



PROJECT MUSE®

Hagio Moto's Nuclear Manga and the Promise of Eco-Feminist Desire

Margherita Long

Mechademia, Volume 9, 2014, pp. 3-23 (Article)

Published by University of Minnesota Press
DOI: [10.1353/mec.2014.0003](https://doi.org/10.1353/mec.2014.0003)



➔ For additional information about this article
<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/mec/summary/v009/9.long.html>

Hagio Moto's Nuclear Manga and the Promise of Eco-Feminist Desire

In April 2012 the leading shōjo manga artist Hagio Moto published a collection of five new works in response to the Fukushima nuclear disaster. Titled *Nanohana* (Rape blossoms), the volume was hailed by a review in the *Mainichi* newspaper as proof that manga subculture responds to societal problems “more quickly and more incisively than any other medium” (Figure 1).¹ But the *Mainichi* review, like those in the *Yomiuri* and *Asahi Weekly*, stopped short of spelling out the exact nature of Hagio’s insight.² And there were also disgruntled otaku bloggers who complained that *Nanohana* merely repeats the same antinuclear slogans (“It’s not safe!”) we have already been hearing for decades.³

In this essay I propose that what is interesting about Hagio’s contribution to Japan’s denuclearization debates is the way she connects the problem of the nuclear with the problem of desire. In “Purūto fujin” (Madam Pluto) and “Ame no yoru: Uranosu hakushaku” (A rainy night: Count Uranus), radioactive elements take human form and become irresistible to everyone but a tiny minority who refuse to forget their chemical properties. With wry precision, Hagio equates the ability to be humanly wanted with the inability to be materially questioned or acknowledged. The target of her critique is our dominant



FIGURE 1. Cover image from the first edition of *Nanohana* (Rape blossoms) (Shōgakukan, 2012).

model of desire, in which it is only after some original, physical object goes missing that we can begin to desire its substitute, which is de facto entirely cultural.

This essay expands my reading of *Nanohana* by drawing out its affinity with an earlier and much longer work by Hagio, *Sutaa Reddo* (1980, *Star Red*). Here Hagio not only sharpens her critique of desire-as-usual but offers a brilliant alternative. The heroine Sei is a galaxy-traveling shōjo who refuses to accept “love” as compensation for the destruction of her beloved planet, Mars. In the process, she teaches her lover Erg how to go back to his own culture’s dead planet. There, at her insistence, he relearns human love by reawakening his capacity for human/nonhuman interaction. The result is joyously eco-positive—the rebirth of a planet! And yet, in the rich body of

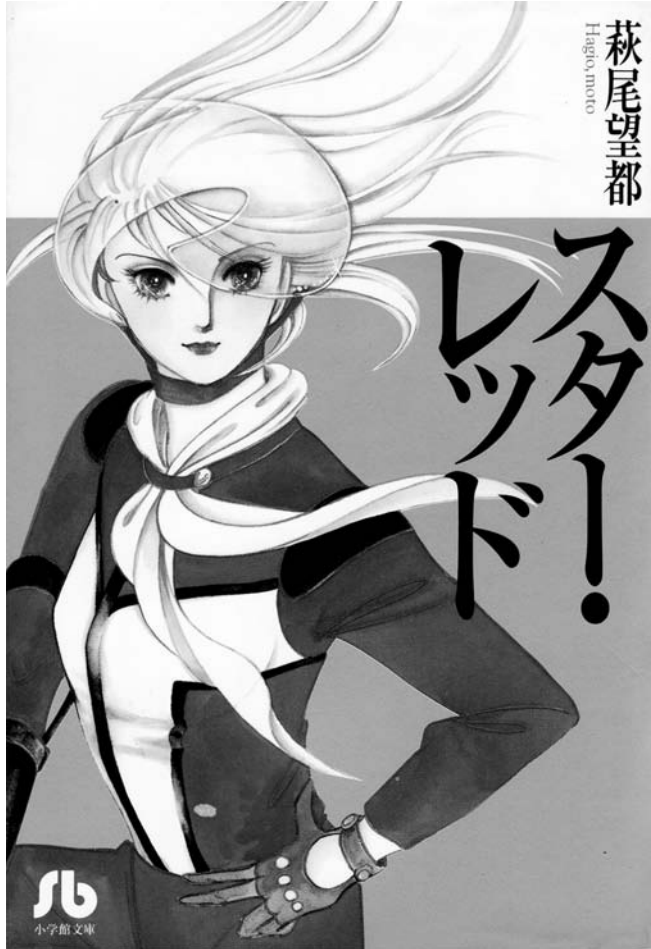


FIGURE 2. Cover image from a later edition of *Suta Reddo* (1980, Star Red) (Shōgakukan Bunko, 1995).

Japanese feminist writing on Hagio, this eco-critical element has gone mostly unremarked (Figure 2).

At stake, I think, is how we conceive our relation to material origins. What does it mean to love a planet the way Sei loves Mars? Do we really need to sever our relation with the physical object before we can begin to make sense of it? Desire it? Desire each other? Indeed, what would it mean for intra-human relations if they were not founded in a prior sacrifice of the material world? These are questions that a group of North American feminists has recently begun to ask under the rubric of “new materialism.”⁴ What I propose in this essay is that a similar set of questions is key to a rich but tantalizingly incomplete debate that has been swirling around Hagio’s work since the 1980s: the debate about the hyper-girl.

“Hyper-girl” (*chōshōjo*) is a term coined in 1984 by critic Miyasako Chizuru in her study of Hagio’s early manga, *Chōshōjo e* (1984, *Toward the hyper-girl*). Miyasako argues that we can situate Hagio’s heroines along a continuum of feminist progress from the *shōjo* demanded by patriarchy, to the *hishōjo* (anti-girl) of works like *Heart of Thomas* (1974, *Tōma no shinzō*) and *Pō no ichizoku* (1972, *The Poe clan*), who seizes agency as a “boy with no genitals.”⁵ Then, even more positively, we have the *chōshōjo* of *Star Red*, who takes the stage emphatically as a girl. The *chōshōjo* draws her identity from a set of hyper-powers (*chōnōryoku*) that, according to Miyasako, honor a “feminine principle” (*josei genri*) of receptivity to alterity. In her 1995 afterward to Shōgakukan’s bunko edition of *Star Red*, Kotani Mari credits Miyasako’s “hyper-girl” concept with capturing “the power of the heroine’s vital force, something we might even call the assertiveness of her female corporeality (*joseishintai no sekkyokusei*).”⁶ In 2001, in a major public forum on Japanese popular culture, Kotani posited the hyper-girl as an important feminist alternative to Saitō Tamaki’s “beautiful fighting girl” (*sentō bishōjo*), with whom she is often confused.⁷ However, on the pages of *Mechademia* in 2006, Kotani lamented that the hyper-girl had failed to attain critical visibility:

