Euromanga: Hybrid Styles and Stories in Transcultural Manga Production

Introduction

From the nineteenth century onward, Euro-Americans developed a strong cultural fascination for Japan, which is often referred to as 'Orientalism'. Classically, Orientalism refers to the power relationship between the West and its Eastern Other. This relationship, however, is uneven. Even today, Orientalism is presumed to be characterized by Western superiority and Eastern inferiority as a result of the internalized power regimes of colonialism (Said, 1978). The relationship between the West and Japan, however, is more complex than Said's theory forebodes. The dialogue between the Western countries such as The Netherlands and Japan is an intimate one where narratives, experiences and memories constantly cross borders. One space where this flow is most clearly visible in art and popular culture.

Historically, Japanese culture has been appropriated in Western impressionist art, Zen gardens and architecture (Napier, 2007). When World War II tarnished this culturally rich image, the image of Japan became more ambivalent and raised both fear and curiosity. Today, the islands' global identity, which lingers between East and West, inspires Western corporate businesses, art and media as it represents a mixture of spiritual traditions, strong labor and family morals, as well as an advanced technocapitalist model (Ivy, 1995; Wolferen, 1995). This Orientalism - an ambiguous fascination for Japan's Otherness - is closely related to the reception and appropriation of Japanese popular culture in the West.

The cultural dynamics between Japan and the West cannot readily be signified as hegemonic forces, but are complex flows that go back and forth between groups. An example of the widespread influence of Japan is manga, a visual language that originates in comics but has spread to animation ('anime'), games and consumer articles. Japan exports media products that are widely recognizable and hailed by consumers all over the world who align themselves with Japan's exotic, fantastical imagery (Smits, 2012). The compelling nature of Japanese culture has been dubbed 'cool Japan', a marketing term that originates from McGray (2002). Coined in the commercial industries, and

adopted in Japanese politics, this concept refers to the country's soft but pervasive power (Nye, 2002).

The cultural influence of Japan has been amply theorized on macro level; signified as 'cultural globalism' (Burn, 2006), 'transculturalism', (Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 2006b, p. 156) or even a 'global space' (McLelland, 2001). On micro level, the mentioned studies explore the figure of the Anglo-American '*otaku*', the fan of Japanese popular culture. While the otaku is pathologized in Japan as a deviant and obsessive fan (Galbraith & Christodoulou, 2012), in Western countries the term has been introduced to connote a more positive identity: the cult-fan interested in Japanese content. The otaku is also a gate keeper that makes Japanese content accessible. Since much Japanese content does not cross the borders officially, Western fans are prone to, for instance, translating comics, games or animation themselves (Denison, 2011). The otaku is thus a liminal figure, someone that hovers between the official industries whose products s/he honors but at the same time, always struggles to get access to the culture at all.

The popular culture of manga thus already creates difficulties in terms of language, accessibility and circulation. This cultural dynamic is uneven, particularly when we consider that manga culture suggests a hegemonic relationship in which Japan influences the West with its soft power. Still, it would be wrong to portray this dynamic solely as an influence from Japan's side, embraced by Western 'Japanophilia'. The Japanese are interested in Western countries and their narratives in their own right. Ito, Okabe and Tsuji (2012) rightly point out that Osamu Tezuka, Japan's preeminent author, was inspired by Disney productions in his work, while today's most celebrated animator, Hayao Miyazaki, embraces European culture in his movies (p. xiii). Despite shared cultural imagery, however, Western and Eastern audiences are largely divided by local protocols, specific interests (e.g., in particular game genres) and language differences.

This article specifically examines the artistic influence of manga in The Netherlands and Germany to explore how Japanese popular culture migrates across media, cultures and local traditions. I use the concepts 'transculturalism' and 'transmediality' to account for these complex cultural dynamics between various local traditions. First, I provide a more general outline, after which I trace the theoretical framework and discuss these two national contexts and exemplify them with various case-studies.

