

The Transcultural Transmedia Media Mix

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Introduction

Entertainment media have undergone significant transformations in the last twenty years. Not only have interaction technologies transformed the way that media is created, distributed and marketed, but global information flows have also transformed the type of media being consumed. Whereas international media markets were previously dominated by American and Western European exports, the past fifteen to twenty years have seen the rise of a new country of origin: Japan. *Manga* (Japanese comics) titles are now so well established in American markets that many distributors will merely translate and release them as they were written, right to left. The fact that *anime* films (animated *manga*, or animated graphics) tend to undergo more extensive alteration is indicative of their broad audience base. Since the late 1990s, for example, *anime* feature films made by the prominent Japanese production company, Studio Ghibli, have been distributed internationally via the American animation giant, Disney. Japan and America's entertainment media are now securely positioned within each other's mainstream popular cultures.

With that context in mind, this article examines the mutual influence of Japan and America's entertainment media industries in terms of their approach to multi-platform production strategies. In a converging media environment engagement may involve viewing, but may equally be linked to extensive participation options such as data remix, or computer game-play. Rather than telling a story in one primary media, producers can now also consider whether they might instead stage a story world through a network of integrated media elements. For example a feature film might introduce a spectacular fictional world populated by characters that are further developed in related television series. At the same time audiences can explore that world for themselves in companion game-spaces (Jenkins, *Convergence* 95).

By comparing the Japanese approach to synergistic, multi-platform production known as the *anime* media mix model with its American adaptation, we argue that transcultural adaptation, which may at first appear to be a potential source of mimicry, is more likely to emerge as a potential force for innovation. Given the tensions inherent in information flows it may seem optimistic to argue that global adaptations of convergent media production strategies are likely to lead to innovation. The assertion echoes Ortiz's observance of the phenomenon of transculturation that accompanies the global migration experience where cultures are not so much acquired, or lost, but both of these and more. When populations migrate around the world their cultures merge and converge, creating new cultures in the process (Ortiz).¹

A similar effect can be observed in the migration of media across cultural groups. As will be demonstrated, transmedia storytelling has incorporated media mix techniques such as cross referenced content and serialization, but also developed its own, particular idioms such as independent, grass roots activist productions and multi-participant alternate reality games (ARGs) that seem as if they are telling real stories across flexible easy access social media platforms. Transmedia storytelling is no longer merely an adaptation of the *anime* media mix.

Whether transcultural innovation is welcome is another matter again. For example, the popular animated American series *South Park* has infamously satirized fans of *Pokémon* as victims of a strange and dangerous manipulation that would brainwash them in to attacking Pearl Harbor. As the franchise that introduced children around the world to Japan's vibrant participation culture, *Pokémon* is in many ways a flagship representative of its entertainment media. Whilst irreverent humor is part of the *South Park* aesthetic, nevertheless it is telling that the "Chinpokomon" episode portrays Japan and its creative products as alien and threatening (Allen 36-55).

Meanwhile in Japan the same creative culture that produced *Pokémon* is itself appropriated in the provocative Superflat art movement. As an alternative expression of convergent aesthetics, Superflat sensibilities interweave and level visual metaphors of past and present cultural influences.

1 This notion that something greater than the sum of its parts emerges from the convergence of separate elements recalls Henry Jenkins' preference for the term trans-media, rather than cross-media.

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Takashi Murakami, the contemporary artist who first suggested the notion, has also described the movement as “anti-Western” (qtd. Sharp 142) in the sense that it rejects the division between high and low culture evident in late capitalist consumerism and what Azuma has called “the American cultural invasion of Japan” (24). That Superflat, by its effort to reclaim the *art* of flatness through its particularly Japanese expression also markets its own commodification indicates many of the complexities at work.

In the analysis presented here of the evolution of the multi-platform production model (not always in the hands of master artists) across cultures, the term “innovation” does not insist that all change has value to all people, but rather acknowledges that something greater than the sum of parts is emerging as a consequence of this sometimes fraught process of influence, resistance and transformation. Beyond Jenkins’ analysis of early attempts by American producers to apply Japan’s media mix production model, few direct comparisons have been made of the ways that America’s adaptation of this approach has both converged and diverged from its Japanese source. Equally, little consideration has been given to the potential impact of emerging transmedial storytelling practices on the Japanese media mix that inspired them. This analysis refers to debates concerning whether cultures are converging, or diverging amidst global media flows (Appadurai, Matei). Often tied to marketing efforts, participatory media frameworks require “non-trivial effort” (Aarseth 1) from their audiences. As such they are arguably potential indicators of shifting cultural inclinations. If globalization does lead to a standardization of cultures as some fear (Liebes, Amin), then it is likely that shift will be reflected in the homogenization of participatory media frameworks worldwide. While global media flows do support the creation of global trends, local media nevertheless retain distinctive characteristics that in turn foster distinct iterations of those trends via media innovations and related cultural practices. Effectively, the process of transcultural adaptation also generates greater complexity, or heterogenization (Appadurai).

