

# Drawing sex: Pages, bodies, and sighs in Japanese eromanga

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BY: Caitlin Casiello

## ABSTRACT

This article analyzes *eromanga*, Japanese pornographic comic books, in terms of the semiotic power of images to create an erotic fantasy space for the reader. Manga are a central part of media culture in Japan. Alongside and closely connected to mainstream manga, eromanga have risen in importance as a space of negotiation for new semiotic methods of expression. At the same time, they have become a battleground for questions of freedom of expression and defending youth and women from sexual violence, especially as manga 'otaku' fan culture becomes increasingly globalized. Focusing on a selection of contemporary eromanga artists, we explore the visual imaginary central to eromanga, a system of visual techniques which stretches the boundaries of the comic panel and the human body into new shapes and forms. Drawing from Thierry Groensteen's and Natsume Fusanosuke's theories of comic semiotics and Nagayama Kōru's and Kimi Ritodrawing's work in the developing field of eromanga studies, we argue that eromanga portray sexuality by intensifying the on-page material – layout, bodies, and sighs (sounds as drawn images) – creating a multiple layering of time and fantasy for the reader. Eromanga often employs techniques and ideas that estrange the boundaries of the human body as we usually conceive it. Eromanga artists draw on erotic fantasies subtextual to anime and manga as a whole, making them explicit. At the same time, eromanga feeds into the broader mainstream world of manga, making thus the analysis of eromanga's semiotics essential to a more comprehensive understanding of manga.

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Japanese pornographic comic books or *eromanga* – more on the terminology and connotations of ‘pornography’ in Japanese and Western contexts in the next section – comprise an essential part of the manga publishing world. These often-overlooked works produce innovations in manga art and are fully integrated into the subculture of anime/manga/games fandom. As *eromanga* focus on sex in forms so explicit as to be pushed out of the ‘mainstream’ (i.e., *ippan* ‘general audiences,’ a clumsy catch-all for non-*eromanga*) manga depictions, their analysis offers an opportunity for looking at manga expressions of desire in their most intense form. Through a semiotic analysis of *eromanga*, based on Thierry Groensteen’s approach to comics as a system founded on “iconic solidarity,” which “constitutes an organic totality that associates a complex combination of elements, parameters, and multiple procedures” (Groensteen 2007:159), this article offers an analysis of contemporary *eromanga* works via trends in page structure (‘pages’), transformations of bodies away from a normative realism (‘bodies’), and the use of word-image-sound effects (‘sighs’) to investigate how *eromanga* create layered spaces of pornographic fantasy for the reader. On the pornographic manga page, sex becomes images layered in series. Bodies jostle against each other across panel frames. Dialogue and sound, drawn, visually interrupt the space.

The dominant form of *eromanga* analysis in Japanese criticism is a combined semiotic and historical approach to particular styles and forms of signification. Manga critic Nagayama Kaoru<sup>1</sup> discusses these signs as ‘memes’ (in Richard Dawkins’ sense), cultural elements that make up the ‘gene pools’ of *eromanga* and mainstream manga alike (cf. Nagayama 2014:20). Manga researcher Kimi Rito similarly approaches *eromanga* history through the process of *kigōka* (記号化), ‘signification’ (the changing into signs, using the same word for ‘sign’ as in *kigōgaku* (記号学), ‘semiotics’) in the development of expressions such as large breasts, nipple movement, and tentacles (cf. Kimi 2017:6). This article builds upon their approach of looking at expressions common in *eromanga*, but instead of a focus on the historical origins of a sign or a discussion of creators’ intent in using it, I show how these signs work within the system of *eromanga* to affect readers’ experiences of erotic fantasy. Essential to this work is the contextualization of *eromanga* as part of a system of manga meaning-making beyond the legally-defined structure of ‘adult manga.’ Most manga contain elements of eroticism, but it is in *eromanga* that these elements prevail and are fully developed. Given the importance of debates on Japanese anime and manga concerning sexual expression, a semiotic approach to *eromanga* allows us to understand how these texts work and how their audiences could read them.

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<sup>1</sup> Japanese names for authors originally published in Japanese are given in Japanese order of family name before given name

## 1. What is eromanga?

### 1.1. Labels

‘Eromanga’ is a portmanteau of *eroi* (エロい, ‘sexy’ or ‘sexual’ from ‘erotic’ but without the literary pretensions often afforded to that word in English) and *manga* (‘comic book’). It refers to manga restricted to adult readers and whose central focus of plot and design is on sexual scenes. Generally, discussions of eromanga restrict their respective definitions to pornographic manga aimed at heterosexual men, but eromanga’s gender dynamics are more complex in practice. Other terms for this body of work include ‘adult manga’ (アダルト漫画), ‘*seijin manga*’ (成人漫画, also literally ‘adult manga’), and ‘*seinen manga*’ (成年漫画, again ‘adult manga’; differentiated from the homonymous seinen manga 青年漫画, the non-pornographic genre aimed at young men). These labels indicate that the respective works cannot be sold to customers under eighteen. Works are labeled with this mark according to the directives of the Publishing Ethics Committee (出版倫理協議会), established in 1963, which initially worked with government reports on works harmful to young people. The marks became standard in 1992 after a movement to regulate adult manga in response to the murder of four young children by supposed manga fan Miyazaki Tsutomu in 1989 (cf. Kinsella 2000:149). This reliance on industry self-regulation, in which works are screened by reviewers internal to the industry to protect publishers from obscenity charges or direct government censorship, is similar to the process for film review by the Film Classification and Rating Organization (映画倫理機構) or *Eirin* (映倫), founded in 1949, which was also the basis for *Biderin* (ビデ倫) which reviews adult video (i.e., live-action pornography.) For creators who self-publish online or in *dōjinshi* (同人誌, independent publications similar to fanzines), the label R-18 (restricted to those over eighteen) is often used to mark pornographic works. Creators selling their works directly are expected to demand age identification from their customers before making a sale. Because explicit depictions of genitalia are still considered obscene in Japan, all eromanga censor their depictions to some degree, using black bars or mosaic effects to partially obscure genitalia in the drawings.