It is important to note that the German and Dutch context are somewhat unique in that they both engaged in manga distribution, translation and local production somewhat later than other European countries, such as France, Italy and Spain (Jüngst, 2004). Methodologically, this chapter provides a close-reading of various Dutch and German Euromanga, and the local contexts in which they emerge. My approach is a medium-specific one (Hayles, 2004) , that reads these comics in terms of their visual and narrative style, with close attention to elements such as paneling and their semiotic implications (McCloud, 1994). I also examine the historical production contexts of these Euromanga. Such comics often emerge in fandom as small independent projects, but can also be initiated by, or professionalized into, mainstream publishing houses. In some cases, the language of manga is adopted by other (comic) artists to experiment with their style or convey criticism on their own culture or the East. This study is also partly based on my own involvement in the Dutch manga scene as an artist and editor of the circle OpenMinded.

Particularly, I shall focus on two cases that, each in their own way, mediate manga. First, I explore the manga publication *Oost West* (2009), in which multiple Dutch artists interpret Japanese culture and aesthetics. The project involved local dõjinshi (amateur manga) artists but also mainstream comic artists who created graphic novels that convey cultural themes and narratives of Japan. Second, I investigate the appropriation of 'yaoi' and 'yuri' dõjinshi in Germany. By close-reading the anthology *Lemon Law* (2007-), I chart how German artists interpret the queer genres of manga culture and in what ways their culture stands out.

Transmedia and Transcultural Fandom

In Western countries, manga projects often emerge as cult comics that draw fan audiences that are already familiar with Japanese popular culture. Especially in Europe, such comic projects are often small-scaled and initiated by fans. However, in Japan, manga cannot be understood through its comics alone but is an elaborate 'media mix' – a combination and integration of different media platforms to sustain large franchises.

Increasingly, media content is spread across multiple media platforms, ranging from television and games to new media. Mass media in East and West increasingly deploy transmedia designs that rely on promotional texts distributed across media platforms (Gillan, 2010; Jenkins, 2006a; Ross, 2008). Transmedia design can also imply

new narrative models that emerge both in Japan and in the West. Henry Jenkins (2006) has for instance coined 'transmedia storytelling' as a model in which the industry distributes narrative content across different media platforms (e.g., television, games, animation). This model of franchising narratives and characters has been common in Japanese popular culture since the eighties (Ito, 2005). It relies on audience engagement to collect narrative content across media platforms and interpret the larger textual world. Jenkins (2006b) exemplifies the model through *The Matrix* where the game explores additional storylines that add to the meaning of the movie trilogy. He also mentions the Japanese game *Kingdom Hearts* (2002), a joint endeavor with Disney, as a best practice.

Other scholars, however, note that the Japanese model has become less geared towards grand, transmedia story worlds and more towards branding recognizable characters (Azuma, 2009). Whereas Western transmedia storytelling may be described as encompassing and plot-driven, the Japanese model is iconic and relies on tropes. However, both Asian and Western transmedia designs imply an active consumer that connects and interprets disseminate parts of the narrative. In Western countries, the increased transmediality of the text is innately tied up to an increased 'participatory culture' around popular culture. Viewer activity is encouraged through web sites, competitions and voting systems (Gillan, 2010; Müller, 2009). It is debatable whether such a model can be mapped onto Japanese popular culture, where participatory culture still appears to be a bottom-up affair, rather than a top-down formation motivated by the industry.

These fan cultures form communities that have been theorized as 'fandom', an analytical term to describe the active audiences of popular culture. Fans are characterized by their creativity, online and offline sociality, and their affect for the media text. Since the seventies, fandom of comics, TV and film has emerged in rich, industrial countries (e.g., North America, and Japan). Increasingly, the fandom of Japanese content or 'manga fandom' develops in emerging economies of countries as China, Thailand and Brazil. Though manga fandom is a global phenomenon, it is innately tied up to local identity. Many authors have described these flows of content as transcultural fandom (Hills, 2002; Hitchcock Morimoto & Chin, 2013) to suggest its cross-overs between cultures rather than nation states. 'transcultural,' for them, implies a term 'which at once is flexible enough to allow for a transnational orientation, yet

leaves open the possibility of other orientations that may inform, or even drive, cross-border fandom' (p. 93).

