

Manga Studies: Discourse, Mediality, Aesthetics

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Outline

Research on manga has been conducted mainly under the umbrella of “Japanese popular culture,” and it has often been expected to serve “wider” issues: the focus has been either on representation, that is, how manga narratives illustrate, for example, gender roles, historical consciousness, youth nationalism, and disaster-related trauma, or on industrial issues, in particular transmedia franchises and the corresponding fan work. Although different, the two foci equally undervalue the media-specific characteristics of manga itself, its discursive positioning, and the materiality that affects possible readings, or usages, as well as social impacts. This course approaches manga as serialized graphic narratives consisting of still and mute visuals, in other words, a form of corporate fiction with specific genealogies and affordances that is highly affine to transmediality. Interrelating methodologies prevalent in comics studies, Japanese studies, and media studies, the course explores what it means to read manga in relation to historical period, publication mode, gendered genre, and actual location of experience, but also material support, stylistic conventions, representational meaning, and non-representational usages in order to equip the student with basic tools for their own manga-related research projects and, in a broader sense, for argumentation in regard to the often contested aesthetic and cultural potential of Japanese comics.

The sessions will be lectures, but each of them will also contain seminar elements, with students being asked to relate the issues at hand to their own experience of reading manga. Especially welcome are contributions on the titles mentioned in the secondary readings. (The readings indicated for each session form the basis for the respective lecture.)

Session 1

Discourse: What’s in a Name?

In contemporary Western languages, the word *manga* designates primarily graphic narratives made in or associated with Japan, in distinction from North American comics and Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée*. But not all comics made in Japan pass as manga abroad. What makes manga manga for which type of audience, and within which context? What are the consequences of translating the Japanese word *manga* constantly as “manga” into English (and other Western languages) and not as “comics”? Recently, there are also attempts to distinguish *manhua* from *manga* when using Roman letters as distinct from Chinese characters. In addition to “Japaneseness,” *manga* carries the connotation of corporate

productions, as distinct from “alternative,” or “independent” comics. How do fan-cultural productions (*dōjinshi*) fit in, and why do non-Japanese comics artists whose page layouts look mangaesque refrain from calling themselves *mangaka*? This session addresses the above questions from a discourse-analytical perspective while introducing basic strands in Japanese and English-language manga studies. The main examples will be Nakazawa Keiji’s *Barefoot Gen*, and Taniguchi Jirō’s *A Distant Neighbourhood*. [Please note that Japanese names are given in the Japanese order, surname preceding first name without separation by comma, except in the Bibliography.]

Berndt, Jaqueline (2020a), “Mangaesque,” in *Japanese Media and Popular Culture: An Open-Access Digital Initiative of the University of Tokyo*, ed. by Jason G. Karlin, Patrick W. Galbraith and Shunsuke Nozawa. Open Access. <https://jmpc-utokyo.com/keyword/mangaesque/>

Kacsuk, Zoltan (2018), “Re-Examining the ‘What is Manga’ Problematic: The Tension and Interrelationship between the ‘Style’ Versus ‘Made in Japan’ Positions,” *Arts* 7, 26. Open Access. <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0752/7/3/26>. Spanish transl. “Reexaminando la cuestión de ‘qué es el manga’: tensión e interrelación entre las posturas del ‘estilo’ y del ‘Made in Japan’,” in J.A. Santiago Iglesias, ed. (forthcoming in 2023). *Manga + Anime: Una mirada transdisciplinar*.

Santiago Iglesias, José Andrés. “Berliac’s *gaijin gekiga* and the mangaesque: Transnational perspectives and cultural appropriation,” *ORIENTALISKA STUDIER* No. 156, 2018, 98–114. Open Access. <https://orientaliskastudier.se/tidskrifter/156-2/>. Revised and extended version in Spanish: (2020). “Berliac y el *gaijin gekiga*. Una perspectiva mangaesca”. *CuCo, Cuadernos De cómic*, (15), 31–51. <https://doi.org/10.37536/cuco.2020.15.1298>

Session 2

Mediality: Manga Magazines

The expansion of the manga market leaned heavily on a specific publication format: the serialization of graphic narratives in special magazines. While the magazine media heaped together graphic narratives from different sites and formats (for example, non-specialized children’s periodicals and exclusive publications for rental stores), it also compartmentalized the readership along demographic lines. Consequently, the magazine facilitated not only genre-specific narrative patterns and visual conventions, but also the formation of proto-virtual taste communities. Editors have played a vital part in manga’s maturation as both an industry and a participatory culture. In recent years, the magazine’s serial format is seeing a certain continuation online, but webcomics (even more conservative ones than webtoons) are undermining aesthetic standards that had been naturalized since the 1970s (for example, the double-page spread, and techniques of guiding the gaze across it). Looking into the above aspects, this session examines the interrelation of materiality and storytelling, while providing glimpses into the (postwar) history of the medium.

