World Building

Boni, Marta

Published by Amsterdam University Press

Boni, Marta.
World Building: Transmedia, Fans, Industries.
Amsterdam University Press, 2017.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/66361.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/66361

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2328938
8. Platform Producer Meets Game Master
On the Conditions for the Media Mix

Marc Steinberg


DOI: 10.5117/9789089647566/CH08

Abstract
This chapter examines the necessary conditions for the creation of a transmedia franchise. Despite transmedia storytelling manuals’ optimistic repetition of the refrain that all you need is your imagination, transmedia development requires specific, often precise conditions to occur. This chapter focuses on two of these necessary conditions in particular: conditions or media a priori that have been essential to the development of the Japanese media mix from the 1980s onwards. Exploring Kadokawa Tsuguhiko and his associates’ creation of transmedia worlds within the Japanese publisher Kadokawa Books during the 1980s and 1990s, this chapter suggests that one of these a priori is the development of magazines. A second, strategic or conceptual a priori for the media mix during the 1980s is the development of the figure of the creator as game master or producer—something that closely resembles what in Hollywood has more recently be called the transmedia producer. In focusing on these two developments and their industry context in the Japan of the 1980s and 1990s, we arrive at the two the necessary conditions for the contemporary form of the media mix and its creation of transmedia worlds.

Keywords: Media mix; Platform producer; Transmedia in Japan; Kadokawa Books; Otsuka Eiji

What are the necessary conditions for transmedia development? What are the medial conditions that support the creation and prolonging of story-worlds? Transmedia storytelling manuals often repeat what they present as a truism: that anyone with an active imagination can create a storyworld. Yet, the conditions under which storyworlds are developed into transmedia
or media mix franchises, and are capitalized on as such, are quite specific (for the sake of economy, we may consider what in Japan is called media mix as roughly equivalent to the North American term, transmedia storytelling, with the significant caveat that the media mix is not tied to stories, as it is often developed around characters). This article sets out to explore the media a priori for the creation of transmedia worlds through a close examination of a specific case study: Kadokawa Tsuguhiko and his associates’ activities within a section of Japanese publisher Kadokawa Books during the 1980s and 1990s.

The media a priori for the media mix is, it turns out, the development of magazines. A second strategic or conceptual a priori for the media mix during the 1980s is the development of the figure of the creator as game master or producer—something that closely resembles what in Hollywood has more recently been called the transmedia producer. The intersection of media or platform producer and game master reshaped the media mix in 1980s Japan and set the stage for Kadokawa’s metamorphosis from a publisher that had taken to releasing films in the 1970s, to a company known for its distribution model of the media mix that crosses multiple platforms, develops tie-ins with book stores and video streaming platforms, and whose activities characterize much of transmedia today. This is the case even as the role played by magazines is supplemented by technological media platforms like e-readers and streaming sites—most notably Niconico Video, one of the most prominent streaming sites in Japan.

Kadokawa Books is still on the frontlines of these transformations. Having merged in 2014 with Niconico’s parent company Dwango, and become first KADOKAWA-Dwango and subsequently renaming itself KADOKAWA (of which Kadokawa Books is now a subsidiary), it is at the forefront of experiments in platform production and media-mix creation. An examination of the earlier moment of magazine creation as platform production offers a vantage point from which to rethink the importance of media platforms to the media mix, as well as to understand the specific history of the media mix in Japan. The framing of the medium of the magazine as itself a platform is a recent rereading of media history by none other than Kadokawa Tsuguhiko himself, who situates magazines and bookstores as earlier incarnations of the digital entities such as iTunes Store and Google Play and YouTube that we call platforms today. In this broader reading of the term, Kadokawa Tsuguhiko recently defined the platform quite simply as “the place where money and people and commodities meet” (Kadokawa 2013, 37).
This broader conception of the platform is part of a reconceptualization of the term within management studies (Eisenmann, Parker, and Van Alstyne 2006), that also finds its way into Google executives Eric Schmidt and Jonathan Rosenberg’s definition of the term in their How Google Works: “A platform is, fundamentally, a set of products and services that bring together groups of users and providers to form multisided markets.” (Schmidt and Rosenberg 2014, 78-79). That is to say, there is something useful about the rereading of media history in terms of the construction of platforms, as sites where money and people and commodities meet, as a bazaar of sorts that allows for certain activities to take place. If the first aim of this essay is to inquire into the medial conditions for transmedia development, the second main objective is to retell the history of transmedia from the perspective of platform building, with the understanding that platforms need not be digital. As Ian Condry puts it most succinctly, “one can think of platforms not only as mechanical or digital structures of conveyance but also as ways to define and organize our cultural worlds” (Condry 2013, 58).

