

HOW TO DO THINGS WITH A PARASITE:  
*KISEIJŪ* BY IWAAKI HITOSHI (1990-FEB.1995),  
OR A VISION OF THE DIVIDABLE SELF IN A  
CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE COMIC-BOOK

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Ethnic cleansing is an obsession we tend to be possessed by in the post-colonial situation after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The once dominant dichotomy between Western Free nations and Eastern Socialism gave way in the 1980s to the other schematic and no less fictional opposition between the "terrorism" of the "Holy Islam" and the defense of democracy by the secularized American "Evil Empire" Samuel P. Huntington's hypothesis of the possible clash of Western Civilization with the Islam-Confucian connection in the near future still influences Washington foreign policy-makers. In the meanwhile, the pursuit of ethnic purity for the sake of ethnic purity became the agenda of many political leaders eager to establish their hegemony out of the yoke of multiple ethnicity.

Iwaaki Hitoshi's comic story, *Kiseijū*, or "Parasite-beast", completed in 1995, offers a far-reaching insight into the hidden xenophobia of contemporary Japanese society, and widely appreciated among literary critics and sociologists. Although comics are still usually disdained among Japanese intellectuals, Tsurumi Shunsuke even confesses that in his life of 73 years no book but one had gripped him so tightly. I myself find this story as a remarkable step in the history of bodily experience in Japan as well as around the world. Why was this story accepted so enthusiastically? How does a fictional parasite reveal some of the blind spots in contemporary ethical interrogations? This paper tries to answer these questions, by analyzing some aspects of the story pertaining to the imagination of the body.

1

One night, unknown extra-terrestrial creatures as large as the tennis balls suddenly begin to fall on Earth. From every incubated ball appears a worm like a snake with a drill on its top. By instinct they try to penetrate the brain of sleeping humans being found nearby. Most of them succeed in taking over the host's brain, and by eating up the head from the interior, they replace the heads of their hosts by their own tissue. Thanks to their elastic body, they imitate their hosts' original physiognomy. By disguising themselves as their host, they seem to keep their recipients' identity. But the original brain does not remain anywhere, and the recipient's

personal identity is lost once and for all. Each host's Body is now controlled by the will of the alien occupant.

From the following morning, atrocious killings begin to take place, when the parasites begin to feed themselves with the nearest human-beings they can find. Wives and children are suddenly attacked by what they still believed to be their husbands and fathers, and so forth. There are thousands of these fake human-beings which suddenly appear on earth, although their invasion is not immediately noticed as such by human beings. The mass-media reports hideous cases of "hashed meat human killings."

One accident, however, prevents the fulfillment of the initial program. One of the worm like creatures fails to penetrate the brain of a boy, as the boy, awakening, notices that something strange is happening to him. The worm jumps toward the head of the boy, but the boy's hand prevent the worm from reaching its destination. The extraterrestrial creature is forced to give up taking over boy's brain and is obliged to remain instead in the right arm of the host. By morning, the worm has entirely replaced the host's right hand. But it is a "failure" for the creature, for he has failed to "kidnap" and destroy the boy's brain. And the host is of course furious at having his right hand and arm eaten by the parasite, for these no longer belong to him. At first, the boy furiously tries to kill the parasite, but in vain. With its super-natural elasticity and high capacity for transformation, the monster easily breaks off the knife with which the boy tries to attack it.

In the boy's confused reaction to his (?) new right hand and arm, we can certainly see a profound ambiguity which remains unquestioned in the practise of medical intervention. On the one hand, it will be easy to see this parasite as a metaphor of cancer. Modern surgery eliminates malignant tumors from the body in order to restore health. Still a massive amputation, causing handicap, seriously degrades a patient's living conditions. On the other hand, the parasite can be regarded as a transplanted prosthesis. Such transplantation is strongly promoted by surgeons in cases where there is no other way for the patient to survive. In order to facilitate transplants, a new guideline was introduced in Japan in 1997, which recognizes the death of the brain as the death of the individual. Thus one's transplanted organ obtains more chance of survival within and under the body of another person.

