Close-ups: an emotive language in manga

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Manga is typically recognised in the Western world by the distinct visual styles of its characters and the vast array of symbolic signs that indicate various emotions and physical reactions. However, research into the use of visual techniques in the development of emotional life in manga is far from sufficient. This paper aims to explore the adoption of the cinematic technique – close-ups in manga – as a narrative tool to communicate a character's emotions and build tension between panels. It draws examples from two manga and conversations with 16 young British readers to examine the impact of close shots on reader engagement.

Keywords: emotion; manga; close-up; reader; cinema

Introduction

A Japanese drama called Nakuna Hara-chan (Japanese: 泣くな、はらちゃん; Translation: Don't cry, Hara) tells a story about the protagonist Echizen's encounter with the manga characters that she created on her notebook. When the fictional character, Hara-chan, comes out of the notebook into Echizen's own world, comedic effects centre around his innocence about his creator's world, and the excessive emotions that overflow from him. A particularly representative set of scenes highlight the crying Hara-chan with two unrealistically large streams of tears running down his face. While ridiculous in real life, this image illustrates a common practice in the manga world – an emphasis on the development of emotions through visual cues.

Brenner (2007) argues that a character's emotional life is key to manga, and that its qualities are made manifest both in a character's appearance and the abundant use of close shots that allow readers to take time to feel a character's emotions. The emphasis on emotions as part of the development of characterisation can be traced back to the strong lyric tradition in Japanese art, literature, and music (Clarke 2004). In contrast to

the epic tradition of Western narrative that tends towards a 'goal-oriented culture', McCloud (1994, 81) argues that manga emphasise 'being there over getting there'. In their study on reasons behind the wide acceptance of manga within Indonesian reading communities, Ahmad and others (2012) identified the expressive renderings of emotions as a decisive factor in attracting readers. Despite the fact that the depiction of emotions seems to have a crucial influence on readers' engagement with manga, few studies have tried to investigate the employment of this narrative technique in manga in detail.

Among the studies that have made an attempt to explore the role of emotions in manga, Li (2016) and Antononoka (2016) both looked at the emotional elements in the development of a character that struggles to overcome a past tragedy. While Li argues that emotions allude to an embryonic idea that is in the process of becoming logic, Antononoka demonstrated ways the layout and composition of images could deliver and reinforce emotional messages. In his later work, Li (2017) also emphasised the effects of backgrounds in contextualizing a character's emotions in manga. Other studies that focus on the symbolic expressions of emotions are Cohn and Ehly's (2016) work that looks into a wide array of emotional symbols applied to the appearance of manga characters, and Abbott and Forceveille's (2011) study that investigates the super-deformed figures that express emotional outbursts through the 'loss of hands'. However, little research has looked into the effects of close-up techniques in manga on readers' emotional engagement with the story.

As part of a larger study that explored young British readers' engagement with manga in literary, aesthetic, social and cultural dimensions (Tsai 2016), this paper sets out to bridge the gap resulting from insufficient attention being paid to the narrative techniques that have significant impacts on the emotional life of manga and reader engagement with the story. In particular, the paper investigates the deployment of close-

ups in two manga and how readers respond to this technique. The paper will begin with

a discussion of the role literary emotions play in a reading experience, drawing on

examples from comics including manga. Thereafter, the paper will concentrate on the

use of close-up techniques in manga to develop emotions and mood and the cinematic

theories behind this technique. Following this, an analysis of two selected manga and

readers' responses will explore the detail of this prevalent phenomenon and its engaging

effects in a reading process. Finally, the paper will conclude that close-ups are an

emotive language that manga artists use to communicate with readers.

Literary emotions and visual communication

Literature is a subtle and yet powerful medium for communicating human thoughts and

emotions. While cultural variations exist in the way emotions are expressed, shared core

emotions enable us to identify, interpret and further empathise with other people's

feelings both through everyday interactions and artefacts produced by people. For

example, readers are likely to experience empathy through an imaginative bond with

characters, particularly when facing contagious emotions, such as happiness or sadness.

This imaginative bond makes the positioning of emotion a literary tool that blurs the

boundary between the fictional world and reality, further encouraging the reader to

consider different ways of viewing their own world (Li 2016). In his study of the

expressions of emotion and affect in manga, Li (2016) argues that the exploration of

character psychology not only encourages character identification, but also allows the

character (and the reader) to make sense of the represented reality by responding to it

through the lenses of emotions. In this way, a character's emotional state allows the

reader to see an idea that is in the process of becoming logic.

> Emotion, rather than being perceived as something opposite to logic and reason, or even something separate from it, is utilized as a form of thought derived from a logic that has yet to be clearly defined, connecting to the idea of affect as an alternative type of intelligence (429).

