

【研究論文】

## A Study of the Relation between Body and the Picture Book —Focusing on Hiroshi Kagakui’s Creative Works—

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### Abstract

Hiroshi Kagakui’s protagonists are all chosen from items used in daily life such as pots, sets of futon and foods. Each has a face, arms, and legs. As their humorous figures evoke a spontaneous smile from the reader, we have the impression that the physical body accepts their beings. Kagakui’s picture books, with their chief aim to entertain small children specially, has a sympathetic resonance with them. This fundamental sense of unity is a result of Kagakui’s capability of appealing to the inner body. The reader enjoys sharing mutual empathy with his humorous protagonists.

**Keyword:** picture book, body, Hiroshi Kagakui

### Introduction

Hiroshi KAGAKUI (1955-2009) was active as an author of picture books for about four years, and his fifteen works have been loved not only by children but also by adults. His protagonists are all chosen from items used in daily life such as pots, sets of futon and various kinds of food, each of which has a face, arms, and legs.

As their humorous figures help to evoke spontaneous smiles from the readers, we have the impression that the reader can relate to the human-like characteristics that the protagonists have taken on, such as arms and feet. The chief aim of Kagakui’s picture books is to attain a sympathetic resonance with their intended readers, especially small children.



(fig.1) *Darumasan-ga*, Bronze Publishing Inc., 2008, front cover

The source of The *Darumasan series*<sup>i</sup> (figure 1) is unique when compared with previous picture books in Japan for babies. *When You Put on an Ofuton (Ofuton Kaketara)*<sup>ii</sup> was published in the year he died, and this book is the best expression of the characteristics of Kagakui’s picture books.

### 1. Kagakui’s creation of picture books

No human characters appear in Kagakui’s picture books. Inanimate “things” are the protagonists, all with faces and human-like arms and feet. When reading these picture books with children, as they sway and laugh as they mimic the actions of the characters in the book. Children may feel a mutual resonance with the human like character’s many of which are unexpected and humorous in Kagakui’s works.

Kagakui’s creation of picture books was his experience of working as a teacher at the School for Handicapped Children for thirty years. Based on his ideas on how to entertain children especially those with handicaps, he was involved in his original Puppet Vaudeville for

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about seven years—puppet plays using sound and movement only, such as making a hose seem like a snake or an elephant. From his experiences in Puppet Vaudeville, he made the following observation about his expression in picture books.

When contemplating things, they (i.e., these inanimate items) start to look like something. Just by adding movement or sound a thing begins to look like something else. They transform into something living.

Interested in such phenomena, I started working with them. My constant sources of ideas were things, sound, movement, and likening. The storyboards were often the drawing of the puppet's actions. When I looked them over, I thought they seemed like a picture book.<sup>iii</sup>

In this paper, I will focus on the work *When You Put on an Ofuton*, which is the most representative of Kagaku's characteristics (fig. 2). I will examine how "sleep" reflects how human beings live, and show that there is a relationship between the behavior of Kagaku's characters and the readers.

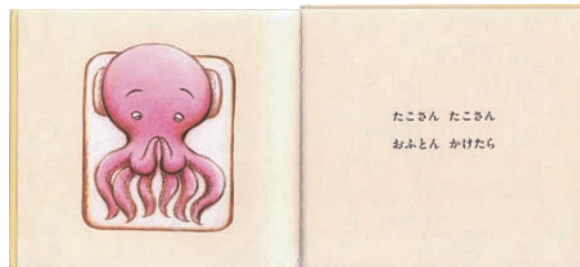


(fig.2) *When You Put on an Ofuton*, Bronze Publishing Inc., 2009, front cover

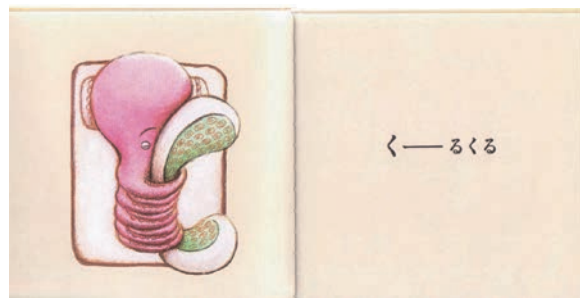
## 2. Overall structure

The book consists of twenty-four pages. With the exception of the first page, the book consists of six sets, each consisting of two two-page spreads, and is read with a one-two rhythm in Japanese.

