

Fukushima, Media, Democracy: The Promise of Documentary Film

An Interview with Kamanaka Hitomi with Introduction by Katsuya Hirano

Translation and Footnotes by Margherita Long

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The original interview is available [here](#).

This interview is accompanied by Margherita R. Long's essay [Japan's 3.11 Nuclear Disaster and the State of Exception: Notes on Kamanaka's Interview and Two Recent Films](#)



Kamanaka Hitomi

Born in Toyama Prefecture, Kamanaka Hitomi entered Waseda University and joined her friends in a filmmaking club. Kamanaka won a scholarship from the Japanese government and

spent time in Canada and the US between 1990 and 1995 studying at the National Film Board of Canada and working as a media activist at Paper Tiger in New York. Kamanaka then returned to Japan at the time of the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake that caused over 6,000 deaths and displaced over 300,000 people in the greater Kobe area of Japan in 1995. While working as a volunteer for the victims of the earthquake, she began to produce documentaries for NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) as a freelance director. Kamanaka's first nuclear-related film, *Hibakusha at the End of the World (Radiation: A Slow Death*, 2003), won several awards, including one from Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs for excellence in documentary. The film shed light on the transnational links of nuclear policies and their fatal consequences by comparing radiation effects at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation in the State of Washington, the effects of depleted uranium on Iraqi citizens during and after the first Gulf War, and victims of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Hibakusha was the first of three works that came to be known as Kamanaka's "nuclear trilogy." Her second work, *Rokkasho Rhapsody* (2006) covered Rokkasho village residents' rifts and struggles resulting from the still ongoing

struggle over construction of the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant in Aomori Prefecture, Japan. Her third work, *Ashes to Honey* (2010), documented local residents' struggle against the construction of a nuclear power plant in Yamaguchi Prefecture. In 2015, Kamanaka released *Little Voices from Fukushima* that followed the mothers in Fukushima who made every possible effort to protect their children from external and internal radioactive exposure, especially the effects of radiation on the thyroid glands of children following nuclear meltdowns, after the 3.11 nuclear disaster. By comparing their stories with those of Chernobyl victims' ongoing struggle in Belarus, *Little Voices* highlights the necessity for measures to protect against radiation. Kamanaka is the only film director who has worked as a nuclear documentarian for over two decades, raising awareness about the gigantic profit-making structure known as the "nuclear village" or "nuclear mafia" consisting of international nuclear agencies, government, energy companies, and financial institutions and underscoring the overwhelming power exercised by this conglomerate of political and financial powers over local residents. Concerned with the fundamentally undemocratic nature of nuclear energy policies, Kamanaka combines her filmmaking and activism. Kamanaka taught filmmaking at Tokyo University of Technology from 2003-2011 as an associate professor and is currently affiliated with Tama Art University as a lecturer. I interviewed Kamanaka in Los Angeles, Tokyo, and Kyoto in 2015 about her views of 3.11, filmmaking, and activism. This interview is based on those meetings. Professor Margherita Long offers [an accompanying essay](#) that puts Kamanaka's idea of Fukushima, media, and democracy in a comparative perspective, and offers a reading of Kamanaka's two most recent films. Katsuya Hirano.

What it means to make films after 3.11

Hirano: You've been addressing issues of nuclear power and nuclear exposure for a long time. Prior to 3.11 you made your "Nuclear Trilogy" with the three films *Hibakusha at the End of the World* (2003), *Rokkasho Rhapsody* (2006) and *Ashes to Honey: Toward a Sustainable Future* (2010). Your most recent film *Little Voices of Fukushima* (2015) is a documentary shot after 3.11.¹ Has the Fukushima nuclear accident changed your approach to filmmaking, or your thinking about filmmaking?

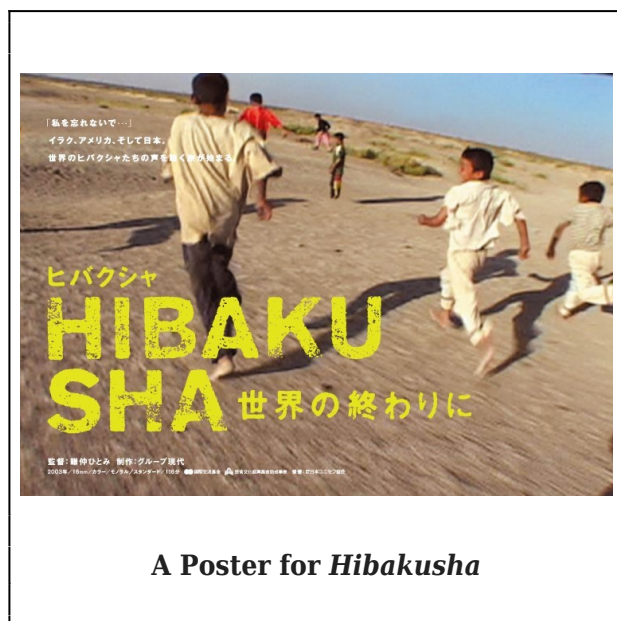
Kamanaka: Let me start by saying that my core motivation in making the nuclear trilogy was to lessen nuclear exposure worldwide. The more humans have used nukes - whether we call them "peaceful applications" of nuclear technology or "nuclear deterrents" to war - the more toxicity the planet at large has had to absorb.

What I came to understand in Iraq making *Hibakusha at the End of the World* was that as this toxicity spreads into people's daily lives, future generations are the first to be sacrificed. As I was realizing that humanity would seal its own fate if it didn't change course, and as I myself was meeting so many children who were dying, their futures cut short, I wanted to take some sort of action. This was my starting place.

Over the course of making the trilogy I was pondering, debating, and filming questions of what could be done and how the status quo could be changed. Yet as soon as I started searching for a way to capture that status quo on film, it became clear that even discerning it would be no easy task: the propaganda-driven manipulation of information blocks our view, nuclear power is imposed on us by a powerful lobby that robs us of our options for protecting the infrastructure of daily life, and basic facts are simply not understood. Also, while I could see that this was true on the one hand, I also came to appreciate the assumption, held by the

great majority of Japanese people, that it is impossible to resist powerful stakeholders like the government and the electric companies. People have only a faint awareness that they are themselves the bearers of sovereign power in a democracy; this became clear to me for instance as I made *Ashes to Honey* and saw how hard it was for the people of Iwaishima to resist the Chugoku Electric Power Company.² So what I wanted to put forward as I documented these various issues was a method for implementing positive solutions.

Then on March 11th 2011 the reality of a worst-case scenario nuclear accident took precedence over all the solutions that might have materialized if we hadn't run out of time, and I was overwhelmed with a feeling of powerlessness.



A Poster for *Hibakusha*

H: So when you say you ran out of time, do you mean that all the films you had made had in a certain sense failed, with respect to the unfolding disaster?

K: Yes that's exactly what I mean. My intention had always been that no one be exposed to

radiation, but the 3.11 accident had not only exposed a huge number of people, but was continuing to expose them, and would keep exposing them into the foreseeable future. Meanwhile to look at Fukushima, the most severely affected area, was to see the same "safety myth" propaganda as before the meltdowns sweeping up everything in its path, so that people continued to have no awareness of risk even as they were awash in radiation.

To some extent the harmful effects will manifest themselves with time and a sense of crisis will finally be born, but by then it will be too late - my films can't simply deliver the truth now when it's needed; they don't work like television or the mass media. So I worried that anything I did might be useless. Yet as I kept pondering what course to follow, I couldn't help concluding that people really need to know the truth.

It's like the adage that what goes unrecorded never happened. If we never make a record of what is unfolding, if we never grasp what is actually taking place, all is forgotten: the past, present and future are rewritten at the convenience of a designated few. Nothing illustrates this as well as the problem of war memory. So I made up my mind to make work based on facts, work with a high-impact message. That's why my first project [after 3.11] was *Living Through Internal Radiation*. I made it with the goal of increasing radiation exposure literacy, as a kind of tool for viewers.

When I'm making a film I'm always conscious of the fact that viewers will be looking for an answer. They want instant gratification, a kind of fast-food response to the question "Well, what are we supposed to do?" This was true especially after 3.11. I know the desire well myself, and that's why I had such a feeling of powerlessness. What would be the point, if I couldn't provide something that would be useful right away? But I knew I had to shake this conviction; I knew the most important

thing was to convey the truth carefully and accurately, if only to one or two people at a time. That's why I made *Internal Radiation*.

When faced with a critical situation like Fukushima, we tend to think in terms of miracles: "If only the world would mend its ways right this second!" But I came to understand that the only honest way forward was to start with the possible, with what we can do with the reality before us, even if it yields no immediately useful results.

H: Listening to you I'm hearing two salient points. First is that those in economic and political power hold on to their positions by ensuring a lack of proper record-keeping, of documentation of fact that are inconvenient to them and their organizations. So it's important to keep recording what has been unfolding in various places, and to oppose their attitude of moving things along in the absence of documentation. That's the first point.