It is believed that visual stimuli could have an immediate and strong visceral effect in communicating emotions (Nikolajeva 2014). When we see a person's facial expressions or bodily postures, our brains recognise them as external tokens of emotions, and respond to them immediately. Similarly, Keen (2011) suggests that illustrations of emotions in graphic narratives can capitalise on the visual codes of emotions and evoke feelings in readers even before they read accompanying texts. Although the process of understanding emotions in reality depends on both visual and linguistic communication in a specific context, images can greatly enhance the efficiency and effectiveness in the communication of emotions and elicitation of empathy. For example, the internal world of a manga character's psychology is often made manifest not only through their facial expression, but also the design of panel flow, layout, and impressionistic backgrounds (Antononoka 2016; Li 2016).

Taking advantage of a shared understanding of visual codes with the audience, artists communicate emotions through a careful choice of lines, shade, colours, shapes, space, angles, distance, frames, and symbols. Keen (2011) uses the phrase, 'strategic narrative empathy', to describe visual coding for human emotions in comics and graphic narratives. She argues that characters' faces and postures can elicit readers' feelings because they are presented in ways that are deliberately designed by the artist to try to manipulate the reader's emotional responses. Eisner (2008) describes facial expression as a window to a character's mind and an adverb to their posture or gesture. The role of facial expression is to register emotion and convey a message about motivation and bodily movement. This narrative tool has been utilised in manga where characters' inner

conflicts are often featured. For example, Antononoka (2016) contends that visualised interiority makes characters, even villains, 'anchors for empathy'. It is notable that manga, as a sequential art, has had a history of presenting the potent feelings of human beings through the adoption of the cinematic technique – close-up. In the next section, we will discuss the origin and the phenomenon of the use of this cinematic technique in manga.

The phenomenon of close-ups in manga

Inspired by American films, the legendary manga artist, Osamu Tezuka, started to use a great number of close-ups and unconventional perspectives to capture characters' psychological states and their movements. A quote from his autobiography says, 'Why are American movies so different from Japanese ones? How can I draw comics that make people laugh, cry and be moved, like that movie?' (Gravett 2004, 26). With this intensified endeavour to engage his readers with every sentiment, Tezuka lavished details on characters' movements and psychological development. Unlike his American counterparts, who were given limited space in daily newspapers (four to five frames) and comic books (up to twenty pages monthly), Tezuka was free to decompress his stories using many panels and pages to capture characters' movements and facial expressions faithfully. As a result, his stories would easily end up containing hundreds to thousands of pages (Schodt 1996). Tezuka's cinematic approach to manga brought a revolutionary change to the creation of manga. Through Tezuka, these Western-learnt cinematic skills were indigenised and became a quintessential feature of manga.

By presenting a character's facial expressions or imminent actions at a particular moment through close shots, manga artists add visual impact to the content within the frame, thereby intensifying the portrayed feelings, mood or tension. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) contend that close shots imply a close personal distance between the

one gazing and the one being gazed at because non-intimates cannot come this close to each other in reality. They argue that a character that is presented at a short distance from the viewer could effectively draw the viewer to identify with them. This emotional process is complicated by the combination of narrative and cinematic editing in manga. The reader may choose to form an aliance with the character that they share the most personal values with. However, images that are presented through a subjective perspective (through a character's point of view) could effectively draw the reader to share another character's experience of the world presented, resulting in vicarious experiences. At the same time, a third character that is presented through close-ups (the object under the reader's gaze) invites empathy from the reader by disclosing his/her intimate feelings. In this situation, the reader is invited to respond to the viewed character emotionally despite the fact that they may not agree with the character's moral standards. This phenomenon explains Antononoka's (2016) argument, as mentioned earlier, that the visual emphasis of a character's inner state makes them an anchor for empathy, even if they are villains.

The depiction of inner thoughts and emotion is key to the development of a story that emphasises the process with which a character resolves their inner or external conflicts. This is achieved in s*hōjo* manga (girl's manga) through a particular emphasis on large, glistening eyes that disclose the 'unspoken affairs of hearts' (Gravett 2004, 77). Osamu Tezuka, the 'God of Manga' (Ito 2008), was believed to be the pioneer of this technique. With influence from the visual styles of Disney characters, Tezuka increased the size of characters' eyes to experiment with the representation of inner thoughts, feelings and reminiscence in *shōjo* manga (Prough, 2011). Although it seems that a patriarchal ideology has influenced the depiction of girls in *shōjo* manga with large eyes, big pupils, and long eyelashes that make them appear cute, attractive and

innocent, this style has been passed down and explored further by female manga artists

after the Second World War. In her interviews with several female artists, Prough (ibid.)

found that the larger the eyes, the wider the range of emotional states artists could draw.

As a result, galaxy eyes have become a trademark of *shōjo* manga that expresses the

most delicate emotions and inner thoughts of characters.

