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ARTISTS, AESTHETICS, AND ARTWORKS

FROM, AND IN CONVERSATION WITH, JAPAN

PART 1 (OF 2)

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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

Mutual Images

A Transcultural Research Journal

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Issue 8

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Marco PELLITTERI | Shanghai International Studies University, China

PREAMBLE

Among the possible ways to publish research data and materials—alongside the more established formats—we proceed here with a second instalment of the "Research Files": batches of qualitative data which have been assessed as useful materials for other scholars. As explained in Mutual Images, *no. 7, we decided to distribute a few of these materials over different issues of this journal, grouping them by type. Through these Research Files, we are also suggesting a way for other scholars to make use of their "raw" data, for other researchers to draw from them, so to favour the circulation of ideas.[1]*

1. Introduction

In this second instalment of my own Research Files, I share with *Mutual Images*' readers three among the several interviews I conducted with Japanese and European scholars and critics specialised in Japanese animation and Japan's history and culture.[2]

As explained in the Introduction of the first instalment of the Research Files (in *Mutual Images*, no. 7),[3] the goal of these interviews took shape from the purpose of the research within which the conversations were to be conducted: complementarily to my interviews with Japanese animators and artists, also the conversations with the scholars focus on relevant themes of auteur animation and commercial anime in the 1970s-2000s

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[1] This preamble is a very short recap from a section of the Editorial of *Mutual Images*, no. 7. See Marco Pellitteri (2019), "Editorial: Layers of aesthetics and ethics in Japanese pop culture". *Mutual Images* [Online], 7, Autumn, pp. I-XVI. https://doi.org/10.32926/2019.7.pel.edito

[2] To give a clearer idea of my overall fieldwork during my three projects in 2013-2019, the total number of interviews I finalised is 120, not including the other types of data collected, that is, surveys in seven European countries, archive research, and visits at manga/anime-related B2C and B2B fairs and conventions.

[3] See Marco Pellitteri (2019), "Research materials from fieldwork in Japan, 2013". *Mutual Images* [Online], 7, Autumn, pp. 29-50. https://doi.org/10.32926/2019.7.pel.rf

vis-à-vis the collective traumas of Japan from the 1920s (e.g., the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923) to 11 March 2011, both in general and in specific reference to particular works.

2. The interviews

The materials shared here are not completely "raw": I have edited them, polishing the form where needed, and introducing the persons interviewed with short biographical notes. The interviews with Yokota Masao and Natsume Fusanosuke were conducted, originally, face to face and in Japanese. The audio recordings were transcribed and translated into English by my research assistant at the time, Ms Sophy S. Suzuki. The interview with Marcello Ghilardi was conducted *via* e-mail, not in Italian but in English, for the sake of practicality.

Interview with Yokota Masao

Yokota Masao is a prominent psychologist specialised in clinical psychology; he is the president of the Japanese Psychological Association, and a professor at Nihon University. He has been for years the president of the Japanese association for animation studies, and editor in chief of *Animēshon Kenkyū*, a leading Japanese academic journal on animation studies. Prof. Yokota has continuously researched on the psychological dimensions of animation and has taught and given invited lectures on a variety of aspects in this very interesting field. I had the pleasure to meet him for the first time in 2001, at the animation festival "I Castelli Animati" in Genzano (near Rome), where he delivered a *lectio magistralis* on Japanese animation. From then, we have regularly stayed in touch. This interview was carried out on Monday, 1st July 2013, in Prof. Yokota's office at Nihon University, Tokyo. Given the longstanding friendship between us, the tone of the interview is colloquial.

1. Masao-san, thank you for granting me this interview. My questions are about Japanese animation and the historical traumas of the Japanese people as a whole. There are many points that we could touch, but I will ask you a few direct questions, and I will listen to your advice, not only as a scholar but also as a Japanese person and from your prospective as a psychologist. First of all, a recurring symbol, from a European's perspective, in anime produced in Japan since the mid-1970s in the science fiction genre is a ritual or quasi-ritual mushroom explosion at the end of the battles between the hero and the monster. As far as my background research tells me, these ritual explosions seem to appear as a recurrent element especially in the Tōei Animation anime

series since the mid-1970s and through the 1980s. Why do you think this theme appeared in that period and not before or after?

At first, Japanese animators during the post-WWII period were sincerely trying to depict a positive future life's image for children. They were trying to create something nice and positive for them. However, later on, a couple new generations of animators began to hold this idea that "life is not that good or joyful"; this was the generation of Nagai Gō and the other people who created [anime series such as *Ufo Robo*] *Grendizer* and *Mazinger Z*.[4] This was because the society surrounding children had become heavily material or commercialised due to gossip magazines and the publishing industry, which tends to print any kind of material that sells well. Robot-themed animated series were created because in such commercialised society, they functioned as a great commercial attractor among children, who became deeply engaged with these series. After a rapid economic growth, Japanese citizens earned more time for entertainment and leisure, so the anime industry began to shift from regular "healthy" anime to well sold anime series centred upon robots and action. As a result, robot anime with high sale rates overcame "healthy" anime because they sold so well. And *Tetsuwan Atom* [from a 1962-68 manga by Tezuka Osamu] was made into animation [in 1963-66, 193 eps, Mushi Production] for similar reasons. Tetsuwan Atom is powered with nuclear energy, and I believe this supports the fact that back then, the Japanese were still afraid of nuclear energy's power. This feeling extended up until the subsequent and today's giant robots…

2. One of the things that can be noticed in the way studios like Tōei Animation, Tokyo Movie Shinsha, or Nippon Sunrise worked on ideas from authors like Nagai or Matsumoto Reiji is that the studios had talented directors and scriptwriters who often changed the original plots and the ways the characters were psychologically and physically designed. For example, most characters created or co-created by Nagai were dramatically changed (and I must say, improved) by the artists of the anime studios: grim figures became romantic and idealistic, informed by pristine ethical views. So, in your opinion, why did those characters change so much within the internal work of the anime studios, and why did the stories become more morally informed? So, there is the fight, the killing of the evil, and Japan and its hero win. Of course, it is easy to understand that these stories are for children, but was there anything more that led to this choice?