Indeed, the culture around anime constructs a 'fantasyscape', as Napier (2007, p. 11) suggests, a site of play and imagination. She summarizes the concept as 'temporary alternative lifestyles that exist parallel to the mundane, which people enter and exit as they please' (id.). Manga fandom itself can also readily be understood as a fantasyscape that connects kindred spirits, both in the fiction itself as well as in its social environments, such as the fan convention. Napier's terminology is derived from Appadurai's *Modernity at Large* (1996), most particularly his understanding of global media functioning as an ideological landscape or 'mediascape'. Appadurai explains that these landscapes 'tend to be image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality' (id., 35). Thus, the concept refers to the ideological underpinnings of media products, such as the news or television or advertising itself which influence our ideas of reality. The fantasyscape, however, puts this term to a more liberal use, suggesting that contemporary media, such as manga, are not about ideological persuasion but about connecting through narratives and the imagination. In the participatory culture of manga, reality and imagination come in various shades of grey – its visuals allow audiences to connect globally by means of fantasy.

Euromanga

The Euromanga that I investigate are closely related to local anime fan cultures, but must not be equated with them. The anthologies that I focus on are professionally published comics, not independent and self-financed fan creations. I have provided an analysis of Western dõjinshi elsewhere (Lamerichs, 2013). Nonetheless, I will briefly explain the dõjinshi model since these local works and their artists are clearly influenced by these contexts.

Dõjinshi are often described as 'amateur manga' (Kinsella, 1998), amateur being a term that stems from the Latin '*amare*' or 'to love'. Nowadays amateur implies the engagement in non-professional activities which partly resonates with dõjinshi. These comics are non-professional as they are often created as labor of love rather than for financial gain. The term 'dõjinshi' is derived from 'dõjin' (literally 'same person' which refers to one or several persons that have a common interest or goal) and *shi* (generally refers to 'magazine' or 'periodical'). Colloquially 'dõjin' stands for the self-publication of

fan works in mixed media (e.g., games, music, and comics) and underlines the community aspect that brings the fans together. 'Dõjinshi' refers to self-published printed works which includes comics, light novels and art books.

Dõjinshi can be homages to existing texts, inspired by anime, manga or game and even Western texts (e.g., *Harry Potter*, *CSI*). Some belong to the genre 'original', meaning that they feature characters and stories that the artist conceived of him or herself. Historically, dõjinshi developed as an important fan practice in Japan in the seventies and is intimately related with the popularity of certain fan conventions, notably Comiket. In Japan, the line between fandom and industry is blurry since dõjinshi are also produced by professional artists. Moreover, many influential mangaka in Japan started out in the dõjinshi scene and participated in it even after their debuts (e.g., CLAMP; Ozaki Minami of *Zetsuai 1989*).

Similarly, the production contexts of Euromanga blur the lines between fandom and the creative industries. A clear example of these experimental production models is the Italian series *Sky Doll* (2000-): a space adventure that integrates aspects of Japanese visual features and storytelling. *Sky Doll*'s production takes a tack from Japanese production models in terms of transmediality. For instance, in their *Space Ship Collection* (2007), artists Barbucci and Canepa engaged professional artists in drawing derivative *Sky Doll* art. What is unique about the project though is the way in which they regulated the production of these artworks and provided scripts for the artists to work with. These creations are not presented as officious fan-made, but as part of the *Sky Doll* franchise.

