

## **Reviewing distinctive DVD experiences: *NEO* Magazine and the critical reception of Asian media distributors**

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### **Abstract:**

This article closely analyses the reviews for Asian films from the longest-running UK magazine that specialises in Asian media – *NEO*. The critical reception of Asian films has been investigated before, but what has not been realised is the significance of the DVD distributors in shaping these reviews. As a result of examining how influential the discs' labels are on the review content, it becomes clear that the critics in *NEO* are assessing more than the film itself. The reviewers are evaluating the entire viewing experience that a home media format, such as DVD, can offer. This is important for Asian media as the *NEO* reviews illustrate how the discs are the primary means of accessing such films for UK audiences. The reviews also suggest that viewers are becoming aware, and have a substantial interest in, how distributors shape their viewing experience.

**Key words:** Asian media, critical reception, distributors, DVD, Japanese films.

DVDs are integral to how Asian media texts, such as Japanese films, are made available to UK consumers. Cinema releases and online outlets (via streaming or downloading) have not been consistently profitable practices for distributors that specialise in Asian films and media. Ever since the popularity of Japanese horror films from 2000 onwards, a steady stream of Asian cinema titles have made their way to the UK via DVD. The importance of this format has also been realised by other distributors of other media exports from Japan, such as *anime* (animation) and *manga* (comics). Volumes of *manga* are often sold alongside DVD releases of Asian films and popular *anime* TV shows at events such as the London Movies Comics and Media (MCM) Expo. This event has run since 2002, and is now held twice a year, with attendance numbers exceeding 200,000 in 2013.<sup>1</sup> The popularity of these

events has also meant that they have spread to Manchester, Birmingham and Scotland.<sup>2</sup> Distribution companies are central to these activities, as they often announce upcoming DVD releases at Expo events, as well as making others available to purchase. The types of distributors that appear illustrate how high in demand Japanese cultural exports are among UK Asian media consumers. Specialist DVD labels in *anime*, world cinema, and Asian cinema in general, all release Japanese film titles. Such releases then feature regularly in the pages of *NEO* – the longest running UK magazine that is dedicated to Asian media.<sup>3</sup> The content of this publication is similarly focused on Japanese cultural exports, as *anime*, *manga* and films from this country are all featured in the review articles.

The DVDs are central to the critical reception in *NEO*, especially in relation to the films that are reviewed. The aims of the magazine convey how it is a relevant representation of the demand for Asian media in the UK. In 2011 *NEO* began an official Facebook page, which now includes the periodical's mission statement:

In every issue of the mag, you'll find features, previews, reviews and guides for the latest anime, manga, Asian movies and games, all written by our team of expert journalists from the UK, the US and Japan. Alongside this exciting line-up you'll also find profiles on the hottest names in the Asian music world, exclusive interviews and more. Because we're an independent publication, *NEO*'s unbiased editorial means that you'll always get our honest and informed opinions so you know what DVDs, CDs and books are worth spending your money on. So if we think something's fantastic, we'll shout it from the rooftops. And if we think something's bad, we'll tell it like it is.<sup>4</sup>

The statement shows the magazine has a respect for its readership in the UK, and that its primary focus is Japanese media. The readers of *NEO* consist of a wide range of tastes and media preferences. Experiences and interactions between fans, critics, producers and distributors of Japanese and Asian media are becoming as valued as the DVDs that they purchase. *NEO* magazine emphasises its reviews as the most pertinent content for its readers, through its use of the phrases 'unbiased editorial' and 'honest and informed opinions'. Therefore, the critical perspectives of the reviewers in *NEO* are attuned to their readers' interests, and are likely to reveal much about UK Asian media audiences when closely analysed. In particular, the reviews demonstrate that specialist distributors of Japanese cinema are given significant attention – both in relation to their films, and the content of the discs on which these titles are released. The *NEO* reviews establish that DVDs are the primary means of purchasing Japanese films in the UK. They also make clear that consumers are concerned with the content of the discs as much as the content of the films. Reviews for the releases of 4Digital Asia and Third Window Films specifically represent these tendencies. The *NEO* critics have reviewed nearly all of their titles, as both companies are UK DVD labels that specialise in Japanese films.<sup>5</sup>

## **Contexts: Japanese Films, UK DVD Labels, and the Significance of Distribution**

4Digital Asia and Third Window have predominantly released Japanese films, which have significantly shaped the UK market for Asian films and media. Tartan Asian Extreme used to be the dominant label for Japanese releases, especially during the years 2000 to 2008. The company concentrated on releasing Asian films through cinema and DVD releases in the UK, and almost all of their titles contained either gruesome or shockingly violent content (Dew, 2007; Shin, 2008; Martin, 2009). This was particularly the case after the critical and commercial success of Japanese films like *Ring* (dir. Hideo Nakata, 1998), *Audition* (dir. Takshi Miike, 1999), and *Battle Royale* (dir. Kinji Fukasaku). The popularity of these titles led to several other distributors releasing similar films, as well as the overall saturation of the UK home media market with these “extreme” titles. Tartan then went bankrupt in 2008, partially because of its narrow focus on these titles. However, similar releases continue to make their way into the UK market through other distribution companies, such as Manga Entertainment, MVM, and StudioCanal (formerly Optimum) (Leader, 2011). The difference now is that these companies release not only live-action films from Asia and other countries, but also animated releases in the form of either *anime* TV shows or features films. 4Digital Asia and Third Window are instead unique for only focusing on live-action film releases from Asian countries, and particularly those from Japan. At first glance, it seems these two distributors are following in Tartan’s footsteps, but *NEO* magazine recognises that these labels offer a lot more than “extreme” content.

4Digital Asia and Third Window began releasing Japanese films in the UK at similar times. Though the former no longer operates as a distributor, both 4Digital Asia and Third Window made a significant impact on the UK market. Up until 2010, these DVD labels predominantly focused on Japanese titles. The majority of these had not been available to purchase in the UK before. After 2010, Third Window began to branch out into releasing more films from Hong Kong and South Korea, as well as Japan. 4Digital Asia then ceased operations within its larger parent label, 4Digital Media, but its staff still continue to provide picture transfer and subtitling services for other independent distributors (such as Third Window).<sup>6</sup> This sort of work is what is appreciated in the *NEO* reviews, alongside the positive and negative attributes of each film. The *NEO* critics judge all DVD releases by the same standards, as the discs’ content is rated and reviewed in a similar fashion to the films. A variety of other review sources are quoted on the DVD covers and websites of both 4Digital Asia and Third Window, but none of them assess all of the distributors’ Japanese releases as both films and DVDs (Wroot, 2013). Most other distributors broadly specialise in films from a range of countries, or media from a range of sources (for example, animation as well as live action). In contrast, 4Digital Asia and Third Window are often commended by *NEO* for providing very different Japanese films from other distributors, as the language of the reviews will demonstrate. The critical reception of DVDs in specialist magazines, such as *NEO*, shows that discs containing more than just a film are highly praised. The reviews in *NEO* also demonstrate how essential this media format is in shaping the consumption of Asian media in the UK.

