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When Life Came to Town: Seeing *Doubles* after *Cocktail Party*

David P. Shea

Abstract: Recently, the noted American film director, Regge Life, came to Keio University as a guest speaker to talk about his films, particularly his newest feature, *Cocktail Party*, an adaptation of the award-winning Japanese novel by Tatsuhiro Oshiro. The film suggests that harm is an inevitable part of the U.S. military presence in Japan, in spite of stated policy intentions. Further, by making the protagonist from Tokyo, the suggestion is made that all of Japan is implicated in the relationship with America -– and, by extension, the larger world and its languages, cultures, and ethnicities. In his talk, Mr. Life also spoke about one of his first documentary films, *Doubles*, which introduces multiracial children who have rights and allegiances to two languages and two cultures. In this essay, I discuss issues raised by Mr. Life, with particular reference to student response to *Cocktail Party*, as well as my personal experience raising bilingual, bicultural children on the one hand, and dealing with being defined in racial terms as a outsider in Japan, on the other. I argue that while race is fundamental to understanding American society, it was not until I came to Japan that I understood what being white (or colored) really means. The issue is relevant for Japanese who, like the young protagonist in *Cocktail Party*, are caught up in global events and struggle to assert agency and responsibility in an increasingly multiracial, multilingual world.

Introduction

Recently, the acclaimed American filmmaker, Theodore ‘Regge’ Life, visited Keio University as a guest speaker, thanks in part to financial support

from the Faculty of Business & Commerce, the Global Passport Program, and the Office for Academic Development of Individual Research. On June 22, Mr. Life spoke in an Open Lecture format to over 200 students in the Symposium Space at Hiyoshi, which followed an open screening of his film *Cocktail Party*[1] the evening before, attended by one of the film's central actors, Mr. Tatsuo Ichikawa. Mr. Life also visited Mita campus on the day of his visit and spoke to my GPP class in the afternoon.

I first encountered the name Regge Life in 1995 when I attended a screening of his film *Doubles*, a brilliant documentary about the multicultural, multiracial children of American and Japanese parents growing up in Japan, not as "half" (*haafu*) but as doubles, with claims to two languages and two cultures, while facing problems stemming from discrimination and alienation. When I saw *Doubles*, the film made a particularly strong impression because I was at the time struggling to raise my own multiracial children as bilinguals with two languages and two cultures, as fully Japanese as they were American, with rights to be both. My son now lives in London and my daughter has just graduated from a Canadian university, and I have never forgotten Regge Life's name because of the inspiration and insight his film provided at a critical time in my life.

In addition to *Doubles*, the director has made a number of other acclaimed documentaries. *Struggle & Success: The African American Experience in Japan* was the first, and *After America, After Japan* as well as *A Good Return* followed *Doubles*, all of which deal with the duality and ambiguity of being multicultural and the challenges associated with adjusting to different cultures, particularly from an African American perspective. The most recent film, *Cocktail Party* is a not a documentary, but an original retelling of a short novel written in 1966 about an all-too-common incident of sexual assault that happened near an American military

base in Okinawa. The film, according to its official release circular, points to the "human toll of accommodating long term military occupation" and suggests that harm is inevitably a part of the equation, however unintended. *Cocktail Party* has received a number of awards and has been recognized at recent film festivals in both Japan and the U.S.

With the visit of Mr. Life, I thought it a good opportunity to use the film as one of the texts in my English classes, which are content based[2)] and deal with social issues involving business, culture, and society. I assigned two second-year advanced English communication classes, as well as my GPP seminar at Mita to watch *Cocktail Party* for homework, and I asked a first-year advanced communication class to attend the screening of the film. In addition, one of the second-year communication classes attended Mr. Life's talk in the Symposium Space. In the following section, I present a short summary of the film and the novel on which it is based, after which I discuss student comments, tracing how they responded to the film and what they felt about its themes.

