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***Neon Genesis Evangelion* and Struggles in Growing Up**

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Asian Studies Program
Bates College

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Science

by

Grenfell Noah Cowper
Lewiston, Maine
May 25th, 2021

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
<i>An Introduction to Evangelion.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Adolescence in Anime</i>	<i>4</i>
Chapter 1 - Ikari Shinji: Pilot, Classmate, Friend, Son.....	9
<i>Angels Attack</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Peers and Panic</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Gender Exploration</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Finally, a Reason to Pilot.....</i>	<i>18</i>
Chapter 2 - Shinji's Two Paths	21
<i>Shinji All Alone</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>A New Pilot.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Shinji's Purpose.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>The Final Angel</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Human Instrumentality</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>A Different Path.....</i>	<i>34</i>
Chapter 3 - The Fall and Rise of Asuka	40
<i>Introducing Asuka.....</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Insecurities.....</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>A Fall from Grace.....</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>Self-Destruction</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Realization</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Revitalization</i>	<i>52</i>
Conclusion	57
<i>Shinji</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Asuka.....</i>	<i>59</i>
<i>Character Comparison</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>Personal Note</i>	<i>61</i>
References.....	62

Introduction

Whenever I speak with peers who are studying Japan's cultures and languages, a consistently prominent thread that ties most of us together is *anime*. I am not alone in stating that *anime* is greatly responsible for my initial and continued interest in Japanese studies, and for a good reason: *anime* is relatable to so many people. The Japanese cultural phenomenon that is *anime* has garnered worldwide attention for decades and is only becoming more and more popular. Animation as a medium has a special ability to convey feelings and emotions with scenes, settings, and characters that aren't even real. The complexity of the ideas that are conveyed vary greatly from *anime* to *anime*, but I believe that relatability is what helps this form of media maintain its prominence amongst the contemporary youth. One such *anime* that has seemingly stood the test of time is *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (Anno & Kobayashi, 1995). I first watched this series as an adolescent while abroad in Japan, and its themes and characters were unlike any *anime* I had seen before.

An Introduction to *Evangelion*

Neon Genesis Evangelion (新世紀エヴァンゲリオン), or *NGE*, is an *anime* written and directed by Anno Hideaki¹ that initially aired in 1995-1996 on TV Tokyo (television network) and has had a variety of spinoffs and reboots that continue to be released. The series has a total of 26 episodes that run for approximately 22-23 minutes each.

¹ Japanese names of characters in *NGE* and associated artists will be formatted with surnames first from here on.

NGE is set in 2015 (twenty years in the future relative to 1995) where a cataclysmic event called the Second Impact disrupted the ecosystem and environment of Earth in the year 2000. The Second Impact caused untold destruction to Antarctica, raising the sea levels and wiping out half of all human life, as well as countless other animal species. In Japan, the former capital of Tokyo has been destroyed in nuclear conflict, causing the creation of Tokyo-2 and Tokyo-3 as the replacement and eventual successor cities, respectively. Much of *NGE* takes place in Tokyo-3, where the special organization “NERV” is headquartered. NERV exists to defend humanity against attacks from sentient beings called “angels” with the deployment of “Evangelions,” large, armored cyborgs that are controlled by human pilots. The angels come in a variety of shapes and sizes but are near unkillable by normal human means like guns, missiles, and bombs due to a special protective ability called an “A.T. Field.” The Evangelions are able to project their own A.T. Fields, so they are (generally) the only way in which an angel can be taken down.

The main character of the series is Ikari Shinji, a passive, fourteen-year-old boy who is suddenly called upon by his father to pilot one of these Evangelions. Shinji grapples with his feelings over his role as pilot and the relationships he makes throughout the course of the series. Piloting alongside Shinji are Sohryu Asuka Langley and Ayanami Rei, who each use their own Evangelions to battle the angels under NERV’s command. Both are fourteen-year-olds as well and attend a school in Tokyo-3 with Shinji. Asuka is a headstrong, determined girl who prides herself on her prodigal abilities both in battle and in academics. Asuka is from Germany, but she has an American father and a half-German, half-Japanese mother,

and she is bilingual in German and Japanese. On the other hand, Rei is a socially reserved, quiet girl who values obeying orders more than anything else. Unbeknownst to most characters including Shinji and Asuka, it is revealed later in the series that Rei is in fact a clone of Shinji's deceased mother, Ikari Yui.

As for Shinji's family, the Commander of NERV is his father, Ikari Gendo, who Shinji has an estranged relationship with at the beginning of the series. After the death of Shinji's mother when Shinji was young, their relationship has been strained, with Shinji living without his father. Gendo is a typically cold and calculating man who believes that the end justifies the means in all situations. Working as Gendo's right-hand man is Fuyutsuki Kozo, the Deputy Commander of NERV. Fuyutsuki was previously the professor of Gendo and Yui, and he provides frequent advice to Gendo.

Other members of NERV also play very important roles in the development of the narrative. Working as the Operations Director at NERV is Katsuragi Misato, a young woman who commands the main three pilots in battle and manages various aspects of NERV. Misato takes Shinji and Asuka under her wing, having them live in her apartment with her. Misato tends to be energetic and jovial at times but maintains a strong degree of composure in her job. Working as a Special Inspector for NERV, Kaji Ryoji is a young male the same age as Misato. Kaji works to provide important information to NERV about other organizations while doing his own research for his personal sake at the same time. Kaji is romantically involved with Misato, and frequently acts as a level-headed figure who dispenses wisdom to other characters. Finally, NERV's head scientist is Akagi Ritsuko, yet again the same age as

Misato and Kaji, who helps with bioengineering with respect to the Evangelions. Ritsuko is present during Evangelion testing and angel attacks to aid in advising Misato.

The End of Evangelion (Anno & Tsurumaki, 1997), or *EoE*, is a film released in 1997 that was also in part written and directed by Anno Hideaki, which serves as a parallel or alternate ending to the last two episodes of *NGE*. The film is 87 minutes long and outlines a world in which an event called Human Instrumentality takes place, merging all human souls into a singular entity. Unlike the main series ending (which is also about Human Instrumentality), Shinji and Asuka end up as themselves once more, their souls separate from everyone else's.

Adolescence in *Anime*

Animation is a powerful medium that can evoke incredible emotion while portraying things that are not of our own reality. For this reason, animation is particularly well suited to the story genres of science fiction and fantasy (Napier, 2002). *Anime* as a medium is considered to have a stronger potential for showcasing the psychological development of its characters as compared to more western forms of media (Napier, 2002). Understanding these competencies of the medium provides support for why *NGE* does such a good job of appealing to its audiences.

NGE's initial and continued popularity is not simply restricted to the casual consumer. According to Susan Napier, a prominent researcher of Japanese literature, *NGE* is "considered by many scholars to be an anime masterpiece" and that "*Evangelion* is one of the most important and groundbreaking anime series ever created" (2002, p. 424). Much

scholarly analysis has been done regarding a myriad of aspects of *NGE*, such as the role of the series in *otaku* culture or the use of its animation style(s) to portray the psychology of the characters (Lamarre, 2009). Research has also been conducted on the role of Judeo-Christian symbolism within *NGE* (Ortega, 2007).

In analyzing *NGE*, I wanted to take a new approach to its scholarly analysis by looking at the way in which it stood out to me, which at its core was the psychology of the main characters. How does *NGE* show what it is like for Japanese teenagers to grow up and find their place in the world? What are their concrete struggles, movement in identity development stages, and the role of relationships and interdependence in identity development? Understanding the cultural, social, and temporal context in which *NGE* was created, I approached this question through a cultural-psychological lens. Initial research into (Japanese) adolescent identity development allowed me to focus my analysis on the role of independence and interdependence in the identities of two primary characters.

In a path to adulthood, adolescents look for their place in society in the process of identity exploration, but this happens in different cultural contexts. According to Sugimura (2020), Japanese adolescents experience more uncertainty than Western youth, due to the changing cultural values and societal structures. In the “individualistic collectivist” society of Japan, young people are facing pressures from older generations to conform to more traditional roles, but they also embrace individualistic roles in search of their own purpose in life independently. Because of these dual value systems, Sugimura and Hatano (2017) explains that there are multiple paths to happiness for Japanese youth. They can find

happiness from their independent sense of stable identity, but they can also find happiness while being “peacefully disengaged” from identity exploration if they embrace interdependence.

Rothbaum et al (2000) explains that Japanese people develop relationships in an interdependent model from infancy to adulthood. In adolescence, Japanese youth grapple with balancing the more Western trend of gradually prioritizing peer-based relationships over parental relationships versus the more emphasized stability of further developing relationships with both parents *and* peers.

Recognizing these pathways to happiness, I answered my research questions by looking at both the concrete actions of characters and the narrative of *NGE* itself. Focusing on the characters of Ikari Shinji and Sohryu Asuka Langley, I looked at each individual’s behaviors and identity development throughout the TV series (episodes 1-26) and the film *The End of Evangelion*, while noting differences between the characters. The individualistic collectivist nature of Japanese society necessitates a balance between independence and interdependence in identity development, so thorough analysis of behaviors, for example whether one of the characters strives for an independent identity or is fueled by interdependent paths to happiness, provided insight into ways in which adolescents toe that line.

I broke down my analysis of Shinji into two separate chapters due to the amount of content the show contains about him, while I utilized a single chapter to analyze Asuka. I watched each episode twice, each time focusing on only one character and identifying any

important behaviors, actions, and dialogue that pertained to their identity development. Additionally, I focused heavily on taking notes with regard to important relationship changes for each character. As I quoted important Japanese dialogue in my notes, I would take care to additionally translate these quotes into my own English, noting the linguistic idiosyncrasies that further inform the importance of the dialogue.

As I moved on to constructing the chapters and my arguments, I broke down the analysis into chunks of episodes based on major events or developments for the given character. These chunks varied from 2 episodes up to 5-6 episodes at a time. Within each chunk, I used my notes to identify specifically how Shinji or Asuka's relationships and behavior were changing and how that affected their senses of identity. Through the support of my initial psychological research, I looked at how these changes related to independent identity growth or the construction of social ties.

Chapter 1 focuses on Shinji's relationship and identity development through episodes one through twelve of the original series. We see Shinji contemplate and explore the reasons behind why he chooses to continue (or quit) piloting Unit 01 while he establishes many new relationships with people in Tokyo-3. Chapter 2 continues to follow Shinji through episodes thirteen through twenty-six, and also looks at *EoE*. Shinji more clearly defines his own role as Unit 01's pilot while processing his feelings regarding a myriad of peer and parental relationships. Within the two endings, he is able to recognize the importance of opening up to others and striking the balance between developing his sense of independent identity while remaining close with others. Within Chapter 3, the focus is shifted to Asuka's relationships

and identity development. Her identity as a pilot is threatened and nearly extinguished but is brought back to life in *EoE*, while her insecurities create difficulties in getting closer and opening up to others.

