

Mutual
Images

ISSUE 7

AUTUMN 2019

LAYERS OF AESTHETICS AND ETHICS IN
JAPANESE POP CULTURE

MUTUAL IMAGES

ISSUE 7 – AUTUMN 2019

MUTUAL IMAGES

A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

FOUNDED BY

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JAPANESE POP CULTURE

EDITED BY
MARCO PELLITTERI

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A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

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Mutual Images is registered under the ISSN 2496-1868. This issue's Digital Object Identifier is: [HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.32926/7](https://doi.org/10.32926/7).

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CONTACT: mutualimages@gmail.com

MUTUAL IMAGES RESEARCH ASSOCIATION – Headquarters
3 allée de l'avenir, Les chênes entrée 3
64600 Anglet – France

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Research materials from fieldwork in Japan, 2013 – Vol. 1

Interviews with five animation directors/scriptwriters: Hirata Toshio, Rintarō, Kamiyama Kenji, Katsumata Tomoharu, Kinoshita Sayoko

Marco PELLITTERI | Shanghai International Studies University, China

[HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.32926/2019.7.PEL.RF](https://doi.org/10.32926/2019.7.PEL.RF)

PREAMBLE

Among the possible innovative ways to publish research data and materials—alongside the more established formats of the research paper, the academic article, and the critical review—we inaugurate here the format of the “Research Files”, batches of qualitative data which have been assessed as useful materials for other scholars.

A certain amount of data which academics collect often remains underused. But such data, if contextualised within one’s own past research activity, can be kept “alive” and perhaps be reborn and virtuously transmitted to other researchers who may want to make some use of them, citing the original source and therefore generating a proficuous circle of knowledge.

We decided to distribute a few of these materials over different issues of Mutual Images, grouping them by type. In this first instalment (presenting some early interviews from one of my own past projects), we are also suggesting a way to interpret the notion of “research files” for other scholars who in the future may want to experiment with it. The format of presentation we have thought of as appropriate—or, at least, admissible and functional—is that of recounting the general features of the original research project within which the data here published were produced, so to favour the circulation of ideas.¹

Date of submission: 18 October 2019

Date of acceptance: 3 December 2019

Date of publication: 20 December 2019

1. Introduction

Between 2013 and 2020 I have been engaging in three transdisciplinary research projects in Japan and Europe, funded by the Japan Foundation (March 2013 – March 2014), the JSPS (September 2014 – September 2016), the Hōsō Bunka Foundation (three annual grants, 2017–2020), and the Tōshiba International Foundation (two annual grants, 2017–2019). I have done this through multiple affiliations at Kōbe University (March 2013 – December 2018), Ca’ Foscari University of Venice (November 2016 – November 2019), and my current workplace, Shanghai International Studies University (from September 2018). The three projects I conducted over these years, overall different from each other in topic, scope, and range of methods, were nonetheless

¹ This preamble is a shorter recap from a section of the Editorial at pp. ix-x.

formulated and conducted in tight temporal sequence and thematic continuity, so to keep, by design, important points of contact with each other.

I will not describe all the three projects here. The purpose of this introduction is mainly to provide an initial and general contextualisation for the research materials I will later present. Moreover, I had the chance to partly utilise many of my data (from archive research and content analysis, in-depth interviews with key persons in Japan and Europe, and a multinational, longitudinal survey) in an extended selection of publications in journals and book chapters. Other materials, currently unpublished and partly or entirely unused, will be utilised in the future for publications, in the form of additional articles or books.

Nonetheless, here I will provide readers with some general coordinates on the subject and goals of the first of those three research projects.

2. The research project from which the following interviews stem

The title of the project I conducted in Japan in 2013–2014, funded by the Japan Foundation, was *Japan's traumatic events in homeland fiction and their presence in the European press: The cases of Japanese animation for youths (1972-2005) and the mainstream daily press in Italy, France, Germany (1991-2011)*. It was a two-fold research project. (1) A study of Japanese science fiction animation for youths produced from 1972 to 2005 dealing with traumatic events, from war to natural disasters, and its possible connections with the experiences and memories of some of the artists/producers who made those animations. This part of the research was conducted via the analysis of a selection of relevant works, and interviews with Japanese professionals of animation and international scholars. (2) A comparative media analysis—focussing on France, Germany, and Italy—of the story-telling strategies of the press regarding traumatic and culture-centred events in Japan and their relevant changes through time, in a combination with the role of forms of Japan's pop culture on notions about the country. This part of the study was conducted through the analysis of five main media events involving Japan which occurred from 1991 to 2011, as covered in a selection of influential newspapers in the three aforementioned countries, while also discussing the dimensions and relevance of the recognition of Japanese cultural forms such as manga and anime during those years as intervening factors in the agenda setting and representational tactics of the mainstream press on Japan during that time span.

The part 1 of my research, related to the fieldwork conducted by interviewing Japanese animation professionals, was divided into three steps. The first step was conducting a literature review and constructing a theoretical framework with a critical analysis of how some crucial Japanese traumas in the twentieth century, through stages of sociocultural internalisation in Japanese society, may have been transferred into a realistic, or allegorical, set of representations, references, and citations as they appeared in Japanese animation—in this instance, feature films and TV series. The second step of the research concerning this theme was an assessment of Japanese animation produced between 1972 and 2005 dealing with traumatic events related to war, environment, terrorism, invasion, and natural disasters. Such an analysis did not only deal with historical events—which I organised into a theorised classification—and with the series/films about which a correspondence was then proposed, but it also presented, in the third step of part 1 of this project, revealing interviews about the perceptions of these fictitious representations among Japanese animation makers and auteurs—directors, scriptwriters, animators, producers.

Here I will not delve into the explanation of part 2 of this research project, the one related to the content analysis of the media coverage on Japan in a selection of newspapers from France, Germany, and Italy. There might be an opportunity in a future instalment of these Research Files as well as in future publications currently being planned. But to better contextualise the interviews presented here and explain the research context in which they were included, I will briefly summarise the part of my research specifically focussing on the topic of the symbolic representations of war trauma in animation.

