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Manga Bomb:
between the lines of Barefoot Gen

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"The line is the relation"
—William James

The challenge of *Barefoot Gen* (*Hadashi no Gen*, 1973-1987) lies in its use of a conventional manga style to depict an event that is often deemed to be unrepresentable in its violence and trauma—the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima on August 8, 1945. *Barefoot Gen* invites us to address not only the experience of survivors of Hiroshima but also to consider what manga expression brings to our understanding of the atomic bomb, war, and trauma. I propose to pay particular attention to the dynamics of the line, as the key to an analysis of the composition of forces in manga. I also propose to show how *Barefoot Gen* works through the dynamics of the "plastic line", which contributes to its articulation of a politics in which vitality and resilience do not appear to reside outside historical violence but seem to emerge with it.

1. *Barefoot Gen* and shōnen manga

Nakazawa Keiji, the author of *Barefoot Gen*, is a survivor of Hiroshima. At the age of six on August 8, 1945, Nakazawa lost his father, his older sister, and younger brother: their house collapsed on them, and unable to escape the wreckage, the three were burned alive in the fires that raged through the city. Nakazawa, his mother, and two elder brothers survived, suffering not only from the privations of postwar Japan but also from trauma and radiation illness. His manga, today compiled in ten volumes, not only shows the dropping of the bomb and the immediately ensuing horrors but also

recounts the severe difficulties faced by the remaining family members over the next years.

Because Nakazawa is an atomic bomb victim and survivor, it is possible to read his manga as an eyewitness account of the atomic bomb. The manga is full of historical references that invite us to read it as such. At the same time, *Barefoot Gen* is faithful to the conventions of *shōnen manga* or boys' manga. As such, the manga disappoints certain expectations vis-à-vis trauma and representation, particularly if readers expect the experience of Hiroshima to defy our received ways of ordering words and images. At the same time, in its fidelity to shōnen manga, *Barefoot Gen* is somewhat idiosyncratic in the broader context of atomic bomb literature and cinema.

There are currents in film and fiction dealing with traumatic experiences that encourage us to expect signs of the inability of ordinary perception and received forms of representation to come to terms with the indescribable violence and unbearable suffering unleashed on Hiroshima. In *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, for instance, the Japanese man continually admonishes the French woman who claims to have seen everything in Hiroshima: "You have seen nothing of Hiroshima". The experience of the atomic bomb at Hiroshima remains unknowable, unspeakable, unrepresentable. Similarly, in Hara Tamiki's devastating short story of Hiroshima, "Natsu no hana", words and temporal sequences buckle and break under the pressure of efforts to convey an experience of hell that ultimately defies comprehension and narration. In a manga about the atomic bomb, readers might expect the very forms and conventions of manga to undergo radical mutation in the effort to grapple with violence and suffering on a scale that defies understanding. Yet *Barefoot Gen* is ordinary and unselfconscious in its usage of manga conventions. It is not an experimental work at the level of form, in the sense of staging a confrontation with the material limits of manga, and forcing readers to question the very ability of the manga medium or manga form to deal with serious historical issues. *Barefoot Gen* assumes that shōnen manga is, in itself, with its basic conventions, as qualified as any other medium or form to grapple with the atomic bomb, historically and experientially.

Not surprisingly then, given that comics, particularly those deemed "for children", are not commonly taken seriously as contributions to art, history, thought, or

politics, the "shōnen-manga-ness" of *Barefoot Gen* generates its share of consternation vis-à-vis its political effects. Critics and readers do not necessarily share Nakazawa's confidence in the expressive capacity of shōnen manga. There is, in fact, a tendency to forget or ignore the shōnen manga dimension of *Barefoot Gen* in discussions of it. Nonetheless the pages that today constitute the first four volumes of the book edition of Nakazawa Keiji's manga were initially serialized in *Shūkan Shōnen Jump* (June 1973— September 1974), popular weekly shōnen manga publication. Subsequent installations appeared in magazines such as *Shimin*, *Bunka hyōron*, and *Kyōiku hyōron*, more associated with public education than with boys' entertainment.[1] Yet the manga does not change stylistically. It sticks to its shōnen-manga-ness. Consequently, as Itō Yū and Omote Tomoyuki have pointed out, *Barefoot Gen* shares a number of features with the manga for boys of the sort featured in the initial publication, *Shōnen Jump*. They note, for instance, how *Barefoot Gen* shares with the other manga in *Shōnen Jump* a "boys' fascination for war-related items" (Itō and Omote 2006: 26). *Barefoot Gen* calls on the conventions of war-related manga for boys in two other respects: "first, the striking prevalence of depictions of violence, and second, the main characters' resolute fighting for their beliefs" (Itō and Omote 2006: 28).

In sum, Itō and Omote call attention to how *Barefoot Gen* is faithful to the conventions of shōnen manga, reminding us that those conventions have implications for how readers respond to it, and for how we assess its impact. For Itō and Omote, Nakazawa's use of shōnen manga conventions results in a fundamental ambiguity. They caution readers, "Any assessment of the degree to which readers received this manga's 'anti-war' or 'anti-nuke' messages should be complicated by the fact that *Barefoot Gen* had its starting point in a magazine that aimed less at enlightening and more at entertaining boys" (Itō and Omote 2006: 23). Similarly, they write of "the fundamental ambiguity of manga that later came to characterize *Barefoot Gen*—being both a story by a witness about the atomic bomb and an impressive comic at the same time". In other words, there is, in their account, a distinction to be made between entertainment and education, or between comic art and the art of the witness. They

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1 For an overview of the publication venues see Itō and Omote (2006: 22-23). See too Omote (2006).

worry that fascination with war necessarily runs counter to serious history, possibly undermining the validity of pro-peace or anti-war statements in popular manga.

It is interesting to note that Art Spiegelman, in his introduction to the English translation of *Barefoot Gen*, calls attention to some of the same features. But the result is not ambiguity. Spiegelman first describes the two-fold nature of Nakazawa's manga: "…the vividness of *Barefoot Gen*… emanates from something intrinsic to the comics medium itself and from the events Nakazawa lived through and depicted".[2] In other words, the power of the manga derives from its combination of historical witnessing *and* the medium of comics. Spiegelman also notes the prevalence of violence, but where Itō and Omote associate it with the conventions of shōnen manga, Spiegelman attributes it broadly to Japanese comics: "The degree of casual violence in Japanese comics is typically far greater than in our homegrown products. Gen's pacifist father freely wallops his kids with a frequency and force that we might easily perceive as criminal child abuse rather than the sign of affection that is intended."

The cuteness of characters also strikes Spiegelman, albeit in a negative way: "The physiognomy of characters often leans to the cloyingly cute, with special emphasis on Disney-like oversized Caucasian eyes and generally neotenic faces. Nakazawa is hardly the worst offender, though his cartoon style derives from that tradition." Subsequently, in my discussion of the cartoon line, I will return to this problematic, not in terms of cuteness but in terms of plasticity. At this juncture, however, I would like simply to note how, for Spiegelman, these apparently excessive conventions of manga expression (violence and cuteness) do not undermine the capacity of Nakazawa's comic to bear witness. On the contrary, for Spiegelman, the comics medium triumphs over its excesses. He concludes, "The drawing's greatest virtue is its straightforward, blunt sincerity". Similarly, Robert Crumb writes in his endorsement for the book jacket of *Barefoot Gen* that Nakazawa "tells the truth in a plain, straightforward way, filled with real human feelings".

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2 Art Spiegelman's remarks initially appeared in the 1990 English translation of *Barefoot Gen* (three pages unnumbered). They also appear in the new full translation of the entire ten volumes, Keiji Nakazawa: *Barefoot Gen: A Cartoon History of Hiroshima* (2004-2009). The volumes and pages of this translation correspond to those in the Japanese edition, Nakazawa Keiji, *Komikku-ban Hadashi no Gen,* 10 vols, Tokyo: Sekibunsha 1975-87.

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Both Spiegelman and Crumb are comic artists, and what's more, it is their job to endorse the translation of *Barefoot Gen.* It is not surprising that they highlight the ability of comics to take on serious issues. Still, the terms in which they endorse the manga are of interest: blunt, straightforward, plain, sincere, and honest. Such terms stand in contrast to those terms that play a key role in Itō and Omote's account, such as entertainment, fascination, and ambiguity. Beyond the obvious differences between the demands of endorsement (Spiegelman and Crumb) and those of criticism (Itō and Omote), there are different orientations toward the medium of comics that merit attention. On the one hand, in Spiegelman, there is a confidence that comics are equal to the task of bearing historical witness, but this depends on the ability of the medium to erase its excesses, to become plain and honest. On the other hand, in Itō and Omote, there is a lack of confidence in the medium of comics, expressed at level of suspicions about the fascination with war and violence in shōnen manga.

For my purposes, while I don't share Itō and Omote's distrust of shōnen manga and their fear that entertainment will undermine education or history, their exploration of media tensions within *Barefoot Gen* strikes me as the crucial first step toward reading manga in terms of the composition of forces, because they go beyond reading manga as transparent depiction of a message. At the same time, while I don't share Spiegelman's endorsement of the comics medium in terms of sincerity or transparency that overcomes its sites of technical excess or allows us to read past them to get at historical witnessing, I agree that there is a sort of overall coordination in *Barefoot Gen*. Yet I prefer to look at the overall composition of forces (such as violence and cuteness), rather than assume that a plain or honest style transcends such forces.

An image appears at the opening of volume eight that for me directly poses the question of how *Barefoot Gen* composes forces (fig. 1, see p. 290). In the foreground is our hero Gen, holding a stalk of wheat, which serves as symbol of vitality and resilience throughout the manga. In the first volume, when Gen's family is deprived of their allotment of rice in punishment for their father's anti-war activism, the father encourages them to plant wheat, telling them to grow strong and tall like the stalks of wheat, which springs back even when trampled. The wheat stalk thus becomes a symbol of strength, vitality, and resilience in the face of adversity. I should also

mention in passing that, as a symbol, wheat carries broader connotations: it stands in contrast to rice, which is historically associated with the emperor and a system of centralized sovereign control of the people. Wheat thus signals a sort of autonomy and resistance to centralized authority as well.

