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Permeability and Othering

The Relevance of “Art” in Contemporary Japanese Manga Discourse¹

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Texte intégral

- 1 IN THE PAST FEW YEARS, the study of manga (comics) in Japan has gradually established itself in the academic realm. The number of dissertations on manga has increased, universities have set up new courses on the subject as part of their curricular reforms, and in May 1998, the Japan Art History Society held a special symposium exclusively on manga. The restructuring of the Manga Department (*manga-ka*) at Seika University in Kyoto is particularly revealing of this trend. Established in 1973, it was the first academic institution for the training of manga artists. Initially, the department’s curriculum favored the teaching of practical skills with a focus on caricature and the short comic-strip. Renamed the Department for Manga Studies (*manga gakka*) in April 2000, it now offers courses on manga history and criticism in addition to technical training in the art of comics. Faculty in the department even announced the launching of an Association for Manga Studies in the summer of 2001. Seika’s manga studies department is noteworthy also in its two-section structure, one for “cartoons”, and the other for “story-manga” (as graphic novels are called in Japan): This shows its acknowledgement not only of comics as a legitimate academic subject, but also of the importance of the previously marginalized graphic novels.
- 2 Internationally, “manga” is automatically identified as story-manga², but in Japan the term also designates the short forms of the one-panel caricature and the four-panel cartoon strip. Until the 1970s, manga as cartoons were mainly addressed to an adult audience, published in newspapers and credited a higher cultural status for their political and social messages. The story-manga, or graphic novel, on the other



hand, has been typically seen as a type of entertaining fiction for younger readers which has come to dominate the realm of manga gradually since the late 1950s with the birth of the manga magazine format. These comics are usually published in special weeklies or monthlies, and produced in close collaboration with editors. Therefore, they are often rendered in a simplified pictorial language, stylistically tied to the conventions of the genre the respective magazine is marketing³, and highly responsive to the demands of their readers. At present, story-manga form the main subject of studies on manga as can be inferred from the body of publications available in Japanese. Such publications include explorations of the development of story-manga in the postwar period (especially from the perspective of mass-media, youth culture and manga literacy), inquiries into the history of manga criticism and research⁴, and also investigations into the specific language – or “expression” – of manga⁵. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Yonezawa Yoshihiro, Murakami Tomohiko, Takeuchi Osamu and other critics who had been nurtured by story-manga claimed a legitimate status for this medium in two ways: on the one hand, they had to strengthen manga’s position against “high” culture, and on the other hand, they were bent on promoting story-manga against traditional forms of manga. After the story-manga carved a visible place for itself in the manga industry and market, gaining recognition both in Japan and internationally (the enormous success of the manga magazine “Shōnen Jump” in the late 1980s is a good indication of the graphic novel’s consolidation), strong advocacies of the (story-) manga’s cultural importance became less imperative. Instead of struggling for the legitimation of its subject and its activities, the emerging field of manga studies is now more involved in defining itself, on the one hand, as complementary to the practices of creating, reading, reviewing and talking about manga, and on the other hand, as distinct from other fields of academic research.

FIGURE I

The word *manga*

In Sinojapanese characters: 漫画
 Katakana syllables: マンガ
 Hiragana syllables: まんが
 絵 + 画 = 絵画
 e [image] + ga [image] = kaiga [painting]

art

geijutsu: 芸術
 bijutsu: 美術

- 3 This essay investigates the relationship between manga, fine art (especially painting) and art history as it is articulated at present in Japanese manga studies. Non-Japanese manga specialists and scholars tend to ignore this discourse, while Japanese students of manga often refuse to discuss the relevance of fine art for their field. Whereas in English it is common to refer to “comic artists” and in French to celebrate *bande dessinée* as the “9th art”, in Japanese, the graphic novel is at most called “culture” (*bunka*) in order to stress its equality to as well as its independence from other forms of aesthetic expression. Significantly, the newspaper Asahi Shinbun named the manga award it established in 1997 “Tezuka Osamu Culture Award” [*Tezuka Osamu bunka-shō*]. The comics that have been awarded this “culture prize” in the tradition of story-manga artist Tezuka Osamu (1928-1989) are manga series appearing in book rather than magazine format, which represent neither exceptional experiments nor a commercially promising debut but rather quality within the mainstream⁶.

- 4 In spite of its unpopularity, the perspective of fine art is not only indispensable to but literally haunts manga studies. Both in their un-problematized affirmations and

strict objections, Japanese manga researchers and critics continually refer to fine art as a sort of standard against which manga is measured. This echoes former debates about “high & low culture” at a time when the legitimation of manga and its study is no longer an issue. The emerging field of manga studies thus finds itself confronted with the necessity to reflect once again upon the question whether the integration of its subject into high-cultural institutions “reveals, if not the total dissolution of the boundaries between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, their extreme permeability” (Clammer 1995: 39), i.e., whether these boundaries are still valid. Due to a lack of critical awareness, the latter seems to be the case, as manga critics and scholars keep their territory separate from other disciplines and discourses, for example from art history⁷.

5 In this essay, “art” is used to address not only art in general as part of “high” culture (*junsui geijutsu*), but also in the more specific sense of visual arts (*bijutsu*), especially painting. The perspective of the latter allows researchers to re-evaluate the position of manga and its study in relation to the “high & low” debate more effectively than would literature or film. Besides manga exhibitions in public art museums⁸ and the growing number of manga museums in Japan⁹, it is especially the focus on uniqueness or singularity of comics as a paradigmatic, unmistakably Japanese cultural form in manga studies which presents an astonishing intersection between conventional critical and scholarly discourses on manga and art history. The concept of an autonomous aestheticized art with the museum as its site was established under Western influence during the early phase of Japan’s modernization in the Meiji period. The new phenomenon was designated as *bijutsu* (fine art, visual arts), to clearly distinguish it from traditional art forms and their social contexts. Fine art with painting at its center (especially the modern Japanese-style painting (*nihonga*)) came to serve as one vehicle for claiming cultural parity with Euroamerica and at the same time for emphasizing Japanese cultural particularism. In the realm of academic art, naturalized as purely aesthetic and often also as purely Japanese, fine art performed a highly political function within Japan’s self-definition as a modern nation in relation to Europe and America on the one hand and Asia on the other. Compared to academic painting which conceals its internal contradictions and discontinuities, as well as its purposes as a medium, under the disguise of autonomous art, (story-) manga functions above all as a medium for daily communication, and appears as an impure, hybrid, form of expression. Aesthetically, it intertwines the verbal and the pictorial, the sequential and the simultaneous, the temporal and the spatial; culturally, it is shaped by Japanese and East Asian traditions as well as by modern European and American influences. Precisely because of these characteristics, story-manga presents a challenge not only to the existing disciplines of art history, literature and film studies, but to manga studies itself. Manga studies risks missing the very specificity of its subject by insisting on “autonomy” and clear segregation, thus repeating the logic of “high art” and conventional art history.

