"Violence is Sexy" and the Lolita Effect: Erotically Coded Violence Against Young Female Characters in Neon Genesis Evangelion and Code Lyoko

Megan Pan

Trigger warning: This excerpt contains discussions of material relating to sexual violence.

In a Tortoiseshell: *In her exploration of two animated shows, Megan **analyzes** the erotic undertones present during the mental violation of a young female character. As she engages with this piece of **evidence**, Megan not only draws a compelling parallel but goes a step further to include detailed notes of visual design and its deeper ties to animated pornography, which ultimately ties to her paper's **global motive**.*

Excerpt

The theme of mental violation also occurs in Code Lyoko with the character of Aelita Schaeffer, one of the youngest characters in the series as well as the single most valuable member of the Lyoko team. Code Lyoko follows a group of teenagers who discover a supercomputer in an abandoned factory near the Parisian boarding school they attend. Upon activating the supercomputer, the friends unwittingly release a malignant artificial intelligence program known as X.A.N.A., which will wreak havoc on the Earth unless they defeat its monsters in the virtual world of Lyoko. The daughter of Waldo Schaeffer, the original creator of Lyoko, Aelita possesses a deep connection with the virtual world, as she holds one of the "Keys of Lyoko" that links her with the supercomputer (and consequently, with X.A.N.A. as well).

Although Aelita had initially been tethered to Lyoko at the start of the series after having been virtualized by her father ten years prior, her friends eventually manage to successfully rematerialize her, permitting her to resume her life as a 12-year-old human girl and enroll in school under the alias Aelita Stones. For the majority of the series, Aelita plays the critical role of deactivating any Towers on Lyoko that have been activated by X.A.N.A., since she is the only one who has the necessary connection to Lyoko that allows her to control the Towers and neutralize X.A.N.A.'s attacks. However, while this ability is what makes Aelita arguably the most powerful of all the Lyoko Warriors, it is also what renders her the most vulnerable.

Because of her power to access Lyoko's functions as well as her special connection with Franz Hopper, Aelita is frequently a key target of X.A.N.A.'s attacks, both in Lyoko and in the "real world." Many an episode of Code Lyoko consists of Aelita being knocked out by a pawn controlled by X.A.N.A. on Earth and brought to the factory in order to be virtualized into the world of Lyoko, where monsters would then attempt to steal her memories or annihilate her permanently without her friends around to help defend her. One monster who poses a particular threat to Aelita is the Scyphozoa, a jellyfish-like creature that is able to steal people's memories and take control of their minds. One of X.A.N.A.'s most powerful monsters, the Scyphozoa is impervious to most physical damage and can use its long, regenerating tentacles to grab and trap anyone standing within its reach; more often than not, its main quarry is Aelita. The scenes featuring the Scyphozoa's attack take place in nearly the same manner each time: separated from her allies, Aelita is confronted by the Scyphozoa, who backs her into a corner. Sometimes she tries to fight back using her (relatively limited) offensive powers, but much of the time, she is unable to do anything other than stand rooted to the ground, paralyzed by fear. The Scyphozoa then proceeds to wrap its tentacles around Aelita, seizing her into the air, before using its remaining tentacles to "probe" Aelita's mind; once this happens, Aelita is frozen in place, incapable of escaping, and we can only watch as her memories are siphoned out of her body, as represented by the glowing red globules that flow through the Scyphozoa's tentacles, much like blood being drawn into a syringe (see figure 9). Unless halted by a counterattack from the rest of the Lyoko Warriors, the Scyphozoa will proceed to drain all of Aelita's energy until her mind is completely taken over by a virus it implants into her head, which temporarily converts her into a vassal of X.A.N.A. and forces her to manipulate the Lyoko interface in its favor.
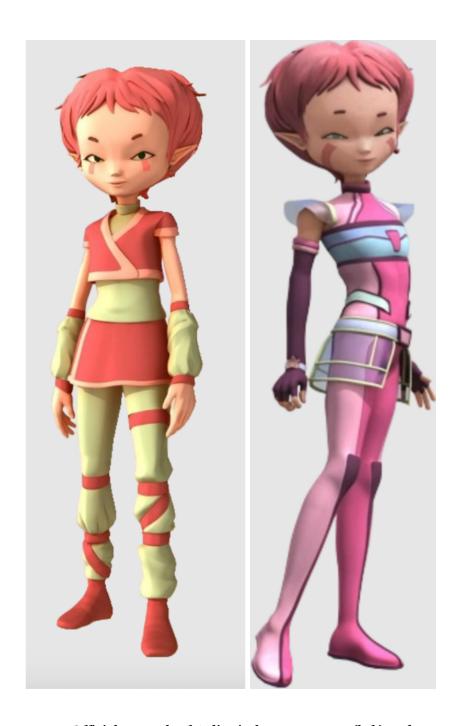
What is particularly disturbing about this one monster and its interaction with Aelita is the erotically coded nature of the Scyphozoa's entrapment and subsequent exploitation, which bears an undoubtable resemblance to the concepts of rape and sexual assault. Almost every encounter Aelita has with the Scyphozoa follows a progression that could just as easily be projected onto an incident of sexual assault: first, she is knocked out (i.e., rendered helpless) and brought to a separate location away from bystanders; then, the Scyphozoa forces itself upon her while she cannot or tries futilely to resist; and finally, she loses any sense of agency and is coerced into carrying out the intentions of her abuser before ultimately emerging from the encounter, newly traumatized and having had a critical part of her selfhood taken away from her as well. Such a singular instance would be difficult enough for Aelita's character to bear, but as it

