

A Complete* Guide to Flip Flappers

*WORK IN PROGRESS, yeah I know it's taking ages

Based on shitposts from /a/, /u/ and /r/anime/, redacted by lukeatlook



Flip Flappers is a goddamn masterpiece.

> 883

- Japan, disagreeing with the statement above

In the era of ubiquitous Light Novel advertisements and manga adaptations - or the other way around - original anime is always something worth checking out. The fact that the studio took the risk of creating their own content instead of making easier money means that they have a pretty good idea to sell, or at least they think they do. Moreover an anime original story is designed with audio and video format in mind, which allows it to use not only image and text, but also sound, cinematography, and all sorts of techniques that adaptations only use to reproduce a story already told in a limited format.

That is the case here. The production company Infinite Dayo has made it their mission, as they say, to produce original anime that leave a long-lasting impact. While it might not be the case with the ultimately forgettable Kuromukuro or the staggeringly boring Glasslip, works like Hanasaku Iroha, Tari Tari, Nagi no Asukara and SHIROBAKO have clearly fulfilled that promise. Having most of their successful series animated by P.A. Works, they've branched out and contracted Studio 3Hz, a new player in the game, known until then for a promising yet underwhelming adaptation of Dimension W. For 3HZ, Flip Flappers is a portfolio piece of sorts, showing off their arthouse capabilities to kickstart them beyond delivering inbetweens for Attack on Titan S2 and Little Witch Academia.

It doesn't work for everyone, of course. Many are dragged in by shiny art and join in on the collective sakugasm, but as the show progresses there are two groups displeased with the direction: one that grows tired of the episodic adventures and demands plot progression, and the other that wants it to

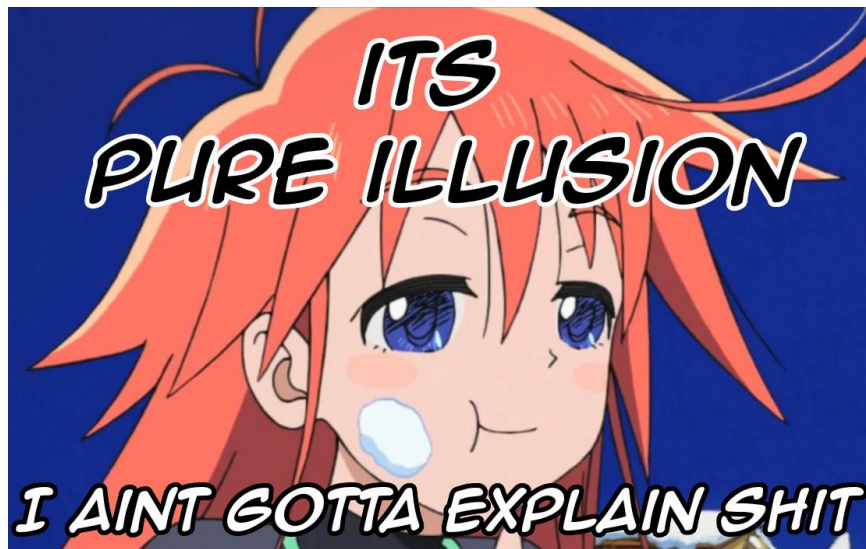
forever remain episodic adventures and hates when the plot progression eventually kicks in. Both groups fail to realize that FLFL isn't a show that lost its way halfway through - it's a deliberately constructed work of art that sets up all of its themes in the "episodic" part, only to wrap it up in the "plot" one. If you've stayed with the show until its end you might grow a new appreciation for it with this handy guide.

There is no objectively perfect anime. There are some titles with pitch perfect quality-to-accessibility ratio such as Fullmetal Alchemist Brotherhood and Kimi no Na wa, but even those aren't free from flaws. FMA's chibi comic relief moments are highly disruptive for many people, and however blissfully eye-pleasing KnNW is, Shinkai still can't write good romantic progression for shit. Some people simply rate anime 10/10 to signify their favourites, some don't give a damn and base their ratings on their personal enjoyment, while others try to tryhard and come up with some "objective" criteria to determine perfect anime. Is there an objective way to rate anime? I can't say for sure if there's a good or bad answer for that question. I'll risk a hypothesis, though, that an anime series can be perfect in one specific thing it does.

Flip Flappers might not be perfect, but it's a masterpiece of symbolism.

Will you rate it 10/10 after reading through this guide? Hello no. If an average viewer needs that monster of a guide to understand it, it's not perfect by any means. But if you've already spent 5 hours of your life going through this acid trip, you might as well spend 20 minutes now to feel better about what you've watched in that time. And that I believe to be a core strength of this show in recommending it to newcomers - it's an energetic, easy to get into adventure (compared to some series like Serial Experiments Lain or Penguindrum which are a bit harder to get into) that evolves into a psy-fi mindfuck you'll need an instruction manual for. Which is why this guide exists.

TL;DR: Flip Flappers reads like a Rorschach inkblot - a big and colorful one at that, and the closer you look the deeper it goes. The main themes, however, are based on the model of psychoanalysis by Carl Jung. You're meant to get hooked in on the episodic surreal adventure and then go into the "deep stuff".



What is Pure Illusion, anyway?

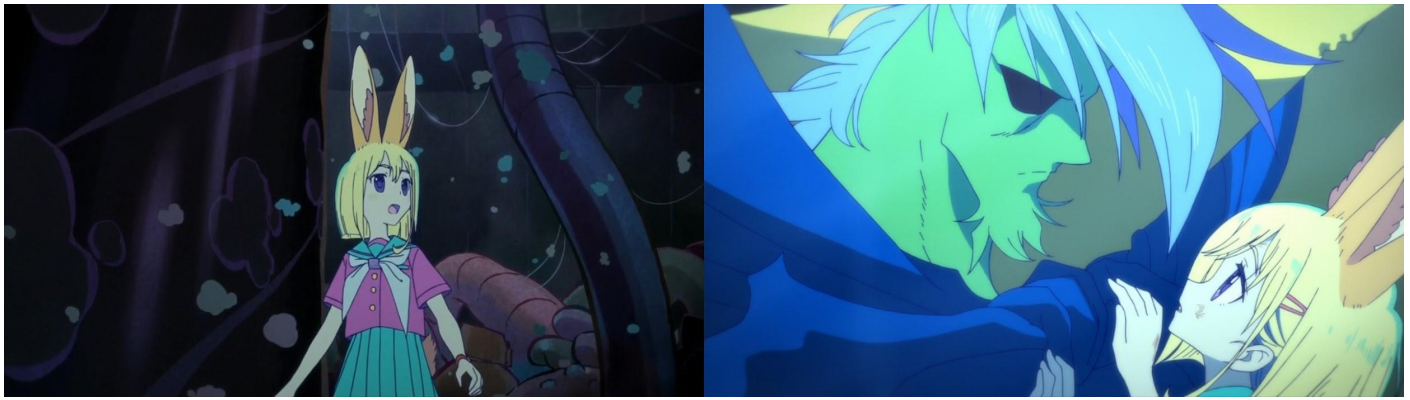
Dreams are often most profound when they seem the most crazy.

- Sigmund Freud

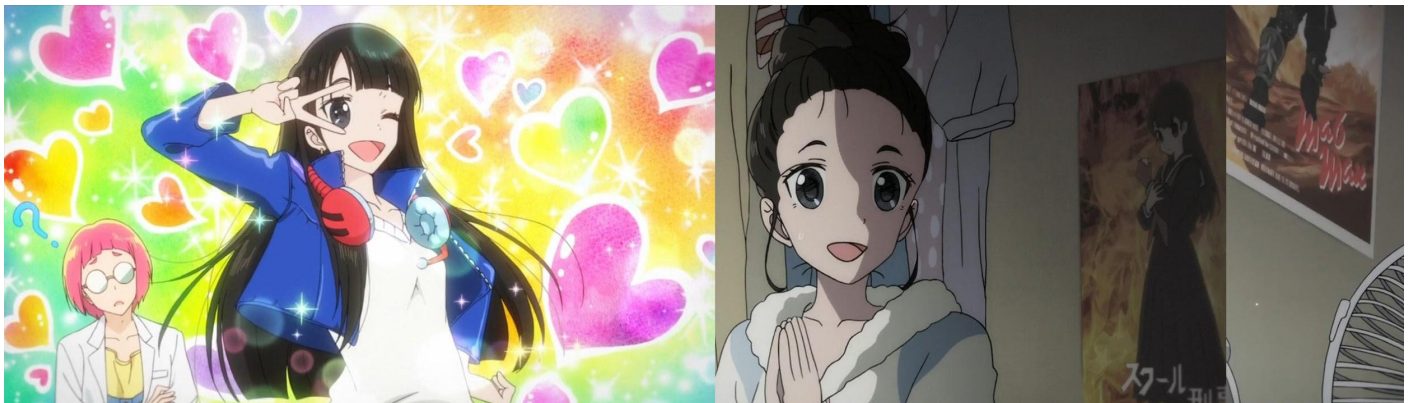
Before we dive deep into deconstructing FLFL's symbolism, let's start with something simple - trying to solve the puzzle that is Pure Illusion. The information we get in the show is as follows: Pure Illusion is based on the subconsciousness of a specific person from the cast and reflects their perspective of the world. In episode 11 it's stated explicitly that ELPIS allows the yuri psychonauts to enter a person's PI. That answer, given the background we'll dig into in further chapters, is only partially correct, but we'll use it for now. It's pretty speculative and doesn't contribute to studying the symbolism or Jungian themes at all, but it's an easy place to start before we go deep down the rabbit hole.



Episode 1 appears to be Cocona. It's a quiet, barren world, with sky as blue as her hair. Snow in particular stifles any noise, and that's how we meet Cocona - in a quiet class in cram school. Notice how in the scene when we meet Cocona, we don't hear any sound from that class even when the students get up and talk - the camera moves outside the window. Contrast with Papika's introduction, which is as noisy as it can get.



Episode 2 is Uexküll. It's a world where the colors are different, everyone becomes a rabbit, cages are terrifying, and a vacuum cleaner is the most scary thing imaginable. Uexküll himself becomes a superhero-like figure, capable of protecting Cocona - but he's still afraid of the gluttonous Papika, who drools at his sight in both worlds. This world alone paired with the name of the rabbit was a dead giveaway of where the show was heading, and we'll come back to Uexküll later.



Episode 3 is Sayuri. It's not obvious at first - the color of the desert sand and the over-the-top character of the world implies Papika as the first answer - but during the sendoff in episode 5 it's Sayuri who's most enthusiastic about the henshin action, she claims to know martial arts in episode 11, and her room in episode 13 is filled with posters of Mad Max, Sailor Moon and Sukeban Deka (it's where the [broken mask](#) comes from).



Episode 4 - no Pure Illusion. The ones girls land in at the end of this episode are skipped and recapped at the beginning of episode 5. They could belong to Hidaka (the one with a space shuttle) and Grandma (the Jack and the Beanstalk one?), but we don't really have enough information to confirm either.



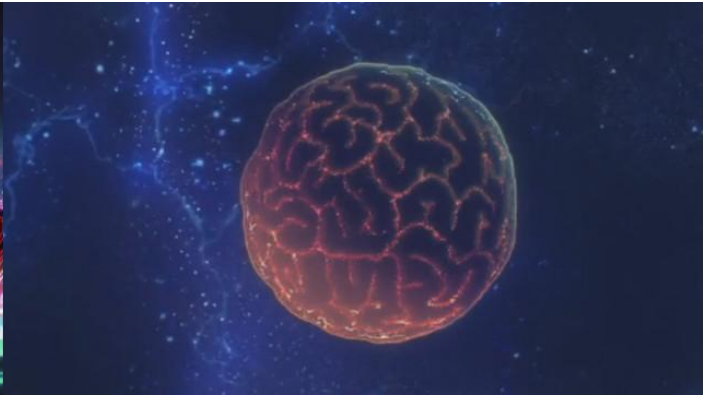
Episode 5 is probably Toto and Yuyu. It takes their innate creepiness to the next level. They fit in by recreating a scene from *The Shining*, and they don't have to step an inch out of character to do it. This particular Pure Illusion exists mostly for the sake of making a statement about yuri, and we'll revisit that topic later on.



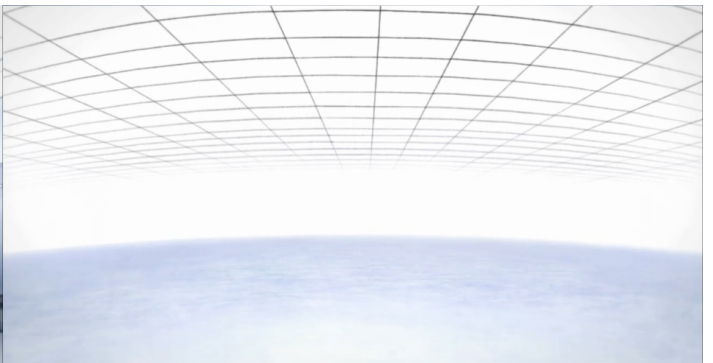
Episode 6 is *Irodori*. That one's obvious. Not only does the world the girls fight for the shard in look like a canvas, also the deeper layer beyond the boundary uses a complementary color set of blue and orange, foreshadowed in *Irodori*'s painting shown at the beginning of the episode.



Episode 7 is where Cocona meets different aspects of Papika and different relationships she could have with her - but none of them are the "real", whole Papika. Is it the inside of Papika's mind, though? Or is it rather Cocona's view of Papika? This PI makes us question if episode 1 was Cocona's view of the world, or Papika's view of Cocona instead.



Episode 8 is Bu-chan. Pops is his alter ego in the Tron world, and Pops's short height and eye asymmetry corresponds to Bu-chan's own perspective. It also explains the low-angle shots and swimsuits in the episode. The command center, clearly based on Hidaka's, reflects the robot's desire to be like his master. In case that wasn't enough, Bu-chan goes into Pure Illusion with the girls, but we don't see him as a robot there, making Pops the equivalent of humanoid Uexküll: moreover, he is seriously hurt after he reappears in Hidaka's lab, hinting at the damage to PI affecting him directly.



Episode 9 is Yayaka. The Dark Knight-esque ceiling from the Pure Illusion is the reflection of the Asclepius locker room and the memory dome is forcing a reconciliation with her past. The space PI where they wear astronaut suits might be Nyunyu's. The portal was set up for her, initially, the PI is empty of shards just like her character is empty of purpose story-wise, and her main attribute is a goddamn flying saucer.