In this chapter, I focus specifically on the manga-inspired comics that emerged in The Netherlands and Germany but I perceive these to be part of a wider trend of transcultural comics that combine different local styles and traditions. These comics point towards a global interest in Japanese popular culture that cannot simply be understood as a soft power. The aesthetics and narratives of Japan also empower local artists, who adopt the language of manga to innovate their own local comic industries. On top of that, manga tropes help these comic artists address those audiences that are often overlooked in the European comic scene, such as adolescent female readers.
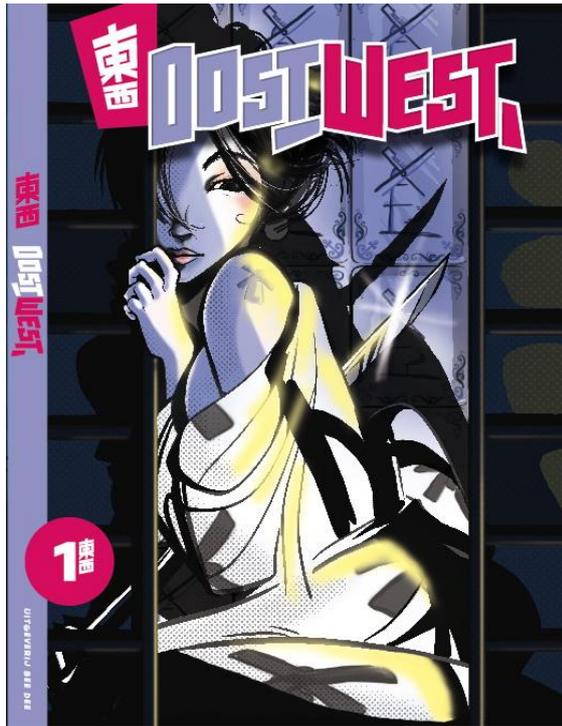
Figure 1: *Oost West* cover by Marissa Delbressine

Figure 2: Menno Kooistra's *Insominia* (p. 2)

Dutch Windmills and Bentõ Boxes

Historically, Dutch manga experienced its first wave in the late nineties in fan zines such as *Onomaga,* the magazine of the fan club 'Oranda no manga', *FaniManga* (1997) and *AniWay* (1998). These magazines often included fan comics inspired by manga, ranging from 'yonkoma', four-panelled gag comics, to lengthier sequential art. Such comics also appeared in commercial magazines, initiated by companies rather than fans. An example of this is *AnimeniA* which was published by the company Gamesworld - now known as Futurezone - which specialized in the distribution of videogames. Simultaneously, solo-artists such as Karin Barend and André Massee provided self-published works for free or small prices at the earliest Dutch fan conventions (pers. comm. Léon van Hooijdonk, 3 November 2012). The earliest Dutch fan manga show tendencies towards original comics rather than fan art which stayed an important characteristic of Dutch dõjinshi until today. With the exception of *AniWay,* many of these fan zines disappeared after a few issues.

In 2001, when Goldfish Factory was founded, Dutch dõjinshi experienced its second wave when artists organized in the Japanese model of artist groups or 'circles' ('*sākuru*') which usually consist of various artists but can also be one individual. Dõjinshi became used more often as a term by Dutch artist, not only for those works that were

non-profit, but also for professional art that was manga-inspired. The foundation of four major circles, OpenMinded (2004), Cheesecake Studios (2004), Howling Riot (2004) and Neutral (2004) coincided with *AniWay*'s *Fanthology* contest – a competition that published the best Dutch fan manga. While OpenMinded and Neutral specialized in shõjo genres, including yaoi and yuri, Cheesecake Studios and Howling Riot were characterized by their interest in shõnen comics.

This second wave in Dutch manga, characterized by the emergence of circles, also had several other features. For starters, the Dutch artists largely published their works in English in order to reach a broader audience. Some circles attended conventions abroad in Belgium or Germany, sometimes under the common header Mangafique. This group particularly promoted Dutch manga, not only by attending a wide range of fan conventions, but also by bringing Dutch manga to other comic conventions and expos. Such Dutch comic markets were commonly structured around popular genres, specifically European comics and Western graphic novels, while manga had a reserved place at these events. The organization Mangafique, however, aimed to create a visibility of manga at these events to create cultural diversity and draw younger audiences to these events as well.

