

# CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER IMAGES IN JAPANESE PORNOGRAPHIC ANIME

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During the past decades Japanese comic books (*manga*) and animation (*anime*) have gained an increasingly important role in spreading contemporary Japanese popular culture all over the world. It is argued that one of the biggest challenges to the industry of Japanese popular culture is the management of the rapidly expanding global market of *anime* (officially Japanese *anime* is broadcast in more than 70 countries) alongside the decline of the consumer and producer base in Japan (Kelts 2008). *Manga* and *anime* have not only become a research object for different academic fields (these genres are linked to Japanese economics, social life, gender studies, history, architecture, religion, etc.), they also serve as an officially recognised tool for Japanese national image creation overseas (Norris 2009).

Despite the enormous attention that *manga* and *anime* achieve both in the academic world and in society, the research on pornographic *manga* and *anime* (in Japanese: *hentai*) is inadequately scarce, especially taking into consideration the fact that *hentai* is one of the major currents within the world of *anime* (Napier 2005). Furthermore, as McLelland (2006) notices, if we search for ‘*hentai*’ in the internet, the searching engine will produce more hits for this term than for such representative loanwords from the Japanese as ‘*sushi*’ or ‘*geisha*’. Contrary to the dominant stereotypical thinking in the West that pornographic films lack narrative and the main storyline limits itself to the sexual harassment of women (Henshall 1999, Kendrick 1988), Japanese *hentai anime* are thematically wide-ranging, complex in narratives

and the main principles used for visual representation of the film characters do not differ from other *anime* genres, except that the narrative of *hentai anime* is necessarily enveloped in a hardcore sexual framework (Napier 2005).

Gender as a category is especially emphasised in the animation of sexually explicit content, therefore *hentai anime* plays an important role as a visual medium representing the images of Japanese masculinity and femininity on the international level. Like other *anime* genres, *hentai anime* is translated, subtitled or dubbed for international users, however, those viewers who have no particular knowledge about Japanese culture can often misinterpret the visual non-verbal information presented in *hentai anime*, as in the example by Caffrey (2008) about nosebleed, which signifies sexual arousal in the Japanese cultural context, but to a Westerner can appear as misleading or inappropriate in the given situation.

The present article aims to explore the most common means of gender image construction in *hentai anime* and how far these means represent the specific aspects of Japanese culture. Talking about the fear and persecution of pornography in the West, Kendrick (1988) argues that the real problem has always been publicity and the permeation of the culture by images. Thus, what is the message that *hentai* animation presents to the world about Japanese culture and gender relations?

The term '*hentai*' is differently interpreted in the West and in Japan. Translated from Japanese, this word means 'perverse', 'abnormal' and is referred to any kind of deviation from the norm (or the extreme), especially in the sexual context, that is, the term encompasses such sexual 'abnormalities' as homosexuality, love suicides, relations with animals, aliens, etc. In the West, however, the term is used in a broader sense as a definition for *manga* and *anime* of any erotic or pornographic content (McLelland 2006).

The range of *hentai anime* subgenres is very wide (e.g., the website *hentaistream.com* provides 168 subgenre categories according to different themes or types of fetish). As material for the discussion of the means of gender image construction in *hentai* animation this article uses five representative films, which belong to the 'fantasy' subgenre: *Angel of Darkness* (1994), *Magic Woman M* (1996), *Magical Twilight* (1995), *Rei Rei* (1993) and *Sex Demon Queen* (2000). Although the category of 'fantasy' often overlaps with other *hentai anime* categories like 'magic', 'demon', 'rape', 'science fiction' etc., the 'fantasy' subgenre is selected because the fantastic

contents of the subgenre provides a wide scope of possibilities for the construction of gender images.

After a brief introduction to the selected *hentai anime* films, the article first provides an overview of the ‘male gaze’ and the ‘female gaze’ viewing perspectives in Japanese pornographic *anime*, and then proceeds to the discussion of masculine and feminine body image construction and its relation to the representation of gender power relations by using a semiotic approach. Finally, the last section discusses the use of time and space and its significance to the perception of represented gender images.

### **Selection of representative hentai animated films**

The article discusses gender image construction in *hentai* animated films that fall into the category of ‘fantasy’ as it is distinguished in websites, providing free or paid access to Japanese *hentai anime*. The main subgenre of a film is sometimes differently indicated in different websites as the same film usually is ascribed to several categories. As the basis for the attribution of *hentai anime* films to the category of ‘fantasy’ I used the database of the electronic encyclopaedia *Anime News Network* and the website *hentaistream.net*, which provides free access to a wide variety of *hentai anime* films and a clear classification of *hentai anime* subgenres. Five representative *hentai anime* films are selected, which belong to the subgenre ‘fantasy’ and can be characterized by a rich plot, as well as high accessibility to international users. Information about the selected films is provided in table 1.

