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Ghostly: 'Asian Graphic Narratives,' *Nonnonba*, and Manga

On 'Asian Graphic Narratives'

Graphic narratives from Asia enjoy an increasing critical attention.[1] However, a common 'Asian' culture can hardly be determined. Works as diverse as Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000–2003), Kishimoto Masashi's long-running series "Naruto" (1999–),[2] Tatsumi Yoshihiro's *gekiga* short stories of the early 1970s,[3] Doha's webcomic *The Great Catsby* (2005–), Kaoru's *Maid Maiden* (2009–),[4] and *Liquid City*, the second volume of which was nominated for the Eisner Awards (Best Anthology) in 2011,[5] share mainly two things: their creators' descent, and the most basic formal properties of comics. At the same time, they differ significantly in terms of readership, publication format, genre, cultural status, and the broader mediascape in which they are located.[6] Including the historically changing influx of American comics, Franco-Belgian *bande dessinée*, and Japanese manga, these conditions affect what kind of stories are told and how, often to an extent which outweighs fundamental aesthetic similarities.

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[1] See Lent 1999, 2001, 2004, 2010; as well as the contributions in Berndt 2010, 2011, 2012; Berndt and Kümmerling-Meibauer 2013; Berndt and Richter 2006; or Lent's *International Journal of Comic Art*, such as Ogi, Lim, and Berndt 2012. One of the earliest accounts from an insider's perspective was Wong 2002. Noteworthy is also the *City Tales* comic-blog (Goethe Institut Jakarta, since 2011), which conjoins artists from Jakarta, Hanoi, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, and Melbourne working in a variety of styles and genres.

[2] Titles of manga that started out as magazine series are given in quotation marks in order to distinguish them from their publication site, that is, the magazine the title of which is italicized. Japanese (Chinese, Korean, and other Asian) names are given in their domestic order, surnames preceding given names (except in the works cited and in citations to authors' works published in Western languages, where they appear in the English order).

[3] On gekiga (lit. dramatic picture), see Brophy 2010; Holmberg 2011; as well as the second and third sections of this chapter; one example of Tatsumi's works in translation is Tomine 2005. The Romanization of Japanese words in this chapter follows the modified Hepburn system (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hepburn_romanization). Japanese words are written without "s" in their plural form. For technical reasons, this chapter refrains from marking long vowels, either by means of macrons or spelling (such us 'shounen').

[4] Kaoru is an original non-Japanese shojo manga artist of Chinese descent located in Kuala Lumpur who publishes in the Malay language prior to Chinese and English. See Gan 2011.

[5] See Liew and Lim 2011.

[6] Tojirakarn 2011, for example, highlights the importance of domestic popular novels by female writers for the establishment of original manga-style girls' comics in Thailand. Wong 2010b introduces an example of girls' comics uninfluenced by shojo manga.

In view of both the diversity of graphic narratives and Asia's geopolitical, religious, and linguistic diversity (which applies to other continents as well), any attempt to generalize 'Asian' comics reveals itself to be a projection, a ghost haunting contemporary criticism in the wake of Western orientalism. In turn, against the backdrop of occidentalism and self-orientalization in Asia, 'European comics' become subject to homogenization, for example, in the name of *bande dessinée*.[7] While this mutual desire to generalize deserves to be acknowledged and not just to be deconstructed, it also calls for contextualization, albeit not at any cost and not only applied to the Other. If a notion like 'Asian graphic narratives' is to make sense, then as a tool that helps to raise critical awareness of allegedly universal presumptions underlying the study of graphic narratives. The fact that the majority of theoretically ambitious publications still exhibits an astonishing inclination to address their topic in general while actually relying on a rather limited body of works gives rise to methodological blind spots that make themselves felt once cultural borders are crossed.

Thierry Groensteen's *The System of Comics* (2007) may serve as an example in this regard. Although available in Japanese, its application within manga studies is hampered not only by the discussion of works unavailable to manga readers but also by assumptions derived from a fundamentally different comics culture. *The System of Comics* suggests, for example, that contemporary artists can choose from a pool of aesthetic devices that have been increasing continuously since the late nineteenth century. This, however, is not an option for manga artists. Manga are typically rooted in weekly and monthly magazines that have formed the backbone of the world's largest comics industry since the 1950s. As such, they are prone to fashions. Both editors and consumers discriminate stylistic devices fastidiously. These devices range from the specific quality of lines (brushstrokes are a present no-go) to the rendering of flashbacks (indicated today mainly by blackened gutters). Outside of Japan, both manga translations and manga-style productions—original as well as derivative ones—are not part of an established mainstream but rather a new kind of alternative comics; yet, even though non-Japanese artists do not have to meet industrial standards, unless aiming at the Japanese market, they too observe the above-mentioned up-to-dateness, first and foremost, in favor of the taste communities to which they belong.

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[7] See Miyake 2012. For a non-homogenizing view on European graphic narratives, see Jan Baetens and Steven Surdiacourt's contribution in this volume.