The overall hypothesis of the whole research project was circular. (1) Japanese animation makers represented, through metaphors embedded in their narratives, a sort of self-Orientalism process of “self-monstering” Japanese traumas in symbolic ways, whereas (2) European media, in a different context, have at times created a narrative of Japan and its populace as facing domestic disasters by putting up a fictitious “monstering of otherness” of Japanese emotions and national character, falling under the perspectives of western Orientalism, techno-Orientalism, and a blatant exotic perception of Japan at large.² In the following subsections, I will briefly comment on the work related to point (1) outlined just above.

² I use the locutions “self-monstering” and “monstering of otherness” as explained in Miyake 2012 and

2.1. Japanese traumas in animation for youths, 1972-2005

Among the notions of Japanese animation at large, especially in the Italian studies on this artistic form (Pellitteri 1999 and 2010, Ghilardi 2003 and 2010, Di Fratta 2007, Fontana 2013), one of the concepts which emerged strongly is a connection between the accounts of dramatic, catastrophic, traumatic events in anime for youths and the peculiar history of Japan in the twentieth century, in particular since the Second World War.

Using this theorised connection as the starting hypothesis of this portion of the research, I conducted a study on a selection of anime series and movies which deal with such events. The study I conducted consisted first of a thorough literature review on the conceptions of collective trauma in cultural sociology and an outlook on national traumas in Japan throughout the twentieth century.³ I identified a classification of types of historical traumas on a national level: natural disasters, the Second World War, the problems caused by radioactive pollution, social crises and shocking events in contemporary Japan. Within these macro-categories, I classified several major events which occurred in twentieth-century Japan and, for each occurrence, I found one or more thematically corresponding series/films, whose main topics can be associated with such an event. Thirteen major events of national relevance and thirty-eight anime works were selected for the analysis. In particular, the seven types of trauma I classified are: earthquakes, military invasions, nuclear bombs, internal riots and terrorism, natural disasters, pollution, and powerplant malfunctioning.

This segment of the study was also meant to identify—within the artistic and technical crews of the selected animation works—some of the key persons to interview about their opinions, insights, personal experience on the recent past of Japan, possible correlations or causations of which they might be aware between the memories of traumatic events witnessed or experienced and the themes of the animated works authored. Perhaps it is needless to say, the selection of these persons was limited to (1) individuals still alive, (2) individuals who were reachable in one way or another, officially or unofficially, and (3) individuals who agreed to be interviewed. A starting

2014. Among my very first conference papers and publications stemming from this research during its implementation or immediately after (in 2013-2014) are Pellitteri 2013a-b-c-d-e-f-g and 2014a-b-c. Cf. the bibliography for details.

³ The scholarship on the notion of trauma is very wide, of course. Since this is neither a complete research report nor a full-grown paper, I will not delve into the details of the theoretical framework I built for my research's actual implementation, but let me just mention some relevant sources: Alexander *et al.* 2004, Kurasawa 2004 and 2009, Cottle 2012.

assumption of this enquiry was that personal stories and experiences, and the internalisation of values and intense feelings related to national traumatic events, might have deeply influenced—consciously or not—several animation makers in their choosing and dealing with the topics of their animated series or films. In other words, a theoretical assumption was that there must have been a symbolised *recodification* of traumas at work among animation creators and by a big part of Japanese culture at large, so that the memory of those facts could be preserved not only, or mainly in a rational way but also via an allegorical and emotional fashion, for better internalisation among the younger spectators.⁴

The period initially chosen for the analysis of the anime works considered was 1972–2005. 1972 was determined as the point of departure in the selection of the anime works because, although traces of national traumas can be seen and analysed starting from TV anime of the 1960s, it is from 1972 that science fiction TV anime for kids and youths began to explicitly show more clearly mature topics, film language, and spectacular devices such as mushroom explosions, death of characters, blood, war, and invasion. 2005 was chosen as the concluding year for the selection since the classification of the traumatic events considered in the analysis ends with 3.11; a final point for the surveying of the animation works related to the topic was a few years before it; however, further refinement of the theoretical framework during the implementation of the project led me to also include in the analysis a few outstanding and relevant anime films and series released between 2006 and 2012 (therefore, by all means, scheduled and produced *before* the 3.11 disaster hit Japan).

2.2. Anime and fantastic conflicts as partly stemming from the traumas of the nation

In the course of the interviews I conducted with animation professionals and in the subsequent analysis of their contents, I had the chance to identify some conceptual trends, memories, and insights which make these conversations precious, revealing material. Directors Hirata Toshio, Kamiyama Kenji, Katsumata Tomoharu, Kinoshita Sayoko, and Rintarō, among other interviewees, provided very interesting memories and reflections.

⁴ Qualified literature is available on a constellation of themes related to war and trauma in Japan's culture and society. I built my own topic, which adds some degree of novelty to past contributions, thanks to Watanabe 2001, Mōri 2006, Lamarre 2008, Ashbaugh 2010, Stahl and Williams 2010 and also Stahl 2010, among other sources.

In general, one of the main assumptions was partly challenged by what several interviewees claimed. According to the reflections of some of them, anime producers, directors, and animators did not generally mean to convey symbols of Japanese history in their plots dealing with war, invasion, or bombardments: their aim, some said in the conversations, was to convey exciting entertainment of good visual quality. This is, however, in contrast not only with factual evidence—that is, the plots themselves, which more often than not deal with an alien invasion, suggested disapproval of Nazi-fascist visual and political symbolism, and nuclear or pseudo-nuclear bombings on Japanese soil—but also with further declarations by the same interviewees in different moments during their own interviews. In other words, part of my work during the interviews and also in the subsequent analysis included elements of ethnographic interpretive sessions, with the goal of understanding what might lie beneath the “official” answers, especially in relation to the personal history of the interviewees during their childhood, often spent during the war years or in the postwar period.

In some cases, as other sources confirm (e.g., past interviews with directors or producers in books, journals, magazines) and as further scholarly sources both in Japanese and foreign languages also argue, the intention of animation professionals to convey problematic meanings and messages was clearly evident in the plots, dialogues, and visual language used in specific series or films. It is worth mentioning the patriotic spirit of producer Nishizaki Yoshinobu in the conception of the *Uchū senkan Yamato* saga (1974–1983) or the general plots of some Tōei Animation’s series partly drawn from manga or projects by Nagai Gō and his creative staff at Dynamic Planning studio, such as *Mazinger Z*, *Great Mazinger*, *UFO Robo Grendizer*, *Kōtetsu Jeeg* (1972–1977). That is why this part of the research was conducted as a study converging with the interviews and the analysis of the selected anime works.

