

# Animated potentiality: temporality and the limits of narrativity in anime

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## 1. Introduction: anime, narrativity and temporality

The primary aim of this article is to explore the treatment given to temporality<sup>1</sup> in certain anime, with a focus on how temporality relates to the interaction between extra-narrative and narrative elements in these works. In order to do this, I will employ theory from the philosophers Henri Bergson, Gilbert Simondon and Gilles Deleuze. While in principle these ideas can be applied to other anime, I will focus on *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, *Serials Experiments Lain* and *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* as exemplary cases. This kind of approach to anime is unusual, but the treatment given to the technical specificity of anime by Lamarre (2009) is one relevant antecedent that also refers to issues of temporality.<sup>2</sup>

As Suan points out in *The Anime Paradox* (2013: 241-260), one of the significant characteristics of Japanese animation is that anime *form* becomes its *content*. Certainly, it is difficult and possibly problematic to distinguish form from content in anime. However, this ‘thinking together’ risks leaving something important out of the picture. Viewers tend to subsume all the elements of a particular anime under an overarching narrative, including those elements that cannot be considered part of the narrative *per se*: i.e., those elements not directly linked to the narrative structure in the way that characters, actions and dialogues are. In many anime we find elements that resist absorption into the narrative, so to speak: disruptive images or symbols, sequences with no clear connection to the storyline, strangely out-of-place sound effects or musical passages, etc. These elements do not interrupt the narrative completely, but they disturb it in a way that is relevant to the interaction between the anime and the viewer. These extra-narrative elements contribute meaning to the work in their own way: not as elements of the story, but as ‘essayistic’ or ‘abstract’ elements that bring attention to the process of building the narrative.

There is a sense, however, that the relationship between narrativity and what I term the *extra-narrative* elements of an anime is itself deeply connected to temporality issues. One of the most

important features of a narrative is that it follows a certain order; a narrative is necessarily divisible into parts or moments, and these must follow each other in a particular sequence. In this sense, the parts of a narrative always constitute a closed set. Yet, extra-narrative elements defy this kind of temporal logic. Though the logic of the story works by producing some form of closed temporality, these extra-narrative elements break the closure and force viewers to consider another type of temporality, one that cannot be reduced to any given set of moments.

Moreover, narratives are always something of the order of the complete individual, that is, something “already interpreted” up to a point. The elements of a narrative can be thought as such only inasmuch as they are *effectively counted* as included in that narrative, in what is always already an act of interpretation. That does not mean, of course, that the reading process cannot itself be an open process: any element may always receive a new and different interpretation, and some of them may even be left uninterpreted. Properly speaking, the elements of a narrative (such as an anime story) are not narrative or extra-narrative in and of themselves: spectators are continuously knitting them into the narrative. However, one of the particularities of anime as a form (and of other forms of moving images too) is that technical and creative aspects of the production directly influence the temporal aspect of this process. This is why we can say, following Lamarre, that anime has its own particular way of thinking temporality, one that is mediated by its technological specificity.

In fact, Lamarre (2009), critically distances his position from excessively “textual” readings of anime that avoid the temporal and material aspect of anime:

The bulk of anime commentary ignores that its “object” consists of moving images, as if animations were just another text. Such a treatment of anime as a textual object has tended in two directions. On the one hand, even when anime is treated largely as text, some commentators will call on the novelty and popularity of anime to bypass the tough questions that usually arise around the analysis of texts. Anime is, in effect, treated as a textual object that does not or cannot pose any difficult textual questions. Analysis is relegated to re-presenting anime narratives, almost in the manner of book reports or movie reviews. On the other hand, some commentators treat anime as text in order to pose “high textual” speculative questions (such as the nature of reality, or the relation of mind and body), again ignoring the moving image altogether but for different reasons. In this kind of textual treatment, the anime stories serve as the point of departure for philosophical speculation, without any consideration of the materiality of animation. (2009: IX)

His proposal focuses instead on the analysis of animation as a technique of the moving image: Lamarre's answer to the question "how to read the *anime*?" explicitly avoids treating it as "one more kind of text" . Highlighting the relevance of anime's technological specificity, Lamarre's project goes well beyond presenting a list of relevant elements for formal analysis (lighting, color, sound, narrative, editing, etc.); he offers an analysis of contents based on the materiality of the moving image. With a theoretical basis strongly inspired by the philosophy of technology (especially of thinkers like Heidegger and Simondon), film theory (with a strong influence from Deleuze's works on cinema) and art history, Lamarre rejects studies based on the theory of devices and the specificity thesis, because of their implicit technological and historical determinism and instead approaches anime from a procedural and open perspective (Lamarre, 2009).

