

Anime Music Video (AMV): Data-visualization methods for video remixes

Notes from a research developed under the guidance of Eduardo Navas at The School of Visual Arts and The Arts & Design Research Incubator (ADRI).

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Figure 1: Safety Dance <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vElbh2Ox1dA>

I have been developing my Ph.D. thesis at the *State University of Campinas* (UNICAMP) since 2014. Currently, with the assistance of the *São Paulo Research Foundation* (FAPESP), I had the opportunity to improve my research under the supervision of Professor Eduardo Navas at The Pennsylvania State University, School of Visual Arts and the Arts & Design Research Incubator (ADRI). This text forms part of the research I conducted during my time at Penn State. I thank Eduardo Navas, Graeme Sullivan, Director of the School of Visual Arts and Professor of Art Education, Andrew Schulz, Associate Dean for Research in the College of Arts and Architecture, Andrew Belser, Director of the Arts and Design Research Incubator and Professor of Movement,

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The research I conducted is part of my thesis - *Anime Music Video (AMV), multi and new literacies: The remix in Otaku culture* - focuses on the audio-visual productions belonging to an online community whose objective is the elaboration, distribution and appreciation of *Anime Music Videos* (AMVs). In this article, I intend to provide a summary of this ongoing research.

Anime Music Video (AMV): remix and new literacies

Remixes based on video edition is part of youth cultures: it constitutes a new practice of multilingual and multimodal literacy that includes new values, new aesthetics and new ways to create and share meanings (LANKSHEAR, 2007; LANKSHEAR AND KNOBEL, 2011; NAVAS, 2012; 2013; 2015). For this reason, it is important to recognize the nature that defines the new ways in which young people construct and share meanings in the contemporary world to have a better understanding of how youth cultures establish, through new literate practices, their networks, sociability, aesthetics and professionalization processes.

The video *Safety Dance* (Figure 1) is an interest example of this *New literacies* that circulate within youth cultures; especially, between fans of Japanese pop culture. Safety Dance was edited by Shin, a well-known AMV editor, who had won the *2012 Viewer's Choice Awards* (VCA) for "Best Dance Video" and "Best Video That Made You Want to Watch the Anime" – VCA is an

¹ **Anime Music Video (AMV):** Data-Visualization Methods and Analysis Procedures for Video Remixes <http://adri.psu.edu/event/anime-music-video-amv-data-vsualization-methods-and-analysis-procedures-video-remixes-0>.

import price given by the AMV portal *the.org* to, as it says, “acknowledge the videos that stand out above and beyond the rest of the video crowd.”²

According to Shin, this remix is not “so original”, but it has, certainly, given him a good reputation in the community: as he emphasizes, *Safety Dance* was very well appreciated by the online community.

Probably not the most original concept, but it was fun to put together. This was my AWA master's entry and while it didn't win it sounded like the crowd enjoyed it and that's all that really matters in the end³. (Shin, 2011)

Shin remixed *Safety Dance* by the band *Men Without Hats* with scenes from *Nichijou* in order to become active in the AMV community, in which he succeeded. AMVs like *Safety Dance* are an example of remix based on video editing: they are new creations built by a combination of materials borrowed from various Japanese animations (*Anime*), and assembled with music in a *video-clip*. They follow traditions related to *otaku* culture and result from the dialogue between Western pop culture and Japanese pop culture.

They are, as stated by Mizuko Ito (2012), a concrete representation of transnational cultural flows. During the production of an AMV, the editor not only handles a semiotic and linguistic repertoire hybridizing cultural references (Japanese animation and Western pop song), but also shows the mastery of the audiovisual language required to produce a *video remix*.

Bakhtinian framework for analysis of "aesthetic works"

At the current stage of my thesis, I have adopted the methodological model proposed by Eduardo Navas on *Analysis of 30 YouTube Music Video Mashups* to describe and analyze our *corpus*.⁴

² <https://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/amvvc/>. (accessed 21 December 2017).

³ Shin, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8V3zP8NhGck> (accessed 21 December 2017).

However, it is important to emphasize that the methodological procedures assumed here were modified to privilege the social instances and goes from the social situation of enunciation to the “material moment,” when the researcher seeks “to understand the external, material work, as an aesthetic object to be realized, as a technical apparatus of aesthetic realization” (Bakhtin, 2010 [1934-35 / 1975], page 22).

Therefore, the thesis goes in accordance with the concept of the architectonic as proposed by Bakhtin and his circle - which can be understood as related to their aesthetics concerns of how an author can “consummate” and “finalize” a kind of wholeness we can call text/utterance. (BAKHTIN, 2010[1934-35 / 1975], page 22).

Examining the act of authoring and its “architectural moment”, Bakhtin proposed an aesthetic methodology centered on the articulation of three moments: (a) the aesthetic object, (b) the extra-aesthetic material givenness of a work, and (c) the teleological understood composition of a given material (BAKHTIN, 2010 [1934-35 / 1975], page 23).

According to Bakhtin, an aesthetic analysis should not be oriented toward the “material realization” of the work. Instead, it should focus on the “aesthetic object.”

An orientation toward the material creates a seductive closeness to positive empirical science. Indeed - space, mass, color, sound - all these are received by the student of art (and the artist) from the appropriate branches of the mathematical natural sciences, and the word receives from linguistics. It is in the soil of the natural science that the tendency is nourished to understand artistic form as the form of a given material and nothing more, as a combination achieved within the bounds of material in its natural-scientific and linguistic determinateness and regularity. This conception would enable judgments of art study to be positively scientific, and in some cases to be directly demonstrable mathematically (p.6259)

Thereby, we must ground our research on “what the work represents for the aesthetic activity of the artist and the spectator, oriented on it.” (BAKHTIN, 2010 [1934-35 / 1975], page 22). In

⁴ <http://remixdata.net/2015/08/11/video-analysis-of-30-youtube-music-video-mashups/>

other words, one must focus on the *architectonics* of the aesthetic object: one needs to base the analysis work on the assumption that the creative work is *value-related*; “it is directed toward the word, toward reality, and that it has to do with human beings, with social relations, with ethical, religious, and other values” (page 22).

