In Between Panel and Gutter

A creative exploration of panels and gutters in Manga storytelling

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Master of Art & Design

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2011

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and believe, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor materials which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any another degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements.

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2011

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed their time and knowledge to the realisation of this research.

First, I would like to give my appreciation to my primary supervisor Dr King Tong Ho for his academic support, advice and encouragement, and for offering inspiration. It was my honour to be your student.

I would also like to thank for my secondary supervisor Simon Clark for his professional knowledge and enthusiastic support.

I would like to thank for my classmates and my family for their suggestions and discussions which helped me with this project.

Content

Abstract

This project investigates how panels and gutters can be creatively reconstructed within a page to reinforce the nature of a narrative in the context of manga. The work experiments with the visual communication of emotions and meanings through symbolised manga panels, gutters and their interactions in relation to the symbolic strategies used in manga storytelling.

Panels and gutters are fundamental components of manga storytelling and in certain genres they have been developed to become important elements contributing to meaning. For example, Paul Gravett (2004) has studied girls' comics and suggests that "they give the panels whatever shape and configuration best suit the emotion they want to evoke" (p. 78). This project explores the concept of "denotation[1]" to transform panels, gutters and pages to create connotative meanings.

In addition, using Kenya Hara's (2007) idea of "emptiness" (p. 241) as a conceptual approach, the experiments further build up a particular visual strategy of manga storytelling, ranging from the generation of emotions, to creating particular connotations to influence the readers' perception of, and imaginings about, the story.

The outcome is a short story in the form of manga which applies this developed visual strategy to explore the use of symbolic panels, the imaginative space of the gutters and alternative approaches to page design. The constituents of this project are 80 percent practice-based work, accompanied by 20 percent exegesis as a complement.

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[1] Denotation refers to the relationship between the signifier and it's signified. Denotation is routinely treated as the definitional, 'literal', 'obvious' or 'commonsense' meaning of a sign. (Chandler, n.d.).

Introduction

This thesis explores the potential of panels, gutters and page design in the context of Manga. The experiments engage with the symbolic meanings of panels and gutters to reinforce the expression of emotions and meanings. The notion of 'emptiness' is employed to enrich the way readers participate in the narrative to develop a particular approach to manga storytelling, thereby strengthening the communication of the narrative.

The exegesis is divided into three chapters:
Chapter 1 introduces the substantial structure of manga and related theories of manga storytelling. It discusses the theoretical application of the denotative sign and its possible connotative meanings in relation to manga panels and gutters. The notion of 'emptiness' is explored in its ability to evoke readers' emotions and imaginations within the gutters. The chapter also provides the justification for using the concepts of symbolic panels and the significant contribution of gutters to the imagined meaning, in order to develop particular visual strategies to the approach of manga storytelling.

Chapter 2 establishes the practical research strategies and methods used. It reflects on the experiments and their theoretical considerations; and analyses the potentials and developments that underpin the research strategies used.

Chapter 3 provides a series of commentaries on the experiments of the research in progress. It critiques the practical methods employed and their conceptual resolutions to examine the effectiveness when applied to manga panels, gutters and page layout. The commentaries also discuss the visual strategies and influences on readers' perceptions used to develop a particular approach to manga storytelling.

Chapter 1: Consideration of Related Theories and Concepts

1.1.   The relationship of images and texts in manga

Scott McCloud (1994) considers manga are a "vessel", parallel to the video and novel, which are a particular medium to present narratives with images and texts (p. 6). However, Dylan Horrocks (2001) has a different view from Mcloud, and revaluates the definition of manga as a special narrative genre "picture book"; and posits that the images should dominate the texts in manga storytelling. He proposes that a manga narrative can still be performed effectively without text, through skilful manipulation of shots and storytelling, such as in Masashi Tanaka's "*Gon*[2]" (Tanaka, 1991, p.23). Instead of using verbal dialogue, *Gon* reinforces the use of gesture, facial expression, and pictorial manga language such as speed lines and sweat drops to narrate a vivid adventure. Therefore, the images in *Gon* dominate the story and even supersede the text in certain situations. This suggests that applications of the manga components of gutters and panels promise potential for use in the visual strategy of manga narration. In this sense, Horrock's claim also advocates such potential.

1.1.1   The dynamics in panels and gutters - closure

Manga, which is called a "comic" in the Western context, is usually composed of six to nine rectangular panels on a page. The panels display sequential moments or states for providing information to the reader to compose a story. As Mario Saraceni (2003) states: "The reader considers the panel as a portion of narrative, where something actually takes place and takes time" (p. 7).

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[2] *Gon* is a fictional Japanese manga series which narratives a little dinosaur's life in the modern jungle. Most of the characters are animals and can't speak a language.

The blank space between panels is called the "gutter". It separates the individual panels and its contained narrative. In those empty space(s), readers have to connect the images in the panels with their imaginations and are prompted to create their own meanings. Mcloud (1994) utilises the word "closure" to describe the relationship between panel and gutter. He states in his book *Understanding Comics*, that closure is the grammar that underpins the language of manga storytelling and is the process of "observing the parts but perceiving the whole" (p. 63). The closure forces readers to connect the visual fractions of intermittent movements or to construct the whole scene through their imagination. Therefore, when incorporating the concept of closure, I consider that gutters are threads that connect the narrative of the story; they ask that "the reader have to provide it [the idea] for themselves" (Saraceni, 2003, p. 9). The function of closure reveals the characteristic of manga narration which impels the reader to actively participate in completing the narrative. This transformative process is open-ended. I am interested in exploring the possibility of designing a visual structure that can influence the reader's process of interpretation and reinforce their emotional involvement when driving the flow of the story.

1.1.2   Mise-en-page

A manga page is composed of panels and gutters. As Will Eisner (1985) declares, "what goes INSIDE the panel is the PRIMARY!" (p. 63), and readers voyage through the scenario panel by panel to experience the manga story. They absorb information in sequential order and this reveals the timing of the narrative events. However, Raeburn (2004) suggests another way to read the manga which is "to pull back and consider the composition all at once, as you would the facade of a building" (p. 25). His idea encourages readers to enjoy reading the structure of the manga page and to observe the composition that manipulates the rhythm of the manga story. This reading

tactic illustrates one of the particular characteristics of manga: the consideration of *mise-en-page[3]*. *Mise-en-page* refers to the application of the size, shape, and position of panels and gutters in a page. It also includes the arrangement of a page to utilise the "disjuncture[4]" between pages. The concept of *mise-en-page* has inspired me to explore the potential of panels and gutters by considering the whole page as a panel, thereby expanding on the possibilities of sequential variations of *mise-en-page* in manga storytelling.

1.1.3   Reading priority

When changing the panels and gutters, it is inevitable that the composition of panels within a page will also be disrupted. This brings a typical problem of manga narration: the confusion of reading order. In Western manga (comics), it is common to read from left to right, top to bottom, which is called a 'Z-path'. Neil Cohn (2008) utilises a series of complex compositions of the panels to evaluate readers' reading priority of manga (See Figure 1). He develops an "ECS Preference Rule[5]" (p. 16) and this is an extension of the Z-path to apply to the navigation of reading manga. However, from his experiments (shown as Figure 2), I have noted that most of the panels maintain regular shapes and usually fill up the whole page space.

I propose that regular shaped panels can also assist readers to instinctively follow the reading flow. In addition, these regular shapes could allow for Cohn's ECSPR analysis which uses the directions of horizontal and vertical (ibid., p. 19). However, this could cause a 'blind side' with a circular arrangement of panels whereby the irregular

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[3] French for "placement on the page".