Oddly, after the publication of *Star Red* in 1980, Hagio Moto never again worked with the figure of the hyper-girl. Moreover, despite its genuine interest, Miyasako’s conception of the hyper-girl never came to be widely accepted.⁸

Where did the hyper-girl go? It is not hard to guess that her disappearance had something to do with the vexed terms (“feminine principle,” “female corporeality”) that critics have used to describe her. Associated with “biological essentialism,” such terms fell out of favor in both Japan and North America with the shift to the cultural constructivist paradigm in feminist theory. Reading Hagio after Fukushima, is it time to reinterpret them? That is, can we redefine “biologism” as the opposite of determinism? As a kind of receptivity to biologies, climates, and, indeed, entire galaxies, that are never directly knowable in their materiality, but that nevertheless exert tremendous pressure for cultural change? Both *Nanohana* and *Star Red* make it obvious why this pressure would be felt most urgently by girls. But Hagio never stipulates that only girls can feel it. She entices all her readers to embrace the *chōshōjo* state of mind that, at the time of this writing, may finally be opening Japan to a nonnuclear future.⁹

NANOHANA: THE PROBLEM OF THE NUCLEAR IS THE PROBLEM OF DESIRE

The opening and closing stories of *Nanohana* feature a shōjo struggling with loss after being evacuated from her Fukushima home. In contrast, the middle three stories parody the far more powerful national and international characters who find ways to justify nuclear power despite the reality of accidents. Let me focus on the first two of these three, which Hagio calls her “personification of radiation” trilogy.¹⁰

In both “Madam Pluto” and “A Rainy Night: Count Uranus,” a radioactive element takes glamorous human form. Using the Greek names of the associated planets, Uranus and Pluto, uranium and plutonium appear before a body of judges. In the first story this body is a cross-section of affluent Japanese society assembled in a stately mansion on a rainy night. In the second, it is a group of Western gentlemen assembled in what looks like a nineteenth-century British court of law. As the would-be judges begin to speak, we realize they are so smitten with their respective defendants that they can utter nothing but starry-eyed admiration (“He’s beautiful!” [72]; “She’s heaven!” [36]). Only a tiny minority uses the element’s chemical name and reminds the group that they are dealing with a radioactive substance harmful to humans.

What Hagio satirizes is how masterfully Count Uranus and Madam Pluto deflect these criticisms with an over-the-top discourse of love. “But I love you all!” says Count Uranus, “I received my power from you.” “I want to repay your kindness by putting it all at your disposal!” (72, 77). To her own “dear humans” (56) Madam Pluto purrs, “Take it! Take all my love!” (42). Readers sense how ridiculous it is for radioactive elements to make proclamations of love to humans, and the most trite sorts of heterosexual love at that. But they also sense how familiar it is for humans to consider the “thing itself” obsolete and to proceed on the assumption that culture, discourse, and desire are all that matter when it comes to how the world makes sense. In the humanities, we tend to associate this mode of thinking with what Jacques Derrida called the absence of an “outside the text.” Here, Hagio points to the limits of such thinking for pondering the nuclear. In both “Count Uranus” and “Madam Pluto,” it is impossible to put the elements on trial because what was required for them to be humanly wanted in the first place—to be “discovered” and sold to the public—was their complete transformation from the “nature” of plutonium and uranium to the “culture” of Madam Pluto and Count Uranus.

Consider the story “Rainy Night: Count Uranus.” Here the culture that replaces the “thing itself” has a strong Japanese inflection. Count Uranus offers his interlocutors “anything and everything, just as they wish” (73), and there ensues an orgy of consumer indulgence reminiscent of the bubble economy of the 1980s. Up pop not only factories, airports, hospitals, and roads but also Ferraris, Parisian Opera Houses, and diamond earrings. The only person who resists is a young woman named Ann, who asks for “clean water, food, and soil, free from nuclear contamination” (77). This is of course the one wish the Count cannot grant. What is interesting is that Hagio has his admirers defend him with lines that could easily have been borrowed from one of Japan’s best-known nuclear advocates, Nakasone Yasuhiro. In April 2011, Nakasone told the *Asahi* newspaper that, although the Fukushima accident was regrettable, the economy remained just as dependent on nuclear energy as in the immediate postwar period, when it allowed Japan to avoid the fate of a “fourth-rate agricultural nation.” He emphasized that most of the world was not against nuclear power, that “solar and wind are not capable of meeting even one tenth of Japan’s energy needs,” and that today’s Japanese have a responsibility to history to recover from the disaster in the same way as “Japanese of the past” (*kako no Nihonjin*).¹¹ Using similar language, a nationalist grandmother in “Count Uranus” rejects green energy with “Don’t be daft!” “Wind and solar can’t make Japan a first-rate nation!” She continues, “If we don’t get rich from Count Uranus’s gifts like other nations, we’ll be letting Japan alone fall behind! It would be an affront to our ancestors!” (79).

Next, Ann cites the problem of nuclear waste and its potential rogue use in nuclear weapons. This time the Count’s devotees counter with the discourse of “completely peaceful nuclear applications” (*akumademo kaku no heiwa riyō*, 80) that played a key role in Japan’s acquiescence to nuclear power in the 1950s.¹² But perhaps the most “Japanese” of all the Count’s lovers is a boy named Tarō, who illustrates Murakami Takashi’s point about otaku being one of the few postwar contingents to own up (albeit too enthusiastically) to the magnitude of Japan’s World War II nuclear trauma.¹³ For Tarō, the term “peaceful applications” immediately conjures the inverse it is meant to disavow. Playacting a giant detonation, he shouts gleefully, “mushroom cloud!” This prompts the oldest member of the gathering, a sickly grandfather, to wake from a nap and shout angrily “Hi-ro-shi-ma!” “Na-ga-sa-ki!” (80). No one pays attention; it is as if the only person old enough to have had a corporeal encounter with Japan’s nuclear past is too close to death to make his opinion matter.