In our case, it was essential to have in mind how the AMV community was social-historically formed within and as part of the *otaku culture* and how the community had *reconverted* – an expression used by García-Canclini (2005) to designate the strategic use of previous economic and symbolic resources in new contexts – the video-clip and video-remix aesthetics during this process.

As Roberts (2012) describes, the development of AMV's aesthetic in the Western has followed three clear moments: (1) The creation and distribution of Japanese animation subtitled videos (also called fansub - short for fan-subtitled). (2) The development of conventions and competitions. (3) And the emergence of networks and fan communities on the internet. During the 1970s and 1980s, access to *animes* was very difficult: importing VHS tapes from Japan was rare and expensive. With the emergence of VCRs, during the 1980s, anime fans began copying and distributing tapes. Loan libraries *club* were formed from this practice, and, as soon as technology enabled (in the late 1980s and early 1990s), fans began to produce their own subtitled tapes. With the growth of the market and the development of the western anime fandom, AMV takes part of the conventions during the end of the anime shows. In this context, especially during the late 1990s, the first competitions began to form, which served as a kind of catalyst that would formalize many of the AMV key aesthetics elements, such as division into categories like humor, drama and action (ROBERTS, 2012)].

According to Mizuko Ito (2012), the otaku cultural and the ethics of the anime fandom are, fundamentally, founded by the will and necessity to publicize Japanese animation in the Western world: the *otaku* sees the ability to access, translate, transmit and produce (remix) materials that can increase and develop their *fandom* as a commitment statement within their entire Japanese animation community.

Mizuko Ito (2012) also explains that, while the AMV online community (mostly hosted at <http://www.animemusicvideos.org>, and referred to by its members simply as *the.org*) is quite accessible and open to new members, it also encourages editors and curators to constantly engage in activities of distinction and *status* acquisition.

At *the.org* participants promote competitions, meetings, multi-editor projects (MEP), forums, interviews with AMV editors, guides and tutorials on editing videos that provide important learning experiences within the community. Within this framework marked by a double tension between the need for openness and for distinction, fairs and online and in-person events related to AMV assessment and competitions play an important role in the consolidation of *anime* videos editors' community: they provide recognition and *status*, while recruiting new fans and members for these communities.

In that sense, AMV editors *reconvert* the language and the video-clip aesthetics - its original promotional qualities and visual strategies to disseminate a particular symbolic product (style, music, concept etc.) - to better fit their needs by drawing on a plurality languages and formats to construct their identities and actively participate, not only within, but also outside the AMV community. They do it, in a unique way, by the peculiarities of the otaku culture and with an atmosphere of conventions, competitions and transnational flows that mark the consumption of Japanese pop culture.

Considering this context, the thesis's discussion so far has followed a research approach that resembles discourse-centered online ethnography. Consequently, our understanding from the AMV community (its cultural values, ethics and aesthetics) has been informed, mostly, by ethnographic extended semi-structured interview with AMVs editors, made via Skype, and also by the analysis of multilingual interaction extracted from an online AMV editors' discussion forum (*the.org*). After this first stage of the thesis, the *corpus* was select and questions were formulate based on information collected. Then, to move further to describe the AMV's, evaluating the research *corpus* for the development of a theory on the aesthetics of this types of video remix.

A theory on AMV aesthetics

The main goal with my research is the development of a theory on the aesthetics of AMV and outline a Bakhtinian framework of analysis for remix videos that could provide directions for a construction of pedagogic parameters centered on the conception of *Pedagogy of New and Multiliteracies*. Consequently, as pointed before, I intend to integrate a qualitative methodology according to Bakhtin's theory of *speech genres* (BAKHTIN, 2010[1934-35/1975]; 2003[1952-53/1979]; MEDVIÉDEV, 2012[1928]; VOLOCHINOV, 2009[1929]) and a quantitative methodology based on media visualization techniques and statistical distributions of formal and stylistic choices (NAVAS, 2012; 2013; 2015).

In the thesis *Anime Music Video (AMV), multi and new literacies*, I propose to describe AMVs created from the same Japanese animation - [Tengen Toppa Gurren-Lagann](#) –, and submitted by the editors to the online community as one of the three main AMV's categories (action, drama and humor).

So far, I have been focusing on these three *AMVs*.

- Written in the Spirals (Action) - <https://goo.gl/hiK9DJ>
- Flash! (Humor) - <https://goo.gl/XGCfJz>
- La Tristesse durera toujours (Drama) - <https://goo.gl/F41VVv>

I have explored carefully the data set envisaging needs and problems to design a better quantitative methodology procedure in order to explore a further great *corpus*. With the methodology set this way, one could add more videos of which AMV's category (action, drama, humor), improving the *corpus* and leading the research to a new stage, in which we can submit the first assertions through revisions, and so, developing an accurately unsupervised learning model that enables to tag automatically the new *corpus*.

Visualizing AMV

Considering this context, the different visualization techniques developed by Eduardo Navas have allowed me to create images that reveal patterns existing in the AMV's audiovisual data set (Figure: 2) for the development of a future theory on the AMV's aesthetics.