6 Finally, the perspective of art is useful for investigating story-manga aesthetically. As a mature medium of expression which activates all senses, manga narrates in a way such that neither the visual nor the verbal or textual gain independence from each other. Nevertheless, researchers often treat the visual and the verbal separately according to modernist conventions. Art museums functioning on the traditional premise of the uncontested domination of “painting” tend to favor the visual component of manga in their exhibitions of current productions in this medium, whereas studies which conceive of manga primarily as a type of literature still tend to confine their analyses to narrative patterns and types of characters, often providing interpretations on representational issues without considering manga’s distinctive way of story-telling¹⁰. Into these approaches, the study of manga’s distinctive “expression” or language (*hyōgenron*) has the potential to deconstruct



binary notions of the visual and the verbal as well as narrow understandings of “representation”.

- 7 Foregrounding the period since the late 1980s as the context for the emergence of manga studies, this essay is divided in two chapters. The first chapter investigates the relation between manga and “art”, while the second chapter discusses the various forms of discrediting this linkage in manga studies. My analysis will highlight primarily the discourse on the visual arts, especially painting, and its assumptions on national culture in recent critical texts on manga. This discourse will in its turn be juxtaposed with discourses on the characteristic features and cultural particularities of painting in art history. The second chapter of this essay also suggests that the so-called “Tōkyō Pop” works of Murakami Takashi, Nara Yoshitomo and other Japanese artists could be stimulating for the emerging field of manga studies insofar as these artists affirm cultural specifics without essentializing, reifying or aestheticizing them.

PERMEABILITY IN THE NAME OF “PAINTING”

- 8 In 1996, manga historian Shimizu Isao described the main tasks of manga studies as follows: first, research “on the history of the funny and the satiric picture as an art of reproduction” (*giga* and *fūshiga*); second, research on the “history of manga expression”; third, examinations of the satiric picture as a cultural factor that brings its critical energy to bear upon the *Zeitgeist*, especially upon hegemonic political and cultural institutions of its time; fourth, the “collecting and sorting out of references and materials related to 20th century manga”; and fifth, the “revision of art-historical studies of funny and satiric pictures”. Shimizu substantiates the latter requirement with references to studies of *ukiyoe* that “concentrated solely on their Value as fine art’while neglecting their specificity as ‘folk pictures’ [*minshūga*]” (Shimizu 1996:167). As in his 1991 history of manga, Shimizu foregrounds not the story-manga or graphic novel but the older short forms of manga whose status as art he takes for granted. Praising these forms for their social critique, playfulness and value as historical documents, Shimizu takes issue with certain studies in art history for their ignorance of the “common people”. This view is shared by Yoshitomi Yasuo, caricaturist and professor in the cartoon section of the Manga studies department at Seika University in Kyōto, who defines manga as a “humorous painting” that can attract an audience much larger than that of conventional painting on account of its defying of the authority of the dominant class and the dominant culture from the perspective of the weak (Yoshitomi 1997: 34).
- 9 The author and critic Iizawa Tadashi, longstanding member of the jury for the “Bungei Shunjū Manga Award”¹¹, takes a similar, if more radical approach in his catalogue essay “Manga as Art [*bijutsu*]”. According to him, manga qualifies “as art [*geijutsu*], as a type of painting [*kaiga*],” insofar as the two elements in the compositum, the *man* and the *ga*, are balanced. He defines the *man* in manga as “ideas, esprit, laughter”, which represents a considerable toning down of the Japanese character’s signification as something that is impulsive, exaggerated, and unreasonable, and which in the case of manga can connote a disruption of the social and aesthetic order that may not be comical at all. Since the character *ga* (image, picture) in manga is derived from the verb *kaku* (“to write” as well as “to draw”), and since it points not to images in general but to a picture rendered with brush and ink which as a rule forms the core of calligraphy and monochrome ink-painting, Iizawa concludes that manga ideally expresses the spirit of Japanese traditional painting in vivid strokes. Accordingly, he dismisses the story-manga of Tezuka Osamu:

In terms of the pictorial, there is nothing new here [...], as one cannot sense the unique personal touch indispensable for an artist [*geijutsuka*]. [...] The brushstroke and the freely changing tension of the line, to which traditional Japanese painting attached great importance, cannot be found; in short, *his picture-planes are without life*



[emphasis mine]. [...] The Tezuka fan is indifferent to the picture-plane, rather putting emphasis on the stor. (Iizawa 1989:7).

- 10 Tezuka Osamu is regarded as the father, even as the god, of story-manga in Japan. His comics excelled in fast-paced narrative entertainment and played a crucial role in the establishment of the story-manga as a long-format graphic novel. German comics expert Andreas C. Knigge goes so far as to attribute the popularity of the comics medium in Japan to the talent of manga artists as story-tellers, and distinguishes this from the decisive role of hero characters in American comics and that of the pictorial rendering in *bande dessinée* (Knigge 1996: 241). In his meta-comic *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud also describes manga as a medium that places a premium on narrative, pointing out that Tezuka's genius consisted in his conception of manga as a system of highly stylized signs which correlates the pictorial and the verbal in a sophisticated, tight synthesis. While this observation clearly contradicts Iizawa's complaint about ignorant Tezuka fans, *Reading Manga (Manga no yomikata)*, the first systematic attempt to define the grammar of story-manga, offers a different understanding of Tezuka's "lifeless line"¹². According to Takekuma Kentarō (who, with Natsume Fusanosuke, belongs to the central authors of this anthology), not only did Tezuka's line signify an ideal modernist dynamics controlled by reason, but it also met perfectly the requirements for relief printing: "If brush and pencil had been the mainstream, the mass-distribution of manga we know today would not have happened" (Inoue, ed. 1995:41).
- 11 Often, the transcribing of the word "manga" will, by itself, indicate the position of the respective author (fig. 1). Whereas in *Reading Manga (Manga no yomikata)* it appears in *katakana* syllables and signifies story-manga¹³, Shimizu and Iizawa insist on the Sino-Japanese characters (*kanji*) emphasizing traditions of humour as well as calligraphy and monochrome ink-painting. Moreover, traces of that ink-brush tradition in manga are conflated with "painting" as a site of tradition¹⁴. To designate such elements in manga as "painting" (*kaiga*) by having recourse to a term that itself is a neologism invented during the early phase of Japan's modernization, reveals an attachment to cultural continuity. This attachment can be traced to several sources, but manga history and art history are the most relevant references for my purposes here. The encounter with Euroamerican comic strips has proven decisive for the emergence of modern manga, particularly in terms of the development of manga's sequentiality of panels and successively articulated temporal units (Inoue, ed. 1995:209). On the other hand, art historians have shown how the term as well as the concept of "painting" [*kaiga*] was constructed in the late 19th century by conjoining different traditions within Japan under Euroamerican influence. Within the newly established realm of "fine art" (*bijutsu*), "painting", comprised of selected and reconstituted traditional as well as Western forms, became increasingly detached from daily social contexts as well as increasingly reified, ascribing essentialist notions of Eastern and Western aesthetic particularities to different styles.
- 12 Bearing this in mind, the unreflected use of concepts of "fine art" and "painting" in relation to manga by critics and historians such as Iizawa invites a questioning of what kind of manga as well as of what kind of art they mean. The art invoked by these critics is evidently the fiction of a continuous, homogeneous tradition which has ideally remained unaffected by historical upheavals and conflicts between academy and the avant-garde. While academic art (*kindai bijutsu*) as represented by powerful art associations and by official art salons, and confined as it was in an ahistorical notion of an aestheticized national culture, lost its predominance in the art world after World War II and unconventional artists without any affiliation gained ground (*gendai bijutsu*), manga deviated from its pre-war relation to art as *honga* (literally: "real picture", or painting). Early professionals like Okamoto Ippei – who in the way of traditional masters called himself *manga-shi* instead of the current term *manga-ka* – created both manga and paintings, but from Tezuka