To sum up, my interviews were a useful research device in two senses: (i) they were a revealing source of information, personal memories, reflections, and insights of animation professionals onto their thoughts, as individuals and as artists, upon their own work; (ii) they were a tool with which to understand how animation makers often rationalise and “downgrade” the actual depth of their own artistic activity, framing it in terms of pure work-for-hire, despite the sensitive nature of the contents of so many anime series and films.

3. The interviews

In this first instalment of my own Research Files, I share with *Mutual Images'* readers five interviews I had the honour of conducting with prominent Japanese animation directors: the late Hirata Toshio, Rintarō, Kamiyama Kenji, Katsumata Tomoharu, and Kinoshita Sayoko. In terms of research planning and methods, even though I cannot release the minute details, I will say that in order to interview these personalities of animation, I laid out a structure common to several interviews (namely, the first four questions) and a second group of three to four questions which varied from interviewee to interviewee, personalised to each author.⁵

As explained in the Introduction, the goal of these interviews took shape from the purpose of the research within which the conversations were to be conducted: interrogating these artists on relevant themes of auteur animation and commercial anime in the 1970s-2000s vis-à-vis the collective traumas of Japan from the 1920s (e.g., the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923) to 11 March 2011, both in general and in specific reference to each animator's works.

For this occasion, the materials shared are not "raw", but they are translated into English. I have edited them in a reasonable fashion, polishing the form where needed, adding foot-notes of clarification, and introducing the personalities interviewed with biographical notes.

Where not otherwise specified, the interviews were conducted with the on-site assistance of Ms Sophy S. Suzuki, a talented Japanese-American currently working at a world-leading technology company in Tokyo. Sophy was at that time a student at Meiji University, from which she graduated under the supervision of Professor Fujimoto Yukari.

Interview with Hirata Toshio

Born on 16 February 1938 in Tendō, Mr Hirata Toshio passed away on 25 August 2014, aged 76. He graduated at the prestigious Musashino University in 1961 and was immediately hired at Tōei Dōga (from 1998, Tōei Animation) as an animator. He then worked for Tezuka Osamu's Mushi Production, after which he started working as a

⁵ In these years I also had the chance to interview several more creators, directors, animators, music composers, producers, and editors working in the anime and manga industries, as well as scholars and European anime/manga distributors, publishers, and programmers. To give a clearer idea of my overall fieldwork during my three projects in 2013–2019, the total number of interviews I finalised is 120, not including the other types of data collected, that is, surveys in seven European countries, archive research, and visits at manga/anime-related B2C and B2B fairs and conventions.

director from 1981 for the influential Madhouse studio and other animation companies. In the 1990s, he narrowed down the amount of his activities, working mainly as a storyboard artist or animation supervisor. Considered a master by his own peers, he left his technical and artistic mark upon a great variety of extremely popular productions.

Mr Hirata answered my questions in an email message. He had kindly declined my suggestion to meet in Tokyo, because his health condition was already not very good. This is among the reasons why he preferred to answer the questions not one by one, but in a continuous and coherent discourse, rather than by inserting his thoughts after each of my questions. In his text, nevertheless, he cogently addressed all of the topics, showing great insight and sensitivity. To this day, not having had the chance to talk with him over tea and hear his voice is still a great regret, but I feel privileged to have received his reply and thoughts.

The email exchange took place in July 2013. Here below, I display in blue the questions I sent him via email, followed by Mr Hirata's complete answer, to which I have added some informative footnotes. I show the questions as I had originally laid them out for Mr Hirata, to better show the reader the original interview's structure as an intended research tool. The questions were sent to Mr Hirata in Japanese. Salutations and other parts of Mr Hirata's text not directly related to the answers have been omitted. The language of Mr Hirata, although translated into English, has not undergone any overt changes, and the articulation in the paragraphs strictly follows his own pagination of the message.

1. Mr Hirata, what do you think of certain *tôpoi* in Japanese animation of the 1970s-1980s, such as mushroom explosions, alien invasions, wide devastation of Japanese cities?
2. What do you think of other *tôpoi* in Japanese animation in the 1990s-2000s, such as urban violence and poverty, serial killers, and *otaku* culture which self-represents itself?
3. Do you think there might be, or already is, some effect on the themes of Japanese animation (producers' decisions, authors' scripts, animators' visualisations, market's trajectories) after the trauma of the 3.11 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami?
4. Do you think that anime dealing—even just in terms of fantasy—with catastrophic or critical events, if meant by their authors to make the audience learn some messages about a historical past event, did get some result, being “educational” in terms of historical memory?
5. As the animation director of the special anime film *Hiroshima ni ichiban densha ga hashitta* (1993), what were your emotions in directing the animation and contributing in visualising the event displayed in the film? And what were your feelings during your direction cooperation on *Hadashi no Gen* (1983) and direction on *Hadashi no Gen 2* (1986)?

6. How much and in what ways did you cooperate with Ms Nobumoto Keiko (screenwriter of *Hiroshima ni ichiban densha ga hashitta*) and Mr Takayashiki Hideo (screenwriter of *Hadashi no Gen 2*)? How did you—director and screenwriters—decide to put into dynamic images such terrible events and their aftermath? How, in particular, did you come to a decision about how to visualise the effects of the atomic explosion on places and people?
7. How much do you believe that these animated movies—and in general the kind of films remembering the most tragic facts of Japanese recent history—can contribute to preserving the memory of such tragedies, especially for the younger generations?

I am sorry that my drafted paragraphs are unorganised.

I will answer your questions mainly through *Hadashi no Gen [2]* and [*Hiroshima ni Ichiban densha ga hashitta*].⁶

Mainly about how these movies were thought out and animated.

Every summer, in Japan, we have an End of War anniversary. Due to such an event, many kinds of media issue multiple works related to the war and the nuclear bombs.

