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## Introduction

**P**ostmodernism is bound to be retrospective. By placing itself after an event, it punctuates its past. Interiority, subject/object binarism, centrality, universalism, logocentricity, masculine neutrality—all such hegemonic traits that have ranged over the whole paradigm of the Enlightenment are bracketed. The West—for postmodernism is a Western event—thus sees a fracture which gapes wide as if unbridgeable. Playfulness, gaming, spectacle, tentativeness, alterity, reproduction, and pastiche are offered to guide the new age. Such terms are intent on dispersal, maintaining a sensitive aversion for any form of concentration. But denial is always contaminated by affirmation. Serious playfulness is no longer playful; the Other remains the Other only when looked at from the opposite side of the boundary; inconclusiveness is conclusive after all, once it becomes an identifiable consciousness. Likewise, as postmodernism empties itself of historicity, it is haunted by the memory of the erased past and anxious about the unrivaled future. The present is as

elusive as ever, and in the face of it looms the obtrusively substantial mirage of modernity.

The most problematized of all the absences in postmodernism is a relation with politics. As the agent of action is dispersed, so is the possibility of voluntary intervention, hence politics; postmodernism of course knows that the absence of politics is political, and (sometimes) fears the consequences of aloofness. The black hole that is formed by the rejection of modernism is also apt to obliterate the trace of historical Western expansionism that was at least cofunctional, if not instrumental, in producing epistemological hegemonism. Thus a paradox: as postmodernism seeks to remedy the modernist error of Western, male, bourgeois domination, it simultaneously vacates the ground on which alone the contours of modernism can be clearly seen. Furthermore, colonialism and imperialism are ongoing enterprises, and in distinguishing late post-industrial capitalism from earlier liberal capitalism and by tolerating the former while condemning the latter, postmodernism ends up by consenting to the first world economic domination that persists in exploiting the wretched of the earth.

By now everyone knows that at the end of the nineteenth century over 80 percent of the world was ruled or dominated by the Western powers. Fewer understand, however, how abruptly and completely the history and geography of the dominated were fissured by their first encounter with the West. National—or, more usually, regional—histories and geographies had to be broken off at the contact, and the stories of their whole past had to be retold in the new light of the “world” (i.e., Western) context. It is as if the pre-contact time had been wrenched off and replaced by an unfamiliar temporal system that would efficiently dissolve the residual old. Peoples were also displaced from their sundry geographic centralities to the peripheral positions assigned by the Western metropolis: thus appellations like the Middle East and the Far East—the fragmentation of regions into colonies/nation-states. New history and new geography combined to produce the magical peripheries of the primitive, in which the natives were enticed to participate as their proper residents. Always and everywhere the West is at the highest in evolution, at the normative center, and is seen as the newest in development and the oldest in tra-

dition. Thus the West has been the utopian fulfillment, from which the non-Westerners are scrupulously excluded. No non-Western region is free from this exercise in rewriting, and, more importantly, no non-Western nation has yet to recover from the shock of the contact with the West even in these twilight years of the twentieth century: certainly not Japan, a third world copycat, the all-time economic wonderchild, that now threatens to become the hegemon of the twenty-first century.

Enter Japan and postmodernism.

Much of the news about Japan has been ominous of late. In the United States and Europe, we see an increasing number of reports on Japan's "agenda for world domination," which, according to a recent book by Michael Montgomery, have survived intact since the imperialist prewar years. Japan doesn't buy, and the Western manufacturers and politicians are outraged; Japan buys, and the media buzz loudly about the nouveau riche stealing off the treasures of the West. The *Wall Street Journal* prints an article about the American Japanologists turning into Japan-apologists bought off by the munificence of Japan-related foundations; William Safire of the *New York Times* complains about the discomforts of being in Tokyo, a city of knocked-down capitalism. The Japanese tourists are despised wherever they go for indecorous groupiness, although their spending is eagerly sought after. The bashing goes on unabated as if the outcry of the Yellow Peril a few generations ago was justifiable after all.

There might be some truth in some of this, but the overall perspective of such hocus-pocus is that of the same old Western hegemonism. It looks far more legitimate this time around, simply because the threat of Japan's economic power is now perceived to be real. Against such fearful self-projections, however, there is other news from Japan that indeed raises rather serious questions concerning the condition of Japanese society.

