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Easing Transition with Metaphors: A Case of Transsexuality

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Abstract

Using Yūji Usui's novel *A Grass-Carp on a Tree* (1993) and its film adaptation (1997) by Atsushi Ishikawa as metaphors, this paper traces the transition of Japanese attitudes towards sexuality. The novel and the film work as vehicles that “map” what is actually taking place in Japan and how the transition is felt by Japanese people.

Keywords: transsexuality, transition, metaphor, sexuality, Japanese culture

Izveleček

S pomočjo romana Yūjija Usuija *A grass-Carp on a Tree* (1993) in njegove filmske adaptacije (1997) avtorja Atsushija Ishakawe kot metafor, članek sledi tranziciji japonskega odnosa do seksualnosti. Roman in film delujeta kot modela, ki začrtata, kaj se pravzaprav dogaja na Japonskem in kako tranzicijo občutijo Japonci.

Ključne besede: transseksualnost, tranzicija, metafora, seksualnost, japonska kultura

1 Introduction

The title of Yūji Usui's novel *A Grass-Carp*¹ *on a Tree* (1993) flaunts an oxymoronic ring, for carps do not climb a tree. This semantic stunt shares

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¹ This fish belongs to the carp family and is a herbivore. The technical term for this fresh-water fish is *ctenopharyngodon idella*. In Japanese, the name is written with two ideographs denoting “grass” 草 and “fish” 魚 and pronounced as *sōgyo*. The Japanese name probably comes from the fish's fondness for grass. It lives in lakes, ponds, pools, and backwaters of large rivers. It grows to about a

something in common with the word “transsexuality.” Sex and gender² are commonly conceived of as fixed at birth. They were not to be transferred, transposed, or even transcended. Gender differences used to factor in the discussion of labor exploitability (by Marxist and socialist feminists), familial psychodynamics (by psychoanalytic feminists), women’s proximity to nature (by ecological feminists), women’s independence, rights, and power (by radical feminists) and the like. Japanese academia was one of many which avidly swallowed these Western insights. Unique to *A Grass-Carp on a Tree* is that it trumpets the advent of the age to see sex and gender as alterable. The time has come for carps to climb a tree.

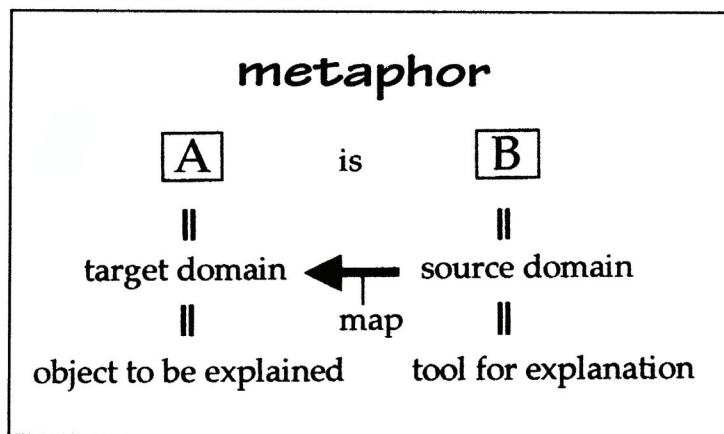


Figure 1: A metaphor. (Source: Deleuze 1988 and Kövecses 2002)

If metaphor is “understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain” (Kövecses 2002, 4), that is the tool Usui uses to explain the delicate shift of cultural values. He subscribes to Zoltán Kövecses’ basic formula of “A is B,” with the “A” being the object to be explained, and the “B” being a tool of the explanation. Kövecses calls “A” a “target domain” and the “B,” “a

meter and a half long. Since the English name is long and difficult to pronounce, I will call it “grass-carp.” All the translations of Japanese texts without special notations are mine.

² John Money reports that “sex” used to belong to the genitalia and procreation as male or female and “gender” used to belong to philology and grammar until the second half of the twentieth century, and that the humans show the least evidence of hormonal difference compared to other primates. (Money 1995, 101) His definition of gender is the private experience of social role called gender role, with the gender role being the public expression of gender identity. (Money 1995, 25)

source domain.” (Kövecses 2002, 29) The “source domain” “maps” the “target domain.” The source domain, that is, speaks the language we know.