A film director once said that there are “movies you want to make” and “movies you must make”. The works I mentioned above are definitely of the latter kind.

We know that the majority of people don’t even enjoy watching such movies [if they have to do it] by paying money.

[For these movies,] Budgets and ranges of animation techniques are limited. Hence they are released on special occasions in dedicated television programs, or are screened at small events in minor movie theaters.

The themes of these films are quite heavy, so much so that TV programmers and TV stations organise special projects for them from the start, then a scriptwriter, a director, and other staff are chosen.

[In our case,] Mr Takayashiki, Ms Nobumoto, and I were selected.⁷ Mr Takayashiki and I had experienced this heavy atmosphere beforehand during our work for *Hadashi no Gen [2]*. [*Hiroshima ni ichiban densha ga hashitta* was my first work after I directed the “NHK Special” film *Natsufuku no shōjotachi*.⁸ Ms Nobumoto, however, had already prepared a phenomenal story script for the movie; therefore we did not need to communicate that much, and were able to hand down the work to the production.

And about the directing.

The time and atmosphere in which I, and also Mr Takayashiki, were born and raised was in a small town in the Tōhoku region, which is now well known for the

⁶ Respectively, ‘Barefoot Gen 2’, 1986, Madhouse and ‘The first train run to Hiroshima’, 1993, Madhouse. The former is the second part of *Hadashi no Gen* (by Mori Masaki, 1983, Madhouse) and narrates the story of a group of young survivors after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, an event told in Mori’s film; the latter is the story of a little girl after the bomb on Hiroshima and partly evokes, by topics and atmospheres, what is represented in the *Hadashi no Gen* diptych. The two *Hadashi no Gen* films are drawn from Nakazawa Keiji’s famous manga.

⁷ Takayashiki Hideo, born in 1947, is the author of the plots and/or scripts, as well as the director, of many popular, high-level productions. Nobumoto Keiko, born in 1963, is currently among the most requested scriptwriters for animation.

⁸ ‘Girls in summer dresses’, 1988. This too was made, like the films previously mentioned, by Madhouse for the public TV station NHK. It is a mixed-technique (live action and animated cartoon) documentary focussing on three 13-year-old girls who live in Hiroshima and their lives in the aftermath of the atomic explosion.

3.11 earthquake; I was seven years old when Hiroshima and Nagasaki were attacked with the atomic bombs.

It was the same time period in which Totò lives as a little boy, in my favorite Italian movie, *New Cinema Paradise*.⁹

And like Totò, [as a child] I also would sneak into the cinema theatre and see, in American newsreels and films, the destroyed cities of Japan, poverty, chaos, violence, and wandering boys and girls.

These are my origins.

And at the same time I became infatuated with Popeye, Donald Duck, Blondie, and other American funny cartoons. Like Totò, I also would begin to shoot films.

And then the 3.11 earthquake in Tōhoku, Japan, occurred. To me, this was the sight of something which I had already seen once.

In the process through which I manage to create my animated characters' visual expressions, the influence from the mindsets I remember from my own childhood and memories are unavoidable. Of course I will not depict them directly. I would rather avoid educational messages or mature perspectives. When I am working, I persistently stick to what the children's perspectives would be.

Unfortunately, movies are "temporary". I believe that a variety of tragedies and incidents are forgotten; they have faded away [from people's memories] by now.

Otaku culture and the subculture market are seemingly flourishing these days?¹⁰ I wonder who is gossiping about such a notion.

Are they the state officials or businessmen, who know nothing about the [*otaku*] culture?

Like I said before, in the land of a defeated country, I have watched and fell enamored with Disney and American comic cartoons, and then became an animator; and thanks to that genius named Tezuka Osamu, young people including myself have transformed animation into a proper form of Japanese animation. However, it was unexpected that this would later change into the pathological and introverted *otaku* culture.

I will absolutely not participate in such a culture.

Finally, I want to tell you that I learnt some heartwarming news.

I was reading a newspaper, and found that at the latest "Rookie of the Year" Manga Awards, the winner was a woman author who stated that, twenty years ago, when she was a little girl living in a suburban area, she saw a film of mine and this inspired her, and that was the origin point of her career.¹¹

After all, this really cheered me up.¹²

⁹ By Giuseppe Tornatore, 155', col., Italy 1988. Totò is the name of the leading character, a child during the postwar period in Sicily (Italy), who many years later, as an adult, remembers with nostalgia his childhood in a small Sicilian village, when he for the first time was emotionally marked by the powerful and universal appeal of cinema.

¹⁰ This paragraph is a reflection by Mr Hirata indirectly solicited by my quick mention of *otaku* culture in the second question. Because of the very little time he had in his daily life, and because of the great privilege he had already extended to me in replying to my emails, I believed it was better to avoid asking him for a follow-up comment on this point.

¹¹ I cannot be totally sure, but after a few checks I established that the reference made by Mr Hirata could reasonably be to the "New Artist" category of the Tezuka Osamu Cultural Prize, 2014 edition, which that year was awarded to Kyō Machiko for *Mitsuami no kamisama*, the story of a girl in the aftermath of the 11 March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

¹² This interview has already appeared, in Italian, in Pellitteri 2018, 1: 395-7.

Interview with Rintarō

Rintarō, the pen name of Hayashi Shigeyuki, was born in Tokyo on 22 January 1941 and for decades was, and still is, one of the most acclaimed Japanese animation directors, with a highly recognisable style. His career began in 1958 at Tōei Dōga, where he learnt the basics (colouring, in-betweening, etc.). He quickly developed the qualities of a director and, in general, of a filmmaker, with a personal vision of cinema and visual storytelling. He was subsequently hired at Tezuka Osamu's Mushi Production, and later contributed to the foundation of Madhouse studio, one of the most influential in Japan, both artistically and commercially.

The following interview is from June 2013 and was carried out in an email exchange. As Mr Rintarō answered my questions one by one, in this case I reproduce the interview using a Q&A structure.

1. Mr Rintarō, what do you think of certain *tōpoi* in Japanese animation of the 1970s-80s, such as mushroom explosions, alien invasions, wide devastation of Japanese cities?
2. What do you think of other *tōpoi* in Japanese animation in the 1990s-2000s, such as urban violence and poverty, serial killers, *otaku* culture which self-represents itself?

