

4 The Intercultural Challenge of the “Mangaesque”

Reorienting Manga Studies after 3/11

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INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL CRITIQUE, REPRESENTATION, AND “MANGA”

Since the late 1990s, globalization, the content industry, and fan culture have been prevailing thematically in Japanese comics research, while the issue of manga’s sociocritical potential has been more or less sidelined. Yet the earthquake of March 11, 2011, and its aftermath, especially the meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, suggest the need to reconsider what role manga may play in contemporary Japanese society besides serving short-sighted economic and national purposes, or affective interests of (sub) cultural groups. Pursuing manga’s engagement with the nuclear issue, which this chapter sets out to do, is not only a matter of current conditions though; it pertains also to basic methodological problems of manga studies, like the relationship between form and content, between expression (*hyōgenron*) and representation (*hyōshōron*), and between aesthetic properties and cultural mediality. As such, these problems are anything but new. Against the “emphasis on content or representation” (LaMarre in Smith 2011, 143), manga research has come to foreground two aspects in particular: the comics form with its media-cultural capacities and the actual agency of readers as users. Significantly enough, both aspects draw attention to relational meaning beyond steady, identificatory references to a certain symbolic order.

However, in view of 3/11, time seems to be ripe for a reorientation—from defending manga and its users by, among other things, substantiating connections with “society”, to questioning manga culture in regard to how it may contribute to society in its entirety. Since most Japanese academics keep a low profile in this regard,¹ and as answers are not easily available anyway, this chapter aims at raising methodological awareness and suggesting problems that, in the end, will have to be tackled by multidisciplinary and intercultural investigations, starting with the notion of “(civil) society” in twentieth-century modernization processes² and its recent change vis-à-vis both globalization and subsocietal communities, through to the relevance of critique in an era that has been characterized as “postcritical” (and skeptically revisited, e.g., by Foster [2012]).

Previous attempts that consider both Japanese-language and English-language comics discourse have exhibited a strong *transcultural* inclination; in contrast, the subsequent discussion focuses on *intercultural* encounters—not with the intention to segregate “manga” from “comics”, but to interrelate the perspectives of comics-specific and nonspecific expertise, while taking into account the existence of diverging preconditions in academia and public discourse. After all, reference to society at large and a respective critical engagement are not given the same importance in recent Japanese manga discourse as in contemporary English-language comics criticism.

In the search for manga’s sociocritical potential, topical endeavors are inclined to be favored, and rightly so. Whether nuclear power becomes a subject matter at all is not to be trivialized under the present Japanese situation. Moreover, the topical approach holds another potential: by catching the attention of historians, gender and ethnicity studies, or recently also disaster researchers, that is, academics who are not primarily concerned with comics, it allows for stimulation beyond the narrow circle of manga studies that chooses to avoid macropolitical claims. While the former tend to correlate single manga works to the socioeconomic or even geopolitical situation of the nation, the latter concentrate on readership—as partitioned according to gender, age, and subcultural affinity—and on literacy.³

For contemporary Japanese-language manga discourse, manga are, first and foremost, magazine-based serialized graphic narratives. Neither editorial cartoons and newspaper comic strips nor educational comics (*gakushū manga*, which usually do not reside in magazines) or translated graphic novels are given much thought. As such, manga attracts interest less as a container of ideology but rather as a form. Yet the attention to form is, above all, tied to specific genre conventions. These are regarded as pivotal—historical differentiation and intermediality included—whenever the purview of representational content is at issue. In short, manga studies focuses on form in a highly contextualized manner, namely, on what can be told and what can be shared among which readership.

Subsequently, I shall first briefly revisit the discussion on the A-bomb manga *Barefoot Gen* (*Hadashi no Gen*, by Nakazawa Keiji, 1973–1987; hereafter abbreviated as GEN)⁴ focusing on its intercultural undercurrent. Then I will introduce some series that due to their nuclear power topic became themselves topics of discussion after 3/11. These are, namely, Shiriagari Kotobuki’s award-winning *Manga after 3.11*; the *yakuza* series “White Dragon-LEGEND” by Tennōji Dai and Watanabe Michio, which partially fell victim to “self-restraint” (*jishuku*); and Inoue Tomonori’s debut sci-fi tale “Coppelion”, which likewise due to a sudden topical sensitivity saw the cancellation of its TV anime, scheduled for broadcast in late March 2011. I focus deliberately on series addressed to adult readers that are more or

less generically framed as male and approach the issue of nuclear power explicitly.⁵ These examples indicate that the problem lies not necessarily with manga artists’ lacking awareness of social issues. Apparently more critical is the decreasing interest in ideology-centered readings facilitated, as it is, by the manga-specific contexts of publication and reception. It is precisely these aspects that shall be highlighted subsequently through the application of the label “mangaesque”.

GEN AGAIN

Concerning the relationship between manga and society, some patterns of argumentation prove to be astonishingly persistent. Recent discussions of GEN are exemplary in this regard, as many stay within the opposition between representational content and manga-specific form. This has been criticized by LaMarre (2010) who argued against the alleged opposition between “serious messages” versus “light entertainment” by demonstrating that manga-specific, nonrepresentational meanings reside in the protagonist’s energy to survive, indicating a biopolitical instead of geopolitical orientation. LaMarre not only repudiated the opposition as such but also suggested complicating each pole in itself, distinguishing between “structural line” and “plastic line” for the form side, and correspondingly, signification and meaning for the content side.⁶ While his discussion treats Japanese-language and English-language comics critics transculturally as equal participants in the same global scholarship, I shall highlight some intercultural aspects here.

