

Mutual
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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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LAYERS OF AESTHETICS AND ETHICS IN
JAPANESE POP CULTURE

EDITED BY
MARCO PELLITTERI

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A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

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MUTUAL IMAGES

ISSUE 7

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial – Layers of aesthetics and ethics in Japanese pop culture
MARCO PELLITTERI (Shanghai International Studies University, China)IX-XVI

ARTICLES

Gaijin mangaka: The boundary violating impulse of Japanised “art-comics”
ANA MATILDE DE SOUSA (Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal)3-26

RESEARCH FILES

Research materials from fieldwork in Japan, 2013 – Vol. 1
MARCO PELLITTERI (Shanghai International Studies University, China).....29-50

REVIEWS

Animated Encounters:
Transnational Movements of Chinese Animation, 1940-1970s – Daisy yan Du
LAURENCE GREEN (SOAS University of London, UK).....53-56

Osamu Tezuka, el Dios del Manga – Exhibition at the Museu Nacional d’Art de Catalunya
ANTONIO LORIGUILLO-LÓPEZ (Universitat Jaume I, Spain).....57-62

Editorial – Layers of aesthetics and ethics in Japanese pop culture

Marco PELLITTERI | Shanghai International Studies University, China

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Dear readers, students, fellow scholars,
welcome to this seventh instalment of *Mutual Images*.

Contents of this issue, at a glance

This issue is not as thick as all the previous ones and as the next will be; it compensates its brevity, however, with a novelty which I describe a few lines below. In its conciseness, *M.I. 7* contains one very interesting article, a book review, an exhibition review, and in fact, a new, special section which I will discuss in the next segment of this Editorial. We will resume the publication of bigger instalments from *M.I. 8*, upcoming in June 2020.

The article we publish in this issue is “*Gaijin Mangaka: The Boundary-Violating Impulse of Japanised ‘Art-Comics’*”, by Portuguese researcher Ana Matilde de Sousa. I will briefly comment on this nice piece of scholarship in the section after the next.

As alluded to above, *Mutual Images 7* inaugurates a new section, titled Research Files. This requires a specific introduction and it is therefore explained just below.

Research Files¹

Mutual Images is a journal whose Editorial Board has, since the establishment of our research association and of this publication, always had in mind the idea that academic scholarship and journals could/should be the venue, to a certain degree, of new solutions for the presentation of original research. This is why, among the possibly 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 have been thinking for months about the modality we inaugurate here: the Research Files. This format basically

¹ This segment of the Editorial is also repeated, in a much shorter version, as the introductory text of the Research Files at p. 29. Those who have already read it there or who are reading it here for the first time are advised.

consists of the presentation of research materials which, even though carefully revised, peer-reviewed, and edited for publication, nevertheless constitute batches of qualitative data which have either never been published in any other form, or which have been published only in part, or which have been anyway assessed as worthy of publication as useful materials for other scholars, researchers, and students in the academy community.

The idea came to us from two directions and situations. From one side, because we felt the thrill to propose a practical, straight-forward way to make interesting materials available; from another side, because we wanted to launch a signal to fellow scholars at any stage of their careers, from professors to graduate students: at least some of the data we collect as researchers can be shared without particular embarrassment or jealousy, and without the fear that we might “burn” or underuse them. On the contrary, a certain amount of data which academics collect often remain underused or unused. But such data, if contextualised within one’s own past research activity, can be kept “alive” and perhaps be reborn, 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. Hence, the idea of presenting bites of data from past research endeavours which are currently under use, or momentarily resting in researchers’ hard disks.

We decided to distribute the presentation of a few of these materials over different issues of *Mutual Images*, grouping them by type. In this first instalment (presenting five 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 it in *Mutual Images*, by proposing their own “raw” data. The format of presentation we have deemed 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.

Layers of aesthetics and ethics in Japanese pop culture

Here I will try to explain why we chose this particular title for *Mutual Images 7* and its Editorial, through a concise discussion of the inherent themes of the issue’s contents.

The article we publish in this instalment is, as announced before, “*Gaijin Mangaka: The Boundary-Violating Impulse of Japanised ‘Art-Comics’*”, by Portuguese researcher Ana Matilde de Sousa. The paper focuses on a topic which, among many, I particularly fancy both as a scholar of visual media and a person fond of comics and popular arts. It

is a very well informed, up-to-date, and richly illustrated discussion on how, to what degree, and according to what aesthetic and intellectual tactics did international comic artists use graphical and narrational elements which could be generically seen as “originally” pertaining to the praxis of Japanese comics’ languages, styles, registers, and story-telling techniques. De Sousa takes, as case studies, comics from various creators reunited in a special collection, *Gaijin Mangaka*, published in 2016 by Latvian publisher Kuš! as the 25th book of a comics anthology series titled *š!*, co-edited by its regular curator, David Shilter, and, for this particular volume, by an Argentinian author, Berliac, who positions himself as a “neo-gekiga” artist—gekiga being that area of Japanese comics characterised by a dramatic attitude, neo-realistic topics and narrative tones, and cruder and often avantgarde-type drawings, inaugurated in the second half of the 1950s by Tatsumi Yoshihiro and other committed, independent artists, such as Tsuge Yoshiharu.

While *Gaijin Mangaka* contains short stories by some authors of the *crème de la crème* of the international comic scene who declaredly homage, cite, or recombine elements which can be acknowledged as “manga-ish” (here the label *mangaesque* introduced by German scholar Jaqueline Berndt comes in as particularly opportune and functional),² it is also crucial to underline that Ana Matilda De Sousa herself is one of the artists featured in the book, hence she writes here not only as a scholar but also as an artist.

Among the main assumptions and concepts discussed in the article, there is that according to which “art comics” (comics whose authors engage in a diverse variety of languages, codes, and representational strategies including citation, mimicking, etc. from other art forms) engage in a playful, multi-layered dialectic with mass culture, street culture, and the imagined boundaries between “high” and “low” (popular) arts. The generational factor also plays a relevant role, in that the majority of comic artists who engage in styles reminiscent of or derived from expressive elements of manga were born between the late 1970s and the mid-1990, therefore belonging to a wide age cohort which, in many countries, I could here easily define as a “manga/anime-native generation”, having these artists grown up—like millions of people who are not artists but simply part of a quasi-global audience—enjoying Japanese animated cartoons on television first since they were kids, and (also) manga books then, as teenagers and young adults. In this sense, we could argue that the process by which at least some authors decided to use features of manga was not simply spontaneous, but, up to a point, even unaware, at least

² Jaqueline Berndt introduced and explained this theoretical notion in Berndt 2007, 2012, and 2013.

at first; however, it has to be also added that in the case of the artists dealt with in De Sousa's article, we are before comic makers who have deeply reflected on their own work and are fully aware of what they are doing. De Sousa's essay is not entirely groundbreaking, because a vast theoretical/empirical scholarship on this topic and on many related case studies has, luckily, been produced in the last years;³ but what is outstanding and intriguing in and about her article—besides its own quality as a nice piece of scholarship—is the self-reflection of an artist/academic whose take is thus revealing. The article also contains a clever discussion on controversial notions, which are perceived and framed in different ways by different scholars (here the intervening factors are not only the discipline and background but also the nationality and therefore different cultural biases), such as “cultural appropriation” and “mukokuseki”, but it is certainly not my goal to personally address these themes whatsoever—not here, anyway.

This article presents several layers of content and implications, binding together in a harmonious discussion Japanese pop art, non-mainstream manga and independent, often self-published international comics production, the cultural background of non-Japanese artists engaging in *mangaesque*-type art comics and alt-comics, deep conceptual categories drawn from structuralist semiotics and late-20th century philosophy, linguistics, sociology, and the discourse of contemporary art criticism, pinning all of this to the concrete cases of the samples of comics displayed in De Sousa's analysis. These are some of the reasons why the general title of this issue of *Mutual Images* mentions the notion of multi-layeredness of Japanese pop culture, also in the wake of the overall themes which the readers will read about in the Research Files section.

Here we are, thus, at introducing the aforementioned new section, adopting a different acceptance of the notion of a multi-layeredness of Japanese pop culture's aesth/ethics.

In the aftermath of the atomic bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, for years Japanese artists refrained from facing and dealing with that event; among the first to ever approach the bombings explicitly were Iri Maruki (1901-1995) and his wife Toshi (1912-2000): after visiting Hiroshima in the second half of the 1940s, the two artists were shocked by what they saw, and subsequently devoted themselves, for the years to come, to the making of the polyptych *Genbaku no zu* ('Panels of the bomb', 15 paintings of 1,8 x

³ E.g. Berndt and Kümmerling-Meibauer 2013; Brienza 2015 and, in it, Lamerichs 2015; Pellitteri 2009, 2016, 2018.

7,2 m, 1950-82), in Nihonga style (Maruki) and oil painting (Toshi). The first panels of the series were exhibited in the early 1950s, contributed to start a vivacious cultural debate—the Marukis would also be awarded the Peace Nobel Prize in 1995—and led the way to other artists' production in a variety of formats and media, among which sequential art (in its two stylistic environments of manga and gekiga) and animation (in its two main categories of experimental animation and anime, or technically standardised commercial cartoons); I will come back to comics and animation in a few lines.