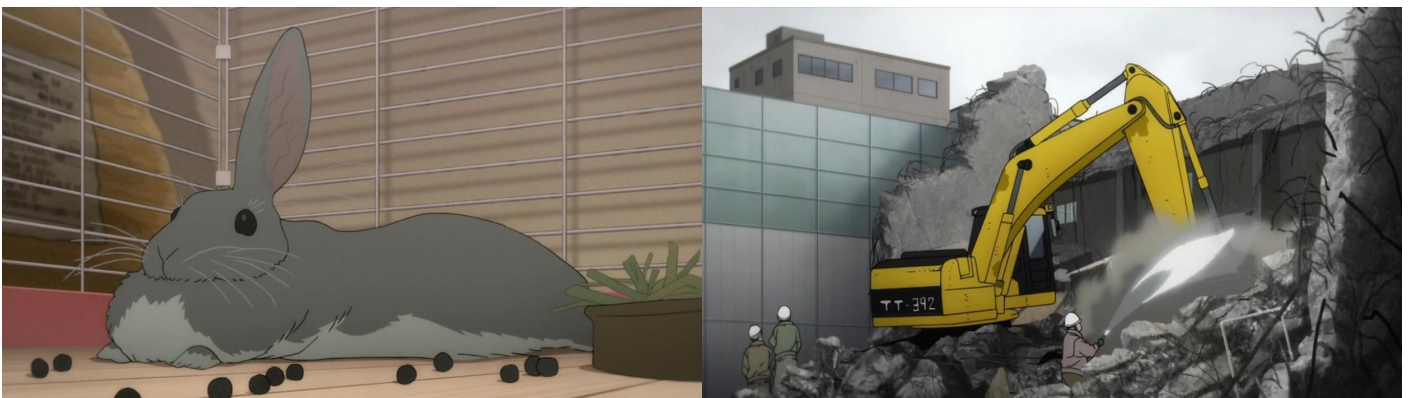
Episode 10 - no Pure Illusion. Mimi invites Papikana to hers, but we saw it earlier already - it's the one with the boat, river, lake, and clovers. Episode 10 explains its origin: it's based around the cloverfield that was Mimi's first contact with the outside world, and clovers are later Mimi's main motif while fighting Asclepius. This particular Pure Illusion has many faces - the river can be gloomy and mysterious or bright and cheerful, and the cloverfield tears down in the final episode.



Episode 11 is a glimpse of the Pure Illusion of Salt's father, catalyzed by ELPIS. We also see Cocona in Mimi's PI, which is now bright as day now that she has her daughter back (that's assuming every PI is assigned to one specific person - it could be that river in particular reflects Cocona's relationship with her mother).



Episode 12 - no new Pure Illusion, we revisit all the ones from episodes 1, 2, 3 and 8. In the end, Cocona and Papika find themselves in Mimi's cloverfield PI, now misty and gray due to Mimi losing control of the situation and becoming afraid that both her friend and her daughter will reject her. Later in the finale the cloverfield turns into a dark forest, with Mimi floating like Ophelia in a pond.



Episode 13 is Salt. He forces his PI onto Mimi's using ELPIS, and later Cocona gets caught inside it - a grim, depressing world where Pure Illusion is lost and Sayuri became a replacement mother figure for Cocona. The best hyperreal entities are Uexküll, who tricks the audience into expecting a "it was all a dream" ending, and Bu-chan, who becomes a fully-grown excavator (check its number).

By entering a PI, you learn the character of another person. If you go in too deep, through the gate, you can permanently alter their very personality. However, it works both ways - the PI can influence you as

well, adjusting your appearance to fit its theme. The influence on psychonauts isn't forced and direct - Cocona develops through living the story of Flip Flappers, not necessarily because of Pure Illusion mojo.

Later on, as we progress into the theories of Umwelt and Collective Unconscious, we'll notice that explaining PI with just the former isn't the full answer and actually the latter might also play a role. Does it mean everything we've "solved" so far is completely wrong? Not exactly. It's still a pretty consistent method of proving that there's a method behind FLFL's madness and it's worth to reflect on the entire thing.

And now that we've covered the easy stuff, let's move on to the real deal.

Show, don't tell



The Breadcrumb Trail

I like visual storytelling and hiding stuff in plain sight.

- Oshiyama Kiyotaka, director of Flip Flappers

"Show, don't tell" is the golden rule of cinematography. It's something that good movies do: use the picture rather than words to communicate with the viewer. Everyone hates infodumps, right? A well-written movie - or a TV series - will use scene composition and cinematography in general to convey the emotions and setting faster and more subtly than by just having a character or a narrator read it out loud. A great movie won't stop at setting up the mood and will unlock the full potential of visual storytelling.

Symbolism works in a quite similar manner, just one level deeper. You don't have to put symbols on the screen - they can be present in the text or even in the music as well. However it's an extension of the same idea - telling the story in a more complex and interesting way than just reading it out loud. What symbolism does is encouraging the viewers to discover the meaning of the story by themselves, which makes it the IKEA furniture of storytelling. Sometimes it's quite easy to understand (skulls seem pretty obvious, right?), but in many cases you're pretty much doomed to search for a guide in the form of a note left by an art critic that will explain to you what the author meant. If this sounds to you like a boring literature class, well, that's because this is exactly it, just with pictures.

One other reason why we need this guide instead of just throwing a hint and letting people solve it on their own - besides the obvious fact that 99% of the audience are not versed in Jungian psychoanalysis - is that the Japanese authors and audience work with different symbols than the European ones, and whenever a Japanese author picks up on the European iconography, they tend to do it by-the-book instead of relying on instinctively recognized symbols. What's completely lost in translation are for example the heraldics - the usage of mythical creatures like unicorns and dragons is different or nonexistent - and the Japanese flower language, which isn't something a European viewer will pick up without a hint (well, neither did I).

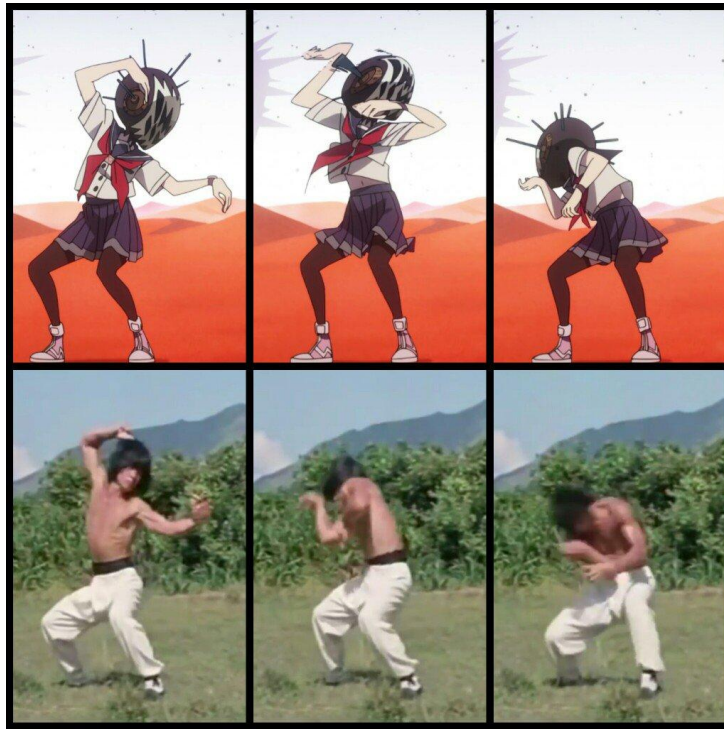


Even if you don't get it or don't see it at all, it will work on your subconsciousness until the reveal comes. Still, sometimes the questions come naturally, like: "What was the meaning of nail clippers in Salt's desk?". The scene presents them in such a manner (they're the only item presented there) that it forces you to ask this question. Of course there's the literal meaning - later on we see a guitar in young Salt's room - but given that episode 7 explores different aspects of the relationship between Cocona and Papika, sexual one included, nail clippers function here as a low-key sexual symbol from the LGBT community (if you don't know why, you have a lower chance of having a happy girlfriend).



Let's not pretend that FLFL is the first show to ever do that. Symbols are powerful tools present in many different series. The drills in TTGL are a symbol of progress and advancement despite hardships, the prenatal imagery in Evangelion (LCL, umbilical cord) foreshadows themes of both parentage and humanity, and Death Note is pretty apparent in its usage of Christian symbols such as crosses or washing one's feet, which in turn makes the apple clearly a symbol of temptation and playing God. That's how the breadcrumb of symbols works - you pick on the easiest stuff, and then on start noticing the less apparent ones.

Speaking of religion, if you grew up in a Christian culture you should be really familiar with the idea, as Jesus' parables are using symbolism a lot, and the symbols used in those parables gained even more powerful meaning (for example, Jesus brought up a quantity of money as a metaphor for inborn gifts, and today we use that amount of money as the word "talent"). With the added bonus of explaining the symbols right after telling the story.



I Understood That Reference

It is known

- it is known

Symbols and references are a code of communication that allow to communicate a whole package of ideas at once. To say that FLFL is packed with references is like to say Keijo has some curved female bodies in it. Technically correct, but it doesn't even begin to describe it. There's tons of subtle references, scenes, shots or motifs that are inspired by and/or homages to such classics as Nausicaa, The Girl Who Leapt Through Time, Mad Max, Pretty Cure, Sukeban Deka, Fist of the North Star, The Shining, 2001, Revolutionary Girl Utena, Neon Genesis Evangelion, and many, many more. The onslaught of references is partially a byproduct of outsourcing the storyboards and giving the storyboarders free reign on that, and partially the director's deliberate effort (episodes 3 and 8 in particular).

[TODO: Super Robot reference image]

Such references are not always directly related to the symbolism, not in most cases. Quite the opposite - invoking images from other works doesn't contribute to telling your own story. By basing on references to parallel works (movies, anime series) alone, you risk getting called out as repetitive and unoriginal. However, using references is a way of communicating with the audience. "We know who you are", says the staff of FLFL. "We know you know this particular piece, and now you can see all we put in the show is intentional. Please continue to look for such subtleties." References are a good way to gather your audience into a specific mindset, and then build upon that foundation.

[TODO: Bu-chan, Zoromes]

Nevertheless, there are some points where symbols and references meet. Bu-chan, for example, resembles the Curiosity Rover robot that landed on Mars, and its appearance is a good fit for the otherworldly adventure of the main duo. It goes deeper than that, though: the fact that there is a brain inside him is a direct reference to Zoromes preserving the last man from Earth with a brain-in-a-box device in stories by Neil R. Jones. Such tropes are actually so omnipresent in sci-fi that most people don't

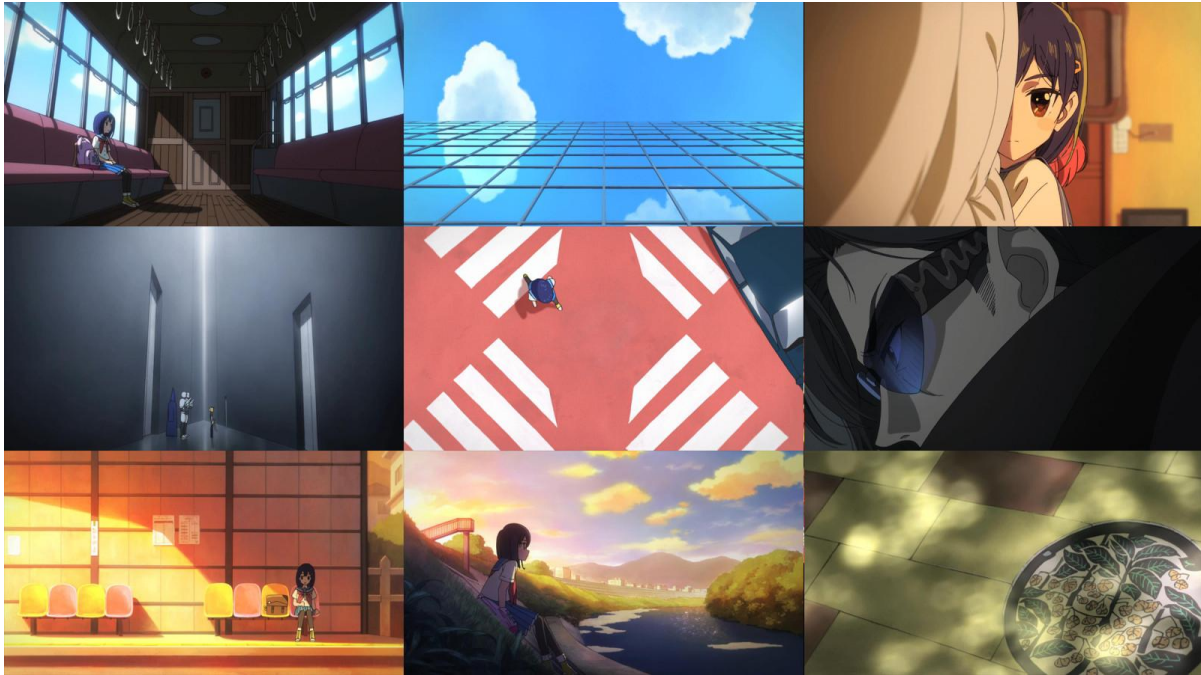
question the source, yet many authors, including the Ghost in the Shell mangaka, point to The Jameson Satellite as their inspiration.



Another double-purpose object would be the Thinker statue in episode 2. On its own, it's a piece of art that implants in your brain the idea of reflection, thinking, you may even pick up immediately on associating this statue hiding the entrance to Pure Illusion with the idea that Pure Illusion is indeed going inside a character's mind. The reference game goes into high stakes, however, when you realize the cultural context behind The Thinker - it's a famous figure, but few people know it's actually from a composition called The Gates of Hell illustrating Dante's Divine Comedy.

[TODO: Episode 13]

The border between references and symbols blurs and eventually disappears when you get cases such as the scenes in episode 13 clearly inspired by Salvador Dali's surrealist paintings *The Persistence of Memory* and *The Elephants*, which are famous pieces of symbolism themselves. And that's just the tip of the iceberg, as there's a plethora of fairy tale motifs throughout the whole show, which we will talk about in lengths later - and fairy tales are a language that employs some of the strongest symbols our culture has ever seen.



KINO

The Western inspirations are numerous and come in all sorts of forms and shapes. Later on we'll get to episode titles, but let's give some thought to the name of the show. Flip is derivative of Flippant, "displaying unbecoming levity in the consideration of serious subjects or in behaviour to persons entitled to respect", and Flapper means "fashionable young woman intent on enjoying herself and flouting conventional standards of behavior." Together this leads to a fairly apt description of the central characters in the show, lesbian girls who have all the fun in the world. While alone this seems dubious, the new show by the same studio "Princess Principal" follows near identical structure with Prin/Prin rather than Fl/Fl. That leads us to a theory that the name is a compromise between meaningful message and words that just sound funny together.



Not everything boils down to symbolism. Visual storytelling goes beyond relying on external knowledge - the strength of Flip Flappers lies in using the potential of the anime medium to its fullest. A great example of an ongoing part of the narrative that never gets relayed in a verbal form is Cocona's birthmark complex. This plot device plays somewhat an important part but not a single line about it is spoken - all are small movements and indirect reactions: why Cocona's ZR is so high up when compared to all the other main characters, why Cocona obsessively cleans up her skirt before going out to school, why Cocona gets angry and stops to clean it up when Papika messes up her skirt, why Cocona won't go in the water and catch fish with Papika, why Cocona won't play basketball or swim, why Cocona eventually tears

off the bandaid in front of Papika (which symbolizes Cocona opening up to her) but then gets shocked by being called "Mimi".



At the point where the twins bring up the subject and state that they are ordered to remove the fragment from Cocona, we already know that something is up. And Cocona herself never gets to speak about it - after everything is done we see her checking up her thigh in the hyperreal Pure Illusion.

And that's just one example. When you look at the whole show, especially in comparison with the light novel adaptations, you can notice it relies on movement, scene composition, sound and silence rather than any words. In many battle scenes the characters will only shout each other's names - this isn't a battle shounen where calling your attacks and stopping to talk for two episodes is a legit fighting strategy.



Hyperart Thomasson

Aren't you reading too much into it?

- most sane people

Now here's one reference that should shut down any denial of symbolism in this anime. Sure, in many shows the fans are overthinking it and looking for hidden messages where there aren't any. But aside from the staff vocally acknowledging all the trivia they put on the screen is intentional (...which they did in the interviews, but you can't know that by just watching the show), they use one theme that answers that question on its own: Pure Type.

