

A Blue Cat on the Galactic Railroad: Anime and Cosmic Subjectivity

LOOKING UP AT THE STARS does not demand much in the way of movement: the muscles in the back of the neck contract, the head lifts. But in this simple turn from the interpersonal realm of the Earth's surface to the expansive spread of the night sky, subjectivity undergoes a quietly radical transformation. Social identity falls away as the human body gazes into the light and darkness of its own distant past. To turn to the stars is to locate the material substrate of the self within the vast expanse of the cosmos.

In the 1985 adaptation of Miyazawa Kenji's classic Japanese children's tale *Night on the Galactic Railroad* by anime studio Group TAC, this turn to look up at the Milky Way comes to serve as an alternate horizon of self-discovery for a young boy who feels ostracized at school and has difficulty making friends. The film experiments with the emergent anime aesthetics of limited animation, sound, and character design, reworking these styles for a larger cultural turn away from social identities toward what I will call *cosmic subjectivity*, a form of self-understanding drawn not through social frames, but by reflecting the self against the backdrop of the larger galaxy.

The film's primary audience consisted of school-age children born in the 1970s, the first generation to come of age in Japan's post-1960s consumer society. Many would have first encountered Miyazawa's *Night on the Galactic Railroad* (*Ginga tetsudō no yoru*; also known by the Esperanto title *Ĥokto de la Galaksia Fervojo*) as assigned reading in elementary school. After the text was discovered among Miyazawa's papers after his untimely death in 1933, the story's audience gradually grew, and by the postwar period it had

ABSTRACT In the 1980s, Japanese animation shifted its focus away from the social self and toward *cosmic subjectivity*, the framing of intensely personal emotions within the larger impersonal expanse of the universe. This essay examines an important moment in this shift: *Night on the Galactic Railroad*, anime studio Group TAC's 1985 feature based on the classic Japanese children's tale by Miyazawa Kenji. The film emphasizes the interpenetration of the microcosmic and macrocosmic through a range of experiments with "limited" animation, sound design, and character design that would in turn influence the imaginary worlds of later anime. REPRESENTATIONS 128. Fall 2014 © The Regents of the University of California. ISSN 0734-6018, electronic ISSN 1533-855X, pages 124–58. All rights reserved. Direct requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content to the University of California Press at <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp>. DOI: 10.1525/rep.2014.128.5.124.

become one of the most well-known children's stories of modern Japan. Not unlike Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* (1943), the story has gone on to inspire all manner of adaptations into other expressive forms, including theater, dance, and most recently a best-selling application for the iPad.¹ Countless other popular Japanese narratives draw directly and indirectly on its plot and imagery.

As the tale opens, the main character, Giovanni, is struggling. His father is away on what appears to be an illegal hunting trip and is late returning home, leaving the young boy open to constant bullying at school. To make matters worse, his mother is bedridden. Unable to rely on his parents, Giovanni works before and after school setting type at a print shop to help make ends meet. He has no time to study or socialize, but he does have his vivid imagination. This proclivity to daydream only leads to more teasing, however.

On the night of his town's annual Centaurus festival, Giovanni escapes the celebration (and further teasing) to head alone up a nearby hill. Lying on the grass, he nods off while gazing up at the stars, absently recalling the astronomy lesson he had heard in class earlier that day. Moments later, he is a passenger on a giant steam train moving across the Milky Way. On the seat facing him he discovers Campanella, the only one of his classmates to stand up for him at school and Giovanni's only friend. As the train travels across the galaxy it passes through different constellations, each appearing to the boys as a type of mystical and symbolic landscape. Giovanni gradually comes to understand that the train is serving as transportation to the afterlife for the recently deceased, and his friend Campanella—he eventually realizes with a shock—numbers among them. He will later learn that Campanella drowned in the local river earlier that evening while saving a classmate who had fallen into the water. Unlike Campanella and the other passengers on the Galaxy Express, Giovanni discovers that he possesses a rare form of ticket allowing him to return to the world of the living at the end of the journey. When he wakes up back on the hill, he makes a vow to follow Campanella's self-sacrificing example and “work for the happiness of all people.”

The anime studio Group TAC (1969–2010) was well situated to reimagine Miyazawa's most famous tale for a younger generation of anime viewers. The studio consisted of former sound and animation staff from Mushi Productions, Tezuka Osamu's legendary anime production team.² The film's director was Sugii Gisaburō, a protégé of Tezuka who had worked under him on the seminal television anime *Astro Boy* (*Tetsuwan atomu*) in the 1960s. Sugii made his directorial debut with Mushi Pro's television series *Adventures of the Monkey King* (*Gokū no daibōken*, 1967) and later received accolades as animation director for Mushi Pro's groundbreaking,

if commercially unsuccessful, psychedelic erotica *Belladonna of Sadness* (*Kanashimi no Beradona*, 1973).

The studio tapped two additional high-profile creators to join Group TAC on the project. Leading Japanese avant-garde playwright Betsuyaku Minoru adapted Miyazawa's story into a film script, making subtle alterations and adding one entirely new character. Hosono Haruomi composed the melodious synthesizer score, fresh from the global success of his pioneering electro-pop trio Yellow Magic Orchestra. Besides doing well at the box office, the film received the official approval of the Japanese Ministry of Education and won the prestigious Ōfuji Noburō Prize at the 1986 Mainichi Film Awards. The film's critical and commercial success raised the story's popularity to new heights in the 1980s, cementing the importance of Miyazawa's work among a younger generation of viewers.³ At the same time, Group TAC's film marked a turning point in the history of anime and its engagement with the shifting contours of Japanese subjectivity.

In an essay penned around the time of the film's release, Betsuyaku notes a shift in Japan in the relationship between what he describes as the subjective *foreground*, the things an individual can immediately touch and feel in the near distance, the *background*, a far-off realm connected with the world or universe as a whole often associated with transcendence, and the *middle ground*, or the realm of the social that mediates between the other two. For Betsuyaku, the fragmentation of Japanese society in the 1980s into more personal, privatized identities and the splintering of Japanese culture into various subcultures led to a weakening of the role of the middle ground. Instead, individuals increasingly sought to connect the foreground realm directly with the background, bypassing the social dimensions of self.⁴

Japan was at the time reeling from several decades of rapid economic growth and a shift to full-scale consumer capitalism, with the social movements of the late 1960s gradually transforming into more privatized forms of identity and belonging in the 1970s. By the early 1980s, the focus on economic and cultural nation building had receded, and, spurred on by the rapidly proliferating options available in the cultural marketplace, Japanese began looking elsewhere for new frames of meaning for their lives.

A new "religion boom" focused on a search for new forms of "authentic" sensation beyond social or historical frameworks, from seeking out one's past lives to experiments in extrasensory perception. The popular "new academicism" best sellers of the mid-1980s sought to rethink human existence through emergent perspectives from poststructuralism, postmodernism, ecology, and cybernetics. Meanwhile, tourism campaigns and popular travelogues emphasized journeys into exotic and often evacuated landscapes, both foreign and domestic.⁵

These cultural trends coincided with a marked shift in Japanese audiences' relationship to fictional narratives. Sociologist Mita Munesuke dubs the period from the mid-1970s to 1990 the "age of fiction," noting that around this time fictional works in a wide range of media stopped attempting to reflect or engage with existing social realities and instead sought to provide immersive alternate "worlds" audiences could escape into. Sociologist Miyadai Shinji expands on Mita's periodization, noting how these fictional worlds were playing an increasingly central role in the formation of individuals' subjective identities.⁶

Religious studies scholar Haga Manabu describes how the "expressive individualism" of the period made new demands on subjectivity, emphasizing the assertion of individuals' difference from those around them, often through consumer choices in lifestyle, fashion, and media. Whereas earlier media technologies focused on bridging distances between individuals and creating new possibilities for communication, the younger generation instead sought to use media technologies to *increase* the distance between themselves and others, bracketing off social identities and providing alternative frames for envisioning the self.⁷

Night on the Galactic Railroad and Miyazawa's larger corpus fit snugly into this search for new subjective frames. Miyazawa's stories from the 1920s and early 1930s attempt to rethink religion and human identity through an expansive and integrative vision of the cosmos. The author was known for his idiosyncratic attempts to synthesize religion and science; his enthusiasm for obscure pursuits like vegetarianism, children's stories, and Esperanto; and his devotion to the agricultural livelihood of his native Iwate prefecture. While his interests were unusual among Japanese authors at the time he was writing, by the 1980s the type of cosmic subjectivity presented in *Night on the Galactic Railroad* was very much in vogue.

Within the context of the 1980s shift in subjectivity away from a socially oriented self and toward more privatized and individuated identities, anime emerged as a key site in the search for imagining a subjectivity based in something beyond the (increasingly fraught) context of a reflective social identity. As I will argue, the precise sensory ambiguities of limited animation, sound design, and character design in Group TAC's *Night on the Galactic Railroad* offered 1980s audiences a powerful framework for bracketing out the social and reimagining subjectivity against an expansive cosmic background.

Group TAC's film holds an important spot in an influential line of theatrical anime drawing on both religion and science to position the human subject as but a small part of an expanded cosmos. Earlier anime with cosmic settings often relocated existing social dynamics to outer space, as in the so-called "space opera" anime exemplified by the *Gundam* and *Macross* series

(beginning in 1979 and 1982, respectively) and the Miyazawa-referencing *Galaxy Express 999* (*Ginga tetsudō surii nain*, 1978). In contrast, Group TAC's *Night on the Galactic Railroad*, along with Oshii Mamoru's two early directorial efforts *Urusei Yatsura: Beautiful Dreamer* (1984) and *Angel's Egg* (*Tenshi no tamago*, 1985), envision the cosmos through more reflective, quieter, and more personal landscapes.⁸ These mid-1980s experiments would in turn be important precursors to the subsequent decade of highly influential anime including *Royal Space Force: The Wings of Honneamise* (*Ōritsuuchūgun: Oneamisu no tsubasa*, 1987), *Akira* (1988), *Ghost in the Shell* (*Kōkaku kidōtai*, 1995), and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (*Shinseiki evangerion*, 1995–96), all of which paired sensational action sequences on Earth with more reflective meditations on the cosmic and deep-historical dimensions of self.

