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Encountering Uchiyama Aki: On the Need for Situated Knowledge and Learning in a Global World

Introduction

On the fourth floor of an office building between the Yotsuya and Shinjuku neighborhoods of Tokyo, things have gotten awkward.[1] Seated at a plastic table are an art historian and manga translator affiliated at the University of Tokyo, a small publisher of minor comics in English, and Furusato Yukiyoshi, who runs this space and a number of operations out of it. These include a matchmaking service; the Instant Noodle Gallery (*Kappu men gyararī*), which does indeed celebrate that staple of Japanese fast food; and the Uchiyama Aki Museum (*Uchiyama Aki myūjiamu*), dedicated to a manga artist popular in Japan in the early 1980s and generally forgotten since.[2] I have been working with Furusato to better comprehend his efforts to revive interest in Uchiyama and raise money for the man by selling his original drawings, which are displayed around the room, and the art historian and manga translator and comics publisher have joined me this evening to see if they might play a role.

The awkwardness stems from various degrees of confusion about what we are encountering here. As Furusato spreads original artwork onto the table and passes around envelopes filled with inked layouts for manga old and new, published and unpublished, we are awash in a wealth of information and artifacts, but have little time or framing to make sense of it all. And as we struggle to figure things out, the artwork makes its way to some visitors from abroad, including one with little experience with Japanese comics. Accompanying the manga translator and art historian, but clearly uncomfortable with what she is seeing –

[1] This encounter took place on January 24, 2018.

[2] See the Instant Noodle Gallery website and promotional video here: <http://カップ麺ギャラリー.net/>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCoSp-Kkobc>.

bishōjo, or cute girl characters, erotically posed – the visitor asks if it is child pornography. I hear it explained that Uchiyama is associated with *lolicon*, or the Lolita complex, but what does that mean? The visitor thinks that she knows well enough what this is, and who produces and consumes it, and that the man is just arguing semantics. Voices are beginning to be raised. Perhaps not getting, or not caring, about the fuss, Furusato has started placing hot bowls of instant noodles in front of his guests. He says he hopes that we can all stay in touch and work together toward Uchiyama's revival.

Emerging from the conference *Manga, Comics and Japan* at Stockholm University that brought together scholars from media studies and area studies, this article argues that there is a need for situated knowledge and learning in a global world. This means, for example, responding to Furusato's invitation and outreached hand rather than retreating from awkward and off-putting encounters, which might lead us to new positions and perspectives. In many cases, this requires being there for extended periods, building relationships and trust, and working through human interactions and material connections. At a time when information and images flow freely and rapidly in transnational networks, our research may demand that we slow down and seek out other archives and sources that are not digitized and do not circulate. The article is organized around encountering manga artist Uchiyama Aki, who we discussed in that room with Furusato, but was in fact absent, as he has largely been since disappearing in the 1980s. The return of Uchiyama potentially disrupts assumptions about the social and sexual problems of manga and Japan, which have by now percolated to the highest levels of governance.[3] In the first place, however, one has to find Uchiyama, to try to see him and hear him out. The paucity of such research points to challenges and opportunities for media and area studies going forward.

Encountering Uchiyama Aki

To begin, we need to go back. Although there is some confusion about the precise details of his professional debut, Uchiyama Aki (aka Noguchi Masayuki) was active as an artist from the late 1970s. The period is important for a number of reasons, including the boom in pornographic *gekiga*, or a grittier form of Japanese comics that often aim for realism; the increasing visibility of older anime fans, who supported the box-

[3] See for example this address by Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, a United Nations Special Rapporteur, in October 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zQBTZ_R29c>.

office triumph of films such as those in the *Space Battleship Yamato* (Uchū senkan Yamato) franchise; the proliferation of niche magazines targeting manga/anime fans; and the establishment of sexual parody of manga/anime characters in these magazines and at events such as the Comic Market. In this moment of ferment, Uchiyama was producing work for niche magazines such as *Monthly Out* (Gekkan out), where he had the freedom to draw cute girl characters sexually and find an audience. Crucially, this was an audience looking for something other than *gekiga*, which for its realism had come to dominate pornographic comics. In the work of artists such as Uchiyama, they found cute girl characters of the type seen in manga and anime, but sexualized, if not engaged in sex acts, which was seen as a distinctive break from norms (Sasakibara, 2004, 37; also Takekuma, 2003). Material of this kind, and an orientation toward it, came to be known as *lolicon*.

