From poly-medium to post-medium
A discourse on non-evolutionary movements of manga and comics

Marco Pellitteri

This is a reflection on manga as a litmus to talk about two dimensions of comics at large. The first is the non-evolutionary nature of the comics medium. The article first argues that manga's and comics' perceived stages over time cannot be informed by the metaphor of evolution, but proceeded via "lateral" movements. We suggest that this form has mutated and is migrating into different technological realms, following non-ascending movements that date back to more ancient forms of visual sequential languages. The second dimension we discuss is in fact comics' transition from a "poly-medium" to a "post-medium" status. This article's focus on comics' post-mediality relates the new situation of media convergence where comics as content carrier is in turn carried through any possible image-supporting device, and this entails the loss of its status of a technology-specific form.

Introduction

This article presents a tentative discourse on comics and manga[1] with the wish to start and solicit a discussion about two dimensions of comics at large.

The first dimension is the positing of a non-evolutionary nature of comics. Using the history of manga and examples from visual arts as a litmus, we shall argue that manga's and comics's medial and formal stages over time can't be informed by the metaphor of evolution, but proceeded via non-progressive movements in which the usually misunderstood features of evolution in the natural sciences do not apply.

The second dimension is comics's transition from a "poly-medium" to a status of "post-medium". The latter notion originates from art criticism and media studies in Europe. Manga/comics have become polymedial forms based on the co-presence of various layers of communication, materiality, and sensoriality. But until recent years they have travelled through a specific technology, printing. Now, whilst much comics scholarship is addressing the innovations of digital- and e-comics, our focus on post-medium relates a new type of media convergence, where comics as content carrier are in turn carried through any possible image-supporting device; this entails the loss of their old status of a technology-specific form. Discussions on "post-ness" of media languages have thus far involved cin-

---

[1] Japanese comics. The word is rendered in regular text, not italics. Moreover, it is to be intended at the plural, as a body of works (but without the desinence "-s"), and/or at the singular, as a medium or any specific work.

ema, although only in terms of "post-cinema"-nness (Shaviro 2010, Denson and Leyda 2016) and not of post-mediality. We argue that manga/comics have mutated and are abandoning the paper-supported platforms to migrate into new realms, via lateral moves that we can understand by referring to more ancient forms of visual art. To propose this idea, we shall take a step back (or, to keep on topic, a lateral step) from comics scholarship and make use of alternative views that should help us to see this issue from a different angle.

In this introduction, we present a short description of manga and then a synthetic comment on comics at large as a medium. In the subsequent sections, we shall attempt to outline the two core points of this article.

The word manga alludes to sketchy drawings of light subject that inspire a sense of executive speed and a scenic dynamism. By this word most Japanese, today, indicate comic books produced both domestically and in general, i.e. also foreign comics; for which, however, the loanword *komikku / komikkusu* ("comic / comics") is often used; outside of Japan, the term refers to comics made by Japanese creators (Kinsella 2000, Miyamoto 2002, Koyama-Richard 2010, Bouissou 2010).

As it occurred in Europe, also in Japan the dialectic between art, public, economy, and urbanisation facilitated a luxuriant production of serial images. Like in the case of European and US comics (Brancato 2018), in effect, manga stood out as a form of graphic narrative in the late nineteenth century, following a succession of previous representation forms that foreshadowed comics as we intend them today. However manga, unlike comics, BD, and fumetti—which have been in perennial osmosis with forms of art and expression circulating between neighboring countries—has developed somehow more independently in Japan. But let us also consider that this development, although relatively solitary, also benefited, in part, from external influences that made manga (especially when seen from a European standpoint) a crackling laboratory of experimentation, innovation, and invention.

A great many critics frame comics as a "genre". But the comics medium subsumes within itself an endless number of narrative genres: concretions of conventions and settings, such as thriller, science fiction, adventure, erotic, horror,

and many others, all of which in turn consist of a variety of narrative subgenres.[2] Comics, moreover, are often referred to as a "union of texts and images". But there are also comics lacking verbal texts and displaying drawings only; on the other hand, there are comics in which panels host no drawings but are white or obscured (in black or gray), and the only elements are balloons stemming from either undrawn or off-stage characters. From these simple examples is easy to see that the definition we find in many manuals on comics is wrong: it is true that *most* comics come with images and texts, but this does not mean that their central feat is this. To this end, a fundamental treatise is the book *Graphic Novel* (Tosti 2016): a mature discussion on the historical development of comics and on the multidisciplinary debate on the relationship between text and images. It therefore seems that the indispensable features of comics, as a communication device, are to be found elsewhere.

There are those who insist on the paginated sequence of drawings, and those who deny that the sequence (drawings that suggest, imply, or openly indicate a succession of moments and/or actions linked together) is necessary to define a comic; in these cases, the comic would be there *in potentia*, and could be seen as a non-sequential comic: one which, nonetheless, makes use of other recurring codes—drawing, delimitation of the same within a panel, etc. In these cases, though, if a panel or vignette were to be called a "comic", it would have to contain at least one balloon, which is one of the possible traits of the comic in the absence of the sequence; otherwise, a solitary drawing devoid of other symbolic codes of comics will have to take on the definition of "cartoon", i.e. a stand-alone drawing.