Lamarre's critique is interesting because it points to a lack of adequate concepts to address the peculiarity of anime as moving image, and it makes clear how these conceptual shortcomings are directly related to the philosophical problematics of temporality. Many of the analyses produced by anime studies thus far, e.g. Napier (2005, 2007), focus too closely on the textual content of the works while ignoring how the technical specificity of anime requires dealing with the passing of time. Within critical circles, there is a tendency toward discussion of anime as structured narrative, but we find many examples in anime of elements that cannot be fully explained via a strictly narrative approach.

For an example of the issues that are left out in analyses strictly concerned with the parts of a narrative and their relative order, we can follow Lamarre's example and look at some of the ideas developed by Deleuze in his texts on cinema. According to Deleuze, beneath the instantaneous cuts we call images (or frames) and their sequence there is "a movement or a time which is impersonal, uniform, abstract, invisible, or imperceptible, which is 'in' the apparatus, and 'with' which the images are made to pass consecutively" (1986: 1). Deleuze rejects the idea that a film is fundamentally a sequence of still images: to him, the defining trait of cinema is the production of a temporal continuity which brings forth what Deleuze calls the movement-image. This effect is not achieved through a mere addition of images or frames, but by reintroducing temporality to their sequence. Deleuze goes further to analyze another kind of temporality also present in film, one that would be more original, in a sense, than the reconstituted temporality of the movement-image: namely, the time-image, a heterogeneous, indivisible form of temporality akin to Bergson's *durée*.

Lamarre is not the only one to notice the relevance of temporality to anime studies. In a recent article, *Anime-Rhythm: Audio-Visual Flow, Tempo, and Pacing in Anime Narratives* (2015), Suan develops the idea of *rhythmic* analysis of anime. He states that "anime's rhythms are combinations of

sounds, dialogue, image compositions and degrees of movement and stillness, with certain elements accenting the sequence as it extends through time in ways that may be analyzed.”<sup>3</sup> Again, this analysis goes beyond an understanding of anime as merely a narrative structured along a linear sequence, focusing instead on the emergence of patterns or rhythms that escape linear temporality.

In this article I will attempt to show how certain issues typically ignored by narrative analyses are relevant to the understanding of anime, through a commentary on some aspects of *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, *Serial Experiments Lain* and *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*. Specifically, I will focus on the way temporality is affected by the relationship between narrativity and the “extra-narrative” elements of anime. In order to do this, I will first reintroduce some concepts used by Bergson, Simondon and Deleuze to describe time and its relation to potentiality. These concepts offer us the proper tools for understanding how these anime work with temporality.

## 2. Bergson, Simondon and Deleuze on potentiality and temporality

Despite of the many differences that divide the thought of Bergson, Simondon and Deleuze, they do share some crucial features. Not only do they constitute a clear line of intellectual heritage, but they all attempt to elaborate philosophies of nature that confront reality in its dynamic specificity and explicitly avoid reduction to static representations. I will now briefly summarize some of their main concepts.

### 2.1. Bergson: *durée* and virtual

The most fundamental concept in all of Bergson’s philosophy is that of *duration* (*durée*). According to Bergson (2004; 2001), one of the greatest problems for our understanding of both time and consciousness is our natural tendency to confuse real time with its “spatialized” version, a deformed image of time that hides its most basic features. Real time or duration is the immediate medium of consciousness, and it ultimately coincides with reality itself in its *becoming*. It is characterized by the exhibition of *heterogeneity in continuity*, expressed under the form of what Bergson calls *qualitative multiplicity*: that is, the kind of multiplicity that we find in perceived or remembered phenomena *prior to applying any abstract thought or operation of measurement to them*. These features tend to be obscured by our practically-oriented intelligence, and reinterpreted in terms of homogeneity, divisibility and quantitative multiplicity typical of space.