Well, manga or comics are created for individuals, and anime are open to the public viewing. So, consequently, anime got more censored than manga. Tōei itself has been working hard on this issue by keeping the violent scenes as scant as possible. Also, the original characters' design or their looks were changed [simplified] in anime because animators need to re-draw the parts of these characters in order to animate them. So, animators needed to keep the original design as untouched as possible, but at the same time they needed to reform its shape making it "rounder", in order to create the characters' smooth movements. That's why some character design changes when it is transformed into anime. Since manga are made for an individual audience, manga authors can infinitely blend in as much passion and taste into their work as they want, but for anime there are many people involved in order to complete one work, so character design is changed to a form easier for animators to draw and move

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[4] *Mazinger Z*, 92 eps, 1972-73, from a project by Nagai Gō; *UFO Robo Grendizer*, 74 eps, 1975-77, from a project by Katsuta Toshio and Tsuji Tadanao (Tōei Animation) with the cooperation of Nagai; both series were made by Tōei Animation.

inside the film. And the designs are usually changed to round and spherical forms because that kind of shapes are easier for children to receive and feel familiar with.

3. What is in your opinion the difference in attitude between the series by Tōei directed or written by people like Akehi Masayuki or Katsumata Tomoharu, etc., and the anime by Tomino Yoshiyuki, like *Kidō senshi Gundam* [Nippon Sunrise, 43 eps, 1979]? Tomino was born in 1941; what is the message he wants to convey? Because he said all sorts of things during his interviews, for instance that "the war must be realistic", and he also added "especially in Japan"; his anime works seem to me to be particularly against the vision of Tōei's super robots. He wanted to express the drama of real world.

   What Tōei was traditionally creating were works "easy to understand", or "intelligible" animations. Therefore, Tōei's anime are easier for children to understand and bond with. However, Tomino holds a different type of ideas about animation. He believes that animation could depict a more complex and deeper psychology. I don't think this is due to a trauma that was caused by war. Tomino was targetting some new group of audience who were older than Tōei Animation's typical viewers, so he despised "intelligibility" and focussed on mechanic details and complex military composition. This was done in *Gundam*, and the result was that during its first airing, *Gundam* was not very popular; but after a few months, it gained numerous fans. I assume that *Gundam*'s fans are the people who understand the complexity and the deep story, and to whom it just took a little time to find the kind of anime that fulfills their taste. So basically, Tomino preferred "complexity and mysteriousness" over "intelligible and simple" story lines. This is why anime of recent years, such as *Shinseiki Evangelion* [international title *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, by Anno Hideaki, 23 eps, Gainax, 1995], sometimes depict a story that makes no sense at all. When the classic long-running tv series came out, their goal was to engage audiences to watch a short episode every week. But in the case of *Evangelion*, this kind of directing or scripts were created for a new audience, and not because of some kind of traumatic experience. If the Japanese held a trauma, I believe they would have avoided this kind of direction or scripts. So, they are doing it purposely, as in a "you guys are afraid of these things, aren't you?" kind of approach.

4. You mentioned *Evangelion*, and we will talk about *Evangelion* later on. So, besides Nagai and Tomino, there are other big names in 1970s animation, one of whom is Matsumoto Leiji. He has another vision, a romantic, nostalgic vision. He has a progressive idea of nationalism and he also was born during the war. For example in his manga and then anime *Uchū kaizoku Captain Harlock* [Tōei, 42 eps, 1977], the representation of people on Earth in the future may give us hints on how he may have perceived the Japanese of the 1970s. Too placid, quite uninterested in what surrounds them, and seemingly unaware about what actually happened during the war. What is your opinion on Matsumoto's anime, especially *Captain Harlock* and *Uchū senkan Yamato* [Academy Productions and Group Tac, 26 eps, 1974-75], in terms of relation to Japanese history?

   About Matsumoto Leiji, well, in the case of *Uchū senkan Yamato*, Earth was already destroyed, and the protagonists are travelling through space to reach Iscandar and save their planet. In this story, they are not trying to recover Earth by themselves, but rather try to earn help from a third party, an alien being, to solve their problem. So, they don't have the idea to rebuild or recreate something by themselves. This idea comes from Tokyo after WWII, which got bombarded so badly that almost everything was wiped out and there was nothing left, and children had this feeling of "it cannot be helped". And

animators did nothing about passing down a different message to viewers, they just depicted the hopeless situation that things could get better if protagonists got some kind of problem-fixing device somewhere else far away in space. I believe that this kind of idea is very poor. There is no futuristic message to suggest to children or audiences to live a "better life" or "create a better life by doing this" (whichever it is). These manga/anime do not show a message that tells us "the future is bright and unfearful". But this is what Japanese manga creators have been doing for a long time. There are no new visions about the future for children to use as a role model. The works inspired by or drawn from Nagai's projects are the same. He depicts an idea such as "the future is chaotic" or "devil monsters could one day invade the Earth" but gives no clear solution or constructive explanation about any "bright future". We could say the same about most of Japanese animators nowadays. Even *Gundam* is an anime about constant fighting action scenes [and political struggle] and avoids talking about "what we should do after this battle in order to create a bright future". So, if I say "trauma", I mean that Japanese animators hold a trauma of creating constructive logical story lines that make sense.

