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VISUALITY AND FICTIONALITY OF JAPAN AND EUROPE IN CROSS-CULTURAL FRAMEWORK

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Mutual Images

A Transcultural Research Journal

FOUNDED BY

AURORE YAMAGATA-MONTOYA, MAXIME DANESIN & MARCO PELLITTERI

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VISUALITY AND FICTIONALITY OF JAPAN AND EUROPE IN CROSS-CULTURAL FRAMEWORK

EDITED BY

MARCO PELLITTERI & MATTEO FABBRETTI

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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

Marco PELLITTERI & Matteo FABBRETTI | Kōbe University, Japan; School of Modern Languages, Cardiff University, UK

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Dear readers, students, fellow scholars,

welcome to this third instalment of *Mutual Images*.

This is the output of our fourth yearly international workshop, which our research association organised and held at Aarhus University (Denmark) on 13 and 14 May, 2016.

The common ground of the articles that form this issue is expressed in two notions: *fictionality* and *visuality*, applied in this case to the ways Japan and Europe have been narrated in works of fiction and, either realistically or fictionally, represented by graphical/visual means in recent times. The essays hosted hereby explore these thematic areas keeping as their core framework and conceptual mindset a cross-cultural perspective, declining the two guiding concepts under multiple approaches.

As editors of this issue, what we appreciate the most in the way it presents itself to readers is that its articles (1) propose compelling topics, (2) generously delve into theory, (3) provide well researched reviews of the literature, and finally (4) deploy and recount a number of practical examples, thus avoiding the trick of being well informed on something without diving into concrete cases. In this picture are included the two book reviews in the final section, by Judit E. Magyar and Jamie Tokuno: the choice of the analysed works is perfectly suited to the notions of fictionality and visuality we identified as the issue's *fil rouge*.

What is, in a few words, *fictionality*?

We can briefly define it as a "quality" or a "property" of fiction as opposed to non-fiction, intending the latter as consisting of factual accounts. One of the ideas behind the Aahrus workshop and, overall, one of the notions supporting this issue, was that a great deal of images that are received and consumed in Europe about Japan are based on fictional narratives rather than factual accounts: novels, video games, *manga*,

animation are all literary genres or entertainment forms (or both, depending on the perspectives one wants to adopt) in which there is no guarantee that what we read/watch is grounded in reality; this includes—and this is our primary interest here—all those instances in which Japan, or the Japanese people, or specific aspects of Japan's culture and populace are represented. On the contrary, situations, images, and narratives that may even be based on factuality can, and often are as a matter of fact, be totally invented, imaginary. Therefore, what we encounter in these narratives, in their being fictional, is to be framed as fantastic or fantasized representations. Factors such as otherness, exoticism, and Orientalistic attitudes are frequent elements of such fictional interpretations of "Japan" or "Japanese things".

To this end the first article, by Fabio Domenico Palumbo, looks at the rhetorical devices used in a selected group of recent Italian literary works that show three different representations or "narrative uses" of Japan: *Il re dei Giapponesi* ('The king of the Japanese,' 1949), an unfinished novel by Pier Paolo Pasolini; *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979), *Palomar* (1983), and *Collection of Sand* (1984), all novels by Italo Calvino; and *Silk* (1996), a short novel by Alessandro Baricco.

The second umbrella-notion of this issue, *visuality*, is, compared to fictionality, a very different "device" of representation. While fictionality, *ipso facto*, refers to the either written or oral or visual representations of fictional persons, places, and events, visuality can instead refer either to images recorded from reality or to pictures invented, drawn, painted, or in one way or another "fabricated" — let us think of digitally retouched photographs. Images of many kinds and natures are gates through which one can form ideas on places, facts, and concepts that have happened in reality; or means of entertainment if those images, if that visuality, refer to fiction(ality).

It is therefore very problematic, in some instances, to establish whether a visual contribution, a graphical narrative that declares to be showing facts, is actually plausible and reliable. Which is precisely the case study presented in the article of Oda Tomoko on the use of the manga expression form as a means of political communication by Kobayashi Yoshinori, a famous author and pundit manga creator who in his political manga pamphlet *Sensōron* (1998) carries out a provokingly revisionist discourse on the Japanese military's involvement in the Nanjing Massacre, which occurred between December 1937 and February 1938. *Sensōron*, theoretically, is a non-fiction manga, a verbo-visual discussion on a historical topic; however, as the article argues, the

rhetorical devices and the selection of information and sources used by Kobayashi as well as the display of images that are not historically grounded make his manga a "suspicious" work, an incisive example of how images can be ambiguous.

Fictionality and visuality intersect in Manuel Hernández-Pérez's article about the way Spain is depicted in selected examples of Japanese animated works, or *anime*. His argumentations very effectively spell out the subtle ways by which fantasy and facts can be mixed in order to create narratives that, while mainly framed and appreciated as fictional, give the reader/watcher a strong feeling of plausibility and internal consistency. In the article, for example, we shall find a description of how the artistic crew of an animated series depicted a real Spanish town to tell fictional stories, deploying various tropes associated with Spanish culture, such as bullfighting. Again, we see here the use of fictional/rhetorical devices, this time deployed not by European creators to depict Japan, but the other way around.

The ways fictionality and visuality work as filters through which reality can be framed are also at the centre of Azuma Hiroki's thought in his own analysis of the otaku's consumption of visual narratives. Dylan Hallingstad O'Brien therefore proposes an analysis of Azuma's ideas, namely those expressed in his 2001 book *Dōbutsuka suru posutomōdan*, and those that have followed it in more recent years, putting an emphasis on the notion of hypervisuality.

The categories of Azuma Hiroki's work are also deployed in the last article of the issue, by Luca Paolo Bruno, which focuses on visual novels in form of PC games. Bruno proposes an explanation of the devices behind the construction of characters. The article can be somehow framed as complementary to the first essay of the issue, closing an ideal circle because it deals with *visual* novels that are completely *fictional* and created by Japanese artists, whereas Palumbo's article deals with non-visual novels in which the depiction of Japan, by non-Japanese authors, however fictional has a solid grasp in documented reality. Moreover, one of the themes of Bruno's article is the otaku's interest in the small non-narratives and in the little details described by Azuma as "database consumption" as opposed to the classic approach to narration, which has its core in a teleological conception of narrative in which the details only serve a larger picture, a meaningful story, and are unworthy per se. It is fascinating, in this context, to see where and how perceptions of fictionality (and, up to a point, of reality) do change among consumers whose consumption style is so new and different.

Before inviting readers to dive into this issue, we would like to make them aware of some useful information related to *Mutual Images*, both the journal and the association.

1. Next issue will appear in Spring 2018 and will include papers from the international workshop that was held at Nagoya University on 22-23 April, 2017.
2. The issue after that will be published in Autumn 2018 and will collect papers from the international workshop — imminently upcoming while we write these lines — at Aoyama Gakuin University (Tōkyō), 25 November, 2017.
3. One of the guiding intellectual criteria of *Mutual Images* is scholarly inclusiveness: whilst the journal is a strictly peer-reviewed publication, we consider it a place where young as well as senior scholars can experiment with new ideas and approaches, with some more intellectual freedom than that usually permitted in more institutional journals. Therefore, we invite readers to spread the word and forward information about *Mutual Images* to their undergraduate and graduate students, post-doc researchers, and colleagues at more advanced stages of their careers.

Enjoy *Mutual Images*, 3.

Marco PELLITTERI, *Main Editor*

Matteo FABBRETTI, *Member of the Editorial Board*