

**REVIVING THE POWER OF STORYTELLING:
POST-3/11 ONLINE “AMATEUR” MANGA**

Shige (CJ) Suzuki

The City University of New York – Baruch College

Prose writers, of course, can be very evocative, and I appreciate what they do, but I find there is nothing like thrusting someone right there. And, that’s what I think a cartoonist can do.¹

– Joe Sacco, comics journalist

There is, or used to be, this concept of the ‘objective reporter’ who goes out and records the facts. But that’s bullshit.²

– Sarah Glidden, creator of graphic novel

How to Understand Israel in 60 Days or Less

Introduction: Comics Respond to Japan’s Triple Disaster

Japan’s triple disaster – the massive earthquake on March 11, 2011 that caused the tsunami and the subsequent nuclear meltdown – prompted vexing questions about postwar national policies and the economic structure, raising citizens’ awareness of social and political concerns after a long period of “depoliticization.”³ The catastrophe, collectively referred to as “3/11,” triggered a massive civic demonstration not seen since the 1960s’ Anpo opposition movement.⁴ The 3/11 disaster also has prompted cultural

¹ Joe Sacco, “Underground(s): Robert Williams’ Presentation from 2002 UF Comics Conference,” *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 2004 (accessed November 3, 2013, http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v1_1/sacco).

² Sarah Glidden, “Meanwhile...Comics Journalism and Sarah Glidden,” *Bad at Sports: Contemporary Art Talk*, May 12, 2013 (accessed October 13, 2013, <http://badatsports.com/2013/meanwhile-on-comics-journalism-and-an-interview-with-sarah-glidden>).

³ Masao Miyoshi and Harry Harootunian, “Introduction,” in Masao Miyoshi and Harry Harootunian, eds., *Postmodernism and Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989).

⁴ For the post-disaster anti-nuclear demonstration, see Piers Williamson, “Largest Demonstrations in Half a Century Protest the Restart of Japanese

production by artists in diverse fields through which they urged us to reflect on what the 3/11 disaster brought to the victims, local people, the nation, and beyond.⁵ Such responses have not been limited to socially established “art” forms. Some artists have chosen more familiar and everyday forms of cultural expression such as street performances, graffiti, and cover songs.⁶ Japanese comics or *manga* is also one of such vernacular media employed in response to this disaster.

In Japan, where manga are embraced by the public, it is not surprising that manga would be one of the cultural outlets for narrating, discussing, and examining the 3/11 disaster and its aftermath. In fact, several Japanese *manga-ka* (comics artists) produced works to give shape to their sorrow, confusion, and frustration as well as the compassion that they felt for disaster victims. Within a couple of years after the disaster, several manga about 3/11 were published, including: Shiriagari Kotobuki’s *Anohi kara no manga* [Manga from That Day], Hagio Moto’s *Nanohana* [Cole Flowers], Hirai Toshinobu’s *Higashi Nihon daishinsai: Kimi to mita fūkei* [Great East Japan Earthquake: The Scenes I Saw with You], Suzuki Miso’s *Boku to Nihon ga furueta hi* [The Day I and Japan Trembled], and Imashiro Takashi’s *Genpatsu genma taisen* [Nuclear Plants: The Great Battle with Genma].⁷ Some of these manga employ the generic conventions of fantasy or speculative fiction; others document the disaster through “reportage manga,” based on the artists’ own experience and research.⁸ All of these

Nuclear Power Plants,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 10 (2012) (accessed August 8, 2013, http://www.japanfocus.org/-Piers_Williamson/3787).

⁵ In her essay for *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, Akiko Mizoguchi introduces eight Japanese artists, including novelists, painters, and filmmakers, who created artwork as a response to Japan’s triple disaster.

⁶ Ethnomusicologist Noriko Manabe documented how music was utilized in the anti-nuclear demonstration after 3/11. In addition, Jon Mitchell discusses an anonymous graffiti artist “281_Anti Nuke” who has been active around Tokyo.

⁷ Japanese names in this paper are used in Japanese order – family names followed by given names – except when authors prefer Western rendering of their names in their essays in English.

⁸ It should be noted here that we also witnessed the swift rise of international responses and alliances made *through* this popular medium.

manga, which I call “post-3/11 manga,” visually narrate how the authors experienced the crises and confusion as well as the post-disaster reality in which people were struggling to recover from the devastation while worrying about the dangers of nuclear power pollution.

While many of these cartoonists are professionals with a relatively long career of working with commercial publishers, many amateur and/or non-professional cartoonists have also produced and self-published their works of manga online. Some of these authors quickly gained a large following of readers who subsequently shared links and comments to the online manga via social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Mixi, and others. Before long, a few exceptional works of the self-published online manga were re-published in book form by commercial publishers and sold at bookstores, reaching a much wider readership.