I believe that the main theme of your first two questions is the same, hence I will answer them together. It is true that the anime you suggested in the question do exist, but those were not the mainstream of Japanese animation at that time. In those years [1970s], many TV anime were simultaneously created which belonged to many and very diverse genres (magical stories or fairy tales, sports, comedy, etc.). But also SF anime casting robots as main figures gained popularity and rapidly flourished during that time. At the end of the twentieth century [around 1975], a quarter of century before its end, in Japan an "end of the world or century" sensation grew collectively, which entailed ideas such as that according to which the "end of the world" in our reality corresponded to "Earth's devastation" in fiction. These images are strongly anchored in people's minds, so most anime works from those years (many of whose themes were "destruction and regeneration") deeply reflected people's anxious thoughts. The fans of these anime works became the original *otakus*, and they were the ones who unified and organised the other scattered *otakus*. The power of these *otakus* has, for better or for worse, affected Japanese anime.

3. Do you think there might be, or there is already, some effect on the themes of Japanese animation (producers' decisions, authors' scripts, animators' visualisations, market's trajectories) after the trauma of the 3.11 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami?

It is true that creators are facing a huge [moral] conflict, but its effect on their work depends on each individual's choice. In my personal perspective, I am currently suffering grievously over what kind of anime I should create. Although anime is entertainment based on commercialism, I believe that the time has come to reconsider this settled idea of Japanese animation; but to be honest, I personally do not have an absolute faith in this idea. This is not limited to anime; any Japanese professional who takes part in a feature film, in literature, music,

and arts, is developing a similar awareness about this issue. What is certain is that this is not the kind of problem for which we can easily reach a conclusion.

4. Do you think that anime dealing—even just in terms of fantasy—with catastrophic or critical events, if meant by their authors to make the audience learn some message about a historical past event, did get some result, being “educational” in terms of historical memory?

This problem also relates to my previous answer. I believe that these works focus on how to survive in today’s chaotic world, rather than delivering an educational message. Of course, anime works themed with educational messages could be produced now or in the future; if so, after 3.11, creators must have strong determination and intention to create anime with a firm message.

5. In your direction for the sci-fi anime series and movies on *Uchū kaizoku Captain Harlock* (1978, 1982) and the films on *Ginga tetsudō 999* (1979, 1981), drawn from manga by Matsumoto Leiji, the transposition into cinema of the original stories’ atmospheres is impressive. The pace of the narrative, the images chosen, the feelings communicated through your direction give the idea of a sad future, originated from a past where mankind did not succeed in creating a fair society. How much of this notion do you agree with?

Our work’s utmost goal is to reproduce the main theme inscribed in the original work through film expression, and deliver it to the audience. Sympathising with the original story’s motive and characters, and deeply pursuing its essence and reconstructing it into film text, is paramount to our job.

6. The world portrayed in the film *Metropolis* (2001), directed by you and originated from an original manga story by Tesuka Osamu, displays a complex future, where the bright sides of individuals and the positive aspects of technology are overshadowed by an oppressive social system with fascist tendencies. How much did you cooperate with screenwriter Ōtomo Katsuhiro in visualising the social metaphor of *Metropolis*, and how much do you agree with the general, philosophical message displayed in your film?

That was the main theme of the original work; the story was created upon the idea that technology is a “double-sided blade”. In other words, the story’s main point is that an omnipotent technology could be turned into a terrifying nightmare by its use. In order to vividly depict this theme, we certainly did use [notions of a] fascist society as a background. Mr Ōtomo Katsuhiro and I had a similar understanding about this anime’s theme, so we did not have problems, like wavering, when we were working on the script. Of course we had numerous discussions and meetings, in order to make our movie fantastically entertaining.

7. In *Mōsō Dairinin* [*Paranoia Agent*, by Kon Satoshi, 13 eps, 2004-05], for which you worked on the storyboard of an episode [ep. 9: *ETC*], we see a Japan where people dive into and isolate in new technologies; a world where urban violence and criminality have increased and where people are scared to walk around at night. Is a pessimistic vision of Japan portrayed, or a realistic one, on your opinion? The imaginary world created by the character Maromi and the scenes of violent destruction of Tokyo, wonderfully displayed in the series, are strongly effective. What was the strategy of visual design which you followed in creating your storyboard? Do you believe that the Japanese people are falling towards a mutual isolation from each other, and into a state of widespread “paranoia”?

In regards to this anime, I believe I am not the best one who can answer your question. That is because I only worked on it for a single storyboard, which was requested by the series’ director. If I could talk about the episode I curated, what I tried to do was illustrate humans’ hidden envy and malice—especially those of housewives living at small distances from each other in housing compounds—which resulted in the psychological cornering of one woman, another housewife,

when she eventually bursts her inner darkness. The storyboard I worked on illustrated this kind of madness within a typical normal life.¹³

Interview with Kamiyama Kenji

Kamiyama Kenji, born in the Saitama prefecture on 20 March 1966, is an outstanding animation director. He has worked for years with director Oshii Mamoru, from whom he has learnt many aspects of the profession. After having worked as a background painter and animator for productions such as *Akira* (1988, by Ōtomo Katsuhiro) and *Majo no takkyūbin* (1989, by Miyazaki Hayao), Mr Kamiyama started working at Fuga studio, and subsequently became one of the main names of Production I.G studio. He has signed or participated in precious anime works. His first famous directions are for the anime series *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* (2002–2003) and other several following instalments of the franchise: *Seirei no moribito* (2007) and *Higashi no Eden* (2009). One of his most outstanding directions is for the feature film *009 Re: Cyborg* (2012), of which he also signed the script and which is therefore very cogent here. The film, based on the characters of the manga *Cyborg 009* (1964-92) by Ishinomori Shōtarō, revolves around a terrorist attack, and in it a terrifying nuclear explosion is displayed. Mr Kamiyama replied to my questions via email in July 2013.

1. Mr Kamiyama, what do you think of certain *tōpoi* in Japanese animation of the 1970s-1980s, such as mushroom explosions, alien invasions, wide devastation of Japanese cities?