Cocktail Party

The film is noticeably different in terms of both plot and tone from Oshiro's (1989/1966) original narrative. The novel is told from the perspective of Mr. Ogawa, in a stream of consciousness style, with voices that chronicle events that happen to the protagonist, an Okinawan who speaks Chinese as well as English and was in China during the war. The story is set during the 1960s when memories of the war were close and Okinawa remained under American occupation. The narrative begins with Ogawa wandering lost on the U.S. military base, admiring the rich lifestyles of the Americans and thinking about the "voluptuous" wife of Commander Miller, to whose house he has been invited for a cocktail party. The political and economic

imbalance between the U.S. and Japan is taken as a matter of course, and Ogawa muses on parallels between the Japanese colonization of China and the U.S. occupation of Okinawa. He makes the case for reversion to Japan – where it belongs, he asserts, and at the end of the evening, he accompanies the other guests who go in search of a young American boy who did not return from school. It turns out that the boy's nanny, an Okinawan local, had taken the boy home without telling anyone, which is ironic because during the search, Ogawa hears about the rape of his daughter, and the news upsets him tremendously. Because Okinawa is under U.S. military control, however, there is nothing he can do. To add insult to injury, Ogawa's daughter is herself arrested because she pushed her assailant, an American serviceman renting an apartment from Ogawa, over a cliff, breaking his leg. Ogawa asks his friend, Sun, a Chinese lawyer for help that he does not receive, and the story ends on a rather bleak note of "mutual distrust and suspicion that plague people who live in the midst of an enemy" (p. 48).

Unlike the novel, the film is set in post-reversion Okinawa (after 2000) that is no longer under military rule, nor is there much of a gap in terms of lifestyle or affluence. The film begins at the officer's club on the military base, where Mr. Uehara, a Japanese businessman and Mr. Ohashi, the protagonist, have been invited by Major Porter in a revival of the cocktail party tradition. The American assailant, Wilson, is a military officer who lives on base and meets Naomi, Ohashi's 19 year old daughter, at a bar. He does not break his leg. The assault is presented as an incident of date rape, about which both parties, Wilson and Naomi, provide differing accounts. The next day, Naomi's father helps his daughter contact the Japanese police, who send a detective to take Naomi's testimony, a move which triggers a parallel investigation by the U.S. military police. A relatively straightforward narrative shifts between the different perspectives that play against each

other. We see through the eyes of the father, and his introduction to and subsequent negotiations with Major Porter and Mr. Uehara, a businessman hoping to get a contract from the base, but we also see through the eyes of Naomi as she relates her side of the assault that took place outside the bar, first to the Japanese police and then to her lawyer. In addition, we see the American point of view, that of Major Porter as well as Wilson, who strongly asserts consensuality and denies any guilt, although his protests ring false – at least to my ears – in contradistinction to Naomi, who insists that she was assaulted, although in her trauma, she does not remember the exact sequence of events very well. It turns out that Uehara's sister was also assaulted twenty years before, which has scarred Uehara and taught him how difficult it is to bring a charge of rape against an American soldier. As the narrative changes according to the distinct perspectives, with Ohashi's certainty contrasting with Wilson's categorical denials and the American commander's instinctive protection of soldiers under his command, the truth slowly emerges within the "he said, she said" ambiguity of rape cases, one person's word set against the other's. The situation is resolved when Naomi talks to her lawyer and Wilson is interrogated by the military police, and we see the parallel accounts of what actually happened in tightly framed flashbacks to the night at the bar, with Wilson's guilt slowly becoming clear. There is no real resolution, however. Although the American is culpable and thus subject to prosecution under Japanese law, Naomi states that she is undecided whether to press charges in a lengthy and difficult court trial, or leave Okinawa and return to Tokyo, a note of ambiguity tempered by an assertion of agency (Naomi will decide her future) on which the film ends.

Critical Response

Cocktail Party has been well received. It was an official selection at noted

film festivals in Japan and the U.S. and has earned a number of positive reviews. According to the accompanying flyer, Merry White, the well-known anthropologist, called the film "subtle" and its dramatic performances "excellent." Ronald Suleski, renowned East Asian scholar, noted that the film is "thoughtful and insightful and satisfying," and Peter Grilli of the Japan Society of Boston rated the film "powerful" and "compelling."

Given the complexity of perspective and the controversy of sexual assault, it was clear that using *Cocktail Party* as an assigned text in English class would be challenging for students. Consequently, I set out to measure reactions by asking everyone to fill out open-ended surveys in the final minutes of the class following Mr. Life's visit. I surveyed four classes, the first year film class, the two second year communication classes, and the Mita seminar (which included graduate and exchange students). I asked what students thought about the film, whether they liked it, what themes they noticed, how they understood the issues raised. Students were not pressured to give positive responses, and all surveys were anonymous, with no way to trace who wrote what opinion. There were, in total, over 70 comments collected.