If the media mix and its history has particular import to the rethinking of the conditions of transmedia in general, it is due, in part, to the central place it occupies in Henry Jenkins’ development of transmedia storytelling as theory, within Convergence Culture (Jenkins 2006), and in part to the intensity and variety of manners in which media mixes unfold in Japan. It would be an exaggeration to credit Kadokawa with the development of media mix completely; as I argue elsewhere, there are earlier examples of media mix that stretch back to the 1930s, 1950s, and, particularly, with the start of television animation, to the 1960s (Steinberg 2012). Nevertheless, Kadokawa Books has played a key role in the current development of transmedia in Japan and is therefore also a company that we must credit with the development of the conditions for the model of transmedia storytelling that the Wachowskis found in Japan. The Wachowskis later used this model in The Matrix and this model served as the fundamental axis for Jenkins’ own theorization of the phenomenon. The third objective of this essay, then, will be to offer a more in-depth portrait of a particular era of the development of the media mix within Japan, painting a clearer picture of the development of the Tsuguhiko-style media mix than I was able to do in Anime’s Media Mix, and doing so in part through the lens of the development of “new media” in the 1980s. I should also note that this re-examination of the 1980s as a new media era is inspired by scholarship on the transformation of the television into monitor during that period and the work of Thomas Lamarre and Sheila Murphy in particular. The
proliferation of media around the television set—notably, computer games and videotapes—transforms the media milieu in which television is situated. The new media of the 1980s offered new possibilities for unfolding media mixes, possibilities that were aggressively explored within Kadokawa Books.

Before continuing, a brief overview of Kadokawa Books is in order. Kadokawa Tsuguhiko’s father, Kadokawa Gen’yoshi, founded the publishing house in 1945 and dedicated it to the publication of highbrow literary classics and haiku. Upon Gen’yoshi’s passing in 1975, he turned the reins over to Tsuguhiko’s elder brother, Kadokawa Haruki. Haruki and Tsuguhiko together took the company down the path of media-mix production, albeit with somewhat different techniques, target audiences, and attitudes towards transmedia expansion. Elsewhere, I’ve noted the sordid family history and the sibling rivalry between the two brothers (Steinberg 2012); for now, let it suffice to note that both brothers’ work was essential to the transformation of Kadokawa into a media mix powerhouse. Schematically, Haruki developed what he called the Holy Trinity model of media synergy, characterized by blockbuster or large-scale film production for mass consumption, combined with the re-release of novels and soundtracks. The advertising blitz promoted all three elements of this Trinity at once—film-novel-soundtrack. Tsuguhiko, by contrast, opted for a smaller scale media-mix practice that relies on the fantasy turn in the 1980s, drawing on and learning from the popularity of role-playing games like Dungeons and Dragons (which provided those at Kadokawa with an important source of training for transmedia world building), and connects with the increasing centrality of video games to popular culture, and the media mix in particular (Picard and Pelletier-Gagnon 2015). A major rift between the brothers would developed around 1992-1993, leading Tsuguhiko to quit the company and start his own. Months later, after Haruki was arrested on drug-trafficking charges in 1993, Tsuguhiko returned to take the reins of the company and henceforth treated the company as his own.

In what follows, I shall briefly trace the emergence of this latter model of the media mix, which has since become the backbone of one strand of transmedia practice in Japan—namely, smaller-scale productions that aim for smaller-scale successes among their slightly older target audience. With its deep connection to “new media” of the 1980s such as the VHS and the Famikon (or Nintendo Entertainment System, as it is known in North America), the Tsuguhiko media mix is the bridge between analog and digital transmedia developments. As such, it offers
a glimpse into the way responses to technological and social changes that first became apparent during the 1980s inform the reformations of the media mix with the rise of digital media in the 2000s. Simply put: to unravel the media a priori of transmedia storytelling and to build a bridge between media-mix practice and the increasing mediation of cultural content via digital streaming platforms such as Niconico Video, it behooves us to examine some key developments that took place in the 1980s within Kadokawa Books.

