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OPPRESSIVE JAPAN

One of the main criticisms of Japanese authorities and the media following the triple disaster was that there was a lack of freedom of press, information and expression—to raise concerns for radiation levels, or to make any comments that are perceived to dampen the spirit of *kizuna* and reconstruction. In Chapter 1, I discussed how certain commentators argued that *kizuna* led to excessive groupism and suppressed dissent, which drew attention away from the negative consequences of the disaster. I also discussed how negative opinions and depictions of the disaster were often labelled as causing *fūhyō higai* (reputational damage) for the residents and farmers of Fukushima, as observed in the case of the ‘nose bleed’ in the *manga Oishinbo*.

Several critical developments that followed the triple disaster were instrumental in drawing further attention to the issue of freedom of speech in Japan. First of all, the 2013 *Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets*, also known as the ‘State secrets bill’, was designed to protect information relating to national defence. This event caused much debate due to the perceived ambiguity as to what constitutes a secret or punishable offence under this law. Protesters against the Act gathered in November and December 2013, twice filling to the brim the 3,000-seat-capacity Hibiya Outdoor Theatre in Tokyo. This concern was also reflected in the 2016 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders, which ranked Japan 72nd out of 180 countries (ranked 11 lower compared to 2015 and 61 lower compared to 2010), below Asian neighbours, such as Hong Kong and South Korea, who were ranked 69th and 70th, respectively.

Shortly after the World Press Freedom Index results were released, the issue of freedom of speech received much media attention again when David Kaye, a UN special rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, visited Japan in April 2016. Kaye reported in his preliminary observation that while there was a high level of freedom of expression and speech, there were issues in terms of the freedom and independence of press, in both print and broadcast media. Specifically, he drew attention to the issue of self-imposed censorship:

Numerous journalists, many agreeing to meet with me only on condition of anonymity to protect their livelihoods, highlighted the pressure to avoid sensitive areas of public interest. Many claimed to have been sidelined or silenced following indirect pressure from leading politicians.¹

There is a growing sentiment in Japan that while there is no official government censorship, freedom of information and press was compromised in post-disaster media reporting. This sentiment is conveyed in a growing number of dystopian texts by authors such as Tawada Yōko, Henmi Yō and Yoshimura Man'ichi, which are set in a future Japan, in which these freedoms have been further compromised. Conversely, Takahashi Gen'ichirō chose to tackle these issues more directly by composing his novel out of the very language that is shunned in Japanese society. In this chapter, I analyse how these texts portray and imagine different discursive environments in Japan's future.

Dystopian Responses by Tawada Yōko, Henmi Yō and Yoshimura Man'ichi

Many Japanese-language responses to 3.11 situate Japanese society in a post-nuclear disaster apocalyptic dystopian future, in which high levels of radiation have become the norm and a totalitarian government is in place. A selection of these works will be outlined briefly here because they yield more or less similar results in terms of images for Japan's potential future—although there are differing degrees of negativity and hope across the works, they point to right-wing tendencies and ineptitudes of the (future) Japanese Government and their tendency to

1 Full text available at: www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=19842.

hide information.² Transnational author Tawada Yōko (2012), who writes in both Japanese and German, perceptively led this group of responses by publishing *Fushi no shima* [*The island of eternal life*] in the collection *Soredemo sangatsu wa mata* [*March was made of yarn*].³ According to the limited information the Japanese protagonist and narrator of the story could obtain in Germany, Tawada's dystopian Japan is closed to the rest of the world in a new form of *sakoku*⁴ and run by a private corporation by the name of 'Z Group', whose identity is hidden behind black masks. In this story, radiation from Fukushima has had the strange effect of making centenarians immortal, while children are weak and dying from radiation disease. Despite this tragedy, Japanese citizens manage to find entertainment in the form of *go* and *shōgi* board games and 'with no television, there is nothing to do during the long evenings but read, yet as the lights go out at sundown, storytellers have appeared to recite the stories of old comic books or animated films to the accompaniment of guitars or lutes', in a 'weird return to life in the Edo Period' (p. 11). This idea of Japan, the former technological and economic giant, taking a step back and coming to terms with living within its means is similar to Mikuriya Takashi's proposal of the slow life philosophy explored in the previous chapter.

Tawada developed this dystopian theme fully in her novella *Kentōshi* [*The Emissary* (US); *The Last Children of Tokyo* (UK)], published in a collection of the same name in 2014 (which also contains *The Island of Eternal Life*).⁵ Instead of a Japanese citizen living in Germany, *The Emissary* is written from the perspective of Yoshirō, who is a strong and immortal 107-year-old man who devotes his energies to looking after his weak seven-year-old great-grandson Mumei. Mumei (whose name literally means 'no name' because his parents were not there to name him following his birth) is so weak that he struggles to walk more than a few metres, to get dressed without assistance and even to eat solid food. Yoshirō and Mumei live in temporary housing on the Western fringes

2 There are many other dystopian works I have not covered here, such as *Baraka* by Kirino Natsuo (2016), *Hangenki wo iwatte* [Celebrating the half-life (of caesium)] by Tsushima Yūko (2016) and *Beddosaïdo mādā kēsu* [Bedside murder case] by Satō Yūya (2013).

