

CHAPTER 4

Manga
An Affective Form of Comics

Jaqueline Berndt

In the late twentieth century, the word *manga* entered usage in Western languages, and nowadays it designates primarily graphic narratives made in or associated with Japan, in distinction from North American comics and Franco-Belgian *bandes dessinées*. But not all comics made in Japan pass as manga abroad, just as the word *anime* does not necessarily reflect the broad scope of animated film created there. In addition to country of production, both popular and academic discourse also categorizes manga according to style, format, and sociocultural disposition. Manga narratives are regarded as “a cheap form of fiction generating demand for new products on a daily and weekly basis” (Grennan 321), and as appearing in “digest-sized tomes printed backwards and populated by large-eyed, pointy-chinned, pinch-faced adolescents who all look so much alike” (Harvey 167). Outside of Japan, these narratives circulate typically in the format of trade paperbacks (*tankōbon*) that maintain the Japanese reading direction from right to left.¹ Hard-cover editions with flipped pages such as *Buddha* by Osamu Tezuka (1928–1989)² are apparently not manga enough to be shelved in the same bookstore corner.

This narrow notion of manga leaves us with two options: either to concentrate on Japan’s domestic scene and verify traits exhibited by Japanese comics across production modes, publication venues, genres, readerships, and historic periods, or to conceptualize manga along lines other than national ones, as a form of comics that has certain traits in common with similar non-Japanese graphic narratives. Thierry Groensteen’s insistence on the applicability of a universal rather than culturally specific comics studies framework makes a case for the latter (Groensteen 51). Keeping in mind the specific conditions that gave rise to

¹ See Kacsuk, also for the “Made in Japan” notion as conditioned by media and institutional factors.

² Japanese names are indicated in the Western order. The romanization of Japanese words follows the modified Hepburn system.

manga in its local setting, this chapter promotes a transcultural approach through a form-conscious discussion and conceptualizes manga as an affective type of graphic narrative.

Manga has already attracted ample interest pertaining to its ways of expressing emotions (see Groensteen; Abbott and Forceville; Tsai). But the focus on emotions tends to foreground how a given state of mind is captured or visually encoded, presuming psychologized and consciously acting subjects who are human, or humanlike, individuals. While the psychologization of fictional characters has been highly conducive to the sociocultural recognition of comics, in recent years, the critical focus has shifted from characters as individual entities to imaginary, as well as pragmatic, connections between multiple actors (intradiegetically, between characters; transdiegetically, between characters and readers; and extradiegetically, between readers via characters). Closely related, the potential of material surfaces to channel readers' attention has gained prominence in scholarship. These shifts have been articulated, among other things, in the name of affect as an intensive, overwhelming force that involves the reader effortlessly in embodied and material ways.³ Giving critical preference to affect over emotion is a matter of prioritization rather than opposition: it implies placing the emphasis on the reader, their being affected by comics-specific devices in favor of close interrelations that eventually blur the line between self and other, inside and outside, subject and object of gazing. Characters' faces, and in particular eyes, recommend themselves as a prime example here.

The pictorial device of huge eyes has famously been regarded as a hallmark of manga, although onomatopoeia and script, pictorial runes,⁴ linework, and panel layout are all equally important for the operation of affect in this type of comics. Focusing on eyes allows for a discussion of media-cultural particularities, and also for questioning the applicability of cinematic concepts, which are often taken for granted in comics criticism, such as the power dynamics of gazing. In its focus on manga eyes as both an attention-drawing and interconnecting device, this chapter goes beyond their exclusive attribution to *shōjo* (girls) *manga* and widens the view to approach something closer to an ocular history that includes boys (*shōnen*) comics, as well as graphic narratives for an older audience, occasionally categorized as alternative manga abroad. The examples illustrating crucial

³ Schneider (10–11) provides a compact overview of affect theories in the context of comics studies.

⁴ Speed lines, flourishes, popped veins, and other non-iconic graphic elements (Abbott and Forceville 106).

historical instances here have been selected in view of the exceptional amount of Anglophone comics criticism they have generated. They include Keiji Nakazawa's historical manga for children *Barefoot Gen*; Keiko Takemiya's *shōjo*-esque style in the science fiction narrative *To Terra* and her pioneering boys love manga *The Poem of Wind and Trees*, as well as Jirō Taniguchi's graphic novel, *A Distant Neighborhood*. Before zooming in on how they employ eyes, however, a brief survey of manga's reception outside Japan is necessary.