“New Media” and the Magazine Media Mix

Reading through Kadokawa annual internal company reports, one thing becomes strikingly clear: Kadokawa Tsuguhiko was intrigued from very early on by the commercial potential of new technologies. He often discusses what in the 1980s was (already) being called “new media” (nyū media) in speeches and essays prepared for these reports, which were distributed at annual company gatherings of employees and business partners, and ostensibly describe the directions the company was taking. As early as 1984, he discusses the potential for electronic books—a format that would only come to fruition in the 2000s and that only became commercially viable towards the end of that decade (Kadokawa 1984, 4). This interest was, by no means, simply a personal hobby; it was closely tied to his managerial vision for the company. As he summarizes in 1984: “New media is new business.” This embrace of new media as new business persisted throughout Kadokawa Tsuguhiko’s career and eventually resulted in the production of an e-book platform, BookWalker, meant to rival Amazon’s Kindle.

But the “new media” that most interested Tsuguhiko in the early 1980s was the television set, or rather, the TV set as it was undergoing its transformation into video monitor by the emergence of the VCR and video game consoles. Consequently, after a long process of incubation, Kadokawa Tsuguhiko founded the weekly magazine Za Terebijon (The Television), with the first issue appearing in September 1982.

Here it is worth quoting Kadokawa’s explanation for the founding of Kadokawa Shoten’s first-ever weekly magazine:

It is said that television has entered its third revolution. First the black-and-white television, second the color television. From now, in its third age, it will become possible to use the television set for TV newspapers
and for TV calling, and, before this, fiber-optical transmission will exponentially expand the number of channels. As a result of these changes, the TV will shift from what is now an entertainment-centric medium to a more individualized information transmission tool. In the midst of this diversification of media in the near future, *The Television* is certain to become the most important and central magazine. (Kadokawa 1982, 7)
As Kadokawa Tsuguhiko predicts, reflecting existing popular rhetoric about the future of television, television was no longer just a stand-alone medium, but was increasingly becoming part of new media, something closer to a computer than a mere television, and an interface to a wider media world. As Kadokawa recalls, “I thought that around the television set a new market was starting, and new possibilities would be opening.”

The impact of this foundation of The Television on Kadokawa Shoten’s history is hard to overstate. In company charts and documents (themselves symptomatic of attempts to narrate and re-narrate company history), 1982 is consistently listed as a key year for Kadokawa: the beginning of the “Magazine Era”. In fact, Tsuguhiko had wanted to start a television magazine since the early 1970s. During a visit to the US in 1970, he was thoroughly impressed with the American magazine TV Guide (Satō, 80-81), but, when he raised the idea with his Kadokawa associates, they thought it would be impossible to gain the kind of scale needed for such a magazine to succeed. Ten years later, in 1982, he finally founded The Television. Tsuguhiko envisioned this as more than simply an information magazine listing the TV schedule; it was meant to be a magazine that engaged the culture and technology around the TV set. This included the culture of the stars who appeared in TV shows, but more important still, it focused on the new technological developments around the TV set: the video cassette recorder and the TV-based video-game system.

The VCR and the video-game system were hardware attachments to the TV set that would transform the television from a reception device for on-air programming to a platform that could accommodate recorded programs played back at a later date, also known as “time-shifting”. It also gave rise to an entirely new market for video cassettes, as well as new models of distribution and aesthetics of both film and animation—straight-to-video film and animation programs (V-cinema and OVA). This was also the first step towards thinking of the TV set as a platform for entertainment. The next step would be to build magazine platforms around The Television.

Magazines as Platforms: The Television, Comptiq, New Type, and Marukatsu Famikon

The Television was a first experiment in an attempt to capture the increasingly complex media environment that was unfolding in the early 1980s. It was also the place from which two of Kadokawa’s most important magazines for the media mix would emerge: Comptiq and New Type.
Comptiq started as an extra edition of The Television, its first issue hitting newsstands in November 1983. The genesis of Comptiq started with Kadokawa Tsuguhiko suggesting to Satō Tatsuo (later president of Kadokawa, but still a freelance editor at the time) that he develop a game magazine for the growing PC game market. His reasoning was that, if there could be a magazine for media around the television set, there could also be a magazine around the personal computer. Mimicking The Television tagline, “A Book for Having Fun with the TV” (Terebi to asobu hon), the tagline for early issues of Comptiq was: “A Book for Having Fun with the PC” (Pasokon to asobu hon).