onwards, the assumption that academic painting skills formed a necessary basis for creating manga, has, at least in the realm of story-manga, been dismissed (Inoue, ed. 1995: 64).

- 13 In addition, the *gekiga* (literally: “dramatic pictures”), a new kind of graphic novels which sacrificed the allegedly essential humour and playfulness in favor of efficient narration of often dark stories for young adults, emerged and came to constitute the mainstream of manga in the 1960s. But *gekiga* was dismissed as a mere industrial mass-product devoid of aesthetic value. Striving to maintain their own status within the manga world, the advocates of the short-form manga strongly objected to this new form of story-manga as “non-art” and, consequently, “non-Japanese”. Decades later, Iizawa seems anachronistically to uphold this type of conservative argument:

In America, there is a term which reminds one at first of manga: comics. But closer inspection reveals that this does not have anything to do with laughter, rather, it concerns the transferring of adventure narratives into picture stories. [...] For someone like me, who regards manga as a genre of art [*bijutsu*], this *gekiga* is not interesting at all (Iizawa 1989: 7).

- 14 Apparently, as comics, or an entertaining mass-cultural medium that places emphasis on the integration of the verbal and the visual for the sake of story-telling, manga replicates “America” too closely, thus abandoning its national and aesthetic purity. It is certainly true that, with its appropriation by the culture industry, the *gekiga* gradually lost its initial unorthodox character of resistance to or rebellion against the dominant culture and its ties to folk-culture, and that it began to use the word *komikku* (“comics”) in manga magazines like “Young Comic” (1967) or “Big Comic” (1968). However, this tendency did not so much reveal a process of pernicious foreign infiltration, but should rather be regarded as an outcome of ongoing modernization; the loan-word *komikku* still contained the memory of folk-cultural traditions insofar as it alluded to a realm different from one’s daily surroundings, and at the same time to the modernity of American mass-culture. Art critic Sawaragi Noi puts it this way in his article for an anthology on manga studies:

Our being so much attracted by manga owes a lot to the fact that the manga traditions from the “Scrolls of Birds and Animals” [*Chōjū giga*] to “Hokusai Manga” have been lost in the process of modernization [...] (Sawaragi 1997: 31).

- 15 As demonstrated above, an underlying assumption about the putatively unbroken, solid and static tradition of national culture comes into play whenever “manga” is invoked as, or banished from the realm of “art”. Interestingly enough, the discipline of art history, which in December 1997 examined its own involvement in the establishment of a modern national culture at an international conference organized by the National Research Institute of Cultural Properties, began to “discover” manga precisely at the time when manga was acquiring an international reputation as the new hallowed symbol or representative art form of Japanese culture. In May 1998, the Japan Art History Society held, for the first time, a symposium on manga as one part of its regular spring conference: “Thinking *Manga* from Art Historical Perspectives”¹⁵. In the call for papers which was sent out six months prior to the conference, the organizers used a language that suggested a domestication, an epuration and a cooptation of the manga medium and the subsuming of this new subject under an old canon – probably because they were expecting resistance from their colleagues.

- 16 The call for papers justified the “unprecedented step of dedicating a symposium to this subject” by invoking the fact that, even though a central task of art history was the analysis of images, the discipline had neglected “the most widespread images in our country, manga”. Yet, there was no explicit reference to narrative or sequential images as crucial for story-manga. Secondly, manga was ascribed academic relevance by pointing to its death: “[...] since there is already a generation of non-manga readers emerging, a time has come when it is possible to look back”. This



seemed to imply that manga is something belonging to the past, a tradition entering the stage of museumization and therefore safe to examine as an object of academic study. Finally, the organizers referred to recent exhibitions of manga artists in public art museums, implicitly articulating a need to catch up with what had become a new trend in the art world since the late 1980s, when the Kawasaki City Museum opened its manga department with two full-time manga curators.

17 Whereas the announcement of the symposium singled out the necessity for art history to attend to images in general without naming the specificity of images generated by the medium of comics, most papers actually read at the conference¹⁶ focused on contemporary story-manga and initiated discussions about its specific expression, often referring to the above-mentioned *Reading Manga (Manga no yomikata)* and to further writings by its central authors, Natsume Fusanosuke and Takekuma Kentarō, who are well known to students of manga but not to art historians. However, even though the explicit consideration of manga studies – usually not regarded as academic – in the standard environment of an academic conference may signify an acknowledgment of the “alien element” on its own merits, such consideration will only result in applying conservative art-historical methods of stylistic investigation to a different subject unless the conceptual paradigms, the practices and the very foundations of the discipline are subjected to critical scrutiny. An unprecedented critical questioning of the modern institution of fine art in Japan has been underway since the 1980s. Historical inquiries into the establishment of this institution in the late 19th century have emerged¹⁷ along with analyses inspired by recent Japanese art, such as the publications by Sawaragi Noi mentioned above. Art historians have produced exhaustive studies of hitherto neglected peripheral domains within the field, such as design¹⁸ and of the various Others excluded from the institution of art, especially women artists¹⁹ and modern and contemporary Asian art²⁰. Except for Sawaragi, these scholars rarely pay attention to the contemporary story-manga or to the exegesis and theories it has generated, but their work could be used for historicizing notions of art within manga studies, and for increasing contextual reflexivity about the meaning and function of comics and its study in modern Japanese culture.