The second is that the government responded quickly to the triple disasters and especially the nuclear accident with propaganda, disseminating a new safety myth to counter the prospect of radiation damage in Fukushima and elsewhere. Meanwhile, to leave a record in opposition is to disseminate facts at odds with government propaganda, even if those facts don't sink in right away. My sense is that your [immediate post 3.11] work shows not only that this is possible, but that it can represent a timely, concrete political intervention into the "state of emergency" that the government uses to conceal the truth and make it legal to trample on human rights.

In other words, what you've accomplished by means of your documentary filmmaking is to intervene both in history (by carefully recording facts and memories) and into the political status quo (by resisting the propaganda of the government, the electric company, and the mass media). Without your intervention, everyone would have fallen in line

with the safety myth.

K: Well, in fact people are falling in line. It's because of the overwhelming power of the government, TEPCO, and the media.

H: True enough. The government offers these simplistic resolution policies: "A little soil decontamination and you'll be all set to move back!" "There's no need to worry about radiation!" Although people harbor doubts, it's natural to want to indulge the fantasy. Meanwhile, the message you've wanted to send in opposition is that things are not so simple; that we need a firm grasp of what's really happening, so that we can start from a place of comprehension.

K: Right. But even that is still beyond most people. So the question is how to construct an alternative media, and how to use filmic media to sustain connections. What I'm struggling with most now is this problem of continuity: of funding streams, and also of networks.

Tokyo University dining halls are currently serving 500-yen lunch specials with names like "Fukushima Plate" and "Namie Dish." They feature Fukushima rice and vegetables and are enormously popular with women students, selling out in a flash to comments from the students along the lines of "It must be safe, because it's within radiation limits set by the government!" and "If anything, it's tested food from Fukushima that we can eat with confidence!" These sorts of scenarios really hit home how resolutely the pro-nuclear energy establishment has been trivializing the accident.

With what sort of filmic technique is it possible to address this mindset, and relay a truth that is for them unspeakable and unknowable? It's not clear one could ever secure enough funding for such a task!

H: This strategy of replacing the prospect of internal radiation with images of eating right,

then selling the package to women college students is horrific, isn't it? It's unbelievably underhanded to satisfy students' ethical impulses by convincing them they're supporting Fukushima's economic recovery by consuming Fukushima food.

K: It seems to me that the nature of discourse within Japan has changed dramatically since 3.11. We've seen the birth of a psychology that can recognize a lie perfectly well, then internalize it regardless.

H: I know what you mean. People know the line they're being fed smells fishy, but they end up accepting it because it's what they want to hear and it makes them feel safe. They've stopped being able to think properly, buffeted since the disasters by catch-phrases like "recovery" (*fukkō*), "bonds" (*kizuna*), and "Hang in There Fukushima!" (*ganbare Fukushima*). This is why they cast reason aside and fall in line with whomever offers the quickest solution.

K: Yes, it's as if people are living only by their reflexes, playing some sort of mindless video game. They no longer think in terms of contexts and narratives; there's no sense of history, or reflecting on cause and effect within the flow of time and the particulars of chronology. What we're seeing is the proliferation of a style of living only with what is right in front of one's eyes.

Within this sort of ephemeral atmosphere, Abe Shinzō's regime can push through whatever it wants because its majority in the Diet is so secure. Things they've been unable to accomplish for seventy years of Postwar Democracy they're accomplishing now in the blink of an eye. Those of us who can see what's happening think how awful it is, and that we'd better do something, all while being dragged hopelessly along.

One example is the easing of the Three Principles on Arms Exports; apparently it's fine now for Japan to sell weapons.³ Very few

Japanese are even aware of the fact that Mitsubishi has been allowed to manufacture and sell tanks. While policy-makers are advancing their own projects the whole process is obscured in a black box, and ordinary citizens go about their lives with no inkling of what's happening. By the time the flames come licking up around them it will be too late! But they don't know this either. In my observation, we have already headed down a pretty dangerous path.

H: Here we arrive at the topic of the picture book (2004) and film project (2015) with which you've been involved, "What Happens Before War"?⁴

K: Indeed. And of course one of the issues addressed by both those projects is how to resist being swept up in the flow of time, to resist the inevitable militarization. That's why when I'm asked whether my way of making films has changed since 3.11, I have to say that fundamentally it has not. My films have always aimed to provide the viewer with a full understanding of historical context, and his or her place within it. It's only by means of such an understanding that we can solve problems. That's why I think filmmaking is crucial.

H: It seems to me that in fact the act of thinking historically is exactly this act of pondering our historical situation in as broad a context as possible, and grasping its topology or phase as specifically as we can. This is what being a historian has in common with your way of making documentaries.

It's precisely at times like this, when everyone is agitated and we feel like the rug is being pulled out from under us, that we need an approach that doesn't lose sight of the big picture becomes that much more essential.

K: It seems that documentary films, like history, force us to think about what it means that we're socially positioned the way we are. Prior to 3.11, I focused on getting people to ask

why we (people in Japan and other “advanced countries”) are able to exist amidst such wealth. I wanted them to consider the aggression inherent in achieving this affluence at the expense of the rest of the world’s poverty. Wasn’t it the very fact of our living in wealthy societies that made each of us in some sense a perpetrator of suffering? This is one of the points I tried to get across with my film *Hibakusha at the End of the World*.

H: *Hibakusha* was a film that took up the injustice of Global North versus Global South.

K: You’re right it was, of people being trampled underfoot from deep in the past until far in the future, and as a structural problem, rather than mere coincidence.

H: Exactly. Within an unjust and asymmetrical world structure.

K: Asymmetry. It’s such an important concept. When 120-odd people are killed in Paris there’s not a single world leader or “developed country” media outlet that doesn’t call it a “huge tragedy.” But when 600,000 Iraqi children fall victim to American and NATO bombs, or are sacrificed to civil war, it never makes the news.⁵ This is the exorbitant asymmetry of our world. Without understanding this distortion it’s also impossible to understand where terrorism comes from, and why it proliferates.

H: I couldn’t agree more.

K: That’s why I think it’s crucial for us to realize that if we’re all being used as leverage to squeeze the Global South, we can also remove our personal weight from that equation, one by one, and counter the distortion by standing against it. It’s not unrelated to the warped relationality between Fukushima and Tokyo, between the cities and the provinces.

H: Being committed to theorizing this

relationality or structure is really important, I agree. It’s what your film *Hibakusha* succeeds in doing so well.

K: I’m so glad you think so.

Information Control: The State and the Nuclear Industry

H: *Hibakusha at the End of the World* shows how tightly the nuclear energy industries in Japan, the U.S. and the former Soviet Union controlled information about nuclear risk. Watching the film we feel that an entire system of concealment has developed to obscure the realities of exposure after a nuclear accident.

K: Right, and in this sense Chernobyl represents a total failure of the system. That accident harmed a wide area, and the idea that radiation exposure is terrifying was fairly widely disseminated across the affected area. So from the perspective of international nuclear power advocates, Chernobyl was completely mishandled.

There was a great deal of work done on the realities of exposure, and it became clear not only that children would be born with congenital defects, but also that the effects of radiation would be passed on to the next generation. This created a situation in which, all around the world, just the word “Chernobyl” immediately conjured a nuclear accident. Regretting this, nuclear advocates began stepping up their efforts to control information.

H: This needs to be seen as something that happened on a global scale, doesn’t it, through offices like the IAEA.

K: Exactly. What’s more, the IAEA has direct ties to Japan, in the sense that those who promote nuclear energy in Japan are intimately connected to key players in the IAEA. After all, Japan’s position within the global nuclear

energy industry is increasingly central.

With Toshiba purchasing a controlling share of Westinghouse, and Mitsubishi investing heavily in Areva, it's not an overstatement to say that Japan is assuming a leadership role in the global nuclear industry.⁶ Areva ran up a huge deficit on the construction of the Olkiluoto plant in Finland, and just when it was facing fiscal crisis Mitsubishi Heavy Industries stepped in.⁷

As you're well aware, however, we mustn't forget that the roots of controlling information about nuclear exposure and the risks of nuclear energy stretch all the way back to policies developed at the time of the first nuclear bombs. There's historical continuity here. Directly after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or even before that, during the process of developing the technology, the minimization of exposure and the concealment of harm were already taking place on a grand scale.

H: Do you think it's accurate to view what happened with 3.11 as an instance of this larger operation of information control? Immediately after the triple-meltdowns the Japanese government dispatched "government scholars" (*goyō gakusha*) like Yamashita Shun'ichi to give public lectures at dozens of places in Fukushima, and these lectures were covered with zero criticism by television, radio and newspaper companies that disgorged their contents without changing a single word.

K: Yes, that's how I view it. Of course, Yamashita Shun'ichi is a unique character who played a specific role. Because he is a Chernobyl specialist there were very few people who could rebut his arguments. It was he after all who had taken the initiative to produce the most comprehensive epidemiological survey after Chernobyl. True, the ¥500,000,000 (\$4.5M) he spent on the survey came from the Sasakawa Foundation, but still . . .⁸

The government and TEPCO were well aware of this. Because Yamashita was president of the Japan Thyroid Association, in dispatching him they were forming a precise battle formation, with someone who seemed unbeatable out in front. As for the media simply disgorging everything he said, that set up the basic structure of information dissemination that started right after the Fukushima nuclear accident and continues to this day.