Obscured Diversity

The earliest translated editions of comics from Japan were dominated by *gekiga*. This term was coined by comics artist Yoshihiro Tatsumi (1935–2015) in 1957 in order to distinguish the then new graphic narratives created by him and his peers from previous serials aimed at children, especially those by Tezuka. In the beginning, *gekiga* was exclusively published for book-rental shops (*kashihon'ya*), but over the course of the 1960s *gekiga* artists, stories, and styles were, for the most part, absorbed by magazines of the major publishing houses to become part of *seinen* (youth) *manga*. Decades later, North American comics criticism came to promote *gekiga* as an alternative to the global manga boom that flourished in the form of licensed printed translations from the late 1990s to the late 2000s (see Suter).

Yet, best-selling serials targeted to adolescent readers and not *gekiga* have shaped what is recognized as manga today. This began with *Dragon Ball* by Akira Toriyama (b. 1955), and *Sailor Moon* by Naoko Takeuchi (b. 1967). The production, distribution, and consumption of their localized versions were neither indebted to *gekiga* nor to *Barefoot Gen* by Nakazawa (1939–2012), the actual progenitor of translated manga editions. The first two of *Barefoot Gen*'s ten volumes had already been released in English in 1976, attracting little interest from the comics community.⁵ Comics from Japan only gained attention in 1987 with the publication of a translated edition of Tatsumi's short stories and the first issues of *Lone Wolf and Cub* by writer Kazuo Koike (1936–2019) and artist Gōseki Kojima (1928–2000). The latter serial was highly influential in terms of visual storytelling, as can be seen in page layouts deviating from the conventional grid and including unframed images drawn directly into the uninked space in, for example, *Ronin* (1983–1984) by Frank Miller (b. 1957). In the

⁵ See Sabin on the reception of *Barefoot Gen* from peace book to graphic novel and manga.

same vein, *Akira* by Katsuhiro Ōtomo (b. 1954) acquired considerable fame from 1988 onwards, in tandem with its animated movie adaptation. This *gekiga*-like narrative that often places the reader in the driver's seat, as McCloud has so aptly put it (*Understanding* 114), resonated with science fiction fans. Addressing a mature audience open to realist storytelling, *Akira* did not directly connect to the notion of manga that began to gain ground around a decade later. The fact that it was first published in a lavishly flipped and colored Americanized version is indicative of the audience intended initially.

The type of manga most prominent today has been identified as “a popular visual literature of escapism” (Grennan 321). Representative of Japan's comics mainstream, it is characterized by fictional entertainment featuring cute characters, highly formulaic visuals, and game-like narrative structures deliberately left incomplete with regard to narrative coherence and the overall ending: “all of [the narrative and pictorial] techniques amplif[y] the sense of reader participation in manga, a feeling of being part of the story, rather than simply observing the story from afar” (McCloud *Making*, 217). Narrative twists fueled by intense emotions rather than rational reasoning may easily appear as escapism in the face of sociopolitical, or autobiographical representation. But this type of manga (usually published by big media corporations) also facilitates active engagement, from empathizing with characters and filling in narrative gaps to the formation of taste communities in which fans create, critique, and cosplay. Its “visual language” – highly shareable due to codification – has the potential to be put to both exclusive and inclusive, industry-compliant and subcultural, use, as practices inside and outside of Japan show.

Regardless of whether the emphasis is on Japanese particularity or, more specifically, on a corporate style that invites participation, the diversity of graphic narratives in Japan stays out of the picture. This includes the constricted notion of *gekiga* as essentially noncorporate, which ignores not only its industrial cooption but also the studio system run by Tatsumi's historic peers such as Takao Saitō (1936–2021). Another recurrent blind spot is the segmentation of corporate comics along the lines of age and gender, or more precisely, the inclination to take the masculine genres – *shōnen manga* (for boys) and by extension *seinen manga* (for youths) – as the standard. In addition to subject matter or artists' gender, this standard makes itself felt in the treatment of panel and page.

In his meta-comic *Understanding Comics, the Invisible Art* Scott McCloud highlighted some particularities of Japanese comics. He included *shōjo manga*, but only with regard to facial and background expressions,

not the genre-specific interplay between panel and page. While McCloud's aspect-to-aspect type of panel transitions has been related to *shōjo manga* traditions of communicating internal rather than external motion (e.g., by Tsai 476–477), these traditions are more prominently represented by devices that trigger an alternation of the visual frame between panel and page rather than tracing individual panels in sequence (Groensteen 63). Elaborate multiframes were initially introduced by female artists in the 1970s together with narratives that privileged interiority and interpersonal relations over physical action and fierce competition. McCloud referenced *The Rose of Versailles* by Riyoko Ikeda (b. 1947) (*Understanding*, 133).⁶ Yet, the *shōjo*-esque features of Ikeda's manga – emotive page compositions and hyper-feminine character imagery – were actually due to the artist's compromise between the girl readership of the magazine and her own aspirations to create *gekiga* (which is evident in the serial's dynamic fight scenes and the occasional inclusion of historical realism).