18 Significantly, writings by Ishiko Junzō and Tsurumi Shunsuke from the late 1960s, which discuss the relationship between manga and art from a perspective that refuses to essentialize the aesthetic and national characteristics of manga, were not brought up at the Japan Art History Society’s manga symposium. In *On the Art of Manga (Manga geijut suron, 1967)*, Ishiko claimed that manga and art (*geijutsu*) are not opposites but partly overlap. Referring to a wide range of manga, including the *gekiga*, and familiar not only with academic art but also with the Japanese avant-garde of his time, he identified painting and manga as two legitimate forms of “expression” each with its own history and practices. According to Ishiko, painting addresses a need for aesthetic autonomy and for individual appreciation involving an exploration of hidden meanings and comparatively passive enjoyment. Manga on the other hand is a medium that delivers “understandable images” which, though undoubtedly close to surfaces and accessible to the masses, are not passively consumed as they cause readers to actively confront, and participate in the creation of meanings and values. Thus, the manga in Ishiko’s view generates a critical kind of viewing images, which he demonstrates through his own readings of the *gekiga* of Shirato Sanpei and Mizuki Shigeru²¹. To Ishiko, manga embodies both art and entertainment, and political critique. Though manga historian Takeuchi Osamu has critiqued Ishiko’s use of difficult concepts and developing of obscure arguments that cannot but puzzle the average manga reader (Takeuchi 1997:31), he obviously missed the point of Ishiko’s provocative ideas about art and its convergence with, or divergence from manga. Sociologist Tsurumi Shunsuke described the contemporary understanding of “high art” in a study, *Marginal Arts (Genkai geijutsuron)*, which



was published in 1967, in the same year as Ishiko's book on manga:

In contemporary Japanese, the word “art” [*geijutsu*] evokes something like a Beethoven concert by Kogan at the Hibiya hall. This understanding involves three issues: a cultural production or artifact which is invested with authority because of its position in the history of Western civilization (the authority issue); this artwork is performed for us by a celebrity from a highly developed country (the issue of imitation and passivity); and finally, the audience for this performance is a minority of cultivated people residing in Tōkyō, the capital city of Japan (the issue of Tōkyō centralism as opposed to regional culture) (Tsurumi 1982: 6).

- 19 Tsurumi divests “high art” – which was a product of Japan's modernization process and which earlier in this essay was addressed as *bijutsu* and academic painting-of its symbolic monopoly by shedding light on a “marginal art” such as manga. According to him, marginal art constitutes the oldest, most enduring and most receptive form of art. Thriving on the ambiguous borderline between the everyday and aesthetic experience (the latter as distinct from daily practices), marginal art absorbed the contradictory impulses of modernization, eventually giving birth to “pure art” (*junsui geijutsu*) as well as “mass art” (*taishū geijutsu*). Unlike Tsurumi, Ishiko did not conceive of the aesthetic as something separate from the everyday, which in addition to the point he made about art and manga as complementary and overlapping, rather than antagonistic realms, is a conception that must be considered exceptional even at present.

OTHERING “ART” FOR MANGA

- 20 One recent trend in manga studies is concerned with the distinctiveness of manga's language rather than with its general status as “art”. An exemplary instance of this trend, which is called the “expression” school [*hyōgenron*], is the above-mentioned anthology *Reading Manga (Manga no Yomikata)*. Focusing on the story-manga from the perspective of manga artists, the authors explore the textual conventions constituting the foundation of readers' manga literacy, and attempt to explain the enormous popularity of this medium in contemporary Japan. They also aim at developing a specific and testable language for manga criticism. Taking as their point of departure the most basic pictorial element in a manga panel – the line – and the tools used in its rendition, the contributors to *Reading Manga* show how various meanings are evoked. They proceed then to analyze the components in the single panel, proposing new analytical terms such as “shape metaphor” [*keiyu*] and “sound metaphor” [*on'yu*]. These terms signify contextual attributes which make possible the visualization of the invisible, especially movements and mental states; at the same time they suggest that the pictorial cannot be separated from the verbal and vice versa which is a crucial characteristic of comics. The next step is a description of the various shapes of panels as well as of their relation to one another within the space of a page or a succession of pages (fig. 2), with special attention paid to the weaving of the simultaneous and the sequential in spatially articulated time. Another term is introduced at this point; in order to underline its active role, the gutter is called *mahaku* (literally “the white in-between”). Based on traditional Japanese aesthetics, this term aptly captures the combination of the spatial and the temporal, or *yohaku* (negative space) and *ma* (between) (Inoue, ed. 1995:185).
- 21 In contradistinction to McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, *Reading Manga* focuses on how semantic clarity can be achieved in a fundamentally ambiguous medium. Accordingly, the book does not explore the average in the light of the exception by foregrounding experimental manga which would approximate “art” in terms of their originality or radical aesthetic innovations, but rather prefers to discuss standard works as examples of high quality within the mainstream. Art comes into play only in certain juxtapositions of the specific pictoriality of manga with painting. However, the range of reference to “painting” (*kaiga*) in this volume is quite restricted: it



connotes either the monochrome ink-brush tradition in Japanese art, or an undifferentiated, homogeneous tradition of Western pictorial realism. Although both traditions are denied any impact whatsoever on contemporary manga artists, what is assumed to be their general stylistic characteristics is applied to the explanation of manga:

The post-war manga is an iconic expression created through an assemblage of symbolic lines; at the same time, it has sought to attain the pictorial realism of the Western painting (Inoue, ed. 1995:72).

- 22 The authors of *Reading Manga* merely allude to popular stereotypes of (Japanese and Western) painting instead of proving their characterizations with concrete art-historical references. But the unfamiliarity with and the lack of expertise in the discipline of art history in this text are less problematic than its arguable tendency to ascribe certain aesthetic features as essential to the West or the East. This is striking as it contradicts the reference to Kandinsky²² (which, incidentally, is one of the rare invocations of theory in the book). In *Reading Manga*, Kandinsky's theory of abstract art is wrenched from the discursive and historical contexts in which it was created and put in the service of purely stylistic investigation, whereas in McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, such modernist art, precisely because it is critical of the traditions of Western painting as they have come down since the Renaissance, proves crucial for a discussion of what comics do and do not have in common with art.
- 23 If projects such as that initiated in *Reading Manga* are to be developed further, an understanding of modern visual culture as a heterogeneous field comprising various visual media and forms of expression as well as the practices and discourses they have generated is imperative. Manga historian Takeuchi Osamu critiques the authors of *Reading Manga* as follows: "Unfortunately, for all their new words and novel vocabulary, their work has not progressed to the point of formulating a meaningful grammar for the genre" (Takeuchi 1996: 2). While Takeuchi thinks that they miss being "meaningful" (sic!) because of a "lack of historical perspective", he himself may have overlooked the manifold insights into the history of manga styles proposed in that book. What is problematic in *Reading Manga* is not its overlooking of historicity, but rather the selectivity of its historical perspective as it is applied to manga but not to art, and considered for specific styles but not in the case of discourses. The focus on manga as pure expression is matched with the homogenization of its Others – painting as well as Western comics. Throughout the book, Western comics are invoked uncritically and without visual references as a mirror for Japanese particularities, suggesting that the real focus is not comics in general – the book serves partly as a tentative theoretical frame and grammar of the comics medium as well – but Japanese comics. It is this unacknowledged concern with reducing comics to a Japanese cultural grid that distinguishes *Reading Manga* sharply from McCloud's *Understanding Comics*²³, and which demonstrates that even discourses on story-manga aim at the logic of "high art", though perhaps unwittingly. Read from a perspective related to "painting" and to a putative Japanese cultural singularity, *Reading Manga* leads to an obvious, but seemingly unintended conclusion – that the study of manga cannot be kept clear from either "art" or national identity politics.
- 24 The same applies to anthropologist Yamaguchi Masao. In "Manga Elements in Contemporary Art" (*Gendai geijutsu ni okeru manga-tekina mono*), a talk he gave at the Art Research Center at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto on October 22, 1999, Yamaguchi, after briefly touching on the current extraordinary popularity of Japanese manga and animation in the West, went on to discuss the relation between comics and fine art in Japan only by referring to traditional picture-scrolls (*emakimono*), to recent manga exhibitions in art museums and galleries, and to the fact that manga drawings (*genga*) by famous artists now sell for prices as high as




