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Frenchy Lunning (Ed.), **Mechademia Volume 4: War/Time**, University of Minnesota Press, 2009, 296 pp., $21.95 (paperback).

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Mechademia Volume 4: War/Time, the latest edition of the book-length annual journal of manga and anime edited by Frenchy Lunning, attempts to engage with the relationship between war and everyday culture across a number of historical and artistic contexts. Combining research articles, reviews, an interview, and a short manga, *Mechademia 4* reaches out to a broad audience including both scholars and fans. Perhaps inevitably, the "time of war" that most haunts this collection stretches from the beginning of the second Sino-Japanese war in 1937 to the deck of the USS Missouri in 1945 with due consideration to the rise of Japanese military expansion in the late 19th century and Japan's post-World War II reconstruction. However, "war/time" is not "war time" in such a limited sense. Contributors to *Mechademia 4* go well beyond issues of nostalgia or memory to explore a very present tense, omnipresent war/time. As Thomas Lamarre's introduction argues the comfortable sense of a clear divide between the everyday and the disruptive, aberrant "war time" is artificial in a world where war is "a self-propelling operative condition in which war acts as a control on the everyday time of orderly social productivity, while that everyday time spurs the spread of war" (p. xi). War penetrates peace, and structures it. In pursuit of this argument, *Mechademia 4* is a solid, if not extraordinary, success.

Like all such collections, the individual contributions to *Mechademia 4* are of uneven quality. Among the best, Rei Okamoto Inouye offers an insightful historical study of manga artists' attempts to win credibility for their work by allying with Japan's imperial ambitions. This contribution should fascinate those interested in the relationship between political and cultural power and the historical circumstances of artistic production. Tom Looser's discussion of Mamoru Oshii's *Blood: The Last Vampire* draws on Giorgio Agamben's theorization of "bare" life to provide a dazzling explication of the political implications of life and death. Other articles are less satisfying, perhaps because they try to appeal to a mixed audience that includes specialists and fans as well as a more general reader. Most articles in *Mechademia 4* are organized around specific texts, individual authors, a generic category, or some combination of the three. This orientation proves too restrictive. While one can hardly fault an author for focus, sometimes it comes at the price of greater resonances beyond the object(s) in question. For example, Gavin Walker's discussion of *The Place Promised in Our Early Days* offers a virtuoso performance filled with post-modern twists and theoretical invocations, but ultimately one is left with little beyond an assured performance in textual interpretation. Wendy Goldberg's nicely observed and argued reading of *Grave of the Fireflies* is valuable for its close attention to the text but probably will not have much to offer those without a specific interest in that film. Dennis Washburn's exploration of history and memory in the video game *Final Fantasy X* falls partially in this category, although as a contribution to the seemingly endless ludology/narratology debate in video game studies it may reward more general interest.

Understandably, but not inevitably, the authors found in *Mechademia Volume 4* generally maintain an emphasis on anime and manga within the context of Japan itself and in relation to national history and culture. Following such a paradigm always risks taking the nation as a given rather than the object of inquiry, and this tendency is particularly treacherous in analyses that seek to relate a reading of a text or group of texts to some kind of national and/or historical zeitgeist. In such situations, the interpreter's own interpretive skills often become the final arbiter of historical truth unless leavened with attention to the interpretations of diverse other audiences. In reading such work, it is often relatively simple to appreciate the difference between those scholars who can balance text and meta-text, and those primarily talented in hermeneutic juggling. Most of the contributions to this collection walk this line with considerable success—mostly thanks to their willingness to acknowledge and investigate the enormous amount of theorizing "Japaneseness" undertaken by the Japanese themselves. However, acknowledging previous theorizations of Japan and Japaneseness must not prevent maintenance of a critical distance from cultural essentialism. Mark Driscoll's study of Yoshinori Kobayashi's ultra-nationalist manga masterfully overcomes any such tendency by positioning Kobayashi's historical revisionism in relation to both Japanese national politics as well as local senses of identity and history in Okinawa and Taiwan. That he manages to accomplish this while giving due attention to the cultural resonances of Japan's economy and celebrity culture is simply breathtaking. Perhaps a book is in order.

In one critical sense, however, Driscoll's contribution is not representative of the collection as a whole and, despite *Mechademia Volume 4*'s variety, one seemingly obvious question remains almost entirely unacknowledged. As any trip to an American book or electronics store quickly demonstrates, anime and manga now constitute a major cultural force outside of Japan. With *Mechademia 4's* focus on Japan's complicated relationship with its militaristic past, excluding more extensive attention to the meaning of Japan's archetypical "war/time" in more international terms seems a major oversight. The ambivalent relationship between Japan's cultural power and its historical relationship to its neighbors in Asia is extensively documented, and Driscoll approaches this topic nicely, but in the context of "war/time" it seems more like a theme that should permeate the whole volume. Furthermore, while attention is given to Japan's ambivalent relationship with American culture (and geo-political power), the influence of Japanese culture in the U.S. is virtually absent. Much like how young Japanese and Germans seem surprisingly willing to slaughter their grandparents in video game representations of World War II, American anime fans' ability to either identify with, misunderstand, or simply look past the imagined defeat and/or ritual humiliation of their country (and, often, their ethnicity) in name or by proxy in some of the manga and anime discussed in this volume warrants interrogation. The only article to devote itself to Japanese influence in America, Takayuki Tatsumi's study of the role of the ninja and its relationship to Christianity in Japan, is unfortunately one of the weaker offerings. While perhaps due in part to issues of translation, this article's unwarranted conceptual leaps and odd factual gaffs (the Catholic Inquisition as purveyor of the "black arts") should have been remedied before publication.

Three general comments on the collection deserve mention. Given the stunning cover image and the collection's subject matter, it is surprising that *Mechademia 4* contains so little in the way of illustration or reproduction. Usually this would not merit mention, but the collection suffers because it is so difficult for the non-specialist reader to follow much of the more in-depth textual analysis without some

visual aids. Also, the absence of an index is a problem that will make it less likely that future writers will cite the work. Finally, the *Mechademia* series in general should be commended for its willingness to take chances on unusual methods and mixed media, and I hope that this aspect of its mission becomes more and more central over time. Any journal or collection that attempts to sustain attention in the novel faces considerable challenges, not least the fact that the requirements of academic life rarely encourage authors to pursue projects that do not fit neatly into a tenure file. No matter how lofty one's statement of purpose, most editors would agree that it is difficult to publish work that doesn't exist, let alone to do so consistently over time. *Mechademia*'s continued willingness to experiment deserves our praise and attention.