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The nuclear technology debate returns. Narratives about nuclear power in post-Fukushima Japanese films

Abstract

The presented article revolves around the widespread debate on the Fukushima catastrophe in Japanese cinematography and the artists' responses to the incident. They give the viewers clues on how to understand the reasons and results of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, as well as how to perceive nuclear technology after the catastrophe. The author analyses the chosen post-Fukushima films, points out the recurring depictions, and deliberates on the ways of presenting nuclear power. The analysis starts with a brief comparison of post-Hiroshima and post-Fukushima cinematography. The author then focuses on activists' art in the form of anti-nuclear agitation (*Nuclear Japan*, 2014 by Hiroyuki Kawai) and pictures that can be classified as *shōshimin-eiga*: *Kebo no kuni* (*The Land of Hope*, 2012) and *Leji* (*Homeland*, 2014). The third part of the article puts emphasis on the description of the catastrophe as a "new beginning", as Takashi Murakami presents it in *Mememe no kurage* (*Jellyfish Eye*, 2013). The debate on nuclear technology also appears in the remake of the story about the best-known Japanese monster, Godzilla, reactivated by Hideaki Anno in the post-Fukushima film *Shin Gojira* (*New Godzilla*, 2016). The last part of the paper presents the Western point of view and covers analysis of films such as Alain de Halleux's *Welcome to Fukushima* (2013), Doris Dörrie's *Griße aus Fukushima* (*Fukushima, My Love*, 2016) or Matteo Gagliardi's *Fukushima: A Nuclear Story* (2015).

Key words: Fukushima, nuclear power, post-Fukushima film, Japanese cinema, catastrophe

Introduction

The widespread debate on the Fukushima catastrophe, the future of the Japanese reactors, and the suffering, fears, and social problems the nation has to face have also influenced Japanese cinema. The artists' responses to the incident and the aftermath that is still felt have resulted in a cinematic wake that happened surprisingly quickly after the catastrophe. The narrations about nuclear power, even though considered as a taboo that should not be violated while the memories of the tragedy are still alive, are constructed so as to face social fears; they give the viewers (also around the world) clues on how to understand the reasons and results of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, as well as how to perceive nuclear technology after the catastrophe.

The recurring pictures that can be found in most of the post-Fukushima films are depictions of the off-limits exclusion zone, guarded by the government because of high-level radiation. The artists also underline the contrast between the silence in the zone and the hustle and bustle of the temporary houses and schools occupied by the victims. Nuclear power itself is presented in two ways: neutrally, for example in *Leji (Homeland)*, 2014 by Nao Kubota or *Kibō no kuni (The Land of Hope)*, 2012 by Sion Sono, or in the form of activist art and anti-nuclear agitation (*Nuclear Japan*, 2014 by Hiroyuki Kawai). It is almost impossible to find positive commentaries about nuclear power in post-Fukushima films; however, the catastrophe can be described as a “new beginning”, as Takashi Murakami presents it in *Mememe no kurage (Jellyfish Eye)*, 2013). The debate on nuclear technology also appears in the remake of the story about the best-known Japanese monster, Godzilla, reactivated by Hideaki Anno in the post-Fukushima film *Shin Gojira (New Godzilla)*, 2016).

The primary purpose of this paper is to analyse the narrations about nuclear power in Fukushima-related Japanese films in the context of the directors' personal points of view on the issue and the impact of their works on Japanese society. As can be perceived, observing the catastrophe through subjective lenses is almost unavoidable as the authors of the aforementioned films are not only distant observers. They combine personal experiences with the national trauma they are part of. Due to this fact, the presented article aims to deliberate on the problem of how Japanese filmmakers have presented nuclear technology since 2011, while linking their works to the films that emerged after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. Another point of focus presented in this paper is how the audience understands the aforementioned films about the tragedy and why they are gaining popularity in Japanese society. Moreover, it is also worth focusing on the impact the pictures may have on collective memory, as will be discussed later. The examples of the films presented in this article were chosen because of their popularity and significance for the development of the nuclear technology debate.

