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Japanese Media Cultures in Japan and Abroad

Transnational Consumption of Manga, Anime, and Media-Mixes

Edited by
Manuel Hernández-Pérez
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About the Special Issue Editor

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Editorial

Looking into the "Anime Global Popular" and the "Manga Media": Reflections on the Scholarship of a Transnational and Transmedia Industry

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Abstract: This article introduces the special issue dedicated to global industries around anime, its theoretical commentary and its cross-cultural consumption. The concepts "anime" and "anime studies" are evaluated critically, involving current debates such as those presented in this volume. This discussion will employ the concepts of "manga media" as well as the "popular global", giving an account of the transmedia and transcultural character of these creative industries. The conclusion critiques the irregular presence of Cultural Studies in the study of Japanese visual culture and advocates for constructing an updated dialogue with this tradition in order to readdress the study of these media as a form of global popular culture.

Keywords: manga; anime; global popular; transnational; creative industries; scholarship; editorial; Japanese cultural studies

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1. The Problematic Definition of "Anime" and "Anime Studies"

Creative industries around manga, anime and video games contribute decisively to the global collective imagination. Anime has been perceived as an international phenomenon since the end of the 1970s, when it reached TV markets all over the world (Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017; Schodt 1996; Pellitteri 2010). Since then, the persistence of Japanese visual narratives can be seen in the multitude of forms their products take as well as the diversity of the agents and locations of those products' consumption: the Southeast Asian markets, the social base of European and American television audiences from the 1980s and 1990s, online streaming contents, American and European art-film circuits, a myriad of local adaptations and even *transfictions*, illegal distribution, etc.

These are just some of the many ways in which anime products have been consumed over the last decades. This diversity entails differentiations between scholars' reflections on these industries that are no less complex. As it has been pointed out, in the case of manga (Berndt 2008, p. 296), the treatment of Japanese content industries may well differ depending on the "cultural contexts" of both audiences and researchers. The chosen academic genre of the researcher should also be considered, although this is a logical by-product of those contexts. In my opinion, this refers to the scholar's cultural framework (i.e., nationality, mother tongue), but also the formal conventions of each scholar's type of publication (i.e., monographs, scientific conferences, etc.) and their implied audiences.

In that sense, the informative tone of the monograph has surely been the most popular approach in the first works published in English and other Western languages. These works were intended to and, in many aspects, succeeded in giving a holistic view of Japanese content industries. Their focus on the stylistic features and narrative tropes common to a narrow selection of products have been largely criticised. However, these popular texts, mainly in English (Schodt 1983; Napier 2001; Levi 1996) and French (Groensteen 1996), still have the merit of being the first to describe these international industries to international non-academic audiences, although they have failed to establish a valid categorisation and theorisation of these complex products. Maybe the main issue with these works

is the way anime and manga are treated as monolithic entities that embody many other values; for example, their serial nature, their relationship with the Japanese visual arts, etc. These features are not always adequately discussed, but, instead, are taken for granted. Scholars failed to recognise "the aesthetic and cultural ambiguity of manga" (Berndt 2008, p. 296). However, it is precisely this ambiguity, manifested throughout the history and (dis-)continuity of manga in relation to other traditional media—as well as the lack of agreement over the structural and stylistic definitions of those media—that makes meta-theoretical reflection so necessary.

1.1. Anime and Academia

Compiled academic works have taken many approaches to Japanese popular culture. Most of them have a special focus on its visual culture (Martínez 1998; Lozano-Méndez 2016); however, manga and anime seems to be a common feature and, very often, the core of these reflections. With the consolidation of publications into specialised journals such as *Mechademia* (2006–) and other publications in related disciplines such as comic books, animation and Japanese studies, anime and manga seem to have maintained their role as articulators of these studies.

Basic bibliometrics can help us reflect on the key features of this body of works, its direction, and its problems, offering a complementary picture to the aforementioned approaches. At first glance, the number of studies involving manga and anime are scarce compared to other cultural industries. Academic production has been developed in parallel to the economic and social impact of this set of media in the international community. While it can be argued that the international popularity of the anime media-mix markets reached its peak at the beginning of the 2000s (Hernández-Pérez 2017a), this effect is not reflected in indexed academic literature until the middle of the decade, when publications about these topics began to proliferate (see Figure 1).

This approach is only intended to bring attention to the interest of international academia on anime, not to give an accurate account on the entirety of manga and anime scholarship. Therefore, the limitations of this type of exploration must be discussed. The main resources for the study of academic production are indexed platforms such as Scopus (Elsevier) and Web of Science (Clarivate Analytics). These databases aggregate the major international publications, which are designated as such based on the terms of scientific impact for a market hegemonically dominated by the main English-language publishers. Most of the studies indexed were published in English and only a minority in other languages such as French (2.1%), Spanish (1.2%) and Japanese (0.8%)[1]. The lack of publications in Italian may come as a surprise, as it is a market particularly interested in the history of comic-books' (*fumetto*) production and culture that has contributed a significant number of seminal academic studies[2] and many other informative volumes.

We could consider how other academic databases such as JSTOR may also include relevant publications about manga and anime written in other European languages. In contrast to Scopus and Web of Science, this database has a special focus on humanities but shares with the other indexed platforms the prevalence of English-language resources. Thus, the hegemony of Anglo-Saxon academia through these databases bias any attempt to construct a comprehensive bibliography. If language limits the sample's diversity, institutional affiliations, on the other hand, may or may not correspond to the

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[1]   Please notice that, while I recognize the relevance of the Japanese speaking authors and their priviliged access to sources that are key for the understanding of these media, I'm much more interested in the depiction of an international academic discourse. While manga and anime can be not one but two different discursive objects, the text by Berndt (2008), "Considering Manga Discourse Location, Ambiguity, Historicity" may be a useful starting point for those interested in the description of debates arising within Japanese-language forums.

[2]   See, for example, the series of essays by Maria Teresa Orsi titled "Il Fumetto in Giappone 1" (1978), an academic reference that locates manga as an outcome of Japan's Meiji era. By linking manga to Japan's adaptation of Western newspapers' satirical traditions, this may be one of the first non-continuist approaches to its origin in Western academia. On the other hand, sociologist Pellitteri (1999) offers in *Mazinga Nostalgia* a comprensive study of the international distribution, adaptation and reception of anime through the case of the Italian market.

author's nationality and, in many cases, are not even properly documented. In addition, many other forums, including non-indexed electronic journals as well as books addressed to general audiences, magazines and blogs, will have an impact that is difficult to measure.

(**a**)

(**b**)
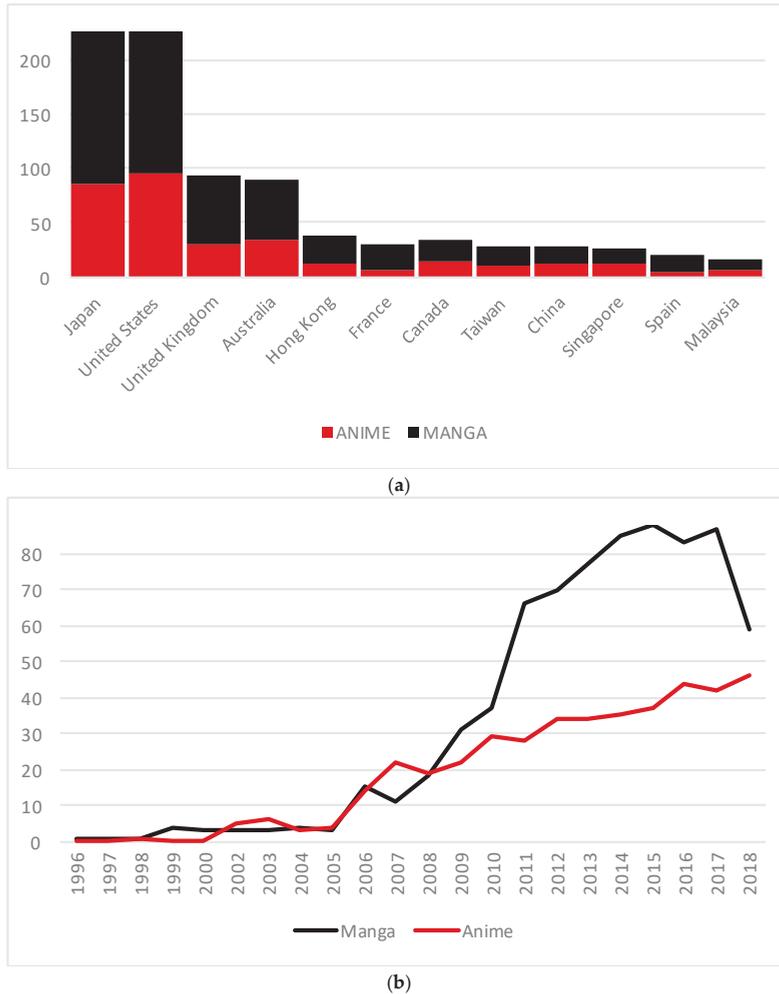
Figure 1. (**a**) publications including the terms "manga" (*n* = 750) and "anime" (*n* = 425) in their titles or abstracts for the period 1980–2018; (**b**) main national producers according to affiliation. Samples of articles studied (1980–2018) belong to independent searches, but the Jaccard index, or percentage of shared articles within both subsamples, is 32.815%. Source: Scopus (Elsevier), December 2018.

In this survey, Japan is the largest academic producer of literature on the anime media-mix, accounting for 27.6% of total academic publications. It surpasses other superpowers in the academic world of the humanities, including the US (23.3%) and the UK (9.3%). Anime seems to be an object of study that is common to many disciplines among Social Sciences and the Humanities, but, perhaps surprisingly, academic production has proliferated considerably in many other disciplines as well. While there is an abundance of studies conducted in the Arts and Humanities (32%) and Social Sciences (34%), there is also a significant amount of research occurring in other, scientific subjects (i.e., Computer

Science, 16%), in which anime is either an object of study or a tool for the research in question. The data for manga is similar, as it shares many of the samples due to the abundant historical, financial and stylistic synergies between both media. Manga and anime are also part of the academic discourse for other non-Japanese disciplines, such as the pedagogical applications of educational manga (also known as *gakusai manga*), the design of three-dimensional (3D) characters and the most recent use of anime to test and improve indexing mechanisms in streaming video systems. Manga and anime have become relevant discursive objects that are not exclusive of any scholar forum as defined by discipline, country or language. The internationalisation of these terms creates several challenges related to their definition, while several scholarly traditions construct theoretical frameworks that may be understood as somewhat incompatible, if not contradictory.

1.2. Anime Disciplinisation and Future Directions: Who Will Lead towards Anime Epistemology?

Given the fact that manga and anime are common objects of study in multiple disciplines, it is worth asking if the disciplinary definition of anime studies is still necessary.

First, we should remember that disciplines were originally formed with the goal of only categorising and organising knowledge. Now, in academia, the diversification of knowledge and the needs of the professional market have made possible the emergence of a myriad of new disciplines. In most cases, they also respond to an administrative necessity (i.e., university departments), with no existing relevant epistemological or methodological differences between them. On the other hand, it is necessary to differentiate institutionalisation from pure meta-theoretical reflection; that is, the direction that should be taken by a group of studies, regardless of whether or not they are identified with a specific discipline. The Anglo–Saxon tradition of Cultural Studies both in Europe and in the United States has contributed decisively to the fact that in higher education (HE) institutions, popular culture has become a relevant discursive object, supported by the success of new academic courses. The same may eventually happen with anime and manga, as HE curricula becomes more diversified year after year.

However, the *disciplinisation*, or perhaps institutionalisation, of these studies in Western countries seems to be quite different from their academisation in Japan and in Southeast Asia (SEA), closer to the centres of production. While in the UK, there are some modules on anime (University of Birkbeck, the School of Oriental and African Studies, etc.), the majority are framed within Japanese Language or Japan Studies programmes. The content of these courses in Western countries tends to be more theoretical than practical, as a consequence of the academisation of the topic. Anime is defined in relation to other Japanese national branding components such as manga, J-Pop or sushi.

In contrast, in Japan, private institutions such as the International University of the Arts (Osaka), have a clear professional orientation, offering specialised degrees such as "Character Design". This contrasts with the courses offered by other universities, which are more active in the organisation of research seminars (i.e., Tokyo International University, Kyoto–Seika). These centres have influenced decisively the creation of international links by making possible the collaboration of international researchers through workshops and specific doctoral courses.

Another, quite different, issue is whether an epistemological direction is even necessary to guide the discussion around Anime Studies. In this special issue, the subject is discussed extensively by Professor Jaqueline Berndt, who distinguishes four orientations towards politics, culture, art and media (Berndt 2018, p. 2). These orientations can be understood as the first steps towards interdisciplinarity, through the appropriation of methodologies from, and perhaps collaboration with, Area Studies, Political Science, the Humanities and Media Studies, among others. However, while Berndt professes to escape from any disciplinary straitjacket, she leaves no room for any doubt about the primordial role of Japanese Studies in the enduring definition of anime as an academic object. Instead of developing the methodological and epistemological contributions of other Social Sciences, Berndt prefers to focus on the articulating capacity of Japanese Studies debates about the definition of anime. These theoretical dualities—namely, the predilection for context over text and media ecology over medium specificity—are in fact consequences of this flight from the disciplinary. In addition, she

adapts a cross-sectional perspective to indicate the importance of certain topics that are defined as "methodological issues" (ibid.), thus denying their relevance as independent approaches.

Due to the needs of modern academia and the directions imposed by an overspecialised labour market, a strict view of disciplines can no longer be maintained. However, the discourse around discipline may retain some value. Becoming a discipline is a necessary and desirable process that can establish a physical presence within academic institutions and infrastructure and financial support for academic studies. In the same unavoidable way, citations and social impact grant status and resources to researchers. These are lesser evils. On the other hand, adopting a single perspective, albeit an eclectic one, such as Japanese Studies, does not seem totally right either. As in the case of other Area Studies, the discipline has been subject to sensitive criticism. These voices, from the very field of Japanese Studies, warn against the risks of becoming a form of sophisticated academic ethnocentrism, while at the same time specialised journals:

> ... have operated as a form of thought police maintaining this emphasis on language issues, guarding the field from the encroachments of theory and protecting it from disciplinary specialists who lack the linguistic tools deemed necessary to understand Japan. (Reader 1998, p. 238)

We can see examples of these different directions throughout this special issue, where the problem of discipline, object of study, and scholar identity splits into new uneasy questions. Thus, Comic Studies is replaced by Manga Studies shifting from Media Studies to a more specific and isolated, but perhaps more legitimate approach (Kacsuk 2018, p. 4). In this scenario, interdisciplinary dialogue—when the ideal transdisciplinary collaboration among scholars is not possible—seems to be the best choice.

In order to embark on my personal exploration of the definition of the manga and anime industries, I will accept two premises that will form the core of my discussion. I hope they will work to establish future dialogue with the rest of the texts in this issue.

First, I would like to propose the term "manga media", in comparison to other popular terms such as "anime media-mix" (Steinberg 2012; Schodt 1996). I think this could better represent the complexity around this object of study, as well as its plural and transmedia nature, in terms of not only production and distribution strategies, but also cultural consumption. With this, my discussion draws closer to other transmedia positions (Ryan 2004) that, from the perspective of narrative theory, have pointed out contextual definitions of "medium". Context has been defined, so far, from a historical perspective, where anime and manga media systems have been considered a complex system or "ecosystem" (Steinberg 2012; Lamarre 2018). However, the use of the media ecology (Scolari 2012) metaphor has not yet been fully applied to the history of manga media.

Secondly, I will discuss the consequences of defining this "manga media" as a cultural industry with a transnational orientation. Far from delving into the mature debate of Japanese versus "Otherness", I will point out the immense legacy of Japanese visual culture to the collective imaginary. For this reflection, I will use the concept of the "Global Popular" (During 1997) that unfortunately has been more often cited than discussed with necessary depth.

Finally, I will examine how these issues can benefit (or are already benefiting) from engaging in dialogue with post-Birmingham Cultural Studies.

2. "Manga Media" and Their Ecosystem

Character licensing, transcreation in non-media products and, above all, the building of fictional worlds populated by characters and histories, have been key features of transnational cultural industries since the beginning of the 20th century. Media historians, so-called transmedia archaeologists, have identified several early examples of these convergences, most of them linked to pulp literature and comic books, a model that would later be developed by large conglomerates such as the Disney legacy (Freeman 2017; Scolari et al. 2014). Parallel transmedia manifestations in the Japanese market have also been documented, mainly through the study of early character-driven industries in paradigmatic

cases such as *Norakuro* (Steinberg 2012, p. 93). However, perhaps what makes the history of animation in other transnational industries and, consequentially, Japanese media history different is the central role that the comic book plays in their media ecosystems, in contrast to other transnational media conglomerates. Over the last 50 years, the vast majority of Japanese media franchises have originated from the comic book and, to a lesser extent, the video game. Manga and anime industries share intellectual copyrights, finances and, presumably, the same target audiences.

These synergies have been discussed in different terms. Thus, for example, the emergence of the domestic market in the UK in the late 1980s contributed to the popularisation of the term "manga films" as a commercial brand, but also as a kind of new genre within the home video industry, or "*manganimation*", which features animation for adults. On the other hand, a decade later when the digital age began and with it the rise of internet audiences, the phenomena "*manganime*" was coined in the Latin–American market. The use of these portmanteaus and other similar terms is not accidental. Anime is, in many aspects, the gateway to Japanese content industries overseas, as the European and American markets have shown extensively (Levi 1996; Pellitteri 2010). These terms refer to the first contact of international audiences with these industries and, interestingly, to the way manga has been understood and consumed since then. Due to the wider diffusion of anime, for many consumers manga is unknown and, in the best of cases, only acknowledged as the origin, the hypotext, of the more popular format of anime. With these hybrid terms, the discourse was not simply focusing on the transmedia industry—or a set of industries—but on a culture based on consumption, with an emphasis on fan communities.

In the formal sense, there are many similarities between these two media. The stylistic characteristics that define anime, including its serial character and its visual style, find their origin in adaptations inspired by the original manga. Quite often, anime products (TV series or miniseries) take the form of somewhat faithful adaptations of the manga for television or other channels. There is no single form of adaptation, as it can take different forms depending on the nature and intention of new products and their level of intertextuality in relation to the source text, which can be considered the centre of this network. Thus, in many occasions, the narratives of the anime take the form of non-canonical adaptations of the storytelling featured in the original manga, even by developing a parallel or reticular history, which is commonly referred to as "fillers" (Hernández-Pérez 2017a).

Adaptation, therefore, is the key textual feature of the Japanese contents industries and also an essential part of its history. Osamu Tezuka's influential TV animation, *Tetsuwan Atomu* (1963), has been often analysed as the paradigm of these transmedia adaptations (Schodt 2007; Steinberg 2012). The work was, in fact, a pioneer in many ways. It was the first animated production constructed as an adaptation of a previously successful manga. It was also the first example of the transnationalisation of capital, having been produced in collaboration with American broadcasters and distributed consecutively by American and Japanese broadcasters. Its commercial success and successful overseas distribution contributed decisively to the manufacturing of peripheral products, particularly toys, within the Japanese media ecosystem, a strategy known as *masu komi gangu* or "mass media toy" (Steinberg 2012, p. 89). *Tetsu Atomu* has since been studied as a prototypical example of the commodification of characters and stories, as well as multiple transmedia adaptations. The term *media mikkusu* or "media-mix" gained popularity with Japanese advertising agencies after the 1960s (ibid., p. 139), but Steinberg's comprehensive work around anime media-mix stimulated the extensive use of the term. Many previous works, not just in the English language, have pointed out the use of multimedia strategies within the Japanese popular industries and particularly the media-mix strategies (Pellitteri 1999; Allison 2006). While Steinberg (2012, p. x) originally intended to place emphasis on the nature of the Japanese media "ecosystem", it seems that, in the process, media-mix eventually emerged as the ideal metonymic form to designate products (franchises), strategies (media mix) and even the particular idiosyncrasy of media production systems in Japan.

Terms are important. As such, I would like to examine here the implications of my own proposed term, "manga media". Using this term also allows me to delve into discussions around the production

and consumption of anime that are considered in this special issue, through critical examination of its main features.

2.1. Its Etymology

The term "manga media" it is etymologically correct, referring to an important semantic feature of this set of media. The Japanese word *man-ga* (漫画) is unanimously translated as "whimsical" or "improvised" pictures. This description does not necessarily define a single channel or physical foundation. Drawings can be animated and associated with a purely ludic experience. A set of historical circumstances suggests this term originated from the work of Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), and eventually came to represent the whole medium, overtaking other terms with similar meanings that stemmed from multiple visual traditions that also contributed to its inception (Ito 2005, p. 6).

It is widely accepted that all modern forms of manga are, in some way or another, derived from the "mainstream format", the story–manga. But what about other related media such as video games or merchandising? Regardless of the definition behind this set of *paratexts*, in terms of their narratives we can perceive in them a common aesthetic. Azuma (2009) goes a step further in affirming the existence of "grand non–narratives" or iconographic databases and "small narratives", as opposed to the models of classical narratives or "grand narratives" (i.e., literature). From an iconic approach, this aesthetic is characterised by the simplicity of its forms and yet, at the same time, its incredible potential for eliciting emotions from engaged audiences (Berndt 2008, p. 304).[3] The visual style of these arts is also characterised by the flat shape in which the volumes are presented, related to the concept of the "superflat" proposed by the artist Murakami (2000), which is nothing more than a postmodern comment on the roots visuals of manga from the Edo period (Steinberg 2004, p. 449). In that sense, the term manga, or "media–manga", seems appropriate for this aesthetic, which is typified by flat colours and hyper-realistic forms that denote movement, a common feature of this set of media.

2.2. Its Complexity and Diversity

Manga media seems appropriate to designate a plural form, since we are referring to a set of media. When defining manga media, we appeal to a common aesthetic that identifies those artefacts as members of the same group, but this does not necessarily explain the relationships between different media. In the paradigm of convergence, media are related through the replication of other medias' physical and cultural qualities. The mediation or remediation of a medium has been used to explain the appearance of digital media and its multimedia features (Bolter and Grusin 2000). This has led to the conceptualisation of these relationships as established by familiarity, or by following the metaphor of the media ecology, as an "ecosystem" (Scolari 2012; Postman 2000). While the metaphor entails many other consequences around the conceptualisation of a medium and its relationship with other elements of this system (i.e., co-evolution, extinction, hybridization, etc.), this ultimately refers overall to its complexity. This may be understood as a description of a group of several components or its interaction over time, for the media ecology has also value as media historicism.

In the same way, these terms have been used to describe Japanese visual media as an ecosystem. In Steinberg's anime media-mix (Steinberg 2012), the toy obeys a logic of remediation, which is defined as the commodification of characters and stories. Lamarre (2018) goes further in his version of an ecosystem, emphasising organic conceptualisations of media productions systems—including infrastructures—and the complex relationships between audiences and the media. Both texts embrace the media ecology key terms but they do not elaborate on the implications of applying that metaphor to the manga media case. In that sense, is it possible to talk about one single media evolution?

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[3] It may be necessary to differentiate between the notion of aesthetics as an individual perspective and as a shared feature. In this special issue, Torrents (2018) concisely argues how each medium can be assessed according to its aesthetic, by evaluating its ontological materialities.

Are we talking about hybridisations of historical media (i.e., story-manga and early anime)? This is a topic deserving deeper reflection. After all, the history of an object will change radically after its (re-)conceptualisation. In this very same issue (Torrents 2018), "transduction" is used to refer to the transformation of the material and informational characteristics of manga media. But a purely narrative (or rather, *narrativist*) and discursive approach to this phenomenon should not be ruled out yet. To point out, as I have done, manga media as sign systems with a certain degree of narrativity also emphasises their semantic and communicational nature over their formal and structural properties. In that sense, even the most fragmented and deconstructed version of manga narratives recognise the existence of some kind of communicational goal in the form of "information" (Azuma 2009, p. 38). This communicational role, distilled to a purely semantic form where only emotional meanings can be discerned—perhaps deposits from previous world-based narratives—coexists with other cultural and contextual features.

Designating a technology as a medium, such as manga or anime, is justified by not only the identification of technological components—a remediation of codes delivered through a group of channels—but also their cultural components, that is, their idiosyncratic features rendered in the form of a production system and its tradition (Ryan 2004, p. 11). Apparently, integrating technological and cultural approaches such as this, to the notion of "media", can bring about a conflict with the notion of combining *transmediality* and narrative that is defended by these very same positions—first, because different media can share similar narrative outcomes while being differentiated by their production history. After all, there could be cases (at least in theoretically) where the differences between well-defined traditions such as manga and comic-books are not as clear as those between independent cultural forms. Secondly, if narrative possibilities are always influenced by the semiotic code how can be sure we are talking about the same process? However, this is answered by adopting a wider frame for the notion of *transmediality.* Narrative "across media" (Ryan 2004, p. 20) refers to a form of cognitive narrative, so we could be talking about multiple narratives and not necessarily a unique process evoked as a response to the interaction with these media.

I will, however, use this cultural reading on media to reflect on the contextual definitions of manga media. In this case, the culture of production will be the transnational media-mix, whose relationship with Japanese culture, understood as a set of signifiers and their associated value systems, will be discussed later. Therefore, manga media will be understood as a set of media linked in an interdiscursive way. At the individual level (anime, videogames, even musicals), different forms of hyper–remediation of the manga will cause it eventually to act as a central medium. As we will see, the history of manga media supports the use of the term in this context since, ultimately, all media are related within this media ecosystem.

2.3. Its Audiences

Manga media are consumed by general audiences but retain the idiosyncratic properties of fan communities' consumption styles. This distinction may seem superfluous in today's world, where subculture icons from "low–brow" media such as comic-book or fantasy literature have become blockbusters. A consequence, perhaps a secondary but no less relevant one, of this acknowledged triumph of superheroes—and, therefore, serial narratives—is that they have also encouraged a certain level of commitment to their consumption. This is a consequence of the serial origin of these narratives, which is common to transnational industries as discrete from one another as American comic books and manga media. Through these new audiences, the figure of the "transmedia user" or the "implicit consumer" emerges (Scolari 2009, p. 592). In fact, transmedia storytelling as a theoretical framework is simply the adaptation of concepts from classic narratological theories; in this case, the "narrate", a term common in rhetorical (Phelan and Rabinowitz 2012) and even semiotic models such as the one proposed by Eco (1984). These consumers are not only consuming a set of related products but also finding a faithful reflection of themselves in texts specifically designed for them.

For every serial user—a kind of transmedia explorer, in the sense of fan consumption—there will always be many other casual or even single–media consumers. However, it is clear that this type of audience has grown as a consequence of the boom in serial media and transmedia. Here, I emphasise again the structural characteristics of manga media and how they have facilitated more fragmented or "narrativist" consumption, but, for other reasons, have still configured relationships between media and audiences of no less significant emotional value. Manga media are constructed not only through production strategies but also through different forms of consumption, which have previously been referred to as the value of context over text. On this point, it is necessary to clarify the salient importance of technological factor, a well-known dimension of paradigmatic "convergence" (Jenkins 2006, p. 293). It is precisely this technology which allows users to develop multiple communication strategies—and even collaboration—with cultural producers. In this regard, we have commented in this issue on the creative practices (Suan 2018), the consumption of different intermedia adaptations such as those from manga and videogames (Yoshioka 2018) and even the aesthetic value of media-mixes' materiality (Torrents 2018). It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that fan consumption describes audiences' behaviour better than any other label in the case of manga media.

3. Manga Media (Including Anime) as a Manifestation of the Global Popular

Among manga and anime studies, it has become commonplace to start any exploration with a comment on their Japanese-ness. These discourses are often built on the history of transferring these media to their textual characteristics. Researchers tend to agree that Japanese-ness is not an exclusive or absolute quality, but a degree of relationship between these products and Japan, particularly its visual heritage. We cannot deny either that audiences are also aware of this relationship, which has eventually also contributed to Japanese products' commercial success in international markets. As an example of this intimate relationship, the term "Japanimation" was coined in the first years of American cultural criticism, to refer to television and domestic video markets (Patten 2004, p. 5).

It is also common to find the cultural study of Japanese industries framed in a discussion about the "transnational" or "global" (Berndt 2012; Daliot-Bul and Otmazgin 2017). Although the use of these terms is not entirely uncontroversial, as I will discuss later, it is necessary to clarify that the internationalisation of media, whether understood as globalisation or *transnationalisation*, is not a one-dimensional phenomenon. Using the well-known paradigm of "globalisation", at least three different types can be distinguished: economic, financial and cultural (During 1997, p. 811).

In the case of manga media, as happens with other internationally relevant industries, there is little to say about these first two types. For decades, anime production has been segmented and distributed to different industries among other countries. The intellectual capital, so to speak, in the form of scripts and storyboards, has its origin in the Kanto region of Japan, where most of the production houses and publishers are located. The workforce that animation requires has been sourced in different Asian countries. When economic development made previously affordable human resources more expensive, animation producers began to look for other more affordable collaborators in neighbouring countries (Lent 2007, p. 108). On the other hand, financial globalisation is probably one of the most defining aspects of anime since its inception. As mentioned before, the transnationalisation of capital, on the part of American broadcasters, was precisely what made the sustainability of the first anime by Mushi productions possible.

Cultural globalisation is a separate question. Even if we already understand that this entails the creation and diffusion of shared signifiers, two important implications still need to be discussed. The first has been already implicitly defined through relationships within the economic and financial globalisation types (Ibid.), Let us consider, for example, the structures of the global economy. Slowly but inevitably, global media landscapes have adopted new forms as a result of universal technological convergences. In these new scenarios, anime has emerged as a new and important market through streaming platforms (Crunchyroll, Netflix, the Shueisha mobile application, etc.), though we have not yet seen the consequences of its impact on the industry. The true nature of the relationships between

content distribution platforms and audience response is still unclear. Major distribution platforms such as Netflix or Crunchyroll do not offer public data except on rare occasions. With the exception of the analysis of national catalogues (Hernández-Pérez et al. 2017), few tools can help to determine the success of a product in relation to a local market. The functioning of these companies is nothing but that of a big black box, in which we can only guess the effect of broadcaster mergers, new international distribution agreements and many other movements within the global market. Only a few studies, such as those showcased in this special issue, are beginning to shed light on this transformation through the analysis of these new maps of production and distribution (Hernández Hernández 2018, p. 107).

The second implication of this more complexly defined cultural globalisation lays in the form—or the different forms—in which this global imaginary is constructed and, more relevantly, the functions it could potentially perform. For Film Studies, the "national" label seems inappropriate for representing the diversity of cultural products, as it is constrained by the limitations of the "nation-state" construction (Higson 2000, p. 66). The problems behind this conceptualisation are obvious. Nations are categories built by the political reality of a given point in history and do not necessarily correspond to a monolithic notion of a community's identity. If anything, it is more appropriate to understand them as the image that, in our role as audience, we associate with a certain group. The question becomes even more difficult to solve if we look at the multiple possible effects of the global. In the most negative interpretation of its effects, the term globalisation refers to a pernicious force that is equivalent to that of "cultural imperialism" (Tomlinson 2012). Cultures with a global vocation, therefore, would be considered predators with the ability to phagocyte indigenous cultures. Japanese popular culture has not been exempt from these criticisms, especially in relation to the success of its products in the Asian market (Schodt 1996, p. 307; Iwabuchi 2002, p. 39). On the other hand, the positive effect of global products has also been pointed out.[4] They can either expand the cultural repertoire and its associated values or contribute new ways of interpreting these global products from indigenous frames of reference, as a consequence of a local/global negotiation (Higson 2000, p. 62). In fact, the construction around the "national" can be as useless as the "transnational" or "global" industries, unless we can articulate them through a functional definition. In the case of anime, for example, it has been suggested that international audiences can inherit meanings from other discourses such as tourism (Hernández-Pérez 2017b), performing a kind of promotional role and contributing to its national branding. In the same way, manga and animation productions have also been considered through an ideological prism, as forms of Japanese identity or even anti-American discourses (Penney 2009). These debates are frequently extended to the rest of Japanese visual culture because, as I mentioned, transmedia dynamics are prevalent and related on many financial, aesthetic and semantic/narrative levels.

This issue features studies dedicated to the discussion of this hybrid character of Japanese cultural industries when they are encountered by international audiences. The enormous diversity of these industries calls into question the possibility of making our analysis transferrable; even so, the works in this issue may provide valuable insights into the many facets of cultural globalisation. That the aesthetics of Japanese visual industries, particularly anime, have influenced non–Japanese producers through co-productions is a fact of great historical importance. The article by Jose Andres Santiago Iglesias (Santiago Iglesias 2018) goes a step further in making a comparative analysis in terms of cinematographic montages that quantify and have the potential to characterise these hybridisations. From this data, it can be deduced that even if anime does not exercise imperialism in ideological terms, it is nonetheless one of the great hegemonic powers at an aesthetic level in the field of transnational animation. On the other hand, Suan (2018) re-examines these layers of transnationality as reflected on fan–made complex animations (*sakuga*). Not only anime, but many other markets reflect these influences. Thus, *kawaii* aesthetics, for example, are studied in this issue (Pellitteri 2018) as an example

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[4]   In this context, I prefer not to differentiate between transnationalisation and globalisation, although in fact they have been defined as very different, even opposite terms. Transnational media flows have been defined as a result of the interaction between different national producers, and, unlike "globalization", can present more than one centre (Iwabuchi 2002).

of this spread of transcultural commodification. This study concludes that, despite its prevalence, the *kawaii* culture present in European comics is not so much a transformation of the Japanese cultural industries as a cultural trend parallel to the enduring effect of Japanese pop culture. We must assume that this is a consequence of the long tradition of the production and exportation of transcultural signifiers. It makes sense that there is a global Japan imaginary in which anime and manga are just another component, albeit a very significant one.

4. Conclusions

Anime, manga and videogames are transnational industries that, although inseparable from other media associated with Japanese popular culture, have managed to attract highly diverse global audiences. As the valuable contributions to this issue demonstrate, studies around these industries have reached theoretical maturity. This maturity is also proved in the way manga and anime scholars seek to define the discipline's identity, by opposition to other disciplines. Many other valuable opinions have been left out of this special issue with the purpose—perhaps misguided—of creating a coherent and in-depth volume. Unfortunately, I felt it necessary to omit local (Japanese) approaches to this phenomenon, as well as other multidisciplinary essays from the Social Sciences, Tourism Studies, International Political Studies, etc. As special editor for this issue, I have given priority only to those contributions articulated around transmedia and the transnational conceptualization of these media. While it can be understood that anime and, particularly, its notion as a medium, has been given a prevalent presence within this project, these only studies that have been articulated as part of a systemic view are included. My apologies to those other authors whose proposals did not match with this project's specific approach.

So far, we have defined manga media as a complex product which adopts various transmedia forms in its production while sharing a common aesthetic. These transmedia (or cross–media) forms combine strategies of retroactive media expansion with other tactics coordinated and planned by production committees (media-mixes). From Media and Cultural Studies, there is a tendency to discuss media by establishing a focus exclusively on their narrative capacity. However, it is more useful to consider narrative as a property rather than a category that excludes narrative media from the text. Ultimately, that property that we commonly refer to as "narrativity" (Ryan 2004) can also be transferred, from medium to media, or from a predominant or central position within, in this case, the Japanese popular, eventually to the manga medium. Thus, for example, ancillary products such as a TV soundtrack, a toy or even fancy dress can be considered media with a certain degree of narrativity and, therefore, transmedia adaptations of manga and anime (Hernández-Pérez 2017a).

However, if manga media, are, as we have seen, just one more manifestation of the commodification of culture, it is surprising that there has not been, until now, a greater integration of the Cultural Studies tradition with manga and anime studies—with the valuable exception of a few seminal works (Kinsella 1998; Hills 2002). Moreover, many of observations adopt ideas and language from many Cultural Studies traditions, understanding those in a "global" sense. This issue, for example, features some explorations of consumption behaviour that may correspond to the concepts of identity reassurance (Berndt 2018; Suan 2018) or even a weak act of resistance.

In the absence of an existing, adequate quantitative study or in-depth exploration, I must hypothesise that this group of studies has followed the path of other Area Studies, which notoriously disengage with the debates around post-structuralism, postmodernism, and critical theory—a bias that has already been pointed out in relation to Asian Studies and, particularly, to Japanese Studies (Reader 1998, p. 237; Burgess 2004).

I understand that the defence of this idea, even as a mere hypothesis, can provoke suspicion. For many, Cultural Studies is the dominant paradigm, whose vast diversity seems to encompass all discourses, whether critical or not. As such, it is difficult to name a study of any cultural product that does not refer, in one way or another, to the almost omnipresent theoretical body of Cultural Studies

through the Anglo–Saxon and Latin–American theorisations[5], the discontinued tradition of Japanese Cultural Studies or many other groups defined under the motto of "media, culture and society". This is likely because we all share an interest in the textual and contextual definitions of popular culture, this being one of the defining principles of that celebrated dual character of Cultural Studies (Hall 1980).

On the other hand, there would many opinions about the reductionist approach that could be adopted to a Cultural Studies framework. This would be like considering these industries only as "popular culture", therefore, discarding other valuable analyses of these manga media as creative industries, international exportations, historical objects or other conceptualisations that are not necessarily related to either cultural or artistic approaches. My point was identifying the benefits of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches, derived from any academic field, in this particular field. In that sense, the dialogue with other traditions in media studies has been largely adopted by manga and anime studies. In this very same issue, there have been some good examples of these contacts, inspired by the traditions of Television Studies, the Film Studies and Adaptation Studies.

I used the example of global Cultural Studies as an example of how easily we can strike an empty multidisciplinary pose when we merely use terms, but we do not engage with the original social and academic environment that originated its consolidated epistemological form. Concepts such as "fandom", "seriality" or "power" may become useless if we do not recognise the particular moment and socio-cultural context in which they were incepted or discuss adequately to bring light to new questions. In my opinion, there is value in adopting the ethos of a particular approach that transcends the frequent pragmatic approach among scholars and, in fact, requires and deserves some degree of responsibility. The same can happen with the use of other traditions among Media Studies as they are extensively being used as theoretical frameworks.[6] There are, however, some good examples of this effort to adopt other points of view and embrace interdisciplinarity.

We should not be confused by the level of specificity and maturity that has been achieved as a consequence of decades of academic production. Studies on manga, anime and other related products are just one more chapter in the history of transnational media industries.

I hope this claim for an updated dialogue within Anime Studies and other traditions within Media Studies can be understood not as purely a form of personal criticism but as a valid opportunity to contribute to the Anime Studies as a transdisciplinary project. The challenge we are facing, as has happened with many other young disciplines before, is to overcome our consolidated status as an object of study—largely enriched by studies on manga, anime and complex systemic views such as media-mixes—to consolidate that unique set of tools that can be eventually transferred to other disciplines. Perhaps, only by achieving this stage will we bring both recognition and a sense of identity to the field.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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[5] While there are valuable exceptions of projcts embracing Cultural Studies, in the form of articles but mostly, as collaborative books (Lozano-Méndez 2016), these are not necessarily critical and not specially focused on identity as a key articulation point. This surely indicates how wrong it is to define the Cultural Studies Project as a homogeneous theoretical body. Instead, multidisciplinar approaches connecting Literary Theory, Political Economy, Film Studies, among many others, are the usual starting point. It also reinforces my idea of being in a "paradigm" where some key concepts such as "cultural hegemony", "consumption as a response or manifestation of identy", and other legacies of this tradition are, perhaps wrongly, taken for granted.

[6] In this sense, I have commented in this article, some examples where Media Studies terminology, such as the one derived "media ecology", is used in purely descriptive terms. These approaches are valid and have some value, but they could have been transformed in more valuable contributions to the field of Anime Studies (and also Media Studies) if they had engaged with a deeper reflection of the terms employed.

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Article

Re-Examining the "What is Manga" Problematic: The Tension and Interrelationship between the "Style" Versus "Made in Japan" Positions

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Abstract: The term manga is used to refer to a range of related and at times exclusive domains according to the position of the speaker. In the present paper, I examine one of the fundamental dichotomies underpinning the arguments in relation to the meaning of manga, the tension and interrelationship between the "style" versus "made in Japan" positions. Building on research on manga, comics, and *bande dessinée*, I outline a framework that attempts to take stock of the most common features associated with works being considered manga. Highlighting some of the possible connections between visual style and content-specific elements on the one hand, and the Japanese language plus the culture of manga production, dissemination, and consumption in Japan on the other hand, I argue that the manga as style position is not as pure a possibility—transcending all cultural and material situatedness—as it is sometimes held up to be. At the same time, the manga is made in Japan position is not as simplistic as it is commonly thought to be and indeed points to a far deeper and more fundamental interrelationship between manga and Japan—as its real and mythical place of origin—than its proponents might actually articulate.

Keywords: manga; comics; *bande dessinée*; global manga; OEL manga

1. Introduction

Manga, not unlike other similar concepts,[1] cannot really be defined in a satisfying manner (cf. Berndt 2008). The word itself is originally written as " 漫画 ", with the first kanji meaning whimsical, involuntarily, or unrestrained, and the second one denoting brush-stroke or picture.[2] Today, however, it is also written in hiragana, katakana, or even romanized script for stylistic purposes and to express different emphases in relation to its meaning. Indeed, the meaning of the expression has not only undergone important shifts within Japan since it first started to be used in relation to various forms of illustration (the most well-known example being *Hokusai manga* from the nineteenth century), later political cartoons and daily strips (Stewart 2013), and finally long-form sequential art (Itō 2005; Odagiri 2010), but the question of continuity or its degree among these various forms is also an important point of contention. Some histories of manga highlight the tradition of drawn cartoonish figures within Japan dating back to as early as the twelfth–thirteenth centuries, with the most famous example, *Chōjūgiga*, depicting anthropomorphized animals reminiscent of modern satirical cartoons. The actual continuity between such picture scrolls, later *ukiyo-e* images, and modern manga, however, is strongly debated, and a more scholarly history of modern manga emphasizes the importance of the

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1 See for example Suan (2017) for a discussion tackling the issue of what is anime.
2 See Stewart (2013, p. 31) for a brief summary of Miyamoto Hirohito's work on the changes in the meaning of the two kanji together from "spoonbill bird" to "caricature".

influence of political cartoons and comic strips from Europe and the US in the works and ideals of pioneers like Kitazawa Rakuten (Stewart 2013).

Turning to contemporary uses of the term, manga is commonly understood to have come to refer to comics in general in Japan. However, the narrower meaning of Japanese comics only has also been around for some time (cf. Odagiri 2010), as evidenced by words like *amekomi*—the abbreviation of *amerikan komikku*—used to denote US comics among aficionados. This more restrictive meaning of manga has also gained ground probably in part due to the way the term has come to be used outside the country to refer to comics made in Japan. As a result of the rise in interest in Japanese comics abroad and the growing number of works inspired by them, manga is also understood by many as a purely stylistic category. But other less commonly known uses of the expression have been well documented as well. For example, as a result of the development of a mature manga publishing industry in the US, offering both localized Japanese works and original domestic publications, a business definition of manga—being "simply a comic book of a particular trim size and price point that girls and women would be expected to read" (Brienza 2016, p. 12)—has also emerged there.[3]

In the following, I will examine one of the most fundamental dichotomies in relation to the meaning of manga that addresses the very core of this multiplicity of positions: the tension and interrelationship between the "style" versus "made in Japan" positions. Put simply, the first position would seem to argue for the potential of a purely formal definition of manga that can transcend national boundaries and systems of production or dissemination without any sort of difficulty. The latter position implies an anchoring of the form in the cultural and linguistic context of Japan and the realities of the wider manga industry and fandom found there. I will provide a more nuanced description of the various elements of these positions in Section 3 below.

The style versus made in Japan positions also correspond to a certain degree to the two historical perspectives referenced above.[4] Histories of manga emphasizing the roots of the form, or at least the sensibility that gave rise to it, being traceable back to the time of *Chōjūgiga* and/or *ukiyo-e* seem to gesture toward its inextricable link to Japan. Scholars arguing for the modern origins of the form and highlighting the formative influence of political cartoons and comic strips from Europe and the US clearly underscore the way media, styles, and genres can and do travel between different linguistic and cultural domains. It is this very movement of forms of artistic expression and entertainment and their relationship to national cultures that are once again highlighted by the present debates around the meaning of manga.

Manga—along with anime and Japanese video games—has become a staple element of youth culture in a large number of countries around the world. As such, it serves as an example of the potential multi-directionality of globalization and cultural flows (cf. Iwabuchi 2002). It also stands as an exemplar of what it means to have truly transnational circuits of production, dissemination, and consumption both in relation to official channels and grassroots initiatives (Brienza 2016; Mihara 2010). Manga is perceived as belonging to or stemming from Japan but at the same time is also increasingly experienced by young people across the globe as their own culture of choice; and its circuits of production, dissemination and consumption are being both decoupled from the Japanese context and seen as unentangleable from its country of origin. It is these very tensions that lend so much potency to manga—and the wider manga culture, or media mix of manga, anime, video games, light novels and toys (see Allison 2006; Condry 2013; Mihara 2010; Steinberg 2012)—as a possible channel for forging affective ties among young people in various countries around the world in relation to Japanese culture

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[3] Odagiri also notes how, in the US, alongside visual style, "price and format" seem to have become primary characteristics identifying manga, as opposed to for example country of origin (Odagiri 2010, p. 54). He further underlines the importance of format in identifying manga in the American context by pointing to the existence of a reverse operation, where Japanese manga are sometimes published in "large-size hardcover or softcover editions" and positioned as graphic novels rather than manga (Odagiri 2010, p. 54).

[4] I am very grateful to my first anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

and, as a possible extension, to Japan. This is one of the reasons why manga was also adopted as a central element of the "Cool Japan" nation branding framework. But at the same time, the delicate balance and the double-edged nature of these tensions is perhaps nowhere more clear than in the way "Cool Japan" is now often seen to have not lived up to its potential in relation to furthering economic growth and/or the generation of "soft power" in the arena of international relations (Brienza 2014; Iwabuchi 2015; Valaskivi 2013).

To highlight the way this double bind is constantly reframed and renegotiated, I will reference not only views and positions in relation to the world of manga publishing, criticism, and research within Japan but also the business, fan, and research perspectives in other countries. Furthermore, in the next section, I will turn toward laying out in more detail some of the stakes and complexities implicit in both how we delineate the meanings of manga and the naming conventions that follow from those decisions.

2. The Unavoidable Entanglement of Positions and the Politics of Naming

Throughout this text, the problem of "what is manga" will be central to my discussion, and in order to avoid any confusion, I would like to make clear that I understand the term manga to have no fixed a priori meaning—it is only in the way the term is invoked by and encountered by various groups that any meaning is assigned to it.[5] However, there is no easy way out, and no position devoid of bias, as cultural studies and other critical approaches have been emphasizing for a long time now. As a result, this seemingly detached meta-stance will also lend itself easier to privileging certain approaches, while implicitly undermining other positions. The pressing problem of what expressions to use in the following discussion provides a concrete example of this.

The terms "original English/German/etc. language manga"—commonly abbreviated OEL manga in the case of English language works—or "global manga", among other names, draw attention to the way manga produced outside of Japan cannot simply be referred to as manga. As Young (1990) explains, in all such binaries, the unmarked—thus seemingly transparent and universal—position corresponds to privilege, and the marked-out position to subordination. This is in fact the case in discussions of manga, as I will demonstrate in my analysis below, where global manga, marked out by its adjective, suffers from a legitimacy problem *vis-à-vis* supposedly "real" manga—that is Japanese manga—or in these arguments simply manga, without a qualifying adjective. By choosing to use the expression manga to refer to all works identified by their producers and/or localizers and/or disseminating agents and/or consumers—and the list can go on—as manga, I necessarily privilege the manga as style position over the manga is made in Japan stance, to be discussed below, even though on one level, my own position in itself does not entail any such claim. And although such a move might be seen as liberating, since it opens up the possibilities of what manga can be, it is at the same time an unintended challenge in relation to the current privileges enjoyed by Japanese manga.[6] Even so, the use of the term manga in the above described way, and the corresponding invocation of the adjectival construction "Japanese manga" to refer explicitly to manga produced in Japan[7] still only

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5   Even though one could argue that kanji are pictograms and thus cannot be arbitrary in the same way as a non-motivated string of characters or phonemes, as Stewart points out: "despite some *kanji* having, in Peircean semiotic terms, iconicity (i.e., look like the thing they are intended to represent), their usage is arbitrary and their meaning dynamic. That is to say, the *kanji*-composed word *manga*, like all words, has no essential meaning. Rather, it is a site of negotiated meaning, and any meanings given to it are subject to change over time, between users, and contexts". (Stewart 2013, p. 31, italics in the original).

6   Whatever our views might be on the current distribution of power in relation to any given problem, it is important to remember that any reconfiguration of a given power dynamic will be experienced as positive or negative based on the concerned actors' position within the status quo compared to which the redistribution of privileges takes place.

7   Japanese manga, could be used to refer to an endless combination of different dimensions of varying gradation in relation to the works' producers, publishers, etc. (cf. Brienza 2016), however, for my present discussion, I will simplify this to works first published in Japan.

partially changes the original power dynamic, in part because of the history and temporal aspects of the expression manga, as will be explained below.[8]

There are even further layers of complication and corresponding power relations at play, which become apparent when considering what is being equated with or delineated from manga. Taking two more common examples beyond the above discussed global manga, one might also ask, how do *manhwa* and how do other forms of comics or sequential art relate to manga, and what types of power relations are implied in those delineations?[9] Starting with the position of Korean manhwa,[10] it can both lend itself to be positioned as manga (Yamanaka 2013), and indeed seems to have profited from the interest in Japanese manga abroad (Nakano 2009; Schodt 2013; Yamanaka 2013), but at the same time depending on the context can be and is championed as a unique national comics culture (Leem 2012; Yamanaka 2013; Yoo 2012).[11] However, the position of various flavors of global manga are not all that different from Korean manhwa—indeed, in a way, the latter could also be seen to qualify as global manga. What then sets forms like Korean manhwa potentially apart in, for example, Europe and North America from global manga is their more established positions as respective national comics cultures—their longer history of having been influenced by Japanese manga[12]—and their geographical and cultural proximity to Japan.[13]

Regarding the distinction between manga, comics, and *bande dessinée*, it is not only the replication of positional claims for various national comics cultures already touched on previously, and the conjoined double problematic of styles versus national/cultural/linguistic territorial distinctions vying with and reinforcing each other at the same time,[14] but also the added layer of disciplinary differentiation on the level of academic inquiry (cf. Berndt 2010a; Berndt and Kümmerling-Meibauer 2013) that needs to be noted. The claims of manga studies to both uniqueness and universality *vis-à-vis* the wider field of studies of sequential art or comics studies highlights, in the context of the academic field,[15] the same strategic shifting of positions endemic to all aspects of the present problematic.

This leads me to the final point I wish to raise in relation to the what is manga problematic. From creators, to publishers, to readers and fans, to government agencies, to critics, researchers and academics there are innumerable actors in vastly differing contexts invested in varying degrees in delineating what manga is, with the stakes and payoffs in relation to their efforts also being wildly different. Furthermore, as already indicated above, the positions of these actors can change in time and/or according to strategic needs, and in many cases can even invoke seemingly contradictory positions at the same time. For example, the International Manga Award established in 2007 by the

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8 And to complicate things further, the arguments put forth in the present article could also be interpreted in a way that would seem to reaffirm the privileged position enjoyed by Japanese manga, the affordance of which is just as much an unintended but at the same time unavoidable part of the present approach as the arguments' flip-side of challenging its current dominant position.

9 There are of course many other comparisons that help learn about manga—see for example Natsume's detailed discussion of the similarities and differences found in relation to Hong Kong *manhua* (1997).

10 In line with the conventional mode of discussing manhwa in English (Berndt 2012), Korean and Korea in the text refer to South Korea.

11 "In Japanese, discussions of this exchange in the name of "influence" and the resulting similarities would tend to use the word *manga*, while attention to the agency of Korean artists and readers and, in consequence, Korean-Japanese differences leads to favoring the word *manhwa*". (Berndt 2012, p. 7, italics in the original) It is in this way, taking my lead from the authors I am citing, that I use the term manhwa throughout this article. On the other hand, in previous work (Kacsuk 2011), I have highlighted the often-shared position of Korean manhwa and Japanese manga in the Hungarian fandom and market for example.

12 See Cheng Chua and Santos (2015) for a discussion of US comics versus Japanese manga influenced sequential art in the Philippines as an example of the importance of the temporal dimension in relation to the presence of different comics cultures in the context of a particular national market.

13 A detailed discussion of the richness of positions and power relations implied in the way OEL manga, global manga, manhwa, manhua, and so on are invoked to delineate various forms of non-Japanese manga, not to mention the complexity of the qualifying adjective non-Japanese itself (again see Brienza 2016) will for now have to be left unexplored.

14 Emphasizing "national particularities" in relation to different forms of comics—as Berndt points out reflecting on this strategic aspect of discursive position takings—has been mobilized both in "the domestic struggle for cultural status and [...] the international struggle for market shares" (Berndt 2010b, p. 2).

15 Field in the Bourdieusian sense (see for example Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs seems to work toward a more inclusive notion of manga by showcasing non-Japanese creators while at the same time can also be seen to reinforce the centrality of Japan in relation to defining what manga is.[16]

Having offered a snapshot of the conundrum of terms, positions, and stakes involved, I will now turn to the central issue of the present article, in which I hope to highlight some aspects of how the debates around what is or is not manga are far more complex than usually given credit for.

3. Style versus Made in Japan

Without attempting to provide a comprehensive overview here, in Figure 1. below I have collected a number of different characteristics that are often either said to characterize manga and/or are mentioned as being responsible for the uniqueness of manga. I have tried to group these elements together according to what aspect of manga they correspond to (in the rows) on the one hand, and based on the distinction—namely style versus made in Japan—I find most important in relation to the what is manga debate (in the columns).[17] The columns "visuals", "content", and the "made in Japan" columns together also correspond to the three-level model proposed by Lefèvre for "comparative comics research" to account for not only "formal properties" and "genres, themes and characters" but also for "how comics are produced and consumed" (2010, p. 87).

	Manga as style I. visuals	Manga as style II. content	Manga: made in Japan I. "easy" to reproduce elements	Manga: made in Japan II. "hard" to reproduce elements
anime-manga style, not necessarily manga specific	• character design • visual code • background design			
composition	• page and panel layout • panel development			
underlying principle	• subjective viewpont favored			
production	• monochrome		• tankōbon format	• mode of publication & circulation • Japanese magazine editors • media mix potential
content		• genres • narrative structures • tropes & themes • character templates		
explicit Japanese elements			• Japanese cultural references • Japanese script	• Japanese language
implicit Japanese background				• Japanese visual cultural environment • Japanese manga & dōjin culture

Figure 1. Elements that contribute to making manga what it is.

