

The Utopia of Apocalypse

*Anti-human exceptionalism in Shin Megami Tensei &
A critique on the anthropocentric understanding of
established notions of utopia in science fiction studies*

Title: The Utopia of Apocalypse: Anti-human exceptionalism in Shin Megami Tensei & A critique on the anthropocentric understanding of established notions of utopia in science fiction studies

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Abstract

This thesis serves two purposes: to consider philosophical issues through video games and to make its reader aware of the normality that is anthropocentrism or human exceptionalism. Building on the recent interest in animality in animation studies, “The Utopia of the Apocalypse” proposes a Derridean discursive ‘monster’, theorised through established ideas of monstrosities and contextualised by cyberpunk video game series *Shin Megami Tensei*, to challenge the established anthropocentric understandings of the concept of utopia. Guided by ontological questions about this discursive ‘monster’ – what is it? how does it work? – this thesis analyses the transgression of the human-nonhuman-machine interface in *Shin Megami Tensei: Strange Journey* through a conceptual dialogue between the uncanny and techno-intimacy. The process of reading this thesis is intended to be equal to the process domesticating a ‘monster’, making it a pet and becoming aware of anthropocentrism as a normality.

Keywords: animal studies, ecofeminism, media studies, philosophy, sf studies

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Guan van Zoggel

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Introduction

After successfully infiltrating the base where Jack's squad had captured my fellow soldier Jimenez, I ran into what looked like a laboratory. In the centre of the room, one of Jack's men guarded the dimly illuminated tubes with an automated machine gun. Unknown distorted voices filled the room with agony. I hid behind some crates and listened. "Humans... Cursed humans", one shouted. "You want my power so much you don't mind cutting me up?" another yelled. I put down my gun and peeked through the crates. "This humiliation! I should have killed you on the spot when I met you!". The tubes contained demons. Some of them dismembered, others highly malformed as if they had been through a series of experiments. "Give them back... Give them back...", one of them begged. "My hands... My feet... Give them back to me..." Upon hearing this, my heart started throbbing and I stood up. "I'm angry, but I see now why God cursed the humans... They're unsalvageable! Their wretched souls are stuck deep inside their bodies!", the demon in the most inner tube shouted. "That's right! Curse me all you want. The strong demons will become new weapons, the others spare parts. Now THIS is science!", Jack's soldier answered. "The fusion of technology and demons!" Realising I had snuck up behind him, he turned around and we soon thereafter emerged in combat. "Humans... Cursed humans...! Kill each other! Kill each other! Kill each other without end... Until you die, we shall be at your heels..." Not before finishing him off I realised that I was no whit better than he was.

This excerpt is based on a scene halfway through the game *Shin Megami Tensei: Strange Journey* (Atlus, 2010; henceforth: *SJ*), which was released for Nintendo DS in the United States in 2010, one year after its initial Japanese release. All aforementioned dialogues and

descriptions of actions are courtesy of developer and publisher Atlus; all thoughts and emotions described in the excerpt, however, are my own. It was *my* heart that was throbbing, only to realise that it was hypocrite of *me* to think that *I* was any better than the character on the screen. After all, it was *me* who had been fusing demons to give birth to stronger species to overcome my character's weaknesses for at least thirty hours so far. It is precisely this total immersion, or presence, in a diegetic reality, rather than merely observing one without actively taking part, that makes video games so compelling (McMahan, 2003: 68-9). In order to achieve total immersion, the player has to transcend the barriers of engagement, investment and engrossment, and ultimately those of empathy and atmosphere (Brown and Cairns, 2004).

Rather than focusing on how total immersion can be achieved design-wise, this thesis is concerned with the interactions between the human, the nonhuman and the machine within the diegetic reality of video games. Blending the distinctions between each subject of the aforementioned trinity – resulting in what literary critics would call a 'monster'¹ – this paper has to draw from various disciplines in order to comprehend this 'monster', including several media studies, science fiction (henceforth: sf) studies,² philosophy and to some extent ecology. Ultimately, however, this theoretical 'monster' proves to be a useful argument or tool to not only rethink power relations among human races, but also, as this thesis is focused on, to challenge established ideas within the field of sf studies.

Guided by the Derridean notion of the 'monster', this thesis attempts to produce "a discursive monster [in the first two sections] so that the analysis [in the third section] will be a *practical* effect, so that people [i.e., in this case, the reader] will be forced to become aware of the history of normality" (1995: 386). Among the many

¹ Literary critics' thoughts on monstrosities and similar concepts will be discussed in more detail in subsection 'The monstrosity, the cyborg and the hybrid', p. 16.

² In this thesis the abbreviation 'sf' is also used to encompass both 'science fiction' and 'speculative fiction'.

issues posed by this thesis, the foremost question this thesis is centred around, then, is as follows:

How does the discursive 'monster' constructed throughout this thesis force its reader to become aware of the history of normality?

To answer this question, this thesis is divided into three sections, each seeking answers to questions related to the 'monster'. The first section serves as an accessible vehicle to introduce the 'monster', both literally and figuratively. By drawing from the recent interest in animal studies among animation scholars, the central questions focus on the manifestation or composition of the 'monster': how this 'monster' relates to nonhuman animals (henceforth: animals), how thinkers have formulated their ideas on monsters and how one should understand, or start to understand the 'monster' central to this thesis. To provide an accessible entrance to understanding the 'monster', the first section introduces the blurring distinctions between humans and animals in Paul Wells and Thomas Lamarre's discussions on animals, animality and anthropomorphism in animation – largely inspired by Haraway's cyborg theory and Latour's attempt to rethink modernity, challenging the traditional anthropocentric subject-object distinction. Moving from the disciplines of animation studies and animal studies, the second section is concerned with the interaction between individual elements of the 'monster'. Fear for the familiar yet foreign, on the one hand, reminds us of Sigmund Freud's interpretation of the *unheimlich*, or 'uncanny'; affection for the exotic yet unknown, on the other hand, may be readily associated with techno-intimacy – especially in this thesis' context of media studies – and studies on human-machine relations by, among others, Anne Allison. Relations, "the one true universal" according to Donna Haraway (cited in LaBare, 2010: 106), provide insight to questions regarding the composition of this thesis' 'monster': what do the human, nonhuman and machine mean to one another, and how does the 'monster' challenge the traditional

subject-object distinction? If the first two sections search for answers regarding the manifestation or composition and the individual interacting elements of the 'monster', respectively, the third section employs the 'monster' in a debate to challenge established and prevalent ideas about utopia, primarily Jameson's work within the field of sf studies. As a composition of multiple species, the 'monster' is an attempt to justify the theoretical existence of a utopia – or at least an endeavour to call attention to the anthropocentric thinking in a field that is often concerned with species other than human.

The research subject from which this 'monster' has been derived is the video game *SJ*. This paper specifically deals with a Japanese role-playing game because of the following three reasons: First, the range of console role-playing games is simply too vast to take entirely into consideration.³ However, rather than making a general claim about Japanese role-playing games, the aim of this research is to consider and reconsider philosophical issues through video games. Second, as the thesis is concerned with the ambiguous nature of relationships between human and nonhuman, Japan's native religion Shinto ('the way of the gods'),⁴ in which every object may embody a *kami* ('deity'),⁵ might prove relevant for this thesis, if not a follow-up research. Third, other case studies with meaningful interactions between humans and nonhumans, used to support the thesis' primary case study, are similarly developed by a Japan based company. Although this demarcation of focus toward a Japanese

³ For more insight in the role of monsters and other nonhuman creatures in primarily Western developed video games, see Fred Botting's excellent analysis of *Doom* in *Limits of Horror* (1993: 78-88).

⁴ Despite being a primitive religious thought, Shinto managed to 'survive' the introduction of Buddhism in the sixth century in Japan. One reason for this survival is the complementary nature of both religious thoughts: whereas Shinto is concerned with life, vitality and associated with birth and marriage, Buddhism focuses on the suffering of human life and practised through funerals. Hence, most Japanese have ever since considered themselves both Shintoist and Buddhist (Varley, 2000: 19-47).

⁵ Often translated as 'god' or 'deity', the word *kami* does not hold the connotation of 'transcendent' – unlike the former – but one along the lines of 'upper' or 'above' (Varley, 2000: 9). To follow the definition provided by Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), one of the most prestigious nationalistic scholars of the Tokugawa period: "The word *kami* refers, in the most general sense, to all divine beings of heaven and earth that appear in the classics. More particularly, the *kami* are the spirits that abide in and are worshipped at shrines. In principle, human beings, birds, animals, trees, plants, mountains, oceans – all may be *kami*. According to ancient usage, whatever seemed strikingly impressive, possessed the quality of excellence, or inspired a feelings of awe was called *kami*" (cited in ibidem: 9).

role-playing game may be considered as an approach bordering on Saidian Orientalism,⁶ it should be noted that such a limitation is required, on the one hand, to refrain from endless historicisation and contextualisation, and, on the other, to provide the necessary firm soil to build on, especially with a 'monster' that is not only composed of multiple species, but also theoretically composed of multiple disciplines.

⁶ Said's self-proclaimed "most readily accepted designation for Orientalism is an academic one. (...) Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient—and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist—either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she says or does is Orientalism" (Said, 1995: 2).

What is this 'monster'?

"Monsters cannot be announced. One cannot say: 'here are our monsters', without immediately turning the monsters into pets."

- Jacques Derrida (1989: 170)

Building without firm soil is impossible. Therefore, in order to construct a method that allows us to start understanding the manifestation or composition of the 'monster' central to this thesis, I will draw from two recent studies in the field of animation scholarship, wherein an interest in animality (and somewhat less recent, anthropomorphism) in animation has developed. By means of a literary review, I will discuss Paul Wells' most recent work, *The Animated Bestiary: Animals, Cartoons, and Culture* (2009), and Thomas Lamarre's articles on speciesism published in three editions of the journal *Mechademia*. Especially the latter's ideas on interaction between multiple speciesism is crucial for understanding the composition of this thesis' 'monster', which will serve as the cornerstone for the discussion that follows.

Animated animals and anthropomorphism

In his impressive monograph, Paul Wells calls attention to a critical engagement with the phenomenon of animated animals in the history of animation. Throughout five chapters, he provides both a theoretical and a pragmatic oriented toolbox for the reader to rethink animality in animation whilst highlighting more specific topics, such as his identification of four archetypes of metamorphosis of animals (2009: 149-174). In his chapter on the employment of animals as

embodiments of meaning, challenging prevalent clichés and connotations, he turns to the presence, or absence, of relations between human and animals in certain animation films. The discussion on the risks of anthropomorphism in relation to humans is led by animation teacher Ed Hooks' argument that "[i]nter-species communication is a fascinating challenge for animation" (cited in Wells, 2009: 120-1), arguing that there are numerous examples of animation films that limit the interaction of nonhuman animals to other nonhuman animals. A similar point was made by Japanese auteur Osamu Tezuka, who felt that "if forest animals in *Bambi* had been as self-aware and mutually social as they were depicted, they would not have remained so fearful and remote from man" (Patten cited in Wells, 2009: 121). This observation by Tezuka in regards might have been a crucial observation in developing his manga *Jangaru Taitei* ('The Jungle Emperor', 1950-1954), or *Kimba, the White Lion in the West*, in which the animals from an African animal kingdom, led by Kimba, engage with humans and try to make them acknowledge themselves as social equals.⁷

This interaction between multiple species, what Hooks described as 'inter-species communication', constitutes the foundation of Thomas Lamarre's article on the 'multispecies ideal' (2010), largely based on the work of Tezuka. Following the Japanese literary trope of opting for a party-based group dynamic over a singular hero – as has been a prevalent literary trope in early Japanese epic novels and recurrent in modern digital games⁸ – Lamarre associates Haraway's notion that the cyborg⁹ is a subspecies of companion species¹⁰ with

⁷ Ironically, while Tezuka's argument was the result of his observations of Western animation films, Disney does not only lack acknowledging *The Jungle Emperor* as a source of inspiration for *The Lion King*, despite the many similarities (Wells, 2009: 122), it also ignores the inter-species communication that was one of the cornerstones for *The Jungle Emperor* according to Tezuka.

⁸ This association has also been made by Kieran Blasingim, who draws parallels between the Japanese epic novel Nansō Satomi Hakkenden (1814-1842, 'The Eight Dogs Chronicles') and several popular Japanese video game series, such as *Final Fantasy* (Blasingim, 2006: 32-41).