Similar to Kövecses’s scheme is Michel Foucault’s study of “outside” and “internal.” (Deleuze 1988, 87) The Foucaultian “internal” is a force to be affected by “outside.” (Deleuze 1988, 72) So, the “outside” is from where the Foucaultian force “diagrams” the “internal.” The Foucaultian force is a spontaneous, receptive, informal element that integrates power and knowledge, (Deleuze 1988, 81-82) and its power is nothing oppressive in the way the neo-Marxian (patriarchal capitalism) or the neo-Freudian (law-giving) ways are, but produces and affects another’s subjectivity. (Faubion 1994, xix) His “internal” may be a personal sentiment or that of the society one belongs to, and the “outside,” everything else that is new or foreign to the “internal.” Thinking takes place when the “outside” “eats into the interval and forces or dismembers the internal.” (Deleuze 1988, 87) So, the “internal” is a compound of select forces that have already been brought in from “outside.” The more receptive the “internal” is of the “outside,” the more open-minded is a person.

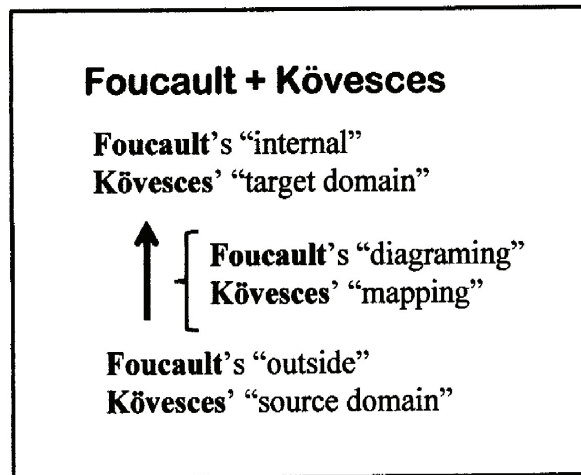


Figure 2: Foucault’s and Kövecses’s perceptions of the world. (Source: Deleuze 1988 and Kövecses 2002)

The first part of this paper studies how Usui’s novel disburdens the concept of sexuality from the weight of socioculturally entrenched stigma by dint of the

working of metaphor, and its second part, on how Atsushi Ishikawa's film adaptation of Usui's novel diagnoses the major characters' "internal."

2 Yūji Usui's novel *Grass-Carp on a Tree* (1993)³

By the time Yūji Usui's novel *Grass-Carp on a Tree* (*Ki no ue no sōgyo* 木の上の草魚 1993, henceforward *Grass-Carp*) was published, a significant number of individuals had undergone surgery or taken other medical measures to change their legally registered gender⁴; they, with the support of the Japanese media, pressured the Japanese government to issue a law that would approve change of an individual's officially registered gender⁵. Usui took it upon himself to metaphorically explain the psycho-dynamism behind sex change.

Usui names a 22-year-old transsexual (a person born with both sexual organs) in this novel Hiroshi (before he becomes a female) and Hiromi (after a sex change) Toriiyama. Toriiyama relies on his male friend, Wataru Ikegai, for moral support during and immediately after his sex change. It would not be wide of the mark for us, readers, to assume that Wataru's slow reaction to his friend's change reflects the average Japanese person's reaction to a matter such as this. Usui uses five objects to metaphorize Hiroshi and Wataru's psychodrama: i.e., (1) a crossbar telephone switchboard, (2) crossword puzzles, (3) the pond in which a huge grass-carp lives, (4) a cherry tree by the pond, and (5) a grass-carp. The crossbar telephone switchboard belongs to the telephone company Wataru works for; the crossword puzzles are Hiroshi's hobby; the pond is where Hiroshi and Wataru first talk to each other; the cherry tree talks to Hiroshi as he relaxes on it; Hiroshi and Wataru have seen the legendary grass carp.

The crossbar switchboard with 200,000 circuits is managed by half a dozen experienced technicians including 26 year-old Wataru Ikegai. The sound of the incessantly connecting and disconnecting circuits of the switchboard collectively hums like a horde of winged insects, bringing to Wataru the "warm, calm, yet

³ This novel hit the "best seller" list, and it received the Yoshikawa Eiji Literature New Writer Award.

⁴ Among many, Katsuki Harima 針間克己 and Saeko Sōma's 相馬佐江子 *The Coming-out of 30 Gender-identity Disorder Patients* (性同一障害30人のカミングアウト) (Tokyo: Futaba-sha, 2004) gives a realistic sense of the quantitative change.

⁵ A law named the *Act on Special Cases in Handling Gender for People with Gender Identity Disorder* (*sei dōitsu-sei shōgai tokurei-hō* 性同一性障害特例法) was issued in 2003.

tense” feeling of a successful human communication. Undoubtedly, the switchboard is a metaphor of human communication as well as Wataru’s “internal.” Things like the countless lights in the night-sky of Hakodate City in Hokkaidō, for instance, make him wonder if the whole world might be a vast switchboard.