Dutch artists have largely focused on original characters and stories, though some fan art and parodies have also been published. Goldfish Factory for instance published a series of *Sailormoon* (1992) parodies since 2001, while Neutral specialized in drawing dõjinshi of Clamp series such as *XXX-Holic* (2003-2011) since it was founded in 2004. It is striking that the Dutch scene has focused largely on creating original art though and also valued this deeply. This can be explained partly by the fact that Dutch artists also sold their work outside of fandom at other comic venues.

In the Dutch context, fandom and professional comic scenes often come together. The anthology *Oost West* (East West) (2008) is an example of these inverventions between manga culture and fandom, one that I would like to elaborate a bit further. *Oost West* is a collaboration of professional Dutch artists as well as Dutch dõjinshi artists and art students. I see this work as exemplary of the Dutch manga scene since it also included graphic novel artists that explored Japanese content and styles. This diversity, I would argue, is characteristic of the Dutch manga scene.

 O*ost West* is a 178-page volume that reflects on the cultural crossovers between The Netherlands and Japan. The title clearly suggests a dialogue between the West and

the Eastern Other. *Oost West* features many artists that debuted in Dutch manga fandom, such as André Massee and Marissa Delbressine. The anthology, from the comic publishing house Beedee, is in Dutch. Thereby, it appeals to the Dutch comic scene rather than a broad, international fan community. This can be contrasted to Dutch dõjinshi, which are commonly published in English to make sure that international audiences can read the booklets.

The comics in *Oost West* are printed in grayscale and often contain screen tones and dynamic, cinematographic paneling. However, within the character designs and backgrounds, some artists clearly adopt a mainstream manga aesthetics with highly stylized, detailed characters (figure 1), while others draw in a cartoonesque or more realistic style. In this blend of Eastern and Dutch culture, a clear transcultural dialogue emerges that I will discuss by going into several important narrative and aesthetic themes in the anthology.

The cover by Marissa Delbressine already contextualizes the anthology as a meeting ground of cultures. Colored in dark purple shadows, a female samurai seductively looks at the viewer (figure 1). Her hand touches a shoji screen and though her pose would suggest shyness, her gaze is brutal. Her katana, visualized most clearly in her shadow, characterizes her as a ninja, crouched in a hidden compartment and ready to assassinate her target. Upon closer observation, the image is rife with Dutch symbols, such as the windmill tattooed into her upper arm. This motif is repeated in the background of Dutch tiles, decorated with the same symbol. This Dutch image echoes the fascination that European painters have long since had with Japanese women. As such, the illustration is emblematic not only of Dutch manga fandom, but of the tradition in which it is rooted.

Oost West has several distinct features that reveal the Dutch interpretation and appropriation of manga styles and storytelling. For starters, several stories are set in contemporary Japan and visualize its characteristics from a European point of view. *Morgen* (*Tomorrow*) by Alice and Mike is set in a crowded Japanese subway where humans as well as small, cute monsters are seated. This exaggeration stresses the cultural imagination of Japan by the Dutch as a crowded, modern country, connected by vast networks of trains and subways. Other comics, such as *Icarus* by Marissa Delbressine, visualize a large urban terrain with high-towering buildings and billboards. Kino-kun's *Pockey Grabe and Mountain Dew* is set largely in a convenience store

('*konbini*'), Yoyogi park and Shibuya. In these comics, Japan and its pop-culture is associated with urbanity, consumerism, and with its specific means of transportation, such as subways or *shinkansen* bullet trains.

Moreover, the Dutch artists mediate common themes of Japanese popular culture. Specific genres and tropes which are associated with Japan form lines throughout the anthology. Several post-apocalyptic and science fiction stories are embedded in the comic. Olivier Heiligers' *Messiah* displays a visual style that is clearly inspired by the designs of Akira Toriyama and Leiji Matsumoto. André Massee's *Groeistuipen* (*Growing Pains*) also echoes shōnen storytelling by focusing on the quest of three boys that assemble a magical artifact. Several of the comics sport hybrid characters and monsters (figure 2), which create transmedial relations with series such as *Pokémon* and *Digimon* which were among the first anime to be broadcasted in The Netherlands. Dutch artists are clearly inspired by the fantastical elements of manga: its alternative settings, characters and creatures.

