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Manga *In This Corner of the World*

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••• Conjoined by Hand

Aesthetic Materiality in Kouno Fumiyo's Manga In This Corner of the World

JAQUELINE BERNDT

In recent years, content-driven, or representational, readings of anime and manga have been increasingly countered by mediatic approaches, but the main focus has been mainly on the materiality of platforms and institutions rather than that of signifiers and artifacts that afford certain mediations in the first place. Kouno Fumiyo's *In This Corner of the World* (*Kono sekai no katasumi ni*) provides an excellent case to explore manga's aesthetic materiality, last but not least because of its congenial adaptation to the animated movie of the same name directed by Katabuchi Sunao (Studio MAPPA, 2016).¹ This movie attests to what John Guillory has pointed out in a different context, namely, that "[r]emediation makes the medium as such visible."² Consequently, it is used below as a foil to highlight how Kouno's manga conjoins different materialities in a medium-specific way resting on the drawn line, print on paper, and the serial format of the narrative.

This article pursues manga mediality from the angle of materiality to approach forms as aesthetic affordances without reiterating a decontextualized formalism modeled on modernist notions of authorship and autonomous art. First, I will try to summarize the story as unimpaired as possible by considerations of medium specificity in order to demonstrate subsequently what attention to aesthetic materiality may lead the reader to see or rather to become: namely, a mature participant. Second, I focus on the precedence of hand-drawing as well as the variety of drawn lines, pointing out that in Kouno's case aesthetic materiality does not facilitate authorship (evinced by traces of the artist's hand) or the manga medium as an art form (evinced by modernist self-reflexivity as an attribute of the text itself), but commonality, a distributive agency that involves artist, characters, and readers bridging past and present. Then, I turn to what is more often associated with materiality, namely, the physicality of the publication medium. Instead of paper quality (i.e., the coarse and yellowish printing paper of Japanese editions so difficult to reproduce abroad), I foreground linework, lettering, and paneling as well

as the physical placement of the individual installments within the magazine. I interpret these aspects as nonverbal statements about genre conventions and also correlate them with the theme of marginality touched upon already in the work's title. As a whole, I hope to demonstrate that the focus on manga materiality in the broad sense (that is, including a non-representationalist attention to forms of representation, mediation, distribution, and perception) allows for critical readings of popular fiction that acknowledge its inclusive potential.

In the course of the discussion, I refer time and again to aspects that distinguish *In This Corner of the World* from conventional manga as represented by the global bestsellers. Characteristic of Kouno's work is a conjoining of not only actors and times but also dispositions: it keeps with mangaesque conventions and twists them concurrently, occupying a third space between major franchise-prone productions and highly authorial expressions. While such a disposition applies to a significant number of Japanese graphic narratives—stretching from Tezuka Osamu and Ikeda Riyoko to Taniguchi Jirô, Asano Inio, and Kyô Machiko—it still easily escapes European or North American comics studies insofar as they are inclined to neatly sort between “graphic novels” as serious personal and political narratives on the one hand, and “comics and manga” as industrial, coded, and serial B-literature on the other hand.³ Against this backdrop it raises wrong expectations to call manga like Kouno's “alternative,” even if they appear slightly deviant within the mediascape that is locally and globally associated with Japan.

A Hand's Tale

Kouno's graphic narrative was serialized in the biweekly magazine *Manga Action* from January 2007 to January 2009. Whereas the Japanese book edition falls into three volumes, the translated English edition crams the whole 430 pages into one unwieldy volume to accommodate a type of consumption that rests less on serialization than in Japan.⁴ In line with the structure of the original magazine series, the book edition begins with 3 unnumbered prologue chapters, which are followed by a total of 44 numbered chapters and one “Final Chapter,” each forming a more or less self-contained short episode of mostly 8 (sometimes 12, 14, or 16) pages and ending with a punchline.

