

Degrees of Kitsch:

Japanese and English Intercultural Understanding

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Summary

Central to this thesis is a theory of intercultural understanding in terms of kitsch. The area under investigation spans a wide range of fields, including narrative (paintings, theatre, novels and films), business management theory, and leisure (social dancing). I investigate the phenomenon of intercultural understanding as between Japan and England and as illuminated by anthropological theory (in particular the work of Clifford Geertz). Testing if my three means of inquiry - the imaginative, the productive and the leisurely - could be made to overlap, I research on the marketing of cultural products across various borders in England and Japan.

I identify the essentially “comic” process, as characterised by Kenneth Burke, as ‘the maximum of forensic complexity’ of intercultural understanding so much of which takes place under the signs of fragmentation and hoped-for reconciliation. While dealing with comic views of the Japanese and the British as ‘emotionally charged’ consumers, the thesis is also against categorising all cultural imitations as kitsch. This thesis tackles those initially distant aspects of Japan and England that the two countries have made near, assimilated into their culture. Viewing the Japanese and the British as actively engaged in an ongoing creative synthesis of the exotic with the familiar, the modern with the traditional, this thesis seeks for the lesson to be learned for achievement in cultural assimilation. This thesis explores some attempts to create the action which will embrace embodiment and emotional transposition. Naturally the thesis discusses hermeneutics, and describes the cultural principles underlying practice in order to identify factors influencing intercultural understanding.

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Introduction

All encounters with a strange culture are both cursed and blessed by kitsch. To fashion a mode of perception unencumbered by eternal truths and fixed representations is one of the most difficult tasks of intercultural understanding. To resist those representations which are endlessly reinforced and circulated by the media and other popular discourses poses an enormous challenge. The challenge lies in revising the modes of discourse that are used in speaking of the self and the other. These modes have historically been formulated either by way of an epistemological dictatorship or by kitsch. Central to this thesis is a theory of intercultural understanding in terms of kitsch.

The area under investigation spans a wide range of fields, including narrative (paintings, novels and films), business management theory, and leisure (social dancing). I investigate the phenomenon of intercultural understanding as between Japan and England and as illuminated by anthropological theory (in particular the work of Clifford Geertz). The literary and the economical, the cultural and the industrial, of course, are inseparable. I identify the essentially “comic” process, as characterised by Kenneth Burke, as ‘the maximum of forensic complexity’¹ of intercultural understanding so much of which takes place under the signs of fragmentation and hoped-for reconciliation. Naturally the thesis discusses hermeneutics, and describes the cultural principles underlying practice in order to identify factors influencing intercultural understanding.

My method is historical and ethnographical. My stance is “participant-as-

¹ Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, London: University of California Press, 1984: 42.

observer” or ‘living-and-watching’, which stress an involvement with practitioners in their society that entails more than detached observation. The story of one’s life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which one derives an identity. I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from that past, in the liberal mode, is to deform my present relationships. I was born and brought up in Japan. I have been living in the UK for 7 years. I might be more “Japanese” or “Butterfly-like” in England, while I might appear to be more “westernised” and “feministic” in Japan. The possession of an historical identity and the possession of an intellectual identity coincide. In contrast to many researchers who work in areas in which they are truly the “other”, I am in many ways both **like** and **unlike** other participants in Japanese and English society.

My subject is the formation of intersubjectivity. It purports to grasp a blurred form of intersubjectivity which is not structured around a clear distinction between attachment and separation, and as between Japan and England. My work involves the casting-away and recapturing of Japanese culture and English culture, and hence the symbolic playing-out of the development of a subjectivity which signifies an attempt to control loss. My work is therefore at once in touch with my maternal Japanese culture and “the second home” of English culture. My contact with these two cultures is not based on mastery, nor ever achieves full autonomy. Hence my work involves hermeneutics, a form of intersubjective and cognitive inquiry inseparable from ambiguity, and therefore different from “self-centered” representations constructed around the usual social-scientific framework of dualisms such as “inside” versus “outside”, “first-person” versus “third person” descriptions; “phenomenological” versus “objectivist” or “cognitive” versus “behavioral” theories; “emic” versus “etic” analyses

(Geertz, 1983: 56).

The thesis is in three parts. Part 1 (chapter I and II) explores theories of understanding. The customary practice of examining exotic cultures from the scientific position is put to the test. Chapter I, with an emphasis on Clifford Geertz, claims that human scientists should be pulled well away from the emulation of the natural sciences and toward a reintegration with the humanities of which they are naturally part. Geertz proffers that the realities for both the observer and the observed in the human sciences are practices, that is to say, socially constituted actions, and these cannot be identified merely in scientific abstraction. The hermeneutic approach claims to deny and overcome the rigorous opposition of subjectivity and objectivity. Understanding in context cannot be reduced to a system of categories defined only in terms of their relations to each other. Chapter II explores kitsch, a particular, heavily but not entirely, commercial mode and manner of understanding exotic cultures. Kitsch involves a mirroring process in which a reflection is continuously softened and distorted. This chapter, then, poses a question: How does the 'kitsch' circulate in the cultural exchanges between Japan and the West?

Part 2 (chapter III through V) deals with the realm of the imagination. This section makes use of visual, theatrical, literary and cinematic texts to document kitsch encounters which have circulated between Japan and the West since the 19th century. Visual artists and writers – their work and lives – provide moments in which social practice and imaginary configuration clash. The role the other culture plays in these moments is examined and compared. Chapter III discusses Western artists of the 19th century, who were influenced by *Japonisme* (*Japonisme* is one of the key examples of the East-West interartistic and intercultural phenomenon.). Focusing on the

phenomenon of *Japonisme*, this chapter entitled "Japan in Aesthetic Theory", aims to explore the phenomenon of *Japonisme* and the "structure of feeling" of 19th century Western culture.

Chapter IV examines Yukio Mishima, not as the writer, but as a presence in kitsch. Mishima is a Japanese writer of the immediate postwar period, who was compelled by the unprecedented foreign occupation to reframe his relationship to the dominant West. In spite of himself, however, his construction of "Japan", "tradition", and "emperorumism" reveals, in retrospect, false localism. What is interesting about Mishima is his strategy to *politicise Japanese aesthetics*, which indeed resulted in dissolving everything into kitsch. Showing the essentially comic nature of the process in relation to kitsch, this chapter explores Mishima's anachronism and "flair", then a Western treatment of Mishima in terms of its unrooted interculturalism, in reference to the Paul Schrader's film, *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters* (1985).

In chapter V, I contend that the great Japanese film director, Akira Kurosawa offers us one vivid, comprehensive example of what it is for a Japanese artist so to translate the great Western myths of Shakespeare, that assume first a Japanese and subsequently a universal significance. I shall further argue that in order to bring off this colossal achievement, Kurosawa deploys the procedure and simplifications of one version of kitsch, but does so not to reassure audiences, and to eradicate difficulty, nor to soften the facts of life and death, but rather to borrow the simplifications and compressions of kitsch and place them in a quite different context. That is to say, Kurosawa notices the simplifying similarities of the North American cowboy Westerns and of Japanese samurai dramas. As in conventional kitsch, he decontextualises both

characters and narrative lines but turn them to his own purposes, instead of reassuring his audience. In a series of simple and dramatic silhouettes, he borrows the conventions of Japanese Noh plays in order to make the familiar outlines of kitsch into the strange and masked obscurities of his own, distinctive cinematic forms. He thereby renders his films a quite exceptional instance of intercultural inquiry and understanding. In doing so, he gives cultural inquiry a powerful lead, one exceptionally difficult to follow in terms of cultural method. This chapter, consequently, can hardly offer the cultural inquirer a method; it can, however, teach the inquirer a lesson. The lesson, postmodern in its way, is that we borrow the instruments of kitsch at our peril, **and** that the risk is worth taking. Only if we are able, as I have already put it, to use it to make the familiar seem strange, to compare incomparables, and to look through the lenses of one culture at the peculiarities of another, will we throw away the sentimentality of kitsch in order to make use of its simplifications.

In Part 3 and 4 (chapter VI and chapter VII), the scope of argument is expanded to examine cultural assumptions as they operate in the realm of the economic and leisure. The abstracted arguments about literary and cultural problems must be re-absorbed in the specific and concrete, in the everyday life of production and consumption. Chapter VI focuses on production, involving fieldwork with reference to business management theory. A fundamental conflict of interests between capital and labour remains central to Japanese business management theory which, in my view, has much about it of a kitsch flavour. They are incommensurable views. This chapter builds on our knowledge of the employment of Japanese working practices and the structure of industrial relations in Japanese manufacturing transplants in the UK.

In chapter VII, some signs of hope are to be detected in consumption. This

chapter deals with the global popularisation of a cultural product, ballroom dancing. It explores the sequence of cultural absorption, in particular, the Anglicisation of ballroom dancing across England, and semi-Japanisation of ballroom dancing in Japan. This chapter is no less than an ethnographical and historical enquiry into the realms of ballroom dancing in England and Japan. I explore the way in which ballroom dancing had been indigenised and transformed by the working-class in England, and the way ballroom dancing has been adapted by the middle-class in Japan. I should note, first, that I write from the perspective of a Japanese, who participated in a variety of social dancing in the north of England (ballroom dancing, salsa and Argentinean tango) and still enjoys doing so. I am no stranger to what is salutary and joyful in dancing. All the same, my experience is also decisively stamped by having witnessed kitsch in ballroom dancing, such as the TV spectacle, BBC's long-running, *'Come Dancing'*. However, my argument goes beyond the clichés of both "cultural imperialism" and academic snobbism.

And yet the issue of "cultural imperialism" must be tackled. Paralleling the extraction of labour from Britain (as discussed in the previous chapter), Japan, the passion-repressed country of the capitalist world system, has been appropriating emotional and affective practices from the British working class. The working class's emotional and expressive practices and arts have been categorized, homogenized, and transformed into commodities suitable for Japan's consumption. The British working class taught their version of (in my term), 'sophistication of pleasure' to Japan, which had not yet overcome the asceticism which is a predicament of modernity.

On the other hand, arguing against a sociological view of appropriation as "cultural imperialism" or "academic snobbism", I explore some of the ways in which

innovative action resists the productive and textual relations that turn bodies into objects of social control, and creates relations that enable creative action and liberated intersubjectivities. I would like to demonstrate how ballroom dancing is embodied to express the self, neither English nor Japanese, but rather a complex and hybrid self. It also challenges the Marxian notion of human action which has generally appeared to the sociologist as instrumental action, movement conceptualised and valued in terms of its utility. Dance provides a way of seeing that conditions for human existence cannot be reduced to socio-economic relations and forms. Ballroom dancing bodies may reflect and resist cultural values simultaneously, an amiable moral to find in international recreation.

1. Interpretation and Comparison

I. 1.Hermeneutics

*This is the use of memory:
For liberation - not less of love but expanding
Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
From the future as well as the past. Thus, love of a country
Begins as attachment to our own field of action
And comes to find that action of little importance
Though never indifferent. History may be servitude,
History may be freedom (T.S.Eliot, 'Little Gidding').*

Understanding is always misunderstanding. The act of translation is faithful to the original meaning of translation - "betray (traduttore)" (Clifford, 1997: 39). Adaptation of "text" in unfamiliar culture is loss of reflexivity, a sign of cultural destabilisation. One enters the translation process from a specific location, from which one only partly escapes. In translation, the access to something alien-another language, culture, or code- is substantial. Something different is brought over, made available for consumption. One keeps getting closer and farther away from the truth of different cultural/historial predicaments. This reflects a historical process by which the global is always localised, its range of equivalences cut down to size (Clifford, 1997: 41).

Thus, the method of human science should be hermeneutics which is a study of the act of interpretation. Geertz argues that anthropological understanding does not result from acts of total empathy with the "natives", leaving the ethnographer "awash in immediacies as well as entangled in vernacular." Nor does it result from distant and removed observation, leaving the ethnographer "stranded in abstractions and smothered in jargon" (Geertz,1983: 57, 69-70). Geertz advocates our traversing "the hermeneutic

circle”, a movement back and forth or rather, around in a spiral, between generalization and specific observation, abstractions and immediacies, looking “from the outside” and trying to understand the vantage points “from the inside”.

Hermeneutics is similar to the art which delivers truth. According to Adorno, “art is rationality criticizing itself without being able to overcome itself.” Unlike Hegel, Adorno claims that the promised reconciliation of subjectivity and objectivity can never become actual and thus must remain a perpetually hoped-for “beyond” (Adorno 1996: 357-66). This is to say that hermeneutics announces itself in the logical expression of practice, that brings a holistic meaning into play, without being able to express it totally.

According to Richard Rorty, (1998) philosophy advances by increasing its imaginativeness rather than its rigor. The hermeneutic approach claims to deny and overcome the rigorous opposition of subjectivity and objectivity. Understanding in context cannot be reduced to a system of categories defined only in terms of their relations to each other. Charles Taylor proffers² that the realities for both the observer and the observed in the human sciences are practices, that is to say, socially constituted actions, and these cannot be identified merely in scientific abstraction. The meanings of these practices are as Taylor states,

not just in the minds of the actors but are out there in the practices themselves, practices which cannot be conceived as a set of individual actions, but which are essentially modes of social relations, of mutual action. These meanings are intersubjective; they are not reducible to individual subjective psychological states, beliefs, or propositions. The human world is neither internal and subjective nor external and objective; it is the medium of shared understanding that exists in the relationships among people (Taylor, 1971:177).

² See Taylor’s article, ‘Interpretation and the Sciences of Man’.

For Taylor, human life is characterised by being in an open system. It cannot be shielded from external interference and studied in a vacuum or a scientifically controlled environment. From this it follows that the exactitude that is open to the human sciences is quite different from that available in the natural sciences. Our capacity to understand is rooted in our own self-definitions, hence in what we are. Human beings are self-interpreting, and self-reflexive animals; intersubjectivity is an irreducible entity.

Human life is characterised by self-awareness, reflexivity, creativity, intentionality, and meaningfulness; human life thus takes on dimensions different from those of the natural world and is not so subject to its physical natural law. The intellectual use of the term "science" undermines the value of the hermeneutical "human sciences", overstating the power of the natural sciences. The interpreter of cultures should distance himself from part of the scientific tradition. Hermeneutics is dialogic; it presupposes interpretative exchange (Inglis, 1993:145). Hermeneutics is a legitimate alternative method to conventional human science, characterised by the mechanistic, reductionist approach of positivism with a "refiguration of social thought". Over-reliance on science is problematic because science itself has nothing to say about what things "mean", only how they may be used.

Human scientists have turned away from the emulation of the natural sciences; they need to effect a reintegration with the humanities of which they are etymologically part. Human scientists study meaning rather than behavior, seek understanding rather than laws, and reject mechanistic explanations of the natural-science variety in favor of interpretative explanations. In the canonical period, as

discussed earlier, “social” scientists preferred to see their studies as a mode of science, rather than of writing. Inglis, citing Geertz contends that ethnography is a form of writing, something no less created than a novel, even if created out of different materials (Inglis, 1993:165). There are various modes by which we ‘translate’ what we have seen and persuade the readers that we have somehow apprehended ‘a slice of culture’ (Geertz, 1988: 4). Believing with Max Weber, that “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after, construing social expressions on their surface enigmatical” (Geertz, 1973: 5). For Geertz a method of mediating and judging between conflicting interpretations would look rather more like a transformed version of textual criticism in the humanities. The possibilities of analogy and metaphor is significant. To consider human activity as text and symbolic actions as drama, in other words, human scientists have to rework, if not abandon, their traditional assumptions about the nature of their intellectual enterprise.

The attempt by Geertz to place anthropology in the realm of literature (‘writing culture’) is thus given a nudge in a new and intriguing direction. Anthropologists are asked at least to consider, and preferably to incorporate, indigenous literary genres in their writing as a means towards furthering their understanding of the cultures they study. With culture there is perhaps nothing outside of texts, from which it would follow anthropology, sociology, history, and the like should be disposed to interpretative reading as the primary tool of understanding.

I. 2. Hermeneutics and the Author

Michael Polanyi distinguishes two poles of knowing, one called “self-centered” and the other, “self-giving” (1975: 70-3). The “self-centered” is the form of knowing that is more confined to perception in its observational aspect and to the gaining of the kind of knowledge that we call “scientific”. Self-centered knowing has also predominated in such areas as arts, cognitive science, philosophy, psychology and in fact remarkable results have been attained in this form of human knowledge. Such knowledge does **not** depend so much upon our understanding of it for its meaning. One way in which this is physically manifested daily is in our use of technology, such as in turning on a computer or driving a car. For a driver car is a tool. On the other hand, “self-giving” knowing is the gaining of knowledge that we call “aesthetic”. Writing poetry, playing musical instruments, playing sport, dance, and martial arts requires our attention in a different way in order for it to count as knowing. We have to understand ourselves as connected to our body and other individuals in order to play well. This form of knowing involves “self-giving” that increases our involvement in a significant way. Hermeneutic practice involves both “self-centred” and “self-giving” modes of knowing, though I shall claim that the priority belongs to “self-giving knowing”.

Hermeneutics is a challenging task for ethnographers. It is as difficult for ethnographers to get themselves into their texts as it can be for them to get into the culture they are studying. Writing as an aesthetic activity, however, should be regarded as hermeneutic practice or “self-giving” knowing no more “objective” than other activities such as sport, dance and martial arts. With this method we

acknowledge will be intersubjectivity. The more irreducibly intersubjective its topic is, the more truthful the written work will be. Such a hermeneutic turn toward intersubjectivity refocuses on the concrete varieties of cultural meaning without falling into the traps of cultural relativism. Cultural relativism involves an illusion that the “death of the author” gives all freedom to the reader. The identity of the “author” (no matter how hybrid and unfixed it actually is) in human science and the problematics of discourse are important.

All this increases the power of the theory and the voice of the author. Nietzsche, for example, complains of philosophers who aspire to impersonality (objectivity) when ‘what happens at the bottom is that a prejudice, a notion, an inspiration, generally a desire of the heart shifted and made abstract, is defended by them with reasons sought after the event -they are one and all advocates who do not want to be regarded as such, and for the most part no better than cunning pleaders for their prejudices which they baptize “truths”.³ Similarly, Geertz poses questions vital to an understanding of any observation and reporting –visual forms included – of other cultures. He identifies as rhetorical strategy the widespread pretense of “looking at the world directly, as though through a one-way screen, seeing others as they really are when only God is looking” (Geertz, 1988:141). Geertz adds in reply to growing cries of “tell as it is”, social scientists share “the strange idea that reality has an idiom in which it prefers to be described...a spade is a spade, a rose is a rose...leads on to the even stranger idea that, if literalism is lost so is fact” (Geertz, 1988:140). Gadamer in turn suggests that the metaphoricity of language is what

³ See A Genealogy of Morals.

makes it possible for the text to “speak” to us. The distance between thing and thinking created by language is bridged by the metaphor as “the coincidence of sensible appearance and supra-sensible meaning” (Gadamer, 1989: 67). The metaphor grants the possibility to language to be truthful.

I. 3. Hermeneutics and the Medium

Hermeneutics goes beyond the “self-centered knowing” witnessed in the scientism and subject-centeredness of the subject-object schema within which we, today, tend unconsciously to operate (Palmer, 1969: 229). Hermeneutics transcends scientific schema. The explanatory power of science is the consequence of its basis in a law-bound, epistemic subject whose activities can be generalised and understood as context-free operations. This exercise relies on a medium which is primarily a tool. The scientific concept of medium as a middle factor is a common but dualist notion of a medium. According to Jeffery L. Bineham, this is a Cartesian legacy, a dualist separation of subjects and objects (1995:1). The Cartesian paradigm has guided, until the past half-century or so, most Western thought and action. In this notion, the medium stands between two or more objects that exist independently of one another. This notion of objectivity assumes that the “isolated” observer is able to understand the “isolated” object. This dualism is especially apparent when the scientific observer is described as somebody equipped with an official degree of accuracy and neutrality, and who represents reality.

It is important to note that neutrality of science and its pretended “objectivity” can often be an illusion. Science often involves a form of ideology, which explains why

it is called here “self-centered knowing”. While the project of Enlightenment science was to free itself from the thrall of religious belief and to know the world through “fresh” eyes, it also dominated nature and it led to the ecological crisis. Science's ability to predict and control nature developed for the benefits to humanity. Despite these advances, however, science is one-sided. The crucial bias is the separation of quality from quantity; *being is being measured*. Under the power of Cartesian science, nature's totality is parceled out between physical, chemical, biological, social, cultural and psychological domains as if these divisions inhere in the order of nature itself. These are arranged hierarchically and ultimately reduced, in recent developments, to the primacy of physics because, until the advent of molecular biology, it was indisputably the most mathematical of all the sciences (Aronowitz, 1998: 21-2). Maths and physics become the models for all forms of being. And Cartesian epistemology is the master of the discourse of domination. Its positing of subject and object as two quite separate entities drains the subject of nature and drains the object of culture. They face each other as antagonists, but nature is constructed as object, devoid of any of the presumed qualities of the subject.

In scientism, as the absorption in context-free methods, the medium exists and stands between two or more objects that exist independently of one another. This notion of medium is not satisfactory when hermeneutic understanding is the aim. Hermeneutics should be contextual, aimed at recuperating the cultural and political energies currently blocked by social forms of exploitation and domination. Hermeneutics does not deal with what connotes a middle ground or delivery system. What hermeneutics deals with is, as Bineham suggests, “the pervasive and enveloping substance within which one lives, one's element, one's environment, or

the conditions of one's life.”⁴ It is comprised, that is, by the meanings and forms that are utilised to create and shape a world.

Thus the object of understanding is not to be understood as an instrument or tool that we use: rather it is the world in which we live. Understanding occurs not simply through a medium, but within a medium. Within the medium subjects and objects exist together. The possibilities of an objective world or a subjective observer are extinguished, for all that is experienced and all who experience are shaped by the medium. This perspective thus rejects the central tenet of Cartesian dualism: that a gap exists between mind and matter, between subjective observer and objective observed. Through this perspective, 'medium' is surely the wrong word. Let us consider instead experience in relation to practice (roughly content and form).

I.4 “Practice-near” and “Practice-distant”

The lines from Yeats' poem goes:

*O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance? ('Among School Children')*⁵

The cognitive model of hermeneutics involves converting (translating) one type of knowledge to another. The conversion can be tacit-to-tacit (doing physically, watching somebody, then doing it); tacit-to-explicit (doing it, then describing it); explicit-to-tacit

⁴ OED, vol.6. 299 referred by Bineham, 1995: 2.

(reading about it, then doing it); or explicit-to-explicit (reading about it, then describing it.) Hermeneutics is no more than a refined version of our understanding of other people in everyday life (Inglis, 1993:145).⁶ Hermeneutics is dialogic; it presupposes interpretative exchange. Facing the object of interpretation, we 'translate' or paraphrase it. According to Taylor, some objects of interpretation have sense but no reference (e.g. dance); secondly, all objects have expression distinct from the sense they express, particularly, intentions. Thirdly, they have what Taylor calls a subject; and Inglis (1993:144) extends this to the duo, maker-and-recipient. The object, that is, produced by someone for someone else. Finally meanings exist within the area under the influence of other meanings. One could not talk about the meaning of an action without connecting it to a narrative (including other actions) if you want to interpret its meaning. Consequently, the ambition of hermeneutics is always towards holistic inquiry, the understanding of a part in terms of its situation in the whole. The rich hybrid transactions and interactions hint at the possibilities of human understanding, an understanding neither abstractly universal nor stubbornly local. The spiral of hermeneutics is a way to get out of the circularity of kitsch.

When hermeneutics is considered, the distinction between “practice” and “experience” is significant. Oakeshott provides a philosophical perspective on the distinction between two concepts. Firstly, experience can be interpreted as knowledge in general, while practice is a particular kind of knowledge. According to Oakeshott (1933: 323), experience in the first place is always a *world*. Secondly, experience implies thought or judgment. Thirdly, what is ‘achieved’ in experience is

⁵ ‘Among School Children’, 1927, (Rosenthal, 1962: 117).

truth. Fourthly, in truth, no separation is possible between experience and 'reality'.⁷ For the modes of experience, Oakeshott selects history, science and everyday practice (330). Each of these is an arrest in experience, a world of abstract ideas; in each what is distinctive (from the standpoint of the concrete totality of experience) is its failure to provide what is 'satisfactory' in experience, a coherent world of ideas. For the example of a coherent world of ideas, Oakeshott defends the autonomy of philosophical as well as abstracted experience. However, in the end, as Oakeshott suggests, practice is given precedence. 'Great achievements are accomplished in the mental fog of practical experience' (321).

Practice is connected to action, "which implies change, and involves a world in which change is both possible and significant, a mortal world (258-74).

Practical activity, then, presupposes a world of fact and of reality the determining characteristic of which is that it can be changed. Unlike those in history and science (which assume a fixed and unchanging reality), the explicit concept of reality in practical experience is that of a mutable reality. In practical experience reality is asserted under the category of change. (273)... Mortality, I take it, the central fact of practical existence; death is the central fact of life; I do not, of course, mean merely human mortality, the fact that we must one day cease to be; I mean the far more devastating mortality of every element of practical existence, the mortality of pleasures and pains, desires, achievement, emotions and affections. Mortality is the presiding category in practical experience (274).

The world presupposed in practical experience is what is 'here and now'. To 'put into practice' is to transform an idea into an action (259). The content of this world

⁶ Also see his Popular Culture and Political Power, chapter 3.

⁷ When reality is not given explicitly and as a whole in experience, there has occurred what Oakeshott calls "an arrest" in experience; the full obligation of experience have been avoided, its full character surrendered. (323-4) Alternatively, Oakeshott calls these arrests in experience, modes or modifications of experience. These modes of experience are worlds which are exclusive of one another.

is determined by practical judgment. This practical judgment is, however, never conceived to be an end in itself; it is always preliminary to the activity which belongs to practical experience. Practice is never the mere assertion of the present; it is essentially action, the responsive alteration of 'what is' so as to make it agree with 'what ought to be' (274)

Practice is an action which causes changes. Practical experience is an essence for achievement in experience. Practice is not autonomous, while experience can be. All human practice is historical. No practice occurs outside the history. All practice is constituted in terms of a particular intermixture of language and tradition. Thus practice and context are inseparable. Practice cannot be reduced to socio-economic relations and forms.

Experience can be conceptualised as either "practice-near" or "practice-distant".⁸ This distinction may be helpful to understand the knowledge (experience) being transmitted. Social action, which has typically been practice-near experience, is opposed to the 'text' of practice-distant experience. Geertz, however challenges this dichotomization, by *regarding social action as the text*. He suggests that the distinction between practice-near experience and practice-distant experience is a matter of degree. He poses the extension of the notion of "text" beyond things written on paper or carved into stone. Geertz illustrates its application to social action, to people's behavior toward

⁸ Applied terms from Geertz's "experience-near" and "experience-distant". Geertz points that the formulation has initially been made by the psychoanalyst, Heinz Kohut between "experience-near" and "experience-distant" concepts. Geertz explains: A experience-near concept is, roughly, one that someone might himself naturally and effortlessly use to define what he or his fellows see, feel, think, imagine, and so on. An experience-distant concept is one

other people and culture in general.

The key to the transition from text to text analogue, from writing as discourse to action as discourse, is, as Paul Ricoeur has pointed out, the concept of "inscription": the fixation of meaning. When we speak, our utterances fly by as events like any other behavior; unless what we say is inscribed in writing (or some other established recording process), it is as evanescent as what we do. If it is so inscribed, it of course passes, like Dorian Gray's youth, anyway; but at least its meaning – the said, not the saying- to a degree and for a while remains. This too is not different for action in general: its meaning can persist in a way its actuality cannot (Geertz, 1983: 31).

Geertz points out that the extension of the notion of text is that it trains attention on precisely the phenomenon: 'on how the inscription of action is brought about, what its vehicles are and how they work, and on what the fixation of meaning of flow of events – history from what happened, thought from thinking, culture from behavior – implies for sociological interpretation' (ibid: 31).

This "practice-near" experience is tacit. Practice-near experience is that of which we have a knowledge that we may not be able to tell easily. Practice-near experience is more mysterious and harder to talk about, because taken-for-granted. A practice-near experience results in a cognition that is distinct from a "practice-distant" medium. "Practice-near" experience tends to be "tacit". Michael Polanyi attempted to explain such an experience through his theory of tacit knowing. Practice-near experience is then similar to his conception of tacit knowing: 'we know more than we can tell' (Polanyi, 1983: 4). Polanyi suggests that "tacit knowing" applies to practice-near experience, such as performative knowledge, and physical acquisition of skill

that specialists of one sort or another employ to forward their aims. (Geertz, 1983: 57)

whose ‘unlanguagable’ and ‘difficult-to-describe’ aspect can be explained by its “physicality” and “attending”. According to Polanyi, in “the functional structure of tacit knowing”,

We are relying on our awareness of a combination of muscular acts for attending to the performance of a skill. We are attending from these elementary movements to the achievement of their joint purpose, and hence are usually unable to specify these elementary acts (Polanyi, 1983:10).

Typically a “practice-near” experience generates interpretations of knowledge that are described as free, spontaneous and immediate compared to “practice-distant” experience. Understanding or the interpretation of knowledge is not based as much on a fixed relationship within a system of categories that characterises a “practice-distant” experience. “Practice-near” experience is arrived at through close, repeated interactions between the person and the practice. Knowledge is subject to continuous interpretation, because no single interpretation captures the meaning of an experience. There are an indefinite number of perceptions and understandings all which may be valid.

In a "practice-near" experience, the interpretation of experience is evoked by the practice rather than a system of a pre-established categories. This type of interpretation brings forth more understanding of an experience than typically associated with a “practice-distant” experience. However, the demerit is that the practice-near concepts can drown us in immediacy. In practice, nothing recurs. Practical experience is a mutable reality. In practical experience reality is asserted under the category of change (Oakeshott, 1933: 273).

In a practice-distant experience, the discrepancy between the practice and the perception of that experience is often significant. The merit of a practice-distant

experience tends to infer comprehensive or complete understanding. However, the demerit is that it makes us dizzy with abstractions. The pre-conceived images or stereotypes that characterise a “practice-distant” experience narrow understanding. The prevalence of stereotypes that characterises this experience disguises this gap and often results in a deluded interpretation of knowledge. Within a “practice-distant” experience the gap between practice and the perception of experience is bridged by the use of assumptions. Experience becomes assimilated within these assumptions which is based on limited prior experience and knowledge.

I.5. Theory, Practice and Telos

Rationality in human science contradicts scientific objectivity in which subject isolates object. The rejection of scientific “objectivity”, however, does not deny that arguments and interpretations are subject to critique. In Bernstein’s words, “we must avoid the fallacy of thinking that since there are no fixed, determinate rules for distinguishing better from worse interpretations, there is no rational way of making and warranting such practical comparative judgment” (Bernstein, 1983: 91). Though no ultimate foundations preside, neither does moral nor intellectual chaos. Instead, shared standards should exist in the finite nature of the reason.

This section elaborates a notion of good theory. Theory is a representative example of the abstract nature of verbal medium through which we understand our lives. As discussed, language is more practice-distant than action. We see the tendency for theory to become a mere collection of abstractions and could never be more than an abstraction itself. To aim for good theory,

1. Abstraction has to be derived from practice.
2. Abstraction has to stimulate intersubjectivity.

Practice and intersubjectivity are the two key terms I would like to argue for as essential for good theory. To begin with, practice is what reawakens the meaning of text. The task of the writer of meaning is to help the reader reawaken the meaning of his theory. In other words, the task of writer is to achieve the conversion, tacit-to-explicit and to encourage the reader the conversion, explicit-to-tacit. The written tradition is something that we encounter as alien, and the hermeneutical task is best described as a transformation of texts back “into speech and meaning” (Gadamer, 1989: 354f). Writing in this sense is a derivative of the “actual language of speech” (Ibid: 354), the representation of a representation. Writing has to overcome this alienation. It has to be transformed back into language, which is constituted by the presence of the living dialogue. The art of reading to respond involves appropriate historical consciousness. The interpreter transforms the written signs back into language, i.e. into meaning. It is the achievement of the interpreter to make it talk.

Related to theory as an act of narration, Oakeshott provides some inspiration for good theory. Oakeshott defines good theory as “the totality of experience”. It is, in Oakeshott’s terms, ‘experience without reservation or arrest, experience which is critical throughout, unhindered and undistracted by what is subsidiary, partial or abstract (Oakeshott, 1933: 3). To make experience intelligible requires some sort of intellectual organization, ‘arrests’ of experience are the currency of epistemological idealism. The idealist aims to take a jumble of ideas and trim and shape it into coherent and self-

contained 'world of ideas'. Theoretically the number of potential arrests are endless.⁹ To define a good theory further, I would like to combine the ideas surrounding 'practice' of Oakeshott with MacIntyre.

Good theory is characterised by two conditions. Firstly, the more "practice-near" it is, the more intersubjectivity the theory tends to contain. Secondly, good theory has awareness of its "telos". To begin with the first condition, the practice-near theory contains intersubjectivity. As discussed, "practice-near" experience generates interpretations of knowledge that are described as free, spontaneous and immediate compared to "practice-distant" experience. Theory as a "practice-near" experience, is thus arrived at through close, repeated interactions between the person and the practice. Oakeshott insists that theory be understood and exercised in terms of what he calls 'practice', i.e. the cumulative deposit of experience across generations and within persistent patterns of conduct. Oakeshott implies that theory should be worldly, concrete, an extension of practice (Oakeshott, 1975: 107). Thus knowledge has to be consumed by practice. Knowledge is not merely given, discoverable with increased effort or superior training. 'We begin' writes Oakeshott, 'with a world of ideas; a given is neither a collection, nor a series of ideas, but a complex, significant whole... the given in experience is given always to be transformed' (Oakeshott, 1933: 29).

In fact, it is in this context, in Experience and Its Modes, that Oakeshott condemns that 'most barren "rationalism"' as he describes the fallacies that experience is simply given rather than filtered through ideas, and that judgment is merely analysis or classification. This is simplistic intelligence, he says quoting Hegel, with its

⁹ In Experience and Its Modes, Oakeshott describes the modal logic of history, science and practice.

narrowing ‘passwords of “either or”’ (Oakeshott, 1933: 25). In practice-near theory, knowledge is subject to nonstop interpretation, because no single interpretation captures the meaning of an experience. There is an indefinite number of perceptions and understandings, all which may be valid. Thus, such knowledge is neither autonomous nor subjective, but *intersubjective* because it is rooted in “practice”.

Good theory contains the “core concept of virtue”, which Alasdair MacIntyre aligns in terms of “practices, narrative unity, and tradition”. The former two terms are related to the “practice-near” aspects of good theory. Firstly, a practice is an established form of cooperation in which the point of the activity is “internal”. For example, when one plays chess for the love of the game, not for prize or money. We eventually go well beyond anything that can be captured in explicit rules, for we ourselves become experts able to modify the standards (MacIntyre, 1981: 175-7). This strikes accord with Oakeshott’s view that practice is never the mere assertion of the present; it is essentially action, the alteration of ‘what is’ so as to make it agree with ‘what ought to be’. (Oakeshott, 1933: 274) Thus a virtue at the first stage may be defined as an acquired human ability the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are “practice-near”.

Secondly, human lives possess what MacIntyre calls “the unity of narratives”. MacIntyre infers that the unity of a whole human life is a narrative unity, stressing in particular human good. (1981: 218-20). He argues that lives as they are lived must exhibit the unity of narratives, because “human actions are not intelligible unless they are embedded in the context of narrative framework”. MacIntyre singles out a particular kind of narrative unity as central to his account of the virtues: namely, the

unity of a life spent in quest of human good.

The premodern world conceived of each human life as a unity, and the function of the virtues was to enable an individual to make of his or her life one kind of unity rather than another; whereas modernity partitions each human life into segments: work from leisure, private life from public, the corporate from the personal, childhood and old age from adulthood. Conceptually, modern people think atomistically about human actions rather than seeing them as part of ongoing narratives, distinguishing between the individual and the roles that he or she plays. Hence the unity of a human life becomes invisible to us and the premodern virtue which presumes such unity, loses intelligibility. What makes us feel such a unity is a good theory. As Inglis suggests, a good hermeneutic interpretation is a superior story.¹⁰ The “practice-near” theory involves such a unity. The process of the theory becoming “practice-distant” leads to the decline in rationality, because the unity of theory falls apart. The history of the decline in rationality (as opposed to mere rationalization) is seen when the theory begins to embody genuine objective and impersonal standards, which provide rational justification for particular policies, actions and judgments and which themselves are in turn susceptible of rational justification.

“Telos” is the second condition essential for a good theory. According to Oxford English Dictionary,¹¹ telos signifies end, purpose, ultimate object or aim. Telos is what makes us feel how finite practice is. Theory as a medium should contain certain discursive awarenesses of “telos”. According to MacIntyre, the third virtue is “tradition” framed by “natural teleology” (1981: 52-9). Within this

¹⁰ See Media Theory, Fred Inglis, 1990:1.

Aristotelian framework, a distinction is drawn between untutored human nature as it happens to be, and human nature as it would be if it realized its natural end or telos. The moral concepts, and in particular the concepts of the virtues, are then seen as mediating between these two conditions, so that the virtues are simply those states that enable humans to realize their natural telos.

MacIntyre argues (1981: 54-5) that the Enlightenment thinkers took over traditional moral concepts from this Aristotelian framework, concepts which were essentially designed to enable human nature to realize its telos. At the same time they rejected the natural teleology that lay behind these moral concepts and gave them their point. The project of justifying morality rationally then became the task of showing that it is rational for all human beings, however their untutored nature may happen to be, to accept moral concepts which originally served a clear teleological role. What results is a disparity between the inherited moral concepts and the impoverished modern conception of untutored and therefore undamaged human nature; and it is this disparity, in MacIntyre's view, that determined the failure of the Enlightenment project.

MacIntyre claims that for the Aristotelians there was an internal relation between moral rules and the man's telos. If this is so, the telos would inform what it meant to follow the moral rule. Without the telos, however, the moral rules become "practice-distant", thus arbitrary, devoid of any point. MacIntyre suggests that, if we detach morality from that framework, we will no longer have rationality; or at the very least, we will have radically transformed its character (1981:53). Reason

¹¹ second edition, 1989.

without the telos is “an unharmonious melange of ill-assorted fragments” (ibid:10). Reason is not a capacity that can free itself from historical contexts and horizons. Rational thought is only made possible by the traditions within which people live. Reason functions only within some tradition, for tradition provides the "stream of conception within which we stand", and which we utilise in the processes of rationality (Palmer 1969: 183; Bernstein, 1983: 130). This is not a limitation or deficiency of reason, but rather it is the case that the essence of reason is rooted in human finitude.

II. Kitsch

II. 1. The Conceptualisation of Kitsch

To fashion a mode of perception unencumbered by eternal truths and fixed representations is one of the most difficult tasks of cross-cultural exchange. To resist those representations which are endlessly reinforced and circulated by the media and other popular discourses poses an enormous challenge. The challenge lies in revising the modes of discourse that are used in speaking of the self and the other. These modes have historically been formulated either by way of epistemological dictatorship or by kitsch. Central to this thesis is a theory of intercultural understanding in terms of kitsch.

Kitsch is a strongly derogatory description that makes up the classical moral battle over mass culture. The title of Clement Greenberg's 1939 essay is "Avant-Garde and Kitsch", in which Greenberg sought to define kitsch. Kitsch is a German word, meaning trash, the gaudy and decorative, like "the Victorian figurines that decorated the windowsills in Brighton, England". In the American context, Greenberg labeled popular commercial art, such as cutesy dolls, kitsch. 'Hello Kitty' is undisputed Japanese kitsch. 'Hello Kitty' merged child and grown-up audience of the capitalist world. Kitsch is not only bad taste, it has a powerful seductive ability both to attract and revolt at the same time. Kitsch has become a part of our everyday life, and nobody can deny its attraction. All kitsch manifests an orgiastic atmosphere: It is like a ticket to the collective dreams. It could be the sheer

inappropriateness of stubbing out your cigarette on a plastic religious icon or the pretentiousness of having gold on a functional object such as a bathroom tap.

It is difficult to define kitsch. Matei Calinescucue regards kitsch as 'one of the most bewildering and elusive categories of modern aesthetics'. He says,

...like art itself, of which it is both an imitation and negation, kitsch cannot be defined from a single vantage point. And again like art – or for that matter antiart – kitsch refuses to lend itself even to a negative definition, because it simply has no single compelling, distinct counter concept (Calinescucue, 1987: 232)

The term kitsch, which was originally used exclusively with reference to paintings, has been gradually extended. The term is now used more or less freely throughout the arts. It may pejoratively apply to a wide range of art forms: painting, sculpture, music, literature, film, TV programs, dance, and virtually anything else subject to judgements of taste.

We generally agree that kitsch makes life “transparent”, thus easily identifiable. However, the instant identifiability in kitsch depends on how well we are accustomed to the given representational convention. In order to detect bad taste one must first have good taste to the convention. The existing differences in the identification of kitsch may actually be explained by its conditions. For example, *Cio Cio-san* in Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly* might be kitsch for the Japanese point of view, while the Japanese adaptation of English ballroom dancing might be kitsch for the English point of view. So, too, Western and Japanese adaptations of tango might be kitsch for the Argentinean point of view. The differences in the identification of kitsch may help us understand why people disagree about kitsch and outline what it is they are actually disagreeing about.

The conditions of kitsch in the classical debate are clearly context-and-culture or individual-dependent. Because kitsch depends on the moral belief and orientations of the observer, the appearance of kitsch objects can differ markedly from observer to observer, and from culture to culture. Whether or not a given subject matter is considered kitsch may differ from culture to culture. I would like to eliminate a number of standardised elements in the use of the kitsch concept, or at least mark them as questionable.

The classical debate on kitsch has attracted broad popular and intellectual comment. Naturally, the academic discourse on kitsch grapples with the conceptualisation of kitsch.¹ The major problems on the tradition of 'kitschography' are based on the abstract decontextualised category of kitsch. Neglecting the complexity of encoding and decoding, the critical examination of emotion, the study of kitsch face the similar problem in popular cultural studies. What Lawrence Grossberg has criticised as the 'communications model' in popular cultural studies, where even if the 'message' of culture is variable the structural source of its encoding and the site of its decoding are not, is now faced with describing, in addition to 'meaning', 'the complexity of effects and relations circulating through and around culture' (Grossberg, 1992:45).

Crimsted suggests that one learns so little from the classical debate, especially in its negative mode about kitsch. He disparages the sharply drawn dichotomy that have neither the clarity nor usefulness their divisors presume: divisions between high and low, avant-

¹ The question of categorisation is touched on a number of works including the recent critics. (e.g. Robert C. Solomon, "On Kitsch and Sentimentality". (*The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 49 (1), Winter 1991: 1-14) and Pawlowski, 107-8 referred in 'Kitsch against Modernity', C.E. Emmer, *Art Criticism* 13 (1) 1998: 53) The critics such as Pawlowski and Crimsted for example, raise the justification for declaring something to be kitsch. (David Crimsted, 'Popular Culture Theory; An exploration of intellectual kitsch', *American Quarterly* 43 (4) 1991: 541-78)

garde and kitsch, creative and commercial, personal and mechanical, comforting and questioning, elite and mass, stimulating and anaesthetising, and serious and popular. The more complicated schemes tend to move to trinitarian complexity (doubtless to vie with more influential thought involving Father, Son, and Holy Ghost); feudal, bourgeois, and proletarian; or id, ego, and superego; elite, folk, and mass; lowbrow, middlebrow, and highbrow; fine, popular, and vulgar; and masscult, midcult, and highcult (Crimsted, 1991:557).

The attack on kitsch is often linked to academic class snobbery and a sociological-historical hypothesis about “power”. For example, kitsch is often connected to the poor’s imitation of the rich. Many categorisations of kitsch are thus class-biased: the object is kitsch just because it “belongs” to a 'lower' class which is imitating the ‘higher’ class. "Kitschographers" tend to assume that status seeking was the primary category for investigating kitsch. The focus is on acculturation (to high culture), seen as a means to a higher social position.² An idea frequently broached in discussions of kitsch is that members of the lower classes only purchase kitsch because it is an imitation of upper class art forms, and they would like to have the appearance of belonging to that class, even though they do not possess the skills (education or socialisation) necessary to recognize real art, let alone understand it. Therefore, goes the argument, they are dependent upon the advice of experts (who do understand these upper class art forms) or are dependent upon advertisers who simulate such expertise and advice.

² The word "class" is usually referred to as a relationship between (a) income and economic/social level and (b) education, acculturation, and accumulation of "cultural capital". See Pierre Bourdieu’s Distinction.: A Social Critique of the

The substantialist mode of thought characterises the common sense of kitsch – intellectual class snobbism and racism. This mode of thought leads to the error, because the activities and preferences specific to certain individuals or groups in a society at a certain moment were regarded as substantial properties. It is treated as if they were inscribed once and for all with a sort of biological or cultural essence. As Bourdieu emphasises:

Some would consider the fact that, for example, tennis or even golf is not nowadays as exclusively associated with dominant positions as in the past, or that the noble sports, such as riding or fencing (or, in Japan, the martial arts), are no longer specific to nobility as they originally were. ...An initially aristocratic practice can be given up by the aristocracy - and this occurs quite frequently - when it is adopted by a growing fraction of the bourgeoisie or petit-bourgeoisie, or even the lower classes (this is what happened in France to boxing, which was enthusiastically practised by aristocrats at the end of the nineteenth century). Conversely, an initially lower-class practice can sometimes be taken up by nobles. In short, one has to avoid turning into necessary and intrinsic properties of some group (nobility, samurai, as well as workers or employee) the properties which belong to the group at a given moment in time because of its position in a determinate social space and in a determinate state of the supply of possible goods and practices (Bourdieu, 1998: 4).

Status seeking is thus inter-culture; inter-class, race and gender: and it is not only from bottom to top of society but also from higher to lower of society.

