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ARTISTS, AESTHETICS, AND ARTWORKS
FROM, AND IN CONVERSATION WITH, JAPAN
PART 2

MUTUAL IMAGES
ISSUE 9 – AUTUMN 2020

MUTUAL IMAGES

A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

FOUNDED BY

AURORE YAMAGATA-MONTOYA, MAXIME DANESIN & MARCO PELLITTERI

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ARTISTS, AESTHETICS, AND ARTWORKS
FROM, AND IN CONVERSATION WITH, JAPAN
PART 2

EDITED BY
MARCO PELLITTERI & JOSÉ ANDRÉS SANTIAGO IGLESIAS

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MUTUAL IMAGES

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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CONTACT: mutualimages@gmail.com

MUTUAL IMAGES RESEARCH ASSOCIATION – Headquarters
3 allée de l'avenir, Les chênes entrée 3
64600 Anglet – France

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A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

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Editorial –

Vale, annus horribilis. Salve, annus mirabilis?

Marco PELLITTERI | Xi'an Jiaotong—Liverpool University, China

José Andrés SANTIAGO IGLESIAS | Universidade de Vigo, Spain

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

Say goodbye to 2020, say goodbye my baby

This issue is a peculiar one, for three reasons. The first: it is the second and last of 2020, and we know how difficult a year this has been. When you will read these lines, it will most likely be 2021 already, and even though some most relevant improvements in our lives may be still yet to come — such as being vaccinated, travelling freely, jumping into the caressing sea waters, and storing inside a drawer all the unused masks, hopefully forever — at least we will have this nasty creature, 2020, behind us. The double-twenties has been a difficult object to handle also for *Mutual Images*, both the association and the journal. We had to first postpone the eighth edition of our yearly international workshop to this upcoming January 2021.¹ Then, although we managed to put together the eighth issue of the journal last spring and organise a special autumn workshop, that instalment was quite a short one because of various problems many authors and reviewers were busy with due to the global situation, and the workshop — this time, by features and size, perhaps a symposium rather than a workshop — had to be conducted *via* digital information technologies, through a software of video-conferencing that some of you may have vaguely heard of, its name is Zoom.²

Nonetheless, the symposium was a success and a prestigious one, organised with and at the University of Padua (Italy), and with other Italian cultural institutions, and the University of Vigo (Spain), thanks to the enormous help of Marco Bellano and José Andrés Santiago Iglesias. José, as you have seen in the frontispiece of this issue, is also,

¹ <https://mutualimages.org/mutual-images-8th-international-workshop/>.

² <https://mutualimages.org/2020/10/19/program-the-journey-around-the-world-through-images>.

like it happened in the last issue, the co-editor of this instalment of *MIJ* and co-author of this Editorial.

The second reason is that besides being the last issue of 2020, this is also the last that belongs in a six-monthly periodicity. The main board of the association (president and vice-presidents), with the general approval of the editorial board, has deliberated and then resolved that *Mutual Images Journal*, from 2021, will assume an annual periodicity, so to allow us to devote more time to our various projects and put together one single yearly issue, but one thicker than the two 2020 instalments. In fact, largely due to covid-19, also this issue comes to you in a reduced format. While doing our best to secure scholarly content of high quality for the international research community of readers in the humanities, social sciences, media and art studies, cultural studies, and area studies, we had to face two sad realities: substantial delays or definitive withdrawals of articles by authors who had to cope with personal challenges, and an almost sinister conjuncture of submissions of unsatisfactory quality, which we saw ourselves obliged to reject, in accord with our expert peer reviewers.

A third reason, not directly connected to the journal but more broadly impacting our association, is that we could not organise our second summer school in 2020, after the nice experience and good success of the first summer school in July 2019 at the University of Messina (Italy). Let us indulge for a moment in sweet nostalgia for a special summer full of learning, scholarship, valuable colleagues and students, and sun, good food, and sea.³ Moreover, among our honourable lecturers, we had Professor Tiziana Lippiello, who has been recently appointed Rector of Ca' Foscari University of Venice (Unive.it/data/people/5591147). Congratulations, Tiziana!