The point of these references on visual arts is that the literary and cinematographic discourses on Hiroshima and Nagasaki had already begun in Japan in the bombings' aftermath: let us think of the book *Nagasaki no kane* ('Nagasaki's bells', 1946) by Dr Nagai Takashi, a famous radiologist, and the 1950 film version by Ōba Hideo; the novel *Kuroi ame* ('The black rain', 1950) by Ibuse Masuji; or the semi-fictional film *Hachi no su no kodomotachi* ('Children of the beehive', 1948) by Shimizu Hiroshi and the documentaries *Genbaku no ko* ('Children of the atomic bomb', 1952) by Shindō Kaneto and the more explicit and critical *Hiroshima* (1953) by Sekigawa Hideo. But neither these novels and films, nor the fantastic allegory of Honda Inoshirō's movie *Gojira* (1954), explicitly displayed the nightmare of the graphic, terrifying obliteration of the atomic bombs' victims as they were rendered in some outstanding works of Japanese sequential art and animation issued in the 1970s, by authors such as Tatsumi Yoshihiro or Nakazawa Keiji in gekiga and manga respectively, and animators Kinoshita Renzō and Sayoko, and Mori Masaki and Hirata Toshio, in auteur animation and anime respectively. These manga creators and animators had to struggle with their conscience when they decided to engage in the visual and narrative representations of the "pika-don" (the great explosion) and their effects on the humans and humanity as an idea. Nonetheless, they felt the deep prosocial mission to tell, explain, visualise the unthinkable, for their generation (the *yakeato sedai* or 'generation of the burnt-out ruins') and especially for the future generations, to show, explain, recount the nightmare, so that it would not be forgotten.⁴

Mutatis mutandis, in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami of 11 March 2011, for a few years many comic artists and animation directors and scriptwriters have hesitated to accept (or decidedly rejected) the several proposals they had been receiving

⁴ This paragraph and the previous are partly drawn from one of the twenty-five entries I wrote for the upcoming *Enciclopedia dell'arte contemporanea* ('Encyclopaedia of contemporary art') of the Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani. This essay, in particular (Pellitteri 2020), is precisely devoted to the theme of atomic bombs in Japanese arts.

from TV stations, local or national political parties, or various committees, to lead artistic works based on the events of Sendai and Fukushima. As some animation directors told me in the interviews I had the privilege to have with them during one of my research projects in Japan in 2013-14 (yes, this is a hint to the Research Files section of this journal), the idea of creating a work on that disaster—even if meant to an educational or commemorative purpose—was for them ill-conceived or at least still premature to be taken into consideration with the due objectivity: animators and manga artists, especially the older ones, felt to be, when facing this event, mainly or only citizens and wanted to preserve a form of pudor and respect for the victims, waiting for some time before (perhaps) deciding to engage in some kind of artistic endeavour related to those facts.

In the end, these were the reasons why we have wanted to title this issue of *Mutual Images* “Layers of aesthetics and ethics in Japanese pop culture”: there are more visible as well as deeper and more hidden strata of choice, engagement, artistic awareness, and morality, in the paths undertaken by Japanese artists (or non-Japanese artists who are at some level hooked by the features of Japanese creative arts), than meets the eye.

I sincerely hope you will enjoy this short, but dense, 7th issue of *Mutual Images*.

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ARTICLES

Gaijin Mangaka:

The boundary violating impulse of Japanised “art-comics”

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the artistic strategies of Japanised visual artists by examining the emerging movement of manga-influenced international “art comics”—an umbrella term for avant-garde/experimental graphic narratives. As a case study, I take the special issue of the anthology š! #25 ‘Gaijin Mangaka’ (July 2016), published by Latvian comics publisher kuš! and co-edited by Berliac, an Argentinian neo-gekiga comics artist. I begin by analysing four contributions in ‘Gaijin Mangaka’ to exemplify the diversity of approaches in the book, influenced by a variety of manga genres like gekiga, shōjo, and josei manga. This analysis serves as a primer for a more general discussion regarding the Japanisation of twenty-first-century art, resulting from the coming of age of millennials who grew up consuming pop culture “made in Japan”. I address the issue of cultural appropriation regarding Japanised art, which comes up even on the margins of hegemonic culture industries, as well as Berliac’s view of ‘Gaijin Mangaka’ as a transcultural phenomenon. I also insert ‘Gaijin Mangaka’ within a broader contemporary tendency for using “mangaesque” elements in Western “high art”, starting with Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno’s No Ghost Just a Shell. The fact that the link to Japanese pop culture in ‘Gaijin Mangaka’ and other Japanised “art comics” is often more residual, cryptic, and less programmatic than some other cases of global manga articulates a sense of internalised foreignness, embedding their stylistic struggles in an arena of clashing definitions of “high” and “low,” “modern,” “postmodern”, and “non-modern”, subcultures and negative identity.

KEYWORDS

Alternative comics; Art world; Cultural appropriation; Global manga; Japanisation; Kuš!; Millennials; Postmodernism; Transculturalism; 21st Century visual arts.

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š! #25 *Gaijin Mangaka* (July 2016) is a special issue of the celebrated pocket-sized comics anthology š!, published by the Latvian comics publisher kuš! (Fig. 1). The volume was co-edited by Poland-based Argentinian comic artist Berliac, together with David Schilter, the regular editor of kuš!, and has an introduction by British journalist and comics critic Paul Gravett (author of *Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics*). In the span of its 164 pages, *Gaijin Mangaka* features works by 15 contributors: Berliac (Argentina), Andrés Magán (Spain), Aseyn (France), Ben Marcus (USA), Daylen Seu (USA), Dilraj Mann (UK), GG (Canada), Gloria Rivera (USA), König Lü.Q. (Switzerland), Luis Yang (Spain), Mickey Zacchilli (USA), Nou (USA), Vincenzo Filosa (Italy), xuh (Poland), and

myself, Hetamoé (Portugal). Underlying this selection of authors is the awareness of an emerging movement of manga-influenced “art comics”. According to comics scholar and critic Pedro Moura, “art comics” is an umbrella term for a subset of alternative comics or alt-comics. These are united by an overall, if highly diversified and often situated and contextual, attitude of conflation between the mass and street-cultural field in which the medium of comics has historically thrived due to its target audience and modes of circulation, and “high” or experimental art (Moura, 2013: para. 2-3).¹ Examples of comics authors fillable under this banner include the likes of Christopher Forgues, Aidan Koch, Simon Hanselmann, Michael DeForge, Blaise Larmee, Margot Ferrick, Noel Freibert, or Leon Sadler, among many others. In this sense, the term “art comics”, while necessarily vague, ambiguous, and indeterminate, shares some similarities as an analytical handle with the “art film”, gesturing to a deviation from the conventions of the mainstream (and mainstream alternative) industry. Today, “art comics” have dedicated publishers like kuš! in Europe (since 2008) or 2dcloud in the United States, the latter founded in 2007 by artists Maggie Umber and Raighne Hogan (Morley, 2017: para. 2).²



Figure 1. š! #25 *Gaijin Mangaka*, published by kuš! in July 2016.

¹ The quotation marks in “high” will be used throughout this paper to signal that, following Andreas Huyssen, I am not alluding to any static or essentialist definitions of “high” and “low”, but to the highly contested “high art”/mass culture binary that has nevertheless been ‘a central conceptual trope and energising norm of the post-World War II period that took hold in the context of Cold War cultural politics and the explosive acceleration of consumerist and television culture’ (Huyssen, 2002: 367). Moreover, the term “art comics” does not mean to revert to any discussion on the legitimacy of comics in general as an art form, which—even though the art historical canon continues to neglect them—should by now be a settled issue. It is simply used to index a specific trend within the contemporary production of comic books.

² Umber also runs the influential Tumblr blog *Altcomics*, showcasing the variety of sensibilities, visual/narrative approaches, and bridges with contemporary art in “art comics”.

The fact that the artists in *š! #25 Gaijin Mangaka* were all born between 1980 and 1995 suggests that this demographical cohort, labelled “millennials” by researches and popular media alike, may be relevant in understanding and contextualising their works. Although narrower definitions enclose the millennials within 15 years ranging from 1981 to 1996 (Dimock, 2019: para. 5), the exact birth years vary and looser definitions describe them as “people reaching young adulthood in the early 21st century” (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.). To be sure, categorising culture by “generation” is not without its contradictions, as it glosses over the many diversities of class, gender, race, nationality, and other socio-economic and political divides that factor into the creation of individual and group identity.