In film research, reviews are often found to be highly revealing forms of evidence. Academic studies of them have led to the discussion of opinions and tastes in relation to films and other media texts. Barbara Klinger initially called for materials outside of the film text to be studied in her article 'Digressions at the Cinema: Reception and Mass Culture' (1989). A few years later, she emphasised how useful reviews can be as a means of identifying patterns of discourse:

While there is some evidence that reviews influence attendance decisions, we cannot blithely assume that they dictate public response. Their value for reception studies lies rather in their mobilization of terms that attempt to define how a film will be perceived in the culture at large. (Klinger, 1994: 70)

Janet Staiger had also investigated reviews, and other texts and objects related to film and media, in order to understand the history and reception of particular films (1992). Both Staiger and Klinger then re-addressed the potential scope and outcomes of reception studies in later publications (Klinger, 1997; Staiger, 2000). Their influence is evident through the adoption of similar methods by other researchers. Mark Jancovich has recently written several articles about the many canonical opinions and tastes within newspaper reviews, particularly those of the *New York Times* from the 1940s (2009; 2010a; 2010b). In Jancovich's own words: 'Not only was the *New York Times* the most prestigious and respected newspaper of the period, but [Bosley] Crowther and his fellow film critics were situated within a classic position of cultural legitimacy.' (2010a: 48) Here, Jancovich has used a similar approach to Staiger and Klinger, and demonstrated the potential findings that can be discovered from interrogating one publication's reviews. The *NEO* reviews have been studied similarly, but the content and discussion of the films' content is not the most compelling finding. Comments made about the DVD labels are highly significant in light of recent academic perspectives on distribution.

While film distribution is an integral process within the filmmaking industry, it has only come under close analytical scrutiny within the last five years. As a result, the following views have emerged:

It is widely recognised by those working in the film and video sector that distribution is the vital link which connects producers to audiences throughout the whole sector, from the commercial film industry to grassroots community initiatives. But to those outside the sector, that link is largely invisible... (Knight and Thomas, 2011: 13)

Distribution plays a crucial role in film culture – it determines what films we see, and when and how we see them; and it also determines what films we do *not* see. (Lobato, 2012: 2)

Knight and Thomas see distribution as being 'invisible', and Lobato's statement emphasises this preconception. In contrast, the content of the *NEO* reviews suggests that film distribution is not invisible at all. The DVD labels are integral to how critics form their opinions on the latest UK Japanese home media releases. Thorough analysis of the reviews illustrates that the distributors' actions influence the categorisation of the films and their viewers, through terms such as "cult". The assessment of the overall viewing experience on the discs is evident, in reference to the film and the extras, as well as the status of the distributors alongside the Japanese filmmakers. Above all, the DVD labels are visible because they reflect the demands and interests of Japanese media consumers in the UK – in terms of the films released, and how these titles should be presented on DVD.

**REVIEWS ASIAN FILM**



**TERMINATE!**  
Ayase's robotic character in *Cyborg She* comes with the reference number of 'Cyberdine Model 103'. Sound familiar? It should. *Cyborg She* is the comically responsible for all kinds of computer-related carnage in *The Terminator* series. Now, that's crazy!



# Cyborg She

A pension-aged professor called Jiro, crippled in a shoot-out when he was a youth, builds a beautiful femme fatale robot in the shape of a woman he once met and kill for and sends her back in time to look after his virginal, and painfully shy, 21-year-old student self (essayed by Katsuka Koido). This she does, saving the boy from gunfire, although our poor young hero ends up falling in love with the top-heavy terminator, whilst the lady in question (played by Ich's Haruka Ayase) has no idea how to return such emotions. Eager to get rid of her – and accusing the girl of breaking his heart – Jiro soon feels as lonely as ever. Nevertheless, little does the lad realise that his gorgeous acquaintance will soon stop the Grim Reaper from taking his life for a second time...

did read that right) director Kwak Jae-young – who won considerable acclaim with his hit comedy *My Sassy Girl* – gives us two characters to really care about and a bonkers plot that, nevertheless, moulds together credibly well. Sure, one of the two main personalities may be made of metal but, just as in the Disney classic *WALL-E*, the film's cyborg sweetie grabs all of the best moments, and is so likeable, that it is difficult to imagine anyone not warming towards her...



Arriving in Tokyo ala *Arnie* in *The Terminator* series, Ayase's 'cyborg' first appears to us as a juvenile delinquent – breaking widows, shoplifting and nicking the occasional piece of fruit from market vendors. Naturally, Jiro is intrigued by the girl's actions and smitten when she finally shows him some attention (even agreeing to stay over in his unempt student apartment). What follows is as melancholy as it is maddening – with writer-director Jae-young alternating between set pieces of outrageous comedy and unrequited love.

Wisely, however, the movie's tone never demonises Ayase for her inability to return the feelings of the young man who has fallen in love with her. Rather, we feel genuine sadness that she can never relate to him as anything other than someone who must be protected at all costs. It would be a shame to give away where this plot is going but, as with this month's *Tiddi Wore*, it would seem that man-made disaster is the name of the game in the Oriental film world right now...

Veering between comedy, cute chick-flick-like theatrics and, finally, complete balls-to-the-wall carnage, *Cyborg She* is an eccentric mix of genres, but also nothing short of

involving. Praise, especially, has to be given to one-time swimwear model Ayase who, as in *Ich*, enters a positively adorable performance and eats up her screen time with such aplomb that it can only be a matter of time before she becomes a certified superstar. With natural good looks and actual acting ability, the voluptuous vixen is certainly a great deal more appealing than many of Hollywood's decidedly more vacant leading ladies (we will refrain from naming names, but look to any of the recent 'teen' horror flicks and you will have some idea). Whereas *Ich* never gave her quite enough time to showcase her charms, *Cyborg She* demonstrates just what a rare talent she is.

Crossing gender boundaries and never feeling like a 'chick flick' or a 'gay's movie', *Cyborg She* is that rare entity, a thoughtful slice of *fluff* that has something to offer both sexes. And should any male *NEO* readers be in doubt about that – just remember: you do get some healthy final reel destruction!

