

Destabilizing gender but not race? Effeminate Boys, Caucasian Appearances, and Uncertain 'Gutters' in (Shōjo) Manga

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In his article "De/facing race: towards a model for a universal World Comics" (*Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, 2016) Jeeshan Gazi denies manga the potential to provide a "universal visual language" because of its lack of "transcendence of racial signifiers." As a matter of fact, the ethnic identity of manga characters has been a controversial issue, mainly in regards to the genre shōjo (girls) manga as the stronghold of apparent racial ignorance. Opinions differ notoriously as to whether mangaesque faces and physiques are to be regarded as 'stateless' or rather Caucasian and, in extension of the latter, an idealized self-image of 'the' Japanese. Remarkably, non-Japanese manga-style artists tend to mark ethnicity by means of skin color. Shōjo manga has been critically appreciated for undermining heteronormativity, for example, by featuring effeminate boys in same-sex relationships, and for subverting the aesthetic order of the grid by passing over the gutter in the form of either layered visuals or intervals compressed into mere lines. But while shōjo manga is conceded a destabilizing potential in regards to gender representation and, closely related, page composition, it is denied the very possibility of an in-between positionality with respect to racial signification. Interrelating Japanese theories on the 'gutter' (Jp. *mahaku*, lit. 'the void in between') as well as mangaesque queerness with non-Japanese accounts of racial representation in graphic narratives, this paper addresses the notorious issue of visible ethnic identity in light of a conception of World Comics which acknowledges the irreducible situatedness of 'universal' forms.

Kurzbiografie

Dr. Jaqueline Berndt is Professor in Japanese Language and Culture at Stockholm University. Holding a first degree in Japanese Studies (1987) and a Ph.D in Aesthetics/Art Theory from Humboldt University Berlin (1991), her research and teaching has been informed by visual culture, media aesthetics and museum/exhibition studies, and focused on manga as graphic narratives, anime, and modern Japanese art. Her publications include the co-edited volume *Manga's Cultural Crossroads* (2013), and the monographs *Phänomen Manga* (1995) and *Manga: Medium, Art and Material* (2015).
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