Hiroshi’s favorite pastime, meanwhile, is solving crossword puzzles. It is as integral to his “internal” as the switchboard is to Wataru’s. Both “crossbar” and “crossword” cross things but the former is for communication and the latter, for non-communication. In actual life, Hiroshi’s female friends have abandoned him because he did not pay them the kind of attention other boys did, and his male friends left him because he showed no interest in girls’ sexuality. Each crossword puzzle of 300 x 300 black and white boxes is a map of his unresolved relationship with the massive “outside.” His current problem is: “Which would make more sense for me to be, a complete woman or an incomplete man?” The answer floats somewhere in between his “internal” and “outside.” Left alone, he has only himself to ask: “Who is there to share my penis problem?”

The episode of Hiromi taking Wataru to a parking lot shows Hiromi’s obsession with the black boxes. She asks Wataru, “Doesn’t this look like a crossword puzzle?” For Wataru, the similarity ends where the white grid lines on the cement align with the black boxes in crossword puzzles. Wataru asks, “Did you bring me here just to show me the lines?” Hiromi desperately yells, “This used to be that pond.” By “that pond” Hiromi means the place where Wataru saw a huge grass-carp and tried to catch it. Hiroshi saw this from a branch of a cherry tree, jumped down, and cut Wataru’s fishing cord as well as his hand with a knife.⁶ The two boys wrestled in the water and Wataru, a nationally rated *judo* player, threw Hiroshi onto the ground. Hiroshi landed on his own knife, stabbing his chest with it. Wataru carried Hiroshi to the nearest road and called an ambulance. Hiroshi told the police that he fell off a tree. Because this was different from Wataru’s testimony, Wataru was arrested and suspended from school. The incident derailed the stellar student from a career course and turned him eventually into a switchboard operator. The hospital, meantime, discovered that Hiroshi was equipped with two sex organs. Because Hiroshi’s parents died soon afterwards, deranging the maid Shino, Hiroshi had only his doctor and a nurse to share his

⁶ Hiroshi had a knife to cut the sweet potatoes used as bait for the grass-carp.

secret. Much like a crossword puzzle, the incident stagnates in Hiroshi's checkered "internal."

The pond beyond an iron fence near Hiroshi's house lies "outside" the community's culture. Hiroshi's father and his maid Shino had told the little boy never to go beyond the iron fence, for the Master of the pond would eat him if he did. The kindergarten child confuses the word *nushi* (master 主) with *sushi* (寿司) and draws a parallel between a cultural phallus with his biological penis⁷:

How does the Master look? It may be like a giant *oinari-san*⁸. Or can it be like *tekka-maki*⁹? Oh, I got it, it's *kappa-maki*¹⁰; I've heard that the *kappas*¹¹ live in ponds. The ideas made him laugh. A cucumber-face cannot be handsome. Maybe it looks like a pee-pee. (Usui 1993, 4)¹²

The phallic power persists in Hiromi's "internal" even after she has lost her penis and the *nushi* has been buried under the hard and flat cement.

Meanwhile, the cherry tree "maps" or "diagrams" Hiroshi's "internal." The way Hiroshi has the tree by the pond transplanted in his house shows how important it is to Hiroshi's "internal." The gentle voice from the tree—which is first low like a man's and later high like a woman's—keeps "diagraming" Hiroshi from his kindergarten days onward. It lures the boy with a blizzard of small petals and a friendly call, "Come over here!"; scolds him when he urinates on it, "Your pee-pee is going to come off"; encourages him to climb it, "Don't be afraid, you can do it"; tells him once he has climbed it, "You are going to change slowly from now on. I'm going to help you." It advises Hiroshi, "Catch the grass-carp and eat it"; "You should make friends with Wataru"; "Tell Wataru about your penis"; "Don't hold on to the thing you cannot use"; "Become a woman"; "Don't be afraid to become a woman"; "Kill the man in you." As Foucault has predicted that the "outside" collapses when it is fully integrated in the "internal" (Deleuze 1988, 87), the voice bids farewell shortly after Hiroshi loses his penis. After that, Hiroshi is

⁷ J. Laplanche and J-B. Pontalis explains the difference between phallus and penis: "In psycho-analysis, the use of this term underlines the symbolic function taken on by the penis in the intra- and inter- subjective dialectic, the term 'penis' itself tending to be reserved for the organ thought of in its anatomical reality. See: Laplanche and Pontalis 1973, 312.

⁸ *Oinari-san* is cooked fried soy-bean bag stuffed with rice.

⁹ *Tekka-maki* is raw tuna wrapped in rice and seaweed.

¹⁰ *Kappa-maki* is cucumber wrapped in rice and seaweed.

¹¹ *Kappa* are mythological amphibian creatures shaped like human beings. They are believed to eat cucumbers.