Context: Japan and America as Global Media Producers

Historically, America’s influence on Japanese industry and culture dates back to the post-1945 era when they oversaw Japan’s reconstruction efforts; by the Seventies, however Japan asserted its independence both

in terms of business and popular culture.² As a result Japan gained international status likened to a form of “soft power” (Kelts 112-3), but that power has also been limited. In terms of the global spread of *anime* and *manga* fans, it was limited by the reach of popular cultural influence. At the same time it was limited by a history of power relations which have, for example, required that Japan’s entertainment exports be routinely bleached of any perceived cultural influence to ensure they contain no sexist, racist, religious or violent references deemed inappropriate for American tastes. Meanwhile American exports have tended to cross national borders, as is, with few changes bar localized marketing campaigns. However recent years have witnessed a shift: Japanese products increasingly flaunt their identity (Hong, Black). Not only are media arts emulated by both amateur and professional cartoonists, animators, toy designers and computer game developers worldwide, so too are their production models (Jenkins, *Convergence* 93-130). Hybridity is not merely the result of cultural exchange; in the context of the international diaspora, networked cultures and global media flows, it is a key cultural process: “[It] needs to be understood as a communicative practice constitutive of, and constituted by, sociopolitical and economic arrangements” (Kraidy 317). By interacting with and influencing each other, different groups produce new hybrid cultural artifacts that in turn remodel cultural settings (Lull 242). This shift has wide-reaching implications. If national cultures can be singularly defined in terms of a bounded, particular essence, then transcultural adaptations are more likely to lack that essence; they involve multiple appropriations by multiple cultures in multiple contexts, both artistic and commercial, so that it becomes difficult to identify a single, originating culture.

In the context of Japan and America essentialist notions of culture are indeed problematic. Both nations already share a history of complex, mutual fascinations and influence.³ Susan Napier traces “Japanophilia” (Ito xii) back to at least the nineteenth century when French impressionists developed a fascination for all things “Oriental” (Napier). The fantasy of a marvelously exotic Japan spread to other western nations such as Europe

2 By the year 2000 *manga* and *anime* related products had replaced Japan’s car industry as a major export (Allison, “Cultural Politics” 8).

3 This mutual fascination continues today in such popular youth culture movements as Japanese gothic, or hip hop sub-cultures and in America, western Otaku (fans of Japanese media).

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and North America. In the 1970s when George Lucas, inspired by Japan's production models, made efforts to secure the (lucrative, as it turned out) merchandising rights for the *Star Wars* saga (the first of many applications of the *anime* media mix strategy within America) his influential efforts were part of a long tradition of transnational creative borrowing. Nonetheless the inspiration has been mutual: Japanese creative artists have been inspired by American as well as European models. Kadokawa Haruki, head of Kadokawa Publishing (often credited as the originator of the media mix),⁴ cites Nazi propaganda techniques as one of his main inspirations (Steinberg 245). Taking control of the mass media, Nazi propaganda lured audiences through entertainment programs and slanted news broadcasts in order to be able to repeatedly reinforce simplistic propaganda (Doob 422-41). Despite the combined influences of the global diaspora and networked cultures, regional history and geography still inform local media production. For example, *anime* and *manga* titles are often designed with international markets in mind, yet they still express a particular hybrid style. *Anime* series, for instance, might draw upon traditional Japanese folk tales, but equally contain a mix and match of cultural imagery appropriated from around the world including blonde hair, blue eyes, European settings and Judeo/Christian iconography. Such strategies have inspired Iwabuchi to argue that international fans of anime are not so much preoccupied with Japan's cultural products, but rather subscribe to a kind of whitewashed glocalization that is sold to them as some strange, exotic other when it is in fact quite similar, by virtue of its sheer neutrality (33). Glocalization refers to a transcultural trade strategy that combines designed transnationalism (characterized by seemingly universal concerns such as family, children, animals, with the capacity for localization through translation, particularized marketing campaigns and the like (Iwabuchi 46-7). Fans counter that whilst *anime* and *manga* characters might appear to lack nationality they are nevertheless drawn in what they term an identifiably Japanese style - an economy of line and movement combined with striking geometrics (Norris 45-59). More importantly, both *anime* and *manga* are seen to engage with the world from a complex, emotional framework (Norris 26-8. Napier 177). Explorations of such things as gender change and cyborg identities