5. I would like to ask you something about other big names of Japanese animation. There are two in particular whom I want to mention, Mr Takahata Isao and Mr Miyazaki Hayao. But before, I would like to close the circle about the visual trope of mushroom cloud explosions. Until a certain moment in the history of science fiction anime, mushroom explosions are something typical, a recurring scene. But in Tomino's anime, in the scenes with battle explosions there are no mushroom clouds: Tomino puts forwards other kinds of social criticisms, and through other visual triggers, as you commented. However, some years later in anime's history, in the *Akira* manga (1982) and then especially in the anime transposition (1988) by Ōtomo Katsuhiro (b. 1954), another kind of explosion appears which is hemispheric instead of mushroom-shaped, and it is white instead of colourful, and it is silent instead of noisy. So what is in our opinion, in this perspective, the possible difference of attitude by which the mushroom explosion was introduced in robot anime for kids in the 1970s and the idea that Ōtomo wanted to convey in the 1980s? because in the *Akira* manga and also partly in the movie, we spot many blunt criticisms against Japanese society of yesterday and today. Many symbols are put all together, such as religious fanaticism, nationalist factions, the military, a fascist government, youth motorbike gangs, student protests, the over-development of Japanese cities, and a distance between young and old generations. So, is this explosion to be read in some way like a purifying action? What is it in your opinion?

I believe so too. Basically, Ōtomo's generation are trying to create something new by destroying everything from the past. *Akira* displays great destruction at the beginning, and then the action starts. However, *Akira* does not show us the solution: it rather displays a state of chaos and confusion after utter destruction, no kind of constructive steps are shown or suggested to create some better future. This is not special about Ōtomo, but the same can be also said about other animators who worked with him, like Rintarō.[5] Otomo's film begins with destruction, but nothing is built from it. In *Akira*, these characters with superpowers show up, but they then move to a different world rather than rebuild their future. I am not sure if I could call this trauma, but there is this one feeling according to which "the past generations are unacceptable, so we must destroy them"; nonetheless, these artists do not give us any hints about what

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[5] For more on this director, cf. the Research Files in *Mutual Images*, no. 7, which hosts an interview with this director.

kind of action they are going to undertake to create a new future. I believe that this pattern, not showing the act of creating new future, is the big error in Ōtomo's animation work.

6. Back to Miyazaki and Takahata. They are older than Tomino and Ōtomo. especially Takahata [1935-2018] is some years older than Miyazaki [b. 1941]. They treat the idea of Japan's past during the war in different ways. Takahata, in *Hotaru no haka*, for example, especially in that field, is very realistic and educational, and also posits a very strong criticism of Japan; while Miyazaki, despite also putting forward a clear criticism about certain features of past and present Japan, gives some hope. And his nostalgia is counterbalanced by a clear projection towards the future. It seems to me that in films like *Ponyo* or *Laputa*, but especially in one of his first masterpieces, the tv series *Mirai shōnen Konan*, there may be traces of the trauma or at least the struggle that these authors went through in a Japan hit by bombardments and poverty during the hard reconstruction of the post war years. What are, in your opinion, the recurring themes and visual symbols in Miyazaki and Takahata's movies in a reference to the war?[6]

Takahata has [had] his own war experience. He was in Okayama with his sister and tried to desperately run away from the massive bombardments. So, he recreated his childhood experience in the animated film.[7] Takahata was finally able to create such movie when he was fifty years old, so it took a pretty large chunk of time for him to unveil his memories. On the other hand, Miyazaki is a little younger than Takahata and his war experience is different from Takahata's. I believe that Miyazaki's—he says this by himself too—war experience has less effect on his animation. He says that he was able to "survive the war with a minimum amount of suffering". So, it was basically all gone by the time Miyazaki became old enough to notice what was going on around him. This experience of "everything got blown away" or "there is nothing left here" is the basis for both animators' work. Takahata is the one who thinks about "what should I do, through anime, to make this world a better place?": since his father was a teacher, Takahata created an animation that is pedagogical. Miyazaki is the one who just wants to create his own imaginary worlds through animation, and he is also good at targetting specific audiences and understanding how to show his work to those targets. However, Miyazaki has no specific messages to appeal to the society. He just wants to depict his sensibility through animation. Miyazaki has no thoughts of "I want to create animation and also lead this society to a better direction". At least not as much as Takahata, I believe.

7. There is a moment in Japanese animation when the old traumas seem somewhat overcome and anime, especially in the 1990s, turn their attention much more onto the present time. So, this attention to nostalgia, to talking about past events, is almost gone: the 1990s are the moment in time, I think, when new authors try to speak about the present, using new metaphors and topics. For example, we mentioned *Evangelion* and *Gundam*. Well, we see, in Anno Hideaki's *Evangelion*,

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[6] *Hotaru no haka*, roughly translatable as 'Grave of the fireflies', Studio Ghibli 1988; *Gake no ue no Ponyo*, ' Ponyo upon the cliff', Studio Ghibli 2008; *Tenku no shiro Laputa*, 'Laputa, the castle in the sky', Studio Ghibli 1986; *Mirai shōnen Konan*, 'Conan, the future boy', 23 eps, Nippon Animation with NHK, 1978.

[7] *Hotaru no haka* serves this purpose through the transposition into animation of a 1967 autobiographical novel by Nosaka Akiyuki (1930-2015). Takahata's personal story resonated with Nosaka's, even though the director's take was much less tragic than the writer's. During a bombing, for several hours Takahata lost sight of his little sister, and he finally managed to find her alive. In Nosaka's story, the boy, Seita, fails to keep his sister alive: the little girl, Setsuko, dies of starvation, as Seita does as well a little while later.

battles among giant armoured genetically modified warriors, explosions, enemies, and a secret base. So, we see, basically, most of the tropes of older robot anime, but in a more disturbing way, nourished by a very strange and deep interest for the characters' psychologies and the exaggeration of many themes, such as the inter-generational conflict between father and son. Do you see any connection to some social crisis in Japan, and is there anything we could learn about Japan and its issues by reading between the lines of *Evangelion*?

