Loss in the Land of Toys:
_Purikyua_ and the Marketing of Childhood Nostalgia

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Abstract
This paper explores the relationship between perpetual innovation and connection to an unchanging past in the media content and merchandising of the children’s series _Purikyua_. Using an ever-expanding array of merchandisable devices in regularly renewed worlds, _Purikyua_ functions as a celebration of transformation in both the structure of its narrative and its transmedia networks. At the same time, numerous elements of _Purikyua_’s content and affiliated events centre on moral lessons valorising children’s closeness to an unchanging identity or previously lost past. The merchandising of the series encourages children’s enactment of that closeness, resulting in a system that both asks children to connect to the past and positions that connection as ultimately attainable through engagement with _Purikyua_. This paper combines analysis of the 2009 _Purikyua_ film with a broader discussion of the series’ structure and merchandise. _Purikyua_, like many similar children’s franchises, simultaneously glorifies change and fixates on maintaining the past without change. Through its intense merchandising, nostalgia becomes intimately intertwined with consumerism, displaying children’s regained connection to the past as the goal of their participation in the transformative realms of _Purikyua_ and its many toys.

**Key Words**
Children’s media, toys, merchandising, nostalgia

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Introduction
The popular girls’ series _Purikyua_ utilises a comprehensive and intricate style of renewable character merchandising that at first glance appears to glorify absolute and continual change. _Purikyua_, a work made collaboratively by Toei Animation, Asahi Broadcasting Corporation and Bandai Namco, draws on the reality-blurring potential of the media mix to bring the series into the everyday lives of child participants. Through complex systems of collectible merchandise, _Purikyua_ encourages children to not only own items embla-
zoned with the images of characters, or play with figurines that look similar to characters, but to engage in the same activities and accumulation-based development as its characters. This development, however, is predicated on an awareness of loss and a sentimental emphasis on the unchanging, promoting connections to the past and positioning merchandise and media consumption as a gateway to appreciation of one’s personal history.

In this paper, I will discuss the ways by which much of the available merchandise for Purikyua emphasises the formation of close personal relationships between the product and the individual, and uses innovative merchandise to highlight the ambiguous ground between purchasing Purikyua merchandise and participating in the ever-changing, ever-expanding world of Purikyua content. As a close examination of the 2009 film Fresh Purikyua! Eiga: Omocha no Kuni wa Himitsu ga Ippai!? indicates, however, the world of constant change that is Purikyua is also marked by a simultaneous trend towards glorifying unchanging relationships based on attachment to the past. I will argue that these coexisting impulses result in a system in which the merchandising and marketing of Purikyua formulate the development of an all-encompassing Purikyua world through the consumption of childhood nostalgia. 1)

The many mixes of Purikyua

In 2011, Bandai issued a survey asking the parents of 2,000 children to indicate their children’s favourite characters (Bandai Namco Group, 2011a). 2) Wedged between the characters that have dominated Japanese children’s media for decades—including Kamen Rider, Super Sentai, Anpanman, Doraemon, and Hello Kitty—is Purikyua shirizu (translated variously as the Pretty Cure or Precure series), a series that began in 2004, and unlike most of the other highly popular series with which it contends, is explicitly targeted at girls.

The gendered nature of the show is made adamantly clear by toy creator Bandai, which features Purikyua on its website ‘Bandai Girl’s Channel’. Toei Animation’s website for the 2010 HeartCatch Purikyua! film states explicitly that the show is targeted at girls aged 4–6, although a press release for a 2011 Purikyua attraction invites participation from girls aged 2–8 (Bandai Namco Group, 2011b). In one study of elementary students, an impressive 90 percent of the girls interviewed said they liked Purikyua—a noticeable contrast to the 57.1 percent of boys who claimed to dislike the series (Fujita, 2009, p. 82). The above-mentioned Bandai survey also makes clear the gender segregation in interest: while Purikyua is the top-ranked character amongst girls aged 3–5 and 6–8, and reached fifth place for girls aged 9–12, it never once reached the top ten within any age group amongst boys. In fact, the number of respondents who chose Purikyua as their child’s favourite character amongst both genders combined is almost identical to the number of parents of girls who chose Purikyua, suggesting that girl audiences account for almost all of the show’s popularity. 3)

One interesting feature of the Purikyua series is its division into multiple sub-series; for the sake of clarity, I will refer to these as ‘seasons’, although the term is highly misleading. ‘Season’ usually implies some degree of continuity; namely, a series that has an ongoing plot but is split into multiple units. Purikyua, however, is essentially released as a wholly different series approximately each year, with only the general concept remaining the same. 4) That general concept involves a standard ‘mahō shōjo’ narrative: two or more junior high school student girls are approached by magical fairies from another world, who transform their mobile phones into a magical accessory. The girls use their phones to transform into ‘Cures’, which involves a change in clothing and hairstyle, as well as the acquisition of magical powers and combat skills. They employ
their new powers to fight monsters created by the servants of an evil villain from another realm. The plot alternates between the girls’ everyday lives and their battles as Cures. Within this framework, most elements of the show change depending on the season. This results in considerable variation in terms of the characters, the characters’ relationships, the fairies and their relationships with the characters, the types of monsters they fight, the goals of the evil villains, the other realms from which the fairies and villains come, the number of Cures, the thematic emphases of the series, and even the graphic style. As of September 2017, there have been fourteen Purikyua seasons, and the series has undergone twelve complete renewals.

