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How do Amano and Sui's illustrations convey their expression through the material in the analogue and digital processes?

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Introduction

As once stated by Edwards (1988, Preface), ‘Drawings, like words, have *meaning* – often beyond the power of words to express, but nonetheless invaluable in making the chaos of our sensory impressions comprehensible.’ Through the materials and how they are used, illustrators have been able to convey their expression through their work, whether this was through analogue or digital processes. This philosophy will be questioned and researched into in order to understand how the properties of an illustrator’s tools and the techniques that can be used from them can visually communicate the illustrator’s expression and their human touch within their work. Further to this, the visual analysis into Yoshitaka Amano and Sui Ishida’s illustrations will be conducted as examples of illustrators who utilise their materials within their creative practice.

Yoshitaka Amano is an analogue artist whose work has been created using a multitude of different mediums for each individual piece, his choice of media ranges from various painting and drawing supplies to print making.

Whereas Sui Ishida is primarily a digital illustrator which means that he produces his work through digital art software. Similar to Amano, Ishida uses several brushes and tools to create a wide array of effects within his work through his digital painting style. Additionally, there is direct evidence that Ishida in his artbook (Ishida, 2020) that he experimented with analogue drawing techniques within his digital creative process by drawing his illustrations, scanning it in then painting them in through digital software.

With regards to the theory in this essay, Charles Peirce’s Semiosis and his triadic model of communication will be referred to as an overarching theory that will explain the meaning behind the material with these two illustrators through a semiotic perspective. The connection between this theory and the visual analysis of the artwork will establish how the components within different materials such as texture, marks and colour carry independent meanings that when interwoven would play into the artist’s expression within their work.

Furthermore, the subconsciousness within the mind and how materials can affect creativity will be explored as part of the discussion with Amano and Ishida's illustration processes.

These theories will tie into the visual analysis of Amano and Ishida's fantasy themed artwork in order to understand how they express themselves or the message in their artwork through the choice of materials and the other elements that connect to the media itself such as the marks, textures, colours and more.

Theoretical Background

From the start of art history when cavemen created the cave paintings up to the mid-20th century, the majority of illustration type of work had been made through analogue means with illustrators using various mark-making techniques as well as materials for drawing and painting (Tucker, 2025). In this current era, art has now shifted into the realm of digital art with illustrators utilising technology and digital software to develop their artwork instead of using analogue materials. However, it should be noted that despite the rise in digital art as Webster states:

In harmony with the tactility of handmade work [...], agencies are also looking for artists whose work breaks out into the physical world. It can be digitally created and then adapted for murals or wraps, or made first and foremost in the physical world using traditional media and/or natural materials.

(Webster, 2024)

Regardless of the fact that digital media has become more popular, there are illustration agencies and illustrators who still look for the materiality of analogue art within digital work and the human expression that comes from it. Counterpoint to this statement, it is possible to bring the human touch into digital art using the fundamental knowledge and skills acquired from the experience with analogue processes.

Further to this point, Doonan states that these basic principles that form the picture or illustration includes the interweaving and placement of lines, colour and shapes which the illustrator considers when using and organising their choice of medium throughout the creative process (Doonan, 1993, p.12). There are techniques and tools that each illustrator utilises within these fundamentals in order for them to communicate their expressions through their work. Although these principles came from analogue methodologies, they are applicable to digital art as well because:

An artistic foundation comprised of sound drawing and painting skills, conceptual problem solving, and strong design application, ultimately result in successful hand created or analog solutions, and translate well into digital applications and output.

(Phillips-Pendleton, 2018)

The tools we employ for mark-making and texture within our work may result in a difference in visual quality between analogue and digital processes. Despite this, the development of digital art software has been able to create tools that is able to emulate textures and brush stroke effects that appear similar towards painting and drawing material. The testing and applying of the material's capabilities alongside the artistic foundations in visual communication are both necessary actions in both analogue and digital processes.