⁹ Haraway defines her concept of the cyborg as "cybernetic organism", "a hybrid of machine and organism", "a creature of lived social reality" and "creature of fiction" (1991). Haraway employs the cyborg as a discursive monster to rethink socialist-feminism "postmodernist, non-naturalist mode and in the utopian tradition of

several (early) post-war works. One such example is director Seo Mitsuyo's take on the folklore Momotarō with his manga film *Momotarō, umi no shinpei* ('Momotarō's Divine Navy', 1945), starring the young eponymous hero who, supported by a group of 'Japanese animals',¹¹ receives cooperation from the indigenous animals of the southern sea island he just arrived on. As mentioned before, Tezuka's manga *Jangaru Taitei* follows this same principle of 'inter-species communication' and 'multispecies ideal', which Lamarre then describes as "striv[ing] to imagine the interaction of species beyond the logic of social Darwinism" (Lamarre, 2010: 59), i.e. the social policy of survival of the fittest. *Jangaru Taitei*'s protagonist Leo is not merely king of the lions, but emperor of a "multispecies cooperative (...)", with the manga "offer[ing] images of different species engaging in playful rivalry or harmonious cooperation reminiscent of the jungle scenes in *Momotarō, umi no shinpei*" (ibidem).

Multispeciesism, as the term implies, is derived from – and an expansion of – 'speciesism', a term coined by Lamarre in the first part of his work on animals in animation. Similar to his challenging monograph *The Anime Machine* (2009), in which he introduces terms such as 'cinematism' and 'animetism',¹² he starts off this tripartite on speciesism by formulating his latest philosophical thoughts. Building on John Dower's *War Without Mercy* (1986), Lamarre draws from Dower's description of persistence of racial consciousness and racial typology, whenever human animals are depicted as nonhuman animals, as the principle of speciesism. In other words, "speciesism is a displacement of race and racism (relations between humans as

imagining a world without gender, which is perhaps a world without genesis, but maybe also a world without end" (ibidem: 151).

¹⁰ Lamarre refers to Haraway's provocative thesis "I have come to see cyborgs as junior siblings in the much bigger, queer family of companion species" (Haraway, 2003a: 63).

¹¹ Here, 'Japanese animals' does not imply that these animals are unique to Japan, but it serves to indicate a difference with the indigenous animals Momotarō and his animal friends run into. Following the conventional traditions of the folklore, Momotarō's party comprises a dog, monkey and pheasant – to which Tezuka added a rabbit (Lamarre, 2010: 57), possibly derived from another folklore, *Inaba no Shirousagi* ('The Hare of Inaba').

¹² Whereas in 'cinematism', referring to Paul Virilio's thoughts, the movement of perspective is the result of a moving camera (such as with live-action films), in 'animetism' movement is the result of sliding layers within an image and recorded by a fixed camera (such as with animation productions) (Lamarre, 2009: 6).

imagined in racial terms) onto relations between humans and animals” (Lamarre, 2008: 76). In the discussion on the role of dehumanisation of races in Japanese animation (rather than, and in contrast to, American bestialisation) through various pre-war animation films, Lamarre argues that these early works of speciesism could be read allegorically with animals representing a particular nation. Towards the end of the first part, Lamarre questions whether speciesism is fated to displace racism (to erase, reinscribe, and renew it), or whether it can produce “something new, something beyond racial thought?” (ibidem: 90).

He offers his view on this issue in the second part, focusing on the works of *manga* artist Osamu Tezuka within the ‘paradigm’ of *sengo* (‘post-war’) to understand Japanese history, which generally means encouraging the belief that history could begin anew, and that modernity had gone wrong in Japan, but could be righted (Lamarre, 2010: 54). Unlike pre-war speciesism, Lamarre argues, this paradigm marks a shift towards ‘multispeciesism’, similar to multiculturalism and a product of Japan’s vision of a multi-ethnic empire. The aforementioned imagination by Tezuka in striving to “imagine the interaction of species beyond the logic of social Darwinism” (ibidem: 59) ultimately proves to be unmaintainable. In questioning the operative logic of ‘species differences’ (a set of seemingly irreducible and insurmountable biological differences), Lamarre postulates that “speciesism feels like an exceedingly inflexible form of racialism” (ibidem: 70), since biological racialism is portrayed as *natural* (his italics), which on the one hand is little more than a continuation of modern racialism. On the other hand, however, in criticising officials’ acceptance of racialism in the post-war period, such as the UNESCO Race Question of 1950, Lamarre argues that “the appeal of speciesism lies in the challenge that is posed both to reactionary racism and to progressive antiracism, by staging an encounter between the human and the nonhuman” (ibidem: 71-2). Concluding that “speciesism has expanded beyond its initial emphasis on racial difference to embrace all manner of cultural difference” (ibidem: 76), he continues to

discuss contemporary understandings of representation theory and national allegory.

While this paper is not concerned with the translation of racialism to nonhuman characters in video games (rather than comics and animation in the case of Lamarre), speciesism and multispeciesism will serve as an essential method, or tool, in understanding the components that together form the 'monster' of this thesis. Indeed, if we regard the discussion on speciesism hitherto as a tool to understand the 'monster', then – in line with the analogy – the following introductory subsection to the thesis' primary case study serves as ammunition to support this tool in its struggle to render the 'monster' comprehensible.



Figure 1: Nakajima overlooking the sexual intercourse between his teacher Ohara in the physical world and the demon Loki in the virtual world (Nishikubo, 2001).

Contextualising *Shin Megami Tensei*

Without drawing too much attention to the term ‘intermediality’¹³ and its wide range of definitions, it should be noted that the *Shin Megami Tensei* series is – like many, if not most popular Japanese works (e.g. an animated adaptation of a manga)¹⁴ – not a medium

¹³ Robin Nelson considers the traditional definition of intermediality as “a bridge between mediums” (2010: 14) obsolete and prefers Klaus Bruhn Jensen more up-to-date definition: “Intermediality refers to the interconnectedness of modern media of communication. As means of expression and exchange, the different media depend on and refer to each other, both explicitly and implicitly; they interact as elements of particular communicative strategies; and they are constituents of a wider cultural environment” (ibidem: 14-5).

¹⁴ For example, the most popular *Shin Megami Tensei* game, the fourth instalment of the Persona subseries, *Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 4* (Atlus, 2009), has spawned numerous derivative ‘narrative works’, including several manga series; a 26 episode anime adaptation, which was later re-released as a 90 minute feature film; an adjusted and expanded version (‘remake’ or ‘port’) of the game for another game console; a fighting game based on the original game’s setting; multiple live stage productions; a detective novel based on one of the character’s post-game adventures; and even, despite not officially supported by *Persona 4* developer/publisher Atlus, a pornographic parody film (cf. Azuma, 2009: 58 ff.)

specific production. Although its popularity flourished as a video game series, the *Shin Megami Tensei* series originated as a trilogy of Japanese cyberpunk novels, *Digital Devil Story: Megami Tensei* (1986) by Aya Nishitani, describing the revenge of gifted high school student Nakajima on his bullies by summoning the deity Loki¹⁵ through a self-written computer program. One week after the program's initial execution, Loki executes the bullies by controlling Nakajima's fellow students' bodies. Loki, however, demands female sacrifices in return. Impregnating Nakajima's beautiful teacher Ohara (through a helmet that connects her body to the cyberspace in which Loki resides) does not suffice (figure 1), however, whereupon Loki materialises himself into Nakajima's world to horribly molest his friend Yumiko. Nakajima rapidly summons the beast Kerberos,¹⁶ which attacks Loki and allows Nakajima to escape to Asuka,¹⁷ where he plans to resurrect Yumiko. There it becomes apparent that Yumiko is a reincarnation of Izanami (hence the story's subtitle), the Japanese *kami* of creation and death,¹⁸ whose powers provide Nakajima with sufficient time to summon Hinokagutsuchi¹⁹ as a sword to vanquish Loki from reality.

This brief summary of *Digital Devil Story* already provides vivid descriptions of various manners of interaction between human and

¹⁵ Loki is a god or a jotun ('giant', race opposite of gods) from Norse mythology, who is generally depicted as a rebellious and malicious trickster, responsible for the death of Odin's son Balder and the destruction of the world, or Ragnarök (Lurker, 2004: 113).

¹⁶ Kerberos, also rendered as Cerberus in the *Megami Tensei* and *Shin Megami Tensei* video games, is the Greek hound of hell, guarding the gates of the Underworld according to Greek and Roman mythology. Unlike its popular depiction with multiple heads, it is portrayed as a white lion with a snake-like tail coming out of its back in the *Megami Tensei* series.

¹⁷ The precise location where Nakajima resurrects Yumiko is the Ishibutai crypt, one of Japan's largest monolithic structures and is believed to be the tomb of Soga-no-Umako ("Ishibutai Kofun", 1995).

¹⁸ Together with her husband and brother Izanagi, Izanami forms Japan's primeval deities, who created the land and conceived other *kami*. Hinokagutsuchi's birth became Izanami's death (q.v. note 199) and she was casted away to *yomi* ('underworld'). Despite Izanagi's efforts to save her, she had already eaten food from *yomi* and was thus unable to return. Upon seeing her true form, rotten and covered with maggots, Izanagi fled while Izanami tried to stop him. After Izanagi managed to flee, Izanami proclaimed that she would destroy 1000 lives each day, to which he replied that he would conceive 1500. Therefore, Izanami is associated with both creation (while being alive) and death (while residing in *yomi*).

¹⁹ Hinokagutsuchi was a Japanese *kami* of fire, whose fire burnt his mother Izanami to death during his birth. In a rage of grief, his father Izanagi decapitated him and his remains formed new *kami*. According to Michael Ashkenazi, the "birth of fire marked the end of the creation of the world and the start of death" (2003: 186).

nonhuman characters. These human-nonhuman relations appear to be hostile, in the case of Nakajima and Yumiko versus Loki; cooperative, such as Kerberos' attitude towards Nakajima; desirable, as Ohara becomes jealous when Loki rapes Yumiko; and transcendental, with Yumiko reincarnating as Izanami. Unlike the video game series it spawned, the novel trilogy and subsequent animation adaptation offer linear narratives. In other words, all the human-nonhuman relations in the *Digital Devil Story* are predetermined by its author and cannot be altered or influenced by its reader or spectator. Following this logic, I would like to briefly introduce the video game series it spawned before moving on to a more theoretical discussion on human-nonhuman relations in video games, especially the *Shin Megami Tensei* series, in the following section.

The video game series emerged with two *Megami Tensei* games developed by Namcot²⁰ in 1987 and 1989, after which the rights of the series were acquired – for reasons still unknown – by the Japanese video games firm Atlus. Paying little heed to the narrative foundation of the novel trilogy, Atlus made numerous additions while leaving the core principles of the games untouched, turning *Shin Megami Tensei* (Atlus, 1992)²¹ into an underground cult-hit in Japan (Kalata and Snelgrove, n.d.). Set in a post-apocalyptic Japan during the last decade of the twentieth century,²² *Shin Megami Tensei* revolves around a charismatic leader working toward a coup d'état by summoning and exploiting demons from the underworld. After receiving an email that contains the Devil Summoning Program, the story's nameless hero, the player's avatar, is able to communicate with, fight against or recruit demons he encounters. Ultimately, his

²⁰ Namcot is a brand established by arcade manufacturer Namco (now fused with Bandai) in the 1980's to develop and publish video games for home consoles. Halfway the 1990's it was merged with the Namco brand.

²¹ 'Shin' in *Shin Megami Tensei* is susceptible to multiple interpretations: first, the character used to write 'shin' (真, 'truth') may have been added by Atlus to distinguish their games from the Namcot developed games; second, *Shin Megami Tensei*'s 'shin' is phonetically equivalent to 'shin' (新, 'new'), phonetically suggesting a degree of improvement over the *Megami Tensei* series; and third, it follows the video game naming convention of games that were developed for Nintendo's Super Famicom (SNES in the West), by adding 'shin' (or 'Super') prior to the game's title.

²² The post-apocalyptic setting of the *Shin Megami Tensei* video games build on

choices throughout the game determine the future of Japan through siding either with God and his angels (for absolute order), or with Lucifer and his demons (for total freedom), or siding with neither to realise his own vision of society.²³

Following its moderate success, especially in comparison to blockbuster-esque role-playing series such as *Dragon Quest* and *Final Fantasy*, it spawned main series sequels for Super Famicom (*Shin Megami Tensei II*, 1994), one for PlayStation 2 (*Shin Megami Tensei III: Lucifer's Call*, 2003) and one for Nintendo DS (*Shin Megami Tensei: Strange Journey*, 2010), of which the latter serves as this paper's primary case study and will be discussed in greater detail in the following section. While the main series follow the novel's conventions of a human protagonist fighting alongside and versus demons, Atlus also developed several subseries, which slightly deviate from the main series' core principle. For example, the *Digital Devil Saga* series enables its post-human protagonists to transform into demons²⁴ and in the *Persona* series the demons are portrayed as manifestations of the characters' inner feelings.²⁵ Other subseries, such as the *Devil Survivor* and *Devil Summoner Raidou Kuzunoha* (which in itself is a subseries of another subseries) series, replace the traditional turn-based game mechanic with a strategy-based and action-based system, respectively.

What makes the *Shin Megami Tensei* games more relevant for this paper than other Japanese role-playing games, is that it offers the player a blank slate (within the limitations of formalised systems within games), where choices will influence the outcome of the apocalyptic invasion of demons and thus the future of Tokyo or the

²³ *Shin Megami Tensei* creative director Kazuma Kaneko describes the influences of these choices as follows: "It's not wrong to put everything into simple "good" and "evil", like in other games, but what's right and wrong can be completely different, depending on your position and perspective; it's very ambiguous. So I say, why not let each player tackle that question of what's right and wrong?" (Moore, 2010: 1).