**DVD EXTRAS**  
Nothing, nothing, nothing... In this current climate it seems fewer cult DVD labels are splashing the cash on extras. A shame.

Now this is what we would have expected Park Chan-wook's comparatively lightweight film *Cyborg* to be like. In this Japanese sci-fi romance (yes, you



074 NEO www.neomag.co.uk

**CALLUM WADDELL**  
A robotic romance that is sure to capture your heart.  
FILM ★★★★★ EXTRAS

Figure 1: *NEO* magazine review for *Fine, Totally Fine*.<sup>7</sup>

**Cult Distributors: How the Labels are Labelled**

In the reviews of *NEO* magazine, both 4Digital Asia and Third Window are categorised as cult DVD labels. The term appears in two separate issues, and the reviews are written by the same author, Calum Waddell (see Figures 1 and 2). In using ‘cult’ to characterise elements of the DVDs for *Fine*, *Totally Fine* (dir. Yosuke Fujita, 2008 – Third Window) and *Cyborg She* (dir. Jae-young Kwak, 2008 – 4Digital Asia), Waddell refers to both the films and the distributors (Waddell, 2009d; 2009f). The use of cult could summarise the films’ contents –



**Fine, Totally Fine**

AVAILABLE: 11 May  
LABEL: Third Window  
Films  
CERTIFICATE: 15  
NO. OF DISCS: 1 Disc  
RETAIL PRICE: £14.99  
RUNNING TIME: 110 mins

**DVD EXTRAS**  
Kudos to Third Window Films for giving us quality extras on its library of cult eastern insanity. *Fine, Totally Fine* comes with cast interviews and a behind-the-scenes making for a neat little package.



## Fine, Totally Fine

**A**n almost indescribable oddity, this debut offering from director-to-watch Yosuke Fujita is a comedy whose delicate sense of humour is almost certain to be lost in translation. Nevertheless, the great performances, stylish cinematography and bizarre storyline is unlikely to go unloved by appreciators of eccentric cinema and, for that, we're pleased to see this esoteric mini-epic on the shelves.

*Fine, Totally Fine* introduces us to a trio of protagonists, each approaching 30: an introverted female photographer/artist, a horror movie buff with a gift for special effects wizardry and a nice-guy hospital manager. Where they all fit together is part of the plot's singularly surreal talent – and although the movie is – perhaps surprisingly – often a bit of a downer (even in spite of its occasional attempt to aim for high concept hilarity and fluffy romance) there is plenty to enjoy here. With Pinter-esque dialogue and discussions, not to mention a *Reality Bites* feel to the humdrum set pieces and a charming grasp of life's lunatic quirks, Fujita certainly gives you something to chew on. Even so, this might be just a tad too pretentious to win over the mainstream – but if your tastes lie in the arthouse then *Fine, Totally Fine* will leave you feeling satisfied, totally satisfied...

— CALUM WADDELL

A perversely enjoyable exploration into mundane modern existence – Japanese-style.

FILM ★★★ EXTRAS ★★★



**Funuke, Show Some Love You Losers!**

AVAILABLE: 11 May  
LABEL: Third Window  
Films  
CERTIFICATE: 15  
NO. OF DISCS: 1 Disc  
RETAIL PRICE: £4.99  
RUNNING TIME: 10 mins

**DVD EXTRAS**  
Just a series of trailers for this and other Third Window Films – all though, to be fair, these must be an hour's worth of previews!



## Funuke, Show Some Love You Losers!

**H**ow can you go wrong with a title as memorable as this? And, indeed, what can be said about a movie that begins with a couple being crushed in a car accident courtesy of a rogue cat on the carriageway?

*Funuke* is an insane, sort-of-satire focusing on a dysfunctional family and the resulting friction when they are all brought together after the aforementioned motorway massacre (think of a less pretentious version of *The Royal Tenenbaums*, and you're halfway there).

*Funuke* largely deals with the strained relationship between two sisters: Kiyomi, an arty introvert, and Sumika, the older of the two and a bitchy, if slightly insecure, failed actress. However, although this might sound a bit slight, rest assured that the story soon becomes a lot more sinister – spiralling into subplots focused on sexual deviance, sibling rivalry and spousal abuse. It does not always hang together, and some of the ‘hilarity’ might be a bit dark for many, but *Funuke* is that rare animal: a genuinely challenging, not to mention mind-mangling, cult comedy that demands your attention. And, as an aside, leading lady Eriko Sato is blindingly brilliant as bitchy leading lady Sumika...

— CALUM WADDELL

This slice of manga-inspired madness is a tad overlong, but it is still nutty enough to warrant a watch.

FILM ★★★ EXTRAS ★★

### FILM ROUND UP

**Calum Waddell gets stung by the Female Scorpion**

A box set sent from the heavens, we tell you! Well, that was our initial reaction when the fabulous *Female Prisoner #701: Scorpion* collection arrived at *NEO* this past month. Combining 1972's original classic (which we awarded a well-deserved five stars back in 2006), as well as the first sequel, *„Inhouse #7“* (a four star offering in its own right) and 1973's *Beast Stable* (three stars), this is a must-have godsend for any self-respecting cult movie buff. Priced at only £15.99, and with each picture sporting gorgeous transfers and sharp sound quality, we really cannot recommend this kooky compilation enough.

In case you need a plot rundown, 1972's initial outing introduces us to kick-ass heroine Matsui (played with awe-inspiring aplomb by *Lady Snowblood* starlet Mako Kaji). Wrongly imprisoned, thanks to her double-crossing, crime-connected husband, our girl is soon exposed to the harsh hell of incarceration – although it is not long before she is butt kicking her way out of *Strangeways* and straight back to her former homestead. With excellent special effects, and a truly endearing leading lady, this is one of the most outright entertaining bouts of grindhouse grime to ever slip out of the Far East. The sequel, however, is more of a raucous road movie – although the action continues to come thick and fast and, despite an underlying air of gloominess, there is a real ‘girls doing it alone’ attitude to the on-screen insanity. Third entry *Beast Stable*, however, stumbles a little – although it's still a damn sight more scorching than most of today's genre offerings! Released by Bureka, this set demands to be purchased.



Figure 2: *NEO* magazine review for *Cyborg She*.<sup>8</sup>

both are romantic comedies, where the former concerns a love triangle within a group of social misfits, and the latter concerns a young man's feelings for a female cyborg. However, the term can potentially represent a variety of further connotations, as suggested by recent studies (Gorfinkel, 2008; Martin, 2008; Mathijs and Mendik, 2008: 1-12; Mathijs and Sexton, 2011: 1-10). Waddell is not the only reviewer in *NEO* who attaches this label to the distributors or the films they release. Within the pages of *NEO*, the discussions of the DVD labels and the use of the term 'cult' refer to a wide range of tastes and niche markets. This is in relation to Asian media, and the term's use in *NEO* highlights the potential interests that such consumers can have in the UK. Analysing the use of cult will therefore reveal what specific connotations are being implied.