H: Still, a scholar like Mr. Yamashita -- surely he knows what he's doing when he manufactures and disseminates supporting evidence for the safety myth? Don't you think he's aware that he is concealing the truth?

K: Yes I think he is definitely aware. But I think he and all the other "government scholars" have bought into the government and nuclear industry's logic of collateral damage. This is how I read his notorious statement "I am a Japanese. I will honor what the Japanese nation has decided."⁹ He's tacitly acknowledging that nuclear contamination and radiation exposure will be explained away as unfortunate but ancillary events. It's the reasoning that this is the most appropriate way to avoid the escalation of fear toward radiation, and to avoid the extensive damage of social panic and community destruction that would be caused by mandatory evacuations.

H: So they deal with the accident as an unavoidable ancillary event caused by chance rather than as a structural problem, rather than as a case of criminal negligence resulting in death and carrying criminal repercussions. In turn, this generates even bigger profits and shores up the system that drives the whole operation. A certain number of people have to sacrifice themselves in order not only for profits to continue to flow, but also for the nation not to descend into chaos. This is the logic.

K: Right, and we can see how it lines up perfectly with the American logic we've heard

repeated since 1945, that dropping atomic bombs and killing 200,000 people was regrettable, but far better than the deaths of 1,000,000 Americans. In other words, the dead of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were sad but ineluctable sacrifices necessary to end the war. They get justified as collateral damage.

H: This is where I've come to see an analogy between the way war works and the way nuclear power works. It's true as well for the modern state. The logic that a certain amount of sacrifice – it differs whether we're talking about democracy or dictatorship – is necessary to industrial and political prosperity has already been made immanent from the start. In other words, this sort of structure in which it's possible to force the country's citizens to sacrifice themselves when necessary is always operating as an essential precondition to the creation and maintenance of so-called "prosperity" and "sovereignty." In English we call it the logic of the "national sacrifice zone," which functions even within democratic societies. Those who are sacrificed tend to come from the ranks of the socioeconomically and racially disempowered. What both war and nuclear power keep at the ready is the evocation of a "state of exception," in which the law will be temporarily suspended and civil rights will not be protected. This is how it's possible for the nuclear power industry to cause a catastrophic accident and never face criminal charges, and for the government to ask people to die on behalf of the country without anyone talking about murder.¹⁰ Quite the contrary, the dead and dying are glorified as heroes of the state. Your film *Hibakusha at the End of the World* does a magnificent job of showing how this sort of violent structure is expanding on a global scale.

K: That's right. I could never have said it quite so theoretically, but it's precisely what I have in mind as I make my films. When you've got a group of people who know full well the persistent risks of nuclear energy but fall under

its spell and become advocates nonetheless, there's got to be some sort of righteous pretext or moral obligation for them to rally around. You come to feel it especially keenly when you're involved in the process of making a documentary film.

H: What I sensed in the scenes of Hanford, Washington from your *Hibakusha* film was the righteous pretext "This is how we defeated the Soviets;" "This is how we protected the Free World."

Another element in the Hanford scenes is the attitude of emphasizing the invincibility of scientific knowledge, of declaring ad infinitum that if one looks at the data scientifically, the likelihood of actual harm to bodies and health is extremely low. Meanwhile lots of the residents are dying of cancer.

K: It's because they can't see the cause and effect relationship; because they're able to make themselves not see it. The structure of discrimination you mentioned earlier figures in here as well, toward those who are being sacrificed.

H: Well, it's too bad for those folks, but if we hadn't done it we wouldn't have been able to protect America and protect the whole world. That's the rationale – that a certain amount of sacrifice is unavoidable. And so we see how the state of affairs that gives rise to national policies (*kokusaku*) is premised on the possibility of sacrificing human rights, of ignoring them. And when it comes to the nuclear energy industry, military power and industrial profits are intimately connected. It's the story of industry profiting handsomely when the state maintains its nuclear weaponry capacity.

K: That's certainly a valid point; in Japan they say an already-built plant with a generating capacity of one million kilowatts makes ¥100,000,000 (\$904,000) a day. But isn't the nuclear industry in the U.S. in decline? Because

the risks are too high not a single plant is under construction,¹¹ and in Europe as well everyone is keenly aware of Areva's failure [with the Olkiluoto plant in Finland].

True, places that have grown rich selling oil like Dubai and Saudi Arabia are hurrying to build nuclear power plants before they exhaust their fossil fuel resources. It makes sense, given that they only have about 40 years left. Probably less than 40 years, truth be told. But eventually they'll spend more decommissioning these plants [than they ever made generating electricity with them].¹²

And there's also the whole issue of nuclear reprocessing, which American scientists are now saying is a dead end. What [both nuclear reprocessing and] decommissioned nuclear warheads produce is plutonium. But the United States has no need for plutonium from reprocessing plants because it still has a surplus of decommissioned nuclear bombs. Using this surplus for power won't work either. When we think of current plans to develop a reactor that could burn plutonium as fuel, and the amount of time these plans have been in the works, what we see worldwide is nothing but failure. Japan is the perfect object lesson here, with the Monju plant leaving its negative legacy of having sat completely idle since causing an explosion [in 1995].¹³ Globally, reprocessing is over.

Nevertheless, where energy policy is concerned Japan remains as fixated [on nuclear] as ever, even though globally the fundamental thinking, the philosophy itself, has been changing. Of course the reason people dig in their heels is because they've been able to set up [nuclear power] as a profit-making enterprise. But in the grand scheme of things it loses money.

H: Still, it's been contrived to earn money for a certain segment of its proponents?

K: Right, because that's the sort of system that's been set up. In other words, of Japan's

roughly Y600 billion (\$5.3 billion) annual Energy Development Budget, roughly 60 or 70 percent goes to nuclear, and this has been true for over thirty years.

So for example, in the case of the Kaminoseki plant which I document in *Ashes to Honey*, the Chugoku Electric Company spent Y450 billion (\$4 billion), but when you consider that over several years the Energy Development Budget (enerugii kaihatsu yosan) incentivized them with annual sums of Y100 billion (\$887 million) and Y50 billion (\$443 million), it's clear they were able to build it for next to nothing. Then in addition they're allowed to take a 3.8 percent profit on capital expenditures, which they tack directly onto peoples' electricity bills. That's the system we have.

Given that there's also something called a Subsidy for Electricity Generating Locations (dengen ritchi kōfukin) paid directly from the tax base, we can see that electric companies, far from exposing themselves to risk, have actually set up a system for nuclear power that guarantees they make money hand over fist. The more plants they build, the more they profit. This is the single biggest reason nuclear power expanded at a breakneck speed in Japan.

H: And it is also how depopulated areas came to hear so much about how nuclear power would fill town and village coffers, and provide plenty of employment. "Japan is poor in natural resources so relying on nuclear is the only way!"

K: Exactly. "It's because electricity is essential to Japan's trade and industry." "It's because nuclear is the lynchpin to economic growth." This is what we are told, and yet Japan experienced no energy shortages when every plant shut down after 3.11. So why all the talk about restarts? In a country with so many earthquakes? We've gotten by just fine for the past 695 days without a single reactor in operation (laughter).

H: Seen in an international frame, the Japanese standard of living even without nuclear power has been excessively extravagant. The high level of energy consumption has continued unabated.

K: I agree: excessively extravagant. I mentioned earlier the fixed assumption that arose from within the dire poverty of life right after WWII, namely that life is only as affluent as the amount of energy you consume. This assumption is still alive and well.

The same assumption helps us understand how it's possible, despite 695 days without nuclear-generated electricity during which there were no restrictions and no brownouts, and during which we maintained extremely high levels of energy consumption by international standards, for government officials, government scholars, and business leaders to reproach the anti-nuclear contingent by saying "It's not like we can just return to the Edo Period!" The number of people who say this is staggering.

So we see how difficult it will be to change the collective consciousness. That's how deeply and indelibly [the assumption that affluence equals energy consumption] gets imprinted onto peoples' consciousness, time after time.

H: You've given us a vivid picture of the way nuclear policy and economic growth get imprinted, or shall we say naturalized, in the collective consciousness, and how the Japanese media has largely failed to problematize this. What is your view of how the major media outlets responded to this most recent accident at Fukushima? What do you make of how it continues to be handled in the press?

K: The only truly serious coverage has been in the *Tokyo shinbun*. And maybe a little in *Chūnichi shinbun*. Beyond that I feel like the press is just not covering it. Of course to some degree they can't get away with not reporting the facts. "Yes, reactor one exploded;" "Yes, reactor three blew up." That's about the extent

of it. But beyond that they offer no investigative reporting, for instance, on the state of nuclear contamination in the environment, or what is planned for the melted-down fuel inside the reactors, and the spent fuel still stored on-site.

Oh yes, the *Asahi Shinbun* has been running its "Prometheus' Trap" series.¹⁴ That's quite good. But the problem is that Japanese people just got so tired of Fukushima. After the accident, information that had never been disseminated suddenly came gushing forward as if a dam had broken. People felt completely saturated, hearing nothing but that day after day. Past a certain point people couldn't bring themselves to tune in and consume it. In addition, during those first six months the news became obsolete incredibly quickly.