In the period following these works, what I am calling cosmic subjectivity would come to be understood within the rubric of *sekai-kei*, a genre of anime, manga, video games, and light novels roughly translated as “world-type.”⁹ As Alexander Zahlten writes, a *sekai-kei* work “synchronizes its protagonists’ intimate emotional quivers with the fate of the entire world.”¹⁰ Rising to prominence in the wake of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*’s phenomenal popularity, these works present a bipolar narrative where an intensely local, personal relationship (most often a love story) is intertwined with the fate of the planet or the galaxy, often in the form of an apocalyptic crisis. As Motoko Tanaka notes, references to a larger social context (Betsuyaku’s “middle ground”) are largely absent in *sekai-kei* stories, favoring instead a bipolar structure where the intimate details of the protagonist’s life are decisive for the continued existence of the world as a whole.¹¹

Studies of the genre connect it with concurrent debates over social-withdrawal syndrome (the *hikikomori* phenomenon) and larger concerns over young men’s refusal of “maturity” in favor of continued fantasies of personal omnipotence.¹² Media theorist Azuma Hiroki notes the tendency of *sekai-kei* works to be preoccupied with “self-absorbed versions of the world” and reads the genre through a Lacanian framework. Traditionally, the inner world of the Imaginary and the radically external realm of the Real would be mediated by the Symbolic, an inherently social domain. Echoing Betsuyaku’s earlier formulation, Azuma argues that with recent generations of Japanese, the role of the Symbolic has weakened, creating a situation where the Imaginary intersects more directly with the Real. Notably, he traces the origins of the *sekai-kei* genre back before *Evangelion* to the early 1980s novels of sci-fi author Arai Motoko. Yoko Ono pushes the lineage back even further, proposing, “It is possible to consider that the quintessence of *sekai-kei* has existed from the early stages of Japanese Sci-Fi, particularly in the ones for juvenile audiences.”¹³

Along with Arai’s work, *Night on the Galactic Railroad* can be understood as an important precursor to the later development of *sekai-kei* and the more

general turning away from the “middle ground” of the social to a more direct interpenetration of foreground identity and background universe. There is no direct threat of apocalypse in Miyazawa’s story, but Giovanni’s confrontation with his friend’s death, within the context of a children’s tale, amounts to something equally earth shattering. Similarly, while there is none of the teenage romance typical of later *sekai-kei* narratives, Giovanni’s intense emotional investment in Campanella’s friendship, on which everything in Giovanni’s world appears to hang, serves as a prepubescent substitute. The collapse of the Symbolic and the struggle to become a full social subject is a strong theme in the film as well, from Giovanni’s difficulties setting text while working in the print shop to his inability to speak when called upon in class.

Recognizing *Night on the Galactic Railroad* as a proto-*sekai-kei* work helps connect the later genre with a wider set of issues surrounding the transformation of Japanese subjectivity in the 1980s. While discussion of *sekai-kei* has largely been limited to subcultural “otaku” lineages in manga, anime, video games, and light novels, Group TAC’s *Night on the Galactic Railroad* marks a point where these specific media histories match up with larger shifts in spirituality, tourism, and other quests for novel experience aiming to provide alternate frames for subject formation beyond the social.

Cosmic Subjectivity in 1980s Japan

As noted earlier, by the 1970s and 1980s Japanese tourism was becoming less about encountering other places, peoples, and cultures and more about reflecting on and reimagining the self while moving toward unfamiliar horizons.¹⁴ Travel through unknown landscapes was much in vogue at the time of the film’s production. Group TAC had already participated in the larger exotic travel boom of the 1970s, promoting a rural mythos through its television series *Manga Tales of Old Japan*. Series director Sugii Gisaburō subsequently decided to spend some time away from the anime industry, setting off to travel the country from the mid-1970s to the early ’80s before finally returning to helm *Night on the Galactic Railroad*.¹⁵ According to Sugii, the goal of his journey was to leave the familiar everyday world behind. He describes his travels as a way to “open up space” within himself for new ideas and inspiration, space he drew on when he later sought to render Giovanni’s otherworldly journey in animated form. He notes, “I could make *Night on the Galactic Railroad* precisely because I had traveled. My approach to visual expression greatly expanded after these experiences.”¹⁶

Hosono Haruomi similarly brought a range of travel experiences to bear on the soundtrack for the film. At the time of the film’s release he was at the

apex of his long-term engagement with musical exotica, a style surfacing in albums like *Cochin Moon*, a 1978 collaboration with graphic artist Yokoo Tadanori based on a trip the two made together around India. In December of 1984, the same month he was composing his score for the film, Hosono gave a concert with Yasuno Tomoko at Tokyo's CineVivant under the title "La Musique Exotique," an evening that would become part of the emerging world music boom.¹⁷

A few months earlier, Kadokawa, a leading Japanese publisher, had arranged for Hosono to travel with religious studies scholar and "new academicism" icon Nakazawa Shinichi to a number of esoteric holy sites around Japan. Hosono and Nakazawa recorded a conversation at each stop on their itinerary, which Kadokawa then published under the title *Sightseeing: Pilgrimage to the Sacred Places of Japan (Kankō: Nihon reichi junrei)*. The book reached stores in June of 1985, just a few weeks before the theatrical release of Group TAC's film.¹⁸

Here, too, Miyazawa was ahead of his time. The author's initial inspiration for *Night on the Galactic Railroad* is said to be a train and ferry trip he made in August 1923 to Sakhalin, then under Japanese rule. The trip was ostensibly work-related, but Miyazawa's writings from the time make it clear it was also a voyage of mourning for his sister Toshiko, who had passed away the previous November of tuberculosis. Many speculate that this experience of a train moving through unfamiliar landscapes as a vehicle of grief inspired Miyazawa to later conceive of a galactic train on its way to the afterlife.¹⁹

Group TAC's *Night on the Galactic Railroad* animates these various experiences of reflective travel, mapping them onto a place all can see but only the imagination can actually journey to: the constellations of the Milky Way. Giovanni's trip through the galaxy provides him with a way to connect his own material existence with the larger cosmos. At the same time, this outward journey also serves as a journey inward. As he moves across the Milky Way, Giovanni maps his own emotional and physical past onto the deeper historical layers of the galaxy. Otō Yōko alludes to this in her review of the film in the major Japanese film magazine *Kinema Junpō*, where she notes how it gives audiences the feeling that "every cell of our bodies is part of the universe, while our bodies constitute a universe in themselves."²⁰ The middle social layer drops out, and instead subjectivity (and the human body) are reconceptualized through a cosmic register.

This shift in subjectivity is signaled in the film each time Giovanni turns away from the pain of his social identity to gaze up at the stars in the night sky above him (fig. 1). Giovanni repeats this gesture many times throughout *Night on the Galactic Railroad*. By the end of the film, when he looks up one last time, it serves as a synecdoche for the reframing of identity enacted by the film itself.



FIGURE 1. Giovanni gazes up at the Milky Way. *Ginga tetsudō no yoru* (*Night on the Galactic Railroad*), directed by Sugii Gisaburō (Tokyo, 2002), DVD. All images are from this DVD.

Mapping Miyazawa's Cosmos

The turn away from the pain of social life and toward a cosmic embrace is a central theme in many of Miyazawa's poems and stories, and before analyzing the film more closely it will be helpful to outline Miyazawa's unique cosmology. In her dissertation on his poetry, Sarah M. Strong describes Miyazawa's vision of the sky as "an oceanic vastness, a sacredness into which he hoped to merge his own limited identity."²¹ The cosmos described in Miyazawa's poems often moves from an emotionally painful social realm near the Earth's surface, then passes through the clouds into gradually purifying and painless layers on leaving the Earth's atmosphere behind. This centrifugal movement culminates in the far reaches of the Milky Way, where Miyazawa locates the Christian and Buddhist heavens. For Miyazawa, the heavens serve as a realm beyond the painful realities of social identity, a place where the social subject gradually falls away to reveal a more pure and profound image of consciousness in contexts far beyond the planet's surface.

At the same time, this journey into the heavens enables a rethinking of what constitutes life back on Earth. In addition to the ethereal realms found by moving out into the Milky Way, Miyazawa imagines an intermediary realm of shifted perception at the Earth's surface, an "atmospheric" environment superimposed on the everyday reality of human life. Strong describes this atmospheric surface layer as "a realm of the imagination where the brightness

and magic [Miyazawa] associates with the upper space can work upon the objects of everyday reality, transforming them in subtle ways.” This transformed reality occurs through a sensitivity to “intricate convulsions of light,” entailing a “process of seeing the world with new or strange eyes.” In his poetry, Miyazawa first refers to this space as “atmospheric Japan” (*kiken Nihon*). He later takes to identifying this alternate world with the Esperanto-derived name Ihatov (*Iĥatōvu*), Miyazawa’s name for his own Iwate prefecture “transformed by imagination.”²² In the preface to his first book of stories, Miyazawa describes Ihatov as

a dreamland that really exists in the mind of the author. . . . There, everything is possible. One can instantly jump over fields of snow and ice to travel toward the north, riding the great wind that circles around the Earth, or one can talk with ants that crawl under the red cups of flowers.²³

Miyazawa, whose imaginary travel is always simultaneously both macrocosmic and microcosmic, stretches time and space to rethink the interior of the self through an expanded sense of the world outside. He is emphatic that Ihatov *really exists*, that it has no less claim to reality simply because it requires the imagination to access it.