As the world marvels at Japan's dramatic growth in technology and production, its political and intellectual situations display many signs of stress and strain. Most educated Japanese, however, seem to be quite unconcerned with this development. There are extremely few oppositionists, and those few are scarcely heard anymore. The political intellectual arena itself, which was once—for generations before

and after the Pacific War—central to the country's cultural vigor, has been disturbingly quiet and vacant. Academia and journalism have remained uninvolved for years in issues that are urgent to many outside of Japan: Japan's role in the East-West confrontation; the gradual return of nationalism and Japanism; Japan's contributions to the third world, and the lack thereof; racism, emperorism, consumerism, stupefying anti-intellectualism, governmental depoliticization of culture, institutional defanging of criticism, diffusing of environmental programs, tattering of information and analysis, unmistakable try-outs in rewriting world history and geography with the first world *and* Japan as the joint master-narrators. Japan, in short, is feeling its own economic muscles and seems complacent at present, readying for its future move.

The talk of premodernism, modernism, non-modernism, and anti-modernism has been going on in Japan ever since the mid-nineteenth century. Like all the other non-Western nations for which the encounter with the West has been disastrous and traumatic, Japan had to face up to the chronopolitical condition as an urgent national thematic. Of course, there never was a unanimity, but the constant practice of locating the insular society on the international map of progress has at least provided it with a scheme of disagreements. They knew the extremes of ultranationalism and Westernizationism, and they were well acquainted with all the problematics of modernism. Many traits of postmodernism described by Lyotard, Baudrillard, Deleuze, and Guattari among others, have been at least glimpsed in Japan, though not certainly in the *postmodern* terms. When the news of Habermas-Lyotard controversy traveled to Japan, in short, there had already been a trained audience there who felt sufficiently *déjà vu* about the whole range of opinions. It is this near colonial encounter with the West that had offered to the Japanese a privileged position distant enough from modernism but close enough to it to be in the know.

Japan's economy plays an indispensable role in shaping the discourse. Whether its productive mode is late-stage capitalist or pre-modern capitalist, the group dynamics of Japanese social and economic formation has obviously worked to enable a highly efficient system to emerge. Of a sudden, a chronopolitical situation looks in-

significant to them in view of such an enormously conspicuous success: who cares whether it is *premodern* or *postmodern*, as long as people are well-fed, clothed, healthy, thoroughly socialized and strategically informed? Even critical consciousness appears immaterial in their view before such a visible and tangible success. Thus the nation's critical and intellectual space is now painlessly absorbed into its productive space, calming the discontented and silencing all the dissenters.

The clue to Japan's success in trade and exchange may not be found in a miracle at all. One readily recalls its long and repeated exposures to the superior outside civilizations before its encounter with the West: first Korea, then China and India, and then in the sixteenth century Portugal and Spain. Japan had opened and closed its ports to such external forces often enough to know how to connect its own temporality with different axes of time, progress, and power. Indeed Japan may never gain sufficient confidence to develop interiority and autonomy, to become the mover of its own fate, so far remaining decisive only in relation to the other more self-determined subjectivities. Japan's history is suffused with the sense of the dominant Other and its own marginality. And it has been forced to rewrite its history repeatedly. In the process it has somehow managed to represent itself, however imperfectly, to its own people in its own terms so that they might survive one more encounter. In a sense, the twentieth century's global integration has shown to Japan the culminating limits for accommodations, beyond which it needed to go no further. It may not have replicated modernism—despite the advice from enlightened historians such as Maruyama Masao. In the meantime, however, the West is becoming acutely aware of the shortcomings of modernity. And in this self-diagnosis of the West, Japan may have at last found its ghostly double.