The first two-page spread shows an octopus, "Tako-san", resting on a bed, with the caption, "Tako-san, Tako-san, When you put on an



(fig.3) pp.2-3



(fig.4) pp.4-5

*Ofuton...*" (fig.3). The second two-page spread now shows Tako-san grasping an ofuton in a letter "C" (fig.4).

So when the reader turns the page, that page covers the preceding page like a futon. In other words, the bodily action of reading and turning the page is directly linked to the development of the story, and the reader assumes an active relationship with the picture book.

There are an equal number of living and non-living characters in the book, starting with the octopus, and then going in to various types of things including soft ice cream, toilet paper and beans.

Aside from the cover, all the characters are shown from above. When the reader turns the page, he or she covers each character with an ofuton, which leads to a change but without disturbing the sleep of the character. However, with the exception of the ant that appears in the middle of the book, all the characters have their eyes closed.

Therefore, even though an ofuton is given to each of the characters, their sleep remains undisturbed. This continues until the last scene with a set of ofuton (used as a bedding mattress) and a pillow. The characters do not make eye contact with the reader, and with exception of the last character—that is, ofuton's mouth is not drawn in so that its facial expression does not tell us what it is feeling or

thinking.

On the first page of this set, the ofuton and the pillow are facing the reader, where they are fast asleep in a closed-in space. When the reader turns the page, he or she covers each character with an ofuton, without disturbing the sleep of the characters even with this change.

### 3. The depiction of Sleep

Let us see how each character is shown with the ofuton.

The octopus is grasping its arms into the shape of the letter “c”. Next, the soft ice cream lying on its side is unable to stay awake. It will eventually melt but its melting will be hastened by being covered with an ofuton.

In contrast with the octopus and the soft ice cream, the ant appearing next expresses its joy with the word *ni-ko niko* (=with a smile) when covered with an ofuton (fig.5).



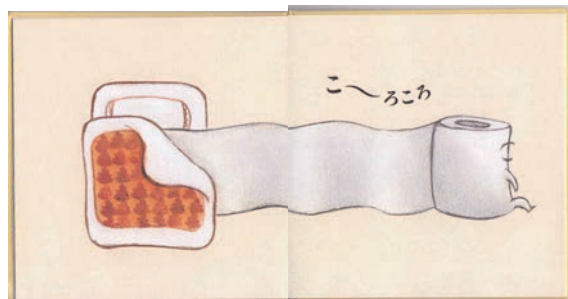
(fig.5) pp.12-13

The illustration of the ant is much smaller than all of the others, and in the next scene, the eyes of the rotund ant obviously express delight. This is the only character whose eyes are open, and the joy of covering oneself with an ofuton and its joy is shared with the reader through eye contact. However, the illustration is tiny, and the reader must purposefully look at it to understand this.

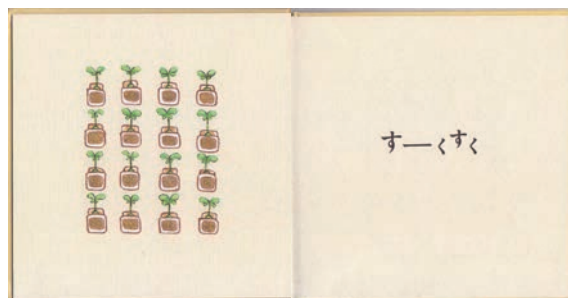
Next, the toilet paper is without self-awareness due to its being in a deep sleep with the word *ko-ro koro* (=rolling) (fig.6).

The beans have transformed into a form without faces, arms, and legs, and the word *su-ku suku* (=growing nicely) gives a sense of forward-looking expansion and growth (fig.7).

Up to now, each character was shown alone, now 16 beans are shown in the same scene in their own beds. It is unsettling for a bean to



(fig.6) pp.16-17



(fig.7) pp.20-21

sleep alone, but when they are with other beans, then they all feel a sense of security.

The depiction of sleep from the octopus to the beans demonstrates a flow from insecurity to joy, and then growth. Not just the joy and sense of freedom of life, but also the insecurity and feeling of entrapment pertaining to human life can be depicted in this one picture book.

Although all the characters up to now had arms and legs, the last set of an ofuton mattress and a pillow do not have either at first (fig. 8). However, in the next scene, the ofuton covering itself now has arms that seem to embrace the whole bed (ofuton mattress), so that the whole set of ofuton mattress, pillow and ofuton covering can at last enjoy a peaceful sleep (fig.9).

The ofuton and the pillow are have pink shading below the eyes to indicate the rising feeling of warmth that the ofuton covering is providing them. Therefore, we are shown an image of the bed itself deep in sleep.

