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Imaginary Nostalgia: The Poetics and Pragmatics of Escapism in Late Modernity as Represented by Satsuki & Mei's House on the EXPO 2005 Site

Abstract

The inclusion of a life-sized replica of the family house from the anime work My Neighbor Totoro (Studio Ghibli/Miyazaki Hayao, 1988) among the international pavilions on the EXPO 2005 site resulted in the creation of an absolute highlight-sightseeing attraction, running fully-booked months in advance during the EXPO; after the EXPO, the whole site eventually becoming a huge sanctuary for the preservation of nature with Mei & Satsuki's House as a pilgrimage space in the center. Based on extensive fieldwork – over several years of interviews and participatory observation – as well as in-depth literature research, this presentation's goal is to point out the intricate relation between nature, escapism and happiness as main parameters in the process of reconstructing the past. The past will be viewed here as a repository of emotional energy and socio-cultural role-models, beyond political and economic compulsions, transgressing the limits of time and space.

Introduction

Since its foundation in 1985, Studio Ghibli has become the epitome of a successful enterprise, dealing with the production of cultural assets "made in Japan" and globally merchandising animation works, both aesthetically reflecting upon reality and ideologically tackling current issues such as: environmental pollution, social discrimination, coming of age, historical responsibility, the meaning and value of life and love as a complex emotional paradigm. The Studio Ghibli was founded by Takahata Isao (b. 1935) and Miyazaki Hayao (b. 1942), so-called "war's children" who had created the New Japan.[1] Both of them had already

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[1] Helen McCarthy and Hayao Miyazaki, *Master of Japanese Animation*, Berkeley: Stone Bridge, 1999, p. 46.

gathered experience in the field of animation, which they then successfully employed creating their own animation studio, where they released animated works greatly impacting the audience – and with huge gains at the box-office. Taking into consideration the stress-ratio between aesthetic visions and consumerist compromises, during the last three decades Studio Ghibli developed into a symbol of cultural power, being regarded by specialists and fans alike as a living legend in times of upheaval and distraught:

> "I think Studio Ghibli is [like] the Kremlin. The real one is long gone, but [its fake successor] is still sitting in the middle of the fields in Higashi Koganei. But in a sense, there is a reason for its existence [and] meaning, I think it plays a certain role [simply] by existing. Just like those steel-like athletes could not be produced other than in the communist countries, a certain kind of people cannot be produced [but] by the principals of the market economy".[2]

Based on extensive fieldwork – over several years of interviews and participatory observation – as well as in-depth literary research, and taking into account Studio Ghibli's aesthetic-ideological position within Japan's Soft Power macro-endeavors, the goal of this paper is to underline some of the studio's creative strategies. These strategies can be seen, for example, in the emotional ambivalence, dynamic reconsideration of history and artistic highlighting of spiral-like dialectics of cause and effect realized in the Japanese project of the life-sized replica of the family house from *My Neighbor Totoro* (*Tonari no totoro*, released in 1988, directed by Miyazaki Hayao) on the EXPO 2005 site, among other international and corporate pavilions. After an initial explanation elucidating the history of the relationship between these two artifacts – the anime movie's family house and the EXPO 2005's landmark – in the second part of my paper I will point out the intricate relation between nature, escapism and nostalgia as reflected by them respectively through the circumstances of their emergence and media impact. Thus, these three main elements – nature, escapism and nostalgia – appear as main parameters in the process of reconstructing the past as a repository of emotional energy and socio-cultural

[2] Brian Ruh, *Stray Dog of Anime: The Films of Mamoru Oshii*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 17.

role-models, beyond economic-political compulsions, and transgressing limits of time and space. Following this train of thought, it becomes obvious that the "imaginary" and the dynamics of its interaction with the "symbolical" and the "real" plays a fundamental role in the creative re-evaluation of identity as an individual choice within the socio-cultural integration framework of late-modern Japan.[3] Socio-cultural integration is consequently conceptualized as a historic and geographical construction by which the revitalization of the past happens via cultural artifacts praising nature, human bonding and the afterworld. This in turn creates social cohesion and mutual acceptance among individuals living in late modernity.

As shown further below, the agency of subjects and objects replaces reality within the complex interplay of thoughts and emotions. During this interplay, animation works create a space which allows the credible comeback of mythology during the tumultuous 20th century. This appears as a contradiction to the general tendency of the West, where the description of any phenomenon as "mythology" or "mythical" means to categorize it as "unreal" or "outdated" – an echo of Enlightenment and secularisation. However, in the wake of the new millennium and its unexpected challenges, the necessity to accept mythology and learn from its lessons, while additionally regarding mythological truths as guidelines and without discarding them as fantastic artifacts, becomes obvious. This might be a reason why mythology appears in anime works as a powerful alternative to contemporary chaos of thoughts and ideologically constructed reality.[4] Through selectivity and adjustment to ever-changing requirements of the market – anime plots and characters are highly stylized interpretations of the human world and body, and that their ethnic belonging is a question of perspective rather than of factual delimitation – anime as a genre and technique became a symbol of the "new mythology", in which social actors accept self-sacrifice and honesty as a means to save the world. Rather than action movies, anime works possess the ability to fuse technology and art, deeply grasping the main problem of current times through: speedy changes of narrative tempo, permanently metamorphosing symbols and through highlighting

[3] Julia Kristeva, *La révolution du langage poétique*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974, pp. 28–54.

