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How creators depict creating manga:

Mangaka manga as authenticating discourse

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1. The prosperity of manga about "drawing manga"

In 2009, a big issue within Japanese media discourse on manga was the boom of stories which depicted manga artists (*mangaka*) as their protagonist and/or the manga industry as their scene of action. Not rarely called *mangaka manga* (lit. manga-artist manga), the abundance of such works showed itself, among other things, in the 2010 edition of *Kono manga ga sugoi!* (This manga is great!), an annual ranking book based on critics' nominations, which was launched in late 2005. In the male-manga category, "Bakuman" written by Ōba Tsugumi and drawn by Obata Takeshi came first, while Kobayashi Makoto's "Seishun Shōnen Magajin 1978-1983" (*Shōnen Magazine of my youth* 1978-1983) was in third place.[1]

These two works are slightly different insofar as the former takes the form of complete fiction, and the latter presents itself in the form of memoirs by the author himself, but they also have one thing in common: their serialization in boys' weeklies, widely read within the Japanese manga market, namely *Weekly Shōnen Jump* and *Weekly Shōnen Magazine*. In other words, these mangaka manga are not only popular

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[1] As works with *mangaka* as their main motif, the ranking book introduced further Tatsumi Yoshihiro's retrospective *Gekiga hyōryū* (A drifting life), and Yamada Naito's *Beatitude*, a Boys'-Love style retelling of the *Tokiwa-sō* legend (which refers to the apartment house of the same name, the site of collaboration between Tezuka Osamu and younger manga artists in the mid-1950s).

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with a limited readership—that is, readers who have a profound knowledge of manga (including manga history) and critically assess both the model behind the depicted mangaka image and its manner of depiction—but also a much broader readership which usually consumes manga as entertainment.

In an essay published at the end of the 1980s, Ōtsuka Eiji pointed out the emergence of "industry (*gyōkai*) manga", i.e. insider stories to be enjoyed on the condition of familiarity with the "industry" = "behind-the-scene circumstances for creators" (Ōtsuka 1988: 87-91). Ōtsuka spoke of the "age of industry" with respect to the fact that artists and editors came to the fore of manga works in particular and the media in general, and that persons related to the cultural commodity of manga were commodified themselves. Here, consumers began to "share information, values and even illusions with the industry's insiders" (Ōtsuka 1988: 74). When related to Jean Baudrillard's theory of consumer society, this current may indicate the emergence of a production space which has turned into a simulacrum, reproduced in the manga media by its commodified agents and shared by its consumers. In his analysis, Ōtsuka demonstrated that the success of *Weekly Shōnen Jump* rested upon commodifying its own "system" by disclosing its mode of production to the reader, especially the regulation of manga series in proportion to their print-run and by means of questionnaires (Ōtsuka 1988: 10-11).

Kono manga ga sugoi! approximates Ōtsuka's argumentation when it suggests that the popularity of "Bakuman" can be traced back to its reception as a kind of quasi-virtual "society watching" (2009: 8-9). This authenticity effect is supported by the fact that the manga depicts behind-the-scene episodes and editorial meetings of a manga magazine (the *Weekly Shōnen Jump* of Ōtsuka's analysis, to be precise), and that it refers to Jump artists, works and editors by their real names. So, mangaka manga like "Bakuman" can be regarded as manifestations of a certain imagination and its commodification, an imagining of the production of culture which has been raised by the media as part of manga's shift into a cultural industry.

Yet, the authors of "Bakuman" as well as their editor in charge are quoted in *Kono manga ga sugoi!* with the comment that their depiction of the manga industry was "completely fictional", and that they did not want readers to take their series at face value (2009: 5-7). They suggest authenticity by the implication of continuity with the real manga industry on the one hand, but on the other hand, they deny this claim of authenticity by emphasizing that their story was merely a fabricated commodity. This inconsistency reveals an aspect which cannot simply be settled by calling mangaka manga a simulacrum, or an accomplished copy without any original. That is to say, mangaka manga are not just simulacrum commodities, but processes of “articulation” in which numerous elements related to the authenticity of manga production and especially the mangaka are being assorted and intertwined. The above-mentioned ambiguous attitude toward reality and representation, fiction and nonfiction may emanate precisely from such articulation, and this is the issue at the center of my discussion below.