A manga such as Takeuchi's *Sailor Moon*, which entwined affectionate poses with girls fighting, was available in English only after 1997. Since then, narrative tropes, multiframe designs, and pictorial runes derived from girls manga have become part of fusion styles that stretch across Japan's traditional genres and beyond its national borders. Examples that undermine the assumption of influence – that is, the often one-directional and as such hierarchical relation between supposedly discrete entities – are Jen Wang's modernized Cinderella tale, *The Prince and the Dressmaker*, and Alice Oseman's queer romance series *Heartstopper*. Young adult graphic fiction like this may be regarded as inspired by manga, although not necessarily called by that name.

Manga Eyes

In the 1980s, European comics critics perceived manga as culturally too specific and therefore too exclusive for non-Japanese readers to enjoy effortlessly. Nowadays, manga is “one of the most recognizable styles of representation” (Cohn 153). This recognizability often draws upon character design, most notably the eyes. Regardless of size, eyes have been the main device for evoking (or quelling) affection in Japan's modern visual

⁶ Ikeda's manga is properly credited as distinct from two other pictorial citations of *shōjo manga* heroines. At the time, a translated excerpt of *The Rose of Versailles* was available, together with excerpts from *Barefoot Gen*, Tezuka's *Phoenix*, and Leiji Matsumoto's *Ghost Warrior* (in Schodt 1998/1983).

media: “[i]n contrast to ‘Western’ emoticons where most attention is paid to representing the mouth, the most important part of *kaomoji* [facial characters] are the eyes” (Giannoulis and Wilde 3). Comics have undoubtedly contributed to that importance, and not only *shōjo manga*. In general, characters depicted with huge eyes suggest a sympathetic nature and a very young age (which recalls Konrad Lorenz’s *Kindchenschema*). As such, big eyes easily stand in for comics, a medium traditionally targeting children and disparaged as childish. Large, round eyes embellished with long lashes and articulate pupils may affect the reader in several ways, with close-up shots potentially enhancing the intensity of the interaction.

Close-ups of faces or eyes are usually traced back to Tezuka, who is probably best known as the creator of *Astro Boy*. Tezuka has entered manga history as a cartoonist who, in the immediate postwar period, provided children with dynamic, cinematically informed adventure stories. His professional debut, the almost 200-page-long *New Treasure Island* (*Shintakarajima*, script by Shichima Sakai, 1947), is a good example in this regard. The manga begins with the protagonist Pete riding a car (Figure 4.1). To generate the sensation of racing, the perspective shifts from side to frontal view and, as if to zoom in on Pete’s face, the shot size changes across the four vertical panels into which the page is broken down, including an extreme close-up of his eyes. On the top of the next page, the subject and object of gazing are intertwined, as a little dog appears in Pete’s right eye. The dog was crossing the street when it suddenly froze in shock, facing Pete (and the reader). Finally, in the fourth panel, it sits down bathed in sweat, but no longer framed by the black ring that turned out to be Pete’s iris. This iris carries a little notch on the lower right, foreshadowing the psychologization of manga characters that became a staple of extended graphic narratives.

Due to his eyes, Pete was perceived by Japanese readers of the immediate postwar period as highly approachable and radically modern. Aided by sweat drops in previous panels and reinforced by the onomatopoeia superimposed onto the page, the close-up of eyes with pupils endowed the protagonist with something like interiority. In the 1950s, Tezuka also elaborated on the proportion of black and white within the pupil, and added eyelashes, eyebrows, and eyelids (Natsume 81–89). This design went hand in hand with increasingly mature stories of life and death: cinematically informed nonverbal storytelling facilitated irreversible narrative events, and characters began to assume psychological depth; it suffices to recall *Astro Boy*’s childhood trauma, his rejection by Dr. Tenma, and the resulting emotions that motivate his later actions. Consequently, big eyes came to suggest preexisting interiority.