4 These sorts of multi-platform blockbusters grew out of Kadokawa Shoten's tri-pronged marketing model based upon the notion that in this sort of networked environment advertising campaigns for one increased sales of all the others.

are just some of the themes that appeal to those who see these stories supporting an alternative perspective. Many international fans believe that the combination of similarity and difference found in *anime* and *manga* titles enable them to explore their own identity, not as captives of a possibly narrow local culture, but as members of a broader, global sphere (Norris 170-3). Numerous fans go on to study Japan in more depth and even travel to Japan as a result. In this way, built upon appreciation, even possibly spurious fandom of a performed, global face can bridge cognitive dissonance and foster greater cultural familiarity over time.

Amidst international politics, cultural hybridity is clearly a power trail, as much as an exchange (Kraidy 333). Perhaps this might also involve the ability, ideally, to be open to the world, to encounter and conduct relatively equal communicative transactions of cultural exchange and thereby create new, hybrid identities. If those transactions are nevertheless unequal, then transcultural adaptations generate innovation when they also localize global influences. The signatory, limited frame *anime* style is an example of the innovative potential of transcultural adaptation.⁵ Inspired by American precedents such as *The Dover Boys* (1942), this minimalist, stylistic technique was employed during the early Sixties by industry founder Osamu Tezuka in an effort to save costs. At the same time he was already well aware of the power of the image: woodblock prints of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, valued expressive strength through the use of simple lines (“A picture of flying kites [...] might include some strings without a visible kite” (qtd. Levi 21)). An open admirer of Disney’s animation style, Tezuka also drew upon his national artistic heritage that was ideally suited to the abstract, limited animation style. Criticized at first, the technique was also taken up by later animators and eventually became widely regarded as a unique aesthetic (Azuma 11-13). This process of hybridization also operates within fan cultures, as well as in terms of production-style, as the next section tries to demonstrate.

Fan Cultures

Unlike America where *manga* tends to be seen as an *anime* spin off primarily directed towards children, in Japan comics have been a national

5 A signature *anime* style that simulates animated movement by moving the camera over still images and recycling anime cells whenever possible, thus limiting the required number of animation cells, or frames.

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obsession for young and old alike for over fifty years. *Manga* is a primary media that has generated numerous subgenres and audience cultures.⁶ Importantly, *manga* is also an easy access medium that has amassed a strong amateur following. Over the years those hobbyists have become a focal point for an extended culture of prosumer fandom, whereby fans also produce and share content. Contemporary *anime* and *manga* franchises are thus embedded amongst vibrant communities of devoted, information-obsessed prosumers. In Japan the traditional name for devoted *manga* fans is *Otaku*, an historically derisive term that roughly translates as “media geeks” (Ito 8). *Otaku* have stereotypically been perceived as obsessive and socially awkward consumers, typically male, lost in a phantasm of virtual desire. In 1989 when a serial murderer/mutilator of young girls turned out to be a fan of *Lolicon manga* (which depicts childlike, female characters in an erotic manner), *Otaku* were portrayed in the media en masse as psychologically disturbed perverts (Kinsella 310). Over time, their status has improved due to the introduction of participative technologies and the growth of international fan networks such as the “Japan- otacool(s)” (Britton 11) who tend to conceive of their “child-like, girlish passions” (Nihonkeizaishinbun, qtd. Kinsella 18) as a form of social agency.