But to define eromanga by their legal definitions is to limit them to a publication status, rather than a group of works that share styles and themes and a reader community. Nagayama Kaoru defines eromanga initially as “manga that include erotic elements” (Nagayama 2014:6)<sup>2</sup> but points out that all manga contain erotic elements in some form and that what is considered erotic depends on the reader. Considering this,

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<sup>2</sup> All translations from Japanese are by the author, Caitlin Casiello.

he offers these potentially narrower definitions: “works drawn with sexual or erotic themes” or “works that occupy a position where sexual or erotic motifs are required” (Nagayama 2014:6). Kimi Rito insists on the necessity of a broad definition. Nonetheless, she produces one even narrower than Nagayama’s: “a general term for the manga genre focusing on sexual stories drawn in order to excite and release sexual arousal for adult readers” (Kimi 2017:359). This definition characterizes eromanga by their use. The next sentence specifically mentions masturbation, tying it to a history of defining pornography as works intended for masturbation despite the potential for numerous other reader responses.

This opens up the perpetual problem of Porn Studies: the definition of pornography and its difficult distinction from different, more publicly acceptable modes of erotic production (e.g. ‘erotica’). By calling eromanga ‘pornography,’ our goal is not to malign them as unacceptable or obscene, but instead to position them as forms of media that depict that which is beyond the limits of representability – eromanga “go[] too far” in Žižek’s definition (Žižek 1989:37), but we follow Linda Williams in rejecting the categorization of sexually-themed works into “good” and “bad” since “one person’s pornography is another person’s erotica” (Williams 1989:6). Pornography, existing at the limits of representability, frequently becomes a battleground for debates on the social acceptability of sexuality in media because any limit can be defined by what is outside of it. Because eromanga are structured around sexual content (Nagayama’s “sexual (...) motifs are required,” 2014:6 – the narrative logic of the plot is subordinated to a demand to show sexual scenes) and depict sexuality usually pushed outside of normative representation, I use the term pornographic to describe them, though there are a number of possible distinctions between eromanga and live-action film or photographic pornography.

## 1.2. Eromanga history

Eromanga are also often defined through their historical evolution and publishing contexts. Manga historian Yonezawa Yoshihiro defines both eromanga and manga broadly, allowing his history to include eromanga within a legacy of works dating back to 17th-century erotic prints in the *ukiyo-e* style, known as *shunga*. However, any actual traces for a descent from *shunga* to eromanga might pale in the face of its discursive use, as proponents of eromanga connect the two to place their genre in an artistic tradition and afford it the import of Japanese history: such as the defense attorneys did during the 2002–2007 *Honey Room* (蜜室) eromanga obscenity trial (cf. Cather 2012:249). Eromanga history, as it is usually understood, starts with post-1945 *kasutori* magazines (カストリ雑誌); entertainment magazines printed on cheap paper made available after wartime paper shortages led to the suspension

of many magazines (cf. Yonezawa 2010:8). The art style of illustrated stories from *kasutori* led to *gekiga* (劇画) comics of the 1950s, comics with a realistic style often contrasted with the more Disney-like cartoonish style of manga for children, typified at this time by the works of Tezuka Osamu (cf. Nagayama 2014:32). *Gekiga* included works that were ‘adult’ in terms of their erotic or other thematic and political content, associated with leftist students and workers, making them a frequent target of government pressure and right-wing boycotts (cf. Kinsella 2000:143).

As *gekiga* styles were subsumed into manga more generally in the 1970s, eromanga became an important area of identity formation and subcultural negotiation for anime and manga fan culture. In 1975, a group of fans of *shōjo* (少女), ‘girls’ manga artist Moto Hagio founded the Comic Market, a space for *dōjinshi* trading including media research, fanworks, comics, and art. Comic Market became a haven for the subculture group known as *otaku* (オタク). As coined in the magazine *Manga Burikko* in 1983, the term refers to obsessive fans of niche media, most often anime/manga/games. Though originally considered socially backward in dangerous and disruptive ways, *otaku* – as consumers and as creators – increasingly began to drive the formal development of the anime/manga in production. Through the influence of *otaku* tastes and creation, the *gekiga*-style of realism in eromanga was slowly replaced by the *bishōjo* (美少女), ‘pretty girl’ style in the 1980s, which uses more cartoon-like aesthetics associated with anime/manga today.

### 1.3. Eromanga as *Otaku* culture

Within the large Japanese and global market for manga, pornographic manga had a significant, underexplored influence on the history of the development of the anime/manga/games fan culture. These pop culture media comprise the form of *otaku* culture adopted as an exportable and marketable commodity in service of nationalistic soft power under the government’s early 2000s “Cool Japan” program (cf. McLelland 2017:6). Though the pornographic aspects of *otaku* culture are considered less desirable for the national image than Studio Ghibli and Hello Kitty, eroticism has always been a part of the conversation of artists and readers involved in the development of manga styles. The cutesy rounded characters of children’s anime are inherently tied to an unspoken adult eroticism. Famed anime director Miyazaki Hayao of Studio Ghibli, known for his adventurous young girl characters, notes an erotic connection he felt as a teen with the princess character from Toei’s animated feature film *Legend of the White Snake* (白蛇伝, dir. 1958) as one of the origins of his desire to create manga/anime (cf. Galbraith 2019:96). Desire, in a flash of an animated character’s body, moves the shapes, genres, and themes of the media which came to define Japan’s most globally distinctive form of contemporary media.