If The Television was not just about television but also about TV’s wider media culture, Comptiq was also not just about games, but about the wider media culture of games, including manga comics. Significantly, it was also the source of the development of new content, including an entirely new literary format. It was in Comptiq that one of the key serializations of the 1980s started: Record of Lodoss War (Rōdosu-tō Senki), a collaborative project by a Dungeons and Dragons table-top role-playing game (TRPG) group called “Group SNE” led by Yasuda Hiroshi, and turned into a serial novelization by Mizuno Ryō. The Lodoss project started out as a transcript of a TRPG replay. Mizuno’s novel form rewrite of the serialized replay (transcribed in the dialogue form of the game) is seen as one of the origins of what today is called the “light novel”, a genre of juvenile fiction that increasingly dominates book sales in Japan; a genre in which Kadokawa imprints have a 70-80% market share. Hence, Comptiq is not only an influential game magazine, but it also became the starting point for one of Kadokawa’s best-selling book formats: the light novel. As Satō Kichinosuke suggests in his company history of Kadokawa, Comptiq became a kind of platform that gave birth to some of Kadokawa’s most important contents—Lodoss in particular and later Lucky Star in the 2000s—a later moment in time when the English tagline for Comptiq was, appropriately, “MediaMix Game Magazine”.

The animation magazine New Type similarly emerged from The Television, with its writers initially drawn from the animation division of the latter (along with Inoue Shin’ichiro, formerly at another anime magazine, Animekku, as an associate editor, later a key person in Kadokawa management). New Type quickly became one of the most influential anime magazines from the late 1980s to this day, and, like Comptiq, a source of new content for Kadokawa media mixes (such as Nagano Gō’s Five Star Stories). The first issue appeared in March 1985, timed to coincide with the release of the Kadokawa animated feature, Kamui no ken (Satō 2007,
Marukatsu Famikon, the home video game magazine based around the Nintendo NES, debuted soon after, in 1986, and became another key Kadokawa magazine that was both a source for information and a platform for the creation of new content.

These magazines and others like them became the launch pads or platforms both for new media mixes and for the new model of the media mix that Kadokawa Tsuguhiko and his editors Satō Tatsuo and Inoue Shin’ichiro developed in the 1980s. The magazines were important nodes for this new model of the media mix for several reasons. First, they were framed as “information magazines”, which allowed them both to cover other companies’ content, but also to promote Kadokawa’s own content through advertising and special articles. Second, while they began as sites for the comic versions of existing media such as video games, they quickly became hubs for the production of new or original content. This content would then be developed across different media forms, resulting in a media mix. Third, closely related to the second point, the content producers who contributed to these magazines had begun to explore a new model of media production that was based around the creation of worlds before individual narratives or particular serial installments (whether manga, serial novels, OVA animation, or games). Here is where content producers like Ōtsuka Eiji, Yasuda Hitoshi and Mizuno Ryō, and CLAMP became key. Fourth, the production of this new content took place using a model of the media mix that contrasted sharply with Haruki’s high-risk, high-return model. The media mix promoted by Tsuguhiko at the institutional level and through the magazines was a new model of low-risk, middle-return, aimed towards what would later be called “subcultural” audiences—older teens and young adults who searched for more mature content than that offered by the more mainstream manga magazines of the time—and using new distribution formats like the video tape, as well as new novel imprints such as Sneaker Bunko, which later became famous as the go-to site for the light novel genre. The magazines inserted themselves into the gaps between the major manga magazines of the time that targeted mass audiences, and became key platforms for the production and development of a different model of the media mix.

Inventing the Game Master

If magazines as platforms form one pillar of the Tsuguhiko media mix, the development of the role of “game master” or transmedia producer is its other
Mizuno Ryō of *Lodoss* fame would be one such Kadokawa game master; another is found in the figure of Ōtsuka Eiji. Ōtsuka is well-known as a subcultural critic, academic, and author of light novels and light novel-writing guides. While nominally independent, he has consistently worked with Kadokawa-affiliated companies as a freelance manga scriptwriter, novelist, and critic since about 1986. Moreover, Ōtsuka offers an invaluable theoretical exposition of the Tsuguhiko media mix in the well-known collection of essays he wrote in the late 1980s, *Monogatari shōhiron* (“A Theory of Narrative Consumption”).