Berndt, Jaqueline (2020b), “Conjoined by Hand: Aesthetic Materiality in Kouno Fumiyo’s Manga *In this corner of the world*,” *Mechademia* 12(2): 83–101.

Kálovics, Dalma (2020), “Manga Across Media: Style Adapting to Form in the 1950s and 1960s and in the Digital Age,” *Mechademia* 12 (2): 102–123. Spanish transl. “El manga a través de diferentes medios: La adaptación del estilo a la forma en los años 50 y 60 y en la era digital,” in J.A. Santiago Iglesias, ed. (forthcoming in 2023). *Manga + Anime: Una mirada transdisciplinar*.

Hartzheim, Bryan Hikari (2021b), “The Affordances of Omaké in Gotouge Koyoharu’s *Kimetsu no Yaiba*,” *Transcommunication* (Waseda University) 8 (2): 159–170. Open Access.

Session 3

Representation: Boys Love, and “Queer Manga”

As a thematic genre that grew out of the demographic genre of girls comics (*shōjo manga*), Boys Love (BL) manga has seen an exceptional rise in popularity both in Japan and on a global scale. But with respect to the representation of LGBTQ communities and their social issues, BL manga is not necessarily acknowledged as a variant of “queer comics,” which again forms a new category in anglophone comics discourse. In addition to basic intercultural differences between anglophone and Japanese fandoms related to conceptions of identity and also realism, this session aims to examine queering as a matter of perspective and furthermore manga/comics as a queer media form. A brief look at the evolution of BL manga in Japan will be provided, including the historically changing semantics of *shōnen’ai* and *yaoi*.

Gratifications gained from consuming BL by diverse audiences will be considered as well.

Bauwens-Sugimoto, Jessica (2016), “Queering Black Jack: A Look At How Manga Adapts to Changing Reading Demographics,” in *Proceedings from the 2016 NAJAKS Conference at Stockholm University: Japanese Studies Volume*, ed. by Jaqueline Berndt & Gunnar Jinmei Linder, *Orientaliska Studier*, No. 147, 111–142. Open Access. https://orientaliskastudier.se/documents/06_Bauwens_111_142.pdf. Spanish transl. “*Black Jack* bajo el prisma de lo *queer*: una mirada a cómo la industria del manga se adapta a los cambios demográficos de sus lectores,” in J.A. Santiago Iglesias, ed. (forthcoming in 2023). *Manga + Anime: Una mirada transdisciplinar*.

Galbraith, Patrick W. (2020), “fujoshi: 801-chan,” *Japanese Media and Popular Culture: An Open-Access Digital Initiative of the University of Tokyo*, ed. by Jason G. Karlin, Patrick W. Galbraith and Shunsuke Nozawa, no pag. Open Access. <https://jmpc-utokyo.com/keyword/fujoshi/>

Nagaike, Kazumi (2020), “Boys’ Love: Kumota Haruko,” *Japanese Media and Popular Culture: An Open-Access Digital Initiative of the University of Tokyo*, ed. by Jason G.

Karlin, Patrick W. Galbraith and Shunsuke Nozawa, no pag. Open Access.

<https://jmpc-utokyo.com/keyword/boys-love/>

Orbaugh, Sharalyn (2018), “Compulsorily Queer: Coercion as a Political Tool in Queer Manga,” *Orientaliska Studier* no. 156, 176–189. Open Access.

<https://orientaliskastudier.se/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Sharalyn-Orbaugh.pdf>

Fanasca, Marta (2021), “Attack on normativity: A queer reading of *Shingeki no Kyojin* (*Attack on Titan*),” *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 7 No. 2, 255–270.

Scott, Darieck, and Ramzi Fawaz (2018), “Introduction: Queer about Comics,” *American Literature*, 90, 2 (June): 197–219.