Still, what about Japan’s nuclear present, at Fukushima? Ann points out that the cesium contamination there is one hundred times worse than at

Hiroshima. But Count Uranus upstages her, in a virtuoso performance of how easily Fukushima's lessons can remain unlearned. In a speech as eloquent as it is preposterous, the Count propounds the necessity of sacrifice for a world of peace and wealth. He concedes that, globally, nuclear accidents may well take place every twenty-five years. But, he says, this is a small price to pay for the absence of war. "Tens of millions died in World Wars I and II" (82), he intones, "but the world is now rich thanks to the massive heat I generate" (78), and we know that "people only fight when we have poverty and disparities in wealth" (81). "Quite right!" affirms one of his lovers, a company president. "You've completely eradicated hunger, even war!" (82). With bitter irony, Hagio indicts the way our first-world love affair with nuclear rhetoric simultaneously justifies and erases the material realities of places like Iraq, Afghanistan, and East Africa. And she goes further. She also indicts the way we cover over this structure of sacrifice by calling the result "love." Comforting a woman who is frightened about Fukushima, Count Uranus pulls her teary face toward his in a classic pre-kiss close-up. Looking up into his eyes, she is weak and confused. Looking down into hers, he is reassuring:

WOMAN: It's scary! I don't like worrying. I want to live a beautiful life!

URANUS: You can! Go ahead and forget it, this "accident."

WOMAN: Forget?

URANUS: Yes! Focus on everyday life! . . . If you are injured I can satisfy you with my wealth.

WOMAN: Oh Count Uranus, how thoughtful of you to take care of us!

URANUS: It's because I love you all so much! (87-88)

With this scene, Hagio draws a connection between the most clichéd formulations of heterosexual "love" and a philosophy of desire that comes dangerously close to predicating the meaningfulness of everyday life on an extreme prior injury that must be disavowed.

One of the things I love most about *Nanohana* is how Hagio exposes the starkly different positions that men and women are required to assume in these clichéd formations. In "Count Uranus," the personified nuclear substance appears as a fully clothed figure of rhetorical authority and active desire. In "Madam Pluto" she is a send-up of what we might call the pornification of women. Scantly clad in a dominatrix outfit, she trades the Count's honorifics for the debased vernacular of a sex worker. "You want me, don't you?" she beckons. "Isn't it me you crave?" (41). On hands and knees, with her mouth open and her ass in the air, she belies her dominant persona with a series of

submissive poses, and her appeal to those who would judge her follows suit. She praises man for his transcendence over animals, by means of fire, weapons, language, writing, and mathematics. And she says she is indispensable to him, because his history of increasingly powerful technologies—soon to culminate in stem-cell science that will master death—can only be powered by an equally eternal energy source: herself. Hagio's joke is that one does not have to change much about men's fantasies of either the ideal woman or the ideal energy source to make the analogy work. Both are endlessly available, endlessly compliant, and endlessly "hot." What is more, they are endlessly specular, rewarding every glance with the reflection of man's god-like omnipotence.

The biggest difference between the "Pluto" and "Uranus" stories is that, whereas Count Uranus seduces everyone with his discourse of love, Madam Pluto stumbles. Is it because she is never fully a subject of that love? Only its object? The assembled gentlemen charge her with the scission of human DNA and announce that she will have to be buried underground. At this she becomes enraged and, in a bizarrely wonderful basketball interlude, scores four goals of 24,000 points to teach them about her half-life. It will take 96,000 years for her poison to begin to dissipate! As many of us realized keenly after Fukushima, this is a unit of time that tends to exceed human understanding.¹⁴ By attempting to score what are essentially extradiscursive points against her interlocutors, Madam Pluto emphasizes that she has never fully completed the journey from nature to culture. And so it turns out that she cannot be fully wanted by humans, because she cannot speak a language of desire that fully divorces itself from its material outside.

In this way, *Nanohana* makes a very specific point about desire and about nuclear energy. Hagio is saying that desire-as-usual seals itself off from the contingencies of nature, and at great human peril. But she is not saying that by simply embracing the alternative, and maintaining our relation with materiality, we will necessarily keep ourselves or our planet safe. Hers is a much more nuanced eco-politics, a politics she develops with astonishing scope over the 526 pages of *Star Red*.

PLANET LOVE AND THE ECO-POLITICS OF THE HYPER-GIRL

Serialized in 1978–79, *Star Red* is set three centuries in the future, in the year 2276. Writing at the peak of the U.S.–Soviet arms race, Hagio imagines a future in which nuclear humans have remained in charge. They have not yet

destroyed the Earth with radiation, but a war to control satellite defense missiles (anticipating Ronald Reagan's "Star Wars" by four years) has come close, so that each and every city is protectively domed, and all suburbs are abandoned. Even before the doming of the cities, overpopulation has prompted an increasingly ambitious set of colonizations, first of planets in Earth's own solar system, and then in the stellar systems of Proxima, Alpha Centauri, Barnard's Star, and Sirius. To convey the brutality of this "glorious age of galactic development," Hagio offers the sad example of Mars.¹⁵

HAGIO'S JOKE IS THAT ONE DOES NOT HAVE TO CHANGE MUCH ABOUT MEN'S FANTASIES OF EITHER THE IDEAL WOMAN OR THE IDEAL ENERGY SOURCE TO MAKE THE ANALOGY WORK. BOTH ARE ENDLESSLY AVAILABLE, ENDLESSLY COMPLIANT, AND ENDLESSLY "HOT."

Poor Mars! Originally settled by Earth in 2050, it is converted to a penal colony in 2070, when high fetal mortality makes it hard to sustain the colonial population. Focusing on more exploitable planets, the people of Earth begin to ignore the Martian prisoners, and by 2150 they have been left to die. But they do not die. In symbiosis with Mars's atmosphere, their women start giving birth to babies who deal with the lack of water and oxygen by means of *chōnōryoku* or hyper-powers, the scope of which increases exponentially with each generation. When Earth becomes interested in recolonizing Mars in 2264, scientists are shocked to find a thriving population of fourth- and fifth-generation Martians whose DNA differs significantly from humans'. In this new species, we have Hagio's answer to the question, "What would happen if we did not sever our relation to material reality?" Rather than engineer, pollute, and abandon an ever-expanding set of environments, the Martians have stayed put, used less, and adapted. And the result is not that they are nontoxic or eco-balanced but simply that they are different, even while they themselves cannot control this difference or predict its implications. The protagonist, Reddo Sei (Red Star), or Sei for short, is one of the few fifth-generation Martians to have survived Earth's recolonization of her planet. Accordingly, her *chōnōryoku* abilities are the most powerful in the text, and overtly feminized. That is, *chōnōryoku* evokes *chōshōjo* and vice-versa, with both "hyper-powers" and "hyper-girl" serving as metaphors for the ability to sustain a human-nonhuman interaction.