*A Theory of Narrative Consumption* has had at least three lives, which, in part, follow its multiple re-publications. Ōtsuka was working full-time for Kadokawa Media Office (a subdivision of the publisher under the control of Tsuguhiko and the site of many of the magazine editorial boards) at the time he wrote it and the book should be read in part as a theoretical elaboration of the new media mix structure towards which Tsuguhiko, Ōtsuka, and his close associates at the Media Office were working. It was written, as Ōtsuka later laments, as a kind of “marketing theory for [ad agency] Dentsū and Kadokawa” (Ōtsuka and Azuma 2001 p. 7). This was, indeed, the first life of the book, taken up most ardently by marketing theorists. The book gained a second life in the 2000s by a new generation of theorists. Azuma Hiroki, in particular, resuscitates the book by engaging deeply with arguments made by Ōtsuka a decade or so earlier, even as he develops his own theory of *otaku* consumption (Azuma 2001).

But the book also has a third life: as a critical and crucial example of what American production studies scholar John Caldwell calls “industrial reflexivity”—a kind of *self-theorization of industry practice* (Caldwell 2008). That is, this book offers us a glimpse into the logic behind a model of the media mix that—contrary to Azuma’s thesis about a break in consumption habits—is still very much alive today, arguably at the heart of contemporary media life. At its core, the book is a meditation on the connection between world building and transmedia; it is in this vein that Ōtsuka describes it in his 2012 rewrite of the book.

Ōtsuka’s theory of publishing proposed to develop multiple narrative fragments on the basis of a single “worldview” (Ōtsuka 2007, 244; Ōtsuka and Azuma 2001, 7). This new model of the media mix dovetailed with that in development by Kadokawa Tsuguhiko and would form the theoretical basis for Ōtsuka’s practice as editor and creator of manga- and novel-based media mixes at Kadokawa, starting with his own *Madara* manga, video games, role-playing games and novels (Ōtsuka and Azuma 2001, 7; Ōtsuka 2007, 243). While I have looked closely at the mechanics of what Ōtsuka calls narrative consumption and its relation to the worldview elsewhere (Steinberg 2012), I
would like to focus here on the relationship between world-building and the position of what Ōtsuka calls the “game master” (gēmu masutā) or “narrative controller” (monogatari no kanrisha) (Ōtsuka 2001, 35), roughly comparable to more recent propositions in Hollywood about the role of the transmedia producer. As the use of the term “game master” implies, it is also a figure or role influenced by the model of storytelling and play that the table-top RPG Dungeons and Dragons brought with it to Japan.

If Kadokawa Tsuguhiko built magazines and operated as a platform producer, the editors and contributors working under Kadokawa Tsuguhiko, such as Ōtsuka, Yasuda, Mizuno, Satō, and others developed a model of content creation based around the building of worlds, and the subsequent unfolding of narratives within the worlds as particular works (manga series, novelizations, on-video animations, etc.). Their medium of choice was, to a degree, inconsequential or, at the very least, secondary to the worlds and settings behind them. They were first and foremost world producers, or game masters, and only secondarily novelists, manga scriptwriters, or game developers. Unlike the Haruki model of the media mix, which invariably started from an original novel, under Tsuguhiko, the original was the worldview itself, something that consumers could only access through consuming the various manga, novels, video games, and so on that were based on this worldview. The absence of a single original text and the principle of the worldview were what gave the Tsuguhiko media mix its infinitely serial character.

Although less well remembered than either Slayers or Record of the Lodoss War, Madara offers a useful site for understanding how the Kadokawa Tsuguhiko media mix functioned—because it was an early success of this model (albeit shaped by the even earlier success of Lodoss), we see in it the role of the “game master” in orchestrating the unfolding media mix, and because it makes visible the centrality of world building to this media-mix practice. Here, I turn to a brief examination of Madara as a model of the Kadokawa Tsuguhiko media mix.