Then there are critics who have posited that the sequence itself in the comic, on a representative level, does not show virtually dynamic drawings that indicate the passage of time in the transition from one panel to another, but rather fixed drawings that only show instant snapshots in an eternally hypostatised and non-sequential present (Battaglia, 2017). However, this idea is wrong: comics and manga are stunning temporal devices. Among the major and more mature treatises on the semiotics and temporality of comics, we advise readers to retrieve two

---

[2] A further observation is that comics are not a merely narrative form. Whether they contain fiction or documentary content is a choice of the author. In fact, in both comics and manga, non-fiction is very frequent.

Daniele Barbieri books (1991, 2017) and as many by Thierry Groensteen (1999, 2011). In these volumes (as also, if we may, in Pellitteri 2019), comics emerge as a "tensive" art, capable of communicating rhythms and cadences of reading/fruition/vision and of suggesting to the reader to engage in an ocular scanning of the sequential images through narrative and structural strategies, i.e. inherent to the topographical subdivision of the page, the shapes and dimensions of the panels, the visual symbologies aimed at communicating sounds, movements, speed, and other sensory *stimuli* translated into a visual coding. Comics are, ultimately, a form of fiction, a visual art, and a popular spectacle that can aspire—and has often come—to become a fine art and, in the end, an "immersive" language/ambient for its users in which various languages coexist. That is why in our book *Sense of Comics* (1998) we called it a "super-language"; we still owe the notion of "immersive ambient" to Barbieri (1991).

Thanks to these feats, comics can produce sensations of emotional and cognitive involvement: a factor such as the iconicity of the characters facilitates the process of identification by readers, especially the younger ones; the fixity of the images, complementary to their arrangement in paginated sequences that signify the succession of narrative moments or phases of an action, produce in the reader's mind an active work that stimulates the imagination and intellectual faculties on several levels; the usual presence of alphabetic texts inside the drawings through the speech balloons or caption text boxes and of the drawings themselves creates a powerful mental dynamism when an almost simultaneous deciphering of two totally different codes occurs: the drawing is analogical/iconic, while the alphabetic text is symbolic by definition. This is why a comic is immersive: it requires a composite intellectual commitment, however different from that activated by cinema or typographic literature. Not a lesser or a better one, but a different engagement by all means.

One last element. Comics are generally syntethic in their graphic design: authors carefully choose a few significant and well placed traits to suggest even complex objects, which the cooperative intellect of the reader decrypts and completes. But there are also pictorial comics, painted to the smallest details in watercolor, acrylics, even as oils on canvas. In other words, the visual articulation and

the textural depth of comics's graphical and cognitive complexity are multi-layered. This, as we shall see, is in connection with the notion of a non-evolutionary succession of moments in comics's history, in which "more complex" and "simpler" phases alternate.

The semantic and theoretical misunderstanding of an "evolving" path

Scholars do not always agree on what comics are, that is, how they should be defined as a medium and language. These uncertainties include Japan, where critics and historians of the graphic arts and media do not easily converge on the historical parable and the linguistic traits constituting manga. The first scholar who spoke of manga organically in a European language was Frederik L. Schodt (1983). Based on debates previously conducted by Japanese critics, Schodt proposed a genealogy of manga starting from the Japanese medieval periods. It is a reasoning analogous to that of western scholars, who for decades have traced the origins of comics in Europe to representations such as those of the prehistoric mural graffiti of Lascaux or Altamira and the medieval embroideries of Bayeux (Becker 1959).

We must therefore deal with the discourse of how to intend the phases of initial development and the historical-theoretical and linguistic definition of manga (and comics at large) as a medium and expression form. To begin with, the theme of the medium's "origins" and cultural legitimacy is well summarised as follows:

> the […] understanding of comics predetermines which traditions, or "origins", come into view. To me, manga is an aesthetically and culturally, but also historically highly ambiguous medium vacillating as much between historic continuity and discontinuity as between the Gutenberg galaxy and the computer era, temporality and spatiality, reading and writing, playfulness and seriousness, infant and adult. From such a point of view, it seems much more appropriate to rely on manga's fundamental ambiguity instead of giving in to rather anachronistic purity claims, as happens whenever the relation between contemporary comics and premodern Japanese art is either absolutely affirmed or denied. (Berndt 2007, pp. 33-4)

Indeed, various scholars simplistically argue that manga has its primary forerunner in scrolls painted on rice paper with humorous stories dating back to the eleventh and twelfth centuries and drawn by monks, bonzes, and other artists;

these are the *Chōjū jimbutsu giga*, depicting episodes with beasts outlined in a style between the realistic and the funny. There are four scrolls, the first two of which are attributed to abbot Sōjō Tōba (1053-1140). They are called *emakimono*. In addition to the Tōba scrolls, six hundred have come down to us. In these scrolls, drawings are positioned in such a way as to suggest an order of reading through sequences in space and time of scenes and stories of daily life, battles, important political events, short stories, meetings between lords, quarrels between animals, fantastic situations with monsters and goblins, and grotesque, surreal, and comically off-the-wall events.

The *emakimono* scenes are not divided into separated "boxes": the breakdown into squares or panels will in fact take over in the modern era. Yet it is not difficult to notice that the artists of these compositions already had an idea of how to divide the space in order to direct the viewer's gaze from one situation to another with a diachronic linearity that would unequivocally restore the sense of history, designed and narrated through illustrations: the very act of gradually unrolling the sheet from right to left had to produce—as it does today among the lucky ones who find themselves handling them for study reasons—a feeling of witnessing a story or episodes that unfolded in time as well as in space. Furthermore, given that in Japan the accidental perspective that would be perfected in architecture and painting in Italy in the fifteenth century was still unknown, in these scrolls the relationship between closer and more distant objects is symbolically communicated by the position in the drawing: the figures placed in a lower position are intended as closer to the observer and those placed higher are intended as further away, also given that their relative dimensions tend to decrease from the bottom upwards. It is possible to admire some, very beautiful, in the Edo-Tokyo Museum of the Japanese capital.