3 The title evokes 'Fukushima' as well as '*Fuku no shima*', which is an appellation used for advertising campaigns in the region, such as '*Fuku ga mankai, fuku no shima*' [Happiness in full bloom, the island of happiness] (fukucam.jp/).

4 The term *sakoku* refers to the policy of national isolation in Tokugawa Japan, in which foreigners were not allowed to enter the country and Japanese were not allowed to leave.

5 The English translation of *Kentōshi* by Margaret Mitsutani (2018), *The Emissary*, was the winner of the inaugural National Book Awards for Translated Literature.

of Tokyo because the city centre has become uninhabitable. Areas such as Okinawa and northern Japan are said to be prospering by producing valuable crops such as fruit and rice. While the exact cause of this is never mentioned explicitly, it is hinted that the setting is a future Japan, where a much worse version of Fukushima has occurred (other than Yoshirō's immortality, there are also references to contaminated produce and mutated giant dandelions), as described in *The Island of Eternal Life*.

However, Tawada's dystopian imagination of Japan's future is not characterised by an Orwellian display of surveillance and political oppression. Instead, what gives her novella an eerie, dystopian feel is an extreme lack of clarity surrounding the exact nature of the system: how it came about, who is ruling the country and what would happen if you break the unspoken law. In Tawada's dystopia, citizens refrain from doing anything that might upset the privatised government because they live in fear, even though they do not know what it is exactly that they fear. For example, foreign languages and cultures are not completely banned, but because there is an invisible consensus that it is not desirable, citizens refrain from doing anything that could be interpreted as being foreign. In a manner reminiscent of wartime in 1940s Japan, native words are preferred to foreign imported terms: *tsunagi* instead of *ōbāōru* (overalls) and *kawaya* instead of *toire* (toilet). Because they are no longer used, foreign terms are associated with the older generation and children are made fun for using the English 'mama' instead of *okāsan*. The baker that Yoshirō frequents was an abstract painter in a previous life, but decided to take up baking instead for his personal safety because his paintings would often be interpreted to be depicting foreign scenery. Yoshiro buries a half-finished draft of a novel that he wrote (also titled *Kentōshi*) at the 'cemetery of things' rubbish dump because he feels that he included too many foreign place names in it. This future Japan is eerily frightening because it is a self-perpetuating dystopia, which is powered by invisible consensus, rather than set laws. Although a legal system exists, the laws keep changing all the time. Tawada (2014b) explained this in an interview with literary scholar Robert Campbell:

If a dictatorship is born in Japan (and I fear that this may happen), I don't think it would be in a simple form where there is a clear government and those who criticize the regime get sent to prison. We've seen dictatorships like that everywhere and they still exist. Instead, I imagine it to be a scary time where a shapeless, sticky

and dark fear would spread and no one does what they should be doing, as human beings, because they restrain themselves saying: 'I'm not going to do that because I'm scared'.

Tawada provides a future vision for what would happen if the current self-restraint (*jishuku*) of expression is taken to an extreme.

Another factor that makes this dystopia eerily recognisable to post-3.11 Japanese readers is that citizens have accepted and adapted to this way of life, which is presented as being tolerable. Satire is allowed on newspapers, which also publish letters from Japanese citizens living abroad. One letter claims that 'it is more profitable and also safer to continue being pirates with my foreign comrades than to return to Japan' (p. 110), making Yoshirō laugh out loud. This small freedom gives a false sense of illusion that 'life is not so bad', despite travel being restricted domestically and banned internationally and information being heavily controlled (helped by the fact that the internet is no longer used). However, there are also some arguably positive aspects to the system, including that wealth has become unimportant and that the country is no longer excessively centralised around Tokyo. Tawada's dystopian Japan is not without hope, which is presented towards the end as Mumei is selected as a messenger to travel to India, in the hopes that the data on his health will help others to find a cure for his condition. *Kentōshi* is more forward- and outward-looking than *Fushi no shima* in that the solution is presented in the form of increased intercultural communication and cooperation.

Conversely, *Aoi hana* [The blue flower] by Henmi Yō (2013) and *Borādo byō* [The bollard disease] by Yoshimura Man'ichi (2014a) present a bleaker view of Japan's future as a totalitarian dystopia, in which government control is maintained through the means of terror, propaganda or drugs that prevent people from thinking. *Aoi hana* is the monologue of a man, an internal refugee who is fleeing earthquakes and foreign bombs (Henmi, 2013, p. 12) following the death of all his family members. The man walks along the ruins filled with radioactive corpses in search of *poranon*, a happy-drug that brings to mind the methamphetamine *hiropon*, which was widely popular following WWII and famously used on *kamikaze* soldiers. Despite this reference to the war, the setting of the novel is clearly designed to defamiliarise post-Fukushima Japan. In a way that brings to mind the post-3.11 official attempt to unite citizens in the name of *kizuna*, television advertisements consist of pro-war messages by the Advertising Council Japan (p. 36) and a song that 'makes everyone

feel the sense of fulfilment that comes with caring for and helping others and the happiness that comes with not resisting’ and those who dislike the song are ‘suspected of antisocial personality disorders and a tendency towards unpatriotism and watched carefully by their organizations and society’ (p. 119).