In This Corner of the World is the story of Suzu, a humble young woman who grows up in the Hiroshima delta, approximately 3 km away from the later

epicenter of the atomic bomb. The actual plot begins in February 1944, when the nineteen-year-old is married off to the neighboring town of Kure. There she cooks, scrubs, and cares for her sick mother-in-law while the men are at work—her husband, Shūsaku, as a minor clerk at the navy’s court-martial and her father-in-law as an engineer at the shipyard of what was then the largest naval base of the Japanese Empire. Foreign in this corner of the world and constantly scolded by her sister-in-law Keiko, Suzu has but one refuge: drawing. Already as a little girl, she compensated for her older brother’s bossiness by depicting him as an ogre in short comic strips. In her new setting, drawing helps her to cope with the unfamiliar environment while keeping the repercussions of war at bay. In June 1945, Suzu loses both her niece Harumi and her right hand to a delayed-action bomb. Months later she learns of the death of her parents and the radiation sickness of her younger sister in Hiroshima, from where Suzu and Shūsaku take an orphan home in the end.

The manga’s title refers to a collection of nonfictional texts, first published on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Hiroshima bomb. But whereas that volume accentuated the place (*kono . . . katasumi de*: “in this corner”) and Hiroshima at that,⁵ Kouno uses a particle that may also indicate a direction (*kono . . . katasumi ni*: “into this corner”), connoting both the protagonist’s move to another town and the reader’s orientation to the wartime past. The animated movie of 2016, which drew broad public attention to Kouno’s narrative, fueled primarily two readings of it: on the one hand as a war story, on the other as “a period drama about female forbearance”⁶ (both more or less underpinned by the postwar discourse of Japanese self-victimization through feminization).⁷ Whereas film critics found the war responsibility inadequately addressed,⁸ the manga artist herself said that she wanted to show Hiroshima from a perspective other than the one naturalized in Japan: “Somehow I felt reluctant to watching and depicting things related to the atomic bomb. I think I don’t like the fact that the ‘atomic bomb’ is immediately linked to ‘peace.’ As if it had bestowed peace on us!”⁹

Yet, the war is not the only driving narrative force, neither in the manga nor the animated movie. Although the movie gives the male characters more space and extends the social spectrum through their jobs, the women are at the center, Suzu and, as her counterpart, Keiko, who had been a modern girl and married out of love, but once widowed is to hand over her son to the in-laws and on top of that, to see her house in Kure’s downtown demolished for firebreaks. The third historical type of woman is the courtesan Rin, whom Suzu encounters when she loses her way in the city, and who perishes in the

bombardment of July 1945 together with the red-light district of Kure. The animated movie of 2016 marginalized Rin and concealed Shūsaku's premarital relationship with her, which facilitated its promotion as a story of growing marital love outside of Japan.

In view of the manga's remediation by the animated movie, *In This Corner of the World* appears to tell not only of war and love, but also of a drawing hand. Hosoma Hiromichi, who published a collection of meticulous observations on both works, maintains that the animated movie shifted the narrative's perspective completely from Suzu to her right hand.¹⁰ Kouno herself acknowledged that shift for the third volume of the Japanese edition, stating in an interview, "that from this point on, it is the story of the hand."¹¹ As if heading for this shift from the outset, occasional panels feature a single hand placed against empty ground. This starts with the third prologue episode: In the last small panel on the bottom left (according to the Japanese reading direction just before turning the page), a hand holding a pencil stub ap-