In effect, there existed forms of expression chronologically prior to comics but which were not comics, and on the basis of which the compositional and linguistic premises for comics consolidated which then, at some unforeseeable moment in the future, would set the conditions for the emergence of a new language and form of visual communication, with the traits that we attribute to comics today. While we agree with those who called comics a "magnificent bastard" (Bran-

cato 1996) and while this is also true of manga—which since its development in modern times has been blended with European and US comics and illustrative styles—we should also be careful when attributing to comics or manga "origins" that date back beyond what a serious historiography can document and prove.

An illustrious artist, Isao Takahata (1935-2018)—famous as an animation director of immense talent: he directed the animated series *Heidi* (1974) and the film *A grave for the fireflies* (1988)—was also a refined essayist; among his works, there is a valuable volume in which the filmmaker traces a fascinating evolutionary path that establishes medieval *emakimono* as a direct genealogical starting point for Japanese animation and manga (Takahata 1999). His book was welcomed by many Japanese art history scholars, by the literary intelligentsia, and to some extent by the Ministry of Culture, very pleased that a respected artist had "proved" the existence of a direct dynastic line between ancient and contemporary art forms, and endorsing the notion that Japanese art today is a harmonious, consequential effect of the art of the past. This notion, since the year 2000, has become an official learning subject in Japanese schools. In 2006 the Kyoto National Museum emphasised, in the exhibition *Dai emaki ten* on the medieval scrolls, a presumed line of direct descent to manga, presenting it as certain and "self-evident" (Berndt 2008, p. 16).

Thus, are *emakimono* comics's "precursors"? The idea that art forms have a "natural" *before* and *after* often crystallises in national cultures. This is also true in our context: in comics scholarship (and in its fandom), the parlance refers to "ancestors", "predecessors", "pre-comics", "proto-comics", and comics in a contemporary sense (as discussed in Tosti 2016, pp. 25 ff.). With hindsight, a path is envisioned which from a hypothetical prehistory of the form would gradually condense into its modern and current appearances. This *ex post* rationalisation is a forcing found in many areas, and eloquently called the "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983): in our case, the classification of expression forms and works or artistic currents in a historical progression reimagined as an organic process, ordered and to be seen as inevitable. Let us just think of the Egyptian hieroglyphs and the Trajan's Column, which comics scholars have for decades framed as "ancestors of comics", on the basis that both present sequential illustra-

tions; sequences that have been considered comparable to the panels of comics and therefore, "obviously" linked to comics as their forerunners. This idea of comics as even dating back to cave and rock graffiti was disseminated in global scholarship in a pioneering, elegant, but partly misleading book by Lancelot Hogben (Hogben 1949).

The misunderstanding about a hypothetical logical gradualness in stages of artistic and linguistic forms is the same that still exists today about the mechanisms of the evolution of life forms. A great many people, consciously or unknowingly informed by a finalistic thought, think that if birds fly is because at a certain point, in the development of animal forms, some species have developed long and feathery limbs and a certain body shape "in anticipation" of the function of flight. This is a teleological mystification: in reality, evolution moves through minimal adaptations over time, or, some paleontologists maintain, through sudden and always random leaps; the function that little by little an organ or the limbs will assume, occurs without the slightest original planning but on the basis, in fact, of fortuitous adaptation processes. In short, nature proceeds improvising, but on a time scale of millions of years, therefore today the results of progressive adaptations look like perfect engineering projects, designed to achieve a specific goal (Gould 2012). In other words: in the arts as well as in evolution there is not an ideal-typical planned gradual development, but rather long periods of stagnation followed by fast leaps. And beware: not of leaps "forward", but more disenchantedly, *lateral* changes that it is not our task to establish whether they are "for the better" or "for the worse".

To illustrate this general notion pertaining to the parallel between natural evolution and artistic developments, and then the next concept more specifically pertaining to visual arts and comics, we resort to two essays by a scholar that could not be farther from comics: paleontologist and evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould (1941-2002). As at times happens, in fact, a detached or anyway uninvolved perspective can provide if not a fresh start, at least a new angle; in the field of comics studies, it would certainly not be the first time. Gould writes:

> In our culture's focal misunderstanding of evolution, most people assume
> that trends to increasing complexity through time must impart a primary and

> predictable direction to the history of life. But Darwinian natural selection only yelds adaptation to changing local environments, and better function in an immediate habitat might just as well be achieved by greater simplicity in form and behavior as by ever-increasing complexity. Thus, one might predict that cases of evolutionary simplification will be just as common as increases in complexity. […] [One of the biases] that have so hindered our understanding of natural history [is] the misequation of evolution with progress […] (Gould 1999a, pp. 355-6)

If this misunderstanding is so widespread among the general population about the actual governing principles of evolutionary change, then we could see if a similar biased assumption gained a foothold in the discourses and assumptions on comics. Adopting this notion to the history of the medium, we could then establish a principle of adaptability of comic art to specific environments and the alternance, in various historical periods and cultural and/or commercial contexts, of situations in which comics production has tended to higher specialisation and complexity, and others in which it has tended to lower specialisation and complexity; or to a reverse correlation between higher specialisation and lower complexity, or *vice versa*. This variety of combinations can indeed be spotted along comics's history.