Especially striking in this image is the appearance of the cast of characters from *Barefoot Gen* in front of the mushroom cloud, posed in theatrical gestures, smiling, happy, full of life. Even those killed by the atomic bomb appear vital and triumphant before the mushroom cloud, as if cheering on the Gen who runs toward us brandishing a bamboo staff.

This composition of the forces of human vitality with the deadly forces of mushroom cloud may initially encourage a simple reading of the image and of the manga: the forces of life, nurtured through family and friends, overcome the horrors of the atomic bomb. We might read the relation between atomic bomb and cast of characters in terms of a triumphant superimposition of human resilience upon deathly powers of military destruction, a superimposition through which the forces of life successfully defeat those of war. Such a reading is not entirely out of keeping with *Barefoot Gen*. Throughout the manga there is indeed a sense of resilience in the face of adversity, and defiance vis-à-vis authority, which allows Gen not only to survive under horrible conditions but also to emerge stronger than ever. Indeed in the same volume, page 253, Gen's resilience and defiance culminate in a scene in which he writes, in the ground with a sharpened stick the characters for "self-reliance" (*jiritsu*) in large bold strokes. It is almost as if the entire experience of the war, the atomic bomb, and the poverty, indignities, and deprivations of postwar Japan have culminated in the triumphant autonomy and defiant vitality of Gen.

While such a reading of *Barefoot Gen* does justice to the life-affirmative anti-authority humanism of the manga (namely, humans can emerge from the experience of war and destruction with greater commitment to opposing all powers that threaten to oppress, exploit, and destroy human lives), it also runs the risk of turning the atomic bomb into an entirely positive transformative experience, as well as turning the manga into a linear presentation of a unified progressive statement. The atomic bomb risks appearing manageable and productive, rather than traumatic and disabling. Clearly, however, even in the image of the cast of characters in front of the atomic

bomb, the relation between the forces of life and the forces of destruction is not so straightforward. The image is somewhat jarring, because it juxtaposes atomic bomb and comic characters, without fully defining the relation between them. In other words, there is a composition of forces, and even an overall coordination of them, yet there is also a disjuncture or gap. *Barefoot Gen* defies the modernist paradigm of trauma in which representation proves inadequate to the task of depicting and conveying the unrepresentable, which encourages strategies of formal decomposition and dissolution. Yet, even though *Barefoot Gen* leans toward the composition of forces rather than toward the decomposition of representation, there is a disjuncture. This is where we might speak of trauma in a more localized and specific way (in contrast with totalizing gestures that frequently appear in analyses that begin and end with trauma).

Following Itō and Omote, we might add that the disjuncture in *Barefoot Gen* is to some extent between historical reality (the atomic bomb at Hiroshima) and shōnen manga conventions (lively manga characters and a defiant boy).[3] But the result is not ambiguity or ambivalence. The disjuncture allows for a transformative relation without linear causality. It constructs a relation that cannot be qualified as entirely positive or affirmative, nor as negative in the common causal sense of one thing erasing or destroying the other. This is where the specific techniques and material orientations of manga become important. Nakazawa is working this relation in manga, after all. Gen's experiences may roughly parallel those of Nakazawa Keiji, yet Gen is not him, as the author frequently reminds readers in his prefaces, commentaries, and interviews. Nakazawa works through his experiences in manga with a shōnen character named Gen, and, as I will show, manga techniques for compositing forces lead Nakazawa toward a very specific take on the atomic bomb. To understand how these manga techniques work, we need to begin with the most basic gesture of manga, the line.

2. Line, form, and structure

Manga begins with the movement of the stroke that marks the surface, with the

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3 I have in mind here the almost paradigmatic shōnen manga scenario in which an angry boy or youth enters into a violent situation or world of violence, and the expectation is that adding this shōnen violence to a violent situation will somehow resolve the violence or transcend it.

pressing of pencil to paper, with the pressure that digs into the surface of the page, flattening fibers and leaving graphite embedded in the paper behind it. As Jacques Derrida was fond of pointing out, the moment of the stroke or trait brings with it a kind of oscillation and uncertainty: with a dark line drawn in pencil upon white paper, for instance, it is not perfectly clear which is foreground and which is background. While there are conventions that encourage us to take the dark line as a figure in the foreground that stands out against a white background, we can also take the dark line as the remnant of a dark page that was almost completely covered with white, or as a tear in the page revealing a dark background behind the white paper. The simplest stroke on a page generates an oscillation between foreground and background, where the force of the stroke lingers in a vibration between white and dark. We might think of the stroke that marks the page—the line—as a "first synthesis".[4]

The act of resolving that oscillation, of assuring that this is a dark line upon a white page, entails, in Derrida's manner of thinking, a sort of violence in which the white is effectively ignored or "negated" in favor of the dark stroke. We suppress the foreground/background oscillation in order to "read" or attend to the stroke. The white page becomes the ground, and the stroke becomes the figure. At this second level of synthesis, the ground is at once a condition of possibility and impossibility—what Derrida glosses as a condition of (im)possibility. Without the white page, we don't perceive the stroke, and yet in perceiving the stroke, we ignore the page.

Despite the fact that Derrida encourages us to think about the emergence of a distinction between ground and figure in terms of something like negation and violence, it is important to note that this generation of a ground is not yet an act of metaphysical violence in which the materiality of the ground is negated to assure a foundation for universal knowledge. This happens at a third level of synthesis. Derrida often addressed this third synthesis in context of the privileging of speech or logos over writing and gesture. For instance, when we take the dark stroke on the page not merely as a figure but as a sign to be read logographically (as *ichi*) or ideographically (as the idea "one"), two syntheses come into play. We use our literacy or competency,

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4 While I use the terms first, second, and third, I do not intend an absolute temporal order. Such syntheses never occur in isolation. I am using synthesis roughly in the manner of Deleuze (1994).

detaching figure from ground (second synthesis), and then detach sounds or ideas from figures and gestures (third synthesis). For Derrida, the second synthesis of literacy or competency in reading presents a rather ordinary, inevitable, *de facto* set of material relations. But a long tradition of metaphysical thinking has transformed it into a *de jure* relation. This third synthesis insists that, in reading, what matters is the content, the idea, what is said. In effect, when we read manga entirely in terms of its content or message, we transform our basic literacy into a metaphysical relation to the world, not only suppressing the materiality of manga but also insisting that it doesn't really matter. Thus we move from the de facto situation of the second synthesis (ground/figure) to the de jure situation of the third synthesis (foundation/knowledge).

As my hedging with such philosophical terms as negation and synthesis indicates, I am not primarily interested in a deconstructive reading of *Barefoot Gen*, in the sense of deconstructing its metaphysical moments, or in the sense of evoking it to deconstruct the ways in which the atomic bomb has become a foundational narrative; or at least I am not interested in doing deconstruction in the usual sense. What concerns me is getting a better sense of the material orientation of forces specific to manga, and the deconstructive account of the emergence of ground and figure is a useful point of departure. Naturally, a deconstructive question arises about the possibility of a metaphysical relation to the line, a "line-centrism", in which the de facto competency of using lines to make manga turns in a foundational position that imposes a line-centered order of things.[5] Still, if we don't explore the dynamics of line, we cannot broach such questions.

There is a common sense understanding of lines that subordinates their dynamics to forms. Which is to say, lines are taken primarily as tools to construct shapes or, more broadly, forms. If the force of the line is acknowledged, it is only insofar as it imparts a tonality to the form, making the form feel weaker or stronger, thicker or finer, for instance. The emphasis falls on the form over the line, and we end up reading forms

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5 In his study of Chinese calligraphy, Nakatani (2006) addresses the question of universal graphism. A similar question about ordering capacity of the calligraphic line in early Japan appears in LaMarre (2000). While I don't wish to suggest an unbroken lineage from *sho* (calligraphic writing) to manga, I think that the dynamics of traditional calligraphy at once mesh with the cartoon line and shift it considerably in the context of modern manga.

rather than lines. The result is formal analysis. Formal analysis is very useful, and in my opinion, it is one of the more promising trends in contemporary comics analysis. I am thinking of Natsume Fusanosuke (1997), Fuse Eiri (2004), Ōtsuka Eiji (1994; 2008), Scott McCloud (1994), and Thierry Groensteen (2007a; 2007b) in particular, but there are a host of other discussions of comics, manga, and BD (*bande dessinée*) that go beyond a simplistic account of content or narrative description by taking in account the dynamics of panels, strips, characters, speech balloons, and other forms. Such analyses make us pay attention to the materiality of comics, opening avenues for considering at once the specificity of comics in relation to other media and their potential sites of intersection and overlap with other media and forms of expression (cinema, animation, theatre, radio, and literary fiction). Nonetheless, I would like to challenge the subordination of line to form that characterizes such approaches, in the spirit of building on, enlarging, and shifting their insights.

Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* provides a good point of departure. In his account of abstraction in comics, McCloud establishes three tendencies in comics. There is a tendency toward the realistic depiction of entities, and two abstract tendencies away from it. One is toward the art object or picture plane where "shapes, lines, and colors can be themselves and not pretend to be otherwise", and the other tendency is toward "iconic abstraction… where every line has a meaning" (McCloud 1994: 51). He suggests that comics generally pursue this tendency toward iconic abstraction. His primary example is the iconic abstraction of character depiction, with an emphasis on the face of characters being rendered abstractly as a circle with two dots for eyes and a slash for a mouth.

On the basis of these three poles, styled as a pyramid, McCloud shows how different kinds of comic expression actually present a mixture of these three tendencies. Nonetheless, the general tendency of comics is toward iconic abstraction. For instance, when he addresses the motion lines around Charlie Brown, he remarks, "even the most *straightforward* little cartoon character has a '*meaningless*' line or two" (McCloud 1994: 51). In other words, the dynamics of the line is taken as "meaningless", as secondary or supplementary to the art of comics, which for McCloud lies primarily in the tendency toward abstract form as meaning. Such a bias makes sense in the context

of McCloud's comics whose purpose is avowedly didactic. Yet as a side effect of his effort to instruct readers about understanding comics, McCloud tends to reduce the art of comics to their ability to convey meaning. And meaning for him is a matter of signification, rather than a matter of material orientations.[6]

Something analogous happens in Ōtsuka Eiji's account of how Tezuka Osamu simplified and abbreviated manga expression by introducing *kigō-e* or "symbol images" that expressed word-like meanings without words (Ōtsuka 1994: 10-11). A squiggly line over the head of a character, for instance, conveys confusion. And we might consider emotion lines (lines around characters' faces that express or enhance the affective quality of an emotion, with radiating lines to portray anger or astonishment), or expressive dialogue bubbles (wavy or spiky lines around speech to indicate or heighten their affective impact) (Fuse 2004: 8-16; 84-93), or any number of other elements that fall under the heading of manga iconography.