The episodes of the selected *hentai anime* films were viewed on *hentaistream.net* and *watchhentaionline.net*, because of the high accessibility to a wide range of *hentai anime* in these websites, which allow a free viewing option online without downloading (neither free nor paid)<sup>1</sup>.

The selected animated films are analysed by using a visual semiotic approach, because visual communication is the principle means to produce and to convey the meanings of messages about gender in *hentai anime*. The cultural aspect of coding and decoding the meanings of visual signs is very important as “messages are made of signs and conveyed through sign systems called codes; meaning is derived only to the degree that the receiver of the message understands the code” (Moriarty 2002: 21). Based on Dyer’s

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.hentaistream.net> ; <http://www.watchhentaionline.net> Duration of access: Sep. 2012-Jan. 2013

Table1. Information about the representative hentai animated films

Title	Year of release	Production company	Number of episodes	Subgenre/ category	Story in brief
<i>Angel of Darkness</i>	1994	Pink Pine-apple	4 (135 min.)	Demons, fantasy, rape, science fiction	Each episode has different characters with different names, but the main storyline is about a male college professor who is incarnated as a tentacle monster and establishes a secret laboratory, where he uses the bodies of female college students and teachers for his deadly experiments.
<i>Magic Woman M</i>	1996	PASOKAN	2 (33 min.)	Fantasy, magic, adventure	A young sorceress Meruru encounters various evil beasts and fights them by using her magic powers. She achieves her ultimate powers when she experiences an orgasm.
<i>Magical Twilight</i>	1995	AIC	3 (50 min.)	Fantasy, magical girl	Three young witches from a magical kingdom receive different tasks for their examination, and these tasks target at the same object, who is a young college student Tsukasa from a human world. Tsukasa falls in love with one of the witches and protects her from the other two magical girls.
<i>Rei Rei</i>	1993	Aubeck, AIC, KSS, Pink Pineapple	2 (60min.)	Magic, fantasy	A sensual evangelist Kaguya feels when humans need her help in love or sexual relations, so she flies down to the human world together with her servant Pi Pi and uses her magical powers to help them.
<i>Sex Demon Queen</i>	2000	AIC	1 (38min.)	Demons, fantasy, rape	Kuri and Linna are two sorceresses fighting with demons and beasts, who try to satisfy their sexual lust: finally they are trapped by Sex Demon Queen, who makes them dependant on their own insatiable sexual appetites.

(1996: 97) proposed scheme of nonverbal means (visual signs) used in communication about human subjects (appearance: *age, gender, race, hair, body, size, looks*; manner: *expression, eye contact, pose, clothes*; activity: *touch, body movement, positional communication*; props and settings), the present analysis of gender image construction in *hentai anime* uses six categories of indexical visual signs (body size, age, race, genitals, dress, attributes of supra-natural body powers), which are relevant to the selected genre of *hentai anime* and significant in terms of cultural interpretation by analysing gender images. Props and settings are discussed in the section that analyses the use of time and space in *hentai* animated films.

### **The 'male gaze', or the 'female gaze'?**

Many authors agree that in popular culture gender images are usually portrayed from male perspective. This argument refers to different areas of popular culture like women's and men's style magazines (Clammer 1995, Miller 2006), television programs (Milestone & Myer 2012), *anime* and *manga* (Napier 1999, 2005, Narita 1999). Films with pornographic content, including animation, are characterised as a genre created by men and for men, where men are portrayed as active aggressors, and women as passive, powerless, dehumanised creatures without personality (Narita 1999, Henshall 1999). However, is it always the 'male gaze' that dominates in *hentai anime*?

Kendrick (1988) cites a long definition of pornography presented by Dworkin (1985), which describes in detail characteristic scenes of pornographic films, where women are portrayed as an exploited gender:

(Pornography is- *author's note*) the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures and/or words that also includes one or more of the following: (i) women are presented dehumanized as sexual objects, things, or commodities; or (ii) women are presented as sexual objects who enjoy pain or humiliation; or (iii) women are presented as sexual objects who experience sexual pleasure in being raped; or (iv) women are presented as sexual objects tied up or cut up or mutilated or bruised or physically hurt; or (v) women are presented in postures or positions of sexual submission, servility, or display; or (vi) women's body parts- including but not limited to vaginas, breasts, or buttocks- are exhibited such that women are reduced to those parts; or (vii) women are presented as whores by nature; or (viii) women are presented being penetrated by animals; or (ix) women are



presented in scenarios of degradation, injury, torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised, or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual (Kendrick 1988: 233).

