

# Miscellanea



# Kamishibai: “touching” narrative and expressive art

Rita Casadei\*

*Abstract:* Originally, Kamishibai (紙芝居 from the Japanese translated as theatre of paper) was born as an agile and immediate form of entertainment; for its narrative and expressive artistic energy, it is nowadays appreciated as a significant resource, also from the perspective of inclusive education. This contribution is intended as an introduction to Kamishibai, opening the doors of this small theatre, making room for new forms of imaginative and creative storytelling, relational and emotional experiences, valuing tactile and sensory experience, as well. Touch and contact can be realised by sharing co-constructed readings about the world and by emotional participation in a new proximity, made up of glances that touch, sounds and voices that recall, gestures and rhythms that attract, images that host. Kamishibai is a simple object, even light to transport; it easily finds its place in indoor as well as outdoor environments, creating frames and places of enchantment; it works thanks to human energy (bodily-emotional-imaginative) that Kamishibai does not consume, but rather regenerates.

*Keywords:* education, corporeality, art, expressiveness, creativity.

*Riassunto:* In origine, il Kamishibai (紙芝居 dal giapponese tradotto come teatro di carta) nasce come forma di intrattenimento agile e immediata. Per la sua energia artistica – immaginativa, narrativa ed espressiva – è oggi apprezzato come risorsa significativa ed efficace anche dal punto di vista di una didattica inclusiva. Questo contributo intende fornire un'introduzione al Kamishibai, nell'idea di aprire le porte di questo piccolo teatro per suggerire spazi e forme di narrazione immaginativa e creativa. In particolare, si vuole leggerne il potenziale rispetto all'alfabetizzazione emotiva, in un contesto favorevole alla relazione e alla valorizzazione dell'esperienza tattile e sensoriale. Il tatto e il contatto possono realizzarsi attraverso la condivisione di letture co-costruite del mondo e la partecipazione emotiva, promossa da una prossimità fatta di sguardi che toccano, suoni e voci che richiamano, gesti e ritmi che attraggono, immagini che ospitano. Il Kamishibai è un oggetto semplice, non ingombrante, facile da trasportare; trova posto sia in ambienti interni sia esterni, trasformando gli spazi in angoli di incanto. Un fattore determinante per il suo funzionamento è l'energia umana (corporea-emotiva-immaginativa) che il Kamishibai contribuisce a rinnovare e rigenerare.

*Parole chiave:* educazione, corporeità, arte, linguaggi espressivi, creatività.

\* Università degli Studi di Bologna, rita.casadei@unibo.it

## 1 Introduction

*Kamishibai* – 紙芝居 – is how these ideograms sound in Japanese. Internationally translated as paper play, paper drama, paper theatre, where 紙 *kami* stands for paper and 芝居 *shibai* stands for play, opera, story, scene, theatre. *Kamishibai* can be inscribed in an artistic-expressive form in which the narrative and the sound are united with the visual. Before going into a presentation of this specific form of narration-communication-expression, few notes will be given helping those who are not at all familiar with this reality figure out what we are physically referring to: a wooden theatre (*butai* 舞台) that serves as frame, space, time and place of the narration, two wooden clappers (*hyoushigi* 拍子木) that resonate and announce the beginning of the event, tables depicting the story, the storyteller, the audience, a welcoming space. Traditionally, as this was an itinerant form of entertainment, the small *butai* was set up on a bicycle, thus enabling the storyteller to reach different areas of the city. To begin with, it is necessary to point out the socio-historical reality in which *Kamishibai* takes origin. It was born in Japan, at the end of the 1920s where its great popularity in the streets lasted until the 1970s; from that time on, the presence and gradual spread of television and other communication media determined its necessary adaptation to more circumscribed contexts, but continuing to gain interest even on an international scale. First of all, *Kamishibai* is the fantasy space on the street corners of cities, where at the call of the two clappers, children flock to meet the storyteller ready to entertain, amuse and enthuse them. This is the image that has most penetrated the memory and heart of those who experienced childhood in that period. It may be useful to start from the concreteness of its being a sensory and aesthetic experience in which imaginative thinking, gesture, sounds, and voice mutually solicit each other to promote a narrative filled with imaginative and creative possibilities, both on the level of thinking, language, relational and emotional expressive skills. It all begins with an attention-grabbing sound, announcing the start of the performance, and attracting a large audience, not only the youngest. It all begins with an invitation to participate, and this is already a statement of its intent to include, welcome and integrate. The sound is an important element in the ceremonial of other ritualised forms, where religious, artistic and folkloric elements are often intertwined. The sound produced by the wooden clappers is a call to be a part, not just passive, but active within an event experienced chorally. In this case, one becomes part of a narrative intertwined with the image, its movement and the context – cultural, social and natural – within which it all takes place. The popularity of *Kamishibai*, and the interest that still seems to be renewed in it, may be said to derive from its being a dynamic, bodily, tactile experience where the physical, sensorial and emotional touch and contact is a continuum marked by different aspects.

