Politics, Porn and Parody in *Koi suru genpatsu* (2011) by Takahashi Gen'ichirō

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Abstract   This paper seeks to show how Takahashi Gen'ichirō exploits parody to show the critical function of self-reflexive literature in the novel *Koisuru genpatsu*. Coherently with his experience as a political activist in the sixties, Takahashi interprets literature as a revolutionary act of resistance; it can be argued that he broadly embraces the conception of art – ideally inherited by Marcuse's aesthetic – as a space for thought and action that makes resistance to the social *status quo* possible. Through the analysis of significant elements of the novel's peritexts and epitexts, this article tries to reconstruct the web of signifiers that constructs the novel, in order to show how – in Takahashi's concept of literature - every act of speech needs to be placed in a social structure, where the agency of discursive subjects always modifies the signifying process.

Keywords   Takahashi Gen'ichirō. 3/11 Literature. Contemporary Japanese Literature. Parody.

Sommario   1 Introduction. – 2 Thresholds of Interpretation. – 3 Through the Looking-Glass. – 4 Conclusion.

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> The truth of art lies in its power to break the monopoly of established reality (i.e., of those who established it) to *define* what is *real*
>
> (Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension. Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, 1978).

1 Introduction

This paper is focused on the novel *Koi Suru Genpatsu* (A Hot Nuclear Reactor) by Takahashi Gen'ichirō (b. 1951), which was first published in the November issue of the literary review *Gunzō* a few months after the Triple Disaster in Tohoku: the earthquake, tsunami, and melt down of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, which struck the eastern part of Japan on 11 March 2011. The nuclear accident turned a natural disaster into an environmental and political catastrophe. In the aftermath of this tragic sequence of events, both the government and the mass media contributed to the construction of a 'normalising' narrative of recovery based on the idea of 'national bonding' (絆 *kizuna* is a 'rediscovered' term that has been extensively employed in the official discourse often in connection with stereotyped concepts of community, nature, and Japanese identity (see DiNitto 2014; Slater et al. 2012; Tokita 2015). As pointed out by Rachel DiNitto (2014), this narrative relies on traditional stereotypes of the character of the Japanese people. It explains that the Japanese people will endure hardship (*gaman suru*) as they have in the past, and the disaster tells a story of communal suffering on the national level and removes questions of blame from the politically fraught context. This national narrative also avoids the difficulty of talking about or directly confronting the actual destruction itself. It moves away from the site of danger and distress to a distant, yet comfortable and familiar narrative of recovery (DiNitto 2014, 344).

The cultural response to the catastrophe was immediate and heterogeneous, which was consistent with the national narratives of recovery and collective healing, thereby contributing through the discursive reworking of the individual's experience of suffering to the construction of a collective trauma. Nevertheless, in the multifaceted corpus of works that has been variously labelled 'post-3/11', and 'Fukushima/*daishinsai* (Great Disaster)' literature, some authors have created "radical counter-narratives to trauma" (Flores 2017, 141). Takahashi's intention, as displayed in *Koi Suru Genpatsu*, undoubtedly is in that direction because this work can be read as a coherent example of his general approach to literature, which he uses as a powerful instrument to provide "a model of resistance in the discursive condition" (Yamada 2011, 13). Takahashi voices his unconventional perspective on the national aftershock of the disaster, displacing it from the silence imposed by the trauma to an uncomfortable zone of

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collective mourning. I will argue that the continuous displacement of meaning aimed at showing the limitations of imposed discourse, is one of the *topoi* of Takahashi's writing.

In the table of contents of *Gunzō*, *Koi Suru Genpatsu* is summarised as follows:

大震災チャリティーAVを作るために奮闘する男たちの愛と冒険と魂の物語

*Daishinsai **charitī AV** o tsukuru tame ni funtō suru otokotachi no ai to bōken to tamashii no monogatari.*

A tale about the love, the adventures, and the spirit of a group of men who struggle to produce **a charity adult movie** for the victims of the Great Disaster.[1] [Emphasis added]