Furthermore, the comics are highly self-reflexive and intertextual, thereby explicitly addressing the Dutch that reads the anthology. Many of the comics contain references to known characters in the background, such as Pikachu. Others purposely dress their characters in the Japanese street style of gothic lolitas, such as the colourful protagonists in *Morgen* by Alice and Mike. Other stories are set in fan cultures themselves, such as mentioned *Pockey Grabe and Mountain Dew* which narrates the story of two fans that meet out of character in a convenient store and then compete with each other in a cosplay contest. The collection creates visibility and awareness of the practices of manga fans, but also presumes a knowledgeable reader.

Throughout the comics, an aesthetic of cuteness emerges in the soft monsters and wide-eyed manga tropes. As Ngai argues, when observing Takashi Murakami's artworks, cuteness has transgressive potential because it can also package uncomfortable truths more readily. Cuteness, then, not only suggests vulnerability and helplessness, but also aggression and power (id., p. 283). *Oost West* reveals a similar discourse, especially in its comic *Toys in the Attic* by Schwantz and Wortel, which follows a manic child in a toy store. Taunted by wide-eyed, fluffy plushies, he kills all the customers with a katana. The comic can be compared to the *South Park* episode *Chimpokémon* (1999): a parody of *Pokémon* in which the children are enticed to buy all the toys produced by an evil Corporation from Japan. What these two stories have in

common is a critique of 'global capitalism and obsessive consumerism' . Though the examples are Japanese, these concerns of standardization can also stem from the West, as suggested by the popular concept 'McDonaldization' .

Thus, cuteness becomes a site for transgression in these Dutch productions. *Oost West* is not only a tribute, but also a critique of particular Japanese values, such as its intense consumerism and pressure on youth. While cuteness can be critical, it is also a visual device that labels these heterogeneous Dutch comics as manga. It grants artistic license to comic producers. Thus, aesthetic devices become a key mediator of cultural values; a semiotic tool that bridges East and West.

Figure 3, 4: See attachment

The Fantasyscape of German Yaoi

Historically, the context of German manga is fundamentally different from its neighboring country, The Netherlands. In Germany, manga has been widely popularized and translated, and anime has been amply broadcasted on national television. German publishing houses have translated and published manga extensively since the 1990s, though several titles were released before this decade.

In terms of translation, *Barefoot Gen* was already published in Germany in the late 1980s. Though manga were sporadically translated in the years to follow, the publication of *Dragon Ball* (1996) by Carlsen Comics quickly led up to more publications. Particularly the late 1990s were characterized by the publication of many different manga by studios such as Egmont Ehapa and Carlsen Comics. This coincided with the broadcasting of major anime such as *Sailor Moon* as well as a crisis in the German comic market (Malone, 2000, p. 23). The translation and publication of Japanese comics in Germany became especially profitably the new millennium. In 2005, the revenue of the manga industry was 70 million euro which was a 6.9 % increase compared to 2004 (Knumann, 2006). The growth of the entire book industry, however, was only 1 % . In other words, manga quickly became a dominant comic medium in Germany, which can be opposed to the visibility of manga in The Netherlands, where it was considered a niche medium at best.

Similar to Dutch manga, German manga pioneered in fan magazines such as *AnimaniA* (since 1994) and *MangasZene* (2001-2006). Germany, however, developed a

thriving publishing culture in which local manga artist have been scouted by means of contests. Their work was published by companies such as Carlsen Comics. As Malone (2010) writes: 'The local publishers rapidly capitalized on its appeal to female readers and began fostering local manga artists in Germany. These are mainly young women producing *shōjo* manga, and increasingly integrating popular boys' love elements into their work.'