Although in no way the first or only artist to pursue manga/anime-style eroticism, Uchiyama, coming up in the commercial environment that he did, became one of the most visible and successful. Indeed, his name is plastered all over the early 1980s and what came to be known as "the *lolicon* boom." Consider, for example, *Comic Lemon People* (Komikku remon pīpuru), which associated itself on its debut cover with "the *lolicon* comics that will dominate conversation in 1982." On that cover, just below the title of the magazine, is prominently displayed a cute girl character drawn by Uchiyama and appearing in a work titled "*Lolicon* Syndrome" (Rorikon shindorōmu). Speaking to the scale of the boom, in 1982, Uchiyama was also serializing his manga "Andoro Trio" (Andoro torio) in *Weekly Shōnen Champion* (Shūkan Shōnen Champion), a mainstream magazine. This *lolicon* work, centering on sexualized encounters with a cute girl character, was popular enough that Uchiyama simultaneously parodied it in *Lemon People*. As if to demonstrate the blurred line between subculture and mainstream, in *Weekly Shōnen Champion*, "Andoro Trio" appeared beside "Prime Rose" (Puraimu rōzu), a series by the legendary manga artist Tezuka Osamu. Such was the demand for Uchiyama at the time that he reportedly had manga serials in seven monthly and two weekly magazines, which amounted to over 160 pages a month.[4] His work was memorialized regularly, including in the June 1983 issue of *Manga Burikko*, which is also the issue where "otaku" was first used as a negative label for fans. When explicitly pornographic

[4] According to the May 1982 issue of *Animage* magazine.

anime began to hit the market, one studio branded its series *Lolita Anime* (from 1984) with the name "Uchiyama Aki."[5] By then, his name alone was enough to move product.

The boom died down soon after, but the man dubbed "the King of *Lolicon*" had already withdrawn to attend to family affairs. Time marched on, and Uchiyama, seemingly left behind, never again achieved a comparable status. So great is the contrast, in fact, that he seemingly disappeared. Now, Uchiyama is not the only artist associated with *lolicon* that disappeared during or after the boom. Credited as the first to release a *lolicon* fanzine in the late 1970s, writer Hirukogami Ken disappeared, only to be rediscovered living as a Buddhist priest in the late 1980s (Tsuchimoto, 1989, 104-105). Famous for his pioneering aesthetic of "cute eroticism" (*kawaii ero*) and contributions to the *Cybele* (Shibēru) series of fanzines, a major impetus to the *lolicon* boom, manga artist Azuma Hideo also disappeared, as recounted in his aptly titled *Disappearance Diary* (Shissō nikki, 2005). While Azuma returned to critical acclaim and a slew of reprints and retrospectives, however, such has not been the case for Uchiyama. Of course Azuma is the more influential, but it is still somewhat shocking that someone so prominent in the past has seen virtually no commemoration. If, as manga historian and critic Nagayama Kaoru proposes, the end of the *lolicon* boom saw a rapid diversification of art and interests (Nagayama, 2014, 95-97), then perhaps Uchiyama was simply too intimately tied to this moment to transcend it. Surely being one of the most symbolic figures of the *lolicon* boom, if not the symbolic figurehead, also means that it is more convenient for many to forget him and move on.

Bringing Uchiyama back takes on new significance here, as his return opens up "historical possibilities" and "a different way of telling about the past" (Davis, 1983, vii-viii; also Ginzburg, 2013). Since withdrawing to attend to family affairs, most notably his ailing mother, Uchiyama has been almost completely isolated for decades. He does not own a computer, does not like to go out and lives a relatively solitary life of the imagination drawing cute girl characters. Living as he does, Uchiyama maintains an understanding of *lolicon* from the manga/anime subculture of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Then, at least among manga/anime fans in the

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[5] The studio in question is Nikkatsu, whose *Lolita Anime* is not to be confused with Wonder Kids' *Lolita Anime*, the first pornographic anime series in Japan, which started its release earlier in the year. Both were eclipsed by Fairy Dust's *Cream Lemon* series, which also started in 1984.

nascent subculture in Japan, *lolicon* did not indicate men desiring young girls per se, but rather "an existence that seeks two-dimensional images (manga, anime) rather than realistic things" (Akagi, 1993, 230), or manga/anime as opposed to *gekiga*, photographs and human bodies.[6] In this subcultural sense, the emphasis is on "cuteness," "roundness" and something "manga/anime-like" (Nagayama, 2014, 83). Oriented toward fiction and stressing parody and play, this understanding of *lolicon* is at odds with the one that emerged in Japan in the late 1980s and early 1990s in response to a serial child molester and murderer, who apparently conflated fiction and reality and acted out perverse desires (Kinsella, 2000, 126-129), and the understanding that emerged overseas in response to the increased circulation of Japanese cartoons from the late 1990s into the early 2000s, which intersects with concern about virtual child pornography (Cather, 2012, 269-271; also McLelland, 2016). There is growing global consensus about the social and sexual problems with manga and Japan, which seems to ignore the history and situated knowledge of manga/anime subculture, even as we are not talking about a distant past or people.