Between mutilation and transplantation, two contradictory desires seem to coexist. If the former seeks purification by a physical operation, the latter promotes symbiosis of heterogeneous elements against the nature of the immune system. By presenting a parasite simultaneously as a cancer to remove and as a prosthesis to transplant, Iwaaki's comic story sheds light on this ambiguity in medical ethics and questions the propriety of the treated organs. To whom does the transplanted organ

belong?-a question that medical ethics has tried to conceal under the skin of a body.

## 2

Indeed, we can no longer say for sure, in this story, which is the donor and which the recipient. For the boy, his right hand and arm are a parasite which, however, he cannot remove. For the extraterrestrial creature, what is superfluous is the brain of the host's body on which it has transplanted itself. Despite this mutual inconvenience, both of them recognize little by little that they are mutual dependent. However hostile its host is, the parasite cannot live without its host (here it would not be superfluous to recall, with René Schérer, that "host" and "hostility" share the same etymological root with "hospitality", which also accounts for the uneasiness of being hospitalized). The same is true for the host: however disobedient to him his right hand has become, it is useless and disadvantageous to lose it. Still, it is one thing to understand the necessity of cooperation; it is quite another to make the cooperation actually work.

Serious but somewhat comical quarrels and conflicts take place between the boy and the monster, as two different identities and wills are forced to coexist in the one and the same human body. The monster occupying the right arm of the host is busy learning everything about human society, and rapidly obtains necessary knowledge and language skills. Full of curiosity, he reads through an encyclopedia and imitates even a bird's anatomical physiognomy by his elastic and transformable body, while the host complains about the fact that he has to clear the table after his parasite's enthusiastic reading by which it scatters everything around himself (vol. 1, p.45). (For the sake of comprehension of the images, let us remind you here, that in Japanese comics the story goes from above to below and from right to left).

Here, the author of the comic demonstrates unexpected imagination in the depiction of such details when, for example, the boy meets his girl friend. His right arm suddenly transforms itself into a huge phallus, faithfully or fancifully reacting to its host's hormones. Here the parasite appears as an exaggerated synecdoche of the male genital organ, which is made of elastic skin stuffed with sponge like tissue. In fact the parasite is at the same time curious about the sexual instinct of human beings and is irritated by the too reticent and hesitating behavior its host takes toward the high-school girl. "It is a pity that I could not observe human intercourse. It is no good for your health to refrain from doing what you want to do. You know your health is also my own," the right hand preaches to the boy (vol. 1, p.58).

Further, the right hand even tries to cause an erection in the boy's penis against the will of the host, while he is (or they are) in a public lavatory. "Stop it, this silly guy !" shouts the boy, "It's cold, the water !" The right hand complains.

"Shut up !" the boy ripostes. Their dialogue looks like an insane monologue, and surprises boy's school-mates. For the boy's confusion, even the forced ejaculation is reduced to be a shameful exhibitionism of masturbation practiced in public...(vol.1, p.54).

In the meanwhile, the boy, is lead by some progressing intimacy to name his parasite "migy", apparently stemming from "the right side" [migi] in Japanese. The parasite, Migy, on the other hand, refuses to be regarded as a pet animal of the boy, but gives him back the command of his "own" right hand while it want to sleep by his will (vol.1,p.46, 65-66). "I sleep now. Treat your right hand carefully," it says to the boy. By trial and error, Migy also learns little by little how to avoid putting the boy into useless trouble. To put down possible suspicions, the boy's "right arm" should not show any strange behavior. It is out of question for it to transform itself in public, without respecting the human body's anatomical limits. For their own safety, not only Migy itself but also the boy must keep secret "Migy"'s existence, even from his family. By this strange "cohabitation", the boy also recognizes, to his own surprise, that he is now gifted with super-human power in his right arm. This fact inevitably affects the boy's personality.