Producing the Madara Project

Mōryō senki Madara (“Demon Chronicles of Madara”), commonly abbreviated to Madara, began serialization in Kadokawa’s Famikon/NES magazine Marukatsu Famikon, kicking off in the 27 November 1987 issue of the biweekly publication, at editor Satō Tatsuo’s suggestion. Madara was unique for being the first original manga in a game magazine, rather than one based on an existing (or forthcoming) game, as was the model until that
point. This was an era when game publishers typically created tie-in manga serializations as a form of cross-promotion. In practice, this tended to limit creative license and ensure that the rights were held by game publishers; two problems that Madara, as an original creation, could sidestep. In this case, rights were not owned by the game publisher, but rather by Kadokawa Books and, in this case, the creator of the manga, Ōtsuka Eiji, who went by the pen name “Candy House”. Ōtsuka (as Candy House) was credited with “Story & Concept” and, in some later issues, as “director” as well.
By this, we should understand Ōtsuka to be not only the creator, but also the producer or director. This was not a mere “manga” it was a project from the start. The Madara Project credits appear, with some variation depending on the magazine installment, as follows:

Story & Concept: CANDY HOUSE  
World Plan: Aga Nobuhiro  
Art & Comic: Tajima Shou-ji  
Monster Design: Tsubura Hidetomo  
Directed by CANDY HOUSE

What does it mean to have a “directed by” credit in a comic series? The credit gestures to the type of role Ōtsuka calls a media mix “producer”, pointing to the importance of having a transmedia approach to authorship itself. Ōtsuka (as Candy House) adopts a producer-like role, managing the proper unfolding of the franchise. At a key moment in his *Theory of Narrative Consumption*, he dubs this producer role that of the “game master”. This seems an apt term, given that it comes from the realm of the TRPG, where the game master is the creator and narrator of the game. This is a significant development in the status of the original author, an early incarnation of what would be the 2010 designation “Transmedia Producer” in Hollywood—although, according to Ōtsuka himself, this conceptualization of the director as producer was itself inspired by the role of George Lucas as producer and visionary world-builder behind the *Star Wars* series. Whether derived from Lucas or not, this world-building credit for a media-mix producer became central to transmedia in practice around Kadokawa magazines in the late 1980s.

*Madara* is a narrative that structurally replicates the tale of the wandering hero on a quest, and (as Ōtsuka points out on many occasions) roughly retells the narrative of Tezuka Osamu’s late 1960s manga *Dororo*: a young man (Madara) born to a king is stripped of his “chakra” and is left to die (Tezuka 2012; Ōtsuka 2013, 48). He is saved, however, and his missing body parts are all replaced by mechanical parts, making him, in essence, a cyborg. Whenever he defeats one of the domineering overlord Emperor Miroku’s minions, he regains one of his stolen chakra. He is accompanied on his travels by a young girl, Kirin, who also possesses mysterious powers, and who aids Madara on his journey. As Ōtsuka himself declares, the work on the narrative level is an example of structural piracy: the repurposing of an existing narrative (*Dororo*), albeit with a new setting—a vaguely central-Asian fantasy world.

The narrative here functions as a lure into the world; if the plot points are not new, the unfolding world was captivating, as were the visual
aesthetics and structure of the manga. Madara was created in the model of a role-playing video game, or RPG, popular at the time. As part of the preparation for the serialization of Madara, Ōtsuka enlisted game designer Aga Nobuhiro to design the rules for the Madara world; hence, the Madara world was implicitly rule-based, like the worlds of Dragon Quest or Dungeons and Dragons. These rules mostly lie in the background of narrative, but the RPG elements of the game come to the fore periodically in the manga (particularly in battle scenes, and “level-ups”). Square inserts with text that simulate the 8-bit Famikon text display found in some games appear within the manga frames. A combination of narrative information on a character and a list of its rank, hit points, karma, and stamina are listed in box inserts, in a pixelated typescript reminiscent of the 8-bit game experience. Particular moves or types of attack specific to a given character are also described in this form, along with the effects such an attack would have. This information was arguably superfluous to the narrative itself. While it was included in the manga magazine serialization, and in the first large-format paperback manga books (first published in August 1989), the subsequent paperback manga release removed the RPG-like inserts.

We can surmise from this removal of the game elements that they did not serve an immediate narrative function. Rather, their importance came from the way they established the intermedial quality of the manga. They made the manga seem as if it was an RPG, even though it wasn’t, nor was it even based on one. In this regard, the tagline created for the manga during its serialization is noteworthy: “The Bloodcurdling Hyper RPG Comic” (Senritsu no haipā RPG komikkku) (11 December 1987) was its original tagline, and “The Hyper RPG Comic that Feels 100% Like a Game” (gēmu kankaku 100% no hypā RPG komikku) (27 June 1988) one of the most oft-repeated ones. The emphasis on RPG and the game-like is key to the promotion of Madara and to its framing as a hybrid narrative-game text.