Code	Class	N
F	1st year Film	19
W	2nd year Communication	21
T	2nd year Communication	20
G	seminar on Japanese culture	11

To analyze the data, I read all remarks iteratively, selecting and refining categories according to salience and commonality. The intention was not to capture a representative spectrum of student response, but to highlight key categories of interpretation in order to gain a better idea of how students understood and related to the film.

Student reactions to Mr. Life's talk were broadly positive. One student wrote "I loved Regge's talk" (T-15) and another said that it "gave me confidence to look for dreams and gain them" (T-9), while yet another added "his experiences were beyond my expectation... and taught us a lot of things" (T-11). Comments about the film, however, were more varied. While students were largely positive in their response, some were surprised by the topic. One student, for example, wrote that, judging from the title, s/he expected a light story about partying but was shocked to encounter the narrative of an assault. A number of students were unmoved and critical. One student diplomatically noted that "the movie was not my favorite" (T-7) and another commented that "it could have been a little more interesting" (T-10). Not a few were confused by the lack of an easy-to-follow narrative and tentative resolution at the end, which one student called "a bit ambiguous" (W-7) and another said "made me feel strange" (F-1). For many students, however, interest was generated by the topic of Okinawa. There is strong awareness of the American military bases there, an issue that often appears in national news. Okinawa is not something about which students know a lot, but it is nevertheless a topic in which they seem to think they *should* be interested. Students wrote:

> *Before watching the film, I never thought about the Okinawa problem deeply, but in the movie it was depicted personally, and I enjoyed watching it. (W-8)*
>
> *This was the first time I saw a movie about Okinawa. Some of the scenes were shocking but I thought I should watch until the end. (W-17)*
>
> *Since I was born and raised in Tokyo, I didn't feel close to Okinawa at all. (W-20)*
>
> *I had no image of Okinawa. Japanese students are just taught that*

Okinawa was returned in 1972.... The Japanese not in Okinawa avoid knowing the real facts, which is why the movie made me kind of uncomfortable. (GPP-5)
The film showed a side of Japan that is often overlooked. (GPP-10)
I found out how blind I was to the Okinawa situation. I didn't take things happening in Okinawa as problems of Japan. (T-5)
This is a problem we all know of but no one really thinks about it because it is so far away. (T-14)

Students were saying not only that Okinawa is a part of Japan, but that it is often overlooked and they themselves rarely thought about either the prefecture's history or its current development. As a result, the film was viewed by many as a chance to think about issues not normally addressed. In one respect, interest in Okinawa rates high as a subject of debate, "often seen in the news" (T-15). At the same time, many people in Tokyo do not really know – or "avoid knowing" (GPP-5) what is going on, given the "distance" (GPP-3) from the mainland. In short, the film hit a nerve and generated positive valence.

At the same time, there was a substantial minority of students who had an overall negative reaction to the film, rejecting it out of hand, with critical remarks clustering around two points: pace and responsibility. First, students who were critical said that they thought the film was slow and boring, with acting styles that were stiff and understated. Students wrote:

the movie goes so slowly that it makes me sleepy (W-2)
I didn't like ... the Japanese acting. I felt like they were just reading the lines. (W-15)
it was boring... and I almost fell asleep. (F-6)

the acting was horrible.... (T-2)
To be honest, I didn't like the film.... (T-4)
I didn't like the acting. (T-10)

Students seemed unimpressed by the reserved tone and measured dialog. Those who were critical seemed to completely miss how the relatively fixed camera style and formal delivery is a stylistic construct, reminiscent of (and possibly in homage to) the great Japanese director Ozu Yasujiro. Then again, my own impression of the film was that the acting was genuine and emotionally powerful. Some students were simply impatient and held unreasonable expectations of excitement and stimulation. In other words, criticism was grounded in an oversized Hollywood sensitivity that artificially inflates the sensational, the near opposite of Ozu-style reserve, wry understatement, and complexity.

