The media-cultural element: Two graphic novels by Japanese American authors read in Japan

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[This draft is meant only for discussion at the Hong Kong University workshop, May 2012. Don't quote! Considering that there will be papers on Adrian Tomine's short stories as well as SKIM given prior to mine, I refrain from introducing these works in avoidance of redundancy. Please note that footnotes and references are not complete yet, also, that the text has not been proofread by a native English speaker. Figures will be presented on May 19 via powerpoint.]

1. "Asian American graphic narratives" in focus

The term "Asian American graphic narratives" implies a twofold interest: in comics as graphic narratives,[1] and in a particular kind of comics, ethnically specified. Zhao (2010), for example, defines Asian American comics as "part of an ethnic subculture" (p. 12). From such an angle, completely different graphic narratives come into the picture as a group if not a genre, including Stan Sakai's *Usagi Yojimbo* (1998-)-, Fred Chao's *Johnny Hiro* (2008-), Tak Toshiyama's comic strip *Secret Asian Man* (1998-), Adrian Tomine's short-story collections (*Sleepwalk*, 1998; *Summer Blonde*, 2002; *Shortcomings*, 2007) und Mariko & Jillian Tamaki's book-length *SKIM* (2008). Leaving aside whether these authors and their readers would endorse it, such a grouping has its potential, first of all, as a topical, Cultural Studies-related endeavor rather than a comics-specific one.[2]

The comics mentioned above have primarily one thing in common: their creators are Asian North Americans. Such creations have been attracting attention—for example, in *Melus* (ed. by The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States)—with respect to their possible contribution to "recent debates about the politics

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1 Below, I use "comics" in the sense of "graphic narratives." See dominant discourse in Japan: manga are mainly regarded as *story-manga*.

2 "... investigating comics' intersections with, say, theories of gender or postcolonialism, political and social issues, accounts of history and psychoanalytical methods … reveal more about those discourses and social structures than they do about the comics medium per se." (Miodrag 2011: 265)

of race within a supposedly post-ethnic or post-identity context" (Oh 2007: 131). For someone like me—located in Japan and in the field Japanese Manga/Comics Studies—this involves two obstacles: firstly, in regard to the topical orientation, the limited cultural (in the sense of geopolitical, or regional) scope, and secondly, in regard to Comics Studies, the inclination towards a "general emphasis on contents and representation" (LaMarre in Smith 2011: 143).

The topic as such is closely linked to a specific cultural as well as disciplinary site, that is to say, North America and (Asian) American Studies. Japanese manga discourse—as well as manga research coming from the field of Japanese Studies—attaches less importance to issues of race and ethnicity. If at all, these issues are being addressed by scholars who studied in North America and received their academic socialization overthere (Ōgi, Nagaike). Yet, this is not to say that the particularly American concern with minorities proves irrelevant to research in and on Japan, including Manga Studies. After all, ethnic issues exist in Japan (although not necessarily racial ones) and they call for critical attention, stretching from the Korean minority [ex.: Mr. Park/Bok in "Barefoot Gen"] and Japan's "margins" (Okinawa [ex.: Higa Susumu]) to mainstream occidentalism and reversed orientalism (see Miyake [ex.: "Hetalia"]).

However, the concern with representing Asian Americans, although paramount, is not limited to authors, characters and subject matter anymore. As distinct from the majority of sociological attempts, recent essays in American Studies put the "reflection paradigm" behind them, and exhibit an awareness of the aesthetic properties of graphic narratives, attributing their interpretations to the distinctiveness of comics. Thus, Sandra Oh arrives at the conclusion that Tomine's short stories are "working against closure within a medium enabled by closure" (2007: 149).[3] And Derek Parker Royal finds a "paradoxical effect of ethnic identification in comics: Graphic narrative, in allowing the reader to 'mask' him- or herself in its non-mimetic figuration, invites empathy with the nondescript 'Other' on the comic page, thereby encouraging the reader to connect to other experiences and other communities that might otherwise have been unfamiliar." (2007: 10).[4] Both refer to McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993).

[3] "As such, both racial identity and the graphic novel depend on hegemonically determined narratives, or closure, and the reiteration of these narratives." (p. 144)

[4] In relation to not race but gender, Chute (2010) is exemplary of that trend to short-circuit social

Yet, the flaws of his theory go often unnoticed: it does not only overemphasize the pictorial aspects of graphic narratives,[5] it is also highly formalistic and as such negligent toward media-cultural aspects of comics, such as publication formats, generic frameworks, horizons of expectations, modes of reception, literacy, conventions etc. The same applies to Thierry Groensteen's *System of Comics* (1999/2007), where the existence of a constantly increasing reservoir of comics-specific means of expression (speech balloon, speed lines/emanata, sound words, panel layouts etc.) is presumed, without considering the fact that artists' choice is not at all unbounded, but confined by certain waves of fashion, especially if they commit to the institutional framework of "comics" (see Yoo 2012). It is eventually due to contexts like these, whether potentials inherent in individual comics are actualized are not, whether, for example, Tomine's storytelling facilitates resistance against racialized identity, and whether it "can serve to train readers to accept narrative ambiguity and to see a story as more than a linear progression from a beginning to an end" (Chin 2007: 250).

