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THE MAKING OF A CORPORATE ELITE

ADULT TARGETED COMIC MAGAZINES OF JAPAN

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and

Research in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Tomoko Kondo

Graduate Program in Communications

McGill University, Montreal

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the popularity of comic magazines among Japanese adult readers - primarily it looks at the male audience, but it also considers female response. It analyses texts of specific men's comics to illustrate the discourse of "masculinity-through-occupation" which these magazines offer to readers. In addition it explores the phenomenon of "readership response" by examining a selection of "reader letters." The role-adaptation-through-enjoyment possibilities these comic magazines provide to male readers is compared to parallel possibilities for female readers by examining both women's responses to male comics, and the nature of narrative in women's comics.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans ce mémoire de maîtrise, nous explorons la popularité des bandes dessinées chez les adultes japonais. Cette étude porte en premier lieu sur le public masculin et ensuite sur la réponse des femmes à ce type de littérature. Nous analysons le discours des bandes dessinées s'adressant aux hommes et décrivant "le modèle masculin valorisé dans le travail". De plus, nous examinons la réaction des lecteurs à ces bandes dessinées en analysant une série de lettres aux lecteurs. Ces magasines de bandes dessinées proposent à leurs lecteurs masculins une vision de leur rôle en soulignant le plaisir de s'y conformer. Nous comparons cette vision aux possibilités offertes aux lectrices féminines par l'examen de leur réaction à ces magasines masculins, d'une part, ainsi que par l'étude du discours dans les bandes destinées à ces dernières, d'autre part.

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INTRODUCTION

Michael: Well, I'll be! I'd heard that in Japan university students and even businessmen read comics on the train. And what do you know, it's true!

Nomura: I'd bet you're surprised. (From English translation of a part of a dialogue in an introductory Japanese language textbook[1])

Comics are a major medium of popular entertainment in Japan. Readers, from preschoolers to middle-aged people, from the lowest to highest socio-economic groups, can purchase a wide variety of comics. Comics appear in daily newspapers and in many general magazines. There are comic textbooks on such themes as world history and international economics, as well as comic versions of classical literary works. Comic magazines, however, take a central place in comics in Japan today. Hundreds of different comic magazines appear weekly, biweekly, and monthly. Each has a specific group of readers targeted according to age, sex, and tastes. While some magazines are general, others specialize in such fields as science fiction, sports, mah-jongg games, and pornography. Within each can be found a number of comics, including the predominant story-comics, i.e. comic strips with long narrative development. These magazines run from a few to several hundred pages. In a word, the Japanese version of a comic magazine is like several different kinds of North American comic-books-in-one. Between the story-comics, they are filled with short comic strips, articles, and advertisements.

Comic magazines are sold at regular book stores, as well as at train station kiosks,

speciality shops, all-night convenience stores, and even in vending machines. More than two billion[2] ~~copies of~~ comics - comic magazines and book versions compiled from serialized magazine comics - were published in Japan during 1990[3]. They amounted to 37.5 per cent of the total number of books and magazines published, ten per cent more than in 1980.

The prevalence of comics in Japan is intriguing, both in terms of readership and in terms of popularity, because in other industrialized countries comics were made obsolete by the introduction of television. In North American and Europe, comics are today primarily read by children, the relatively uneducated and those who follow fads.

Many factors have been mentioned as contributing to the great popularity of comics in Japan. John Lent (1989), summarizing the discussion on this issue, listed the following seven factors: (1) the Japanese inclination toward visual forms of communication due to their writing system[4]; (2) a shift from print to a pictorial medium, triggered by television; (3) the generally felt need to escape from the high-pressure society both among children and adults; (4) the comic's function as an instrument of a rebellious youth culture pitted against classical forms; (5) the purchasing power of younger readers; (6) the ease of reading comics; (7) and the lack of physical space for children to play. Nonetheless, it is virtually impossible and perhaps unnecessary to isolate the causes of such a complex cultural phenomenon as the comic medium. Instead I will try to understand the actual relationships between readers and their comics.

Grown-up men reading comic magazines on the train and other public spaces have been a well-established and much-reported cultural given in Japan for at least the last two decades. It is a social phenomenon that Westerners and others from outside the culture find difficult to understand. The generally proffered assumption is that Japanese men read horror, crime, and

pornographic comics for a quick and easy, sensory escape from their stressful everyday life. However, this explanation is far from satisfactory and needs further examination. Until we understand what is actually "in" the comic magazines, and what purpose and pleasure reading them offers the Japanese reader, we cannot understand their commonplace use among Japanese adults, nor their significance.

To explore the gratification from Japanese comics, this thesis focuses on men's comic magazines and tries to fathom their popularity with and relationship to their readers. As popular culture, including comics, is a site where meaning is created, shared and lived, our analysis will illuminate some aspects Japanese culture and the people living it.

Review of the Literature

Although large-scale studies of comics (comic strips and comic books) have been relatively scarce in North America and in Japan (Berger, 1973; Harrison, 1981; Kure, 1990; McAllister, 1990), there is still a good-size body of literature which concerns itself with the analyses of comics[5]. These studies can be divided into three groups according to Robert Allen (1987). They are United States mass communication studies, pre-structuralist or traditional criticism, and what Allen calls "contemporary" critical studies.

Mass communication studies consist of a body of works in the research tradition which has been dominant in the United States between the 1940s and 1960s. Among these are an important group of sociological readership surveys. They focus on comics' readers, and investigate reading frequencies and reader preferences (Haskins and Jones, 1955; Robinson and White, 1963; Van Tubergen and Friedland, 1972, for example). The second subgroup is media

effects research, which tries to examine the possible causal relationship between comics and reader behaviour. Here the focus has mostly been on violence and juvenile delinquency among children and youth believed particularly open to such possible effects (Hoult, 1949; Wertham, 1954, for example). Neither of these research traditions are of immediate relevance to the present study.

The third subgroup of studies in the mass communication tradition are large scale content analyses of comics, mostly on newspaper strips (for example, Speigelman, et al., 1953, Seanger, 1955; Barcus, 1963; Hutchison; 1969). They aim to characterize some aspects of a group of comics by isolating certain content characteristics and correlating these statistically with meaning generation. Again these studies are not directly related to my particular question regarding reader satisfaction.

Growing awareness of the role of popular culture in society has led many researchers to focus on media representations and stereotypes in comics and cartoons. Here Greenberg (1970) and Thiboudeau (1989) have investigated racial stereotypes while Anderson and Jolly (1977) and Meyer et al. (1980) have looked into sexual stereotypes in the wake of the women's movement. More recent scholarship has incorporated qualitative approaches. Harold Hinds and Charles Tatum (1984), for instance, studied Mexican comic books to isolate the principal images of women and compared them to traditionally held stereotypes of Mexican women. Such an approach should be helpful in analyzing "who is represented" in Japanese men's comic magazines.

The second group of studies can be called a traditional criticism. They consist of an assortment of different kinds of works which investigate the authorship of the comics. Among

them are a series of critiques of Japanese contemporary comic artists by Kawamoto Saburo[6] (1988), analyzing their visual and verbal styles, and the study by Yoshimoto Takaaki (1984). The latter studies how some Japanese comic artists create their fictional world through a combination of verbal and visual languages.

Other traditional analysis have been more interested in the ways each comic "reflects" its respective society. The historical analysis of popular American comics by Arthur Berger (1973) found that comic characters embody the values of their era. In a similar vein, Sakuta Keiichi, et al. (1965) traced Japanese popular comic characters from the 1920s to the 1960s, and found that they too reflect the people and their life at a certain period. Tsurumi Shunsuke (1973) in turn inferred certain social ideologies from Japanese postwar comics.

Others authors are more concerned with how industrial practices in the comic industry such as publishing house ownership or self-censorship have influenced the content of comics in the United States (McAllister, 1990; J.P.Williams, 1987). One of the underlying assumptions of Ishiko Junzo (1980), who traced the historical transformation of Japanese postwar comics, is that reader profiles dictate the comic content. In his work on Japanese postwar comics, Kure Tomofusa (1990) also pays attention to the specific industrial practices and their relation to comics. This type of research helps me to locate the comic magazines I will be looking at in their historical and social contexts. Men's comic magazines now are historically rooted in postwar Japanese comics. This is evidenced by a particular production style, market position, and target readership, all of which determines the contents of the comics.

Still other researchers focus on different genres of comics, such as superheroes (Lang and Trimble, 1988, for example) and romance (Perebinossoff, 1975; Bailey, 1976). Delores Mitchel

(1981) analyzed a group of underground comic books by women artists. She found that these comics usually featured women and seemed very close to the artists' own concerns. Consequently their style differed significantly from that of mainstream comics usually produced by male artists.

A comparison of different genres yields insights about how the narratives are constructed. Frederik Schodt (1983) deals with the sarariiman, or "salary-man" Japanese comics genre. He characterizes them as comic strips dealing typically with a pathetic rank-and-file white-collar, middle class worker depicted in a minimalist drawing style - a parody of the conforming life style of salary-men. These studies teach me that magazines must be analyzed at both the individual story level as well as at the genre level.

The third group of comic studies are based on insights from structuralist linguistics and semiotics. These analyses consider comics not as "works" but as "texts" whose structural features partially determine how a reader makes sense of the content. According to Allen, a text is "the site of intersection for a complex web of codes and conventions" (1987: 7). Umberto Eco (1979) elaborates on how a reader or a group of readers produces meanings through their engagement with the text. This approach also assumes that a text and textual conventions have a relationship with underlying conventions or ideologies. In his analysis of Superman comics as a "closed text" (8) which is open to every possible interpretation, Eco suggests that the narrative structure and what Superman embodies - a civic conscience endorsing the legitimation of capitalistic society - are essentially interrelated. Through plot lines it is possible to compare comic texts structurally and to identify commonalities which are lost in the fractured surfaces of the narrative. Eco's approach to the narrative structure of Superman comics allows me to view

certain narrative structures collectively - something necessary to analyze comic magazines.

The other important departure of this group of approaches is that the issue of gender has been acknowledged. While sexual difference is signified by biological differences conceived as "natural," "gender" is culturally created. It is a classificatory system which separates the dominant male from the subordinate female in the social hierarchy. This hierarchy also structures language, as well as the way we think. Thus the comics I will be looking at can be seen as a "symbolic system," through which "we communicate and organize our lives so as to understand how it is that we learn to be what our culture calls 'women' as against what are called 'men'" (E. Ann Kaplan, 1987; 227).

Barbara Thaler (1987) analyzes gender stereotyping in comic strips in The Washington Post and concludes that pure gender stereotypes are not overtly observed. She suggests that this is because readers have turned against oppressive gender stereotypes. The research by Ledden and Fejes (1987) is one of the few on Japanese comics which addresses the problem of gender. They examined the portrayals of gender roles in men's comic magazines and found that most of the female characters operate in traditional gender roles, in a high degree of agreement with prevalent Japanese social norms. They also found that those who do not belong to traditional gender roles are portrayed unfavourably. They noted that despite this, there are some discrepancies in social norms in terms of the treatment of marriage. In the treatment of marriage in the comics, romantic love and personal compatibility are the basis of marriage, though social norms put more emphasis on fundamental economics. They argue that this emphasis on romance creates a contradiction in the narratives, opposing traditional, practical gender roles and emotional ones.

Though these findings include many interesting points about the portrayal of gender roles, the analysis does not tell us what the different types of gender roles "mean" in the symbolic system of comic texts. According to contemporary criticism, these texts do not simply "reflect" one-to-one the ongoing situation of a persistently strong, traditional view of gender roles, nor the ferment over women's position in current Japanese society. In addition, we do not know why these gender roles are represented the way they are in men's comic magazines. Sandra Buckley (1989), in an analysis of male oriented pornographic comics[7] showed that the text/image was constructed to neutralize the threat to traditional gender roles. However, for the present thesis, however, research by Angela McRobbie (1991) seems most promising.

McRobbie conducted a textual analysis of a British teenage girl's magazine, Jackie in the late 1970s. She traced the changes in Jackie and other teenage girl's magazines and comics during the last decade subsequent to her initial study, the most notable change being a decline in romantic discourse. The special relevance of her studies to our analysis is that she studies the magazine as a text. This is different from much of the above mentioned research and analysis in which comics are treated separately from the medium which carries them. Many researchers recognize the importance of approaching media texts as a group of texts organized by specific conventions. Among these conventions are what Raymond Williams calls "flow" or continuous sequences.

McRobbie conducted a "reading" of Jackie, seeing the magazine as a "specific signifying system(s)" (91), in which many different texts function together to construct a specific discourse. Through her analysis of operating codes in the magazine, she concludes that the magazine's romantic discourse is designed for the construction of teenage femininity. However, as she

limited her study strictly to the text, she acknowledges the limits of her own study, stating, "until we have a much clearer idea of how girls read Jackie and encounter its ideological force, our analysis remains one-sided" (131-132). She reports that several researchers had interviewed and made use of the diaries of those who read Jackie after her initial analysis done in the late 1970s, and that they have found the reading processes more varied, active and engaging. She acknowledges the need for have more knowledge of how the text is actually read by readers, suggesting the application of ethnographic reader research.