Bergson believes that modern science does not correct this mistake, but rather deepens it, stripping both physical time and consciousness completely of their most fundamental characteristics,

their dynamism and their evolving nature. Both the entire history of philosophy and that of modern science have fallen prey to the same illusions, confusing real time and real movement with abstract space. At least since Zeno of Elea, thinkers have tended to confuse the properties of the measurable distance existing between any two points A and B, which is itself abstract and infinitely divisible, with those of a real movement between the points. Yet not only does travelling from point A to point B take a certain amount of real duration, but any particular movement from point to point constitutes a unique and irreducible act, and as such cannot really be divided. Any real movement happens only once and during a particular passage of time. It cannot be reduced to its parts or reproduced identically. Abstract distance, by contrast, is itself a product of the act of measuring, and by its very definition must be reproducible and its identical units able to be analyzed.

To understand duration fully, we have to consider the difference established by Bergson between *spatial or mathematical continuity*, which consists of the juxtaposition of an infinite number of small points or moments, identical between themselves and external to each other, and the aforementioned *heterogeneous continuity* of duration. For the latter, the moments of duration are neither infinitely small nor identical; they coincide with the apparition of real qualitative differences in the world and in consciousness, and they permeate each other, just as any new perception modifies and qualifies the whole of a memory. For Bergson, this kind of continuity is the most basic one. The discontinuity characteristic of individual separate objects is but an abstraction overlaying this fundamental continuity of time, and mathematical continuity goes a step further in this process of abstraction, preserving the abstract medium of comparison and the possibility of analysis without retaining the objects or the qualities themselves.

Another fundamental feature of Bergson's duration is its asymmetry. Time is always the production of novelty and the modification of what already exists by the introduction of the new. The future emerges through a real activity, differentiating itself from the background of the past; therefore, time cannot be reduced to a mere matter of order, nor correctly represented as a simple juxtaposition of what already exists (as in a spatial line). Time is intrinsically oriented towards one qualitative 'direction,' the realization of that which does not yet exist.

This relationship between the apparition of true novelty and the asymmetrical flow of time leads us to a second Bergsonian concept, that of *the virtual*. In Bergson's works (2004; 2010), the word *virtual* refers on some occasions to memory inasmuch as it conditions activity, and other times to *that which is real and possible at once*. In both cases, it is used to express the involvement of the past in the production of the future. The virtual is thus not opposed to the real, but to the *actual*. The past is

usually not active by itself, in the sense that it does not have any direct effect on present events. However, sometimes the past remains indirectly active in the present, as in the case of memory. Memory is virtual because it has real effects without being entirely actual: it extends the efficacy of the past into the future. In a more general sense, the virtual is the *real possible*, something that is real and active without being actualized or complete; it is that which brings novelty forth without having happened yet. The virtual is, in a sense, wider than the actual. It is what ultimately makes events happen, what 'causes' becoming. In any case, the virtual should not be conceived as something separated from the actual; it is immanent to it. If Bergsonian duration is heterogeneity in continuity, qualitative difference and the asymmetric emergence of novelty, *the virtual* is precisely the active connection between past and future that makes difference and novelty possible; it is the past continuously contributing to the future in novel and non-predetermined ways.

## 2.2. Simondon: individuation, *apeiron* and potentiality

The works of Simondon (1989; 2005<sup>4</sup>), not unlike those of Bergson, constitute a philosophy of nature based on a plurivocal conception of being, a philosophy that attempts to account for all dimensions of reality in its concreteness and its dynamicity. Accordingly, Simondon sets himself up to the task of including and explaining the inventive nature of reality its *ontogenetic* character. The concept of *ontogenesis* refers to reality's capacity for producing new domains and dimensions within itself in order to solve its inner contradictions; Simondon conceives of being as a *phasic being*, never completely coincident with itself and always involved in a permanent process of problem-solving. This problem-solving is embodied in the different processes of individuation, through which beings that possess a certain amount of unresolved potential energy gradually acquire their definitive form in interaction with their environments. These processes are inventive, in that their nature is dynamic and constantly changing, as well as exhaustive, in that they account for all aspects of reality, physical, vital, psychic and collective.

In order to explore and analyze the processes of individuation, Simondon uses what he calls the *transductive* method. While in the context of methodological and epistemological reflection, the term *transduction* is presented in opposition to both induction and deduction, thus transduction should not be understood simply as a logical device or as a method for analyzing reality. It refers to the very kind of process by which reality advances. Simondon's theory of transduction describes the processes of productive communication between domains by which the incompatibilities of a certain system are solved through the generation of new forms and new dimensions of reality. In transductive processes,

the active structures of a certain domain are carried beyond their original limits. It is precisely because cognitive processes are themselves transductive that we are able to grasp, by analogy, the nature of transduction.