H: It's a small step from becoming obsolete to being forgotten entirely.

K: "Enough is enough!" That's generally how people felt. But I don't think that exonerates the media from accurately covering how much the government is minimizing the accident and dodging its aid responsibilities, or how each successive policy strays from its stated intention.

Television coverage was the worst. Television stations stopped talking about Fukushima sooner than any other media outlet. It's the same with their coverage today: nothing, zero. It's because the biggest sponsor for most of them was TEPCO.

In 2011 I received a prize for something or other and at the party there were a lot of producers from local commercial broadcasting stations saying I should appear on their programs. When I replied I would if it were feasible they responded, "Oh it's fine now! Because TEPCO is no longer sponsoring us . . ."

But in the end they never once reached out to me. The people who come to me for material are all from French newspapers and TV, or the

Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), or the BBC. Places like that. The Japanese media never come. Never.

3.11 happened just as I was taking my film *Ashes to Honey* on the road for its premiere. The Japanese media covered this correspondence only reluctantly. It's hard not to conclude that they simply don't comprehend the seriousness of the nuclear accident.

When you ask journalists from the local news outlets like the *Fukushima Minyū* and *Fukushima Minpō* newspapers or the Fukushima Hōsō television station why they didn't respond immediately to the nuclear explosions by reporting that this was dangerous for the people of the prefecture, that they should evacuate, that according to Japanese law a certain level of radiation designated a place an uninhabitable nuclear regulation zone, they claim it was because they didn't know; because they themselves were without the proper knowledge. Instead, they waited to see what the government would say and simply broadcast that, with no analysis or interpretation.

During the postwar period, as the "Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy" slogan gained strength, it was taboo for the media to talk about risks in the future or environmental damage in the present. So local reporters deemed it futile to spend energy investigating and writing about these topics. Either they knew their findings would never see the light of day and therefore omitted them, or they held back from doing the reporting in the first place. As a result no one accumulated this knowledge and no one handed it down, so even when it seemed something might be happening there was no interest and no attempt to understand.

Exercises in Democracy: What Documentary Film Can Accomplish

H: What was it that first made you think you would like to make documentaries about nuclear problems and nuclear exposure?

K: It was definitely my trip to Iraq. Many children were exposed to radiation as a result of the US invasion of Iraq and its use of depleted uranium bullets [rekka urandan].¹⁵ I was moved by the fact that once a body is exposed, it can never completely recover. I've since learned from the case of Belarus that it's possible to reduce the effects of radiation exposure to some degree through recuperative care outside the contaminated zone. But in the cases of both Iraq and Chernobyl of course it was not possible for the entire population to move, and in any case a certain amount of harm is unavoidable.

As I myself resolved to learn as much as I could about these issues I came to discern various elements, one by one. I needed for instance to trace the history of nuclear energy, to speak with people in the "nuclear village," and to understand how the "nuclear fuel cycle" works.¹⁶ I also needed to study what happens to the human body when it is exposed to ionizing radiation.¹⁷ Although of course I consulted the literature on the topic, there was a lot I could only learn in the field, at the sites I was studying.

H: Your experience making *Hibakusha at the End of the World* seems to have influenced the content of the film on many levels.

K: It's true it did, because that was the very beginning for me. First I had to consider, in both the American and the Japanese contexts, who had first made nuclear bombs and nuclear weapons, and for what purpose, with what results. Then I also needed to consider the harm being done by depleted uranium bullets used in modern warfare during the Iraq War: about low-dose radiation and chronic exposure. When I was making *Hibakusha at the End of the World* no one in the mainstream was asking these sorts of questions. They were considered

minor.

H: I see. I've always admired the way you were able to connect those three places – America, Japan, and Iraq – both spatially and temporally. It's a really original approach, and beautifully executed. Usually documentary filmmakers train their sights on just one place. Then they isolate the problem. But you illustrate so effectively how, structurally, the nuclear problem is always a global problem, and has been from the beginning.

K: I tried to draw both axes into the film – both the depth of vertical time as it relates to the problem of the nuclear, and the breadth or horizontality of space.

H: It comes across wonderfully clearly. We start in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and move to Hanford in the United States, then to Iraq. So we get spatial continuity and also temporal expansion at the same time.

K: When we talk about time it's important to focus on the temporal process by which radiation exposure manifests in the individual bodies of those who experienced the bombings. That time is internal to each hibakusha – the time it takes for the radioactive material to establish itself in the body, and for the body to begin changing in response. Because this is something that requires the passage of time, I wanted to trace the existence of what we might call the life that lives that interval: human existence, flesh-and-blood existence.

H: I think I know what you mean. Dr. Hida is a great example.¹⁸ Dr. Hida Shunsuke definitely embodies that interval.

K: Exactly.

H: He's both a first-person narrator of the Hiroshima bombing, and a medical doctor who grappled with addressing its effects his entire life.

K: Precisely. And what's really marvelous about him is that he never lords his status as a scientist over his patients. Instead he gives each one of them his intimate attention, asking how he can support not their illness but their life. This is what I find incredibly human about him – that as a doctor he takes this approach.

H: There were doctors who responded like this in Iraq as well.

K: Yes there were. Dr. Jawad. Jawad Al-Ali.

H: He once said that the tragedy of watching children succumb to cancer one after another made him so sad he feared his own heart would give out.¹⁹

K: And I would say that, among the Iraqi people I've met, the type of deep humanity that Dr. Jawad exemplifies is not at all rare. Islam is perceived negatively in the West today, but what does it mean to turn toward God five times a day and pray? Isn't it also turning toward oneself to reflect? We're talking about a people who set aside time morning, noon and night, five times, to face themselves and face God.

When I first set out for Iraq I did not have a positive image of Islam, but I was impressed by this introspective quality that Muslims have. And their humor! I found them to have a keen sense of compassion.

H: Yes, this comes out quite naturally in the documentary.

K: I think so, too. When I left for Iraq the image of that country constructed by the Japanese media was a negative stereotype, personified almost entirely by Saddam Hussein, of a belligerent people: dictatorial, violent, and warmongering. It was discriminatory.

It makes sense when you consider the relations between the American media and the Japanese media on this point. Like a Russian doll, the

American version of Iraq opened to a Japanese version of Iraq inside, exactly the same, as if Japanese reporters had no ability to refashion the stereotype on their own.

So when I took the clear position that these Iraqi people whom it was supposed to be obvious deserved bombing were actually just as human as we are, and have pride, and human rights, and are not aggressors but victims – when I took this position it became difficult for NHK to accept my work. Because originally I had gone to Iraq on a shoot for NHK (laughter)! You're never supposed to give the "enemy" a human face. A stereotype is an ideological device for dehumanization.

H: They felt uneasy about your shattering the stereotype that they had helped create.

K: Precisely. Yes. There's an element of the mass media that only functions to strengthen stereotypes – that may just be its destiny. Of course this is not true of all mass media. On the contrary, I myself try to break stereotypes, to grasp a more multi-faceted, three-dimensional reality.

H: This is an objective you've said you first encountered through the media activist group Paper Tiger during a stay in New York, isn't it?²⁰ Participating in that group and developing this kind of thinking was a formative experience?

K: That's right. Before I went to New York I was already working in Japan making films and television programming. But like most people in those fields I wasn't much interested in questions of why and for whom we make our works. My priorities as a filmmaker and as a television director were how to make successful, high quality images. I wanted to express my individuality, and I cared about how critics responded. The question of for whom we make our works was unimportant because it was obvious: I make works for myself! But I came to realize that media has a crucial

additional role to play.

Because I worked more in film than in television I had convinced myself that authorial style was paramount. But when I started working with Paper Tiger in New York almost every single person in this citizen-directors' group was a minority. There were undocumented filmmakers from Mexico and black filmmakers with AIDS. Hispanic worker filmmakers. And of course there were also middle class white people, but what they wanted to make films about were radical changes within their daily lives, like implementing a Canadian-style single-payer national health insurance in the US. Mainstream American media couldn't muster any enthusiasm whatsoever for such topics. It was only through Paper Tiger that I was able to discern this contrast. And so I resolved to make films at Paper Tiger – to make our own media as a counter-culture to the existing media culture.

Of course the people who wanted to produce this sort of alternative media had only rudimentary skills – many had never picked up a camera before. What they did have was vision and conviction. "This is what we want!" "This is what we need!" In contrast, I had skills. I began to wonder what would happen if I used them for someone else -- for their cause rather than mine. This was a real stroke of luck for me.

H: They had an internal vision that they wanted to express, and you were able to back it up not with your authorial style but with a shared sense of political commitment.

K: That's right; we wanted to address our own problems, and to solve them through media. We definitely had political commitment. But we struggled because we didn't know how to put a film together. We also had no budget. Still, I had skills. And the experience helped me appreciate, not that I should use them in America, but that I should take them back to Japan, This is what I had in mind when I

returned to Japan in 1995.

H: What kind of issues did you want to address? Did you have a clear vision of the perspective you wanted to bring to bear on certain issues in Japan?