This paper takes as its examples the only two comics by Japanese American artists which have been published in Japanese so far, Adrian Tomine's *Sleepwalk and Other Stories* (Jap. transl. by Presspop Gallery, Tokyo 2003) and Jillian & Mariko Tamaki's *SKIM* (Jap. edition titled *GIRL*, Sanctuary Publ., Tokyo 2009). Instead of evaluating their aesthetic qualities as such, this paper pursues why they have not been received well in Japan, despite the efforts of their publishers. Against the background of manga culture (in and outside Japan), the two comics in question do not only reveal their particularities; they also indicate the importance of media-aesthetic considerations as an intermediary between social discourses on ethnicity and the comics form. After all,

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discourses with the comics form. To her, comics have a "particular value for articulating a feminist aesthetics" (p. 8), precisely because they allow for theorizing trauma in connection to their fragmented form. Aesthetically characterized by intertwining the visual and the verbal, and by the interplay between presence and absence, comics as such are regarded as a challenge to the structure of binary classification. Chute claims: "we may understand the very form of comics as feminized" (p. 10), leaning on an essentialist link which was subjected to criticism already two decades earlier (see Felski 1989). It is important to note that Chute's argumentation addresses itself *implicitly* to non-comics readers. Against the assumption that comics provide non-complex stories, she wants comics to be acknowledged as "a constant self-reflexive demystification of the project of representation" (p. 9), which, according to her, can only be found in works that "push against easy consumption" (p. 26).

[5] Miodrag (2010) demonstrates that the spatial arrangement of text segments is actually part of comics' visual arsenal. See, for example, p. 10 of *SKIM*, upper half, where a framed photograph of the protagonist's parents as a couple is accompanied by two verbal segments which indicate their separation spatially=visually.

"working against closure within a medium enabled by closure" does not only apply to Tomine's stories, but also to the long-running magazine serializations of shōnen (boys') und shōjo (girls') manga, although with different consequences, which are mainly due to genres *within* manga. While in America manga is usually understood as one genre of comics, or graphic narratives, in Japan it flourishes as a discrete "media art"[6] encompassing a wide variety of genres, comparable to Hollywood cinema, although categorized according to gender and age rather than subject matter (romance, Science Fiction, mystery, costume drama etc.).

The "masking effect," on the other hand, dominates mainstream manga, as a media favoring empathy and participation prompted, among other things, by close-ups of appealing characters with huge eyes. But it not necessarily "encourages the reader to connect to other experiences," on the contrary. Today's manga fans lack curiosity for Otherness, and they exhibit a remarkable indifference towards politics and society at large. The way in which the majority of manga readers (Japanese and non-Japanese alike) have been responding to the triple disaster of 3.11 [2011] and its aftermath—namely with repression in order to preserve their affective community and, on the part of foreign fans, their "imaginary Japan"—is highly symptomatic in that regard.

In view of this situation, one might be tempted to turn towards more sophisticated readings, or a sort of aesthetic "enlightenment" (education) to confront manga readers with non-familiar visual and narrative forms. This, however, falls short without media-cultural considerations, as my examples suggests. Instead of advancing proposals for their improved marketing, they shall serve here to illuminate a methodological problem, or another "invisible" dimension of comics, that is, the relevance of meanings, ascriptions and discourses, which precede any reading of such comics: generic frameworks related to fan cultures on the one hand, national-cultural characterizations on the other (superhero comics as "American", manga as "Japanese"). Starting points for such an approach can be found in Zhao (2010), mainly with respect to the following aspects:

Firstly, in an attempt at intertextual analysis, Zhao examines his examples'

6 This has been the naming by Japan's Agency of Cultural Affairs since 1997. Japanese manga fans would not call manga "art" though.

"interacting with popular culture," instead of relating them directly to social discourses. From the outset, he not only selects comics which occupy "both a popular culture position and a 'literary' position" (*American Born Chinese*, *Johnny Hiro*, *Secret Asian Man*), but he also applies a cultural definition of comics—as an art form which inhabits both mainstream and periphery.

Secondly, he does not confine himself to highly realistic graphic narratives—which very likely appeal to non-comics readers—but he focuses on "challenging the mainstream through *play*" [emphasis mine]. This bears the potential to relate the topic of ambiguous, fluid identities not only to the interplay of the visual and the verbal, but also to the fundamental non/seriousness of comics, its parodist aesthetics (see Frahm 2000).