Another difference pertains to assumptions of authorship. Due to the predominance of serialization, contemporary manga artists, as distinct from many of the Japanese pioneers, are only rarely well-planned with respect to the overall story arc and aesthetic intent, but very methodical in regard to the single installment's storyboard.[8] What recurs in recent Western publications on graphic narratives is, furthermore, the idea that the hand-drawn graphic line "brings us back to the embodied author" (Gardner 2011: 66). In Japanese works, as distinct from most non-Japanese manga productions, hand-drawing is still prior to CGI, but, in comparison to Western comics, it plays a different role. For one thing, the contrast between calligraphic onomatopoeia and consequently mechanical typefaces for almost any sort of script is striking. Like other aspects, this relates to a basic characteristic, namely the fact that in manga the agency of the reader often counts more than that of the creator as 'author.' Manga artists may employ assistants who mimic the line of the master, and a specific line work that astonishes readers at first may become 'naturalized' due to familiarization in the course of a series. This is not to say that Japanese manga criticism ignores the narrative workings of the graphic line. On the contrary, it has pursued them since the mid-1990s, but on the understanding that the hand-drawn line in manga is put in the service of a highly conventionalized 'visual language.'[9]

In view of the fact that graphic narratives do not possess a universal grammar or preexistent lexicon, systematic discussions have denied them the status of language, and with good reason. Yet, both a different body of texts and different ways of relating to these texts may change the picture. Graphic narratives characterized by a high degree of codification as well as reader literacy easily evoke the impression of a 'visual language.' The persisting prominence of this notion among manga critics and readers indicates less a paucity of theoretical expertise than the reference to a cultural practice that cherishes sharing and mediality.[10] Naming manga a 'visual language' points beyond the issue of decoding sweat beads or nose bleeds. It refers, above all, to the existence of specific communities that value less a single work's aesthetic or ideological qualities than its facilitating relationships and support of reader participation,[11] from empathy and immersion to fan art/fiction and CosPlay.

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[8] Consisting of a rough panel layout, character faces, placement of speech balloons, lexias and sound words (cf. Ito 2005: 158; Jap. *name*).

[9] Inoue 1995 as well as Natsume 1997 set out from analyzing the graphic line, but not related to 'authors.' See LaMarre 2010 for a non-auteurist discussion of the 'power of the plastic line' in manga.

[10] Cf. Cohn 2010; Petersen 2011: 185.

[11] Cf. McCloud 2006: 217.

Closely related, 'visual language' signifies a mode of expression that can and has to be memorized in order to be repoducable.[12] The majority of artists and readers treat manga's pictorial elements like script. Famously, Tezuka Osamu (1928–1989), the pioneer of graphic narratives in postwar Japan, defined his drawing style as hieroglyphic (1979: 43):

> You know, just recently I realized that I am not aiming at drawing pictures. This isn't my profession anyway, right? I've never done sketching, my drawing is completely self-taught. That's why, as an instrument of expression, as a tool for telling stories, I draw something like pictures, but as I really came to think recently, these aren't pictures to me. [...] They are something like hieroglyphs.

Takekuma Kentaro—who is, together with Natsume Fusanosuke, one of the central authors of *Manga no yomikata* (*How to Read Manga*), the first systematic attempt to explore the grammar of narrative manga[13]—suggests that we understand manga not in terms of pictorial art, but as script (*sho*). After all, manga do not visualize observations but thoughts, and their creators draw upon the reservoir of patterns and cyphers in their head that they have acquired through copying the style of their favorite manga artist as if doing writing exercises.[14] Similarly, the majority of pre-modern Chinese (and Japanese) art prioritized neither faithful mimetic reproduction nor artistic originality but rather the variation of standardized components, as Sinologist Lothar Ledderose (2000) has illuminated. According to him, both Chinese script and traditional painting, notwithstanding sculpture, are to be understood in terms of a modular system, escaping a notion of the pictorial that settles beyond conventionality and dependence on specific 'language' communities.

For these reasons, manga has tacitly come to represent 'Asian graphic narrative.' In fact, manga may even be regarded the stronghold of graphic narratives as such. After all, book-length comics with developmental storylines, aging characters, and explorations of the inner self—so-called *story manga*—started their triumph in Japan already around 1950, and they crossed cultural borders within East Asia long before the more recent wave of globalization.[15] But as much as there is to be said for manga as representatively Asian, as much can be held against it. First, graphic narratives from Japan do not necessarily exhibit a universal compatibility. Apart from postcolonially informed separations between 'Japan' and 'Asia' that are still prevalent in Japanese-language discourse, the verticality of Japanese script and its progression from right to left form obstacles for intercultural transfer, and the magazine as the major publication format has not taken roots anywhere outside of Japan, not even in Korea.[16] Secondly, non-Japanese artists and editors of manga-style graphic narratives facilitate the separation of 'Japan' from 'Asia' when they cater more or less exclusively to the first instead of other markets in the same region. This tendency surfaces, for example, in Taiwan, where manga publishers rarely engage in developing ties within the Chinese-language realm including Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philippines, and Malaysia. Thirdly, the Korean case deserves attention. On the one hand, the historical influx of Japanese manga—among other things, via piracy—is repudiated, while, on the other hand, both government and publishers try to carve out a commercial fortune for Korean manhwa overseas by simultaneously distancing themselves from manga and capitalizing on its reputation.[17] Finally, it is manga's proliferation among younger people worldwide that should prevent critics from limiting these graphic narratives to Asia alone; for its advocates, manga is a kind of world comics.

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[12] For a discussion of copying as the bedrock of creation in manga, see Takemiya 2003.