As a part of the ecology of manga/anime fandom, eromanga serve as an experimental space drawing on the subtextual sexuality of non-pornographic manga/anime – *Legend of the White Snake*'s sexy princess transformed into a Miyazaki girl character now actually having sex. Nagayama uses the cultural genetics of memes to distinguish this misreading from a more straightforward model of cultural influence: "Mememes, to use a term from Azuma Hiroki, are misdelivered in a way which betrays the intentions of their creators, and the genetic code is misread, replicated, recombined, formed into linkages, and bundled only to be again misread" (Nagayama 2014:20). Rather than a sexualization of non-erotic content, the sexual versions of common manga/anime tropes found in eromanga are one manifestation of the affective connection manga/anime fans form with the works they read. Erotic fanworks such as *dōjinshi* and fanfiction fill this void for specific series, allowing readers to reverse the paradigm in mainstream works, where sexuality remains hidden, into one where sexuality is prominent and ready to be enjoyed for a particular character or couple. Considering this function of fanworks, eromanga serve as sexually-explicit fanwork for the entire universe of manga/anime conventions, relying on the readers' knowledge of the intertextual world of manga/anime to create works where the sexuality implicit in that world is now explicit and central. In Azuma Hiroki's model of database consumption, otaku consume anime/manga/games not as individual works but as compilations from a 'database' which contains various tropes and elements (cf. Azuma 2009:54); eromanga are where the sexually-explicit elements from the database can be expressed. An eromanga where a boy has sex with his little sister may not be based on a specific set of characters or series, but it is engaged in conversation with a number of manga, anime, light novels, and games which thematize the close, protective, frustrated feelings a boy feels for his younger sister. Moreover, eromanga are extremely influential on boys' and young men's manga, which in turn integrate new tropes emerging from eromanga. This close interaction between pornographic manga and its non-pornographic counterpart means that eromanga are essential to understanding manga/anime fandom and the ways in which desire is represented on manga pages.

#### 1.4. Eromanga studies

Japanese research on eromanga, exemplified by Nagayama Kaoru's *Eromanga Studies* エロ漫画スタディーズ (2014, translated in 2021 as *Erotic Comics in Japan* by Patrick W. Galbraith and Jessica Bauwens-Sugimoto) and Kimi Rito's *Expression History of Eromanga* エロ漫画表現史 (2017, translated in 2021 as *The History of Hentai Manga: An Expressionist Examination of Eromanga* by Molly Rabbit), focuses on tracing trends in the works themselves similar to the approach of analyzing particular techniques in terms of their history and readerly effects used by Natsume Fusanosuke (1997) and other

manga scholars. Manga historian Yonezawa Yoshihiro also wrote a comprehensive *History of Postwar Eromanga* (2010) covering the industry's transformations from the postwar *kasutori* pulp magazines to the realistic adult *gekiga* comics to the shift towards *bishōjo* eromanga, which still dominate today.

English language scholarship tends towards industrial or anthropological analysis. One of the most substantive analyses of eromanga as a visual medium comes from a discussion of the major obscenity trial (2002-2007) regarding the eromanga *Honey Room* (蜜室 in Kirsten Cather's *The Art of Censorship in Post-War Japan* (2012); the legal interest in what eromanga *show* and *do* for the reader (especially the young reader) turned the courtroom into an ad hoc media theory conference. In *Adult Manga* (2000), Sharon Kinsella analyzes the history of the manga industry to examine the nature of manga for adults – not just eromanga but political manga, business manga, and manga for anyone older than the key manga demographics of *shōnen* and *shōjo*. Focused more specifically on sexual content, Anne Allison's *Permitted and Prohibited Desires: Mothers, Comics, and Censorship in Japan* (2000) offers a critical Freudian analysis of eromanga as a symptom of embedded misogyny in Japanese media. On the other end of the spectrum, Patrick W. Galbraith, in *Otaku and the Struggle for Imagination in Japan* (2019) and numerous articles, examines the development of pornographic styles in otaku culture as a potentially liberatory form working against the demands placed on men by a patriarchal society. Work by Setsu Shigematsu on eromanga toes the line between the condemnation and celebration of eromanga; though sexual fluidity is not in and of itself liberatory, manga can “throw into relief prevailing views about the proper uses and places for sex [...] demonstrate different ways in which sexual fantasy and fetish are imagined and configured, and [...] give visibility to [...] the malleabilities and fluidities of sex” (Shigematsu 1999:129). Beyond these, most analyses of sexually-themed manga in English have focused on the genres of *boys love* (BL), and *ladies comics*, erotic genres aimed at female readers focused on male/male romance and male/female romance, respectively. The popularity of queer and feminist frameworks for academics makes BL and ladies comics a topic with a pre-existing degree of interest – how do women living under patriarchy find a way to express their sexual desires? Scholarly work by Mizoguchi Akiko (2015), James Welker (2019), Mark McLelland (2017), Edo Ernest dit Alban (2020), and Kristine Santos (2020) has addressed BL as a global genre for the exploration of queer desire and community through comics.