The ideas of ontogenesis and transduction prepare us for understanding Simondon's concept of *potentiality*. Simondon refutes the Aristotelian notion of potentiality based on the existence of atemporal finished forms or *entelechies*, for being too static and reducing being entirely to individuality. Instead, his notion of potentiality is based precisely on the existence of the pre-individual. The transductive processes by which individuation advances require the presence not only of partially individuated structures, the 'singularities' whose structure is communicated and 'amplified' in transduction, but also of a certain amount of *pre-individual being* or potential energy, which cannot be ascribed neither to an individual nor to its environment. Simondon compares this pre-individual reality or potential energy to the pre-Socratic notion of *apeiron*, the undetermined: like *apeiron*, pre-individuality exists as an omnipresent charge of potentiality that cannot be defined in any particular terms, but is identified as what pushes individuation into the future through the different levels of reality: physical, vital, psychic, collective and even technical.

### 2.3. Deleuze: difference

Deleuze's work was heavily influenced both by Bergson's interest in the dynamics and evolution and by Simondon's approach to the plurality and creativity of being. One of his fundamental aims is to produce a thought capable of capturing events in their uniqueness. He does so by developing a concept of *difference* not based on that of identity (Deleuze, 1993): in deleuzian ontology, difference is the most basic aspect of being. For Deleuze, being is univocal, in that it is fundamentally difference: being is said in one sense of all the different individuals, inasmuch as being is always *being different*. Being, therefore, is itself an expression of an originary difference, one that does not depend on the perspective of any external agent. Deleuzian being-as-difference manifests its existence and expresses its essence by its very being embodied in particular entities: being is univocal in its multiplicity because it is immanently different.

Deleuze's concept of difference as ontologically primordial is reminiscent both of Bergson's duration with its heterogeneity in continuity and of Simondon's ontogenetic approach, and it could in fact be considered a synthesis of the two. Deleuzian difference is a never-ending process that is continuously differentiating from itself; what remains to be explained in terms of this very difference is how identities and repetitions can appear in the world and in consciousness. In Deleuzian ontology,

objects, identities and moments are part of a superficial stratum of reality, a stratum produced and operated by cognitive agents or by similarly structured entities. Underlying this level and every appearance of identity there is always an active potentiality, a virtuality (in a sense almost identical to that of Bergson) at work.

The formulation of this contrast between the identities apparent in our everyday life and the reality of primordial difference mirrors a pattern that we find also in Bergson and Simondon. The three authors postulate the existence of two different levels of reality that correspond to two kinds of temporality. There is a manifest form of temporality, one in which identity, individuality and abstract spatiality play fundamental roles; but this manifest, patent time exists only as a result of the processes happening on a hidden, latent level, one that cannot be represented with the help of the traditional images or symbols of time, and that is characterized as a creative process of self-differentiation. These two aspects of temporality are not truly external to each other: the latent one (what we could call the *process-time*) is continuously present in the manifest one (the *product-time*) under the form of potentiality or virtuality, even if our representations of reality tend to make this invisible. It is interesting to note that the relationship between those two aspects of temporality is analogous to the one existing between narrativity and extra-narrativity. Just as product-time draws attention to process-time, extra-narrative elements highlight with their presence the existence of the basic images, symbols and structures supporting the narrative order.

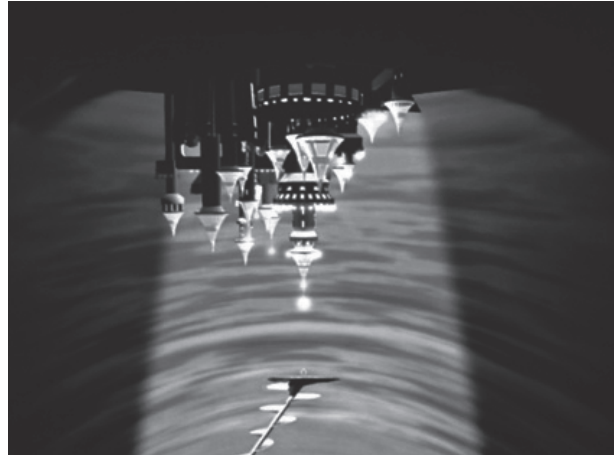
### 3. Analysis of *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, *Serial Experiments Lain* and *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*