conventional paintings. The main part of his lecture, however, was dedicated to a mere survey of the relation between comics and fine art in the United States, in which artists such as Winsor McCay, George Herriman and Roy Lichtenstein were given a prominent place. Thus, Yamaguchi's talk seemed to imply that negotiations between comics and painting were a specifically Euroamerican issue. Although Yamaguchi cannot be counted among manga scholars, he has nevertheless contributed the introductory essay to the catalogue of "The MANGA Age" (*Manga no jidai*) exhibition.

- 25 This exhibition, which represented the culmination of the gradual acknowledgment of the story-manga by "high-cultural" institutions, demonstrated a very similar dilemma: by refusing to reflect upon the place of fine art in modern Japan and – in this case – the museum as its site, the organizers ended up repeating its very logic and presenting manga as a purely aesthetic and uniquely Japanese art, untainted by influences from other media or cultures. Shown first in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tōkyō and then in the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art in 1998 and 1999, the exhibition was the largest ever of its kind with 380 manga works by more than 250 artists. As the subtitle and the images on the poster made abundantly clear, the "manga age" was to be understood as the age of story-manga, ranging from the early works of Tezuka Osamu to the manga version of the mid-1990s TV animation series "Neon Genesis Evangelion". To justify this approach, the organizers proposed the following perspective in the prefatory remarks displayed at the entrance of the exhibition as well as in the accompanying catalogue:

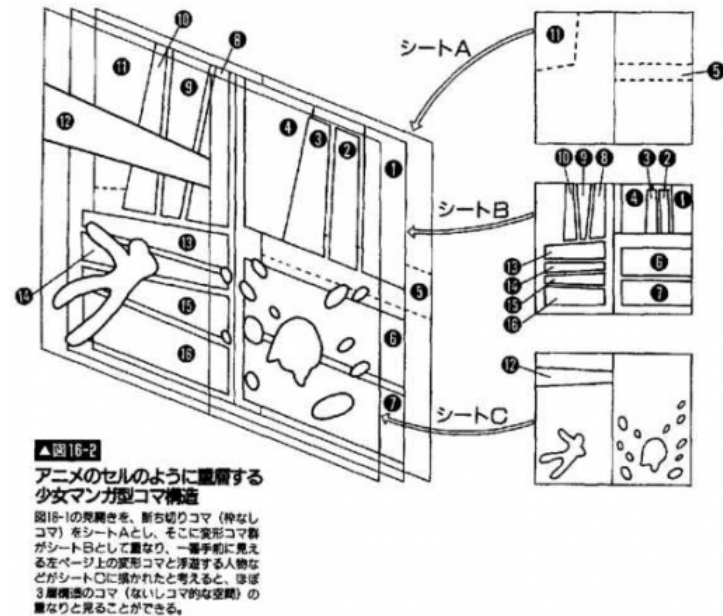
The better known images and representations of Japan circulating abroad are those of an economic and technological superpower, as well as the projection of a traditional culture boasting the Kabuki theatre and *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints. However, relatively little is known of the culture of contemporary Japan. As genres like manga, animation and special-effects films, which were once consumed and appreciated only within the realm of subculture, matured and began to produce works of higher quality, and as the generation which grew up with them [...] is becoming aware of their influence, it is perhaps not far-fetched to say that these phenomena are no longer a subculture, but have gained the status of a culture that can legitimately represent Japan (*Manga nojidai* 1998: 2).

- 26 The reference to Japan and to its representation abroad is noteworthy. Since the whole catalogue was in Japanese – as distinct from many exhibitions of modern art in Japan – the confirmation of the status of manga could only be a self-confirmation, reminiscent of the construction of fine art and the discipline of art history during the last decades of the 19th century by internalizing the Western gaze. Nevertheless, art was acknowledged only in the last of the twenty-seven sections of the exhibition, which showed one Lichtenstein, and several examples of Japanese pop-art. Even in the material presentation of the manga exhibits, the organizers seemed to avoid any relation to art or manga as art. Unlike previous manga exhibitions, which had favored original drawings framed and put behind glass, so as to make comics – a mass-reproduced medium that in a quite real sense lacks "originals" – appear like authentic works of art, "The MANGA Age" exhibition pinned slightly enlarged monochrome copies of whole pages or double pages from comic books to the wall. In addition, the visitor was offered an audio-guide consisting of headphones and a folder and was asked to touch the pages and turn them over. Thus, an integral part of the experience of manga was at least partly considered. Nevertheless, according to the conventions of the museum, visibility was inevitably favored. There were no reading corners within the exhibition space, and what could be seen on the walls were only fragments with no complete sequences.

- 27  The Tezuka Osamu retrospective at the National Museum of Modern Art in Tōkyō in 1990 had already shown that the story-manga, with its focus on narrative rather than

pictorial value, confronts the art museum with certain difficulties. According to curator Iwasaki Yoshikazu, “the most serious challenge was the narrative nature of manga. (*sic!*...) But with the work of Tezuka manga, [...] it is technically impossible to present it as a whole [...]”. Therefore the organizers decided to emphasize not the narrative element, but the “visual presentation of Tezuka’s achievement, his originality in technique, and the visual appeal of his manga” (Iwasaki 1990:12). Narrative sequentiality distinguishes manga from painting as the main genre of museum art, and to overlook mangas narrativity while foregrounding its visual style or the artist’s working process may result in a subordination of manga to “high art”. Yet, more importantly, visibility is favored in the art museum in order to narrate a certain story – which is usually the history of canonical fine art. In the case of the “The MANGA Age” exhibition, this was replaced by the history of story-manga.

FIGURE 2



Multilayered page layout as distinctive for the girls’ manga of the late 1970s, demonstrated by Natsume Fusanosuke in Reading Manga (Manga no yomikata), Takarajimasha 1995, p. 181.

