

**University of Kent**  
**2019 BA (Hons) Graphic Design Dissertation**

**In what ways does Manga's Visual Language convey meaning?**

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**Credit 45**

**Wordcount (with bibliography): 7999**

**Wordcount (without bibliography): 7048**

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## **Introduction**

This dissertation aims to explore the origins of manga's visual language and how it conveys meaning. Having originated in Japan, manga is a traditional comic and visual narrative consisting of multiple styles and genres (Rousmaniere, 2019: 20). The word 'manga' is derived from the Chinese characters "man" (involuntary) and "ga" (pictures), to describe drawings that are comically amusing (Lewis, 2005: 10).

In their study of manga, Neil Cohn (2007, 2013) and Frederick L. Schodt (1983), amongst others, have already covered the meaning behind manga's visual language. However other authors such as Bruce Lewis (2005), Scott McCloud (1993, 2006), Robert Rozema (2014) and Hayden Scott-Baron (2005) and have explained more about the contents of manga and how they communicate to the audience.

People argue that readers from the West find manga difficult to understand compared to Western comics due to their cultural differences. Most of manga's visual techniques are easily understandable while others are more unusual and regarded with absurdity by Western readers, including "big eyes" and "spiked hair" as well as symbolic expressions like the nosebleed and mucus bubble (McCloud 2006) and (Rozema 2015).

The deconstruction of manga's visual language will be undertaken through the process of exploring the origins of manga throughout its history, identifying the artists that developed its style and analysing different visual techniques used in manga.

Case Studies will identify the main aspects of manga's visual language and compare and contrast manga to western comics, followed by observing the visual elements of shoujo (girl) and shonen (boy) manga. The conclusion to the dissertation will be summarising the techniques found in manga's visual language and explaining how those techniques have engaged readers in becoming occupied in its stories, as to what makes it so popular today.

### **Literature Review**

Throughout manga's history, the comic has grown and flourished into a vast array of popular styles – from illustrated hand scrolls in the 1100s and woodblock prints in the Edo Period (1603-1868) to newspapers and magazines in the 1950s (Cohn, 2013: 153). The modern style of manga is believed to have developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, coined by Hokusai Katsushika (1760-1849) in his *Hokusai manga* collection and influenced by Osamu Tezuka (1928-1989) for his Western style and cinematic techniques. Since then, manga has become a successful worldwide phenomenon with Japanese and Western readers alike (Rousmaniere, 2019: 20, 22; Beaujean, 2019: 114; Bouissou, 2010: 25).

Over the course of history, manga has developed its own visual language, characterised by a system of popular visual techniques, including stylised faces of characters and “graphic emblems” (Cohn, 2007, 2013). Although Western comics have become more familiar with manga, some readers in the West are still having difficulty trying to understand peculiar aspects of manga's visual language. This is

primarily because Manga is a different language to Western comics. The difference of visual language in comics lies in cultural heritage; Japanese manga is based on Eastern art and writing, while Western comics are based on ancient Roman and Greek imagery (Lewis, 2005: 30; McCloud, 2006: 97).

The earliest forms of manga date back to the sixth and seventh centuries, when employees drew offensive caricatures of their bosses on the ceilings and walls of the Toshodaiji and Horyuji temples in Nara. This was not necessarily a new art form as they were just doodling out of boredom (McCarthy, 2014: 6; Lewis, 2005: 12).

The true origins of manga emerged during the 1100s, when a series of painted hand scrolls known as *Frolicking Animals (Choju jinbutsu giga)* emerged. Created by Buddhist priest, Toba Sojo (1053-1140), these scrolls became highly popular amongst readers for their “humorous yet sophisticated” stories of anthropomorphic frogs, monkeys, rabbits and foxes performing the activities of monks, priests and nobles (with the Buddha especially portrayed as a frog) (McCarthy, 2014: 6-7; Lewis, 2005: 12; Rousmaniere, 2019: 12). Praised for his sense of humour and animalistic passion, Toba has been regarded as a “medieval Buddhist” with a resemblance to Walt Disney, and is considered to be one of the ancient pioneers in the history of manga for creating the first cartoon to feature funny animals (McCarthy, 2014: 6-7; Lewis, 2005: 12; Schodt, 1983: 28).

During the Edo Period (1603-1868), artists in Japan began producing coloured woodblock prints called *ukiyo-e* (translated as “pictures of the floating world”) which

reflected on everyday life in Japan, including scenes of violence and sexual content, followed by landscapes, caricatures, and actors from the kabuki theatre (McCarthy, 2014: 7; Lewis, 2005: 14). Kabuki Actors were the most popular subjects in ukiyo-e (Ryoko, 2019: 284), known for their colourfully embellished costumes, innovative stage decor, professional acting and top-quality visual aesthetics (Leiter, 2002: xix).



Figure 1. Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *One Hundred Colours of Facial Expressions*, 1836

Woodblock print artists had developed early techniques for portraying emotions and put their focus into caricaturing kabuki actors' facial expressions (fig 1) (Ryoko, 2019: 284). They used "visual cues" to convey their emotions thoroughly through exaggerated expressions; this was likely to have had a major influence on manga's stylisation (Ryoko, 284).



Some actors' expressions had been reflected in their makeup (fig 2), consisting of "rolling eyes, contorted mouth, tensed faces, and grimaces" to the point where caricaturisation became one of the dominant aspects in ukiyo-e, similar to what modern shonen (boy) and shoujo (girl) manga portrayed (Bouissou, 2010: 20).



Figure 2. Utagawa Toyokuni III, *Illustrations by Toyokuni*, 1859

The symbolism of kabuki is explained by Leonard C. Pronko (2002) in his essay, *Kabuki: Signs, Symbols and the Hieroglyphic Actor*. Kabuki recognised its actors, performances and staging material (props, decor, costumes, sounds, etc) as an enormous quantity of signs. During the performances, those signs visualised the narratives and stimulated the audience's imagination by transforming into symbols.

This was highly conventional in non-realistic drama when actors of the great theatre from the past presented their characters in a “non-illusionist manner” (Pronko, 2002: 238-239, 241).

Modern manga was coined in 1814 by ukiyo-e artist Hokusai Katsushika (1760-1849), when he produced a series of woodblock prints known as *Hokusai manga*, depicting the lifestyle and everyday activities of Japanese society. He used the term to refer to his drawings as “irresponsible pictures” when he applied them to his copybook (Lewis, 2005: 10, 14). He used a special technique called the split-frame to represent the “passage of time” through the division of two panels, in a way that showed what happened “before and after” (Ryoko, 2019: 278; Lewis, 2005: 14-15).

In 1861, British sketch artist Charles Wirgman arrived in Yokohama and started the satirical magazine, *Japan Punch* in 1862. Known for his satire of real-life events and politics, Wirgman was the first artist to have applied a Western style (and speech bubbles) to Japanese cartoons. In *Japan Punch*, Wirgman portrayed European caricatures with big noses and long hair, reflecting on the “early isolation of Europeans”. He also satirised life in Tokyo and caricatured “Japan’s first students educated abroad”. Japanese artists became heavily influenced by Wirgman and began producing their own political newspapers and magazines based on his style. Wirgman is considered to be the “forefather of both manga and Western-style Japanese art” (McCarthy, 2014: 8-9; Schodt, 1983: 38-39, 40).