²⁴ See Kieran G. Blasingim (2006) for an analysis of similarities between the *Digital Devil Saga* series, among others, and traditional Japanese heroic tales.

²⁵ Elsewhere, I have argued that the fourth *Persona* video game explicitly offers a clash between understandings of traditional and modern Japan, encouraging players to rethink prevalent concepts of identity in light of their respective *Zeitgeist* (Van Zoggel, 2011a).

planet as a whole.²⁶ In this sense, *Shin Megami Tensei*'s gameplay is heavily dependent upon two concepts I have highlighted in the discussion on Wells' and Lamarre's work: 'inter-species communication' and 'multispecies cooperative'. Like the lion Leo in Tezuka's *Jangaru Taitei*, the player controlled main character is able to engage in 'inter-species communication' with the demons, soon leading to a 'multispecies cooperative' to reconstruct the world according to the player's choices.

The role of these choices is best evident in *Shin Megami Tensei III: Lucifer's Call* (henceforth: *LC*). The outcome of the world's rebirth is determined by the 'Reason' the player decides to side with.²⁷ In the temporal post-apocalyptic world in which *LC* takes place, however, Reasons constitute the world's natural laws and its inhabitants, primarily demons, and operate according to the game's rendering of post-apocalyptic Tokyo. Demons, including the half-demonic main character, are unable to establish their own Reason and are thus encouraged to follow one of the existing Reasons. Yet, the player can also reject these Reasons and follow his own path by staying neutral, with the world eventually returning to its previous, pre-apocalypse state; siding with Lucifer, postponing the Earth's rebirth; or even triumphing over Lucifer, leading to the collapse of the game's universe through the destruction of time and a battle between the main character, supported by Lucifer, and the 'The Great Will', arguably referring to Lucifer's archrival in the *Shin Megami Tensei* series, YHVH (Yehowah).

²⁶ The apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic setting of *Shin Megami Tensei* video games serve as the backdrop to think about questions, such as "what's at the end of the universe? Is there an end?". Creative director Kazuma Kaneko thinks that "most people have asked this sort of question at some point in their life. Personally, I just love thinking about things like that. Even though humans are part of the universe, nobody knows why the universe exists, or how humans came into being. A philosophical approach is the only way we can reach some kind of conclusion. That's exactly what myths are—philosophical explanations of the universe and man—and why I love myths so much" (Moore, 2010: 1).

²⁷ The 'Reasons' in *LC* are inner philosophies reflecting the ideologies of the humans destined to survive the Conception. These Reasons are roughly equivalent to: Buddhism inspired existential nihilism (named Shijima, "All at one with the world"); isolated individualism (Musubi, "I am the center of the world"); and social Darwinism (Yosuga, "The world only needs beautiful things").

The monstrosity, the cyborg and the hybrid

At this point, it should be evident that the demons in the *Shin Megami Tensei* games fulfil a crucial role in the process of initiating, shaping and challenging the future of each game's diegetic reality. In the case of *LC*, the human Reason leaders accumulate demon followers to conquer the other Reasons and determine the future of the universe. This perspective on the nonhuman, however, is not unique to the series' creative director Kazuma and his team; rather, it corresponds with the ideas on monsters, their horrifying appearances, the degradation of what is considered sacred and their role within society of many twentieth century thinkers.

As gods degraded from the divine position and sacred domain, the nonhumans in *SJ* readily reminds us of Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of 'grotesque realism', which he explored in his dissertation *Rabelais and his World* (1984).²⁸ Through *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, a series of five novels by French author François Rabelais (1494-1553), Bakhtin understood 'grotesque realism' as "degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity" (Bakhtin, 1984: 19-20). Degradation was "downward", i.e. "the fruitful earth" (in contrast to heaven) and "the genital organs, the belly, and the buttocks" (in contrast to the face and head) (ibidem: 21).²⁹ Bakhtin's description of the 'grotesque image' – "reflect[ing] a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and

²⁸ Despite submitted in 1940, the defence of Bakhtin's dissertation was postponed after World War II. The dissertation had many scholarly opponents, which led to meetings until the government intervened and denied his doctorate. *Rabelais and his World* was not published before 1965, nineteen years after Bakhtin's initial defence (Holquist, 1982: xxv).

²⁹ Particular designs demons, or nonhumans, in *Shin Megami Tensei* challenge Bakhtin's distinction between "upward" and "downward". For example, the demon Diana – symbol for female fertility – is portrayed as an entity a human archer, yet the top of her head ("upward") features multiple female breasts ("downward"), as if it were a headdress. Her shoulders, hips, knees and ankles are similarly covered with female breasts. This, perhaps, is designer Kazuma Kaneko's interpretation of the "exaggerated" nature of the grotesque body (Bakhtin, 1984: 19) and bodily reversal of degradation.

becoming" (ibidem: 24) – is ambivalent,³⁰ contradictory and, of course, monstrous from "the point of view of "classic" aesthetics, that is, the aesthetics of the ready-made and the completed" ibidem: 25). Here, Bakhtin highlights 'grotesque realism' as a literary mode to break with what is considered the norm – something this subsection will return to while discussing Foucault and Derrida – on, among others, the aesthetic level and the political level.

In his celebrated work *Les Mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines* ('The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences', 1966), Michel Foucault offers a literary excavation of human sciences by developing and demonstrating his concept of the 'episteme', an apparatus of understanding which shapes the knowledge of a particular epoch.³¹ In the fifth chapter, dealing with the classification of things, Foucault discusses (the role of) the importance of the monster and the fossil in relation to taxonomies. He argues that "the monster and the fossil are merely the backward projection of those differences and those identities that provide *taxinomia* first with structure, then with character" (Foucault, 2005: 171), stressing the importance of defining the boundaries of what is considered the norm. He then further emphasise the differentiating role of the monster and mark of origin of the fossil by concluding that "the monster provides an account, as though in caricature, of the genesis of differences, and the fossil recalls, in the uncertainty of its resemblances, the first buddings of identity" (ibidem).

Foucault's perspective on the monster as a concept to define, or break with, normality is similar to that of his contemporary Derrida. In an interview with Derrida in *Points...: Interview, 1974-1994* (1995), he is asked by interviewer Elisabeth Weber to clarify the relation "between what [Derrida calls] the monsters of [his] writing and the

³⁰ Ambivalence is not just an "indispensable trait" (Bakhtin, 1984: 24) for the 'grotesque image', it is also a trait of Bakhtin's descriptions of the grotesque as a method,

³¹ Foucault later defined 'episteme' as follows: "I would define the episteme retrospectively as the strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable within, I won't say a scientific theory, but a field of scientificity, and which it is possible to say are true or false. The episteme is the 'apparatus' which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may from what may not be characterized as scientific" (1980: 197).

memory of this absence of power” (Derrida, 1995: 385). Emphasising the difficulty to grasp this relation, Derrida starts by describing his understanding of a monster as a hybridisation or composition of heterogeneous organisms. Such monstrosity, as a pragmatic tool, reveals what is considered normality:

Faced with a monster, one may become aware of what the norm is and when this norm has a history—which is the case with discursive norms, philosophical norms, socio-cultural norms, they have a history—any appearance of monstrosity in this domain allows an analysis of the history of the norms. (ibidem: 385-6)

Similar to Derrida’s argument that monstrosity can be considered as a tool to analyse the history of norms, *LC* employs the sudden apocalypse and invasion of humans to force the player “to become aware of the history of normality” prior to the apocalypse (ibidem: 386). The player has to take the strengths and weaknesses of the universe prior to the apocalypse into consideration and advance his engagement with the monstrosity, the demons, accordingly.

Derrida also remarks that the “monster is a species for which we do not yet have a name” (ibidem), yet it remains a composition of species, or fragments thereof, already known to mankind. One example to illustrate Derrida’s point would be the *Chímaira* (Greek for ‘goat’) from Greek mythologies, which was said to have “a lion’s forequarters, the body is that of a goat (with a goat’s head) and the tail is replaced by a snake” (Lurker, 2004: 43). Despite being a composition of familiar species, as apparent from Lurker’s description of the *Chímaira*, Derrida contends that the monster is frightening “precisely because no anticipation had prepared one to identify this figure” (Derrida, 1995: 386.). This unpreparedness is a recurring gameplay mechanic in *SJ*, as ‘new’ (that is, previously unidentified) demons are represented by an animated graphical icon by the main character’s ‘Demonica’,³² a highly advanced battle suit. The paper will return to *SJ* in greater detail in the following section.

³² Demonica stands for “Demountable Next Integrated Capability Armor”, and functions similar to the COMP devices used in other *Megami Tensei* products, including the *Digital Devil Monogatari* novels (Nishitani, 1986).

These unidentifiable and thus terrifying attributes of the monster are of fundamental importance to the concept of the monster, since, as Derrida points out, as soon as the monster is acknowledged as a monster, it is being domesticated. In other words, derived from another writing: “Monsters cannot be announced. One cannot say: ‘here are our monsters’, without immediately turning the monsters into pets” (Derrida, 1989: 80). It should be noted that, as Derrida himself argues, his concept of the monster is not limited to organisms; it can similarly be associated with abstract ideas, such as the future:

The future is necessarily monstrous: the figure of the future, that is, that which can only be surprising, that for which we are not prepared, you see, is heralded by species of monsters. A future that would not be monstrous would not be a future; it would already be a predictable, calculable, and programmable tomorrow. All experience open to the future is prepared or prepares itself to welcome the monstrous *arrivant*... (Derrida, 1995: 386-7)

This process of domesticating a monster, forcing us to change our habits and thus norms, is what Derrida calls “the movement of culture” (ibidem). These monstrosities – the manifestations of the unacceptable, or intolerable, of the incomprehensible – produce *events* in histories (ibidem, his italics) and force us to rethink our norms and history thereof.

While Derrida optimistically posits his understanding of the monster as a pragmatic tool to move culture and its norms, one should not forget that the monster still has the quality of the uncanny, to which this paper returns in the following section. As Colin Milburn reminds us in his article on Darwin and Derrida’s perspectives on the monster, that, despite both thinkers celebrate the monster’s *arrivant* to violate the order of things, “[h]orror is a weapon, and while sometimes it may be used for affirmative purposes, such as the implantation of a deconstructive or an evolutionary discourse, there exist horrors and monstrosities that can never be accepted” (2003: 621).

To put the aforementioned conceptualisations of the monster in perspective, this section will conclude with Bruno Latour's reconsideration of modernity and Donna Haraway's work on the cyborg, which Joshua LaBare associated with sf's obsession with 'things' (LaBare, 2010: 79-81). While connecting the contrasting definitions of a 'thing' – 'an inanimate material object' on the one hand, and 'an action, activity, concept or thought' on the other – to Haraway's provocative thesis³³ on the cyborg is fairly straightforward; much more intriguing, however, is the association with Latour's attempt to rethink modernity. In discussing the hypothesis of his book *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), Latour briefly describes that

The hypothesis of this essay is that the word "modern" designates two sets of entirely different practices which must remain distinct if they are to remain effective, but have recently begun to be confused. The first set of practices, by "translation", creates mixtures between entirely new types of beings, hybrids of nature and culture. The second, by "purification", creates two entirely distinct ontological zones: that of human beings on the one hand; that of nonhumans on the other. Without the first set, the practices of purification would be fruitless or pointless. Without the second, the work of translation would be slowed down, limited, or even ruled out (Latour, 1993: 10-11).

In other words, Latour's 'modernity' is a dichotomy of the domain of the subject (e.g. "human", "society", "politics", and "mind") on the one hand, and the domain of the object ("nature", "world", "science", and "nonhuman", etc.) on the other – the very existence and recurrent formation of hybrids ("networks", "mediators", "collectives", etc.) are incompatible with Latour's modernity. Hybrids, here, are 'instable events' (or "imbroglios") that just happen and, despite exhibiting characteristics of subjects and objects, cannot be understood from the subject-object dichotomy. Only after being stabilised, these hybrids 'produce' subjects and objects – therefore, Latour renders hybrids as ontologically primary.

³³ The provocative thesis mentioned here as follows: "I have come to see cyborgs as junior siblings in the much bigger, queer family of companion species" (Haraway, 2003a: 58-59).

The observant reader may have noticed similarities between the thoughts – certainly not method – of Derrida, Haraway and Latour: these thinkers are concerned with “*tertium quids*” (LaBare, 2010: 80), a literally ‘third something’ that is unknown yet present in combination with two known ones. Derrida’s monstrosity, Haraway’s cyborg and Latour’s hybrids are definitely no synonyms, but point towards the same: that what is unknown will affect – back to Foucault – the order of things.