## ② Historical background

A glance at history reveals a number of possible predecessors of Kamishibai, which may date back to very distant times. A few guidelines will be traced in order to reconstruct a brief review, bearing in mind the custom of the integrated use of the sound medium – music, voice, storytelling – and the visual medium – image, representation and word – to narrate, represent and transmit contents. It is possible to trace Kamishibai back to the traditional *e-toki* 絵解き (literally: explanation through images) genre already present since the 12th century. This genre includes the artistic form of the *e-makimono* 絵巻物 – depictions on sheets of paper or cloth to be rolled up and unrolled – used to narrate through images stories of illustrious and representative figures from history and literature. In this case, the structure of the *e-makimono* can also be seen as a stylistic artifice that dynamically suggests the unfolding of actions, the passage of time, through the very flow of the images as they unroll. The characters are visually narrated in the succession of their events, often inserted in a further temporal flow evoked by the changing of seasons, a theme and image very dear to the Japanese aesthetic sensibility. *E-makimono* is connected to the practice of *e-toki* with which buddhist monks instructed the population – not always literate – using depiction of certain episodes from the Buddha's life. This served to communicate precepts and conduct useful for community life, weaving threads of sharing a common feeling, of social and religious cohesion, also through aesthetic experience. Within this tradition we can also mention a different form of narration, in which there is no illustration, but visual evocation of images through the formula of the narrating chant and accompanying music. Singing and music are carried by a storytelling monk: *biwa houshi*. This term denoted the blind wandering monk who told stories while accompanying himself with a traditional stringed instrument, called *biwa*. The voice modulated into chanting and the sound of the stringed instrument created imaginative dynamism, almost a form of visual and emotional animation together. The coexistence of a multiplicity of expressive languages makes these artistic-communicative genres a formula for conveying taste, sensitivity, entertainment, information, education. The effectiveness and communicative penetration are entrusted not only to the medium but also to the atmosphere that the medium itself can create. Knowledge is not entrusted only to verbal listening and the mere exercise of memory, but transmitted through an integrated repertoire of evocative and emotionally rich languages. Referring to a slightly more recent era, the 18th century, a further connection of Kamishibai with theatre can be identified, with a specific reference to one of its forms: *utsushi-e* (写し絵). These are magic lanterns, inspired by Dutch lanterns but then readapted and transformed. Some historical studies identify this art form as the closest precursor to Kamishibai, also considering its technical structure and format. We find, in fact, a wooden box in which an oil lantern was placed, a glass screen and illustrations were scrolled. All