The score-boxes, situated separately from the review columns printed in *NEO*, are particularly indicative of opinions of the labels. In **Figures 1** and **2**, the images represent one page and half-page reviews, whereas some others can be printed on two pages. In the blue boxes, the films are given a separate star score from the DVD extras included in their UK disc releases (both are scored out of five). The box also includes a critical summation of the film, which is paralleled by an overview of the disc extras. It is in these lines, in the reviews for *Fine*, *Totally Fine* and *Cyborg She*, that opinions on the distributors are expressed, as well as their categorisation as cult DVD labels. In May 2009, Waddell wrote: 'Kudos to Third Window Films for giving us quality extras on its library of cult eastern insanity. *Fine*, *Totally Fine* comes with cast interviews and a theatrical trailer, making for a neat little package.' (2009d) With *Cyborg She*, in November 2009, similar inferences are made even though 4Digital Asia is not named by Waddell: 'Nothing, nothing, nothing... In this current climate it seems fewer DVD labels are splashing the cash on extras.' (2009f) This line is incorrect because several extras were included on the *Cyborg She* disc.<sup>9</sup> However, Waddell's usage of the word 'cult' can be interpreted in several ways. The term implies that the films are unusual in comparison to other UK home media releases, both in relation to their content and how they are presented within the DVD format. The reviews' use of this category is ultimately positive, and it demonstrates what is of value to Asian media consumers in the UK.

Explorations of the history of cult films, and the usage of the term, are widespread within academic studies of cinema. Certain statements help to highlight opinions and views on cult that are shared by other writers, as well as illustrating its complexity – both in general, and in the context of the *NEO* reviews. In 2008, with Xavier Mendik, Ernest Mathijs charted the many genres and categories of films that cult can encompass (for example, from horror to science-fiction, and their various hybrids and sub-genres). Moreover, cult films are claimed to have 'an active and lively communal following' (Mathijs and Mendik, 2008: 11), as well as 'a continuous market value and a long-lasting public presence' (Mathijs and Sexton, 2011: 6). However, the term's use transgresses two other specific meanings, published in 2008, which are illustrated with the following quotes:

Every media consumer is in some sense a ready-made cult viewer – that is, if we accept the identities that media franchises construct for us in advance and use technologies in the ways they are intended. (Gorfinkel, 2008: 38)

The fatal moment for any cult movie is its much-vaunted “crossover” into the mainstream – or at least into a niche market big enough that some scout-representative of the mainstream will be clamouring to get in and colonize it. (Martin, 2008: 40)

‘Cult’ is recognised both as a commercial term that signifies a set of niche tastes that media producers believe they can cater to; and as a category of media that is perceived as separate from mass-produced media texts (specifically, ‘the mainstream’). Respectively, the quoted statements see the two patterns of behaviour as representing different types of cinephilia. Such behaviour is associated with avid fans of films, and has influenced certain media production practices linked to DVD, as found by Barbara Klinger (2008). DVD cinephilia can represent either an aesthetic appreciation of a film, or a desire to know the story of a film’s production and history following its initial release (42-3). Cult can therefore refer to certain generic traits, market perceptions, or media distribution practices. The *NEO* reviews refer to all of these aspects in the reviews for *Fine, Totally Fine* and *Cyborg She*.

Waddell implies both filmic traits and market perceptions with his use of ‘cult eastern insanity’. In making this statement, Japanese cinema is seen to cater to those who prefer films and media located outside of the mainstream, and have a range of characteristics that are broadly seen as out of the ordinary (or, insane). This also appears to be justification for Waddell using terms such as ‘eccentric’, ‘Pinter-esque’ and ‘*Reality Bites* feel’ to describe *Fine, Totally Fine*, as well as a reason for suggesting that the potential audience for this film see themselves as preferring cult films and media (2009d). The terms quoted imply both generic and stylistic traits and certain tastes regarding theatre and television, each of which attach a myriad of connotations to one Japanese film.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the cinephilic connotation of cult is applied to both Third Window and 4Digital Asia as DVD labels, in both the *Fine, Totally Fine* and *Cyborg She* reviews. Third Window is perceived as a ‘library of cult eastern insanity’ (2009d), and 4Digital Asia is a ‘cult DVD label’ (2009f). Not only does this suggest that they release certain types of films, but it also implies particular expectations for the discs. For both Third Window’s and 4Digital Asia’s releases, the *NEO* reviews state preference for distributors that add extra content for the benefit of their viewers. The statements infer that the labels attract a cult following because of the treatment of their releases.

Further evidence of this is illustrated in three favourable reviews that specifically assess the distributors’ actions within one issue of *NEO*. In issue 54, Waddell reviews the teenage comedy drama from Third Window, *Kamikaze Girls* (dir. Tetsuya Nakashima, 2004); and the fast-moving horror from 4Digital Asia, *X-Cross* (dir. Kenta Fukasaku, 2007); while David A. McIntee reviews the Third Window release of the tragic but colourful *Memories of*



*Matsuko* (dir. Tetsuya Nakashima, 2006). In this latter review, McIntee confirms that a variety of DVD special features are appreciated, with the statement that both a making-of and a storyboard-to-film comparison are 'not bad at all!' (2009). However, in the *Kamikaze Girls* review, it is not just the DVD extras that are evaluated alongside the film. Waddell says that the packaging is 'gnarly', in addition to the disc containing 'slender, but worthwhile' extras (2009a). Aesthetic appraisal is not limited to the film text itself, but extends to the packaging, the menus and special features. In the second review by Waddell, he states that '4Digital Asia has blessed *X-Cross* with a solid DVD presentation – with extra features that include cast and crew interviews, and a making-of documentary.' (2009b) Here, the DVD extras are seen as bonus content that accompanies the 'solid' presentation of the film's visuals, and the well-received films. 4Digital Asia and Third Window are seen as exemplary labels because of how they 'bless' their DVDs with 'gnarly' packaging and extras. The reviews imply that this treatment matches the diverse traits and qualities that can be found in the films released by these distributors. The critics make it clear that Japanese film fans in the UK expect extra material as part of their home viewing experience.