Having established this theoretical framework, it might be relevant to briefly re-examine the discussion on animality and anthropomorphism in animation by Wells and Lamarre in light of this framework. Both authors are interested in the playful challenges posed to the ‘boundaries’ between human and animal, and are thus constantly emphasising the hybrid nature of their research subject. Wells, building on his analytical model on bestial ambivalence in the first chapter (2009: 51 *ff.*), appears to be more concerned with the anthropomorphisation of the animal, whereas Lamarre, drawing from wartime animation, explores the allegorical representations (or translations) of human races into animated animals (Lamarre, 2009). By adding these anthropomorphised animals and dehumanised humans to the set of conceptual *tertium quids* already discussed in this subsection, it should be clear how we should start to understand the ‘monster’ of this thesis: a trinity of the human, the nonhuman and the machine – challenging the subject-object binary and what is considered normal by transgressing, and perhaps even trespassing, the domains of one another. The following section, then, discusses the correlation between these domains and – finally – gives this conceptual ‘monster’ flesh through the context of the demon from *Shin Megami Tensei* series.

How does this ‘monster’ work?

“Intimate play goods are machines used for play and instruction and also for communication and companionship. Significantly, these devices are also said to be “healing” in rhetoric that assumes players are already wounded: physically on edge, overworked, stressed out. Being touched by another, albeit a machine, is soothing: the s(t)imulation of social intercourse.”

- Anne Allison (2006: 190)

Having discussed the manifestation and composition of the ‘monster’ in the previous section, this section seeks to discuss the complex system of interaction between individual components of the ‘monster’ in more detail. As the first chapter already discussed the human-nonhuman relations at length, this chapter will call attention to the human-machine (and, to some extent, the nonhuman-machine) interface. In doing so, two concepts are essential in thinking about these relations. Fear for the familiar yet foreign, on the one hand, will follow the concept of the uncanny, or the *unheimlich*.³⁴ Affection for the exotic yet unknown, on the other, may be readily associated – especially in this thesis’ disciplinary field of media studies – with the concepts of techno-intimacy and intimate virtuality, which anthropologist Anne Allison (2006) has associated with *Tamagotchi* and *Pokémon*, respectively. As stated before, these concepts will be guided by the *Shin Megami Tensei* series, in particular *SJ*, to provide a solid understanding of the ‘monster’ in the final subsection so that it can be employed in the debate during the third section.

³⁴ The German word *unheimlich* literally means ‘unhomely’, but it translated throughout this paper as ‘uncanny’ to follow the translating conventions of the authors whose work will be discussed. It should be noted that *unheimlich* and uncanny are no precise equivalents of one another.

The Uncanny

I was first introduced to the concept of the uncanny in a 2002 article by Miri Nakamura on Japanese author Yumeno Kyūsaku's novel *Dogura Magura* (1935). As a result of Japan's self-imposed *sakoku* ('locked country') policy during the Tokugawa period (1603-1868),³⁵ Japan had long been isolated from the rest of the world and had thus been affected marginally by foreign influences. Although Japan's modernisation, roughly equal to 'Westernisation', did set in before the advent of the twentieth century, *Dogura Magura* is considered as one of the few works that deal with a more 'pure Japanese' science fiction than its post-war counterparts.

Nakamura focuses on the role of technology in the pre-war periods of the Taishō (1912-1926) and early Shōwa (1926-1989), considered by contemporary thinkers as "the age of machines, in contrast to the people at the turn of the century, who feared machines" (Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke (1930) cited in Nakamura, 2006: 6). Nakamura then provides a detailed account of Japan's curiosity regarding machinery and even humanoid technology on the one hand and the fear among thinkers regarding the influence of technology on mankind on the other. She is particularly interested in *Dogura Magura* since, rather than focusing on physical machinery, it is concerned with the dystopian potentialities of technology by "deploy[ing] mechanical metaphors to capture the functioning of the human mind" (ibidem: 10).

Instead of summarising *Dogura Magura* and discussing the usage of the uncanny as a metaphor, Nakamura's concept, or rather conceptualisation of the 'mechanical uncanny' is more relevant to this thesis than the actual novel itself. Although the exact definition of the mechanical uncanny is dependent on its context and thus varies throughout the article, its conceptual purpose remains

³⁵ This *sakoku* policy was an initiative of the Tokugawa shogunate, established in 1600, to preserve its national hegemony and prevent the influence of Christianity by terminating a "lively century of intercourse with the countries of western Europe" (Varley, 2000: 164). Only the Dutch were allowed to continue their trade with Japan, even though their presence in Japan was limited to the artificial island Deshima in the harbour of Nagasaki. See Varley (2000: 164 ff.) for an accessible yet profound account on relations between Tokugawa Japan and the Western world.

constant. To describe a few, the mechanical uncanny is perceived as a “literary mode that blurs the line between what is perceived as natural and what is perceived as artificial” (ibidem: 5),³⁶ “a mode of fear that captures the invasion of the mechanical into the biological” (ibidem: 9), and “marked by a certain loss of both individual and national identity and a certain nostalgia for a pre-Westernized Japan” (ibidem: 11).³⁷ Although Nakamura concludes her article by arguing that the mechanical uncanny in *Dogura Magura* is at work on two levels, namely on the level of the individual and on the level of national consciousness, I argue that it is also at work on the level of the discourse, since – to cite Nakamura herself – “mechanical metaphors to capture the functioning of the human mind” (ibidem: 10) are deployed throughout *Dogura Magura*.

Nakamura’s conceptualisation of the mechanical uncanny is obviously, as she indicates herself, one of many interpretations and repurposes of the uncanny as it was coined by Ernst Jentsch in his 1906 essay *Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen* (‘On the Psychology of the Uncanny’) and later popularised through Sigmund Freud’s 1919 essay *Das Unheimliche* (‘The Uncanny’). Since Nicholas Royle has already written a satisfying historisation of the uncanny (2003), this paper will directly focus on an object that is historically central to, if not intertwined with the discussion and formulation of the uncanny: the automaton. The uncertainty of having “a human person or rather an automaton before him”, Jentsch wrote (1906: 11); Freud rephrased “the theme of the doll Olympia (...) must be held responsible for the quite unparalleled atmosphere of uncanniness evoked by the story [of E.T.A. Hoffman’s *Der Sandmann*]” (1911: 202). Nakamura, too, devotes an entire subsection of her article to describe how none of the ostensibly human characters in *Dogura Magura* are a coherent purely “natural” subject, indeed (2006: 12-18).

³⁶ Here, again, we see tension between the dichotomy, or lack thereof – to follow Latour (1993) – of modernity; this literary mode of the uncanny transgresses, not unlike Haraway’s cyborg, the traditional subject-object binary.

³⁷ This is apparent in Yumeno’s text since Western science is presented an opposing dark force to Japanese culture (Nakamura, 2006: 11).

Especially in light of Nakamura's context of early modern Japan, the emphasis on the automaton evokes notions about *karakuri*, short for *karakuri ningyō* ('automaton'), which can also be translated as 'mechanism', 'device' or even 'trick.' The arrival of a Western clock in Japan halfway during the sixteenth century ultimately led to the development of these mechanically complex animated figures, a development highly prevalent in the Tokugawa period. However, as anthropologist Masao Yamaguchi contends in his excellent chapter on the ludic nature of Japan's modernisation, "we can say that the Japanese learnt to tame the machine by means of the *karakuri* puppet because they considered the puppet an extension and copy of the human figure, not as something sent by demons or animated by the divine" (Yamaguchi, 2002: 78). Whereas the automaton evoked an uncanny feeling in Western societies – e.g. the aforementioned doll Olympia in *Der Sandmann*, or Fritz Lang's dystopian film *Metropolis* (Lang, 1927), in which a robot agitates human labourers – the Japanese enjoyed the presence of automata in a similar manner as they enjoyed domesticated animals, namely as charming copies of the human figure (Yamaguchi: 79).³⁸ In other words, unlike Western societies, the Japanese felt especially sentiments of similarity, if not affection, towards automata. This affection towards machinery will be central to the discussion that follows in the next subsection.

So far, this subsection has been a discussion based on accounts regarding the conceptualisation of the uncanniness of the human-machine interface. Examining *SJ* through the framework established by this interface, it becomes apparent that the uncanny (and intimate virtuality, as discussed in the following subsection) towards the machine – and the nonhuman – can be distinguished at two levels: the ludic level, i.e. the integration of the uncanny in the gameplay,

³⁸ A possible reason why automata were cherished during the Tokugawa period yet feared in pre-war Japan is that the Japanese intellectuals may not have been concerned with the automata themselves, but rather with the penetration of Western sciences and thoughts in a nation that had been isolated from the rest of the world for 250 years. To cite Nakamura once again, this mechanical uncanny of Japanese intellectuals "marked by a certain loss of both individual and national identity and a certain nostalgia for a pre-Westernized Japan" (2006: 11).

will be discussed in a critical dialogue with the affection towards the machine in this chapter's final subsection; the narratological level, i.e. the game's diegetic reality, requires a close examination of one of the main supporting characters of the game. The following subsection will discuss another supporting character, one that can be associated with the concept of intimate virtuality.

Considering the importance to 'Always contextualize!',³⁹ the premise of *SJ* will be briefly summarised. Set in the present, Antarctica, serving as the game's main setting (unlike Tokyo in foregoing entries in the series), is exponentially being consumed by a hyperspace, which scientist readily have dubbed the 'Schwarzwelt'.⁴⁰ To investigate this imminent worldwide threat, the United Nations sends off four vehicles with the world's most prestigious scientists, soldiers and technologies. Upon penetrating the Schwarzwelt, three vehicles are damaged beyond repair and the hyperspace offers no simple exit.⁴¹ The player, assuming the role of an American soldier (or Japanese in the Japanese version of the game), is requested to investigate the whereabouts of the Schwarzwelt, only to discover that it is inhabited by demonic creatures seeking to take control of the human world. His Demonica suit (q.v. note 32) allows him to not only see the otherwise invisible demons, but also to interact with them. He and his colleagues then visit several locations spread throughout the Schwarzwelt, which correspond with sectors, alphabetically named after constellations, such as Antlia and Boötes, and are being governed by a demon lord, each with its own methods

³⁹ This is a reference to Fredric Jameson's rallying cry 'Always Historicize!' in the preface to his work *The Political Unconscious* (1981).

⁴⁰ Mari Nakamura pointed out to me that *SJ*'s investigation of the Schwarzwelt and the human inability to communicate with the nonhuman without depending on auto-translation technologies is similar to the premise of the 1961 SF novel *Solaris* by the Polish author Stanislaw Lem. Similar to *SJ*, the nonhuman in *Solaris* (the eponymous sentient planet) tests the human scientists by materialising human simulacra derived from the scientists' repressed feelings and memories. Incapable to conceptualise *Solaris*' actions through human consciousness and science, the story emphasises the failure of the human to communicate with the extraterrestrial nonhuman (cf. Jameson, 2007: 108-118).

⁴¹ The Schwarzwelt's outer barrier is a "plasma cloud that dismantles all approaching objects at molecular level" (Zelenin in *SJ*). The investigation team's highly advanced vehicles use a "plasma engine to penetrate the protective wall" (AI computer Arthur in *SJ*). Once penetrated the wall and arrived in the Schwarzwelt, it becomes clear the investigation team is only able to leave the hyperspace through the 'Vanishing Point', the Schwarzwelt's only exit and guarded by a fierce demon lord.

or political motives to pursue humanity's destruction.⁴² The sectors largely appear as reflective constructions of the seven deadly sins, starting off with wrath, lust and gluttony.

The character in question is the cold-blooded Russian scientist Zelenin, holding the rank of First Lieutenant. She maintains a professional attitude throughout the narrative yet remains reluctant to recruit demons as partners for battles. This unwillingness is further fuelled by fear when she is captured by a demon lord for *in vivo* testing in order to contribute to the demons' knowledge of the human biology. Saved in time by the angelic demon Mastema,⁴³ who later forces another angelic demon into her Demon Summoning Program for her own protection, Zelenin becomes interested in Mastema to the extent that she allows him to transform her into an angel. This mode of being enables her to sing a hymn which soothes the minds of humans. Despite her blind loyalty to Mastema and other angelic demons, Zelenin constantly emphasises her distrust and discomfort in cooperating with demons; in Zelenin's case, her attitude towards the demons would best be described as uncanniness – familiar yet foreign.

It is obvious that Zelenin's reluctance stems from her uncertainty regarding the metaphysics of the demons and the world they inhabit, the Schwarzwelt. Unable to obtain answers to her questions – 'what are demons?', 'can I trust them?', 'why should I trust them?' – through logical empiricism, Zelenin determines to remain unaffiliated with the demons. In order to reassure Zelenin – and to satisfy the curiosity of the reader of this thesis – the remaining part of this subsection will examine uncanniness and the

⁴² The Antlia sector lord, known as Morax, considers mimicking human warfare as the most successful method ("Nothing is more efficient at slaying humans than humans themselves! We need only to mimic you to slaughter humans on a grand scale!"). Mitra of Boötes, interested in human biology, is offended by the human revolt ("Humans bleed pointless blood! Humans breathe pointless air! Humans think pointless thoughts! In every way, shape, and form, humans are pointless creatures"). These political motives may be interpreted as arguments against war and experiments on animals, respectively.