Kitsch is the softening and broadening of emotion, rather than status-seeking or imitation. The problem of kitsch is how it is imitated and what is lost. When lower-class practice is taken up by a higher-class, what is often lost is sophistication of human desire. The tango dance, an initially Argentinean lower-class practice was taken up by higher-class, later by the wealthier countries. The tango's journey around the world and its

kitschification in the West and Japan prove a clear vulgarisation in the sphere of sex and emotion. As Savigliano puts it, the passion-poor countries of the capitalist world system have been appropriating emotional and affective practices from the 'Third World'. "Latin" dances are imported from South America to the West, being 'cabaretised' by the emphasis on pelvic motion and syncopated rhythms.

For many class-biased and high minded aesthetes of any country, sex and emotion have long been a matter of asceticism. In class-biased argument, human sexuality is still associated with "immorality" and "furtiveness", and is a matter of "control" instead of a matter of sophistication. The tradition of asceticism is especially prominent among the high-minded Christian aesthetes. The asceticism reflects a Western, more general marginalisation and trivialisation in the department of "sophistication of human desire." Supremacy of the mind over the flesh is until very recently central to the Western traditional theme of morality. Western thought splits a person into mind and body, or into godly half and beastly half, and tries to subjugate the one to the other. Western desires, particularly sexual desire, must be subjected to asceticism. If human desire is strong and irresistible, it must be controlled by the religious sense of sin. Human desire and entertainment has long been a matter of either control or indulgence and this simple dichotomy prevented any theory of "sophistication of human desire" from being produced.

Similarly, emotion has long been the subject of asceticism in the class-biased definition of kitsch. John Waters Dictionaries define kitsch as 'popular art with sentimental appeal'. This definition reflects the opinion of the academic class of many societies which associates itself with emotional control, and rejects any kind of sentimentality as the

expression of inferior, ill-bred beings. Irony and skepticism are the marks of the educated; sentimentality is the mark of the uneducated. This tendency of theorists on kitsch presumes a simple dichotomy between the elite products of emotionally controlled goods and the mass of emotionally-charged consumers, most of whom despise or despair over mass culture's emptiness and its baleful influence from political perspectives ranging from Mandarin to fundamentalist, from proto-fascist to Marxist (Crimsted, 1991:558-9).

Emotion as a matter of asceticism causes this dichotomy between control and indulgence. It prevents any theory of the 'sophistication of emotion' from being produced. It indicates the limited ability of academic interpretative frameworks to accommodate the critical examination of emotion. This limitation is also partly related to the fact that emotion is often read as 'unlanguageable'; and hence pre-linguistic expression. In the academic tradition, the only thing possible for objective critical examination is limited to what is languageable, speakable, writable such as conceptualisation, theory and thought. Something about emotion, then, is seen to resist incorporation into existing linguistic classifications. They signal a discontent with what traditional theoretical formulations allow emotion to mean.

Theorists of modernity have made multiple efforts to determine what class of objects falls into the categories of kitsch without regarding pleasure, sex and emotion as examinable categories. Scholars who defend or attack mass culture usually suggest that high art is involved with a personal and idiosyncratic vision and explores the new and unconventional, while popular art lulls, sanctifies the accepted pattern of things, and comforts with formulaic familiarity (ibid: 564). The notion of multiple zones seems more

promising than the tendency of kitsch theorists to presume a simple political dichotomy. The perspective which holds more promise for actually understanding kitsch is a more relational, contextual explanation.

II. 2 Kundera and Kitsch

The study of kitsch has to be contextual, because kitsch is a function of the way an object is used or treated (Higgins, 1996: 132). However, it is difficult to make the study of kitsch contextual because of the characteristics of kitsch which denies its own history. Emmer states that kitsch functions to escape the surrounding historical conditions, which reflect an ever-increasing universal neurosis (Emmer, 1998:53-5). Kitsch signifies dreams of simplification, which has a seductive ability. In kitsch, nothing waits for attentive interpretation. Kitsch does not substantially enrich our associations relating to the depicted objects or themes. Kitsch involves “taming” something, and making it less reflexive and less emotionally-refined.

The relational and contextual study of kitsch is provided by Milan Kundera. Kundera, whose famous novel, The Unbearable Lightness of Being³ singled out some such general features. In kitsch, as Kundera suggests, everything is instantly interrogated for its proximity to the "border" between being and emptiness. “Lightness of being” is the opposite pole of “categorical agreement with being”. “Non-being” is "light" or “weightless”, because “the categorical agreement with being” reduces the 'weight' of it.

Kitsch, according to Kundera, has one source in the "categorical agreement with being" and another source in "lightness of being". "Categorical agreement with being" screens out all that is objectionable in life. Kundera goes on to illustrate:

The aesthetic ideal of the categorical agreement with being is a world in which shit is denied and everyone acts as though it did not exist...kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence (Kundera, 1980:248).

Kundera begins his provocative analysis with theological and metaphysical premises, noting that the "dispute between those who believe that the world was created by God and those who think it came into being of its own accord deals with phenomena which go beyond our reason and experience". The basic faith that Kundera finds behind all the European religious and political movements is traced to the first chapter of Genesis, which tells us that "the world was created properly, that human existence is good, and that we are therefore entitled to multiply" (Kundera, 1980: 248).⁴ It is this basic faith that Kundera calls the "categorical agreement with being".

"Categorical agreement with being" signifies all totalitarianism which deprives people of memory and thus retools them.⁵ The individual act of "remembering" counters not just the abuse of power but power itself, which inevitably seeks to direct the collective judgment and disposal of the particular experience "the only reason that people want to be masters of the future," writes Kundera, "is to change the past". Commemoration is always for better or worse, a political act. Kundera talks of forgetting as the ever present form of

³ It was often quoted at the symposium on kitsch.

⁴ Quoted by Kulka (1996:.95).

death within life. "Remembered" objects are already arbitraries ready for total reconstruction. Nostalgia is one inevitable example of this process. In the memory of the past, things are arbitrary to create a "romantic" effect. Kitsch and romanticism as a common quality are emotionally charged. Each escapes into the idyll of history, the simplest and most direct way of soothing this nostalgia. Kitsch takes advantage of this arbitrariness of the memory. Kitsch deceptively hangs on to the "frozen" life in order to totalise its own existence. Kundera's concern is political propaganda and the use of kitsch as a cover for totalitarianism. Kitsch is, as Inglis puts it, the inevitable product of all totalitarianisms, whether "Fascist, Stalinist, or the blank and enveloping totalitarianisms of the shopping mall" (Inglis, 1993: 73).

Decoding: Lightness of Being

For Kundera, kitsch has its source in "the lightness of being". Kitsch is something more than simply a work of art in poor taste or the object of sentimentality. There are "kitsch attitudes" and "kitsch behavior". The kitsch-man's need for kitsch: it is the need to gaze into the mirror of the beautifying lie and to be moved to tears of gratification at one's own reflection. Kitsch has to do not only with the nature of the object or objects involved but also with the *mélange* of emotions elicited in the viewer or the user. A recognised masterpiece among paintings can also function as kitsch according to the user. It might be utilised by some viewers as an occasion for worthless pretentiousness. The picture may be

⁵ Mirek, the protagonist in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* desperately tries to hide in his life history that he had an "ugly" girl friend.

nothing for the buyer in terms of experience. Even in mimetic art, which involves an enhancement of certain experiences, kitsch attitude tones them down.

What is sought in kitsch is not only a certain object, but also an emotion or a mood. In kitsch, there is no encounter with an object which would warrant that emotion. Thus, religious kitsch seeks explicit religious emotion without an encounter with God, and erotic kitsch seeks to give the sensations of sexual love without the presence of a physical someone whom one desires. But even where such a person is present, love can itself be said to be kitsch if that person is used only to simulate a feeling of love, if love has its center not in the beloved but within itself. Kitsch creates illusion for the sake of self-centred enjoyment.

While “categorical agreement with being” is blamed for the whole process of capitalist production, the lightness of being is blamed on the human readiness for self-deception. The lightness of being shifts the indictment away from the object of sentiment and back to the subject, to the viewer and not the art or artist. Sentimentality of the user in kitsch is an excessive or immature expression of emotion. According to Calinescuc (1987: 258), kitsch thrives on aesthetic infantilism. Mental passivity and spiritual laziness characterise the amazingly undemanding lover of kitsch. According to Calinescuc, (1987: 7), kitsch is associated with “pop hedonism”, the cult of instant joy, fun morality and the narcissism of the consumer.

The notion of kitsch in Kundera's novel is "the sentimental and deceptive embellishment of life" (1983: 116). The nature of categorical being causes its viewer to be flooded with a certain emotion, “lightness of being”. Kitsch feeds the narcissism of the

consumer and evokes “cheap” and “easy” emotions. Kundera argues “kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession”. The first tear says: how nice to see children running on the grass. The second tear says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass! It is the second tear that makes kitsch. It moves us to tears for ourselves, for the banality of what we think and feel.

Above all, the interference with “appropriate” behaviour in kitsch is the dominant charge. The objects or themes depicted by kitsch are instantly and effortlessly identifiable. According to Kulka (28), kitsch works may be described as *transparent* symbols, the clear referential function of which is essential to their success (114). The transparency of kitsch results from its lack of aesthetic depth. The explication of the concept of depth reveals that the chief deficiency of kitsch consists of a special kind of redundancy.

Theodore Adorno’s defines kitsch as the “parody of catharsis”, “the parody of aesthetic consciousness”. Catharsis in tragedy is caused by a radical simplification of the action destined for catastrophe, while comedy is founded, in Kenneth Burke’s phrase, on ‘the maximum of forensic complexity’. Kitsch is caused by neither of the two. Kitsch simplifies action without any consequences.

Kitsch in my view can be regarded as a subject matter of comedy. Comic catharsis is caused by principles of “incongruity” at the heart of all comic theory (Golden, 1984 :283). Duckworth adds that,

The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been through it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity (1971: 310-11)

Bergson found the comic inflexible, something mechanical encrusted upon living (1956: 92). In Le Rire (Bergson:1947), moreover, Bergson views the subject matter of comedy as whatever is rigid, automatic, and mechanical in human mental, spiritual, and physical behaviour. These rigidities, these mechanisations of the human spirit, all subvert the optimum level of human social behaviour, and for Bergson the purpose of comedy is to bring the powerful admonishing force of laughter to bear on this kind of social disruptive human behaviour and thus alter it for the better. The basic goal of comedy is the correction of such formal qualities inappropriate to cultural content and intention as kitsch by the punishing humiliation of laughter. It emancipates affected individuals from the bonds of rigidity into which they have fallen, so that they can respond with the flexibility and grace that is inherent in their human nature.

II. 3. History of Kitsch: Emotional Loss in Touch

Kitsch can hardly be used in connection with anything before the late eighteenth century or the early nineteenth century. Kitsch is a term used from the advent of modernity onwards when the mechanisation of human emotion took place. Calinescue regards kitsch as one of the most typical products of modernity (Calinescue, 1987: 7).⁶ Kulka points out more precisely that kitsch has become a widespread phenomenon with a strong cultural impact only in the second half of the nineteenth century (Kulka, 1996:16). Whether kitsch

began at some point in recent history, or whether it is as old as art itself, one thing is beyond dispute: Kitsch has become an integral part of our modern culture, and it is flourishing now more than ever before. To connect kitsch to modernity attaches it to a specific historical period with particular characteristics. In the nineteenth century, for the first time in history, men could travel faster than by foot, on an animal or sail, and gain a different sense of changing landscape, a succession of images, which they have never before experienced.

Modernity gives rise to two different and even contradictory phenomena which despite all appearances are tightly connected within 'commodity fetishism' (Olalquiaga: 1998: 81). On the one hand, it yields the idea of novelty that is fundamental to sustain its own reproductive mechanism, mass production. To this end, it has to discredit the culture of maintenance that preceded it and that hinders the speed and quantity of commodity production necessary for capital surplus and profit making. In this sense, modernity is oriented only towards the future, relying on an ideology of progress for which mechanisation is basic. Yet, on the other hand, modernity glorifies all that has been left behind, perceiving in it a metaphysical dimension that is now lost, the preindustrial past, embodied in the notion of the exclusivity. The exclusivity is represented by its distance and intangibility - it can not be seen, heard, smelled or touched, only emotionally "felt" or cognitively apprehended. Such exclusivity is an ancestor of kitsch.

Kitsch was brought into being by the industrial revolution which made the mass-production of images possible. According to Calinescuc, the appearance and growth of

⁶ Calinescuc regards that kitsch concept includes modernity. See Calinescuc's Five Faces of Modernity (1987).

kitsch is the result of capitalist technology and business interest - in the domain of the visual arts (Calinescue, 1987: 8). Importantly, the term kitsch was originally used exclusively with reference to paintings. Mechanical reproduction altered the proliferation and affordability of images. As Benjamin first noted and Olalquiaga repeats, the nineteenth century witnessed a multiplication of image-making techniques that transformed Western culture's visual unconscious. Mechanical reproduction not only altered the proliferation and affordability of images, but also enabled a particular, modern sensibility based on the preeminence of looking and collecting. Although this sensibility may be traced back several centuries, what emerges at this moment is the unprecedented democratisation of the practices of looking and collecting (Olalquiaga, 1998: 13).

Calinescue states that kitsch is, historically, a result of Romanticism. Rise of kitsch is related to change made by Romanticism in the conception of aesthetic ideal. Before Romanticism the aesthetic ideal was fixed, transcendent, absolute and unattainable. Beauty was the imitation of an eternal idea. Beauty was thought to inhabit an unchanging realm above the flow of reality. Art was thought to grasp the essence of nature in an ideal form, and because of that essence beauty came to be considered as having an eternal nature. Romanticism sought for immanence in particular, finite works of art. During the Romantic era the aesthetic ideal lost all trace of its former transcendence and came to be perceived exclusively in terms of its immanence. However, even in Romanticism, the idealistic structure of aestheticism remained. In Romanticism, beauty was conceptualised as indwelling, inherent, actually present and remaining within. Romanticism emphasised the individual, the subjective, the irrational, the imaginative, the personal, the spontaneous, the

emotional, and the visionary. In Romanticism, an appreciation was shifted towards a general exaltation of emotion over reason and of the sensibility over intellect.

...many romantics promoted a sentimentally oriented conception of art, which in turn opened the road to various kinds of aesthetic escapism (Calinescue, 1987: 237).

In Romanticism, in other words, theory or ideal remains prior to practice. Yamazaki argues,

In classicism, the ideal of beauty was given as an objective canon, whereas romanticism sought to achieve more direct and subjective unity with ideas. In either case, the artist was required to pursue a pure and one-dimensional objective at all times.

Even in the modern age, when people began to believe that art must portray reality, the basic idealism did not change. Realism allowed no compromise on the part of the actor, and demanded that he portrays social injustices and human ugliness relentlessly. In addition, the Western tradition required that the artist be aloof to his secular surroundings. He was expected to make his art outside the framework of actual human relations (Yamazaki, 1984: xxxvi).

The historical conceptualisation of art in Romanticism continuously enhanced “theoria”. It sought for and cultivated mimesis “within individual”, but prevented “praxis” or mimesis “between individuals” from “sophisticating”. Inherited from Romanticism, kitsch etherealises (to remove all that is material or corporeal) the body, human contact, experience, history, narrative.

Modern capitalism has removed the very concept of experience with goods internal to ourselves (virtues) to the margins of our lives. The modern annihilation of experience is explored by MacIntyre⁷. MacIntyre’s notion of virtue may be defined as “an acquired

⁷ MacIntyre suggests that modernity decreases the core concept of virtue in terms of practices, narrative unity, and

human ability, the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices.” A practice is an established form of cooperation where the point of the activity is "internal". We eventually go well beyond anything that can be captured in explicit rules, for we ourselves become experts able to modify the standards (MacIntyre, 1985:175-7).

In the modern art forms, the eye was regarded as the most superior organ and the sense of sight is paramount for critical credibility (Fabian, 1983: 107). Kitsch is born out of modern aesthetics, preeminently looking and reading, (watching TV, films, or reading newspapers, journals, computers screens, etc) which tends to be “practice-distant” and to lack embodiment. In contrast, traditional hermeneutics is based on “doing”, or on a direct relationship to phenomena which encourages embodiment. It can be easily identified in a traditional form of performance such as ritual performance. It reflects upon traditional aesthetics which nourish “practice-near” media.

Kitsch lacks a ritual element in handing out cultural and aesthetic nourishment. Firstly, for “an anthropology of experience”, according to Turner,⁸ ritual, which in tribal society represents all available sensory codes, reproduces experience: speech, music, singing; the presentation of elaborately worked objects, such as masks, shrines triptychs.⁹ The symbolic connection in mimetic referentiality protects the specificity (or practice-nearness) of aesthetic experience by basing it on the prerequisite of trained sensibility and

tradition. See his *After Virtue*.

⁸ Victor Turner developed anthropology of performance in direct relation to ‘an anthropology of experience’. (Turner, 1981)

⁹ ‘Images of anti-temporality: a essay in the anthropology of experience’, *Harvard Theological Review* 75, (2) 1982: 243-365. The Ingersoll Lecture, delivered 5 October in Harvard University, 1981.

knowledge.

Secondly, fulfillment in performance is related to the process itself. The ritual performers and participants are not interested in the rite that succeeds or fails. Performance is to reproduce practice by parenthesising the “goal” of the practice.¹⁰ Ritual performance which often symbolises death and sacrifice, requires much of self-reflection of the participants. In many societies, ritual performance is regarded as a product of moral imagination, or a concept of the way its members may judge their world. What Adorno calls “self-reflection” identified in traditional aesthetics is lost in modern aesthetics. Adorno’s notion of artistic truth and content is derived from a dialectical reading of traditional aesthetics through the eyes of twentieth century art. Given vast discrepancies between traditional aesthetics and contemporary art, Adorno holds that “there is only one way by which aesthetics can hope to understand art today, and that is through critical self-reflection” (Adorno, 1984: 467).

As the result of a long cultural process, the “practice-distant” arts have come to replace a traditional, mimetic referentiality in arts. Daniel Bell states that modernism provided the new syntax of art and the dislocation of traditional forms.

In the classical pre-modern view, art was essentially contemplative; the viewer or spectator held power over the experience by keeping his aesthetic distance from it. In modernism, the intention is to overwhelm the spectator so that the art product itself through the foreshortening of perspective in painting, or the sprung rhythm of a Gerard Manley Hopkins in poetry -imposes itself on the spectator in its own terms (Bell, 1978: 48).

¹⁰ See Masakazu Yamazaki’s *Engi Suru Seishin*.

Modern aesthetics neglects the very fact that audience affect the production of art in various ways, and participate physically in making the arts as they are. With industrialisation, urbanisation, spreading literacy, labour migration, bureaucracy, the division of the leisure sphere from the work sphere, the growth of the market and money economy, the performing arts comes to be defined as a professionalised practice. Theatre, for example, breaks the unity of the congregation which is ritual's characteristic performative unit, converting total obligatory participation into the voluntary "watching" of actors by an audience. Such dualism has been a problematic characteristic in the modern art forms. Sports and athletics, stemming from sacred ball-games and funeral games, became professionalised practices. For a majority of modern people, more and more indirect vicariousness to live through the "practice-distant" arts became a fundamental trait of modern hermeneutics. Thus, in order to understand today's hermeneutics, one has to explore the intrinsic characteristic of the imaginary participation that occurs through the "practice-distant" mode of expression.

II. 4. Degrees of kitsch: immediacy of narrative

Kitsch etherealises narrative and unifies audience. Degrees of kitsch depend upon its immediacy in narrative. It is an important aspect of our aesthetic experience that there are visual works and styles where the medium is more or less transparent than in others. Transparency is achieved by a transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction. Transparency is deceptive, for nothing cannot be transparent where the subject is

understood through any medium. Complete transparency is neither an achievable nor desirable goal. Arthur Danto argues that:

*The medium...is of course never really eliminable. There is always going to be a residuum of matter that cannot be vaporised into pure content.*¹¹

Different media are “perceived to be” more or less transparent than others. Comparative judgment is necessary: the perceptual degrees of transparency are discussed below. The two aspects in relation to transparency are important: the loss of creator and the loss of contact with reality.

Firstly, I argue that immediacy signifies the loss of creator. The peculiar triumphs and degradations of photographic representation are due to its “perceived” immediacy - lack of metaphor and formality, which leads to the loss of the creator’s intention. Peter Kivy introduces the concept of the immediacy of the medium and the resulting loss of creator in the visual arts.

If I set my gaze on Seurat’s Grand Jatte, I am acutely aware at all times, of the tiny daubs of paint with which the painter represents his subject; these spots are Seurat’s medium, and it is a singularly untransparent medium, because it ceases to be prominently in the gazer’s awareness as he or she experiences the work. On the other end of the spectrum are trompe l’oeil paintings in which the fruit and game are so “realistically” depicted as to tempt one to reach the “space” of the canvas to touch the objects therein. Here, we are tempted to say, medium has become transparent to perception, is seen through without refraction, to the representational content within (Kivy,1994: 66).

¹¹ Arthur C Danto, The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art (Harvard University Press, 1981:159)

Secondly, thus the degree of immediacy accords with the degree of loss of contact with reality. This is because immediacy comes with a promise to provide an unreal sense of connectedness. The immediacy of the *trompe l'oeil* paintings shares being with the object of which it is the reproduction. The illusional sense of connectedness, of closeness to something infinitely remote is an important source of fascination with immediacy. Paradoxically, immediacy encourages a sense of losing touch with reality, like being stranded in the world of the simulacrum. Without the power of immediacy in the *trompe l'oeil* paintings, Seurat's *Grand Jatte* tells more about the object and prompts our critical intelligence. Kitsch works in favour of an undeveloped critical sense.

II. 5. Degrees of Tension: Regeneration of *Ma* (in-between)

Kitsch signifies loss of tension. The challenge to kitsch is against transparency or "identification" which destroys tension. One response to the challenge is the attempt to respond to such "practice-distant" existence by creating the "practice-near" action which will embrace embodiment and emotional sophistication. A metaphorical inspiration to such challenges can be provided by the Japanese concept, *Ma*. *Ma*, is in my definition, a counter concept of kitsch. *Ma* is a term suggesting intervals or gaps in time and space. *Ma* provides what kitsch destroys, tension or an in-between time/space. For example, it refers to a room as the space in between the various walls, or to a musical rest as an interval in the temporal flow. This "in-between" concept thereby carries a host of related meanings in relation to tension: *engawa* (veranda), *iro* (colour/eroticism), *mononoke* (supernatural beings), *ki*

(energy), etc. One very specific example of *Ma* aesthetics manifested in architectural design can be seen in the *engawa*, or the veranda/walkway surrounding many traditional Japanese homes. Kisho Kurokawa speaks of the *en* of *engawa* as related to *Ma*; namely, as expressive of relational merging into “third worlds” of in-between reality. As he says:

Perhaps the most important role of the engawa is as an intervening space between the inside and outside – a sort of their world between interior and exterior. Insofar as it sits in the shelter of the eaves, it may be considered interior space, but since it is open to the outside, it is also part of exterior space. The engawa is an outstanding example in architecture of what I call “gray space” or the intervening area between inside and outside. But the special significance of the engawa gray space is that it is not cut off or independent from either interior or the exterior. It is a realm where they both merge (Kurokawa, 1979: 5f).

Ma can be seen in an aesthetics of form that values the flowing, processing, transforming, transient, ephemeral, subdued, simple, clean, and “empty” character of things. The literal, descriptive, objective world –the differentiated world – is collapsed in direct, immediate experience. An aesthetic continuum emerges as an in-between reality where time, space, and all things merges into one flowing moment.

Ma aesthetics is metaphorically anti-kitsch. *Ma* transcends kitsch’s immediacy by creating aesthetic distance. *Ma* aesthetics is not primarily intended to communicate some social, philosophical, or religious message. In *Ma* aesthetics, the medium has multifarious controls which prevent emotional vulgarity among people involved. To prevent immediacy is to basing art on the form of *Ma*. The symbolic connection created by the form not only specifies the aesthetic experience, but also prevents the exclusivity of aesthetic experience. In *Ma* aesthetics, the certain “form” exists without totalising.

To grasp the further metaphorical implications of *Ma* aesthetics, one can focus on a particular instance of the actor's medium, the mask in Japanese Noh drama. Examining the role or function of the actor in Noh will allow us to ask how *Ma* aesthetics function in the traditional masked play. Moreover, by studying the role of mask in Noh drama, one gains insight into one of the most highly sophisticated traditions of *Ma* aesthetics. The mask and masked acting are not necessarily simplistic or primitive theatrical conventions. Ezra Park refers to the symbolic significance of the mask:

It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role. .. It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves (Park, 1950: 249).

The deliberate devise of mask in the classical play is contrastive to the kitsch narrative of immediacy.

The mask which lies between characters and audience is the abstracted medium **which produces experience.**¹² For the actor, Noh masks impose a surrender of subjectivity upon the actors wearing them. In other words, the actor gives up his or her individuality when putting on the mask. The mask which depersonalises is essential in Noh, because Noh involves a philosophical interest in the dissolution of personality. (Lamarque,

¹² The role and function of the mask are found in the classical drama of many traditions, such as ancient Greek tragedy and in the theater of Japan, etc. There are many precedented works done to show that several performance practices of Noh parallel those of Greek tragedy, including, chorus, a limited cast of male actors; a relatively bare scene area; dance, instrumental music, song and most significantly the use of masks. Martha Johnson suggests some striking similarities between the principles and aesthetic of masked performance in Noh drama and those of fifth century Greek Tragedy. ('Reflections of Inner Life: Masks and Masked Acting in Ancient Greek Tragedy and Japanese Noh Drama', Martha Johnson, *Modern Drama* 35 (1) 1992: 20) There are similarities between the overall appearances of the masks. Johnson

1989, 165) Zeami advocates that the actor transcend surface-bound mimetics to achieve what he calls *monomane*, literally, “the true imitation of things.” (Zeami, 1974) A theatrical communication in Noh is then based on bare essence rather than detailed imitation. Personal expressions on the actor’s face as well as those of the mask are regarded as ‘representative’ factors to be eliminated. The roles played by masks are complex and multifarious. The literary mask may function to disguise or protect the wearer’s face. However the use of the mask is **not** to deceive, even though it conceals the face; and indeed the beauty of masks as disguise lies in their function of bringing out “experience” by withholding or concealing.

For the audience, the mask helps to produce the distance between character and audience that is essential if the action’s universality is to be grasped. By symbolic means, the audience participates in the creation of the play by free association and brings it to life internally (the viewer ‘experiences’); a drama based on individual experience filtered through the emotion of the performer. The shared dramatic experience, in other words, is not the viewer’s adjustment of himself to the protagonist on stage but rather his creation of a separate personal drama by sharing the play with the performer. Each audience must participate in building these relationships.

Tension is created by the mask, the symbolical denial of immediacy, realism and transparency. Such a device creates the contact with reality. As Mikhail Bakhtin states, “the mask does not hide, but it reveals.” Emotional sophistication leads to the special reality

points out the similarities between the Antigone mask and the Noh female mask (27) The portrayal of the mask limits its expression, while simplicity, sculptural elimination of the mask produces the neutral, or at least non specific face.

which creates “tension” in the self-other relationship. For the same face of the abstracted mask, the actor, characters and audience think in different ways. This concept of difference does not mean “separation”, this concept instead involves a fusion of the minds of actor and audience or of self and others. Self-other relationship in Noh is not apposition but rather active fusion. The formality of Noh drama brings about a fusion in the minds of many participants of the play: performer, character, audience, even onlookers. Each of them ‘experiences’. Through this wordless dialogue between performer, character, and audience, a close relationship is formed. The relationship is not between me and you, nor the first and second person. The mask has to exist to create the tension necessary. An artistic medium such as the mask ‘exists’ so that audience do not completely identify with the character. There is a mask, so that the audience do not identify with the actor. None the less, the medium (in this case, the mask) is there, existing. It is there so that the subject (author, actors, masks) does not kill the object (audience)’s existence, because the medium helps both subject and object ‘exist’.

II 6. Kitsch Encounter: Japan and the West

II 6.a. Kitsch and International Understanding

As I began this chapter saying intercultural understanding is cursed in terms of kitsch. Kitsch shares the urge to totalise, to include too much; it also reduces any external challenge to the terms of one’s own discourse. Kitsch, with its quick-frozen answers, is

truly numb (that is unreflexive); it displays Milan Kundera's a "categorical agreement with being". The complexity of intercultural understanding is simplified and speeded. The strange suddenly becomes familiar. Indeed kitsch is the impediment and the vehicle of transcultural discourse.

Littlewood covers the history of the representation of the Japanese in English and American fiction and classifies Japanese character stereotypes according to themes of 'Aliens' 'Aesthetes' 'Butterflies, and 'Samurai'. Littlewood finds that the Japanese character is intentionally or otherwise inevitably stereotyped as are all foreigners. (1996) Luis Alposta selects for the cover of his book,¹³ *El Tango en Japón*, a painting showing a Japanese male in traditional kimono and *chonmage* (coiffure) playing the accordion, half squatting, so as to show the globalisation of tango. (See Fig.1) Yosuke Kawamura's drawings portrayed kitsch simplifying "the globalisation of culture": on the front cover of *La Tierra de la Salsa*, a Latin woman dressed in a kimono, holding maracas. Other paintings depict occupied Japan through couples – Steve and Sachiko, Kimiko and Bobby – or through anachronisms –like a scene from a samurai film, two retainers and their sword-toting master pause in a journey to drink bottles of Coca-Cola from a vending machine. (Toop, 1999: 215)

Globalisation of the earth enabled transmission of knowledge on a world wide scale. Intercultural understanding signifies a very modern phenomenon in the sense that cultures remote to each other attempt to interpret and adapt unfamiliar meanings. Intercultural

¹³ Luis A. Alposta, Buenos Aires: Editorial Corregidor, 1987. It was drawn by Sigfredo Pastor, cited by Savigliano in his 'Tango in Japan'.



Cover of Luis Alposta's *El Tango en Japón*, drawn by Sigfredo Pastor.

were gradually separated from political and economic institutions. Now the samurai tradition has shifted into the market. The massive recirculation of the cultural artifacts (computer games, books, films, television sitcoms, songs, clothes, cars) used a tremendous number and variety of samurai icons. Those icons often represent an illusion of completeness, a universe devoid of past and future. Such an anarchic condition destabilises Japanese traditional hegemony.

4. Samurai with Flair: Bodies and Boundaries

The winning iconicity of samurai that Mishima created is attributable to the flair he added to the samurai tradition. Mishima's adaptation of western homosexual kitsch is found in his obsession with body building. He trained to build powerful muscles in the upper part of his body, in his arms, chest and shoulders. As kitsch feeds the narcissism of the consumer, samurai imagery feeds the narcissism of Mishima. Narcissism is evident in Mishima's own bodybuilding, inspired by North American Californian beach culture. Mishima's iconography of samurai life is invested with a foreign set of meanings, generating a hybrid product. Its flair influenced particularly by Mishima's treatment of Western culture explains why Mishima is known abroad. This recycling phenomenon leads to the blending of Samurai with Western narcissism.

Mishima's narcissism is a prevailing illness of modern time, where individualisation is losing any 'ritual quality'. The body is treated as an instrument for controlling, and the individual body becomes mechanical. Mishima's narcissism is not

understanding often departs from practice. The departures from practice are always excursions into a foreign country. A fundamental trait of intercultural understanding is having more opportunity to be an onlooker outside practice. This is because intercultural understanding takes place in visual culture, the predominant experience of tourism, and often in the fixed mode, such as words on paper, photographs, films, etc. What one culture can provide the other culture with in modern society is dominated by consumer goods. The massive recirculation of the cultural artifacts (films, television sitcoms, songs, clothes, cars) produces a tremendous number and variety of icons. The importance of what happens in international understanding lies at the heart of understanding of the world we inhabit. International understanding is a way to know how culture adapt to what Raymond Williams calls the 'structures of feeling' of another, unfamiliar culture.

Williams pictures cultures as indivisible, as the common heritage of ordinary men and women, and as the site of struggle between classes, races and sexes. He provides the key idea of "structure of feeling"¹⁴ by which the values of the past, present and future are given form and meaning. A structure of feeling in intercultural understanding is to be found in the best-known stories of the day. Signifying a transfer of the "structure of feeling", intercultural understanding is typically a mode of aspiration encumbered by eternal truths and fixed representations. The matter of victory or defeat is often important in international understanding. International understanding is enmeshed in relations of power. The competition and borrowings between different cultures reflect concerns related to cultural

¹⁴ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, London: Hogarth Press, 1992: 41ff. The best introduction to Williams is Williams himself, starting with his early, classic work, *Culture and Society*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

hegemony as well as aesthetic practice. When the content is drawn from another culture, it is typically integrated and ordered so that it becomes intelligible, controlled, and agreeable. This is described as 'making sense' of the content so that it appeals to a "universal" audience. However, 'making sense' may be regarded as a subtle violence in which meaning is provided as a photographic form of knowledge that best serves dominant cultural goals.

The transfer of "structure of feeling" is like the transfer of "text". Thus the study of culture would do well to study the processes of encoding and decoding involved in translation. In successful translation, the access to something alien such as another language, culture, and code is substantial. One enters the translation process from a specific location, from which one only partly escapes. Something different is brought over, made available for understanding, appreciation and consumption. The original connotation of translation (*traduttore*) is "betray (*traduttore*)". (Clifford, 1997: 39) The crucial betrayal in translation suggests what is missed and distorted in the very act of understanding, appreciating, describing. One keeps getting both closer and farther away from the truth of different cultural and historical predicaments. This reflects a historical process by which the global is always localised, its range of equivalencies cut down to size. (ibid, 41)

Adaptation of "text" in unfamiliar culture involves loss of tension. Inevitable are the loss of the sense in human touch¹⁵, the loss of reciprocity, and a sign of cultural destabilisation and negotiation. Adapted texts thus serve as data documenting intercultural transfer. They provide the scholar with actual situations of cultural transfer rather than

¹⁵ See McLuhan's distinction in his *Understanding Media*, between 'cold' media and 'hot' media. TV as media is regarded as colder than telephone, for example. (McLuhan Marshall, London: Routledge, 1994)

hypothetical situations: Adaptation puts the original in motion to decanonise it, a wandering and a kind of permanent exile. (Bhabha, 1994)¹⁶ Through the study of adaptation, one can demonstrate how fragments survive, which wanderings occur, and how texts in exile are received.

II. 6. b. Japan and the West

Intercultural understanding includes “transaction”, as Hassan states, ‘for the model is always changed in cultural replication; something is lost and something gained in translation; and the idea of an “original”, in a time of simulacra, carries no conviction’ (Hassan, 1990: 81). This section aims to see such dynamic process of mutual **misunderstanding** as between Japan and the West where it is constantly doubling back on itself, the misunderstanding which supposes it is understanding gives rise to further reciprocal misunderstanding. This section thus sees its topic in term of the mutual embedding of its two halves: the West misunderstanding of Japan versus the Japan’s misunderstanding of the West. Describing the reciprocated incomprehension, it examines a wide range of cultural, sensual and destructive encounters between Japan and the West and the often piecemeal ways in which Orient and Occident have misunderstood and transformed each other.

¹⁶ Quoted by Susan Bassnett, in Constructing cultures : essays on literary translation, Clevedon : Multilingual Matters, 1998.

Oriental cultures have fascinated the West since Marco Polo came back from the Far East in the late 13th century to inform Europe that Japan was the new Constantinople. The beginning of the modern era in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was a moment when Orient and Occident perceived each other as an object of spectatorial delight while reading its mercantile profitability and intellectual consumption. In the late 20th century, projections of the exotic continue to filter into the popular imagination through art, fashion, exploitation films, travel books, tourism, pornography and television.

It is the mid-nineteenth century, as Buruma puts it, that the images of East and the West hardened. The West was virile, dynamic, expansive, disciplined, and the East was indolent, decadent, pleasure-loving, passive. (Buruma, 1996: xix) The sex burdened by Christian guilt in nineteenth-century Europe prompted Western colonial, missionary writers to project sexual freedom onto the Orientalist landscape. The Japanese taught their (in my phrase) the ‘sophistication of pleasure’ to Western culture, which had not yet overcome asceticism.

In return, the West taught their asceticism to Japanese culture. As Buruma illustrates

Some Japanese in the nineteenth century believed that Christianity was the unifying force that gave Europeans their vigour and discipline. This inspired them to come up with a muscular creed of their own: state Shinto. It was designed to promote absolute obedience to the emperor, as the divine embodiment of ancient Japanese values. ...The kabuki theatre and other arts of the old world of licensed hedonism were cleaned up and became academic expressions of national tradition. Public nudity was to be discouraged – even the ‘sacred nudity’ in traditional Shinto ceremonies of nature worship. State Shinto had to be clean and patriotic, just like muscular Christianity. (Buruma, 1996: xix)

In modernity in Britain influenced by Japanese “libertines”, the discipline was loosened, and the individual freedoms are established, while the context of life in Japan influenced by Western “missionaries” was one of discipline and reliable obedience. In both the West and in Japan, the myth of the Other as either “libertines” or “missionaries” contains its contradiction. The Japan is already infected by the West, the West by Japan. This, I think, is salutary as well as cursing, enrichment as well as contamination.

The Western academic consumption of Japan has long taken the narratives of kitsch. The way Western scholars approach Japan can be characterised as a transition from holistic, exoticising Japanology to a more specialised, scientific Japanese Studies. Harvey’s general interpretation of the western intellectual heritage is pertinent to how these two stages (Japanology and Japanese Studies) have tried to grasp Japan. According to Harvey, the western intellectual heritage created the dichotomy between ‘aesthetic theory’ and ‘social theory’.¹⁷ Aesthetic theory and social theory have been the most powerful mediators for understanding Japan in the West. Aesthetic theory is reflected typically in pre-modern Japanology, and social theory is reflected in modern Japanese Studies. Japanese Studies puts special emphasis upon social studies of contemporary Japan. Japan, before modernisation, has been interpreted through the lenses of aesthetic theory, or in the narrative of tradition. Aesthetic theory seeks out the rules that allow external and immutable truths to be conveyed in the midst of the maelstrom of flux and change.

¹⁷ Harvey explains that the schism in western intellectual heritage concerning conceptions of space and time. (The Condition of Postmodernity, 1990: 205) He perceives that aesthetic and cultural practices mediate between an aesthetic consciousness aligned with and the ethical projects of Becoming (the annihilation of space by time) and Being (spatialisation of time).

Japonisme,¹⁸ one of the examples of interarts phenomenon, constitutes aesthetic theory. Aesthetic theory takes the view that the painters, architects, sculptors, poets, and writers of all sorts try to communicate certain values through construction of a spatial form. In aesthetic theory, a theory of “being”, time becomes something to be conquered to achieve beauty.

During and after the second world war Japan began to be interpreted by way of social theory, or in the empirical and scientific narrative of progress. Social theory is a theory of social largely political and economic not personal "becoming". It focuses on the process of social change, modernisation, and revolution. The perception of 'progress' entails the conquest of space, the tearing down of all spatial barriers, and the ultimate 'annihilation of space through time' and the mapping of both onto money. (Harvey, 1990:205) The reduction of space to a contingent category is implied in the notion of progress itself.¹⁹ Japan in the narrative of progress was regarded a great contributor to knowledge. None the less, Japanese cultural significance in the West remained illuminated by a narrow academic concern.

Increasingly since the end of the war, more and more Japan specialists have begun seeing themselves as more objective and neutral. Japanese Studies was pursued within the ideology of modernisation theory. Geertz defines the problems of ideology:

¹⁸ Adaptation of Japanese art on the part of Western artist became fashionable in the 19th century.

¹⁹ For example, the suppression, prohibition and regulation of indigenous dances under colonial rule in some colonised areas is an index of the reduction of space to a contingent category. It represents a denial of the local practice by colonial rule. (The Politics and Poetics of Dance, Annual Review of Anthropology, 27, 1998: 503-32. See. p.522)

The inherent elusiveness of ideological thought, expressed as it is in intricate symbolic webs as vaguely defined as they are emotionally charged; the admitted fact that ideological special pleading has, from Marx forward, so often been clothed in the guise of "scientific sociology"; and the defensiveness of established intellectual classes who see scientific probing into the social roots of ideas as threatening to their status, are also often mentioned. (Geertz, 1993:195)

Geertz suggests that modernisation theory was a symbolic system that functioned not only to explain the world in a 'rational' way, but to interpret the world in a manner that provided "meaning and motivation". It functioned as a metalanguage that instructed people how to live. The key to modernity is a cult of individualism. A cult of individualism encourages the transformation of the self: this becomes the basis of social being not only in the West but also in Japan.²⁰ Most major modernist intellectuals of the late Tokugawa and Meiji period such as Fukuzawa as well as more contemporary one such as Maruyama see the creation of autonomous individuals as essential to Japan's progress. And both Maruyama and Fukuzawa would agree that since this precondition has not yet been met, Japan has not fully achieved modernity.

Within the ideological parameters of modernisation, Japanese civilisation is most often used as an exceptional or an alternative road to modernity²¹ under the subcategories of "collectivism".²² Japan is located as an alternative road to modernity, because economic success took place in a country which was deeply collectivistic from the Western perspective. Theodore von Laue put it thus: "Japan's 'achievement' since 1945 represents the most startling triumph of the world revolution of Westernisation: a non-Western

²⁰ Japanese modernisation advocated 'shutaisei' (independence of the spirit).

country unexpectedly successful in terms of Western achievement."²³ Western attempts to make sense of Japan's modernisation is stimulated by the puzzle of a huge economic success that has taken place in the context of a non-Western culture. 'Japan' began to signify a concept itself and as constituting a collective historical subject coterminous with such abstracts as 'progress' and 'economic' success.

The quantitative growth of Japanese Studies was promoted, especially in the years prior to the bursting of the economic bubble in 1993, less by intellectual interest in the meanings and messages of Japan per se. The growth can be explained by factors such as increased funding from Japan. This was designed to a great extent to promote desired images of the country and by the interests of governments that wanted to know more about the "Japanese model" as a means of finding ways to compete economically. Many academic institutions (and academics) jumped on this Japanese bandwagon, motivated less by critical academic interest in the country, its society and language, and what the study of Japan can contribute to our wider academic concerns, than by the images of large piles of yen eagerly donated by Japanese businesses and increased numbers of students rushing to seize that apparent passport to wealth and jobs offered by knowledge of Japanese language and culture (Reader, 1998:239).

Japanese economic growth was regarded a "miracle", because such a "collective" culture as Japan partook of the West's "modernisation". Thus the success of collectivism threatened European 'historicism'. European historicism was initially established in the

²¹ This view echoes with a Japanese author, Eiko Ikegami in her The Taming of the Samurai who considers Japan an alternative way to modernity.

Enlightenment and consolidated by Europe's technological and military superiority through the nineteenth century. Europe was regarded as the exemplar of modern civilisation, and "to be modern" was to have a political and social life similar to the countries of western Europe. Such Eurocentric anxieties for modernisation are best reflected in the belief in Western science and the attendant cult of "individualism".

The irony in the twentieth century is that while Japan emulates individualism, economic success inclined the West to begin emulating Japanese collectivism. Since the beginning of the 1980s, the Japanese case has been situated within a Western discourse: that is to say, within public discussions about the "problems" afflicting the economies of the United States and Western Europe. These "problems" involve the anxious self-perception among many groups in the latter societies that their economies have become less competitive and are generally weakening. Several aspects of Japanese collective life, management techniques, education and ethical practices were all investigated as part of the search to emulate the Japanese system and practices.²⁴ A 1987 report from the U.S. study of education in Japan states,

Japanese education...has been demonstrably successful in providing modern Japan with a powerfully competitive economy, a broadly literate population, a stable democratic government, a civilisation in which there is relatively little crime or violence, and a functional society where the basic technological infrastructure is sound and reliable (United States Department of Education, 1987: 69).

²² For example, when S. N. Eisenstadt advocates Japan as an alternative road to modernity.

²³ Cited by Reader, 1998.

²⁴ For example, Duke, Benjamin, The Japanese School: Lessons for Industrial America, Praeger publisher, 1986.

The Japanese form of capitalism is regarded as “communitarian”, as opposed to the Western individualist brand. In the discourse, Japan’s collectivism is repeatedly used by the West as a construct with which to examine the Western circumstances which threaten its individualism. The most striking example here is the pro-collectivism literature related to business management and economic policy: the broad spectrum of investigations devoted to in-service training, intrafirm techniques and qualities attributed to “Japanese management style”, and to industrial trade, and financial policies on a national level.²⁵

The Japanese presence in the Western imagination prompted a theory of Japanese uniqueness. The “scientifically” reduced structural forms and relational axes explained the distinctiveness of a Japanese culture which outsiders could not directly know or participate in. Like Ruth Benedict, their explanations proceed from the presumption that Japanese are “unknowable” except to Japanese. Benedict represents the apparent contradiction as between chrysanthemum and sword, between, that is, the kind and gentle Japanese and the utterly ruthless Japanese. The experience of war with Japan had made this the fundamental question in order to “know the enemy”. Written against the war-time image of the defeated Japanese as cruel and terrible, Benedict’s work carefully functioned to stress the positive and aesthetic side of Japanese culture. The contradiction and ambiguity of the Japanese raised by Benedict persists in the subsequent interpreters of Japan.²⁶ They see an absolute and systematic difference between Japan and the West: Japan has its own rationality, morality, systems of democracy, economy and art, all superior to the West. The discourse

²⁵ An example is Ezra F. Vogel, *Japan as No. 1: Lessons for America* (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1979)

²⁶ See Ian Littlewood’s *The Idea of Japan* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1996: 102-3)

focuses on 'traditional' Japanese values of conformity and loyalty. The West, in its account, for them is over-rational, amoral, too individualistic for the good of society, and hence inferior.

This discourse is taken over by the Japanese themselves, notoriously known as *nihonjinron*. Postwar Japanese social scientists - the impressive and provocative analyses of Nakane Chie in *Tateshakai* and Doi Takeo in *Amae no Kozo* shows how or why Japan had become proficient in the technological and entrepreneurial senses. The Japanese modern myth of exceptionalism has a long and complex history before Nakane and Doi and has come to permeate many aspects of modern Japanese culture. Reminiscent of Japan's World War II propaganda, *nihonjinron* is an attempt on the part of its writers to glorify Japan.