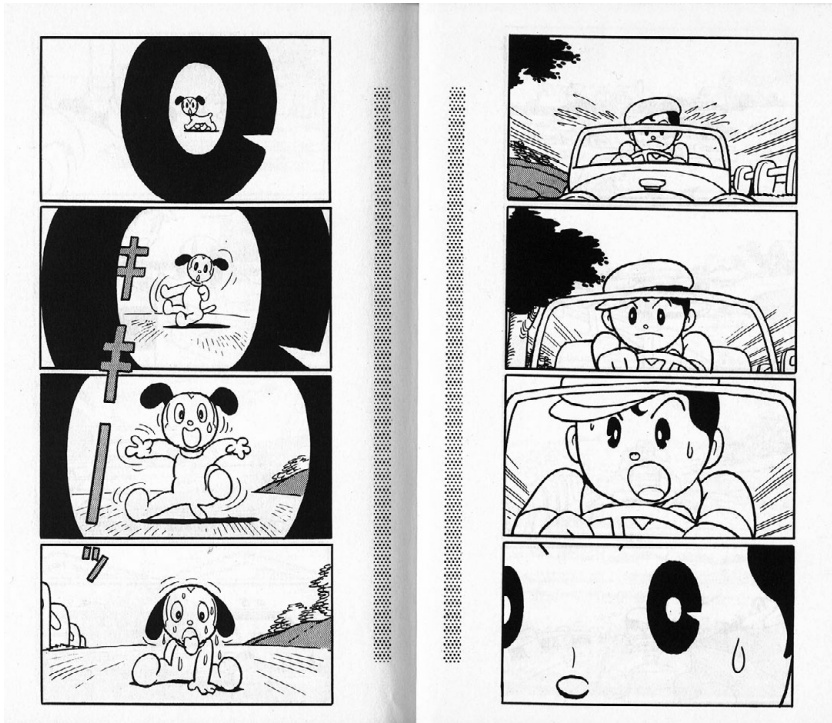


Figure 4.1. Suggesting emotions through an iris with a notch. Osamu Tezuka, *Shintakarajima* (Tezuka Osamu manga zenshū 281) [1947] (Kodansha, 1984), pp. 12–13. Read from right to left. ©Tezuka Productions, 1947.

Mitigating Violence

Like Tezuka's early comics – in particular *Kimba, the White Lion* – Nakazawa's *Barefoot Gen*, arguably the first manga to cross language borders, combined fatal events and mortal characters with the consideration of children. Its protagonist Gen is an elementary schoolboy in Hiroshima when the atomic bomb is dropped on August 6, 1945 (at the end of the first of ten volumes). The ensuing conflagration kills half of his family. Over the course of eight years, Gen meets many atomic-bomb victims like himself, and he experiences numerous sad partings. Eventually, his mother succumbs to radiation sickness. But Gen himself survives due to his ability to bounce back, or his “plasticity” (see Lamarre). This is implied graphically on the manga's first page by the use of

jumping-jack postures and it is exemplified later in the narrative, for example, through an astonishing rise from the dead after having fainted and being dumped on a pile of corpses. Animating still images and operating in part as comic relief, Gen's plasticity mitigates, in all its improbability, historically realist violence.

In his introduction to the first volume of an early translated edition, Art Spiegelman noted two things about *Barefoot Gen* that connect to the discussion here. First, he found the manga "cloyingly cute, with special emphasis on Disney-like oversized Caucasian eyes and generally neotenic faces" (n.p.). And second, he discerned a specific way of visually communicating intense emotions: "Gen's pacifist father freely wallops his kids with a frequency and force that we might easily perceive as criminal child abuse rather than the sign of affection that is intended" (n.p.). The translation of affects into physical acts has been a common trope in graphic narratives for boys: manga-literate readers approach these acts not as mirroring a historical reality but rather as invoking media-specific conventions that convey a reality effect of their own, namely, an emotional probability, a shareable feeling. A similar example of emotional expression via non-facial information is the loss of hands in the serial *Yotsuba!*: "neither to be taken literally, nor as exemplifying a feature of the 'super-deformed' technique [...] cueing a character's loss of control, predominantly through being overcome by emotion" (Abbott and Forceville 103–104).

Informed by such conventions, the behavior of Gen's father can be taken lightly, but other instances of graphic violence cannot. Especially noteworthy are the atomic-bomb victims who, with their melting skin, reappear nightmarishly over the course of the narrative. In contradistinction to Gen, their eyes are small, completely black, and without pupils, as if signaling that they are already lost, incapable of bouncing back to the realm of the living (Yoshimura 267–275). Gen's mother, for example, is accorded an intermediary position: her eyes have pupils but when she witnesses her family dying, they are covered by hatching in a way that is reminiscent of horror manga.

Japanese manga critics maintain that the clear divide in *Barefoot Gen* between those who are meant to survive and those doomed to die – and the clear dissociation from the latter – can be traced back to the fact that its serialization began in *Weekly Shōnen Jump*, the magazine for boys that became the flagship of the manga industry in the late 1980s. Previously, Nakazawa had published a few short stories on the same subject matter in non-mainstream magazines for young adults, such as

Manga Punch.⁷ Inclining towards a *gekiga* style, these stories neither anonymized the dying nor deprived them of dialogue. This gave them the appearance of hovering between life and death, and resulted in an uncanniness that was considered inappropriate for a young readership. *Barefoot Gen* answered to the ambiguity by adjusting *gekiga* to the requirements of *shōnen manga*, drawing a clear line between Gen as subject and the black-eyed victims as object. This is evident in the existence of pupils or lack thereof, and further in the contrast between big and small eyes.