The *NEO* reviews illustrate how the DVD labels can appeal to many niche (or cult) tastes through their releases for the UK market. The reviews state the qualities of the films that can potentially appeal to existing markets. They outline how DVD media and extras represent a niche market, suggesting that this highlights another cult following of consumer interest. Essentially, the cult Japanese film fan seeks out unique Japanese films – in terms of their contents and traits, and their presentation on DVD. This is in sharp contrast to the promotional strategies of other labels, such as Tartan Asia Extreme, where the characteristics of the films were often emphasised more than the features of the discs (Dew, 2007; Shin, 2008; Martin, 2009). Therefore, the *NEO* reviews imply that the interests of UK consumers of Asian media have moved on from shocking imagery and violence. They now seek out films with various characteristics, as well as a viewing experience that makes full use of the DVD format. Further examples of critical reception within *NEO* also illustrate that consumers want extra material to supplement the specific characteristics of the films.

### **What's in a Disc?: Critical Assessments of the DVD Experience**

The reviews in *NEO* place strong emphasis on the DVD format for film-viewing, which reflects their readers' interests. This is perhaps most evident in the reviews' presentation in the magazine, as the discs' extras are assessed separately from the films. However, there is more to the emphasis of the DVD format than these segregated elements. The *NEO* reviewers manage to see the films before their official release in the UK. The DVD could potentially be viewed with the extras on it; or they may not yet be available; or the film may be screened theatrically before its DVD release. The reviews for the *20<sup>th</sup> Century Boys* films (dir. Yukihiro Tsutsumi, 2008-2009 – 4Digital Asia) illustrate these different means of viewing the films by the critics in *NEO*. In addition, the reviews signify a prominent pattern, which is a preference for the DVD format over other means of film-viewing. The reviews assess the contents of the discs, and often praise them as an ideal means for UK audiences

to watch the films released by 4Digital Asia and Third Window. These patterns imply that Asian media consumers ultimately desire the DVD release over other media formats.

DVD studies help to highlight the benefits of the format that the *NEO* reviews refer to, and in turn illustrate how DVD media adds to the film-viewing experience. Most studies of discs of films and television shows do argue this, but for different reasons. Researchers such as Craig Hight have attempted to demonstrate how DVDs create opportunities for interaction for their viewers. His case study leads to him to conclude that they mostly provide commercial opportunities for filmmakers and production companies to market the films and related products (Hight, 2005: 12-14). However, Martin Barker and Kate Egan also investigated the same discs used in Hight's case study – the extended-edition DVDs of the *Lord of the Rings* films (dir. Peter Jackson, 2001-2003). They found that both readers of the books and viewers of the films valued the DVDs and their extra content, as it allowed for reflection on the filmmakers' adaptation of a well-known story (Egan and Barker, 2008). These findings show that viewers with interests in both film and literature find the DVD format to be the most rewarding, because these various contexts can be addressed within the discs' extra material. Within the *NEO* reviews, the DVD releases are praised for similar reasons.

Other writers have similarly claimed that the wide range of interactions offered by DVD can create diverse meanings and pleasures for viewers. Aaron Barlow (2005) argues that the medium has fundamentally changed the film-watching experience, and it appeals to a broad spectrum of viewers. He argues this frequently throughout his book, as these excerpts show:

It is unlikely, however, that the DVD will disappear as a discrete item, replaced by Internet access to movies... This is a technology where the medium is certainly changing the message it conveys... (27)

Most people hunger to be more than passive viewers. The "couch potato" cliché never really captured the whole of what was being experienced or desired, as the explosion of the interactive Internet has shown. (159)

Though compared to online media, DVD is seen as a separate medium that offers unique ways of interacting with films and other media texts. This perspective is paralleled within *NEO* magazine. The reviews promote the benefits and possibilities of the DVD format, and even suggest that it is superior to other means of film-viewing. Furthermore, they address how the DVD releases can satisfy niche consumer interests in Japanese cinema and Asian media.

The reviews for the *20<sup>th</sup> Century Boys* films are particularly helpful in illustrating these patterns, as they chart the different formats in which the films could be viewed in the UK (courtesy of 4Digital Asia). The first article on this series of films was a double-page feature (in contrast to Figures 1 and 2). The review in Issue 56 of *NEO* was printed when the first

film was being screened in several UK cinemas, prior to its DVD release. Because of this, the assessment of the discs' extras reads as follows:

At the time of writing the final line-up of extra features for the DVD release has yet to be properly nailed down, but expect a two-disc Special Edition with lots of behind the scenes goodies, and a 24 page Book of Prophecies of your very own. From what we at *NEO* have already seen, this will be a keeper for fans of the flick! (West, 2009b)

The review was then followed up by a shorter one in the next issue, which both claimed that the DVD was 'packed to the rafters' with extras and confirmed the above details for the first film's disc release (Waddell, 2009c). Finally, the entire trilogy was reviewed in Issue 72, following the release of a four-disc box-set containing the films and several extras. Again, the DVD extras were assessed separately:

With an entire disc devoted to bonus features, this generous package boasts four hours' worth of extras. These include interviews with the cast members, a documentary on the Japanese premiere, extensive behind-the-scenes footage and a lavish 24 page booklet. (West, 2010a)

In all these reviews, the DVD content is regularly praised and emphasised as the most rewarding reason for buying a copy of the film. The assessment of the extras also parallels some of the comments made about the films, suggesting that the experience offered by the films can be extended by the distinctive contents of 4Digital Asia's discs.

For example, in Issue 56, the film's release is listed in the review as 'theatrical', yet David West still provides a thorough list of the expected extras on the *20<sup>th</sup> Century Boys* DVD (2009b). The review states that Japanese film fans will find that the disc release is worth waiting for, which implies that the extras are highly desired by these viewers. A 'Book of Prophecies' booklet is included, which references a key text in the film's narrative, about former childhood friends trying to stop apocalyptic events. The large amount of behind-the-scenes footage is then labelled as 'goodies' (West, 2009b).<sup>11</sup> The follow-up review in Issue 57 then categorises the film as the start of a '*Lord of the Rings* style fantasy trilogy', and suggests that it is a 'bum-numbing epic' for those who watch both the films and the numerous extras (Waddell, 2009c). However, parallels are most evident when comparing West's assessment of the films and the DVD extras in his final review of the trilogy. In Issue 72, he states that the trilogy is 'long, complicated, perhaps inevitably patchy due to its size, but *20<sup>th</sup> Century Boys* is unflinchingly faithful to Urasawa's original epic [in reference to the *manga* the films are adapted from]'.<sup>12</sup> The DVD extras are described as comparably 'epic', through the use of the words 'generous package' and 'boasts' in reference to the four hours of content contained within the special features (West, 2010a). The extras scored 5 stars, suggesting they are everything DVD viewers could wish for, as well as being worthwhile

material that will appeal to fans of the films. 4Digital Asia is being praised for its actions in distributing the *20<sup>th</sup> Century Boys* films; appropriately supplementing their ‘epic’ content; and acknowledging their roots within other popular Japanese media (e.g. *manga*).