¹² All the translations of Japanese texts into English are mine, unless stated otherwise.

left with the voices of urologist Kageyama, his nurse Natsue, who is another transsexual, and Wataru. Kageyama and Natsue have already revealed to Hiroshi the danger of holding onto two genitals; Wataru finds a job for Hiroshi at the switchboard, helps him solve his crossword puzzles when possible, accompanies Hiromi to Hokkaidō to see his detached but very much missed penis, and ultimately satisfies Hiromi's female carnal desire. Solving Hiroshi's crossword puzzle questions, above all, is a metaphor of Wataru's crossbar telephone switchboard diagraming Hiroshi's crossword puzzle. Gradually, Wataru becomes Hiroshi/Hiromi's indispensable confidant.

The cherry tree and the grass-carp play a tug of war, so to speak. No matter how friendly the cherry tree may be, Hiroshi has trouble giving up the glamorous grass-carp. He is confused:

That *sushi* has been appearing in my dream lately. Did you drop this gold penis? Yes, the gold penis was mine. Don't lie. It's this iron vagina that you dropped. The *sushi* gets mad at me and sinks down in the pond with the penis and the vagina. (Usui 1993, 214)

Hiromi is not sure what genital she is left with, let alone which one will serve her better. Soon, she covets Wataru's penis. "I'm just being frank. I'm confused," says Hiromi.

Sometimes I want to get rid of my femaleness, yet again, I don't want to go back to the manhood. I'm lost and worn out. It's true that I'm glad I came all the way to Hokkaido to meet my old penis. It makes sense. I got to talk with you a lot, too. But the thought of seeing my penis tomorrow confuses me again. Am I a man or a woman? Which will I be tomorrow? I started drinking to blow away my anxiety. Then the grass-carp and *sushi* made fun of me. So, I took a good look at my naked body in the bathroom. Then my female body aroused my male-me. It was sickening. I felt, that you may be able to make me a true woman. Both grass-carp and *sushi* agreed with me.

"So, you grabbed a hold of my dick?" Wataru asked.

"Please don't talk dirty like that."

"Is there a decent way to grab a dick?" Wataru made himself sound insensitive. He could not restrain himself otherwise. The person standing in front of him, wrapped in a blanket, was a plant of the rice-plant family, and Wataru was the grass-carp. He wanted to swallow the plant. If he talked gently, he would lose self-control. What would happen then? (Usui 1993, 243–244)

The metaphor of a plant and a fish has a hierarchy of values and power as Kövecses' "great chain of being metaphor" (Kövecses 2002, 123–126) explains, and Hiromi as a plant is offering her soul and body to a carp, but Wataru is no more than a switchboard operator or a "diagrammer" of "internals." He is not a grass-carp, master, or a phallus.

Hiromi's problem is seeing the penis as a "phallus" or a "master-signifier" (Connell 1995, 70), as earlier generations have done. So, she tells the urologist Kageyama that a penis is more fundamental to human existence than any other human organ. But Dr. Kageyama has a broader "diagramming" circuit. He replies:

My patients tend to take the ailing part of their bodies to be the key to human existence. A heart, stomach, lung, kidney ... there is no organ that is not basic to human existence. The patient who just died had cystitis cancer. A bag to store urine can be the key to existence. (Usui 1993, 214)

Kageyama does not give a penis a "phallic" power or let it cause an identity crisis.

What really is it that *Grass-Carp* tells us? A clue is that cherry blossoms are one of Japan's two¹³ national flowers. So the philosophy they espouse can be a metaphor of Japan and Japanese culture. And the novel suggests that Japanese culture is going feminine¹⁴. Wataru's co-worker, Togasaki, recaps a magazine article to endorse the feminization supposition as he polishes his wife's cigarette lighters:

The birthrate in Japan is noticeably dropping especially in cities. A random sampling of male city dwellers reveals that they hardly produce sperms. This tendency is rapidly increasing. The cause, according to the article, is a stressful life. (Usui 1993, 93)

The conclusion of this "Come on Mr. Penis" story is that the penis, as well as masculinity, is getting to be burdensome for Japanese men. As with Togasaki, more men are happily polishing women's cigarette lighters. Dr. Kageyama also speaks in his usual *sang-froid* tone:

¹³ The other is chrysanthemum.

¹⁴ Mitsuyoshi Hayashi defines femininity as something that rests on feeling, resonance, and sensitivity, such as what music conjures. The sentiment is individualistic, temporal, and concrete, unlike the abstract and logical ideologies men rely on. For details, see: Hayashi 1983, 116. We may also expediently borrow Kimi Komashaku's description of *onna rashisa* 女らしさ ("femininity") "passive and quiet" (*Junnō de otonashii koto* 順応でおとなしいこと). See Komashaku 1984, 34.

