

Mutual
Images

ISSUE 8

SPRING 2020

ARTISTS, AESTHETICS, AND ARTWORKS
FROM, AND IN CONVERSATION WITH, JAPAN
PART 1 (OF 2)

MUTUAL IMAGES
ISSUE 8 – SPRING 2020

MUTUAL IMAGES

A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

FOUNDED BY

AURORE YAMAGATA-MONTOYA, MAXIME DANESIN & MARCO PELLITTERI

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EDITED BY
MARCO PELLITTERI & JOSÉ ANDRÉS SANTIAGO IGLESIAS

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MUTUAL IMAGES RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

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A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

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Mutual Images' field of interest is the analysis and discussion of the ever-changing, multifaceted relations between Europe and Asia, and between specific European countries or regions and specific Asian countries or regions. A privileged area of investigation concerns the mutual cultural influences between Japan and other national or regional contexts, with a special emphasis on visual domains, media studies, the cultural and creative industries, and popular imagination at large.

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Editorial – Mutually holding on in critical times

Marco PELLITTERI | Shanghai International Studies University, China

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

A friendly greeting to readers and fellow scholars

I have been slowly putting this Editorial together, one small piece at a time, between March and June 2020, while being, like you all, focussed on rather bigger matters. Not only I, as the composer of this Editorial, but all the members of our journal's Boards want to express our sincere appreciation and affectionate friendship to our academic community, regardless of field and discipline. Since January 2020, we have been living in a weird and dramatic moment, and the social sciences and the humanities as a whole, although technically much more fortunate than many other professional categories, are scholarly, collectively, and privately touched by the current pandemic at several levels. We cannot travel to join conferences or workshops as we would like, and in many cases we cannot visit our loved ones if they happen to live in another country; we cannot easily (or we cannot at all) move around if we had planned some fieldwork; we cannot even take a normal walk in our neighbourhood or go to the grocery store without the fear of being infected, or of infecting someone else if we are unaware carriers of this insidious virus—to this end, the use of the sanitary mask is saving millions of lives, even though there are egotistic brain-dead individuals everywhere who challenge this elementary precaution. But as researchers, as academics, our productivity does not necessarily depend on being out there, and in this sense we are hugely privileged. We can still write, investigate, study, read, communicate, teach, help our students to learn and grow, and somehow cheer them up, because they also have been stuck at home at an age in which the physical co-presence of peers is of paramount psychological relevance.

It is therefore with a never before felt spirit that I am writing these lines: to greet *Mutual Images's* readers with a brotherly message. I am stating the obvious here, but let

me say anyway that, even though the misused motto “we are in this all together” may not always be valid because of the privileges many of us enjoy in one way or another, each one of us is at risk and suffers various degrees of discomfort or danger; we are facing a situation which will be studied for years to come, and which is already being studied, as a matter of fact.

I will quickly get back to the latter point in the final segment of this Editorial. First, in the following lines, I would like to briefly introduce the contents of *Mutual Images*, no. 8.

On this issue's contents

The three articles of this issue come from papers presented at Mutual Images Research Association's seventh international workshop, which was held at the University of Vigo, Spain, on 3-4 June 2019 (<https://mutualimages.org/archives/mutual-images-7th-international-workshop>). The workshop was hosted in Vigo thanks to Prof. Ana Soler Baena, Dr José Andrés Santiago Iglesias, and Tatiana Lameiro González, whom we co-organised the event with. This is why José, who is a member of this journal's Scientific Board, co-edits this issue of *Mutual Images* and will co-edit the next as well, where several other articles drawn from that workshop will be published. This eighth issue should have collected the whole set of papers from the Vigo workshop selected for publication, but the Covid-19 impacted our plan, therefore we could publish only three papers here, postponing the publication of the others to the next instalment.