[13] See Inoue 1995; see also Natsume 1997, 2008, 2010.

[14] Cf. Takekuma and Yamamura 2006: 9–10.

[15] See Choo 2010; Leem 2012; Yamanaka 2013 for the Republic of Korea; Wong 2010a for Hong Kong; Chew and Chen 2010 for the People's Republic of China.

It goes without saying that such assertions are contextual and fluid in themselves, dependent on what 'manga' is set against. Contrapositioning manga against other kinds of graphic narratives tends to neglect the internal differentiation that, in the case of comics, applies to both their historic and their generic diversity. The real challenge, however, is to equilibrate apparent universals and particularities. 'Manga' exists without existing, like one of Mizuki Shigeru's ghosts, upon which I shall touch in the next section of this chapter. It is a highly segmented culture—suffice it to mention the genres of boys' (shonen), youth (seinen), and girls' (shojo) manga—but across all subdivisions, it can be taken as a participatory variant of graphic narratives not limited to manga style that, in its ghostly ambiguity, calls for revisiting evaluative criteria based on modern notions of authorship, work, and aesthetic sophistication.

The Ghost Stories of *Nonnonba*

In January 2007, Mizuki Shigeru's manga *Nonnonba*[18] was, in its French translation, awarded the Grand Prix for Best Album at the International Comics Festival in Angoulême. Whereas Japanese critics were delighted, Bart Beaty, an expert on Franco-Belgian alternative comics, published a review on his website that culminated in the verdict that *Nonnonba* is "one of the dullest comic books I have ever read" (2007: n.p.). In all probability, Beaty's critical focus was less on the book itself than on the festival's jury and, in a broader sense, the reception of Japanese comics in France at that time. CJ Suzuki, for example, traces the honoring back to the fact that "Mizuki's manga evoke a profound impression of the 'authentic' image of traditional Japan or Japaneseness, which would satisfy the Western, Japanophile expectation" (2011: 234–35). Instead of pursuing this line of argumentation, that is, the 'orientalizing' of Japanese comics, I will question the practicability of allegedly universal evaluative criteria through a close reading of one episode of *Nonnonba*, in due consideration of specifically mangaesque aspects.

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[16] See Yoo 2012 for a stylistic comparison of contemporary Korean and Japanese girls' comics with respect to translated editions.

[17] See Yamanaka 2006, 2013.

[18] This chapter uses the title of the English edition.

Granted, *Nonnonba* is unlikely to pass as 'manga proper,' neither among contemporary fans nor Japanese critics. As distinct from the majority of long-running series, *Nonnonba* consists of almost self-contained episodes, 26 to be precise, each of which is between 8 and 22 pages long. Although Mizuki had published several 40-page episodes under the heading of "Nonnnonba" in the boys'-manga magazine *Weekly Shonen Champion*,[19] the two Japanese *tankobon* volumes[20] of *Nonnonba to ore* (1991–1992) were largely based on his novel of the same title (1977) and published in tandem with the short TV series produced by NHK, namely its local station in Tottori, Mizuki's native region.[21]

In *Nonnonba to ore* (Nonnonba and I), as the Japanese title reads, Mura Shigeru (b. 1922)—better known by his pen name Mizuki Shigeru—depicts the 9-year-old Muraki Shige and his daily life in a remote village in Tottori prefecture in the 1930s. The title's 'I' suggests a personal, if not autobiographical stance, while its first noun points to the old woman (*ba*) from whose stories the 'I' learns about *yokai*, "a word variously understood as monster, spirit, goblin, ghost, demon, phantom, specter, supernatural creature, lower-order deity, or more amorphously as any unexplainable experience or numinous occurrence" (Foster 2008: 8). The old woman is not only a substitute grandmother to Shige but also a *nonnon*, as both *kannon*, the Buddhist god/dess of mercy, and shamans are called in his home dialect. Although she is one of the protagonists, she does not appear in all book chapters. In "Bean Counter" (*Azuki-Hakari*),[22] for example, she is completely absent, which does, however, not diminish the suitability of this 10-page episode to represent Mizuki's storytelling.

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[19] Beginning in issues #49 (Dec. 1, 1975: 107–46) and #1 (Jan. 1, 1976: 219–58), where they appeared next to installments of Tezuka Osamu's "Black Jack," Yamakami Tatsuhiko's "Gakideka," Azuma Hideo's "Futari to 5-nin," and other series that have entered the canon of boys' manga since then.

[20] *Tankobon* is the Japanese name for bounded book editions of manga that has entered Western languages signifying a distinct publication format of comics, next to the American 'comic book' and the Franco-Belgian 'album.'

[21] In 1991 and 1992, five episodes each.