2. Mangaka as “exemplary agents” constructed by autobiographical elements

With respect to why music journalism is so engaged in discourse about the life of popular musicians (interviews, documentations of privacy, biographies etc.), popular-music researcher Jason Toynbee (2000) assumes that musicians are expected to serve as “exemplary agents” onto whom a variety of values are projected. Such projections include the pop musician as an extraordinary artist and creator of outstanding works, a representative voice of subcultural communities, and a popular hero resisting the tyranny of capital and market. Multilayered expectations toward the musician as an exemplary role model give rise to discourses of “authorship”, that is, exemplary conditions of what a musician (or author) is supposed to be like. And these discourses are incessantly cast back onto the artistic practice of actual musicians and their life, in pursuit of their authorship’s authenticity.

The role of exemplary agent expected from people called artists or creators, which Toynbee discusses, does not only apply to popular music.[2] In comics culture, it is not uncommon for artists to respond to the expected role of exemplary agent by portraying themselves as authentic “authors” with the help of autobiographical

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[2] For example, Howard S. Becker (1982) points out that artists are required to exhibit attitudes and abilities appropriate to ensuring the *raison d’être* of their specific collaborative network for cultural production which he names “art world”, and that they are required to do so by agents of other “worlds”.

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elements. One example is the boom of autobiographical elements in European graphic novels, as introduced by Bart Beaty (2009). According to him, in recent works released by independent European publishers, some artists tend to employ narratives about the creation of comics as signifiers of authenticity. Leaning on Thierry Groensteen's characterization of such works as "the chronicle of the professional life, the *mise-en-scène* of the author's trade in comics", Beaty makes out a respective trend in *bande dessinée,* raising David B.'s *L'Ascension du Haut Mal* as his example (Beaty 2009: 233). In this work (available in Japanese under the title *Daihossa*, Akashi shoten 2007), fragmentary childhood memories are crossed with stories about the author's family as well as the origin and development of "David B.", the comics artist.

One of the forerunners of David B.'s attempt can be found in Art Spiegelman's well-known *MAUS*. Held in high esteem among American underground and alternative comics, *MAUS* is a milestone in regard to deploying elements of daily life and autobiography within comics, but it focuses not only on family relations—first and foremost the relation between Spiegelman and his father—narrated parallel to recollections of the holocaust. One of the characters is Spiegelman himself, as the "author" who writhes with creating his work out of painful memories and private anecdotes.[3] Furthermore, previous work by Spiegelman is inserted into the main narrative, as material related to the story of his family. Thus, *MAUS* provides also a self-interpretation and reconstruction of Spiegelman's artistic career.

Beaty gives the following explanation for the boom of autobiographical elements within graphic novels: Drawing upon the 1970s boom of autobiography in painting, photography and film, young comics artists have been deploying such elements since the 1990s on the one hand in order to warrant the legitimacy of their "authorship", and on the other hand as an aesthetic opportunity to develop a "personal voice" (Beaty 2009: 229). In other words, autobiographical elements are not just one sort of material which may widen a work's range, but means of legitimization which allow for maintaining that this work was created by an "artist".[4]

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[3] See for example sequences where the character Spiegelman is not depicted as an anthropomorphized mouse but as a human wearing a mouse mask. These parts demonstrate clearly that, even as representation, the character Spiegelman is placed on a level different from diegetic characters, namely, that of a self-reflexive "author" (Spiegelman 2003: 201-207).

3. Mangaka as "professionals"

It is noteworthy that the process of expecting and confirming the role of exemplary agent affects the distribution of symbolic rewards, such as reputation. Consequently, the expectation of creators to embody this role is bigger in markets of small-scale production where creators address small-scale communities giving more importance to symbolic than economic rewards (Bourdieu 1996). The American and European examples mentioned above belong mainly to this market of small-scale production.

But what about manga in Japan, where the mass market's impact is particularly strong? When discussing the representation of authors in manga, Yomota Inuhiko treats works by Tsuge Yoshiharu and Nagashima Shinji as exemplary for the deployment of autobiographical elements (Yomota 1999: 268-271). As he points out, "stories about how passionately they attempted to come to terms with the difficult issue of what constituted a true manga, when they were young" (Yomota 1999: 268-270), are at the center of their works.