In fact, the authors of *hentai* animated films are provided with a lot of space for imagination allowed by the animation genre itself. Therefore sexual scenes here can sometimes appear much crueller than those described in the definition of Dworkin of those that could be acted by real actors. Especially it is characteristic to those *hentai anime* films that fall into the category of 'fantasy', where the protagonists often include various fantastic creatures (goblins, ogres, sea monsters, dwarves, machines, etc.). For instance, in the film *Magic Woman M* the penis of an ogre is shown almost the size of the main female character, the girl-sorceress Meruru, whom he rapes. Another popular theme in *hentai anime* is the so called "tentacle sex", where female characters have sexual intercourse with fantastic creatures that have numerous tentacles. Almost every article about Japanese pornographic animation mentions the *shunga*- ('erotic'- author's note) style art piece "The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife" by Hokusai (1820), which serves as a historical link for the origins of "tentacle sex". This piece portrays a naked woman entwined by two octopuses, one of them sucking up to her genitalia. Some researchers express surprise about the fact that some Japanese women not only tolerate *hentai* animation, but even buy it, regardless of aggression against women portrayed in films of this genre (Henshall 1999). However, this kind of attitude also plays to the 'male gaze' as it ignores women's perceptions and interpretations of the rape scenes present in *hentai anime*. As Cornell (1995) notices, even feminists support the 'male gaze' in pornography, because by fighting with male power and the lust expressed in pornography they actually acknowledge the presence of this power.

According to Dean (2009), it is incorrect to claim that pornography dehumanises certain people, because people do not find the whole persons sexually arousing, but some partial objects belonging to those persons (certain features or parts of the body). Especially in the case of animated pornography a viewer is provided with a wide spectrum of possibilities for self-identification with certain characters, because here we see not actual human bodies, but stylised representations, which "(...) are accurate enough for us to recognize the human marker, unreal enough to fill them with our own corporeal awareness- or rather, the imaginative projection of our

corporeality as perceived in the territory of sensorial memory, then placed upon an animated body” (Ortega-Brena 2009: 18). Therefore it is possible to assume that a woman views the enormous penis of a fantastic creature as a sexual fetish, but does not identify herself with the pain that presumably would be felt by a real woman, if a penis of such huge size penetrated her. In animation a viewer does not see, where the penis the size of a woman’s body ‘disappears’ inside her body, and her facial expression or moans can evoke associations of experienced pleasure rather than suffering. In the case of tentacles, sexual caresses of different erogenous zones at one time could be interpreted not as rape, but as a pleasant sexual fantasy (it could be that the fisherman’s wife did not dream about, but dreamt of sexual pleasures with octopuses, because in Japanese the word ‘*yume*’ can have the both meanings), visualised by animation, but not converted to reality with all its real sensations and consequences.

It is important to mention that in *hentai anime* of the ‘fantasy’ subgenre only female and demonic male characters experience orgasm, whereas male characters embodying human males are usually portrayed only in the state of sexual arousal (*Rei Rei*) or performing sexual acts, but not experiencing orgasm (*Magical Twilight, Angel of Darkness*). In some cases human males are portrayed without genitals (*Rei Rei*). This can be explained by censorship in Japan, which restricts a public display of female pubic hair (Miller 2006) and male genitals (Napier 2005). In this case a human male character allows to male viewers a ‘safe’ self-identification with the role of passive male -spectator instead of the role of active rapist. Milestone and Myer (2012) argue that even in the position of spectator, the male position is superior than that of the female, because in contrast to women, men only look, but do not put themselves on display as objects to be looked at. Although in ‘fantasy’ *hentai* animation human male characters are not directly portrayed as objects of sexual observation, masculinity of demonic male characters is represented in a demonstrative and highly imaginative way, as will be discussed further in this article. Furthermore, human male characters often represent a popular image of contemporary beautiful young man (*bishōnen*), which carries homoerotic connotations, but is nevertheless idealised among contemporary Japanese women as well (Kam 2012). Ortega-Brena (2008) argues that the emphasis on androgynous, hermaphroditic or trans-human body representation in erotic *anime* provides the viewers with both masculinised and/or feminised points of views as it enables a viewer’s imagination to take on any form of gender

identity. Thus, it is possible to argue that ‘fantasy’ *hentai* animation creates equal possibilities for both the ‘male gaze’ and the ‘female gaze’.

A fantastic world of *hentai anime* creates a double effect of sexual visualisation: on one hand it opens unlimited possibilities for the representation of sexual situations (it can make the sexual content more ‘hard-core’), on the other hand it allows viewers to dissociate themselves from or to involve themselves with a portrayed action to the extent that they prefer (to take the safe position of spectator). Although there are no sufficient academic sources about the ‘female gaze’ in *hentai* animation, certainly in Japan women and young people gain increasingly more power as consumer and creator audiences in the production of popular culture, therefore in animation (including *hentai*) new gender images are created according to the needs of this newly emerging audience (Kam 2012). In the next section I analyse the representation of the male and female body in ‘fantasy’ *hentai* animation, which reveals contemporary Japanese views about gendered power relations and dominating ideals of feminine and masculine appearance.