As my starting point for the discussion of the contents and relationships of the table's elements, I want to first emphasize that although the style and the made in Japan positions are often seen as

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[16] For a discussion of the *Cool Japan* nation branding project in relation to manga, see for example Brienza (2014).
[17] The space of this problematic can arguably be broken down according to other dimensions as well. For example, in her overview of a particular instance of this debate, analyzing the posts from a forum topic about OEL manga on *Anime News Network*, Brienza identifies not two, but five positions: "Manga as Marketing Function", "Manga as Style", "Manga as Japanese", "Manga as Quality", and "Why Do You Care So Much?!" (2015, pp. 104–8). In a way, setting up a central dichotomy like I do in this paper is again itself a move privileging certain positions and suppressing others.

opposed to each other, they are instead better understood as a nested set, by which I mean that most people who argue for the manga is made in Japan position are usually not trying to point out that manga are stylistically far more diverse than what seems to be implied by the other position; rather, they would probably agree with a large number of the elements of the manga as style argument but in addition also hold that they have to be made in Japan. Furthermore, this characteristic of the arguments forming nested sets is also true in relation to the two sub-positions—visuals and content—of the manga as style side of the table. In other words, for the majority of proponents who would argue for elements in a given column defining what manga are, they will most likely take for granted all other elements enumerated in the preceding columns to the left of the given column. Thus, the manga as visual style argument is usually the smallest common denominator within these arguments. It is therefore on this section of the figure that I want to focus first.

3.1. Manga as Style I: Visuals

In order to unpack the manga as visual style position, I will draw on comics and manga studies, most notably Cohn's (2013), Natsume's (1997, 2010); (Natsume and Takekuma 1995), Groensteen's (Groensteen 2010; Groensteen [2011] 2013), and McCloud's (McCloud [1993] 1994) work. These four authors are not only representative of studies of sequential art in relation to the major comics traditions of Franco-Belgian bande dessinée, Japanese manga, and US mainstream and independent comics but also explicitly address the specificities of the manga vernacular—or *shōjo* manga in particular in the case of Groensteen—that set it apart from the other main stylistic families.[18] However, it is worth keeping in mind that only Cohn focuses explicitly on developing a fully fledged comparative approach to different visual styles—or visual languages in his terminology—of sequential art.

All four authors discuss elements of character design, morphemes, or symbols and paneling specific to manga. Starting with character design, McCloud—who, I should again stress, is not aiming for a comprehensive overview of the stylistic peculiarities of manga in *Understanding Comics*—notes the widespread employment of iconic characters and what he calls the "masking effect" ([1993] 1994, pp. 42–43). The masking effect, refers to the way characters are drawn in a more abstract style, inviting reader identification, with the backgrounds often created in a contrasting more realistic style—but he further notes that this is not manga specific *per se*, as it is also found in works like Hergé's *Tintin* (McCloud [1993] 1994, p. 42).[19] Groensteen likewise finds the characters of shōjo manga to be "minimally differentiated" ([2011] 2013, p. 59), echoing McCloud's argument.[20] Furthermore, building on Takahashi's emphasis on the significance of "jojō-ga and shōjo novels" for the development of shōjo manga (Takahashi 2008, p. 132) Shamoon points out how the visual depictions of "dōseiai relationships" mirrored the narratives by "also reinforc[ing] an aesthetic of sameness" (Shamoon 2008, p. 139). The discussion of the fact that manga characters—and often their surroundings as well—are commonly drawn in iconic ways, as symbols rather than photorealistic representations, also has a long tradition within Japanese language manga criticism and research going back all the way to Tezuka's own comments on how his drawings are more like symbols, a visual language, than representations of reality (Ōtsuka 1994). Even though there seems to be a correspondence between the Japanese, Francophone and Anglophone comics studies discourses in relation to the higher level of abstraction

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18 As Suzuki (2010) and Lefèvre (2010) both emphasize from different angles, these comparative studies are often themselves based on a smaller number of representative works and could hardly claim to do justice to the stylistic diversity found across authors and genres in time in any one of these major domains of comics.

19 McCloud, in addition, identifies the use of a contrasting more realistic style for characters that are supposed to be perceived as "other", objectifying them in the process, as opposed to the more iconic design of characters intended to elicit identification from the reader ([1993] 1994, p. 44).

20 Writing on hybrid forms of manga, Bainbridge and Norris likewise mention how "the features of the manga style (big eyes and exaggerated body proportions that often mix a number of racial, cultural, and gender characteristics) make many manga characters racially, ethnically, and often sexually indeterminate" (2010, p. 246), further pointing to the way manga character designs are often perceived as being potentially more abstract than character designs in other comics traditions.

of manga character designs, it is important to keep in mind that not only do we find a range of varied character design styles in manga, but defining character design patterns in US comics—both mainstream and independent—as well as Franco-Belgian bande dessinée also often follow highly patterned modes of depiction (see Cohn's (2013) visual breakdowns of US independent and superhero comics for examples of just how abstract these styles can also be).

On the level of more specific elements of character design, Cohn in his cognitive science underpinned visual language approach to sequential art offers the following characteristics of what he terms *Japanese Visual Language* or JVL[21]—noting that there are, of course, genre specific differences. With regards to graphic structure "people are drawn with big eyes, big hair, small mouths, and pointed chins" (2013, p. 154), "noses are [also] typically underemphasized" (2013, p. 155).[22] While these traits of facial representation might be argued to correspond more strongly to works of certain periods, genres, or artists, they nevertheless offer a good outline of some of the features that, for example, European and North American readers commonly associate with manga, in part popularized by the visual world of how to draw manga guides (Bainbridge and Norris 2010) from the beginning of the manga boom—from the late nineties and early 2000s onwards—in these countries.

Cohn (2013) also offers a very detailed discussion of symbols, or in his terminology, closed-class morphemes, the various sets of visual signifiers used in conjunction with other visual elements to convey fixed meanings, such as forms of speech and thought balloons, indexical lines, impact stars, upfixes, supplations, eye-umlauts, forms of reduplication, and so on. Similar to McCloud (McCloud [1993] 1994, p. 131) and most all discussions of manga he too calls attention to the unique set of such bound morphemes found in JVL.[23] It is important to remember, however, that these symbols, such as the sweat drop, also have a history of development and change over time with regards to their signified meanings and common modes of use (Natsume 1995a).

Natsume (2010) also draws attention to the use of vertical script in Japanese manga as opposed to the horizontal lettering found in bande dessinée and comics. This, as will be discussed below again, impacts the form and layout of speech balloons. As Yoo emphasizes, speech bubbles—especially in shōjo manga and *sunjeong* manhwa—are not only "a crucial part of the picture plane", but the blank space inside them also carry meaning in relation to "the protagonist's emotional state", which can be lost or transfigured in the process of translation and the changing of vertical to horizontal script (2012, p. 50).

Furthermore, all four authors also mention the use of non-conventional visual symbols such as the background in shōjo manga to depict emotional inner states—again, likewise found in, for example, European color comics, adds McCloud (McCloud [1993] 1994, p. 133). In addition, McCloud (McCloud [1993] 1994, p. 114) and Cohn (2013, pp. 158–59) also point to the use of subjective motion lines—as opposed to objective ones—as a further visual hallmark of manga style, which however, as both authors also note, are now increasingly found in US comics as well, a point I will return to below.

Finally, in relation to paneling, the most obvious characteristic of manga compared to American and European comics—and notably also Korean manhwa—is that they are read from right to left, resulting in a corresponding difference in panel development. Within English language comics studies, one of the most often cited distinguishing feature of manga identified

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[21] The relationship between JVL and manga is that the former is used to create the latter, but it is not manga itself (Cohn 2013).

[22] Although Groensteen argues for sidestepping the detailed examination of the artwork itself for a better understanding of what comics really are (a markedly different stance from the other three authors' approaches) in his *System of Comics* (Groensteen [1999] 2007), he is nevertheless enticed by the imagery of shōjo manga and allows himself a few points in relation to character design—similar to Cohn emphasizing the role of the depictions of both eyes and hair—in his chapter addressing edge cases of the comics form in his follow-up volume *Comics and Narration* (Groensteen [2011] 2013).

[23] For an enumeration and analysis of the visual metaphors (*keiyu*)—the term introduced in *Manga no yomikata* (Natsume and Takekuma 1995) for these symbols—in Japanese manga, see Takekuma (1995). See also Cohn and Ehly (2016) for a quantitative exploration of the differences in the distribution of visual morphemes found in *shōjo* and *shōnen* manga.

by McCloud (McCloud [1993] 1994) is its unique distribution of panel transitions. Analyzing the works of representative authors McCloud found that manga demonstrated a higher percentage of aspect-to-aspect transitions and the employment of moment-to-moment transitions, both of which are mostly lacking in US mainstream comics and Franco-Belgian bande dessinée but also found in US independent or alternative comics, the panel transition distributions of which are very different to all other forms.[24] Cohn, using his own approach of examining underlying grammatical structures in the make-up of panel sequences, further elaborates McCloud's findings by comparing the frequencies of macro, mono, micro, and amorphic[25] shots in different visual languages. Works of manga were found to depict "whole scenes as much as they showed the parts of scenes" (2013, p. 160), meaning a higher ratio of mono and amorphic shots compared to American mainstream and independent comics, which also corresponded to the higher use of "environmental-conjunctions"—another term introduced by Cohn—within manga panel sequences. Environmental-conjunctions refer to the way panels "show individual elements of a scene, which together create the sense of an environment in the mind" (2013, p. 79). Cohn cites Shamoon (Cohn 2013, p. 163) in relation to how this style was introduced by *gekiga* authors seeking to create a more cinematic style but was then adopted in other genres of manga as well, again highlighting the importance of change within Japanese manga itself—further discussed below.

For Groensteen (Groensteen [2011] 2013) and Natsume (1997, 2010), the discussion of the peculiarities of paneling found in Japanese manga are tied to the innovations introduced in shōjo manga and the special position the genre itself occupies in Japan both in relation to the industry and the critical discourse surrounding manga. Indeed, one of the differences in genre—as well as creators and readership—between the major traditions of comics art is the significance of manga for girls and women created by female artists in Japan (Natsume 1997, 2010). This is now also replicated in manga outside Japan (Brienza 2011; Malone 2010).

Natsume emphasizes the multi-layered nature of page layouts and paneling in shōjo manga, likening it to the structure of cell animation (Natsume 1995d, pp. 180–81). He also references the way Itō further develops his ideas to draw attention to the way the "uncertainty of the frame" (2005, p. 228 cited in Natsume 2010, p. 48)—the fact that "in manga it is actually impossible to say whether the reader's visual frame is formed by the page or the panel"—is what "makes manga expression unique" (Natsume 2010, p. 48). But, as Shamoon points out, shōjo manga is subject to change as well, and layering has, for example, been employed less in "stories aimed at older readers" since the nineties (2008, p. 146).

Groensteen also takes on board Natsume's concept of the multilayer, emphasizing how it "is combined with, and sometimes substituted for, that of the *multiframe*" ([2011] 2013, p. 63, italics in the original)—his preferred term for approaching the nested structure of interrelated frames of reference in comics (Groensteen [1999] 2007). He reaches this conclusion after identifying six distinct characteristics of shōjo manga paneling, namely: (1) "the catwalk effect";[26] (2) the preference for "long narrow frames"; (3) the "tension between closed panels" and either panels that are open towards the margins of the page or "unframed drawing[s]" between panels; (4) one or more "small inset panels superimposed on a larger panel"; (5) the pronounced role that blank spaces or whiteness play in the composition; and finally (6) the "decorative elements, [...] like flowering branches, showers of stars or twists of hair, that substitute for the frame and surround an image or a whole page" ([2011] 2013, p. 58). Furthermore, Groensteen also notes how, except for the first and last of these elements, they all

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[24] For further discussion of panel transitions in US underground comics—confirming McCloud's observation—see Garlington (2016).

[25] Amorphic shots do not show "active entities" (i.e., characters) (Cohn 2013, p. 56).

[26] Groensteen is referring to the full-figure representations of characters often spanning the length of the page and standing outside the panels of the story. These *sutairu-ga* (style pictures), as they are commonly referred to within manga studies, were often initially only added to the *tankōbon* version of the stories to replace the advertisements featured in the original magazine serializations (Kálovics 2016).

show up in other genres of manga as well, but not as pervasively as in shōjo manga. Indeed, for him, one of the most peculiar tensions in relation to shōjo manga is the contrast between what he perceives to be rather schematic character designs on the one hand—as already discussed above—and highly innovative page layouts and paneling on the other hand.

One of the underlying stylistic peculiarities of manga to emerge out of these analyses is that manga emphasizes the subjective viewpoint in its storytelling (Cohn 2013; Groensteen 2010; McCloud [1993] 1994). The use of subjective speed lines (McCloud [1993] 1994, p. 114), the spillover of emotional states into background images (Groensteen [2011] 2013, p. 123; McCloud [1993] 1994, p. 133), the higher number of subjective panels found in manga (Cohn 2013, p. 166) all seem to underline this theme,[27] and I would add to this list that even the "chibification" of characters[28] can be seen to express subjective perception as opposed to objective reality. Some of Groensteen's further observations also align with this proposition. In relation to the characteristics of shōjo manga paneling he notes how the "permeability of boundaries" acts in a way as "to invite the reader to project herself into the unreal world of the heroine and to identify with her" ([2011] 2013, p. 62). And even the recurring lack of backgrounds and the frequency of close-ups in shōjo manga (Groensteen [2011] 2013, p. 59) can be interpreted in a similar way, that is, emphasizing subjective identification versus objective depiction.[29]

3.2. Manga as Style II: Content

In discussions of what makes manga manga, content-specific elements peculiar to Japanese manga are less often mentioned than the characteristics pertaining to visual style discussed above. This does not mean, however, that references to such traits in analyses dealing with manga cannot be found. First and foremost, as already cited above, the distribution of genres—especially with regard to their nominal target audiences according to gender—seems to present a unique feature of what manga are in comparison with American comics and Franco-Belgian bande dessinée (Natsume 2010), which traditionally cater to a mostly male audience. This aspect of manga has had a huge impact not only on the development of the manga market and fandom outside Japan (Brienza 2016; Erik-Soussi 2015; Malone 2010)[30] but also on the perception of what the term manga potentially means in various countries (Brienza 2011). Although shōjo manga is the most important example, it is far from the only unique genre to emerge from Japanese manga. Groensteen, for example, notes the distinctiveness of eroguro, "a cross between the erotico-grotesque and the extremely violent" ([2011] 2013, p. 57).

Regarding narrative progression, Drummond-Mathews—building on Joseph Campbell's monomyth framework—points out how shōnen manga usually focuses on the "initiation phase of the hero's journey" of the protagonists as opposed to American superhero comics, where "heroes spend most of their narrative time in the return phase of the journey" (Drummond-Mathews 2010, p. 73). Shōjo manga's focus on "emotional interiority" and its verbal "style approaching poetry" (Shamoon 2008, pp. 144–45) are also hallmark elements that—although potentially shared with sunjeong manhwa—are often contrasted with non-Japanese comics. As for unique character templates, of which there are many, Prough discusses the figure of the "*bishōnen* (beautiful boy)", which was also first pioneered in shōjo manga (2010, p. 95).

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27 Drawing on Gravett's observation that "in Western comics we read what happened next; in manga, we read what is happening right now" (cited in Groensteen 2010, p. 24), Groensteen also emphasizes the way manga provide a more immersive experience of the story compared to Western comics.

28 In the context of anime and manga chibi has come to mean the deformed representation of characters—usually depicting them smaller and cuter—often employed to mark moments of emotional intensity and comical effect. This form of representation is also commonly found in derivative parody works.

29 As Takahashi notes, there is a double movement here, "faces and figures serve opposing functions: close-ups of the former draw the reader inside the emotional life of the character, while, simultaneously, more distanced views of the latter allow for a consideration of external aspects like physical appearance or clothing style" (Takahashi 2008, p. 125).

30 According to Nakano, shōjo manga is the main driving force behind the international spread of manga (2009, p. 133).

In the very last section of *Manga wa naze omoshiroi no ka* [Why are manga interesting/entertaining?] on the peculiarities of manga, Natsume points out three further characteristics, beyond the role of shōjo manga, that he considers to have advanced the unique development of Japanese comics (1997, pp. 270–72). The unparalleled size of the comics market in the country, coupled with its somewhat insulated state and its lenience toward sexual and violent content,[31] have all contributed to an environment in which experimentation can flourish. Thus, the formal and content elements peculiar to Japanese manga, as already alluded to above on several occasions, can be seen to be related to the size and structure of the Japanese manga market and its system of production, dissemination, and even consumption patterns, leading on to the topic of manga as made in Japan.

3.3. Manga: Made in Japan—Potential Connections

Brienza notes how the manga is made—or more precisely published first—in Japan position can also be seen as a way of circumventing the fuzziness implicit in any attempt at providing clear-cut definitions based on style (2015, p. 106). This interpretation highlights the possibility of moving beyond the simplistic dismissal of the manga is made in Japan position as mere closed-minded essentialism while retaining one's critical stance at the same time. In the present section, I will attempt to provide four further different approaches to teasing out the critical potential that this position can point toward in understanding the complicated relationship between style, production, dissemination, consumption, and place of origin (summarized in Figure 2). These four aspects will be related to (a) consumption, (b) production and dissemination, (c) linguistic and cultural context, and (d) temporal change.

Figure 2. Potential connections between elements of the *style* and *made in Japan* positions[32].

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[31] In relation to themes and tropes within manga, Lent (2010), for instance, offers examples of how Taiwanese manhua and Korean manhwa, despite having been strongly influenced by Japanese manga on the level of visuals, are still likely to retain unique characteristics in relation to personalities and values represented in the works or even the level of violence depicted. In a similar way, Yoo (2012) draws attention to the thematic differences in stories between shōjo manga and sunjeong manhwa.

First, starting with the consumption side of the problem, another possible reason for wanting to limit the boundaries of what can be considered manga to comics produced in Japan is tied to the desire for authenticity. On the one hand, the enjoyment of manga for a great many readers is not unlike the enjoyment of American pop culture was/is outside the United States for example, with the myth of the US being just as much consumed as the actual content of the products themselves. From this vantage point manga and authenticity in relation to manga are still anchored in Japan, as its "real" and at the same time "mythic" place of origin. In a way, Japan is to manga what the Mississippi Delta is to blues or the Bronx is to hip-hop. On the other hand, as Vályi (2010) and Hodkinson (2002) demonstrate, the discourse around authenticity within fandoms and/or subcultures offers a way for participants to both lay claim to membership and status within the group and to position themselves in relation to its central issues. Brienza (2015) also comes to a similar conclusion, informed by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of distinction, regarding the significance of policing what is manga within US anime-manga fandom.

Second, from a production- and dissemination-oriented point of view, it could be argued that there are certain qualities of Japanese manga that arise specifically as a result of being produced within Japan. First on the list of the most often cited unique qualities of the Japanese manga market is its truly unparalleled size (Nakano 2009; Natsume 1997; Odagiri 2010). Furthermore, and strongly related to this point, is the system of magazine serialization coupled with the publication of tankōbon editions of successful titles, the creator-editor relationship fostered at these magazines, and the importance of the media mix potential of series (Berndt 2008; Moreno Acosta 2014; Nakano 2009; Natsume 1997; Omote 2013; Prough 2010).

So strong is the perceived potential connection between the system of production and the manga being produced that the introduction of its elements—like "manga magazines and Rookie of the Year awards"—in Korea could be seen to have influenced Korean manhwa's development to approximate Japanese manga more closely (Yamanaka 2013, p. 92). The differences between the two production systems—for example, the higher number of self-published tankōbon (Yoo 2012) and the lack of Japanese-style editorial control (Lent 2010) in Korea—have also been cited as a possible reason for some of the divergences between Japanese manga and Korean manhwa.

Following on from this thought, it is common knowledge just how important Japanese editors are in the development of "the story, characters, and pacing" of a series (Prough 2010, p. 99), monitoring reader feedback, providing suggestions even to the point of practically co-authoring stories in some cases (Omote 2013).[33] The magazine system, however, has a number of further implications for the development of stories. Through the example of the change in tone of *Naruto*, Omote (2013) illustrates how the distribution of the types of stories being serialized concurrently in a given magazine can impact the progression of a specific series. The fact that there are multiple stories appearing in one publication can also alleviate the pressure to constantly provide high-tension cliffhangers and in this way impact the stories' development (Natsume 1997). According to Moreno Acosta, the initial magazine serialization compared to the straight-to-tankōbon production of OEL manga also necessarily has an impact on narrative progression, with the story structure of the latter closer to the novel form with no cliffhangers, and a marked lack of the repeated re-establishing of plot points and re-introduction of characters found in manga serialized in magazines first (2014, p. 65). Furthermore, in relation to the decompression of scenes and the corresponding cinematic style discussed above as a hallmark of manga paneling, McCloud (McCloud [1993] 1994) suggests that it might be linked to the unique publication format and pace of Japanese manga. Indeed, the strenuous weekly publishing schedule and the visual conventions emerging out of a cinematic oriented creatorly approach can be seen to align to support each other. In addition, even the size of the original tankōbon editions

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[32] The variation in the color and style of the arrows and borders carries no extra meaning and is only employed to help delineate overlapping domains of influence.
[33] Lefèvre (2010, p. 88) citing Rogers notes that editors can play just as important roles in the production of mainstream titles in the US as well.

can impact the contents and visual composition of manga—in this case "how much information is included in each page"—as demonstrated by Yoo in her comparison of Japanese shōjo manga and Korean sunjeong manhwa (Yoo 2012, p. 50).

The significance of the pace of publication is also apparent in the way stories originally circulated in Japan in weekly magazines—sporting a dozen or so concurrent series—were in many cases initially published in the single series monthly floppy format of US comics featuring around two installments of the story at the most (Brienza 2009; Goldberg 2010; Kacsuk 2011; Schodt 2013) and thus providing a somewhat glacial story progression compared to their original publication rhythms.[34] The mode of publication outside of Japan could never fully follow the Japanese model, either in pacing or in the double system of magazine serialization and tankōbon editions, but after a period of trial-and-error, now seems to have adopted the tankōbon format as the standard for publishing manga (Brienza 2009, 2016; Kacsuk 2011; Malone 2010).

The publication formats of manga are also interrelated with their distribution channels both in and beyond Japan. The shift in the meaning of manga within the US to that of girls' comics, argues Brienza (2009), was in part the result of the way manga came to be disseminated in bookstores following the adoption of the tankōbon format, as opposed to the comic book store—the traditional source for US comics. This example also highlights how the context of a preexisting comics culture and its conventions can further impact the way manga is understood within a particular market.

Finally, one of the less obvious elements of the system of production to impact the development of stories and characters is the structure of copyrights in relation to the intellectual property being produced. In the case of companies holding the rights to the characters of their titles, the authors can be replaced while serialization continuous, as is the case in US or Hong Kong comics (Natsume 1997), for example. In Japan, on the other hand, creators usually retain the rights to their characters, which according to Natsume can be seen to contribute to the development of more pronounced author-specific styles (1997, p. 265). The role of selling rights to characters and stories has also increased over time in the business model of manga production in Japan, especially since the breakthrough success of *Akira* (Nakano 2009, p. 102), tied to the "'one content—multiple uses' type production" (Nakano 2009, p. 18), or as it is more commonly known, the media mix (Steinberg 2012).

Third, looking at the linguistic and cultural context, starting with the use of the Japanese language and corresponding script, they both impact manga in a number of different ways. First, it has even been suggested that the way kanji have a stronger role as visual markers rather than aural ones in the Japanese language—where a single kanji can often be read in a number of different ways with regards to pronunciation—has impacted the development of manga by creating a stronger link between the spatial and the temporal (Natsume 1997, pp. 178–80). Second, Japanese not only "has a much wider range of onomatopoeic expressions than most languages", but their incorporation in illustrations also has a rich tradition stretching back all the way to *ukiyo-e* (Petersen 2009, p. 166). Petersen notes how US comics usually pay far less attention to differentiating between the "weight and emphasis" of sound effects, and in turn OEL manga also seem to lack the "same degree of complexity" in relation to the depiction of sounds (2009, p. 170). In their visual language framework–informed quantitative analysis, Pratha et al. (2016) also found a marked difference between Japanese manga and US comics in the distribution of the form and content of sound effects. Third, the use of Japanese script is going to have an impact on page layout and paneling, as any retoucher, translator will attest who has ever had to deal with the vertical-shaped speech bubbles of Japanese manga. In fact, vertical speech bubbles, which are just a natural result of vertical typesetting, can become another stylistic element associated with Japanese manga to the extent that even creators of global manga will sometimes employ them in order to better approximate the look and feel of Japanese manga pages (Moreno Acosta 2014, p. 76).

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[34] Not only in the US, but in other countries as well, for example Hungary, see Kacsuk (2011).

The questions surrounding the appropriate translation of Japanese, the treatment of—mostly katakana form—sound effects, and the handling of Japanese cultural references, have been a favored topic of both academic inquiry (Natsume 1995c, p. 136) and fan debates. The overall trend seems to be a move away from the "domestication" of Japanese cultural references, phrases and even orthography, preserving more and more of the original, a move towards "foreignization"—according to Rampant's interpretation (Rampant 2010)—which is rooted in "scanlation" practices.[35]

Japanese cultural references will inadvertently make their way into manga, similar to how, for example, US superhero comics are also littered with the quotidian elements of American life. All these components ranging from clothing, food, architecture, objects, patterns of social interaction and so on, which are transparently everyday within their culture of origin will become starkly obvious in the context of reception grounded in a different cultural backdrop. And similar to the way tropes in rock music, punk, or hip-hop that were originally very much tied to their context of origin have carried over as hallmark elements of the style itself invoked in a foreign context so too various elements of Japanese culture have made their way into global manga. In fact, the influence of this kind of intrinsic correspondence between form and content can be seen in the predilection evidenced in—especially early—works of global manga for not only working with Japanese tropes but even setting the whole story in Japan.[36] One more further element of the cultural context in Japan that, as Cohn (2013) points out, also possibly impacts the appearance of manga is the wider Japanese visual cultural environment.

Finally, looking at the fourth aspect of the connection between the style and made in Japan positions, the temporal dimension of change, the fact that Japan—for now—is the fountainhead of authenticity in relation to manga and the uphill battle that global manga face becomes strikingly evident. Such a longitudinal view of manga has to take into account the shifts in both Japanese manga and forms of sequential art abroad, for it is in relation to the interplay of these changes that the conceptions of what is or is not manga are constantly re-evaluated.

Considering changes within Japan, for instance, the system of producing and circulating manga has and will change over time with a corresponding impact on the development of manga form, genres, and so on. An example from the past is the link between rental book businesses and the development of gekiga (Suzuki 2013), as for the future, Nakano (2009) offers the case of the impact digital distribution and consumption—in part driven by the desire to read manga but without the hassle of owning physical books—will possibly have on manga. For example, coloring can become more widespread if no printing costs are involved. Omote further notes how the shift toward consuming stories in tankōbon form among an ever-widening segment of the audience within Japan[37] will also have an impact on how the reception of such works can be understood (2013), which—I would add—in turn can and probably will have an impact on story creation and other aspects of manga.

However, most importantly, a creator working—or first published—in Japan will not have to worry about whether their work is perceived as manga, for it is that by definition. Examples of this would be the way the visual world of Hideo Azuma plays with negating some of the conventional forms of expression common to manga (Natsume 1995b), or the way traditional hallmark elements of shōjo manga like the focus on eyes in order to achieve emotional intensity, can be replaced by other tools, such as the nuanced depiction of hands in Kiriko Nananan's *blue* (Shamoon 2008). On the other hand, any stylistic, thematic, etc. innovation in relation to manga outside Japan will always be perceived as a move away from manga.

This is the real underlying connection between the manga as style and the manga is made in Japan positions: manga published first in Japan and all the stylistic innovations it might entail will be

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[35]   "The zeal of hard-core American otaku fans, who prize authenticity in manga format, has also led to a strange phenomenon. Because most Japanese manga are now published in English in Japanese format, with page and panel order in a right-to-left sequence, and onomatopoeia left in Japanese, they have in a sense become an awkward hybrid format". (Schodt 2013, p. 23)

[36]   For example, the *Manga Shakespeare* version of *Romeo and Juliet* is set in modern-day Japan (Hayley 2010, p. 270).

[37]   Schodt also foresees the gradual disappearance of manga magazines in Japan (2013).

authenticated as manga by definition. Because manga published outside of Japan still suffers from the lack of this same automatic recognition as manga, its creators are faced with two options. They either attempt to strictly adhere to already recognized conventions of manga, potentially resulting in allegations of slavish imitation and/or a dated look compared to the cutting edge of what is being published in Japan,[38] or they decide to pursue their own vision and possibly end up with something that is manga or manga-like but not necessarily recognized as manga by certain parties. The potential innovations, in this case, perceived as leading away from manga, as opposed to enriching it.

This could very well change with time, but for now it is no wonder that artists creating manga and manga-like works outside of Japan have increasingly come to distance themselves from the label—for example, Bryan Lee O'Malley, the creator of the *Scott Pilgrim* series refers to his work as "manga-influenced comic"[39]—in order to circumvent the possible backlash the adoption of the label manga might invoke (Moreno Acosta 2014). Ironically enough, they are doing so at the very same time that their publishers might be positioning them as manga from a marketing point of view based on the logic of format adherence identified by Brienza (2016).

Itō's systems approach to manga outlined in *Tezuka Izzu Deddo* (2005) [Tezuka is Dead] can help better understand this self-reinforcing feedback loop that seems to maintain an invisible barrier between Japanese manga and global manga. It provides a vantage point that allows for the aligning of formal and textual analyses, theories of authorial intention, and reception and representation all in one unified framework (2005, p. 75). In this model, individual works, readers, and authors alike are embedded in the space of manga expression, which is made up of the various genres of manga, all of which are further embedded in the wider space of other forms of expression on the one hand, and the wider social environment on the other hand. Genres in this framework arise and change in a dynamic relation between the readers' and the authors' constantly evolving knowledge of the interplay of various works and their shifting positions. Although not explicitly stressed by Itō, these feedback loops ultimately provide a temporal dimension to his framework. Furthermore, the perception of genres and individual works and their respective evolution will both be influenced by the shifts in the wider social and art/media/expression environment and at the same time have an effect on those very changes themselves.

Thus, based on Itō's model, the stylistic shifts and changes in other forms of sequential art, as already alluded to above on several occasions, also have an impact on what is and will be considered manga-specific. The adoption and diffusion of various elements—from visual symbols, character design, paneling to story structure, character templates and so on—originating in manga to US comics and Franco-Belgian bande dessinée has already produced a discernible mark on those traditions (Brienza 2016; Cohn 2013; Groensteen [2011] 2013). These shifts together with the proliferation of manga and manga-like works produced outside of Japan will no doubt effect changes—most likely a loosening (Odagiri 2010)[40]—in relation to the currently existing underlying bond between the concept of manga and Japan as its privileged place of origin.

4. Concluding Thoughts

The manga as style position, as I hope to have demonstrated, is not as pure a possibility—transcending all cultural and material situatedness—as it is sometimes held up to be. At the same time, the manga is made in Japan position is not as simplistic, as it is commonly thought to be, and indeed points to a far deeper and more fundamental interrelationship between manga and Japan—as its real and mythical place of origin—than its proponents might actually

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[38] Such time lags are again symptomatic of center–periphery relationships.
[39] http://www.gordonmcalpin.com/writing/interview-bryanomalley.html (accessed on 15 October 2016).
[40] "For authors and readers of this generation, 'manga' does not necessarily mean Japanese manga. If stylistic hybridization continues in the same vain, the unifying force of the word 'manga' will gradually weaken, and the art style and panel layout associated with it now will become just one of many technical and stylistic options" (Odagiri 2010, p. 55).

articulate. Thus, an acceptance of the inherent impossibility of the either-or positions and an appreciation of the intricacies of the and-and relationship between these two aspects of the meaning of manga can help better understand the double bind facing policy drives like "Cool Japan" or the position of manga creators and publishers outside Japan and the spread and development of the form itself as it relates to the wider circuits of national and transnational manga production, dissemination, and consumption.

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Anime in Academia: Representative Object, Media Form, and Japanese Studies

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Abstract: The transcultural consumption of Japan-derived popular media has prompted a significant amount of academic research and teaching. Instead of addressing globalization or localization as such, this article investigates the interplay of anime research and the institution of Japanese studies outside of Japan, addressing recurrent methodological issues, in particular, related to representation and mediation, intellectual critique and affective engagement, subculture and national culture. The inclination towards objects and representation in socio-cultural as well as cinema-oriented Japanese-studies accounts of anime is first introduced and, after considering discursive implications of the name *anime*, contrasted with media-studies approaches that put an emphasis on relations, modalities, and forms. In order to illustrate the vital role of forms, including genre, similarities between TV anime and Nordic Noir TV drama series are sketched out. Eventually, the article argues that the study of anime is accommodated best by going beyond traditional polarizations between text and context, media specificity and media ecology, area and discipline.

1. Introduction

The transcultural consumption of popular media from Japan, which this thematic issue of *Arts* addresses, is not only a matter of global markets and fan cultures; it also includes academia. Academic knowledge production has almost always been striving for transcultural relevance. More recently, considerations of students' transcultural media experiences have also been brought to the fore, motivated by critical, cultural-studies shaped intention and/or economic necessity. Thus, manga, anime, and video games started to migrate from subculture into higher education. Outside of Japan, departments that teach Japanese studies have been a frontrunner in that regard, and a significant amount of scholarship has been produced, especially in English and with respect to anime.[1] Among fans as well as academics anime is enjoying a higher presence than manga in part due to the institution of film studies (which holds a much stronger academic position than comics studies), but more so the increasing empirical and theoretical importance of digitalization and media ecologies. Guided by an interest in anime studies and related Japanese-studies pedagogy, this article reverses the focus on "animation as an alternative way to understanding Japan".[2] To determine in which way Japanese studies expertise may contribute to understanding anime, the article surveys major currents in publications based on Japan-related, or Japanese studies, expertise without aspiring to be an

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1   As a matter of fact, anime studies as distinct from animation studies (see Sections 3 and 4 of this article) is represented more strongly in the non-Japanese academic community than in the Japanese one as, for example, the Japan Society of Animation Studies evinces. Related to the specific position of both cultural industry and art-school education, the underrepresentation of academic research on anime in Japan calls for a discussion which goes beyond the scope of this article.
2   This was the central concern of the international workshop *Japanese animation and European contexts: International dynamics, local receptions* held at Ca'Foscari University, Japanese section, in February 2018.

exhaustive account of anime research. While occasionally including publications in Japanese, it refrains from addressing the perceived lack of interaction between respective studies inside and outside of Japan, primarily because fundamental methodological issues cannot necessarily be ascribed to location and language, as, for example, papers by native Japanese academics working in non-Japanese academia indicate.

Naturally, the majority of publications are polarized, aiming at the study of either Japan or anime. Yamada Shōji[3] from the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (*Nichibunken*) observes a gap between "manga/anime studies" and Japanese studies, which, from his point of view, reiterates the not easily reconcilable difference between the second and the third generation of Japan experts, that is, anthropologists/social scientists and media studies scholars (Yamada 2017, pp. 3–4). In Japanese studies settings, anime has, by tendency, been subsumed to "Japanese popular culture". Tentatively, four orientations can be discerned: first, towards politics; second, culture (mainly in the socio-anthropological sense, while still prone to the national); third, Art (primarily in relation to [national] cinema); and, four, media (including industry, production processes, distribution, merchandising, consumption, technicity, literacy, genre conventions, etc.). Orientations 2 and 4 acknowledge fan-cultural expertise and creation. But, instead of discussing the four orientations separately and at equal length, this article highlights methodological issues that run across them: representation and mediation, intellectual critique and affective engagement, subculture and national culture. The incipient section introduces the second and third of the above orientations putting an emphasis on their actual similarities, while the next section turns to the discursive implications of the name *anime*. The fourth section considers briefly the media studies approach, including a contrastive look at TV anime and Nordic Noir drama series, while the final section addresses anime's possible ways in and out of Japanese studies.

As distinct from philology, the mainstay of traditional Japanology, and against the backdrop of recent social-science dominance many Japan scholars promote a shift from texts to contexts, often equating textual analysis with an emphasis on representation (Smits 2017, p. 228). Yet, to a greater or lesser extent, all of the approaches interrelate text and context, exhibiting differences with respect to *which* contexts they consider and *how* they analyze texts rather than playing off one against the other. Often, this escapes attention as the institution of Japanese studies is traditionally more inclined to categorize research by *what* is studied rather than *how*—that is, to privilege object and area (or geopolitical rather than disciplinary territory). As literary scholar Michael K. Bourdaghs observes:

> Area studies often treats its fields of knowledge as something like paint-by-numbers projects. Each new study fills in a predefined space on a given grid, coloring in another blank to provide a more detailed picture of the object—say, Japan. As a result, area-studies scholarship, even that which self-consciously adopts oppositional approaches—critical approaches to, for example, race, gender, sexuality, or fascism—tends to deal with its objects of study in terms of their seemingly given content, ignoring the ideological forces at work to generate the sense of givenness. (Bourdaghs 2018, p. 591)

Such an inclination limits the research of anime insofar as it does not consider notions of anime itself. But, there is also a challenge involved, that is, to question oppositions—not only between research on anime and Japan, or text and context, but also considerations of fandom and society, serial narratives and self-contained works, media specificity and media convergence, and genre fiction and art-house cinema.

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[3] In this article, the romanization of Japanese words follows the revised Hepburn system. Japanese names are indicated in the Japanese order, that is, surname preceding first name without separation by comma, except in the References. Globally used Japanese terms (such as manga or otaku) are not italicized.

2. Representation

Anime is occasionally touched upon by scholars engaged in political science, history, and international relations with respect to national branding (i.e., the infamous Cool Japan policy),[4] neo-nationalism, or remilitarization, but the bulk of Japanese studies in the humanities pays attention to representations of Japanese culture and society in anime, whether in texts or usages, with a background in literary studies or anthropology. While there are discussions of animated movies in regard to Japanese religion, mythology, and folklore,[5] especially critical accounts of gender representation abound. Anthropologist Dolores Martinez, for example, makes a typical case with her analysis of a character type called "cyborg goddess".[6] With the intent to shift the attention from the girl (*shōjo*) to the mature woman and from subcultural to national audiences, the focus is on "how the Japanese body is represented". As it turns out the representation in question serves as an escape from present societal dilemmas, in a way that answers "the unspoken desire of many a Japanese: another chance to remake the nation-state after the war is won" (Martinez 2015, p. 85). While assuming to go beyond textual analysis in favor of the broader historical and societal context, anime texts—identified as "animated feature length films" (Martinez 2015, p. 72) and taken as a given, or tool—are "reduced to retelling the plot and offering [. . .] sociological and anthropological readings" (Kono 2011, p. 205), which themselves abet generalization.

Literary scholars, too, have approached anime through a socio-cultural lens from Napier (2001), who provides Japanological expertise to the fandom and wider public outside of Japan, to Alisa Freedman, who, together with Toby Slade, promotes "serious approaches to playful delights" in the Japanese-studies classroom and highlights "how popular culture reveals the values of the societies that produce and consume it" (Freedman and Slade 2017, location 312), how it teaches enduring "lessons about history, international relations, business, class, gender " (Freedman and Slade 2017, location 312). In line with the paradigm shift in Japanese studies since the 1990s, anime as part of Japanese popular culture is to open a gateway to "broader themes", accompanied by pedagogical efforts that aim at turning attention away from fan communities to society at large. However, the focus on society at large through popular media texts is not that easily achieved. Two examples shall briefly illustrate that.

In the attempt to grasp popular sentiment in post-3.11 Japan, literary scholar Amano Ikuho analyzes the recent reception of the animated movie *Space Battleship Yamato* (or Star Blazers; Uchū senkan Yamato, 1977) introducing her example as follows:

> In the eyes of the Japanese audience, *Yamato* was extremely successful partly because of its narrative design modeling the convention of the *Bildungsroman*, a diegetic frame in which an ordinary young man grows by adopting and learning from collective social norms and values. /On the other hand, [. . .] the social context of 1970s Japan allowed *Space Battleship Yamato* to be read as a manifest case of historical revisionism, rather than a story of straightforward nationalism. (Amano 2014, pp. 328–29)

Typical of discussions that employ anime as an occasional tool for the exploration of societal issues, the Japanese audience is first generalized and then short-circuited, i.e. immediately correlated, with individual media texts. In addition, already existing analyses, which by now include considerations of multiple audiences, escape notice. For example, animation historian Sano Akiko has diligently demonstrated what is common sense within Japanese-language anime criticism, namely, that the audience of *Space Battleship Yamato* was not homogeneous (Sano 2009, pp. 289–97). Because of its historical subject matter—the allegedly unsinkable Battleship Yamato that was sunk in April 1945—the movie attracted adult audiences, and critical intellectuals related it to the issue of coming to

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[4] See (Valaskivi 2013).
[5] See (Ogihara-Schuck 2014; Okuyama 2015); and the excellent book chapter by Foster (2015).
[6] See (Martinez 2015, 2017).

terms with the nation's past. But articles in anime-fan publications left the historic war untouched, focusing instead on the design of characters and vehicles as well as the effective minimalism in suggesting movement. In reference to both the movie and the TV anime series (26 episodes, first broadcast 1974–1975), fan critics paid exclusive attention to forms, or "the materiality of the medium" (Silvio 2006, p. 128), while the foremost interest of traditional intellectuals was directed to narrative contents, or representation.

Thus, a dichotomy emerged that still resurfaces in Japanese studies today, as the recent example of a queer-studies critique of Hosoda Mamoru's *Wolf Children* (Ōkami kodomo no Ame to Yuki, 2012) may indicate. At the beginning of the analysis by Germer et al. (2017), animation is defined as potentially offering "a twofold view of existential threat or liberating alternative vision of contemporary society, along with a process of constant metamorphosis" (Germer et al. 2017, p. 1), but the actual analysis considers mainly what plot and characters represent, which culminates in the conclusion that the movie ends up "reifying and reinforcing normativity" (Germer et al. 2017, p. 7). Remarkably, queerness appears as a matter of represented contents, reified, so to speak, by the director in a self-contained text, not as a matter of anime's own performance, its textual openness to audience participation, or the interrelation between the text and various audiences.[7] Taking anime as a given, the movie is read as ultimately promoting the patriarchal ideal of "good wife and wise mother", celebrating Japanese-studies expertise. In addition, the director's œuvre is characterized as "a Japanese version of a national 'cinema of reassurance'" (Germer et al. 2017, p. 2). This obscures more than the possibility of multiple readings, including the meaning of reassurance for different actors. Not necessarily Japan-related discourses of national cinema, genre cinema, and animation as genre (see Section 4 of this article) pass unnoticed and so do the fundamentally collaborative nature of anime and its multimodal performance of subcultural tropes.

Regarding anime as cinema allows, among other things, for relating it to society at large and as such also to Art; but, at the same time, it runs the risk of privileging the conceptual work of the director while underestimating the physical labor of the key animators, and centralizing the narrative role of the plot while overlooking non-narrative elements.[8] The "lens of social context" (Germer et al. 2017, p. 1), as applied by the articles introduced above, is apparently expected to warrant critical as political thinking, which again is often implicitly ascribed a potential to warrant the *raison d'être* of Japanese studies as part of the humanities. But reflections on the situatedness and forms of critical thinking remain rare; it is mainly identified by its opposite: fan-cultural "celebration" or "amusement". This orientation shows itself, for example, in Deborah Shamoon's discussion that calls for "transcend[ing] the superflat, database-driven aspect of anime", and for appreciating anime works that "radically challenged the otaku audience to detach from their fantasies and go out into the real world" (Shamoon 2015, p. 105). Criticality seems to be the *conditio sine qua non*, the opposite of the textual, philology-like focus that academics see returning in students' engagement with anime, manga, and games (Smits 2017, p. 228). When compared to the familiar opposition between uncritical (affective) fan activity and critical (intellectual) academia, Stevie Suan's article in this issue (Suan 2018) points into a different direction as it demonstrates how *sakuga* fans' activities may very well become critical insofar as their affective focus on form, in addition to craft and labor, allows for dismissing national-political representationalism. Reminiscent of modernist art and its mobilization of transcultural form, such a focus may admittedly go at the expense of situatedness, but it certainly draws attention to contemporary assemblages that escape polarizing assumptions.

Japanese studies tends to foreground national aspects of a transnational media form like anime. This manifests, among other things, in a penchant towards national cinema, as is the case in approaches to anime from art-theoretical and film-historical perspectives, exemplified by Swale (2012) and

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[7] Sharalyn Orbaugh's discussions of anime and manga offer an alternative in this regard, see for example (Orbaugh 2015).
[8] See (Suan 2018).

(Novielli [2015] 2018). At first glance fundamentally different from the accounts introduced above, they actually have numerous things in common: They, too, privilege feature length films, or "cinematic animations" (Lamarre 2018, p. 9), over TV-prone productions; they highlight directors, assume a non-segmentalized audience, consider neither subcultural nor transnational contexts, and they juxtapose "serious" representation with amusement, commerce, or craft. Admittedly, the two monographs cannot easily be lumped together. Swale engages in a theoretically informed exploration of anime's contribution to "art proper", understood as "the imaginative dimension of both the creative process and the viewers' engagement" (Swale 2012, p. 59), and he applies an allegedly universal concept of autonomous art when he asserts:

> The ultimate litmus for identifying the genuinely artistic aspects of the work of anime lies in the capacity to identify a process of expression that is not a slave to the instrumental aims of its constituent parts, i.e. craft, representation, amusement or magic. (Swale 2012, p. 121)

In contradistinction, Novielli refrains from any consideration of theory or even medium (for example, variants of cel animation) when she presents her chronology from 1917 to 2013, which foregrounds outstanding (male) artists and their collectives as well as the politico-societal conditions and cultural particularities that are represented in character types and stories. The relation between individual and group features centrally in the discussion of older works, and so do symbolizations of Japan and America, or Europe.

Yet, despite their significant methodological differences both monographs share an inclination towards Japanese cinema (whose very end Alexander Zahlten's book (Zahlten 2017) proclaims in the name of industrial genres, national times, and media ecologies). Indicative of that is the restraint exercised with regard to the word *anime*. Novielli mentions it only in a footnote (Novielli [2015] 2018, p. 58), concordant with her attachment to experimental animation: The book concludes with a section on the professors and graduates of the animation department at Tokyo University of the Arts. Swale uses the word *anime* frequently, but omits it from the Index. This appears to correspond with his focus on the (likewise exclusively male) directors Miyazaki Hayao, Kon Satoshi, and Oshii Mamoru as well as his correlation of anime to cinema, regarding both Japanese cinematic traditions and recent "post-cinematic" trends. Closely related to the cinema focus is the orientation to Art, which surfaces less in the form of status claims than in the preference for bounded works, that is, movies that are capable of representing a director's imagination and lending themselves to critical interpretation.[9] Especially Novielli's monograph seems to validate the observation that " . . . the preference is still highly modernist in that discrete art objects are leveraged against large social forces and power relations". (Lamarre 2018, p. 29).

3. Naming

Novielli's book is dedicated to Yamamura Kōji, a creator of animated short films in various techniques such as *Muybridge's Strings,* which received an Excellence Award at the 15th Japan Media Arts Festival in 2015 (where the Grand Prize went to *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* by director Shinbō Akiyuki, causing some friction between the two camps of "Japanese animation" at the time). The dedication anticipates the book's emphasis on Japanese animation as something broader than anime, a position widely shared among animation professors at Japanese art schools, like Yamamura himself, and manifested in the volume edited by Hu and Yokota (2013). Against this backdrop, it may appear like an attempt at elevating anime to a level above entertainment and affective fascination to call it *animation*. In fact, European fans have been using the words interchangeably without such aspiration. This is evident in the French volume edited by Pruvost-Delaspre (2016), which speaks

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9 In Novielli's book interpretation is not always substantiated by means of historical evidence. Thus, it appears arbitrary to regard the characters of Masaoka Kenzō's short film *Kumo to chūrippu* (The spider and the tulip, 1943) as representations of America (the spider), Japan's Asian colonies (the ladybird), and the protective Japanese Empire (tulip) (Novielli [2015] 2018, p. 31).

mostly of *l'animation japonaise* when actually *anime* is meant. Foregrounding distribution in the French market and reflecting on the split-up of discourse between traditional film criticism and fan expertise, the volume highlights cel animation, distribution formats (such as VHS and DVD), narrative genres, and franchises, rather than *auteurs*, festivals, and "high-quality standard" (Novielli [2015] 2018, p. 47). Nevertheless, the appendix list of Japanese animations that were released and sold in France features only five TV series among a total of 77 entries (Pruvost-Delaspre 2016, pp. 214–16). This is due to the specifics of anime consumption outside of Japan. With respect to the animated movies by Miyazaki Hayao, the "Kurosawa of animation", James Rendell and Rayna Denison note:

> Just as the transnational reproduction, promotion and dissemination of Studio Ghibli's texts worked to spread Miyazaki's cinema as a new kind of art animation, fans have actively embraced that cinema for the resistant and ambiguous subcultural capital that it affords [. . .]. (Rendell and Denison 2018, p. 11)

The very fact that Miyazaki Hayao's work has its own "database"[10] points once more to the necessity to go academically beyond oppositions like the one between animation, or animated movie, and "anime proper". After all, *anime* is a matter of perspective. From a fan-cultural (and especially non-Japanese) point of view, the movies by Miyazaki—as well as Takahata Isao or the above mentioned Hosoda Mamoru—may pass as both: cinema and anime. From an infrastructural and economic one, their movies may appear as the opposite of the commercially successful "franchise anime film", which stays aesthetically and economically related to the world of TV even if screened in theaters (Lamarre 2018, p. 9).

On the flipside of the coin that maintains, "not all Japanese animation is anime", anime is uninhibitedly defined as "all animation made in Japan". But although the word *anime* is in wide use now for the sake of convenience, not even all cel animation made in Japan (to take the medium-specific angle) has been regarded as anime in Japanese-language discourse. The name *anime*, derived from the English loanword *animēshon*, gained momentum only in the 1970s (Tsugata 2004, pp. 18–21). Earlier, cel animation was called *manga eiga* (cartoon film) and, from the late 1930s onwards, also *dōga* (lit.: moving images). During Japan's postwar democratization under US-American sway the Anglicism *animēshon* started to spread, denominating on the one hand Disney's fully animated *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, which saw its first Japanese screening in 1950, and on the other hand experimental short films as pioneered by Norman McLaren. Thus, the word *animation* came to assume a twofold role: on the one hand, serving as an umbrella term for a specific film genre; and on the other hand, marking "art animation", that is, short films to premier mainly at film festivals, such as Yamamura's works. In contrast, *anime* has been associated with the technique of limited (cel) animation, entertaining fiction, and the TV series format, which started in the early 1960s. Distinguishing itself aesthetically by the central role of voice acting and sound design, a shared set of auditive, narrative and visual conventions, and a strong non-representationalist proclivity in its settings as well as the design and figurative acting of its characters[11] (and therefore not rarely mistaken as escapism), anime has assumed a global recognizability rooted in specific practices and discourses.[12] This anime is closely tied to TV series, pertaining to the segmentation of narratives into episodes and arcs with a recurrent pattern of pacing,[13] the exhibition of fluid character-identity in the form of *chibi*,[14] viewers' media intimacy based on literacy, and the enhancement of a "media mix" affinity that was around already at

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[10] In the sense of a fan-cultural repertoire or virtual archive, which was initially conceptualized by Azuma (Azuma 2009) in the name of "database" and has not seen its translation into the vocabulary of recent archival discourse yet. With respect to Miyazaki fandom see (Morimoto 2018).

[11] See (Suan 2017, 2018).

[12] Pioneered by series such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (Shinseiki Evangerion, 1995–1996, dir. Anno Hideaki) and *Sailor Moon* (Bishōjo senshi sērā mūn, 1992–1997, dir. Ikuhara Kunihiko et al.); recent popular series by female directors include *K-On!* (since 2009, dir. Yamada Naoko) and *Yuri on Ice!!!* (2016, dir. Yamamoto Sayo).

[13] See (Suan 2017, 2018).

[14] Exaggerated ("super deformed") midget character, or midget version of the same character, visualizing affective states and approximating a first-person perspective.

the very beginning. The Japanese late-night broadcasts of the last two decades (23:00–04:00) have been advantageous not only economically (that is, as a reasonable marketing tool for DVDs); they have also been crucial in shaping the global conception of *anime* as a basically open-structured media form for adults resting on serialization (within one series and beyond).

4. Media Form

The TV-induced type of anime has been at the center of a new strand of media-studies research that turned away from *what* anime texts as bounded entities represent, towards *how* they work within local and global media environments. Stretching from investigations of franchises (Steinberg 2012) and the collaborative practice in studios (Condry 2013) to explorations of distribution networks (Denison 2018) and media geographies, the new academic interest is empirically motivated by "a shift from the exchange of contents to the interconnectivity of distributional platforms" (Steinberg and Li 2017, p. 180) under the conditions of digitalization and globalization. Accordingly, the privileging of objects and their (national) production, or critical reading, abates, making room for modalities and distribution. In pursuit of "how the relation between television and animation hinges on infrastructures, multimedia franchises, and media ecologies" (Lamarre 2018, p. 1)—in Japan even before the spread of digitalization—Lamarre maintains that "animation becomes something other than a self-contained object or self-identical content existing apart from its distribution. It becomes a kind of nondiscrete object" (Lamarre 2018, p. 9). More specifically, he conceptualizes anime as "a mode of technosocial existence" (Lamarre 2018, p. 10).

As such, anime is not approached as a medium in the narrow sense being confined to support and technology, and prioritizing the object itself, but rather as media, that is, from a broader perspective that acknowledges the interplay of textual and contextual forms, a "crossroads of aesthetics, technology, and society" (Mitchell and Hansen 2010, location 174), which goes beyond technological determinism precisely because its focus is on relationality. Considering anime, broadcast slots, like the late-night one mentioned above, have proven to be as vital for its perceived and practiced media specificity as viewing devices. But, in Japanese, it is difficult to distinguish between medium specificity and media specificity as the word *medium* is only rarely used. Zahlten (2013), perhaps in disregard of this difficulty, dismisses media specificity in favor of media environments. While his argument against ahistorical culturalist and formalist approaches[15] stands to reason, two questions arise, one with respect to object orientation, and another with respect to polarization: Is media specificity invariably a matter of objects to be approached in one specific way? And, in view of the fact that in practice media specificity goes hand in hand with media convergence, how does media (not medium) specificity change under media-ecological conditions?[16]

The focus on how anime mediates, and what is mediated as anime, draws attention to forms, albeit beyond the object-centered type of modernist formalism. In order to methodologically reunite texts and contexts, Caroline Levine has suggested to regard "all shapes and configurations, all ordering principles, all patterns of repetition and difference" (Levine 2015, p. 18) as forms (not structures) and to seek out "the intricacy of relations [between them] over interpretive depth" (Levine 2015, p. 39). In *The Anime Machine* (Lamarre 2009), Lamarre took his departure from such forms, in particular forms of animated movement as related to the treatment of space in anime—the compositing of the multiplanar image, and the handling of intervals between and within images, with the exploded view as one case. In *The Anime Ecology* (Lamarre 2018), he determines: "The multilayered image [. . .] implies the generation of a translayer force." (Lamarre 2018, p. 6). Thus, the initial attention to underdetermination as the fundamental characteristic of the anime machine runs into a media-ecological theory that focuses on TV as entwining the social and the technical; relatedly, it foregrounds the interplay between

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[15]	Elaborated in (Zahlten 2017); see, for example, locations 362–65.
[16]	Addressed within Japan-related film studies, for example, by Lee (2017).

aesthetics and economics rather than political representation or respective academic critique.[17] In a similar vein, Suan highlights anime's formal conventions and how they are performed as a system that warrants the media's global recognizability, marketability and reproducibility across individual styles and cultural locations (Suan 2017, 2018). Form-conscious approaches like these show an openness for exploring and conceptualizing aspects of anime that go beyond the re-confirmation of Japan-related knowledge. They acknowledge the agency of producers, mediators, spectators, and matter itself, as well as the relevance of pre-representational and post-critical viewing. On top of this, they hold the potential to include considerations of anime's aesthetic materiality, stretching from Gekidan Inu Curry's collages[18] to the interrelation between 2D (two-dimensional) and 3D (three-dimensional) imagery, including the insertion of (apparent) hand-drawn sequences into computer-generated film.