During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Japanese manga artists took inspiration from American comic strips - like Bud Fisher's *Mutt and Jeff* and George McManus's *Bringing up Father* - and produced a prolific number of comics throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The initiation of World War Two had a negative impact on the manga industry. During the war, manga production had declined due to military build-up, demand in propaganda and warfare materials, followed by harsh censorship and paper shortage. After the war, Japan became heavily influenced by American media, including the animations of Walt Disney. The most popular influence in Japan was Walt Disney's animal characters; they became so popular that manga artists created characters mostly based on Mickey Mouse, including *Norakuro* by Suiho Tagawa (McCarthy, 2014: 18; Lewis, 2005: 16; Rousmaniere, 2019: 24-25).

Tezuka Osamu (1928-1989), has often been regarded as the 'God of manga', praised for his cinematic techniques and narrative style in his comics, most of which have been inspired by Western movies and Disney animation (Beaujean, 2019: 114). In 1947, Osamu had published his first book-length project *New Treasure Island* (*Shin Takarajima*). Based on the original novel by Robert Louis Stevenson, the book was a combination of *Tarzan*, *Treasure Island* and *Robinson Crusoe*, and featured a mixture of European, American, and Japanese references. The book became highly successful and sold over 400,000 copies for its fun and exciting story, strong cast of characters, and impressive cinematic techniques. (Rousmaniere, 2019: 25, Beaujean, 2019: 114, Lewis, 2005: 18).

During the 1950s, Osamu created three more bestsellers, *King Leo (Janguru Tatei, 1950)*, *Astro Boy (Tetsuwan Atomu, 1951)* and *Princess Knight (Ribon no kiwi, 1953)*, each of which featured iconic characters that resisted evil and always fought for justice (Beaujean, 2019: 115). In the process of comic-making, Osamu has accomplished many styles and techniques, including cinematic perspective, multiple genres, manga comics for girls, and multiple volume production (Lewis, 2005: 19). The famous artist then went on to produce over 700 manga books for audiences of all ages; from thereon, Osamu's art has had a heavy impact on the manga industry, and continues to be admired worldwide (McCarthy, 2014: 25).

### **Manga's Visual Language**

Since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, sequential imagery has been a vital part of manga storytelling (Rousmaniere, 2019: 22). Manga is not a style of illustration, but a visual language – a form of “picture-writing” based on Japanese culture and art. Similar to a “rule system” of speech patterns or body language, manga creates a language of its own by composing pictures together into a sequence. A typical example of that visual language would be characters with stylised faces or graphic emblems (Cohn, 2007). Osamu has described his process of drawing his comics as “writing a story with a unique type of symbol”, in which he creates a pictorial sequence of “hieroglyphics” (Osamu Tezuka, quoted in Lewis, 2005: 31).

Both manga and Western comics have each developed their own visual languages based on their origins. Because of this, many people in the West - who are familiar with American and European comics - have been confused and overwhelmed by

certain aspects of manga, such as characters' large eyes or wacky hairstyles. There is also the fact that manga is read right-to-left, opposite to how Western comics are read left-to-right (Hart, 2008: 191). At this point, Western readers still question their ability to analyse and interpret manga's visual language, especially when Japanese comics have succeeded in pushing the boundaries of Eastern and Western societies during their development (McCloud, 2006: 97, Schodt, 1983: 154).

In their study of manga's visual language, Lewis (2005) and Rozema (2015) have distinguished the traditions between Japanese and Western comics; manga tells stories through pictures while western comics tell stories through words. Manga's purpose in storytelling is to "show, don't tell", while the priority of Western comics is to "tell the story, not to show it" (Lewis, 2005: 31). For example, the superhero manga, *One Punch Man*. vol. 1 has fewer speech bubbles and less dialogue than Marvel's *Venom: Lethal Protector*.

The speech bubbles in *Venom* (fig 3a) drive the narrative and describe what is happening, while the images are there to accompany the dialogue and action. *One punch Man* (fig 3b) focusses more on the imagery, while speech bubbles play a minor role. Conventionally, manga would have very little dialogue or "even no words at all" (fig 4) and the narrative is carried on by the imagery itself. From what fig 3a and 3b have shown, manga contains more images and less text than Western comics and encourages its readers to not just read its stories, but become engaged with them (Lewis, 2005: 31, 33; Rozema, 2015: 61).



Figure 3a. Speech bubbles in *Venom: Lethal Protector*, p. 16



Figure 3b. Speech bubbles in *One Punch Man*, vol. 1, p. 64

In 1982, McCloud (2006) had discovered a vast number of visual techniques in manga storytelling that were “rarely seen in American comics” during the ‘80s. For starters, “iconic characters” were identifiable among readers for their simplified facial features - as mentioned earlier by Cohn (2007) – followed by various “archetypes” with distinctive characteristics. Some scenes were broken down into “wordless panels” and emphasised specific parts of the stories from “aspect to aspect”, without the reliance on text or dialogue. Highly detailed objects took on a more realistic approach in resembling people’s “real-life experiences and interests”, while scenes of landscapes and buildings memorised specific environments, which created a “sense of place” (McCloud, 2006: 215, 216; Rozema, 2015: 16).

This brings up the subject of the “masking effect” - another conventional style used in manga - in which cartoon characters stood out against photorealistic backgrounds (McCloud, 1993: 43, 44). Readers were also captivated by various genres in manga; ranging from horror, romance and fantasy to comedy, sports and business, each of which have been inspired by the stories of Tezuka (McCloud, 2006: 216, 226).

Other visual elements motivated readers’ emotional and physical perceptions; fast-paced action scenes - represented by “streaked backgrounds” - made readers feel they were literally moving with the action, while “emotionally expressive effects” such as backgrounds, montages and caricatures provided readers a deep insight into the characters’ thoughts and feelings. All of these visual elements created a unique and “common” theme in manga; this theme not only helped attract people into reading its stories, but it made them become engaged in the stories they were reading, and felt as if they were “part of [them]” (McCloud, 2006: 216-217).

The god of manga, Osamu is known for having created a variety of iconic styles and cinematic techniques, including “speed lines, travelling shots and big eyes”, all of which define Osamu’s talent and are used in modern manga today (Lewis, 2005: 19). The first volume of *Astro Boy* (fig. 4) demonstrates Osamu’s use of cinematic perspective and aesthetics. In pages 18-19, the main character Tobio is presented driving at seven different shots and angles out of ten panels. On page 18, the first four panels show Tobio driving, and focus on him at four different perspectives in a vertical order from top to bottom. The top panel closes in on Tobio in the car, while the next two panels zoom out and view him from a further distance. The fourth panel

(bottom) views Tobio's car from behind and underneath. Page 19 (opposite) views Tobio from the front view and closes in on him as he is about to crash into a truck. The first five panels in the page spread are accompanied by speed lines in the background; the speed lines exaggerate the speed and direction Tobio is travelling in and create a fast-paced action sequence. The last panel on page 19 closes in on Tobio's face and revolves around his "big eyes", one of the major aspects used by modern manga artists (Lewis, 2005: 19, 21). The close-up also captures the shock in Tobio's face; this emphasises his emotional state and creates a powerfully emotive impact for the reader. Osamu is known to have used the close-up perspective numerous times in his comics, focussing on the characters' actions and emotions. This has become a popular method used today by many manga artists as a way of setting the mood and adding tension through the emphasis on facial expressions and sudden movements (Tsai, 2018: 475-476).