[4] Jennifer Ellen Roberston, '"Internationalisierung" als Nostalgie im heutigen Japan' in *Überwindung der Moderne? Japan am Ende des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1996, p. 179.

breaks as a basic display technique. As a result, the slippery structure of identity appears as a symptom and a metaphor for a world obsessed with upheavals and spectacular events as well as with flowing information, in a continuously evolving society.[5] This translation from ethics to aesthetics, from imagination to ideology, from message to medium facilitates the development of the Protean shape of the anime, best summed-up in three representational modi: apocalypse (the vision of the beginning and the end of the world), ritual (change and upheaval, death and renewal) and nostalgia (pain, loss and absence).[6]

Within these three representational modi, nostalgia is the one modus mainly employed in the re-creation of childhood space in *My Neighbor Totoro* and subsequently, mainly transported within the re-construction of Satsuki and Mei's House on the EXPO 2005 site. Originating in the Greek word *nostos* (meaning "to return home") and *algos* (meaning "painful circumstance"), in this era of liquid individualities, nostalgia refers to the dolorous longing for a prototypical home. This "home" is conceptualized, more often than not, as an invention of the self: "Can I be nostalgic for the Ganges, a place I have never been, or for the Crusades, a time when I have never lived"?[7] Thus, nostalgia means a sort of "love" to and "longing" for the origins. Starting with the plain nostalgia for a time when all things were better, more beautiful, healthier, happier, more civilized, more exciting, through reflexive nostalgia as complex sentimentalization of departed times, up until the interpretation of nostalgia as the analytical revival of the past; nostalgia leads to identity formation and consolidation.[8] Nostalgia is part of an infinite process of identity construction, preservation and implementation in the dialectical quest for continuity in the midst of discontinuous environments: "[Asian] villages living for generations in one place would be baffled by nostalgia. It is an affliction of traveling

[5] Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture II: The Power of Identity*, Oxford and Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1997, p. 268.
[6] Susan J. Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle*, New York: Palgrave, 2005, pp. 23–38.
[7] Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday – A Sociology of Nostalgia*, London and New York: Macmillan Press, 1979, p. 8.
[8] Marylin Ivy, *Discourses of Vanishing – Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 27; Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Re-Inventing Japan: Time, Space, Nation*, Armonk, New York and London: M. E. Sharpe, 1998, p. 131; Jennifer Ellen Robertson, *Native and Newcomer – Making and Remaking a Japanese City*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991, p. 17.

races who don't like where they have arrived and have no taste for the next destination".[9]

The nostalgic wave during the 1970s and 1980s in Japan took the re-invented world of pre-modernity as a reference point, while in the West, the same phenomenon referred to the early modern times: [10] the agricultural communities in which full-time farmers pursued their work in pastoral bliss appeared as necessary ideological reserves for metropolitan Japan. The celebration of the imaginary *furusato* (homeland) created a blatant contrast to the practical *nôson* (farming village), in direct subsequence to the 1966 "my car era" that began in Japanese media:

Mass nostalgia reactions are most likely to occur in the wake of periods of severe cultural discontinuity, as happened following the profound upheavals of the 1960s. Nostalgia is also a conserving influence: it juxtaposes the uncertainties and anxieties of the present with presumed verities and comforts of the lived past, although it would be incorrect to assume that because it does so it always arrests or inhibits present purpose and action[11].

The current usage of *furusato* means "homeland" or "hometown" referring to a familiar place where one was born and raised. The word can be written both in hiragana and in kanji characters, whereas in the second case, it can be read either *furusato* (Japanese reading) or *kokyô* (Chinese reading), with the peculiarity that the latter is more formal and more literary and the former rather colloquial.[12] *Furusato* is one of the most popular tropes and symbols employed by Japanese politicians, urban planners and mass media advisors. The ubiquity of *furusato* derives from a multiple context which highlights feelings of belonging and security. The juxtaposition of modernity's layers – mostly conceived and perceived as alienation and nostalgia – exists together with inter-generational differences, class interferences and dialect transgressions beyond regional borders. Thus, the intrinsic clashes between concurrent layers of modernity and their production modi

[9] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*…, p. 50.
[10] Donald Richie, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film – A Concise History with a Selective Guide to Videos and DVDs*, Tokyo, New York and London: Kodansha International, 2001, p. 15.
[11] Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*…, p. 140.
[12] Ivy, *Discourses of Vanishing*..., p. 103–108; Robertson, *Native and Newcomer*…, pp. 7–14.

grants the individual necessary energy to detach him or herself from the limitations of national culture through the past – and to surpass them.[13] The changing views of urban and rural lifestyles led initially to the re-writing of the *furusato* concept as a nostalgic vision of a disappearing past and of an unattainable future.

A further important element in the creation of the rural universe of childish bliss in *My Neighbor Totoro* was the emergence and dispersion of the cuteness aesthetics. By this, I mean the idealization of childhood corresponding to the neo-romantic tradition of a pure space of human existence, in which grown-ups may behave like children (so-called *burikko* or "fake children"). Thus, the *kawaii* ideology represents a collateral form of "Western" import to postwar-Japan.[14] In the West, early critique of the spiritual poverty of modern humans and of the modern society, developed through industrialization and urbanisation, which led to the romantic re-evaluation of pre-industrial society a reflex-generated movement. This might as well have glorified the "noble savage" living in "uncivilized worlds", that is rural communities, which seemed to have remained in a kind of "civilisational childhood". These were taken as examples against the corrupt and alienated powers of modern social forms and regarded as sources of simplicity and innocence – completely ignored were the miserable and harsh reality of those very rural communities.[15] Walt Disney's cartoons and Charlie Chaplin's movies created an aesthetic foundation for this urban nostalgia of a healthy village life – in this concern, it is important to note that Disney was highly popular in Japan, both before (until it was censored) and especially after WWII. In the same way that Disney's cuteness cult alludes to a sentimental trip into the idealized – even more so: atemporal – past populated with happy animals and village characters from fairy tales, the Japanese cuteness cult, according to statements made by Japanese informants, correspondes to a sentimental trip into the idealized – similarly atemporal – childhood.[16] Disney romanticized