The pervasive use of close-ups in manga to depict psychological states and

moods is observed in McCloud's (1994) study on relations between panels. Comparing

manga and Western comics, McCloud noticed that manga artists used a higher

proportion of panels to depict the transition of time (*moment-to-moment transition*) and

aspects of a place, idea or mood (*aspect-to-aspect transition*) than transitions of actions,

subjects, and scenes. In particular, McCloud observed that *aspect-to-aspect transition* is

a type of panel transition that is rarely seen in the West. This observation underlines the

reliance on close shots in manga to depict the nuances of emotions, mood, and actions.

Similarly, Li (2016) observed that manga artists place emphasis on *nagare* – the

frequent display of a single incident across multiple panels to depict a character's

emotion and affective responses. In this way, these expressions are not only measured

temporally, but also spatially.

Taking a different approach to examining how information is highlighted in

panels, Cohn (2011) inspected variations of entities (characters or objects) included in

300 panels in each of twelve American and twelve Japanese comic books. He

categorised the panels as *macro* (containing more than one entity), *mono* (showing a

single entity), and *micro* (including less than a single entity). One of his key findings

was that *macro* panels were used twice as frequently as *mono* and *micro* panels in the

American comics, while manga use far more *mono* and *micro* panels than *macro* panels.

That is, American comics present full scenes more often than partial scenes that feature

one single entity or part of it. By contrast, manga focuses on detailing a single entity or aspects of the entity. With this finding, Cohn affirmed McCloud's (1994) view that *aspect-to-aspect transition* is used more often in manga than Western comics to feature a sense of place or mood. This emphasis results in a slower narrative in manga, where information is spread out over several panels to build characters, establish a setting, highlight a moment, or enhance the suspense (Cools 2011; Brenner 2007). In this way, readers are placed at a close distance to the depicted object or character, and invited to 'experience' the moment of the story as if they were involved in the illustrated event or place.

Juxtaposed close shots tend to communicate extremely fragmented information that can only be made complete with meanings assigned to the abstract, imaginative space between panels. The interplay between the concrete and the abstract space that are separated by frames is fundamental to a reader's emotional and cognitive engagement with manga. In the next section, we will continue to explore the functions of close-ups in manga by drawing upon cinematic theories and considering the dynamics of *off-screen space*, which can enhance the effects of close-ups greatly.

Cinematic functions of close-ups

Balázs (2010; 2004) treats close-up as a lyric language that communicates the naturalism of love or hate, and conveys emotions more efficiently than words due to the simultaneity of facial expressions to the expressed emotion. With a focus on the depictions of facial expressions, Balázs (2004) suggests that there are at least two functions of close-ups. One is to reveal what is happening under the surface of appearance, and the other is to express the poetic sensibility of the director who manipulates close-ups together with other cinematic techniques to realise the first function of close-ups. According to Balázs, close-ups take the heart, not the eyes, to

appreciate them. They put spectators in a new dimension that is beyond the physical – it

is no longer a figure of flesh and bone that we see, but an expression of emotions,

moods, intentions and thoughts. Balázs (2010, 3) says, "In close-ups every wrinkle

becomes a crucial element of character and every twitch of a muscle testifies to a pathos

that signals great inner events". Similarly, Lefebvre-Linetzky (2016, 218) uses

"emotional nakedness" to describe the power of close-ups in penetrating the physical

surface and enabling the spectator to apprehend the pain and joy of a character and to

see "a moment of truth". According to Lefebvre-Linetzky, close-ups were widely used

during the silent era of films because faces were the dialogues. This technique has also

become a useful narrative tool in manga, where words are often used succinctly with

details lavished in images.

In fact, close-ups are not only beyond physical perception, they also transcend

physical distance. In reality, we do not normally have the opportunity to take time to

observe a person's face in such close, detailed, and intense ways as we can with close-

ups when watching a film (Balázs 2010). Close-ups not only break personal spaces, but

also optical laws where objects at a far distance are perceived to move slower than those

in a close distance. According to Balázs (*ibid.*), close-ups guide spectators to examine

every presented detail, and the large quantity of details take a longer time to absorb. As

a result, close-ups appear to be slower in time than medium shots, and medium shots are

slower than long shots. This is based on a psychological fact rather than an optical one.

The psychological fact is significant because the slowness allows the development of a

story mood and a character's emotions, thereby providing time for readers to immerse

themselves in the fictional world.

The penetration of close-ups into a character's inners state often induces a sense

of intimacy. Persson (1998) contends that such intimacy comes in two forms. The first

is psychological, due to the experience of reading someone's mind, and the second is optical, due to the close distance presented by the camera. The latter allows the director to manipulate the discourse space, thereby giving emotional proximity – the spectator feels close to characters or perceives characters to be close to each other, while the real distance is usually bigger when a long shot reveals so (Pérez Ríu 2015). In contrast, the former allows the spectator to invade a character's inner space without being noticed and without the fear of being condemned, which according to Pérez Ríu (*ibid.*) is *voyeuristic intimacy*. This safe space allows readers to rejoice or mourn with the character without the return of a similar disclosure of one's own inner world, and to enjoy the threat from a villainous character's vicious stare without the worry of personal safety.