Evangelion's main character is a 14 year old boy who fights the threat of total destruction brought by mysterious "angels" which nobody knows where they came from. And his father, who is supposed to be the guardian of the main character, is a lunatic, so the boy must fight alone. I believe this anime was a great hit because when it was on air, there were many teenagers who related to the main character's situation. The teenaged or young audiences held an anxiety against the society they were going to grow in: they could not envision their own future, unsure of what kind of job they would secure. There are numerous information flooding this world, but youths don't know how to find those that fit their own self, and parents cannot find their sons and daughters' special talents or guide them into what to do, because such parents' times were different, and their current insight is useless for today's children. Hence, that is why animations like *Evangelion* became a big success. And the film versions of *Evangelion* depict the psychology of what happened to those audiences, who had watched the tv series, after a decade or two. What Anno depicts is the "unchanged closed reality world" where young audiences live, and nonetheless have "no idea of what to do to change that world" and "don't know which way to go". Anno illustrates all these issues: that is why this incomprehensible story was created. The director depicted the youths' anxieties about the world by using the giant warriors' actions and casting beautiful girls, so it was easier for audiences to bond with and enjoy the animation.

8. Another author I would like to focus on is Oshii Mamoru (b. 1951) who, in his film *Kōkaku kidōtai*,[8] shows a futuristic world attacked by a thriving criminality. This is typical of many artists in many countries, but what do you think of Oshii's vision, why does he insist so much in depicting this kind of society? In many of his other works, we see an overwhelming criminality empowered by the new technologies and artificial intelligences, and complex relations between humans and artificial beings.

Oshii was, first of all, a militant student who fought during the 1960s' student activism, so he wanted to change society and also strongly believed that "reformation is possible". However, student activism quickly ended and he noticed that reformation was actually impossible, hence in one of his films, *Kerberos: Jigoku no banken*,[9] he illustrated the story of characters who lost the fight for social reformation; and the main message, "we want to change society", is depicted in *Kōkaku kidōtai*. In this movie, Oshii illustrates that "society is controllable through cyberworld, and social reformation is possible from this place". Also, Oshii is in antithesis with Takahata and Miyazaki, who produced "healthy" animated works for children: Oshii believes, instead, that "society is not trustworthy". That is why Oshii is constantly illustrating, through his animations, messages such as "change is a necessity" plus "we must change using militaristic power". He belongs to the generation of those who dreamed of a "revolution", and he tries to illustrate this fantasy through this medium called animation. He and

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[8] 'Special armoured anti-riot squad', international title *Ghost in the Shell*, 1995, based on a manga by Shirow Masamune.

[9] 'Hell watchdog Cerberus', international title *StrayDog: Kerberos Panzer Cops*, live action, 1991.

others are trying to reconstruct their dream idea through animation. Oshii is trying to make the idea "we tried to change the world" appealing through his animation. And the generation of animators just after Oshii's, like Anno, pursue instead directing styles that suggest "just enjoy animation" rather than "let's try to change society": Anno creates animations based on the "anime is a fun thing" kind of stance.

9. The last author I would like to talk about is Kon Satoshi (1963-2010). He was one of the most visionary authors of world animation. He also had a strong grasp on Japanese society. In a series he directed, *Mōsō dairinin* (international title *Paranoia agent*, 13 eps, Madhouse, 2004), in the end the whole plot was a fantasy of the protagonist. But nonetheless, during the investigation by the policeman, we can see how Kon depicted Japan in the early 2000s. We see images that are close to real Japan: Kon proposes a social criticism to the way new technologies have set people apart from each other. For example, there is a scene when we see a train with a thousand passengers, all of them staring at their cell phones. So, there is a strong sense of individual isolation even though you are surrounded by others. One of the main themes in this anime, in my opinion, is the theme of unsafety, a sensation of unsafety among people in Japan. Japan was and still is, possibly, the safest country on Earth, where criminality is very, very low. But in this series, there is a boy character who apparently smacks people's heads with a baseball bat, so the sensation of fear is quite strong among the people in the anime series. There have been, in Japan, cases of urban violence and gore criminality. Kon had already approached this issue in his movie *Perfect Blue* (1997), where he talked about an alleged otaku criminal: the crazy criminal in the film, in the end, was not the otaku fan portrayed, but the plot per se was, I think, a precise reference to 1989 and the terrible case of Miyazaki Tsutomu. Something more, and big, that Japan has gone through during the 1990s was the sarin gas attack in Tokyo (1995). So, was there, on your opinion, a precise vision about Japan according to Kon? Is Japan, for Kon, a violent place?

Kon was trying to communicate that "reality is good, but dreams are also fine", unlike Oshii, who puts forward the notion that "fantasy or dream are above reality, so it is better to move to those kinds of worlds". I believe Kon was trying to illustrate "what happens when the dream takes over reality and unrealistic figures begin appearing in the real world: are you people going to be okay with that?". This is common throughout his filmography. In his animations he depicts a border line between real world and dream that becomes loose and unstable. This instability is his main message. Kon is saying "the current society we live in seems to be safe, but is this safety stabilised?", and tosses a feeling of anxiety towards the audience. He is depicting that "maybe it is not safe after all", and some groups of the audience agree and resonate with his idea. Kon was positing the idea that "this place [Japan] is really safe, clean, no worries to starve, and easy to live in, but is it truly safe?" to audiences. And the director's conclusion was that maybe this world is not quite a "safe" place, "although it is safe, there are people who stare at their cell phones for a long time and end up falling from the platform of the train station, and this kind of incidents occur even in the safe everyday life that you currently live in". Kon was trying to depict these pitfalls that exist in daily life; in *Mōsō dairinin,* "what is going to happen when the main character gets into a slump and is unable to come up with new ideas, and children refuse to go to school?". Kon states that this kind of serious issues still occur, even though people believe that their daily life is safe. So, unlike Oshii's "revolutionary" and "must change the society" idea, Kon held a "there are supernatural things inside our common reality" kind of thought.