### 3

The symbiosis of two identities on the same body has a real model in Siamese twins. The freak has since long stimulated the imagination. In the case of Tokugawa Japan, Santō Kyōden is known to have written in 1788 a comical story of "yellow cover book" (*kibyōshi-bon*) about the psychological conflict between a pair of siamese twins (*Soritsugi gin giseru*: translation impossible). A man, named Hanbei and a woman, named Onatsu share a body, which causes them interminable troubles until they were successfully separated by a Nagasaki Dutch style surgeon, who put Hanbei's head on a dead body of another man. In modern times, Hagio Moto's comic, Hanshin (Divinity Separated into Half), tells a story of two sisters born as Siamese twins. Once separated each other by surgical operation, the one who has been beautiful dies an ugly death, while the other who has believed herself ugly, survives, to her own surprise, as a beautiful lady. This love-and hate psychodrama was mounted on stage by Noda Hideki in 1986 and enjoyed a high reputation. Later, Hagio developed the same framework into the love-and hate ambivalence between a beautiful mother and her baby who believes herself to be the reincarnation of an Iguana, a huge lizard living in Galapagos Islands.

The only existing specimen of Pushimi-pullyus, a creature invented by Hugh Lofting, as a thoughtful and modest animal with two heads, which accompany Dr. Dolittle in his voyage to Africa, is given the name of Oshitsu-Osaretsu, in Japanese by Ibuse Masuji. A more advanced specimen in evolution, or a Japanese

variant (as in this case two heads speak simultaneously) is recently found by Horie Toshisachi in an illustrated book for children written and illustrated by Sasaki Maki: Do you know where the pink elephant is ? By the way, it is curious to note that the débâcle of the Austria-Hungary Empire, which had the emblem of two headed eagles, coincided with the disastrous end of ethnic coexistence in East Europe. This coincidence suggests what is implied in the iconography of the siamese twin allegory. Incidentally, in a fantastic novel by Satō Aki, *Peregrination of Balthazar*, which won the third Grand Fantasy Novel Prize in Japan in 1991, is also based on this historical and geographical context of the lost Austria-Hungary Empire. The protagonist of this novel is a *Doppelgänger* who incarnate(s) the duplicity of his own existence under the threat of massive human slaughter and genocide by the Nazis...

What makes Iwaaki's comic different from these precedents as well as ordinary Hollywood-type "alien-monster" stories ? The difference consists in the fact that the protagonist is (or are) a chimera-like mixture of an extraterrestrial and a human boy, and that they are doomed to behave themselves as an individual by concealing their plurality. The identity of Migy consists in hiding itself by perfectly playing the role of the host's right hand (this makes the comic story fundamentally different from the short surrealistic novel, *Kataude (Arm)*, by the old Kawabata Yasunari in 1964, who fancied a detachable arm). Migy must be concealed in the skin of its host ("dans le peau de l'autre"), in such a way that we have a grammatical difficulty in determining whether we should use plural or singular, to speak of "it", "him" or "them".

Two points must be made about this intentional indeterminability. One, the well-known *Doppelgänger* situation gains here new significance. In one individual body there live two independent identities. But these two different identities are none the less mutually dependent. Socially behaving as (or at least trying to behave like) an individual, their private self is divided (c.f. Ronald David Laing's *Divided Self*). The self-evidence of identity is blurred and becomes object of constant conflicts. But in observing these conflicts, questions come to our mind. What is the "I" which pretends to be individual ? Is the integrity of a self so self-evident as we tend to believe? Is the split-personality a psychotic trauma that the patient has to overcome? etc. It is not superfluous to add that the idea of a boy with his eye-shaped partner is explicitly inspired from Mizuki Shigeru's famous comic story of hobgoblin boy Kitaro, whose left eye, believed to be his father, lives in and out the left eye socket of his son. Here, the integrity of the self is sustained by the subverted mutual dependence, which also defies the universality claim of Freudian hypothesis of the Oedipus complex.