In addition to this, from these marks and textures that we produce on the canvas, there is the symbolic value that comes from the illustrator's tools and materials. In Doonan's book (1993, p. 12) and Phillips-Pendelton's paper (2018, p. 3), they state that the act of mark-making through any form of media as a form of telling and expression by the illustrator, even if the medium is a pencil, pen, paint or something else entirely, there will always be a statement to be spoken through the material and the marks made by it. According to the Tate (n.d.), they define mark-making as the creation of various types of marks within the artist's pieces, for example lines, dots, patterns and texture. These marks can be made with a loose or firm hand grip which will produce gestural or controlled brush strokes respectively, as well these can come from any material that touches the surface such as a pencil to paper, paint on canvas, a digital paint tool on the screen, tattoo marks on the skin, even a non-physical form as sound can be considered mark-making. The choice of materials and tools employed by the illustrator and the marks made from it plays a role into artistic expression and how they tell the message within their artwork, whether this being a harsh pen mark to convey a sense of boldness or raw emotion, or a wash of watercolour for a more ephemeral atmosphere.

The theory of Semiotics itself involves the perception of signs and symbols from our observations to hold a form of meaning that can be used within visual communication (Atkin, 2006). In the Peircean Semiotics that was developed by Charles Sanders Peirce, he established the theory on semiotics through his triadic model of communication which consisted of three components that formed the term sign. These components themselves are the semiotic sign's physical form, the aspect that this sign represents, and the mental perception that arises from seeing the sign. In Peirce's theory, he refers each of these parts respectively as The Representamen, The Object and The Interpretant (Media Studies, 2021). Further to this, within each component there are subclasses that Peirce introduces as part of deepening the level of his theory from the three general components to specific terms that apply to various circumstances. The most notable subclasses are Iconic, Indexical and Symbolic which reside within, The Object and they facilitate the level of which the representation from the sign will be understood by the target audience from simple to complex (Wood, 2018, p. 538).

In context towards illustration, by utilising these principles within the Peircean theory, the illustrator would be able to enhance their skills within visual communication. Through manipulating the triadic structure to form signs that could have specific representations that the viewer would interpret directly, or more abstract representations that would lead them to a suggestive interpretation (Wood, 2018, pp. 535-537). A few examples of how this theory is applied into the practical work of illustration can be through colour theory which involves the symbolic value behind colours. This includes red meaning blood, love or danger, composition, body language or gesture, and mark-making as previously stated.

Yoshitaka Amano

During 1967, Yoshitaka Amano started his career as an animator and character designer for Tatsunoko Production when he was fifteen, then shifted towards freelance illustration around the 80s where he worked in various commission jobs for different clients. As an example, there is Square Enix who produced the video game series *Final Fantasy* that Amano worked on as their character designer, visual concept designer and logo illustrations (Amano, 2016).

Below is an illustration Amano created for the package cover design for *Final Fantasy I* (Fig. 1), the illustration itself features the protagonist titled; Warrior of Light and Princess Sarah who gets kidnapped at the start of the game by the antagonist, the focus of the video game is that the main character sets on a quest to save her from the villain and return her to the kingdom of Cornelia (Ferguson, 2021). In the SQUARE ENIX interview with Koichi Ishii and Amano (2025a), Ishii comments that the focus with illustrations back around the time of *Final Fantasy I* was to imprint how the game should be imagined into the player's mind. This is mostly due to how the quality of the video game's display quality was pixelated which made it challenging for players to visualise the content in the game. Through the expressiveness and visual communication skills within Amano's illustrations, players are able to visualise the world building, characters and the story whilst playing the video game.



Fig. 1: *Final Fantasy illustration*

Furthermore, it can be stated that Amano's package illustration successfully represents the story within *Final Fantasy I* (Fig. 1) using the principles of Peircean theory. According to Doonan (1993, p. 12), the entirety of an illustration has an emotional and psychological effect on the viewer that gets them to question why the piece triggers this response in them and how. Through the interweaving of simple and complex semiotic signs within the illustration, Amano forms connections using socio-cultural context of the video game's story but also the subjects within the illustration. In western culture, knights are typical representation of chivalry that protect royalty (indexical) and are depicted in the stereotype of going on quests in order to save the captured princess (symbolic). Additionally, the small details of dragons and the style of armour the knight is wearing carry iconic representation of fantasy that mirrors the genre of the game.