As an "art of emphasis" (Balázs 2010, p39), close-ups can be used to achieve efficiency purposes by guiding the audience's gaze to the most significant details and moments or by showing only the start and finish of an action, while maintaining a sense of continuity. This technique of emphasis allows the director to control the tempo of the story by editing a chain of shots and counter shots that reverberate or clash with one another to dramatize the continuity of the story flow (Lefebvre-Linetzky 2016, p28). The sense of continuity between shots as well as between the cropped details and the contexts to which they belong relies on the spectator to fill in the invisible, omitted details drawing upon their own life experiences. In sequential art, such as manga, this is crucial to apprehending meanings that are conveyed through juxtaposed images. According to McCloud (1994), the ability of the reader to fill in the gap of the invisible using their imagination is called 'closure'. This ability is analogous to a cinematic experience where spectators play an active role in realising meanings that dwell in the off-screen space.

In cinematic discussions, off-screen space refers to the space outside the borders of a screen that allows only a part of reality to be seen. As a result, off-screen space is sometimes described as 'blind space' (Curry 2010), 'bracketed' (Carroll 1996) or 'masked' (Bazin 1967). The on-screen and off-screen space, although appearing to be two separate domains, are closely related and constantly interact with each other. According to Burch (1973), there are three ways to define off-screen space: by physical borders of the screen frame, by a character's gaze towards someone/something that is not on the screen, and by leaving out parts of a character's body from the screen. As off-screen space is purely imaginary, the filmmaker can use it to sustain tension. For example, positioning a serial killer outside the screen space, but showing the killer's hand holding a knife on the screen can leave the audience to speculate to whom this arm belongs. The filmmaker may also choose to leave out the killer completely and let the victim on the screen *gaze* towards the edge of the screen or at the spectator. The victim's facial expressions and gaze will bring the audience's attention to the unperceivable killer in the off-screen space, which according to Davis (2014), requires the audience to make a qualitative leap to perceive a 'possible world'. In this way, the interplay between on-screen and off-screen space engages the audience with their imagination. When a close-up technique is employed, the audience is not only guided to see beyond the surface of appearance, but also beyond the visible range on the screen.

Similarly, the panel structure in manga functions like film screens. Readers have the ability to construct a narrative based on a sequence of images that are 'cropped' out of the represented reality. When seeing a character holding up an axe in one panel, and a screaming sound in the other, the reader is prompted to imagine what happens between the two juxtaposed panels, that is, the *off-panel space*. McCloud (1994) argues that the ability of 'closure' makes the reader an accomplice who aids the crime in their own way

during the process of meaning-making. The panel structure of comics makes the narrative inherently fragmented and readers are invited to take an active role in bridging the meanings. Further, the lavish use of close-ups and extreme close-ups in manga can intensify the sense of fragmentation, as this technique allows only individualised aspects to be presented. While extreme close-ups are not normally adopted in cinematic traditions, except for avant-garde, this technique pervades manga and serves the purpose of focussing the reader's attention on one aspect at a time, inviting the reader to reflect on what remains abstract outside the panel. In this way, the imaginary domain outside a panel can greatly intensify the visible emotion or mood within the frame, and leave readers in suspense due to their insufficient knowledge of the overall situation at a particular moment of the story.

The above literature has demonstrated the power of close-ups in creating emotional proximity, a sense of intimacy or threat, and a rhythm of the story in films. Similarly, when this cinematic technique is applied to manga, it enhances the reading experience of a sequence of images that although remain still on the paper are brought to life in the reader's imagination. Close-ups, as a narrative tool, invite readers into a character's emotional life and inner thoughts, which is crucial to an engaging reading experience of manga. The following sections will look closely at the use of this technique in two manga and the emotional responses it elicited from a selected group of readers.

Methodology

This work is based on a study of young British readers' engagement with manga (Tsai, 2016). As the study set out to explore reasons that attract young British readers to manga and their engagement with the text in their lives, a focus group was considered the most suitable method for data collection. Focus groups allow the capture of insights

gained from a dynamic group discussion where participants inspire and encourage each

other to share their views on a chosen topic and probe each other for further details

(Liamputtong 2011). Sixteen keen manga readers from two schools in London were

invited to participate in the study. The 16 participants included 8 boys and 8 girls from

Years 7 to 10. This age group was considered the most avid readers of manga according

to the librarians in both schools. The participants were put into two male groups and

two female groups. Each group participated in three group discussions, which was

followed by a one-on-one interview with each participant. A thematic analysis was

carried out on the data to identify key themes thereafter.

The chosen corpuses included one *shōnen* manga (*Naruto* volume 6) and one

shōjo manga (*Vampire Knight* volume 4), which were the two main demographic

categories aiming at teenage readers. The choice of titles was based on their popularity

in English speaking countries, and the choice of volumes was based on how well they

represented the range of artistic and literary techniques adopted in *shōnen* and *shōjo*

manga. Each of the participants was given the two manga to read before joining the

group discussions. During the focus groups, the participants were invited to reflect on

their reading experience, and to interpret the use of certain visual techniques, such as

cinematic editing. In addition to face-to-face meetings, the participants were also asked

to keep reading journals as part of their participation in this study.

