Performing Differently

Convention, Medium, and Globality from Manga (Studies) to Anime (Studies)

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While anime studies has flourished in the past few years, in many respects manga studies is much more developed, with a longer history and more debates within the field. Because anime and manga are intimately intertwined media, one might ask what models anime studies could borrow to expand the field. But, as there are significant differences between the two media, there will be points where the theoretical models overlap or deviate, specifically in regards to their inter-related yet media-specific aesthetics. Today I will focus on some of these points, specifically the apparent unity of manga and anime's conventionalized aesthetics, the material distinctions in the respective media, and the variant degrees of globality.

I would like to start with a field of discourse concerning both anime and manga. Azuma Hiroki and Otsuka Eiji appear at the forefront of the theoretical discourse focusing in particular on anime, manga, light novels, and games. Otsuka seems to provide the starting point by positing a type of realism, dubbed "manga-anime realism" (*manga-animeteki rearizumu*), which begins to appear in novels in the 1970's. Azuma (who builds off of Otsuka's work) highlights how the obvious fictionality of anime, manga, light novels, and other otaku media products gives them their own rules of "realism" (Azuma 2007). Building on this line of thought, one could say that in order to sustain this specific kind of realism there must be certain shared textual elements, frequently repeated patterns that are part of how the works are produced and consumed. These conventionalized elements would trigger such impressions of consistency to the extent that they create their own type of realism. These elements may be considered what constitutes the database theory that Azuma conceived, where otaku break down a work into various elements, such as the repetitive character designs (moe-elements), consuming them as a "database" from which they can use these elements to create derivative works (*nijisōsaku*) like dōjinshi (Azuma 2009). I see these conventionalized elements as performative: the database elements recalled and performed in combination to bring manga-anime realism into being. The shared nature of these conventionalized elements produce manga-anime realism, with the performance of the shared conventionalized elements giving anime, manga, and light novels a sense of unity, especially in regards to their aesthetics.

The above discourse on otaku media provides provocative theories and has been very influential in both the anime studies and manga studies fields. Though it is very productive to look at anime and manga together, the assumed unity of the performance of their shared conventions is an area that is rarely scrutinized in either field. In regards to such conventions and their aesthetics, especially in terms

of the particularities of the media, manga studies has a number of more detailed considerations on these subjects. While Otsuka's own work, as well as that of Natsume Fusanosuke, Ito Go, and the work on comics done by Thierry Groensteen and Neil Cohn can be given as examples, there are few systematic approaches to anime aesthetics and conventions.

If we are to consider conventions and aesthetics, as they can be seen as the structures within the texts, semiotics would be a good place to start. Due to the semiotic stage within Japan in the 1990's, manga studies is more advanced in discussions of the conventions of the media, especially in the Japanese discourse. Anime studies has virtually no discussions of the semiotics of anime. Only within the last few years have the major academic discourses moved towards exploring anime as a medium, mainly centering on the contributions of Thomas Lamarre examining anime with an emphasis on the dynamics of its animation. Within manga studies, however, there are already several in-depth discussions which range from considerations of line and panel arrangement, to the uses of sound effects and charts of the particular conventionalized expressions used. Related discourses include the connection between manga and cinema (Otsuka 2013; Miwa 2014) and the type of image flows characteristic of story manga. But the manga semiotics model, especially in regards to movement and flows, is not so easily applied to anime, despite the two media's sharing of conventions and content to the degree that they appear to produce a single type of realism.