"Bean Counter" opens with the panorama view of a bay, framed by trees in the foreground and accompanied by the laconic verbal insert "The Muraki home." Zooming in while crossing the gutter to the next tier-wide panel, the reader witnesses a conversation between Shige's parents. His father, a dilettante and epicurean, has just quit his job at the local bank and now considers writing film scripts, while his mother moans about the family's income. On the first three pages alone, the parents appear eleven times each, mostly in medium close-ups, with the mother leaning toward the left and the father toward the right. The conversation comes to an end with a balloon conveying speechlessness ("...") on part of the mother, who faces the right, that is, the 'past' of Japanese script. Remarkably, Drawn & Quarterly maintained the Japanese right-to-left reading direction. This promotes the book as a manga,[23] while adhering to the initial layout that guides the reader's gaze mainly by intra-panel components, above all, character faces and bodies pointing forwards or backwards.[24]

Through a turn to the left, supported by the almost diagonal placement of the stairs in which the mother is standing, her and the reader's gaze arrive at Shige. He has just returned from a performance of "The Haunted House," a play mentioned incidentally at the episode's beginning. On the next one and a half pages, Shige tells his brother that he has been looking for inspiration to depict a scary yokai, the so-called *Azuki-Hakari*, or bean counter, whom he wants to feature in the picture book he is working on. All he knows about this creature is that it makes horrific noise on the ceiling by throwing beans. The brothers' talk is punctuated by two panels occupying the entire tier, on the bottom of the fifth page and on the top of the sixth, respectively. In a change of perspective, both convey a similar outside view of roofs, trees, and pylons; by means of vertical lines and onomatopoeia they indicate rain and the elapsing of time.[25] The whole family is already asleep, and only Shige is still sitting over his drawings when he is suddenly roused by a voice represented in a strangely waved balloon with an organic-looking gooseneck tail. Over the entire seventh page, Shige responds to the (still invisible) Azuki-Hakari, who spouts hackneyed phrases such as "I exist without existing" (Mizuki 2012: 139). Preceded by a lightning-shaped zigzag line traversing the first panel of the eighth page diagonally from top right to bottom left, the yokai makes its appearance before Shige's (and the reader's) eyes, only to proclaim that destiny predetermines into what family you are born and what you will do in life. When Shige wants the Azuki-Hakari to stay a little longer (on top of the tenth and last page), the ghost refuses with the remark that "more time does not necessarily lead to a deeper understanding" (Mizuki 2012: 142) and vanishes on another zigzag line, this time running from top left to bottom right. The ghost's exit is underlined by a sound word at the tail of another wavy line placed in the first panel of the next tier, that is, right below the last close-up of Azuki-Hakari. The episode ends with sweat drops and another speechless balloon, but it does not offer any punch line or specific moral (which can hardly be gained from the previous platitudes either). The very last panel, an almost exact copy of the outside view on top of the sixth page that had opened Shige's encounter with the yokai, closes the circle. It is still raining, and nothing has really changed.

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[22] For the Japanese edition, cf. Mizuki 2007: 129–38; for the English edition, cf. Mizuki 2012: 133–42.

[23] In contradistinction, the Tatsumi anthologies also published by Drawn & Quarterly and edited by comics artist Adrian Tomine were reformatted to accomodate the Western reading direction: "if a comic book (or 'graphic novel') is to reach as wide an audience as possible, the last thing it needs is another obstacle for new readers to surmount" (Tomine 2005: n.p.).

[24] On the centrality that 'manga proper' gives to guiding the reader's gaze, see Inoue 1995 and Kanno 2004.

Beaty gives mainly three reasons for his dislike of Mizuki's book. First, he points to the fact that *Nonnonba* is a "slow-paced or plot-absent comic" that is not "driven by unique visual sensibilities and expansions of the comics form […;] the art does absolutely nothing to hold the attention" of the reader; second, he finds that "none of the characters is well developed or interesting, and the book relies on sentimental stereotypes at almost every turn"; third, he disapproves of the obvious discrepancy between the manga's alleged autobiographical realism and "an element of the fantastic," which to him results in the simplistic message, "hey, youth is a magical time of imagination" (Beaty 2007: n.p.).

Nonnonba's panel layout, to begin with, is indeed sedate, basically breaking the page into four tiers with two panels each. Although sizes slightly alter and certain instances are emphasized through blow-ups, none of the panels ever stretches over the entire double spread, drawing attention to a larger frame, neither literally nor figuratively. The reader is supposed to 'scan' the panels, more or less one by one, and page after page from top right to bottom left. The effect of transparency induced by the moderate layout is undermined by the caricatured character design, especially that of the boys. But meticulously depicted hand-hatched backgrounds and the rendering of characters' outlines with the G-pen, which allows for mutable stroke width, lend a realist weight to bodies and scenes, characteristic not only of Mizuki's particular style but also gekiga. Pioneered around 1960 by Tatsumi Yoshihiro, Saito Takao, and Mizuki himself, among others, these adult-oriented comics showed a strong inclination to employ medium close-ups like those in the episode introduced above, as well as small eyes.[26] Before returning to these stylistic issues in the next section, I will examine *Nonnonba*'s narrative.

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[25] Unfortunately, the English edition replaces the initially hand-drawn sound words by edged printed letters that do not blend in visually.

A Ghostly Mode of Storytelling

Nonnonba's supposed shortcomings include its vacillating between narrative progression and undramatic episodes, the personal and the conventional, the realist and the fantastic. Some critics have appreciated *Nonnonba* as a "modest autobiography (no imposing first-person discourse, but a story that reveals itself little by little)" (Guilbert 2008),[27] and readers interested less in autobiography than in modern Japan have acknowledged its historical depth.[28] Indeed, the manga contains many allusions to Japanese militarism, the gap between the still traditional periphery and the modern center Tokyo, as well as gender hierarchies such as those condensed in the selling of Shige's friend Miwa to a brothel. However, at the center of delving into the personal and collective past are the yokai, topically as well as aesthetically, and not merely as a means of nostalgia.[29] At a first glance, these ghosts belong to a realm beyond modern anthropocentrism, a world where natural and social predeterminations prevail like in the rural parts of prewar Japan. In such a world, mortal diseases are part of daily life. Concordantly, the death of Shige's cousin Chigusa is not laden with tragic meaning.[30]

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[26] Cf. Ito 2005: 214.