In many ways, Purikyua is simply yet another iteration of tropes that have long pervaded Japanese children’s media franchises. Its episodic superhero structure is used amply throughout children’s television shows, and ‘mahō shōjo’ stories have been common throughout the history of girls’ manga and anime. Purikyua could be understood as a recent incarnation of the most internationally famous of these works, Sailor Moon (1991–2004). Sailor Moon also included a Toei Animation television show broadcast on TV Asahi, toys released by Bandai and a manga released by Kodansha’s Nakayoshi. Purikyua’s similarities to Sailor Moon, however, are less fascinating than its myriad differences. While Purikyua was first developed by a team of Toei Animation staff with the purpose of creating a media mix work, Sailor Moon began as a manga that is almost always looked to as the definitive, or original, work. The plot and characters continued throughout its five television seasons, and it was more highly sexualised—all aspects that, according to Noguchi Tomoo’s 2010 article on Purikyua’s success, can be considered mistakes from which the makers of Purikyua learned. Ideologically, there are other points of difference: whereas magical girls have historically not been shown actually fighting, but rather defeat villains through magic spells, the Cures primarily fight through punching, kicking, and other physical combat (although they finish off the job with magical spells). Furthermore, Purikyua is less overtly focused on heterosexual romance, choosing instead to emphasise familial relationships, female friendship, and occasionally female relationships with romantic overtones. Perhaps most significantly, Sailor Moon was also less unabashedly consumerist, with its marketable elements seeming relatively mild in comparison to Purikyua.

While Purikyua is usually compared to Sailor Moon, it may be more accurate to compare it to TV Asahi’s long-running Super Sentai series. Like the Super Sentai series, Purikyua is an Asahi series, shown during their Sunday morning superhero lineup; the series renews approximately every year; it involves transformation sequences based on elaborate technological magical accessories that can easily be reproduced and sold to children; it stresses friendship, not romance, as the key thematic emphasis; and it involves copious amounts of hand-to-hand combat. While the Super Sentai series is tokusatsu rather than animation, and geared towards boys, the similarities between the two series are striking. In fact, toys are marketed explicitly using the idea that the two franchises are different gendered sides of the same coin, exemplified in an ad shown on TV Asahi in May 2011 for plastic dishes decorated with images of Asahi’s superheroes: the ad showed a girl saying ‘I’m Purikyua!’ followed by a boy saying ‘I’m Go Kaiger [the 2011 Super Sentai season]!’. The ad then showed the entire collection of dishware, which consisted of two essentially identical sets distinguished by colour and character—the Go Kaiger version represented by the boy was blue, whereas the Purikyua version represented by the girl was pink. A ‘superhero’ show at the 2011 Tokyo Toy Show featured characters from Kamen Rider, Go Kaiger, and Suite Purikyua fighting together as allies, and a pull-out comic in Kodansha’s magazine for children aged 2–4, Otomodachi, featured the characters of Go Kaiger and Suite
Purikyua engaging in everyday activities together as friends.

As its commonalities with Sailor Moon and Super Sentai suggest, Purikyua is in many ways very similar to what has come before. It can, however, seem more heavily commercialised than its predecessors. Purikyua’s usage of a renewal system like that of Super Sentai, combined with the additional flexibility of animation, has enabled Purikyua to refine its media content/toy marketing system in a way that increasingly merges both elements.

‘Looking is fun, collecting is even more fun!’

The epitome of Purikyua’s commercialism can be found in the words adorning the pages of a Fresh Purikyua! (2009) book. Rather than a storybook, the book is a collection of information and details about the characters, story, and, of course, merchandise of Fresh Purikyua!. Written in bright yellow bubbly letters on the first page of the book’s catalogue-esque collection of photos and descriptions of Fresh Purikyua! merchandise is the caption, ‘Looking is fun, collecting is even more fun!’ (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 15). The use of this phrase shamelessly moves the catalogue beyond simply tempting children with photographs of Purikyua merchandise to directly entreating them to purchase (or ask their parents to purchase) those products. This focus on explicitly illustrating the connection between the child and the toy is further shown on the packaging for Purikyua merchandise, which typically include a photograph of a child dressed as a Cure and holding the toy. Sometimes numbered instructions are also featured, displaying vividly how the toy can be used identically to the correlating item in the television show.