10. During your travels in Italy, did you notice any particular bond between Italian people and Japanese anime? If you did, what kind of relation did you notice?

Oh, I think in Europe people respect artists more than in Japan. The Japanese do not respect directors, animators, even producers. There is no respect. And the culture of animation is not so popular as one might think. Everybody knows animation, but even so, people do not respect animation at all.

11. Not as a cultural artefact, maybe they respected it more if it made more money?

Yes. In Italy, people respect artists very much. I think that a maturity of culture makes people respect artists. I think. But it's not the case in Japan.

12. Are you saying that you think that in Italy people are more culturally mature?

Yes.

13. What may be your personal opinion, in the end, about a possible, direct relationship between historical facts in Japan—especially facts that have shocked the nation—and the themes of Japanese animation for kids but also for young adults?

Japan has a feature: the Japanese quickly forget the past disasters. That's why we forget that Japan was once burnt down during the world war, and so we build new things instead. It's the same for the animation industry: younger people don't really look at past masterpieces, and they just keep creating new stuff. There is this idea of "new is good" in Japan, and old things are not much praised, so it's okay to break them down.

14. Do you think that there has been a pedagogical intention by Japanese animators and producers to do something educational? For example, about the war or the importance of peace, etc. If you think that this may be true, do you think that their ideas have been successful with at least one generation of kids? Do you think that series like *Grendizer*, *Harlock*, or *Yamato* or other more recent series were successful in conveying any values to Japanese kids? Or were they just an entertainment?

I think they were just entertainment. So, some kids used to like animation. Now there are so many different forms of entertainment. And animation is, today, only one of the possible forms of entertainment. And kids can select the animations they like. And even now they select and enjoy video games, and other things.

14. What do you think about the fact that in countries like Italy, France, or Spain, these series have gained so much success and now people aged between 30 and 50 say things like "thanks to anime I learned to live, I learned values of life, I learned values of peace, freedom, love for each other, respect, and sacrifice"?[10] These are big values. So why do you think these series taught so much to foreign kids and perhaps not to Japanese kids?

In Japan, engaging in daily life by children was already there since the animation culture was born, and the ways children were picked on and bullied were thought of and depicted as normal events in life. In combat-themed animation, the animators depicted how characters interact with their teammates very naturally. So, there are always the hero's teammates, his/her family, and sometime love exists around the hero to support him/her. In European and American works, more attention is paid to "individuality" but not to the "cooperate with people and accomplish something" kind of idea. In Japan, "cooperation with others" is highly valued, and audiences are touched when they see that kind of scenes. When

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[10] Cf. the ethnographies collected in Francesco Filippi and Maria Grazia Di Tullio, *Vite Animate. I manga e gli anime come esperienza di vita* ('Animated Lives: Manga and anime as life experiences'). Roma: King Comics, 2001, *passim*.

individuals try to accomplish something by him or herself, Japanese generally think "oh… that's overdone or too much" and try to press down this individual. And this kind of "what to do and not to do in order to blend into the group" notion is shown in anime as numerous examples for audiences. This stance never really changed since the past and is still there. Anime works still depict similar scenes of "what to do or not to do to become a part of group" by hook or by crook throughout history.

Interview with Natsume Fusanosuke

Natsume Fusanosuke (b. 1950) is a professor in the Graduate School of Humanities of Gakushuin University in Tokyo, where he teaches in the area of critical studies on manga and animation. He has authored dozens of books on comics theory and history and is one of the leading authorities of the field in Japan and Asia. I met with Prof. Natsume on 14 June 2013 at 17:00 in his studio in Tokyo, accompanied by my assistant, who served as interpreter; the following conversation is an edited, synthesised blend of our oral chat and the written answers and clarifications he sent to me *via* e-mail.

1. What is, on your opinion, the degree and depth of the (possible) relationship between the main social themes dealt with in manga and anime since the post war period and the major collective traumas faced by the Japanese nation since WWII (the war itself, the atomic bombings, major earthquakes, environmental disasters, homeland terrorism)?
   In general, the idea of collective trauma varies upon each generation of population. In these populations, especially the people who supported and preferred manga and animations, there is a group that was born in postwar from 1945 and through the 1950s and that prefers manga over anime, and a group that was born in the 1960s (first otaku generation) and cherishes both manga and anime: these are all postwar baby boomers.
   For these postwar baby boomer groups, the images of World War II and the nuclear bombs are still vivid as the tragedy that they were, and this idea is not limited to manga or anime. However, for a second generation of otaku (born in the 1970s), there is less shock among them. The Aum shinrikyo sect attack (1995) and the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake (1995) are, rather, the greatest tragedies for these people. Furthermore, Japan, compared to the United States and Europe, has a societal composition that is quite vague, but I believe that the ideas of trauma for the more cultivated people and for the general public are different. By the way, I would personally prefer to call it "psychological complex caused by an ideology or a discursive space" when I think about this topic, rather than "collective trauma".

2. What are, in your experience as a scholar, the main topics virtually or explicitly related to those major collective traumas of the Japanese nation and people that have been more frequently dealt with in manga and anime since 1945 to present day? And who are, according to your insight and analysis, the most representative authors of such, possible, cultural/thematic relationship?

Well, I believe that the most impressive theme is "war". The image of the "nuclear bomb" could be added there. If we use movies as examples, I think of *Gojira*, and in manga, I think of Tezuka Osamu and Mizuki Shigeru's images pattern; in anime, *Uchū senkan Yamato*, *Kidō senshi Gundam*, and *Shinseiki Evangelion* are linked to those images.