The people of Earth, in their ignorance, imagine that this interaction is simple. Hagio gives us two different versions of their mistake. The first comes from Anju, a woman who works for a government agency that wants to appropriate Martian powers "for the betterment of society" (270). Anju

and her colleagues take Sei into custody, examine her, and remark with envy on her three main powers: telepathy (*kannōryoku*), teleportation (*seishindō*), and telekinesis (*nendōryoku*). As Kotani Mari explains, American science fiction had been depicting all three since at least the 1950s.¹⁶ In Japan as in the United States, readers had come to equate them with domination—with the certainty that one can read someone else’s mind in terms legible to oneself (telepathy), that one can fit naturally wherever one projects oneself (teleportation), and that one can use the power of the mind to remake the material world according to one’s own will (telekinesis). None of the three abilities admits of any uncertainty, any acknowledgment that the object acted upon might exert its own force in return. Anju holds fast to these definitions, certain that telepathy especially can attain a high “safety index” and be used for things like solving crimes and preventing accidents (269). But Anju is bitterly disappointed. Feeling trapped and misunderstood, Sei inadvertently explodes Anju’s government agency with the power of her unconscious. When she telekinetically transports everyone in the unit back to the “soil that birthed them” (*shusshōchi*), her hyper-powers seem to assert that their true usefulness is for communing not with one’s government but with one’s environment (318).

Yet if hyper-powers do not ensure mastery over the material world, neither do they ensure subordination. Hagio critiques this idea by means of a second Earth character named Paveman. As head of an agency called the “Bureau of Information, Department of Martian Research,” Paveman must make sure Earth’s resettlement of Mars remains safe from the renegade fourth- and fifth-generation populations who have been driven from their sacred capital and into the hinterlands. He carries out his duties sadistically, using biological experiments on live Martians in an attempt to neutralize their hyper-powers. Unlike Anju, he knows these powers are incompatible with the status quo—that they represent a divergent human future. But he is unable to conceive of that future as anything but “regression.” He rants:

Their power of vision is zero! They apprehend things with extrasensory perception! Their eyes are completely unnecessary. And isn’t it true that people who have the power to move objects by telepathy can go perfectly well without fingers or hands? They can teleport, so what do they need with legs? They have telepathy, so why would they need vocal cords? Right? What do they need with words? Before long they will stop needing noses, mouths, ears . . . And how will that be? When people just rattle around the face of the earth like mineral deposits? Even thinking will become obsolete. And living! If this is not regression, what is it? (306–8)

Paveman's speech is remarkable for the forced logic of his conviction that their hyper-powers will turn Martians into rock formations. It seems ludicrous given the vitality of *Star Red's* Martians. But he is constrained by what Miyasako Chizuru calls "limitless allegiance to the linearity of his own temporal thinking."¹⁷ Paveman locates humans at the end of an evolutionary timeline beginning billions of years ago with tiny sea organisms, and shouts, "It is completely unacceptable for anyone but humans to rule the universe!" (309). It is a highly un-Darwinian understanding of evolution, an understanding in which all nature's adaptations can be charted teleologically along a single temporal axis with "Man" at its frozen endpoint. Although Paveman knows hyper-powers seek different destinations, in his schema there is nowhere to go but backward, to an original, mineralized "nature" that is inert and unchanging.

NATURE/CULTURE AND THE "DEAD" PLANETS OF ZESUSERU

This view of nature is amplified by the villains in the second half of *Star Red*, where Sei learns that the Earth–Mars conflict is but the most recent chapter in a much older conflict between a group of victorious "Zesuseru" and the red planets (*sekishoku keisei*) they have been persecuting for thirty thousand years (Figure 3).¹⁸ According to the Zesuserians, the only way to keep the universe safe for humanity—for "wisdom, virtue, and reason" (394)—is to seal away the demons (*mamono*) that lodge in the hearts of all who dwell on red planets (398). They accomplish this by blowing up the offending planets, relocating the inhabitants, and "regulating" them with locks or "seals" (*fūin*) on their hyper-powers. Like the people of Earth, the Zesuserians believe there are "any number of livable planets" (396) in the universe, and that what defines humanity as such is its consciousness—indeed, a consciousness that becomes human in direct proportion to its freedom from planetary input. In a brilliant third gesture of historical framing, Hagio has the Zesuserians trace their fear of red planets to an even more ancient civilization reported to have been destroyed by *chōnōryoku* (Figure 3). The ruins of this civilization occupy some two hundred planets that the Zesuserians have designated "Zero Ward," placed off limits, and declared officially dead.

How are we to understand this death? One thing that makes *Star Red* a compelling contribution to Japan's denuclearization debates is the parallel between one of the pro-nuclear faction's main arguments and this Zesuserian ideal of humanity divorced from planetary input. We often hear that the

	Time Period Relative to the Year 2276	Dominant Ability (Nōryoku) Race	Persecuted Hyper-ability (Chōnōryoku) Race
First Frame (First Half of <i>Star Red</i>)	The last 226 years	People of Earth Representative: Paveman	People of Mars Representative: Sei
Second Frame (Last Half of <i>Star Red</i>)	The last 30,000 years	People of Zesnuseru	People of “Red Planets” Representative: Erg
Third Frame (Prehistory)	Between 900,000 and one million years ago	An “ancient civilization” that tried to master chōnōryoku but failed	

FIGURE 3. The narrative frames of *Star Red*.