This is not the first time in the literary career of Takahashi that he chose the provocative and destabilizing association of 'porn' with 'charity'. In *Gunzō* (October 2002 to August 2004), he had previously published a series of texts based on the same theme, which was titled, *Meikingu Obu Dōji Tahatsu Ero* (Synchronised Erotic Attacks: The Making Of), a deliberate pun on the term used to describe the September 11 terrorist attacks on the US (*dōji tahatsu **tero***). This deliberately outrageous approach and the recourse to explicit material echo the dissident attitude of avant-garde Japanese filmmakers, who in the sixties created a counter cinema in a moment of great political ferment. It is known that Takahashi took part in the student protests in those years and that this activist experience had a tremendous effect on his artistic production, which began after a ten-year period of aphasia following a ten-month prison term for civil disobedience. Even if a temporal *caesura* existed between his political activism in the late sixties and the beginning of his literary activity in the early eighties, it is undeniable that the two periods are connected; to put it in Herbert Marcuse's terms, all Takashashi's literary career can be seen as a meditated consequence of the 'Great Refusal' to the 'one-dimensional thinking' imposed by the violence of political language and more generally by all forms of authorities.[2] Since the publication of his first novels and essays, Takahashi has shown that a clear path

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1 All translations are made by the Author unless otherwise stated.

2 The influence of the Frankfurt School on Japanese counterculture movements in the sixties is historically evidenced by the significant number of translations of its members' works during those years. Beginning in the late fifties, critical theory penetrated Japan through the speculations of Marcuse, Fromm, Benjamin, Habermas, and Horkheimer (For an accurate and meditated reconstruction, see Lucken 2017). Even if I do not claim here a direct and exclusive influence of Marcuse's thought on Takahashi's conceptualization of the role of literature in contemporary society, I think we can deduce from his

runs through all his works. According to Marc Yamada, his literary engagement is "an incessant attempt to renew political and literary sign systems as a means of resisting the limitations imposed by the state, the media, and literary criticism" (Yamada 2011, 2). Resorting to pornography proved to be a very effective way for Takahashi to examine the socially internalised, repressive discourse from the inside out. Since the late nineties, he has used adult videos "to thematize the liberation of meaning from conventional reading patterns" (20) in several fictional and non-fictional works.[3]

Takahashi has consistently shown his intolerance of the coercion of imposed discourse whether it is social convention or literary interpretation. His works are highly metafictional and often openly parodic, as in *Koi Suru Genpatsu*. According to Linda Hutcheon,

> postmodern parody is deconstructively critical and constructively creative, paradoxically making us aware of both the limits and the powers of representation. (Hutcheon 1989, 98)

In this paper, I will demonstrate that Takahashi exploits parody to show the critical function of self-reflexive literature, thus raising a politically incorrect voice against the supremacy of the 'unspoken' in Japanese society. Takahashi's novel is a prime example of the author's wider literary project, which is to go beyond what he perceives as the limitations imposed by politics and the media. His aim is to undermine the overwhelming power of the violent rhetoric in the political discourse, which imposes a univocal interpretation of reality. Consistent with his experience as a political activist, Takahashi views literature as a revolutionary act of resistance, which in Marcuse's aesthetic is expressed as a space for thought and action to resist the social *status quo* as much as possible.

2 Thresholds of Interpretation

Takahashi's fictional works are explorations of the superimposed meanings of imposed significations. They can be seen as self-referential worlds that openly show their discursive construction by subordinating plot and character development to the supremacy of lan-

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novels and essays that he views art as a revolutionary form of resistance, which is the legacy inherited from critical theory's approach to aesthetics.

3 In addition to the already mentioned serialization of *Meikingu Obu Dōji Tahatsu Ero* (*Gunzō*, 2002-04), Takahashi published a novel about the AV world (*Adaruto*, Adult Videos, Shūeisha, 1999) as well as essays ("Ai no gakkō – AV o yomu", School of Love: Reading Adult Videos, in Takahashi 2001a; "Poruno shōsetsu no tadashii kakikata", The Correct Way to Write a Porn Novel, in Takahashi 2001b).

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guage. *Koi Suru Genpatsu* is not an exception. From the thresholds of the text, the reader is projected into a dialectical world that has no connection with factual reality even if the context appears to be self-evident. His words relate to the hidden truth not of a pre-existing reality but of the way words are used to construct the conventions of signification that shape everyday life. I will quote some parts from the incipit of the novel to give examples of Takahashi's ability to release the disruptive potential of language.