This paper discusses post-3/11 online manga, created by “amateur” or non-professional cartoonists who mobilized social media such as websites, blogs, and social network services (SNS) for production, publication, distribution, and communication.⁹ My interest in these non-

Within six months of the disaster, French artist/editor Jean-David Moravan started a comics anthology project, *Magnitude 9: Des Images pour le Japon*, which includes both Japanese and American cartoonists’ works and illustrations. In the UK, the *Comics Alliance* also initiated a comics anthology, *Spirit of Hope*, in which domestic and international artists contributed their short comics/manga works. Within Japan, cartoonist Adam Pasion, who lives in Nagoya, started a similar comics project, *Aftershock: Artists Respond to Disaster in Japan*, through the online fundraising website Kickstarter. The project was successfully funded for publication, collecting about \$3,800, over \$1,000 more than the goal. These comics publishing projects, initiated by a few individuals located in geographically different places, were connected and developed into a collective project, demonstrating domestic and international cooperation through comics production beyond linguistic and national borders. These domestic and international examples testify again to the fact that comics exist not only as a form of entertainment or of individual expression but also as a medium for communication as well as one that shapes solidarity and cooperation.

⁹ Although the word “amateur” might be generally associated with “unskilled,” it does not necessarily apply to these two artists. The term “non-commercial” might be more precise, but, as I shall discuss later,

professional cultural productions stems from a couple of the following reasons. First, their works offer personalized and local responses to 3/11 from an individual standpoint and, therefore, provides multiple experiences of the disaster, often including empathetic responses to the victims. Their visual narratives recorded and/or gave shape to the creators' emotional reactions to what happened in the disaster from the perspectives of the "ordinary" citizen, which constitute a "cultural repository" of the tragedy from individuals (in contrast to the disaster narratives by the state or the mass media). Second, their works were produced and circulated through non-conventional routes, different from the already-established publication and distribution system in Japan; thus, their online manga are relatively free from commercial and institutional demands, restraints, and censorship.

Third, in relation to the previous point, readers who have played the role of distributor and commentator via various social media also shared their online manga. The use of social media by the readers resulted in a much wider circulation of the online manga than was initially foreseen, some of which go beyond manga's narrowly defined, compartmentalized fandom communities.¹⁰ Using the term "media convergence," media scholar

Kizuki (and possibly Misukoso, too) have produced and sold their works at manga/fanzine events, which can be considered as a commercial activity. For this reason, I use "amateur" or "non-professional cartoonist" in this essay.

¹⁰ Manga scholar Jaqueline Berndt discusses the importance of exploring "manga's sociocritical potential," stating that Japan's triple disaster "suggest[s] the need to reconsider what role manga may play in contemporary Japanese society besides serving short-sighted economic and national purposes, or affective interest of (sub)cultural groups." After pointing out some methodological problems of manga criticism, she claims that "the real task (of manga criticism)" is "not only to foreground the affective aspects of manga culture as such but also to highlight their fundamental relationality, involving creators, editors, and readers, generic genealogies, and sites of media consumption. My paper partially responds to this assertion by examining the alternative, non-traditional way of manga production and circulation. See Berndt, Jaqueline, "The Intercultural Challenge of the 'Mangaesque,'" in Jaqueline Berndt and B. Kümmerling-Meibauer, eds., *Manga's Cultural Crossroads* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

Henry Jenkins discusses this sort of cultural production and circulation that “depends on consumers’ active participation.”¹¹ Unlike Jenkins, my focus lies not so much in the entertainment industrial practice or its connection to a new business model, but rather in the phenomenon of citizens’ deployment of manga along with new technological media in the context of Japan’s catastrophic disaster and its recovery.

In the following sections, I will examine two representative examples of such post-3/11 online manga by non-professionals: Misukoso’s *Itsuka nanohana batake-de* [Field of Cole: Remember the Great East Japan Earthquake] and Kizuki Sae’s *Shinsai nanoka-kan* [Seven Days in the Disaster].¹² In principle, both online manga, respectively created by two different women, portray people (including the cartoonists themselves) who were directly and indirectly affected by the 3/11 disaster. These works of manga were first serialized or published online, and then instantly circulated and shared by its readers. Before long, commercial publishers recognized the popularity of these manga and began publishing them in book format. Particularly, I will focus on demonstrating how these online manga resist the so-called “information fatigue,” which consists of the psychological tiredness that comes from desensitization to repeated exposure to media, in addition to the rising amnesia that affected people soon after the disaster. Based on Walter Benjamin’s theory about the nature of “storytelling” and how significant information about people can be portrayed, I will expand on the effectiveness of graphic storytelling, its resilience to the mass mediated images and information, as well as its ability to maintain human empathy towards the disaster victims.

Non-Professional Online Manga by Misukoso and Kizuki

Japan’s 3/11 disaster brought about sizable destruction and the loss of many lives in the Tohōku region. The rest of us also “experienced” the disaster through mass media and other sources, feeling stunned, saddened, and powerless at the sight of painful images of the devastation and victims.

¹¹ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 3.

¹² The English translation of Misukoso’s *Field of Cole* is available on Amazon Kindle. When a publisher asked to publish her manga, she proposed the condition that her manga would be translated and published in English with the hope that non-Japanese readers would also remember the disaster victims.