K: I was in a bit of a daze for a while after I returned, and then the Great Hanshin Earthquake struck. Because I had no job and lots of free time I went to Kobe as a volunteer, and all of Japan's problems came tumbling down on me. They were problems of the Japanese family, of the sort that had been invisible while peoples' houses still stood, but that were exposed when the walls fell and the families were driven out.

My job was to drive to Kobe and deliver special meals provided by a sponsoring group in Tokyo for children with food allergies who were living in cardboard evacuation shelters within school gyms. It was when I visited the families of these children with allergies that I sensed there was something terribly wrong. It wasn't just gender problems between the parents, or the extreme environment in which the children were placed, or administrative problems, or problems of medical treatment and PTSD. It was all of them together. This was the place from which I began.

H: So, completely by chance, the same Kamanaka Hitomi who in New York had been drawn into a political consciousness and acquired a new way of making films found herself face to face with the Great Hanshin Earthquake.

K: Yes it was a real encounter! For me the act of filmmaking always is. I never set out conceptually with the idea to make this or that kind of work. Instead I encounter it on site, and it either draws me in or it doesn't. I feel it or I don't. I don't think metaphysically. I just start digging and that sets the filmmaking process in motion.

H: Still, when we consider the films you started to make at that time, there's a certain continuity isn't there? I'm not sure whether to call it continuity or a sustained political sensibility, but it's at work in all of them.

K: Yes, well, for instance it was in the process of making *Hibakusha* that I came to see what my next film would address. After all, the problem of the nuclear is quite deep, and it is intertwined with our modern lives in a staggering number of ways. So it was natural that in the midst of making *Hibakusha* the theme of my subsequent film *Rokkasho Rhapsody*, namely, the current state of the nuclear industry in Japan, would come into view.

I like to exhibit my work in a way no one else does, by attending the screenings in person, getting feedback from the audience immediately afterward, and using my camera to make a record when new social movements arise, like I did when I took *Rokkasho Rhapsody* on the road. That was when what was needed was the theme of *Ashes* to come into view: not "What should we do about nuclear energy?" but "What should we do about the future of energy writ large?" One of the most important questions of this film is how to offer positive solutions.



Rokkasho Village



Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant



Anti-Rokkasho Demonstration in Tokyo

H: Watching *Ashes to Honey* I was struck by the way a glimmer of hope keeps appearing and disappearing, even while there is no explicit vision of exactly what should be done in the future. The film suggests a certain sense of possibility – that if we only make up our minds, something called community can form itself from the bottom up, while we’re in the process of devising new forms of renewable energy and taking various measures.

K: In Japan, even if people know this phrase “from the bottom up” (botomu appu), they’ve usually never created that kind of community. But that’s not true of Sweden. We can really learn a lot from observing what happens there, for instance, when a cattle farmer realizes he can achieve energy self-sufficiency using methane gas from his herd’s manure, and when local people invest in his project.

It’s a way of thinking in the direction of local autonomy, in the direction of being able to do things independently without relying on the national government. Compared to countries such as Sweden, Japan is weak at this. I made *Ashes to Honey* in 2010, in which I addressed the issue of local autonomy, but the theme is still very much on my mind because local autonomy is fundamental to democracy. Especially when faced with “national this” and “the Abe administration’s that,” I think being able to decide how to solve problems at a local level – the problems we face in the places where we live, and where we’ve put down roots – is crucial to cultivating a democratic society.

That’s why I don’t spend much time at weekly protests in front of the Prime Minister’s Office. If I’m always making the rounds with my films between the far corners of Hokkaido, remote places in Tohoku, Shiga Prefecture, Shimane Prefecture, and Kyushu, it’s because I’ve come

to believe that the center has no hope of changing if these other places don't change.

What we see in Sweden and in the places I filmed for *Ashes to Honey* are not the actions of a centralized state but rather humble struggles on the part of people living in small towns and villages to bring about, on the strength of their own actions, a wholesale transformation in the way energy is produced and used. In point of fact the people of Iwaishima are up against centralized nuclear energy policies that rob them of their right to self-determination. Although whether or not to build a nuclear power plant is something that people who live there should be able to decide by themselves, they're left with no say in the matter whatsoever. So it's in places like this that the change must begin.



Iwaishima, the focal point of *Ashes to Honey*



Anti-Iwaishima/Setouchi Power Plant Protest in Tokyo. Koide Hiroaki²¹ is second from left.

H: When we think about nuclear energy policy it's really this part that feels most violent. All at once the logic of the state and the logic of capital arrive on the scene and people are robbed of their communities, their land, their way of life: everything is gutted. Meanwhile local people are bought off. "What's to complain about? Haven't you got more money now than you've ever seen in your lives?" But what it means to live, to experience life's happiness, is not a matter of purchasing power or consumer confidence. With the influx of cash comes the gradual destruction of the quality of food, water and air -- of the condition of not having to worry about their safety -- and also the pleasure of work, the pleasure of encountering nature. These are lost together with the community. Your films make us feel this especially keenly; they make us feel your conviction that democracy is fundamentally a matter of building community in the place where you live, by your own will and determination, according to your own vision.

K: That's exactly right. If you think about Fukushima's problems past and present, they all stem from the uprooting and destruction of autonomy. It's clear if you look at my screenings by region. My films are only screened if an independent group brings them to town, so they only find an audience when

invited by local people.²² The number of times they've been screened in Fukushima Prefecture is extremely low.

H: I see. Does this point to an absence of civic groups?

K: Yes it does. Civic groups exist but they're weak, and few and far between. In comparison, someplace like Nagano Prefecture has quite a lot. There is a great variety of groups, and their regional initiatives are lively. The sense of autonomy is strong. It makes a huge difference.

When the accident at Fukushima occurred, if a variety of civic groups had already existed I think they would have mobilized right away. Especially in the dissemination of information. We would have seen an immediate attempt from within the region to share facts and communicate locally.

One advantage of diverse and active civic groups is the accumulation of knowledge and experience around collective action. People know how to work together toward a single goal even with those with whom they disagree. In Fukushima it seems this was lacking. And while there were any number of complicated contributing factors -- historical, political, social and economic -- those same factors were what predisposed Fukushima to its dependence on nuclear policies in the first place. So while we saw many civic groups take shape after 3.11, we also saw them quickly splinter and dissolve. It was the same kind of splintering and dissolution as when the plants were constructed. Buying up farmers' land to build the reactors, the government and TEPCO used money to eradicate their way of life. The community was splintered into supporting and opposing factions, and only after these factions had been set to battling each other did the authorities make their move. It's what's called "nipping solidarity in the bud." It's a method of dismantling solidarity, whether solidarity exists from the start or arises in opposition to nuclear construction. We saw it in Rokkasho. We saw it

in Iwaishima. We saw it in Fukushima.

H: So what you're saying is that on top of a comparatively weak tradition of civic groups invested in local autonomy, Fukushima had its weakness doubled by the divisive policies rolled out by TEPCO and the government after the accident. The disaster gave rise to a sort of twice-enfeebled situation.

K: Yes that's exactly my point. I'm a big supporter of Mutō Ruiko but I can't help feeling she's up against quite a lot in Fukushima.²³ It would really be disastrous for the movement in which she's participating to become isolated. Because there are so many people throughout the country who want to support Ruiko-san, I feel confident that things will work out, but it's harsh there inside Fukushima.

H: I was speaking with Mutō-san recently and she too spoke of how "government scholars" wasted no time making their way to Fukushima after the accident to start spreading the safety myth all over again. When these scholars said they knew Chernobyl and that Fukushima was nothing in comparison, even people who had been allies in the anti-nuclear movement, and who had attended study groups, would applaud and exclaim their admiration, saying "What a splendid person." Mutō-san said she had witnessed this moment of surrender time and time again.

K: Well, isn't it the same thing we saw at Hanford, Washington? The local people listened to the scientists' explanations and quickly capitulated. "Oh I see, so there's nothing to worry about." The main challenge with solidarity is whether a community can maintain itself without falling into the traps of capitalism and power (division, bribery, safety myths). That's why what my films attempt to discern is the structure that sets the traps. The viewer quickly comes to recognize that he or she is not only complicit with a

structure that requires sacrifice, but that the

policies that sustain it will eventually bring about the destruction of his or her own way of life as well. "I'm next." That's the point.

What's crucial is that we learn to extricate ourselves from positions of support. So it's not a matter of ad-hominem attacks or forcing two or three people to take responsibility, but of gaining a comprehensive perspective on how the problems presently unfolding are connected and mutually determined: of seeing things from an objective, high-angle view. This is what I want my documentaries to accomplish – the birth of a new consciousness; the feeling of a new self, out of alignment with the old. I call it a "chemical reaction of consciousness."

H: When a local group self-screens your films, I wonder if you would call it an exercise in democracy. I'm asking in relation to the phrase you just used, "a chemical reaction of consciousness."