The second troubling criticism focused on responsibility: a surprising number of students were dismissive of Naomi's claims of rape. In the film, the discourse of assault is presented from an American point of view, which contains implicit assumptions about guilt and responsibility. While some students seemed to relate to – or understand this worldview, others missed the slow disintegration of Wilson's story, perhaps because of his cockiness, which seemed to me to be the overly loud protest of the guilty. Students who were critical, however, were not at all sympathetic to Naomi's plight, charging that she should not have gotten into the situation in the first place, drinking and enjoying herself in a dangerous area. They also stated that she was unclear about the attack, and that she didn't produce the final version of her story until the heated exchange with the lawyer, after she had been questioned repeatedly. Students wrote:

> *I couldn't feel sympathy with Naomi because she was acting childish for her age 19. (W-9)*
> *I didn't like how it made you think Naomi was the victim and Wilson was to blame, but doing a film about something we tend to look away from was good. (T-2)*
> *I thought Naomi was to be blamed. I didn't like her because she was hiding from what happened. She should have been more careful. (T-8)*
> *I didn't like how Mr. Ohashi believed too much in his daughter, Naomi's innocence. (T-10)*
> *I didn't like Naomi because she acts like a complete victim although she also made a mistake. (T-12)*

It seemed, in fact, that students were blaming Naomi for being assaulted. In contrast, Americans would likely say that rape is clearly and unambiguously a violent assault, regardless of the extenuating circumstances. A girl has the right to have a good time at a bar and to flirt with a man, but she also has the right to call an end to the fun, and to expect that no means no. What students were asserting is rooted, arguably, in a decidedly un-American moral universe with sharper boundaries assigning blame and delineating right and wrong. At the same time, I don't think that students were actually agreeing with Wilson's classic justification of rape: that no means yes. In Wilson's skewed view of the world, violence is rationalized by sexism. Unfamiliar with the discourse about date rape, students were adopting a moralistic attitude that granted little room for making a mistake.

While I was dismayed by the apparent insensitivity to the assault, I also recognize that there is perhaps some similarity between unsympathetic students and my own perspective as a protective father. One of my first reactions to the film was that I wanted my daughter to watch it, partly as a

reminder – or warning about what could happen if, like Naomi, she were not careful. It seems that, in a sense, students criticizing Naomi were speaking from the same sensitivity that gave rise to my concern; in one respect, they had internalized this parental warning. They were saying that they recognize the danger in the desire to "just have a good time," which Naomi offered in explanation of why she left the bar and stepped into an abandoned building with Wilson. With warning sensors fully functioning, students were probably saying that they would never have done the same. Though their unforgiving attitude is tantamount to blaming the victim, I believe they were simply looking at the film from too narrow a viewpoint. In sum, though the teacher in me hoped students would stand in solidarity with the film's protagonist, the father in me recognized where student criticism was coming from.

In contrast to the minority who expressed censure, most students adopted a sympathetic understanding of Naomi, one that recognized the irrefutable reality that everyone makes mistakes. Some related to Naomi in terms of their own vulnerability, while others reflected more tolerance for error. Students wrote:

> *At first I was not really on the side of Naomi but then I realized the struggle she felt. Sometimes, even if you are on the side of justice, it is hard to win the battle. Reality is cruel. (W-5)*
> *It really opened my eyes to the dangers of night life. (W-13)*
> *It made me think how hard it is to talk about your own experience when it's a trauma. (F-3)*
> *I thought that this problem could happen to me, too. (W-16)*
> *that I am a girl made me realize how these things actually occur and... I need to protect myself. (F-17)*
> *the movie reminded me to be careful when we drink.... It's easy to make*

mistakes, and it made me think about what I would do if one of my close friends does something bad. (F-19)

During class discussion, I asked if students had ever drank alcohol with their friends when they were 19 – that is, while still not yet legally of age. All but one raised their hands. Perhaps they recognized how close to Naomi they stood on that point.

A third category of student response incorporated the shift in opinion that occurred after class discussion, something that often happens with other texts. Students tend to become more positive, more understanding, and more receptive after they have had the chance to talk about what happened and why. In other words, they learn dialogically from the ideas and insights expressed by classmates, which in turn stimulate their own interpretive response and interpretation. While the first impression of *Cocktail Party* was negative for many students, engaging in discussion afterward in class worked to deepen appreciation and change their mind about the film. Students wrote:

I found the film quite boring at first, but as I discussed about the themes and symbols, I found it quite interesting. (W-4)
At the time I finished watching, I felt it incomplete, but when I came to class and discussed the film with everyone, I got the idea why it's named Cocktail Party and I understood the change of Naomi at the end of the film. (W-6)
It [the film] was good material for discussion. (T-4)