Thirdly, he poses the question of how "the notion of popular culture and globalization as exclusively Americanization" (p. 13) is being contested (ex.: Johnny Hiro). This relates to manga, in regard to both Japanese editions of American comics which have to gain acceptance in a foreign environment, and comics preferences of young (especially female) American readers which are increasingly influenced by their manga-reading experiences.

In other words, a media-cultural, or media-aesthetic, approach which takes manga in account could enhance the understanding of comics' hybridity. So far, a linkage between the lived cultural hybridity of Asian Americans—as specific subject matter—with the aesthetic hybridity of comics (word/image, time/space, in/visible)—as allegedly universal form—prevails. The cultural hybridity of the specific comics forms themselves go usually unnoticed.

Manga, for example, has developed an aesthetic and cultural hybridity which, today, matches the requirements of globalization. In manga, the seemingly incompatible is juxtaposed often more abruptly and excessively than in American or Francobelgian comics. This applies to a whole range of aspects: narratives blending modern drama and its tripartite structure with the traditional 4-step rhetoric of *kishōtenketsu* (起承転結; derived from Chinese poetry), or inheriting the concept of *monogatari* (物語, tale) with its intertwining of the realist and and the fantastic; the employment of motifs from different cultural backgrounds and their uninhibited intertwining; the pictorial combination of 2D (the cartoonesque) and 3D (the naturalist, photorealist). Also

noteworthy is the fact that mainstream manga leave the ethnic identity of their protagonists vague. The less pictorially specified faces, bodies and places appear, the more easily can they be invested by non-Japanese readers, with fantastic imaginations as well as with experiences of their own everyday lives. Manga's global mobility stems to a large extent from its being sufficiently exotic and familiar at the same time. Compared to manga, which outside Japan appears not only as a "genre," but also as a—highly hybrid—"style," graphic novels[7] such as *SKIM* give a classically universal, and in that sense transcultural, impression, leaning on no particular (sub)culture — except that of modern, middle-class intellectuals which has been providing the western "universal" standard for the last two centuries.

2. Two exceptional graphic narratives

Adrian Tomine's *Sleepwalk and Other Stories* (Jap., Presspop Gallery 2003, 95pp.) and Jillian & Mariko Tamaki's *SKIM* (Jap.: *GIRL*, Sanctuary Publ. 2009, 138pp.) reside both outside the established popular genres. But they have more things in common.

(1) Their Japanese edition was not motivated by highlighting "Japanese [North] Americans," or related subjet matter. The intention of their Japanese editors was rather to introduce well-narrated, non-generic comics.

Yamada Yūji,[8] co-translator and co-publisher of *Sleepwalk*, admitted in an interview, that he took the name "Tomine" for Italian when he first heard it in San Francisco, and he regards this now-friend, figuratively, as a "gaijin in yukata" (a foreigner/外人 in Japanese attire), while acknowledging his personal engagement with "Japan" (Yamada, Interview 2012). Tomine himself was quoted as saying, "…[I] tried to think of a story that Dan Clowes or Jaime Hernandez probably would never write" (Chin 2007: 252).

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[7] Being very well aware of this term's problematic implications and also of the fact that its meaning has been reduced to "more than 100 pages book format," as the naming of mainstream manga volumes shows, for example in the case of "NARUTO," I use it here in the sense of a cultural position outside of the established popular genres, which manifests itself, among other things, in the wholeness of these works, their invitation to take every detail as remarkable and meaningful because well-wrought and intentional: nothing seems to be left to chance—as distinct from running series, especially in manga weeklies.

[8] I am using Japanese names in the Japanese order, that is, family name preceding first name without separation by comma.

Nagai Hajime, former free-lance editor and now on the payroll of Sanctuary Publishing, wanted to introduce *SKIM* in Japanese by all means, after American friends had introduced the book to him in 2008 (Nagai, Interview 2012). He aims at raising a sensitivity for comics as "sequential art" in the broadest sense, as means of expression beyond, or prior to, any genre categories (under which also Japanese artists have to suffer[9]). In view of manga's proliferation abroad and the increasing amount of OEL manga productions in the U.S., he was interested in "original creations." Jillian Tamaki's drawing and panelling impressed him immediately.