In a market where consumption can be identified with the propensity to collect and share different media, fan culture is a core component of the mix. The *Pokémon* franchise, for example, was designed to be “something you *do*, not just something you watch or ‘consume’” (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 12). The core text in this instance was not, in fact, an *anime*, or *manga* series, but a Nintendo Game Boy game that staged the collector theme “Gotta Catch ‘Em All!” Suddenly children across Japan, and shortly thereafter the globe, were armed with their very own *Pokémon* collector tool. With these portable technologies in hand they networked, traded and fought for ever-increasing numbers of lovable, fanciful creatures that inhabited virtualities at their fingertips. The irony is that “while [...] ‘doing’ clearly requires active participation on the part of the ‘doers,’ the terms on which it is performed are predominantly dictated by forces or structures

6 Japanese *manga* subgenres include *shojo* (girls), *shonen* (boys), *seinen* (womens), *josei* (mens) and also subculture genres such as *yaoi manga* featuring boy on boy love, generally made by female artists and also the infamous *lolicon manga* which depicts young girls in an eroticized and often brutal manner.

beyond their control” (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 12). Nonetheless *Pokémon* was nevertheless an undeniably creative work that struck a chord with a generation of children around the world.

However it is also true to say that different markets consume products in different ways. For instance, the more individualistic, free roaming, military styled first person shooter genre popular in America is rare amongst Japanese game titles that tend to favor more social, role-play action. Similarly, whereas Japanese game settings tend to be more stylized, American designers tend to favor realism. In Japan, the media industry’s traditional collaborations with all sorts of fan-based cultures have been regarded as business acumen (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 167). The unofficial tolerance that Japan’s entertainment media traditionally has held towards participatory activities such as amateur *manga* production has nurtured an intensely active fan culture networked through online communities and real world hubs such as the Akihabra district in Tokyo, where electronic and popular culture ware line the streets, or the comic markets and conventions where fans gather to celebrate and trade amateur *manga* production (*dōjinshi*), figure art, *cosplay* (dress up costume play), amateur game production, *anime* music remix and *mad movies* (mash-up video remix production). That tolerance has since been sorely tested by widespread, unauthorized digital redistribution of official content (Thompson). For better, or worse Japan’s entertainment media is interdependently linked with an intensely devoted, resourceful and vibrant fan culture.

Does Japan offer a precursory vision of America’s future media cultures? In the late Eighties theorist Ōtsuka Eiji argued that the rising status of participatory media would eventually lead to industry consumption (Eiji and Steinberg 99-116). He warned that “there will no longer be manufacturers. There will merely be countless consumers who make commodities with their own hands and consume them with their own hands” (113). Observing the current state of the *manga* industry, one might ask whether that stage has now been reached; but on closer examination the reasons behind these challenges are revealed to be more complex. Just as the spread of digital social media and computer games is transforming the American mediascape, so too Japan’s media is in flux and the results of this are still unfolding. Recently, one commentator wondered whether

digitization might even herald “The Death of *Manga* (Tarbox).”⁷ Sales are plummeting (ICv2), *dōjinshi* (the private manga journals that dominate the amateur comic markets) are booming, while scanlations (translated *manga* scans) proliferate online. According to one American commentator, Japan’s *manga* industries are struggling because they hesitate at the prospect of digitization and instead swamp the market with poor quality print media (Thompson).⁸

Whether American industries are destined to find themselves in the same situation is unclear. *Manga*, designed around old delivery methods (print) is easy to mimic and reproduce without cost. Other participatory media, such as computer games and social media nevertheless (largely) control access to what then becomes a variable, mediatised experience. Despite these differences, the social and industrial influence of participatory culture in America does appear to build upon similar themes to its Japanese counterpart. Like Japanese *Otakus* comic fans in America might well be stereotyped as geeks similar to the bright, but socially inept Sheldon character in the popular sitcom *Big Bang Theory*. Unlike *Otakus* in Japan, however, who historically might hide their cosplay outfits from public view, Americans are more likely to flaunt their fandom.

Demand for open access, participatory engagement fueled experiments such as *The Lost Experience*, an interactive transmedia story event that ran between seasons two and three of the popular series *Lost*. Engaging the “hive mind” (Rose 145),⁹ the inter-seasonal mystery and puzzle story played out through various media events including a series of television advertisements for fictional companies that aired during the commercial breaks.¹⁰ *The Lost Experience* is an early example of a type of game-like interactive story known as an alternate reality game, or ARG, requiring viewers to trawl through various media such as websites, twitter

7 The American fans who subbed Japanese *anime* and *manga* for local distribution might have helped to create an international market for the product (Jenkins) but the industry has since condemned the scanlation and file sharing practices of fans, forcing many sites to shut down.