Dick Hebdige (1988) analyzes a British cartoon, Biff, and argues its relation to post-modern society. McRobbie also notes the increasing embodiment of "post-modern values[8]" in the teenage girls' magazines and comics. McRobbie implies that possibly two perspectives, one on the text and the other on the reader, should ideally be incorporated in our analysis of the Japanese men's comic magazines.

A review of the existing literature suggests that as the format of the Japanese comic magazine is itself quite different from its Western counterpart, it is useful to approach the text as "structured whole(s)" (McRobbie, 1991: 91). Consequently I will view Japanese men's comic magazine as a sign system, operating on many different textual levels. Among these are: the frame, the episode, the serialized story, the genre, and the magazines as a whole, in their visual and verbal expressions. In addition, I will assess how these text are read by readers. This will enable me to clarify the pleasures readers derive from them and how readers use them in their leisure time.

At the same time, these magazines are sex-specific products as well as age-specific, though the latter distinction is not as clear cut as the former. The Japanese publishing industry

recognizes these distinction and has a long history of producing separate types of comic magazines according to sex and age. There are magazines for boys, girls, teenage boys, teenage girls, and for men and women.

To analyze comic magazines, I must therefore place the issue of gender at the centre of my attention. My textual analysis will have to investigate how the magazines are structured to meet certain "gender" rules and conventions which are ascribed to Japanese "men." In spite of this, however, it is known that women also read "male" comic magazines. My analysis must therefore also be sensitive to what might be called the phenomenon of "cross-gender" reading. This I will analyze through an investigation of reader letters written by women. Together these two approaches will help me to illuminate how the magazines function for both men and women in their gender specific organization of everyday life.

Methodology

The thesis will undertake this task only in an exploratory way.

For the analysis of text as a sign system, I will look at different sections of the magazines at different levels of texts. As it is naturally impossible to exhaust the infinite number of texts, one genre is isolated for this purpose. I will be looking at a genre of corporate comics: story-comics about businessmen, or more precisely, about salary-men. The selection is based on the fact that the large core of the readers are known to be salary-men themselves. Three story-comics of this genre are examined on the level of character types in order to observe the representations of the different kinds of salary-men, and at the level of episodes in order to examine the story themes.

The second type of textual analysis will be undertaken at the magazine format level as a whole. Different sections of the magazines, mainly story-comic instalments, will be examined in relation to the "story" angle. We will examine them as part of the magazine "flow" to see how each section functions together to produce a certain overall message. Other sections of the magazines, such as articles and advertisements are also to be looked at in order to understand the ways in which all sections of the magazine function as a "signifying whole."

To analyze the readers, I will rely on a second set of texts which are found within the magazines themselves, e.g. reader letters. Published letters from the readers are not, of course, the readers themselves. Their representation via reader letters is mediated at many different levels. First of all, only a limited number of readers actually write and send their letters to the magazines. Then, the written letters are selected and edited to a certain extent for publication. When published and incorporated in the magazine text, each letter has a different meaning from when it was written by an actual reader. Nevertheless, these letters can be an ample source of information about the readers if I carefully read them as I do with other texts. After all, they do contain evidence about reader satisfaction and reader expectations as well as general outlooks on Japanese culture and society. Through the assessment of reader letters I thus simulate an ethnographic approach which might directly involve the interview of magazine readers of both genders.

Sample Magazines

In 1990, there were thirty-four men's comic magazine titles on the market. This figure does not include pornographic comic magazines or other underground comic magazines of which

there are probably several dozens. Among men's comic magazines, I have selected three of the best selling comic magazines, all from the same publisher, using issues published in 1989 and 1990. Their selection was determined by their appeal and by the fact that they have reader letter pages.

Biggu Komikku (Big Comic, Big hereafter) is one of the oldest and the best selling comic magazines for men. It is published twice a month. It started in 1968 as a monthly and was one of the earliest comic magazines specifically targeted for adult readers. Soon it changed to twice a month, which remains its publication schedule up to today. At the present stage, the main readers are white-collar men in their thirties and older. Biggu Komikku Originaru (Big Comic Original, Original hereafter) is Big's spin-off publication. It too is published twice a month and was founded in 1972. The readers, too, are mainly over thirty. The third selected comic magazine is Biggu Komikku Supirittsu (Big Comic Spirits, Spirits hereinafter), another spin-off publication which is directed to a younger group, from high school students to those in their twenties. It began in 1980 as twice monthly publication, and since 1986 has increased to a weekly schedule. The three magazines have circulations more than one million per issue, occupying roughly twenty per cent of the men's comic magazine market. The publisher, Shogakkan, is one of the biggest publishing companies in Japan[9] and is well known as a publisher of grade magazines, study aids cum entertainment magazines specifically published for pupils in each grade, starting from preschool to grade six.

All three magazines follow almost the same format. They are printed on a pulp paper in black ink, with a few full-colour pages, slightly smaller than letter size. Each issue has about 300 hundred pages, folded and stapled. Each issue consists of story-comics, most of which are

episodes of serialized stories, while some are complete in themselves. They make up about 80 per cent of the pages. "Nonsense" or "gag" comics, short articles and advertisements fill the rest. Big and Original have several story-comics, while Spirits has about fifteen, due to its weekly format. In terms of reader letters, Big carries from seven to ten letters, Original carries from four to six letters per issue, and Spirits carries from six to ten letters per issue. Published letters are predominantly about the comics themselves and their relation to readers' lives. The gender ratio of letters is roughly seven from men to three from women[10] in Big. In Original the ratio is six to four and in Spirits it is about equal. Letters carried in Original are longest, while those in Spirits are the shortest and frequently illustrated, reflecting the fact that the Spirits readers are the youngest group of readers among the three magazines.

Thesis Outline

Chapter one concerns itself with a genre-level textual analysis using the three serialized story-comics of the corporate comic genre. Story lines, character types, and visuals in the three different versions of corporate comics are compared to each other to determine the common characteristics of the genre, such as general themes and overall narrative structure. Male reader letters regarding the corporate comics will be examined to see what sort of pleasure and significance the male readers derive from this leisure activity.

In chapter two a textual analysis will be conducted on the magazine level. I will look at a specific issue, Big, 25 November 1990, in order to decipher the ways in which a particular magazine issue contributes to the construction of "masculine identity" in Japan.

Chapter three looks at women as cross-gender readers to analyze the gender differentiated

reading of the texts. Moreover, an analysis of a single issue of women's comic magazines is carried out in order to see what kind of reading matter is available to women and why they choose to read men's comic magazines.

The thesis ends with a conclusion, which discusses the implications of the findings and the limitations of the present study.

Notes to Introduction

1. Nagara Susumu, et al., Japanese for Everyone. Tokyo: Gakken, 1990: 109.
2. Industrial figures of this and other chapters, if not otherwise specified, are taken from Shuppanshihyo Nenpo. Tokyo: Zenkoku Shuppan Kyookai Shuppan Kagaku Kenkyujo, 1991.
3. According to Frederik Schodt (1983), at the peak of the United States comic industry in 1954, the comic book market of the United States was about one billion copies a year, whereas at the beginning of the 1980s, it was about 138 million copies (127).
4. Schodt suggests calligraphy, which has a long history in Japan, is a fusion of writing and drawing. He also notes that the use of ideograms in the Japanese language has had something to do with the overwhelming visual elements in Japanese culture in general (25).
5. Because of some difficulties in gaining access to the Japanese literature, Japanese literature on the mass communications studies is not thoroughly represented here.
6. Japanese names in this thesis is in the order of original Japanese names: the family name first and the given name second.
7. As differentiated from the new genre for pornographic comics for women.
8. She lists as examples such factors as "the dominance of the visual text over the written text,

retro dress, joky tones, a love of the swift and slick fast-turnover images of pop consumerism, pastiche, and overwhelming emphasis on 'informationalism'" (184).

9. According to a 1990 report, Shogakkan is the close second, following Kodansha, a general publishing house which also has comic publications.

10. Japanese differentiates in usage and inflection between the two sexes. It is therefore quite easy to determine the sex of writers of letters, even when there is no real name or a pen-name accompanying a letter.

CHAPTER ONE

GENRE-LEVEL ANALYSIS: CORPORATE COMICS

In this chapter, I will look at three different versions of comics in what I call here corporate comic genre - a group of story-comics which deal with the life of businessmen in their corporate working environment[1]. Through the analysis of these three comics, we will try to determine the common characteristics of the genre, as a point of entry into the text of Japanese men's comic magazine.

Moreover, by assessing reader letters about these corporate comics from male readers, I can also explore the significance of these comics in the everyday life of the readers.

Corporate Comics as a Genre

Since the middle 1960s - coinciding with the changes in industry and marked economic growth - comic strips that feature company employees have appeared in major newspapers and in regular magazines. They featured non-elite employees, showing them both at work and at home. The arrival of white-collar employees to story comics is relatively new[2]. However, since its inception as a genre about ten years ago, this type of comic is occupying an increasingly larger part in men's comic magazines.

I will look at one each of the serialized corporate comics from three sample magazine titles. Each of them is one of the most popular, thus longest-running, instalments in each respective magazine: "Nazeka Shosuke [For Some Reason, It's You, Shosuke]," "Somubu, Somuka, Yamaguchi Rokuheita [Mr. Yamaguchi Rokuheita of the General Affairs Section, the

General Affairs Department]", and "Tsuribaka Nisshi [Diary of a Fool Angler]."

There are certain similarities among them, besides that of genre. All of the main characters are rank-and-file men working at their corporate headquarters in Tokyo.

"Nazeka Shosuke"

"Nazeka Shosuke [For Some Reason, It's You, Shosuke]" (by Hijiri Hideo)" is a story in which an unfavoured newcomer to a corporation gradually grows into a good businessman through his on-the-job experience. It is carried in Spirits, the magazine targeted for the youngest group among the three sample magazines.

Shosuke is a young businessman working for the food department of a large international trading firm. He occupies the very base of the corporate hierarchy but has the potential to be promoted to managerial position. Although he is from a mediocre university - a negative asset in an environment where school factions tend to prevail - his good nature, humble personality and willingness to learn make his future apparently quite bright.

Each episode entails some business situation and its resolution, with a conventional lesson given each time. These lessons include: "Make most of the mistake;" "Don't forget the importance of traditional face-to-face communication in today's high technological business situation;" "True leadership is measured by the number of good advisers you have, rather than the way you handle everything by yourself;" " A real leader does not make people around him jealous of him;" "Listening to and understanding others is much more important than imposing your ideas on others;" "Making your superior lose face is a big mistake even when he is wrong."

In its fifteen-page format, a typical episode involving Shosuke devotes the first twelve

pages to an introduction of a business problem to be solved and the process of solving it. The following two pages are devoted to the after-work conversation between Shosuke and his boss(es) in the regularly frequented bar near the office. There the lesson learned in the preceding pages is summarized by a boss. The last page concerns a joke one of the characters makes in the workplace, relating the lesson learned to one aspect of some character's personality and private life.

The target readers of this comic are implied by the catch phrases editors place in on the opening page of each episode, the table of contents and in trailers, signifying how editors want the comic to be read. The typical copy for this serial found in these spaces are "the bible for today's salary-man" or "a must read for the salary-man." In one corner of the cover page to each episode, there is also an English line which reads "How to be hot salaried-man" [Sic]. The Japanese term sarariiman, is from the English "salary-man" or "salaried man," originally referring to white-collar office employees. As middle-class consciousness spreads through the society and as management styles maintain a minimal difference between the treatment of blue-collar and white-collar workers, the salary-man becomes an omnipresent figure. As long as a man belongs to an organization and gets a monthly salary, he is a salary-man regardless of his job category. Salary-men share specific traits, behaviours and worldview, because of their common experience of being salary-men. A salary-man is a product of what is generally called Japanese management: the seniority system which determines promotion and salary; the semi-lifelong employment system in which annual recruits are drawn from those fresh out of school; the high in-firm mobility among different job fields; extensive benefits, from subsidised housing to recreational facilities and events; and overall job security.

"Nazeka Shosuke" is designed to provide readers lessons on how to be a good salary-man. And what are these lessons, exactly? Randy Hirakawa (1987) argues that the specific organization of Japanese business contributes to effective communications among employees, cutting across section and rank because of common objectives. This also applies to where Shosuke works. In one episode (Spirits, 24 July 1989), a good communication network cutting across the vertical chain of command results in business opportunities for the section to which Shosuke belongs. Ordered to come up with some ideas for a new product, Shosuke, young and eager, succeeds in developing some novel sample products. This seems to please everyone except his boss who has given Shosuke this assignment. Observing this situation is a fatherly higher-up. Asking Shosuke out to the nearby bar after work, he reminds him of the historical anecdote of a medieval Shogun who climbed to that position from the lowest Samurai rank by always leaving the final touch to otherwise completed projects for his boss. Shosuke is advised to ask his boss to conclude the deal for the materialization of the project. Realising the trap of depriving his boss of his own contribution to a successful project, Shosuke willingly follows this advice.