Moving on towards the colour palette in Fig. 1, the illustrator took into consideration the use of a triadic colour scheme of blue, red and yellow to create vibrancy. According to

Lam (2024), a triadic colour scheme involves three colours on the colour wheel that create a triangle format when you connect them together with lines. Furthermore, using this scheme is very effective in marketing purposed illustrations as the right combination can support with presenting information in a simpler format, convey the message behind the product and have a direct influence towards the audience's emotions and actions. Usually, triadic colours scheme can be challenging to pull off, however, Amano used the 60-30-10 rule to create a hierarchy with blue the main colour for the knight's armour, yellow the secondary for the scarf and horns and red for accents and small details, doing this establishes balance between the colours and avoids colours feeling overpowering to the viewer (McGregor, 2024). Also, the saturation within colours has been considered as there is a high contrast between the bold colouring in the knight and the use of muted colours for everything around him. Coming back into colour theory, Doonan (1993, p. 31) asserts that the saturation and tone within a colour informs more of the emotional connotations than the colour itself, with the exception of red meaning warmth. Connecting this theory to Peircean theory, the saturation within all the colours in Fig. 1 form indexical and symbolic representations because the saturation contrast between the triadic colour scheme and muted colours expresses the focal point being the knight within the illustration. As well, the analogous palette of muted pinks and purples used for the kidnapped princess and the background in the mirror deprives any clues of where she could specifically be which in turn suggests that she is in a distant, unfamiliar land.

During the creative process of his illustrations, Amano uses a broad range of materials from drawing and painting tools such as pencil, watercolours, drawing ink, acrylic paint and oil pastel to printmaking with lithography, as evidenced from his interview with Akira Uno and the photograph sequence of him drawing in his artbook (Amano, 2016), as well as videos that showcases him drawing and painting (Archipel, 2020). The fact that he uses a wide selection of varied materials in each individual piece makes it challenging to discern what Amano has used specifically in these examples. However, through the examination of the grainy texture and flat colouring in the illustration, it is possible that Amano used lithography printing for creating the package illustration (Fig. 1). One of Amano's sources of inspiration that has influenced his art style is Japanese

wood block prints (Amano, 2025), their most notable trait is their grainy flat colouring style that comes from the printing method. Comparing Hokusai's woodblock printing (Fig. 2) to Amano's illustration (Fig. 1), there is a heavy similarity in the texture and flat colouring style between the two which supports the belief that Amano used lithography in the artwork.



Fig. 2: *Under the Wave off Kanagawa*

Another point about his creative process is that Amano comments about how he does not struggle with producing artwork, his typical style of working is that he trusts his instincts in the development of his illustrations, this in turn allows him to create piece after piece without overthinking or doubting himself (Archipel, 2020). According to Edwards (1988, p. 14), as an example of a creative form, the act of drawing can reveal evidence of mental shifts and determine whether the right-brain or the left-brain mode led the drawing, despite the artist might not be aware that they are being affected by a certain mental state in their drawing process. Edwards further believes that understanding which brain mode is in command and how to control these mental shifts are necessities towards improving creative thinking. In Amano's case, it is clear that he

is able to control his brain shifts between analytical and creativity thought processes which allows him to unconsciously but accurately place marks on the canvas to develop his expressive character drawings and illustrations, as evidenced by (MyAnimeList Official, 2019).

For example, in page 15 of Amano's artbook (2016), it features his *Final Fantasy I* package illustration and the rough sketch that was made in the preliminary stages of the illustration (Fig. 3). The sketch itself has been created through the layering of quick, bold and loose linework, we know this because 'Speed shows in the texture of the mark, its weight, its roughness and smoothness. [...] Time becomes an embedded quality, which can be seen and comprehended.' (Edwards, 1988, p. 61). This explains the difference in line quality between the face and the rest of the knight's body shows that Amano made sure that his lines were precise when drawing the face so that it would be distinguishable, whereas the rest of the figure has more build-up of lines that become unrefined as he became slightly faster when drawing. Furthermore, this shows that Amano's sketching approach expresses his confidence in his mark-making through the tools he uses.