Moreover, most artists generally published by *kuš!* were born from the late 1970s to the late 1990s, so *Gaijin Mangaka* does not stand out much in this respect. Still, the exact coincidence of *Gaijin Mangaka* artists with millennial years becomes more significant when put against the broader backdrop of the contemporary art world. Here, the appearance of “mangaesque” (Berndt, 2014: 77–78) elements—which, in the formulation of art historian Jaqueline Berndt, comprise “the amalgam of texts, discourses, institutional contexts, and audiences that gives rise to notions of ‘manga proper’” and “including both positive and negative connotations” (Berndt & Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2014, 5)—and other Japanese pop-cultural references in the works of Western artists is almost exclusively the turf of millennials, i.e., artists presently in their twenties and thirties (I will address the exception of Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno later in this paper). The reason for the pervasiveness of the “mangaesque” among the millennials is that they were the first group of children and adolescents outside Japan to witness the rise of Japanese pop culture to global soft power. For instance, as scholar Casey Brienza points out, manga did not significantly penetrate the American market until the late 1980s, and sales did not boom until well into the 2000s (2009: 103) when millennials came of age. As manga, anime, videogames, and other products of Japanese pop culture began to seep into Western mediatic milieus and consciousness, increasing their presence on television, bookshelves, and the Internet, the cultural influence of Japan became capable of challenging the hegemony of the United States and Europe. Series like *Dragon Ball*, *Sailor Moon*, *Evangelion*, *Pokémon*, *Naruto*, *One Piece*, and many others imprinted the taste of 1980s and 1990s children all across the globe, from North and South America to Europe and Africa, brought together on an unprecedented scale by the Internet and social media.

In this sense, millennial fans of Japanese pop culture illustrate the latest stage of what media theorist Iwabuchi Kōichi calls the “shifting meanings of Japanization from colonial contact zone to domestic indigenization to exportable glocalization” (GARAGEMCA, 2018: 34'37"), marked by the emergence of soft power discourses and Cool Japan governmental policies. That is why, as argued by Yoda Tomiko, the “J-” in “Japanese pop culture” nowadays has a significant degree of separableness from the national, indexing a global subculture of fans centred around consumer commodities like manga, anime, videogames, and so on. As Yoda puts it, “Rather than assuming that the Japanese popular culture today ultimately refers to some form of larger national frame, we may understand the prefix *J-* as inscribing the subculturation of the national” (2006: 46). This subcultural dimension of Japanisation, connecting the social and self-identities of artists who are also generationally connected, is reinforced by the introductory blurb of *Gaijin Mangaka*. It also introduces the idea that the increased accessibility of Japanese comics and animation translated into the discovery, by millennials in their early adulthood, of alternative kinds of manga circulated in magazines like *Garō* and *Ax*,³ that helped sediment and evolve their childhood interests:

Imagine a parallel dimension in which a whole generation was raised on Sailor Moon for breakfast, and Akira was the first thing they saw on the comics rack. And just when they were about to grow out of it, in the space of a decade, they were bombarded by more alternative, adult-oriented manga—what connoisseurs call Gekiga—reaffirming their love for the devices and aesthetics of the comics medium in the Land of the Rising Sun. What a bunch of freaky hybrids would result! (Schilter, Berliac, & Muizniece, 2016: 3)

The trend of manga-influenced “art comics” is in no way restricted to the artists in *Gaijin Mangaka*. As Paul Gravett points out, “They are not alone—others include Lala Albert, Julien Ceccaldi, Gabriel Corbrera, Sascha Hommer, Hellen Jo, Joe Kessler, Jonny Negron, Jillian Tamaki and Bastien Vivès to name but a few” (2016: 4). According to Gravett, this heterogeneous group of artists is “unanimous in their admiration for and inspiration from manga, but their own expressions in response are dynamically diverse and personal, and are all the stronger, and sometimes stranger, for this” (2016: 4). Indeed, a cursory look across the pages of *Gaijin Mangaka* is enough to grasp the variety of artistic approaches and influences in the volume. From the alternative comics of *Garō*

³ Founded in 1964 by Nagai Katsuichi, *Garō* was a manga magazine specialising in alternative/underground/avant-garde manga. Artists associated with *Garō* include Katsumata Susumu, Sugiura Hinako, Yamada Murasaki, Shirato Sanpei, Maruo Suehiro, Nananan Kiriko, King Terry, Tsuge Yoshiharu, Tatsumi Yoshihiro, Nekojiro and Furuya Usamaru, among various others. *Garō* published its final issue in 2002 and was succeeded by *Ax*.

to mainstream *shōjo* manga, the contributions abide by, subvert, reinterpret, parody, or otherwise manipulate and employ the categories of manga and Japanese pop culture. For a taste of such diversity, I offer a brief overview of the works in *Gaijin Mangaka*, as well as of other parts of the book, such as its cover and artist biographies.

Themes and styles in *Gaijin Mangaka*

In this section, I address the contributions of *Gaijin Mangaka* authors Berliac, Luis Yang, Nou, and Gloria Rivera. Berliac's contribution, titled "Moriyama's Dog" (12 pages), is rendered in the author's trademark neo-*gekiga* style, embedded in the *gekiga* and *seinen* traditions of alternative manga for mature audiences, popularised by Japanese comics artists like Tatsumi Yoshihiro (Fig. 2). It tells the story of an agoraphobic *mangaka* ("manga artist") in a creative slump, forced to look after the dog of his upstairs neighbour, Mr. Moriyama, who has passed away. Although reluctant at first, the *mangaka* comes to believe that the dog enabled him to overcome his writer's block and becomes obsessed with it. When the dog manages to escape the apartment, he desperately searches for it outside; only to end up brutally beat up by a gang of delinquents. Throughout the story, Berliac represents the dog as a pastiche of Moriyama Daido's 1971 photograph of a stray dog. Moriyama's iconic picture alludes to the pariah status of renegades and rebels in Japanese society (Rubinfien, 1999: para. 7), echoing Berliac's own experience as an outsider of the Argentinean comics canon for working in the language of manga. More broadly, the theme of pariahhood relates to the "foreignness" inherent to the concept of *gaijin mangaka*, which I will address in the next section.



Figure 2. Excerpt from Berliac's "Moriyama's Dog" in *Gaijin Mangaka*.

Berliac's contribution stands out in *Gaijin Mangaka* as one of the most clearly identifiable as “manga proper” (or “*gekiga* proper”). Other contributors like Yang, Nou, and Rivera, gravitate more towards the style, and deconstruction, of *shōjo* aesthetics. Luis Yang's comic “Tabako” (14 pages) is a *kokuhako* or “love confession” story in a high school setting, narrating the blossoming love between a teenage girl called Rumiko and her upperclassman, a boy called Yamada (Fig. 3). Yang makes extensive use of pastiche elements from *shōjo* manga, rendering his story in the typical black and white style of Japanese comics, with copious amounts of starry screen tones, sailor and *gakuran* school uniforms, and Japanese suffixes like *-chan* or *-senpai*. The character design is also deconstructive, parodying the commercial beautification of girl-oriented comics. For instance, Yang reduces the characters' sparkling eyes to ill-defined masses, their chins are overly long, and the linework is intentionally sketchy. Each page is divided into two panels, in which the bottom panels tell a relatively linear, clichéd love story—Rumiko-*chan* frets over Yamada-*senpai*'s request to meet on the rooftop, eventually confessing her feelings for him—and the upper ones portray a weirder, dream-like silent narrative with no dialogues. In the latter, Rumiko finds her classmates unconscious (dead?) inside the classroom, picks up a discarded cigarette from the floor, and smokes it. The juxtaposition of these timelines effectively unveils the haunting uncanniness of *shōjo* manga's reification of feelings into sentimental stock phrases and settings, that “Tabako” seems to both adore and poke fun at.



Figure 3. Excerpt from Luis Yang's “Tabako” in *Gaijin Mangaka*.

This uncanny experience is also central to Nou's “Ring Mark” (10 pages). “Ring Mark” is a wordless abstract story involving identical cute girls who are left blank or uncoloured against colourful, flat environments populated with floral motifs—a

recurring element in Nou's work, derived from her interest in botanical illustration and photography (Nou, 2016: Artist Interview: Nou, para. 4; Fig. 4). Depicted in Nou's bold *ligne claire*,⁴ the girls in the story fuse, mutate and change scales among themselves and the flowers. Sometimes they cry, but it is unclear whether this is a result of genuine emotion, or if they are overflowing with material fluxes; the fact that the tears turn to pollen, blending with the flowers, points towards the latter. Nou depicts a queer ecology where the distinction between organism and environment threatens to disappear, and the gender/sexuality of these androgynous "girls" becomes as fluid as their surroundings. "Ring Mark" is the contribution in *Gaijin Mangaka* most focused on pure formal play, rejoicing in the transformative beauty of metamorphoses represented in the medium of comics.

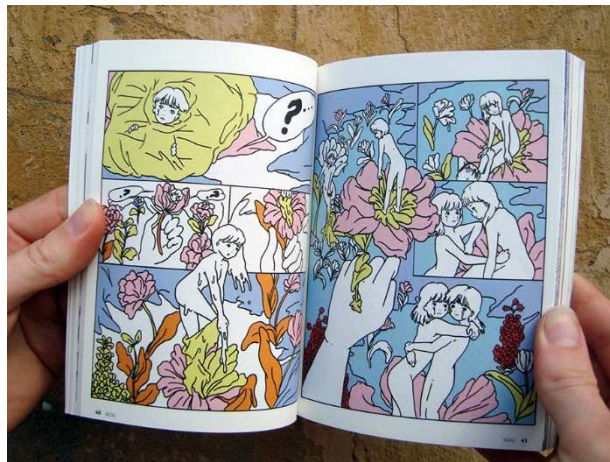


Figure 4. Excerpt from Nou's "Ring Mark" in *Gaijin Mangaka*.