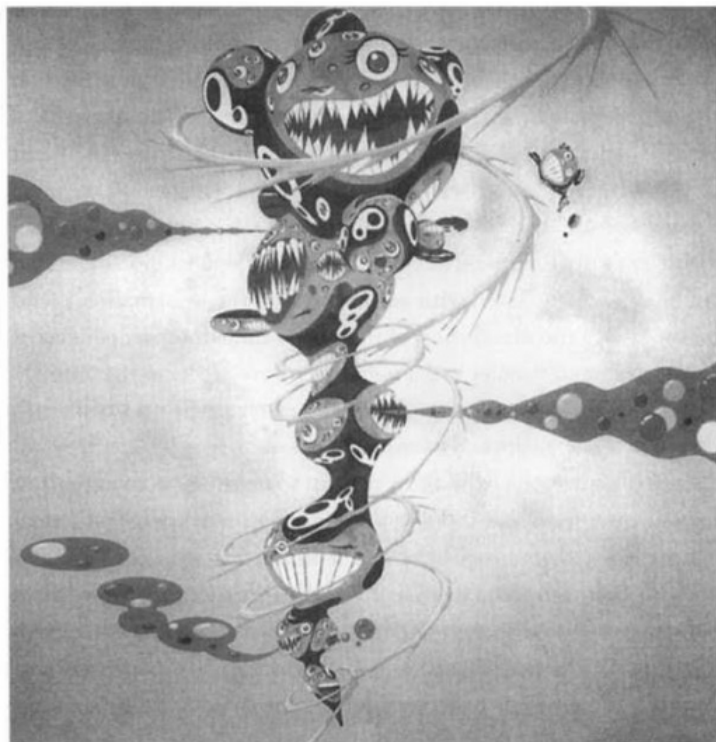
28 Following the conventional periodization found in manga history, the exhibition began with Tezuka’s “New Treasure Island” (*Shin Takarajima*, 1947), thus suggesting that he was the originator of story-manga but without any proof or visible comparison to previous manga artists. Following this section on Tezuka, the exhibit proceeded to present four parts in chronological order – the 1950s, the 1960s, the 1970s, and “since the 1980s” – in which certain genres, like “Humour, Gag, Nonsense” or “SF and Fantasy”, as well as certain subjects like “Genealogy of Heroes and Heroines”, “The Expanding Body” or “Manga for Youth”, were repeated. The integration of “Horror and Occultism” (genres that emerged in the 1960s and boomed again in the 1980s) was considered innovative, especially for their implicit link to subcultures within manga. However, several genres and subjects were conspicuously absent. Sexuality appeared only as part of standard “harmless” genres, and genres like the *ero-gekiga* of the 1970s, which in its treatment of sexuality can be compared to American Underground Comix, were left out altogether – probably to appease the metropolitan authorities. Violence in manga was presented in a strangely decontextualized fashion, completely unconnected to social and political issues. Girls- and women-centered genres were foregrounded only in section 10, “The Golden Age of Girls’ Manga” – which was a strong indication of the organizers’ unwillingness to explore gender issues within manga. The exhibition, which closed with an overview of the information age of the 1990s and the



dissolution of manga by multimedia, displayed a male-dominated teleology of a putatively pure art form that had remained impervious to foreign cultures as well as suspiciously unreceptive to other media and forms of expression.

- 29 At first glance, the exhibition seemed to resist the conventions of the art museum in that it did not foreground the work of individual manga artists as geniuses, but focused on the narrative medium as a whole. It even refrained from using the “expression” approach [*hyōgenron*]. In order to avoid representing manga as a purely visual medium, the organizers raised the issue of “What is Manga? Its Expression and Grammar” in a separate section, and commissioned catalogue essays not from the authors of *Reading Manga*, but from manga critic Murakami Tomohiko and from anthropologist Yamaguchi Masao. However, because of its dwelling on genres and characters (which echoes *otaku* perception²⁴), and especially because of its inclination to exclude contemporary political, social and cultural issues as well as its inclination to aestheticize, the exhibition ended up replicating the dominant modern narrative of “Art” as promoted by conventional art history and the art museum. Thus, it also missed the chance to explore the potential of the latter. Hosogaya Atsushi, manga curator at the Kawasaki City Museum, identifies such potential especially in maintaining and collecting original manga drawings which are “a fellow to art works and a cultural inheritance of Japan” (Hosogaya 1998: 92). Museum visitors may on the other hand expect a different treatment of manga in the museum – namely as a hybrid medium interacting with other visual and narrative arts both from Japan and from abroad.

FIGURE 3



Murakami Takashi: *The Castle of Tin Tin*, 1998; in: *Monthly Art-Journal “Bijutsu Techō”*, vol. 51, No. 770, May 1999, p. 129.

- 30 The Japanese artworks arranged in the last room (and mixed with Lichtenstein despite their very different attitudes towards fine art) deviated from the exhibitions general conception insofar as they clearly transgress the boundaries between “high art” and “low culture” and gleefully deconstruct the myth of a homogeneous national identity that seemed to lurk in the neat manga history on display on that occasion. Four of the six Japanese artists²⁵ presented in the last section of “The MANGA Age” have been involved in a remarkable trend which was initiated in the early 1990s. This so-called “Tōkyō Pop” (or Neo-Pop) art is often regarded as a mere



game devoid of subversiveness or of a critical edge (Hasegawa 1997:17), but it responds to a set of questions that were raised in Japan in the late 1980s and early 1990s. According to art critic Matsui Midori, this discourse was concerned with:

whether the inclusiveness of Japanese culture was symptomatic of its materialist decadence and ‘colonial’ dependence on the West or a sign of some hybrid particularity that resisted any ideological classification (Matsui 1997:28).

- 31 In other words, the question was whether the trend to imitate in modern Japanese culture should be understood in terms of dependence on the West – using the modernist criterion of originality and lamenting its apparent absence in Japan – or whether it should be affirmed in accordance with the chaotic, random strands of city life in contemporary Japan. The Tōkyō-Pop artists chose the latter mode, relating their doubts about a naturalized cultural homogeneity with their distrust of “Art” as one of its signifiers. Instead of observing the familiar binarisms of modern Japanese art, such as Japan vs. the West, or purely aesthetic art vs. its impure Others, they consistently transgress them. Sawaragi Noi, Tōkyō-Pop’s prime advocate and interpreter, writes that these artists usurp the sanctioned borderlines between different media, cultures and genres (Sawaragi 1998: 94).
- 32 Artist Murakami Takashi for example questions the difference between comics and academic painting by showing their basic similarities as two flat media (fig. 3). When modern Japanese-style painting (*nihonga*) is taken out of its traditional architectural and social context – deprived of its ontological status as a medium – and is presented in glass cases or on the museum wall, it raises the question of how autonomous it can be, and thus, how different it can be from manga. Murakami, who actually has a degree in *nihonga* from the National Art University in Tōkyō, strides both *nihonga* and manga not only in his unabashed pastiches of motifs, characters and settings from both traditions, but also in his emulation of the collaborative team work in an artists’ collective he founded, named “Hiropon Factory”. His art carries on the *nihonga* tradition both subversively and affirmatively, and may be described as a pictorial anti-naturalism in that it favors flatness and decorative stylization. However, Murakami does not treat this kind of painting as eternal art, but rather as an ephemeral and cute toy signifying “super-flat Japan”, or a culture flat in its social structure, its pictorial spaces, and its imitative thinking (Murakami *et al.* 1998: 20).
- 33 Similarly, Nara Yoshitomo’s works combine subjects and modes of representation that are usually conceived as opposites: adult and child; the serious (or even scary) and the cute; the format of the painting, and the round cartoon outlines and graphic clarity of manga characters with occasional written inserts²⁶. Marilu Knode, the curator of Nara’s exhibition at the University of Wisconsin in 1998, describes his works as “not making a case for a unique Japanese position, but a global one” which suggests the “power discrepancy between adult and child” (Knode 1998). While conflating “global” with “universal” (not the global as appearing in the local Japanese context which this essay has attempted to sketch), she emphasizes the distinction of Nara’s art from manga:

Unlike [...] contemporary Japanese manga with its blatant exploitation of fleshy youth culture [...], Nara’s work sidesteps sexual politics and a disingenuous naïveté to imagine a sophisticated complex of desire, projection, and self-projection (Knode 1998).

- 34 Yet, Nara’s is an art that is closer to manga than it may seem from this perspective. Like the works of other Toky5-Pop artists, it affirms visible surfaces instead of spiritual depth; conjoins the visual, the verbal, and the narrative instead of separating them neatly; prefers a dialogue with the viewer to an hermetic self-referentiality by treating “painting” as a mere medium; and does not claim a unique identity. Just like the medium of manga, which is determined by commodification, reproduction technologies, genre specifics and team work, this art questions the



notion of modern authorship. It strives neither for “anti-art” – like the Japanese avant-garde of the 1960s – nor for an alleged pre-modern authenticity. Rather, critically aware of Japan's modernity, it actualizes a traditional mutuality of aesthetic concerns and quotidian culture. According to Japanese traditions, it accepts the “here and now” and adjusts to it, but without longing for an all too modernist authentic originality.

PROSPECTS

- 35 The discursive issue of manga as “art” might be irrelevant for enjoying comics, but it nevertheless gains critical importance when previously exclusive institutions like public art museums and universities begin to absorb the once “alien element” as is happening in Japan today. What matters then is not an essentialist definition of manga as art, but rather a re-envisioning of the limitations as well as potential of these institutions by means of the new subject while keeping this subject itself fluid. From the perspective of aesthetics, the comparative exploration of manga and other media (including traditions of narrative painting) promises insights into manga's specific combination of the pictorial and the verbal; the spatially decorative and the temporally narrative; and finally, reading with viewing while turning pages in a concrete place and time – all of which still needs to be related to the modernity of this medium in a broad sense. From the perspective of national culture, the specificity of manga, often claimed as non-political and purely aesthetic and precisely thereby serving political as well as economic interests, is to be challenged by means of a comparative examination of comics from North America and Europe, but also from other regions, especially Asia²⁷, in order to investigate differences and similarities. As sites of research serving for the most part non-utilitarian goals, public museums as well as academic studies bear at least a potential for exploring non-hierarchical differences between several kinds of comics and art, and for evaluating the pros and cons of “their extreme permeability”.

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Notes

1. This essay is partly based on my publication in German: “*Verkunstung*” des Comics. *Wo japanische Kunstwissenschaft und Mangastudien sich bislang begegnen*. Thesis. Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, special issue: *Disorientiert: Japan, der Westen und der Ästhetizentrismus*, ed. by Jörg Gleiter (1998) 6, pp. 52-73. Special thanks to Alwyn Spies for her help with the English text, and to Livia Monnet for illuminating editorial comments on the various versions of this study.

2. Since even the word “manga” has entered English and other languages, I do not feel it is necessary to give a general description of the phenomenon here. For a general introduction for western readers, see Schodt 1983, 1996; Groensteen 1991.

3. The advertising giant Dentsū’s “Information and Media White Paper” divides manga magazines commercially into three categories: boys, girls, and adults (Dentsū Sōken, ed.: 36-41). From an aesthetic point of view also, genre differences according to gender and age still prove to be the most important ones in terms of story type and drawing style, despite recent cross-overs of readers and a wide range of content-oriented subgenres.

4. See Takeuchi and Murakami (eds.) 1989; Takeuchi 1997; Uryū 1998.

5. See Natsume Fusanosuke’s publications including Inoue (ed.) 1995; Yomota 1994.

6. Prizewinners of the “Tezuka Osamu Culture Award”: 1997 Fujiko F. Fujio “Doraemon”, 1998 Sekigawa Natsuo & Taniguchi Jirō “Botchan’ no jidai”, 1999 Urasawa Naoki “MONSTER”. Natsume Fusanosuke received the Special Award 1999 for “his outstanding work in the field of manga criticism”.

7. Art historian Yamashita Yūji, for instance, has consistently refused to link his scholarly field of specialization with his personal interest in comics. Despite the subtitle of his essay “The Impasse of the Tradition of Disciplinary Boundaries”, he continues to uphold the boundaries he purports to



deconstruct, especially when he rejects academic studies of manga in general, pretending to defend comics against art historians, whose symposium on manga he did not even attend (Yamashita 1998: 79).

8. The following is a selection of manga exhibitions in public art museums in the past ten years (the first venue of each exhibit is cited in brackets): 1989: *Shōwa no manga-ten* (Kawasaki City Museum et.al.); 1990: *Tezuka Osamu-ten* (The National Museum of Modern Art, Tōkyō); 1991: *Daimanga-ten* (National Parliament Library, Tōkyō); 1993: *Mizuki Shigeru to nihon no yōkai* (Prefectural Art Museum Hyōgo), *Toriyama Akira no sekai-ten* (Kawasaki City Museum), *Manga manga manga-ten*. *Nihon manga no 300-nen* (Kawasaki City Museum); 1994: *Garō 30* (Kawasaki City Museum); 1996: *Nihon no manga 300-nen* (Kawasaki City Museum); 1997: *Okamoto Ippei – Gendai manga no paionia* (Kawasaki City Museum), *Tōkyō pakku-ten* (Art Museum Meguro, Tōkyō), *Shōjo manga no sekai-ten* (Prefectural Art Museum Hakodate, Hokkaidō).