8 Unlike DMPs Digital Manga Guild that has experimented with profit sharing arrangements with amateur translators.

9 A fan created online wiki where thousands of fans swapped detailed facts about the show.

10 A comic-con is a convention where comic fans congregate.

accounts, YouTube videos, mobile phone messages and performance events, in the hunt for clues about the complex lives of fictional characters. Solving such problems demands a collective response – for example, through an online forum gathering essential pieces of a puzzle scattered in far-flung locations around the globe. ARGs began in America as a form of marketing designed to generate buzz about a media title and engage the active prosumer base, based on the assumption that if people don't necessarily watch your program, then you have to make them want to. Hence advertising increasingly looks like content and vice versa. Initial interest in ARGs within America may have dipped as producers search for ways to broaden their audience base, but these sorts of experiments are even more limited in Japan, despite the fact that some have been quite ingenious. One of the few to be staged in conjunction with a popular *manga* mystery series, *Detective Conan* (Aoyama), was based around the idea of a trading card game. Players submitted their solutions online to puzzles that were printed on the back of trading card games; once they had reached a particular point threshold they would be sent mysterious emails that told them stories also hidden in the game. The activity attracted interest, but Japanese producers appear cautious about ARGs that are still unproven in their market as well as conceptually demanding.

In her book *Different Games, Different Rules* sociolinguist Haru Yamada states that the main difference she experienced between Japan and America were their attitudes towards languages and relationships. Within Japan she observed an emphasis on interdependence and implicit communication, compared to an emphasis on individualism and personal expression in America: “[t]he American field is one where individuals play out self-reliance and practice explicit communication” (18). As Japan's industries have already demonstrated through technical developments such as the *wii*, the people are equally ingenious; nevertheless it is true that many prefer to speak out anonymously about social issues. Hence the ARG is likely to be adapted to suit the demands of this particular fan-base.

Transmedial Approaches

Both the *anime* media mix and transmedial storytelling production models are creative production strategies in and of themselves, characterized by a unified, coordinated production of temporarily and

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thematically linked networks of equal value media (rather than hierarchies of supportive merchandising). In Japan, such networks have become a foundational strategy of the larger *manga* and *anime* media franchises (Steinberg 141-2). They exist as integral parts of a multi-modal story weave that may include electronic games, light novels, as well as various forms of merchandise such as trading cards, stationary, clothing, toys, packaged food and even themed transport (Allison, “Cultural.”) An American produced trend report, *Transmedia Rising* (JWT Intelligence) displays American and Japanese productions on the same “Transmedia Milestones” timeline (fig. 1). This acknowledgement of the influence of Japan’s media mix approach frames it as part of a transnational tradition.

The perceived need for localization of global ideas might explain why the influence of the *anime* media mix upon the development of transmedia storytelling is, nevertheless, sometimes overlooked in historical surveys (Demartino). Despite this omission, the general shift towards media connectivity was championed and developed within Japan’s *anime* and *manga* industries. In the 1980s Ōtsuka was proposing that fans hungrily consume fragments, or snippets of narrative in an attempt to piece together a mysterious, but thrilling (when discovered) grand narrative (Eiji and Steinberg 104-11). His theories grew out of his observations of a sticker campaign for “Bikkuriman Chocolates” which printed snippets of information about each of the characters on the chocolate wrappers. As children started to collect these wrappers they started to see an overview narrative form, much like a puzzle. Ōtsuka noticed that as the campaign wore on children would often throw the chocolates away because by that stage all they really wanted was to find out more of the story, so he started to look at how to make sense of this desire for totality through the theory of narrative consumption, emphasizing the drive to consume signs through which consumers can construct narratives, rather than products themselves. He argued that such narratives are reminiscent of mythological epics that emerge out of an expansive range of settings; the more detailed the world is, the more real it feels (Eiji and Steinberg 106-107). This notion has been seized upon and much talked about online (Doyle). In America it is now also often referred to as a universe in order to highlight that this is something “so large it cannot be contained within a single medium” (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 95). Differences such as these accumulate in “a process where integral elements of a fiction get *dispersed systematically*

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TRANSMEDIA MILESTONES

While the Web is an essential element of cross-platform storytelling today, transmedia's roots lie in precedents that range from Disney to manga to Star Wars. Here are some select transmedia milestones.

A year after *Star Wars* premiered, a new character, **Boba Fett**, appeared in a TV special. After viewers embraced the subsequent action figure, he was elevated to a significant film role—one of the first examples of a character from a secondary medium moving to a primary one. Beyond that, the *Star Wars* story world has manifested as six films, TV shows, books and toys, with the action figures allowing fans to create their own stories.