GEN was, arguably, the very first Japanese comics to cross language borders, thanks to activists of the peace movement.⁷ In Japan, it crossed a different kind of divide, that between age groups and cultural camps: as early as the 1980s, it entered school libraries, receiving acknowledgement at a time when comics were still widely regarded as both infantile and harmful to children. Since then, GEN has taken root as “a national manga” (*kokuminteki manga*) according to Yoshimura (2011, 1) who stresses its exceptional domestic position and the importance of GEN being a typical manga: symptomatically, in school libraries it enjoys a much higher popularity than other manga works by the same artist. Manga researchers such as Yoshimura have traced back the traits which make GEN “manga proper” mainly to the initial publication site and its stylistically lasting impact on the work. GEN was serialized with intervals from 1973 through 1987, taking its departure from *Shōnen Jump*, a latecomer among the boys’ manga magazines. In 1974, *Jump* already had a weekly circulation of 1.65 million copies, with each copy going through the hands of approximately three readers (Fukuma 2006, 24). Yet, not ranking among the top ten series in the magazine anyway, GEN was discontinued after one year

and three months, and its serialization went on in magazines not specializing in manga.⁸

Whereas manga researchers attach more weight to media-specific usages than “outstanding content” (Yoshimura 2011, 1), most discussants from other fields tend to do the reverse. Such differences are, however, not due to national particularities (be it the much stronger cultural prevalence of comics than literature in present Japan, or Japan as a nonwestern modern society with a peculiar public sphere). In Japan too, GEN has been discussed critically in relation to larger social discourses, especially by literary scholars engaged in postcolonial and gender studies.⁹

Let us briefly recall the story that came to fill an unexpectedly successful ten-volume book edition.¹⁰ The manga’s timeline stretches from April 1945 to spring 1953. At the beginning, the daily life of elementary schoolboy Gen and his family is depicted. Since Gen’s father is against the war, the family is persecuted by police and neighbors. When the atomic bomb is dropped on Hiroshima (toward the end of vol. 1) the fire kills Gen’s father, his sister, and his younger brother. Shortly after, Gen’s mother gives birth to his baby sister who survives only a few months. In the course of events, Gen meets many other A-bomb victims (*hibakusha*), and he experiences numerous sad partings; his mother dies of radiation sickness in spring 1950 (at the end of vol. 7). From vol. 5 onward, the narrative relates Gen’s friendship with orphaned children who try to survive as street urchins, escape detention camps, and work for the black market. Eventually, Gen becomes the apprentice of a billboard painter, and after graduating from junior high school, he leaves for Tokyo at the end of vol. 10.

Yoshimura contends that “precisely because it was an outstanding and unique ‘canonic A-bomb manga’, GEN did not connect to the issue of nuclear power” (2011, 1; trans. mine). This assessment implies both the “manga proper” aspect—the lack of political impact being due to comics-specific qualities—and a content-related implication, namely, the fact that GEN was regarded as an A-bomb manga (*genbaku manga*; Fukuma 2006; Yoshimura 2012b), not as a manga about nuclear power or *hibakusha* and only rarely as a “Hiroshima manga” despite the attempted use of local dialect (“Manga to chiikisei dai-2 bu: zenkoku ni hirogaru chihō/jimoto manga” [Manga and locality, part 2: Local/hometown manga spreading nationally], 225). When A-bomb literature saw its canonization, GEN too entered school libraries. Nevertheless, as a story about postwar Japan told from below that also reveals *hibakusha* discrimination, some critics have appreciated GEN’s “resistance against the turning of A-bomb literature into a genre” (Kawaguchi 2010, 223), a process closely intertwined with the discourse of national self-victimization.¹¹

However, some aspects spur doubt about the primary relevance of ideological content to GEN’s readers. Firstly, ultra-right-wing groups in Japan have been, on the whole, very restrained in their objections, and the often

rather conservative local boards of education have not yet objected to GEN's use at school, although the wartime responsibility of the emperor is frequently brought up by Gen's father.¹² Secondly, surveys (Itō 2006; Shikata 2006) have revealed that even within the frame of peace education, children are rather attracted by meanings beyond straightforward antiwar messages, namely, Gen's robustness and his utopian freedom of action in devastated Hiroshima. In this regard, Yoshimura (2011, 2) has called attention to another circumstance: In school libraries, the volumes of a manga series are not necessarily read in the sequence that the author intended, but rather according to availability, which promotes the remembrance of single scenes and iconic images at the expense of the story and its historical background. And thirdly, there is the reproach of aesthetic inconsistencies. GEN has not been acknowledged unanimously, due to its vacillating between “objective” accounts on the one hand, and “mangaesque” traits, including stereotyping, on the other.¹³ In 1990, American comics artist Art Spiegelman noted in his introduction to the new English edition of GEN:

The degree of casual violence in Japanese comics is typically far greater than in our homegrown products. Gen's pacifist father freely wallops his kids with a frequency and force that we might easily perceive as criminal child abuse [. . .] Yet these casual small-scale brutalities pale to naturalistic proportions when compared to the enormity of dropping a nuclear weapon on a civilian population. (2004, n.p.)