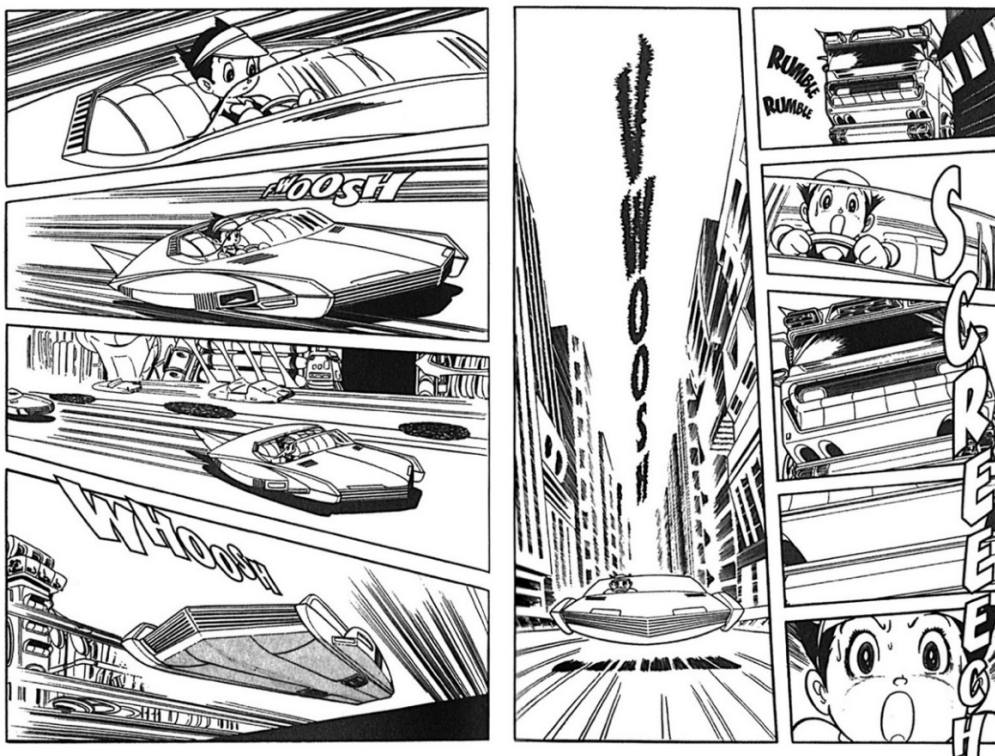


Figure 4. Speed lines and perspective used in *Astro Boy*, vol. 1, pp. 18-19

Schodt (1984) and McCloud (2006) have commented on how Japanese artists have specialised in using two different graphical approaches to drawing manga, from simple lines to exaggerated features. The focus of Japanese artists in comic-making has been the appliance of caricatures and the “overall essence” of emotional scenes, in which they have created serious stories in a cartoonish style, while portraying characters in exaggerated formations. Manga artists have also focussed on the “simplicity of line” in their art styles by concentrating on the characters’ fundamental structure whilst capturing their facial expressions and body language through simple strokes, along with minimal shading and no colour (Schodt, 1983: 22).

In distinguishing the two different graphic styles used in manga, ‘Simplification’ brings out the clarity of a character by focussing on their “key features”, while ‘Exaggeration’ increases the detail in a character up to a more extreme level, making them look more graphically intense and “lively” (McCloud, 2006: 48, 94-95).

Westerners have found this approach bewildering as the concept of creating serious stories in a “cartoony style” has resulted in “shoddy draftsmanship”, such as replacing characters’ right hands with left hands, or altering the patterns in their clothing (Schodt, 1984: 22).

Manga has also developed a unique form of iconography, consisting of various types of symbols used to help emphasise a character’s emotional or mental state (Rozema, 2015: 63). The purpose of visual shorthand in manga is to visualise a character’s thoughts and feelings, without relying on explanation (Scott-Baron, 2005: 10). In 2017, a new system of symbols had been established in a four-panel strip



comic called *Giga Town* by contemporary manga artist Kōno Fumiyo (b. 1968). Here she deconstructs and analyses a series of symbols known as *manpu*, each with a unique role in demonstrating the characters' behaviour (Fumiyo, 2019: 54, 58).

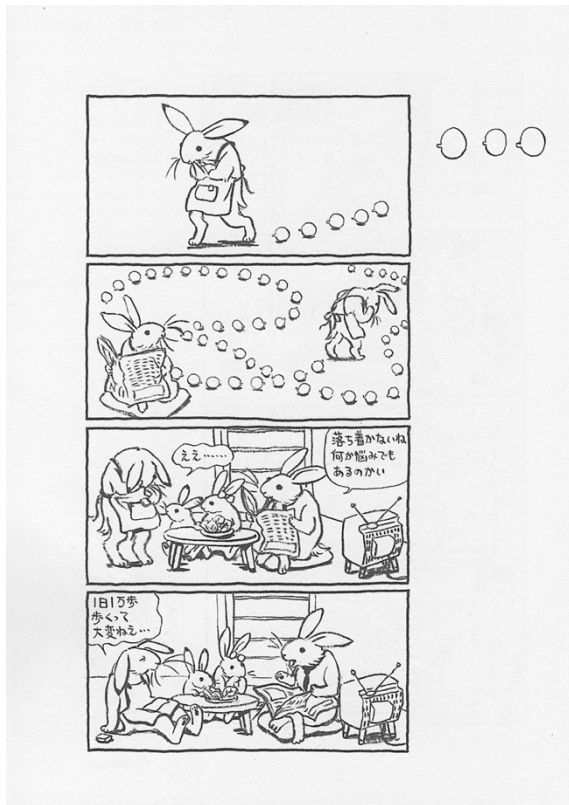


Figure 5a. *Giga Town*, p. 7

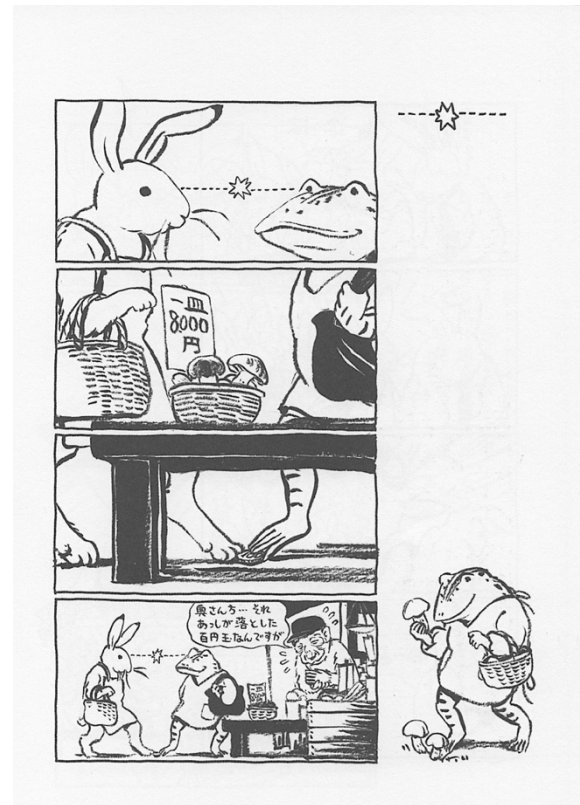


Figure 5b. *Giga Town*, p. 59

A character leaving a trail of mushroom clouds behind them indicates “kicked-up dust” (fig 5a). An arc of lines flashes to indicate a specific object or when a character has spotted something. Dizziness is represented by either spiral patterns in a character’s eyes or a coil hanging over their head. The spiral is also used on the legs to represent the character running very fast. Drops shooting out of a character mean they are sweating or crying (fig 5b), while a character surrounded by fire means that they are angry or “fired up”. Some symbols in *Giga Town* are unique; facial contact between two characters is indicated by a dashed line with a star in the middle to

represent a fixed position or a “state of hostility” (fig 5b). A character’s hostility is also represented by a lightning bolt appearing above them (Fumiyo, 2019: 58-69).