While Japanese manga artists and critics look usually down upon foreign comics when it comes to panel layout—regarding most of it as immature, something "we have overcome 40 years ago"—Jillian Tamaki's pages are highly appreciated (once you get manga readers to actually read the book and to tolerate the western reading direction). Although initially specialized on illustrations (that is, single images), in *SKIM*, Tamaki provides the reader with a visual flow which is fascinating in itself, even beyond the representational issues it intimidates. Employing only a minimum of verbal text, to say nothing of the absence of "talking heads," she impresses as a *visual* storyteller in the true sense of the word: she guides the reader's gaze over the pages, altering not only the optical angle panel by panel, but also the focus on page and panels—like a zoom-in/zoom-out, the space of the page providing the "ground" for panels as inserts which often observe temporal succession. Her pictorial "nesting" of bordered and unbordered images even complicates the notion of the gutter in a way reminiscent of shōjo manga's rebellion against the (generically) male grid in the mid-1970s, by means of multilayered collage-like designs [ex.]. Likewise reminiscent of shōjo manga is the amount of text segments outside speech (or thought) balloons, in other words, the importance of monologue.

In addition, the theme of *SKIM* is universal, according to Nagai: coming-of-age is awkward, a general state of alienation especially for girls, in America as well as in Japan.[10] (Interestingly, Yamada explained the relative success of Daniel Clowes' *Ghost World* with a similar reference to girls' culture).

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[9] For example, Moroboshi Daijirō, in en.wikipedia.org: Morohoshi.

[10] From an American and scholarly angle, *SKIM* seems to recommend itself as a story about race and homosexuality. Preconditioned by highly codified simulations of homosexuality in female manga

(2) Both *SKIM* and *Sleepwalk* are initially rendered in black and white, which recommends them to a Japanese readership to whom monochromy is more familiar than full color. This can be confirmed by a look at Urasawa Naoki's "Billy Bat",[11] a rare example of a manga featuring a Japanese American protagonist, the cartoonist Kevin Yamagata. Vol. 1 begins with his (fictitious) comics "Billy Bat" which is rendered in full color, and thus marked as foreign (pp. 3-26). Also alien to Japanese readers is the western reading direction from left to right: both *SKIM* and *Sleepwalk* were left unflipped (according to Nagai, out of cost concerns).

(3) With respect to their Japanese publication site, neither *Sleepwalk* nor *SKIM* recommend themselves as comics in general and manga in particular. *SKIM* was released by Sanctuary, a medium-sized publisher specialized on non-fiction books about money and business, which only occasionally indulges in comics.[12] *Sleepwalk* was published by Presspop Gallery, a small-press publishing house which follows an American model insofar as they focus not on specific media (for example, manga), but a certain alternative lifestyle, selling artist toys, books, DVDs, T-shirts, bags and music CDs, not only in Japan[13] but increasingly also in America. Their most successful comics title in Japanese is Daniel Clowes' *Ghost World* (Jap. first edition 2001, print-run 6.000 copies),[14] which benefitted from the almost simultaneous release of the

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subgenres, Japanese readers show an inclination to take this aspect of *SKIM* lightly, linking it to media conventions rather than to social reality. I am aware that I have to provide a possible reading of *SKIM* which is not centered on "Japanese Americans" and homosexuality; pressed for time at the moment, I will try to present my ideas at the Hong Kong workshop.

[11] Scenario by Nagasaki Takashi, in *Morning*, 2008-2012, completed, 8 vols.

[12] Under the label "Sanctuary books new comics", nine titles have been published so far, none of them based on a magazine serialization, including such diverse manga as Shirai Yumiko's *TENKEN* (2008, English & Jap. *Tenken-sai*, the first fanzine/*dōjinshi* manga, which was given one of the Japan Media Arts Awards by the Agency for Cultural Affairs in 2007 (http://plaza.bunka.go.jp/english/festival/2007/), essay manga like "Tales about money which nobody would teach you" (Uda Hiroe, 2010) and "Travelling to Shrine throughout Japan" (Suzuki Sachiko, 2010), and also Joan Sfar's *Little Prince* (2011). The selection follows Nagai's preferences.

[13] Their translated comics include Jim Woodring, Peter Bagge, Julie Doucet: *My New York Diary* (2002).

[14] Second, slightly revised edition 2011 (1,575 Yen); also available from Presspop Gallery are Daniel Clowes' *Like a Velvet Glove Cast in Iron* (Jap. 2005) and *Caricature* (Jap. 2005).

movie adaptation. In the wake of that success, Presspop Gallery published *Sleepwalk*, a collection of short stories be an artist close to Clowes, Adrian Tomine (2.000 copies).