Two, it is already clear that the story contains, in its framework of a scien-

tific horror fiction, some fundamental criticisms of (Western) hygienic policy. In this story, parasite is not regarded as something to be exterminated or eliminated as an absolute evil enemy which threatens the integrity of the hero or heroine (like the case of these intruders in American Hollywood film of *Terminators*, *Robocop* or early *Alien* series). Instead, in this *Bildungsroman*, the parasite is interpreted as the indispensable partner for the fulfillment of the young protagonist's personality. The symbiosis with the parasite seems indispensable for the self-formation of a full-fledged individual. Interestingly enough, this view coincides with the latest discovery in the medical studies of immune system and seems to be supported by parasitologists. However, before touching upon this problem, at the end of the paper, we have to make some other preliminary remarks.

## 4

Now we are only at the end of the first volume of a story composed of ten volumes. For the sake of comprehension, let us summarize the three main frameworks of the story. The main trouble with the parasites is that they feed themselves on the fresh human body. It is true that the sensational minced meat human slaughters cases gradually disappeared. Instead, however, increasing number of mysterious disappearances or unaccountable absences are reported (what the Japanese called *jōhatsu*, or "evaporation". The parasites has studied, in the meanwhile, the safer and cleverer way of obtaining their food in secrecy. And yet, despite this apparent "socialization", the human huntings are still going on without being noticed.

Secondly, while the parasites spread throughout the human world, some eye-witnesses inevitably appear. To eat a human body, the parasite has to abandon its human disguise and transform its head into a monster-like mouth with fangs for mastication. It was impossible to conceal perfectly this transformation from human-eyes. Finally an individual fails to keep his true nature in secret, and carelessly tries to kill the eyewitness. Counter-attacked by sulfuric acid, however, it loses its brain self-control and provokes a massacre in a high school. To stop the slaughter, the boy and Migy in cooperation throw a stone at the breast of the insane parasite. The stone thrusts through the human chest, leaving a huge hole. To kill it, the only effective way is to destroy the host's human heart. By this incident, however, the monster's body is finally captured by human beings, as irrefutable evidence of their horrifying existence. Investigations are undertaken in secret to solve the mystery of this unrecognized and dangerous creature.

Thirdly, the boy is the only human being who knows so far the truth of these incidents. Therefore, his existence was regarded by other parasites as an imminent danger to them. A simple breaking of their secret by the boy could easily

endanger their whole existence. For their own safety, the "normal" parasites decide to kill this "mutant" individual. The police also mark this important eyewitness. Here is the common destiny of the mediator, who runs the risk of being regarded as dangerous from both sides. Like the bat between the realms of birds and animals in *Aesop's Tales*, this "mutant" individual, half-parasite and half-human, plays a privileged but risky role between the two antagonistic sides. As the story advances, tensions rapidly grow.

## 5

Yet, it is not our intention to deprive our audience of the pleasure of reading this breath-taking story. Instead, we concentrate our attention on the messages the author slips into the details of the story. Let's have a closer look at the nature and character of the parasite. As for the relationship between human being and parasite, three points must be made.

First, as for the instinct of eating human body. One parasite remarks that it received the imperative to kill the human species at the moment it invaded the human brain. Migy confesses for its part, "This furious emotion to kill does not exist in me, who hasn't robbed the human brain" (vol.10, p. 129). We are also informed that Migy itself does not have any hunger nor need of eating human body, so long as it is alimented by its host (vol.1, p.148). It becomes clear that only those parasites which have devoured human brains are imprinted with the instinct to exterminate human beings. By these, the author seems to suggest that the instinct of killing is not programmed into the parasite as its inheritance but is transmitted to it from the human brain that it has devoured.