This possibility to become a professional manga artist heavily shaped the discourse and distribution of German manga. Fans quickly professionalized their work in the late nineties in official publishing houses such as Schwarzer Turm and Fireangels that were not solely a labor of love. These publishing houses strived to pay their artists and were more than independent, non-commercial groups. This professionalism also meant that printed comics were not seen as amateur objects that originated in a specific learning space, such as in The Netherlands or Japan. In Germany, printed works often equated published works, and had to have a certain quality.

Those who were excluded from publishing therefore focused more on online portfolios, at platforms such as deviantArt, or created web manga. Specifically the German fan forum Animexx has been a key platform in the distribution of self-created manga for many years where budding artists could display their art and receive feedback. German artists also developed the habit to share their art amongst friends in con booklets: sketch books brought to conventions in which other fans draw commissions for free.

For a long time, independently published comics did not flourish well in Germany where professional expectations had to be met and an amount of payment was expected. The past years, however, there has been a shift in German fandom. Fireangels editor Anne Delseit speaks of a 'renaissance of dõjinshi' as different independent artists are now slowly organizing in casual artist groups and circles, comparable to the Japanese production model (pers. comm., February 19, 2013). The large publishing companies now carefully set their professional status apart from independent groups and circles, but they also struggle with this. Both parties, publishing houses and circles, are present at fan conventions and need clientele.

The production of German manga, as Paul Malone (2010) writes, was innately tied up to policies surrounding sexual and aggressive media content. A climate of moral panic surrounded manga since 2008, when new policies and regulations prohibited the

depiction of under-aged, fictional characters, under the assumption that these depictions were in fact expressions of child pornography. This political discourse was integrated in the German manga and also led to innovative comics that particularly addressed child abuse and the sexual depiction of under-aged characters.

While there are many Germanga to choose from, I decided to base my analysis on several comics in the anthology *Lemon Law* by Fireangels. This ongoing anthology has five volumes with the sixth due in 2014. Fireangels specializes queer manga, most particularly homoerotic yaoi (McLelland, 2005; Thorn, 2004). These genres include gay romance and are primarily created by and for women. Its lesbian counterpart, 'yuri', is less visible in popular culture in Japan and other countries. Nonetheless, Fireangels has published some yuri comics as well. Similar to Japan, the German yaoi artists and authors appear to be all women. The anthology series *Lemon Law* consists of 5 volumes and is still ongoing. It focuses on yaoi but queer romance is often not its main genre characteristic. In fact, the anthology sports historical fiction, science fiction, slice of life and fantasy stories in which gay romance is but one theme. The success of *Lemon Law* reflects the overall German interest in yaoi.

Lemon Law is printed in grayscale but includes several colored pages. It has a prototypical tankõbon format (B6), which is an unusual printing format in most Western countries. The Dutch manga *Oost West*, for instance, is printed in B5 format, which is more standard in Europe. In terms of aesthetics, *Lemon Law* appears to be more faithful to the visualization of manga than *Oost West*. Some styles appear to be more inspired by stories that flourished 1970s and 1980s (figure 3) while others display the conventions of contemporary yaoi (figure 4). Overall, *Lemon Law* is a blend of styles but one that remains true to the characteristics of manga and integrates few elements of traditional European comics or graphic novels.

When analyzing the series, several themes stand out, compared to *Oost West*. For starters, the anthologies hardly feature any stories that are set in Japan. Instead, they offer fantasy settings, modern and historical versions of Europe, or unspecified places. Many of the stories are firmly rooted in a German or European tradition. In *Emerald Rising* by Marlicious, which features a young boy with French parents who moved to a new country, supposedly Germany. The comic integrates many French sentences, expressions and stereotypical references to French culture, such as jokes about baguettes. The Other in this comic is not Japan, but the neighboring country France,

suggesting that the local manga form a complex vessel of (inter)national images and tropes. Historical fascination, however, grounds several of the other stories. *Octavian* by Minzpyjama (figure 3) is set at the court of Vienna, characterized by its powdered wigs and detailed sceneries. The young Octavian, dubbed the 'Rosenkavalier von Wien' meets a famous count, but their affair is met with the jealousy of another man. In this case, local history is mediated through the exotic style of manga and eroticized. Through the iconic style of shõjo manga from the 1970s and 1980s, the artist explores German and Austrian history. Despite its emphasis on romance and sexuality, yaoi functions as a powerful tool for rewriting in these cases, similar to other types of feminist writing which have historically relied on appropriation and parody.