While manga and comics indeed use what is variously called iconic abstraction, or symbol images, or iconography, I would like to point out that, when analysis begins and ends at this formal level, two subordinations come into play. The dynamics of line is subordinated to form, and material orientations are subordinated to language. These correspond to what I previously called the second and third syntheses. In this approach, simply put, we read comics in terms of forms, and then forms in terms of meaning as content. Thus, the de facto situation in which lines generate forms is transformed into the de jure argument in which form is thought to convey meaning transparently. In McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, such an emphasis makes sense in the context of a didactic comic in which the comics artist strives to deliver a message or convey content directly to readers. Nonetheless, Derrida's critique of logocentrism proves entirely relevant here: McCloud tends to transform the art of comics into an art of language modeled on speech as the direct transparent delivery of content (signification). This is based on a simplistic model of transparent communication in which writers speak directly to readers who rather passively receive content. Accounts of manga

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6 It is a general characteristic of the French thinkers cited here that *sens*, which might be translated in English as "meaning", refers to meaning as direction or orientation rather than signification. I follow that usage here.

iconography head in the same direction, as does Ōtsuka's association of symbol pictures with ideographs.

If we recall that Derrida's deconstructive critique of logocentricism was gauged as a challenge to structuralism, we begin to see how the formal analysis of comics leans toward a structural analysis, in which forms are taken as structures, and structures as bearers of signification. Structure becomes the de jure position that depends on the de facto situation of form. In discussions of iconography, the icon or symbol picture assures the subordination of comics form to structures of signification. This structural inclination is also apparent in analyses of the relations between panels.

Let's continue with McCloud and look at his discussion of "transitions" and "time frames". Others have taken up similar questions, such as Will Eisner, Natsume Fusanosuke, and Thierry Groensteen. But the strength of McCloud's account lies in its broad scope and willingness to offer a general structural paradigm. In his account of transitions, he offers six categories for relations between panels: moment-to-moment, action-to-action, subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene, aspect-to-aspect, and non-sequitur (McCloud 1994: 74). This approach allows a highly concrete analysis of comics based on measuring the relative proportions of different kinds of transitions within different comics. In other words, transitions in comics appear amenable to measurement, and measurement is possible on the basis of panels, that is, on the basis of structural, usually rectilinear or geometric divisions of the white page. Such an approach subordinates the line to form (that of the panel), and then the usually geometric aspect of the panel allows for a subordination of form to structure. Where the icon subordinates form to signification, the panel subordinates time to space: spatial arrangement organizes a sense of time. And it is on the basis of such subordinations that McCloud proposes to measure transitions.

McCloud knows of course that questions of time and space are more complicated, and in a subsequent chapter on time frames, he begins with the subordination of time to space only to challenge it. He starts by entertaining the notion that "each panel of a comic shows a single moment in time", and "between those frozen moments—between the panels—our minds fill in the intervening moments, creating the illusion of time and motion" (McCloud 1994: 94). And he adds, "Naah! Of course not! Time in comics

is infinitely weirder than that". In other words, McCloud here highlights the work of something *immeasurable* in comics. In fact, the subtitle of his book is "the invisible art", and it is precisely the work of the invisible within the visible that concerns him—as an art of the invisible, comics are not reducible to the measurement of lines, forms, and structures. Instead comics are matter of gaps, intervals, spacing, and the continuous surfacing of the ground, the white page. I am entirely in agreement with McCloud. If I nonetheless propose a shift in emphasis (toward an analytics of the line), it is to avoid what I see as the maintenance, however unwitting, of a subordination of line to form that turns into a de jure subordination of form to structure, which, in analyses of the panel, generally takes the form of a subordination of time to space.

It is telling that, once McCloud tells us that space-time relations in comics are more complex than decomposing temporal events into instantaneous moments of time that are then recomposed to make for motion and time, he turns to an analysis of lines, that is, motion lines. What was initially forced out of the frame (time) now appears within the frame, in the guise of motion, which is rendered by various kinds of motion lines or effects of motion blur. Yet, after this account of motion lines, McCloud quickly moves on to say, "by introducing time into the equation, comics artists are arranging the page in ways not always conducive to traditional picture-making". In other words, it is as if temporal complexity is reintroduced in comics only after being pushed outside the panel (only after its structuration by panels). Consequently, the so-called weirdness of time remains constrained to the space within or between panels. Time remains constrained by structure, by the composition of geometric structures. It is not surprising then that McCloud concludes his chapter on time frames with an evocation of the perfection of nature. In effect, because he subordinates line to form and form to structure, the ground of the white page can return only in the form of cosmos, of a duly ordered, rule-bound yet beautiful nature that owes more to Platonic notions of nature (eternal Forms) than to contemporary conceptualizations of chaos, complexity, emergence, or fractal geometries. This is why comics in *Understanding Comics* prove at once childlike and ancient, cartoonish and eternal. Its analysis tends to abstract the cartoonish in the direction of eternal Forms, universal laws, structural composition, immutable ideas, and cosmological perfection—icons and panels.

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I have, via McCloud, looked primarily at two forms (character and panel). I have shown (a) how he sees character heading toward iconic abstraction (and signification); and (b) how his discussion of panels, even as it tries to move beyond the subordination of time to space, remains locked into it, precisely because his analysis continually subordinates line to form, and then form to structure. My point is not that McCloud is conceptually old-fashioned or scientifically outdated. In fact, the question might well be turned the other way. Rather than ask whether McCloud's account falls short due to an unwitting commitment to a cosmology of form and structure, we might well ask whether comics as a medium does not tend in this direction. Is this a genuine tendency in comics? Do comics tend to subordinate line to form and structure, or this an effect of comics analysis? Are there other ways of reading, say, icons and panels?

My sense of comics is that we can indeed detect in them a tendency toward form and structure, which formal analysis tends to highlight. But, even though comics use forms and structures, there is no reason to make these into the law or the truth of comics as a medium, to establish them as a transparent conduit for content or signification. As we have seen, this is a genuine tendency among commentators who wish to insist above all on the seriousness of comics, or on the ability of comics to address social and historical issues. Endorsements of *Barefoot Gen*, as we saw, stress how its simplicity and directness overcome or transcend its penchant for cuteness or casual violence in order to convey its message. But what would *Barefoot Gen* be without the "cute" faces of its children, or its slapstick violence and action scenes, or its anger?

There is in fact a countervailing tendency in comics, which can be approached via an analytics of the line. Attending to the dynamics of the line in comics will allow us to do two things. First, rather than begin with a divide between space and time, we can begin with the dynamics of two different kinds of line, each with an incipient space-time dynamics. Second, rather than build one synthesis upon another in such a manner as to subordinate "lower" level events (drawing, inking, layering of tone paper) to "higher" order concerns (content, structure, signification), we can leave open the play between line and form, and form and structure, for instance. In the next section, I will build on a contrast between two kinds of line: the structural line and the plastic

line or cartoon line. As is implied in my association of the plastic line with cartoons or comics themselves, I see the forces associated with the plastic line as integral to comics, equally important as forms or structures, and maybe more so. What is more, the plasticity of the cartoon line tends to keep open the play between different levels of synthesis, such that we see and feel its dynamics across levels. The plastic line invites a transversal and disjunctive synthesis, whereas the structural line encourages a subordination of lines to forms, and forms to structures (icon to signification, and time to space).

3. The structural line

In his account of the image, Jean-Luc Nancy remarks, "The image is separated in two ways simultaneously. It is detached from a ground and it is cut within a ground. It is pulled away and clipped or cut out" (Nancy 2005: 7). This notion of a double separation is important in considering how lines become images. For a line to become an image, it must be at once detached or pulled away from a ground and cut out or framed by edges of some sort.

What is interesting about Nancy's account is how it avoids subordinating drawing or painting to form. Instead Nancy suggests that when a stroke or strokes becomes an image, the mediator is not form but a clipping out or framing. In this way, Nancy keeps open the relation between what I previously called first and second syntheses. His account combines them in order to remain true to the force of the stroke and gesture, and thus to sensation in art, by bringing the logic of second synthesis closer to the first. In effect, he is bypassing an analysis that presumes the primacy of form, structure, or representation. He sustains attention to the "how" of art rather subordinate it to the "what" of art.

In the instance of comics, the line is becoming image as soon as it is read as a mark (detached from a ground) upon a page (framed with edges). But in the context of comics the term figure is probably a better conceptual rubric than image. Even though Nancy's account of the image is not ocularcentric but geared toward touch, contact, and tact, the term image might take on a vision-centered trajectory in the context of comics. What is more, the term image might make it seem that text is dropping out of

our comics analysis. Figure is a more fitting term because it refers to the figural force underlying both text and image. And so, to rephrase Nancy's account, let's say that the line is becoming figure as soon as it is felt as a mark upon the page. In other words, the stroke doesn't need form to have a figural force. A line is an incipient figure. It doesn't have to be subordinated to a form in order to exert an effect. The two forces of separation—detaching from the ground and clipping out edges—transform the stroke, the line, into a figure.

On this basis, we can speak of two kinds of line. In the previous section, I discussed the subordination of line to form, and form to structure. We can also think about this subordination in terms of the *structural line*. At its most basic, the structural line is one that transforms the informal edges of the page into a highly regular form, by repeating those edges with great formality. The obvious instance in comics is the panel. The rectilinear lines of the panel formalize the edges of the page, at once replicating it and channeling the force of edges into a formal unity. What was an edge becomes a rule. Indeed these lines are commonly drawn with a ruler, and a relation to law and structure is in the offing. In order for the structural line to turn into law or structure, however, it would have to pass through form. It would have to submit to form. For instance, the structural line might be subordinated to the demands of one-point perspective, to the form of the vanishing point on the horizon, which allows for scalar proportions. Such a form (one-point perspective) might then be subordinated to the law or structure of Cartesianism, in which rules of perspective begin to pose as the most objective and scientific way to represent the world.