[4] Disjuncture functions when the reader is turning the page. There is a little pause of time from the bottom-right panel to the top-left panel on the next page. This offers an opportunity to manipulate the reader's expectations and the impact of their emotions.

[5] ECSPR, the abbreviation of *external compositional structure preference rule*, is a system of reading manga. It analyses the rule of reading order. It includes the rule of entry constraint: 1.Go to the top left corner. 2. If no top left panel, go to the leftmost panel that is highest, and apply the navigational constraint: 1.Follow the outer border, 2. Follow the inner border, 3. Move to the right, 4.move straight down, 5. If nothing is to right, go to the far left and down, 6. Go to the panel that has not been read yet.

composition may prohibit a clear and concise vertical and horizontal plane. The shape and compositions of symbolic panels could be random and varying which may also lead to reader confusion of reading order. Therefore, in my opinion, the ECSPR analysis can function in most formal compositions of manga panels, but it might not be sufficient enough to navigate the manga reading strategy in a sequence of symbolic and irregular panels. The reader might still hesitate to move between a spider web-like or a flower-like structure of panels which are in a circular composition. Therefore, in my project I endeavour to explore other possibilities in dealing with the challenge of reading order. In Cohn's experiments, he only employed empty, blank panels to examine ECSPR within various compositions and he does not consider the way that subject matter can drive the reading flow.

Greg M. Smith (1999) explored the diversity of panels of a printed manga in relation to the static frame of an on-screen animation. He states, "the size of these comic's frames makes the comic's reader glance back and forth to parse the information in the frame" (p. 36) and the reader would voyage along with the character's movement and action. (ibid., p. 36). He has addressed the significant role that subject matter within the panel has in relation to the composition of *mise-en-scene*. In other words, the design of the image and subject matter within the panel is able to help guide the reader in navigating the narrative flow on the page.

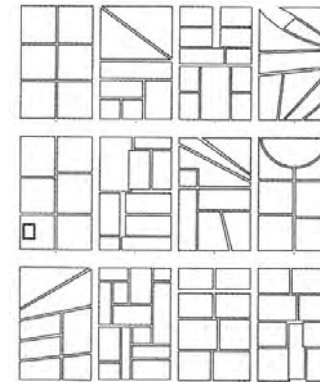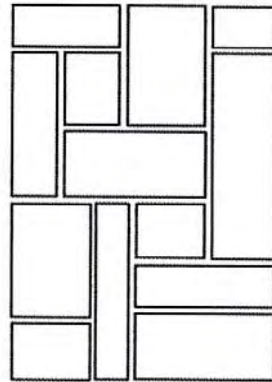Figure 1. Cohn, N. (2008). Navigating Comics. p. 6. Tufts University.

Figure 2. Cohn, N. (2008). Navigating Comics. p. 28. Tufts University.

1.2 From rational, emotional, to connotative

Manga panels are created for two purposes: showing narrative content and manipulating the rhythm of the story. The basic shape of manga panels is a rectangle, which is similar to the traditional visible area in a TV screen. The rectangular panels efficiently utilise the space of a page as a parade system. This repetitive shape (and/or size) of the composition of panels creates a rational arrangement to guide readers intuitively to follow the order and concentrate on the story content (see Figure 3). Within this rational structure, emotional stimuli and narrative clues are contained within the panels.

However, in order to visually create the emotion or atmosphere of the story, such a rational repetitive flow of panels is sometimes inadequate. The Japanese female mangaka[6] has developed a particular genre of manga. It unchains the formal application of the manga panel and utilises the massive overlapping of irregular shapes of panels to foster emotional involvement (see Figure 4). Paul Gravett (2006) has studied this genre of girls' manga and suggests that "they give the panels whatever shape and configuration best suit the emotion they want to evoke" (p. 78). The female mangaka strives to visually portray the sensation experienced by characters through the panels and gutters. For example, in Figure 4, Miki Aihara (2005) utilises slanted panels in the middle of a page to show the turbulent feelings of the character, and the emotion is accentuated through the use of a dark gradient in the gutter to imply that the character is submerged in profound sadness. In my opinion, this strategy could successfully generate an emotional response in the viewer. It treats the composition of overlapped and merged sequences of panels as collage; and has expanded the function of manga panels.

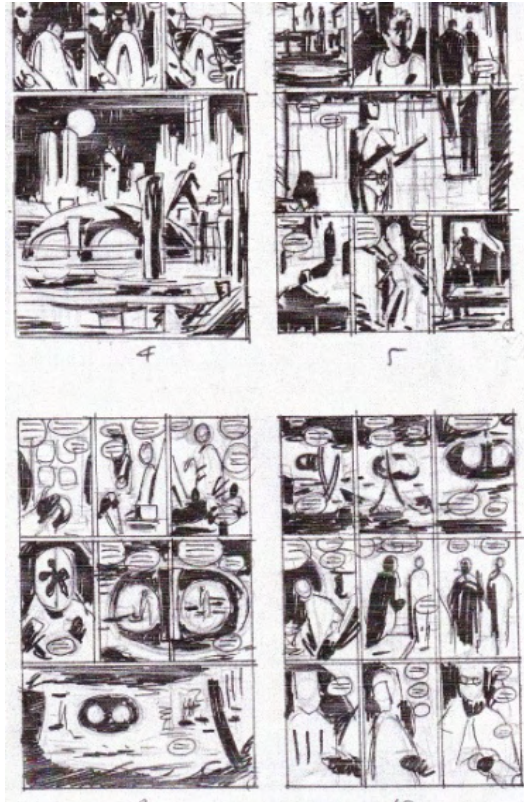[6] Mangaka is the Japanese term for the author of manga.

Figure 3. Gibbons, D. (2008). *Watching The Watchmen*.

Figure 4. Aihara, M. (2005). *Hot Gimmick* (Vol. 9).

1.2.1   Inserting messages into manga panels

To physically translate a panel into a meaningful and effective element in manga storytelling, certain semiotic theories are worth investigating. Semiotics can be defined as "the science of produced meaning" (Danesi, 2007, p. 3). There are many manifestations of semiotics; one of the basis of semiotics which I intend to adopt in the panel design is the use of symbols. Daniel Chandler defines a symbol as "a mode in which the signifier does not

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resemble the signified but which is fundamentally arbitrary or purely conventional" (Chandler, n.d.). In other words, we need to know what the symbols stand for in advance if we want to understand the meaning. The creation of manga involves a certain degree of the use of symbolism. Saraceni (2003) describes the stylised drawing of an object as symbol and suggests that "recognised symbols are used very commonly in comics and form their pictorial vocabulary" (p. 25). For example, the manga lines form symbolic elements such as a character's facial expressions or gestures to underpin this special language. Therefore, I have investigated this aspect of symbolism in manga and explore the possibility to also transform panels and gutters into symbols to convey meanings.

Osamu Tezuka, the 'father' of Japanese manga, has utilised the designed panels to create an atmosphere that resonates within the episode, as shown in Figure 5. As Gravett (2004) states: "Notice too how much he changes all the panel layouts to diagonals as soon as the surgery begins [on the page], as if he is 'cutting up' the pages" (p.68). This composition of panels has implications not only for the emotional response in the readers, but also ascribes symbolic information for them to respond to the episode. At this point, the layout of these panels exceeds the usual devices used in manga storytelling. Its role has become a symbol to influence the readers' perception and interpretation of the story. Further, the use of panels in this way can be seen as a 'sign', and according to Chandler "the connotation is used to refer to the socio-cultural and 'personal' associations (ideological, emotional etc.) of the sign" (Chandler, n.d.). In other words, the connotative meanings of these 'symbolic' panels to a great extent relies on the readers' comprehension and conventional recognition of them to be able to construct meaning.