This brings us to the second concept that we wanted to discuss: prior forms or works of art do not have to be more primitive than the succeeding ones. The level of technical and expressive complexity and specialisation is most of the times based on the cultural and social context in which those forms and works of art are produced, as well as on other contingent factors: patrons's requests, audience, physical placement, etc. We cannot possibly say that Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon* (1934-44) is any less sophisticated than Jack Kirby's *Fourth World* (1970-73) or that David Mazzucchelli's *Asterios Polyp* (2009) is any more complex than the former two, although the storytelling codes of the three works are not exactly the same. In another essay of the same book, Gould writes, commenting on the general awe at the discovery of the beautifully Paleolithic parietal paintings in Chauvet (32,410 b.C.), in stark contrast with the much less articulated cave paintings of Le Portel (much more recent, dated 11,600 b.C.), and relying on the works of the most illustrious scholars of the field, Henri Breuil (1952) and André Leroi-Gourhan (1967):

We are suprised […] to discover that something so old could be so sophisticated. Old should mean rudimentary […] Instead, we see the work of a primal Picasso […]. I shall then suggest that the more appropriate expectation of maximal sophistication for this earliest art should only increase our appreciation—for we trade a false (if heroic) view of ever-expanding triumph for a deeply satisfying feeling of oneness with people who were, biologically, fully us in circumstances of maximal distance, both temporal and cultural, from our current lives. (Gould 1999b, pp. 162-3)

[For] Breuil and Leroi-Gourhan […] the chronology of cave art must record a progression from crude and simple beginnings to ever more refined […] expression. […] They were […] simply caught up in conventional modes of thinking […] (Today we can date the pigments by carbon-14 and other methods, […] [but Breuil and Leroi-Gouhran could not]). The only hope for dating therefore inhered in the painitings themselves […]. Both scholars therefore turned to the venerable technique of art historians of later times— the analysis of styles. […] But nothing either in abstract logic or pictorial necessity dictates that one form of mannerism must be four hundred years old, while another style […] could only emerge much later. If we had absolutely no other evidence but Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* and Picasso's *Guernica*—no texts, no contexts, no witnesses—we could not know their temporal order. […] Breuil and Leroi-Gouhran […] fell back so easily and so uncritically […] upon the most conventional form of progressivist mythology: a chronology ordered by simple to complex, or rude to sophisticated. (Ibid., pp. 168-9)

Gould's main point is that we should consider that both the men and women of 30,000 and those of 10,000 years ago were the same as us: Homo Sapiens. Hence, even considering all the due differences of technological advancement and cultural change, we must not fall into the an "uncritical acceptance of the progressive paradigm for the history of art" (ibid., p. 174). Then, given that later cave paintings appear to be "less refined", or somehow simpler, than previous paintings, we need to find a different explanation than the biased notion of progressivism in the arts:

we surely don't regard Pericles as worse than Martin Luther King, Jr., just because he lived a few thousand years ago. Phidias doesn't pale before Picasso, and no modern composer beats Bach by mere virtue of residence in the twentieth century. […] So why should parietal art be any more primitive than the great statue of Athena that once graced the Parthenon? (Ibid., p. 175)

This last point gives us the space to finally conclude this discussion with comics—and we could also apply it to many other forms of art and communication. We see an effective application of these notions to the format and publishing field of the graphic novel. On the one hand, complex visual architectures were put in place in sequential illustrations in the eigtheenth and nineteenth centuries by European artists such as Gustave Doré and many more, on whom readers can refer to the magisterial books of David Kunzle (at least, Kunzle 2015 and 2021); on the other hand, as Andrea Tosti explains in the over 1000 pages of his book (2016), in the "genre" of the graphic novel we quite systemically, in the last twenty years or so, record a significant shift in the relation between alphabetical text and graphic image, in the general levels of semiotic complexity of the paginated drawings, as well as in the purely artistic articulation of the drawings's morphology, and, to use Groensteen's vocabulary (1999), in the "solidarity" of the pages's and panels's montages. A possible hypothesis is then that a lateral movement has taken place and is ongoing in the development of comics as a language and art form, in which different contexts of production, distribution, and consumption of comics are determining various adjustments in the levels of sophistication of the language, dependent on the expectations of new audiences, whose prerogatives are pushing publishers and creators to recalibrate visual styles and codes of communication so to meet the expectations or a different ability to comprehend visual languages of this unspecialised audience.

The reasons cannot certainly be reduced to these, and this modest proposal for further reflection had the purpose to indicate a possible direction for discussion.

Media mix and polymediality: manga as a "media genre"

The manga sector, both domestically and internationally, relies on interaction processes among different industries that cooperate, in looser or tighter coordination, to exploit a franchise as much as possible. The manga domain communicates with that of anime and with those of toy companies, advertising agencies, and in general with any actor that might want to exploit a given character or

fictional world. In this perspective, the manga medium forms the core of a network of inter- and transmedial relationships among characters, products, technological platforms, media environments, storytelling languages, aesthetic strategies, and forms of consumption. In other words, manga is more than a medium or expression form, and it can seen and studied as a system: an interrelation of different commercial stakeholders, initiatives, and brands more or less coordinated around the manga form and its parallel "enhancement", the animated series, and their most iconic characters.

The manga medium therefore operates within such complex network of coordinated initiatives, which in Japan is defined "media mix". This locution started to be used in the 1980s, after the success of Kadokawa Pictures' transmedia-oriented productions in the 1970s (Steinberg 2012). However, as Odagiri Hiroshi notices, as a business strategy centred on fictional characters, pioneering media mix-type synergies were already in use in Japan since the 1930s (Odagiri 2010).