(4) *Sleepwalk* and *SKIM* differ from *Johnny Hiro* or *American Born Chinese* insofar as their subject matter and style position them beyond popular media culture. They do not contain any allusions, or even parodies,for example, of Japanese popular culture, and no references to manga-style either. This could be explained time-wise: Tomine created his stories (1995-98) shortly before the manga boom set in ("Sailor Moon" in English starting in 1995, "Dragon Ball" in 1998); *SKIM* is *set* in 1993 (as the newspaper image in the panel inserted in the lower right corner of p. 89 indicates). However, the general distance of both artists towards the kind of manga which has been carrying the recent boom seems to be more important.
With respect to comics, Tomine regards especially Daniel Clowes and Jaime Hernandez as kindred spirits, if not models. But in the introduction to a collection of Tatsumi Yoshihiro's short stories, he reveals, that as a teenager, in 1988, he was deeply impressed by this artist's "depiction of an overwhelming, alienating modern world [...] Tatsumi's visuals were restrained, minimal, and stylized in a manner that seemed appealingly foreign. [...] I had seen some Japanese comics, or *manga*, before, but none of it had appealed to me in the way that Tatsumi's did." (Tomine 2005, n.p.). Which does not come as a surprise since Tatsumi's comics are *gekiga*, "pictorial dramas" for adult readers with a significant amount of social criticism and a "direct expression of a personality that is keenly observant" (ibid.), unlike the kind of mainstream manga which is proliferating on a global scale today. The first English-language anthology of Tatsumi's work appeared in 1987, in tandem with the historical *gekiga* "Lone Wolf and Cub" (子連れ狼; En. 1987, art: Kojima Gōseki, scen.: Koike Kazuo), followed by the SF series "AKIRA" (Ōtomo Katsuhiro, En. from 1988 onwards).
Gekiga readers are different from the present "manga" readership, and Tomine does not address the latter with the Tatsumi anthologies edited by him (four so far). This is evident from the publication format he chose: re-formatted to accomodate the western reading direction, "flopped," as he says (or "flipped," as the manga world calls it). Tomine explains: "... if a comic book (or 'graphic novel') is to reach as wide an audience as possible, the last thing it needs is another obstacle for new readers to

surmount." (ibid.) Aspired here is a universality unfamiliar to Japanese readers. Although Japan is said to be the "country of manga," not all Japanese actually read manga, and even manga readers have only few works in common. In fact, communication about one and the same work among different kinds of readers is rare. Furthermore, independent comics artists lack the support by intellectuals which, for example, Tomine can count on. Yamada points out, that the vivid alternative culture of the late 1990s, which was critical against consumerism, curious about independent American comics, interested in contemporary art (Nara Yoshitomo, Aida Makoto) and new manga emerging from the margins of the industry (by female artists such as Okazaki Kyōko, Nananan Kiriko, Yamada Naitō), has vanished during the last decade: their "subculture" was replaced by "otaku" culture (nerds; female equivalent: *fujoshi*=rotten girls[15]).

Jillian Tamaki recalls reading comics for girls in her childhood (*Archie*, *Betty & Veronica*), but names as her most important inspirational sources Will Eisner, Seth, Chester Brown (Randle 2011), Daniel Clowes and—Adrian Tomine (Chan 2005). The latter astonishes, considering the differences between *SKIM* and *Sleepwalk* in their English as well as Japanese editions.

First of all, Tomine's book is a collection of short stories, and as such not readily accessible for Japanese manga readers who expect an artist to establish him- or herself with long-running series first. Short-story collections are usually published later.[16] Japanese readers have now the opportunity to encounter Tomine as an artist via lifestyle sites, for example, the magazine *In the city.TokyoCultart*, published by the "happy life solution company" beams (five issues so far). Since it was launched in fall 2010, Tomine has created all the cover illustrations, and the second issue even printed eight pages out of his *Scenes from an Impending Marriage* (in western, that is, "reverse" reading direction [fig.]).

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[15] Self/designation for dedicated *yaoi* fans. *Yaoi*: mainly heterosexual female fandom focused on male manga (and anime etc.) characters who are "coupled" with each other to be engaged in homosexual relationships. Transgressive appropriations/parodies of existent major works are highly popular. About one million Japanese women are estimated to be *fujoshi*, irrespective of their commitment's extent.

[16] A good example being Shirai Yumiko: Her "TENKEN" (Jap. *Tenkensai*) sold 80.000 copies when printed in book (*tankōbon*) form 2008. Her first short-story anthology was published by IKKI Comix in 2010.

The most significant difference is that Presspop Gallery refrained from pandering to Japanese manga conventions.[17] With the intention of keeping the Japanese edition of *Sleepwalk* as close as possible to the American book edition, they reduced the size of the book only slightly, and opted for hand-lettering [fig.]. The resulting prize of 1,420 Yen (relatively cheap compared to their more recent publications)[18] addresses an adult readership. In contradistinction, the Japanese edition of *SKIM*, alias *GIRL*, costs only 800 Yen (see vol. 1 of "Billy Bat," 2009, 600 Yen). Unlike the majority of translated western comics, including *Sleepwalk*, *GIRL* excels in trying to adjust a foreign graphic novel to domestic Japanese expectations by means of the publication format. The size of the hardcover Groundwood Book edition—18cm (w) x 26cm (h)—was changed into a handy soft cover *tankōbon* of 12,7cm x 18,8cm (duodecimo, slightly different from B6), and girted with a typically Japanese paper belt (*obi*), which announced in big characters: "It sucks to be 16" (16歳は最低だ。). With the paper wrapper, Japanese script intrudes the cover[19] which otherwise relates the names of author, artist and translator in Latin letters indicating foreigness. Likewise by mutual agreement with the Tamakis, the title was altered: the mysterious and, as we learn, highly personal name Skim, which rendered in Japanese *kana* syllabary would not trigger the English connotations, was turned into the typecasting and esay-to-grasp anglicism *GIRL*. (I will come back to this in my next section).