Small eyes were characteristic of *gekiga*'s departure from child-oriented manga. Child-oriented manga, however, used them to distinguish between protagonist and secondary characters, friend and foe, self and other. Gen's big eyes set him apart as the central character with whom the reader is supposed to identify, or more precisely, share intense emotions. As part of "performative images," they indicate an inner consciousness that is "less a reflection than a site of emotions not acted upon" (Kajiya 240). In other words, they operate in an affective way, bringing forth potential emotions that have not been actualized yet. But they might also come across as Caucasian, not just due to their own size and shape but more specifically, in juxtaposition to the smaller and slanted eyes of other characters like Gen's Korean neighbor, Mr. Pak. In manga, narrow eyes are easily perceived as a means of "othering." Rather than identification, they invite instantaneous dissociation, which may range from impulsive refusal to admiration from afar.

More than "Mirrors of the Soul"

Manga eyes are largely read as representations, especially of ethnicity. To which type of reader such readings apply, and at which point in the medium's history, is too controversial a matter to be treated cursorily within the constraints of this chapter (see Berndt 269–272). Instead of focusing on what manga eyes may reference, this section highlights how they interconnect what is normally divided, using *shōjo*-like examples.

Eyes interconnect characters with each other, and characters with readers. Whenever *shōjo manga* is critically addressed, extreme close-ups of eyes filled with highlights of diverse shapes tend to take center stage. But manga eyes do not have to be big to involve readers affectively. *Sailor Moon*, for instance, features characters that are cross-eyed or X-eyed, have clenched or arched eyes, and also "eye-umlauts" in the form of hearts or

⁷ Published monthly from 1967 to 1985.

spirals (see Cohn). Such pupil-less eyes do not serve the “omnipotence of the narrative” (Groensteen 56) by revealing what lies beneath; they operate as surface devices that involve readers by virtue of cuteness, “a locus for intimacy, care and affection” (Gn 55), that “affects because of its difference to the subject” (50).

Yet, even big eyes are not always or inadvertently representations of interiority. As pointed out above, through the example of *Barefoot Gen*, eyes become cues for characters’ positions and feelings by means of juxtaposition. The resulting difference, however, is not necessarily fixed. It often varies contextually, according to the partner with whom a certain character is pictorially paired. In *shōjo manga*, differences in size and shape have served to distinguish pure-hearted, affect-driven young girls from calculating adult women, but also masculine and feminine character traits. The latter is particularly evident in manga narratives that evolve around the trope of the (not necessarily cross-dressing) “girl in male attire” (*dansō no shōjo*). A representative historical example is *The Rose of Versailles*. One of its protagonists, the female Oscar, who was raised as a man and trained as a military officer, comes to guard Queen Marie-Antoinette as a woman in male attire. This Oscar exhibits narrower eyes and shorter eyelashes, as well as a longer face with a sharper jawline, in comparison to female characters, but whenever she is depicted next to a man whom she adores, she acquires rounder “feminine” forms (Oshiyama 165–170). In intimate moments with her beloved André, who is of lower social rank than her, faces and eyes become uniform in shape, suggesting an equal standing beyond gender and class. Two decades after *The Rose of Versailles*, *Sailor Moon* followed in its steps, at least with regard to gender performance, with the introduction of Haruka, or Sailor Uranus. Engaged in a relationship with a female peer, Haruka exhibits more masculine traits (and uses a masculine first-person pronoun) in everyday school settings, while assuming more feminine ones when fighting as a magical girl.

Instead of character pairs, dreamy-looking single characters in close-up have been one of the most prominent features of *shōjo manga* since the 1950s. When placed in collage-like, multilayered compositions where they are orbited by multiple pictorial and linguistic fragments (especially popular since the 1970s), these facial close-ups seem to reflect what is going on inside. But on closer inspection, the huge eyes often appear lost in space, staring dead ahead, and lacking a specific focus. Obviously, they are neither directed inwards nor to the reader, and they do not address any specific intradiegetic pictorial element. Such eyes suggest indifference towards the divide between inner and outer reality, depth and surface,

subject and object, or conversely, they make the opposites meet. Keiko Takemiya (b. 1950) used this device frequently in her 1000-page-long science fiction serial *Towards the Terra*. Published in a *seinen*, not *shōjo*, manga magazine, it anticipated the conjoining of feminine and masculine genre traits that is quite common today.