The following discussion will be based on the responses from selected

participants who are named using pseudonyms. The excerpts have been labelled with

their sources including 'individual interview', AG (School A, girl group), AB (School

A, boy group), BG (School B, girl group), BB (School B, boy group). The numbers that

follow after the group names indicate each of the three group discussions that students

participated in.

The two manga and close-ups

Naruto is a long-run serial manga written by Masashi Kishimoto (2011). It has been

serialised in the manga magazine, *Shonen Jump*, for 15 years, producing 700 episodes

in 72 volumes. Volume 6 (hereafter *N*6) features the story of a ninja *Chûnin* (middle)

Selection Exam[1] where the main characters are Naruto, Sasuke, and Sakura. As they

carry out the task required to pass the exam, the villain Orochimaru defeats Naruto and

Sasuke, leaving Sakura to fight other enemies alone.

    Vampire Knight is written by Matsuri Hino (2010), and has been serialised in the

manga magazine, *Shojo Beat*, for 9 years, with a total of 93 episodes in 19 volumes.

Volume 4 (hereafter *VK*4) features the conflicts between Zero, an ex-human vampire,

and Shizuka, a pureblood vampire that took Zero's human life and killed his parents. As

Zero's blood lust drives him towards madness, Yuki, the heroine, agrees to offer

Shizuka her own blood in exchange for a solution to save Zero.

    The pervasive employment of close-ups is noticeable in both manga. Among the

883 panels in *N*6, 373 panels are close shots that present the upper body of a character

from chest and above (medium close-up), the face (close-up), or a partial face with eyes

(extreme close-up) as the central focus. Similarly, among the 805 panels in *VK*4

(excluding bonus stories), 381 panels are close shots that show characters in the

abovementioned ways (Figure 1 & Table 1). This calculation has excluded close shots

that focus on other parts of the body and those that zoom into partial areas of an

environment or object, so as to highlight the emphasis on the depiction of the

character's facial expressions.

   [Figure 1 near here]

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[1]   In the ninjia world, a *genin* (low ninjia) needs to take the *Chûnin* Selection Exam to be

       promoted to a middle-rank ninja

Figure 1. Percentage of close-ups in the corpuses

Table 1. Number of close-ups in the corpuses

[Table 1 near here]

The affective reading of manga

While people from different cultures may express their emotions in different ways, there

is a shared emotional repertoire that allows people to recognise and interpret basic

emotions, thereby communicating with each other (Evans 2003). The rich depiction of

emotions in manga was identified by the participants as one of the key features that

attracted them to this oriental text. They were quick to pick up and respond to the

emotional cues delivered through close shots. For example, two manga readers

suggested that the visual impact of close shots contributed to a vicarious experience

when reading manga:

> When we are really close to them, it feels like we are actually near them.
>
> (Zoe, AG group interview 1)

> For example, say, I slaughtered my clan and then la la la… and you see sadness in
> his face, like shocked [….] That was telling you that 'Oh, the story can hit you.'
> And then you'll be more gripped to the story. I like a lot of moments like that.
>
> (Travis, BB Group interview 3)

Zoe's experience concurs with Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) and Persson's

(1998) argument that close shots allow the viewer into an intimate proximity with the

character based on our life experience of personal space. Travis' experience showed that

words and images enhanced each other, thereby stitching the reader into the emotional

moments that the character was going through. Travis' particular interest in the visual

depiction of emotion in manga is reflected in the drawing in his reading journal:

[Figure 2 near here]

Figure 2. Travis's reading reflection of N6 (drawing)

Travis chose to present the feelings and personality of a villain character in

Naruto through the depiction of his eye. His annotation reads:

Evil eyes that only seek evil and has [sic] witnessed lots of pain and heartache.
Emotions speak volumes.

In his individual interview, Travis explained this drawing:

What I'm trying to show is that this person could look good, but he has been evil
[….] His eyes are now full of rage, anger, because of the things and life
experiences that he has had.

(Travis, Individual interview)

Travis chose to focus on the depiction of this character's face in a close-up scale

so as to express the character's internal quality and feelings through eyes that are the

windows to the soul. While this technique has often been used by artists to suggest a

character's psychological state, it can also be manipulated in a way that conceals such

information so as to build a character. For example, Zoe commented on the

characterisation of Sasuke in *N6*:

Sasuke, his hair covers his eyes, so he is like the [type of] guy that hides his
emotions.

(Zoe, AG Group interview 1)

The focus on the depiction of character's eyes in manga caught Abel's attention

too. In his personal interview, he explained why he was particularly interested in the

drawing style of *shōjo* manga:

They [manga characters] have description in the eyes.