### 1.5. The Gender of eromanga

This also opens the question of the gender of eromanga readers and creators. Broad definitions of eromanga allow flexibility in what is included under the term for research purposes. Still, they belie the fact that there are notable genres of sexually-themed

manga treated separately from the 'eromanga' of 'eromanga studies' like 'boys love' and 'ladies comics' aimed at women. By the broadest of definitions, these genres are also eromanga in the literal sense of 'comics with sexual themes' even though their publication contexts, dedicated magazines, and targeted demographics differ from the popular associations with the term 'eromanga'; many do receive the 'adult manga' label which prevents sale to those under eighteen. However, eromanga researchers tend to retain the differentiation between eromanga and genres with sexual themes aimed at women in their selection of works if not their definition. Nagayama includes women-aimed genres in his definition but generally does not analyze 'boys love' works alongside eromanga works. Kimi goes so far as to define out erotic comics of the genres aimed at women – ladies comics, boys love comics, and teens love (male/female romance aimed at teenage girls) – by claiming these genres have more complex priorities beyond sexual arousal and masturbation compared to eromanga (Kimi 2017:359.) This is not to say that 'boys love' should be analyzed with men's eromanga, but that there is an unspoken assumption regarding who gets to be 'ero' – the default is men sexually interested in women, and the exceptional cases are marked. In a shift against this tendency, Kristine Michelle L. Santos discusses the rising trend of *ero*-BL as "an indication of an increasingly intertextual sexual media landscape where boundaries of sexual expression move between normative [heterosexual/eromanga] and non-normative [queer/BL] sexual spaces" (Santos 2020:287). There is also significant overlap in publishers, spaces for sale/trade, and creators of eromanga and BL, indicating a shared community across gender/genre lines which becomes particularly important when legal restrictions threaten sexual expression.

In this vein, Nagayama argues that women creators and readers are more involved in eromanga creation than is popularly considered to be true. For example, Nagayama (2014:104) discusses the prominence of women artists and BL publishing in conjunction with the import of the meme of *shota* (シヲタ), young boy characters in the mid-1990s. In the translators' introduction to the English edition of *Eromanga Studies*, Galbraith and Bauwens-Sugimoto refer to "a head-spinning sense of gender mayhem" (quoted in Nagayama 2021:26) in the eromanga world that Nagayama describes. We must offer this with a caveat: I have been a woman in eromanga spaces, bumping elbows in the lines at 'men's day' at Comic Market or digging for a specific eromanga author at stores like Mandarake, and these are certainly, noticeably, spaces filled with male bodies. In any analysis of eromanga's 'gender mayhem,' it is necessary to juggle the real presence of diverse genders, a nonetheless dominant presence of male bodies, and the imagined audience of men, which informs how works are marketed and designed as separate but overlapping elements of eromanga's gendered audience. Despite the actuality of women's involvement and connections with genres aimed at women, the

works discussed as eromanga are often thought of as “pornographic comics for men” (e.g., Nagayama 2021:14, note 3). Similar to how genres of manga such as *shōjo* (girls) and *shōnen* (boys) often attract adult readers of many genders while also being aimed at a particular demographic of young girls or young boys, eromanga therefore involve an imaginary man, a demographic man whose desires meld into marketing research on the individual and diverse desires of actual readers. Living readers with individual gendered experiences are therefore always, to some extent, at a remove from this imagined reader. This imaginary male reader reinforces an image of eromanga as works eroticizing the (imagined) female body oriented towards stimulating (imagined) male arousal and orgasm. While saying eromanga is pornographic comics for straight men is an oversimplification, this imagined gendered audience clarifies the type of works most often included in the definition of eromanga.

## 2. Methodology

As eromanga contain a wide range of styles and genres, it is impossible to describe all eromanga in any space. To focus on elements of eromanga which might be considered representative rather than the innovations of an individual artist, I analyzed a broad range of contemporary works. The works reviewed for this project were collected from lists of recommended and bestselling artists between 2014 and 2015 on eromanga market sites and forums. A wide variety of artists were selected to represent the current styles popular amongst the community of connoisseurs who consume these works. For the analysis, we avoided relying heavily on some of the specific fetishes that have become famous in Western discussions of eromanga, such as tentacle/monster scenes and lolicon, to retain a focus on widely used visual/formal elements rather than narrative/fetish content. The full list of artists reviewed contained over 600 works, but ultimately the focus is on 52 artists (see APPENDIX) chosen for popularity based on Twitter/pixiv followers and whether or not they were actively working/publishing during the time of this research.

### 2.1. Pages and panels

Like mainstream manga, eromanga can consist of stories continued over many chapters or short stories contained within one or two chapters. Stories are often published in dedicated magazines and then, if an artist has enough material, collected into stand-alone volumes called *tankōbon* (単行本). For example, the volume *Juicy* (ジューシー) by the artist Cuvie (キューヴィー), published in 2011 by Fujimi Comics, collects thirteen chapters comprising nine separate stories; these chapters were originally published in Fujimi’s adult comic magazines *Comic Momohime* and

*Penguin Club* between 2004 and 2009. A similar volume collects all the chapters in the *Sister Control* (姉 (シスター) コントロール) series by YuzukiN' (柚木N') (pronounced Yuzuki-en-dash), which was published in the magazine *Comic MUJIN* between 2010 and 2011, along with three additional bonus stories. Due to the expectations of the genre, every chapter in serialization contains some sort of sexual encounter; the plot advances in increments leading up to a sex scene (or, often, to explain a sex scene shown in *medias res* at the beginning of the chapter). This structure forms the expectations for each chapter; while reading, the awareness of the coming sex scene is in the back of the reader's mind.