Human males used to exaggerate gender differences when they tried to attract the female's attention. Examples range from penis worship in ancient Athens to the middle school students' preference for acting tough. They grew beards, developed muscles, and gave a masculine tone to their language and clothing. The smell of perspiration and some degree of uncleanness used to symbolize masculinity. We don't see those nowadays. (Usui 1993, 122)

The urologist sees the penis as a caricature/metaphor of Japanese culture: "I think Japan—I often wonder why the Japanese archipelago looks like a penis—is losing its penis," (Usui 1993, 124) and goes on to offer his hypothesis:

Suppose this is in fact evolution, it must be towards the direction of doing away with, or at least, doing with less males. The evolution may be preparing humans for an environment of several thousand or tens of thousands of years later. (Usui 1993, 124–125)

If the disappearance of the grass-carp from the pond is a metaphor of a transition of Japanese culture, Hiromi's sex change must be a part of the evolution. The cherry tree has navigated her through the rocky road. A Japanese magazine named *Bessatsu Takarajima 112: Otoko ga abunai 男が危ない!?* (*Supplement Treasure Island 112: Males Are in Danger* 1990) supports Dr. Kageyama's hypothesis by reporting how manly jobs—such as the police and the self-defense army—have lost recruiting power; new employees come with little motivation; what used to be "manly" opinions and behaviors are oftentimes disliked; statistically, more men than ever are going to cosmetic clinics; stereotypical male characters on televised dramas are pushed around by women, and so on.¹⁵ This is what *Grass-Carp* is about.

3 Atsushi Ishikawa's film *A Grass-Carp on a Tree* (1997)

Yoshiko Kanai declares in her *Postmodern Feminism*:

The hermaphrodites or bisexuals refuse to espouse either one of the female or male gender. They introduced an awareness that is outside the sex/gender canon. Nonetheless, they have not managed to liberate themselves from the binary concepts of male and female. Theirs is a deconstructive sexuality with a gendered tail attached to it. They will not be able to shake off the tail unless they recognize others within themselves. (Kanai 1989, 171)

¹⁵ These are my summary of the topics in the magazine.

Without using the word “metaphor,” Kanai talks about the “internal” and “outside” of human awareness in the way Foucault does. What Kanai sees as a quest for diversity within the “internal,” and the “internal” itself resembles Julia Kristeva’s “love,” whose dynamics is “established not by the designation of a reference that is reducible to being, but by the relationship the speaking subject has with the Other during the utterance act.” (Kristeva 1987, 274) Kristeva means that there should not be a culturally fixed or predictable “mapping” route from a source to its target domains. There should not be a culturally prescribed channel between the feelings of Hiromi and Wataru. Wataru should let circumstance dictate his relationship with Hiroshi/Hiromi. Kanai and Hanazaki Kōhei call their Kristeva-like approach “the *epochē* エポケー approach,” (Kanai 2002, 28) or “suspension of judgment” approach. There, the analyst would sit close to the patient, listen to his/her story, and most importantly, create the patient’s space in his own mind/soul before analyzing the situation. (Kanai 2002, 29)

Rather than rushing to the mapping process, the film *A Grass-Carp* first introduces Wataru’s maleness (*otoko-rashisa* 男らしさ).¹⁶ It opens with a medium shot of Wataru throwing one judo player after another in a practice hall. His partners come forward with the phrase *onagai shimasu* お願いします (“please drill me”) only to be thrown on their backs instantly. Some twenty others wait for their turns sitting formally on the floor. Katō Takehiro’s active camera cross-cuts between the athletes’ torsos and legs to express the young power and fervor. The large practice hall is decorated with award certificates the high school has earned. This opening shot identifies Wataru as the epitome of the three traditional types of “manliness” by Itō Kimio’s standard: i.e., superiority (prowess), sociocultural power (heroism), and possessiveness (the awards). (Itō 1995, 80)¹⁷ Wataru in high school was a phallic man.

Hiroshi, on the other hand, is a loner who would silently observe Wataru’s practice at the doorway to the hall. Yet he is clad in a *kendō* outfit—for the sport that makes one hack another with a sword. The two protagonists’ encounter at the pond shows that Hiroshi conceives himself above Wataru, and in fact sits on a tree branch above Wataru’s head. He responds to Wataru’s friendly inquiry, “Are you

¹⁶ In order to feature the Japanese sense of “manliness” versus the Western conception of “masculinity,” I will use the word “manliness.”

¹⁷ The three concepts in Japanese are “*yūetsu*” 優越, “*kenryoku*” 権力, “*shoyū*” 所有.” (Itō 1995, 82)

Mr. Toriiyama’s son by any chance?” with “Go home already” “don’t piss there,” and “don’t come back!” from a branch of his favourite cherry tree.