> 不謹慎すぎます。関係者の処罰を望みます。

> This goes beyond impudence! I hope there will be punishment for those involved. (Takahashi 2011b, 6)

This is the second quotation that Takahashi Gen'ichirō places at the beginning of the novel. This comment refers to the contents of the novel, and it is ascribed to the anonymous author of 'letter from a reader' (*tōsho*). The first opening quotation, which is as false as the second, is as follows:

> すべての死者に捧げる… という言い方はあまりに安易すぎる。

> I dedicate this book to all those who passed away… What a shallow way to say things! (6)

This line is supposed to have been taken from the imaginary 'Collection of Quotes from the Internet' (*Intānetto jō no meigen shū*). The dialogue between a hesitant author and an indignant reader is completed by the voice of Ishikawa, the protagonist of the novel, a character we will soon learn to recognise in the following pages because of his very colloquial tone. Ishikawa directs his harsh disclaimer to the reader:

> いうまでもないことだが、これは完全なフィクションである。もし, 一部分であれ, 現実に似ているとしても, それは偶然にすぎない。そもそも、ここに書かれていることが, ほんの僅かでも、現実に起こりうると思ったとしたら, そりゃ, あんたの頭がおかしいからだ。
> 　こんな狂った世界があるわけないじゃにあか。すぐに, 精神科に行け! いま, すぐ! それが, おれにできる, 唯一のアドバイスだ。じゃあ, 後で。

> It goes without saying that this is a work **of complete fiction** (*kanzen na fikushon*). Even if some parts of it resemble reality, that's just a **coincidence** (*guuzen*). If you ever entertain the idea that there may be a slight chance of something written in this book happening in real life, that's simply because **you're barking mad** (*anta no atama ga okashii kara da*). How can such a **cra-**

zy world (*kurutta sekai*) exist! Go see a psychiatrist! Right now! That's **the only** piece of advice I can give you. See ya'. (7; emphasis in the original)

Contrary to the reader's first thought, the *kurutta sekai* we are drawn into is not actually the one in which an AV director wants to support a charity for the victims of a national tragedy by filming orgies and onanistic acts. The 'crazy world' Ishikawa hint at is one in which speaking about nuclear danger is taboo despite the evidence of a historical catastrophe. The discursive world created in *Koi Suru Genpatsu* is a noisy counterpoint (i.e. a *parody* in its etymological meaning) to the silence imposed on all other minority opinions by the predominant rhetoric of 'correctness'.[4] What is obscene – suggests Takahashi via Ishikawa's extraordinary venture – is not the naked body exposed in a porn movie. Instead, what is really outrageous is the fact that Japanese media choose to conceal the debris and the corpses in the aftermath of the catastrophe. Moral judgment is suspended because a crucial ethical question is at stake: what can be done to expose and overcome the withering away of critical thinking in Japanese contemporary society?

In this context, *warai* (laughter), with its empowering, liberating effect, has a central role. Included in the short summary of the novel presented in the table of contents of the *Gunzō* issue, the word also appears as another significant paratextual element in the promotional blurb[5] of the paperback edition of the subsequently published novel:

この世界の非情を前に無力を人間ができるのは，唯一，笑うことだ。

All that powerless human beings can do to face this cruel world is just one thing: to laugh. (Takahashi 2011b, cover)

This reference to laughing as a quintessential human activity can be considered an unsolicited moral defence, or, acceding to a *second degré*, a subtle *clin d'oeil* to Rabelais's reference to Aristoteles ("le

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4 Takahashi was very active on this matter immediately after 3/11, especially through his Twitter account. The inherent violence of political language that tries to cover up dissent imposing a zealous call for 'correct behaviours and correct thoughts', such as 'solidarity' and 'hope', is the theme of several tweets that were later collected in a volume, *'Ano hi' kara boku ga kangaete iru 'tadashisa' ni tsuite* (What I've Been Thinking About 'Correctness' Since 'that Day') (see Takahashi 2012a).

5 The *obi* is interesting even in its graphics. The most visible element is blue writing in a "hippie-inspired" font, reading "*sutei kurējī*" (ステイ・クレージー, stay crazy). The unlikely fundamental theme of the novel is then associated (by the publisher?) with a clear cultural frame: the one in which 'Power to the imagination!' was the keynote.