of this was accompanied by the expressive power of the narrator's voice and the voice of musical instruments. The insulating power of wood made possible for the artist to hold the box-theatre in his hand and for its modest size to carry it with him. From this new method of animation, attributed to Hagiwara Shinzaburo, in the early 1900s, we owe the origin of the Tachi-e (standing illustrations) Kamishibai (McGowan, 2015), which brings a form of entertainment to the streets by drawing inspiration from the classical stories of *Kabuki* and *Bunraku* theatre. The reinterpretation in such a different and simplified format and the street as theatre led this genre to be initially perceived as a crude and popular reproduction of theatre; simply saying: "paper theatre" – Kamishibai. The popularity of this renewed genre was immediate and considerable to the point of generating a kind of entrepreneurial system of agent-hirers – *kashimoto* – who produced and distributed *Gaito Kamishibai*: the street Kamishibai. This system employed artists able to depict and write the most evocative contents of the story and storytellers. Acquiring and renting the necessary tools was affordable; all that was needed was a bicycle, a wooden theatre, instruments for sound and illustrations, then communicative talent. It is the *Gaito Kamishibai* that makes its first appearance; its explosion and popularity is based on the sole purpose, unusual for that era, of entertaining children. Kamishibai was not only born as a communicative-expressive medium, it is not only visual storytelling: it is also a phenomenon that crosses cultural, social, economic, political and architectural needs. Along with to the informal style, "educational kamishibai" also came into being: *Kyouiku 教育 Kamishibai*. This distinction can be explained from the rising interest in Japan for reconsidering the concept of childhood with its specific evolutionary stages and its needs concerned to instruction and learning. Contents and ludic-didactic programmes were designed by adults and always oriented towards an eminently educational purpose.

### ③ The storyteller: *Kamishibai no ojisan*

The storyteller (traditionally a male role) is not only associated with the physical voice of the narrative. He plays an important role as a communicator: that is, as a promoter and facilitator of a community attentive to and attracted not only by content, but joined by a sharing of meaning and emotion. Being thus the promoter of imaginatively, emotionally and relationally rich experiences, he is the receiver of affection: *Kamishibai no Ojisan*. In Japanese language, 叔父さん *Ojisan* is the term used to refer both to the parental figure of the uncle, and to the figure of a middle age man who commands (and to whom one wishes to express) respect and affection. From a socio-historical perspective who is the *Kamishibai Ojisan*? The economic depression following the great Tokyo earthquake in 1923, the world economic depression of the late 1920s, and the concomitant massive process of urbanisation resulted in a large number of unemployed men. At the

same time, however, these were also the years that saw the appearance and distribution through the emerging media – newspapers, magazines, radio and cinema – of new forms and dynamics of information and entertainment and, therefore, of new professions. It was customary to accompany the silent film with a third-person narration (already a ritual and aesthetic custom in other traditional theatrical forms) and this was the task of a professional: *katsudo benshi*. The first films distributed in Japan were never completely silent; the sound commentary professionals entertained the audience with an oral narrative, a kind of “illustration” in the background of the film. This professional inspired the animator-artists of the Kamishibai, in their narrative style, in the dramatisation of the story and also in the way they handled the illustrations on the small wooden stage-theatre. Kamishibai was influenced by visual techniques from the world of silent cinema that was emerging and spreading on a global scale. With the gradual introduction of the spoken film these professionals had to go elsewhere, many of them turned to Kamishibai and became talented storytellers. At that time, big cities were reorganised under the influence of Japan’s modernisation process. The redefinition of places, their physical characterisation as a function of use, and thus of control, was the product of the hegemonic culture of the time in relation to which Gaito Kamishibai consisted, on the other hand, in valorisation of “space” as neutral, free dimension that became an atmosphere characterised by density and sensorial-emotional concreteness. While not intentionally being against the hegemonic culture, Kamishibai took it far and beyond it. The magic, perhaps, lies in its double visible-invisible nature, in being small itinerant theatres of alchemy, capable of freeing and inhabiting spaces to create events filled with meanings and senses. Material and immaterial density of this space creates its own magnetism in the physical contact, in the smells of the street, in the taste and flavour of the candies, in the interaction between storyteller and the little spectators. So much so that one can speak of Kamishibai in terms of a tactile-sensory experience. The small size of wooden frame-theatre makes it possible for it to move for the storyteller and for the audience to create animated realities that then vanish. That frame-theatre recalls, shakes and revitalises a plurality of human, cultural, emotional, artistic factors capable of giving effect to a reality that lives not only for the duration of its representation, but also in the time of the wait, until once again that magic reality returns to recreate itself. These street corners were experienced physically and emotionally as the spaces of fantasy, generated a social imaginary of sharing, cohesion, empathy. They were transformed by the coming together of people, children *in primis*, by stories, narratives, by the representation and enactment not only of a form of entertainment, but above all by a human, social, cultural experience chorally shared: what in Japanese resonates as *kyoukan* 共感 – a very important aspect of sensitivity. The human dimension – present in the symbolically rich figure of the storyteller and his interaction with the audience, in the emotional explosion and corporeity as a prevailing factor – marks the density of meaning of this phenomenon. Crowds of enthusiastic, unsupervised children

