

Over There

If I want to imagine a fictive people, I may invent a name for them, treat them assertively like part of a novel, found a new *Utopia*, so as to comprise no real country in my fantasy (but then it is this very fantasy which I compromise in the signs of literature). Or I may, without in any way claiming to represent or to analyse the slightest reality (these are the major gestures of Western discourse), I may skim off from somewhere in the world (*over there*) a certain number of *traits*, and with these *traits* deliberately form a system. It is this system which I shall call: Japan.



Photo:

The ceremonious letter.

Woman preparing to write a letter. "Picture side of a postcard which was sent to me by a Japanese friend. The other side is illegible: I do not know who this woman is, if she is painted or made up, what she wishes to write: a loss of the origin in which I recognize *écriture* itself, of which this image is to my eyes the sumptuous and discrete emblem." (RB)

East and West therefore cannot be taken here for "realities" which one might try to compare and contrast historically, philosophically, culturally, politically. I do not gaze lovingly upon an Oriental essence; the East is indifferent to me; it simply provides me with a supply of *traits* whose activation and deployment allow me to "flatter" the idea of a symbolic system hitherto unknown, entirely detached from ours. What can be sought in the Orient is not another set of symbols, another metaphysics, another wisdom (desirable as the latter may be); but rather the possibility of difference, of a mutation in the properties of symbolic systems. Someday someone should write the history of our own darkness, and show the density of our narcissism, someone should tally the few calls of difference which we occasionally managed to hear and the ideological co-optations which inevitably followed, in which known languages (the Orient of Voltaire, of the *Revue Asiatique*, of Loti, or of *Air France*) were used to acclimate our incognizance of Asia. Today a thousand things are to be learned from the Orient: an enormous labor of cognizance is, or will be necessary (its delay can only be attributed to ideological obfuscation). But while leaving immense zones of shadow (capitalist Japan, American acculturation, technical development) here and there, it is also necessary that a thin streak of light seek out, not other symbols, but the very fissure of the symbolic. This



Photo:
Rain, Seed, Dissemination.
Warp and Weft, Texture, Text.
Écriture.

Fragment of the Ise-Shu manuscript, known by the name of *Ishiyama-gire*; Indian ink and paint on pasted colored paper; Heian period, beginning of the 12th century. Tokyo, Giichi Umezawa collection (photo: Hans-D. Weber, Cologne).

fissure cannot appear at the level of cultural products: what is presented in this text does not belong (or so I hope) to art, to Japanese urbanism, or to Japanese cuisine. The author has in no sense ever photographed Japan. Quite to the contrary, Japan has spangled him with multiple bursts of light; it has placed him in writing situation. In that situation, personal identity quavers and old readings are overthrown; meaning is shaken, torn apart and extenuated into its unsubstitutable void, while the object never ceases to be significant, to be a signifier, and as such, desirable. In its way, writing or *écriture* is a *satori*: *satori* (the Zen event) is a more or less strong (but in no way solemn) tremor which makes both knowledge and the subject waver: it brings about a void of speech. And it is also a void of speech which makes for writing: from this void proceed the *traits* with which Zen, in the *exception* of meaning, writes out gardens, gestures and houses, banquets, violence.

Pachinko

The Pachinko is a slot machine. One buys a small supply of metal marbles at the counter; then, in front of the machine (a kind of vertical game-board), with one hand one inserts each marble into a slot, while with the other one uses a clapper to propel the marble through a circuit of deflectors; if the shot is right (neither too strong nor too weak), the propelled marble discharges a shower of other marbles which fall into your outstretched hand, and one has only to begin anew—unless one should prefer to exchange his winnings for a paltry reward (a bar of chocolate, an orange, a packet of cigarettes). There are very many Pachinko halls and they are always full of a diversified clientele (young people, women, students in black tunics, ageless men in business suits). The Pachinkos are said to do as much (or even more) business than all the department stores in Japan (which is probably saying a good deal).

Pachinko is a collective and solitary game. The machines are arranged in long rows; standing before the board, everyone plays for himself, without