Items in the show are introduced according to a principle of development through constant acquisition. As the characters learn and develop positive relationships with others, they accrue new items. Typically, these involve small collectible pieces (such as jewels or sweets) that can be attached to and then used in a variety of ways with larger, more complex items (such as wands or smartphones), so that each type of merchandise creates incentive to collect the other. Similar to Anne Allison’s discussion of what she terms ‘Pokémon capitalism’ (2006, p. 197), perpetual accumulation is the key. ‘The logic of Pokémon,’ Allison states, ‘is not confrontation but accumulation: the never-ending quest to “get” more pokémon that, though starting out as opponents, are assimilated into (rather than exterminated by) the self’ (2006, p. 255). In a more explicit formulation, she claims: ‘Addiction to the rush of acquisition is part of the pleasure in Pokémon’ (2009, p. 187). Cultivating an ‘addiction to acquisition’ is, of course, as crucial a goal to the makers of Purikyua as it was for Pokémon—and perhaps even more so, given the unusual level of input that toy merchandiser Bandai had upon the series.

Toei Animation, TV Asahi Broadcasting Corporation, and Bandai work together closely to decide on the series’ content, particularly making use of Bandai’s knowledge about the children’s market to ensure that the content suits current trends and fashions amongst the target demographic (Noguchi, 2010; Hartzheim, 2016). Bandai’s expertise also comes into play when ensuring that the accessories used by the Cures to transform are easily marketable; in fact, one might see the increasing influence of merchandising concerns in the gradual change of visual representations of the accessories over time. While the accessories in Purikyua’s first season were subtly integrated into the narrative, they have featured ever more prominently in each subsequent season. Since the 2012 season Smile Purikyua!, advertisements and animation sequences merge images in the standard animation style with computer generated images of the actual toys available for purchase, a strategy which both draws attention to the visually distinct toys and highlights the connection
between toy and narrative.

Merchandising is also a key consideration in the use of Purikyua’s strategy of yearly renewal. While not an innovative idea—the Super Sentai and Kamen Rider series have been using this strategy since their origins in the 1970s—it is the first application of such a comprehensive scheme to a show targeted towards girls, and is the most recent iteration of this scheme. Purikyua was formed from all that was learned from Kamen Rider and Super Sentai, as well as all that was learned from previous ‘magical girl’ series, and benefits from the adept combination of those ideas. Changing a series completely on such a regular basis provides a number of advantages: extensive further merchandising possibilities is the most obvious advantage, but such a strategy also guarantees that plots and characters are always reasonably accessible to new audiences, ensures that the characters are always able to keep up with the latest trends in fashions and accessories, and essentially grants the creators endless opportunities to form ever more perfect products by refining the characters and scenarios based on what was and was not successful. There are a host of benefits to Purikyua’s renewal system for Bandai, Toei Animation, and Asahi Broadcasting Corporation, but for the purposes of this paper, the system results in one outcome of overriding importance: the creation of a constantly reimagined world that is constructed without end in always new ways. Each Purikyua item is part of a vast transmedia network that has been constructed to promote its own continuation, and thus operates according to the logic of perpetual expansion and proliferation.

The systems of Purikyua merchandise remade for every season are joined by a variety of other merchandise and events designed to bring the world of the child consumer and that of Purikyua closer. The MP3 player used by the main character of Fresh Purikyua!, Rabu, has a real-world companion that plays the Fresh Purikyua! theme song; advertisements encourage children to practice dancing like Rabu and her friends. When a new toy is displayed on the television show, its introduction is typically followed immediately by advertisements for that toy (sometimes multiple advertisements shown back-to-back). The Cures themselves appear in numerous events, represented by actresses in full-body outfits. While most of these events involve simple appearances, some are more interactive: in one event related to the film’s release, Rabu gave dancing lessons to the children in attendance.

Purikyua’s strategies to promote specific merchandise and general engagement with the narrative also serve to blur the boundaries between the fantastic world of the media content and the everyday life of the child participant. Due to Purikyua’s focus on replicability, it is possible to have a lifestyle that essentially mimics that shown within Purikyua. A child can listen to music as Rabu does, mix perfumes using the same bottles and scents used by one of Rabu’s fellow Cures, or make ‘animal sweets’ like the characters in 2017’s Kirakira Purikyua A La Mode. The more fantastical elements are equally replicable. One can care for the needs of a demanding digital fairy character on a Purikyua smartphone, act out the transformation sequences with complete Cure outfits and fully-functional accessories, and even participate in the Cures’ battles against evil as an audience member or ‘miracle light’-wielding ‘supporter’. For those who want to get closer still to the world of Purikyua, the Purikyua Narikiri Studio, located in a rotating handful of shopping malls across Japan, is a cross between a store and a theme park. Costumes are available for dress-up, as well as games, toys, and backgrounds against which the new Cures can have their photos taken. Bandai’s marketing emphasises the changeability of the Cures by making their transformations replicable by child audiences.
Purikyua shows a perpetually expanding world, a world created through regular and total transformation. Driven by the promotion of acquisition, it is not limited by a single story, a single set of characters, or even a single universe. Instead, the characters, stories, universes, and merchandise multiply endlessly, never designed to reach an end. Purikyua does not simply reproduce narratives in multiple adaptations, or even use the more common media mix strategies of expanding on the adventures of a set of characters or exploring the boundaries of a set world, but goes further still: it is driven by concept alone. With each of its forms adhered together only by the malleable boundaries of an abstract concept, Purikyua becomes a media mix that can persistently adapt to the latest trends, revise itself to fix less successful elements, hold the attention of even the most easily distracted audiences, and most importantly, expand its boundaries endlessly into the lives of children and their parents.