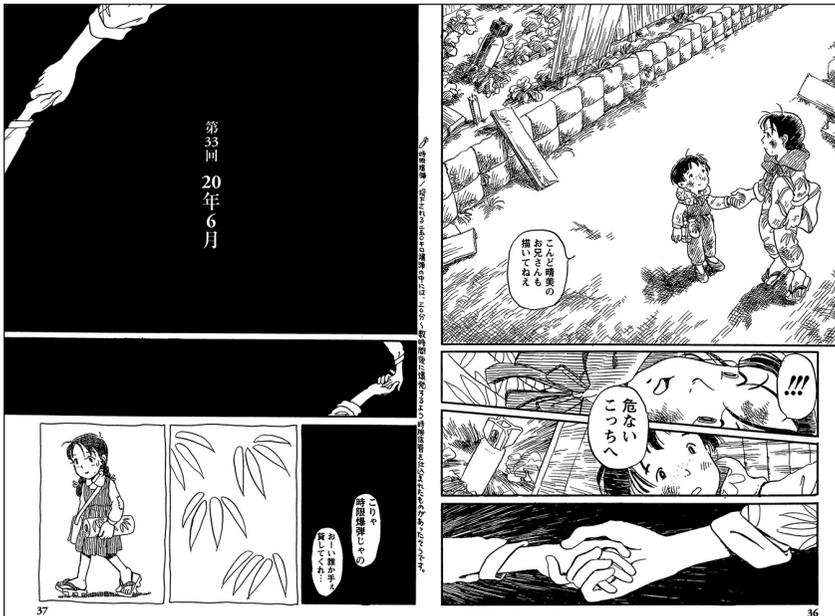


Figure 1. Right: the last page of "Chapter 32 (June, year 18), left: the first page of "Chapter 33 (June, year 18 [1945])." Kouno Fumiyo, *Kono sekai no katasumi ni, ge (In This Corner of the World, III)* (Tokyo: Futabasha, 2009), 36–37. © Fumiyo Kouno, Futabasha 2009.

pears; eighteen pages—and, for Suzu, five years—later this panel reappears, except that now chopsticks point to the left propelling the reader forward. After the explosion of the delay-action bomb on the last page of chapter 32 (Figure 1), when it becomes clear that Suzu has lost not only her niece but also her drawing hand, the hand begins to lead a life of its own, first as a mental image: A panel with the bandaged arm stump is followed by one with the complete hand which sketches a shamrock that grows into a garden of paradise, with Harumi playing in it (Figure 2). In chapter 39, the hand descends from above and strokes consolingly Suzu's head as she kneels in her vegetable patch crying on August 15, 1945, after the Emperor's radio speech. And at the very end of the manga the hand even gains its own voice. Holding a pen, it opens the last chapter, and after having spoken to Suzu in the form of a letter composed of panels and handwritten monologue, it becomes visible again, sequentially placed in free space and now holding a brush with which it watercolors the remaining pages.



Figure 2. The return of the lost hand. Kouno Fumiyo, *Kono sekai no katasumi ni, ge* (*In This Corner of the World, III*) (Tokyo: Futabasha, 2009), 42–43. © Fumiyo Kouno, Futabasha 2009.

Haptic Participation

But in Kouno's manga the hand is far more than a motif that attracts attention to what it represents. Before any symbolism, it serves a pragmatic function, namely, to invite the reader into the storyworld. Whereas conventional manga employ close-ups of character faces, here close-ups of the hand assume that role. This already appears in the third prologue episode when Suzu is given a pencil by her classmate Mizuhara to do a drawing in his stead. While the right half of the double-page spread relates the situation in seven ruler-rimmed panels, the left half features two hand-drawn and almost empty rectangles that are slightly shaded on the lower left (Figure 3).

The upper one contains a tail-less speech balloon with Suzu's words; the lower one shows her hand drawing a brush stroke to the right, flanked by two more bubbles. Suzu's forearm, however, is part of the frame, which at this

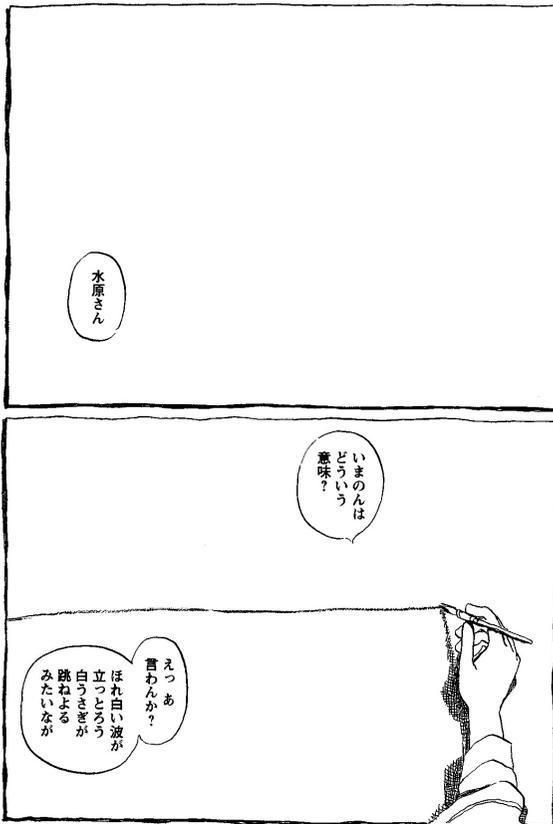


Figure 3. Suzu drawing. Kouno Fumiyo, *Kono sekai no katasumi ni, jô* (*In This Corner of the World, 1*) (Tokyo: Futabasha, 2008a), 45. © Fumiyo Kouno, Futabasha 2008.

point bulges into the panel. As distinct from the animated movie, the comics medium is capable of making Suzu's hand the entry point to an empty space, which is at once the protagonist's drawing paper and the manga page in the reader's hand. The ensuing sensation of overlap is heightened on the following double-page spread, where the paper is drawn as if rising at the edges. Thus, the reader conjoins the protagonist in a concurrently representational and material way.

