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The Spaces Between Us: The mise-en-scène of *Evangelion: 1.0*

The original *Neon Genesis Evangelion* animated television series, which aired from late 1995 to early 1996 in its home country of Japan, is the brainchild of Hideaki Anno, a veteran animator who struggled with depression before creating the series (Samuels). In the 2000s, Anno, widely regarded as one of the most influential figures in Japanese animation (Gates), announced a plan to reintroduce *Evangelion*, his most well-known creation, to modern audiences (Miller). The result was *Rebuild of Evangelion*, a film tetralogy that began in September of 2007 with the release of *Evangelion: 1.0 You Are (Not) Alone* (in Japan, *Evangelion: New Theatrical Edition: Prelude*). An almost shot-for-shot remake of the first six episodes of the original *Neon Genesis* series, with a streamlined plot, additional scenes, and state-of-the-art computer-generated visual effects, *Evangelion: 1.0* works well as a standalone film despite its status as an adaptation. One of the reasons for the film's success as a work of artistic cinema *and* as a work of popular cinema is that the film itself is a very personal and partially *autobiographical* story (Anno, 169-170) for the *auteur* behind the project. *Evangelion: 1.0* is heavily allegorical, showing Anno's emotional struggles through a terrifying, fantastic lens. This allegorical nature is evident in *1.0*'s mise-en-scène – specifically, its production design, lighting, and composition, all of which emphasize a massive scale and great distance between individuals. Through the mise-en-scène of *Evangelion: 1.0*, the audience experiences director Anno's personal understanding of emotional turmoil and mental health issues, but ultimately, a way to overcome these problems makes itself clear as the film progresses.

One of *Evangelion's* unique features is its production design, and in *1.0*, both natural and artificial environments emphasize the feelings of loneliness and helplessness that come with depression and other mental health problems. The futuristic city of Tokyo-3, the overall setting of the film, is more often than not seen from a long distance away, in a manner that emphasizes its scale. The monstrous Angels comprise the main threat of the film, and in response, the military organization NERV deploys giant weaponized cyborgs called "Evangelion" (or *Eva*, for short); however, Tokyo-3 is a monster in its own right, by virtue of being the setting for the action. As the film progresses, Tokyo-3 comes to represent the place where problems happen, and it is the place where the lead character and avatar for director Anno (Anno, 1969-1970), fourteen-year-old Shinji Ikari, must deal with his personal issues as he settles into his new role as the pilot of prototype Eva Unit-01. Given that Tokyo-3 is so daunting in its size, adjusting is no easy task.

NERV's headquarters, situated beneath Tokyo-3 in an artificial environment called the GeoFront, is equally daunting, a massive maze of elevators and hallways that cause both Shinji and his superior officer turned guardian, Misato Katsuragi, to experience confusion at the start of the film. Much like depression, it is difficult to navigate and fully understand. *NERV*, incidentally, is the German word for "nerve"; the GeoFront may represent the human brain or mind as a whole, and NERV Headquarters may represent the part of the brain or mind responsible for emotional states, particularly depression. Even deeper into the Earth, far below NERV Headquarters, is Terminal Dogma, in which NERV keeps the entity "Lilith" – the Second Angel and the genesis of life on Earth – in containment, crucified and impaled with a massive spear. Lilith is the reason behind the Angels' constant attacks on Tokyo-3, as the Angels wish to cause a cataclysmic "Third Impact" by using Lilith's power. Lilith is thus a metaphor for the

underlying cause of depression. Lilith, though secured, is on full display in Terminal Dogma, suggesting that the reasons for depression, though buried deep within the mind, are recognizable.