Miyazawa is not usually associated with postwar developments in manga and anime, but his assertion of the validity of imaginary worlds as an alternate site of subjective investment should be understood as an important literary predecessor to the “age of fiction” that emerged a half-century later.²⁴ In reimagining Miyazawa’s tale as an anime feature, Group TAC draws on the author’s cosmic vision to experiment with limited animation, sound, and character design. While earlier anime creators had already begun exploring the aesthetic potentials of each of these domains, *Night on the Galactic Railroad* pushed each of them further, producing a landmark film that reimagined Miyazawa’s cosmic subjectivity through the specific audiovisual dynamics of the anime medium.

Limited Animation for Cosmic Subjectivity

Research into Miyazawa’s original story frequently attempts to map out the (often oblique) scientific and religious imagery woven through the tale.²⁵ Group TAC drew upon this research in attempting to render Miyazawa’s language in audiovisual form, only to be confronted with a different problem: how could Giovanni’s cosmic subjectivity be translated into an audiovisual medium without losing the abstract imaginative power of the original text?

Throughout the original story, Giovanni is constantly engaging with and exploring the novel perceptual environments around him, rather than

reflecting inward to try to make sense of his experience. Sugii focused on this environmental rendering of emotion as a guiding principle for Group TAC's film, noting how it would challenge anime's existing emphasis on discreet and distinctive characters:

I think film is overwhelmingly powerful in how audiences respond to everything in the image, including the landscapes, not just to what is described by the characters that appear within them. I do not want to make films that "make you understand" [*wakasareru eiga*], but films that "make you feel" [*kanjisaseru eiga*]. Take Giovanni's loneliness, for example. For a film to articulate this feeling, what matters is less Giovanni's actions and more the type of darkness that envelops him, the colors and shapes of the surrounding trees and grasses. These become the more important elements. We need to rid ourselves of the thinking in anime up to this point that believes that all meaning must come from the characters. By approaching landscapes and characters as equals, a film comes to naturally absorb the audience's attention. I want to give the feeling that humans are part of the landscape. This is the aim of *Night on the Galactic Railroad*.²⁶

Sugii describes the film as Giovanni's internal world "made panoramic," rendering the boy's emotions not through dialogue or responsive action but through shifts in the surrounding environment.²⁷ In this respect, the film reflects the type of emotional environments created by the dreaming brain, which tend toward orientational instability, a reduction of self-awareness, and an inability to distinguish between external inhabited space and internal affective response. Of course, Giovanni himself is dreaming for much of the film's running time (though first-time viewers may not be aware of this fact until Giovanni awakens near the end of the film and finds himself still lying in the grass).²⁸

In describing his vision for the film, Sugii emphasizes how Miyazawa's writing purposely leaves the story open to interpretation, refusing to explain everything to the reader. He understands this dimension of Miyazawa's style through his own formative experiences working under Tezuka Osamu, who practiced a similar form of illustrative restraint. Sugii recalls being skeptical when he came to work on *Astro Boy* and found Tezuka developing a style of animation where characters barely moved anything but their eyes and mouths. This was the birth of "limited animation," a term referring both to limiting animation's usual focus on movement as well as a limiting of the number of animation cels used in production. A standard twenty- to thirty-minute television animation at the time would have used around thirty thousand individual cels, whereas *Astro Boy* used around four thousand to cover the same amount of time. For Tezuka, this limited style was an altogether different art from the animated films of Walt Disney in the United States or Tōei Animation in Japan, and he insisted on calling it not *animēshon* but *anime*. He argued that anime was not simply a style born from the economic

demands of television animation; it also enabled an enhanced focus on story and feeling, in contrast to *animēshon*'s emphasis on movement. Sugii recalls skeptically sitting down to watch the first completed *Astro Boy* episode and being shocked at how emotionally moving this limited movement could be.²⁹

While the budget for a high-profile theatrical anime like *Night on the Galactic Railroad* would have allowed higher production standards than those employed in anime for television, Sugii instead drew on the less-is-more lesson of his early years with Tezuka.³⁰ In many ways, the film goes even more limited than *Astro Boy*, focusing at length on what is left unsaid and unseen, on what lies just over the horizon and in the pauses between on-screen movements. The emphasis here is not so much on silence or stillness themselves, but on the way limited movement opens up gaps (Sugii uses the term *sukima*) in the perceptual, narrative, and emotional fabric of the film, not unlike the uncertain distances between stations on the Galaxy Express. These gaps are akin to the “animetic interval” described by Thomas LaMarre, in which the perceptible disjuncture between layered anime cels departs from the “dynamic character movement” of full animation, and instead presents a distributed plane “available for disassembly and reassembly” by viewers as their gaze moves across the different layers of the image.³¹ *Night on the Galactic Railroad* emphasizes this kind of distributed perception not only through the animetic interval but also by opening up indeterminate fissures within the film's settings, sound design, character design, and narrative structure. By purposefully emphasizing these gaps, *Night on the Galactic Railroad* draws out connections between Giovanni's private feelings and the expanded background of the cosmos, rendering the microcosmic (the individual) and macrocosmic (the film/world) as one continuous and complex topology.

Both the film and Giovanni's train journey begin with disorientation. The opening shot of *Night on the Galactic Railroad* shows Giovanni nodding off surrounded by darkness. This image passes by in a flash, followed immediately by a cut to an overhead long shot of a small school building in an open field (fig. 2). The animation camera seems to swoop in a slow disorienting arc back and forth across this image, gradually drawing in closer to the school. This dizzying intro serves as the film's “establishing shot,” but rather than orienting viewers in space, it starts the film with an off-balance and inhuman perspective.

As the story develops, gaps proliferate. Giovanni lies down on the hill outside town, suddenly witnesses the arrival of a giant steam train, and a moment later is already on board. We never see him entrain, and later on he tells Campanella he doesn't remember boarding himself. When Campanella later appears on the train, he materializes on the bench across from

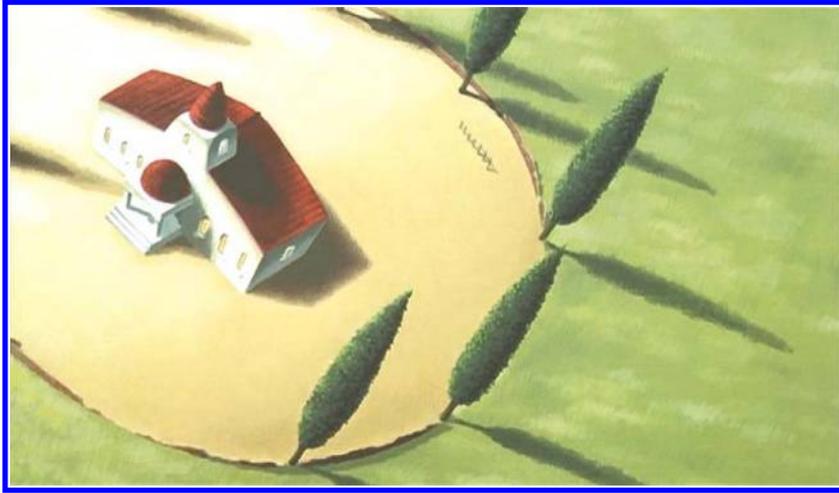


FIGURE 2. The off-balance “establishing shot” of Giovanni’s school.

Giovanni as if out of thin air. Other passengers and their belongings similarly fade in and out of existence.

When Giovanni and Campanella are worried about getting back to the train on time after the Pliocene Coast stopover they suddenly discover they can “run like the wind,” and the station appears in front of them just as they need it to. Smaller material objects are also physically responsive to emotion, such as Giovanni’s train ticket, the Bird Catcher’s birds, and the apples that multiply as desired. “Around here, things just seem to grow on their own, without effort,” one of the train passengers notes. This emotional-environmental reflexivity also works to erase: as soon as Giovanni begins to understand that Campanella has already died back on Earth, Campanella vanishes from his dream, as if responding directly to Giovanni’s unspoken realization.

The film’s cosmic environments appear to transform with the speed of thought. Strong argues that in Miyazawa’s tale “the train travels through a world informed by Buddhist cosmological concepts of layered heavens marked by increasing liberation from physicality.”³² While the Buddhist affinities are certainly present, for a simpler explanation we need only turn to the extraordinary physical transformations drawn up by both Giovanni’s dreaming brain and the imaginative hand of the animator. In both cases, physical transformations often move in time with the emotionality of a scene.

This tight reflexive circuit between private emotions and surrounding environments—a property shared by both dreams and later *sekai-kei* anime—finds further expression through the film’s hyperassociative design, one that populates the Milky Way with objects from Giovanni’s memory.

Many of Giovanni's experiences on the train echo things half-consciously perceived during the first part of the film when Giovanni is awake and moving around town. This includes his teacher's lesson on the Milky Way, the toy steam train Giovanni remembers playing with at Campanella's home, the article about a shipwreck Giovanni sets while working at the print shop, and numerous other small details. Each of these private memories reappears in Giovanni's dream mapped onto the larger emotional cosmos of the Milky Way.

These fragments are couched not in a coherent narrative logic, but within cavernous spaces full of loose ends and inexplicable encounters. The film's episodic structure—nineteen chapters marked by intertitles—expands on Miyazawa's original chapter divisions, first following Giovanni in his movement from place to place and then following the train from station to station along the Galaxy Express line. The transitions from episode to episode each mark an elision of an unspecified amount of time, broken by a white-on-black intertitle announcing each new chapter. The forward momentum of the film comes to a rest at each of these breaks, often with no strong link between the prior episode and the following one. This open, "distributed" form allows the sequencing in each section to be less tightly structured than in a more plot-driven work. Sugii describes a preference for films that are not "nice and tidy," but have a certain looseness as to what gets included. "The film is put together in such a way that you can throw in various elements and it would still hold together."³³ Rather than weaving everything into a continuous narrative based around Giovanni's conscious actions and reactions, the film explodes his identity into an open and immersive map of the stars.