My analysis of Shinji and Asuka hits home the fact that the struggles they experience are, while fictional, powerful representations of the struggles Japanese adolescents of the 1990's faced in growing up. At the core of their identity and relationship developments are the people around them, and there are many internal conflicts between senses of independence and interdependence on and from the important people around them.

Chapter 1 - Ikari Shinji: Pilot, Classmate, Friend, Son

In the beginning of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, Shinji is thrown into the fray physically, emotionally, and socially. I use this chapter to analyze two main trends in Shinji's identity development: the beginnings of his interdependent relationships with other people around him and his exploration of his independent role in society. This chapter's analysis is done for episodes one through twelve. Much of episodes one through eight are all about Shinji's introduction to his role as an Evangelion (Eva hereafter) pilot, as well as the establishment of many important relationships with people like Ikari Gendo, Katsuragi Misato, Ayanami Rei, Suzuhara Toji, and Sohryu Asuka Langley. As the series progresses, Shinji's bonds grow stronger, and he reaches out to those around him for answers as to what his role is and why he is piloting Unit 01. In turning to his peers and guardians, he asks them why they fulfill their roles, and he comes to the realization that he pilots Unit 01 to receive praise from his father. My analysis within this chapter is done in two to four episode chunks at a time, and each section encompasses an important event or set of events that influences Shinji's identity or relationship development.

Angels Attack

In this section, I look at Shinji's identity development within the first two episodes. The beginning of the show follows the introduction of NERV captain Katsuragi Misato and Shinji's father, Ikari Gendo, who represent parental figures to Shinji in different ways. Shinji additionally begins to think about his place in society and his purpose in piloting the Evangelion Unit 01. Through these initial developments, the character of Ikari Shinji is

established for the audience, and we can see the basis from which he will continue to change and grow from here on out.

In the first episode, Shinji is picked up by Misato, who quickly becomes a sort of guardian to Shinji by transporting and protecting him while the first angel is attacking the city of Tokyo-3. As the extremely powerful “N²” (non-nuclear) landmine is detonated in an assault against the angel, Misato covers Shinji with her body to protect him from the blast impact. Misato quickly brushes aside the formal way in which Shinji addresses her, as she says “「ミサト」でいいわよ (‘Misato’ is fine),” to him, indicating she wants him to call her by her first name (Anno & Kobayashi, 1995, Ep. 1, 6:22). These initial actions create a degree of familiarity and closeness between the two that is heavily contrasted by the relationship between Shinji and his father Gendo. Misato begins to act like a guardian to Shinji, which we soon see is a role he has been without for some time now.

We get initial hints as to the nature of Gendo and Shinji’s relationship as Shinji remarks to Misato that his father wouldn’t have called for him unless he was needed. As Gendo leaves to preside over the launch of Unit 01, his deputy commander Fuyutsuki notes, “3年ぶりの対面か (It’s been three years since they met face to face),” highlighting the estrangement (Ep. 1, 12:27). As Shinji and his father come face to face, with Gendo high above in a control/communications room in the holding bay, there is not only a physical distance, but also an emotional distance that Gendo holds away from Shinji. As Shinji asks Gendo why he only called for him now, Gendo explains, “必要だから呼んだまでだ (I have a need for you, so I called)” (Ep. 1, 15:13). Just as he suspected, Shinji can understand that

Gendo simply sees him as a means to an end or a tool, as his role of Evangelion pilot is explained to him. As soon as Shinji refuses to pilot Unit 01, Gendo calls for Rei, which relays to Shinji that he was never truly special or “the only one who could do it.” This subverts the classic trope of Shinji being “the chosen one,” who is normally the only person able to defeat the threat at hand.

Over the course of episodes one and two, Shinji’s familial network is grown through his new relationship with Misato, as she begins to officially fulfill aspects of the parental/guardian role that Gendo has rejected. A large turning point for Shinji is finding his new home within Misato’s apartment. In episode 2, when Shinji is about to enter for the first time, he says, “お邪魔します (Excuse me for entering),” using polite language while asking Misato to pardon his intrusion (Ep. 2, 12:07). In response, Misato corrects him, reassuring him that he doesn’t need to be polite in entering his own home. Opening up a little, Shinji says “ただいま (I’m home)”, invoking the feeling of returning to a habitual home, and then in response, Misato says, “おかえりなさい (Welcome home)”, almost like a mother would when her child returned from school (Ep. 2, 12:20). This dialogue is paired with the visual of Shinji’s feet physically crossing the threshold from outside in inside the apartment, mirroring the metaphorical shift from that of stranger to family.

Internal questions regarding Shinji’s own sense of identity arise within these two episodes, but particularly in episode one do they reach an important turning point, where Shinji has to consider his role in the conflict at hand. When standing in front of Unit 01 in the launch bay, Gendo to Shinji explains his reason for calling him to Tokyo-3: to bear the

responsibility in protecting humanity from the angels. Shinji is overcome with anxiety, saying that it is impossible for him to pilot Unit 01, and he openly refuses. Misato urges Shinji not to run away and instead pilot Unit 01, and questions Shinji's reason for even coming in the first place. She forces him to consider the fact that he is not only at odds with his father, but more importantly *himself*. Seeing the state that the other pilot, Rei, is in, Shinji elects to pilot Unit 01 to prevent her from getting further hurt.

This is the audience's first exposure to Shinji's consideration of his greater place in society, and his exploration of his identity with respect to his role as Eva pilot. Shinji has (for now) committed to being involved with NERV and has taken the responsibility of piloting Unit 01, but he has done so with reluctance and no clear drive behind his decision at this point. In moving in with Misato and meeting his father again, Shinji has taken the first forays into establishing relationships with those around him in this new environment. The first seeds of interdependence are beginning to sprout.

Peers and Panic

As Shinji meets new classmates in Tokyo-3 and fights another angel, he struggles to consider the reasons behind why he is currently piloting Unit 01, and in emotional pain, he escapes the reality of his situation by running away from home. In returning home, misunderstandings are cleared up, and new friendships are created.

Shinji's relationship with his peers is initially cold, until he gains potentially unwanted attention from everyone after revealing that he is the one who pilots Unit 01. Shortly after, Shinji is punched by Toji, another student, because Toji's sister was hurt in the

first battle and he blames Shinji's carelessness. Shinji reacts with general apathy and doesn't fight back against Toji, but when Toji and Kensuke (another student) are caught up in an angel battle and are let into the entry plug of Unit 01 mid-fight, they experience firsthand the pain Shinji goes through in fighting. Seeing how difficult it is, emotionally and physically, for Shinji to pilot Unit 01, Toji feels remorseful for having hit Shinji, especially when he doesn't come to school. On his way home after running away, Shinji meets Kensuke once again, and realizes they have something in common, a lack of a mother. Despite being initially cold to his classmates, Shinji is slowly learning more and connecting with them. Later on, Toji asks Shinji to punch him in retribution for hitting Shinji, and Toji reveals his change of heart in supporting Shinji's feelings. In coming around to understanding Shinji, Toji has tried to even things out, showing that he wants to put the past behind them and move forward as equals. In these examples, we can start to see adolescent attachment transferability at work (Rothbaum et al., 2000, p. 1125). Shinji is beginning to pull away from his familial ties, as evidenced by his claim that Misato isn't family and his disobeying of her direct orders, and instead develops relationships with peers like Kensuke and Toji. While it was tough at first getting transitioned into a new school and life, Shinji is able to have shared experiences with the students around him and friendships start to grow through those interactions.

After being detained by NERV agents while returning home, Shinji reluctantly accepts his position again, but Misato scolds him and tells him that he should resign if he doesn't truly want to pilot. Shinji resigns, but right before he is about to leave Tokyo-3 on a

train home, Misato arrives outside the station. Without knowing this, Shinji decides not to leave at the last moment. Looking up, he sees Misato, and after a long moment of the two making eye contact from across the rails, they rekindle their damaged relationship by repeating the “ただいま - おかえりなさい” exchange (Ep. 4, 21:52).

In episodes five and six, Shinji starts to consider the nature of his relationship with Rei, the other Eva pilot working at NERV. Continuing his efforts to establish relationships with his peers, Shinji takes opportunities to have conversations with Rei, which initially fail. In going to drop off Rei’s renewed NERV card, Shinji awkwardly walks in on Rei while she is coming out of the shower. While Shinji is overly concerned about his mistake, Rei seems to take no mind to the fact that she’s been seen naked, and she generally ignores Shinji as she leaves her apartment. Later on, Shinji attempts to make small talk with Rei about her upcoming reactivation test, but conflict over the two’s opinions of Gendo causes Rei to slap Shinji’s face. Things have gotten off to a rocky start with Rei, similar to Shinji’s introduction to Toji. Despite the initial conflict, though, Rei eventually reassures the concerned Shinji that she is there to protect him in the mission at hand at attacking the angel, Ramiel. A tipping point of sorts is reached as Rei protects Shinji from a large blast of energy, the angel is defeated, and Unit 00 is damaged. Shinji shows great concern for Rei’s wellbeing by rushing to open her entry plug, crying as he sees she is okay. In this moment, Shinji voices a desire for Rei to feel as though she has more than just piloting Unit 00 as a goal in her life. Here, Shinji is further solidifying his concern for Rei, and he shows that he cares for her through his actions, while she has done the same to a degree. Shinji’s relationship with Rei has grown

to the point where he wants to protect her as a friend, and he cares about her physical and emotional wellbeing. While Rei's primary objective is following the orders given to her, she is starting to act in a similar manner towards Shinji.

By now, Shinji has gotten much closer than before to Toji, Kensuke, and Rei, and his network of peer support has grown stronger. His interdependence is growing alongside the blossoming of these relationships, as he is beginning to rely on Rei mid-battle to help him while returning the favor. Despite this, he is struggling between the expectations of those around him to pilot and the pain associated with fighting angels, which manifested in his running away from his responsibilities, but returning quickly after.

Gender Exploration

Asuka is a very important person in the development of Shinji's sense of interdependence. As she represents the closest thing to a sexual/romantic interest at this point, Shinji's emotions are at the forefront of his mind when interacting with her. She is not someone who he can easily rely on when they first meet, but that gradually changes with time and experience alongside her in and out of battle. Aside from Asuka, Shinji also sees other sides of Misato that he hasn't seen before and grows closer with her.