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rire est le propre de l'homme"). Laughing in the face of tragedy is on-
ly possible in a Carnivalesque suspension of moral judgment; carni-
val's overturning allows the writer to show – and all of us to see – that
the king is naked.

According to Philippe Lejeune, the paratext is "a fringe of the
printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text"
(cited in Genette [1987] 1997, 2). In my opinion, the paratextual ele-
ments, starting from the ambiguous title, reveal the entirety of the
work from both the point of view of the contents and the linguistic
choices made by Takahashi. We find at the threshold of the text some
keywords and themes that are crucial in the interpretation of the
novel, which can be read as a salient example of the anti-novelistic
approach to plot construction (or rather de-construction, as we will
see later) and language usage (or abuse), which are central to Taka-
hashi's writing and his interpretation of literature. *Fukinshin* (impu-
dence) is one of these keywords. Moving from peritext to epitext, it
is interesting to note that the Japanese journalist who interviewed
Takahashi in 2011 called the book a "fukinshin no katamari no you-
na shōsetsu" (cluster of impudence) and "an impudence that open-
ly choses to **ignore the self-control mood** of the Japanese society
(*seken no jishuku mūdo*)" (Takahashi 2011c; emphasis added). Strict-
ly related to this and obviously interrelated, *charity AV* and *shobat-
su* (punishment and moral condemnation) are two other relevant key-
words. As previously discussed, *warai* is the keyword that allows us
to enter Takahashi's literary world in general and to understand his
perspective on some of the urgent post-Fukushima questions in par-
ticular. Is it possible to take a stance against the violence of politi-
cal language and show its implications through a completely unusual
and 'impudent' point of view? What is the place of literature in such
a socially fragmented context?

This fragmentation is reflected in the scattered elements that con-
stitute the narration in which several micro-stories are related to dif-
ferent topics and moments of Japanese history. Nevertheless, the ref-
erence in the opening of the novel to the role of voices on the Internet
and the social climate they contributed to creating after the triple
disaster in Tohoku suggest that the importance of the debate in the
social media is an underlying subtext that runs through the work.
Another one that clearly emerges from the peritextual elements that
I have discussed is the use of politically incorrect language to fight
"the power of ideology to shape the perception of identity and mean-
ing" (Yamada 2011, 3).

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3   Through the Looking-Glass

In moving from the threshold of the novel, it is convenient to give some elements of the plot in order to delve into its composition although I think that 'plot' is a term that we should always 'put under erasure' in Derridean terms in considering Takahashi's construction of storylines. As in the majority of his novels, 'plot' here is 'an inadequate yet necessary' term used to describe the way in which the elements in the text are connected but still follow divergent paths inside and outside the main storyline, thereby often giving it a metafictional dimension.

In the opening of the novel, a man is looking at a black screen and listening to some unmistakably lustful groans, which are at a certain point interrupted by a voice singing a Japanese version of Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On*. Then appearing on the screen are a group of monkeys and a monolith that are clearly the alter egos of the ones that appear at the beginning of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. However, these monkeys are engaged in an onanistic act, and the monolith displays words of nationalistic support to the victims of the great Tohoku catastrophe to whom the earnings of the 'charity AV' are dedicated.

> 　　我々は
> このあたりから、メッセージが始まっているようである。
> 　　この度の震災で被災した皆さんを
> 　　全力で支援します
> モノリス… そっくりさんのくせに、やるじゃないか。キューブリックのモノリスの、なんかこうインテリっぽい、っていうかいかにも一神教てきな、ジコチューな感じとはだいぶちがう。社会貢献か。いいんじゃないか。謙虚で、わかりやすいし。
>
> 　頑張れ、ニッポン
> 　ニッポンはひとつ
> 　我々もニッポン人だ

正直いって、ちょっとしつこい。「ニッポン」とか「ニッポン人」ということばの繰り返しが、なんか押しつけがましい… なんてことをいってはいけません。みんなが、それでいいというなら、反対する理由はありません。どうぞご自由に。
　それにしても、スローガンはもいい、って感じだな。
　で、なに?