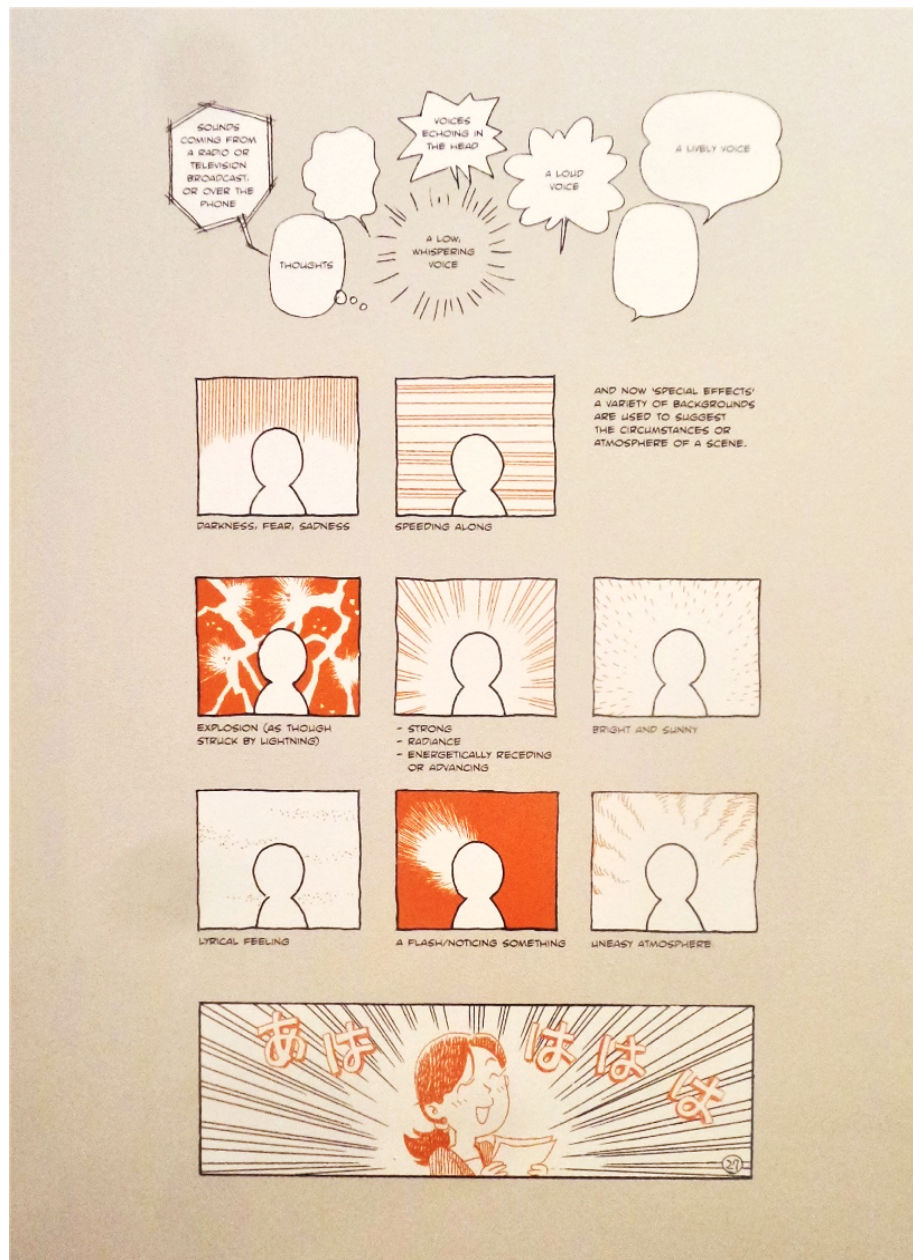


Figure 6. Manga exhibition, *Background effects*, 2019

Sometimes emotions in manga are even expressed by patterned backgrounds (fig. 6). They can be used to emphasise a character’s psychological state as well as suggest the tone of a situation (Japan Powered, 2011; Fumiyo, 2019: 72).

Occasionally, the background would transform into an abstract wallpaper, giving the reader a picture of what the character is feeling. An abstract background consists of a variety of patterns or symbols depending on the situation; love is expressed by hearts, confusion is expressed by spirals, and speed lines are used to suggest dynamism (Japan Powered, 2011; Scott-Baron, 2005: 15). Abstract backgrounds also create a psychological effect in the reader's mind and affects their interpretation of the characters they identify with. Numerous types of emotions have been conveyed by a variety of expressionistic backgrounds; this has become a common aspect used in romantic manga (McCloud, 1993: 133; Japan Powered, 2011).

Real-life elements contain a lot of visual data that is hard for readers to interpret all at once. In the modern world, readers have a limited capacity at obtaining information and an overwhelming amount of data is often considered mind-boggling to the reader. When the reader analyses something symbolic, their understanding develops, and the image becomes real to them. A symbol is less complicated and much easier for the reader to perceive, so it is up to them to symbolise their observations in order to understand them. A manga eye reflects human observation and interpretation and is easier for the reader to interpret than a real eye. In reality, big eyes are non-existent, and neither are big bulky muscles as seen in American comics. Whatever nationality, comics narrate through their own visual language, neither of which are any more realistic than the other (Lewis, 2005: 30-31).

## Case Study 1: Manga Faces

The stylised faces of manga characters are recognised for their large eyes, small noses, pointy chins and distinct hairstyles. Each of these features create an iconic and consistent style in which the characters of manga share similar facial features and are recognised anywhere, compared to how characters vary in Western comics (Rozema, 2015: 61-62). This form of stylisation also focusses on expressing emotions at an amplified level (Scott-Baron, 2005: 10).

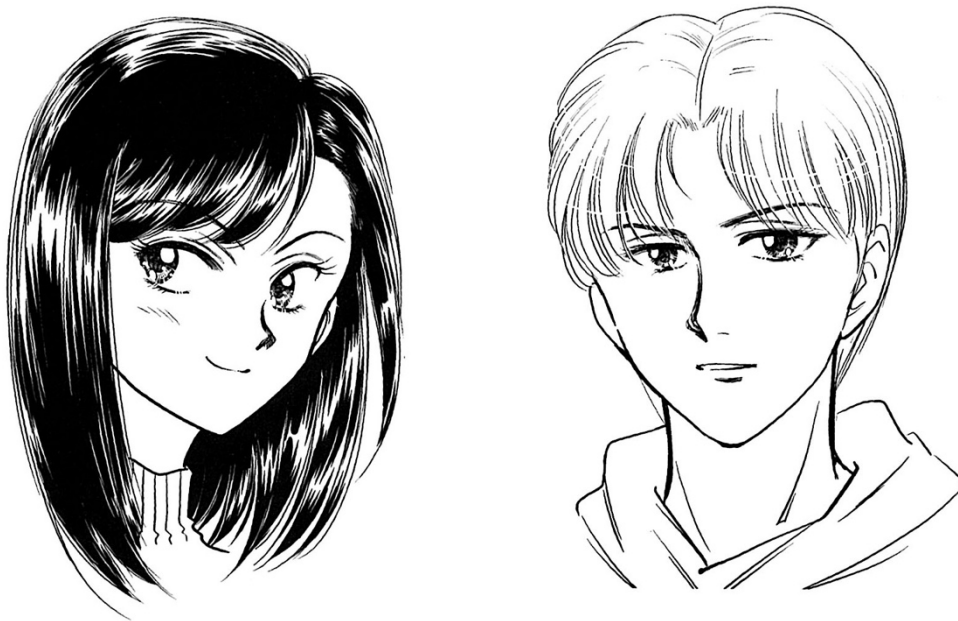


Figure 7. Manga faces, *Manga for the Beginner*, p. 29

These features make characters in manga look identical to each other and are recognised in almost every comic. In order to tell characters apart from each other, manga artists specialise in other elements like the hairstyle. In fact, the style of hair is probably one of the most useful elements in distinguishing the characters and gives each of them a “unique identity” (Cohn, 2013: 154; Hart, 2008: 32).