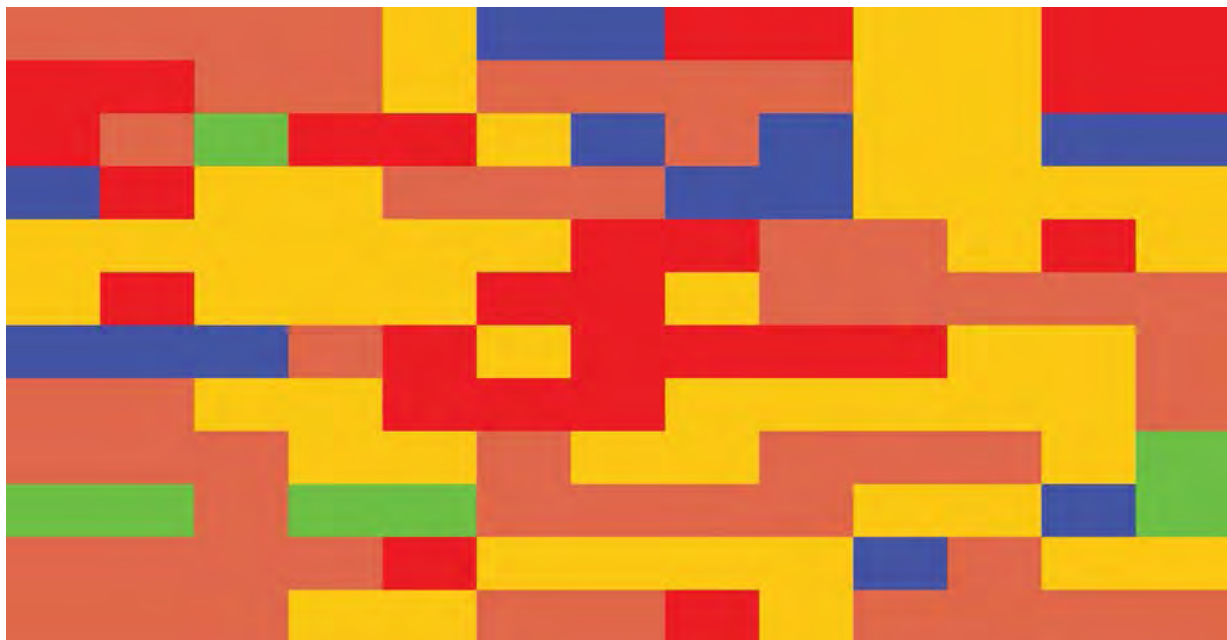
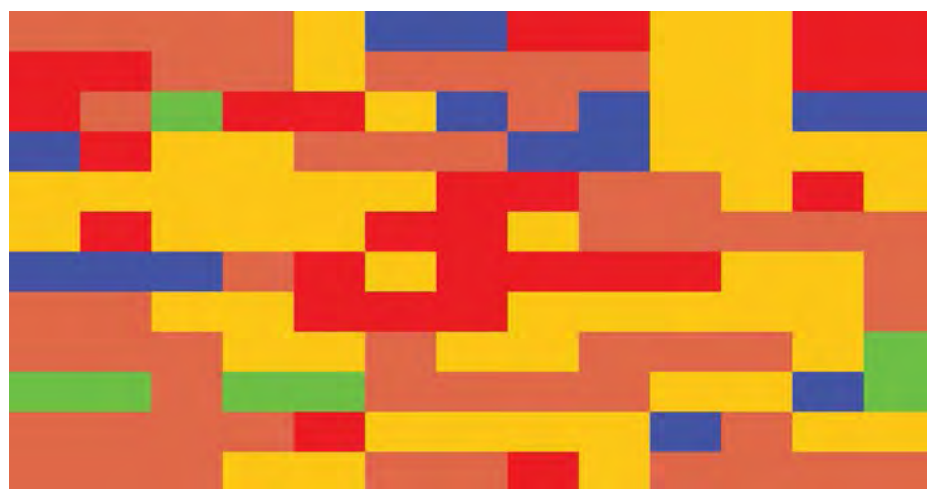


Figure 2: Visualization of *anime characters* in the AMV **Spiral – Action**. Color code: red = *Kamina*, yellow = *Simon*, blue = *Yoko*, green = *Spiral King*, brown = *Mechas*.

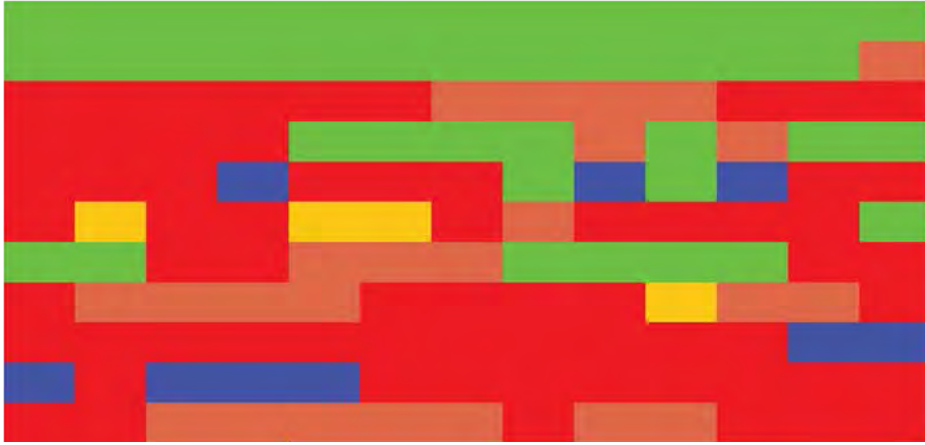
I believe that media visualization, as proposed by Eduardo Navas, can also productively illuminate certain Bakhtinian concepts, such as, *architectural form*, *compositional form*, and *style*. Through Eduardo Navas's methodology, I have been able to figure out how the “selectivity” (NAVAS, 2012; 2013; 2015) of certain *characters* can be guided by an architectonic project. Put in other words, it has provided me with a better understanding of how an editor, based on certain values, and guided by his project, defines what to select and construct a specific set of clips in order to form a video remix.

For instance, in the Action AMV (*Spiral*), different from the Humor and Drama AMVs (*Flash!* and *Tristesse*), the editor distributes his clips' selection between giant robots controlled by people - *Mechas* (color code: brown) - and the others anime's characters. In that particular case, we can see that the editor centers his effort to construct a whole that emphasizes the struggle and relationship between *Simon* (color code: yellow) and his friend *Kamina* (color code: red) - Figure 3.