In the field of manga and anime, the current practice of media mix developed, since the 1980s-1990s, as combinations—designed mostly upstream by companies or, more often, groups of companies—of narrative forms, media events, and consumer goods in which a character or a group of characters, or more generally a fictional world, is launched for commercial exploitation (Steinberg 2012).

Manga therefore informs (with anime) a multi-faceted system capable of generating profits and affection among huge audiences of consumers. Among the reasons manga series are so appreciated among crowds of youths in various countries, one of those that emerge is strongly related to the systemic arrangement of the medium: a framework that stands out also when the importation of manga and their animated versions is definitely bootleg or even banned by local governments.

Manga is, in sum, an industry with its own organisational characteristics; an entertainment product that is both made and sold in Japan and overseas; and a medium operated by its producers within a complex system of networked entrepreneurial collaborations meant to expansion and profit through other media languages and platforms. The transmedial features of anime should not be overlooked, especially when the attached concepts subsume the cognate notion of a media convergence culture (Jenkins 2004 and 2006). To this end, we will illus-

trate a typology of *polymedial* developments: the classification we present is related to media mix and media convergence, but sheds an alternative light on the diachronies and synchronies of so many commodity-based and polymedially "hybrid" commercial projects from the past 100 years or so. We will display a progression of six distinct "models" that we called the *auroral* model, *binary* m., *reverse binary* m., *organised synergy* m., *spontaneous synergy* m., and *super-synergy* m. (Pellitteri 2002 and 2010).

1. The auroral model consists of cases of monomedial or mild bimedial presentation in popular literature between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which sometimes expanded through literary derivations or comic strips, and more rarely with exploitations through other media. However, to be thorough, we find cases that we can make fall within the auroral model and date back to the early nineteenth century: for example, in England, the stories of *Doctor Syntax* (1812) illustrated by Thomas Rowlandson, which inspired a flourishing market of statuettes, pub insignia, clothes, dishes, and other derivative products.

2. The binary model was the standard from the 1930s to the 1960s: the expansion of characters and their narratives had its origin within cinema (a strong and pervasive medium) and a development through media featuring small production economies and simple technological platforms, such as comic strips or comic books, and a various, cheap, and at times, unlicensed merchandising.

3. The reverse binary model saw its maximum glory in the 1970s and 1980s: franchises falling within this model used to begin their expansion, unlike the previous models, not from a medium deploying a narrative but rather from media based on a material support, such as toys, and around which, in cases of apparent success, an *ex post* narrative background would be created, so to fuel the exploitation of the characters, commodified in the forms of toys or other goods.

4. The most common model in the late twentieth century for the proliferation of franchises based on fictional characters was the organised synergy. This model is similar to media mix. Let us think of projects primarily revolving

around toys: coordinated initiatives based on a simultaneous or tightly progressive expansion plan in the short term, such as the Japanese *Gundam* project (Clover, Nippon Sunrise, and Bandai, 1979-), the US *Masters of the Universe* line (Mattel, 1981-88), or the Italian *Winx Club* (Rainbow, 2004-). It is the paradigm of polymedia-oriented commercial deployment that was first put into practice by US marketing professionals and then labelled as convergence by Henry Jenkins.[3]

5. A telling example for the following model—the spontaneous synergy—is the unorganised production of the often unauthorised goods suddenly developed by manufacturers without a regular license to exploit certain fictional characters. This vivacious mode of expansion presented itself, unexpectedly and "anarchically", at the dawn of the arrival of Japanese cartoons in Spain, Italy, and France from 1975 on, with the outstanding success of anime series such as *Alps no shōjo Heidi* (1974), *Ufo Robo Grendiser* (1975-77), *Uchū kaizoku Captain Harlock* (1977-79), and many others (Pellitteri 2018). The goods displaying the images of these characters were of many kinds: toys, stationery, Carnival costumes, garments, stickers and decals in potato chip bags or chewing gum packets, etc. Much in this model, though in a decidedly uncontrollable fashion, repeated or anticipated some of the developments that the anime media mix had undergone or would undergo in Japan in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s; more importantly, this same uncontrolled, bootleg mode of exploitation of Japanese characters and franchises overseas has been widespread since the 1960s in many countries.

6. Through the last model we indicate the refinements of business strategies based on well designed plans, not anymore organised around a trial & error logic; the culmination of this process consists of cases of simultaneous and global presentation of a narrative world on many national and international platforms, not only according to convergence but also to polymediality. The most telling case is Nintendo's *Pokémon* project launched in Japan in 1996 and

---

[3] The author, in fact, wrote that convergence "is both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process. Media companies are learning how to accelerate the flow of media content across delivery channels to expand revenue opportunities, broaden markets and reinforce viewer commitments. Consumers are learning how to use these different media technologies to bring the flow of media more fully under their control and to interact with other users" (Jenkins 2004, p. 37).

in America and Europe, by Nintendo of America, in 2000 (Pellitteri 2002, Tobin 2004). A glorious case of globalising media mix, which we called, within our classification, a super synergy model, because featuring an upstream-organised international simultaneity of polymedial manifestations and media-commodities.

