

Web Riders on the Storm

Anime Music Videos, Aesthetics, and Copyright

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Introduction

In anime fan culture, defined as the fandoms that have grown up around anime, it is very common for fans to take established material and use it as a basis for their own work. Fan fiction in its many forms can be found all over the internet, and there are hundreds of thousands of fan art images similarly dispersed. Doujinshi, unofficial fan-produced manga based on established manga, are common. These forms are based on the idea that the creator takes the existing canon, and works from it, using it as a foundation. Given the nature of anime as a joint moving image and audio form, it is more difficult to produce a fan work in the same form, using the anime as raw material. (Pullen 85)

Enter the short video form. Taking existing video and audio material, an editor mixes and remixes them together into a new product – sometimes one that bears little relation to the sources. Despite sharing content origins with doujinshi, fan art, and fan fiction, anime music videos are a closer methodological cousin to electronica. As with electronica, the modus operandi is that of sampling. Anime music videos are made by extensively sampling selected sources, and then editing these samples together into a larger structure of samples that gives them meaning. The synthesis frequently explores something that the original video did not (Jenkins 163).

Unlike electronica, the samples are rarely visually distorted to the point of being unrecognizable. It is common practice for the video to be cut extensively, but for the origin of individual clips to be easily recognizable. The audio is usually the whole of a commercially available song. Obviously, this tends to run aground of copyright law.

Since the anime music video community has evolved largely isolated from any of the other fan-video communities, the net result is that anime music videos have a unique aesthetic and form that is under threat from copyright law (Pullen 81).

Start At The Beginning!

Before the current state of a form can be examined, some background in its history and

evolution is requisite. The anime music video (or AMV) form can be traced back to 1982, to a man working on Gundam fansubbing (fansubbing, the subtitling of anime by fans, is beyond the scope of this paper). He noticed that there was some time left on the end of the tape he was working with. To fill it, he used two VCRs to put together selected clips from the show, and then dubbed music over his creation. This idea caught on somewhat with other fans, but it was fraught with difficulties. The hardware required wasn't excessively hard to acquire, but good hardware was. That is, it was easy to find a VCR, but finding one that would allow for the required precision of timing was difficult, and the ones that did were expensive. Beyond that, this method forced linear editing, meaning that the entire video had to be planned out in advance. Going back and changing a scene was very difficult, as a result. Additionally, there were issues with footage acquisition, since subtitles in a video are highly distracting and the unsubtitled tapes were difficult to acquire (Springall) (Jenkins 161).

With the advent of non-linear computer editing suites that can be reasonably afforded by common consumers, things began to change. Editing no longer meant days with two VCRs and poor control over the timing. Non-linear editing via computer allows simultaneous access to all points of the footage in question, and it allows for timing down to frame granularity. Source acquisition problems still existed, however. Getting the footage onto a computer for editing was not an easy or fast process. This was compounded by the relatively low storage capacities available to home users.

However, it wasn't until domestic anime DVDs and DVD ripping became common that the anime music video form really began to grow. Getting footage didn't involve hours with a VCR and a capture card – only a few minutes with DVD Decrypter or equivalent DVD ripper. DVD-ROM drives and DVD rippers became common after 2000. The major barriers to editing, those of means and source, were gone, and growth was only a matter of time (Springall).

In 2000, it happened. Kris McCormic created AnimeMusicVideos.org to catalog all extant AMVs. The result was that the nascent community now had a focal point, and focus it did. Currently, AnimeMusicVideos.org has approximately 444,000 registered members, 27,000 of which are creators,

and 76,000 videos in its catalog, 43,000 of which are stored on servers owned by AnimeMusicVideos.org (all numbers rounded to lower thousand). Over fifty new videos are uploaded daily, and a larger number of catalog entries created. One fansubber's inspiration has touched at least half a million people, and that just on one website. The first AMV may not be much to watch by modern standards, but that isn't what matters – the form of the anime music video is what matters (Springall) (AnimeMusicVideos.org).

As one might expect, the artistic and aesthetic development of this form has matched pace with technological development and availability. Timing has become increasingly important, as has quality of both video and audio. The use of special effects is a hotly contested issue, as it is in modern cinema. The aesthetic that has develop is strongly different from that of MTV-style music videos, and itself worthy of examination. Any unique aesthetic has value, but before this uniqueness (and thus value) can be asserted with any strength, the aesthetic must be explored and defined.