gathered on street corners around the storyteller, so that in some the fear arose that their over-stimulation through stories and the street context might constitute a social danger. Hence the urge to regulate this phenomenon by introducing the rule of writing the text on the back of the illustrations, so that it would be possible to control the content transmitted. Starting with this restriction, the back of each illustration no longer only contained generic stylistic indications but also the plot and the actual story. Before this rule, most was left to the improvisation of the street storyteller.

#### ④ Kamishibai today: spaces, places, uses

Kamishibai is still alive today. One rarely encounters it on street corners, even though some young artists are voluntarily coming together to bring it back to life, according to the custom of yesteryear. These voluntarily joined theatre groups aim to bring children back to the reality of the park, of outdoor aggregation, participation and live interaction, reviving the taste for traditional forms of entertainment with their technical simplicity but rich in communicative power and intensity. Bringing Kamishibai back to the streets is for these radiant groups of artists a project to relaunch a new trend in entertainment, one that can meet the desire for a simpler, less frenetic and more gentle lifestyle. Currently, Kamishibai is used in pre-school services and kindergartens, but above all it lives in cultural centres and local libraries that seem to replace what used to be the street. The adult, formal world is present in school in its dynamics of learning formal knowledge, in family the presence of parents is connoted by their overseeing aspects of discipline and behaviour, while community places such as cultural centres and libraries are experienced by children as free, open spaces in which the presence of parents and teachers does not prevail. This factor seems to somehow reawaken a spirit of openness and freedom (Bingushi, 2005). These are precisely places where Kamishibai is preserved and developed in today's Japan. The aims are playful, but include the transmission of content and knowledge useful for a spirit of active citizenship.

#### ⑤ Use of Kamishibai in the present day

The following are a few examples of uses in Japan in the present day. At present, the International Manga Museum in Kyoto, in view of its strong influence on the world of Animé and Manga, has systematically initiated a project not only for the recovery and preservation of the Kamishibai as a cultural expression, but as a communicative resource for cross-cultural entertainment, appreciation and learning. Multimodality (Hiroaki, 2017), sensoriality and humanity as prevailing characteristics make Kamishibai an enjoyable experience for an international



audience. The multiplicity of languages and devices, the richness and plurality of content of the stories are intended to communicate plurality as an attitude, as a welcoming gaze, as education in a spirit of encounter, respect, sharing and peace. The artist Yuushi Yasuno, active as a street storyteller in the 1970s, contributed considerably to this project. The idea that motivates and moves him is not a nostalgic feeling of recovering tradition, but the conviction that the versatility of the languages employed in this communicative medium, enriched by the human relational component, can be a significant stimulus to a renewed culture with a profound and wide-ranging outlook. Valuing richness, diversity, creativity, intercultural encounter: to this end, Kamishibai can express and make available a potential for innovation, according to which each culture can express itself and make itself accessible to others. The Yokohama Museum of History promotes a Kamishibai Festival, with the intention of keeping its memory alive as a visible and tangible heritage of street culture. Everything is reproduced in the traditional style: bicycle, candy, tools, *butai*, storyteller. The aim is to communicate content that teaches people to appreciate and share their social and cultural environment, through the languages of creativity, sensoriality and cognitive, emotional expressiveness together. The Museum of History itself, as well as other museums, collaborates with some primary schools in the area, with extra-curricular proposals. Activities related to the practice of Kamishibai fall within the educational area called *Zukou* 図工 – art and craft. The construction of the Kamishibai is recognised as an activity involving art and craft, but also animation and representation, in the involvement of sensory expressivity. In schools, another area involved is *Kokugo* 国語 (language and literature) for training in linguistic-expressive skills and stylistic sensitivity. Kamishibai is also included as a project within library micro-circuits, including the library of the Yokohama History Museum, mentioned above. Some of these achieve special mention and formal recognition for the quality of their activities in the following areas:

1. promoting a genuine sense of belonging by fostering love for the place of one's birth;
2. promoting intergenerational relations;
3. promoting expressive-communicative skills and inclusion;
4. promoting young people's participation in cultural continuity, care of the environment, intervention in emergencies (fires, earthquakes, accidents).