This story is illustrative not only of the positive flow of information within a corporate structure but of the shared value of hierarchy. Shosuke could not be a good salary-man without knowing that getting ahead of others is not a good thing to do. He has to know his own position in the company hierarchy so that his own achievement benefits everyone, especially his boss. He has learned yet another lesson, which gives him one more criteria to be a "good" salary-man. But more important is his own willingness to learn, without questioning existing wisdom.

Shosuke's image of a good salary-man spills into the full-page advertisement which

appears following each episode. It is done in comic strip form with the same cast of characters as the comic itself. In this short comic advertisement, Shosuke and other people in the workplace encounter a situation where they feel the need for a revitalizing drink of this one specific brand, an everyday item for Japanese businessmen who are supposed to need such drinks to cope with the heavy work load.

Shosuke seems to have successfully learned all the lessons he needs at his present position at the base of the corporate ladder. In more than nine years of serialization, Shosuke grew from a neophyte to a reliable employee. This serialized story-comic came to an end in a 1991 episode[3], when Shosuke is promoted to a chief clerk, supervisor of several employees. At the same time, he decides to get married to one of his associates, which he has been hesitant to do up to this point because of his lack of self-confidence about surviving the corporate environment. Consequently, the story changes its title from "For Some Reason, It's You, Shosuke" to "No Wonder, It's You, Shosuke" and will be carried in yet another spin-off magazine targeted for a slightly older group of readers. This time, he will learn how to be a good middle manager.

Somubu, Somuka, Yamaguchi Rokuheita

"Somubu, Somuka, Yamaguchi Rokuheita [Mr. Yamaguchi Rokuheita of General Affairs Section, General Affairs Department]" (Original script: Hayashi Ritsuo, Artist: Takai Ken'ichiro) is another popular corporate comic, serialized in Big with its twenty page format.

The title character, Yamaguchi Rokuheita, is about thirty years of age, single, and works for a large auto maker at its headquarters in downtown Tokyo. The job description of the section is everything that is not covered by other sections. The section does not produce any profit, and

never attracts the limelight on its own performance, since it exists only for the comfort and better business environment of all the for employees. Rokuheita performs many miscellaneous jobs, from delivering green tea leaves to each section to running the office during a sudden power failure in the middle of a hot summer day.

The very nature of the section's odd jobs makes it one of the most unrewarding, unnoticed sections in the company. However, Rokuheita himself is highly regarded by everyone because he can do his job - his miscellaneous jobs. He turns his seemingly totally uninteresting and not-so-challenging jobs into something exciting. Routine bureaucratic jobs in his hand can be done in an imaginative fashion.

His position in the general affairs section makes him well aware of private life, such as family situations and personal interests and hobbies of the employees and business clients as well as the members of the local community. In many episodes, it is this very knowledge that he uses to solve a problem. His performance is outstanding because he communicates to the right person at the right time in the right way so that the harmony of the company as a group is maintained.

In one episode (Big, 10 February 1990), his communication skills are displayed. A newly promoted CEO arrives at his new executive office and demands of the general affairs section many non-essential things such as the replacement of a wall painting and installation of a bigger screen television. Rokuheita deals with these matters wittily and smoothly.

In the meantime, one of his juniors, who works in sales, comes to Rokuheita asking for advice. The junior says that he has been asked by a corrupt government official for a bribe, and that his supervisors seem willing to take the risk to make a profit. He does not want to do it, he says, but what can he do but obey the bosses if they think it has to be done for the company?

Rokuheita does not say anything, but instead goes to the CEO. He then takes his junior to see the CEO, who tells the supervisors responsible to stop the deal. Assuming the responsibility, the CEO goes to see the company president, reporting the issue and asking for post-approval. The president tells the CEO that he is in a position to decide such things on his own. The CEO calls Rokuheita up and says "You have a guts to interfere with another section's business, don't you?" and continues, "Don't do that again," to which Rokuheita just says "I am sorry."

In this seemingly simple episode of who says what to whom in a corporate structure, there are some points which underline the fact that Rokuheita is a good company employee. First, he is reliable. His junior came to him for advice even though he was in a different section. He could see what kind of person the new CEO was beneath his arrogance, that he was a man of principle. He knew to whom to talk in order to solve this specific problem. He did not say anything unnecessary when accused of interference. And he went outside the formal chain of command if necessary, in this case helping the company to stay on the right track. He is the "hero" of this comic because he fulfils his function in the corporate structure, although the kind of jobs he does rarely are recognized.

Another thing which makes him a "hero" is his relation to his bosses. This section is headed by a section chief, and under him there is a sub-chief. The section chief, though representing the section, does not seem to manifest his expertise on any occasion. He is caught between the higher-ups and his subordinates and cannot make any substantive decisions. According to the introduction of each character found in the margin of the first page of each episode, this section chief is "an ordinary person." The sub-chief has strong upward aspirations, but does not care to work much, and "at least ten times a day, he speaks ill of others." He is

a smooth talker to his superiors, but a demanding boss to his staff, ducking all the responsibilities. Rokuheita does not seem to care about the lack of leadership and selfishness on the part of these bosses. Instead, he just takes it for granted and finds pleasure in doing the job he is asked to do, or in helping others to do their jobs. Because of his willingness to fulfil his duty without accusing the bosses, his competence does not cause any disruption in the hierarchy of the workplace. He does not do his job for the individual recognition or claim to achievement. He merely fulfils his role as given, helping his section and the company.

Here it should be noted that unlike North America, where a worker retains his/her job category and tends to change companies, in Japan, a worker changes his/her job categories within a company, especially when one is young. A company hires an employee, not an accountant or a personnel manager. It is a common understanding, therefore, that Rokuheita might not stay in this section for good. A sales director in the company, impressed by Rokuheita's performance, says "He is too good a person to be in that general affairs division." One politician tries to hire him away as one of his staff members since "it is a waste of his talent to remain as a mere salary-man," to which he replies, "I like the job I do now in the general affairs section." The important thing in the narrative of this comic is that Rokuheita likes his present job and thinks that no matter where he is it is up to him to do a good job and no matter what he is assigned it is up to him to make it interesting. This serves as an important piece of advice for many salary-men, whose position in the company is "given" rather than chosen.

Editors are well aware of what readers want in Rokuheita. In one of their comments to a reader letter, they say that during their discussion with the artist and the original story writer, "we always remind ourselves to keep Rokuheita's character a kind of guy you find sitting next

to you in your office so that you can feel close to him, despite the fact that he is a superman." (Emphasis added)[4]. All modesty aside, Rokuheita is a superman in that he always finds a solution to a problem, without complaining, his only weapon awareness of the situation and consideration of others. His enemy is not the evil, violent power trying to destroy his company. It is routinization of the job, loss of motivation, selfishness, and irresponsibility, to which many salary-men find themselves prone in the bureaucracy of the workplace.

"Tsuribaka Nisshi"

In contrast to the two main characters of the corporate comics we have already seen, the main character of "Tsuribaka Nisshi [Diary of a Fool Angler]" (Original script: Yamasaki Juzo, Artist: Kitami Ken'ichi), serialized in Original, seems to be the example of a "bad" salary-man. While "Shosuke" is dubbed by editors "an ultimate guidebook for businessmen," and "Rokuheita" a "good and easy manual for salary-men," the heading on the book version of "Diary" reads:

> If you want to live like him [the main character], you'd better prepare to leave the company. In this sense, it is a trouble making book, rather than trouble-solving book [a pun in Japanese, by replacing two Chinese characters with others with of the same pronunciation.][5]

Leaving a company, for a typical Japanese businessman, is a major life decision. A company is a community which one joins and expects to stay in for the rest of one's career. Then, what makes the main character in "The Diary of an Angler," Hamasaki Densuke, an uncharacteristic member of the corporate culture?

Like the other two corporate heroes, Hamasaki also works in the headquarters of a

company located in a thriving business district of central Tokyo, in his case a large construction company. He belongs to the sales department, is in his early thirties, and lives in a typical suburban duplex with his wife and son. Up to this point, he is a typical salary-man. However, he is the only one among his doki people who has not yet been promoted to a managerial position, while everyone else has been promoted at least to chief of a small group and even some, to section chief. And that is very serious for a salary-man. A typical salary-man, especially those in bigger companies, joins a company in the spring as a fresh recruit right after graduation from university. The people who join a company together are called doki - people of the same year of entry - and the sense of doki remains until the end of his life in the company. Those who join the company before he does are his senior, and those after are his junior. As long as the seniority system works in a literal sense, senior people remain his superior and juniors remain his subordinate. However, different rates and limits of promotion can complicate the relationship. While doki are tied together as a group, the inner competition is strongly felt because the comparison of positions is easily made among them.

Hamasaki is known as an "eternal bottom rung employee" and a "no good salary-man." Coming from a mediocre university, he is considered extremely fortunate just to be in the company. What makes him a no-good salary-man is his lack of motivation for promotion or infirm recognition. He refuses a weekend of business golf to entertain clients. During a mah-jongg game with clients, in which he ought to be a good loser to please the clients, he takes the game seriously and wins. In a word, he lacks the understanding of what it means to be a member of salary-man society. He does not seem to care about his position at all. His seemingly unsuccessful company life is made up for by extreme good fortune. First, he has a

very happy family life with his wife and a child (which makes many so-called elites think twice about their job-devoted life style). Second, he has a passion and talent for fishing. And it is through this hobby/passion that he becomes such an uncharacteristic salary-man in another sense - - in his hobby world he is a friend of and master to his own company's president and other important people in business and government.

The narrative develops along the public/private axis, which becomes the basis of the humorous situations and mismatches. Publicly, Hamasaki's day to day performance is not good. His humour is too much for his bosses and colleagues, though because of his frankness and honesty, he is popular among the female workers, all in assisting positions. Privately, he is content with a close-knit family life and his love of fishing and nature. He does not take advantage of his acquaintances with many influential business people, including his own president. On their fishing trips, he treats them not as important big shots but as just friends who share the same passion, in which he excels both in passion and technique. The company president and other bosses, on the other hand, exercise some influence over his public activities in the company, giving him opportunities seemingly unmatched to his regular job performance. On these occasions, too, he performs what he does best - he captures the hearts of the people by his good nature and frankness. No one in the office knows about his friendship with the company president. The whole situation creates a lot of pleasure for readers who are let in on the secret.

This comic maintains itself as realistic. The cast includes supporting characters among whom are many different types of typical salary-men: an upwardly mobile middle-managerial boss of Hamasaki, a section chief who finds himself in the awkward position of supervising

Hamasaki who is his doki, "elites" who build their self-esteem on their favoured academic backgrounds and an alcohol-prone middle manager. And even Hamasaki himself, though many times non-conformist, knows the bottom line of a salary-man. Free spirited as he is, he never thinks of leaving the company. However, compared to the other two comics, this one makes clear that this is a fictional world being depicted. The comic has a narrator, identified as either the script writer or the artists, and who uses the same type of speech as rakugo, the Japanese traditional art of humorous story telling. Hamasaki is a fictional hero in a realistic corporate workplace.

Characteristics of the Genre

The basic discourse of these three corporate comics is the confirmation of traditional values nurtured in Japanese corporate culture. All of them deal with the different issues and problems salary-men - members of this culture - face in their life. "Shosuke" is about learning through experience. The main idea behind "Rokuheita" is the sense of duty and responsibility in a given position. "Diary" points to the issue of being one's true self in an organization.

Loyalty to the company is the common thread among all the characters. A conversation between the company president and a big financier in one episode of "Rokuheita" about a "head-hunted" elite salary-man soon to leave the company, is typical in expressing this view (Big, 25 November 1989).

> President: Every company wants to have able employees. Financier: Yes, able employees are important assets for any company.
>
> President: However, if a company has only "able," elite employees, it goes to bankrupt.

For a company, regular, ordinary employees are also indispensable.

Financier: Yes, elites can exist only where non-elites are. In other word, there are no unnecessary people.

President: That is what a company, or a society, is all about, isn't it?

Financier: For a company, a hard working, loyal employee, though not especially gifted, who stays with the company for a long time is of more value [than a able, gifted employee who might leave the company for his/her own benefit], don't you think?

President: You are right. I was pretty ordinary, too.

In exchange for loyalty from its employees, a company gives job security. In all three comic serials, "you're fired" is a frequently used word, since everyone understands that it seldom happens. Even Hamasaki in "Diary" does not have to worry about his job security.