Discussing the specificity of comics as a paper-based medium and its persistence in the digital age, Katalin Orbán has highlighted how much comics rest on "print text [being] experienced as permanently integrated with its material base."¹² In reference to Alois Riegl, Orbán observes that "the sense of materiality is thus established mostly through a tactile relationship, in which hand-book contact and haptic visuality mutually inform each other."¹³ While Laura U. Marks exemplified haptic vision with regard to video imagery and its grain,¹⁴ in manga—a type of comics defined primarily as "line picture" (*senga*)¹⁵—haptic vision as an embodied form of seeing rests mainly on the drawn line. Drawing is one means of approximation, as anthropologist Michael Taussig observes: "A line drawn is not important for what it records as much as what it leads you to see."¹⁶ This is inspired by John Berger's account of drawing, who actually went further than seeing: "Each confirmation or denial brings you closer to the object, until finally you are, as it were, inside it: the contours you have drawn no longer marking the edge of what you have seen, but the edge of what you have become."¹⁷ Berger understands drawing primarily as an autobiographical record and applies it to the becoming of the artist, whereas in Kouno's manga the personal act of drawing goes beyond individualism; it serves commonality—between the characters as well as between artist, characters, and the readers who are being taken by hand and invited to eliminate historical distance, not simply looking at the past, but literally touching it.¹⁸

Kouno had previously experimented with such closeness in the six-page colored short story "*Furui onna*" (An old-fashioned woman, 2006).¹⁹ Again, the protagonist is a young woman who appears to submit silently to Japan's modern patriarchy, and again she is an amateur artist, except that this time she draws on the bare back of leaflets. Emulating such a support, the pages on which the manga panels are laid out are imprinted with faint mirrored patterns, which seem to shine through from the leaflet's front. While this does not necessarily catch the eye upon first reading, on closer inspection it may ironically undercut the verbal affirmation of patriarchy and nationalism.

Here as elsewhere, Kouno calls upon her audience to maturely engage, at the risk of remaining politically vague herself.

In contrast to the water-colored “*Furui onna*,” the monochrome manga *In This Corner of the World* leans exclusively on graphism for layering different worlds, such as when it takes only one drawn line to conjoin the Bay of Kure and its battleships with their image in Suzu’s sketch book (in chapter 12). The animated movie retains the discontinuous outlines of characters’ faces and the little strokes on cheeks and arms, but it juxtaposes the different levels of perception primarily through distinction between graphic, or linework-based, and painterly renderings. Occasionally new sequences had to be created, for example, in the case of the colored target-marking bombs. While the manga relates their threat in one densely packed “hyperframe” panel in chapter 26, the animated movie first shows spots of color on a blue background, accompanied by sounds of detonation, before a hand with a brush enters the screen to set just such paint splotches onto the sky, thereby deferring the actual danger to another, aesthetic dimension, which can be read as escapism.

In the manga, the hand also presents itself as the subject materially, that is, through the very type of drawing. A particularly striking example appears in the middle of chapter 35, sixteen pages after the explosion of the delayed-action bomb. Here, Suzu monologizes in view of the ruined city of Kure, that it appears to her “as a world drawn with my left hand,”²⁰ which Kouno actually follows through with in her drawing of the images: “Halfway I decided to draw the background consistently with my left hand. Normally you would not get pages of such poor quality printed.”²¹ This especially stands out, as Kouno keeps to hand-drawn hatching, eschewing the use of screen tone. Due to her left-handed rendering the bars and struts of the room where Suzu sits in her sickbed futon (in chapter 35), consist of shaky lines, which the background artist of the animated movie, Hayashi Kōsuke, turned into broad impasto strokes, also brushed with the left.²²