[13] Roberston, '"Internationalisierung" als Nostalgie im heutigen Japan…', pp. 180–185.
[14] Yoshiko Shimada, 'Afterword – Japanese Pop Culture and the Eradication of History' in *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art*, London: Reaktion, pp. 186–191.
[15] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991, p. 27; Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, Oxford and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 128.
[16] Anne Allison, 'Cuteness as Japan's Millennial Product' in *Pikachu's Global Adventure – The Rise and Fall of Pokémon*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004, p. 34–49; Nicholas Bornoff, 'Sex and Consumerism – The Japanese State of the Arts' in

nature in comparison to culture and industrialized society. In opposition, the Japanese cuteness ideal romanticized childhood in its relation to adulthood, displayed as a dirty world of power, solitude, without any traces of value or satisfaction.

From poetical art to pragmatic enterprise. Playful identities: Satsuki & Mei's House as an object of fantasy and desire

The anime movie *My Neighbor Totoro* was released in 1988 by Studio Ghibli under Miyazaki Hayao's direction. Basically, the plot deals with the incipient stages of the relocation from city to rural area of a small family of four: a sickly mother, working father, Kusakabe Tatsuo, who is an university professor of archeology and two daughters, Satsuki- eight years old, and Mei- four years old. They move to the countryside in order to be closer to the hospital in which the children's mother is recovering from tuberculosis. The action takes place in Japan at the turn of the 1960s, and the house the family moves into, is anostalgic combination of a run-down old mansion and a comfortable a cottage, both in Japanese traditional style. Right from the beginning, this house plays a fundamental role in the gradual integration of the new arrivals within the simultaneously familiar and fantastic environment of rural life, composed both of friendly, helpful neighbors and of magical, kind creatures.

The release of *My Neighbor Totoro* marked the explosion of the so-called "Totoro-craze" in Japan. This "Totoro-craze" was visible in such socio-cultural phenomena as the enthusiastic re-consideration of nature and its – real or fictional – inhabitants, re-visitation of "heritage trees" (protectors and providers), the seeking of the simplicity of life within nature as an escape from an over-sophisticated urban environment, the respect for frugal, rural life and the discovery of happiness and the re-authentication of myths, legends and folkloric beliefs.

Aproximately 17 years later, in 2005 at the world exhibition in Aichi – in short: Aichi EXPO 2005 – an identical, life-sized replica of the family house from the anime movie *My Neighbor Totoro* was included among the international and corporate pavilions. More than previously

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Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art, London: Reaktion, 2002, p. 41–68; Sharon Kinsella, 'Cuties in Japan' in *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1995, p. 220–254.

estimated, this inclusion resulted in the creation of an absolute highlight sightseeing attraction, running fully-booked months in advance and during the EXPO 2005. After the EXPO 2005, the whole site eventually became a huge sanctuary for the preservation of nature with Satsuki & Mei's House as a pilgrimage destination in the center. Ironically, housing projects and emerging shopping-malls increasingly suffocated and gradually eliminated the natural habitat around the memorial EXPO 2005 park, in blatant contrast to the EXPO's motto – "Nature's Wisdom" – and EXPO's mission, which gathered national and corporate pavilions expressing themes of ecological co-existence, harmony, renewable technology and nature's wonders. Still, Satsuki & Mei's House, as the life-sized replica from *My Neighbor Totoro* was named, continues to attract tourists and locals in tens of thousands every year, so that holidays and weekends are always fully booked weeks in advance, while working days run in average up to 97% capacity.

Satsuki & Mei's House on the EXPO 2005 site was initiated, designed and created by Miyazaki Gorô (b. 1967), a professional landscape architect and, most notably, the eldest son of the anime director Miyazaki Hayao. Before pursuing the Satsuki & Mei's House re-creation of the life-sized home replica from his father's anime *My Neighbor Totoro* on the EXPO 2005 site, Miyazaki Gorô was involved in the architectural design of the Ghibli Museum (Mitaka Forest Ghibli Museum).[17] The Ghibli Museum, which belongs to Studio Ghibli and is located in the Inokashira Park in Tokyo, was opened in October 2001, after several years of projects and preparations, with Miyazaki Gorô serving as director from 2001 to 2005.[18]

Satsuki & Mei's House belongs to the same project meant to expand the Ghibli enterprise in public perception, as it is a Ghibli Museum in itself as well, composed of three main exhibition areas besides a homey

[17] Gorô Miyazaki, *Mitaka no mori Jiburi Bijutsukan zuroku* [The Image Book of Ghibli Museum in Mitaka Forest], Tokyo: Tokuma Foundation for Anime Culture, 2004, pp. 25–44.

[18] Parallel to his activity as an architect and landscaper, Miyazaki Gorô directed two anime movies, *Tales from Earthsea* (2006) and *From Up On Poppy-Hill* (2011), both released by Studio Ghibli. He additionally directed the TV anime series *Ronya, the Robber's Daughter* [*Sanzoku no musume Rônya* (26 episodes), based on the eponymous children's fantasy book by reputed Swedish author, Astrid Lindgren, first published in 1981, co-produced by Polygon Pictures and Studio Ghibli], aired from October 11, 2014 until March 28, 2015 on NHK BS Premium.

cinema and "The Principal" main hall. The Ghibli Museum recreates the atmosphere and settings of the Ghibli anime works in the smallest details, and it transfers their magical worlds into reality. The Museum also aims at familiarizing visitors with the real life of the animators' universe, consisting of long and strenuous work hours. From this perspective, Satsuki & Mei's House is rather a poetical emergence into the nostalgic world of childhood, as opposed to the quite technical and distanced space of the Ghibli Museum. Still, it is an extension of the Ghibli Museum with its cat-bus displayed in one of the secondary rooms – kids being allowed to play with/in it – and with its giant robot built on the roof of the Ghibli Museum, plucked directly from the steampunk universe of *Laputa: The Castle in The Sky*.