Lilith, the other Angels, and the Evas all embody the personal demons that people with mental illness must face. The Angels have designs that are inhuman and terrifying, and they grow larger with each battle; both the Fifth and Sixth Angels utterly dwarf Unit-01. This escalation is representative of depression not only returning, but returning stronger than in previous experiences. Meanwhile, the Evas, which safeguard humanity against the Angels, are no less sinister-looking despite their bright color schemes. Both the purple Unit-01 and its orange-yellow predecessor Unit-00, while humanoid to a greater degree than the Angels, are nonetheless alien in nature. Unit-00 has a singular red eye and no visible mouth, and Unit-01 has a quite demonic head, complete with a massive opening mouth and a horn protruding from the front. Indeed, Ikuto Yamashita, the mechanical art designer for the original series as well as the *Rebuild* tetralogy, recounts director Anno's desire to have the Evas bear "the image of a demon" and appear "just barely restrained by mankind" (Yamashita, 171). The Evas protect the world from total annihilation, but their tendency to go inexplicably berserk tells that they too are monstrous. The Angels represent recurring depression; however, the Evas are far from a representation of proper treatment. If anything, the Evas cause even more problems for Shinji, as he frequently expresses reluctance to pilot Unit-01. The Evas represent the wrong kind of treatments for depression – treatments which are almost as damaging as the depression itself. The problematic nature of the Evas – in their behavior but also, more importantly to this essay, in their appearances – suggests a reluctance on the part of director Anno to treat himself according to advice from people in his life.

Lighting design also plays an important role in *1.0*, with stark contrasts and color palettes representing the characters' emotional states, sometimes subtly and other times drastically. Harsh shadows appear frequently in the film to represent emotional turmoil. The scene of Shinji's initial meeting with his father Gendo Ikari, also the Supreme Commander of NERV, has Shinji's eyes frequently obscured by a dark shadow as Shinji questions why he, of all people, is the best and *only* candidate to pilot Unit-01. When Shinji later encounters Toji Suzuhara – a classmate whose younger sister was injured during Unit-01's battle against the Fourth Angel – at his new school, a shadow obscures Shinji's eyes once more as Shinji questions whether or not he deserves any of the blame for what happened to Toji's sister. The shadows of buildings against the sunlit ground create a contrast of light and dark, further representing Shinji's internal conflict and uncertainty.

Much later in the film, when Shinji visits the dilapidated apartment building of fellow Eva pilot Rei Ayanami – a blue-haired, crimson-eyed, deathly pale girl who seems to rarely show emotion – the apartment itself features shadows that are not as harsh as those in previous scenes. The lack of harsh shadows in this scene may be a deliberate choice, to show how Shinji has progressed as a character up to this point in the story; Shinji makes the decision to enter Rei's apartment on his own, suggesting more resolve on his part. A certain level of ambivalence remains, but, in this case, there is not as much as there had been previously. The lighter shadows make a return to the film when Rei visits Shinji in the hospital, whereupon Shinji expresses his fears about piloting Unit-01 to her. In this scene, the lack of harsh shadows reflects that, while Shinji is still, to some degree, ambivalent, he is more aware of what he wants.

While most of *1.0* takes place either under clear, sunny skies or on clear nights, unusual atmospheres make appearances throughout the film, reflecting unique emotional states. One of

the more notable unusual atmospheres is the cloudy, rainy sky that appears after Shinji's defeat of the Fifth Angel. This atmosphere represents the beginning of a new kind of turmoil that both Shinji *and* Misato must face – conflict on a personal level. Whereas Misato was fairly lax around Shinji prior to the battle with the Fifth Angel, afterwards, the relationship between Shinji and Misato becomes strained, and the rainy atmosphere signals this turning point. Later in the film, during the initial preparation for Operation: “Yashima,” Misato's plan to defeat the Sixth Angel, the setting sun casts a striking purple glow over the environment and the characters that inhabit it. This change in overall atmosphere signals more than just the setting sun; it represents Misato becoming more serious and emotionally capable, coming into her own as a competent authority figure.

After Shinji's first attempt to destroy the Sixth Angel with Unit-01's prototype positron cannon spectacularly fails, the Sixth Angel retaliates with a powerful beam attack and nearly destroys NERV's forward operating base; at this point, the sky turns red as flames and smoke rise into the air. This dramatic atmospheric color scheme, accompanied by the orchestral composition “Angel of Doom,” reflects Shinji's inner emotional turmoil as he tries to figure out what to do with himself. Though he is initially paralyzed by fear and self-doubt, Shinji soon finds the courage to move Unit-01 forward and attack the Angel one last time – and succeeds.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is the element of composition within *1.0*. Often, *1.0* places small characters in vast environments to further emphasize a sense of loneliness and helplessness. As Tokyo-3 is usually seen from a distance, even the titanic Evas and Angels are, relatively speaking, small. When the Fourth Angel makes its initial attack, the frame rarely closes in on a particular detail. Instead, the audience is able to see much of the battle between the Angel