Drawn by Hand

In recent years, comics studies have advanced a more differentiated view on the collaboration between text and image, exploring variety within each of the two tracks.²³ The visual track of Kouno’s manga is exceptionally rich in image formats. Some chapters contain diagrammatic representations of

railway lines and timetables; others switch between panels that show Suzu sewing or cooking, and panels that serve as pictorial instructions for those activities, reminiscent of infographics. What the women learn in the air defense lessons is related through Suzu's notebook on the top half of six consecutive pages in chapter 29, and how the neighborhood association works is introduced in chapter 4 through the lyrics of a war-time song, the lines of which are accompanied by uniform picture boxes. In chapter 20, the panels even mimic dress patches with their dashed edges, alluding to Suzu's haphazard way of mending. But all these formats have in common that they are executed as freehand drawing. Not even urban spaces and their buildings assume a sharp-edged photorealistic look. Printed signs, posters and calendars are re-mediated by hand as are the extradiegetic historical explanations, placed as vertical Japanese script in the inner page margin (Figure 1). In addition to the laborious manual work that determined women's everyday life during the war, Kouno's freehand drawing associates both the "original contexts" of the re-presented mediums and their appropriation by Suzu or, more precisely, her hand.

But as dominant as free-handed drawing may be, the materiality of the drawn line itself changes with the tools. After the first prologue chapter, Kouno swaps the manga pen nib for a brush, evoking with water-saturated black ink the humidity of a summer's day in the tidal mudflats of Hiroshima Bay. The memories of Rin are rendered with a rouge brush, the utensil of the courtesan, which Suzu received from her with the advice: "Go on and make yourself pretty. / You know what they say . . . / When they clean up the bodies after a bombing, they start with the prettiest ones."²⁴ The most common alternation, however, is that between pen and pencil. While the pen stroke marks the diegetic present, the paler pencil outlines the domain of Suzu's imagination. It also sets itself apart from her everyday life in Kure materially: as pencil drawings are difficult to reproduce in printed manga, they were first copied and then glued into the artwork. A pencil is used for the short comic strips that caricature the older brother (five individual pages in total) as well as for the recurring heron, that associates with Suzu's past and hometown.²⁵ At the beginning, pencil drawings are located in thought bubbles—for example, when little Suzu pictures the candy she could buy—but mostly they serve two purposes: informative inserts (postcards or the neighborhood circular, for example) and panel frames that enclose retrospectives or mental images. The most representative example of the latter is the sequence in chapter 33 right after the explosion of the delayed-action bomb.

A large black panel opens that chapter, and then small panels with a freehand-drawn border appear, at first only occasionally interrupted by panels with the bold, ruler-rimmed standard frame (Figure 1). Gradually, it becomes clear that the penciled panels relate shreds of memory, which flicker through Suzu's feverish dreams: sewing sessions with the grandmother, the encounter with Rin, time spent with little Harumi. The bold panel frames—and with them the external reality—are gradually gaining the upper hand until the word “murderer” slips out of Keiko's mouth. The following page features the two already mentioned vignettes of Suzu's hand: first, the strongly contoured bandaged stump; second, the faintly outlined healthy hand (Figure 2).

This differentiation by line type is highly medium-specific (although not necessarily salient). Consequently, the animated movie expanded the big black panel at the beginning of chapter 33 to a whole sequence which, according to a handwritten note of the director in the storyboard, departs from cel animation in favor of “something like cine-calligraphy,”²⁶ i.e., the technique of direct engraving on filmstrips as developed by Norman McLaren with *Blinkity Blink* (1955). Accompanied by crackling noises, white lines flash. The voice of the grandmother can be heard and Suzu's monologue. Then the ground changes from black to white. The cel-animated colored figure of Suzu runs down a coastal path, indicated in gray lines, until a look at the bay, drawn with crayons, opens and Harumi can be seen and heard. Sound compensates for what stayed invisible in the manga's gutter.

Magazine Matters

Kouno conceived *In This Corner of the World* not as a book, but as a serial narrative, and published it in a magazine that appears to primarily target male readers judging from its cover photos and manga contents (*seinen manga*).²⁷ In the Japanese context, this raises the issue of gendered genre. Does the cute-looking protagonist cater to a generically masculine gaze? Are elements of generically feminine manga fed into a masculine domain? The very fact that all kinds of visual formats are appropriated by the artist's, and through her Suzu's, hand may suggest an inclination to reducing otherness in a shôjo-mangaesque way.²⁸ Yet, significant formal characteristics of shôjo manga are missing: The linework is mainly rendered with a G-pen, a device that has shaped the appearance of graphic narratives for young men (*gekiga*, *seinen*

manga). In addition, screen tone is eluded as is the preference for printed script and more than two saliently alternating typefaces.