With this in mind, I set out to access the living history of the late 1970s and early 1980s in Japan and think about manga/anime subculture today, which included tracking down Uchiyama Aki. Despite his name appearing frequently, however, there are few material traces of the man himself. When starting out, the only piece I had to work with was an interview with Uchiyama published in *Animage* magazine in May 1982. Alongside a brief profile was a hazy photograph, and I gathered that he at one point resided in the Tokyo suburbs and his family owned a restaurant there, but nothing concrete. Other traces most certainly exist, but I did not have knowledge of or access to them.[7] For the most part, one is left with people talking about Uchiyama, rather than hearing from him,

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[6] In the manga/anime subculture of Japan, "two-dimensional" (*nijigen*) refers to the world of cartoons as opposed to the world of humans, or "three-dimensional" (*sanjigen*).

[7] A core issue is that subcultural materials are not fully or even well archived, which means that a researcher has to rely on what has been written by others in secondary sources, purchase whatever primary sources s/he comes across in lucky encounters at stores or during auctions and pray to meet someone with a private collection willing to share. To address this serious limitation, Morikawa Ka'ichirō, an expert on manga/anime subculture in Japan, is working with Meiji University, public institutions and numerous fan groups and organizations to establish the Tokyo International Manga Library, which is the next step after the already operational Yonezawa Yoshihiro Memorial Library of Manga and Subculture. For more, see the official website: <http://www.meiji.ac.jp/manga/english/>.

let alone having a way to hear him out directly. It might be tempting to try establishing contact through what appears to be his homepage, which is after all branded with the mark of "Uchiyama Aki Productions," but this official-looking website is in fact not operated by Uchiyama, who does not own a computer.[8] Instead, someone else speaks for, and as, Uchiyama, which introduces the danger of misinformation.[9]

Doubting that the man himself would be so technologically savvy or engaged, I was thus initially skeptical of the Uchiyama revival online, but someone that claimed to belong to the same club as Uchiyama in his university days was running the campaign.[10] The activities were also tied to a physical location, the Instant Noodle Gallery, just a few blocks from my university. So it was that I began to work with Furusato and, through him, to work my way back to Uchiyama. This kind of fieldwork is time consuming, messy and without guarantees, but it turned out that Furusato wanted me to meet Uchiyama as part of the revival; I imagine the thinking was that reporting the interest of a American researcher in Uchiyama would offer him some measure of legitimacy. I had my own reasons for working with Furusato, but we negotiated our agendas over time and in relation to each other, which finally put me in the room with Uchiyama. Over the course of interacting with Uchiyama, it became clear that he would have been unlikely to respond to an interview request that came through other channels, as he remains content in his isolation and drawing and sees no purpose in talking about the past. Indeed, it seemed to me that he could not really grasp why anyone, let alone a foreigner, would care about him, let alone now. It was pressure from Furusato, who was trying to open Uchiyama up and get him back on his feet after the passing of his mother and in the face of his own deteriorating health and deep depression, that made the encounter possible.

After all this fieldwork, however, comes the question that Uchiyama himself posed: Does anyone care what he has to say? Elsewhere I have

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[8] See the homepage here: <http://starcollector.under.jp/index.htm>.

[9] Indeed, key information in the Japanese Wikipedia entry for Uchiyama comes directly from this homepage, but, in a recent personal interview (May 5, 2018), Uchiyama revealed that much of it – for example, anything taken from the tab "Profile" – is inaccurate. To make matters worse, there is also a Twitter account, which the homepage suggests is run by an imposter, because "Uchiyama Aki does not use Twitter." See the account here: <https://twitter.com/u__ak>.

[10] See the introduction to the revival project here: <https://faavo.jp/tokyo23/project/2231>.

suggested that the answer might be no, because manga/anime art such as his is being defined and treated as child pornography around the world (Norma, 2015, 85-86; also Adelstein and Kubo, 2014). Against the backdrop of moral condemnation and legal action against media and material labeled *lolicon*, I showed how a commercial publisher in the United States decided to cut an interview with Uchiyama and his drawings from one of my books to avoid sparking "a moral firestorm;" I showed how an academic publisher based in the United Kingdom decided not to include the drawings for fear of reprisal for "making them available," which could violate Commonwealth law; and I showed how an academic conference in Australia requested the drawings be removed from a presentation using similar rationale (Galbraith, 2016, 114-123).[11] From these examples comes the unmistakable message that it is better to err on the side of caution and just drop Uchiyama. I said then, and repeat now, that, "refusing to look at *lolicon* material and listen to people involved not only closes down the space for discussion and debate, but also actually prevents understanding of the issues at hand" (Galbraith, 2016, 127). How can we know what we are talking about if we cannot see the images and hear what people involved make of them?