Indeed, GEN invites realistic readings with respect to tortured bodies and hibakusha survival, but it also deviates from realism. Nuances are not its strong point, as the G-pen-based line work and the scarcity of screen tones indicate. GEN appears “graphic”, literally, due to its drawn images firmly outlined and rendered in black and white, and figuratively, due to its drastic and as such spectacular visualizations of violence, ranging from dying people with melting skin to fierce street fights.

Bringing the notion of performative imagery to the fore, Kajiya (2010) has demonstrated that GEN's visuals are subjective not by chance or inability but by intention, a conscious effort to trigger emotions and even action. In order to support this argument from an intercultural angle, I will use the remaining part of this section to scrutinize recurring assumptions about comics' sociocritical potential and their applicability to typical manga. Christine Hong's pre-3/11 essay about GEN shall serve as my example for numerous reasons, namely, because it deserves attention within manga studies; because it is deliberately positioned within the context of U.S. reception, which sets it apart from the usual transcultural, often universalist, approach toward manga by many non-Japanese comics critics; and because it inadvertently reveals limitations of such transcultural discussion.

Hong takes her point of departure not from comics studies but the “flattening of historical and national difference particular to the American reception of Hiroshima representation” (2009, 144). Analyzing GEN as a testimonial in connection to the geopolitical relations between the United States and Japan, she arrives at the conclusion that GEN is “a deeply ahistorical account” (142), “far from furnishing a more balanced picture of Hiroshima” (148). With respect to the manga’s visual dimension, she acknowledges that “Nakazawa collapses the geopolitical divide between the mushroom cloud of the policy-makers and the incinerated wasteland experienced by *hibakusha*” but curtails that this “yields an incomplete cognitive map of US geostrategic designs for post-war Japan” (150–151). With respect to the levels of narrative and reception she asserts that the “exceptionalist thesis of an American-sponsored democracy-to-come, premised on US military intervention, is essential to *Barefoot Gen*’s value as a wartime lesson for the post-war peace” (128).

Like other recent attempts at co-opting comics into critical scholarship, Hong’s argumentation is not simply based on an outdated “reflection paradigm”, which could be countered by a form-centered argument. Admittedly, she treats GEN as an autonomous book, or graphic novel, so to speak. But this does not mean that word-image tensions, differences between textual level and visual idiom, or spatialization, one of comics’ crucial properties, escape her attention, even if she privileges the single “testimonial comics image” over sequences of panels or pages. The consequential shortcomings of this do not simply apply to the preferencing of content over form, or text over context. Unsettling from the perspective of manga studies is rather that society as a whole and geopolitics as intersocietal or international relations outweigh media-cultural contexts such as publication formats, generic frameworks, horizons of expectations, modes of reception according to literacy, that is, familiarity with conventions, as well as other meanings, ascriptions, and discourses that precede and specify any reading of specific manga series. Short-circuiting the relationship of single texts, by assuming a universal comics aesthetics, with social discourses and national reception is unlikely to meet the approval of manga readers, critics included. Some examples shall illustrate that.

Firstly, Hong analyzes GEN’s wheat motif in its link to not only the survival of the protagonist but also the rebirth of Japan as a nation (2009, 142). Although pertaining to an animated movie—namely, *AKIRA*, the “post-nuclear version of the apocalypse” (Freiberg 1996, 95)—the reading of the central character Tetsuo as “a national allegory of Japan” (100) as well as the assumption that the narrative “expresses certain aspects of Japan as a whole in the 1980s” (Napier 1996, 255) are equally pertinent here precisely because of their vagueness with respect to what exactly allows for such a conjunction with the national, and how far its scope reaches, generically as well as historically. Does national generalization

apply only to the anime, or also to the manga, and further, to contemporary manga series such as “Coppelion” discussed in the subsequent section?

Secondly, drawing heavily on Spiegelman’s foreword, critics find a capability for eyewitness accounts or reclaiming history in hand-drawn images and their purported intimacy (Hong 2009, 143; Worcester 2011, 139–140). Yet as is well known, manga images, although still basically relying on hand drawing, have been inclined to support a highly conventionalized visual language that can easily be shared. Moreover, readers’ reception of conventions is affected by a process of familiarization, in the evolution of a genre as much as in the course of a long-running series. “Coppelion”, for example, attracts the eye with a startling line work in the beginning, but this attraction wears off quickly because style does not lend itself to the “constant self-reflexive demystification of the project of representation” (Chute 2010, 10).

Thirdly, many western critics expect self-reflexivity to connect to critique. Incidentally, self-reflexivity is employed as a measure of value for comics works,¹⁴ but only rarely applied to one’s own premises, which include author centrism, a predilection for alternative comics, and the tacit assumption that self-reflexivity escapes familiarization. Typical manga do not necessarily lack self-reflexivity. Fundamentally shaped by serialization—and as such at least temporarily open-ended narratives—manga too have a general (although different) disposition to “working against closure within a medium enabled by closure” (Oh 2007, 149). This has been amplified since the late 1990s by the medium’s maturation, which gave way to rampant intertextual play. As distinct from GEN, “Coppelion” exhibits its contemporaneous imprint, for example, by characters’ frequent metafictional remarks stretching from similes that mark strange situations as mangaesque to an equation of the clone protagonists with mangaesque personalities. Serving less critical discovery than knowing reconfirmation, these elements call for a consideration of a postcritical kind of self-reflexivity.