Poetic ideologies: escapism as socio-cultural adventure

While envisioning and designing the life- sized version of the family house from *My Neighbor Totoro* as Satsuki & Mei's House on the EXPO 2005 site, Miyazaki Gorô repeatedly underlined the fact that he was not only trying to reproduce an animation-released product into reality, but also trying to recreate a life-feeling, an existential mood of the late 1950s and early 1960s. These are the so-called "Showa thirties", which are the epitome of nostalgia in present-day Japan with its all-encompassing, alienating strive for efficiency and progress in late modernity. There are several reasons why exactly this period of time – mid-1950s until mid-1960s – represents a nostalgic climax. Firstly, it begins a couple of years after the end of the American occupation (effective as of April 28, 1952); secondly, it ends before the so-called "golden decade" starting, from mid-1960s until mid-1970s, which marked the international acknowledgment of Japan as an economic superpower. Such events as the Tokyo Olympics (1964), Osaka EXPO/Osaka International Exhibition (1970) and the world premiere of *The Rose of Versailles* (1974, staged by the Takarazuka Revue Company) accompanied and highlighted this ascension, while negative occurrences such as the "Minamoto disease" (in Kumamoto prefecture, official recognized on September 26, 1968) and the first "oil crisis" (October 1973, provoked by the OAPEC countries) played in the

background as negative effects of worldwide economic development and its impact on political and social structures.[19]

After the completion of Satsuki & Mei's House on the EXPO 2005 site, Miyazaki Gorô stated:

When I sit in the twilight-bliss in the living-room of the freshly finished "Satsuki & Mei's House", there is both the feeling of [directly] immerging into /immersing oneself in the movie, and the hallucination of being (again) in the house of my grand-parents, which has been demolished. Within the mysterious mood incorporating both nostalgia and freshness, I fantasize that, who knows, maybe the "pitch-black assistants" [*makkuro-kurosuke*] are observing me from the darkness.[20]

What Miyazaki Gorô strove to create, was an escape space by means of nostalgic reproduction as a main catalyst within nature. Thus, Satsuki & Mei's House is not only a real, life-sized copy of the movie artifact, but a space for encounters and initiation journeys, as experienced by Satsuki and Mei in the anime movie as well. It is a gate between universes, not only the human and the animal or verdant world, but also between reality and dream, the possible and the probable, necessity and desire. The broken bucket and the archaic water well become tools enabling the rediscovery of one's childhood – more often than not experienced as merely the product of a merchandized interaction between what Julia Kristeva has called, "the imaginary chaos and the symbolical order preparing the self for the confrontation with the real".[21] Thus, until the visitor reaches Satsuki & Mei's House, they are guided through an artificially created labyrinth of increasingly intimate landscapes reproducing the primordial encounter between an innocent child and wild nature. These landscapes include Japanese and Alpine

[19] Joy Hendry, *The Orient Strikes Back – A Global View of Cultural Display*, Oxford and New York: Berg Press, 2000, p. 28.

[20] 夕暮れ時、完成した「サツキとメイの家」の茶の間に座っていると、映画の中にいるようでもあり、今はなくなってしまった祖父母の家にいるようにも錯覚します。懐かしさと新鮮さが同居する不思議な気分で、もしかするとマックロクロスケ（真っ黒黒助）が暗がりからこちらを見ているのではないかと空想してみたりするのです"– Gorô Miyazaki, *Satsuki to Mei no ie no tsukurikata* [The Construction Method of Satsuki & Mei's House], Tokyo: Studio Ghibli/Tokuma Press, 2012, p. 4.

[21] Kristeva, *La révolution*..., pp. 44–57 and 73–79.

scenery, leading towards a generous pond, which reflects the house in the distance.[22]

Inside the house, a familiar atmosphere is created by the impression that its inhabitants have just left and are about to return. Naturally the shelves are filled with clothes in accordance with the season, there is an assortment of food available in the kitchen and the towels in the bathroom might as well have been used during the common evening family-bath ritual (as visualized in the anime movie, which led in an initial phase to heated debates in the West as to age restriction). As spotted from mostly middle-aged visitors' conversations, entering Satsuki & Mei's House is equal to a physical return to their own childhood, with metal lunch-boxes and cotton-underwear, often accompanied by tearful remembrances of one's own school-days and teenage habits. Conversely, younger visitors, aged 25 to 35, proceed with exploring the places where totoros might hide and with playing detective in finding out the degree to which the building on the EXPO 2005 site replicates its animated original. Teenage visitors often sit around bored or play on portable video-games, unable to follow their parents' enthusiasm focused on what a high-school boy called "a bunch of old, smelly clothes" (though the clothes in the 1950s-fashion aligning in the shelves are not smelly!). Smaller children simply prefer to imitate the characters featured in the movie – and thus to reproduce their imaginary universe, while copiously entertaining their parents (mostly in their 30s). Satsuki & Mei's House thus turns into a space of recollection and self-discovery in the midst of a collective consciousness seldom expressed so clearly and spontaneously.

Modernization and urbanization (1950s, 1960s, 1970s)		**Idealization of the countryside (1970s, 1980s, 1990s)**	
Towards homogeneity of culture: urbanization, modernization		Rediscovery of cultural and regional differences: idealization of the countryside	
Urban	**Rural**	**Rural**	**Urban**

[22] A bus ride is possible as well, as most of the visitors would prefer, but for those choosing to take the less known path from the former West-Entrance, the initiation trip towards Satsuki & Mei's House is worth the 20-to-25-minutes-walk.