turns out, the Scyphozoa's attacks become a repeated occurrence throughout the Code Lyoko series, meaning that Aelita is subjected to its invasive assaults over and over again.

Furthermore, the Scyphozoa's specific visual design reinforces its likeness to a sexual predator taking advantage of the young Aelita. Unlike virtually every other Lyoko monster, which attacks from a distance by shooting lasers, the Scyphozoa's unique purpose makes it the only creature that engages its opponent in close-range "physical" contact. Although many elements of its design are clearly based on a jellyfish, the Scyphozoa is also comparatively human in its depiction, as seen by the sigil on its head resembling a face and its distinctly patterned purple body that makes it look as if it is wearing clothing. As such, it is this amalgamation of the humanesque and the bestial that begets a beast with uncomfortably sexual undertones. With its snaking tendrils reminiscent of the tentacle erotica previously mentioned as one of the visual tropes in hentai, the Scyphozoa's encounters with Aelita take on an even more insidious connotation of perverse, fetishistic indulgence. The fact that these attacks become a recurring motif over the course of the show only further emphasizes the regularity of the erotic gratification that is meant to be derived from Aelita's repeated violation. In the context of Code Lyoko's existence as a children's program, the casualness with which the visual language of sexual violence can be subtly included as a central plot point is worth considering in its muted perpetuation of the Lolita effect's "violence is sexy" myth.

Figure 9. Aelita is captured by the Scyphozoa, who begins to extract her memories. From "Réminiscence." Screenshot capture by author.

Official artwork of Aelita in her season 1-3 (left) and season 4 (right) Lyoko attire. Taken from the Code Lyoko Fan Wiki (https://codelyoko.fandom.com/wiki/).

Author Commentary

Megan Pan

As a hard-core anime enthusiast, when it came time for me to decide what to write my second comp lit JP on, my heart was instantly drawn to the idea of performing a critical analysis of some of my favorite animated works. In particular, I wanted to compare a work of Japanese-style anime with an anime-inspired cartoon, in order to examine their similarities and differences given the historical and social contexts of their creation. The two works I chose to look at were the Japanese anime Neon Genesis Evangelion, a genre-defining classic from the 90s, and the French cartoon Code Lyoko, a show from the mid-2000s that aired on Cartoon Network. Initially, my plan was simply to juxtapose the stylistic and thematic elements of both works, with a particular emphasis on key visual aspects shared between the two animations. However, as I continued my research process, something caught my attention that would end up shifting the direction of my paper entirely.