Therefore, in regards to the comprehensibility, I have noted the difficulty of using symbolised panels as a mode of communication in this project, because the intended understanding and interpretation by the readers are not guaranteed. In Figure 5, Tezuka deals with the meaning of symbolic panels through an unconventional mode of interaction between panels. It evokes in the reader the idea of 'cutting up' in the surgery scenario through the design of panels and gutters in this medical science manga. In this sense, the story has become a support to

induce readers to recognise the meaning of the symbolic panels. Thus, the relationship between the panels and the story has become more connected and they complement each other to present multiple layers of meanings of the episode. In my opinion, this application of panels indeed provides emotional stimulus to evoke resonance within the readers, and produces the meaning to support this episode. I intend to further extend this idea of designing panels based on significant symbols to reinforce intended meanings.

Such a design strategy has brought into question the conventional function of the panel. So the questions can then be asked: What could be the expanded role of the panel? An amplifier of emotion? Or a significant symbol of an episode?
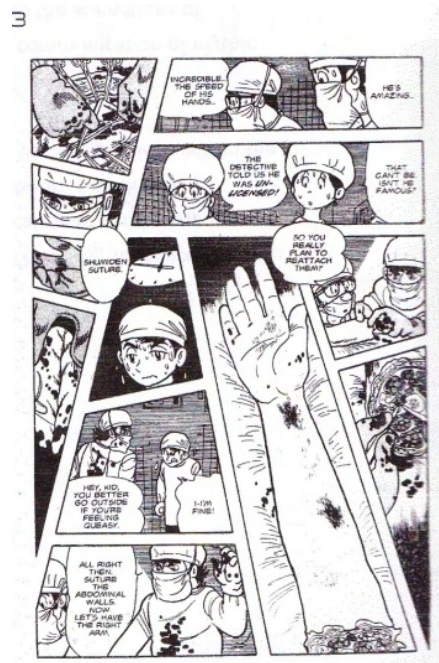

Figure 5. Gravett, P. (2004). *Manga: Sixty Years Of Japanese Comics*.

1.2.2   Interlacing of panels and gutters as narrative device

Mark Joyce (2003) describes cinematic montage as "when two pieces of film are placed side by side [and] the audience immediately draws the conclusion that the two shots must be related in some way" (p. 394). The way manga performs is similar to montage. They both ask readers or audiences to create meaning from different portions of the image within a panel. However, it is also important to mention the cinematic tactic of 'intellectual montage', which places different images in collision to form meaning. For example, Joyce refers to an episode in *October* (Eisenstein, 1928) where: "a shot of a mechanical golden peacock is placed next to a shot of a man (the peacock does not form part of the world of the film, that is, it is non-diegetic[7]). The audience draws the conclusion that the man is vain" (Joyce, 2003, p. 396). This idea of creating meaning from the collaboration of diegetic and non-diegetic shots has inspired this project to transform gutters to become connotative signifieds.

McCloud (1993) states that manga functions as the process of winking eyes and the gutter is like the moment we close our eyes (p. 92). That is the time when imagination comes out to form meaning in between a sequence of images. I adapt his metaphorical implications and intend to influence the 'forming' of meaning through the manipulation of the gutters. The meaning could be changed if I can insert another image in readers' mind during 'the moment they close their eyes'. I believe gutters can further expand the function of symbolic panels (see p. 14). Thus I explore the possibility of transforming the non-diegetic gutters into connotative signifieds.

1.2.3   Blank gutters as a space for imagination

Kenya Hara's (2007) idea of 'emptiness' offers conceptual synergy in exploring the expansion of the functions of gutters in this project. He states "communication happens when the recipient, offered not a message but an

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[7] Non-diegetic refers to an element which does not exist in the world of the story. For example, the background music is non-diegetic.

empty vessel, supplies the meaning himself" (p. 146). Hara's idea of emptiness has encouraged me to explore the function of the blank space of gutters to motivate the reader's active participation in the process of interpretation. Hara's design approach to Muji[8], through the use of conceptual emptiness so the audience themselves can evaluate the value of Muji products, allows the consumer to take active control of the cognition of value.

However, when applying this strategy to the blank space of the manga gutter, the idea of emptiness struggles to function efficiently. The traditional habit of reading sequential art would motivate the readers to produce meaning from the empty space through other visual elements (symbols, signs etc.) around the gutter. As Eisenstein states (as sited in Barber, 2002): "in nature we never see anything isolated, but everything in connection with something else which is before it, beside it, under it, and over it[9]" (p. 5). In reading a sequential narrative, readers will try to connect different images and construct their perceived meaning. Raymond Briggs' (1982) project *When the Wind Blows* is an example of the successful use of emptiness in manga. He draws a huge gap, two full blank pages, between two episodes (as shown in Figure 6). When reading through this story, the readers would be prompted to evaluate this blank space by connecting it to the previous episode that culminates in a nuclear explosion. The empty pages ask for an imaginative resolution. The reader has to weave the narrative in between these two episodes. Therefore emptiness indeed induces the readers to actively imagine the horror of a nuclear explosion. Again, the conceptual emptiness of the gutter must correspond with the content / imagery inside the panel for it to be effective.

"Mood can clearly play an important part in perception" (Chandler, 2008). Chandler's statement indicates that readers with different moods might have completely different feelings for the same object. Briggs also skilfully employs variances in mood to influence readers' perceptions of the empty space. Briggs instils a variety of moods

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[8] Muji is a Japanese brand. Its products are designed with pure, simple and light colours and usually without any pattern.
[9] Barber notes that this quotation is from a conversation between Eisenstein and Eckerman in 5 June 1825, translated by John Oxenford.

in the contents / images of the panels prior to and after the blank pages. The variances in mood facilitate the readers to construct a mental scene within the blank page. Then is this blank page a gutter?

In Briggs' project, there are direct and indirect approaches to the empty blanks as a space for imagination. How can the empty space of gutters (if a blank page is also a gutter) function efficiently for such a purpose? In Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No. 2: Resurrection* (1895, Mahler), he utilises a period of countermelody to encourage the audience to recall the main theme of this symphony themselves. This tactic is similar to the idea of emptiness but it provides some auditory hints to facilitate the audiences to shape their imaginations.

This tactic inspires me to consider the use of 'designed' emptiness through shaped gutters. I intend to utilise the outline of the gutter to be a visual 'hint'. The shape of the gutter's edge would have the potential to facilitate readers' perceptions of the intended meaning of the author, through their own imagination.

Figure 6. Briggs, R. (2003). *Blooming Books*.

1.3 Empty space of gutter as a vessel of fantasy

In this project, I challenge the function of gutters to support the reader to develop the story in their imagination. I look for the possibilities of transforming the role of gutters into characters who actually participate in the story.

The ancients created fiction stories and fantasy characters to explain unknown phenomena and to eliminate their emotion of fear. As Denis Dutton (2009) states: "[Fiction] helps them to navigate life in control of their emotions rather than being controlled by them" (p. 123). Certain characteristics of mythic fantasies are worth considering when looking at expanding the function of gutters. Ancient people created fantasy through observation, imagination, and emotional preferences. In addition, they would spontaneously supply values to the fantasies through their cultural cognition. This process of forming fantasies is parallel to the conceptual function of emptiness. Panels provide narrative while gutters provide an imaginative space. I endeavour to investigate the characteristics of the empty space of gutters in conjunction with panels to expand their interlaced potential as a narrative device.