Developed	Backward	Nature	Culture
Prosperity	Poverty	Heart *kokoro*	Materialism
Sophisticated	Rustic	*Furusato*	City, unfamiliar
The succeeded	The failed	Human living	Crowded, polluted
Science	Superstition	Sacred	Secular
Rationality	Irrationality	Communal spirit	Individualism, capitalism
Civilization	Ignorance	Authenticity	Alien
Modernity	Tradition	Tradition	Modernity
Westernness	Japaneseness	Japaneseness	Westernness

(Author's creation based on Moon)[23]

From this perspective, Satsuki & Mei's House is a predecessor of the society of the future which holds the essence of *furusato* as a valid answer to such questions as "What is homeland? A place? Relationship? Possession? Emotion?". However, there are no universal answers related to *furusato* as represented by Satsuki & Mei's House: e.g., a real home, neighborhood or childhood's memories. The evocation of *furusato* in case of Satsuki & Mei's House appears as *furusato-zukuri* (the creation of homeland, the construction of homeland) in an ongoing political project to create common memories as means of social reproduction, while the longing for the past and the dissatisfaction with the present are used to create an imagined-remembered community of abundance and emotional warmth in/for the future.[24] As displayed by Satsuki & Mei's House, the *furusato-zukuri* is supposed to integrate current activities and interpretations of past conditions within the construction process of an authentic preview of the future. Provided that human spirituality is

[23] Okpyo Moon, 'The countryside reinvented for urban tourists – Rural transformation in the Japanese mura-okoshi movement' in *Japan at Play: The Ludic and the Logic of Power*, Joy Hendry and Massimo Raveri (eds.), London and New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 231f.; Morris-Suzuki, *Re-Inventing Japan*…, p. 241.

[24] Roberston, '"Internationalisierung" als Nostalgie im heutigen Japan', p. 186.

a combination of geniality and naivety; of utopian daydreaming and prodigious spontaneity, which are limited, unified and sterilized in the process of growing-up, Satsuki & Mei's House emerges as an oasis of calmness and security, full of nostalgias and mysteries. It enables the adult spirit to momentarily escape the contradictions, disenchantments and insecurities of the current disturbed world and to immerse itself in a universe of friendly, warm, sincere emotional exchanges and bonding.

Pragmatic aesthetics: the political and economic implications of escapism

During the production process of anime TV series such as *Heidi, the Girl of the Alps*, *Lupin the Third, 3.000 Miles in Search of Mother* or *Red-Haired Anne* (*Anne of Green Gables*), both Miyazaki and Takahata acknowledged the fact that their ideal to create high-quality animation works, reflecting human existence with its joys and losses within the limited framework of the television industry, both in terms of financial and temporal availability, would forever stay a mere dream[25]. The foundation of Studio Ghibli made their dream come true, so that they could regard every anime work as an entity in itself. Following the establishment of the studio, their task would ultimately be to keep the balance between commercial success and personal aesthetic values according to their motto: "Make a movie; if it was successful at the box-office, make the next movie; if it fails, that's the end".[26] The production of good anime works was the most important task, the extension of the production site was regarded as a byproduct. Indeed, by developing high-value anime works with a general-human message, financial success became a natural side-effect. In spite of the fact that both Miyazaki and Takahata repeatedly highlighted the idea that Japanese audiences were their main target, with a specifically Japanese message to bring over to that very Japanese audience – even though several of their anime works were inspired by non-Japanese sources – in time, anime works released by Studio Ghibli became international blockbusters.

However, it would be a cheap generalization to regard Studio Ghibli as a cultural paradise living on the production of cultural assets. The last

[25] Isao Takahata 'Erosu no hibana' ['An Explosion of Eros'] in *Departure Points 1979–1996*, Miyazaki Hayao (ed.), Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 1996, p. 578.
[26] Maria Grajdian, *Das japanische Anime: Versuch einer wissenschaftlichen Annäherung*, Sibiu: Lucian Blaga University Press, 2008, p. 82.

few works especially (since *Howl's Moving Castle*) illustrate the danger of high expectations and lurking artistic narcissism (combined with increasing tendencies of cultural nationalism). Rather, Studio Ghibli is a further manifestation of late-modern mythologies.[27] As an efficiently working duo in spite of fundamentally different personalities, Takahata and Miyazaki works revived passion, love and force in their anime, while obeying the consumers' wishes and expectations without giving up on their own ideals reminiscent of late 1960s ideology. As outposts of the so-called "new globalization of Japanese animation",[28] Studio Ghibli is still regarded as an antithesis to Disney. East-West dichotomy oversees is senseless however, because Japanese animation is by far not a monolithic entity as is Disney, but a dynamic conglomerate which stays unpredictable in its diversity and plurality – similarly to Japanese culture and society.

Thus, beyond being a cultural artifact released by means of the animated medium, Satsuki & Mei's House becomes a tool to create and transmit feelings of longing and, paradoxically, belonging. Social affiliation is transcended as emotional belonging, translated, in turn, into happiness as a chance to re-visit one's own childhood with the eyes and the experience of the mature mind. Nostalgia is an "invented emotion" which allows for the transfer of significance in historical terms, which leads, again, to socio-cultural sustainability as a result of conscious choices, on the basis of everyday events and accumulated life experience. As social actors, such as Pierre Bourdieu put it, it enables the growth into responsible, self-aware citizens. More than being a plain touristic highlight, Satsuki & Mei's House becomes a space where the childish imaginary/imagination confronts the mature symbolic and recreates the real as a site of responsible, self-aware happiness.