But the logic of the structural line is not inherently directed toward Cartesianism. Its general logic is that of a line between two points. It is Euclidean, with a propensity for geometric efficiency and propriety: the line is not just between two points; it is taken as the shortest distance between two points, in which case it begins to appear highly efficient. Still, to transform this Euclidean line, drawn with a ruler, into the ground for a structure, the rectilinear shape of panels must be made into, or taken as, the formal unity of comics. Thus form prepares the way for structure.

When it comes to using the panel in comics, the structural line verges on subordination to form when the artist starts thinking of the rectilinear shapes of panels

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as confining or constraining the play of other lines. You might start drawing characters with an eye to how they fit into the panel, composing them within that shape, and taking care to assure that their lines don't exceed that frame. You may start thinking of characters in terms of forms rather than in terms of the figural force of the lines composing them. Nonetheless, the panel does not thoroughly dominate the medium of comics; it cannot truly subordinate everything to the logic of form and structure. For instance, even though you might begin composing a comic by sketching in the panel distribution and then drawing characters, actions, scenes, or emotions within the panels, you still have another sense of the general layout, one that precedes drawing the specific frames of the panels. The dynamics of this other sense of layout is probably not thoroughly rectilinear and formal but loosely relational.

There is, needless to say, a trend in comics criticism toward formal analysis based on panels (McCloud, Groensteen) as well as panel distribution (*koma-wari* in Natsume). Formal analysis of comics typically lingers on the structure of panels for a number of reasons.

First, there is no doubt that the panel has played a crucial role in making comics what they are. While it is always possible to link comics to older art forms, such as picture scrolls, narrative paintings, or cave drawings, that present sequences of actions or events, there is something distinctive about the way in which the panel formalizes the edge of the page.

Second, the sequencing of panels is a prime site for the articulation of temporal relations in comics. If we think somewhat reductively in terms of a historical transformation of one-panel comics into four-panel comics (*yonkoma manga*) or strips (American comic strips or the "bandes" of BD) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it is clear that looking at panels allows for a consideration of a variety of temporal phenomena, such as timing, rhythm, motion, and action, as well as flashback, reiteration, repetition, and remembrance. The same is true of the subsequent historical transformation of strips and four-panel comics into longer narrative forms such as *story manga*, *gekiga*, comic books, and graphic novels.

Third, there is a self-conscious modernity in the use of panels in comics. In conjunction with their serialization in newspapers that allowed for repeating characters,

themes, and in some instances, extended narrative arcs, comics opened a dialogue with other mass-produced media forms at the level of the panel. The dialogue of comics with cinema and animation is especially prevalent because the structure of sequential panels affords an intersection with the dynamics of the moving image in the "classical film style". David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson are frequently cited for their formal characterization of classical film style as entailing a cause-and-effect, goal-orientated subordination of time to space, through the use of various cinematic techniques that together conspire to produce a sense of continuity (see Hansen 2000). Gilles Deleuze notes a similar effect but parses it differently. Deleuze sees in prewar film a tendency toward using one type of moving image (the action image) to coordinate a variety of different types of moving image. The result is a tendency toward what he calls the movement-image (Deleuze 1986).

In any event, although comics are not moving images in the usual sense of deploying movie cameras and projectors, the use of panels in comics can be seen to present a decomposition and re-composition of movement analogous to cinema and animation; even if, like McCloud, we wish to complicate that scenario, it is an actual tendency in comics. Indeed, in the instance of Japanese story manga, commentators have typically credited Tezuka Osamu with introducing film conventions into manga in order to establish a stable and imitable form of manga expression, a classical style, if you will. Commentators commonly turn to Tezuka's 1947 story manga, *New Treasure Island* (*Shin Takarajima*), calling attention to scenes in which the movement of an automobile down the road, for instance, is decomposed into a series of images that cinematically recompose movement across panels on the page. The history of interaction of comics with cinema and animation is deeper and more complex than accounts centered on the pivotal role of Tezuka's postwar manga typically acknowledge, but there is nevertheless an important point to be made, namely, that the structure of panels in comics not only affords a site of intersection with moving image media, but also confronts the dynamics of modernity in the form of the spatialization of time.[7]

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7 Harry Harootunian addresses modernity and spatialization of time in "Ghostly Comparisons" (2003: 39-52).

Previously, I mentioned how McCloud rightly challenges the idea that "each panel of a comic shows a single moment in time", and "between those frozen moments—between the panels—our minds fill in the intervening moments, creating the illusion of time and motion" (McCloud 1994: 94). Yet, even as he challenges the model of a cinema-like re-composition of movement, he is not able to overcome the spatialization of time implied in it, precisely because he remains caught in the formalism of panels: thus he turns to movement within panels or frames.

In sum, formal analysis of panels in comics is genuinely insightful, opening a series of important questions about temporality, spatialization, and the intersection of comics with moving image media, which can in turn pose crucial questions of modernity. Yet, in subordinating line to form, formal analysis tends also to subordinate form to structure. Thus, if we wish to complicate a structural analysis of comics, we need to return to the very line that grounds formal and structural analysis. But now we should note that structural lines have a sort of built-in resistance to form as well. While such lines imply structural stability and formal regulation, they also have a degree of fragility and brittleness. They don't bend under pressure; they break. They snap like bones. In calligraphic terms, we might well characterize the structural line as boney. As such, forms composed of structural lines tend to shatter and fragment into shards of forms. Panels, for instance, tend to break into a range of angular shapes, to tilt and list, and sometimes they explode, but rarely do they bend or warp or curl. In fact, as soon as the structural lines of panels start to bend, warp, or curl, they begin to turn into another kind of line altogether—the plastic line or cartoon line, which implies a very different set of relations to form, geometry, and structure.

4. The plastic line

Sergei Eisenstein's unfinished book on Walt Disney is the inspiration for my emphasis on the plastic line (Eisenstein 1988). While Eisenstein was writing about animation, his account begins with illustrations in children's books and returns incessantly to the art of the line. He thus makes the line central to understanding cartoons, and what's more, he does not establish a sharp divide between comics and animations (which we tend today to separate). In fact, as the use of the term cartoon for both comics and animation

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reminds us, from the mid-1920s through the mid-1940s, comics and animations, especially those geared toward young audiences or general audiences, emerged in synchrony, almost as if they were one distinctive art with two media aspects (print and film). The term manga, for instance, which was largely synonymous with cartoon, could as easily refer to animation as to print comics, even without the rubric "film" that was sometimes added to it—"manga-film" (*manga eiga*) or animation. It is not so surprising then that, in a discussion of Disney animation, Eisenstein should dwell on the dynamics of the line.

Eisenstein calls attention to the elasticity of shapes, the mobility of contours, and the fluidity and diversity of forms, which he frequently links to primordial protoplasm-like vitality, primitive exuberance, and ecstasy. His approach to this tendency is probably best summed up in his use of the term "plasmaticness" (1988: 21). Eisenstein intermittently contrasts this plasmaticness with "heartless geometrizing" (1988: 35) and the "formal logic of standardization" (1988: 42).

In other words, he sees a tension, and potentially a dialectical contradiction, in the emergence of plasmaticity at historical moments characterized by formal standardization: LaFontaine's fables in contrast to Descartes's metaphysics and the formalities of the French court (1988: 35); and Disney's cartoons in contrast to "Ford's conveyer belts" and the oppressive regularity of work in America (1988: 3). We might well add the contrast that I presented schematically at the outset: Nakazawa's shōnen manga in contrast to foundational narratives of trauma and the institutionalization of history. Of course, *Barefoot Gen* doesn't stand outside, or in strict opposition to, the modernist aesthetics of trauma or the institutionalization of history. After all, as the first manga accepted into Japan's primary school libraries, and as the first manga translated into English, *Barefoot Gen* has taken on some canonical weight. Still, as Eisenstein's account of Disney suggests, this is precisely where its shōnen-manga-ness becomes important. And if we follow Eisenstein's lead, the quality of shōnen manga lies in the plasmaticness that derives from cartooning.

Eisenstein deftly steers his account of plasmaticness toward what he calls the stroke drawing (1988: 43), a drawing in which the line traces a continuous contour in a single stroke, in form rather like an amoeba (1988: 83-84). Drawing a cartoon line

is very different from drawing a line between two points, the structural line. In fact, to enhance the contrast between the cartoon line and the structural line, we can also call on Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between a "line between two points" and a "point between two lines" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 480). The continuous amoeba-like contour is an example of one kind of a point between two lines. The contour creates the sense of a center of motion within it. It makes for an animate center, as if there were a point within the contour that at once grounded and provided the impetus for mobility and elasticity of the line on either side of it (or with the amoeba, on all sides of it). With its animate center, the cartoon line doesn't tend toward the efficiency and propriety of Euclidean geometry.

While Eisenstein's account of plasmaticness is the inspiration for my attention to the cartoon line, as indicated in my preference for the term *plasticity* rather than plasmaticness, I wish to take his insights in a somewhat different direction.

Eisenstein highlights how the basic gesture of cartoons—the stroke drawing—allows for a continual transformation and deformation of form, without an actual loss of form. He refers to this at one point as "poly-formic capabilities" (1988: 41). His account tends to emphasize not only form and deformation but also transformation. Partly due to his emphasis on animism as an earlier stage of development, his account gives the impression that cartoons return us to a primitive elasticity, fluidity, and flexibility. We might thus conclude that the cartoon line is the return of a lost authenticity. Moreover, his cartoon line appears largely passive, reacting to whatever strikes it, availing itself to transformation. Yet we need also take into account the potential for movement and activity that the cartoon line imparts. I would like to call attention to the explosive quality of plasticity.[8] As the association of plastics with explosives implies, plasticity refers us not only to elasticity and flexibility (passive reaction) but also to the ability to bounce back, the capacity to adopt new form (active transformation). The plastic line is precisely a line that both gives way and bounces back, both bends and springs back. This is because it generates a point between (or within) lines, and that point, as an animate center, enters into relations with points

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8 I am drawing on Catherine Malabou's distinction between flexibility and plasticity in *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* (2008).

outside the lines. If we take the example of an amoeba-like shape, there is a point outside the squiggly contour and a point inside it, which are linked directly, somehow in sync. As such, the "form" has an internal animate center (center of indetermination) that imparts "life" to it, yet this inside center or point is in sync with an outside, which makes for a receptive elasticity. While Eisenstein does not speak at length to this aspect of the plasmaticity of the cartoon line (his book is after all unfinished), he notes something analogous in his passing references to pure affect ("affect freed of any purpose"; 1988: 10) and the soul of cartoon characters (1988: 41).