Finding points of personal connection with the film also seemed to facilitate a more positive response. For instance, some students who attended the

director's talk were able to relate personally, which helped them recognize that a central theme underneath the shifting, unresolved narrative was not blame, but agency and responsibility for one's actions, a theme that has strong resonance with many students:

> *I changed my impression of the movie after listening to Regge's talk. When I watched the film, I couldn't see the theme and felt bad, but I realized that Regge was telling us to take responsibility for our acting and to keep in mind how you impact on others. (T-3)*
> *I didn't like the movie at first because I thought it was just telling us the problem Okinawa is facing, but after listening to Regge's talk, I realized that there were other messages he wanted to tell, such as taking responsibility for the choices we make. (T-20)*

In his address, Life made the point that he wanted to end the film with Naomi telling her parents that she herself would decide whether to continue with the lawsuit or return to Tokyo – either way, it was her decision. To hear the writer/director talk about an artistic decision allowed students to empathize with the character's motivation and understand her predicament.

Another interpretation that I introduced in class was the possibility that Naomi, being from Tokyo, could be seen as a symbol of Japan as a whole. Consequently, she represents the students themselves, with the implication that the military alliance which allowed the U.S. to appropriate Japanese territory is, in some respect, an assault on Japan, both in Okinawa and throughout the archipelago. In other words, Naomi is us. Consequently, we are faced, like her, with making a decision to assert agency, how we respond to the bases located throughout the country and, by extension, the role of the military itself within Japanese society. Of course, there is the perceived

geopolitical threat from China and Russia which stimulated the military alliance with the U.S. and, possibly, required the bases in the first place. The issue is open to debate, but agency brings the chance to raise one's voice and thus assert one's opinions as a citizen of a democratic society. The question is how to interpret the use of territory and deal with the associated effects on local residents, as the larger world intrudes on the local, with inevitable questions of rights and responsibilities regarding political as well as social, cultural and economic considerations. Like Naomi, we must make a decision about what to do, how to act.

In class discussion, some students made other, equally valid interpretations. One student, for instance, pointed out that things have changed. Though the military bases in Okinawa (and, by extension, throughout the country) still generate pain and controversy, the Japan portrayed in Oshiro's novel has changed dramatically over the past 50 years. The point is that "even though we're not sure" Naomi will continue the suit against Wilson, "the result is in contrast with Uehara's family decades ago" (GPP-11) when bringing suit against an American serviceman was not even within the realm of possibility.

Importantly, a few students noticed the positionality with which they viewed the film. The idea here is that interpretation is shaped by one's point of view. The perspective from which students watched the film involved implicit assumptions and expectations about value and judgement. One student wrote, for example:

> *I feel lucky to encounter this kind of movie. Maybe ordinary Japanese avoid heavy stories; we like more fun ones. I have a strong influence of American that makes me want to protect the marines. (T-18)*

The student makes an insightful point – two, in fact. First, students rarely watch movies like *Cocktail Party*. Movies are, more commonly, matters of entertainment, of distraction and amusement, which makes it difficult to "enjoy" a measured, formal performance about such a decidedly un-fun topic as rape. Most students have been raised on a steady diet of action adventure and super heroes, which almost always leads to a happy ending. Ambiguity, pain, and response to assault are themes that appear in many good films, but for 19 and 20 year-old students, it is easy to dismiss them as slow. Further, the student's comment about "protecting" the marines suggest the tendency to support what we know best. Most students viewed the film from a position of social and cultural certainty, one based in Tokyo. In general, students are isolated from the turbulence of Okinawa, and stand apart from the confluence of culture which the U.S. bases represent, where American perspectives clash with Japanese. Arguably, it is easier in Tokyo to insist on a singular cultural identity that distinguishes between us and them, insider and outsider, drawing a clear border between Japan and the world. In another sense, though, Japan as a whole and Tokyo specifically are increasingly open to the cultural complexities and multiple orientations which the film expresses. This confluence also presents a case for using a film like *Cocktail Party* in the language classroom, to highlight cultural ambiguities and the questions they elicit.