3. Many European critics say that manga creators and animation directors active from, and their works created from, 1945-46 on and in the following decades, are "children of the Bombs". What do you think about this claim? Was (and/or is still) the experience of the atomic bombings the major trauma for the Japanese nation from 1945 to present day?
In general, I believe that this is correct enough. However, the image of the nuclear bombs parted away from the direct experience in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and got connected to stereotypical images of wars, like mushroom clouds and explosions, and after the 1970s these images are inherited and perceived not as memory but as simple themes or pictures. On the other hand, it is true that nuclear bombs are still an extremely strong image among the general population. However, I don't believe that this idea of "trauma" is the same among all the citizens who were born in the postwar years.

4. Are there collective traumas of Japanese contemporary history (from WWII to present day) that are somewhat a taboo for manga creators and animators? For example, are there, in your knowledge, manga or anime dealing with the Humanity Declaration by Emperor Hirohito in 1946? Or with the hijack of the JAL 351 flight in 1970?
Taboo itself does exist. Since manga and anime are products sold in a business market, portrayals of the Emperor are avoided, and Islamic religion is also cautiously handled. Also, segregation problems inside and outside of Japan (Jews, Burakumin)[11] are avoided. However, the Emperor's Humanity Declaration itself is not a taboo. For Japanese people who were born after the war, the Emperor is obviously not recognised as a god. Adding to that, I have never heard that the JAL 315 highjack was even just framed as a taboo topic. I believe that the young population hasn't even heard of these incidents.

5. What do you think of certain recurrent tropes in manga and animation of the 1970s-1980s, such as mushroom explosions, alien invasions, wide devastation of Japanese cities? Is there a direct, or indirect, relation (in terms of visual symbolisations) to WWII?
Like I said before, until the 1960s people had direct experiences of the war, which did affect manga/anime's images. However, after the 1970s, these images are passed down as *simulacres*. In that meaning, these simulacres are not directly related to "trauma" but we could say these are rather indirectly related.

6. What do you think of other visual and thematic tropes in Japanese manga and animation in the 1990s-2000s, such as urban violence and poverty, serial killers, an otaku culture which self-represents itself? Could it be possible that there has been a transposition into visual symbolisations of collective traumas? Or, perhaps, it is only about references to recent events as materials from which to create entertaining and compelling stories?
I believe that establishing connections between all these and the theme of trauma involves more of a problematic method of finding out historical

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[11] The Burakumin, or Hamlet People, were a highly stigmatised populace that live(d) in underdeveloped or undeveloped, marginal, isolated small villages in the deep countrysides of Japan and later in the cities' poor outskirts.

reflections in anime and manga's expressions. I don't think that this is impossible, but it must be done carefully. These images could be used as popular images simply to promote sales, but at the same time the process of choosing these images includes the subconscious desire of Japanese manga and anime's consumers, the awareness about certain problems, and psychological complexes at a variety of levels.

7. Do you think that there might be, or there already is, some effect on the themes of Japanese manga and animation (producers and publishers/editors' decisions, authors' plots and scripts, manga creators and animators' visualisations, market's trajectories) after the 3.11 trauma of Tōhoku's earthquake and tsunami?

This definitely exists. First of all, creators tended to conceal the images that remind people of the 3.11 earthquake and tsunami. This example I'm bringing up is not from manga or anime, but I'll explain it anyway. In karaoke, after 3.11, the song titled *Tsunami* [2000], by famous Japanese singer Kuwata Keisuke [b. 1956], was not sung by people although it was one of the most popular songs in Japan. And many manga authors and musicians visited the disaster area as volunteers and wrote about their experience in their works, and sometimes sold these works to donate the profits to the disaster areas. For example, in the manga series *Oishinbo*,[12] the real time disaster area was repeatedly depicted in a couple of episodes. There are also some manga authors who kept creating anti-nuclear messages in their works. However, throughout the huge Japanese manga market, I believe this movement is not very popular. I could not come up with good examples that affect the whole entire market system. The market itself has its own rules and logics.

8. Do you think that manga and anime dealing—even just in terms of fantasy—with catastrophic or critical events, if meant by their authors to make the audience learn some message on historical past, did get some result, being "educational" in terms of historical memory?

Authors who had experiences of the war, like Tezuka and Mizuki, obviously included such messages in their works. There are other authors who follow their style. However, whether their works function as "educational" or not depends on the readers or viewers, most of whom frame them as entertainment in the first place. Only some people get eventually "messages" from them. In this way, I guess that manga and anime possibly do have an effect as message deliverers. The ideology that anime and manga works should contain messages, or somewhat some meaningful theme, and viewers should receive those messages, has declined at the end of the 1960s. Since the 1970s, receiving elevating messages from fictional works basically depends on the individual receivers; what has become the most important thing, and the most common nowadays, is to enjoy fiction as fiction.

9. In order to ask you about a further perspective related to the previous questions: is there any possibility that manga and animation authors tried (with or without a conscious, rational awareness) to express to younger generations (readers and spectators) their feelings and visual metaphors/symbols generated by their own memories concerning their particular experiences of such events as the war, the bombings, pollution and people's death by radiations, street protests (1968…), terrorism, etc.?

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[12] 'Gourmet', by Kariya Tetsu and Hanasaki Akira, 1983-2014. The song *Tsunami* is performed by the band Soutern All Stars, of which Kuwata is a member as the main songwriter. Their career spans decades, from 1978 to present day.

In terms of "on purpose", only few of the creators did or are doing so. If this "purpose" shows up too much in their work, I believe the receivers will start to keep distance from that work. In terms of "subconsciously", my opinion is that their works share with the Japanese people a common subconscious complex. I feel that it is hard to reach a conclusion by talking about this kind of topic through abstract discussion and without concrete examples. For example, Miyazaki Hayao deploys numerous literal messages in his works. However, at the same time he is a highly talented entertainer, and this feature is the first thing that he is evaluated for. Oshii Mamoru's work is also very meaningful, but his visual art's sense is the one that receives greater evaluation. Many entertainers working in tv animation might not show the same eminent idea or ideology, and it might be very hard to decode their direct messages; but it is possible for individual critics to find these aspects inside their works.