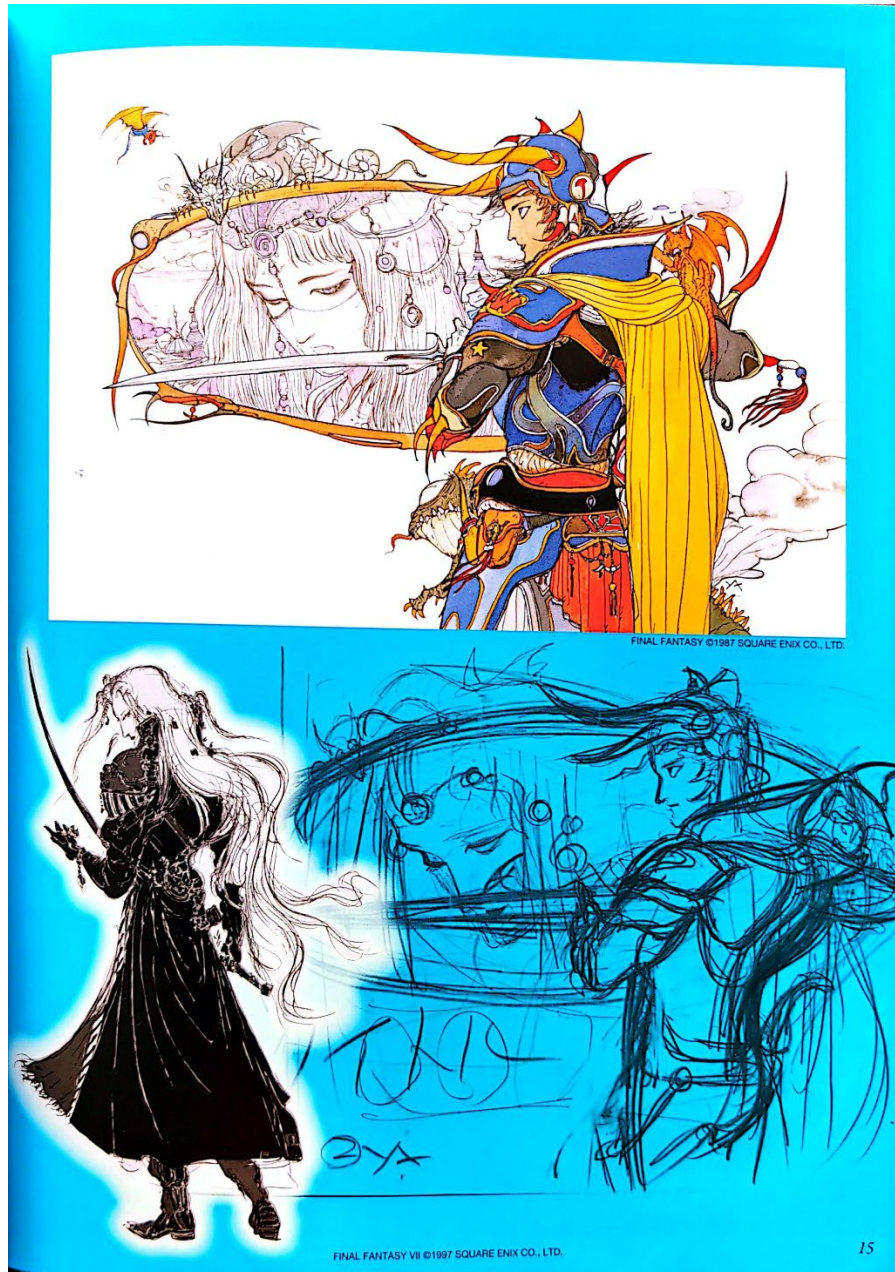


Fig. 3: Amano Artbook p. 15

Sui Ishida

Sui Ishida is a digital illustrator known for his manga series *Tokyo Ghoul* which explores dark fantasy themes and subject matter of identity and psychology as the main character transforms who initially was human becomes half-ghoul after enduring a serious accident and struggles adjusting to his warped life. These two pieces were created by Ishida as editorial pieces for *Young Jump* (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5), a Japanese magazine that primarily publishes by Shueisha that targets young adult groups. The illustrations themselves (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5) feature Juuzou Suzuya, a side character with a slight twisted personality who works as a ghoul investigator in Ishida Sui's manga series *Tokyo Ghoul*. In Ishida's *Tokyo Ghoul* artbook that features these pieces, he states that he mixed elements of the Impasto technique within his usual illustration process, the reason for using the technique is because he describes it as a great method for refining the face but the piece then becomes messy in detail when moving away from the focal point (Ishida, 2020, p. 71). Ishida's illustrations typically portray figures and characters in a painterly style with a mix of semi-realistic and abstract characteristics, moreover, his approach to his painting process has been described as a 'free-form method of painting' (Nakumir, 2020). In Fig. 4 and Fig. 5, the focal point being the face in these pieces carries the greatest detail and almost a three-dimensional appearance but the further away the area around the face is, the more loose the detail becomes such as the hand being an impression. He further mentions that he was satisfied with the outcome of the minimalistic style towards the face from using the Impasto technique (Ishida, 2020, p.71). Incorporating Impasto elements into this piece expresses the artist's desire towards drawing the viewers eye to the faces in his illustrations. Additionally, it tells the importance for illustrators to not get disheartened from failure and to keep experimenting in their work process so that they are acquiring practical knowledge from that could develop their artists expression (Mugnaini and Lovoos, 1966, p. 102).



Fig. 4: *Special Double Pinup Green*



Fig. 5: *Special Double Pinup Grey*