Towards the Terra unfolds in an authoritarian future where allegedly immaculate humans are fabricated by erasing childhood memories in a so-called adult exam. At the core of the narrative is the opposition between the new breed of humans and the Mu, a deviant species equipped with psychic powers. The manga's protagonist, Jomy Marcus Shin, becomes an intermediary between the two. At the beginning, he is contacted by the Mu's chief, Soldier Blue, with the request to assume leadership. This encounter takes the form of telepathy (Figure 4.2). The page that conveys the significant moment features three Jomys. In the middle ground, on the right, he appears to be floating in free space, with drooping head and shoulders. In the lower and smaller panel insert, he is asleep, eyes closed; the upper panel insert, an extreme close-up, shows him wide-eyed and with his right hand raised as if in defense. Although turned towards Soldier Blue, who is depicted in full-body length on the left gesturing towards the "first" Jomy on the right, the "third" Jomy's gaze does not point at the telepathic intruder. Rather, the open eyes play a pragmatic role: they provide a nodal point for the reader to stitch together the fragments of the page, including the monologue lines that convey Soldier Blue's voice as perceived by Jomy in his state of trance.

Horror manga, especially the unpredictable body-horror type, also employs close-ups of eyes. In the case of Junji Itō (b. 1963), this relates to *shōjo manga*, as he has largely published in female-oriented magazines such as *Monthly Halloween* and *Nemuki* since his professional debut in 1987. But in his graphic narratives, characters' eyes do not ensure the unity of the page. On the contrary, staying within bordered panels that are to be read one by one, they reinforce fragmentation. Still, Itō's uncannily veined eyes and Takemiya's affectively sparkling ones have something in common: neither provide psychologized substantiation for the narrative events.

Figure 4.2, for example, is composed in a way that involves the reader in Jomy's experience of telepathic communication: we see what he sees with his inner eye, and we hear what he hears. But the image of suggested subjectivity, Jomy's internal view, includes a view on Jomy from the outside, and the interiority is not about hidden emotional truths. After all, it is telepathy that conjoins inner and outer reality, as well as the different characters and places. Thus, the display of interiority can be



Figure 4.2. Telepathic intrusion of Soldier Blue (on the left) into Jomy's interiority. Keiko Takemiya, *Tera e* [1977], vol. 1. (Square Enix, 2007), p. 111. ©1977–2007 Keiko Takemiya.

contagious, or affective, insofar as it involves the reader, but it is not necessarily representing a subject vis-à-vis an object through a gaze. Unfocused eyes invite us to cross the line that separates characters from each other as well as the reader: they invoke the impression that certain feelings do not belong to any specific character, but to all involved parties, up to and including the reader. Other prominent identifiers of *shōjo manga* fulfil a similar purpose, for example, unframed soliloquy-like lexia, speech balloons without tails, and the regularly objected visual “sameness” of characters. The latter is often employed to suggest interchangeable, or equal, character positions, as demonstrated through the example above. But it may also extend beyond individual texts and occur across genres. Jomy, for example, resembles one of the protagonists from Takemiya’s most famous manga series, *The Poem of Wind and Trees*.

This long-running serial, first published in a manga magazine for girls, has become famous as a pioneer of the boys love genre (initially called *shōnen'ai* in Japanese and usually known as *yaoi* abroad). Set in France in the 1880s, *The Poem of Wind and Trees* features two adolescent boys – Serge and Gilbert – who become lovers, try to live independently as a couple, and are ultimately separated by death, after two years of narrated time. Gilbert is the wind mentioned in the manga’s title. His beauty, as well as his mysteriously promiscuous and imprudent behavior, affect the characters around him, beginning with Serge. Gilbert’s centrality to the narrative materializes in numerous pages that single him out. Medium shot panels, or close-ups with only his right eye sparkling and his left eye staying hidden under a strand of hair, constitute him as the ultimate object of attention (Figure 4.3). Lecherous gazes (by characters as well as readers) objectivize him, but strangely enough, he plays along, up to and including sexual assaults, even rape. This does not necessarily freeze him in the position of a helpless victim. Often, “[h]e executes agency through acknowledgement, manipulation and re-turning of the gaze” (Antononoka 235). This agency is further expressed through sudden changes in his portrayal, from still postures to energetic jumping and running. Consequently, Gilbert’s one-eyed appearance – with the visible eye unfocused – comes across as both self-protective and belligerent, inward- and outward-oriented. While confirming power-based divides, he also subverts them, visually as well as narratively.