One way to avoid misunderstanding could be to speak not of *manga* but *manga culture*, thereby distracting attention from what single manga works *say* and instead, for example, turning to what manga genres (and readers) *do*. Such a reorientation may also help to locate manga’s sociocritical potential in other places than those that have led mostly to negative findings so far. Leonard Rifas, involved in GEN’s English-language editions from their very beginning, is quoted by Hong with the assessment that this manga did not succeed in “raising social awareness” in the United States (2009, 128). And Kent Worcester indicates that the problem is not limited to manga when he states, “How comic artists reacted to 9/11 no doubt mattered much more inside the comics subculture than beyond” (2011, 152). Does this mean that comics are ill-equipped for contributing to social awareness? And related to Japanese comics, are we to conclude that manga has to go beyond

the mangaesque—generic convention, “commodification as cultural entertainment” (Hong 2009, 133), “easy consumption” (Chute 2010, 26)—in order to become socially relevant?

MANGA AFTER 3/11

I shall now turn to three recent examples that explicitly address the dangers of nuclear power in Japan. My selection is limited by the notion of manga, which is most prevalent in Japanese discourse, that is, series carried in off-the-shelf magazines and their subsequent book editions, leaving aside the Internet as well as manga productions within the context of local protest movements, and also fan creations. In other words, I concentrate on graphic fiction, or story manga, at the expense of other genres. First of all those genres not examined here is documentary, or reportage manga, such as Suzuki Miso’s “The day Japan and I shook”,¹⁵ and Yoshimoto Kōji’s “Santetsu: Notebook on maps of Japanese railway travels—documentary of the great earthquake disaster on Sanriku railway”.¹⁶ Likewise, I refrain from discussing so-called essay manga, the genre that adult readers recently turn to with regards to social reality,¹⁷ including Fukumitsu Shigeyuki’s “What would my wife say?”,¹⁸ Torino Nanko’s bird-manga “Toripan”,¹⁹ and Kobayashi Yoshinori’s “Pulling out from nuclear energy”.²⁰ I also pass over educational manga, for example, Yamagishi Ryōko’s thirty-eight-page one-shot “Phaeton”. Published after Chernobyl, it became famous only in the summer of 2011, due to its complimentary republication on the Internet (and a new commercial book edition).²¹ Of a similar vein, although consequently fictional, Hagio Moto’s twenty-four-page shōjo manga “Canola Flowers” would have to be considered as well.²² Putting the genre issue aside, I will concentrate on manga that are nonaffirmative of nuclear power. Pronuclear works commissioned by electric power companies do not fit my criteria anyway, since they took either the form of mere character design—for example, Uchida Shungiku’s Denko-chan family (since 1987) for Tepco (Tokyo Electric Power Co.)—or, if fictionalized and laid out in panel sequences, the form of educational comics, such as the Tepco PR manga by Hirokane Kenshi (b. 1947) which, between February 2007 and May 2011, featured a replica of his famous character Shima Kōsaku as a pro-nuclear power scientist.²³

Within the manga industry, the Triple Disaster of 3/11 triggered actions related to charity or fund-raising, and to the consolation of children by providing complimentary manga content online. But it also caused “self-restraint” (or self-censorship, to be precise) among major manga publishers, particularly with regard to the nuclear power plant accident. The silence within manga magazines lasted until the release of the May issue of *Comic Beam* on April 12.²⁴ There, Shiriagari Kotobuki (b. 1958)²⁵ commenced a short series with the episode “Seaside Village” (*Umibe no mura*, 24 pp.), which

anticipated consequences of the Fukushima accident for people’s life. The setting has it that in 2061 metropolitan areas do not exist on the Japanese archipelago anymore. Now people live in small villages where makeshift solar cells on hovels supply the necessary power, although in a rather flaky way. In one of these settlements, a bedridden grandfather recalls his past life in the luminous and convenient metropolis of Tokyo, which the third installment “Shaking town” (*Furueru machi*, June 12, 24 pp.) pictures in retrospect, focused on how the grandmother of the story had to postpone her wedding due to 3/11, before learning that her groom was killed by the Tsunami and leaving for the north together with the now grandfather. For the background to his sketchily drawn characters, Shiriagari occasionally employs photos (of an explosion, for example) emphasizing the initial gap between the actual event and its media coverage as well as the reality of the disaster’s aftermath coming closer.

The future that awaits the protagonists does not look desirable. In view of the exhausted oil resources, people do not seem to have a choice but to bear the restrictions to their living standard: The grandfather tries to cheer himself up by admitting that, at least, he could now enjoy the night sky. As such, this orientation is reminiscent of postapocalyptic sci-fi manga that saw their heyday in the 1980s (Tamura 2011, 148–149). But while Ōtomo Katsuhiko’s “Akira” (1982–1990)²⁶ suggested the destructive power of atomic weapons via mutated human bodies, Shiriagari’s manga anthropomorphizes atoms: Episode 2 titled with the crossed-out word “Hope” (*Kibō*, May 15, 16 pp.) relates the accident of the Fukushima plant from the perspective of the cesium and iodine particles inside, some of which start to press outward once they find a “hopeful” crack in the wall. Turning the next-to-last page, the view zooms out into a bird’s-eye sight of the burst reactor, leaving it to the reader to imagine the consequences. Hope manifests itself in grandson Mirai (literally, “future”), a posthuman winged child who appears on the scene already in the first episode: Disobeying his parents’ ban, he flies with others of his kind to the ruin of the Fukushima power plant, now overgrown with vegetation and, on closer inspection, surrounded by dozens of wind wheels. The installment’s last double spread provides an impressive aerial view of the angelic children almost merging with nature. In the fourth and final episode “Sky and water” (*Sora to mizu*, July 12, 23 pp.), these children are likened to lotus flowers ascending from mud to console the ghosts of the dead.