Hyperart Thomasson, a concept developed by a Japanese artist Genpei Akasegawa, is an object made or placed in a way that it serves no purpose anymore, caused mostly by changes to architecture that rendered a specific object obsolete and caused it to become a piece of art even though it wasn't built to become one. A great example would be Pure Stairs - stairs leading to nowhere, Pure Door - doors you can't walk through, or a window that has a wall behind it. This connection has been spotted in FLFL as soon as the girls entered Flip Flap for the first time and after walking through a corridor of useless doors and stairs they entered a box/room/wardrobe opened with a room door. There's actually a direct shoutout right away. On a second look, there are some other elements fitting the theme, such as Papika's tube, which is a Pure Tunnel - an obsolete tunnel with nothing above it.



The concept was namedropped by Salt in episodes 2 and 10, by calling the area "Thomasson". Later in episode 11 Sayuri and Hidaka exited the headquarters through a Pure Type door. Calling the warp area a "thomasson" might imply that putting the girls into the box serves no purpose, as we've seen them entering Pure Illusion in many other places as well. The one common element of all entrances to Pure Illusion, both inside the Thomasson and outside, is Bu-chan, and this tiny pervy audience surrogate robot will forever remain an enigma. Funny enough, by the last few episodes with Mimi going rampage it's Bu-chan who becomes useless and obsolete. Compare to Nyunyu, who is a walking unfired Chekhov's gun.



What's so important here is the usage of art that wasn't even built as art, but we view it as such. The message behind putting it in FLCL is pretty simple: EVERYTHING in this show is meant to be read into, everything is art, everything is a symbol. Even if it was not meant to be, feel free to interpret it as one.

Except Nyunyu, because fuck that. Nyunyu exists solely for the show to reference Evangelion by using the words "Third Child", and for Yayaka to fear being replaced.

That being said, let's move on to particular symbols because boy there's many to catch.

The Arsenal of Symbols



Color Symbolism

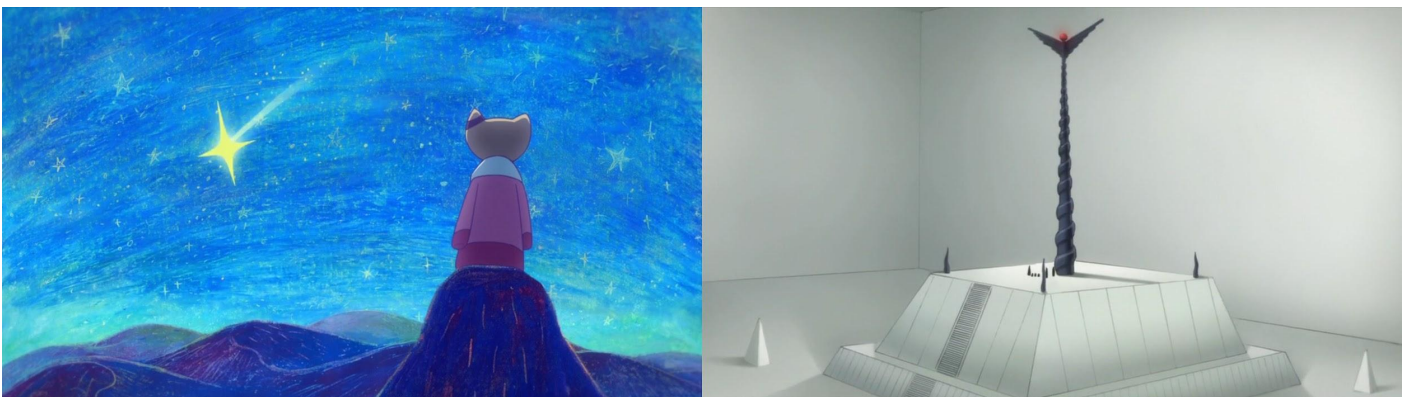
The blue curtains represent his immense depression and lack of will to carry on

- literature teacher

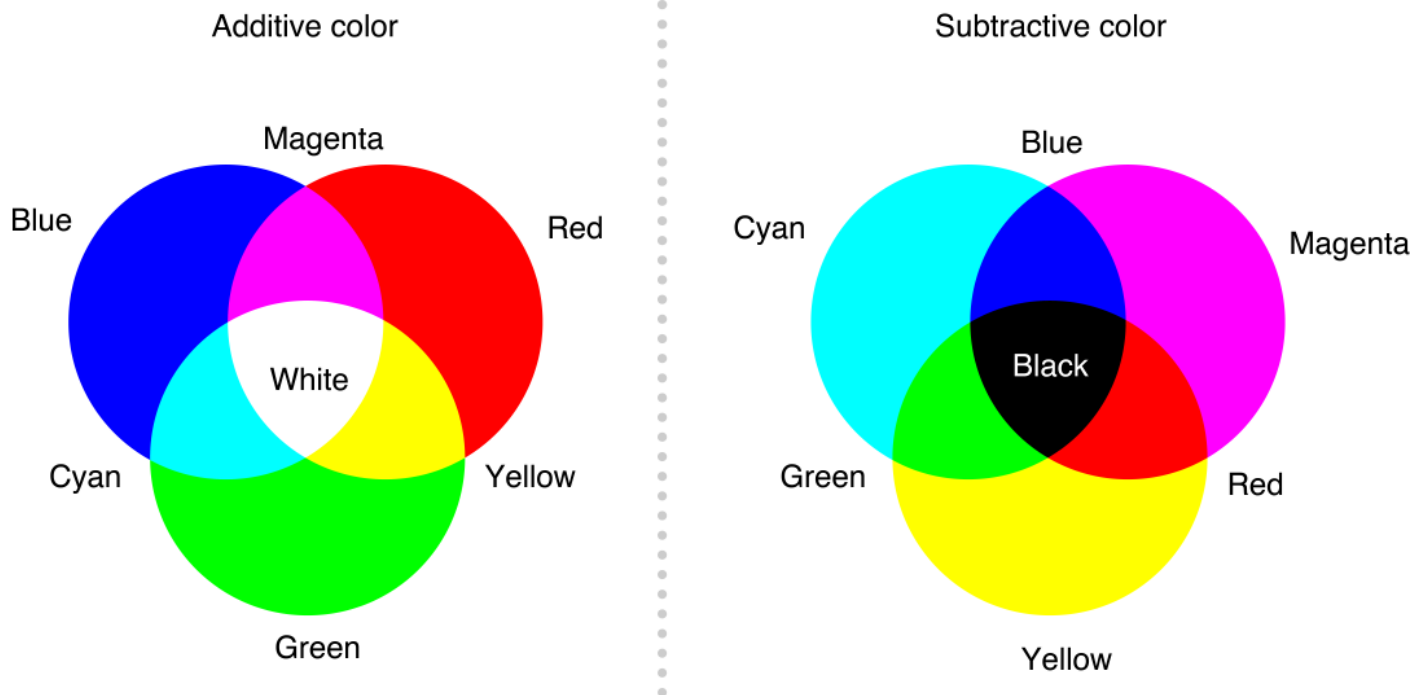
The curtains were fucking blue

- the author

Color is one of the simplest and most powerful symbols art has. It allows the author to immediately set the mood and convince the audience to feel in a particular way about a character or a scene. The meanings of a single color can be diverse and depend on the culture: while red is universally associated with intensity, warmth and passion, black and white have their roles almost reversed on the opposite ends of the Earth. In the West, black is the color of mourning, in the East it's white.

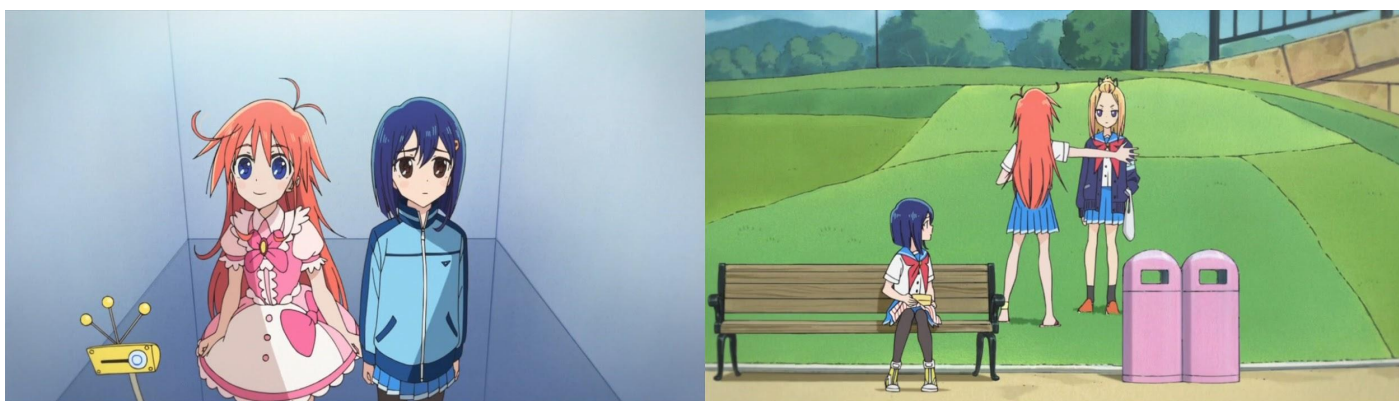


Most of the time colors don't have any symbolic meaning behind them - they just help depicting the objects in the picture or are picked to make a nice composition with each other. That changes when the object is colored in an unexpected or deliberately distinct manner. Same goes for a color palette overload, or an unexpected lack of color. Of course you can be reading too much into it - the dreaded blue curtains from that joke, interpreted as the symbol of poet's depression, might be simply fucking blue without any intended meaning - but when it's apparent enough, it's worth a guess, and we've already established that FLFL is pretty inviting when it comes to analysis.



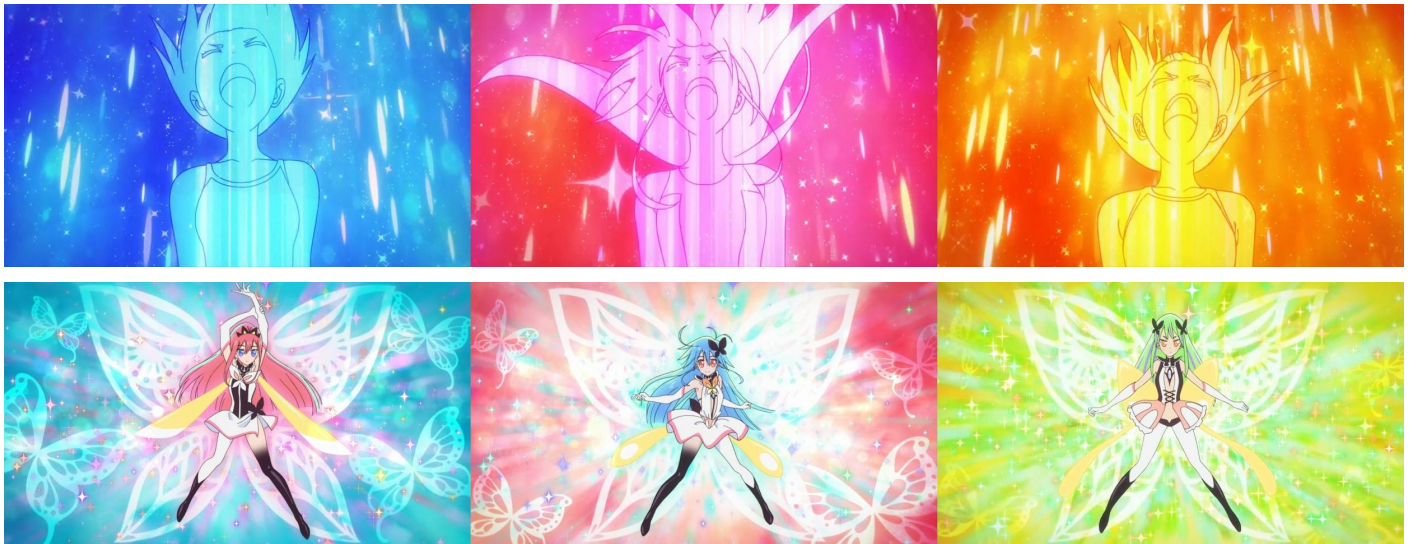
Colors come in two palettes: the additive one and the subtractive one. Subtractive - based on the fact that objects absorb light and reflect only their color - is just like the basic colors on painter's palette, the ones you know from preschool. Red plus yellow equals orange, yellow plus blue equals green, blue plus red equals purple. The additive palette, however, is based on the light spectrum and it's what you're looking at, literally. I mean your computer/phone screen while you read this. When you add light, it works a little bit differently. To get yellow, you mix red and green. Green and blue gives cyan. Blue and red gives magenta. Since we're adding light, the end result is brighter.

So we have the painter's palette (red, yellow, blue), and the RGB/CMYK palette, with primary colors (red, green, blue) and secondary colors (cyan, magenta, yellow). If you put together the primary colors of both additive and subtractive palettes, you get a set of four: red, yellow, green, blue - the full Teletubbies ensemble.

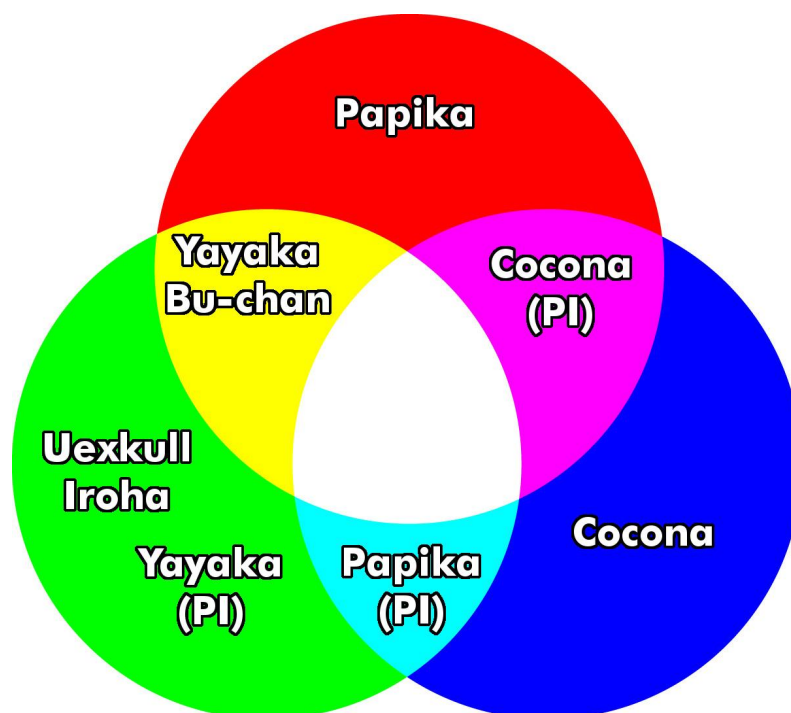


Flip Flappers does three simple yet important things:

1. All the main characters fit into primary colors trio. Papika, Yayaka and Cocona have red, yellow and blue hair respectively. In the joined set of 4 primary colors, Uexküll and Iroha show up from time to time with green, and Bu-chan covers for yellow while Yayaka is absent. That's the "real world" palette. The hair colors are pretty much tailored to the characters: Papika is energetic and chaotic, Cocona is calm and withdrawn, and Yayaka is the shining prodigy.