1.3.1 Bringing non-diegetic gutters into diegetic characters

One of the interesting characteristics of mythic fantasies is the way they existed in the ancient times. The ancients believed in fantasised stories and characters that do not exist. Dutton (2009) says fantasies "enter into the total motivational life of individuals, shaping and directing the belief systems and their behaviour" (p. 123). In my opinion, fantasies exist in the form of interpretations which are heavily influenced by the ideological beliefs of society at that time. People interact with fictions through the form of beliefs or customs and in time, fiction and beliefs are fused. Fiction isn't fiction anymore and has become the belief.

In principle, the gutter is usually seen as a non-diegetic element; however, I have suggested its potential role as

signifier to generate meaning (see p. 14). Smith (1999) comments that: "the black comic gutter intrudes into the diegetic world and becomes a graphic element in its own right" (p. 42). The black gutter obtrusively occupies some of the panel's territory (shown as Figure 7). It forces readers to connect the black area to the narrative image and compels them to create meaning within the story.

This use of the black gutter lends itself to be further applied to the concept of emptiness to transform the non-diegetic gutters into 'imaginative' diegetic. In addition, the fantasies of the ancient mythic stories also support the notion of them acting in the role of a conceptual gutter.
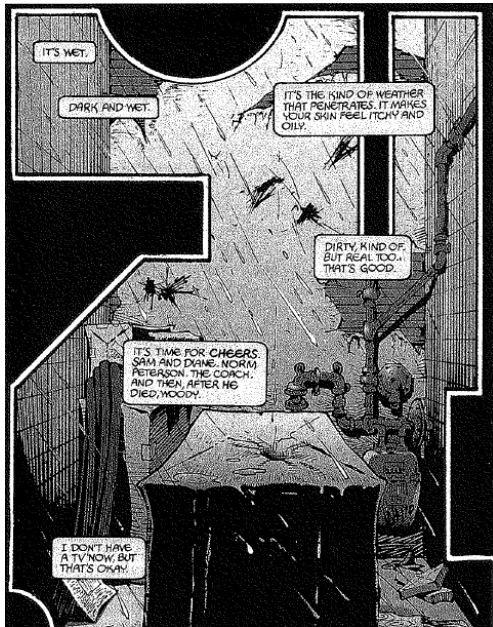
Figure 7. Smith, G. M. (1999). Shaping The MAXX: Adapting the Comic Book Frameto Television.

Chapter 2: Methods and Evaluation of Practical Research Strategies

2.1 Design approaches

This chapter discusses the method of research and the evolution of the practical process for developing manga panels and gutters through a variety of related theoretical approaches. The methods used in this project are strongly based on prior research to develop strategies of manga storytelling. Inferential and heuristic approaches were employed to construct the overarching methods used in the project.

Organising

Considering possible solution of disadvantage and adjusting the project from advantages.

Inference & Forming new idea

Looking for possible extensions and logical solutions actively to form new idea.

Analysing the particularity of main subject

Criticising

Gathering feedback from peers and focusing readers to consider from other perspective.

Reseach methods

Conceptual sketch

Transfering idea into rough visual images to observe the initial effect.

Revising

Considering the result from self-evaluation and design a revision of the exapriement.

Self-evaluation

Analysing the conflicts and supports between theoritical and practical approach by self-evaluation.

Studing related theories

Pointing out the focusing area from practical sketches and further studying related theories and knowledges.

Diagram1

The research process started with investigating key issues regarding the main subject and then progressed with a cyclical research system (Diagram 1). To practically observe and perceive the impact of the creative process, I created a series of conceptual sketches, motifs of an episode, and the related shapes of panels and gutters. I then analysed the initial sketches and developed the potential outcomes to locate possible problems. Using an inferential approach, I collected associated data from related themes and looked for possible solutions in a logical way. The inferential solutions and their related theories were applied to self-examine the effect of the initial sketches. This was followed by making revisions on the trial versions of the same narrative. Furthermore, I sought opinions from peers and supervisors to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of the trial versions from a reader's point of view, to finish the cyclic progress of creating that version.

Theoretical research that adopts an inferential approach involves data collecting and case studies to provide feedback, which guides the trial and error process of the practical development of the project.

2.2   Evaluation of practical research strategies

This section discusses the practical methods used in this project and presents reflective considerations of the experiment in progress. The practical research methods can be defined into two stages. Initially, this research strives to explore the methods of transforming panels and gutters to function as signifiers within the story. The research process used is designed to advance the examination of the efficacy of conveying semiotic meanings; with the primary goal of creating emotional stimuli. And in using this process, it aims to transform the qualities of gutters to form a characteristic that participates in a fantasised narrative through the notion of 'emptiness'.

2.2.1 Transforming manga components into signified: panel, gutter, and page layout

The implementation part of the project started with an exploration of the application of panels and gutters; this subsequently extended to an exploration of the composition of page layout and narrative. This approach enabled me to experiment with the function of each fundamental component of manga and to discuss the practical methods which would be adopted into further integrated research practice.

From panel to signified

Panels are usually considered as containers that encapsulate narrative. Readers follow the story visually through the scenarios presented in the images within panels. As Eisner (1985) states, "the panel [is regarded] as the medium of control" (p. 40). Panels could directly influence the story flow and readers' perceptions. This is the particular characteristic of manga narrative. Comparing the visual narrative approaches of film and manga, the manipulation of the panel's shape, size and position could provide many possible visual strategies within manga storytelling. Many Japanese mangakas for example utilise various shapes of panels to reveal the emotion of the episode; and meanings are portrayed visually through recognised patterns or symbols to enrich the tactics of manga storytelling.

Using a commonly recognised example, the shape of the heart is considered a symbol of love and joy within some cultural contexts. Therefore, an image of a smiling face might convey different meanings when placed within a general rectangle panel and heart-like panel. There is an obvious impact of the collective interpretation of the meaning of this combination when I analysed the function of this symbolic panel. While the shape of panel provides emotional stimuli, it is the content inside the panel that unveils the specificity of the narrative. Figures 8, 9, 10 and 11 suggest different narratives around emotional engagement with this theme. Thus, in this way the outline of the panel functions as signifier to interact with the image inside to specify meaning and emotion.

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Figure 8. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Smile 1*.
Pencil & ink on paper. 100x65mm.

Figure 9. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Smile 2.*
Pencil & ink on paper. 100 x 65 mm.
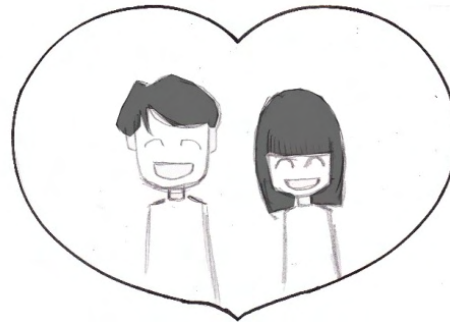
Figure 10. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Smile 3.*
Pencil & ink on paper. 100 x 65 mm.
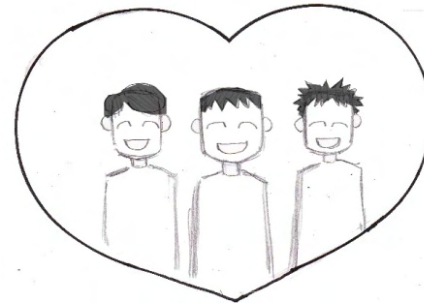
Figure 11. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Smile 4.*
Pencil & ink on paper. 100 x 65 mm.