The *NEO* reviewers are of the opinion that the DVD release adds to the experience of watching a film. The critics believe that all discs should meet this expectation, in addition to praising discs that do so. For example, several reviews do not simply give a low score to DVDs that include few extras, but state outright dissatisfaction at their minimal contents. Earlier, the review for the science-fiction rom-com *Cyborg She* was mentioned as discussing 4Digital Asia’s actions as a distributor, and this followed an emphasis that the DVD contained ‘nothing’ (Waddell, 2009f). Similarly, Third Window’s release of the sex-centred comedy drama *Lala Pipo* (dir. Masayuki Miyano, 2009) is summarised as containing the ‘original theatrical trailer and that’s yer lot’ (Waddell, 2009g). This colloquial phrasing infers that the reviewer was expecting much more than the trailer in the DVD’s contents. However, both these DVDs did contain several special features when they were released.<sup>13</sup> The review of the 4Digital Asia disc release of *Hidden Fortress: The Last Princess* (dir. Shinji Higuchi, 2008) reveals why some reviews are not always able to correctly confirm the content of the DVD extras. In the assessment of the extra content for this action-packed period adventure, Waddell says: ‘Nothing confirmed at time of going to press.’ (2010) This statement does not simply reveal the lack of information that the reviewers sometimes have to contend with before a DVD’s release. An expectation for the disc’s contents is still created, implying that those who wish to seek out the film should keep an eye out for what extras may be contained.

In its reviews, *NEO* magazine reveals that it believes that the digital format of DVD is capable of offering viewers more than just a film-viewing experience. The reviews not only reveal the diverse types of Japanese films that are in demand in the UK, but also the ways in which these films should be presented. The magazine’s reviewers explain how the DVD releases do, or do not, add to the generic traits and qualities specific to each film. The appraisal of the extras demonstrates appreciation of the distributors’ practices, in addition to recognising and discussing their actions. The reviews for the *20<sup>th</sup> Century Boys* films have particularly illustrated how the content of the extras can be compared with the characteristics of the films. In other examples, the films’ distinct traits are specifically attributed to the UK distributors as much as the Japanese filmmakers. These comments highlight an underlying trend throughout all of the reviews in *NEO* magazine.

### **Authored Expectations: Parallels between Authorship and DVD Labels**

Comments concerning authorship are frequently found within the review for the relationship drama *Kakera* (dir. Momoko Ando, 2009 – released by Third Window). This is in reference to the director, decisions in making the film, as well as the story’s origins as a *manga*.<sup>14</sup> Following these points, the DVD extras are stated as providing ‘viewing pleasure’, which implies an appreciation for the effort that Third Window has gone to in putting together the disc release (West, 2010b). This review supports claims made throughout the

article, regarding criticism of the DVD labels as a whole, in addition to the individual films and disc releases. Other examples illustrate similar expectations within the *NEO* reviews regarding the distributors' actions and the special features' content. *Kakera* is not the only review that refers to a film's authorship, and a film's director can even be used as a basis through which to identify characteristics similar to other films. Furthermore, the authorship of the releases is frequently attributed to the distributors, and the critics often praise the DVD label as much as the director.

References to authorship are not only prominent in *NEO*, but also in previous studies of reviews, which helps to highlight its significance. Opinions and comments that circulate around particular directors have often been examined to chart perceptions of a certain filmmaker as well as their films. For example, Klinger has charted how critical opinions of Douglas Sirk's films changed over time, signifying how he was first identified as a specialist in a specific genre (particularly melodrama), and later as an established auteur (1992: 69-96). Parallel views have then been found within studies of Asian film directors. Oliver Dew argues that critical perspectives of directors as either genre specialists or artistic auteurs are regularly evident within reviews of films from Asian countries (2007: 53-7). However, analyses of DVD media have revealed other potential authorial influences that affect films. Brookey and Westerfelhaus conclude that Pixar reinforces its brand image as a production company within the content of the extras found on DVDs of its films (2005). Tom Brown later made a similar argument following the study of certain disc releases of Disney films (2008). While brand image and media promotion are the focus of both of these articles, essentially they are referring to the authorship of the DVDs as well as the films. The *NEO* reviews discuss both the Japanese filmmakers and their UK distributors in several instances. Such comments demonstrate how influential each of these factors can be when assessing a DVD release. The critics' expectations and preconceptions specific to the authorship of both 4Digital Asia's and Third Window's discs are particularly evident.

Authorship, regarding both the film and its DVD, is noted most often within the review of *Kakera*. At the top of the page, before any other details of the film are mentioned, director Momoko Ando's family ties to Japanese cinema are explained through the fact that her sister is an actress (Sakura Ando, who stars in another Third Window release, *Love Exposure* – dir. Sion Sono, 2008). West then integrates several other facts about the film's crew within the review, before awarding the film four stars:

Shot by veteran cameraman Hirokazu Ishii, *Kakera* has a very traditional Japanese visual style that brings to mind the films of Yasujiro Ozu. Each frame is meticulously composed, camera movement is selective and sedate, while the colour palette is subdued. This fits the tone perfectly, as does the melancholy score by former Smashing Pumpkins guitarist James Iha. (West, 2010b)

The film is being explained as a collaborative effort, and West sees it as important to identify those responsible for the elements that contribute to the four star score. However,

Ando's directorial style is the overall focus within the review, which is highly significant. This is Third Window's first release from a female director, and this is perhaps not surprising, because female film directors are rare in Japan (Blair, 2014). Ando is therefore seen as the unique creative force that successfully brings these various elements together within her directorial debut. The other consequence of this is that her filmmaking skills are compared to acclaimed male Japanese directors, such as Ozu.<sup>15</sup>

However, significant attention is given to the disc's other contents, which are appreciated almost as much as the film itself. Three stars are awarded to the DVD extras, and West states:

For your extra viewing pleasure there is a 28 minute conversation between film critic Jasper Sharp and Momoko Ando, plus a 22-minute Q&A session from when the film played at the ICA in London. On top of that you get the theatrical trailer for *Kakera* plus trailers for other Third Window releases. (2010b)

The film's authorship is central to the extras' content, in addition to Ando being the focus within the rest of the review for *Kakera*. West is not just utilising this coincidence as a means of linking the film's characteristics to the DVD's special features. By claiming that Third Window provides 'extra viewing pleasure', he is highlighting the distributor's efforts in releasing the film on DVD for UK audiences, as well as the extra material they were able to gather for the disc release of *Kakera*. As a result, Third Window is perceived by *NEO* as a distributor that frequently aims to provide UK audiences with unique viewing experiences on their DVDs. They pick out films with distinctive characteristics and package them to reflect these traits. Such judgments of the distributor mean that high expectations subsequently exist for all of the label's DVD releases. Similar preconceptions are illustrated within other examples of the *NEO* reviews for Third Window's releases.