In its movement of double separation (detaching from a ground and clipping out), the plastic line, as point between two lines, presents a completely different tendency in its composition of forces than the structural line does. Let me first address detaching from the ground. While the structural line does produce a vibratory oscillation between figure and ground, this oscillation tends to be quickly resolved because the structural lines enhance their strength and protect their brittleness by coalescing into solid geometric forms. The panel is the prime instance. The motion line is a sort of limit case where the structural line appears to free itself of form by associating itself with movement, and yet because movement often remains associated with panels (or more broadly with distance per unit time), the motion line only regains its vibratory force when action ruptures panel structure and explodes across the page, as in the battle scenes prevalent in shōnen manga where flying fists and feet in the heat of action begin to summon splashes and dashes of ink, and the shortest distance between two points (hero and foe) is a matter of anticipation and preemption not measurable distance.[9]

In contrast, when the plastic line separates from the ground of the white page, it sustains a certain degree of autonomy; it doesn't need to join with other lines immediately, because its force is figural, and a single plastic line is nearly a self-sufficient figure. What is more, due to having a point between lines (animate center), even when it presents itself in a dark bold contour, it implies a relation or dialogue between the point inside and the point outside, which makes the ground (the white page) palpable. The plastic line thus tends to remain closer to the vibratory oscillation

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9 Shirato Sanpei's *Kamui-den* is a brilliant example.

between figure and ground.[10] The limit case for the plastic line is the application of color, shading, or tone paper (also called screentones). These applications are equally plastic in that they do not need form or structure and sustain a certain degree of autonomy. Yet, because such applications tend to remain within the line, they to some extent forfeit their autonomy to shore up the plastic line, and at the same time, the plastic line loses some of the force of attraction between inside and outside points, becoming a contour with an inside less susceptible to the outside. While the plastic line does not in this way become a structural line or structure, it does verge on becoming a form, and as such, becomes more amenable to the form of the panel. To some extent, inking is also a limit case, for similar reasons. Inking over and erasing pencils can also transform the plastic line into something less autonomous in terms of figural force and more subordinated to the logic of form. For this reason, really good inking, in which finesse and differential force are palpable, is necessary to prolong and reinvent the plasticity of the line. Similarly, the application of ink, tones, and other kinds of shading can make or break the plasticity of manga, enhancing or hindering its figural force.[11]

As for clipping out, we have seen how, in the form of the panel, the structural line repeats and regulates the page. In effect, it re-presents the page, transforming it into a frame, and thus it tends toward structure. (The re-composition of movement via panels inclines toward representation and signification insofar as the reality of the movement presented can now be taken to have existed prior to its presentation in panels). In contrast, the plastic line has an informal and uncertain relation to the edge of the page. While it derives force from it to emerge as a figure, it does not repeat or re-present it in formal terms. Thus the edge of the page feels fuzzier, as if somehow incomplete or vague about its limits. In a practical way, comics need the figural force of the plastic line to get readers to turn the page. The impulse to turn the page comes partly from a sense of suspense, from a desire to see what happens next. Yet such suspense and such desire happen because the plastic tendencies of comics prevent the structural tendency

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10 The example of certain optical illusions is instructive here, such as the well-known image that oscillates between faces in profile and candlesticks, or the classic Duck-Rabbit, or even the elephant in a boa hat of Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince*.

11 In the use of screentones, inking, and black-white contrast as forces in themselves, *Death Note* is exemplary.

from making the page into an absolute and final frame of representation. In other words, narrative has a ground; it only separates itself from the page as story by playing off the plastic and structural tendencies of comics. The tendency of the plastic line to de-structure or deform the edge of the page is striking in certain lineages of *shōjo manga* in which the panel structure dissolves into scattering flowers, streaming lace, or washes of stars; or panels appear to float on wisps of cloud or ocean foam, while characters wearing exquisitely patterned clothing seem to oscillate on the threshold between the flow and form.[12]

Yet this is not pure plasticity by any means. These two tendencies that I have established on the basis of the line are limit cases, which never appear in pure form. Even though in my broad examples I associate the dissolution of panel structure in shōjo manga with plasticity, I should add that this sort of characteristically shōjo page layout calls forth formal and structural tendencies precisely as a material limit to plasticity. Simply put, rather than a pure liberation of the figural force of the plastic line, rather than pure flows, the strategies of composition and elements in the composition often become exceedingly formalistic. The edge of the page is deformed, rendered informal and fluid, but then is limited by a sense of form and structure at the level of the composition of flows. The page is liquefied but not liquidated, to produce formal flows. Conversely, while shōnen manga geared toward action frequently rely on a formal structuration of panels, subordinating characters to goal-orientated action, this reliance on the structural line exceeds itself, and, often through motion lines, reintroduces plastic tendencies through strikes and blows that start to overwhelm the formality of the page. This is where styles that are sometimes strictly divided—shōjo and shōnen—actually turn out to overlap and intersect.[13] The overlap of motion and emotion lines is a prime instance.

Comics are always a mixture of these two tendencies. The art of comics begins with reciprocal determination of the plastic line and structural line, each of which

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12 I am thinking of Ikeda Riyoko and Hagio Moto.

13 For its disjunctive synthesis of such page layouts, I am thinking of Takemiya Keiko's *Terra e*, and a prime example of shōnen battles renewed from within is Arakawa Hiromu's *Full Metal Alchemist*.

has its own tendencies toward syntheses, which makes for new levels of reciprocal determination. In interest of making my argument clearer, let me summarize it in binary tabular fashion, with the caveat that I do not see structural divide or strict opposition between the plastic and structural but rather a series of interactions.

THE PLASTIC LINE	THE STRUCTURAL LINE
LEVEL 1:	
The cartoon line (and calligraphic line)	The ruled line
Point between two lines	Line between two points
Non-Euclidean	Euclidean
LEVEL 2:	
Figure	Form
Form of expression	Form of content
Character	Panel
LEVEL 3:	
Differential	Structure
Timing, rhythm	Genre
Affect	Action, emotion
Fabulation	Representation[1]
Disjunctive synthesis	Conjunctive synthesis[2]

1. In addition to Deleuze's notion of fabulation, Jacques Rancière's distinction between aesthetic regimes and representionalregimes of art is consonant with this determination as well.
2. These syntheses are roughly similar to those in Deleuze and Guattari, if one adds that the "connective synthesis" takes place at the level of pencil and page.

Rather than look at these pairs in terms of oppositional categories, we need to consider the different levels where these tendencies are both self-propelling and reciprocally determining, becoming materially entangled and entering into conjunctive and disjunctive syntheses with one other. Considering the speech bubble or *fukidashi* in this manner, we see how the simple bubble introduces plasticity into the structural line with a roundness that generates an encounter between the ruled lines of panels and the more plastic lines of characters. Its form also presents an engagement with the structure of writing: bubbles in manga tend to be long and narrow to convey vertical columns of glyphs, for instance. The protrusion that commonly points outward toward the character's head can also be turned inward to present off-panel speech

(or the protrusion omitted), or its lines can take on affective or emotional qualities with curved, spiked, or tenuous stroke. Thus the form of expression conjoins with the form of content, and affect with action and emotion. In manga, onomatopoeias are common, coursing across panels and sometime across pages. They are often written in the structurally oriented lines of *katakana* (Japanese syllabary), yet the repetitive force of their voluble flows also defies the structured lines of panels, breaking the ruled lines into rhythms and tones. In addition, I briefly mentioned motion lines and such applications as inking, shading, tone paper, and color. In motion lines, the structural line moves against the tendency toward conjunctive synthesis that subordinates line to form and structure. Conversely, the plasticity of inking, color, tones, and shades can serve to formalize the plastic line. Such mixtures are then read with and against page layouts, and at the same time, action and affect enter into reciprocal determinations, and narration alternately detaches from fabulation (pushing it into the background) and grounds it (highlighting mythic qualities). The complex mixtures at these different levels of polarization and synthesis provides an entrance into an analysis of how *Barefoot Gen* coordinates or composes such forces, as it works through the stable and imitable conventions of shōnen manga.

5. Composition in violence

At first glance, everything about *Barefoot Gen* appears to conspire against the plastic line, especially if we look for elasticity, flexibility, or delicacy of line. Indeed, as Kawaguchi Takayuki remarks, "*Barefoot Gen* employs the thick heavy lines prevalent in shōnen manga magazines from the mid-1960s into the 1970s" (Kawaguchi 2008: 111). What is more, the structure of panels is very regular, and although its manner of sequencing action, perception, and emotion merits attention, there is nothing unusual about it. Action is usually conveyed with full body images (panels in which we see the entire body). It alternates between panels in which the character's action is situated in a location (street, house, school, etc.) and panels in which the character's body (or characters' bodies) fills the panel, often captured in somewhat dramatic poses. Establishing images clearly locate where actions take place. The form of the panel gives way to the force of the page not through active shattering or emotive dissolution

but through enlargement: there are scenes that fill two full pages.

Perception provides unambiguous orientation: if we see a character looking or listening in a certain direction, we subsequently have a presentation of what the character sees or hears. Emotion is rendered iconically for the most part, with a limited range of facial expressions in conjunction with emotion lines (surprise, anger, confusion, delight). Dialogue neatly stitches up any gaps between actions and emotions. If the limited range of facial expressions sometimes runs the risk of conflating different emotions or flattening emotions into a limited set of responses, dialogue at once dispels ambiguity and broadens the palette. The dark thick ink lines and careful application of shading and tones within the lines, together with the tendency to avoid the use of negative space (forms and figures tend to fill the panels and only "lean" toward or open into other panels on the basis of a continuous sequence of action), contribute to the sense of an overall coordination of various forces in which line and figure are subordinated to form and structure: character is subordinated to panel; and motion and emotion appear subordinated to a structure of action and reaction. In sum, this might be called a classical style.