Yet, we also witnessed the swift rise of domestic and international cooperation, alliance, and solidarity in the relief efforts and assistance, which also attested to the resilience and compassion of the people, who were affected both directly and indirectly by the disaster. In her book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, American critic Susan Sontag writes about compassion toward the suffering of others: “Compassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers. The question is what to do with the feelings that have been aroused, the knowledge that has been communicated.”¹³

One such example of Sontag’s claim is Misukoso’s online manga titled *Field of Cole: Remember the Great East Japan Earthquake*. Misukoso is a pseudonym used by Ishizawa Mihoko, a graduate student living in Tokyo, who had been managing her own blog called *Misukoso!* on which she had posted her mini-manga series before the disaster. The opening episode in the book edition of *Field of Cole* explains her initial motive for creating manga about the people who were afflicted in the disaster.

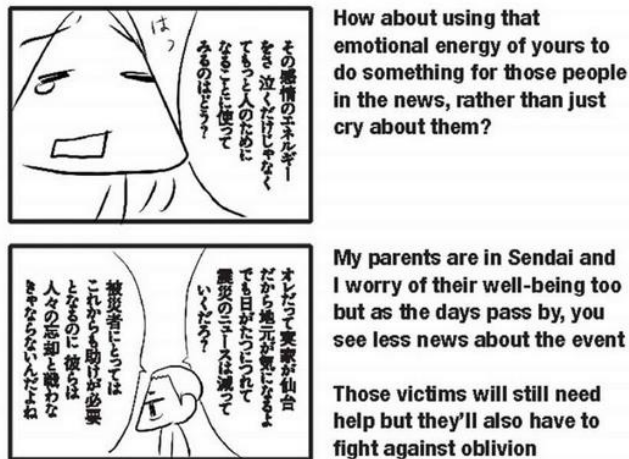


Figure 1. Misukoso, *Field of Cole*, English-language Kindle version

¹³ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2004), 101.

Like many of us, Misukoso learned of the disaster in the Tōhoku region from the mass media such as TV, radio and newspaper. Facing the relentlessly painful images and horrible stories that were continuously pouring in, Misukoso was psychologically overwhelmed, only able to sob over the disaster victims. One day her partner set spurs to Misukoso by encouraging her to express her feelings and emotions about the disaster victims in the form of manga, rather than just sit passively responding to the news in a counter-productive manner. She began to collect personal stories and experiences from diverse sources and serialized them into a short-narrative manga on her own blog. To put it another way, Misukoso *translated* her compassion into action, as Sontag suggests, by narrativizing the memories and experiences of the suffering of the disaster victims in the form of manga and transmitting them to her readers.

Though her visual style is simplistic and even cartoony with constant ellipsis of background depiction, Misukoso’s manga still conveys vivid and emotionally appealing narratives about some of the victims: an elderly woman who died while saving her grandson from the tsunami, children who lost their parents and became orphans, an elderly couple living within seven kilometers of the nuclear plants who decided to live (and die) there, and people who sacrificed themselves for the well-being of others. Once her graphic narratives about the disaster victims were posted on her blog, her manga about the 3/11 disaster quickly attracted readers from all over Japan, which led to “30,000 views in the first week.”¹⁴ Such a high number of page views within a short period was attained by the use of social network services by which the readers posted links and added comments on her manga. Such rapid popularity online prompted a commercial publisher, Fusōsha, to publish her manga in a 168-page manga book in 2011.

Another post-3/11 online comic that follows a similar pattern of production, circulation, and publication is Kizuki Sae’s *Seven Days in the Disaster*. Kizuki is a housewife who sometimes works as a freelance cartoonist/illustrator for local businesses. Unlike Misukoso, Kizuki herself was a disaster victim. On the day of the disaster, she was living in Sendai,

¹⁴ Chris Cooper, “Japan’s Tsunami, Quake Spurs Manga Novel,” *Bloomberg Businessweek*, May 27, 2012 (accessed October 8, 2013, <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2012-05-27/japan-s-tsunami-quake-spurs-manga-novel-for-forgotten-victims>).

Miyagi Prefecture, where the effects of the earthquake were severe. As the title indicates, she documented the earlier days of her experience in the crises and visualized it as a 32-page manga on “Pixiv,” a Japanese-language illustration/manga sharing online community, an equivalent to English-language online community “deviantArt.” Kizuki’s work depicts her struggles in the post-disaster condition, her life with the lack of basic lifelines, the fear of aftershocks and radiation poisoning, the townspeople’s suffering, and the eventual evacuation from her beloved town. Similar to Misukoso’s case, Kizuki’s work also gained much attention via social media, which has received more than 170,000 views to date.¹⁵ When she posted her manga on Pixiv on April 4, 2011, less than one month after the disaster, it was drafted only in pencil because, according to Kizuki, she was afraid of making mistakes if she penned it in ink due to the dizziness she felt due to post-disaster stress and the constant aftershocks.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the unfinished state of her manga added a sense of urgency and authenticity to her depiction of the crisis and the stressful condition of the disaster victims. This further stimulated the circulation of her manga, which was labeled by her readers as “a manga created by a disaster victim.”