Now I will expand on how these ideas relate to the analysis of anime by examining *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, *Serial Experiments Lain* and *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*. There are several reasons why I have selected these particular series. Firstly, all of these works present as part of their settings the coexistence of two worlds or aspects of reality that are, at least up to a point, consistent with the different forms of temporality I have mentioned. Secondly, for each of them, this double character of reality is expressed at least partially through interactions between narrative and extra-narrative elements. Thirdly, all three play with extra-narrative elements that lead to breaks in linear temporality which, while being integrated in the plots, point beyond the explicit narrative and offer the spectator a very particular possibility of reflection.

The way in which narrativity, extra-narrative elements and temporality interrelate in these anime



is complex. In all of them there is a combination of narrative paces: some parts of the material follow standard rhythms and techniques, and are therefore easily interpreted by the viewer as contributing to the narrative and setting one kind of temporality; other elements are introduced in such a way that they contrast with this standard



narrativity. This not only makes them appear extra-narrative in the sense defined before (signaled as contrasting and not completely absorbed into the narrative), but also makes them define new modes of temporality that are therefore incorporated into the experience of watching the series. In these sense, the extra-narrative elements or moments are what modulates the expression of temporality throughout the anime.<sup>5</sup>

*Revolutionary Girl Utena* follows Utena Tenjo, a teenage girl who refuses to wear a girl' s uniform, in her repeated battles to keep possession of the "Rose Bride," embodied in fellow student Anthy Himemiya, who supposedly holds the key to the power to "revolutionize the world." In the series we are presented with not just two, but four different forms of temporality. First, we have the linear temporality represented by the unfolding of the basic plot from chapter to chapter: a structured series of events that incrementally add to the development of the plot, increasing the amount of information available to the spectator and leading up to the conclusion. Besides this progressively unfolding time, we also observe a circular temporality represented by the ritualistically repetitive development of the battles for the possession of the Rose Bride. Closely connected to this circular temporality we find a static form of temporality, embodied in the images of the castle in the sky (Figure 1) before and during the battles and in other repetitive background images, whose staticity and independence of the natural progress of the argument is made obvious through the selection of the animation techniques. Finally, we have the time of the promised revolution, a time which is continuously alluded to but never directly presented, and therefore is experienced as a time of waiting and possibility. Out of these four forms of temporality the first two can be linked to what I have termed product-time, that is, the explicitly presented time in which the narrative is directly offered, and the second two can be understood as part of process-time. They appear partially and indirectly, and they

point to the reasons behind what we see in product-time.

It is interesting to consider how these different kinds of temporality interact during the series. We could say that circular temporality is produced as a result of tension between the linear story and the static world of the castle in the sky. In spite of the tendency for the argument to advance, everything happens as if the static structures represented by the castle in the sky prevent this from occurring, 'trapping' the plot in a series of struggles between Utena and other members of the institute.

This structure is reminiscent of the idea of eternal return developed by Mircea Eliade (1954), who maintains that circular time was a common cosmological feature before the cultural "invention" and subsequent spread of linear time, and that many cultures share rituals and practices aimed at restarting and refounding time in the eyes of a community. In such rituals the idea of origin is not of something that must be closed and completed to be real: in every iteration of the ritual there is a new retrospective foundation of time. In the linear time of history, origins confer reality to the course of time, but in the circular time of myths and rituals, the mythical moment is founded by the act of repeated ritual. Mythical time is like a unit of measure: it is made real by its application in the act of measuring time (through repetition).

Similarly, in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* we can see the ritual of the fight as a recasting of time through a series of static structures. But, what are these structures that are never properly explained during the show? In *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, the castle in the sky and similar images can be read as (re)presenting the schematicity of the plot itself, which in turns acts as a metaphor for both the strict conventions of anime and its demographics and for gender rules. The series exhibits a forced emphasis on stasis and lack of dynamism to point to matters that are only indirectly alluded to in the story itself. Utena and her attempts to change the world by defending the Bride of the Rose from the challengers can be seen as a metonym for the entire series: the series, like Utena herself, is trying to promote a transformation precisely by (re)producing with minimal changes the institutionalized scheme. This intended transformation involves both a change in anime stereotypes and likely a more general shift in gender relations: as for the latter, as Mari Kotani notes in her article on the series (2006), part of the critical potential of this anime lies in the fact that the boundaries between the world of *shojo* and *shonen* dissolve because of Utena's actions. Through the intervention of some elements that resist a natural interpretation, the action is transduced from inside the narration to its outside.