This classical style is a combination of Tezuka's child-orientated story manga and the adolescent-orientated gekiga. Such a combination is not surprising: Nakazawa mentions his early appreciation of Tezuka's story manga, and by the 1970s when he began work on *Barefoot Gen*, gekiga styles had thoroughly permeated shōnen manga. Defining gekiga is difficult: there were a number of different takes on it, and the term itself is rather changeable. But then the same can be said of the style of story manga that has become so closely associated with Tezuka: not only were a number of other artists working with similar conventions at the same time, but also there were precedents for Tezuka's forms of expression. Given the complexity of both story manga and gekiga, my account of them is necessarily selective, biased toward the analysis at hand.

Gekiga is commonly said to be darker in tone, in contrast to the lighter tone of Tezuka's story manga, which is in keeping with the idea of gekiga reaching out to an audience of adolescent boys rather than children. Still, we should not forget, as Natsume Fusanosuke reminds us, that Tezuka attracted all manner of *mangaka* to

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Fig. 1: Nakazawa (1993), vol. 8, p. 1.

children's story manga due to his ability to produce complex stories with his innovations (Natsume 1998). Moreover, even though Tezuka's manga of the 1940s and 1950s may be said to be lighter in comparison to subsequent developments in gekiga, his manga were in their day accused of being too violent for children. We might think in terms of two kinds of violence: a "lighter" violence in Tezuka and company, which drew inspiration from slapstick, gag strips, Hollywood films, and Disney animations, as well as mystery and science fiction adventure genres; in contrast to a "darker" violence in gekiga, inspired by European and Japanese New Wave cinema, as well as crime fiction and other fictions bringing milieu to the fore. Tezuka himself moved toward these darker modalities of gekiga expression in the 1970s and 1980s.

In *Barefoot Gen*, the lighter modalities of the Tezuka lineage are most palpable in

Fig. 2: Nakazawa (1980), vol. 5, p. 163.

Fig. 3: Nakazawa (1975), vol. 3, p. 198.

those scenes that Spiegelman characterizes in terms of casual violence, such as the scenes where Gen's brother playfully bonks Gen on the head, and his face takes on a comedic expression of agony (fig. 2); and in moments of delight where someone's leg shoots out perpendicular to his body (fig. 3). These are slapstick or gag modalities of violent action and reaction, with an evocation of plasticity in the form of a body with the capacity to spring back. Recall that this capacity to bounce back gathers discursive force through the symbolism of wheat in *Barefoot Ge*n.

The darker modalities associated with gekiga appear in the sequences in which Gen and the other children battle gangsters (postwar black market *yakuza* types), confront the biological experimentation of the American military, and denounce politicians, the emperor, and political hypocrisy in general; and in the recurrent image of the sun that punctuates the manga without reference to the story's actions or characters' emotions. The sun is a thoroughly perplexing evocation of the power of the bomb, the emperor (his mythic status of descendent of the sun goddess), the passage of time, and the fecundity and brutality of the natural world, all of which collectively perplex the manga in their figural coincidence. This is a different evocation of plasticity, not so much at the level of the line as at the level of the figure. The sun image takes on figural force.

In sum, the figural force of the manga resides in the tension between the springy stalk of wheat (plastic) and alternately oppressive and benevolent orb of the sun (geometric). In figural terms, the action stretches between ground and sky, like a plant pushing toward and against the light. Yet the wheat implies a lighter modality of violence, and the sun darker modalities of violence.

For the most part, we don't feel any radical disjuncture between these two modalities. This is because Barefoot Gen uses manga conventions to produce an overall coordination of these forces. This overall coordination tends to work through a subordination of line to form, and form to structure, at the level of action and reaction. The coordinating logic of action and reaction opens a vast range of possibilities for kinds of violence that are emotionally larger yet figurally constrained. For instance, Gen's mother does not hesitate to wallop her children when they need correction (fig. 4). If such violence seems acceptable, it is within the terms that the manga sets up: her

slaps are a reaction to their (incorrect) actions;
although the children's actions come in reaction
to the downright abusive actions of the relations
with whom they temporarily live, the mother's
"corrective violence" remains within cause-
and-effect logic; it is thus comprehensible. Its
forces don't exceed manga form and structure.
Similarly, even though other forms of corrective
violence, such as that of teachers against
students, appear less acceptable in ethical terms,
these are nonetheless composed within manga.
In sum, shōnen manga conventions allow for
an economy of action that serves to coordinate

Fig. 4: Nakazawa (1975), vol. 4, p. 37.

or compose various forces, which are figured in terms of kinds of violence stretched
between lighter and darker modalities.

What haunts this composition, however, is the possibility of "pure violence" that
escapes the logic of cause and effect, action and reaction, which can appear at either
end of the spectrum (wheat or sun). There is the violence of parents against children,
which is experienced as pure because its cause is not tainted, its anger is in fact love
and nurture (growing wheat). And then there is the violence of war in general, and the
atomic bomb in particular, that in *Barefoot Gen* defies the logic of cause and effect, and
the economy of action (harnessing the atom). The "economy" of war and destruction
cannot be reckoned or measured; it is impossible to conclude or confine it by
attributing responsibility to one side or the other. Rather it is an endless spiral of action
and reaction in which both are effects, and there is no cause or reason. There is only a
regime of destruction. While the basic actions of *Barefoot Gen* are composed between
these two poles of pure violence, there is something that hovers over the composition—
Gen's general affective attunement, anger.

It is here that we might begin to think in terms of trauma. After all, Gen's
anger, as anger, is an attunement toward an object. Yet the object of his anger shifts
incessantly: now it is the damned war, now the damned bomb, now the damned

emperor, now the damned Japanese politicians, now the damned American soldiers, now the damned black market profiteers. Of course such associations are entirely comprehensible in thematic terms; Gen's anger is consistently directed at those who exploit others, diminishing or destroying their lives and livelihood. Yet this substitution of objects of anger merits attention. On the one hand, it is anarchic, because this anger selects whatever is at hand, even as it makes broader proclamations. On the other hand, it is traumatic in that it doesn't seem liable to make an "adequate" substitution. It is locked into repetition. The other side of Gen's anger is his emotional attachments. In addition to his attachment to the surviving members of his family (mother and two brothers), Gen finds substitutes for the younger brother and older sister killed at Hiroshima. The operations here are less anarchic and traumatic in that the substitutions are based on resemblance. There is, however, an unsettling insistence on the adequacy of these substitutions, and, if the substitutes seem to agree to their new role, we get the impression that it is impossible to withstand the violent force of Gen's affective attachment. There is a pure violence to Gen, which tends toward the pole of parent-child or sibling-sibling economy, in which anger is pure because inseparable from natural affections. Such anger becomes inseparable from a love of life, of all that sustains or prolongs the forces of life.

We can read this affective attunement—pure restless anger—in terms of a traumatic response that tends to escape, trouble, or haunt the conventions of shōnen manga. Yet we should not forget that this trauma is not separable from the medium of comics itself. In other words, if we simply seize upon the "message" of trauma or its politics, we miss the tonality and the materiality of violence itself, which is related to the medium.[14]

Gen's "pure anger" is, oddly enough, associated not only with the "nurturing anger" of caregivers (father, mother, siblings, friends) but also the plastic line. Many of the scenes of frolicking and of nostalgic remembrance of past delights in *Barefoot*

14 As Ōtaki Tomonori verifies in his careful analysis of speech patterns of characters in *Barefoot Gen*, Gen's speech gradually comes to dominate the manga, deepening the impression of the manga bearing a message, especially in conjunction with the anti-war speeches that peak in volume. See "Manga o 'kotoba' de yomu: keiryō teki bunseki no kokoromi" (2006: 139-140). But as Ōtaki indicates, such an analysis would have to be supplemented by an analysis of image and panel.

Gen evoke a playful slapstick-like violence between father and sons or between boys. While such moments are fleeting, they are indicative of how the plastic line operates in this manga. As I mentioned previously, the plastic line is not only a matter of elasticity, flexibility, and passive deformation or transformation. It is also a matter of springing back, of rebounding. It has an explosive quality. This explosive quality of the plastic line appears in scenes with more playful or care-giving violence. It also lingers in the conventions for character design of children and trustworthy or affectionate adults: the large low-set eyes, the prominent rounded cheekbones, the large head, and the generally rounded contours. There is also a general rigidifying of such qualities, and instead of elastic consistency, the plastic line verges on the formal and structural. In effect, there is a suppression of elasticity and flexibility. Yet this very holding back of elasticity makes the force of plasticity feel ever on the verge of exploding. This explosive force of plastic line is at once summoned and held back as if to increase and refine its capacity for pure anger against the bomb, war, destruction, and exploitation of life.

At the level of form, because the plastic line is held back, a sort of dialectical struggle takes place between the plastic line and the structural line in *Barefoot Gen*, which follows directly from shōnen manga conventions. Ōtsuka Eiji's discussion of war and peace in Tezuka's manga provides an excellent delineation of this dialectics (Ōtsuka 2008: 111-125).

6. Cartoon and mecha

Ōtsuka calls attention to a tension or even contradiction between *mecha* (mechanical devices) and character in shōnen manga. What is interesting is how he relates this difference to drawing styles. Noting the impact of Disney cartoons on manga of the 1920s and 1930s, Ōtsuka shows how this results in characters that appear to possess a "deathless body" (*shinanai shintai*) (Ōtsuka 2008:118). In other words, he points to something analogous to the plastic line. Characters' bodies can be violently deformed in various ways, yet the characters don't die. They eternally spring back. Ōtsuka quickly expands his discussion to the level of a broad ideological stance in war and action films—cartoon lines make for invincible warriors. While Ōtsuka's generalization

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is somewhat fast and loose, there is something important at stake here.

Ōtsuka calls attention to a lineage of shōnen heroes, in which techniques of cartooning can also be said to impart a sense of the immunity and safety in the midst of war and combat, by generating plastically invulnerable characters. In this respect, Gen of *Barefoot Gen* bears comparison not only to the boy heroes in the shōnen manga of the postwar era but also to those of the wartime era cartoons, such as Bōken Dankichi or *Momotarō*. Even with the tendency in *Barefoot Gen* to suppress the flexible contours of the plastic line, the sense of invulnerability and invincibility associated with cartoon-line boy heroes persists at the level of form. Despite the dangers that thrill and frighten readers, such heroes can provide readers with a sense of safety and security amid war, destruction, and poverty.