(Abel, Individual interview)

Although Abel was quick to assert that he only read *shōnen* manga, during a

group interview with the other boys, the comment above shows that he was able to

appreciate the aesthetic aspects and purpose of this distinct technique in *shōjo* manga.

Another student, Elsa, explained why she could relate to manga better than

novels:

> The thing about manga [is that] you can just see it visually and how it relates to
> people. It's their feelings and emotions.
>
> (Elsa, Individual interview)

Hogan (2011) claims that readers readily respond to literary emotions because

the depiction of emotions provides an eliciting condition, which prompts readers to

recall past experiences (memories of similar emotions or situations), to think and judge

(whether the character is convincing or worthy), and then to respond with or without

empathy. The visualisation of literary emotions seems to facilitate such a rapport

between Elsa and characters in manga.

Close-ups, particularly extremely close-ups, are effective narrative tools to invite

an immediate response to the character's emotions. For example, in one of the

confronting scenes in *VK4*, the artist adopts three extreme close shots to express the

inner states of the characters (Figure 3).

[Figure 3 near here]

Figure 3. *VK4*, p. 40 (Vampire Knight © Matsuri Hino 2004/HAKUSENSHA, Inc.
Image used courtesy of Hakusensha, Inc.)

In this confronting scene, Zero was trying to exact revenge for the death of his

parents. However, when he tried to pull the trigger, the blood bond[2] between him and

---

[2]   Shizuka bit Zero after killing his parents, thus leaving a shared blood bond between them.

Shizuka took control of him and paralysed his finger. Olaf and Elsa interpreted this page:

> He looks kind of nervous-ish [sic] because of the way he is holding the gun, and that really tells you what he is going through at the moment.
>
> (Olaf, BB Group interview 2)

> He's scared [….] He doesn't know what's going on. He's like, 'What?! What's going on?' And he recognises that his finger is not moving.
>
> (Elsa, BG Group interview 2)

Both of the readers took up the emotional cue of close ups in this page and focused their reading on Zero's internal state, which was presented visually as a 'silent soliloquy' (Balázs 2004) in the first two panels. Note that the storyline would not have been altered if the two extreme close-ups were not included in this page. In fact, they are images cropped out from the medium shot shown in the third panel. It is clear that the artist's intention is to accentuate the psychological state that Zero is experiencing at the specific moment. In this way, the first two panels function as the 'preview' of the third panel to guide the reader's gaze to the character's emotional transitions. The meanings of these panels are confirmed by Shizuka's verbal challenge in the dynamic speech bubbles that have broken through the border of the bottom panel – 'Are you surprised that you can't do it?'. Furthermore, the close-up of Shizuka's expressionless face implicates an indifferent attitude in contrast to the shock in Zero's face, thus adding tension into the conflict between the two characters. By singling out individual details, the artist intends to achieve at least three purposes. Firstly, the reader will not lose insights into a character's psychological development when the event unfolds. Secondly, close-ups add visual impact to what is framed, and hence enhance the significance of it. Thirdly, close-ups limit the visible range, which can effectively keep

the reader in suspense temporarily until a further shot reveals the whole situation. In this way, they limit the reader's knowledge to a micro level so as to bring what remains unseen (off-panel space) to the foreground of the reader's reading experience and add tension to the story. This example illustrates the engaging power of close-ups as an art of emphasis (Balázs 2010), a language of lyricism (Balázs 2004), and a narrative tool to dramatise the continuity (Lefebvre-Linetzky 2016).

A fighting scene in *N6* is arranged such that tension can be built through a dynamic interaction between presented entities in close shots and the cropped-out entities in the imaginary space outside the frames (Figure 4).

[Figure 4 near here]

Figure 4. *N6*, pp. 174-175 (NARUTO © 1999 by Masashi Kishimoto/SHUEISHA Inc. Image used courtesy of Shueisha Inc.)

Wesley interpreted these two pages:

This part was talking about when she does 'Substitute', for example, to cheat him… [panel 1], and then he [the artist] shows the way he's turning around [panel 2]. But then it zooms in onto his face to show how scared he was [panel 3-4]. Then it shows Sakura on top of him, like, to [let us] know why he's scared [panel 5] [….] And then you know how scared he is, and what he's feeling, everything [panel 6]. And you know how she feels, and in the end, it shows from the side – how she got him [panel 7].

(Wesley, AB Group interview 1)

On this double spread[3], panels 2, 3, 4, and 6 zoom in on Zaku's (the male character) facial expressions whilst leaving out Sakura (the female character) – the cause of Zaku's emotional state in the 'blind space' (Curry 2010); that is, the off-panel space. This technique not only focused Wesley's attention on Zaku's emotion, but also

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[3]   Manga is read from right to left, top to bottom.

blocked his access to the wider context thereby creating tension until the long shots in panel 5 and 7 provided more information about the interaction between the two characters. Li (2016) contends that emotions are a narrative tool that allows both the character and the reader to explore the circumstances within which this character is situated. In the example above, neither the words nor the close-up images in panels 3, 4 and 6 directly explain what is happening to Zaku. However, the shock in Zaku's face sends out a clear message that he is in a threatening circumstance that can only be visible in the reader's own imagination of the off-panel space. The uncertainty of Zaku's actual situation (the degree of danger) accumulates and diminishes in the alternating shot distances throughout the double spreads, thus creating a beautiful rhythm of tension in the story.

