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Reading (and looking at) *Mariko Parade*: A methodological suggestion for understanding contemporary graphic narratives

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1. Differentiating graphic narratives: A methodological lacuna

It is a safe generalization to make: never before have comics, manga and graphic novels been more popular, among readers as well as academics. Nonetheless, although manga and comics remain distinguishable on a cultural basis, the difference between comics and graphic novels, especially across western cultures, is far from clear, as is evident, for example, from Jan Baetens and Charles Hatfield's articles in *English Language Notes* (46,2 2008). While both Baetens and Hatfield find the term problematic, the latter does suggest that an interdisciplinary methodology can

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aid in comprehending the diversity of graphic literature. The terminological uncertainty regarding graphic novels, which can be anything from alternative or artistically inclined graphic narratives to comics published in book format (implying, at least for this paper, the mainstream, frequently serial, graphic narratives and their counterparts across the West like *bande dessinée*, *fumetti* and *tebeo*), is indicative of the absence of appropriate methodological means of grasping the differences in word-image narration. Yet although some graphic novels are extremely similar to comic books since the graphic novel label is often regarded as referring only to the format (e.g. Versaci 30), many graphic novels stand out through their attempts to resemble other literary and visual media like novels and paintings through their manipulation of textual and pictorial narrational tools in frequently complex ways.

In contrast, as can be seen in their drawing styles or panel transitions, manga contain some basic differences from western comics (parallel to those between anime and cartoons). However, given today's speedy transmission of information and the prevalent multimodality, word-image media continue to diversify, absorbing influences from one another and other related media. Since translations of Ōtomo Katsuhiro's *Akira*, published by Marvel Comics in 1988 (and followed by an animated film two years later), manga have inspired many western artists, promoting not only the phenomenon of indigenous manga but also influencing artists like Frank Miller, Bryan Lee O'Malley and Edmond Baudoin. It was also in the 1980s that the graphic novel label became more recurrent with DC initiating the Vertigo imprint and Marvel creating Marvel Graphic Novels. Hence the expansion of the potential of sequential word-image narration, as embodied by many graphic novels, has coincided with—and been enriched by—cross-cultural interchange.

As an outcome of the *nouvelle manga* initiative and a collaboration between a French and a Japanese artist, *Mariko Parade* is probably one of the most conscious concretizations of cross-cultural interchange between Western comics (specifically BD) and manga. As will be shown in the course of the following analysis, through incorporating the influence of diverse media and their traditions such as BD, manga, anime and the *nouvelle vague* in films along with the *nouveau roman* or new novel, *Mariko Parade* exemplifies intermediality as well as cultural interaction within and across media. Given the “Nouvelle Manga Manifesto”, charted out by Boilet, the constructedness of such interaction forms an underlying but prominent layer in *Mariko Parade*.

Through analyzing *Mariko Parade*, this paper aims at demonstrating the

application of a combinative methodology for looking at unusual, in several senses hybrid, word-image media. A work-based instead of reception-based approach is adopted in order to show how openness is engendered in graphic narratives, whereby the focus on one book allows for an in depth analysis, the results of which can serve as comparative poles. Instead of providing definitions of the different kinds of word-image narratives, this paper is concerned with the innovational tools employed by word-image narratives and the means that can be used for discerning them.

2. Openness as a methodological tool

In *Die Sprache des Comics* (The Language of Comics), Ole Frahm rejects the distinction made between comics and graphic novels and proposes “weird signs” as a means of understanding the working and significance of comics (i.e. all graphic narratives), which implies, an essentially parodic element in all kinds of graphic narratives. Frahm’s emphasis on the performativity of graphic narratives is worth bearing in mind, since it underscores the processual nature of sequential art forms. However since it is not just a question of parody, one could propose “strange signs” for graphic novels instead of Frahm’s “weird signs”. “Strange” is proposed because the mocking element remains but is accompanied by the uncanny juxtaposition of serious content with drawings that due to their reductive essence can be caricatural. Hence strangeness can denote the unsettled factor that the drawing style’s serious intonations, despite its removal from realism, produces. This in turn has the potential for alternative readings and consequently openness on visual and the accompanying literary levels.

