Review Article

Northrop Davis, *Manga and Anime Go to Hollywood***:** *The Amazing Rapidly Evolving Relationship between Hollywood and Japanese Animation, Manga, Television, and Film,* **Bloomsbury: London, 2016: 410 pp.: ISBN 9781623562489, £ 80.00 (hbk); ISBN 9787623561444, £ 23.09 (pbk); ISBN 9781623560386, £ 21.09 (ebook)**

Corresponding Author:

Manuel Hernandez-Perez, School of Arts, University of Hull, UK

Email: m.hernandez-perez@hull.ac.uk

Anime studies are still a young research field and it still drive by the diversity of its scholar's background whether they came from Japanese studies, Communication and Media approaches or Comic book studies. There are also other materials that, while valuable, aren't really a product of the interest of addressing to a particular academic community. In this sense, Northrop Davis' *Manga and Anime Go to Hollywood* is an easy and enjoyable read due to its direct and informative style. Its visual layout is also appealing and full of colour illustrations.

Davis succeeds in introducing other media in his description of Japanese popular culture, mainly TV dramas (*doramas*) and special-effects cinema (*tokusatsu*) but also other traditional forms with a historical relevance such as early scrolls, woodblock printing, *kamishibai* (paper theatre) and *takarazuka* performances. It is understandable that he addresses only the most "popular" within the popular Japanese Culture: in the vast universe of references, signs and meanings that is global popular culture, it is impossible to cover everything. In general terms, the text is a pleasant and well-documented read although students and academics of manga and anime may miss a greater depth on the subject. With regard to the structure of the book, the text is not always organised coherently and there is a certain degree of redundancy.

The book is constructed around the definition of manga and anime languages and narratives and their adaptation to American cinema. From the beginning of the text, Davis introduces the metaphor of hybridisation and the existence of a 'DNA' in cultural products. The metaphor guides the description of manga and anime's external features and articulates the entire text. The chosen metaphor is valid but perhaps limited in scope. Hybridisation, as shown by transnational studies, may correspond to different models of globalisation, regionalisation and localisation (Iwabuchi, 2000). In this sense, the work of Davis mentions numerous examples of localisation of Japanese products released in the US. With this, he is implying that the big Hollywood blockbusters are a local phenomenon (American) and because of this, he does not discuss the globalisation of manga and anime (i.e. other local non-American adaptations). He does not show interest either in regionalisation or the existence of other relevant areas of influence such as East Asian markets. Perhaps, the greatest contribution to this discourse around hybridisation is not

the evidence based on the analysis of the texts but rather the access to sources of special interest, as other academics (mainly American ones), producers and distributors of both markets. These interviews (some conducted by the author himself) are perhaps the most interesting aspect of the book. They work as a very useful tool in order to provide a fast overview of the current industry. This is the case in Chapter 5, which outlines the main features of the manga industry including processes and agents. Here, the somewhat complex and unattractive world of copyright management and moral right differences is highlighted as the main creative engine and interaction with the fan community through *doujinshi* (fan art).

The insertion of case studies is the main argumentative aspect of the research. Davis identifies the historical relationships between the manga industry and the US film industry and presents the results of these 'cross-influences'. In Chapter 1, for example, he presents examples of the replication of archetypal themes and figures in both media. The analysis of narrative tropes is itself commonplace in comparative studies, but the main criticism of this method is arguably its lack of usefulness. Identifying narrative tropes can be aprioristic because its presence does not necessarily guarantee causality or that these influences, if they exist, are significant. Nevertheless, the turning points are there: from Fred Ladd's adaptations of Japanese TV productions to Hayao Miyazaki and, of course, the commercial failure (albeit arguably not creative) of *Speed Racer* (2008).