But whereas for example Nagashima's "Mangaka zankoku monogatari" (The harsh story of a manga artist, 1961), one of the representative works of the 1960s, features a whole range of young "artist-like" mangaka engaged in theoretical discussions about their ideal comics, Tsuge's later short stories, such as "Yoshio no seishun" (Yoshio's youth, 1974) and "Aru mumei no sakka" (An unknown author, 1984), emphasize the rigors of a mangaka's life, accompanied by scepticism and a disillusioned attitude toward idealistic, ivory-tower conceptions of art. As a contemporary example of such autobiographical manga, Yomota mentions the 1980s short stories, in which Okazaki Kyōko recollects her years as an assistant. "There is no idealist sermon of the kind Nagashima's generation got so enthusiastic about, and no realist scent of life à la Tsuge either. Just stories about how she began to use the G-pen which would later determine her style, told in a modest and humorous manner by means of this very G-pen." (Yomota 1999: 272)

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[4] According to Odagiri Hiroshi (2007), the 9/11 shock also disillusioned U.S. mainstream comics artists with respect to their creative activities. Odagiri calls the sort of charity comics, in which artists depicted the event itself as well as their responses and emotions in order to cope with the shock, "comics for healing". This phenomenon can be read as suggesting artists' scepticism toward the role of exemplary agent, the loss of this role, but also its rediscovery and reconstruction.

Recently, Natsume Fusanosuke investigated how the mangaka's image itself, as depicted in Japanese manga, has changed historically from the pre-war years to this day.[5] Summarizing his account briefly, this transformation can be regarded as follows: Due to the rapid industrialization and expansion of scale in manga production since the 1960s,[6] the mangaka's image changed from an autonomous and self-contained individual painter or artist, as symbolized by Tezuka Osamu's self-portrait with beret, to a professional collaborator within an industrial organization, reflecting the complexity of a production system which included, among other things, the division of labor between script and artwork.

The differences in the autobiographical works by Nagashima Shinji, Tsuge Yoshiharu and Okazaki Kyōko also reflect this transition. From the angle of the autobiographically represented role of exemplary agent (where the authenticity of "being a mangaka" has its roots), this transition appears as a shift from depictions of an artistic attitude aimed at the realization of abstract ideals (see the young Bohemians and their coffee-house debates in Nagashima's work) to depictions of the practice of professional life, linked to facts such as techniques, tools and workplace. By mastering tasks of professional life through acquiring technical and professional standards, mangaka come to embody the normative role of a "professional".

An extreme example of such mangaka manga is Aihara Kōji and Takekuma Kentarō's "Saru de mo egakeru manga kyōshitsu" (abbr.: Saruman; Even a monkey can draw manga, 2001-02). This work about two guys who form a team in order to become mangaka, makes the techniques and attitudes required from professionals itself subject to parody. As distinct from Fujiko Fujio's "Manga michi" (Manga road, 1970-72, 77-82, 86-88) which Aihara and Takekuma probably had in mind, "Saruman" shows interest in the small aspects of technique and professional life, rather than the temporal and spatial journey of its protagonists (who stay in their apartment most of the time and do not talk about their past anyway). In contrast, “Manga michi” focuses on the individual development of the later artists, including autobiographical elements such as their initial encounter with Tezuka’s work and their life in Tokyo.

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[5] In his lecture at Hanazono University, Kyoto, July 31, 2009. The Japanese handout is available here: http://blogs.itmedia.co.jp/natsume/2009/08/post-dc4b.html (last access: 2010/8/1).

[6] For the historic transformation of the manga industry see Nakano (2004).

Even if less extreme, many mangaka manga, for example the above-mentioned “Bakuman”, accentuate occurrences of professional life, such as deadlines, meetings and the variable popularity of magazine series, instead of delving into the artist’s initial background and outset. In such manga, people’s imagination of the mangaka’s role as exemplary agent is being re-articulated within the cultural industry, through elements of professional life. Precisely this is characteristic of mangaka manga as commodifications of manga production itself.

4. Mangaka as personality figures

Above, I have related the articulation and representation of the role of exemplary agent (as expected from mangaka) to autobiographical and professional elements. In this final section, I wish to draw attention to the fact, that the conditions which structure the role of exemplary agent, are actually set as values shared within (sub)cultural communities, values which precede individual creators and their work.