Within a single chapter, a manga is divided into pages (viewed as a double-page spread) and within pages into panels. According to Thierry Groensteen, the panel is the smallest distinguishable unit in a comic (cf. Groensteen 2007:27); though the panel can be expanded and divided, it loses any meaning if broken down further into lines or shapes. The panel, however, gains its meaning from its relation to other panels on the page, and the page exists in relation to the book as a whole. As a single eromanga chapter continues, the page design shifts according to the scene; as stated previously, there is a particular contrast between the sexual and the non-sexual scenes. The non-sexual scenes for the most part look like any other manga, but as the plot builds to the sexual encounter at the heart of the chapter, the panel layouts intensify. While a page depicting a non-sexual scene might feature a simple three or four panels layout, as the sex scene starts we have six, seven, eight divisions centered around a larger tableau. The panels seem to depict a variety of moments either with no connection to each other (sudden position shifts for the characters) or with moment-to-moment detail that exceeds the necessary information for simply understanding what is happening. This format lives within the 'network' of eromanga which Groensteen defines as general 'arthrology': "[W]ithin the paged multiframe that constitutes a complete comic, every panel exists, potentially if not actually, in relation with each of the others" (Groensteen 2007:146).

Natsume Fusanosuke outlines three basic functions of a panel: to structure time, to guide the reader psychologically through expansion/contraction, and to express space by limiting the frame of the image (cf. Natsume 1997:152). The function I want to highlight here is the role of the panel in organizing and creating temporality within a comic; particularly in *shōjo* manga, the structure of time is more often psychological rather than strictly linear in progression (cf. Natsume 1997:158). Panels do not impose a particular time duration, but they visually create a sequence and cue the viewer into a particular temporal rhythm (cf. Groensteen 2007:46). Panels in a manga do not necessarily equate to a single shot in a film, though the comparison is sometimes apt (cf. Groensteen 2007:26);. However, panels may happen in sequence when 'read' or understood as part of the story, their first impact is visual, and, initially,

they are seen all at once. When the reader opens a comic book to see a two-page layout of material, all of the time represented in the sequence of panels therein occurs at once in front of the eye. When the eromanga reader opens a book or a magazine, a sexual scene occurs in front of the eye, with the great variety of panels representing the moments which, in a film, would have to happen in sequence; here they can happen all at once for the reader. As the chapter and the characters head towards their climax, the mechanics of how they move from moment to moment become unnecessary; what becomes important, instead, is a multiplicity of moments arranged on the page so that the eye may rest on all at once – or choose the ones most affecting.

The example here comes from a collected volume called *JC Ecchi* JCエッチ by Shiwasu no Okina (師走の翁), published in 2009. Below is a sequence of eight pages (Figures 1-4) comprising the foursome that occurs while the main characters (a teacher and his three students) visit Disneyland. On the first double-page spread (Figure 1), we have a pattern of four panels (top right, girl A penetrated from behind); then three panels (bottom right, girl B penetrated against a window); then several panels that overlap each other – fellatio, armpit, three that proceed down the top left zeroing in on the reaction of girl C – before culminating in a tableau of girls A and B lying down in front of girl C and the man. The next page continues this trend wherein separate sexual acts are given only a panel or two to be completed and moved on from (Figure 2); in the course of four pages, thirteen different sexual positions are drawn and sequenced into twenty-four panels. Many of these panel transitions represent changes in point of view, from the man's perspective to an outsider's perspective.

Following this excessive amount of activity, the manga shifts into showing tableau pages of the post-coitus scene (Figure 3): a single page of each girl, alone, looking up at the man. In two of these, she is also looking up at the reader; in the second one, the reader seems to be peering in at the scene as a third party. These single-panel pages shift to the opposite extreme from the previous pages, a pause that allows space to process the earlier pages while visually enjoying their effects in greater detail. Finally, the sequence ends with a serene image of the four characters asleep as the manga returns to a more standard panel layout (Figure 4). Through the variety of images, the seeming 'speed' at which the actions develop, represented by an increased number of panels, and through the shifts in point of view, the reader has the option of visually selecting the most pleasing or arousing moments to form a fantasy space. The inclusion of multiple women characters also courts this element of reader choice in experiencing the comic: the imagined heterosexual male reading can pick the girl he finds most appealing to focus his fantasy attention on. All pornography allows the viewer to fantasize about its contents selectively; eromanga are not alone in building this quality of selection into their design, but the inclusion of this multiplicity of panels creates a space easily inviting to imaginative projection.



**Figure 1.** *JC Ecchi* by Shiwasu no Okina (2009:108-109); please note throughout that two-page spreads are in Japanese page order from left (here, p. 108) to right (here, p. 109).



**Figure 2.** *JC Ecchi* by Shiwasu no Okina (2009:110-111)



Figure 3. JC Ecchi by Shiwasu no Okina (2009:112-113)

