Editorial

Continuing research in a time full of sound and fury

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Dear readers, students, fellow scholars,

welcome to this eleventh instalment of *Mutual Images* Journal, titled "On politics of visual media" after the main section of this present piece.

If only we had known...

We left our previous instalment, in December 2021, with hope, a renewed energy, and a pinch of naivety toward preparing the return to the "true normal";[1] that is, doing our best to come back to a more direct, human-way of connecting with each other, and not let grow further the insidious notion that online research – and teaching – activities were to become the "new normal." As exemplified by our workshops over the years, we had, and still believe that the human component is, above all, primordial in what we do.

However, after the *annus horribilis* of 2020, and the confusion and uncertainty of 2021, 2022 seems to have been determined to prove the old French proverb "Jamais deux sans trois" (lit. "never two without three", meaning that things always come in threes). Two months after our publication, on the 20th of February, Russia started its illegal invasion of Ukraine, and war and fear erupted in Europe in a way not seen since World War II. Witnessing the harrowing weeks, soon turned into months and now years of destruction, mayhem, and human rights violations, pushed by a fascist rewriting of History, has left a sickening taste of ash in our mouths, as both individuals and researchers in *Humanities*. And as often, students and professors have been paying a heavy price: for resisting, in Ukraine, for protesting, in Russia.

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[1] See our Editorial in *Mutual Images*, Issue 10, December 2021.

It could have been you; it could have been us.

It can still be you; it can still be us. Almost two years later, the extreme isolationist and nationalist spin keeps going, from Hungary and Slovakia to the USA, where the banning of books and manuals in schools is ramping up to such a point that it feels that, even in our democracies, we are not that far away from hearing a match being struck – Ray Bradbury must be turning over in his grave.

There is something Macbethian in watching unfold such a violent and absurd echoing of the worst hours of our civilisation, like a whisper in those winds of change: "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing". And yet. And yet, what is happening must be a reminder of the importance of what we, as readers, students, scholars in the Humanities, are doing. Of the importance of dedicating our time, our energy, our lives to decrypt societies and cultures, in order to record, to learn, to understand, and when the needs arise, to do better, to be better. It serves as a reminder of why we, at *Mutual Images*, even started our adventure to explore mutual representations. This is why we must not succumb to despair, nor fall prey to the voices of those who consider useless, unwelcomed, or even dangerous in some specific cases, such research.

2022, a partial yet necessary gap year

In parallel, the 2022-2023 period has been an odd one for MIRA as a group. On the one hand, we moved from our 9th International Workshop which took place in Salford, Manchester (UK), in December 2021, to our 10th, in Cluj-Napoca (Romania).

The first, titled "Medievalism in East Asia – I: From Printed Story-Worlds to Digital Role-Playing Games", gathered international researchers with interest in representations of Medievalism in Popular Culture from a cross-cultural perspective. Due to the existing restrictions, this workshop was organised as an online event by Manuel Hernández-Pérez (University of Salford, UK), Maxime Danesin (Lorraine University, France) and the support of the Digital Curation Lab at the University of Salford (UK).

Unfortunately online as well, the event in Cluj-Napoca was organised on the 5th of November 2022 in collaboration with the Sembazuru Japanese Centre for Japanese Studies (Faculty of Letters, Babeș-Bolyai University, Romania), and dedicated to the omnipresent seasonal imagery in Japanese Language, Culture and Literature.

While the proceedings of the latter are expected to be published for our twelfth issue, the present instalment presents two of the most interesting materials collected from our 9th workshop: an article by Stacey Jocoy (Texas Tech University, USA) and Heike Hoffer (the Ohio State University, USA) on the neo-medieval sounds of the *en vogue* composer Kajiura Yuki – an indirect link of the upcoming *The Palgrave Handbook of Music and Sound in Japanese Animation* (in production, to be released in May 2024) edited by Marco Pellitteri, and in which both Jocoy and Hoffer themselves contribute a chapter each –; and a welcomed contribution by the early-career scholar Andrea Mariucci on the cultural transition from *Dungeons & Dragons* to *Dragon Quest*. Those are followed by the main section of this issue on politics of visual media, curated by Marco Pellitteri (Xi'ian Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China) and, as our guest editor, David Christopher (University of Leicester, UK) – presented in the section's editorial.

If we have been pleased with our online collaborations, meeting wonderful new colleagues each time, a certain tiredness toward that system and the lack of direct, human contact, has made us consider taking one year-gap for our workshop activities – which we will be resuming, thus, in 2024.

On the other hand, after moving from a semi-annual to an annual publication, our Journal keeps evolving, this time with the appointment of Manuel Hernández-Pérez (University of Salford, UK) as Vice-Editor and Strategic Supervisor. As a scholar, he has been involved in the activity of this journal and this association since June 2015, when he participated in our second Mutual Images Workshop, held in Kobe, Japan. Since then, Manuel has become a close friend and collaborator of this community, being involved in many other activities organised by MIRA. He has contributed with original research to the journal and the workshops, has been serving as a member of the Editorial Board (2017-2023), and has helped in the organization of our Summer Schools. He has also contributed as co-organiser of the editions VIII (Kyoto, 2020) and IX (Salford, 2021) of the Mutual Images International Research Workshop.

Together with this incorporation, we are also presenting some structural changes: while Marco Pellitteri (Xi'ian Jiaotong-Liverpool University) will carry on with his functions of Main Editor and Scientific Supervisor, Maxime Danesin (Lorraine University, France) is now Vice-Editor and Editorial Supervisor, and Aurore Yamagata-Montoya (MIRA) has stepped down from Editorial Manager. As friends and colleagues,

the editorial team wishes to express their warmest thoughts for Aurore's dedication all these years. Dr Yamagata-Montoya has contributed to the development of this project since its inception and has been adopting different roles in the association but most significantly, the Presidency (2015-2023). Aurore is leaving the journal's management having in front of her new professional endeavours, but will still be part of this project in one way or another by staying at the head of MIRA.

These changes are our way to adapt to the new challenges we face, and to support them, we had decided to take a necessary gap-year, thus publishing this issue now. Since 2016, *Mutual Images* Journal has been pioneering research on East Asia and the transnational consumption of popular culture; under the new editorial team, the Journal will carry on with its mission by providing high-quality, peer-reviewed articles and disseminating information about the activities of MIRA. And in order to do so, a few more changes are predicated to be done next year; we certainly hope that you will find them satisfactory. Stay tuned.