The classification we presented has the purpose to subsume the concepts and procedures of both media mix and convergence. Media mix projects, in the anime-centred acceptation of the locution, are a prerogative of Japan's media ecology; and convergence is explained by Jenkins not only and "simply" as a trend or a structure but also as a "culture" that presupposes an advanced media system. Thus, by polymediality, we rather intend to emphasise the diachronies and synchronies of how varieties of media are involved, and in what sequences or according to what simultaneities, for the exploitation of any fictional character-based franchise, either legally or illegally. Art scholar Jaqueline Berndt has correctly noticed that manga has been studied by most researchers, for years, within the framework of area studies; and what has happened recently is a shift of the discussion into media studies (Berndt, 2018). Along this wake, manga might be intended as a "media genre". This definition is not far from that of "industrial genre" proposed for anime by Alexander Zahlten (2017). Zahlten suitably poses an emphasis on the characteristics that made anime a highly recognisable form of animation based on the way its own industry developed and adopted specific routines, mechanisms, and habits; we propose the label "media genre" for manga simply on the basis of the fact that Japanese comics deploy peculiar linguistic strategies that make them so easily spotted as such, to the point that in many cases we can intend them as *formulaic*. And that is why manga could be intended as a "media genre": it nurtures, within its own formal logics, "formulas" that turn out to be deeply embedded in and typical of the medium.

Manga as a post-medium

"Post-medium" is a notion that in the near future will probably be increasingly taken into account in relation to manga as a media form, an industry, a system, and a popular art. We here address the question whether manga, today, may

fall within a "post-medial condition". This notion and its implications have, to our knowledge, never been written down in relation to manga so far, especially because these conditions of manga's possible post-mediality have emerged in recent years; many studies on manga hinder on the medium's transnational journeys and permanence in various national-cultural contexts and put a certain emphasis on the structures of international production and distribution, on the cultural policies related to the reception and acceptance of Japanese pop culture abroad, and on the localised tactics and practices of consumption and communal experience centred on manga's (and its cognate medium, anime's) heroes and fictional words. Nonetheless, there is a need to explore what is post-mediality, what are the conditions under which we may be observing a post-medium, and why manga may have become a post-medium.

The locution was coined by Italian art critic Gianni Romano, who used it in 1994, with the orthography "postmedia", which also became the title of the first Italian web magazine about contemporary art (Quaranta 2013, p. 221). Two years later, Félix Guattari would publish a short critique-manifesto on the new media, in which he comments upon the advent of "a transformation of mass-media power that will overcome contemporary subjectivity", allowing for "the beginning of a post-media era of collective-individual reappropriation and an interactive use of machines of information, communication, intelligence, art and culture" (1996 [2013, p. 27]). In this sense, the discussions on post-media found a niche in the academic discourse conducted in Europe in those years around the emerging notion of "collective intelligence" and the reflections on the new media's technological innovations favoured by influential scholars such as Pierre Lévy (1994) and Patrice Flichy (1995).

The acceptations of the term post-medium, therefore, may mainly refer to two contexts: that of "post-mass media" and that of the technological innovations in contemporary arts, with the inescapable contacts between the two. Already in the 1990s, the condition of a post-mediality was seen as determined by the directions that the constantly improving electronic and digital media were undertaking. One key meaning of the post-medial condition then refers

> to the twilight of new media and to the new direction in which [they] started to develop. This direction is mainly set by everything that follows the media (also the media of art)[,] which had been historically shaped and stabilised by tradition. In the times of digital convergence, however, the media lose their autonomy as forms framed by rigid rules that determine the type of immanence of a particular medium to the openness based on digital trans-coding[,] which turns particular identified media into polymedia (and post-media) sets composed of hybrid tools. (Zawojski 1996)

The core of the scholars who conduct their discourses on post-medium, post-media, and post-mediality embrace the political components of such innovations in the dialectics between systems of control and information, the public, and the practices and tactics of private or collective use of the new and newly re-segmented media technologies, in a (post-)Marxist critical perspective. But the possible post-mediality of manga can be approached from a technical-medial standpoint.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, manga works were consumed mainly through two interconnected media formats and five consumption-related situations. The media formats were (1) periodical (monthly, bi-weekly, and weekly) anthological magazines and (2) monographic volume series in pocket size, or *tankōbon*; the consumption-related situations were (1) the manga rental shops (*kashibon-ya*), (2) the individual purchase at bookstores or manga shops and reading at home or in private spaces, (3) the reading manga for free in so-called manga cafés (*manga kissaten*), (4) the reading manga on trains (at times, even manga magazines that were left on the benches by other readers), and (5) the illegal but vastly practiced and tolerated "lurking" manga at bookstores and convenience stores. These formats, situations, and policies were later recombined through new assisting platforms and contexts of fruition, such as school- and university manga fan clubs and the direct mail distribution (1980s-1990s), and, later, via the rise of internet piracy (2000s); this happened in basically all Asian countries, in the whole Europe, and across the Americas; a relevant portion of Azuma Hiroki's (2001) reflections on how Japanese hardcore fans or *otaku*, in the 1990s-2000s, catalogued minimal elements of the manga- and anime characters they cherished, focuses precisely on how such practices took place in the nascent virtual environments. Nevertheless, these starting modes of inter-platform content decanting were not actual forms of

unifying media convergence yet, but, rather, forms of combination and inter-medial dubbing.

However, something new happened from the 2010s, with the coming of large bandwidth-supported mobile media in the developing countries and in the previously isolated areas of those affluent countries where previously there was a big bandwidth divide. Thanks to a new, luxuriant variety of internet-connected devices, the multiplication of now legal online streaming platforms, and the growth of national or global libraries of books, comics, films, and TV series in such platforms, manga (and anime: the two forms are convergent here) started to play a new role within this enormous amount of possible sources and modes of consumption.