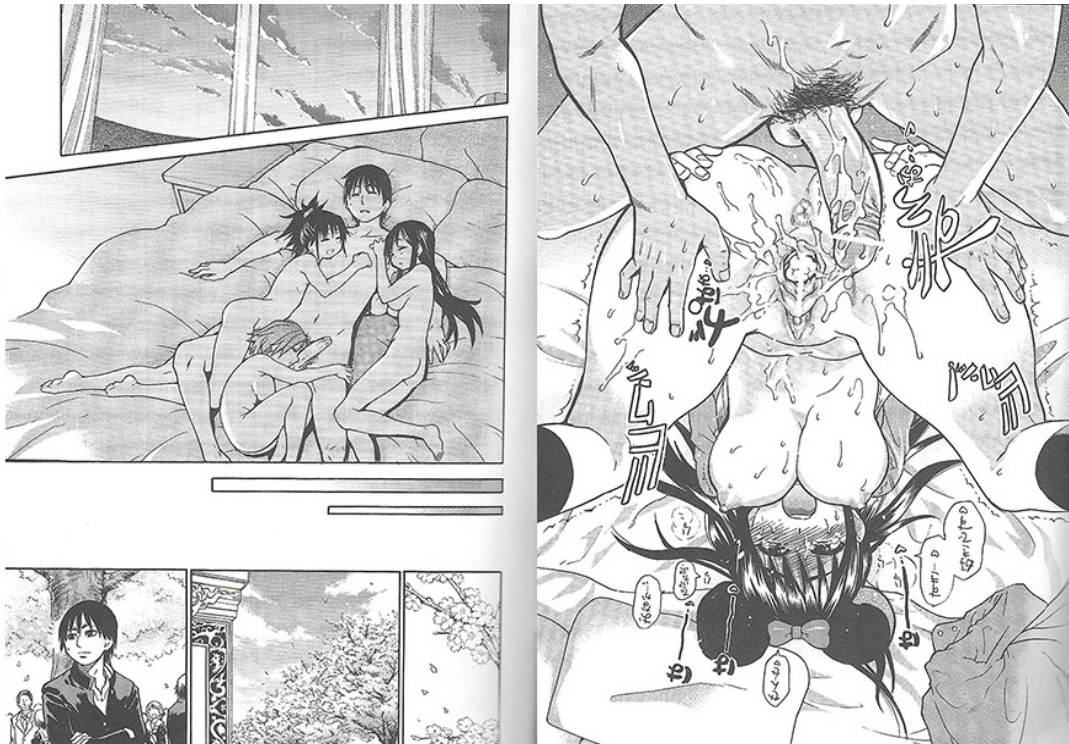


Figure 4. JC Ecchi by Shiwasu no Okina (2009:114-115)

The imaginative capacity given to the reader as they move from panel to panel is considered a unique part of manga and comics as an art form. The dangers of this imaginative potential became a significant point in the obscenity trial of the eromanga *Honey Room* (蜜室) by Beauty Hair (ビューティ・ヘア). The court, in this case, indicated that manga are particularly erotic because the panel arrangement of drawn images pulls the reader in as an imaginative collaborator who must fill in the gaps from panel to panel: "In the judges' minds, this invitation to read the invisible 'space between the lines' or behind faint maskings was no testament to the artistry of the medium but rather evidence of its obscenity" (Cather 2012:254). Part of eromanga's capacity to affect is found in this design by which a reader, moving from panel to panel, must bridge the gutters by imagining the interceding moments, contributing their sexual fantasies to the one on the page.

## 2.2. Bodies

So what fits into these complex panel arrangements? As the example shows, the majority of the page is filled with bodies during the sex scenes: moving bodies, naked bodies, contorted bodies. The constant repetition of the body in fractured portions through the juxtaposition of panels already creates a feeling of duplication, a layering of angles, and a sense that the body associated with one character is multiplied many times throughout the page. Looking at the *JC Ecchi* example again, it becomes almost confusing that there are three women but only one man; surely, surely there is more than one penis doing all that work? The multiplicity of panels therefore suggests another key element of the sexual-visual space of eromanga: the definitions and identity of the bodies on the page are not fixed.

Drawn lines allow a body to become malleable, creating pornographic expressions impossible in live action photographic or filmic pornography. This category of body transformation in fact covers a number of the expressions covered by Kimi and Nagayama, such as large breasts, male sexual organs on otherwise female bodies, the sexual intercourse cross-sections, and tentacles. I will subsume these under one category through a perhaps unexpected concept: the body that emerges in eromanga is defined by the particular quality of permeability. Central to this is the penetration of the body in coitus. But the concept of permeability applies to many other aspects of the bodies seen in eromanga, often making the body strange, unnatural to a degree beyond the usual dehumanization of manga character design. The mechanics of the bodies operate differently as their defining boundaries become permeable and changeable. To explore this permeability, we can divide its manifestations into two groups. First of all, there are the things that come out of the body: sweat, semen, and vaginal fluids, as well as organs, particularly the penis and the breasts. Second, there are the things that go into the body: the penis and the eye of the readers.

Sweat and moisture feature prominently in many eromanga scenes. Like the panel angles becoming more frenzied as the action intensifies, sweat and moisture covering the body are markers of intensifying action. Sometimes the sweat is sweat, sometimes water, but it covers the drawn body in small markings that suggest an internal state of arousal, if not necessarily sexual. One book, Hisasi's collected volume *Porno Switch* (ポルノスイッチ 2012), declares on the cover: "Please get me soaked!" (「ずぶ濡れにしてください」), also "Please make me wet!" The book eroticizes water in a variety of ways; the scene pictured here, for example, features a bathtub scene where both the water and the heat of the room coat the bodies of the character in a sheen of moisture (Figure 5). The amount of water is suggestive here of movement – it seems to shake and slide – and the fluids more overtly associated with sex, as the moisture lines in the bottom left panel seem to extend from the point of penetration.

Sweat and moisture on the skin are the first levels on a spectrum of bodily fluids. Eromanga also uses urine, breast milk, and blood as elements of design and eroticism. However, the most important fluids in eromanga are precisely those one would expect, i.e., vaginal fluids and semen. Both these fluids serve as symbols of sexual



Figure 5. *Porno Switch* by Hisasi (2012:200-201)