This draws on the informal appearance of the Studio Ghibli as a building and enterprise nurturing a co-existence with nature among equal humans from its *anpo*[29] ideology. Miyazaki re-created the

[27] Jan Condry, *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2013, p. 24; Patrick Drazen, *A Gathering of Spirits: Japan's Ghost Story Tradition: From Folklore and Kabuki to Anime and Manga*, Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011, p. 98.

[28] Shana Heinricy, 'Take a Ride on the Catbus' in *Wide Eyed Wonder: Anime & Philosophy*, Josef Steiff and Tristan D. Tamplin (eds.), Chicago and La Salle: Open Court Press, 2010, p. 8.

[29] The *anpo* movement was a student movement in Japan, comparable to the western 1968 movement, and opposing the renewal of the *Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security*

idealized memory of a serene world in which the classical principles of "competitive undertaking" were replaced by those of "peaceful togetherness" – principles taken from an archaic nature able to regenerate and live on eternally.

Continuing and expanding Studio Ghibli's ideology and aesthetics of a pacifist world respecting the value of human life, Satsuki & Mei's House proves that "imagined nostalgia" is a basic element in the comprehension process of its own popularity. More than the anime movie, Satsuki & Mei's House is in itself an active visualization of an imaginary past, which was never experienced as such and which leads to the real, practical configuration of the desired object through the gradual processing of emotions. On a more abstract level, it is the "maternal", semiotic subversion of the "paternal", symbolical order. This symbolical order conducts within a highly intertextual context of extremely stylized imageries to the ideal of an impossible femininity.[30] On the other hand, Satsuki & Mei's House appears as "nostalgia for the present" in its display and location, as there is an active attempt to construct childhood, nature and femininity as a cute adventure within a spatial and temporal framework where it could have never possibly existed. [31] As a consequence of this process, the past turns into a place of imagined communities and impossible identities: "The past is now not a land to return to in a simple politics of memory. It has become a synchronic warehouse of cultural scenarios".[32]

The ideologized representation of distance, painted in temporally and spatially nostalgic colors, leads to the emergence of grotesque representations of the self and of the other. Especially the cute feminine self emerges as a never-to-be-attained entity which nurtures the mechanism of nostalgia infinitely through its symbolical absence within

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between the United States and Japan 日本国とアメリカ合衆国との間の相互協力及び安全保障条約 *Nippon-koku to Amerika-gasshūkoku to no Aida no sôgo kyôryoku oyobi anzen hoshô jôyaku* (also known as *Anpo jôyaku* 安保条約 or just *Anpo* 安保), first signed in 1952 in San Francisco, then amended in 1960 in Washington and extended in 1970, in spite of the protests.

[30] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble – Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London and New York: Routledge, 1990, p. 88; Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter – On the Discursive LOimits of "Sex"*, London and New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 41; Kristeva, *La révolution*..., p. 476.

[31] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large – Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis and London: Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 77.

[32] Ibid. p. 30.

the male discourse. This mechanism is practically displayed through the euphoric contemplation of the future and through the emotional compilation of scenarios to access reality through the nostalgic endeavor.

The "imagined nostalgia" and the illusory remembrance are crystallized in this process as eternal sources of aesthetic longing. The ideal of *furusato*, as displayed by Satsuki & Mei's House and by its anime version, reminds us of the intellectual nostalgia present in Charles Baudelaires poem *Je n'ai pas oublié* from the cycle *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857-1868) and his consciously constructed ideal of the homeland. However, the *furusato-zukuri* (homeland construction) and the imagination of primordiality as represented by the "Totoro phenomenon", underlie a complex dialectics and re-semantization process:[33] a specific version of the self is created, composed both of an experienced past, of historicity, materiality and warm intimacy, and threatened, at the same time, by feelings of fear, virtual homelessness loss of orientation and loneliness.[34] Conversely, Satsuki & Mei's House represents romantic, idealized, "post-nostalgic" forms of love and belonging – and emerges as a powerful instrument in the redirection of quotidian nostalgias:

> [R]omantic fiction is surely popular because it […] restores the childhood world of sexual relations and suppresses criticisms of the inadequacy of men, the suffocation of the family, or the damage inflicted by patriarchal power. Yet it simultaneously manages to avoid the guilt and fear which might come from that childhood world. Sexuality is defined firmly as the father's responsibility, and fear of suffocation is overcome because women achieve a sort of power in romantic fiction. Romantic fiction promises a secure world, promises that there will be safety with dependence, that there will be power with subordination.[35]

It is a complex illusionary process based on visual representations within which contradictory feelings of imaginary nostalgia, of a never-

[33] Roberston, 'Internationalisierung als Nostalgie im heutigen Japan', p. 181.
[34] Ibid., p. 189.
[35] John Storey, *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture – Theories and Methods*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996, p. 47.

experienced past and of an impossible future are accumulated.[36] Various forms of sublimation and repression of an alienating present are generated, propagated and implemented within the playful concatenation of images and sounds, of real memories and virtual thoughts, of familiar ideals and distant ideologies.

Ultimately, Satsuki & Mei's House effuses that form of nostalgia, which originates in the identification with an apparently forgotten past- providing the feminine ideal as a spatial-temporal "forgotten self". Desires of virtual visualizations of this "forgotten self" are implemented within an intertextual, carneval-like framework.[37] Through the nostalgic display of gendered memories, social control and, on a more collective level, strategies of cultural imperialism, Satsuki & Mei's House re-creates a space of "national erotics" on the EXPO 2005 site, envisioning it as repeatedly individual nostalgias. This ideologically displayed "erotics of remembrance" produces human characters who, in turn, lead to new forms of control and categorization, of self-perception and self-representation.