- The transformations shift the color theme towards neon hues (CMYK spectrum), flipping the colors of the two main characters. Cocona and Papika don't just swap their hair/eye colour - yeah, we instinctively consider cyan and magenta variations of blue and red respectively, but those colors are actually a halfway point on the RGB spectrum (cyan between blue and green, magenta between red and blue). Yayaka, who doesn't transform, completes the Cyan-Magenta-Yellow trio in Pure Illusion.



- The palette of all primary and secondary colors is complete once Yayaka transforms. Green is the last piece of the puzzle, with Uexküll holding a temp position on it for a time.



Note how both yellow and green are a "third wheel" to the main duo repeating in both primary color sets: red and blue. As much as you can hate the redhaired tsundere/white-haired kuudere cliché you can find in other anime, colors are a simple yet powerful tool to give you some extra flavour. But color-coding the characters is just the tip of the iceberg.

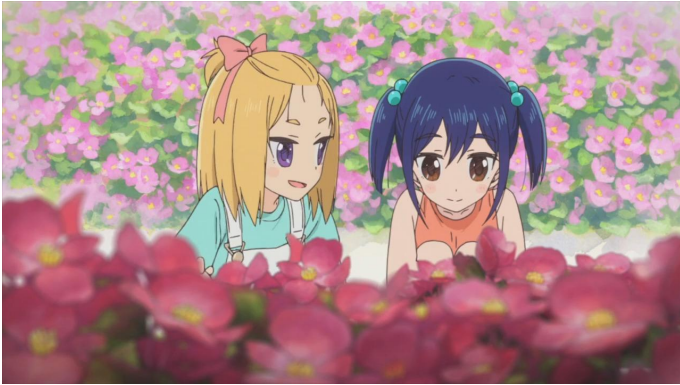


I'd write something about the backgrounds and scenery here but most of the locations were based on genres, clichés or something generally known to the viewer - these colors aren't something FLFL came up with on its own. What's absolutely deserving praise and recognition, though, is the usage of the beaten to death blue-and-orange color scheme in episode 6, with a pinch of red during the parents' argument. It's pure KINO and the highest emotional point of the entire anime. Part of the quality of the scene comes from the brilliant camera work and animation, but the colors allow the audience to get on track with the mood of the scene despite being as lost in the episode's plot as the main characters were.

Naturally

>

The flower symbols will go over your head unless you know what to look for, but flower language is actually a thing in Japan, and there are numerous recently released anime series that use it in the background, like Kiznaiver, or as the main artistic theme, like Yuuki Yuuna wa Yuusha de aru.



[This section is under construction. I will read up on flower language and come back.]

[Alright, I can't do this alone. Please contact me if you know anything about flower language.]



[This is also a good place to pin the animal characteristics of Papika and Yayaka, with an extra pinch of explaining why are animal symbols underused in anime, with the wolf vs bear comparison, and branching out to mentioning Yuri Kuma Arashi]

wikiHow to do anything...

EDIT

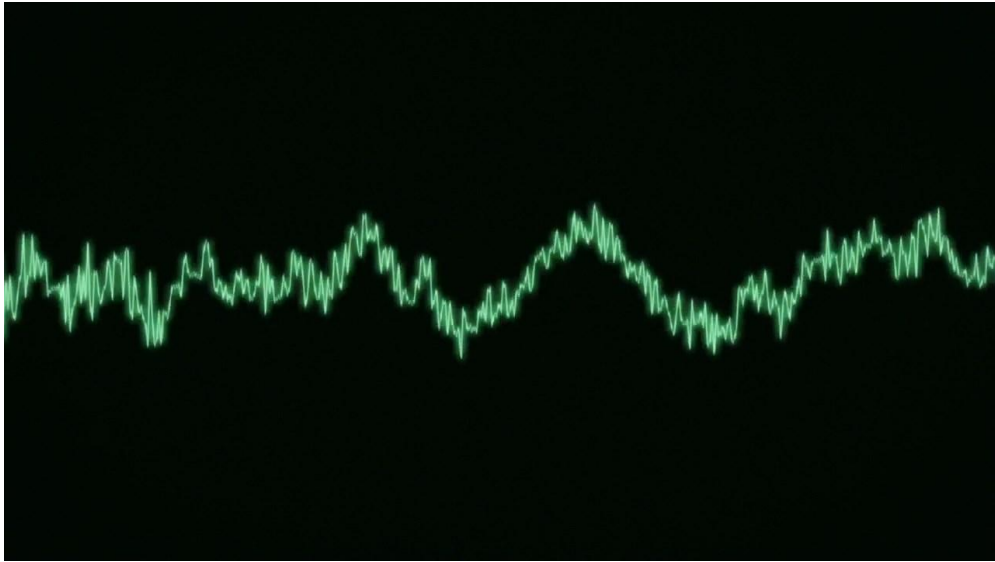
Part 1

Introducing a Dog and Cat for the First Time



1 **Prepare for the introduction.** Whether you are bringing a new cat or dog into a home that already has a cat or dog or you are trying to make your existing pets get along better, you need to create a good foundation to build on. To begin with, make sure that your home has ample space for the two pets to have some space away from each other. You will need to keep the pets separated for several days, so multiple rooms in your home are necessary.

[Also this is a perfect place for the butterfly/cicada motif]
[And Uexküll]



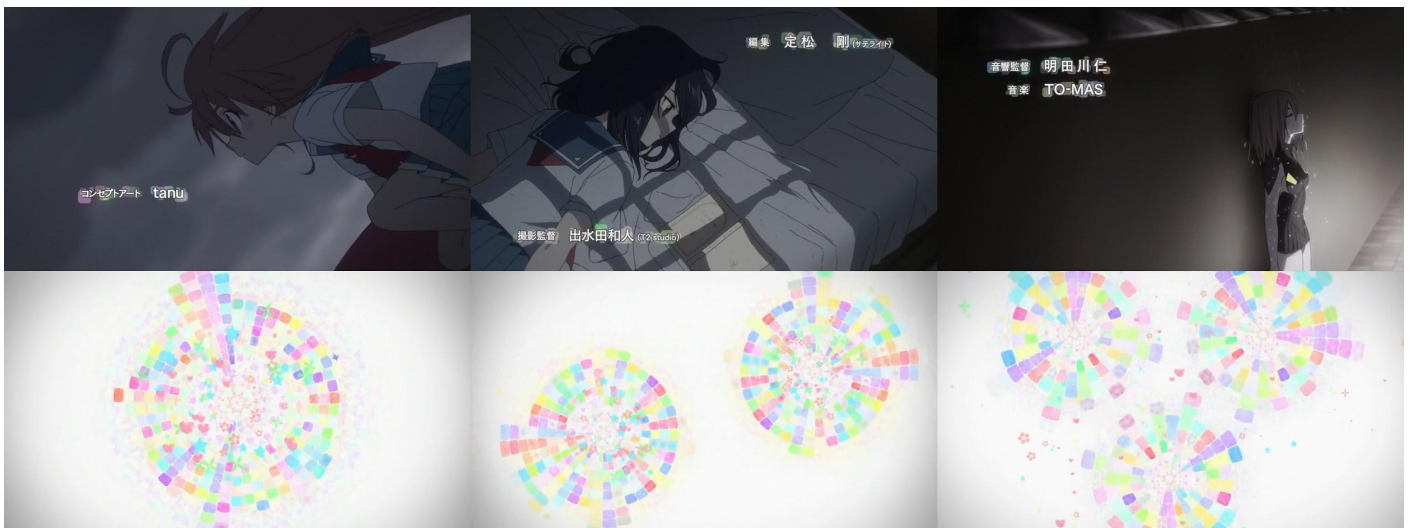
The Sound of Silence

I... I wrote a song for Cocona

- just /a/ meme

As we've said in the very beginning, the barren, quiet world of Cocona's Pure Illusion reflects her shut-in, silent personality. Later on in episode 3 Welwitschia will call it out: Cocona starts out devoid of character, but we of course know that she develops over the series. The silence returns in episode 9, when Cocona's contact with Papika and especially Yayaka is cut off for a while.

Now this is only a leitmotif, but the show goes into some depth about sound and music in general. The production values for audio aren't anything spectacular, other than having few catchy songs, but Flip Flappers actually has a pretty consistent naming theme based on audio processing. This starts as soon as the very first image of the OP sequence, which is an audio visualizer. It's not even the only visualizer in the OP - there's a recurring colorful theme with circles: one after we see Papika on screen, two after Cocona gets introduced, and three after Yayaka and the twins come into the picture. This can be interpreted in two ways: either Cocona and Mimi count as two, or three circles refer to Yayaka as the third member of the team, displayed with a little delay to avoid too obvious hinting.



All the episode titles

This is from someone who attended FliFla Talk Show:

>The titles of every episode are using audio terms because the director is an audio otaku. Papika & Cocona must go to PI in a group of 2 refers to "バランス接続"(balanced line).

>Btw the idea of PI comes from "Pure Audio"(see my other comment on "Pure Audio")

<https://twitter.com/315ByFFK/status/819945038415155200>

Balanced Line (wiki) :

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balanced_line

Therefore, the term "impedance" also refers to balance line.

Comments in this section sourced by tastySugar

are related to audio processing and can be loosely interpreted as related to the episode's contents. We start with "Input", the initial stage of the actors in play, moving on to "Converter", which refers to translating the perspective into someone else's. "XLR" from episode 3 is a high-end connector standard for symmetrical signals, pretty relevant for Cocona's and Papika's synchronous transformation, but fun fact here is that most XLR connectors use three cables - and indeed we have Yayaka and the twins here for the number three (also, irises in henshin form pose a resemblance to the XLR connectors). The episode where girls go on a sleepover in order to get along which each other is properly named "Pure Equalization", and episode 5's "Echo" fits the theme of looping routine. Later on we have "Pure Play", where Cocona and Papika take turns playing the character of Iroha (or perhaps, replaying her past), "Component" (type of HiFi signal), where Cocona meets literally different components of Papika's personality, episode 8's "Breaker" which is loosely related to circuits, widely used in CB radio communication (though there's next to no chance Oshiyama knew that) and might be a reference to your good old Giga Drill Breaker from TTGL, and episode 9's "Pure Mute" probably refers to the moment where Cocona was separated from Yayaka and Papika and could see them, but couldn't hear their conversation. Then you have "Jitter", a term describing issues with signal timing, when episode 10 changes the show's formula and drops the plot on us, "Storage", which refers to both Mimi emerging from within Cocona and bringing flashbacks to the table, and episode 12's "Howling", that nasty ear-piercing feedback loop a poorly placed microphone can cause, and revisiting the previous Pure Illusions all over again is some sort of feedback loop, with Yayaka, already capable of taking down Welwitschia on her own, amping up into henshin mode.

Finally episode 13 is named "Pure Audio" which wraps up the entire series. In Japanese, "Pure Audio" means a state of the ultimate audio quality in the HiFi field. It's the ideal of perfection that any sound engineer or audiophile will strive for.

And following information is from someone who attended FliFla Talk Show event:

>The idea of Pure Illusion came from Pure Audio, when the director was thinking would someone be able to see a different world if he can feel the sound which is infinitely close to the original sound. And also the director wanted to use the word "Illusion", so he combined these two ideas, and name the world "Pure Illusion".

Source:<https://twitter.com/amehurasu12/status/819951670314430464>

Therefore, this word here isn't just to look cool. It is origin of the idea of "Pure Illusion".

. From "Input", through processing, to the output that is the whole series. The audio vocabulary is mostly there to look cool, like the religious symbolism in Evangelion, but it's pretty consistent, down to using terms like "impedance" to describe the unity of purpose between two characters.

And if that wasn't enough, Mimi and Papika are subjects no. 33 and 45 respectively, and these numbers are the most common RPM frequencies used in Direct Drive (another phrase anime scene loves to use) turntables.

Salt's "monoliths" are actually ribbon tweeters. A ribbon tweeter uses a very thin diaphragm that supports a planar coil frequently made by deposition of aluminium vapor, suspended in a powerful magnetic field to reproduce high frequencies.



Mirrors, Illusions and Duality

But there's one Iro. There's always been only one.

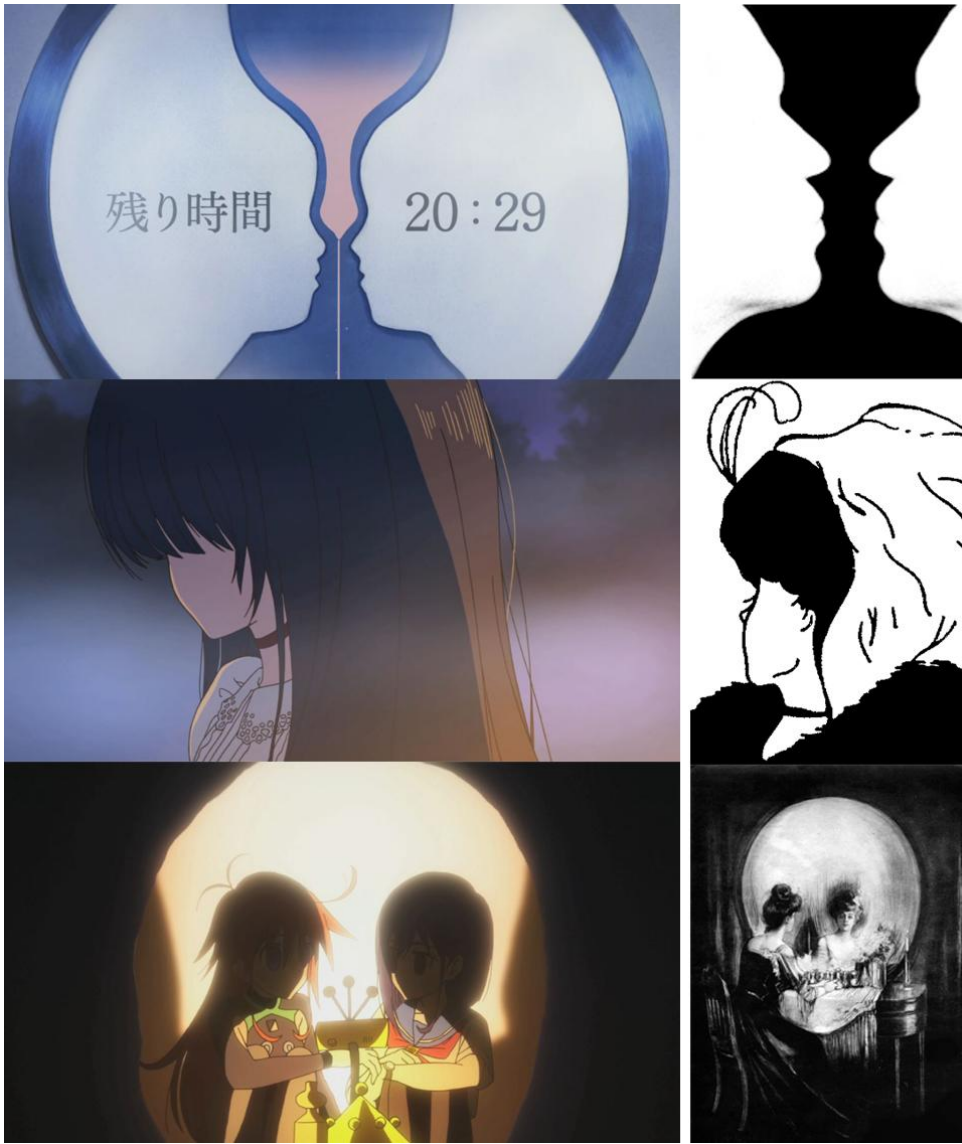
- Papika-Irodori

One great thing about symbolism is that even if you don't pick up all the clues, it implants some ideas and themes in your brain before the reveal comes. By the time episodes 6 and 12 come, this might seem obvious, but the theme of duality is present from the very beginning of the show.