Nonetheless, 2021 will be the year of the second Mira international summer school: we change continent entirely and, on 22-26 June, the didactic and scholarly event will be held at Xi'an Jiaotong – Liverpool University in Suzhou, 90 km westward of Shanghai, co-organised with the Department of Media and Communication, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, and with the patronage, among other institutions, of the AAIC (Association of Italian Academics in China). The event will be on-site and should enjoy the participation of a relevant number of Chinese and international students living and studying in China currently; in this sense, assuming that international mobility will be still difficult next summer (both within Europe and between Europe and various eastern

³ <https://mutualimages.org/archives/international-summer-school-2019>.

countries), at MIRA we thought that it would be sensible to change scenario and plan, this year, an Asian event: moreover, having China, everything considered, kept the epidemic under control within its national borders better than any European nation can claim, the situation down here is indeed safer.⁴

In the following lines you are briefly introduced to the contents of *Mutual Images*, no. 9.⁵

On this issue's contents

This issue of the journal may be short, but not *that* short. We have the pleasure to offer to you three full-length articles and the reviews of two highly interesting books.

The reviews are written by Tyrus Miller, Dean of the School of Humanities at the University of California (Irvine), and “our” Alejandra Armendáriz-Hernández, who serves on *Mutual Images*' Editorial Board. The first, at pp. 91-94, discusses a book by Christopher Reed focussing on (mainly) European/American “bachelor Japanists” and their displays of alternative masculinities. The review and the discussed book deal with the links between Japanism — framed as a set of fascinations for, and inspirations from, Japanese modern and contemporary forms of visual arts — among western men and their peculiar, and/or overtly homosexual, masculinities; here we could just add that the appeal of Japanese visual/pop cultures indeed attracted and still attract various European artists — we refer here mainly to comic artists in Europe — who may display or indirectly suggest a set of different, dandy-ish masculine identities in tight connection with their appreciation or love, evident in their artwork, for Japanese culture and its artistic and daily-life aesthetics. The main artist who comes to our mind is Igort (b. 1958), with his masterworks *Quaderni giapponesi* ('Japanese notebooks', 2015-20, 3 vols) and the more recent instalment of them, *Kokoro* ('Heart', 2019).

The second review discusses a collection on Japanese cinema edited by Fujiki Hideaki and Alastair Phillips, which we can frame as a “reader” in Japanese film or a handbook of sorts, although not being exactly all-comprehensive. The epistemology that informs the book's structure, as thoroughly illustrated in the review, is well balanced with the goal of

⁴ Clearly, for updates on the summer school, you can check in the future our website Mutualimages.org as well as the webpages of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Department of Media and Communication at Xi'an Jiaotong – Liverpool University: Xjtlu.edu.cn/en/study/departments/school-of-humanities-and-social-sciences and Xjtlu.edu.cn/en/study/departments/academic-departments/media-and-communication respectively.

⁵ For those who noticed and those who did not: yes, the title of this first section of the Editorial honours a 1980 Billy Joel hit.

exploring the various angles from which to discuss the object, and therefore the collection can be both a starter for students of cinema (and/or of cinema in Japan) and a theory-thick reading for academics, be they film researchers or area studies scholars. However, we second the comment by Armendáriz-Hernández about the too common cultural and scholarly limitation of this book's selection of contributors, who are usually either Japanese or Anglophone scholars, which turns this volume into a quasi-exclusive dialogue between Anglophone "white" culture (from the UK, the US, and Canada) and Japanese authors' reflections on local cinema; but pleasing presences are also Swedish, Hongkonghese, and Korean scholars. The absence of European authors from France, Germany, Italy, and Spain — whose traditions of production of auteur cinema and theoretical innovation and advancement of cinema theory are by far the most relevant worldwide in the history of the medium and whose historical output has been inspired by or has provided inspiration for many Japanese filmmakers across the last century — is appalling because it is a too frequent culturally monistic habit. Another last limit of the book seems the choice of giving space to animation only in one chapter, only in relation to "anime" (which is one sub-category of animation made in Japan), and only through the theory-specific eyes of a non-Japanese scholar; more relevantly, because the history, industry, production routines, and aesthetic features of cinemas of animation in Japan are not reducible to one single view and essay, and need to be handled — as they indeed have, elsewhere — in separate comprehensive books, or else the impression will be implicitly suggested of a too peripheral position in the Japanese industry of the moving image, which is far from being true. But putting aside these diverging opinions on the desirable balance of a composite and complex work as this, *The Japanese Cinema Book* is a great piece of collective scholarship and as such, it is highly recommended, as the reviewer effectively explains at pp. 95-101.