Currently most of the scholarship on comics comes from the literature or cultural studies departments, as is evident from the departmental affiliations of most comic studies scholars (like Jan Baetens, Jean-Paul Gabilliet and Hillary Chute) as well as the publications containing most of the research in comics studies including the *ImageText* and *Studies in Comics* journals or the *Studies in Popular Culture* series of the Mississippi University Press. The absence of research on graphic narratives in departments based on visual material like visual studies and art history is striking. Reasons for this include the strong narrative characteristics of such works along with the underestimation of comics, their relegation to the fringes of popular culture and consequent disqualification from traditional literary and artistic academic disciplines. Indeed despite their proclaimed dissolution, the categories of high and low art continue to haunt contemporary media, and the emergence of graphic novels to designate more complex, literary or artistic works in comparison to the typical comics is to a certain

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extent symptomatic of the persisting division between high and low art. The division itself is not groundless, but it is perhaps more fruitful to specify the factors on which these distinctions are based (for example on the degree of depth or the possibility of multiple readings) rather than taking the high and low art (or fine art and popular art) labels as conclusive.

Highlighting the distinguishing features and workings of the graphic novel by remaining attuned to its literary and visual aspects is the point of departure for the methodology presented here. After touching on the purposes propelling the creation of the nouvelle manga as a concept, *Mariko Parade* will be analyzed on the literary and visual levels. While the analytical framework is broadly based on semiotics, it incorporates art historical methodologies of formal analysis and iconography as used, among others, by the proponents of the Warburg School, like Erwin Panofsky [cf. *Meaning in the Visual Arts, Iconology* etc.]. Simultaneously however the analysis is similar to the literary notion of a close reading concentrating upon key literary devices as well as the intermedia and intercultural connections to bring out the innovations and unusualness of the book that in turn indicate the emergence of new kinds of contemporarily pertinent word-image combinations.

Before describing the method the notion of hybridity employed here deserves clarification. Hybridity is used in lieu of bimodality because it emphasizes the interaction between the two modes, as well as others implied by them, like audio or video. That *Mariko Parade* itself is a conscious hybrid of bande dessinée and manga underscores the potential underlying interaction between media or genres of media. The suggested method unfolds along the traditional categories of form and content (as far as they can be separated), relying upon the literary scholarly tradition for the textual signs and the tradition of iconography and formal analysis for the visual element. Ultimately the concentration is on the contribution of these visual and verbal tools towards creating openness in graphic novels, like *Mariko Parade*. Furthermore openness comes across as a useful attribute for distinguishing between the concepts of comics and graphic novels.

As applied here, openness refers to Umberto Eco's concept of the open text, which can be condensed as follows:

The aesthetic dialectics between openness and closedness of texts depends on the basic structure of the process of text interpretation... This structure is made possible by the nature of the system of codes and subcodes constituting the world... The reader finds his freedom (i) in deciding how to activate one or

another of the textual levels and (ii) in choosing which codes to apply (Eco 1984: 39).

The openness of a text is, therefore, gauged by the interpretative scope allowed for the reader.¹ As such the concept has acquired a greater degree of specification than Eco's earlier explication of the open work of art in the late 60s (in his *Opera Aperta*) and is a pertinent means of distinguishing cultural products and their effects due to its flexibility and applicability for all kinds of media. The potential for openness is incremented in word-image combinations due to their reliance on two basic modes of expression, namely the pictorial and the literal, because that increases the referential scope. It is, after all, for media combining several channels, like film, that the multiple possibilities of webbing narrative threads, open for each reader and reading have been brought up. Thus Philippe Marion, while using Thierry Groensteen's notion of the structuring effects of the *mise en réseau* (or the spatio-temporal organization of the panels and pages in a book) also transposes Gilles Deleuze's notion of *image-temps* or time-image to emphasize the momentary, variable aspect of the final story entailing the simultaneous interpretation of visual and verbal material and transforming the typical reader into a reader-viewer or "lecteur-spectateur" (Marion 1993: 84). Given the degree of input required, the spectator can also be regarded as a "spectateur" (Dumouchel 1989) a spectator-actor, which is comparable to the reader's participation in open graphic narratives.