Some specialised libraries offer *butai* on loan, set up courses for parents and children who wish to learn how to build, perform and animate Kamishibai. Some community services employ Kamishibai because of its effectiveness in focusing attention and group involvement: not only as a device for communicating, conveying and educating on issues considered socially relevant, but also as a pathway for education in communication, socialisation and expression where these faculties are impaired. The plot of the stories is taken from popular and folkloristic culture – *mukashibanashi* (tales of yesteryear), but there are readaptations linked

to socially relevant contemporary content. In particular, themes of certain issues concerning fragility and marginality are dealt with, in order to arouse feelings of sharing, helpfulness and solidarity. From this quick review, an important factor emerges: the human dimension in its being corporeity-expressiveness-sociality, creativity in the readaptation to content, the dynamism of the instrument, the chorality in fruition. These aspects are precisely the same as those that characterise the traditional Kamishibai.

## 6 Kamishibai and education

According to Kamishibai scholar Tsunekatsu Suzuki (2005), prevailing characteristics that have decreed the appeal and popularity of this medium are as follows: a) atmosphere of street corners generated by the taste of candy and the power of imagination; b) attractiveness determined by the content of the stories particularly indulgent towards children's taste; c) storyteller's communicative ability; d) special bond formed between the children and the storyteller; e) simultaneous involvement of a plurality of stimuli and sensory faculties: taste, smell, hearing, sight, imagination, touch-contact (children crowded close to each other, often on their way to the performance they held hands or led younger siblings by the hand); f) live participation in the event, as a group experience shared chorally with friends and acquaintances in the neighbourhood. Some of these characteristics persist, of others perhaps a little nostalgia remains. What is striking is that at the mention of Kamishibai, at the sight of the illustrated cards, the most popular narrative series and the bicycle with the little theatre, a feeling of nostalgia mixed with enthusiasm is created in Japanese adults – children then – that has never been extinguished, for the simplicity, warmth and emotional richness of that experience. To enrich this article, is offered below an interview<sup>1</sup> with Naoki Mizushima (professor at the University of The Sacred Heart in Tokyo) who as an expert on education through art helps focus attention on some key traits.

- 1 Consider the uniqueness of the Kamishibai phenomenon. When you hear people say Kamishibai, what is the first image that comes to mind?

I go back in my memory to the time of my childhood, to the time of stories told in the form of an illustrated performance. I am 60 years old, people my age and older remember those experiences well. Until the late 1960s, it was a custom for children to wait for the storyteller to arrive and in masses flock around his bicycle, enjoy the show while enjoying the candy. For us children it was an experience that made us excited and happy, the storyteller was a special figure. The eye contact, the looking directly into each other's eyes, favoured communication through facial expressiveness, tone of voice and gestures. I felt attracted and stimulated by

<sup>1</sup> The interview is taken from Casadei (2019), pp. 33-35.

that figure who brought fantasy into our world. When questioned by children, he always knew how to give an answer with spontaneity and humour, his 'knowledge and wisdom derived from his own life experience. I can say that for me he was like the character of Alfredo in the Italian film *Nuovo cinema paradiso*. I would have liked to have approached him and befriended him, but at the time I was too shy a child to get close to him.

What aspects are most characteristic of the Japanese sensibility?