Peter Dale's *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (1986) catalogues Japanese efforts to idealize themselves by constructing the West as a unitary and radical Other. The notion of Japanese uniqueness is a mode of discourse, a body of knowledge, a nationalistic political vision of reality that represents an integral part of material civilisation both culturally and ideologically, with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery and doctrines. To the Western imagination, Japanese uniqueness, a Western academic tradition, is a style of thought deriving from its economic efficiency and success. Efficiency and forty-year success by this token the discourse of Japanese uniqueness, and emphasises, of course, the managerial and bureaucratic values. Ethnicity and cultural difference have exchanged their intrinsic values for the more extrinsic ones of market exchangeability.

Japanese uniqueness resulted in celebrating and promoting the world standardisation of 'modernisation'. Such treatment is, on my definition, kitsch. Kitsch is a

necessity for Japanese modernisation in order to systematise and institutionalise Japanese management theory to reach large numbers. A non-Western world of collective practices has been categorised, homogenised, and transformed into commodities suitable for Western consumption and interpretation. The collective and productive image of Japan becomes a unit of cultural capital which is invested in the narrative of modernisation theory. As a result, Japanese uniqueness served as an ideological defence for the dominance of capitalism over the rest of the world. The “Japanese miracle” led to collective heroism. This collective heroism has long been central when Japanese superiority in the field of business management was pronounced and became an export. In globalisation, the everyday rituals of nationalism entail the reorganisation of social space as a means of ensuring the national homogenisation of a particular territory (e.g. a factory, a garden, or a restaurant). It leads to the standardisation of space in a particular format governed by social boundaries.

Japanese uniqueness made the Japanese “untouchable”, but “worthy”. “Uniqueness” suggests a distinction that is naturally worthy, even precious. According to Olalquiaga, uniqueness is formed when objects are personalised in the privacy of someone’s specific universe, whether it be an album, a room, or any individually articulated space (Olalquiaga, 1998:16-7). In Japanese management theory, Japanese uniqueness is not intrinsic to Japan or Japanese experience; it is personalised in the privacy of capitalist experience. Experience of Japan becomes mainly available through signs, “JIT” (Just-In-Time Production), “HRM” (Human Resource Management) or “TQM” (Total Quality Management): Japanese things are not lived directly but rather through the agency of a medium, in the consumption of

capitalist images and objects that replace what they stand for. In conceptualising manufacturing systems, to confine myself to those powerfully cultural institutions, analysis objectifies labor, synchronises production, and abstracts the analysis of work from the concrete reality of continuing class struggle and resistance. The labour and human beings who labour under this system are absent from the enquiry.

The pitfall of Japanese uniqueness came to the fore as Japanese economic recession deepens. Dale's criticism became a popular discourse in the post-bubble Japan. While Japanese uniqueness is prominent in the discourses of the 'Japanese miracle' and 'what has gone right' during the late 1980s and early 1990s, while enunciating Japanese uniqueness is popular in the contemporary on-going discourse of 'what has gone wrong', concentrating the dark side of Japanese capitalism. The study of Japan becomes one of the explanatory variables in the latest economic trend. A whole genre of studies involving Japanology and Japanese Studies dedicated to mystifying **and** demystifying the Japanese has homogenised and kept audiences entertained, if not necessarily enlightened. They are kitsch, and my contribution to cultural studies.

2. Artists and Writers

III. Japonisme: Japan in the Aesthetic Theory

III. 1. Orientalism Revisited: Butterfly vs Geisha

A production of Puccini's great hit, *Madama Butterfly* was presented by Opera North in Leeds Grand Theatre on 1 Feb 2000. Butterfly was played in England by a Russian opera singer acting the role of the Japanese woman. I am a Japanese woman describing her opera in English. Such is contemporary intercultural communication. Although a fine acting and singing performance of Butterfly melted my ears, I did not need hankies to prepare myself for the demise of poor Butterfly at the end of the performance. Rather I became a momentarily detached observer. Firstly, what put my emotion off was my feministic and egalitarian rejection of the theme in this opera, which was the unequal cultural relations between Japan and the West – particularly the US -: and the attraction which western culture exerted over many Japanese, who are eager to adopt any American styles and customs. Secondly, my emotional detachment can be explained by lack of verisimilitude in the Japanese “cultural codes” of the stage presentation. The sets and costumes look appropriately Japanese-ish for the non-Japanese, however for me they are far from convincing me that they are Japanese. Suspension of disbelief does not work. Simply pulling a black wig to the rear into a pony tail is not sufficient reason for me to believe that the opera singers on display are actually from Nagasaki. The Butterfly I saw in the stage is a mile away from a Japanese heroine should be (is really like).

My image of a geisha heroine entails the ideal of the geisha, called *iki*, a

harmonious union of voluptuousness and nobility.¹ *Iki* is an Japanese aesthetic notion loosely translated as chic and coquetry but with an irrepressible undertone of amorousness. (Kuki, 1979:16) Chic and coquetry, however, are not enough to describe a whole meaning of *iki*. Coquetry is accommodated by brave composure almost like the warrior's vitality. Moreover, *iki* in geisha is a fusion of coquetry and resignation that simultaneously negates and affirms everyday life. Whilst detachedly breathing neutral air, *iki* purposelessly and disinterestedly makes 'self-disciplined play'. (Kuki, 12) Kuki makes clear that whenever the aesthetic notion of *iki* appears in art, its disinterested play is not incarnation or representation of something but is a suggestion of upmost aesthetic subtlety. It can consist, as Kuki says, simply in a hand gesture. (Kuki, 30)

Iki is a term which is often referred as a mannerism of *geisha*, derived from her down-to-earthness. The *iki* ideal can be manifested by highly specific choreographies of facial expression, posture, and placement of the feet and hands. Her ambivalent attachment-with-detachment toward her client or her lover is often described as *iki*, not because all emotion is controlled, but because of the sophistication of her passion. If *Madame Butterfly* is a trained geisha who affords a servant such as Suzuki, she should appear as a woman whose standing position is with the torso tense, slightly tilted forward, whose arms curve downward and whose knees are flexed, giving geisha its earthiness.

With these assumptions, *Madame Butterfly*, supposed to be a tragedy, was for me rather a comedy. The visual images are as comic as the English operetta, *the Mikado!* A geisha, whose toes turned out (they are aesthetically supposed to be

¹ Quoted by S. Light, Shuzo Kuki and Jean-Paul Sartre: Influence and Counter Influence in the Early History of

turned in), the *kimonos*, whose bottom looks loose like flare skirt, its wrong color-coordination, the sandals without thongs, all do not look right. The Butterfly I saw appeared in Kundera's sense, 'light'. The earthiness of the Japanese geisha who acquired life-long training as a fine artist of human relations is lost. Instead, there is an elevation, a sense of lightness found in the whole Opera, *Madame Butterfly*. (Perhaps that is why it is called Butterfly, light with wings. The word butterfly embodies her lightness, the metaphorical weightlessness.)

In this section, exploring a master-text of Orientalism, *Madame Butterfly*, I would like to suggest a kind of Orientalism which is not touched by Edward Said. Revisiting Said's concept of Orientalism, poses the question: What is there in Puccini's opera that makes for kitsch? There are apparently some strengths and weaknesses in using the concept of Orientalism to analyse instances of European and North American art which explore the people and the terrain of the imaginatively constructed other world. Of necessity, this section refers repeatedly to Said and it also engages with Puccini's opera, *Madame Butterfly*, as it provides the key coordinates for mapping the terrain of Orientalist discourse. However, one weakness of confining our thinking to the concept of Orientalism is that we neglect certain important issues, firstly what is lost in Said's text, Orientalism, and secondly, what he neglected in his argument against Orientalism. Orientalism is a too simplified image of the Other. I shall ask, what is actually lost?

III. 2. "Primitive or "Sophisticated"

Central to the Western Orientalist imaginary, the figure of the geisha (whose most well known incarnation is Cio-Cio-san/ Madame Butterfly) epitomises an exoticised and subservient femininity that is leavened with a tantalizing mix of passive refinement and sexual mystique. *Madame Butterfly* released the Romantic stereotype of the passive Japanese woman victimised by the West.

In much European writing, one of the Orientalist themes identified by Said is the celebration of an easily available sexuality, linked to metaphorical sexualisation of the Orient itself. Of Flaubert, for example, Said observed:

Woven through all of Flaubert's Oriental experiences, exciting or disappointing, is an almost uniform association between the Orient and sex. In making this association, Flaubert was neither the first nor the most exaggerated instance of the remarkably persistent motif in western attitudes to the Orient.... (Said, 1979:188)

Clearly, the easy access to prostitution for, say, nineteenth and early twentieth-century travellers of private means is not easily disassociated from other forms of exploitation; the colonial context is obviously crucial.²

However Said refuses to engage seriously with issues of sexuality even if he implicitly acknowledges their direct relevance to his project. He claims that he has no interest in exploring the role that sexuality played in the creation and dissemination of Orientalism.

² For general definition of Orientalism see the opening of Said's *Orientalism* (1-4). For a discussion of "Oriental sex" based particularly on the case of Flaubert, see pp. 186-190. Said presents several sexually explicit scenes from

Why the Orient”, he writes, “seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat)... is not the province of my analysis here, alas, despite its frequently noted appearance. (188)

His tendentious elision of issues of sexuality grounds his discourse in asceticism. In his argument, human sexuality is still regarded as “immorality” and “furtiveness”, and is a matter of “control” instead of a matter of sophistication. Said’s omission of Oriental sexuality is unfortunate, because it dismisses the question of what is actually lost in Orientalism. By his omission of Oriental sexuality, Said suggests that the Orient is not as “sexual” as the Occident imagines it after all. Confined by asceticism, Said does not suggest that hermeneutics (and its amplitude of fantasy) and human desire are part of the field of cultivation. I would like to go beyond Said’s Orientalism by assuming that hermeneutics and human desire indeed have degrees of sophistication.

An aspect of western aesthetic modernity in the 19th century constructed the foreign other as an object of kitsch emotion. Advance of kitsch is, as discussed in the previous chapter, pertinent to change made by Romanticism in the conception of aesthetic ideal. In Romanticism, an appreciation was shifted towards a general exaltation of emotion over reason. The Romantics turned its attention to the cultivation and the care of the self. In this quest for the self, a high premium was placed on spontaneous expression and unfettered gratification of one’s passion.

In reality, there was a cultural repression. In nineteenth-century Europe, sex was bound to a normative conception of the family and entailed “a web of legal, moral even political and economic obligations of a detailed and certainly

Gustave Flaubert’s Egyptian diaries (186-8).

encumbering sort' (Said, 1979:190) Hence, what is repressed at home is then displaced and transferred onto the exotic who is forced to function as the scene of prohibited desire. Bakshi observes that "the 'embourgeoisement' and institutionalisation of sex in nineteenth-century Europe prompted Western writers to project sexual freedom onto the Orientalist landscape. (Bakshi, 1990: 153) This was also linked with sexual freedom from Christian asceticism, because the colonial conquests were often accompanied by missionary activity. As Said puts, the Orient was "a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe". (Said 1979:190) As concerned with Japanese sexuality, central to Western exploration was geisha. Geisha is rarely questioned as anything more than a "lovely" prostitute in the popular Western imagination.

However Western exploration of sexuality still involves guilt: The non-Christian population has been either categorised as "sexually "uncontrolled" (decadent) or romantically idealised as "freedom" (utopia). As a result, "Oriental sex" was dismissed as "primitive". The Western cultural denial of pleasure in the 19th century reflects upon the notion of "primitive". The notion of "primitive" and its usage and meanings in Western societies needs to be understood before attempt to unravel how the "Oriental sex" was dismissed as "primitive". There are famously, two sets of meaning implied by "primitive" in Western society. These sets may seem contradictory, but they are actually dependent on each other.

1. savage, underdeveloped, uncivilised, unskilled, unsophisticated, and simple.
2. natural, instinctive, spontaneous, exotic, romantic, colourful, and unspoiled.

It may appear as if the first set of meanings of “primitive” has only negative connotations, while the second set has positive values. However, both sets of meaning are based on the narrow aesthetic criteria: Both sets can be equally destructive with regard to Japanese aesthetics in regard to emotion and sexuality. Such a limited interpretative framework (sexuality as a matter of control or indulging) can partly explain why Japanese tradition, centralised in the “sophistication of human desire” has been trivialised or marginalised in the Orientalist ascetic discourse.

“Sophistication of human desire” characterises Japanese traditional culture in which human desire is a matter of sophistication rather than of control or indulgence. In nineteenth century Japan, sexual pleasure was not as regulated as in the West, the concept of furtiveness about sex was unknown (at least until Commodore Perry’s arrival). The 19th century erotic prints, *shunga* (as mentioned earlier) show active sexual love as between two people, the woman as active as the man, the actions of each absorbing the other. *Shunga* reveals sex as worthy of observation or that it is so much a part of everyday life that is likely to be observed. The “sophistication of human desire” reached its cultural peak in the 19th century. The aesthetic value of that époque was “the floating world”, with connotations of the transience of earthly existence. The low-to-middle-class Japanese townspeople created art and a life style of their own that centred greatly on the pursuit of pleasure. The brothel became a place not merely to find sexual relief but one where artistic experience and ephemeral love combined. Geisha are accomplished entertainers who since early childhood had been trained in etiquette, music, song, poetry, dance, painting and calligraphy. Mastery of calligraphy was deemed especially important since the exchange of letters played such a key role in the game of love. Those with the greatest intelligence, poise

and graciousness became celebrated personalities, drawing a cortege of actors, painters and urban socialites after them. With their serene, ivory-like powdered faces, delicate nape of neck, resplendent kimonos and elaborate hairstyles decorated with ornate combs and pins, they epitomised for the people of the epoch the ideal of *iki*. Geisha was a popular subject matter for the woodblock artists, providing them with endless inspiration. The woodblock prints of famed courtesans were sought by rich and poor as pin-ups.

Geisha culture gave birth to this highly sophisticated aesthetic codes, *iki*, as touched upon in the prologue of this section. *Iki* is the term born out of heterosexual relationship refined in 'lowbrow' geisha culture in Edo period (1603-1886), and it eventually came to signify the quality through which Japanese 'highbrow' art and poetry receive their essence. According to Kuki, *iki* is demonstrated to be untranslatable through reference to any number of foreign terms. *Iki* represents an aesthetic notion that characterises a sensible appearance through whose lively delight shines the supra-sensible.

According to Kuki, coquetry towards the different sex is the first feature of *iki*. That relations with the different sex form the original being of *iki* is also understood in how *iki* was popularly pursued not only by artists but also by ordinary townspeople in the Edo period. The moral ideals of Edo culture are reflected in *iki*. In the Edo period term, for example, used by Chikamatsu's famous short story,³ '*iki matters*' (*ikigoto*)

³ Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1724) Japanese playwright, widely regarded as the greatest Japanese dramatist. He is credited with more than 100 plays, most of which were written for the *bunraku* (puppet theatre). Many of his puppet dramas are adapted by the kabuki plays. The characters that people Chikamatsu's domestic tragedies are merchants, housewives, thieves, geisha, and all the other great variety of people who lived in the Osaka of his day. Most of the domestic tragedies were based on actual incidents, such as the then-popular trend of double suicide of lovers. *Sonezaki shinju* (The Love Suicides at Sonezaki, 1703), for example, was written within a fortnight of an actual double suicide. The haste of composition is not at all apparent even in this first example of his double-suicide plays, the archetype of his other domestic tragedies.

loosely means 'erotic matters'. 'Ikimatters' often refers to an artist interaction between geisha and her clients where geisha and clients seduce each other by exchanging poems and performances. When we say 'iki talk' (*iki na hanashi*), we mean talk which concerns positively-tensed or rhythmical relations with the different sex. The structure of *iki* displays the three transformational moments of 'coquetry' (*bitai*), 'brave composure' (*ikuji*) and 'resignation' (*akirame*). Kuki explains

Coquetry is a relational attitude which constitutes the possible relations between the self and the different sex, where a non-relational self posits a sex different to that of the self. The 'voluptuousness', 'raciness' and 'amorousness' and so forth which may be found in 'iki', are then only the tensions whose foundation is this relational possibility. (Kuki, 1979:7)

The principal domain of coquetry is in the continuation of the relational, which is the secret of 'sophistication of pleasure'. Coquetry will be extinguished of its own accord and the tensions are lost, when different sexes achieve complete union. *Iki* ignores all the facile suppositions of reality and brackets all real life.

Iki is extinguished of its own accord and the tensions are lost in the passive geisha in the Western imagination such as that of *Madam Butterfly*. *Madame Butterfly* replaces the *iki* ideal for Western Romanticism. Butterfly denies intense pleasurable stylisation of social conduct in Japan by preferring romantic extremity of passion. Western Romanticism required rapid emotions, startling passages. *Madam Butterfly* aims at rapidity of execution, more than at perfection of detail. The object of Western Romanticism is to stir the passions rather than charm the taste.

III. 3. The Exaltation of Emotion: Transformation of Butterfly Tales

One can trace Butterfly stories back to the writings of Julien Viaud, a French naval officer who wrote under the pen name of Pierre Loti. (Wilkinson, 1990) Loti is an author of numerous travel-inspired novels that were bestsellers, and largely perceived to epitomise 19th century exoticism. The success of Loti's travel literature is, no doubt, due largely to its exoticism in which the aesthetic sensibility is inspired by strange and remarkably original places. In exoticism, aesthetic worth can only truly be gauged in terms of "re-membering" visual attractiveness, visual eroticism or physical beauty. Such aesthetic worth is one of the principles of exoticism and of its success in the popular arts. Kitsch emotion plays a significant role in exoticism, attaching to a person or objects to feel at home in the strange part of the world.⁴ Essential to kitsch emotion is exotic colours and doomed passions.

As a matter of fact, Loti's travel notes on Nagasaki in 1885 are filled with a great many negative racist remarks about physical features, smells and the civilisation of the Nippons.⁵ During his stay in Nagasaki, Loti is only attracted to one young girl 'exquise a regarder; elle est la seule Japonaise que j'ai rencontrée si complètement et si étrangement jolie'.⁶ His travel notes of the country in general are contrastive to his fanciful work, Madame Chrysanthemum. (1887) The contrast shows that his visual re-membering of a fragment of Japanese culture (in his case, the Japanese girl, in particular) exemplifies his exoticism in general. Japan's monuments and even its impoverished inns are thus suddenly illuminated.

⁴ As for kitsch emotion, see Adorno's article on the Ophelia myth in Dialectic of Enlightenment.

⁵ See Andre Dedet, 'Pierre Loti in Japan: impossible exoticism', Journal of European Studies 29, part 1, (113) 1999: 21-5. To Loti, naturally, everything seems 'comique' from the cooked meals 'pouvant servir d'amusement tout au plus' (87) and to the garden of Taiko-Sama, 'le plus mignon, le plus manière et le plus impayable de tous les jardins' (95). This impression is sustained throughout Loti's visit and he reiterates it at the end of the text: 'Au sortir de la sainte Montagne, tout ce Japon ordinaire semble encore plus saugrenu, plus comique, plus petit'. (138)

⁶ Referred by Dedet, 'Japoneries d'automne' (1885:24) in Voyages (1872-1913) coll. Bouquins (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1991: 146.

Madame Chrysanthemum describes a French naval officer's adventure with a geisha in Nagasaki. As one of the few ports isolationist Japan kept open to foreign traders, Nagasaki had a reputation as a safe harbor for Dutch, Portuguese, and other European traders. While there, sailors could benefit from the services of a variety of Japanese prostitutes, geisha, and other types of female companions. Stories like the one about Will Adams, the sixteenth-century Englishman who settled in Japan and married a Japanese woman were well known in Loti's day.⁷ The story's exotic passions caught the fancy of the West, where it was retold in various versions, most notably by Loti. In these tales, a Caucasian man, far from home and its morally moderating influences, falls in love with and often marries a young girl from another race and culture. He leaves his young bride, and, back in the West, marries another. When he returns, he discovers his nonwhite wife has had a child, whom he and his white wife adopt. Abandoned by her husband, sacrificing her own happiness for the "good" of her child, the cast-off lover kills herself.

Borrowing rather freely from Madame Chrysanthemum, an American short-story writer, John Luther Long wrote a magazine story, titled "Madame Butterfly". In 1900, with Long's assistance, an American playwright, David Belasco brought the story to the stage, where it became a tremendous success in both the United States and England. Giacomo Puccini saw the play in London and immortalised the story in one of his most highly regarded operas in 1905. (Jones, 1983: 163)

Although Puccini never visited Japan, he saw and was inspired by a Japanese former-geisha, dancer, Sada Yacco⁸ who toured to perform in Milan 1902. (Chiba: 1998: 18) Puccini's opera even included musical arrangements of some of the pieces

⁷ This romance also became the basis for the Clavell's bestseller, Shogun.

of Sada Yacco.⁹ As we all do in intercultural understanding, Puccini strove to reconstitute into his own object. Puccini liberates the indigenous metaphor from its reference to Western reality. His rewriting of the other's culture or music in the form of reproduction, normalisation, "re-membering", functioned as we have argued throughout this chapter, to incorporate kitsch emotion. The Japaneseness of the opera is "the Japan" reflected through the prism of Puccini's imagination. His Japan is "practice-distant" enough to carry out his musical fantasy.

He was fascinated by the exotic. Except for Sister Anglica, and Gianni Schicchi, Puccini turned to foreign locals to find settings for his operas: the Latin Quarter of Paris, the treaty port of Nagasaki, the Forbidden City of Peking. As Liao points out, seven of Puccini's twelve operas were named after their heroines' sobriquets; Butterfly, Boheme, Turandot, Tosca, etc. Each lives by kitsch emotion: they are all essentially the same- mysterious, innocent, fragile, helpless, lovely, and passive. This is the redemption of kitsch.

In the aesthetics of the "sophistication of human desire", Butterfly is "anti-heroine". Her stubbornness and her lack of responsiveness is in this context, "comic". Her life depends upon her emotional independence and her 'emotional individualism' which leads her to continuous self-deception and her loss of contact with reality. Butterfly's only question before facing the traumatic realisation of Pinkerton's marriage is "when do robins make their nests in America?", echoing Pinkerton's promise that he will return "in that happy season when the robin builds its nest again". Little does she realise that Pinkerton is returning only to fetch her son to fill the nest

⁸ She toured in America and Europe in 1899-1900 and 1901-02.

⁹ See Arthur Groos's "From Sada Yacco to Cio-Cio-san: Japanese Music Theatre and Madame Butterfly", Annual Convention of the Association for Asian Studies, Chicago. Mar. 1997.

he and his wife, Kate, have been making together in America. She deceives herself until the sad news had to be finally revealed by Suzuki. Coming face to face with reality, Butterfly decides to seek refuge in death. Taking up a dagger left by her father, she returns to her Japanese roots and seeks release in the ritual suicide of *hara-kiri*. Hypersensitivity or self-delusion of such a geisha is odd in the indigenous "structure of feeling" where the geisha is supposed to be a trained artist of human relations. Her artistic aptness is supposed to be inextricably linked with her human relation, let alone with her lover. Her aptness at being geisha is lost. The Butterfly narrative is thus deprived of "sophistication of human desire". What is added instead is such insensitivity in order to articulate a condition of abject devotion and an exaltation of emotion allied to helpless abandonment.

Her unchangeable emotion towards Pinckerton is a heroine's quality in the context of Western Romanticism. Romanticism exhibits the artist's vision of individualism, and is an artistic or "aesthetic" conceptualisation. Over against bourgeois modernity, which exhibits linear time as positive progress or improvement, Romanticism rejected the recent past and even the present, and defined itself principally in opposition to bourgeois modernity. Principles of Romanticism exhibited the predominance of emotion and imagination over reason and formal rules (classicism) and over the sense of fact, and the senses over intellect.

Romanticism represented a fundamental revolt against the culture of the rationalism and utilitarian thought which had increasingly characterised western culture since the eighteenth century (Baumer, 1977, 270) Critical of the Enlightenment and hostile to the calculating egoism advanced by the industrial revolution, the Romantics were, as Gilmore suggests, hostile to the emergent order's

rationalistic calculating outlook, its uprooting of traditional structures, and its relentless monetising of human relations (Gilmore, 1985: 5). Bourgeois modernity lies behind the objective individual. Money and commodities dominate the new urban economy, which forms such a huge and complex market that direct contacts between those who make the goods and their customers are no longer common. The impersonality of bourgeois modernity, in other words, is the setting for kitsch emotion of the Romantics.

Gina Marchetti regards Butterfly's role as a "patron saint of female submissiveness", a martyr to Western romantic notion of love". It is underpinned by a fundamental irony: "Butterfly may be a fool, stigmatised by her racial difference, but she also rises to become a heroine, who is ironically destroyed by the Western values that elevated her to the status of martyr." (Marchetti, 1993: 81-8) The sacrifice in its simple original religious form signifies the renewal of the martyr's faith. Butterfly moves us most closely when she is in fact a victim and is seen as victim. Our emotional commitment, in a major of cases, is to the woman who dies, rather to the action in which she dies. This is a pathos tending to bathos, and this pity-without-an-object is virtually a synonym for kitsch emotion. There is no renewal of life, but a positive renewal of our guilt, which can move us more deeply than the consummation of any order of life. The "structure of feeling" of *Madame Butterfly* is made to stimulate the pathos rather than experience.

III. 4. Japonisme and Beauty Frozen in the Visual Arts

During the isolation of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, Japan restricted

its trade to the Netherlands. Thus the Western voyagers to Japan during isolation were few, but existed. An example is the Japanese room in Schonbrunn Palace in Vienna is dated 1763. It should be noted that *chinoiserie* - the fashion for Chinese art generated after 1760 or so, had paved the way before the interest shifted to Japan. This latter event can be dated 31 March 1854, the day on which the ports of Japan were opened to the world by Commodore Perry of the United States Navy. A year later Japan concluded trade agreements with Russia, Great Britain, the United States and France, and in 1856 with the Netherlands. After two centuries of isolation, economic and cultural exchange could begin. The Western voyagers to Japan were intrigued and, in some instances, appalled, by the culture that they witnessed. Ever since, Japan's distinctive characteristics have alternately charmed, irritated, and baffled Western observers. The West discovered a place, a myth of alterity, strange men and women in a landscape of dreamlike Japan.

Although Paris was the acknowledged centre of *japonisme*, it started earlier in Britain. (Chiba, 1998: 4) At the Great Exhibition in London some Japanese art objects were displayed¹⁰, and in 1854, an exhibition at the Gallery of the Old Water Colour Society¹¹ in Pall Mall East consisted solely of Japanese art. In the late 1850s, the Gothicist architect W.E. Godwin was already collecting Japanese prints to decorate his home in Bristol. Godwin became a life-long friend of James McNeill Whistler, who had moved to London from Paris in 1859 to act thereafter as a bridge between the avant-garde artist circles of the two cities. In 1862, the International Exhibition in London featured "the largest display of Japanese art ever seen at that

¹⁰ Mainly drawn from the collection of sir Rutherford Alcock, the first British Consul-General in Japan. By 1863, *Japonisme* had been well under way in London.

¹¹ Johnsell Cotman from Royal Water Colour Society of Artist is a British man who was fascinated by Japanese

time in Europe".¹² In London, Liberty's, a shop specialising Japanese art was opened in Regent Street in 1875, which was patronized by Whistler, Rossetti, Fredrick Leighton, William Morris, Burne-Johnes, Albert Moore, John Ruskin, Godwin, Ellen Terry, Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, among others.

This section explores attitudes toward and the different phases of the assimilation of Japanese aesthetics and practice in late 19th-century Western society, particular in Britain and France, ranging across the arts and painting. One might perhaps accuse any European assimilators of mere exoticism, but the evidence makes it clear that some assimilating traits were sophisticated and conveyed more positive effects than the others. The ability of cultural imagery to travel and adapt itself to new requirements and desires should be examined by either as sign of "kitschyfying" or as a sign of "sophisticating".

On one hand, the reception phases in *Japonisme* suggest stages of kitsch. In terms of how Japanese imagery was used for the artist, three stages can be suggested. It can be said that each stage of Japanese imagery satisfies the desire for intensity in a different way: in the first stage, collectorship, through an osmotic process resulting from the collection and possession of objects without understanding their meaning; the second stage is characterised by commodification through using objects without understanding their meaning; incongruity and inappropriateness are evident.) In the third stage, assimilation, by recycling them into a hybrid product. In the third stage, Japanese objects become assimilable through the common 'structure of feeling'.¹³ Assimilating Japanese

arts.

¹² Quoted by Chiba, 1998: 4.

¹³ It indicates the framework we have for feeling at home in the strange world. By "structure of feeling", the value

objects provides the individual artist with feeling at home in the strange or “practice-distant” part of the world.

On the other hand, a phase of sophistication is also critically examinable. Introspective as *japonisme* is, the assimilator embodied and cultivated his new individual sensibility. Here we find a precept. It is that the more serious and profound the assimilator, the slower was the process of assimilation and the less obvious its manifestation. This is because embodiment is a long process. The degree of kitsch decreases according to the degree of embodiment. Wichmann suggests its comparative judgment in the *japonisme* arts.

Direct copies of Far Eastern models are in any case artistically unsatisfactory for the most part, for it was only through the transmutation of exotic stimuli in works of a high artistic standard that techniques were developed which liberated artists from the stagnant European traditions. (Wichmann, 1980:11)

European art historians make the distinction that *japonisant* or *japonaiserie* designate someone who collects or studies Japanese arts without creatively reworking them, and *japononiste* denotes someone who applies Japanese principles and models in Western creative works. Thus the gallery-owner Durant-Ruel was a *japonisant* but Monet was a *japoniste*. Moreover, Chiba’s demarcations are pertinent to this critical examinability. Chiba describes the changing phases of reception in *japonisme* as it cuts across temporal demarcations in terms of collectorship, *japonaiserie*, to *japonisme*. The first phase began with the opening of the country effected by Commodore Perry in 1854 up to 1867, the year of the first *Exposition Universelle* in Paris. With the second phase (from 1868 to around 1883) taking the form called

of the past, present and future are given form and meaning.

japonaiserie – “using Japanese objects as props for conjuring up fanciful visions of Japan”- and the last mature stage (to the outbreak of the first world war), *japonisme* proper, taking the form of “the assimilation of certain stylistic approaches and design principles”. (Chiba, 1998:3)

In the first phase, collectorship, the Japanese objects are collected and personalised in the privacy of the collectors. The collecting involves Japanese *kimono*, lacquer ivories, ceramics, textile, medicine boxes and ornamental sword guards. For example, the Japanese samurai sword is a collected item for the libretto-composer of *Mikado* (1885) which turns out to be the key to his inspiration to his operatta.¹⁴ The sword tempts W.S.Gilbert to go to the International Exhibition in London where Japanese arts (including traditional performances in progress such as Noh and kabuki) were displayed. The *Mikado* parodies a phase of collectorship-the Victorian England with its obsession with all sorts of Japanese objects from fans to kimono, and from screen to jar. In this phase, a queer and quaint Japan was consoled by “happy Japan” kitsch, in which mindlessness prevails and everything is unsoiled and painless.

The second phase, commodification, takes the form of *japonaiserie* - “using Japanese objects as props for conjuring up fanciful visions of Japan”. (Chiba, 1998:3). Many artists adopted Japanese motifs, and featured musical instruments, flower patterns, and kimonos in their paintings. Rossetti was one of the earliest painters of *japonaiserie*, in such paintings, *The Blue Bower* (1865), *The Beloved* (1865-66), and *A Sea Spell* (1872). Another representative example is Vincent van Gogh’s geisha motif in his *Self-portrait with bandaged ear*. (See Fig.1) The portraits of Western

¹⁴ See Guilbert and Sullivan, by Hesketh Pearson, London:Penguin Books, 1950.



Vincent van Gogh
*Self-portrait with bandaged
ear (detail)*
Paris 1889
Oil on canvas
60 x 49 (23½ x 19½)
London, Courtauld Institute
Gallery



2 Claude Monet
*Madame Monet in a kimono
(La Japonaise)*
1876
Oil on canvas
231.5 x 142 (91¼ x 56)
Boston, Museum of Fine
Arts

women in kimonos were popular. Monet's portrait of his wife in a kimono (*Madame Monet in a kimono* or *La Japonaise*) (See Fig.2) is filled with Japanese objects.

And the last stage, assimilation, *japonisme* proper, takes the form of "the assimilation of certain stylistic approaches and design principles" (Evelt viii)¹⁵. Many major artists in Paris and London, including Degas, Manet, Whistler, Seurat, The Nabis and Toulouse-Lautrec, Rossetti and Beardsley incorporated the Japanese aesthetic into their arts. Flat qualities such as emphasis on line, the high horizon, the lofty viewpoint, asymmetry, balance of black and white areas, narrow verticality and omission of foreground/background distinctions stunned both artists and public.

III. 5. Spontaneity and Sexuality

An important aspect of *japonisme* is the phenomenon of the Western higher class¹⁶ emulating the lower class. At the center of Western bourgeois collectorship in Japanese art were the 'lowbrow' arts, namely Ukiyoe (woodblock prints) and Manga (monochrome prints). Hokusai's *Manga in Paris* in 1856 was collected and engraved by Felix Bracquemond, which attracted great attention. A 15-volume series of woodblock sketchbooks in black and white, *Manga* remained, for the next several decades, the most popular of all Japanese prints and objets d'art, including monochrome ink paintings and picture scrolls, and it became the staple among collectors' aspects of daily life, customs and legends of the Japanese people, as well

¹⁵ Quoted by Chiba, 1998: 3.

¹⁶ According to Hauser (1951: 72), the Impressionists, for example, come very largely from the lower and middle sections of the bourgeoisie, but who are much less concerned with intellectual problems than the artists of earlier generations; they are more exclusively craftsmen and "technicians". However, there are also members of the wealthy bourgeoisie and even of the aristocracy among them. Manet, Bazille, Berthe Morisot and Cézanne are the children of rich parents, Degas is of aristocratic and Toulouse-Lautrec of high aristocratic descent. Thus the well-

as nature, rendered in fantastic realism and characterised by a light comical touch.

They are not the aristocratic arts but the arts 'of' and 'for' the low-to-middle class Japanese, artisans and merchants. The social classes constituting Japanese society in the Edo period were nobles, warriors, peasants, merchants, and artisans. (Yamazaki, 1994: 21) Japan's samurai or rich landowners held the undisputed reins of political, economic leadership. Lower on the social ladder ranked the peasants with their labour produced the country's food, followed by the artisans whose work was visible in art and architecture. On the lowest rank were the urban merchants and tradespeople who were thought to contribute nothing tangible. These three classes were without slightest role or voice in government. The official ideology of the Edo period relegated artisans and merchants to the lowest slots of the social class structure. Artisans and merchants of the Edo period, undaunted by the contempt in which they were held by the authorities, vigorously asserted themselves culturally. They expressed their own taste in art and custom, as well as their own philosophy and worldview. The blossoming of lower-class art reflected their affluence and sophistication.¹⁷

Japanese lower-class practice was taken up by the Western rising bourgeoisie. Partly this was inevitable: Western artists and collectors saw only a restricted portion of Japanese art – no paintings or sculpture, but prints and albums which the Japanese government certified as exportable. When the first woodblock prints arrived in Paris in about 1862 they set off a wave of enthusiasm for Japanese art that crested decades

known *Japonisme* artists, Manet, Degas and Toulouse-Lautrec are from the genteel bourgeois society.

¹⁷ According to Yamazaki, wealthy Japanese merchants since the Muromachi and Momoyama periods had few parallels in the rest of the world in that, each was an individual with a possessor of artistic accomplishments and scholarship who exhibited taste in daily living. These affluent merchants resembled the wealthy merchants of the European Renaissance in serving as patrons of scholars and artists. However, in contrast to the European wealthy counterparts, many are the artists themselves. (Yamazaki, 1994: 41)

later. Until the 1880s, foreign access to painting and sculpture, which integrate religious values, was virtually impossible. Even when Europeans glimpsed this 'high' art, they dismissed these Buddhist sculptures, exquisite landscape, scenes from classical legends, symbolic birds, supernatural creatures or flowers, and austere calligraphy, practiced for its own inherent grace and valued for its brushwork, because they did not understand it. Before 1860, Japanese officials classed the prints sent to Europe among the lowest products of their art. Ukiyoe in a Buddhist term meaning or from the noble's perspective signifies a derogative meaning, the "sad world". To nobly born government administrators, depictions of the daily life in brothels, scenes from kabuki theatre, and portraits of courtesans and actors illustrated low-to-middle-class life and were far removed from serious art. The revelation of the comic aspect in common people was not the language of refined people, samurai and rich landowners. Hokusai's depiction of common, primary, human gestures was not thought proper for Shogun, being regarded as 'low instinct'. Single-sheet works exported to Europe were by printmakers, of whom the most widely known were Utamaro and Hokusai. Ukiyoe are prints dealing with the entertainment and prostitution.

"*Ukiyo*" (the floating world) is in a 'highbrow', Buddhist derogatory meaning. However, from the perspective of affluent merchant and artisans (*chonin*), it is the aesthetic value of "the floating world", with connotations of the transience of earthly existence. For low-to-middle-class merchants and artisans, the term covers the aesthetic values, which cherished the passing moment and temporal flux for their own sake, ranging from up-to-date and fashionable consumption to the erotic. The fluidity of the alternative social and cultural values associated with the *ukiyo* posed a threat to

the stable, hierarchical, official culture promoted by government. They created a life style of their own that centred greatly on the pursuit of pleasure. 'Sophistication of human desire' was the department of the townspeople. Every large city had its pleasure quarter. In Edo, it was located in Yoshiwara. The streets were lined with theatres and restaurants, public baths and houses of assignation. *Ukiyo* is about living just for the moment, viewing the moon, the cherry blossoms, singing songs and drinking sake, floating like a gourd on the river. These well-to-do *chonin* were neither vulgar nor ignorant. Instead of indulging their wealth, they created 'rules' to their own pleasure. The diversions created by the lower social was what Gerd Lester calls 'a peaceful but most consequential revolt.' (Lester, 1994:79) The entertainment district was a place not merely to find sexual gratification but one where artistic experience and ephemeral love combined. The women of the pleasure quarters were expected to be skilled in music, poetry, painting, calligraphy, and other arts. Mastery of calligraphy was deemed especially important since the exchange of letters played such a key role in the game of love. The woodblock artists such as Utamaro pictured their favourite retreats, the pleasure quarters with their enchanting seductresses and the Kabuki theatre where gregariously costumed actors with mask-like faces gave spectacular performances, provided them with endless inspiration.

No matter if European artists knew that their favourite arts are a 'lowbrow' art, *japonisme* freed the Western artistic mentality from the constraints of its academic conventions in terms of two aspects; spontaneity and sexuality. As was the case with Manet and Degas, the appeal of the Japanese lay in their suggesting a means to render contemporary life more vividly than the realism of academic art permitted. Where the Japanese depicted the teahouse of the Yoshiwara, Degas painted the cafes and

concerts of the boulevards. The innumerable Japanese theatrical prints showed the actors in their latest roles – we can actually date the prints from the theatrical records, since the publishers rushed them at once into their shops. Degas's view of the stage, audience, orchestra, rehearsals, and examinations give a similar sense of contemporaneity.

The Japanese aesthetics of *ukiyo* which cherished the passing moment and temporal flux for their own sake, attracted European avant-garde artists whose also wanted to express ephemeral impressions of city life. Many of the Japanese elements European artists encountered corresponded with effects they had noticed and admired in their own environment. Both are city dwellers. Like Japanese artists, Impressionists created an urban art, not only because it discovers the landscape quality of the city, but because it sees the world through the eyes of the townsman. In both Ukiyoe and impressionist arts, recognition is given to the dynamic and organic elements of experience. A world, the phenomena of which are in a state of constant flux and transition, produces the feeling that every phenomenon is a fleeting and never-to-be repeated constellation.

Japanese exaggeration of perspective foreshortening contributed to the particular kind of painting the avant-garde was trying to evolve. Needham offers an example in relation to Monet,

Monet wanted to paint a scene that not only was visually convincing in its freshness and immediacy but also included the atmosphere –what he referred to as the 'enveloppe' of air. The traditional Japanese picture precluded this latter element, while the one-point perspective style in Western landscape created a steady recession with a time element that eliminated immediacy. (Needham, 1975:17)

For the avant-garde, *japonisme* spelt liberation, the revelation of techniques which

released them from the old traditional concepts of classical modelling taught at the academies. From the Renaissance onward, central perspective with a fixed view point used to be a gulf between Western and Eastern concepts of space.

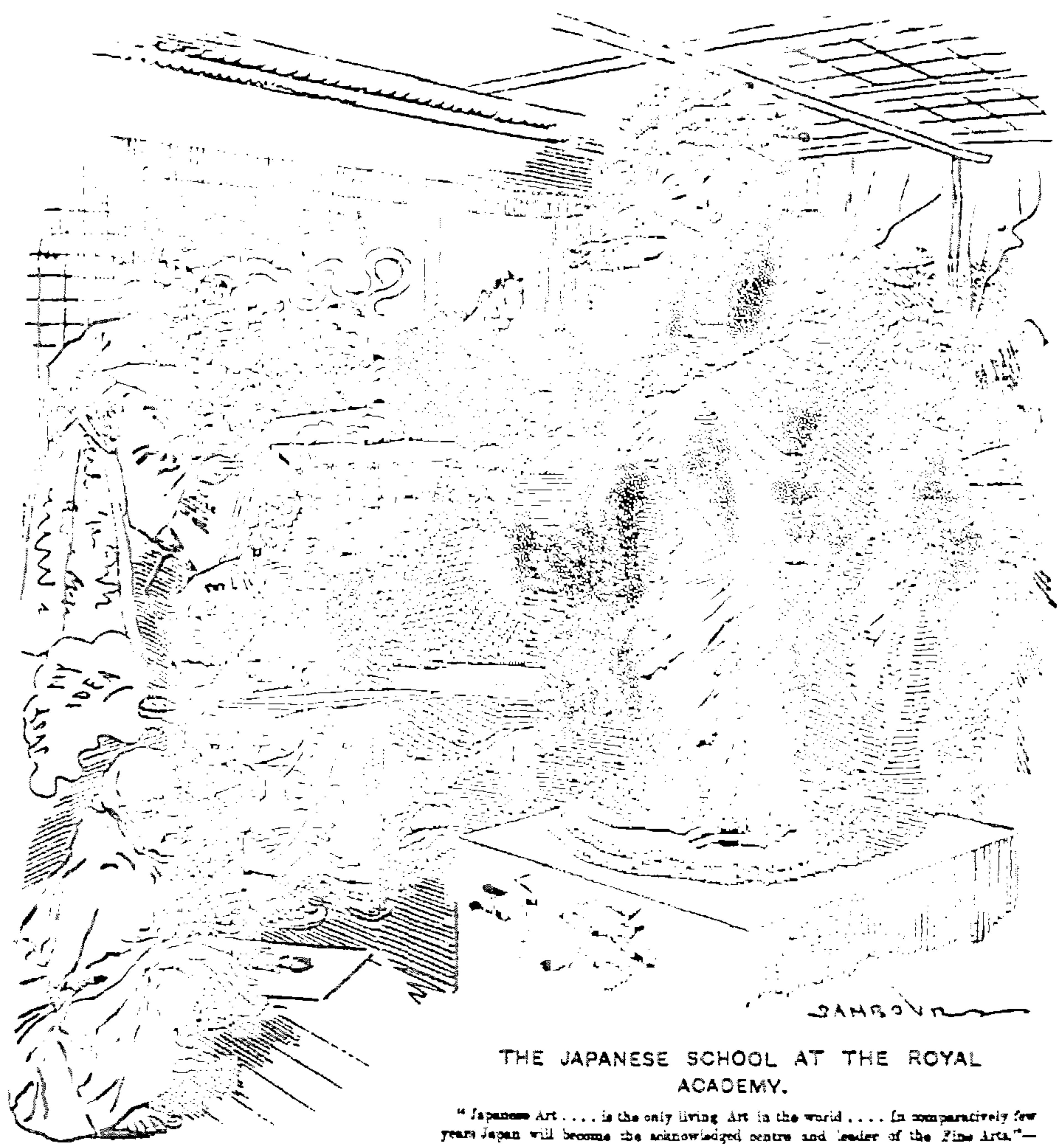
The avant-garde's experience in discovering Ukiyoe brought about sophistication of the artists' individual visions and a new, spontaneous relation to reality. In particular, the Japanese theme breathed new life into the traditional Western subject of the woman. A *Punch* cartoon of 4 February 1888 entitled "The Japanese School at the Royal Academy" comically depicted a group of British *japonistes*, clad in kimonos and surrounding a Japanese female model (Fig. 3) On one hand, some Western artists celebrated female beauty, combining the elements of the two opposing male ideals of womanhood in the era: the virtuous "angel of the house", devoted to husband and family, and the wanton femme fatale, seductive, dangerous, and, often, entranced by her own sexual power. On the other hand, others incarnate the realism of woman, with a muscularly independent posture and business-like sexuality.

The gesture and posture in Japanese arts provided the former Western artists with new ideas about poses or particular actions. Avant-gardists are emancipated to see Hokusai draw subjects which took on shapes according to the autonomy of their individual movements, following the laws of normal physical mechanisms. Subjects select their own pose, appropriate to their calling and their environment. Avant-garde artists attempted to incorporate spontaneity in their work as a vital part of the composition. A major collector of Japanese art, Ary Renan described Hokusai's rendering of motion:

Motion is pursued by Hokusai. Our art is entirely opposed to this. It is constructed on the absence of movement, on a sort of perpetual retouching from nature. Movement seems to us a burden upon truth – we mistrust it as an excess, a danger.



A geisha postcard. 1900s.



THE JAPANESE SCHOOL AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY.

"Japanese Art . . . is the only living Art in the world . . . In comparatively few years Japan will become the acknowledged centre and leader of the Fine Arts."—
Extract from Japanese Lecture on Japanese Art. Title "Times," Jan. 25.

3 Cartoon from *Punch*, 4 February 1888.



4 Dante Gabriel Rossetti
The Blue Bower
 1865 Oil on canvas

Originally appeared in Chiba's article,
 'Japonisme: East-West Renaissance in the Late 19th Century' (19



5 Dante Gabriel Rossetti
A Sea Spell
 1877
 Oil on canvas
 42.01 x 35.00 inches 106.7 x 88.9 cms
 Fogg Art Museum,
 Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

(1889:100)¹⁸

For Avant-gardists, 'body-language', as expressed in the individual, intimate, spontaneous actions and postures of private bourgeois life, was acknowledged to be a subject worthy of art.