Besides the formal level of containing multiple channels of communication, the openness of a text is connected with the more content-based features of inserting levels of meaning, such as the use of figurative devices like metaphors or intertextuality. In this respect, the symbol, understood by Eco as "a textual modality, a way of producing and of interpreting the aspects of a text" (Eco 1986: 162), is frequently "suggested by the co-text and by the intertextual tradition" (Eco 1986: 163). Consequently intertextual references are a means of expanding the scope of the diegesis by locating it within a network of other texts. Interestingly the original Greek version of the word symbol—*symbolon*—acquires additional significance in the context of iconotexts since it was a sign of recognition formed by an object broken into two; hence something which, though incomplete, was a carrier of meaning. This aspect of disjointedness requiring readers to fill in the gaps lies at the core of the iconotextual sequential narration. In superimposing intercultural and intermedia layers upon the hybrid nature of iconotexts,

¹ Sensitivity to possible reader constructions of texts has also been propagated by Todorov, among others (e.g. Todorov, Tzvetan, *Genres in discourse*, Cambridge/ New York: Cambridge University Press 1990).

graphic novels offer several kinds of readings and hence, considerable openness, whereby readers will naturally interpret the works in accordance with their individual frames of reference.

3. Interaction between media and cultures

Published in 2003, Frédéric Boilet and Takahama Kan's *Mariko Parade* covers 188 pages (roughly four times the length of an *Astérix* volume) and is issued as a part of Casterman's *écritures* series.² Tellingly *écritures* employs dimensions close to B5. This size of approximately 176 x 250 mm is significant because it is usually used for paperbacks. Originally favored by the underground comix, the format is also common for graphic novels.

Born in 1960, Boilet is a French artist active since the 1980s. His works have been characterized by their periodic, jumping transitions recalling film stills or photographs. During his sojourn in Japan between 2001 and 2008, he became more active as a mangaka, albeit with a very distinct style, primarily due to rotoscopic images. Takahama, born in 1977, has been publishing since 2001 in the alternative manga magazine *Garo*, that appeared in the 1960s and targeted adults.

Hinting at the cinematic affiliation, Takahama describes the nouvelle manga as a "manga d'auteur" (Boilet and Takahama 2003: 3), which the two artists consider synonymous with BD d'auteur (Boilet 2007, internet). For Boilet, the nouvelle manga, like the non-commercial nouvelle BD, sets itself apart from the commercially established genres by being accessible for everyone, regardless of culture and age group essentially through their everyday themes (Boilet 2007, internet), as in the case of *Mariko Parade* love (Boilet and Takahama 2003: 5). The term, "nouvelle manga" (originally 'nouvelle manga vague') was coined by Kusumi Kiyoshi, editor of the monthly art magazine *Bijutsu Techō*, to describe the multifaceted nature of Boilet's works: graphically affiliated with the BD, they employ the narrative style of manga, specifically "sa fluidité, sa technique pour suggérer les sensations, les sentiments" (its fluidity, its technique for suggesting feelings and emotions", Boilet 2001, internet), whereby the themes and tone recall alternative, art-et-essai French films (Bastide 2001, internet). The employment of 'manga' as a feminine noun, in deliberate disregard of French grammatical conventions, also serves to distinguish it from western mainstream

² Titles in the series include: Ari Folman and David Polonksy's *Valse avec Bachir* (2009), José-Louise Bouquet and Catel Muller's *Kiki de Montparnasse* (2007), Ben Katchor's *Histoires Urbaines de Julius Knipl, Photographe* (2005), Taniguchi Jiro's *Le journal de mon Père* (2004), Craig Thompson's *Blankets. Manteau de Neige* (2004) etc. See Jesse Bi's review in the online magazine *du9* for the effects of imposing the same format on all the albums of the series (Bi 2005, internet).