K: I would! It takes time, to be sure. After a screening we never fail to make time for discussion. When you make a space for conversation people start speaking out, even general audience members, and there's a cultivation of debate. For instance, at a post-screening discussion in one town a Fukushima evacuee spoke up and said that in order to save her three children she'd had to leave behind her husband, who refused to acknowledge the dangers of internal radiation. But evacuation rent subsidies had been cut off, and she'd never received any support from her husband, so she was wondering how she and her three children could get by. In the course of the discussion, this woman ended up declaring that she was going to go to the local administration and petition that her housing subsidy be extended. This is a woman who had never once in her life done anything remotely political. There are lots of evacuees like her. When you talk to them you hear that they're lower middle-class, income-wise. So at a screening to which, say, 100 people come, you're face to face with the fact

that people like this are not getting any state aid at all. Little by little, as the concrete details of their lives become clear, the injustice of policies toward refugees is vividly exposed, together with the criminal irresponsibility of the government.

Listening to the discussion, it's impossible not to start thinking, "what am I myself going to do about this?" At one screening there was a city council member who told everyone that, having been consulted that night by the evacuee, he now planned to go with her to petition the prefectural office, and that everyone else should come too. That was how the conversation developed! By the end, two more people in the audience had declared that they would also make the trip.

H: So by means of the screening they are able to see how they are already connected to each other, and how they should be connected. It's the spontaneous birth of activism. Having come to see the film they come to this realization and, exchanging conversation and ideas, discover a new relationality.

K: Exactly, they have a connection. And to make this discovery, watching the film together and discussing it amongst themselves are really important.

What the mass media is saying and what Kamanaka's film is saying are totally different. How to take this in? People feel unsettled. So to keep them from going home like that, I ask them to wait a bit, to stay and discuss it together for 30 minutes or an hour, so that they can return with something a little more organic.

I also always ask them to fill out a questionnaire. This way, in addition to watching the film and the discussion, and listening to my lecture, they don't leave without making an effort to verbalize what they themselves felt. The return rate is extremely high. People write *a lot*. This way each person

has a chance to give feedback. It helps connect them with the group that organized the screening as well. I work hard to facilitate these connections.

H: When fellow humans are forced to speak to each other face to face, and especially when they come from completely different backgrounds, one for instance from a difficult economic situation, and another rich but perhaps ignorant of social realities – from the coming together of such different perspectives a diversity of voices is born, and what they have in common is the ability to achieve a certain kind of exercise in democracy.

K: Right. This is precisely what the Paper Tiger excelled at: gathering extraordinarily diverse people and giving them all a voice without affixing any hierarchy to their opinions. Every Wednesday ten people would get together and one by one all ten would say what they thought. Because there was zero tolerance for interruptions we had to listen to each person to the end, and it took forever! The process was so arduous that we all worried we would never be able to make a program or any kind of coherent work. But that was how we did make films, one by one, very slowly. Because that was how I came to understand democracy, I'm fully aware that democracy is a major hassle.

Hirano: Yes. Democracy happens in the practice and operation of everyday culture, doesn't it?

K: Shouting in front of the Prime Minister's office is incredibly important. But even more important I think are the small acts that one undertakes oneself in one's own daily life.

H: To create a democratic society requires an enormous amount of time, and the task is never finished; if it is not sustained, it disappears.

K: Exactly, and it can't be a matter of saying, "Oh, let's do this or that." There has got to be a collective conviction, "This is something we

must do." It's only from such conviction that real action begins, that everyone commits their abilities, their brain power, their power to act.



Kamanaka's citizen-led independent film screening.

H: Is it that people have never given themselves license to exercise their potential? Or that great swaths of the population aren't even aware they have it? If I think about a democratic society in which, by some means or another, each person is able to express what they feel and think in daily life, transmitting this collectively, nurturing it, transforming it into action.

K: You're exactly right. The notion that I might be free, that it's fine to feel, think and speak freely, and live freely, so long as I take responsibility for my feelings, thoughts and speech: this notion is very weak. It's weak that people are free to express themselves, and that it's only through self-expression that they realize their potential. The history of nuclear power is built on that kind of political culture, and has had the unfortunate effect of strengthening it.

The Japanese education system restricts that sort of potential.²⁴ What I try to cultivate at my

documentary screenings is exactly the sort of space that has never been nurtured within the Japanese education system, in which people know they can speak freely because they themselves are free, their choices are theirs, and no one will harm them if they give voice to their thoughts and feelings. Quite the contrary, people will all listen, their opinion will be respected, and everyone else will be free to speak as well.

H: Yes, and one more principle applies here: that we are equal to the end.

K: Exactly. Without hierarchy. Whether we are women or men, old or young, college-educated or not. A level playing field. Completely flat. I always remind people that we are equal.

H: Do audiences feel a sense of emancipation after participating in these discussions?

K: Yes, they go home extremely satisfied! One way or another they feel gratified, emboldened.

H: It's empowering isn't it?

K: Empowering! Exactly!

H: I can see how this would be transformative, given that the sense of empowerment, the experience of potential, has been locked away until then.

K: That's right, because the powers that be are intent on keeping it confined; they want to restrict people's open debate, and the sense of connection that arises. They want to keep "chemical reactions of consciousness" under lock and key. But when people in Fukushima are worried about radiation and ask about the effects of ionizing radiation, and possible harm to children, this shared emotion itself, this overwhelming worry itself is an injury. For people to narrate their experience it is to narrate a violence that has been done to them, and to protest.

Those in power want to control and confine the growth of a movement that arises when a collective consciousness is born from this sort of protest. "You're crazy getting all worried like that! It's because you're ignorant. If you go on saying those things you'll be conspiring with harmful rumors (fūhyō higai)! You'll be standing on the side of those who discriminate!"²⁵ This is how those in power preempt protest. This is how they root out and eradicate voices that speak out against violence.

H: One thing that's always left a deep impression on me in your films is the way they introduce different voices even-handedly, even pro-nuclear and anti-nuclear voices. In academic language it's called "polyphony," from the music theory term for the sound of multiple voices. Independent melodies stand out variously in time, intersecting, colliding, and reverberating, and the result is called "polyphonic." Do you keep this sort of thing in mind when you are shooting a film?

I also want to ask a little bit about the viewing experience, insofar as your audience is invited to keep track of these various opposing, colliding and harmonizing voices and interpret what they're saying. It strikes me that this gets to the heart of the democratic potential of documentary cinema, because the viewing itself is an exercise in democracy.

K: The emphasis is less on my own message than on those of the people who appear in the film. This sort of space for discourse is rarely opened within Japanese society. So my job is to prepare a receptacle and ask how it's possible actually to listen, to pay attention.

Opportunities to make diverse voices actually resonate are rare. But for instance, when I made *Rokkasho Rhapsody*, even though the pro-nuclear and anti-nuclear factions almost never had the occasion to exchange opinions in real life, it was possible to make them talk to each other within the reality constructed by my

film.

H: Yes I think you wrote about this somewhere, that it was only after they had seen your film that the people of Rokkasho started talking to each other.

K: I never make just a film; for me it's crucial to follow up and talk about "what happened after that." So after *Rokkasho Rhapsody* I made something called *Dispatches from Rokkasho 1-4*, and in the fourth dispatch we see people from the opposing sides begin a dialog.²⁶ I think it's really important that this takes place at the grassroots level. My role is to be the facilitator.

H: Both in your work and in your way of life, you take dialog very seriously. So of course as you outlined earlier in your filmmaking you always begin by finding out what people want to say, and make listening your point of departure for coaxing out dialog. Then in turn your audience members absorb the film and negotiate its dialog internally, as we've discussed. And finally, after the screening, they engage in a dialog with each other. So the emphasis is on the creation of binding relationships through dialog.

K: That's right. It comes from my own experience of not necessarily getting my best ideas while lost in thought, alone. What happens far more often is that you get inspired in conversation with someone completely different from you, and discover within yourself an unknown voice. Preaching to the choir doesn't work. It's this dialog with difference that's lacking in Japanese society I think. So when I teach young people I always emphasize the importance of putting thoughts into language. Maybe because they seem to communicate only through images, young people try to get by on obfuscation, in a rush of imprecise words. I want them to appreciate the importance of working toward effective verbalization. I'm thinking here for instance about the way someone like Mutō Ruiko communicates. Her words are precise and

powerful. I really admire them.

A Revolution of Feelings: The Politics of Everyday Life

H: You've written about new citizens' movements in terms of "a revolution of feelings" and "a revolution underfoot." Could you speak to this idea, of the potential inherent in new ways of doing things? I imagine it's hard to separate this from the problem of filmmaking.

Of course in the 1960s and 1970s political movements were very organized; they had clear leaders, and factions, and a kind of compunction to declare allegiance to right or left – that's how they worked. They were always pursuing questions of who was orthodox and who was not. That sort of thing. But now we've entered a completely different age, and it seems to me that this is reflected clearly both in your method of filmmaking, the way you distribute your films, and the way you participate in movements. I wonder if you could say a little bit about that potential, in terms of "a revolution of feeling" and "a revolution underfoot."