[27] See also the thorough discussion by Lefèvre 2007.

[28] See Suzuki 2011, based on Foster 2008.

[29] Due to his representation-centered approach, Suzuki assumes that Mizuki's yokai manga (not only *Nonnonba*) foster nostalgia for a lost nativist past (cf. 2011: 232), but he misses the implications of the yokai's fundamental ambiguity that undermine binarisms, for example, between tradition and modernity, allegedly Japanese spatialized narratives and 'Western' developmental plots (cf. 2011: 235).

[30] Besides her equation with a ghost upon her first appearance, by means of vertical lines on the upper half of her face (Mizuki 2012: 95), it is noteworthy that she is the only character with big dark eyes, which can be traced back to the girls' manga Mizuki created in the late 1950s for rental gekiga. On a side note, Chigusa as well as Miwa do not feature in Mizuki's novel (1977).

Besides historical background, it is *Nonnonba*'s commitment to slowness, its withdrawal from straightforward storytelling, and its abstention from psychologizing that makes the appearance of the yokai plausible. Mizuki's ghosts, however, are endowed with an astonishing presence and visual determinacy. Supposed to oscillate between the visible and the invisible, to finally escape modern rationalization and stay indefinite, they look modernized if taken as isolated images and short-circuited with general discourses of modernization.[31] As a matter of fact, the initially oral folklore saw its first visualizations in late eighteenth century, taking the form of printed matter circulating in urban areas. Although Mizuki draws heavily on the style of those early-modern pictures, it should not be overlooked that his figures, in all similarity, appear in modern manga, where they are contextualized by factors such as comics aesthetics, generic markers, industrially fostered readership segmentation, and the medium's cultural positioning. Not visualization in general, but specifically visualization in manga—as a historically distinct imaginary and discursive space—confirms the yokai's status as inhabitants of a vague intermediary realm.

This can be deduced from a comparison with the literary predecessor of *Nonnonba*. Its protagonist carries Mizuki's real name Mura Shigeru and thus suggests the narrative to be more authentic than the manga. Most importantly, the novel exhibits a striking restraint to give precise accounts of the yokai, whereas the manga depicts them in detail. Considering that manga in general is expected to provide not necessarily authentic but verisimilar fictional worlds (and that Mizuki does not directly claim an autobiographical voice in *Nonnonba*), it becomes obvious how a manga-specific ambiguity of what to take for real and the in/determinacy of yokai can go hand in hand. The unpacking of such potential, however, depends on the reader. What may still appear as a lack of consistency to literary critics has been embraced by younger non-Japanese readers since the late 1990s: the seemingly incompatible, the appropriation of elements from different cultural backgrounds and media, or the generic blend that complicates, among other things, the categorization of erotica (*hentai*) as serious pornography. In short, not refined purity, but spectacular, and sometimes uncanny, hybridity is one of the crucial contemporary attractions of manga on a global scale.

With this in view, manga's representational penchant to feature the co-existence of ostensible opposites like the super/natural or fluid boundaries between humans and nonhumans cannot easily be ascribed to Japanese (or even 'Asian') traditions. Rather than placing contemporary popular narratives directly in continuous cultural or religious traditions, theater specialist Fukushima Yoshiko foregrounds not traditions as such but their mediation when she proposes, "Japanese theater, especially *shogekijo*, consciously re-encountered traditional Japanese theater and literary arts through story-comics" (2003: 15).[32] In her analysis of stage adaptations of specific manga,[33] Fukushima refers to 'manga discourse' as "a rule-oriented, codified discourse appealing especially to the visual and aural senses" (2003: 76). Such a broad notion of what otherwise could be called the 'mangaesque' allows her to clarify the aesthetic accomplishments of allegedly apolitical, spectacularly superficial, and speedy productions: the distance toward illusionism, the prevalence of non-psychologized characters whose emotions are rather expressed through rapid movements than dialogue, and the 'decorative' rather than representation-oriented use of words. Fukushima also turns to *monogatari*, an archetype of narrative that traces back to the Japanese Middle Ages.[34] Initially intertwining myth and novel, oral and written tales, escape from and resistance to social reality, this narrative model has been, on her account, revived by manga artists since the 1950s.[35] Noteworthy in this regard is that she mentions Mizuki as well as Tezuka.

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[31] Cf. Kinoshita 1993: 56.