There is a tendency towards recognition of flows and rhythms in these semiotic/media focused examinations of manga (Inoue 1995; Groensteen 2007; Lamarre 2010). This flow and the rhythms it produces can be conceived as a holistic notion of considering manga aesthetics. The line weights and shifting differences in panel and page composition provide a complex sensation of rhythm that places the viewer in various viewing positions as they move across the panels and pages. A good example of the dynamism of manga flows can be found in the seinen manga *Shamo* (1998-2015; chapter 55) in the depiction of two characters fighting. Though at our own pace, we follow the flow of the images, creating a spiraling sensation of movement, a rhythm that mimics the type of grappling and jerky shifts of weight and energy in the throws employed by the two fighters. The variations between the white of the page and the black of the line, and the undercurrents of the panel and page structures provide the shifts which produce a rhythm where the shapes and contours of the lines and panels change with the dynamics of the fight.

Unlike in manga studies, rhythm is not addressed in depth within anime studies.[1] Flow and rhythm in anime may also be thought of as a holistic consideration of anime aesthetics, diverging from manga both in sensation and means of production. In anime, each image is composed of colored layers that are adjusted in the compositing process, then played in succession to produce the moving-image. The dynamic flow of images creates a sensation of rhythm through the constant switching between shifting image compositions and alternating between varying durations of shots and degrees of movement and stillness. An example of the implementation of such rhythm can be found in an action scene from the end of episode 10 in Bakemonogatari (2009), where the protagonist is attacked by an invisible snake in a

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1 Thomas Lamarre and Marc Steinberg note a certain rhythm in anime, but cite it as a description of the media's dynamic rather than examine the concept of rhythm in anime in detail. Lamarre notes the development of a rhythm the context of a comparison of the dynamics of shot reverse-shot in anime, manga, and classical cinema (2009: 295). Steinberg sees a specificity in the motion-stillness rhythm in the animation of *Tetsuwan Atomu* that came to be seen as the 'TV anime technique,' and formed the basic pattern for all subsequent anime and connects to the wider media-mix ecology at the time (2012: 9, 17, 36). I have previously delineated the narrative rhythms of anime in *The Anime Paradox* (2013), and detail a more holistic conception of anime-rhythm in a forthcoming article entitled: "Anime-Rhythm: Audio-Visual Flow, Tempo, and Pacing in Anime Narratives" (2016).

Figure 1: Scene from the manga *Blade of the Immortal*, book 8 (page 228-229) depicting the movement of the sword fight in exploded projection.

grass field. Though on screen for differing durations, we see a few seconds of the protagonist, followed by the grass, the protagonist, then grass, switching between dark and light colors and distinct image compositions, each taking a separate viewpoint, going back and forth between shots of the invisible snake in the grass and the protagonist. We are restricted from seeing the entire picture, and this creates a sensation of tension through the rhythm of alternating viewpoints, with the rhythm punctuated by the scenes of the grass or the switch to the protagonist. Sustained by shifting between dissimilar image compositions and degrees of movement and stillness, this rhythm is largely predicated on how captive we are in the flow of the images within the frame of the screen.

This divergence in production of flows in the media has implications for how we address these related media. The semiotics and media theories around manga generally tend to return to the basic components of the line, the panel, the page, and the word. Line, word, and panel distribution, if we are to take the trio described by Natsume Fusanosuke and Saito Nobuhiko, would form all the elements that constitute the structure of manga (Inoue 1995), from conventionalized expressions to the rhythms of the panels and the narrative arcs they sustain. If we expand on this and follow Lamarre's assertion of manga's material limit as the page (Lamarre 2009: 288), we see that the dynamics of line (Lamarre 2010), tonal variation (Lamarre 2009: 295), and panel shape, size, and distribution dictate the dynamics of these elements. But in anime, the material frame of the images is not the same. In his brief discussion of the differences between anime and manga in *The Anime Machine*, Lamarre posits that the material distinctions of the frame, the limits of the respective mediums, has an impact on the expressive modes

Figure 2: (Read from left to right) Scene from the anime K-On in which the manipulation of the visual frame (of what can be seen) and the precision of timing of that visual restriction (when and for how long we see what is within the frame) is employed to produce a comedic effect.

utilized (2009).[2]