It was tragic, and I believe this must never happen again. I have used a nuclear explosion effect in a film of mine [*009 Re: Cyborg*], but this was to convey the message of the events in the movie. Teal atomic explosions should never occur anywhere in the world.

2. What do you think of other *tōpoi* in Japanese animation in the 1990s-2000s, such as urban violence and poverty, serial killers, *otaku* culture which self-represents itself?

What happens inside animation is, I believe, alternative [fictional] acts to some extent. But I don't believe that these expressions are meant to promote those acts [in real life].

3. Do you think there might be, or already is, some effect on the themes of Japanese animation (producers' decisions, authors' scripts, animators' visualisations, market's trajectories) after the trauma of the 3.11 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami?

I believe effects have already appeared. When imagining the victims' feelings, we should think of them as issues which are not supposed to be articulated in a light manner.

¹³ This interview has already appeared, in Italian, in Pellitteri 2018, i: 397-8.

4. Do you think that anime dealing—even just in terms of fantasy—with catastrophic or critical events, if meant by their authors to make the audience learn some message about a historical past event, did get some result, being “educational” in terms of historical memory?

[These anime] are meant to bear messages of peace, rather than educational content.

5. In writing the *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* series, did you and your fellow animators have in mind recent Japanese crises such as national and international terrorist attacks, specifically the infamous 1995 sarin gas attack in Tokyo subways?

The sarin gas attack in Tokyo’s subways, the United States’ 9.11, political scandals, a bribery case, and other incidents which shocked Japan and occurred in and outside of Japan during the 1980s are the [series’] main subjects.

6. The *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*’s plot deals with cyberterrorism, a complicity or an identity between high-level technology industry and criminality. Is there, beneath this setting, a political vision or message about present-day Japan?

Regarding cyber-technology, we created this anime by imagining the evolution of networks since the year 2000. In regards to political crimes, we used a bribery case as a base, and also focused on the problem of companies deeply involved with politics, such as the ones dealing with high-tech medical devices. Regarding identity, through the pursuit of a relationship between society and the individual, I reflected upon the meaning of life for people in today’s world.

7. The interaction and merging of human and technology (software, hardware, cyber-implants) is seen as something inevitable. Even in today’s Japan, there is a continuous increase in the relationship between humans and machines. Do you see this process in a negative, worrying light? Is this process going too far, or do you think that humans will find a balance in the near future, living in harmony with new technologies?

I created the *Ghost in the Shell* series based on the belief that technology is something which brightens up mankind’s future. Technologies and networks have evolved madly since the time we created this anime. I do believe that one day humans and technology will form a peaceful harmony. However, complications of social systems could become a tough barrier for each individual. I hope that technologies will be used to overcome this conflict.

Interview with Katsumata Tomoharu

Katsumata Tomoharu, born in the Shizuoka prefecture on 4 February 1938, is the director of many influential animated TV series of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, although he also signed important works in the two following decades. Just after his graduation in Cinema at Nippon University in 1960, he started to work at the Kyōto branch of Tōei Company as an assistant director for Makino Masahiro, Kudō Ei’ichi, and Tasaka Tomotaka, masters of theatrical films and television period dramas set in the age of samurais. Some years later, he was hired at the Animation division of Tōei, in Tokyo, and started to direct numerous series in various genres (adventure, metal giant armours, magical girls, ninja, etc.) for children and youths. He worked on some of the most

important characters and franchises of Japanese pop culture, such as *Cutey Honey*, *Devilman*, *Uchū Kaizoku Captain Harlock*, *Cyborg 009*, *Hokuto no Ken*, and *Saint Seiya*, besides other series and films which will be mentioned over the course of the interview.

I talked with Mr Katsumata at Tōei Animation studios, in the district of Nerima, Tokyo, on 3 September 2013 for almost two hours. This version of the interview has been cut for the sake of brevity and to keep it focused on the topics I want to highlight here.

1. Mr Katsumata, when did you decide to devote your career to animation directing? Was it your choice or was it in part circumstances which led you there? Did you want to work for cinema or for television? When did you decide that this would be your specialisation?

I decided it when I was directing *Tiger Mask* [a dramatic/sport-centred animated series from 1969–1971, whose general director was Tamiya Takeshi]. Until then, I had always repeated to my superiors at Tōei, “Please, let me shoot some period dramas!” I have had an interest in cinema since I was a child. An uncle of mine, to tell you the truth, was a cinema star and one of my aunts, when she was young, had been a Takarazuka Revue actress. At home I have many photographs of me as a child surrounded by Takarazuka actresses, with my father or my mother holding me in their arms. When I saw those pictures again, as a teenage boy, I said to myself, “Wow, what a thrill!”¹⁴

2. Is there a film you saw as a child or a teenager—a Japanese, or European, or American movie—which positively marked you?

The film which struck me the most was a movie by Mr Kurosawa Akira, *Nora inu* [*Stray Dog*, 122', b/w, Japan 1949]. Other films are *Bambi* [David Hand *et al.*, 70', col., USA 1942] and one more Japanese film, *Nagasaki no uta wa wasureji*.¹⁵ But *Nora inu* by Mr Kurosawa is the one which hit me really hard. I was impressed with Mr Kurosawa Akira's talent.

3. You were born in 1938. Where were you during the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? How, in your opinion, did these tragic facts affect you? Did you move out of the place you were living or did you and your family stay there during those weeks?

In August 1945 I was in Izu province, Shizuoka prefecture [near Mount Fuji, in south-central Japan]. At that time, of course I was a kid and I didn't understand the ongoing events. I only remember that [just after Hiroshima and Nagasaki] my parents and other grown-ups were panicking and would excitedly talk of a new kind of bomb. In my neighbourhood things had been relatively quiet, but then things escalated quickly. We got the news of the bombings and soon after we listened to the Emperor's speech, and everything was over by then. Maybe we were reckless but we stayed there, and in the end we were all right. In general, nothing happened to me and my parents. I was lucky; there was no risk that we would get bombed. The war airplanes crossed the sky above us at an

¹⁴ The Takarazuka Revue, established in 1914 in the town of Takarazuka (in the central west of Japan) as a tourist attraction, today includes several artistic crews in Takarazuka and other cities, and is formed of young women only.