In early August 2011, *Comic Beam*’s publisher Enterbrain released the book *Manga after 3.11* (*Ano hi kara no manga*). In addition to the short magazine series, it contains Shiriagari’s daily four-panel strips for the evening edition of the newspaper *Asahi Shinbun*²⁷ as well as new adventures of the “Elderly Twins” (*futago no oyaji*), two of his stock characters. Taken over from the literary monthly *Gems of the Novel* (*Shōsetsu hōseki*), one of these episodes has the twins meet a box-like female character sitting sadly on the river bank.²⁸ She warns them not to come closer as she is a nuclear

power plant who has fallen ill due to an earthquake. Shortly afterward, the twins realize that there are many more like her, some of them complaining about their risky location and insufficient security.

Shiriagari's book received one of the 15th Media Arts Excellency Awards from Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs in February 2012. This was effective as both a courageous public statement by manga-culture insiders²⁹ and a booster for the book's circulation, especially through the related exhibition, which displayed the variety of Shiriagari's publication formats and his volunteer work in an emergency shelter of the affected region. But the award also indicates the ambiguous position of *Manga after 3.11* with respect to the mangaesque. While in part derived from a magazine series, the book deviates from a typical tankōbon insofar as it crosses media that are usually poles apart, that is, a manga magazine, newspaper, and literary journal. Moreover, *Comic Beam* itself is not a typical manga magazine either. With a monthly print run of around 25,000 copies³⁰ occasionally ranking among the worst manga magazines, it contains a diversity of styles and narratives addressed neither to boys or girls but mature readers regardless of gender. Suffice to recall its hit series "Emma" (Mori Kaoru, 2002–2006) and "Therma-e Roma-e" (Yamazaki Mari, since 2008), both by female artists. Not really committed to a specific genre (although in cases of doubt typically categorized as *seinen*),³¹ *Comic Beam* provided Shiriagari with the site for an atypical miniseries that avoids the usual developmental narrative consumers expect to get hooked on and the respective goal orientation. Readers are rather invited to contemplate and communicate on what kind of life to lead and what fundamental changes to accept. Instead of pressing apodictic points with respect to the pros and cons of nuclear power, *Manga after 3.11* crosses different perspectives—not only generically but also temporarily between present and future, and spatially between the inside and the outside of the power plant.

Extratextually, for example in TV interviews, Shiriagari opts for a pull-out from nuclear energy. But he defines his social task as a manga artist as follows: "Scientists can produce data. Politicians can produce policies. What a mangaka can do is to draw the mood (*kūki*) of the moment" (trans. mine).³² *Manga after 3.11* shows Shiriagari's willingness to take chances: to accept that stylistic provisionality is inevitable in such a case of real-time response, and to face the possibility that the expressed thoughts may not hold. Recently, there are voices that claim that the nuclear plant accidents need to be exhaustively understood before they can be represented in manga—just like GEN became possible only decades after the atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima. However, Shiriagari's case suggests that manga goes beyond "understanding", that it is a medium that may communicate many more voices than (Tepco-sponsored) newspapers or TV stations.

If sheer knowledge about the dangers of nuclear power in earthquake-ridden Japan was the matter at hand, regular manga readers could have gained plenty prior to 3/11, for example, from a series like “*Hakuryū* (White Dragon)-LEGEND” running in *Manga Goraku*, a weekly magazine with a circulation of approximately 500,000. On February 18, 2011, installment no. 155 opened a new chapter called “Nuclear-power mafia” (*Genshiryoku mafia*). In it, the protagonist, a yakuza in perpetual search of information suited for blackmailing, learns about the fictitious company *Tōto Denryoku* (echoing the full name of Tepco in Japanese, *Tokyo Denryoku*) and its power plants when he meets a former assistant manager who feels responsible for the death of one of the nuclear “nomads”: A poor farmer was contaminated due to a shortage of masks but not told. However, just when a critical (and shortly after, murdered) journalist had asked the central character about the sincerity of his intentions, the story was left hanging in midair as the editorial board notified its readers that “[i]n view of the damages caused by the earthquake on March 11, we regret to announce that this chapter will be discontinued” (“‘*Hakuryū*-LEGEND’ nitsuite no oshirase”, March 17, 2011). Apparently too timely and too explicit, the already published magazine episodes did not reappear in the tankōbon edition.³³ Indeed, they related facts that, in retrospect, apply perfectly to the Fukushima disaster: the problematic interrelation between the regional monopolist and its ill-paid subcontractors, the concealment of cancer cases by the health administration, and the suppression of critical discourse. And so, “White Dragon-LEGEND” lived up to its genre name *gekiga*,³⁴ that is to say, a sort of Japanese comics that deliberately deviated from the mangaesque (as understood in the 1950s) in favor of dark stories about adult outsiders, addressed mainly to mature male readers, and sometimes implying social critique. But despite its topicality, “White Dragon-LEGEND” was not very likely to gain a broader sociocritical impact in Japan, not even after 3/11. On the one hand, its clear generic framing got in the way: the yakuza setting and the character design of the protagonist with his uncool 1960s Elvis look, the bold visuals and simple page compositions, not to forget the accompanying series in the same magazine with their occasionally violent and also sexist depictions—these elements may appeal to a certain male clientele, but repel contemporary teenagers or fans of female manga genres, at least at first glance. On the other hand, the series’ regular readers cannot easily be presumed to open themselves to explosive political topics in a sociocritical way: after all, *gekiga* series are *expected* to have such settings. In this regard, “White Dragon-LEGEND” not only hints at the slightly anachronistic image of *gekiga* within contemporary manga culture but also suggests two mangaesque implications of genre: the privileging of certain taste communities over broader society-wide communication, and the eclipsing of societal topics, or more precisely, their emergence as generic conventions.