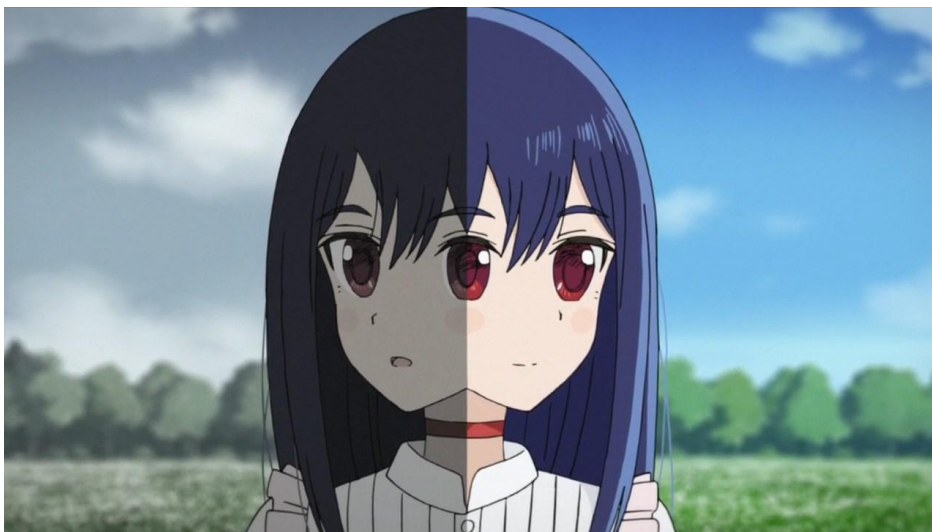
Look at any given frame of the show from that has both Cocona and Papika on it. Pause it. There's a high chance that whichever frame you chose, especially in the earlier episodes, Cocona is on the left side and Papika is to the right. Why is that?



Right and left are symbols as well. Most humans are right-handed. Many people use left-to-right writing systems or drive on the right side of the road. In the West, right is the "right" and obvious way, left is the other way associated with negative concepts in many languages. This doesn't work exactly the same in Japan, but you get the idea. One interpretation of right and left that seems to fit FLFL perfectly, though, are the two halves of the brain. This exaggerated yet based on truth theory describes the left half of the brain as calculated, logical and systematic, while the right half of the brain as impulsive, free-spirited and imaginative.



There's only one scene that noticeably breaks this pattern: the one in episode 1 where the girls sit in an igloo. It would be a nice counter argument, but then this happens. Yeah, it's flipped, but from the skull's point of view, the brain halves are in their right places.

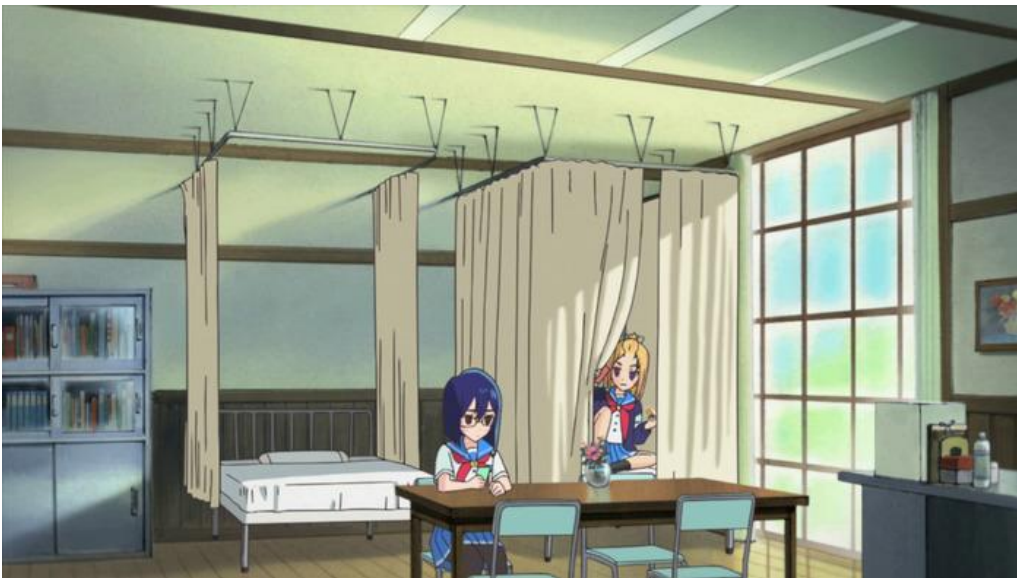


The concept of duality goes much further than that. By the end of the show, we literally have two sides of Cocona's parents clashing against each other, but it's just the tip of the iceberg. Cocona and Papika in their yin-yang nature complement each other, and even though they seem pretty constant and

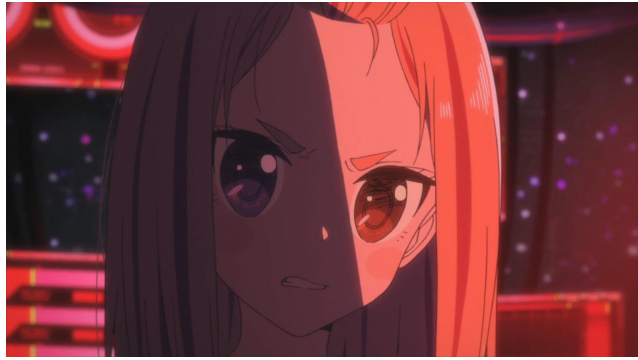
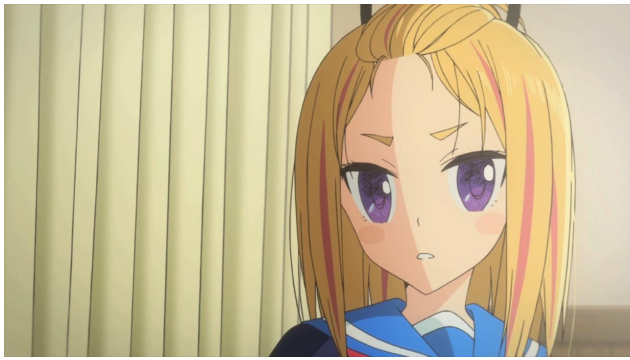
unconflicted on their own (especially Papika doesn't seem to have any), they are both two-faced when you take time into consideration. Papika's simpleton nature hides a troubling past and Cocona's own subtle duality emerges with the entrance of Mimi, leading up to the final push that differentiates Cocona before and after the journey.



To help you realize that, there are two characters that are internally conflicted and divided. First, most apparent example, is Irodori. In episode 6 Cocona and Papika play Psychonauts and enter her mind: Papika plays the cheerful but withdrawn part, while Cocona ends up as the active but troubled one. The episode uses masterful cinematography to move them through blue-and-orange color scheme that reflects her half of Iro's emotional situation. The catharsis comes when the two parts join hands together, literally, allowing Irodori to move past her guilt and change herself.



The second example of an internally conflicted character is obviously Yayaka, and even though it comes into the spotlight in episode 9, it's been foreshadowed way before that with the clever usage of light covering half of her face. The reveal of her involvement in the main plot is another thing, hinted at with scenes such as the one in the nurse's room or her reaction at the girls venturing into Pure Illusion - which was shock, but not surprise.



The theme of duality and relationship between characters is reflected by numerous visual tools, and the symmetry and screen division are just one of them. Another recurring theme is the usage of mirrors - both literally flipping the image reflected in glasses and ponds, and having a thing mirror another thing. Bell tower in episode 5 mirrors the real-world bell tower, Iro's Pure Illusion mirrors her painting, and Pops' command room mirrors Hidaka's laboratory. Last prominent symbol of duality is the illusion, an image with two ways to look at it - the young-old woman, hinting at Mimi and her influence on Cocona, and the hourglass illusion, which is the very first image of the show, strongly hinting at the multi-layered nature of the show you're about to watch. Both are referenced in the OP as well.

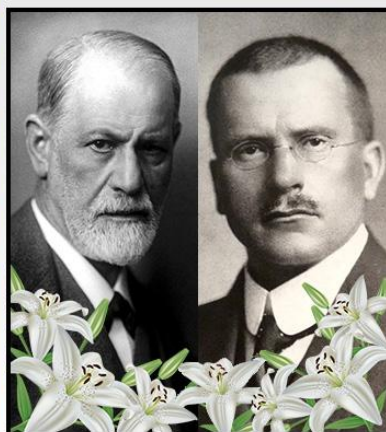
Below the Surface



WHAT I WATCHED



WHAT I EXPECTED



WHAT I GOT

Umwelt of Ego

You're so devoid of character you couldn't stay in control

- Welwitschia

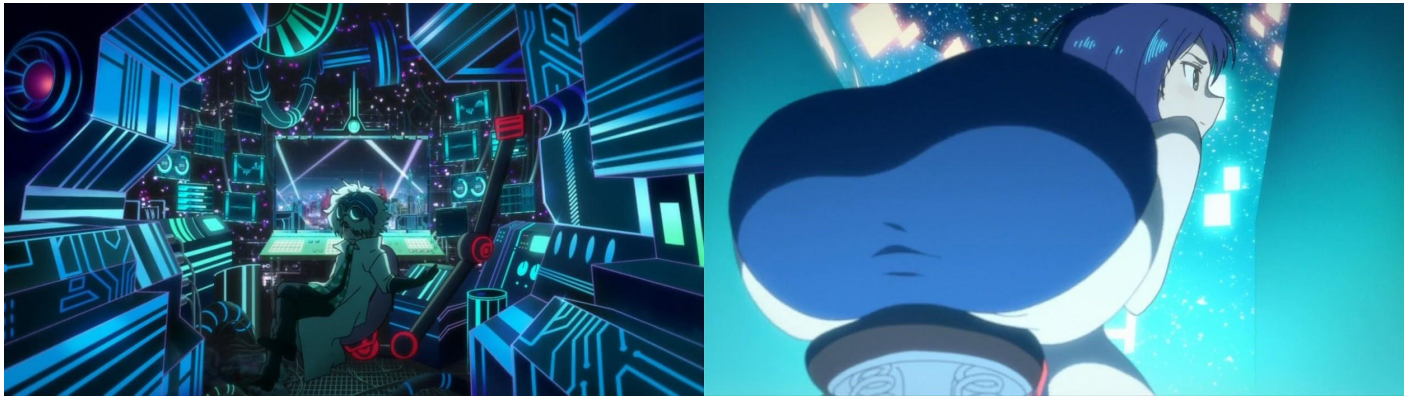
While we've established that duality and "two" are a pretty apparent theme, in the color theory section we've been talking about "three" a lot. And there's some humongous psychological background to that number. Even before the director straight out admitted he wrote the story inspired by the works of Carl Jung, people have immediately picked up on how the main cast reflects the Sigmund Freud's (yeah, that guy) model of the human psyche.



In Freud's model, Ego is the self-conscious part of the psyche that mediates between the other two - the instinctual, unorganized Id, and the critical, organized Superego. The conclusion we can come to is that with Cocona as the main character, she's obviously the Ego, with Papika-Id drawing out Cocona's desire for adventure, and Yayaka-Superego wishing to keep her safe in the routine school life. That parallel

alone opened up people's attention and encouraged them to look at the bigger picture with Psychology 101 in mind.

However, in hindsight it might appear that it's Yayaka who's the Ego, and Cocona who's Superego. Yes, initially Papika and Yayaka are the external forces affecting Cocona, but ultimately Cocona is the organized one, and Yayaka is the most conflicted of the bunch.



Another interesting concept that has been name dropped from the get go is the Umwelt. Cocona's rabbit is named after Jakob von Uexküll (yes, you heard that right, Uexküll), a biologist and author of biosemiotics, the science of studying signs and codes in the biological realm

I would additionally mention Gestalt Psychology which attempts to explain the organization of cognition. A lot of Gestalt Psychology was based upon the parsing of visual stimuli. The motto: "The whole is other than the sum of its parts" was seen in episode 7 in how Cocona realizes that Papika is other than just her eccentricism, or her loyalty. Papika as a whole is what makes Papika, Papika. Will expand more.

If you refer to your "duality" section with the pictures of the young/old woman and skull, Gestalt Psychology attempts to explain why this happens and the mechanics of perception. Biosemiotics is important to Gestalt psychology as both form and construction of form is first perceived as stimuli. Principals of totality as well as isomorphism takes half root in biology half in psychology. - Jacob Chess

(which ties wonderfully into our attempt at treating FLFL as a message to decode). Umwelt is the self-centered world of a living being, perceived and interpreted using sensory information available - and it is the main concept behind Pure Illusion as a whole. The wildly different styles of various worlds of Pure Illusion stem from different characters of the show, and it is their perception that matters. The biological origin of the term Umwelt is most apparent in episode 2, in which the Pure Illusion is Uexküll's world - a realm where everyone's a rabbit, the colors are perceived differently, and a vacuum cleaner is the most scary thing imaginable. This also explains and justifies the sleazy fanservice in episode 8 - it's a world seen from the perspective of the head pervert of the series. Umwelt is actually referenced in character names twice, as the director learned about Uexküll's works from the books by a behavioral scientist Toshitaka Hidaka.

Gestalt and Collective Unconscious

[Alright, we're breaking this paragraph into 2-3 and describing Collective Unconscious. I'm already having weird dreams about the subject so yeah it needs to be covered]



Finally, without such obvious clues to lead in, we have Jung's model of the psyche. It's similar to Freud's, but a little bit different, using the names of Shadow, Self and Persona to describe concepts parallel to Id, Ego and Superego. While before we've talked about opposite ends influencing the core personality, with Cocona as a parallel for Ego, it's also important to recognize that each character can be analyzed on their own. Papika is a misdirection here - she's a character fully in harmony with her Id, with very little Ego if any - that might stop us from realizing that both Cocona and Yayaka are internally conflicted, projecting their own Persona against their true desires. Cocona pretends to be indifferent and stoic, but deep down she's eager to go on an adventure, angry at Papika, and missing her parents - and Yayaka, while appearing cool and calm, develops a strong one-sided affection. The show is packed with such references. The book Papika reads in episode 5 has a golden scarab on its cover, which is a Jungian symbol of synchronicity - meaningful coincidences that allow the person to lower down their rational approach to the world and open up to their emotional and metaphysical side.

Pure Illusion as in the collective unconscious

Oshiyama was developing the Pure Illusion concept based on Umwelt as early as when he worked on Space Dandy. [3] The collective unconscious was introduced after he found the Umwelt concept didn't give him enough freedom to create Pure Illusion worlds:

Originally most of my knowledge just came from reading this book by behavioral scientist Toshitaka Hidaka that did a good job of talking in easy-to-understand terms about stuff like the Umwelt [...] Later, the works of the famous psychologist Hayao Kawai about the field of psychology, myths, folktales, and such were very helpful as well. [...] There's actually a lot of that sort of stuff included in episode 18 of Space Dandy too, but nobody noticed (laughs).[3]

What is Pure Illusion?