The transcultural, while situated, working of forms mediated by TV suggests itself also from a comparative angle. At the risk of taking a detour similarities between TV anime and Nordic Noir TV drama shall be briefly sketched out in order to illuminate the relevance of critical attention to modalities rather than objects and what they may represent. Both anime and Nordic Noir became globally consumed niche media almost concurrently: anime in the latter half of the 2000s, Nordic Noir in the early 2010s. In view of production modes and representational content, the two appear so strikingly different that the lack of comparative analysis does not come as a surprise.[19] What was coined Nordic Noir by the British media company Arrow Films are mainly public service TV series, which are also known as "Scandi crime",[20] featuring complex female detectives while addressing the downside of the Nordic welfare state in a sociocritical, gritty realist way. In contradistinction, anime productions are privately funded, and their serial narratives evolve often around girl characters, in addition to boys or young men, who inhabit story worlds that do not reference contemporary society directly, even if they are set in Japan (*sekai-kei*[21] being an evident case).

But in view of formats and modalities commonalities appear: Both Nordic Noir and anime have spread outside the markets that they were initially produced for, and in subtitled versions at that; both have seen (live-action) remakes in the US and UK; both relate to discursive transmedial clusters, involving more than TV series, and both have proven effective with regards to "contents tourism". Studies published in English on the Nordic Noir phenomenon over the last few years point to factors of success, which also apply surprisingly well to anime: printed popular fiction that laid the ground for the TV productions (Nordic crime novels, in part comparable to the role of Japanese manga for anime); seriality as programming strategy, production mode, narrative form, and viewing experience; non-broadcast viewing via DVD and streaming sites; and the connection to genre: "genre acts as a sort of battleground [...] for developing domestic film culture as a dynamic part of an international system of cinema" (Gustafsson and Kääpä 2015, p. 6). The last point, however, does not apply to animation as a cinematic genre, or anime as a genre of animation (at least not anymore).[22] Similarly, "Nordic Noir is not a clearly defined genre, but a concept with genre affinities" (Hansen and Waade 2017, p. 9). Thus, the "genre" attribute implies two things: first, highly conventional and industrial "genre film" as the modernist antipode to art-house movies, and, second, thematic fictional genres therein. The international visibility of genre film from Japan or the Nordic

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17 An example for the difficulties to address anime within the framework of "critical animation" is (Steinberg 2017), which shows criticality as a property of the critic, not anime itself.
18 See *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* (since 2011, dir. Shinbō Akiyuki).
19 Hills (2017, p. 53) mentions Casey Brienza's work on invisible cultural labor in paratextual industries when pointing out that, in contrast, Nordic Noir related labor has been rendered invisible by choice.
20 Pioneering examples are *The Killing* (Denmark, 2007–2012) and *The Bridge* (Denmark and Sweden, 2011–2018).
21 Fictional genre where the relation between the protagonists and the fate of the world is not mediated by social institutions.
22 Zahlten (2017, location 207) notes that anime may have qualified as an "industrial genre" at certain moments in Japan's postwar history. He employs "industrial genre" as a relational concept to highlight "meaningful constellations of industrial structures and practices, media texts, spaces of circulation, and spectatorships" (locations 175–76). Besides, with their claim "anime is not a genre!" fans have resisted the subsuming of anime to an allegedly universal type of animation (modelled on North American productions).

countries is not entirely new; suffice to recall the former popularity of locally specific genres, such as sword-fighting (*chanbara*) or sexploitation movies. But the success of contemporary Nordic Noir drama and anime leans on globally shared genres, like mystery, horror, and science fiction.[23]

At a glance, Nordic Noir and anime seem to have adopted the role that art-house movies (for example, by Ingmar Bergman or Ozu Yasujirō) once played as representatives of national cinema, although for different audiences. In fact, critics have observed with respect to Nordic Noir that "genre film transformed into an art film of sorts when it left the [. . .] national sphere" (Gustafsson and Kääpä 2015, p. 7). This may also apply to anime, but only under the condition that the modernist polarization between internationally acclaimed national cinema and domestically popular genre film is dropped. In view of the placement of locally specific TV series in the globalized media market, Matt Hills argues that Nordic Noir "has been articulated with forms of anti-mainstream cultural difference that may be better thought of as potentially subcultural and *neocultural*" (Hills 2017, p. 51). Two aspects are especially noteworthy here: "cultural difference" and the "neocultural". As for the first, referencing and projecting locality (whether Nordicness or Japaneseness and in whatever form), more precisely, "attention to national/cultural distinctiveness that feeds into a fetishising discourse of 'exotic' difference" (Åberg 2015, p. 101) has been vital for Nordic Noir as well as anime to appear as alternative to the Anglophone popular media mainstream. The "neocultural", on the other hand, points to "quality TV", which fuses subcultural and (national-)cultural capital, according to Hills: "'Fan-like' and 'cult-like' practices are culturally mainstreamed here, forming part of a newly dominant discourse of binge-watching" (Hills 2017, p. 56). In other words, non-fannish viewers are invited to take a fan-like, in-between position.

In sum, it can be said, that, in addition to TV studies, genre theory sheds light onto what helped to establish Nordic Noir and anime as global brands, namely, the interplay of a distinctive representation, or invocation, of locality and globally familiar forms: Not anime as a genre, but thematic genres that are employed in anime have mediated "Japan" as a cultural form.[24]

5. Japanese Studies as Media Studies?

Choo (2013) has maintained that area studies and media studies do not live well together, or more pointedly, that area studies alienates media studies. According to her, the American field of Japanese studies, since its inception, has not only generated comprehensive knowledge about Japanese society and culture, but also put that knowledge in the service of "seizing Japan" by means of occupying certain subjects. But the subject of anime does not enjoy much reputation within the humanities—be it for the alleged lack of social realism and political critique, its aesthetics of conventions and "database" references, or simply the fact that academics from other fields as well as administrators lack exposure. Thus, anime does not easily help to "seize Japan" apart from recent Cool Japan policies, which, in the wake of tourism as the new industry, have shifted anyway from entertaining media to folklore, fashion, and food. Against this backdrop the question arises where to locate anime research: within Japanese studies or better without?

Anime research is usually delineated by geopolitical area and disciplinary territory, associated on the one hand with Japanese, or Asian, studies, and on the other hand with departments that engage in film, media, art, or literary theory. But anime is not necessarily addressed within those departments, and if so, it is inclined to be subjected to allegedly universal, western-centric categories "that exclude certain kinds of cultural production from the realm of 'art'" (Apter 2013, p. 48), to name just one possible case. The disregard for the situatedness of concepts of Art is as symptomatic as

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[23] See for example the discussion of anime in relation to the global genre of Science Fiction by Posadas (2014), who suggests to complement traditional Japanese-studies representationalism (introduced in Section 1 of this article) with "representing genre".

[24] See (Kacsuk 2016), who employs the sociological concept of subcultural clusters, instead of genre, to explain rise and convergence of the anime-manga-otaku field outside of Japan.

is the exclusion of TV anime series from Swale's discussion. But "challenging basic, 'universal' assumptions of 'disciplines'" is accomplished not only by "presenting area studies as a modifier of discipline in the combination of 'discipline *and* place'" (Smits 2017, p. 227); it implies also historical time. Situating concepts of (anime as) Art, for example, provides an opportunity to acknowledge both cultural particularities and post-modernist commonalities, as it relates to differences within the institution of modern art in Japan as well as its global transformation in recent years.

Lamarre names Japanese studies as one of the fields *The Anime Ecology* is drawing on, and his book clearly strives to feed Japanese experience into transcultural media studies, with respect to traditions of transmedia storytelling, the "unbundling of TV from medium and platform" already debated in the 1980s, and Japan's "formation as an urbanized media center" (Lamarre 2018, pp. 2–3). Anime's new relevance in the age of digitalization and media ecologies (or anime as method) provides the point of departure here. In line with the modal conceptualization of anime, Japanese-studies expertise is employed as a tool to consider historically specific local situations that conjoin transnational aesthetic and economic configurations. This approach strikes as different from the inclination to link media research to the modern nation and its public political sphere in order to reach beyond area studies.[25] Zahlten's *The End of Japanese Cinema* addresses Pink Film, Kadokawa Film, and V-Cinema as examples of "industrial genres" but not anime, which is probably because anime appears less "deeply permeated with concerns about the nation" (Zahlten 2017, location 149). Leaving aside whose concerns these concerns actually are, it is interesting to note that they come to the fore from both within and without the institution of Japanese studies—in the attempt to connect Japan-related expertise to non-area studies scholarship, due to expectations by those not interested in specific (Asian) locations. Consequently, media studies' promise for making an intervention with regards to reading anime texts as representative objects that provide direct access to the "area" of Japan may get easily caught up in representational issues of a different, institutional kind. A radical way out of Japanese studies does not seem feasible.

With regards to undermining modernist notions of representation, authorship, and nation Japan-related media-studies publications on anime have been engaged not only in the promotion of media ecology but also media regionalism; the allegedly increasing irrelevance of anime's media specificity has been seen to be accompanied by the (often also managerially advanced) dissolution of Japan specificity into Asian studies. Indeed, anime has been flying both beneath and above the national radar, not evenly shared within the nation, while crossing borders in terms of production, distribution, and consumption. Writing on the emerging creative industries in East Asia around 2010, Pang asserted that in Japan anime was only slowly integrated into national-economic discourse (Pang 2012, p. 234). With respect to the tolerated practice of copying, which for her distinguishes cultural from creative industries, she stated: "The form's strong affiliation with copying enormously complicates any national and cultural identity produced thereby, because there is no such thing as authenticity." (Pang 2012, p. 251). It can be added that, as distinct from manga, Japanese anime has been based on (hierarchical) Asian production networks since the 1960s, and that recently Chinese web companies invest a lot in Japanese productions bringing anime's transnational dimension to the fore. Against this backdrop, anime research may seem to be best situated in Asian studies programs as they aim to unloose the tie to Japan specificity in line with media regionalism. Yet, Asian studies as area studies still finds its main *raison d'être* in object, or subject matter, orientation,[26] even if it focuses on relations within the geopolitical, sociocultural, and imaginary territory that it investigates. In such an institutional site, it is hardly surprising to see anime subordinated to a bigger purpose. But, while acknowledging that area studies does not provide the solution for the methodological issues raised in this article, it goes

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[25] See, for example, the volume *Media Theory in Japan* (Steinberg and Zahlten 2017), which refrains from featuring manga and anime studies; presumably because these may easily appear too object-centered, too subcultural, or not theoy-prone enough.

[26] The volume *Introducing Japanese Popular Culture* (Freedman and Slade 2017) gives explicitly preference to such categories (anime, manga, video games, literature, fashion, etc.) over "concepts" like otaku, Lolita, *kawaii*.

without saying that Japan-related expertise is relevant to the study of anime. Area studies' potential to highlight otherwise academically marginalized subjects, such as subcultural productions, should not be denied either: It offers a platform for anime research whenever film-studies departments do not welcome it. Consequently, the question of where in academia to locate anime—within or without Japanese studies—becomes itself an issue of situatedness. In view of the modality at the core of the media of anime, the challenge is how to mutually engage Japan-studies expertise and an anime-specific research, in other words, to interrelate area and discipline, context and text, media ecology and media specificity. An important step to conjoining what Japanese-studies convention more or less strictly divides may be to conceive of the "area" itself, not as end but means, or medium, so to speak, in order to focus not on *what* it is but *how* it operates on objects, practices, and networks, for example, in the form of anime.

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The Anime Industry, Networks of Participation, and Environments for the Management of Content in Japan

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Abstract: Video-sharing sites like YouTube and streaming services like Amazon Prime Video and Netflix, along with unlawful platforms such as Anitube, are environments of consumption enabled by increasing transnational consumption that are pushing for transformations in the Japanese animation industry. Among these platforms, the Kadokawa Dwango Corporation is known to rely on the integration of consumers' practices and the needs of the animation industry in a changing and challenging era of transnational content flows. In this paper, I focus on the Kadokawa Dwango Corporation, a major player in the contemporary media mix, and its pushing forward of the creation of an environment that integrates two different stances on cultural content: one which represents the industry's needs regarding cultural content as intellectual property, and another that represents consumers' practices and which regards content as a common or free resource for enabling participation in digital networks. I argue that rather than the production of content, it is the production of value through the management of fictional worlds and user's participation in media platforms that lies at the core of the Kadokawa Dwango Corporation's self-proclaimed 'ecosystem'. This case represents the transformations in the Japanese content industry to survive the increasing transnationalisation of consumption and production.

Keywords: Kadokawa Dwango; Niconico; Japanese animation market; fan culture; media mix

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1. Introduction: Emergency Measures and the Kadokawa Dwango Corporation's Two-Sided Position

On 13 April 2018, the Japanese media reported that the Japanese government, at a panel held at the Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters, decided to take 'emergency measures'[1] asking Internet providers to voluntarily block access to the piracy websites Mangamura, Anitube, and Miomio. In the same day, the headquarters also published a document that explained these measures as extraordinary but necessary to protect copyright holders and the base of the business upon which content is produced. In the case of Anitube, famous for streaming Japanese animation for free, it was estimated around 46 million people accessed the website in February 2018 (99% from Japan), causing an estimated 88 billion yen (IPSH Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters) of damage to the industry.

In the same day, major publishers, such as Kodansha Ltd., Shueisha Inc., and Kadokawa Corporation, subsidiary of Kadokawa Dwango Corporation, made public announcements praising the measures, followed by the Association of Japanese Animations. On 23 April, Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corp (NTT) announced that it would block the sites identified by the government. This announcement came a day after legal experts and members of telecommunication companies in

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[1] All quotations and sources originally in Japanese have been translated by the author.

Tokyo discussed the hazards of the way in which 'emergency' measures like these, lacking proper legal provisions and public debate, allow the government to arbitrarily block access to internet sites.[2]

The day following the NTT announcement, Nobuo Kawakami, president of Kadokawa Dwango Corporation, announced his support of the government decision as the only resource available due the current loophole in Japanese law against illegal foreign internet services that target Japanese consumers. However, as Kawakami states, his position on this issue is two-sided; one is from the point of view of a copyright-holding company, and the other from the perspective of a web service that 'should be worried about being the target of regulation' (Kawakami 2018). In fact, besides Kadokawa Corporation, the other subsidiary of the Kadokawa Dwango Corporation is Dwoango Co., Ltd., the company that runs the video-sharing site Niconico (formerly Niconico Dōga). Niconico is a popular site in Japan, similar to YouTube, and closely related to Japanese anime and manga amateur and fan culture, where users are able to upload material that many have copyright issues. This gave Niconico a reputation of being 'a den of illegal videos' (Iijima 2017, p. 62) since its beginning, around 2007, fostering further efforts by the site to erase illegally uploaded content.

This series of events comes after the increasing massification and trans nationalisation of the Japanese content industry sector usually considered a subculture, the sector represented mainly by manga, animation, and tokusatsu films (mainly science fiction, horror, or fantasy films characterised by the use of special effects). The success of the films *Your Name*, *Shin Godzilla*, and *In This Corner of the World* in theatres in 2016 made it evident that this 'subculture' had transformed into mainstream culture (AJA Association of Japanese Animation). In addition, foreign platforms, such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, have been operating in Japan since 2015, and since 2017, Netflix has further been recognised as an important player in the Japanese animation production scene, when their collaboration with around 50 anime studios and related companies was announced (AJA Association of Japanese Animation). Thus, although, according to data from the Anime Industry Report 2017, streaming of digital content still constitutes only a small share of the market (2.4% in the broad sense[3] and 5.2% in a limited sense), significant transformation in the ways in which industrial actors and cultural policies regard digital content are already building the foundation for a system in which digital content is central.

This paper analyses the way in which Kadokawa Dwango Corporation addressed these transformations, responding to international trends as well as deeply domestic issues, such as the complicated relationship between the Japanese content industry, its long-running horizontal structure, and the networks of participation shaped by consumers, such as those in fan and amateur cultures. In this paper, I argue that Kadokawa Dwango Corporation's proclaimed 'two-sided position' can be described as rooted in an environment aimed at creating value based on the management of at least two forms of integration: the integration of fictional worlds and the integration of platforms. The first form of integration is built on the dynamics between property and commons, and the second form of integration, built upon the first one, points to the integration of users' activities into a closed environment comprising the combination, interplay, and management of several platforms. Thus, my aim is to show how these forms of integration respond to the conditions and practices of the Japanese anime industry, as well as fan and amateur cultures.

My analysis broadly covers 2010 to 2016. This is a period where the Japanese animation industry was in a continued depression and moved from its structural orientation toward home markets toward a marked market recovery, diversification, and an increasing adaptation to international driving forces. Besides industrial reports, relevant material published in magazines and newspapers, and previous research on the subject, I based my analysis on the fieldwork and interviews I conducted between 2014

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[2] Statement available from the following website: https://www.nttdocomo.co.jp/info/news_release/2018/04/23_00.html (accessed on 27 April 2018).
[3] The AJA defines the 'broad sense' of the Japanese animation market as 'based on estimated sales in animation and animation-related markets' (AJA Association of Japanese Animation, p. 2).

and 2015 in Japan, as part of my Ph.D. research on the Japanese animation content industry and its amateur and fan culture (Hernández 2016).

2. Theoretical Framework: Economy of Participation in Informational Networks

The cases analysed in this paper exemplify the transformations of consumer culture and industrial practices that the Internet as an increasingly socially interactive media continues to bring about. Much research focusing on the participatory features of new Internet platforms has been done, in particular after the emergence of the Web 2.0, through terms such as user-generated content (UGC), referring to the content produced by media platforms users as amateur videos, or consumer-generated media (CGM), referring to media like YouTube, shaped mostly by user-generated content (see for example Gillespie 2010; Kozinets et al. 2008; Snickars and Vonderau 2009; Kim 2012).

Previous literature related to the keywords of 'participatory culture' (Jenkins 2006a, 2006b; Delwiche and Henderson 2013) and 'collective intelligence' (Lévy 2013), or the work of Lawrence Lessig (2004, 2006), on intellectual property, has shown how the productivity of engaged media users, such as fan communities or the open-source movement, are transforming our ways to relating to media on the basis of collaboration and shared interests, goals, and resources. Scholars such as Von Hippel and von Krogh (2006), focusing on the open-source movement, have also argued for the positive effect that freely revealing findings and transforming proprietary information into public domain may have for industries, fostering innovation at low costs while the protection of information may be rather expensive (Von Hippel and von Krogh 2006).

In contrast, authors such as Tiziana Terranova (2000, 2004) have argued that the Internet relies on networks of immaterial unpaid labour, fuelling a prolific strain of criticism on the exploitation behind audiences' productivity. For instance, Andrejevic (2009) seeks to develop a 'theory of exploitation for the interactive era' (p. 406) focusing on the transformation of YouTube into a profit-making structure, where the industry seeks to capitalise on 'user-generated data' (p. 406) and the information generated by users' interaction with its platform. As he concludes, content providers 'want the use-generated data without the user-generated content' (p. 421). In a similar vein, Fuchs, based on the premise that knowledge is in essence a public good and its production is inherently social and cooperative (Fuchs 2009, p. 77), argues that in a commodified Internet economy, consumers' productivity and participation means 'the total commodification of human creativity' (Fuchs 2009, p. 82).

Marc Steinberg focuses on the Kadokawa Dwango Corporation to criticise Google, Amazon, and Apple's 'platform imperialism', casting a more positive light on the potentials of media platforms. He characterises Internet commercial platforms as self-enclosed ecosystems where content is delivered and points out how a few companies are positioning themselves as the only content distributors, eliminating the possibility of amateur content generation (Steinberg 2017). In contrast, he focuses on the video-sharing site Niconico and its capacity to sustain the 'communities, cultures, and practices that form around media mix projects' (Steinberg 2017, p. 99). As Steinberg explains, the Japanese term 'media mix' is a 'popular, widely used term for the cross-media serialisation and circulation of entertainment franchises' (Steinberg 2012, p. viii). Niconico differs from YouTube as its interface allows users to transform and generate content, fostering subcultural and local networks that may also further develop new forms of the media mix (Steinberg 2017, p. 105).

From a broader perspective on Japanese media culture, Steinberg (2012, 2015) has stressed the central role played by Kadokawa in the development of the media mix system. Following Steinberg, the character merchandising developed since the beginning of the 1960s around the manga and later animation character Tetsuwan Atomu can be regarded as crucial in the development

of the 'transmedia connectivity' that lies behind the media mix (Steinberg 2012).[4] This system underwent further development by Kadokawa Pictures, led by Kadokawa Haruki around the 1970s (Steinberg 2012, p. 149; Odagiri 2010).

In this paper, I depart from these perspectives, and in particular, Steinberg (2012, 2015, 2017)'s seminal work on Kadokawa and Niconico, to outline the environment for the management of content that the Kadokawa Dwango Corporation represents while paying particular attention to the industrial practices of the Japanese animation content industry and its relation to animation fan and amateur cultures in Japan.

Although the business models represented by the animation industry and Niconico are contrasting to a large extent, they are inevitably connected in everyday consumption. Moreover, consumers, producers, and content copyright holders have forged a huge grey zone (Hiragi et al. 2014) of informal agreements, based on the linkage between these models. Thus, in this paper I argue that it is the formal integration of these diverging models that lies at the base of the environment pursued by the Kadokawa Dwango Corporation. This formal integration is what allows the creation of value and the management of content and platforms for participation. The 2014 merger of Kadokawa Corporation, a platform for the management of intellectual property, and Dwango Corporation, a platform for the management of users' activities and UGC, is evidence of this.

3. The Cool Revolution and Surviving Transnationalisation

In his book *The Age of the Cloud and the 'Cool Revolution'* (2010), Tsuguhiko Kadokawa focuses on information technology, its role in transforming the nature of the production and management of content, and the ways in which audiences engage with it. At the time of the book's publication, he was the CEO of Kadokawa Group Holdings, which is now under the name Kadokawa Corporation, a subsidiary of Kadokawa Dwango Corporation, established after a merger between Kadokawa Corporation and Dwango Co., Ltd. on 1 October 2014. In his book, Tsuguhiko Kadokawa focused on the transformative effects that companies like Google, Apple, and Amazon have on the relationship between hardware, software, and the connection of content and services enabled by the use of information networks and cloud technology. The purpose of this book becomes evident in the title of his subsequent book, *A Copyright Law That is Not Defeated by Google and Apple* (Kadokawa 2013). Kadokawa was calling with urgency for transformation and the construction of a particular system (an 'ecosystem') before the race for control of the management of digital content—which had already brought about radical changes in the nature of digital content and its production, consumption, and management—is lost. To this end, in 2010, Kadokawa addressed the situation faced by the content business in Japan with a compelling metaphor. For him, the Japanese content industry's attitude toward overseas innovations was similar to feudal Japan's self-imposed isolation. In that context, the video-sharing website YouTube, which has emerged from what he calls 'the globalisation of knowledge and information'[5] (Kadokawa 2010, p. 58), and more recently Netflix (Kadokawa 2017, p. 157), are like the Black Ships that arrived in Japan at the end of the Edo Period.

The metaphor of the Black Ships conveys a feeling present in the Japanese content industry since those days, and it is linked to the conflictive atmosphere that still surrounds the Cool Japan policies as well. Some of the tension between the Cool Japan policies and the animation industry has its origin in the complicated relationship between the orientation toward the overseas market that the Cool Japan strategy—a set of cultural policies and initiatives carried out by governmental and civil organisations—encourages and the relatively inward orientation of the Japanese industry, which has a

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4   For instance, Steinberg detailed how, although Akado is commonly regarded in Japan as the origin of the media mix, the image of Atomu provided the consistency necessary to develop connections between several media. See (Steinberg 2012, pp. 70–80).

5   With this term, Tsuguhiko Kadokawa makes reference to the digitalisation of information and knowledge and its spread through the internet.

strong focus on the domestic market. In this context, Tsuguhiko Kadokawa's metaphor is compelling. As he states, the stance of feudal Japan toward the Black Ships is similar to the stance of content copyright holders and broadcasting companies toward YouTube. They trusted that geopolitics would keep their business area safe, but the worldwide influence of YouTube and more recently Netflix proved they were wrong (Kadokawa 2010, 2017).

Tsuguhiko Kadokawa's words are an interesting mix of several discourses found in the Cool Japan strategies and literature concerning information society and participatory culture. On the base of the globalisation of knowledge, Tsuguhiko Kadokawa regarded the 'Cool Revolution' as a revolution led by 'participating masses' (Kadokawa 2010, p. 128). These masses have clear goals, use media content based on their lifestyle (p. 128), and are actively engaged in the production of content (p. 113). In Kadokawa's analysis, praise for the democratisation of personal expression by means of the Internet is blended with his characterisation of business models such as that of Apple. For instance, Kadokawa describes the distribution of content through platforms built on specific hardware or terminals that has characterised Apple's business model as a mixture of software and hardware, from which emerges a hybrid business model, shaped by a network of content distribution within a closed system administrated by a single company (in this case, Apple). Within this system, the masses are the receivers as well as the senders of messages; they become active producers of content and participants in a huge space of information where the amount of this information becomes the key to generating value (p. 113).

The protagonists of this 'cool revolution' are the masses. As Kadokawa states, the winning business model of this revolution will be that which coordinates the whole, the model that can satisfy users by offering them a fascinating experience (p. 129). In his view of what he regards as the 'last stage of the cool revolution', 'a unified or integrated 'store' that provides everything will appear' (p. 129). Kadokawa's stress on the role of participative audiences, the integration of production, distribution and consumption, and the emphasis on offering a fascinating experience to users is central for characterizing his standpoint toward the 'cool revolution', as opposed to the overall perspective shared by the Japanese content industry around 2010.

4. The Japanese Animation Industry: Producing Value from Intellectual Property Management

Some of the important changes in the Japanese animation industry in the last decade are concerned with the influence of public cultural policies, such as the Cool Japan strategies, which promote local products or Japanese goods and services overseas by appealing to consumer sensibility through the branding of national or local culture (Mihara 2013, 2014; METI 2014). Among areas like fashion, food, advertising, or tourism, and in particular animation and manga, the promotion of content is one of the most featured elements. The inauguration of the Strategic Council of Intellectual Property in February 2002 and the announcement of the Intellectual Property Basic Act[6] in December of the same year were the frameworks upon which this set of cultural policies was built. As Arai (2005) describes, the Intellectual Property Strategies fostered in Japan since 2002 aim to achieve a 'knowledge-integrated' industrial structure, rather than 'labour-integrated' one (Arai 2005, p. 5) and transform Japan into an 'intellectual property-based nation' (p. 5). Among the measures that aimed to foster an 'intellectual creation cycle' (p. 10), the promotion of content businesses became key to reviving the Japanese economy (p. 10).

The Cool Japan discourse commonly stresses the success and popularity of Japanese animation in foreign markets, as is the case in the speech titled 'Towards New Growth' by former Prime Minister (2008 to 2009) Tarō Asō, in which he highlighted the popularity of Japanese animation, games, and fashion (Asō 2009). Following the same line, Tsuguhiko Kadokawa focuses on the *otaku* as a way

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6   'Chiteki zaisan kihon-hō' as in the Japanese original. English translation as in the Japanese Law Translation Database System, Ministry of Justice, Japan. http://www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/ (accessed on 30 April 2018).

to stimulate the Japanese economy, emphasising the spread and popularity of Japanese animation (Kadokawa 2010).

However, in 2009 the Japanese animation industry was still far from being the cultural superpower that the Cool Japan policies seek to promote. There was not only a significant disproportion between the widespread popularity of Japanese animation and monetary profit in overseas markets, as Mihara has pointed out (Mihara 2014). There was also, above all, a fragile and mostly domestically oriented industry in a perpetual financial struggle. This is the industry that formed the backdrop for Tsuguhiko Kadokawa's comparison of the closed attitude of Japanese content copyright holders toward YouTube with the closed attitude of feudal Japan. At the end of 2010, this industry was experiencing a period of continued market depression that generated a feeling of crisis.

4.1. The Markets

According to the most recent version of anime industry data published by The Association of Japanese Animations (AJA Association of Japanese Animation), a general estimation of the 'Japanese animation market in a limited sense'[7] shows an increase between the years 2002 to 2005 (from 136.6 billion yen to 223.2 billion yen) and a fall from 2006 to 2009 (to 145.7 billion yen in 2009). The data shows a sustained recovery from 2010 onward, showing a market size of 230.1 billion yen in 2016, surpassing the market size of 2005 for first time (AJA Association of Japanese Animation).

In addition to income from television broadcast stations, the areas analysed include revenues from several categories such as movies and theatres, videos, distribution via the internet, merchandising and sales of related products, music, overseas markets, and pachinko machines. From these categories, income from television remains the highest, around the 29% on average from 2002 to 2014.[8] In the same period, the other principal sources of income for animation studios are indicated by the average percentages of income for merchandise (16%), videos (14%), and movies and theatres (11%). About 12% of the income, on average, in the same period came from overseas markets. In comparison, data from 2016 shows a decrease in television (28.6%), merchandise (13.2%), and video (5.4%), the same figure for theatres (11%), and an important growth for income from overseas markets (19.2%) (AJA Association of Japanese Animation).

The financial depression from 2006 to 2009 frames the concerns of Tsuguhiko Kadokawa over the expansion of websites such as YouTube. In 2006, overseas markets amounted to 31.2 billion yen compared to 19.5 billion in 2014. Likewise, the domestic video market fell from 37.3 billion yen in 2006 to 16.1 billion yen in 2014. However, in contrast to the general reaction from the industry, Kadokawa's primary concern was not about the losses imputable to piracy and illegal uploading of content by users on YouTube or similar platforms. Rather, he was concerned about losing distribution channels to Internet companies located in the United States, as well as the increasing dependence on storage or cloud services monopolised by companies such as Amazon, Apple, and Google. Based on these conditions, he states that Japanese content industries will lose the 'chance to produce and reproduce new value' (Kadokawa 2010, p. 189).

These concerns are linked to the structure that supports the production and creation of value within the Japanese animation industry. As the above market figures show, the Japanese animation market is composed of different media. This fragmentation of the market and the industries at play is crucial for understanding the different stances of the industries involved in the animation market and their stances toward intellectual property within a general system of production, distribution, and merchandising.

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[7]   As the AJA report defines it, this is the 'market size based on the estimated sales revenues of all domestic commercial animation studios' (AJA Association of Japanese Animation, p. 2).

[8]   All percentages are calculated by the author on the basis of AJA data from 2017 (AJA Association of Japanese Animation).

In all cases, the income from the market of anime broadcasting on television, which is usually the starting point in the process of television anime production, is usually not enough to finance the costs of production. As such, the dependence on secondary uses of the original work is necessary, as is the sale of DVDs or the commercialisation of licenses in order to obtain profits. However, in most cases, a large percentage of the copyright is held by the television station companies, making it difficult for anime companies to directly exploit secondary use of the work. This has led to a prolonged state of deficit in many animation production companies common until now (AJA Association of Japanese Animation; Kanzawa 2007; Aoki 2006; Ishizaka 2005; Taniguchi and Asō 2010).

The market for goods based on animation characters and licenses is one of the most lucrative areas related to the production of animation and represents one of the main incentives for sponsors. The huge gap between the size of the market in a broad sense (1630 billion yen in 2014) and the total of sales revenues for the animation studios (184.7 billion yen in 2014) clearly shows the importance of this area. As the AJA report points out, this gap is largely attributable to the leverage effect produced by 'animation-related business including character merchandising' (AJA Association of Japanese Animation, p. 2). Hence, intellectual property management is essential for safeguarding the system that the anime industrial world has built up around the huge profits gained from character merchandising, and shapes the way in which animation is produced in Japan.

4.2. The Production System

From a broad perspective, the general structure of the anime business has been composed of the relationship among three components: (1) the film or television companies that make a request for the production of content; (2) the anime production company that directly receives the request; and (3) a large number of subcontracting companies that specialise in different steps of the production process. In this system, the television companies are primarily at a higher position, while the anime production companies play a subordinate role (Ishizaka 2005; Taniguchi and Asō 2010). Other related industries that have an important role are the sponsors who provide the initial investment to the television station, the toy makers who manufacture and sell character-related goods, the advertising agencies, and the video packaging companies that sell DVDs, among others.

Overall, the production system used to include the coordinated work of many different companies, most of them being rather small (Ishizaka 2005). This is a tendency that only began to show signals of change after 2016 (AJA Association of Japanese Animation). In 2005 for instance, Ishizaka estimated there to be approximately 440 anime studios or producers, around 70% of which had fewer than 30 employees, and about 42% of which could be considered one-person companies (ibid).

Production work is commonly carried out in the following way: first, the anime production company receives the original commission from the television station. The work requested can be the production of a full show, part of a show, or a collaboration between the television station and the anime company. In each of these cases, the television stations usually retain the biggest percentage of the copyright (Ishizaka 2005; Taniguchi and Asō 2010). Once the anime production company receives the commission, the work is divided and entrusted to many subcontracting companies that specialise in different steps of the production.

Among the sponsors of the television station are the DVD producers and video game and toy makers. In most cases, they own the rights of commercialisation, receiving their profit from the sales of products and licensed goods. However, since the budget given to the anime production companies in almost all cases is not enough to cover the cost of production, such production companies usually rely on secondary use of the product, through the sale of licenses, to obtain profit. Therefore, in many cases the animation is only considered as a means to sell goods, such as toys featuring characters from the animated series. The main concern regarding the working conditions for creative workers here is that because of the unequal power relations between the anime production companies, television stations, and sponsors, in addition to restrictions on copyright, the anime companies, animators, and creative workers are in many cases excluded from the profits. Consequently, not only the protection of

intellectual property but also its proper management is a significant issue in the Japanese animation content industry.

As Taniguchi and Asō (2010) remark, the production committee system enables partial resolution of some of these problems. This system of production, which first appeared in the 1980s in the film industry, has become increasingly popular in the anime industry since the 1990s (Tanaka 2009); by 2010 nearly 80% of animation was produced following this system (Taniguchi and Asō 2010). It is worth noting that, as Steinberg (2015) has pointed out, this system was actively pushed by Kadokawa.

4.3. The Production Comittee System: A Horizontally Fragmented Structure

The production committee system allows many companies to contribute to the production budget and distributes the copyright in proportion to the amount of investment. Through this system, small anime production companies, which are unable to afford a sizable investment, can also participate—albeit on a smaller scale—in the secondary market of animation alongside the sponsors and television stations. However, animation producer Hiroaki Inoue, former executive vice-president of Studio Gainax and producer of several anime since the 1980s, explains that the production committee system has many problems that have resulted in a need for the integration of current and former production practices.[9]

One of the difficulties identified by Inoue is the fragmentation of responsibility across several parties for the management and conclusion of a single project. As he states, such a situation results in nobody taking responsibility. Here, the critical issue to consider, as Inoue points out, is that nobody owns the product in its totality. This situation can cause several complications, such as the restriction of license sales to overseas markets and the worsening of the position in power relations between companies related to content production in comparison to advertising companies. For Inoue, the former is due to the impossibility of animation companies owning their product's intellectual property, remaining manufacturers above all else. In comparison, television companies and advertising companies, as well as toy makers and other goods producers, can gain revenue from other sources. In this regard, an example is the character Hello Kitty, whose intellectual property is wholly owned by the company Sanrio. This is the kind of model that, in Inoue's view, may help the Japanese animation industry survive the fragmentation of markets and production.

In sharp contrast, for Tanaka (2009), the production committee system is a major strength of the Japanese animation industry. Tanaka defines this system as 'horizontally dispersed' in opposition to the system in the United States, which is 'horizontally integrated' (Tanaka 2009). The Walt Disney Company is the best example of the US system where a single, large company monopolises the rights. This system ensures full receipt of the profits but also presents a greater risk—in terms of bearing the costs of unsuccessful productions—and may obstruct the use of the content on different platforms and media.

On the contrary, the horizontally dispersed Japanese system, as Tanaka explains, consists of many small companies that share the production and the content. Under this system, it is easier to allow the secondary use of the same content and to develop franchises in different media and to adapt the original content (mostly narrative worlds and characters) in a range of new derivative content, and as such, develop the license business and media mix (Tanaka 2009).

The character business model, a licensing system that generates profit from the secondary use of successful characters, is also part of this model. It can be compared with the star system used by the filmmaking industry in Hollywood, with a growing emphasis since the 1990s on the charisma of characters, as in the case of Hello Kitty and Pokemon, as well as an emphasis on 'moe characters'

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[9]   Semi-structured interview conducted by the author with Inoue Hiroaki on 12 March 2015. One session, 120 min. The interview was conducted in Japanese and recorded at a coffee shop near Okayama Station, Okayama city, Okayama prefecture, Japan.

(kyara moe), which followed the success of Neon Genesis Evangelion (Kanzawa 2007). This trend has been reinforced in so-called 'midnight anime', a type of TV animation broadcasted mainly from 24 h to 26 h, produced primarily by a large number of small companies that were established in the period of financial success starting 2000 and ending with the short period of renewed TV animation success that occurred from 2005 to 2006[10] known as the 'anime bubble' (Taniguchi and Asō 2010, pp. 40–41; TD Teikoku Databank, LTD, p. 6).

The primary purpose of using of characters in marketing is to prompt consumption regardless of the nature of the merchandise to be consumed, or to act as an interface or communication tool between the customer and the seller or brand (Odagiri 2010; Tsuji 2009). In any case, the character is also intellectual property capable of generating profit for its creator or a third party. The licensing and merchandising systems are the mechanisms that link each specific media in which the character can be used. In the case of the content industry, as previously mentioned, the real profit from the content comes from its secondary use as opposed to its primary use. Licenses for merchandising and promotion will link the activities of the original licensor with other parties such as toy and merchandise makers, PR agencies or broadcasting companies, and distributors.

This production model also makes it possible to bear the high production risks that are common in cultural industries, giving dynamism and diversity to the industry and the content produced. However, the management and protection of the licenses becomes complicated, and this is, in many cases, a major obstacle in decision-making processes and in the promotion and expansion of licensed Japanese content in overseas markets (Sugiyama 2006; Tanaka 2009). As one representative of Aniplex Inc. explained in a session held for foreign companies at the event AnimeJapan in 2014,[11] each copyright holder has to give their agreement before the initialisation of commercialisation or the sale of broadcast licenses abroad. This process can significantly delay the distribution of licensed content in overseas markets.[12]

4.4. Pushing for Transformation

Since the domestic market for television animation has, in most cases, the most substantial economic impact on the anime industry, areas such as licenses and the character business in the domestic market, alongside the media mix, play a significant role, while areas such as overseas markets or streaming digital content remain small. The stable relationship between television companies, advertisers, toy makers, and anime companies, along with the amount of the revenue from broadcasting, have kept this horizontally fragmented structure of production and specialised use of various media working alongside the management of intellectual property as central elements in the production of content and monetised value.

However, some factors are also pushing Japanese copyright holders to approach overseas markets and change the actual structure of the industry. Besides the transformations brought about by information technology, the declining birth rate in Japan is also forcing Japanese content copyright holders to explore foreign markets (Koito 2014). The way in which the Japanese videogame industry has positively faced the changes generated by information technology and built overseas markets offers a model of reference for the animation content industry (Koito 2014)—a model that, as Masuda reports, is showing its influence in the animation industry since 2016 with the success of the free smartphone game application Fate/Grand Order and the participation of Aniplex Inc. in the area of social games (AJA Association of Japanese Animation).

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10 The period of the 'anime bubble' may differ depending on the year when the market contraction began. This year may vary between 2006 and 2007, depending on the categories which are included in the market analysis. For instance, according to HUMANMEDIA, this bubble period ended in 2007 (HUMANMEDIA Inc. 2011, p. 80).
11 Anime Japan, preopening event. 21 March 2014. Tokyo Big Sight, Tokyo, Japan.
12 It is possible to assume that for many stakeholders, in particular those from smaller content producers, copyright management in overseas markets is a too time consuming and risky endeavour to engage without any kind of intermediaries.

It is noteworthy that the natural links between the game industry and the area of computer software, the development of platforms, and the view of consumers as active users of software is closely connected with the transformation of the audiences that websites like YouTube or Niconico are bringing to the production, as well as the social use of media texts such as books, manga, music, movies, or animation. These companies hold a significantly different approach to intellectual property management and ways of producing value that entails an important loss of control over content and an emphasis on the management of communities.

5. Losing Control and Creating Value: Participation in the Niconico Economy

Niconico is a website that has been closely linked to manga and videogame fan communities in Japan since its launch. The first prototype of Niconico Dōga (now Niconico) was launched in December 2006 by Niwango, Inc., a company devoted to Internet community sites and which is now part of the Kadokawa Dwango Corporation. The beta service was initiated on 15 January 2007 (SHD Studio Hard Deluxe Co., Ltd.) and, with the launch of the gamma version in March of that year, the upload service became available (Shiba 2014).

After its launch, the site quickly became not only a video-sharing site but a place for play among internet enthusiasts and people associated with the Japanese amateur and fan culture. Niconico, along with YouTube, is a typical example of Web 2.0 and the new possibilities for 'collective intelligence' that its architecture enabled. One of the best examples of such possibilities was the proliferation of consumer-generated media (CGM) such as the MAD[13] videos—mashups composed mainly of parodies of fictional anime characters—on the site when it was launched.

Nobuo Kawakami, former president of Dwango and current CEO of Kadokawa Dwango, explains that at its beginning the site was filled with MAD videos 'and things with problems about copyright' (Kawakami 2014, p. 62). However, as Sugimoto Seiji, CEO of Niwango, Inc. points out, it is noteworthy that many MAD videos became original content (Shiba 2014, p. 119). The transformation of derivative creations such as the MAD videos into original content is key to understanding how a platform for sharing videos that jeopardise the protection of intellectual property has managed to find its place as a legitimate business model. Niconico has become a showcase for fan produced material and also distributes original content licensed by several content copyright holders, as is the case for some Japanese animation companies.

Derivative content is created from a base of fan mixing practices and the amateur culture, and its transformation into original content enables the possibility of further commercialisation. Expressed in a schematic way, in contrast to the model of the Japanese animation industry summarised above, what Niconico achieved in its first stage of development (mainly around 2007 and 2008) was the creation of value through relinquishing control over the production and use of content as intellectual property. This loss of control fostered the creation of value in a broader sense, that is, the creation of an environment of interaction filled with unconventional content, where both the environment and the content are regarded as valuable by a specific community of users.

5.1. Fan Networks, Communities, and Markets

In addition to the illegal uploading of copyrighted material by users, the practice of editing and mixing new videos using formerly original content as raw material has been an important issue in the discussion of websites such as Niconico, YouTube, or Anitube, especially when these services grew quickly in popularity. However, the nature of Niconico is different to that of YouTube, and these two also differ greatly from Anitube. The organic relationship between Niconico and the amateur and fan communities that preceded it played an essential role in the early formation of Niconico and its current state. This website was in some degree the heir of the Japanese fan and amateur culture, which

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[13]   MAD stands for 'music anime dōga', a pseudo-anglicism where the Japanese word 'dōga' means video.

is commonly thought to have originated in the 1970s and 1980s. This culture has at its core the amateur production of manga or derivative works and fan-constructed networks of distribution for these works. Fan creations are usually sold at events such as Comic Market, which is the most famous example of a significant amount of fan events that are held every month in Japan. Thus, these events are a display of the massive network of fan and amateur activities that spread all over Japan and overseas.

The organisation of these events, called 'dōjinshi sokubaikai', is similar to free markets where fans sell fan-made magazines, music, or software among other media texts. Many of the texts are parodies or derivative works that may borrow characters and elements from an original text, but tend to concentrate on characters or elements of popular animation shows, manga, or games. These works, also called secondary creations (ni-ji sōsaku), the network of fans and amateurs, and their practices of interaction and communication through the appropriation of media texts as public domain, were at the core of the effervescence that characterised Niconico at its beginning.

Although the massive fan culture in Japan feeds on the unlawful use of intellectual property, many content copyright holders recognise its importance. As Hiroyuki Nakagawa, patent attorney and head of the Nakagawa International Patent Office notices, the market value created has no relation to intellectual property rights (Nakagawa and Tomonori 2015, p. 11). In other words, as long as there is a market, anything can be an object of commodification. It is more common that the acknowledgment of something as intellectual property and its registration within the copyright system comes after the creation of value in the market. This process, which can be understood as an example of what has been called a 'second enclosure movement' (Klein et al. 2015), is a central element to consider when we address the relationship between various media and the companies involved in the media mix system or the character business described above. Therefore, amateur and fan communities, as key players in the process of value creation, have shaped a symbiotic although informal and often conflicting relationship with the content industry.

5.2. Architectures for Participation and Commons

In his book *The Ecosystem of Architectures* (2008), Satoshi Hamano, a researcher of information society theory, focuses on the environment that links the user and the software through his use of the keyword 'architectures'. He analyses Google, blogs, 2Channel, Mixi, and Nico Nico Dōga, among other platforms, and regards the architectures that support these services as a type of power based on the management of environments. He stresses that these architectures render unnecessary the internalisation of values or ideas in order to support such structures (Hamano 2008, p. 21). In this respect, he takes a similar stance to that of authors, such as Terranova (2004), who have argued for the loss of centrality of meaning and rhetoric in power struggles in information networks. However, Hamano is rather optimistic about these architectures and the way in which they shape society.

Hamano argues that architectures like those of Niconico help consumers to produce new videos or works, as in the case of the MAD videos, by encouraging collaborative creations (Hamano 2008, 2012). That is, he focuses on how fans or amateur creators share their works among themselves as 'commons' (Hamano 2008, pp. 99, 250). For Hamano, this is the base for producing a particular type of content which can no longer be regarded as conventional 'secondary creations' but as '*n*' creations (Hamano 2008, p. 249), that is the mix and remix of several secondary creations. As he stresses, this way of producing new cultural texts is different to the ways in which YouTube is used (Hamano 2008, p. 250).

For Hamano, the dynamic creativity behind Niconico and the MAD videos is based on a particular architecture of Niconico which he describes as a type of pseudo-synchronisation. One of the characteristics of Niconico is that its users can post messages in the video window. These messages are displayed in front of the video at the minute and second that the user posted them. Each user can add messages separately, and when the video is reproduced, these messages are also reproduced, merged, and synchronised. This feature generates the sensation of watching the video together with other commentators.

As Hamano argues, the illusion of simultaneous viewing allowed by Niconico's architecture is the basis for the creation of evaluation standards for the content posted on the website. These standards are the result of the aggregation of shared subjective judgments on the value of the work made by users, and given that they are determined through viewer consensus, they have a degree of objectivity. This sort of objectivity becomes the basis for quality standards that further encourage creativity and participation. Moreover, the evaluation standards depend on the community of users and it is limited to them, and for that reason Hamano refers to them as 'bounded objectivity' (Hamano 2008, p. 257). Based on this feature, Hamano stresses in a later work that by building this type of architecture the aim of Niconico is to offer a shared experience, or to give users the 'service of 'experiencing' the video' (Hamano 2012, p. 489).

Drawing on Walter Benjamin's famous thesis on the mechanical reproduction of artworks, Hamano calls this feature a reproduction not of the work, but of the here and now (Hamano 2012). This feature is what lies for him at the base of the '*n*' creations that animate the popularity of Niconico, and serves to differentiate it from YouTube. In other words, he is emphasising the role of an environment which has at its base not the production and reproduction of works or media texts, but rather the production and reproduction of a social experience. The presence of a community and media texts that are regarded as commons is essential to setting up a media environment that allows this production of social experience and the productivity that emerges from this base. Examples of this productivity begin with activities, such as adding commentary or adorning the videos with text, a feature also stressed by Steinberg (2017) as a way to transform the content. Further activities, such as adding illustrations or animation to a song uploaded by a different user, or borrowing elements from a video to produce a different one, are at the base of the extraordinary productivity of the genre of amateur electronic music, Vocaloid, and the popularity of the virtual singer, Hatsune Miku, from around 2007 to 2014, whose songs were mostly produced as UGC by communities gathered on Niconico.

Likewise, Masahiro Hamasaki (Hamasaki 2011; Hamasaki et al. 2008), senior researcher at the Information Technology Research Institute at the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology (AIST), has focused on the particularities of the networks that shape the content of websites like Niconico. He focuses on the high productivity in the production of '*n*' creations, in particular on the kind of collaboration that, in contrast to other types of media production, lacks formal labour organisation and a clear goal. This sort of spontaneous collaboration characterises the production of new media texts on the Niconico platform. Hamasaki emphasises the important role played by informal structures in collaboration, and the way in which fan cultures generate or develop new resources that a profit-making structure or rational production system cannot afford.[14]

The perspectives of Hamano and Hamasaki are strongly linked to the concept of 'collective intelligence' (Lévy 2013) and have as their base the role of knowledge and, in this case, media texts or content as shared resources within a specific community with clear boundaries. Their accounts of the textual productivity behind MAD videos or fan works and the popularity of the architectures that enable such productivity delineate some of the more important elements as the presence of a community and the understanding of works, texts, or content as a type of commons.

5.3. Commodification and Platforms

Participation in fan or amateur networks may be a non-profit activity. However, CGM, like Niconico, are also profit-making structures. When authors such as Fuchs (2009) speak of the commodification of audiences or Terranova of free labour (Terranova 2000, 2004), they are referring in

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[14] Semi-structured interview conducted by the author with Hamasaki Masahiro on 15 December 2014. One session, 96 min. The interview was conducted in Japanese and recorded at the Information Technology Research Institute, AIST Tsukuba, Japan.

essence to the same phenomenon: the integration of social interaction into a profit-making environment. Likewise, despite the rising popularity of Web 2.0 and digital media which in Japan is closely linked to the proliferation of UGC, IT-related industries, and the Creative Commons organisation, not everybody is so enthusiastic about the participatory amateur culture.

The animation and manga producer Susumu Sakurai regards amateur culture as a culture that 'has grown too much'.[15] Sakurai is CEO of Creators Producer Units Go Inc., a small production company founded in 1996. In his view, slogans like that of the third annual Niconico Chōkaigi festival—'everyone is a protagonist'—are misleading. He argues that such a slogan aims to make attendees believe that they are protagonists because they can participate or express themselves, when in fact they are only allowed to participate if they pay for the service or the entrance fee, as in the case of the Niconico Chōkaigi festival. Similarly, participatory culture and CGM seem to blur the line between amateur and professional creators, but as Sakurai states, amateur participation in the industry only worsens the labour conditions for creative workers and content production companies.

While people directly involved in content production make a clear distinction between creators and audiences, new digital media like Niconico popularises participation in media production and blends the figure of the creator with that of the audience to generate the figure of the user. Increasingly, the user and the content remain as two poles that give dynamism to a system where content is less fixed and social experience is more closely tied to media production.

The role of the kinds of digital media commonly described as platforms arguably goes beyond the role of mere communication intermediaries (which provide channels and means for mediated communication). Platforms provide multiple delivery channels for media content and play a central role in the creation of media synergy. The interaction between several media that synergy strategies aim to create is only made possible by capturing users' attention and making them build connections between the different platforms in which the content is distributed. As Hamano has shown in the case of Niconico, the relevance of the content for the user is closely tied to the social dynamics of appreciation enabled by the website's architecture. This feature makes digital media platforms an essential element for building and shaping users' shared experience, becoming active agents, rather than neutral carriers, at the core of the communication process.

The term platform, applied to digital media, usually conveys the image of open structures that support the activities of users. However, as Gillespie points out, this word misrepresents the influence that digital media exerts in deliberately 'shaping the contours of public discourse online' (Gillespie 2010, p. 358). For Gillespie, media like YouTube uses the term platform to simultaneously address consumers, advertisers, and content owners, eluding the contradictions arising from the frictions between these three different audiences and the liability the platform providers may have for any possible copyright infringement. Sakurai's discussion about participatory culture conveys these frictions, which are related to the simultaneous approach to content as commons for enabling participation and property for obtaining monetary profit.

In any case, as mediators between users, platforms are not as open and neutral as they seem and shape the 'practical, technical, economic, and legal' (Gillespie 2010) conditions behind the production and management of content. Increasing attention on CGM exists alongside concerns about intellectual property protection, but in the case of industries focused on both media platforms and the management of licenses, we can also find a different approach to the concept of property and media content that is changing the practices that until now have characterised the production, management, and monetarisation of content for industries like Japanese animation. Within this context, it is not surprising that content copyright holders or industries focused on the professional production of content collide with platform industries focused on the creation, management, and commodification

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[15] Semi-structured interview conducted by the author with Sakurai Susumu on 28 April 2014. One session, 111 min. The interview was conducted in Japanese and recorded at 1107Production Company, Ōkubo office, Shinjuku Ward, Tokyo, Japan.

of environments for participation which have an important base of 'amateur' content, as in the case of Niconico. However, from the perspective of platform providers, the appeal of a system based on a coalition of both systems and the creation of an 'integrated store' that unifies all in a single environment, as Tsuguhiko Kadokawa stressed, is clear.

6. Between Content and Users: Kadokawa's Management of Fictional Worlds and Media Platforms

Tsuguhiko Kadokawa defines a platform as 'a concept of the cloud age in which persons, things, and money overwhelmingly come together' (Kadokawa 2013, p. 37). Kadokawa argues that the power of cloud services, such as Apple's iCloud, is focused on user experience of the 'total value' (Kadokawa 2013, p. 20) generated by the organic combination of several reproduction environments designed for the cloud where all the content can be concentrated and stored. Furthermore, the organic aggregation of platforms and content into an environment in which companies such as Amazon, Apple, and Google are pioneers neutralises property rights and subordinates the role of content copyright holders to the owners of the integrated stores and channels of distribution. Kadokawa criticises the 'monopoly of the platform' built by these companies but at the same time he admires it (Kadokawa 2010, 2017). In a quote from Jōichi Itō (director of the MIT media lab), states that those with control of the brand, the network, the ecosystem, and the platform—as opposed to control over content—are on 'the winning side' (Kadokawa 2013, p. 51).