Manga and anime are not high arts. These works are basically commercial products that are created for the public's entertainment. However, that might be why these media reflect the general public's desires, wishes, dreams, and complexes. Manga and anime are media that live in today's world, and that is what makes them so special and important. All of this considered, they are unstable and difficult to analyse.

I am sorry that my answers were so long. But my honest impression is that it would be hard to conduct an objective analysis, without taking into account the enormity and complexity of Japanese manga and anime as an industrial market.

Interview with Marcello Ghilardi

Marcello Ghilardi teaches and researches about Aesthetics at the University of Padua (Italy). He obtained his Ph.D. in Aesthetics and Theory of Arts from the University of Palermo, after having trained in the universities of Padua, Milan, Paris, and Beijing. He lectured in several Italian and foreign universities, including Paris, Barcelona, Berlin, and Kyoto, and was a visiting scholar at the University of Hong Kong. He works as a translator and consultant for various Italian publishing houses, for which he also edited volumes and texts by Cassirer, Jullien, Merleau-Ponty, Nishida, and others. Among his books: *L'enigma e lo specchio. Il problema del volto nella pittura contemporanea* ('The enigma and the mirror. The problem of the face in contemporary painting', Esedra, 2006); *Una logica del vedere. Estetica ed etica nel pensiero di Nishida Kitarō* ('A logic of seeing. Aesthetics and ethics in the thought of Nishida Kitarō', Mimesis, 2009); *Filosofia nei manga* ('Philosophy in manga', Mimesis, 2010); *Arte e pensiero in Giappone* ('Art and thought in Japan', Mimesis, 2011); *Filosofia dell'interculturalità* ('Philosophy of interculturality', Morcelliana, 2012); *Il vuoto, le forme, l'altro* ('The void, the forms, the other', Morcelliana 2014, new ed. 2017).

This interview was carried out *via* e-mail in June 2013. Unlike the two previous interviews presented here, the topics of this one are more localised to Ghilardi's home country (which, incidentally, is also mine). The interview I conducted with him belongs to a set of conversations I had with several scholars and journalists from Italy, France, Germany, Spain, and a few more European countries; this "European" set of interviews is complementary to the interviews I had with Japanese scholars and journalists.

1. Marcello, how would you say that Japan is seen, in general, in Italy?

In my country, Italy, Japan underwent a peculiar shift of representation in people's minds, during the past decades. In the 1980s, it was generally seen as a growing power among the most developed countries in the world, for its increasing influence in economy and industry; but it also conveyed a scary image, and it was linked to a somewhat mechanical and quite inhuman perfection. The current image of Japan displays a split-stereotyped idea of computers and transistors, on the one hand, and *samurai* and *geisha*, on the other. In the 1990s, the crisis of the Japanese economic "bubble" calmed down some fears and gave a nicer image of Japan, not anymore seen as an invincible and scary empire of wealth, economy, and technology. During the last fifteen years, the image has become a little more complex, and Japan has maybe begun to be considered as a nice and friendly nation in the "Far East", in comparison to China's growth, now seen as scary as was Japan some thirty years ago. But, generally speaking, I would say that Italian people have a sort of general attraction for the Japanese nation and culture, even though there is not a wide or deep knowledge of its main features.

2. How would you say that the Japanese are seen, in general, in your country?

A typical feature of the Japanese as they are understood in Italy is connected to their commitment to their job and company. Men are always at work, women are submissive; no one can understand what they really think; they never say "yes" or "no"; they have only a few days of holidays in which they travel in length and breadth to Europe taking photos. But, just as the image of Japan changes, I think that also the image of the Japanese people is slightly changing in the latest years; also because the new generations have a different view and a different exposure from the notion of the Japanese "myth" that was circulated between the late 1970s and the early 1990s.

3. What are, on your opinion, the crucial points of such visions in Italy?

Maybe the crucial point is linked to the ideas of *work* and *nation*, and the difficulty to understand their diligence and the engagement to their companies and the State. Italian people can truly understand the connection to family, but they are generally astonished by the commitment of Japanese men and women to their company's hierarchy, or their respect for the national institutions. The split that generally arises is in the self-perceived emotional and inventive character of the Italians on one side, and a perceived idea of precision, attention to the detail, and perfection of the Japanese on the other.

4. Have, in the last twenty years, the general images of Japan changed in Italy, and, if they have, due to what specific events, in your opinion?

Yes, they have, in my opinion, mostly for the new economic situation of Japan and the whole world; and for the "soft power" that Japan began to use since the

1980s and 1990s, with popular culture and some important icons such as film and anime directors. In the recent past, of course, the tsunami of March 2011 and the nuclear problems put Japan in the spotlight, even if sadly, conveying a great deal of worries and concerns.

5. What is the general "distance" between the Japanese and the Italians?

As I said before, my impression is that Italian people represent themselves as belonging to a culture of improvisation, emotion, and creativity, while they think of the Japanese as very effective and precise people, but narrow-minded. Moreover, the Italian mindset risks to be often individualistic or family-centred, in comparison with the Japanese mind, which—using a sort of commonplace— tends to be more nation-centred. These mutual stereotypes end up creating a distance which, in the long run, makes a true encounter more difficult, with the exception of the persons who deal in a deeper way with the other culture and traditions, meet the people, travel, and read good books…

6. How would you say that Japan is represented in the anime broadcast in Italy?

The wide variety of anime series that were and are broadcast in Italy makes a straight answer to this question difficult. We could see a certain image or representation of Japan in some particular series, like the sport stories: there we can see the emphasis on the values of sacrifice and training, very close to the ideals of a healthy nation pointing to a continuous progress. But if we take as an example some comedy series, we can also see a culture able to joke about its own weaknesses or flaws; and if we get some *shōjo* series, we can have the idea of a Japan in which the role of young girls and women is trying to progress from the traditional niches. I should add, by the way, that the huge number of robot-themed series broadcast in Italy in the 1970s and 1980s showed a technological Japan, in which "western" science and technology had been so well studied and imported that they had become a distinctive mark of the country.