Spiral – Action



Flash! – Humor



Tristesse – Drama

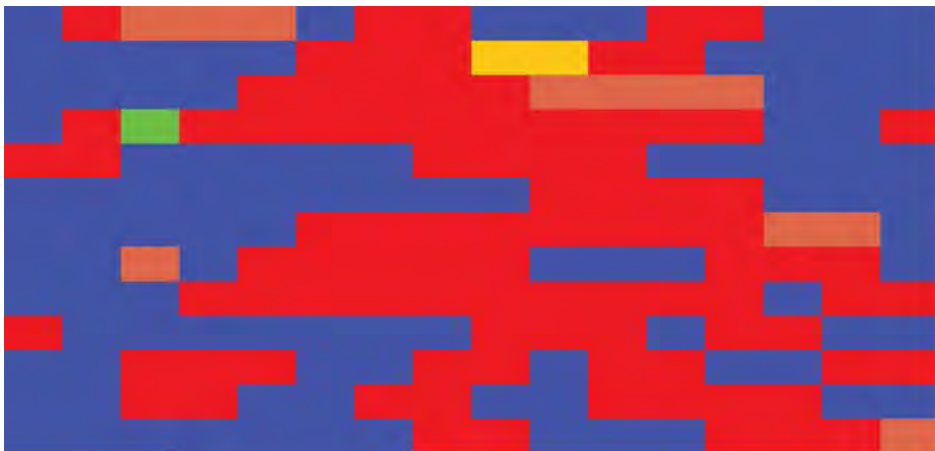
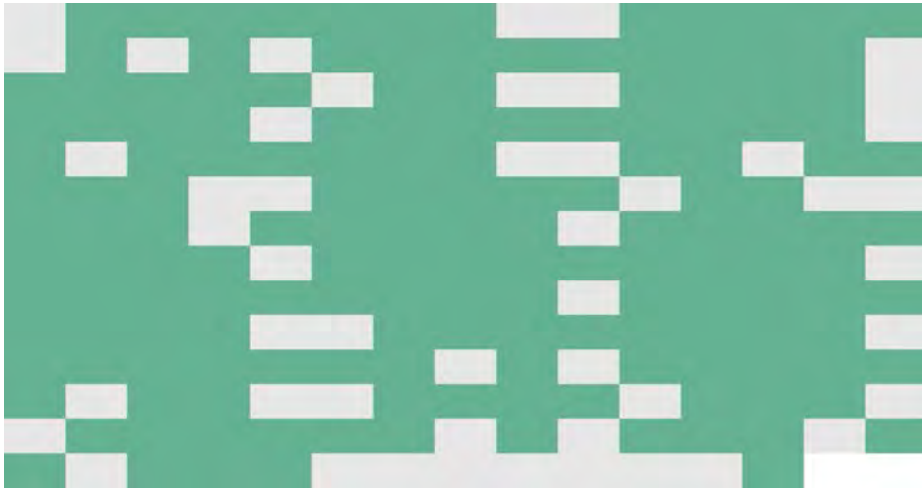


Figure 3: Visualization of *anime* characters in AMV's genre: **Action, humor, Drama**. Color code: red = Kamina, yellow = Simon, blue = Yoko, green = Spiral King, brown = Mechas.

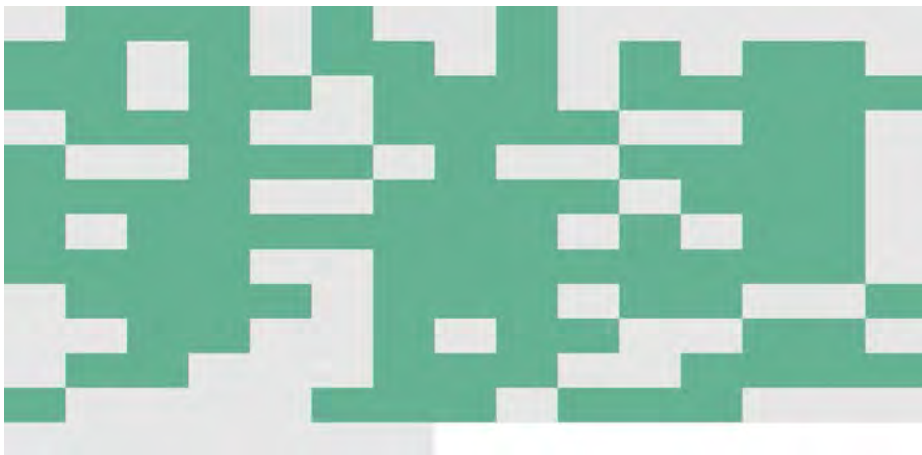
In addition to the understanding of how characters are selected, the possibility to evaluate the synchronization established between the visual and musical rhythms is important to my research, given the importance of it to AMV aesthetics. Therefore, the pace of a cut (together with shot composition) in a remix scene is a fundamental data set to be included into the AMVs analyze.

In this regard, I have been developing (under Navas's supervision) media visualization techniques that can allow me to focus on the *visual rhythm* (Figure 4).

Spiral – Action



Flash! – Humor



Tristesse – Drama

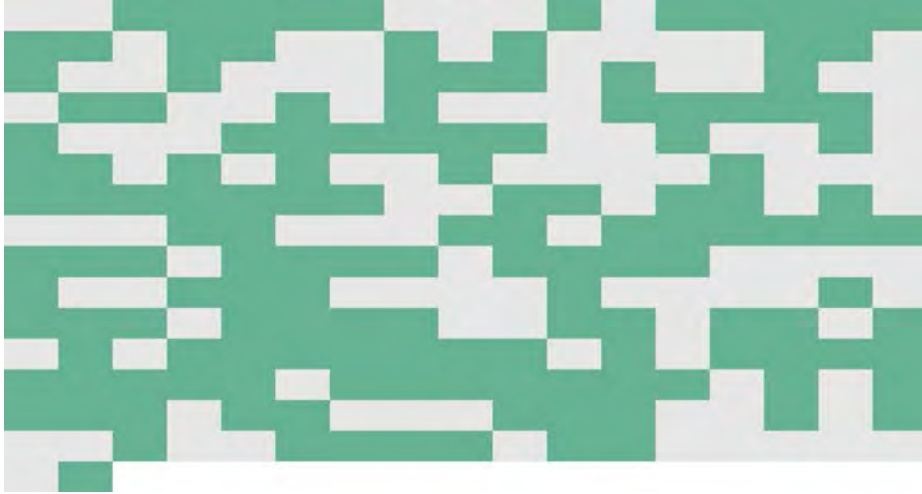


Figure 4: Visual rhythm - AMV's genre: **Action, humor, Drama**. Color code: green = scene cuts.