### **Gender, body and power**

In *hentai* animation the portrayal of body is essential as a means for gender image construction. From a semiotic perspective, it is possible to distinguish the following categories of indexical signs, signifying masculinity and femininity in *hentai* animation: body size, age, race, genitals, dress, and attributes of supra-natural body powers.

**Size.** Goffman (1987) in his analysis of gender images in advertising argues that male superiority in power over women is represented by the size of male body, that is, in ads a man is usually portrayed taller than a woman or a woman is shown in a sitting or lying position next to a standing man, thus taking a role of an ‘inferior’, ‘lower’ person. *Hentai* animation often makes the difference between male and female body size especially outstanding, but there is no rule that a male body is necessarily bigger or taller in comparison to a female body. Napier (2005) distinguishes between two dominant types of male bodies in *hentai anime*, namely, a “comic voyeur” and “demonic phallus incarnate”. In selected *hentai anime* films male characters of the first type are presented either as comic fantastic creatures, serving a woman with supra-natural powers, or as human males



with funny faces, expressing emotions in an exaggerated way, who either cannot achieve the desired sexual satisfaction or are sexually abused by women. Non-human male characters of this type are presented with a very small body. For example, in *Rei Rei* a funny character Pi Pi, who is a servant of the main female character Kaguya, is shown having extraordinarily big ears and his body is of a size only up to the knees of Kaguya. In contrast to 'comic voyeurs', demonic male characters are shown of an enormous size, with impressive musculature, necessarily with a huge penis, sometimes with tentacles of phallic shape as well. Napier (2005) explains this difference of male character presentation by a long history of voyeurism in Japanese erotic culture and by claiming that a male viewer can both identify himself with a voyeuristic character and feel superior to this. Thus, active, aggressive masculinity is placed into the world of fantasy, whereas a 'real' masculinity, which is easier to be identified with by real male viewers, is associated with passiveness and limited power.

Next to Napier's (2005) suggested types of male characters in *hentai anime*, it is meaningful to distinguish a third type- that of a young beautiful man. This character type could be placed in a position between the types of a *comic voyeur* and a *demonic phallus incarnate*. The young beautiful man character is not so active in searching for sexual intercourse as the demonic figure, but neither is he a passive spectator, because under auspicious circumstances he engages in sexual activities. This type represents a contemporary idealised image of a young man both in appearance and in character: he is portrayed as tall, without body hair, with soft facial features, he appreciates feelings and helps women (Iida 2005, Miller 2006, Kam 2012). The example of this kind of character is one of the protagonists in *Magical Twilight*, who must choose between three young beautiful witches trying to seduce him. He falls in love with the girl-witch who's body does not look as impressive as the bodies of other two witches, but who takes care of him in a motherly manner. Later he protects her faithfully from other 'bad' witches. In the second episode of *Angel of Darkness*, the boyfriend of the main heroine Haruka is shown as cute, a little childish in his behaviour (when he plays various pranks on his girlfriend), but in the end he is the one who saves Haruka and other girls from a demon-incarnated professor Shimazaki. It is possible to make an assumption that the appearance of this new type of male character in *hentai* animation is a consequence of the mentioned development of female and youngster audience as an important consumer group.

**Age.** Pflugfelder (2012) argues that age has served as an important gender describing category in Japan since old times, as until Meiji Restoration in 1868 gender categories were defined not by genital distinction between male and female, but by using the criteria of age, dress and hairstyle. Next to female and male gender Pflugfelder (2012) discusses the category of 'youth' (*wakashu*) used in the Tokugawa period, which implies a young, beautiful, sexually attractive man as an object of sexual pursuit for both men and women. This age category describes an interval between childhood and manhood, whose "(...) identity as a *wakashu* did not in and of itself require participation in any particular form of sexual relations. What it did, instead, was to place the individual within an age-defined subset of the larger male population that the *shudō* ("way of youths" - author's note) tradition regarded as exclusively worthy of aesthetic appreciation and erotic pursuit by fellow males" (Pflugfelder 2012: 965). The contemporary image of a young, cute man with a smooth body, androgynous dressing and hairstyle, which has become popular together with the spread of *kawaii* ("cute" - author's note) fashion style (Kinsella 1995), resembles closely to the image of young men, who previously fell into the category of *wakashu*. In pornographic *anime* human male characters quite often embody this image of a young beautiful man, but as was mentioned beforehand, characters of this type demonstrate their power neither through their body size, nor through sexual competence, nor through facial expression. Masculinity of these characters is rather passive. For example, one of the main male characters in *Angel of Darkness* (episode 1) is a young, handsome professor Goda, who becomes an active character only after being incarnated as a tentacle monster, thus indicating that activeness and sexual aggressiveness are synonyms for otherness or un-reality.