Death and totalitarian control are also prevalent in *Borādo byō*, which tells the story of a town called Umizuka, from the perspective of a young girl called Kyōko. In Umizuka, residents are brainwashed to stay united in their allegiance to their ‘clean and safe town’ by singing the ‘Umizuka song’ and participating in community activities. In reality, radiation sickness is everywhere and the disfigured children continue dying,⁶ but the town’s residents must keep their myth alive through the fervent propaganda of *musubiai* (coming together), which is reminiscent of *kizuna*. Those who are suspected of having the slightest amount of doubt in Umizuka’s greatness or *musubiai*, such as Kyōko and her family, are reported and taken away by mysterious ‘men in suits’. Yoshimura’s dystopia is characterised by an eerie facelessness, in which the exact nature of the town’s government is unclear, but residents must watch their every move and utterance to ensure that they do not do anything that makes them stick out from the majority. For example, Kyōko’s mother throws away the meat and vegetables she buys (she needs to buy them to keep up appearances in public) and feeds her daughter imported canned foods and instant noodles, which she believes are safer. However, when they are at a community lunch with other townspeople, where they are served local produce, Kyōko’s mother tells her that she must eat everything. Umizuka’s eeriness is amplified by the fact that the story is narrated by Kyōko, who as a child does not fully understand her situation. Kyōko is constantly scolded by her mother for what seem like insignificant acts for both her and the reader, such as staring too much at a flower or a baby’s mouth. It becomes clear by the end of the novel that the flower and the baby’s mouth were both disfigured by radiation and that staring at these was not acceptable because it meant that she noticed that they looked different. The implication is that the successfully brainwashed townspeople do not even see the world because they become blind to the reality around them.

6 Although Yoshimura (2014a) only refers to the sickness as ‘poison’, there are various clues in the novel that point to radiation being the cause, such as Kyōko’s pet rabbit having no front legs (p. 162). Yoshimura (2014b) claims that a non-3.11 reading is possible and that the cause could be a poisonous gas or a virus.

The dystopian works that I have outlined above each have in common an eeriness that comes from a lack of clarity surrounding the government and the diseases affecting citizens, which is a metaphor for the insidious and invisible nature of radiation. These works are convincing in their dystopian portrayals of the country because they build on the fear of the invisible that many Japanese felt post-3.11, as well as real-life restrictions on freedom of speech during the war. In both *Aoi hana* and *Borādo byō*, mindlessly conforming to mainstream ideology by taking drugs or singing propaganda songs is the only way of being normal and surviving in this future Japanese society. This provides a powerful critique of the culture of *shikō teishi* (the suspension of thought) and avoiding unpleasant discussion, which is believed to have become apparent in post-3.11 Japan.⁷ This critique is carried out even more directly and controversially in Takahashi Gen'ichirō's *Koisuru genpatsu*, which I explore below.

Conformity versus Pornography: Takahashi Gen'ichirō's *Koisuru genpatsu*

If the dystopian responses to 3.11 portray a future Japan in which minority opinions and critical thinking are quickly suppressed by social consensus, Takahashi Gen'ichirō's (2011a) post-3.11 novel, *Koisuru genpatsu* [A nuclear reactor in love], demonstrates how this may be overcome to allow for greater freedom of expression. Similar to the dystopian responses, Takahashi portrays the atmosphere of conformity and social pressure, which he believed was pervasive in post-3.11 critical discourse. He demonstrates that this is created by a mix of Japanese blind trust for authority, legitimate-sounding rhetoric used by the authorities and the existence of many taboo topics that are never properly discussed. However, Takahashi's novel is also a kind of social experiment, which confronts readers by bombarding them with language that would be considered to be inappropriate by many in Japan, especially following

7 *Shikō teishi* has been a keyword in Japanese critical discourse since around 2010, appearing in book titles such as *Shikō teishi shakai: 'junshu' ni mushibamareru Nihonjin* [The 'thought suspension society': a people being ruined by obedience] by Gōhara Nobuo (2009) and *Tāima Hisuteri: shikō teishi ni naru Nihonjin* [The cannabis hysteria: the Japanese who cannot think] by Takeda Kunihiko (2009). There was also some interest raised following the results of the World Values Survey 2010–2014, which demonstrated that 73.8 per cent of Japanese answered that they believe newspaper and magazine reporting to be reliable and 69.7 per cent answered that television reporting was reliable, compared to 22.8 per cent and 23.2 per cent respectively in the US (Maita, 2015).

such a devastating disaster. Instead of simply showing the process by which consensus is formed, Takahashi demonstrates by example that such consensus can be broken by a strong presence of inappropriate and incorrect language. If read in this way, Takahashi's novel has the effect of blurring the line between correct and incorrect, which seems to have become more rigid post-3.11 and shows hope for greater freedom of expression in future Japan.