To present a simplified version of a complex argument, Lamarre sees manga in terms of an encounter with the moving image, portraying manga as an exploded projection of movement.[3] Instead of distributing the movement across panels and pages through the line as in manga, anime deals with the force of the moving image through the compositing of the layers of the image that creates the movement of animation. Building on this, we can consider anime as producing rhythms which tend to move between various image compositions, the duration of time between shots, tempo of the cuts, and alternating degrees of movement and stillness[4]. Manga, however, creates rhythms in the way it distributes the exploded projection of movement in line and panel across the page. In this sense in particular, manga allows a higher degree of freedom of movement across the panels and pages whereas anime is often quite restricting, directly forcing us to follow at the anime's pace, not our own.[5] Manga and anime thus handle rhythm in different ways: manga relies on line dynamics, and the shape and distribution of speech bubbles and panels to create a sensation of rhythm; anime constrains what we can and can't see, and when and for how long we see it, forcing us along at a dictated pace, allowing anime to rely on literal rhythms predicated on "beats" (or more precisely, "accents") in actual time.[6] This results in varying types of rhythmic tendencies in manga and anime, and thus separate conventions of movement, stemming from the material distinctions of anime and manga. In turn, these separate conventions of movement create

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2 See Lamarre's chapter "Anime Eyes Manga."

3 A great example of this is found in the manga *Blade of the Immortal* in book 8, pages 228-229, depicting a sword fight in which there are 12 square panels across the two page spread, each panel detailing the exploded image of specific points of the movement.

4 Steinberg also sees a rhythm of motion and stillness in anime (2012: 9, 17).

5 I do not want to give the impression that anime produces a more passive spectator. This is merely to point out that, in respect to the flows in manga, which are often described in a manner that puts the viewer/reader to work in creating the rhythm through their visual/mental synthesis of line, word, panel, and page, anime forces the rhythm upon the viewer in terms of pacing. Two viewers/readers would take separate amounts of time to read the same manga, but two viewers of anime could watch the same anime any number of times and the play time would be the same.

6 This consideration of rhythm is adapted from semiotician Theo Van Leeuwen, who describes rhythm as repeated intervals with the succession of different stimuli containing accented or non-accented elements, during which one can perceive differences in duration, intensity or other recognizable factors (Van Leeuwen 1985).

variances in the performance of conventionalized expressions, humor, and narrative, despite them sharing similar models, even overlapping source material.

The medium specific alteration in the performance of these conventions allows for deviating effects when considering the discrete types of expressions of movement. For example, there is a divergence in the performance of humor, where timing is a crucial element. Anime can control what we see within the frame, as in this example from *K-On* (2009), where one character keeps looking away from the other, forcing us to delay our sight of the other character whose odd position is revealed with precise timing. Manga has to rely on other devices to produce a sensation of time and rhythm to enact a gag as we can see the whole page (and thus many panels) at once. This can be seen in the example Natsume provides from the manga *Bonbon*, the rhythm changing through the size of panels in the flow of the sequence where the gag is enacted (Inoue 1995: 173). Because of this important variance of how timing is employed within the visual frame and its effect on producing humor, it is no shock that Lamarre's discussion on the differences between manga and anime focuses on comedic scenes in the anime and manga versions of Chobits (2002).

Due to these material distinctions, the performance of many of the conventions we assume to be shared between anime and manga actually tend to diverge. This divergence also effects narrative on a macro level, but even seemingly simple visual elements such as character designs are performed divergently. For example, when the internationally famous manga *Blade of the Immortal* was made into an anime, the art style of Samura Hiroaki was very difficult to sustain in animation, and thus encountered a large change in character design due to the discrepancies in material: the line of the manga could not withstand the force of the movement as conventionally employed in anime. Because of the medium specific distinctions, semiotics applied to manga does not cross over well despite apparent similarities, especially when in consideration of the varying types of movement employed. To combine Natsume and Lamarre's conceptions of manga, if in manga the line, word, and panel are given primacy, with the material limit as the page upon which we find an exploded projection of movement, then all other semiotic considerations would build from this and thus differ greatly between manga and anime. There is clearly a sharing of conventions that gives the impression of a unity and similarity to the extent of a shared sense of realism, but they go through great lengths in separate ways to perform this sense of unity. Put another way, manga and anime often attempt to arrive at the same place, but through divergent means, and upon closer inspection, even that apparent unity often reveals variances. With this in mind, methodologically, we cannot take the same media mechanics of manga and apply them to anime. We must, instead, make those differences, in terms of methodology and material, productive for anime studies as we cannot simply rely on the material that manga studies provides.