Female characters in 'fantasy' *hentai* animation always have human appearance, although the main heroines possess various supra-natural powers. Female characters are always young, slim, with big breasts and usually long haired. Positive heroines are cute, girlish, doll-like (with huge eyes and colourful hair). This image of a young, slim woman with big breasts is popular both in Western and in Japanese mass media (Milestone & Meyer 2012, Clammer 1995). However, the image of an immature, cute (*kawaii*) young girl in Japan can be interpreted differently from male and female perspectives. Some researchers argue that young Japanese girls choose this infantile image, because they seek to postpone the moment of becoming an adult woman, which is associated with social restrictions and

responsibilities (Kinsella 1995). On the other hand, among men the image of a young infantile girl is popular because of men's fear of being criticised by women (Henshall 1999). According to Henshall (1999), a young girl lacking experience (presumably, sexual experience as well) allows a man to feel self-confident about himself, as such a girl cannot criticise him and he can feel important being as the one who 'awakens' her sexual awareness. In *hentai* animation female characters are portrayed from the 'male gaze' perspective: young girls always 'discover' their sexuality by having sex with various demons and other kinds of creatures. For example, after being raped by a forest demon Meruru, the heroine of *Magic Woman M*, discovers that her magical powers appear after she experiences orgasm. In *Sex Demon Queen* two sorceresses Kuri and Linna firstly are sexually 'awakened' by the professional caresses of an experienced girl, and afterwards fall into the realm of endless orgasms and sexual lust by having sexual intercourse with demonic monsters from the past.

However, it would be not right to ignore a different type of female characters in *hentai* animation, which is a type of a cold, beautiful, mature and experienced woman. This image of femininity corresponds to the image of *The Dark Lady* (as contrasted to the image of *The Fair Maiden*, which can be equated to a young *kawaii* girl's image in Japanese *anime*) suggested by Barthel (1988) in her study about of the dominant stereotypes of Western womanhood in advertising. It is important to note that this type of femininity in 'fantasy' *hentai* animation usually represents evil and the aggressiveness alongside demonic male characters (like the female college director in *Angel of Darkness* who assists the demon-possessed professor Goda in looking for rape victims among female students, or the Sex Demon Queen in *Sex Demon Queen* who wants two female heroines to die from endless orgasms while being continuously raped by demons), thus making the femininity of a mature and sexually dominant woman equal to rough, unattractive masculinity. However, contrary to negative male characters, negative female characters are portrayed as young and beautiful, but not cute and childish like the main positive heroines.

**Race.** The surroundings portrayed in the majority of the *hentai anime* analysed suggest that the place of action is Japan (modern and ancient building style, Japanese hot springs, temples, bullet trains, etc.); however, it is difficult to determine the race of acting characters. Huge blue or green eyes of girls and human male characters, big breasts with pink nipples and long legs of girls appear Western rather than Japanese. Still, the activities

carried out by the characters imply their Japanese-ness: they eat using chopsticks, practice traditional martial arts, pass exams in Japanese schools, etc. Clammer (1995) notices that Japanese models in Japanese women's magazines never advertise underwear, breast firming products, products for hair removal; neither are Japanese models ever presented half-naked. This could be related to the fact that in case of women Japanese-ness for Japanese people is associated with maturity, elegance, subtle taste, whereas in men's case it is associated with the image of the *salaryman* (white collar employee - *author's note*): short black hair, official outfit, hairy body (Barancovaitė-Skindaravičienė 2009). None of these images is related to sexuality or erotica, therefore it is possible to make an assumption that both in magazines and in *hentai anime* films Western bodies are used as means to construct an attractive, still 'safely other' gender identity.

**Genitals.** Genitals in *hentai* films belong to the most important gender signifiers. In selected representative *hentai* films of the 'fantasy' subgenre there is no case in which female genitals are portrayed in exaggerated size or otherwise emphasised in an extraordinary manner. A common feature in portraying genitals is that female area of genitals is almost always shown fully epilated. One reason to explain this could be the already mentioned censorship regarding public display of female pubic hair (Miller 2006), another reason can be the popularity of young innocent girl's image, which serves to stimulate male erotic fantasy. In *Angel of Darkness* we can observe a few cases when females are shown with unshaved pubic hair, but this type of genitals' presentation is more characteristic of supposedly 'older' heroines like female teachers. Actually, in pornographic *anime* human male characters also appear with their hair shaved around their genitals. Partly it represents a common Japanese contemporary fashion, which requires both men and women to get rid of body hair and thus achieve the effect of a smooth, soft skin (Miller 2003, 2006). Smooth skin is advertised as means of looking attractive to the representatives of the opposite sex (Barancovaitė 2006). For this reason it is not surprising that in *hentai* animation a smooth, epilated genital area becomes a signifier of sexual attractiveness both in case of men and women.