The film's editor, Furukawa Masashi—who also worked with Sugii on *Astro Boy*—describes editing *Night on the Galactic Railroad* to focus on the pauses between actions.³⁴ This strategy allows viewers to shift to a more unfocused mode of attention, moving away from goal-driven action and reflective social identities. Art director Magoori Mihoko notes how the animators similarly focused on developing "a way of drawing so that objects seem to float up out of the light emerging within darkness."³⁵ The film's almost entirely nocturnal setting cultivates this atmosphere. The limited lighting implies a far larger landscape than it reveals, while at the same time rendering the larger cosmos dark and abstract, evacuated of social detail (fig. 3).

Sound Design for Cosmic Subjectivity

The sound design of the film echoes these unseen horizons, producing an acoustic image of the galaxy as a reverberant space of indeterminate



FIGURE 3. Light emerging within the darkness.

proportions. The key sound of the film, what we might call its tonic note, is the slow, stately *goton goton*, the clanking of the train as it lurches across the great expanse of the Milky Way. The sound is both lower and slower than the familiar rhythmic gasping of a steam train. Drenched in reverb, it trails a long decay appropriate to a sound echoing back across great cavernous distances. Visually, the train appears to be moving quickly, and yet the slow tempo of the sound gives the conflicting sensory impression that the train is nearly stationary.

This *goton goton* returns over and over during the course of Giovanni's journey, fading during conversations between passengers but always returning to recontextualize these dialogues within a larger impersonal frame. Sugii asked sound designer Kashiwabara Mitsuru for a sound resembling a mother's heartbeat heard from inside the womb.³⁶ The massive presence of this steam train echoing from the outside is in stark contrast to the hushed acoustics inside the train, where even the soft rustling of characters' clothing is clearly audible. These contrasts all point to the uncertain dynamics of Giovanni's cosmic subjectivity: light emerges out of darkness, inner quietude comes bathed in vast echoes, and immense spaces are rendered intimate. The train moves at great speed with the sensation of barely moving at all, while its engine's slow reverberations sonically contour the malleable space-time of the cosmos.

The film's music similarly references this vacillation between subject and environment. Sugii's instruction to Hosono for the score was to emphasize the wavering (*yureru to iu koto*) that characterizes Giovanni's fragile emotional state.³⁷ This quivering registers on the soundtrack through an emphasis on

tremolo. From the first low-octave rumble of the piano during the opening credits, Hosono and Kashiwabara lace the film with a wide range of wobbly, vibrating sounds, each poised somewhere between the synthetic and the organic. Underneath the train's *goton goton* is a barely audible oscillating waveform resembling something between wind and the hum of electrical wires. Other trembling synthesizer tones run throughout the soundtrack, such as the trembling low note of Hosono's "Phantasmic Fourth Dimension Theme" (*Gensō yoji no tēma*) and the distorted recording of Antonín Dvořák's *Symphony No. 9 in E Minor "From the New World."* The latter is warped, as if by the uncertain temporality of the handless station clock visible in the sequence. These pulsing frequencies rhyme with the repeated visual motif of stuttering electric light fixtures, as if the whole film was subject to a metaphysical power surge.

Inspired by Dvořák's melding of the folk music of his native Bohemia with elements of Native American music and African American spirituals, Hosono's cues for the film meld Christian hymns, somber requiems, Satie-esque nocturnes, and electronic signal processing. Each gives sonic form to Giovanni's wavering between foreground and background, self and cosmos, dreaming brain and distant horizons. Like the film's many religious references, the cumulative effect of the many cultural references in the music is their melting together into an amorphous mass of sound, effectively undermining any attempt by viewers to place the film within a particular social or historical context. The richly melodic yet spatially unstable textures of the music enable the film to feel warmly familiar at the same time as it hints at the ethereal cold of the cosmic environment it traverses.

This cosmic flickering comes to the fore in the guise of the Blind Wireless Operator, a new character Betsuyaku introduced into Miyazawa's original story when adapting the script. The Blind Wireless Operator is an elderly technician who first appears stumbling through the train on the way to a small radio room elsewhere in the locomotive (fig. 4). Once there, he listens intently to the audio signals his equipment picks up as the train moves across the heavens. He hears distant singing amidst heavy static and asks Campanella to transcribe the lyrics.

As Giovanni and Campanella later learn from a fellow passenger (a nun), the Wireless Operator is hearing the hymn "Nearer My God to Thee," a "prayer to be carried away to heaven." The lyrics, by nineteenth-century English poet Sarah Flower Adams, are loosely based on a dream recounted by Jacob in Genesis 28:11–19. The hymn sounds the film's theme of self-sacrifice in a particularly Christian context:

Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me;
Still all my song shall be nearer, my God, to Thee.



FIGURE 4. The Blind Wireless Operator.

This hymn was reputedly the last song played by the band on the Titanic as the ship was sinking. Sure enough, within a few minutes three new passengers (a tutor and his two charges) appear on the train after drowning at sea following their ocean liner's crash into an iceberg.³⁸

Betsuyaku describes his idea for the new character as a Wireless Operator whose job is to hear all the misery in the world.³⁹ An elderly blind man sits alone in a small windowless cabin as the train hurdles across the galaxy, stretching his ears to pick up and transcribe the invisible collective suffering of the universe. What his transcriptions are for is never made clear. What matters is this act of listening intently to the abstract suffering of the cosmos, transparent and detached from any particular individual. In other words, the Wireless Operator models a form of witnessing and memorial that moves beyond particular social contexts to impartially attend to a more impersonal emotional galaxy.

The Blind Wireless Operator, the Bird Catcher's call to "open your ears and listen to the swans outside," and Giovanni and Campanella's gigantic ears all serve as reminders of the importance of expansive listening in the film. Like the reverberant *goton goton*, these images of inclusive environmental perception serve as a constant reminder of distant horizons, the larger darkness that surrounds the visible. This is what Betsuyaku means when he says, "Not being able to see allows for various things to be seen more clearly."⁴⁰

Revealing the connections between Giovanni's private memories and the deep layers of the cosmos appears to be the purpose of the "Pliocene Coast" sequence, an especially mysterious interlude at the center of both



FIGURE 5. Cygnus Station.

the film and Miyazawa's original story. When Giovanni and Campanella disembark for a twenty-minute stopover at Cygnus Station, they enter a cavernous hall absolutely devoid of people but full of traces of their recent presence, like a ticking metronome and a still-smoking pipe. Art Director Magoori notes that while it seems people were in the hall just moments before, they could also have disappeared a hundred years earlier. Like a painting by Giorgio de Chirico, the hall connects an evacuated everyday architecture with the infinite that enfolds it (fig. 5).⁴¹

As they enter the station, the two boys' dialogue takes on a ritualistic quality, a rhythmic call and response in which Campanella continually echoes Giovanni's proposals:

GIOVANNI: Shall we disembark too? [*Bokutachi mo, orite miyō ka*]
 [Campanella nods.]
 GIOVANNI: Shall we walk around a little? [*Sukoshi, aruite miyō ka*]
 [Campanella nods.]
 ...
 GIOVANNI: Shall we open [the door]? [*Akete miyō ka*]
 CAMPANELLA: Sure. [*Sō da ne*]
 ...
 GIOVANNI: Shall we try going down [the stairs]? [*Orite miyō kai*]
 CAMPANELLA: Let's try going down. [*Orite miyō*]⁴²

The interpersonal rhythms of the Japanese language are highlighted here, but at the same time the repetition works to collapse the distance between

the two boys' perspectives, blurring the distinction between Giovanni and Campanella as discreet characters.⁴³ The speech has a back-and-forth quality not unlike the metronome ticking away in the hall. Through the hypnotic repetition of Giovanni's rhetorical questions, the boys become two halves of the same consciousness as it splits upon itself. As Tanaka notes, it is typical of the later *sekai-kei* works that "secondary characters are mirrors or shadows of the protagonist, whom they never seriously confront."⁴⁴

The cavernous and highly reverberant spaces of the station environs further blur distinctions between self, other, and surrounding landscape. As Giovanni and Campanella pass through the station and descend an impossibly long staircase into the subterranean caverns of the Pliocene Coast, they move down into the deeper layers of cosmic space-time (fig. 6). The boys pass through a curiously evacuated plaza resembling a fossilized version of their town square, and continue down to the banks of an underground river. There they come across the Professor, an archaeologist busy leading a team of workers to carefully excavate the fossilized remains of a "vos," a giant ancestor of the modern cow that, he notes, dates back to the Pliocene (fig. 7).⁴⁵ The Professor appears deeply concerned that the workers will accidentally damage the fragile remains of the beast. Giovanni asks him whether the fossils will eventually be displayed in a museum. His explanation, while at first oblique, points directly to the orientational instability of the cosmos itself:

No, we are here to provide evidence. For us, this looks like a thick, rich, fossil stratum. We have various kinds of evidence that these rocks are 1.2 million years



FIGURE 6. The staircase down to the Pliocene Coast.



FIGURE 7. The Professor.

old. But others might see this region as something completely different—it all depends on who is looking. That is, it could appear as water, or air, or even an empty patch of sky.