The system pursued by the Kadokawa Dwango Corporation can therefore be described as an environment composed of users and content in which the management of content, rather than its production, is fundamental. As the *Company Research and Analysis Report* issued by FISCO Ltd. summarises, the Kadokawa Dwango Corporation's strength is in its wide services network, supported by the management and development of intellectual property into various media and services. Among them, Niconico's web service focuses on user-generated content and the communities that have this content as their core (Sato 2017). As a publisher, the Kadokawa Dwango Corporation releases around 5000 new stock keeping units per year, including already running magazines and manga titles, as well as the commercialisation of user-generated content—mostly novels—which are the original works at the core of the media mix process (KDC Kadokawa Dowango Corporation). In the case of animation, the Kadokawa Corporation's website lists 169 titles, dated from 2010 to 2018, as part of its 'intellectual property strategy' (KC Kadokawa Corporation). The publication by Kadokawa of three novels and two manga titles in relation to Shinkai Makoto's 2016 megahit animation film *Your Name* is one recent example of this system that holds the management of content at its core. Kadokawa was one of the companies that participated in the film's production committee and managed the adaptation and realisation of the film in different media.

Furthermore, this environment depends on the integration of two systems capable of generating content and value. One is the system widely used by the horizontally fragmented Japanese animation industry, a system focused on the production of fictional worlds and its management as intellectual property. The other is the informal system of amateur and fan creativity that developed parallel to the industry, a system in which productivity has been fostered by the architectures of participation as seen in the case of Niconico. I regard these two forms of integrations as an attempt for the double integration of several fictional worlds and the integration of several platforms into a single closed environment.

The most recent stages of development of this environment can briefly be approached through the history of Kadokawa and Dwango after the two companies initiated a comprehensive business tie-up in October 2010. The former Kadokawa Group Holdings also advanced its internet platform construction with the start of its digital books store, BOOK☆WALKER, two months later, in December 2010. In May 2011, both companies also initiated an alliance with capital involvement, and six months later, in November 2011, BOOK☆WALKER and Niconico Dōga launched 'Niconico A comic service'. In March 2013, the joint advertising venture 'Smile Edge Co., Ltd.' was established, and in July of the same year, a business alliance between Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corp (NTT) and Dwango

was celebrated. After the merger of Kadokawa and Dwango in May 2014, all Dwango and Kadokawa subsidiary companies came to comprise a group of 42 subsidiaries. The group is focused on the web services provided by Niconico, and the publishing business of magazines and books carried out by Kadokawa. These business include the IP management of books and video, as well as videogames and live events, among other business (Sato 2017).

6.1. Management of Integrated Fictional Worlds

This form of integration is part of what Steinberg and Ōtsuka have regarded as a particular development of the media mix system led by Tsuguhiko Kadokawa since the 1980s. As consumer attachment to content enables media synergy, fictional worlds are the engine that drives engagement and participation within Kadokawa's media mix. Moreover, the further integration and management of fictional worlds within Kadokawa's system gives fictional worlds a similar role to that of the cathedrals of consumption described by Ritzer (2005)—a means of consumption where fantasies are crucial in luring the consumer. These cathedrals are characterised by the focus not on the commodity for sale or the consumer but on the setting. In the case of Kadokawa's integrated fictional worlds, rather than the commodified users of the platforms or the content, the central element is the setting that exists between users and content. Generating and administering this setting is the main focus of the media mix developed by Tsuguhiko Kadokawa.

As Ōtsuka has repeatedly argued (Ōtsuka 2001, 2004, 2014), the logic that brings together many different media forms in the consumption of one particular work is backed by the presence of a fictional narrative world, or a fragment of that world, such as a fictional character. From Ōtsuka's perspective, it is the narrative backdrop that is consumed and prompts further consumption. He calls this drive 'narrative consumption' (Ōtsuka 2001) and argues that it was a common notion among advertising companies like Dentsu Inc. in the 1980s (Ōtsuka 2004). Likewise, it was also a core element in the logic of the content developed by the Kadokawa Corporation during the same period.

'Narrative consumption' also provides the basis for creating many secondary or derivative works based on a particular fictional world. As Ōtsuka stresses, this system lacks a hierarchical structure where a single work stands as an 'original'. Therefore, it also erases the figure of the author, which is conventionally the basis for ownership, as well as the author's rights or the copyright system. Although this 'narrative consumption' system draws resources from the narrative worlds, which can be regarded as commons or in the public domain (Ōtsuka 2014), it also needs to have copyright management in order to commercialise the content generated. Therefore, for Ōtsuka, this system simulates the existence of an original work and an author. As he emphasises analysing Kadokawa's business scheme, even in the case of the Haruhi Suzumiya series, when an original novel is adapted into various media and the media mix is created, it loses its place as an original. In this case, the fictional character becomes the axis of a system for generating variations that are developed and commercialised in different media platforms (Ōtsuka 2014). The Haruhi Suzumiya series was originally published as a novel by Kadokawa Shoten in 2003, followed by the manga serialisation in 2004, also by Kadokawa Shoten. The TV animation version (season 1 in 2006 and season 2 in 2009) was produced by Kyoto Animation with the participation of Kadokawa Shoten and Kadokawa Pictures.

Here, it is crucial to identify how the media mix system implies not only the creation of content or the use of content in different media. It also signifies the integration of such media in an environment or system. This environment will prompt active consumption in a way that is, in principle, beneficial for the industry. From this perspective, a focus on narrative, such as in the case of Ōtsuka, may be also considered part of this integrative environment, as it links any creative work or activity to a particular fictional universe. Steinberg has focused on this feature and stresses how the media mix is not merely the re-use of content in several media, but rather is the creation and management of content that intersects throughout several media platforms, expanding and generating new content as a model of the media mix (Steinberg 2012, 2015).

6.2. Management of Integrated Platforms

The October 2014 merger of Kadokawa with Dwango, the company that manages Niconico through its subsidiary Niwango, has been regarded as the integration of several platforms for content management into a single system—the Kadokawa-Dwango ecosystem. As Ōtsuka points out (Ōtsuka 2014), Kadokawa represents the management of professional content, while Dwango had a similar function in the amateur-produced content scene. None of these companies are focused on the production of content, but rather on the construction of an infrastructure. From this perspective, the merging of the Kadokawa and Dwango platforms or infrastructures has meant that free or spontaneous amateur practices are subsumed into a one-sided, closed system.

The media mix system, a widespread commercial practice for developing content across several media platforms, can be regarded as a form of platform integration. It is built on the base of the proliferation of several narrative worlds and fictional characters on different media platforms, and is closely related to the animation industry and its horizontally disseminated shape, as well as to its precarious financial position. Moreover, as in the case of narrative worlds where the central element is not the content or the user but the setting between them, the central element is, in this case, not in any of the platforms, but in the environment generated by the interplay of all of them. The role of Kadokawa as a provider of infrastructure, in contrast to the role of anime production companies, reflects this feature.

The decentralised structure of the content industry, namely the industries related to animation, manga, and videogames, is the primary environment wherein media mix practices have been developed. This decentralisation developed from the specific needs of the television animation industry and has provided a way to cope with the production risks inherent to the nature of content and cultural industries. The role of fictional worlds in the integration of several platforms, alongside the management of the interplay between platforms and the activities carried out by their users in a profit-making structure, is a distinctive feature of the business model of the Kadokawa Dwango Corporation. As such, the Kadokawa Dwango Corporation draws on the particular media ecology shaped by the Japanese anime industry and networks of participation.

7. Conclusions: Monetising Values and Environments for Content Management

In this paper, I have shown how the business model pursued by the coalition between Kadokawa and Dwango has at its base the industrial practices and structure that characterises the Japanese animation industry and the network of fan and amateur culture upon which Niconico built its platform for participation. Although closely linked in practice, the business model behind the character licensing business and the media mix model, as developed by Kadokawa under the direction of Tsuguhiko Kadokawa and now under the lead of Nobuo Kawakami, represents two different stances toward the creation of value and the management of content. The tacit acceptance of the creation of derivative works by fans that has characterised the stance of the animation industry and content copyright holders toward amateur markets like Comic Market has generated a grey area of informal practices that entail overlooking copyright infringement. This grey area and the impossibility of its formalisation within a legal framework is a signal of the differences that usually keep both stances concerning the use of content divided. As such, we can regard the practices of the Kadokawa Dwango Corporation as an attempt to formalise and commodify the environment that has linked these two models in practice.

The animation industry is based on a model that seeks to protect the content regarded as intellectual property and depends on its commercialisation, generating revenue mostly from a secondary market spread throughout an extensive horizontal network composed of various media, services, and merchandise. However, as we saw, this system has failed to ensure good conditions for small anime production companies. On the other hand, the model represented by Niconico and the Dwango Corporation has at its base not the content but the commodification of social activity generated within its platforms. Yet, the role of content is still fundamental to this system—not as

intellectual property but as the cultural resource in which the social activities unfold—hence content takes the form of commons in this system.

As both are business models based on the production of monetary profit, in both cases the management of intellectual property is an essential element. The difference is, therefore, in the object of management and commodification, for the animation industry the object is the content itself and for the platforms, it is the audience or the 'participative masses'. As in the case of the media mix and the character business model, the stress is not only on the joint effect of the use of content in several media platforms, the use of content in advertising for selling goods or services, or the use of the same resource for the secondary market, but also on the central task of creating value, as in the case of the networks of participation enabled by the Niconico architecture.

The 'two-sided' position represented by Kadokawa Dwango in the current debate on Internet regulation describes its nature as an environment for the management of content in which the commercial practices of the industries related to animation production and the practices of fans merge. Particularly from 2016 until now, a fierce rivalry among digital platforms has increasing been pushed by transnational trends. Legal internet platforms, such as Netflix, and unlawful platforms, such as Anitube, are transforming the Japanese animation industry and putting the legal provisions concerning the management and protection of intellectual property under pressure. It remains to be seen if the Kadokawa Dwango environment is able to survive as a two-sided platform within the changing domestic and transnational conditions.

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Consuming Production: Anime's Layers of Transnationality and Dispersal of Agency as Seen in *Shirobako* and *Sakuga*-Fan Practices

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Abstract: As an alternative reading of anime's global consumption, this paper will explore the multiple layers of transnationality in anime: how the dispersal of agency in anime production extends to transnational production, and how these elements of anime's transnationality are engaged with in the transnational consumption of anime. This will be done through an analysis of *Shirobako* (an anime about making anime), revealing how the series depicts anime production as a constant process of negotiation involving a large number of actors, each having tangible effects on the final product: human actors (directors, animators, and production assistants), the media-mix (publishing houses and manga authors), and the anime media-form itself. Anime production thus operates as a network of actors whose agency is dispersed across a chain of hierarchies, and though unacknowledged by *Shirobako*, often occurs transnationally, making attribution of a single actor as the agent who addresses Japan (or the world) difficult to sustain. Lastly, I will examine how transnational *sakuga*-fans tend to focus on anime's media-form as opposed to "Japaneseness", practicing an alternative type of consumption that engages with a sense of dispersed agency and the labor involved in animation, even examining non-Japanese animators, and thus anime's multilayered transnationality.

Keywords: anime; transnationality; transnational animation production; performance; media-form; dispersed agency

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1. Authorship and Agency in Anime Production: A Transnational Perspective

The approach to anime as a media consumed transnationally is often one where the audience is seen as consuming "Japanese culture." In academia (which is its own type of consumption-production), an extension of this is revealed in some analyses that focus on a particular work's commentary on Japanese society. It is often a film that is taken up as the subject of inquiry, with the director the person the work is attributed to. A set of famous directors occupy the majority of the focus: Hayao Miyazaki, Mamoru Oshii, Satoshi Kon, and, more recently, Mamoru Hosoda and Makoto Shinkai.[1] Such a concentration on film is reflected in the tendency to elevate these directors to the status of auteur, even though the problems of auteur theory from film criticism are widely acknowledged. In consideration of this, there is often an implicit understanding that there are other agents involved in the production, but researchers continue to utilize the singular director as a type of short-hand for an agent which orchestrates the major decisions of the production. Here "production" becomes less of a process as the focus switches to the "producer" as the central, authorial agent. In a sense, such an approach makes the film product become the director's "speech-act", so to speak. This allows for an

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[1]   To a lesser extent this extends to Isao Takahata and Katsuhiro Ōtomo as well.

analysis of the anime work in question as producing a commentary, a commentary that is often seen as addressed to Japan and read as focusing on the topic of Japanese society.

Here I do not mean to say that directors should not be given recognition, or that they are not involved in many levels of the production (for which Miyazaki is notorious). Rather, I want to highlight how this tendency of attribution to some singular agent reveals a tendency towards certain conceptions of authorial agency, creative and cultural production, and methodological approaches to interpreting (and consuming) anime. When considered in the context of transnational consumption, we find the same methodological approaches common in analyzing anime as a commentary on Japanese society by directors: anime is "Japanese culture" consumed outside of Japan, making anime works a speech-act about Japan, because, as is commonly thought, anime comes from Japan. This produces a conception of transnationality whereby people consuming anime outside of Japan are consuming Japanese products, which is less transnational (across borders, operating beyond the received notions of nation-state) and more inter-national (two distinctive nation-states engaged in cultural exchange, Iwabuchi 2010), producing a sense of "inside-outside" that is relatively neatly defined—in this case, consuming Japanese media (produced inside of Japan) while the consumers are outside of Japan. Thus, there is a sharp distinction seen between production (authored by directors in Japan) and consumption (inside vs. outside of Japan) that overlaps with the idea of the inter-national (distinctive nation-states), which might be overcome by engaging with both production and consumption to explore the transnational dynamics of anime.

This is not a disavowal of reading anime as a commentary on Japan or the contributions such scholarship has made. Nor is this a denial of the importance of the nation at play here. Rather, this is a suggestion for exploring an alternative approach that more fully engages with transnationality. For instance, while it is widely accepted that anime is a transnationally consumed product, and it is generally acknowledged in academia that anime has a history of transnational production, the implications of these layers of transnationality are not often explored. This is important to consider as much of anime's transnational labor is for the animation, which is the basis of the very media product itself: anime *is* animation, making the results of the animators' labor a significant portion of what we actually receive as the final work. We might connect the lack of exploration to the above-mentioned tendency to emphasize directors (who operate in Japan) over animators (who operate across national borders), which also relates to the framework of the inter-national rather than the transnational. As such, it can be productive to consider a more inclusive view of anime's transnationality—that is, accounting for the dispersal of agency in anime production, how this extends to transnational production, and how (and if) these elements of anime's transnationality are engaged with in the transnational consumption of anime.

In order to explore the dynamics of agency in anime production, in this article I will conduct an analysis of the anime *Shirobako* (2014), which details a number of processes of anime production as the central narrative of the series. Broadly, this analysis is also done in reference to Ian Condry's (2013) ethnographical work on the anime industry in Tokyo, which he describes as a "collaborative creativity" that involves not just typical creative producers (animators, directors) but even corporate executives. In terms of methodological approach, this article is underpinned by Bruno Latour's (2005) "actor-network theory." I use "agency" here as an adapted version pulled from Latour's work, where an "agent" performs actions, "making some difference to a state of affairs, transforming some As into Bs through trials with Cs" (pp. 52–53). Agents that exercise such capacities are not limited to human actors but include a whole host of non-human actors that work with/on humans, including various materials, technologies, and anime's media-form itself—that is, the repeated patterns utilized that distinguish anime as a particular type of media product.

Because of the relationship between the multitude of human and non-human actors, each working with, on, and through one another, one can trace an intricate web of actions that affect the final product, often in directly discernible ways (e.g., the narrative, the animation, etc.). As such, instead of a single agent in one location who is the source that orchestrates the production, there is a dispersal of

agency, a "network" of actions from multiple agents (at different times, in different places) and the negotiations that arise from their mutual engagement that result in effects that we see in the anime product. This does not mean that an anime work cannot sustain itself as a commentary on a topic, or cannot be read as exploring an issue, but that the source of that exploration becomes complicated, as does the context with which it may be engaging. As a self-reflexive exposition of anime production, *Shirobako* depicts such a web of effects. In the analysis that follows, I will show that anime production involves a large number of actors with differing degrees of control, each one involved in diverse developments that result in a constant process of negotiation, the outcomes of which are tangible in the final product (the anime itself) and can (and do) occur transnationally. Anime production thus operates as a network of actors whose agency is dispersed across a chain of hierarchies, making attribution of a single actor (human or non-human) as the agent who addresses Japan (or the world) difficult to sustain.

Furthermore, *Shirobako*, as an anime, invites (if not enforces) an alternative approach to consuming anime, less as a commentary on Japan per se, and more on the anime industry itself. The series provides a sharp focus on the labor involved in anime production, with a particular emphasis on the animation: much of the drama of the series is motivated by issues involving the animation itself (though other elements, such as story-boarding, script-writing, and voice-acting are prevalent). When these animation production issues are resolved, many times they will display the intradiegetic animation at the end of the episode, the *sakuga* (a complex animated sequence), often lasting just a few seconds, but revealing the fruits of the labor (and its conflicts) that were just witnessed as the drama of the episode. In this way, the series forces the viewer to focus on the *sakuga* sequences as the product of labor by many people. These sequences are all from the intradiegetic anime the studio is producing, but one which we (the viewers) do not know the details of the narrative.[2] This type of consumption of the animation sequence itself, estranged from narrative, resembles the type of consumption practices employed by a particular type of fan: the *sakuga*-fan.

While I have glossed *sakuga* above as "a complex animated sequence," the very term "*sakuga*" is slightly ambiguous in Japanese. At its most simple, it is "images that are made" and is usually associated with key-animation (officially known by the separate term of *genga*—key-frames that are not colored and do not include in-betweens) but *sakuga* can also mean the final cut of an animated sequence. As such, the term implies that it is merely one part of a larger production process and holds the potential for an ambiguity of attribution to multiple agents in its production while still attributing credit to a key-animator. Terminology aside, it is the *sakuga* part of anime production that is the central concern of *sakuga*-fans. They are interested in these key sequences as the focal point of production. While not ignoring elements like narrative, character design, or voice-acting, *sakuga* is what they concentrate on.

As such, in the final section, I will transition into how *sakuga*-fans tend to focus on form and the materiality of the medium of animation as opposed to "Japanese society." The products of their consumption practices are published on the internet, making the engagement with their work transnational, as it is available freely on the internet, across the world. I will examine how, based on English-language YouTube and blog posts by such fans, they present an alternative type of consumption that engages with a dispersed sense of agency regarding animation, the people involved, and how they also examine non-Japanese animators (and thus anime's transnationality). In fact, this focus on the animation and its production sets up an alternative type of viewing that generally disregards narrative in favor of the craft of animation and the people who labor behind it. Interestingly, these transnational fans who focus on form also seem concerned (and critically engaged) with the labor of animators and their harsh working conditions inside (and outside) Japan.

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[2] Though, it should be noted, the two intradiegetic anime produced by Musashino Animation were later released as one-episode OVAs.

2. *Shirobako*: Analysis

What makes *Shirobako* relatively unique in the TV anime world is how it brings the dispersal of agency in animation production to the foreground. There are precursors to *Shirobako*, such as *Otaku no Video* (1991), which details the transformation of a college student into an otaku who then creates two otaku media companies, and *Bakuman* (2010), a series about an aspiring manga creator and their relationship with the anime industry. However, *Shirobako* focuses almost entirely on the anime industry, exploring the finer details of anime production itself. Centering around the production assistant and administrator Aoi Miyamori, *Shirobako* follows her role at the fictional anime studio Musashino Animation, and includes various characters heavily inspired by those in similar roles (in different studios) in the real-life anime industry. In the background, Miyamori's four friends from her hometown have also joined the anime industry in different roles (2D key animator, 3D animator, script writer, and voice-actress), and they dream of working on an anime together. The narrative of the series follows the production of two different intradiegetic anime *(Exodus!* and *The Third Girls Aerial Squad*) and the drama that occurs during the production process of TV anime. As such, *Shirobako* provides a convenient object of analysis with which to examine the workings of the anime industry and exactly who (and what) is guiding the production, making decisions, and producing effects on the final product. However, because of the self-reflexive mode of address (an anime about making anime), the work should be approached with a strong dose of skepticism. Its self-representation should not be considered the final word on the status of the industry and can easily overly dramatize or misrepresent the actualities of the work place.

Though acknowledging that this is not necessarily an accurate depiction of the anime industry, the form of the presentation of *Shirobako* (an anime about making anime) constructs a self-referential account of the anime industry while also offering some evidence for the claims about distributive agency in anime production. Through an analysis of key sequences of the series, I will (1) discuss how there is a production hierarchy where various roles exert different degrees of control over the creative process; (2) explore the agency of the materials involved as the animators and directors struggle with elements of cel-animation and its mixture with CG animation, and briefly depict the differences between manga and anime production/industries; (3) detail how the media-form constrains the production: different expectations for the product, the types of facial expressions used, and the structure of the narrative (action-oriented climaxes); and (4) provide some brief information on the transnational production involved in *Shirobako*—something unacknowledged in the series—and discuss how this manner of dispersed agency in anime production frees anime to acknowledge its transnationality rather than emphasize its exclusive nationality. For ease of explanation, these have been divided into distinct sections. However, it is important to note that many of these are interconnected, such as when the capabilities of the medium (cel animation) allows for a complex division of labor, which affords for (transnational) sub-contracting, and additionally, can affect where and when certain types of animation are employed in the narrative.

2.1. Negotiated Decisions

Let me begin with the production hierarchy, which, as noted before, is often conceived with the directors and top-level producers at the top of the chain of command—those making the decisions, so to speak. Even if this is expanded, anime is so often seen from the perspective of a type of "creative industry" in which animators, writers, designers, voice-actors, and musicians get much of the spotlight (and credit) for a production. However, *Shirobako* consistently undermines this conception of the hierarchy of decision making power in anime. In *Shirobako*, an administrator takes center stage and is shown as integral to the anime production process, part and parcel of this creative industry. This is evident in the position of the main protagonist, Miyamori, who performs the role of "desk", a production assistant who organizes and relays information and materials between animators and top-level staff but also works towards solving problems that have tangible effects on the final product of the animation. However, the administrators are not the only positions whose actions are shown

to affect the final product. A whole slew of roles is featured, such as general managers, in-between animators, sub-contractors, freelancers, colorists, editors, sound engineers, publishing executives, and manga authors. Indeed, there are so many characters that names and position titles are often extra-diegetically inserted next to the characters in every episode, something rarely done with such frequency in anime. Furthermore, many of the characters switch roles between the first and second TV anime produced at Musashino, moving into different positions, showing how each particular production can be executed very differently, despite including most of the same people.

Because of the large group of people involved, the complex hierarchies of production, and the diversity of technical, administrative, and financial expertise necessary for the successful planning and implementation of a production, the series has plenty of points of conflict when nothing runs smoothly. Many of the conflicts featured disrupt the conception of the singular vision of a director, with multiple agents involved, including supposedly minor roles such as production assistants sitting in on (and influencing) important meetings with the top-level producers. This also includes the enforcement of conducting the labor itself. In episode 5, for example, the "desk" for the first TV anime (*Exodus!*), Yutaka Honda, forces the director to work by comically locking him in a cage to finish the storyboards, showing how the director is the one who produces the story-board, but the enforcement of the actual enactment labor is coming from other roles.

These conflicts also involve non-human actors, who often receive close-up shots of the specific materials or sequences that display their use (or malfunction): servers that transfer data unexpectedly go down, causing chaos; cars (and their drivers) that can deliver the goods at the speed necessary; and, of course, the cels, papers, pencils, and computers used to make the animation, which each must be worked with to produce an anime. Storyboards are important to consider in this light as well. The storyboards' creator might be seen as another source of authorship, as they are adaptations of a script which will be used as a central reference point by the animators and editors for the rest of the production. It should be noted that, in reality, it is not always the case that the director will do the storyboards. Sometimes it will be the episode director, or another member of the staff, and storyboards are finalized in meetings with many members (Condry 2013, pp. 10–13). While credit should not be denied to the storyboard creator, the storyboards themselves also become an agential actor, as they guide much of the production from that point onwards. As Condry notes, while storyboards are filled with details and instructions from their author(s), there are multiple different interpretations that can come from the storyboard object (2013, p. 48). Such issues are worked out in meetings (pp. 10–13), but are also left up to those with the skills to interpret and produce a refined section of the production based on the storyboards (p. 12). As such, the storyboards are important actors in anime production that animators (and other staff) must grapple with (often at a distance from the producer of those story boards), working with them to perform their various roles in the production. This is addressed in episode 15, when the director meets with the animators to explain what types of images he wants from his storyboards, and extradiegetic comments state that the animators have to make more polished images from the rough images given to them on the storyboards. In a sense, the animators are negotiating with the storyboard itself, as they must make certain creative decisions from the instructions detailed on the storyboards, adding such interpretations into the animation of the final product we see.

Further negotiations about how to execute the storyboards come from still more workers with multiple chains of command. This continues to create conflict down the line. While Miyamori and another production assistant argue over whose fault certain problem are in episode 5, they understand that everyone must suffer the consequences, and it is only through the cooperation of various workers that the issue can be fixed. Although there is a clear chain of instruction, with directors and producers at the top, *Shirobako* makes an effort to show how collaborative the creative process actually is, revealing how even the production assistants affect the final product in their daily negotiations and decision-making.

While the effect of animators in particular will be addressed below, there are also other positions in the production process that are shown to undercut, interrupt, and affect the final product. These even come from outside of the studio itself, problematizing the view of even a single studio as the source of a product. *Shirobako* exposes the importance of relationships within the larger industry (including anime, manga, and other related products), with decisions often occurring outside of both the Musashino studio and a formal business environment (e.g., offices, conference rooms). For example, in episode 12, producers from Musashino informally discuss with an executive from a publishing company about the possibility of their studio getting the contract to produce the hit manga series *The Third Girls Aerial Squad* over a game of mahjong. Ultimately, Musashino gets the contract, displaying how important a network of contacts within the industry is for a studio to stay relevant with in-demand material to base their productions on, showing how integral other media are for the anime industry. It also reveals how anime studios "chase" those who hold the rights for such source material. Anime studios appear dependent on source materials (they cannot always produce "original" works) and are in a sense under the control of the companies and their executives, who are higher up on the hierarchy of production. Indeed, Condry also notes the importance of various executives outside of what is normally considered production staff in multiple different anime productions that he observed (2013).

While the contract for *The Third Aerial Girls Squad* comes from the company that publishes the manga, this is a bit of an oversimplification of the actualities of anime production. In reality, anime production since the mid-1990s has been funded by a production committee made up of a number of different companies that each contribute a small portion of the investment to produce the anime but maintain certain portions of the rights for the intellectual property. Despite this discrepancy, the interaction with the publishing company—presumably a stand-in for the production committee—produces engaging drama and displays some of the realities of how dispersed agency operates in anime production, even at the top of the chain of command. For example, the importance of voice-actors is highlighted, especially in episode 14, when producers and talent agents (as well as the uninterested representative of the publishing company that owns the rights to *Aerial Girls Squad*) argue over how different variables—such as the voice-actor's role as idols or their current fan following, as well as their actual capacity to play the given role—are considered when casting for the anime. The inclusion of the representative from the publisher highlights their importance in the hierarchy of production, but also the role of the anime as part of a larger media-mix, where the anime is one product among many with a different capacity to draw in fans—voice-actors are one of these avenues, an aural component to anime that is not physically present in manga.

The difficulties of such a production hierarchy are revealed throughout the series. For example, in episode 13, when the character designer is changed, the producers worry that the publishers might not be happy (and thus they may lose their contract), as they may have chosen the studio based on the staff from their previous production. There are also crucial moments when the publication company executives and/or the author of the manga step in and reject the work produced by the anime studio. This includes forcing changes to character design as in episode 16, even though Musashino was well into the production process based off the designs. Such influences become extreme in episode 23 when we learn that, due to poor communication between the publishing company's representative and Musashino studios, the manga author rejected the storyboards by the anime studio for the ending of the series (which would continue past the manga's current narrative developments). Though they received a preliminary agreement from the manager of the manga author at the publisher and proceeded quite far in the production (including the voice-acting), they are rudely requested to re-do the final episode. On top of this, the publishers do not allow Musashino studio's staff to meet with the manga author directly, causing a large problem.

Such instances display the actual authority of the publishers (stand-ins for the production committee) over even the top-level producers and director of the anime. In this way, *Shirobako* establishes a chain of capacity for decision-making, with the publisher/production committee at

the top, followed by the director and producers. However, this is always complicated by the actual processes of production, in which episode directors and animation supervisors, as well as the animators themselves, make important decisions, or when the production assistants solve various problems and make suggestions (or force higher-ups to work) that result in tangible effects in the final product, examples of which I will examine below. As such, *Shirobako* provides an account of anime production in which there are layers of decisions upon decisions, in which there is the assertion of agency at multiple levels within the chain of command, each action adding (or subtracting), adjusting, and transforming the results we see in the final product. *Shirobako* makes us recognize the different shifts that occur due to each actor (human and non-human) in the production process, each having an effect on the final images and sounds, seen and heard. It displays the struggles behind each frame and the labor behind the animation, producing a multilayered take on anime production.

2.2. Media-Mix and Materiality

Because anime production is so often part of a media-mix, anime producers must work in conjunction with the publishers/production committees to maintain a certain degree of similarity (or planned divergence) with the other media. This means that there may be conflicts between the different producers of the various media, a conflict that is not always based on the differences in a "creative vision" of the agent(s) of production but a divergence that stems from the diversity (or lack thereof) of materials involved in their respective processes. As such, a large degree of agency must be negotiated in the process, as directors and producers must tackle not just the executives that own the intellectual property but the challenges of working with and in the mediums that the different media of the media-mix are produced in.

This has wide-ranging consequences. For instance, in episode 20 there is a meeting discussing how to approach the ending of the anime of *Aerial Girls*, in which the director, producer, top administration staff, and the script-writer brainstorm about possible directions for the narrative, as the anime's airing will outpace the manga's publication (a common occurrence in anime adaptations). The director points to how in manga it is easier to change directions of the story than in anime. Debating on whether the protagonist in *Aerial Girls* should not fly, continuing the trauma she received in a previous episode that kept her from piloting (a regular trope in mecha anime/manga), or should rise to the challenge at the end and fly, overcoming her crisis. In the current stage of the manga, the pilot is left grounded, but the staff argue that in anime, the expectations are different, and the pilot must fly in the end to make a satisfactory ending.

While there is a chain of command here, it is clear that there are multiple different actors, each exerting varying degrees of agency throughout the process. This gets further complicated as the agreed plan of letting the pilot fly is directly undercut by the meeting with the manga author of the *Aerial Girls* in episode 23. The anime director makes his case that the protagonist pilot should fly, because, like in his life, they continue to fight because of their compatriots, because of those working hard around them. The manga author replies that, for the anime director, the anime production team is like the *Third Aerial Girls Squad*, to which the director agrees. However, the manga author sees it differently, because each of the girls in the aerial squadron is a metaphor for the problems that plague him personally. While entertaining the myth of the lone manga author here (in truth, manga authors often have assistants and work very closely with editors), a difference between mediums is revealed: theoretically, manga can be made by one person with pen, paper, and publishing technology (print or digital) who has developed a certain set of skills (e.g., drawing, developing narratives and characters, paneling, etc.), whereas anime generally involves a large group of people, each with various specialized skills (e.g., animator versus script-writer versus voice-actor) and access to different technologies (different both from the technology and materials of manga, as well as in terms of diversity of technologies used). This difference in medium-specific labor practices develops into a difference of group dynamics, which is further extended into the respective approaches each creator (manga and anime) takes when addressing the problem of how to continue the narrative. However,

this difference becomes productive through the collaboration of the director and manga author: it is the anime director's interpretation of the manga author's approach that sparks a renewed understanding of the pilot's character, one which the manga author then affirms. The director then proceeds to suggest a way to provide an internal motivation for the pilot, and through their interactive brainstorming, produce a satisfying solution to this problem of the narrative, one which satisfies the demands of anime's narrative conventions and the manga author's convictions. Furthermore, they actively work together, a productive outcome of conflict that results in a similarity between the anime and manga versions of the work.

Here we see how, despite the apparent closeness of manga and anime, there are divisions that the specific mediums (comics vs. animation) produce. With this in mind, from the current approach of "actor-network theory", the materials used in production become actors, the differences in mediums affecting the type of production processes and their group dynamics (as in the discrepancy of interpretations between anime director and manga author). More to the point, the above described interaction between director and author exposes how human agents must work with the affordances of the mediums, in concert and in tension with the material, to conspicuously produce an effect of similarity between manga and anime and invoke a recognizable relation between them that synergizes the media-mix (cf. Steinberg 2012).

This problem of maintaining a relation between anime and manga and their distinctions in the materials of production occurs even in areas that would be supposedly simple to solve. For example, during the character-design phase for the production of *Aerial Girls* in episode 13, the character designers explain the difficulty of designing a character from the 2D manga for the anime, which has to work in three dimensions in animation. As Thomas Lamarre has detailed, character design is itself a crucial element of anime (and manga's) engagement with the moving-image (what Lamarre calls "soulful bodies"), both in the medium of (limited) animation and as it relates to the character's ability to move across media (the media-mix) (Lamarre 2009, pp. 200–4; see also Steinberg 2012). As such, the character designer must twist and morph the designs that come from one medium (comics) to work with the affordances of the materials at hand to adapt them for another medium (animation), maintaining a clear resemblance to the manga (referring viewers to the manga product as well as other media) while still allowing for the operability of the character designs in animation. In this manner, character design adaptation is another process of negotiation between material and human actors.

Yet, there is another dynamic at play in the adapting of character designs from manga to anime. This is referenced in episode 13, when Rinko Ogasawara, the previous animation director, notes how in the process of imitating the source manga, repeating the characters over and over, eventually they become the animator's own characters, and if this does not occur then the animator cannot be a character designer. Her statements thus frame producing an adaptation as a problematic of reiteration, bringing attention to an important tension between repetition and variation, in which reiterations somehow eventually produce change (Suan 2017b). In these processes, there is not only the operations of working with certain materials to produce the work but also an active engagement with a history of conventions from earlier anime works: anime's media-form.

2.3. Anime's Media-Form

Before going further, let me better explain what I mean by media-form. Concisely, anime's media-form is the repeated conventions that we see in anime, i.e., what makes anime recognizable as such—the reiteration of these conventions producing the resemblances that we see in anime works. Such conventions are myriad, from the character designs to the voice-acting styles, from the narratives to the character expressions and animation techniques used, all with a history. These conventionalized elements become what we expect out of anime as a particular media product, as new anime works have a relation to earlier works through the repetitions that sustain theses expectations. This has developed into a system of such conventions, such as Azuma Hiroki's database (Azuma 2009), even as the conventions shift over time. Anime's media-form is thus performatively constituted by the enactment

of large quantities of these conventions in the animated productions we call anime (Suan 2017b). The term "media-form" is used to distinguish itself from genre (which is often used to imply works that employ particular thematic tropes: romantic-comedy genre vs. robot genre) or style (which is often used as something individualized: a particular author's or artist's style), as the conjoined words "media-form" highlight formal notions while emphasizing how, following Lamarre (2009), anime should not be separated from its performance in the medium of animation (Suan 2017b, pp. 65–66). It is this performance of the anime media-form that is the very subject of the drama of *Shirobako* and is what makes *Shirobako* itself recognizable as an anime.

What this means, then, is that anime's media-form is another element at play here that is constraining and structuring the production process, something that restricts the staff within certain boundaries (what is expected of the anime media-form) while also giving them a point of departure, thus making them the agents of anime production. Let me provide an example. In episode 12, the top-level producers and administrators discuss what to do for an important scene at the climax of the *Exodus* series. They argue over the feasibility of producing the scene the director wanted involving a herd of horses. Animating such a scene would be complex and difficult to produce in terms of the technical skill of the animators, as well as the time it would take to produce it. A suggestion by one of the producers was to either do the scene in 3D (which would be difficult because the 3D animators were already overbooked and busy) or adjust the story-boards to show scenes that pan over the horses and do not show their legs moving. This is harshly objected to by the managing production assistant Honda. He argues that this is a climactic sequence and cannot have shoddy animation sequences (*sakuga*), insisting on the importance of the climax for the success of the series itself. Indeed, even *Shirobako* follows the patterns they discuss in the show: the episodes at the climax, in particular, episode 23, feature complex, action-oriented sequences as the director sneaks into the publisher's office building, comically performing game-like martial arts moves to defeat a string of "bosses" (the executives and managers at the publishing house) who try to keep him from meeting the manga author.

In such a conflict, there are multiple forces at play here that drive the decision-making process: the time, staff, and budgetary restrictions, but also the expected structure of the anime series, an expectation built from previous anime, which demands complex and exciting animated sequences to ensure the success of the series. The director was working towards the latter, while the producers must provide a solution for the former. Ultimately, it is Miyamori who delivers a viable solution which satisfies both requirements—a solution that was itself suggested from a famous animator who is entirely outside of the company—that is, using the in-house veteran animator Shigeru Sugie to animate the horses. However, even this final animated sequence is achieved only through a team effort. Due to the time-restraints, Sugie (who usually works on children's animation) must draw rough sketches that are then to be cleaned up by other lead animators. In fact, the two animation supervisors actively volunteer to do this job, as they want to learn from his techniques and participate in this part of the production. Here, we not only see the multiple layers of laborers' work that go into a single animation sequence (key-animation, clean-up, and in other sequences, coloring and then editing), but it also reveals how important building on the expectations from anime performances are for the production process.

Because of the importance of reference to other examples of animation, there is a certain delimiting range based on previous examples that structures the type of animation considered acceptable in anime, highlighting how particular the performance of anime's animation is. We can see this in another example when the junior animator Ema Yasuhara becomes overcome by fears of producing poor animation for a sequence involving a cat. Her fears are visualized as the image of a cat with sharply defined lines that "devolves" into a squirmy ball that loses its distinction as a "cat." In these sequences in episode 8, it explicitly shows there is a clear preference for a particular type of animation, straying away from amorphous shape-shifting objects towards more "stable" images which remain recognizable. While in this context it is a display of fear for reduction of quality, certain types of "art animation" purposefully produce destabilized images or have character outlines that "vibrate" and

are inconsistent. Yasuhara's fears visualized as such reveals a general tendency within anime to shy away from certain types of animating of objects (humans, or cats, etc.) in favor of more rigidly defined stylistic boundaries. To help Yasuhara get over her fears, general animation supervisor assistant, Yuka Iguchi, takes her out for a walk and instructs Yasuhara to look at previous examples of animation and to copy them, to "learn by copying", implying that animators are building their skills from previous examples but also stressing the importance of copying and repetition, as well as relations to previous examples of anime history in the production of contemporary anime—something that is somehow both beyond their control (in the past, outside of their immediate decision making) and that they can also contribute to (through copying and their own productions).

This is also evident in a story-arc that occurs over episodes 4–6 when there is a dispute between a 2D animator, a production assistant, and a 3D animator. Here, the 2D animator (Ryūsuke Endō) abruptly withdraws as animation director, because the 3D director had already finished the animation of an explosion in CG, which the 2D animator wanted to draw. Feeling as if 3D was becoming favored, and due to the poor relaying of information by the production assistant, the 2D animator becomes angry and withdraws. Ultimately, the issue between 2D and 3D animation is solved in episode 6 by a visit to an exhibit of a fictional anime (based off of the 1980 anime *Space Runaway Ideon*), and the two animators bond over their mutual affection for that earlier series. This is one of the many sequences where they show how the animators, as well as other staff, were (and still are) fans of anime, active consumers who have devoted themselves to its production. This feedback loop of consumer (fan) to producer (animator), in which consumed anime informs produced anime, is further emphasized in *Shirobako* in sequences in which the anime animators observe themselves, other characters, or creatures to animate them by this reference. Because the show's mode of address is in anime's media-form, the characters are observing the anime world to (re)produce anime—it is literally self-referential.

This brings me to one of the most recognizable elements in anime that exposes how "external" (and thus imposed, learned, and performed by the animators) anime's media-form is to the production process: anime's conventionalized facial expressions. The performance of facial expressions in *Shirobako* becomes an important plot-point during episode 3, when they have to re-cut a certain segment because the "images" (*e*) are "losing" (*maketeru*) to the voice-actress' performance (*shibai*). The general animation supervisor assistant, Iguchi, must redraw the character expression, making it more expressive. This must be done in a timely manner, and so Iguchi concentrates on this particular expression, spending all night drawing the images, repeating to herself the sentence "I knew it", the lines that the character must say during the enactment of that pained expression. This is a general practice in animation, in which an animator works through an expression to get the timing correct, or views their own face making that expression—a practice that then makes the animator take on the actions of the animated character, and the character becomes imbued with the actions of the animator (Kim 2015). However, what is important to consider in anime is that character expressions have to carefully balance the repeated conventionalized codes, what Donald Crafton calls "figurative acting" (Crafton 2013; Suan 2017a), with the individualized expressions specific to that character's emotions (what Crafton calls "embodied acting"). Often, anime characters tend towards a stricter repetition of these codes, and indeed, the pained expression Iguchi is animating for the character Aya in *Shirobako's* interdiagetic anime *Exodus!* is one that is performed very similarly by characters in many other anime. In such sequences, characters (often female) lower their head; their eyebrows become upside-down arches that move closer to the center of their head, and their eyes transform between lightly arched lines, to squinted eyes, and then become filled on the side with tears; as the head moves (often in a diagonal, then circular motion), the tears disperse into water droplets. For example, though this post-dates *Shirobako*, the character expression by Akko in episode 6 of *Little Witch Academia* (2017) is

performed in a very similar manner[3]—an overdramatic expression that is regularly repeated, not in the exact same manner, but in the general model that is adhered to across multiple distinct anime productions (Suan 2017b, 2017a). What is intriguing here is that Iguchi herself is an anime character, thus further emphasizing not only how those animating and those animated force each other to act, sharing the action through the act of animating, but also how there is an added layer in anime animation: that the figurative acting codes must be adapted, something outside both the animator and animated, forcing them both within a certain mode of expression. Indeed, as if to comment on this and highlight the meta-performance, the soft-spoken junior animator Yasuhara is curious of Iguchi's work, and while peering over her shoulder loudly knocks over the garbage can. Yasuhara's face immediately switches to rounded, white-eyes, a figurative code often used to display shock, and in this case, embarrassment. However, Iguchi does not take any notice as she is concentrating so hard on her drawings.

The shared (and thus external, non-individualized) nature of figurative expressions is brought into attention throughout this episode. When Miyamori looks at some other key-frames in episode 3, the characters have certain conventional facial expressions on them, which we view by seeing Miyamori flip through each image, the camera focusing on the papers. The next cut is to Miyamori with another separate, conventional facial expression on her face as she remarks with a sigh how cute the characters are. Later in the episode, when scared about a possible error, Miyamori makes the round, white-eyed expression for mortified shock that Yasuhara did when she knocked over the garbage can (though without a blue tint, this time). Finally, at the end of the episode, both Yasuhara and Miyamori sit and watch the final cut of the *sakuga* of the animated, pained expression.

After Iguchi finishes the key-frames with the new expression, they are sent to Ogasawara, the general animation supervisor. In one sequence, she reviews the frames and adds one single line to one frame, explaining to Yasuhara how just that one line to the outline of the character's chin can make a difference. In this sense, even the key-animated frames receive an adjustment, a masterfully placed line that changes the movement of the expression, another agential layer added to the act of animation. Following this, the images are taken to be colored and are then edited together to make the final cut. As such, there are multiple people involved in just this one sequence, where actions that effect the final product are traceable not only from person to person but also through the enactment of the figurative code for that pained expression. This episode, in particular, displays how many people are involved as agents in the production process, but it also reveals how crucial anime's media-form is, something external to the animators, one carefully practiced through repetition of references. In these sequences, because they are already performed in anime's media-form, the practice becomes emphasized as they are referencing themselves as anime.

To close off this section on media-form, it is worth noting how anime's media-form has increasingly become associated with Japan, shifting from a niche product to a media-form that represents Japan as a nation, globally. This is subtly revealed in one of the conversations that occurred during the above-mentioned conflict between the 2D animator (Endō) and the 3D animator. In episode 5, Endō and another animator remark on how 3D animators should just go to California to produce such flavorless animations, inciting a difference between 3D and 2D, where 2D is connected to anime (and more suited to anime). This statement occurs during a drinking session with Saburō Kitano, a character (modeled after animator Ichirō Itano) who teaches "Japanimation" to 3D animators. It is important to note that this is the first time that the term "Japanimation" was used in the series (generally using the word "*anime*"), a term that nationalizes the animation technique and media-form. Playing the role of the wiser, senior animator, Kitano notes how he teaches them how to distort time and the images using the 3D software, and that, though the 3D animators cannot draw, they love "anime"

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[3] This was actually noted by a Japanese fan on Twitter (HASSO 2017), who provided images to display the comparison and noted the hard work involved in their respective productions.

(connecting "Japanimation" with "anime"). Ultimately, he proposes that they work with 3D animators, cooperating with them, learning the capabilities and difficulties of 3D animation to improve anime's quality. He acknowledges that the differences in materials and technology provide different ways to animate, each with various strengths and weaknesses, and this negotiation between these two can be productive, helping to make better quality anime. Here, we see an acknowledgement of the clashes between 3D and 2D animation and the different capacities of their technologies, as well as a connection between them that is through learning the "basics of Japanimation", with Kitano stating that techniques and "an (artistic) sense" (which is implied is something that can be taught and learned, not natural) of 2D animation can be useful for 3D animation. There is an implicit understanding that there is a difference between anime's media-form and other types of animation, even if it is here revealed in relation to a "national" distinction.

2.4. Transnationality

While the relation of anime to Japan is very strong, anime works have been transnationally consumed since *Tetsuwan Atomu* in the early 1960s (Mihara 2014), and portions of anime's animation have been outsourced throughout Asia since the late 1960s (Choo 2015). This transnational production system increased in the 1970s and 80s (Choo 2015; Kim 2015), continued into the 2000s (Masuda 2016), and still occurs on a large scale to this day. Not only related to animation, increasingly, funding is coming from China and the US (often to animate franchises, the intellectual property of which is owned by those funding the production), and globally available online streaming services are supporting (and promoting) anime productions that will be exclusive to their services (Sudo 2017). It is in this context that the agency of the labor—here defined as the capacity to make decisions that affect the final product—of anime production takes on another geopolitical dimension: who, in which country, is really making the decisions? Because of our inability to work through transnational productions without relying on national frameworks, there is a tendency to legitimize anime as "authentic" due to its relation to Japan ("it is mostly a Japanese production, making it Japanese"; "the Chinese are just providing the funding for this"). Conversely, such reliance on national frameworks can be exploited to show the power of a non-Japanese market over Japanese production ("they are catering to our tastes now"). Either of these readings are possible, because there are few alternative frameworks[4] to engage with when we consider anime's layers of transnationality in its production, distribution, and consumption.

Much of the transnational production in anime occurs through sub-contracting labor from the major studio that is tasked with producing the anime. While *Shirobako* depicts a generally positive view of freelancing through the almost mentor-like role that the freelance animator Misato Segawa plays for Miyamori, the series provides a less favorable view of sub-contracting for animation. This is done through sequences involving a sub-contractor called Studio Titanic, portrayed as a run-down office with sloppy organization and poor production quality. What the series leaves out is the large-scale reliance on such subcontractors and freelancers in the industry, and how much of this actually has a transnational component to it.

Indeed, this is true of *Shirobako* itself. The series is produced by the Japanese studio P.A. Works and Warner Entertainment Japan (a subsidiary of the U.S. company). Beyond the funding, there are other laborers involved in the production as well. This includes work such as finishing animation (usually the coloring), which was partly outsourced to YABES, a studio in South Korea, and TAP (Toei Animation Philippines) in the Philippines. Even key animation was done in South Korea, for example, in episode 13 which used YABES and Hanil Animation studios there. Some of the backgrounds

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4 One of them may be regionality, though it may not always follow established geographies. For a recent approach to media regionality, see Marc Steinberg and Jinying Li's recent work on media platforms and region (Steinberg and Li 2017) and Thomas Lamarre's work on media geographies (Lamarre 2015).

in episode 3 were done by Studio Suu, with Vietnamese names credited at the end of the episode. Other roles were filled by non-Japanese as well, such as animation directing, which for episode 21 was done by Rong Hong and Jung-Duk Seo (which were presumably done in Japan but could have occurred in South Korea). For episode directors, along with Japanese directors Fumihiko Suganuma (episodes 7, 13, and 15) and Hideaki Kurakawa (episodes 12, 16, and 22), South Korean Jong Heo directed multiple episodes (episodes 3, 8, 17, and 24). Storyboarding was also done by Heo for episodes 3, 8, 10, 17, 23, and 24 (most probably in Japan). This means that some of the key sequences that were analyzed above, specifically in episodes 3 (the facial expressions) and 23 (the issues between manga and anime; the complex "boss fights"), are partially due to the labor of Heo, who worked as episode director and/or on the storyboard (which itself becomes a transnational actor). Thus, there is an important element of agency that is transnational, not just in the animation but in other levels of production, contributing to the labor in ways that bare it on the final anime product.

Because much of this information is gleamed from the credits, it is difficult to determine exactly which sequences were done by which animator (for Japanese and non-Japanese staff), and besides the studio name, it is difficult to place exactly where the labor took place (inside or outside of Japan). That aside, one can see that the dispersal of agency is one that is not just confined within the borders of Japan but operates across anime's transnational production network. This significantly complicates the conception of anime as an address from Japan to Japan. With this in mind, we cannot forget that, according to *Shirobako*, within Japan there are assertions of agency at multiple levels in the production hierarchy, so this could also be applied to those working outside of Japan (and those from outside of Japan working within Japan). This is also true for the impositions, the limits on agency that occur in the process of production: the working through, with, and on materials and technologies that act upon the animators; the media-form which comes from outside of the animators, which they must learn, through copying and (re)production in iterative performances.

The above-described conception of anime's performance that highlights the importance of repetition diverges considerably from the prevailing conceptions of creative labor. The "standard" take on creative labor presumes a "top-down" type of creativity, in which, according to Joon Yang Kim, there is a valorization of intellectual labor over physical labor, in which directing is considered more important than the physical labor of animating (2015). Here, the creative visionary of the director is the esteemed agent, their instruction the authoritative guidance from which orders flow, which are merely "followed" by the animators (or other staff)—the director is the author's voice, the agent making the address, producing a commentary (often on Japan) through the process. Such an approach is an implicit endorsement of a type of creativity that is based on a modernist reverence for novelty in the act of creation (Pang 2012), a valorization of departure from trend rather than the "following of orders" and repetition, which are denigrated as corollary to (mass) industrialized production. An alternative view of creativity is beyond the scope of this essay,[5] but for the time-being, I would suggest that a conception of dispersed agency, one in which all parties involved have different degrees of power in this hierarchical structure, allows us to see a more collaborative, transnational process come into play in anime production. This is a similar mode of viewing that is also practiced by *sakuga*-fans.

3. *Sakuga*-Fans: Activities and Effects

3.1. Focus on Anime's Media-Form

As noted prior, throughout the series, *Shirobako* directly highlights *sakuga* animation (e.g., scenes of flipping through key-frames, additions at the end of the episode), forcing a particular type of consumption upon the viewer, making them consume not just a narrative about production that

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5   I discuss this in more detail in a forthcoming book chapter "Repeating Anime's Creativity across Asia" in *Trans-Asia as Method: Theory and Practices*. Edited by Jeroen de Kloet, Yiu Fai Chow, and Gladys Pak Lei Chong. London: Rowan and Littlefield International.

focuses on the labor "behind" anime but also to acknowledge the actual animation itself, in its *sakuga* condition. This is the same focus for *sakuga*-fans, except it is expanded to their engagement with any anime work. In other words, they are explicitly concerned with anime's media-form, specifically from a technical, production process, and aesthetic perspective. This is evident in the works that *sakuga*-fans produce, published on the internet. Emblematic of such works is the popular Sakuga Blog, run by a multinational group of English-speaking fans: (using the online pseudonyms of the top 3 writers) kViN is located in Barcelona, Spain; Disgaeamad is located in Tokyo, Japan; and liborek is located in the Czech Republic. Sakuga Blog publishes interviews with animators (conducted by the site or translations from Japanese publications into English, such as a translation of an interview with Megumi Kouno, Disgaeamad 2016), reviews of the production of airing TV shows, and runs a large archive of animation sequences. This archive is called Sakuga Booru, which hosts short sequences of animation (without sound) that are organized and categorized according to anime title and the key-animator that it is credited to. With each animation tagged with that information, the site is easily searchable by either anime title or animator. There are also a number of anime YouTubers that focus on *sakuga*. They produce videos where they discuss specific animators, showing certain segments, often estranged from their context in the narrative, detailing the production history of that work and/or describing the history of the animators and their work. Some of them have substantial followings, such as AnimeAJay from the UK, who has 136,000 subscribers. While there are other resources by and for fans of *sakuga*, I will be focusing on these here.

It is important to note that these fans are explicitly interested in anime's media-form and by extension its production process, and through this they become somewhat critically engaged, mainly in concern to the terrible work conditions of the animators themselves. This is something left out of *Shirobako*, which does not show the dire situation of many of the animators. While it does display the stresses involved in the demanding work and portrays some animators (and other staff) as less financially stable, the series makes no sustained remarks in the narrative on the severity and precarity of their livelihood, or the meager pay of the animators. This is a well-known issue in the anime industry, something that many fans have taken note of, and *sakuga*-fans are actively critical of the situation. This is particularly evident in the blogs, which decry the animators' pay and work conditions. Such a position is blatantly evident in a recent post on Sakuga Blog entitled "The Struggle of Anime's Novice Creators", which goes into great detail about the difficulties of junior animators, the harsh working conditions, low pay, and poor job security, but also suggests possible alternatives and praises studios like Kyoto Animation, which does seem to provide a favorable (and successful) model for other studios (kViN 2018a).

In addition to the direct discussion of their work situation, one might also interpret the focus on animators as an attempt to address this. Sakuga Blog highlights newcomers in the industry, who are in the most precarious position as junior animators, making the least amount of money, lacking experience and contacts. Though not explicitly stated, this praise and promotion works as a way to elevate their status (especially among English-reading fans) and could potentially raise their profile within the industry. As such, *sakuga*-fans are to a degree politically active, acknowledging the poor working conditions and pay of the animators, actively investigating and disseminating information on the situation, and, in a sense, calling for solutions to these systemic problems. It is their engagement with the media-form that then involved research into the production process, which exposed the uglier side of the industry. They are also keenly aware of the importance of sub-contracting in the industry, even using an image from *Shirobako*'s fictional sub-contractors Studio Titanic in their blog post on the role of outsourcing (kViN 2018b). Accompanying this understanding of the integral role of outsourcing in anime production has also led to an acknowledgement of anime's transnational production, which I will detail below.