In the context of this chapter, it is noteworthy that the manga’s narrative presents Gilbert’s behavior not as prudent or calculated, but affect-driven. A multi-volume flashback provides some background information, introducing the complicated relationship with his father Auguste

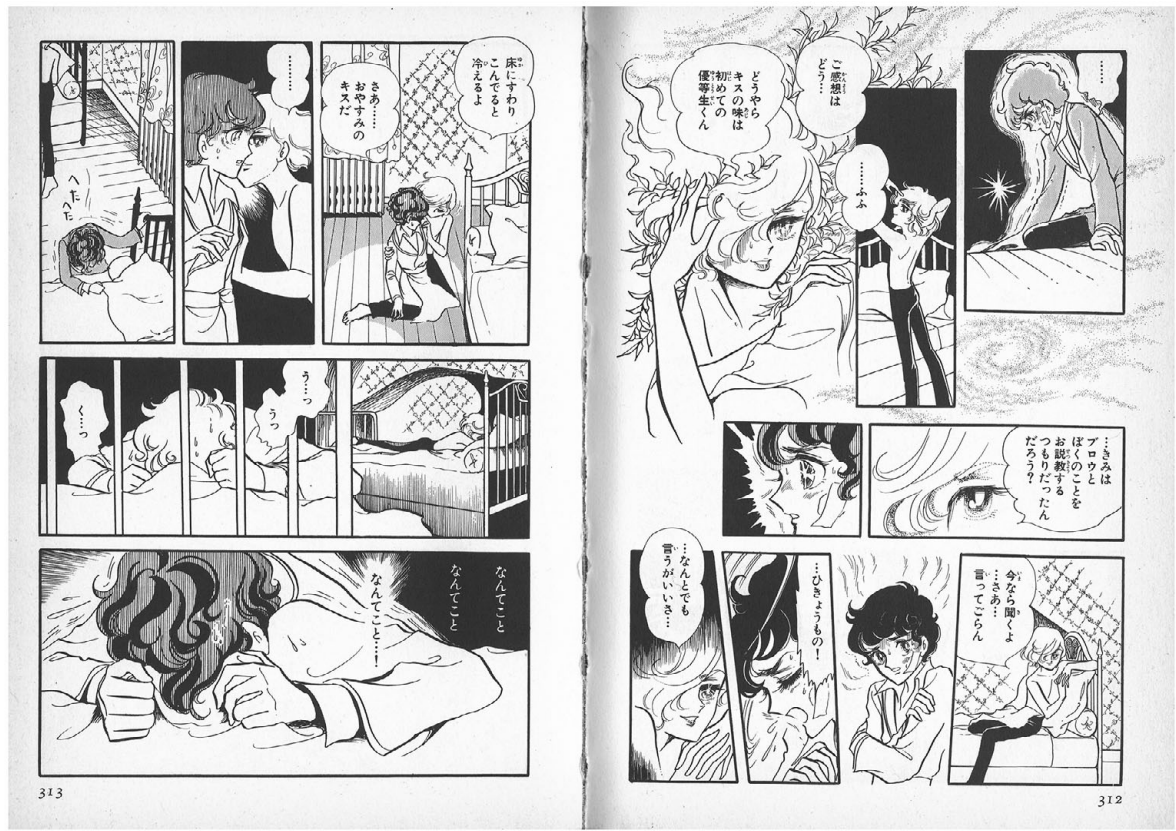


Figure 4.3. Room-mates Serge and Gilbert.
Keiko Takemiya, *Kaze to ki no uta* [1976], vol. 1 (Shogakukan, 1998), pp. 312–313.
Read from right to left. ©1998 Keiko Takemiya.

who pretends to be his uncle, and his frequent exposure to child abuse. But rather than unresolved trauma the narrative foregrounds the way he was brought up – as a feral child, unspoiled by civilization – to explain what makes him act rashly and impetuously. Furthermore, the narrative focuses less on rationalizing Gilbert’s behavior than on foregrounding Serge’s strong attachment to him. Serge serves as the main focalizer, who mediates between the initially targeted girl readers, and the boy characters who not only replace the traditional boy-meets-girl configuration, but also twist it into a story of fluid positions. Similar to the other examples discussed above, in Takemiya’s graphic narratives, large eyes facilitate the removal of feelings from individual subjects whose identity rests on separation from others; their affectivity operates as an invitation to share, rather than to observe, feelings.

Interconnecting Different Spheres

As a crucial affective device for involving readers, manga eyes often go hand in hand with cartoonish exaggeration and narrative improbability. Their employment is unusual in graphic narratives of a more subdued and personal tone, such as Jirō Taniguchi’s (1947–2017) *A Distant Neighborhood*. Initially serialized in a *shonen manga* magazine alongside Saitō’s studio-produced *gekiga*, *A Distant Neighborhood* sends its 48-year-old protagonist back to his 14-year-old self, a junior-high school student living in a small town, who sees his father leave the family and his mother die a few years later. Time travel eventually helps him resolve the related trauma and revisit his own attitude towards being a husband and a father. This is narrated in a highly subjective manner,⁸ beginning with the protagonist’s frequent monologues. Rendered in the past tense, his adult inner voice is always present, even while he relives the events of his youth (and engages in monologue as well as dialogue in the present of the past). There is also the famous graveyard sequence in the first chapter, where he slides into the past for the first time. While the transition itself is conveyed through wordless panels that feature nature devoid of people in “non-character-bound focalisation” (Mikkonen 146), its result is presented from a visual first-person perspective with sneakers, legs, and hands spotted by the protagonist before he himself enters the picture again.