As the Professor implies here, the Pliocene Coast serves as an image of the cosmos glimpsed through the purifying forces of deep memory, where the last vestiges of reflective identity have been stripped away with the passing of the epochs—while, at the same time, echoes of the past continue to surface in different ways depending on the perceiver. This is an image of the cosmos both infinitely expansive and infinitely particular to the observer; a world that, as the Professor notes, “all depends on who is looking.”⁴⁶

Through sound design, music, and dialogue, *Night on the Galactic Railroad* fuses internal memories and external environments, connecting them through a series of nested rivers: the translucent subterranean river of deep space-time on the Pliocene Coast, the “silver river” (*ginga*) of the Milky Way, and the “Black River” (*kuroi kawa*) running by Giovanni’s town, where Campanella drowns trying to save his classmate.⁴⁷

Character Design for Cosmic Subjectivity

The sensory disorientations of the film’s visual and sound design combine with a simultaneous emptying out of the characters. By exaggerating the iconic simplicity of the drawn figure, Group TAC’s characters become sensory vessels for audiences’ experience of the cosmos. Interviews



FIGURE 8. Some of Group TAC's "troupe of cats."

and reviews published around the time of the film's theatrical release focused on its most radical departure from the original story: the use of anthropomorphic cats in almost all the major roles. Sugii says he had wanted to adapt Miyazawa's story for a long time, but was stuck on how to portray the human figures. As he notes, part of the esoteric appeal of Miyazawa's stories is the visual ambiguity of many of his characters.⁴⁸ The original tale provides almost no description of the boys' appearance, despite vivid depictions of the environments around them. Some characters have Italian names and eat European-style food while remaining recognizably Japanese in their attitudes and behavior, while other characters have Japanese names but resemble early industrial Europeans or Americans in their manner and dress.⁴⁹ The Italian-sounding names of the main characters had led the major Japanese public broadcaster NHK (*Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai* [Japan Broadcasting Corporation]) to use young Italian-looking actors in an earlier live-action production. Sugii was unsatisfied with this approach, as he wanted to preserve the indeterminacy of Miyazawa's characters, rather than letting the names alone determine their appearance.

Sugii was unable to find a way to maintain Miyazawa's descriptive ambiguity until he came across Masumura Hiroshi's 1983 manga adaptation of the story, which features a cast of anthropomorphic cats.⁵⁰ The director had found his answer. He sent out a memo to the Group TAC staff announcing that they would be making *Night on the Galactic Railroad* "as acted by a troupe of cats" (a *neko gekidan*; fig. 8).⁵¹

Of course, anthropomorphic animals were nothing new to animation, and Miyazawa's other stories also regularly featured animals in both speaking

and nonspeaking roles.⁵² The original *Night on the Galactic Railroad*, however, does not mention cats at all—and in fact Miyazawa is said to have disliked the animal. Somewhat ironically, then, the cats turned out to be a perfect medium for the visual indeterminacy Sugii sought to preserve. By placing cats in the lead roles, viewers would finish the film without a specific image of particular human boys, and their attention would be led more to the background cosmos surrounding the characters.⁵³ Compared to human figures and all the associations particular human faces bring with them, these more anonymous and unfamiliar cat faces blend easily into their surroundings. Sugii describes the cats as a “filter” on the visual that preserves the careful indeterminacy of Miyazawa’s writing.⁵⁴ Rather than depicting specific humans acting against an impersonal backdrop, Group TAC’s cats point to the cosmic interpenetration of subject and environment in their very design.

While early character designs for Giovanni and Campanella were close to those in Masumura’s manga, character designer Eguchi Marisuke eventually reworked them into creatures even more ambiguous than Masumura’s originals. The cats’ new physiognomy shifted to an uncanny distortion of familiar human proportions. With a short lower torso; wide legs and tail; and tall, sloping upper bodies, Eguchi’s cats have a lower center of gravity than humans, visually rooting them more solidly to the earth (fig. 9). Giovanni’s skin became blue, and Campanella’s pink, vivid colors that further alienate them from any familiar feline appearance. Their faces took on a more distant, and, as one reviewer points out, vaguely sad expression (fig. 10).⁵⁵ Insofar as emotions can be discerned on these faces, they express something between wonder and sadness, a fascination with the external world crossed with the pain of an internal one. In these characters, the common association of large anime eyes with increased expressive potential is inverted. The cats’ flat expressions stare out at the audience for most of the film, reflecting the surrounding environment while refusing access to any subjective depths not already visible in the landscape. The starkly graphic quality of the figures’ outlines likewise reveals little through contour or shading. Instead, the cats are formed from thick black lines enclosing uniform colors. The inscrutability of these feline actors adds to the story’s mystique while emphasizing its subjective dispersal. As Sugii puts it, the cats have a certain “mysterious transparency.”⁵⁶ Drawing on a classic image from modern Japanese literature, Giovanni’s and Campanella’s translucent faces often appear reflected in the windows of the train, composited against the dark landscapes flowing by outside (fig. 11).⁵⁷

Through this ensemble of transparent cats, the film builds on a trend in anime character design developed earlier in *Astro Boy*. Marc Steinberg has traced the emergence of what he calls the *character system* in the wake of Tezuka’s groundbreaking series in the early 1960s. Drawn characters like



FIGURE 9. A feline frame more rooted to the earth.



FIGURE 10. Giovanni and Campanella's transparent sadness.

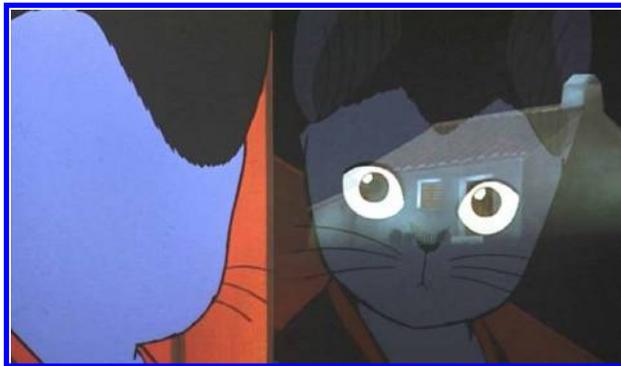


FIGURE 11. Giovanni's reflection through the train window.

Astro, Steinberg argues, achieve a kind of “dynamic immobility” in part because, unlike human actors or characters based on living subjects, they easily circulate across media and between objects. The character system tends toward the “erasure of origins” through the “increasingly nonlocalizable nature of the ‘original.’” The drawn character becomes an independent force that is highly mobile and instantly recognizable, does not age, and can be endlessly and easily replicated.⁵⁸

The *Night on the Galactic Railroad* animators, many of whom had worked with Tezuka on *Astro Boy*, push the subjective ambiguities implicit in the drawn character even further. The anthropomorphic blue cat has no real-world analogue, so doesn’t risk introducing into the film any direct reference to existing social realities. Instead, Giovanni’s transparent visage remains a blank canvas upon which viewers can paint their own individual hopes and fears.⁵⁹ At the same time, however, the film refuses to position the cats as portable, marketable, and merchandisable icons like Astro, by emphasizing the inseparability of the characters and the immersive galactic landscapes that surround and shape them.

Cosmic Subjectivity and the Reframing of Death

Through these experiments with limited animation, sound, and character design, Group TAC’s *Night on the Galactic Railroad* became a pivotal film for reimagining the larger turn toward cosmic subjectivity through the specific aesthetic potentials of the anime form. Its position as a “children’s film”—an official selection by the Ministry of Education—helped establish its influence among the young anime audience coming of age in the 1980s. The more recent comments posted to various clips from the film at the popular Japanese streaming website *Niconico dōga* often comment on viewers’ sense of nostalgia on revisiting a film first seen as a young child, and the strong impact the film made when they first saw it.⁶⁰

To better understand the implications of the cosmic subjectivity presented to these young viewers, I will now look more closely at how the film navigates the “middle layer” of social identity, and mark where the film still resists the solipsism of the later *sekai-kei* works. Despite its focus on the cosmic over the social, the film is at pains to gesture toward a renewed social commitment upon Giovanni’s return to the village at the end of his dream travels. There is, no doubt, an interpersonal aspect to Giovanni’s journey, inasmuch as it serves as a form of grieving for his suddenly departed friend and the pain of his larger social identity. In mapping his identity onto the cosmos, Giovanni is able to recontextualize his father’s absence, his mother’s

illness, and the death of his best friend as minor transformations within this larger and more persistent frame.⁶¹ This begins to pull Giovanni out of the intense isolation he feels at the start of the film, when his fraught social identity is all he has to frame his feelings. Giovanni's galactic journey gives him a way to understand his friend as simply moving to another part of the cosmos, one present each night in the form of the constellations floating above him. Giovanni's new intimacy with the galaxy doesn't make his sadness disappear, but renders it subjectively transparent (as illustrated by his cathartic facial shudder near the end of the film).⁶²

For a work aimed at young children, *Night on the Galactic Railroad* stages a remarkably direct encounter with loneliness, death, and mourning. It is Giovanni's transformation over the course of the evening that renders the film most distinct from the later *sekai-kei* works, where more circumscribed narratives often seem to offer little possibility for personal growth.

Night on the Galactic Railroad marks Giovanni's emotional growth through his shifting relationship with Campanella. Campanella is ostensibly Giovanni's best (and perhaps only) friend, and the story refers to their time spent together as younger boys. But the lonely Giovanni needs his friend more than his friend needs him. The classroom scene that opens the film succinctly presents this dynamic. Campanella keeps quiet to save Giovanni embarrassment when he cannot answer their teacher's question, and later he is the only one among the other children who refrains from teasing Giovanni about his missing father. However, Campanella is also the most popular boy in school (a trait physically marked through his taller stature and distinctive coloring). His responsibilities to the larger group mean that he is not always able to find time for his isolated friend.