Already in his *Manga daigaku* (*Cartoon College*, 1950[36]), Tezuka explained how narratives should be structured and maintained *ki-sho-ten-ketsu* to be the foundation of both comic strips—in postwar Japan usually composed of four vertical panels—and story manga.[37] In contradistinction to the European three-act structure with its succession of set-up, confrontation, and resolution, the rhetorical structure of *ki-sho-ten-ketsu* consists of four steps in accordance with the four-line compositions of Chinese poetry from which it was derived.[38] First, something happens (*ki*). Then, this occurence is elaborated on, taken in (*sho*), or made acceptable, by considering several aspects in a way closer to spatial juxtaposition than linear succession. A plot-oriented reader may get the impression not of two different steps, but of an excessively long introduction. Even Saso Akira, manga artist and professor, combines the first two steps when he offers the following formula: "(A1+A2) + B = C. That is to say, A1: at the *ki* stage, you raise a problem; A2: at the *sho* stage, the problem deepens, it seethes; B: *ten* happens due to the entrance of a different element, whereby the problem gets solved, or a new aspect of the problem becomes visible (C: *ketsu*)" (Saso 2009: 118). For manga readers, the second phase serves as a process of relationship building with the text, which may be enjoyed for its own sake (as the journey being the destination) or taken as a preparation for the shift. The twist (*ten*) often appears protracted, and it does not bring the narrative to a close. A kind of epilogue follows, wrapping up the story without providing any moral (*ketsu*). In many cases, this looks like an open ending to those unfamiliar with fictions other than classic representations leading to resolution or dialectic sublation. But the East Asian tradition of *ki-sho-ten-ketsu* did resonate with international modernism, as Kurosawa Akira's prize-winning film *Rashomon* (1950) exemplifies. Its narrative revolving around the truth instead of addressing the core issue directly received credit as an alternative to Western traditions of representation.

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[32] Shogekijo literally means 'small theater' and, since the late 1970s, refers to troups that set themselves apart from modern script-based theater, the underground of the late 1960s, and traditional forms of play such as Kabuki.

[33] By Noda Hideki and his troupe Yume no yuminsha (Idlers Playing and Sleeping in a Dream, 1976–1992).

[34] See, for example, Murasaki Shikibu's *Genji Monogatari* (*The Tale of Prince Genji*, early eleventh century), which is often called the world's first novel.

[35] Cf. Fukushima 2003: 58.

[36] Title translation according to Tezuka 1977 [1948]: 4.

[37] Cf. Tezuka 1977 [1948]: 110–11.

[38] For a Communication Studies approach, see Maynard 1997: 158–162.

Against the backdrop of *ki-sho-ten-ketsu,* the Azuki-Hakari episode turns out not to be 'plot-absent,' but compliant with a different sort of plot. To begin with the latter half, the twist (*ten*) clearly sets in with the ghost's voice on the bottom of the sixth page, that is, after about two thirds of the episode. Then, it stretches over three and a half pages before reaching the end (*ketsu*), which consists merely of the last two tiers presenting the ghost's trace, the drawing protagonist, and the outside view. Although difficult to subdivide, the very fact that the first two phases of *ki* and *sho*—or A1 and A2—clearly occupy almost six out of ten pages would meet the approval of manga artist Takemiya Keiko. According to her, the dullest thing to do is an even segmentation,[39] for example, four times two and a half pages in *Nonnonba*'s case.

Rhetorical structures such as *ki-sho-ten-ketsu* set priority onto the reader's affective participation, often at the expense of linear argumentation. This participatory potential made *ki-sho-ten-ketsu* an attractive model for structuring manga narratives to be serialized in special weekly or monthly magazines, which, in the Japanese comics market, began to become standard around 1960.[40] Manga are not Japanese 'comic books' but, in principle, graphic narratives first serialized in magazines where installments of different series interact with each other in the eye of the reader. Precisely the magazines have helped to keep *ki-sho-ten-ketsu* alive, applying it to both micro and macro levels, that is, single installments and entire series. Prolongations of popular manga such as "Dragon Ball" (1984–1995) and "Naruto" (1999–) are highly reminiscent of the second phase (*sho*). But modern consumers cannot be hooked in the long run without drama. As is well known, the Japanese mainstream sets itself apart from the American one insofar as such manga are basically not open-ended narratives[41]: Despite all extensions due to commercial conditions, they eventually reach closure. Since 1948, manga characters have died, causing irreversible effects for the narrative.

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[39] See Takemiya 2010: 127–28.

[40] Related to serialization, it should also be noted that the link between the elitist tradition of *ki-sho-ten-ketsu* in Chinese poems written by Japanese and modern story manga is to be found in the serial novels published in Japanese newspapers of the pre-war era, for example, Yoshikawa Eiji's *Musashi* (1935, in *Asahi Shimbun*), on which Inoue Takehiko based his manga "Vagabond" (1998-, in *Weekly Morning*).

As mentioned above, the second phase seems to privilege spatial juxtaposition over temporal progression. Thus, it does not come as a surprise that Scott McCloud quotes a manga by Mizuki when introducing his "aspect-to-aspect" (1994: 87) type of panel transition. He also equates Mizuki with Tezuka in this regard and runs the risk of being dismissed as 'universalizing,' especially from a manga studies angle that views Tezuka's work as too human-centered and too West-oriented, his line work too clear, and his framing too 'cinematic' to be discussed on a par with Mizuki's.[42] Nonethless, differences are a matter of perspective. Not only from McCloud's perspective in the early 1990s, but also from that of 1970s shojo manga or recent shonen manga shaped by gamification, Tezuka and Mizuki have a lot in common. In addition to their commitment to manga as a 'visual language,' they share the attention to *ki-sho-ten-ketsu* as a model that allows for contextual ambiguity in regard to straightforward storytelling. And as the next section demonstrates, even Mizuki's manga exhibit a 'cinematic' approach toward panel and page, albeit not necessarily in the sense of dynamic action.