Transforming the gutter into the signified

The gutter is the space between the panels. It controls the rhythm of the story and connects all the fragmented images within the panels. This experiment investigates the possibility of transferring these spaces into signifiers to generate new meanings. Gutters provide a conceptual space of imagination through the presentation of blank space (emptiness). In a way, gutters influence the content of unseen episodes by providing a space for the imagination. I experimented with montage as a visual strategy to connect the imaginative spaces of gutters with the narratives inside the panels. By juxtaposing the panels and symbolic gutters, readers are encouraged to create their own meanings of an episode.

One consideration is how the design of the gutter can affect the capacity of the imagination. A specific finding is that the narrative inside the panels can have a significant influence on the conceptual space of the imaginative representation of the symbolic gutter. Figures 12 and 13 are composed with the same symbolic gutter of a heart, however the emotions stimulated by each of them are different in capacity (effect) and meanings. For example, Figure 12 suggests an obvious happy ending but in Figure 13, the implied meaning is ambiguous and sometimes paradoxical. This example of a commonly recognised 'heart' symbolic gutter has demonstrated the connected relationship between symbolic gutter and the narrative inside the panels.
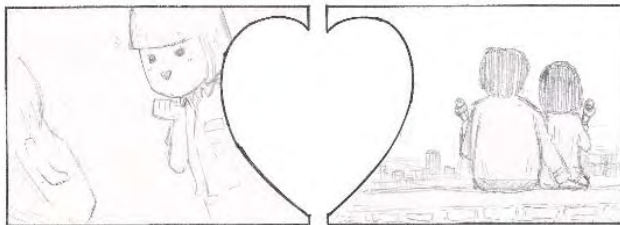
Figure 12. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Love in gutter1.*
Pencil & ink on paper. 180 x 60 mm.
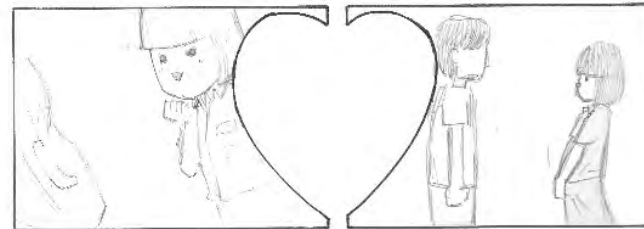
Figure 13. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Love in gutter2.*   Pencil &
ink on paper. 180 x 60 mm.

Design of Page layout

The previous experiment has also opened up for consideration, the page layout of the composed panels and gutters.

Raeburn (2004) suggests a particular way of reading manga, which is to pull back and to see the composition of the whole page (see p. 9). Eisenstein (1825) deemed that "the reader would never see things isolated" (see p. 17). Readers might grab the idea of the narrative of the panels through the page layout. In this sense, the manga page layout could be considered as collage, expanding the design of *mise-en-scene* from within the panel to crossing over the whole page. Page layout controls the reading rhythm of the story flow and reinforces emotional stimuli it contains. Figures 14 and 15 are an experiment that illustrates the same story of a fight between two boys with two different tactics of layout; ending with one of them being beaten by the other and leaving with anger. The page layout of Figure 14 employed a traditional arrangement of 3x3 regular grids. Such a repetitive and static composition of panels and gutters only directs the sequential flow of the story. In figure 15, the various shapes and sizes of the panels manipulate the rhythm of the story and imply the relationship between the characters. At this point, I think the design of the page layout could be part of the strategy of manga story telling. The
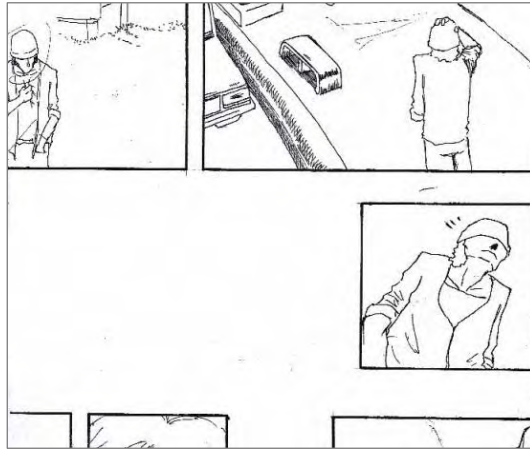

Figure 14. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Fight1.* Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

Figure 15. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Fight2.* Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

role of panels and gutters becomes significant once the design of page layout shapes and composition of gutters and panels work collaboratively; thus impacting on the narrative of the story.

2.2.2   Characterising the gutters

Reshaping non-diegetic gutters to become diegetic characters

Fantasised myths are another conceptual body of knowledge (see p. 19) that inform this project. Mythic fiction functions through the belief in fantasised figures, which are 'virtual' in a contemporary sense. In the following discussion, I call such fantasised figures 'virtual figures'. Transforming the space of gutters into a fantasised character unfolds possibilities. In doing so, I have attempted to develop a strategy to reshape non-diegetic gutters to become diegetic characters. The notion of emptiness informs the visual strategy of the project and enables me to reinforce the function of gutters, in order to create significant imaginative meaning within the blank space; thereby supporting the transformation of the non-diegetic gutter into a diegetic character.

The tactic of evoking the readers' imaginings of the virtual figures, is one of the research strategies explored here. In the initial experiment (Figure 16), I separated the fantasy world and narrative within the area of panel and gutter. Following Briggs [see p. 18] I eliminated certain panels and created vast empty spaces to provide an imaginative space. However, I felt this does not lead readers to a space of creative fantasy. Instead the blank space becomes blockage to the flow of the narrative. I then tried to change the regular shape of the panel (or gutter) to become an 'edge' symbolic gutter to further induce readers to perceive the denotative sign and to create imaginative fantasies themselves about the meaning (shown as Figure 17). I note that Smith's (1999) idea certainly supports this method of blending the boundary of diegetic and non-diegetic elements (see p. 19). The unnatural edge of the panel shape intrudes into the diegetic world within the panel. Therefore, it is possible that this irregular shape encourages readers to create imaginings within the blank space and it also facilitates those

imaginings to cross over into the diegetic world within the panel.

Figure 16. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Desire1*.
Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.
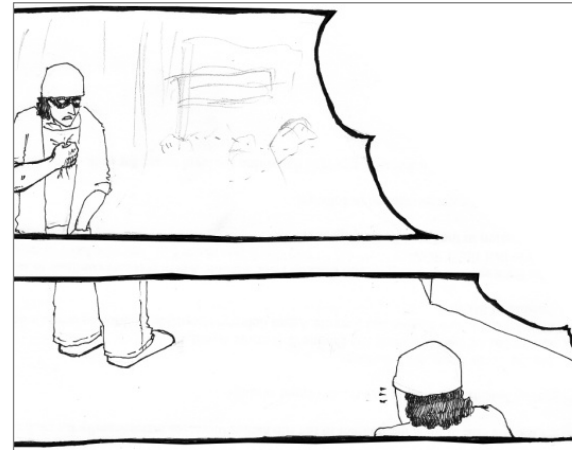
Figure 17. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Desire2*.
Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

Movement

Another method to achieve a characterised gutter is to create movement and a variation of gutters. A character in a story should have his or her reactions and interactions in the diegetic world. Ricardo Imbert's and Angelica de Antonio's (2005) strategy of building a virtual 3D character in a vividly believable role inspires this method. They reinforce the interaction between their 3D character and its environment to convince the audience of the character's authenticity (p. 63). This has parallels with how mythic fantasies have interacted with ancient peoples. A characterised gutter could also interact with the scenario inside the panel through the action and variation of its virtual figure. In addition, the action or movement can also reinforce the effect of the denotative sign in the gutter. In Figure 18, the mouth-like shape that is composed by the blank gutters narrates greed and its

appearance varies along with the boy's desire.