Since before the disaster, Japan has often been described both domestically and overseas as a society with groupthink tendencies, in which individual opinions are not valued. Decisions are said to be made on the basis of *kūki* (air) and those who do not follow the consensus are described as *kūki ga yomenai* (unable to read the air; 'KY' for short), which is synonymous with lacking social skills in Japanese society.⁸ It is a cliché of *Nihonjinron* that, to survive in the closed *mura shakai* (village society), the Japanese must adhere to the majority group at all costs, as 'the nail that sticks out gets hammered' (*deru kui wa utareru*) and might even be subjected to *mura hachibu* (ostracism/excommunication from the group) (Christopher, 1984, p. 53; Reischauer, 1977, pp. 135, 141). As outlined in Chapter 1, the disaster was perceived to have reinforced this cultural threat to freedom of expression. Due to the polarisation in opinions on questions such as nuclear power, Fukushima essentially created two 'villages' that the Japanese must choose between. Intellectuals such as Odajima Takashi (2012) argued that a very small selection of opinions received public attention in Japan and that when there were two opposing forces, they refused to listen to each other, which created tension rather than discussion. Takahashi (2012a, p. 129) also viewed post-3.11 Japanese society as an environment that was dangerously polarised, especially between pro-nuclear and anti-nuclear camps and has actively commented on this on his Twitter account @takagengen, as well as other media.⁹ According to Takahashi (2012a, p. 130), members of Japanese society have been forced to make a choice between these two stances, to determine which one is *tadashii* (correct),

8 For example, Kōkami Shōji (2009) explored this in detail in his *Nihonjinron* work *Kūki to seken* [The 'air' and society].

9 A selection of his comments on Twitter have been published in a book, *'Ano hi' kara boku ga kangaeteiru 'tadashisa' ni tsuite* [What I've been thinking about 'correctness' since 'that day'] (2012), from which these quotes are taken. Takahashi (2012) has also published the short story collection *Sayonara, Kurisutofā Robin* [Goodbye, Christopher Robin] and the essay collections *Hijōji no kotoba: shinsai no ato de* [Words in crisis: after the earthquake] (2012) and *Bokura no minshubugi nandaze* [This is our democracy] (2015) and has appeared at various public talks.

to be a rightful citizen—an intellectual atmosphere that stymies healthy debate and creativity. *Koisuru genpatsu* is a more literary and imaginative expression of these concerns, explored through the lens of language.

Keeping with his metafictional stance, Takahashi has always played with the idea of a central and stable plot or storyline in a novel, which is true to some extent for *Koisuru genpatsu*. Takahashi's works typically attempt to provoke thought, rather than to tell a coherent story. Although ostensibly about a group of men who attempt to create a charity adult video for the victims of 3.11,¹⁰ the story mostly happens in a complex web of tangents and no actual filming occurs in the novel. As the protagonist, Ishikawa asks, 'How much progress have we made in the story? Are we nearing the end, or have we entered a dead-end? I have no idea. Has it even started? I often get this feeling, actually' (p. 230).¹¹ Some of the most important scenes in the novel occur in these tangents, such as the story of the war veteran president of the adult video production company where the protagonist works as a cameraman. The president was on the battleship Yamato when it sunk on 7 April 1945. Floating on the water, the president has a comic and poignant conversation with his friend Katahira, who is a 20-year-old virgin, about what they imagine vaginas to look like. Katahira dies shortly after and the president decides that if he makes it home alive, he will dedicate his life to thinking about sex—the only thing that matters. Another tangent occurs when the 55-year-old pornography actress, Yoshiko, gives a lesson to Saori, who is in her fourth year of primary school, on how to protect herself from the sexual advances of men. Yoshiko, who was raped by her primary school teacher, has some unconventional views on education—she believes that schooling should consist entirely of practical lessons on sex and death, which take priority over book-learning. Each of these tangents have a story of their own to tell, whether they are individual histories or snippets of social criticism and the charity adult video that Ishikawa is making is what binds these stories together, rather than being the story that Takahashi wants to tell.

Takahashi makes his reader question whether *Koisuru genpatsu* is even a novel, just like it is unclear whether the adult videos in the novel are indeed adult videos, with their lengthy historical scenes and singing.

10 The tagline for the book is: '大震災チャリティーAVを作ろうと奮闘する男たちの愛と冒険と魂の物語' [A group of men give their all in making a charity adult video for the Great Earthquake ... A story of love, soul and adventure].

11 All translations of Takahashi's writing are my own.

As part of his attempt to avoid any kind of expression that can be considered to be normal, conventional or mainstream, Takahashi also challenges his readers to go beyond genre conventions. For example, the obi strip around the cover of the book asks, ‘Do you accept this novel?’ and Takahashi repeatedly attempts to break the fourth wall by conversing with his readers throughout the novel, addressing them as *anta*, which is an affectionate second person address (p. 29). He also employs his signature self-reflexive style in the narrative, making Ishikawa correct and ridicule himself—playing the role of both *boke* and *tsukkomi* in Japanese comedy.¹² ‘Suddenly, on the screen, Mr Monkey (*osaru-san*) appears. Well, it’s really just a monkey (*saru*), but today I just feel like calling him “Mr Monkey”’ (p. 11). Perhaps the most striking metafictional technique employed is that the adult video in the novel, and consequently the novel itself, is partly narrated in musical style, which eliminates any remaining possibility of suspension of disbelief. Characters suddenly burst into song during the dialogue, in a manner reminiscent of Dennis Potter’s 1986 BBC television series *The Singing Detective*, or the literary works of Thomas Pynchon. The song selection is a combination of foreign pop songs with some Japanese popular songs.