The corporate workplace in these comics has a strong sense of community, consisting of a group of loyal people who work together for the whole. It is where one's life is based and where life is to be lived, not a place outside of one's life. This is probably why the narratives of these comics go on in the workplace or nearby restaurants and bars frequented by colleagues, never penetrating into the main characters' private lives. This is not so with "Diary of a Fool Angler," in which fishing scenes and depictions of family life are frequent. However, it is through these private activities that the hero acquaints and interacts with the important people in his public life. Readers do not know the private life of those people, but it is assumed that their public life as worker represents their whole way of life. Even the question of marriage, seemingly a very private affair, is shared by practically everyone in the workplace. In the case of the two celibate protagonists, the prospective wife is an assistant or a secretary working in the

company, and people in the workplace judge him implicitly or explicitly to be a good enough salary-man to get married.

> A company is like a big family, sometimes even like a vacation land [where they have fun together]. Now that the sense of community is being lost in families and in the neighbourhood, the company may be the only community left for men, where they can base their lives and find strong spiritual ties. (Emphasis added, Aoki Toshio, 1985: 246)

While this depiction by a Japanese journalist of a corporate workplace is true to the setting of our corporate comics, it is obviously an idealized image. Raw feelings, greed, lust and desire for power are not expressed. Human relations are not overtly confrontational, as differences in opinions mostly originate in the different positions each character occupies. As there are no absolute villains, and no agony, inner conflict and self-doubt in the characters, stories never get too serious. Despite their own disadvantages (Shosuke's lack of good academic background, Rokuheita's unrewarding position, and Hamasaki's lack of promotion), these characters have found their respective niche as salary-men. They are portrayed as happy there. Corporate comics are happy stories.

The graphic style also contributes to create this "not so serious but realistic" narrative. The landscape, buildings, and interior are executed in photographic realism, conveying a sense of reality, and placing each character in a certain locale and position (i.e. Tokyo, big firm). The characters - especially noticeable in the case of "Rokuheita" and "Diary" - are drawn in more or less a minimalist cartoon style, which is far from realistic. Such a drawing style is not suited to depict heroes with deep psychology.

Readers of Corporate Comics

The reader letters section of the magazine has multiple functions when imbedded in the text of the magazine. For readers it provides a forum of exchange about various features and contents of the comic magazine. When personal crises and concerns are recounted in letters in relation to comic stories, the section also functions as something similar to a "problem page" though no advice is given. For the editors of the magazine, publication of letters in praise of the comics and magazine enhances the value of the magazine. When readers talk about movie or television versions of comic stories, the letters function as advertisements. Publication of critical letters also enhances the value of the magazine because this might be seen as a reflection of an open editorial policy. However, the main function of the reader letter section is to establish the existence of a community of readers by presenting various views and comments from the readers themselves. As discussed in the introductory chapter, published letters are mediated on many different levels and do not represent the real readers per se. Nevertheless, they are at least published and have some appeal to the readership. Yet it is the variety of these letters that attracts our attention.

Letters concerning corporate comics reveal that corporate comic texts are always talked about in relation to readers' reality. There seem to be two assumptions on the part of readers to support this. One is that corporate comics reflect the reality of corporate culture, which readers are familiar with. The other is that reading corporate comics is meaningful in the real life of readers.

However, within these general assumptions, specific reactions to corporate comics can be observed. They are broadly grouped into three types.

The first group sees the same value shared by the characters and themselves. Most of these letters concern either "Shosuke" or "Rokuheita." Reading corporate comics are therefore associated with learning about mindsets and human relationships in the corporate workplace, i.e. practical know-how.

A university student who will soon join the work force reports, for example, that he is using "Shosuke" as a "guide book" for the corporate life waiting for him. "As I substitute myself with Shosuke, the reading becomes so intense"[6]. Another reader, who started reading the same comic in the hope that it would make him a better salesperson, says he has been reading it attentively, commenting that comic reading could be a very useful thing[7]. As the basic format is always the same, the readers know a problem is solved one way or another by the end of the episode. The readers seem to be participating in this problem solving process, relying on resources from their own experience.

This group sees the characters as role models. As one reader says, they want to see in the character an "attractive enough person to be my eternal role model"[8]. They compare the characters to equally impressive real life colleagues. And even at work, they talk about the characters. One reader reports that he asked his younger colleague whether his role model was Rokuheita. According to this letter, the colleague replied, "I do not think of him as a direct role model. But as I have been reading his story for a long time, it naturally occurred to me that I have to be as good as he is"[9].

However, readers may outgrow comic characters. A reader of "Shosuke" notes Shosuke is too lucky to be true, asking the script writer and the artist to give him more hard times so that he will "grow"[10]. It could be inferred that if readers like this one find the lessons of each

episode too obvious, while real life is far too complicated and unrewarding, the repeated pedagogical tone of this serialized comic would cease to give reading pleasure.

The second group of readers like the way the main character lives, while they do not think they can be like him themselves. This is mostly the response associated with "Diary." The detailed and concrete fishing scenes in various locations contribute to the success of this serial - one of the longest running corporate comics - as fishing is a very popular pastime in Japan. However, the main character's position in his company as a "bad" salary-man, in fact, seems to appeal many readers. He is "bad" in the conventional workplace environment, but it in turn makes him a "hero." Many letters suggest that readers consider him a "hero" in that he is free of all the constraints of complex human relationships that dominate the life of salary-men. Yet, as an individual, he can catch people's hearts, unlike the stereotypical salary-man who constantly tries to impress people with his business card. Many readers seem to have found the episodes on Hamasaki's business trip to Australia a reconfirmation of what kind of person he is. During this business trip, while enjoying fishing and spending some time together with the local people, he builds a genuine, spontaneous human relationship and understanding with them. It wins over the typically formal, calculated approaches taken by his elite colleagues, and brings about good business results. In reader letters, Hamasaki is conceived as a free-spirited individual, free from the constraining pressure of corporate bureaucracy, confident enough about himself not to care about promotions and his in-firm reputations. He is not only regarded as an uncharacteristic salary-man, but "un-Japanese-like."

The third group do not like the way the main character lives. This is by far the smallest in number. A high school boy[11], in the midst of his "university entrance examination battle,"

says he used to take it for granted that he would be a salary-man one day. He expresses his disgust for corporate life as represented by Shosuke and his colleagues. His rationalization for studying hard used to be that once he gets accepted by a "good" university, he can get a "good" job. He says he is totally disillusioned and disappointed by Shosuke's life, which is nothing but hard work day after day just to serve the company. He laments that he is no longer sure whether he can go through the hard entrance examination competition with this loss of rationalization.

Transcending the three different ways of responding to the corporate comics is that the male readers identify themselves in their job or potential, future job, and read the corporate comics in relation to the jobs they currently have or will hold.

The following letter suggests that sharing workplace experience is important for readers in deriving interest, significance and pleasure form these corporate comics.

> I am a third year salary-man and a big fan of "Rokuheita." I have been reading Big since my university days. To tell you the truth, though, "Rokuheita" was never my favourite in those days. Being a salary-man myself has made me discover how interesting and funny this comic really is! It was indeed "a pearl before a swine" for me in the past. (From Mr. Ishizaki Tatsuji, Saitama Prefecture)[12]

Sharing their experiences, readers come away with information and know-how, while contributing their real-life knowledge to solving the problems the comic characters encounter. These comics offer an opportunity to reflect on tackling the job and to gain a fresh motivation. Readers also compare the scenes to their life in the workplace or potential workplace, and try to find a place where they fit in. Different types of characters provide models for each possibility. Some characters fit their own image of themselves, while others show possibilities

for different relations to the workplace.

It seems that these corporate comics provide readers - many of them salary-men - the opportunity to share the pleasure and pathos of being salary-men. At the same time, they are affirming the value of being salary-men.

Two assumptions seem to be shared by salary-men readers of corporate comics. One is that it is necessary to blend into the corporate structure despite individual concerns. The other is that it is in the organization, not outside of it, that one can fully fulfil his potential, where he can grow to be a better person suited for the position he occupies in the corporate structure.

Corporate comics seem to affirm the paradoxical position of the salary-man, where blending into the organization assures his position as an individual.

As "public" is not clearly distinguished from "private" in the narratives of the corporate comics, reading corporate comics does not entirely belong to leisure time outside of work. Readers do not leave their domain of working life completely to escape into something very different. By reading these comics, on the contrary, they are looking at characters just like themselves in a similar work environment and examining their own experience in light of characters in the comics. The reading pleasure of corporate comics is created when the readers share the narratives with the characters in the comic.

Notes to Chapter One

1. The term "business comics" are widely used in Japan. It is a wider than the corporate comics and includes various kinds of business situations.

2. Kure (1990: 202).

3. Sprits, 1 July 1991.

4. Big, 10 June 1989: 288.

5. Original, 5 December 1990: 53.

6. From "For Some Reason, it is Paradise for Job Seekers," Chiba Prefecture, Spirits, 22 October, 1990: 335.

7. From "Seiko My Love" Spirits, 6 March 1989: 313.

8. From a reader asking for anonymity, Aomori Prefecture, Big, 10 June 1989: 288.

9. From Mr. Matsui Hajime, Chiba Prefecture, Big, 10 March 1990: 239.

10. From "A Realist!?" Chiba Prefecture, Sprits, 5 March 1990: 320.

11. From "Bright Star Gentleman." Osaka Prefecture, Spirits, 14 and 21 May, 1990: 327.

12. Big, 25 July 1989: 207.

CHAPTER TWO

MAGAZINE LEVEL ANALYSIS

One issue of a comic magazine consists of several story-comics, together with short comics and articles, which serves as fillers, as well as advertisements. Story-comics represent certain genres, such as corporate comics, business comics, sports comics, and romance comics. The combination of story-comics in a single issue bears a significance in the signifying system of the text of the magazine. In this chapter, I will examine what kind of narrative is constructed in a single issue of a comic magazine as a "structured whole". It will be argued that the narrative is constructed to emphasize "masculine identity" in Japan.

Individualists' Challenge to Corporate Identity?

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, traditional corporate values are the framework of our three corporate comics. Most of the readers of these comics are basically accepting. However if we scrutinize letters from male readers more closely, it becomes apparent that they are not always in accordance with the corporate workplace structure idealized in these corporate comics. A salary-man sometimes is disgusted with being one. In fact, it could be said, occasional resentment and self-doubt at being a salary-man is a part of the life of many members of corporate culture.

> Following the recent reorganization of the company, a reshuffling took place. I had been anticipating being promoted to section chief. It may sound arrogant, but considering the work I had been doing and my in-firm reputation, I thought I had every reason to be

promoted. However, I remained assistant section chief. The new section chief, though some years senior to me, is just a smooth talker with no significant work record. Frankly I was in a state of shock. Sleepless nights followed. Now there are high job demands and many people are changing jobs. I thought about going independent or changing companies. However, I have a family to support, and do not have the courage to leave the present company. While disgusted by the company, I cannot leave the security it is providing me. In the end, I sigh while reading "Here's the Project!" Sunsuke [the main character of the serial] does the job for himself, not for the company. As a man, I wish I could be like him, who singlehandedly fights against industry's giant organizations, depending just on his talent and guts. Yearning to have some of Shunsuke's high energy myself, I tell myself to do the best I can in the present company for now. (Emphasis added, from a reader asking anonymity, Tokyo)[1]

This reader's hero, Kudo Shunsuke, is the main character in a serialized story-comic in Big, "Here's the Project," who left Japan's largest advertising agency and founded his own, and has since been, competing with the industry's giant corporations. For this reader, Kudo represents an exciting, challenging, individualistic life, opposite to his own secure but at times unsatisfying corporate life. In this case, the frustration was triggered by the promotion, or lack of it, because promotion could be "paramount to his career" and in many cases "becomes the white-collar worker's sole purpose in life" ("Sarariiman," Encyclopedia of Japan).

This letter was printed to show the sentiment of salary-men caught between the security in the community of company and the yearning for what they conceive as a challenging, individualistic, "manly" life outside of it. They seldom leave their present environment because

they "do not have the courage" to do so. In a society which holds fast to the cultural principle of group orientation and its modern-day incorporation into corporate structure, being an individual outside of the group is hard-won. One of the prototypes of Japanese popular heroes is a lone man detached from any organization in society. Kudo is the present day incarnation of the lone Samurai.

Among our corporate "heroes" discussed in the preceding chapter on the corporate comics genre, there is Rokuheita, who works for the betterment of the group and who finds pleasure and pride in doing so. Hamasaki is a "hero" in that he retains a free spirit even inside the confines of a bureaucratic organization. Shosuke is a young, fresh mind, eager to be a traditional corporate hero despite the odds. Although different in detail, they all can be classified as organization men, who find their space in a traditional corporate culture in different degrees of commitment to that tradition. Kudo, on the other hand, is the one who steps out of the corporate structure and goes it on his own, living in a raw, competitive, individualistic business environment.