and the UN forces in full. Because the Angels represent depression, this initial battle with the Fourth Angel establishes the gravity and scale of the situation. The Angel is not something to take lightly, and therefore, neither is depression or any other mental illness or emotional struggle. The audience's first introduction to Unit-01 (and thus, the concept of the Evangelion) occurs when NERV's Chief Scientist, Ritsuko Akagi, brings Shinji and Misato to the Eva's holding cage inside NERV Headquarters. The inactive Unit-01 dwarfs the three – especially Shinji, since he is the primary focus of the scene. Unit-01 immediately presents itself as something commanding awe, and something that will become very important and terrifying in its own right. Moreover, it presents Shinji with a problem *beyond* the threat of the Fourth Angel and its successors. Namely, Shinji now has to pilot something that he does not understand. Taking previous sections of this paper into account, this composition suggests that while Unit-01 is a way to counter the problem of the Angels (depression/mental illness), the Eva is a monster itself, and may do more harm than good (as improper treatment for mental illness would).

Later, after living in Tokyo-3 for three weeks in between Angel attacks, Shinji still seems to be lost, both physically and metaphorically, as the scenes that show Shinji by himself in Tokyo-3 place him as a small person amongst crowds; Shinji is still beholden to his emotional troubles. Later still, when Shinji runs away from Misato and NERV after Misato scolds him for disobeying her direct orders, many of the shots in and around Tokyo-3 place Shinji *completely* by himself and cause the environment surrounding him to dwarf him. The audience can see, from the composition alone, that Shinji is not just physically solitary, but also emotionally alone.

A sense of colossal, daunting scale is most present, however, during the battle sequences, owing to the size of the Evas and the enemy Angels. The film's frame of reference mostly shows

wide shots to the audience during Unit-01's battle with the Fourth Angel, working to establish a sense of scale; in effect, the frame portrays struggles with mental health as intimidating, albeit through a fantastic lens. This theme continues in Unit-01's battle against the Fifth Angel, which further emphasizes the scale of the two combatants and their battleground. Midway through the battle, the Fifth Angel sends Unit-01 hundreds of feet into the air, causing it to crash into the side of a hill; as it is airborne, Unit-01 becomes even smaller amidst its environment – and therefore it seems more helpless, as does Shinji. Later, Unit-01's failed initial sortie against the massive Sixth Angel emphasizes just how far-reaching the Angel's destructive power is, and how Unit-01 – and, therefore, Shinji – is not equipped to deal with the situation at hand. From Unit-01's quick defeat, the audience sees Shinji's lack of emotional preparedness and stability as well.

The final battle pitting Unit-01 and Unit-00 against the Sixth Angel, however, establishes the physical threat (and thus the emotional threat) as massive, but subverts the trend of helplessness just before the Sixth Angel's ultimate defeat; Rei assists Shinji by shielding him from the Angel's beam weapon, and suddenly the scale of the battle is smaller, concentrating primarily on Unit-01 and Unit-00. With Unit-01 and Unit-00 working in tandem, the space becomes more manageable, and so does the battle and the emotional struggle that it represents. This ties into the final aspect of the film's composition that this paper will highlight – the use of small spaces to show how interpersonal connections can alleviate some of the stresses of emotional struggles and mental health issues.

While vast spaces are prominent in *1.0*, smaller and more intimate spaces, when they appear, bring Shinji closer to other people not just physically but emotionally as well. At the start of the film, when small spaces appear in *1.0*, they are uncomfortable for Shinji, but as the film

continues, Shinji grows more at ease in smaller spaces, and thus allows himself to further open up to other people. This progression implies that connections with other people are a means of treating depression, though not outright eliminating it. Progress in this regard is notable even in the first act of the film. When Shinji and Misato head to NERV after their first encounter with the Fourth Angel, Shinji is quite distant despite being in the seat right next to Misato, who is in the driver's seat. He asks no questions, and only speaks when Misato asks him questions. This enclosed space is something that makes Shinji uncomfortable because he came into the situation as an individual shut off from others. Minutes later, however, the situation changes. On the way down to the GeoFront from the surface, Shinji becomes more talkative, and the "camera" moves closer to both Shinji and Misato in a manner that is not uncomfortable but rather connective.