Here (Figure 4), we can distinguish moments when the scene cuts pace increases (green area - faster visual rhythm), from those when a scene is “longer” (grey area - low visual rhythm). Its interest to notice that the green area (fast cuts) tends to be less common in the drama video (Tristesse), than in the action and humor AMVs (Spiral and Flash!).

So, in this sense, to improve the analysis of visual rhythm, I have mixed the functionality of some tools, provided by software such as *Adobe Bridge* and *DaVinci Resolve*, to generate spreadsheets containing my thesis corpus's meta data. This procedure has allowed me to export and work the AMV's meta data through “R” (a free software for statistical computing), where the AMV's visual rhythm information could be explored in many different ways.

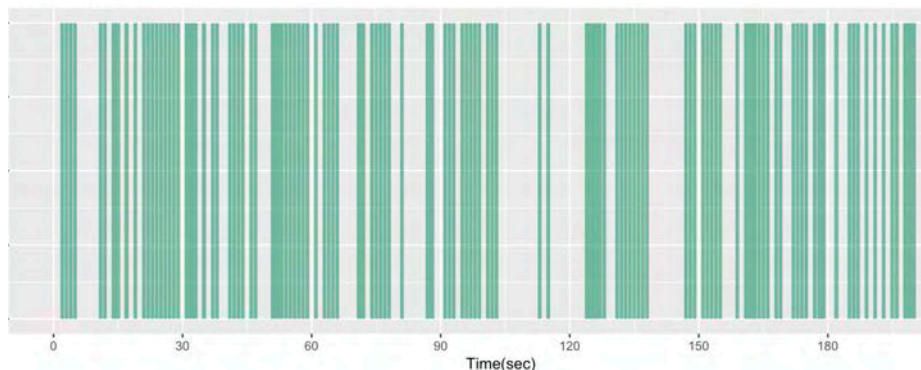


Figure 5: Visual rhythm (R) - **Spiral AMV**. Color code: green = scene cuts.

The visual rhythm can be visualized in relation to the corpus tags. For instance, the cuts from a specific AMV can be explored by its characters (Figure 7), or by the quality of a shot (Figure 8).

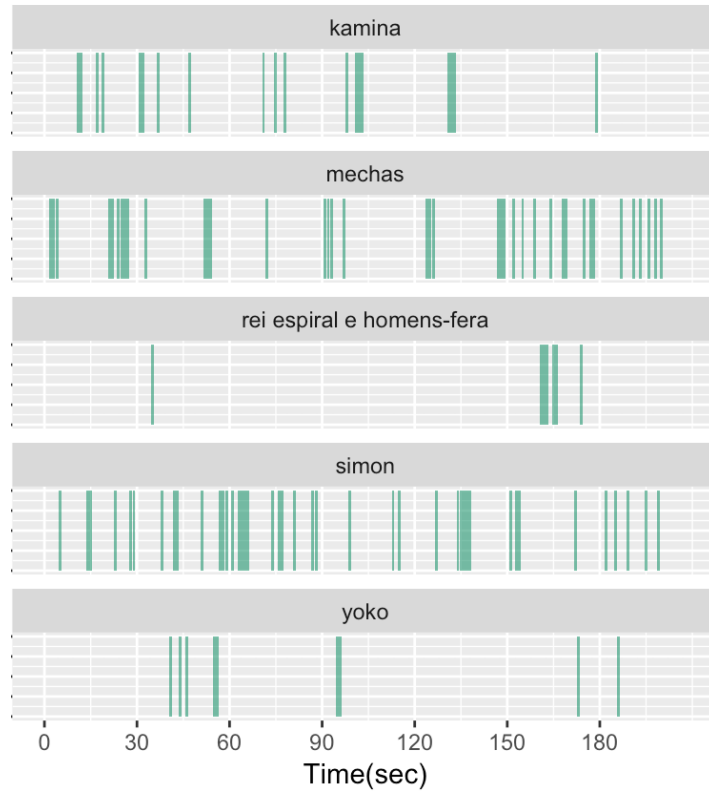


Figure 7: Visual rhythm by *character* (R) - **Spiral AMV**. Color code: green = scene cuts.

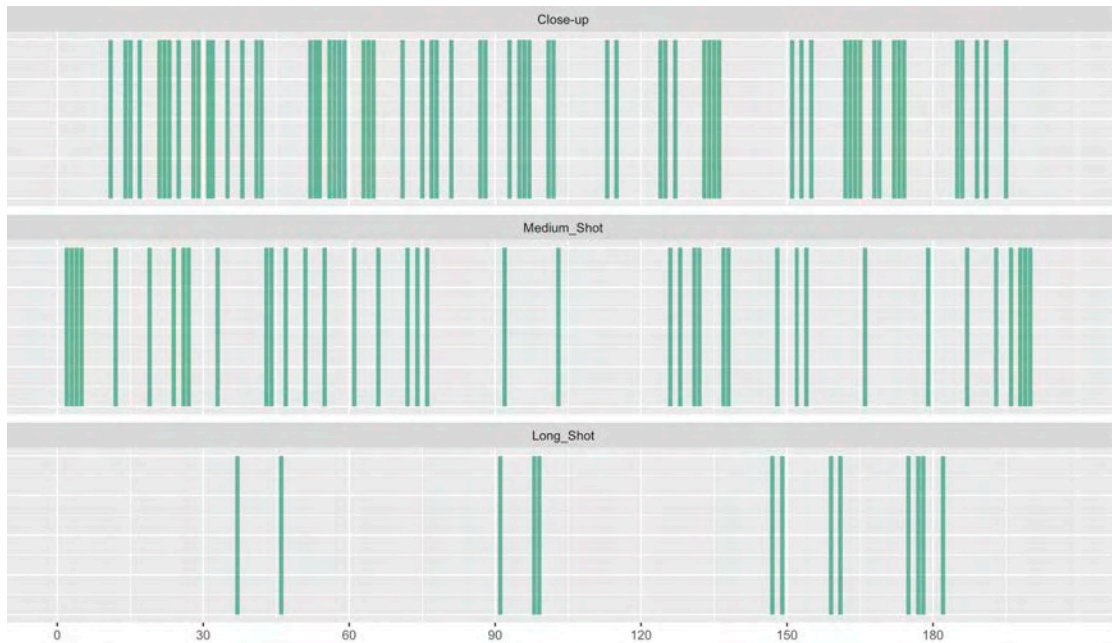


Figure 7: Visual rhythm by *shot type* (R) - **Spiral AMV**. Color code: green = scene cuts.