In contemporary manga, printed script predominates, for better readability as well as aesthetic transparency (that is, an access to characters and storyworld unimpeded by material concerns). Hand-lettering is by convention used for onomatopoeia and, in female genre tradition, extradiegetic, often funny comments on characters and situations.²⁹ Kouno, however, avoids such commitment to genre. Her manga leans on pictoriality rather than scripted text to evoke closeness, such as in the case of the drawing paper or the left-handedly drawn background. Her speech balloons are almost uniformly filled with printed characters. Handwritten onomatopoeiae are employed sparingly, until the manga's last third: when the sirens no longer seem to stop, the panels become superimposed by sound words that assume a ropelike physicality.

Furthermore, the paneling does not necessarily suggest affiliation with the genre of *shōjo* manga, which tends to foreground space, shifting the reader's attention back and forth between panel and page. And even if the G-pen plays a crucial role, an affiliation with *seinen* manga—which foregrounds the flow of time through transition from panel to panel—is not suggested either, although Kouno apparently invites the reader to proceed from panel to panel and from tier to tier, slightly offsetting the vertical gutters. Only in parallel montages of concurrent action is the grid geometrically accurate. This becomes evident, for example, on one page towards the end of chapter 32: Suzu and Harumi are sitting in an air raid bunker. To distract her niece, Suzu draws the faces of the family members into the dusty ground. While a sequence of vertically arranged sound words visualizes both the force and the length of the bombing, the underlying panel grid suggests less a process than a stagnation of time: The gaze of the characters, and the reader, while guided from right to left, is urged by onomatopoeiae to turn downward, which enforces the oppressiveness of the situation.

Such attention to the still space of the printed page manifests further in the occasional material juxtaposition of image and script. When Suzu lies on the sickbed and cannot yet make out reality, a horizontal panel suddenly appears in the middle tier across the entire double-page spread (chapter 33). It repeats an originally vertical panel showing Suzu and Shūsaku on a bridge and their reflection in the water (in chapter 15), which is now turned 45 degrees to the right. Compared to the panels on the upper and bottom tiers, the visible world appears reversed. The voices, however, remain in the medial “normality” as the speech balloons feature the Japanese dialogue in the usual

vertical arrangement. Such a juxtaposition of seeing and reading direction can already be found in Kouno's first Hiroshima manga, the twenty-nine-page story "Town of Evening Calm" (*Yûnagi no machi*, 2003).³⁰ The protagonist, a young woman who feels guilty about having survived, suddenly runs up a vertical panel, away from the dead in the ground. But the Japanese lines of her monologue, which are to be read from top to bottom, pull back the reader's gaze after each upward movement, thus anticipating her eventual fall over (Figure 4).