Assimilation was slow and gradual. Women's bodies with Japanese motifs, *koto* and *kimono* are carefully arranged in the idealistic way, to feed a sexual appetite of the man looking at them. Rossetti painted, in many of his works, half-length allegorical representations of beautiful bourgeois women. They were pure kitsch. He depicted models and mistresses whom he admired and loved in lyrical and luxurious poses, often as characters from literature or mythology. *The Blue Bower* (1865) (Fig.4) is an archetypal Rossetti's image of woman.¹⁹ The painting commemorates her alluring lips, her flowering auburn hair, radiant flesh, and voluptuous proportions; she is caught in an alluring pose, glancing sideway at the viewer while fingering the strings of a Japanese *koto*. (See Fig. 4 and 5) The admirable motif of a standing figure which seems to incline, initiated by Whistler was painted in many variants by Manet and Monet. Women's gestures are tender, passionate, and sometimes flirtatious.

Degas is recognised as one of the great explorers and assimilators of the Japanese influence in terms of female in motion. Again, his conversion to Japanese subject matter was gradual rather than dramatic. His intention is to step outside the world of conservative bourgeoisie into the 'aesthetic' life of the Paris streets. Leaving his passion for portraiture which represented a link with tradition, he focused on two particular female subject-groups: ballet dancers (Fig.6 and Fig.8), and women at their

¹⁸ In the second volume of the magazine, *Artistic Japan*, 1888-91, 2 (9) 1889.

¹⁹ It depicts Fanny Cornforth, a favourite model who later became the artist's mistress and housekeeper.

Hokusai's figures are anonymous, set at a distance from the viewer, as if ignoring him; but in the Degas's work the movements are directed entirely towards the attention of the viewer. (Witchmann, 1980:36) He would draw and re-draw a particular figure, demanding that his model should pose unflinchingly for hours on end, and then store away the drawings in his reference collection for future use. (Bernard, 1986:80)

Realism

The move to the new view of posture and movement demanded of European artists a more direct communication with the subjects, such as Hokusai and Utamaro possessed. They had to move out of the ateliers. The reaction of the ordinary person to the various stimuli of the world around them were manifold and full of feeling. A whole range of primary human gesture was observed and depicted in Hokusai and Utamaro's art with an intimacy that was unknown to Europeans. Avant-garde artists perceived that Hokusai and Utamaro made themselves physically and emotionally a part of their environment, which they studied not only very closely but also comically. The avant-gardists were interested in Japanese art as 'a living art' in which 'traditions and craftsmanship were unbroken'²⁰, and the results full of attractive 'variety, quickness and naturalistic force'. (Wichmann, 1980:8) The speed and rhythms of the Japanese graphic artists impressed Vincent Van Gogh. He wrote to his brother.

*The Japanese draw quickly, very quickly, like a lightning flash, because their nerves are finer, their feeling simpler.*²¹

When depicting the realism of the female subject, the European avant-garde did not

²⁰ Japanese Art of Edo Period, Christine Guth, Everman Art Library: London, 1996: 39.

²¹ Van Gogh, Vincent, The Complete Letters, 3 vols, New York, London, 1958, letter 500.

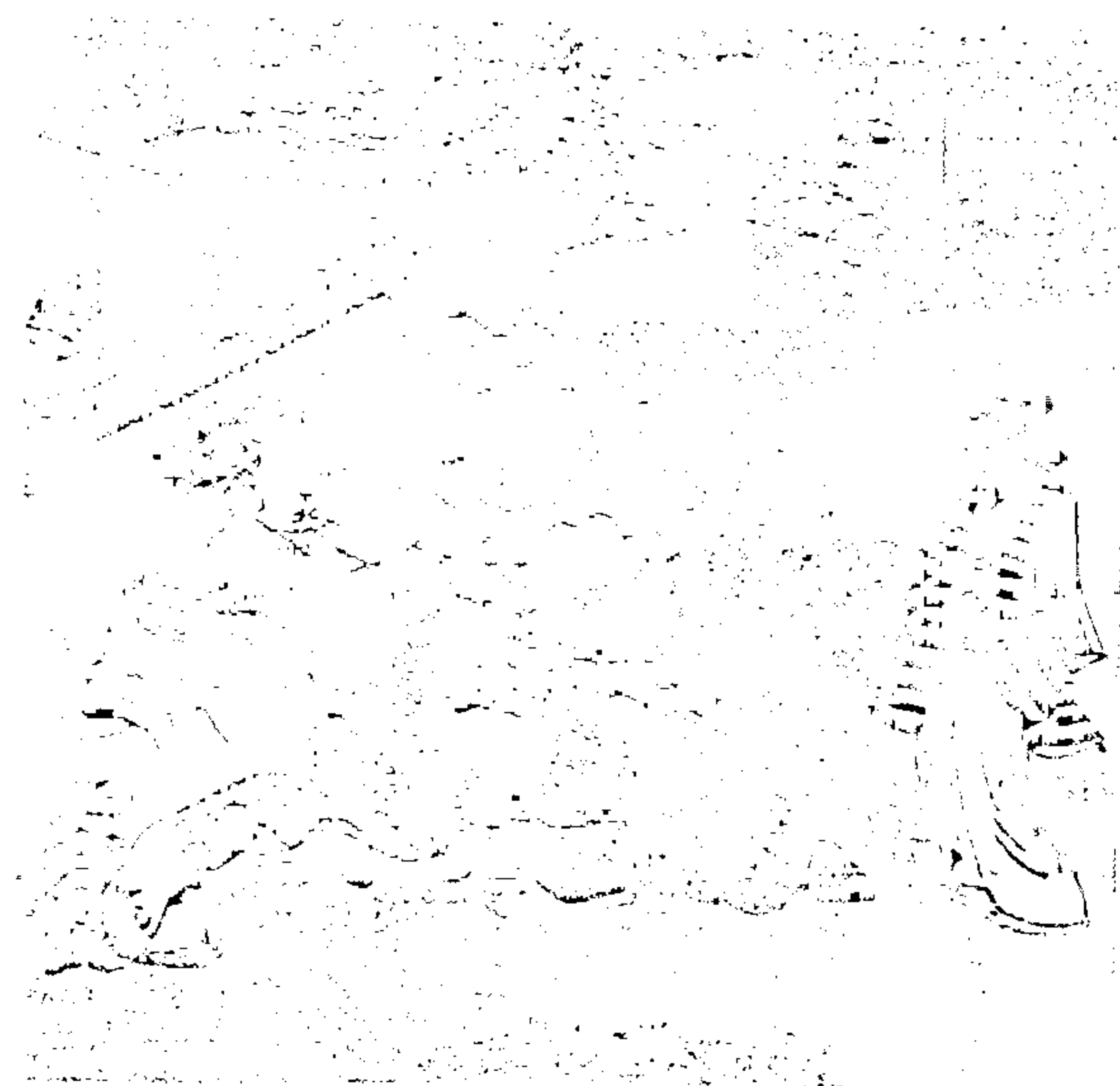
have the public acceptability except the privileged space of bourgeois Salons, while the Japanese artists had it, which was essential for the artists. The culture of the Japanese artists was mass oriented; the arts spread among the masses as pastimes²², in response to which entrepreneurs who produced popular culture came to the fore. In the pictorial arts, the townspeople favoured prints such as Ukiyoe and Manga over high arts such as traditional schools of painting. It was almost exclusively through the medium of the print that Hokusai's art reached its public, especially the lowest strata of the population, namely merchants. The revelation of spontaneous aspect of common people was the language of the townspeople.

In Japan, like in Europe, artistic and intellectual exchanges across school lines were common, and paintings and calligraphy, like poetry, often functioned as a kind of dialogue. (See Fig.10) While Western counterparts socialise in the cafes, however, Japanese artists, the brothels are centres of social life, conversation, and arts making. (See Fig. 11) The arts were practised, admired, and evaluated at physically and emotionally intimate social gatherings. (Guth, 1996: 29) The rhythm and tension of human relations or in-between people was a part of the artistic practice. While Japanese artists sought truth in-between individual, European artists did truth inside individual. In relation to the Impressionism, Haser states,

Impressionism is the climax of self-centred aesthetic culture and signifies the ultimate consequence of the romantic renunciation of practical, active life.
(Haser, 1978:66)

When learning the Japanese arts expressing pleasure and eroticism, European artists filtered them through 'self-centred aesthetic culture'.

²² The salons of Tokugawa period were wide open to the public, and their products enjoyed a popularity, such as an illustrated novel that sold well over 10,000 copies.



11 MIYAGAWA CHŌSHUN
*Courtesan Painting a
 Standing Screen*, from
Popular Amusements in Edo
 1716-36 (detail). Handscroll,
 ink and colors on paper,
 15 3/4" x 16 7" (40 cm x 5.1 m)
 British Museum, London.

The courtesan painter was a popular theme in Edo prints and paintings. Here a fashionably dressed and coiffed woman paints a landscape, with her attendants assisting by preparing ink and holding pigments.

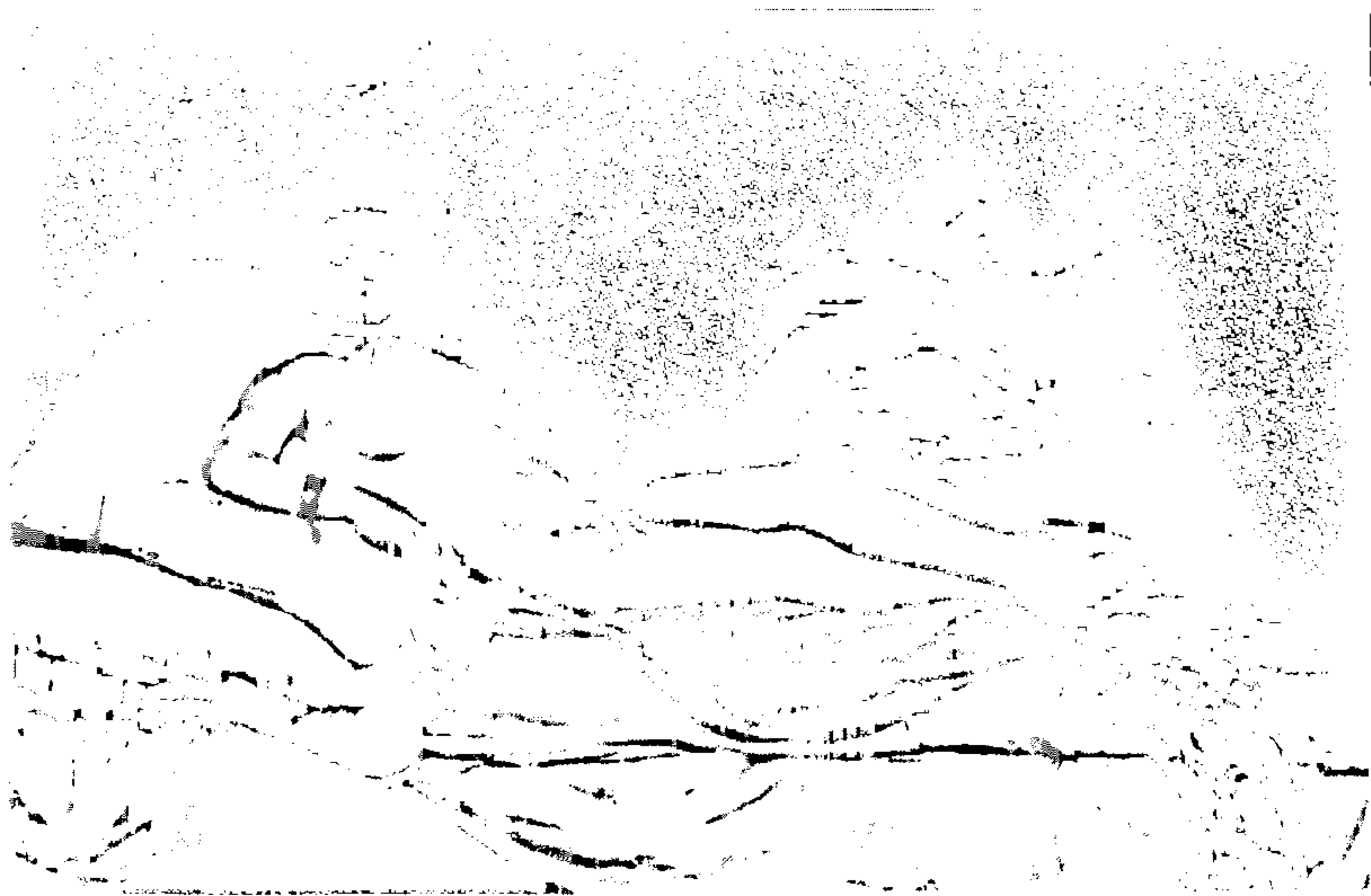
10 KAWANABE KYŌSAI
 (1831-89)
Painting Party, 1881.
 Hanging scroll, ink
 and light colors on
 paper, 7'6 1/2" x
 3'2 1/2" (2.3 x 1 m).
 Tyler Collection,
 USA.

Brushes in hand,
 two artists,
 surrounded by
 fellow painters and
 calligraphers,
 prepare to paint. In
 the background,
 completed scrolls
 are displayed.



In fact, European artists began to look at Japanese erotic prints, *shunga* during the period of disintegration of the academic nude. The Japanese theme of courtesans in prints were a useful tool, because everything available was being used as grist to the anti-academic mill. During the period of disintegration of the academic nude, artists began questioning a contradiction or 'unequality'. The avant-garde artists attempted to solve this contradiction by depicting the individualism of the artist's object, the woman. Against the academic tradition of idealism, the Western avant-garde artists began seeking to bring realism to the fore somewhat defiantly. Manet represented a turning point. When the painting was exhibited in 1863 in the *Salon de Refusés*, it was greeted with contempt, outrage and bafflement by critics and friends alike. Manet's *Olympia* (Fig.12) (influenced by Japanese arts²³) depicted a nude woman identifiable as a prostitute. Olympia is adroitly and assertively breaking her confines. His female figure runs counter to perceived notions: she does not subscribe to the traditional role of tenderness and passion. Olympia takes pride in being a woman, knows the power and has sexual requirements of her own. Sitting upright and cool on the bed, Olympia incarnates a new type of woman, with a strongly independent presence and business-like sexuality. Manet's figure accosts the viewer with a bold stare. Far from being flirtatious, Olympia challenges the viewer with her disciplined posture. *Olympia* serves the dual purpose of calling attention to herself and rejecting it at the same time. Olympia is the confrontational observer who unsettled the viewer. Manet used Olympia to disconcert the bourgeois observer who believed he had power over woman in pictures. The Manet's subject corresponds with those in the

²³ Many of Manet's subjects corresponded with those in the Japanese prints. The geisha powdering in the mirror or showing off their kimonos and coiffures must have inspired Manet. He painted the parisienne and her gloves, hats, parasols, and petticoats. The French courtesan *Nana*, 1877, stands half dressed in front of a mirror powdering



12 Edouard Manet,
Olympia, 1865, oil
on canvas.



13 Kitagawa Utamaro
Utamakura
1788



14 Katsushika Hokusai
Fukujuson
1815

Japanese prints, geisha. Manet revived the traditional Western subject of the woman through the Yoshiwara theme of courtesans.

Manet's *Olympia* lacks the erotic laughter inseparable from Japanese erotic prints, *shunga*. While Manet's *Olympia* segregates and represses sexual tension, Japanese prints integrates and heighten them. *Shunga* are wildly exaggerated versions of sexual practices, which are supposed to stimulate laughter. (See Fig.13 and 14) Japanese erotic arts have the comic mimetic traces. Eroticism is connected with laughter. It is general in all the grotesque Ukiyoe prints which laughably depicted the pleasures of Edo. Particularly, Ukiyoe prints of sexual intercourse in whatever combination (male-female, male-male, the threesomes being the most common) were called *waraie* (laughing pictures). When used in reference to erotic contexts in the Edo period, *warau* meant laughter inspired by sexual intercourse. The term *waraie* denotes sensual pictures that provoke laughter. Art with such an intimacy was both quaint and refined to Europeans.

Through his graphic arts, Beardsley offers an illuminatory comparison to Manet's. Beardsley learned a great deal from the Japanese erotic prints about the portrayal of sexuality and humour with artistic merits. Like Manet, his art emphasizes the individualism of his object, the woman. Beardsley depicts women outside the home. His female figures run counter to perceived notions; they do not subscribe to the Victorian perception of subservient women. The women in his arts were powerful, sometimes even ugly, standing tall and moving determinedly. However, Beardsley was not able to deploy the comic qualities in the Japanese erotic prints. Unlike Japanese artists who are the heroes of the common people who appreciate the

herself, while her gentleman caller is cut in half of the edge of the painting.

aesthetics of 'floating world', Beardsley lacked the cultural basis and the public capable of such sexual laughter in his own country. By defying conventional Victorian notions about portrayal of sexuality and transforming the Japanese comic touch, Beardsley ironically depicts 'middle class British hypocrisy', expressing his individual vision. (Zatlin, 1997:39) Beardsley's treatment lacks laughter, but gains a political and satirical view in order to depict the Victorian repressed sexuality. One of the illustrations to Beardsley's unpublished series of c.1896 *Lysistrata*, is an example, entitled *Adoramus* ('we praise thee'); the woman, whose vagina will never accommodate it, is reduced to kneeling to kiss the object she can never match. (Fig.15) The camp appearance of the male adds another layer of misogyny: he has won what he does not even want. The sexual irony of Beardsley was beyond the edge of late-Victorian middle-class acceptability. Most Victorians were unprepared for such eroticism. In his own country, Beardsley reaped notoriety, even infamy instead of glory. His countrymen even made him an outcast. (Zatlin,1997:15) The Japanese prints assisted this Victorian artist in subverting the Victorian conventional pornography and nude, seen, for an example, in the seductive Frederic Leighton's "The Fisherman and the Syren"²⁴ (Fig.16).

The European avant-gardist's efforts of understanding Japanese eroticism did not go as far as making the 'comical' contact with it. The avant-garde artistic consciousness towards eroticism was a serious one. Rejecting conservative bourgeois value in their own society, the Western avant-garde perhaps tended to an acceptance of the energies of Japanese plebeian popular culture. However, their treatment

²⁴ As John Walsh puts it, 'The English nude is a strange girl, a weird combination of the passive and the predatory, the dreamy and the down right dangerous.' ('Sensation! Victorians Exposed', The Weekend Review, The Independent, 20 October, 2001:7)



16. Frederic Leighton
The Fisherman and the Syren
1858



15. Aubrey Beardsley, *Adoramus*, an unpublished drawing for *Lysistrata*, c. 1896.

inevitably lacked laughter. Three reasons can be suggested. The first is related to a discrepancy between the 19th century Japan and the West which lies in the humour about human sexuality. While the 19th century western nude and pornography require a serious attitudes toward sex, the Japanese made fun of sex by parodying erotic scene²⁵, while Western pornography exemplified no such whimsicality and explicitness of sexual act in the 19th century as not yet. Before Japan came under Western influence, the Japanese attitude toward sex was more accepting. The humor was comic rather than leering.

Shunga were 'erotica', opposed to pornography objectifying female. *Shunga*, unlike Western pornography, were works of great artistic merit, stressing mutual pleasure. (Beardsley, 1997:221) With little respect for privacy, voyeurs are frequently depicted vicariously enjoying the goings-on through slightly opened curtains or spy-holes in the paper screens, adding to the piquancy of the scene. (Zatlin, 218-63) Because the purpose of *shunga* was to stimulate one's sex life, rather than merely to relieve sexual tension as in the West, *shunga* urged the viewer to recreate a scene with a partner.) Western pornography excluded the observer from participation and forced him to remain passive. (Zatlin, 1997:249) In *shunga*, the vagina is shown as equal in power and size to the penis. (Screech, 1999: 185)

The impact made by *japonisme* on European art was manifested with greater or lesser kitsch and sophistication. On one hand, *japonisme* sophisticated the artist visions of truth "within" the individual, and enabled them to depict common and primary human gestures, whose instantaneous reflexes are so fleeting. *Japonisme* sophisticated angles of vision of the artists- from below, from above. The crossing of

²⁵ On sexual humour in erotic prints, *shunga*, see Levy Howard S. Japanese Sex Jokes in Traditional Times, Sino-

the boundaries of pictorial perception revolutionised the artists' composition and made it boundless. (Wichmann, 1980:10) It was through embodiment of exotic stimuli that sophisticated artists from the European visions. European imitative realism was thus transformed into symbolic realism. On the other hand, *japonisme* is inevitably kitsch, eliminating the Japanese 'lowbrow' collective artistic and erotic vision embodying truth "in-between" individuals. The "practice-near" inspiration which was at the heart of representation in Japanese models was replaced in Europe by a stylised reality. Its basis was not objective reality, but a reality that transcended the everyday, a fantasy world that transcended empiricism. The result was the establishment of an association with abstraction, which in turn pointed the way towards modernism and the atomisation of society in an age of individualism.

IV. Yukio Mishima

IV. 1. Introduction

Kitsch is something like an “introduction” to our contemporary life”. But kitsch not only deflects our gaze, but hides or ‘screens’ truth. Kitsch represents an illusion of completeness, a universe devoid of past and future. The urge to represent completeness for individuals as well as societies, is a sign of kitsch. Kitsch is like a mirror which does nothing but reflect itself. What breaks the ‘non-reflective’ mirror of kitsch is practice, action and embodiment. What transcends kitsch is mimesis. Mimesis is pertinent to what Gadamer defines as rationality criticizing itself without being able to overcome itself. This is to say that truth announces itself in the expression of the living virtuality of experience, that brings meaning into play, “without being able to express it totally” (Gadamer, 1989: 416). What transcend kitsch is inseparable from experience itself, inseparable from being.

Kitsch emotion encloses and cuts off human contact, enables kitsch to travel far. It is importable and exportable. The foreign places, persons and things are always perceived as lacking in something (rationality, control, propriety) and being excessive in something else (violence, sensuality, passion) (Savigliano, 1995: 251). The West tends to commercialise Japan as kitsch, as well as Japan commercialises itself as kitsch. Such a relation reflects commercialisation of Japan’s image created by the consumer and producer. The West as “the consumer” domesticated pre-modern Japan, the people,

and the things, as seen in *japonisme*. Japan's image initially displays the amiable side of the Other: clothing, food, art, courtship, song and dance. The Russo-Japanese War (1904-5) changed the image of Japan, as Chiba puts it, 'from the nation of flowery beauty to that of might' (1998: 3). Modern Japanese military or economic power tempts the West to emphasise its threatening side: violence, dictators, sexual perversion.

Facing the threat of the West, as "the producer" Japan has attempted to establish a cultural identity of its own by valorising Japanese tradition and nationalism. The search for a premodern, authentic Japanese past to oppose to the modern, foreign-imbued present is an old story in Japan. The Japanese have been busily engaged in a debate about what makes them unique and in examining their feelings toward and dealings with foreign influences in their society. Many Japanese are still very sensitive about how Japan is regarded by Westerners. They often use reaction as a clear mirror with which to define themselves. Kitsch is like a mirror which does nothing but reflects itself. The more different, distinctive and unique Japan's image seems in the mirror, the more attractive the image becomes both to Japanese and the West. What distorts images of Japan is the combination of Western exoticism and the emphasis on difference made by the Japanese themselves - to the point of self-exoticism. A problematic figure contributing to such circulation of kitsch is a Japanese modern novelist, Yukio Mishima. Mishima is interesting for us not as the writer, but as a presence in kitsch.

Mishima represents the self-manifestation of kitsch, because his whole life is devoted to a continuous unreflexive mirror making. Orientalism involves exoticism of

the other and self-exoticism: both of them are modes of isolation. Mishima's samurai bravado represents a both Orientally and Occidentally inspired show of what it means to be Japanese. Mishima shaped his life to live up to the image of Japan created by Japanese nationalism and European individualism. Mishima's body is like a flourish of samurai which has lost its historical roots. What Mishima produces is the hybrid kitsch of Western and samurai culture.

Showing the essentially comic nature of the process in relation to kitsch, this chapter explores Mishima's conceptualisation of "Japan", "tradition", and "emperorism" in terms of its anachronism, and its "flair", then a Western treatment of Mishima in terms of its unrooted interculturalism, in reference to the Schrader's film, *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters* (1985).

IV. 2. The Kitsch Life of Mishima

The *harakiri*, the samurai ritual suicide of Mishima in 1970, shocked the world. One of the reasons for which Mishima is well-known is due to his sensational life: his homosexual experiences, his masochism and his ritual suicide are represented in his autobiographical novels and biographies. His life embodies kitsch, because his formal qualities are all inappropriate to cultural content or intention. Mishima was a romantic aesthete of "Japan", "tradition", and "emperorism".

As Miyoshi puts it, Mishima was a writer of Showa Japan par excellence

(Miyoshi: 1991:152). Mishima was born in Tokyo in 1925, a year before Emperor Showa's reign began. After the short period of *Taisho democracy*, the era of Showa saw the rapid rise of nationalism and militarism around the time of the Depression, the war, the destruction followed by the unprecedented foreign occupation. Before long, the U.S. Cold War policy encouraged Japan to regain productivity. Before the end of Mishima's life Japan had already been set on its way to the Japanese Economic Miracle.

He grew up in the (to him) horribly bourgeois, uptown Tokyo (*yamanote*), 'the city of bureaucrats, the uptown Tokyo, colorless, elitist, pretentious, formal, timid, humorless, unimaginative, conformist, repressed and arrogant (Miyoshi, 1991: 152). He was educated at the power center of statism, an exclusive school managed by the Imperial Household Bureau. Brought up by a grandmother who shut out all outside influences on the boy (including that of parents), Mishima led an extremely imaginative and theoretical life or "practice-distant" life as a writer and a homosexual. He was a model husband who married to a woman who bore him two children. There is no proof that he has ever "practiced" his homosexuality.

Mishima saw much that he disliked in postwar Japanese life. Japan was wrenched from feudalism to capitalism in the nineteenth-century to emerge as a major industrial power after World War II. "We watched modern Japan become drunk on prosperity", he said, "and fall into an emptiness of the spirit". Mishima attempted to undo the ill effects of Japan's economic expansion by his mixing of samurai tradition with courtly elitism. The grandeur of the samurai tradition intricated his imagination.

Mishima believed in the ancient Japanese samurai principle of harmony of pen and sword, a creed which calls for a blending of art and action. The erotic image of the rising sun before the young hero commits *harakiri* excited him. Mishima revised the samurai tradition and attached to his own theology of emperorism.

The absence of a high ideal or grace in the contemporary world was what led Mishima to forming his Shield Society (a para-military group consisting of no more than 100 men). This para-military group would exemplify the aristocratic or elitist posture of a bygone age. Its activity was largely ceremonial. The principle was to fight for the Emperor. Mishima's theory defines the divine emperor, the transtemporal and metahistorical being, as evading all historical restrictions. The emperor is regarded as the spiritual and cultural center that would sustain the purity of the Japanese. Because the emperor would provide an alterity to the deprived Japan, the nation could again be creative, generative and erotic. Mishima's version of emperorism is thus a proposal against the growing ideology of homogeneity, as an instrument for high economic growth. For Mishima, the political enemy was the contemporary society, which he lived in.

IV. 3. Mishima's Anachronism Compared to *Jidaigeki*

Mishima's construction of "Japan", "tradition", and "emperorism" can be understood within the context of two categories of kitsch. Kitsch is produced for two categories, namely propaganda and entertainment. The process of kitschifying in "Japan", "tradition", and "emperorism" has a long history before Mishima's treatment. I would like to identify Mishima's treatment in comparison to the kitschifying process in Japan's war propaganda and Japanese popular culture. The transfer of the Japan's feudal tradition to mass culture is similar to the desacralisation of the art occasioned by mechanical reproduction. The feudal culture originally contains the social drama which is "corrective" for samurai community. As the samurai community increases in scale, however, with specialised institutions, the feudal tradition ramifies into genres where direct connection with the social drama becomes increasingly attenuated. Since the Meiji Restoration (1868), the Japan's feudal tradition was reconstructed entirely for propaganda. When Japan began to westernise or modernise, the samurai world view was generalised to the whole of the Japanese population.¹ The construction of Japaneseness through *bushido* (The Way of Samurai) takes place of course through intense spiritual training within a military context (in the two World Wars), and outside of it through the educational system, and the productive system (business management). In modern Japan, the feudal tradition becomes an effective tool for creating and

¹ Look at The Way of the Heavenly Sword: the Japanese Army in the 1920s by Leonard Humphreys, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995.

consolidating Japanese community and social totality. The samurai tradition becomes the “bourgeois” medium which is experience-distant and politically oriented. The germ of reflexivity originally present in the feudal tradition impoverished its performative aspects. The feudal tradition is then figured as a significant force in political and ideological reproduction; the various cultural apparatuses are more or less closely integrated into the institutions of state, which mean on the one hand that the samurai tradition has a public function, on the other hand that it acts among other things as a fairly direct medium of ideological power.

In the postwar capitalist society, the samurai tradition, gradually denuded of much of its former symbolic wealth and meaning, hence its transformative capacity, persists in the leisure sphere but at the cost of relinquishing its healing and inspiring quality. A representative Japanese traditional hegemony in leisure can be recognised in the national moral drama such as *jidaigeki*.² A structure of feeling of the postwar Japan can be identified in the *jidaigeki*. In other words, by means of *jidaigeki* the Japanese “feel at home” in the American-influenced modern Japan. Through the presentation of a partially illusory past shown in *jidaigeki* it becomes possible to signify something of the local identity and perhaps to do it so profitably. The assertion of such “place-bound identity”³ sought in *jidaigeki* rests on the motivational power of tradition. In the face of

² The *jidaigeki* is a heroic drama of samurai which draws upon the peculiarities of Japanese history and myth. Influenced by the North American cowboy epic, *jidaigeki* often contains an ideology of “bourgeois myth” and “individualism”. “*Jidaigeki*” is set before or during the collapse of feudal Japan. The samurai warrior class, because of the disintegration of the feudal system in Japan faced its adventures and especially the difficulties. This historical background provide the basis for the *jidaigeki*. *Jidaigeki* involves violence and the lone samurai hero facing long odds. *Jidaigeki* is notorious for its clear cut insistence on distinct heroes and villains.

³ This term is borrowed by Harvey, 1990: 303.

all the flux and ephemerality of flexible accumulation, it becomes difficult to maintain any sense of Japanese historical continuity. The irony is that Japanese tradition is now often preserved by being commodified and marketed as such. It is the destabilisation of the Japanese past which Mishima was trapped in.

Oe accused Mishima of “shaping his life to live up to the image of Japan created by Europeans” (Tobin, 1992: 31). Mishima is heavily affected in spite of himself by his awareness of the West as his potential critics and consumers (ibid). Mishima’s popularity in the West is partly based on the Western structure of feeling as it encloses Japanese samurai culture. Mishima consoles such a structure of feeling. ‘Structure of feeling’, Raymond Williams’ well-known phrase, indicates the framework we have for feeling at home in the world. By “structure of feeling”, the value of the past, present and future are given form and meaning. The feudal tradition of Japan has long provided the West with such a structure for feeling at home in the strange or “practice-distant” part of the world. In doing so, it oversimplifies.

Mishima’s search for roots was consequently reproduced by the West and marketed as an image, as a simulacrum or pastiche. The symbolic realms of tradition were gradually separated from political and economic institutions. Now the samurai tradition has shifted into the market. The massive recirculation of the cultural artifacts (computer games, books, films, television sitcoms, songs, clothes, cars) used a tremendous number and variety of samurai icons. Those icons often represent an

illusion of completeness, a universe devoid of past and future. Such an anarchic condition destabilises Japanese traditional hegemony.

IV. 4. Samurai with Flair: Bodies and Boundaries

The winning iconicity of samurai that Mishima created is attributable to the flair he added to the samurai tradition. Mishima's adaptation of western homosexual kitsch is found in his obsession with body building. He trained to build powerful muscles in the upper part of his body, in his arms, chest and shoulders. As kitsch feeds the narcissism of the consumer, samurai imagery feeds the narcissism of Mishima. Narcissism is evident in Mishima's own bodybuilding, inspired by North American Californian beach culture. Mishima's iconography of samurai life is invested with a foreign set of meanings, generating a hybrid product. Its flair influenced particularly by Mishima's treatment of Western culture explains why Mishima is known abroad. This recycling phenomenon leads to the blending of Samurai with Western narcissism.

Mishima's narcissism is a prevailing illness of modern time, where individualisation is losing any 'ritual quality'. The body is treated as an instrument for controlling, and the individual body becomes mechanical. Mishima's narcissism is not to be understood by its place in the traditionally defined order. Rather, we have to triangulate the meaning of this tradition through the whole range of erotic images with which Mishima articulates his sense of things. The body as a project is exemplified by

the growth of 'gym' and body building. 'Body projects' in late modern conditions became significant in terms of establishing individual's self-identity.

Mishima's narcissistic projection of erotic masculinity is shaped by kitsch, exactly because he was interested **not** in the body in motion but in the body captured and fixed. His adolescent fixation on early death (which preserves unaging youth, that is, changeless beauty) suggested a kitsch aesthetics. Mishima had a tendency to turn Western art into a fetish. The well-known example of this tendency is his fetishism of a Guido Ren's painting of St. Sebastian (which depicted the saint with arrows penetrating from his torso and his hands tied to a limb) treated often as a symbol of homosexuality in the West. The twelve-year old Mishima's discovery of paintings of St. Sebastian is described in his famous autobiographical novel, Confessions of the Mask (37-41). Aroused by the beauty of the martyr's body - hand tied above his head, arrows digging into his sides -Mishima masturbates and has his first orgasm. The picture of Sebastian is personalised in the privacy of Mishima's individual space. He is a forerunner of Japan's postwar commodity fetisism.

Inspired by the picture of St. Sebastian, Mishima's samurai imagery adds a new meaning to narcissism. By adding masochistic flair, samurai imagery becomes unique to Mishima. As Miyoshi states,

The impending death in the course of the war only heightened the erotic thrill of commitment to it. Such an abandonment of the self paradoxically provided a self-enclosed space that was under no threat of outside interference (Miyoshi, 1991:154).

Erotic awareness of the “body surface” was unthinkable in the feudal tradition. In the feudal Japan, the body is to be cultivated not for narcissistic motives, but as the vehicle for realization. In relation to knightly membership, samurai garments are thus made not to show physicality but to hide it. Mishima took off his concealing garment of samurai and exposed his bodily surface. Body worship is a new element added to Mishima’s representation of samurai tradition. A new element is the imported version of the Western traditional mind-body notion where theory comes prior to practice. By the way of the contrast, in the *bushi*-way, practice has been regarded as more important than theory. This aesthetics is illuminated by Yasuo Yuasa, who examines the Eastern mind-body theory in contrast to the Western mind-body dualism. Reevaluating the significance of this theory from a contemporary perspective, Yuasa writes:

Since the tradition of a mind-body dualistic pattern of thinking is strong in the West, as previously mentioned, there is a strong tendency to train the body through conscious calculation. That is, the assumption is that training proceeds from mind to body, or from mind to form. Contrary to this order, the tradition of Eastern self-cultivation places importance on entering the mind from the body or form. That is, it attempts to train the mind by training the body. Consequently, the mind is not simply consciousness nor is it constant and unchangeable, but rather it is that which is transformed through the body (Yuasa, 1993: 26).

In Japanese traditional aesthetics, thus virtue of practice and the role the body plays are significant. They could be illustrated by a key word; *shugyo* (self-cultivation from body) (Yuasa, 1993: 3). Mishima’s experience is far away from that of *shugyo*. The distinction

between Mishima's body-building and *shugyo* is based upon the conceptions of aesthetics and the practices they develop as a result. Mishima focuses his training exclusively on body surface. Mishima seeks to strengthen muscles in the body surface without improving motor coordination. For Mishima, the body is understood as a machine-like thing with the goal of making it become as strong-looking as possible. In the gym, like all contemporary gym-goers do, Mishima works his body with inanimate facilities and machines. As a result, Mishima lacks the physical aptness required for a swordsman. The artistic performance of the samurai reflected upon martial arts is traditionally presented to the opponent samurai in person. That of Mishima, however, is presented by a camera as pictorial and erotic masculinity. Mishima disguised his sickly physical frailty which he was ashamed of, by bravado. He was in fact a swordsman with very poor reflexes. His body lacked aptitude, as many of his close friends said (Ishihara, 1990: 116-81). The chivalric prowess and grandeur of the Japan's feudal tradition fired his romantic imagination like some epic spectacle. But his action could not embody it. In this mode of interpretation, *bushido* (The Way of Samurai) is lifted up from the practice to turn into kitsch.

The ideal of *shugyo* is to cultivate a body that initiates as well as responds. The ramifications of the responsive body are extended by the fact that the body is not independent. The value, *shugyo* concerns the virtue of the fluid self. The cultural ideal has distinct conceptions of individuality that insist on the fundamental relatedness of individuals to each other. The samurai defines the self as the responsive body listening to another responsive body. The emphasis is on attending to others and interdependence with

them. This core of the cultural ideal was ignored by Mishima, who added the narcissism of North American body-building culture, which neither assumes nor values such connectedness among individuals. In the body-building culture, individuals seek to maintain their independence from others by attending to the self and by discovering and expressing their unique attributes.

The rise of body building culture can be explained by the lack of reflexivity in society. The lack of institutional reflexivity prevents the individual from finding a conducive environment in which to develop, cohere and renew. On the other hand, the cultural industry's manipulation of fabricated needs weakens the individual's ability to choose its object of affective investment and thereby to form reflexivity. The reflexivity's function as "the coordinator" and reality-tester are employed wrongfully by identification, idealisation and introjection, all mechanisms through which the individual loses its anchor in rationality and narcissistically makes the "beloved" object part of itself. Mishima fails to find a world in which to embrace this concept of reflexivity with anybody either in Japan or in the West.

IV. 5. Mishima and the West

Mishima is not enclosed by the Japanese, and as Miyoshi puts it, anyone can read him in any way he or she pleases (Miyoshi, 1991: 150). Mishima is well known in the West, while another Japanese novelist Kawabata Yasunari is hardly known. As

most Japanese agree, however, Mishima's position within Japan is controversial.⁴

However, if one were to judge by the amount of material translated, Mishima would surely seem the most popular and respected of modern Japanese writers in the West.

The novelist Oe Kenzaburo has complained that the West's fascination with his countryman Mishima Yukio is misplaced and even offensive.

Facing the strange world of Mishima, the West tend to idealise Mishima and create another version of Orientalism which oversimplifies Japan's image. Mishima is treated as a writer who admired the chivalric prowess of samurai tradition but also emulated it. He was regarded not only as a great writer, but also as a successful actor and an expert swordsman. This is evident in Mishima's biographies written by Western writers.⁵ In reference to an American director's film on Mishima, this section shows the nature of idealisation of Mishima in the West. In connection to this argument, I would like to suggest that Schrader's film is a recycling of Mishima's kitsch.

IV. 5.a. *Mishima: A life in Four Chapters*

Paul Schrader's film, *Mishima: A life in Four Chapters* (1985) is a two-hour biography, based on the autobiographical novels written by Mishima himself. The film was opposed by Mishima's relatives and his right-wing supporters so that it was forbidden to be shown in Japan. Sensational issues such as Mishima's ritual suicide

⁴ Rimer, 1982: 11.

⁵ The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima by Henry Scott-Strokes, and Mishima: A Biography by John Nathan.

(*seppuku*) and his homosexuality are central to the film. A cinematic biography can be no longer than two or three hours, while the duration of a literary biography can depend upon its readers. A cinematic biography compared to the literary one, aimed at larger audiences, tends to become superficial and sensational, a more personal and less scholarly biographical representation.

The film is divided into four chapters, *Beauty, Art, Action, and The Harmony of Pen and Sword*. Mishima is portrayed by Ken Ogata, a more masculine-looking actor than Mishima himself. The frame is Mishima's last day. The first three sections of the film each contain a condensed version of one of Mishima's novels. Each chapter consists of intertwined threads of action. The editor supplied continuity between three different time lines while preserving the thematic relationships between events in the various settings. Throughout the film, Schrader intercuts three different film styles; pseudo-documentary style, textbook-like style, and theatrical style. All three styles appear in each of the film's four chapters, where they are linked by theme rather than "chronology or narrative" (Raynes, 258). Schrader's techniques use narrative frames and flashbacks, cutting between past and present (Willson, 1997: 270).¹

Firstly, the last day of Mishima's life is presented in realistic color, in sequence, and in pseudo-documentary style. The day begins with his ritualistic suicide. This story line unfolds documentary style. In between we learn about Mishima's life in a series of black-and-white flashbacks. Mishima's past (everything in his life prior to November 25, 1970) is treated, also sequentially, in a 'textbook-like' fashion, with static

compositions. Schrader tells a story of Mishima's childhood, his overbearing grandmother, his interest in theatre and his traumatic school days. His homosexuality is suggested by a flashback of him dancing with a younger man in a dance hall. The younger man touches Mishima's shoulder and teases him about being flabby. Mishima storms out of the dance hall. The third style is the theatrical renditions of three of Mishima's novels, The Legend of the Golden Pavilion, Kyoko's House, and Runaway Horses. The stories from the novels use stylised, staged sets. The Legend of the Golden Pavilion deals with a nihilistic Buddhist priest tormented by beauty; Kyoko's House, about a narcissistic actor involved in a sadomasochistic relationship with an older woman, Runaway Horses, the story of a fanatic military cadet's obsession with suicide. These episodes filmed in saturated and gaudy color using stylised sets, cause melodramatic effects. Through these pieces, we are introduced to Mishima's attraction to sadomasochism, nihilism and suicide. Bits and pieces of the three threads are woven together with a thesis on the major motivating forces behind Mishima's life.

The film, *Mishima*, is itself an intercultural phenomenon, in that it is a filmmaking collaboration between Japan and the West. The biographical film of the Japanese novelist is shot in Japan and made by an American director. It was the first major Japanese-American feature co-production filmed in Japan in the Japanese language. The film is made in Japanese with English subtitles and narration by Roy Scheider. The script was originally in English, conjuring up translated sources of Mishima's literature and his autobiographical novels. They are translated back to

Japanese, except Mishima as the narrator (Roy Scheider), who speaks in American English.⁶ Scheider leads the film in an emotionally-detached manner like Nick Callaway in Great Gatsby. Except this narration, all dialogues are in Japanese with Japanese actors. Japanese actors playing the role of Mishima in the film were Ken Ogata, Kenji Sawada, Yasosuke Bando and Toshiyuki Nagashima. Their dialogues are no more plausible than the Japanese actors in the more recent Japanese-American feature film, *Pearl Harbour* (2001). They are stiff-jointed. The film lacks what Charles Taylor would call cultural ‘wholeness’. *Mishima* embodied the fragmentations taking place in intercultural understanding without any reconciliation.

The film conjures up an imaginary construct of past representation from other mass-mediated sources such as Mishima’s novels and biographies. The fragmented images of Mishima’s work do not reconcile Mishima’s kitsch life, but rather represents a common conflict of modern man. Such representations surrender to vision of the present world as rootless. This anachronism robs the film of its sense of “the field” and “the time” or history. Therefore, the film loses its critical capacity toward Mishima and the modern society in which we live.

IV. 5. b. The Film, *Mishima* as Postmodern Comedy

The film has both tragic and comic elements, but it is not mimetic because of

⁶ Except one brief flash of a press conference with Western journalists of the Mishima. It is only when Mishima speaks English in Japanese accent.

the absence of the “social”. According to Aristotle's theories for tragedy and comedy is a consistent argument developed in the Poetics and the Rhetoric, (Golden, 1984: 289), the social is significant in comedy and tragedy, in that a unique meaning of mimesis as the form which manifests not an isolable stance, rooted in individual experience, but a shared experience. If there is some difference, tragedy emphasises on rigidity of individual while comedy does on rigidity of community.

It should be recognised that Mishima as kitsch bridging prejudices between Japan and the West needs renewal operations by the vision of comedy. Comedy breaks the mirror of kitsch, dissolving the rigidity of conceptual habit. Comedy “encompasses human misery by seeing them not as tragedy but either as mistakes or as shameless acts of cheating” (Inglis, 2000: 53). However, the film as a failed comedy, resulted in re-reflecting the mirror of kitsch. The film does not reflect upon the possibility of self-awareness, self-reflexivity and self-criticism. It lacks historical consciousness. Because the film is separated from both the Japanese and the “Western” experiences, it can neither be comedy nor tragedy. It contains the characteristics of what I would call, “postmodern comedy”, a rootless form of narratives prevalent in postmodern time.

The film can be considered as a typical postmodern cultural artifact by virtue of the eclecticism of its conception and the anarchy of its subject matter. According to Marchetti, postmodern culture is a ‘cult of pastiche and parody’ (1993: 202). Indeed, a tacit acceptance of the illusory nature of identity itself is one of the principal markers of postmodernism as a style. Postmodernism is a style prominently in Schrader’s *Mishima*, explains bits and pieces

of anachronistic representations of figure. The film uses such a postmodern narrative which uses plots as a shorthand for the mercurial nature of identity. Jameson sees this psychic borderlessness as a part of an acknowledged loss of “self” occasioned by the contemporary acceptance of the death of the Cartesian subject (Jameson, 1991: 119-20). Like pastiche, this postmodern sense robs the film, *Mishima* of its sense of history and, consequently, its critical ability to allude to the possibility of change.

Alexander states that postmodernism is the comic frame (1994:181). Because good and evil cannot be parsed, the actors - protagonists and antagonists - are on the same moral level, and the audience, rather than being normatively or emotionally involved, can sit back and be amused. In the postmodern comedy, indeed, the very notion of actors is eschewed. The traditional role of comedy was a vehicle for gaining cultural clarity. According to Kenneth Burke, comedy as “the maximum of forensic complexity” deals with “man in society” (Burke, 1984:42).

Comedy must develop logical forensic causality to its highest point, calling not upon astronomical marvels to help shape the plot, but completing the process of internal organization whereby each event is deduced “syllogistically” from the premise of the informing situation. (Burke, ibid)

In the postmodern comedy, this meaning-making reflex important for “man in society” had been blocked: we are unable to focus our own present, as though we have become incapable

of achieving aesthetic representations of our own current experience. Jameson anticipated “those new forms of collective thinking and collective culture which lie beyond the boundaries of our own world,” describing them as the “collective, and decentred cultural production of the future, beyond realism and modernism alike” (Jameson, 1983:11).