Changeable girls, changeable worlds

Reflecting the multiplicity of its media franchising, the narrative content of Purikyua depicts change with a celebratory attitude. The celebration of change in Purikyua’s narrative takes four key forms: 1) the physical transformations of the characters (as well as the fairies and accessories), 2) the embrace of forward-thinking, optimistic attitudes that talk explicitly about moving towards the future’s potential, 3) the relatively progressive gender values embodied by the show, which convey appreciation for social change, and 4) a thematic emphasis on change in the narrative, which sees the emotional and physical metamorphosis of key characters dominating the plots of many Purikyua seasons. Although these themes are largely applicable to all Purikyua seasons (with some exceptions), I will use the example of the 2009 film and television season of Fresh Purikyua! to illustrate these four focuses on transformation.

Fresh Purikyua! centres around Momozono Rabu, a cheerful, kind-hearted girl who is defined equally by her positive attitude and her ceaseless devotion to her friends. Rabu’s transformed form is the pink-themed Cure Peach, while her friends transform into other fruit-themed Cures. The monsters in Fresh Purikyua! are created by servants of the evil lord Moebius from the planet Labyrinth by attaching a gem to ordinary objects such as vending machines, wigs, or blackboards to make often silly-looking monsters with properties related to the original object (for example, a vending machine monster shoots juice and coffee onto innocent bystanders). The three Cures must fight these monsters by returning them to their previous state, and ultimately, must defeat Moebius himself, who is revealed to be a supercomputer seeking to take over all of the universe’s memory.

The most visually outstanding forms of transformation that mark Purikyua are the vigorously highlighted and exhaustively repeated transformation sequences—which are, not coincidentally, the element of ‘mahō shōjo’ works most frequently discussed by scholars. It is notable that when the characters turn into their Cure forms, they are effectively different people: Cure Peach is addressed as Cure Peach, and on associated official books and websites, the characters are usually referred to by both of their forms. The main characters of all Purikyua seasons, then, are first and foremost defined by their lack of singularity; from episode one of each season, which sees the lead character gain their Cure form, to the TV Asahi Purikyua websites that show each character both as a girl and as a superhero, to the transformation sequences that indicate the main action of each episode or film, the defining element of Purikyua’s leading characters is their possession of two forms. Furthermore, the show is based on a variety of other transformations: fairies turn into keys,
ordinary objects turn into monsters, and villains have their own transformations that parallel the Cures’.

This thematic emphasis on transformation takes place in the context of a series that is deeply oriented toward the positive power of the future. The season of *Fresh Purikyua!* in particular reinforces the focus on change with its exaggerated optimism and future-oriented outlook. Rabu’s catchphrase, ‘I’ll get happiness!’, epitomises the attitude of the season: looking forward with the belief that the future can be shaped in a positive way. This focus on acquiring happiness, as with Allison’s discussion of *Pokémon* cited above (2006, p. 255), suggests an accumulation-based conception of emotion. Happiness is not something that one simply experiences, but something that can be actively attained. Both happiness and unhappiness remain a temporary state that can be fought or acquired, like the monsters the characters fight (which, notably, are designed by the villains to inspire unhappiness) or the items Bandai encourages audiences to collect.

For all its pink, cuteness, and fixation on fashion, *Purikyua*’s depiction of gender roles is surprisingly wide and at times, even subversive. The gender politics of *Purikyua* are analysed extensively by Masuda Nozomi, who discusses the relatively unconstrained gender roles that mark the first *Purikyua* season, noting, for example, the unusual choice of black for the main character’s theme colour (2009, p. 107). The form of fighting depicted is also unusual: Cures battle not with the spells common to ‘mahō shōjo’ characters, but by kicking and punching their attackers—when the sight of young girls physically attacking anything is essentially absent from mainstream Japanese children’s media, this can be seen as a subversion of usual gender roles (2009, p. 109). As discussed above, there is also little emphasis on romance in most *Purikyua* seasons, which distinguishes the series from the passionate romance that guides *Sailor Moon* (2009, p. 111). While Masuda is less encouraged by what can be seen as a reversal of some of *Purikyua*’s more subversive elements in the later season *Yes! Purikyua 5*, some of the series’ unique gender portrayals remain—and in *Fresh Purikyua!*, which was released after Masuda’s article was written, some of the changed elements of *Yes! Purikyua 5* (such as the emphasis on heterosexual romance) are reversed yet again. Suzuki Mishio, a Yomiuri columnist, also discusses the progressive elements of *Purikyua* in contrast to the ‘mahō shōjo’ stories of her youth:

> There is neither a king to protect them to the last, nor a prince to come and save them. Their girlish shapes, with ribbons on their torsos and earrings in their ears, are covered in mud as they grapple with enemies who wish to devour the world, or villains who crush the weak. They do not yield to any power, no matter how strong, and they certainly never give up. Relying on no one and sticking to their own convictions, they are independent heroines. (2010; my translation.)

*Purikyua*’s use of ‘independent heroines’ suggests another form of transformation: a belief in social transformation, particularly that which moves along a predetermined path of linear progress that sees physically strong, autonomous women as the model to be emulated, and positions accumulation of abilities and representative character types as the ideal form of transformation.

Echoing the physical transformations that so dominate *Purikyua*, and drawing on the optimistic, forward-thinking attitude embraced by the show, the emotional transformations of the characters are a key element of *Fresh Purikyua!’s* narrative. The fifty-episode season roughly follows two twenty-five episode narrative arcs, both of which revolve around the transformation of a main character. These are not the surface-level transfor-
mations of Rabu into Cure Peach, but deep changes that reflect on the very identity of the characters involved: the villain Eas’s transformation into the beloved friend and ally Setsuna/Cure Passion, and the transformation of the cute fairy Chiffon into the ‘universe’s memory’. Both arcs are centred on complete, all-encompassing transformations that are visually reinforced by changes in the characters’ appearance. These narrative arcs reveal a focus on transformation that reaches beyond the premise of the series. Change in *Fresh Purikyua!* is a persistent thematic preoccupation, encompassing multiple levels of form and narrative.

The vengeance of the abandoned

A closer analysis of *Fresh Purikyua!* shows tensions in its apparent celebration of change. The 2009 film *Omocha no Kuni wo Himitsu ga Ippai!?* follows the Cures and Usapyon, a well-loved stuffed bunny of Rabu’s who has been relegated to her closet for many years, as they travel to the Land of Toys. In order to save the toys that have begun disappearing from Earth, the characters must fight the Toy Majin. They eventually learn the Toy Majin is in fact not a single entity but a massive conglomeration of abandoned toys planning to take over Earth as vengeance for the children’s betrayal of their beloved playthings. When Usapyon joins the Toy Majin, Rabu has to tearfully apologise to her beloved toy. One person’s tears, however, are not enough to cure the bitterness of thousands of abandoned toys. Usapyon claims that they need to gather the hearts of all children who love their toys. Rabu then implores children in the audience to use the ‘miracle lights’ they were given upon entrance to the cinema to express their true love for their toys, and when the toys see how many ‘miracle lights’ are shining, they realise they were never forgotten. This is a dramatic variation on a popular theme, in which abandoned objects return to seek vengeance on their owners; it is a simple folktale writ large, expanded to all children, and intensified by the creation of a world existing entirely for the abandoned toys.

The theme of transformation is as pervasive in this film as in the rest of the *Purikyua* franchise. There is still the obvious transformation of girls into Cures (and in this film, a second level of such transformation, as Cure Peach gains a new form as Cure Angel), but the transformations do not take only these surface-level forms. There is also the transformation of the toys, objects that undergo an unsettling transition from lovable companions to vengeful spirits; the Toy Majin, a being composed of thousands of toys, who from that already altered and fluid form is finally transformed to a single teddy bear; the Land of Toys, formed from a re-positioning of toys as inanimate objects owned by humans to living creatures inhabiting a world of their own making; the final form of the Land of Toys, which at the end is transformed from a deserted, deadened plane to a green, flower-studded field; and Rabu’s own emotional transformation, as she learns to value her stuffed toy.

The Land of Toys is not a world of unique communities, places, or individuals for which the characters are shown to care. It is formed rather of a curious mixture of childhood and loss. It is a bright, playful world, featuring buildings made of multicoloured blocks, a fountain topped by a smiling pink whale, and streets filled with toy trains and wind-up figurines. At the same time, it is inhabited by toys rejected by their owners, abandoned—and filled with bitterness and a desire for vengeance due to that abandonment. Loss is a key element of this story: loss of one’s childhood toys by one’s own negligence, a loss that leads the same toys to intense action against their prior owners. The Land of Toys itself, by virtue of being formed of abandoned toys, is essentially a world created through loss. The association with folklore further places this story as one
of the past; children can be saved from the corruption of progress not only by remembering their toys, but also by remembering the stories that instructed them to remember their toys. In this construction, wisdom lies in connection to a threatened past.