The Ghostliness of Manga: Post/Cinematic Devices

In his ground-breaking monograph *Tezuka Is Dead* (Jap., 2005), Ito Go introduces the notion of 'manga ghost'[43] in order to highlight the aesthetic ambiguity crucial to graphic narratives. But he does not revisit the interrelation between pictorial and scriptural signs, temporality and spatiality, or sequenciality and simultaneity, as may be expected from a

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[41] Carrier ties the posthistoricality of comics on the micro level to "extended, essentially open-ended narratives" (2005: 56).

[42] Cf. the summary given by Suzuki 2011: 230–35.

[43] Jap. *manga no obake*. Being well aware of the differences between *obake* and *yokai*, I use the same translation for the sake of my discussion of ambiguity.

European academic point of view. Targeting the modernist dichotomy of ‘fantasy vs. realism’ that is as much prevalent in the cultural reception of manga[44] as in cinema-oriented manga criticism,[45] he focuses on indeterminacy concerning character and frame. With respect to the first, Ito sets out from Tezuka’s early graphic narrative *The Mysterious Underground Man* (*Chiteikoku no kaijin*, 1948),[46] which features a rabbit who behaves like a man, wearing trousers, walking around on two legs, and speaking the human language. To Ito, this Mimio (literally, ear man) is an archetype of the manga- or comics-specific ghost, above all, because he intertwines two seemingly irreconcilable sides.[47] Mimio is a proto-character (*kyara*),[48] a drawn image not rooted in real life. As such, he can only pretend to have a body and an inner self. Yet, under certain conditions, this spurious creature morphs into a realist novel-like character (*kyarakuta*).[49] In fact, as Tezuka’s narrative evolves, Mimio’s ears become invisible, pictorially as well as metaphorically, until they recur when he dies after saving the earth. Asked for a last word, he wants his humanhood to be confirmed by his fellow characters.

Historically, Mimio stands at a crossroads. His ambiguity still testifies to the fact that manga in general is “a hybrid of the fantastic as epitomized by character icons’ large decorative eyes [or ears in Mimio’s case; JB], and ‘naturalist realism’ in regard to depictions of the everyday” (Ito 2012: 440), but he also heralded the four prime decades of story manga during which the two sides were more or less neatly separated and the latter predominated, last but not least within emerging manga criticism. Since around 1990, manga culture has seen a major shift back toward the first, that is, the pole of fantasy, fabrication, and figurativeness. As a result, ‘inconsistency’ is now more often embraced than deprecated.

Ito’s discussion of proto-characters, which as such applies to comics across cultures, has enjoyed vivid attention outside Japan less in relation to comics research than media convergence and fandom studies. But regarding manga-specific ways of storytelling, it is actually his second issue—the indeterminacy of the frame, or field of vision (*fureimu no*

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[44] Outside of Japan, manga has been received mainly as a fantastic fictional realm inhabited by cute doe-eyed and cat-eared creatures, a fact that serves Ito as his point of departure for elaborating on *Tezuka Is Dead* (cf. 2012: 440). See also Brenner (2007: 77–79), who titles one section “East Meets West: Fantasy vs. Realism.”

[45] Between the 1960s and the 1990s, the truism that Tezuka’s postwar story manga was innovative due to the employment of ‘cinematic’ devices prevailed in Japanese manga discourse. A typical example is Takeuchi 2005.

[46] For the translation of the title, cf. Onoda Power 2009: 46.

[47] Cf. Ito 2005: 139.

[48] See Ito 2007 for an extract in English translation.

[49] Cf. Ito 2005: 273.

fukakuteisei)—that calls for attention. Ito sets out from the fact that, in contrast to cinema, printed graphic narratives involve an unsettling of the reader who incessantly has to decide whether to privilege the single panel or the entire page, if not the double spread. The page may, for example, push itself to the fore of the reader's attention when characters grasp panel borders (as in Tezuka's pre-gekiga manga), or body-length images of girls posing like fashion dolls are superimposed vertically over horizontal tiers of panels (as in shojo manga).[50] Then again, the page may go unnoticed in cases like the *Nonnonba* episode introduced above, where characters stay within borders and appear as if filmed by a hidden camera.

In light of this, it is notable that Pascal Lefèvre chooses "Lone Wolf and Cub"[51] in order "[t]o demonstrate that formal analysis can be used for all kinds of comics" (2012: 71). Foregoing caricatured deformations of its characters and presenting their duels by means of "a film-like technique of shot/reverse-shot" (Lefèvre 2012: 77), this series' mise-en-scène and framing is not representative of manga in general but particularly gekiga and with it the majority of productions in the male genres of shonen and seinen manga during the 1970s and 1980s. What appears 'film-like' in the comparatively unspectacular *Nonnonba* is the montage of single panels that, by their unequivocal content, resemble discrete pieces of reality, 'shots' or frozen moments to be visually scanned in sequence. In tandem with gekiga's inclination to seclude the storyworld (from intrusions by the artist entering the scene as a character, or other extradiegetic gags), the characters do not only stay embedded within the panels but also maintain their visual identity therein. Even when multiplying, they remain recognizable.