Mishima's life is not 'exotic', but 'strange' to the Japanese. His life is atavistic and nonsensical: He carried out the feudalistic mode of suicide in modern Japan. His infatuation with self-sacrifice, manifested in his own “demonstrative” suicide, is also comic. If he had been a swordsman, he would have killed himself in his house more privately. Instead, he committed suicide during a frenzied harangue from the high point of a public monument to the assemblage below. What Williams calls "the rhythm of sacrifice" (1966: 156) is absent in his life. In tragedy as the original religious form, the sacrifice signifies the renewal of the martyr's faith. Mishima's self-sacrifice has the effect of ending up being comic rather than tragic. Mishima himself, who was infatuated with the tragic hero, knows that he has “always looked ridiculous: when he walks on stage determined to make the audience cry: the result is just the opposite and instead, they burst out laughing” (Stocks, 1974: 275). Many Japanese audiences find comic elements in the deadly serious Mishima. In this sense, Mishima's life is comedy at least, for the Japanese audience in the respect that he is ridiculed. Though brave and committed, Mishima was ridiculous whenever he tried to be serious.

Replacing the laughter, however, Schrader's film prompts pity as well as sadomasochistic sensuality with an exotic motif. Through Schrader's narrative, the

strange life of Mishima becomes less nonsensical, thus familiar. Mishima was the exotic subject far enough for Schrader to idealise. Schrader's cinematic narrative prevents cleansing operations towards kitsch. The film moves many of the audience most closely when Mishima himself is in fact a 'victim' to be pitied at. In this sense, the Schrader's film is postmodern comedy, where the appropriate laughter is drowned in pity. This is postmodern comedy because it lacks what original comedy provides, the opportunity for those experiencing to see the "imitation" of the social and to laugh at themselves without feeling pain. Theorising the object represented by the genre of comedy, Aristotle regards comedy as an "imitation" of baser men or "the ridiculous". The ridiculous is some error or ugliness that is painless and has no harmful effects. The example that comes immediately to mind is the comic mask, which is ugly and distorted but causes no pain.⁷ The problem of Mishima is for Schrader that Mishima as the subject was too "exotic" to laugh at.

Postmodern comedy borrows some elements of tragedy such as death without its essence. In this sense, postmodern comedy is pertinent to what Raymond Williams calls "modern tragedy". The characteristic of modern tragedy, which postmodern comedy borrows, is "an increasingly isolated interpretation of the character of the hero" (Williams: 32). In tragedy, the protagonist is normally a noble individual whose fate destroys him. Tragedy concludes how "light" even "the powerful categorical being" (the noble) is. Mishima does not have such "meaning" as a tragic hero in the West, let alone in Japan. In

⁷ It is quoted by Golden: 285/ Poetics, 1449, b24-28, Leon Golder and O.B. Hardison, Jr., Aristotle's Poetics: A Translation and Commentary for Students of Literature, University Presses of Florida, 1981.

this sense, Mishima's life is not tragedy for the West, in that he is not noble enough for them. As a result, in Schrader's film, Mishima's death ended up being merely a sensational end of the action.

The film as postmodern comedy may have elements of tragedy, but lost the importance of tragedy which concludes itself by redeeming culture. According to Williams, in tragedy the destruction of the protagonist is not normally the end of the action. Some new distribution of forces, physical or spiritual, normally succeeds the death.⁸ The life that continues is informed by the death; has indeed, in a sense, been created by it. But in a culture theoretically limited to individual experience, there is no more to say, when a man died, but that others also will die. Postmodern comedy, like William's modern tragedy, can then be generalised not as "the response to death" but as "the bare irreparable fact" (Williams, 1966: 56).

In the film, *Mishima*, the samurai iconography is invested with a new set of meanings, generating a hybrid product. Samurai imagery reached a higher level of commodification than in Mishima's treatment itself. Schrader expresses his fascination for Mishima's fetishism of the samurai way of death, and how this decadence leads, via violence, to sexual release. Schrader dramatised the suicide scene, making Mishima (Ogata) cry loudly at the moment of *harakiri*. A cry of 'Uwoooooo' was a new element added to *harakiri* practice. The insistent, Wagnerian score by Philip Glass builds tension for the big emotional climax of this sensational scene. Here, *harakiri* is invested with a foreign set of meanings to become comprehensible. Schrader recycles samurai tradition into a hybrid

product that allows for a simulation of the lost practice.

Commodification is one of the main modes of integration in intercultural understanding. Schrader's film may be considered a meeting point between different cultures. It is where the iconography of a culture, in this case, Mishima's construction of "Japan", "tradition", and "emperorism", instead of ceasing to exist, is transformed by absorbing new elements. Reproducing the images of samurai imagery 'predigested' by Mishima, the film constitutes a postmodern sensibility. The consumption of images has been qualitatively altered: the images must convey a particular feeling and they must stimulate emotion. The film is the result of that search. *Mishima* as postmodern comedy is deprived of the appropriate catharsis of comedy.⁹ Postmodern comedy lacks the essence of comedy whose function is reflexive "social" correction. In the film, there is not a renewal of our life or understanding, but a renewal of the Mishima icon. Indeed, in intercultural understanding, resignation to such an uncritical reproduction, has often become an order of life.

Mishima's anachronism and "flair", and the Schrader's film, *Mishima: A life in Four Chapters* (1985) can be understood within the context of two degrees of kitsch. Degrees of kitsch depend upon its immediacy in narrative. It can be said that each degree of kitsch satisfies culture in a different way: the first degree is manifested by a nationalistic mode; the second degree is by an international mode. In the first degree, characterised by false localism, the individual reconstructs his or her national history

⁸ In Greek tragedy, as Raymond Williams suggests, this is ordinarily a religious affirmation. (Williams, 1966: 55)

⁹ Aristotle regards mimesis as involving a renewal of life as the essential pleasure. Then all forms of mimesis, tragic, comic, epic, etc., must have their own appropriate catharsis.

and creates the canon, while in the second degree, characterised by an unrooted interculturalism, the canon is recycled into a hybrid product.

V. Akira Kurosawa

V. 1. Beyond Kitsch: Kurosawa's Samurai Adaptation of Shakespeare

In the following chapter, I shall argue that Akira Kurosawa, the great Japanese film director, offers us one vivid, comprehensive example of how a Japanese artist relates and translates the great Western myths of Shakespeare, assuming first a Japanese and subsequently a universal significance. I will argue further, that in order to achieve this powerful effect, Kurosawa borrows the simplifications and compressions of kitsch, and then places them in a quite different context. As Kurosawa assembles the procedure and simplifications of one version of kitsch, he does so not to reassure audiences, eradicate difficulty, nor to soften the facts of life and death. For Kurosawa, the purpose of kitsch is to make the experience more deceptively personal.

Kurosawa notices the similarities of the North American cowboy Westerns and of Japanese samurai dramas. As in conventional kitsch, Kurosawa decontextualises both characters and narrative lines. However, the usual processes of kitsch tend to end at such a point. Kurosawa continues, and transforms them for his own purposes. In a series of simple and dramatic images, he adapts the conventions of Japanese Noh in order to make the familiar outlines of kitsch into the strange and masked obscurities of his own distinctive cinematic forms. This process renders his films with an exceptional instance of intercultural inquiry and understanding, and whilst Kurosawa gives cultural inquiry a strong indication of his intentions, it is also one that is exceptionally difficult to follow in terms of cultural method. Hence, this chapter can hardly offer the cultural inquirer a method; it can, however, demonstrate an interesting principle. In a significant and postmodern way, Kurosawa shows the possibilities and risks involved in using kitsch. As explained above, it is not until kitsch is

employed to make the familiar seem strange, to compare the incomparables, and to look through the lenses of one culture at the peculiarities of another, that we discard the sentimentality of kitsch.

Kurosawa, indicatively for the purposes of this study, has been drawn to Western literature as a basis for his films. Kurosawa's most prominent adaptations are *Ikiru*, *The Idiot* (*Hakuchi*, 1951), *The Lower Depths* (*Donzoko*, 1957), *Throne of Blood* (*Kumonosujo*, 1957), and *Ran* (1983). *Ikiru* is an adaptation from Goethe's Faust from the perspectives of Japan in the twentieth century. *The Idiot* is an adaptation of Dostoevsky's novel of the same title, *The Lower Depth* that of Gorky's play. In the cases of Shakespeare and Dostoevsky, Kurosawa's transliteration was obvious. He was undaunted by these great authors of Western literature, whose plays and novels had delved deeply into the soul of Western man, had already become universalised and therefore a part of the collective Japanese experience.

Kurosawa furnishes Western literature with a Japanese framework. Some of his work is set in post-war Japan while other films are set in the sixteenth-century. The most conspicuous examples of "intercultural embedding" are offered by his samurai adaptation rather than his films dealing with modern Japan. His monumental films are *Throne of Blood* (*Kumonosujo*) released in 1957 and *Ran* released 1983. These films, in which Shakespeare's Macbeth and King Lear are translated to the samurai world in the Japanese historical period of *sengoku* (the turbulent late sixteenth century), the Japanese Civil War, created a world-wide sensation with their ingenious 'transliterated' scenarios and vivid images. Recognition of a specific context is important in these two samurai adaptations of Shakespearean tragedy: *Throne of Blood*, though 'The Castle of the Spider's Web' is its more literal and pertinent translation; and *Ran* -meaning 'Chaos' - his adaptation of King Lear in huge cinemascope and stunning colour.

His samurai work, moreover, always strongly personal and 'Japanese', is nevertheless universal, exactly because of its alienness in his samurai adaptation of Shakespeare. In other words, Kurosawa's samurai adaptation of Shakespeare is a significant work of the human imagination, which, as Geertz puts it¹, 'speaks with equal power to the consoling piety that we are all like to one another and to the worrying suspicion that we are not' (Geertz, 1983:42).

Kurosawa's work is therefore on our terms intercultural not only because it reached out to embrace the cultural archetypes of Western literature, but also in that it deals with what I shall call the 'cultures of kitsch'. Throughout his long career, Akira Kurosawa has consistently devoted himself to challenging kitsch conventions which are both deep within Japan, and "beyond" the realm of Japan. On one hand, Kurosawa confronted the ways in which Japanese popular culture subsequently imprinted its own connections and values on the samurai culture and on the mythological construct of sixteenth-century Japan. On the other hand, Kurosawa, influenced by North American popular culture, the cowboy genre, transcends the conventions of the hackneyed Western. In short, the unconventional attempt of Kurosawa challenged the kitsch convention of both samurai genre and cowboy movies. Akira Kurosawa, I wish to argue, offers a work of art in terms of kitsch practice and theory, reconciling as he does the opposing claims on his artistic integrity through the elaboration of a series of artistic and practical paradoxes.

V. 2. *Jidaigeki* as Kitsch

Akira Kurosawa has been one of the film directors most deeply influenced by the cultures of kitsch, specifically the modern conventional heroism of samurai and its alternative

¹ Geertz puts it in regard to Icelandic saga, Austin novel, or Balinese cremation.

incarnation, the American Western cowboy.² Paradoxically, however, Kurosawa challenged these modern conventions.³ The samurai drama and film in Japanese popular art is called the *jidaigeki* genre, the canonised legends and heroes of Japan's past. The samurai-cowboy adventure *jidaigeki* is a predictable and repetitive genre, with a clear cut insistence on distinct heroes and villains. *Jidaigeki* is a moral fantasy typically consisting of a combination of universal moral archetypes, combined with culturally specific elements that create relevance and excite the fantasies to the audience within that culture. Hence, the hero will be fitted with the trappings of the specific culture in which he appears. A useful comparison might thus be drawn between *jidaigeki* and the cowboy tale. Like *jidaigeki*, the Western cowboy genre is generally kitsch, largely because it is easily identifiable⁴ and 'self-flattening'; the mythology supporting the characters is cliché heroism, and such formulaic cinema sells well.

Jidaigeki only negligibly differs from the Cowboy Western, providing the illusions of cultural alterity. *Jidaigeki*'s Japaneseness provides trade-marks of identification for differentiating between the (actually) undifferentiated. In *jidaigeki*, samurai becomes what Olalquiaga (1992:42) calls "first-degree kitsch", where representation of samurai is based on an indexical referent and simplicity of code. For example, the factors leading to samurai brutality and ritual suicide are arranged like an index. The word signifying Japanese ritual suicide, *seppuku*⁵ expresses the inter-relation of connected Japanese history and cultural morality. Thus, the representation of samurai has use-value in this mode of kitsch. In first-degree kitsch, the relationship between object and user is immediate and traditional, one of genuine belief. The American cowboy adventure is a parallel national first-degree kitsch

² An English equivalency is *Knights of the Round Table*.

³ The conventions of the Western and the *jidai-geki* have been discussed in an article by Stuart Kaminsky. ("The Samurai Film and the Western", *The Journal of Popular Film*, I (Fall, 1972: 312-24)

⁴ Theodore W. Adorno's definition of kitsch as the "parody of catharsis, "the parody of aesthetic consciousness".

⁵ The synonym word *harakiri*, so well-known all over the world, is but little used by the Japanese themselves. Furthermore, *harakiri* is called by Englishmen, *happy dispatch*, a humorous name for this

genre in North America to *jidaigeki* in Japan. Both types of story - the Western and the Samurai epic - are culturally relevant to their intended audiences, but would seem at the first sight less so to outsiders. Both have cultural specificities. (e.g. sword for samurai and gun for cowboy), because moral fantasy- a belief or ideology essential to the society- naturally differ from culture to culture. A Japanese might be confused, for instance, at the cowboy's injunction against shooting a man in the back, while Americans find samurai's ritual suicide incomprehensible. Cultural specificities such as these touch something fundamental in the audiences.

As *jidaigeki* is conventional for the Japanese, the mythology of the West is a part of the American self-identity, even if it is based on a distorted and falsified sense of history. *Jidaigeki* draws on the peculiarities of Japanese history and myth just as the Western draws upon those elements in North America, and develops them into a storytelling technique. The "universal" elements between the two are quite similar: the hero is empowered with characteristics such as courage, conventional morality, and a belief in his duty and ability to redress evil. In both types of story the hero's task is to eliminate some specific evil, and then to move on to the next crisis.

Long before Akira Kurosawa's samurai films were produced, the samurai has been defined as a powerful cultural canon in Japanese popular art. Facing the threat of the West, Japan has, like many countries, attempted to establish a cultural identity by valorising Japanese tradition and nationalism. The search for a primordial, authentic Japanese past to oppose to the modern, foreign-imbued present is an old story in Japan. The Japanese have always been busily engaged in a debate about what makes them unique, and in examining their feelings toward and dealings with foreign influences in their society.

Japanese form of suicide.

What particularly summons up the peculiarities of Japanese history and myth is the *jidaigeki*. Moreover, *jidaigeki* often implies the ideology of the “bourgeois myth”. The image of the samurai is regarded as the epitome of classical Japanese. Since Meiji, when Japan began to westernise or modernise, the samurai (“bourgeois”) world view was generalised to encompass the whole of the Japanese population.⁶

As Adorno suggests, the fact that bourgeois art forms are part of everyone’s culture is “the great artistic deception of the twentieth century” (1970: 31). *Jidaigeki* is an apparatus of the predominant ideology in Japan. *Jidaigeki* is, as indicated above, largely bourgeois in orientation. Despite often lavish and glamorous representations⁷, *jidaigeki* is typically conservative, aesthetically conventional and establishment-oriented. The cultural forms of *jidaigeki*’s artistic expression are immediately meaningful within a bourgeois culture. *Jidaigeki* resists any inherent ability to be self-reflexive.

Jidaigeki has long produced a structured and whole narrative that is regarded as an effective tool for creating and consolidating Japanese community and social totality. The massive recirculation of *jidaigeki* produces a tremendous number and variety of icons, but themes remain fairly one-dimensional, essentially a repetition of how *jidaigeki* transforms conflict into harmonised struggle. Members of Japanese audience tend to indulge themselves in reopening familiar and, hence, unprovocative feelings and experiences. They do not challenge their own beliefs and yet perceive that this has occurred. The aesthetics of representation embedded in *jidaigeki* induce deception and deliberate self-deception among the Japanese.

⁶ See The Way of the Heavenly Sword: the Japanese army in the 1920s by Leonard Humphreys, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995.

⁷ *Jidaigeki* is a form which is usually exploited for costume melodrama.

Naturally, *jidaigeki* has been used as ideological propaganda. The production, distribution, and exhibition of nearly six thousand *jidaigeki* was made between 1908 and the end of the Pacific War. The films in this broad category, Desser (1992) notes, include comedies, ghost stories, and action-packed tales of heroism. The samurai genre went through substantive social and national evolution after the collapse of the Japanese Empire at the end of World War II.⁸ Importantly, American-supported post-war recovery and subsequent industrial imperialism that emerged in Japan has been, perhaps excessively, attributed to the American western or cowboy genre. The messages prevailing in these genres, despite significant cultural differences and earlier hostility between two nations, were, like all kitsch, readily embodied within Japanese commercial film in the 60s.

The construction of Japaneseness and standardisation of the nation's image was a collaborative creation both of the samurai and Western bourgeois individualism. Samurai requires superficial variation, giving the semblance of a sophisticated, individualised western image. Samurai culture can be regarded as adaptable to either western or Japanese bourgeois individualism.⁹ Bourgeois individualism is embedded in simplicity of code, solitude of action and an abstraction of history. *Jidaigeki* are set before or during the collapse of feudal Japan. The samurai warrior class, its adventures and especially the difficulties occasioned by its slow demise with the disintegration of the feudal system in Japan, provide the basis for the *jidaigeki*. These evince a special fondness for violence, for the lone hero facing long odds, and for a clear cut insistence on distinct heroes and villains. The figure of the masterless

⁸ See David Desser "Toward a structural analysis of the Postwar Samurai Film", Reframing Japanese Cinema: Authorship, Genre, History, ed. Nolletti, Authur and Desser, David., Bloominton: Indiana University Press, 1992.

⁹ Ikegami, in the book, The Taming of the Samurai the samurai sense of individuality falls within the parameters of what has considered individuality in the West. She also rejects the notion of the individual as a western unique invention and concludes that the concept of the individual is deeply rooted in the samurai code of honor that evolved over the centuries.

samurai whose *daimyo* (local warlord) was defeated, and thus finds himself unemployed, is a common feature of *jidaigeki*, along with the lone gunfighter in a Western.

What links these moral epics, *jidaigeki* and the Cowboy Westerns across cultures is the predictability of the ending: the hero succeeds in accomplishing that which is deemed by the audience to be morally right. They have in common their portrayal of the hero as a “good guy”, who fights in the open, with honor, despite being outnumbered by hordes of treacherous enemies. Their audiences may reasonably expect that the heroes will either survive the battle, gloriously successful, or die tragically (but heroically). Either way, the clear and ever-present message of such a tale is that the moral struggle matters. Such works usually serve most effectively as war propaganda, as *jidaigeki* functioned as a propaganda for the World War II while *The Magnificent Seven* functioned as a propaganda for the Vietnam War.

Influences flowed both ways between the Hollywood Western and *jidaigeki*. It is not surprising that Kurosawa became internationally better known for samurai movies. Kurosawa has been one of the very film directors deeply influenced by both the Western¹⁰ and *jidaigeki*, transcending both as conventional genre. Kurosawa transcends kitsch, sometimes by making ‘the comic’ out of kitsch, for example, in *Rashomon* (1950), when the bandit’s narration is marked by Hollywood-style clichés of heroic romance (complete with thundering music accompanying his ride on the horse). As Goodwin puts it, the narration “comically conveys the self-inflated quality of his claims to prowess and bravery” (Goodwin, 1994:130). The samurai’s self-inflated suicide is an instance of kitsch, of romantic agony rather than fulfillment of *bushido*¹¹.

Kitsch circulates the globe as an essential part of our mutual understanding. The

international acclaim for *Rashomon* raised Kurosawa to the status of Japan's most famous director. *Rashomon* won the American Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 1951. Ironically, however, it turns out to be difficult for Kurosawa's artistic achievement to be transmitted, whether by the Japanese or the American. Hollywood returned the compliment by remaking samurai films as Westerns. Several of his samurai films have been remade and reframed as kitsch *jidaigeki* by Japanese directors, and cowboy Westerns by Western directors. *Seven Samurai* was remade by John Sturges as *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), *Rashomon* was remade by Martin Ritt as *The Outrage* (1964) and *Yojimbo* was remade as a spaghetti Western, *A Fistful of Dollars*, which in turn inspired a host of Hollywood imitations. By destroying Kurosawa's comic rhythm, they came back with kitsch; which is mostly serious. For example, there is an equivalence between the bandit's narration in *Rashomon* and the cowboy narration in *The Magnificent Seven*. The difference is that the former is comic while the latter is cool and self-consciously serious. *The Magnificent Seven* dwells on dialogue and a preachy "message". Action sequences are interspersed with long talking sequences. At one point, there are bandit scouts on the hills above the village and the cowboys get into position to fight back, each cowboy with a peasant or group of peasants. Then we are shown a long dialogue scene as the cowboys stay pinned down in their positions. During the night before the last battle, there is a good deal of talk between the six gunmen and the seventh young recruit about the drawbacks to the life of a gunslinger. After the farmers betray the gunmen, they are then to be escorted resentfully out of town by the bandits, and Steve McQueen has a sentimental speech about how he would have liked to settle down in a place like this, while Charles Bronson tells the village children that their fathers are not cowards for betraying the cowboys, but rather that their fathers are really

¹⁰ For example *Rashomon*, *The Seven Samurai*, *Throne of Blood*, *The Hidden Fortress*, *Sanjuro*, *Yojimbo*.

heroic in assuming the responsibility of families, land and a settled life.

The adaptation of samurai culture itself inspires the West, which occasioned, for example, the success of James Clavell's *jidaigeki*, Shogun and the NBC television miniseries. The novel is a portrait of the gradual acculturation of a shipwrecked English man, the sea captain Blackthorne (based upon the real life William Adams) in feudal Japan. It is also a romantic tragedy about Blackthorne's forbidden love affair with a Japanese married lady samurai, Mariko. Blackthorne's love for Mariko and growing appreciation for the samurai way of life encourages him to become a samurai himself. As romance blossoms between the lovers, Blackthorne teaches Mariko Western concepts of love, and she in turn teaches him the "karma", and the control of emotions. At one point he stoically and over-seriously looks on as Mariko prepares to commit ritual suicide to atone for losing face, a classic moment in cultural distortion by all sides.

In the television miniseries, a leading actor in many Kurosawa's films, Toshiro Mifune takes the role of Lord Toranaga, the powerful warlord plotting to become Shogun. In contrast to Kurosawa's lens, the kitsch 'lens' of *Shogun* lifts the "weight" of Kurosawa's art. In *Shogun*, the actor 'puts on weight': The individuality of Mifune comes to the fore. Kurosawa's lens in contrast, is self-aware of the necessity of a certain equilibrium of power that prevents any individual component from totalising. None the less, Kurosawa expresses the difficulty of negotiating subjectivity and the weight of his art. According to Kurosawa, talking about his film, *Drunken Angel* (1946),

... a film director can rejoice over a marvellous asset only to have it turn into a terrible burden. If I let Mifune in his role of the gangster become too attractive, the balance with his adversary, the doctor, played by Shimura Takashi, would be

¹¹Translated the "Way of the Warrior".

destroyed. If this should occur, the result would be a distortion of the film's overall structure. Yet to suppress Mifune's attractiveness at the blossoming point of his career because of the need for balance in the structure of my film would be a waste. And in fact Mifune's attraction is something his innate and powerful personal qualities pushed unwittingly to the fore; there was no way to prevent him from emerging as too attractive on the screen other than keeping him off screen. I was caught in a real dilemma. Mifune's attractiveness gave me joy and pain at the same time (Kurosawa, Something Like Autobiography, 1982:162).

Kitsch is the discourse which banishes all the doubt and irony that Kurosawa dramatises and incarnates: it is all smiles and cheers, beaming and euphoric. The final scene of *Shogun* is pure kitsch, where Toranaga (played by Mifune) watches from a hillside as Blackthorne supervises the building of a new ship. The great samurai chieftain wonders aloud the startling passages, encouraging banal emotionality:

Mariko, it was your karma to die gloriously and live forever. Anjin-san (Blackthorne), my friend it is your karma to never leave this land. And my karma, which I did not choose, my karma is to become Shogun.

It is important to distinguish carefully *Shogun* from Japanese *jidaigeki* and American cowboy Westerns. The latter are "first-degree kitsch" (as indicated earlier), where the relationship between object (samurai/cowboy imagery) and user (Japanese/American) is "practice-near" and traditional. In *Shogun*, by contrast, samurai is designed as an exotic commodity, second-degree kitsch that has no trace of use value, no longer being "the real thing" for connoisseurs. The mass marketing of samurai imagery as kitsch is only possible once the imagery has been stripped of its signifying value. What matters is the samurai's iconicity itself. The samurai's traits, such as ruthlessness or cunning, and the *seppuku* (samurai's suicide) are easily isolated and fragmented, becoming totally interchangeable and metonymic. A metonym for samurai signifies ruthlessness or *seppuku*. As floating signs, they can adhere to any object and convey onto it everybody's culture, thereby "kitschifying" it.

It can be said that each degree of samurai imagery satisfies the desire for intensity in a different way: in the first degree through nationalism still infused with use value; and in the second degree by interculturalism and fragmentation. Even though they are produced for

different functions, these two degrees cohabit in the same contemporary space. This mediates a form of globalisation, where myriad cultures live side by side, producing both national and intercultural kitsch. National kitsch is a false localism; intercultural kitsch is an unrooted internationalism, tinged with the seductive qualities of the exotic.

V. 3. Noh and Film

One prime responsibility of a film director is to define what interests him the most, what resonates with his current concerns. The point is to weigh carefully what is essential to the dramatic experience and what is peripheral. Kurosawa reinvented the *jidaigeki* genre, by populating his work with the canonised legends and heroes of Japan's past, and at the same time, contradicts this orthodox, institutionalised culture. This is partly so by his drawing of material from the Japanese theatrical tradition. Noh theatre is the art that most obviously feeds into Kurosawa's cinema, and it is this tradition that disrupts and contests conventions of the 'cultures' of kitsch.

His aim of adapting Noh theatrical devices for the cinema seems to be to expand the cinematic experience and to mitigate the immediacy of kitsch that absolutely controls the flow, and the location of the audience's attention. Deploying Noh, Kurosawa expresses his work with greater "distancing" sensations, in order to produce the irreducible elements of lived experience. An achievement of notable significance of Kurosawa's is thus a rigorously 'un-kitsch' synthesis of the cinematic medium and Noh theatre.

Film as a medium has its own techniques of expression self-evidently different from a conventional staged play. The cinematic medium is to be regarded as, in Sontag's words, progressive from theatrical stasis to cinematic fluidity, from theatrical artificiality to photographic naturalness and immediacy.¹² Film consists of a succession of ever-changing images and has constantly flowing motion as one of its characteristics. There is no need to consume time in drawing a curtain or in changing properties, lights and costumes. The cinematic medium loses these intermissions of the action in the theatre that contribute to the emotional detachment required by the audience. Although the rapid motion excites the

spectator, this constant attachment discourages emotional cultivation and encourages film as escapism. “The moviegoer”, writes Kracauer, contrasting him to the theatregoer, “is much in the position of a hypnotised person” (Kracauer, 1961:159-60). To awake the audience from its hypnotised state, Kurosawa deploys the static scene as learned from the Japanese Noh theatrical tradition. Kurosawa’s stylistic and semiotic borrowings of art forms reflect his concerns about philosophical issues of aesthetic detachment. Kurosawa states:

During the shooting of a scene the director’s eye has to catch even the minutest detail. But this does not mean glaring concentratedly at the set. While the cameras are rolling, I rarely look directly at the actors, but focus my gaze somewhere else. By doing this I sense instantly when something isn’t right. Watching something does not mean fixing your gaze on it, but being aware of it in a natural way. I believe this is what the medieval Noh playwright and theorist Zeami meant by “watching with a detached gaze” (Kurosawa, Autobiography, 1982:195).

Kurosawa makes us aware of the fact that film thrives on the narrative equivalent of a technique familiar from painting and photography. Emptiness and lack of depth are two traits that characterise the two-dimensional sense of surface and space in films. The history of the cinema is regarded as the history of its emancipation from theatrical “frontality”, from theatrical acting (gestures needlessly stylised and exaggerated), from theatrical furnishings (“unnecessary distancing” of the audience’s emotions), then perhaps from intelligent reflection.

Photographic naturalness and immediacy in film have enormous implications for the spectator's relationship to the actor's body. The body is objectified by the distributor in the form of the film as a commodity independent of the actor. The theatrical idea of the actor as a whole body becomes, on film, the actor flattened and edited within the image frame. The

¹² Susan Sontag, ‘Film and Theater’, Tulane Drama Review II, Fall 1966: 24, See also collected in her book, On Photography.

actor could be seen close up, so that stylised movements are perceived to be unnecessary. The apotheosis of realism, as Sontag suggests, the prestige of “unstylised reality” in film is actually a covert political-moral position (Sontag, 1966: 26). The fragmentation of the body in the cinematic medium totalises the emotional attachment of the spectator. This fragmentary quality of the cinematic medium was exploited by the kitsch genre of *jidaigeki* and Western. For kitsch, this fragmentariness is an ‘emancipation’ from theater. It is no accident that this shift in the function of the actor's body is most evident in the turn toward fetishisation of the male and female star and their metonymic body parts in *jidaigeki* and Western genres.

In the film, consequently, as Silberman argues, the actor loses his control over his body (Silberman, 1996: 560). The body consists of separate parts moulded together by the camera and the edit. The radical fragmentation of the modern personality no longer refers to the autonomous individual. Rather, it reveals the new quality of the cinematic image that disassembles its object in order to reconstruct it for the spectator. The cinematic apparatus separates the person from the acting. No longer does the detail “need” the rest of the body, nor does the actor know at any particular moment in what context the body or its detail will appear within a sequence (Silberman, 1996: 560-1). Kurosawa however prevents the actor's body from being an object of the technology.

Kurosawa does not demand for the actors conventional “large” gestures or melodramatic style, but still requires the formal gestures of the stage actors. Moving away from the naturalistic-mimetic model of acting technique, he opened the way for various kinds of credible stylisation for the camera. Kurosawa’s challenge was to integrate the organic body into a radically anti-naturalistic aesthetic without having it simply become an ornament. In Kurosawa's film, reduction and condensation borrowed from Noh were the main techniques.

The performance practices of Noh share, with surviving and ancient rituals an attentive respect for the bodied force of physical presence in contact with the earth. The ground itself on which the individual expressions materialize is manifested by the life force, *Ki*, which Zeami likened to the life-strings that operate marionettes (Kakyo: 100). Among accomplished actors this acting style produced intense and rhythmically charged figures with a high degree of suggestivity; poorly trained actors looked like marionettes, with their cramped movements. In this sense, an actor in Kurosawa's film needs as much control over his or her body as in a play.

Kurosawa applies the body language of Noh characters, who do not speak or move like real people, in order to produce 'strangeness'. Kurosawa's film is committed to abstraction, and the film offered the new scale for the abstraction of referential meaning through the presence of the image. The acting, with its distinctive movements within space was an integral part of the search for new forms of expressiveness through a new body language.

Kurosawa stylises the actor's movements such that he deliberately took advantage of lack of depth, which is characteristic of film. Kurosawa has combines long takes and stationary cameras with telephoto lenses so as to foreshorten and flatten perspective to the two-dimensional, surface orientation traditional in Japanese visual and dramatic art. The effect of flattening the perspective and the deliberate placing of each actor in the frame makes detachment the main visual motif. As a result of visual imagery detached from normal perspective – according to Kurosawa himself –the characters acquire 'a weight, a pressure (that is) almost hallucinatory, making the rhythms of the movements emerge'.¹³

Kurosawa's adaptation can thus be characterised by the physicality of the actor, its hexis, and the composite relationship of the kinetic possibilities of cinematic space and the

actor's presence. This corporeal vision is Kurosawa's. Kurosawa's emphasis on the capacities of the body over scopic codes, attends to all that makes visuality without affinity to touch, a visuality favouring qualities of shadow and griminess, which evokes a viewer's awareness of tension between characters, and between contrasting elements such as human/superhuman and fiction/reality. Kurosawa's art requires much of self-reflection from the audience.

V. 4. Shakespeare and Noh

For a Japanese director working with Shakespeare text, the first problem is the question of translation. Because the poetry of the language is considered at least partly the location of its meaning, what is lost in translation is not insignificant. Overcoming this loss for the Japanese director requires them to make the most of the visual, nonverbal resources available, and to see to it that sensory codes will reproduce experience. This device evokes a viewer who cannot merely gaze but who must resort to his (the viewer's) own body to understand the world.

Kurosawa's Shakespeare may be regarded as one of the notable examples of such a method. His approach tries to compensate for the 'loss' of the original by translating the 'language-heavy' text into visual image-sound equivalence. It can then reveal the powerful potentialities of the non-verbal dimension inherent in Shakespeare, a dimension little explored by English directors, and thus, paradoxically enough, can lead to the success Kurosawa has enjoyed in the West.

Kurosawa is the originator who furnishes the Elizabethan tragic repertory through a Japanese disposition. Kurosawa has to consider the likenesses¹⁴ and differences between the linguistic, literary, dramatic and cultural background in Elizabethan England and that of

¹³ Cited by Shirae, Yoshio, Hayao Shibata, and Koichi Yamada. 'L'Empereur.' *Cahiers du Cinema* 183 (1966: 76).

feudal Japan. Kurosawa translates Shakespeare into the period of *sengoku* in order to explore the ‘universal’ political dynamism of Shakespeare’s tragedies. In the *sengoku* period, the social order was breaking down under the civil war as rival *daimyo* (local warlords) battled for supremacy. The setting of his films in eras of social turmoil and transformations of political orders afforded the director situations that reveal the individual rulers amidst their failed ambitions.

Kurosawa borrows the conventions of Japanese Noh plays, a product of the same *sengoku* period, in order to make the “familiar” outlines of Shakespearean theatre into the cinematic forms, which is “strange” for the audience not only outside but also inside Japan. The individual, tragic worldview in the Shakespeare plays is subdued in Kurosawa’s adaptation by the use of ‘forms’, in particular, those derived from Noh semiotics. To prevent immediacy or intimacy, Kurosawa bases his art on the form. The symbolic connection created by the form not only specifies the aesthetic experience, but also prevents the exclusivity of aesthetic experience. In Kurosawa’s aesthetics, the certain “form” exists without totalising.

In Kurosawa’s *Throne of Blood* as well as in his *Ran*, Kurosawa uses Noh techniques to compress dialogue into wholly visual imagery. There is little introspection or analytic dialogue, with visual imagery and action carrying more significance than words in a marked departure from Shakespeare that has bothered critics unfamiliar with Noh semiotics (Parker, 1997: 512). Given the limitation on literal translation, Kurosawa has pared the dialogue to the minimum necessary to advance the plot.

Noh conventions in *Throne of Blood* and *Ran* both translate and estrange ‘the original’s dramatic energy and intensity without having recourse the verbal language’ (Yoshimoto,

¹⁴ warlords, witches, feudalism, kings, courts, wild landscape, etc.

2000: 29). The masks, makeup, body movement, and symbolic conventions of Noh are fully incorporated in the films. Traditional Noh referents like the crows in *Throne of Blood* (as well as being present in Shakespeare)¹⁵ or the stone fox head presented to Lady Kaede in *Ran* constantly reflect Noh stylisation (Parker, 1997: 510).

Kurowasa jettisons Shakespeare's linguistic 'text' in favour of its equivalence in action. The important difference between Noh and Shakespearean theatre reflects the emphasis on action in the former in contrast to the emphasis on text in the latter. Peter Lamarque illustrates:

The character of King Lear can be studied and understood through a careful reading of Shakespeare's play. But the text of a Noh play provides only one element in the development of the play's characters. So integrated is a Noh performance between music, dance, poetry, mask, costume and, above all, mood and atmosphere that characterisation cannot be comprehended through any single element in abstraction (Lamarque, 1989:158).

In Shakespearean theatrical traditions, the actor's body is dominated by the voice. Shakespearean theatre was the product of the Renaissance, where the audience is expected to watch each actor delivering a speech.¹⁶ In Shakespearean theatre, the actor develops and impersonates the unique individuality. According to Sontag, linear "coherence" of detail is the rule in Occidental narrative theatre, and gives rise to the sense of the unity of the characters (Sontag, 1961: 29).

The unity of character in Shakespearean theatre is something foreign or even 'anti-Noh' in Noh theatre. In fact, Noh presupposes a philosophical interest in dissolution of personality. Characterisation in Noh, is abstract, begins with a figure whose life is already associated with some abstract qualities such as grace, poignancy, courage, or forbearance.

¹⁵ Act III, 'the crow takes wing to the rocky wood'.

Donald Keen gives a good example of this purely abstract refinement in his account of the Noh dramatist, Zeami and his treatment in one of his plays of the death of Atsumori, derived from The Tale of the Heike¹⁷. In the original, as Keen points out, there is much subtle psychological detail which explains the circumstances under which the warrior Kumagai killed the youthful Atsumori on the battlefield.

Comparing the two stories we see that almost every element of pathos or drama in The Tale of the Heike has been deleted from the play. Atsumori's youth, his resemblance to Kumagai's son, his insolence in response to Kumagai's solitude, Kumagai's regret when forced to kill Atsumori - all are eliminated, leaving only the story of a man unable to forget his defeat at an enemy's hands. Of course, the audience was familiar with the story as told in The Tale of the Heike, but Zeami's play does not depend on this knowledge; instead, he chose to delete everything particular about the two men....(Keen, Classical Theatre, 50-1).

Lamarque offers explanation of the concept of dissolution of personality by contrasting it with what might be called a "biographer's conception" of a person, requiring for identity that some coherent story can be told linking episodes in a person's life (Lamarque, 1989:165). The biographer's conception constrains not only the abstract conditions for personal identity but also our idea of what it is to know, or understand, a person. We feel understanding is limited if we have access only to discrete fragments of a person's history. We have the biographer's urge to make realistic connections. Noh appears to reject the biographer's conception of a person; it deliberately isolates fragments of a life. Although there are temporal connection in the narrative structure of many Noh plays, with earlier and later stages of life drawn together through recollection, just as often time itself is fragmented, and the sense of coherence threatened by the juxtaposition of dreams, distant

¹⁶ See Martin Esslin's The Theatre of the Absurd, London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1962.

¹⁷ It was compiled during the turbulent era of civil strife spanning the Kamakura period (1192-1133) and the period of the Northern and Southern Courts (1333-1392)

memories and ghostly apparitions. The invocation of the past serves not so much to explain the present as to heighten its dramatic intensity. In Noh, personal identity is “encapsulated in each vivid and momentary fragment of a life” (Lamarque, 1989:166).

All these formal factors, but particularly the paradoxes of the stylisations of Noh, need to be kept in mind if the significance of Kurosawa’s cinematic art is to be interpreted. The film adapted the paradoxes of the Zeami’s teaching, for example, “violent body movement, gentle foot movement”.¹⁸ This idea led Kurosawa to form a particular attitude about the dance of the demon. Even while playing the part of a ferocious demon, the actor’s physical expressions in Kurosawa’s Shakespeare adaptation are, to some extent, elegant and delicate.

As in staged Noh, the disunity or fragmentariness of the characters in Kurosawa’s Shakespeare adaptation is symbolically unified within the whole atmosphere of the film: spatial and temporal. The unity can be found within the screen’s flat rectangle –not only within movement, but also gesture, facial expression, furnishings, and the reinforcement given to these by non-verbal sound. Blankness and stillness is enhanced by the spatial and temporal Japanese aesthetic form of *Ma*. *Ma* is the Japanese aesthetic conventions meaning “in-between” featuring, ‘expectant stillness and open space pregnant with possibility’ (Pilgrim, 1984: 142) as discussed in the Chapter II. *Ma* aesthetics was, as I argued, metaphorically anti-kitsch. *Ma* aesthetics transcends kitsch’s immediacy, creating aesthetic distance and tension.

The visual details of *Throne of Blood* that reminds us of *Ma* were achieved in traditional ink and scroll paintings. They attain precisely the goal of creating dramatic opaqueness in the realistic images of the world. This dark-light opposition further translates the verbal imaging

of Shakespeare. The white mist, the black mountain castle with its low ceiling, Noh stage-like rooms (The room inside the castle), the dark forest where there is a thundershower while the sun is shining are presented for us on film with a self-conscious sense of theatrical tension.

Ma aesthetics involving pregnant space and expectant stillness, in Noh, add an independent semiotic dimension to the action, helping to produce a fusion of the emotion of performer and audience or of self and others. The device of *Ma* heightens and activates emotion. In Noh, *Ma* signifies meaningful “no action”, manifested between individual’s expressions. The actor, while performing various actions and “no action” spins out the continuing tension that envelops the flow of time.

As in Noh, Kurosawa uses *Ma* aesthetics in the scenes of tensely stylised stillness alternating with bursts of violence. There are indications of *Ma* aesthetics in the presentation of the blind boy, Tsurumaru in *Ran*. Kurosawa uses non-verbal sound to replace word, when Tsurumaru suffers like the blind Gloucester in *Lear*. While Gloucester in *Lear* says, “A man may see how the world goes with no eyes. Look with thine ears” (4.6. 152-153), Tsurumaru in *Ran* plays the disembodied shrill of the *nohkan* or Noh flute. It is the only wind instrument used in Noh theatre’s musical accompaniment and it conventionally expresses the main character’s state of mind. The flute tune expresses Tsurumaru’s state of mind, his fury, his despair and grief. The actor who plays Tsurumaru is an acclaimed Noh actor, Nomura Mansai. The flute circles and shapes the silence and blankness in this scene with great intensity, hence dramatic intensity is provided by *Ma*.

¹⁸ *Fushikaden* (1491), by Zenchiku Zeami, ed. Tomiichiro Nogami and Nishio Minoru, Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1997: 102-3.

V. 5. *Throne of Blood*

Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* inaugurated and sparked the great international period in the history of sound Shakespeare on film. Orson Welles (USA) and Laurence Olivier (GB) had laid the groundwork with their films of Henry V, Hamlet, and Macbeth in the 1940s, but the great explosion in Shakespeare films came in the period from 1950s-1970 when directors from Italy, (Zeffirelli) Russia (Kozintsev), Germany, and Poland (Polanski and Wajda) joined with their counterparts in England and America to create the richest and most diverse examples of Shakespeare reimagined in the film medium.¹⁹ The appearance of Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* in 1955 extended Shakespeare on film from its Anglo-American limitations. Kurosawa demonstrated that Shakespeare could be enriched by his assimilation into a foreign culture.

On one hand, there are resemblances to their Shakespearean originals – castles, mountains, cloud vistas, galloping horses, scurrying samurai in insect-like armour backed by fluttering pennants, and cool geometrical interiors of ritualised behavior. On the other, some of the Japanese implications of *Throne of Blood* are utterly different from the Shakespearean originals. Pursuit of Kurosawa's interculturalism and its modernity requires a focus on Kurosawa's favouring form over content, action over linguistic 'text', and the unity over the fragmentariness of characters.

Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* begins and ends with choruses, traditional in Japanese dramatic forms as those in early Greek tragedies. As Raymond Williams suggests, Shakespearean tragedy is thoroughly secular in its immediate practice, compared for example to the Greek tragedy which is fully religious. The individual worldview was consequently thematic in Shakespearean drama as compared to the Greek tragedy. Although undoubtedly

retaining a Christian consciousness, Shakespeare emphasises humanism where “an individual man, from his own aspirations, from his own nature, sets out on an action that led him to tragedy” (Williams, 1966: 88). Kurosawa establishes the prologue and epilogue and frames the film from a distant, almost geologic perspective. Through these devices, the dramatic action becomes more impersonal.

To encourage impersonality further, Kurosawa uses a particular Noh mask as a model for the face of a particular character in *Throne of Blood*. He reports to Sato Tadao that he showed Mifune (who plays the role of Washizu/Macbeth) the mask called *heida*, a mask of a warrior, and to Yamada Isuzu (Asaji/Lady Macbeth) the *shakumi* mask, a face of a beautiful middle-aged woman on the verge of madness.²⁰ In both, the facial make-up of the actors is based on the specific Noh masks, which has the effect of depersonalising and thereby universalising character (Parker, 1997: 510). Kurosawa appears to reject the unity of character; rather he deliberately isolates fragments of a life. The actor in *Throne of Blood*, through the study of the mask, expresses an essence of character. This dissolution of personality is, as discussed earlier, contrastive to the unity of character required for coherent identity in the Shakespearean originals.

Kurosawa’s adaptation of Macbeth shows little concern with the inner richness or individuality apparent in Shakespeare’s tragedy. *Throne of Blood* is contrastive to the original in terms of Shakespearean heroism. Washizu (the Macbeth figure) is antiheroic, compared to Macbeth. As compared with Macbeth’s greatness, and strength in the face of fate and retribution, Washizu appears ignoble, small-minded, and passive. Macbeth was an efficient soldier, whose ambition and delusion devised his own catastrophe. Different from the

¹⁹ See Kenneth Rothwell’s preface to *Shakespeare on Screen* (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 1990, pp.5-9

²⁰ Kurosawa, interviewed by Sato Tadao, *Zenshu Kurosawa Akira*, vol.4.353-54. Originally published by Rober Manvell, *Shakespeare and the Film* (New York: Praeger) 1971: 103.

original Shakespearean Macbeth, Washizu dies ignobly at the hands of his followers, not bravely in single combat with the Macduff figure (Noriyasu).