Fukushima disaster cannot be allowed to dictate nuclear policy because of the *sōteigai* or “unforeseeable” status of the earthquake and tsunami that caused it. According to Tokyo Electric Power Corporation and its government sponsors, since tectonic plates and the Pacific Ocean are unlikely to deliver such a devastating combination again, the disaster is statistically irrelevant. With arguments like this, are they not telling us, like the Zesnuserians tell their victims, to put a lock on our receptivity to the inexplicability of the material outside? Are they not saying that, when it comes to planning for humanity’s future, any force of nature that exceeds our imagination is prohibited from exerting pressure on our decisions? It is the sort of resolute anthropocentrism we have heard steadily since Fukushima, as when economics minister Yosano Kaoru remarked in August 2011, “We thought that human beings—the Japanese—can control nuclear by our intelligence, by our reason. With this one accident, will that philosophy be discarded? I don’t think so.”¹⁹

In *Star Red*, Sei’s definitive gesture as hyper-girl is to insist on traveling to the most ancient of the Zesnuserian’s off-limits planets and seeing for herself whether it is really dead. Hagio stages this journey as Sei’s reaction to learning that the Zesnuserians plan to blow up Mars. Rather than save her home planet, which may be impossible, Sei wants to challenge the premise that mandates the destruction of all “red” planets. She wants to challenge the premise that nature’s force must be foreclosed, declared inert, for human culture to evolve and flourish.

As part of the new materialism debates in North American feminism,

Elizabeth Grosz has argued that feminists themselves come close to adopting such a premise when we rely exclusively on theories of cultural constructivism to understand how gender and culture evolve over time. In an essay called “The Nature of Culture,” Grosz offers a sympathetic account of cultural constructivism’s post-1968 resistance to prevailing naturalisms that justified divisions of labor, sex, and race by attributing them to the laws of nature. But Grosz points out that we lose important political and conceptual resources if we recognize only culture as productive and generative, and accept the conservative view of nature as invariable, universal, or predictive. If feminists want to understand all the ways culture can change, and if we want better to effect that change, Grosz says we need to understand nature as something that “bequeaths . . . a series of problems or provocations which each cultural form must address, in its own way, even if it cannot solve them.”²⁰ She writes:

IT IS NOT A MATTER OF KNOWING DIRECTLY WHAT THE FORECLOSED ORIGIN HAS TO SAY. RATHER, FOR THE HYPER-GIRL, IT IS A MATTER OF FINDING OUT WHAT WE OURSELVES CAN SAY DIFFERENTLY AS A RESULT OF ORIENTING OURSELVES TO IT, AND RESPONDING TO ITS PROVOCATION.

the natural is *not* the inert, passive, unchanging element against which culture elaborates itself but the matter of the cultural, that which enables and actively facilitates cultural variation and change, indeed that which ensures that the cultural, including its subject-agents, are never self-identical, that they differ from themselves and necessarily change over time.²¹

In *Star Red*, what is depressing about the Zesnuserians is that they have remained self-identical (for thirty thousand years!) precisely by sealing themselves off from the dynamism of their environment. Worse, they have projected their denial of nature’s generativity backward in time, to the million-year-old civilization that Sei visits. It comes as no surprise that when she arrives there she feels the planet “resonate” and declares, “nothingness and death each have their own kinds of meanings” (436).

What kind of meanings? As *Star Red* soon shows, it is not a matter of knowing directly what the foreclosed origin has to say. Rather, for the hyper-girl, it is a matter of finding out what we ourselves can say differently as a result of orienting ourselves to it, and responding to its provocation. Grosz calls it “the force of an outside that induces thinking,” “that incites culture.”²² In *Star Red*, the result is nothing short of a new set of definitions for desire and sexual difference.

REENGAGING THE ZERO-POINT OF THE UNIVERSE: A NEW MODE OF DESIRE

At the same time that Sei learns the Zesnuserians plan to destroy Mars, she also receives a confession of love from a shōnen named Erg. Because Erg has been Sei's loyal fellow-traveler since the start of the adventure, readers are well disposed toward him. The problem is that Erg has been brainwashed by the Zesnuserians. Although he too has hyper-powers, having grown up on a red planet, he willingly gave them up when his planet was destroyed six thousand years earlier, installing the required lock and declaring himself safe from "nothingness, darkness, and madness" (520). Visually and conceptually, Erg's salient feature is the form this lock takes: a short, sturdy horn on the top of his head, like a unicorn's. The horn is distinctly phallic, and as Erg spells out the terms of his love for Sei, we realize that *Star Red* is setting them up as the foils for a vastly superior alternative.

Faced with the loss of Mars, Sei declares her intention to die there with it. But Erg cites the Zesnuserian Law (*okite*) that one can never go home again, and says she should find a new planet, like he did (400).²³ Surprised, Sei presses him on the location of this new planet:

SEI: You . . . where were you able to find your new home (*furusato*)?

ERG: In you. I've been looking for you all this time.

Without a doubt.

Will you be my Mars? (403-4)

Sei's second quintessentially *chōshōjo* gesture in the text is to reject Erg's proposal out of hand. For what would it mean to "be Erg's Mars"? Like Erg's horn, which represents the loss of his hyper-powers, Erg's "Mars" would also represent a lack, the exploded planet. It is this strange status as the symbolization-of-lack that makes both the horn and Erg's would-be lover phallic. Because they point simultaneously to the existence of some prior state of wholeness and to its eternal prohibition, they function as classic examples of the master signifier of desire in Lacanian psychoanalysis.

In an essay called "Refiguring Lesbian Desire," Elizabeth Grosz points out that lack-based desire is not unique to Lacan. Tracing it as far back as Plato, for whom desire "is a lack in man's being, an imperfection or flaw in human culture," Grosz reminds us that Hegel is also an important antecedent:

Hegel conceives of desire as a lack, a unique one that, unlike other lacks, can only function if it remains unfilled, a lack, therefore, with a peculiar object

all of its own . . . The only object desire can desire is one that will not fill the lack or provide complete satisfaction.²⁴

Grosz posits two main consequences of the dominance of this model of desire, with its impossible object. In *Star Red*, Hagio can be seen to skewer both of them by means of Erg's proposal. The first consequence Grosz notes is the model's usefulness to capitalist and other modes of perpetual acquisition. Consider the Earth's acquisition of Mars, which was merely the first in a series that included Jupiter, Neptune, and Pluto, as well as planets in the systems of Proxima, Alpha Centauri, Barnard's Star, and Sirius.²⁵ Given that the text defines planetary "desire" as a galactically scaled, imperial capitalism constantly cycling through the consumption, manipulation, dissatisfaction, and (in the Zesnuserian case) destruction of successive planets, Erg's request that Sei "be his Mars" could hardly be more terrifying. Even assuming she avoids the worst, if desire is inherently unfillable, then Erg's taking her as his replacement home planet is destined to be just the first in a long chain of decidedly unloving substitutions.