Guinness

1955



mem0614

Disneyland opened and *The Mickey Mouse Club* TV show launched as a way to help promote and finance the park. Suddenly Disney was no longer simply known for animated characters on film and TV. Now it was a larger story world where the characters came to life; the ethos was embodied by Annette Funicello and the rest of the Mouseketeers, who sold viewers on the brand.

1978

The cross-platform concept filtered out of Japan with **Pokémon**, whose fans followed the characters across TV, film, games and trading cards.



Kichiga Menat

1979

Mid-'90s



Aimen YAMADA

In Japan, **manga and anime properties like Gundam** (which launched in 1979) have spanned media, manifesting on TV and film, portable and console video games, in print, in collectible format and as theme park attractions.

The Beast, created to promote the film *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, got more than 3 million players involved in a futuristic murder mystery that included thousands of websites, phone calls to players and, in three cities, real-life rallies. It was a pioneer in the genre of alternate reality games, which use online and offline components to turn storytelling into a massive interactive game. An ARG is inherently transmedia.



4entertainment.com

1999



indys8

The Matrix: The filmmakers were inspired by anime culture when they created this transmedia universe that includes three films, animated shorts, games, comics and merchandise.

2001

Lost: A blueprint for extending a TV show well beyond its time slot. The story's complexity prompted viewers to form online communities, and a fan created the *Lostpedia* wiki. There were games, a novel "written" by a character, websites for fictional entities in the show and a series of mobisodes (mobile episodes).



lospedia.wikia.com

2003



henryjenkins.org

The term "**transmedia**" first surfaced in the '90s, then was picked up in 2003 by **Henry Jenkins**, director of MIT's Comparative Media Studies Program. Now a USC professor, Jenkins remains an influential academic voice in the field.

2004

Why So Serious?: A 2009 Cyber Grand Prix winner in the viral category at Cannes, this promotion for Warner Bros. *The Dark Knight* drew 10 million-plus participants via hundreds of Web pages, mobile, interactive games, print, e-mail, events and video. The alternate reality game, which centered around the Joker, even included cakes with a baked-in phone that players picked up from bakeries.



alternativetobranding.com

2006



Gamduffy

Heroes is one of several TV shows that followed *Lost*'s transmedia model. This dip outlines the "online stories that impact and extend on-air broadcasts, unique Web and mobile features, and countless ways for fans to interact."

2008

Fig 1. Timeline: Transmedia Milestones, from the *Transmedia Rising Trend Report*, Courtesy of JWT Intelligence

across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience" (Jenkins, "Transmedia," emphasis in original). Whereas the media mix in Japan has a strong merchandising drive, Jenkins emphasized the narrative implications of this production strategy.

Much of the discourse that surrounds the focus on narrative coherence within transmedia storytelling emerged out of Jenkins' analysis of one of

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earliest, flawed attempts to apply Japan's media mix strategies: *The Matrix* franchise (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 93-130). Its producers aimed to emulate the sort of synergy that propelled the obsessive consumption of some of the more popular Japanese *anime* and *manga* franchises: *The Matrix* was not just a series of films, but comprised a series of animated shorts, comics and even a game, *Enter the Matrix*. The films' directors, the Wachowski brothers worked closely with the producers of the various media to ensure that they created a networked story that could not only stand alone but incorporate cross-referenced media elements. The idea was that users would follow these trails to explore a networked narrative that pieces together like a puzzle:

For example, in the animated short, *Final Flight of The Osiris* [(Jones)] the protagonist, Jue, gives her life trying to get a message into the hands of the Nebuchadnezzar crew [...] At the opening of *Enter the Matrix*, the player's first mission is to retrieve the letter from the post office and get it into the hands of our heroes. And the opening scenes of *The Matrix Reloaded* show the characters discussing the 'last transmission of Osiris (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 102).