Still, rather than conclude that such conventions invalidate *Barefoot Gen* or undermine its historical capacities, we might return to Itō and Omote's remarks about a fascination with war in shōnen manga but think of this fascination differently. Itō and Omote are suspicious of *Barefoot Gen* because it does not resolutely part company with the fascination with war prevalent in shōnen manga. But, if we think of fascination in the stronger sense of a mixture of attraction and revulsion, then it is hard to imagine how a complex relation to war could be articulated without evoking fascination. We shouldn't think of a fascination with war as a simple relation; even the national policy films of the wartime era do not present a simplistic relation to war. Of course, to indicate the complexity of fascination with war is not to redeem it. The point is that war is not so easy to embrace or reject.

The same is true of the use of the plastic line to create invincible boy heroes. In Japan's wartime manga films, in the celebrated *Momotarō umi no shinpei* (Momotarō: Divine Soldiers of the Sea) for instance, the sense of the invulnerability of the boy hero does not derive from slapstick or gag violence in which the hero is deformed and then rebounds. Rather the plasticity of the heroic character figures as a sort of latent force of resilience, which takes on spiritual implications in the context of the action, but which also seems to exceed the action. In this respect, postwar boy heroes like Gen are direct descendents of wartime heroes. Such plasticity becomes inseparable from a fascination with war in that it allows us to enter into war and to pull back from it. It affords a

complex relation to war.

Ōtsuka addresses something of this complexity when he turns to the profound contrast between the deathless bodies of characters and the design of mecha, that is, mechanical devices, machines, and vehicles ranging from airplanes and tanks to factories. Where characters embody the fluidity and invincibility of the plastic line derived from cartoons, Ōtsuka remarks how drawings of mecha in manga derive from drawing styles dedicated to scientific representation, to accuracy, precision, and measurement for purposes of rationalized intervention or instrumentalization. This is analogous to what I dubbed the structural line.

There is indeed a strong contrast in manga, and especially in war-related manga, which persists today, between the densely detailed and precise drawing associated with machines and vehicles, versus the fairly simple fluid contours that delineate characters. In exploring this contrast, Ōtsuka calls attention to a formal tension: character form versus mecha form. In mecha form, as Ōtsuka notes, the structural line is organized in accordance with conventions of scientific accuracy derived from European legacies of representation. Ōtsuka doesn't go into much detail, mentioning both one-point perspective and engineering diagrams. Looking closer at the mecha designs in question, I think it fair to say that their drawing conventions derive largely from techniques of exploded projection used for mechanical assembly diagrams (LaMarre 2009: 120-122). Such techniques impart depth and detail to depictions of machines or mecha in shōnen manga but do not strive to organize the overall space within the panel in terms of one-point perspective. Consequently, within the space of the panel, there emerges a profound contrast between character and mecha. This contrast can be articulated in various ways. It can be extended into a tension or struggle between human and machine, or it can be flattened into partnership or complicity.

In his discussion of mecha, Ōtsuka also moves quickly from drawing style to ideology: because such mecha styles tended to settle on weaponry (fighter planes, tanks, guns, robots, and even military factories), he associates them with death and destruction. As such, in the contrast between cartoon form and mecha form, he sees a relation between human life and military death.

Ōtsuka suggests that, in Tezuka's war manga, rather than a tidy partnership of

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invincible cartoon hero and mecha, a genuine tension emerges between the deathless body and the deadly mecha. In Tezuka's manga, a question thus arises: what happens when deadly weapons turn against the cartoon hero? Can a cartoon hero really die, and what kind of death is it? In other words, within war manga itself, questions emerge precisely because of the basic contrast between drawing styles—or we might say, due to a fundamental incommensurability between plastic line and structural line.

True to the conventions of shōnen manga, *Barefoot Gen* presents a strong contrast between character form and mecha. This contrast becomes especially evident in panels and sequences in which military weaponry appears. Exactly as Ōtsuka indicates, airplanes, battleships, trains, and other vehicles are drawn in the mecha style, in structurally precise detail, in a manner reminiscent of the exploded projection of assembly diagrams. Two prime examples occur in volume 7. On page 55, as Gen reads about the Enola Gay (which dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima), the airplane is drawn above his head in illustration (fig. 5). The structurally precise and mechanically dense lines of

Fig. 5: Nakazawa (1990), vol. 7, p. 55.

the plane present a sharp contrast with the more rounded forms of Gen and his friends. Similarly, on page 104, where a Japanese-American officer defends the American use

Fig. 6: Nakazawa (1990) vol. 7, p. 104.

of the atomic bomb by evoking Pearl Harbor, an illustration of the Japanese attack on American warships at Pearl Harbor appears in the panel alongside him (fig. 6). Note how in this instance the mecha style contrasts more sharply with Gen's rounded features than with the adult's angular features, as if to underscore the military complicity of the adult's face. Such a contrast is common throughout the manga: the faces of adults, particularly those who are not sympathetic characters, convey less plasticity than those of the children. In sum, the contrast between cartoon form and mecha form in *Barefoot Gen* tends to settle on a contrast

between children versus weapons of destruction as well as versus devious, complicit adults.

The mecha style is also used for apparently neutral depictions, as with the presentation of the temple Kiyomizudera. The children travel to Kyoto with their mother and visit Kiyomizudera, which the mother visited on her honeymoon with her now dead husband. Here the contrast between characters and mecha style of the temple is striking (fig. 7), and while the temple itself is not associated with military weaponry per se, the characters' conversations linger on mass death, and the mother presages her death and indeed soon dies, vomiting blood in a gruesomely spectacular manner as they leave the temple. In other words, a dialectical struggle between forces of life and death does indeed emerge around the contrast between the

Fig. 7: Nakazawa (1990), vol. 7, p. 230.

plastic line (children) and the structural lines of mecha (machines, vehicles, and even architectures). The association of death with architectures goes even deeper: we have only to recall the recurrent images of the faces of Gen's father, elder sister, and younger brother pinned between the beams of their fallen house. It is precisely because, under conditions of war, houses can transform into mecha-like weaponry of destruction that the contrast between plastic line and structural line takes on new urgency. And a series of quasi-dialectical questions arise through this formal contrast. Is a synthesis of these polarized tendencies possible? Or will one force triumph over the other? Can life and peace triumph over death and war? Or will there be only an eternal oscillation without hope of reconciliation, let alone hope of actual movement beyond cycles of destruction?

Posing questions in this manner might encourage us to pull a definitive message out of the manga, to decide what *Barefoot Gen* tells us about the atomic bomb. But to read manga is not to extract a content or message. We should keep in mind that, even if Nakazawa set out to use comics to present a message, he had to work through
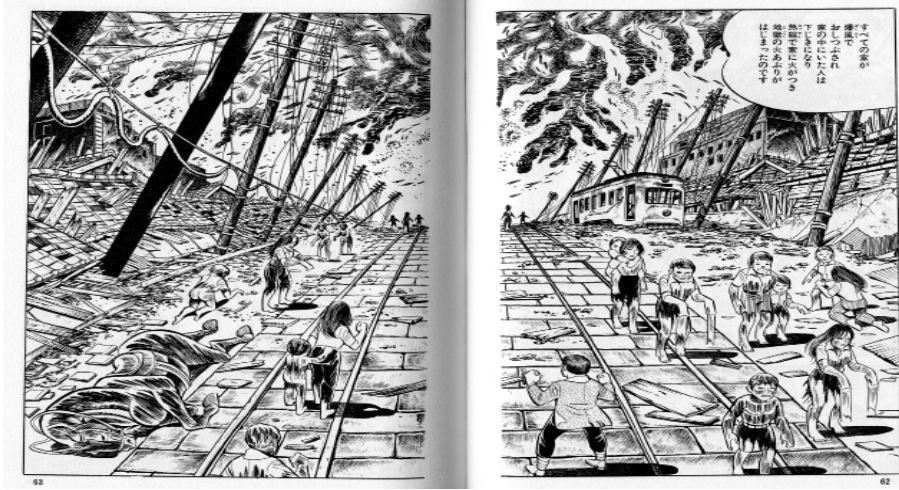
Fig. 8: Nakazawa (1990), vol. 7, pp. 62-63.

comics, through the conventions of shōnen manga. There are of course a whole series of statements in *Barefoot Gen*—about the evils of war; about the complicity of armies, politicians, and profiteers; about the will to survive; about self-reliance; about friendship and family; about the struggle for peace, to name a few. Such statements do not attain or even strive for discursive regularity, however. Nor do comics need to strive for discursive regularity, or to impart a coherent and consistent message. But comics do compose forces, and so, if we want to explore *Barefoot Gen*'s take on the atomic bomb, we must turn to how the manga composes forces in its images of Hiroshima on August 8, 1945, with attention to the problematic of lines, forms, and structures. Let me turn to another image in volume 7 that expands the panel form across two pages to provide panoramic view of the horrors of August 8 (fig. 8).

Striking about this image is its insistence on the structural line and structures. It is not a scene of wild disorder. Although the image spreads across two pages, the form of the panel is retained, with neat lines around the image. The image is also organized with a sense of one-point perspective, an almost iconic one-point perspective view down the railroad tracks, with horizon and vanishing point. Structural lines abound: not only the railroad tracks but also their stone bed remain precisely rectilinear, and although the strongly ordered perspective serves to highlight the strangeness of the

listing telephone poles, the poles retain a sense of structure. The emphasis on structure also serves to highlight the disappearance of houses along the tracks. Oddly, however, the collapsed houses remain orderly. This overall insistence on structure and structural lines ultimately serves to foreground what is horribly out of place: the humans walking toward us down the track, flesh melting from their limbs like wax from a candle.