A second consequence of lack-based desire is sexual difference, or, more accurately, the fake difference we get when a dominant group covers over humanity's origin and defines what remains exclusively in terms of the impossible master signifier that takes its place. Erg's horn is a perfect example. When Sei asks him if what the Zesnuserians say could really be true—that the existence of beings with hyper-powers is meaningless, superfluous—Erg hedges. "I don't know" (read: yes). "No one knows. But doesn't it mean something that you and I are here like this in conversation?" (400). Erg tries to redirect Sei to a conversation he calls "love," but he is only willing to have it if he can count on his horn to keep him sealed away from her defining difference. Like the discourse of "love" in *Nanohana*, it is premised on the exclusion of what matters most about the other.

We see Hagio's alternate model of love when Sei asks Erg to remove his horn, and he agrees. Readers can't help regretting that Hagio waits until the final fifty pages of *Star Red* to make this happen. We want more time in this new world of phallus-free desire! We want more time not least to appreciate the two powerful events of rebirth that it enables.

The first is the regeneration of the ancient dead planet the Zesnuserians call "Zero Ward." Erg has traveled there with Sei and has fearfully witnessed her receptivity to its resonance. Ultimately, that resonance absorbs her, body and mind, and she is teleported from Zero Ward to a limbo-space far from Erg. Left alone on his planet, he begins to reconsider his definition of love, and it is in his desperate solitude and yearning that he decides to remove

his horn. As soon as he does, we see the Zesnuserians panic at the geophysical data emerging from Zero Ward. The amount of carbon is exploding. The surface temperature is rising. Within three thousand revolutions, the planet will regenerate its swamps, and organic life will flourish. If we read the scene literally, it is a miracle that human receptivity can beget such spectacular rebirth. But if we read it metaphorically, it is a vibrant symbol of the dynamism that nature has possessed all along, independent of human willingness to acknowledge it.

The second rebirth is Sei's. Stuck in limbo after being absorbed by the resonance of the dead planet, she reconnects with an old Martian ally, the third-generation shōnen Yodaka. From the start Yodaka has been helping her in her struggles against Paveman and the Zesnuserians. But his own hyper-receptivity to the spirit of death has landed him, too, in this limbo, which Hagio depicts as a black, galaxy-dappled backdrop to their floating bodies. From here they continue to exercise telepathy, channeling the grief of a group of Martians gathered around Yodaka's comatose body. It is at this point that the two decide to use hyper-powers to inhabit this body together, with Yodaka growing a uterus and Sei becoming a fetus. In some of the text's most quoted lines, Yodaka intones, "Sei! Just make yourself tiny! Be small and tuck yourself in here. I'll help you . . ." (501). In this way Yodaka becomes "Yodaka Mama," and *Star Red* ends with a sixth-generation "Junior Sei" still gestating inside him but already blessed with a remarkably queer set of committed parents. As Miyasako Chizuru points out, these parents include the newly transgendered Yodaka, an anticapitalist Egyptian man Labaaba who takes Yodaka as his wife, and even the watchful spirit of a cross-dressing fourth-generation Martian named Kuroba, who has given her life for Sei.

Miyasako calls these parents "sexual outlaws" in a Zesnuserian world, people whose "extraterritorial sexuality" remains impossible so long as society assigns the work of deciding what is dead and not dead exclusively to shōnen like Erg.²⁶ She writes:

At the zero-point, the modern shōnen stands rigid, as if frozen, but the *chōshōjo* does not falter. Having arrived at this point . . . Hagio Moto represents a "feminine principle" that discerns a source of rebirth in the zero-point deemed "nothingness" by linear temporal thinking.²⁷

Miyasako derives her term "zero-point" both from "Zero Ward" and from her argument that linear temporal thinking charts a static course for men's lives toward what Erg refers to memorably as "the conclusion called

death” (408). Although many have interpreted Miyasako’s as a biologically essentialist point—namely, that the “feminine principle” avoids this conclusion because women are the “sex that gives birth”—I take her to be making a much more nuanced argument about the relation between material origins and the conditions of possibility for sexual difference. We know that, for Erg-as-modern-shōnen, the horn (the dead-lock!) both determines what is desired (woman-as-lack) and regulates what is sexually legible (the other as substitute origin). Therefore, to break this deadlock and make “outlaw” sexualities possible, it is not enough simply to struggle against the terms mandated by the horn, from within its cultural sphere. The answer lies instead with renegotiating the relation to origin—with discovering what Miyasako calls “a source of rebirth at the zero-point”—in order to break the cycle of prohibition and substitution, and replace lack-based desire with something much more productive. In *Star Red*, that something goes by the name *chōnōryoku*.

Let me clarify this point by means of two critics who would seem to disagree with Miyasako. In his 1989 essay, “‘Umu sei’ to shite no shōnen—‘Seisa no shōjo mangashi’ no tame ni” (Shōnen as the “sex that gives birth”: Toward a shōjo manga history of sexual difference), preeminent popular culture critic Ōtsuka Eiji emphasizes that there are two crucial rebirths in *Star Red*: of Erg’s planet, first, and of Sei as Junior Sei, second. For Ōtsuka, it is essential that *both* are carried out by young men.²⁸ Affirming Ōtsuka’s point, feminist Fujimoto Yukari writes, “it is emphatically not Sei who gives birth to a child and in this way regenerates life. *Star Red*’s plot does not depend on facile maternal myths but rather on straightforward miracles.” We should note that Japanese feminism has waged a long and important battle against the modern state’s abuses of the “maternal myth” (*bosei shinwa*) of mothers as naturally selfless caregivers.²⁹ But we should also consider whether we do mothers a disservice when we reassign their reproductive capacities to men and call it a feminist victory. This runs the risk of becoming a reappropriation of origin, rather than a renegotiation with it.

It also runs the risk of misreading *Star Red*, since the rebirths accomplished by Erg and Yodaka are not miracles but culminating instances of the *chōnōryoku* for which Sei has been fighting from the start. What is more, they are both the direct results of Sei’s having said no to becoming Erg’s Mars and perpetuating lack-based desire. It is true that Erg is responsible for the regeneration of his planet. But it is also true that he would never have gone there had it not been for Sei, and would never have chosen to open his hyper-powers to his planet’s resonance if she had not insisted it was the only way he could love her without annihilating her. Similarly, Yodaka is clearly the mother of

Junior Sei. But Hagio explicitly positions his use of hyper-powers as the result of having telepathically witnessed Erg remove his horn and cry, “Sei! I love you!” (498–99). In other words, it is only because Yodaka is so moved by Erg’s affirmation of material origins, and the new love it enables, that he is prompted to suggest the pregnancy that will allow Sei, via Junior Sei, to make her way back to Erg.