　我々は、この作品の売り上げをすべて、
　　　被災者の皆さんに寄付します

そう来るか。いや、いいと思うけど。なにより、その気持ちが大切なんだ。

チャリティーAV

恋する原発

We

message starts here

**support with all our strength
the victims of the recent disaster.**

Hey, look at you, monolith… a lookalike of that other one, but still not bad at all! I'd say that Kubrick's one is definitely not as intellectual as you are… [Y]ou're definitely less monotheistic and self-centered. Socially useful, no less! Not bad, not bad at all. And humble, easy to understand!

Hang in, Japan!

Japan is one!

Je suis Nipponjin

A little bit annoying, to be honest. The repetition of words like 'Japan', 'Japanese' is a bit pushy… I shouldn't be saying this. If you think this is ok, ladies & gentlemen, please, go ahead, I have no objection. Please feel free. Wait, what the heck?!

**We are engaged to allocate all the proceeds from this work
to the victims of the disaster.**

Wow, I didn't see that coming. That's great, mind you. What counts is the intention.

A Hot Nuclear Reactor

A Charity AV

(Takahashi 2011b, 11)

Takahashi ironically points the finger of blame at post-3/11 slogans, which risk becoming formulaic and trite when they are blindly repeated to adhere to what is considered politically correct. Empty formulas allow the public to feel relieved by looking at itself in a glass that always gives the same feedback in a comforting image of correctness and social cohesion. Takahashi wants to convey the extreme

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opposite by breaking that fragile glass to show an alternative reality in which contradictions and doubts are legitimate albeit troublesome. This excerpt from the first chapter clearly shows the dialogical and colloquial style Takahashi adopts in the novel (except chapter 7, as I will point out later). In his opinion, the tragic events of 3/11 are the right occasion to speak freely about national taboos, which are in this context, the risks of nuclear energy production and the smooth repression of conflicting opinions in the name of national harmony and social cohesion. To bury them with the victims as a sign of silent respect is the most disrespectful response to the tragedy, which Takahashi conveys in this novel and other related works.

Table 1 Outline of *Koi Suru Genpatsu*

1	メイキング・1　ホワッツ・ゴーイン・オン	Making of 1 - *What's going on*
2	メイキング・2　恋人よ、帰れ我が胸に　（ラブァー・カム・バック・トゥ・ミー）	Making of 2 - *Lover, come back to me*
3	メイキング・3　この素晴らしい世界　（ホワット・ア・ワンダフル・ワルド）	Making of 3 - *What a wonderful world*
4	メイキング・4　虹の彼方に　（オーブァ・ザ・レインボー）	Making of 4 - *Over the rainbow*
5	メイキング・5　恋するために生まれてきたの（アイ・ウォズ・ボーン・トゥ・ラブ・ユー）	Making of 5 - *I was born to love you*
6	メイキング・6　守ってあげたい	Making of 6 - *Mamotte agetai* (I want to protect you)
7	震災文学論	*Literary theory of the Great Disaster**
8	メイキング・8　ウィー・アー・ザ・ワールド	Making of 7 - *We are the world*

*Emphasis added (Takahashi 2011b)

As shown in Table 1, the text is composed of seven different 'takes' (in cinematographic terms), which do not correspond to the actual filming of the charity adult video presented in the opening of the novel. However, the actual filming will never take place, and what remains of the entire challenging project is an incoherent and nonsensical sequence of scenes that do not have any logical progression in the storyline. Nevertheless, two apparently unrelated elements are recurrent: the leitmotiv of famous popular songs and characters somehow related to the protagonists, who are the film producers. They tell fragments of their personal stories, which are always connected to Japanese national taboos.

The purpose of these nonsequential scenes, which are not 'behind-the-scenes' of the film and which, like all taboos, remain a discursive construction, is to reveal the concealed stories in Japanese history and society: the comfort women; the spirits of Korean soldiers at Yasukuni *jinja*; the bombing of Hiroshima; the victims of Minamata dis-

ease; and, of course, the consequences of nuclear energy production as well as the life of people in the world of pornography. All these stories contribute to Japan's collective history, demonstrating that, as one of the characters in the novel says, "Japan **has been 'shaking' for decades**, without anyone realizing it" (Takahashi 2011b, 46; emphasis added). The introduction of pop songs as the basis of the plot is closely connected to the hectic pursuit of the author's objective, which Takahashi revealed in an interview with Sasaki Atsushi in *Gunzō*, underling the fact that the songs create the effect of *ostranenie* or defamiliarization (*ika kōka*), which is another strategy, in addition to the use of explicit content and language, to subvert common logics and received opinions (Takahashi 2012b, 225).