Figure 18. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Desire2.* Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

Chapter 3: Commentary on practical experiments

In this chapter, I give a critical overview of my experimental practice which will lead to the final exhibition work. These experiments were performed to respond to the theoretical potentialities that I have established: empty space and shape of gutter; transforming the non-diegetic to diegetic; and collaboration of gutter, panel and page design. This exegesis does not cover a critical commentary of the final work. Any supplementary information on the final work and exhibition will be compiled and included to complete the exegesis after the examination and prior to the submission of the library copy.

3.1   Amplifier of emotion

Fighting

This series of experiments (see Figure 19, 20 and 21) examine the influence of panel design and *mise-en-page*. It was performed through an exploration of the composition and shape of the panels and their variation on the visual impact to the episode.

Figure 19. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Fight1.*
Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

Figure 20. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Fight2.*
Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

Figure 21. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Fight3.*
Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

The story in Figure 19 follows the traditional prototype and portrays the scenario of a fight between two men. It provides a clear reading flow to the reader. Gutter and *mise-en-page* do not function to help with the narrative. In Figure 20, the *mise-en-page* of these panels is modified. I rearranged the size of the panels to maneuver the rhythm of this story. Larger panels highlight the primary narrative and its atmosphere and smaller ones give details of the narratives through size difference and composition to create movement of time and space to accentuate the emotional tension. The relative position of the two men's close-up shots operates to portray their relative mental states. The long rectangular panel that separates the page is employed as a symbol of their conflict. Figure 21 applies irregular composition of panels to reinforce the emotion of the episode. It reveals both

the physical and mental status of their temporal relationship. The size, shape, overlapping and the detail of the narrative inside the panels are significant and indicate the superiority of one man over the other. In a way, the hierarchical gesture of the panels is offensive and ensures that the political and physical power of the superior is clear. The squashed in-between gutter spaces correspond to the discernible empty gutter that are used to intensify the tension and the rhythm of the episode. This experiment sets out to demonstrate the impact of certain effects and their effectiveness in amplifying emotions through an expansion of the traditional, regular and repetitive shape and size of gutters.

3.2   Symbolising panels and gutters

Walking through the door

In this experiment, I explored the process of meaning making by transforming panels into signifiers. The prototype episode I designed is of a man walking through a long stairway and passing through a door. In this experiment I investigated how meanings are generated in relation to the story and design of the panels.
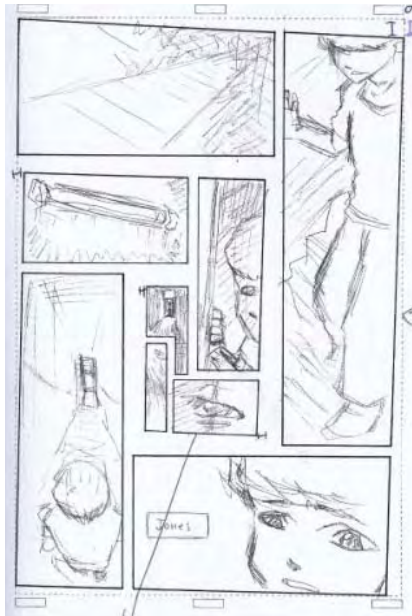
Figure 22. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Spiral.*
Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

Figure 23. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Through the door.*
Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

Figure 24. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Machine.*
Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

In Figure 22, I designed a spiral flow for reading the panel so it became the conceptual inspiration for the signified meaning. The effect of this spiral shape can be explained using Roland Barthes' (1972) idea of the mythical layer of semiotics. These panels together compose a denotative sign of a spiral, so that when the reader engages with the scenario they 'travel' through the spiral (led by the panel flow). The experience of 'travelling' provokes other associations in the reader, which influences their perception of the story. Again, the movement, gesture, size and shape of the panels (and gutters) collaborate to create an accumulated 'falling' sensation and tension when walking through the stairway to the door. Accompanied with the image on the next page (Figure 23), the impact of these two pages forms its meaning and gives me a sensation of optimism and hope in this episode. This sensation is cultivated from the accumulated emotion developed through travelling along the spiral flow of the

33

panels.

In Figure 24, I intended to insert different symbols to influence the narrative of this episode. I wanted to utilise the idea of a machine to design the shape of panels with the intention to elucidate the 'mechanical' mundane daily life of the persona. However, this experiment failed to achieve my aim. The complexity of the shapes of the panels as a symbol is not communicated. The whole design structure of the panels lacks harmony and does not help readers to construct meaning. In addition, the complexity of shapes of panels also cause confusion in the reading flow.

Hence, the main problem of reading priority has appeared within these experiments. Cohn's idea of ECSPR (see p. 10) also does not apply to both pages. However, I had utilised the protagonist's actions to guide the reading flow of Figure 22 and this helps to facilitate the spiral reading flow.

Letter

This experiment examines the cooperation of shaped gutters and *mise-en-page*. Similar to the process of "Walking through the door", I set up a prototype episode of a man receiving a letter who then starting to run. The symbols I chose to insert into the gutters are drops of water and flowers which I intended to connotate sad and happy emotions. I interlace the symbols of the gutters and the narrative within the panels to influence the meaning of the episode.

Figure 25. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Drops.*
Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

Figure 26. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Flowers.*
Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm

Reading the *mise-en-page*, readers might perceive the implied sadness and happiness of the symbols within the page. However, if we look into every panel and gutter within the story flow, the function of this symbolic gutter is not as strong as I had expected. Readers can make sense of the motif of this episode with a quick glance at the page, but the drops breaks down when glancing through the panels and gutters. In other words, while these compositions of symbolic gutters can lead to the effective pervasion of emotions within the episode, they are unable to evoke meaning and imagination in the manga narration.

Comparing the two experiments of "Walking through the door" and "Letter" in which I transformed panels and gutters, I note that the connotative panels function more effectively because of the nature of the story container.

The transformed panels are more likely to affect the narrative. In contrast, the connotative gutters are external influences where they are considered as non-diegetic elements. However, I found some interesting interactions within certain gutters that provoke readers to create a sense of connection between the gutter and the narrative content inside the panel. This idea inspires me to develop a further experiment as described in section 3.3.