In turn, Gloria Rivera's contribution "Domestic Scene" (12 pages) is about a lesbian couple and their emotionally loaded conversations about college memories, coming out, sexuality, and love (Fig. 5). Rivera renders the comic in a painterly style, whose murky ambiances in subdued pastel and brownish hues evoke the weightier subjects found in some *josei* manga (women's comics), which Rivera cites as a significant influence (Gravett, 2016: 6). The contours of Rivera's manga-style characters are sometimes barely defined, with the characters, their environment, and their words

⁴ *Ligne claire* (French for "clear line") is a term coined by Dutch graphic designer Joost Swarte to describe a drawing style pioneered by and typically identified with Franco-Belgian comics authors such as Hergé (*Les Aventures de Tintin*) and the School of Bruxelles, consisting of uniform black lines, with no hatching or ink shading. Although with roots in black and white comics from the 1920s, the *ligne claire* is often combined with bright, flat colours, as in Hergé and his collaborators' do-overs of *Tintin's* stories from the 1950s onwards (Knudde, 2019, 'Clear Line').

becoming a kind of melting patchwork, resonating with the couple's dissolving and fragile relationship. Unlike Nou's girls, who are more of a blank slate in permanent flux, Rivera's characters are burdened with personal stories and memories, seemingly embedded in the deep stratigraphy of lines and paint that gives them shape.



Figure 5. Excerpt from Gloria Rivera's "Domestic Scene" in *Gaijin Mangaka*.

Other contributions in *Gaijin Mangaka* attest to the variety within the book. Vincenzo Filosa's "Don't Touch This Gamela" is finely detailed, contrasting with the brutalism of Ben Marcus's "Fool of Memory," whose figures are heavier and more concise. "Deep Shit Honey" by Aseyn is short and sweet, like a slice of life lullaby, while Mickey Zacchili's revels in the cuteness of raw computer drawings. GG's "Lapse" is quietly meditative and sophisticated, whereas xuh's black-and-red imagery evokes the tradition of female gothic manga. Others, like Andrés Magán ("Day 57"), Dilraj Mann ("Everyday") or Daylen Seu ("Codependent Cunt"), display an array of murkier influences resulting in idiosyncratic, eclectic works. My contribution, "Trance Dream Techno," combines pictures, text, and *kaomoji* (Japanese emoticons) in a one-panel-per-page narrative; it also includes an *omake* ("extra"), playing with the popular *yonkoma* ("four-panel") format (Fig. 6). As one reviewer points out, because the artists' engagement with the languages of manga varies greatly, *Gaijin Mangaka* demonstrates, if anything, "the futility of taking 'manga' to mean anything other than a comic produced in Japan" (Hennum, 2016: para. 7). But, in today's global market, even such clear-cut definitions are fated to be quickly troubled (Brienza, 2015a: 106).



Figure 6. Excerpt from Hetamoé's "Trance Dream Techno" in *Gaijin Mangaka*.

The inherent difficulties of tackling a global "Japanese" pop culture lends a tongue-in-cheek undertone to Berliac's cover for *Gaijin Mangaka* (Fig. 7). The cover features a collage of stereotypical Cool Japan elements, from *maneki-neko* and origami to noodles and schoolgirls, from *kinbaku* bondage to manga mascots and *ukiyo-e*, among other recognisable icons of Japaneseness. On the inside, however, there is no such nation branding, but a more diluted, diverse, and sometimes cryptic approach to Japanese comics. The diversity of influences is evident in the authors' bios at the end of *Gaijin Mangaka*, where contributors were asked what their favourite manga is (Fig. 8). The responses range from beloved hits like *Ranma ½* and *Captain Tsubasa* to cult classics like *Akira* and other works by Ōtomo Katsuhiro (*Speed*, *Domu*). From interwar manga like *Norakuro* to horror masters like Itō Junji (*Tomie*). From "golden age" *shōnen-ai* by Hagio Moto (*Thomas no Shinzō*, or *The Heart of Thomas*) to psychological *josei* manga by Okazaki Kyōko (*River's Edge*). From light-hearted comedies like *Yotsuba&!* to underground comics by authors of *Garō* fame like Tsuge Tadao (*Burai Heya*), Tsuge Yoshiharu (*Muno no Hito*), and Hayashi Seiichi (*Sekishoku Erejii*, or *Red Coloured Elegy*). And *seinen* manga ranging from Matsumoto Taiyō's slice of life drama *Sunny* to Urasawa Naoki's sci-fi thriller *Nijūseiki Shōnen* (*20th Century Boys*), or Sonoda Ken'ichi's action-packed *Gunsmith Cats*.



Figure 7. Berliac's cover and backcover for *Gaijin Mangaka*.

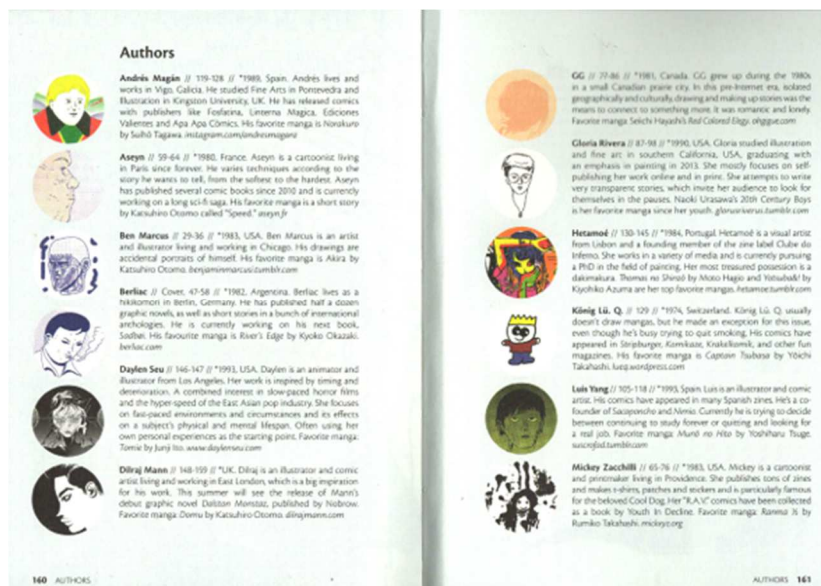


Figure 8. Artists' bios in in *Gaijin Mangaka*.

This kaleidoscope of influences and the examples of contributions presented above reveal that, not only are the artists in *Gaijin Mangaka* not detached observers of Japanese pop culture but that they bring their familiarity with both mainstream and alternative manga into the field of “art comics” in a variety of expressions. This mixture poses important if complex questions concerning authenticity and artistic purity in a globalised age when the parameters of cultural membership are potentially more fluid but also more gatekept than ever. In the next section, I address the issue of manga appropriation in *Gaijin Mangaka* and argue that it manifests, and is aligned with, the “boundary-violating impulse” of “art comics”.

Gaijin Mangaka, appropriation, and transculturalism

According to scholar Casey Brienza, the term “global manga” describes “a medium which has incorporated requisite cultural meanings and practices from Japanese manga but does not otherwise require any Japanese individual or collective entity in a material, productive capacity” (Brienza, 2015b: 5). In the context of global manga, Manfra (French manga), Euromanga (European manga), Amerimanga (American manga), and original English-language (OEL) tend to emulate the stereotypical style of mainstream *shōnen* or *shōjo* manga or negotiate a stylistic middle ground with Western indie comics. Other movements, like Nouvelle Manga, have joined artists from Europe (Frédéric Boilet, Vanyda) and Japan (Taniguchi Jirō, Nananan Kiriko, Hanawa Kazuichi), combining *bande dessinée* with “realistic” manga. Frédéric Boilet’s *L’épinard de Yukiko* (2002) and Vanyda’s *L’Immeuble d’en Face* (2005) are two of the most celebrated non-Japanese works of Nouvelle Manga, while examples of OEL manga include Adam Warren’s *The Dirty Pair* (1988–2002) or Svetlana Chmakova’s *Dramacon* (2005–2007) (Chmakova, 2017). The title *Gaijin Mangaka* thus carries an irony considering that what is typically associated with the expression “foreign comics creators” are global manga movements such as these—not the field of experimental comics. Nevertheless, what these various expressions have in common is the “appropriation” (between quotation marks, for reasons I will discuss shortly) of the language and culture of Japanese comics, in various senses and to different degrees.

The appropriation of culture, or “cultural appropriation”, can refer to a diverse set of phenomena that bring into play issues of “*misrepresentation, misuse, and theft* of the stories, styles, and material heritage of people who have been historically dominated and remain socially marginalized” (Matthes, 2016: 343). When applied to artworks, this often translates into the “use of artistic styles distinctive of cultural groups by non-members” (Matthes, 2016: 343). In the 2010s, the term “cultural appropriation” took on a life of its own in the social media, as part of the broader fourth-wave social justice movement and hashtag activism. While accusations of cultural appropriation tend to target the mainstream culture industry (Asega *et al.*, 2017), alternative or underground art is also not immune. Figure 9 shows a screenshot of a *Tumblr* user asking kuš!, the publisher of *Gaijin Mangaka*, the following question: “do you not think that Japanese people are going to find ‘gaijin mangaka’ deeply lame at least and a bit offensive at most? I love all of your other books but am finding this a bit gross” [sic] (stomachbees, 2016).