This setting reminds us of the hypothesis advanced by some anthropologists in terms of the origin of the human species. In his *A View to a Death in the Morning, Hunting and Nature Through History* (1993), Matt Cartmill examines the mythological, ideological, and cultural backgrounds of the "killer ape" hypothesis, which was propagated by some post-World War II Western physical anthropologists studying human evolution. This hypothesis was based on the idea that the human species was born at the moment when some anthropoids began hunting and killing with weapons at their hand. According to this idea, which Robert Ardrey named "hunting hypothesis", we cannot account for the history of human being without taking into account the hunting. Konrad Lorenz's best seller, *The Aggression* [*Das Sogenante Böse. Zur Naturgeschichte des Aggression*, 1963], also reflects this tendency of evolutionary psychology in the 1960s. Ardrey even defined the human being as "predatory animal with the innate instinct of killing with the help of self made weapons". In the story by Iwaaki, it seems as if the parasite were programmed to penetrate into human brain so as to obtain this unknown instinct of aggression

from that which it is now entitled to devour.

Second, as their symbiosis goes on, the boy and Migy also begin to change their mentality. In the volume 2, the boy's heart has been destroyed by the attack of a parasite, disguised in his mother. To save the life of his host, Migy divides itself to substitute the broken human heart by its own tissue. With this operation, the boy, coming back to life, gets superhuman power, while Migy diminishes its size by 30 percent on the right arm and takes on the human habitude of falling asleep out of his control for 4 hours a day. The once rational and cold-blooded reasoning of Migy also takes on a human touch.

A subtle example is found in their dialogue. "You know that the parasite cannot develop the sentiment of human affection." Migy says. "In case you endanger me by your affection of your girl friend...". "I understand," the boy replies. "I mean, Migy adds, you don't want to see your right hand kill a girl friend you love...". "Do you threaten me by that ? You are completely lacking in affection," boy retorts with anger. "But so, it is." Migy protests, quietly. Here, the last words by Migy betrays what he means. By saying that he lacks in affection, the words undoubtedly show his affection toward the boy, and more generally toward the lives of every creature (vol.5, pp.86-87).

Third characteristic. As a creature, the parasite is curiously lacking in the capacity of reproduction (here is the fundamental difference from, say, *Alien IV*, and I wonder if the author from the outset was fully conscious of the result this setting would eventually bring about). As far as it occupies the head of a human body, the reproduced baby by the female human host logically belongs to human species. The parasite cannot intervene in the genetic memory of the host species on which they live. One "female" parasite finds it strange that she is lacking in the capacity to transmit her own gene to posterity and questions its own *raison d'être*, as a creature. "Where did we come from, what are we, and where to?" (vol.7. p.228: here is, of course, the famous question Paul Gauguin asked in Tahiti). She also makes an experiment of intercourse with another "male" (the sex being that of the parasitized human body) so as to procreate a human baby (vol.1.p.183).

Later the author of the story explicitly refers to the Richard Dawkins's idea of the "selfish gene" (vol.6, p.124), which was frequently discussed around 1995. From the genetic point of view, so long as the parasite is incapable of intervening into human genetic memory, it cannot be regarded as a parasite. A university professor explains in the story: "if our body is a marionette of our gene, then what matters is not the human species but rather "I" and "my" posterities which will transmit "my" gene". "Ultimately, this would explain all the altruistic behavior, like helper and care-taking behavior, affection to the family members and eventually the mother instinct itself." "In the final analysis, we would be lead to the conclusion

that such a thing like the mother instinct simply does not exist". However, the professor also suggests a weak point in this selfish-gene hypothesis by showing many examples of altruistic behavior among animals, insects and plants, which even do more harm than good to the survival of the gene in question.