The importance of these divergences, and how to deal with them, come to the fore when we consider the growing global presence of manga and anime. Anime are beginning to be increasingly produced abroad, while manga has been produced outside of Japan for quite some time now, and thus once more anime studies may want to look at the discourse in manga studies. On the subject of production outside of Japan, this discourse settles around what Casey Brienza calls "global manga," manga that are produced "without any direct creative input at all from Japan," distinguishing between the "inputs" of "symbolic and stylish appropriation" and "economic and/or labor" (2015: 16-17). In the terms used in this paper, global manga could be seen as performing Japanese manga's conventionalized elements, but are produced without economic support or labor from Japan. These global manga would include OEL manga (Original English Language manga) as well as Chinese manhua and Korean manhwa, among many others. Brienza notes a number of boundary cases—which she nonetheless perceives as qualifying

as global manga—of artists/writers who are non-Japanese operating within Japan and the Japanese manga market, or are Japanese working in foreign markets (2015: 17-18). Global manga do not plug into the Japanese production system and are often not for consumption within Japan. Even if they are translated, this is not part of the Japanese production system of manga.

The increased production of anime and manga outside of Japan forces us to engage with anime and manga as imitable conventionalized media. Even those who see anime and manga as "cultural diplomatic tools," the endorsers of the "Cool Japan" campaign, must contend with this aesthetic perspective to attempt to "measure" their impact abroad. However, as Zoltan Kacsuk alerts us, while diplomatic influence through the spread of manga is debatable, there is Power at play, with Japanese manga consistently existing at the forefront of global manga trends, often by the pure virtue of its position as "Japanese" (Kacsuk 2015). In this sense, we might say that non-Japanese manga appear as mimicry of the Japanese style, "mimicry" here used in a similar manner to the way Homi Bhabha applies it, as a performance of the same elements but looked down upon as lesser due to the Power relations at play between performer and performance model (Bhabha 1994). I would argue that anime's connection to Japan is related but dissimilar from that of manga, in part due to the material distinctions of the media that effect the production system and its connection to Japan. In other words, significant numbers of anime already operate as what Brienza calls "boundary cases," intersecting with many nations at once, most often Japan. Because of this, the research in manga studies will have to be rethought to fit the material realities of anime production.

In his discussion on the creation of Japanese popular culture abroad, manga theorist Ito Go notes the wider spread of anime overseas, and even mentions manga and anime in tandem multiple times, yet he still focuses his discussion entirely on OEL manga (Ito 2008). This may be because of the material distinctions of the two media which force a dissemblance in the production processes and costs in terms of economic and human capital: manga can be made relatively easily by a minimum of one, whereas anime, especially as it is currently made within Japan, needs a large number of technical specialists and multiple companies engaging in the work together. Yet this cooperative system of production in Japan actually lends itself very well to globalization. In fact, "Japanese" anime has been produced through a transnational network for decades, with significant portions of the animation outsourced throughout Asia (Hu 2010; Mōri 2011). Anime is in this way simultaneously more global and more connected to Japan than manga in terms of production. As such, anime studies cannot simply take the research models from manga studies on global manga, as one would need another type of global framework.