Seeing Doubles

Students did not watch the documentary *Doubles*, but the visit by the director led me to return to the film to see how I would respond not only as a parent, but as someone who for the past 20 years has been involved with issues of multicultural and multilingual identity on a personal as well as professional level. On the surface, the style of *Cocktail Party* is markedly

different from that of *Doubles*, but there is an underlying sensitivity and orientation the two films share. Both deal with personal issues of belonging and ownership. Both ask "who has the right to be here?" and both suggest that cultural identity is contested, multiple, and dynamic. Naomi is from Tokyo and lives in Okinawa. She speaks both English and Japanese, and, though the relationship goes terribly wrong, she gets involved with an American. Naomi poses the question that the informants in *Doubles* also wrestle with: "how is Japanese identity defined?" and she suggests that there is no simple answer. Both *Cocktail Party* and *Doubles* illustrate social heterogeneity and how living in any one culture inevitably entails friction and uncertainty, in terms of language, values, and orientation. On a personal note, after seeing *Doubles* again, I was engaged to consider not only the issue of multiculturalism, but also that of race.

Doubles traces the voices of bilingual, biracial children and adults born or raised in Japan, reflecting on their experience. There are three broad groups introduced. The film begins with the first, children born during the Occupation, when for seven years the American military controlled the entire country and contact between U.S. servicemen and Japanese women produced thousands of children. Many were left abandoned in Japan, facing stinging discrimination and isolation, and many were gathered and raised by Miki Sawada in the Elizabeth Sanders Orphanage in Oiso, with a sizeable number growing up and integrating into Japanese society. The second group are what one interviewee calls "undercover" Japanese, those who do not appear to be Japanese but in fact, are – or those who appear to be Japanese but who trace a multicultural heritage outside Japan. The third category are children of "modern" multiethnic families, the number of which has increased dramatically with the rapid economic growth of the bubble period that brought so many foreign nationals to Japan, and sent so many Japanese

abroad.

Most of the modern doubles who appear in the film talk of the difficulty in coming to terms with a multiethnic identity, but the film suggests that it is perhaps even more important to note that problems associated with multiculturality do not originate exclusively with the individual. They are also the result of discriminatory attitudes that exist in the surrounding society. In this way, doubles are perceived as Other, and they are rejected because their racial features signal difference. Race is not an empirical concept – most scientists flatly reject the term, but it is an irrefutable *social* construct that is incontrovertibly real because people use the idea of race to see and act in the world, typically in a discriminatory manner (Bradley, 2014). In the film, Hawaii is presented as so diverse that it is blind to racial (i.e., ethnic) diversity, and double children there are not teased because of their appearance. It is not the case, however, that America as a whole accepts racial difference. Race is absolutely fundamental to the American worldview: people unfailingly look at the world through the lens of color.

Doubles does not deal exclusively with children of African American fathers, but they are the largest group in the film. They also raise the issue of race as a category of prejudice, particularly in the U.S., which is often seen, incorrectly, as a melting pot. There is a scene when one girl recounts living in Japan, where she faced teasing for being different even though she had, in her words, "denied" her difference to fit in. Her father decided to move the family back to the States, to what she thought was her "home" country, only to find that in the U.S., "the real trouble began." She was shocked at the "hatred toward Blacks" shown by white Americans, and she realized that so many people did not fundamentally accept her. Moving back to America caused as much cultural shock and marginalization as living as a *gaijin* foreigner in Japan, leaving her with the feeling that she did not fit in

anywhere. The problem of belonging the girl faced and that many bilinguals wrestle with, goes beyond the identification the individual asserts; it is only resolved in the assertion of agency that acknowledges marginalization and prejudice that people face. In this respect, Life's film recognizes those who are overlooked and unheard. As one student wrote:

> *The movie speaks for the people who do not have a voice and who may be marginalized. (GPP-11)*

The issue of marginalization is fundamental to Japanese society, even as the country is being pulled slowly, ever so slowly, into the global community where citizenship and national identity are not defined in terms of "blood" but legal residence that allows multicultural, multiethnic plurality. In Japan, the dominant ideology is still that a person "belongs" to only one culture and only one language, as sharply divided racially as America, suggested by the term *haafu*, which is rooted in the discriminatory insult "half-breed," meant to disparage and diminish racially mixed children. There is little room for the overlap that allows people to live in two cultures, full members of both.

My personal response to seeing *Doubles* goes beyond considering my own children, who clearly fall into the category of modern doubles. On the one hand, the film reminds me that, rather than considering doubles a distinct, separate group, I increasingly see myself as a double, a bilingual, bicultural member of both American and Japanese societies with a dual set of rights and responsibilities. In other words, double is not simply a category into which one is born, but also a kind of dual consciousness (Gates, 2003; Pittman, 2016) that one grows into. Like the children in the film who are marginalized and excluded because of appearance, the way I look shapes the way I am perceived. I am seen, in other words, as different and my identity

is automatically and inevitably tied to this perception of otherness. The classification as outsider, however, is not wholly negative, and not something I reject. In fact, I embrace the term because the liminality in being double also entails the advantage of being able to draw on more that one set of linguistic and cultural resources to act in the world. There is, as Luke (2017) writes, real insight born in juxtaposition that is "often painful and difficult but insight nonetheless" (p. 5).