The pregnant female parasite happens to find herself fitting in this category. As a matter of fact, the pregnancy and care-taking of "her" baby may be interpreted as purely altruistic behavior, as it does not contribute to the prosperity of the parasite but rather endangers the parasite's own existence as an individual, in particular, and as a species, in extension. This scientific experiment of pregnancy, made out of mere curiosity, also begins to influence and change the character of this "female" parasite, as the story goes on.

6

While the parasite tries to find a way toward the symbiosis with human beings, the human beings set up systematic manoeuvre for the extermination of the parasites. The headquarter of the parasite, located at a city hall, is detected by special commandos, and armed troops lay siege to it. Under the pretext of rescuing the citizens from a dangerous narcotic intruder, armed with a rifle, the army begins to lead the people out of the city hall to put them under x-ray screening. If the head of the human skull is replaced by the monster, the x-ray image gives a shadow, thus allowing the army to find out and identify the parasite. It is enough-or so the army thinks-to shoot at the remaining human heart by the T-shot gun to kill the parasite, one by one.

In the x-ray screening, we can see a metaphor of the desire inherent in (Western) anatomy and dissection. As Barbara Duden has suggested, Western anatomy cannot be satisfied with the surface of the skin, but tries to penetrate into the hidden depth of the body by cutting it up. Despite its sophistication, x-ray screening also tries to reveal the hidden truth supposed to be concealed under the surface of the skin. The technique of the beholder (Jonathan Crary) consists in penetrating into the invisible and visualizing what has remained invisible. This desire of "visual penetration" so to speak, seems to be criticized by our Japanese comic author. For, in the story, the military manoeuvre of the x-ray screening is doomed to failure...

Three factors trigger the failure; and all these factors are related to altruistic behaviors. First, the mayor, who has been supposed to be the leader of the parasite, sacrifices himself.

Before being shot like a bees' nest, the mayor gives his final conference in front of the army. He refuses any idea of environmental protection or the move-

ment for the prevention of cruelty to animals. All these measures are, according to him, nothing but a deformed expressions of human egoism. While preaching the harmony on earth, the ecological movements contribute, in reality, to the destruction of the earth's nature. For the worst parasite on earth is nothing other than the human beings. The so-called parasite is accomplishing the sacred mission of eliminating the over-populated human species, so as to restore ecological balance on earth for the future of all lives..." This somewhat naive and dangerous warning is of course scornfully ignored by the soldiers who shot this supposed leader of the parasite, disguised as the mayor. And to their surprise, the body is revealed to be that of a human being.

As a human being, the mayor would have been able to survive, if he wished, by safely passing the x-ray screening. And yet he sacrificed himself for the cause of the parasite with the following will: "Human beings, you shall learn before long how important your own natural enemy is [occupying a superior position in the natural kingdom]. It is your duty to protect the parasite." At best, it could not be anything other than a parody of the statement by an ecology fundamentalist. Ironically, however, the massacre of the parasite, carried out by the army in horror, bears witness to the brutal nature of human species, which has no other aim than mercilessly to annihilate any creature which menaces human existence.

On a rather superficial level, here is a simple message that the author wanted to transmit to the readers of the story. Human beings have to keep in mind the fact that they are the worst parasites on earth. For the pigs which provide pork, human beings are no better than parasites. And yet both of them can be understood as coexisting in symbiosis, from a holistic point of view (vol. 6, p.131). The parasites are created by the storyteller to reveal this simple truth. Yet, there still remain at least two other lessons that we can learn from this tale. Both of them are also related to the act of sacrifice taken by the parasites, which can be understood in terms of altruistic behavior (as mentioned earlier).

## 7

Secondly, therefore, the "female" parasite, which made the "epiphanic experience" (Barbara Duden) of pregnancy and is going to give birth to the human baby, gradually begins to understand human sentiment. In front of the boy's girl friend, who is worried about his life and safety, the parasite heaves a sigh, saying "Is it an envy if I wish I could share your affection?" (vol.8, p.18). Later, she is surprised by her own irrational behavior of uselessly killing a detective when the detective has threatened to kill "her" baby in revenge for his massacred wife and daughter. Half-knowing that he means "her" only to give "her" a trial, the parasite cannot suppress a kind of mother instinct that springs up in her, and desperately tries to

save "her" baby at the expense of "her" own safety.