The film holds the Toriiyama parents accountable for Hiroshi’s self-absorption. Hiroshi’s father, Toriiyama Shōgo, adheres to the old fashion “manliness” complex *à la* Makoto Hosoya: (1) he nurses a pathological fear against losing in a competition, (2) he is insensitive to another’s feelings, and (3) he is likely to burn out or perish from illness. (Hosoya 1995, 69–70) Shōgo keeps himself in the political forefront by serving as the Chair of the City Council and is now campaigning for reelection. His name, Shōgo (“illuminate one’s own path” 昭吾) is self-serving. In Wataru’s father’s words,¹⁸ “He maintains an ostensibly moderate political stance, yet he is known to land a blow with the knife made of his wealth on his constituents.” This swordsman image metaphorically corresponds to that of Hiroshi in the background of the judo practice hall. Mrs. Mitsue Toriiyama is Shōgo’s ally and victim.¹⁹ Shōgo’s unusual display of exhilaration at a male baby’s birth, for instance, robs Mitsue of the opportunity to tell him that their baby is a hermaphrodite, and makes her hysterically secretive of Hiroshi’s abnormality. Mitsue first attacks the nurse Natsue, “So, you saw it? I don’t want you here. I haven’t even let my husband know it. We don’t need a nurse to get in our business.” And Mitsue demands that Dr. Kageyama stop “fooling around with” (*ijikuri makuru* いじくりまくる) Hiroshi’s body. She is a sentinel for Shōgo’s self-indulgent “internal.” Hosoya Makoto’s prediction hits the mark and the overworked Shōgo crashes his car while driving to the hospital where an ambulance has taken Hiroshi. Mitsue who was already hospitalized also passes away in shock shortly afterwards. There is black-box-like ominousness about this family and house. Part of it is Shōgo’s total absence from it as well as the screen. The swinging and rustling tall trees around it command Wataru to halt and renew his resolve to go in each time he visits it. Like the black boxes in crossword puzzles in Usui’s novel, the trees resist social interaction. The interior of the ostentatious house is large but hollow. Basic facilities for living, such as a kitchen, dining table, and living-room furniture are missing. Hiroshi’s maid Shino serves her favorite mango juice on the bare wood floor.

¹⁸ Shin’ichi talks about Mr. Toriiyama while Toriiyama is still alive.

¹⁹ Hosoya (1995, 69) and Itō (Itō 1995, 80) agree that the old type superiority complex, power complex, and possessiveness show more prominently in his relationship with women than with men.

Wataru's home, on the other hand, reminds us of the humming of the telephone switchboard in Usui's novel. His father Ikegai Shin'ichi, is a new type of "ideal man," (Hosoya 1995, 73) who strives to live in harmony with others. His name with the characters for "progress/growth 伸" and "unity —" goes well with his personality. Even in a contest with Shōgo for the City Council Chairship, he takes a totally different approach. The physical laborer's uniform he wears when he first enters the frame matches his slogan, "Ikegai Shin'ichi appreciates the citizens' perspiration,"²⁰ which is written on the side panel of the party's campaign van. Unlike anyone in the Toriiyama family, Shin'ichi avoids confrontation. In an *actualité* scene of Wataru and Shin'ichi resting from jogging on a riverbank, Wataru mentions anecdotally that he is working with Hiroshi at a video rental shop. A medium shot catches Shin'ichi's face until he completes his chopped and drawn-out utterance, "Oh? With Mr. Toriiyama's son? I see," and reflexively gives its place to another medium close-up of the back of his head. The stillness of his head and the disappearance of the children and their voices from the background suggest that Shin'ichi is bearing up.

Unlike Shōgo, Shin'ichi plays the roles of both parents in his single-parent family. Metaphorically speaking, he is a hermaphrodites/bisexual without a gendered tail attached to it. His deceased wife is not left out of the love in Kristeva's sense. Her photograph is framed and put on a bureau, at which Wataru and the camera cast a warm gaze. The father hangs the wash, wipes the dining table, takes care of his potted plants, and gives Wataru two cans of beer when Natsue pays a surprise visit. The background props—of a rice cooker, food, drinks, and spices—suggest that the father and the son have a familial bond.