A further element to note—significant to both the RPG and the Tsuguhiko-style media mix as theorized by Ōtsuka—is the emphasis on the storyworld. Instead of starting with an individual work, Ōtsuka and his collaborators on Madara started by creating the world to which the work would belong. Information about the world could itself be marketed or sold as an important resource. Rather than placing the importance on a trinity of products—the book-film-soundtrack of the Haruki media mix—the Tsuguhiko media mix rather put the emphasis on the consumption of the world upon which products were based. The result was that any number of products could be created out of a given world. This was particularly the case with series like Madara that operated on the principle of rebirth and
reincarnation. From a production angle, the narrative functions as a lure to the world, and it is through the various serializations that this world is accessed and expanded.

*Madara* was quite explicit about this; at the end of every installment of the comic, there was a “Settings Collection” (*settei-shū*) page: a special information section on main characters, their monster adversaries, or the world. This
page offered a detailed fragment of information about one element of the larger Madara world (settei being a substitute term for sekai or world; Ōtsuka uses the terms interchangeably in his *A Theory of Narrative Consumption*).

While the serialization was eventually turned into an actual RPG game for the Famikon, and then a direct-to-video anime, the setting pages also enticed readers to create their own narratives. *Madara* thus plugged into the existing culture of amateur comic creation, fostering it further at various stages, with periodic invitations for readers to contribute character designs of monsters, for instance, that would be used in later moments of the manga. Crowd-sourcing the production, and the involvement of an active fan base, were key elements of this version of the media mix. There were even officially published *Madara Official Pirate Editions* (Ōtsuka and Tajima 1991), filled with works culled from those sent in by fans. Ōtsuka describes this as a joke at the time, but it was one that was inspired by the open structure of the *Madara* world, in which the character was described as possessing 108 lives—far too many for Ōtsuka and Tajima to write themselves. Therefore, the very narrative setting was also an open invitation for fans to participate in the writing of the storyworld. *Madara* had what we would call today an “open architecture” that encouraged user-generated-contents. Indeed, it very much anticipates the mobilization of fan production (and fan labor) for official releases today. In all of this, Ōtsuka functioned as a project director and producer of the media-mix franchise.

**Conclusion**

By way of conclusion, it is worth returning here to a figure we started with: Kadokawa Tsuguhiko. What role did Tsuguhiko play? He was certainly not the auteurist producer that his older brother Haruki was—he wasn’t someone who intervened in the minutiae of media-mix production. Rather, he was a pioneer of a new kind of figure: the *infrastructure producer*, or what we might call the *platform producer*. Tsuguhiko produced the platforms that became the basis for “content” development by media mix directors/producers like Ōtsuka, Yasuda, and Mizuno. He built the magazine infrastructure and put together the institutional know-how and departments within Kadokawa that would go on to oversee the production of straight to video animation (or OVA), games, and so on. As I noted at the opening of this article, Tsuguhiko retrospectively describes magazines like *Za Television*, *Comptiq*, and *Marukatsu Famikon* as platforms. Having created the conditions necessary for the development of a relatively new form of media mix based around figures like Ōtsuka and
Mizuno, Kadokawa Tsuguhiko’s role was as a relatively detached platform producer. In this model, the platform producer builds the media upon which the media mix director depends; the latter in turn builds narrative or content worlds and orchestrates transmedia development.

Of course, it is worth recalling that the emphasis on worlds is not unique to the Japanese media ecology. Indeed, as I noted in passing above, the Hollywood embrace of transmedia in the 2000s is, in some ways, fundamentally indebted to Japan’s unfolding media mix—even as key figures of the Japanese media mix such as Kadokawa Tsuguhiko and Ōtsuka point to Dungeons and Dragons and Star Wars as key inspirations for their own media mix ventures. Transmedia in the North American context and the media mix in Japan are, then, closely intertwined, one building on the other. But as I have shown here, two elements played a fundamental role at a formative moment in the development of the media mix in Japan around Kadokawa in the 1980s: the magazine as platform and the game master as media-agnostic coordinator of the media mix. Together, they were the support and the guidance for the creation of media-mix worlds and, as such, they are also the necessary conditions or media a priori for this very particular kind of transmedia development.