Genitalia of demonic and fantastic male characters are portrayed in a completely different manner. Penises of demons can remind one of a huge hairy stick, mystical amphibian creatures are shown with bent, ribbed penises of almost their own body size (*Magic Woman M*), other monsters use all-reaching penis-shaped tentacles (*Angel of Darkness*, *Sex Demon*



*Queen, Rei Rei*) or huge drill-shaped mechanical instruments (*Angel of Darkness*), and so forth. It is possible to assume that a big, rough, hairy, muscular and aggressive demonic masculinity represents a hyperbolised image of traditional *kōha* ('hard' - *author's note*) school samurai masculinity, which emphasises male strength of body and mind, as well as a negligent attitude toward women as impure (*kegare*) and not worthy to be objects of romance or tender feelings (Henshall 1999).

In summary, it is possible to conclude that the way of portraying male genitals contributes to a common tendency in the representation of masculinity, when both a traditional active, aggressive, 'hard' masculinity and a passive, pacifistic, 'soft' masculinity exist next to each other. This tendency reflects the realities of contemporary Japanese society, where men are expected to fulfil both the norms of traditional hegemonic masculinity embodied in the *salaryman* image, and the new requirements for 'soft' masculinity (Iida 2005). The portrayal of female genitals represents a 'male gaze' at femininity, which also corresponds to reality in contemporary Japanese society, and which motivates women to take care of their appearance faithfully according to the image of attractive femininity created by men, that is, to look youthful, have a smooth skin, enlarge or correct the shape of breasts regardless of the costs (Miller 2006).

**Dress.** Analysing dress as a signifier of gender in *hentai* animation is meaningful only in the case of female characters, because the majority of male demonic characters are portrayed without clothes (citing Mandoki, "clothing is a privilege of humans, the only animal species capable of radically changing its appearance" (Mandoki 2003: 620), and the dress of other male characters in *hentai anime* does not differ from male clothing, characteristic to any other movie genre.

Mandoki (2003) argues that people choose their clothes for their power of denotation and connotation. In *hentai* animation women's clothes usually create connotations of 'cuteness', 'childishness', 'magic', 'warrior', 'Japanese-ness', which together signify 'femininity'. Although at first glance 'childishness', 'cuteness' and 'warrior' seem to be hardly compatible features, in *hentai anime* female characters' clothing combines warrior outfits with a short schoolgirl skirt and hair braids with ribbons, under a long gown of a sorceress we see laced Victoria style panties, resembling a contemporary Japanese Gothic Lolita (*gosurori*) style (Onohara 2008). As Dean (2009) notices, the genitalia themselves as such are not automatically an erotic fetish, they have to be accordingly sexualised. In the analysed *hentai anime*



films girls' breasts are fetishised by framing them in the armour outfit of warrior princess Xena style (of course, the armor outfit's task is only to lift and emphasise breasts of impressive size), by fitting them into a corset or wrapping by wide bands (allusion to kimono underwear used for bust correction (Miller 2006, Goldstein-Gidoni 2008), only in contrast to wearing a kimono, the heroines of *hentai* films use bands not in order to hide their busts, but to expose and to emphasise them). In the case of positive female characters, genitals are hidden under the details of an immature, childish girl's clothing (short skirts resembling a high-school student's uniform or laced panties).

Taking into consideration that cute childish (*kawaii*) or Japanese gothic Lolita (*gosurori*) styles are perceived as young Japanese women's form of protest against social restrictions assigned to a mature woman (Kinsella 1995, Onohara 2008), and acknowledging the tendency of these styles to use different ribbons and body movement restraining corsets or bands, which can be associated with the wearing of traditional Japanese kimono, symbolising 'Japanese-ness' (Goldstein-Gidoni 2008), the combination of such connotative meanings of a dress as 'warrior', 'Japanese-ness' and 'childishness' to describe 'femininity' implies interpretations of femininity beyond a simple male-oriented fetish creation. In 'fantasy' *hentai* animation the idealised image of a woman is shown to be that of an extraordinary (magic), fighting spirited, childishly innocent Japanese. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the claim about women in *hentai anime* being portrayed only as passive sexual objects or things is not correct.

***Magic powers and their attributes.*** Possession of magical powers by many of *hentai* film heroines is another important aspect, which serves as evidence that female characters in *hentai* animation are not only passive and powerless creatures. In Japan the history of linking women with magical powers has a long history. They were identified with incarnations of evil spirits, women served as mediums in shamanistic practices, where they had extraordinary abilities to use their body as a channel to transfer messages of dead ancestor spirits or various deities (*kami*) (Napier 1999, 2005). Looking from a female perspective, such abilities provide women with power over men, but from a male perspective these powers are perceived as a threat to be defeated by controlling a woman through her body, which is supposedly a carrier of her extraordinary powers. Therefore in 'fantasy' *hentai anime* films males attempt to control female power by sexual possession of her body. Despite their magic powers, female heroines are always overpowered