As distinct from Toynbee’s approach, Jean-Luc Nancy and Federico Ferrari (2004) focus on how conditions for this role materialize in single works. Drawing on Roland Barthes’ pronouncement of the “death of the author”, they try to recapture the relation between work and author by separating the notion of the latter from the actual person who precedes the work. While Barthes criticized the notion of “author” as personal origin and thus the authority which precedes the work and governs its particularities, Nancy and Ferrari regard the “author” as impersonal, as both a concept deduced from the semantic properties of the work, and the mechanism for realizing its particularities. This figure is also called creativity.

But in the process of its recognition by the reader, it often happens that the “author” leads the reader to ascribe properties of the work to the character of a clearly imagined person. According to Nancy and Ferrari, such cases are mediated by the “author’s portrait” (ranging from literal picture to biographical fragments and derived from the creator as an actual person). In other words, the “author’s portrait” lends a face, a personal corporeal image originating in the creator, to the character which supposedly reveals itself in the work's specific meaning. People incessantly project their desire of authorship—their wish to actually see the impersonal concept of "author" and thus the representation of creativity—into the author's portrait as a personal figure ("Whoever created such a work must be an appropriate person like this one!").

One important aspect of mangaka manga is that these comics give rise to the mangaka figure, or character as the author's portrait within the work itself. Mangaka manga do not only imply that expectations toward the role of exemplary agent are represented by creators themselves; through the mangaka character which is a figure of pseudo-personality, they also bundle up readers' desires to fix the image evoked by the work into a personality, while projecting this desire onto social relations including the creator. Thus, the beret in Tezuka's self-portrait curbed the self-awareness of later mangaka who grew up reading Tezuka's manga.

According to Ōtsuka Eiji, Tsuge Yoshiharu's attempts at fragmentarily commodifying his private life through photos and texts, and Kajiwara Ikki's scripts which suggested to be "true stories", last but not least by diegetic appearances of the writer himself, have one thing in common: both blur the boundaries between work and person by reproducing in life the "author's portrait", that is, an image actually evoked by the work (Ōtsuka 1988: 236-240). Tsuge Yoshiharu who became famous as a writer of autobiographical manga (which, in reference to the modern Japanese "I-Novel" are not rarely called "I-Manga" in Japan), has proven to have a special knack in his real life for dealing with the authorship readers deduced from his work and fixed through diegetic characters who seem to be his alter ego.

Shimamoto Kazuhiko's mangaka manga titled "Hoero pen" (Comic bomber, since 2001) provides another interesting example. Drawn as a parody of the passionate strokes of male-oriented "hot-blooded" (*nekketsu*) manga, this story about the fictitious mangaka Honoo Moyuru tells about overcoming various tasks and crises typical for a mangaka's professional life. Its fascination owes as much to the depiction of the protagonist's astonishing skills as to his jokes about professional standards.

In this case too, readers tend to equate the protagonist Honoo with its creator Shimamoto. However, what readers try to find in Shimamoto through the figure of

Honoo are not traces of autobiographical elements, but skills and standards available whenever difficulties and tasks of a mangaka's professional life are to be faced. Shimamoto himself seems to accept this authorship which readers find in Honoo, strategically linking it to his behavior as an actual person. In addition, it is noteworthy that the public unemployment office's website "Hellowork for 13year-olds" which gives advise on how to take up your favorite career, recommends Shimamoto's "Hoero pen", along with autobiographies and collections of interviews, as a reference book for becoming a mangaka.[7] Thus, the image of authorship fixed by the readers with respect to Honoo, returns to them, taking on the form of a discourse on the role of exemplary agent.

On closer inspection, we find the "mangaka's portrait" in various places, not only inside works, but also on flaps and book jackets, in postscripts to book editions, and in the table of contents of manga magazines. These "author" figures fragmentarily evoke and personalize a certain image of authorship. In tandem with the mangaka's image as exemplary agent, this image of authorship is being shaped through imaginations of manga production which appear in the form of mangaka manga.

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[7] See the mangaka section of the public Japanese website: http://www.13hw.com/job/02_02_03.html (last access: 2010/8/1).

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