Further evidence of these patterns is found within the review for *Funuke, Show Some Love You Losers!* (dir. Daihachi Yoshida, 2007). Waddell sums up his opinion of the film in one sentence: 'This slice of manga-inspired madness is a tad overlong, but it is still nutty enough to warrant a watch.' (2009e) In addition, the film is given a score of three stars, and so this statement equates to an appraising recommendation for UK viewers. Despite these comments, the extras are only awarded two stars, and Waddell explains that there is '[j]ust a series of trailers for this and other Third Window films – although, to be fair, there must be an hour's worth of previews!' (2009e). Though there are minimal extras, Third Window's efforts are still appreciated. This parallels the review on the same page of this article, which is for *Fine, Totally Fine*, and is where Waddell calls Third Window's films a 'library of cult eastern insanity' (Waddell, 2009d). The terminology used for the DVD releases does not just characterise the films. It encompasses the whole viewing experience that the DVD labels have constructed.

4Digital Asia's releases are discussed similarly within *NEO*, both in regards to the directors of the films and the label's actions as a distributor. One particularly indicative

review is for the film *Starfish Hotel* (dir. John Williams, 2006). It is not favoured by Waddell, as he only awards the film 2 and a half stars, and states that it makes the puzzling films of David Lynch seem simplistic in comparison.<sup>16</sup> However, he does concede that the presentation on the DVD is 'first class', both because of the visual quality of the film, and the inclusion of a making-of and interview with the director in the extras (Waddell, 2008). Waddell shows signs of appreciating and regularly expecting a variety of content within 4Digital Asia's releases. No matter the quality of the film, the DVD will be visually pleasing, and it is likely to have considerable additional content. This opinion of 4Digital Asia's releases is especially highlighted by a unique review from 2009.

The review for *Death Note: L Change The World* (dir. Hideo Nakata, 2008) has an extreme contrast between the assessment of the film and its DVD extras. West writes that the film '[s]ucks like a Dyson on overdrive' (2009a), and only awards it one star. West then awards the disc's extras four stars, and decides that they are worth watching out of context from the film. His assessment of the special features supports this conclusion:

While no amount of extras can compensate for a stinky movie, you cannot fault 4Digital Asia for trying. The two disc set comes with a booklet, an interview with Kenichi Matsuyama [the film's lead actor], the obligatory 'Making Of' documentary and lots of features from the Japanese press campaign. (2009a)

West is aware that UK audiences are unlikely to buy the film for the extras alone, but he still makes the case for the DVD's content. These comments suggest that interviews with particular actors, and insights into Japanese media promotion, are of particular interest to UK consumers as much as are the Japanese films. The review therefore confirms that a significant factor in the reception of 4Digital Asia's releases is the package that they put together outside of the film's content.

Authorship remains to be a recurring trait within the critical reception of films, though this does not only concern the film's content. The *NEO* reviews demonstrate that the actions of a distributor can be interpreted as an authored trait within a DVD release. Moreover, expectations and preconceptions of the standards of the disc releases have been found alongside discussions of both the film directors and distributors as authors. While this could be argued as a trait that recurs only throughout all the examples discussed in this article, the uniform format of all the critics' opinions illustrates that this occurs within other reviews in *NEO*. Analysis of these articles has illustrated how much the DVD distributors are an integral factor within the comments about both the films and their disc releases. Both 4Digital Asia and Third Window are stated as responsible for the quality of the films, as well as whether or not the discs meet the expectations that *NEO* has for the DVD format.

## **Conclusion**

The *NEO* reviews are very revealing for several reasons. The critical reception of the DVD releases from both 4Digital Asia and Third Window has demonstrated the diverse UK market

that the distributors were catering to from 2008 to 2010. The term cult, regularly used by the *NEO* reviewers, has a variety of connotations attached to it which signify the various tastes and preferences of UK viewers of Japanese films on DVD. The distributors' categorisation as cult has been illustrated in addition to their releases being labelled as suited to fans of fantasy epics, romance, science-fiction, stylistic directors, and numerous other niche tastes. These assessments of the films do not just signify the potential markets for these films in the UK, but also the other aspects of the DVD releases. Moreover, *NEO* demonstrates the wide appeal that the discs' special features can have for consumers with interests in different types of Asian media.

These patterns have continued in later reviews. Though 4Digital Asia ceased releasing new Japanese films in 2010, Andrew Kirkham and his colleagues maintained their digitising and subtitling work through the companies Japanglish and Silk Purse Enterprises, and launched Cine Du Monde.<sup>17</sup> This name is reflected in the label's releases, as its current output includes English-language releases as well as Asian films. The English-language titles are not mentioned in *NEO*, but the label's Asian releases are reviewed. One example is *Re-Cycle* from 2006 (dir. Danny Pang and Oxide Pang). Waddell's review compares the film to Japanese horror cinema, specifically in his summary statement: 'Goosebumps and silliness in equal measures, *Re-Cycle* should keep anyone who misses the glory days of J-horror knee-deep in spooks.' (2012) Furthermore, Waddell is still appreciative of the efforts of the DVD label, as seen in the next few lines: 'Audio commentary, special effects documentary, footage from the premiere, plenty of cast and crew chit-chat, and more besides. Colour us impressed'. (2012) From these sections of this article, the actions of the distributor are obviously still integral to the reviews in *NEO* – whether they are specialists in Asian film or not.