As an interesting point of comparison, there was another film released only two months before *Omocha no Kuni* that employs similar themes to create a world very much like the Land of Toys. *Hottarake no Shima: Haruka to Mahō no Kagami* (2009) is a CGI film produced by Production I.G. *Hottarake no Shima* shows a young girl, the isolated Haruka, entering a world made entirely of items abandoned by humans (the titular Hottarake no Shima). Like Rabu, Haruka is poignantly reunited with her bitter, abandoned stuffed toy, and again like Rabu, Haruka’s tear-filled embrace of her toy earns her both forgiveness and a powerful ally. The world of *Hottarake no Shima* is far more elaborately developed than its Purikyua equivalent, but it also exists primarily to form a connection between a young girl and her personal past. The most powerful form of magic on Hottarake no Shima is, in the end, a mirror which contains Haruka’s memories of her childhood.

The similarity of the two works to the 2017 transmedia work *Himitsuno Coco Tama*, which is predicated on the (cute and collectible) spirits of objects no longer in use, shows that this particular trope remains in use today. Furthermore, works based on worlds that exist primarily to help a child connect to their own past—stories in which elements of the child’s life before they reach the new world remain a constant presence and even drive most of the story in the other world—are common in contemporary Japanese children’s films and other related media. In many stories, the alternate worlds entered by the characters involve explicit and powerful connections to the character’s past life in the ‘real’ world, allowing them to better understand themselves, their family, and/or the community in which they live. Coming to terms with their past, and creating a future based on enduring ties to that past, is a recurring theme.

In *Hottarake* and *Purikyua*, however, memories of the non-fantastical world are not simply present, but the all-encompassing basis of the other world’s creation. The past becomes a tangible presence, creating the very ground they walk on, the buildings they pass, and the characters with whom they interact. The alternate world is the past, brought to life in a new way. In these lands formed of memories and loss, growth and development occurs not through independence from the past but by strengthening the character’s ties to the events, objects, and people of their past. In *Hottarake no Shima*, Haruka must remember her early childhood. In *Omocha no Kuni*, Rabu must learn to care for Usapyon once again. Crucially, the use of the ‘miracle lights’ connects this moralising directly to the actions of the children in the audience, as Rabu’s plea asks that they reaffirm their own love for their toys, and the ultimate defeat of the Toy Majin is portrayed as partially due to their efforts. These past worlds, then, exist to fortify young children’s ties to the world they knew and the objects they loved, showing characters who develop into more mature individuals not through forming new connections in an unfamiliar world but through understanding their past relationships in deeper, more meaningful ways.

The world of *Omocha no Kuni* is one in which the past has pervaded every building block. It is the past of children who have begun to grow, but the film suggests that their development was not an ideal form of development. They rejected their old toys—the things they had once loved, and a crucial connection to their childhood memories—and moved on to new toys. They grew in a way that involved a rejection of what they had once been and what they had once treasured. *Omocha no Kuni* positions this growth as negative, and directly contrasts children’s attempts to develop a new sense of identity to their formation of powerful
emotional connections to their own past and childhood. *Purikyua* valorises a strong adherence to a sense of self tied always to the past, with any movement forward based on looking backwards.

**A Cure for progress**

*Purikyua* in general, and *Fresh Purikyua!* in particular, provides the viewer with a world of constant, ever more creative transformations in form and content. We have girls who become magical warriors, mobile phones that become vessels of powerful magic, rivals who become allies, everyday objects that become monsters, and infant-like fairies who become the world’s memory. In the *Purikyua* series, we have a system of yearly renewal, resulting in total transformations of plot, setting and characters, and taking place within an already perpetually changing stream of content created and re-created for every new medium to which this massive media empire extends.

At the same time, however, the television series, in its own roundabout way, develops a world that celebrates changelessness. The objects may become monsters, but this is presented as a sort of corruption of their nature; the transformation is temporary and never absolute, always creating monsters that retain basic characteristics of the original objects. The Cure’s attacks, with names such as ‘Healing Prayer’, are positioned as essentially purifying the monsters, bringing them back to their true forms.

Furthermore, a strong sense of unchanging identity pervades, exhibited in the pre-established, shallow and stereotyped personalities given to each character, marked by each character’s theme colour and catchphrase. The characters rarely change throughout the series in any noticeable way. Moral lessons are learned in individual episodes, but they do not seem to result in lasting changes in the characters. Even when transformed into Cures, the characters maintain their trademark theme colours, personal values, and established relationships with others. Despite such dramatic visual transformations as those that turn the girls into Cures, or that turns the villain Eas into Cure Passion, true personal transformation is repeatedly rejected in favour of a simple, static sense of identity.