Session 4

Alleged “Origins”: Medieval Handscrolls, *Hokusai Manga*, and Early Modern Graphic Fiction

Comics discourse abounds with recourses to presumed origins, usually for the sake of legitimization. 20th-century manga discourse was inclined to highlight Japanese art appreciated in Europe and North America, in particular early-modern *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints, and medieval handscrolls (*emaki*). Manga researchers, however, have grown cautious against such origin claims. Pointing to the obvious stylistic, narrative, and medial differences from alleged progenitors, they have argued for understanding manga as a fundamentally modern media form. This session revisits the most widely cited progenitors of manga (and, in part, anime) from the perspective of embodied reading and the aesthetic materiality of graphic storytelling. It will demonstrate that the correlation of today’s manga with aesthetic traditions may offer topical insight depending on how it is done, that is, which type of manga is compared to which art form from the past against which set of contemporary concerns. Tracing core features, the contingency of “manga” will come to the fore, not only in retrospect but also in view of postdigital conditions.

Kern, Adam L. (2021), “Manga,” *Keywords for Comics Studies*, ed. by Ramzi Fawaz, Deborah Whaley, and Shelley Streeby, NY: New York University Press, 148–153.

Berndt, Jaqueline (2021), “Manga Flows: Reading the Paneled Spread Against Handscroll and Webtoon,” in *Love, Fight, Feast: The Multifaceted World of Japanese Narrative Art* (exh.cat.), ed. Khanh Trinh, Rietberg Museum, Zürich; Zürich: Scheidegger & Spiess, pp. 50–55.

Example [short story in English, 8 pages] Okadaya Tetuzoh, *That’s All For Now* (*Mazu wa kore nite*, 2015)

Example [in Jp.] 阿留多「古典をマンガ化/ものくさ太郎 (ラブコメ)」. Online publication, July 2020. <https://note.com/arutacomix/n/n67c69495d63b>

Further Reading:

- Cohn, Neil (2013). *The Visual Language of Comics: Introduction to the Structure and Cognition of Sequential Images*. Bloomsbury.
- Exner, Eike (2022). *Comics and the Origins of Manga: A Revisionist History*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Lefèvre, Pascal (2011). “Mise en scène and Framing: Visual Storytelling in *Lone Wolf and Cub*.” Randy Duncan, and Matthew J. Smith, eds, *Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods*. London: Routledge, pp. 71–83.
- McCloud, Scott (1994). *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, New York: Harper Perennial.
- Mikkonen, Kai (2017). *The Narratology of Comic Art*, London: Routledge [on Taniguchi: pp. 129–149].
- Nagayama, Kaoru (2020). *Erotic Comics in Japan: An Introduction to Eromanga*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Natsume, Fusanosuke (2021), “The Functions of Panels (*koma*) in Manga,” translated by Jon Holt and Teppei Fukuda, *ejcjs (electronic journal of contemporary japanese studies)*, 21.2.
http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/ejcs/vol21/iss2/holt_fukuda.html?fbclid=IwAR378HVAudeH99DMdM0v832Em-Z5Hee2aBpGM6sxD8Lg2Fkfsyy4G-d8BDU
- Romero Leo, Jaime (2017), “La estética de la Nouvelle Manga. La reivindicación de lo cotidiano en la nueva novela gráfica franco-japonesa,” *CuCo, Cuadernos De cómic*, (8), 83–101. <https://doi.org/10.37536/cuco.2017.8.1250>
- Santiago Iglesias, José A. (2010), *Manga: Del cuadro flotante a la viñeta japonesa*. Pontevedra: Comanegra.
- Santiago Iglesias, José A. (2016), “Toward Maturity: Analyzing the Spanish Comics Industry Through a Comparison of National Graphic Novels and Gafotaku-Oriented Manga,” in *Cultures of Comics Work*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 219–234.
- Schroff, Simone (2019), “An Alternative Universe? Authors as Copyright Owners – The Case of the Japanese Manga Industry,” *Creative Industries Journal* 12.1, 125–150.
- Suzuki, Shige (CJ), and Ronald Stewart (2022). *Manga: A critical guide*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Wilde, Lukas R.A. (2020). “Material Conditions and Semiotic Affordances: Natsume Fusanosuke’s Many Fascinations with the Lines of Manga.” *Mechademia* 12.2 (spring), 62–82.