Also noteworthy as a difference from *Sleepwalk*, whose lettering looks even more hand-made then the original, is the replacement of the free-hand font by phototypesetting (which also applies to the Japanese edition of Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*, 2011). Hannah Miodrag asserts, that "the visual apparatus categorizes typescript as narration and freehand as diary …" (2010: 316); yet, this is not the case in Japanese comics. Phototypesetting has become the norm in manga since more and more complicated Sinojapanese characters entered the pages (due to a readership advancing

[17] This distance towards mundane manga culture, its literacy and genre bonds, applies also to ShoProBooks,a subsidiary of the major manga publishers Shogakukan, Shueisha und Hakusensha: http://www.shopro.co.jp/english/index.html. Titles include BD in A4 size (Nicolas de Crécy *Période glaciaire*, Christian Volckman *Renaissance*; similar to Lewis Trondheim *Mr. O*, Kodansha 2003); American comics (Frank Miller, Alan Moore etc.) in B5. An exception is *Fun Home* (A5, like the original).

[18] Chris Ware *Jimmy Corrigan* (vol. 1 2007: 2,415 Yen; vol. 2 2010: 2,940 Yen; vol. 3 20120: 3,885 Yen).

[19] There is no Japanese script on the cover of *Sleepwalk*.

in age). In order to ensure the legibility of these characters on pages of poor quality (with respect to the material as well as the printing), handwriting had to be avoided, or more precisely, it was allocated the magazine margins for artists to address their readers personally (in book editions, it appears mainly in short epilogues). The shrinking in size—usually from magazine serialization (about A4), in *SKIM*'s case from the hardcover picture-book like edition to the *tankōbon* format, is another factor. Mentioned in passing, not all lines which are blotted out in the English original, reappear canceled in the Japanese edition (for ex., En. p. 70, second tier, second panel; in the second "diary entry" on p. 7 the line about the colors black/red is rendered with putting the word in parantheses instead of cancelling it),[20] and the arrangement of lexia, too, differs occasionally. This causes aesthetic losses and even misunderstanding. The overall impression becomes less personal, lacking the homogeneity which unites linework and letters; and the two different levels of monologue—restrospective and concurrent comment—grow hazy. Japanese readers familiar with girls' manga are used mainly to the second; the phototypesetting invites them to read the first kind of monologue as it were the second. Besides the lettering, there are at least two more formal characteristics which undermine the closeness to girls' (shōjo) manga suggested by the title of the Japanese edition. In shōjo manga, black (=Asian) hair is not necessarily rendered pictorially in black. Rather, changes of hair color indicate varying emotional states, and they also help to distinguish characters from each within a monochrome visual media. That is to say, signifier and signified, as well as different signifiers in their relation to each other, do not primarily serve the purpose of realist representation, referring to an extratextual reality. But Skim's hair color—in its contrast to her "blond" class-mates, and including her later bleaching experiment—is to be taken literally, as are the blackened pages. While in manga (and especially in shōjo manga with its multiple time lines) blackening is conventionally employed as an indicator of flashbacks, in *SKIM*, it denotes night-time and connotes the protagonist's dark mood (or "dark" inclinations to Goth and Wiccan subcultures—which, disputably, approximates its function as "emotio-scapes"/情景 in manga).

[20] Handwritten words as integral part of the visual dimension of single panels, for ex. En. p. 22, bottom tier, first panel, or p. 52, second bordered panel, are accompanied, or even buried, by Japanese footnote-like translations in phototypesetting.

In short, appealing to Japanese manga readers by means of the above-mentioned assimilation efforts[21] was well-intentioned and courageous, but obviously not successful because misleading. According to Nagai, only 1.000 copies of the inital 7.000 print run have been sold so far.