Flow of 25 November 1990 issue of Big

Raymond Williams (Williams, 1974; Heath and Skirrow, 1986) proposed "flow" as an important element in analyzing television. The notion of flow enables an analysis of what a viewer experiences in television viewing. By flow, Williams means a sequence of television programming, including programmes, advertisements and trailers. A flow can be captured at many different levels of text from visual frames to entire schedule for broadcasting. By examining flow, he argues, it becomes possible to see, in a seemingly arbitrary juxtaposition of

elements, the message specific to each televisual text. He points out that in some cases "the apparently disjointed 'sequence' of items" is organized by a remarkably consistent set of cultural relationships" (Williams, 1974: 105). Applying this notion of flow of televisual texts to our magazines seems useful, despite the different nature of the two media, because it encourages us to see the magazine as a whole as experienced by readers and how it is structured textually and discursively. Though Williams' flow analysis covers different ranges of flows (long, medium, close) we will look at the flow of the magazine in its entirety, as our interest here is to see how each instalment work together with others to produce some significance. As it is not possible to chose "the most typical" issue from our sample magazines, the choice of issue is arbitrary.

Flow: Big, 25 November, 1990.

S.C. = story comic. C. = humour, nonsense short comics.

An. = Announcement. Ad. = Advertisement.

Page	Group	Title and Description
1	Cover	Magazine title in Katakana and an English phrase "COMICS FOR MEN." An illustration of a Sumo wrestler, with caption. Titles and artists' names for nine story-comics it carries.

2	Ad.	For cars.
3-5	Photo + Article	"Big Joke." A spoof of a paranormal phenomenon widely reported by media.
6	Ad.	For domestic cigarettes.
7-32	S.C.1	"Medusa No.19: On a Fortress." Set in the late 1960s, the story evolves around two university students who are in love, but take the opposite side of the student rebellion.
33-34	An.	"Big Comic Prize for Comics and Original Scripts for Comics." Result on the second-round selection and call for works for the following competition.
35-54	S.C.2	"Yamaguchi Rokuheita, No.107: A Cute Little Thing Left Behind." A baby is left alone in a car parked in front of the company building. Among different reactions from different company members, Rokuheita helps a secretary to find the irresponsible parents.

55	Ad.	For animated version of a comic series carried in the magazine.
56-57	Article	An essay on everyday life by the female comic artist of story-comic 3.
58	Ad.	For two books of essay anthologies by the two comic artists whose works are carried in the magazine.
59-60	Ad.	For credit card, accompanied by an application form.
61-84	S.C.3	"Series: Family Dining Table: A House of Cards, Part One of Three." A happily married couple both thirty-one years old with two little children, encounters a crisis when the wife's sister's teenage daughter comes to live with them following the sudden death of her parents in a traffic accident. The wife tells the husband that the girl is actually her own daughter, born when she was fifteen.
85	Article	On golf.
86-87	C.1	"Third-class Sarariiman Lecture, No.14."

88-89	Ad.	For cassette/compact disk self-teaching English conversation course.
90	Ad.	For the classic series of comic books published by the publisher of the magazine.
91-112	S.C.4	"Junpei, No.105: Be a Man." Pride, harmony and integrity of a group of local tuna fishermen is at stake when a challenge is posed by an outsider fisherman conspiring to take over the group. Junpei, the main character, has to protect the group integrity by competing with the outsider (in fishing technique).
113	Ad.	For credit card.
114	Ad.	Workers wanted by a high-paying parcel/courier company.
115-117	C.2	"Dotera neko."
118	Ad.	For book version of one of the comic stories which used to be carried in the magazine.
119	Article	On professional baseball.

120-121	Trailer	On Big Comic Superior
122	Ad.	For travel books and mysteries.
123-146	S.C.5	"Here's the Project, No.38: A Gossip Actress." The small advertising agency the main character has founded is now dealing with a theatrical project. The client and playwright disagree on a casting of an actress. Kudo, the main character, reconciling the two sides, makes the most of actress's romance scandal for the promotion of the project.
147	Ad.	For a book on comical social satire.
148-149	Tailer	On Big Comic Original
150	Article	Critique on the works of a famous comic artist.
151	Ad.	For imported whisky.
152-153	Ad.	For railways company.
154	Ad.	For imported cigarettes.

155-186	S.C.6	"Legend of Kamui, Part 2, No.62: View of the Field." Historical drama set in feudal Japan. Jobless samurai and lower class peasants and town's people who lost their homes join together to build a new seaside community.
187-210	S.C.7	"Hotel, No.147: A Prophet." A self-claimed prophet causes a big social panic when he tells people about a coming tragedy, projected to occur in a Tokyo hotel. The main character, a hotel manager, after uncovering the prophet's past, talks him into easing public tension. How the prophet was psychologically and financially hurt by the treatment of one hotel in the past is revealed in the process.
211	Ad.	For as outdoor life magazine.
212	Article	On travel.

213-234	S.C.8	"High Tide - Magnitude 7.7, No.16: An Invitation to Death." A man who left an office job in Tokyo returns to his parents' to take care of his sick father. After narrowly escaping the devastating high tide caused by an earthquake while fishing, the man decides to collect records of those who encountered this tragedy that took so many lives. In the process he discovers many real-life dramas lived by those concerned.
235-237	Article	"Big Fan." readers' letters and other short articles.
238	Ad.	For non-fiction books.
239-241	C.3	"Maboroshi Mama." on bar hostesses.
242	Ad.	For the book version of story comics carried in Big Comic.
243	Ad.	For a finance firm.
244	Ad.	For a device to develop hidden talent.

245-288	S.C.9	"Golgo 13, No.291: A Miscalculation of an Artificial Brain." Realistic "inside story" of the Gulf War. Illegal transfer of a classified strategic computer programme by an ex-US government official, and the sale of a super-computer by a Japanese trading firm to Iraq, makes the country capable of conducting an effective war. The main character, a sniper-assassin for hire, is assigned to destroy the computer software and to kill the ex-US official.
289	Trailer	On the special issue for Golgo 13.
290-291	Trailer	On the forthcoming issue of Big Comic.
292	Article	On different life styles. Table of contents.
293	Quiz	A pictorial quiz with questionnaire.
294-296	C.4	"Akabee."
297	Ad.	For golf gear.
298	Ad.	(Back cover) For canned coffee.

Flow Analysis

This magazine flow shows that the kind of corporate comic genre I have come to see in the previous chapter (here, S.C.2) is neither textually nor discursively distinct from the rest, but rather a part of a discourse of serial texts.

The reality-orientedness, where elements of cultural values are taken as given is the general basis of the magazine discourse. Not only the ones which deal with corporate culture but other story-comics set in realistic circumstances, without much departure from the kind of life readers are expected to lead. Comics, both story-comics and short comics, are predominantly set in present-day Japan or the Japan of recent past. When a story takes place in feudal Japan (S.C.6), the description and depiction of events is historically detailed, even with quotes from books on the subject. When the story happens outside of the country (S.C.9), it is in the middle of a current international affair with political, geographical and economical facts lumped together with credible fictional details. Unrealistic elements - super-natural phenomena, mystic fantasies, remote future - are not present here. Not only are supernatural phenomena excluded from story-comics narratives, they are the stuff of spoof, as found in the photo-article at the beginning of the magazine and in one of the story-comics (S.C.7). Characters are regular people and do not possess any special powers as do superheroes of American comic tradition. Unrealistic, illogical comics devoid of reality are only found in one of the short comics (C.4). The magazine text is basically situated in an extended reality, with no sharp departure from the world where readers reside.

The title of the magazine is important in this respect. Big Comic, though written in

Japanese in Katakana[2], it is obviously an English name. As generally observed in the names of Japanese consumer goods, foreign (Western) origin words, whether written in Katakana or in the alphabet, convey more sophisticated, modern, overtones. Here they do not use the Japanese word manga, but instead use "comic." Regardless of the word origin and what it means in English, the term "comic" transliterated in Japanese is torn from any connotation of "funny" and "humorous" inherent in the term "manga." It adds a more sophisticated ring. The title thus conveys that what is in the magazine is not unrealistic or just funny stories, but something more important.

Most of the time in both story-comics and short comics, the main characters are men, and, except for the assassin in S.C.9 whose nationality is not clearly known, everyone is Japanese. Female characters play only decorative and supplementary roles except for a few story-comics and short comics. To illustrate what kind of stories are told about these men, and to see the characteristics of the narrative structure, a conceptual diagram of the plots of story-comics is furnished (Fig.1)[3].

Three arrows radiating from the centre of three concentric spheres indicate where the narratives mainly takes place: workplace [W], home [H], and other, which are termed here transitional [T]. The three concentric spheres indicate the degree of satisfaction or comfort each of the main characters seems to be feeling in his/her respective place. The inner ring is negative (-), in which the main character is not feeling comfortable. The middle ring is neutral (O) where we cannot read any dissatisfaction or satisfaction. The outer ring is positive (+), where main characters are feeling comfortable where they are. It also means that from outer to inner, the degree of dissatisfaction is bigger.

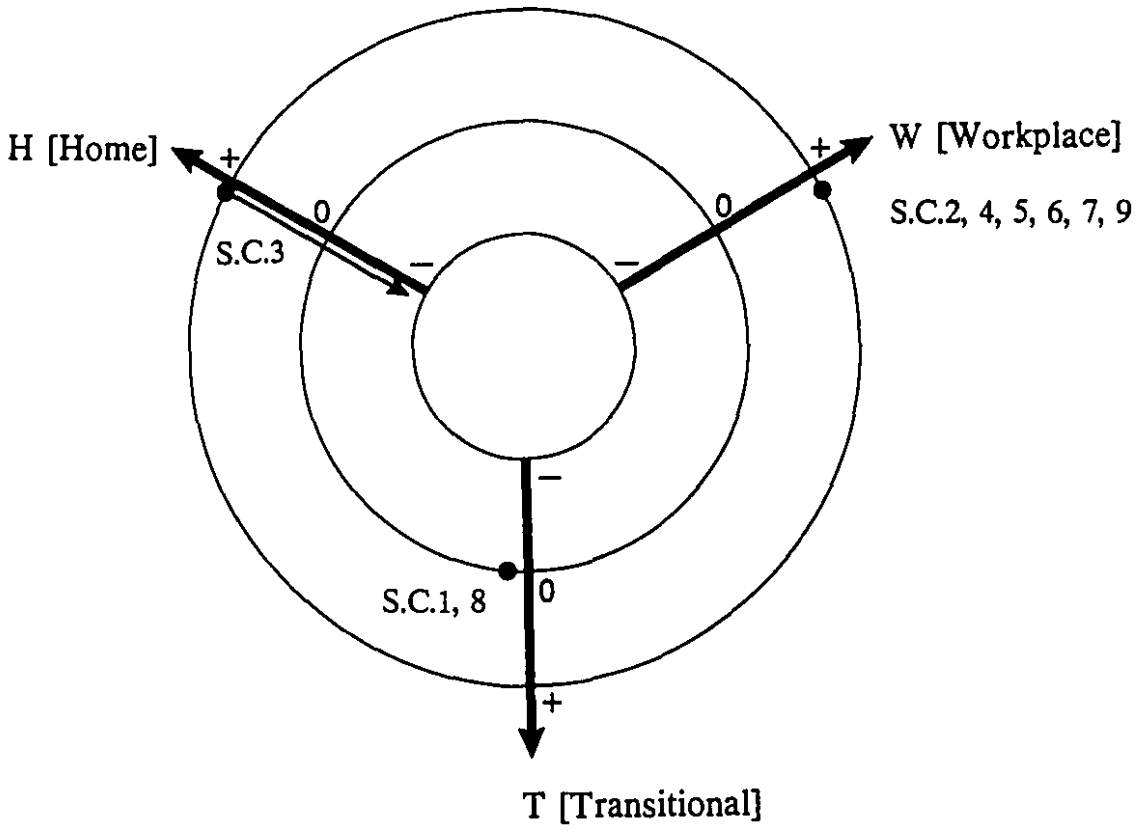

Fig. 1. Narrative Structure of Story-Comics in Big, 25 November 1990 issue.

There is a heavy concentration on the workplace as the scene of the stories. Every main character here seems to be comfortable where he is, so we have six story-comics at [W+]. These story-comics predominantly deal with men in the workplace, and these men are basically happy where they are. This is also the common characteristic we have seen in corporate comics. What is transmitted in each respective story of is how to do one's job. We may add S.C.1, presently at [T0], to this category, potentially, because the story at its preliminary phase of development is expected to deal with the main character's political career.

The occupations dealt with in these story-comics range from ordinary salary-man to international assassin-for-hire. These occupations represent different degrees of group affiliation or individualism inherent in these various jobs.