3.2. Engaging Anime's Transnationality

Many of the activities of *sakuga*-fans function as a form of knowledge production. This includes the blogs that hosts interviews, the videos that expose (and educate) other fans on animators and the production process, and the archiving work that categorizes animators with the sequences they animated. This is an extremely difficult research process, as the credits of an episode do not include which animator drew which sequence. *Sakuga* YouTuber AnimeAJay, from the UK, describes his method of determining which animators produced which scenes in an extended video (AnimeAjay 2017). He explains how he carefully combs through the credits, cross-referencing the staff of each episode with online information of what projects and episodes the animators and animation supervisors worked on in the past. Then, he starts to compare parts of the episode to examples of their previous work. He looks for certain similarities of parts of the characters, such as the ears or the noses, or how different animators draw explosions, smoke, or the crumbling rock formations that are typical in action anime.[6]

Such a practice of viewing would align with what Lamarre sees in anime's visuality, that is, a multi-layered "field dense in information" (Lamarre 2009, p. 145). Lamarre explains that through this type of viewing, "character design or mecha design may prove more important than story or character, or the key animation of battle scenes may garner as much attention as character development" (p. 145). Lamarre explains that this mode of viewing "flattens the hierarchy of production by which directors are supposed to be of primary importance, followed by producers or writers, followed by animation directors, key animators, and character designers" (p. 145). In this sense, building on Lamarre's observations, we can see that *sakuga*-fan practices intimately engage with the media-form of anime, flattening received hierarchies of production. This allows for the appreciation of anime as a performance of animation, one that does not necessarily have to be seen as exclusive to Japan. As such, I would suggest that when fans search out the sequences by particular key-animators, they are looking for exceptional performances of anime's media-form rather than seeing anime as a commentary on Japan (or Japanese society).

There is thus an effect of a levelling of the transnationality of anime's production in the knowledge produced by the *sakuga*-fans, in which they do not focus on anime's Japaneseness. This is not necessarily explicitly said but is the effect of the way in which they position non-Japanese animators. While this is present in the archive of Sakuga Booru, which features non-Japanese animators such as Austrian Bahi JD in the same manner as Japanese animators, there are more active approaches that integrate non-Japanese animators as valued instances of anime performance. For example, the Sakuga Blog, conducted a long interview with Korean animator Se Jun Kim, discussing his recent work as a director and his accomplishments as an animator (Kraker2k 2017). This is also present in the YouTube community. Anime YouTuber (that is, not specializing in *sakuga*, but talking about anime generally) The Canipa Effect began a series called "animator spotlight", which discusses a particular animator's work across different anime with Kim as the focus (The Canipa Effect 2015). The very first animator he chose was not Japanese (but works in Japan), and he labels him the "Modern Mecha Master", adoringly describing his work, and only mentions his ethnicity once, stating that as "a Korean animator in Japan, he hasn't lent his skills to a huge amount of series, but the ones he has have certainly been noticeable." From his description of the scenes shown, it is very clear that it is his skill as an animator that is the focus, in performing mecha animation sequences that are thrilling, stating "it is people like Se Jun Kim that really do make mecha anime a visual spectacle." The Canipa Effect focuses on animation performance and, as such, equalizes Kim along with the other Japanese animators he discusses in later videos in the animator spotlight series.

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[6] AnimeAJay focuses on *Dragon Ball Super*, which continues a tradition of certain tropes, such as the crumbling rocks in power-up sequences.

Such an equalizing through juxtaposing animators next to one another is done in other *sakuga*-fan videos. A YouTube channel that focuses on *sakuga*, BlueSakuga, features videos that are the sequences done by one particular animator with no commentary. Though only having 11 videos, two of those are on South Korean animators (Se Jun Kim and Sunghoo Park), putting them alongside other videos of Japanese animators such as Masuda Hirofumi and Nakamura Yutaka (BlueSakuga 2015c, 2015b, 2015a). This is also done in the "animation breakdown" video of episode 130 of *Dragon Ball Super* (2015–18) by YouTuber AnimeAJay (2018). Here, he comments on part of the production process, displaying and crediting the episode directors and the different sequences to their respective key-frame animators, and notes who the specific animation supervisors were. In this particular *Super* episode, which was widely praised for its high quality of animation and as the climax of the series, AnimeAJay goes through each complex action animation sequence, spending over 18 min describing multiple sequences that are each only a few seconds long. Briefly describing the animators' histories in the show, he juxtaposes Chinese animator Yong-ce Tu next to other Japanese animators. He describes how he was a 2nd key-animator since his introduction in episode 34 until episode 90, in which he drew 100 cuts for the major fight in that episode and provided key-animation (and some 2nd key-animation) from that point onwards. He describes how he has learned from Naotoshi Shida and Yuya Takahashi and then positively describes the sequence by Tu. He thinks that Tu is also a fan of *Dragon Ball Z* (1989–96) as the parts of the fight he animates feature "flurries straight out of the [fights from] the Cell and Buu [story-]arcs." He praises the exaggeration of the figures in the *Dragon Ball Super* fight, saying that it goes "hand-in-hand" with Tate Naoki's animated sequences earlier in the episode. He also notes how one particular sequence is a repurposed (completely redrawn, but maintaining the key-frames for the movement and storyboard) sequence by Takahashi, but this time it is done by Tu. He then moves on to describe the episode director, Ryōta Nakamura, and how it was from his storyboard that much of the action came. He notes how even still sequences are well composed, describing how images of the background give the audience time to breathe between intense action sequences. Afterwards, AnimeAJay analyzes the work of the Japanese animators in the same amount of detail, including a sequence by Shida, describing the movement that he feels is characteristic of his character animation (the shaking head of the character as he powers up) and noting how impressive the details on the characters are in their stills, while highlighting the complexity of the movement involved.

In his videos, AnimeAJay pays careful attention to the animation, describing the vibrancy of colors, the contortion of bodies, and the impact of certain images, praising the rhythms between movement and stills. In these analyses, there is attention paid to the mark of individual performances while acknowledging the need for consistency. He also highlights the multiple actors that are involved in anime production and their distinctive contributions, while still grasping the chain of command. Fan works such as this acknowledge the transnationality of anime and the multitude of actors involved, understanding the difficulties of working with the medium of animation. Here, just as in *Shirobako*, the individual contributions are underscored by the clear recognition of the dispersal of agency, even across national boundaries, through intensive engagement with anime's media-form.

4. Consuming Production: Towards Rethinking Approaches to Transnationality

Not isolated to anime, there is an increasing need to reconcile the multiple layers of transnationality and dispersal of agency in the production, distribution, and consumption of global media in general. With agency dispersed across a network, one which occurs across national borders, transnationality fundamentally shifts conceptions of the "local" and "global": a "local" site of production may be part of a larger production network that crosses extensive distances and national boundaries, intersecting with the "global" at that site. Following Latour, when we trace these transnational networks whatever a (national) "society" is can be understood as differently assembled, and as media like anime are so often tied to notions of locale-based culture (anime as a commentary on Japanese society), we must rethink how "cultural production" can be considered in light of these cross-border assemblages. This also means that the material conditions of labor can have diverse

affects, even for related media. For example, manga (made with a minimum of one human agent in one locale)[7] and anime (made with multiple studios and sub-contractors in various locales) can have different types of transnationality in terms of production. Similar divergences may also be revealed in "actor-network" analyses of consumption. However, as we unravel the specific dynamics of these media, we may also find clues to alternative modes of engagement that move beyond the inter-national and consumption-production dichotomies.

In the above examples, one can see how "consumption" is also tied very distinctly to "production." Just as *Shirobako* provides an anime about production to be consumed, *sakuga*-fans produce works from their own consumption practices; they consume the production processes of anime (not just its results) and produce writing, archives, and videos on this information. This process often takes on a transnational component that reveals a particular type of transnationality. In *sakuga*-fan blogs and videos, we can see how anime's transnationality is multilayered, with an understanding of the outsourcing occurring for anime's animation and the consumption of anime in places outside of Japan. At the same time, there is an acknowledgement of non-Japanese working in the industry and producing fan products (like the blogs) inside of Japan. As such, the transnational in regards to anime is not something that is clearly outside of Japan but includes Japan as well as other countries. This is an important shift to consider, a type of flattening that goes across national borders, an alternative to an inter-national inside-outside of Japan dynamic (anime as a commentary on Japan; Japanese culture consumed abroad) when we conceptualize anime's transnationality. It is *sakuga*-fans' consumption of production and their own subsequent transnational production that highlights the dispersed nature of decision-making and contributions to anime's production and the multilayered transnationality of anime. *Sakuga*-fans practice an approach that delves into the mechanics of anime's media-form, focusing on skilled performances and exploring the labor behind them, acknowledging the multiplicity of actors involved, opening up anime to its transnational potentials in their engagement with both Japanese and non-Japanese animators. Globally popular, anime's images tend to signal Japan, but *sakuga*-fans recover the transnationality of anime's production by engaging with its media-form.

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7   Latour asserts a methodology that stringently "flattens" site-specific (what he calls "local") and macro-conceptions (what he calls "global"), and, indeed, the materials, tools, and media-form of manga extend beyond the confines of the site of production. However, I am (over)simplifying this here merely to highlight how anime and manga's differences in materials, tools, and media-form can lead to important divergences.

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Technological Specificity, Transduction, and Identity in Media Mix

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Abstract: In this paper, I focus on the study of the relationships between technological specificity and media mix, focusing on how anime, as a visual medium, is connected to other media. There are two main aspects to this paper: the study of the complexities of the visual media milieu in the age of media mix, taking into account the technological materiality of different channels of production and consumption, and the study of the way these complexities must be approached. Taking materiality and information as the key aspects of the way specific objects in media are interconnected, I explore a question that has appeared recently in media studies: what is the right way to approach the relationships between media?

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, the emergence of new strategies in the production and consumption of narrative fictions has changed the way people relates to cultural technical objects and to the narratives they enact. Some of them have to do with the interaction between different media.

In *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (Jenkins 1992), Henry Jenkins described the expansion of a viewer culture in which fans were no longer passive consumers—if they had ever been. He was one of the first to use, in the turn of the millennium, the concept of "transmedia storytelling"[1] to refer to the phenomenon where elements of a narrative spread across multiple media platforms. In recent decades, the label "cross-media storytelling" has also emerged to describe a specific transmedia strategy: while in transmedia proper, different stories occur in shared world that appears in multiple media, cross-media does not use strategies to expand a central narrative through multiple narrations, but redistributes one narrative through different platforms. Those phenomena have attracted the attention of scholars from different disciplines, and they have raised some methodological and epistemological challenges related to the interaction not only between media, but also between the disciplines that study them.

This discussion has had interesting ramifications in the world of Japanese media studies. In the last few years, a growing group of researchers have directed their attention to the study of the production and consumption of cultural products in the context of what has come to be known as media mix.

What is media mix? Media mix refers to a use of transmedia strategies where stories, worlds, and characters spread over different platforms. As it happens with cross-media storytelling, media-mix emerges from a single product of a single media and spreads through different media. However, the

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[1] Marsha Kinder used the term in 1991 to refer to franchises which use joint storytelling strategies across different media. Henry Jenkins uses the term for the first time in an article for *Technology Review*, "Transmedia Storytelling" (Jenkins 2003), in which he considers how the coordinated use of storytelling in different platforms can make the characters more attractive for the public.

concept of media mix is used mainly in the context of Japanese cultural productions, and while most examples of "transmedia storytelling" tend to emphasize the narrative continuity between platforms, media mix is based instead in a principle of variation: in media mix, characters, elements of world construction, and specific tropes associated with a particular fiction are repeatedly used in different media as variations on the same idea, sometimes without any direct continuity.[2]

According to Marc Steinberg's definition in his book *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan*,

> The anime media mix within popular discourse refers to two intersecting phenomena: the translation or deployment of a single work, character, or narrative world across numerous mediums or platforms (also known as repurposing) and the synergetic use of multiple media works to sell other such works within the same franchise or group. (Steinberg 2012, p. 142)

In the book, Steinberg explores the connections and interactions between some Japanese cultural productions, including certain manga, anime, and video games; the characters used in these productions; and the toy market. These links were already explored by commercial producers in pre-war hits such as *Norakurom*, but they have had an especially important role in Japan's cultural industry since they consolidated on the 1960s. To inspect the history of these transmedia relationships and the way they evolved into what we now call media mix, Steinberg follows one particular thread of fiction: Tezuka's Astroboy. The choice is not arbitrary: the concept of media mix it was introduced precisely in the context of the 1960s, even though it would not become a buzzword until the 1980s (Steinberg 2012, p. viii).

The academic discourse on media mix is also closely entwined with the discourse on otaku culture. Although some anglophone[3] researchers have recently entered otaku studies discussions, it is a field populated mainly by Japanese researchers and scholars, which in turn are, in many instances, deeply indebted to continental thinkers. In some aspects, otaku studies could be interpreted as the "Japanese equivalent" of media mix studies.[4] The most prominent participants in the discussion are Eiji Ōtsuka, Hiroki Azuma, Tamaki Saitō, and Gō Itō. Although I will not discuss the works of these authors in depth, it is interesting to mention that they identify two main features of Otaku culture: the fragmentation of the narrative, and the increasing importance of characters (rather than the story itself) as items of consumption.

In this paper, I explore three issues concerning general ontological and methodological aspects of media mix. However, to enable some finer-grained perspective, at different points I focus on anime as an example how a specific medium integrates into media mix:

1. How does media mix affect the identity of its component media as a technical objects? Media mix implies a process of producing stories, characters, and worldviews in which different media are purposely included into the mix from the onset. It is based on seriality, not continuity. As a result, it raises questions that are particular to it and different to those suggested by other transmedia strategies, questions such as: what is at stake in divergent and convergent series of fictions? What acts as a basis for these divergence and convergence processes? And which kind of identity can a cultural product such as anime have in this context of variation?

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[2] Kopylova's brilliant and comprehensive PhD thesis is a case studio on media mix focused on *Gankutsuou: The Count of Monte Cristo* (Kopylova 2016). In her thesis, Kopylova examines the case of Gankutsou as an emblematic example of media mix case where one story, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, originally written by Alexander Dumas, is adapted through different media platforms (there's an anime, mangas, and light novels).

[3] In "Taking otaku theory overseas: Comics studies and Japan's theorists of cultural postmodern" (Brienza 2012), Casey Brienza analyzes the discourses of Japanese Otaku theorists and their differences with parallel anglophone developments, while in "From 'game-like realism' to 'imagination-oriented aesthetic': Reconsidering Bourdieu's contribution to fan studies in the light of Japanese manga and otaku theory" (Kacsuk 2016), Zoltan Kacsuk reviews the AMO (anime, manga, and otaku) Studies of these Japanese authors considering them in the light of theories exposed in the book *Distinction* by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.

[4] Kopylova devotes a chapter of her thesis to the relation between media mix and otaku studies (Kopylova 2016, pp. 65–72).

2. How should we conceive media mix itself as a technical object? Is there such a thing as a specific "intermateriality" of media mix? While Japanese video games, anime, manga, and other media have become intertwined in media mix, each medium retains its own technical and narrative specificity, so the different materialities of each technical object are obviously very relevant when we want to approach their relationships. One question that arises as central is: is there such a thing as the specific "intermateriality" of a group of media?

3. What kind of methodological problems arise in the study of the materiality of media mix? Media mix is essentially hybrid: it is not only transmedia, but also transnational and transdisciplinary. In academia, it has been approached from sociological, economical, narratological, historical, aesthetical, and technical points of view. But, how can these different perspectives be put together in order to unearth the specificity of its object?

In order to look into these three issues, I will introduce some ideas extracted from Simondon's theories of individuation and the technical object. I will also apply some of the core ideas from Lamarre's book *The Anime Machine*.

In his book, Lamarre presents a theory of animation that provides an answer to the question "how should we read anime?", focusing on its technological specificity instead of treating animation as "just another text" Lamarre's proposal goes beyond presenting a list of relevant elements for the formal analysis of anime (lighting, color, sound, narrative, shooting, editing, etc.). He presents a content analysis based on the materiality of the moving image. The result is a book with an emphasis on how animation thinks technology, not on the representation of Japan in the anime.

2. Identity in Media Mix: The Case of Anime

As happens with its subject matter, media mix studies can be characterized as transdisciplinary, transnational, essentially hybrid. Media mix has been approached from sociological, anthropological, historical, and philosophical points of view (Steinberg 2012; Allison 2006; Condry 2013; Lamarre 2017). In turn, the identity of anime has been considered from an aesthetical point of view (Suan 2017), from a historical one (Clements 2013), and from a materialistic one (Lamarre 2009), but what about anime as a component of media mix?

When we consider anime as a medium whose narratives intertwine with other media, a fundamental question emerges: what constitutes anime's specific identity as a component of media mix? Although anime includes an ever changing diversity of genres, audiovisual styles, narrative techniques, animation techniques, character styles, and worldviews, they all tend to converge according to certain conventionalized patterns. To understand anime, then, we need to look at the way repetition and convergence phenomena, on the one hand, and variation and divergence phenomena, on the other, contribute to its identity. In mass-produced anime, certain patterns tend to be repeated in a recognizable manner, conforming to a unity of narrative and visual style that can be identified as typical of anime. However, considering anime as something homogeneous would be wrong, especially in the context of media mix theory.

The matter of the role of divergence and convergence in the constitution of anime as a medium can be approached on the basis of very different ontological notions of variation, repetition, and identity.

We have the Derridean (Derrida 1978) conception of identity and differentiation. Although in Derridean philosophy a copy can be said to be "without original", in the Derridean notion of "copy without original", difference and identity are thought to emerge through the very same process of "failed copying". One does not have any priority over the other: identity, which is always structurally incomplete, is founded at the same time and in the same act than difference

On the other hand, for Deleuze (Deleuze 1994) variation is secondary with respect to both identity and to the difference that founds it: variation is a difference that requires a prior identity, a difference that makes sense only if it is based on an already predetermined identity. In the Deleuzian model, there is an ontological priority of difference, but this ontologically primary difference is not a variation with respect to anything: there is no "original" of which there can be a divergent copy.

There are, then, two main ways to understand pattern variation and convergence in anime, and they follow different ontological logics. In some cases, the idea of variation implies a previous identity. If it is possible to execute a variation on a piece, it is precisely because the piece is previously "something", because it is already constituted in its identity. On the other view, it is variation itself that constitutes or "performs" the identity.

Stevie Suan is an academic who has been working on what constitutes anime's identity as a medium. Suan has explored the issue of anime's identity in an article called "Anime's Performativity: Diversity through Conventionality in a Global Media-Form" (2017). To Suan, anime's identity is a matter of convergence within a diverse activity, and his fundamental question concerns how anime can maintain this identity while continuously producing—at the same time and in the same process—variation and difference.

> Put differently, how does anime maintain a relatively uniform aesthetic, and thus retain its identity, but continue to produce diversity and change over time? This is the aesthetic problem anime works through in the performance of the anime themselves. (Suan 2017, p. 66)

Suan's ontological stance on the identity of anime is based, in many aspects, on Butler's theory of performativity and, less explicitly, on Derridean deconstruction. For Butler, identity and difference are produced performatively. Every identity category is produced by acts of repetition that take place over time; identity is performative in the sense that it is produced in the acts themselves in which its variability and differentiation are shown, and therefore, it is in constant review. The same performative acts that establish identity also establish difference and variation.

> To conceptualize anime in these global contexts, anime's identity can be considered as straddling the dynamic divisions between uniformity, repetition and the global, on the one hand, and diversity, variation and the local, on the other. As such, anime's media-form can be seen as produced through, using Judith Butler's [. . .] turn of phrase, a 'stylized repetition of acts' that negotiates anime identity in each performative instance, working through the problematics of diversity and uniformity, multiplicity and unity. This problematic is invoked through the engagement of conventionalized elements and the technical processes/materiality of animation. In other words, anime's identity is constituted just as much by audio, visual and narrative conventions as the medium of animation they are performed in. These conventions, when performed, bring anime into being, producing 'acts of anime', so to speak: a 'doing' of anime. (Suan 2017, p. 67)

One of the main examples of a definition of anime's identity founded not only in variation, but in a more fundamental "animetic difference" can be found in Lamarre's work.

Many academics have devoted themselves to analyzing anime from a thematic point of view, but most have tended to ignore the very materiality of Japanese animation (Lamarre 2009), that is, the fact that it is a moving image. Lamarre, on the other hand, presents an analysis of the anime based on the materiality of the moving image, providing an exhaustive study of the technical aspects of animes of Miyazaki, Anno, and CLAMP, and adapting to their specificity:

> I wish to highlight that the force of the moving image, which results from the mechanical succession of images, is the basic technological condition for animation. It is surely for this reason that many theories of animation gravitate toward philosophies that give ontological priority to movement over stillness, to process over structure, to becoming over being, and even to life over death. (Lamarre 2009, p. xviii)

Lamarre believes that the specific materiality of the animation is fundamental to understand what they offer us from the thematic point of view. Not taking into account the way in which the

anime thinks about its themes can lead to taking it as a passive object in which messages are merely transmitted or reproduced.

His proposal focuses, in contrast, on the analysis of animation as a technique of moving images. Lamarre highlights the technological specificity of anime as the way to read anime. Technological specificity takes into account the way anime is materially formed, the way the "animetic interval" works, that is, the movement between planes of image. In his book, Lamarre makes some comments about divergence and convergence in anime:

> In keeping with this approach, I see recent developments in transmedia serialization not in terms of a break with animation but in terms of divergent series of animation unfolding from the animetic machine. Instead of breaks between eras or generations, I see divergent series that entail mutations and transformations, transitions and passages, in which different series remain on stage. Divergent series today crowd the scene. Indeed, even if they are somehow outdated or passé, the animations associated with Ghibli, Gainax, and CLAMP remain an important force, alongside a wide variety of anime-game series and other serial franchises. (Lamarre 2009, pp. 301–2)

According to Lamarre, we must focus on the materiality and technical specificity of anime, as it provides the context of emergence of these divergent series. Talking about anime without understanding its technical specificity is producing a collection of anecdotes.

Lamarre draws on Deleuzian ontology, according to which empirical experience is, first of all, an experience of pure difference, with categories coming only later. The more you capture the specific, the more you capture ontological difference. By looking at the material specificity of anime, Lamarre is approaching the difference that constitutes anime before any variation may occur.

In this sense, Suan's proposal bears a resemblance to Derridean ontology, and distances itself from the Deleuzian ontology used by Lamarre. The latter is in a position similar to Deleuze regarding his position on the ontological priority of the difference.

First and foremost, looking at technological determination reminds us that media convergence or product alliances are not inherent in the animetic interval or in the media associated with animation. We might use the term "media mix", because "mix" feels decidedly more neutral than "convergence" or "alliance". Yet I think it necessary to back up another step and consider, however schematically, what is at stake in starting with the divergent series that follow from the moving image. It is on the basis of divergent series that we can begin to look at how modes of production and distribution intersect with, and strive to capture, the animetic machine (Lamarre 2009, p. 302).

As I have already mentioned, repetition is not primary in Deleuze: it is presented as that which generates identity, but it is always considered as secondary, ontologically speaking, with respect to difference. Suan stands out from Lamarre in considering that animetic difference (new fashions or styles in the anime, new variations) appears after convention.

In a sense, Suan's proposal is less concrete than Lamarre's, but tries to be broader. Suan's approach does not take material specificity as a key element in answering to the question about what anime is. We only know that it is founded through repetition. Where Lamarre points to an "original" difference that is repeated in anime, Suan points to the mechanism of repetitive variation itself.

If we examine Suan's proposal from the point of view suggested by Lamarre, the following problem emerges: if the anime medium is taken as a "formal system", we can never understand in its concreteness the difference that founds it. When Lamarre analyzes the characteristic repetitions of anime, he finds specific material elements to be definitory of its identity. Those elements present a novelty that makes anime stand out from everything that is not anime. In Suan's performative serialization analyses, repetition itself constitutes the medium, while for Lamarre repetition is always the repetition of a difference of content.

3. Specificity and Transmateriality in Media Mix: Transduction between Media

Separating medium and message in media is as problematic as separating form and content. In both cases, the two accompany each other: they are always in the process of becoming together.

Simondon's philosophical notion of information and his critique of the hylemorphic scheme can be illuminating to this respect (Simondon 2005, pp. 39–51). According to Simondon, it would be an epistemological error to consider the principle of individuation (that is, that which constitutes individuals as separate and unique), as something prior to the acquisition of form. If we describe form acquisition as mere abstract process, information loses its characteristic dynamism. To understand processes by which a technically mediated cultural object acquires its form, it is important to approach them in its very concretion, in its becoming. In animation, for instance, there is a very specific technical process by which certain physical, social, and technical elements are combined to form sequences of drawings in movement. This process is already complex for each medium, but in the case of media mix, there is an added layer of complexity: we need to know not only how a particular class of objects is physically, technically, and culturally informed, but also, how some meaningful elements can be transported from one medium to another and still retain their identity.

In his book *The Anime Machine*, Lamarre defends the thesis that the technical specificity of anime is crucial to understand what anime really is and how it thinks its subject matters. How about media mix? Is its technical specificity, and therefore its identity, reducible to that of the media that participate in it?

Conceiving the technical and material aspects of media mix from a Simondonian point of view allows us to interpret it as an object whose technicality is based on a transductive operation that materializes the relational aspects of a certain set of interactions between the human being and its milieu. According to Simondon, the primordial technical object is never a natural physical system, but rather a physical transduction of an intellectual system. It consists of a crystallized succession of applications of knowledge, and that is what constitutes its "artificiality". But for some degree of technical perfection to exist, the technical object has to gain distance from its operators and approach the kind of existence of natural objects: a necessary condition for this to occur is the presence of indeterminacy in the system that constitutes a device. This indeterminacy opens the technical object to the possibility of an open relationship with the world. In this sense, media mix can be understood not only as the crystallization of certain psychological social operations in a technical form, but also as an example of certain technical operations (those materially characteristic of each media) gaining a certain independence from its material conditions of emergence, from the questions they were originally supposed to answer.

However, if there is no merely abstract "content" that can be transported from one platform to another, we have to face another question: what is the specific intermateriality of this medium? How are the different media related to each other at a material level? The process by which media mix is constituted as such is not one of translation, but of transduction: an intertwining of different domains of reality that constitutes a new domain in itself. The specificity of media mix consists precisely in that the features of a certain technical specificity (of a particular thinking device) are transduced into others: the adaptation of "ideas" or "characters" from one medium to another is a process in which the materiality of both terms and of the process of adaptation itself has to be taken into account.

The idea of transduction underscores the processual aspect of reality and the existence of active relationships between all levels of reality, from the physical to the technical. In transduction, technology is not seen as a mere copy of the social: it relates both to it and to the physical world as interconnected but distinct realities. In any case, we see that, at all levels, there is always a propagation and amplification of the structures themselves, and that this propagation reveals the individual as a relational being.

Simondon conceives reality as a system that cannot be reduced to a collection of terms, that is, one in which relations are as real as terms. In fact, relations are prior to terms: they constitute them. Transduction lets us conceptualize the real relations between different domains of reality, by which

they come to be and to interact to each other in the same unique movement. An individual and an environment constitute a system that evolves together: individuation is not exclusive of the individual or the medium, but operates transductively in both.

Simondon deals with technological individuation according to these parameters. According to Simondon, a genetic interpretation of the relationship between human beings and the world is necessary to understand technical objects. Technical reality does not constitute an independent domain, but is—in fact—one of the first forms of relationship between man and the world. Although the emergence of technicality appears the bring discontinuity between man with the world, this discontinuity does not erase a previous ontological continuity. Thus, although the genesis of a particular technical object could be described by itself, its meaning cannot be unearthed without looking at its genesis, that is, at its relationships with other levels of reality. For example, in the case of the media mix, we can describe how that particular anime or video game was made without taking into account anything else than itself as a technical object, but that leaves something important about its meaning in the shadows. For Simondon, we cannot understand technicality only by looking at technical objects because technicity is something that surpasses them. Technical objects result from an objectivation of technicality, but technicity is not exhausted in objects nor totally contained in them.

This technicity that is not exhausted in objects is also what keeps them in active relationships. The products (anime, manga, videogames, light novels) included in media mix are both technical objects and an aesthetic objects and, in this sense, they are forms of collective expression embodied in a technical gesture. They are transductions of certain psychological and collective structures into physical systems, social gestures crystallized in technical objects. We situate ourselves in a materialist perspective: thought occurs in the interaction with reality that is always material. Matter shapes thought and thought shapes matter. We must understand media mix as a technical milieu in which objects are shaped meaningfully.

We can think of a variety of examples. For example, some features of the anime character Naruto are derived from the conditions of production and consumption of the Naruto manga. In an interview, Kishimoto commented that he changed Naruto's original goggles for a headband because it was too tiring to draw them every week, and it took a lot of effort from the animators to animate three-dimensional googles (Gallow 2017).

Another classic example is that of the relationship between robot anime and the toy market. Some features of the super robot genre that started with Mazinger Z cannot be explained without reference to the robot figure market. With Mazinger Z, products quickly racked up record-breaking sales, forming a cornerstone of the robot anime success story. Its success not only meant a long history of making toys related to the world of robot anime, it also made it clear that viewers were potential consumers of these toys. In any case, Mazinger Z toys were part of a second generation of toys in which the previous tin robot toys had been abandoned. As Schodt says:

> Bandai, Japan's most famous robot toy maker, had made tin versions of Mighty Atom in 1963, but in 1974 it began manufacturing a toy robot that replicated Mazinger Z-artist Go Nagai's giant "drivable" robot warrior that thrilled young Japanese boys in comics and animation Company designers made the toy "realistic." It could not only pose, but with plastic parts and a die-cast zinc metal alloy body, had a feeling of weight and power. (Schodt 2010, chp. 5, sct. 3)

The different markets and distribution technologies associated with each medium can also have a significant impact. Seisakuinkai (production committees) are crucial in media mix production. In these committees, companies gather together in order to decide the transmedia strategies for a specific franchise. As a result, the materiality of the distribution channel has a direct impact in creative decisions form the onset. In addition to this, some distributors (such as pirating sites) make unexpected changes to the product which enhances media mix's logic of variation.

4. Transdisciplinary: Methodological Challenges of Media Mix

So far, I have addressed the issues of identity in anime in the context of media mix, and the specific identity of media mix itself. In the first part, I have dealt with the role of divergence and convergence in constituting a medium: according to Lamarre's proposal, anime's identity should be found in its specificity, and its specificity it is something which can be found in its technical and material operations. In the second part, I have discussed the importance of specificity and materiality in media mix as well. To conduct good research on media mix, what is needed is a good knowledge of its material and technical specificity. Given the fact that media mix studies have to deal with different media, it is appropriate to say that they have to be interested in how information is transduced form one milieu to another, and in how this operation affects their different materialities. The technical specificity of media mix implies a transmateriality, but how does this affect both media mix studies and particular media studies, such as anime studies?

In media mix, some technological features of a medium are somewhat transduced into another. It is no longer enough, for instance, to understand animation technology to understand anime; you also have to understand the technology of another type of media (i.e., you have to understand how a toy is produced to understand how animation is produced, or understand the relationship between a manga and an anime, etc.).

To consider media mix according to its material configurations is to consider what processes and technical operations are carried out by this kind of object in order to enact meaning. If we turn again to Simondon's criticism of Aristotelian hylomorphism and its influence, we can observe that his criticism focuses precisely in the fact that hylomorphism and its descendants conceive the technical processes by which materials acquire new shapes in a way that is overly abstract and static. That is, matter and form are never separate: they join together, and they should always be thought of together in their relationships, not separately. In the first chapter of *L'individuation* (Simondon 2005, pp. 39–67), using the example of the manufacturing process of a brick, Simondon shows that the technical operation by which an object acquires a particular shape is always a dynamic relationship between a prepared material and a materialized form, a process in which the presence in a system of a certain amount of potential energy is a necessary condition.

The epistemological mistake pointed out by Simondon consists in considering the information processes (i.e., the processes by which matter is informed) in a technical operation only from the viewpoint of inductive logic, which leads to producing a universal abstraction in which the inherent dynamics of technical becoming are left completely out of sight. It is crucial to stress here the importance of the (material) specificity of the technical operation. Simondon turns his criticisms against those approaches to the technical object that do not take into account its genesis and its formation processes—i.e., that consider the object only as a product, forgetting its production completely or treating it as a mere epiphenomenon. I think it is possible to transport the main idea expressed in Simondon's analysis of the production of a brick to the production of anime as a technical object in the media mix context. This helps us avoid approaching it from an overly abstract epistemological view, which would reduce it to a mere product and severely obscure an important part of its material specificity. In my research, I have been focusing on the materiality of the technical operation that constitutes anime, particularly its dynamism: taking into consideration the material specificity of anime as a technical object implies not only considering certain formal and narrative structures in which meaning is produced, but also looking at how they emerge through time in a particular process involving the movement of images. More importantly, it stresses the importance of media mix as a medium in which different materialities are involved.

When talking about media mix, one important methodological issue is how we approach the specific way elements are adapted from one medium to another, or in some cases, how they are conceived "intermediatically" (but always in reference to a given set of media). All too often, there is a tendency to look at it in an excessively abstract way. My approach stresses precisely that it is due to the fact that relation has an ontological priority to individuals that we can talk about media mix. It is

also the way we have to examine it methodologically. To study media mix, we need experts in the technical specifics of each medium (narratologist, ludologists, musicologists, etc.), but we also need researchers focused on specific transduction processes (adaptation studies), and researchers who study the concrete and complex patterns in which the relations between different media become a milieu and, in a sense, a driving force in productive processes.

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Kawaii Aesthetics from Japan to Europe: Theory of the Japanese "Cute" and Transcultural Adoption of Its Styles in Italian and French Comics Production and Commodified Culture Goods

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Abstract: Kawaii culture and aesthetics are a peculiarity of contemporary Japan and move across mass media, impulse goods, creative industries, and juvenile tendencies. The concept, graphic styles, and commodities related to a kawaii culture are composite. This article, in its first part, outlines the theories and general features of this cultural trend in Japan and as it is framed in most western countries. In the second part, it also focuses on whether and how the concept and the related styles and commodities have found a place in Europe, with particular reference to Italy and France. These two countries, in fact, have been since the late 1970s the key markets in the Euro-American region for Japanese contemporary culture for youths, namely Japanese comics (generally called manga) and commercial animation (or anime). Anime and manga are, in effect, an integral part of the theoretical discourse on kawaii in the two markets considered, as it is discussed accordingly in the second part of the article. In its last section, the article addresses the impact of kawaii styles on youth cultures in Europe, which is, although limited, multidimensional: it has involved spontaneous drawings among children, a certain amateur and professional comics production, amateur and commercial animation, toys and a diverse merchandising, street art, and fashion design.

Keywords: kawaii; youth cultures; Japan; Europe; trans-acculturation; manga and anime

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1. Introduction

A culture of cuteness is widespread in Japan and part of a transcultural phenomenon that has, at various degrees, become indigenous to groups of distinguishing fans in Europe. The peculiar expression of cuteness-related aesthetics in Japan is called kawaii,[1] on which, in the first part of this article, I provide a theoretical discussion. In the following parts of the essay, an exploration and description of children's and comics creators' artwork in Italy and France will be presented as evidence of the adoption and adaptation of a kawaii culture in the two countries. The so-called Euromanga (comics made by European creators but influenced by the visual and/or narrational clichés of Japanese comics, which are usually named manga) and the wide popularity of Japanese animation are also further evidence of the fusion of Japanese and European aesthetics in certain fields of youth culture and visual-narrative media in general.

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[1] This article is in part devoted to an analysis of the concept/term kawaii and of kawaii aesthetics, things, and commodities. I shall not make use of italics to underline the word, because I use it systematically throughout the text. By a convergent logic, I will almost always use kawaii instead of cute, because the English translations of the Japanese word do not catch the many nuances of the original term. The same treatment is accorded to other Japanese keywords such as manga and anime, introduced in the article's abstract, and in general for all terms: if they are rendered in italics, they are only at their first appearance.

This phenomenon is not entirely new: many other processes of creolisation and transculturation could be analysed, drawing from the past or from present time; however, the one here discussed is peculiar. Among the elements of interest in the graft (Pellitteri 2002) of Japanese aesthetics into the local youth culture by Italian and French fans, practitioners, and professional artists, there are: (1) the cultural causes, which are not based on a process of acculturation/assimilation from a dominant culture to a dominated one, as it happens during colonial dynamics; and (2) the cultural outcomes, which profoundly differ between the manifestations of this culture in Japan and the interpretations of it in the countries here considered, whose practitioners are not just receivers but active users who have interpolated the Japanese kawaii aesthetics with local elements, in a process that is still in progress; (3) the socio-demographics and width of the audiences interested: while in Japan the culture of kawaii is quintessentially a female-oriented one, widespread across a wide age range and definitely mainstream in the country, in Italy and France kawaii things and aesthetics are relegated to niche subcultures and more specifically belong to a (still, mainly female) youth culture and to a little girls' culture, just episodically expanding to the adult world professional forms of expression.

The discussion on the kawaii that I will conduct is certainly not the first of its kind: even just thinking of contributions in European languages, many analyse the topic from within different disciplines, providing sociological conceptualisations as well as experimental/clinical evidence on the psychological processes elicited by objects considered as cute or on the commodification of the kawaii as a set of cliched styles into merchandised products (Pellitteri 2002; Pellitteri [2008] 2010; Sabin 2004; Sherman et al. 2009; Borggreen 2011; Sherman et al. 2013). It is, therefore, a little puzzling to me that the authors of a more recent article claimed that "the academic literature offers no significant effort to describe and understand the concept of *cute*" (Granot et al. 2014, p. 68), not mentioning the six sources I have just listed within parentheses and despite that article itself mainly provides a ten-page dense and multidisciplinary literature review of other, numerous, previous and valid contributions focusing precisely on theoretical and empirical, multidisciplinary research on the cute; while offering a bare one-page "Discussion" that does nothing but summing up the insight emerging from the literature review itself.

On the contrary, and besides the sources aforementioned, the reader should refer to a special issue of the *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture* (Dale 2016b). The volume is a thorough and comprehensive review and discussion of "cute studies"—that is, studies on the concept of cute. This extensive set of contributions, and especially the introductive essay by Dale (Dale 2016a), teaches or reminds us, among the many elements of information and analysis: (1) about the inter- and transcultural dimensions of the aesthetics of cuteness in the East Asian region—the cute and its Japanese declinations are not part of a dynamic that interests Japan and western countries only but, on the very contrary, strongly involves the Asian region as well; (2) that the word cute in English originally holds negative nuances, an element that should be taken into account in current analyses; (3) certain physiological/psychological bases for the feelings of attachment or attraction to objects or animals or persons deemed as cute; (4) important distinctions between the manifestations of cute products and visual stimuli circulating in the consumer cultures that originate in the creative industries of western countries and those of kawaii products, and visual stimuli circulating in the consumer cultures that originate in the Japanese creative industries and are then disseminated in many Asian and non-Asian countries; (5) a fundamental set of differences between a "field of cute" and a "field of kawaii" (these definitions are mine), according to which it is sociologically and experimentally studied that the implications of kawaii are other and deeper than those of cute; namely, this is explained by Hiroshi Nittono (2016), included in the journal issue here mentioned.

The discourse of this article is, up to a point, conducted in the wake of that set of analyses.

2. Kawaii as a Composite Concept

In the study of phenomena that are not—or not yet—fully legitimate in the scholarship or renown in the general press and public opinion, it is customary to introduce the main concepts of the subject

by providing at least summary genealogies, definitions, and labelling. A habit which, while it can perhaps be thought of as superfluous by specialists, is undoubtedly useful to readers who are not. This is also true in the case of this article's main concept. Therefore, before tackling the core topics of this essay—kawaii aesthetics and their presence in Europe—I start it by reminding that kawaii is a Japanese adjective, as the reader has already foreseen. Nowadays, kawaii has a relatively agreed-upon range of meanings that go from "cute" to "sweet", from "tender" to "childish", from "innocent" and "gentle" to "honest" and "soft", and from "small" to "lovely"; more rarely are the meanings associated to the word negative, such as "clumsy" or "stupid" (Lieber Milo 2017).

An adjective, then; but a word that is also utilised in the non-Japanese scholarship as a noun, i.e., "the kawaii". Not so different, after all, from the way the late Italian art critic and philosopher Gillo Dorfles distinguished kitsch things and "the Kitsch" as an aesthetic category (Dorfles 1968). Similarly, in this essay, I will refer to kawaii things as well as to the kawaii intended as a general concept to which those kawaii things, more or less cogently, refer and by which are informed.

However, first, as I suggested above, genealogy, definitions, labelling.

My underlining the necessity to provide semantic genealogies and theoretical and/or operational definitions of the notions that will be discussed thereafter comes from the fact that in all the sources I have been consulting since 2000, when I first began to study and then publish on kawaii, this device has often been particularly zealous; as if an in-depth look at the linguistic origin of a word were crucial to a greater understanding of the phenomenon currently labelled with that word. Two of the latest—and indeed highly informative—contributions to this end are an article (Nittono 2016) and a conference paper (Lieber Milo and Nittono 2017). In them, the semantic nuances currently associated with the word kawaii are shown as deriving from a long history that dates to the 11th century's *Pillow Book* by Sei Shōnagon and evolves until the 19th century, when the acceptations of the adjective came closer to those that are associated to the word nowadays (cf. also Burdelski and Mitsuhashi 2010). In this sense, those contributions conform to the very same formula of the scholarship on kawaii in the last fifteen years. The information on the word has not changed much and is repeated by most authors, more or less exhaustively. Including this writer, up to a point. In fact, while I am not willing to delve into the many and multilayered historical steps that brought the word kawaii to its current set of meanings and nuances, I will selectively follow the consolidated trend and provide information and, hopefully, insight, on the concept, with the function to introduce the reader to the final theme of this article—kawaii aesthetics in France and Italy.

In contemporary Japanese, the adjective kawaii comes from the noun *kawaisa* ("sweetness", "nicety"). The word has many meanings, depending on the context and the topic of the sentence in which it appears. However, we can say that it mainly points out, in the context here under examination, an emotional attachment to creatures such as chubby pups and roundish objects of small dimensions; the word is more often than not associated to a girl/girlish culture, as in opposed to a supposedly "manlier" aesthetics (Lieber Milo 2017); and it has been studied, as a contemporary phenomenon, as coming from youth subcultures, with particular reference to female teenagers (Kinsella 1995).

The concept of kawaii and what is marked as kawaii-like in most instances contain and involve a hyper-consumerist stress which, in the words of cultural anthropologist Anne Allison, is "technologically advanced and nomadically portable" (Allison 2004, p. 35). The category of kawaii/kawaisa can frame a peculiar type of cyclical conflict between the adult world and the young Japanese, and especially young females, born after the early 1950s. The themes of such contrast have been renewed from the end of the 1960s onwards and include an unease for the stereotypical gender roles imposed on women in Japanese society as well as the pressure about becoming wives and mothers at an early age. The evolution of a kawaii culture has never stopped, consisting also of media fads such as the *Tamagotchi*: developed by Aki Maita and Akihiro Yokoi and commercialised since 1996 by Bandai, the Tamagotchi was an electronic capsule (*tamago* means "egg") whose software simulated a puppy needing constant care. The phenomenon of a commodified kawaii culture then moved over the *Pokémon* monsters' in-built-designed roundness, puppy-like look, big eyes, and soft

and graceful shapes. Like *Hello Kitty* or other childish-looking characters, they feature a design easy to reproduce for millions of little ones in their private drawing activities. (More on this later.)

In studying the kawaii in non-Japanese environments, a preliminary semantic factor regarding the difference between the Japanese context and non-Japanese observers must be considered:

> The use in the western [European-American] scholarship of the word kawaii and of all its acceptations (kawaii culture, the concept of kawaii, aesthetics of kawaii, kawaii phenomenology, etc.) is a functioning simplification used by scholars to label with a precise name an aspect of reality. [...] To the Japanese, expressions like "kawaii culture", "concept of kawaii", etc. can appear weird [...]. The only exception is in Japanese sociologists who are familiar with the (mostly western) scholarly works in which the word is used. In the Japanese language there exists a good deal of [...] [definitions] replacing what westerners call kawaii culture. [...] Kawaii is instead a common and quite old adjective. Hence it does not [necessarily and only] belong to a juvenile slang and one should be careful enough to not use it solely in relation to new generations. The adjective kawaii is such an ordinary word that several common variants exist. To sum it up, it is us [Europeans-Americans] who speak of "kawaii concept" and "kawaii culture", while in Japan it essentially remains an adjective which, without designating an object, has little to define. [Martorella and Pellitteri 2002, p. 268, in Pellitteri 2002. Translated from Italian].

We should, therefore, attempt to understand kawaii culture framing it as a "kawaii sentiment": an attitude toward things, cubs, or persons that is informed by the category of kawaisa. In doing so, we need to examine the kawaii in its original Japanese context of development, but this is a necessary step to later recalibrate the concept—and its commodified applications—in the European contexts: without an understanding of the kawaii's original cultural milieu of birth, our comprehension of its presence in European pop (sub)cultures would be maimed.

I believe that a necessary step in a critical survey on the genealogy of the Japanese cuteness could, or perhaps should, at least briefly mention and illustrate the work of Shūzō Kuki (Kuki 1930). We could define the adjective kawaii as a mutation/evolution from the concept of *iki* ("grace", in the sense of aesthetic elegance), a term that is not used today and was instead common in Japan's Edo period. Following Kuki's discourse, we can argue that the kawaii has some points in common with the iki. For instance, a certain kind of liberation from conventions through pleasure. In comparison to the iki, in the kawaii there is a push toward garishness and above all a proximity to sweetness; but, just like the iki, the kawaii keeps a strong link with the notion of *distinction*. A typical element of the kawaii is indeed the search for such distinction: the desire and aspiration to being different, but not against something, as happens in countercultures. For further considerations on the iki and the ways Kuki's writings have been used in recent scholarship for theorisations of the kawaii, cf. Martorella 2002; Botz-Bornstein 2011, XXIII ff.

Another important element to understand the origin of a kawaii culture is the Takarazuka revue. This relation does exist, but it is indirect and passes through the work of influential artist Osamu Tezuka (1928–1989), as I explain in a few lines. Takarazuka revue's origins date back to 1914. That year the entrepreneur Ichizō Kobayashi decided to found, with his wife, a theatre made up only by girls, strictly virgins, to increase the attraction of a small town, Takarazuka, not too far from Ōsaka (Robertson 1998). At a first look it may be difficult to see, in the Takarazuka revue—either that of the 1920s and 1930s or that of present time—explicit signals of the kawaii. Moreover, today the Takarazuka revue has assumed narrational and aesthetic tones that have moved far beyond its originally more idealised, abstractly graceful styles. The actresses impersonating male and female figures are, in current Takarazuka revue, slender and adult-like, for instance. The Takarazuka revue has, today, also become the symbol of an androgynous aesthetical model, an indifference to gender in the name of a superior aesthetic ideal, as is clear when seeing the scenes, costumes, and the actresses' movements displayed in any of the many shows staged by the five crews of the company. In addition, this should not astound, considering the insistence on the identification of Japanese ethics in an aesthetical, comprehensive form

(Martorella 2002). However, the revue can, or perhaps should, also be seen as a monument to a culture that originally was informed by the kawaii, characterised by an "extreme" concept of femininity and childish innocence. Here enters Osamu Tezuka. He was born in Tokyo, but he soon moved with his family to Takarazuka, where, as documented in all biographies on the artist or in any good book on the history of Japanese comics (Schodt 1983; Piovan 1996; McCarthy 2013), he frequently saw Takarazuka revue shows with his mother and met some actresses. The visual and content-related impact of the aesthetics of this form of theatre on the young Tezuka would later produce an effect on several features of the artist's work and on the settings, character design, and plotlines of some of his manga stories. One in particular is in deep resonance with the aesthetics of the Takarazuka revue, *Ribbon no kishi* ("The knight with the ribbon", 1953), a story that is considered a template for modern Japanese comics for girls, or shōjo manga. Elements such as the characters' clothes, their wide eyes and marked eyelash, the graceful body shapes, the plot, all bear resemblances with the overall aesthetic and thematic mood of many Takarazuka revue shows. If we add that the aesthetics and visual motifs of many shōjo manga since the 1970s are in accord with the kawaii, as well as with the standards established by Tezuka via the influence on him of the Takarazuka revue, we cannot avoid acknowledging this visual and thematic circularity.

Therefore, the kawaii is not to be merely seen as a subculture, but rather as an integrated and fundamental part of Japanese general and popular/massified culture. A hyper-consumerist and technologically developed society such as the Japanese one appears as needing the resources (also) of a kawaii culture to promote consumption and the development of that consumerist system. This culture of kawaii is integrated in Japanese society. It has contributed to the birth and growth of some of those highly profitable creative industries that have allowed the flourishing of a wealthy society which has known wealth more than any other since the 1970s (Ōmae 2001); so much so that kawaii things and commodified fictional characters, such as aforementioned Hello Kitty, have been discussed in relation to their presence in international newspaper headlines and as catalysts for the boosting of certain fields of Japan's creative industries and overall appeal (Yano 2009).[2]

On the other hand, and clearly, the kawaii is not a concept, in the Japanese debate, far from criticism and analysis. Since the 1990s, kawaii-themed trends and the very usage of the word in the youth languages have been discussed and investigated by Japanese intellectuals and academics, among whom Kazuma Yamane (1993); Sōichi Masubuchi (1994); Eiji Ōtsuka (1997); Reiko Koga (2006); Inuhiko Yomota (2006); Takamasa Sakurai (2009); Shinji Miyadai (2010), and others. Along with the differences in perspective among the mentioned scholars, a common trait in all their approaches to the topic is that the kawaii (as a word, concept, set of trends) is theorised as a relevant element of Japanese culture in the 20th and 21st centuries.

2.1. Kawaii as a Pattern Crossing Contemporary Youth Culture

I touched upon the fact that kawaii things, characters, and commodities—as a peculiarity of Japanese contemporary culture—move across mass media, impulse goods, creative industries, and juvenile tendencies. The basic concept, visual styles, and merchandise related to an often-mentioned kawaii culture are extremely composite. While this article is outlining the general features of this cultural phenomenon in Japan, it also focuses on whether and how the notion of kawaii's styles and commodities found a place in Europe, with some particular references to Italy and France.

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[2] The same author has later on published a monograph on the birth and commercialisation of the Hello Kitty intellectual property in Japan and its success the United States (Yano 2013). Yano's book is a rich anthropological and mediological study of the franchise's history and its impact on wide consumer audiences. It focuses on the US context, that is, on a specific national environment, and it does it thoroughly. However, the way the analysis is conducted may at times lead the non-Japanese and non-American readers to wrongly assume that discussing the impact of this (or any other) Japanese pop-cultural phenomenon in the United States holds a universal validity in terms of cultural analysis of the consumer cultures.

These two countries, in fact, have been for the last forty years the key markets in the West (there included the Americas) for a commodified Japanese contemporary culture for youths, namely Japanese comics (generally called manga, that is, precisely, "comics" in Japanese) and commercial animation (or, as they are often shortened in Japanese, anime, a buzzword that is highly widespread in foreign languages too to designate Japanese commercial animation). The impact of kawaii styles onto growing fringes of European youth cultures is, although indeed limited, multidimensional: it has involved spontaneous drawings among children, a certain amateur and professional comics production, amateur and commercial animation, a multi-faceted merchandising, toys, street art, and fashion design (Pellitteri 2002, 2018; Koma 2013a, 2013b, 2014).

In a book on the impact of Japanese visual cultures in western contexts (Pellitteri [2008] 2010), I identified three main thematic and aesthetic patterns in the ways entertainment forms such as manga and anime arrived and were perceived in Europe. I called one of them "the model of the Infant". The word infant comes from the Latin *infans, infantis*, i.e., someone (a newborn) unable to speak. The infant is here intended in a symbolic fashion, as the typical kawaii puppet, which resembles a cute puppy; or the technological object requiring constant attention, such as aforementioned Tamagotchi, an electric creature asking for non-stop care; or Hello Kitty, so helpless that it is drawn without the mouth in order to make it look more infantile, exteriorly as well as etymologically; and Pikachū, the well-known little Pokémon rodent that is only able to say the syllables of its name, repeating "pika-pika-pika-chu" as in a litany. It is not a coincidence that the prototype and, still today, the apotheosis of a kawaii style in the world of imaginary characters of consumption stemming from Japanese companies is indeed Hello Kitty, which became a multimedia star since the early 1980s and is loved today across the wealthy world and increasingly appreciated and present in developing countries in East/Southeast Asia and the Middle East. The worldwide licensing rights of Hello Kitty are since 1976 a property of the Japanese company Sanrio; the character has become globally famous as an emblem of the kawaii. Besides Hello Kitty, Sanrio has conceived a microcosm of similar characters: Badtz-Maru, Kerokeroppi, Airu no Pekkle, My Melody, Pochacco, Pudding, and others. The merchandise of Hello Kitty represents a prodrome of what later has happened with the Pokémon. Hello Kitty integrates all the characteristics of a kawaii object: it (or "she") is small, defenseless, in simple pastel colors, and its looks have the proportions of a newborn—large head, small body. In short, it is designed to inspire tenderness and affection.

Italian scholar Cristiano Martorella, pointing out that no mouth is ever drawn on Hello Kitty and that its face is basically expressionless, argues that children can

> project their emotions [on the kawaii-style characters and dolls] [. . .] much more easily. If the child is sad, it sees Hello Kitty grow sad, if he/she is happy, it sees the character smile. This is the power of imagination, and it is much stronger with simpler and more essential graphical representations. After all, it was Italo Calvino who proposed lightness, rapidity, visibility, multiplicity as virtues of the new millennium [. . .]. And this kind of design corresponds to such demands. (Martorella 2002, pp. 172–73; the reference is to Calvino 1993)

This is a phenomenon similar to the "Kulešov effect". Described by Alfred Hitchcock in his conversations with François Truffaut (Truffaut 1967), the Kulešov effect was the result of an experiment on cinema editing. It consisted of showing a close-up of actor Ivan Mosjoukin followed by the image of a dead newborn: at that point, the observer would see some compassion on the face of Mosjoukin. Then the image of the child was replaced with that of a dish of food and now the observer would perceive an expression of appetite on the face of the actor. Finally, when the image of the food was replaced with that of an attractive woman, the observer would interpret the face of Mosjoukin as showing some sexual desire. In what I would like to define the "Hello Kitty effect", the iconographic suggestions—which should reveal the feelings of the expressionless character to the observer—are replaced with the state of mind of the observing child, who reads on the impassive face of the kitten feelings defined according to the child itself's current humor. As Yukio Fujimi concludes (Fujimi 1998, pp. 18–20)—following the theory of psychologist Donald W. Winnicott (1971)—figures such as the

Pokémon or Hello Kitty are visible as "transitional objects", points of contact between the external world and one's own self, a way to make concrete reality interact with one's own imagination. In that, it appears that we move further from a more institutional genealogy according to which the psychological processes embedded in the relationship with a kawaii character/object are related to the theorisation scientist Konrad Lorenz had established between neotenia and instinctive affection in his classic *Kindchenschema* (Lorenz 1942, as also reported in Lieber Milo and Nittono 2017). To this end, it has been empirically proven that feelings and attraction for objects deemed as kawaii in style are socially driven—guided by positive, approach-motivated feelings—rather than purely psychologically driven (Nittono 2016, p. 89 ff.; Kringelbach et al. 2016). The transitionality of kawaii-styled products is also connected to the sentiment of nostalgia for the toys of childhood, which in many cases have round shapes, soft colors, and are generically associated with a sentiment of sweetness and tenderness (Yomota 2006; Dale et al. 2017). It has to be added, however, that analyses on nostalgia and nostalgic practices among adults remembering "Japanese things" of their childhood (robot toys, dolls, stationery, etc.) can be—and it has been—extended far beyond the realm of kawaii styles (Pellitteri 1999, 2018).