Another series that had anticipated the Fukushima disaster with an astonishing verisimilitude since 2008 is Inoue Tomonori's "Coppelion", counting fourteen volumes by summer 2012.³⁵ Although not primarily conceived as a manga about the dangers of nuclear power plants, after 3/11, it was taken as such, and the young artist revealed his awareness, when he voiced concern about an eventual stop of the manga series in view of the canceled anime (Tamura 2011, 161). The action of "Coppelion" is set in October 2036, twenty years after a fatal accident at the fictitious Odaiba nuclear power plant killed 90% of Tokyo's population. Three female high-school students are being dispatched to the highly contaminated, now walled-in City of Death in order to detect and rescue the very last survivors. As distinct from these former inmates, or retirement-home residents, the girls do not wear protective suits; they are resistant against radiation, to such an extent that they can enter even those parts of Tokyo that private companies have turned into a giant repository site for nuclear waste from all over the world (vol. 3). On their expedition from the suburban towns Tama and Fuchū to the central district of Shinjuku—for which they need eight volumes—the girls meet an array of secondary characters, among them the former chief engineer of the Odaiba plant, and the colonel of the self-defense forces who was in charge of the evacuation two decades ago. These adults spell out the causes of the disaster, namely, willful neglect of earthquakes, cost reduction at the expense of safety precautions, self-serving politicians who withhold vital information, and people's unwillingness to change their consumerist lifestyle. Meanwhile, a summit is held in Kyoto where Australia, the new nuclear world power, thwarts the international pullout from nuclear energy using the familiar phrase "Atoms for Peace!" (vol. 6). By vol. 14, the Japanese prime minister too changes sides—and has Article Nine (which renounces war as a sovereign right) removed from the Japanese Constitution.

So far, the narrative looks politically charged. Reversing the image of the "gated community" alone is provocative enough. Whereas many contemporary manga picture Tokyo as a city almost as clean, well-ordered, and convenient as Tokyo Disneyland behind its walls, the young members of the so-called Coppelion Unit bore their way through a dirty, chaotic, and irksome ghost town where the space of civilization has been reclaimed by nature. Yet soon, this nature reveals its unnaturalness. Oversized feral beasts as well as "naturalized" monster robots, which have assumed features of extinct animals, attack the girls, and the girls themselves are likened to the unnaturally bubonic zelkova trees in Fuchū's avenue (vol. 2). But while they too are capable of coping with radiation, being products of genetic engineering, they are incapable of bearing children. Literally puppets in the hands of the state, they begin to realize and to question their status as marionettes. And this becomes the central subject, upstaging the issue of nuclear power. Accordingly, the ensemble of characters and their social specter narrows, presumably to keep the magazine readers hooked. From vol. 6 onward,

the protagonists burst in less on adults than schoolmates, clones like themselves, mostly female. Due to not only the magazine’s generic profile as such but also the need to keep a long-running series attractive for the regular (assumed young male) reader, the narrative increasingly makes room for catfights, so to speak. It does not come as a surprise either that the girls allow occasional glimpses upskirt when in combat.

“Phase 49”, the installment that opens vol. 14, is typical for the perky mixture of social subject and mangaesque diversion. Here, Dr. Coppelius, the creator of the Coppelion cyborgs, is about to rebuild one of the protagonists into the perfect puppet. In order to stay uninterrupted, he has locked up three of her mates who cannot escape unless they solve a riddle. While they discover that Dürer’s *Melencolia* (actually reproduced in “Phase 50”) is the gist of the matter, Dr. Coppelius overhears the TV news reporting on increasing orders of nuclear power plants by developing countries that wish to acquire plutonium for military purposes. Just as he thinks to himself that mankind has finally opted for its extinction, a mysterious panel, the last on this spread, presents naked feet. Upon turning the page, it becomes apparent that they belong to the Ozu twin sisters who have taken off almost all of their clothes because of the rising temperature in their prison.

“Coppelion” has been published in *Young Magazine*, a periodical with a circulation of more than 700,000 copies weekly. Almost three decades ago, this was the site of “Akira”. The two series resemble each other insofar as they both feature young protagonists who are taken advantage of by “contaminated” authoritarian adults. This harks back to a long tradition of Japanese boys’ culture, including the idealist young pilot of war tales (*senki mono*) and his fight against corrupt superiors as well as the female cyborg as one of his successors. But Ōtomo’s famous forerunner lacks the cuteness, the unconditional preference for youth, and the preponderance of manga-internal allusions that—in tandem with multipanel page layouts of short-lived resonance—render “Coppelion” a rather light narrative despite its auspicious takeoff. Thus, the series may help to confirm that the more mature the manga industry and its genres, the less politically connotative the readings of single works. Skilled readers concentrate on characters’ tangible emotional states and relations rather than on ideological interpretations. “Coppelion” has more usages to offer though. But to unpack its nonrepresentational potential sociocritically remains up to the readers.