Know Thyself

The aesthetic that has developed in the modern AMV community is complex and largely unexplored in any formal sense. The only aesthetic to be described with any degree of formality is a constructive one. That is, the perspective of a person who makes videos, and thus views videos through that experience, or the perspective of a producer as opposed to a receiver. This aesthetic describes videos in terms of synchronization, concept, and effects.

Got The Music In Me

Synchronization, or synch, is the idea that in a music video the audio and video should be connected. When there is sound, there is video to match. This aesthetic value has been further subdivided into musical, lyrical, and mood synchronization for ease of discussion and analysis. Synchronization is typically viewed as the most important technical aspect of a video, the medium

through with everything else can be conveyed.

Musical synchronization is the simplest, conceptually speaking. This is the idea that cuts, fades, effects, or just events in the video are timed to match the audio. A strong guitar riff might be matched with a cut, or a snare drum hit with a lens flare. A bass drum hit might be paired with an explosion, particularly if there are a series of bass drum hits in an action video. Long, slow, lilting musical passages may be coupled with equally long and slow crossfades. This can be layered, with certain characters, visual effects, or types effects bound to specific sounds. Perhaps a series of explosions timed to a particularly hard set of guitar riffs.

In addition to musical synchronization, there is also lyrical synchronization. This is video being matched to the lyrics. Obviously, this only applies to audio with lyrics. Where musical synchronization matches instruments and instrumental sound to video, lyrical synchronization matches lyrics to video. It is very common for videos to have an image or clip match with the literal meaning of lyrics. For example, the line “war and anger shall reign” may be paired with an image of ignorant armies clashing upon a darkling plain. In this case it is highly appropriate, since the subject matter of the song in question (Blind Guardian's “Battlefield”) is war.

Lyric interpretation need not be literal, however. Symbolism and other less literal representations do occur. “New medicines should ease this pain”, from Dead Poetic's “New Medicines”, paired with images of a warrior overlaid with images of his friends give a decidedly less than literal meaning to the lyrics. Here, the new meaning is about the people that keep the warrior from homicidal insanity. The lyrics have been placed into a new context, and this one is about personal relationships.

In addition to musical and lyrical synchronization, there is the less easily described mood synchronization. To take an example, using Clint Mansell's “Requiem for a Dream” to create a horror video capable of inflicting nightmares (as the author knows from personal experience). Unfortunately, this is a little explored area, and thus very difficult to discuss within the context of an overview of

anime music videos.

What It's All About

Where synchronization is a very granular way of examining a video, examining it bit by bit, a video concept is about the overall pattern in the video. The message, idea, or theme underlying a video can all be described as guiding concepts. Concepts are more difficult to define than synchronization, but three clear categories have been defined: storytelling, exploration, and examination. There are other categories, such as parody, but those do not require definition, as they are common in other mediums, and thus familiar to most everyone.

Storytelling is exactly what the name suggests: using the combination of audio and video to tell a story. The story may have very little to do with either the original video or audio sources, or may have everything to do with them. The easiest form of storytelling, and thus the most common, is simplifying a preexisting story and retell it. This is true in any form, and anime music videos are no exception. However, videos that take an existing anime (or more rarely, set of anime) and splice together an entirely new story are highly prized (when successful) or viewed as a good attempt (when not). Again, as in any other medium, stories run the gamut from simple to complex to incomprehensible.

Exploration videos are a little different. These videos focus not on a story, but rather on a concept of some sort in a general sense. Possible subjects include war, coping with loss, tragedy, purity, and innocence. Love and romance tend to be subjects in the specific, rather than the general treatment found here, but general explorations of relationships are not unknown.

Examination videos tend to focus on a single character, couple, or group of characters. Rather than the general view offered by an exploratory video, an examination video deals with a very specific instance of something (i.e., an example of the concept in question). The personality, motivations, history, or other aspect of a character are all viable subjects for an examination video. Videos that

examine a couple tend to be about the relationship. Friendships, rivalries, and romances all fall into this grouping. Groups of characters are generally examined in terms of some commonality, as the limitations of the form (time and space) tend to prevent closer examinations.

Blinded By The Light

Paralleling one of the larger aesthetic issues in contemporary cinema, many anime music videos make use of a significant amount of special effects. The appropriateness of any given effect is largely a matter of opinion, but three loose schools of thought have emerged, describing a spectrum. One school is artistic, one focuses on visual appeal, and one is utilitarian.