This applies, for example, to the shonen manga "Naruto." At the beginning, it seems to comply with clear identities, favoring the alternation between seeing and being seen with respect to the confrontation between antagonists as well as between 'me' and 'I.' The reader's gaze proceeds mainly from bordered panel to bordered panel, facilitated in the English translation now and again by small arrows in the top-right corner of some double spreads saying "Read this way." Tapered frames are reserved for especially fierce duels.[52] In some cases, large panels that stretch over the entire width of the double spread and occupy its upper half suggest that the opponents actually act on common ground, as do heavily hatched motion images within panels. But none of these elements draws attention to the page as a frame or field of vision. In line with this, the protagonist stays recognizable as himself, even if his eyes narrow to slits occasionally, or his body shrinks to *chibi*[53] size in order to suggest certain affective states. He always sets himself apart visually from the people who may appear with him in the same panel as inner images.[54] Although half human, half fox demon, Naruto does not give the impression of a 'ghost,' not even when he applies the doppelganger technique that allows him to assume the form of multiple clones. But as these clones suggest from the start, the apparently clear, or 'cinematic,' panel layout is deceptive, the visible not to be trusted.[55] This contrasts with *Nonnonba*'s invitation to accept the realness of yokai. In addition, "Naruto" deviates from the gekiga-induced tradition of 'cinematic' realism in its visualization of characters' 'inner selves.'

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[50] Groensteen observes that "certain mangas are signaled by a massive use of panels that are superfluous from a strictly narrative point of view [...]. More than the panel, it is therefore the page or the sequence that [...] constitutes a pertinent unit" (2009: 116).

[51] *Kozure okami*, by Koike Kazuo and Kojima Goseki, 1970–1976 in *Weekly Manga Action*.

[52] Cf. Kishimoto 2003a: 172–73.

Several panels contain two views of the same character, an external and an internal one. "Naruto" applies this post-cinematic device, which has come to prominence since the 1990s, mainly to the female character Sakura, who literally stands beside herself, showing a smile to the outside world while actually being grim-faced inside (the English translation marks the latter as "Inner Sakura"; Kishimoto 2003a: 90, 100 186). Sometimes she also distorts her face to such an extent that she would not be recognizable anymore in an isolated image (for example, when she witnesses the accidental kiss between Naruto and Sasuke, rejecting it as gay or, self-reflexively, an allusion to Boys' Love manga).[56] While such 'out-of-body shots'[57] are reserved solely for female characters and thus help to confirm the gender-conservative bias of "Naruto" in terms of its representational approach,[58] the inner voice of boys is likewise presented in a post-cinematic way when lexias of inner monologue are spread over numerous panels and related to the character only by means of his huge eyes, which attract the reader's attention and entice him or her to stitch the parts of the page together in a more ambiguous, imaginative way less predetermined by characters' gazes and what they see.[59] Ito traces this back to shojo manga. Outsiders understand its infamous saucer eyes usually in a representational way, conceiving them as exaggerated 'mirrors of the soul' or manifestations of an 'Asian' inferiority complex against Caucasians, but their perceptional and technical function does often go unnoticed. In its emphasis on feelings and atmosphere, shojo manga favored collage-like multi-layered page designs with borderless panels to support its narratives, which approximated literary rather than 'cinematic' realism. But male genres came to present the standard of manga. Ito questions their alleged universality when he asserts, "we should not lose sight of the fact that 'cinematic' realism was given rise by a twofold repression of the 'mangaesque'" (2005: 219), that is to say, the repression of the proto-character and that of the page as the crucial frame for manga.

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[53] Literally meaning 'diminutive person,' this word has become a technical term in global manga fandom.

[54] Cf. Kishimoto 2003b: 59.

[55] Cf. Ito 2011b: 11.

[56] Cf. Kishimoto 2003a: 92. In order to stress that character icons are not necessarily an integral part of panels as 'shots,' Ito (2012: 478) also discusses the chimera-like intertwining of highly stylized heads or faces with realistically depicted bodies for one and the same character, and the interlocking of different perspectives within the same panel (for example, half-profile and frontal views).

[57] Cf. Izumi 2008: 39–44; Ito 2012: 471.

[58] See Fujimoto 2013.

[59] Cf. Ito 2011:12.

With its unusual amount of inner monologue as such and, relatedly, also its alternate leaning on huge eyes and gazes mediated by small eyes, "Naruto" attests to the fact that typical manga today intertwine what was previously separated. Acknowledging the indeterminacy of the frame, series like "Naruto" stand by manga's ghostliness, and they raise an awareness for it in retrospect as well. Thus, contemporary readers may approach older works like *Nonnonba* in a different way, as well. Manga's ghostliness has regained momentum at a time when due to digitalization, virtualization, and an increased extent of aesthetic interactivity, the role and constitution of the modern narrative is subject to fundamental change. Whether story manga will further on be read as narrative representations or whether they will serve mainly as vehicles for game-like motions is not necessarily rooted in the narrative itself, but, in the end, rather a matter of perspective and context. As a highly intertextual 'system,' manga provides both kinds of pleasure.[60]

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[60] Cf. Ito 2011a: 75.

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