The murder of the detective is a fatal error, and "she" is welcomed by a shower of bullets by police agents. With "her" powers of destruction, it would have been easy to survive, but "she" gives up fighting and sacrifices herself for the survival of "her" baby (vol.8). To protect the baby from the bullets, "she" transforms "her" hair into a cocoon like shelter. This reminds us of the mantella of the Madonna Misericordia of the Christian iconography. (Hubert Damisch's Freudian interpretation shows in reference to the Jewish tradition, that a niche like chamber hidden behind Madonna's mantella is self-evidently a metonymical substitution of the foetus, while the mantella which hides the interior being the substitute of labia.) Thus the parasite transfigures into a protecting cape to secure the human baby. The relationship between parasitism and protection is reversed here, and the vampire dies as the Holy Mother. This "consecration" is realized by the religious and theatrical transsubstantiation of the "abject" (in the sense of Julia Kristeva) into a sacred relic.

Before expiring, the "female" parasite entrusts with satisfied countenance the care of this "usual human baby" to the protagonist schoolboy. It seems as if she had understood her *raison-d'être* as an example of altruistic behavior (as explained by the university professor of biology). While the boy muses upon "her" last words of gratefulness to the boy's acceptance of "her" baby, Migy is confused by this "foolish" self-sacrifice.

Third, Migy also sacrifices itself for the survival of the boy. It would have been easy to kill, one by one, the hostile parasites. But the dead "female" parasite had prepared, before her death, an invincible creature composed of five parasites. For the boy and Migy, it is out of question to overcome the attack of this formidable enemy, which has massacred all the armed forces at the city hall carnage. In the final duel with this foe, Migy takes an unexpected strategy of separating itself from the boy. If the foe owes its invincibility to the unity of four individuals under the forced command by the one occupying the head, Migy trusts, in contrast, on the dividability of the individual into two independent parts.

The historical circumstances would permit us to suppose a geo-political background subconsciously imprinted in this confrontation between the dividable self and the unified political body. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, people felt disillusion by the dream of the forced union of world-wide communism, which proved to be a type of collective dictatorship. Even in North America, a book with the title of *Disunited States of America* has recently become a best-seller. French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy proposed an *Être singulier pluriel*, to question the conventional Western idea of the human being as an individual/indivisible entity. In his *La Pureté Dangéreuse*, Bernard Henri-Lévi also pointed out the danger of the

quest for singular purity for purity's sake. It seems as if the effort of maintaining a united political body by force has definitively given way (even on the level of nation-state building) and the state of being constantly contaminated by parasites has become the alternative of the post-cold war, post-colonial era.

To turn back to our story of the boy and Migy, however, even with this strategy of dividing the self into plurality, Migy fails to kill the foe, and for want of better solution, Migy finally saves the boy's life at the price of its own. In its vanishing consciousness, the dying Migy finds its final satisfaction. At this self-sacrifice by the company parasite, the boy also recognizes what he has shared with Migy. The loss of his right arm also means the loss of the other in his own self, without which he can no longer maintain his integrity as an individual. Suddenly the story takes a pessimistic and tragic tone, at the end of the volume 9....

## 8

I have to refrain from telling what kind of reversals, upside-downs and table turnings still await the readers in the final volume 10. Instead, let us see what is at stake in this fantastic story in terms of the imagination of the body. In the final analysis, a question is raised in front of two incompatible ethics. One, based on the dignity of the irreplaceable individual and the other gives priority to the holistic equilibrium of the environment. From the latter point of view, it is human beings which are the poison of the earth, and the parasites can be regarded as the necessary remedy to neutralize this poison in the planet's ecosystem (vol. 3 p. 204; vol. 10, p.142). Still, the pregnant "female" parasite wonders, if the baby "she" has conceived is a poison... The author confesses in the postscript to have struggled to overcome this dilemma in search of the denouement of the story. Yet it is in this dilemma between the two antithetical choices (or two incommensurable ethics) that the author successfully articulates the instability of the "self" which fluctuates in the symbiosis with others.