7. How would you say that Japan is seen, in general, by manga/anime fans in Italy?

Maybe manga/anime fans could be divided in at least two different generations (if not three): the first one, who grew up in the late 1970s and the 1980s, now entertains with Japan a sort of nostalgic feeling, even if most of the fans never went to Japan or read anything about it; but they have a general sense of interest and, how to say… "gratitude" for the country which so many anime series stemmed from. The generation grown since the 1990s seems to me less emotionally concerned—there is a less powerful feeling linked to the freshness of the 1970s tv series—but in some cases is more acute in the will to deepen the interest for Japanese culture. The younger fans are more likely close to the internet resources to learn some Japanese, or acting as cosplayers, or create fandom-based social networks; so, they may have a slightly deeper knowledge about the actual Japan. Finally, it is true that the average anime fan still holds a sort of fantasised and not always clear image of Japan's complexity: only a few decide to go on and understand a little more the subtleties of its culture.

8. Has the popularity of Japanese animation and comics played a positive or negative role (or a marginal role, if any) in the popularity of Japan and the Japanese in Italy?

In the beginning of the broadcasting of Japanese anime on Italian tv stations, the image of Japan was worsened among adults: in particular, among the parents of the young spectators. Their prejudice allowed them to see only violence and nonsense in those tv series, and the generational split contributed to a misunderstanding of Japanese culture at large and the themes displayed in anime. After this so-called "first impact" with Japanese animation, the popularity of Japan was enhanced and began to be more and more positive, also

thanks to the coming of age of that generation of young tv anime fans: when the scare of Japan's economic power decreased, also the popularity of its heroes became a means to develop in Italy a more suitable image for the masses.

9. What is, in your opinion, the cultural importance of the conventions devoted to comics, manga, anime, etc., in Italy, for the popularity of Japan and the Japanese?
The increasing number of conventions devoted to anime and manga in Italy testifies, at the same time, the growing importance of Japanese popular culture and the role of those gatherings to widen the knowledge on Japan. Conventions and exhibitions contributed to the development of the popularity of Japan, no doubt, but it is to be seen whether they could and can offer a *deepening* of the knowledge of its complexities and dark sides…

10. What do you think of certain recurrent *tòpoi* in Japanese animation of the 1970s-1980s, such as mushroom explosions, alien invasions, wide devastation of Japanese cities?
We could think that these *tòpoi* have been so recurrent just to play a sort of collective mourning, in the forms that a popular medium such as manga or anime can foster. Some scholars also tried to point out the importance of these images as a collective way to process those national traumas; where the so-called high culture failed, maybe pop culture could take the relay and boost a general action of working out the sorrows and fears of the Japanese populace, recalling and transfiguring the nuclear bombings of 1945, the American victory in the Pacific War, or the war rubbles.

11. What do you think of other *tòpoi* in Japanese animation in the 1990s-2000s, such as urban violence and poverty, serial killers, an otaku culture which self-represents itself?
It seems that in the last decade of the twentieth century Japan folded itself up, focussing on its internal problems: the economic crises, the earthquake of Kobe in 1995, terrorist attacks, serial killers that shocked the public opinion were the major concerns in those years, and the stories about alien invasions or giant robots with extravagant mechanical designs were partly abandoned (except for the successful *Shinseiki Evangelion*, which mixes these elements with a plot centred, not by chance, on a teenager full of complexes). I think that we can also frame these *tòpoi* within an interesting feature of Japanese anime: anime is a mirror of Japanese society, or it provides a representation of it, better than many academic essays or arthouse cinema. This does not mean that anime are full of aware insights and are intended as an answer to the Japanese's concerns, but that they can intercept many instances and display them on the screen, giving the opportunity to objectify them and make them clearer to creators and audience alike.

12. Do you think that there might be, or already is, some effect on the themes of Japanese animation (producers' decisions, authors' scripts, animators' visualisations, market's trajectories) after the trauma of the 3.11 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami?
Of course, I could quote the case of *Kibō no ki*,[13] by Studio Ghibli, as an important demonstration of the animation world's closeness to the themes of the tsunami. But, as far as I know about present day's tv series production, I cannot really say if the traumatic event that took place in 2011 has already produced a change or any effect in anime's production trajectories. I might say that it would be

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[13] 'The tree of hope', by Yamamoto Nizō, a crowdfunded project whose revenues were donated to the disaster area.

strange if it didn't give any hint for a new manga or tv anime series; I don't mean as a straightforward theme to represent; but it could function as an underground tension able to bring to light some deep visualisations, or to channel the energies for a new poetical creativity.

13. Do you think that anime dealing—even just in terms of fantasy—with catastrophic or critical events, if meant by their authors to make the audience learn some message on historical past, did get some result, being "educational" in terms of historical memory?

I think that the re-elaboration of critical events in various forms of narrative, including anime, is certainly "educational", and can help to articulate a sharper mind to approach those events historically. I mean that it is not for the direct historical accuracy that those kinds of narratives can be useful, or for a direct link to the memory of the onlookers, that anime can have an important role in building a historical consciousness; it seems to me that the role of anime could be that of creating a sort of inner space to process some traumatic episodes, a space in which the members of the audience can be helped to create an internal significance or reorganisation of their feelings, in order to come, *then*, to a more mature understanding of past events and memories.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marco PELLITTERI *is a media sociologist. He teaches in the School of Journalism and Communication of Shanghai International Studies University. He has published extensively on histories and theories of Japanese pop cultures and soft power, television, video games, animation, and comics. Among his publications, the books* Mazinga Nostalgia *(1999, 4th ed. 2018, 2 vols) and* The Dragon and The Dazzle *(2008, Eng. ed. 2010).*