

Manga Critique

Overall this project seems consistent in meeting its goals. It explores the six proposed aspects deemed key to shojo manga – panel layout, cinematic influence, emotion, learning through copying, folklore and cultural magic, new technologies - through creation of three pages of manga. Through these, and especially the use of new technologies, the project provides some interesting ideas for design and content configuration. However, there are some areas such as the general visual style where the project emerges weakly.

Visual Style

The visual style in the project is fairly basic. The character designs convey the needed information but contain minimal details such as shading or line work. The background imagery in the second page is exclusively set in a straight-on perspective which creates a childish look to the panel. Typically, most manga pages bring in differing perspectives to create a sense of depth and space. Often this spatial complexity is missing from the project's manga pages. The digital lining and colouring of the work is also lacking nuance. The lines are mostly the same thickness which creates a flatness to the work. Different line sizes and tapered line ends would likely make the pages more dynamic. Finally the overlapping between panels could be better executed. On page one the panels, thought bubbles, and character are very distant from each other, instead of the interactive, tied together style of many shojo manga pages. Perhaps having an overall colour or pattern which takes up the white spaces would fix this problem. This is attempted in part on the third page. However, the

result emerges as overly dark making the page harder to read. While the author of the project did not have access to screen tone which is traditionally used for making manga pages, it may have been worth researching an alternative, or finding some way to break up the block tone of the background colour with pattern.

Cultural Appropriation vs Appreciation

One part of the project focused on the folklore element frequently seen in manga. The project aimed to replace the Japanese folklore aspects of shojo manga with aspects of Scottish folklore. This brings up questions of cultural appropriation versus appreciation. Cultural appropriation is the act of taking things from a culture that is not your own, in particular doing this without showing respect or understanding for the culture. On the other hand cultural appreciation focuses on learning about another culture in a respectful and usually humble way. This aspect of the project seems to clearly fall into the category of cultural appreciation. Firstly, the project comes as a result of three months of intense study of Japanese manga including its theory and history, therefore demonstrating a knowledge of the art form. Furthermore, manga works in the shojo genre were studied and referenced extensively throughout the project. The author of the project has also spent time learning some Japanese. These all lead to an informed author who has researched the subject area extensively before trying to copy and experiment with manga form. Secondly, bringing Scottish elements into the created panels in lieu of Japanese ones makes sense as the author set the pages of created manga in Scotland. Arguably it would have been closer to appropriation if the author had set the story in Japan as she has not lived in the country and has only a surface level understanding of the culture. Setting it in Scotland, her home country, thus makes more sense. Lastly, the author doesn't try to distort Japanese Visual Language, instead she works with it.

New Technology

The use of new technology in the project arises as one of its most interesting features. The project contains two main uses of new technology: the uses of digitised photos for setting, and the use of digitised photos to create leaves which are laid across and over panels. The leaves were created by taking a digitally altered photograph of a leaf, overlaying a drawn outline of a leaf, and then cutting the photo down to fill that outline. These leaves create an interesting distinction between real and fantasy. Bringing in altered photographs immediately creates a divide in each of the pages between the two different mediums: drawing and photography. In page one the photograph of the city makes the reader hyperaware of the drawn nature of the character. However, in later pages the leaves serve as a bridge between the drawn panels. Both these interactions create interesting interpretations for the reader and act as interesting way of visual storytelling. The potential for these interactions is not fully realised in the three pages, however the idea remains as a strong jumping off point for future work.

The use of new technology also ties in to manga's long tradition of experimentation. Playing around with photographic elements, digital tones and texts show new ways one could put together a manga page. Furthermore, the techniques also contain the pedestrian quality of learning to draw manga. Learning to use tools like adobe illustrator or photoshop – provided one can gain access – is a very teachable skill, just like learning to draw manga through copying other manga. If you cannot draw, you could still learn to configure a story together through photography and 2D design.

Conclusion

While basic in visual style some interesting ideas were put forward by this project. The mix of mediums through new technology emerges as the most interesting outcome.

Hopefully pursuing this idea more will lead to new discoveries and a better understanding of its interpretive potential.