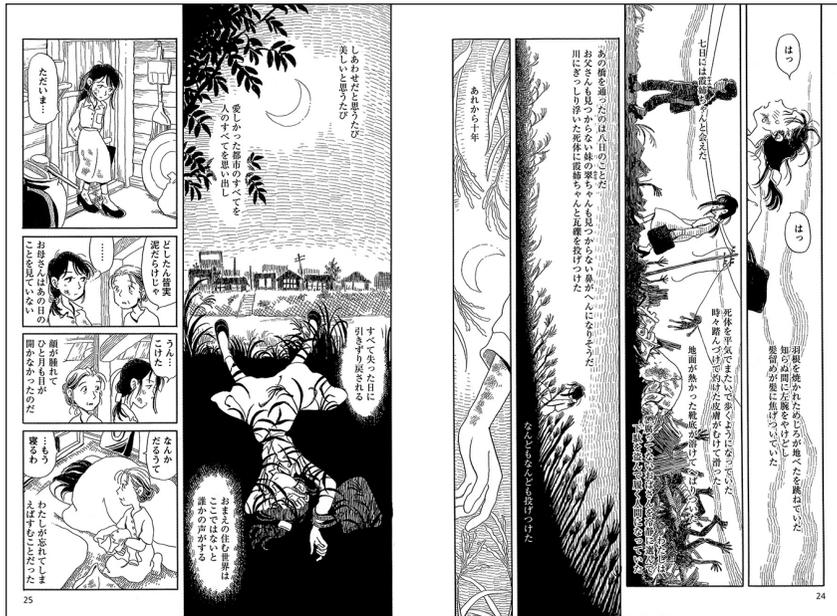


Figure 4. Material opposition of image and script in Kouno's first Hiroshima manga *Town of Evening Calm*, in Kouno Fumiyo, *Yûnagi no machi, sakura no kuni* (Tokyo: Futabasha, 2004), 24–25. © Fumiyo Kouno, Futabasha, 2004.

Considering the above, Kouno's graphic narrative clearly defies conventional genre attributions, and it even uses the physicality of the manga magazine to set itself apart from the genre of that very magazine, in this case, *seinen manga*: The installments of the series were placed between the table of contents, actually occupying the last page, and the back endpaper (Figures 5 and 6).

While popular series appear far ahead in a manga magazine, *In This Corner of the World* slipped into the last corner, like a humorous extra, a "gag manga,"

not to be taken too seriously.³¹ The deliberately marginal positioning within the magazine began with chapter 2, when Suzu moved to Kure, a marginal “corner” of world history from the point of view of the atomic bombings. Seen from Kure, the atomic cloud of Hiroshima did not look like a mushroom, according to the image on the last page of chapter 37. But while this image suggests a peripheral, regionally specific view, manga critic Yoshimura Kazuma nationalizes it as Japanese in juxtaposition to the mushroom cloud as an icon established by American photographs.³²

The material marginality of Suzu’s experience is lost in remediation when two pages, which were initially published with an intermission of two weeks, come to form a double-page spread in the book edition. Likewise lost, especially in translated editions, is the intricate interplay of the format of serialization with the diegetic time of action: The frontispiece of chapter 1 indicates “December 18,” which corresponds to the year Shōwa 18 (1943), but also Heisei 18 (2007), the release date of this manga chapter. In the apparently conservative reference to the imperial calendar, according to which, for example, the downfall of the Empire in 1945 does not necessarily appear to be a



Figure 5. Last page of chapter 32 upon first publication in magazine *Manga Action*, no. 13, 2008 (Futabasha). Bottom right margin: invitation to read also the next issue; left page: advertisement of a dating site, addressed to male readers. © Fumiyo Kouno, Futabasha 2008.

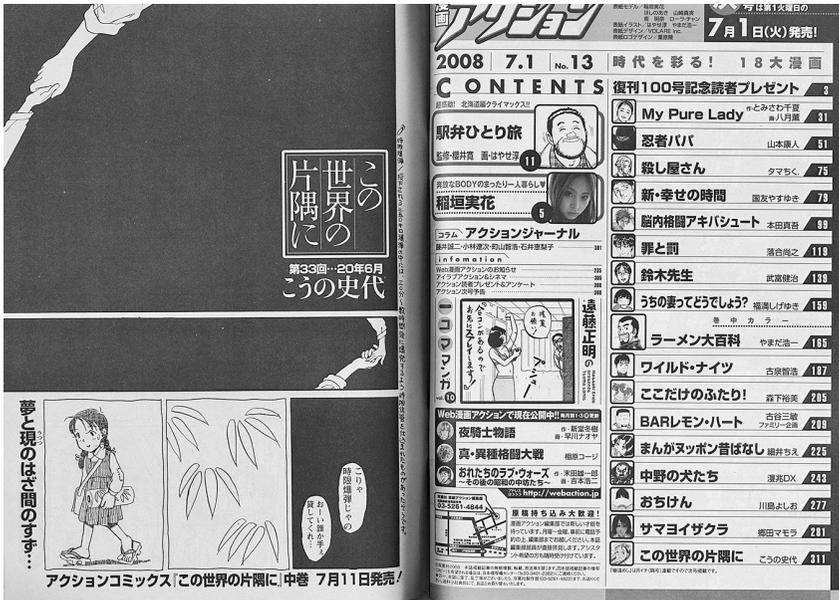


Figure 6. First page of chapter 33 upon first publication in magazine *Manga Action*, no. 14, 2008 (Futabasha). Right page: Table of Contents, with Kouno’s title on the bottom right (indicating page 311). Bottom left: Editor’s announcement that vol. 2 of the series will go on sale on July 11; left margin: “Suzu caught been between and reality.” © Fumiyo Kouno, Futabasha 2008.

caesura (as the Shōwa era lasted from 1926 to 1989), the manga conjoins past and present yet again. Finally, it deserves mention how the dust jacket of the third Japanese volume anticipates unobtrusively the narrative’s tragic climax by showing Suzu lying on her back with her arms straight up, but her right hand folded inward (Figures 7 and 8). This is easily overlooked, for example, in gallery exhibitions that give preference to framed color illustrations over monochrome paneled pages.