The very elements that highlight the schematicity and lack of dynamism of the plot (not only the repetitive backgrounds, but also the repetitive enigmatic dialogues between shadows commenting on the argument of the series or the cryptic exchanges between the members of the student council) open

a critical space that prepares a breakdown of the narrative in the series finale. Many of the scenes work as simulacra of the main story, making the whole of the narrative self-conscious: in a sense, they point openly to the fact that any plot is always a failed attempt at completeness. All these scenes can be considered extra-narrative insofar as they are pointing from inside the narrative itself into the impossibility of its full realization. They show the falsity of the linear time of the advancing plot and of the circular time of the stereotype as well: ultimately, they point to the precariousness of any narrative.

This is made abundantly clear by the apparition of the last kind of temporality. Besides the three temporalities identified as linear narrative, circular narrative and static narrative, the series alludes constantly to a fourth kind of temporality, that of the expected revolution. Despite not being properly identifiable with any particular element of the series, this temporality is what gives meaning to the entire series, what structures its continuity despite the complex combination of rhythms. In Simondonian terms, it can be identified with the potential energy at work in the series, that which leads it successfully through the process of solving the problems and tensions generated by the use of difficult-to-integrate extra-narrative elements. The times we see directly represented in *Utena* are fragmentary by themselves: they are made coherent by this expectation of the undetermined.

Similarly, we can compare this temporality with Bergson's *durée* and Deleuzian difference: it is something of which we have a direct experience (in our expectation for something revolutionary to happen), but that at the same time remains always elusive because of its constant evolution, always different from itself and other than itself. Even more clearly than the static temporality of the sky castle and its reference to the circumstances of production, this time is an immanent time of the process, a time of potentiality that brings asymmetry and novelty to the series.

Indeed, if we look for the promised novelty in the resolution of the plot we encounter a paradox: in the end there is indeed a revolution, but *Utena* fails to be a prince to Himemiya and 'save' or 'liberate' her. In *Revolutionary Girl Utena* there is no possibility for identity and this is why the end of the series is pure event. There is no "resolution" in *Revolutionary Girl Utena*'s plot, because the revolution is not carried out in any of the times representing the narrative order.

The series *Serial Experiments Lain* focuses on a high school girl named Lain who, after and a chain of strange events initiated with one of her classmate's suicide, becomes obsessed with a virtual environment known as the Wired. Eventually she will discover that nothing is what appears to be in that world, not even herself. From a formal point of view, *Serial Experiments Lain* follows a completely different strategy than *Revolutionary Girl Utena* and *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*. In *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, for instance, action scenes have a very important role in the development of the plot, while in

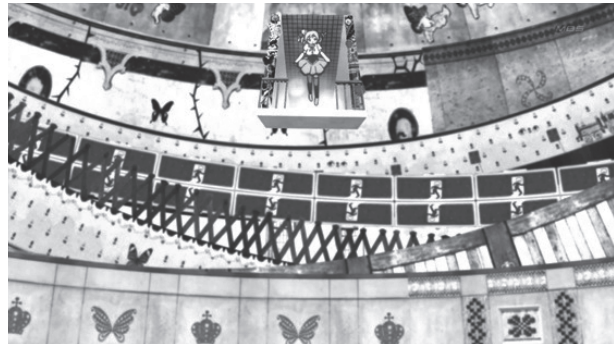
*Serial Experiments Lain* there are only a few, and they are not crucial. In a way, we can see in *Serial Experiments Lain* an example of what Deleuze refers to as *time-image* (1989). For Deleuze, in the movement-image, the immediate datum we are presented with is the movement itself in its extension, the changing whole, but we only perceive time itself in an indirect and mediated way. In contrast, in the time-image we see a direct presentation of time, the constitutive unfolding of a present that is passed and a past that is preserved: an unfolding without completion, because there is no clear distinction between the moment passed and the one coming into being. *Revolutionary Girl Utena* and *Serial Experiments Lain* present the passing of time directly instead of representing it, but rather than doing this through reference to a promised change, it is accomplished by playing with inaction, slow times and the tension inherent to the still image. In other words, by focusing on time itself and not in movement. The time of the process is presented here as being "inside" the linear time of the story, appearing along with it, and this is conveyed through extra-narrative ruptures and through the expectation produced by a certain style of directing.