The first school of thought adopts an artistic approach to special effects, seeking to heighten the emotions projected by onto the viewer or otherwise strengthen the impact of the video. One example is a video that deals with the past, present, and future as discrete events, color coding them as green, white, and sepia, respectively. In this instance, the artistically applied effect strengthens the internal structure of the video, which deals in part with relationships over time. This can lead to heavy-handed or incomprehensible symbolism. However, it should be noted that any video which requires liner notes to be rendered comprehensible has probably failed to communicate properly.

The second school of thought can be briefly summarized as “let's have fun”. These are effects used for visual appeal, like color in the *Wizard of Oz*. These generally have no artistic merit other than that the editor had fun creating them and thinks they look pretty. This can lead to stunning technical achievements, such as compositing two hundred clips into a massive wall, or videos where the editor got so caught up in placing lens flares that the original concept has been lost entirely.

Given the aesthetic value of musical synchronization, it is no surprise that special effects have come into common use to achieve tighter (that is, better timed and edited) synchronization. While this is the most practical and utilitarian view, the anime music video community is an artistic one. The strictly utilitarian use of special effects tends to be looked upon as the mark of an inexperienced editor,

one who hasn't learned to really integrate effects into the video yet. The general vein of thought is that a good editor knows when synchronization can be put on hold for something more significant. An inexperienced editor is less certain of this, and thus more likely to add effects so as to not lose synchronization. A good example of this would be a “green” editor adding a strobe effect to a scene in an attempt to heighten its impact, while a more seasoned editor knows that the scene's impact is stronger if left unmodified.

Know Thy Enemy

In what is perhaps an ironic twist, copyright is the bane of this particular art form. The anime music video form is based entirely upon copyright infringement. There are several subjects within the area of copyright that merit examination, including copyright and the World Wide Web, copyright and fan/remix culture, fair use, and a specific discussion of anime music videos in the context of copyright law.

Virtual Property, Virtual World

The central idea of copyright is this: it is possible to own an artistic work in the same manner that one might own a bagel or a house, without eating or living in it. The central idea of the internet is that Alice can send an arbitrary packet P to Bob in an automated fashion, and Bob will receive packet P in the form that Alice sent it (some header details aside). When artistic works can be accurately reproduced as a discrete series of ones and zeros, these ideas are on a collision course (Olson 195).

Copyright, literally, refers to the right to control how something is copied. Now, it has been expanded to cover all forms of reproduction, derivative works, and some other things. Hundreds of years ago, this meant books. Enforcement was relatively easy, as copying a book was (and is) an immense undertaking. Now, when piracy can and does occur with no more effort than a mouse click, copyright is regarded by many as a guideline. Anything online is seen as available for use and reuse

without gaining permission first. To put it another way, the perception is that anything on the internet is available for mixing and remixing (Thomas 87).

The legal reality of this, of course, is that just about everything on the internet is copyrighted. As copyright is automatic under the Berne Convention (an international treaty dealing with copyright), and as the vast majority of countries have ratified the Berne Convention (including the United States), any creative work is automatically covered under an international copyright. With the few exceptions of things that have wound up in the public domain in some fashion, even without a copyright notice, the correct assumption is to assume that the work in question is copyrighted by someone (notable exception – the United States government is forbidden to hold any intellectual property, and thus anything on a US government webpage can be assumed to be public domain).

Play it, Cut it, Quick - Remix it

Remix culture, in a general sense, is difficult to define. The best that can be realistically hoped for is to say that a culture may be a remix culture in the same way that Lassie is a canine. How else can one cover communities that range from OCREmix to fan fiction? Remix culture is not even particular to new media, as Carroll's classic The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass have been subject to the literary equivalent of remixing over time (Jenkins).

Modern remix culture, however, is very much a new media creature. When cultural artifacts (music, art, TV, literature, etc.) are treated as code, to be used and reused, then the result is a form of remix culture. Like any new media product, it remix culture has a love-hate relationship with old media. Love, in that remix culture needs old media, as raw material if nothing else. Remix culture cannot exist without something to remix, and that something is either old media or a new media production made from old media. Hate, in that old media tends to take a very dim view of remix culture, or “copyright infringement”, as old media would prefer to dub it (Zimmerman) (Oppenheimer) (Thomas 82).

Fan cultures, or fandoms, are inextricably linked to remix culture. Fan cultures encourage and thrive upon involvement, analysis, and various forms of remixing. The companies about whose work fan cultures form tend towards a very mixed view of fan cultures. While active and involved fans are more likely to spend money on merchandise or otherwise send it to the rights holders, these same fans are also likely to engage in socially acceptable but illegal remixing – like anime music videos. This mixed view is transmitted to fans, leaving them with inconsistent messages about their activities (Pullen 81) (Jenkins 165).