Behind the advent of these “amateur,” non-commercially produced post-3/11 online manga, there is a rich and dynamic subcultural activity/practice in Japanese manga culture: manga *dōjinshi* (fanzine) events. Typically, a manga *dōjinshi* event refers to a grassroots-organized fair among manga fans to exhibit, sell, and purchase their self-published manga works. The biannual “Comic Market” in Tokyo is a representative example. Scholars and researchers have often discussed this “worlds’ largest regular gathering of comic fans” in Tokyo,¹⁷ but similar, smaller-sized events also have been developed and organized all over Japan. Historically, this amateur participatory culture became prominent in the early 1970s when the “cheap and portable offset printing and photocopying facilities rapidly became available to the public”¹⁸ but it has now extended to online communities such as Pixiv and other digital content-sharing

¹⁵ As of December 15, 2013.

¹⁶ Sae Kizuki, *Shinsai nanoka-kan* (Tokyo: Prevision, 2011), 112.

¹⁷ Fan-yim Lam, “Comic Market: How the World’s Largest Amateur Comic Fair Shaped Japanese *Dōjinshi* Culture,” *Mechademia* 5 (2010), 232.

¹⁸ Sharon Kinsella, *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Contemporary Japanese Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2000), 140.

websites with the rise of new media technologies such as scanner, illustration software, and Web 2.0 technologies.¹⁹



Figure 2. Kizuki Sae, *Shinsai nanoka kan*. The image is taken from the draft sketch of the manga posted on Pixiv.net

¹⁹ By social media, I refer to the Internet-based interactive and communication websites or applications through which users can exchange and share information and self-created contents.

The growth of manga *dōjinshi* has cultivated a fertile ground for empowering the cultural industry of manga in general, as exemplified by the fact that several professional cartoonists have emerged from this participatory culture.²⁰ In one of her earlier manga episodes, Misukoso depicts herself as actively participating in amateur manga production and its community, including the Comic Market. Similarly, in *Seven Days in the Disaster*, Kizuki also presents herself as being dedicated in amateur manga “sale and exhibit” events such as “Super Comic City” in Tokyo or “Adventure Project (ADV)” in Fukushima Prefecture.

It is no accident that these online manga were created by female cartoonists. Particularly, in the manga *dōjinshi* subculture, the majority of amateur or semi-professional creators are female like Misukoso and Kizuki.²¹ According to Shimotsuki Takanaka, one of the founders of the Comic Market, approximately 90 percent of participants at the first Comic Market in 1975 were female middle- or high school students.²²

The 1970s is chronicled in Japanese manga historiography as the “Golden Age” of shōjo manga when several innovative young artists, who were later called “*24nen gumi*” – such as Hagio Moto, Takemiya Keiko, and Ōshima Yumiko – appeared. Their untraditional works accompanied by diverse stylistic and narrative experimentation enthralled young female readers and, simultaneously, inspired them to produce their own manga. Although the ratio of male cartoonists in fan events has increased in recent years, the DIY-spirited, gender-oriented manga *dōjinshi* subculture has still offered a venue for female non-professional cartoonists.

²⁰ Several professional manga artists to emerge from this participatory culture include the popular cartoonists Togashi Yoshihiro, Kōga Yun, CLAMP, Yoshinaga Fumi, Ono Natsume, etc.

²¹ According to Kinsella, until 1988, “approximately 80 percent of *dōjinshi* artist attending Comic Market were female, and only 20 percent male... During the 1990s, however, male participation in Comic Market increased to 35 percent.” See Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, 112. From a more recent statistic from “Comic Market 35th Year Survey: A Report,” as of August 2010, the number of staff and attendees occupies more than half of the total number, and among the category of manga creator groups, 34.8% are male creators, while 65.2% are female creators.

²² Shimotsuki Takanaka, *Komikku māketto soōseiki* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun Shuppan, 2008), 16.



Figure 3. Kizuki Sae, *Shinsai nanoka kan*

Another gender-oriented characteristic of Misukoso and Kizuki’s online manga is that they inherited the generic conventions of *essei manga* or “essay manga.” An essay manga typically depicts the mundane life of the protagonist – often the cartoonist herself – from a subjective point of view, with simplistic and even “super deformed” drawing style. According to Japanese manga scholar Yoshimura Kazuma, this genre has been cultivated “predominantly [by] women” and because essay manga have often appeared in non-manga magazines (women’s fashion and information magazines) as well as newspapers, essay manga have been well-embraced not only by avid manga fans but also by “regular” adult women readers.²³

²³ Yoshimura Kazuma, “*Essei manga no tokuchō*,” in Shimizu Isao, et. al., eds., *Manga no kyōkasho* (Kyoto: Rinsen shoten, 2008), 197. While as a genre, essay manga has been cultivated mainly by female cartoonists, in recent years several male cartoonists have produced highly acclaimed

With life-like characters in everyday environments, the short narrative form of essay manga often details the author/protagonist's mundane affairs, including daily moments of happiness, wonder, and frustrations. These subject matters about the daily life of the author/protagonist foster an affective intimacy with its targeted reader.²⁴ In particular, both online manga by Misukoso and Kizuki follow both thematic and stylistic conventions of essay manga; however, unlike a typical essay manga, their post-3/11 online manga foreground a condition in which their "everyday" reality has been utterly changed by the disaster.

