The leading creators of the two most significant movements in manga in the 1920s and 30s, proletarian and children’s manga, have a common origin in the short-lived but extremely generative radical art movement MAVO. Both Yanase Masamu (1900-45) and Tagawa Suihō (1899-1989) participated in MAVO in the early 1920s, and after its demise they put its principles into practice in their manga: Yanase was particularly influenced by German artist George Grosz (1893-1959), while Tagawa’s smash hit manga Norakuro (1931-41) incorporated diverse influences that ranged from Constructivism to Charlie Chaplin. Not coincidentally, the wartime state took a dim view of both men’s work, but MAVO and the European avant-garde thus exerted a lasting influence on the history of manga overall, as the manga output of both men challenged the existing consensus on what “manga” was, extending its scope in terms of subject matter, artistic strategies, and audiences.

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