Over episodes seven and eight, Shinji gets to see more sides of Misato's personality and he gets to meet Sohryu Asuka Langley, the pilot of Unit 02. In episode seven, Shinji is initially disgusted by Misato's behavior at home, as she drinks early in the morning and is quite lazy. This behavior is contrasted by how she acts quite professional outside of the house, which is the only side that others get to see. At being told this by Shinji, Kensuke and

Toji respond, saying that Misato's relaxed behavior at home means that she considers Shinji to be family, which evidently surprises Shinji. This flies in the face of his prior statement about Misato not being family. In episode eight, Shinji also catches glimpses of Misato acting with more confidence and authority than he's seen in the past, as speaks down to UN naval officers. All of this shows that Shinji is getting to know Misato at a more intimate, familial level.

Shinji and Asuka's relationship is initially rocky, with Asuka's gung-ho personality clashing with Shinji's reservation. A strong example of this is the fourth angel attack, when Asuka wants to immediately get into Unit 02 and fight, but Shinji wants to talk with Misato and receive permission to fight before committing to any plan of action. Despite instances of Shinji being bossed around by Asuka, they can still work around their differences to defeat the angel together in Unit 02 at the last moment.

In episodes nine and ten, the status of Shinji and Asuka's relationship grows more confusing, and Shinji has conflict over his feelings regarding her. Forced to live out every moment of their lives together for the sake of perfecting an attack pattern on the newest angel, Shinji gets to see new sides of Asuka. The night before the coordinated attack, the two are left alone at home, and Asuka tells Shinji not to enter her side of the room while they sleep. Despite this, she sleepwalks her way into bed right next to Shinji, and Shinji is physically closer than he's been before to Asuka. Shinji appears to have a sexual desire for Asuka, as he eyes her lips and attempts to go in for a kiss while she sleeps. Right before he kisses her, Asuka begins to cry and calls out for her mother, which causes Shinji to recoil and

move from the bed to the other side of the room. Shinji says to himself, “自分だって子どものくせに (And yet you’re just a child like me)”, indicating that she is still only a child (like Shinji), despite her adult-like facade and behaviors (Ep. 9, 17:15). At this point, Shinji sees Asuka as an Eva pilot and an adolescent like him, but he also recognizes his sexual attraction to her.

In episode ten, these sexual feelings continue as he blushes at seeing Asuka in a bikini so close to him and gets embarrassed. At the end of the episode, when on the other side of a wall at an onsen, just hearing the sounds of Misato poking fun at Asuka is enough for Shinji to become sexually aroused. Shinji additionally shows signs of care for Asuka as he jumps into the magma of the volcano the angel is in to save her, despite having no special equipment for protection from the heat. That Shinji is willing to risk his safety for Asuka’s, despite the frequently unfriendly relationship they have, is evidence that he is beginning to care more for Asuka and their bond is growing.

Shinji’s relationship with Misato and Asuka has grown stronger over these episodes. Misato is acting more and more like a parental figure with him, and Asuka is becoming a peer that Shinji can rely on and explore his feelings with. As adolescents emotionally mature, many try to figure what it means to be romantically or sexually involved with others without intense commitment. Shinji is doing the same with Asuka, testing the waters a bit by getting a little closer to her, physically and emotionally.

Finally, a Reason to Pilot

Episodes eleven and twelve highlight the trust that Shinji is putting into his fellow Eva pilots and explore Shinji's relationships with Misato and Gendo. Shinji continues to be able to rely on those around him, especially his friends, and is growing even closer with his parental figures. The episodes also reveal Shinji's realization of his purpose in piloting Unit 01. Shinji's realization of *why* he pilots is just as important in developing his sense of identity as his identification *with* piloting.

In episode eleven, Shinji, Asuka, and Rei are all stuck outside of NERV facilities and they have no way to contact the rest of the members with the power out. In finding a path through maintenance tunnels and ventilation shafts, Shinji trusts both Asuka and Rei's decisions regarding which direction to take. When making a plan to attack the angel that is attacking amidst the power outage, both Rei and Shinji trust Asuka's planning skills and in doing so they successfully subdue the angel. Both of these situations emphasize that Shinji can trust the peers and friends he has with him, and work alongside them to accomplish a common goal.

At the beginning of episode eleven, we see Shinji speaking to Gendo on the phone. Shinji explains to Gendo that his career planning interview at school requires a “父兄 (parent)” to come (Ep. 11, 4:52). Shinji is reaching out to Gendo, giving him an opportunity to fulfill the fatherly role he has been neglecting, but Gendo shuts down Shinji's hopes by saying that Misato has been assigned that responsibility. Later in episode twelve, though, Gendo specifically asks for “初号機のパイロット (Unit 01's pilot)”, which is a more formal

approach to asking for his son by name, but he then praises Shinji for a job well done in defeating an angel, saying “話は聞いた、よくやったなシンジ (I heard what happened, well done Shinji)” (Ep. 12, 20:35). As explained previously by Misato, Asuka gets angry at Shinji frequently because “人の顔色ばかり気にしてるからよ (You only pay attention to the expressions of other people)”, which supports that Gendo’s praise is incredibly important to Shinji (Ep. 12, 6:24). He later on explains to Misato that he realized hearing his father’s words of praise is his purpose for piloting Unit 01.

In episode twelve, Misato reveals to Shinji her reason for working at NERV, which is to get revenge on the angels for killing her father. As Misato explains the nature of her relationship with her father, Shinji openly remarks that her father was just like Gendo. As Misato says, “父の呪縛から逃れるために (In order to escape the restrains of my father)”, Shinji has flashbacks to images of Gendo, and him as a child crying (Ep. 12, 17:42). Shinji can see similarities between himself and Misato, which means he can have empathy for her and relate more to her.

Shinji has once again taken a step further with two relationships, this time with Misato and Gendo. In his relationship with Gendo, he now sees him as a strict but gracious father figure that praises him if he does well enough. Misato becomes someone for him to empathize or associate with.

Within the first half of *NGE*, Ikari Shinji has struggled with his role in society and asked himself and others many questions about what drives them to work with NERV in

defeating the angels. Through this exploration, Shinji has settled on his purpose (for now) in piloting Unit 01: to be praised by Gendo. To Shinji, who never hears any positive reinforcement from his father, this is incredibly important and makes him feel valued. It is worth going through the effort and pain of fighting the angels in order to be told he has done a good job. In developing ties with friends, family, and colleagues around him, Shinji has also created a support network that is balanced between parental and peer-based relationships, and he has created something resembling a home within the city of Tokyo-3.

Chapter 2 - Shinji's Two Paths

By now, Ikari Shinji has become a fully-fledged Evangelion pilot, and chooses to pilot for the sake of receiving praise from his father. Shinji has created bonds with those he lives with, goes to school with, and works with, and he is able to rely on these people in times of need. Over the course of episodes thirteen through twenty-six, and through the entirety of the film *The End of Evangelion*, I continue to follow Shinji's senses of independence and interdependence in his process of forming an identity. This chapter is broken down into sections generally based on important events that span multiple episodes. As Shinji navigates through trans-species, political, personal, and social conflicts, he deals with his own inner conflict over developing a sense of self-identity and developing relationships with those around him. At times, Shinji focuses more heavily on his relationships, while other times, he prioritizes his independent identity.

Shinji All Alone

While episodes thirteen and fourteen have very little information regarding Shinji's relationship and identity development, episodes fifteen and sixteen are filled with many moments where Shinji's desire for parental support is highlighted. Shinji looks to people that are akin to parental figures (like Rei, Gendo, Misato, and his mother) to rely on during his reconsideration of his identity, a stressful time for him.

One of the first moments occurs in episode fifteen, when Shinji starts to project aspects of maternal behavior onto Rei. Shinji takes note of the way that she wrings the water out of a rag, remarking that she looked like a mother when she did that. He then directly tells

her in an elevator, “案外、綾波って主婦とかが似合ったりして (Surprisingly, being a housewife would suit you)” (Ep. 15, 6:48). While housewives are not always mothers, there are potential connotations that can tie them to concepts of maternity, given many wives who stop working and stay at home do so for the sake of their children.

Another desired parental connection for Shinji is with Gendo, but their relationship remains complicated. When Misato speaks with Shinji about his meeting with his father, she tells him “逃げてばかりじゃダメよ (You can't only run away [from Gendo])” (Ep. 15, 7:59). Shinji knows that his relationship with his father is strained, but that the blame isn't all on Gendo. Misato remarks to a NERV employee that Shinji is both afraid of and excited to see Gendo one-on-one, which conveys Shinji's conflict over his relationship with his father. When at his mother's grave with Gendo, Shinji and his father converse about how long it's been since they had been there together. It is revealed at this point that Shinji made an active decision to run away from home three years ago. At the end of their meeting, Shinji reaches out to Gendo, but to no avail; he says that he had a good time seeing him, but Gendo simply says, “そうか (Is that so),” in response (Ep. 15, 10:52).

Furthermore, Shinji is continuing to rely on Misato more and more as a parental figure, to which she is responding positively. When Shinji is getting swallowed up by an angel, and when Shinji's life support begins to run out while trapped inside, he panics and calls out for Misato first. Akin to a child calling out for their mother while in distress, Shinji sees Misato as a guardian that he can rely on to help him in times of stress or need. Misato fulfills this role as she is seen crying while she arrives first at Shinji's side once he escapes

the angel, hugging him close. Misato additionally attempts to prioritize Shinji's safety when making a plan of attack on the angel, as compared to Ritsuko, who cares more about the recovery of Unit 01.

Shinji has much time to spend inside Unit 01's entry plug while waiting for a rescue attempt to get him out. In a long bout of self-introspection, Shinji spends time conversing with his inner consciousness. The "voice within his head" tells him that he is deluding himself by believing that Gendo's words of praise are enough to make him happy, to which Shinji resists and explains that he can keep living in this painful world if he believes that. The voice inside his head implores him to believe in *himself* for who he is. This strong inner conflict that Shinji is experiencing illustrates the reconsideration of his prior commitment to his identity, where it is established that his purpose in piloting is to receive his father's praise. He knows inside that he cannot continue to push forward the way he has been living, and this conflict and reconsideration has created much stress for him. In this period of stress, Shinji is reaching out to those around him who can emotionally support him in a parental role, like Gendo, Misato, his mother, or Rei.

Shinji's mother, Ikari Yui, passed away many years ago when Shinji was only a child, so Shinji has been without a mother figure for some time save for Misato. Shinji can barely remember the face of his mother, but as he has a flashback to a memory of her when stuck inside the angel, Unit 01 goes berserk and tears out of the body of the angel. Due to the fact that Yui's soul resides in Unit 01, this action of berserking at the last moment can be seen as

Yui independently moving and protecting Shinji from harm, akin to the first episode where Unit 01's hand extends over Shinji to stop debris from falling onto him.