A Distant Neighborhood has been found to be “emotionally charged” (Beaty 152) in an introspective way. But the narrative does not compensate

⁸ For a narratological analysis, see Mikkonen 129–49.

for an action-packed plot by representing characters' affects, as would be expected from girls manga. It does not exert affective pressure on the reader either, as it forgoes pictorial runes that evoke cuteness, uses onomatopoeia sparingly, does not privilege visual storytelling at the expense of verbal text, gives preference to regular panel layouts, and embeds the characters in detailed three-dimensional spaces. In general, this manga distinguishes between foreground and background, human actor and environment, speaker and listener, inner and outer voice. Consequently, it stands to reason that Taniguchi is perceived as "more classically 'European' than stereotypically Japanese" (Beaty 147). But while publishers such as Casterman have attempted at "divorcing him from his manga roots" (148), in reality, Taniguchi employs techniques that make both his "literary" and his "genre comics," which appear in different imprints and formats abroad (154), comparable to the examples mentioned above. This explains why it takes much less time to read the 400-page *A Distant Neighborhood* than graphic novels that have emerged from the Euro-American small-press realm.

Not all panels in *A Distant Neighborhood* show detailed spaces. Mimetic depictions are occasionally replaced by abstract momentum lines, for example, when the high school boys do sports or brawl, and conversations between the protagonist and members of his family often take place against a blank background, as if to concentrate all attention onto the speakers, who are mainly presented in shot/reverse shot sequences and from the chest upwards. The most intriguing device, however, is the frontal close-up of the eyes. Four extreme close-ups appear in *A Distant Neighborhood*, and all of them stretch over a whole tier in the middle of the page. Except for the half-closed eyes in the second graveyard scene (Taniguchi 85), all of them convey a sensation of shock, a surprise, or a flash of insight, induced by an overlapping of past and present (59, 148, 353, Figure. 4.4). While the narrative as a whole grounds characters' actions from a psychological perspective through references to childhood trauma, for instance, the extreme close-ups of eyes conjoin the spheres that are otherwise so neatly divided: past and present, the protagonist's inner and outer reality, self-conscious emotion and affective response. As such, these eyes signal what becomes increasingly apparent: that the entire narrative is one continuous monologue, less objective than the meticulously drawn, photorealist imagery might suggest.

As a manga-typical element in a seemingly atypical graphic narrative from Japan, close-ups of eyes appear not often, but memorably in Taniguchi's introspective narratives, reflecting the continuity between



Figure 4.4. The protagonist's 14-year-old self of the past conjoined with the inner voice of the present 48-year-old overcome by the realization that he behaves like his father.

Jirō Taniguchi, *A Distant Neighborhood* (*Harukana machie*), translated by Kumar Sivasubramanian, graphic adaptation by Frédéric Boilet. (Fanfare/Ponent Mon, 1998), p. 353. ©PAPIER/Jiro TANIGUCHI via BCF Tokyo.

corporate mainstream and alternative comics. Even Taniguchi's narratives are informed by a standardized publication format that harks back to serialization in commercial magazines (in his case, of *seinen manga*): its formal characteristics, monochromy, abstract backgrounds, and a certain preference for fragmentation, lengthy panel sequences without words, and a prevalence of faces stand out. In the Japanese context, it was the manga magazine that spurred readers' affective investment and encouraged the development of such devices. But a highly affective type of comics is by no means limited to Japan, and enormous eyes are not limited to manga either, as Taniguchi's style helps to confirm.

Coda

This chapter juxtaposed two options at the beginning: the conceptualization of manga as affective comics, and the search for commonalities across different genres of comics made in Japan prior to the age of webcomics. The fact that they are closely interrelated was demonstrated through graphic narratives by Takemiya and Taniguchi. Being anything but exhaustive, the discussion foregrounded the critical potential of an affect-centered approach by focusing on the (in)famous eyes in manga. It showed how they capture the reader's attention by virtue of the materiality of imagetext prior to any representational considerations. It further analyzed how eyes invite the reader to stitch the visible fragments of a page together, and conduce indifference towards the divisions between inside and outside, seeing and being seen, deep meaning and surface attraction, individualized emotions and shared feelings. This is not to say that representation and its interpretation do not matter in highly affective forms of comics. Rather, it is to acknowledge traits of comics that have been traditionally suspected to be childish, escapist, or acritical as is the case with manga. Laying open their specific potential, however, calls for a shift in focus from pursuing *what* manga is, to *how* manga is, how it engages characters and readers in specific contexts.

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