On the other hand, *Doubles* reminds me that I am white, a classification and orientation that I basically took for granted until I came to Japan and became double. I was born in the States and grew up in a racially separated city that, like many other places in the American South, was divided almost evenly between Black and White, even though almost all political and economic advantage was firmly and sometimes violently held by whites. Within the tension associated with racial segregation, there was little room for duality, even though there was room for declared identification. My father was a politician whose success depended on the African American vote, and a lawyer who (I was told) played a part in desegregating the lunch counters downtown. My mother was a flaming liberal who was passionate about racial equality and worked on the political campaign of one of the first Black mayors of the city. I always considered myself a liberal too, but I never knew what it meant to be white – or Black – until I moved to Japan.

I always thought race was a category to be ignored. I assumed that progressive equality required being blind to skin color, and not considering race when making decisions about such matters as hiring or admissions or residence. In Japan, I experienced race on entirely different terms, and for the first time in my life felt prejudice based on skin color. What I learned was not only that real estate agents might look at me and say "*gaijin dame*" (no foreigners), but that my mere presence causes consternation. People

avoid sitting next to me on the train, they move slightly away while walking down the street. Before I speak, before I say a word, I am judged and categorized, my limits measured, my threat estimated, my value assessed. It is not always negative, but it always happens. It is relentless and ever present in every interaction in which I engage. I can never forget that I am seen as different.

This, I imagine, is part of what it means to be Black in the States, that white people see you before they know you because they have prejudged who you are, your value and character in the instant they notice your skin color – and they always notice. Being white is nothing like being Black. White has a social privilege and advantage, and many whites in Japan are met with a kind of *akogare* admiration, while African Americans face a kind of double discrimination in addition to outsider status (Russell, 1991), but the constant prejudgments with which I am seen challenges my assumptions about race and the division that is typically unquestioned and accepted as inviolate. It is this point that I think about when I see *Doubles*, moved by its nuanced, overlapping perspective on race, and consider its Zen koan assertion that all of us are persons of color, yet we cannot think in terms of color anymore.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have tried to capture a personal reading of two films of Regge Life, stimulated by his visit to Keio University. I have presented a qualitative summary of student response outlining various categories of interpretation, both positive and negative, to the film *Cocktail Party*, and I have argued that the particular perspective from which students view the film informs their interpretation. In my own case, the director's visit led me to see *Doubles* again and reflect on the multicultural complexities that mixed race people

face, as a parent of bicultural children and as a double myself. I argue that there is an underlying theme that connects the two films, along the contour of belonging and agency, and I consider one aspect of what race means to me personally in Japan and in the States.

In the increasingly complex world in which we live, frequent border crossings and overlapping cultural identities generate tension for individuals, particularly those who are different in terms of appearance. As in *Doubles*, multiethnic individuals who live in the interstices of divergent cultures inevitably face discrimination and, like Naomi in *Cocktail Party*, sometimes even violence, particularly that imposed on women. But multiculturality also allows insight and advantage, particularly the flexibility to choose a unique path that blends differences into an original synthesis. *Cocktail Party* and *Doubles* (and the themes they raise) are not necessarily what all my students want to address in the L2 classroom, but they are nevertheless valid topics to consider, because learning a second language always entails shifts of identity, taking on aspects of the "other" and becoming to some extent a different person – in a sense, a double. This cultural complexity is the provenance of foreign language study and it suggests that the classroom is indeed a place where students (and teachers) shift the way they see the world. As we study, we see and are seen in different ways within another language and another cultural frame of reference.

Notes

1) The DVD is available for viewing in the Hiyoshi Media Center, thanks to the assistance of Asada-san and the library staff.

2) Content based refers to the study of the second language through content, where the focus of instruction is on a subject presented in English rather than English itself (e.g., vocabulary and grammar). SLA research, particularly immersion education,

has shown that content-based instruction is highly effective as a pedagogic approach to studying the L2 (e.g., Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

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