When Shinji first encounters an injured Rei – sent to pilot Unit-01 in his place due to his refusal – Rei falls off of her gurney due a tremor from the Fourth Angel's path of destruction above ground. Shinji runs to help Rei, and the two join within an intimate space, despite the setting being the vast Eva hangar. The "camera" focuses on just Shinji and Rei in close-up for a brief moment, and Shinji's interaction with Rei motivates him to pilot Unit-01. Because of the intimate shared space between Shinji and Rei, even within a larger environment, Shinji forges a more personal connection to someone, and thus comes away with a greater understanding of what he has to do for both others and, more importantly, himself. The audience further sees Shinji's willingness to make connections to treat his loneliness when he agrees (albeit not explicitly) to live with Misato at her apartment and settles in, though he shuts himself off from others once more when Misato scolds him. Afterwards, however, Shinji shows signs of further opening himself to others and trying to change his emotional state for the better.

When Shinji visits Rei's dilapidated apartment, he enters on his own when he notices that the front door is unlocked (and accidentally walks in on a nude Rei, just out of the shower). The fact that Shinji is willing to enter such a small space on his own, where he normally would have been uncomfortable, is a major step forward for him as a character. Shinji and Rei share another intimate space in Shinji's hospital room after his initial defeat by the Sixth Angel; this scene, with Rei by Shinji's bedside, focuses primarily on Shinji in a close-up shot in which he expresses his anxieties about piloting Unit-01 to Rei. Shinji is more honest with his feelings partially because he has grown accustomed to smaller spaces and less distance between himself and other people. By the scene's end, Shinji makes his true feelings clear in an intimate space with someone else present – a massive leap forward for his character.

However, Shinji only fully accepts what he *must* do as the pilot of Unit-01 just before the final battle with the Sixth Angel. Misato brings Shinji, just out of the hospital, to Terminal Dogma to reveal Lilith to him and impress upon him the gravity of the situation. Despite the massive scale of Terminal Dogma itself, the scene is a very personal conversation between Shinji and Misato, and framed accordingly, primarily with close-ups. After the conversation, Shinji agrees to pilot Unit-01, and grasps Misato's hand once she offers it to him. This composition shows that Shinji is more open and honest with Misato and willing to be closer to her, both physically and emotionally. At this point, finally, Shinji understands that he is not alone.

The penultimate scene in *1.0* features Shinji rescuing Rei, by hand, from the damaged Unit-00's cockpit after the Sixth Angel's defeat; inside the cockpit itself, Shinji and Rei share an intimate personal connection where Shinji, crying tears of relief, actually asks something of Rei – a simple smile. An initially surprised Rei eventually smiles at Shinji, and Shinji takes her by

the hand to help her out of the cockpit; this is the moment at which Shinji finally learns to be fully comfortable around other people, and to be true to himself and others. The film ends, however, just after the introduction of the mysterious, white-haired Kaworu Nagisa, a sign that Shinji's struggles are just beginning.

I, as the author of this paper, already considered *Evangelion: 1.0* to be one of my favorite animated films before starting to write this paper, but over the course of writing and revising, and watching and re-watching the film several times, I experienced several revelations about the film and began to see it through a new perspective, both as a *devoté* to director Anno and as someone who also suffers from depression. I found this new perspective for myself by carefully analyzing the mise-en-scène of the film, which is at times obvious in its intent but other times far more subtle. *1.0's* unique visuals tell a story all their own – a story of pain and sadness, and of rising above them in order to truly live and have meaning.

Though at times people may feel small and helpless, trapped in a massive environment and afraid to do what is necessary because the scale of the problems within that environment, there is still hope, and that hope comes in the form of other people, to whom the fearful must reach out, and with whom the fearful must connect on a deeper, more honest, more *personal* level. The mise-en-scène in *Evangelion: 1.0* suggests that, by crossing vast distances in both the physical and metaphorical senses, fearful and lonely people can learn to accept others into their lives and, in doing so, confront their personal problems and emotional struggles on a different level and bring them under control. This process may not be easy for anyone – and it may even seem impossible for some – but, ultimately, honesty and connections with other people will allow for a new world of shared experiences, and a break from the seemingly never-ending cycle

of loneliness. Mental health issues and other emotional problems in general are not easy to treat, but ultimately, moving forward is never impossible.

The subtitle of *Evangelion: 1.0*, in just four words, sums up the message quite nicely.

You are not alone.

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