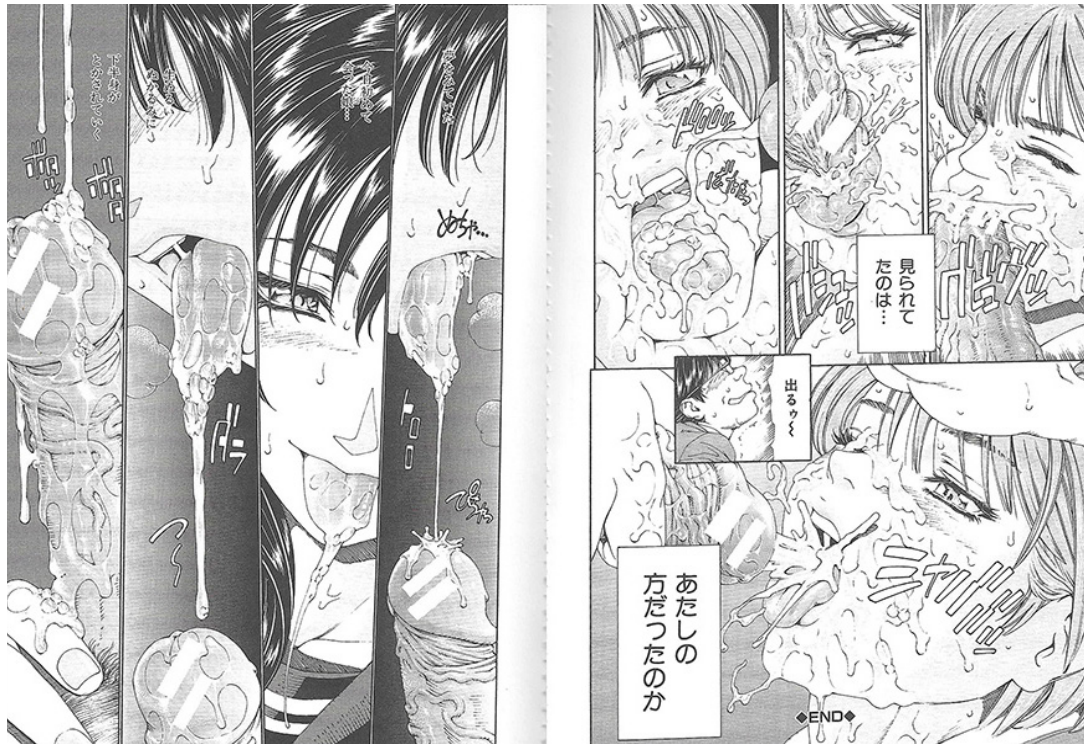


Figure 6. *Accelerando* by Seto Yūki (2004:94-95).

arousal and sexual completion, similar to the ‘money shot’ in filmed pornography (cf. Williams 1989:94). The money shot is designed to prove that the performer involved did achieve orgasm (whether he did or not); however, in eromanga, there is no performer. Instead, what is demonstrated semiotically through the emphasis on semen and vaginal secretions is the eromanga body’s excessive ability to produce arousal. Semen also functions as final proof of possession over the women’s bodies.

This double page spread from *Accelerando* (アツチェランド) by Seto Yūki (世徒ゆうき) (2004) (Figure 6) is actually the end of one chapter and the beginning of the next, but they work well together as a set. The righthand side shows a woman completing fellatio in a group sex scene. This final culmination features her being covered in semen to an excessive degree marks her as having been used to their satisfaction (and to her own). The lefthand side is the beginning of another fellatio scene: the dripping down of saliva mirrors the ejaculation coming out on the other side of the page.

Extending from this ejection of fluids comes the protrusion of parts of the body itself; the ability of the body to exceed out from its expected limits is shown in eromanga through the enlargement or transformation of body parts as they become objects of sexual fixation. This applies primarily to penises and breasts but extends into a spectrum of bodily deformation that becomes the monstrosity seen in eromanga focused on encounters with aliens, demons, and tentacles.



Figure 7. *TiTIKEI* by Ishikei (2013:42-43)



Figure 8. *TiTIKEI* by Ishikei (2013:46)

Though these monster figures are more grotesque, the deformation tendency in eromanga starts with a type of idealization that takes the body parts of sexual fixation and makes them larger or multiplies them. In this selection of pages from *TiTIKEI* ちちけい by Ishikei 石恵 (2013) (Figures 7-8), an artist known particularly for uniquely lively breasts, for example, the breasts of the main character are enlarged to the point of absurdity. They take over entire panels, dwarfing her hands and her face. In Figure 8, they even move independently, one going up and the other going down. Ishikei's approach expresses a desire to create beautiful lifelike breasts through highlighting and movement (cf. Kimi 2017:60). However, the result is breasts that surpass physical believability.



Figure 9. *Sister Control* by YuzukiN' (2011:129, partial)

Eromanga also prominently focuses on penetration into the body but in ways beyond simply showing a penis going into an orifice. One of the most typical ways of maximizing the amount of page space given to the woman's body is by simply drawing the man as invisible even while he penetrates her. Figure 9, from *Sister Control* by artist YuzukiN', shows the penis becoming transparent as it enters the woman, simultaneously giving the reader the full view of the woman and a peek into her vagina. Another common technique takes this view one step further by showing a cross-section of the woman's body as the penis enters her, called *seikō danmenzu* (性交断面図), a 'sexual intercourse cross-section diagram.' This is an example of an eromanga expression rarely seen in mainstream manga (cf. Kimi 2017:176). It is as if, by its very nature, as a demonstration of sexual intercourse,



Figure 10. *Shindo Eru no bunka jinruigaku* by ShindoL (2013:186-187)



‘sounds’ indicating a physical-material condition, and *gijōgo* (擬情語), non-literal ‘sounds’ representing a psychological state. Given these categories and their sometimes complex overlap, the potential for sound effects of all types to create meaning beyond an actual sound, including showing psychological states, is inherent in their use in manga. Sound effects in eromanga are numerous, and their application to a particular imagined sound is more art than science. Still, the drawing of sound into a page design builds a soundscape beyond the level of dialogue alone. “In other words, words as ‘pictures’ become tools to describe the scene and supplement it with detailed, overflowing information that can’t be completely conveyed through literal word meaning” (Kimi 2017:246). I want to call attention to this aspect because, like sweat on bodies, sound effects add more lines to the page in an aesthetic that intensifies the action on the page; their selection, placement, and design work to multiply the central act depicted. Onomatopoeia function as both words and art, serving as the characters’ “psychological description” (Natsume 1997:118.)