At one end of the continuum of group orientation and individualism, there is Rokuheita (S.C.2), the industrious, considerate salary-man concerned with the issue of job responsibility. S.C.7, this time dealing with hotel management, reveals the same basic issue. While the occupation changes and the locale leaves the urban setting, S.C.4, a story of local fishermen, also deals with the problem of group integrity, though the group structure is not as rigid as is the previous two narratives. The only historical drama among the story-comics, S.C.6, deals with the organization of a community under the expertise of a group of people and is one of the most important themes.

On the opposite side of this group-individual continuum, there is a lone-assassin-for-hire (S.C.9). Kudo of S.C.5, ranks next in individualistic attitude. His job as head of a small production company in the advertising industry is considered unconventional and generally reflecting new trends. Also in S.C.9, it is no coincidence that this lone totally individualistic

character is an enigmatic man, whose background and nationality is not clear. This character, Golgo 13, is drawn to look like a citizen of any eastern Asian country, though he is often referred to as Japanese. However, his background and nationality are not known to the readers. Japanese-ness and this lone assassin for hire somehow do not go together. One of the secrets of the success of this comic serial - the longest on-going story-comic with 22 years of serialization and 80 book versions published so far - is well-researched, detailed information on culture, politics and economics in every corner of the world, the background to each episode. Golgo 13 is a hero because he is part of reality.

Looking at story-comics along the W-arrow - the majority of the comics of this issue - the common characteristics among them are that they are set in reality, featuring men at work, and are based on the underlying question of individualism and group value, and the assumption that the degree of individualism one can assert is intrinsic to one's respective job. They all hold the assumption that jobs represent a man's whole way of life, thus defining masculinity. These comic stories serve as samplers of jobs, representing different ways of life through different occupations. They in turn represent various patterns of assertion of masculinity through various jobs and different positions and situations.

With different degrees of group oriented traits or individualist pursuits, the principal male characters in these stories are content with what they are. This basic position of the main characters adds repetition to the overall narrative structure. It is possible to deal with them repeatedly at the same basically unchanged workplace. It makes long serialization possible. This narrative mode dictates how they are to be read. Among the problems and issues raised in each episode, readers can pick and choose what they want to know, since the characters will be

around for a long time.

Let us now turn to the few exceptions outside of the W-arrow. The main character of S.C.8 on the T-arrow is an ex-salary-man, who left his job in Tokyo to take care of his sick father in a local town. His role in this serial is mainly as interviewer and uncoverer of many dramas encountered by many different groups of people at the time of a natural disaster. The notable exception among occupation-based comics is S.C.3, on the H-arrow. It clearly deals with a different issue from the rest. The main character's occupation as salary-man is just a cover to signal an "ordinary life." The story revolves around his family life and its crises. This mini-series is not only exceptional because of its focus on private, family life but because of its artist - the only female artist in the issue. While this is not a place to discuss the particular position female artists occupy in men's comic magazines, it suffices to say that their approaches to the medium, especially in the choice of subject matters, are different from those of their male counterparts[4].

The magazine texts' general tone of depicting reality without much disorder is reflected in its treatment of sex and violence. Contrary to the common claim that comic magazines are full of sex and violence, there is no scene of sex or physical violence in this specific issue.

Let us look at other segments of the magazine. Short articles on sports, travel and different life-styles serve as fillers between the story-comics. Advertisements for durable consumer goods such as cars and golf gear, together with ones for imported whisky, travel, credit cards and finance, reflect urban, middle-class life styles and interests, also echoed in the the tone of articles.

Among various texts in the magazine, there is a seemingly out-of-place recruitment notice

for a courier company. Closer scrutiny reveals, however, that this advertisement, too, is deeply rooted in the discourse of the magazine. This full-colour, one-page advertisement contains photographs of two men, each standing in front of his beloved cars - one is Ferarri, the other a Porsche. Both men are employees of the courier company, and crazy about cars, the text says. This company is perfect for those who love cars, the text suggests, because the job is to drive. The pay is very good, allowing you to buy your favourite imported sports cars, which would be very difficult to afford at a younger age if you held a regular white-collar job. "There is more than one alternative," the text says, asking "Are your ability and talent healthy and active?" Like most of the story comics in the magazine, this advertisement, too, shows an occupational alternative, less conservative and free of organizational restraints than the one a regular salary-man faces.

The magazine provides what the editors and published letters call "useful" reading materials in the form of comic stories, in which everyday concerns of readers as workers are acted out by comic characters. And it presents ways of life through different kinds of occupations and the different positions a man can occupy.

> Curiosity - full speed ahead: Twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year. There's just not enough time to live. Experience many of your unrealized dreams through Big Comics. Meet your other [possible] lives in Big Comics[5].

This in-magazine advertisement for book version comics taken from another issue of Big sheds light on the function of the comic magazine. The copy is set against a close-up of Rokuheita, our industrious, considerate, superman/salary-man underscoring the kind of "dreams" which are spoken of.

There are no super-heroes in this magazine as there is no absolute evil. Everyone is basically an ordinary person, located in a different social position and situation. They behave according to the position they are in, creating conflicts only between each another. Rokuheita can easily be called a "superman" here, where there is no evil to be destroyed.

Yet, the various fictional lives conjured in the magazine texts sit side-by-side with the one real offer from the courier company: "There is more than one alternative." While this recruitment advertisement urges readers to think about the possibility of leaving their present jobs, the magazine offers readers fictional lives outside of their real life. And "life" here means occupations, and the kind of sub-society each occupation is supposed to provide within the present structure of society. Each occupation represented in the comics has its trade-offs - for example, secure but unsatisfactory, exciting and "manly" but insecure. Nonetheless each comic in the magazine provides at least one type of life a man can lead.

Function of Men's Comic Magazines

Many readers of men's comic magazines, as is the case for most of present-day Japan, cannot, or do not, care to live a truly individualistic life outside of an organization, as do some comic heroes. Adult readers have already made their choice of life occupations, and these are very difficult to change. Comic stories represent the kind of occupations readers can directly relate to and provide them with fictional opportunities to act out their lives in these narrative settings. In this way, they bring their own experience to a reading and learn from it. Comic stories that show the kind of occupations remote from readers' own help them to come to terms with present frustrations.

In the readers' fragmented leisure time, in a country marked by long working hours and long commuting hours especially for metropolitan employees, comic stories represent "other alternatives" - asking readers to fill their leisure time with realistic but far-away fantasies.

Notes to Chapter Two

1. Big, 25 October 1990: 233.

2. Japanese has three different sets of writing systems. Hiragana and Katakana are syllabic characters, while Chinese characters are iconographic. Katakana is usually used for foreign origin words.

3. McRobbie (1991) in her analysis of Jackie, identified a large range of codes which operate in the magazine, such as code of beauty, code of personal/domestic life, code of beauty/romance, code of fashion and beauty, and code of romance. She then arranged a diagram to show which segments of the magazine operated in which codes (94). My diagram here, though inspired by her diagram, is more concerned with the conceptualization of story-comics' general plot or narrative structures.

4. In the Japanese comic industry, the division of labour along sex lines has been quite strict so that most comics for girls and women are done by female artists, and comics for boys and men by male artists. Small numbers of female artists, however, recently have established themselves in boys' and men's comic magazines. This trend can be explained perhaps by the industry's move to maximize readership and by the female artists' struggle to obtain themselves better, more secure jobs. However, incorporation of female artists into men's comic magazines has the potential to encourage cross-gender readership and in turn change the nature of discourse of

men's comic magazines.

5. Big, 10 September 1989: 231.

CHAPTER THREE

GENDER-DIFFERENTIATED READING

This chapter concerns itself with the women readers of the men's comic magazines and considers the problem of cross-gender readership. I will assess reader letters from female readers to see what kind of different reading satisfactions they are deriving from the magazines. Moreover, a textual analysis of one issue of a women's comic magazine is conducted in order to further consider the significance of women who read men's comic magazine.

Women as Marginal Readers

There is no statistical data available on just how many readers of our magazines are female. However, reader letters carried in the magazines suggest female readers occupy a considerable portion of these three million-plus issue sellers.

> When I was single, I used to think all the comic magazines for men were pornographic, as every unspoiled, naive girl did. Every time I saw a man reading a comic magazine on the train, I felt disgusted. I became engaged to a man, now my husband, who I thought never had anything to do with such comics. Imagine the shock when he took out an issue of Original from his brief case one night on the train while escorting me home. "Oh, don't tell me you are one of those dirty old men!" I screamed inside. However, my whole perception of the comic magazine has changed completely ever since I glanced over a copy one night. Now I like the magazine so much that I get mad at my husband if he reads an issue before I do, though the magazine is delivered to his workplace.

(Mrs. Kikuchi Toshiko, Forty years old, Aomori Prefecture)[1]

This published letter is one of many letters which show us, and readers of the magazine, how a woman who used to think every comic magazine dirty has come to be a reader once she realized her perception about men's comic magazine was wrong, at least for this specific magazine. As "unintended readers," women readers of men's comic magazines present an interesting case in which to examine the different meanings a popular cultural product has for readers of both genders.

David Morlely (1986), in his study on television viewing in lower-middle class and working class families in London, showed how genders influenced the social function of television. He pointed out a number of empirical differences in how men and women watch, talk and feel about television. He suggested that the particular social roles occupied by these men and women at home - a place for recreation for men and a place for work for women - characterized these differences. Do female readers read and use the comic magazines differently from male readers? If so, how? Why would a woman become and remain a reader of men's comic magazines, especially magazines she saw as unwelcoming, alien, and different, as the above letter implies?

Through an examination of reader letters from women we can identify four types of female readers in terms of the pleasure and purpose they find in reading men's comic magazines. It is possible that more than one type is represented in a single letter.

The first type is occupational-based readers. They are similar to the typical male readers in that they find pleasure in reading comics dealing with the workplace situation they are familiar with as members of the work force. This type is typically found in the letters from single

women. This has much to do with Japanese women's occupational behaviour. It is customary for Japanese women to leave their jobs once they get married or at the birth of a first child, and then go back to the labour force as part-time workers when the children reach school age[2].

What differentiates ~~of from~~ this type of female readers from male readers is character identification. These female readers feel close to the decorative female characters, not the main male characters, because of their similar position in the workplace. As we have seen in Big, and also in Original, there are very few female characters who play significant roles in narrative development. There are rare women characters in managerial positions, but it seems they are not the object of identification for female readers.

It is interesting to note that in Spirits, which aims at younger readers than the other two magazines, more important roles are assigned to female characters. A probable reason for this is that the readers are younger, so the average age of the main characters is also lower than those in the two other magazines. For characters still in school or working as younger employees, there seems to be more room for women to play significant roles. Another possible reason is that Sprits reflects younger readers' understanding and image of society, where women play more important roles. However, it is hard to tell because Spirits also has a few serialized comics where female characters are just sex objects with very thin characterization. Nevertheless, the many important female characters in Spirits seem to contribute to the higher ratio of published letters from female readers.

Whereas male readers' relationships with the main characters tend to be rooted in comparison, female readers appear to relate to female characters in terms of empathy, sympathy, and encouragement. This type of reader seems to engage the workplace narrative with

acceptance of the present order.

One notable exception seems to be the case of one high school girl[3], who reads the book versions of "Rokuheita," which her father buys regularly. "I never wanted to be a salary-man," she says in the published letter, but reading "Rokuheita" has made her think that being salary-man is all right so long as she works in the general affairs section. She uses the word "salary-man" to describe her future prospect occupation, deliberately or not, instead of "O.L.,"[4] a term for female office workers who leave their jobs after marriage, or "career woman," a term reserved for elite women, who usually stay single. Though we should not read into the reader's comment too much by suggesting she has a new career consciousness beyond gender roles, it is nonetheless an interesting use of the word. Another interesting point is her preference for working in the general affairs section. One possible interpretation is that she does not want to associate with her image of competition-prone, profit-crazed corporate culture, but would not mind working for a company if she could do the kind of job Rokuheita does to help people and make them happy.

The second type can be termed "torn" readers, because they have a desire, perhaps hidden, to go back to work but cannot do so under present circumstances. They are typically housewives.

Reminiscing about their past as they read the comic stories, they project themselves into the past when they used to work. Now mostly confined to domestic spheres, they remember the outside world by reading comic stories that take place at work, and recall their "flamboyant," "happy" days when they used to work.

I am a housewife, in a farming household, expecting my second child soon. I work on

> the farm with my in-laws, while my husband is a salary-man. However, I have memories of the golden days when I was an office lady. "Shosuke" reminds me vividly of those bittersweet days, making me feel like going back to work. (From "Admirable Wife." Saitama Prefecture)[5]

Letters seem to suggest that for many female readers all the fun and excitement is sealed in the past when they were single, at school or at work. It also seems that in their present lives as mothers and housewives they do not seek fun and excitement for themselves; their contribution to good homemaking becomes more important. In fact, the writer of the above letter does not forget to add that she should remember her husband's daily hard work, which she tends to fail to appreciate.