As with later *sekai-kei* relationships, Giovanni's attachment to Campanella is from the beginning strongly rooted in a desperate wish to not be alone. On the train Giovanni is at first overjoyed at finally having Campanella all to himself, but this satisfaction is quickly tinged with fear that their time together might soon come to an end. He becomes annoyed when another passenger (the Bird Catcher) interrupts their conversation, and again on the arrival of the Tutor and his two young charges (the drowning victims from the sinking ocean liner). The older of the two children, a girl named Kaoru close to the boys in age, sits on the same train bench as Campanella, and the two easily strike up a friendly conversation. This sends Giovanni, seated across from them, into a fit of silent jealousy. The film registers this by fading out Kaoru and Campanella's conversation from the soundtrack, as if Giovanni's agitated emotional state is in effect overwhelming his ability to hear. At this point, in contrast to the *Blind Wireless Operator*, Giovanni is so busy worrying about himself that he has no emotional resources left to listen to the suffering of others. He eventually turns to look



FIGURE 12. Giovanni looks out the window to avoid facing Campanella and Kaoru.

out the train window as a way to hide his feelings (fig. 12). This turn away parallels Giovanni's many other turns away from painful social interactions in the film, though here the pain is particularly acute. He knows how pathetic it is to envy Campanella and Kaoru, who are simply making friendly conversation—not to mention the fact that both of them have drowned just moments before. At these moments, subject to lonely desperation, Giovanni's desire not to be alone overrides his empathy. After warming to the small kindnesses of the Bird Catcher and Kaoru, however, he gradually starts to open up and follow Campanella's lead in caring for those around him. This, however, leads to a larger set of ethical quandaries that become the focus of the film's final scenes.

The Tutor and his charges, the only human (non-cat) characters in the film, first appear after the train passengers witness the sinking of an ocean liner as it crashes into an iceberg (as I've noted, an unmistakable reference to the Titanic disaster).⁶³ As they take their seats on the train, the Tutor describes how the three of them have drowned and are on their way to the Christian heaven. He declares he decided it was better to sacrifice their lives than to prevent others from having a spot on the ship's lifeboats. The Tutor appears calm and almost smug about having discovered a way to get them into heaven by giving their lives for others. The act echoes Campanella's dive into the river to save a classmate, but in its intentionality it comes across as something calculated and self-serving.

In time, the train passes by the constellation Scorpio. Kaoru recalls the story of a scorpion who escapes a predator by leaping into a well, only to die

there regretting that its death could not have at least allowed its body to feed others. Soon after, the Tutor and his two charges disembark to enter into the Christian heaven at the Southern Cross. In Miyazawa's original story, Giovanni interjects at this point: "Who says you have to go to Heaven? My teacher says we have to create a place that's even better than Heaven right here." This leads to an unresolved argument about which God is the "true" God, implicitly contrasting the transcendent Christian heaven with Miyazawa's Bodhisattva ideal of continual self-sacrifice back on Earth. This religious debate is omitted from the anime, and Sugii transfers Giovanni's pledge to follow Campanella's model of self-sacrifice to the end of the film.

Sugii says he thought about cutting out every reference to religion, but also felt it was important to clearly state Giovanni's newfound resolve.⁶⁴ Yet while the film avoids placing Giovanni's resolution in the context of any particular religious tradition, it implicitly rejects the idea of heaven as an alternative social paradise arrived at by leaving this world behind.

When the train reaches the Southern Cross and the human trio disembarks, the scene is social and boisterous, with a long line of the newly arrived raising their voices in Handel's hallelujah chorus as they walk toward a glowing white cross (fig. 13). In contrast, other stops along the way are for the most part desolate and deserted, whipped by inhuman sounds echoing back across great expanses. This is especially true of the last stop along the line, the Coalsack (*sekitanbukuro*), a "hole in the sky" the train passes through to complete its circuit and bring Giovanni back to Earth.⁶⁵ Unexpectedly, this frightening maelstrom of utter darkness is where Campanella decides to disembark after declaring it to be "the true heaven" (fig. 14). The Coalsack has none of the warm sociality of the Southern Cross, and by alighting here Campanella chooses to confront the inhuman expanse of the galaxy on its own terms. At the same time, the Buddhist implications of this giant swirling vortex are clear: by throwing himself back into the "great wheel" of reincarnation, Campanella will be able to continue working for the well-being of others in his next life, embodying the Bodhisattva ideal.

Giovanni, too, finds himself back on Earth after passing through this final station, albeit still in the same existence as before. He joins the other villagers on the riverside just as the search for Campanella's body is finally called off. Then, turning one final time to face the stars, he vows to be like the scorpion and let his body "burn a hundred times over" for the happiness of everyone (fig. 15). Sugii says it very clearly: "What I'm saying to Giovanni through the film is this: If you want to find true happiness, go back to town."⁶⁶ The film ends by presenting Japanese and Esperanto titles set against a black screen: *Koko yori hajimaru* / *Nun komenciĝas* (Now it begins).

In these final moments, the film pushes for a return to the "middle layer" of Giovanni's social identity. However, it's difficult to say how much this



FIGURE 13. The deceased marching toward the Southern Cross.



FIGURE 14. The Coalsack.



FIGURE 15. Giovanni's final vow.

sudden reemergence of social responsibility affects the overall experience of the film. Emerging only in the film's last scene, Giovanni's sudden declaration of social commitment comes across as highly abstract, more a marker of his spiritual advancement than any concrete commitment to work toward social change at the local level. Given the earlier scenes with the Tutor and his charges, it is also difficult to disentangle the self-interested aspects of Giovanni's sudden will toward martyrdom from a more general desire to help others. His objectives are made further uncertain when he takes off running, conceivably headed home to his mother, but also headed away from the villagers gathered at the river and possible further confrontation with the other students and adults in town.

If the film largely avoids the middle layer of the social, however, the cosmic subjectivity it models can be said to be working, at least in part, toward an expanded framework for human (cat?) subjectivity. While criticism of later *sekai-kei* works tends to assume that the only alternative to social identity is an escape into the solipsism of fantasy worlds cut off from reality, *Night on the Galactic Railroad* maps out a way that anime might instead weave a posthuman subjectivity through the physical contours of our own galaxy, a context no less "real" even as it opens out to perspectives far beyond the human scale. The film offers resources for self-understanding built not from immediate human concerns but through the more elemental materials and deep space-time of the cosmos. By turning away from interpersonal social identities, Giovanni—and the film's audience—gain access to a deeper perspective on the phenomenal world. To return to Betsuyaku's comment on the film, "Not being able to see allows for various things to be seen more clearly."⁶⁷

Recent scholarship on Miyazawa reads his work in precisely these terms. Gregory Golley, for example, has examined how Miyazawa and other Japanese writers of his time were interested in exploring an expanded definition of "realism," influenced by new developments in the sciences, for example in ecology and quantum physics.⁶⁸ Discussions of anime, and particularly *sekai-kei*, rarely make this connection, however, assuming that animated visions of the cosmos are ultimately only a figment of the protagonist's imagination, a fictional substitute for the social. Group TAC's *Night on the Galactic Railroad* attempts to work through a convergence of these seemingly opposed perspectives. The film outlines a cosmic subject both intensely imaginative and at the same time radically impersonal, one moving far beyond the scale of human society or even direct human perception, but infused with all the individual emotional inflections of a dream.

In bringing these microcosmic and macrocosmic scales together, Group TAC develops the strategic ambiguities of limited animation, sound, and character design inherited from their work with Tezuka Osamu, pushing

them each in more environmental and impersonal directions. In so doing, the film helped position anime as a key medium for ongoing attempts to frame subjectivity through something other than the social self. Miyazawa's tale, realized in the animated darkness of the movie theater, allowed audiences to set aside immediate social concerns and instead picture their own existence as part of an immense but highly personal cosmos. Yet it was precisely this turn from the social to the cosmic that made the film very much a work of its time.

Notes

When the March 11, 2011, earthquake struck northeastern Japan, I was on Tokyo's Chūō train line on my way to the Nakano Broadway Mandarake specialty store to pick up a key piece of rare archival material for this project (the "Fantastic Collection Special" cited many times here). I wasn't sure it was a good idea to go deep into the bowels of Nakano Broadway amid the frequent and severe aftershocks, as this four-story shopping arcade crammed full of vintage pop culture paraphernalia looks about to collapse even on a good day. But I went in anyway, and afterwards set out on the long trainless walk home carrying the seed of what would eventually grow into this essay. I'd like to thank the staff of Mandarake, who were of great help even in that most chaotic moment. I would also like to express my gratitude to the editors of *Representations* for their incisive feedback, and to the members of the Japanese Film Workshop at Meiji Gakuin University and the Mellon Fellows at Stanford University for providing venues to discuss these ideas. Note that all Japanese names are given in Japanese order (family name first) except in cases where the author is writing in English (e.g., Motoko Tanaka).