There is also some interest in the prescriptive part or, as Davis calls it, the 'how to' (Chapter 10) that benefits from the author's own professional experience. This section is similar to other scriptwriting guides. It goes through the different steps of the screenwriting process,

providing advice on how to sell one's script, in this case a hypothetical anime to live-action film adaptation. The subject is promising as adaptation processes hold the key to understanding phenomena around transmedia franchises. Unfortunately, when text moves the focus from the stylistic question to the narrative adaptation, Davis does not offer many answers. Many of the points he makes in relation to the differences between Hollywood and the manga and anime industries could be also applied to the differences between serial and cinematographic narratives.

The main problem of Davis' thesis is how the author assumes that exporting narratives from Japan to the USA has a global significance without questioning it. The author seems to ignore the fact that most of the examples are not currently Hollywood productions but co-productions (e.g. *Dragon Ball, Death Note, Astroboy, etc.*). In addition, there are other cases of anime-to-live-action adaptations, some of them official (i.e. previously produced as part of the current media-mixes) but also unofficial, such as Chinese and Hong Kong versions. The text did not address those productions, although they might be relevant in the popularisation of these forms of adaptation in different transnational markets. The applicability or generalisation of the conclusions of the several case studies is also questionable with the exception (due to a large amount of documentation and its significance) of the first cases of anime aired on US television.

As an attempt of stylistic study, the text presents a number of problems. Firstly, it ignores the great variety and heterogeneity of styles in both American cinema and Japanese manga industries. Secondly, Davis relies solely on the opinion of a few filmmakers and their testimonies as major sources. In this sense, their work is a successful product of stylistic

hybridizations also capital transnationalisation. Peter Chung (*Aeon Flux*) and Michael Arias (*The Animatrix*), to name a few, provide valuable and very accessible opinions. However, if readers are looking for a description of the visual codes of the anime perhaps they should refer to more specific works within the academic field for a contextualised description of 'limited animation' (LaMarre, 2002; Steinberg, 2006). In addition to the interviews, extracts from amateur works, derived from the author's own manga class at the University of South Carolina, also illustrate this study of the manga/anime visual codes. These students' examples are intended to illustrate manga visual codes whether they are in a pure or hybrid form. Despite its heterogeneous quality, they are also a suitable way to avoid potential conflicts of copyright issues while lightening up the reading of theoretical contents.

In conclusion, live-action adaptations of comic-books and mangas are a subject of great interest and predictably will continue to be so in the following years. In this sense, it is not clear why Davis' book lacks the ambition, scope or understanding to suggest that it is not actually manga but all sequential arts that share some visual style and narrative with postmodern forms of cinema (another sequential art). It seems, therefore, that delving into sequential languages and particularly other comic-book traditions might have been a good complement to this research.

The book will be surely enjoyed by fans of anime but also by those interested in the world of film production, due to the large number of examples of this exciting field that Hollywood is just starting to contemplate when the live-action adaptation *Ghost in the Shell* has been recently released. Presumably, the immediacy of these examples (the author

even includes rumours and interviews about unfinished projects) means that this book will be out-of-date soon, but it will also justify new book editions if successful.

Reviewer's Biography

Manuel Hernandez-Perez is a Lecturer in Digital Design at University of Hull (School of Arts) where he is Programme Leader for the Game and Entertainment Design course. He is the author of a monograph in Spanish, which can be translated as *Japanese Cross-Media Narrative. Manga, Anime and Videogames* (2017: PUZ). He has also published research on video games and social network narrative aspects and, more recently, on Japanese media industries with a special focus on transmedia narratives and cross-cultural readings of manga and anime products.

References

Iwabuchi K. (2000) To globalize, regionalize or localize us, that is the question. Japan's response to media globalization. In: Wang G, Servaes J and Goonasekera A (eds) *The new communications landscape. Demystifying media globalization.* New York: Routledge, 144-162.

LaMarre T. (2002) From animation to anime: drawing movements and moving drawings. *Japan Forum* 14: 329-367.

Steinberg M. (2006) Immobile Sections and Trans-Series Movement: Astroboy and the Emergence of Anime. *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1: 190.