Certain Inalienable Rights

Contrary to what certain old media forces would like, certain kinds of copyright infringement are both legal and do not require permission at all. This is known as Fair Use or Fair Dealing, depending on the legal tradition in question. Fair Use covers many things, as laid out in US Code § 107:

Notwithstanding the provisions of sections 106 and 106A, the fair use of a copyrighted work, including such use by reproduction in copies or phonorecords or by any other means specified by that section, for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use), scholarship, or research, is not an infringement of copyright. In determining whether the use made of a work in any particular case is a fair use the factors to be considered shall include –

- (1) the purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes;
- (2) the nature of the copyrighted work;
- (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and
- (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work.

The fact that a work is unpublished shall not itself bar a finding of fair use if such finding is made upon consideration of all the above factors.

These criteria are by no means always clear, as explained in the next section.

When Two Worlds Collide

When two fundamentally opposed cultures exist simultaneously, tension, disagreement, and perhaps outright clash are likely inevitable. In this case, the two cultures are anime music video culture and commercial content culture. With AMVs, there are two distinctly copyrighted components: the video and the audio.

The video, typically between three and five minutes in length, usually consists of a number of short clips taken from a show multiple hours in length. Comparatively, this is a small sample being used. Thus, a decent case for the use of video being Fair Use can be made. That it is not possible to reconstruct anything resembling the original work from the anime music videos makes the position stronger.

The audio, however, is a different issue. Anime music videos typically use the whole of a commercially available song. Given sufficient technical knowledge, it's possible to get an MP3 or other audio file from an AMV. There is no sampling argument to be made here. Instead, a song is distributed as a whole, in a form from which is it very possible to reconstitute the whole of the original work.

Taken together, the audio and video unambiguously create a derivative work. The creation of a derivative work without permission is an infringement of copyright. However, if the derivative work is never distributed, then the derivative work cannot have any effect upon the potential market for the original. Thus, creating and never distributing a derivative work is unambiguously Fair Use. It is also rather useless as a piece of art, since art exists to be seen and experienced by an audience. Distribution, thus, is important. Since any distribution of a work that cannot claim Fair Use for the whole of it is copyright infringement, there is a problem.

Recent events have born this out. On Tuesday, November 15, 2005, AnimeMusicVideos.org received a Cease and Desist notice from Wind-Up Records. AnimeMusicVideos.org was forced to take

down videos using audio by the artists Seether, Creed, and Evanescence. More than 2000 videos were taken down, in total (AnimeMusicVideos.org).

Conclusion

If one accepts that any aesthetic has value, then aesthetics should be valued according to their uniqueness. Given the aesthetic described in detail above, it is clear that it holds a significant amount of intrinsic value. The aesthetic, summarized as synchronization, concept, and effects is unique among new media. It is also clear from a cursory examination of copyright statutes, that anime music videos infringe on copyrights. Recent events show that anime music videos are under threat from overzealous copyright holders. Thus, anime music videos have a unique aesthetic and form that is under threat from copyright law.

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Riders on the storm
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Into this house we're born
Into this world we're thrown
Like a dog without a bone
An actor out on loan
Riders on the storm
There's a killer on the road
His brain is squirmin' like a toad
Take a long holiday
Let your children play
If you give this man a ride
Sweet family will die
Killer on the road, yeah
Girl, you gotta love your man
Girl, you gotta love your man
Take him by the hand
Make him understand
The world on you depends
Our life will never end
Gotta love your man, yeah
Riders on the storm
Riders on the storm
Into this house we're born
Into this world we're thrown
Like a dog without a bone
An actor out on loan.
Riders on the storm
Riders On The Storm. 2,658 likes · 1 talking about this. Riders On The Storm ~ The Ressurrection of The Doors. Riders On The Storm have performed thousands of concerts, in dozens of countries, to countless numbe See more. Community See all. About Riders on the Storm. This was the last song Jim Morrison recorded. He went to France and died a few weeks later. The single was released in June, 1971, shortly before Morrison's death. This evolved out of a jam session when the band was messing around with Ghost Riders In The Sky, a cowboy song by Stan Jones. It was Jim Morrison's idea to alter the title to Riders On The Storm. Ray Manzarek used the electric piano to create the effect of rain. Ray Manzarek told Uncut magazine September 2011: "There's a whisper voice on Riders on the Storm, if you listen closely, a whispered overdub that Jim adds beneath his vocal. That's the last thing he ever did. An ephemeral, whispered overdub."