As with *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, this time of expectation or potentiality can be identified as a corresponding to what I term *process-time*, and it is occasionally connected to elements of the plot: for example, the effects of the drug Accela presented in the second chapter. This drug alters the perception of time, accelerating the "processing speed" of the consumer's mind and therefore making time appear slower to her and allowing a more direct form of access to "the Wired," the communication network that represents virtuality and potentiality in the series. In addition, the beginning of each chapter reminds us that we are in "present day, present time." This does not refer to the mere fact that the story is in a contemporary setting, but we are also reminded that the temporality presented in the series is that of the present, that is, that in which a self differentiating-time unfolds.

In *Serial Experiments Lain*, as in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* and (as I will show) in *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*, this underlying "other time" is the locus of the possibility of change. This is revealed most clearly in the last chapter of *Serial Experiments Lain*, in which the protagonist is erased from the memories of everyone and transcends to a superior aspect of existence. This and other turns of the plot become clearer if we keep in mind how the Bergsonian virtual relates to the past and the future: for Bergson all that we experience is immediately split into perception and memory, the world of memory being much broader than that of perception, which is necessarily oriented to specific action. *Serial Experiments Lain* presents a similar pattern: novelty appears by the interaction of the two times of temporality, that of the plot and that constituted by the expectation and the extra-narrative

interruptions, identified internally with the Wired.

*Puella Magi Madoka Magica* presents all the elements typical of the magical girl genre, but constitutes at the same time an exploration of its limits, incorporating aspects of antithetic



genres, as psychological horror, and surrealist stylistic traits. The series focuses on a fourteen year-old girl called Madoka who, after having a strange dream, encounters a magical catlike creature, Kyubey, who offers her and her friend Sayaka Miki a deal: in exchange for becoming magical girls and fighting the mysterious beings called “witches,” they will be magically granted one wish.

In *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*, we are presented with two clearly different worlds or aspects of reality: the world of everyday life, and the strange magical world where all the encounters between the magical girls and the witches happen. The former reflects what is expected from the life of a young teenager: a happy family life, the conflicts typical of a middle-schooler, teenage social activities like going to the mall, whereas the latter involves magical girls who fight witches, beings born from despair that have the capacity of influencing the normal world to cause suicides and accidents. This second world does not follow the logic of everyday life. To begin with, the topology and the general aspects of the magical world (Figure 2) are extremely strange, if not absurd: instead of normal backgrounds we see scattered elements such as patches of colors and incoherent shapes (strings, sheet music, flowers, stairs, traffic signal). Even if, as opposed to events in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* and *Serial Experiments Lain*, the “occult world” of potentiality and difference is directly represented through these elements, they conform to an indeterminate system, a system in which many of the elements resist their incorporation into an individuated form, in such a manner that preindividual energy is preserved in the form of potentiality and indeterminacy. Again, while the general idea of a magic world is introduced in the plot, it is the impossibility of these elements to be individually absorbed into the narrative (their extra-narrative component) which enables them to represent potentiality. While looking at the magical scenes we spectators cannot but distance ourselves from the action and appreciate the aesthetics and the production values: the barriers between the narrative and the act itself of watching an anime product are momentarily broken.

Although the attempt to represent the unrepresentable and include it in the plot is more direct in

*Puella Magi Madoka Magica* than in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* and *Serial Experiments Lain*, that which is presented is precisely a world which exceeds individuation, namely, a world which exceeds any specific definite representation. As pointed out by Bergson (2004) and Deleuze (1993), standard representation involves an abstract perspective and a fixing of limits that cannot fully grasp the character of self-differentiating duration. Another indication that what we find in the magical world is an attempt at a direct representation of potentiality or virtuality is the fact that this world can only be accessed by the granting of a wish. For Bergson, the virtual is precisely an “active expectation,” a kind of self-realizing desire. For Madoka the magical world is different from the everyday world in that the content of expectations really happen there, instead of a world populated by the ‘already-happened’ and moved by the expectation for that which is not yet real.