The back-and-forth that followed among the editors of *kuš!*, co-editor Berliac, and the asker, illustrates how tense the debate around cultural appropriation can become even on the margins of mainstream culture industries, as is the niche of “art comics” (Fig. 10).

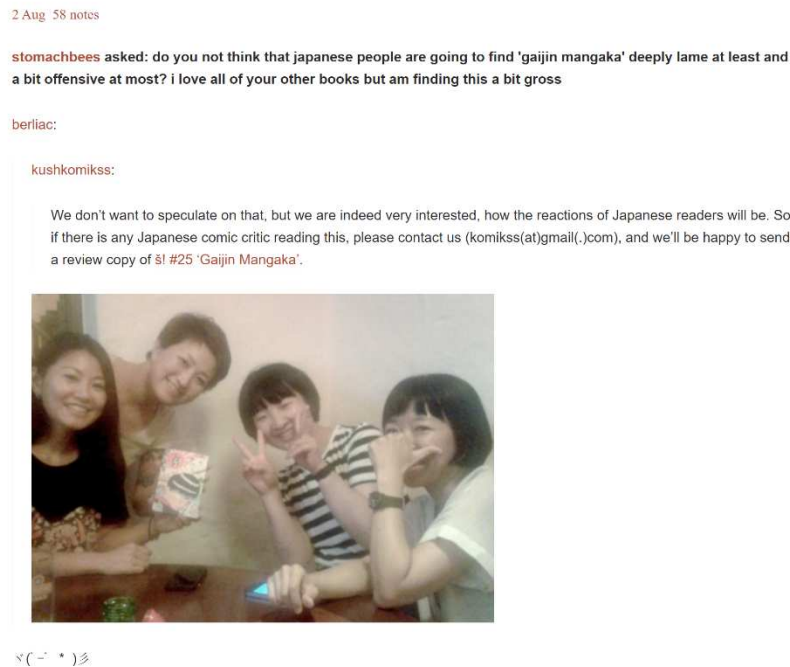


Figure 9. Screenshot of *kuš!* replying to *Tumblr* user *stomachbees*: “We don’t want to speculate on that, but we are indeed very interested, how the reactions of Japanese readers will be. So if there is any Japanese comic critic reading this, please contact us, and we’ll be happy to send a review copy of *š!* #25 *Gaijin Mangaka*.”

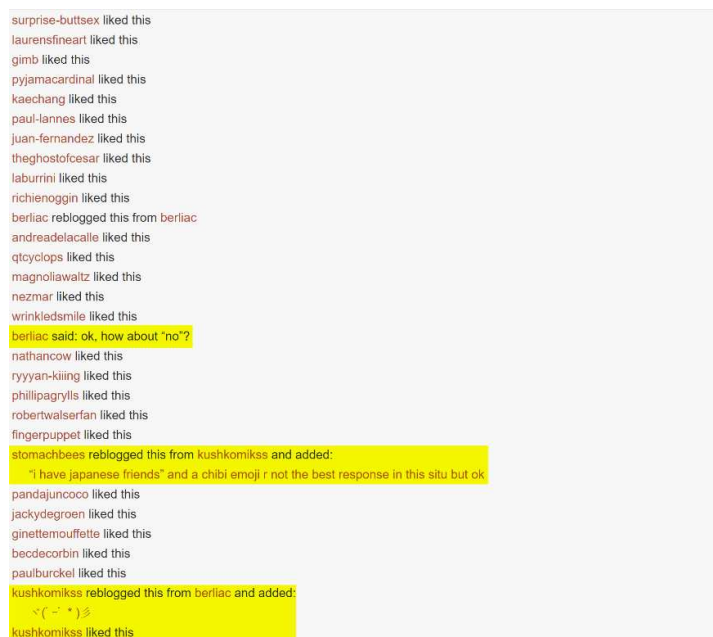


Figure 10. Screenshot of the back-and-forth between *Tumblr* user *stomachbees*, *Gaijin Mangaka* co-editor Berliac and *kuš!*.

Cultural appropriation in art is a thorny issue which, ideally, involves acknowledging and balancing the “appropriative harms” (Matthes, 2016: 346) of artworks while avoiding the trappings of cultural essentialism—that is, separating cultural insiders and outsiders on the basis of “criteria [that] construct ‘essential’ or ‘necessary’ boundaries with the propensity to falsely represent cultures as homogeneous, static, and monolithic” (Matthes, 2016: 355). In the case of manga, gatekeeping cultural membership based on the artists being or not being Japanese entails the “construction of Japan as an authentically discrete, ethno-racial category” (Brienza, 2015a: 97), particularly problematic as it resonates eerily with the country’s own nationalist myths of ethnic, racial, and cultural homogeneity. Indeed, various scholars and artists have pointed out that this manner of thinking risks replicating the logic of ownership and domination underlying the very power structures it seeks to resist (Asega *et al.*, 2017: 2, 10; Matthes, 2016: 346). Moreover, as Iwabuchi Kōichi puts it, articulating “Japan” and “West” in binary terms presupposes that exchanges take place between two stabilized units, which “not only homogenizes the two cultural entities but also directs our attention away from the doubleness of the Japanese (post) colonial experience as a non-Western colonizer” (2002: p. 61). The latter troubles the straightforward assigning of Japan’s position to that of a dominated or marginalized subject.

Also, it is well known that manga itself is “not stylistically or culturally ‘pure’ and free of non-Japanese influence” (Brienza, 2015a: 109), but the product of a long process of cultural cross-pollination in a globalised market. Scholars like Iwabuchi have challenged the “Japaneseness” of manga and anime through the concept of *mukokuseki*—“stateless” or “culturally odourless” commodities. In Iwabuchi’s view, although anime characters may speak Japanese, attend *matsuri*, or sleep on *tatami*, their appearance and the worlds they inhabit are fundamentally “expressing non-nationality” (2002: 105), constructing “an animated, race-less and culture-less, virtual version of ‘Japan’” (2002: 33). Indeed, as Iwabuchi explains, the term *mukokuseki* was coined in the early 1960s to describe a series of Japanese parodies of Hollywood Westerns with a Japanese gunman (2002: 215), thus alluding to a product that manifests, more than anything, the “impurity” of such commodity forms. Moreover, Japanese pop culture has been actively deployed by the Japanese government as a form of soft power in nation branding campaigns like Cool Japan (Iwabuchi, “Pop-Culture”: 422–27), exploiting a nationalist euphoria for its distinctive “Japaneseness” (Iwabuchi, 2002: 30–31) in a globalised landscape more and more marked

by the rise of other non-Western cultural industries (Iwabuchi, 2002: 48) in the Global South and East Asia.

Lastly, if one considers that, as argued by scholars like Neil Cohn, manga is a visual language (Cohn & Ehly, 2016: p. 17), learning its styles and conventions would be akin to learning how to speak and write Japanese, or any other language. Against this backdrop, it becomes exceptionally hard to pinpoint how manga can be “misused” or “stolen.” If there is a criterion for belonging to manga culture, it should not be an ethno-racial one, but that manga “belongs” to anyone who participates in manga culture to whatever degree as an artist, fan, critic, publisher, researcher, or educator, independently of their nationality. As such, for Berliac, *Gaijin Mangaka* is more adequately described by the term “transcultural.” As he puts it,

calling some of the artists in this issue “Hybrids” is, in my opinion, a bit euphemistic. To me they seem more like artistically torn, schizoid... two or more artistic personalities at war with each other. “I wanna do this, but without quitting this.” And that’s great, that’s what makes their work so interesting and unique... They make these stylistic struggles an artistic asset. (Berliac & Schilter, 2016: para. 21)

The concepts of transculturalism and multiculturalism take on different meanings depending on the context. Berliac’s emphasis on the “stylistic struggles” of *gaijin mangaka* aligns with Jeff Lewis’s definition of “transculturalism [that] acknowledges the instability of all cultural formations, discourses and meaning-making processes” (2002: 437), highlighting a permanent negotiation of consonances and dissonances resulting from the lived experience of cross-cultural contamination. According to Lewis, this “may be good, bad or both” (2002: 137), depending on its implementation. Generally speaking, transculturalism appeals to critics of two central multiculturalist metaphors: the “salad bowl” metaphor where cultures mix but do not blend (Grosu-Rădulescu, 2012: 109) and the alternate “melting pot” theory of cultural homogenization. In Berliac’s view, the works in *Gaijin Mangaka* represent a third-way alternative to both global manga that seeks to become “authentic” by erasing its non-Japaneseness and a multiculturalist hybridization aligned with the values of global free-market capitalism (2017: para. 6). In contrast, *Gaijin Mangaka* strikes a perilous position in which the tension between the Japanese and the Japanised, the insider and the outsider, is neither resolved nor eliminated, but evolved into a messier form of artistic expression.