One of the benefits of Ishida being a digital artist is that he has access to a variety of brushes and effects that he has utilised within his work. According to Nakumir (2020), the typical illustration process for manga artists is going from sketching to line art and then colouring in the work, on the other hand Ishida skips the line art stage of the drawing process and goes straight into painting once he has sketched the piece. The result from this gives his work an unrefined charm that expresses his personality through the layering of marks and textures. In Edward's book, she discusses the concept of that lines are capable of conveying different emotions and conducts a visual analysis into Van Gogh's *Grove of Cypresses* and Simone Cantarini's *Studies of an Infant in Various Poses* in relation to 'how master artists use the language of line to express joy.' (1988, p. 79). She further states that Van Gogh's piece deeply expresses joy as his linework is light, curving that rising within the drawing. Van Gogh creates a visual representation of the trees but adds layers of metaphorical meaning by being selective with his mark-making to create an impressionistic depiction of the trees. Therefore, when analysing Fig. 4, the choice of mark-making and texture establishes harsh and violent tones, especially when figure is holding the knife and are stark contrast to the background. Whereas in Fig. 5, Ishida has chosen to paint over areas of the body such as the knife that shifts the atmosphere from harsh to more mysterious. The choice of hiding the knife changes the representation from indexical to iconic, making it more suggestive as to what the figure is holding, which plays into the mysteriousness of the piece.

However, in order to further understand these illustrations, we would need to not look at just one component of the piece and what it represents, but the rest of the pieces and their hidden connections that are presented in the whole image (Doonan, 1993, p. 12). When examining the colour palettes in the artwork, Ishida has used a complementary scheme of vivid green and muted reddish pinks in Fig. 4. Colours used in the complementary scheme intensify each other by creating a strong contrast but can neutralise each other when mixed (Gair *et al.* 2009, p. 17). Whereas, in Fig. 5 the colours consist mainly of neutral greys with subtle accents of bold pink and lavender that enhances visual interests and adding a layer of psychological narrative for the