Conclusion: dialectic subjects and the necessity of nostalgia

The great epic of cuteness, *My Neighbor Totoro*, reveals childhood and naivety as important initiation phases on the way to adulthood. The totoros, whose names are conjured up due to Mei's unclear pronunciation of the word for Northern "trolls", are a combination of an owl, cat and tanuki (Japanese raccoon-dog); from the latter, they also borrow their magical abilities. Generally speaking, their anatomy corresponds to the appearance of cute characters: they are asexual, round, mammalian, with big heads and huge eyes, which become even larger when they are surprised or scared. They are unable to speak, to run, to express themselves or to defend themselves, possessing round bellies and very small, thick arms and legs as well as minuscule mouths – which, however, in case of necessity, appear suddenly out of nowhere.[38] Later on, the totoros prove to be beings from a magical world, in which flying busses in the shape of cats (the popular "cat-bus"

[36] Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*…, p. 65–77; Andy Bennet, *Cultures of Popular Music*, Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2001, p. 153; Michel Focault: *L'archéologie du savoir*, Paris: Gallimard, 1969, p. 462.
[37] Ibid. pp. 77 and 111–117; Kristeva, *Le texte du roman*, Hague-Paris: Mouton, 1970, p. 156.
[38] Kinsella, 'Cuties in Japan…', p. 248.

or *neko-basu* in original in Japanese and famous as such) – invisible for grown-ups' eyes, but greatly helpful for children in need; in which giant trees can grow from seeds within one night; in which the fear of a small child that its mother might die, can melt the real and the fantastic world into one harmonious universe.[39] For Satsuki and Mei, whose mother lies ill in the hospital and whose father is absent during the day, the totoros are guides into the world of grown-ups, companions on the journey from children's uncertainty into the aware existence of being an individual personality. Thus, the totoros show the children a way around the classical image of necessity to repress oneself and to sacrifice oneself under the pressure of community or society, and lead them on the path to the discovery of unknown treasures and joys. The family house is, in the anime movie, a space of mythical encounters between nature and culture, between past and present; where the future is being molded, and humans can live in harmony with the universe. The quotidian life is enhanced by additional miracles, so that going to school, solving household chores, listening to one's tutors, are as normal as immersing into the dream and playing with a broken bucket. Cuteness becomes the pre-condition of a pure world which does not disappear when adulthood is attained, but which goes fully on into adulthood. Insecurity, clumsiness, confusion are as much parts of the emotional dimension of grown-ups as a healthy dose of self-confidence and a happy smile.[40] Consequently, *My Neighbor Totoro* is a hymn to that part of the self, which may not die within the process of growing-up, in the Japanese modern society as well as in the world at-large, but begs to be kept alive within the adult spirit. It longs for the ability to watch one's life with honesty, love, innocence, courage and confidence, simultaneously with the capacity to stay true to oneself and to others in a world continuously on the move.

A direct extension of its original animated version, Satsuki & Mei's House on the EXPO 2005 site, fills the emotional space between honest remembrance and imagined nostalgia. Thus, on one hand, Satsuki & Mei's House presents the childhood's "family house" as a space of socio-cultural encounters: fictional creatures living in the forest, neighbors in the village and the familiar landscape including the well

[39] Julien R. Fielding, *Discovering World Religions at 24 Frames per Second*, Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2008, pp. 18–19.
[40] Patrick Drazen, *Anime Explosion – The What? Why? and Wow! of Japanese Animation*, Berkeley: Stone Bridge, 2003, p. 184.

and the bucket are a healthy return to the safe world of *furusato*, mediated by water and grounded by ancestral trees. On the other hand, Satsuki & Mei's House re-creates the childhood's "family house" as a space of economic-political development, transmitting a sense of protection and security in times of upheaval and transformations. Finally, Satsuki & Mei's House reminds us of the necessity to construct the childhood's house as a center of self-discovery, of learning and education, where the imaginary is a tool leading to symbolic and real dimensions of adulthood. Thus, Satsuki & Mei's House re-writes post modernity as a unifying sign and paradoxical "pre-future" where the dissolved form and the nonsensical contents are not perceived as liberation, but as a version of *ennui* which both mystifies nostalgia and induces escapism as a generalized *mal de siècle*. While nostalgia and escapism are basic assets of "emotional precariousness" in times of confusion and distraught, they might as well be romantically painted ideologies: unreachable, impossible love turns into a life goal, because happiness and a fulfilled existence are boring within the dynamic framework of a consumption society.[41] Nostalgic remembrance – even when only imagined – moves the soul, not the vivid, fresh presence of love. The given simulation takes the upper-hand, and nostalgia is merely a phantasmic, periodic rehabilitation of all lost references.

As symbolically represented by Satsuki & Mei's House, escapism is a combination of nature, religion and the mythical world, leading altogether to the creation of an imaginary nostalgia for an imagined past. It is the reflex-like emotional movement of a world having been modernized too fast, which had jumped from a medieval pre-modernity directly into post-modernity, ignoring most phases of a healthy modernization (passed-through by most Western nations, nowadays categorized as "highly industrialized, postmodern societies"). Realism proves to be merely an emotional artifact. In the Japanese classical visual arts such as *emaki-mono* or *ukiyo-e*, which are continued by anime and manga, as well as in the classical stage arts such as Nô, Kabuki or Bunraku, realism refers to plot, characters and the handling of

[41] Maria Grajdian, 'The Precarious Self: Love, Melancholia and the Eradication of Adolescence in Makoto Shinkai's Anime Works' in *Imagining the Lost Generation: Representations of Precarity in Japanese Popular Culture*, Roman Rosenbaum and Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt (eds.), London and New York: Routledge, 2014, p. 122; Castells, *The Information Age*.., p. 284.

