

I've had a mixed relationship when it comes to Anime.

Back in my late-teens and twenties - aka my dumb-bitch phase - I used to be outspokenly anti-Anime. I'd say the art style just looks the same which, you know, it kinda does, but that would somehow mean all anime lacked creativity or even good animation. So basically the Cal-Arts argument. I am a dumb bitch.

I'd put this down to a lack of exposure. Growing up I'd see anime shows like Ox Tales and Samurai Pizza Cats and saw the Street Fighter movie at some point, perhaps when I wasn't allowed to, and while Japan animation studios had a hand in many of my favourite shows - I missed out on a lot of seminal and definitive anime.

Aka That Good Shit.

Where do I even begin with long-running shows like Dragon Ball, Naruto and One Piece, it's too late for me, I'm done for, go on without me - no wait come back-

Maybe I didn't have the friends to recommend me this stuff or my bias couldn't get over itself, but I've been sleeping on anime for way too long and without a waifu pillow.

[AD READ]

So as I hit my 30s, it was finally time to dip my toe into the swimming pool of anime. And by dip my toe, I meant divebomb into the deep end and immediately drown.

This is the first scene of the first episode of Kill La Kill by Studio Trigger. Ok I'm in.

Ryuko Matoi ventures to an academy to avenge her father's death and finds a talking transforming sailor uniform (ok...) that makes her more powerful, the more naked she is (Errrrrrr.....)

During her quest, she stays with fellow classmate Mako, who is very precious protect the bean. While there the running gag is all the male members of her family are incredibly lecherous, including the father, incredibly big yikes.

Ok ok, it's clearly meant to be played for laughs rather than be predatory. As long as it doesn't get weirder than that.

[Episode 16 / Mother Daughter Bath scene] OH NO

Anime Was A Mistake

Kill La Kill is an incredible show, I had never seen action sequences like this before and the animation and characterization was jaw-dropping.

And it's worth noting that in Japanese "fashion" is "fasshon" which is very similar to "fassho" meaning fascism, meaning Kill La Kill's "naked means power" thing is anti-facism. And speaking as the junior vice-president of Antifa, I approve!

But my full enjoyment was held back by some of the mental gymnastics required to navigate some of these let's just say more raunchier elements. Let's try something different.

So eventually my attention was drawn to anime that carried more of a legacy such as Akira and Neon Genesis Evangelion. I was captivated by the aesthetic, not just the remarkable and painstaking animation quality but the stunning shots of the city and of computer screens. There's some indescribable appeal of this retro anime look, just feels so visceral, the grain and imperfections making it feel tangible and real. And REALLY cemented my love of synthwave, vaporwave and lo-fi hip hop beats to write video essays to. The action

sequences are a mix of unglorifying grotesque and meticulous detail, you can't help but be in awe at what clearly looks like took forever to make.

But... I didn't get it.

There's clear allegories to Hiroshima so one can assume the stories are allegorical in nature too, not to be taken literally. But I came away from Neon Genesis unclear what the meaning was supposed to be. I had watched the Netflix version which I know came with some disappointing alterations to the lead's sexuality. Whether there was something lost in translation or a cultural difference I just wasn't accustomed to, I couldn't help coming away from these feeling sad that I had missed something important, like I was a let down to the hours of labor in every shot. It'll be easy to Google the answers but that's like cheating the anime exam and I'd rather just admit failure. The hip hop studies girl will be very disappointed in me.

My quest led to a giant I had long ignored. Studio Ghibli.

Spirited Away, Howl's Moving Castle, My Neighbour Totoro. I devoured these movies like Ghibli food. Each one feeling like a spiritual journey in of itself, it's warm and comforting and safe. But everyone knows this, I'm saying nothing new. Bad video essay. But Ponyo affected me in a way I hadn't experienced before. You see, prior to this, my only experience of Ghibli was from a bad faith youtube reviewer, who despite stressing they did enjoy the film, still set out to nitpick the film to pieces scene by scene, leaving me with warped expectations.

I won't say who it was, but I watched it so you don't have to.

When I finally did see Ponyo, it was at 3am with a child who couldn't sleep. I put it on assuming very little and it hit me hard.

I probably cried three times. You're told this story almost exclusively from the perception of the children so you too see their sense of wonder and joy. There's just something soul-enriching about this hug. Even without context, this embrace feels so impactful that it sings to my inner child. I won't pretend this is my favourite movie but on pure feelings alone, it makes me incredibly happy. I wish I'd experienced this sooner.

It was coming to the end of 2019 before the whole everything happened and a gif went around saying this is the last day this joke will work.

It was of a school girl eating some bread, discovering the expiry date is on the underside, but-

I had to know what show this was from.

Nichijou was such a curveball, I didn't know what to expect. Apparently no-one did. It got cancelled after 26 episodes, each one too expensive to animate, low TV ratings and the critical reception was mixed. But not only did it gain a cult following, it had critics change their mind, even ones who originally gave scathing reviews. This was going to be strange. Nichijou aka My Ordinary Life, is about a group of school girls and their everyday lives.

Doing things like homework, playing games, hanging out. And that's basically it. No giant robots, no space battles, no nightmare monsters. There isn't even really a plot. The only high-stakes around here are things like getting the wrong lunch. But that's where this show excels. By keeping the stakes low, it becomes an insight into being an awkward teen again and how emotionally charged even the most trivial of things can seem like.

It's told in short chapters which make them feel more like a slice of life, or anecdotes. It seems disjointed, leaping from moment to moment with little connectivity, lifting inspiration from its short form manga origins, but life isn't a well told story, but a series of memories and unreliable biased ones at that, which makes even the crazier moments feel more relatable. Chapters are often separated by what seem like a view from a window, they serve no purpose but become moments of tranquility. It shows how normal can still be in it's own way beautiful. And that what this show is at it's heart, a celebration of the ordinary.

Ok, now I have to talk about the robot girl, child scientist and talking cat.

The closest to a plot the show has to a story is Nano, a robot girl deeply embarrassed about the massive wind-up key on her back and other absurd features. She desperately wants to be normal and her life is anything but. It could be argued the show's adoration for the ordinary is from her perspective. But as we also see, even the normal has oddities and this show revels in them. Despite Nano's paranoia, the others celebrate her differences and their own rather than blend in like... well, like robots. And I love this message because, the truth is no-one is normal. We all have our differences, our quirks, our oddities, some less in our control than others, and that's to be celebrated. Maybe that's why the show had such an odd reaction when it aired, because it's love of the normal defied the norms.

My journey doesn't stop here, I've also been enjoying Aggretsuko and Studio Trigger's latest show BNA. But my lesson has been Anime isn't really a genre, but a medium. And to strike everything that fell under that umbrella is to lose out on so much variety from the beautiful to the ugly to the explosive and to the tranquil. For 30 years, I've robbed myself of these unique experiences. But I'm excited to catch up [One Piece has 900 episodes rant].