¹⁵ Mr Katsumata actually said “Nagasaki no kane wa wasureji”, mixing the titles' words of two films with similar names and based on the same events: *Nagasaki no uta wa wasureji* (“The song of Nagasaki is unforgettable”), by Tasaka Tomotaka (132', b/w, Japan 1952) and *Nagasaki no kane* (*The Bells of Nagasaki*), by Ōba Hideo (94', b/w, Japan 1950). It is fair to assume that Mr Katsumata was referring to Tasaka's film, since he had also worked as an assistant to this director.

altitude of 10,000 mt. While we were there, nothing happened. But then *something* happened which changed me from within and put me in contact with the war. An uncle of mine was killed by American air fighters. It happened on 13 August [1945]. My uncle was a fisherman and, two days before the announcement of the Emperor, in the early morning he went into the ocean, close to the shore, for some diving fishing. It was about 7 or 8 a.m.: I had just said goodbye to him and was going to school. But three [American] air force fighters passed by there and he got shot. His corpse was brought back by the stream on the shore around 2 p.m. that same day. My parents and I were there and they counted the bullet holes in my uncle's body. There were 240. And this was the shocking event of my childhood and life.

4. In many famous science fiction anime series of the 1970s, such as *UFO Robo Grendizer* (1975-77) and *Daikū Maryū Gaiking* (1976-77) directed by you at Tōei Animation in the mid-1970s, the mushroom-shaped explosion first appeared as a ritual moment at the end of every episode, as the climax of the fight between the hero robot and the evil monster. Do you remember, or do you know, if someone in particular at Tōei—maybe an animator, a scriptwriter...—proposed to introduce this explosion style as a recurring moment? And by presenting which aesthetic or narrative reasons to the producers and the directors?

Well, first of all... I am not sure about who, precisely, was the first [to introduce this], also because I am not sure if there was “one” first person who established this trend. At that time each scriptwriter, lead animator, and director had and wanted to find his way to conclude the episodes in a spectacular scene, and thus, in the case of the final battle with the robots, they were free to propose their own style of explosion. Anyway, I am not at all against or critical of the mushroom-shaped explosions. [...] Because in my opinion, it is simply a cinematographic effect of great visual impact. You know, the main theme [in these series] was that of giant robots fighting against other giant robots/monsters, piloted by kids, which was an amazing thing for the children who watched the show. So I believe that there was no direct reference to, you know, Hiroshima and Nagasaki or real wars; it was not like that. Also, in the 1970s, with the improvements of animation techniques and special effects, animators tried to change and try new ways of visual spectacularisation. We were trying to use more light effects and diverse camera movements. These effects would have been impossible in the 1960s. So we used more techniques “to show off” and compete against other studios. Hence explosions were only a way of expressing the spectacular nature of those animations. Also, it was like a game, not something serious.

If I may ask, in turn: why did you ask me this question? Is it because you maybe think that we felt “guilty” or something of the kind?

[An explanation of the reasons of the question by the interviewer followed; *omissis*.]

5. What do you think of the contents of *Tiger Mask* today, more than 40 years after its first broadcast? [...]

I like *Tiger Mask*, because it was not only about the action, about the fights, but also about the human struggle, the emotions, the feelings, and, above all, the very serious social problems of that time. For example, environmental pollution in Japan and other social or personal crises. That is why I believe that *Tiger Mask* is a beautiful series.

6. You are one of the directors who worked on the films and series of the *Uchū senkan Yamato* saga (1974–1983). It is a very famous story, created by Nishizaki Yoshinobu and Matsumoto Leiji, who used the historic battleship as a symbol of the pride and courage of the Japanese in a far away future. With what sentiment, in the early 1980s, did you work on the direction for a film on the space battleship Yamato? [...]

At that time, I was really surprised by the fact that I would be the director of a Japanese feature movie longer than two hours. Before then, I had never had such a chance. And I was very touched by the story being told. I felt a strong emotion while working on this film, also for its contents. Moreover, I truly appreciated the talent of Mr Nishizaki as a producer.¹⁶ As a Japanese, deep feelings crossed my mind when I learnt that in this film, the battleship Yamato would rise again from the fathoms as a war starship.

7. *What kind of feelings?*

The sentiment I felt about the Yamato comes, also in this case, from my memories of when I was seven years old, in 1945. At that time, I knew that the Yamato had been built and launched to protect Japan, but we all know how it ended.¹⁷ I also remember hearing about soldiers in terrible conditions who screamed, "Help us!" in the sea, grabbing some floating parts of the ship. Furthermore, I will never forget the corpse of a sailor I saw floating on the waves of the sea; I was close to the shore, I was simply swimming, and I remember that it appeared all of a sudden and I could not avoid coming into contact with it.¹⁸ All of these experiences gave me the idea that a tragic and negative fate had been written for the Yamato. Just the opposite of the positive image of the glorious space battleship Yamato, which saves Earth.

8. [...] Recently, in March 2011, as we know, Tōhoku was devastated by an enormous tide and there were huge problems at the Fukushima nuclear power plant [...]. Do you think that these two disasters will be dealt with in new animated series in the near future, or do you think that it is perhaps still too soon to turn these events and topics into anime?

I believe that this catastrophe was too tragic and horrible. I think that the conditions are not yet right to discuss them openly in a television series or in a theatrical film. Moreover, I would not work on a movie or a series based on those events.¹⁹

Interview with Kinoshita Sayoko

Kinoshita Renzō (Osaka, 3 September 1936 – 15 January 1997) and Kinoshita Sayoko (b. 1945) are two of the most important names in the history of contemporary Japanese animation. Sayoko, who made many films with Renzō, was, in the majority of their works together, the writer, producer, and co-director. In 1985, they founded the biennial

¹⁶ Nishizaki Yoshinobu (1934–2010), producer for cinema and animation, was the creator and producer of the films and series focussing on the space battleship Yamato, a saga which also benefited from Matsumoto Leiji's (b. 1938) talent as a manga author. The film directed by Mr Katsumata (with Masuda Toshio and Matsumoto Leiji) is *Uchū senkan Yamato: Kanketsu Hen* ('Space battleship Yamato: The last battle', in English *Final Yamato*), 163', Japan 1983.