Kurosawa's adoption of Noh methods for *Throne of Blood* facilitates the creation of an *unheroic* film tragedy. Its protagonist is not depicted as the sole or even primary agent of dramatic events. His inner drives are vocalised through the Forest demon and Lady Asaji, not from himself. The stature of Washizu's feelings, thoughts, and actions is diminished. Kurosawa explicitly treats Washizu as an eternally recurrent type whose "spirit is walking today", as the final chorus puts it. Although the creation of empathy with Washizu is achieved by the practice of Western-style realism (exemplified by Mifune's portrayal of Washizu), empathy fluctuates and is often deliberately thwarted by Noh stylisation. Kurosawa accentuates detachment in the scene of where Washizu meets Noh stylised characters, the Forest demon and Asaji with their expressionless faces. Kurosawa's camera suddenly moves behind the central character, Washizu, and pictures Asaji's mask-like face, which make the audience suddenly move its identification from Washizu back to themselves. While an actor in a realistic theatre tries to express the mind of the role he plays by means of his facial expression, a Noh actor wearing a mask cannot change his facial expression. Noh characters do not speak or move like real people; we can only watch them with detachment and without empathy.

Dissolution of personality and emotional detachment are encouraged in a famous sequence, when the heroes of the wars, the Macbeth and Banquo figures Washizu and Miki, summoned to receive promotion, get lost in the mazelike forest paths. Washizu and Miki gallop madly through the forest. At the heart of the storm, they enter a calm and sunlit clearing. Accompanied by Noh flute, this scene of light and stillness is contrastive to the dark and "noisy" scene with thunder and running horses. It is followed by the triangular set piece

where Washizu and Miki face a frail thatched hut of poles at the centre. An inhabitant in the hut begins singing when Washizu draws the arrow back to shoot at it. The inhabitant is chanting in a low, toneless voice about the vanity of human pride.

*Men are vain and death is long
And pride dies first within the grave...
Life must end in fear
Only evil may maintain
An afterlife for those who will
Who love this world, who have no son,
To whom ambition calls.
Death will reign, man lives in vain.*

Noh influence is particularly strong in the presentation of the Forest demon. The Forest Demon initially resembles a Noh mask called *Uba* (old woman), transforming into the expression of *Yamanba* (the mountain witch). The face of the actress is made up to resemble the unrealistic white immobility of these masks; and her white robe and posture (sitting with one knee raised and eyes lowered), her slow hieratic gestures turning the spinning wheel, her curiously atonal voice are all typical of Noh. When Washizu opens the bamboo drapery, she starts speaking. Significantly, the spinning wheel has two spools, a larger one from which the demon spins on to foresee Washizu's brief career, and slowing to prophesy that of Miki, whose descendants will prolong it. These double spools are lamented by her song and speech. Her movements are accelerated, her eyes are momentarily crossed, and widened to give a demonic expression to her face, and her husky and toneless voice changes to an unearthly quality. After her prophecies, the demon vanishes. In contrast of how silent and still she was a second ago, she swiftly flies away, laughing loudly. After Washizu and Miki rip down the rear of the hut, the hut vanishes too. They find mounds of skeletons in antique armour, behind the hut that is no longer there.

Kurosawa replaces Shakespeare's three witches with the old spinning-woman who transforms into a Shinto demon, the forest's spirit-of-place. According to Kurosawa, this was based on a specific Noh play: 'In the case of the witch in the wood, I planned to replace it with the equivalent to the hag which appears in the Noh play named *Kurozuka*, - in which traveling monks encounter a demon in the guise of an old woman, spinning in a frail thatched hut'.²¹ In *Kurozuka*, an old woman in her cottage²² begins singing after the drapery hung about the hut has been removed. In Kurosawa's version, she stays in the hut, and it is Washizu who removes the hut drapery.

Kurozuka is based on a famous legend in the North District of Japan. Tokobo Yukei, a priest of Kishu District, went wandering about the country with vassal priests. In the Adachi Plain, they found a humble hut in which an old woman lived alone, and asked her to give them shelter. She refused at first, saying her place was too shabby and small, but finally she granted their request. As the evening got colder, she went to a foothill near the backyard of her hut in order to collect firewood, forbidding them to look inside her bedroom. Tokobo observed her prohibition, but one of his attendants broke in and found a pile of dead human bodies in her bedroom. Caught by terror, the priests took flight. Then the old woman revealed her other identity, *Yamanba* (The mountain witch) and caught up with them, but when Tokobo and his vassal priests chanted a Buddhist incantation with prayer beads, she ran away. The Noh, *Kurozuka*, is abstracted and stylised from this moral legend.

Kurosawa dissolves the "evil" personality of the Shakespearean witches, transforming them into a single woman of more ambiguous menace. The Forest Demon in *Throne of Blood* is different in dramatic quality from the three witches in Macbeth. The three

²¹ Quoted by in Manvell, 103; the title means 'Black Mound'. (Manvell, Roger. Shakespeare and the Film. London: Dent, 1971: 103).

²² A covered prop representing a palace, a tomb or a hut is generally called *tsukurimono*.

witches were the ministers of evil who shaped the destruction of Macbeth, and consequently they represent enemies to humanity. The Forest Demon in *Throne of Blood* does not have the same overt horribleness. She does not even appear of her own accord, and it is Washizu who prompts her into action. This action order is significant in the original Noh play, *Kurozuka*, where the old woman begins singing after the drapery has been removed. Likewise in the film, it is not until Washizu confronts her that she begins singing and speaking. She is not as fixed as evil; rather she is a reflection of Washizu. She seems to incarnate human potentialities, fears and emotions and the human quest for order or the release from it. Washizu and the Forest Demon are a reflection of each other, while Shakespearean witches appear of their own malevolent accord. Kurosawa changed Shakespeare's witches into an ambiguous being, adapted from the old woman in *Kurozuka*, who is not only a hag of the supernatural world but also an old woman who lives an ordinary life in this world. She partakes of both unearthly being and real human being.

The dissolution of personality in the Forest Demon is paralleled by sequences in which the Lady Macbeth figure, Asaji, 'is dominated' and 'dominates'. Kurosawa created power reversals and challenges samurai culture's historic exclusion of women from public life. The figure of Asaji is dense with reminiscences of Noh. Like the demon, the actress playing Asaji wears the white, immobile make-up of the *shakumi* mask (of a middle-aged beauty). The Noh performer who wears this mask, when she gets angry, changes into another mask whose eyes are golden-coloured. This mask represents that state of an unearthly feeling of tension and Lady (Asaji) assumes the same state. The second mask is usually called *deigan*. Asaji is consistently still in the frame, but when she does, it is with smoothness and control. She glides across the screen, moving heel to toe as does the Noh actor. Her movement, gesture and expression are conventionalised and shaped within the choreographic

discipline of Noh drama.

There is a contrast between Asaji's tense "still" movement and Washizu's restless movement. Washizu moves like a tiger in the cage with facial grimaces and restless pacing. He paces up and down, he breathes heavily, and bares his teeth. Asaji walks glidingly with the muted clack of her *tabi* (socks) and sussuration of her silk kimono over the wooden floors. The way of walking is one of familiar minimalist effects of Noh. There is no fainting, real or feigned, with Asaji, as Parker points out (1997: 518), she lacks both Lady Macbeth's compunction and her ragged nerves. Her emotion is separated from her voice and her body, and often transferred to Noh flute. Later it is also Asaji who suggests the ruse of Kuniharu's funeral cortege to gain entrance to the Forest Castle left under Miki's guard; and in the ghost scene she is even more contemptuously forceful in controlling Washizu's panic and later in reminding him to inquire whether Miki's murderer has also killed the son. Far from being spared knowledge of Miki's murder, as in Shakespeare²³, in *Throne of Blood* it is Asaji herself who urges it. Washizu is ready to confirm Miki's offer of support by naming the latter's son his heir, but Asaji insists again that Miki will betray them; and when this no longer convinces her husband, she forces Washizu's hand by claiming to be pregnant herself.

It is also consistent with the wider shift of dramatic dominance from Lady Macbeth to Macbeth, in the developing action of Shakespeare's play. The difference between Lady Macbeth and Asaji is given by the speech of the former:

*...Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty!... (1.5. 40-3).*

Lady Macbeth craves for the help of "murdering ministers" (1.5.48) so that she can pluck up

²³'Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chunk'.

her courage; that is, she thinks of carrying out the plot with the collaboration of evil spirits. In contrast, Asaji does not say anything expressing her wish for the help of evil spirits. Lady Macbeth shows her emotional fluctuation between ambition and compunction through her dialogue, soliloquies and asides with Macbeth, while Asaji seldom experiences inner conflict. While the emotional fluctuation of Lady Macbeth is expressed by her inner conflict with the evil spirits, Lady Asaji's style of movement fluctuates only according to her husband.

The clear distinction between the style of movement of Asaji and that of Washizu has a further significant dramatic function. Kurosawa heightens the mutual invasions of the main characters. There are moments of intensity when the power of the two characters mirrors and reverses the posture, movement and gesture. Kurosawa depicts the opposition between stillness and movement in Asaji and her husband, Washizu. While Washizu moves, Asaji stays still. When Asaji moves Washizu stays still. There is a flow and recoil of influence between Asaji and Washizu during the tense silences which precede and accompany the murder of Kuniharu Tsuzuki (the Duncan figure). Washizu sits motionless, in the posture that we have come to associate with Asaji. Washizu's unaccustomed bodily stillness suggests that Asaji has invaded his character, temporarily subsuming his identity. Asaji returns to the room, bringing a spear which she places in Washizu's hands. He then rises and leaves the lighted area on his way to murder Tsuzuki. The camera holds Asaji in its frame while she waits in silence. While Tsuzuki, Washizu's defeated predecessor, is being killed (offscreen), Asaji occupies this room alone, her habitual icy composure broken by furtive glances at the stain on the wall. Suddenly, to the accompaniment of shrill, dissonant Noh music, Asaji rises and begins to dance with frenzied and ecstatic movement. To a sudden shriek of *nohkan* (Noh flute) and rapping drums she rises for a *hayamai* (a quick dance by an demoralised woman) in front of the stain – half ecstasy, half terror like Lady Macbeth's guilt-

ridden sleep-walking: and creates a scene that is pure Noh. Her own frantic dance movements suggest the reciprocal invasion of Asaji's character by Washizu. The balanced transfer of the role from Asaji to Washizu in this central scene is consistent with the change in each character from observer to agent; from one waiting to one committing.

Combining spatial and temporal *Ma* aesthetics (as discussed above), Kurosawa leads the general feeling of the audience into the sequential, rhythmic principle of Noh. Kurosawa regards a good structure for a screenplay as 'that of the symphony, with its three or four movements and different tempos' (Kurosawa, *Autobiography*, 1982: 193). Kurosawa has suggested as a rhythmical model "the Noh play with its three part structure: *jo* (introduction), *ha* (destruction) and *kyu* (haste)" (ibid). By pacing the whole work in the living rhythm of Noh, he gives order to his film.

*Jo, ha, kyu*²⁴ is, according to Zeami, a modulating structure in human actions and a spontaneous flow of things. Dynamic trends are inherent in each of three points. The *jo, ha, kyu* action underpins not only the Noh movement of a hand uttering a sound, or stamping of a foot, but also many other social-aesthetic traditional arts of Japan, such as *renga* (linked poetry) and tea ceremony. Nomura, a contemporary Noh actor, explains that 'jo, ha and kyu apply not only to speed but also to consumption of energy and release from constraint' (Nomura, 2001: 64). *Jo* can be defined as slow preparation or beginning, and it often has the property of an elevated and refined style. *Ha* has the additional meaning of break or disorder. *Kyu* indicates a sudden final to resolve the dramatic action, although it normally concludes in a condition of poise or rest (Goodwin, 1994:185). The precise management of the *Ma* taking place between *ha* and *kyu* is crucial for the actor. An actor arrives at a *kyu* too soon, and by prolonging the *kyu*, it ceases to be *kyu*.

This rhythmic principle of *jo*, *ha*, *kyu* is adapted by Kurosawa in the tempo of performance, and in the phrasing of both chants and musical instrumentation. Kurosawa's *Ma* aesthetics function in the conditions of emptiness and stillness not only between rhythms, actions, but also before and after each event. Kurosawa's device of *jo*, *ha*, *kyu* frames each sequence and the whole film. The introductory chant constituting its *jo*, dramatic events from Tsuzuki's opening war council to the report of Cobweb Forest's movement constitutes its *ha*, and the betrayal of Washizu by his men and the closing chant, its *kyu*. Furthermore, the climax in the last scenes, Noh-like, is composed of the rhythmic structure of *jo*, *ha*, *kyu*. All action concentrates on the accelerated movement of Washizu's final destruction. The death actions of Washizu form one unit when they begin in an easy manner (*jo*), develop dramatically (*ha*), and finish rapidly (*kyu*). In *jo*, the forest advances through the mist in slow motion. In *ha*, Washizu dashes up, then down the staircase between his watch-tower and the courtyard, in dense clouds of arrows which leave his body grotesquely pierced with shafts. The death action is accelerated by Washizu's impulse to mount upwards, then his compulsion downward as life ebbs from him.

By shooting from different angles with three cameras simultaneously, Kurosawa is able to create a dynamic montage of violent action, with occasional sequences in slow motion – or even momentary 'freezes', enhancing *Ma*. This abrupt cessation of sound emphasises an image of the forest. Washizu dies, stumbling towards his rebellious troops retreating into the fog before him. Kurosawa's *kyu* concludes in a condition of poise or rest. When the arrows pierce Washizu's larynx, all sound ceases, and for an instant his warrior's scowl, based on the *haita* mask of Noh, changes to the *yase-otoko* mask's recognition of death.²⁵

²⁴ Originally a term used in *gagaku*, Japanese court music.

²⁵ This 'freeze' effect is like held poses called *kime* in Japanese dance. For the *yase-otoko* suggestion, see Goodwin, 1994: 189.

Kurosawa's *kyu* in *Throne of Blood* in comparison to the ending of *Macbeth* embraces a darker fate, and a feeling that all things are in flux and all life is transitory. Kurosawa depicts a world where usurpation is repeated, and there are no victors or losers. *Macbeth* is killed by *Macduff* on the side of justice, as prophesied by the Second Apparition. On the other hand, in Kurosawa's film, the emphasis is shifted to the third prophecy.²⁶ In *Throne of Blood*, the dramatic sword duel of *Macbeth*, fought by the two men, and so effective on the stage, is eliminated. *Washizu* is impaled by a shower of impersonal arrows, falls like a hedgehog, and witnesses the forest solemnly advancing.

Kurosawa's device ends the film with a rapid finale to resolve the dramatic action. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, a new order is established after the death of the tyrant. In *Throne of Blood*, there is no equivalent of the restorative scene where *Malcolm* proves his worthiness to be the next king. Though there is brief glimpse of *Noriyasu* with the surviving sons of the two heroes, the troops they lead belong to the invading *daimyo*, *Inui*, who is never as saintly as *Edward the Confessor* in *Macbeth*. At the end of *Throne of Blood* the political succession is left wholly at risk, without any sense of a re-established order to offset *Washizu's* death and the chorus's lament. The story of *Washizu's* fall is presented as a recapitulation, set within the framework of a prologue and epilogue. The Kurosawa's cinematic rhythm accompanied by its formal structure and all available sensory codes produce moral imagination, or as *Turner* puts it, 'a concept of the way its members may judge their world',²⁷ leading the audience into a mood of reflectivity.

²⁶ In the original *Macbeth* knows that
Macbeth shall never vanquished be until
Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill
Shall come against him (IV. i. 92-3)

²⁷ *Victor Turner, 'Images of anti-temporality: a essay in the anthropology of experience', Harvard Theological Review, 75* (2), 1982: 243-365. The Ingersoll Lecture, delivered 5 October in Harvard University, 1981.

V. 6. Conclusion

Kurosawa transformed Shakespeare's text into a work of art characteristic of the Noh. Kurosawa maintained for a contemporary audience the disturbing oddity of Shakespeare's vision, and made it ours by the all-encompassing techniques of his style, an intercultural achievement of notable significance. The paradox of Kurosawa's cinematic art offers a range and an incisiveness that permit it to be both culturally inclusive and culturally specific. The paradoxes of its reception lie in the way intercultural boundaries are crossed. Kurosawa weighed things up carefully so that the cultures of Shakespeare and Noh are both essential to the dramatic experience, while the cultures of kitsch seen in *jidaigeki* and the North American cowboy Western are included as necessary to refer to stereotypes that can be exploited for maximum effect. Kurosawa decontextualises the cultures of kitsch, characterised by its false localism and unrooted internationalism, for his own purposes. Thus he seeks to pass over one of the lies of post-war interculturalism exemplified by the cultures of kitsch. Kurosawa makes the familiar outlines of kitsch into the "strange" hybridity of Shakespeare and Noh. The crossing-points may well be more globally and internationally spaced and less secure than more established and consistent genres when Shakespeare in England and Noh in Japan developed. Yet, if the cultures of kitsch are to give way in time to cultural advance, some such art as Kurosawa's is very likely to prove a necessary vehicle of progress or cultural reconciliation.

3. Production: the realm of the economic

VI. Global capital and Local Production: importing management

Understanding business management theory encircles politics, managers and workers. The inquiry should involve, as Geertz advocates, use of “the hermeneutic circle”. As we have seen, the hermeneutic circle signifies a movement back and forth or rather, around in a spiral, between generalisation and specific observation, abstractions and immediacies, looking “from the outside” and trying to understand the vantage points “from the inside”. The understanding should not result from distant and removed observation, leaving the researcher “stranded in abstractions and smothered in jargon”. Nor does it result from acts of total empathy with the insider, leaving the researcher “awash in immediacies as well as entangled in vernacular” (Geertz, 1983: 69-70). The understanding of management therefore should move back and forth between at least two view points, the manager’s view and the worker’s view. To collapse such a ‘hermeneutic circle’ leads to kitsch, in these pages, the familiar name Milan Kundera gives to all totalitarian discourse. Totalitarian kitsch is that discourse which banishes doubt and irony. Kundera suggests that human life is bounded by two chasms: fanaticism on one side, absolute skepticism on the other (Kundera, 1983: 233). For Kundera, as Eagleton puts it, to collapse that tension on either side is the real banality (Eagleton, 1987: 32). All it needs is a certain equilibrium of power, which prevents it from totalising.

This chapter builds on our knowledge of the employment of Japanese working practices and the structure of industrial relations in Japanese manufacturing transplants in the UK. I visited several firms in the Japanese automobile industry in

Northern England from December 2000 to March 2001 for interviews with English managing directors, general managers, sales/purchasing directors or managers. I also conducted interviews during the monthly business seminars organised by JETRO (Japan External Trade Organisation) and the Sheffield Business Link, which I attended. Exploring, by way of fieldwork, the emulation of aspects of Japanese production by a British manufacturing company, this chapter criticises business management literature as tending to oversimplify. On one hand, the enquiry examines the market-led influences in globalisation, and the underlying political forces of state, management and the academic utilitarianism of 'Japanese Studies' which tend to delegitimize worker representation and the principles of collective bargaining. On the other hand, I test and find wanting those Marxist analyses which emphasise the continuing presence of the labour-capital contradiction to be found in the diffusion of Japanese practices. Examining globalisation in business, my conclusion suggests nonetheless that a fundamental conflict of interests between capital and labour remains central but neglected in Japanese business management theory which, in my view, has much about it of a kitsch flavour.

VI. 1. Globalisation and the State

August 2000 was a confusing month for the British car industry. On one hand, Nissan warned that it might not use its Sunderland plant for production of the new Micra because of the strength of sterling. On the other hand, Honda announced that, far from sharing its rivals' currency worries, in order to build a new factory and double its British output – it even plans to export 10,000 cars a year from Swindon to

Japan. The news became the big issue in several newspapers in Britain.¹ This issue made Honda, the “hero” in the British car industry:

There's no need to start bribing the Japanese, or anyone else with more state aid just make them stay. Besides, Honda wouldn't even take state aid if it was offered, said The Daily Telegraph. ...No wonder it's such a successful company ('The Japanese “ritual moan” about sterling', The Week, 2000).

This comment reflects the latest wave of globalisation discourse in the media and popular press outside Japan. Japanese direct foreign investment has increased remarkably since the late 1980s under the globalisation of competition. The late 1980s saw a growing shift of manufacturing from Japan to UK. This shift is the result of the ability of corporations to arrange production across national boundaries, to take advantage of improvements in transportation, and to exploit low-wage labor and the other incentives. The process of what was often called the “Japanisation of British industry” operated in a dual manner, first, via the project of globalisation, and second, via a corresponding nationalism.

The “Japanisation of British industry” is a dynamic force in globalisation. The “Japanisation of British industry” signifies the result of multinational corporations arranging production across national boundaries, taking advantage of improvements in transportation, and exploiting low-wage labour. The “globalisation” process involves the advent of the new and “savage version” of capitalism, what Edward Luttwak characterised as “turbo-capitalism” in 1995 (Luttwak, 1999). Inglis characterises “turbo-capitalism” as;

a creature which in becoming global has made itself capable of throwing off the never very strong restraints of liberal governments in the name of the profitable casualisation of labour; the reduction of the power of trade unions and therefore of wages, and the application of ruthless productivity criteria in

¹ According to the ‘Issue of the Week’ section in The Week, 19 August, 2000, this issue was treated in the Daily Mail, The Mail on Sunday, The Daily Telegraph, and The Sunday Times.

this highly insecure ecology in order to dismiss as many purportedly surplus staff as possible ('downsizing' in the revolting jargon of managerialism) (Inglis, 2000: 46).

Turbo-capitalism is not quite “Japanese”. Japanese management style, which is notorious for its own managerialism, contradicts Turbo-capitalism in some significant ways. Two features of corporate Japan are lifetime employment and a strict seniority system. Japanese employment practices are characterised by a “motherhood” culture which gives security to workers, seeing staff trained and developed internally. Inside Japan, employees are still recruited young and then put through a planned experience program that deliberately immerses them in the company’s culture and working methods. The company, in return to loyalty, offers considerable security of employment.²

But something called “Japanisation”, in the context of Britain, represents a radical new departure in industrial relations, which has been one strand of a wider and extremely powerful globalisation project, or a turbo-capitalism to delegitimize worker representation and dissolve the principles of collective bargaining. When Japanese managements set up their manufacturing transplants in Britain, they may maintain the managerial strategies of Japan while adapting an Anglo-Saxon cult of individualism, but they also sweep away those particular traditions which are hostile to their intensive capital accumulation strategies. For example, there is hardly a Japanese transplant operating in the UK which gives Japanese traditional security measures such as lifetime employment and company pension system. Nor does a Japanese transplant tolerate the British traditional principles of collective bargaining and trade union influence over their workers.

Globalisation project is influencing Japanese industry’s ‘self reliance’ from

the state.³ As the recent survey shows, this national protection is starting to weaken dramatically. In addition, it reflects the latest shift in the discourse of *keiretsu* 'networks'.⁴ *Keiretsu* is a part of Japanese industrial structure of large self-financing enterprise groups. *Keiretsu* involves a relationship with the state and its ministries for mutual gains. Not long ago in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, *keiretsu* was praised as the most important competitive advantage for Japanese firms to establish themselves successfully in North American and Western Europe.⁵ In contrast, the contemporary discourse makes a blanket condemnation of *keiretsu* as the dark side of Japanese capitalism. Just like their prominence in the earlier discourses of the 'Japanese miracle' during the late 1980s and early 1990s, *keiretsu* has once again become the core explanatory variable in the latest wave of counter-discourses about the 'Japanese economic crisis'.

However, the British business in relation to Japan has not been independent from the state. As far as Japanese investment is concerned, the British state has long played an interventionist role. The UK government courted Japanese investment to aid in the regeneration of economically deprived regions. In fact, the UK government's support for Japanese investment has long been a central feature of Anglo-Japanese economic relations. The state has offered substantial financial incentives to Japanese firms who locate in the UK, which was particularly characteristics of the Margaret Thatcher years.

Britain is one of the European countries which have long played host with enthusiasm to Japanese direct investment. The great increase of Japanese investment in Europe in the 1980s and early 90s has been much analysed in its economic impact

² Although there has been a continual change in the labour market, employment practices have not been changing rapidly, and job protection is actually stronger. (Genda and Rebick, 2000: 85)²

³ See 'No more Tears', *Economist*, Nov 25 1999.

⁴ *Keiretsu* refers to Japanese intermarket business groups combining ownership and production networks.

and its implications for comparative management styles. The internationalisation of Japanese industry proceeded from the 1970s in direct parallel to conflict over trade. Towards the end of the 1960s, the rising value of the yen along with shortages and increased costs of labour and raw materials began to stimulate foreign investment.⁶ The Sony Corporation was a pioneer investor in the UK with its colour television factory, opened at Bridgend in South Wales in 1974, and Canon Inc. established the first Japanese manufacturing investment in France when it opened its photocopier factory at Rennes in Brittany in 1984. From the mid-1980s, manufacturing investment in the European Community increased. Japanese manufacturing strategies shifted in the mid-1980s from export orientation to a focus on local production (Conte-Helm, 1989: 32). The importance of Japanese manufacturing investment in Europe is calculated not only on the basis of total project value but also in relation to wider benefits ranging from the creation of direct and indirect employment and technology exchange. For this reason, some twenty European countries have welcomed Japanese direct investment with enthusiasm.

The geographical disposition of manufacturing investment has been determined by a number of factors, both strategic and cultural, and by the public relations role played by governments and development agencies in the selection process. Britain played a premier role in attracting more than 40 per cent of all Japanese investment in Europe (Conte-Helm, 1989:38). The establishment of Nissan Motor Manufacturing (UK) Ltd in the North of England in 1984 represented the largest-ever investment in Europe in a Japanese firm (ibid, 31-2). As of January 1994, a total of 728 Japanese manufacturers were operating in Europe with the largest share of such investment in the UK (206 cases). Moreover, Britain ranks first in the EC and

⁵ Gerlach, M, *Alliance Capitalism: The Social Organisation of Japanese Business*, (California University Press, Berkeley, CA, 1992; Reich, 1991; Tyson, 1993)

second only the United States in its global share of Japanese foreign direct investment (ibid).

The UK attracted Japanese investment for several reasons. Firstly, with English as the second language of most company employees, the ability to conduct business in English, as is possible in the UK is seen as an advantage. Secondly, along with labour cost and availability, the issue of labour relations is of paramount concern to the Japanese. Thirdly, the receptivity of the UK to Japanese investment, or the 'welcome factor', also played its part.

As Danford states, the British state played a strong role, despite the "laissez-faire" ideology of successive Conservative governments (Danford, 1999:223). During the 1980s and 1990s, the effect of de-industrialisation, mass unemployment, anti-trade-union legislation and the defeats of such strong groups of workers as miners, shipbuilders, steelworkers, carworkers, dockers and printers decreased the spirit of resistance and collective bargaining of British workers. The state both created and sustained mass unemployment throughout most of this period of de-industrialisation. In this context, many Japanese managers have acquired sufficient confidence to effect a restructuring of work in capital's favor.

Thatcher, in particular, openly promoted the 'Japanisation of British industry'. Thatcher played a direct part in encouraging Nissan investment in the UK, 'lifting the portcullis', for a succession of Japanese manufacturers to move into UK, impressed with the Japanese technology and the possibilities for fusing the Japanese work ethic onto the 'Victorian values' ideology by which she sought to revitalise Britain. Danford states;

Hiding under the benign cloak of dynamic 'job creation', the Thatcher regime

⁶ Conte-Helm (1996: 31) cited Dicken's 'The changing geography of Japanese foreign investment' (29).

of the 1980's was more interested in using Japanese inward investors to catalyze significant changes in British industrial relations. Thus, mobilising the symbolism of the no-strike deal, and the dominant perception of consensus-based relationships between workers and managers in Japanese firms, the Conservatives sought to decisively weaken the bargaining power of British unions by explicitly supporting Japanese enterprise unionism. (Danford, 1999: 223).⁷

Thatcher encouraged Japanese firms to set up in the old industrial regions, because she thought Japanese management style fitted in with her own hegemonic mission to destroy the power of organised British labour.

It is the interdependent nationalist concerns of both Japan and Britain which make the Japanese car manufacturers stay in Britain. According to the nationalist perspective on the Japanese presence in UK, the Japanese need to be there for access to domestic markets as long as such investment makes for the economic regeneration of deprived regions. Itaru Umezu, Minister Plenipotentiary, Embassy of Japan confirms an on-going interdependent international relationship between UK and Japan.

By common consent, UK-Japan relations are in pretty good shape. When I was a student at Oxford our relations were correct and proper but low profile. It was in the mid-1980s that they really took off. That was when the big wave of Japanese inward investment really started, symbolised by Nissan's establishment of a state-of-the-art-car manufacturing plant in Sunderland. As I reflect on the changes that I have witnessed in our bilateral relations since, then, it seems that whereas in the past Britain and Japan regarded each other as reliable consulting partners or means of testing the water with ideas, we now work together on the global stage, taking initiative and making things happen. Our relations have become much deeper and wider (Umezu, 2000: 99).

The relationship between globalisation and nationalism is complex. Inter-relation between markets and states are globalising the world political map, but nationalisms and identities in a globalised world are rigorously evident.⁸

⁷ See also McIlroy, J. Trade Unions in Britain Today. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988

⁸ See, for example, Globalisation in Question, by Paul Hirst & Graham Thompson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997)

VI. 2. Where do different Collectivisms meet?: Japanese business management in Japan and the UK

This section explores some of the factors which have made it difficult for Japanese management technique to be applied in the UK, in reference to North East England. This section is supported by the fieldwork I carried out on site. Trying to implement the whole Japanese management system in Britain is difficult, as the Japanese management system is itself a byproduct of Japanese culture. The characteristics of the system are embedded in the culture which is distinct from Britain, and are developed from school days. Reflecting the collective nature of society, Japanese management practices are characterised by its collectivistic productivity. Total quality control (TQC) and just-in-time (JIT), combined with aspects of 'worker empowerment' such as multi-skilling, job rotation, teamwork, employee involvement through quality circles and *kaizen* (continuous improvement), constitute the core key words of the so-called Japanese management system (e.g. Elger and Smith, 1994; Morris and Wilkinson, 1996; Oliver and Wilkinson, 1992) In the early 1950s, some major Japanese companies enthusiastically adopted the idea of TQC from the United States, and Toyota developed methods of JIT production which later developed into the concept of 'lean production'.

Pascale and Athos states that Japan's collective culture has caused Japanese firms to develop a unique corporate culture that is the prime reason for Japan's past economic success in the late 80 and early 90s. Japanese corporate culture, they argue, focuses on the collective aspects: staff, skills, style, and shared goals (Pascale and Athos, 1982:125). Firstly, "staff" refers to the demographic makeup of a firm and secondly "skills" refer to the capabilities of the employees. Japanese firms develop

staff and skills through extensive training, particularly for new employees, and through cross-functional job rotations.⁹ Thus, Japanese management system is flexible with few rigid job demarcations. Style refers to the cultural system, its chain of authority, modes of address, wage differentials, and above all its definition of social ways. Teamworking and knowledge sharing is fostered. Central to corporate culture are shared goals.

The major Japanese practice, in contrast to British practice, is characterised by two features, physical collectivism and reciprocity. Japanese collectivism is based on physical proximity among its people. The problem-solving takes place within the company that is at the limit of physical reach. A major reason why Japan had lower rates of unemployment compared to the other industrialised countries, was the stability of the industrial relation system. The industrial relation system is organised by “practice-near” aesthetics. Companies negotiated directly with their workforce through its enterprise union. In exchange for employment security, unions would guarantee cooperative behavior by their members. Firm-specific problems are easier to resolve as unions are ready to work with management to achieve enterprise success and growth. The practice-near aesthetics of Japan is implicit in the physical collectivism of Japanese culture. Japan’s manufacturing competitiveness is affected by this physically collectivistic culture and ‘the ethic of locations’. As Nakane suggests that the Japanese workers have a tendency to conform to ‘the ethic of locations’ for achieving collectivism in location-shared groups rather than position-shared groups (Nakane, 1970).

The disciplining of bodies through collectivism creates a sense of shared identity and common purpose. Group-identity in Japan is something that is taught

⁹ See Pascale, chapter 3 and 4.

from an early age. One example of this can be found in its education, especially since post-war educational reform encouraged pupils to learn “togetherness” required in the workspace. The Japanese school teaches “the ethic of locations” first. Japanese educators teach youngsters the importance of the flexible self. Japanese students belong to the same class (or *kumi*) throughout elementary and junior high school. Each *kumi* eats together, elects leaders, competes as a group in athletic events, takes field trips together, and so on. Within each *kumi* there are smaller groups called *hans*. (the four to six person unit) Japanese teachers often give *hans* assignments in subjects such as science or social studies that require after-school meetings. Through both curricular and extracurricular activities, Japanese children learn early that individual self-adjustment is often necessary for group success.

Collectivism in location-shared groups in the school is not only seen at classes but also in extra-curricular activities such as lunch, cleaning and sport. In Japan’s primary schools, as Merry White points out, Japanese students learn to discover things and solve problems together as opposed to getting to an answer fast: “assignments are made to groups. Individual progress and achievement are closely monitored, but children are supported, praised, and allowed scope for trial and error within the group. A group is also competitively pitted against other groups; a group’s success is each person’s triumph” (White, 1987: 115). Children are primarily responsible for serving lunch and cleaning the school: “The hot lunch is picked up by a team of children, while the rest arrange the desks to form group tables” (White, 1987: 130). After the academic classes, comes cleaning. Each *han* is allocated to clean a particular space of the school. This week, *han* A is responsible for the class room, while *han* B is for the toilet, etc. This rotates every week.

When the UK companies seek to Japanese themselves, cultural obstacles become the major inhibitors of transformation. A whistle-blower's autonomous identity seen in the film *The Bridge Over River Kwai* is a reminder of what kind of obstacles they are. In the UK, the people are taught from a young age that physical individualism is vital. Children are allocated by the parents to their individual rooms at a very early age. The value of being a "physically independent individual" is emphasised. The school promotes the individual above the group. Children become aware from the early age of the fact that there is a division of labour in the school. The cleaners clean, while the children study. It reflects upon the workspace. Workers make sure that they are physically independent from managers. Practice-distant principles, such as human rights at the workplace are strong guidelines for the behaviour of British workers.

The British working force has a different kind of collectivism; what I call, "spiritual collectivism". In British traditional mass-production factories, workers collectively expect to reject managers in the company. They belonged to the trade union separate from the company. Working-class collectivism and solidarity is embedded in the spiritual principles. According to the principles, for example, training courses inside the company exists only to "inculcate" company loyalty. Qualification is rather achieved outside the company. Paradoxically, working-class solidarity is individualist in the sense that the workers think and act for themselves independently from the managers with whom they work in physical contact. The bargain they strike with the company is simple and straightforward. On the other hand, they are collectivist in the sense that the workers are united according to the principles of resistance to the manager's dominant instrumentalist values. Workers are ready to hate their work openly. Thus collectivism of the Western worker is thus

based on “practice-distant” principles. In the context of Britain, traditionally, the male working class solidarity achieved collectivism in position-shared groups rather than location-shared groups. The male British worker pursued solidarity in “physically separate” institutions such as trade unions. Their union regulation of skill and task demarcation, or union influence over effort rates and labour deployment were their guidelines. Even now, when the power of trade unions weakened, British working practices are characterised by spiritual collectivism and resistance. They reflect in the value of individualism in the workplace, where they work for personal achievement and promotion.

In contrast, as Pascale and Athos argue, Japan has developed one institution - the corporation - to handle the individual’s spiritual and productive time, whereas the West has developed separate institutions (i.e. churches and other social circles) to handle each of these issues. Since Japanese employees expect to receive more of their social needs from their place of employment, this encourages them to identify more with their firms and thus work harder. Genda and Rebeck discusses how Japanese vague-occupational identity affects employees.

Sociologists have noticed that the Japanese tend to identify more with their firms than with their occupation.¹⁰ One of the reasons for this is that employees tend to be generalists rather than specialists and occupational identities are vague. This has advantages in the development and training of human resources in that employees are unable to develop exclusive property rights to skills, enhancing cooperation and allowing for greater flexibility. There are costs to this approach, however, as there is likely to be some excess overlap of skills across workers at the same time that many employees are unable to develop more narrow technical skills. (Genda and Rebeck, 2000: 93)

There is considerable investment in internal training. The importance of internal firm training reflects upon the lower value of external training educational degrees such as

the MBA. "Motherhood" culture sees staff trained and developed internally. Employees are recruited young and then put through a planned experience programme that deliberately immerses them in the company's culture and working methods. Staff are encouraged to undertake a wide range of duties in comparison to the characteristic functional specialisation of individuals in British management.¹¹ Promotion tends to be very slow through a seniority system, and at least in the major corporations. Rewards are generally based on a combination of seniority and evaluation by superiors rather than on specific performance indicators. They, in return to loyalty, offered considerable security of employment and "insurance" aspects. Joy Hendry summarises that companies provide

many services and benefits to their employees. Pensions, health-care and bonuses are common place, but they often offer accommodation too. There are likely to be dormitories for unmarried workers, apartments for families, and even larger houses for senior employees, although many may choose to purchase their own property eventually. Company sports facilities are often also available, as are hobby clubs, and there may even be holiday sites in some attractive location by the sea or in the mountains. In return for all this, employees are expected to work hard and often late, to take few holidays and to spend much of their leisure time with colleagues, drinking in the local bars, playing sports together or going on office trips and outings with them (Hendry, 1986:151).

The employment commitment is expected to be two-way, with people giving a high degree of loyalty to their company. In the eye of the British workforce, the Japanese workforce appears to be merely "mechanically" collectivistic. Bob, a manager in accounting (finance and purchasing) said,

There is a cultural difference. In Japan, in the 1980s if the machine breaks down, all work at the weekend with no extra money. It would not work in here. The English do not obey while the Japanese workers obey.¹²

¹⁰ Genda and Rebeck refer to Nakane, 1970; Clark, 1979.

¹¹ William Wrights, Examination of the application of Japanese Management: Practices in the UK with reference to Nissan UK, MA dissertation at University of Central Lancashire, UK, 2001

¹² Toyoda Gosei UK Ltd., South Yorkshire, 2000.

Obedience disturbs British workforce whose occupational identities are more defined.

Peter (anonymous), a production manager said;

One thing is that they need to study the British work force a lot more. No offense to the Japanese management, but they have to study British mentality toward work rather than the Japanese. In Japan, if you tell a worker to do a job one two three four, they will do in that order. However, British worker, if it is better, will try to change the order, one three two four, for an example. He will always try to improve, but the Japanese management style does not accept this.¹²

The impression of obedience in Japanese workers is derived from, in some ways, the limited understanding of Japanese reciprocity and sociability. Such a view regards the human body as a passively inscribed object of subject (power/knowledge/discourse). Sociability and reciprocity makes visible the nonobjectifiable dimension of collectivism. As described by a British manager in Human Resources in a Toyota manufacturing company I interviewed,

It is distinctively different from any other British manufacturing company. Particularly communication is better. Japanese management is more willing to listen whereas British management tends to do what it wants to or sees fit to do. Here there is a lot of discussion before things actually happen.¹³

In the English context, expectation of reciprocity causes confusion, as the same manager said,

The management ideal on the subject of giving voice to workers is that if they have the opportunity to complain, they are less likely to do so. However, they take it as an opportunity to complain instead. Japanese people have more sense of collective responsibility in return of complaining. British workers are not used to have opinion as well as taking responsibility. Production is regarded as the heart of the company. If they are regarded as important, they

¹² Toyoda Gosei UK Ltd., South Yorkshire, 2000.

¹³ Mary (anonymous), Toyoda Gosei UK Ltd, South Yorkshire, 2000.

have to take their responsibility. It is like a culture shock (ibid).

The subject of giving voice to workers causes disruption in the context of British workspace. Pascale and Athos state that Japanese firms have better internal communication, that their employees can better handle interdependent activities because of factors, as it has already been pointed out, directly related to Japanese collective culture. A Japanese workforce has better internal communication than a British workforce because Japanese employees are more accustomed to indirect communication, vagueness and ambiguity.

Reciprocity is a byproduct of physical collectivism. The physically collectivistic culture delineates the gap between management and the shop-floor worker. The typical Japanese company office lacks private offices. Open working spaces facilitate reciprocity and the internal flow of information. Managers and workers use the same canteen and wear the same uniforms. It contradicts with such an oft-cited image of rigid hierarchies in the Japanese company as read in the Economist.

Rigid hierarchies stifle communication between different ranks and discourage workers from questioning their bosses' decisions. The result is that employees have felt unable to blow the whistle (at least openly) on unsavoury practices ('Blow whistles while you work', The Economist, 26 April, 2001).

In fact, the reciprocity and the internal flow of information are the very features of corporate Japan.

The emphasis on reciprocity facilitates knowledge creation as a continuing process, by encouraging its effective communication throughout the company (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Workers create an environment of trust, respect, and commitment. The most influential work related to this aspect of Japanese business management is Nonaka and Takeuchi's The Knowledge-Creating Company. It asks

how effective companies create idiosyncratic knowledge, building an iterative learning cycle or spiral analogous to personal learning. Nonaka and Takauchi's work involves a concern with openness sometimes through quite stylised interactions including off-site meetings outside working hours and a wealth of communication channels- formal and informal- within and beyond the firm.

Informal communication is available by the activities, including going to bars and nightclubs, gambling, karaoke and fishing. Hendry illuminates:

Member of the same workplace may move together to a bar after work, and it is reported that it is possible to be much more frank with ones workmates when drinking together than it is in the formal atmosphere of the office or factory (Hendry, 1986:178).

These entertainment areas facilitate 'zones of evaporation between work and home'¹⁵ and 'provide relief from the stresses of the workplace in a society where the family is less equipped to do this'.¹⁶ This practice does not work in Britain, where physical autonomy is a central value to the worker. Sugita-san, a Japanese managing director whom I interviewed confirmed this. In fact, after the fieldwork and the interview, he invited me to join in a weekend fishing trip for the company employees, which he had arranged. It is no surprise that it was cancelled because of poor turnouts. For the British worker, his family is more a unit of human relation and entertainment. Nigel (anonymous), a manager in production said;

British people regard good time at home as the most important opposed to good time at work. Government also encourages the mother to stay at home for her baby, and father to have the right to paternity leave. It does not seem to be the case in Japan. In Japan, the order of significance in life is work, family and holiday. In England, holiday, family and work. ¹⁷

¹⁵ Linhart (1986) cited by Joy Hendry (1986: 178).

¹⁶ *ibid.*

The Japanese value co-operative activity, both within the company and with external networks of suppliers and customers. The amount of informal interaction and reciprocity among the company naturally decreases when Japanese management is thus imported in Britain.

Physical collectivism and reciprocity coexists in Japanese business management. Reality of the Japanese company involves both qualities, physical collectivism and human reciprocity. Karen (anonymous), a manager in Human Resources in the Toyota manufacturing company implies the ambiguity faced by these two qualities, collectivism and reciprocity.

*One of the main differences with Japanese managers and senior managers is that their decision making is not attached to their ego. It is easy for them to change their mind and if somebody states that it should be done in a certain way, they can change their mind. They focus on the business. The negative point is that all Japanese managers are male who totally focus on the work, and all have wives who do not work. All of them can spend 100 percent of their time just working for their company. They do not see the family much anyway, but that is the Japanese way. British family life is not set out in the same way, where many British workforce work twice as much because when they go home, they are expected to help with household duties, taking kids out to the swimming pool for example. Although British managers at the company work around 12 hours a day which is considered to be quite a long time by British standard. The Japanese management still feel that they are not working enough. (laugh) From a HR point of view I explain that, for Japanese managers it is a long-term career development within the company. For the people who are hired here locally, there is an expectation to have a long-term belief in the company. But this is new to them. They do not have the same faith in the company, because British industry promised many rewards but did not deliver as promised. Therefore they expect that the same thing will happen again. For the British, ego and personality affect work production, whereas Japanese workers do not let their personality intrude upon the work objective. In this company, however, managers are working for the good of the company not the just the benefit of their own salary. Sometimes, in the British company, they work against the company good just to benefit themselves. I do not think that happens here.*¹⁸

¹⁷ Nissan Motor Manufacturing (UK) Ltd, Sunderland, 2001.

¹⁸ Toyoda Gosei UK Ltd., South Yorkshire, 2000.

The physically collectivistic culture in Japan delineates the gap between management and the shop-floor worker. The spiritually collectivistic culture in Britain redefines the gap. A Japanese management system applied in British soil becomes a different thing. Japanese companies in the UK can rarely implement complete 'Japanese packages', including long-term employment and company pension. 'Japanese packages' are not complete without physical collectivism and reciprocity, because they are inseparable qualities of the management in Japan. In Britain, on the other hand, workers tend to value spiritual collectivism and resistance. When Japanese practice is exported to Britain, collectivism collides with individualism. Japanese "physical" collectivism crashes into British "spiritual" collectivism. In Japanese collectivism, the workers feel solidarity with the social group whom they are working with. In British collectivism, the workers feel solidarity with the social group (such as in trade unions and in social class) with whom they resist the employers on the principle of human rights.

VI. 3. The Academic Theory of Politics and Labour

Globalisation in business is the result of the ability of corporations to arrange production across national boundaries, to take advantage of improvements in transportation, and to exploit low-wage labor. Globalisation involves new and discontinuous forms of economic and social processes - new patterns of capital accumulation, investment, global division of labour, global linkages and Post-Fordist industrial techniques. Globalisation resulted as the boundaries of national states are beginning to disappear into the process of making an unseen collective, such as "business managers" or "Marxists". "Business managers" are a representative example of Anthony Giddens' "global communities" which are from abstract political

systems. Network of theory suppresses the fact of competition among managers. Managers are writers and readers. Managers write, read, and exchange theory, expanding the abstract collective network.

There are two schools of thought about Japanese management theory: Managerialists and Marxists. Everything is centered in 'strategy' for the former while it is 'exploitation' for the latter. Managerialists are prominent in the discourses of the 'Japanese miracle' and 'what has gone right' during the late 1980s and early 1990s, while Marxists are popular in the contemporary on-going discourse of 'what has gone wrong', concentrating the dark side of Japanese capitalism. 'Japanese management theory' becomes one of the explanatory variables in the latest economic trend. The only difference is that Japanese management is now perceived not as a universal panacea for economic development and prosperity, but rather as an evil 'thing' whose disturbing practices are deemed to be the direct cause of the Japanese economic crisis.