comics that have largely attracted a male audience and subsequently subverts the dominant trend. Notably in contrast to comics, manga attract a greater proportion of female readers than male ones; a trend mirroring the readership of graphic novels. A comparison with Boilet's earlier, pre-Tokyo works, like *Rayon Vert* with its more sensationalist, rapidly-paced arrangement of perspectives easily reveals the change in narrative pace and mode. In order to extend the phenomenon to a global scale, Boilet applies the nouvelle manga term essentially to its content, whereby it aims at being a universal comic attempting to bridge the distance between readers, creators and editors by presenting the everyday from autobiographical, documentary or fictional perspectives (Boilet 2007, internet).

One of Boilet's means of nearing reality is to incorporate the physical attributes as well as the personality of his models. The first book created through such a collaboration with a model was *L'Épinard de Yukiko* (Yukiko's Spinach), which was published in 2001 by Ego Comme X in France and Ohta Shuppan in Japan. Although *Mariko Parade* is *L'Épinard's* sequel, Takahama's involvement as Mariko introduces a reciprocal artist-model-character nexus because this time both protagonists are based upon the two artists narrating the story. Once again both books have been published in Japanese (Ohta Shuppan 2003) as well as French (with the French version containing translations of the Japanese signs and sound effects in the panels or brief descriptions of Japanese figures or customs mentioned in the story as footnotes). *Mariko Parade* incorporates the brief strips and illustrations that Boilet based on his model and muse between 1998 and 2002.³ These six brief sketches are ensconced in the main story, "La Ballade d'Enoshima", drawn by Takahama and co-written with Boilet. The transitions to Boilet's briefer, older episodes are sometimes triggered by the protagonists recalling those works, or by parallel aspects between the present and the past. Sometimes the episodes are also visually present in the panels from the main story to enable a smoother transition and to include the reader in the protagonists' experiences. While incrementing visual diversity, these brief insertions also provide richer insight into the characters' past and natures as in "Les petits vestes de Boilet" that narrates Boilet's first encounter with Yukiko (who becomes Mariko in the second story).

The story begins with Mariko and Frédéric in a train to Enoshima, with Mariko reading *L'Épinard* for the umpteenth time and remarking that she has changed. The first of many self-reflexive references to the emergence of their book based on their lives appears when Frédéric shows her the drawings he wants to include in *Mariko*

3 "Les Douze Chimères du zodiaque", *Hohoemido, le cérémonie du sourire*, "Histoire presque sans paroles", "Les petites vestes de Boilet", "Juin 2049, Eirin a 100 ans!" and "Les Ampoules de Mariko".

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Parade, leading to the “Les douze Chimères du zodiaque” episode with the series of twelve drawings forming full-paged splashes (Boilet and Takahama 2003: 13). After their arrival at Enoshima, Frédéric takes over the previously neutral narrational perspective and his thoughts written across the panels transform them into stills and alternate with his actual conversation with Mariko (Boilet and Takahama 2003: 56-59).

Most of Boilet’s brief episodes were originally published in Japanese in art magazines (like *Bijutsu Techô*), as manga or comics, highlighting the episodes’ intermediate status. *Hohoemidô, la cérémonie du sourire*, for instance, first appeared in L’Association’s *Comix2000* anthology in 1999. By being a crossover between manga and BD and avoiding complete conformity with the conventions of both BD and manga, *Mariko Parade* stands apart mainstream manga. According to Takahama’s introduction, *Mariko Parade*’s difference from regular manga lies in the absence of violent action and major events (Boilet and Takahama 2003: 5). Other non-manga features include the presence of the protagonist as an active narrator and the narrative style itself and possibly even Takahama’s claim that the book was not made to entertain or divert (Boilet and Takahama 2003: 4).