As mentioned earlier, neither Misukoso nor Kizuki are professional cartoonists. What enabled these "ordinary" citizens to produce, circulate, and publicize their manga is the availability of social media such as Pixiv and online blogs. In Japan, the diffusion rate of mobile technologies (cellphones with video camera devices) is very high, and social media is well embraced by youth and adults. Since 3/11, social media has received much more attention because it was one of the dominant technologies used in the moment of crisis. Cultural anthropologist David Slater and others posit that 3/11 was "the first natural disaster fully experienced through social media," stating that, "almost everything we know now...was significantly shaped by social media."²⁵ In fact, we saw the vivid, terrifying images and scenes of destruction caused by the earthquake and tsunami, such as the washing away of houses, buildings, and towns on such media sources, and many of which were images and

works such as Azuma Hideo's *Disappearance Diary* and Fukumitsu Shigeyuki's *Uchi no tsumatte dō desho?* [What Do You Think of My Wife?].

²⁴ Japanese popular culture scholar Sugawa-Shimada claims the socio-critical aspect of some essay manga by saying that, through the humor and comedic trope, essay manga can address "taboo themes, such as alcoholism, divorce, and death." See Sugawa-Shimada, Akiko, "Rebel with Causes and Laughter for Relief: 'Essay Manga' of Tenten Hosokawa and Rieko Saibara, and Japanese Female Readership," *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 2 (2011), 172.

²⁵ David Slater, Keiko Nishimura, and Love Kindstrand, "Social Media in Disaster Japan," in Jeff Kingston, ed., *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan: Response and Recovery after Japan's 3/11* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 94.

clips contributed by individual citizens who used their own mobile devices to record the disaster.

Some of those clips were broadcast on major television news programs immediately after the disaster hit. In other words, the 3/11 disaster revealed that mass media also had become dependent on social media. Compared to the conventional mass media in which information flows from the center to the periphery, social media has no centralized structure; its rhizomatic structure has enabled a “many-to-many” multidirectional flow of information. Both Misukoso and Kizuki take advantage of the powerful technological innovations to produce, distribute, and publicize their manga as well as to receive feedback from readers.



Figure 4. Misukoso’s manga on her blog

These two post-3/11 manga, powered by social media, can be aligned with “comics journalism” that has become prominent in the field of American comics in recent years. Like “new journalism” in the 1960s and 1970s, comics journalists report non-fictional events not matter-of-factly but create graphic narratives about them by deliberately including creator’s

observations, subjective interpretations, and criticism on what they report. Although Misukoso and Kizuki are not self-appointed comics journalists, such as Joe Sacco, Ted Roll, or Sara Glidden, their works have played a similar role. For instance, while Misukoso was located in Tokyo, she was collecting and selecting information based on her own interests from different sources to produce her graphic narratives. Later in 2011, she also reported her own experience of joining a volunteer program to help disaster victims in Otsuchi-chō, Iwate Prefecture, where the tsunami washed away many homes, buildings, and people. In this “manga reportage,” Misukoso not only details the devastated condition of the visited town but also visualizes the slow recovery process and the psychological impact of the local residents by the disaster.

Likewise, Kizuki’s manga, labeled as a “documentary manga,” details her own experiences of the disaster from the perspective of a housewife and presents learned practical knowledge about how to deal with the post-earthquake hardships from the perspective of an individual or a family. In this regard, we can consider their manga a form of citizen journalism. Citizen journalism is an act of journalism not by professionals but by average citizens who are “playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information.”²⁶ Mobilized by affordable technologies such as smart phones, digital video cameras, and the Internet, we have witnessed the effective use of social media in citizens’ movement in recent years (i.e. The Arab Spring in 2010). Different from professional journalism, citizen journalism often adopts personal and interpersonal views in the form of a narrative.

Whereas typical professional journalism often requires accuracy, objectivity, and detachment prompted by institutional demands, Misukoso and Kizuki’s works reflect the artists’ personal, subjective filters, and interpretations, including their own empathetic responses to others’ sufferings. Such an emphatic attitude found in their graphic narratives has prompted readers to share their work with other readers – sending the link to their friends, their friends’ friends, and strangers – to shape a collective memory of 3/11.

²⁶ Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis, *We Media: How Audiences Are Shaping the Future of News and Information* (Reston, VA: The American Press Institute, 2003), 9.