On one hand, the managerial standpoint idealises the system by suggesting that the influx of Japanese companies into UK has brought new technology, training and management skills into the framework of western industrial practice along with a rigorous approach to quality control and increased productivity. Managerial ideologies thus enhance existing involvements and future collaboration and exchange. When Japanese superiority in the field of business management was pronounced, Japanese management itself became an export in globalisation. Managerial ideologies render individual bodies of workers indifferently exchangeable.

On the other hand, Marxist views suggest many ways in which the Japanese management has been commodified for managerial consumption. Marxist analysis posits its limited understanding of the worker's body, regarding it as an object under capitalism, manipulated by external forces in the services of capitalism. The border of

individual bodies or communities is constantly with us, irrespective of time or age, but it is important that external circumstances make it either more or less visible. Any theory which ignores such a dynamic patrolling the cultural borders does not lead to complete understanding.

Academic theory, both managerial and Marxist, fails to acknowledge the inseparable quality of the Japanese cultural context from the management, in particular its physical collectivism and its reciprocity. As already noted, the major Japanese practices such as multi-skilling, job rotation, teamwork, employee involvement through quality circles and *kaizen* (continuous improvement) are a byproduct of these two Japanese cultural features, physical collectivism and reciprocity. In physical collectivism, the workers feel solidarity with the social group whom they are working with. When Japanese management style is lifted from its cultural context, it is idealised as “profitable” collectivism. Consequently, academic theory becomes either pro-collectivism or con-collectivism. Managerial “kitsch” eclectically celebrates profitability of collective bodies, while Marxist eclectically criticises any “physical” collectivism to absurdity. These two schools of thought are cripplingly divided between too much meaning and too little. Managerial kitsch is a romantic idealism while Marxist kitsch is a bland disassociation by the cynic.

Let us analyze the managerial ideologies predominant in business management theory in the early 1990s. I contend that Japanese business management theory in the case of Britain has been dominated by Oliver and Wilkinson’s, (what I shall call), ‘managerial kitsch’. That is to say, firstly it refuses difference. Secondly, it denies failure or disaster. Thirdly, it eradicates the struggle between labour and capital. Managerial kitsch idealises a system. Production is synchronised. It refuses

difference.

The historical development of what is called 'Japanese Studies' is relevant to the political force which diffuses Japanese management theory. The growth of the study of Japanese business management coincided with the rapid growth of Japanese Studies from 1970 to 1995. Due to Japan's economic successes and its improved international economic standing, the study of Japan, particularly of contemporary Japan, has flourished in Western countries in search of 'lessons'. A factor that encouraged much of the British Japanese Studies boom came also from the desire to "learn from Japan".

A managerial bias in Japanese business management theory developed under the globalisation of competition, where Japanese direct foreign investment increased remarkably in the late 1980s. During the 1980s, the powerful position of Japanese manufacturers caused Western politicians, industrialists and trade union leaders a mixture of interest and alarm. It also enabled Japanese management methods to acquire a central place in many managerialist academic studies of developments in advanced capitalist commodity production. The influence of such studies has in turn contributed to promotion and idealisation of Japanese management methods.

For managerial kitsch, everything including social relation becomes 'strategy' which aims towards the complete elimination of waste in production. This is achieved through application of a full repertoire of production practices: total quality management (TQM) and continuous improvement (*kaizen*); production checks such as statistical process control (SPC) just-in-time production (JIT); labour flexibility; and multi-skilling through teamworking and job rotation. Oliver and Wilkinson argue that, cumulatively, these practises create a fragile production system which may be severely exposed to labour disruption. Consequently, the model

incorporates supporting human resource management (HRM) practice which seeks employee commitment; practices such procedures as long-term job security for core workers, careful employee recruitment and selection techniques, performance-related pay, direct communications and enterprise unionism. Risk-avoidance also extends to buyer/assemblers maintaining long-term relationships with suppliers and close scrutiny of their manufacturing costs and employment policies. Thus in theory at least, the high dependency strategies of Japanese production methods 'demands a set of social (and technical) relations to support the fragile production system. Under this system, strategies for living with uncertainty are swept away' (Oliver and Wilkinson,1992: 323).

The study of Oliver and Wilkinson, the business school writers, is influential enough to quantify an increase in the use of these practices amongst both British employers and UK-based Japanese transplants. Their universalistic, paradigmatic approach to Japanisation asserts according to a managerialist agenda that a 'Japanisation of British industry' is in progress (Danford, 1999: 5). Danford criticises that pure JIT/TQM/HRM ideal types have 'no factual basis' because of the managerialist bias, which denies difference. When the management innovations are examined from the standpoint of managers of 'Japanising' factories, the transplant survey and case study reveal a more uniform and exploitative series of changes.

In conceptualising manufacturing system, the analysis loses its root, objectifying labor and synchronising production. Japanese management theory is personalised in the privacy of the capitalist experience. Experience of Japan becomes mainly available through signs, "JIT, HRM or TQM": Japanese things are not lived directly but rather through the agency of a medium, in the consumption of capitalist images and objects that replace what they stand for. Moreover, the analysis of work is

abstracted from its culture. The living British labour and human beings who labour under this system is absent from the enquiry. British individual bodies of workers are rendered exchangeable with Japanese ones.

Secondly, the managerial theory denies failure or disaster, spreading a prevailing belief that as well as affording competitive advantage to employers, Japanese management methods are good for those who labor. Such kitsch, as Oliver and Wilkinson tell, the Japanisation of British labour is characterised by more skill, more responsibility and more interest, to the extent that, 'Japanese practices seem to hold out the opportunity for improved quality of life'¹⁸ This is managerial kitsch, exactly because it suggests an omnipotent management system.¹⁹

Japanese management methods were regarded as a humanistic alternative to the alienation and degradation associated with conventional Fordism which represents the mass production system.²⁰ Fordism encouraged the culture of worker resistance and the principles of collective bargaining. Under Fordism workers are subordinated to the merciless dictates of the foreman and the machine and organisation and method; it is supplemented by the dull force of economic compulsion – the worker's dependence on cash earnings for a livelihood. The typical characteristics of the trade union in Fordism is made of "aggressive" worker collectivism or solidarity, which was often viewed as having brought about more problems than solutions.²¹ Therefore, Japanese work organisation sounds an appealing alternative to the dehumanising organisational principles of Fordism. For example, Thompson and Rehder idealise the

¹⁸ Oliver and Wilkinson, 1992: 326.

¹⁹ Stewart, 1996

²⁰ An alternative name is Taylorism. Around the turn of the century competitive capitalism gave way to the monopoly or Fordist stage. In 1916 the United States produced one million cars, a figure that no other country reached until 1954. Part of the reason for America's numerical superiority was the prior existence of an affluent, geographically dispersed market. (Fordism Transformed: The Development of Production Methods in the Automobile Industry Shiomi, H.Wada, K. Oxford University Press, 1995) The only way to produce sufficient goods was to adapt Henry Ford's revolutionary system of mass production. Fordist economy began to show weakness in the late 1960s and fell in to crisis in the recession of 1973. Attempts to solve this crisis gave rise to a post-Fordist economy, characterised by flexible production of diversified goods on a new, global scale.

Japanese 'lean system';

...putting back together what the Fordist system separated is key to the success of the lean system: the mind from the body of the worker...management from its' workers; suppliers and retailers from the firm; the traditional business functions from one another".²²

Similarly, Kenney and Florida (1993) analyse the management of work and labour in Japanese plant operations in the USA. They present lean production²³ as a pre-eminent, high-productivity system which is dominant in Japan and which, these authors argue, can and must be emulated by manufacturers in the West. They also suggest that it is also an inevitable outcome of the capitalist dynamic of technological and organisational progress. Regarding Fordism as the most advanced system of production of its time – which, with or without the cultural supports of 'Americanism' was destined to penetrate the West as a distinctive mode of production organisation – Kenney and Florida argued that the diffusion of Japan's new management paradigm had the same inevitability about it.

Thirdly, the managerial theory eradicates the struggle between labour and capital. The managerialist narrative represents certain ideological constructions of industrial development. The concept of resistance is somehow made invisible. The managerial question focuses on the use of Japanese management practices in the UK. A fundamental conflict of interests between capital and labor central to the British organisation of work in the factories of the 1990s has succumbed to the Japanese egalitarian ideology of 'empowerment'. Despite some differences in detail, the idealisation of the Japanese system share a common approach in the construction of a distinctive paradigm of Japanese work organisation and employment relations. This is

²¹ As for "mechanical collectivism", see Durheim's study on suicide.

²² Thompson and Rehder, *NMUK a Workers Paradox*, JAI press, 1995: 47.

²³ Compared to a customary 'Fordist' mass-production operation, lean production system implements a leaner and

based on the general principles of flexible, low-waste production; enlarged and participatory labour processes; and cooperative employment relations.

Theoretical ideal types of management control become reified in a workplace *devoid of politics*. In British traditional mass-production factories, workers are allowed to reject managerial attempts to heighten levels of exploitation because dominant trade union values permit them to think and act for themselves. As Graham puts it, 'workers are free to hate their work openly. Their attitudes are their own. The bargain they strike with the company is simple and straightforward: make quota and you get your pay' (1995: 133). In contrast to this, much of the literature on the Japanisation emphasises the effect of individualisation as being independent from trade union.

Such interpretations say little about the dictates of capitalist work organisation. They undermine the negative consequences of the diffusion of Japanese management practices: labor intensification; health and injury risks; ideological control of workers; strict absence and attendance policies; the exploitation of temporary labour; unequal opportunities for black workers; and anti-trade-unionism (Danford, 1999: 4). Rather than measuring concrete practice in Japan and Britain, managerial kitsch constructs the ideal type of Japanese management principles. Many researchers either prescribe, or attempt to substantiate, a process of international convergence through Western emulation of the Japanese paradigm: a 'Japanisation' of global (or at least British) industry.

Leftist ideology

Leftist research insists on recreating the capital-labour dichotomy traditional in Britain, which is represented by Danford's study. It supports the principles of collective bargaining rooted in worker solidarity. Leftist research claims to put labor back into industrial sociology, and demonstrates the essential conditions for resistance and misbehavior which are still present the workplace (Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995:629). They find that the process which some call 'Japanisation' at work is not unproblematic. In leftist interpretation, Japanese management initiatives when imported to Britain appear to constitute rational capitalist attempts to intensify rates of labor exploitation. The logic of the HRM practices which encourages extensive employee involvement makes little sense in the leftist accounts. Danford attacks Japanese management initiatives, stating that the labour process is in fact often low-skilled, multi-tasked, intensified and alienating (Danford, 1999:6). Danford mentions that these contradictions can only be resolved by moving from the managerial agenda and considering more closely the standpoint of labour. Marxist ideology in the context of Japanese management theory is extremely valuable, but it is problematic in the following way.

Marxist research idealises the capital-labour conflict. It regards a conflict of interests between capital and labour as an *episteme*. In Marxist research, political ideology is dominant and all history is regarded as illustrating the principles of historical materialism. In every society, there is a struggle over the means of exchange. Historical change comes out of the struggle, although the struggle works differently in different societies. In capitalism, the struggle is a class struggle between holders of capital and people who sell their labour. Out of continuous exploitation

comes historical change. They conclude that Socialism thus eventually wins over Capitalism. The Communist Manifesto ended:

The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The Proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

Working Men of All Countries, Unite! ²⁴

Danford's work responds to such a claim. His concluding paragraph in his Japanese Management and British Worker, reads;

The significant point here is that despite their despondency, despite their lack of effective leadership, and despite their knowledge that management was likely to win this particular fight, these workers were still prepared to display overt defiance. Their actions demonstrate that although the new forms of shop-floor regulation in capitalist production exact from labour a more complete subordination to management and, through this, an intensification of its exploitation, this new despotism still cannot suppress the worker resistance and conflict which remain inherent to the capitalist labour process. The dynamic of class struggle in capitalist factory organisation ... follows that the process of change will be subject to more fundamental tensions, inner contradictions and open conflict once the current imbalance of class forces begins to move in the opposite direction (Danford, 1999:228).

Marxist research tends to reduce the life-world to instrumental action, based on the Marxist ideal of protecting the defined self from the others in the workspace. The Marxist theme underlies its limited understanding of "praxis" or human practical activity. Marxist views ignore the insight that life experience takes on different meaning depending on whether individual becomes an initiator of actions in all their plurality and spontaneity. The Japanese worker's experience, passive and obedient as it seems, is the way in which workers discover and appropriates his or her own

subjective territory.

According to Marx²⁵, the act of estranging practical activity has three components:

- (1) The relation of the worker to the product of labour as an alien object exercising power over him;
- (2) The relation of labour to the act of production within the labour process. This relation is the relation of the worker to his own activity as an alien activity not belonging to him;
- (3) Self-estrangement (where) man's species-nature is estranged from him.

The Marxist view is deeply embedded in its universalised selfhood and human rights.

The Marxist ideal is rooted in the individualist tradition in that it assumes the defined self as if it were a fixed property. Marx noted that the commodification of the human

labour power coincides with a subsequent loss of the integrated self: that is, production negates "species-nature" because it restricts spontaneous human activity

(66). What Marx calls "species-nature" is, in some ways, in an unquestioning romantic idealism of the individual in the West. Such a view of individuality is explained by Plath.

In the Western view, individuality is God-given ("endowed by their Creator..."). The seeds of its manifestation are already present at the moment of impregnation. We are "born free". ... social participation can only diminish us; our highest self is realized in peak experiences that takes us out of the ruck of society. Our cultural nightmare is that the individual throb of growth will be sucked dry in slavish social conformity. All life long, our central struggle is to defend the individual from the collective (Plath, 1980: 216).

In other words, selfhood is regarded as if it were the unsplitable atom, or the nuclear true self. The Western ideal of selfhood is thus to protect the united self from

²⁴ It is cited by David McLellan's The Thought of Karl Marx: An Introduction. The Macmillan Press: London, 1971: 48. Communist Manifesto, K. Marx, F. Engels, Selected Works, (Moscow, 1962) vol. I. Communist Manifesto, ed. A.J.P. Taylor (Harmondsworth, 1969: 65)

estrangement. The Western ideal of selfhood is characterised by its unification within a centralised, linear perspective. Truth lies inside the individual in his deep center.

The Japanese view of selfhood challenges the Marxist view of selfhood. Truth lies between individuals. The Japanese self has long been said to have “weak and permeable ego boundaries”, or a “submerged” sense of identity. Japanese modernity has been regarded as being in an “incomplete transition,” since Japanese as individuals are not “psychologically” modern. *Amae*, the cultural term Doi Takeo made in the 1970s, has been disdained as "dependence" and as one of key aspects of the Japanese communication style (Donahue, 1998: 1). The notion of "*amae*" (generally translated as “dependency”) has been a crucial element in many scholars’ discussion of Japanese communication style and its collective nature.

The traditional “submerged” self is by Marxist measure “immature”, because of lack of self-reliance. Maturity according to the Marxist ideal is to protect the defined self from others, while maturity in the Japanese ideal is to reform the undefined self by others. Such interactionist self in Japanese ideal is explained by Plath.

As reflexive (self-aware) beings we must constantly integrate our subjective and object sides, reconcile the “I” and the “me”. ... what we are doing must be recognised or validated by others. People can continue to grow, says the interactionist view, but only to the extent that others allow or confirm that growth (Plath, 1980:8).

This concept of self is a non-phallogentric representation of human intersubjectivity. For the Japanese worker, the workspace serves as a means to create a form of intersubjectivity different from phallogentric representations organised around cultural lineality, coherence and dualism. Japanese working practices enable workers to

²⁵ Marx, K., Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982: 66-9.

describe a set of relations not based on a clear split between subject and object, self and other, or management and the shop-floor worker..

Such a human reciprocity born out of social relations is invisible to the Marxist lenses. The Marxist view of selfhood often resonates with the British perspectives, while the Japanese workers seem mechanically obedient to the management. They see self-negating effects of social relations and a loss of individuality and distinctness. Tom (anonymous), a manager in accounting (finance and purchasing), said;

Japanese management has a different or unique style from British management. However the technique is not unique. It is just that the British have some different name for the similar technique to Japanese. For example, Work Study for Kaizen. We have a long history of industry, 100 years. As for the style, the Japanese seem to obey very quickly without questioning. Whereas British managers are taught to question. Japanese managers are not taught to have motivational skill. When it comes to teamwork, British teamwork is to use the best possible resource in the team. When I see the Japanese teamwork, they seem to do things very individually. The Japanese are better in mass production while British are better at coming up with new ideas and moving them forward. Japanese approach to work is very regimented. Japanese strength is once they started a certain practice and keep carrying them out. The best idea is for the British to set up the company and for the Japanese to keep it running. ...

British workers respond poorly because of lack of motivation. British workforce has to be motivated individually. We do not have mass motivation as the Japanese. Japanese get motivated by being criticised and competitiveness while British get motivated by being praised individually.

*Difficulty in communication comes from cultural problem more than language problem. There is no incentive for the British employees to be as loyal to the company as the Japanese employees. Because of life-long employment, the Japanese commits themselves to the company. Japanese management can be arrogant as well as English. Being arrogant, they are telling them what to do, for example in the shop floor.*²⁶

The manager's comment implies that the British working force believes in the spirit of resistance. The standpoint of labour is placed in a Marxian analytical framework

²⁶ Nissan Motor Manufacturing (UK) Ltd., Sunderland, 2001.

which makes the big deal of subjectivity and conflicts over individual identity.

According to the standpoint of labour in a Marxian analytical framework,

1. The workers should have strong occupational identity.
2. The workers think and act for themselves independently from the managers.

In such a standpoint of labour, Marxist research attacks two major conditions to implement Japanese management theory. One is labour flexibility and the other is the company union policy. Typical Japanese management seeks to develop labour flexibility through the use of multi-skilled employees, as Oliver and Wilkinson argue,

A flexible production system, achieved in the absence of stock to take up fluctuations in demand, clearly requires a flexible and responsive workforce.
(36)

In order to create a multi-skilled labour force, a Japanese company thus spends more on training staff than a British company. Marxist research argues that Japanese management, instead of creating a “truly skilled workforce”, trains labour flexibility which creates skills directed only towards company profits. This view emerges from Danford’s findings in his survey of Japanese manufacturing transplanting in South Wales.

... in contrast to the empowering rhetoric contained in the ideological lexicon of labour flexibility and employee involvement, for reasons of efficiency, lean production operates on the basis of narrow, tightly controlled task flexibility coupled with only limited worker participation in continuous improvement of the production process. (123)

A skilled workforce in the Marxist view is made up of independent workers with occupational identity, who achieved qualifications outside the company. When criticising the flexible workforce, the Marxist view universalises its “truly skilled

workforce". However, the concept of "truly skilled workforce" is different, depending upon culture.

Another condition Marxist research attacks is the company union policy, the Japanese style model of employment relations. This is because the transformative role of Japanese firms in UK appears greatest with regard to 'harmonious' industrial relations or "just us" philosophy. A significant influence of Japanese firms in UK is to challenge the infamous adversarial culture of traditional British human resource relations ("them and us"). Trade Unions traditionally enabled workers' united selves to achieve "spiritual" collectivism. "Spiritual" collectivism is characterised by a network of communication with multiple centers. In British traditional mass-production factories, accordingly, workers collectively reject managers in the company. Regarding the lack of enthusiasm for work displayed by the factory of the earliest phase of the capitalist enterprise, Golembiewski noted that 'they go but faintly to work, as they say, with one buttock'.²⁷ They should have the rights to belong to the trade union physically separate from the company, which allow workers to become an initiator of self-will and action. English working-class "spiritual" collectivism and solidarity is embedded in the Marxist principles.

Accordingly, the Marxist's most significant attack is in this area of industrial relations, with its single-union deals and no-strike agreements in particular. The evidence suggests that non-union deals have been greater in the North East, particularly in the new town areas and green field sites away from union strongholds in the coastal districts; in Peck and Stone's (1993) study over 50 per cent of firms were non-unionised. The new industrial relation saw the demise of worker resistance, decline in the level of strikes and a pliant attitude among unions. In this vein, for

²⁷ Golembiewski, Robert, T., Men, Management and Morality, New York: McGraw Hill, 1965: 181.

example, Garrahan and Stewart (1992) note the irrelevance and impotence of the union at Nissan, where only 30 percent of workers were members anyway, and remark upon the success with which the firm was developing its own corporate sense of identity among workers. This has led some Marxist research to stress the role of Japanisation in developing a less adversarial and more consensus-based work environment. The solution suggested by Marxist research is to return to the adversarial culture of traditional British human resource relations (“them and us”). Marxist research delivers its political ideology and reifies the dichotomy between Japan and Britain, and managers and workers.

VI. 4. Conclusion

By supporting or attacking the Japanisation of British industry, both managerialist and Marxist researches tend to ignore that the ‘Anglo-Saxonisation’ of Japanese industry’ is also in progress. The importance of culture and a living labour under the system is not fully addressed. They tend least to consider the culture of the host country where Japanese techniques are in practice. What is avoided is any paradoxical thought, where cultural borderlines intermix and blur. Making a shift of manufacturing from Japan to UK is an Anglo-Saxonisation of Japanese industry. Bob (anonymous), a manager in finance and purchasing states;

*The Japanese business management in Toyota transplanted in UK began to change a lot into the British way of working in the late 1990s. Japanese society and work attitudes are about 20 years behind what was in the UK.*²⁸

²⁸ Toyota Motor Manufacturing (UK) Ltd., Derby, 2001.

Anglo-saxonisation of the Japanese industry is relevant to what Anthony Giddens calls, “the development of disembedding mechanisms”. Giddens’ dynamic force in globalisation is identified with the development of disembedding mechanisms. This involves the “lifting out” of social relations from local cultural contexts and their restructuring across time and space. For example, it is at work when a multinational company introduces the same methods of production in countries that are otherwise very different. Activities are ‘disembedded’ when they are taken out of their local contexts and reorganised across wide interval of time and space. Symbolic tokens and expert systems involve trust, as distinct from confidence based on practice, or what is thought to be weak inductive knowledge. These “lift out” social activity from localised contexts, reorganising social relations across large time-space distances.

The Anglo-Saxonisation of Japanese industry could be explained as the way Japanese social relations are “lifted out” from Japanese local contexts. So, too, the Japanese company introduces the same methods of production into UK that are culturally very strange. Japanese management transforms itself into a more Fordist style of regime which extends the distance between managers and workers. Japanese employment relations, when imported into the land of individualism, lose its organic collectivism. The residual in the hybridity of Japanese and British business cultures is an alternative to British existing arrangement of management control and worker solidarity. The process of Anglo-Saxonisation of Japanese industry is crucial.

Managers exchange theory, expanding the collective network, while workers become more alienated without having any collective measure, becoming individualistic, physically separate not only from the managers but also from other workers. Managerial and Marxist conceptualisations of industrial relations have

proved immensely valuable, but in privileging the political level on one hand, and the structural on the other hand, they have constrained researchers from exploring the discursive and social and cultural effects of globalisation and Anglo-Saxonisation (individualisation) where both communicator and receiver are situated.

Visible collectivism is weakening, while the unseen collective is strengthening. Footloose global capital is able not only to sap the confidence of physical collectivism and reciprocity, but also weaken the resistance of collective labour. Unseen collectives such as 'business managers' are growing while physical collectivism is weakening. Managerialism blurs politically the boundaries between capital and labour, while Marxism politically reaffirms the boundary as the solution, but fails to see where the boundary lies. The ideology of the managerial, fashionable during Japanese post-war economic boom, overstates Japanese management techniques as all superior to those practiced elsewhere. On one hand, the ideology of Left, with its deep belief in individualism, seeks for the elements of how the individual bodies of the workers are exploited by external forces. As a result, Marxist theory renders any mode of human relations between managers and workers to the instrumental values.

Managers think of themselves as objective and tough, but like everybody else, when it comes to intercultural understanding, they reach the formal usefulness of kitsch. Managers do not like to make the charge. However, all thinking comes from the other society heavily weighs down with the strange, exotic, unfamiliar. My argument is that this is the situation in which formal properties of kitsch become essential to remove the struggle. Management theory is as liable to the necessities of kitsch as any other way of thinking and feeling. In this sense, management theory is relevant to Geertz's 'common sense'. Geertz treats common sense as a 'relatively

organised body of considered thought' (1983: 75). Common sense can be questioned, disputed, affirmed, developed, formalised, contemplated, even taught. It is a 'cultural system' and it rests on 'the conviction by those whose possession it is of its value and validity' (ibid: 76). Common sense rests on the assertion that it is just life in a nutshell and the world is its authority. Common sense presents reality neat; it is not intended to undermine that authority but to relocate it. The same process is at work in kitschification. Kitsch turns everything to common sense. Common sense is all sentimental. Kitsch pretends to be everyday and easy. Like managerialism, kitsch gathers everything into a single system. Kitsch, like managerialism, worked by simple-minded rule of thumb.

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4. Consumption: the realm of leisure

VII. Cultural Absorption of Ballroom Dancing in England and Japan

Controlled footworks, fast spins, exaggerated arms, and an articulated, witty syncopation orchestrate the spectacular fantasy of Salsa. Salsa dancers in 2001 are clearly desperate for the make-believe that they are a bunch of Latinos gathered in a Cuban village square. But *Steel City Salsa*, 18 January, 2002, the latest salsa venue in Sheffield does not come up with a very convincing future for the dance form. The updated trappings of the show are mostly fine – dance shows with multi-ethnic performers from London, Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield, moody, fashionably cut costumes for the dancers, and music with drums and heavy amplifications. But the dancing itself, vaunted as the new fusion of salsa and mixing improvisational-style salsa with quasi-ballroom dancing routines, fake ballet and even more fake Latin and African motifs, often lacks some sensual essences. It lacks the flow of in-between energies, *ki*, which the Japanese martial artist learns to detect in oneself and an opponent. In England, salsa finds a natural fusion with ballroom dancing.

This chapter explores the sequence of cultural absorption, in particular, the Anglicisation of ballroom dancing across England, and semi-Japanisation of ballroom dancing in Japan. The terms, “Anglicisation” and “Japanisation” are used here to refer to the process in which practices originating outside the country are transformed and moulded into a particularly vernacular form. This includes cases where practices introduced to Britain and Japan are influenced by traditional methods or ways of thinking, and are thus practiced with a vernacular sensibility.

This chapter is no less than an ethnographical and historical enquiry. I should note, first, that I write from the perspective of a Japanese, who participated in a variety of social dancing in the north of England (Ballroom Dancing, Salsa and Argentinean Tango) and still enjoys doing so. I am no stranger to what is salutary and joyful in dancing. All the same, my experience is also decisively stamped by having studied kitsch (a problematic term) in ballroom dancing (never more so than in the TV spectacle, BBC's long-running and hugely popular '*Come Dancing*'). However, whilst the argument intends to go beyond the clichés of cultural imperialism and academic snobbery, the conventional view of cultural imperialism will be tackled as itself an ethnocentric concept.

The contemporary English style ballroom dancing is a codified form of other cultural practices, particularly, those of Latin America. Ballroom dancing has been modified, indigenised and transformed by the working-class in England. In a similar process, the same Latin American dance practices have been adapted by the middle-class in Japan via England. That is to say, they have been semi-Japanised through the English working class interpretation of the original material. Paralleling the extraction of labour from Britain (discussed in the previous chapter), Japan, the passion-repressed country of the capitalist world system, has appropriated its emotional and affective social dance practices from the British working class for its bourgeoisie. In a context of global capitalism, Japanese multinational companies exploited the low-cost labour in peripheral regions in Britain. Giddens' dynamic force in globalisation is identified with such a development of disembedding mechanisms (Giddens, 1991). These global operations became possible because the fragmented labour process can be effectively coordinated and reintegrated by exploiting advanced transport and communications

technologies. In return, the British working class' emotional and expressive practices and social arts have been categorised, homogenised, and transformed into commodities suitable for Japanese middle class consumption.

It is, rather comically, a reverse-*Japonisme*. In contrast to modernity in England where the individual freedoms and institutional responsibilities are established, the context of life in Japan was one of strict manners, appearances and reliable obedience. The British working class taught their version of (in my phrase), the 'sophistication of pleasure' to a Japanese culture, which had not yet overcome asceticism, a predicament of modernity.

Such a study of dance within contemporary global and transnational contexts is an area ripe for anthropological investigation. The production and reception of dance have only recently received attention. My major precursor is Marta Savigliano's complex text on tango. It is a work that engages feminist, postcolonial, and poststructuralist theories to produce a provocative account of the Argentinian national dance (Savigliano, 1995). Savigliano presents tango as a practice that has been produced and continues to be reproduced through multiple processes of *exoticisation*. Savigliano illustrated the lives the tango has led in Argentina and in the cultural capitals of London, Paris and Tokyo (ibid. 1995:238-9). As a symbol of the passionate Other in a global capitalist economy, for Savigliano, the tango has been commodified for "imperial consumption". In addition, she demonstrates how the tango has become the object of a process of "auto-exoticisation" by the colonisers themselves.

While her analysis centered on cultural imperialism articulates some aspects of dance experience, it does not capture in Geertz's famous term, the full "practice-near" significance of the body as a responsive and creative subject. Her Foucauldian

argument posits the body as an object, manipulated by external forces in the services of other 'voices': gender (the feminine body), the imperial (body as power) and the state (the discipline of body as a national identity). The argument which follows goes well beyond the conventional cliché-issue of cultural imperialism. Arguing against a simple view of appropriation as cultural imperialism, what is attempted here is to demonstrate how ballroom dancing is embodied to express the self. This makes neither English nor Japanese, but rather a complex and hybrid self. Dancing bodies reflect and resist cultural values simultaneously. This chapter challenges the theoretic notion of human action that has generally appeared to the sociologist as instrumental action, movement that is conceptualised and valued in terms of its utility. Dance provides a way of seeing that conditions for human existence cannot be reduced to socio-economic relations and forms. The dancing shows us that there are ways in which innovative action resists the productive and textual relations that turn bodies into objects of social control, and creates for the dancers relations that enable creative action and liberated intersubjectivities.

The ethnologist James Clifford has written that 'the world's societies are too systematically interconnected to permit any easy isolation of separate or independently functioning systems ... Twentieth-century identities no longer presuppose continuous cultures or traditions' (1988:16-40). One response to the challenge is the radical detachment of the postmodern kind. Another is the attempt to respond to intercultural existence by creating the activity that embraces generously those divergent impulses that Clifford has observed. Although the form of ballroom dancing is pure kitsch, I contend that the content of ballroom dancing has the potential to respond to these two challenges of intercultural kitsch. Ballroom dancing rejects radical detachment in the

postmodern vein: it is premised on an acceptance of its aesthetic values. Moreover, ballroom dancing is the very attempt to respond to intercultural existence through the body, the prime location of any real existence.

VII. 1. a. Narrative of Energy: Aesthetics of Argentine Tango

Argentine Tango is a cross between dancing, wrestling and making love. The Argentine tango what dancers call 'double work', a duet in motion. It is also a brief social drama, the pursuit of the "sophistication of human desire". Tango is not merely sensual excitement; it is the aesthetic refinement of sensual experience. Argentine Tango is a form of sophisticating the human need for touch. Research documents that tactile stimulation is fundamentally required for human maturity.¹ On their study of bonding, Kennel (1995) demonstrate that those infants (human and non human) who are stroked by their mothers at the earliest stages of their post-natal life do much better physically, emotionally and interpersonally, compared to those who do not get this experience of touch. Moreover, the type of tactile contact pivotally affects behavioral development. (Montagu, 1986) Montagu concludes:

The study of mammal, monkey, ape, and human behaviors clearly shows that touch is a basic behavioral need, much as breathing is a basic physical need, that the dependent infant is designed to grow and develop social through contact, tactile behavior, and throughout life to maintain contact with others. ...When the need for touch remains unsatisfied, abnormal behavior will result (46).

The place of physical touch in human development is significant. Our skin is the

¹ See 'On Touch in the Psychoanalytic Situation', Psychoanalytic Inquiry, 20 (1) 2000.

largest sensory organ of the body. The various elements comprising the skin “have a very large representation in the brain.” And the “nerve fibers conducting tactile impulses are generally of larger size than those associated with the other senses” (Montagu, 1986:14). As a sensory system, the skin, Montagu concludes, is the most important organ system of the body, because unlike other senses, a human being cannot survive at all without the physical and behavioral function performed by the skin. “Among all the senses, touch stands paramount” (Montagu, 1986:17). The tactile system is the earliest sensory system to become functional (in the embryo) and may be the last to fade.

Tango concentrates on cultivating a body that initiates as well as responds. The sense of touch, which guides the dancing, assumes importance. Awareness of touching a partner and following “the point of contact” provides the impetus for movement. Touch joins the two dancers, attuning them to each other’s weight and momentum as they move. The intersubjective nature of the body is cultivated by Argentine Tango, because it focuses on a kind of contact improvisation and the physical sense of touching, leaning, supporting and counterbalancing another person.

The ramifications of the responsive body are extended by the fact that the body cannot be independent in the Tango situation. The spatial disorientation unique to the dance form derives from the fact that the centre of gravity in the activity lies somewhere between the two bodies and is constantly shifting. In one respect, body boundary becomes very clear, because one is so aware of touch and weight on the body surfaces; simultaneously, the body’s boundaries are also experienced as being very flexible, because one’s own sense of weight often merges with the weight of another.

The viewer of Tango perceives the dancing as less presentationally directed

than ballet. Most performers occur in small spaces with the audience in close proximity to the dancers, so that the audience is gathered in by this setting and by the emphases of the movement to concentrate on the unification of people through physical contact and interaction. Dancers' noises – breathing, grunting, the sound of falling or catching – are clearly audible. The spectators' empathetic perception of dancers using weight and momentum encourages them to identify physically and kinesthetically with the dancers.

Such a participatory knowing in Tango is equivalent to “self-absorbed” knowing. Tango gives its practitioners self-absorbed knowing opposed to Polanyi's “self-centered” knowing.² The “self-centered” is, as defined by Polanyi, the form of knowing that is more confined to perception in its observational aspect and to the gaining of the kind of knowledge that we call “scientific” (Polanyi, 1975:70-3). This form of knowledge does not depend as much upon our understanding of it than requiring the meaning of the object. For the subject, the object is a tool. One way in which this is physically manifested daily is in our use of inanimate objects, such as in using a mobile phone or driving a car. Moreover, self-centered knowing is predominant in western traditional philosophy due to its emphasis on abstraction from immediate experience for the purposes of discovering rational principles or metaphysical constructs that can surpass the uncertainty and negativity of the lived world.

On the other hand, dancing Tango requires our attention in a different way. This mode of knowing is “self-absorbed knowing” from surrounding animate beings. In order to dance Tango well, we have to understand ourselves as connected to our own body and to another. Moreover, the dancers have to be aware of other

² Michael Polanyi distinguishes two poles of knowing, one called “self-centered” and the other, “self-giving”. (Polanyi, 1975:70-3)

individuals sharing the dance space. Self-absorbed knowing is cultivated primarily in participants. The very structure of such knowing is based on “practice” and “action”, constituted by finitude with respect to spatial, temporal, and narrative configurations. In practice, nothing recurs. Practical experience is a mutable reality. Tango is one of Oakeshott’s ‘practical experiences’ where “reality is asserted under the category of change” (Oakeshott, 1933: 273). Tango both as social dance and contest is arranged around physical boundaries and time limits. It creates spontaneous spectacular playlets.

VII. 1.b. Argentine Tango as Social and Aesthetic Drama

Argentine Tango is a way of sophisticating human pleasure in “transformation”. Transformation takes place through the regular practices of changing partners and spontaneous improvisation. To understand the concept of transformation it is helpful first to look at transformation as delineated by Richard Schechner. To achieve transformation for the participants, Tango is balanced between in Schechner’s, “social drama” and “aesthetic drama”. Schechner identifies two types of drama as encompassing a transformation of some, but not all, participants, and gives us possibility to understand better the dynamic of tango.

Social dramas permanently transform their active participants – as, for example, in a trial or a wedding. Aesthetic drama – a play, for example – does not permanently transform its active participants. Although performers in aesthetic drama transform themselves into a role at the beginning of a performance, this is not a permanent change. Rather it is a temporary becoming, the performer returning to self

during the cool-down. It is the audience who is affected by the transformational aspect of aesthetic drama. By the show's end, they may be moved to a new conceptual or emotional place.³

The tango incorporates some elements present in both aesthetic and social drama. Like most other forms of physical leisure, Tango shares with aesthetic drama the requirements of structure and technique. While Tango takes in such traditional aesthetics as the notion of perfection of the discipline, of eradication of the self and of purity of line (seen in Japanese Noh and Classical Ballet), it also accommodates the demand of contemporary display, flourish and spectacle. As in aesthetic drama, performers wear certain costumes to help them play a role. Unlike aesthetic drama, however – where performers emerge unchanged by their participation, and transformation is experienced by the watchers – the performers of Tango emerge, at least to some extent, changed as they are in social dramas. Performance in a leisure context, then, requires technical knowledge – taking on a role – and it effects change.

There are elements of theatre in Tango. The tango shares some aspects of the form that fit traditional definitions of theatre – audience, costumes, lighting, choreography, technique, style and expressions. The difference is that Tango dancers are the audience that dances. Equally, Tango dancers' technical accomplishment and their sense of the dramatic possibilities of the form, no matter how limited, makes them performers who watch, a knowledgeable audience. The dual role, performer and observer, played by Tango dancers creates the special character of performance in a leisure context. As both performer and observer, dancers hold within a single body the responsibilities – and the responses – of both sides of the performance experience. As

³ Schechner, Performance Theory: 171. Cited by Stern Carrie, "*Shall We Dance?*": 268.

observers they are transformed by watching. As performers, they return to their original status at the end of each dance event. Tango performers, as is all sport, are transformed by their long-term participation. This is because performances in leisure contexts transform by means of regular change of partners, creating new experiences, self-realisation, through making new friends and maintaining old friendships, and for many, by creating a truly new, or renewed, body, 'all time-based changes' (Carrie: 269).

Such theatrical aspects of Tango help participants in a transformation that is a part of Tango experience in general. Despite the codification of technique and stylisation, Tango lacks the structure or choreography that controls most concert dance or the "calling" that controls many traditional dance forms such as square dancing. In the ballroom, every dance is open to new interpretations each time a couple steps on the dance floor, within the structures and conventions of the dance form called Tango.

VII. 2. a. Ballroom Dancing in Britain

Ballroom dancing has been a major export success. Indeed, the present situation of world social dancing demonstrates the richness of the new international crossroads of culture. In England, for example, in the context of social dance's popularity – a context in which with a resurgence of dancing (McGowan, 2001), 'about the five million people go dancing each week' (Gredhill, 1995), and in which there have been explosions of interest in dances, in swing (Marsh, 2001), flamenco (Mackrell, 2001), Argentine tango (Gledhill, 2001), and salsa (Mann, 2001). Never before has social dancing with different origins (such as Argentina tango, salsa, English ballroom dancing, swing, flamenco,) been practiced in the various cultures of the world to such a

degree. From the perspective of the Argentina tango dancers in Argentina, Salsa dancers in Cuba, Foxtrot dancers in England, such a geographical and cultural diversity must seem extraordinary. In this section, I would like to explain the Anglicisation of Latin American cultural practices, focusing on the gradual departure from ‘memorised’ dances to more ‘improvisatory’ social forms.

The participants who take part in ballroom dancing in UK are predominantly white, although there are increasing numbers of Asian as well as African-American participants. Ballroom dancing is originally a white, European collective form, developed as a courtly practice (Carrie, 1999: xvii). In the 15th century, ballroom dancing was included in a variety of contexts for European aristocrats – as part of the festivities on state occasions, at official Carnival celebrations, in the form of French ballets and English masque and as a pleasant cultivated pastime in the form of ‘after-dinner dancing’. The aristocracy, performing at society balls, danced frequently, though its social impact is difficult to determine.

As Filmer (1999) points out, the significance of courtly dances is standardised so that it directs the development of a kinesic sense of social solidarity through common learned muscular rhythms. Dancing as a predominantly aristocratic activity played an important role in the ‘corporeal expression of social cohesion’ (7). The social dancing engaged in at princely entertainment was as a practice itself, considered insignificant, in all probability, memorised, routinised, regimented, and choreographed. In ordinary social dance, men and women were just allowed to hold hands but the distance between the bodies were kept.

The broad democratisation of social dance in England began in the early part of the nineteenth century as the Austrian waltz was popularised for all social classes.

Richardson (1960) observes that in the last decades of the nineteenth century in Britain, where class distinctions were strongly demarcated, the dancing population fell into three categories; the aristocracy (court circle, nobility, landed gentry), upper middle classes (successful businessmen and their families, doctors, barristers, solicitors, officers of the armed forces below the highest ranks), and lower middle classes and skilled artisanal classes (Richardson 1960:116).

Because of improved prosperity for the industrial working class generally in the middle of the nineteenth century, a significant proportion began to enjoy the privilege of some leisure time in the late nineteenth century. The Northern British, with a strong and organised working class won official breaks from work.⁴

All the traditional heavy industries whose skilled and well-paid artisans had won, by way of solidarity and sheer economic indispensability, the most strategic victories in Britain's long and genteel class struggle, counted their unpaid vacations as one of their battle honours. Overwhelmingly, from the 1870s onwards they took them at Blackpool (Inglis, 2000:51).

Working-class people's increased access to seaside holidays (Penny, 1997:58) coincides with the proliferation of dance halls in coastal resorts around Britain, which catered for the holidaying and dancing public. Blackpool Tower Ballroom and Winter Garden's Empress Ballroom emerged as a dancing metropolis. After 1850s, Blackpool became what Inglis puts it, 'the eponym of the working class holiday'⁵ (Inglis, 2000:50).

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the popular assembly rooms were

⁴ The 1833 Factory Act enforced two full days and eight half-days of holiday per year. After the legalisation of trade disputes and strike action, the Bank Holiday Act of 1871 stipulated fixed full public holidays at Christmas, Easter, Whitsun and (at that date) the first weekend in August. See *The Delicious History of the Holiday* by Inglis, 2000: 50.

⁵ Blackpool initially intended to cater mainly for the expanding middle-class family holiday market. However, the comparative absence of a local bourgeoisie led to keep Blackpool for working class. The working class lived and worked near. Moreover, Blackpool had the railway, which helped working class people with a cheap journey.

established. Prior to the First World War, the popular assemblies had expanded to include 'shilling assemblies'. These were usually run under the auspices of a local dancing academy and took place on Saturday evenings at a local town hall in urban areas or the village hall in the rural areas. The 'shilling assemblies' offered access to a wide spectrum of social classes. Spencer et al (1968) speaks of assembly rooms and dance halls right around the country. The most splendid, they claim, were in the north of England, where the urban populations were large, and ground-rents lower than in the metropolis. Ballroom dance moved out of the rarefied atmosphere of exclusive clubs and private homes into public establishments where people of all classes and backgrounds could perform. The improved prosperity for the country generally in the early twentieth century allowed the 'democratisation' of ballroom dancing to reach its zenith with the spread of the various *palais de danse* in the 1920s.

Despite the democratisation of the material of ballroom dancing, the dances themselves, certain class distinctions remained visible in relation to where they danced and also how they danced (Rust, 1969). In the popular assemblies, for example, the waltzes were played at much slower tempi than in the places frequented by those higher up the social scale. The aristocracy aspired to dance effortlessly. For them, to reveal intense application and skill destroyed everything of grace. Elsewhere, the freedom of structure allowed the more physical working class to improvise new and difficult steps. Rust (1969) claims that working class people took more serious interest in dancing, and consequently became more effortful, thus more skillful and acrobatic, than their wealthier counterparts. Richardson (1960) also attributes this to the outbreak of the Boer War, by which time 'it was even considered bad form for a man (amongst the upper strata) to dance too well' (Richardson, 1960:113). This may suggest that a pastime now

perceived to be the province of lower social classes was best relinquished by the aristocracy. It was not genteel. This was working-class culture, and its noisy, gregarious, fretting, chafing, colourful world was a long way from the aristocracy.

A democratisation of ballroom dancing influenced the change in the dancing form towards a refinement of sensual experience. Stevenson (1990) refers to some relaxation of social conventions with respect to relations between the sexes in the late 19th century British culture. In the ballroom, this change seems to have germinated earlier in the nineteenth century, with the passing of the era of the open-couple dance such as the minuet, and the appearance of the 'close waltz', what respondents describe as 'almost an embrace' (Richardson 1960). The public desire for intimate sensual experience from around 1911 was fulfilled by the introduction of the Argentine tango into England via Paris. For several years prior to the First World War, London went 'tango mad'. The exotic movement of Argentine Tango became all the rage in hotels and restaurants where the public could dance (Thomas and Miller, 1997:102).

The vast expansion of premises for dancing in Britain took place in the 1920s. Between 1919 and 1925 there were about 11,000 dance halls and night clubs opened in Britain (Jones, 1986). An emergence of ballroom dancing as popular leisure activity in Britain in the early twentieth century was engendered by sociological and attitudinal changes. To some extent, it marked the beginning of women's freedom. In comparison to other performance forms such as theatre, dance had been, in many societies including England, one of the few places where women could legitimately perform in public. Ballroom dancing enabled women to have an opportunity actively to participate in more public activities, regardless of social position. Thomas (1993) reinforces, by way of ethnographic inquiry, this view that, historically dance has provided women,

particularly working-class girls, with the possibility of self-expression in public spaces, in a culture where women were traditionally confined to the private sphere. Ballroom dancing allowed ordinary women an unprecedented sexual expression. Changes in fashion (shortened dress-style) in the 1920s were indicated by the loosening of social restraints upon women, such that 'by the 1920s women of all classes could aspire to be free to go ... to cinemas or dance halls without exciting too much comment' (Stevenson 1990:173). The 'new woman' and the 'flappers' entered the scene and continued their advance throughout the 'Jazz era' (Penny, 1997: 58).

The emergence of ballroom dancing as a popular activity transformed the traditional fixed features of English ballroom dancing. The gradual departure from 'memorised' dances to more 'improvisatory' social forms problematised the performance of the emerging couple-dances. If there was not a set pattern neither partner could predict a forthcoming movement. This predicament placed emphasis on the notion of 'leading' and in line with social convention and historical cultural factors (Adair 1992), the male dancer took the lead; an arrangement which prevails in social ballroom dancing up to the present. The male determined where to navigate according to the external conditions such as other couples dancing on the same floor, the availability of space, etc. The female was expected to respond to his lead. The greater physical contact required the spontaneous and decisive leading and was all the more necessary for the new 'improvisatory' forms. The assimilation of ballroom dancing from other cultural practices saw the departure from upper class 'memorised' dances to working class 'improvisatory' social forms.