In fact, the *synchronization* between visual and musical rhythm is a very important part in the creation of a good AMV⁵: through a proper *sync* between music, lyrics and mood of an original material, editors materialize the different categories of AMVs (drama, humor and action). Therefore, in order to push this methodology even further towards our main goal, the next important step taken, was comparing visual and sound rhythm. Thus, the free software *Sonic Visualiser* (<http://www.sonicvisualiser.org/>) was very useful to generate visualizations based on which AMV song's: it offers different tools and plugins for annotation and visualization (Figure 8).

⁵AMV's tutorials help new members not only to master video creation and editing techniques, theories and concepts; but also, to acquire key *aesthetic learnings*. Typically, AMV's tutorials to video editing and remix techniques at *the.org* are divided into three topics: *sync*, *concept* and *effects*. The *sync* (*synchronization*) is pointed out as the most important aspect in the creation of a good AMV: through an editing process that produce a proper *sync* between *music*, *lyrics* and *mood* of an original material, editors are able to materialize different categories of AMVs - horror, drama, humor and action.

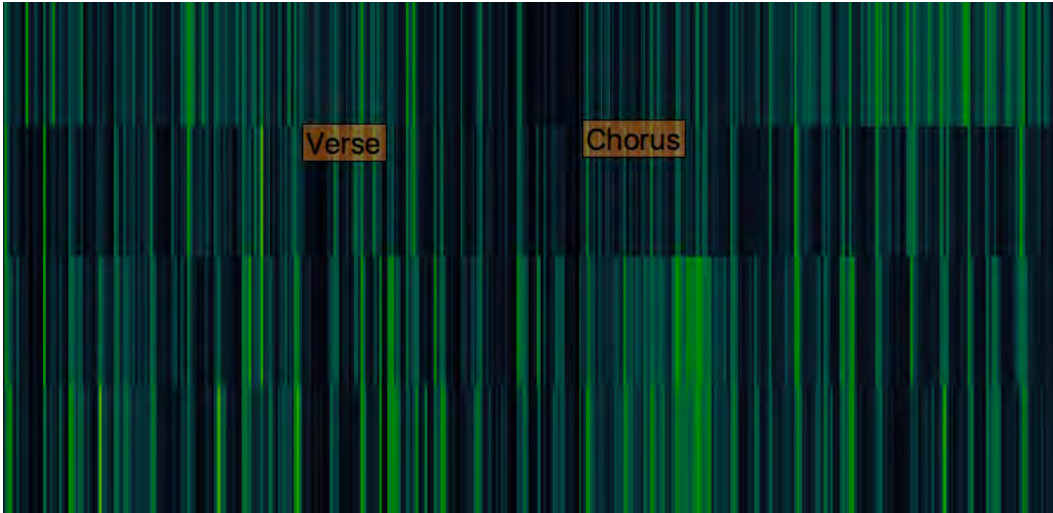


Figure 8: Visual *Chromagram/Spectrogram* plus music (*form*) annotation - **Spiral AMV**.

Most importantly, *Sonic Visualiser* also offers the possibility to export the audio data as a *cvs* files, which can be processed, compared and explored alongside other visual data in “R”.

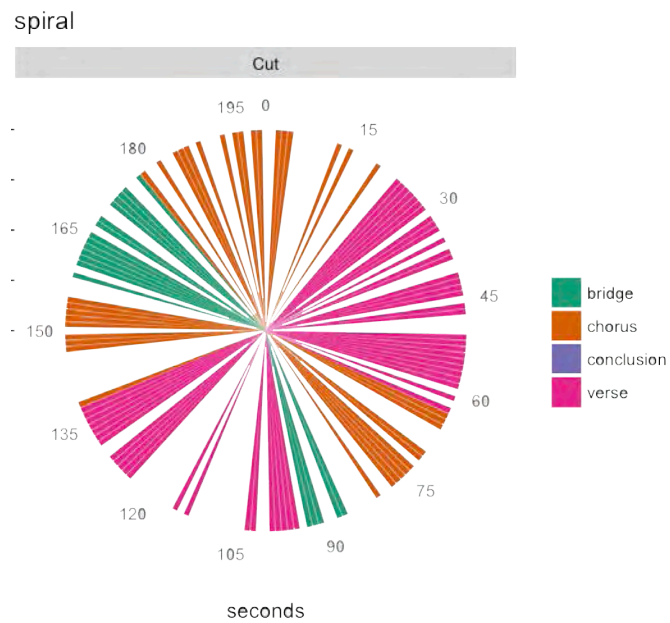


Figure 9: Video cut and song section compared (R) - **Spiral AMV**.

It is possible to submit the audio file through a rhythm digital processes in *Sonic Visualiser* and then the data obtained can be loaded in “R” to be joined with the visual information previously

collected in order to explore how the song rhythm was synchronized with characters and image shots in a specify AMV (Figure 10).



Figure 10: Video cut and song section compared with characters and *shot type* (R).

For instance, we can identify The AMV Spiral's visual pace (its relation between scene and cuts), and how it underlines the subject and character in frame: it focuses in the action aspect of the anime by, mostly, selecting materials configured by Simon's and Mechas's scenes (Figure 11).