The close depiction of the character's facial expression is visually powerful in calling Wesley to respond to the implied emotions. Wesley's interpretation of the shifting perspective in the same page shows that he was drawn to emphasise and identify with Zaku's (the opponent) situation (presented through close shots) even though the chosen perspective of panels 2, 3, 4, and 6 placed Wesley in Sakura's position:

> Um, the way in this one, it shows how we are on his side. We're in his shoes. [It] show[s] how scared we are [panel 2-4]. And that [panel 5], it shows that we've got, we've got him that way. We are kind of excited, but then next, you really know, we're gonna get killed [….] You realise afterwards, like, the tension […], like, 'Oh, someone is on top of me' [panel 6]. But then you realise it wasn't you, because of the way he [the manga artist] shows it.
>
> (Wesley, AB Group interview 1)

The frequency of the word 'we' in this quote shows Wesley's absorption into the two characters and a shifting pattern of identification with them. Wesley's response

shows that he identified himself firstly with Zaku ('*We're in his shoes.*') (panels 2 to 4),

then with Sakura ('*We've got him.*') (panel 5), then back to Zaku ('*We're gonna get*

killed…someone is on top of me.') (panel 6), and finally he shifted back to his own

disposition and detached himself from both characters ('*You realise it wasn't you.*')

(panel 7). The four close shots drew Wesley to empathise and identify with Zaku, while

the alternation of perspectives and distance (panels 5 and 7) shifted his identification

between characters and finally detached him from being a vicarious participant to

become more of an outside observer of the battle, when panel 7 zooms out to present an

omniscient perspective. As Pérez Ríu, (2015, 184) points out, "the dynamic

confrontation of shot and counter shot allows for the expression of the dramatic

relationships between characters". The example discussed above not only engaged the

reader with the intense interaction between the characters, but also placed them in

positions that align their views with the character's viewpoint, hence rendering dual

identification with the character who sees and the one being seen. According to Phillips

(2003), the alignment with a character's viewpoint in a film can generate a close bond

and identification, as the spectator grows to depend on the character for their 'take'. At

the same time, the character under scrutiny speaks directly to the spectator about their

story and feelings to attract allegiance. In this way, the spectator is placed in a double

structure of viewer/viewed (Browne 2004) and is likely to develop dual identification

with both the one viewing and the one being viewed. Similarly, the 'dual perspective'

viewing experience is evident in Wesley's reading of this double spread – the close

shots of Zaku's facial expression drew an empathetic response from him, which

counterpointed the focalisation through Sakura. The shifting identification with

characters showed that close-ups enhanced Wesley's emotional bond with Zaku and

subdued his bond with Sakura despite the fact that he was seeing through Sakura's point of view.

The selected examples of close-ups in the two manga show that the employment of this technique allows artists to particularise and intensify what may otherwise remain more diffuse. This narrative tool sheds light on the psychological development of a character and the emerging logic of the character's life situation. It invites the reader to respond to the underlying emotions, while keeping readers in temporary suspense, due to the limited information available about the overall situation, until reversion to long shots brings what was previously invisible and abstract into view.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated the affordances of close-ups as a narrative tool in manga. Close-ups engage readers with a character's psychological development and the tension that is built upon a character's emotional and cognitive responses to their situation. Manga artists employ close-ups extensively to preview, review, or break down emotional moments in a story, so as to slow down the narrative and encourage readers to reflect on the inner emotional drama of a character. Responses from the participants of this study showed dynamic interactions between these readers and the manga characters, as the virtual camera invited the readers into the world in the panels as vicarious participants. Through close-ups, the readers experienced emotional proximity, which renders a sense of intimacy and identification with the fictional characters. This is crucial to their immersive experience during the reading process. This article has focused on close-up framing and its potential to induce an emotional reading experience of manga. Future studies may look into the use of other cinematic techniques in manga, such as point-of-view editing and angles, and their impact on the emotional life of manga and reading engagement.

