

Miscellany:
Anime – I

J.L. Symonds Patel

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1 Introduction

In this short entry, I aim to give reasons as to why Japanese anime has quite a strong take in the west, as well as to why, more generally, it is a very effective media through which to tell stories.

In this entry, I will go through these main points:

- The Visual Potential of Anime
Where I explore the effects of 2D drawing has on range of visuals anime can deliver.
- The Foreign Aspect of Anime in the West
Where I explore the effects of the fact that Japanese anime comes from Japan, and how the western audience seems to react to that fact.
- The Unreal Aspect of Anime
Where I explore the effect of having a clear visual rift between reality, and what is being shown

2 The Visual Potential of Anime

First of all, the most obvious thing about anime is that it is animated from 2D drawings, whether by hand, or through using digital tools. This means that whatever can be drawn, can be animated. And, by twisting it around, we can easily say that not many things are unable to be drawn. The result is that anime can play host to an infinite amount of worlds and characters, as long as they can be visualised, and so drawn. This gives plenty of potential as to what worlds, settings, and characters can be displayed, meaning anime is a very versatile medium.

Now, we know that anime can be used as the medium to visualise a huge number of settings due to its dependence on 2D renderings, but what about its feasibility. A high end number is cited at around \$300,000 per episode of Japanese anime (Stack Exchange 2017). Compared to a regular TV series, which can easily go into the millions per episode, anime is a far cheaper medium. One main factor may be that one illustrator/ animator can draw several characters, however one TV actor, can only play one character. And so, just with this in mind, there is an increase in possible output per person in production. And so, not only do you have more possibilities in the visuals which anime can deliver, but you have a feasibility, even for out worldly settings, which beats regular cinematography in efficiency. Especially with settings of fantasy and non realistic worlds, anime has a huge advantage, since the cost of drawing/animating/illustrating these settings, is far less than if CGI was being used in a TV series. The fact that one can simply add 2D elements to anime, whilst having it still maintain its uniformity (since everything is 2D anyway), is a huge advantage. Whereas with regular 3D cinema, what is added in (effects, CGI etc.), must be made to match the original 3D setting, meaning drawings and effects have to be heavily edited.

3 The Foreign Aspect of Anime in the West

The fact that anime is a Japanese product means that the language used is Japanese, and the base culture assumed, regardless of the setting, is also Japanese. Thus, when anime is watched in places outside of Japan, there is a rather large effect produced. More often than not, the stories in anime have a fantastical element, which provides some means of escape from reality. To the western watcher, having a language and base culture which is foreign, adds to the non familiarity and, to a certain degree, the fantasy of the anime. Therefore, if one is unfamiliar with Japanese language and culture, it makes anime, at the very least, more interesting, and at the most, more fantastical, possibly adding to the sense of escapism. Therefore, there is an added sense of unfamiliarity, and exploration to the western watcher of anime, not just in the world setting, but in the actual delivery and nuances within, which can make it more attractive.

This probably could be said of any other media, produced in another language, but I would say the effect on animation is far greater, since in regular cinematographic media, you would at least get a glimpse of the real setting of the language and culture. For example, a Japanese TV series/drama would have Japan as the background of the setting, which is of course the accurate setting of the culture and language. However, in anime, the backdrop of the culture and language is not Japan at all, even if it is an animated version of a Japanese setting, and completely fictional setting. And so, the language and culture of Japan, if not known by the watcher, is now subconsciously associated with the fictional setting. Thus, whenever someone who is unfamiliar with Japanese culture and language, watches anime, the language heard, and base culture seen, is heavily surrounded by fictional elements through what is shown in anime. The result is that the language and culture is given as much status as the fiction, deepening the immersion.

4 The Unreal Aspect of Anime

The other thing about anime, is that the clear rift it has visually, makes it clear that whatever is shown, is not linked with reality. Anime utilises illustration and digital drawing, and so there is no hint of real 3D rendering, meaning the basic geometry of the visual world created is fundamentally different. And so, if the base geometry of anime is nothing like the real world, how different must the stories also seem. My point here is that the 2D digital illustration that makes up the anime, creates a fundamentally fictional dimension as its base world, not just a fictional story. All in all, this creates a far more immersive experience when being told stories through anime.

5 Conclusion

This entry was meant to be short, and my aim was simply to show that anime is a very versatile medium through which stories can be told. Not only this, but also that the fact it is a Japanese export means that to those in the west, it is a bit more attractive, and adds another dimension when watching it altogether, since the language and culture is from Japan as well. i do hope that you might see why anime also seems to be quite unique in this way, especially as a growing entertainment medium in the west. In Japan, it isn't just treated as a medium for children's shows, but also used as a medium for all manner of genres. Thus, there are many anime shows out there, for a huge variety of audiences, and with many different settings and stories. And on top of that, there is the element of a new language and culture making it all the more interesting.

Thank you for reading.

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