9. Many manga museums are called “art museums” (*bijutsukan*) because of their privileging of the short forms of manga or because of these institutions’ aspiration for high-cultural status; the first museum dedicated to a creator of story-manga – the Tezuka Osamu Memorial Museum in Takarazuka – opened only in 1994. Here is a list of manga museums (Japanese name, year of foundation, place):

Ōmiya Shiritsu Manga Kaikan (for Kitazawa Rakuten) 1966, Ōmiya/Saitama; *Nihon Manga Hakubutsukan* (at the temple Jōrakuji, called “manga temple”) 1971, Kawasaki; *Kawanabe Kyōsai Kinen Bijutsukan* 1977, Warabi/Saitama; *Hasegawa Machiko Kinen Bijutsukan* 1985, Setagaya/Tōkyō; *Kōshoku Furusato Mangakan – Kondō Hidezō Bijutsukan* 1990, Kōshoku/Nagano; *Yunomae Manga Bijutsukan – Nasu Ryōsuke Kinenkan* 1992, Yunomae/Kumamoto; *Kamiyūbetsu-chōritsu Manga Bijutsukan* 1993, Kamiyūbetsuchō/Hokkaidō; *Takarazuka Shiritsu Tezuka Osamu Kinenkan* 1994, Takarazuka/Hyōgo, *Kibigawakami Fureai Manga Bijutsukan* (for Tomonaga Ichirō) 1994, Kibigawakami/Okayama; *Masudo-chō Manga Bijutsukan-Yaguchi Takao Manga Myūjiamu* 1995, Masudo-chō/Akita; *Kahoku-chōritsu Yanase Takashi Kinenkan – Anpanman Myūjiamu* 1996, Kahoku-chō/Kōchi; planned for Yokoyama Ryūichi (Kōchi), Ishinomori Shōtarō (Ishinomaki/Miyagi), Mizuki Shigeru (Sakaiminatomachi/Tottori).

10. This applies especially to the study of girls’ comics (*shōjo manga*). See for example Fujimoto 1998.

11. For the journal “Bungei Shunjū” and its promotion of short-form manga see the affiliated satiric magazine “Bunshun Manga Tokuhon” (1954-1970).

12. *Reading Manga* is no longer in print, because of complications with obtaining permission to reproduce images from manga. The manga industry in Japan is very protective, which is the reason for the scarcity of illustrations in this paper.

13. The monthly art journal “BT/Bijutsu Techō” (founded in 1948) established a manga column in 1981, which was titled *manga* in Sino-Japanese characters until November 1981, after that in *katakana* syllables, and since September 1989 *comic* in roman letters. The first series lasted until December 1989, the second from March 1996 to March 1998.

14. The unproblematized use of the word “painting” is also visible in the Japanese translation of McCloud’s book in the very definition of “comics”: “Pictorial and other images” (McCloud 1993: 9) became *kaigateki imēji y a sono ta no zuzō* (McCloud 1998: 17).

15. *Dai 51-kai bijutsushi gakkai zenkoku taikai shinpojiumu*, Waseda University, Tōkyō, 31 May 1998; see Tan’o 1998. The call for papers was contained in the regular circular, December 1997.

16. Okada Akiko: *19-seiki furansu no waraeru manga jijō*. “Ganso sutōrii manga shōnen no G. Dore” *no baai* (Comic in 19th century France: the Case of Gustave Doré, the First Story-Comic Wizard); Omuka Toshiharu: “Mavo” *to mangaka. Bijutsukai no shūhen to bijutsu no kyōkai* (MAVO and Manga Artists: the Periphery of the Art World and the Borders of Art); Jaqueline Berndt: *Manga kenkyū to bijutsushi kenkyū to no setten nitsuite* (Where Manga Studies and Art History meet); Nakajima Keiko: *Nihon sutōrii manga niokeru eizōteki wakugumi* (Cinematic Vision in Japanese Story-Comics); Ōnishi Hiroshi: *Shōjo manga no “koma-wari” wo megutte* (Innovative Page Layout in Girls’ Story-Comics: Its Narrative and Visual Significance); Béatrice Maréchal: *Furansu oyobi berugii no manga niokeru nihonjin kyarakut*, (Depiction of Japanese Characters in French and Belgian Bande Dessinée); Miyamoto Hirohito: *Manga no ibasho* (Social Topology of Manga in Pre-War Japan).

17. See for example publications by: Kinoshita Naoyuki, Kitazawa Noriaki, Satō Dōshin.

18. See for example publications by: Watanabe Toshio, Omuka Toshiharu.

19. See for example publications by: Chino Kaori, Ikeda Shinobu, Wakakuwa Midori.

20. For example publications by the curators of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum (opened in 1999), Ushiroshōji Masahiro and Kuroda Raiji.



21. Shirato Sanpei (born in 1932), creator of manga about Edo period ninja which were read as highly political by the students' movement and the New Left of the 1960s (e.g. "*Ninja bugeichō*", "*Kamuiden*"); Mizuki Shigeru (born in 1922), ethnologist and creator of manga on traditional ghosts and spirits which have been perceived as a critique of the fast-paced process of urbanization and modernization in the 1960s (e.g. "*Gegege no Kitarō*", "*Kappa no Sanpei*").
22. The reference to Kandinsky appears in Natsume's contributions to the volume as Wassily Kandinsky: *Ten, sen, men: Chūshō geijutsu no kiso* (original title: *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche*; 1926), transl. by Nishida Hideho. Tōkyō: Bijutsu shuppansha 1959.
23. Translation supervisor for McCloud's book and Japan's leading "otakuologist" Okada Toshio offers a rather skewed and narrow interpretation of *Understanding Comics*, namely as a praise of Japan's new representative culture: "I have a high feeling about Japan's unrivaled position, its uncontested world leadership in the field of manga, animation, and games. There is nothing to learn from the world anymore, now it's the world's turn to learn from Japan!" (Okada 1998: 3).
24. Seen from the perspective of perception and formation of knowledge, *otaku* – who are often described as manic fans of manga and animation – display a marked tendency to collect data as sheer signifiers and to refuse to contextualize or cross several contexts. Thus, an *otaku* would not only deny the linking of certain texts to political or social contexts, but also, in the case of a sequential work, the narrative continuity as such, rather favoring certain characters as cute objects of fetish, which can be extracted and manipulated, frozen in a kind of still "painting". Such an interpretation can be deduced from Itō Gō's description of animation-like images within manga (Itō 1998: 87) as well as from Okada Toshio's definition of the "otaku eye" (Okada 1996: 80-85).
25. Tiger Tateishi, Murakami Takashi, Nara Yoshitomo, Tarō Chiezō, and Nishiyama Minako.
26. Unfortunately, I was not able to obtain permission to reproduce one of Nara's works here. See for example Nara Yoshitomo: *Pancake Kamikaze*, 1996; in: Nara Yoshitomo: *Fukai fukai mizutamari* (Deep, Deep Puddle). Tōkyō: Kadokawa Shoten 1997 (not paginated).
27. The Fukuoka Asian Art Museum has begun to integrate comics into its (still problematic) concept of "Asia", at least as special exhibition in its rental space (Akatsuka Fujio Exhibition, January/February 2000). The manga exhibitions organized since 1990 by The Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center, since 1995 The Japan Foundation Asia Center, concentrate on short forms, not story-manga, whereas the latter has become part of the respective manga exchange only since the first East Asian Manga Summit in 1996.

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culture visuelle au Japon, Tōkyō, Kadensha, 1994).

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