The name "Wataru 廻" (go around) shows the young man's potential to get in touch with cultural "outsiders," the like of Natsue, Togasaki, Dr. Kageyama, Dr. Komine, and Shino. Natsue is the key "diagrammer" who links various insiders and outsiders. She asks Wataru to assist Hiroshi, asks Dr. Kageyama to call Dr. Komine to warn him that Hiromi and Wataru are coming to see Hiromi's detached penis. It was Natsue who notified Dr. Kageyama of Hiroshi's abnormality and tried to do the same to Wataru, has Dr. Kageyama talk to Wataru, and helps Hiroshi culturally and legally changes his gender. Natsue's compassion for Hiroshi comes from her own identity of being a MTF (from male to female). She has, in fact, seriously considered suicide more than once. She knows Wataru since eight

²⁰ This word stands for hard work.

years earlier when he and his father frequented the Citizen's Hospital to see Hiroshi with the self-inflicted wound. Her hope is to have Wataru play the role Dr. Kageyama did for her during her troubled days. She visits Wataru's house and tries to awaken the man's carnal desire by kissing him. The kiss is not really for Wataru, but a hint for him to do the same for Hiromi.

The film expresses Natsue's "outside"-hood and in-between-ness with her dress code. As an offshoot of a certified medical institution, and a former male, her outfits are always—except for once²¹—black or white and their cut is a variation of the men's business suit. Another motif of her outside-ness or in-between-ness is her proximity to windows. She stands by the window in Kageyama's office, opens the curtain in Hiromi's bedroom, and sits on the small balcony by a window in Wataru's apartment. She likes to ventilate the "internal" with "outside."

The doctors Kageyama and Komine are outlandish. Their names, "hidden mountain" (*kage-yama* 影山) and "a small mountain ridge" (*ko-mine* 小峰), put them in a good vantage point for watching other people's lives. The former has given Natsue a sex change operation, helped her overcome her intersex-related confusion, dated with her, been jilted by her, hence believes that only Natsue can help Hiroshi.

The clinic of Dr. Kageyama's friend Dr. Komine is visibly outlandish. Wataru uses his motorcycle and a ferry boat to get there. The two-story solitary building sits on a barren plot of land. The exterior of the building is stained by the weather, laundry dances in the wind on the rooftop, a plastic bag of garbage, an abandoned bathtub, some scraggy plants, and other sundry objects lie by the entranceway. Indoors, live roosters and their chicks walk around on the nurse's counter and the floor. Komine's greeting to Wataru is friendly. As his voice fades off-screen, the camera leisurely cuts to a stuffed deer head, a couple of pheasants, and an owl. They are as dead as the penises the doctor collects. The doctor's asynchronous voice keeps talking: "I have penises that came off on account of a traffic accident, rotted by a rubber band, or excised because a disease enlarged them." Komine is a collector of defunct penises, not a phallus. He does not fight for his own power, either. So, he lets Hiromi run off with a cooler box that contains her old penis. He tells the nurse after Wataru runs after Hiromi, "How can we stop someone who

²¹ She wears a greenish striped blouse when she reminisces the critical time in her life with Dr. Kageyama.

wants it?” His relaxed voice, sparse white hair and beard, a towel around his neck, wrinkled face give off the ambiance of a mountain hermit.

Another peculiar “outsider” is Togasaki, a namesake of the man who keeps polishing his wife’s cigarette lighter in Usui’s novel. Togasaki in the film is the owner of a video rental shop and Wataru’s employer. This character actor and a secondary role comedian brings humor to the story. His “strongly female” language,²² eurhythmic body language, the way his right hand tends to stay near his mouth while his left hand props his right elbow, the way he calls Hiroshi and Wataru with the “-chan” suffix, his high pitched “Ike-chan, *matte!* 池ちゃん待って (Please don’t go, Ike-chan)! *Sutenai de* 捨てないで (Don’t dump me!)” as Wataru runs out of the shop to quit his job, parody a certain type of Japanese women.

Another “outsider,” Shino, becomes demented when the Toriiyama couple passes away. She can no longer tell people apart. She asks first-time visitor Wataru, “You came yesterday, too, didn’t you?” and asks Natsue, her houseguest of at least a week, “I’m sorry to bother a stranger, but would you please ...” All she makes is mango juice and serves it to people who are not there, greeting them pleasantly. At times, she sits on a chair by the Toriiyama couple’s photographs—on which the camera does not focus—and stares at the void in front of her eyes. She is the farthest removed from so-called reality. Diversity is all around Wataru.

Hiroshi’s confession to Natsue reveals her struggle within her “internal”: “That tree is very special to me. It talks ... my penis came off that night.²³ Since then, I have gone to the tree every day to apologize.” Japanese psychiatrist Kimura Bin helps us understand that Hiroshi is schizophrenic:

Schizophrenic patients rather commonly suffer from an auditory hallucination, but hardly from a visual hallucination. What takes place is that the patient sets up an “outsider” where there should be “me.” The subjective “I” alienates his/her own objective “me.” Because “me” is society within the self; “I” sees “me” as an “outsider.” This split is prompted by a pampered upbringing that stalemates the child’s ability to analyze situations. A schizophrenic is unable to acknowledge his/her own actions as his/her own. (Kimura 1976, 143)²⁴

²² The “*no yo のよ*” and “*wa わ*” endings, for example, make sentences “strongly female.” For details, see Okamoto 1995, 301.