Perhaps more disturbing than the biased view that results from not looking or listening is the lingering suspicion that we are for the most part fine with not accessing the situated knowledge of people involved and learning from them. Given its current framing as child pornography, there is really nothing to discuss: *Lolicon* material is bad, those producing and consuming it are bad, and good people must do something to protect children. At the annual gathering of the British Association for Japanese Studies in 2016, after presenting on encountering Uchiyama and the subsequent struggle to learn from him and introduce his knowledge into the global debate, a member of the audience asked, genuinely puzzled, "What more do we need to know?" And just like that, Uchiyama is waved away, because we already know what is going on, who is involved and what is to be done. We do not encounter Uchiyama, or even see the need to do so. For his part, Uchiyama also assumes that such an encounter is unnecessary, but does not realize that the way he sees, thinks and speaks about *lolicon* is fundamentally out of sync with critics beyond his four walls. I certainly learned from our encounter, but wonder if media

[11] Tellingly, even the publisher of minor comics that joined me for the meeting with Furusato that opens this chapter was weary about being associated with Uchiyama and *lolicon*.

and area studies would support the work required to get into that room and see things from there. Such work might challenge what has become a moral position and turn us toward an ethics of encounter and learning with others and from their situated knowledge. It would mean developing our own situated knowledge and then taking a position, ethically.

Conclusion

Roughly speaking, there appear to be divergent meanings of *lolicon* building up from the early manga/anime subculture in Japan (1979-1984), the media panic about men confused about the distinction between fiction and reality becoming dangerous deviants in Japan (1989-1994), global responses to certain forms of manga/anime as child pornography feeding back into policy and legal decisions in Japan (1999-2004) and this feedback intensifying amid the erasure of distinctions between virtual and actual forms of child pornography in Commonwealth nations (2009-2014). By the time we reach phase four, there is discussion between those inside and outside Japan and positioned within and against manga/anime subculture, but they more or less talk past one another and exchange insults. At the very least, we face what sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild calls "empathy walls," which serve as obstacles to "understanding of another person" (Hochschild 2016: 5). Deeper, rigid interpretative frames have led to us/them dichotomies, which "limit the human encounter" (Said, 1978, 46; also Hinton, 2014).

This paper has argued that a more substantial discussion might begin from such encounter, from learning with others in the world and developing situated knowledge. The focus was on Uchiyama Aki, whose personal experience and relatively stable understanding of *lolicon* from the early days of manga/anime subculture could unsettle assumptions about the social and sexual problems of manga and Japan, which are becoming entrenched in global discourse. I have, however, highlighted myriad barriers hindering an encounter with Uchiyama, and a lack of interest in or support for the kind of long-term fieldwork necessary to bring him to the table. If anything, the research is discouraged, because it seems morally wrong to be on "his side," on the other side of the line between them and us. There are consequences to such an association. Better to err on the side of caution, let the man be forgotten and move on. And so this encounter does not occur, even as the specter of the *lolicon* guy haunts us, staging encounters with the imagined pervert, pedophile and predator at every turn.

During the conference in Stockholm that inspired this paper, I was struck by a video shown by cultural-studies scholar Yoshimi Shun'ya during his keynote address. The video was an excerpt from documentarist Kudō Toshiki's *Shinjuku: A Report on the City and Its People* (Shinjuku: Toshi to ningen ni kan suru ripōto, 1970), which turns the camera onto a dying woman on a forgotten backstreet of a changing neighborhood in Tokyo.[12] The video left me shaken, because I recognized in it a sort of living death. I recognized in it Uchiyama, his home and humble sense that no one cares how he lived or that he will die. Lost in time. I began to appreciate more what Furusato Yukiyoshi is trying to do for this man, who he knew all those years ago and wants to revive – really revive, to bring back to life and back into the world that he left behind and has left him behind. And I thought I might understand why Furusato put me in that room with Uchiyama and encouraged me to write about him. Like Kudō did with his documentary film, we need to turn our eyes to this world and the people in it. We can report what we see there in drawings or photographs or words, but whatever they are, I hope that they are moving. I hope that they move us to care more about others, to move toward them instead of recoiling in disgust and assuming the worst.

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[12] For a corollary in comics, see Tatsumi Yoshihiro's "Abandon the Old in Tokyo" (Tōkyō ubasute yama, 1971).

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