Mass Media vs. Comics Powered by Social Media

The choice of social media for their publication by Misukoso and Kizuki is also important in relation to the limitations of Japanese manga publishing industry. In her book, *Adult Manga*, Sharon Kinsella analyzes the industrial structure of Japanese mass media: whereas Japanese mass media such as newspaper, radio, and television “have been produced by large media conglomerates which have more binding relations with the government,” publishers “never need to apply for government licenses and have had more freedom than other media corporations.”²⁷ This indicates that, in Japan, the major mass media corporations can be more susceptible to the state control and demands. On the other hand, the publishing industry has maintained relative autonomy and independence from the state, staying away from, if not completely avoid, direct governmental control.²⁸ In fact, Kinsella observes how manga “has displayed a special responsiveness to the changing political current of society.”²⁹ Manga’s political proclivity, particularly its potential of social and political criticism, was observed more in the late 1960s’ and 1970s’ *gekiga*, a type of manga with serious themes for adults, when Japan saw the rise of counterculture.³⁰

However, such political responsiveness seems to have gradually diminished, if not completely disappeared, from manga by the late 1970s, as Kinsella observes that manga had gone from “being an anti-establishment medium” to a “pro-establishment medium”³¹ in parallel with the depoliticization of the Japanese society in general. This transformation, she analyzes, was caused by the industrial restructuring in which editors with a middle-class background predominantly oversaw and managed the cartoonists in their manga production. Moreover, during this period, the

²⁷ Sharon Kinsella, *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Contemporary Japanese Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2000), 6.

²⁸ For the censorship of Japanese manga, see Yoshiyuki Nagaoka, *Manga wa naze kisei sareruno ka?* [Why Are Manga Censored?] (Tokyo: Heibonsha shinsho, 2010).

²⁹ Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, 6.

³⁰ As for *gekiga* and its social and political criticism, see Shige CJ Suzuki, “Tatsumi Yoshihiro’s Gekiga and the Global Sixties: Aspiring for an Alternative,” in Jaqueline Berndt and B. Kümmerling-Meibauer, eds., *Manga’s Cultural Crossroads* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

³¹ Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, 10.

relative autonomy of the publishing industry had weakened with the rise of increasing numbers of tie-ins with other mass media industries, in particular, via a commercial strategy called “media mix.” Known as the “transmedia franchise” in Anglophone countries, media mix is a marketing strategy that aims to create a “synergy effect” to increase profits by adapting one cultural product into multiple media platforms. As Marc Steinberg documents in his book *Anime’s Media Mix*, it has been practiced by Japanese companies since the postwar period and became a common business model in the 1980s.³² This business practice can increase the potential for profitability, fostering close relations between not only different corporations but also different industries, shaping a community of interest. However, it also potentially undermines the autonomy and freedom of each industry and company, as I shall discuss below, some of which were manifested immediately after the 3/11 disaster.

In general, a crisis is an occasion in which invisible or latent social problems become visible. One of the problems that surfaced during the 3/11 crisis was the limited autonomy and freedom of the current mass media structure in Japan, including manga publishing industry. After the disaster, it is known that censorship, or more precisely, self-imposed restrictions, were quickly put in place. For instance, Inoue Tomonori’s science fiction manga, *Coppelion*, serialized in *Kōdansha’s Weekly Young Magazine* that depicts a post-apocalyptic Tokyo after a nuclear disaster caused by an earthquake came close to cancellation, most likely due to the fictional content’s uncomfortable resemblance to the untimely disaster. Its anime adaptation was also planned before 3/11, but the Fukushima nuclear disaster led to its cancellation. Creator Inoue implies that he was pressured not only by the publisher but also by distributors to suspend the magazine serialization immediately after the disaster (but this was averted).³³ The animation broadcast, however, was eventually cancelled.³⁴ Another

³² Marc Steinberg, *Anime’s Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), viii.

³³ See Tomonori Inoue’s Twitter @inotomo2009, March 13, 2011 tweet (accessed May 5, 2012, <https://twitter.com/inotomo2009/status/47143200196009984>).

³⁴ There was no official statement about the anime series after the cancellation until 2013. In October 2013, the anime series was re-planned and broadcasted on NHK-BS.

example is a *yakuza* (Japanese gang) manga series called *Hakuryū: rejendo* (Hakuryū: The Legend), serialized in *Weekly Manga Goraku* published by *Nihon bungei-sha*, which was suspended with the outbreak of the nuclear disaster. The announcement on the publisher’s websites simply reads: “Considering the disaster condition caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake on 11 March, the 18 March issue (1 April on sale) will be the last chapter of the series.”³⁵ The chapter of this manga serialized at this time was titled “The Nuclear Energy Mafia,” which *fictionally* details the Japanese mafia presence behind an electric company. The name of this fictional electronic company is “*Tōto denryoku*,” which inevitably reminds us of “*Tokyo denryoku*” (Tokyo Electric Power Company, TEPCO).

The main story of the manga chapter develops around the idea of corporate corruption, secretive acts, and the exploitation of human lives, all of which became evident, to some degree, after 3/11. In both cases, the real reasons for the cancelation of Inoue’s manga series were not clear. One can surmise it was likely canceled in part out of respect or concern for the disaster victims. However, such self-censorship, known as *jishuku* in Japan, has been culturally ingrained; for instance, most Japanese mass media voluntarily refrained from broadcasting some entertainment TV shows just after the crisis. However, it should be noted here that the publisher’s announcement never mentions, but instead rather discreetly circumvents, the terms “nuclear plant” or “nuclear accident.” Addressing the nuclear issue was and still remains taboo in Japanese mass media and the publishers have less agency and autonomy compared to previous decades.