The third is the "good housewife" type, which seems to be the most common, at least in its representation in published letters. This type is best seen in housewives' and future housewives' commentaries on their reading of comics. This type associates comic texts and the comic reading experience with their husbands and boyfriends. They try to understand what type of life their husbands lead at work, reminding themselves of the hardship their husbands go through and sanctioning their husbands' way of life. Their significant real-life partners' character, temperament, appearance, performance and position in the workplace are compared to those of the comic characters. They do not have to be the main characters. A small bit part can be a target of comparison if he reminds a female reader of her husband:

> My husband, too, like Mr. Sakagami, is not likely to be successful in his company, but at home he is a perfect husband and father. Mr. Tsugawa, who is sure to go up the corporate ladder fast, is probably alienated by his family members. I think Mr. Sakagami

can expect a happy retirement. The company is not all there is in life, is it, Rokuheita? (Mrs. Nagata Keiko, Chiba prefecture)[6]

This housewife, who says in this published letter that she never fails to read "Rokuheita," continues to write that the story-comic reminds her of the hardship her husband goes through everyday at work as a salary-man. This prompts her, she says, to add one more dish of hors-d'oeuvres to accompany her husband's before dinner drinks on the days she reads this comic.

A reading in which readers project not themselves but their significant real-life partners of opposite sex onto the comic characters is not commonly represented in male readers' letters. Male readers tend to relate themselves or their colleague to the characters in the comics' male main characters. When they talk about female characters in comic stories, they romantically fantasising them, in such context as "she is cute," "I want to have a girlfriend like her" (seen mostly in Spirits).

The reading act could also be constructed as an activity to learn about the life of a salary-man, as well as to be a salary-man's good wife.

Since graduating high school, I have been helping with household chores and have never worked outside. I will soon get married to a salary-man but I feel insecure because I don't know the kind of life salary-men live and what kind of human relationships they have at work. Big, my fiance's favourite, is very useful to me because it contains "Rokuheita." The comic tells me about a world I am not familiar with. It is a useful textbook, so to speak, to prepare me for marriage. (Miss Kato Michiyo, Aichi prefecture)[7]

Women also situate the comic reading experience as an aid to communication with their

husbands or boy fiends. Although this could be an unconscious justification for some female readers to read something not published for them, in one case, a woman begins to buy the magazine, which her boyfriend used to provide her, when he is transferred to a different city. She does so in order to have common conversation topics of mutual interest during their long distance phone calls. Housewives expressing the importance of the comic magazine as providing something to talk about with their husbands is commonplace, whereas only one example is found for the opposite case. Women's deliberate use of comic magazines as a communication tool further attracts our attention, as women do not seem to talk about them with their peers; this in contrast with male readers who seem to talk about the comics at work.

The "good housewife" type also situates the reading experience in relation to her role as mother, as seen in the example of a housewife reporting that she secretly reads Spirits her children read in order to understand their culture. There is also frequent mention about sexual depictions in the magazine. Many female readers who have children report that their children read or look at their parents' reading materials. For Big and Original, which have few sexual or violent depictions, they are content that for the most part the magazine they and their husbands read can be shared by their children. However, Spirits has more of sexual and violent content. Female readers express concerns about their children having an access to it.

These three types of reading enjoyment women readers derive from the magazines show a distinctive difference from those of their male counterpart. And this is because of the occupational and economic differences between male and female readers. A job for men is equal to life itself, whereas a job for women is temporary, transitory, and has to be placed alongside, or after, their roles as housewives and mothers.

For younger women, who have not yet encountered such choices, the reading experience acts as a surrogate. For housewives, the general tone of their letters suggests an economic dependency on their husband. Frequently mentioned by housewife-readers is who buys the magazine. Usually it is their husbands or boyfriends who buy or subscribe to the magazines, and female readers read them in a pass-along manner. When they are the readers prior to their husbands because of the influence of their ex-boyfriends or fathers, they do not fail to mention in their letters that their husbands are also the readers now. In other words, housewives do not seem to read these magazines unless their husband do. Since the spare money they feel comfortable in spending on entertainment is relatively small, women feel the comic magazines their husbands buy and bring back are carefree reading materials. Household economy has a lot to do with the choice of their reading materials as does their relation to their husbands. But is that all?

The significance of the men's comic magazines, especially the second and the third type, certainly fits the image of women whose existence is dependent on their male partners. It is not hard to imagine that women feel more comfortable to send in these husband-oriented letters if they are reading the magazine their husbands buy. There is good reason for these letters to be selected for publication, for they fit and blend well into a magazine text, after all, produced for men.

But why should women read a men's comic first of all, except for the fact they are easily at hand?

To understand the enjoyment of reading men's comic magazines and the significance of cross-gender readership beyond what is seen in the published letters, I have to turn, for now, to

another popular cultural text for women. This will also help to define the characteristics of men's comic magazines more clearly.

Flow Analysis of an Issue of a Women's Comic Magazine

There were forty-three titles published under the category of women's comic magazines during 1990. Most of these magazines are published monthly. Among them, we will look at the "flow" of an issue of Val[8], a monthly magazine with a mid-sized circulation. Though it is hard to chose a "typical" women's comic magazine, this magazine is a good example in that the choice of subject matter is general, and the degree of sexual depiction is moderate. The target readers, women in their twenties, are common to many other women's comic magazines.

Flow: VAL, January, 1990.

Page	Group	Title and Description
1	Cover	Magazine title VAL in alphabet. Full colour photograph of a women in a white dress with a cat. Titles, sub-titles and names of artists of six story-comics.
2	Ad.	For imported colour pencil sets.

3-4	Article	Gifts for readers with photographs of the give-aways.
5-12	Article	"Etiquette for New Year's Cards and Some Idea Illustration for Them."
13-16	Illus.	"Illustrated Man'yoshu[9]." Full colour illustration of modern couple enacting a verse from Man'yoshu.
17	S.C.1	Cover page of "Silence Unable to Fly."
18	Ad.	For constipation drug.
19-58	S.C.1	Set in a red-light district in pre-WWII Japan, a prostitute loves two men in different ways - one with respect as in love for a father, the other with a young passion. The older man helps the young couple to get married.
59	S.C.2	Cover page of "Women of Zodiac signs, No.8: A Scorpio Woman."
60	Ad.	For an assortment of perfumes.

61-108	S.C.2	A women twenty-nine years of age, working for a brokerage firm in Tokyo, is victimized by a marriage swindler, and robbed of her savings, but brings the culprit back to society through her love. They leave Tokyo for his home town - where he used to be a school teacher - to get married and to take over his parents' farming business.
109-140	S.C.3	"If You Find Love, Make it Adventurous" A housewife in her mid-twenties, frustrated by her ever-busy businessman husband, joins a dating club, reencounters her old boyfriend, decides to run away with him, only to find that he is a con artist trying to steal her savings in order to save his own marriage. Desperate, she happens to see her husband in action. Finding out how hard he is working and that he is doing it for her, she realizes how selfish and insensitive she has been.
141-146	C.1	"Picture Talk Between a Man and a Woman: On Comments by Mothers-in-Law on Daughters-in-Law's Child Rearing."
147	Ad.	For a beauty centre.

148	Ad.	Classified advertisement for job offers as bar hostesses.
150	S.C.4	Cover page of "A Street Nobody Else Knows."
150	Ad.	For a computerized dating service network for marriage purposes.
151-182	S.C.4	A female office worker in early twenties, bored by everyday life and frustrated by the pretentious relationship with people around her, regains her self-confidence through an encounter with teen-age street punks/rock musicians. She faces her job, romance, and life more positively than before.
183	Article	"Beauty Medical Science: Bad breath"
184-185	C.2	"Ohoho Diary." On every day life of ordinary housewives who live in apartment compounds.
186-188	Article	"Fortune Telling Based on Zodiac Signs and Blood Types."
189	Trailer	On the next issue of Val.
190	Trailer	On the coming issue of Mystery Val.

191	Ad.	For a correspondence course on Western calligraphy.
192	Ad.	For a lotion to make double fold eye-lids.
193-195	Article	"Val Box." Transcripts of telephone calls and letters from readers on the previously covered theme of "embarrassment at the hot springs resorts."
196-197	C.3	Short comic on how to make a spicy stove-top dish.
198	Article	A quiz accompanied by a questionnaire postcard about magazine readership.
199-214	C.4	Short comic on the etiquette of annual gift giving.
215	S.C.5	Cover page of "My Dear Gan-gan, Vol.2: Dangerous Nights."
216	Ad.	For the record version of "My Dear Gan-gan" and an announcement of the dramatization of the series on stage[10].

217-264	S.C.5	The adventure of a daughter of a New York gangster boss in the Prohibition era, who after her parents' death escapes the rival gangs' attack by fleeing to Europe.
265	Ad.	For weight-losing underwear.
266	Ad.	For a marriage mate-finding service.
267-297	S.C.6	"Intermission." A wife in her mid twenties decides to divorce her husband because of his repeated extramarital affairs. She leaves home and goes back to work. She remembers all the misunderstandings they have had, and subsequent reconciliations, which her husband, a women's magazine reporter, has turned into articles. Finding that they have had too many growing experience together, she goes back to her husband, now cautioned about his repeated affairs and who swears to be faithful to her.
298		Illustrated table of contents.
299	Ad.	For a device to for skin beautiful.
300	Ad.	For a hotel chain

There are a few obvious characteristics of this flow. One is that the main characters in the story-comics and short comics are all women, apparently in their early to late twenties, reflecting the age group of the readers. Another point is that compared to men's comics there are fewer story comics. The men's comic magazine issue have nine, while this issue has six, though total pages are almost the same. One other point is that if the story is serialized, it is a shorter serialization than most of the serials in men's comic magazines. In fact these characteristics are not only connected but are rooted in the magazine discourse, as will be discussed below. They go beyond the difference of frequency of publication.

The prevailing discourse here is the one of romance and domesticity. And there is an interesting relation between the two.

Let us use the diagram[11] as employed for men's comic magazines to examine the narrative structures of the six story-comics (Fig.2).

At first glance, there is a significant difference. The diagram for men's comics is simple, and the one for women's comics is complex. The former is simple because most of the main characters are comfortable as they are. There is no need for significant change. In contrast, these women's comic stories begin with the female main characters in a state of dissatisfaction and in need of change.

First let us observe the two housewife characters (S.C.3 and S.C.6). The cause of their dissatisfaction with married life is their husbands who neglect them (the main characters) and their family life. In both cases, the women live alone with their husbands and have no jobs. The S.C.3 character, starting from dissatisfaction at home [H-], turns to a romance, or a facsimile

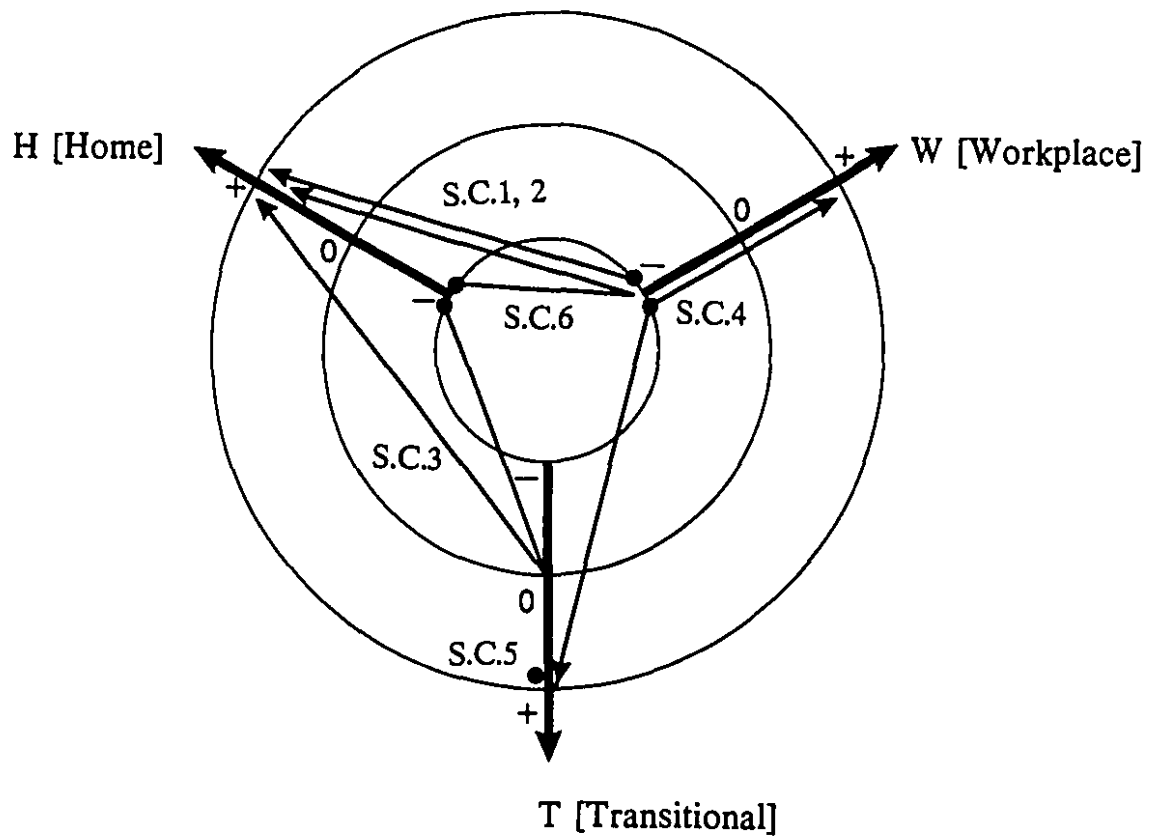

Fig. 2. Narrative Structure of Story-Comics in Val, January 1990 issue.

thereof [T+]. Punished by her own extramarital affairs, she goes back to her hard-working, unsuspecting husband for a happy family life. Her return is accompanied by the news of her husband's promotion, ensuring his occupational success [H+]. The S.C.6 character, starting from [H-], goes back to the job she left once married, where she cannot concentrate [W-]. She comes back home to stronger ties with her husband, who writes a successful article based on their own marriage crisis and its reconciliation, signifying, again, his on-going occupational success. He also swears his fidelity to her [H+].