3. Visibly "Japanese"

In *SKIM*, the protagonist's ethnic issues seem to be secondary: she does not address them verbally, and with Keiko, only her middle name points to "Japaneseness." However, pictorially (that is, on the level of *monstration*), "Japaneseness" is on the spot, and much more apparent than in most of Tomine's panels. This is mainly due to Skim's "Japanese" instead of "universal" face. Its unsettling impact surfaces in describing it as "ugly," which not only Japanese readers do (Randle 2011). Such rejection occurs whenever readers who aim at empathy, at diving into the fictional world, find Skim's face too particular to be put on as a "mask." This face balks at being appropriated; it demands to be acknowledged as "foreign," as individual in its own right. Furthermore, readers whose gaze is conditioned by manga culture, find it even difficult to discern who the protagonist of *GIRL* is: Skim's eyes are too small to guide recognition; and as distinct from the Groundwood book edition (2008) whose cover sets the agenda, Japanese readers have to wait for Skim's first close-up until p. 13 (En., last tier, last panel)—if this small panel may count as a close-up at all.

In the remaining part of my paper, I shall touch briefly upon the different cover illustrations and their implications, before raising two issues: What suggests that Skim is specifically Japanese, not Asian in general? (After all, excluded from the birthday party [En. pp. 83-87] is not only Skim but also the Vietnamese Hien Warshowski.) And how does the absence of this element in the promotion of *GIRL* relate to the marginal pictorial role of ethnicity and race in manga?

The cover of the Groundwood edition presents a cut-off close-up of the protagonist which draws attention to her "Japaneseness" by means of the contrast between color (red, yellow) and monochromy as well as the brush-like, swelling linework, a

[21] As distinct from the original three-part structure, the Japanese edition is divided into five parts which leads to the separation of double spreads and, thus, the interruption of the visual flow.

"Japaneseness" which can further be inferred from the shape of her eyes and the letters forming the name "Tamaki." *GIRL* replaces this by the double spread which pictures Skim's imagined kiss with Ms. Archer in the woods, at the end of part I (En. pp. 40-41). While in the book, this double spread places the couple on the left side (close to the preceding events, that is, the fictional "past"), for the new cover it had to be flipped. Also, it was colored red. The absence of spectacular polychromy suggests a novel not comics; the color itself points to femininity. In short, the publisher tried to make Skim accessible not via her "Japaneseness" but her being a "girl." Furthermore, the new cover makes readers expect a story set in a self-contained female realm, or perhaps even a story about lesbianism. While this topic is not necessarily at the center of this comics' narrative, it is not necessarily unfamiliar to Japanese readers either. Fictional homoerotic relationships between girls have a long tradition in modern Japan, dating back to prewar girls' novels in girls' magazines as well as the all-girls Takarazuka musical theatre. In girls' manga, male homosexuality became a crucial trope in the 1970s and later the core of the Boys' Love genre, as it is called in Japan today.[22] But some BL artists also ventured into depicting lesbian love. Yamagishi Ryōko (b. 1947) was apparently the first to draw a respective bed scene.[23] In the girls'-manga magazines of the 1970s, it was easier to depict homosexual bed scenes than heterosexual ones, because editors found the first to be further afar from reality. The fact that beautiful homosexual boys have been enjoying more popularity (among heterosexual female readers) than girls hints at the fantasy factor prevalent in these manga tales. This applies largely also to the new genre of Girls' Love—*yuri* (lilies)—for which the first special magazine was launched in 2003 (Maser 2011).

While connotations like the generic ones sketched above may be regarded as specifically Japanese by foreign manga fans (although being too "natural" for Japanese

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[22] Western fans prefer the names *shōnen'ai* (lit.: love between boys; in Japanese, signifying the early phase of the genre) and *yaoi* (abbr. of *yama nashi, imi nashi, ochi nashi* = no climax, no meaning, no closure/punch line; in Japanese today used for fan creations and rather explicit contents; see footnote 15). The latter is also written "801" (since the numbers can be pronounced "ya-o-i"). An early response to the recent yaoi boom in manga form began in 2006 as a webcomics: Kojima Ajiko's "Tonari no 801-chan" (My neighbour Yaoi-chan). It relates funny episodes experiences of a male nerd with his girl friend who is a yaoi fan (or *fujoshi*, rotten girl). Interestingly, it was Nagai Hajime, editor of *GIRL* (*SKIM*), who put this webcomic into book form and on the market (for Ohzora Shuppan 2006). He did not anticipate that until December 2010, 500.000 copies would be sold.

[23] In "Shiroi heya no futari" (The pair in the white room, in: *Ribon*, Febr. 1971).

female readers to be nationalized), non-manga readers are likely led to categorize Skim as "Japanese" (and not generally Asian) by art historical references: her face being two times visually equated with a Noh mask (En. p. 48, 73),[24] and reminding viewers of *ukiyoe* wood-cut prints, the emblem of western Japonisme (although the past did know cut-offs as extreme as in the Groundwood cover). Paul Gravett, for example, rediscovers Utagawa Kuniyoshi's "sensitive faces of women" in Skim (not because of a lack of manga reading experience, but a Kuniyoshi exhibition at the Royal Academy, presumably). In his article (2009), Jillian Tamaki is quoted admitting that "it seems the ukiyoe influence is deeper in my subconscious that I gave it credit for," but also that she never intended her character to reflect Japanese prints. And while Gravett fancies a triangle of Kuniyoshi (1797-1861), *SKIM* and contemporary manga, Tamaki does not say anything about the latter.