How, when, and even whether this reunion will happen is left uncertain at the end of Hagio’s text. Likewise, we do not know whether our beloved Red Planet characters will continue to evade their persecutors. What we do know is that it is the *chōshōjo*, more than anyone, who offers them all their best and most open-ended chances. This is because *Star Red* looks ultimately to the hyper-girl to accomplish rebirth—of girls, of love, and of planets—by means of an eco-feminist desire as productive as it is unpredictable.

Notes

I would like to thank Kotani Mari for her encouragement and intellectual generosity. Kotani Sensei wrote the *Mechademia* 1 essay that first spurred my interest in the hyper-girl. She also introduced me to Hagio’s *Nanohana* in 2012 and served as discussant for an earlier version of my work on *Star Red* at the Association for Asian Studies meeting in Atlanta in 2008. Thanks also to Anne McKnight and Brian Bergstrom for being inspiring panel mates in 2008 and to Christopher Bolton for his expert editing.

1. “Konshū no hondana: Shinkan *Nanohana*—Hagio Moto sakuhinshū” (This week’s bookshelf: New publication *Nanohana*—A collection of works by Hagio Moto), *Mainichi shinbun*, May 6, 2012, <http://mainichi.jp/feature/news/20120506ddm015070028000c.html>.

2. The *Asahi Weekly* offers an intriguing if ultimately unsatisfying interpretation, likening radioactivity in *Nanohana* to vampirism in Hagio’s *The Poe Clan*. See Tomiyama Akiko, “Wadai no shinkan: Hagio Moto sakuhinshū *Nanohana*” (New titles in the news: Hagio Moto’s anthology *Nanohana*), *Asahi Weekly*, May 13, 2012, <http://book.asahi.com/reviews/column/2012051300003.html>. For the *Yomiuri* review, see “Shinkan nabi: Manga to anime” (Navigating new titles: Manga and anime), *Yomiuri shinbun*, April 26, 2012, <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/book/comic/sinnavi/20120426-OYT8T00575.htm>.

3. “Sōshoku kata, kagakusei kihaku na wadaisaku *Nanohana*” (Thick on ornament, thin on science: The much discussed title *Nanohana*). Karasumarū no kurukuru kaiten toshokan kōendōri bunkan (The Kōendōri annex of Karasumarū’s revolving library), Book and Manga Review Blog, <http://karasumarū.txt-nifty.com/kurukuru/2012/04/post-818c.html>.

4. Some key titles in the new materialism debates are Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, eds., *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2008); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010); and Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010). See also my essay on nuclear politics

and material feminism, “What Kind of Science? Reading Irigaray with Stengers,” in *Philosophy after Irigaray*, ed. Mary Rawlinson, Danae McLeod, and Sara McNamara (Albany: State University of New York Press, forthcoming).

5. Miyasako Chizuru, *Chōshōjo e* (Toward the hypergirl) (Tokyo: Shūeisha Bunko, 1989), 200. Miyasako defines “*hishōjo*” in contradistinction to the way Honda Masuko defines “*shōjo*” in the “Hira hira” (Fluttering) chapter of her book *Ibunka toshite no kodomo* (The child as another culture) (Tokyo: Chikuma Gakugei Bunko, 1992). For an overview in English of Honda’s book, see Aoyama Tomoko, “*Nodame* as ‘Another Culture,’” *U.S.–Japan Women’s Journal* 38 (2010): 25–42. Honda’s “Fluttering” chapter has been translated by Aoyama and Barbara Hartley as “The Genealogy of *Hirahira*: Liminality and the Girl,” in *Girl Reading Girl in Japan*, ed. Tomoko Aoyama and Barbara Hartley (New York: Routledge, 2010), 19–37.

6. Kotani Mari, “*Sutā Reddo no watashitachi*” (We who are Star Red), in *Sutā Reddo*, by Hagio Moto (Tokyo: Shōgakukan Bunko, 1995), 530.

7. Kotani Mari, “*Ota kuiin wa, ota kuia no yume o mita wa*” (The queer dream of an ota-queen), in *Mōjō genron F-kai* (Net discourse version F), ed. Azuma Hiroki (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2003), 122. Kotani delivered this paper at a symposium on postmodern otaku sexuality organized by Azuma Hiroki and featuring Saitō Tamaki, Nagayama Kaoru, Itō Gō, and Takekuma Kentarō.

8. Kotani Mari, “Metamorphosis of the Japanese Girl: The Girl, the Hyper-Girl, and the Battling Beauty,” *Mechademia* 1 (2006): 166.

9. See Hiroko Tabuchi, “Japan Sets Policy to Phase Out Nuclear Power Plants by 2040,” *New York Times*, September 14, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/15/world/asia/japan-will-try-to-halt-nuclear-power-by-the-end-of-the-2030s.html>. But see also Hiroko Tabuchi, “Japan Backs Off Goal to Replace Nuclear Power by 2040,” *New York Times*, September 19, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/20/world/asia/japan-backs-off-of-goal-to-phase-out-nuclear-power-by-2040.html>.

10. Hagio Moto, “*Nanohana to*” (On the title *Nanohana*), afterword to *Hagio Moto sakuhinshū: Nanohana* (Rape blossoms: A collection of works by Hagio Moto) (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 2012), 157. Hereafter, page numbers will be given parenthetically in the text. I read the third story in the trilogy, “*Salome 20xx*,” as an amplification of themes in the first two. In this story, Hagio casts Plutonium as the perverse female hero of Oscar Wilde’s 1891 play *Salome*.

11. Nakasone was prime minister from 1982 to 1987 and, as a Diet member in the 1950s, influential in setting up Japan’s nuclear power infrastructure. See Nakasone Yasuhiro, interview with Yoshida Takafumi, “Genshiryoku to Nihonjin” (Nuclear power and the Japanese), *Mainichi shinbun*, April 26, 2011. A partial translation appeared as “INTERVIEW/ Yasuhiro Nakasone: Learn Lessons from Fukushima Crisis and Continue to Promote Nuclear Energy,” *Asahi Shimbun Asia and Japan Watch*, May 23, 2011, <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/opinion/AJ201105232599>.