⁴³ Mastema, also known as Mansemet, is "the father of all evil, yet subservient to God" according to the Old Testament Apocrypha. It is said Mastema tempts humans, only to execute them by employing the many demons he commands (Oliver and Lewis, 2008: 240-241).

metaphysics of *SJ*'s demon world through the framework established in the previous section.

The demon in *SJ*, invisible to the naked eye but rendered visible through the Demonica suit (interface: human dependent on machine), is the personification of an accumulation of descriptors for sacred or religious entities as recorded in religious texts and other chronicles. Like Derrida's monster – "a composite figure of heterogeneous organisms that are grafted unto each other" (1995: 385) – the demon, too, manifests itself as an 'imaginary' monster comprising components resembling parts from the human body and the animal body. Imaginary, here, is put between quotation marks to point out that the demon's appearance (or, to put it in non-diegetic context: the designs drawn by artist Kazuma Kaneko), background, and sometimes even attitude, are inspired by our, i.e. real-life humans, ancestors' descriptions of imaginary supernatural entities.⁴⁴ Concluding that the *SJ* demon thus must be an incarnation of a supernatural entity is too quick: the demon proclaims it once was – being worshipped by humans in ancient times – but no longer is.⁴⁵ The demon, then, may be regarded as an entity degraded or lowered from the supernatural world to the material world (*cf.* Bakhtin, 1984); followers of Apollinaris⁴⁶ would have described the demon as *tertium quid*, since it is neither human nor divine (*cf.* LaBare, 2011); similar to the Harawayian cyborg (1985), the demon is derived from human imagination – suggesting it is an object – yet maintaining an autonomy equal, if not superior to that of the human (q.v. note 42); and the challenge it poses for the subject-object binary as a hybrid, an 'instable event', is Zelenin's inability to translate the hybrid within

⁴⁴ Kazuma Kaneko has described the process of designing as follows: "When I design demons, I start by researching their profiles in legends and folklores. Gods and demons that appear in myths greatly reflect the environment, culture and customs of the area they originate from. For example, both Zeus from Greek mythology and Thor from Norse mythology are thunder gods, but their attire and equipment are quite different. I get all that information in my head first, then give the demons new form, sometimes in accordance with their traditional image, and in other times giving them a modern interpretation. Once that's done, the only thing left is for me to draw them in a pose that fits their character" (Moore, 2010: 1).

⁴⁵ This can be interpreted as a decline in dominance of religions throughout the world.

⁴⁶ Declared a heresy by the First Council of Constantinople during the fourth century B.C., the theology Apollinarism contended that Jesus Christ was neither human nor God and thus a *tertium quid* (note 74 in Stalling, 2010: 232).

the subject-object binary of Latour's modernity (2003). Indeed, familiar (as autonomous as humans)⁴⁷ yet foreign (but it is no human!) – the uncanny is a precise description of Zelenin's sentiment toward the *SJ* demon.

Intimate virtuality

Zelenin's uncanniness represents roughly one part of the human investigation team. Her adversary in the human-machine and human-nonhuman interface is the American mercenary Jimenez, who does not mince matters regarding interaction with the demon and embraces each possibility of cooperation. At the time Zelenin was held prison, Jimenez rescued the demon Bugaboo from an experiment and rapidly forms a close bond with the demon. Halfway through the game, Jimenez is instructed to keep his weather-eye open at the entrance of a human-made sector. Discovering Bugaboo had gone missing, Jimenez entered the base to look for his demon and discovered that the locals (humans not part of the investigation team)⁴⁸ had been using living demons as spare parts to fuse with weaponry. In Jimenez's attempt to destroy most of the equipment, he and Bugaboo were caught and subjected to similar experiments themselves. At the time the player arrives, Bugaboo is losing its consciousness and Jimenez asks the protagonist to fuse him with Bugaboo. Upon doing so, 'Awake Jimenez' is created and uses his newfound prowess to take revenge on the humans who have tortured him. In light of the present discussion, Jimenez's affectionate attitude towards Bugaboo can be considered as a degree of 'intimate virtuality' wherein he was willing to sacrifice his life as a

⁴⁷ It is noteworthy that none of the game's human characters relate the demon to a supernatural entity from worldwide chronicles, despite the demons themselves constantly suggest, and some even state, the existence of this relation. Hence, I do not consider the familiarity of Zelenin's uncanny feeling the result of her considering this demon-supernatural entity relation.

⁴⁸ This group of human mercenaries, known as Jack's Squad, have invaded the Schwarzwelt to exploits materials and demons for financial purposes. Using more powerful versions of machinery used by the investigation team, they were able to erect a sector in the Schwarzwelt.

human and to continue living as half-human, half-nonhuman hybrid.⁴⁹

‘Intimate virtuality’ is a term coined by anthropologist Anne Allison in a chapter on Pokémon in her monograph *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (2006) to describe the “virtualization in this [Pokémon’s] mobile, interactive, and additive human-machine interface” (266). As I contend that intimate virtuality is better understood within the context of techno-intimacy – based on the order of chapters in Allison’s book, she would agree with me⁵⁰ – this subsection will start by providing a brief overview of the development of techno-intimacy in Japan.

Allison distinguishes a techno-ideological shift towards the end of the twentieth century (ibidem: 188-191). In the aftermath of World War II, ideologies regarding Japan’s rebuild were largely initiated and drawn from manga and animation series. For instance, the humanoid eponymous protagonist in Osamu Tezuka’s *Tetsuwan Atomu* (‘Astro Boy’, 1952) or the popularisation of mecha, humanoid robots often used for battle purposes, in the animated science fiction series *Kidō Senshi Gandamu* (‘Mobile Suit Gundam’, 1979). Even *shōjo* (‘girls’), a lifestyle originally associated with girl-ish behaviour,⁵¹ turned warriors in *Bishōjo Senshi Sailor Moon* (‘Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon’, 1991). However, following Allison, a shift occurred towards the end of the century:

Techno-intimacy is a sign of the times. While *mecha*-tronics was the fantasy as well as national policy for rebuilding Japan after the war – remaking the country as a techno supernation – *sof*-tronics is the symptom and corrective to this industrial master plan in the new millennium – assuaging the atomism, alienation, and stress of corporatist capitalism with virtual companionship (2006: 190, her italics)

⁴⁹ Technically speaking, the demon Bugaboo Jimenez befriended is an artificially created demon, the outcome of an experiment. The game states that Bugaboo consists for 75% of demon genetic material, suggesting the other 25% was derived from fellow Schwarzwelt investigation team members.

⁵⁰ Introducing the term ‘techno-intimacy’ during the sixth chapter on the *Tamagotchi* devices, Allison continues to build on this form of intimacy in the two subsequent chapters on Pokémon, only to briefly coin ‘intimate virtuality’ toward the end of the last chapter.

⁵¹ While ‘girl’ is a literal and correct translation of *shōjo*, this term is more often associated with the *shōjo* as a phenomenon within academic discourses.

What, precisely, has led to this techno-ideological shift, or collapse of meta-narrative of imagination, Allison does not point out, but she stresses the demand for techno-intimacy, or “s(t)imulation of social intercourse” (ibidem: 190).⁵² This demand was first satisfied by Japanese toy company Bandai’s Tamagotchi devices in 1996, but two years and forty million sold units later, the craze suddenly died off. However, Allison argues, the “mechanical fantasy it gave form to – techno-intimacy – has only intensified in the years afterward” (ibidem: 188).⁵³

This intensification of techno-intimacy as a form of mechanical fantasy is clearly visible in modern Japan-made popular commodities. In his celebrated work *Otaku: Japan’s Database Animals* (Azuma, 2009), originally published in Japanese in 2001, Japanese critic Hiroki Azuma distinguishes a Lyotardian collapse of grand narratives in the domain of Japanese popular works. This collapse, preceded by the obsessive consumptions of fictive narratives as substitutions for real grand narratives (e.g. political ideologies) in the 1980s (cf. Otsuka, 2010), led to what Azuma has called ‘the grand nonnarrative’ (Azuma, 2009: 34ff.). Basically, this grand nonnarrative postulates that fans do not longer engage in ‘small narratives’ (that is, episodes) to gradually discover the underlying grand narrative, but prefer to engage in small narratives through a Derridean mode of consciousness, deconstructing what is perceived, often characters, into fragments and use these to reconstruct derivative works, or simulacra (ibidem: 47ff.; Lamarre, 2009: 257-64). In short, the shift from narrative-centred productions in the 1980s to character-centred franchises in the 1990s that Azuma describes, corresponds with Allison’s observations regarding the shift from techno-ideological fantasies of constructing a techno supernation in post-war Japan to

⁵² Elsewhere I have suggested a connection between the collapse of Allison’s understanding of mecha-tronics with the end of the broadcast of highly influential animation series *Shinseiki Evangelion* (‘Neon Genesis Evangelion’) in 1996 (Van Zoggel, 2011b).

⁵³ The definition and use of ‘techno-intimacy’ is highly context dependent. Other uses of the term, for example, emphasise the paradoxical convenience of everyday technology (Cumiskey, 2005) or the ambivalent relationship between the desire to be connected and the need to stand apart (De Vries, 2009).

the demand for 's(t)imulation of social intercourse' – what Azuma would call 'simulacrum'.

It is this emphasis on character-centred franchises that have become a key phenomenon in understanding techno-intimacy in relation to games. Building on Allison and Azuma's observations, Patrick W. Galbraith has argued that dating simulation video games, such as *LovePlus* (Konami, 2009), which offers open-ended interactions with three virtual girls, open up the possibilities of "becoming" with a technological "companion species" (Galbraith, 2011; cf. Van Zoggel, 2011b). Despite this reference to Haraway's provocative thesis (q.v. note 10), it should be noted that the virtual girls in *LovePlus* resemble human girls⁵⁴ and that the ultimate goal is to marry one of the girls.⁵⁵ While it remains debatable to which degree the virtual girls of *LovePlus* may or may not be regarded as 'human' or 'real', as some fans "resort to fictionalization in order to possess the object of their love" (Saitō, 2007: 227),⁵⁶ this thesis – and this subsection in particular – is concerned with companion species that are considered nonhuman in *both* 'our' reality as well the diegetic reality.

In returning to the aforementioned case study of *SJ* with Jimenez and his demonic fellow Bugaboo, it is safe to say that Allison's concept of 'intimate virtuality' is involved in both the human-nonhuman interface and human-machine interface. Intimate virtuality – although it is never clearly defined by Allison herself – might be understood as a mode of consciousness wherein a human player resorts to virtualisation (perhaps similar to Saitō's "fictionalization") to enable himself or herself to interact with virtual, nonhuman species through a human-machine interface. This human-

⁵⁴ In order to avoid drawing too much attention to the discussion on realism and its innumerable definitions – which is not relevant to the rest of this thesis – I have deliberately chosen to use 'human girls' rather than 'real girls'. For fruitful discussions on realism in digital imagery, see Manovich (1992; 2001, especially chapter four).

⁵⁵ There have been accounts of players who extend their marriage with the virtual girls beyond the game (Van Zoggel, 2011b: 10), which in turn pose interesting questions regarding taking experiences in games beyond its medium (cf. Copier, 2007).

⁵⁶ This is one of the four descriptors of the *otaku* by psychoanalyst Tamaki Saitō. The others are as follows: having an affinity for fictional context; having multiple orientations when it comes to enjoying fiction; for them fiction itself can be a sexual object (Saitō, 2007: 227).

nonhuman-machine interface, then, is – similar, if not identical to Allison’s example of *Pokémon* – at work at two levels. On the level of the diegesis, the highly technological Demonica suit (machine) renders the otherwise invisible demon visible, translates demon language to its user’s native tongue and allows its user to install applications⁵⁷ on the Demonica OS to influence the user’s interaction with the Schwarzwelt and its demonic inhabitants. Building even further on parallels with the *Pokémon* series, the Demonica ‘stores’ demons that are part of the active party (compare to the Poké Ball);⁵⁸ the Demon Compendium serves as a database of registered demons which can be summoned for a fee of money (Pokémon Storage System, albeit this one is free of charge); and the application Demon Analyze displays a demon’s data and its folkloric background (versus Pokédex). The final comparison with *Pokémon* – for now – raises the human-nonhuman-machine interface from the diegetic level to the nondiegetic level of ‘our’ reality. Even though the *Shin Megami Tensei* games have rarely, if ever prior to *SJ*, been concerned with intercommunication among players, which can be considered as *Pokémon*’s very *raison d’être*,⁵⁹ *SJ* introduced a method for players to exchange demons by inserting a 32 digit code in the Demon Compendium – or obtaining an unique demon through a password provided directly by creator Atlus.⁶⁰

In closing up the subsection on the uncanny, techno-intimacy, intimate virtuality and the complex interplay of the human-

⁵⁷ Whereas the main applications are essential for advancing the narrative (e.g. unlocking particular doors and providing access to hidden dimension within the Schwarzwelt), the sub applications are generally additions which ease the burden of exploring the Schwarzwelt (e.g. health regenerators, decrease hostile surprise attacks, ability to fuse rare demons).