The three articles hosted in this issue are all written by Ph.D. students or candidates: as *Mutual Images's* readers know well, we strongly encourage contributions from young scholars even in the very initial stages of their careers, confident that inclusion and early attempts at academic publishing are among the best ways to help green researchers grow, acquire confidence, and get used to being published; that is, to undergo the several and sometimes energy-demanding steps of the professional process of review, revision, and editing. On the one hand, these three articles share fresh approaches to the problems they discuss, and furthermore we can see an alternance of established topics in the disciplines of literary and media studies (*Japonisme*, *kimono* fabrics, and female fashion trends and techniques in late nineteenth century Europe; photography in Japan, photographic magazines, and the influences of European/American photography over Japanese photographers after WWII) with more recently emerging themes whose very nature appears to be at the thresholds of several disciplines and fields (e.g. the

representations of European-related tropes, locations, and values in old and recent commercial animations for cinema and television made in Japan).

In “The influence of Japanese *kimono* on European bustles and their representation in the paintings of the late nineteenth century”, Iria Ros Piñeiro provides an initial exploration of some connections between Japanese decorated fabrics for dresses and clothings, including *kimono*, and specific segments of that fascination for the “Japonaiseries” that characterised the European scene between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. The segments are, on the one hand, that of European painting: many European exponents of the fine arts, and painters in particular, paid particular attention to decorative motifs, textures, flowers, patterns, and atmospheres in Japanese fine arts and artefacts; on the other hand, the second segment is that of European fashion, which was, up to a point, notoriously influenced by Japanese fashion, visual arts, and arts & crafts. This phenomenon, in a broad sense, falls within the definition of *Japonisme* that we all know, however the article by Pineiro sheds some light on a few technical details that allow us to frame *Japonisme* not only in the perspective of aesthetics and Orientalistic views of Japan so widespread among European observers, artists, and merchants, but also in the perspective of clothing makers and fashion designers of that time.

“Photography magazines and cross-cultural encounters in postwar Japan, 1945-1955”, by Emily Cole, discusses the artistic and thematic dialectic between Japanese and European and US-American photographers in the years 1945-1955, also taking into account what the photographic representations of European/US-American cultures suggested about how Japanese cultural identity was to be rebuilt after the war. Framing photography, as an art and a mass medium, as a place of intercultural encounter, Cole focuses on a specific medial platform, that of photography magazines in that decade, framing these magazines as ideal environments for cultural and aesthetic exchanges between European/US-American and Japanese photographers through various formats of communication: interviews, round table discussions, articles, and, of course, photographs by Japanese, European, and US-American photographers. The author shows how these written and visual conversations, available in the photography magazines circulated in Japan, influenced new photographic trends in the country, including the emerging genre of nude art photography and photographic humanism. Occurring in a crucial decade for the definition of a new collective identity for Japan after

its defeat and during the country's ongoing moral/material reconstruction, this intense photographic and publishing activity and the dialogue with the main masters of European art photography (and the major exponents of US-American photo-reportage) played a relevant role in the negotiation of a composite photographic imagery in/for postwar Japan.

The third article in this issue is authored by Oscar García Aranda and is titled "Representations of Europe in Japanese anime: An overview of study cases and theoretical frameworks". The author proposes in it a broad overview of some of the most renown and relevant cases of Japanese animations set in Europe and/or involving European characters: he traces the overall historical and production-related reasons for a certain recurrence, in commercial anime films and tv series for children and teenagers spanning over many genres, of European or European-like reconstructions, literary novels, cultural tropes, as well as the graphical tactics Japanese animators adopted to ethnically mark European characters within the visual economy of anime, ensuring at the same time distinction and design homogeneity. To recount the theoretical frameworks scholars have put forward in the past and take note of the frequent biases some researchers have shown in their discussions on the creative and cultural strategies of anime-makers, Aranda has conducted a thorough literature review that will be a very useful background reference for future, perhaps case study-based, research.