Through these moments, we can see the further formation or reformation of parental-like relationships in Shinji's life, as Shinji tries to connect with others for support. In the case of Misato and Yui, we see that he is successful in drawing out protective, maternal behavior from both of them. With Gendo, Shinji's attempts fall short as Gendo continues to prioritize his work over his relationship with Shinji. With Rei, Shinji has begun to project aspects of maternity onto her, but her reactions are relatively neutral.

A New Pilot

Shinji and Toji's friendship grows stronger over episodes seventeen and eighteen, but this only causes Shinji more pain down the line, fulfilling the "Hedgehog's Dilemma" that was pointed out by Ritsuko to Misato in an earlier episode. It states that people are like hedgehogs; when they grow closer and the relationship becomes more intimate, it is easier to get hurt by each other's spines. In returning home together, they stop at Rei's home to drop off handouts that she's missed. At one point, Toji remarks to Shinji that he initially thought Shinji was an unlikeable person, but he's now grown to see him as a person who goes out of their way to help others. This belief that Toji holds in Shinji is contrasted in Shinji's mind by his actions, as Shinji is "forced" to try to kill Toji while Unit 03 is taken over by an angel. Despite the dummy plug system, which is an effective autopilot, taking over control of Unit 01, Shinji still has to bear witness to the brutalization of Unit 03 in the 13th angel attack, which leaves him mentally scarred and in terror after realizing that Toji was the pilot. This is

the fulfillment of the dilemma, as Shinji would likely not be as upset if it were a complete stranger or other classmate that was nearly killed in the attack.

As Shinji continues to reconsider his reason for piloting, Gendo's beliefs that the end justifies the means drive a wedge between the two. While Shinji has spent some time under the impression that he pilots for his father's praise, Gendo's actions force him to change his perspective. In the angel attack, Shinji is reluctant to fight from the beginning, when he realizes that his target is Unit 03, but Gendo commands Shinji to destroy it. In this situation, we see that Shinji and Gendo have fundamentally different approaches to conflict resolution. Gendo has no problem potentially sacrificing a human life or using the greatly untested and buggy dummy system to protect the lives of many others, but Shinji openly states, “いいよ、人を殺すよりはいい (It's alright, it's better than killing someone),” in response to Gendo's warning “お前が死ぬぞ (You'll die)” (Ep. 18, 17:04). Shinji is willing to die in order to not kill another human being. Shinji's reluctances forces Gendo to turn the dummy system on, and Shinji begs his father to stop Unit 01 as it destroys Unit 03. In Shinji's mind, he is almost being forced to kill Unit 03 with a pilot inside, which creates repercussions for his relationship with Gendo in coming episodes.

Throughout the two episodes, Misato withholds the information that Toji is the new pilot for Unit 03 from Shinji, as she is unsure how to break it to him without causing him distress. Misato continues to deeply care for the emotional wellbeing of Shinji in a parental fashion, so she ends up not telling him by the time Unit 03 is taken over by an angel. In the aftermath of the angel attack, Misato calls Shinji while he is inside Unit 01 watching the

recovery of Unit 03, and he is happy to hear that she is safe, indicating their bond and care for each other. Misato is incredibly apologetic to Shinji for not telling him who the pilot was, saying sorry over and over, as Shinji then realizes as he sees Toji emerge from the entry plug in a terrible condition. Misato knows how much emotional pain she has potentially subjected Shinji to by withholding this information, and she is visibly and audibly distraught when apologizing. Her care is simply more evidence that she only wants Shinji to be happy and prioritizes his emotional health over informing him about Toji, like a mother would do.

Episodes seventeen and eighteen provide the catalyst for Shinji's rejection of Gendo's praise as his purpose for piloting, with whatever relationship progress the two had made being destroyed. The effects of Gendo's actions have strong repercussions on Shinji's behavior in the next set of episodes. As for Shinji and Misato, the closeness of their relationship has been highlighted by Misato's maternal behavior towards Shinji, but it has made things emotionally difficult for Shinji as a result. With respect to Toji, we can see just how important Shinji considers him to be, with the intensity of Shinji's emotional trauma after being "forced" to try to kill Toji. Shinji has come a long way from being punched and bullied by Toji to being very close friends with him.

Shinji's Purpose

After Gendo has attempted to have Shinji kill one of his friends, Shinji's hatred towards his father is powerful, to the point where Shinji threatens to destroy much of NERV headquarters in Unit 01, but he is stopped by Gendo. Albeit inside one of Toji's dreams when he is recovering from the attack, Shinji refers to his father as, “僕を裏切った父さん (My

father who betrayed me)” (Ep. 19, 4:10). In his confrontation by Gendo over his breaking of rules, Shinji remarks that his intention is to never see his father again. While this is similar to the past two times Shinji has run away from home and his father, Shinji has more commitment in his words and tone, as noted by Misato. When Shinji is in a merged state with Unit 01 (as will be further explained in the coming paragraphs), he has many thoughts and visions of people, angels, and past experiences. In this state, we see Shinji’s latent anger with Gendo reach a point where he sees many images of angels, calls them “敵 (enemy),” and he eventually starts to see images of Gendo as well (Ep. 20, 9:16). Shinji begins to associate the two, calling both angels and Gendo, “enemy”. To equate his father with beings that destroy humanity means that his degree of hatred is potentially the greatest it has ever been at this point.

Within episodes seventeen through nineteen, Kaji Ryoji acts as a level-headed third party that dispenses words of wisdom to Shinji in his uncertain state of mind. Due to his position as special inspector at NERV, Kaji seems to have an understanding of Shinji’s situation at all times, and he is able to frequently tell Shinji what he needs to hear. Despite not being incredibly close to Kaji, Shinji goes so far as to reach out to him in searching for information about what his father is like. Shinji is able to turn to him in his times of confusion and questioning, especially in the next episode.

In episode nineteen, after Shinji has apparently made up his mind for the last time to never pilot again due to his father forcing his hand, an angel attacks, and Rei and Asuka are both unable to defend Tokyo-3. In facing his inner conflict over his desire to help and protect

versus his hatred for his father and pain associated with piloting, Shinji speaks with Kaji. Kaji tells Shinji that, while he is unable to do anything more than water his garden during this attack, there is something that only Shinji is capable of doing. He stresses that nobody is forcing Shinji to do anything, and that he can act with his own agency now. Shinji then runs to Unit 01, and standing before his father just like in episode one, he requests the ability to pilot, stating “僕はエヴァンゲリオン初号機のパイロット、碓シンジです！ (I am Evangelion Unit 01’s pilot, Shinji Ikari!)” (Ep. 19, 16:47). Shinji has retaken the role given to him in the past by his father and made it into his own. He has verbally defined himself in name as being the pilot of Unit 01. This is a turning point for Shinji’s conception of his role in NERV, and in society, given it is now something that he chooses to do, not something he is forced to do. He has his own free will, and he has elected to use his will to pilot Unit 01 in order to protect the people around him that he cares for, not for his father’s words of praise. This behavior aligns with the “Commitment” identity status within the three-factor model (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008) as outlined within Sugimura (2020) given Shinji’s clear identity-based decision and associated confidence. To be able to clearly define who he is, and stand up to his father in doing so, shows a new confidence he has obtained and demonstrates significant growth in self-identity.

Amidst the fight with the angel, Shinji reaches a synchronization rate of over 400%, effectively causing him to merge with Unit 01. In this “out-of-body” experience that Shinji has, he refers to concepts and ideas such as the angels in the first person singular form, but continues to correct himself to first person plural speech, such as “ぼくを...僕ら (I...we)” or

“自分の命を...自分たちの命を (My life...our lives)” (Ep. 20, 9:09). Shinji progressively begins to consider himself as being more interconnected with and interdependent on those around him with respect to his responsibilities. This is further emphasized when Shinji sees images of nearly all the important characters within the show flash in his mind, as he says, “僕を知っている人たち...そうか...みんな僕の世界なんだ (The people who know me... I see... These people are what make my world)” (Ep. 20, 8:17). He seems to understand that the relationships he has with others are what create the experience he is having as a person in Tokyo-3 as a pilot.

Misato continues to be motherly towards Shinji, but she is also represented in Shinji's mind in a sexual manner. As Shinji has his self-introspection, images of Misato, Asuka, and Rei, all naked, approach Shinji while speaking to him. Over and over, they ask if Shinji wants to become one with them, in “心と体 (mind and body),” implying that Shinji sees them all to a degree sexually, but also shows his inherent underlying desire for human contact (Ep. 20, 13:54). Shinji remarks to himself in this state that he knows now what it is like to be lonely, but also to be happy and to feel human warmth. Later, as the experiment to reform Shinji from the material in the entry plug fails, Misato holds Shinji's empty plug suit, and calls out in anguish for him to be returned to her. Misato seems to feel a strong sense of personal responsibility for Shinji, almost speaking as if Shinji were her own child. Shinji then rematerializes from the puddle of LCL next to Misato, perhaps spurred on by her desire for Shinji to return (as noted by Ritsuko to Misato).

Shinji has taken a big step forward in his identity development and a huge step backward in his relationship with his father. Shinji rejects his father's methods and praise in order to reclaim his position as a pilot on his own terms, choosing to pilot for the sake of those he wants to protect.

The Final Angel

By episode 24, Shinji has lost the ability to turn to nearly all of those around him that he considers as friends. He thinks out loud to himself, “友達と呼べる人はいなくなってしまった (Everyone who I can call a friend has disappeared)” (Ep. 24, 4:49). At this point, he has been told the true nature of Rei (that she is simply a clone), and Asuka has “run away” from NERV over her feelings of inadequacy. Toji and Kensuke have been moved out of Tokyo-3 after the destruction caused by an angel attack and Misato has been busy uncovering the truth behind NERV and processing the death of Kaji. Shinji is feeling more alone than ever before, and in his loneliness, he meets Kaworu.

Kaworu, unbeknownst to Shinji as the final angel that he must defeat, quickly becomes close to Shinji and makes him feel appreciated. Kaworu spends time with Shinji at NERV and at Kaworu's home speaking with Shinji and getting to know him. In speaking with him, Kaworu is able to connect with Shinji in ways that Misato couldn't, such as when he asks Shinji if he's afraid of intimacy and he touches his hand. In a previous episode, Misato tried to console Shinji, but Shinji withdrew and turned away from her. Kaworu tries to do the same thing as Misato, with their hands being focused on in the same manner as with Misato (potentially to deliberately contrast the scenes), but Shinji doesn't withdraw. Kaworu

even goes so far as to tell Shinji, “好意に値するよ (You’re worthy of my kindness) 好きってことさ (It means I like you)” (Ep. 24, 10:01). It is important to note that the translation of this Japanese into English is difficult given the ambiguity of Kaworu’s words. “好意” can mean affection, but generally implies a favorable attitude towards someone or something. “好き” also operates in the same way as the word “like,” with potential implications of having a crush on someone when it is used, but it can also be used for a general preference for something. Regardless of the ambiguity, though, Kaworu has a clear desire to be closer with Shinji that Shinji doesn’t resist.