As shown in Table 1, the author added a chapter called *Shinsai Bungaku Ron* (Literary Theory of The Great Disaster), which is completely detached in terms of language and content from the rest of the novel. As observed by Ishino Hikari, because this chapter is the only part in the text immediately perceived as logical and coherent based on its plain essayistic style, the reader could conclude that it represents the 'real meaning' of the novel and that its contents are completely reliable (Ishino 2012, 27). However, as I will show later, this chapter is 'a work of complete fiction' (*kanzen na fikushon*) like the rest of the novel. In his books, Takahashi is an author who deliberately omits a *kaisetsu* in order not to force an interpretation[6] on the reader. Hence, he "encourages readers to question all discourse surrounding the disaster, and to be suspicious of language that appears to be logical and coherent" (Tokita 2017, 8). The production of a 'charity AV' is a potential disaster, and in the final chapter, the main character painfully admits the following:

いったい、この作品は、どこまで進んでいるのか。終わりに近づいているのか、それとも、袋小路に入りこんでしまったのか。ぜんぜんわからない。そもそも、始まっているのかさえ。

How much progress have we made in the story? Are we nearing the end, or have we entered a cul-de-sac? I have no clue. Has it even started? (Takahashi 2011b, 111)

The project has been impracticable since the beginning, as the director has intended to blend pornography and literature, adult videos and political issues, a merely profit-oriented film genre and charity

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[6] "Takahashi resists the probing impulse of interpretation, argues Gabriel, by excluding the conventional analysis section (*kaisetsu*) included at the end of most paperback reprints. See Philip Gabriel, 'Interpreting the Postmodern: The Novels of Takahashi Gen'ichirō'" (Yamada 2011, 28).

purposes. This unlikely potpourri is reflected in the clumsy attempt to write a scenario based on scenes such as the one in which Higuchi Ichiyō reads a poem by Takuboku Ishikawa to Oussama Bin Laden before having intercourse with him (Takahashi 2011b, 23). If we read the creation of the film from a Bourdieusian perspective, the attempt to acquire symbolic capital for a genre that is usually intended for a large audience based on the disavowal of economic profit, creates a paradox that creates the effect of defamiliarization and then *warai*.

The serialization of *Meikingu Obu Dōji Tahatsu Ero* (Synchronized Erotic Attacks: The Making Of) between October 2002 and August 2004 occurred after the terroristic attacks in the US in 2001. After the publication of *Koi Suru Genpatsu*, Takahashi admitted on several occasions that for ten years he was not able to write the novel's ending, and he did not know the reason. In an interview in 2011, Takahashi admitted that after 'that day' (*ano hi*, which refers to 3/11 in various texts) (cf. Flores 2017, 154), he understood that the reason he could not finish the novel was that 9/11 was "someone else concern" (*tanin no mondai*), and it was impossible to include elements of *warai* in a work about a political and social problem – terrorism – that was mainly American and European (Takahashi 2012b, 219). *Dōji tahatsu ero* was the basis of *Koi Suru Genpatsu*. However, this time, Takahashi said, "*mejirushi wa warai deshita*" (the mark was the laughter) (Takahashi 2011c). I think this episode can be considered something more than just a part of the trivia regarding the genesis of the work, because it restates Takahashi's attitude toward the nonexistence of absolute signifiers. Terrorism, which has been central to his reflections since the beginning of his literary career (cf. Yamada 2011, 4, 12), needs to be situated in a social structure where the agency of discursive subjects always modifies the signifying process.