K: Well it's really about daily life, isn't it? True transformation emerges from everyday living, not from historical principles or dogma. In this sense I have to say that, like Mutō Ruiko, I believe in the sensitivity of women ("onna" to iu kanjō). It's because women are the ones who live daily life most intimately. Whether they live in the city or the countryside, women cook, women do laundry, and women sort the trash. They think about what kind of trash they're putting out; it's inevitable that the person who takes out the trash be conscious of its contents. And they think about food: what ingredients should be used? Are they safe? Are they healthy? Then there's the choice of clothing, and whether or not it has been conceived ethically. It seems to me that the self who

coordinates all these aspects of daily life experiences a kind of satisfaction: a kind of happiness.

Where the maintenance of daily life is concerned, women are really the ones who do it closest to the source. Of course one could object that statements like this presume natural gender differences. But my point is that in society as it actually exists, it's undeniable that it's overwhelmingly women who do this work. Isn't that why women are the ones who are best able to sustain political movements that derive from daily life? The discovery of potential within the act of living itself seems old, but it's quite new.

When I made "Ende's Testament: A Fundamental Interrogation of Money," (1999) the reaction it elicited was unheard of for a television program.²⁷ People were fascinated with the question, "what is money, actually?" They were eager to rethink the value system that has completely overtaken Japanese society, in which it's possible to exchange anything for money, and substitute money for anything. It became possible to consider the slightly utopian notion of a lifestyle that could sustain daily existence in the absence of money.

But concern for food – where it comes from, how far it travels – has really increased. People are more and more aware that a wholesale shift in the way we use energy can only begin from a reconsideration of lifestyle, because "energy" means so much more than just electricity. What we see increasing is the sensitivity that comes from examining, at every step, our own ways of living, eating, and moving.

H: Yes and this is what you mean by "a revolution of feelings," isn't it? A reexamination of the priorities and values that sustain our everyday lives?

K: Definitely. It's important to appreciate that living in accordance with the same values as

always simply won't work anymore. It takes a great deal of time both to achieve this appreciation with one's brain, and to enact it with one's flesh.

But unless consciousness is reformed first it's impossible to take control of our own way of living; we just remain sunk in a kind of addiction to "common sense." People need to ask themselves whether living as they are is really okay. They need to wake up to the fact that to go on living in blind pursuit of an excessive, material, money-oriented wealth is complicit both with the sacrifice of people and with wholesale environmental destruction. What's revolutionary is when this awakening begins to happen, person by person.

H: Is this what you mean when you talk about "the consciousness of the directly concerned" (tōjisha ishiki)?

K: Exactly. To the extent that we live in a modern society it's impossible not to bear some responsibility for harm, but what's imperative is to think actively about how to lessen the violence. What we're seeing now are communities of people who've realized this – people much younger than myself – banding together and finding really marvelous ways, online especially, to share information about how they're living. So even though it's my policy not to call this "politics," I see it as the most political possible choice.

Respite Care: Hope in Learning From Each Other

H: You've mentioned that your current focus is saving the maximum number of people from radiation exposure. In the case of *Little Voices from Fukushima*, you depict something called "respite care" (hoyō) as one possible protective measure, one possibility for relief.

K: Yes, that's right, I've been proposing it as

one possible approach because I want to offer positive solutions. Rather than simply rail against the problem, the trick is to figure out how we can come to grips with it, as humans: how we can solve it. And essential here is the wisdom of our predecessors.

After all, the mothers of Belarus are a group of people who have been fighting this hand-to-hand battle for more than 30 years. Since the same situation is unfolding in Fukushima, there's a great deal we can learn from the struggles of these women.

H: Was it because you knew that respite care had been set up by the people of Belarus and offered consistently all these years that you first thought of connecting Belarus to Fukushima, and thinking about the two places together?

K: Well, what's happening now in Fukushima is chronic low-dose internal radiation. What I really wanted to know was how people had coped and continue to cope in the case of Chernobyl, when they went through the same thing.

H: Watching your film I was struck by how effective it was to compare Belarus and Fukushima. What the mothers and children of Fukushima want to know most is how to lessen the risks and effects of internal radiation. Especially for people under constant psychological pressure, to pose an answer is to provide a ray of hope amidst great darkness.

K: It's true! And the point is that human beings never give up on learning from other human beings.

H: Your conviction in the experience and wisdom of other people is one of the great strengths of your documentary.

K: People learn so much from failure, from trial and error. It's undeniable. That's why simply not being judgmental is a key tenet of my

documentary-making. It's so important not to pass judgment on the other person. To be human is to harbor contradictions, by definition. That's why calmly accepting contradictions just as they come is the first step toward discerning more essential problems, and how to solve them. We have to ask after the origin of the contradiction, and the status of those who have no choice but to live inside it. When you're caught up in the vortex yourself, you can't understand. But if from that same position you're able to observe others objectively, to observe them as if you were observing yourself, you come to understand quite clearly. That's the effect I always aim for with my filmmaking.

In the absence of judgment, I can gather up voices with equanimity and impartiality, no matter what the position. Impartiality does us the favor of presenting things extremely simply.

H: Extremely simply, yes, but we also sense that the conversation is quite layered; that a great deal lies behind it.

K: Exactly.

H: So is that what you mean by simplicity? The simple fact of recognizing this?

K: That's right. The contradictions arise and present themselves as such.

H: You do a beautiful job of introducing a world that cannot be separated straightforwardly into good and bad. Although you certainly have your own opinions, you never impose them, or skip suddenly to a conclusion. Instead you present the complexities of reality. As a result, audiences are reminded that although they are bearing up under the same dilemma, the same contradictions, they're also still living everyday lives. And the conversation opens onto what choices they can make.

K: Precisely. It's crucial for people to make these issues their own, and think about them

deeply. That's really what I think is missing most in Japanese society today. People are simply in survival mode with their minds in neutral, having severed all ties to empathy. "I simply can't empathize with every last person," they say. Put crudely, it's an extremely lonely kind of society. The only kind of common feeling that gets supported is the warped empathy of patriotism and nationalism. That's why I want to move forward with a firm conviction in the hope and empathy born of building relationships and learning from each other, through the moving image.

H: Thank you so much for talking today.

I would like to thank Kamanaka Hitomi for her friendship and many stimulating conversations over the past 3 years. My many thanks also go to Margherita Long for writing an excellent accompanying essay for this interview and making the interview available in English. Norma Field and Mark Selden offered very helpful comments and suggestions as always. I am grateful to them. Lastly I also want to extend my thanks to Akiko Anson who kindly transcribed the interview, provided notes, and proofread the English version.

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Other interviews on the Fukushima nuclear disaster by Hirano can be found [here](#).

Notes are by the translator except where noted.

Ethnicity”. You can also find the series of interviews related to the Fukushima nuclear disaster in the Asia-Pacific Journal, a project which Hirano started in 2013. He can be reached at hirano@history.ucla.edu.

Akiko Anson is a freelance translator who lives in Iowa City, Iowa. Anson obtained a BA degree in English literature from Gakushūin University in Tokyo, Japan and an MA degree in Asian Studies from the University of Iowa.

Notes

¹ This is Kamanaka Hitomi’s third co-authored piece for *Asia Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*. She discusses her 2006 film *Rokkasho Rhapsody* in [Kamanaka Hitomi, Tsuchimoto Noriaki and Norma Field, “Rokkasho, Minamata and Japan’s Future: Capturing Humanity on Film,” trans. Ann Saphir, *The Asia-Pacific Journal* Vol 5, Issue 2 Dec 1, 2007](#). She discusses her 2011 film *Ashes to Honey: Toward a Sustainable Future* in [Kamanaka Hitomi and Norma Field, “Complicity and Victimization: Director Kamanaka Hitomi’s Nuclear Warnings,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol 9, Issue 18 No 4, May 2, 2011](#).

² The Chugoku Electric Power Company is one of [ten government-regulated electric companies](#) supplying power over two separate grids. Three companies cover the Eastern Japan grid (Hokkaido Denryoku, Tohoku Denryoku, Tokyo Denryoku (TEPCO), and seven cover Western Japan (Hokuriku, Chubu, Kansai, Chugoku, Shikoku, Kyushu and Okinawa Denryoku). In 2008 Chugoku Electric was granted a license to begin landfill in the Seto Inland Sea to build two reactors at a new Kaminoseki Plant. It made slow progress amidst the active local protests Kamanaka documents in *Ashes to Honey*. Operations were suspended in 2011 after Fukushima but in 2016 Yamaguchi Prefecture [renewed its landfill license](#) citing national energy policy.

³ Japan’s [Ministry of Foreign Affairs English website](#) states “On April 1, 2014, in accordance with the NSS, the Government of Japan set out the Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology as a set of clear principles on the overseas transfer of defense equipment and technology that fits the new security environment. The new Principles replaced the previous “Three Principles on Arms Exports and Their Related Policy Guidelines.””

⁴ In 2004, in response to legislation that allowed the LDP to override opposition and send Japanese Self Defense Forces to fight in Iraq without a UN Mandate, a group called Ribbon Project collaborated with the publisher Magazine House to produce a [bilingual children’s book](#) titled *The Way War Is Created* (in Japanese) and *What Happens Before War* (in English). In 2015 an [animated version](#) was produced by a group of filmmakers and artists concerned that 3.11 and the Fukushima nuclear accident were also being used as a pretext for militarization. Kamanaka sells the dvd for educational use on [her web shop](#) and it is also widely available online.