From Hiroshima to Fukushima

The massive and immediate destruction caused by nuclear energy and the fact that the source of this annihilation is human-made traumatizes the collective memory beyond any measurable limits. What is significant in the case of nuclear disasters is the fact that its results function in two visual orders. On the one hand, pictures of untouched landscapes juxtaposed with sudden, total destruction bring to mind apocalyptic visions of the End of Times which are known from Western depictions. On the other hand, the invisible radiation and lack of immediate results (or, in other words, “immediate victims”) have no simple visual representations; this traumatizes the imagination the most¹. The visible effects of the destroyed surroundings of these catastrophes are extended in time by the menace of nuclear contamination that will also affect society in the future². The impact of the nuclear catastrophe on the Japanese nation, happening twice in a relatively short period, put the filmmakers in a situation in which they try to present on the screen a tragedy that is impossible to understand. David Deamer observes that “Each atom bomb film overcomes the spectre of impossibility in its way; each in its own way creates a singular encounter with the nuclear attacks [...]”³.

Visions of the apocalypse derived from Western culture influenced the rise of the post-Hiroshima subgenre of Japanese cinema: *hibakusha*. Narratives which can be classified under this term introduced the topic of the atom bombs and explored the meaning of “Hiroshima” for the post-war generations⁴. The critical potential that characterized the *hibakusha* films, the emphasis on the sociological context of the catastrophe, and the variety of other genres combined with the determinants of the subgenre allows it to be connected to the post-Fukushima cinematic wake. It should be pointed out that the earliest on-screen depictions of the destruction caused by nuclear power were dominated by the three genres which also appear most often in the case of the March 11 incident: contemporary drama, monster movies, and documentary⁵. For example, analogies can be found between Ito Sueo’s *Hiroshima Nagasaki ni okeru genshi bakudan no eikyō* (*The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, 1946) and Hiroyuki Kawai’s *Nuclear Japan* (2014) documentary films, both of which are described in the next part of this article. Both films use original footage and capture with scientific precision the tragedy of the Japanese nation. However, when Kawai restrains himself

¹ Geilhorn Barbara, Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt, *Fukushima and the Arts: Negotiating Nuclear Disaster*, (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 2 – 3.

² Geilhorn Barbara, Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt, p. 3.

³ Deamer David, *Deleuze, Japanese Cinema, and the Atom Bomb: The Spectre of Impossibility*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 31.

⁴ See: Broderick Mick (ed) *Hibakusha Cinema : Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the Nuclear Image in Japanese Film*, (London, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

⁵ Deamer David, p. 31.

from providing a plethora of drastic pictures of mutilated bodies, Sueos's footage shows the drama without euphemisms. The second part of the very first post-bombing documentary⁶ devoted to Nagasaki presents narrations about the tragedy of particular people which can also be found in the film from 2014. The post-Hiroshima style of producing dramas, like Shindo Kaneto's melodrama *Genbaku no ko* (*Children of Hiroshima*, 1952) or Shohei Imamura's *Kuroi ame* (*Black Rain*, 1989), both of which emphasize sentimentalism and focus on the emotions of particular people, can be found in *Kibô no kuni* (*The Land of Hope*, 2012) by Sion Sono. It should be underlined that the differences found in the films mentioned above are intangibly connected to the nature of the two catastrophes: genocide in the case of the World War II events and a tragedy initiated by an unfortunate series of natural factors.

In terms of the impression on American society, March 11, 2011 is also compared to the events of 9.11⁷. It was Takashi Mikuriya who first suggested that the *senryo* (the long post-war period in Japan) ended with the Fukushima disaster. Furthermore, Mikuriya proposed another term, *saigo* (literally: next, after), to describe the time "after the catastrophe".⁸ The new era, in the opinion of the Japanese researcher, has the potential to become more democratic, thus a period full of hope and peace⁹. Barbara Geilhorn and Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt, deliberating on the artistic pursuits related to the nuclear disaster of March 11, point out in their publication that "Fukushima forced artists across the genres to reconsider the relationship between art, representation, and live experience".¹⁰ The experience of the disaster and the analysis of the emotions accompanying the traumatic events appeared not only in film but also in literature and performing arts. Here, it is worth mentioning the artistic pursuits on the grounds of Japanese theatre and the plays of Oriza Hirata and Toshiki Okada: the former, in his play entitled *Sayonara* (*Good bye*, 2011), uses a female android as a metaphor for the failure of the human-technological understanding which resulted in the Fukushima disaster¹¹. On the other hand, Okada's theatre, defined as "musical theatre with ghostly apparitions"¹², aims to criticize Japanese cultural norms, society, and politics. His *Jimen to yuka* (*Ground and Floor*, 2013) performance "depicts a group of

⁶ Loska Krzysztof, "Tożsamość traumatyczna w filmach o bombie atomowej" [Traumatic identity in the films about the atomic bombing], in *Poetyka filmu japońskiego* [The Poetics of the Japanese Film], ed. Idem. (Kraków: Rabid, 2009), p. 352 – 353.