1. The iPad application is available at Ongaku Ehon, <http://ongaku-ehon.com/ginga-night.html>.
2. At first Group TAC focused mainly on providing sound work for other Tokyo animation companies, but with the 1974 anime musical *Jack and the Beanstalk* (*Jakku to mame no ki*) the studio shifted to focus on its own in-house productions. In 1975 they began producing what would become the long-running television anime *Manga Tales of Old Japan* (*Manga Nihon mukashibanashi*, 1975–1995), featuring anime versions of folktales from around the country. The group became known for producing high-quality adaptations of classic stories, allowing them to secure funding for both *Night on the Galactic Railroad* and, two years later, an anime feature based on Murasaki Shikibu's eleventh-century masterpiece *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*), also directed by Sugii Gisaburō and with music by Hosono Haruomi. After a long interim the studio again found success with the 2005 anime feature *Arashi no yoru ni* (On a stormy night). Group TAC filed for bankruptcy in 2010, amid a general shrinking of the anime industry.
3. More than a decade after its original release, the film was revived for a Tokyo theatrical screening in 1996, and a remastered DVD version appeared in 2002. Central Park Media released an English-subtitled version on VHS and later on DVD. The film has also occasionally been screened in planetariums paired with

- educational star shows, most recently in the city of Jōyō, outside Osaka, in 2006. “Ginga tetsudō no yoru’ tokubetsu jōeikai” [*Night on the Galactic Railroad* special screening], *Asahi Shinbun*, July 16, 1996; “Seiza o bakku ni ‘Ginga tetsudō no yoru’” [*Night on the Galactic Railroad* against a backdrop of stars], *Asahi Shinbun*, July 4, 2006.
4. Betsuyaku Minoru, “Chūkei no sōshitsu” [The loss of the middle ground], in *Uma ni notta Tange Sazen* [Tange Sazen rode a horse] (Tokyo, 1986), 10–13. Cited in Motoko Tanaka, *Apocalypse in Contemporary Japanese Science Fiction* (New York, 2014), 54.
 5. Religious studies scholar Nishiyama Shigeru identifies what he calls the fourth “religion boom” of modern Japan starting in the late 1970s. See Haga Manabu, “Wakamono no taikan shikō to gendai shūkyō būmu: sono riariti kankaku to aidentiti no isō” [The sensory orientation of youth and the contemporary religion boom: Its feeling of reality and the topology of identity], *Tokyo gakugei daigaku kiyō 3 bumon shakaikagaku* [Bulletin of Tokyo Gakugei University section 3: Social sciences] 43 (1992): 100. For an overview of “new academicism” in the 1980s, see Sasaki Atsushi, *Nippon no shisō* [“Nippon” Theory] (Tokyo, 2009). Marilyn Ivy has analyzed how Dentsū’s long-running *Discover Japan* domestic travel campaign (1970–1983) and its successor *Exotic Japan* (1984–1987) present unfamiliar but vaguely nostalgic Japanese landscapes for the would-be tourist’s “expansive ego” to use as resources for self-discovery. Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago, 1995), 40.
 6. Mita Munesuke, *Social Psychology of Modern Japan*, trans. Stephen Suloway (London, 1992), 523; Miyadai Shinji, “Transformations of Semantics in the History of Japanese Subcultures,” trans. Shion Kono, *Mechademia* 6 (2011): 235. For Miyadai’s original argument see Miyadai Shinji, Ishihara Hideki, and Ōtsuka Mieko, *Zōho: Sabukaruchā shinwa kaitai: shōjo, ongaku, manga, sei no henyō to genzai* [Dismantling subculture mythology: The transfiguration and the present of shōjo, music, manga, and sex], expanded ed. (Tokyo, 2007).
 7. Haga, “Wakamono no taikan shikō to gendai shūkyō būmu,” 94.
 8. A range of other anime adaptations of works by Miyazawa were also produced at this time, most notably the Takahata Isao/Oh! Productions 1982 anime feature based on Miyazawa’s *Gauche the Cellist* (*Sero hiki no Gōshu*). For a thorough catalog of animated adaptations of Miyazawa, see Catherine Munroe Hotes’s extensive list at *Nishikata Film Review*, blog entry April 7, 2011, <http://nishikatafilmreview.blogspot.com/2011/04/anime-adaptations-of-kenji-miyazawa.html>.
 9. Light novels (*raito noberu*) are a Japanese genre of young adult fiction, frequently accompanied by manga-style illustrations. They have become increasingly popular in recent decades and are now regularly used as source material for anime productions.
 10. Alexander Zahlten, “Meta-, Hyper-, Inter-, Super-, Anime, World Creation, and the Role of Film Festivals,” in *Imaginary Japan: Japanese Fantasy in Contemporary Popular Culture*, ed. Eija Niskanen (Turku, 2010), 21. Prominent examples of later *sekai-kei* anime include the direct-to-video short *Voices of a Distant Star* (*Hoshi no koe*, 2002) and the TV series *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya* (*Suzumiya Haruhi no yūutsu*, 2006).
 11. Tanaka, *Apocalypse in Contemporary Japanese Science Fiction*, 54.
 12. On *hikikomori*, see Saitō Tamaki, *Hikikomori: Adolescence Without End*, trans. Jeffrey Angles (Minneapolis, 2013).
 13. Azuma Hiroki, *Gēmuteki rearizumu no tanjō: Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan 2* [The birth of gamic realism: The animalizing postmodern 2] (Tokyo, 2007), 57; Yoko

- Ono, "Nostalgia and Futurism in Contemporary Japanese Sci-Fi Animation," *Asiascape Occasional Papers* 3 (December 2008): 2. See also Ōsawa Masachi, *Fukanōsei no jidai* [The age of impossibility] (Tokyo, 2008).
14. Phillip Gabriel identifies a similar focus in Murakami Haruki's later overseas travelogues, noting how Murakami presents travel not as an opportunity to learn about other places and peoples, but as a practice conducive to solitary reflection and reimagining the self. Philip Gabriel, "Back to the Unfamiliar: The Travel Writings of Murakami Haruki," *Japanese Language and Literature* 36, no. 2 (October 2002): 158.
 15. Sugii claims to have funded his travels by selling his drawings to people he met en route for 500 yen apiece. Sugii Gisaburō, *Anime to seimei to hōrō to: "Atomu" "Tachi" "Ginga tetsudō no yoru" o nagareru hyōgen no keifu* [With anime, life, and wandering: A genealogy of expression flowing through *Astro Boy*, *Touch*, and *Night on the Galactic Railroad*] (Tokyo, 2012), 116.
 16. "Bunkachō media geijutsu puraza"; "Animation Meister," interview with Sugii Gisaburō, <http://plaza.bunka.go.jp/museum/meister/animation/vol6/>, accessed March 29, 2011 (site no longer exists).
 17. Suzuki Sōichirō, "Non-Standard & Monad," in *Hosono Haruomi OmniSound* (Tokyo, 1990), 208.
 18. The trip would also inspire Hosono's influential ambient music album *Mercuric Dance* (1985). Nakazawa Shinichi's first book, *The Mozart of Tibet* [*Chibetto no Mōtzaruto*], a poststructuralist take on his experiences studying Tibetan Buddhism in Nepal, had become a surprise bestseller in 1983, leading to the author's becoming a leading figure of "new academicism," along with Asada Akira and Karatani Kōjin.
 19. See the essay by Sarah M. Strong in Kenji Miyazawa, *Night of the Milky Way Railway*, trans. Sarah M. Strong (Armonk, NY, 1991), 129–35.
 20. Otō Yōko, "'Ginga tetsudō no yoru' Sugii Gisaburō kantoku ni kiku" (Speaking with *Night on the Galactic Railroad* Director Sugii Gisaburō), *Kinema Junpō* 916 (August 1985): 64.
 21. These and the following quotes are from Sarah M. Strong, "The Poetry of Miyazawa Kenji" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1984), 198, 380, 390.
 22. Strong notes that Miyazawa's poetry emphasizes the spatial volume of this vastness by using the more scientific word for atmosphere, *kiken*, rather than the more everyday *kūki* (air) or *soa* (sky); *ibid.*, 193.
 23. Quoted in Hagiwara Takao, "Innocence and the Other World: The Tales of Miyazawa Kenji," *Monumenta Nipponica* 47, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 244. Translation edited by the author.
 24. As noted earlier, Azuma also points to literary sources for the origins of what he calls the "anime-like realism" of *sekai-kei*, in his case the so-called *shōjo* (girl) novels of the late 1970s and '80s; Azuma, *Gēmuteki rearizumu no tanjō*, 112. On the later turn to imaginary worlds, see Miyadai, "Transformations of Semantics in the History of Japanese Subcultures," 235.
 25. Research on Miyazawa's work, such as the detailed study of *Night on the Galactic Railroad* by Amazawa and Irizawa, often focuses on unraveling the many elusive strands of Miyazawa's complex and idiosyncratic mixture of Buddhism, Christianity, global folklore, and science. This research helped guide Group TAC's visualization, in particulars such as where in the train car Giovanni and Campanella are seated (a question Amazawa and Irizawa address with a remarkable number of charts and diagrams). Amazawa Taijirō and Irizawa Yasuo, *Tōgi: "Ginga tetsudō no yoru" to wa nani ka* [Debate: What is *Night on the Galactic Railroad*?] (Tokyo, 1979).

26. Sugii quoted in *Fantasutikku korekushon supesharu No. 51: Animēshon Miyazawa Kenji Ginga tetsudō no yoru* [Fantastic Collection Special No. 51: Animation: Miyazawa Kenji's *Night on the Galactic Railroad*] (Tokyo, 1985), 54. On the primacy of the character in *Astro Boy*, see Marc Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan* (Minneapolis, 2002). Unless otherwise noted, this and following translations are the author's.
27. Sugii quoted in *Fantasutikku korekushon supesharu*, 54; Sugii, *Anime to seimei to hōrō to*, 169. Giovanni's perspective from the locomotive can also be thought of as panoramic in the sense described by Wolfgang Schivelbusch in his study of the influence of train travel on aesthetic perception. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1986), 24.
28. Dreams always begin *in medias res*, with the dreamer enmeshed in a situation with little understanding of what led to it. Dreams also tend to feature continuous movement, as consciousness responds to the internal vibrations of the body. This movement results in the episodic, fragmented structure common to dream narratives—and *Night on the Galactic Railroad*. See J. Allan Hobson, *Dreaming: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2005), 24–25.
29. After working earlier on Tōei's full animation-style works (including *The Tale of the White Serpent* [*Hakujaden*, 1958], Japan's first color animated feature), Sugii describes his discovery of the limited style as nothing less than a “Copernican revolution,” freeing him from the idea that animation should strive to make movements look as much as possible like the “real” thing; Sugii, *Anime to seimei to hōrō to*, 92–93.
30. While the influence of Tezuka's limited animation is clear, *Night on the Galactic Railroad* also includes brief uses of computer animation, at the time a laborious and time-consuming process.
31. LaMarre fruitfully connects the full/limited animation distinction to Gilles Deleuze's conception of a shift from “movement-image” to “time-image” in postwar European art cinema. Thomas LaMarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis, 2009), 192–99.
32. Miyazawa Kenji, *Eigo de yomu Ginga tetsudō no yoru* [Read in English: *Night on the Milky Way train*], bilingual ed., trans. Roger Pulvers (Tokyo, 1996), 106.
33. *Fantasutikku korekushon supesharu*, 67.
34. *Ibid.*, 48.
35. *Ibid.*, 35.
36. Sugii, *Anime to seimei to hōrō to*, 37. For Kashiwabara, this was the most labor-intensive sound of the film. He strove to produce a recognizable steam engine-like sound that also had a steam whistle like the “glass flute” Miyazawa describes in the original story. *Fantasutikku korekushon supesharu*, 49. The glass flute-like sound is mentioned at the beginning of chapter 8 in Miyazawa's text.
37. Sugii Gisaburō, “Bimyō na ongaku sekai” [A delicate musical world], in the liner notes to Hosono Haruomi, *Nokto de la Galaksia Ferojojo* soundtrack album (Tokyo, 1985).
38. The Titanic disaster also works its way into the soundtrack in the way the distorted Dvořák echoes Gavin Bryars's *The Sinking of the Titanic* (1969), a landmark work of British minimalism that hypnotically loops a distorted “Nearer My God to Thee” in ways that suggest a watery death by drowning. Hosono later pays tribute to Bryars's work in “Columbia” on his 1989 album *Omni Sight Seeing*, and earlier attempted to capture Bryars's “sunken orchestra” sound in his production work for Inoyama Land's *Danzindan—Pojidon* (1983). Hosono also has a personal