Moreover Takahama exacerbates the aspect of extended temporality in manga, particularly through large panels with limited action that create something relatively unfamiliar to readers of both comics and manga, which can be seen as an attempt at life-likeness. Moreover this unsensational realism succeeds in generating reader empathy, much like television series and films with “soft” themes. Additional details like Frédéric’s enthusiasm for the French soccer player Zidane or his reference to John Lennon and Yoko Ono as the “dieux du love and peace” emphasize the proximity of the characters’ worlds to those of readers familiar with western popular culture (Boilet and Takahama 2003: 107).

As shown by the persistent inclusion of the environment, aspect-to-aspect transitions typical for manga abound in the main story by Takahama. In contrast, Boilet’s panels essentially comprise clear transitions, which preserve most of the elements of the previous panels. Thus two distinct drawing styles are discernible in the book, namely those of Boilet’s episodes and Takahama’s “La Ballade”. The contrast between the two artists is discernible in the panel that appears soon after Frédéric begins his overhead narration and then asks Mariko whether she remembers the first time they met, whereby the question is placed in a single panel by Boilet showing Mariko admiring his sketches of her (Boilet and Takahama 2003: 58). Boilet employs a rotoscopic style that hovers between photographs and realistic drawing since it exudes the spontaneity

and realism of a snapshot while emphasizing its drawn nature. In contrast to clear lines Takahama relies a lot more on grey shading that suggest features instead of outlining them. This is suitable for the book's intimate theme and subtle, emotionally intense atmosphere. Moreover the grey tones make the panels appear as if they have been drawn on faded photographs. Opposing the line-based, realistic rotoscopicism, it extends the tendency of manga to become roughly sketchy and cartoon-like (usually for instance for an alternate perspective or mood, such as a behind-the-scenes view from the drawing board) to its backgrounds, which are frequently formed by hasty, vague lines emphasizing their rough, hand-drawn essence and alluding instead of imitating (Boilet and Takahama 2003: 34, 35, 62). This is a complete reversal of what McCloud calls the masking effect that is considered indigenous to manga but has also become prominent in western comics (McCloud 1994: 81). Instead of easy identification with the character and immersion into the elaborately rendered surroundings enabled by the masking effect, a certain distance for the reader is generated. On the other hand, reader empathy is produced by the memoir-like narration. Unfolding from Frédéric's point of view, with Mariko as the conscious object of his gaze, the intermedia and intercultural aspects have a clear western slant. Yet it is not merely the presence of intermedia and intercultural interaction but their incorporation in the story that generates its openness.

4. The layering of meaning and reading possibilities

Weaving the past—which is indicated by Boilet and Takahama's visual style—and following the emotional ups and downs of the protagonists' relationship, the practical aim of the trip is fulfilled by Frédéric alone at the end of the story, namely getting the desired cover picture for the completed book that should simultaneously be an authentic token of their relationship. Precisely this desire for “de vraies photos... pas seulement des documents. Des photos qu'on pourra garder...” (“true photos... not only documents. Photos that one can keep”) made Boilet use his analogue camera during the trip (Boilet and Takahama 2003: 109). The cover photograph, which is also the *Mariko Parade*'s cover, shows Boilet lying next to a stick drawing of Mariko in the sand, wearing a *yukata* with hydrangeas (*ajisai*). This drawing-photograph crossover asserts not only the degree of linkage with real-life people but also the possibility of transience—in itself proximal to the Japanese notion of *hanami*—in Frédéric and Mariko's relationship. Nevertheless it simultaneously affirms the power of images and their ability to preserve and resurrect memories, much like the slides at the beginning of “Les Ampoules” that reenact Mariko's performance for Boilet despite his absence

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at the actual event (Boilet and Takahama 2003: 158). Hence while exemplifying the book's reference to other media, the photographic element also refers to the theme of transience. (However the book's cover, by being in color, undoes the pertinent contrast between Boilet's solid figure and Mariko's outline, since both appear equally three-dimensional.)