⁵⁸ According to *Pokémon* creator Satoshi Tajiri, the idea behind the process of ‘catching’ the monsters in battles is *dētaka* (‘data-fication’), “the reconfiguration of value from a material form (monsters) into data that are storable, portable, and transferable (via communication cables on the Game Boy)” (Alison, 2006: 221).

⁵⁹ *Pokémon* creator Satoshi Tajiri’s “novel” idea to use the Game Boy’s *tsūshin kēberu* (‘communication cable’) for communication rather than *taisen* (‘battling’) was praised by Nintendo as “innovative” and was allowed to develop what ultimately would become *Pokémon* – on the condition that Tajiri would include *taisen* elements, as well (Allison, 2006: 200).

⁶⁰ Rather than depending on external technologies, namely exchanging monsters through wireless connections (e.g. recent *Pokémon* instalments), this static model of exchange is more accessible since the passwords can be inserted at any time and everywhere.

nonhuman-machine interface, I would like to turn to a frequently cited statement by Derrida regarding his conceptualisation of the discursive monster: “Monsters cannot be announced. One cannot say: ‘here are our monsters’, without immediately turning the monsters into pets”, (80) he wrote in 1989. Here, as will be discussed in more detail in the following subsection, Derrida is concerned with a process similar to Latour’s purification (i.e. the process of stabilising hybrids to fit within the subject-object binary), namely the deconstruction – to stay within Derridean terminology – of what is unknown to reconstruction into the domain of what is known. In the light of *SJ*, it is clear that Zelenin, largely due to fear, has not engaged in this deconstruction and thus fails to perceive the demons as something other than frightening monstrosities. Jimenez, however, readily reconstructed the demons in the domain of what is known, “immediately turning the monsters into pets”. Whereas Zelenin is unable to obtain answers to her questions – ‘what are demons?’, ‘can I trust them?’, ‘why should I trust them?’ – through logical empiricism (to cite myself, p. 27), it is Jimenez, testifying to a boundless naiveté, who considers the demons – to cite a ten-year old boy on *Pokémon* – as “imaginary partners, creatures that can be your loyal pet if you control them (...) sort of like animals that are real except mutated” (Allison, 2006: 205).

Anti-human exceptionalism

Having demonstrated the conceptual dialogue between the uncanny and intimate virtuality on a narratological level at length, this chapter’s final subsection will shift focus to the ludic level. This ludic level is concerned with reflections of the uncanny and intimate virtuality on the level of gameplay mechanisms. Since *Pokémon* has proven to be a fruitful addition to the discussion on the human-nonhuman-machine interface in *SJ*, this subsection will provide a similar comparative study.

Theoretically speaking the process of recruiting, training and employing nonhuman creatures in battle in *Shin Megami Tensei*⁶¹ is highly comparable, if not identical to the core principle of the *Pokémon* games. In each main instalment of the *Pokémon* series,⁶² the player assumes the role of a teenager who aspires to become the world's best Pokémon trainer, in which 'Pokémon' refers to the nonhuman creatures, or 'pocket monsters', which can be caught, domesticated⁶³ and deployed in battles against other Pokémon (cf. Allison, 2006: 192-233). Inspired by his childhood memories of collecting and exchanging bugs, *Pokémon* is director Satoshi Tajiri's nostalgic envisionment of pre-industrial Japan, an attempt to provide companionship to those, especially children; suffering from 'solitarism' (ibidem: 201; cf. Turkle, 2011).

⁶¹ Apart from 'Fight' and 'Flee', usual battle options in role-playing game, the *Shin Megami Tensei* games offer the possibility to 'Talk'. While some demons refuse to converse (for reasons unknown to the player) or are simply unable to communicate in a comprehensible manner (such as growling), others are interested in their human visitors and question the whereabouts of humankind. These questions, ranging from requesting a joke to an inquiry into metaphysical differences between demons and humans, can be answered by picking one of three answers provided by the game. Whether an answer is accepted or rejected by the demon depends on various factors; this may be influenced by, among other factors, its demonic race, its gender, the folkloric character the demon is based on, or the player's attributes. Failure results in upsetting the demon, causing it to either attack the player or making it leave. In other words, through trial and error the player has to learn about the nonhuman in order to successfully converse with them. Negotiation becomes available once the player has been able to provide two accepted answers. He is then offered the choice to pursue recruitment or to request Macca (money) or an item. While the latter two will readily be provided by the demon, recruitment involves a series of sacrifices by the player. In exchange for money, items, his health (expressed in HP, or 'health power') or his spirit (MP, or 'magic power'), the demon will consider the player's offer to join his party. While in most cases the demon will be glad or even honoured to participate in the player's endeavours to explore the Schwarzwelt, in some occasions the demon cancels the negotiation, taking the offerings with them – "maybe [demons] are not so different from humans after all", chief designer Eiji Ishida has once put it (Loe, 2010: 71).

⁶² With main installments, I refer to the flagship entries of each so-called 'Pokémon generation': *Pokémon Red, Blue and Yellow* (the first generation; for Game Boy); *Pokémon Silver, Gold and Crystal* (the second generation; for Game Boy Color); *Pokémon Ruby, Sapphire and Emerald* (the third generation; for Game Boy Advance); *Pokémon Diamond, Pearl and Platinum* (the fourth generation; for Nintendo DS); and *Pokémon Black Version, White Version* and the respective sequel to each (the fifth generation; also for Nintendo DS).

⁶³ Anna Tsing has criticised common ideas regarding domestication of nonhuman animals. She argues that "domestication tends to be imagined as a hard line: You are either in the human fold or you are out in the wild. Because this dichotomization stems from an ideological commitment to human mastery, it supports the most outrageous fantasies of domestic control, on the one hand, and wild species self-making, on the other. Through such fantasies, domestics are condemned to life imprisonment and genetic standardization, while wild species are "preserved" in gene banks while their multi-species landscapes are destroyed" (Tsing, forthcoming.: 6).

Unlike the nonhumans in *Shin Megami Tensei*, often mature and horrific in design, the nonhuman characters in Pokémon are ubiquitously recognised as *kawaii* ('cute') – and might even embody the “transspecies potential” described by Lamarre (2010: 63ff.)⁶⁴ –, resulting in the player’s deep attachments to these characters (Allison, 2006: 205-6). In fact, as I have argued elsewhere (Van Zoggel, 2011b: 8), while players have been able to obtain at least 151 Pokémon since the first generation of *Pokémon* games,⁶⁵ most player grow attached to their first Pokémon to the degree that they keep this very Pokémon present in the active party, rather than ‘storing’ them in a personal in-game databases, throughout the entire game. In other words, this attachment to the nonhuman characters in *Pokémon*, originally conceived by Tajiri, having the concept of ‘technological companion species’ in mind, is the product of Allison’s ‘intimate virtuality.’

However, I argue that this intimate virtuality in *Pokémon* is not only the product of the player’s attachment to the domesticated Pokémon, but first and foremost a response to the game’s premise of the uncanny. This means that both intimate virtuality (and techno-intimacy) and the uncanny are at work in *Pokémon*: the player indeed readily establishes a bond with the domesticated nonhuman characters he has obtained, but– and this is crucial – is not able to do otherwise. For example, in the first generation *Pokémon* games, once the players directs his iconographic avatar, represents an adventurous 11-year old boy canonically known as Red, towards an area outside the borders of its home town, Red is halted by the local Pokémon professor, who states that “It’s unsafe! Wild Pokémon live in tall grass. You need your own Pokémon for your protection.” The player sees Red being escorted to the professor’s Pokémon laboratory to choose one out of three ‘starter’ Pokémon. What we see here, is

⁶⁴ Lamarre describes the ‘transspecies potential’ as an act of “an affective force that hovers over and permeates the cruel Darwinist cosmos, revealing itself in tragic sacrifices that promise salvation rather than alternative ideals” (2010: 65).

⁶⁵ Each subsequent generation expands the *Pokémon* universe with approximately 150 new Pokémon. In the most recent installments, *Pokémon Black Version* and *White Version* (Game Freak, 2011), 649 different Pokémon can be caught in total.

that a (team of) Pokémon is required to supplement the player's lack of fighting abilities to form a unity that is allowed to traverse the world.

Despite being a teenager, this vulnerability and lack of freedom, or even limitations, of Red as a human being, evokes notions of the uncanny: on the one hand, as a human being, he is familiar and similar to the player, but on the other hand, he is dehumanised – e.g. Red's inability to autonomously advance – to the extent that his presence outside his native town requires the support of at least one nonhuman species. Therefore, as I argued before, affectionate human-nonhuman relations in *Pokémon* are readily established, primarily because of interpersonal dependency. The mechanical uncanny, then, serves as the game's initial premise (the hero who is not able to fight himself and is dependent on Pokémon), solved by the local Pokémon professor, who provides the player with a Pokémon (and giving the intimate virtuality a push). Ultimately, considering the fairly predictable and repetitive storylines among the *Pokémon* games, it is this intimate virtuality that has been keeping the franchise running and popular for over seventeen years now.

Whereas the buddings of intimate virtuality in *Pokémon* can be distinguished as essential for the game's propulsion and the series' popularity, it is this affection of the player toward the nonhuman in *Shin Megami Tensei* that is presented as counter-productive. Both the human protagonist and his demonic allies gain experience points at the end of each battle. The demons, however, require proportionally many more of these points to gain a certain level (and thus to become stronger) than the human protagonist. This means that employing a demon for a longer period of time is disadvantageous to the player; indeed, the demons are merely 'weapons' – at least gameplay-wise. However, they also serve as 'elements' or 'materials' to fuse one demon with another to create a new, often stronger entity. This 'Demon Fusion Program', presented as an application of the protagonist's Demonica suit, even allows the

player to add a source from a third demon⁶⁶ to the fusion to bestow additional power upon the new entity. While fusing demons – by perceiving them as weapons or materials – proves to be an essential tool in navigating through the Schwarzwelt, the excerpt in the introduction to this thesis shows it is not without ethical consequences. Thus, whereas *Pokémon* is dependent on an affectionate human-nonhuman-machine interface, it is *Shin Megami Tensei* which challenges, or perhaps even rejects affectionate relations by rendering these counter-productive.

This section has sought answers to the questions – as posed during the introduction to this thesis – regarding the interaction between individual components of the ‘monster’. Whereas the interface of human-nonhuman-machine is affectionate and interdependent in the case of the *Pokémon* series, it is a complex correlation – transcending and transgressing the boundaries in between the domains of individual components – that encompasses both the concepts of the uncanny and intimate virtuality, wherein the former exists as a condition to realise the latter.

This section has made clear – or, attempts to clarify – that the demon, the nonhuman in *SJ* is neither hostile nor affectionate toward the human in nature. The demon appears as an autonomous monster, a grotesque manifestation of human imagination – a foreign composition of familiar components – whose imbrolio-esque *arrivant* challenges the human cherished subject-object binary. It is a tool for the human to “become aware of the history of normality” (Derrida, 1995: 386); a tool, a *tertium quid*, developed by the domain of the object (earth, as will be discussed in greater detail in the following section) to put the subject into a parlous state, “allowing an analysis of the history of the norms” (ibidem: 385-6). By “staging an encounter between the human and the nonhuman” (Lamarre, 2008: 71-2), *SJ* violates the order of things: it not only interrogates the subject-object binary, it also questions the binary’s supposedly

⁶⁶ The player receives a demon’s ‘source’ if he is able to gain its trust by regularly employing the demon in battle.

hierarchical order in terms of anthropocentrism, or, to cite Haraway, “the culturally normal fantasy of human exceptionalism” (2008: 11).⁶⁷ In sum, this is the discursive ‘monster’ of this thesis – ready to be unleashed unto ‘our’ world in the following section.

⁶⁷ In her impressive monograph *When Species Meet* (2008), Haraway introduces the notion of human exceptionalism through the following anecdote. “At one of the conference panels, I heard a sad man in the audience say that rape seems a legitimate instrument against those who rape the earth; he seemed to regard this as an ecofeminist position, to the horror of the men and women of that political persuasion in the room. Everyone I heard at the session thought the guy was slightly dangerous and definitely politically embarrassing, but mainly crazy in the colloquial sense if not the clinical. Nonetheless, the quasi-psychotic panic quality of the man’s threatening remarks is worth some attention because of the way the extreme shows the underside of the normal. In particular, this would-be rapist-in-defense-of-mother-earth seems shaped by the culturally normal fantasy of human exceptionalism.” (2008: 10-1). The reason for citing this at length is its relevance for the upcoming section of the thesis.

Content of critique

“Cyborg and companion species each bring together the human and the non-human, the organic and the technological, carbon and silicon, freedom and structure, history and myth, the rich and the poor, the state and the subject, diversity and depletion, modernity and postmodernity, and nature and culture in unexpected ways.”

