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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

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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.

the sample's diversity, institutional affiliations, on the other hand, may or may not correspond to the 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.

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(**b**)
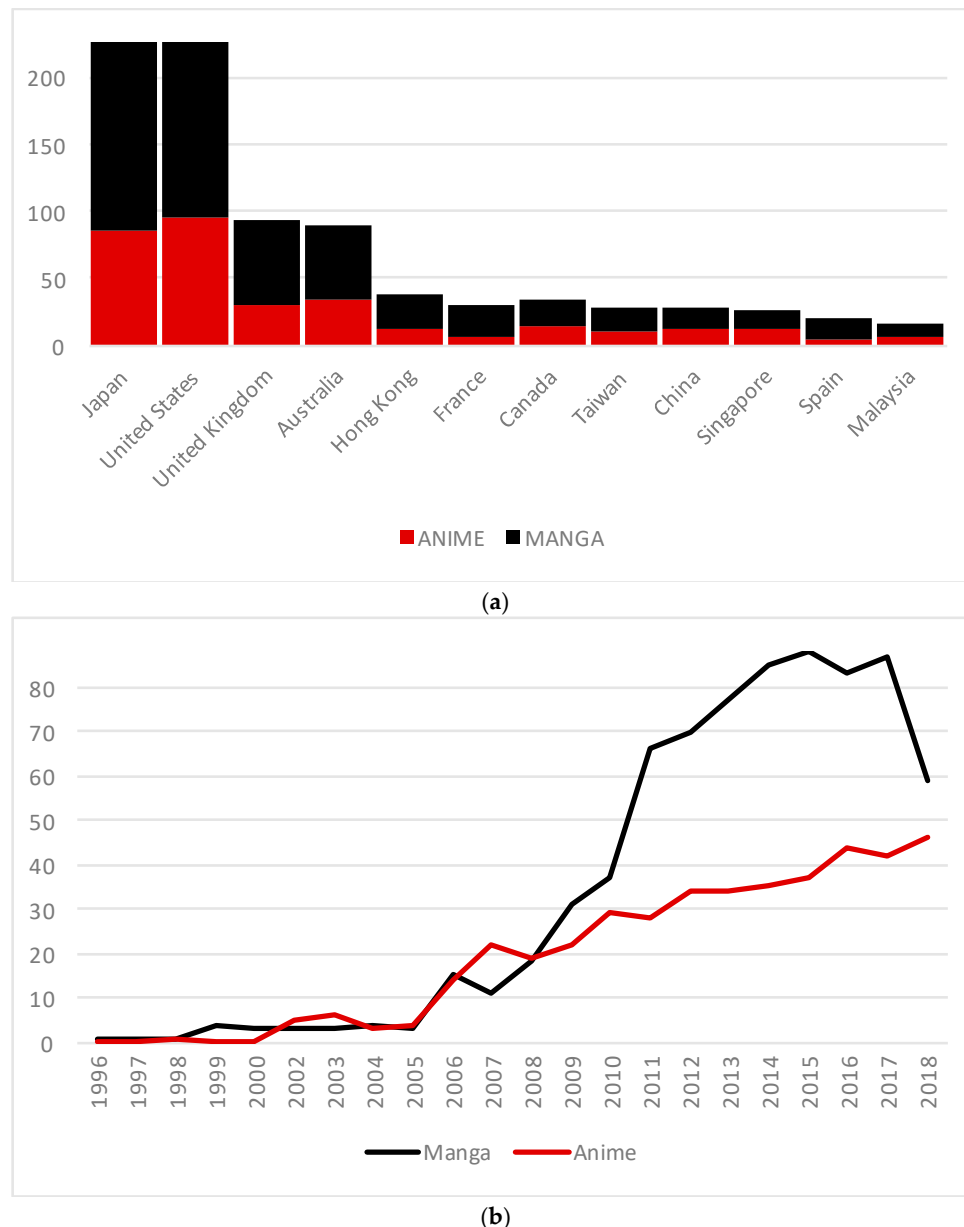
Figure 1. (**a**) publications including the terms "manga" (*n* = 750) and "anime" (*n* = 425) in their titles or abstracts for the period 1980–2018; (**b**) main national producers according to affiliation. Samples of articles studied (1980–2018) belong to independent searches, but the Jaccard index, 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

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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.

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? 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

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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).

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 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.

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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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