Among the four unmarried characters, S.C.1 and S.C.2 both start from [W-], S.C.1, because she does not want to be a prostitute for the rest of her life, and S.C.2, because at twenty-nine she is in eager for marriage and tired of sexual exploitation (affairs with married bosses). For both of them, their satisfaction comes when they finally can be married [H+], after a second man helps the character S.C.1, and the S.C.2 character's true love brings a con-artist to his real, respectable self.

In these four story-comics, "happy married life" is a very strong gravity centre, with every story ending when the main character gets to the point of [H+].

The S.C.5 character, daughter of a Prohibition era New York gangster and a Japanese mother (!), is still at the initial stage of narrative development but it is not hard to tell that her adventure will be over when she is united with the high class United States government official, who accidentally rapes her by mistaking her for someone else.

S.C.4 is notably different from the rest. Starting from dissatisfaction with her present life [W-], she finds herself and her identity, which enriches her private life [T+] and public life [W+], though potentially this new, more confident self will lead her to a happy relationship with

a man she works with. Interestingly, the artist of this story comic is one of the few female artists whose work is carried in their work in Spirits[12]. Above analysis of these story-comics suggests that, despite its claim on the cover that literally translates as the "comic magazine which adventuresses love," domesticity is the central theme running through the magazine. It is also reflected in other segments of the magazine.

Short comics offer practical knowledge of everyday home management, from cooking to etiquette of annual gift-giving, underlining the discourse of domesticity. That is in sharp contrast to the short comics in men's magazine, where social satire and gags prevail. As to advertisements, there are none of the high-priced durable consumer goods as observed in the men's magazines. Instead, inexpensive beauty care devices and accessories appear to feminine conscientiousness over looks, staying in tune with the market for romance, all while dating services urge women to get married. For those who are bored with their present life, there are job offers to be bar hostesses for high wages.

Romance provides a short-term break from the monotony of life, and is allowed so long as it does not destroy family life. With the overarching society almost invisible, most stories are a-historical and a-local, sporting a general tone of modern, urban, middle-class life style. Stories and articles are about "you, your husband (boy friend), and your home" and nothing more. Given this discourse of domesticity-incorporating-romance, female characters with strong character types do not develop. Story-comics tend to deal with one heroine just once. Her romance and adventure are a mere episode - once it happens it is over, and nothing more develops from it. When a character reaches the "happy home," destination [H+], the story ends and there is nothing more to be told. This is in sharp contrast with most of the male characters

in men's magazines, who firmly establish themselves as characters over a long period of time, as stories evolve around their occupation and their characters grow in the process.

Here, we can observe the relationship between the form of the publication and its content. As mentioned before, most women's comic magazines are published monthly. This might be because women cannot purchase comic magazines more than once a month, for reasons of time and money. Since monthly magazines have longer intervals between publication dates, complete episodes are preferred to serialized episodes. The result is more pages per episode and fewer story-comics per issue.

While the form of the publication helps to determine the form of the texts, women, as readers and subject matter, determine the content of the text. As the female character in the comic stories cannot develop into characters who survive repeated appearances, they tend to be one-time heroines. As a result, more pages are required in order to finish an episode complete unto itself. Thus, the three characteristics of the flow of women's comic magazines compared to men's (fewer story-comics, women as main characters, complete stories or shorter serializations) all interconnect.

Significance of Cross-Gender Readership

Women's comic magazines are just one example of many sorts of popular cultural forms targeted to women. The magazine we have studied above does not represent women's popular culture by any means. However, it does share with many other popular cultural texts for women the same kind of discourse of romance and domesticity. Having examined one such magazine permits us to view women's reading of men's comic magazines in a different light.

Women reading men's comic magazines might be understood as an act of submission to the more powerful gender. Women read the magazines their male partners read. They read them to know about their male partners, and talk about the stories with them. The narrative of the texts is difficult for women to directly relate to simply because they are not "in" the narrative structure themselves. The enjoyment and significance of the reading is totally other-directed. The enjoyment seems to come from sharing something with their more socially and culturally powerful male partners, by positioning themselves closer to their culture.

On the other hand, our comparison of a women's comic magazine with a men's comic magazine directs us to interpret their reading act differently. Women reading men's comic magazines could be an act of resistance to the dominant discourse of women's popular culture, which confines them to the sphere of private life. The discourse of the occupation-based public life in men's comic magazines can provide them with enjoyment for themselves, not someone else. Women see a stress-release of men's comic magazines, much like they do shopping. The activity takes them "out of home." It is also possible, as seen in some of the published letters, that reading men's comics can motivate them to want to know more about politics and the economy, which they used to consider a man's world.

How they internalize their reading experience differs according to age, job experience, and the relationship with their male partners. However, for women, reading men's magazines could be a form of resistance, though partial and mediated, to their present life. The reading activity of men's comic magazines, then, takes on different significance and meanings for female readers from those for male readers.

Notes to Chapter Three

1. Original, 20 July 1989: 136.

2. Ueno Chizuko (1988) discusses in detail on the issue of part-time housewife labour and its economic and historical significance.

3. A reader who asks anonymity from Gifu prefecture. Big, 10 November 1989: 289.

4. From English word "office lady."

5. Spirits, 22 January 1990: 322.

6. Big, 10 December 1989: 243.

7. Big, 25 September 1989: 285.

8. Published by Kobunsha, which also publishes a popular women's entertainment and gossip magazine. Val is a spin-off of that magazine. The logo of that magazine appears together with the title of this comic magazine. The name of the magazine, according to an explanation in the magazine, is from "value" and "valuable." The circulation of this comic magazine is about 260,000.

9. The earliest extant collection of Japanese poems from the eighth century.

10. It is obvious that the stage version preceded the comic, because it is the second episode of a short serialization. In the case of men's comics, drama and animation versions for television and films are produced based on the popularity of respective comics.

11. See note 3 of chapter two for the conceptualization of this diagram.

12. Among the largely occupation-based protagonists of the magazine, her story is unique in that its hero is a young man without an occupation or school to attend. Another main character is his elder sister, who works in a corporation. The reader letter shows that one reason for the popularity of this story-comic especially among female readers is that the story boasts a number

of smart, strong, and sensible women.

CONCLUSION

Four and a half decades of postwar Japanese comics have left two marks on comics today: first, the diversified thematic and artistic approaches prompted by fierce competition within the market; second, the large cross-section of readers who grew up reading comics and never left the medium and those who keep joining the succession of older readers.

The comic magazines analyzed above are clearly the product of today's Japanese society. Without the many readers who grew up reading comics, the medium would not exist. Without the industry's effort to keep pace with the changing tastes and agenda of the readers, the medium might have been abandoned.

The analysis of men's comic magazines has shown that presently they cater to large numbers of readers by providing stories of various versions of idealized workplace representing a man's world with masculine identity on display. The readers seem to "participate" in the stories, bringing their own experience at work to the comic stories. The basic discourse of the magazine is designed to preserve the present organization of society. In this framework, many of the comic stories have a repetitive narrative structure making it possible to continue stories for a long time - as long as there is a supply of episodes. Unless readers outgrow the characters, they will remain loyal to the stories. Most adult, male readers have already made their choice of occupations, and cannot or would not want to change their present course, despite yearnings for opportunities in which they could be more individualistic. The comic magazines do not provide autonomous enjoyment, rather readers find pleasure when they bring their concerns and experience to their reading. Male readers generally read comics as encoded, despite variations in their responses to the comics, which might mirror readers' own positions at work and in

society.

Many cross-gender, women readers of men's comic magazines, demonstrate a different relationship to the magazines, because their relation to work is different from that of men. A man's occupation is with him all the time, but a women has a choice even if forced to make one. For many housewife readers, reading men's comic magazines might enhance their roles as good wives. However, in a very tacit way, this behaviour could be interpreted as an act of resistance - though mediated - to the ideological confines of domesticity evident in many of the popular cultural forms available to Japanese women.

Men's comic magazines raise some points of interest for consideration on popular cultural texts in general, including comics.

First, there is the treatment of work. Raymond Williams notes that in popular culture in general "everyday work outside the home is nearly always excluded" (Heath and Skirrow, 1986: 7). Judith Williamson (1986) also notes that "much of mass culture takes place, or is consumed, in the 'feminine' spheres of leisure, family or personal life, and the home: and it also focuses on these as the subject matter of its representations" (101). Portraying the male workplace in different occupational setting is the basic function of the Japanese men's comic magazines and this is the appeal for both male and female readers. But is this significantly different from other popular cultural products?

Williams cautions against the kind of reasoning which automatically connects the function of a form of a medium to its properties, though he recognizes that at times we have to pay attention to the "specific properties crucial to understanding how it [a given medium] works" (Heath and Skirrow, 1986: 11). Perhaps, however, we should consider the properties of the

comic medium simply because all or most of the pleasure from reading comic magazine could not be replaced by ordinary verbal narratives. While it is simple to say that visual presentations are faster and easier means of communication than verbal ones, the crucial factor in this case is the personal relationship between the text and reader.

The reading is personal because it is usually performed alone, unlike interactions with televisual or cinematic texts. It is personal on another level because of the specific relationship of its visual elements to the readers. Although I did not go into detail about different drawing styles, visual elements, of course, are very important to the medium. The visual can "invite" or "repulse" readers at once. A specific style of an artist may communicate well with one group of readers, while other readers many have difficulties approaching the same comic.

Even without the narrative, visual elements may dictate readership. The visual elements can also dictate the kind of narratives they convey, and vise versa, because part of the established grammar of a comic medium is that a certain style of drawing is suited to specific kinds of narratives and genres. Corporate comics, for example, cannot be drawn in the style of the tale about a lone assassin, otherwise, it would be seen as a parody. In this manner, the comic medium offer a sort of personal relationship between the reader and artist, based on each of their sensibilities. Perhaps such personal engagement is one of the factors enabling readers to derive pleasure from reading workplace tales, which otherwise might seem too realistic.

The workplace had not been, until recently, portrayed in story-comics as they are now, however, and this historical transition warrants analysis. Kure (1990: 202) suggests that the corporate workplace has entered into the story-comic domain because of this unprecedented phase in Japanese history where most of the working population draw monthly salaries from

organizations. He implies that a lack of knowledge and wisdom passed on from the previous generation have opened the way to corporate comics' entry into in the popular comic medium.

Another point of particular interest, perhaps related to the first, is that men's comic magazines are published with great concern over age groups. McRobbie (1991) noted that girls' and women's magazines "define and shape the women's world" according to age and status of readers, observing that "there are no male equivalents to these products." Men's magazines "tend to be based on particular leisure pursuits or hobbies" and that "there is no consistent attempt to link interests with age," nor is there a "sense of natural or inevitable progression from one to another, complementary to the life-cycle" (83). In the comic magazines we have treated, magazines are published largely according to age group and the work status defining men's way of life and masculine identity.

These two features of Japanese men's comic magazines as popular cultural texts prompt us to further investigate culturally defined dichotomies: e.g. work and leisure, workplace and home, masculinity and femininity. Are any Japanese notions of these different from those in the West? Or is difference just a matter of degree between the two modern capitalist societies? Obviously, these questions are beyond the scope of this project, although they deserve consideration and attention. Such concerns deserve careful exploration of the historical transformation of the Japanese comic medium as well as rigorous comparisons with other media texts such as television and film in Japan and elsewhere.

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