- Donna Haraway (2003: 4)

“Human exceptionalism blinds us”, anthropologist Anna Tsing contends in her essay on fungi and species interdependence, “[s]pecies interdependence is a well-known fact—except when it comes to humans” (Tsing, forthcoming 5). Allied in this ecofeminist approach with Haraway in an endeavour to demolish the dichotomous wall between society and nature – what Latour has called ‘the Great Divides’ (2005) – Tsing goes on by arguing that

Science has inherited stories about human mastery from the great monotheistic religions. These stories fuel assumptions about human autonomy, and they direct questions to the human control of nature, on the one hand, or human impact on nature, on the other, rather than to species interdependence. (Tsing, forthcoming: 5)

Tsing’s perspective on human exceptionalism serves as an appropriate point of access to this thesis’ final section, wherein the ‘monster’, which has been carefully deconstructed throughout the previous sections, will be repurposed as a crucial argument in the discussion on the concept of utopia in the field of sf studies. The primary intent of this section is not to refute established notions regarding utopia or revolutionise the field, but to demonstrate how the ‘monster’ can be employed as an argument or method in a debate (rather than an isolated theory as it has been hitherto). Therefore, this

section will turn to just one, yet important essay in the field of sf studies, namely Fredric Jameson's "Progress versus Utopia, or, Can We Imagine the Future?".

Despite being published as a singular book, *Fredric Jameson's Archaeologies of the Future* (2005) actually consists of two books: 'The Desire Called Utopia', an extensive examination of utopias presented in numerous works of sf (primarily literary works, though); and 'Other Science Fictions', a collection of previously written essays that deal with sf. Even though this book is arguably even more difficult to read than his inquiry into 'postmodernism' in his 1991 work *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, largely thanks to the speculative subject of the former, it questions whether the concept of utopia is still relevant to the present. In doing so, Jameson demonstrates that the concept still is a useful method to rethink, for example, the present.

In "Progress versus Utopia, or, Can We Imagine the Future?", published as the fourth chapter of 'Other Science Fictions', Jameson argues that the utopia, or the ultimate "text", does not exist in an "empirical" form and must therefore be constructed by reconstructing empirical "texts" (Jameson, 2007: 283, his emphasises). For Jameson, building on Georg Lukács' observations in *The Historical Novel* (1936), this Derrida-esque understanding led to the observation that all history plays by e.g. Shakespeare and Corneille affirm

the past as being essentially the same as the present, and do not yet confront the great discovery of the modern historical sensibility, that the past, the various pasts, are culturally original, and radically distinct from our own experience of the object-world of the present. (ibidem: 284).

The utopian futures of, for example, Jules Verne and H.G. Wells have become dated and historical, and can be reduced to a future of a moment of what is now history. Therefore, Jameson continues, sf conceals a complex temporal structure which does not provide visions of the future, but rather "defamiliarize[s] and restructure[s] our experience of our own *present* (...) in specific ways distinct from

all forms of defamiliarization" (ibidem: 286, his italics). In the discussion that follows, the 'monster' will attempt to frighten Jameson's 'complex temporal structure' and make it fall to prey.

Jameson further develops this idea of defamiliarisation by remarking that sf "does not seriously attempt to imagine the "real" future of our social system. Rather, its multiple mock futures serve the quite different function of transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come" (ibidem: 288). Demonstrating his argument through Raymond Chandler's futuristic vision of now historic Los Angeles, he concludes that "[sf] thus enacts and enables a structurally unique "method" for apprehending the present as history, and this is so irrespective of the "pessimism" or "optimism" of the imaginary future world which is the pretext for that defamiliarization" (ibidem: 288).⁶⁸

Jameson's essay is an invaluable contribution to the field of sf studies – cited by 186 articles according to Google Scholar – and it remains, perhaps thanks to its respectable status, largely unchallenged. The 'monster', however, uninhibited as it may be, will challenge some of Jameson's statements to rethinking the anthropocentric nature of these statements through the multispeciesistic nature of the 'monster'. In doing so, the 'monster' "may reveal or make one aware of what the norm is" (Derrida, 1995: 385); in this particular case, the norm is what Haraway described as "the culturally normal fantasy of human exceptionalism" (2008: 11). Following Derrida's logics, having acknowledged the 'monster' as a monster subsequently requires its domestication; one has to, in Derrida's words, "compare it to the norms, analyze it, consequently master whatever could be terrifying in this figure of the monster" (1995: 386). This section will thus compare the centralised role of the human in some of Jameson's arguments to the 'monstrous' human-nonhuman-machine interface in *SJ*, as elaborated in the previous section.

⁶⁸ The influence of science fiction in Jameson's perception of postmodernism might be apparent in his 1983 essay, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society", in which he describes a similar temporal structure as a feature of postmodernism: "the transformation of reality into images" (1983: 111).

In expounding his argument that sf is concerned with defamiliarisation rather than striving to imagine the future, Jameson frequently employs the pronoun 'us' and its possessive sibling 'our'; at least four times he refers to not us-the-reader, but to us-the-human in discursive constructions, such as "our social system", "our own present", "this present moment – unavailable to us", and "our private fantasies" (Jameson, 2007: 288).⁶⁹ Before moving on to discussing the relevance of utopia in contemporary times, Jameson concludes that "[sf's] deepest vocation is over and over again to demonstrate and to dramatize *our* incapacity to imagine the future (...)" (ibidem: 288-9). With this discursive anthropocentrism and the afore highlighted 'complex temporal structure' of sf as a mode of narrative, the present discussion will shift focus to the environment of the 'monster'.

Paraspaces of the Schwarzwelt

Hitherto its inhabitants and their role in the human-nonhuman-machine interface have been discussed at length yet little attention has been given to the environments within the peculiar hyperspace that has been dubbed the Schwarzwelt by its human investigators. In his chapter 'Slaveship Earth' on afrofuturism, Joshua LaBare first associates the "fundamental intertwining of blackness and Africa, or race and space" (LaBare, 2010: 151) with Hegel's infamous metahistory, in which he considered Africa a "negative space" due to its "Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit" (Hegel, 1956 [1900]: 99).⁷⁰ After the appearance of the Schwarzwelt, the human investigators of *SJ* had similar ideas regarding the hyperspace. With its demonic inhabitants more historical and developed than themselves, they soon came to acknowledge the Schwarzwelt as – following LaBare's theorisation of afrofuturism's Africa – a 'paraspace'. This term was

⁶⁹ Excuse me for having to strip these quotations from their respective sentences.

⁷⁰ For Hegel, the absence of history resulted in a negative presence. For him, Africa was "no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit" (Hegel, 1986 [1900]: 99). Although he acknowledged that, besides Europe, the Orient (Asia) did have a history, it was nonetheless "really *unhistorical*, for it is only the repetition of the same majestic ruin" (ibidem: 106).

coined by literary critic Samuel Delaney, who argued that a number of sf writers

posit a normal world – a recognisable future – and then an alternate space, sometimes largely mental, but always materially manifested, that sits beside the real world, and in which language is raised to an extraordinarily lyric level. (...) conflicts that begin in ordinary space are resolved in this linguistically intensified paraspace” (Delaney, 1988: 31).

In other words, Delaney’s ‘paraspace’ is a fictional space existing parallel to what is considered the ‘normal space’ of the diegetic reality – similar to literary critic Brian McHale’s ‘postmodern zone’: “an alien space *within* a familiar space, or *between* two adjacent areas of space where no such ‘between’ exists” (1987: 46).⁷¹

During the human investigation of the Schwarzwelt paraspace, it becomes clear that the appearance of the paraspace is fundamentally related to the planet earth itself; its inhabitants, the demons, as they themselves claim, were sent to interfere with the human defilement of “the holy realm of the gods” (Ouroboros Maia at the end of the second battle, *SJ*). By portraying the invading nonhumans as representatives of the earth’s will, the premise of *SJ* gives resonance to the ideas postulated in environmentalist James Lovelock’s ‘Gaia hypothesis’. This hypothesis, initially developed throughout numerous articles with microbiologist Lynn Margulis, puts forward the idea that “all life and all material parts of the Earth’s surface make up a single system, a kind of mega-organism, and a living planet” (Lovelock, 2000: x). Considering the first sentence in Lovelock’s book, in which he describes the organism of Gaia – “I had no clear idea of what Gaia was although I had thought deeply about her” (ibidem: vii) – it should come as no surprise that his most recent books entitle his concern for his beloved Gaia, such as *The Vanishing Face of Gaia: A Final Warning: Enjoy It While You Can* (2006) and *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the Earth Is Fighting Back – and How We Can Still Save Humanity* (2009).

⁷¹ Scott Bukatman has written an excellent chapter on correlations between Delaney’s ‘paraspace’ and McHale’s ‘postmodern zone’ in *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction* (2002).

Whether *SJ* director Kazushige Nojima has been influenced by Lovelock is difficult to assess; it is noteworthy, however, that the concept of Gaia's vengeance is not unique to *SJ* among video games, especially the Japan developed role-playing games. For example, in *Final Fantasy VII* (Square, 1997) its planet Gaia⁷² spawned biomechanical entities called WEAPONs to protect itself from the arrival of one of the major antagonists, Jenova. *Ar Ciel*, the planet with consciousness from *Ar tonelico Qoga: Knell of Ar Ciel* (Gust and Banpresto, 2011), similarly develops a will to employ antibodies in order to take its revenge on humans and their warfare, which has severely damaged the planet. In *SJ*, the will of the earth is mediated through the nonhuman entity Mem Aleph, who "remembers the Earth and speaks for it." If the player chooses not to side with Jimenez's ideology of 'Chaos', Mem Aleph serves as the final boss in the game and preaches that

There is no trace in you of the humans who once lived alongside my kind... Humans have fallen so far, becoming nothing but viruses that gnaw away at the earth. They have become lost souls without a future, who seek to crush what they do not possess. Your obliviousness to we demons, to the gods of old, is unfortunate. You mistook yourselves for the center of creation... And lost the ability to revive the twisted, fallen souls... (Mem Aleph in *SJ*)

Apart from Mem Aleph's critique on anthropocentrism, it should be clear why the environments of the Schwarzwelt paraspace form a relevant, if not an essential, argument in our discussion on anthropocentrism in Jameson's essay. The environments, i.e. the eight nonhuman made sectors in the Schwarzwelt, do not merely serve as a geographical stage for a human-nonhuman encounter, but – more importantly – they are also intriguingly interwoven with what Lamarre described as multispeciesism (2010).

As a result of human environmental pollution, the nonhuman representative of earth's will, Mem Aleph, gives rise to the Schwarzwelt and three daughters (the demonic 'Mothers' Ouroboros,

⁷² Even though the planet is referred to as "The Planet" in *Final Fantasy VII*, it was retroactively named "Gaia" in its spin-off CGI film *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* (2005).

Tiamat and Maya) to assist her commanding the demon lord of each sector. Each of these sectors is presented as a materialised construction of human sins, such as wrath, lust and gluttony.⁷³ The sectors, however, are not merely geographical locations within the Schwarzwelt; they are separated by space-time coordinates and quantum variables – perhaps we could consider these as ‘paraspace’ within a ‘paraspaces’. In other words, the flow of time within one sector may differ from the flow of time in other sectors or in ‘normal space’ on planet earth. Whereas the sectors as reflections of human sins are – despite being highly exaggerated – not total defamiliarisations of our present, the volcanic eruptions and lack of flora in the sector wherein Mem Aleph resides is reminiscent of the early days of planet earth. It is the fifth sector which appears as the most peaceful sector, named Eridanus by investigation team, which – especially in relation to speciesism in the context of *Shin Megami Tensei* – is crucial for our discussion on Jameson’s ‘complex temporal structure’ and discursive anthropocentrism.

Leaving an area filled with walls of decay, one enters a nonhuman area of tranquil nature in perfect co-existence with clinically ethereal or perhaps even enlightened technologies (figure 2). In the central tower within this region, screens are embedded in walls displaying the stark contrast of the aforementioned tranquillity against the perverted history of the eradicated human. Indeed, the sector Eridanus portrays an image of planet earth’s ‘normal space’ *should* the earth and thus its human inhabitants be consumed by the Schwarzwelt ‘paraspace’. In other words, the vision presented by sector Eridanus is realisable yet incompatible with the human; the one condition for realising this utopia is an apocalypse for human eradication – and hence the title of this thesis.

⁷³ Although these three sins would suggest that the theme of each sector would follow the principle of the Seven Deadly Sins, I argue that there is too little evidence in the remaining sectors to establish this parallel with certainty – yet, I do not rule out the possibility.