by male demons and only regain their powers after being raped, which in the end help them to achieve victory. However, in the first episode of *Angel of Darkness* the main heroine, who is a girl with homosexual orientation, is not gifted with supernatural powers and nevertheless throughout a film she remains almost untouched by demonic monsters (the only scene of sexual abuse against her is when she is lying undressed and tied up, while little elves obsessed by evil spirits bite her into her nipples and other private parts, however, these elves soon regain their original nature of “good elves” and become her assistants in her fight against evil). Furthermore, in the end she manages to rescue her female college friends from a tentacle monster and female school director as well as a male professor, incarnated by the monster. Thus, demonstration of masculine power finally ends not with a man’s, but with a woman’s victory. Might it be that Japanese men, who are characterised by a need to experience an *amae* dependence from a woman-mother (Doi 1987), in reality seek to be controlled by women, and this wish is expressed in animation of sexually explicit content? The relation between male dependency/fear of a mother figure and pornography in the Western context is analysed by Cornell, who argues that “(...) it is not male power that is portrayed in pornography, but their lack of security over who they are supposed to be” (Cornell 1995:159), and this lack of security she explains psychoanalytically as a result of men’s experienced simultaneous anger and attraction towards a woman-mother figure, caused by the fact of separation from mother as a female in their infancy. However, in Western non-animated pornography there is a clear distinction of roles between a dominant male (wishing to defeat the threatening attractiveness of a female) and a subordinate female, so the dependency of man on a woman-mother figure is neglected and not accepted. In *hentai anime* this dependency is “justified” by showing females both superior and inferior in regard to males depending on the scene.

The magic powers of women in *hentai anime* are symbolised by various material attributes, such as a magic stick, sword, flying broom, amulet, etc. Although these material things contain supra-natural powers, they necessarily drop out of the hands of a female protagonist the moment she is attacked by a demonic male creature, therefore it is only natural that her powers come back only after the sexual encounter with a demon aggressor. Still, as has been mentioned already, in the end the magical things return to their female owners and help them to defeat bad, that is, aggressive masculinity.

In 'fantasy' *hentai* animation both in the case of men and women there is a division between humans and mystical/possessing supra-natural beings exists. In case of men power is characteristic only to mystical, nonhuman beings; subsequently power as a signifier of masculinity is portrayed only in the world of fantasy. The power of nonhuman male characters is emphasised by the size of their body and sexual organs. Nevertheless, in the end these characters are defeated by female protagonists. Magical powers of women are emphasised by using images of different symbolic tools, but often they are incapable of controlling their powers themselves and become dependent on men, as well as from their own sexual desires. Women and human males are presented as young, of a non-identifiable race, but acting mainly in Japanese surroundings.

### **Time and space: here, but not now; now, but not here**

According to Narita (1999), in the 1920s, the period regarded as over-flourishing of sexuality in Japan, the notions of time and space in the world of pornography were abstract and the action isolated from any social relations. Another period of active development in sexual media and literature came after the World War II, when bodies for the people were "(...) the only possession they had managed to preserve from the destruction of the war; Japan's burned-out cities became sites for celebration of the erotic energy of Japanese bodies" (McLelland 2006:4). It was a period when the term *hentai* started being associated with homosexual practices, also the fantastic sexual perversions have become popular and the scope of *hentai* narratives became wider (McLelland 2006). Another 20 years later Japan was occupied by the childish *kawaii* culture (Kinsella 1995) and "mammary-mania", which introduced the idealisation of large female breasts to Japan (Miller 2006). These cultural tendencies influenced the production of *hentai anime* as well.

Despite changing *hentai* topics and gender images, the rather abstract portrayal of time and space has remained. Napier (1999, 2005) gives a few significant examples of unrealistic, gothic presentation of space both in pornographic and in *shōjo* ('young girls' - *author's note*) *anime*. In 'fantasy' *anime* films analyzed in this article one can observe the tendency of time and space not always corresponding to each other. For instance, in *Rei Rei* we see an atmosphere of a modern Japanese city, but the main heroine and

her servant are dressed in a way that reminds us of illustrations from an old fairytale about the magic. Crossing the boundaries in time and space is also present in *Magical Twilight*, in which young witches literarily break their way out to the 'surface', which is called the human world. In case of *Magic Woman M* the time and place of the plot are clearly written on a screen at the very beginning of the film, which is "Giotto 1414: Saint Vinebleht Kingdom (1<sup>st</sup> episode)/Mediola Holy Domain (2<sup>nd</sup> episode)". The time and names of the places evoke associations of a place somewhere in Medieval Europe (a mix of Italian, English and German grammar in the names of places), thus creating a gothic atmosphere described by Napier (2005). Here we see ancient style buildings, mysterious nature and the main heroine dressed in gothic style clothes.