Another problem exposed by the disaster is the media control and technocracy. After the meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant, the Japanese mainstream media were excessively faithful to the sources of the “authorities” such as the government and TEPCO, thereby failing to provide enough critical perspective of the “authorities.” This resulted in downplaying the situation.³⁶ In addition, after the meltdown of the nuclear

³⁵ See the publisher’s official announcement: “Notice of ‘White Dragon – LEGEND,’” *Nihon bungei-sha*, May 17, 2011 (accessed May 5, 2012, <http://www.nihonbungeisha.co.jp/info/20110317/index.html>).

³⁶ In his book, Japanese media studies scholar Itō Mamoru analyzes the mass media discourse, claiming that the TV media shaped the “optimistic view” immediately after the nuclear accident in Fukushima. See Mamoru

plants, information from the news media was inundated with scientific terminology and complicated measurement units, both of which are unfamiliar to “regular” citizens. The invited “specialists” and “commentators” on news programs also offered conflicting prognoses about the condition of the nuclear reactors and the dangers of radiation. This situation, along with the information overload, generated distrust, confusion, and information fatigue among citizens, even causing traumatic psychological damage due to the sheer volume of information.³⁷

At this juncture, Misukoso and Kizuki’s works, I would argue, maintained their resilience and strength in sustaining human concerns and compassion through the power of graphic storytelling. In “The Storyteller” (1936), Benjamin claims the importance of storytelling is its “ability to share experiences” as countering information from news media (the “newspapers” in his age).³⁸ He writes of the power of storytelling:

The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time.³⁹

Benjamin’s claim is intended to praise the “craft” of the storytellers in the modern period who are capable of reviving (or retaining the “ideal” form of) pre-capitalist “mouth-to-mouth” communication and the collective nature of sharing the experience through storytelling because, for Benjamin, the information from news media only offers the immediate impressions of the lived moment (*Erlebniss*), while storytelling serves to communicate human experience (*Erfahrung*). In other words, compared to information that is easily thrown into oblivion, storytelling, for Benjamin, enralls readers; and even after a long period, it revivifies lived experiences.

Itō, *Terebi wa genpatsu jiko wo dō tsutaeta no ka* [How Did the TV Media Report the Nuclear Accident?] (Tokyo: Heibon-sha shinsho, 2012), 65–67.

³⁷ Kayama Rica, *3 11 go no kokoro o tatenaosu* [Rebuilding the Mind of Post-3/11] (Tokyo: Besutoserāzu, 2011), 113.

³⁸ Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 143.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

Unlike the ephemerality of news or information from the mass media, Misukoso’s and Kizuki’s online manga re-activate the viable function of storytelling in the form of graphic narratives. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan once wrote that comics are a “cool” medium, which is “a highly participational form of expression.”⁴⁰ Comics creator and theorist Scott McCloud also claims the reader’s participation in the production of the narrative with the term “closure,” which fills in the gaps between each frame.⁴¹ Inviting the readers in the generation of the narrative, both online manga make the reader re-experience what happened to the disaster victims; to use comics journalist Joe Sacco’s phrase, they “thrust the reader right there.”⁴²

These two online manga also prompted their readers to share stories of other lived experiences that they learned from these graphic narratives. It is often pointed out that Benjamin’s attitude toward the rapid proliferation of modern technologies in the early twentieth century was ambivalent, but the current, twenty-first century multimedia (or transmedia) environment and communication technologies might realize what Benjamin was hoping for; that is, a potential of storytelling to share lived experiences as a collective.

In the Benjamin’s essay, he compares “story” with “novel” stating, that while a novel produces an isolated reader, a story possesses a collective and participatory nature: “A man listening to a story is in the company of the storyteller; even a man reading one shares this companionship.”⁴³ This idea is similar to what happened with the two online manga shared by the readers via social media. Every time a link to one of their manga was posted online by the readers, the reader’s commentaries – praise, review, or criticism on the manga – were also attached.

These works were shared and circulated among readers located in various places using different kinds of social media (i.e. Twitter, Facebook, Mixi, and blogs, etc.), which goes beyond a narrowly-defined subcultural,

⁴⁰ Marshall McLuhan, “Comics: Madvestibule to TV,” in Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester, eds., *Arguing Comics: Literary Masters on a Popular Medium* (Jackson, MS: The University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 107.

⁴¹ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Paperbacks, 1994), 66–68.

⁴² Sacco, “Underground(s).”

⁴³ Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 156.

sometimes highly compartmentalized, taste community. Collectively shared, these post-3/11 online manga sustain the concerns and compassion for the people who are afflicted by the disaster, and demonstrate the “ability of exchanging experiences” which Benjamin claims is the power of storytelling.