The ending of the television series, which pits the Cures’ humanity against a terrifying computer, reiterates that humanistic mentality. It is the movement into the future by building more powerful computers that becomes our downfall. As in the film, it is knowledge of past worlds—our personal past and our society’s non-digitalised past—which saves us. Similarly, the emphasis on valuing one’s toys may seem to exist as a counterpoint to *Purikyua*’s ever-changing merchandising system, a system in which toys are designed to become out-dated the very next year. The message of the film is one that values the one stuffed bunny rabbit a child treasured throughout their childhood; it portrays a childhood characterised not by the endless flow of new toys alongside new media, but by a single stuffed animal, reminiscent of the call for ‘creativity-developing German toys’ referenced by a *Purikyua* critic (Hori cited in Yamamoto, 2010). In a sense, Usapyon’s character challenges the very project of *Purikyua*: Rabu’s own lovingly-remembered childhood is not a multi-media world supplemented by a constant influx of new merchandise, but a time of playing in the nearby field, sitting in her grandfather’s tatami shop, or cooking dinner with her mother—accompanied always by a single stuffed bunny. The Land of Toys forms a rejection of the renewal system that characterises *Purikyua*, adding yet another counterpoint to the emphasis on change that at first seems to define the franchise.

In *Omocha no Kuni*, the past quite literally comes back with a vengeance. The world the Cures enter has become a physical embodiment of the past, memories, and loss. The toys are what we once treasured, and
now abandoned. They are both toys, of the sort that the Purikyua series relies on, and links to an intimate personal past. The narrative is predicated on an unrelenting focus on Rabu’s past as the key to knowledge about the future she must create. It is based on sentiments intrinsically attached to Rabu’s childhood (as shown by a flashback to her as a child, refusing to allow her mother to throw Usapyon away). Moving forward to the happiness-filled future promised by the Purikyua series requires an embrace of one’s own past—the things one once knew (to love one’s toys), the things one once owned (the toys themselves), and ultimately, the person one once was. Given the unchanging sense of identity that pervades Fresh Purikyua!, it makes sense that a deeper understanding of and connection to the essential self would be necessary to form a positive future. In Fresh Purikyua!, this is repeatedly emphasised, as the characters one by one become more deeply connected to that which they always were. From Rabu with her beloved bunny to Eas’ dramatic transformation and every Cure in the Purikyua series who remains fundamentally the same person even after regular, rapid, and total transformation of their physical form, the problems presented in Purikyua are ultimately not solved through transformation, but by appeal to an assumption of the unchanging (and essentially good) nature of the human heart.

What is most significant about the appeal to the past as it is expressed within Omocha no Kuni is the explicit connection that is wrought between the actual child audience and the sentiments expressed in the film. Through the ‘miracle light’ that is called upon at the climax of the film, the Cures are meant to succeed not through their fighting abilities alone, but through the many hearts of toy-loving children. When the children in the audience are explicitly asked to express their love for their toys, the film moves from a general theme of treasuring one’s toys to an explicit, clearly stated appeal for children to show their true feelings of love for their toys to help the Cures.

In one of the more intriguing events related to the release of the Fresh Purikyua! film, this thematic focus on caring for one’s toys was made explicit. The application form for an invitation to an October 25, 2009 screening of the film advertised the presence of a ‘toy doctor’ who would fix children’s broken toys free of charge. This event made clear the connection between the film’s message—treasuring and caring for one’s toys—and the real lives of the child audience: the press release for the event states that ‘this film . . . features the bonds between the hearts of toys and the children who treasure their toys as its theme’ (Toei Animation, 2009). It then explains the toy-fixing event as being ‘in conjunction with this theme,’ and finishes on an imperative note: ‘Precious toys are precious friends. Always take care of them!’ (Toei Animation, 2009). This is a direct statement to child audiences, explicitly connecting the theme of the film to the real lives of the children and, through the toy-fixing event itself, demonstrating a way in which the values presented in the film can actively be applied to the lives of the children.

The world of Omocha no Kuni is a haunted world, in which the past refuses to be abandoned, always returning to enact revenge on those who neglected that which they once loved. This form of haunting, however, does not only happen to fictional characters placed in everyday situations, but is connected directly to the lives of every viewer of the film. As with many elements of the Purikyua series, the haunting of vengeful toys does not sit calmly in the contained spaces of its medium, but seeps into the lives of real children. The story recreates itself in multiple media forms, and blurs the boundaries between presenting values as they relate to fictional characters and the child audiences themselves. To participate in the Purikyua series, children are asked to explicitly connect their own emotions to Bandai-approved actions, which may
involve both constant acquisition-based progression and a simultaneous rejection of any progression that is not based on strict attachment to the past.