⁷ Geilhorn Barbara, Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt, p. 3.

⁸ Mikuriya Takashi, *Sengo ga owari, saigo ga hajimaru* [Sengo era ends, saigo era starts], (Tokyo: Chikura Shobō, 2012).

⁹ Geilhorn Barbara, Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt, p. 3.

¹⁰ Geilhorn Barbara, Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt, p. 10.

¹¹ Eckersall Peter, "Performance, Mourning and the Long View of Nuclear Space," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 7:2 (2015), p. 4.

¹² Eckersall Peter, p. 6.

people experiencing an intense post-Fukushima malady”,¹³ which metaphorically comments on the failure of the Japanese political system¹⁴.

Activist art or searching for the ultimate solution

The controversy arising around the catastrophe that appeared due to the social accusations of the negligence of the government resulted in the emerging activist movement. While searching for the ultimate solution to the problem, both in the West and in Japan, the filmmakers strive to answer whether it is necessary to rely on nuclear energy in future technological development. It should also be underlined that the activists define nuclear power as unequivocally wrong and postulate that its use should cease.

One of the most publicly visible activists who uses film as a medium to communicate his postulates is Hiroyuki Kawai¹⁵. This professional lawyer who decided to become a documentary filmmaker was born in Manchuria, China, but he mentally tied himself to Japan after he graduated from the University of Tokyo in the 1970s. His interest in lawsuits against nuclear power plants reached its peak after Fukushima, but even before the tragic events of March 2011, he was deeply involved in the fight to eradicate nuclear power from Japan¹⁶. Kawai admits that his main purpose is to protect the environment, especially from the tragic nuclear disasters that have long-term effects on natural habitats. Analysing how to reach a wide audience and not satisfied with the number of people attending his lectures, the activist realized that explaining his objectives with a movie would be the best way to popularize his ideas.

Nuclear Japan, released in 2014, was to answer the question that had been asked by the director many times: Has nuclear power brought happiness to the Japanese nation? The documentary goes back to the seven hours before the catastrophe and the camera’s eye accompanies a group of firefighters. They accomplish different tasks, from looking for missing people after the tsunami, to the disposal of radioactive materials. However, their efforts are only presented to underline the message conveyed by the author. At every step, he stresses that if it had not been for the nuclear disaster, many more lives could have been saved¹⁷ and, consequently, he accuses the Japanese government for its faulty decisions. In his work Kawai combines footage illustrating the efforts of the public services and the pain of civilians with interviews with experts (e.g.

¹³ Eckersall Peter, p. 6.

¹⁴ Eckersall Peter, p. 6.

¹⁵ Nuclear Japan Official Site, <http://www.nihontogenpatsu.com/english>, date accessed 18 April 2017.

¹⁶ Nuclear Japan Official Site.

¹⁷ Nuclear Japan Official Site.

Tetsunari Iida, the director of the Institute for Sustainable Energy Policies) and, as he refers to on his website, “facts and evidence”.¹⁸ Moreover, the documentary offers a wealth of technical information on how the reactors function, nuclear policy in Japan, and safety regulations¹⁹. However, even though the author tries to present his findings in the most objective way possible, he cannot help avoiding subjectivization of the matter.

Kawai presents only a one-sided point of view, demonizing nuclear power and providing the ultimate solution to the problem: “to halt nuclear power plants all over Japan²⁰”. The director perceives his movie as a tool that helps to convey his ideas and bring them to a wider audience, not only to those in academia. It should also be underlined that thanks to the complexity of the presented issues and the unique footage of the testimonies provided by the victims, the film was considered as evidence during the trials related to the catastrophe²¹. Even though the event has an obvious tragic meaning, the message Kawai tries to convey can be read as a positive look at the future of the nation. He observes that “the Fukushima disaster has increasingly forced the courts and the judges to expose the lies of the government and the nuclear industry, as well as take responsibility for the huge damage caused²²”. Kawai creates an analogy to the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, comparing the government reactions, commentaries, and actions taken. It is visible that the director has a feeling that the catastrophe, paradoxically, helped to raise the tabooed issue of the post-nuclear trauma. Consequently, Kawai perceives himself as a representative of a new movement that will shed some light on the safety of nuclear energy in Japan.