²³ Hiroshi means the first day she visited the pond and urinated on the tree.

²⁴ This article was written jointly with Yūjirō Nakamura, but this part was written by Kimura.

The symbiosis of two incompatible sexes and two genders in one body and one mind respectively turns an individual schizophrenic. The cherry tree's voice is Hiroshi's own, which was originally implanted by his parents and their spokeswoman Shino. The cherry-tree's Freudian "super ego"-like and Lacanian "father's No"-like voice persists, splitting Hiroshi's "internal." Another psychiatrist rephrases the situation: "When all external stimuli are blocked out, human senses become hypersensitive to the smallest impact from outside, and they detect the activities of one's own mind as hallucination." (Oda 1976, 201–202) Having shut himself off from the physical "outside," Hiroshi had built a hallucinatory "outside," the tree's voice, within himself.

It takes time for Wataru to accept Hiroshi's sex change. When asked by Natsue to help Hiroshi, he flatly refuses, "No thank you. ... Hiroshi's fine the way he is." He impatiently walks out of Dr. Kageyama's office, when the doctor shows him Hiroshi's X-ray. He thinks the sex change is absurd even after Hiromi has lost her penis, registered as a female, and dressed as a woman. The camera describes the tension. Natsue and Wataru, sitting on either side of the picnic table, turn toward the camera but slightly off left. Hiromi comes out of the dark interior of her house where the gazes of her two friends meet. The camera leads the girl up to the picnic table. The next cut is to an establishing shot with Hiromi and Wataru facing each other and Natsue in between. Still in this position, Hiromi asks, "How do you like this?" Natsue's eyes quickly swing over to Wataru to solicit his friendly remark. The montage, meantime, moves to a shot/reverse-shot to catch the anxiety on Hiromi's face and disgust on Wataru's. The two sets of eyes veer away from each other slowly but simultaneously. Only Hiromi's gaze revisits Wataru as she says, "I put on makeup." Her eyes that are wider open this time show her determination to give Wataru a second chance. Wataru from Hiromi's point of view almost looks back at her but not quite. Natsue enthusiastically chimes in, "Isn't she terrific? I was amazed when I helped her put on the makeup." In the next establishing shot from another angle of the table, Wataru turns his head further away from Hiromi and mumbles, "So, this is a triumph of technology, I guess." At Natsue's remark, "Doesn't she look charming? I chose the outfit," Wataru lets out, "Are you going out like that?" Hiromi asks, "What do you mean?" Wataru's voice—"I wondered if you are going to walk in public in a female outfit"—is low and grumpy. Hiromi drops her gaze again and runs to her car. Later that day, Wataru goes to the parking lot where Hiromi had told him that the pond used to be there, feels the warmth of the ground, leans against a wall, and

eats the jam roll his customer at the video shop had given him. His shadow appears on the building wall as if to show that his mind and body have split. The customer had told him that she had two-thirds of her stomach removed in surgery and the lost stomach craves the jam roll. For Wataru, it is Hiromi that makes him eat a jam roll. It is obvious that Hiromi as an outsider has stepped in Wataru's "internal." Wataru's first kiss takes place on the boat back from Kawasaki²⁵ to Tokyo. His effort to take the cooler box away from Hiromi, shouting, "Throw it away! That belongs to Toriyama Hiroshi. You are Hiromi!" turns into a physical battle. Hiromi's blouse comes loose and exposes the scar from the battle at the pond. Wataru's passionate kiss on it obliterates the line between "internal" and "outside." This escalates into Kristeva-style love, the provisional love, or love by circumstance. As Dugald Williamson has observed, sexuality and sexual differences are "never natural givens, but are effects constructed in signification and cultural relations." (Williamson 1992, 113) It has taken encounters and circumstances to make Wataru "love" Hiromi who was once Hiroshi.

4 Conclusion

The destination of Japanese culture, according to Asada Akira is "de-coding (*datsu-kōdo* 脱コード)," meaning, "the center disappears; God dies; the king is decapitated; the father's words lose authority." (Asada 1982, 166) *Grass-Carp* metaphorizes the death of the carp, master, and the phallic power together with Asada's God, king, and the father's words. *Grass-Carp* is about the transition of Japanese attitudes towards sexuality and culture at large.

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²⁵ In the film, Dr. Komine's clinic is in Kawasaki, rather than in Hakodate in Hokkaido.

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