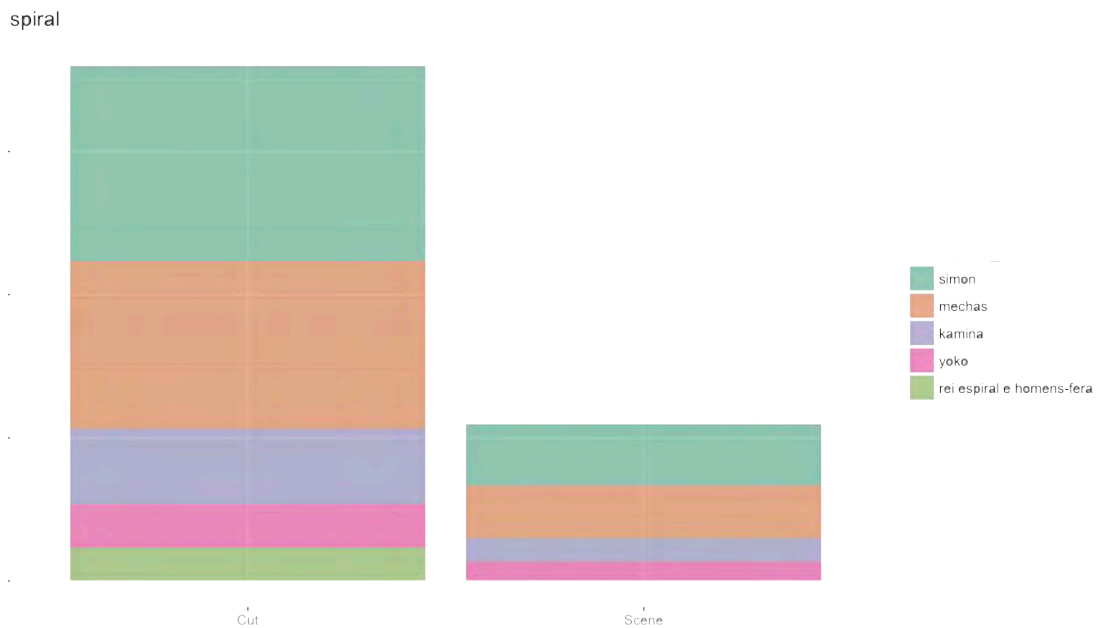


Figure 11 – Characters in frame by cut and scene - **Spiral AMV**.

Nevertheless, when the *AMV's shots* and *characters* are put together to be matched with the *beat/rhythm* of the song⁶ (Figure 12) and when the *scenes* chosen from the original anime to compose the visual pace were *sync* to the music, we can analyze how the emphasis on the *action* between Simon and *Mechas* where also combined with the character *Kamina* - specially during the first part of the video.

⁶ Written in the Stars, by *Tinie Tempah* featuring Eric Turner

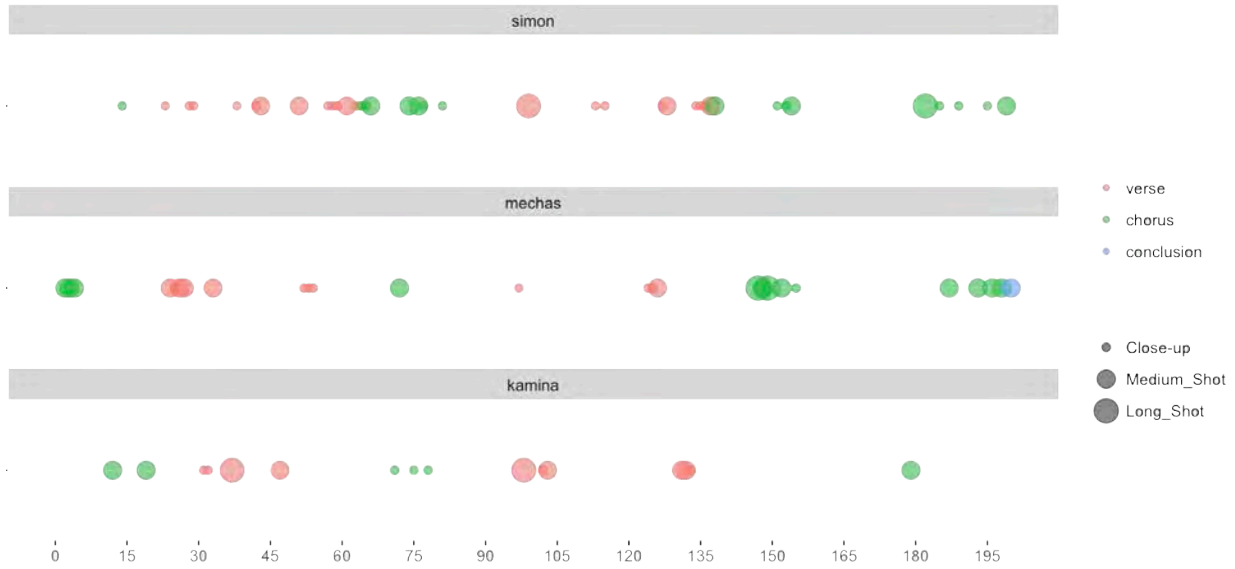


Figure 12: Video cut and song section compared with characters and *shot type* (R) - **Spiral AMV**.

If we focus on the chorus of the song - *Oh written in the stars/ A million miles away/ A message to the mane/ Oh, Seasons come and go/ But I will never changel/ And I'm on my way* -, we can recognize (Figure 13) that the first chorus are edited and *synchronized* with one Simon's close-up scene combined with medium shots from Kamina and Mechas.