Screening the zone, preserving the memories

The catastrophe and form of post-Fukushima societal order in Japan are also vividly presented in dramas. In this category, under the label of the *shōshimin-eiga*²³ genre, there is a plethora of poetic pictures that aim to not only show the destruction, despair, and lack of hope, but also the preservation of collective memories, as well as on the discourse on the future of the nation. The lightly fictionalized narrations, depicting the tragedy of particular families, are designed to challenge viewers’ emotions and, in the

¹⁸ Nuclear Japan Official Site.

¹⁹ Citizens’ Nuclear Information Center, <http://www.cnic.jp/english/?p=3424>, date accessed 16 April 2017.

²⁰ Nuclear Japan Official Site.

²¹ Citizens’ Nuclear Information Center.

²² Citizens’ Nuclear Information Center.

²³ *Shōshimin-eiga* is a Japanese film and TV genre which aims at depicting of the everyday existence of the working class people.

case of foreign audiences, make them familiar with the problems of Japanese society. It can be observed that the message proposed by the authors of the post-Fukushima dramas conveys more neutral meaning than in the case of Kawai's documentary. Under the genre of drama, it is the story of the suffering and pain that matters the most, not the strict anti- or pro- nuclear point of view of the author.

One of the first post-Fukushima drama films, and, at the same time, one of the most appreciated by foreign critiques²⁴, is *Kibō no kuni* (*The Land of Hope*, 2012) directed by Sion Sono. The picture received the NETPAC Award for Best Asian Film at the 37th Toronto International Film Festival. The author focuses on presenting the histories on two families uprooted from their home cities, who strive to fight back for their lost safety by adjusting themselves to the new reality. Sono pays great attention to showing what has happened to the mental condition of the protagonists since the traumatic experiences and the extent to which it is possible to overcome the trauma. The feeling of the constant danger of radioactivity causes the families to develop neuroses, compulsive behaviours, and anxieties. For example, Izumi Ono (Megumi Kagurazaka), the wife of Yoichi Ono (Jun Murakami), is obsessed with protecting her body from contact with radioactive objects or places. When she realizes that she is pregnant, Izumi not only covers her whole house with aluminium foil, but also compulsively checks the radiation level on a Geiger counter—everything to protect her unborn child. By showing three generations of protagonists fighting for survival, the director undertakes a discourse about the future of the country²⁵. Even though it is a farmer Yasuhiko Ono (Iaso Natsuyagi) and his wife Chieko Ono (Naoko Otani) whose fight is depicted in the most dramatic way, it is the child yet to be born that will bear all the consequences of the situation. The actions taken by Izumi to protect her child, depicted in an almost humorous way, show the desperate attempts the Japanese people undertook to preserve their health. In this case, Sono demonstrates that it is impossible to escape the fate and every desperate attempt seems to be grotesque in the face of the inevitable consequences of the radiation.

Leji (*Homeland*, 2014) by Nao Kubota is another film about the results of the Fukushima catastrophe that was mostly appreciated abroad. Even though the director has more documentary pictures than fictionalized dramas on his account, he made a feature film to discuss the post-catastrophe issues. However, the critics observed that Kubota's film differs from the aforementioned *Kibō no kuni* in terms of the presentation of emotions. The critics accused the director of creating a narrative which “perversely

²⁴ See: The Japan Times: Culture, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2014/03/06/films/film-reviews/ieji-homeland/#.WQeCrsakJhE>, date accessed 9 April 2017. As it can be observed, Sono's film was mostly appreciated by the foreign critiques, because the Japanese ones stated that it was too soon to for a fictional treatment of the national tragedy.

²⁵ The Hollywood Reporter, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/land-hope-film-review-406354>, date accessed 7 April 2017.

refuses to engage on a dramatic or emotional level, or to look its unavoidable political context in the eye”.²⁶ The picture, screened in 2014 at the Berlin Film Festival, mostly explores the toxic relations between the characters, thus resembling Shohei Imamura’s narrations about the dark blood ties that led to the tragedy in the rural, apparently idyllic setting²⁷. Kubota focuses on the topic that returns in almost every post-Fukushima drama: the ancestors’ attachment to the land. Here, the Japanese concept of *furusato*, a mythologized picture of a traditional birthplace situated in the beauty of nature, appears as a lost part of Japanese culture. The characters are trapped in the world between—it is impossible to return to the cradle because the *furusato* is lost and, at the same time, they cannot start new lives. Their longing for the lost safety leads them to transgressive behaviour, as in the case of Soichi (Seiyo Uchino), who spends his days loitering around the entertainment district, unable to find a new job²⁸.