The image is horrifying because it depicts an actual event. Still, the force of the image does not (and cannot) derive wholly from its ability to represent actual suffering. The horror of this image derives from its meticulous use of structural lines. While the precision of lines may be read as a quasi-documentary effect, it also implies, in the context of shōnen manga, a spreading of the mecha style across the world. The echoes of one-point perspective, in conjunction with the mecha style, transform the world into an exploded projection, showing how the atomic bomb does not only destroy the physical dwellings of humans but also digs deeper in the nature of things, threatening to explode existence itself. In addition, the mecha style serves to foreground human figures, and what makes these forms especially terrifying in the context of manga is the absence of plasticity. These forms are melting, liquefying, and the result is elasticity without any springiness, as if the very possibility of rebounding or springing back had been driven from existence.[15] The image is expunged of the force of the plastic line. The effect of the atomic bomb in shōnen manga is to drive plasticity from its world, to expel the plastic line even from comics, which is its abode. The question of *Barefoot Gen* might thus be simply phrased, "Can there be plasticity after the atomic bomb?" which is to say, "Can there be comics after Hiroshima?"

The resoundingly affirmative "yes" of *Barefoot Gen*, its belief in comics, is what impresses me most about this manga. And this belief in comics takes the concrete form of a belief in the plastic line. Clearly it would not be enough for Nakazawa to embrace plasticity by covering the entire surface of the manga with plastic figures, expelling the structural line altogether. Such a gesture would not be true to comics, nor would it address the challenge of the atomic bomb to comics, which challenge lies in the

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15 Note that, in *Barefoot Gen*, injuries and scars due to the atomic bomb appear as structural lines robbing the face of its plastic appeal.

ascendency of a mecha complex of lines in organizing existence. This is why *Barefoot Gen* sticks so tenaciously to plasticity, wherever it appears. It is a gesture that gathers strength in the context of shōnen manga conventions, because these at once depend on and suppress the cartoon legacy, ceaselessly transforming it.

This commitment to plasticity unfolds into a series of compositional tensions, formal contrasts, and quasi-dialectical struggles, which do not strive for discursive regularity. Granted we can extract a discursive regularity from *Barefoot Gen* by aligning various contrasts and struggles, and the result would probably be a rather beautiful but somewhat anodyne statement with spiritual overtones, such as "life springs back when most oppressed", or "the human spirit can triumph over any adversity", or some vaguely Buddhist parable to the effect that "it is when you reach rock bottom that you can be saved". But this is not true to the manga *Barefoot Gen*. Before (and beyond) any expression of a belief in life, in humanity, in cosmological harmony, or in peace, *Barefoot Gen* enacts a belief in comics.

The image of Gen and friends striking happy and triumphant poses in front of the mushroom cloud now makes sense in a different way. These manga characters present a counter-explosion to the atomic explosion, one that harnesses the force of the plastic line within the constraints of shōnen manga. As a counter-explosion, it comes with and after the bomb. Just as Gen's "pure anger" exists to counter the multitudinous forces of military-industrial empire, so the explosive plastics of the manga bomb do not reside safely beyond the atomic bomb. This manga bomb explodes with and against the atomic bomb. And if we wish to affirm capacity of Nakazawa's manga bomb to bear historical witness, we would have first to accept its proposition: believe in comics.

Still, even though it is not possible or desirable to impose discursive regularity upon *Barefoot Gen*, its proposition—believe in comics—does make for a specific set of orientations toward the atomic bomb, which come from believing in the plastic line despite the reciprocal determinations that come with it. Manga becomes a way of orientating oneself historically and politically. By way of conclusion I would like to address this prolongation of the plastic line into a set of political orientations toward the atomic bomb and the politics of trauma.

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7. Biopolitics and trauma

Pheng Cheah argues persuasively that the concept of trauma derived from Freud implies a politics of sovereignty, of bounded subjectivity and bounded nationality (Cheah 2008: 189-219). This is because Freud's theory relies on the sovereign integrity of the ego or psyche prior to the traumatic event. There is, in other words, a constitutive closure or bounded sovereign space that is irreparably breached by the traumatic event, shattering the autonomy and integrity of the subject. In effect, Cheah signals the tendency of trauma theory to posit national sovereignty prior to its invention, thus naturalizing nationality or national identity. To counter this tendency, he argues that we need to think in terms of the constitutive exposure of the subject, to address the artificiality of national sovereignty and identity, which is a first step in getting beyond the current tendency toward celebrating or pathologizing national sovereignty, rather than confronting its politics more pragmatically, particularly in the contemporary context of biopolitics.

Cheah's remarks are of interest in the context of the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki for two reasons. First, they help us make sense of the ways in which the atomic bombs have entered into the formation of foundational narratives of Japanese sovereignty in the postwar era (Igarashi 2000). A number of commentators have stressed the dynamics of nationalism in discourses and practices associated with the atomic bombs. There are accounts of how an emphasis on the atomic bomb has spurred the formation of Japanese victim mentality vis-à-vis War World II, which has encouraged indifference and even intolerance vis-à-vis the victims of Japanese aggression during its Fifteen-Year Asia-Pacific War. There are discussions of the elimination of Korean victims of the atomic bomb from the Hiroshima Memorial Park (Yoneyama 1999: 151-186). There are analyses of contemporary right-wing discourses in Japan that argue that the emphasis on Japan's defeat at the end of war (rather than Japan's prewar and wartime legacy of military heroism and even imperial altruism in Asia) has resulted in deviant identity (Ivy 2005: 137-149). Simply put, the trauma of the actual victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has frequently been treated as national trauma, which posits the constitutive closure of the nation prior to, and above and beyond, the traumatic event.

Second, Cheah's discussion is of interest because it encourages us to think about the dynamics of power beyond the Freudian framework of trauma and thus beyond the foundational closure of national sovereignty. This strikes me as especially important in the context of *Barefoot Gen*, because its author is keenly aware of the national appropriation of the trauma of atomic bomb victims,[16] and the manga not only includes numerous references to Japan's war of aggression and discrimination against Koreans forced into labor, but also adopts a resolutely anti-nationalist and anti-imperialist stance. One might argue against the political efficacy of such gestures or question the terms for them: while in the first volume the manga speaks against Japanese militarism, for instance, it does so by emphasizing the anti-war heroism of Gen's father. Moreover, as mentioned previously, Gen's pure anger suffuses the manga to the point that political resistance risks becoming overly generalized or entirely personalized. Nonetheless, the manga invites us to look at the effects of the atomic bomb in a framework other than that of trauma and national sovereignty. Interesting enough, if we consider *Barefoot Gen* discursively, the framework for power is neither that of nation or of class but closer to the biopolitical paradigm evoked in Cheah's discussion.

Throughout the manga, Gen speaks boldly against those who started and sustained Japan's Fifteen-Year Asia-Pacific War, specifically to denounce those who profit from war. At this level, the identification of those responsible within Japan to some extent follows class lines: the rich are frequently depicted as exploiters and profiteers, while those who profit in any manner at the expense of others are denounced as perpetuating the war. In this respect, *Barefoot Gen* recalls the political dynamics of proletarian literature, especially stories for children that dwelled on economic disparity and resistance to special police. War is to some extent class war.

Ultimately, however, *Barefoot Gen* does not offer a proletarian vision, in the sense of focusing on the industrial proletariat. Already in the depiction of Gen's father's pacifism in the wartime era, the manga dwells on biopolitical consequences. The father is arrested and tortured, and the family is denied food by the military authorities.

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16 Fukuma Yoshiaki reminds us that Nakazawa initially had no interest in writing atomic bomb manga, due to his opposition to the media appropriation of the atomic bombs, and it was only after the death of his mother in 1966 that he began to reconsider. See Fukuma (2006: 12-13).

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There is indeed industrial production, but within an economy based on military-related production (what Chalmers Johnson calls "military Keynesianism"), and the effects of power are not registered in terms of class exploitation or extraction of labor surplus. Similarly, in the postwar era, the basic conflict is not between the bourgeoisie and the industrialized masses of proletarian workers. True to postwar Japan, the black market and "unofficial economies" are as important as industrial production, and in the manga, these other economies take precedence over industrial production, which remains almost peripheral to the ongoing conflicts.[17] It is a struggle to survive that is highlighted, a struggle for life, for food and shelter, in which money has immediate physical consequences. In addition, the general emphasis on torture and medical experimentation confirms the general gravitation toward scenes of *biopolitical* struggle. *Barefoot Gen* presents an overall political and historical orientation toward a sort of military-biopolitical complex rather the military-industrial complex.

Following Cheah, we might here turn briefly to Foucault's account of biopolitics. The hallmark of Foucault's critical analytics of modern power is a refusal to think modernity in terms of a single unified power formation (Modernization or Rationalization). Throughout his studies, he continued to address different kinds of power formations, different techniques or procedures for managing a multiplicity. Thus in his later work he spoke of three distinct apparatuses of power, which nonetheless can enter into mixtures: (1) sovereignty or sovereign power, which acts on the imaginary or psyche, forming subjectivity; (2) disciplinary power, which entails dividing and segregating practices that make humans into individual bodies; and (3) security and biopolitical power, which strives to act on the real as such by following its flows and assessing them in statistical or probabilistic terms, thus constructing populations.[18]

In *Barefoot Gen* we see traces of these different power formations. In the ostracism of atomic bomb survivors, we may detect a form of disciplinary power. In the politicians' speeches and remembrances of Hiroshima, we see the operations

17 There is of course Gen's older brother who goes to Kyushu to work in the mines, but this narrative line does not show the suffering of proletariat and soon dies out.

18 This topic is one of the major problematics in Michel Foucault's "Security, Population, Territory: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-78" (2007) and "The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-79" (2008). Note that this is very different from Giorgio Agamben (1998) who sees biopolitics as the underlying quasi-metaphysical truth of sovereignty.

of sovereign power, constructing a national subjectivity. In the directly physical consequences of the circulation of money, and in the tendency to treat bomb victims experimentally in terms of probabilistic population tendencies, we see the biopolitical. The manga thus offers a different understanding of trauma, if we wish to retain that term. Trauma here is not a breach in the boundaries of a pre-constituted subject (nation or individual) but the radical exposure of a multiplicity (the real), which lends itself to different techniques of power simultaneously.

In any event, in *Barefoot Gen*, it is the biopolitical that dominates, potentially folding other techniques of power in it. But the manga is not merely a representation of the biopolitical or a discourse on it. It is the proposition—believe in comics—that spurs a commitment to following the plastic line in shōnen manga, which is prolonged not merely into a politics of affirming or protecting life but into a politics in which life itself emerges as radical exposure, in which explosion of the plastic line enacts resistance at the very site where life enters politics. This is the manga bomb that explodes over the Hiroshima world.

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