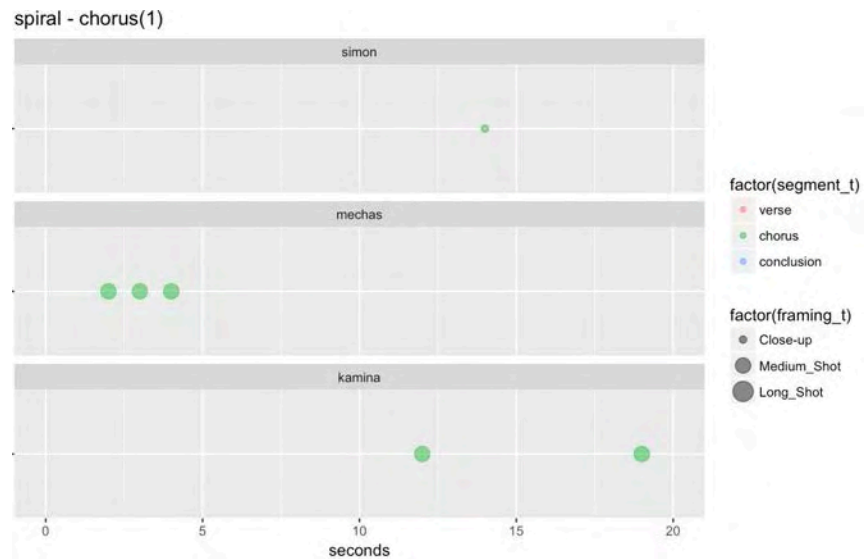


Figure 13: Video cut and song section compared with characters and *shot type* (R) - **Spiral AMV – Zoon Chorus (1)**.

Then, during the second chorus, this relation changes: the remix was composed from three Kamina's close-up scenes combined with Simon's medium shots (Figure 14).

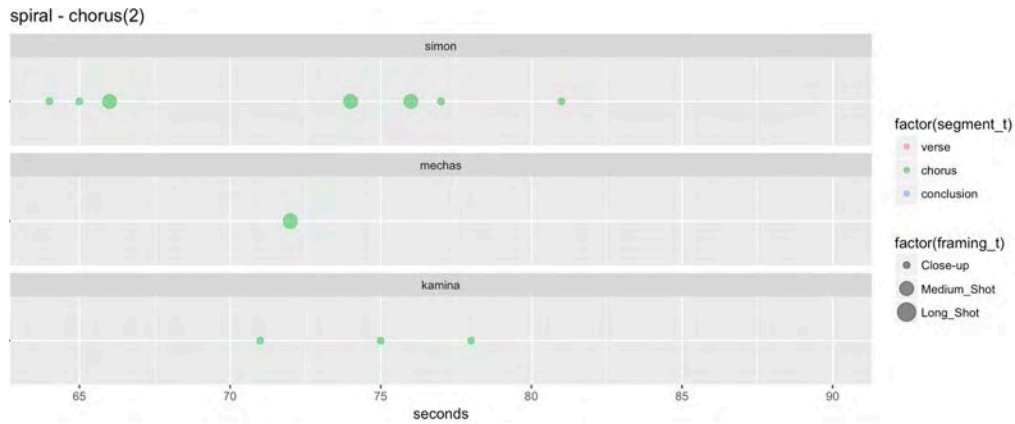


Figure 14: Video cut and song section compared with characters and *shot type* (R) - **Spiral AMV – Zoon Chorus (2)**.

Finally, the last chorus are almost entirely produced with Simon's and Mecha's scenes (Figure 15).

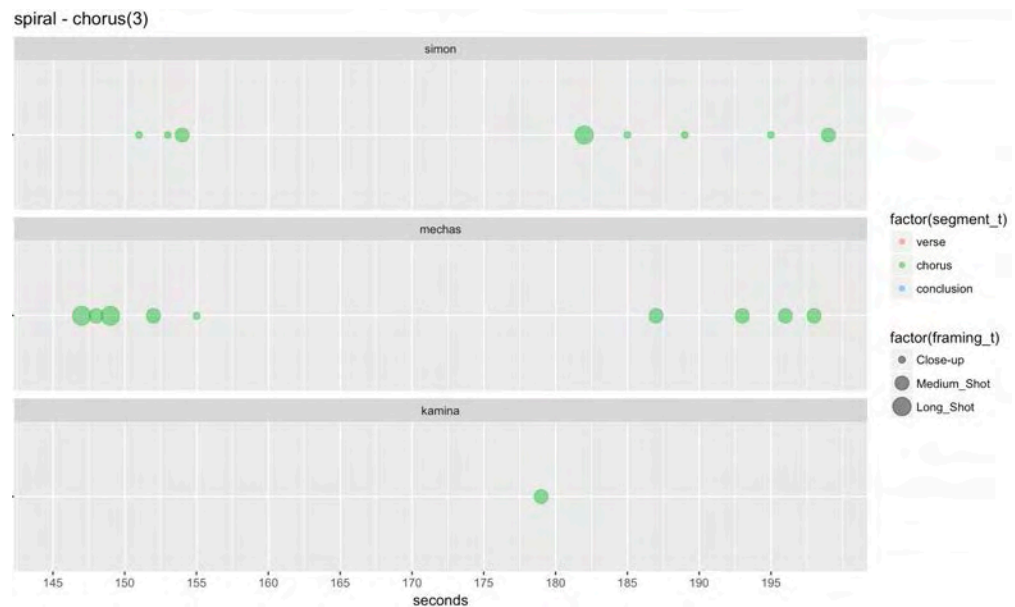


Figure 15: Video cut and song section compared with characters and *shot type* (R) - **Spiral AMV – Zoon Chorus (3)**.

When comparing it with the original material, we can understand the editor's particular comment with the *sync* established between music and image: he emphasizes how Simon has grown during the saga. More precisely, how Simon has fulfilled his destiny (written in the stars), becoming important to his group after the death of Kamina - his best friend - and also how Simon has struggled during this path, learning how to use his internal powers; or his "Spiral force."

Final considerations

We can see how rhythm *syncs* may function, folding in two directions: first, structuring, along with thematic content and style choices, the compositional form; and second, reinforcing an axiological statement (theme, as in Bakhtin/Volochinov). So, rhythm can be understood in both ways; as *architectonic form* (from its axiological and social structure point of view) and as a *compositional form* (from its technical and mechanical aspects). As a *compositional form*, rhythm is achieved by ordering materials, both acoustically and visually. But rhythm is also architectonic apprehended (heard and recognized) when it is (stylistically) related to the values of an inner striving tension which it consummates. In our context, rhythm can be directly associated to the conception and perception of different AMVs categories – action, drama, and humor - but also linked with the AMV's *theme*, or with an editor's particular point of view and his lecture/opinion from the original material selected to form his work.

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