The framework of the discourses on global manga in manga studies provides a basis for the study of manga styles made outside of Japan. The proper name for such works such as "global manga" reflects the clear lineage from Japanese manga in maintaining the "manga" moniker, but has its own proper name as a subject of research within manga studies. This also implies a difference in aesthetics. As noted by Cathy Sell, while the conventions of narrative, visual style of line, panel distribution, rhythm, etc., can be performed with fidelity in global manga, language choice for onomatopoeia, panel direction and layout all have to be dealt with when produced outside of Japan (Sell 2011). But a non-Japanese anime would theoretically not have to deal with anything other than language, as it all flows in the same direction. While language is a big issue, especially as the voice actor star system, crucial for character construction, is Japanese, it does not physically alter the visuality of the work in the way onomatopoeia in another language and dissimilar sized/shaped speech balloons do in manga.

Global manga may sometimes have to wear their variance from Japanese manga on their surface, but anime can be masked quite convincingly with Japanese voice dubbing from the voice actor system.

This is the case with the Chinese[7] made *Chufeng B.E.E.* (2015) which deftly performs anime conventions (and even follows the convention of anime as adaptions of manga, as a Chinese anime adaptation of a Chinese manhua), which has a Japanese dub with well-known Japanese voice actors. This is the path also taken by *RBWY* (2013-) from the American studio Rooster Teeth, with a Japanese dub and even advertisements placed at Comiket.[8]

These anime are advertised as foreign made, but also as collaborating with Japanese voice actors. Such a practice points to the conclusion that while anime viewers abroad enjoy anime in Japanese (through the voice actor system) with subtitles, anime viewers within Japan are more inclined to watch anime without subtitles and in Japanese, emphasizing the importance of the voice (and the voice actor system) to anime across the globe. Furthermore, it seems that anime not produced in Japan still tend to connect with Japan in some way, in this particular case playing within the Japanese market and working with the Japanese production system (here the voice actor system). A cynical take would see this as a strategy to legitimize themselves as "proper" anime, consumed in Japan.

There is no established scholarly term for these types of works, but appropriating the terminology from manga studies we might dub these "global anime." But there is a difference. Global manga are already considered as their own subject of study as styles that have developed outside of Japan from Japanese manga. In discussions of global manga, Japan is the locus of where "manga proper" (or the locus of trending production) is, the basis for a comparison to other styles (Kacsuk 2015). One may be able to talk of a (type of) manga outside of Japan, but the recent tendency of non-Japanese anime approaching the Japanese market suggests that anime has to contend with Japan in a separate manner, as anime production and export/import operate in another way. In consideration of the current trend, it seems that many anime made outside of Japan still tend to connect with the Japanese production system or market in some way. On the other hand, even many "Japanese" anime have significant portions produced abroad, and are exported, subtitled and/or dubbed in foreign languages. Given such tendencies of production, export/import, and consumption at this time, anime studies has to develop its own models as many contemporary anime in general can be seen as "global anime," frequently connecting with more than one nation, but often intersecting with Japan in particular.[9]

Thus we have a few deviations in frameworks manga studies provides but cannot be easily mapped onto anime: shared conventionalized elements that create a sense of unity between anime and manga, the variances of their performance due to the material distinctions of the media, and the utilization and reception of these conventions on a global scale. We may work through the opening provided by these differences. To attempt one brief example, we can read the employment of sign language in the manga/anime *Gangsta* (2015) in regards to the divergent performances in their respective media: the sign language is shown with separate conventions for movement in the anime and manga versions with different effects from the variant performance.

The usage of sign language itself is revealing as it shares much with both anime and manga:

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7 It should be noted that there are a significant number of Korean names in the official production staff listing, though it appears to have been produced in China.

8 While the 3D CG *RBWY* does exhibit aesthetic "inconsistencies" in comparison to most mainstream "Japanese" anime, in comparison to the recent "Japanese" 3D CG anime *Knights of Sidonia* (2014-15) it does not seem so aberrant, especially as the character designs appear more stereotypically "anime-like" than even those in *Knights of Sidonia*. In other words, *RBWY* performs enough recognizably anime-like elements to be mentioned within the current context.