these parameters.[42] The realistic plot is enhanced by the dramatic processing; the quotidian reality and the prevalent worldliness are rescued by a new form of warm humanism. Thus, the representation of social limitations and the tragic conflict between obligations and emotions (*giri-ninjô*), between outside and inside (*soto-uchi*) transforms the historical, generally valid human model into a contemporary human drama. Additionally, it transforms historical characters into normal human beings, driven by feelings and passions. The plot moves away from the general, political, philosophical, historical field of classical art into the practical domain of the realistic display of everyday-life: the abandonment of an idealized correction of reality shifts towards the acceptance of reality as such – and towards its realistic representation.[43] The great characters of human types, abstractly represented as striving for transcendence, are highly individualized, being replaced by realistic characters. This is the process of artistically stylizing ideals of the real individual possessing an extremely conflictual personality with their increasingly symbolical function. The transcendent emotions are sublimed into human feelings, including hopelessness and lack of orientation, with seldom rays of joy and fulfillment of the dreams. New forms of (self-) perception are developed. The inner ambivalence – the tragic conflict between social obligations and personal feelings, between economic power and social contempt in premodern visual and theatrical entertainment genres – anticipates the post-Meiji subject and the modern highlighting of the uniqueness of every individual, caught in a complex network of diachronic and synchronic relationships.[44] Following this train of thought, the form-based structure of any modern entertainment genre in Japan, from *enka* until anime and TV shows, is reminiscent of the *kata*-oriented design of Japanese pre-modern arts and literature:

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[42] Isao Takahata, *Jûniseiki no animêshon: Kokuhô emakimono ni miru eigateki, animeteki naru mono* [Animation from the 12th Century: Movie and Anime-Like Things to Be Seen in the Picture Scrolls Categorized as National Treasures], Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten/Studio Ghibli, 1999, p. 37.

[43] Shimada, 'Afterword…' p. 189f.

[44] Hidetoshi Katô, 'Japanese Popular Culture Reconsidered' in *Handbook of Japanese Popular Culture*, Richard Gid Powers and Hidetoshi Katô (eds.), Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1989, pp. 309–310; Mark Schilling, *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Popular Culture*, New York and Tôkyô: Weatherhill, 1997, p. 78; Christine R. Yano, *Tears of Longing – Nostalgia and The Nation in Japanese Popular Song*, London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 35.

predictability as a nostalgic reaction to intense changes in the background of Japan's frantic industrialization since 1868.

The hybrid realities of today's Japan – multiple border transgressions and transnational exchange in the field of commerce, aesthetics, ideology and science/research – are assimilated within hegemonic discourses on cultural purity and homogeneousness as well as in nostalgic reference to premodernity. The most disturbing is the attempt to culturally re-configurate the fears of modernity through rationalizing technologies, individualizing practices and totalizing apparatuses. This reminds of Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, which is based on the argument of radical otherness that cannot be acknowledged until a constructive, not so much direct dialog as liberating clash, between different discourses occurs[45]. This discursive dialogism – a permanent interaction of meanings: the word, the discourse, the language or the culture, all subjected to a dialogical process as an alternative to the time of their relativization and liquefaction – is vividly included within the romantic communication attempts between visitors and the fantastic world represented by Satsuki & Mei's House along with its fictional inhabitants.

Furthermore, the identity dialectics in Satsuki & Mei's House prove that reproductive nostalgia and historical escapism cannot completely annihilate the coveted longings of those Japanese citizens touring the EXPO 2005 site, hoping to find an apparently lost past again.[46] This is, once more, a reminder of the fact that, though intensively pursued by Japanese politicians and strategists during the Meiji period, not only technologies and institutions of Western capitalism were imported, but also centuries of aesthetic theories, literary forms and social representation modi within a record timeframe. Thus, not only railway technology, but also Enlightenment ideology, not only financial capital, but also Renaissance worldview, not only Prussian militarism, but also British humor were taken over and adapted to the realities of mid-1800 Japan. Innumerable phenomena of intrusion and resistance, of seduction and assimilation occurred within the unbalanced power spectrum

[45] Kristeva, *Le texte*..., p. 23.

[46] Ivy, *Discourses of Vanishing*..., p. 69; Okpyo Moon, 'The countryside reinvented for urban tourists – Rural transformation in the Japanese mura-okoshi movement' in *Japan at Play: The Ludic and the Logic of Power*, Joy Hendry and Massimo Raveri (eds.), London and New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 231f; Morris-Suzuki, *Re-Inventing Japan*…, p. 28.

between Japan and the West.[47] Still, the really profound meaning of the era directly following the Meiji Restoration can be found in the construction of a modern nation-state with the simultaneous transgression of the dynamic worlds of representation and thought within the existing indigenous system. This, eventually, resulted in the veritably subversive activation of the semiotic constellation of pre-Meiji-Japan. From this perspective, Satsuki & Mei's House, raised on the EXPO 2005 site is not a modifying repetition of the family house in the anime movie *My Neighbor Totoro*. In its circular quotability, it does not utilize the argument of tradition until its very exhaustion as self-confirmation and self-validation. Instead, it appears as the postmodern reflection of the fact that power, freedom and justice, as principles, can help create a more human world – maybe "less" perfect, but warm and peaceful in its playful familiarity with childhood memories and emotions.

[47] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity – Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 1991, pp. 172–187.

5. Appendix – Author's pictures

1. General picture of Satsuki & Mei's House

2. Front picture of Satsuki & Mei's House

3. Side picture of Satsuki & Mei's House

4. The well and the bucket

5. Playing Mei by a Japanese girl