A TENTATIVE LAST WORD ON THE “MANGAESQUE”

In its reference to expectations and discourses, the mangaesque may be too iridescent a term to serve positivist research. It implies all those negative connotations that modern society (Japan’s included) has been ascribing to comics, disparaging it as an infantile, lightweight, biased, overly spectacular,

and baselessly exaggerating form of narrative. At the same time, it conveys the affirmative inversion of that image: Welcoming the capacity to facilitate participation and networking, manga advocates' emphasis is on sharing instead of distinction, on empathy and self-confirmation instead of critical questioning, on affective rather than political engagement, and, for the sake of such nonideological, relational meaning, on codification and conventionalization instead of modern realism and authenticity. In addition, it has become evident that patchwork identities matter much more for manga's transcultural flows than national purity³⁶ (suffice it to recall that in the previously mentioned series no one looks as Japanese as Ōtomo's "Akira" characters; even GEN only depicts bad guys as slit-eyed).

This chapter proposes to bring the loaded image of the mangaesque (of what is assumed manga proper, or typically manga) forward as a gateway to the sociocritical potential of typical, and as such postcritical, sometimes even postsocietal, manga. While crucial notions like critique, society, and self-reflexivity stay admittedly undertheorized here, I hope that the previous discussion illuminates a number of blind spots that call for revision—for example, the indiscriminate application of traditional analytical tools and the alleged universality of comics aesthetics, which actually changes not only with time but also culture and genre. Related to the sociocritical potential of "Coppelion", Tamura Keiko states:

We all expose ourselves to a "radiation of the heart" whenever we feel frightened, uneasy and helpless in a quiet and secretive way while turning the pages of a novel, reading a manga, watching an anime. Precisely this lonely and free imaginary "exposure to radiation (*hibaku*)" becomes a bulwark against the "nuclear", against incitement and regulation by a biased and oppressive ideology. (Tamura 2011, 158; trans. mine)

This does not seem enough, firstly, because it stays within the familiar dystopian framework. Yet 3/11 has raised not only the question of how to resist the status quo but also of how to picture an alternative future. Being a site of imaginary worlds rather than direct depictions of social reality, manga may be expected to make important contributions in this regard. Secondly, the emotional and empathetic potential of narratives like "Coppelion", which the quotation suggests, refers to an apparently isolated reader. The real task, however, is not only to foreground the affective aspects of manga culture as such but also to highlight their fundamental relationality, involving creators, editors, and readers, generic genealogies, and sites of media consumption. Rather than excavating hidden ideological layers for educational purposes, manga researchers, primarily based in universities, museums, and libraries, are called on to act as mediators, providing opportunities for exchange across generations, genders, and generic tastes into which the industry has been segregating so far.

NOTES

1. See, for example, “Manga to chiikisei dai-1 bu: ‘chihō’ no hakken” (Manga and locality, part 1: The discovery of the “provinces”) (2012a): At the annual conference of the Japan Society for the Study of Comics and Cartoons held in June 2011, senior manga artist Hasegawa Hōsei, best-known for his “Hatakakko junjō” (Hakata kids’ pure sentiment; 1976–1983 in *Manga Action*), remarked that the emergence of an affirmative image of provincial towns in 1970s manga cannot be dissociated from the then-beginning flow of nuclear-power-related subsidies. This petered out with any response by a manga researcher, including moderator Miyamoto Hirohito. As for a similar example, see Makabe (2012). An exception is Takekuma (2011).
2. Avenell (2010) addresses Japan’s “civil society” in an exceptional manner, which holds potential also for manga studies.
3. Yoshimura (2006) is exemplary in that regard.
4. In English, the *g* of GEN is often pronounced in a voiced manner (as in *gentle*) which would be transcribed from Japanese into English as *jen*; in Japanese, however, it is pronounced as in *get*.
5. My choice may appear problematic—suggesting a “universalization” of male manga—but *shōjo* (girls’) manga or *josei* (women’s) manga deserve a more thorough analysis than I can offer within the limited space of this chapter. Besides, *Shiriagari*’s manga goes beyond the traditional gender divide regarding publication site, style, and narrative.
6. LaMarre (2010, 272–275), especially footnote 6 on p. 272.
7. On GEN’s reception in English translation, see Sabin (2006). See also Schodt’s contribution to this volume.
8. Subsequently in *Shimin*, *Bunka hyōron*, and *Kyōiku hyōron*. For details, see Itō and Omote (2006, 22–23), and Yoshimura and Fukuma (2006, appendix 24).
9. For example, by Kuroko (1993), Ichitani (2010), and Kawaguchi (2010).
10. Best available in Japanese today are the Chōbunsha edition (Nakazawa 1993), a partially revised paperback edition by Chūōkōronsha (Nakazawa 1998), and the more recent Jump Comics edition for convenience stores (Nakazawa 2005) containing the installments of the first fifteen months.
11. The visibility of the Korean minority as epitomized by Gen’s neighbor Mr. Pak is also emphasized, in comparison to Kouno (2006; “Yūnagi no machi, sakura no kuni”, September 2003–August 2004 in *Manga Action*), for example, by Kawaguchi (2010, 220–222) and Ichitani (2010, 385). Kouno’s manga deserves revisiting from a post-3/11 angle, especially in two regards: first, silence in the sense of withholding information and suppressing communication (see Kouno 2006, 16, 51, 86; Yoshimura 2012a, 389–390), and second, the manga’s strong emphasis on the prosaic everyday. Kouno deliberately refrains from addressing Japan’s war responsibility (Yoshimura 2012a, 382) and thereby avoids *ex post facto* “flashforwardness” of the kind that Hong (2009) detects in GEN. Kouno’s consequent distancing from ideology also complicates the interpretation of her protagonist whose humbleness may suggest a traditional, acritical woman to an ideologically formed perspective at first glance.
12. Right-wing groups and commentators have complained about GEN being used in schools. See, for example, Karasawa et al. (2007) and the recent formal petition to Hiroshima City by a group of concerned hibakusha who wanted GEN removed from the city’s school peace education program