Oshiyama: I am trying not to distinguish it as "this kind of thing" among me. At the beginning, there was a stage called "Pure Illusion = Let's be in the Umwelt", but then the possibility of the world called Pure Illusion will be limited, and I felt like I could not rule in the Umwelt. So, I definitely decided that it was not only Umwelt. However, I think that Umwelt and collective unconscious are closely related. In myself, there is a consciousness that "it is like a multilayered layer included in reality", but since that is the same as the Umwelt, it is thought that you should treat it as a world with unlimited possibilities I will. [4]

WIP: Introduce how "DPI = the collective unconscious"

This bottom layer of the shadow is also what Jung referred to as the collective unconscious. [some wikipedia stuff]

Curiously, the last time when the collective unconscious was seriously used as a world setting in a sci-fi anime was Serial Experiments Lain where the collective unconscious was represented as the Schumann resonances and the protagonist connected the world to it by modulating the Wired.



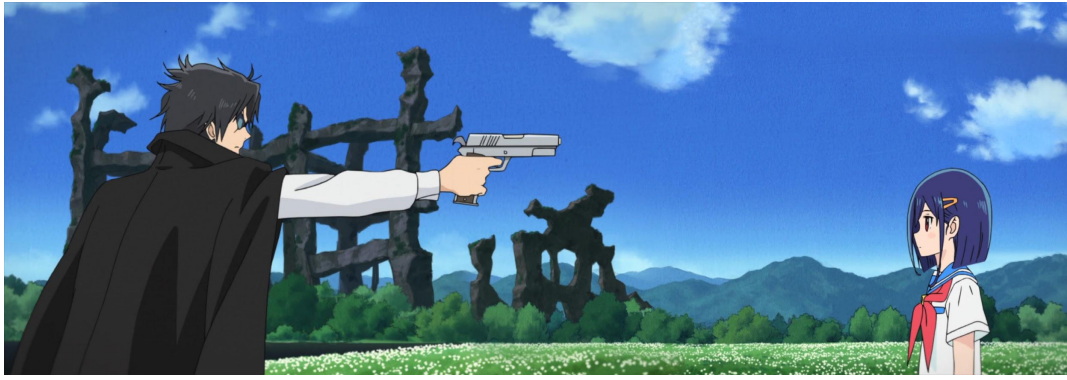
Back to the Womb

The act of birth is the first experience of anxiety, and thus the source and prototype of the affect of anxiety.
- Sigmund Freud

Fear of failure is a major theme that goes along with Cocona's inability to choosing the path for her school future. The dilemma between science and humanities is merely the most universal of them all, but the journey of self-discovery forces her to deal with many more choices and questions about her own nature. The emotional cauldron of self-realization can become too overbearing and running away from the problem is always a temptation.



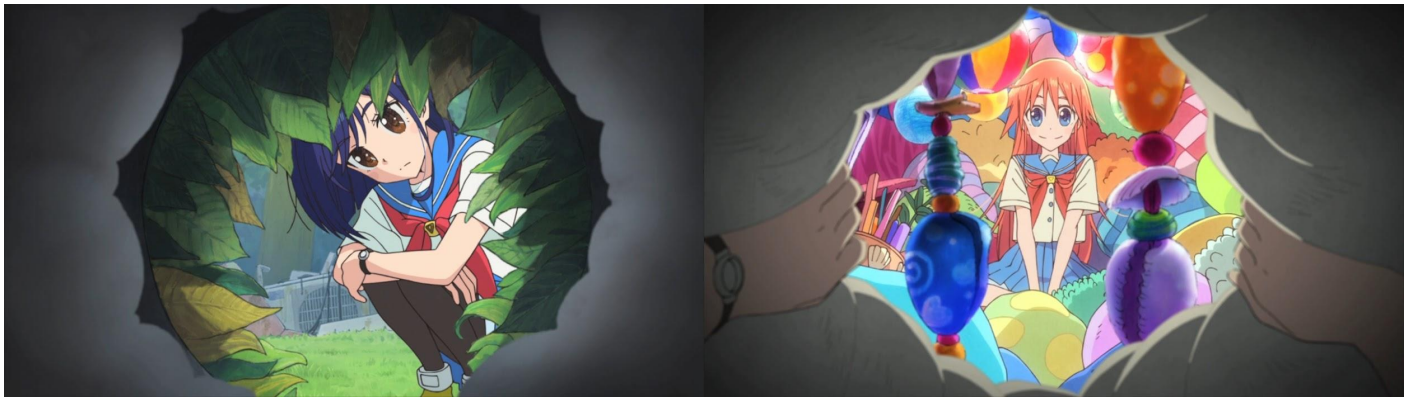
Since we've already made it clear that psychoanalysis is supposed to be a major factor here, let's talk now about a key factor in forming one's identity: parents. The immediate family is the main source of emotional support for a child and their absence, a common theme in so many stories, forces the main character to solve their problems on their own, or by starting a new relationship with an unfamiliar person.



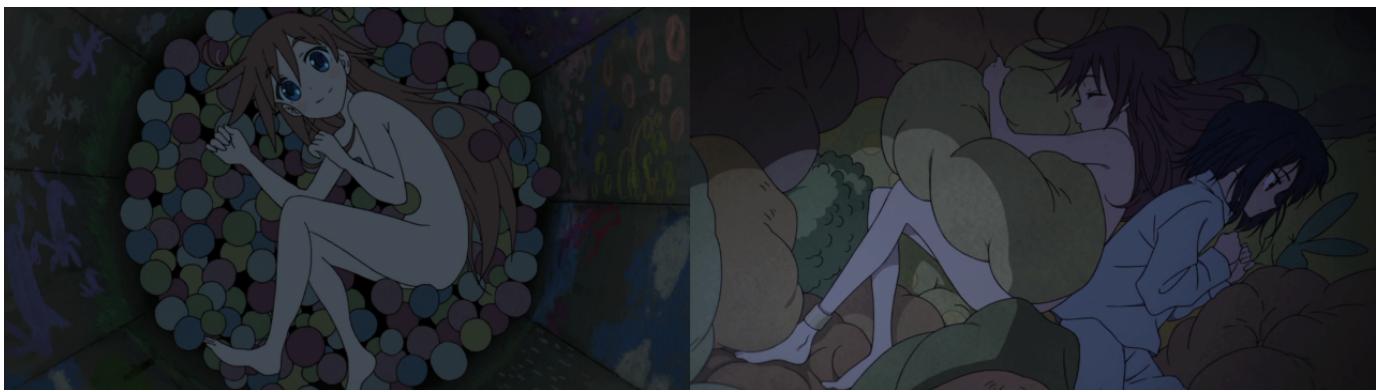
We don't know why Cocona's parents are missing. We don't know if "Granny" is her real grandmother or just her guardian. From the brief exchanges we witness, the old lady seems a little bit too permissive and indifferent to be a real parent figure to Cocona, who herself is pretty withdrawn and passive in that relationship. This setting could actually be seen as a tale of a child of divorcing parents, and even though there isn't any evidence that would prove this theory beyond any doubt, it's still one of the possible interpretations.



But even before we dig deeper into the subject of Cocona's parents, we are presented with few powerful symbols that aren't even all that in the background - they're fairly ostentatious, we just can't quite figure out what's their purpose. I'm talking here about the omnipresent yonic imagery, introduced in episodes 2 and 3 in the form of vagina dentata, one of the most bizarre myths connected to the castration anxiety, which in FLFL's case seems to be a stretch, but could fit as the foreshadowing of Mimi's absorption of Cocona. Castration anxiety is misattributed to Freud, which might explain its origin. Even right now you can read most of these symbols as discovery of one's own femininity, with a pinch of fear and embarrassment. It became pretty clear, though, that some instances are a little bit different.



Take the pipe funhouse in episode 4. Papika changes it a lot ever since their first encounter, but reading it as vaginal imagery seems pretty far-fetched at this stage. This changes when you put together all the other clues, though: in a flashback in episode 10, you can see Papika sleeping in a fetal position in a narrow, tube-shaped ballpit. Then you may realize that Papika's hideout from episode 4 was essentially an upsized ballpit (look closely at these beautiful colorful cushions), which completely explains why she was sleeping naked - that wasn't really fanservice, but a conscious reference to the fetal position.



You could say we're reading too much into this but the prenatal symbolism been done before in Evangelion (LCL, umbilical cord), with similar relevance to the main plot, so it isn't a shot in the dark at all. Considering how plainly obvious are the other Eva inspirations, from the main plot to specific scenes like the empty sunset train in episode 7 or the Seele circle in episode 11, it's actually a pretty safe bet.



But speaking of the umbilical cord - it goes further than that. In episodes 2 and 8, Papika can be seen trying to bite through clearly inedible things - Bu-chan's noodle limbs and the thick wiring of the Tron world. The shocking realization comes after taking the plot into account: Mimi and Papika were on the run for a year. That means it's quite probable that Papika was the one who delivered Cocona. Papika is often pictured with dog-like characteristics like heightened sense of smell (and just like a dog she **hates** the smell of nail polish). This contrasts her with the cat-like Yayaka, by the way. Anyway, what you need

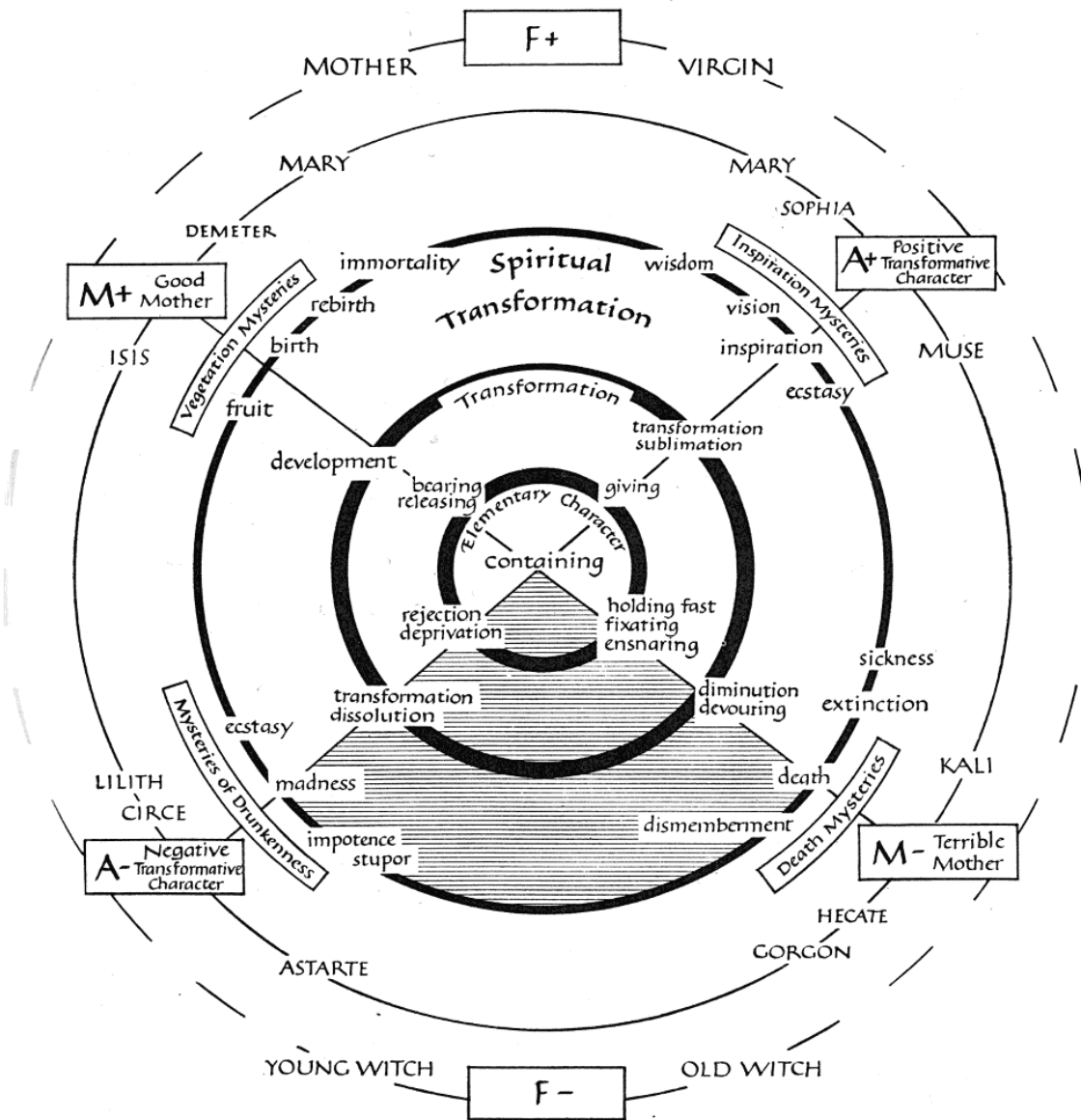
here is some basic knowledge about mammals and birth. What solidifies this theory is the scene from episode 13 where child-Papika munches on a watermelon, leaving messy red pulp on her face. Little known fact is that the insides of a watermelon are actually called "placenta"... and now you cannot unsee it.



This is all of course foreshadowing the escape strategy of going back into mother's care when Cocona hits her lowest point at the end of episode 10. Feeling betrayed by everyone around her, she gives up her agency in favour of Mimi until the final realization of her true feelings. But just like the "back into the womb" theme is foreshadowed, so is its counterpart. Breaking the shell is a motif you can find in episodes 3 (breaking the mask), 5 (breaking the routine) and 9 (breaking out from being just an observer) and overall underlined with the butterfly/moth symbolism (breaking the cocoon, spreading wings, taking flight - "into the sky" are the first words of the opening sequence). Finally, Cocona decides to break out Papika from her womb-like prison, and that's the point from which Cocona is an independent, fully realized character, now aware and open about her feelings for Papika.

This is also the point where I renounce any belief that the resemblance between the name "Cocona" and the word "cocoon" can be a coincidence. Papika may sound familiar to Satoshi Kon's Paprika, but the butterfly symbolism (transformations, Salt's room, his dad's PI) is too ubiquitous to ignore another possible origin: French "papillon" (butterfly).

SCHEMA III



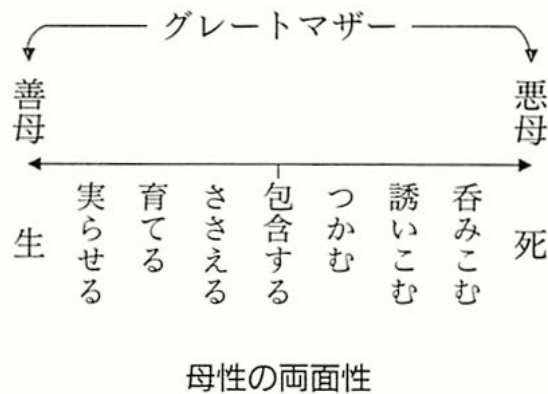
The Great Mother

Maternity at its root is the duality of life and death. Its positive power gives birth to lives, while its negative power devours lives and brings death upon them. Human mothers also have this tendency internally.

- Hayao Kawai, 昔話の深層

Even though we've just nailed the imagery that makes the whole topic noticeable to discussion thread regulars, it takes a good amount of reading to get to the bottom of this. All it takes for us to understand it is to continue the quote from Hayao Kawai:

The positive aspect is easily observable, but the negative aspect holds the children in tight grip, undermines the individuality of the children, and eventually pushes the children into the abyss of mental death. The two aspects share the functional commonality in it being "all embracing", which manifests in issues related to both life and death.