After getting incredibly close, Kaworu initiates his attack on NERV, and Shinji is commanded to go after him once it is revealed to him that Kaworu is an angel. While Shinji is inevitably forced by circumstances to crush Kaworu in Unit 01’s hand, Kaworu eventually accepts his death, saying “このまま死ぬことができる…僕を消してくれ (I can die as is…destroy me) (Ep. 24, 21:30)” Despite this, Shinji’s killing of Kaworu is traumatizing to him.

Shinji’s opening up to Kaworu is yet another example of him being more emotionally open to other people, and connecting with them, just to suffer and be hurt in the end. Shinji had the chance to let Kaworu live, but he prioritized the fate of humanity in killing him. This decision is in contrast with Shinji’s actions regarding killing Toji, potentially signaling his commitment to his new identity as a protector of humanity. In spite of his decision, Shinji agonizes over the fact that he had no choice but to kill Kaworu, and that tears him apart. Turning to Misato, Shinji explains that Kaworu was the only person who had ever said they

liked him, and that Shinji liked him as well. Shinji's admittance to this means quite a lot: though it was such a short time, Kaworu was the closest friend he had ever had. He believes that Kaworu should have lived, but Misato disagrees, saying that Kaworu didn't have the will to live (given he asked Shinji to kill him), so Shinji did the right thing. He thinks her words are cold, drawing tension between the two that is seen at the beginning of *The End of Evangelion*.

These two episodes only served to further demonstrate the fact that Shinji is very alone at this point. After being unable to turn to anyone recently, Shinji gets close with Kaworu, but experiences the Hedgehog's Dilemma once again. He got too close to Kaworu in opening up to him, so that when he had to kill Kaworu, he suffered greatly due to the loss of a friend. Shinji has been able to experience the high points and low points of having strong relationships with others by now. He's been able to protect those around him, have a semblance of a normal school life, and regain somewhat of a family, but he's also been subjected to so much pain because of his relationships.

Human Instrumentality

In the last two episodes of *NGE*, all of humanity experiences what is described as "Human Instrumentality." This event represents an evolution of the human species into a unified life-form where all souls are merged together where there is no conflict, and everyone's weaknesses are complemented by other's strengths. In this state, Shinji no longer has a corporeal body, but his soul is adrift, mingling with those who he has grown to know well within the series. Shinji is able to converse with these people, understand their feelings,

process his own feelings, and eventually come to a realization that he is defined by other people, and that he can be happy with himself.

Within episode twenty-five, Shinji spends time considering a possible world, or way of living, in which he is closed off from everyone around him, isolated from the potential of pain, while episode twenty-six has Shinji processing much of his self-deprecation and hatred, but also his sense of identity. Shinji remarks to himself, “僕は僕を見つけるためにいろいろな人を触れ合わなければいけない。僕の中を見つめなければいけない (In order to find myself, I have to be in contact with many other people. I need to look hard inside myself)” (Ep. 25, 11:38). This statement helps to drive home the fact that Shinji is thinking of his own self-identity as constructed through the relationships he has. The people he pilots with, his classmates, those who fill parental roles, and people who guide him through life are all people he relies on, but who also rely on him. The experiences that he has with them, and the nature of his relationships with them, are what define who he is.

He later continues this, saying, “僕は僕だ、ただ他の人たちが僕の心の形を作っているのも確かなんだ (I am myself, but other people make the shape of my heart)” (Ep. 26, 14:06). Shinji is able to recognize that, while he is a unique individual, his relationships with other people are at the core of his identity. While Shinji recognizes that he hates the person he is right now, he exclaims, “でも、好きになれるかもしれない！ (But, I might be able to come to like myself!)” (Ep. 26, 21:02). In this moment, Shinji’s perspective is changed, and all the people he knows well clap and congratulate him on his epiphany. In this

ending, Shinji has recognized his potential for growth, and that he is able to find out who he truly is through the relationships he has with others.

A Different Path

The End of Evangelion, or *EoE*, is an alternate or parallel ending to *NGE*, in place of episodes twenty-five and twenty-six of the original series. The film focuses on the events leading up to Human Instrumentality, and the instrumentality itself. What makes *EoE* different from the series original ending is that Shinji and Asuka emerge from the rest of humanity's souls in their physical, independent bodies at the end, as opposed to remaining as one with everyone else. This is a direct result of Shinji and Asuka's will to be individualized once more, causing their psychological boundaries between others, or their "A.T. fields," to reform. A possible explanation as to why Shinji makes this conscious decision to be an individual is because of an obligation he feels to not run away from finding himself.

At the beginning of *EoE*, Shinji is still emotionally distraught from the fact that he had to kill Kaworu, and he once again has nobody to turn to. Shinji is afraid of speaking with Misato or Rei, so he visits the hospitalized Asuka, but he is frustrated in reaching out to her due to her comatose state. In anger, Shinji shakes her in an attempt to wake her up, exposing her breasts, and he consequently masturbates over her in the locked hospital room. Despite, or perhaps even due to, his emotional state, Shinji satisfies his sexual desires but immediately regrets it, saying aloud, "最低だ、俺って (I'm horrible/the lowest)" (Anno & Tsurumaki, 1997, 3:47). In his adolescence, Shinji not only considers Asuka someone worth turning to as a friend or peer but continues to view her in a sexual manner.

After all of the angels have been defeated, the secret organization behind NERV, called SEELE, sends a military organization called the “Japanese Strategic Self Defense Force” to wrangle control of NERV’s resources and set Human Instrumentality in motion in their own way. In the midst of the attack, Shinji is in an extremely despaired and unresponsive state of mind, to the point where he is seemingly fine with a gun being pointed to his head, so Misato saves him by gunning down the intruders. In dragging the uncooperative Shinji to Unit 01, Misato gets fatally wounded by a gunshot, and speaks with Shinji in her last moments. While trying to convince Shinji to garner the strength to pilot, he claims that, “ミサトさんだって、他人のくせに！何にも分かってないくせに！（You’re just another person, you don’t understand anything!”) (Anno & Tsurumaki, 1997, 31:29). In this case, “他人” or “another person” has the connotations of a person who is unrelated by blood. In his anger, Shinji rejects the parental/familial role Misato has taken on, and she accepts that, but tells him that she won’t forgive him if he doesn’t take action. Misato makes the self-loathing Shinji promise that he will pilot Unit 01 and then come back, as she gives him her cross necklace. Right before she pushes him into the elevator, she tries to embolden Shinji by kissing him, then telling him “帰ってきたら続きをしましょう (When you return, let’s continue)” (Anno & Tsurumaki, 1997, 32:53).

In this last moment between Shinji and Misato before her “death,” Misato becomes less of a definable person in Shinji’s mind. In the end, Misato collapses and later remarks to herself that she was never able to become a mother to Shinji. While she has protected him like a mother would, she has also kissed him, suggested further sexual contact, and accepted

Shinji's label of "stranger." Nonetheless, Shinji mourns her loss in the elevator, crying harder when he notices her blood on his hand and face. Shinji goes on to pilot Unit 01, but sees that Asuka has been massacred by SEELE, causing him even more anguish.

While the original series ending simply states that Human Instrumentality begins and we see the characters' souls interact, *EoE* handles it differently. An intricate series of rituals spurred on by mass produced, pilotless Evangelion units are what cause Human Instrumentality to begin, and the audience is able to watch as all souls visibly begin to merge into a singular consciousness. In this state, Shinji can "converse" to a degree with those whom he has gotten to know well over the series. Everyone's insecurities are exposed, such as when Shinji gets to see the overtly sexual side of Misato that he's never seen before, which she is embarrassed of. Shinji's raw emotions and true feelings come out when he is "speaking" with Asuka, as he says that he wants to be with her forever and it has to be her and her only. Asuka rebukes this saying that he doesn't actually want her, instead explaining that he's afraid of everyone else and that he's never even loved *himself*. In his fear of being killed and left alone, combined with Asuka's refusal, Shinji angrily chokes Asuka. At this point, Shinji seems to have opened up to Asuka about his insecurities to no avail, causing him to feel betrayal by someone who he is close with.

Despite being told that this is the world he wished for, he realizes that he actually wants to go back to the way it was before. It is explained to him by Rei and Kaworu that any human who can visualize their own self within their mind can return, and that the psychological barriers between people would return (and the pain associated) if one was to

become separate again. Throughout this time, Shinji is still carrying Misato's cross necklace, a reminder of her desire for him to face himself, and to not run away. Even after knowing the pain of individualization, Shinji has a strong enough sense of self-identity that he can separate from all other souls to become himself once again. Right before returning, Shinji speaks with his mother, telling her, “幸せがどこにあるのかまだわからない (I still don't know where happiness is found) けどここにいて、生まれてきてどうだったのか、これから考え続ける (But I'll stay here, and I'll continue thinking about what it's been like since I came into this world)” (Anno & Tsurumaki, 1997, 1:22:22).

Shinji, having returned to “reality,” washed ashore from the sea of primordial soup and created multiple memorials of a sort, to remember those who he cannot see currently. Misato's cross is hung upon a nail embedded in one of these wooden stake memorials. In having individual memorials to remember the people in his life, he has individualized their memories in his mind, in a deliberate contrast to those peoples' current state of Instrumentality. At a certain point in time, Shinji is lying on the shore, when he turns to see Asuka having rematerialized from Instrumentality. Shinji, in a stupor, begins to choke Asuka, who raises her hand to caress Shinji's face. At this point, Shinji releases his grip, begins to cry, and Asuka says, “気持ち悪い (Disgusting),” ending the film (Anno & Tsurumaki, 1997, 1:26:44).

Why Shinji chokes Asuka is difficult to interpret, but it is possible that his prior anger from within Instrumentality is carried over, or that he is attempting to see whether or not Asuka is another real human being (one of which he has not seen for a short period of time).

Asuka's contrasted compassion and words of repulsion, alongside Shinji's anger and tears, are all evidence of their individualized nature. Conflict, pain, and strong emotions are lost in Instrumentality, but individualization brings that back to the two of them once more. Despite these feelings, the two were the only ones who had the will and self-identity to separate themselves from every other soul, all for the sake of starting anew and becoming independent once more.