VII. 2. b. Standardisation and Rigidity

As discussed above, ballroom dancing has its origins in England during the late 18th and early 19th century, primarily among the upper class who participated in social events at balls. During the late 19th and early 20th century, ballroom dancing became popular among the working class who attended public dance halls or ‘popular assemblies’. The departure from upper class ‘memorised’ dances to ‘improvisatory’ social forms was fortunate. Since the early 1920, however, ballroom dancing competitions gained popularity. In 1924, the Ballroom Branch of the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing was formed; its mission was to standardise⁶ the music, steps, and technique of ballroom dancing as an authentic account of how a dance could be done.

Thus in English ballroom dancing the introduction of the Argentine Tango began with the complexity of improvisatory fluency, but was then regulated into renewed rigidity. This rigidity reached a highpoint in the fossilised conventions governing the standardisation of movement in ballroom dancing in the mid 20th century, and it was at that time that the process of adopting choreographic, balletic, individual, self-determined posture and gesture began, confirming its reputation for kitsch in the process.

What eventually came to comprise the standardised style did not emerge from the traditional breeding ground of dance etiquette, the upper stratum of society, but rather, as Rust (1969) points out, skill and grace on the dance floor came to be measured in inverse proportion to social status. As Richardson (1948: 90) comments, the ‘development of the “English Style” was in the hands of the frequenter of the Palais and

the public dance halls, and not in those of the smart West Enders’.

In 1920, the year after the opening of the Hammersmith Palais, Richardson, who was editor of The Dancing Times, and a key figure in the development of ballroom and English ballet, chaired the first of three conferences of teachers of ballroom to attempt to ‘call a halt to freakish dancing before it became worse’. The vernacular improvisations of styles and new creations of dances were idiosyncratic and, in some people’s eyes, potentially unruly (like the masses who did them). And in order to prevent it erupting into chaos, it needed to be homogenised. The freedom in the dance steps and the divergent styles of dancing to be found in the ballroom were viewed as ‘artistic bolshevism’ (Richardson, 1948: 42-3) and this concern was to set out some basic rules of ‘good form’.

The beginning of the standardisation process paved the way for the evolution of competition dancing and the ‘English Style’. There already had been early competitive encounters on the floors of several countries prior to the First World War, for instance big events in cities like Paris, Berlin and Baden-Baden. However, like competitions early in the Thirties, they were more of a private nature, because no international organisations existed at that time for either professionals or amateurs. Competition dancing first came into vogue in Britain just after the First World War, and to begin with there was no delineation between the amateur and the professional dancer. (Richardson, 1948) With the increase in competitions, it became clear that rules had to be set down regarding amateur and professional status and so tentative attempts were made at formulating guidelines, under the auspices of the august editor of The Dancing Times, and these were subsequently used in three World Championships. As a result of

⁶ Its rigidity of rules and regulations were comically depicted in the film, Baz Luhrmann’s *Strictly Ballroom* (1993)

a conference of amateurs, professionals, dance teachers and dancehall managers in 1926, The Dancing Times Rules were revised to define amateur status, and with the establishment of the British Dance Council as the name of the Official Board of Ballroom Dancing (OBBD) in 1929, new rules were brought in which subsequently displaced The Dancing Times Rules (Thomas, 1997:102). The aim of the Council was to establish a co-ordinating organisation to enable teachers to work together on uniform lines. The Council was accepted as the governing body for all matters pertaining to ballroom dancing throughout England, Scotland and Wales.

Englishness and Europeanness are also apparent in the standardised form. Richardson (Richardson, 1948) suggests that, more than a hint of nationalism is apparent in English style. With their strong degree of prowess demonstrated in the ballroom, dancers were keen to keep their dance form 'English.' The establishment of institutionalised teaching in ballroom dancing (through the societies and the Official Board), followed the logic of both competition and nationalism. Winners and losers were evaluated as dancing in the 'English style'. English style resonates with the concepts of good presence, demeanour, and a sense of propriety. It was also apparent in the individualistic, static gestural ideal seen in the European traditional portraiture.⁷ The English notion of 'good bearing' was:

a physical and behavioral value of pan-European (and generally 'western') cultures. It has moral overtones which are frequently expressed in bodily and special metaphors... the notion of 'an upstanding citizen'... 'control is up' (Hall, 1995:80-81).

⁷ See Siegfried Wichmann's Japonisme: Japanese Influence on Western Art Since 1858, London: Thames and Hudson, 1980: 27.

The features of bodily control and matters of technique were reinforced through their relationship with achievement in competition. Rewards through placing in competition have reinforced and established certain characteristics; regimental precision; exactitude; stretched backs; and disciplined, regulated movement; such were the values of the 'English Style', and they came to be imposed upon all who sought to do "proper" ballroom.

It was from the 1930s onwards that the English style started to take hold of the Continent. International matches occurred more frequently, since there already was a generally valid standard and style of competition dancing. In the 1960s, the effort to make ballroom dance an Olympic sport began. The ballroom dances were standardised by the England authenticities as a potential Olympic event, to be judged like ice skating and gymnastics. The university ballroom dancing clubs and competitions flourished. Oxford University regards Dancesport highly, having awarded Full Blue University colours to several men and women from previous years - the same honours awarded to some members of the University's famous rowing and rugby teams.

The codified ballroom dances were made into the international Dance sport championship. English style ballroom dancing is now divided into two categories; what they call, "Modern Ballroom" and "Latin Ballroom". Modern Standard Ballroom" dances are namely Viennese Waltz, Modern Waltz, Tango, Slow Foxtrot, and Quickstep, and "Latin & American" dances are Samba, Rumba, Paso Doble, Cha Cha, and Jive. These ten dances are danced the world over, both socially and in Dance Sport competitions. The figures in these dances have now been standardised and categorised into various levels for teaching, with internationally agreed vocabularies, techniques, rhythms and tempos. Swing dances such as waltz, fox-trot, quickstep are those that are

generally based on European and American style dance. “Latin Ballroom” refers to a collection of stylised and codified dances derived from people of various Hispanic and African origins. They include tango⁸, cha-cha, rumba, samba, mambo and paso doble.

VII. 2. c. Kitschification

The glitter, the glamour in the BBC long-running series, *Come Dancing* reinforced kitschy elements of ballroom dancing, elements of beauty competitions, fashion parades, and hair spray in industrial quantities made up a professional dance spectacular. The perfectly shaped and tanned body of the dancers in *Come Dancing* made for “Athletic-celebrity kitsch” and advertised ballroom dancing as spectacle. To produce a saleable sensual commodity, the ‘English Style’ went through its kitschification. The representation of ballroom dancing as a form of celebrity kitsch shows a lack of understanding of the arts which take place between bodies.⁹ The failure of *Come Dancing* is that it encouraged watchers and discouraged participation.

The democratisation and standardisation of ballroom dancing made ballroom dancing a product that embodies English working-class desire for the exotic *and* homely. Here, ‘the uniform of pleasure was as fixed as that of labour’ (Inglis, 2000: 52) and the rigours of industrial production were married to the codified reliabilities. ‘English Style’ represents this fusion: lines that are clean and precise; set movements that are prescribed; rewarded by medals in a system of hierarchy and codification. But ballroom also contained the potential to simultaneously provide an escape from modern

⁸ Later, tango was categorised in the “Modern Ballroom”.

⁹ In order to experience the arts which take place between bodies, participation is primary.

life, despite being increasingly dominated by the need for rules that meet televisual criteria.

The codification of ballroom dancing and the stress put on competition removed the essence of social drama. Teachers taught “step units” –groups of steps together, exemplified in Arthur Murray footstep diagrams. The teaching of dance routines became the instruction in preset combinations of steps to set music and thus needed to be memorised. The elements of improvisation were neglected, and dancing affected a mechanical appearance.

Bothered by the improvisational character of the indigenous dance styles from which it borrowed, the Latin American dance also required codification. When Argentine Tango was imported into Western Europe, mainly France and England, the English as well as Parisian dance masters wrote tango manuals to regiment and normalize the otherwise ‘untamed’ or ‘unacceptably erotic’ choreography. The Argentina tango retains an aura of scandal in England. John (anonymous), an English ballroom dancer I interviewed told me,

The style of Argentine tango is suited to a single person, who intends to change partners every so often, and ‘pull’ strangers. ‘Modern Tango’ (English style of tango) is suited to couple whose dance is routinised, and who are not to change partners (The City Hall Ballroom, South Yorkshire, 1999).

The ability to lead and follow various dancers of different heights and body sizes is ideal for Argentine Tango dancers. Performed by a heterosexual couple locked in a tight embrace with intertwined legs, following an intricate pattern of suggestive footwork, the Argentine Tango may be interpreted as a metaphor of courtship and seduction, a public display of passion performed (Erenberg 1975: 157).

The Argentina tango style can be characterised by its fluidity, and various

The Argentina tango style can be characterised by its fluidity, and various forms of spontaneous improvisation and expression are possible in this style. The Argentina tango to the English looked 'out of control'. The English style tango was thus strictly codified into rigid movements. Savigliano illustrates the point:

...the faces of the partners should point clearly in opposite directions or, when facing the same direction, be turned completely parallel to right or left shoulder. The position of the hands helped to reaffirm distance and emotional disengagement between the partners: the lady's left hand, with the palm turned down, must touch the gentleman's shoulder perpendicularly The steps should follow a carefully developed sequence of walks, promenades, sways, swivels, reverse turns, chases, and so on, paying attention to a rhythmic pattern of slow, quick-quick, slow and slow and slow-slow (1995:24).

The English transformed the indigenous tango into a more "acceptably erotic" and less fluid form (thus relatively less improvisatory and more routine-oriented than the Argentine style) adding upright comportment, staccato action, a sharper and more compact bodily hexis.

From a dance of courtship in which partner changes were common in Argentina, Tango was transformed into the routinised dance suited for a 'ready-made' and visually well-matched couple (in height and weight) in Britain. Opting out of the custom of partner change, the English style tango omitted one of the essences of the Argentine tango; that of social drama. After the form was re-stylised and eventually categorised within 'Modern Ballroom', tango made its way to the cabarets and ballrooms of Paris, London, and New York. Once appropriated by high society, the disturbing dance became an acceptable form of entertainment and a commodity suitable for packaging and distribution by the international show business industry, which pumped out

¹⁰ The City Hall Ballroom, South Yorkshire, 1999.

ballroom dancing records, dance hand books, films, fashion and stars.

The 'English Style' is the product of the class system and of English sexual conservatism. Ballroom dancing as a whole reflects a constant tension between realism and fantasy in contexts of the class structure of English society; there is a deliberate indulgence in a fantasy that exaggerates its ability to provide an escape from the bonds of cultures such as social class and race. Competitive ballroom dancing, involving 'Modern' and 'Latin' shows an intensive expression of a distinctive fantasy involved in the English style. 'Modern Ballroom' partly involves traditional civility and the courtesies of more 'courtly' manners of the earlier twentieth century. In the Modern 'ballroom' position, the woman dances to the left of the man when in bodily contact. Dress-codes perform an important symbolic function in relation to the fantasies of civility. The costuming may be seen as 'traditional'. As Fiske and Hartley point out, dancers' roles are partly "how-the-Edwardian-upper-class-would-have-danced-it-had-they-done-so" (Fiske, 1993: 42), based on traditional, western, upper-class, heterosexual norms. In "modern", the men wear white ties and tails with white gloves, and carry themselves in a particular shoulders-back-head-up sort of posture while using arm, hand, movements that are ritualisations of the courtesy of the Edwardian upper class.

Moreover, the "modern" dress code is also close to stylised version of stars and celebrities of 1920s' movies such as that of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Thomas and Miller describe the "modern" female dancer so "complete with the piled-up, coifed hairdo glued to her head, face coated in pan-stick make-up, heavily made-up eyes, and glossy lips with a fixed, wide smile" (Thomas: 1997: 95). They wear bronze suntan make-up which was not a required shade for traditional upper-class skin. As Thomas describes, the obvious artificiality of the codes prevents them from being totally

convincing:

we know, and the dancers know, that they are ordinary people from today's subordinate class. The female dancer is adorned in a bright yellow, peacock blue, lime green or pink chiffon dress, with sequined bodice and full calf-length skirt, which edged at the bottom with ostrich feathers (or the like), stands away from and moves with the body, with the aid of layers of nylon net underskirts. The women's dresses have the opulence of those of the class they are imitating, but bring out a brash vulgarity in the quantity of petticoats and sequins, and in the stridency of the colors - all of which clearly asserts that they are not what they appear to be. (ibid).

The raised, slightly backward tilt of the female dancer's upper body, long neck line and high head orientation, and the formalised lifted positioning of the arms combine to give off an air of elegance and 'class', while below the ribcage contact and the intimately touching legs. The codes of ballroom enable both the fantasy of class and the potential of sex.

In the competitive 'Latin & American' dances the dress code and demeanor of both male and female dancer are overtly exotic and sensual. Compared to "Modern", "Latin & American" dances have a more fluid movement imitated from Hispanic and African cultures. They also normally have "fake tanned" skin while the hair is more regularly dyed black. The ersatz tan and black hair are not quite as trivial as they might at first appear. These body adornments are represent of the European theory of exoticism according to which darker skin and black hair connote sensual energy and passion. Fake tan and dyed hair can reveal, cover over or transform the appearance of the body of the person as well as creating permission for a different type of behavior. The paraphernalia of "Latin" ballroom can allow participants to feel differently about themselves, more sensual, affecting the way they walk, talk and express themselves without attracting censure.

The dress code and the demeanor of the female 'Latin' dancer, as Thomas and Miller depicts her, evokes a more overt sexuality to fit in with the body movement required by the samba, rumba, cha-cha-cha, and paso doble. Her hair is slicked back close to her head (rather like a Flamenco dancer), revealing the full contours of her heavily made-up face and neck. Rather than being engulfed by layers of chiffon, she appears to be practically naked; wearing a close-fitting skirt, slit to the waist, revealing an expanse of leg and thigh, a skimpy top with almost no back which shows off her tanned body, and very high-heeled, open-toed shoes which give added length to the legs, and help shift the body weight forward over the front of the foot. The male Latin dancer look, designed to show off his body shape, is reminiscent of John Travolta's *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), with slimline fitted trousers, open necked shirt and raised heel shoes. (Thomas, 1997:95-6) To produce a salable sensual commodity, this ambiguity must be skewed toward the pleasurable and the acceptably erotic. By association with the legitimate points of the balletic technique and upright posture, the Latin American dances are thereby 'Anglicised' and drawn into the 'acceptably erotic' in a social sense.

VII. 3. a. Ballroom Dancing in Japan: Reverse-Japonisme?

The British cultural experience in ballroom dancing can illustrate the process and sequence of cultural absorption. Cultural absorption in this case has been prompted by recoil from an attraction to the exotic, and consisted of a process of taming the exotic, stylization, the development of rules and standards, kitschification and nationalisation. The history of ballroom dancing in Japan experienced a similar process of cultural absorption via Britain.

The development of ballroom dancing in Japan can be said to have begun with the large-scale influence from Europe and the United States on Japan in the last half of the nineteenth century. It was introduced in Japan shortly before the opening of the country to the West in the Meiji period. The opening up of the country after the Meiji Restoration in 1868 was characterised, as we have seen, by the simultaneous goals of modernisation and westernisation. In Japan, ballroom dancing was initially used as means of socialising with the Europeans. The Japanese aristocracy attempted to acquire the Western skills that would allow them to mingle comfortably with foreign diplomats from the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and Switzerland both at home and abroad. *Rokumeikan*, a Western style ballroom built in Tokyo to provide a place for Westerners and the Japanese to socialise, symbolised the radical policy of westernisation. A British architect designed *Rokumeikan*. It was a two story brick building in a Renaissance style built at an enormous cost, paid for by the Meiji government. *Rokumeikan* represented the aristocratic centre of westernisation. In terms of westernisation through dancing, *Rokumeikan* was successful.¹¹ During this period, the image of ballroom dancing is its upper-class elegance, catering for aristocratic couples. In the early 20th century, ballroom dancing, which was initially adopted by the Japanese upper classes, then became popular with the Japanese middle-class. In the 1920s, adapted working people, ballroom dancing became a popular social activity in urban cities, where men and women met.

The Japan of the 1920s was at the centre of cultural turmoil. It was a time of the lost generation, the age of *moga* and *mobo*. (“modern girls and modern boys”) It is described as the lost generation, because the country was fast turning into an industrial

¹¹ The building was completed in November 1883 and stood in the heart of Tokyo. *Rokumeikan* was razed in 1940.

and militaristic power, and the rising middle class was not sure of what was in the future. To cater for this nervous middle-class, there was a flourishing of commercial dance institutions, attracting both men and women. On one hand, Japanese enthusiasm for dancing led to the expansion of university ballroom dancing clubs and amateur dance circles where they shared their skills. On the other hand, Japanese enthusiasm also prompted its sex industry to exploit dance. Allison explains a feature of the Japanese sex industry:

One feature of the Japanese sex industry found most incomprehensible to foreign visitors is the degree to which sex in some establishments is flirted with but eventually deflected. The deflection is often built into the packaging of the sexual enticement; women are kept distant through no-talking rules, glass floors, see-through tanks, cubicles, stages, and so on. (Allison, 1994: 132)

In the 1930s and 1940s, influenced by the Chicago 'taxi dance hall', more and more dance halls were built in urban Japan, catering only for male patrons. The hall employed women dance partners, paid on a commission basis through a ticket-a-dance plan. They were expected to dance with any patron who might select them for as few or as many dances as he was willing to purchase.

Dancing was included as one of the venues for 'water trade' (*mizushoubai*) or working as a hostess in a bar or nightclub. *Mizushobai* in Japan, without any commitment to providing further sexual services, was a well-paying job. Men would pay to drink alcohol and dance with dance teachers or hostesses who worked in the club. Japanese men's night life for men from the 1930s to the 1960s in Japan typically involved drinking, and possibly eating, but invariably accompanied by hostesses who keep topping up their drinks, lit their cigarettes and danced with them. The association

of “dance hall” as *mizushoubai* degraded the image of ballroom dancing into something slightly shady. These dance halls were not brothels, but they were in the same legal category as cabarets and bars. Until 1984, ballroom dancing classes remained off-limits to people under 18.

With the outbreak of the war, any popular culture imported from the USA was banned and in 1940 dancing halls closed down. However, the immediate postwar years saw a reemergence of dance halls catering for couples as well as for males. From the 1960s onward, ballroom dancing was neglected, first because of the popularity of mambo imported from USA in 1955, and much later, a disco scene prompted by, among other causes, the film, *Saturday Night Fever*. Although ballroom dancing became an old fashioned thing to do, dance circles kept practicing and improving their ballroom skills.

Gradually the image of ballroom dancing associated with *mizushobai* became out of fashion. Night club hostesses of the 2000s in Japan perform *karaoke* rather than ballroom dancing. Ballroom dancing began to regain its once-lost image of upper-class elegance, and to be revitalised as a sport. English ballroom style as promoted from the 1930s was taught as a sporting and competitive activity. The English style of competitive dancing was promoting ballroom dancing as sport; not as something a bit shady, but as healthy and elegant. At present, according to the Japanese Ballroom Dancing Federation, the dancing population of Japan is estimated at about 10 million people, according to some sources even 15 million people.¹² Not only the number of amateur dancers, but also the number of professional ballroom dancers has gone far beyond Britain.

For the Japanese serious engagement in ballroom dancing is comic, as

depicted, for example, in the Masayuki Sudo's film comedy, *Shall We Dance?*. It was a comic success in Japan as well as in the West.¹³ It depicted the stereotypical serious and colorless Japanese middle-class businessman in his 40s who discovers pleasure in English style ballroom dancing. For British audiences or those familiar with Britain, the film causes a special laughter, especially scenes set at the English working class resort town of Blackpool. While Blackpool is a working-class holiday town for the British, it is ballroom-dance heaven for the Japanese dancers. This is because it is the very top, prestigious experience for Japanese dancers to take lessons from the top English professional dancers and attend a competition at the Tower Ballroom. The comic effect is pointed out by a review in the Observer:

First, Blackpool is revealed as the Mecca for these Japanese dancers. ...There are flashbacks to Blackpool that make the Tower Ballroom look as exotic as the King of Siam's palace and its beach at night as romantic as Bali. Second, a... macho type deliberately bumps into the hero at a dance contest and is marked down by the judges. The private eye's assistant asks his boss the reason for the penalty. 'Ungentlemanly conduct,' says the older man. 'It's a British sport after all! (The Observer, 1998:7)

This laughter is caused by the Japanese image of ballroom dancing as an upper-class activity. Ballroom dancing represents the leisure features of British working class culture serving as a negation of working life, hence 'its crowded non-productivity; collective unself-protectiveness; joint indolence; financial carelessness; unrewarded effortfulness'. (Inglis, 2000:52) Ballroom dancing is what the British regards as "low-class", "overtly gregarious", "old-fashioned", "uncool", and "kitsch".

¹² Cited from the web site, <http://www.jbdf.or.jp/english/what/organ.html> (2000)

¹³ The movie was a huge box-office success in Japan and swept that country's 13 Academy Awards.

VII. 3. b. Resistance of Japaneseness

In Japan, ballroom dancing has been an exotic import from the West, an erotic symbol of Western heterosexual courtship, and an unprecedented freedom of tactile engagement and sexual expression in public. Ballroom dancing shares with other exotic products the tendency to provoke ambivalent feelings of attraction and repulsion. The Japanese contemporary perception of ballroom dancing has generally been divided into two: on one hand, where ballroom dancing is regarded as 'positive', 'elegant', 'enjoyable' and 'civilised', on the other hand regarded as 'negative', and 'vulgar', 'obscene' and 'low'.

The "negative" images of ballroom dancing link ballroom dancing to a "vulgar" import from the modern West for three reasons. Firstly, they are based on the modern invention of Japaneseness and its by-product, asceticism. Since the opening up of Japan in the nineteenth century, Japan has acquired its own particular version of asceticism. The context of modernity in Japan was the ascetic construction of Japaneseness, including propriety, strict manners, correct appearance and reliable obedience. For a long time, since the encounter with the West, Japan has also been constructing an Occidentalist other in the form of the white Westerner. This Occidentalist construction is reflected in the actual usage of the word *gaijin*. The word, literally meaning 'outside' person, is most frequently translated as 'foreigner', but is commonly used only in reference to whites, who are assumed to be Westerners. The social construction of *gaijin*, as Creighton illustrates, transforms all Caucasians into an essentialised category that reduces complexity among them in order to create a clear contrast with Japanese

uniqueness.

According to Japanese Occidentalism, Western culture embodies individualism and self-exhibitionism, attributes which contravene essential Japanese values. Even the sexuality allowed to *gaijin*¹⁴ can be seen as a projection of individual self-indulgence and sensuality. Japanese society displays both an attraction to ballroom dancing and a repulsion from many of the things associated with it. A modern novelist, Junichiro Tanizaki defines the West as exciting and sexually uninhibited while characterising Japan as staid and domesticated. In Tanizaki's A Fool's Love, (1924-25) the narrator, Joji sends his Westernised young wife, Naomi to take ballroom dancing lessons. Tanizaki saw the Japanese ambivalent attitudes toward the West in an emergence of ballroom dancing as popular leisure.

The exhibitionist appearance of ballroom dancing form is regarded as exotic. In ways parallel to Western Orientalism (seen in the English transformation of tango as 'acceptably erotic'), Japanese Occidentalism also involved a sexual projection of the other. This explains why the Japanese dancing schools have low, very big, clear windows; so it is an overt display that nothing "indecent" is going on inside.

Just as Western Orientalism created self-Occidentalisms through an implied contrast with a simplified West, Japanese renderings of *gaijin* or "white-westerners" are Occidentalisms that stand opposed to Japanese Orientalism as describing themselves. In this context, construction of the Orient as other is "a two-way exchange" (Creighton, 1995:136). Representations of the *gaijin* create and highlight contrasting statements about the specialness of being Japanese. Among the essentialised self-Orientalisms

¹⁴ See Millie R. Creighton's 'The Other in Japanese Advertising', Occidentalism :images of the West, James G. Carrier (ed), Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1995.

created are Japanese assertions of uniqueness and cultural homogeneity.

Hisao (anonymous), a Japanese ballroom dancer I talked to said

The way ballroom dancing is danced by gaijin, it is very passionate, but Japanese people are not drawn to show affection like gaijin; we don't hug, kiss, and emote like them (Toho Dance Hall, Tokyo, 1999).

In modern Japan, the public show of affection violates Japanese notions of social space and privacy. In Japan like any other country, one body touching another body is highly charged with meaning and appropriate in its specific context. Bathing and nursing tends to be a sphere where public touch is acceptable. Everyday social comportment (and nurturing of children by parents, and confrontation in sport) constitutes major activities in which touch is acceptable in Japanese culture. Physical closeness has been practiced as a matter more of nature rather than as an emotional show of sexual affection. Thus heterosexual show of affection in public like hugging and kissing were regarded as 'too direct', 'deliberate' and 'unnatural' things to do.

Ballroom dancing constitutes a controversial body-touching site for the Japanese. It is based on the modern Japanese norm that public displays of affection between men and women are considered taboo, even if they are married. Lack of couple touching behavior in public reflects upon the culture-oriented aesthetics that create collective, inclusive social interaction. The Japanese regard the act of physical affection in public as often exclusive and sufficiently rude to warrant a cut in public contact with the perpetrators.

For the Japanese dancers, ballroom dancing is an acceptable performative deviation from the country's modern norm: for the Japanese, ballroom dancing offers

the seductive, forbidden allure of slipping the confining boundaries of what is socially acceptable and finding a measure of liberty from the boundary of Japaneseness. Within the modern boundary of Japaneseness, the Japanese feel a kind of groundless incongruity in just being Japanese, or just having this fixed identity and existence (Japanese “salary” man, father, mother, teacher as role, etc). When they are practicing ballroom dancing, they are not longing to be *gaijin*; rather they are rejecting a fixed identity. The popularity of ballroom dancing in Japan reflects the Japanese desire for transformation, through social drama, which has been suppressed in the construction of Japaneseness.

VII. 3.c. Japanisation: Revival of in-between energy

Anglicised ballroom dancing has been marketed and kitschified in Japan. The Japanese have tamed the exotic Latin American cultural practices by using the English rulebook of regimented passion. The straight and stiff tango encouraged by the British dance school imposed detachment, and erased emotional engagement and passion. However, by practicing ballroom dancing, some fragments of eroticism lost from the original Argentinean Tango have been revived by the Japanese residual value of emotion and sensuality. This may be because of the strange affinities of Japanese and Argentineans as a unique physical kinship between seemingly alien cultures. While there is something unconventional and foreign about the appearance of Argentine Tango, kinaesthetic knowledge suggests that there is also something familiar about it. Through ballroom dancing, Japanese dancers rediscover some qualities of Tango,

¹⁵ Toho Dance Hall, Tokyo, 1999.

despite the regulation of it, as embodied in the real tensions that are created about identity, opportunity and transformation. Tango is regarded as an acceptable and assimilable way for the sense of touch to be heightened into art and into social drama, too.

Kenji Nozawa, a former ballroom dancer, is now a successful Tango dancer. Kenji with Liliana Nakada made their British debut in November, 2001, when they were invited by the Academia Nacional del Tango (U.K.) Ltd. to appear in the 2nd London International Tango Festival. Takis, the editor of the UK monthly journal, Tango Review, puzzled by the Japanese-Argentinean connection, was given explanations by Kenji, he interviewed:

Takis: What do you think attracted Japanese Tango aficionados to this dance, given that it is so removed from traditional Japanese culture?

Kenji: It has really nothing to do with Japan; there are just many people who enjoy tango as part of their life. We know many people in Japan who, when asked why they are dancing tango, reply, "Because I'm alive!" (2001: 19).

Tango is assimilable and familiar to the Japanese in terms of physical closeness as an expression of the collective nature of society. Japanese collectivism is based on physical proximity among people. The Japanese society demands that its people have quick and acute sensibilities. Tango requires the spontaneous action of touching and reaction to being touched. Sensibility of and with the living body required in Tango is more familiar to the Japanese tradition, regardless of social class, than in England. The Japanese have a tendency toward 'the ethic of locations' for achieving collectivism in location-shared groups rather than position-shared groups in England. (Nakane, 1970)

In the UK, as noted in the previous chapter, people are taught from a young age

that physical individualism is vital. Children are often allocated to their individual bedrooms in their very early age. The value of being a “physically independent individual” is reinforced in English society. English society and its education encourage autonomous individuals who are not susceptible of sensual impressions. (esp. those of touch and emotion) In order for English dancers to see the relationship of Tango bodies for what they are, to understand the nature of the dancing, they must first readjust their sense of acceptable spatial boundaries between bodies. It is a commonplace that in UK the space between bodies is fairly substantial and that as a group English people tend to close off their physical selves. Tango violates this customary personal distance, requiring that partners give each other permission to enter each other’s space, placing bodies in close proximity. Via ballroom dancing, English people experience, what one might call ‘emotional transposition’, coming closer not only to Tango, but also to Japanese culture.

In Japan, physical closeness is not only in the confines of the family, but also in the patterning of values and emotions in general.¹⁶ This seems to contradict not only the lack of heterosexual public touching in Japan, but also cultural stereotypes popular both in Japan and in England, as Savigliano puts it,

passion separates Japanese and Latino souls. On the Western continuum of world exoticism, Japanese and Latinos polar opposites: Japanese are cold, detached, and controlled; Latinos, including Argentineans, are expressive, passionate, and sensual (Savigliano, 1993: 247).

As Regan argues, however, public touching does not necessarily reflect physical

¹⁶ See “Who Sleeps by Whom”, David W. Plath, *Japanese Culture and Behavior*, ed. by Takie Sugiyama Lebra and William P Lebra, An East-West Center Book, The University of Hawaii: Honolulu, 1974: 304-7.

intimacy.¹⁷ It is true that Japanese people are not drawn to emote directly like Latin American and English people by kissing and hugging. Despite the lack of showing affection and emotional public touching, however, physical intimacy is given a high value.

Historically, by the Western standard of high culture, Japanese physical closeness (such as mixed bathing, breast-feeding and changing of nappies in public) was perceived by Western travellers to Japan as ‘indications of Japanese heathenism’ (Allison, 1996). In Japan, interpersonal physical closeness has long lacked the connotation of dirtiness, and has been practiced as a matter more of nature as discussed above. Japanese physical closeness in nursing after modernisation had long been regarded from outside as pathogenic, physical “*amae*” or at least to be taken as a denial of maturation and individuation. An American study comparing the behavior of mothers and their three-to four-month-old babies in Japan and the United States repetitively emphasises the greater bodily contact in the Japanese case. They found the Japanese mother communicates more physically rather than verbally with children. This American impression had long been that of the West in general. By Western standard, physical closeness in the Japanese childrearing tradition has been described as lenient, tolerant, even overindulgent.¹⁸ Despite its westernisation, physical contact has continued to be of much concern. Being aware of its importance and protesting against the Western way of ‘physical separation’, they remade the odd word, ‘*skinshipu*’. This word, adapted in Japanese in this form although not in use in English, has great

¹⁷ Regan studies public touching behavior which differs as a function of the interactants’ race or ethnicity. See “Public displays of affection among Asian and Latino heterosexual couples”, Regan PC, Psychological Reports, 84 (3) Part 2, Jun, 1999: 1201-2.

¹⁸ See Ryoko Tsuneyoshi’s ‘Teaching Empathy: Family and Education in Japan’, Journal of Japanese Trade and Industry: September-October, 1998: 40, Also see Becoming Japanese: The world of the pre-school child, Joy Hendry,

significance in the tactile relationship between families. Japanese childrearing was seen as “spoiling” the child a generation ago, it has been reinterpreted as acts of caring which will make the child more perceptive and responsive later.¹⁹ Physical emphasis is regarded as cultivating the sentiments of the child. The “tacit knowledge” and the ability to understand the feelings of others is regarded as a physical learning of sophisticated emotions. In terms of physical closeness, Japanese culture as a whole has in common more with Latin American culture than with English culture.

In Japan, ballroom dancing is practiced with a similar spirit and commitment to that found in the Argentinians in Tango. For the Japanese, ballroom dancing is fundamentally a human activity symbolising a specific aesthetic stance, the “sophistication of human desire” rather than merely an entertainment or sport. The “sophistication of human desire” characterises Japanese traditional culture in which human desire is a matter of sophistication rather than control or indulgence. For example, the tea ceremony is a “sophistication of drinking desire”. In other words, the tea ceremony is an art for the cultivation of social manners. The tea ceremony is the social drama where people participate, practice and then experience. Fulfillment in the tea ceremony is an achievement in experience. Fulfillment in the tea ceremony is related to the process itself. The aim of drinking, which is satisfying thirst, is “parenthesised” in tea ceremony. It is performance, parenthesising the “goal” of the practice. Additionally, because the goal of the practice is parenthesised, it is difficult for outsiders to figure out what is going on.

Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1986: 98.

¹⁹ By the last twenty years, the general attitude in the West became more favourable toward physical closeness in childrearing. See *Ikuji no Kokusai Hikaku: Kodomo to Shakai to Oyatachi*, (“International Comparison of Childrearing: Child, Society and Parents”), ed. by Ryoko Tsuneyoshi, Sarane, S and Boocock, Nihon Housou Shuppan Kyokai: Tokyo, 1997), As for the practice of cosleeping, see, “Ikuji no Kokusai Hikaku” (“International

The “inter-humanness” and intersubjectivity of ballroom dancing is regarded as the significant sphere where arts develop.²⁰ As already noted, ballroom dancing involves *both* “dances of participation” and “dances of presentation”, as distinct from strictly the “dance of presentation”. Ballroom dancers are audiences that dance. Ballroom dancers participate in the performance from both the audience and the performer’s perspective. They watch and experience how dancers move from the sidelines to the dance floor. They change from audience to performer and back. Equally, ballroom dancers’ techniques and their sense of the dramatic possibilities of the form, make performers a knowledgeable audience. In this sense, ballroom dancing is a reminder of aesthetic stances, the “sophistication of human desire”.

In the sphere of the sophistication of human desire, ballroom dancing is regarded as worthy enough to be related to the concept of *ma*, meaning “in-between”, a very important aesthetic principle in many Japanese arts. *Ma* is generally translated as space; but it is a sensory space, which involves physical space as well as the space of time. This concept is regarded as important in all Japanese forms of art, including as well the movement of the painter or the sculptor in creating their works, the musician performing a piece of music, a poet reciting a poem or an actor performing in a play. In music, it is felt through the silences between musical phrases or single notes. In a flower arrangement, it is felt through the arrangement of the different flowers, branches or

Comparison of Baby Care Guide”), pp.57-66. Also see, “The influence of touch on child development: Implications for intervention, Blackwell PL, *Infants and Young Children* 13: (1) Jul 2000: 25-39.

²⁰ Take lyric poetry, for instance. Waka poems were customarily made at various parties and later specifically at poetry parties, which were a unique form of social gathering. At such a party, a poem was considered completed when it was appreciated and evaluated by those present as soon as it was made. Afterwards this custom developed further and produced the form of *renga* in which a number of persons contributed to create one unified work. Artistic expression is thus a form of sociality and individuality. It is contrastive with the Euro-American tradition of the rationalisation of art and its separation from other aspects of social life. As William suggests, the social organisation of art has often remained submerged and apparently unconnected to the work itself. (Raymond Williams, *The Sociology of Culture*, New York: Schocken Books, 1982.)

leaves. *Ma* is sensory in relation to what is evoked in a person's mind when experiencing something.

The Japanese discovery of 'strange' Tango eroticism through 'familiar' ballroom dancing can be explained by Japan's martial arts tradition. In this context, such activity becomes another form of contact improvisation between the living bodies. Ballroom dancing is performed as a duet with dancers supporting each other's weight while in motion. The ballroom dancers focus on the physical sensations of touching, leaning, supporting, and counter balancing. It is not a coincidence that many dancers have past experience in martial arts such as Aikido (the way of matched energy).²¹ In Aikido, one seeks to use the attacking energies of the other as the mainspring of defense. Thus, ballroom dancing seems to have similarity to the violent, aggressive stereotypes in the martial art coupling, as both rely heavily on intuitive response to the movement of another body. Recent research shows that a harmony is found in the martial arts discipline which transcends the stereotypic notions of punching, kicking, and throwing bodies around rooms.²² Moving in harmony with the partner in ballroom dancing coupling can be regarded as introductory to the movements in tension such as martial arts and Tango.

For the successful execution of technique in martial arts as well as in Tango, the mind must apprehend the feeling that the flow of one's *ki* has become unified with that of an opponent. *Ki*-energy is a "practice-near" concept. It is like life-force, that animates the physical world. *Ki*-energy is psychophysical energy in, around and

²¹ Novack points out the similarity in physical technique between martial arts and social dance (1990:10-1).

²² In fact, the martial arts training provide harmony rather than aggression toward one's body and others. There have been numerous studies including a recent one by B W Lamarre, in his 'Judo – The gentle way: A replication of studies on martial arts and aggression', of the effects of traditional martial arts training on aggressiveness, most reporting a decline in aggressiveness within training.

between the human living bodies. Yuasa explains the concept and phenomenon of *ki*-energy as follows:

The substance of the unknown energy, ki, is not yet known. It is the flow of a certain energy circulating in the living body, unique to living organisms.... the flow of ki, when it is seen, psychologically, is perceived in the circuit of coenesthesia as an abnormal sensations as self-apprehending sensation of one's own body under the special circumstances... When it is viewed energy is both psychological and physiological... Its substance lies in the region of the psychologically unconscious and the physiologically invisible (Yuasa, 1993:116-7).

Ki-energy is inseparable from the movement of which it is the source (Carey, 2000: 34). *Ki*-energy circulates within the interior of the body, while at the same time intermingling with the *ki*-energy pervasively present in the environment including that of other persons. When the Japanese legs are intertwined without an English or Argentinean thought, but within a circle of *ki*-energy, what happened under the sign of the authenticity is only a cultural fossil. The authenticity of the experience cannot be question.

The sequence of cultural absorption is multifarious. For British dancers, ballroom dancing might be a reminder of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers with Latin American passion thrown in. For Japanese dancers, ballroom dancing might be a reminder of Aikido with a Western flair! However despite its flair and kitschy elements, ballroom dancing takes artistic credit in terms of the primacy of the sense of touch, the body's intelligence and its self-absorbed knowing. Ballroom dance can thus be regarded not merely as entertainment, but as an introductory endeavour in sophisticating the responsive body. Such a cultural celebration of the body's endeavour

can be seen to complement the argument formulated by ethnomusicologist John Blacking. He argued that “ritual may be enacted in the service of conservative and even oppressive institutions..., but the experience of performing the nonverbal movements and sounds may ultimately liberate actors”²³ (Blacking: 1985:65). A certain metabolism is necessary for the body to perform. A dancing body is difficult to commodify because it depends on live performance and kinaesthetic transmission.

As an intercultural ritual, ballroom dancing provides continuous process of renewing form of life as “sloughing”. The couple dancing has the potential to transcend kitsch. Although the practice might be initiated by the form of kitsch, the content stubbornly refuses its self-deception and sentimentality. Content is something that potentially absorbs and then transcends kitsch itself. *The content is greater than the form*. Experience in couple dancing as well as in martial arts is ‘achieved’ when the energies of the opponents merge, when one seeks to use the energies of the other as the fulcrum of her energy. Thrusting energy is fed into receptive energy, which allows a counter-action of thrusting energy once more. The action of a couple dancing contains MacIntyre’s “the core concept of virtue”, where practitioners eventually go well beyond anything that can be captured in explicit rules, for we ourselves become experts able to modify the standards.²⁴ Ballroom dancing is never the mere assertion of the present; it is essentially action, as Oakeshott puts it, the alteration of ‘what is’ so as to make it agree with ‘what ought to be’ (Oakeshott, 1933: 274).

Arguing against a simple view of cultural imperialism as appropriation, I

²³ See also Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969).

²⁴ *After Virtue* by Alasdair MacIntyre, Notre Dame University Press, 1981: 175-7.

have demonstrated how ballroom dancing embodies to express the self; not the fixed self, such as Latin/English/Japanese, but rather a more flexible self that creates new identity. The ballroom dancing can be appropriated as a metaphor to signal alternative, non-phallogentric but highly erotic representations of human intersubjectivity. The metaphor of the ballroom, whatever it means and whatever possibilities it contains for the imagination of the dancer, can indicate the ways in which the dancer discovers and appropriates his or her own intersubjective territory. Ballroom dancing here serves to get at a form of intersubjectivity which is not structured around a clear distinction between attachment and separation. Ballroom dancing puts the dancer in touch with the world of the maternal culture whilst at the same time securing the separation from the maternal culture and absorbing the exotic culture through the body. Hence serving as a means by which to imagine a form of intersubjectivity, ballroom dancing enables the dancer to describe a set of relations not based on a clear split between subject and object, or self and other, or between interiority and exteriority. Ballroom dancing provides one way of imagining a formation not organised around cultural linearity, coherence and or Cartesian dualism. It provides a means of representing a mode of being wherein self and other are not separable; wherein the other does not move towards a final, singular rationality and wherein the subject is no longer the individual, bounded, liberal humanist 'self'. In an optimistic spirit, the intercultural adaptation of dancing could be a model of intercultural hermeneutics.

Envoi

Profound changes took place in Japanese and English culture and values under the impact of the development of the mass media and of intercultural contact since the 19th century. This thesis treated aspects of modern and contemporary life across Japan and England that in their sometimes piecemeal fashion remind us of the multi-faceted, post-capitalist, postmodern nature of society. The discussion treated is more about Japan as the Other to Western culture, and the West as the Other to Japan. It is about not only exportation but also importation. This thesis tackled those aspects of Japan and England (real or imagined) that the two countries have made part of their culture.

Intercultural understanding is typically a marker of fleeting items, its ephemerality and consumerist aspect has long been the basis for kitsch, deemed unsophisticated, mass, lowbrow or crassly commercial. Intercultural understanding has often been discussed, an imitative practice. The way this story goes, the foreigners unable or unwilling to create and invent, borrow superficial aspects of another culture and attach them to inappropriate places. However, a theory of intercultural understanding involves more than issues of representation and more than culture traveling or flowing across the world. Intercultural understanding is comprised of the texts and practices of everyday life. The formation and transformation of cultural identities unfold through relation of power that link the nation-states, locations and bodies. In interrogating theories of kitsch through the transformation of cultural identities and locations I have highlighted how the nation-state, the identity of locations and the body are not only important for the making of cultural identities, but how each plays a part in influencing transformation.

The role of the cultural, the literary and the economical, the industrial in controlling its borders are central to this thesis. What is learned from this research on

the marketing of cultural products, narrative (paintings, theatre, novels and films), business management theory, and leisure (ballroom dancing) across various borders in England and Japan is that those trends circulate as popular culture do so, at least in part, because they speak to something in their lives that is, the two problematic subjects of kitsch, sentimentality and self-deception. The romance Japan and Britain hold for each other is often greater than that held by themselves.

Foreign goods, practices, and ideas are changed in their encounter with locations. Japan is unmistakably westernised, and yet English visitors do not find what they see familiar. England is also Japanised in some ways, and yet Japanese visitors do not necessarily find what they see familiar. Highbrow art in one part of the world is imported as lowbrow in the other part. Lowbrow is imported and elevated as highbrow, seen in geisha performed on the grand theatre in the late 19th century London. Borrowing a non-elite visual culture traceable to the mass-produced woodblock prints, and the riverside theatre of itinerant troupes, the avant-garde artists produced the latest in style. And yet, it is correct to remind us of self-reflection; the great numbers of Japanese and British who enjoy and practice in ancient, and anachronistic aesthetics precisely because of its history, and in many cases, precisely because of its 'Japaneseness' and 'Englishness'. Late twentieth century of both Japan and Britain mine the past and often a particular past, the *sengoku* in Japan, the Elizabethan in England. In the service to the national, and make use of the local to access the international commodities market. Extracted in this process is the material to construct a self-image and a national self-image.

Kitsch manifestation of intercultural understanding is comic as a combination of on the one hand, familiar, recognisable, and identifiable, and on the other hand, different, excessive, and/or strange. The culture of kitsch makes the strange outline of

the exotic into the familiar hybridity. Van Gogh's kimono motif, Mishima's body building, Cowboy adaptation of Kurosawa, management theory, and the codification of ballroom dancing are all fusions of the traditional and the borrowed. This thesis attempts to comically explicate the meanings the traditional attach to foreign things and practices. This thesis dealt with comic views of the Japanese and the British as 'emotionally charged' consumers, but it is also against these stories of categorising all cultural imitations as kitsch.

Viewing the Japanese and the British as actively engaged in an ongoing creative synthesis of the exotic with the familiar, the modern with the traditional, this thesis searched for some attempts to respond to such "practice-distant" existence by creating the "practice-near" action which will embrace embodiment and emotional sophistication. The paradox of its reception lies in the way intercultural boundaries are crossed. The lessons learned may be taught either by Kurosawa or by the Tango. Achievement in cultural assimilation is characterised by three conditions. Firstly, the more "practice-near" experience it is, the better is cultural assimilation. Secondly, what is required for successful assimilation is an internalisation of aesthetics. The more intersubjectivity the cultural assimilation tends to contain, the more it transcends kitsch. Thirdly, the more profound the assimilator, the slower is the process of assimilation and the less obvious its manifestation. This is because embodiment is a long process. The degree of kitsch decreases according to the degree of embodiment.

The critical examination of emotion and the body hexis is essential in intercultural understanding. Bodily intuition is paramount; cultural sedimentations are stirred up and fall into new (but still recognisably national) patterns. Emotionally, conceptually such are the transformations of art, as taught either by Kurosawa or by the Tango. National genius proves to be adequate to the new life-understanding

history requires. It is rather less likely, however, that the same genius can bring liberated life to the rulebook of managerial production. But it was not to be expected that my three means of inquiry - the imaginative, the productive and the leisurely - could be made to overlap. Social boundaries are very strong and universal, however much the rules of transgression are local.

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