One of the book's most noteworthy aspects is its central trope of hydrangeas, which embody transience and also connote the two artist-protagonists' disparate backgrounds due to the different cultural connotations attached to the flowers. The insertion of figurative language like tropes takes advantage of the fact that readers have the freedom to read the book at their own pace and to muse over its contents. Originating from the realm of literature, such multi-layered tropes are rare in comics and other popular fiction due to their temporal and mental demands. Yet the very first panel of *Mariko Parade* is a close-up of hydrangeas. In the course of the story, these flowers reveal themselves as the quintessential motif of the book, signifying the changing emotions of the two protagonists as well as their different cultures (Boilet and Takahama 2003: 7). The Japanese symbolism of the flowers is only clarified towards the end by the landlady of the guesthouse who, in response to Frédéric's remark that the flowers have altered since their arrival, points out that hydrangeas change color when in season because of which for the Japanese—in complete contrast to the Europeans—the flower stands for inconstancy and indecision. Ultimately, the flowers end up signifying Frédéric and Mariko's love. Furthermore it is because of this notion of change and uncertainty incorporated by the flowers that the book does not have an unequivocally happy ending, but a more tentative, realistic one.

Importantly these themes of transience on the one hand and critical self-referentiality on the other are highly dependent on the manipulation of formal factors in a manner that is rich in allusions. The album is mostly in black and white. In "La Ballade" color is used exclusively for the hydrangeas in the last few pages to highlight their change (Boilet and Takahama 2003: 172–177).⁴ Moreover the gutters are kept black throughout the book, even though the interstices in Boilet's sketches were originally white. Although artists like Pierre-Yves Gabrion (e.g. in *L'Homme de Java* from the 1990s) have already used black gutters, the shading in "La Ballade", along with the varying thickness of the interstices accentuates the photographic connotations. The significance of colored backgrounds has been underscored by Groensteen. White is no longer perceived as a natural support for the page and consequently acquires a status

⁴ However some of the inserted episodes, like "Les Ampoules", were originally published in color, albeit limited to pale washes of skin and blue.

equal to that of other colors in the panels. In contrast the black gutters emphasize the framing of each panel (Groensteen 1999: 42). While Takahama, like many mangaka, frequently employs such gutters in her other books, *Kinderbook* and *L'Eau amère (Bitter Waters)*, they are slightly thicker and consequently more dominant in *Mariko Parade*. Aptly, in "La Ballade", each panel has the appearance of a snapshot, making the book resemble a photo album of memories, consequently preserving the reference to actual lives; every action occurring in the diegetic present and thus recorded in the book immediately becomes a part of the past, accentuating the sentimental tone as well as the processual nature of the book. That the predominant visual mode is photographic complements the action because Frédéric spends most of his time taking photographs of Mariko not only for creating his art but also in a desperate attempt to preserve cherished moments. Owing to its artistic lightning, "Histoire presque sans paroles" gives a comparable impression. While the thin panels with moment-to-moment transitions in Boilet's other sketches recall photographs like in "Les Petites Vestes", the difference is that these "panel-photographs" freeze action, whereas Takahama's appear as recollections due to the intimate rendition of the monochrome panels (Boilet and Takahama 2003: 112).

As already mentioned, one of the reasons behind transforming the author into the protagonist is to generate a more authentic effect. Stories like *Mariko Parade* consequently stand apart due to the interesting possibility of being true and the corresponding proximity to contemporary life as opposed to the most popular genres of superheroes, thrillers and science fiction. Since the book narrates its own making, with its creators as the story's protagonists, metafiction and self-reflexivity are closely intertwined in *Mariko Parade*, leading to an additional level of complexity. Metafiction, as Linda Hutcheon points out, is related to the openness of the text because it generates greater awareness of the media and consequently their influence and effects in molding the story:

... while being made aware of the linguistic and fictive nature of what is being read, and thereby distanced from any unselfconscious identification on the level of character or plot, readers of metafiction are at the same time made mindful of their active role in reading, in participating in making the text mean (Hutcheon 1984: xii).

The book's several visual references to photography and film, like the artistic intermediary of rotoscoping along with the techniques familiar to fine art such as mixed

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media and painting are, therefore, significant.