Shinji's decision to return to the physical world with his soul and heart walled off from all other people is reflective of his obligation to Misato. In choosing to not run away from himself, Shinji takes a step towards refining his sense of self-identity, giving himself more time to consider his past and explore his future as an independent individual.

Shinji's journey through the adolescent experience has resulted in two conclusions: a world in which he remains part of the unified soul of humanity (the original ending of the series), and a world in which he and Asuka are individuals, separate from everyone else (*EoE*). Both endings are culminations of Shinji's processing of his inter/intrapersonal relationships and his sense of identity within the world. In the original ending (episodes twenty-five and twenty-six), Shinji recognizes that his identity is not strictly independent or interdependent; it is both at the same time. He knows that he is a unique individual, but that the relationships he has with the people around him are part of what make him unique. In this ending, we can see the individualistic collectivism of Japanese society through Shinji's realization of identity. Using Sugimura & Hatano (2017), we can see how Shinji is able to

“peacefully disengage” from the reality that constrains his personal interests and desires through Instrumentality because he has high levels of interdependence on others in that state. Shinji has not only made clear his desire to not be alone, but we can also see that he has the support of everyone around him, as shown in the final congratulatory scene.

In *EoE*, Shinji also maintains a degree of balance between his independent identity synthesis and his interpersonal relationships, but he weights his decisions towards independence. While Shinji cares for those in his life and holds a desire to protect those around him, he is able to spend time in Instrumentality merged with all other souls and comes to realize that staying merged would prevent him from being able to continue developing his sense of identity. In choosing to leave, Shinji doesn't reject the people around him, he simply needs time to explore who he has been and what he will become, while keeping the memory of others intact.

Both endings highlight a central theme in Japanese adolescent development; that growing up is a complex thing. In a society with pressure to not only develop one's uniquely individual identity, but also pay respect to the collectivist cultural values of Japan, adolescents need to strike a balance between these forces.

Chapter 3 - The Fall and Rise of Asuka

After having analyzed Ikari Shinji's identity and relationship development, it is important to look at an adolescent who has a different personality and set of ideals, given not all adolescents experience identity and relationship development the same way. Sohryu Asuka Langley presents an opportunity to see how the identity of a more headstrong, independent adolescent in the series grows and changes with time. In this chapter, I analyze episodes eight through twenty-six and *The End of Evangelion*, following Asuka's relationships and the development of her identity, particularly with regards to her identification as a pilot. Through the series, Asuka struggles to maintain her identity as an independent, capable pilot, not wanting to be perceived as a weak person who needs to rely on others for help. She spends time not only developing, but also breaking off relationships with those around her as she grapples with feelings of inadequacy when comparing herself to others. We also see how Asuka's self-insecurities in the capacity of a pilot, friend, daughter, and romantic partner are explored as she rejects or comes to terms with them. As with the previous two chapters, I continue the process of analysis in sections of two to six episodes at a time, focusing on major events and turning points for Asuka.

Introducing Asuka

Within episodes eight and nine, the audience gets to meet Asuka and see some of the more important parts of her personality, like her pride and romantic desires, but also her immaturity. In addition, Asuka's strong identification with her role as the pilot of Unit 02, as well as her ability as a pilot, appear in her interactions with Shinji and others. She quickly

butts heads with Shinji on a personal level, but their ability to work together is shown through their actions while piloting in both episodes eight *and* nine.

When Asuka is first introduced to Shinji, Toji, and Kensuke, she quickly establishes herself as an abrasive character, slapping the three of them after they have a chance to see her underwear. This behavior can be contrasted to when Shinji sees Rei naked, to which Rei has a very neutral response. Asuka has plenty of energy and pride, which can also be contrasted against Shinji, whom she calls, “冴えない (Dull)” (Anno & Kobayashi, 1995, Ep. 8, 4:20). When hearing from Kaji about Shinji’s impressive skills as a beginner pilot, she is both surprised and competitive, dragging Shinji along in order to boast about Unit 02’s quality as an Evangelion. Even more, Asuka continues to try to show off her skills and prove herself when an angel attacks and she pulls Shinji into the entry plug of Unit 02 to have him watch her in action while fighting the angel. In episode nine, we see another instance of this pride and determination, as Asuka charges forward at an angel in an attempt to defeat it herself without much of Shinji’s help. In both of these instances, Asuka performs well but inevitably fails by herself, and only through the teamwork and synchronized efforts of her and Shinji can the angel be defeated.

Asuka seems to ignore the romantic advances of all boys around her, preferring to focus on Kaji alone. When Asuka transfers to the school in Tokyo-3, she receives many love letters, and the boys at the school are willing to buy photographs of her from Kensuke, but she stomps on the letters, indicating her disgust. In contrast, whenever Kaji appears, Asuka blushes and waves for him, not holding back her feelings of adoration. In hearing that Misato

and Kaji were once sexually involved, Asuka is horrified, and when she departs one of the naval ships, the first thing she asks Misato about is Kaji. While Asuka is clearly attached to Kaji, her desire for him may stem from her need to appear more mature than she actually is.

Within this same vein of reasoning, Asuka's immaturity slips out in episode nine, when she sleepwalks into Shinji's bed. While Shinji initially considers her to be mature in attempting to kiss her, she begins to cry and call out for her mother, revealing that she is much more childlike than she lets on publicly.

Through the first two episodes where the audience is introduced to Asuka, we can see a baseline of her personality, relationships, and sense of identity. While Asuka takes pride in her piloting abilities, deep down she seems to be less mature than she lets on to the average public. She has set herself up within Tokyo-3 as a potential force to be reckoned with but has also shown potential for cooperation with those she works alongside. Using these initial characteristics, we better understand how Asuka changes going forward within the realm of relationship and identity development.

Insecurities

Throughout the course of episodes ten through fourteen, we watch Asuka become more integrated in the pre-existing characters' lives, and more of her underlying insecurities start to show. She is able to settle into life in Tokyo-3, while starting to develop "friendships" of a sort with Shinji, Rei, and Misato (to an extent). Asuka also starts to see that her place as the quantitatively best pilot is becoming threatened, which in turn threatens her sense of identity.

In episode ten, Asuka is charged with capturing an angel from a volcano before it has fully developed from its embryonic stage. In order to dive into the magma, both her and Unit 02 need specialized suits to handle the heat, which look ridiculous in Asuka's eyes. She initially refuses to pilot Unit 02 due to the appearance she would need to have, especially given she might be working in front of Kaji, so Asuka is clearly concerned with other people's perception of her. Despite this pushback, Asuka decides to pilot when she hears that Rei might be using Unit 02 instead of her. Asuka additionally refers to Unit 02 as “あたしの二号機 (My Unit 02),” indicating that she is very possessive of Unit 02, to the point where she doesn't care about how she (or Unit 02) looks as long as nobody else is piloting it (Ep. 10, 10:19). Asuka feels a deep tie of some sort to Unit 02 and is willing to look “bad” just to stay as its pilot.

While inside the volcano, the angel rapidly evolves, attacks her, and she fights back enough to defeat it. During this attack, despite Asuka's desire to finish things independently, she gets into a tough spot and needs to be saved by Shinji, highlighting that she isn't as independent as she thinks she is or wants to be and that she still needs to rely on others for help. When the angel attacked, her cable that carries coolant and other fluids, as well as what connects her back to the surface, was destroyed in the fight. Just as she is about to be lost into the depths of the magma, Shinji jumps into the magma in Unit 01 to grab her arm, saving her life while risking his (due to his lack of protective equipment). Asuka was about to accept death when Shinji saved her at the last moment, and she calls him an idiot for risking his life, but she is happy, with a smile on her face. Asuka considers herself to be in Shinji's debt at

this point, as she then later goes on to protect Shinji from an angel's acid attack, repaying the debt. This indicates that Asuka doesn't like to have to rely on others, given that evening out the debt means she isn't one-sided in asking for help. Asuka values her independence and believes in her ability to protect herself and others.

In episode twelve, the three pilots go through routine synchronization testing, and Shinji is shown to have had the most rapid development of the three. In response to hearing Shinji's synchronization data, Asuka says, “大したことないわよ (That's not a big deal!)” (Ep. 12, 5:40). While she is still better than him in this regard, his quick progress and praise from Ritsuko and other adults are threatening to her position as “best” pilot in her mind. Given she holds piloting in such a high regard, losing that position as best pilot would be a huge blow to her sense of identity. When asked by Shinji why she pilots, she responds with, “自分の才能を世の中に示すためよ (To show the world my talents)” (Ep. 12, 15:20). If she pilots to display her skills, and someone like Shinji becomes more skilled than her eventually, her reason for piloting could wane (or even disappear from her point of view) given how concerned she is about other people's perception of her. Asuka would likely be upset if someone like Kaji saw her as a lesser pilot, or if she wasn't considered important by the higher ups at NERV.

Throughout multiple episodes, Misato becomes more and more like a friend to Asuka. At the *onsen* (hot springs) they visit after defeating the angel within the magma, Misato is playful with Asuka, teasing her and tickling her body much like a friend or older sister would. In many other *anime*, the act of female characters teasing and playing around with

each other in an *onsen* is a common trope, and the female characters are typically friends, classmates, or siblings around the same age or so, which draws that same parallel with Misato and Asuka (Despite their exaggerated age difference). In episode thirteen, when Misato has promised to treat the three pilots to a steak dinner as a reward for defeating an angel against terrible odds, Asuka (and Shinji) decide to choose a ramen restaurant for the sake of helping Misato save money. While Misato does continue to fulfill a guardian and commander position in Asuka's life, she is able to be friendly with Asuka in ways that a parent might not be able to, slightly altering the nature of their relationship.

A Fall from Grace

Episodes fifteen and sixteen represent major blows to Asuka's happiness and sense of identity, with Shinji surpassing her as a pilot and Misato taking Kaji away from her. Both Shinji and Misato start to become rivals of a sort in her mind, and her "friendship" with Rei gets rocky as well. Through these conflicts, her relationships become strained, and her identity as a pilot and potential romantic partner to Kaji begins to weaken.

Within episode fifteen, Asuka's desire to go out with Kaji continues to grow, but Kaji is unavailable to her, so she is set up for a date with a boy her age by a school friend. When this date ends up too boring for Asuka to handle, she bails part-way through to go home, remarking to Shinji, "退屈なんだもん あの子 (That kid was boring)" (Ep. 15, 12:05). She refers to the boy as a kid, and compares him to Kaji, saying that he's the only decent guy around. Asuka continues to reach for maturity through her desire for Kaji and her refusal to respond to any romantic interest from someone her own age.