The most crucial part of a manga character is the large eyes; they define their personality and elicit emotional and mental cognitions into the minds of the readers. They see more depth through the exaggeration of manga characters' eyes, compared to how they view eyes in reality. Rather than relying on words or specific actions, all the information is conveyed through the character's eyes that allow the reader to receive and interpret the information through suggestion (Lewis, 2005: 55).

Characters have different sized eyes depending on their gender and personality. Lewis (2005) and Schodt (1983) compare and contrast the eyes of manga in their study of shoujo (girl) and shonen (boy). Female manga characters usually have larger eyes than the males. Big eyes are conventional signs for innocence, purity and femininity, while smaller eyes are more masculine and serious. Women and children are notable for having large eyes, while the eyes of men are often narrower. In some manga, shoujo characters' eyes are much bigger than shonen characters. The irises in the eyes are also manipulated to personify the character – larger irises mean the character is good, while smaller irises imply that they are evil. Sometimes an evil character – whether male or female – would have very squinty eyes to define the evil in them (Cohn, 2013: 155; Lewis, 2005: 55).

But the speciality of eyes in manga is the deep emotional impact they have on the reader. Described as a “window into the soul of the manga character”, large wide sparkling eyes communicate to the reader about a character's conflict - either in their state of mind or against another character - as the most important part of progressing the story. As discussed earlier by Lewis (2005: 19, 55) the influence of

big eyes in manga is one of Osamu Tezuka’s pioneering techniques. When creating *shoujo* (girl) manga, he had experimented with depicting the emotions and perceptions of female characters by making their eyes bigger. From then on, large eyes have become iconic in manga for expressing characters’ “emotions and inner thoughts” (Tsai, 2018).

### **Case Study 2: Manga Iconography**

In its stylisation, manga has focussed on expressing characters’ emotions through suggestion. While facial expressions have been the primary tools of emotional outlet, manga has established its own visual grammar, in which emotions are represented and enhanced by a variety of symbols or *emanata*. This has eased readers’ ability to understand characters’ emotional or psychological states with more simplicity and has proved useful for comedic purposes (Hayden-Scott, 2005: 10).

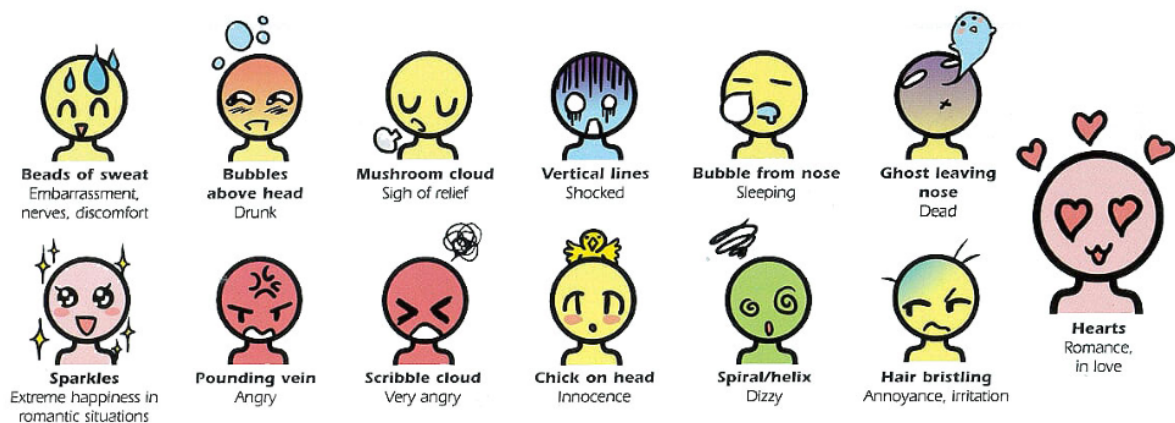


Figure 8. Manga Visual Grammar, *Digital Manga Techniques*, p. 11

As shown in fig. 8, each symbol has become an iconic part of manga’s visual language. While most of the symbols above are familiar with Western readers



(Beads of sweat, Bubbles, Sparkles, Hearts), non-conventional symbols in manga (Vertical lines, Bubble from nose, Ghost leaving nose, Pounding vein) are culturally specific to Japan and have developed during their lifelong history of “isolation from their Western cousins” (McCloud: 1996: 130-131).



Figure 9. Tsukune with two bulging-veins, *Rosario + Vampire*, p. 24

The bulging vein is one of the most notorious symbols used in manga. Appearing over the character’s forehead or cheek, the vein is a common expression of anger or irritation. Sometimes the vein would occasionally float over the character’s hair in a more abstract sense. The bulging vein is known to have appeared in almost every manga comic including *Rosario + Vampire*, *One Punch Man*, *One Piece* and *Black Clover*. On p. 24 in *Rosario + Vampire*, vol. 2 (fig. 9), the character Tsukune is seen



in two panels with two bulging veins; the top panel shows Tsukune's enraged expression, while the panel below views him from behind with the two veins appearing on his cheek and hair. From what fig. 8 has shown, manga comics are known to have used the bulging vein in different ways:

When the character faced away, the vein would have appeared on the back of their head, as a way of expressing concealed anger.

In some cases, two or more veins have appeared on the character's face implying that the character was getting angrier or more irritated.

Sometimes the vein would have appeared all over different parts of the body, specifically the character's limbs (fig. 10).

Additional indicators would occasionally accompany the bulging vein to express the character's mood, such as sweat beads, vertical lines or sharp teeth.