There is a long tradition of visual storytelling in Japan that falls under the genre called e-toki. Every culture in the world has been able to express itself not only through oral and verbal language, but by employing other artistic and expressive languages such as music and painting, for example. What is significant is the presence of these languages in everyday life, as an everyday experience. In the past, in the Edo and Meiji periods, Japan appreciated the *Ukiyo-e* genre, prints that "told" of life, in its everyday aspects; people were attracted to this culture. Now, in contemporary times, we Japanese appreciate 'Manga'. Both of these genres represent a custom in everyday life, both of these genres contain a sensitivity for the image, with its potential for evocation. I believe that the language of the image reveals very important elements in Japanese aesthetics such as *iki* – 粋 (elegance-refinement) and *mitate* – 見立て (metaphorical language). They testify to a taste for artistic experience understood as everyday experience. It is about inhabiting the world of the image; reading images allows one to develop ways of thinking through images. Its metaphorical potential is to be understood in a multi-modal and multi-functional sense. In the Kamishibai, as in other art forms, sound is present to accompany the image and visual representation. Sound also lends itself to being used in a metaphorical sense, suggesting different readings of images and providing different rules in the interpretation of imagery. These aspects are very important in Japanese culture and sensibility, and are certainly present in the Kamishibai.

2 There are many contents and ways of using the Kamishibai.

There seems to be something typically magical about the atmosphere generated through the Kamishibai experience, which made it popular in the past and still contributes to making it a very attractive and interesting resource. From your point of view, what is it?

The immediacy with which one can create a small community of people intent on sharing the performance. As in classical theatrical genres, such as *Kabuki* for example, the third-person narrative voice was a constant element. This single voice can be seen from the perspective of an atmosphere of unity to which it is addressed. It is a voice that accompanies the development of the dramatisation. The audience listens, observes and chorally participates in a progressive emotional and aesthetic tension. The participants are not passive, they are eager to be involved,

their concentration is drawn by a plurality of sound, visual, bodily, expressive languages. Voice modulation, gestures suggest the emotional reading of images. Representation consists of the verbal and non-verbal message. The verbal and oral message is conveyed through two codes: the linguistic and the acoustic (voice, expressiveness, tone, timbre, rhythm). In theatrical forms these are accompanied by other codes - visual, musical, bodily, proxemic - through which the non-verbal message can be deciphered. Emotional waves and tension in concentration are present in small theatre, as in the case of Kamishibai, as well as in large theatre, as in the case of *Kabuki*. It is an emotionally intense "reading" that the individual enacts, in choral sharing.

- 3 From a pedagogical perspective, the Kamishibai is today considered a rich educational experience.

From your point of view, what is the innovative aspect of this analogue tool?

First of all, its handiness has contributed to its popularity. This aspect invites operativity, action, production. Its simple accessibility is a stimulus to the use of fantasy and imagination for teachers in their teaching activities, as well as a tool to stimulate creativity in children. Certainly, the quality of representation is determined by the nature of the story, its organisation, and thus its content and rhythm. But above all it is the communicative ability of the animator that makes the difference. Today, this role can be interpreted by teachers who can use this tool to construct their own paths, their own stories to communicate to children not only the contents of formal knowledge, but also messages with an ethical value. The Kamishibai as a resource reminds us that it is important for the purposes of communication to create a humanly welcoming, friendly and warm context. The warmth and communicative liveliness that is created is an indispensable value, which can and perhaps must also find a place in schools, in classrooms. The simplicity of its use is an invitation to educational innovation!

Considering teacher training and educational offerings for children, what is its potential?

Even after gaining proficiency in the language, children continue to expand their world through a variety of experiences that go beyond strict language competence. Through visual storytelling, words and images come together and in turn generate an even richer imaginative world. Teachers are helped to rethink their approach to children in terms of immediacy and communicative incisiveness. Thinking about how to structure the narrative, in terms of depiction, dramatisation is very important to ensure that children can be attentive, motivated, involved, attracted and not distracted. Moreover, in this mutual involvement not only does the relationship become less distant but the content itself becomes less distant.

4 The Kamishibai is also gaining interest outside Japan.

What is your wish in this regard?

Each country has developed its own, original cultural forms. Rather than emphasising the typical traits of Japanese culture, I would hope that each culture could penetrate more deeply into its own heart through the rediscovery of expressive ideas and languages, of the culture of gesture in favour of an integral and rich education, sensitive to children's needs for expression. This could be the contribution of the Kamishibai, rather than emphasising what is typically Japanese.

What should not be misunderstood?