An important sign indicating transference through time and space is the moon, which appears in all the selected films at the time when a witch/sorceress arrives on the human world after leaving 'her' magic world, or when demons arrive from the world of darkness. Napier (2005) relates this representation of the Other gothic world in *hentai anime* with femininity, which in Japanese culture is related to tradition and its maintenance. The coexistence of several different worlds in one story could be interpreted as a distinction between the reality and the fantasy, which allows a viewer both to separate and to join the attributes of human and nonhuman masculinity and femininity, to travel safely between fantastic idealism and reality, as well as to identify oneself with a variety of images.

The sense of reality in *hentai* animation is constructed by choosing such popular realistic places for the story as high-school or college. In real life these are the places where Japanese men usually look for young girls with whom to spend a pleasant time or for sexual relations. This phenomenon called *enjokōsai* in Japanese, when older men offer financial support for the 'study needs' of young girls (this is money, which girls usually spend not on study, but on expensive bags, cosmetics or accessories) is widely spread in Japan (Henshall 1999).

The portrayal of time and space in 'fantasy' *hentai* animation is not entirely abstract, because the places and time periods represented are recognisable and characteristic of Japanese culture, however, the past and the present often exist at one time, and several alternative worlds exist in one place as well. This emphasises a complicated interconnection between the power and powerlessness of male and female characters, traditional norms and modernity.

## Conclusions

Masculinity and femininity in pornographic animation of the 'fantasy' subgenre is constructed using different means of body representation, which can be referred to as indexical signs of gender: size, age, race, genitals, dress, magic power attributes. Men and women are divided into humans and supra-natural beings or the beings possessing supra-natural powers. Human male and female characters represent contemporary ideals of Japanese male and female appearance and character, that emphasise young age, freshness, cuteness, kindness, smooth skin, a slim body, large breasts of women. Important is that the appearance of both human and 'magic' females in *hentai* animation is portrayed in the same manner, thus the 'magical element' is essentially identified with femininity.

Demonic male characters embody the image of a traditional hegemonic masculinity: a man is strong, sexually active, aggressive, big (tall), muscular. However, all these characters symbolise evil, which needs to be defeated, and it is defeated by women. Therefore it is possible to make the conclusion that in contemporary Japan the image of a traditional and aggressive masculinity carries negative connotations, especially if we take into consideration the fact that the audience of any *anime* genre becomes increasingly younger and female (Kam 2012).

The division into human and supra-natural gender images is intensified by the use of time and space, in which the ancient intertwines with the modern, and where the real world is merged with the magic world of imagination. Aggressive male demons from the past are defeated, and the young modern girls, although dependent on men, finally gain victory over male aggressiveness with the help of their magic powers.

Although the perspective of gender image presentation in 'fantasy' *hentai* animation can still be called the 'male gaze', with the changing audience of *anime* consumers there appears more space for the 'female gaze' as well. As there is not enough attention paid to the research on the female audience of pornography, it is complicated to define accurately what the 'female gaze' in pornography is. Research on *hentai* animation with its rich contents and wide use of imagination could contribute significantly to the understanding of gender image perception in pornography by male and female viewers.



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## **Santrauka**

Straipsnyje tyrinėjamos vyriškumo ir moteriškumo įvaizdžių kūrimo priemonės japoniškoje pornografinėje animacijoje (jap. k. *hentai anime*). *Hentai* animacija, kaip ir kiti japoniškos animacijos žanrai, pastaraisiais dešimtmečiais sulaukė didžiulio populiarumo visame pasaulyje. Pornografinio turinio animaciniuose filmuose lytiškumas yra ypatingai pabrėžiamas, todėl šio žanro *anime* yra svarbi vizualinė priemonė, pristatanti japoniško vyriškumo ir

moteriškumo įvaizdžius tarptautiniu lygmeniu. Straipsnyje, pagrįstame penkių reprezentatyvių *hentai* animacinių filmų medžiaga, aprašoma „vyriška“ ir „moteriška“ *hentai* animacijos „fantasy“ žanro perspektyva, semiotinės vyriško bei moteriško kūno įvaizdžio konstravimo priemonės, taip pat veiksmo vietos ir laiko reikšmė vaizduojamų lyčių įvaizdžių suvokimui.

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### **Abstract**

The article explores the means of gender image construction in Japanese pornographic animation (*hentai anime*). Alongside other genres of Japanese animation, during the last decades *hentai anime* has gained enormous popularity all over the world. Gender as a category is especially emphasised in the animation of sexually explicit content, therefore *hentai anime* plays an important role as a visual medium representing the images of Japanese masculinity and femininity on the international level. Based on five representative *hentai anime* films of the ‘fantasy’ subgenre, the article provides an overview of the ‘male gaze’ and the ‘female gaze’ viewing perspectives in Japanese pornographic *anime*, semiotic means of masculine and feminine body image construction, as well as the use of time and space and its significance to the perception of the represented gender images.