Conclusion

In This Corner of the World is an exercise in conjoining: the wartime past and the (in contemporary Japan) increasingly oblivious present, a politically charged history and the easily relatable personal act of drawing, haptic participation and critical contemplation. It accomplishes such conjoining through the deliberate employment of manga-specific materiality as grounded in the



Figure 7. Dust jacket of vol. 3 of the Japanese edition (Kouno, 2009), in the reader's hand.



Figure 8. Dust jacket of vol. 3 of the Japanese edition (Kouno, 2009), unfolded. © Fumiyo Kouno, Futabasha 2009.

Japanese mediascape, so that parts of it may get lost in translation. With respect to the printed page as a site that conjoins multiple panels and as such different views, critic Nakamura Tadashi has highlighted the interplay of subjectivity and objectivity (or the imaginary and the symbolic) as characteristic of the manga medium in general and Kouno's manga in particular. Neither privileging one of the poles nor fusing them beyond recognition, *In This Corner of the World* indeed keeps a balance, juxtaposing different types of line within the same page space, redrawing printed matter by hand, and detaching the hand from Suzu in terms of character ontology. Ultimately, Suzu is anything but able to escape the harsh social reality qua imagination. Manga as a highly affective popular media has been promoting a relation between subjectivity and objectivity that resembles *sekai-kei*—“characterized by the immediate link between micro-condition, the protagonist's family and school (I), and macro-condition, concerning global crisis and ruin (world).”³³ In contradistinction, *In This Corner of the World* provides plentiful historical knowledge to the receptive, and margin-sensitive, reader.

But as indicated in this article's introduction, manga's medium specificity includes aesthetic form as much as sociocultural disposition. With regard to freehand drawing, the use of the pencil, and an emphasis on the sense of touch, the indifference towards genre, and furthermore its historical realism but lack of semantic straightforwardness, *In This Corner of the World* clearly deviates from what sells as “manga proper” in the domestic and global marketplace. At the same time, this graphic narrative cannot be denied distinctive manga features, ranging from magazine serialization and the centrality of a cute-looking character to the prioritization of closeness and affective participation over critical distance. Rather than presenting another, only this time Japanese, variant of “middlebrow” fiction located in between the modern dichotomy of high art and literature (or the “aesthetic disposition”), and industrial mass culture (or the “popular disposition”), Kouno's conjoining coincides with the “imagination-oriented disposition” of recent fan cultures that entwine the specialized expertise of the first with the penchant for sharing of the latter.³⁴ A focus on forms in their materiality rather than representation may help to illuminate such “third” disposition across fields.

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Studies (1987) and a PhD in Aesthetics/Art Theory from Humboldt University Berlin (1991), Berndt's academic work has been informed by media aesthetics and exhibition studies, and focused on graphic narratives, anime, and modern Japanese art. She has widely published in Japanese, German, and English; for example, the co-edited volume *Manga's Cultural Crossroads* (2013), and the monographs *Phänomen Manga* (1995) and *Manga: Medium, Art and Material* (2015). For more information see <https://jberndt.net>.

Notes

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1. The live-action film (Nihon TV *shūsen dorama supesharu* broadcast on August 5, 2011) did not make a significant public impact. Following the unexpected popularity of the animated movie of 2016, TBS produced and broadcasted a TV mini-series (July–September 2018, 9 × 54 min.). A prolonged version of the animated movie was released in December 2019 (*Kono sekai no (sarani ikutsumono) katasumi ni*).
2. John Guillory, "Genesis of the Media Concept," *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 2 (Winter 2010): 324.
3. Jan Baetens, Hugo Frey, and Stephen E. Tabachnick, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge History of the Graphic Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Kindle Edition), 10–11.
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