All over the world, education is permeated by the use of technological languages; learning language to use computers and other algorithms derived from artificial intelligence is important in today's society. But I also believe that visual storytelling still has great potential to refine those basic human requirements, through education in communication and emotions. Certainly, with the support of a tablet we can scroll through images as a simulation, but live reality allows for a richer emotional experience. The Kamishibai is a live theatre form, the relational and emotional dynamic has the flavour of concreteness. For parents and teachers involved in the education of children, concreteness has great significance.

## 7 Concluding remarks

As a crucial feature can be emphasized the co-presence of a plurality of languages: music, dance, song, speech, illustrations. The text is a narrative mostly in the third person, characterising the actor as an intermediary between meaning and sense, word and voice, image and sound, content and gesture, evocative rather than descriptive. In the illustrated book or picture books, the images are more detailed, adapting to a non-collective use, moreover it is meant to be read directly or listened to by someone else reading. It is not meant for immediate and collective enjoyment of listening and visual observation as simultaneous. The images of the Kamishibai are large enough to be grasped simultaneously by a large group of children: it is conceived as a group activity that generates shared cognitive-emotional-affective relational experiences by activating imagination, confrontation, experimentation and expression. From a pedagogical perspective, Kamishibai can be understood as an educational device with great potential: not only doing lessons with Kamishibai, but also knowing how to build a Kamishibai experience allows important faculties to be developed: cognitive, imaginative, inventive, creative, bodily, linguistic, emotional and expressive. Like any art form, there are rules, but these rules can be broken. *Butai*, the frame-theatre is recommended because it orients and focuses the audience's attention as well as formalising a spatio-temporal reality that is defined but not separated from that of the audience

and giving the performance greater intensity. The rhythm is such that attention can linger on the image, creating a suspended time in which listening and observing the performance activates an imagination that is participatory and emotional. It is important to increase communication skills and abilities. Kamishibai can regenerate itself as an educational medium. Many children lack communication skills, they are inhibited in this. Current media are fast, convenient, multi-functional, but they do not present or stimulate the most important aspect in human beings: the ability to communicate, directly. Today's media support fast but mediated communication; in a sense, the human input is deferred, with its colour, warmth and emotional tone. On the contrary, Kamishibai allows communicative immediacy: it is not a medium based on speed, but on immediacy. More than half of all adults who have problems at work display fragility, poverty and communication difficulties. One is not able to express oneself directly, in person, nor does one know how to interpret the communicative message of other people, suffering misunderstanding and communication difficulties and relational friction. That is why it is important from an early age to have to care for and nurture these abilities, through the possibility of learning the languages of expressivity, to know one's own needs and desires for expression. Kamishibai is an analogue medium: in addition to content, it transmits humanity, renews and supports communication in the most natural way: from person to person without an interface device in the way.

## References

- Bingushi K. (2005). *Kamishibai as media in early childhood care and education*. Nagoya Ryujo College, Annual Report of Studies, vol. 27, 53-67.
- Casadei R. (2019). *Una storia che viene da lontano* in P. Ciarcià, M. Speraggi (eds.). *Kamishibai. Istruzioni per l'uso*. Bologna: Artebambini.
- Freedman A., Slade T. (2018). *Introducing Japanese Popular Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Hiroaki I. (2017). *Revisiting Japanese Multimodal Drama Performance as Child-Centred Performance Ethnography: Picture-Mediated Reflection on 'Kamishibai'*. In T. Chemi, D. Xiangyun (eds). *Arts-Based Methods in Education Around the World*. Gistrup-Delft: River Publishers.
- McGowan T. (2015). *Performing Kamishibai: an emerging new literacy for a global audience*. London: Routledge Education.
- Suzuki T. (2005). *Media toshite no Kamishibai* (Kamishibai as a medium).
- Tamaki D. (2006) *Kamishibai for everyone*. <http://www.kamishibai.com/PDF/kamishibaieveryone.pdf>

## **Sitography**

Language Arts Lesson Plans: Kamishibai <https://easc.osu.edu/>

Kyoto International Museum of Manga <https://www.kyotomm.jp/en/>

The International Association of Kamishibai of Japan <http://www.geocities.jp/kamishibai/index-eng.html>

MU:ART - <http://muarts.org.uk/artist/kamishibai/>