Takahashi’s career as an author has revolved around the issue of the lack of freedom in both literary and political expression in Japan. Following his involvement in the radical student movement of the late 1960s and his eventual arrest and aphasia, Takahashi became sensitive to the ways in which the Japanese language was used to define and suppress political minorities.¹³ In particular, the aggressive use of the terms *bōryoku* (violence) and *bōryokudan* (violent groups) by the mainstream media to characterise the student movement led Takahashi to fear the Japanese language itself, including how it is used as a source of violence.¹⁴ In his previous novels, Takahashi wrote against this kind of aggressive political

12 In *manzai* stand-up comedy, there is usually a comedian who acts as *boke* and another who acts as *tsukkomi*. The *boke*’s role is to make silly and funny remarks, which the *tsukkomi* corrects, causing the audience to laugh.

13 Although through a different medium, there can be some parallels drawn between Takahashi’s works and the non-fiction and documentary work of Mori Tatsuya, whose Aum Shinrikyō documentary *A* is critically acclaimed outside of Japan.

14 Takahashi (Yoshimoto & Takahashi, 2005, p. 304) gives the example of the response of the Chancellor of Tokyo University following the death of a far-left revolutionary group member in the 1967 Haneda Incident: ‘minshu shugi no na no moto de bōryoku wa ikenai’ [violence is wrong in a democracy]. Takahashi (1998, p. 225) used the term ‘fear’ to describe his relationship with language. See Yamada (2011) for an in-depth exploration of other events that shaped Takahashi’s literary project.

language that attempts to define and oppress, by exploring the boundaries of the Japanese language beyond a one-to-one correspondence between its signs and meaning. As Yamada (2011) claims, referring to Takahashi's first two novels, *Sayōnara, gyangutachi* and *Jon Renon tai kaseijin* [John Lennon v. The Martians], these are 'metafictions, or fictions that self-consciously underscore the conventions of signification' (p. 5). In his earlier works, Takahashi achieved this by 'invit[ing] readers to experience and even collaborate in the unbounding of meaning in the interpretation process' (Yamada, 2011, p. 18). This can be observed in the titles of his novels, which frustrate our desire to assign a single and stable meaning to them: *Yūga de kanshō teki na Nippon yakyū* [Japanese Baseball: Elegant and Sentimental] and *Jon Renon tai kaseijin* [John Lennon v. The Martians], for example, and similarly, *Koisuru genpatsu* [A nuclear reactor in love].¹⁵ In this sense, *Koisuru genpatsu* continues many themes from his previous works: exploring new possibilities for unassertive language that encourages multiple interpretations and testing the limits of the Japanese language, while being aware that he is still using the language that he is criticising.

Published in November 2011, just eight months after 3.11, *Koisuru genpatsu* can be differentiated from Takahashi's previous works in that it responds in real-time to the aggressive language that proliferates in post-3.11 Japan on both left- and right-wing sides of the political spectrum. In addition, he addresses the issue of correctness—when a certain political discourse gains majority support in a group in Japan, it also becomes correct, which then silences all other minority views. The novel paradoxically highlights this politicalness and correctness of mainstream expression in post-3.11 Japan by exploring minority views and the realms of language with the least aggression, which is deliberately unassertive, inappropriate and, at times, nonsensical.

Takahashi's criticism of the post-3.11 Japanese discursive environment focuses on the social pressure to conform to what is right and what is done by the majority—to donate money to charities, to refrain from frivolous activities and entertainment in the spirit of *jishuku* (voluntary self-restraint or mourning) and to conserve electricity (*setsuden*). For example, many graduation ceremonies around Japan were cancelled

15 One could interpret this title as a reference to the single-mindedness of those at the opposite extremes of the nuclear power debate (as in the saying *koi wa mōmoku* [love is blind]), or simply the heatedness of the debate, being equated to the excitement of love. However, the title still thwarts our attempts to ascribe meaning to it, by making the subject of this love the nuclear reactor.

following the earthquake because it was considered to be inappropriate to hold celebratory events in such circumstances. Takahashi, who lectures at the Meiji Gakuin University, planned on delivering a speech to those students who decided to turn up on campus anyway. Although Takahashi was unable to deliver the speech, he made it available on Twitter. In this speech, Takahashi (2012a, p. 33) tells his students that it is okay not to conform to what is ‘right’, if they do not feel that that is genuinely what they want to do. The opening sequence of the charity adult video in *Koisuru genpatsu* contains slogans such as ‘hang in there, Japan’, ‘Japan is one’ and ‘we are all Japanese’ (p. 16)—slogans that bear a strong resemblance to those used in 3.11 campaigns. To this, Ishikawa has the following reaction:

To be honest, I’m a bit sick of it all. The repetition of words like ‘Japan’ and ‘Japanese’ is starting to sound rather pushy ... No, it’s not right to say things like that. If everyone likes it, there is no reason to protest. They can do as they like. But I really wish they would give it a rest with the slogans (p. 16).