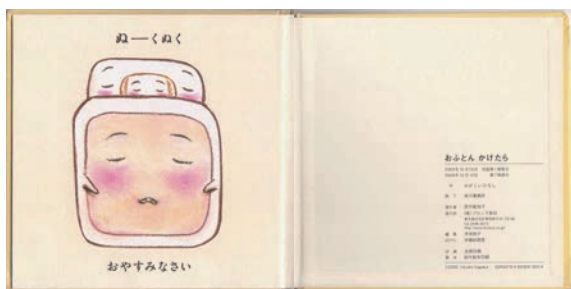
It is well known that sleep is indispensable for the life of living creatures. It is an activity closely intertwined with life. Sleep is a natural, irrational act which renders us defenseless to the outside world. Sleep is thus a micro-image of the joy and insecurity of life itself, and the subsequent feeling of freedom and entrapment that accompanies them. By the abstraction and symbolization of divergent things interfused together as the “things” in this book, their

essential aspects are concreted and clearly represented.

Sleep is equalizing for everyone. The “things” appearing in this book are varied, but they all are covered by an ofuton in the same way. In other words, the reader and the “things” in the picture book comprise a community revolving around sleep. This picture book shows the realization of this sense of community can be easily seen for the warm sense of being wrapped together in an ofuton.



(fig.8) pp.22-23



(fig.9) pp.24-25

#### 4. A sense of life being alive in “things”

Besides things that actually have legs like the octopus and the ant, in *When You Put on an Ofuton* things without legs such as the soft ice cream, toilet paper, and the beans are given arms and legs shaped like protuberances growing from them without changing their overall shape. The functions and texture of each character are preserved even through the actions and the onomatopoeic sounds.

In other words, the addition of eyes and arms and legs indicating sound, movement, and furthermore life is integrated with these things.

Reading the book with infants, bodily actions in imitation of the characters, such as rolling up inside a coat like the octopus, or rolling on the floor like the toilet paper, are observed. There is no background to this work: from beginning to end the consistent structure

of the book is one in which the characters face the reader squarely from the front. For that reason, the focus is restricted to their actions and changes in state, and it is easy for the reader to directly and physically respond to them.

The most salient feature of this work is that both a “normal” ofuton without a face, arms, and legs and an ofuton with a face, arms, and legs appear. There are other examples in which personified characters are depicted on the back covers in their original appearance, but they do not present both aspects as clearly as in *When You Put on an Ofuton*. Kagakui’s idea that “things” also have their own life is unequivocally represented.

#### Conclusion

At the source of the reader’s sense of unity with the work there may be a primordial and shared sense of urging in the human body. Kagakui says, “A sense of commonality with every living person in terms of physical senses and biology, such as eating, has been important for me.”<sup>iv</sup>

In *When You Put an Ofuton* all of the universe goes to sleep from the tiny living creature that is the ant even to the bed and pillow. Rooted in our daily activities, this very creature activity of sleeping represents the acceptance of anything and everything. In Hiroshi Kagakui’s book, the image of sleep can be said to welcome everyone.

Kagakui’s aim—the depiction of our common and immediate feelings, among them being those directly linked to life, that is to say, a depiction of the fountainhead of humanity, and the joy of sharing that sense with the reader—comes to fruition in this work.

Picture books of course are enjoyable for following a storyline dealing with the feelings of the protagonist. However, the true delight of picture books is when adults and children can read together certain messages by taking the book in hand, or can open up their individual physical or internal worlds.

An approach to Kagakui’s picture books may provide great hints for contemplating the nature of the relationship between the picture

book and the reader and among people linked

together by the picture book.

This paper was first presented at The 22nd Biennial Congress of IRSL held at the University of Worcester, United Kingdom, on 12th August 2015.

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<sup>i</sup> *Darumasan-ga*, Bronze Publishing Inc.,2008  
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*Darumasan-to*, Bronze Publishing Inc.,2009

<sup>ii</sup> *Ofuton kaketara*, Bronze Publishing Inc.,2009

<sup>iii</sup> *Ehon Navi BLOG - Interview with Hiroshi Kagakui-*. Ehon Navi. Web. 1 Sep 2013.  
<[http://newblog.ehonnavi.net/2009/01/post\\_153.html](http://newblog.ehonnavi.net/2009/01/post_153.html)>.

<sup>iv</sup> *Kodansha Ehon Tsushin -Picture Book Rookie Award interview-*. Kodansha. Web. 1 Sep 2013.  
<<http://shop.kodansha.jp/bc/ehon/interview>>