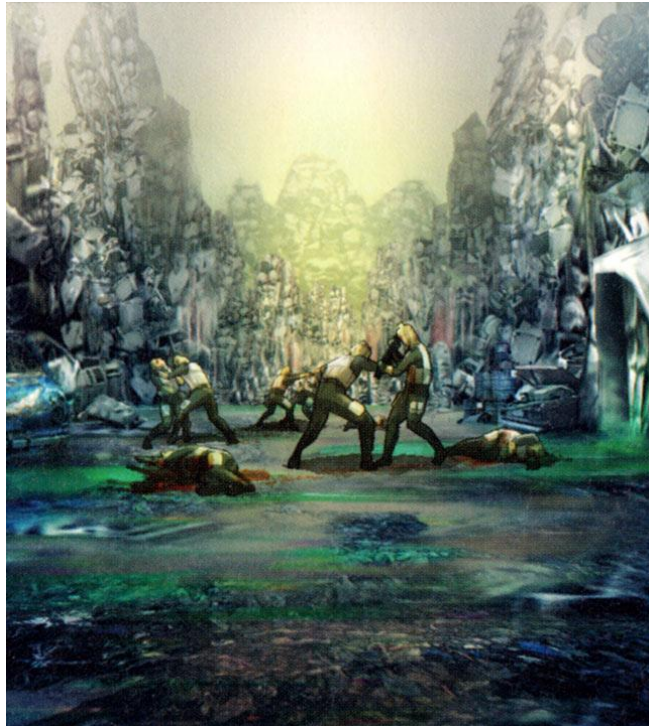


Figure 2: These illustrations portray the sector Delphinus (top), the site of destruction, and the sector Eridanus (bottom), the harmonious utopia. The fighting between the investigation team members in Delphinus is caused by violent spirit possession, directed by the local demon lord Asura (Famitsu Shoseki Henshūbu, 2009: 86, 90; “Shin Megami Tensei STRANGE JOURNEY Schwarzwelt Reminiscences”).

However, as Jameson reminds us-the-reader, “an “achieved” Utopia – a full representation – is a contradiction in terms” (2007: 294). Here, Jameson assumes an anthropocentric stance in thinking about the utopia; the achievement of a full representation of a *human’s* utopia might be a *contradictio in termini*, but what about the *SJ* demon’s – or, in general, any other *existing* nonhuman’s – utopia?⁷⁴ Is the impossibility to achieve a full representation of what one has in mind (e.g. an ideological society) what defines utopia? Is utopia indeed ‘nowhere’, as the literal translation of the word suggests,⁷⁵ or, as suggested by LaBare, does it stay “where it is now: elsewhere” (2010: 118), not ruling out the possibility of its existence? Or, as presented in *SJ*’s Eridanus sector, should we-the-human rule out the existence of utopia if it is incompatible with the human? These are some of the issues implied in *SJ* during the human investigation of the sector Eridanus. If the human protagonist is killed in action, a brief animation is shown wherein the earth is being consumed by the Schwarzwelt and a message in red reads ‘Mission Failed’. Or did it? Indeed, the eradication of the human might count as a failure for the investigation mean, but also as a realisation of the nonhuman’s utopia – and perhaps also James Lovelock’s – with nature’s undisturbed regeneration⁷⁶ and the demon’s retrieval to their perished godhood. Approaching the ontology of utopia from a multispecies perspective – “by staging an encounter between the human and the nonhuman” (Lamarre, 2008: 71-2) – highlights the anthropocentric connotation of the conceptual utopia.

Defamiliarisations of whose present?

Having established and demonstrated the monstrous nature of the ‘monster’, this multispecies stance, let us-the-reader return to

⁷⁴ In LaBare’s discussion on Jameson and the utopia, he rhetorically remarks that mosquitoes are the only one willing to live in a mosquito’s utopia (2010: 118) and continues to build on the anthropocentric assumption that we-the-human are working towards an “impossible – because fractured, contradictory, multifarious – goal” (ibidem: 119-20).

⁷⁵ When the word ‘utopia’ was coined by Thomas More for the title of his book *Utopia* halfway through the sixteenth century, it was derived from the Greek words *ou* (‘not’, negative) and *topos* (‘place’): nowhere.

⁷⁶ Even though no mention is made about the nonhuman animal throughout *SJ*, it is safe to assume that they were not part of the human eradication.

Jameson's acknowledgement of a 'complex temporal structure' in *SJ* (i.e. the narrative mode of defamiliarisation of our own present rather than an imagination of the future). *SJ* does not defamiliarise 'our own present' in Jameson's sense of the argument; if anything, it *transgresses* 'our own present' by providing a paraspace which reflects human exceptionalism and exploits its consequences. The Schwarzwelt turns the subject-object binary table through 'dehumanisation' of the subject, as became apparent in the case of Zelenin's capture for *in vivo* testing to contribute to the autonomous demons' knowledge of human biology.⁷⁷

However, *SJ* does defamiliarise 'our own present' by questioning what 'our own present' means. In order to elaborate on this question, let us-the-reader return to the Schwarzwelt sector Eridanus. There we meet the demon Thoth, derived from the eponymous Egyptian deity. Unlike its more popular depiction of an ibis-headed male entity, *SJ*'s director Kazuma Kaneko's design of Thoth is portrayed as a baboon (figure 3), wearing its headdress of a lunar disk on top of a crescent moon whilst reading the Book of Thoth,⁷⁸ the cover featuring multiple Egyptian symbols.⁷⁹ Thoth informs the player that in ancient times he was being worshipped by humans as a deity of knowledge, i.e. he is conscious of history and his past, after which he presents the player with the task of retrieving volumes from his book; he does so in a ludic manner by providing cryptic descriptions of another demon that holds of one of the volumes.

⁷⁷ Obviously, this might be interpreted as critique on the use of non-human animals in experiments.

⁷⁸ According to the Egyptian tale 'Setne Khamwas and Naneferkaptah', the radiating book written by the deity Thoth contained two spells: the first enabled its human caster to speak the nonhuman animal tongue; the second enabled its human caster to perceive divine entities (Lichtheim, 1975: 127-9). The abilities of the Book of Thoth correspond with the standard functions of the Demonica suit in *SJ*.

⁷⁹ The Book of Thoth the *SJ* Thoth is holding features two mirrored versions of the Eye of Horus (symbolising healing and protection); the *djed* hieroglyph (referring to stability and the symbolic backbone of deity Osiris) and a hieroglyph reminiscent of a highly simplified form of Ma'at's feather. The arrangement of symbols on *SJ*'s Book of Thoth represents a face.



Figure 3: The demon Thoth as it appears in *SJ* (Kaneko, 2008: 588).

What is arguably most intriguing about this scene is how it challenges notions of time and Jameson's 'complex temporal structure'. What we-the-reader see here is the encounter between an object from the past (the deity Thoth) and a subject from the present (the human investigator), in a space that represents an impossible utopic future for the subject, yet the present and the possible utopic future for the object from the past. In other words, what Thoth – conscious of his godhood in ancient times – considers as the present (i.e., peacefully reading his book in sector Eridanus) is what is possible outside the Schwarzwelt paraspaces and will become reality once the Schwarzwelt consumes planet earth (and the distinction

between 'normal' space and paraspaces dissolves). Simultaneously, the human investigator explores the multiple paraspaces of the Schwarzwelt, in which the spatial dimension of each paraspaces is indexable according to spatial dimensions known through historical accounts on earth in the 'normal' space. Without trespassing too much in the domain of time and space philosophy, I would like to emphasise that in the paraspaces where the human investigator encounters Thoth, the human is – as a matter of fact – present in what Jameson has described as a contradiction in terms: a full representation of an "achieved" Utopia (Jameson, 2007: 294). Whereas I agree with Jameson that a realised utopia is indeed a contradiction in terms – suggesting there is a problem with the terminology – this section has distinguished the human's utopia Jameson is concerned with and the nonhuman's utopia, as is a prevalent theme in *SJ*.

Of course, one might ask, *SJ* is a popular work of fiction, building on an often criticised Gaia hypothesis and developed for commercial purposes – what is in it for us? Taking an ecofeminist stance, *SJ* offers a critical demonstration of 'somersaulting'⁸⁰ the subject-object binary. Leaving their anthropocentric life on earth behind, the members of the *SJ* investigation team – agents of the human – become trapped in this 'somersaulted' Schwarzwelt, where 'anti-human exceptionalism' reigns; where the once superior human is degraded to an object – a mere object repurposed for experiments to benefit the nonhuman; where nature and technology exist in perfect co-existence; where the human's unrealisable utopia is realised only through the absence of the human – the confirmation that utopia is incompatible with the human.

The *SJ* demon, born as anti-bodies from and for human exceptionalism, is a true Derridean monster in both the figurative as the literal sense: "it *shows* itself [*elle se montre*] (...) in something that is not yet shown and that therefore looks like a hallucination" (1995:

⁸⁰ Derived from LaBare, the 'somersault' implies more dimensions of reversal than an ordinary reversal (2010: 89), which is appropriate in the context of a reversal of the all-encompassing binary of subject-object.

386) or the sudden appearance of the Schwarzwelt. It critiques the ontology of the human – “A lamentable mistake birthed by the waters of life. (...) Break apart, you sinful clumps of matter!” (*SJ* demon lord Ouroboros Maia) – and the norm established by the human – “the foolish notion of “order” has caused the human spirit to wither and decay” (*SJ* demon lord Asura). “Faced with a monster”, Derrida argued, “one may become aware of what the norm is and when this norm has a history”, allowing “an analysis of the history of the norms” (ibidem: 385-6). The act of exposing the agent of the norm – the human – to the monster – the demon – is precisely what happens during one of *SJ*’s endings: the player sides with Jimenez, the demon and thus the monster, acknowledging the stigma of human exceptionalism – the human failure to treat the nonhuman with respect – and, as the agent of the norm, to mend human’s failure through eradication of the human.

If the reader now would conclude that this is a sad conclusion to what has been a harsh journey, one has missed the objective of this thesis’ ‘monster.’

Conclusion

By grafting monsters from establishing theories – Bakhtin’s literary mode of ‘grotesque realism’, Foucault’s taxonomy defining monster, Derrida’s normality exposing monster, Haraway’s gender transgressing cyborg and Latour’s ontologically untranslated hybrid – and the human-nonhuman-machine interface from *SJ* onto each other, this thesis has composited a discursive ‘monster’ to make its reader aware of the culturally normal fantasy of ‘human exceptionalism.’ As if dealing with anatomical dissection, the first section deconstructed the ‘monster’ to examine its theoretical carcass and describe the function of each conceptual bone. The second section was concerned with the conceptual physiology of the ‘monster’, e.g. the correlation between and interdependence of the uncanny and intimate virtuality in *Shin Megami Tensei*. Having determined the innate nature of this thesis’ ‘monster’ as ‘anti-human exceptionalistic’, the interest of the third section in the ecology of the discursive ‘monster’ in relation to other discourses led to a highlighting of the anthropocentric nature of, in this case, the understanding of utopia.

It requires more than a singular thesis to domesticate a ‘monster’, to make it a pet. Among the many questions posed during the examination of the ‘monster’, however, there is one – as posed at the beginning of this thesis – that must be answered today:

How does the discursive ‘monster’ constructed throughout this thesis force its reader to become aware of the history of normality?

The monster, as a grotesque exception to the norm, inhabits the negative space that envelops the norm and in doing so, it enables one

to identify the norm, to provide it with taxonomy, to institutionalise it, or to make one aware about the history of this norm. It should be noted that it is not a passive concept but an active and pragmatic construct that more than once violates the norm. Such collisions result in events, sometimes traumatic, that require a translation or purification to be comprehended within the domain of the norm, leading to an adjustment of the norm: the movement of culture.

The discursive 'monster' proposed in this thesis has not been able to move culture nor was it its intent to move culture; it would not have been able to, as the movement of culture requires multiple collisions between a monster and the norm before it is able to affect the latter. Nonetheless, the 'monster' did make the reader aware of the anthropocentric nature of established notions of utopia and violated this norm, if only a little. Further violations by this or a similar discursive 'monster' are required in order to affect culture.

For now, this thesis has been deliberately highlighting its function as a monstrosity, unlike, for example, the core arguments in Mikhail Bakhtin's controversial dissertation (q.v. note 28). This has two main reasons: first, it is necessary to understand the complex interaction of theories within the theoretical framework of the discursive 'monster'; and second, it marks the parallel between the monstrous function of the *SJ* demon as the antibody for human exceptionalism within the diegetic reality and the 'monster' as the antibody for human exceptionalism within the field of sf studies.

For the sake of a brief critical reflection, I will conclude by providing counterarguments for a particular assumption – and perhaps I have procrastinated doing this for too long – that was required to violate Jameson's celebrated 1982 essay. Of course, the word 'utopia' is a man-made construct to describe a 'nowhere', which it literally means. Arguing that the demon's utopia may exist but may be incompatible with the human is, indeed, a contradiction in terms. Why would a man-made linguistic construct be incompatible with the human yet compatible with the nonhuman? It is at this point where I ran into

the limitations of language: how do I meaningfully convey my philosophical thoughts through man-made linguistic constructs? Regardless of whether these philosophical thoughts are derived from experiences that have been subjected to heuristic judgement (in contrast to pure experience), it is impossible for a human to meaningfully convey or understand the ideas of a nonhuman in a nonhuman language – that is, until nonhuman animals reach the evolutionary stage wherein they will be able to meaningfully communicate with us-the-human.

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