Here, Ishikawa seems to be speaking for all Japanese people, who are feeling overwhelmed by the slogans and social pressures in post-3.11 society. Through Ishikawa’s words, Takahashi reveals a part of post-3.11 society that does not appear in official discourse—those who feel uncomfortable with these slogans but are unable to speak out against them due to the pressure to conform.¹⁶

However, Takahashi is not condemning the act of charity itself; he is simply criticising people who donate money as a result of social pressure. Takahashi is suggesting that charity has become an automatic reflex for Japanese people, which prevents them from reflecting on what is needed in the disaster-hit areas. Ishikawa claims that he cannot understand anything except for adult videos, so he should ‘stay quiet’ and donate without asking questions—‘after all, as long as you pay a bit of money, no one will complain, right?’ (p. 196). What Ishikawa does not understand, at this stage of the novel, is that everyone can contribute in their own way and this is not necessarily by giving money: the president and the

16 These slogans are reminiscent of other periods of crises in Japan, as Takahashi (2012a) points out: ‘The same thing happened during the wars of the Meiji period, when the wars started in the Shōwa period and also when that ended and Japan turned into a democracy. Just like what is happening now, using pretty words, people fervently insisted on conforming to what is “right”, while denouncing all that is “inappropriate”, “unpatriotic” or “reactionary”’ (p. 33).

chairperson, who are originally from Tōhoku, go home to help their families, whereas Ishikawa's colleagues Yama-chan and Kameda go to volunteer in Iwate and start an outdoor childcare centre in Fukushima, respectively. Takahashi's message is that Japanese people should think on their feet and help people in creative ways when they feel the need to do so, not just always mindlessly donating for the correct good cause to which everyone else donates.

Takahashi begins his novel with a quote from an imaginary book, *Intānetto jō no meigen shū* [A collection of quotes from the internet]: 'I dedicate this book to all those who passed away ... No, saying that would be too shallow'. He follows this with 'a letter from a reader', which reads 'this is extremely inappropriate. I hope there will be punishment for those involved'. Takahashi's response to this typically Japanese, 'legitimate' opinion is expressed through the protagonist of the novel, Ishikawa, who appears and speaks directly to the readers (*anta*) in the casual first-person *ore*, instead of the more formal *watashi*, in a more colloquial tone (also represented by the more curvy, playful font):¹⁷

It goes without saying that this is a work of complete fiction. Even if some parts of it resemble reality, that's just a coincidence. If you even entertain the idea that there may be a slight chance of something written in this book happening in real life, you're barking mad. How can such a crazy world exist? Go see a psychiatrist! Right now! That's the only piece of advice I can give you. See you later.

These three pages clearly display that Takahashi is aware that his writing may be viewed as inappropriate in the post-3.11 context and he does so deliberately. Ishikawa's retort retains elements of the same violence inherent in the language that criticises him, such as labelling his readers as 'barking mad'. However, because his language is more illegitimate, this violence is easier to observe for his readers than in the legitimate-sounding rhetoric of mainstream discourse.

Takahashi makes it clear that he is deliberately avoiding conventional Japanese forms of mourning disaster victims because he believes that those words do not carry any substance. Later, Ishikawa questions: 'I am sensitive to my own pain, but maybe I am insensitive to the pain of others

17 It is assumed that the speaker is the protagonist as the pronoun *ore* is used, which is the pronoun Ishikawa uses throughout the rest of the novel.

... Is it possible at all to understand other people's pain, though?' (p. 127). Takahashi suggests that since it is not possible to understand the suffering of others, it is insincere to pretend to understand. Takahashi does not pretend to be able to understand or that a legitimately written dedication in his book would do anything to let their souls rest in peace. From the beginning of the novel, Takahashi calls for his Japanese readers to base their evaluation of information on its content, rather than its source or its appearance of legitimacy.

Takahashi favours pornography as a way to talk illegitimately because it does not follow the moral and aesthetic codes of mainstream discourse and can have the power to bring socially formed preconceptions to light. Pornography is a device he previously used in his 1999 novel *Adaruto* [Adult], which focuses almost exclusively on non-mainstream pornography, such as those featuring old women or scatological elements, in a way that makes his readers question what exactly is normal and what is an unusual fetish. However, as Takahashi (1998, p. 118) contended, 'normal pornography' that attempts to follow the rules and 'ideologies' of pornography has the potential to be didactic and to play a part in dictating how sex should be done 'correctly'. This is why Takahashi seems to feel an affinity for the unconventional pornography of Japanese directors, such as Baksheesh Yamashita and Company Matsuo, who actively challenged conventions in the pornography genre by including 'bizarre things no one has ever seen before and unimaginable kinds of people doing all sorts of things', which forced viewers to leave behind their societally conditioned conceptions of love and sex (p. 119). For example, Ishikawa describes the video of 72-year-old pornography film star Yone as something that is as 'frightening as the leakage of contaminated water from Fukushima' and reports that, when confronted with this 'frightening' image, many viewers chose to close their eyes to avoid looking at it (pp. 128–132). As Takahashi (2012b) explains, 'we become lost for words when confronted with nude old women, because, unlike young girls, society doesn't have the words to describe what they look like. I want my readers to become lost for words in my novel'—old women do not usually figure in socially formed preconceptions about sex. Takahashi's use of unconventional pornography in his works relates closely to his political concerns that mainstream discourse defines 'the correct way to think about love and sex' and that unconventional pornography has the power to destroy these preconceptions, just like literature.