The last contribution of this issue is the second instalment of the "Research Files" section, which we inaugurated in the previous issue: this time, the materials presented—as, hopefully, interesting sources for future use by other scholars—are interviews with three experts (two Japanese professors and an Italian researcher) focussing on topics similar to those discussed in the "Research Files" of *Mutual Images*, no. 7: the prominent psychologist Yokota Masao, the outstanding manga scholar Natsume Fusanosuke, and a leading scholar of Japanese philosophy of his generation in Italy, Marcello Ghilardi.

Personal thoughts on social research in the time of the Covid-19

I am Italian and I have been living and working in China since late August 2018; therefore, I have been seeing and living the current pandemic from a two-folded and, I daresay, very special perspective, since in different ways China and Italy have been, from January to April, the two initial main epicentres of the viral outbreak. Many researchers around the world, and in China too (my current university included), have already

started cyber-ethnographies and online surveys focussed on the spread of the Covid-19 and the emotional and behavioural reactions, living styles, coping tactics of families, youths, or formal institutions. Whilst as a researcher I perfectly understand the importance of collecting data on the micro- and meso-social dimensions of this global epidemic, I must admit that part of me—the least scholarly, perhaps, but the one informed by a somewhat different perspective on morals and citizenship—feels some unease at the idea that while the outbreak of this virus is ongoing around the world, we are already trying to dig into the lives of people who in many cases may have lost one or more of their loved ones. Nonetheless, I admire those fellow academics who had/have the rationality to pursue this kind of endeavour.

The decision to engage in sociological research, or cultural/artistic activities related to a tragic phenomenon while it is still happening or when its effects are still being felt personally and collectively, pertains to personal choice;¹ although, clearly, some academic convenience and blatant cynicism may also be involved. I cannot deny, in fact, that the immense amount of social and psychological research on life in the time of the Covid-19 shocks me a little, especially when we can easily see that much of this research—namely, many online surveys—is theoretically ill-conceived, technically clumsy, and tendentially violating respondents' privacy (and, at times, their mourning).

A negative effect among many that I have seen in this frenzy around and about producing data and publications on the pandemic is the too-direct involvement with students by teachers and researchers. We know that university students have always been the guinea pigs for generations of academic researchers, because, even though it is very selective and self-contained, any college student population is always an easy-to-reach basin of responses for surveys, or subjects for pilot studies, or experiments, or quasi-experiments. In my view, however, cautious judgement should be observed if researchers want to resort to students to investigate any dimension of the impact of this pandemic on our lives (or specifically on students' lives). I have been aware of many Chinese and non-Chinese colleagues, in China and elsewhere, who have basically jumped at the chance to exploit their students or their university's student population at large as the sampling frame for some (too) quickly designed survey on this or that aspect of the life at the time

¹ To this end, please see my Editorial and the "Research Files" in *Mutual Images*, no. 7, where my interviewees and myself reflect upon the importance of personal choices (involving the individual's sensibility and sensitivity) when choosing whether to engage in artistic or industrial creativity directly related to recent collective disasters or crises.

of the pandemic. While I can understand the importance of collecting data to advance knowledge, what I have seen are too many sloppy surveys in terms of methodology (e.g. questionnaires that have been disseminated with no pilot test or collegial consultation among peers) that are extraordinarily intrusive into students' lives; so much so that, even without considering for a moment the ethical issues, the imbalance of certain tools for data collection likely make them highly inaccurate and unreliable.

As you can see, I have penned these lines with no particular regard for hypothetical, vague, academic etiquette or any particular scholarly *bon ton*. With the same frankness and friendly attitude, I would like to conclude this Editorial, also on behalf of Mutual Images Research Association, by wishing everybody to stay safe, stay active, and keep in touch with us for some *en plein air* activity together, when this global nightmare is over; if a new outbreak of the bad ol' bubonic plague does not take over after Covid-19, that is.

If you can, please enjoy this 8th issue of *Mutual Images*.