Japanised Western “art comics” and contemporary art

What innervates the “stylistic struggles” in *Gaijin Mangaka* and other Japanised “art comics” from authors such as Lala Albert, Julien Ceccaldi, or Jonny Negron, is their filiation within a broader trend of non-Japanese contemporary art incorporating Japanese pop-cultural elements alongside other twenty-first century aesthetic novelties, like digital and Internet aesthetics. Nichole Shinn’s *Kiss Me* is an excellent example of this fusion, an artist’s book consisting of digital collages created from sets of virtual “paper dolls,” called Kisekae Set System or KiSS, prevalent in otaku fan communities during the Internet’s early years (Shinn, 2016: final insert; Fig. 11). Those same associations are present in the paintings, drawings, and videos of artists like Jon Rafman, Michael Pybus, Sven Loven, Lauren Elder, Rachael Milton, Sua Yoo, Yannick Val Gesto, or Bill Hayden, among others, in whose work the references to Japanese comics, animation, fandoms, and videogames emerge organically as part of their broader millennial identity (Fig. 12). Another example is the recent collaborative project *Still Be Here* by musician Laurel Halo, artist Mari Matsutoya, digital artists Martin Sulzer and LaTurbo Avedon, and choreographer Darren Johnson, a media performance and installation featuring the Japanese cybercelebrity Hatsune Miku, commissioned by the Transmediale/CTM Festival and first presented at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin in 2016.



Figure 11. Excerpt from Nichole Shinn’s artist’s book *Kiss Me*.



Figure 12. Example of a contemporary painting referencing the "mangaesque." Sven Loven, *Augury*, 2017. Acrylic on canvas, 71 x 58 cm.

Historically, Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno's *No Ghost Just a Shell* (1999-2002)—the title is a pun on the iconic 1995 cyberpunk anime film *Ghost in the Shell*—was the first Western artworld project to employ “mangaesque” visuals, 20 years ago, even though its *modus operandi* does not precisely align with that of *Gaijin Mangaka* or the above-mentioned artists. French artists Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno acquired the legal rights to a manga character called Annlee, and each produced an individual piece starring her: Parreno's *Anywhere Out of the World*, in 2000, and Huyghe's *One Million Kingdoms*, in 2001. They also commissioned others to use Annlee free of charge, gathering an impressive array of artists including Henri Barande, Francois Curlet, Liam Gillick, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Pierre Joseph with Mehdi Belhaj-Kacem, M/M, Melik Ohanian, Richard Phillips, Joe Scanlan, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Anna-Léna Vaney. Notwithstanding the groundbreaking and artistic value of *No Ghost Just a Shell*, to some extent, it illustrates an outsider mentality that externalises the viewer from Japanese pop culture. Huyghe and Parreno essentially propose to rescue Annlee from the Japanese mass-cultural environment, where, according to them, she would fade away and disappear, by entrusting her to the more capable hands of Western “high art”.

This outsidersness is unsurprising, given that Huyghe and Parreno (born in 1962 and 1964) belong to a generation that, unlike the millennials, was not extensively exposed to anime and manga. Arguably, instead of a taste for Japanese animation per se, *No Ghost Just a Shell* stems from the artists' interest in the late 1990s zeitgeist, marked by the fascination

with digitality, Japan, and anime. At the time, it was erupting everywhere in pop culture, from Wamdue Project's "King of My Castle" music video, which was also composed of *Ghost in the Shell* footage, to Playstation's famous "alien girl" commercial in 1999, that resembles Parreno's alienesque restyling of Annlee in *Anywhere Out of the World*. However, even now this externalising discourse continues to be reproduced, for instance, in Haus der Kulturen der Welt's promotional blurb for *Still Be Here*, although it does not seem to reflect the thoughts and opinions of the artists' involved (Jones, 2017). In the blurb,⁵ the phrasing attributes special deconstructive abilities to the Western "high art" performance while seemingly erasing a decade's worth of deconstruction, transgression, and appropriation of Hatsune Miku by the Japanese fan community.

On the other hand, Japanised Western "art comics" and contemporary art differ from the incorporation of manga and anime visuals by Murakami Takashi, Nara Yoshitomo, and other Japanese artists associated with the Superflat and Neo-Pop movements, from which the element of "gaijiness" (foreignness in relation to Japan) is naturally absent. Moreover, while the negative identity of being not-Japanese is a defining element for artists practising what Casey Brienza calls "manga without Japan" (2015b: 1), an additional layer of negativity is at stake when Western "high art" references Japanese pop culture. In the West, twentieth-century modernism was shaped by what art and literary critic Andreas Huyssen famously called "the Great Divide" (1987: viii) between "high art" and mass culture. Emerging in nineteenth-century Europe, this divide was not only challenged and destabilized as soon as it surfaced—by the historical avant-garde and postmodernism from the 1960s onwards—but rests on hypocritically "insisting on the divide while time and time again violating that categorical separation in practice" (Huyssen, 2002: 367). Regardless, as Huyssen points out, "the opposition between modernism and mass culture has remained amazingly resilient over the decades" (1987, xvii), to the point that today's artists, critics, and institutions continue to struggle and shape their practices in relation, and opposition, to that paradigm.

⁵ The blurb reads as follows: "*Still Be Here* explores Hatsune Miku as the crystallisation of collective desires, embodied in the form of a teal-haired virtual idol, forever 16. In watching the deconstruction of this perfect star, the audience comes to the uncanny realisation that Miku is simply an empty vessel onto which we project our own various fantasies. In this void, the topology of desire within a networked community becomes tangible and Miku becomes an allegory of the commodified female body as governed by corporate regulation and normative social etiquette. The performance critically deconstructs this body and speculates on opportunities to transgress it through means of appropriation" (*Still Be Here*, 2016).

Japan occupies a particular position in this respect, as the country became a sort of postmodern symbol, both in the eyes of the West and domestically. For instance, Roland Barthes memorably called Japan the *Empire of Signs* (1970), while Alexandre Kojève, in a famous 1968 footnote to *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, claims that Japan is a “totally formalised” society whose encounter with the West will “lead not to a rebarbarization of the Japanese but to a ‘Japanization’ of the Westerners” (1980: 162). Murakami Takashi’s “The Super Flat Manifesto” also taps into such portrayals of depthless Japan by Western philosophers, opening with a promise-threat that “The world of the future might be like Japan is today—super flat” (2000: 5). This line echoes both the techno-orientalist dystopias of science fiction films like *Blade Runner*, in which Japan appears “as an almost comforting figure of danger and promise” (Ivy, 1988: 21), and the country’s “complicit exoticism” (Iwabuchi, 1994) in the construction and commodification of Japaneseness—not least *postmodern* Japaneseness, or the Japaneseness of postmodernity. Indeed, according to anthropologist Marilyn Ivy, “postmodernism” itself became a widely circulated informational commodity in 1980s Japan, propelled by the boom of “new academicians” or “postacademicians” like *Structure and Power* (1983) author Akira Asada (1988: 26–33). The popularity of postmodernism in Japan implicitly celebrated “the nation’s triumph over modernity and over history”, from which the country had been denied “a full-fledged subject position and historical agency” (Yoda, 2006: 34).

Going back to *Gaijin Mangaka*, even if (as argued in the previous section) manga cannot be culturally appropriated, paradoxically, the adoption of “mangaesque” elements in “art comics” still does, in my view, indicate a “boundary-violating impulse” (Iwabuchi, 2002: 17) in which the transgression of ethno-racial and national boundaries overlaps with an avant-gardist or experimental ethos. Because “art comics” in general tend not to stick to the conventions of mainstream comics, Japanese or otherwise, most of the works in *Gaijin Mangaka* have more intricate or subtle links to the “mangaesque” than a typical work of Euromanga or OEL manga. In conflating with notions of “high” (i.e., experimental, avant-garde, arthouse, etc.) art, “art comics” necessarily engage with the historical “baggage” of contestation that this category carries. As such, while manga and anime may generally operate as *mukokuseki* commodities in globalised mass culture, concerning the modernist “anxiety of contamination” (Huyssen, 1987: vii) that shaped and continues to shape definitions of “high” and “low”, they remain the Other of taste and the West. Especially so, given that Japan was posed and posed itself as a postmodern antidote to Western history

and modernity. Much like Pop Art in the 1960s, Japanese pop culture in the West today has become—along with digital aesthetics, Internet culture, and 1990s and 2000s subcultural trends, which often appear mixed in artworks—a “synonym for the new lifestyle of the younger generation” (Huyssen, 1987:141). Japanised millennial artists adopt a negative identity towards Western modernism by identifying instead with the postmodernity or “modernity of the geographically ‘non-modern’” (Huyssen, 2002: 364). Moreover, the statelessness or odourlessness of much Japanese pop culture renders these cultural commodities even more menacing by disavowing a superficial inscription in the continuum of traditional, reassuring Japan. A menace that, for instance, Murakami Takashi, in view of maximising Superflat’s entrance into the Western art market, attempted to mitigate by inserting Superflat into a lineage of “eccentric” Japanese artists from the Edo period (Murakami, 2000: 9–15).

In Kristevian terms, one may say that the works in *Gaijin Mangaka* and other Japanised “art comics”, because of their insiderness to “high art”, somewhat apart from other expressions of global manga, engage more powerfully with the ‘inside/outside boundary, and... the threat [that] comes no longer from the outside but from within’ (Kristeva, 1982: 114). In other words, such works problematise, in multiple or even contradictory ways, the phantasmal leakage of linguistically and geographically contained Japaneseness into the Western consciousness and art canon. They, therefore, replace the pacifying and cooptable discourse of hybridism (Iwabuchi, 2002: 219; Shohat & Stam, 2013: 43) with an abject phenomeno-poetics of internalised foreignness. That is why, for Berliac, the *gaijin* in *Gaijin Mangaka* must be de-essentialised from its national frame:

Gaijin (“foreign”) Mangaka (such as the artists in *š!* #25), are not such for the country they were born in, but rather in a broader, philosophical and artistic sense: they don’t feel at home in their own bodies of work, therefore they’re always in transition, always walking the thin line of “not this/not that” and “this and simultaneously that”. (Berliac, 2017: para. 6)



Figure 13. Left: Cover of Berliac's *Playground* (Ediciones Valientes, 2013). Right: Excerpt from *Playground*.