Manifesting a literal-minded approach to constructing a plot that resembles documentary films, the director especially focuses on the daily routines of the people influenced by the catastrophe²⁹. Paradoxically, the most striking scenes in the film are not those presenting the dynamic actions of the characters, but the ones depicting rural labour or food preparation. There, Kubota emphasizes the attempts of the protagonists to maintain social order, even though, together with the houses, the bonds of the family have been destroyed.

Monsters reactivated

Cultural anxiety about radiation and the fear of nuclear fallout appeared on Japanese screens right after World War II. Among the science fiction films featuring a variety of monsters, mysterious creatures, and physically changed people, the greatest popularity was won by Ishiro Honda’s *Godzilla* series. Except for its similarity to Ryūjin—the deity of the sea that appears in the scriptures of the ingenious Japanese religion, Shinto—the dragon-like creature that emerged from the ocean symbolized the fears of the sudden development of deadly technology and the results of its use in warfare³⁰. The appearance of the monster emerging from the water was described in the first film of the series, *Gojira* (*Godzilla*, 1954), as the result of the H-bomb experiments³¹.

²⁶ Variety, <http://variety.com/2014/film/asia/berlin-film-review-homeland-1201109899/>, date accessed 19 April 2017.

²⁷ Variety.

²⁸ Variety.

²⁹ Variety.

³⁰ Perrine Toni A., *Film and the Nuclear Age: Representing Cultural Anxiety*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), p. 77.

³¹ Perrine Toni A, p. 77.

What is more, Honda's films, especially the first one, bring together unnamed fears of a mystery that comes from 'the outside'. As Toni A. Perrine observes in her publication concerning the cultural anxieties of the nuclear age, both the appearance of nuclear energy and the cinematic *Gojira* can be perceived as acts of "transformation of matter into an unimaginable destructive force".³²

It is not surprising that the rubber monster came back to screens again after the Fukushima catastrophe and its symbolic connections to the destructive power of nuclear energy were reactivated. *Shin Gojira* (*New Godzilla*, 2016), directed by Hideaki Anno and Shinji Higuchi, at the same time breaks with both the familiar schemes from the previous productions and the references to the canonic appearance of the monster. However, what is most significant in terms of researching the ways in which the Fukushima disaster is depicted in Japanese film is that *Gojira* is no longer a result of nuclear experiments. It comes with a tsunami wave, earthquakes and radiation, but the origins of the creature remain unknown. Furthermore, the role of the Americans in the narrative has changed: in the newest production, they are the most important allies in the deadly fight³³. It is also worth mentioning the focus on the reactions of the catastrophe victims presented in Anno and Higuchi's film. As happened on the streets of Japanese cities, in *Shin Gojira* the people measure the radiation and share information on social media websites. Also, the bitter portrait of the government and the news resembles real life: the officials, under the burden of bureaucracy, are unable to cooperate and the transmitted meetings are filled with clichés and jargon³⁴. The nuclear debate in the newest *Gojira* film is concluded with optimism: even though severe damage was done to the metropolis and uncountable deaths resulted from the officials' reluctance, the monster is finally defeated. It turns into a concrete monument, remaining in the heart of the city as a testament to the victims of the tragedy.

It is also interesting yet surprising that the appearance of a monster in post-Fukushima narration can be found in Takashi Murakami's film *Mememe no kurage* (*Jellyfish Eye*, 2013). The director's debut, although kept in the light comedy tone, raises a question that was overlooked in other productions: how can children's trauma after the catastrophe be minimized? Even though the tragedy that hit Japanese society is not explicitly named, the viewer realizes that the young Masashi Kusakabe's (Takuto Sueoka) father died because of a catastrophe somehow related to nuclear power. Together with his mother, the youngster moves to a rural area—escaping both the damaged environment and the painful memories. However, soon it turns out that the children in the village are obsessed with a smartphone app that allows them to control

³² Perrine Toni A., p. 84.