Sociologist Nobuyoshi Kurita believes that the kawaii will determine "the future of Japan", even suggesting that the prosperity or decline of the country may depend on how the creative industry of kawaii objects, narratives, and visual media will look in the near future (ref. in Kageyama 2006). Consumerism in Japan, as I argued above, is extremely distinctive, not only for the quantity of goods and commodities purchased and consumed, but also for the types of products and goods on the market and for the fetishised relationship that Japanese consumers often create with these products. According to Jean Baudrillard, consumption is not a passive mode of satisfaction of needs, a way "of appropriation to oppose against the production process in order to balance naïve patterns of behavior and alienation" (Baudrillard 1968; It. trans. 2004, p. 249); it is "an active mode of relationship not only with the objects but with a community and the world" (ibid.) and an activity "of systematic manipulation of signs" (ibid., p. 250). What is consumed is not so much the object, but rather an idea: what might be called the simulation of a relationship between the object and its owner. Baudrillard argues that consumption is a "total idealist practice" (ibid., p. 254) in which the purchase and in-depth use of the object mean that "a will to live" (ibid.) is hidden in the connection with the subject that is, in turn, also symbolically consumed. The objects, finally, multiply indefinitely because they fill "every moment [with] an absent reality. Consumption [. . .] is based on a lack" (ibid., p. 255).

One of the reasons for the overconsumption of kawaii-themed merchandise would then be the perception of a lack. Not of physical objects but of personal relationships. When they are scarce, the result is a psychologically-induced retreat into objects that in various ways suggest friendly, emotional, supportive relationships, and that are reminiscent of childhood: Hiroto Murasawa, professor at Ōsaka Shōin Women's University, argues that kawaii styles and the acquisition of objects in those styles are symptoms of the fact that those who buy them "do not want to grow up" in their attitude, deemed as "not self-assertive" (ref. in Kageyama 2006). It does not seem a coincidence that many adults and youths—not only children, not only in Japan—are very close to things such as the Tamagotchi (as argued in Allison 2006) and that the video games and toys related to Pokémon and similar franchises sold/sell so well, being based on a plotline in which the monster trainer cultivates a relationship of affection and love with these fictional creatures.

The theory of the lacking space, suggested by media scholar Henry Jenkins regarding the watchers of TV series such as *Star Trek* and then videogamers, could somehow also be tailored to this context. Jenkins (Jenkins 1992; Cassell and Jenkins 1998, pp. 263, 278–79), sensitive to the ideas of Michel De Certeau (1984), links the passion of US-American fans for both television adventure and science-fiction series, and for video games, and the practices of rewriting and sharing places, opinions,

and emotions, to a lack of physical space in the lifestyle of many youths in big cities. Space, missing in physical reality, is replaced by an imaginary space shared with other fans.[3]

2.2. An Important Distinction in Kawaii Aesthetics: Character and Kyara

Among the many features of manga/anime aesthetics (which strongly inform the kawaii and are by it also mutually nourished), one is particularly cogent in the discourse on kawaii culture and in its declinations and applications in the non-Japanese contexts: the stylised or naturalist morphologies of characters, in connection to the narrative scope of the stories in which they star, the graphic expressiveness, and the marketing strategies of products based on them. This framework is not at all new in Japan or in the West, but its recent developments originate from a debate between two manga scholars, Gō Itō (in Itō 2005) and Eiji Ōtsuka (in Ōtsuka and Ōsawa 2005). The theoretical event prior to this debate is a distinction that has been in place for a while in the field of Japanese scholarship on manga, which is the one between *character* and *chara* (contraction of the former) or, considering the Japanese transliteration, *kyara*. The matter had already been discussed in the 1990s by prominent manga scholar Tomofusa Kure. In some of his works, Kure emphasized the concept of *kyara ga tatte iru*: of a story "with well-defined characters"; that is, in the words of Kure himself, of a narrative "where the heroes are the most important thing" (Kure 1999, p. 31).

The kyara is, in the Japanese context, a type of very stylised character, often in animal form, an iconic figure with a recognisable name that lends itself to the most varied kinds of marketing: by its visual design as well as the narratives it conveys, kyara can be hugely successful in the creative industries that commodify heroes and figures of manga or anime. In fact, many manga's main characters, and even today most of the best-known ones, belong to this category. They are allegedly superficial their contents, and, often, they sport kawaii styles. On the other hand, the character is a figure which, since the manga stories of the postwar period by aforementioned Osamu Tezuka, has acquired a status going beyond that of the kyara, which is an icon with the function of supporting a comic episode or an action story. The character has risen to become a dramaturgical persona with subtler and subtler facets, in accordance with the evolution of the manga medium's complexities. From Tezuka on, in fact, manga characters have gained increasing substance, particularly in "story manga"—serialised manga with interconnected episodes, a format introduced in Japan by Tezuka—and in *gekiga*, dramatic-themed manga with rawer styles of drawing.

Itō's book organizes most of its reasoning on this alleged dichotomy between kyara and character: between icons devoted to commercial exploitation and characters with narrative "substance". The Japanese critic seems to complain about this opposition, commenting that today manga are dominated by the market power of the kyara, to the detriment of characters and stories as Tezuka had conceived them. For his part, Ōtsuka notes that criticising the kyara means attacking the same creative and commercial process that made the US-American creative industries promote to the wider public iconic characters such as Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck, which after all are nothing other than kyara, according to the meaning given here. A related topic, which, however, will not be discussed here, is in the work of French cultural anthropologist Clothilde Sabre (2014), who analyses the development and role of so-called *yuru-kyara* in Japan-located tourism: that is, the kawaii-styled mascots designed to promote locations, towns, or companies. There, kyara are almost constantly deprived of any narrative content and only exist in the context of tourism promotion.

It appears that, as underlined by sociologist Kiyomitsu Yui (2006), according to Itō there is a transformation going on from Tezuka's characters to current kyara, in a process of narrative simplification and commercial sophistication, whereas originally the process put at work by Tezuka

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[3] In a similar fashion, it is possible to connect the success of kawaii- and sd-styles (sd: super-deformed), gadgets, games, ornaments, and mobile phones among many Japanese and non-Japanese to deficient and instinctively longed-for emotional relationships.

had often been the opposite one, with an evolution from kyara to character. Moreover, according to Itō, character and kyara often overlap on each other to form the same narrative figure. To sum up, kyara is a kind of root from which the creator can then develop the elements of the character. Hiroki Azuma has a similar opinion (Azuma 2001) and analyses the kyara from a postmodernist viewpoint, framing it as able to "migrate" from one work to another among the media, unlike characters, which are seen as unable to "escape" from the medium for which they were originally created.

Whereas it is true that Tezuka created his characters adopting various rules of the Disney design, it is also true that, as psychologist Tamaki Saitō suggests (Saitō 2000, pp. 18–22), the rhetorical processes at work in Disney characters—and in other similar animals of US-American animated cartoons—and in the Japanese ones are different. Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck work as metaphors, and kyara such as Doraemon and the Pokémons work as metonymies. The first rhetorical figure is based on shared abstract similarity, the second on an abstract contiguity. It is for this reason that Warner Bros' Sylvester the Cat can act in adventures where humans are absent, while in their narrations Doraemon and Pikachū "serve" human characters or, as with Hello Kitty, exist outside of a human-referred narrative context (ibid.). Yui and Itō then note that the Tezukian heroes, represented in iconic style, i.e., as kyara, are involved in stories where their substance is not abstract but solid, vulnerable and, at times, mortal. In addition, this is in clear contrast with the actual physiognomy of kyara, which are figures where the concept of mortality is usually not contemplated. Kyara's physical bodies are usually dehumanised and/or superhumanised, abstract and inanimate (Inoue 2007, pp. 161–85). According to Ōtsuka, the mortal substance of the postwar Japanese kyara is due to the all-Japanese arisen born from the destruction caused by the atomic bombs. It is also true that, from the 1970s, the mortality of post-Tezukian kyara has disappeared: characters such as Doraemon, Qtaro, Arale, Hello Kitty, and Hamtarō, which clearly belong to the kawaii kingdom, have become dolls of carefree fruition and great economic potentiality. The hypothesis that can be here proposed, based on Ōtsuka's theory, is that the memory of the corporeity offended in the armed conflict is bypassed by more consumerist tendencies, in line with the current times and with the Japanese's desire to leave the war behind and fully plunge into the postmodernity. However, it is a postmodernity in the broadest sense, frantic and oblivious: because if it were true that, as Anthony Giddens (1990) posits, postmodernity is a radicalised modernity that ponders on itself, then the theme of self-reflection would not seem to be present in the kawaii and in kyara, the way it is contemplated in other genres, especially science-fiction. Regardless, in the commercial world, the kawaii aesthetical category was born from a strategic desertion of problematic content and the exasperation of the visual and emotional traits connected to the concept of kyara.

Let me, however, present a criticism or, if you will, a corollary to this theory of immortality of the body of kawaii-styled kyara that should be considered when thinking of cute characters. Figures sporting kawaii traits have not always been "light". This, not only in Tezuka's work but in general in much animated production for children, and for decades.

Most critics of the kawaii have, in fact, neglected to add or they failed to realise, in their studies on kawaii kyara presented in anime series, that being a kyara does not necessarily mean to be an immortal and/or a psychologically mono-dimensional character. This bias is probably due to the fact that so many critics—especially the non-Japanese ones—do not know in depth the vast and diverse production of the anime industry, especially that of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. In those decades, plenty of animation studios and several anime-makers introduced in the casts of many series figures that corresponded to a certain, or a pronounced, kawaisa in the visual representation, but were fully tridimensional characters, both in psychological terms and in their narrational development. A paradigmatic example is Joli-cœur from *Rittai anime: ie naki ko* ("3D anime: boy without a home" by Osamu Dezaki, 52 eps, TMs, 1978), a visually fascinating and profoundly educational transposition from the 1878 novel *Sans famille* by French novelist Hector Malot. Joli-cœur is a funny and lively little monkey, part of a band of itinerant street artists formed by an old tenor singer and musician, an orphan boy, three dogs, and the monkey himself. Joli-cœur is supposed to be a comic relief in a mainly dramatic social novel for the younger, and in most cases he is, with his funny behavior and

facial expressions; and his visual design corresponds, overall, to styles that can be assessed as kawaii. However, at a certain point in the story Joli-cœur falls sick (a strong fever due to staying too long exposed to winter cold) and dies, leaving his friends, as well as the series' audience, in despair. The storytelling of these events is tragic and realistic, and totally contradicts the idea, circulating in much scholarship since the Itō/Ōtsuka debate, that kawaii kyara's body is not concerned with mortality any longer. Joli-cœur is a tridimensional figure, has a story, a psychology and a narrational depth, and a mortal body. Many more examples of psychological complexity would be possible, such as the dog Spank and the cat Torakichi from *Ohayo! Spank* ("Hello, Spank!", from Shun'ichi Yukimuro and Shizue Takanashi's manga; by Shigetsugu Yoshida, 63 eps, TMs, 1981). (On *Ie naki ko* and *Spank* cf. Pellitteri 2018, pp. 838–41, 927–29).

That said: as stated at the beginning of this set of theoretical contextualisations, the understanding of the kawaii in Europe cannot be separated from a framing of it in broader terms. In fact, the kawaii in Europe has assumed different aspects than it had and has in Japan. In Japan, the kawaii is, as we have seen, a well-established part of contemporary culture and aesthetics and it is present, in more specific ways, as one of the features of youth subcultures such as, for example, the Gothic Lolita (Nguyen 2016) and others. However, in the main European national markets for manga and anime, the kawaii styles do not appear to be dominant/relevant aesthetics within the field of Japanese pop cultures. There are, nonetheless, some specific subfields of what has sometimes been called "J-culture" (Richter 2008) in which we can observe features of the kawaii.

3. A Blending between the Kawaii and Manga Aesthetics in European Contexts

In the late 1970s and in the 1980s, especially in Italy, Spain, and France, the first great arrival of Japanese animated TV series occurred in Europe, accompanied by a wide displaying of collateral publications: illustrated books, original and bootleg manga pocket albums, toys and gadgets, licensed products, and goods of all sorts. It was the so-called first anime boom in Europe (Pellitteri 2014) and it established the first step of a Japanese pop culture for youths in the Old Continent.

In those years the imagination and imagery of millions of West-European kids changed. The influence of hundreds of Japanese anime series on television, new anime-inspired toys in the households, illustrated books with anime characters, and soon afterwards manga in kids' magazines, created a new sensibility and taste for more than one generation of children. These kids would later become teenagers and young adults and would buy, in the 1990s and 2000s, tons of translated manga during the second step of this expansion, when not only European publishers and TV networks asked for manga and anime as in the previous phase, but now also Japanese companies began to strongly promote the exportation. British anthropologist Sharon Kinsella, in an early 1997 article, spoke of a "Japanisation of European youth". This definition, although a little exaggerated, is not far from truth if we focus our attention onto those fans of J-culture whose cultural taste and personal expressions in terms of lifestyle, in relation to Japanese pop cultures, fall into that composite category named *mangaesque*, by which German scholar Jaqueline Berndt (2007a, 2007b, 2012, 2013) not only indicates a set of styles and attitudes related to manga as literary and graphic texts but also, and above all, a corpus of production and distribution attitudes of cultural products that have an impact on the consumer's and prosumer's cultures. Today many items, products, social- and community practices could be defined mangaesque, and this converges with the notion of *trans-acculturation* (as introduced and defined in Pellitteri [2008] 2010): an array of Japanese literary and entertainment forms and products that have in recent years become the center around which communities of youths but also of former youths assemble. In other words, I would label this process a "mangaisation" of certain intermediality-based processes which involve production and consumption of cultural artefacts, regardless of their link to the world of manga intended as narratives and products for the publishing market.

Connected to this phenomenon, there is a factor that we can see as in correlation with the adoption and success of kawaii-like products and mangaesque styles among European youths: a change in the supply strategies of Japanese anime series in European television channels in the transition between

the late 1980s, in the 1990s, and in the following decade. This change mainly interested the genres of anime series broadcast. As a natural consequence, it produced a shift in the composition of the audience. In Italy and France mainly, and in the same years, to various degrees, in other countries, in the 1980s strong concerns among adults, educators, politicians, about the alienness of Japanese cartoons led many television stations to reduce or stop the broadcasting of anime with adventurous or allegedly violent content, e.g., giant robots, science fiction, adventure at large. The anime series that were left untouched and those whose rights were purchased with more conviction from that phase on, all belonged to genres where protagonists were young females: *majokko* (teenage witches), romance, and transpositions from European-American novels for girls.

This change constitutes a process that I summarise under the label "from cool to kawaii": from adventures based on a certain degree of action and addressed to an audience of kids without distinction of gender, to series devoted to an audience of girls only. This transition was not only aesthetic and related to genres, but also involved music: the anime songs associated to these series for girls (both the original Japanese versions and the ones produced for the local broadcastings) had very different atmospheres and melodies, started to be sung by female artists only, and contributed to a stereotypical genderification of the perception of televised anime as a whole. The result of this composite dynamic led, subsequently, to what I here argue to have been a "feminisation" of the reputation of Japanese anime due to the genres released on television and in theatres.[4] I also need to specify, however, that the words "cool" and "kawaii" are not widely used in Italy or France. As for cool: in these two countries the usage of English words is, in the standard language, limited; in the Italian context, the local idiom is very rich and nuanced, and English is limited to a few established words, such as *hobby* or *okay*, or terms related to digital technology (*computer*, *mouse*, *browser*); in French society and cultural establishment, English is convincingly disregarded at all levels of the population. As for kawaii: it is used by the most committed fans and practitioners of manga, anime, cosplay, and Japanese pop-cultural commodities and narratives in general, but it has not entered the common language, despite having been recently included in some dictionaries.

The implications in the European scene of this composite process have become clear since the late 1990s and more strongly since the early 2000s: (1) a majority of anime for girls was observed to be airing on television; (2) the release in theatres of Japanese animation films almost exclusively by the Ghibli studio and the absence in the cinemas of virtually any anime film related to science fiction or adventure; (3) the rise of a completely new audience for comics: a female readership, focusing on a suddenly enormous supply of manga for girls and young women.

The last element to be outlined is that communities of elder fans, who had lived the first phases of anime and manga's success in their own countries and now are often part of globalised communities, still see animation, comics, toys and gadgets coming from Japan as something deeply, typically, absolutely Japanese; especially in Italy, the one country in which the Japanese origin of anime was never hidden and, on the contrary, overtly presented as coming from Japan (a similar phenomenon, however less generalised and therefore less impactful, occurred in France and Spain as well); whereas, now, many among the younger members of such communities can be defined "J-culture natives" and—despite perfectly knowing that manga, anime and the like do come from Japan—do

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4   This phenomenon, if you let me in this footnote a little more complete and thorough, was made of two distinct processes that mutually intertwined. I just called the first "from cool to kawaii". The second process that was at play in those years can be called "from universal to particular". When anime first arrived in Italian, French, Spanish television stations in the late 1970s and over the course of the 1980s, the themes and meanings delivered by those series (originally made in Japan in the 1960s–70s–80s) were very diverse, coming from directors and animators who were kids or adults during WWII, strongly influenced by their own life's experiences and cultural taste (such as European and US-American cinema and music), and addressed to a very broad audience of children and teenagers. Kids and girls, in Italy and France especiallywere able to enjoy all those kinds of anime series with no gender divide (unlike it occurred in Japan), and the supply itself of the anime series that aired in those years spanned through a stunning variety of genres. However, this second process is not under analysis here. For more information and insight on it, cf. (Pellitteri [2008] 2010; Pellitteri and Giacomantonio 2016; Pellitteri 2018).

not necessarily see J-culture's products and stylistic features as appealing as their elder fellow fans do because of their Japanese origin, or in some cases they do not qualify such items, styles and narratives as Japanese at all. In other words, this culture—however it is today widely shared that Japanese anime and manga are Japanese—is not always perceived by young fans as a foreign culture, but rather as their own culture, stratified, or literally molten, with European ways of expression. In addition, this is one of the expected effects of cultural globalisation: not just the notion of glocal—that is, the local dimension absorbing and melting with the inter- and transnational ones (Robertson 1995)—but the very fact that a culture that once was foreign now becomes the native culture of these new fans, and they do not even realise that this process has taken place, for they are young and currently do not care much of what happened before their time.

3.1. Key Aspects of Kawaiisation/Mangaisation in Italy and France

In the following subsections I will tackle, by proposing a short account of them, the outcomes of what was described above and in which we could observe, among other elements, also kawaii features since the late 1970s and with more documentation from the 1980s and 1990s.

The first outcome is a widespread practice among children, kids, and teenagers: that of emulating or reproducing—in their private graphic production at home or at school—characters, features, and styles of famous Japanese animation series broadcast daily or weekly on national or local television channels. This phenomenon has been rarely recorded in academic scholarship, hence it is difficult to offer a precise account of it; nevertheless, direct observation along the years and research by fellow scholars and myself show some evidence of a process that has been neglected despite being before our eyes for decades. The other outcome is the use of stylistic and linguistic elements taken from manga and anime by French and Italian comics artists, in the domains of both professional and amateur production. Such use has been and is in some cases deliberate and in other rather instinctive; sometimes overtly declared, other times more nuanced.

In all these cases, it must be noted that the kawaii or kawaii-like features are only a part (in many cases indeed secondary) of a set of inspirations from manga and anime. In my account, moreover, I will take into consideration these two kinds of production without distinction between drawings by male and drawings by female subjects; but it has been generally observed that the production of kawaii-like drawings (faces and face details like eyes and noses, objects, sceneries, etc.) pertains more to female than male drawers.

3.1.1. Kids Drawing Anime-Like Characters and Things

Alongside the growing commercial "colonisation" by Japanese pop-cultural products, something has happened and is still happening in western autochthonous production, and in Italy and France in particular. Until recently few observers, along the years, seemed to have realised that two generations of children and then former children, since the late 1970s, in their own drawing practices had begun to change their ways of graphic production, to increasingly often reproduce somatic types and conventions of Japanese animation. Their drawings dramatically turned towards figurative styles that tended to emulate anime and manga's images, items, and characters.

Moreover, in the 1990s and 2000s some of those former children would become either amateur or professional comics creators and their drawing styles would be, consciously or not, influenced by manga and anime: settings, division of the pages in panels and their dimensions and shapes, visual codes, body and face morphology of the heroes, even the ways narratives were composed, or the characters' psychologies, and so forth. This fact had been already noted, thirty years ago, by psychologists Bertolini and Manini [1988] (1993). In their book, they took note of some brand-new practices of children's graphic production influenced by the consumption of those successful shows, in a complementarity between television viewing and artistic practices:

figures of robots, flying machines, chiseled [mechanical] men with horns appeared in children's graphic productions at the same time as, and after, the television broadcasting and the production of space-themed comics and cartoons. (Bertolini and Manini [1988] 1993; rev. ed. 1993, p. 90. Translated from Italian)

The scarce attention paid to such indications, even by those very psychologists who analyse children's artistic production, can be seen in much research: for instance, a study titled *Il disegno dei bambini* ("Children's drawing practices", Cannoni 2003) shows a large number of drawings clearly based on the faces and big eyes of anime and manga characters, but does not offer any comment on it or, perhaps, without even realising it. However, other contributions take note of these trends, such as *Un ponte d'immagini* ("A bridge made of images") by art therapists Maria Grazia Cocconi and Loretta Salzillo (Cocconi and Salzillo 2001), as well as other works focusing, to different extents, on the relationship of anime and manga with the drawings of little boys and girls and their multilayered imagination/imagery (Pellitteri 1999, 2018; Pellitteri [2008] 2010; Filippi and Di Tullio 2002).

The consequences of this phenomenon at the expressi Pellitteri e and cognitive levels to date are still to be analysed. In the doodles of children accustomed to television animation and therefore, inevitably, to anime, eyes, faces, bodies, objects, spaceships, and symbols such as stars, flowers, and beads of sweat on the faces of the characters tend to imitate the expressive codes of the Japanese shows. In the workshops on comics and animation cinema I have conducted with Italian children and teenagers in schools and libraries (Palermo, Rome, Bolzano, Brixen, 2000–2016), I have seen with surprising consistency how boys and—even more frequently—girls draw faces and bodies in a way that is similar to or even virtually the same as manga characters, very often in an SD/kawaii version. The often-syncretic traits of anime, in which graphics and themes taken from both Japanese and Euro-American traditions coexist, extended so deeply into the minds of the young viewers as to soon influence their graphic habits, in so yielding a partial mangaisation of their drawing strategies.

The most evident traits of kawaisa in the observed drawings can be found in the shapes of the faces and in the size ratio (about 1:1 or 1:2) between the head and the body of the human and animal figures; in the particularly big dimensions of the eyes and small size of the nose; in the choice of the subjects to draw since the 1980s (from Yōichi Kotabe's design for Zuiyo Eizō's 52 episode-long *Alps no shōjo Heidi* animated series directed by Isao Takahata in 1974 to Sanrio's Hello Kitty and similar characters, to the more recent Pokémon and others); and in the colour choices, systematically inclined towards white as well as light, pastel, and subtle tonalities of pink, green, yellow, blue.

3.1.2. Glocal Drifts: Euromanga and Manga-Flavoured Comics

The other phenomenon of interest tackled here is a fusion between the above-mentioned procedures of spontaneous artwork creation and the dynamics of semi-professional publishing output containing comics that follow the canons of Japanese manga. This kind of productions comes mostly by amateurs, linked to fandom communities. Such productions represent an effect of the cultural process that has weighed on the new generations' modalities of artistic expression. This familiarity to manga occurs in many settings. Fanzines, homo-erotic-themed manga created by women and intended for a niche female audience (Sabucco 2000), and amateur artists who at comics-conventions take little writing-desks here and there and exhibit, sell, or give for free, their manga-like comics. This is the burgeoning activity as observed in events such as *Japan Expo* in Paris and *Lucca Comics and Games* in Lucca since the mid-1990s.

Nevertheless, besides the above-mentioned phenomena there are three specific modalities with which that trend, called Euromanga (Cravotta 2007), has occurred in the world of professional production. The first, the coarsest but with a deep significance, is the one that in the 1990s was named in Italy—with a bit of scorn—"spaghetti-manga": comics made by Italians—and the discourse is easily extended to France—where manga-like plot lines were melded with a character cast and visual clichés based on mangaesque design (either in the characters' figures or the panels' design). This trend, however, did not last. Manga, in Italy and France, had conquered the aesthetic taste of

many readers and of several comics artists much more deeply than in other countries. In addition, in the two countries Japanese influences have produced, in professional comics, two more modalities for Euromanga. On one side, the middling of styles recalling manga in *fumetti-* and *bande dessinée* (or BD) series of big publishers such as Bonelli, Disney Italia, Dargaud, Soleil. On the other side, the self-aware and artistically driven use of both visual and narrative manga's suggestions and atmospheres from creators peripheral to the big publishers' industrial production and favoured by the reliance of some small and medium publishing houses. As for what France is concerned, among the most interesting creators of BD active in the field of Euromanga there are comics-makers whose works have appeared in the mangaesque magazines of Les Humanoïdes Associés, among whom Lord Shion, Shupak, Kalon, Karos, Mika, Liliàn, Ueza, Andrea Iovinelli, Massimo Dall'Oglio.

On the other side there are creators informed by more sophisticated poetics and who are experiencing a process of progressive ripening, such as (in Italy) Andrea Accardi, Giovanni Mattioli, Davide Toffolo, Vanna Vinci, or (in France) David B., Mathieu Blanchin, Frédéric Boilet, Nicolas de Crécy, Étienne Davodeau, Emmanuel Guibert, Fabrice Neaud, Bastien Vivès. They are creators of works that are recognisably European in the settings, narrative and graphical techniques, literary quality, and issues tackled. However, they do not give up a participation in Japanese imagery. This is evident in some of the visual and narrative rhetorics.

In Italy, the main magazines and publishing houses that have hosted the works of the aforementioned Italian creators were *Fandango*, *Mondo Naïf*, *Scuola di Fumetto*, and Kappa Edizioni (now KappaLab). In France, the abovementioned artists have been publishing for many of the big mainstream publishers (Dargaud, Soleil, Casterman, etc.) but also for the main "independent" French BD publisher, aforementioned Les Humanoïdes Associés (*Shogun Mag*, *Shogun Shonen*, *Shogun Seinen*, *Shogun Life*). It must be noted, however, that the kawaii elements are, in these works, quite sporadic and peripheral even in the series written and drawn by female authors. The general trend of these Euromanga travels in fact on a double track: on the one hand, there is the attempt to follow the patterns of the Japanese manga series for young adult and adult readers (where kawaii features are seldom), and on the other hand these comics creators, being European, display a fusion of narrative and stylistic elements taken from Japanese manga with their local tradition in terms of drawing styles and settings. This has also happened recently, in 2014, with a book that collects short stories by sixteen French young comics artists deeply fond of Japan (Monard 2014). Named *Kokekokkô*, the book displays a wide range of styles which only slightly mention or use kawaii features. There is, however, in the graphic mood of this publication as a whole, a clear reference to kawaisa and to the same attention shared in Japan for everything that is generally deemed cute.

All this supports the notion of a transversality in the reception of Japanese pop-cultural forms in these two countries, not only in the perception by young audiences but, most interestingly, in autochthonous cultural production, which in recent times has reached the domain of TV animated series designed in Italy or France and yet intended for a globalised market. The commercial success of comics/animation series such as *W.I.T.C.H.* and *Winx Club* are the most telling cases. In addition, it is here that we can recognise a more visible presence of kawaii aesthetics, blended with features of European comics and American and Japanese commercial animation for children and teenagers.

3.1.3. *W.I.T.C.H.*, *Winx Club*, *Sky Doll*, and Transcreolisation: Bites of Kawaii

There is no need here to retrace the media career of *W.I.T.C.H.*, *Winx Club* and *Sky Doll*, Italian comics series successfully published in France as well. *Sky Doll*, in particular, was first published directly for the French market and only afterwards in Italy and other countries, among which the United States. Created by artists Alessandro Barbucci and Barbara Canepa, this science-fiction and fantasy series displays a graphic style that overtly merges Disney-like design, Japanese manga features, and a mix of "cool-kawaii" (as framed in Botz-Bornstein 2011) visualisations and motifs (on this topic cf. Pellitteri 2009). *W.I.T.C.H.*, *Winx Club* and *Sky Doll* are the major emblems of how in Europe, during

the 2000s, processes of aesthetic and commercial hybridisation in the sector of characters for the very young have been carried out.

The first two series are based on five witches/fairies, each with her identifying marks, personality, colour and/or totemic elements, style of clothing, and special powers; in both series, sequences of battle against the forces of evil or rivals of various types are alternated with sentimental moments and scenes of daily life. The ludic-narrative and psychological model is the same as in the Japanese *Sailor Moon* series (by Naoko Takeuchi, 1991), which in turn incorporated the pattern of a five-member team from some classic science-fiction televised anime series of the 1970s (for instance and above all, Tatsunoko Production's 1972 celebrated series *Kagaku ninjatai Gatchaman*).

While *Sky Doll* is a series for adult connoisseurs, in the case of the other two the merchandise and mediatic power they displayed made them two mass phenomena, which instead of having boys as a target were aimed at girls. The fact that Italy, a somewhat marginal country in the transnational creative industries in relation to contemporary mass- and pop culture for youths, is the source of two composite media-commodities that have won tens of millions of young spectators, fans, consumers around the world (Asia, Europe, the Americas), is stunning. However, it is a little less surprising if we link the graphic-narrative style and themes of both to their sources of influence, namely the anime and manga franchises that for over thirty years have been successful at the mainstream level in Italy and France (and Spain), much more than in any other western country.

Numbers say that *W.I.T.C.H.* and *Winx Club* have been for years to girls what *Pokémon* was to boys in the early 2000s: the first used to sell over 16 million copies of its magazines across the world, the second sported an animated series scheduled in 130 countries with significant ratings. The turnover of the merchandising was hundreds of millions of euros for both franchises (Caprara 2005). These results would have been impossible to achieve if *W.I.T.C.H.* and *Winx Club* had not been blatantly modelled on anime, adding a touch of European (for the former) and American (for the latter) visual appeal. Here we are faced with a case of transcreolisation: the convergence of a dominant aesthetic factor (themes, narrative structure, general morphology of the characters taken from manga and anime) and two side factors (France-inspired comics design and US-inspired fashionability) in a professional milieu treasuring the traditional Italian know-how and a favourable period for certain media trends.

4. Conclusions. Enlarging the Perspective on the Kawaiisation of the Aesthetics of Youths' Commodified Visual Culture in the European Scenario beyond Amateur Manga

Is the kawaii, today, a strong trend in the reinterpretations of J-culture in Europe?

The answer should be, very simply put, "no, it is not". In my observations and study of the multi-faceted J-culture in Europe, I have found that the dominant trends, styles, and themes of Japanese pop cultures as they have been displayed and consumed in Italy and France since the late 1970s are, for the most part, something else. They follow in most cases very different visual and thematic paths, which are translated in graphical and narrative moods *other* than those referring to the kawaii, such as the giant robots and the alien violent invasion of Japanese soil, the cyborgs and technological superheroes, the science-fiction sagas, the sport champions, the young orphans struggling against adversities and searching for their parents or a place in the world, the fighting warriors, etc. In most manga and anime series published in the two countries, the main styles have been different and so has been most of the related merchandise, such as toys, stationery, etc.

Elements of kawaisa, however, are very often present as side traits in many of these dramatic narratives and visual worlds. First of all, in the shape and psychology of some secondary characters (children, little animals, robots), meant by the production studios—in the case of anime series—to add elements of cuteness in narrative contexts otherwise excessively dramatic. In other words, we can see the presence of psychologically monodimensional kyara figures in narrative worlds populated with psychologically tridimensional characters, keeping in mind the kyara/character distinction presented above as well as my remarks on the mortality some kawaii figures can be assigned.

Secondly, we must not forget—and this is the main context in which kawaii features appeared and that made kawaii's initial success in the most receptive European markets—the many anime series devoted to young magical girls, such as *Mahō no tenshi Creamy Mami*[5] and many similar franchises, plus a quite rich set of related merchandising for little girls, whose dominant colours were, easy to imagine, the many shades of pastel pink, gold, and silver. In these series, the roundness of characters and objects, the delicate colours of the cinematography, the plethora of stars, flowers, smooth and curvy visual motifs, all of this is pure kawaii as intended in this context; and we can argue that, during the 1980s and then 1990s, these series were, together with the powerful Hello Kitty merchandising, the primary propeller of the fascination for the kawaii among young girls. By surveying the fashion products addressed to little girls and teenage girls in the 1980s and 1990s, we find brands such as Naj Oleari (Najoleari.com), the famous Italian textile/clothing company, or Poochie, a Mattel property of the 1980s: a cute, white-and-pink female dog, far too overtly based, in its visual features and fore purely commercial purposes, on Hello Kitty.

The long-term effect of these objects and motifs is visible in fashion brands created recently, such as the world-famous TokiDoki by Italian designer Simone Legno (Tokidoki.it), whose products can be seen as a syncretic fusion of kawaii elements directly taken from the 1980s–90s; kawaii in street art (Radosevic 2012); the world of *gashapon* (little, portable plastic gadgets very popular among kids and girls and frequently used as accessories: Daniele 2008); the visual moods of Neo-Pop art works by celebrated artists such as Takashi Murakami (Testa 2010a); the spontaneous organization of young female communities referring to the Japanese "Gyaru" subculture, one of whose fashion codes is the use of kawaii or kawaii-like items and accessories.[6]

I conclude this succint exploration by arguing that, according to what was observed along the years, there is a basic difference in the way kawaii styles have appeared and been performed and consumed on one side in Japan and on the other side in the relevant European markets. Whereas in Japan kawaii motifs, characters, and fashion items are, as stated previously, a part of Japanese culture deeply embedded in the general society, in Europe girls who dress "kawaii", or use products and objects that can be labeled under the kawaii category, usually follow aesthetic and fashion trends that are seen in their general cultural context as something "other" and "weird", far more pronouncedly than it happens in Japan. It is the case, among others, of the Gothic Lolita fashion, which has gained in Italy, France, and Germany (and also among practitioners from other emerging markets for manga and anime, such as Russia, Hungary, Poland, etc.) the status of a well-defined, all-female subculture whose meanings go beyond the fashionability of the clothes and accessories (Testa 2010b; Koma 2013a, pp. 71–79; Nguyen 2016). To this end, it would be possible to posit that in the world of applications of kawaii styles to daily life, a kind of stigma might be at work, similar to that (in the meaning introduced in Goffman 1963) which was found in the subcultural practices related to the passion for manga and anime in the 1990s (Bouissou 2008; Pellitteri [2008] 2010). Hence, a relevant research topic to explore would be the otherness and the weirdness of kawaii culture as a constellation of niche subcultures in the European contexts: not only the alleged otherness/weirdness of a culture of kawaii and of its practitioners as seen from the outside, but also the possible otherness/weirdness of that culture of kawaii as possibly perceived *within* the context itself of those very practitioners. That is: do European fans (especially young women fond of manga, anime, J-culture) recognise kawaisa and kawaii items as part of their own culture, or are they exotic and exoticised elements wittingly used as

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[5] By Osamu Kobayashi, 52 eps, Pierrot, 1983. In Italy: *L'incantevole Creamy*; in France: *Creamy, merveilleuse Creamy*. Like many anime broadcast in France, *Creamy* too was roughly based on a previous Italian localisation. Many anime series appeared on French television from 1985 to 1992 were in fact broadcast on the LaCinq channel, which was a property of the Italian/Fininvest (currently Mediaset) holding. A similar process occurred in Spain (with Tele Cinco) and Germany (Tele Fünf), all Fininvest/Mediaset properties.

[6] Italian and French examples: Kawaiigazette.com/jfashion-gyaru-style-in-italia-due-chiacchiere-con-honey-pop and http://gyaru-sa-france.skyrock.com. These are micro-communities, formed by very little numbers of young women; that is, they are at present time strictly niche subcultural fringes.

markers of distinction in terms of extravagance? Is the kawaii perceived by its practitioners and among external observers as something *Japanese* or something culturally and culturally/national not defined or "odourless" (as in Iwabuchi 2002)? The alleged indeterminateness of many cultural products made in Japan, indicated as without a marked cultural identity by Iwabuchi, is, moreover, at the center of an articulated debate: cf. (Daliot-Bul 2009; Pellitteri [2008] 2010; Koma 2013b).[7]

To further link this provisional ending of my discourse to the theoretical contextualisation by which I have opened the present essay, I would like to refer again to the concept of "perception of a lack" in Jean Baudrillard. If the practice and use of kawaii items, motifs, attitudes can be intended as a symptom of a lack among young Japanese practitioners, is there some kind of lack in the European practitioners too, and, if there is, the lack of what is it?

A very last observation concerns the expansion of a kawaii culture and related styles in Europe into a context that has not, to my knowledge, been analysed yet and that certainly deserves to be. It is a most interesting process of *transgenerational transmission* of kawaii culture (as part of a broader culture of anime and manga) from young mothers to their little daughters. It has been recorded that in these latest years women in their thirties or early forties who in their childhood and teenage were fond of Japanese animation and manga, and who today, having formed a family, have become mothers of daughters up to eight, ten years old, tend to dress their daughters and provide them with accessories that directly come from their own childhood and youth imagery of the late 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s. Characters and kyara such as Hello Kitty, Doraemon, Candy Candy, Creamy Mami, Sailor Moon, and the whole plethora of female kawaii or kawaii-like heroines of Japanese anime famous in the 1970s–80s–90s are a significant part of the visual legacy of these mothers to their little daughters (Impegnoso 2018). This process has been identified as pertaining to parents who define themselves "Italian otaku". For a survey on this notion and for a discussion on the so-called "European otaku" cf. Pellitteri 2008.

This probably means that—as it happens for any evolving cultural process—also for what concerns this phenomenon, while we try to analyse as much as we can its history and its current situation, we have already found out that there might be in the close future a further development of the cultural parable of the kawaii in inter- and transgenerational terms.

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[7] The concepts of cultural odour and odourless cultural products introduced by Iwabuchi work very well in several domains of Japanese creative industries. They just do not in the field of anime and manga. The acceptance and adoption of the concept of odourless culture in relation to things like manga, anime, and kawaii objects is based on a general laziness by most scholars dealing with this topic. I have noticed that far too many scholars simply embrace (because of a perceptional bias and, I would argue, a lack of further reading and analysis) and accept as granted the idea that in manga and anime—as Iwabuchi posits—the features of Japaneseness are erased, omitted, or downtoned. My explicit criticism to this alignment to the notion of anime/manga as "odourless" is based on the realisation that most scholars who accept this idea are not competent in the languages, aesthetics, and production histories of manga and anime and in the complex but not at all hidden visual codes of these two forms of expression. In fact, plenty of cultural, thematic, morphological, and racial markers are displayed and easily spotted in the visual idiolects of almost all manga series and anime shows produced since the 1960s. For an explanation on why and how it is not possible to adopt the concepts of odourless and other associated conceptual monstrosities such as "racial neutrality" in the visual and cultural analysis of manga and anime, cf. Pellitteri [2008] 2010; and Pellitteri 2018.

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The Anime Connection. Early Euro-Japanese Co-Productions and the *Animesque*: Form, Rhythm, Design

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Abstract: After European audiences had first contact with anime in the late 1970s, animated co-productions between domestic producers and Japanese studios emerged in the early 1980s, playing a lead role in standardizing anime aesthetics and hence contributing to the broader development of anime in Spain and other major European markets. These pioneering co-productions fostered the arrival of Japanese studios to the European broadcasting scene. However, its real impact on the popularization of anime is subject to debate. Appealing to a European audience, these series lacked some of the most recognizable features associated with anime as a larger medium. Nonetheless, in some of these animated productions there was an underlying *animesque* flair in the shape of conventionalized elements, character design, facial expressions, rhythm, camera action and tropes. Neither entirely domestic nor fully Japanese, these hybrid productions set up a 'bridge' between European and American animated visual language and anime mainstream features, thereby shaping the collective idea of what anime is for the first generation of viewers in Spain and Europe.

Keywords: anime; animesque; co-productions

1. Introduction

In the early 1980s the Spanish anime scene was quite different from other major European markets—mostly Italy and France—due to the disparate pace of the liberalization of TV frequencies and the subsequent arrival of several (Japanese) anime productions to those markets. In contrast, Euro-Japanese co-productions gathered momentum, becoming immensely popular among Spanish children's audiences. I believe these early co-productions or hybrid-productions—seeming neither entirely domestic nor fully Japanese—set up a 'bridge' of sorts between European and American animated visual language and mainstream anime features, thereby shaping the collective idea of what anime is for the first generation of viewers in Spain and in Europe. Thus, throughout this paper I will try to highlight the paramount role of Euro-Japanese animated co-productions in the popularization of anime aesthetics and how these pioneering co-productions fostered the arrival of Japanese studios and anime licenses to the European broadcasting scene.

I will not address Euro-Japanese animated co-productions focusing on market and production-related issues; rather, I will approach from a material perspective, leaning on rhythm, movement, cinematography, design and aesthetics. In order to do so, I will mostly rely on animated series from the first half of the 1980s rather than more recent productions. To this end, I will basically structure this paper in three major parts: firstly, I will briefly address when and how co-productions arose in Spain; secondly, I will emphasize the role played by the licensing company and producer BRB International within the Spanish scenario previously described; finally, I will try to highlight some similarities and differences between anime and these Euro-Japanese animated co-productions and address some of those particularities, focusing on some prominent examples that have a stronger 'anime feel'—including several Spanish BRB International and Nippon Animation co-productions.

2. The Rise of Euro-Japanese Animated Co-Productions

When we address the Spanish anime scene within a larger European frame, we should begin in the late 1970s. The anime fever began in Spain with *Mazinger Z*[1] and *Heidi*[2], the dynamic that arose between both animated productions, and what they meant for viewers and anime itself as a fulfilled medium. Despite the first attempts to successfully distribute and commercialize Japanese animation in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was not until *Heidi*'s arrival that anime started to gain the attention of audiences as a standalone medium in Spain. Comprising 52 episodes, *Heidi* was produced by Zuiyo Enterprises, directed by Isao Takahata and casted Hayao Miyazaki as artistic director of the show. Considered the very first of several series produced under the common label *Meisaku* (literal meaning "theater masterpieces"), it was a major success among children and adults alike. However, *Heidi*'s unprecedented success was also shaped by the broadcast of *Mazinger Z* in the following years.

Spain was the first western country in which *Mazinger Z* was broadcast—rather than France or Italy, two countries in which a similar *Mazinger* phenomenon never took place[3]. What ultimately makes *Mazinger Z* a unique case study is its legacy, which greatly differs from that of other anime series broadcast in Spain during that decade and which was closely related to the political, social and educational criticism that arose after the late 1970s. Considered violent and harmful for children's education, only 32 of the 92 chapters from the original series were finally aired.

From 1978, several articles appeared complaining about *Mazinger Z* and its negative influence on children[4]. The show was described as aggressive, violent and full of sexist connotations surrounding the character of Sayaka (Ortega 1978, p. 26) and her female robot. While some censorship was already applied to the series in Spain, it was still considered by many conservative groups as sexist and harmful for children. *Mazinger* was also described as simple *manichaeism*[5] and criticized for its simple, child-friendly script: the classical figures of good versus evil, fighting to the death. Ultimately it was addressed as *"a mythification of the American technicism deeply established in Japan as a colony"* or *"a glorification of violence"* (Fernández 1978, pp. 25–26).[6]

For many years, researchers suggested a connection between the premature cancellation of the broadcast of *Mazinger* on TVE[7] and the complaints led by politicians, educators, newspapers and parental organizations protesting the explicit violence and the implied aggression in some of the dialogues and situations. However, other researchers (Romero 2014) recently pointed out that Toei did not circulate the full 96-episode series in Europe but issued an adapted 'international edition,' consisting of approximately a third of the original anime. According to Romero, Toei sold the rights to

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[1] Toei Animation 1972. Based on the eponymous manga by Gō Nagai. Entitled in Castilian Spanish as *Mazinger El Robot de las Estrellas*, *Mazinger Z* was first screened on TVE on 4 March 1978.

[2] *Arupusu no Shōjo Haiji*, Nippon Animation 1974. Heidi first aired in Spain on 2 May 1975, on a children's TV program (*Un globo, dos globos, tres globos*) on the national public TV channel TVE (Televisión Española).

[3] Instead, *UFO Robot Grendizer* is considered an equally huge success both in Italy and France. Known in both countries as 'Goldrake' or Goldorak, *UFO Robot Grendizer* is an anime produced by Toei Animation, part of the *Mazinger* franchise originally created by Gō Nagai. *UFO Robot Grendizer* was broadcast in Japan from 1975 to 1977. For further information on the topic, I would refer Marco Pellitteri's in-depth analysis (Pellitteri 2008).

[4] "La Televisión como escuela de Violencia" (TV as a school of violence) by Juan Manuel Ortega and published in the conservative newspaper *ABC* in 1978. 15 October 1978, p. 118, depicts a picture of *Mazinger Z* and quotes a survey carried out by CBS, which states: "kids who watch violent series ultimately behave violently."

[5] Jesús Romero, in a radio interview (21 March 2014), suggested that many complaints were not solely pointed at the violence but rather focused on the lack of a more sophisticated plot, as with Romero in: *Las tardes del Ciudadano García—'Mazinger Z', un hito generacional* (RTVE 2014). Romero is also the author of the divulgate book entitled *Mazinger. Planeador abajo*. Palma de Mallorca: Dolmen.

[6] "In the foreground stand the actual main characters, the monsters fighting each other: on one side Mazinger Z, and on the other side a long series of horrid machines of destruction, identified by different acronyms. This is the main pattern of the movie. In the background, like underrated beings in this world, are the men who pilot the robots: Kōji, a classical cliché of the «gutsy youth» of overdeveloped countries; the wise scientist who loves peace; the hermaphrodite Baron Ashler and, the apex of evil, Doctor Hell. All of them away from the real fight, in a society in which everything works through a button." (Fernández 1978, p. 25). In the original article Kōji is referred to as 'Soji' and Baron Ashler/Ashura (アシュラ) as Baron Asler. For consistency, translation of the original quote follows the original character's names.

[7] Acronym of Televisión Española, the national state-owned television broadcaster in Spain.

a short, highly edited version consisting of those 33 episodes, more similar to the length and number of episodes of the American series to which European broadcasters were accustomed (Querol 2011). Either way, TVE broadcast only up to episode 56, in which the *superalloy Z* is stolen by the evil minions of Dr. Hell, leaving the viewers with a bittersweet feeling and a general sensation of confusion and unfinished business (Sanz-Arranz 2011). While it is true that after harsh criticism from parental associations and newspapers alike the broadcast went into hiatus for nearly three months, *Mazinger Z* was scheduled to return in early 1979, and the remaining five episodes were finally aired. Years later it was rescheduled via different national broadcasters, but it never reached the wide exposure of hits like *Heidi* or *Marco*, which were screened for years on different TV channels after their debut.

From this point onwards, many parents and politicians harshly disapproved of Japanese productions, complaining about the violence often depicted in anime (Montero 2012, p. 48). Moreover, the fact that many of the early anime films screened in Spain via adult film retail and distribution companies (as opposed to the usual children's distributors) led to the idea than anime as a whole was not suitable for children[8]. Paradoxically, many of the same people praised the 'family-friendly' values as shown in Nippon Animation's *Heidi* and *Marco* and many other series that comprise the *Meisaku* collection[9], in contrast with the dystopian future of war and violence portrayed in *Mazinger Z*. Consequently, this duality reinforced the idea that *Heidi* was not a Japanese anime but rather a Spanish or European production. Nonetheless, we could conclude that while the overall success of *Heidi* was greater than *Mazinger*'s—appealing to a larger substratum of Spanish viewers—the overall impact of *Mazinger Z* on the Spanish anime market was far more significant. Within the Spanish anime scene, *Mazinger Z* altered the concept of animation for children and adults alike, shaking generational barriers for this medium.

It was not until the early 1990s that the anime industry finally blossomed in Spain. Actually, the development of the anime industry in Spain in the late 1970s and 1980s and its boom in the early 1990s mimics its progression in France and Italy, the latter playing a major role in the import and retail of many Japanese series in the early 1980s (Pellitteri 2010). However, I would argue that the different pacing in the timeline between the anime boom in Spain and other European countries ultimately defines the specific Spanish scenario[10]. Between 1978 and 1983 more than 183 anime series were broadcast on several Italian channels (Moliné 2002, p. 68)[11]. Meanwhile, the lack of private broadcasters in Spain due to the delay of the liberalization of TV frequencies led to a wholly different scenario, providing a new opportunity for Euro-Japanese co-productions to thrive.

There was a lag of approximately 5 to 10 years between the Italian and French anime boom in the 1980s and the one that took place in Spain in the early 1990s as a result of the liberalization of TV frequencies and the arrival of *Dragon Ball*. Although the Spanish model is similar to most European countries, the timing of events differed greatly and did not overlap with the French or the Italian scene. Ultimately, different timing led to circumstances specific to each nation. The development of Euro-Japanese animated co-productions had a major impact in the Spanish market precisely due to the delay in the arrival of relevant anime productions compared to events in Italy and France as a result of the liberalization of TV frequencies. In that regard, two factors played a major role: the lack of private broadcasters apart from the state-run TVE channels, therefore leading to a lesser demand for anime series; and the involvement of BRB International, which pioneered the European co-production market—ahead of other audiovisual corporations from more prominent markets—by popularizing Spanish–Japanese co-productions across the European scene. Although I will be addressing the

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8   I am grateful to my third blind reviewer for highlighting this connection.
9   Nippon Animation's *Meisaku* collection (lit. meaning "theater masterpieces") involved several titles depicting the same family-friendly histories, adapting or clearly inspired by some European literary classics meant for children. On 8 January 1977, two years after *Heidi*'s premiere, *Marco, de los Apeninos a los Andes* (Haha wo tazunete sanzenri, 1976) was first broadcast in TVE, quickly followed by other animated productions such as *El perro de Flandes* (Furandâsu no inu, 1975).
10   For further discussion on the Spanish anime timeframe between 1975 and 1990, see Santiago (2017).
11   Moliné refers to the source: *Eureka* 11–12, November–December 1983, p. 5.

role of Euro-Japanese co-productions within the Spanish anime timeline, I sincerely believe that the main findings and observations regarding these animated series could be extrapolated to other major European markets.

3. The Leading Role of BRB International

Between the early arrival of *Mazinger Z* in the mid-1970s and the anime boom that took place in the 1990s, the Spanish anime scene was very different from the thriving scenario described in Italy and France. A *hiatus* of sorts took place between the *Meisaku* era and the *Dragon Ball* phenomenon yet to come. However, this anime rupture throughout the 1980s favored the development and arrival of several Euro-Japanese animated co-productions—and specifically Hispanic–Japanese co-productions—leading to what now can be only addressed as a 'golden age' for these hybrid products.

Following the *Mazinger* controversy, politicians and parental associations responded by enacting several codes of good practice, with general guidelines regarding the depiction of violence on children's TV shows. This political response against action-anime also fostered domestic productions. Nevertheless, the Spanish animation industry lacked the resources and time to start producing from scratch. Accordingly, several co-productions emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, many of them between Spanish producers and Japanese studios, the latter being responsible for technical development. In this regard, the Spanish media company BRB International, which had already played a key role in the arrival and rise of anime in Spain, became one of the most prominent agents. Having licensed *Mazinger Z* in the first place, BRB International began to produce its own animated series, most of them in partnership with Nippon Animation[12] alongside other Asian animation studios[13].

Founded in 1972, BRB International mainly focused on production, distribution and broadcasting licenses. BRB International started as a content distributor of American and European productions from Hannah-Barbera and Warner Bros., and it was responsible for the arrival of series such as *Tom & Jerry*, *The Muppets* and *The Pink Panther* to Spain. In 1975, BRB International commercialized *Mazinger Z*, and afterwards started to distribute Euro-Japanese co-productions such as *Maya the Honey Bee*[14], *Vicky the Viking*[15], *The Big Bear of Tallac*[16] or *Bannertail*[17]. However, beginning in 1980, BRB International also started producing its own animated material, achieving three noticeable audience hits in partnership with Nippon Animation, beginning a long and successful relationship with this Japanese studio: *Ruy, Little Cid*, *Dogtanian and the Three Muskehounds* and *Around the World with Willy Fog*[18]. Actually, these BRB International productions may as well be the first collaboration between media industries in Spain and Japan. BRB's founder, Claudio Biern Boyd, was involved in many of these early projects, being responsible for the concept and acting several times as both scriptwriter and character designer. Back in 1984, BRB International's sales VP stated: "*We are currently producing a 26-segment animated series a year. Creation of the characters, script, storyboard, M&E, dubbing and postproduction are done in Spain, but the*

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[12] *Ruy, Pequeño Cid* (*Ritoru Eru Shido no bōken*, 1980), *D'Artacán y los tres mosqueperros* (*Wanwan Sanjushi*, 1981) and *La vuelta al mundo de Willy Fog* (*Anime Hachijūnichikan Sekai Isshū*, 1983).

[13] *David el Gnomo* (*The World of David the Gnome*)—produced in 1985 in partnership with a Taiwanese studio—being the most remarkable example.

[14] *Mitsubachi Maya no bōken*, Nippon Animation, 1975.

[15] *Chiisana Baikingu Bikke*, Nippon Animation, 1972.

[16] *Seton Dōbutsuki Kuma no ko Jakkī*, 1977.

[17] *Banner y Flappy* (*Seton Dôbutsuki Risu no bannâ*; German: *Puschel, das Eichhorn*; and English: *Bannertail: The Story of Gray Squirrel*) is a German-Japanese animated series. It is based on the tales by Ernest Thompson Seton and co-produced by ZDF (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen, a German public TV broadcaster) and Nippon Animation. It premiered on April 7th, 1979. It first aired between 1979 and 1980 in Spain.