Thus, this is why manga might probably be increasingly framed and/or la-belled as a post-medium: all the entrepreneurs who work with manga/anime know that the possibilities of business have multiplied even though segmented, and they act accordingly. Nonetheless, today, difficulties arise in the negotiations with Jap-anese publishing houses and IP owners, which still tend to be inward-oriented. Manga (and anime) were already—also in the eyes of the Asian, European, and American operators who established businesses based on this entertainment form—a "pure", but also a "tweenable", content that had no exclusive relationship with one or two media technologies or platforms, but that could and, especially now, must be exported into a quantity of different transmedial venues; and that could be continuously re-edited according to ever changing local conveniences.

Conclusion

In this article, after a general introduction of its core points, we have pro-posed a tentative argument against a stereotypical and wrong notion of "evolu-tionary" development of comics, which is a scientific bias that has also under-mined the general understanding of the evolutionary theory in the natural sciences. Using mainly manga, we argued that the notion of historical progression of com-ics from an origin to initial forms, up to the mature development of them in the current form, is to be considered forced because it does not take into account that most of the times the erratic directions taken by languages and artistic forms are

random; that is, artists neither know nor can in any way establish, unless they are prescient, into which forms the fruits of their creative vein of today will be able to change in the distant future. What happens to artistic forms does not consist of "steps" that can be ordered logically, but in discrete moments in history that develop from one into the other, yes, but according to paths that are not preordained and not determined.

In the second part, we focussed on an ongoing development of manga/comics in the framework of the points of contacts between technological sources, transmediality, and the public's modes of consumption, positing that manga in particular, and increasingly, comics at large, are to be both framed as a post-medium.

To this end, we conclude this discussion pointing to the notion of "sources and modes of consumption". In a post-medial condition, whichever these sources and modes are—whether this or that streaming platform, or any torrent service providing fan-uploaded bootleg libraries—the technological site of storage and potentially unlimited, repeated consumption is or will be soon a unified device, whether a large "mobile phone" or a compact "PC" (the inverted commas signify the temporariness of such labels, preluding to unseen innovations); and a device that among other functions, as already happens, encourages not only real-time interactions among *users*, but also pseudo-real-time interventions over the *content* itself.

In the field of anime we would refer, among other possible examples, to the phenomenon of *danmaku* (in Japanese) or *danmu* (in Chinese): quasi-real-time tags, instant messaging, and comments, sent by users while watching streamed or simulcast anime episodes or films on services such as the Japanese NicoNico Dōga or the Chinese BiliBili (Yue, Qin, and Pei-Luen 2017, Zhang and Cassany 2019). In the discourse of manga, we can refer to the myriads superimposed comments, sidenotes, jokes, and disclaimers by fans that surround the amateur translations of electronically scanned, re-edited, and distributed bootleg editions of manga in various languages (so-called scanlations). The phenomenon of scanlations is not only and merely about piracy: it is a cultural practice that, however technically illegal, is a typical feat of the post-mediality of manga/comics, in that

only through the mechanism of post-media is it possible to add content to content, to generate new layers of meaning and communication and circulate them informally but widely/wildly, regardless of the final technological support of fruition.

Hence, the accent on the "pure" content that manga/comics entail, and the post-mediality that now surrounds these forms of visual storytelling and practice-centred engagement, somehow allow us to also see them not only as *poly-* and *post*-media but, in the end, also as *meta*-media, in that they have been turned into carriers not only of their own content but also of nested, rife interactions among fans.

References

Azuma, H., 2001, *Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan* ('An animalising postmodern'). Tokyo: Kōdansha (Eng. trans. *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

Barbieri, D., 1991, *I linguaggi del fumetto*. Milan: Bompiani.

—, 2017, *Semiotica del fumetto*. Rome: Carocci.

Battaglia, B., 2017, *Corto. Sulle rotte del disincanto prattiano*. Rome: Armillaria.

Becker, S., 1959, *Comic Art in America*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Berndt, J., 2007, "Traditions of Contemporary Manga (1): Relating Comics to Premodern Art", *Signs – Studies in Graphic Narratives*, n. 1, pp. 33-47.

—, 2008, "Mangamania: Discontinuities, Perspective Changes and Diversity", pp. 12-23, in *Ga-Netchū! The Manga Anime Syndrome*. Frankfurt: Deutsches Filmmuseum Frankfurt am Main / Deutsche Filminstitut / Museum für Angewandte Kunst Frankfurt.

Bouissou, J.-M., 2010, *Manga. Histoire et univers de la bande dessinée japonaise*. Arles: Philippe Picquier.

Brancato, S., 1996, "Il magnifico bastardo. Critica e fumetto, connubio perfetto", pp. 31-6, in F. Giromini (ed.), *Gulp! 100 anni a fumetti. Un secolo di immagini, avventure, fantasia*. Milan: Electa.

—, 2018, "Arte e riproducibilità tecnica. Illustrazione, manifesto, fumetto", pp. 81-99, in S. Brancato, E. Chirchiano, and F. Fichera, *Il mondo dei media. Sociologia e storia della comunicazione*. Naples: Guida.

Breuil, H. and Mortelmans, G., 1952, *Les Figures Incisées et Ponctuées de la Grotte de Kiantapo (Katanga)*. Tervuren: Musée Royal du Congo Belge.

Denson, S. and Leyda, J. (eds), 2016, *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film*. Falmer: Reframe Books.