As in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* and *Serial Experiments Lain*, in *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* we are presented with a “time inside time,” different from standard temporality (product time) but inherent to it. This structure is more clearly shown in the final chapters, again like in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* and *Serial Experiments Lain*, where linear temporality is broken: what seemed like the unfolding of a story with a simple narrative logic (a succession of episodes), is revealed to be only a fragment, only one amongst the myriad repetitions of a cycle (caused by Homura’s desire to save Madoka). The real story, then, is analogous in structure to bergsonian *durée* and deleuzian difference: a repetition in which the repeated is, however, always different from itself. It is not the linear story that is important, but the fact that its repetition and differentiation enables the emergence of real novelty. The sacrifice of Madoka at the end of the series can be interpreted as in line with this idea. Although we find some resolution in it, the end of the series cannot be understood as a simple conclusion to the story: all the past is virtually present in the disappearance of Madoka. The crucial matter is not whether Madoka is remembered or forgotten. What we see represented in the final sequences of the series is the passage itself from the virtual to actuality, the act by which process-time produces product-time.

## Conclusions

In these three anime we can see a double strategy for the treatment of temporality: through the analysis of the relationship between process-time and product-time as well as through the focus on the way potentiality and virtuality are presented in the latter. With concepts like *durée*, virtuality, individuation, transduction, potential and difference, the philosophies of Bergson, Simondon and Deleuze

offer the unique tools to decipher how these anime think about time. In the first place, they enable us to see the difference between the mentioned two forms of temporality. One is typical of either linear or strictly circular plots, where events are presented orderly and successively; the second is deeper and presents a more complex structure, but in any case consists of a genuinely creative process, irreducible to any static order or description (Ballús and Torrents, 2014). Additionally, they provide us with a way to understand how an important part of what happens in an anime happens outside the level of the interpreted/individuated, through conflictive elements that resist interpretation. Lastly and most importantly, they help us notice how the relationship between narrativity and extra-narrativity and its influence on the treatment of temporality and potentiality opens a space for reflection that goes beyond the patent narrative and formal aspects of the works. This constitutes a good example of how anime can sometimes function not as a particular message-conveying text, but rather as an instrument for the production of new thought in interaction with the spectator: namely, as thinking devices.

The difference between the idea of text as a vehicle for meaning and that of a thinking device is double. On the one hand, and despite the fact that the critics of the classical notion of text have been qualifying this metaphor of decades, the idea of text-as-vehicle makes the production of meaning something external to the text itself, be it prior to it or posterior: the 'message' in the text is either something that exists before the text or something that will come to exist later and resulting from it. The notion of a thinking device makes it clear that there is no one particular message external to the process of 'sense-making' in which spectator and anime engage. On the other hand, it also points to how the agency of this process is shared by the spectator and the anime itself: the anime is no mere tool or prime matter, but an active part in the process of thinking. While the general idea of a thinking device can of course be applied to other forms of cultural consumption, the kind of play between narrative and extra-narrative elements I have pointed to in this analysis shows that anime is a particularly relevant example of this kind of interaction between spectator and work.

Therefore, I think not only that these concepts from Bergson, Simondon and Deleuze bring some light to the issue of temporality in anime, but also that these anime, as thinking devices, function as a powerful tools to be used in our attempt to understand reality. Indeed, we may put into question whether we should look at them merely as tools (as mere objects of admiration) or to consider them as entering into what Simondon would consider processes of collective individuation with the spectators, producing true intellectual novelty.

## Notes

- 1 By temporality I refer to the general structures that define a certain experience of time, to 'what happening in time means' within a certain model or under certain conditions.
- 2 There is an interesting article by Livia Monet (2006) where the author uses the Bergsonian notion of *Durée* to analyze some art installations by Tabaimo consisting mainly of animations made by the author. I mention it due to its proximity to my approach.
- 3 In Suan, Stevie (forthcoming in 2015). "Anime-Rhythm: Audio-Visual Flow, Tempo, and Pacing in Anime Narratives" in *Full ou Limited ? La "qualité" de l' animation à la télévision, entre économie et esthétique*.
- 4 I used the original French version of both *L'Individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d' information* (2005) and *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (1989) as there' s no official translation in English of these works yet..
- 5 In this article I focus on the modes of temporality expressed in the works, approaching up to a point as if they were mere 'content,' that is, something depicted or described in the anime. A more detailed approach would require focusing in the way the experience of the different modes of temporality emerges from the interaction of viewer and anime, that is, from the successive couplings and decouplings between the viewer's actions and expectations and 'what happens on the screen.'

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