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	Chest-above	Face	Eyes	Total
*N*6	111	208	54	373
*VK*4	115	199	67	381

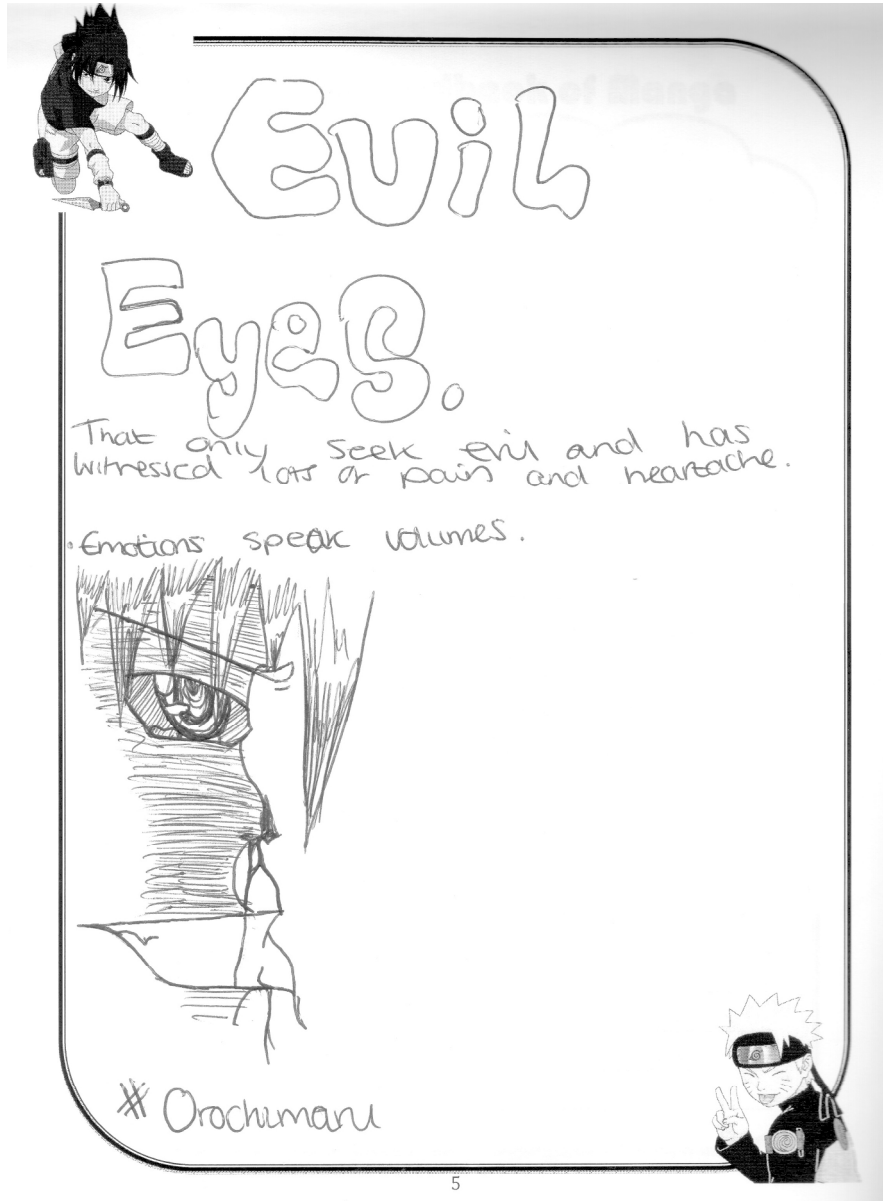Figure 1. Percentage of close-ups in the corpuses
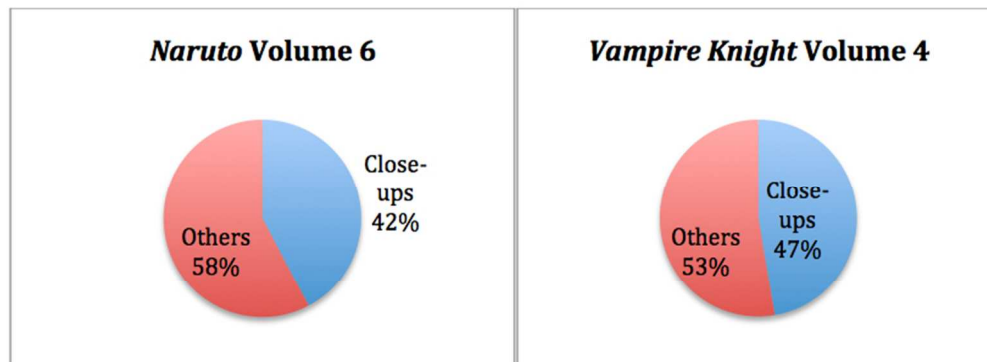
289x108mm (72 x 72 DPI)

Figure 2. Travis's reading reflection of N6 (drawing)

806x1096mm (72 x 72 DPI)

Figure 3. VK4, p. 40 (Vampire Knight © Matsuri Hino 2004/HAKUSENSHA, Inc. Image used courtesy of Hakusensha, Inc.)

109x190mm (150 x 150 DPI)

Figure 4. N6, pp. 174-175 (NARUTO © 1999 by Masashi Kishimoto/SHUEISHA Inc. Image used courtesy of Shueisha Inc.)

242x190mm (150 x 150 DPI)