Flichy, P., 1995, *L'innovation technique. Récents développements en sciences sociales, vers une nouvelle théorie e l'innovation*. Paris: La Découverte.

Gould, S.J., 1999a, "Triumph of the Root-Heads", pp. 355-73, in Id., *Leonardo's Mountain of Clams and the Diet of Worms*. London: Random House.

—, 1999b, "Up Against a Wall", pp. 161-78, in Id., *Leonardo's Mountain of Clams and the Diet of Worms*. London: Random House.

—, 2002, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Groensteen, T., 1999, *Système de la bande dessinée*, Paris, PUF.

—, 2011, *Bande dessinée et narration. Système de la bande dessinée 2*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Guattari, F., 1996, "Towards a Post-Media Era", pp. 26-7, in C. Apprich, J. Berry Slater, A. Iles, and O.L. Schultz (eds), *Provocative Alloys: A Post-Media Anthology*. Lüneburg: Post-Media Labs and Mute Books, 2013. Text of October 1990, first published in *Chimères*, n. 28, spring-summer 1996.

Hobsbawm, E. and Ranger, T. (eds), 1983, *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hogben, L., 1949, *From Cave Painting to Comic Strips: A Kaleidoscope of Human Communication*. New York: Chanticleer Press.

Jenkins, H., 2004, "The cultural logic of media convergence", *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 33-43.

—, 2006, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Kinsella, S., 2000, *Adult Manga: Culture & Power in Contemporary Japanese Society*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Koyama-Richard, B., 2007, *One Thousand Years of Manga*. Paris: Flammarion.

Kunzle, D. (ed.), 2015, *Gustave Doré: Twelve Comic Strips*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

—, 2021, *Rebirth of the English Comic Strip: A Kaleidoscope, 1847-1870*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Lévy, P., 1994, *L'intelligence collective: Pour une anthropologie du cyberspace*. Paris: La Découverte.

Leroi-Gourhan, A., 1967, *Treasures of Prehistoric Art*. New York: H.N. Abrams.

Miyamoto, H., 2002, "The Formation of an Impure Genre: On the Origins of *Manga*", *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, vol. 14, pp. 39-48.

Odagiri, H., 2010, *Kyarakutā wa nanika* ("What are characters?"). Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō.

Pellitteri, M., 1998, *Sense of Comics. La grafica dei cinque sensi nel fumetto*. Rome: Castelvecchi.

—, 2002, "Estetica *kawaii* e modelli di sviluppo intermediale da Topolino a Pikachû", pp. 180-247, in M. Pellitteri (ed.), *Anatomia di Pokémon. Cultura di massa ed estetica dell'effimero fra pedagogia e globalizzazione*. Rome: SEAM.

—, 2010, *The Dragon and the Dazzle: Models, Strategies, and Identities of Japanese Imagination — A European Perspective*. Latina: Tunué with the Japan Foundation and Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

—, 2018, *Mazinga Nostalgia. Storia, valori e linguaggi della Goldrake-generation dal 1978 al nuovo secolo*. 2 vols. Latina: Tunué. Revised and updated edition (1st edition: 1 vol., Rome: Castelvecchi, 1999).

—, 2019, "The aural imagination in comic art", vol. 1, pp. 511-48, in M. Grimshaw, M. Walther-Hansen, and M. Knakkergaard (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Quaranta, D., 2013, *Beyond New Media Art*. Brescia: Link.

Schodt, F.L., 1983, *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics*. Tokyo:

Kōdansha International.

Shaviro, S., 2010, *Post-Cinematic Affect*. Ropley: Zero Books.

Steinberg, M., 2012, *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press.

Takahata, I., 1999, *Jūni seiki no animeshon. Kokuhō emakimono ni miru eigateki animeteki narumono* ("Animations of the twelfth century: Aspects of the twelfth century's painted scrolls selected as national heritage that resemble cinema and animation"). Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten.

Tobin, J. (ed.), 2004, *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Tosti, A., 2016, *Graphic Novel. Storia e teoria del romanzo a fumetti e del rapporto fra parola e immagine*. Latina: Tunué.

Yue, C.; Qin, G.; and Pei-Luen, P.R., 2017, "Watching a Movie Alone Yet Together: Understanding Reasons for Watching Danmaku Videos", *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction*, vol. 33, no. 9, pp. 731-43.

Zahlten, A., 2017, *The End of Japanese Cinema: Industrial Genres, National Times, and Media Ecologies*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Zawojski, P., 1996, "Post-Media Technoculture – the time of hybrids and hybridization", *Cyberempathy. Visual & Media Studies Academic Journal*, vol. 12, no. 1 (republished in *Piotr Zawojski: Blog Archive*, 10 January 2018, Zawojski.com/2018/01/10/post-media-technoculture-the-time-of-hybrids-and-hybridisation).

Zhang, L.-T. and Cassany, D., 2019, "The 'danmu' phenomenon and media participation: Intercultural understanding and language learning through 'The Ministry of Time'", *Communicar*, vol. 27, no. 58, pp. 19-29.

Marco Pellitteri (Palermo, Italy, 1974) is a cultural- and media sociologist. He received a Ph.D. in Sociology and Social Research from the University of Trento. He is an associate professor in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Media and Communication, of Xi'an Jiaotong – Liverpool University (Suzhou, China). Among his main publications, the monograph *The Dragon and the Dazzle* (Tunué with Indiana UP 2010) and the edited collection *Japanese Animation: Transnational Industry, Audiences, and Success* (with Heung-wah Wong, Routledge 2021).