Ano hi's earthquake and its consequences have profoundly shaken Japanese society, and several intellectuals hold that it must be considered a point of no return: that day, according to Kimura Saeko, "the veil has been lifted from the eyes of the world, and our sense of values has been renewed" (Kimura 2013, 9). Takahashi defined *ano hi* as "a temporal shake" (Takahashi 2011a), a *caesura* not only in his literary production but also in contemporary Japanese history. For him, 3/11 is the end of the seemingly endless *post-war era*. In an article published in *The New York Times* (with Ikeuchi Satoru and Numano Mitsuyoshi) eight days after the event, he wrote, "this disaster is the war that many Japanese have been dreading and expecting for a long time" (Ikeuchi et al. 2011). After *ano hi* he felt the urge to write, especially through his Twitter account, but he was struck by the ubiquitous abuse of what he called "the political usage of language", in which "rhetoric is used to convince of its correctness not only as a form of language but as a projection of reality" (Yamada 2011, 7). Tamaki Tokita, in her article, "*Koi Suru Genpatsu* and the

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violence of 'correct' language in post-Fukushima Japan" (June 2017) summarised the context of verbal conflict following 3/11 as being animated by two distinct counterposed groups: the pro-nuclear and the anti-nuclear camps. According to Tokita,

> [W]hat Takahashi calls the 'politicalness' of language has reached extreme levels in this context, where both sides claim that their views are entirely correct to the exclusion of all others. Citizens are forcing each other to pick a stance between leftist anti-nuclear and rightist pro-nuclear and to accept every aspect of policy that accompanies their chosen stance. This discourse is of the same dogmatic and aggressive nature as that heard in the mainstream media during the student movements in the 1960s, and at many other points in Japanese history. However, the post-Fukushima situation represents a particularly pressing case because there are two fiercely competing versions of 'correctness' to which Japanese citizens from all walks of life are being equally exposed. (Tokita 2017, 231)

In my opinion, the reference to the tumultuous protests of the sixties is the key to accessing *Koi Suru Genpatsu*. In this novel, Takahashi reestablishes a direct connection with his debut work, *Jon Renon Tai Kaseijin* (John Lennon vs. The Martians, 1985). He feels that the climate of *jishuku* (auto-control, self-censorship), which was predominant in Japan in the aftermath of 3/11, is very similar to the *kotoba no jōtai* (the current status of the language) in the eighties. Hence, in the interview with Sasaki, he revealed that he had chosen to return to the language and the themes in *Jon Renon*. Since then, pornography has been a way for Takahashi "to thematize the liberation of meaning from conventional reading patterns imposed by mainstream media and literary criticism" (Yamada 2011, 20). However, in 2011, choosing to use pornography had a new meaning. In the interview, Takahashi stated that pornography is a perfect metaphor for contemporary Japanese society as well as a post-war genre in decline, which marks the end of an era. In Japanese AV, the technique of *bokashi* (shading of) is used to conceal the most important parts; however, this concealment actually confirms their existence. Sasaki concluded that speaking about AV means in the end speaking about post-war Japanese history (Takahashi 2012b). Pornography allows Takahashi to choose a completely illegitimate angle from which to examine and speak out against post-Fukushima Japan. In his vision, it is the peculiarity of literature to accomplish the fundamental task of changing the way of thinking: "writing a work of fiction is in itself a very political thing to do" (McCaffery et al. 2002, 197). An author, according to Takahashi, must accomplish this task by being unconcerned by what is supposed to be correct in any particular histor-

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ical context. In a long TV interview[7] about the literary response to the great Tohoku catastrophe, Takahashi supported this idea by referring to *Quatre Heures à Chatila* (Four Hours in Chatila, 1982) by the French author Jean Genet after his direct experience of the immediate aftermath of the massacre of three thousand Palestinians in Beyrouth. Jean Genet was the first European to enter the camp at Chatila a few days after the massacre. According to Takahashi, Genet wrote about this experience in a beautiful, erotic style that is "Mishima no youna utsukushii buntai" (as beautiful as Mishima's). Genet's text overcomes the debate about whether it is correct for a literary text to portray disaster.

In moments of emergency, said Takahashi elsewhere, writers should trust their own instinct and act like the *bricoleur* of Levy Strauss in *La Pensée Sauvage*. The *bricoleurs* work with their hands in devious ways, combining pre-existing things in new ways, making do with whatever is at hand, and using existing signs in ways they were not originally intended (cf. Takahashi 2012b, 222).