The world of Purikyua is replicated in myriad toy stores, homes, and events—places transformed, if only temporarily, into locations of an ongoing, ever-changing set of Purikyua-infused narratives. As Purikyua extends across multiple media platforms, years, and nations, it also refuses easy containment in another world. Becoming a Cure, taking care of a digital fairy, and using your ‘miracle light’ to help Rabu save the day are all clever ways of engaging children, and particularly of engaging them in a way that sells merchandise, but they are also ways of allowing the narrative to enter children’s everyday lives. What type of entrance has that been? First and foremost, one that sells products: a life filled with toys, and the appreciation of those toys magically transformed into an ethical value. Omocha no Kuni is nothing if not a celebration of consumerism. Loving toys is conflated with loving one’s friends, and most significantly, with loving the past. In the logic of Purikyua, toys define our past, and they must define our present and future as well.

Beyond its blatant consumerist values, however, the Cures’ entrance into our world brings with it a colourful selection of mismatched ideologies. It is marked by unresolved tensions: the themes of continual change, expressed through a resolute clinging to an unchanging past. Purikyua is a series that is always moving forward, periodically re-creating itself in such a way that the past becomes irrelevant, forming an endless stream of new content, asking children to transform their world and themselves to fit always changing desires. Purikyua relies on constant innovation of form, and it does this while decrying the concept of innovation.

The haunting of the past depicted in Omocha no Kuni, and the unchanging identities in Fresh Purikyua! more generally, stand in opposition to most interpretations of Japanese anime, particularly those created for children. Fluidity and transformation, while a common focus in English-language scholarship on Japanese anime, essentially shows only half of the world of Purikyua. Despite a scholarly fixation on the transformations of ‘maho shojo’ characters, Rabu’s identity, regardless of her alternate form of Cure Peach, is very much defined by a ‘singular essence’ (Allison, 2001, p. 257); namely, her pink, happy, loving nature that is present even in her name. Any representations of a mutable identity—Eas’ transformation would be the most obvious example—are carefully positioned as a realisation of one’s true inner nature. The presence of merchandise that seeks to connect children’s lives to that of the Cures can be seen not as an attempt to appeal to a child’s fluctuating identity in a postmodern world, but as constructing a childhood past that is heavily infused with, or reliant upon, Purikyua merchandise. Purikyua shows a world where toys become placeholders for childhood nostalgia, creating memories that will then become a part of children’s treasured personal past, but always branded with the Bandai logo. In a series that glorifies perpetual transformation on every level, it is that which resists transformation, that which refuses change, which is ultimately valued. The continual transformations could even potentially be interpreted as an assertion of the power of the unchanging self: the natures of the Cures, and the other people and objects around them, remain so steady they can be maintained whatever form they assume. No matter how radical the transformation, it can never bring about lasting and significant change.

In Fresh Purikyua!, we are presented with multiple, powerful, and visually stunning transformations that occur within a bright, future-oriented world that at first glance appears disconnected from any notion of the past. The function of fluid identities here is inextricable from the series’ merchandising, as the transformative
impulse has become heavily gendered and consumer-based. *Purikyua* uses mutability as a gripping visual display that creates increasing opportunities to integrate the lives of girls with Bandai’s toys. The glorification of transformation does not, however, replace connection to the past, but rather accompanies its construction as the sentimental centerpiece of the series. In the land of *Purikyua*, the child must change—and that change must be marked clearly by merchandise acquisition—but change ultimately brings the child ever closer to a world that might otherwise be lost. Through *Purikyua*’s integration of the series with children’s everyday lives, transformation to regain the past functions didactically: by participating in related events and ‘supporting’ the characters in their filmic journey, children are asked to directly enact a personal connection to a threatened past.

**Notes**

1) All discussions of *Purikyua* texts used in this article, as well as press releases and other materials from Bandai Namco, are based on the Japanese-language versions, and all translations are my own. Translations of other works are noted as such.

2) The survey results were released on June 2011 and were based on the reports of parents of 1,000 girls and 1,000 boys between the ages of 0 and 12.

3) It is possible that boys enjoy *Purikyua* but do not inform their parents of this, or that parents of boys are reluctant to report their child’s enjoyment of *Purikyua* in a survey. Either of these scenarios, however, would suggest that there is considerable social pressure placed on boys to deny their love of *Purikyua*. Based on the numbers given, it would seem that only one of the 1,000 boys consider *Purikyua* their favourite character.

4) As the entirety of *Purikyua* is referred to as *Purikyua shirizu*, to use a word other than ‘series’ seems inappropriate.

5) While the functions of the character’s mobile phones are the most elaborate, other accessories also act out their roles in a real-life context; for example, the ‘Cure Sticks’ used by the characters in *Fresh Purikyua!* take the form of instruments that light up and play music when casting spells to defeat the enemy, actions imitated by their toy replicas.

6) This theme is presumably based on spirits in Japanese folklore called *tsukumogami*, usually translated as ‘artifact spirits’. *Tsukumogami* are spirits of objects who sometimes seek vengeance on those who wronged or abandoned them. Stories that involve reconnecting to the spirits of abandoned objects are prevalent in children’s series, as discussed further below.

**References**