¹⁷ The Yamato, launched on 8 August 1940, was sunk by the American forces on 7 April 1945 in the sea off Okinawa. 2,375 men died, and only 276 survived.

¹⁸ Unfortunately, it is not clear to me from this detail whether Mr Katsumata was referring to the corpse of a sailor from the Yamato. The distance between Okinawa and the shores of the Shizuoka prefecture is, however, very broad. Although the drifting of a human body for hundreds of miles in the sea is not impossible, I would make an educated guess that the corpse which Mr Katsumata came into contact with in the sea of Izu was not that of a member of the Yamato's crew.

¹⁹ The material of this interview is just a selection from a longer conversation I had with Mr Katsumata. A larger (and in other ways also abridged) version of the interview has appeared, in Italian, in Pellitteri and Giacomantonio 2016: 139-46.

Hiroshima International Animation Festival, and ran it together until Renzō's death. Since then, Sayoko has continued to direct the festival. Among their most outstanding films, the one most directly related to the specific main topic of this interview is *Pika-don* (1978), the explicit visual narration of the atomic bomb's explosion over Hiroshima. The following conversation is from October 2013. It was recorded at a restaurant after a special lecture by Mrs Kinoshita at Osaka University of the Arts, where the filmmaker also hosted a screening of the unabridged and, astoundingly, still unpublished version of *Pika-don* to a class of 20 years old students (and me). This interview was conducted in English, thanks to Sayoko's fluency in the language.

1. *Why did you and Renzō think of Pika-don?*

We do not think instantly of some particular expression. We think about others; about pollution... We have to do something. We do not ask anyone, so we can make our independent films. So we have to be courageous, because we want to put very serious ideas in our films.²⁰

2. *Why, in your opinion, did mushroom-shaped explosions first appear in Japanese animation as a recurring element in the mid-1970s?*

First of all, we [Renzō and I] never look at other artists' work: we just take care of ours, and pursue our own ideas. We think about our own life. We do not think of *Hadashi no Gen* [the 1973 manga by Nakazawa Keiji about a young Hiroshima survivor and his life] or other manga and anime, or about the authorities [meaning here, governmental agencies or influential non-profit associations]. Authorities always want to influence the artists' works. This is a crucial point. If we are free and the audience do not agree, it is just our fault, and we don't have to blame anyone else. We give [in our films] our honest opinions. Let us think for example of the people who suffered for the bombings: there are powerful associations, and they would like, perhaps, to correct or comment on our ideas. Big companies also try to take care of the associations' reactions: they want those associations to be all right with their films. But we don't: we make our own films with our own money, and we are free to do what we think we want to do and what we have to do.

3. *Why did certain animation films or series deal with the topic of A-bombs?*

Our animation was very scary for children. We made [among others,] three films, [about] fire bomb[s], [the] A-bomb, and Okinawa.²¹ The fire bomb was a very cheap but effective [kind of] bomb against our country. Japanese houses were made in wood, so fire bombs were very effective. In Tokyo many people

²⁰ Mrs Kinoshita, during the interview, when referring to the work with her late husband always used the present tense. It is not entirely clear to me—nor did I think that it would be sensible to point this out during the interview—whether this was an involuntary simplification of the grammar and syntax by Sayoko or, as I by far prefer to think, an elegant and heartwarming way to implicitly letting the interlocutor appreciate a silent but vivid presence of Renzō by her side. Whichever the case, I have left Mrs Kinoshita's expression untouched.

²¹ The films hinted at in the mentions by Mrs Kinoshita are, most likely, the following. About the American air raids with the dropping of fire bombs, *The Last Raid: Kumagaya* (1993); about the A-bomb, clearly, *Pika-don* (1978); and, about Okinawa, *Ryūkyū Okaku: Made in Okinawa* (of which, at Renzō's death, only the storyboard had been made; the film was completed and shot by Sayoko in 2004). For more context on the Kinoshitas' filmography, cf. Munroe Hotes 2009 and Id., w.y.

died. We have to think about it, to remember. War is something against common people. The atomic bombs were only two, and so powerful, but many people died in Tokyo or Kōbe, because of so many fire bombs, in only one night. Renzō and I had a reason to make those films, but maybe TV series had to catch the attention of the audience until the next week.

[On commercial SF anime:] The budgets [of anime studios, in the 1970s-1980s] were very low, so they had to work continuously, so they had to keep the mind of the audience on the story and its tragic, dramatic events. Drama was very important. So this is the way I understand the situation, but I really can't understand why they chose such mushroom-shaped explosions; but maybe children do like explosions. Anyway, the audience is not only made of children, there are also young adults who can understand certain implications. The same thing with our films: in our case, most of our audience is formed of adults.

4. What is, in your opinion, the cultural impact of your work on the new generations of spectators and animators in Japan? Not only on the audience but also on the animators.

Our film *Pika-don* was just the beginning of a movement of the audience for peace. Many say: "Ah, that film is so, so and so...", etc. But some others had a very strong impression from the film. A message for peace. But we don't want to teach anything to the audience. We just show them. So if they receive some impression, we are happy.

Sometimes I wonder: why am I doing this? Why do I spend time and money and everything on this?... Because I was born in this world. I cannot find another answer.

5. Have you ever thought of making a film about the Sendai tsunami and Fukushima? Don't make them now! Not now. They [the people in Sendai] are still alive, they are [people] who have to deal with their problem. We have to think about their problem. Many people asked me to make a film on it. I believe I shouldn't. We have to help, not make films on this thing. I don't know when it will be the time to make films on it. It is not something you decide. It is about when you feel you want to make a film on it. Someone asked me to make it. So I answered: if you want a film on this, please make it by yourself.²²

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marco PELLITTERI is a media sociologist. He teaches in the School of Journalism and Communication of Shanghai International Studies University. He has published extensively on histories and theories of Japanese pop cultures and soft power, television, video games, animation, and comics. Among his publications, the books *Mazinga Nostalgia* (1999, 4th ed. 2018, 2 vols) and *The Dragon and The Dazzle* (2008, Eng. ed. 2010).