The Good Mother <-- The Great Mother --> The Terrible Mother
 Life / Give Birth / Nurture / Support / Tolerate / Control / Lure / Engulf / Death
 The two sides of maternity [Kawai94]

In episode 12 and 13 we observe vivid demonstration of the “abyss of mental death” as hypnotized Cocona sits in the boat, the “tight grip” as Croco-Mimi reaches out with her tentacles to hold Cocona, and eventually Mimi’s world-devouring transformation form decorated with the poisonous [red spider lilies](#). Indeed, life and death, renewal and destruction as mutually indispensable and closely related opposites are all part of the maternal archetype. The mother archetype is a creative and destructive power acting from the depths of psyche, the collective unconscious. [Birkhauser88, p26-27] Similarly, the Terrible Mother aspect is characterized by Jung as “anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate.” [Jung81, par158]



The intrinsic connection and duality between the two opposite aspects of the same archetype is represented by two symbolic entities of the same Mimi on screen. However, the two entities cannot be viewed as two distinct good and evil mother figures in isolation. As an example, in fairy tales dark mother characters often imprison their victims. [Birkhauser88, p65] When in reality the mother’s imprisonment from overprotective love is also paradoxically indistinguishable from the mother’s nurturing care of the same love. The same duality is present in the imprisonment action itself where the loss of liberty by imprisonment often turns out to be simply a period of incubation as a condition of achieving a higher level of individuation in the course of the story. In hindsight the imprisonment actually becomes an essential and unavoidable stage in the process of development. [Birkhauser88, p83] From a literary criticism perspective, the two Mimi entities stem from the simultaneous interpretations of both aspects of the Great Mother archetype on the same character.

[Consider reuse of vagina dentata images above]

Motifs of the Terrible Mother are laced everywhere in earlier episodes. As we know, the defensive traps in Pls created by Mimi's shards are all more or less manifestation of Mimi's split personalities. The vagina dentata motif appearing in Pls is likely another demonstration of the Terrible Mother aspect of Mimi manifested through Mimi's shards. Jungian psychologist Erich Neumann examined this motif in his book on the Great Mother archetype. [Neumann72, p168]



FIG. 38. ILAMATECUHTLI



FIG. 39. SCYLLA

Left: Aztec goddess of death; Right: Scylla of devouring whirlpool

The positive femininity of the womb appears as a mouth; that is why "lips" are attributed to the female genitals, and on the basis of this positive symbolic equation the mouth, as "upper womb," is the birthplace of the breath and the word, the Logos. Similarly, the destructive side of the Feminine, the destructive and deathly womb, appears most frequently in the archetypal form of a mouth bristling with teeth. We find this symbolism in an African statuette, where the tooth-studded womb is replaced by a gnashing mask, and in an Aztec likeness of the death goddess, [Fig. 38] furnished with a variety of knives and sharp teeth. [42] This motif of the vagina dentata is most distinct in the mythology of the North American Indians. In the mythology of other Indian tribes a meat-eating fish inhabits the vagina of the Terrible Mother; the hero is the man who overcomes the Terrible Mother, [44] breaks the teeth out of her vagina, and so makes her into a woman.

[42]: This archetypal symbol also occurs in the modern world, when the Terrible Mother appears as a castrator, as a womb armed with teeth, in dreams and fantasies. Here too the teeth symbolize the masculine quality of the knife and of the destructive male, which are a part of the negative female.

[44]: *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, "The Slaying of the Mother," pp. 159 f.

Meanwhile, if Papika's lair has to be considered as a yonic motif, it would represent the positive femininity of the lip-shaped womb. (The leaves at the entrance of the pipe can somehow be related to pubic hair given their soft and smooth nature unlike sharp cutting teeth.)



Skulls, symbol of death

Left: The earth goddess Coatlicue (Stone, Aztec) [Neumann72, Pl.68]

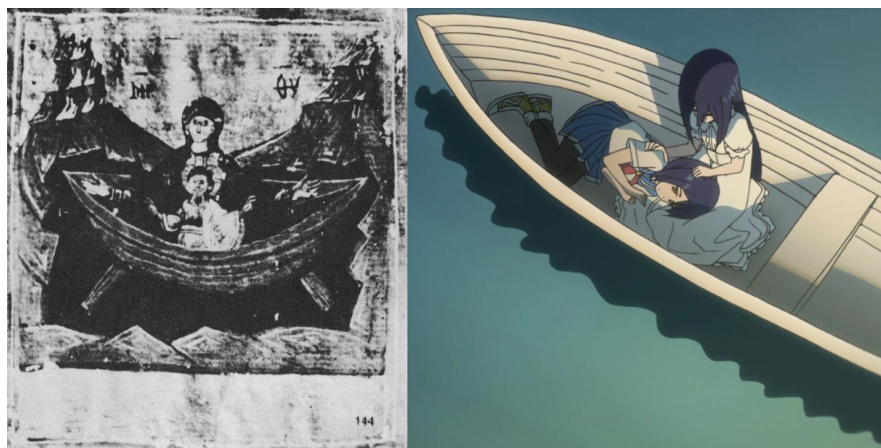
Right: Skull-headed Hydra (snake symbolism)?



Am-mit, the Terrible Mother parallel to Ta-urt. Crocodile head, devourer of souls.

Left: Am-mit at the judgement of the dead (From a papyrus, Egypt) [Neumann72, Fig.35]

Right: Monster guarding the underworld gates (From the Papyrus of Nu, Egypt) [Neumann72, Fig.36]



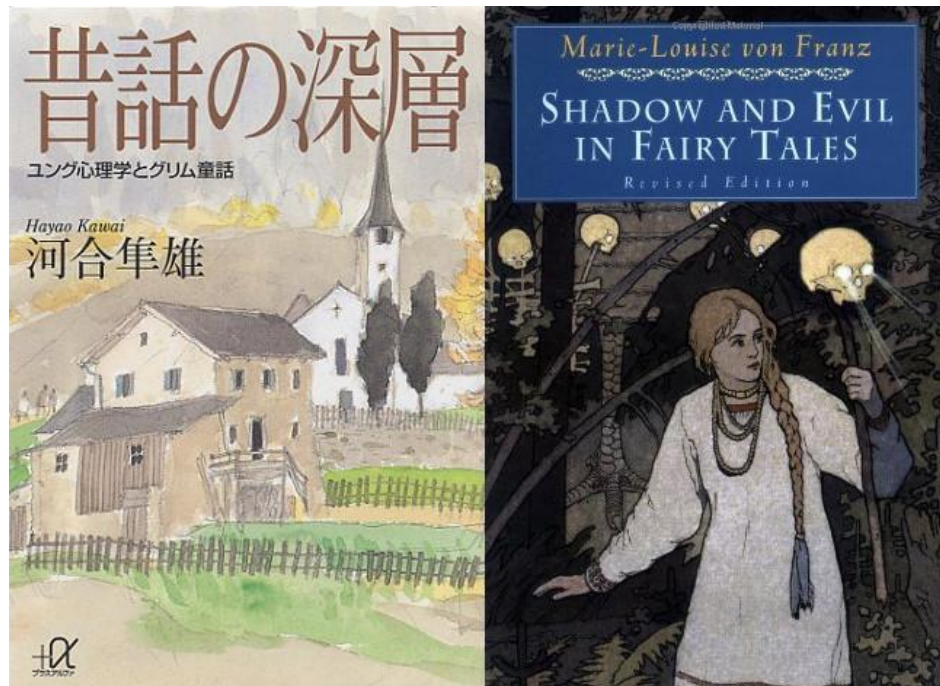
Left: [Madonna](#) as ship (Miniature from a Yugoslav psalter) [Neumann72, Pl.118]

The cradle and crib symbolism of the ship belongs to the vessel symbolism of the Feminine. The cradle is a copy of the uterus ship, in which the sleeping embryo rides into life, rocking on the primeval ocean, like the gods crossing the celestial ocean of the Great Mother in their cosmic bark. But the ship is also a ship of the dead, "which leads back to the swaying, gliding, somnolent rhythm of earliest childhood, of the primordial ocean and the night. Over thousands of years we see this burial custom preserved, and for still another thousand years the cradle has endured." [Neumann72, p256]

Death and Rebirth

No, the Evangelion subtitle is not accidental. Over the course of the story we stand witness to [sort of a rehash on everything in this section]

Innocent Fairy Tale Adventure



Lens of Jungian interpretation

[I need a good quote from MARie-Louise von Franz here. I can't find get her books in my country]

By the time you've gotten to this point, you may already expect that the wonderful cheerful fairy tales invoked in Flip Flappers are anything but. That is indeed the case here.

As is mentioned in the interview, Oshiyama drew much inspiration from Hayao Kawai's works on psychology and folk tales. Hayao Kawai (河合隼雄, 1928–2007) was a Japanese Jungian psychologist who has been described as "the founder of Japanese analytical and clinical psychology." From 1962 to 1965 he attended the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich, which was co-founded by Marie-Louise von Franz (1915–1998), a Jungian psychologist renowned for psychological interpretations of fairy tales and also a collaborator with Jung himself. Kawai has published multiple books on fairy tales interpretations in Japanese and it's fair to assume his works were directly influenced by von Franz's lectures on the same topic at the institute. The one book written by Kawai, 昔話の深層 (1977), contains the interpretation of Hansel and Gretel, which as we know was illustrated in the ED. This is probably one of the books read by Oshiyama.

The books by Kawai and von Franz are not a literary study of ethnic folk tales with psychoanalytic methods, rather, the Jungian psychologists tried to gain better understanding of the collective psyche through the study of archetypal images available in fairy tales. According to von Franz, fairy tales are the purest and simplest expression of the psychic processes going on in the collective unconscious and they represent the archetypes and patterns of human psyche in their barest and most concise form that transcends specific cultural backgrounds. Therefore the value of fairy tales for the scientific investigation of the unconscious exceeds that of all other material, including myths or legends which are limited by their cultural material, or analysis of individual dreams. [Franz96, p1]

By walking the same path that Oshiyama walked, we hope to get a glimpse of the ideas and intentions involved during Oshiyama's conception of the story and provide basic psychological context for the

motifs in the show. Note that this is however not intended to be an extensive literary interpretation of the story with psychoanalytic methods.



Cocona's matricide and *Hansel and Gretel*

In the first draft I wanted to base the last episode directly on Hansel and Gretel. It turned out to not be possible, so I turned it into the ending. Please consider the ED a part of the main story.

- Oshiyama Kiyotaka

The ED is a literal rendition of the fairy tale *Hansel and Gretel* which is a reference as explicit as you can get. In Kawai's book, after establishing the Great Mother archetype, he then interpreted *Hansel and Gretel* to demonstrate the process of children's psychological independence from the mother through symbolic matricide. He argued that in the story of *Hansel and Gretel* the witch building the Gingerbread House and preparing dainties to lure the children represents the archetypal motherly love that spoils the children, which in turn harms the individuality of the children.

He used this interpretation to argue for the conflicts in the relationship between the children and their mother and how the children struggle with and gain independence from the negative aspect of the mother archetype:

The tragedy of King Oedipus is a presentation of the complicated everlasting conflicts between the children and their parents. Freud often cited this as an example and coined the term Oedipus Complex. However, Jung considered this issue not limited to familial relationship, instead it is more related to the parental archetypes universally present in human unconscious.

The children receive their mother's love and care after being born, through which they experience the mother archetype, that is, the mother that accepts the children's everything and gives the children everything. As the children grow, they will realize the negative aspect of the mother, the power that hampers the individuality of the children, and they eventually realize they must depart from it.

Thus, the matricide theme appears in certain stage in the process of growing up. In this case the matricide becomes the story of Hansel and Gretel defeating the witch. Though the matricide only happens in the mind of the children, not in the real world. [Kawai94, ch3]

Considering Kawai's interpretation and argument, we can safely draw the parallel that the matricide becomes the main plot of the show where Papika and Cocona defeat the Terrible Mother aspect of Mimi. Cocona is able to take back her individuality from Mimi's mind control, and by defeating Mimi she gains psychological independence to freely adventure with Papika no longer bound by her mother.

Cocona was struggling with Mimi all along as the matricide main plot started as early as episode 1. During the whole journey of adventures in PIs Cocona was experiencing and fighting with the shards of Mimi, or

actually the shards of Mimi's split personalities, before even seeing Mimi herself. In episode 8 we are made aware that Mimi's shards are an intrusive destructive power alien to PIs. Also we can observe various visual cues hinting at the connections between PI defensive traps and Mimi's features (red tentacles, red eyes, and other red elements). Therefore we can assume that the defensive traps are created by Mimi's shards as manifestations of Mimi's split personalities. Based on the assumption we discover that Cocona's fight with the defensive traps are actually detailed demonstrations of her fight against various qualities of the Terrible Mother: the suicide of PI monsters in episode 1, the devouring vacuum in episode 2, the mind control and imprisonment (bondage) in episode 3 and 9, the seduction and temptation to stay in episode 5 and 7 [note*], the destruction and killing in episode 8.

[note*]: Episode 7's PI is particularly ambiguous for interpretation. From the perspective of PI mechanics, the faux Papika's are created by the defensive trap in this PI according to Cocona's mind to appease her and tempt her to stay forever.

The theme of the daughter persecuted by her mother (stepmother) is a surprisingly common one in fairy tales as if they must have it to describe the relatively complete processes of female individuation. Again, the shows that a woman must come into terms with the negative mother aspect in her process of individuation, first in the form of the personal shadow, later as part of the Self. [Birkhauser88, p30]



The two Iros and the shadow

In Kawai's book he discussed Grimm's fairy tales [The Two Brothers](#) and [The Golden Children](#). It is already unusual for two main characters to appear in a fairy tale as in *Hansel and Gretel*, however in this case the presented tales have two main characters as twin brothers with the same age and rank, which requires special consideration related to the shadow.

The shadow is defined in Jungian psychology as the personification of certain aspects of the unconscious personality, which could be added to the ego complex but which, for various reasons, are not. The shadow is built up when the repressed qualities are not admitted or accepted because they are incompatible with those chosen by the ego. [Franz74, p5-6]

In chapter 5 Kawai is directly citing von Franz's *Shadow and Evil in Fairy Tales*. As von Franz writes:

In fairy tales the figure of the shadow appears as a shadow-hero, more primitive and more instinctive than the hero but not necessarily morally inferior. [...] Generally only one aspect of the unconscious content can be realized at one time, other aspects being rejected. The shadow of the hero is therefore that aspect of the archetype which has been rejected by collective consciousness. [Franz96, p114]

Von Franz also argued for the relative and complementary nature of the shadow in fairy tales:

In fairy tales, where there is no such thing as the shadow, there is the doubling of an archetypal figure, one half being the shadow of the other. [...] A model of an archetype can be said to be composed of two spheres, one light and the other dark. With the archetype of the Great Mother you have the witch, the devilish mother, the beautiful wise old woman, and the Goddess who represents fertility. [Franz74, p31]

The story of the golden children points to another problem. [...] They are again each others' shadows (a shadow, it must not be forgotten, is only relative), but they are here twin figures, characterized in two ways, for one stays at home disgusted by the world's stupidity and the other goes out into the world. There are similar stories in Old Egypt: Anub and Bata, brothers, have the same fate, one is caught in the world and the other is a hermit. [Franz74, p107]

In this show, the concept of the shadow is used to characterize Iroha's and Mimi's personalities. In episode 6 Papika and Cocona entered Iroha's deep-PI, which represents the realm from her unconscious to the collective unconscious. We observe that the two aspects of Iroha's unconscious are represented by Papika and Cocona respectively. Unfortunately one of them must stay at home drawing with crayons, which represents the shadow in the repressed state, while the other goes out with Auntie happily in the

accepted state. Very strong visual cues are given to illustrate their differences with one given dark and cold color and the other given light and warm color. Just as the different aspects of the unconscious can be accepted and rejected by the consciousness, they can switch the shadow status with each other, which is an authentic rendition of the relative concept of the shadow.