- connection to this infamous piece of history: his grandfather, Hosono Masabumi, was a survivor of the Titanic disaster and the ship's sole Japanese passenger. He was harshly criticized on his return to Japan for the "shameful" act of saving himself while others drowned. On Hosono's musical connections with Bryars, see Suzuki, "Non-Standard & Monad," 231.
39. *Fantasutikku korekushon supesharu*, 48.
 40. Miryam Sas identifies a similar concern in the contemporaneous theater of Terayama Shūji: "On the one hand, this is a relationship of non-seeing, of missing something crucial; on the other hand, it is a path toward transcending or breaking beyond the well-worn routes of psychic and linguistic knowing"; Miryam Sas, *Experimental Arts in Postwar Japan: Moments of Encounter, Engagement, and Imagined Return* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 72.
 41. Magoori Mihoko describes Cygnus Station as a representation of time itself. The original storyboard drawings, not used in the film, show an M. C. Escher-like maze of staircases leading from the station down to the coast. See *Fantasutikku korekushon supesharu*, 37 and 53; *Animēshon "Miyazawa Kenji Ginga tetsudō no yoru" settei shiryōshū* [Collected production materials of the animation *Miyazawa Kenji's Night on the Galactic Railroad*] (Tokyo, 1985), 53.
 42. *Ginga tetsudō no yoru (Night on the Galactic Railroad)*, directed by Sugii Gisaburō (Tokyo, 2002), DVD. All quoted passages are from this DVD.
 43. This rhythmic repetition echoes the type of phrasing often heard in the experimental theater of Betsuyaku and other playwrights of the preceding decade, like Terayama Shūji. The performative dimensions of the statements here also echo Miyazawa's interest in the workings of mantra. Note also Ono Ryūshū's proposal that Miyazawa chose Campanella's name in reference to the Italian word *compagno*, or "companion," alongside the more explicit reference to the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian astrologer Tommaso Campanella. Miyazawa, *Night of the Milky Way Railway*, 156.
 44. Tanaka, *Apocalypse in Contemporary Japanese Fiction*, 55.
 45. The Pliocene Epoch comes at the end of the Neogene (later Tertiary) period, and currently is dated to 5.332 million to 2.588 million years ago (earlier than the 1.2 million years Miyazawa has the Professor state). The Earth's climate cooled at this time, leading to the emergence of relatively larger herbivores.
 46. Some Miyazawa scholars connect this spatio-temporal flux, described by the author as "4-dimensional," back to the Miyazawa's interest in Einstein's theory of relativity. See Saitō Bunichi, *Ainshutain to Ginga tetsudō no yoru* [Einstein and *Night on the Galactic Railroad*] (Tokyo, 2001). Strong notes that Miyazawa associates not just outer space but also the subterranean with more "purified" emotions; Strong, "The Poetry of Miyazawa Kenji," 380. A similar personalizing of the void occurs in Miyazawa's original text as Giovanni stares at the night sky just before drifting off to sleep: "The sky didn't seem to be a cold and empty place like his teacher had said. The more he looked, the more he couldn't help feeling like it must be full of fields with woods and farms."
 47. "Black River" is the name of the final episode of the film. This river appears to be based on the Kitakami River near Miyazawa's hometown of Hanamaki in Iwate, which, like the Pliocene Coast, contains an abundance of fossilized walnuts. See note in Miyazawa, *Night of the Milky Way Railway*, 160.
 48. Sugii notes that early drafts of Miyazawa's stories often have more concrete details, but as Miyazawa revised them he edited out the specifics to render the tales more symbolic and abstract; *Fantasutikku korekushon supesharu*, 32.

49. The film draws hints from Miyazawa's interest in Esperanto to imagine a rural, vaguely southern European town populated by cats who speak in Japanese but write and read Esperanto and have mostly Italian-sounding names. Other characters in the film, like Kaoru, have Japanese names but appear European in dress and appearance. This fluid mixture of cultures echoes the universalist aspirations of the Esperanto movement. Meanwhile, the architecture of Giovanni's town in Group TAC's film is closely based on existing locations the animation staff visited during a research trip to rural Spain: everything from the cobblestone streets to the layout of the classroom to the grasses in the fields. For some of the original production design images, see *Animeshon "Miyazawa Kenji Ginga tetsudō no yoru" settei shiryōshū*.
50. Masumura notes that Miyazawa's Ihatov was on his mind when he first conceived of Atagoul, the cat-and-human universe of his own original manga. After adapting *Night on the Galactic Railroad*, Masumura continued on with an entire series of manga based on Miyazawa stories, each featuring anthropomorphic felines; *ibid.*, 9; Masumura Hiroshi, *Ginga tetsudō no yoru saishūkei shokikei "Burukaniro hakasehen"* [*Night on the Galactic Railroad* final form/early form (Professor Burakiniro version)] (Tokyo, 2001).
51. As a *Representations* editor pointed out, TAC is CAT spelled backwards. While TAC appears to be an acronym for Tashiro Atsumi Corporation (Tashiro being the company founder and president), this coincidence may well have played a role in the studio's feline proclivities. For Sugii's original memo to the *Night on the Galactic Railroad* staff, see Sugii, *Anime to seimei to hōrō to*, 165–70. See also Ishioka Masato's documentary *Animation Master Sugii Gisaburō* (*Animeshi Sugii Gisaburō*, 2012).
52. On anthropomorphic animals in anime, see Thomas LaMarre's series of essays on "speciesism" in three volumes of Frenchy Lunning, ed., *Mechademia 3: Limits of the Human* (Minneapolis, 2008); 5: *Fanthropologies* (Minneapolis, 2010); and 7: *Lines of Sight* (Minneapolis, 2012).
53. *Fantasutikku korekushon supesharu*, 65.
54. Sugii, *Anime to seimei to hōrō to*, 33.
55. Otō, "'Ginga tetsudō no yoru' Sugii Gisaburō kantoku ni kiku," 160.
56. *Fantasutikku korekushon supesharu*, 9. This quality is captured in one of Hosono's more reflective musical cues for the film, entitled "Jobanni no tōmei na kanashimi" [Giovanni's transparent sadness].
57. As in the famous opening scene of Kawabata Yasunari's *Snow Country* [*Yukiguni*] (1935–37).
58. Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix*, 72–73 and 160.
59. Like *Astro Boy*, the character designs also served a more practical iconic role, giving the film a distinct and immediately recognizable look. Sugii and Eguchi Marisuke recently returned to the same character designs in another anime feature based on a Miyazawa tale, *The Life of Guskō Budori* (*Guskō Budori no denki*, 2012). The eponymous main character, again an anthropomorphic blue cat, looks very much like a grown-up Giovanni.
60. Niconico, <http://www.nicovideo.jp/>.
61. In some ways, Giovanni's turning away from social identity and toward the cosmos models a practice familiar from a wide range of religious and philosophical traditions. The practice of reframing human existence away from the social and toward a larger impersonal universe is a familiar theme going back to Stoic philosophers like Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. It plays no less a role in Miyazawa's beloved Lotus Sutra, with its emphasis on situating earthly beings

- within an immense cosmological order. In both traditions, this reframing serves an ethical purpose, downplaying self-interested social desires and emphasizing instead how the self emerges from the profoundly impersonal forces at work in the larger universe.
62. This use of the stars to work through loss is paralleled in a remarkable interview near the end of Patricio Guzmán's documentary *Nostalgia for the Light* (*Nostalgia de la Luz*, 2010), where a Chilean astronomer who lost her parents to Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship recounts how studying the galaxy has helped her to reframe her grief.
 63. Sugii follows Masumura in mixing in a few humans into his "troupe of cats." This difference in species is never remarked upon in the film, and, as Sugii notes, it helps to keep the audience unsure about the social boundaries of the world depicted; Sugii, *Anime to seimei to hōrō to*, 169.
 64. *Fantasutikku korekushon supesharu*, 65.
 65. Astronomically speaking, the Coalsack Nebula is a dark area near the Southern Cross. Viewed from the Earth, it appears as an opening in the stars of the Milky Way (thus serving as the film's final *sukima* [gap]).
 66. *Fantasutikku korekushon supesharu*, 67.
 67. *Ibid.*, 48.
 68. Gregory Golley, *When Our Eyes No Longer See: Realism, Science, and Ecology in Japanese Modernism* (Cambridge, MA, 2008).