[18] *Ruy, Pequeño Cid* (*Ritoru Eru Shido no bōken*, 1980) was a co-production between BRB International and Nippon Animation, also with the partnership of TVE (Televisión Española, de major public TV channel in Spain). *Dogtanian* (*Wanwan Sanjushi*, 1981) was produced by BRB Internacional and Nippon Animation. *Around the World with Willy Fog* (*Anime Hachijūnichikan Sekai Isshū*, 1983) was produced by BRB Internacional and animated by Nippon Animation and TV Asahi, in partnership with TVE (Televisión Española).

actual animation is handled in Japan, releasing one segment a week. Over there we can complete the whole series in six months, whereas in Spain it would probably take four years."[19]

However, the fever did not last. A few years later and after several popular hits, the enthusiasm for co-productions declined, and the initial will of Spanish broadcasters to produce their own children's content rapidly faded[20]. In this regard, we can highlight two decisive factors in the decline of Hispanic–Japanese animated co-productions: production budgets and the liberalization of TV broadcasting frequencies. By the end of the 1980s, it was far cheaper to buy anime series from the Japanese producers and European licensors and rights-holders than investing a large amount of money in producing similar proprietary content. Concurrently, the emergence of new TV private channels (Antena 3 and Tele 5, with particular relevance for the latter, owned by the Italian conglomerate Finninvest) fostered the arrival of imported anime series from its partner networks in Italy and France. Anime was cheaper, it was easily produced, and they only needed to import it from neighboring nations. The adaptation and dubbing process (from Italian or French dubbing, instead of the original Japanese language, in the early years) was easier. In addition, the success of some mainstream titles in those markets was a strong endorsement, becoming a hit among the audience, reinforcing and giving priority to these series over domestic productions.

4. Euro-Japanese Co-Productions and the *Animesque*

There is little doubt that these co-productions opened the Spanish broadcasting market to Japanese studios and some anime licenses. However, its real impact on anime's future arrival and further boom still remains a subject of debate. The fact that these productions allowed a deeper partnership with Japanese license companies is undeniable. Nonetheless, for an European audience the lack of iconic markers that many fans nowadays recognize as part of the larger 'anime form' led many of them to think that while these series might be Japanese (or at least made in Japan), they were ultimately not anime. Euro-Japanese co-productions are usually acknowledged as a hybrid of sorts, an in-between not entirely western and not fully Japanese. Notwithstanding, for the scope of this article the relevant issue does not lie within the label (whether it is anime or not) but in the *animesque*[21] within these animated series—especially now when many Japanese studios outsource their own productions to other companies all over southeast Asia, and anime itself has problems balancing its identity as a Japanese cultural artefact and its distinctly transnational scope (Suan 2017).

Thus far, co-productions have been seen as a rupture in the anime scene of the 1980s by fandom and researchers alike (Montero 2012), and ultimately as a means to strengthen the European animation and promote domestic productions. However, rather than addressing the differences, we should focus on the similarities: I believe these early co-productions share core aspects which, in the mid-eighties TV scene, helped to build 'bridges' and shared traits with the anime series yet to come.

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[19] Maria Aragon (BRB International's sales VP) in *Variety* (1984, p. 206).

[20] This fact might eventually bring up some questions in regards to the popularity and continuity of these hybrid co-productions. Even though one could argue that the hybridization did not generate a sustained audience and was superseded by Japanese anime products, I ultimately believe that it was not a problem of critical mass but rather of budget: Japanese anime was cheaper than Euro-Japanese co-productions, thus leading to a market shift. Notwithstanding, the aforementioned BRB co-productions were very successful at the time; and in a similar light, today's anime-style US productions are also quite successful among an international audience.

[21] I am using *animesque* in the same way as Suan does, who derives the word from 'the mangaesque', coined by Jaqueline Berndt. Mangaesque, as she describes is: "*what passes as 'typically manga'* (or typically anime) *among regular media users... in the sense of manga-like or typically manga, which is, of course, no established scholarly term, yet it allows to draw attention to practically relevant popular discourses on the one hand and on the other to critically informed, theoretical reflections on what may, or may not, be expected from manga* (and anime)" (Berndt 2012).
Therefore, in this paper *animesque* broadly refers to "anime style". Thus, animesque productions are those identified as anime by fans—even if these productions are not necessarily anime—or use formal and narrative elements that are traditionally linked with Japanese anime productions. In this paper, the *animesque* concept is useful to lessen the weight of the nihonjinron discourse and to focus the debate on the formal, narrative and design aspects that ultimately define this medium.

Among the several Euro-Japanese co-productions developed in the 1980s, there are noticeable differences between these various series regarding the degree of involvement of the Japanese studios. In some cases, the entire creative process was developed in Europe by different domestic studios, leaving only the production role to the Japanese counterparts; occasionally there was a real partnership, with teams on both sides equally contributing to the final product; and in some cases there was major Japanese leadership, while the European producer was solely responsible for financial control, outsourcing all the creative aspects of the project to the Japanese studio. Thus, a thorough classification would be truly difficult for the scope of this paper, but nevertheless remains an interesting topic to explore more deeply, studying how it affects its *animesque* dimension. However, there are shared traits that broadly apply throughout most of the various series.

In this matter, *Sherlock Hound*[22] provides an interesting approach with regards to how *animesque* co-productions played a leading role in the promotion of anime aesthetics. Firstly, this is due to Hayao Miyazaki's highly recognizable style, openly regarded as very anime-like by European fandom and audiences[23]. Secondly, this is due to the different timing in regards to the arrival and broadcasting of Miyazaki's 1978 series *Future Boy Conan*[24]. *Future Boy Conan* aired in Spain after 1990 through several regional broadcasters and was dubbed in co-official languages, in a similar fashion to *Dragon Ball*. Spanish viewers first came in contact with Miyazaki's style through *Sherlock Hound*, released in advance of *Future Boy Conan* despite being a later production. Consequently, when Miyazaki's early movies arrived in the nineties, they felt somehow familiar to many viewers who grew up with *Sherlock Hound* on TV, sharing many of Miyazaki's signature traits (currently identified as genuinely *animesque* by most European viewers).

Euro-Japanese animated co-productions were meant first and foremost for an European audience. Character designs, plots and general scenarios were usually distinct from other coetaneous anime series produced entirely in Japan. Thus, there are some shared traits that are usually identified as non-*animesque*, that is topics and themes, some of which refer to domestic referents, European literature and cultural traditions; the overall tone, with a more childish and infantile approach, meant for children, or lacking appeal for an older audience; an abundance of non-human protagonists, animals or anthropomorphous animals as characters (*Dogtanian*, *Willy Fog*, *Maya the Bee*, *Sherlock Hound*, *Bannertail*, etc.) However, when we address design, cinematography or rhythm[25,] many traces of the Japanese craftsmanship are still recognizable. Thus, I believe the *animesque* flair relies on several aspects involved in the production process.

4.1. Narrative Continuity between Chapters

Anime narratives present an abundance of self-contained series and self-contained stories, providing narrative continuity throughout different episodes, as compared to both self-conclusive or

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[22] *Sherlock Hound* (*Meitantei Holmes*, 1981) is a quite unique example of Euro-Japanese co-production and for that reason I will address it with great caution throughout this paper. Over time *Sherlock Hound*—a brilliant 1981 co-production between the Italian broadcasting conglomerate RAI and Tokyo Movie Shinsha—has achieved a cult status among fans and critics alike. Its animation exceeds both in quality and production details many other contemporary productions. Hayao Miyazaki was initially involved in the series, directing six chapters. However, production came to a hiatus due to a legal conflict with Conan Doyle's right-holders. When production restarted in 1984 Miyazaki was already immersed in his *Nausicaä* project. Kyosuke Mikuriya was responsible for the remaining 20 episodes. Despite this, Miyazaki's signature style is reflected throughout the whole series, in character's design, action sequences or humor scenes.

[23] Despite Miyazaki's attempt to address his movies not as anime but as *manga-eiga*—an archaic term—and distance himself from the larger idea of the anime medium.

[24] *Mirai Shōnen Conan.* NHK, 1978.

[25] More than twenty different animated series were analyzed for the purpose of this research, categorized into three different groups: (1) US animated cartoons, popular among the Spanish audience in the 1980s; (2) Euro-Japanese co-productions from the same period; and (3) several coetaneous anime series, many of which aired years later in Spain once the liberalization of the TV frequencies took place.

self-contained chapters, more common in the analyzed US cartoons[26]. When it comes to Euro-Japanese co-productions, this same pattern appears to a greater or lesser degree. In most BRB International co-productions the story works as a whole, developed through the several episodes that comprise the complete series. Despite this, it is not unusual that some US productions[27]—quite famous and successful with Spanish children at that time—also provide a self-contained story; however, while chapters might be interrelated and provide a sense of continuity (not self-conclusive), they are self-contained, as they usually present, develop and conclude an episode-plot that is relevant to the overall-plot but does not rely on cliffhangers at the end of the chapter.

4.2. Recurrent Use of Cliffhangers and Eucatastrophe

This feature is closely connected with the previous item. In most of the analyzed anime series and Euro-Japanese co-productions, there is a generalization of the cliffhanger as a tool—for narrative purposes and in order to build up momentum. Moreover, many of these *animesque* series use eucatastrophe as an aid to loosen the tension delivered with the cliffhanger. Both resources, extremely common in anime series and Euro-Japanese co-productions, provide a different sense of rhythm.

4.3. Iconic and Reductionist Character Designs and Conventionalized Elements

In many of the anime series and BRB co-productions analyzed, character design is neither cartoony nor realistic but rather iconic, based on the suppression of superfluous elements. This is a quite simple and yet effective feature also common in manga. The character designs rely on a set of conventionalized elements (Suan 2015) which ultimately point to the idea of the *animesque*. We might not fully talk about Azuma (2009) *database* or Suan (2013) *mosaic* in Euro-Japanese co-productions, but many of the characters depicted in these series share common traits with their anime counterparts. Nonetheless, their facial expressions and bodily movements are closer to the conventionalized elements expected from the *animesque*, especially when it comes to human characters (as depicted in *Ruy Little Cid*) rather than anthropomorphic animals (as seen in *Dogtanian*). The way Ruy smiles, blushes or rolls his eyes is closer to *animesque* characters than to those from US or European animated productions in the mid-1980s—mostly when compared with the designs from the Meisaku collection series such as *Heidi*. Moreover, despite the anthropomorphic dogs portrayed in a Doyle's Victorian-steampunk scenario, *Sherlock Hound* uses the same set of conventionalized anime elements such as facial expressions and bodily movement. Furthermore, it uses Miyazaki's own conventionalized designs—which do not fully fall within Azuma's database or Tezuka's star-system.

4.4. Specificity of Color Palette and Abundance of Tertiary Colors

Many Euro-Japanese co-productions present a distinctive hand-drawn quality of the line and a particular color palette, with an abundance of tertiary colors and less saturated scenes, quite similar to the anime series being produced in the 1980s. Of course, these formal similarities are but the logical result of co-productions being crafted by Japanese studios. However, there are solid similarities between the Euro-Japanese co-productions and several coetaneous anime, especially when compared to mainstream American cartoons. In the aforementioned US-animated productions, there is a consistent color palette throughout the whole series—with minimum or non-existent color variations in characters—whereas anime deeply relies on a changing palette matching the equally variable range of emotions of the characters and environments in which the action takes place (Horno-López 2013, pp. 233–34). As stated by Horno-López, "*colour can also become a key element that can act both as a shaping tool for the figure and as a narrative tool for animation itself*" (Horno-López 2013, p. 229). Horno-López

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[26] E.g., *He-man and the Masters of the Universe* (Filmation, 1983), *The Real Ghostbusters* (Columbia Pictures and DiC Entertainment, 1986).
[27] E.g., *Dungeons and Dragons* (Marvel Comics and TSR, 1983).

further examines the potential ramifications of the "dynamic use of color" and the variations in color regardless of characters in some anime (Horno-López 2017, pp. 158–59). Without inferring such a sophisticated use of color in the analyzed animated Euro-Japanese co-productions of the 1980s, it is an equally identifying element nonetheless, especially with regard to the emotional representation of the characters (as seen in *Ruy, Little Cid, Dogtanian and the Three Muskehounds*) as opposed to the consistent color palette of the main protagonists in American cartoons—such as *Dungeons and Dragons* or the invariable color of the characters depicted in a pantone-like style in *He-man and the Masters of the Universe*. Ultimately, it is possible to speak of storytelling through color, that is, *animesque* productions do not necessarily display a realistic depiction of color, but instead an emotional representation of color to match both the overall atmosphere of different scenes and the iconicity of the characters.

4.5. Volume through Movement

There is a certain popular consensus regarding addressing anime as flat, often backed by concepts such as Murakami's *superflat*, coined by the artist in his *superflat manifesto*, as a result of an exhibition that took place in Tokyo in the year 2000. For Murakami, *superflat* is about blending styles, surfaces, images, literature, social references, into a 2D picture plane. Notwithstanding, both Lamarre (2009) expand the original concept of *superflat* in regards to *selective animation* (Gan 2008)[28], "*that produces a sense of dynamic movement on a flat plane rather than movement (. . .) in depth*" (Shamoon 2015, p. 94). As Lamarre states, "*Murakami's account suggests that, if one is to think across media and between lineages, then one has to think about kinds of movement. He does not centre his account of flatness or two-dimensionality on movement per se. Yet his discussion invariably returns to, and turns on, the problem of movement*" (Lamarre 2002, p. 334). Lamarre then adds: "*I should like to stretch Murakami's superflat, and think of a superflat that entails flat interactions or flat articulations. That is, the superflat becomes a quality of movement, change or transformation*" (Lamarre 2002, p. 338).

In the last decade, the expression 'selective animation' has been broadly used to address anime instead of the traditional definition of 'limited animation'. Although the Japanese studios first relied on limited animation due to budget constraints—especially when compared with the American animation industry—over time this limitation became its strength, leading to a series of unique aesthetic resources and the appearance of a sense of pace and rhythm that ultimately defined anime as we know it. The movement of cells and layers in multiple directions at different speeds creates a new sense of dynamism (Horno-López 2014, pp. 89–90). Thus, 'limited animation'—which has negative connotations—became 'selective animation' as a result of this creative shift.

However, from a simple material perspective, I would argue that anime is not necessarily flat (when understood as a lack of volume), and that this conception comes from a different understanding of how to create volume and movement in 2D animation[29]. In many of the analyzed US cartoons, movement is achieved by physically rendering the different frames of the characters, while 1980s anime and *animesque* productions rely deeply on stills and yet sometimes achieved a larger feeling of motion through a clever use of multi-planar, parallax effects and utterly unconventional montage. "*Rather than attempting to mimetically reproduce movement in depth, Japanese animators have tended to emphasize sideways 2-D motion and a dynamic iconography*" (Shamoon 2015, p. 94). In *He-man and the Masters of the Universe, Dungeons and Dragons* or *The Real Ghostbusters*, background and figure unfold on the same level, and while the characters are indeed animated, it ultimately provides a sense of flatness. Instead, in anime there is a fairly distinct graphic approach between background and figure. Anime

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28 Selective animation as defined by Gan: "*Selective Animation is a new term intended to replace the older expression "limited animation" (. . .) Such simplified expressions are common in Japan, as several generations have grown up with animated series on television where simplified expressions are standard. In addition, the international commercial success of* anime *in recent years has also increased their confidence that these expressions are effective, possessing a different aesthetic from the so-called full animation*". (Gan 2008, pp. 6–7).

29 As pointed by Lamarre "*Moreover, as a consequence of the emphasis on static images, camera effects became more pronounced—panning across images, following objects, tracking up or back, framing in or out*" (Lamarre 2002, p. 336).

and the Euro-Japanese co-productions define volume through movement; thus, instead of animating the characters themselves within a still frame, anime 'moves' the camera (the different still layers in the frame) providing a deeper sense of volume. As a result, this creative 'device' redefines the perception of rhythm.

4.6. Particularities in Shots and Montage

Finally, there are significant differences in shots and montage, which help to build an inner rhythm. I would like to pay further attention to this point.

Many of the aforementioned animated co-productions use multiple long shots to depict the scenario and environs in which the action is going to take place. For instance, if we take a close look at the opening scene of the first chapter of *Dungeons and Dragons*, *He-man and the Masters of the Universe*[30] or *The Real Ghostbusters*, we immediately realize there is only one long shot introducing the action preceding the appearance of the main protagonists (or other characters involved in the scene). Conversely, the opening scenes of many of the analyzed anime shows are composed of multiple shots, offering not only visual/objective information on the environment in which the action takes place but also sensitive/subjective information "*most often used to establish a mood or a sense of place*" (McCloud 1993, p. 79). In *Future Boy Conan*, the creators used eight different shots for the opening scene, while in both *Heidi* and *Mazinger Z* they used five. In a similar fashion, BRB International's co-productions depict an identical usage of multiple introductory shots with an ambience function (Figure 1). Thus, we could easily argue that this sense of rhythm—intentionally reveling in details—is a very recognizable trait of the *animesque* in many early Euro-Japanese co-productions.
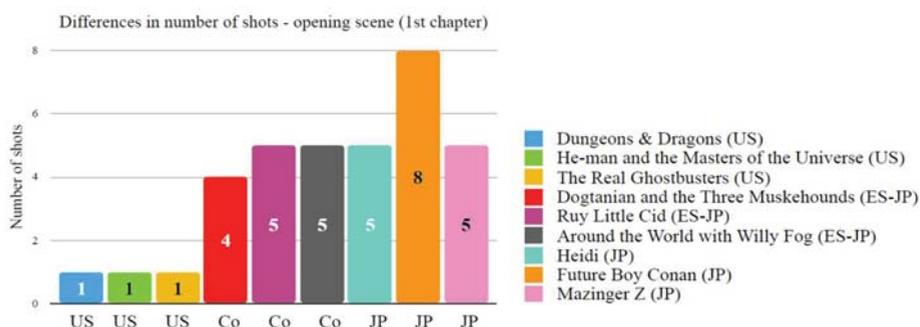
Figure 1. Comparative chart between some early 1980's American cartoons, Japanese anime series and *animesque* Euro-Japanese co-productions, according to the number of shots used in the first chapter's opening scene. Chart by author ©2018 José Andrés Santiago Iglesias.

We observe a similar pattern with regard to the types of shots used in US cartoons, Japanese anime and Euro-Japanese co-productions aired in the 1980s. Again, when comparing the aforementioned US cartoons with anime from the late 1970s and early 1980s and BRB co-productions, the latter employ a large number of close-ups[31]. Hitherto many animated productions still relied on the structure and typical shots from the cinema industry. Thus, the analyzed US animated productions depict a more conservative montage, while the *animesque* rapidly jumps between different types of shots. In that regard, whether it was intended for economic reasons or creative motifs, anime's concatenation of shots became revolutionary in its own way. Furthermore, in regards to shots and montage, I firmly believe

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[30] Although the second shot might seem to be an independent shot, it is panning the camera to show us the room and the villains. Therefore, we can only refer to one introductory shot.

[31] In *Dungeons and Dragons*, *He-man and the Masters of the Universe* or *The Real Ghostbusters* there are virtually no (or very few) close-ups, while both anime series and Euro-Japanese co-productions frequently use close-ups.

that the correlation between anime and western animated productions is not unlike the interplay between manga and 1980s US mainstream comics. The connections between frames in manga—with the dominance of 'subject to subject', 'scene to scene' and especially 'aspect to aspect' as addressed by McCloud (1993, p. 74)—resemble the connections between shots in anime (a bond of sorts between *komawari* and montage). At the same time, the lack of close-ups in US cartoons is stressed by the fact that there are almost no non-human shots providing information about the environment. While anime and *animesque* co-productions usually use these kind of shots with metonymical intention, the analyzed US cartoons tend to focus exclusively on the characters, thus providing a more literal approach. These 'aspect to aspect' connections in montage are closely related to the *pillow shot,* as thoroughly analyzed by Shamoon (2011). Thus, as it happens with some 'aspect to aspect' connections, the *pillow shot* has symbolic value but does not necessarily move the plot forward. Despite this, the *pillow shot* is a less abundant resource in these early co-productions than in contemporary anime. Aimed at a children's audience, these *animesque* series were far less sophisticated than contemporary *an* anime *ime* both in terms of technical development and montage.

Sherlock Hound indeed uses the *pillow shot* as well as other animetic resources, but it does so in a very particular way, as it deeply relies on Miyazaki's unique shots and signature moves, hardly seen in any US-animated cartoons in the 1980s. Lamarre already acknowledges Miyazaki's *uniqueness* in this regard: "*in many respects, Miyazaki appears to be the least animetic and most cinematic of animator-writer-directors*" (Lamarre 2002, p. 341). For instance, to provide a deeper sense of movement and make it feel cinematic, *Sherlock Hound* uses a lot of in-depth camera movements. One of Miyazaki's signature shots—seen in most of his early works and frequently used in *Sherlock Hound*—comes as a result of his collaboration with animator Yasuo Ōtsuka who is mainly remembered for using the 'peg hole' technique. By rotating the still (*genga*) around the hole at the top of the animation sheet (the *peg bar*, and thus the name of the technique), Miyazaki and Ōtsuka set a unique feeling of unbalance. Thus, Miyazaki's frenzy runners would oscillate into and out of the motion—barely keeping their equilibrium—instead of running in a straight line towards the camera.

5. A Bridge for Anime: Conclusions

Appealing to a European audience, Euro-Japanese animated co-productions lacked some recognizable features associated with anime as a larger medium. Themes, plots and scenarios were vastly distinct from mainstream anime series. Nonetheless, in many of these animated productions there was an underlying *animesque* flair in the shape of the conventionalized elements, character design, facial expressions, tropes, rhythm, camera-action, shots and montage. After European audiences had first contact with anime in the late 1970s, animated co-productions between domestic producers and Japanese studios emerged in the early 1980s, playing a leading role in the standardization of anime aesthetics, and hence contributing to a broader development of anime in Spain and other major European markets. Actually, these pioneering co-productions favored the arrival of Japanese studios and anime licenses to the European broadcasting scenario. We cannot refer to it as domestication, since these animated series were already 'domestic' products. However, we might speak of a passive acquisition of anime's aesthetics and most relevant visual elements. There was an unconscious osmosis of sorts from the anime's substratum, coding it within a whole generation of viewers and providing the tools (basic tools but tools nevertheless) to decode anime. Ultimately, I believe Euro-Japanese co-productions laid the foundations for what *animesque* means in Spain and how viewers approach anime as a medium.

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The Essence of 2.5-Dimensional Musicals?
Sakura Wars and Theater Adaptations of Anime

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Abstract: This paper examines 2.5-Dimensional musicals, or theater adaptations of anime/manga/videogames. As the genre has been gaining popularity in Japan since around 2007, criticism on the genre began to appear. What they uncritically assume is that the pioneer of the genre was the theater adaptation of *Prince of Tennis* first produced in 2003, and the unique mise-en-scène that attempts to recreate the "world" of the original, including the characters, setting, and the characters' extreme skills of tennis, is a hallmark of the genre. However, such a view fails to consider the fact that these are actually merely characteristics of a subgenre of 2.5-Dimensional musicals represented by *Prince of Tennis* and other similar shows. This paper argues that another show, namely the theater adaptation of the videogame *Sakura Wars*, first produced in 1997 and continuing to this day, actually presents a number of important questions and viewpoints that are useful and necessary to critically discuss the genre, such as how two-dimensional characters are materialized on stage, which role audiences play in that process, how 2.5-Dimensional musicals can be contextualized within conventional theater genres rather than a part of "media mix" strategies, and tension between the local and global in their production and consumption.

Keywords: 2.5-Dimensional musicals; *Prince of Tennis*; *Sakura Wars*; voice actors; characters; live performance; audience participation; export

1. Introduction

One notable characteristic of anime is that it is, more often than not, a part of a larger franchise involving other media formats such as manga, videogames, or novels (Condry 2013; Denison 2015; Kataoka 2011; Steinberg 2012). A recent addition to these "usual suspects" within the so-called "media mix" strategies is theater adaptations of anime, manga and videogame dubbed as "2.5-Dimensional musicals." Its popularity as a genre led to the establishment of the Japan 2.5-Dimensional Musical Association in 2014. According to the Association, between 2000 and 2007, 15 to 20 2.5-Dimensional musicals (defined by the association as "any theatrical representations based on Japanese manga, popular animation, and video games" and, despite the word "musical", "straight plays, comedies, and dramas" are also included) were produced every year. After 2007, the number began to increase and, after 2011, 20 more new plays were produced every year, bringing the total number to 123, attracting a total audience of 1.32 million in 2015 (Japan 2.5-Dimension Musical Association n.d.).

In this article, I will critically overview current discourses on 2.5-Dimensional musicals in Japan, comparing two shows, namely, *Prince of Tennis* and *Sakura Wars*. Currently, as detailed below in Chapter 2, critics as well as producers of 2.5-Dimensional musicals uncritically assume that the genre has its origin in the theater musical adaptation of *Prince of Tennis*, or *Tenimyu*, as it is often called by fans, first produced in 2003. They also give its "revolutionary" or "innovative" mise-en-scène that attempts to recreate the world as it is depicted in the original manga, as well as its anime adaptation, as the essence that constitute the genre. However, I argue that *Sakura Wars*, which is largely neglected

by critics and producers, adapts very different strategies in adapting a "two-dimensional" text into a stage play, and therefore deserves critical attention.

Despite its very long history (first performance in 1997 with annual or twice-annual productions up to the time of writing with some hiatuses), its popularity (spectators including such prominent figures as film director Yamada Yōji), and involvement of high-profile figures in theaters, including kabuki actor Ichikawa Shun'en, actor and director Mitsuya Yūji, who later played significant role in *Tenimyu*, and designer Yokoo Tdanori, who designed some of posters of the show, very little critical attention has been paid to the stage productions of *Sakura Wars*, based on videogames of the same title: Suzuki Kunio, a specialist of Japanese theater, makes a passing remark in his book chapter on 2.5-Dimensional musicals (see below for more details), and Fujiwara Mayuko, a specialist of American musicals, also refers to the show in a footnote of her article on theater adaptation of *Black Butler,* saying the show is significant in reflecting on the nature of 2.5-Dimensional musicals as musical-theater plays (Fujiwara 2015). However, neither of them analyzes the show in detail nor compares it with *Tenimyu*-esque shows. By comparing the theater adaptation of *Sakura Wars* with *Tenimyu*—especially the way the former recreated the characters on stage, not through mise-en-scène but recreating the world within the original texts through a complex narrative structure that enables the spectators to "enjoy the world" of the original text, as Azuma Sonoko puts it in her attempt to pinpoint differences between 2.5-Dimensional musicals and other conventional plays based on anime, manga, or videogames, as discussed below—I will demonstrate that, while some aspects of *Tenimyu*, such as production over a very long period of time with the same actors playing the same role for a prolonged period of time, it, and later shows similar to it from some other 2.5-Dimensional musicals as in its broadest sense (adaptation of anime/magna/videogames), mise-en-scène is not necessarily the only factor. Instead, it is actually more like a property of another subgenre of 2.5-Dimensional musicals established by *Tenimyu*. I will also discuss the prospect of exporting 2.5-Dimensional musicals, in relation to strength and weakness of *Tenimyu*-style shows vis-à-vis *Sakura Wars,* which stems from their different approaches to recreating the characters on stage.

As Rick Altman asserts in relation to films, genre is not a fixed and stable entity, but instead it is discursively constructed by different parties (Altman 1999). The current discourses that uncritically assume *Tenimyu* as the origin of 2.5-Dimensional musicals obscure actually how the genre came into existence before the word was coined, and also significant issues that could warrant further discussion within theater adaptations, as well as live performance in general based on anime/manga/videogames. In addition, such discourses significantly restrict critical discussion of the genre because they overlook the very simple fact that these shows are a part of cross-media adaptation strategies, but are at the same time theater plays that can be discussed as such, contextualized within appropriate theoretical and historical framework that is specific to the media. The aim of this paper is to critique current discourses, especially the rupture between the broad definition of 2.5-Dimensional musicals seen in the pamphlet of the Japan 2.5-Dimensional musicals Association and the very narrow view held by at least some critics as well as potentially the creators/producers themselves by presenting an alternative view/example of theater adaptation of 2D texts. By doing so, I will attempt to contextualize 2.5-Dimensional musicals as a subgenre within live performances, especially theater, rather than simply a variation within cross-media adaptations. This approach will enable us to investigate the genre focusing on its media specificity that separates it from its original "2D" texts, especially physicality represented by the tension between bodies of the actors and 2D characters, stage sets/space, and fictitious world/setting within the original 2D texts, shared experience bound to a specific time and place, and transnational, independent, and/or ad hoc consumption of media texts.

2. Is *Tenimyu* the Origin of 2.5-Dimensional Musicals?

2.1. *Prince of Tennis and Sakura Wars*

Before delving into detailed discussion, some overview of the two franchises is necessary. *Tenimyu* is based on *Prince of Tennis*, a manga by Konomi Takeshi serialized in weekly manga magazine *Shōnen Jump* between 1998 and 2008. The story features a group of middle-school boys who belong to the tennis clubs of different schools competing over each other. They have extreme skills that are impossible to reproduce in the real world, and the story develops over arcs that cover matches between different characters/schools. It was first adapted into a TV anime series, which ran between 2001 and 2005. *Tenimyu* follows the original storyline, with the first season produced in 2003, featuring many young *ikemen* (good-looking) actors, and is targeted at female audience. In addition, there also are some shows called "Dream Live" and "The Great Sports Day (*Dai undō kai*)", in which the actors sing or play sports outside the usual framework of structured production, but still as their characters. These "extra events," as discussed later, are a very significant feature that *Tenimyu* and *Sakura Wars* have in common, and one of the factors that separate these shows from some other 2.5-Dimensional musicals.

Sakura Wars (*Sakura* hereafter) is videogame originally released in 1996. It is a fusion of a dating game and simulation game in which the player becomes the captain of a special team in the interwar period. The team consists of young girls with various different personal and ethnic backgrounds. Sequels were released in 1998, 2001, 2002, and 2005. The first two games are set in Tokyo, which in the game is called "Teito" or the Imperial capital, reflecting the prewar historical setting. In the third instalment, the locale moves to Paris, then returns to Tokyo to feature all characters who appeared in the first three stories, and the fifth instalment features all-new characters in New York. In April 2018, after a long hiatus, a new instalment was announced to be released in 2019, again set in Tokyo but 17 years after the original story. Theater plays a very significant role in the text: the special team disguises itself as a revue company modelled after the Takarazuka Revue Company (although it is in the Ginza area of Tokyo rather than western Japan), a Parisian cabaret in Montmartre, or a Broadway theater in New York, and the girls are actresses or dancers/singers at these venues when they are not fighting, while the avatar of the player is a ticket collector.[1] As mentioned above, it was

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[1]   The latest addition to the franchise so far is a manga and its theater adaptation, published and first produced in 2012. These are spin-offs of the original videogame featuring another team in the same theater in Teito, which has never appeared or been mentioned in any of the earlier texts (videogames, features, and TV anime, novels, manga, theater plays). Interestingly, all but one of the members of the team are young men who usually work as musicians playing for the productions featuring the actresses appearing in the videogame (but they never appear in this manga or musical), and the leader is the only female in the team, who is the conductor of the orchestra. Unlike their female counterparts, who are all skilled in combative activities such as sword-fighting, shooting, or karate and fight the enemies in robots, they play musical instruments that have the power to amplify a supernatural power called *reiryoku* or spiritual power the men and the conductor (and also their female counterparts and their commander) have to sedate or attack the enemy. The manga was serialized in a monthly *shōjo* or girls' manga magazine *Hana to yume* between 2012 and 2013. The limited collector's edition of the first volume of the manga book (*tankōbon*) came with a DVD with a short anime (2.5 min), a slideshow using panels of the manga complete with voices dubbed by the voice actors, and a roundtable featuring them. It appears that this manga and musical were an attempt to catch up with the popularity of 2.5-Dimensional theater featuring young actors: unlike the "main" videogames and their theater adaptation, the target audience was clearly female, and the cast of the musical were not the voice actors who dubbed the anime. However, the manga was discontinued only after four volumes, and the show went into a hiatus after two seasons. There can be a number of possible reasons for the relative unpopularity of this new instalment. The biggest of them can simply be that the whole project was based on a manga that seems to be hastily created for the sake of creating a *Tenimyu*-style 2.5-Dimensional musical, with characters and settings sticking out of the rest of the "universe" of the franchise. However, another important and interesting aspect, which I cannot fully cover in this particular article, is the issue of audiences' gender. Apart from the points I will discuss below, one significant difference between *Tenimyu*-style 2.5-Dimensional musicals and the theater adaptation of *Sakura* is the target audience. Some of the original texts of typical 2.5-Dimensional musicals, such as *Prince of Tennis* or *Yowamushi pedal* are serialized in *shōnen*, or boys' manga magazines (although with female fans, just like similar examples from the 1980s such as *Captain Tsubasa*) but, once adapted to theater, the target is predominantly female with its cast consisting of young male actors, and the audience, especially as was the case with early productions of *Tenimyu* as discussed later, seem to behave similar to fans of male *aidoru*. The original videogame of *Sakura* is categorized as *gyarugē*, or dating game, also targeting male players, but in reality, there are a number of female fans as evidenced by existence of *dōjinshi* or fan-created manga or novels featuring the homoerotic relationship between few male characters in the series. However, another "hook" of the franchise for the female fans is the existence of

adapted into a theater play in 1997, continuing up to the time of writing with hiatuses, while the characters featured as well as the title of the show changed over the period. As in *Tenimyu*, *Sakura* also has a number of productions in which the actresses sing or play games as their characters outside usual productions. More significantly, Hiroi Ōji, the general producer of the franchise, had a theater adaptation in his mind when the project was launched, and one significant criterion of choosing the voice actresses for the first, second, and fifth videogame was whether they could sing and/or act on stage (Hiroi and Hamamura 2011). In other words, the stage adaptation was originally planned to be an integral part of the so-called "media mix" strategies, which is not the case with *The Price of Tennis*. In addition, unlike many other long-running 2.5-Dimensional musicals, the shows of *Sakura* are not simple a theater adaptation of the original videogame. Instead, they have a totally original storyline featuring some characters that only appeared in them or sometimes filled the gap within the setting or storyline of the original.

2.2. Discourses on 2.5-Dimensional musicals as A Genre

The sharp growth of the genre attracted popular and critical attention in Japan. Japanese prominent art magazines *Yuriika* (*Eureka*) and *Bijutsu techō* (*The Art Handbook*) covered it extensively in their April 2015 and July 2016 issues, respectively. The shared assumption evident in descriptions of the genre in these magazines, as well as others such as the pamphlet issued by the Japan 2.5-Dimensional Musical Association, is that the genre has its origin in *Tenimyu*. For example, the issue of *Yuriika* mentioned above had a commentary that overviewed the history of 2.5Dimensional musicals between the period of 1991 and 2015, when the issue was published, categorizing the genre historically and chronologically using some keywords.

However, the period before 2003, categorized as "Pre-*Prince of Tennis*", has only four entries apart from the theater adaptation of *Saint Seiya* (1991), known for featuring male idol group SMAP, who at the time were still in the infancy of their career. All other keywords refer to plays, directors, and production companies after *Prince of Tennis* (Yamada and Ueda+PORCH 2015). The pamphlet issued by the Japan 2.5-Dimensional Musical Association has a list of representative 2.5-Dimensional musicals, in which *Prince of Tennis* (*Tenimyu* hereafter) is explained as having "spearheaded the rise of today's 2.5-Dimensional musical boom" (Japan 2.5-Dimension Musical Association n.d.). Mainstream media also make a similar claim, as is the case in an article on *Asahi Shimbun* that reported on the popularity of the genre (2.5 jigen myūjikaru seichōchū: Manga, anime butaika, gaikokujinkyaku nimo ninki 2017). Academics also attempted to define and describe the genre, using *Tenimyu* as the benchmark and watershed of the genre. Suzuki Kunio, for example, claims in his chapter at the end of an edited volume that overviews the history of musicals in Japan, that the "genuine origin" of the genre is *Tenimyu* (Suzuki 2018). However, if 2.5-Dimensional musicals are defined as theater adaptations of anime/manga/videogames, they existed, as Suzuki also points out, since the 1970s in the form of *Rose of Versailles* by the Takarazuka Revue Company first produced in 1974 (Suzuki 2018). What exactly, then, makes *Tenimyu* so special? Suzuki is somewhat vague in this respect. After overviewing theater adaptations of anime/manga/videogames in Japan since the 1970s, he, as mentioned above,

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characters who resemble "male", or *otoko yaku*, in Takarazuka. As discussed in detail later, both in the original texts and also theater adaptations, gender-crossing exists and plays a significant role in *Sakura* in complicating the relationship between the characters and the actresses who play them, as well as the way the audience see the play. Coexistence of "straight" female characters and these "male" characters is a unique feature of the franchise that seems to contribute to the relatively strong presence of female fans for a dating game. The same also applies to the theater: although this is based on my observation for the past 12 years and there seems to be some variations depending on which of the three teams (Tokyo, Paris, or New York) the show features, in general, it is readily observable that the male–female ratio of the audience of *Sakura*'s show is far closer to equal than typical 2.5-Dimensional musicals. It could be said that the new manga and musical failed as a result of trying to catch up with the popularity of 2.5-Dimensional musicals by simply copying the format (all-young male cast), and even inventing a story that really does not fit into the corpus of existing texts solely for that purpose; it, against the intention, could have driven away many of the fans of the original videogame and its theater adaptation.

claims that *Tenimyu* is the "genuine origin" of 2.5-Dimensional musicals and acclaims its uniqueness as follows:

> The exchange of rally [as it is represented in the play] is nothing but the very structure of [ancient] Greek tragedy that [involves interactions between] one [character] and another, or two; the way [the characters] play tennis or the skills they use represent their personalities, and the choreography that skillfully uses rackets even has aesthetics in reminiscence of nō or kabuki theater. I believe that a production that is filled with so much originality has been long absent from Japanese theaters, and it would hardly be an overstatement to say that each players [of tennis in *Tenimyu*] are materializing an art form that is comparable with ukiyo-e woodblock printings (Suzuki 2018).

I will further examine his discussion of 2.5-Dimensional musicals in more detail later, but at least for Suzuki, a theater-studies specialist, what makes *Tenimyu* different is its mise-en-scène. However, one question that has to be asked is: Is the mise-en-scène of *Tenimyu* an essential part of 2.5-Dimensional musicals, or is it actually a property of the particular type of subgenre represented by *Tenimyu*, namely, a theater adaptation of manga that was later adapted into anime, which features a sport played by a group of young schoolboys and has an "over-the-top" depiction of the characters and their skills?

Suzuki's idea that the mise-en-scène seen in *Tenimyu* is a hallmark of 2.5-Dimensional musicals is shared by other critics and also producers of these plays. For example, Hoshino Futoshi claims that 2.5-Dimensional musicals have three characteristics, namely: they are musicals based on existing manga or anime; the cast are mainly young male actors; and they do not rely on the convention of realism on which conventional musicals stand, and this third point called for a new genre title of 2.5-Dimensional musicals (Hoshino 2015). He then explains that 2.5-Dimensional musicals stand on an alternative convention of realism, namely: appearances of the characters played by actors clearly and closely resemble those of the original two-dimensional characters; stage sets often consist of highly simplified components; and the code of narrative in the original that is often un-naturalistic is prioritized over coherence of a theatrical narrative structure (Hoshino 2015). Sociologist Azuma Sonoko discusses the third point on the code using Ōtsuka Eiji's concept of "manga/anime-esque realism (*manga anime teki riarizumu*)," namely, an idea that manga and anime have a different kind of convention about what is real/realistic within the world they depict, and that is not necessarily compatible with the idea of realism in the "real" world. Significantly, manga/anime-esque realism, unlike "naturalistic" realism, also focuses thoroughly on characters rather than people with flesh/a body. According to Azuma, 2.5-Dimensional musicals respect conventions within the original texts, however unrealistic they appear to be, while in conventional musicals based on manga or anime, such as those produced by the Takarazuka Revue Company, such unreality is adjusted or modified so that it is more acceptable for the audience. Therefore, 2.5-Dimensional musicals form a genre that is separate from conventional theater adaptations of manga, anime, or videogames. She also asserts that in 2.5-Dimensional musicals, "manga and other texts are not simply one of ingredients for theater production, but it is rather that theater performance is chosen and utilized as a means to allow the audience to enjoy the world depicted in those texts" (Azuma 2016).

None of these critics, however, clearly explain exactly what they mean by such unconventional mise-en-scène, or how unconventional a show should be to be recognized as a 2.5-Dimensional musicals. Suzuki simply quotes from the theater program of a recent production of *Tenimyu*, which claims that the show reproduced the tennis matches as they are depicted in the manga, which were said to be impossible to recreate, using a spotlight that signified the movement of the ball coupled with the sound of the ball being shot, which was also enhanced by a video image where necessary; it featured memorable music that directly represented the image of the world depicted in the original; and powerful dances that featured the forms of tennis (Suzuki 2018). Hoshino makes a point similar to Azuma without referring to Ōtsuka's concept, stating that the performers/producers and the spectators share the understanding that 2.5-Dimensional musicals are adaptations of texts in a totally

different media format that is impossible to be reproduced on stage. He points out that, in *Tenimyu*, speeches and events in the original that are often nonsensical are represented on stage as they are without any modification, keeping highly charged emotions in the original (Hoshino 2015). He also refers to the unrealistic tennis skills displayed by the characters in the original *Prince of Tennis* as specific examples, but he does not make any general definition or discussion on unreality as the essence of 2.5-Dimensional musicals (Hoshino 2015) Azuma simply gives the unrealistic color of the characters' hair or their costumes as examples (Azuma 2016) Ueda Mayuko, in her discussion of another sport-themed 2.5-Dimensional musical *Haikyū*, lists mise-en-scène in these sports-themed 2.5-Dimensional musicals, which she calls "revolutionary," namely "the Puzzle Ride System" in *Yowamushi pedal*, a choreography devised by the show's director Nishida Shatonā, representing a bicycle race with actors only having the handles of bicycles moving on the stage in precisely choreographed formation, the aforementioned examples of representation of tennis match in *Tenimyu,* and also the tilted stage in *Haikyū*, which features volleyball matches (Ueda 2016).

A pitfall of this approach is that it significantly limits the critical and also creative scope of 2.5-Dimensional musicals because it is basically based on the idea that *Tenimyu* is the prototype of the genre, and mise-en-scène that attempts to recreate the "over-the-top" aspect of the original on stage as it is seen in *Tenimyu* is an, or even *the* essence of, 2.5-Dimensional musicals. It is true that *Tenimyu* is highly successful and popular. It, at the time of writing, has no less than 32 "arcs" over three seasons between 2003 and 2017 (Myūjikaru Tenisu No Ōjisama Kōshiki Saito Koremade No Kōen 2018). The show attracted an audience of no less than 2.1 million in total as of 2016, and some shows were produced outside Japan (South Korea and Taiwan) (Japan 2.5-Dimension Musical Association 2016). Furthermore, other similar shows Ueda mentions also enjoy popularity. However, whether the mise-en-scène touted as unique or even "revolutionary" in *Tenimyu* and other similar shows is truly an essential aspect of 2.5-Dimensional musicals is questionable because there are numerous anime/manga/videogames that provide the original for these theater adaptations, and not all of them have the same level of "over-the-top-ness" found in *Tenimyu* and others. However, excessive emphasis on *Teniyu* and especially its mise-en-scène as a specimen example of 2.5-Dimensional musicals leads to a potential risk that creators, critics, and spectators only recognize quasi-*Tenimyu*-esque shows as 2.5-Dimensional musicals, leaving all other shows slipping out of their fingers. This actually seems to be already happening in several areas: as already seen, critics tend to use *Tenimyu* as almost the only example of typical 2.5-Dimensional musicals, and so do the practitioners. Matsuda Makoto, the producer of *Tenimyu*, the CEO of Nelke Planning, a company producing a number of 2.5-Dimensional musicals and one of the organizers of the Japan 2.5-Dimensional Musical Association, was asked in an interview about texts that are suitable for adaptation into 2.5-Dimensional musicals. He replied:

> To adapt manga and anime into a stage play, you would need some kind of idea. I believe that shows in which the idea enabled the original to be "converted" successfully [into a stage play] will be successful. For example, in *Tenimyu* we converted tennis matches into dances and songs. In *Yowamushi pedal*, [we converted a bicycle race] into highly choreographed human movements (*pawā maimu*). It is difficult to recreate the sense of being on the scene as you read it in the manga on stage, but if you read the manga and come up with the idea for the conversion, then there is a chance. I tell young producers that if you simply copy the original, that won't work, and also you would lose out if you don't have the device for conversion in your head. I feel that that is the most thrilling aspect of 2.5-Dimensional musicals (The Japan Foundation 2015).

Again, Matsuda equates the "idea" with coming up with a mise-en-scène that effectively reproduces manga/anime-esque characteristics of the original on stage. However, is this the formula of success for 2.5-Dimensional musicals, and its essence as a genre? I argue that that is not the case. Instead of focusing on mise-en-scène, we can approach some significant aspects of 2.5-Dimensional musicals by examining another show, namely, the theater adaptation of *Sakura*, which predates *Tenimyu*

but still has some similar aspects as well as significant differences in terms of its approach to theater adaptations of anime/manga/videogames or two-dimensional texts.

2.3. 2D "Characters" on Stage

Suzuki, in his overview of 2.5-Dimensional musicals, gives three significant aspects of the genre besides the mise-en-scène, which is predominantly associated with the post-*Tenimyu* period, namely costumes, characters, and fans (Suzuki 2018). He asserts that one significant change in the early history of 2.5-Dimensional musicals is that productions such as *Rose of Versailles* or *Saint Seiya* attracted audiences because they came to the theaters, not necessarily because they were fans of the original texts, but because they often wanted to see the Takarazuka actresses/Johnny's idols; after the theater adaptation of *Sailor Moon* in 1991, which did not feature any famous actors, most of the spectators were fans of the original and they wanted to see the characters in costume on stage that looked exactly as in the original (Suzuki 2018). Both *Tenimyu* and *Sakura* are the same in this respect, at least to some extent. To be more precise, in both cases, the producers made attempts to "educate" the spectators so that they expected to come to the theater to see the characters and participate (or not participate) in the show as such, as discussed below. However, while *Tenimyu* features young actors who physically very strongly resemble the characters they are playing, in *Sakura*, it is the voice actresses who played the voices of the characters in the original videogame that play the same role on stage. This difference leads us to the first major issue on 2.5-Dimensional musicals: how would they recreate characters on stage? Behind this question is still another question: what is character?

The idea of character is a popular topic in discussion of Japanese popular culture, especially in relation to manga.[2] In the case of 2.5-Dimensional musicals, discussion on characters often focus on the relationship between the 2D characters who lack physicality and their "3D" representation on stage by actors with a body, and especially on how the integrity between these two is secured. As is the case in many post-*Tenimyu* 2.5-Dimensional musicals, one aspect, obviously, would be physical appearance. But that is not everything. Instead, in 2.5-Dimensional musicals, it is often argued that eventually the actors have to "be the character" by digesting all aspects beyond physical appearance. That, in turn, leads to an assumption that in 2.5-Dimensional musicals, the actors are always the characters, not the actors, and it is not acceptable for them to show, at any moment, their "real" self. As Hoshino aptly puts it, in 2.5-Dimensional musicals, the actors are "mediums" that facilitate the appearance of 2D characters in a 3D space. He compares 2.5-Dimensional musicals with a religious ritual because of their shared characteristics, in that both of these make the spectators/worshippers have an illusion that something that does not exist in reality is physically in front of them through the body of a person. In his view, as such, actors in 2.5-Dimensional musicals are a sacrifice in these rituals, whose bodies are dedicated to the imaginary figure for its materialization (Hoshino 2015). In other words, the actors are containers for the characters. Sugawa Akiko, one of Japanese pioneers in research on what she termed the "2.5-Dimensional Cultural Sphere (*2.5 jigen bunka ken*)" or a host of products/activities that lie in the liminal area between 2D texts and the 3D "real" world, such as 2.5-Dimensional musicals, cosplaying, and so-called "pilgrimage" or tourism to places that appeared or used as model of locales in 2D texts, makes a similar point in some more detail using, again, *Tenimyu* as an example. She states that spectators of *Tenimyu* "superimpose the image of anime on the actors on stage by appreciating their appearance that looks exactly the same as in the anime (and also their makeup, costume, and props that are a replica [of the anime and manga] and their voice (the actors imitate the voices and speech style of the characters they play as they are presented in anime as closely as possible)" (Sugawa 2015). As a result, these "3D" actors are required to completely suppress their "true self" to be the characters, and this "characters-first policy," as she calls it, "pushes away personal characteristics of the individual actors to the background" (Sugawa 2015).

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2   For example, Chapter 3 of (Itō 2005; Ōtsuka 2013; and Azuma 2007) among many others.

In 2.5-Dimensional musicals, the "myth" that the actors on stage are the characters, not actors playing the role of the characters, is crucial. These remarks on the relationship between the actors and characters tell us about one aspect of this myth. However, it is not only the actors who are involved in the creation and maintenance of this myth because it has to be shared by the producers, actors, and the spectators for 2.5-Dimensional musicals to exist, and for that, different techniques have been developed. I argue that *Sakura Wars* and *Tenimyu* share some of these in contrast to the assumption that these are unique to the latter, and, at the same time, they take different approaches in securing integrity between 2D characters in the original text and 3D ones on stage. More specifically, they both incorporated a mechanism that reinforced the myth in the form of extra shows in which the actors performed outside usual theater productions, but still as the characters. However, in *Tenimyu*, as discussed later, this extra show is more like a way to enable the spectators to immerse themselves in the world of the text by allowing them to see the characters exist outside the play (i.e., not bound with prescribed speeches and actions in the original text and the script), even cheering at them by shouting the name of the characters, while in the regular shows they are supposed to "behave." In *Sakura*, on the other hand, the aim and effect of the extra shows are the same, but the spectators are encouraged to actively participate in the reinforcement of the myth in the regular shows by interacting with the characters, and the mechanism to facilitate this process is integrated into the structure of the show, making it a fusion of a theater play and a live music performance. In addition, while *Sakura* elects to use the voice of the characters to secure the integrity between 2D and 3D characters, *Tenimyu* opts for physical appearance, although the actors are trained to imitate the voice and speech of the characters in the anime adaptation.

Another important issue about the physical representation of 2D characters on stage for long-running shows like *Sakura* and *Tenimyu* is how to cope with actual physical and emotional changes of the actors through passage of time. Again, the two shows have commonality in that the performers, unlike one-shot shows, are allowed to identify or "become" the character over a longer period of time. At the same time, the different method to secure the integrity between 2D and 3D characters in these two shows have their own strengths and weaknesses, which are related to the prospect of exporting these shows, or 2.5-Dimensional musicals in general, as discussed toward the end of this article. Now, I will discuss each of these points in turn, starting with some general discussion on the materialization of 2D characters in 2.5-Dimensional musicals, or what it exactly means for the actors to "become" the characters.

3. How Actors "Become" Characters

To consider what it means for actors to be the characters in 2.5-Dimensional musicals, it is necessary to reflect on what characters in this particular context are, and what the differences between the characters in the original 2D texts and their representation or "recreation" in "3D" world are. Anime critic Fujitsu Ryōta claims that anime characters can exist because their integrity is guaranteed by coherence of its iconographic characteristics (such as color of hair) and voice. Of these two aspects, the former are simply signs, while the voice, although it is attached to the body of the actor, the viewers hear it as the voice of the character, not that of the actor; therefore, it is actually separated from their body (Fujitsu 2015). He also asserts that in 2.5-Dimensional musicals or live film adaptations of 2D texts, on the other hand, the body of the actor exists first. It is when "the adaptation can offer proper reasons why the actor has to recreate the iconographic characteristics of the character using his/her body" that "the 'body' and 'iconographic characteristics' strike a balance and a '2.5-Dimensional character' (that recreates a 2D character in 3D) is born" (Fujitsu 2015). If, in this process, excessive emphasis is placed on recreating iconographic characteristics with the body of the actor having a weak link with them, the result would simply be a person who looks like the character (Fujitsu 2015). What links these two (the body and the iconographic characteristics) is internal characteristics of the character that is formed within the mind of the actor, and superficial aspects of the character, such as hair, speech style, and costume, can only stand on top of it (Fujitsu 2015) According to Fujitsu, for the

actor to form the "internal characteristics of the character," it is crucial that the adapted text has an ample amount of "information on setting and story" that facilitates the process (Fujitsu 2015).

The claim that information on the setting and story is necessary for an actor to "be" the character does not seem to be unusual in relation to the relationship between an actor and their role because that will facilitate a deeper understanding of the role, just like contextual information on conventional dramas and relevant methodologies for acting would also apply to 2.5-Dimensional musicals. However, there are some differences between 2.5-Dimensional musicals and many live-action adaptations, especially feature films or TV dramas. Live-action adaptations tend to feature established actors and the stories are often modified or abridged due to lack of time to recreate the entire story of a given anime/manga, thus requiring "reason for the actor to physically recreating the character" and the formation of the "internal characteristics." At the same time, however, unlike 2.5-Dimensional musicals, where the spectators, as Suzuki pointed out above, come to the theater to see the characters, not the actors, audiences of these films or TV dramas may well want to see the actors as much as or more than the characters. In 2.5-Dimensional musicals, on the other hand, the actors are expected to fully recreate the character, even by suppressing their own self. In addition, the story tends to be exactly the same as the original, spanning a long time in terms of time both in and outside the text. This means that the actors on stage need extra information on the setting or context so that they can fully be the characters.

Tsutsui Haruka, in her discussion of *Tenimyu*, explains that this "extra" is two-folded: one is "temporal and spatial parts" that are supplemented to the original text when it was produced on stage, and the other is temporal continuity, in which one actor continues to play the same role over a prolonged period of time. The added temporal and spatial parts can be regarded as a version of the extra information Fujitsu mentioned. Tsutsui states that when two-dimensional visual texts are adapted to stage, the entire world of the original text as it is represented in it is "set up" on stage by the behavior of the characters and events that happen to them outside the frame of the anime or manga being inserted in a form appropriate to theater as a medium (Tsutsui 2015). On the actual stage, these inserted parts take the form of ad-libs, intentional variations between each production, and, in the case of *Tenimyu*, what is called "the bench work", or pantomimes by characters on the background who are not playing in the match taking place at the center of the stage. These are not relevant to the main plot of the original or the play, but they are very important for the spectators because they can see these in front of them even though they are not depicted in the original 2D text, and so are for the actors (and also the characters as they are represented on stage) because these make it clear that the characters do not exist simply to recreate the original story, but they can "build up stories spontaneously" (Tsutsui 2015). She also points out that the longer an actor plays the same character, the stronger they will be associated with it (Tsutsui 2015). If we apply Fujitsu's scheme, these "blank parts" that allow actors to develop the character beyond simple facsimile of the original will facilitate the actor's deeper interpretation of the character that, in turn, leads to the formation of "internal characteristics." Furthermore, by playing the same role, the actor can forge a deeper and stronger link with the character to further develop understanding of the "internal characteristics".