viewer to unravel. According to Morton (2019), colours create meaning in two main systems which are natural associations and psychological symbolism, they further state that the origin of these meanings can be visible as those found in nature with red being fire or blood and blue being water or the sky for example. However, some can be more hidden and require socio-cultural context for the viewer to interpret the meaning more accurately. Additionally, 'Emotional connotations are communicated more strongly by tone and saturation than by hue, with the exception of the link between red and warmth [...]' (Doonan, 1993, p. 7). Coming back to the colour schemes in Ishida's artwork, the muted reds and pinks in Fig. 4 are a natural association towards blood or danger (Bare Home, 2022), especially when we connect the colour to the marks on the t-shirt resembling blood splatters and the knife having a red on it as well, these small icons between the colours and marks feed into the overall indexical representation of that the figure being portrayed a killer or dangerous. The green background intensifies the figure's presence through the use of the complementary scheme and coupled with the abstract texture splash promotes the harsh, energetic feeling towards the figure. Whereas with Fig. 5, Ishida replaces the green background with grey. The connections between the natural association of grey representing mist or fog, the same style of textured mark-making that resemble the appearance of mist and the choice of painting over the knife but leaving it as an impression all establish a mysterious atmosphere around the figure which contrasts the harsh violent depiction in Fig. 4. Further to this, we find shapes in the illustration's context and our interpretations of these shapes depend on the overall context (Bang, 2016, p. 3). This further emphasises that we can interpret the abstract background in Fig. 5 as mist or fog as the shape of the mark-making resembles the shaping of mist or fog. Additionally, the inclusion of these blues and pinks act as a small contrast to the heavy use of grey that draws the eye in, but their high-saturation and how the colours are on the cooler side of the colour wheel imply psychological symbolism that ties into the overall mysterious atmosphere.

Ishida states in his artbook (Ishida, 2020) that although he mainly produces his illustrations for the *Tokyo Ghoul* series digitally, he did experiment with analogue techniques in the *Tokyo Ghoul:re* volume 9 panels and cover (Fig. 6) by drawing and

inking the characters on paper then scanning it and adding the finishing touches digitally.



Fig. 6: *Volume 9 Cover*

He further states that he found his drawings were not up to his preferred quality due to his lack of control with his tablet screen, after he completed volume 9, he kept using analogue techniques for drawing subjects that he could do faster and better that way whilst saving time for other things digitally (Ishida, 2020, p. 59). Additionally, Marzullo (2024) finds that analogue drawing helps with unwinding from the stress that can build up sometimes from doing digital art. The experimentation of adding analogue tools and processes in his drawings allowed Ishida to break away from the stiffness he felt from drawing on a screen by switching his materials from digital to physical. Changing materials can help an illustrator to not only experiment with different techniques and the tools themselves, but also it can be a method to break out of their art block or thinking outside of their routine in order to elevate their practice and their expression.

Additionally, this shows that there is a need for that sensation with experiencing physical materiality even when working digitally, this feeling and knowledge we gain from this sensation is transferrable in the digital tools and this is reflected in the illustrator's self-expression within their artwork.

Conclusion

Regardless of the illustration being created through either the analogue or digital process. These two illustrators were able to convey their expressions as evidenced by the visual analysis from their artwork. As well as the theory that correlates to the analysis findings, these two illustrators were able to express their intentions through their materials, the components that come from the chosen media and the overarching theory of Semiosis in everything we see.

The first of these being the visual quality produced from using the materials, as found from the theory and illustrator's artwork, the many physical aspects tied to the media such as mark-making, colour, texture carry their own connotations that play into the allegory within the art. From the visual analysis, Amano's artwork reflects his sources of inspiration of Japanese Woodblock art, Western comics and Art Nouveau through the way he captures the characters with fluent, confident, gestural brush strokes and using lithography printing to colour in his illustration. Additionally, relying on his unconsciousness, allowed Amano to not overthink steps within his creative processes which resulted in an increase in productivity and being able to express himself on a deeper level.

In comparison, Ishida's digital illustrations represent the characters from his Tokyo Ghoul stories in an emotional provocation through layers of brush strokes to achieve a mix of semi-realistic and abstract representation, and limited colour schemes with psychological symbolic meanings. Furthermore, he has learned from experimenting with his work that using techniques from analogue processes has helped him find ways of saving time within his illustration development by drawing his work in analogue and then finalising it digitally.

To conclude, the connection between the choice of media and the underpinning semiotics shows that the overlaying of subtle connotations from the material components has helped them to communicate their message or expression to the audience through their art. Whether if the work was made through analogue or digital processes, it has been proven that the incorporation of the human touch and creative

thinking is present within Amano and Ishida's work through the techniques discussed in this essay as they can be transferred between the two processes.

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