In considering whether the concept of a story world is a mere translation, adaptation, or an extension of Ōtsuka's grand narrative theory of consumption, it is useful to reconsider the debate about whether story adaptations across platforms amount to extensions. The argument that each new transmedia story-telling element offers a narrative extension (as opposed to the mere remediation of the same story across various media) overlooks the difficulty of drawing distinctions between the two (Dena 148-9). The process of adapting stories according to the various strengths, weaknesses and protocols of each media is likely to introduce new elements regardless. This is echoed in Moore's argument that when adaptation studies seek to analyze these shifts they undertake "the study of media itself" (Moore 191). Rather than limit the distinction between adaptation and extension to an either/or definition, perhaps it is more useful to speak of general tendencies. Transcultural adaptations tend to be motivated by the demands of cultural, rather than technological protocols. Like media technologies, those protocols vary over time. If cultural influences have

already crossed borders, such as in the case of Japan and America, then the process of creative appropriation and remix is likely to be ongoing. If this is the case then adaptor and receiver are perhaps best identified according to which media or technique is being adapted at the time.

Such techniques are likely to be shaped by the contexts and cultures that engage with them. Osamu Tezuka, creator of *AstroBoy*, Japan's first comic book hero laid the commercial foundations of Japan's media mix delivery model. Inspired by Disney's character merchandising strategies,¹¹ Tezuka was also limited by the realities of smaller markets and budgets. In response he took an early gamble to sell the *AstroBoy* television show to the networks for a fraction of what it cost in the hope that he could make his money back through merchandising tie-ins. *AstroBoy* stickers were given away free with Meiji marble chocolates (sponsors of the television show). This merchandising strategy might not have been new, but when Tezuka tied it to the animated television version of a popular comic series it took off. Soon everything was covered in stickers, which only fueled the craze even more. Participants at the time recount that it was as if *AstroBoy* exploded out of the television screens in to everyday life wherever they went (Steinberg). This sort of blanket presence through intense, almost environmental marketing continues today and characterizes the *anime* media mix, extending through every possible media outlet and merchandising arm whereby fans can extract the brand and use it to wallpaper their lives with fantasy (Ito 13). America may have provided the early inspiration for this merchandising drive, but even America's capitalist consumer orientation does not appear to match the propensity for mass merchandising that so often characterizes the larger *anime* media mixes. *Pokémon* managed to generate so much consumption activity based around the theme of collecting cute, fanciful pocket monsters that it amounted to a cultural phenomenon. In his study of the connection between media technology and consumerism with particular reference to the Disney brand, Eric Jenkins argues that animation has a unique effect on audiences: "In live action people see existent life; in animation they imagine life" (206). Consumers might emulate the lifestyles and fashions portrayed in live action films, but Jenkins argues that fans of animated media seek instead

11 Character merchandising effectively mediatize products (Steinberg) by branding them with a particular media identity in order to apparently imbue them with that personality's characteristics.

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to repeat the affect of a fantasy experience; this desire can much more easily be tied to a wide range of objects that often become fetishized as a result (206-20).¹² One Japanese fan intimated that this drive is intensified by the easy sense of intimacy with virtual characters (and technology in general) inherent to the Shinto religion where Gods, humanity and nature are treated as related equals (Geraci 237). Makoto Nishimura, the engineer who built Japan's first real robot in 1928, comments: "If one considers humans as the children of nature, artificial humans created by the hand of man are thus nature's grandchildren" (qtd. Hornyak 38). These artificial creations easily become characterized as "a mechanism for interacting with the world through the imagination" (Allison, "Cuteness" 43). Bearing this in mind, Japan's advertisers have co-opted them as "devices for self-realization" (Dentsu 95).

A comparative study of American, Japanese and British media mix marketing techniques found that Japanese companies were far more adept at what is actually a very complex juggling technique (Doyle, Saunders and Wright 182). The authors took a proactive, but long-term approach towards the task and were generally much more alert to opportunities to build niche markets over time. By contrast, despite the success of *The Matrix* films the overall franchise was not nearly so popular in the American market, partly because western consumers weren't used to having to seek out stories across multiple platforms, but also partly because the creators weren't quite so adept at staging a media mix as their Japanese counterparts. There were no portable devices, no culturally provocative networking opportunities, no narrative mirrors and not even any suspenseful, nagging cliffhangers between platforms, so most filmgoers simply ignored the rest.

In recent years, however, there has been a revival of interest in transmedial storytelling in America through Facebook groups, meet-up groups, Twitter streams, blogs, conferences and "how to" courses, as well as the development of a vibrant community of independent transmedial storytellers. Unlike in Japan where media mix franchises are characterized by a comfortable marriage of *commercial* and *creative* imperatives,¹³ in

12 Early examples of multi-platform production in America, such as Walt Disney's theme parks all seem to involve some form of graphical media.