9 While my observation is applicable to the global anime scene of today, I cannot foresee the transformations anime production outside of Japan may go through in the future.

Figure 3: The same scene from the *Gangsta* manga and anime where the deaf character Nicholas uses sign language, depicted and "interpreted" in the conventions of the respective media: in full movement with subtitles in the anime and with dual-images of the hands and special speech balloons in the manga.

a codified, visual system of expression, but one that is performed through movement—sign language literally speaks through movement. Sign language highlights the difficulties of heavy conventionalization: those without understanding of the conventions, those who do not know the signs are left almost clueless. It also exposes one important aspect of language (or any conventionalized system): the difficulty of changing it. To forcefully add something entirely new is challenging, and any sudden insertions will be jarring, difficult to read, and runs the very high risk of a poor reception. To media forms which are deeply tied to the market, this is not a welcome thought. The sign language performed in *Gangsta* is a reminder of how conventionalized these media are, to the point that foreign signs (in this case, sign language) inserted within them are incomprehensible without some aid. [10]

While they share the same model for sign language, its expression and interpretation aids in the *Gangsta* anime and manga are performed in divergent ways. Sign language is performed in the conventions of movement and language for the respective media, performed in the manner the material limits of their media allow. In manga the usage of "translated" expression comes across as a specialized type of speech balloon, but not entirely dissimilar from how other characters communicate, which is also through speech balloons. But sign language, as it is actually performed in our world, cannot be displayed in manga as it is a media that does not physically move. To counteract this, manga uses a convention common in comics and manga, by showing the hand in two positions at once, signifying movement from one point to the other.

However, in the anime, the sign language can be displayed through physical movement and when the deaf character Nicholas "speaks" through sign language, the viewer is often forced to view subtitles, even in Japanese. This is a more rare experience within anime viewing in Japan: that a character

10 In fact the very reason for the deaf character Nicholas's use of sign language is itself a convention: a character who is given an immense power, but also receives a "disability" from the power. Steven R. Anderson calls this a "(dis)ability" in conjunction to the characters affected by the (super)natural *mushi* in *Mushishi*, but the most direct resemblance to *Gangsta* comes from *Darker Than Black*, which features many characters called contractors who receive an immense super-power but must perform some strange habit after each use (e.g. break their own fingers). Nicholas, as a "twilight," is deaf, but other characters have other (dis)abilities, such as not appearing to age. Nicholas overcomes his deafness by learning sign language and how to read lips, and can even speak, although with difficulty. The sign language here functions in a very literal way as allowing Nicholas to speak more freely.

has to be consistently subtitled in order for the Japanese viewer to understand. However, most foreign viewers engage with anime through subtitles, and so the experience is not as unique. But because it forces an experience of reading into the watching process, it also brings the anime viewing a experience closer to that of manga. The *Gangsta* anime forces, through the unfamiliarity with those specific signs, a unified experience of viewing across the globe, (literally) gesturing towards the interconnected conventions of anime and manga in a global context. In a sense, *Gangsta*'s use of sign language highlights the unity among viewers across the globe with the familiarity of the conventionalized elements that anime (and manga) perform, as the only part that is unfamiliar for most is not the conventions of the media, but the sign language signed.

Despite the apparent similarities and close association of the media, the models of manga studies do not always directly apply to anime. However, the differences can open up new points of departure for us to move through. Anime and manga may share conventional models but they perform them in varying ways, often realizing an apparent unity of aesthetics, but employing distinct methods to arrive there, with revealing deviations. Similarly, anime studies may share research models with manga, but have to perform them in accordance to the paths the media take, and in this way, perhaps we can contribute back to manga studies, once more through the sharing of difference.

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