- because of its “incorrect” depiction of history (“‘GEN’ heiwa kyōzai saiyo chūshi o” [For stopping the usage of GEN in peace education] 2012). Many thanks to Ronald Stewart for pointing out these facts to me.
13. See Luciano (1981). Köhn (2007) touches on GEN’s respective rejection by Japanese literary scholar Kuroko (1993).
 14. In addition to Chute, see, for example, Kern’s mentioning of GEN (2011, 38–39) and the survey of post-9/11 comics given by Worcester (2011).
 15. *Boku to Nihon ga furueta hi*, started in *Monthly Comic Ryū*, issue 8, August 2011 (released June 18), continued online. I would like to thank Takeuchi Miho for sharing her manga materials related to the aftermath of 3/11 with me.
 16. *Santetsu: Nihon tetsudō ryokō chizuchō, Sanriku tetsudō daishinsai no kiroku*, started in *Monthly Comic@Bunch* (a magazine launched in January 2011), December 2011 issue (released October 21).
 17. For an introduction (focused on women’s manga), see Sugawa-Shimada (2011).
 18. *Uchi no tsuma tte dō deshō*, serialized in *Manga Action* since 2007. Installments 104–109 (May–July 2011) relate the post-3/11 fears and reflections of the author (b. 1976). They reappear in vol. 4 of the book edition.
 19. Serialized in *Morning* since 2005, the experience of the 3/11 earthquake was related in installments no. 289 (issue 19, released April 7) and no. 290 (issue 20, released April 14), and in June 2011 added to vol. 11 of the book edition.
 20. *Datsugenpatsu-ron*. Under this title, Kobayashi (b. 1953) published a manga series in the general journal *SAPIO*, from the December 7, 2011, issue (released November 16) through to the June 27, 2012, issue (released June 6), after which he changed the title. The journal’s publisher released a book edition in August 2012.
 21. First publication under the label of “Asuka Comics” in 1988 without previous magazine serialization. The manga departs from Greek mythology—Jupiter’s son Phaeton not being able to keep his father’s horses and cart under control—and then turns to the *gakushū* mode, but with the artist herself (b. 1947) appearing as a kind of *chibi* character when she shares the alarming facts she has learned with her readers.
 22. *Nanohana*, in *Monthly Flowers*, issue of August 2011 (released June 28).
 23. Audiovisual web-manga “Tōdenken ni kike” (Listen to the Tōden Institute), with a total of fifteen installments, abruptly discontinued in May 2011. The protagonist justified nuclear power with respect to global warming, stable electricity supply, and ecology. Hirokane’s trademark series “Shima Kōsaku” (in *Morning* since 1983) addressed the disaster in installment 104 (April 21, 2011); in numbers 105–108, the protagonist visited the affected region, and in number 109, he expressed the intention of discontinuing his company’s engagement in nuclear power.
 24. Fujimoto Yukari claimed in a discussion that Sano Mioko’s “Paradise without you” (*Kimi no inai rakuen*) was the first (Makabe 2012, 132). But this manga touched only indirectly on radioactivity—calling it “invisible dangerous substances”—and the respective June issue of the magazine *Chorus* was released on April 28, that is, later than the May issue of *Comic Beam*.
 25. The artist’s penname means “Bottom-up Fortunas”.
 26. In *Weekly Young Magazine*.
 27. *Chikyū bōei-ke no hitobito* (People of the earth defense family), since 2002. The earliest strip in the book is from March 14.

28. Initially part of the journal’s June issue (released May 21), republished in Shiriagari (2011, 77–84).
29. This time, the jurors were manga artists Takemiya Keiko, Minamoto Tarō, and Saitō Chiho, as well as manga critics Murakami Tomohiko and Hosogaya Atsushi.
30. Less than one-tenth of *Weekly Shōnen Jump* (see JMPA 2012) but not as minor as *AX*, the successor of the alternative magazine *Garo* with its estimated five thousand copies.
31. In distinction to shōnen and shōjo manga traditionally designating manga for (male) “youth”.
32. See Ōkoshi (2011).
33. GEN’s first book edition was not edited by the publisher of the magazine series either.
34. The magazine self-designates as such, and artist Watanabe Michio is attributed not the “artwork” but “gekiga” of the “White Dragon-LEGEND” series. For a discussion of gekiga formed by its contemporary North American reception as alternative comics, see Suzuki’s chapter in this volume.
35. Vol. 9 was released in January, vol. 10 in May 2011. In fall 2011, the manga’s publication site was shifted from the weekly to the monthly *Young Magazine*.
36. Prior to this chapter, I have related the mangaesque mainly to issues of globalization. See, for example, Berndt (2010b, 32–35).

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