12. Since March 11, 2011, there have been a number of essays in the online journal *Japan Focus* about the process by which Japan was persuaded to accept nuclear energy in the early and mid-1950s, after having been the target of nuclear attacks in 1945. Peter Kuznick quotes a Defense Department consultant to Eisenhower’s 1953 United Nations “Atoms for Peace” speech advising the president, who needed nuclear fuels and technologies for the arms race with the Soviet Union, “the atomic bomb will be accepted far more

readily if at the same time atomic energy is being used for constructive ends.” See Yuki Tanaka and Peter Kuznick, “Japan, the Atomic Bomb, and the ‘Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Power,’” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 9, no. 18 (May 2, 2011), article no. 1, <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Yuki-TANAKA/3521>. Oguma Eiji notes that the countries that have promoted nuclear energy’s “peaceful applications” from the Cold War to the present day are the same ones whose nuclear arsenals play the biggest role in their international diplomatic standing: “International opinion poll surveys in response to Fukushima demonstrate that Japan, Germany, and Italy indicate a preference for breaking away from nuclear power generation, while the United States, France, Russia, China, and others adhere to their standpoint of nuclear power promotion. In other words, the standing members of the UN Security Council, who armed themselves with nuclear weapons after winning World War II, maintain their position of promoting nuclear power.” Oguma Eiji, “The Hidden Face of Disaster: 3.11, the Historical Structure and Future of Japan’s Northeast,” trans. Kyoko Selden, *The Asia-Pacific Journal Japan Focus* 9, no. 31 (August 1, 2011), article no. 6, <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Oguma-Eiji/3583>.

13. Murakami Takashi, “Earth in My Window” (*Mado ni chikyū*), trans. Linda Hoaglund, in *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan’s Exploding Subculture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 123.

14. This point is elaborated compellingly in Peter C. van Wyck, *Signs of Danger: Waste, Trauma, and Nuclear Threat* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 33–76.

15. Hagio Moto, *Sutaa Reddo* (Star Red) (Tokyo: Shōgakukan Bunko, 1995), 120.

Hereafter, page numbers will be given parenthetically in the text.

16. Kotani, “Sutaa Reddo no watashitachi,” 532.

17. Miyasako, *Chōshōjo e*, 264.

18. Translating an essay by Kotani on Japanese women’s science fiction, Miri Nakamura uses “Zesnusers” for the plural of “Zesunuseru.” Here, I use “Zesnuserians.” Kotani Mari, “Space, Body, and Aliens in Japanese Women’s Science Fiction,” trans. Miri Nakamura, in *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams: Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime*, ed. Christopher Bolton, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr., and Takayuki Tatsumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 58.

19. Quoted in Evan Osnos, “The Fallout—Seven Months Later: Japan’s Nuclear Predicament,” *The New Yorker* (October 17, 2011): 61.

20. Elizabeth Grosz, “The Nature of Culture,” in *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005), 51.

21. *Ibid.*, 47.

22. *Ibid.*, 48.

23. There is a strong affinity between this Zesnuserian law and the Lacanian framework Deborah Shamoan reads in Takemiya Keiko’s 1977–1980 science fiction series *To Terra* (*Tera e*). See Deborah Shamoan, “Humanity Grows Up,” in *Manga and Philosophy*, ed. Josef Steiff and Adam Barkman, 149–59 (Chicago: Open Court, 2010). For a reading of Hagio and Takemiya’s contrasting approaches to the politics of desire, again defined psychoanalytically, see Midori Matsui, “Little Girls Were Little Boys: Displaced Femininity in the Representation of Homosexuality in Japanese Girls’ Comics,” in *Feminism and the Politics of Difference*, ed. Sneja Gunew and Anna Yeatman, 177–96 (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1993).

24. Elizabeth Grosz, “Refiguring Lesbian Desire” in *Space, Time, and Perversion* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 176.

25. We know that Neptune and Pluto have been colonized because Sei wonders if Erg might be from either of them, before she learns of his true origin in the Zesnuserian Galaxy. And we know that Jupiter has been colonized because Erg carries a fake passport from there, or rather from its moon Ganymede, to fool the Martian immigration authorities.

26. Miyasako, *Chōshōjo e*, 276.

27. *Ibid.*, 277.

28. Ōtsuka Eiji, “‘Umu sei’ to shite no shōnen—‘Seisa no shōjo mangashi’ no tame ni” (Shōnen as the “sex that gives birth”: Toward a shōjo manga history of sexual difference), in *Kodomo ryūritan: Sayonara “kodomo” tachi* (Tales of the exiled wanderings of a child: Goodbye children) (Tokyo: Shin’yōsha, 1990), 180.

29. Fujimoto’s essay on Hagio appears in a volume of Ueno Chizuko’s six-volume *New Feminism Review* series. Titled *Bosei fashizumu* (Maternity fascism), this volume is edited by women’s historian Kanō Mikiyo and features essays on successful efforts by both the state and nationalist feminists to appropriate maternity for right-wing ends. Fujimoto Yukari, “Seishoku kara no tōsō, aruiwa, sekai no saisei: Hagio Moto o chūshin ni” (Escape from reproduction, or, the world’s regeneration: With a focus on Hagio Moto), in *New Feminism Review 6: Bosei fashizumu: Haha naru shizen no yūwaku* (Maternity fascism: The temptation of mother-as-nature), ed. Kanō Mikiyo (Tokyo: Gakuyō Shobō, 1995), 134. Interestingly, the same volume, which came out nine years after Chernobyl, features two pieces actively critical of both German and Japanese antinuclear activism that rallied around “mothers who give birth to life, protecting life” (seimei o umidasu hahaoya wa, seimei o mamoru) (183). This is an important context for Fujimoto’s constructivist reading. Kanō Mikiyo, “Hangenpatsu undō no naka no bōsei: Kansha Taeko *Mada maniau no nara* o chūshin ni” (Maternity in the anti-nuclear power movement: With a focus on Kansha Taeko’s *Is it Too Late?*), in *New Feminism Review* 6, 180–85; Kanō Mikiyo and Claudia Von Werlhof, “Bōsei wa sekai o sukū? Yōroppa hangenpatsu undō no shimesu mono” (Will maternity save the world? What Europe’s anti-nuclear power movement shows), in *New Feminism Review* 6: 166–78.