「震災7日間」/「槻月 沙江」の漫画 [pixiv]

http://www.pixiv.net/member_illust.php?mode=medium&illust_id=17905695
pixivに投稿された「槻月 沙江」の漫画です。「まだ余震でペン入れ無理でした。」

タグ 10点じゃ足りない *2010ベストマンガ もっと評価されるべき クリック推奨 希望
本当に無事でよかったです *東日本大震災 *漫画 震災実録



sukekyo @sukekyo

フォローする

これはおもしろかったな。震災にあった7日間のドキュメンタリーマンガ。 / 「震災7日間」/「槻月 沙江」の漫画 [pixiv]
<http://htn.to/JBLVUB>

返信 リツイート お気に入りに登録 2011.04.19 10:01



佐々木真宏 @SasakiTakahiro

フォローする

作品の中の“線”は少しも揺らいでいない。 / 「震災7日間」/「槻月 沙江」の漫画 [pixiv]
<http://htn.to/5ntesR>

返信 リツイート お気に入りに登録 2011.04.19 10:18



谷分章儀 @taniwake

フォローする

わかっててやってるな、最後の3ページ。しかし肝は「希望」と答えた息子の無邪気な笑顔と違いますか。 / 震災7日間（槻月沙江 / 32P） <http://htn.to/oXyv4g>

返信 リツイート お気に入りに登録 2011.04.19 10:20



水無瀬 なぎさ @kumoato

フォローする

震災7日間 | 槻月 沙江 #pixiv pixiv.net/member_illust...
漫画にして残すのは良いこと！ でも感想を書いている人達とすごく温度差を感じた。そっかーこれが目新しく見えるのかー。地震なかった地域じゃ分かんないもんねって。

返信 リツイート お気に入りに登録 2011.04.19 10:21

Figure 5. Readers' comments on Kizuki's manga on Twitter

Postscript: 3/11 is Not Over

This paper has focused on only two representative works of post-3/11 online manga, but there are other similar attempts.⁴⁴ For instance, Nakayama Naoko, a housewife living in Ishimaki, Miyagi, began her own blog site in which she has documented what happened to her family since 3/11 and how they have been coping with the post-disaster life. She set up a website called *Sanriku kozakana netto* [Sanriku kozakana net] with the intent to record her family’s history and memory of 3/11. As part of this project, she also published (first online) a 22-page manga *Neenee shittetaa?* [I Know What Happened] scripted by Nakayama and drawn by Masuda SIN.⁴⁵ In an interview, Nakayama explains her motive: “[a]fter all, the experiences we are sharing are very small. They are just everyday parent and child stories that may not seem like important news. But if the manga or my blog triggers something in people so that they can look back on a tragedy and go on, or learn to trust and believe in their family members, I hope they will keep on reading.”⁴⁶ In contemporary mass media, it is not uncommon to find “human interest stories” in the newspapers or TV news programs. However, they are inadequate or often marginalized due to the limited space and time and filtered through institutional and commercial screenings and inspections. In contrast, like Misukoso and Kizuki, Nakayama details the personal, familial, and communal experiences of the

⁴⁴ Another example is the one by Ōtsuka Hisashi, an elementary school teacher in Fukushima, who produced a manga about the high school students who have gone through life-changing experiences due to the disaster. It was scripted by his colleague Satō Shigeki. Available from: “Manga comics,” Yomiuri.co.jp, November 19, 2012 (accessed May 5, 2013, <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/feature/eq2011/information/20120926-OYT8T00685.htm>).

⁴⁵ This manga was first posted on the website managed by Nakayama for free access. See her website, “Great East Japan Earthquake,” Kozakana, 2011 (accessed May 5, 2012, <http://www.kozakana3.justhpbs.jp/index.html>).

⁴⁶ Ibid. Currently, the booklet format of the manga is available online. Nakayama’s interview was taken from an English-language news article: Kris Kosaka, “Mom Who Blogged about Tsunami Wants People to Remember,” *The Japan Times*, July 5, 2013 (accessed August 8, 2013, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2013/07/05/our-lives/mom-who-blogged-about-tsunami-wants-people-to-remember>).

locals since 3/11, which otherwise would not be taken up as major news media. What is common in these efforts of the “ordinary” citizens is a strong determination to render their personalized and local memories of 3/11 in a form of graphic narrative. What their manga demonstrated is a potential to share lived human experiences together with the readers.

As early as December 2011, the government officially declared a “return to normal” (“*shūsoku sengen*”) regarding the Fukushima nuclear accident. This governmental attempt seems to sweep the disaster under the proverbial rug since solutions to the immense amounts of nuclear waste and polluted water continue to remain unresolved.⁴⁷ More than three years have passed since the 3/11 disaster and residents in Tokyo seem to be back to a “normal” life, away from the disaster where many citizens are still unable to return home (or for some, their hometowns are utterly wiped away). If a collective amnesia might be seeping into the minds of the people, these two manga urge us to revisit the moment of 3/11 and to think and rethink in both cognitively and emotionally engaged ways about the disaster victims and post-3/11 Japan.

⁴⁷ This “declaration” was retracted by the next ruling party in March 2013.