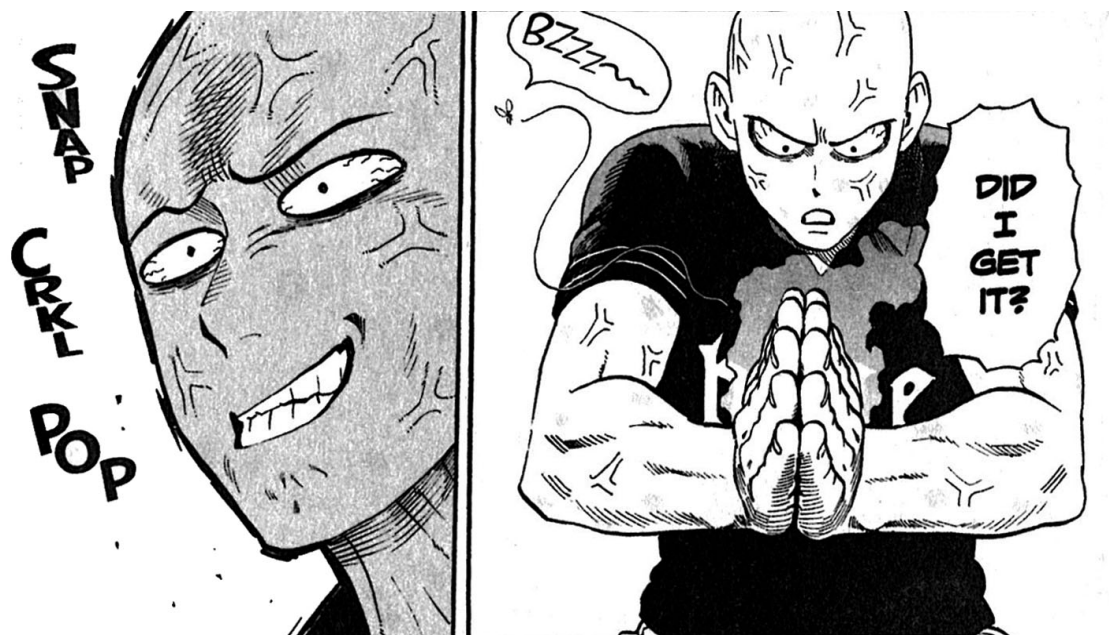


Figure 10. Saitama in *One Punch Man*, vol. 1 trying to kill a mosquito, p. 112

Tears and Sweat are also popular symbols in manga. Sweat drops are mainly physical elements associated with tension, but they are also emotional enhancements (McCloud, 2006: 96). In manga, one giant sweat drop on a character's forehead represents embarrassment, worry, surprise, anger or discomfort (Rozema: 63; Scott-Baron: 11). The character's feelings vary depending on the size and number of the sweat drops. The sweat drop is accompanied by other emotional indicators like the bulging vein or vertical lines (Japan Powered, 2011).

Tears are common signs of a character crying. Normal tears in manga portray a character's sadness more seriously and create a sense of drama. But then those tears are presented in a more comedic fashion such as small bubbles in the corners of the eyes, waterfalls pouring down the cheeks, or even fountains shooting out from the eyes (Rozema: 63; Japan Powered, 2011; Cohn, 2013: 158).

Two of the most challenging symbols in manga have been the nosebleed and mucus bubble, both of which Western readers have found confusing and hard to interpret. The nosebleed occurs when a character is sexually aroused while the mucus bubble is blown out of a character's nose when they are sleeping (Schodt, 1983: 154, McCloud, 2006: 97).

Two records of the nosebleed have been found in *Black Clover vol. 1*. On chapter 4, p. 116, Asta's nose bleeds when he encounters the drunken witch Vanessa (fig 11a); this clearly demonstrates how the nosebleed works under the influence of being aroused by a beautiful woman in manga.



Figure 11a. Asta with nosebleed, *Black Clover*, vol. 1, p. 116

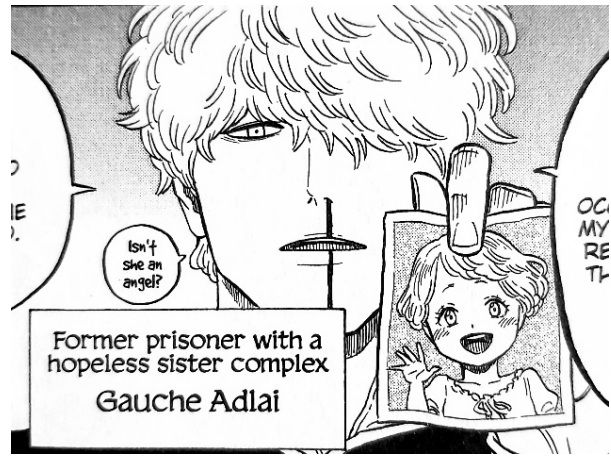


Figure 11b. Gauche with nosebleed, *Black Clover*, vol. 1, p. 152

However, the nosebleed has been depicted under a different cause. On chapter 6, p. 152, the character Gauche Adlai (fig 11b) has a nosebleed when he mentions his little sister Marie. Awkward as it seems; it does not imply that he is sexually attracted to her. Opposed to its original meaning, Gauche's nosebleed reflects his affection for Marie as part of his "hopeless sister complex" (Tabata, 2015: 152).

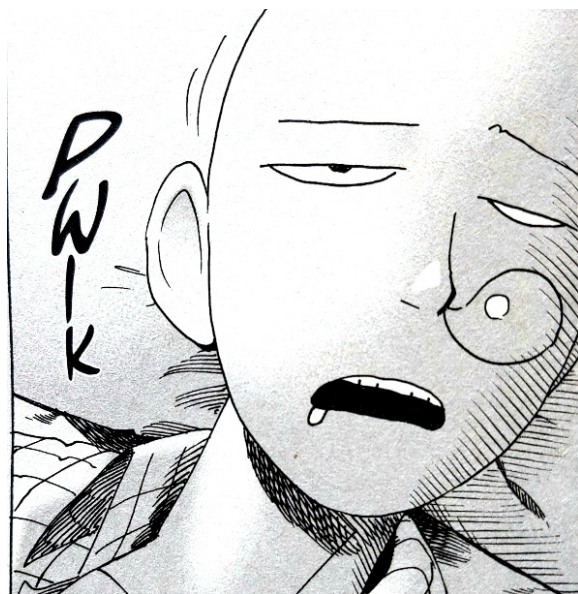


Figure 12a. Saitama with mucus bubble 1, *One Punch Man*, vol. 1, p. 66



Figure 12b. Saitama with mucus bubble 2, *One Punch Man*, vol. 1, p. 177

The mucus bubble has appeared two times in *One Punch Man*, vol. 1. On chapter. 4, p. 66, the main hero Saitama is seen blowing a bubble whilst sleeping in his

apartment (fig 12a). In the Bonus Chapter: *200 Yen* (fig 12b), 12-year-old Saitama stares down and blows a mucus bubble whilst standing in a crowd of students at school; this implies that Saitama is feeling bored or drowsy.

Aside from symbols, characters' emotions are occasionally conveyed through bodily exaggerations in manga (McCloud, 2006: 220). *Hyper-stylisation* is a technique applied to a visual perspective of a character by altering their form, as a way of emphasising on their behaviour and emotional state. A sense of humour is created through this technique as it highlights the character's behaviour in a comical sense (Scott-Baron: 21). Super-deformation (SD) is a common technique used in manga for emotional exaggeration. This form of stylisation is one of the most unusual effects in manga. When a character becomes super-deformed, they turn into cartoonish miniature versions of themselves called *Chibis*, defined by large heads, shrunken bodies and simplified facial features – giving the appearance of dolls or small children. This effect is occasionally used to exaggerate on emotions and create light-hearted scenes, as well as reducing the level of seriousness in the story (Cohn, 2013: 158; Japan Powered, 2011).

In *Magi: The Labyrinth of Magic*, p. 103, Aladdin is excited to seek dungeons and find hidden treasures, including Djinn's metal vessel, until his friend Alibaba takes credit for Aladdin's magical powers by referring to him as his "servant". As Aladdin's excitement freezes, his body has shrunk, and his head enlarged with his eyes and mouth reduced in detail and his nose gone. This adds emphasis on Aladdin's emotions in both a dramatic and comedic manner (fig 13).