Although the authorities and the government clouded their post-3.11 arguments in legitimate and authoritative sounding rhetoric, using keywords such as *kizuna*, *jishuku* and *tabete ōen* (support the disaster-hit areas by eating their produce), Takahashi implies that the problem is compounded because Japanese people blindly trust official-sounding discourse without questioning its content. While the Japanese loyalty to and respect for their rulers has been a subject of wonder in the West since WWII, Japanese intellectuals have recently criticised this tendency as *shikō teishi* (suspension of thought), which is characterised by a kind of laziness when it comes to critical thinking with regards to official discourse. In his novel, Takahashi uses language that is as far removed as possible from legitimate-sounding political rhetoric to create obstacles to this Japanese style of unquestioning obedience. Readers are prevented from trusting anything in the book because characters in *Koisuru genpatsu* lack confidence and express themselves in colloquial speech (even heads of state including former prime minister Kan Naoto) and hardly a page passes without some form of sexual slang. This illegitimate effect is amplified by the fact that disaster and death are considered serious issues that must be discussed using legitimate language.

Another example of Takahashi's criticism of legitimate-sounding rhetoric is a chapter entitled *Shinsai bungaku ron* [An essay on earthquake literature], inserted towards the end of the book, which appears to be a discussion on the role of 3.11 literature. In stark contrast to the rest of the novel, the content of this chapter is much more serious and written in normal language. As Ishino (2013, p. 31) observed, this chapter is the only part of the novel that is logical and coherent, which may cause readers to conclude that this chapter represents the crux of what Takahashi wanted to say in his novel. Because they feel so relieved to finally read something that they can understand after being bombarded by Takahashi's absurd writing, most readers would not stop to question whether its content were reliable (p. 31). However, this chapter is also a work of fiction, which discusses imaginary works with the names of artists and authors written in *katakana*, like the other characters in the novel. The eight-hour version of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, as well as *Kamisama* (2011), which are discussed in the chapter, are both fictional works, despite being based on their real versions (by Miyazaki Hayao and Kawakami Hiromi respectively). Although the chapter deals with some of the concerns that Takahashi explores during the rest of the novel, its content cannot be taken at face value. Takahashi frustrates readers' attempts to find any

easy explanation of the novel. Takahashi suggests that reality does not have easy explanations and that Japanese people must learn to take all discourse surrounding the disaster with a grain of salt and to be suspicious of language that appears to be legitimate and authoritative, whether it be his own essay or any other commentary on the disaster.

In *Koisuru genpatsu*, Takahashi reveals that many taboos remain in Japanese society by using pornography as a direct metaphor for them. The words of the 55-year-old pornography film star Yoshiko highlight this similarity: ‘the problem is that no one wants to talk about it ... So you never gain an understanding of what it is’ and the real reason why people do not talk about it is because ‘it’s hidden away, so you can’t see it’ (p. 160). *Koisuru genpatsu* is Takahashi’s attempt to encourage debates on delicate matters in Japanese society—sex, money, death and, perhaps most importantly, nuclear power. Pornography is a highly appropriate metaphor for nuclear power in that they are both essential parts of the everyday lives of Japanese people, yet are hidden away from the public eye. Pornography is also rigged—it is a *yaochō*, a ‘put-up job’, in which everyone knows what will happen at the end, despite any unwillingness feigned by the participants (p. 10). In a similar way, Japanese nuclear politics is also rigged because it is governed by political and financial interests. Through his metaphor of pornography, Takahashi suggests that what needs to change in Japanese society is not the taboo or sexual perversion, but the lack of discussion about these subjects, which make it seem as though they are not happening. Takahashi shows that the hesitation and shock the reader feels when reading his novel plays an important role in perpetuating these taboos.¹⁸

Takahashi’s boundary-testing demonstrates that taboos can be overcome when there is enough discussion on the subject—readers eventually get used to the sexual explicitness and inappropriateness of the novel and begin to question why it is a taboo at all. The novel demonstrates that the act of talking about a taboo, in any shape or form, can make it more acceptable, even in Japan. However, it is also true that debates surrounding the taboo subject of nuclear power would not have occurred in Japan in