In this light, Berliac's case is particularly impressive. Among the works in *Gaijin Mangaka*, "Moriyama's Dog" is (along, perhaps, with Filosa's "Don't Touch This Gamela") the one that, being straightforwardly gekiga, does not fit into the category of "art comics". However, a look at Berliac's background troubles this straightforwardness, as he is the author of *Playground* "Una novela gráfica. Un documental. Un cómic" (in English, "A graphic novel. A document. A comic"), a highly acclaimed work of "art comics" based on John Cassavetes's *Shadows*, itself an iconic piece of experimental cinema (Játiva, 2016; Santoro, 2014; Fig. 13). After publishing *Playground* in 2013 with Ediciones Valientes, Berliac suddenly shifted his style from the visual and narrative language of "art comics" to the one of *gekiga*, as if shedding his skin to reveal a truth hidden beneath it. In *Seinen Crap 2*, a zine published 2015, Berliac wrote—not without controversy⁶—that "to begin making manga was to me the artistic (that is, existential) equivalent of 'coming out of the closet,'" entailing "a rejection towards my previous self" (Berliac, 2015). Regardless of one's opinion on the appropriateness of Berliac's comparison, it effectively conveys how works such as "Moriyama's Dog," which on the surface are "simply" (global) manga, are in fact rooted in a negative relation to Western notions of "high art".

⁶Writer and artist Sarah Horrocks (mercurialblonde, 2015) started a polemic with Berliac's text, which led to the abrupt cancellation of his comic *Sadbøi*, a graphic novel about the immigrant experience—coincidentally, a different iteration of the "inside/outside" boundary—by Canadian publisher Drawn & Quarterly in 2017 (Drawn & Quarterly, 2017).

Conclusion

The comics anthology *š! #25 Gaijin Mangaka* is a thought-provoking collection of transnational graphic narratives, posing important if complex questions concerning authenticity and artistic purity in a globalised age. It is also symptomatic of the Japanisation of millennials—the first Western generation to grow up immersed in a mediatic milieu where anime and manga proliferated on television, bookshelves and the Internet. No longer discrete observers of Japanese pop culture, these young visual artists now bring their familiarity with anime, manga, and other Japanese pop-cultural forms into the various media in which they work, including “art comics”.

In the first part of this paper, I discussed four *Gaijin Mangaka* contributions (Berliac’s “Moriyama’s Dog,” Luis Yang’s “Tabako,” Nou’s “Ring Mark,” and Gloria Rivera’s “Domestic Scene”) to exemplify the diversity of approaches in the book, incorporating a wide range of manga genres like *gekiga*, *shōjo* and *josei* manga. I argued that the cover and title of the book establish a tongue-in-cheek relation to both the nation branding elements of Cool Japan, and other types of global manga like Manfra, Euromanga, Amerimanga, and OEL manga. As co-editor Berliac explains, the “foreignness” in *gaijin mangaka* refers less to the countries of origin than to the struggles of transcultural art.

In the second and third part of the paper, I took a closer look at the question of appropriation and transculturalism regarding global manga, in general, and Japanised “art comics”, in particular. I argued that, while one should not dismiss the issue of cultural appropriation, it is questionable whether any appropriative harms take place when it comes to manga: an ever-evolving transcultural visual language that has been actively exported to enhance Japan’s soft power in the global market. I also inserted the *Gaijin Mangaka* phenomenon within the broader scope of Japanised visual arts in the twenty-first century, in which references to “mangaesque” imaginaries increasingly appear in “high art” contexts. In the end, the “gaijiness” of *Gaijin Mangaka*, in its multiplicity and contradictions, articulates a three-fold sense of internalised foreignness. On the one hand, even if one admits that manga is *mukokuseki*, global manga is always somewhat at odds with the phantasm of “genuine” (Japanese) manga. On the other, non-Japanese and non-Japan-based manga artists can experiment an estrangement in relation to their countries’ national canons (e.g., Argentine or Franco-Belgian comics). Finally, Japanised “high art” mobilises a foreignness from within the Western art canon to deliberately

forefront the categorical instability of “high” and “low,” “modern,” “postmodern,” and “non-modern”, of subcultural and negative identities.

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RESEARCH FILES

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

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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 *tōpoi* 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 *tōpoi* 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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²² This interview has already appeared, in Italian, in Pellitteri 2018, i: 398-400.

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REVIEWS

***Animated Encounters: Transnational Movements of Chinese Animation, 1940-1970s* – Daisy Yan DU**

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019, 276 p.

Review by Laurence GREEN | SOAS University of London, UK

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When Jonathan Clements' *Anime: A History* was released in 2013, it felt like a breath of fresh air to the field of anime studies. For years, existing literature on anime – both populist and academic – had invariably focused on either the 'contents' of the medium, the fans viewing it, or both. We were told time and again of anime's capacity for storytelling and visual spectacle, and why it meant so much to fans on the other side of the world from its country of origin – Japan. Clements' study did something different – it situated anime firmly within the real world, part of a clear, systemised process of production and consumption. A product with a clear value attached to it – commercial or otherwise. With this premise in mind, Clements could map out the history of anime across the past one hundred years, not only building on the important work of Marc Steinberg's 'media mix' to describe anime's insatiable capacity for joined up media franchises, but also filling vital gaps in the nebulous blur of anime's early years.

But in the years since the release of Clements book, we have seen a turn once again in the tone of anime scholarship, driven primarily by the work of Thomas Lamarre and his deeply theoretical approach to viewing anime. Put forward in his ambitious *The Anime Machine* (2009), and subsequently built on in *The Anime Ecology* (2018), Lamarre's theories create a different kind of systemisation to that of Clements – one interested in the nature of anime-as-medium itself. Lamarre's description of the 'animetic' quality – the art of the moving image itself – bristles with big terminology: the multiplanar image, the distributive field of vision, exploded projection, modulation. It is meaty stuff, and its complexity may be off-putting to those looking for a more general reader for their Japanese pop culture classes, but it also represents the most concerted effort in the study of anime

right now to prescribe a dedicated critical line of theory for anime-as-art. And so, with the study of Japanese animation very much part of the critical establishment now, so to speak, attention has inevitably begun to turn to the rising star of Japan's neighbours, Korea and China. While Korea has understandably been garnering its fair share of the soft power limelight of late for its impressive pop music chops, China's cultural output and the role it can potentially play in a global market is more of an enigma. Thus, Daisy Yan Du's book *Animated Encounters* and its premise to focus squarely on all things Transnational in Chinese animation offers mouth-watering potential, as does its colourful cover-art and status as the first in the University of Hawaii's new *Asia Pop!* series of studies. In many ways, the book feels like a natural companion piece to Clements' *Anime: A History*, taking a primarily historical methodology, but pairing it with the somewhat denser, more theoretical stylings favoured by the likes of Lamarre.

The core of Du's argument rests on the assertion that transnationality in Chinese animation is nothing new – rather, it was transnational to begin with. The early chapters of the tome give ample space to the troubled history of Japan's colonial occupation of the Manchurian region and the exchange of animation staff between the two countries. Here, the rather dry succession of dates and historically important personas feels like it belongs as much to the history of Japanese animation as it does to a Chinese one – a further nod perhaps, to the inherent transnationality at the heart of Du's thesis. This concept is expressed most clearly in the idea of Manchuria itself as an imagined state rather than a material country, an immaterial existence that persists in the memory to this day. We are asked to consider questions of what it means to possess a 'national' style of animation, and to what degree Chinese animation might 'self-orientalise' itself.

These are exciting, vivid concepts, but one of the continuing frustrations with the book's early movements is that while it feels like it is unearthing a treasure trove of immense value, its tangibility – the sheer spirit and verve of the animation itself – is hard for us to get a true measure of. The plot descriptions offered up are dull, workmanlike affairs, quickly lost between the relentless tides of political history and encyclopaedic procession of key players. That's not to say that a historical approach to the material does it no favours - far from it. Clements' book was a masterclass in conveying the relevancy of historical material through intensely memorable anecdotal flavour, and Du herself finds her knack for it in the book's far more readable latter passages.

Chapter three picks up on the decline of a particularly Soviet influence on animated output and Du returns to the idea of a Chinese 'national style'. One of the most fascinating

engagements with this is the concept of ink-painting in animation – an art so fantastically skilful that the practical how-to of it remains a jealously guarded secret. Du states how the ‘hypervisibility’ of more recent computer-generated efforts to emulate this effect only add to the mystique of the genuine article. Also interesting is the discourse on what purpose exactly animation should serve. Is it a children’s medium, designed purely to serve children and reflect children’s lives on film? We hear of the suspension of fictional filmmaking between 1966 and 1970, as the didactic qualities of Chinese cinema reached their extreme. The most bizarre manifestation of this tight control being the erasure of animals (an extension of Mao’s campaign against unhygienic ‘pests’) from the screen. Du devotes the entirety of her fourth chapter to this fascinating detail, in what is by far the most engaging work in the study.