Once at home, Asuka spends time getting a little more intimate with Shinji. She sees Shinji practicing the cello and actually compliments him, which is significant development for someone who constantly berates Shinji. After getting a call from Misato, Shinji tells Asuka that she won't be home until late, which worries her given she is out with Kaji at the moment. She seems to fear that Misato and Kaji's past romance be rekindled, getting in the way of her pursuit of Kaji. Later, in an act of supposed boredom (and potentially while preoccupied with thoughts of Misato and Kaji), Asuka asks Shinji if he wants to try kissing, teasing him when he initially refuses. Shinji pushes past his embarrassment to kiss her, and Asuka holds Shinji's nose because his breath was tickling her face, but Shinji runs out of air, so he eventually has to pull back. When he does, Asuka turns and runs to the bathroom, with her eyes hidden in darkness. This *anime* trope usually signifies the fact that someone is sad or upset, and while Asuka was comically disgusted later in the bathroom, she seems genuinely upset in this moment. She could be upset that the kiss didn't feel the way she wanted it to, or that she was embarrassed for having kissed Shinji, or even that he pulled back earlier than she wanted him to. This awkwardness between the two of them is just another factor in the worsening relationship between Shinji and Asuka.

When Kaji returns home with a drunk Misato, Asuka is initially excited to see him, but he has to leave quickly after. Before he leaves, though, Asuka is able to smell Misato's perfume on him, which helps her realize that they had been intimate in some form this evening. She is upset by this and takes her anger out on Shinji by blaming her mood on their

terrible kiss. By now, Asuka has found a rival in Misato, who threatens her relationship with Kaji.

In episode 16, Asuka finally loses her place on top as the “best” Evangelion pilot, or at least she does so in her mind. When Shinji’s synchronization test data comes back better than Asuka’s, she is very frustrated. Venting to Rei in the locker room, she lists off sarcastically how strong and powerful and unbeatable he is, and comments how easy their jobs will be, but as soon as Rei leaves, she punches a locker. Asuka struggles to handle this news given she has identified so strongly with the concept of performing better than any other pilot. If we look back to episode eight, we can recall that one of the first things she was surprised to hear about from Kaji was how high Shinji’s synchronization scores were for how little training he had, so we know she places much value on them when regarding the talent of pilots.

In her anger, she tries to rile up Shinji on the battlefield by suggesting that his scores qualify him to take the lead, but he agrees with her (to her surprise), which only makes her more upset. While Shinji’s confidence only ends up getting him in trouble, Asuka uses this as an opportunity to make herself feel better, remarking to herself that test scores don’t equate to piloting ability in the field. This dig towards Shinji seems to be against what she typically believes and may be a personal excuse for her lesser synchronization score. Asuka seems to always find a way to shift blame or feel better in the face of personal failure, potentially because accepting her failures would mean accepting she isn’t the best.

When Shinji eventually escapes from within the angel, he is hospitalized due to his long lack of life support inside. Despite all of her rivalry with Shinji, Asuka is outside his hospital room when Rei goes inside to check on him. While she tries to hide the fact that she came to see him as well, she still cares about his safety and wellbeing.

Episodes seventeen and eighteen provide little screen-time for Asuka, but we do have opportunities to see her relationship with Hikari, a classmate, grow stronger as Asuka provides relationship advice about Toji to her.

Self-Destruction

Episodes nineteen through twenty-four represent Asuka's progression from functioning pilot to catatonic depression. Asuka repeatedly feels as though she fails to defeat the angels and her ability to pilot takes a huge hit, which turns into a negative feedback loop spiraling downwards. Not only is she forced to confront repressed childhood trauma, but she also cuts off everyone around her, closing off her emotions from her friends and family while her self-hatred grows. Her previous sense of identity as an Eva pilot is all but destroyed in the wake of these events.

In episodes nineteen and twenty, Asuka grapples with "losing" to Shinji yet again in fighting against the angels. When an angel attacks the NERV headquarters and Shinji is unavailable to fight, Asuka thinks that she has a chance to redeem her lesser synchronization scores in single handedly defeating it. Despite her best efforts, Unit 02 loses both arms and is decapitated by the strong angel, and all Asuka can think about is her own failure after Shinji returns to NERV at the last moment to take down the angel. Even though Rei is nearly killed,

and Shinji is disembodied inside Unit 01, Misato's call to Asuka to inform her of Rei's health is completely ignored and we see her frustration manifested in the disheveled state of her room. Asuka is so upset that she does not care whatsoever about the health of her peers/friends at all, highlighting how much value she places on re-establishing herself as the "best" Eva pilot.

In episode twenty-two, the audience receives exposure to Asuka's past history, and Asuka continues her descent into self-hatred. Asuka has flashbacks to her time with Kaji before coming to Japan, relaxing outside. Asuka remarks to Kaji that she doesn't like the fact that Misato puts up a facade but that she will miss Kaji a lot. While Kaji brushes off her attempts at romance, he assures her that she will be able to find a boy in Japan who is cute. This interaction further emphasizes the desire for Kaji she has and the rejection of Misato that has been happening as of late. While Asuka tells Kaji, "バカなガキに興味はないわ (I don't have any interest in some idiot kids)," Kaji rejects her advances by saying "アスカはまだ子どもだからな (You're still a kid)" (Ep. 22, 0:59). Despite wanting to be viewed as an adult, emotionally and physically, Asuka is still seen as a child.

By this point, Asuka has flashbacks to her childhood and the audience learns that her mother developed a mental illness when Asuka was young. Asuka's mother's mental illness led her to believe that a doll she had was Asuka, and that she didn't know who the real Asuka was. We begin to get an understanding of why Asuka has the hatred she does for Rei, who acts like a doll, and why she wants to separate herself from other people, preferring independence. If her mother had never been there for her from a young age, Asuka would

have been used to doing much on her own without a parental figure, given her father and especially stepmother remain fairly uninvolved in her daily life.

Asuka eventually begins to reject the relationships around her. “ミサトも嫌 シンジも嫌 ファーストはもっと嫌 (I hate Misato, I hate Shinji, and I hate the First (Rei) even more)” says Asuka in the apartment bathroom (Ep. 22, 8:27). Continuing, she says, “パパも嫌 ママも嫌 でも自分が一番嫌 (I hate papa, I hate mama, but I hate myself the most)” (Ep. 22, 8:34). She has found reasons to hate everyone around her, and the hatred seems to stem from a sense of jealousy for what she cannot have. In her eyes, Shinji is a better pilot, Misato has a better relationship with Kaji, and Rei is the perfect doll who does exactly as she’s told, just what her mother would have wanted Asuka to be like in her mentally ill state. She doesn’t have the things the people around her have, so she lashes out in anger at them, but also at herself for not being able to be better in all aspects.

Later on, amidst a psychological attack from an angel, Asuka is forced to relive past childhood traumas. Even though this causes her immense psychological pain, she stands her ground, saying she would rather die than retreat from the battle. This only showcases how desperate she is to prove herself in front of everyone to the point of death. In her pained state, Asuka processes some of her unconscious feelings about her relationships. She has a desire to think and live for herself and wants to be able to live on her own without anyone's help, but deep down she also thinks she’s lying to herself about that. These are snapshots of a conflict that we see resolve in two different ways at the end of the series. Asuka is eventually saved by Rei’s actions in Unit 00, which frustrates Asuka to no end, once again reducing her

self-worth further. In being saved, Asuka *believes* that people think she is weak and needs saving, and that she doesn't have the strength or abilities to fight on her own and be the pilot she once was. She rejects the assistance of others to try and maintain that image of a strong, independent Eva pilot. She continues to keep her appearance as mature and adult-like as possible to avoid negative perceptions about immaturity from those around her.

In episodes twenty-three and twenty-four, Asuka reaches her breaking point. She spends time away from her living situation with Misato and Shinji, seemingly unable to handle life around them, and stays at Hikari's house. When told to pilot Unit 02 once more, she reluctantly goes to fight but her synchronization rates drop to the single digits, preventing her from being able to move Unit 02 at all. At this point in time, Asuka is unusable as an Eva pilot, which causes her to fall into a deep depression. She runs away and for seven days, she starves herself, feeling like she has zero worth and that life isn't worth living. After being found naked in a bathtub and apprehended by NERV agents, she is brought back into NERV custody for the time being. Asuka has reached a state of catatonia, where she feels as though she has absolutely nothing because she is physically unable to pilot Unit 02 anymore. Her sense of identity has been primarily based on piloting for so long, so losing this ability is such a blow to her self-worth.

Realization

In the final episodes of the series, twenty-five and twenty-six, we can see instances of Human Instrumentality through the eyes of Asuka. In the dream-like state of Instrumentality, Asuka is initially apprehensive about reliance on other people for support, but Rei posits to

her that she has separation anxiety, and she eventually comes to realize that she is in fact afraid of living alone. After having spent so much time pushing others away, refusing to rely on other people, and striving for independence, Asuka comes to accept that she wants to be around people besides herself. Asuka also has confusion over why she doesn't want to cry but continues to cry anyway, even after vowing not to. She has kept emotions bottled up for the sake of maintaining an independent and strong social facade, but deep down she has always had the pain and trauma from her childhood that she never fully allowed herself to process. She also initially blames Unit 02 for her shortcomings as a pilot but comes around in realizing that she only has herself to blame.

In this ending, she is part of a world where everyone is merged together, which means she doesn't have to go on alone anymore. Seemingly, this world allows her to open herself up to others, to rely on others, and to hear out what others have to say about her. Asuka has made some important realizations about the role of other people in her life, like the fact that she pushes others away when she actually wants to be connected with other people. Her identity and ability as a pilot are not touched upon in this ending, more so her new ability to connect with others through Instrumentality and her interdependence.

Revitalization

The End of Evangelion represents Asuka's bounce back from her depressive state of zero self-worth to that of an energized pilot who has much to live for. Through the physical and emotional support of her mother (in the form of Unit 02), she is able to re-identify herself

as a person worthy of piloting an Eva and someone who has confidence in their sense of individuality as a human.

At the beginning of *EoE*, Asuka is in a coma, presumably from when she was catatonic in episode twenty-four. When the attack on NERV headquarters is initiated, her body is moved to Unit 02, underwater, as to protect her. While inside Unit 02, Asuka awakens from her coma to a different attitude, saying that she doesn't want to die. This contrasts her previous behavior and words. As the attacks continue, missiles and bombs reach Unit 02 and she cries out in pain, but she has an epiphany that her deceased mother was really with her the entire time, as a part of Unit 02, protecting her and watching over her. This epiphany revitalizes Asuka's fighting spirit, as she is now piloting for her mother to see, which drives her to nearly defeat all of the Mass Production Evas within an incredibly short time span. Asuka is determined to win, saying “負けてらんないのよ！ママが見てるのに！ (I'm not going to lose! Mama is watching!)” (Anno & Tsurumaki, 1997, 37:24). Despite her best efforts, the Mass Production Evas' cores are not destroyed, which allows them to continue operating after being heavily damaged by Unit 02. Unit 02 is torn to shreds by the Mass Production Evas and Asuka suffers immense physical trauma, but she continues to try to fight until the end, up until many spears are stabbed right through Unit 02. Asuka's willpower to fight and pilot seems to be intrinsically linked to people's perceptions of her, so knowing that her mother is watching her allowed her to show off her talents, potentially to receive praise from her mother/those around her.