In this page (Figure 12) from *The Shape of the Girl You Love* (君の好きな女の子の形) by MARUTA (2008), a couple having sex outside are written over with sound: “gupyu,” “gish,” etc. The heavy dark ink with which the sound effects are rendered contrasts with the gray tones that make up the scene. Sound effects cross panel borders and exist both within and outside speech bubbles, also connecting to the dialogue, as the characters reach the point where they are speaking



**Figure 12.** *The Shape of the Girl You Love* by MARUTA (2008:21)

in stops and starts such as “naa,” “aaa,” “fu,” “ha...” that are closer to sound effects than words. Surrounding the couple with moans, the sound effects are almost more evocative of meaning: they indicate the action that causes the characters to lose their ability to speak without stuttering. This action, of course, is penetration, and the sound effects indicate this in terms of both being the sounds made in the course of the action and by framing the action on the page. In the center and the bottom left panels, the act of penetration is surrounded by the sounds it causes in visual form, framing the area of visual interest while creating the sound in the reader’s mind.

Dialogue also often serves to call attention to the sexual acts being performed. It also clarifies what is happening amid the complicated panel layouts discussed above. A female eromanga character will often engage in a narration of



Figure 13. *Juicy* by Cuvie (2011:202-203)

what is happening to her or what she wants to happen; common lines include “You’re inside me,” “I am going to come,” and “I don’t want to get pregnant.” Her ‘voice’ functions as a visual dirty talk to allow access to her experience, though that experience is almost always the same reluctant, embarrassed pleasure. Though in many instances, the dialogue adds another layer of sexual signs to the page, in many eromanga, the characters’ spoken words, particularly those of female characters, become the dramatic thrust of the scene. The narrative drives toward the woman’s admission of pleasure, and it is only after her admission that the rest of the characters achieve climax.

This device is often used in eromanga stories that focus on rape or coerced sex, but the example page here (Figure 13) is from the short story “Shōjo Straight” (少女ストレート) by artist Cuvie in the volume *Juicy*. This story takes the most purely *shōjo* (girl’s romance) storyline – a girl’s friends tease her about her crush on a boy, he overhears, then they get caught in the rain together – and reimagines it in a way that maximizes the eroticism: The friends are also teasing her about how she is still a virgin, the rain soaks her clothing exposing her bra, and she and the boy ultimately have sex. It also takes the romance trope of the ‘confession’ scene and resituates it in the bedroom context: Now, their love confessions to each other take place while they have sex. His admission that he loves her leads to her ardent declaration, which prefigures her passionate orgasm. From examples like this, we see that even in the more basic sexual dialogue (‘I’m coming,’ etc.) coming from a still drawing on the page, the speaking of the act is part of what makes it so.

### 3. Conclusion

By portraying sex in the manner described, eromanga stylizes sex into a layering of multiple signifiers of sexuality that overcome what one might imagine to be the limitations of a static, drawn form. The use of a surfeit of visual information – too many panels, too many bodies, too many sounds – suggests the scene’s intensity and creates a space of extremity that can move the body and the reader into an imaginative relationship that allows for fantasy. The disruption of panel linearity in favor of visual multiplicity, the undermining of bodily coherence, and the subordination of text to support the image is central to a genre where the fantasy experience is primary over the consumption of narrative information. These insights from eromanga also allow us to reexamine other manga genres in terms of how they operate to allow the reader to fantasize within the manga pages – as long as we accept that pornographic works are always integral to the media culture, which otherwise pushes them out of sight.

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## APPENDIX – List of Artists

English Name	Japanese name
Ishikei	石恵
Yamatogawa	大和川
Yuzuki N Dash	柚木N'
Seto Yuuki	世徒ゆうき
Shiwasu No Okina	師走の翁
Gunma Kisaragi	如月群真
Meme-50	メメ50
Hisasi	Hisasi
Bosshi	ぼっし
Inuboshi	犬星
Odanon	織田non
shindol	新堂エル
Mochi	モチ
cuvie	Cuvie
Maruta	MARUTA
Kamino Ryu-ya	上乃龍也
Homunculus	ホムンクルス
Hanaharu Naruko	鳴子ハナハル
Takeda Hiromitsu aka Shinjugai	武田弘光 真珠貝
Tsukino Jyogi	月野定規
Erect Sawaru	エレクトさわる
DISTANCE	DISTANCE
Fuuga	楓牙
Noise Noise	(のいす)
MTSP	MTSP
limusu Aki	いーむす・アキ
Chihiro Harumi	ハルミチヒロ
Hokama Mitsuri	ほかまみつり
Miyabi Tsuzuru	みやびつづる
Doi Sakazaki	土居坂崎
Ohtomo Takuji	大友卓二
Amatarou	天太郎

English Name	Japanese name
Nagare Ippon	流一本
Nishiiori	西安
Onizuki Aruchu / Udon-ya	鬼月あるちゅ / うどん屋
Onizuka Naoshi	鬼束直
Ffkddddd / Fukudaada	フクダーダ
Okada Kou	岡田コウ
Ki no Hitoshi	鬼ノ仁
Sameda Koban	さめだ小判
JingRock	甚六
Natsu Iori	夏庵
Bareisho	馬鈴薯
Fuetakishi	フエタキシ
Fue	Fue
Sena Youtarou	瀬奈陽太郎
Kishizuka Kenji	木静謙二
Higena Muchi	ひげなむち
Senke Kagero	千家カゲロー
Hakaba	墓場
Hori Hiroaki	堀博昭
Makinosaka Shinichi	牧野坂シンイチ

#### AUTHOR

**Caitlin Casiello** Ph.D. candidate in Film & Media Studies and East Asian Languages & Literatures, Yale University, United States