In my experience re-watching both programs, I observed a curious trend that manifested itself across the two. As Neon Genesis Evangelion and Code Lyoko are both action-based fantasy series, a certain level of combat violence is to be expected while watching, but I noticed a marked discrepancy in the treatment of the young male versus the young female protagonists in the two shows. As opposed to their male counterparts, the adolescent heroines were frequently subjected to compromising circumstances that seemingly allowed their pain to be capitalized as an erotic commodity for the viewer's consumption—a form of sadistic voyeurism, so to say. The more I watched, the more I remarked this trend taking place, and it eventually led me to change up my analytical lens from one of pure stylistic evaluation to an investigation of the visual tropes associated with this phenomenon. While researching, I came across a book by the scholar Meenakshi Gigi Durham in which she describes the "Lolita effect," referring to the hypersexualization of young girls and how the concept of "violence as sexy" is often perpetuated in media, and from there, the term and its associated implications became the cornerstone of my critical analysis.

The body of my paper was structured into four separate sections focusing on each of the female protagonists from across both shows; the excerpt included for publication is taken from the section on Code Lyoko's Aelita Schaeffer. In my analysis for each character, I wanted to include a "standalone" close reading that pointed out the important visual elements of the scenes I picked out, as well as a deeper contextualization of said elements that provided greater

insights on the tropes in animation, pornography, and other related visual media informing the scene. Of course, the "Lolita effect" and the correlation of violence and sexuality remained paramount throughout it all. Overall, the experience of writing this paper was a journey in and of itself, and I am grateful to have had the chance to share such a labor of love with you. Thank you for taking the time to read my work, and I wish you all the best in your own writing endeavors.

Editor Commentary

Diane Yang

My precalculus teacher in high school was glamorous, brutally organized, and very, very strict. Well-dressed and impeccably mannered, the class resided in terrifying admiration of her. During a casual after-school conversation, I was shocked to learn that she had once been a drummer in a punk rock band. This stern woman, who drilled trigonometric formulas into my head, was also a wild, free-hearted musician?

Often, the most shocking realizations don't come from bizarre fun facts and far-fetched stories, but from uncovering unknown dimensions of mundane people and objects in our lives through the use of new **lenses**. Megan does exactly this in her examination of two children's television shows, heightening the impact of her work on her reader. Uncovering the "erotically coded nature" of a character's mental entrapment by exposing undeniable parallels to the "concepts of rape and sexual assault" requires skillful **close reading**, which is exactly what Megan executes. Notably, Megan is able to identify a pattern in her **evidence** material that prompts interest: the uncanny similarity of the process of the ensnarement of a main character to the predatory weakening of individuals during acts of sexual violence.

Part of the effectiveness behind Megan's **analysis** is the effort she places in not only drawing a singular parallel for a singular event, but in also fleshing out the contextual background of the scene. After the character is violated, Megan does not ignore the aftermath of the scene and notes how Aelita "emerg[es] from the encounter, newly traumatized and having had a critical part of her selfhood taken away from her." By pushing her **close reading** an extra step and noting the impact of the main event on the character, Megan's **analysis** is even more compelling to the reader.

Perhaps most impressive about this excerpt is the ease with which Megan is able to tie her **analysis** to her **global motive**, reminding her reader of the pressing importance of her work — the "so what" of her paper. By exploring the visual imagery present in the scene and likening the villain to tentacle erotica, Megan notes the "amalgamation of the humanesque and the bestial that begets a beast with uncomfortably sexual undertones." Noting how these dark and disturbing fetishes exist so blatantly in children's television, Megan highlights how themes and motifs of sexual exploitation exist so casually in everyday media, deftly reinforcing the need to study her subject area in the first place.

Works Cited

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Bios

Megan Pan, '23 is a comparative literature concentrator from Short Hills, New Jersey, with certificates in theater, creative writing, and Asian American studies. Her dream is to become a leading scholar of anime, pornography, and animated pornography. Failing that, she would like to become the first American woman to be flung into the sun. She wrote this paper as a junior.

Diane Yang, '23 is from Yorktown Heights, New York. She is pursuing a concentration in Electrical Engineering with certificates in Entrepreneurship, Applications of Computing, and Sustainable Energy. On campus, Diane serves as the President of Princeton Racing Electric, in addition to working as a Fellow in the Writing Center. She loves collecting houseplants, running after chickens, and driving late at night. Diane wrote this as a junior.