Further evidence for this can be found in a later review of a Third Window release. Though the label did begin to release more films from Hong Kong and South Korea after 2010, its Japanese releases still get significant coverage in *NEO*. This is illustrated by the double-page review for the psychological thriller *Shady* (dir. Ryohei Watanabe, 2012). Once again, Waddell's summation of the DVD extras is highly significant: 'Nothing available on the extras front as we went to press, but we are promised interviews with the director and (most welcomingly) both leading ladies.' (2014) As indicated by this statement, the film's two leads are praised highly in the review with the words 'sterling cast' and other similar lines: 'We come to like these girls and to enjoy their company. This element, especially coming from a young male director (just 24 years old when *Shady* was made), is worthy of applause.' (2014) But perhaps most importantly, the extras are looked forward to by Waddell as a result of this appraisal, suggesting that viewers should anticipate them. This speaks volumes about the *NEO* critics' expectations for disc extras from this specific distributor and, subsequently, its standards for other DVD labels. The potential viewing experience of DVD releases is highly praised within *NEO*. It is also not seen as a negative when a film is only available in this format (in contrast to Blu-Ray and online streaming). This



was the case for both *Re-Cycle* and *Shady* (Waddell, 2012; 2014), which demonstrates how integral DVD is to distributors that target UK consumers of Asian media.

Various types of films have been discussed throughout this article, though most have been labelled 'cult', and both 4Digital Asia and Third Window have demonstrated a consistent treatment of them. In addition, the reviews in *NEO* have illustrated a constant appreciation of the efforts of the DVD label alongside the characteristic traits of the films reviewed (whether they are positive or negative). The majority of the space in the review articles may be dedicated to criticism of the films, but these opinions are closely tied to the assessments of the discs' packaging and extra contents. Within *NEO* magazine, the names and reputations of particular distribution labels are used as standards against which other releases can be judged. This is a significant reflection of the interests of UK consumers of Japanese films and other forms of Asian media. Viewers of these titles, and readers of *NEO*, clearly have an interest in not just the content of the DVD releases, but also the work that makes them available.

### **Biographical note:**

Jonathan Wroot teaches Film Studies classes at the University of Worcester – specifically on Audience Research, Authorship, Cult and Exploitation Cinema, and Film Reviewing. His PhD thesis investigates the distribution and marketing of Japanese films on DVD in the UK – through the packaging, extras, trailers and websites of 4Digital Asia and Third Window (in addition to their reviews in *NEO*). Some of these findings have been published in the online journal *Frames*, and other findings have been presented at conferences in Bournemouth, Coventry, London, Manchester and St Andrews. His PhD was awarded by the University of East Anglia. Contact: [jlwroot@googlemail.com](mailto:jlwroot@googlemail.com).

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## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> 'Story', MCM Expo Group website, <http://www.mcmexpogroup.com/story/> (accessed 22/04/2014).

<sup>2</sup> 'Shows', MCM Expo Group website, <http://www.mcmexpogroup.com/shows/> (accessed 22/04/2014).

<sup>3</sup> *NEO* magazine was launched in 2004. It is now not the only UK publication dedicated to Asian media, as a new magazine was launched in 2012 called *MyM* – 'Home', *MyM Magazine* website, <http://www.mymags.net/> (accessed 22/04/2014).

<sup>4</sup> 'NEO Magazine – About', *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/neomagazineuk/info> (accessed 22/04/2014). This statement was formerly on the *NEO* website, but the magazine and its webpages were redesigned in 2011.

<sup>5</sup> One DVD release from Third Window, *Turtles Are Surprisingly Fast Swimmers* (dir. Satoshi Miki, 2005), was not reviewed in any issues of *NEO* from 2008 to 2010 – despite its release date on 23/02/2009. *NEO* was aware of the film, though, as it mentions the DVD's release date in Issue 53, January 2009, 22; and also as part of an 'Asian Movies 2009' preview feature in Issue 54, February 2009, 36. In the feature article, the film is described as 'hilarious', which implies an opinion by the author, David West, though it is not categorised as a review.

<sup>6</sup> 'Silk Purse Enterprises - About', *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/SilkPurseEnterprises/info> (accessed 22/04/2014); 'Japanglish – About', *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/Japanglish.translation/info> (accessed 22/04/2014); 'Cine Du Monde – About', *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/CineduMonde/info> (accessed 22/04/2014); 'Home', *Cine Du Monde* website, <http://www.cinedumonde.co.uk/> (accessed 22/04/2014).

<sup>7</sup> Waddell, C (2009d), 'Fine, Totally Fine', *NEO*, No.58 (May), 77 – © *NEO* Magazine and Uncooked Media.

<sup>8</sup> Waddell, C (2009f), 'Cyborg She', *NEO*, No.65 (November), 74 – © *NEO* Magazine and Uncooked Media.

<sup>9</sup> *Cyborg She* was released by 4Digital Asia on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2009. Its special features contained a making-of; a special effects featurette; footage from the film's showings at the Yubari Film Festival, its premiere, and its official national release day; interviews; and several trailers and TV spots.

<sup>10</sup> Harold Pinter is a critically acclaimed playwright, who was awarded a Nobel Prize in 2005, suggesting that his style of drama and writing is unique – 'Home Page', *Harold Pinter* website, <http://www.haroldpinter.org/home/index.shtml> (accessed 23/04/2014).

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*Reality Bites* (dir. Ben Stiller, 1994) is a film which depicts a love triangle between three college graduates living in Houston, and emphasises its stylistic and contemporary 1990s setting – ‘Reality Bites’, *IMDb*, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0110950/> (accessed 23/04/2014).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> West’s mention of Urasawa Naoki is a reference to the original *manga* that the film is based on – which is also explained on the 4Digital Asia website: ‘20<sup>th</sup> Century Boys: Introduction’, *4Digital Media* website, <http://www.4digitalmedia.com/20cb/> (accessed 23/04/2014).

<sup>13</sup> The extras for *Cyborg She* were explained earlier. *Lala Pipo* was released by Third Window on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2010. Its extras included a making-of, an interview with the cast, and its trailer.

<sup>14</sup> The review explains that the film is an adaptation of the manga *Love Vibes* by Sakurazawa Erika.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Schrader (1972), *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*, University of California Press; David Bordwell (1994), *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema*, Princeton University Press, 1994; Catherine Russell (2011), *Classical Japanese Cinema Revisited*, London: Continuum.

<sup>16</sup> Lynch’s films are often noted for their puzzling content and visuals - Erica Sheen and Annette Davison (2004), ‘Introduction’, in E. Sheen and A. Davison (eds.), *The Cinema of David Lynch: American Dreams, Nightmare Visions*, London: Wallflower, pp.1-4.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Silk Purse Enterprises - About’, *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/SilkPurseEnterprises/info> (accessed 22/04/2014); ‘Japanglish – About’, *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/Japanglish.translation/info> (accessed 22/04/2014); ‘Cine Du Monde – About’, *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/CineduMonde/info> (accessed 22/04/2014); ‘Home’, *Cine Du Monde* website, <http://www.cinedumonde.co.uk/> (accessed 22/04/2014).