13 Even grass roots franchises that emerge from participatory activity tend to express a personal, or communal experience through various media, rather than mount a distinctly political agenda, or consciously embrace the art form of transmedia production itself.

America a substantial proportion of the production community appears to be primarily inspired by the creative and social potential of transmedial storytelling. Termed “transactivism” (Srivastava), the ability to generate social action through participatory, convergent media has attracted an earnest response from local voices intent on using it as a tool for social change. One example of this can be seen in “The WorkBook Project,” a portal for digital artists founded by writer/director and “experience designer” Lance Weiler, who first gained a reputation for cutting edge transmedia storytelling with the 2006 cinema release for *Head Trauma*. The screening of the film was accompanied with a bleeding narrative so that real phones in the street surrounding the theater rang, while characters and props from the film were handed out to passers-by in the street. After the screening filmgoers received eerie messages on their phones from characters in the film. Since then Weiler has gone on to produce a wealth of transmedia productions, including “Robot Heart Stories,” an experiential learning project for disadvantaged students, and the award-winning convergent project *Collapsus* (Pallotta, Weiler and Wendig) that combined documentary, drama and game space in the one, networked online site.

The American approach is marked by innovations that have grown out of an emphasis on the art of storytelling as opposed to either merchandising, or character-driven multiplicity. This view is evident in a piece produced by the Producer’s Guild of America to define a transmedial producer:

[T]he person(s) responsible for a significant portion of a project’s long-term planning, development, production, and/or maintenance of *narrative* continuity across multiple platforms, and creation of original *storylines* for new platforms. Transmedia producers also create and implement interactive endeavors to unite the audience of the property with the *canonical narrative* and this element should be considered as valid qualification for credit as long as they are related directly to the *narrative* presentation of a project (Producers Guild of America, italics ours).

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This determined focus on transmedial narrative has also created new challenges; it requires unity and a certain amount of authorial control, which interaction can disrupt. This doesn't leave as much room for fan intervention, or innovation as might be desired (Jenkins, "Transmedia.") Perhaps American storytellers can learn from their Japanese counterparts, whose focus on character merchandising, combined with a general cultural fascination in "alternate and interpenetrating dimensions" (Cavallaro 4), has permitted narrative flexibility. Each character can generate numerous iterations, all of which have equal value – including participatory fan works. It is worth noting that Ōtsuka's influential theories about the consumption of narrative have since been adjusted by other theorists such as Hiroki Azuma who argue that the introduction of technologies enabling the extracting, archiving and remixing of elemental bits and bytes of digital media,¹⁴ has created a situation where consumers no longer consume grand narratives. Instead what they now seek is the data itself, shaped at best in small bursts of story arcs contextualized by consumption of "the database of Otaku culture as a whole" (Azuma 59) – the networked container for a prosumer culture built upon engagements with simulated realities.

Nonetheless Azuma's warning that this process might create a "world [that] drifts about materially without giving meaning to lives" (95) is sobering. Transactional media flows can generate shallow, affective media experiences just as they can also foster compelling, complex engagements. Media may need to keep in step with changing cultures, but there is also a role for historical benchmarks, particularly in terms of broader cultural flows. Equally it is important to remember that neither narrative nor innovation needs to disappear from the media landscape. Transculturation, involving local articulations of global flows, is a complex process that introduces fresh ways of seeing and being in the world. As such it is likely to emerge as a site of innovation as well as historical reinvention.

Conclusion

In this article it has been argued that whilst the *anime* media mix and transmedial storytelling are both global production strategies, they are

14 Participatory engagement with these elements is linked to a fictional desire known as *moe* for favorite *anime* characters, or more accurately those affective features that enable fans to enact this desire through their repeated consumption, remix and recycling of composite characters.

also significantly different by virtue of the cultures that engage with them. The localization of content that occurs as part of transcultural adaptation introduces change. Whenever change occurs, the potential for innovation is evoked alongside the potential for destruction. Incorporating the loss of the old, and the emergence of the new, each transcultural adaptation is necessarily stamped with the character and context of each adaptive culture. In the case of exchange between Japan and America what emerges from their mutual influence is perhaps not quite Japanese, not quite American, but something different – a hybrid identity is potentially greater than the sum of its parts. When it is still emergent this *something* may appear to be displaced and awkward, nevertheless every adaptation sews a seed that as it grows has the potential to nurture, or inspire innovations that all can share and adapt in turn.

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