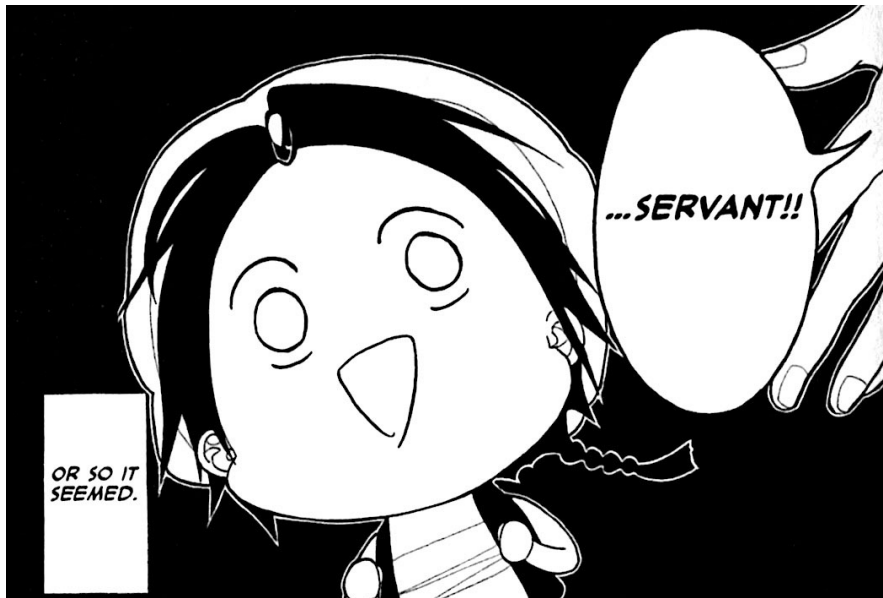


Figure 13. Aladdin becomes super-deformed, *Magi*, vol. 1, p. 103

Hand Loss (HL) is another unusual technique, in which the character's hands disappear and become stumps during emotional situations (Cohn, 2013: 158). In Kiyohiko Azuma's fourth volume of *Azumanga Daioh*, Hand Loss is used to represent emotional loss of control, loss of physical control and even lost control over reality. In their study of the *Azumanga Daioh*, Forceville and Abbott have deconstructed the Hand Loss technique in analysing the characters in the story having been depicted with it. By defining each of the characters' personalities, the authors have concluded their study in describing Hand Loss as a "complex shorthand with a variety of meanings" (Abbott and Forceville, 2011: 18).

From what the case study has shown, some symbols like the bulging vein on the forehead (anger) and the large sweat drop (worry/tension/surprise) have become famous among readers and have eventually been adopted by Western comics. Peculiar manga symbols like the nosebleed (sexual arousal) and the mucus bubble (sleep) have come across as confusing to Western readers based on their cultural

differences (McCloud, 2006: 96-97). Just because those symbols are culturally different doesn't mean they are not easy to understand entirely (Rozema: 63). A character with a large sweat drop or a bloody nose is the equivalent of an angry character's face turning red in Asterix (Forceville, 2011) or a dark cloud hanging over Charlie Brown's head in a state of depression (Rozema: 63).

### **Case Study 3: Shoujo Manga**

Shoujo manga is the target demographic of a young female audience, mostly young girls. Written by female artists, stories in shoujo manga mostly revolve around Romance and focus on characters' emotions and relationships. Shoujo also tells other stories ranging from violent dramas to cute animals and "childhood dreams". Each of those stories offer more "complex and mature plots" and are captured in a clever and stylish manner that resembles shoujo's style. Characters in shoujo are normally presented with "tall and slender physiques", while wearing stylised clothing, consisting of European or Western fashion (Scott Baron: 12; Schodt, 1983: 89).

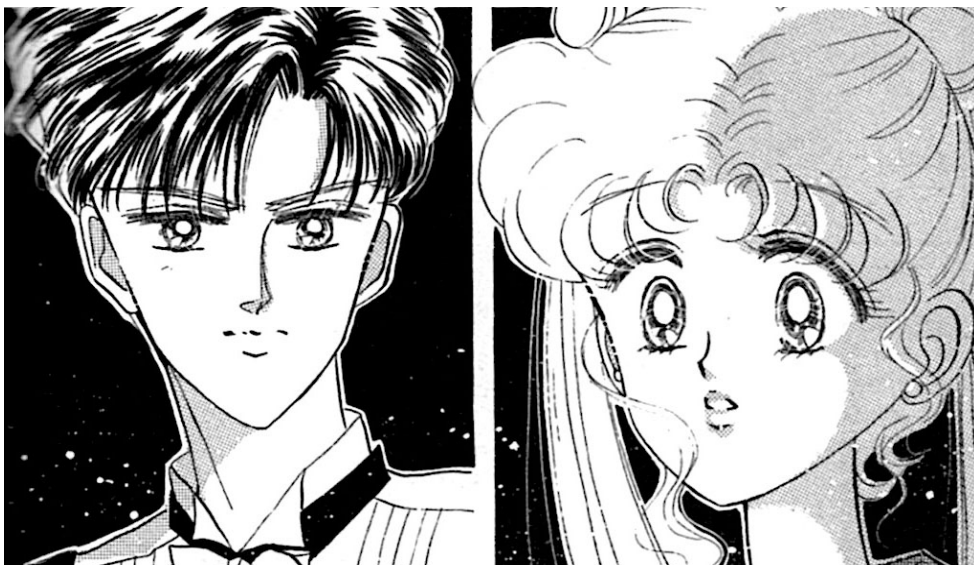


Figure 14. Faces of Sailor Moon (Usagi Tsukino) and Tuxedo Mask (Mamoru Chiba), *Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon*, vol. 1, p. 236

Based on what has been stated earlier in the first case study, female characters in manga are known for having stylised faces. All the characters in *Sailor Moon* (fig 14) are recognised for having large eyes, small noses, pointy chins and stylised hair. Each of the female characters – including Usagi – share the same facial features in which they are identical, whilst they are distinguished by their hairstyles (Schodt, 1983: 90). As shown in fig 14, Usagi's eyes (right panel) are much larger than the eyes of her love interest, Mamoru Chiba, aka Tuxedo Mask (left panel).

Shoujo's most remarkable trait is its iconography; it relies heavily on abstract imagery such as "flowers, sparkles [and] feathers" in expressing emotions and representing beauty and significance in its stories (Scott-Baron: 12). Sparkles of light express hope, joy or longing in a character; they occasionally appear in the characters' eyes to make them shine brightly and add greater emotional impact. Flowers are the most romantic icons in shoujo manga; they are a common expression for "charm and glamour", as well as "hope and potential". They also help represent a character's perception of another character; this is evidenced by the superimposition of flowers around them. There are also cherry blossoms and feathers. Cherry blossoms symbolise romance associated with Spring, while feathers are used as signs of purity and elegance. These romantic elements are also used to express negative meanings; blossoms fall when love comes to an end or when a character dies; feathers are used to suggest seriousness, depression or prejudice when they float around a character (Scott-Baron: 13).



A number of patterns have been used in *Sailor Moon*, vol. 1. These romantic elements include flowers, leaves, stars, sparkles, hearts, carrots and cherries. The most frequently used patterns in *Sailor Moon* are flowers, revolving around the charm and beauty of the characters (as mentioned earlier by Scott-Baron: 13).

One species of flora includes the sunflower. Four students from Cluj-Napoca, Romania have studied the sunflower in their study of symbolism in plants (2015). In religious cases, the sunflower symbolised the sun and the “love of God” for its bright yellow colour and turning towards the sun. It was used as a positive sign for vitality, fertility, energy, joy, health and wisdom. And like the feather in shoujo manga (Scott-Baron: 13), it has also been used in a negative sense to represent frantic romance, temporary passion, superficiality and false prosperity (Farcas, Cristea, Farcas, Ursu and Roman, 2015: 196-197).