Though allusions to film and photography have been discernible in Boilet's works since long, albeit of the more common kind, such as the drastic perspectives and panel layouts in *Le Rayon vert* from 1987, rotoscopic drawing became more dominant after his move to Japan. In addition, cinematic conventions common to most comics and manga (the pioneering mangaka Tezuka Osamu was, after all, greatly inspired by Disney animations), particularly the significance of perspective and transition, are used throughout the book by both artists. These include the alternation of full front, single shots of the two protagonists during their conversations (Boilet and Takahama 2003: 130–133), as well as the aforementioned close-ups that intensify intimate moments and also increase the involvement of viewers or readers as during their second night on the island or the moment of their parting (Boilet and Takahama 2003: 143, 171).

However as indicated by the original description, “nouvelle manga vague”, various similarities with the French New Wave are discernible that are uncharacteristic for comics or manga. The focus on Mariko during some of their talks gives the impression that Frédéric is holding the camera throughout the narration, even a film camera in the case of continuous panels. Thus beginning with the structure itself, the story is marked by the auteur, more precisely the two auteurs. Along with the arrangement of the panels, the monochrome but atmospheric tones in the main story also recall film. Particularly the dimmed ambience of Takahama's night scenes is evocative of film since regular comics aim at clarity and even Boilet includes limited night scenes. Especially during their second night on the beach, the darkness-defying vividness of the panels and the close-up views are evocative of anime, with the grey shading generating three-dimensional effects in some of the panels (Boilet and Takahama 2003: 147–148).

Additionally, the main narrative's measured pace is comparable to the nouvelle vague's partiality for real time, and that the story itself is in-the-making, laying the process of its creation bare, is another similarity. Likewise the shifts to Boilet's episodes, as well as the flow of the episodes themselves (particularly “Les Chimères”, “Les petits vestes de Boilet” and “Les Ampoules”) recall discontinuous jump cuts favored by the nouvelle vague. On a related but literal note the nouvelle manga also illustrates the commonalities that exist between graphic novels and the nouveau roman, which is particularly intense in Boilet's works. Notably Alain Robbe-Grillet, who clarified the general traits of the New Novel, also collaborated with New Wave directors like Alain Resnais in key movies such as *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (1961) and *L'Immortelle* (1963). Far from being a theory unified by a set of principles, the New Novel is “an

exploration” through which the authors try to bring out hitherto ignored possibilities of the medium as well as the metafictional focus upon the process of becoming (Robbe-Grillet 1989: 134). This holds for graphic novels due to the degree of verbal and visual experimentation often applied, such as the melange of visual styles in *Mariko Parade*, the predominance of (in multiple senses) photographic visuals, the motif embodying the story’s themes and even the very ordinariness of the storyline and its romantic theme—a combination that is largely absent in both comics and manga. Yet while borrowing techniques or referring to other media, *Mariko Parade* also underscores the uniqueness of its sequential static pictures, highlighting their relative freedom and constraints, as in the case of the color seeping in the images toned in black and white that occurs with the hydrangeas towards the end of the book (Boilet and Takahama 2003: 174–175).

Thus *Mariko Parade* shows how the potential of word-image narratives is constantly being explored and extended. These works consequently become places marked by both transculturality and transmediality that bring in additional levels of hybridity and call for methodologies sensitive to these several interacting facets. Correspondingly, the most rewarding means of analyzing them involve taking into account a variety of media traditions, extending from the purely visual and literary to the mixed, as well as considering their possible cultural nuances. For this the notion of the open work of art, with its wide, mutational gambit provides a useful and malleable analytical basis. Lastly, the interculturality and intermediality brought out here can be seen as a reflection of the contemporary globalized multimedia world, deploying the graphic novel as a particularly contemporary medium; its intermedial nature can be seen as reflecting the prevalence of Internet and multimedia where communication and expression are also dependent upon the interaction of two or more media.⁵

5 According to Lev Manovich, in the 1990s “moving-image culture went through a fundamental transformation”, the incorporation of several kinds of media to the extent that “hybrid media became the norm”. (Manovich 2007, internet)

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Biography

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