The metaphor of the *bricoleur* can then be useful to shed light on the real meaning of the chapter *Shinsai bungaku ron* in *Koi Suru Genpatsu*. Takahashi uses parody strategically to create the sense of "repetition with critical distance" (Hutcheon 1985, 6) by integrating in the main text some plausible (but actually invented) examples of post-disaster literature. One excerpt is *Kamisama (2011)* by a 'Kawakami Hiromi', whose name is written in katakana. The reference is to the intertextual fiction, *Kamisama 2011*, by the writer Kawakami Hiromi, which is a rewriting of her 1993 story *Kamisama* (God Bless You). Takahashi rewrites both *Kamisama* and *Kamisama 2011* by superimposing the two texts and adding parentheses to indicate parts in the actual two texts by Kawakami were added or deleted. This *bricolage* creates a new text in which some characters reemerge from post-catastrophe oblivion. As Takahashi suggests, a new text allows a new interpretation that is not necessarily 'true' or 'correct'.

This short example of Takahashi's use of parody as a textual trope is significant at the macro level of the entire text. According to the paradoxical definition given by Inoue Hisashi in his essay, *Parodi shian*, parody is a mirror that deforms (*yugamu*) accurately (*seikaku ni*) (Inoue 1979, 39). This accurate deformation is exactly what Takahashi accomplishes in *Koi Suru Genpatsu* by using *warai*, which, in his opinion, is the final aim of literature as the ultimate weapon against political correctness.

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[7] "Daishinsai to bungaku no yakuwari – Guest: Takahashi Gen'ichirō" (The Great Earthquake and the Role of Literature). *Nyūsu no shinsō*. Asahi Newstar, 11 June 2012. URL `https://youtu.be/7bC--ToTDU8` (2019-06-11).

4   Conclusion

On 26 August 2017, a video produced by the Miyagi Prefectural Government in the region of Tohoku was censured and removed from YouTube. As part of a Miyagi tourism campaign, the short video featured model and actress Dan Mitsu, who is known for playing erotic roles, as a tour guide wearing a kimono. According to the online version of the *Japan Times*,

> The video was produced jointly by the Miyagi Prefectural Government, the Sendai Municipal Government, and the East Japan Railway Co. for ¥23 million, part of which came from a reconstruction fund for the March 2011 earthquake-tsunami that devastated large areas of the Tohoku region. [...] The video contains suggestive and provocative lines, while there are repeated close-up images of the actress parting her lips and rubbing the head of an animated turtle. [...] The prefecture planned to withdraw the video [...] amid unabated complaints from viewers and female members of the prefectural assembly.[8]

The video was sexually provocative because it is common knowledge in Japan that the association of 'turtle' 亀 with 'head' 頭 refers to the tip of the male genitalia. Funds made available for the reconstruction of the disaster-stricken area were then reallocated to the production of a sexually explicit video. The episode resembles an ironic inversion, that is, a distorted reflection in a parodic mirror, of the unlikely narrative expediently conceived by Takahashi in *Koi Suru Genpatsu*. This impudent, *fukinshin* attempt to draw attention to the region devastated by the triple catastrophe six years before was phagocytised by the political correctness of public opinion through censorship. The commendable attention to sexism actually perpetuates one of the most blatant national taboos. In Japan, pornography – like nuclear energy and its consequences – is ubiquitous yet invisible. As Ishikawa, *Koi Suru Genpatsu*'s protagonist, comments, the idea of free speech, albeit referred to in the Constitution of Japan, is like a "rice cake in a painting" (Takahashi 2011b, 36): it looks very good on paper, but it does not exist in reality.

   The Miyagi episode inevitably brings to mind Takahashi Gen'ichiro's harsh judgment of the Japanese media's avoidance of showing the corpses of the victims of *ano hi*. Not a single image of

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8 "Miyagi to Remove 'sexist' Tourism Video After a Month of Complaints". *The Japan Times*, 21 August 2017. URL `https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/08/21/national/miyagi-remove-sexist-tourism-video-month-complaints/#.XFYoz1z-0k2w` (2019-06-07).

the thousands of casualties was shown in a country that conceals what is considered *hidoi* or outrageous: genitalia, dead bodies, handcuffs, parting lips, and winking turtles (cf. Takahashi 2011c). "To resist what is 'incorrect' is easy", concludes Takahashi. "However, resisting what is 'correct' is extremely complicated".

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