The Terrible Mother aspect takes over. (Ep. 11)

Similar switches of shadow status happened with Mimi with similar visual cues of shadow given (notice how the shadow visual switched place). The nature of her shadow is already much discussed in the two aspects of the Great Mother archetype. Salt also faced his shadow and refused to switch. Salt's father would also have switched with his shadow. Unfortunately the exact meaning of the shadows of Iroha, Salt, and Salt's father only have speculative answers so we will leave it to the readers to decide.



The Good Mother aspect takes over. (Ep. 13)



Papika and *Sleeping Beauty*

In another chapter Kawai used the fairy tale [*Sleeping Beauty*](#) to examine adolescence and the development of female psyche. Once again we find motifs with striking similarities with the show.

He argued that the sleep of the princess represents a necessary stage in the development of female psyche:

A handsome prince showed up right after one hundred years. When he approached the thorny fence, the fence was split left and right on its own and made way for the prince. The prince reached the princess unhurt by the rose and kissed the princess, waking her up.

In Grimm's' version, even though the princess saw the prince for the first time she still watched the prince with familiar fondness. Perrault's version is more dramatic, where the prince opened her eyes and spoke gently, "Is it you, dear prince? You have been long in coming!" For people meeting each other for the first time and saying "is that really you" so confidently, it requires same years worth of mental growth. Considering the mental aspect, "one hundred years" is not literally one hundred years in wall time rather it represents the time they spent for their mental growth. [Kawai94, ch6]

In the end of the show Papika was shown to be imprisoned in the fenced tree prison grown around her and sleeping for a very long time. Eventually Cocona came and found her. After they had a heartfelt hand holding, the fence split to left and right on its own and freed Papika. After that it became Papika's lines in the beginning of the show: "I was sleeping. You took so long to show up, Cocona. I waited forever for you." Here the wait represents the mental growth during adolescence (the sleep).



The motif of the thorn of sleep in *Sleeping Beauty* relates to the tendency of the mother figure to spread sleep. Sleep is not negative per se as Kawai interprets it as as mental growth. But if sleep comes at the wrong time, a man will be in danger of being put to sleep by the nourishing mother in a regression into childhood, an unconscious state in which he receives everything he needs from his mother on a plate. [Birkhauser88, p65] Cocona was put into a hypnotized state by Mimi as a demonstration of this sleep motif. Meanwhile, both interpretations of the sleep make sense for Papika's case.

Pure Yuri

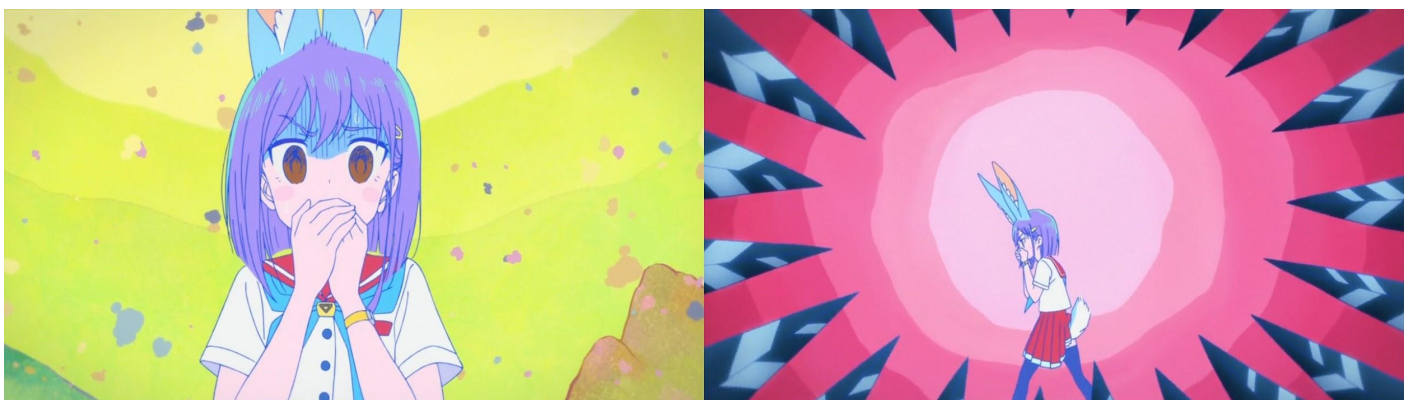


Puberty and Adolescent Romance

The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed.

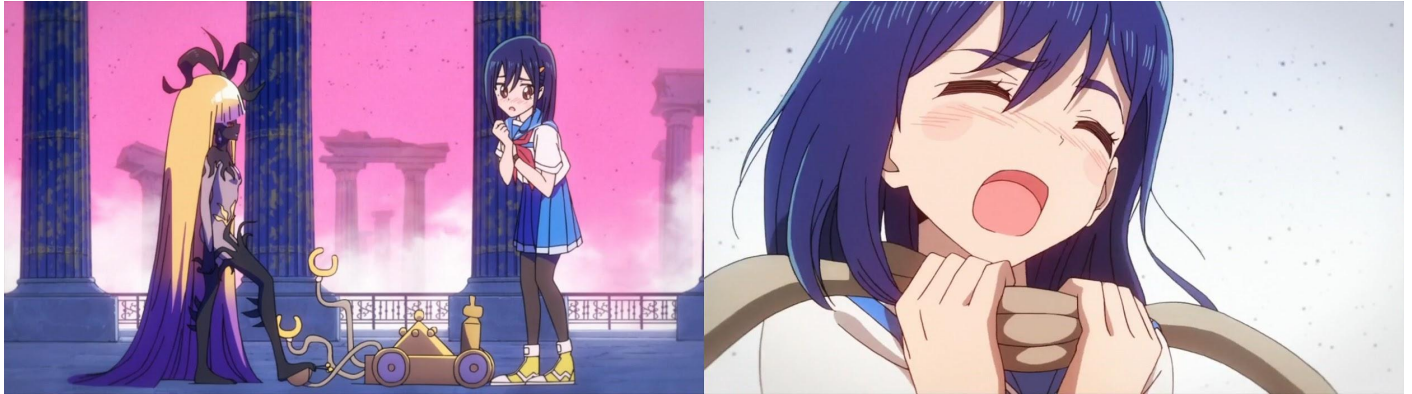
- Carl Jung

While some reviewers go as far as lumping this show together with Izetta and Hibike as "yuribait", under closer examination FLFL is actually a honest-to-God yuri romance. In case you didn't put together the clues laid in the first few episodes, the director said it out loud when asked that the "yuri" hinting is definitely intentional. When you've got the director of Strawberry Panic, all-time yuri classic, and Sono Hanabira OVA, the purest yuri hentai in existence, involved (he was the episode director for ep 4), it's pretty damn obvious the show is meant to be yuri, and demanding a kiss scene is a misunderstanding of the Japanese culture. However, FLFL is a psychological adventure first and a yuri romance second - and it definitely isn't a Shoujo Ai drama. Instead of going into external factors of yuri romance - the pressure from society, the feeling of being different - it goes internal, focusing on self-discovery and development of the relationship.

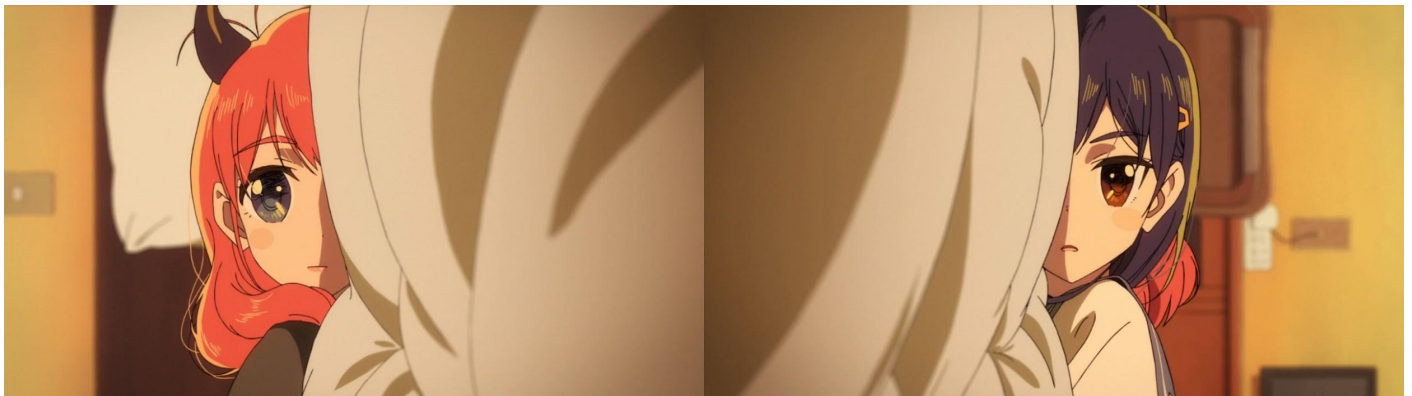


Many of the subtle (or not so subtle) themes present in the show can be interpreted as unspecific references to puberty, sexual awakening, adolescence - most apparent ones are the teeth embarrassment in episode 2 and everything about Welwitschia in episode 3, but with quotes like "I've got this fur all over" episode 2 might contain more references to puberty than it initially seems. Rabbit is a

fertility symbol after all, and the episode features the rabbit unexpectedly appearing at the school, and then getting out of control and running around like crazy. Hiding in the washroom is another clue.



Could the story work as a straight romance? I'm not sure it could. The intriguing, at times problematic relationship between Cocona and the girls around her is a tightly connected to her development and sense of femininity. Dealing with the hard to grasp infatuation with the same sex is what makes her social withdrawal all that more interesting. She's clearly uneasy when around women, be that the nurse, Iroha-senpai, Weitwitschia or of course Papika carelessly undressing. So while technically you could flip the genders on for example Papika and turn the romance straight, you would then miss out on a significant part of the problem with deciding who exactly Papika is to Cocona, as the episode 7 tries to present and examine.



So while it would be possible to extract the core themes of individuation and self-realization from the glorious mess that is Flip Flappers, the same-sex relationship adds an irreplaceable layer of doubt and confusion for Cocona to break through, without which the whole show would lose a key piece of significant value. And it's not just the character of the main-cast romance: the show makes an effort to recognize and lampshade the genre.



"yuri"



yuri

Girls Can Love Girls

Not really about friendship or romance, it's the feeling that I cherish, the feeling to hold her dear, to worry about her, the feeling of a throbbing heart, hearts being connected, the empathy, the longing, or sometimes the sweetness from just looking at her as if I am the mother.

- Ayana Yuniko, "Why I love yuri"

What might have been "reading too much into it" has become the most plausible explanation when episode 5 came around. It doesn't just invoke yuri themes, with, well, literally placing lilies all over the screen: it references the entire Class S yuri genre (Marimite) and criticizes it by exaggeration: the setting loops and repeats with all tease and no progression. The clock never reaches the "final hour", which symbolizes never actually committing to the same-sex relationship, and the whole setting is portrayed as a horror, a nightmare you're trapped in.

This is again drawing from the staff information, but needs to be said - the director took some "lessons" on how to write yuri from the show's scriptwriter Ayana Yuniko, a yuri enthusiast. Her advice lead to reducing Pops' height to get him out of Cocona's eye level and would have resulted in keeping the "boyish" versions of Papika in episode 7 in female bodies - but this was changed after the character designer's input. Ayana wrote the screenplay of episodes 1-3, 5, and 6 (episode 4 was handed to her close colleague, Ayumi Sekine) . Her outline for episode 8 about fighting zombies in space trains, however, had to be scrapped after they found out the setting was scooped by Kabaneri in the previous season. Yuniko and Oshiyama together decided the main plot of the series. She started as a diehard yuri fan of Aoi Hana and worked on it first but she accumulated some pent-up frustrations working on yuri subtext adaptations over the years. This time she was given free reign to "add whatever [she] wanted on top of" Oshiyama's core story and her true creative vision of yuri shone through.



And if the wedding-dress hand-holding snuggle-surfing finale doesn't convince you, nothing will. Note how their outfits look like a cross between wedding dresses and armor. They're each other's princesses and knights simultaneously.

Wrapping Up



What the flying fuck was FLFL even about, then?

FLFL is the Space Dandy of Evangelion, the FLCL of Madoka, an avant-garde post-modern helter-skelter aggregation of, more or less, discordant phantasmagorical acid trips laced with yuri fanservice in which all current partaking female's breasts are no larger than A cups.

- /a/

That's the beautiful thing about symbolism: you get to discover it. There is no definitive answer that covers everything I've touched here, so you are free to pick your own one. It reads like a Rorschach inkblot.

Without extrapolating too much, we can underline some key elements of the story:

Cocona is a withdrawn girl whose parents are initially out of the picture (you can interpret it as a tale of a child of divorced parents). One day she leaves her comfort zone, opens up to another girl, and goes on an adventure with her, confused with what their relationship actually is. However, what dwells deep within Cocona is her longing for the long-lost relationship with her mother. Cocona, afraid of failure, runs away back into her mother's care, but she realizes that her new relationships aren't something she can - or wants to - give up, and that her friends aren't letting her go that easily either. She accepts who she is and becomes her own person.

Above all Flip Flappers is a story about identity and self-realization based on the Jungian model of individuation. There's the theme of adolescence as well and it works as a coming-of-age story, but the show can be more than that, portraying psychological concepts in a mind-screwingly surreal, yet oddly accessible way.

And if you don't want to go that deep, you still have the wonderful technicolor adventure.



Special Thanks to

/a/nons whose observations and opinions I've put into words here - especially the ones who provided feedback in the forms of comments to the sections of the first draft, such as tastySugar, who provided comments in the audio section, and xfs, who we have to thank for the interview infodump and the content of Jungian interpretation of fairy tales.

Blizz and Ange (Futanon) for initial feedback that caused me to move around or rewrite entire sections of this document, sometimes including an alternative interpretation to mine

Mi Bero for thoroughly analyzing the episode titles and explaining the audio processing jargon

Hiroshima Nagasaki for not completely ruining 4chan yet



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Notes

[3]: Oshiyama's Megami interview

[4]: Additional interview in Megami magazine <http://pastebin.com/raw/6TjXeXF8> (TODO: Google machine translate, please ask a translator to help)

Links

Infinite Dayo wants to produce original anime that will last for 10 years - <http://ascii.jp/elem/000/001/005/1005156/>

Oshiyama mentions Kubrick as inspiration - <https://twitter.com/siromitu/status/815059682175746048>

Pure Audio - [link](#)

Pure Audio as the inspiration for "Pure Illusion" 1 - <https://twitter.com/315ByFFK/status/819945038415155200>

Pure Audio as the inspiration for "Pure Illusion" 2 - <https://twitter.com/amehuras12/status/819951670314430464>

Roadmap - Sections to Improve

Cinematography - We need someone with experience in Kubrick movies who will write a few words there

Flower language - I can google and write down what begonias, clovers and dandelions mean, but I'd prefer if it was written by someone who cares

Psychology - I'll redact it, just give me time (it's been almost half a year, but fuck it)

Fairy tales - I need quotes from Marie Louise von Franz. Quotes about fairy tales.

Yuri - I feel like this show deserves to have more written about yuri

If anyone feels like they want to contribute, message me at reddit/gmail (lukeatlook at both).