³³ The Columbus Dispatch,

http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/life_and_entertainment/2016/08/07/1-japans-latest-godzilla-movie-draws-on-1954-original-fukushima-nuclear-disaster.html, date accessed 18 April 2017.

³⁴ The Columbus Dispatch.

fantastic (animated) pet monsters and organize ‘dog fights’ between the creatures. Here, the director uses comedy to tell a story about mysterious scientists who study how to control catastrophic forces by manipulating students’ emotions³⁵. The pets, called F.R.I.E.N.D.S., are vessels that transmit the feelings of their little masters to the control centre. The fact that the children put a lot of energy into the game leads to the birth of a huge monster that tries to destroy the area.

The film was negatively reviewed and the ending was considered naive; it was also dismissed for its camera work and ragged special effects³⁶. It was also observed that the coming-of-age story mixed with philosophical themes of fighting with trauma, evil, and self-limitations was incomprehensible for younger viewers and too infantile for adults³⁷. However, Murakami’s film resembles his artistic pursuits: as a contemporary painter and sculptor, he is recognized for combining high art with pop-cultural aesthetics³⁸, which is also visible in the visual style and plot of his debut. The author tried to introduce a fresh style of talking about the Fukushima catastrophe—a remedy for the children’s trauma hidden under a layer of family cinema. Even though it was too soon to combine the painful memories with cute animated characters, Murakami’s film remains a unique and thus creative and brave way of presenting the catastrophe in Japanese cinema.

From the Western point of view

Fukushima-related narrations and the nuclear technology debate since 2011 have appeared not only in Japanese cinema. A critical comment on the catastrophe also comes from Western directors, among who should be mentioned Alain de Halleux’s *Welcome to Fukushima* (2013), Doris Dörrie’s *Grüße aus Fukushima (Fukushima, My Love)* (2016) or Matteo Gagliardi’s *Fukushima: A Nuclear Story* (2015). Through their works, these filmmakers from abroad share their compassion and feelings of being greatly moved by the tragic events. It is worth mentioning here that Doris Dörrie, the author of *Kirschblüten – Hanami (Cherry Blossoms)* (2008), was motivated by the fact that she felt a strong connection with the Japanese nation. She visited Fukushima right after the tragic events and almost anthropologically gathered the testimonies of the victims, which she later used in constructing the plot of her film. Dörrie’s *Fukushima* revolves around the

³⁵ The Hollywood Reporter: Jellyfish Eyes, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/jellyfish-eyes-mememe-no-kurage-727224>, date accessed 19 April 2017.

³⁶ See: The review written by Roberta Smith, a co-chief and critic of the NY Times. The New York Times, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/15/movies/review-jellyfish-eyes-a-childrens-film-from-takashi-murakami.html?_r=1, date accessed 21 April 2017.

³⁷ The New York Times.

³⁸ Takashi Murakami’s profile on Artnet: Artnet, <http://www.artnet.com/artists/takashi-murakami/>, date accessed 17 April 2017.

problem of mutual understanding between Western and Japanese culture, which was also a central subject in *Kirschblüten...* In the post-Fukushima narrative, the relation that emerges between a young German woman, Maria (Rosalie Thomass), and the elderly geisha, Satomi (Kaori Momoi), casts new light on the collective experience of an entire generation of Japanese people who suffered the catastrophe and the fear of radiation³⁹. When the women protagonists by chance move in together to the Satomi's partly destroyed house in the closed Zone, a subtle bond develops between them. Depicting Maria's struggle to understand a different culture while trying to be helpful in rebuilding the retired geisha's life, the director aimed to emphasize how difficult it is for foreigners to cope with unfamiliar traditions. In one of the interviews, Dörrie admits that her main purpose was to answer the question: Can the Westerner, who does not understand Eastern mentality and culture, in any way help Japanese people?⁴⁰ Even though the narrative revolves around the post-catastrophe trauma, the central part of the film is the relations, based on the author's autobiographical references, between women symbolizing disparate cultural backgrounds.