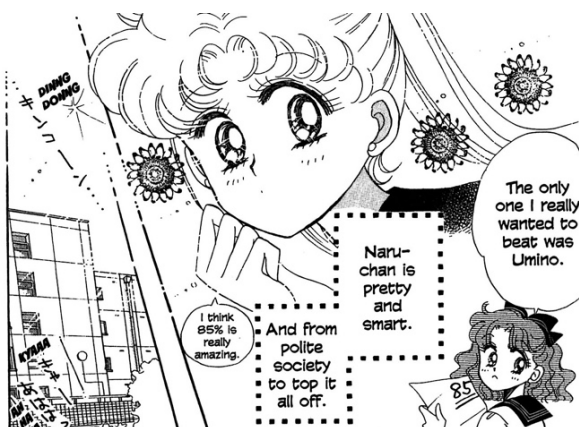


Figure 15a. Sunflowers in *Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon*, p. 12



Figure 15b. Sunflowers in *Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon*, p. 170

*Sailor Moon*, vol.1 has appeared to have used the sunflower two times for romantic and emotional purposes. Pages 12 and 170 have demonstrated this.

Three sunflowers appear on p. 12 (fig 15a) when Usagi talks about her best friend Naru and comments on her grade. One sits by her cheek on the left while the other two are aligned to the right. The three sunflowers emphasise Usagi's interpretation of Naru.

On p. 170 (fig 15b), Usagi and her friends fantasise about being brides as they discuss weddings. Together they blissfully share a speech bubble in which two sunflowers appear.

From what figures 15a and 15b have shown, *Sailor Moon* has used the sunflower to express happiness, warmth and delight within the characters. As stated earlier by Scott-Baron, flowers in shoujo are common metaphors for beauty and romance, as well as representing how other characters interpret each other (2005: 13).

In *Flowers and Dreams*, Schodt (1983) explains how shoujo manga captivates its audience through its visual contents. When a reader observes the cover of a shoujo comic, a young beautiful girl encourages them to look inside and get a glimpse of the comic's defining characteristics. Inside, the reader experiences a montage of floating images, followed by flower patterns, close-ups of characters' faces, and free-floating prose that reflects on the thoughts of the "characters in the story or the artist herself". Sometimes prose uses hearts and stars as punctuation to give a more abstract view of the character's "frame of mind". Those who are unfamiliar with shoujo find its style confusing to start off with, but they eventually come to appreciate the experience of reading it once they become indulged in its visuals (Schodt, 1983: 88-89).

#### **Case Study 4: Shonen Manga**

The first Japanese comics were aimed primarily at boys and young male adolescents; they eventually developed and captured the attention of a “wider audience” several years later. Shonen manga is more masculine than shoujo and most of the main characters in shonen are male, with female characters playing secondary roles in the stories. While shoujo focusses on emotions and romantic relationships, shonen manga focusses more on “action and physical movement” and aims to fight enemies, accomplish goals and overcome difficulties. Specific shonen themes include combat, martial arts and military capabilities, followed by beautiful women, supernatural powers and giant robots, all of which have been described as “common and effective forms of storytelling” (Scott-Baron: 15).

Since the end of the second world war, shonen manga developed themes that mostly focussed on comedy and portrayed issues about policies and history, whilst tackling censorship by depicting jokes about excrement, sex, nudity and graphic violence during the 1960s. A diversity of genres have also emerged in shonen comics, including sports, horror, action/adventure, and war. Sports is one of the “more popular genres” in shonen manga, ranging from football, tennis and basketball to martial arts. Action/adventure is another popular genre involving heavy battles and long journeys, whilst blending in with other elements such as fantasy and science-fiction (Drummond-Mathews, 2010).

Giant robots are another one of shonen’s most popular themes, as a symbol of ultimate power. The first manga to feature a giant robot was created by Ryūichi Yokoyama in 1943 during World War Two; the image was made to ease Japan’s

frustrations over the heavy air raids from the enemy. Giant robots later appeared in manga comics by Osamu Tezuka, Mitsuteru Yokoyama, and Gō Nagai during the 1950s and 60s, and have had a massive influence on American comics and merchandise in the late 70s and early 80s, leading to animated shows and toy productions like *Transformers*, *Voltron*, *Shogun Warriors* and *Robotech Defenders* (Drummon-Mathews, 2010: 68; Scott-Baron: 16; Schodt, 1983: 57, 156).

Shonen is far less abstract than shoujo and relies more on action and physical energy. While the central focus of shoujo manga lies in emotions and relationships, shonen focusses on conflict and achievement (Scott-Baron: 12). *One Piece* features the story of Monkey D. Luffy who sets out to sea to form a crew and become king of the pirates; *Black Clover* features Asta, a young magician unable to use magic who receives a five-leaf clover and trains to become the Wizard King; *Magi: The labyrinth of magic* tells the tale of Aladdin who ventures around Arabia to search dungeons for hidden treasures. Each manga shares the same idea of lead male characters overcoming difficulties and achieving certain desires.



Figure 16. Shonen Iconography and effects, *Digital Manga Techniques*, p. 15

Shonen's iconography consists of explosions, lightning, speed lines and fire (fig 16). Apart from their literal sense, these energies suggest emotional and physical states; explosions and fire express power and strength, while lightning conveys shock or

rage. Speed lines are the most prolific effects used “extensively” in shonen manga. Appearing in almost every scene, speed lines exaggerate on speed and movement and make the action more dynamic. They also intensify emotional scenes, as when a character becomes shocked or raises their voice (Scott-Baron: 15-16). When the backgrounds become fully streaked, “Subjective Motion” is created and the character is depicted in a fast-paced action sequence. This gives readers the impression they are not just observing the action, but they feel they are physically and literally moving along with the character (McCloud, 2006: 216, 220).



Figure 17. Speed lines in *One Piece*. vol. 1, pp. 30-31

The effectiveness of speed lines is demonstrated by *One Piece* (fig 17) in pages 30-31. Speed lines range from horizontal lines to vertical lines to diagonal lines, each of which bring out the action from different angles and directions. Speed lines are also used at different perspectives; from long shots to mediums shots to close-ups. In long shots, speed lines value the central figures and intensify the emotional impact from a distance. When used in close-up scenes, speed lines shoot out from the corners of the frame and draw in on the character's expression (top right panel).

### **Conclusion**

Many visual techniques have been discovered that define manga's visual language, including diverse genres, subjective motion, wordless panels, photorealistic details, and expressionistic effects (McCloud, 2006).

The literature review has explained the history of manga and evidenced early techniques that developed, while Case Studies have provided evidence from manga books and identified visual techniques used in manga storytelling. Manga's visual language covers many different meanings; it emphasises emotion and action, details specific elements, captures real-life events, holds multiple interests and is represented by an iconic style of character design.

Symbolism has been the most common aspect in manga's visual language.

Characters are distinguished by their schematic facial features, with their eyes being the most valuable elements in defining their personalities and expressing their emotions (Cohn, 2013; Lewis, 2005).

Visual shorthand (both conventional and non-conventional) has played a vital role in representing characters' moods and actions. Specific symbols like the bulging vein have become popular among western readers, while the more awkward types (nosebleed and mucus bubble) have been explained to those that were not familiar with them (McCloud, 2006; Rozema, 2015).

With all of those visual techniques combined, the meaning behind manga's visual language is to stimulate readers' interest through powerful visuals and make them become engaged in the stories they read.

While there are still some Western readers who struggle to follow its visual language, anyone familiar with manga will have the opportunity to educate themselves in that they will eventually come to understand it and make use of its visual techniques to their artistic advantage. Suffice to say, manga continues to flourish throughout the world and influence new readers today.



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