The main courses of this issue's menu are, however, and as always, the articles.

The first article, by Karim El Mufti, pp. 3-37, addresses the deep influence of the anime series *Ufo Robo Grendizer* in the Arabic-speaking sphere (paying special attention to the Lebanese case) since it was first broadcast in the late 1970s and early 1980s, becoming a symbol of resistance during a harsh war period. Following a thorough analysis of the arrival and broadcasting of *Grendizer*, El Mufti highlights two core issues with regard to this discussion. Firstly, the iconicity of the character and series, exceeding the original narrative to resonate with the daily brutal situation many kids had to deal with. With an

undergoing civil war and the Israeli occupation, many young Lebanese viewers found true similarities with the events described in *Ufo Robo Grendizer* — a people losing their home planet to an invasion force from outer space — and the series became a beacon of resilience, self-sacrifice and resistance. Secondly, El Mufti highlights the important role *domestication* played in the dissemination process, freeing *Ufo Robo Grendizer* of some of the original Japanese references in order to appeal to a larger audience not necessarily (and unlikely) familiarised with them — thus allowing for a deeper empathic connection with the viewers, despite their different backgrounds and personal situations. The author's in-depth review addresses some issues sometimes overlooked in this kind of analysis, including the importance of the dubbers and the challenges faced by the production team in Lebanon. However, one of the most interesting aspects of this article lies in offering a perspective on a market that has been largely overlooked and unknown in the dominant discourse by European and American scholars. While most seminal works on anime outside Japan focus on the largest anime markets, it would also be wise to acknowledge the tremendous social impact many anime series have had on other markets — like the Arabic-speaking world, or South-East Asia and Latin-American countries — over the last decades.

The second article (pp. 39-65) takes as a starting point the reports published in two US newspapers in the late 19th century (*The San Francisco Chronicle* and *The Chicago Tribune*): Aurore Yamagata-Montoya covers the two-months journey, from San Francisco to Washington, of five Japanese girls, sent to the US as part of the Iwakura Mission (1871), focussing on the representation by American media. The girls were meant to be educated in the US system so that Japan could be perceived as a civilised country on par with the western nations. Yamagata-Montoya's article relies on textual analysis of dozens of columns published in both journals (paying special attention to the choice of words as well as the consistency of the referred pieces of information) and visual analysis of the very few existing photographs, confronting the aestheticised and romanticised notion of Japan by Americans with the actual facts. This thorough analysis of the media sources covering the role of the five girls is part of a larger undergoing research project by Yamagata-Montoya, focussed on Japanese women in US newspapers during the first years of the Meiji period. The article, most importantly, traces similarities with the idealised image of Japanese women today, which — in many regards — reinforces the same clichés.

Finally, the article by Ziwei Shuai addresses the Lolita fashion phenomenon from a variety of cultural approaches (pp. 67-88). Shuai begins with a comprehensive guide to Lolita fashion, paying attention to its history — born in Japan during the 1980s — and cultural background, its development within the Japanese popular scenario, and its main traits as a movement. The core issue addressed is the role played by Lolita fashion in challenging many of the preconceived notions of Japan's culture. Nonetheless, Shuai suggests how the performative self-reaffirmation behind Lolita fashion can be understood as an act of defiance (and individualism) against Japan's collectivist culture. However, the article also explores the contradictions of such self-reaffirmation within the international scenario and — most importantly — a globalised marketplace.

We began this Editorial by addressing why this issue is a peculiar one, calling attention to three different reasons: the dreadful 2020 and the overwhelming challenges it has posed for everyone on a technical, professional, emotional and psychological level; the upcoming change of periodicity in the journal, being this the last six-monthly issue; and the impossibility of holding the *Mutual Images* summer school in 2020. However, this issue is also peculiar since it is the second instalment (issues 8 and 9) in which José Andrés Santiago acts as co-editor, following the collaboration between *Mutual Images* and the *dx5-digital & graphic art research* group at Universidade de Vigo, which hosted the 7th *Mutual Images International Workshop* in 2019 and supported the autumn symposium held at the University of Padua in 2020. A partnership which will hopefully lead to exciting new projects in the future.

Please enjoy this 9th issue of *Mutual Images* and let us say farewell to 2020.