To understand better the ethical implication of the politics of the body in this story, it would be helpful to cast here a glance on the recent development of immunology and its impact on a wide range of the reading public.

In his best-sellers, *The Laughing Ascarid* (1994), Dr. Kōichirō Fujita advances an interesting hypothesis. According to him, Ascarid, a parasite living in the human intestines, which still prevailed in Japan 30 years ago, has prevented the people from being attacked by the atopic skin inflammations or the cryptomeria pollen allergy (analogous with hay fever).

A person having been contaminated in childhood by the ascarid retains the immunoglobulin E (IgE) which has been produced in reaction to ascarid's excretion. Most of the immunoglobulin E is inactive and covers the surface of the cells

known as basophile leukocyte or mastocyte. Thus even the new immunoglobulin E is later produced in reaction to such allergen as cryptomeria pollen or the dog ticks (*konahyōdani*, in Japanese) it cannot be combined with leukocyte or mastocyte. So the production of the chemical trigger to the allergy is prevented.

Ironically enough, therefore, the extermination of the ascarid by Japanese hygienic policy in the last half century contributed to the development of atopic skin diseases among many contemporary Japanese. Tada Tomio also argues in his best-seller *Semiotics of the Immune System* (1994), that the improvement of hygienic conditions and the development of the antibiotics have provoked the prevalence of allergies. Because of the decrease of usual bacteria and antigens, the immune system seems to have lost its conventional enemy. The environment of symbiosis with the antigen in a subtle equilibrium has been rapidly destroyed. Instead, an unprecedented aseptic germ-free condition has been created in the advanced countries. In this obsessive bacteria-phobia, any possibility of symbiosis is rejected by the contemporary Japanese, even mentally, as the wide spread demand in the consumer market for the anti-bacterial stationary goods [*kôkin guzzu*] proves. In this condition, the immune system begins to show symptoms of over-reactions to, and excessive refusal of, the slightest changes in nature. Tada Tomio also warns us by saying that the extermination of natural enemies and parasites eventually results in the occurrence of self-destructive autoimmune diseases [*jiko men'eki byō*], the symptom of its unprecedented increase being already reported.

The obsession with parasite-free hygienics may also be understood as a metonymical expression of the obsession with ethnic cleansing, based on the illusion of ethnic purity (and in this sense-and in this sense alone-Bernard Henri-Lévy's warning of Dangerous Purity is relevant). According to the Huntingtonien dichotomy, combined with discussions on the global standard of the 21st century world system, the Confucian East Asia as well as the Islamic world, which remain incompatible with the Western value system, may be regarded as parasites of the planet. As an aftermath of the destiny of Jewish and Polish peoples, who have fallen victim to extermination and holocaust during WW II, the horror and obsession with ethnic cleansing continues to spread in the world today. Iwaaki Hitoshi's story of the alien parasite can now be understood also as a parable of warning to this utopian dream of parasite-free paradise and serves as an antidote to the globalizing "puritan" paradigm of the New World Order. Here is also a symptom against the so-called global standard fundamentalism of the opening millennium.

To conclude in a frontal and conscious violation against the pretended "politically correctness", let us evoke a cosmetic metaphor. To prevent skin trouble, it is known that a symbiosis with some sorts of bacteria is indispensable. Iwaaki's story proposes a new insight into the hygienic of the skin, and opens up, I hope, an

unprecedented perspective on the politics of bodily imagination which we should elaborate for our own mutual symbiosis.

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