18 An example of this is the reaction of Waseda University to this book. Takahashi revealed on Twitter that the university banned the use of *Koisuru genpatsu* as part of the title of a talk he was going to give on campus in October because they considered the expression to be inappropriate (this is further evidence to Odajima’s claim that nuclear power is becoming an issue that no one wants to be involved with in Japan). The combination was probably considered problematic in that it carried the risk of making it appear as though he was making a pro-nuclear statement and being inconsiderate to the disaster victims and that Waseda University supports this.

the first place were it not for the Fukushima disasters. Sadly, it seems that the power of speech is insufficient, in many cases, to instil enough of a sense of urgency in the general population to *start* such debates. This is why Ishikawa decides not to use his alien assistant's supernatural powers to go back in time and make it so that 3.11 never happened at the end of the novel—not only would this be turning away from reality, but it would also reverse an invaluable opportunity to begin the debate on taboo topics in Japan, including nuclear power. To borrow the words of the chairperson of the adult video production company, Japan has been 'shaking' for decades, without anyone realising it (p. 94) and 3.11 simply brought to light all the existing problems of Japanese society. The best we can do is not to pretend that it never happened, but to face the issues squarely and to keep speaking about them.

Post-3.11 critical discourse has been characterised by the use of easily discernible markers to identify and label 'enemies'. In *Koisuru genpatsu*, this is illustrated through the example of two words: *hōshanō* (radioactivity) and *hōshasei busshitsu* (radioactive material). Although it is technically incorrect, the term *hōshanō* is often used to refer to radioactive materials in Japan in expressions such as *hōshanō more* (leakage of radioactivity), especially in the media because the term is easier to say. However, following 3.11, the correct usage of these terms has been an indicator of the depth of the speaker's knowledge of nuclear power, which has led to nit-picking. Takahashi seems to feel that this is an issue of minor importance relative to the urgency of healthy debates surrounding the future of nuclear power in Japan. As Ishikawa puts it, 'Why do I have to worry about such things? People tell me I shouldn't get it wrong. Why? I don't understand at all' (p. 180).

Another example is the discussion of two cover songs: the Korean versions of Itsuwa Mayumi's song *Koibito yo* ([Oh, lover], probably referring to Rhee Hwa Sook's version) and *Yuki ga furu* [Tombe la neige] by Salvatore Adamo. In Japan, Korean copying of Japanese culture is often derogatorily referred to as *pakuri* (stealing). However, Ishikawa reveals that the Korean singers sang these songs with such pride that he was moved to the point of tears, claiming that 'it really doesn't matter whether a song is *honmono* (real) or *pakuri*' (p. 44). What is important here is Takahashi's choice of *Yuki ga furu* as his example—written by Salvatore Adamo, an artist born in Sicily and raised in Belgium, who was known for performing all over the world in numerous languages. Although the song is well known in Japan, it was originally written in French and sung by Adamo in many

languages, including Korean. Takahashi most likely deliberately included this example to further blur the line between real and fake or right and wrong. By referring to these examples, Takahashi suggests that whether one's language is correct or not (both in the sense of word selection and the choice of the language itself) is unrelated to the value of what is expressed.

On the very last page, Takahashi once again brings up the issue of what constitutes an adult video, and by extension a novel, with what appears to be a conversation between Ishikawa and the president:

What do you think?
Suggestion dismissed.
Why?
Because that's not porn! (p. 276)

With this conversation, Takahashi paradoxically demonstrates that even such labels of genre are unimportant and unnecessary in the interests of free expression. If not a novel, Takahashi's novel could be called a performance, much like the actions of the *Yubisashi otoko* [pointing man], who gained fame for filming himself pointing his finger at the LiveCam at the Fukushima Daiichi Power plant. The back cover of the novel references this video with an image of Takahashi pointing at his readers. In Takahashi's (2012a, p. 283) own words, the 'pointing man' is saying, 'You're all pointing at others and attacking them, but why don't you try point that finger to yourself for once?' Takahashi's finger-pointing performance is a powerful criticism of the tendency to hide away from real debates in post-3.11 Japan.¹⁹ Takahashi's question, 'do you accept this novel?' becomes a question aimed at Japanese society as a whole when read in this light. Takahashi encourages Japanese people to go beyond narrow-minded labels such as left-wing or right-wing and to pay more attention to the content. Although Takahashi admits that he is powerless as an individual, he displays hope in the collective power of Japanese society. As he argues, 'there is no freedom of expression in Japan because Japanese people do not want it' (p. 73); that is, he believes that it is possible for Japan to break out of the stifling cloud of conformity if the Japanese people decide to work together. Takahashi attempts to aid this

19 In this way, Takahashi's work shares much in common with the music and performances of the anti-nuclear protestors in Tokyo following 3.11; see Brown (2018) and Manabe (2016).

process by stirring up controversy for controversy's sake, in the hopes that he will be able to desensitise Japanese society to unconventional opinions and expressions and to encourage healthy debates.

The dystopian works explored in the first half of this chapter are different in nature to Takahashi's novel. In the dystopian works, minority opinions are suppressed, whereas they are celebrated in Takahashi's work. However, if dystopian literature is considered to provide negative examples of what society should *not* aim for, we can also say that the authors in this chapter express hope for a more democratic future Japan, in which minority opinions can be easily expressed and heard.

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