As Human Instrumentality begins, Asuka's soul is able to interact with Shinji's, and the two have multiple interactions. One prominent interaction is that of Asuka telling Shinji, “あんたが全部私のものにならないなら私何もいらぬ (If I can't have all of you then I want nothing)” (Anno & Tsurumaki, 1997, 1:02:43). Asuka and Shinji seemingly tiptoe around sexual and romantic feelings throughout the course of their relationship but here in Instrumentality, nothing is held back as souls are merged into one and secrets are non-existent. Asuka makes it clear to Shinji that she is open to being close with Shinji but that Shinji would need to commit to her, indicating her sense of selfishness and resentment towards other people. When Shinji tells Asuka that he wants her and her alone, Asuka responds by saying that all Shinji does is hurt her, and that he doesn't truly want her because anyone will do for him. Given there is little support for her argument that Shinji hurts her, Asuka's words could be taken as manipulation towards Shinji. Asuka has an idea that she can get what she wants but not return anything, given Shinji opens himself up to her like she wanted, but she rejects his desires.

At the end of the film, Asuka manifests as a separate individual like Shinji, apart from the rest of humanity's souls. As explained in the prior chapter, this ability to individualize was only possible for Asuka because she could visualize herself as separate and distinct from everyone else in humanity. Asuka had a desire to be separate, to be an individual again despite the pain associated, but likely for a different reason than Shinji. While Shinji wants to remain part of the physical world to continue to process how he defines himself in relation to others, Asuka may be more inclined to stay separate due to her sense of ego and desire for

independence. On the beach, Shinji chokes her, but she raises a hand to caress his face. When he begins to cry and loosens his grip, she says, “気持ち悪い (Disgusting)” (Anno & Tsurumaki, 1997, 1:26:44). Asuka being willing to caress Shinji’s face despite his angered assault on her raises an interesting question as to her intention. Her actions can be read as an improved capacity for sympathy, responding to Shinji’s pain and suffering with kindness and care, her understanding of which may have been brought about by having her soul merged with Shinji’s for some time.

EoE shows very predominantly Asuka’s reclamation of her identity as a pilot after having been so far removed from it. She goes from catatonic depression to reinvigorated pilot, proving to be incredibly adept and deserving of her position, all because she was able to receive support from her mother in the shape of Unit 02. After having spent so much time pushing people away and trying to be self-reliant, she realizes that her mother is there to protect her and support her, which she accepts. In the end, becoming individualized again post-Instrumentality showcases the strength of her self-identity, and despite her initial frustrations towards Shinji, she comes around to being able to show some form of compassion to him. Asuka has not become someone entirely new, but her confidence in her identity decisions is returned and she is making progress towards establishing a reciprocal relationship with others.

Asuka, like Shinji, has grown and changed in significant ways throughout the course of the series. She started out as a confident Eva pilot who didn’t want help from anyone else,

and progressively lost the confidence to pilot, bouncing back in *EoE* but somewhat changing her identity in the original ending. She made good friends, but then turned around and pushed everyone away, just to let people back in once again. In the original ending, she faces her personal insecurities to grow into someone who can open up to others, rely on others, while in *EoE*, Asuka is the only other human besides Shinji who chooses independent existence over Instrumentality, somewhat developing a better sense of empathy.

While they have similar “endings,” Asuka proves to be very different from Shinji in many other ways. Asuka’s sense of independence and identity as a pilot stand as more prominent modifiers of her identity and relationship development than Shinji. Shinji spends more time than Asuka trying to reach out to others throughout the course of the series, while Asuka only comes to realize that she wants to be around other people at the end. While Shinji grappled with whether or not he wanted to be a pilot, Asuka always wanted to be one, she simply felt like she had fewer piloting abilities towards the end.

Conclusion

The goal of this thesis has been to take an in-depth look at the ways in which *Neon Genesis Evangelion* portrays the struggles Japanese adolescents face in growing up and how they develop their identities. In order to do this, the actions, behaviors, and dialogue of Ikari Shinji and Sohryu Asuka Langley have been analyzed with respect to the ways in which these two adolescents grappled with their relationships and their senses of identity. The results of this analysis are that *NGE* accurately portrays the complexities inherent in identity formation and relationship development that psychological research on Japanese adolescents highlights.

Shinji

Shinji's identity as an Evangelion pilot changes multiple times throughout *NGE*. At the beginning of the series, Shinji is called upon to pilot Unit 01 partially against his will, and he feels pressure to do so to satisfy his father and stop the injured Rei from having to pilot. Shinji has little perceived free will because of these pressures, and despite being told that he doesn't have to pilot if he doesn't want to, he wavers on his feelings. At multiple points in the series, Shinji decides to quit his role as pilot, but he always comes back eventually. The major difference with the last time he decides to return to piloting is that he chooses to do so for the sake of protecting those he cares about, like Asuka, Rei, or Misato, from the angels. He faces Gendo, defining himself clearly as the only person who is to pilot Unit 01, but Shinji doesn't identify as a pilot because his father wants him to, he does so on his own terms for the sake of humanity.

In the tumultuous exploration of his identity, Shinji is in need of support systems from friends and family, but his experiences making new relationships and developing existing ones is tough. Particularly with regards to parental figures, Shinji seems to never get back what he lost, but Misato comes close. With the death of his mother and the estrangement of his father, Shinji is forced to rely on Misato while continuing to reconnect with Gendo. Despite many attempts to grow closer with him, Gendo only gives Shinji any form of praise or acknowledgement a single time, which Shinji latches on to. Eventually, the relationship between the two of them reaches the point of no return when major disagreements arise. On the other hand, Misato quickly takes Shinji under his wing and fulfills his need for someone to look after him, but she is unable to truly replace his mother. While Misato frequently prioritizes Shinji's health and safety, sometimes above the primary objective of defeating the angels, she exists as someone who is too young and in ways socially and emotionally unprepared to support him. She attempts to be there for Shinji when he is distraught, but he rejects her support, and in *EoE*, Shinji even explicitly tells her that she is unrelated to him (therefore she isn't family/doesn't understand him).

In making new friends and establishing relationships with his peers, Shinji suffers emotional trauma multiple times when he gets too close emotionally. Shinji initially holds back from opening up to the other adolescents in his life, but with time he gets to know his fellow classmates and pilots. With both Toji and Kaworu, Shinji is then forced into situations where he needs to fight them and ultimately hurt or kill them to serve the greater good of protecting others and being so close to the two of them makes this situation even harder on

him. Shinji is also traumatized in *EoE* when he sees the remains of Unit 02 after it was destroyed by the Mass Production Evas. His closeness with Asuka makes her apparent death even that much more painful to him as he screams out.

Asuka

Asuka's identity as a pilot undergoes many changes as well. When she is introduced, she has full confidence in her abilities to pilot as well as the performance capabilities of Unit 02. She feels as though she is superior to Shinji and Rei, but she recognizes Shinji's potential. With time though, Shinji slowly surpasses her in synchronization scores, and she begins to believe she is perceived as less talented in comparison. This causes a negative feedback loop in which her loss of confidence affects her piloting abilities, and vice versa. After reaching a breaking point, Asuka is unable to pilot, feels as though she has zero worth, and doesn't consider herself to be worthy of identifying as a pilot anymore. In *EoE* though, she has a sudden realization that her mother's soul has been part of Unit 02, always watching over and protecting her, giving her the drive necessary to regain her piloting abilities and destroy the Mass Production Evas.

Asuka also struggles with maintaining the relationships she has with people around her for a multitude of reasons that all come back to her insecurities. With Shinji, she progressively feels as though she is less talented at piloting in comparison. With Misato, Asuka becomes jealous of the romantic relationship she has with Kaji. As for Rei, Asuka is jealous of the "perfect" doll-like qualities that Rei has, those of which Asuka's mother wanted her to have right before she died. Eventually, she pushes everyone away because of

these insecurities, but she comes to accept others into her life once again in the original ending. She accepts that she doesn't want to be alone anymore, that she is okay with relying on others for help, and that she doesn't need to be fully independent all the time.

Character Comparison

Shinji and Asuka share many similarities in their struggles. Both find themselves conflicted over the role other people should have in their lives as do many other Japanese adolescents. Throughout the series, they grapple with rough parental relationships, have disconnect from their peers, and have major concerns regarding their independent senses of identity. In *EoE*, they are the only two humans who are able to individualize themselves out from Instrumentality, signaling their strong senses of self-identification.

On the other hand, Shinji's issue with his identity is that he spends most of the series trying to clearly define it through exploration. In contrast, Asuka knows what she wants to identify as (a pilot), but her confidence and by extension her piloting abilities cause her to eventually be unable to identify as a pilot for a time. In addition, Shinji is reluctant to open up to others because of the potential to be emotionally hurt, but Asuka refuses to rely on others because of her need to be superior and maintain her independence.

In reality, the difficulties that Japanese adolescents face as they grow up and find their place in society are very similar to Shinji and Asuka's struggles, despite differences between the characters. Both of them have complex relationships with the expectations of their family and spend a lot of time balancing their degrees of interdependence on peers and family throughout the series. *NGE* is able to showcase that life is never straightforward, and

that identity exploration is a continuous process, as we watch Shinji and Asuka's identities evolve over time.

Personal Note

Writing this thesis has provided me with a new and unique lens through which to watch and enjoy *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. When I first watched *NGE*, I was studying abroad in Japan and only a couple years older than Shinji and Asuka. At that time, I was in the process of developing my own sense of identity as an adolescent, and I'm *still* exploring who I am to this day. In my opinion, what makes this series so powerful and worth watching, discussing, and analyzing is the capacity for the target audience of teenagers and young adults to identify with both Shinji and Asuka's struggles. It is clear that *NGE* has been popular since it was first aired in 1995, as communities of fans have grown, merchandise remains profitable, and new films have been released. I believe that its popularity can be attributed to how well it portrays the experience of adolescence. The raw emotions and experiences regarding relationships are very real representations of something we all go through, and it has the potential to transcend cultural boundaries. I am continually hopeful about the future of the medium of *anime*, and while I am in agreement with many other scholars in believing that *NGE* is a masterpiece, I am also looking forward to seeing the universality of other great works to come.

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