While the book’s stronger second half does a lot to rebalance the dryness of the early chapters, as a whole, the writing is unfortunately plagued by a number of questionable stylistic quirks. Du repeatedly refers to Osamu Tezuka’s famous production company as ‘Bug Productions’ - a literal translation of the Japanese *Mushi Production* (or *Mushi Pro* for short) that it is usually referred to in almost all anime-centric studies. Likewise, she states that Japanese animation is often ‘reductively’ called anime – whereas this is simply a romanisation of the exact same term the Japanese use to refer to the medium.

Lastly, but by no means least, the paucity of illustrations and artwork contained in the book feels like a real stumbling block. While there were no doubt unavoidable limitations behind this - for example copyright, or simple access to available materials - the book feels all the poorer for the sheer fact that we cannot see what Du expounds so many words simply describing. It is no surprise then that chapter four, with its fantastic spread of visuals from *Heroic Little Sisters of the Grassland* (1965), feels easily the most vivid. The inconsistency is frustrating, more so because the strength of this final chapter and subsequent afterword leaves the reader (finally) wanting more, precisely at the moment Du brings proceedings to a close.

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Osamu Tezuka, el Dios del Manga – **Exhibition at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya**

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Review by Antonio LORIGUILLO-LÓPEZ | Universitat Jaume I, Spain

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2019 marked a significant date for the circulation of Japanese popular culture in Spain. Manga Barcelona, the multitudinous event formerly known as “Saló del Manga”, reached its 25th edition. A quarter of a century has passed since its modest beginning as a meetup that brought together around a thousand enthusiasts of manga, anime, and video games at the Estació de França in Barcelona. At twenty-five years, the most relevant event for Japanese popular culture in the country is enjoying good health. In this last edition, more than 150,000 visitors walked the 78,000m² fairgrounds at the Feria Barcelona Montjuïc, spurred on by a programme full of activities that included a list of artists invited from Japan. This list was particularly extensive in the case of a specific group of them: the *mangaka*.

Manga Barcelona is organised by FICOMIC,¹ a non-profit organisation created in 1988 by the Catalan guilds of publishers, distributors, and booksellers for the circulation of comics as a medium. It would be difficult to understand the current state of manga publishing in Spain without also considering this initiative, which is promoted by the sector itself. After surviving the financial crisis of 2008, Spain now has a prosperous publishing landscape, something that was unthinkable even a few years earlier. In 2018, around 800 manga volumes were published in Spain, recovering the highest figures prior to the financial crisis (the peak was 740 in 2008). Since then, the health of the manga market has improved both in quality (e.g. greater variety of genres and demographic sensitivities) and in competition. More than 20 publishing houses have published manga in Spain throughout 2018 (Guía del Còmic, 2018; Bernabé, 2018). Many of them, such as

¹ Federació d'Institucions Professionals del Còmic. This association is also the organiser of the Saló del Còmic de Barcelona.

Milky Way and Tomodomo, are post-crisis publishers that challenge the hegemony of the national branches of large transnational publishing groups such as Planeta, Norma, Panini, and Ivrea through cult titles for niche markets. In this way, we can understand how the continued presence in Manga Barcelona of *mangakas*—this year's edition featured, among others, Atsushi Ohkubo, Kusanagi Mizuho (invited by Norma Editorial), Kanno Aya (Tomodomo), Kawamoto Homura and Seiki Kei (ECC Ediciones) or Yamaguchi Tsubasa (Milky Way Ediciones)—is related to the status of manga in the national publishing sector.

To make the most of the 25th anniversary, FICOMIC launched the exhibition "Osamu Tezuka, el Dios del Manga", an unprecedented exposition in Catalonia produced in collaboration with the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Tezuka Productions, and the Festival de la Bande Dessinée d'Angoulême, where the expo commissioned by Stéphane Beaujean and Gaëtan Akyüz was initially exhibited in 2018. Located in a temporary exhibition hall of the monumental Palau Nacional on the hill of Montjuïc (a short walk from the Fira), the structure of the exhibition follows a chronology of Tezuka's life divided into five key periods: "the age of innocence" (1945-50), "the quest for an ideal" (1950-65), "confrontation with reality" (1966-78), "re-encounter with history" (1972-89), and only one dedicated to animation, significantly titled "the revolution of animated manga: the adventure of Mushi Production" (1962-73).

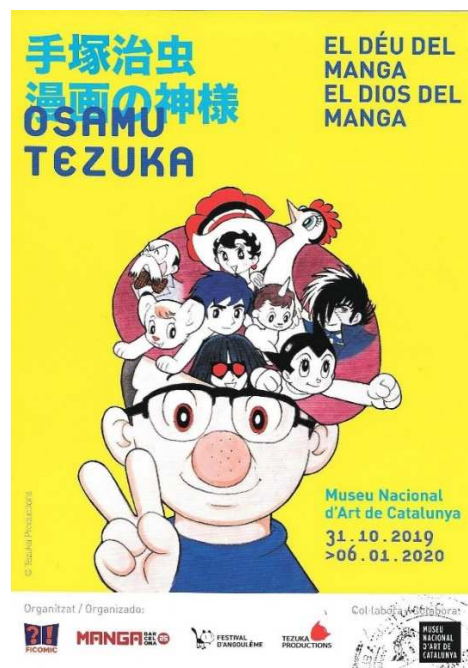


Figure 1. Flyer from the exhibit *Osamu Tezuka, el Dios del Manga* (31 October 2019 – 6 January 2020). © Courtesy of the Museo d'Art Nacional de Catalunya, Barcelona (2019)

This last period is of special interest in the Spanish context, as the first works by Tezuka to reach our territory were not his manga, but anime films that he scripted—such as *Sindbad no Bōken* (T. Yabushita & Y. Kuroda, 1962), which premiered in Spain in 1964 and the animated television series *Jungle Taitei*, adapted from a manga series of the same name (S. Hayashi, 1965-66), which was broadcasted in 1969 (Martí Escayol, 2013: 62). In addition to being considered the main architect of the consolidation of the manga industry after World War II (Onoda Power, 2009: 19), in the following years Tezuka propelled the Japanese animation industry to unknown limits. The broadcast of the first episode of *Tetsuwan Atomu* (O. Tezuka, 1963-66) on New Year's Day 1963 is generally considered the beginning of a new era for Japanese animation. Although its premiere was just a few months ahead of other influential series that contributed to consolidating the thirty-minute anime episode format, *Tetsuwan Atomu* is generally cited as the pioneer in the field of anime. And, although the routines and themes established by Mushi Productions would be polished and expanded with the passing of the decades, in *Tetsuwan Atomu* lie the foundations of the style of television anime.

Each of the periods are accompanied by reproductions and originals of Tezuka's pages and by the eloquent and informative texts by Beaujean and Xavier Guilbert² on the socio-cultural context of each period and on the particularities of the around the two hundred works, including illustrations, panels, *tobira-e*,³ and *dōga*.⁴ Access to these originals is a rare occasion. Tezuka was very jealous with his originals, so it is extraordinary that he gave in to their exhibition, albeit after a process of retouching and reframing (Beaujean and Guilbert, 2019: 4). The harmonious collaboration of the curators with the heirs of Tezuka's works is evident considering the participation of Macoto Tezka in the opening the exhibition. Director Tezka (born Makoto Tezuka) is Tezuka's son and is part of the management of Tezuka Productions, in whose headquarters the exhibited originals are kept and where offers continue to arrive for collaborations, productions, and merchandising requirements regarding his extensive production (the latter also occupy a priority place in the museum shop window display). The life-long retrospective is complemented by four murals dedicated to biographic notes, to the *COM* magazine, and to two sections set aside to illustrate the evolution of his drawing techniques and his audacious narrative

² The texts are written in Catalan and there is a contiguous QR code to access a Spanish translation.

³ Page that precedes the episodes of serialised manga that are not usually published in the later compilations.

⁴ In animation, intermediate scenes intercalated between two *genga* (key scenes).

experiments. These murals are especially pleasing because of the display of intertextualities among works of all his periods and because of the explication of his influence in later *mangaka* through the compilation of testimonies from authors such as veterans Leiji Matsumoto and Rintarō, and those of subsequent generations such as Naoki Urasawa and Taiyō Matsumoto.

Finally, I must point out that this exhibition is aimed more towards those already initiated in Japanese culture who want to search for the origins of the medium than those who are completely new to the codes of Japanese comics (e.g. the panel dialogues are in Japanese; there is no other format than the panels displayed). Far from this being a flaw, the maturity of the exhibition is perfectly calibrated to the growing knowledge among the Spanish manga community, which has enjoyed in recent years the publication of practically all the major works of the so-called "god of manga" since 1995.⁵ Although the devotion to Tezuka has taken time to physically consolidate —perhaps, as in other regions of the world, he seems to be more a “patron of sorts” who should be acknowledged and respected e than a worshipped god— this exhibition lays the foundations for more fervent faith within the growing manga consumer communities in Spain.

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⁵ With the edition of *Black Jack* in Spanish by Glénat.

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