Notes

2. For useful accounts of Niconico Video, see: Johnson and Nozawa.
3. Author interview with Kadokawa Tsuguhiko, 23 June 2013.
4. The following builds on additional archival research and interviews of key Kadokawa personnel that I incorporated into the expanded, rewritten version of Anime’s Media Mix, published in Japanese as Naze Nihon wa “media mikkusu suru kuni” nanoka / Why is Japan a “Media Mixing Nation”?).
5. For a highly informative account of Kadokawa Haruki’s filmmaking activities, see: Zahlten.
6. These can be contrasted with “megahits” such as Pokémon or Yōkai Watch, which target children as their main audience and aim at mainstream success.
7. For another take on this transition and debates around media convergence, see: Oyama and Lolli 2016.
9. Unlike Kindle there is no hardware version of BookWalker, but the service is available as an app on iOS and Android devices, as well as for computers.
10. Interview with Kadokawa Tsuguhiko, 26 June 2013.
12. Of course, in marking 1982 as the beginning of the magazine era, the Tsuguhiko-era narrations of the company history also efface its earlier forays into monthly magazine production, started by Kadokawa Haruki. Indeed, it’s necessary here to recognize that the success of *The Television* is built on the media system Haruki set up. The first hit issues of *The Television* used Kadokawa Haruki Office actresses like Yakushimaru Hiroko—a star at the time—on the cover. Hence, while I distinguish the Haruki-style media mix from the Tsuguhiko-style media mix, the latter benefited from conditions set up by the former.

13. Interview with Kadokawa Tsuguhiko, 26 June 2013.


15. Though Ōtsuka notes that Lodoss is only one of several possible origins of the light novel format. See also: Kawasaki and Iikura.


17. Interview with Ōtsuka Eiji, 24 March 2013.

18. This book, originally published in 1989, was expanded and republished in 2001 as *Tethon monogatari shōhiron*, then substantially rewritten and republished again in 2012 as *Monogatari shōhiron kai* (“A Theory of Narrative Consumption, Revisited”).

19. On Ōtsuka’s entry into Kadokawa Media Office and the conditions he had already conceived for a more minor type of media mix, see: Ōtsuka 1999, 264-269.

20. Dentsū is the largest advertising agency in Japan and took close note of the theory of narrative consumption Ōtsuka developed.

21. This is how I would read Ōtsuka’s rewrite of the book in its most recent version, *Monogatari shōhiron kai*, as a reflection on the conditions of its first era of publication, as they extend into the media world of the present moment.


23. This credit sequence is taken from the 12 February 1988 issue of *Marukatsu Famikon*.

24. Interview with Ōtsuka Eiji, 24 March 2013. For useful reconsiderations of the role of authorship in the American context, see: Gray and Johnson.


26. Ōtsuka’s fascination with structural piracy comes in no small part from the important place of structuralist narratology on his conception of storytelling. In this regard, his own education as an ethnographer coincided with the rather late translation and introduction of Propp in Japan during the late 1970s and early 1980s, which had a profound impact on his sense of storytelling.

27. In the 2000s, the loop narrative would take on this structuring role, enabling similarly spiraling serialization, as in the *Suzumiya Haruhi, Steins; Gate* or *Fate/Stay Night* franchises.
Works Cited


Kadokawa, Tsuguhiko. 1982. “‘Kadokawa Shoten, hatsu no shūkansi’ sōkan ni atatte” (On the occasion of the first issue of “Kadokawa Shoten's first weekly magazine”). In: *Kadokawa Shoten sōritsu 38 shūnen* (Kadokawa Books 38 Years From its Founding), annual internal pamphlet.

Kadokawa, Tsuguhiko. 1984. “Atarashii shuppan wo motomete” (In pursuit of new publishing). In: *Kadokawa Shoten sōritsu 40 shūnen* (Kadokawa Books 40 Years From its Founding), annual internal pamphlet.


Steinberg, Marc. 2015. Naze Nihon wa “media mikkusu suru kuni” nanoka (Why is Japan a “Media Mixing Nation”?), translated by Nakagawa Yuzuru, supervised by Ôtsuka Eiji. Tokyo: KADOKAWA.
Media Cited


About the author

Marc Steinberg is Associate Professor of Film Studies at Concordia University, Montreal. He is the author of the award-winning books *Anime’s Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan* (University of Minnesota Press, 2012) and *Naze Nihon wa “media mikkusu suru kuni” nano ka* (Why is Japan a “Media Mixing Nation”?) (Tokyo: KADOKAWA, 2015). He is also the co-editor of the volume *Media Theory in Japan* (Duke University Press, 2017).