Whether consciously or not, the Groundwood cover illustration leans upon western traditions of Japonisme as part of the collective visual memory.[25] Japanese viewers, however (or those familiar with Japanese art history), associate less the 18th and 19th centuries, that is, the heyday of *ukiyoe*, but rather—historically closer to Noh—the Japanese middle ages (ca. 11th-15th cent.), including the illustrated scrolls of *The Tale of Prince Genji* (*Genji Monogatari emaki*, 12th cent.). Traditionalist painters of the first half of the 20th century turned to this past in quest of modern beauty: Female painter Uemura Shōen (1875-1949), for example, acquired renown by combining Noh and generic beauties (*bijin*/美人). Yet, the ideal of beauty changed tremendously after WWII, last but not least under the influence of girls' manga. Suffice to look at the most

[24] Viewers who are familiar with discourses of "Japaneseness," for example those related to Techno-orientalism, may link the Noh mask—which in *SKIM* echoes the mimic inexpressiveness of the protagonist—to *Blade Runner* (dir.: Ridley Scott, 1982): The dystopic, "Asian"-looking Los Angeles of the future is furnished, among other things, with a huge advertising screen featuring a *maiko* (a "dancing girl," easily mistaken for a *geisha*) with a heavily white-painted, mask-like face and an artificial (="fake") smile.

[25] Manet's *Olympia* (En., p. 44) also evinces Japonist (especially *ukiyoe*) influences: see the dark outline of her body, its planar rendering, the "layering" of the space, the abandonment of pictorial depth, the decentered/asymmetrical composition etc. (which triggered contemporary reception as "dirty" and "lower class.") Against this background (as well as the unreflected popularity of Impressionism in Japan), Morimura Yasumasa (b. 1951) "appropriated" this painting in 1988 under the title of *Portrait - Twin (Olympia)*, featuring himself both as the prostitute (naked and with a blond wig) and her black servant, suggesting to be the twin of both. This won him fame, because it matched the critical concerns of the New Art History in America, where his pseudo-painting was read in relation to "Asia (Japan) as women," or the racial dimension overlooked in previous studies of "the painting of modern life" (T.J. Clarke; Norman Bryson -- not in reference list, yet).

famous manga adaptation of the *Tale of Prince Genji*, Yamato Waki's "Asakiyumemishi" (in *mimi*, 1979-1986, and *mimi Excellent*, 1987-1993, 13 vols) which today prefigurates images of medieval beauties as much as the above-mentioned scroll.

Manga characters, especially in works for younger readers and for girls, do not look Japanese, or Asian, with respect to the shape of their eyes and their bodily proportions. Some critics trace this back to Japan's modernization as westernization, which includes obliviousness of Japan's past as an invader and colonizer in Asia (Nagaike, Miyake). However, as Ōgi (2004) has demonstrated, "westernization" in shōjo manga (from pictorial renderings to narrative settings) cannot be simply equated with occidentalism as an equivalent to western orientalism, at least not with regard to the 1970s and 1980s. At that time it provided Japanese girls with the opportunity to appropriate the "west" with its masculine connotation, and to distance themselves from the dominant discourse of "Japanese femininity," forming their own imaginary community. Unsurprisingly, the beautiful boys, who indulge in homosexual love on manga pages, have been given mainly "western" looks. This criticality, however, is not prevalent anymore. Today, caucasian-looking characters are mostly signifiers without caucasian signifieds, which makes them as much available to consumerist play as to post-ethnic projections (for example, by non-Japanese fans of various ethnicity and race).

Two more aspects deserve attention: firstly, huge eyes may—under certain conditions—represent caucasianness, but they are also expressive requirement of manga as a visual media. With the increase in long, novel-like narratives and in psychologization, eyes gained pictorial importance as windows of the soul. Secondly, the history of censorship, or self-regulation, has to be considered. In 1990, shortly after Tezuka Osamu's death, some Japanese activists accused his representations of Africans (for example, in "Kimba, the White Lion") to be racist. Under American influence, a whole campaign set in, affecting literally mangaesque (exaggerrated) depictions by a whole range of established artists. Many obviously concluded that it is the safest to stick to caucasian-looking, "universal" faces.

[I would like to elaborate on that and give more examples, the point being "deviations from the norm," related to generic and other norms. And the conclusions are still due.]

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