Documentary insights can also be found in the films presenting the catastrophe from the Western point of view. Here it is worth mentioning the pictures by Alain de Halleux and Matteo Gagliardi, who combine their original footage with scientific explanations of the causes of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster and personal commentaries. The first author visits the city of Minamisōma, situated 25 kilometres from the reactor, in order to present the everyday struggle of the population of that area. Many of the inhabitants want to be evacuated, while others wish to stay in their homeland and rebuild the city; this results in increasing conflict within the community. Moreover, the Tepco company, which is financially responsible for compensation, refuses to pay their fines; this forces the victims to search for funds globally⁴¹. The author uses the contrasting Eastern characters of a Zen master and a samurai as a metaphor of the two attitudes towards the rebuilding of a new social order after the tragedy. From this perspective, the victim can choose the course of action in Halleux's film: he can either accept his fate and stay in his *furusato*, or fight for a better future for the next generations. The purpose of Halleux's film was to present the problem to international viewers to encourage financial support from the worldwide community.

However, while the Belgian director restrains himself to the presentation of interviews with victims that were mostly recorded two years after the incident, it is

³⁹ Sadowska Malgorzata, "Fukushima, moja miłość" [Fukushima, My Love], *Kino* 2:2017, p. 79.

⁴⁰ InteriaFilm, <http://film.interia.pl/wywiady/news-doris-dorrie-hold-dla-kobiet-fukushimy,nId,2347171>, date accessed 5 June 2017. The interview with Doris Dörrie was conducted by Piotr Czerkawski during the 68th Berlin International Film Festival in 2017.

⁴¹ To read more about Halleux's film, see: Cinergie.be, http://www.cinergie.be/webzine/welcome_to_fukushima_d_alain_de_halleux, date accessed 4.06.2017.

Gagliardi who demonstrates a greater diversity of cinematic techniques. In his film, this Italian filmmaker combines footage recorded when the events started with animated sequences, fragments of TV programs, and experts' commentaries. Gagliardi balances the need to remain objective against the personal emotions and assessment of the journalist Pio d'Emilia, who experienced the fear of being in Japan during the catastrophe. The Italian Sky TV reporter decided to leave Tokyo the day the earthquake struck and move to the areas affected by the tsunami with the intention of being the first foreign observer to document the tragedy⁴². Except for an unreleased interview with the former Japanese prime minister, Naoto Kan, which casts new light on the government's actions⁴³, Gagliardi's film also offers a unique approach to the understanding of the viewer's perception. The animated manga-style sequences are used to make the material more comprehensible and visually attractive.

Taking into consideration the examples presented above, it can be observed that a post-Fukushima current also appeared in the West and these foreign filmmakers have added new insights into the discourse about nuclear power. The narrations provided by Western filmmakers could also be starting points for further academic research, such as comparisons of films by authors from distinct cultural backgrounds, analysis of the approach to nuclear energy, as well as the techniques and genres chosen to cover the issue.

Conclusion

The nuclear power debate that returned after the Fukushima catastrophe has not faded in film-making. Even though the Japanese films concerning the issue seem to be more appreciated abroad, filmmakers such as Takashi Murakami and Hiroyuki Kawai consider deliberating on the problem to be part of their artistic missions. Possible answers to the questions of whether the Japanese nation should rely on nuclear energy in the future are presented by the directors in documentary or family cinema form, thus aiming to give the viewer a way to understand the complex causes, results, and political issues related to the tragedy. Others, such as Sion Sono and Nao Kubota, try to show the problems of particular members of the traumatized society to a wider audience and, as Doris Dörrie has done in the West, focus on the emotions accompanying the loss of the homeland. What is more, monster films such as the aforementioned *Shin Gojira*, also play a key role in presenting the problem on the screen, albeit in symbolic form.

⁴² See: Fukushima A Nuclear Story [official website], <http://www.nuclearstory.com/>, date accessed 4.06.2017.

⁴³ Fukushima A Nuclear Story. In the interview Naoto Kan admits that Japan avoided a bigger catastrophe not because of the planned government actions but thanks to sheer luck.

Therefore, no matter the motivation of the individual artists, it should be emphasised that there are many voices and sides in the discussion about nuclear energy. In this case, films help to express the points of view of the directors and communicate their findings to a wider audience.

As Malgorzata Sadowska observes, Fukushima deprived the Japanese people of the illusion they could use to think about atomic energy. Since 2011, it has no longer been possible to recognize atomic energy as simply bad (the bomb) or good (the power plant), as it was the latter that brought about annihilation⁴⁴. For the people who survived the catastrophe, as well as those who observed it on TV screens abroad, cinema can become not only a source of information (in the case of the documentary productions), but also a medium that helps in understanding the influence of the catastrophe on the inhabitants of Japan.

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