⁵ This interview originally took place in October and December 2015. Here Kamanaka

references the Paris terror attacks of 13 November 2015. The figure “600,000” corresponds to the World Health Organization’s estimate for the number of children under fifteen who died during seven years of the Iraq War. Kamanaka discusses this figure in the first chapter of her book *Hibakusha: Dokyumentarii eiga no genba kara* [Hibakusha: From Ground Zero of Documentary Filmmaking] (Tokyo: Kageshobō, 2006), 23.

⁶ The nuclear businesses of the American conglomerate Westinghouse were sold to British Nuclear Fuels Limited (BNFL) in 1999 after Westinghouse purchased the communications company CBS in 1995, renamed itself CBS, and divested from non-broadcast operations. BNFL sold a 77% share in Westinghouse to Toshiba for \$5.4B in 2006 at a time when the global market for nuclear power was expected to grow in China, India, the UAE and Eastern Europe. In late 2015 when Hirano interviewed Kamanaka, Toshiba had already weathered an accounting scandal centered in part on its [failure to disclose Westinghouse losses](#). But it had yet to suffer the full impact Kamanaka predicts, which the *Financial Times* would call in February 2017 the “[Downfall of Toshiba, a Nuclear Industry Titan](#)”. In early January 2018, [Toshiba sold Westinghouse](#) to the Canadian company Brookfield for \$4.6B. In contrast, Mitsubishi remains sanguine about its investment in the French multinational group Areva, with which it [began partnering in the early 1990s to sell nuclear fuel and established a joint venture in 2007 to make reactors](#). Here Kamanaka references Mitsubishi’s decision to purchase more shares in Areva just as the German company Siemens was [pulling out](#), in part over failures at the Olkiluoto NPP in Finland. Losses of almost \$9B motivated Areva in 2017 to spin off its reactor unit as “Areva NP,” selling [about 50%](#) to the French Government company Electricite de France (EDF) and [20% to Mitsubishi](#). According to the Nikkei Asian Review, Mitsubishi’s investment in Areva is now \$621M.

⁷ The [Olkiluoto Nuclear Power Plant](#) in Finland had two reactors built in the 1970s and in 2005 commissioned Areva to build a third. Originally scheduled to be completed in 2010, the project has gone 200% over budget and is still not finished.

⁸ [Wikipedia’s English entry](#) on Yamashita is incomplete but indicates the controversy that surrounds him. He served as chair of the [Japan Thyroid Association](#) after co-authoring [several Chernobyl papers](#) under the auspices of the Sasakawa Foundation and in collaboration with the World Health Organization. The Sasakawa Foundation was funded by [Sasakawa Ryōichi](#) (1889-1995), a controversial right-wing figure who made money in China and Manchuria during the Fifteen Years’ War and through a gambling empire in post-war Japan. It is worth noting also that many regard the United Nations’ World Health Organization (WHO), with which Yamashita collaborated, to be compromised by the close relationship with the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) mandated by a [1959 agreement](#) in which the two agencies promise always to act in “close collaboration.” The WHO rebutted this argument in a [2001 statement](#).

⁹ Kamanaka is quoting a line from Yamashita’s 3 May 2011 public meeting in Nihonmatsu, Fukushima, in which he defends the claim that exposures of up to 100 millisieverts per year are safe. One of the people who asks him a question is Jodo Shinshu priest Sasaki Michinori, who appears in both of Kamanaka’s post 3.11 documentaries. A transcript and video of the 70-minute meeting is available from [ourplanet-tv.org](#).

¹⁰ An important exception to the tendency for perpetrators of nuclear disasters to go legally unpunished is the mandatory indictment (*kyōsei kiso*) seeking criminal penalties (*keijibatsu*) for three TEPCO executives currently making its way through Tokyo District Court. See [here](#).

¹¹ As 2016 ended, 99 U.S. reactors produce 19.5 percent of U.S. electricity. Many of these reactors will reach the end of their current licenses and could close by mid-century. A number of these reactors are at risk of near-term closure due to market competition and the possibility that expensive major components will need replacement. Two reactors are currently under construction in the United States. Georgia plans to go ahead with two new reactors, just after South Carolina backed off. See an August 2017 [article](#) from *New York Times* as well as World Nuclear Association [website](#) updated February 2018 (KH)

¹² It should be noted that Saudi Arabia decided to build two large nuclear power reactors in 2015. This is a significant scale-back from its original plan to build 16 reactors over next 20-25 years at a cost of more than \$80 billion. It projects that nuclear reactors provide 15% of energy by 2040, along with over 30% of solar capacity. This indicates that Saudi Arabia is investing more resources into the development of solar and other renewable energy than nuclear even though nuclear energy is by no means insignificant. (KH)

¹³ In 1995 the Monju “fast breeder” nuclear plant in Fukui Prefecture suffered a sodium leak and explosion that was subsequently covered up. The [close of the plant was announced](#) in September 2016.

¹⁴ [The series](#) ran from October 2011 to March 2016 and has since been edited into [nine total volumes](#) by Gakken Publishing.

¹⁵ Weapons enhanced with depleted uranium (DU) were [used by the US military](#) for the first time in the Persian Gulf War in 1991 to penetrate Iraqi tanks. They were subsequently used in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq again in the Iraq War of 2003-2011. Widely reported health consequences led to [requests for a global moratorium](#) on their use.

¹⁶ “[Nuclear fuel cycle](#)” (kakunenryō saikuru), refers to the multi-stage process by which uranium is mined, enriched and burned in a standard reactor, then either stored as spent fuel (nuclear waste) or reprocessed into mixed-oxide (MOX) fuel for use in a “fast-breeder” reactor.

¹⁷ Kamanaka gathered what she learned into a book co-authored with Dr. Hida Shuntarō. See *Naibu hibaku no kyōi: genbaku kara rekka urandan made* [The threat of internal radiation: From nuclear bombs to depleted uranium bullets] (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 2005).

¹⁸ Hida Shuntarō (1917-2017) survived the atomic bombing in Hiroshima and devoted his life to caring for victims of radiation exposure. He became a mentor of Kamanaka after her return from Iraq; she describes the process in the first chapter of *Hibakusha: Dokyumentarii eiga no genba kara*. Dr. Hida plays major onscreen roles in her films *Hibakusha at the End of the World* (2003) and *Living Through Internal Radiation* (2012).

¹⁹ Dr. Jawad Al-Ali of the Sadr Teaching Hospital in Basrah is quoted widely in global media accounts of cancers caused by depleted uranium in Iraq. See for instance [here](#).

²⁰ Founded by media activist Dee Dee Hallock in New York City in 1981, [Paper Tiger Television](#) continues to pioneer alternative community media and curate an extensive archive of independent and DIY programming.

²¹ See [Katsuya Hirano’s interview with Koide](#).

²² For the first few years after release, Kamanaka’s films are generally shown only through *jishu jōei* or self-organized screenings. [Her website](#) gives detailed instructions on how to book, advertise, and stage events. For a detailed account of their significance for community formation and social activism see Hideaki Fujiki, “Networking Citizens through Film

Screenings: Cinema and Media in Post-3.11 Social Movements,” in Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin, eds., *Media Convergence in Japan* (Creative Commons, 2016).

²³ Mutō Ruiko is a long-time antinuclear activist based in Fukushima and a key figure in the movement to hold TEPCO executives and government officials criminally liable. To understand the movement’s evolution from a group of “Complainants” to “Supporters of a Criminal Lawsuit,” see this [video](#) at the *Fukushima genpatsu keiji soshō shiendan* website. For *Asia Pacific Journal* pieces about Mutō, see [Tomomi Yamaguchi’s essay](#) from 2012, [Katsuya Hirano’s interview](#) from 2015, and [Norma Field’s essay](#) from 2016.

²⁴ Japan’s Basic Law of Education (*kyōiku kihonhō*) enacted in 1947 was amended under the leadership of Abe Shinzo in 2006 to de-emphasize equality and critical thinking and emphasize “patriotism.” For facts see [Wikipedia](#). For analysis, see [McNeill and Lebowitz](#).

²⁵ “Those who discriminate” can refer to school bullies calling Fukushima evacuees “radioactive,” or people who practice marriage discrimination against prospective partners who have been exposed, or those who exert social pressure on parents who speak openly about thyroid cancer. Norma Field provides an overview and a wealth of citations in her essay [“From Fukushima: To Despair Properly, to Find the Next Step.”](#) As Kamanaka notes here, however, the term “discrimination” (*sabetsu*) has also been appropriated by the pro-nuclear faction to silence those who speak out about radiation’s effects, on the grounds that they too are practicing *sabetsu*.

²⁶ All four “dispatches” (*tsūshin*) take the form of documentaries. The four-disc set is available from ILL and also from [Kamanaka’s website](#).

²⁷ Kamanaka’s program about the German fantasy and children’s book author Michael Ende (1929-1995) aired on NHK in May 1999. A [book version](#) by Kamanaka’s production company Group Gendai and NHK producer Kawamura Atsunori was published in 2000 by NHK Press. It remains in print in a bunko edition by Kodansha.