Love story

This series of works investigates a set of variable panels used in manga storytelling. I utilise a flower's life to imply a couple's relationship from the beginning to breaking up. In Figure 27, the shape of blooming flower contains the episodes when they are passionately in love (left panel), the scattered shape of petals (middle panel) shows their disputations and the withered flower panels (right panel) is intended to represent the breaking up. This tactic creates an interaction between the panels and the scenarios, and forms a deeper meaning to the story.
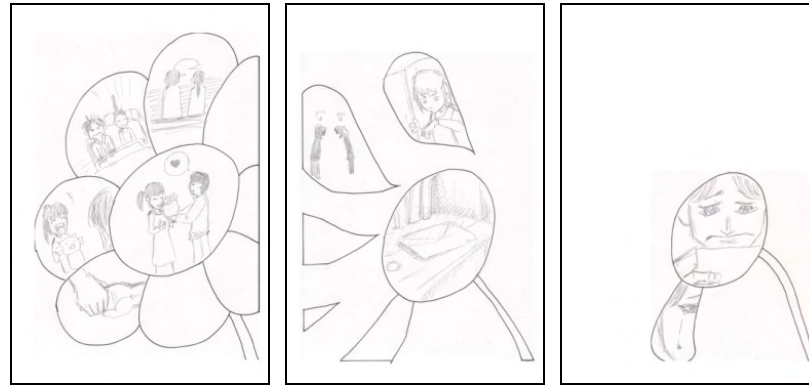
Figure 27. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Blooming to withered.* Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm x3.
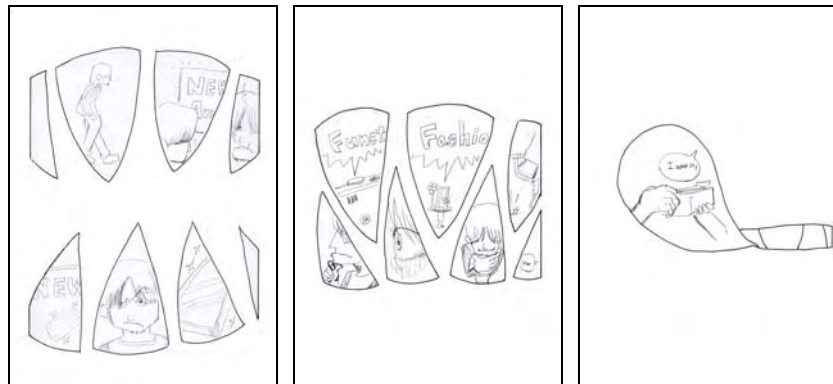
Figure 28. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Bite.* Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm x3.

Although this strategy is successful in expanding the connotative function of panels, there are also notable conflicts between the panels in that it causes confusion in reading priority. The second experiment of an eating mouth is also a significant example of such confusion (see Figure 28). The scenario of this project is about a man that is obsessive about consuming goods. I utilised a 'mouth-like' symbol of panels and the action of eating represents the desire to consume. However, what does the representative symbol represent? Eating or being

eaten? This is paradoxical. While the scenario intends to suggest that the protagonist has been 'swallowed' by his own desire, the panels which carry this narrative act as the 'eater'. This conflict between the representations of the panels is unable to provoke a conceptual impact; rather it creates confusion in the visual narrative. In addition, when comparing to the first experiment in Figure 27 where the reading flow is specific and is guided by the circular arrangement, it is quite confused in this 'mouth-like' symbol. Therefore, in order to design the movement of sequential panels as a signifier, these disordered and confusing variables need to be considered in advance.

3.3   Imaginative space

This series of experiments furthers the exploration of the transformation of panels and gutters into signifiers to generate meaning. I intended to change their quality from non-diegetic gutters to shapes which might suggest characters in the story to help construct a mythic narrative.

As with the practical research process used previously, I set up a prototype to explore a contemporary mythical narration. Here, I focused on the episode of "The desire to consume" which was discussed earlier. The following are examples of the experiments.

To start with, I designed a fairly traditional manga layout format of a 3x3 grid (see Figure 29). This layout retains the rhythm and the original sensation of the story which serves as an example for comparison.
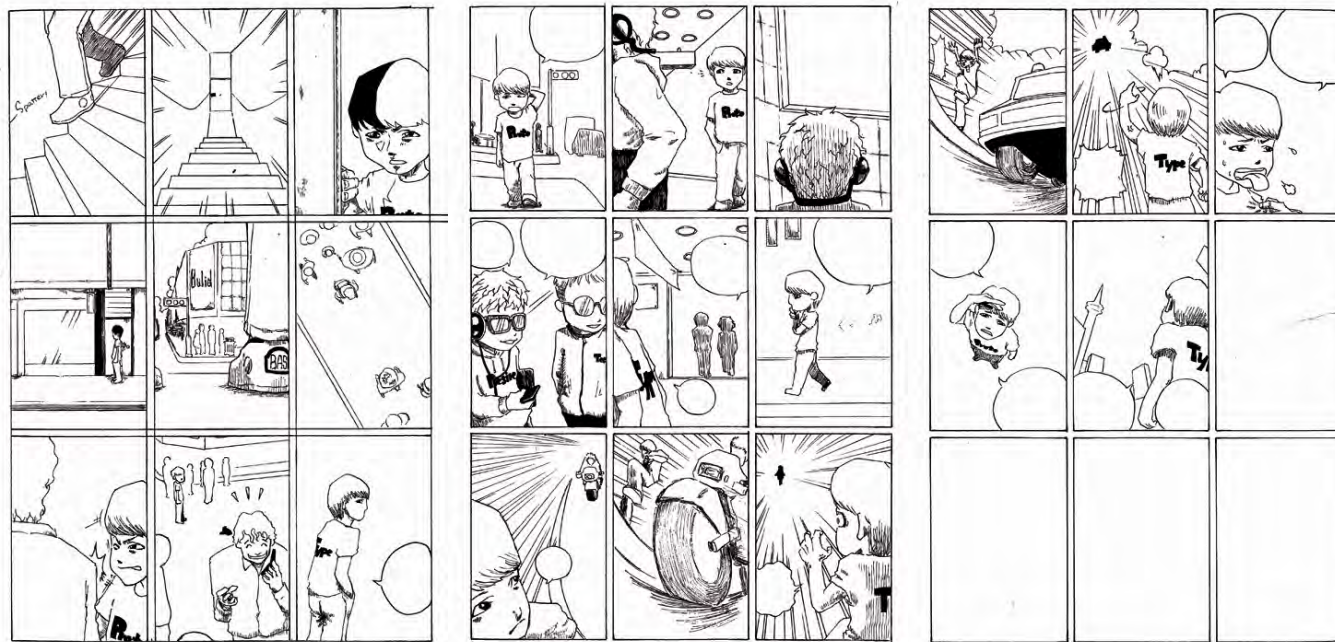
Figure 29. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Prototype of story.* Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm x3

I redrew the episode with a designed rhythm to engage participation in the imaginations. I also eliminated the panel that contains the narrative on the fantasy of desire (see Figure 30); thus leaving it a blank gutter. I tested whether the reader connected the blank gutter with the fantasies through the panels.
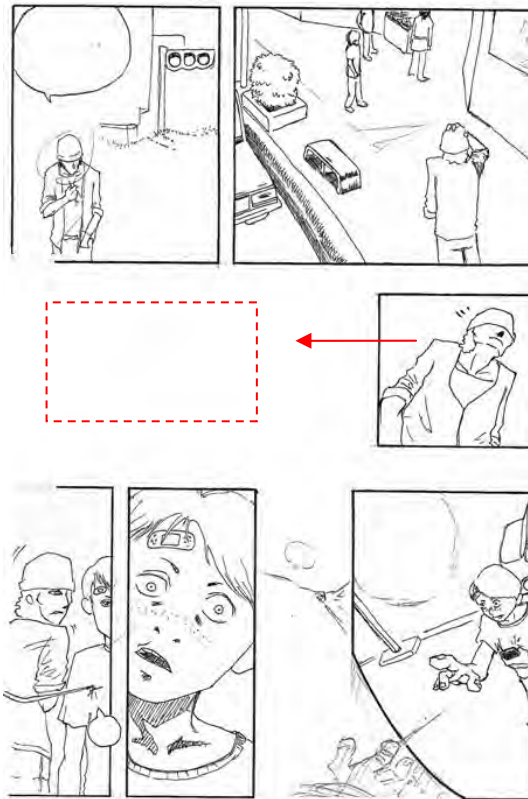
Figure 30. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Desire1.*
Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm

I utilised the protagonist's action to throw light on the blank gutter space (see red arrow in figure 30). However, while readers might be aware of the empty space, the visual impact is not effective enough to shape either the character or its possible connotations. I have therefore implemented visual clues within the blank gutter to reinforce intended meanings.