It is not just actors who are involved in this process of formation of characters. As it is already observable in the example of the "bench work" above, the spectators also go through a process in which they accept the actors as the characters. In his article on *Tenimyu*, Iwashita Hōsei reaches a conclusion similar to Tsutsui's point above that "continuously watching *Tenimyu* is to observe the actors grow and identify with the characters" and "consequently the image of the growing actors creates that of the character different from the original text on stage" (Iwashita 2015). Before reaching this conclusion, however, he, also referring to the "bench work" and such events as "Dream Live" and "The Great Sports Day (*Dai undō kai*), contends that, as the spectators follow this process of observation, they superimpose "actors with names of their characters" on "actors with names as actors (i.e., not necessarily their real name but the name with which they are known as actors)" (Iwashita 2015). These two concepts, in addition to another category, namely, "the actors with their real name" (i.e., the actors in their private life where they use their real name) were originally adapted by Azuma Sonoko in

her analysis of fans of Takarazuka: the former is an equivalent of an actress who is playing a particular role in a particular play produced by the revue company, and the latter refers to the same actress herself who plays different roles in different plays, again produced by the company, but still under the same stage name either as a male (*otoko yaku*) or female (*on'na yaku*). In the case of Takarazuka, the life of actresses as "actors with their real name" is hidden from the fans (Azuma 2009). According to Iwashita, the spectators of *Tenimyu*, by watching the behavior of the actors in the "bench work," "Dream Live", and "The Great Sports Day", which are not relevant to the plot, they appreciate how "correctly" "actors with the names of their characters" understand and play the character they are playing, and, at the same time, they are also looking for "actors with names as actors" or the "true self" of the actor that can actually compromise accuracy (Iwashita 2015). He further points out that the fact that, once 2.5-Dimensional musicals are sold as DVD or Blu-ray, these discs have bonus features such as behind-the-scenes footage that provide the viewers with images of the actors outside the stage, further encouraging this type of viewing. Iwashita's point seems to be contradictory to the claim made by Sugawa and Hoshino above that, in 2.5-Dimensional musicals, actors have to completely abandon their "true self." However, his point, as well as that of Tsutsui, actually indicates that such a claim does not mean that in 2.5-Dimensional musicals the actor has to be totally transparent, but it rather means that even their personality should contribute to reinforce the existence of the 2D character they are playing on stage. Even under the "character-first" policy, the personality of the actors actually exists within the characters recreated on stage in a very subtle form, and it is this delicate balance between the two that the spectators enjoy when they see a 2.5-Dimensional musical production.[3]

The articles on *Tenimyu* I have mentioned above often refer to "Dream Live" and "The Great Sports Day" to contend that, in *Tenimyu*, the relationship between the actors and the characters they are playing is unique. These events, which started in 2004 and 2012, respectively, as already briefly mentioned, are different from regular productions in that they are totally irrelevant to the plot of the original text. In these "extra events", the actors sing songs in the former or play various "real" sports in the latter, still as the characters they are playing. In other words, in these extra shows the characters exist outside the original text as it is represented on stage in regular productions, and their existence relies entirely on the actors. Thus, the borderline between "actors with the names of their characters" and "actors with names as actors" in Iwashita's scheme is blurred. These shows, if we apply Tstsui's concept, consist solely of the supplementary temporal and spatial parts. In an interview, Ueshima Yukio, the director, choreographer, and writer of *Tenimyu* since its first production, asked about the difficulties the actors can face in Dream Live where they have to keep playing their characters outside the regular production, independent of the storyline, replied as follows:

> In the regular productions [of *Tenimyu*] we make it a rule to make the actors stay in their characters all time. I tell them that they still have to be the characters even when they go down to the auditorium [during the show as a part of mise-en-scène]. In Dream Live, although these are live performances [rather than a stage play], they must be there as the characters. I tell them never stop doing that, and scold them if they are forgetting to be their characters. But unlike in the regular performances, the spectators can shout [the name of the characters] aloud like "Ryōma!" or "Tezuka *buchō* (the head of the club)!" From the very beginning [of these shows] we direct [the spectators] to call them by the name of the characters, not the actors ('Tenimyu' to iu mahō no kuni no tsukuri kata: Orijinaru enshutsu/furitsuke Ueshima Yukio 2016).

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3 Although I cannot discuss this in full detail, the three types of personae are not specific to Takarazuka or 2.5-Dimensional musicals, but obviously can be applied to celebrities or stars in general: Richard Dyer (2004), for example, points out that a "star image consists both of what we normally refer to as his or her 'image,' made up of screen roles and obviously stage-managed public appearances, and also of images of the manufacture of that 'image' and of the real person who is the site or occasion of it." In the case of these genres, however, the tension between "image" and "real" can be further complicated because of the complex role of gender within the scheme.

This means that, in *Tenimyu*, the producers are making an active attempt to blur the boundary between the two kinds of actors in Iwashita's concept.

This kind of relationship between actor and character, however, is not unique to or established by *Tenimyu*. In reality, *Sakura* has almost exactly the same mechanism, since before the first production of *Tenimyu*'s The Great Sports Day in 2004. More significantly, in *Sakura*, such a scheme is at work not only in the extra shows but also in regular ones. In addition, unlike *Tenimyu*, in *Sakura* the mechanism is built into the structure of the show itself in the form of complex narrative structure that enables the spectators to immerse themselves into the "world" of the original text. Between 2002 and 2006, the shows of *Sakura* were produced twice annually in summer and during the New Year holidays rather than just in summer. While the shows in summer were conventional musicals, the New Year shows, titled *Shinshun kayō shō* or The New Year Music Show, consisted of two parts: the first was a short musical that often supplemented the story of the show held in the summer before, and, in the second part, as in *Tenimyu*'s counterparts, the actresses, as their characters, sang, danced, played Japanese *taiko* drums, or engaged in various activities including games or quiz competitions. Particularly interesting and important among these is "various activities." Apart from one exception (a form of quiz/comedy show called *ōgiri*),[4] the actresses did not know the questions until they heard them on stage for the quizzes, and, as for the game, the whole event was improvised: they played *sugoroku*, a board game often played in Japan when friends and family come together to celebrate the New Year. On the board of *sugoroku* is a stretch of path that connects the origin and the goal. Just like in Monopoly, the players roll a die and move their game pieces. The one who reaches the goal first wins the game. Again like Monopoly, the path between the origin and the goal is divided into many grids, and the players have to follow the instructions written on the grid on which their piece landed. In the case of *Sakura*'s shows, these instructions asked the players to do various things, such as impersonating another character, singing a song that is usually sung by another character, or play a musical instrument of their choice (only for this, the actresses were informed in advance and practiced during the rehearsals, choosing an instrument ranging from the trumpet to the Japanese *shamisen* lute). These games continued over the period of the entire production (usually a week). In the case of quizzes and *ōgiri*, the points won by the actresses were accumulated and carried on to the next performance on the following day, or sometimes in the evening of the same day. *Sugoroku* was suspended when they ran out of time for the day, and was resumed in next performance from where they left it. So the spectators had to either attend all shows or buy the DVD that includes behind-the-scenes footage and all variations of the show, including ad-libs and changes to the setlist, to know the final result, making the show akin to a variety show and a live music performance rather than a theater performance.

In these extra shows, exactly as Iwashita and Tsutsui point out in relation to *Tenimyu*, the spectators enjoy observing how accurately the "actors with the names of their characters" understand the characters they are playing as well as "actors with the name as actors" that appear in the improvised conversations. In addition, they also often enjoy some deviation of the characters on stage from the original characters, for example, a character who is calm and does not show emotion in the original text making jokes. This sounds contrary to Ueshima's remark above. However, in the case of *Sakura*, the actresses still stick to the way the characters speak to each other and also the general setting in the original text, including personal relationships between the characters. Therefore, the deviation does not necessarily appear as a contradiction, but often as parody. In *Sakura*, this is actually not limited to these extra shows but also observable in regular shows in the form of ad-libs and vignettes that change from one performance to another as in the "bench work" in *Tenimyu*. However, the second part of the New Year show of *Sakura*, as is the case with the extra shows of *Tenimyu*, stands

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4   This is a game often performed by comedians in Japan where they come up with puns or improvise conversations based on themes set by the master of the ceremony who is also the judge. If the judge decides that the answer is witty, funny, or pleasing to them, the contestant will be awarded with a cushion on which they can sit. The judge can take it away if they do not like the answer. The contestant who first wins ten cushions, wins the game.

entirely on the subtle coexistence of the character and the actor within their body.[5] This will not be possible unless the actors fully "become" the characters by playing them over a long period of time (seven years by the time when these activities were introduced), as Tsutsui puts it referring to *Tenimyu*. Such continuity can be used as a marker that distinguishes a certain type of shows from others within 2.5-Dimensional musicals.

In addition to these extra shows themselves, in *Sakura* there are a number of other devices that blur the distinction between the two types of actors. For example, the spectators are regularly encouraged or even directed to share the understanding that those on stage are not the actresses but the characters, an idea crucial for a 2.5-Dimensional musical. All shows of *Sakura* have a preliminary briefing to the spectators, where Hiroi, the producer, and another character appear on stage and give health and safety instructions as well as general remarks on behavior during the show. (Hiroi himself appears as a character that only appears in the stage shows). Besides these, they also give specific instructions as to when to applaud (not during the song but inbetween, they should stop when the actresses begin to deliver their lines), and they have to call those on stage by the name of the characters, not the actresses. In addition, at the end of each performance there are short self-introductions and speeches by the characters, but these are also given as the characters, not the actresses. The only occasion this convention was broken was when the show featuring characters from the first two videogames came to an end to be replaced by shows with those from later instalments in the franchise in 2006, reminding Hoshino's remark that the actors on the stage in a 2.5-Dimensional musicals are dedicating their bodies to the characters. (In this very last show, the actresses stopped being the characters and finally spoke as themselves). As is the case with *Tenimyu* and many recent 2.5-Dimensional musicals, shows of *Sakura* were later sold on VHS, and later DVD and Blu-ray. Early examples of these featured very short interviews with the actresses and some other key members of the staff, such as Hiroi and composer Tanaka Kōhei, who has composed all musical pieces for the franchise including the original videogame, anime and the shows. Later, the DVD began to be sold as a boxed set including two, three, or four discs with the main show and extra features. In addition to those mentioned above, the extra features also had hours of footage shot by the actresses themselves as well as Hiroi throughout the period of the rehearsals and even during the show, enabling the viewers to see "actors with names as actors"[6].

In addition to these, another device that further complicates the relationship between "actors with names as actors" and "actors with names of their characters" is built into shows of *Sakura*. All main characters who are the members of the special team in the original videogame are female, and disguise themselves as actresses of a revue company, one of which is clearly modeled on Takarazuka, or singers or dancers of a Parisian cabaret. In the original videogame, we hardly see their actual performance, but in the show, it is shown on stage, and for the adaptations of those set in venues other than Paris, they feature a play-within-the-play, which is a representation of shows produced by the revue company within the text. As is the case with the "real" Takarazuka, all roles are played by female actors, meaning some of the characters are playing female roles, and others male. At the same time, the shows also depict the daily life of the characters leading up to the production of the play-within-the-play; in the show in summer 2014, the characters behind the stage were struggling to keep the show (play-within-the-play) going when a guest star joined the company to attempt to destroy the show by killing those on stage. The spectators, especially those familiar with the setting of the characters, can develop expectations on what kind of role the characters will play in

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[5] Some 2.5-Dimensional musicals have a structure similar to "Great Sports Day". For example, according to Sugawa, the theater version of *Sengoku BASARA* (2014) consists of two parts. Act 1 is a "serious play" and Act 2 is composed of various different sections with a strong sense of parody, such as singing songs changing lyrics, a dance competition, as well as skits that are mostly ad-libbed and talks including episodes of mishaps featuring actors with names as actors. Sugawa comments that, in these, "rapid switching and coexistence between '*neta*' (parody) and '*beta*' (the "sober" aspects outside the parody or even the setting of the texts)" were clearly observable (Sugawa 2015).

[6] However, expectably, these footages are "sanitized" to some extent. We hardly see "heavy" moments such as the actors receiving feedback, or sometimes being yelled at.

the play-within-the-play, for example, whether that should be a male or female role as in Takarazuka, a hero or villain, or serious or comical character. Sometimes, they may feel that the casting within the play-within-the-play perfectly matches their image of the character (not the actresses playing them), or at other times, totally unexpected, in a positive or negative way. This means that both the characters themselves and the actresses who are playing their roles are subject to the relationship between the three kinds of actors in Iwashita/Azuma's scheme: they, as "actors with names of their characters", play the role of the characters who are also "actors with names of their characters" in the play-within-the-play. In Act 1 of the regular shows, which depicts the daily life of the characters, the actresses are still "actors with names of their characters", but the characters are "actors with names as the actors" or also "actors with their real name". On the other hand, in the New Year Show, when they are playing the games, the actresses are between "actors with names of their characters" and "actors with names as actors" while they are playing the characters who are "actors with names as actors" (as discussed in a moment, even in these extra shows, they are regarded as actresses belonging to the revue company both by the voice actresses playing them and the spectators because of the framework that defines the theatrical space). The spectators are watching the show going back and forth between these different relationships. From the actresses' point of view, in playing their role, they have to have a very deep and "accurate" understanding of the characters because, in the play-within-the-play, they have to play the role as if the characters are playing it, although in terms of the storyline, the play has no direct link with Act 1 or the original texts. This process can lead to further reinforcement of the "internal characteristics" of the characters and strengthen the link between the character and the actresses because the relationship requires that both roles are played by the same actress, thus giving the character a physical body in the form of the actress. For the audience, the "setup" of the image of the character on stage that Iwashita mentions is accomplished more effectively and strongly because the process takes place simultaneously on two different levels that reinforce each other, so to speak.

The examples examined above at length, however, are not the only factors that enable the characters to be identified with the actresses, and the spectators accept that they are seeing the characters, not the actresses. Another very significant difference between *Sakura* and *Tenimyu,* as well as other similar recent 2.5-Dimensional musicals, is that, unlike in the latter, the physical appearance of the actresses hardly plays any role in making the spectators identify the actresses with the characters. In *Sakura*, the voice actresses who played the voice of the characters in the original videogame are playing the same role on stage. This naturally means what they have common is just the voice. (For example, in the case of the adaptation of the first two videogames, the tallest character is played by the shortest actress, and vice versa). Under Fujitsu's scheme, we can say that in *Sakura*, the voice of the characters is prioritized over iconographic characteristics as a device to secure the integrity between the character and the actor with a physical body. As already mentioned above, Hiroi, the producer of the franchise, chose the actresses with a theater adaptation in view. Asked why he elected to have the voice actresses play the same role on stage, he replied that he once heard at another theater anime adaptation of a child among the spectators complaining that the voice was different from the anime, and he thought that "this is a betrayal to the spectators. Why shouldn't the characters have exactly the same voice as in the original." (Yamakawa shizuo kareinaru shōtaiseki 2007).

Hiroi, unlike in the case of recent 2.5-Dimensional musicals, believes that what secures the integrity between the character and the actor on stage is primarily voice rather than physical appearance. While relatively few 2.5-Dimensional musicals feature voice actors playing the same role they played in the anime, such a convention can be actually found outside the theater in the form of live performance by characters in anime or videogames featuring female idols such as *Love Live!* or *The Idol M@ster*.[7]

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[7] The exception includes *Hunter x Hunter* (2000, 2002, 2004), *Ōshitsu kyōshi Haine* (2017), and *Shōjo kageki rebyū sutāraito* (2017). The third example is particularly interesting because it, as *Sakura*, features theater with an all-female cast as part of the setting. Furthermore, the project started primarily as a musical, and at the time of writing, the anime will be broadcast for more than a year after the project is launched, by when two theater performances will have been produced. These

Comparison between this type of live performance, which sociologist Kawamura Satofumi calls "voice actor-character live", with *Sakura* is very useful because they share one important aspect, namely, the role of the audience, especially how they participate in the show, and that, in turn, is related to another significant point that enables *Sakura* to recreate the world of the original text on stage without relying on peculiar mise-en-scène: identification of the actual space of the theater and the spectators with the world within the original text.

4. Audience Participation in 2.5-Dimensional musical and Voice Actor-Character Live

In his article on the live performance of *Love Live!*, Kawamura, using Brian Massumi's concept of affect, argues that in a voice actor-character live, the audience, through their spontaneous and active participation in the show, which he calls an affective relationship based on interaction on the spot—by clapping their hands, waving their glow sticks of different colors, each of which corresponds with different characters, or shouting set phrases sometimes spontaneously but collectively or occasionally in response to the song/speech by the actresses—rather than a reproduction of preconceived images, plays an active role in materializing the character in front of them, and such participation, in turn, has an influence on the voice actresses on stage by making them feel as if they indeed are the characters they are playing (Kawamura 2016) These behaviors by fans are common in many conventional live performances by idols in Japan. What makes *Sakura* unique is that, despite being a theater play, it does also feature these activities by the spectators, and that is encouraged by the producers and those on stage. The spectators actually go through training as spectators on how to actively participate in the show. This is already seen in the aforementioned example of the briefing before the show where the characters brief the audience when to or not to clap their hands, applaud, and so forth. Such instructions may appear to be a version of "APPLAUD NOW" signs in a television studio that prompt the audience to applaud at any given moment. In reality, however, these instructions are intended to train spectators so that they can appropriately and fully participate in the show on two different levels: as theatergoers and also "accomplices" who build up the space where the actresses exist as the characters just like the audience of a voice actor-character live.

One point that Kawamura does not mention in his article is that, even in the case of a voice actor-character live, the type of behavior by the audiences that he calls affectionate relationship often requires audiences to have some previous knowledge on the "code of behavior" so that they can fully participate, because shows such as *Love Live!*, which are produced a number of times over a prolonged period of time, tend to have their own convention as to how the audiences should participate, for example, when and how to clap or when and what to shout during the performance, in response to the "call" by the performer or even without the cue, among others.[8] To fully understand it and participate, audiences will have to either attend the show many times to observe and learn the code or "study" it in advance by watching a recording of the show or asking fellow "senior" fans who are already familiar with the code. Not all of these codes are set by the performer/producer. In a number of cases, they are developed gradually and spontaneously among the audiences as they attend the show multiple times.

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shows consist of a play in the first part, which is followed by a live performance featuring songs sung by the actresses as their characters. It also deserves attention that *Hunter x Hunter* and *Shōjo kageki* are produced respectively by Marvelous Entertainment and Nelke Planning, two major players in the production of 2.5-Dimensional musicals and founding members of the Japan 2.5-Dimensional Musical Association, meaning these companies have attempted and/or are attempting to establish a new form of 2.5-Dimensional musical beyond the *Tenimyu*-esque style. One reason why this type of show is rare is because it is difficult for popular voice actors to participate in rehearsals on a regular basis. Hiroi says that agents of voice actors are not happy for their actors to appear in shows of *Sakura* because that will prevent them from appearing in other anime regularly (Hiroi and Hamamura 2011). In the two recent examples given above, many of voice actors playing major roles in the anime are new to the business or mainly perform in theaters rather than voice act, meaning they can fully participate in rehearsals without worrying about other engagements.

8   I do not intend to entirely reject Kawamura's claim that these interactions are based on affect. It is true that fans "perform" perfectly even when they hear a song that has never been performed before, which amazes the performers, and affect does seem to explain what actually happens in the auditorium when something like that happens. However, for those who missed that "magical moment," it, at least to some extent, is a matter of learning the "correct" behavior.

If these are encouraged by the so-called "officials," namely, the performer and/or the producers, they are likely to make some announcement on it online and, if the performer hosts a radio program, in that. Still, a novice audience would need to learn the code in advance by accessing such announcements.

In the case of *Sakura*, as we have already seen, such learning takes place in theater, facilitated by the "officials." In 2008, the shows of *Sakura* came to an end, to return a year later. Up to 2008, the shows were clearly promoted as theater plays under the banner of *Kayō shō* (music show, 1997–2006), or *Rebyū shō* (revue show, 2006–2008). After 2008, however, the title was changed to *Raibu* (live) and the structure and content of the show became close to Dream Live in *Tenimyu,* where the characters simply sing with short conversations or skits in between. Since after this change to the title, use of glow sticks in the auditorium, which was prohibited up to that point, was allowed, again with instructions telling the spectators that they should break the tube so that the stick begins to glow before the show starts, not between songs during the show to avoid distraction due to the peculiar clicking noises. Other features found in live music performances in Japan, such as the spectators waving a small long rectangular towel over their head, were also introduced. In other words, the show became closer to a live musical performance rather than a musical play. Since 2012, the format of the show returned to musical play, but among the conventions introduced during the period between 2008 and 2012, use of glow sticks remained unchanged. Before 2006, however, the audience participated in the show by clapping hands and shouting. Some of these, which take place while the characters singing, were started simultaneously among the spectators, just like similar examples that Kawamura points out in relation to *Love Live!* and eventually the spectators came to learn the convention. In addition to these, however, besides during the songs, the spectators were encouraged to make such participations during the play. During the period up to 2006, strong influence of Japanese popular theater (*taishū engeki*) and kabuki was observable. For example, in shows between New Year 2004 and summer 2006, just before the climactic scene where the characters play a swordfight, they introduce themselves imitating a famous scene in kabuki play *Shiranami goni otoko*. In the original kabuki, it is a convention that, just after giving their name (as the characters) in turn, the actors pause for a moment, during which the spectators shout the name of the actor. In *Sakura*'s show, exactly the same thing happens, but the spectators shout the name of the characters, not the actresses, following the convention in 2.5-Dimensional musicals and also reflecting the structure and setting of the show discussed below. In the behind-the-scenes footage in the DVD of the show, we can see that when these scenes are rehearsed, the staff shout the name of the characters simulating the reaction of the spectators, meaning that it is an expectation that the audiences would do the same in the actual production (Sakura taisen kayōshō fainaru: Shin ai yueni: Tokuten disk 4: Hanagumi kamera 2006). For these scenes, there was no "official" instruction to the spectators but they, possibly imitating the kabuki convention, spontaneously gave the shout.

But, in other occasions, there was very explicit "training." Shows between summer 2002 and 2006 featured Kumimoto Takeharu, a *rōkyoku* (a genre of popular musical narrative accompanied by *shamisen* lute) performer, who was known due to his attempts to modernize the genre by fusing it with contemporary music genres such as rock. In *Sakura*'s shows, he appeared as a *rōkyoku* performer who is a fan of the characters as actresses. On stage, he performed *rōkyoku* on the characters. After singing once, he briefed the audience when and how to shout some set phrases such as "*Mattemashita* (We were waiting for you!)!", "*Tapppuri* (We want to hear you playing as long as we can)!", "*Meichōshi* (You are singing great)!", and "*Nippon ichi* (You are the greatest performer in Japan)!" He then vacated the stage and appeared again, this time with the shouting from the spectators. He repeated this in every production, but those who attended the show regularly (possibly even all productions of the season) became familiar with the routine and they began to shout spontaneously. In addition, because these phrases can be used outside the *rōkyoku* context, the spectators learned when to use these phrases at scenes where Kunimoto was not on stage or at events on *Sakura* other than the shows.

This idea of educating the audience derived from the fact that in the early period of the shows' history, the spectators did not understand the appropriate behavior as spectators. Hiroi recalls that the

spectators of the very first production of the show in 1997 behaved so badly (they chatted during the show, clapped hands to any trivial and short funny expressions and even when the characters were singing a song that was not appropriate for clapping hands such as a ballad, mobiles rang during the show) that the show overran by 40 min, leading to complaints from the staff and actresses. From the next day, Hiroi began the briefing (Hiroi 2004). What is interesting and unique about shows of *Sakura* is that instead of "educating" the spectators to follow the conventional "code of practice" for theatergoers, i.e., that they should "behave" during the show by watching in silence in principle, they were encouraged to participate actively by following appropriate principles "taught" by the "officials." *Tenimyu*, on the other hand, took a totally opposite approach. According to Matsuda, in the early stage of the shows, he faced similar issues, such as the spectators calling the characters' name when they appeared on stage, displaying placards with the names of the characters over their heads, or coming to the theater in cosplay. This led to complaints from other spectators saying the placards were obstructing the view of the stage, cosplaying was distracting, and that they should not shout because they were watching a musical. In response to these, rules on watching the show were displayed on the official website of the show: no cosplay; no calling of names; no boards; watch the show quietly. The spectators followed these, but Matsuda began to feel pity for them and that it was actually unhealthy to make them watch the show like that, and decided to set an occasion where they are exempted from some of these rules such as calling the name of the characters, which led to Dream Live (The Japan Foundation 2015).[9] In the case of *Sakura*, the briefing, as well as lessons by Kunimoto, were not simply intended to teach the spectators how they should behave, but to train them so that they could participate in the construction of the atmosphere of the theatrical space. After taking such lessons, the audience learns how they can contribute in such an operation and take appropriate actions making their own discretions on when to applaud, clap hands, or call out.[10]

Another significant point of training the spectators as such and encouraging them to participate is that when that is coupled with the narrative structure of the shows discussed above; that enables the space of the theater and the spectators in it to have the double structure similar to that between the voice actresses and the characters as actresses. In the show during Act 1, the spectators are watching a play depicting the daily life of the characters. Here, the spectators are sitting in the auditorium of the venue, still communicating with those on the stage. However, once the play-within-the-play starts, they are watching a production of the revue company, and they are now sitting in the auditorium of the theater where the revue company is based; thus, the theater as the venue of the "real" production is transformed into the place depicted in the videogame, enabling the spectators to be in "the world of the videogame". In the show, the "real" venue is actually not called by its real name, but a composite of the actual name and that of the theater in the game, further enhancing the feeling of "being there". Reinforcing awareness of the spectators that they are theatergoers and also they can participate in the show appropriately through the "training", rather than a passive observer, can further enhance the sense of "immersion", enabling the world of the original text to be "set up" on stage effectively.

Shows of *Sakura* fascinated a number of theater and film practitioners who found the relationship between the spectators and those on stage ideal. For example, Kayano Isamu, who directed the show from 2004 and was later involved in other theater adaptations of anime, such as *Macross F*, states:

> For me, as someone who has been working on theater, the greatest thing [about the shows of *Sakura*] is, after all, the spectators . . . They really play an important role in building up

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9   These behaviors by the spectators are often observable at concerts of young Japanese male idols such as Johnny's, suggesting that the fanbase for the two genres is overlapping. Interestingly, a Japanese fan who attended a production of *Black Butler* in Beijing, seeing the lively reaction of the Chinese audience, commented that the atmosphere in Japan could also possibly be livelier. (White150109 2016).

10   Hiroi, in an interview with Yamakawa Shizuo, quoted later, states that he tried to encourage such an interaction between the spectators and those on stage with Tokugawa-period kabuki theater in mind. Here, we can see the relationship between the show and conventional theater genres, including traditional ones, which I will discuss in more detail later.

the atmosphere on stage. So they give the very final touch to what we were making in the studio during the rehearsals when it is finally materialized on stage. They clap hands or shout exactly at the right time (Sakura taisen kayōshō fainaru: Shin ai yueni: Tokuten disk 4: Seiyōken kishakaiken 2006).

Film director Yamada Yōji, who frequented the show, recalls his experience as a spectator:

The strange sense of unity between those on stage and in the auditorium is not what I would find in conventional theater plays, concerts, or operas. It is as if [the spectators] are all familiar faces who know each other . . . At first, I felt a strange feeling as if I were a stranger in a foreign country, but as I attend the show many times, I found myself standing up or applauding alongside younger fans (Yamakawa shizuo kareinaru shōtaiseki 2007).

It is not only that these prominent figures were attracted to the shows because of the peculiar close relationship between the actors and the spectators, but the shows, as I have already mentioned above, have a strong link with conventional Japanese theater, and those involved in the show were consciously making efforts to establish the shows as a "proper" original musical within Japanese theater. Analyzing the historical context of the show will enable us to have an insight of the situation before "2.5-Dimensional musicals" came into existence as a term or genre, and also critique the idea that it is an essentially different and independent genre that came together with *Tenimyu*.

5. 2.5-Dimensional musicals and Conventional Theater Genres

The relationship between the theater version and the original is very different between shows of *Sakura* and *Tenimyu,* as well as other similar recent 2.5-Dimensional musicals. Many recent 2.5-Dimensional musicals, including *Tenimyu,* are a simple adaptation of the original text, and therefore the spectators know the storyline. (For a non-Japanese-speaking foreign audience, this apparently enables them to enjoy the show even without subtitles) (Sankeibiz 2017). As such, the spectators come to the theater not so much to follow the storyline within the play, but as Nishida Shatonā, the director and choreographer of *Yowamushi pedal,* asserts, to see "live events" including glitches that unfold on stage and also the actors (Nishida 2015). As for the shows of *Sakura*, on the other hand, it is true that the spectators come to the theater to see such "live events", as is the case with parts that change on daily basis or ad-libs as well as the game in the New Year Shows. However, in terms of the storyline, the shows are completely different from the original, or even supplement them. For example, the show in summer 2012 depicted the relationship between characters belonging to the special teams in Tokyo and New York, which is not told in the original text.

Furthermore, the shows even have influence on the "original" text, namely, the videogame. After the summer show in 2001, Tomizawa Michie, playing Kanzaki Sumire, a member of the Tokyo team, gave a notice to Hiroi that she was stepping down from the role in the show, although she still would keep on playing the role in any future release of the videogame and other texts other than the plays. Hiroi approved this and, in the New Year show in the following year, Sumire/Tomizawa "retired." That was followed by an OVA (Original Video Anime, anime to be distributed on VHS/DVD/BD rather than broadcast on TV) and an audio drama depicting Sumire's retirement. Eventually, in the fourth videogame released in April 2002, Sumire left the team at the ending. In other 2.5-Dimensional musicals including *Tenimyu* that are adaptations of the original as a part of cross-media adaptations, actors regularly "graduate" to be replaced by new ones; it is unlikely that what happened on stage had any impact on the original text or more "central" text within the franchise such as anime because, even if such "central" media is not always an exact replica of the original in terms of the setting and storyline, they still are "subsidiary" to the original. In addition, we should also note that this string of events harks us back to the uniqueness of *Sakura* and any live performance in which the voice actors playing the characters they played: in these shows, it is very difficult, to say the least, to let anyone "graduate" to be replaced by someone else because

the integrity of the character between the original and on stage is secured by the voice rather than iconographic characteristics.

The significance of the show within the franchise of *Sakura* means that these are not simply a version of adaptation or supplementary "event (*ibento*)" for promotional purpose. Instead, it is a text on its own. And as such, the shows were intended to be a "proper" theater play and musical firmly contextualized and established within conventional theater in Japan at the time. The idea that even 2.5-Dimensional musicals are theater plays in spite of their seemingly "revolutionary" or "innovative" mise-en-scène is very simple and natural but tends to be overlooked by many commentators, as seen in the articles I have mentioned so far, which often uncritically analyze these plays from the perspective of a branch of cross-media adaptations.[11] Examining the relationship between *Sakura*'s show and conventional theater will remind us of the significance of such a viewpoint.

Actually, the early shows of *Sakura* were not so much a proper theater production but an extension of an "event", and those in the anime industry saw it as such. As Yokoyama Chisa, who played Shingūji Sakura, the lead character of the first two videogames, recalls, the first show in 1997 was more like an "Act 2 of a music show in Japanese popular theater" because microphones came out of all sorts of places, such as a basket the character was carrying or from behind a tree on stage when they were about to sing (Sakura taisen kayōshō fainaru: Shin ai yueni: Tokuten disk 4: Seiyōken kishakaiken 2006). According to Nishihara Kumiko, who played Iris, also in the first two videogames, the staff working for the show were not specialists of theater production and "it took them a really long time to move the sets around between the scenes and it was really noisy . . . so we [actors and actresses] would often ask them whether they want any help" (Sakura taisen kayōshō fainaru: Shin ai yueni: Tokuten disk 4: Seiyōken kishakaiken 2006). Hiroi states that those around him within the industry thought that the show, at the beginning, was a mere "event" or a "cosplay show" (Hanagumi zadankai 2004). Neither the cast nor the staff were happy about the quality of the show, and, according to Nishihara, during the first show, Hiroi and Takano Urara, who played Maria Tachibana, were talking to each other, saying, "we cannot finish the show like this." "We've got to make a [proper] play, not something like an event" (Sakura taisen kayōshō fainaru: Shin ai yueni: Tokuten disk 4: Seiyōken kishakaiken 2006). From the second season, the show clearly moved away from being an "event" to a "proper play." After the end of the first show, Hiroi researched on how long rehearsals should be to produce a decent play, what kind of place a studio for rehearsals was, and what equipment and facilities were needed. As a result, the period of rehearsal was extended from one week to a month and any request on the studio or rehearsals themselves began to be communicated to the staff (Hanagumi zadankai 2004). From the third show, specialists of theater productions joined the staff, and established stage and musical actors such as Sonooka Shintarō and HotaruYukijirō joined the cast, to be followed in the fourth season by Mitsuya Yūji, who is also known as a director and later involved in establishment of *Tenimyu* (Hanagumi zadankai 2004). The summer show in 2005 featured the cast "flying" over the stage. Hiroi, who had the musical *Peter Pan* in mind when he wrote the script, invited the staff of the musical who were involved in the stunt in the show to work for the show of *Sakuta* (Hiroi 2006). Furthermore, the show established a link with conventional musical plays in Japan. For the summer show in 2001, whose "play-within-the-play" was a musical adaptation of *The Sea God's Villa* (*Kaijin bessō*), a play written by playwright and novelist Izumi Kyōka in 1914, kabuki actor Ichikawa Danjirō coached the actresses on kabuki-style dance, and, in the show in which Tomiazawa/Sumire "retired", another kabuki actor, Ichikawa Shun'en, appeared, playing a female role. In the summer show in 2005 and the New Year show in 2006, Kashima Noritoshi, an established actor in popular theater with a long

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11 One notable exception is Saitō Mayuko, a specialist of Western musical theater, who analyzed *Kuroshitsuji* (Black Butler) focusing on the role of the songs to conclude that 2.5-Dimensional musicals are not so much musicals as revues because the songs do not play a central role in the development of the plot or themes, and are simply there to enable the characters to exist on stage. As mentioned in the introduction, she refers to shows of *Sakura* saying they are significant because of the existence of a simple storyline developed by songs.

acting career starting in his childhood played a monstrous figure who could take over the body and mind of anyone he chose. The summer show in 2004, whose "play-within-the-play" was based on the Chinese story *Journey to the West* (*Saiyūki*), even featured a group of traditional Chinese theater actors.[12]

The shift from an "event" to a "proper play" is absent from such shows as *Tenimyu* or *Yowamushi pedal* that are often mentioned as the pioneer or benchmark of 2.5-Dimensional musicals. Those who were involved in the establishment of these shows, such as Mitsuya, Nishida, and Ueshima, are established figures in theater. On the other hand, Hiroi, along with Tanaka Kōhei, a composer of numerous anime theme songs and soundtrack scores, including all songs and music for the entire franchise of *Sakura*, ventured to create a musical based on a videogame as total strangers to theater. Hiroi says that he, as such, turned to established figures for advice on how to produce a play, and they accepted him (Yamakawa shizuo kareinaru shōtaiseki 2007). Furthermore, it will not be an overstatement to say that precisely because they did not see theater as just a version of adaptation and, instead, something completely different that has to be started from scratch, including writing new stories solely for the theater version, the show integrated various different genres in terms of form, technique, and actors, still retaining the setting and characters of the videogame instead of becoming a closed genre that is segregated from existing theatrical genres.

6. Transnational Consumption of 2.5-Dimensional musicals

Finally, let us contextualize the two different types of shows discussed so far within the prospect and reality of transnational consumption of 2.5-Dimensional musicals. Producers of 2.5-Dimensional musicals are very keen to export the genre outside Japan, and also use the genre to attract foreign visitors: the pamphlet of the Japan 2.5-Dimensional Musical Association, in which all texts are in Japanese and English, very clearly indicates that. For example, under a section titled "Global Viewpoint: The First Modern Japanese Theater that Appeals to the Global Market", it states:

> Knowing the enormous popularity of Japanese manga, anime, and videogames in the global market, we support not only the productions that target international audience members, but also those that aim to go into the global market, i.e., bringing Japanese productions to other countries, or licensing productions to local presenters (Japan 2.5-Dimension Musical Association n.d.).

In the section, three main activities to achieve these goals are listed, namely, "Understanding Global market" by "sharing information of areas that have potential for your show"; "Access to experts", which enables the members of the association to "be introduced to those who toured shows overseas, or those in your considered areas"; and "Inbound", meaning "approaching the international communities in Japan", which, it claims, is "probably the first step in your global approach" (Japan 2.5-Dimension Musical Association n.d.). This section tells us different ways 2.5-Dimensional musicals can be consumed transnationally: touring the show itself, featuring the original Japanese cast/staff; licensing the show to be produced with local staff/cast; and bringing foreign visitors to theaters in Japan to see 2.5-Dimensional musicals.

Starting in the late 2000s, various attempts were made on all of these fronts. Some shows such as *Tenimyu*, *Kuroshitsuji* (Black Butler), *Live Spectacle Naruto*, and *Death Note: The Musical* were produced in various Asian countries, including China, South Korea, and Malaysia. Apart from *Death Note*,

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[12] In August 2018 it was announced that OSK Nihon Kagekidan, one of three major all-female revue companies in Japan alongside Takarazuka and Shōchiku kagekidan, is producing *The Sea God's Villa* based on *Sakura's* show, in Minamiza, one of the most prestigious theaters in Kyoto in July 2019. This adaptation is quite interesting because it very clearly attests to the link between *Sakura* and conventional theater genres in Japan I have discussed. In addition, the flyer of the show clearly states that the show is based on that of *Sakura*, and also the official website states that show of *Sakura* is "legendary production" that continued for 10 years, referring to the first productions featuring characters from the first two videogames, and also it is "forerunner of 2.5-Dimensional musicals." (OSK Nihon kagekidan 2018) This, to my best knowledge, is the very first "official" reference to *Sakura* as forerunner of 2.5-Dimensional musicals.

the shows featured a Japanese cast playing in Japanese with subtitles in local languages. *Death Note* took a different approach by licensing the production in South Korea to be performed by local actors in Korean, whereas in Taiwan the Japanese cast played in Japanese with Chinese subtitles. As for the "Inbound," Aiia 2.5 Theater Tokyo, a venue managed by the Association and dedicated to the production of 2.5-Dimensional musicals throughout the year, was opened in 2015. The pamphlet emphasizes that "doors are always open for international audience members" with such services as global ticketing with which foreign patrons can purchase tickets online in English within and from outside Japan officially and an "eyeglass personal monitor, on which the translation of your preferred language appears on the lenses (out of a maximum of four preset languages)" (Japan 2.5-Dimension Musical Association n.d.).

All of these areas invite one question that can potentially separate 2.5-Dimensional musicals from other activities, events, and facilities in which fans consume anime not as texts but as experience within a "2.5-Dimensional culture." Sugawa Akiko defines 2.5-Dimensional culture as "cultural practices that reproduce fictitious world of contemporary popular culture (such as anime, manga, and videogames) within the real world and [enable the fans to] appreciate the blurry boundary between fiction and reality" (Sugawa 2016). Among other examples, including cosplaying, visiting places depicted in or related to these texts, and voice actor-character live, she gives 2.5-Dimensional musicals (Sugawa 2016).[13] Although all of these examples do share the characteristics as she defines as 2.5-Dimensional culture, there are actually two further, different categories within it: those associated with a specific place/space, and those not. Rayna Denison discusses the growing significance of Japan as a geographic place/space where anime is consumed as an experience in the form of specialist shops, theme parks, galleries/museums, and locales in anime texts (Denison 2015). A 2.5-Dimensional musical, as it is envisaged in the pamphlet of the Association, seems to be placed in a strange and interesting position: while it is mobile, just like cosplaying, it can be (and the producers apparently want it to be, at least in some cases) bound to Japan as a geographic place as well as a cultural and linguistic space as examples analyzed by Denison.

2.5-Dimensional musicals, on the one hand, seem to have mobility, as evident in the fact that shows have been produced outside Japan and are at least recently becoming more and more popular. For example, Japanese fans who attended the production of *Kuroshitsuji* in Beijing and Shanghai in 2016 reported that at least on the particular days they attended the show the venue was almost or completely full (Shanghaiajie 2015; White150109 2016).The tour of *Live Spectacle Naruto* in China in 2016 was also very popular, with tickets for almost all performances sold out, according to the Association (Sankeibiz 2017).

At the same time, however, we should note that these shows often retain strong links with Japan; they, more often than not, are played in Japanese by Japanese actors.[14] In addition, the spectators often include Japanese fans who travel from Japan: the official websites of the shows have information on how to book tickets in Japan or through local agents (Chūgoku Kōen ni Kansuru Oshirase 2015; Kaigai Kōen ni Kanshite 2016). In the case where the show is produced further afield, for example in Paris, there even is an "official" packaged tour to attend the show (Myūjikaru tōken ranbu atsukashiyama ibun pari kōen kettei 2018). This tendency remains the same from the early period of export, namely, the production of *Tenimyu* in Taiwan and South Korea in 2008. Japanese fans write that about 60 percent of the spectators seemed to be local, while 40 appeared to be from Japan (Kanna 2008; Petit Frame 2008). Matsuda, the producer of the show, also recalls that the

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13 It is also worth mentioning that she, referring to Henry Jenkins's concept of participatory culture and Erika Fischer-Lichte's "performance", emphasizes the significance of the active participation of the "players" or those who consume these events, reminding us of the role of the audience in the shows of *Sakura*. (pp. 98–99).

14 The prominence of productions featuring Japanese cast playing in Japanese could be associated with the desire of foreign fans to see the "authentic" original or Japanese version rather than an adaptation, comparable with their preference for subtitles than dubbing for anime.

ratio between local and Japanese fans in these productions seemed to be approximately the same (The Japan Foundation 2015). These seem to show that productions of these shows abroad are not simply consumed by fans in the country of production but also involve the "outbound" mobility of avid Japanese fans, and the producers actually target these fans to sell tickets and fill the venue. If so, for the Japanese fans, these productions may be basically an extension of a show in Japan because they feature the same cast as in Japan. It also could be said that the fact that these shows have been produced abroad is used to raise their profile, as observable in the excerpt from the theater program of *Tenimyu* quoted earlier that refers to productions abroad as a barometer of the show's success.

One interesting example that contrasts with these shows is *Death Note: The Musical*. This, so far, is the only example of a licensed production of a 2.5-Dimensional musical outside Japan. The key for success seems to be that the show has a very strong link with conventional theater in Japan and the States: it was directed by Kuriyama Tamiya, a famed Japanese theater director and the art director of the Japanese National Theater; music was composed by Frank Wildhorn, who is known for such shows as *Jekyll and Hyde*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel,* and *Dracula: the Musical,* among others; the book was written by Ivan Menchell, an American TV producer and writer; the Japanese cast included established actors such as Kaga Takeshi, who appeared in many American and British musicals produced in Japan, such as *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *West Side Story*, *Les Miserables,* and also *Jekyll and Hyde*, reminding us of the link between shows of *Sakura* and conventional theater. In addition, it is also significant that, unlike many other 2.5-Dimensional musicals, *Death Note: The Musical* is not a direct adaptation of the original manga, but the storyline, which covers Part 1 or the first 59 episodes of the original manga, is edited and abridged. In terms of mise-en-scène, it also is closer to a straight play rather than a musical, and does not have any "innovative" features found in sets and choreography in "mainstream" 2.5-Dimensional musicals based on sports manga such as *Tenimyu*. In other words, while it still has clear 2.5-ness with manga as the original, and characters' appearance and setting closely following the original, the theater version of *Death Note*, unlike *Tenimyu* and other similar recent 2.5-Dimensional musicals, is intended to be a version of a conventional play that is accessible to those who are not necessarily familiar with the original, rather than a faithful reproduction of the original on stage making use of unique mise-en-scène; more significantly, it actively seeks to present itself as being "cosmopolitan" or "international" rather than "Japanese." The difference in approach can be due to the fact that one of the producers of the show is Hori-pro, a large Japanese company specializing in management of actors, singers, and comedians, as well as the production of films, plays, and TV commercials, while *Tenimyu*, *Kuroshitsuji,* and *Live Spectacle Naruto* are all produced by Matsuda's Nelke Planning. The example of *Death Note* further complicates the issue of the association of 2.5-Dimensional musicals with Japan because one drive behind the eagerness among producers to export 2.5-Dimensional musicals is potentially nationalistic ambition to compete against Western musicals. The cover of the pamphlet of the Association, which reads "*Nihon hatsu sekai hyōjun myūjikaru* (Japanese musicals to be the global standard)", shows that very clearly (Japan 2.5-Dimension Musical Association n.d.). Matsuda also states in an interview:

> All musicals that were successful in Japan so far are all imported from Europe or the States. In other words, in Japan we are diligently producing those imported works, paying fees. That is wonderful in itself, but it would be great if we can create our own Japanese musicals. It is not easy to export Japanese straight plays, but Japanese manga and anime are accepted and loved so much around the world, so if we theatricalize these properly, we can beat [the European and American musicals] (The Japan Foundation 2015).

Asked about his future plans at the end of the same interview, he says:

> Hori-pro is already doing this with *Death Note the Musical*, but I want to establish a system under which we sell the [production] rights of a theatricalized works [of 2.5-Dimensional musicals] to [producers in] other countries. Just like we are paying fees to produce Euro-American plays, we sell the rights to the world. [The theater version of] *Lion King*, as I

heard it, is being produced in seven countries around the world. That means the copyright holder will receive the fee every day. Similarly, [Japanese copyright holders will receive a fee if] Japanese 2.5-Dimensional musicals are produced around the world, for example *Death Note* in Korea or *Sailor Moon* in France. I can imagine that if they produce *Naruto* as a version of *Cirque du Soleil*, it will attract a huge number of spectators. . . . What often people from abroad tell me is "Japan has got such great treasures. Why don't you use them?", [or] "Japan is a great country with a lot of attractive media contents (*kontentsu taikoku*)." Despite there being so many interesting novels, films, and manga, they are all locked up in a box and never used. Manga and anime are now loved all around the world so they should be promoted more. Now, live performance is gaining popularity in all parts of the world, so if we couple that with powerful originals such as manga, anime, and videogames, there is no possibility that we will lose out. . . . We don't have to feel inferiority about the problem of [using] Japanese [which is not a lingua franca] because more and more people are learning it through manga (The Japan Foundation 2015).

Interestingly, Hiroi makes almost exactly the same point from a slightly different angle eight years earlier in an interview with Yamakawa Shizuo, former broadcaster turned theater critic:

Hiroi: The audiences first get hold of the original anime or videogame as texts and thoroughly appreciate the world [in those texts]. Then, once they come to the theater, they can enjoy [the world they know from the texts] live: this is truly innovative and will stimulate the realm of theaters. It can become a catalyst to attract young spectators and those who haven't come to theaters before to theater en masse.

Yamakawa: So you mean you are going to base the show on videogames created in japan, is that correct?

Hiroi: Yes, Actually [conventional imported Western] musicals are performed in Japanese, aren't they? Plays originally performed in English are produced in Japanese in Japan and probably in Korean in South Korea. If [we are to export theater plays from Japan and] the show were based on a videogame, [being produced in local language] would not be a problem, but kabuki does not work like that. Traditional Japanese plays would look unnatural if produced in English, maybe. Actually, [such transnational production] is possible because it is a musical. And shows based on a videogame would be even easier [to be produced like that]. I believe this is going to be popular.

Yamakawa: So, if you combine characters of videogames with techniques of kabuki or *shinkokugeki* (a subgenre of Japanese popular theater), you can create something rather interesting, can't you?

Hiroi: Many videogames [including *Sakura*] feature Oda Nobunaga, so if we make a *Nobunaga: the Musical* based on one of them, his character can be a world-class King of Demons (as he is often depicted in such Japanese popular texts) (Yamakawa shizuo kareinaru shōtaiseki 2007).

The strong hegemonic undertone, as it is especially evident in Matsuda's remarks, seems to indicate a desire to make Japan the "center" of the theatrical world rather than a periphery and the receiving end. When this desire is associated with Japan as a geographic place, that will lead us to the third milieu of transnational consumption of 2.5-Dimensional musical: the "inbound" aspect, or making 2.5-Dimensional musicals a tourist attraction for foreign visitors, thus firmly associating the genre with a specific geographical place and theater as a space, making the experience "authentic", comparable with watching American or British musicals in Broadway or the West End.

There is another important aspect that "anchors" many 2.5-Dimensional musicals, especially *Tenimyu*-style ones, in which the members of the cast "graduate" after some time to be replaced by new ones to Japan. Besides exporting or touring the shows, the Association, as seen in its pamphlet, is very eager to make the shows an attraction for foreign visitors (and foreigners living in Japan). As we have seen at the beginning of this article, one significant aspect of the 2.5-Dimensional musicals, as Suzuki points out to draw a line between *Tenimyu* and conventional theater plays based on anime, manga, and videogames, is that, after *Tenimyu*, the spectators come to the theater to see the characters, not the actors. Hoshino also makes exactly the same point (Hoshino 2015). This is natural given that many of the actors in the 2.5 dimension are not established actors or idols like SMAP in *Saint Seiya*. However, recently some young actors are appearing in multiple shows. Suzuki Hiroki and Tamaki Hiroki, who appeared in a number of shows including *Yowamushi pedal*, *Tōken ranbu*, and *Black Butler*, among many others, are the best examples. The consumption of "actors with names as actors" in the form of behind-the-scenes footage in DVDs of the show and social media actually leads to a situation where they, although not to the same degree as their more established peers, are subject to consumption as actors. In addition, as we have already seen and as Tsutsui points out, in *Tenimyu*-style long-running musicals, temporal duration is significant because that enables the actors to "be the character". Tsutsui also asserts that, because of the fact that these actors continued to play over different arcs of the show over a prolonged period of time, their life as characters was not "severed by reasons that exist outside the text" and spending plenty of time within the text (as the characters on stage) "brought a peculiar sense of existence to their life as characters" and that enabled "unconventional events like 'The Great Sports Day'" to be held (Tsutsui 2015). Iwashita, although he specifically mentions *Tenimyu* as the example, also states that "to watch *Tenimyu* is to observe the actors grow in every arc and identify with the characters they are playing" (Iwashita 2015). If so, then watching *Tenimyu* or similar 2.5-Dimensional musicals actually has an aspect of watching the actors themselves, although it is to see them "grow up". For fans who live outside Japan, and especially if they do not have access to the show itself and/or do not understand Japanese, such style of consumption is not easy to practice.[15] If this type of show is licensed to be produced in an any given country in the same format as the original, meaning running over a several arcs spread across many seasons featuring local actors, what can happen is the same process of consuming the actors is also appropriated within the local context, as is the case in Asian "sister groups" of the idol group AKB48. If this happens, the show can be freed from being geographically bound to Japan. But this, in turn, can mean that there will be a two different tiers of authenticity: the local version and the "authentic" Japanese version as the "original", which can be a catalyst to bringing spectators of the "local" version to see the "authentic" Japanese version, perfectly matching the third agenda set by the Association, "Inbound".

So far, the focus was on *Tenimyu*-style shows, where young actors play the same character for a prolonged period of time before "graduation". How does *Sakura* fit in the picture? Being conceived when broadband was unheard of, the franchise enjoyed very limited mobility outside Japan in the form of DVDs of anime and translated manga; however, the videogame itself and the shows are yet to be released outside Japan at the time of writing. However, the announcement that a new videogame of the franchise will be released in 2019 with a totally new setting, as is anticipated, may mean that the franchise will join the list of 2.5-Dimensional musicals to be exported. Yet, there seems to be one fundamental issue that makes it difficult for the franchise to enjoy the same outbound mobility enjoyed by some other shows, provided that the show based on the new videogame, if produced at all, takes the same format as before, namely, the voice actresses play the same characters on stage. This style of production, in the first place, is getting more difficult to adapt because of the availability of the voice actresses during the rehearsal period. The behind-the-scenes footage of *Sakura*'s shows

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[15] This can be partially solved by simultaneous live screening of the show, as is happening with some shows such as *Naruto*, which was shown in cinemas in six different countries.

reveal that there is a number of occasions where the actresses have to be absent from rehearsals due to other engagements and their roles are played by stand-ins. Holding established voice actors over a prolonged period of time free from any other engagements, as Hiroi's remark on the reluctance of agents to allow their voice actors in *Sakura* shows indicates, is very difficult.[16] Thus, it is highly unlikely, to say the least, for the show to have a tour outside Japan like *Tenimyu* and *Kuroshitusji*, or even one-off performances such as *Tōken ranbu* and *Sailor Moon*, which are to be produced in Paris in July 2018 as a part of a string of events that promote and celebrate cultural exchange between Japan and France. However, such immobility can actually have a positive aspect unlike other 2.5-Dimensional musicals, which are "mass-produce-able" as John Auslander asserts about modern live events using shows for children featuring trademarked superheroes such as Batman at a theme park as an example; in the case of *Sakura*'s show, the body of the actresses and the characters are inseparably connected, so there will be no possibility of the "two-tier" structures applicable to other 2.5-Dimensional musicals that can be licensed to be produced in other countries (Auslander 2008). The shows will not be available on tour either, meaning the only way for any foreign fans to see the show would be to actually come to Japan, making it a truly "authentic" experience that is firmly linked to a geographical place and space.

7. Conclusions

One point that cannot be overemphasized in concluding this article is that there has to be a historical perspective in analyzing 2.5-Dimensional musicals. Currently, the view that *Tenimyu* is the pioneer and benchmark of the genre is so strong, as evident in examples of Japanese articles I quoted throughout this paper, that very little attention is paid to the historical background of the genre. Shows of *Sakura*, which predate *Tenimyu* and the phrase "2.5-Dimensional musicals", provide us with a number of important, interesting, yet overlooked points of reference vis-à-vis more recent shows, especially *Tenimyu* and other similar shows that are often uncritically assumed to be the most significant and representative examples of 2.5-Dimensional musicals, that warrant discussion. Indeed, another important lesson that shows of *Sakura* present is that we need to approach the genre more critically, contextualizing it within conventional theater and also anime-related live performances rather than just a variation in "media-mix" strategies. Emphasizing the "revolutionary" or "innovative" aspect of *Tenimyu* excessively would obscure the simple fact that 2.5-Dimensional musicals are defined as theater plays based on Japanese anime, manga, or videogames in general, and, as such, the genre may well have links with existing genres of theater or other anime-related events. In addition, the shows may even provide a ground for a general discussion on the nature of a live event, especially a play, and how spectators participate in it, as seen in the comparison between suppression of audience participation in *Tenimyu*'s regular performances and *Sakura*'s encouragement for active participation coupled with "training."

We are yet to know whether the new videogame of *Sakura* will be accompanied by shows, but whatever form they take, or if they are not produced at all, that, again will provide us with a lot of food for thought in reflecting on the genre because any change or lack thereof will show us how the franchise managed or failed to cope with the totally new world of 2.5-Dimensional musicals, which did not exist when the original show of *Sakura* was conceived, thus highlighting, again, what the genre currently is.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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[16]   See Note 7.

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