In other cases, the German artists blend manga storytelling with other repertoires. Several of the comics deconstruct genre repertoires that are common in Western crime fiction, procedural drama or superhero comics. *China Blue*, by Anne Delseit and Sai Nan, is a hard-boiled detective set in a town controlled by an Asian underworld. The artists blend Japanese visuality with a type of storytelling reminiscent of American film noir. In similar fashion, *Coined*, by the Dutch artist Marissa Delbressine, parodies classic super comics and also shows that Japanese styles can easily be combined with other genres and media. In other words, the artists and authors of Lemon Law do not merely reproduce manga tropes, but instead combine it with their own local cultures and traditions.

These and other stories suggest that *Lemon Law* not only mediates manga visually, but displays similar interests in queer characters, cult storytelling and characterization. The characters and stories are iconic and cater to a specific niche audience, interested in the chemistry between male characters. The settings serve as a background in which these relationships enfold and particular tropes, such as the hero and the villain, are deconstructed and eventually queered. Fireangels is only one publishing company of out of several in Germany that create local yaoi and yuri. The widespread nature of German yaoi suggests that manga is not only embraced as a visual culture, but that its specific genres are also further developed. Yaoi, then, may be one fantasyscape that brings together narrative tropes and audiences from different cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion

This study has shown that manga is a complex phenomenon in continental Europe with a unique history of appropriation and remediation. The dõjinshi groups and manga publishers from Germany and The Netherlands show a deep fascination for Eastern culture that is constantly invigorated. The dynamics of these local manga can only be understood through a transcultural framework that takes into account the local context as well as the appropriation of foreign cultural capital. Euromanga have developed unique local traditions and styles that inform their cultural context and readership.

Manga, however, is more than a particular medium or style for these artists. It is also a culture in which particular hierarchies and gatekeepers in comic production are contested. The participatory culture of manga allows European artists to experiment with creative styles and foreign models of comic creation and distribution, such as dõjinshi circles. This democratic model is clearly fore grounded in the practices of Dutch and German manga artists and cannot be separated from the emergence of manga fandom. While these local manga may often originate in such subcultures, they do not stand in isolation from the professional comic culture at large. Dutch manga artists are often active in independent dõjinshi scenes, that thrive particular around fan magazines and circles, but individual artists also work together with other comic artists on larger projects. In Germany, however, manga are often professionally published and the artists are more faithful to the look and feel of mainstream manga.

One can conclude that manga is not merely mimicked or parodied in these local subcultural contexts, but incorporated in a particular mainstream comic culture. Within these comic scenes, manga tropes and production models function as a source of innovation and experimentation. German and Dutch artists are clearly drawn to specific genres and tropes from Japanese popular culture, such as the homoerotic yaoi. Through this genre, Western artists can comment on the heteronormativity of Western popular culture and create alternative stories about gender and sexuality. In *Lemon Law*, however, romance motives and erotica also appear to take the backseat in favor of building a unique story world or text.

What comic artists take from the culture of manga, then, are its vast fantasyscapes that appeal to the imagination and transgress the conventions of their local fiction. The artists and writers also tend to unite themselves in similar fashion as

the circles in Japan, suggesting that participation is key to this medium. Manga is not merely a medium then, but also a learning space that inspires creativity.

Overall, these budding manga artists bring the cult sensibility of manga to Western markets and fandom. The discourse on manga has to be diversified to take these local expressions into account.

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