Figure 31. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Desire2.* Pencil & ink on paper.
220 x 300 mm.

In Figure 31, I designed a 'mouthful bit' page layout with the panels to denote eating and imply the desire to consume. In addition, in the second half of the page, I applied the concept of sequential movement to these panels/gutters. This is a critical advancement of this project towards characterising the gutters. However, at this stage the visual clues of the project scatter over the page. The denotative sign is broken up into fragmented signs to inform the episodes of individual panels and the panels do not work coherently with each other.

In the next experiment I considered the *mise-en-page* and attempted to design the page layout as an integrated image. I applied the method of transforming panels to construct them as a spider net-like grid. This approach followed the similar path of "Walking through the door" to accumulate emotional tension.

Figure 32. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Spider-net and desire p1.* Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.
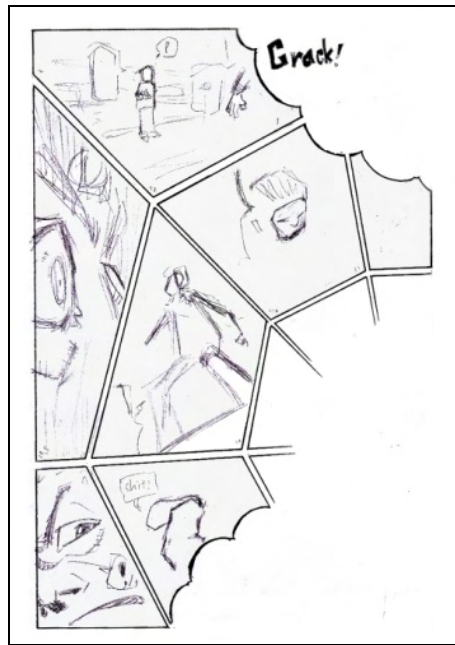
Figure 33. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Spider-net and desire p2.* Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

Figure 34. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Spider-net and desire p2.* Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

As a consequence, I expanded the potential of the concept so that it crossed over pages; and as such the traditional conceptual modes of gutter and panels within a page are expanded to carry continuity from one page to the other (see Figures 32, 33, 34). This tactic opens up the potential to instil fantasies across pages and blend

the meanings and boundaries across diegetic and non-diegetic elements. It enriches the blank spaces of the gutters so they act as a vessel where the reader can apply their imagination.

Figure 35. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Spider-net and desire p1.*
Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

Figure 36. Fu, C. S. (2011). Spider-net and desire p2.
Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

This tactic also provides more capacity for the interactions of the images in the panel and imaginative room in the gutters to blend the boundary between diegetic and non-diegetic space. For example, in Figure 35, the narrative drives along with the structure of panels; the closer to the centre of the web, the more desire the character has to purchase. In addition, in Figure 36, the character reacts with the shape of the gutter's edge. These interactions are meant to bring the non-diegetic elements of panels and gutters into diegetic world as characters.

However, with this strategy, gutters and panels are not fully capable of controlling the rhythm of the story any more. Instead, the rhythm has to be considered holistically as a core creative element when designing the page layout. In this sense, the design of the narrative within the panels has to come after.

Another continual process of this project is the exploration of the diegetic imagined narrative within the empty space. I reinforce the sense of transforming the blank area into a character by unchaining the formal practical

border of a page. To expand the function of non-diegetic space to become diegetic-imagined space, this therefore implies that the formal mode of the border of a page could be broken down to reinforce the sense of bringing diegetic characteristics to the blank gutter space.

Figure 37. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Spider-net and desire with shaped edge p1.* Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.
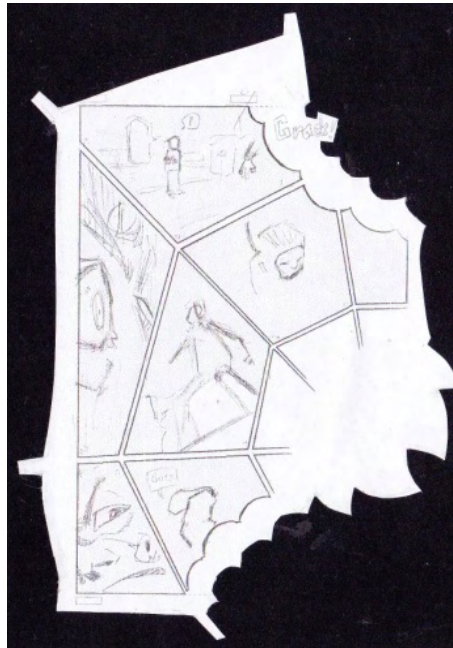
Figure 38. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Spider-net and desire with shaped edge p2.* Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

Figure 39. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Spider-net and desire with shaped edge p3.* Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

However, such unchaining breaks the balance between the narrative images of the panels and the fantasies allowed for in the empty space. It also diverts the attention of the readers to the shape of the edge of the page. In a way, the interaction of the scenario and denotative sign to form a connotative meaning is made redundant.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The application of the manga panels and gutters promise great potential to expand the communication of narrative. Symbolising these manga components provides a notable approach to creating meanings to manipulate the emotion and sensation of the story. The prospect of developing a unique and effective strategy of manga storytelling is significant. The use of symbolic panels and gutters advance and enrich the narrative tactic; and through interaction between symbolic manga components and narrative subject matter, it is possible to enhance visual expression by embedding multiple layers of meaning to the story.

This project extends the exploration of the singular symbolic panel and gutter to the design of a whole page. This provides more visual impact to implement the emotional stimuli and expands the possibilities for the manipulation of sequence in panels and pages. The integration of symbolic panels within a page lessens the flexibility of panel design and story rhythm but could intensify the feelings, emotions, and meanings of the narrative. It changes the process of creating manga narrative which traditionally constructs panels to manifest the story content. The symbolic arrangement of panels sometimes needs to be considered prior to the narrative structure to effectively convey the meaning through this visual strategy.

The use of conceptual emptiness is able to lead the readers' participation within the manga gutters. In addition, strategically transforming the edge of the gutter into a denotative sign to provide a visual clue also supports the application of emptiness.

In summary, the use of denotative signs to create connotative meanings enriches the application of gutters, panels and pages in manga storytelling. Employing various applications of conceptual emptiness to evoke feelings and perceptions strengthens the pursuit of meaning making in the manga. While this project is experimental and

does not provide a conclusive argument to change the creative modes of current practice, it unfolds infinite possibilities to enrich the contents of manga.

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Figure 20. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Fight2*. Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

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Figure 33. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Spider-net and desire p2.* Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

Figure 34. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Spider-net and desire p3.* Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

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Figure 37. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Spider-net and desire with shaped edge p1.* Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

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Figure 39. Fu, C. S. (2011). *Spider-net and desire with shaped edge p3.* Pencil & ink on paper. 220 x 300 mm.

A manga book by Chung-Su Fu

BAM!!

Hey! I am Still here.

It's your turn... you can't run away.

!

Little Red Riding Hood

A manga book by Chung-Su Fu

Baa Baa
Black Sheep

But, Granny

All the better to see you with.

What a
big mouth
you have!!