Still, to confuse Japan's non-modernity with the West's "postmodernism" is perhaps a serious error. The two versions are differently foregrounded in history. Further, Japan's identification of itself with the first world might be a repeat performance of the archetypal colonial gesture, lusting after the coveted membership in the utopian sanctuary. Japan has lived through this process before in the mid-nineteenth century. Does it need to repeat it? Such a posture will re-

sult in justifiable suspicion and resentment in the rest of Asia. In this respect, the multivalence and uncertainty of postmodern gaming will ill serve Japan's equanimity. All the gibberish gushing from advertising copywriters and store designers (heroized appropriately enough in the crazed world of Tokyo consumerism) and their supposed apologists, such as Kurimoto Shinichiro or Tanaka Yasuo, is too tedious to be taken straight—except as a reminder that Japan's "postmodernism" seems indeed to totter at the very brink of lunacy and dissolving intelligence. Are we to follow/misread Deleuze and Guattari's prescription to a literal end?



Despite the doubts surrounding the "authenticity" of Japan's putative postmodernity, it should come as no surprise that the most successful latecomer to economic and social transformation, which literally incorporated the aporias of modernity as a condition for transformation, now signifies a "scene" or "space" that Lyotard has described as "that which in the modern poses the unrepresentable in the presentation itself . . . that which is concerned with new presentations, not purely for the pleasure of it, but the better to insist that the unrepresentable exists." Whether or not the several papers presented in this collection attest to the installation of Lyotard's vision in contemporary Japan and adequately account for and describe the performative dimensions of consumer culture, as described by Norma Field's reading of the novel, *Somehow, Crystal*, is, perhaps, less important than that they recognize the generally held conviction that Japan offers the occasion, in a way that may very well resist representation and narrativization, to examine the scene of this new imaginary.

In a certain sense, the decision to confront the scene of Japan's postmodernity represents a delayed reaction to the opportunity provided three decades ago by Alexandre Kojève in a footnote to the revised edition of his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, delivered first as a series of lectures in France between 1933 and 1939 at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes. Kojève observed after a trip to Japan (1959) that while Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* had in fact revealed the fundamental structures of life that make history possible, Japan seemed to offer the spectacle of a society that had for nearly

three centuries “experienced life at the ‘end of History.’” To live in the time of post-history—a condition Kojève believed to be as universal as the structure of desire, recognition, and action (work) that propelled history everywhere—meant acknowledging the abdication of philosophy’s claim to offer new truths about the human condition. “No doubt,” he wrote, “there were no longer in Japan any Religion, Morals or Politics in the ‘European’ or ‘historical’ sense of the word. But *Snobbery* in its pure form created disciplines negating the ‘natural’ or ‘animal’ given which in effectiveness far surpassed those that arose, in Japan or elsewhere, from ‘historical’ Action, that is, from the warlike and revolutionary Fights or from forced Work.” In a forecast currently shared by Japanese and foreign admirers of Japan’s postmodernity, especially those who see the scene as a more complete and perfected version of the model of modernization, Kojève announced that the interaction between the West and Japan, inaugurated first by the former in the form of imperial expansion, will result not in a “vulgarization” of the Japanese but rather in the “Japanization” of the West. The importance of this observation lies in Kojève’s willingness to imagine a universal condition of post-historical society reached first and most successfully by the Japanese. Yet he could be reassured, as are the epigoni who celebrate Japan as Number One, that the social order Japanese have evolved—the new age of culture heralded by the Japanese bureaucracy—is not only a universal condition to be followed by all societies but, more importantly, merely the last stage of a social model envisaged first by the modern West. Here, perhaps, is an “inversion” of the aborted project of modernity conceptualized by Takeuchi Yoshimi, as Naoki Sakai proposes, and the real meaning of his dim estimate announcing that “Japan is nothing.” For in this sense, Japanese society is simply a more complete version of the Western model which critics like Takeuchi feared would sustain the role played by Japan and the Orient as “suppliers” of recognition so necessary for Western identity.

Echoes of Kojève’s conception of Japan’s post-historic incarnation are audible throughout all of those efforts which signify the elimination of guarantees to secure stable meaning and which, therefore, compensate for the loss of grounding by appealing to the indeterminate, the undecidable, and the unmasking of all master codes and

narratives as fictions seeking to present what is invariably unrepresentable. To think beyond what is thinkable, and to live in a scene that must resist being represented, may qualify as the sign of the sublime but it also risks inviting the most dangerous forms of political inaction and abdicating even the possibility of resistance.

A number of the papers in this collection explore the status of resistance in the critique of modernity and its inevitable disappearance in the postmodern scene. Tetsuo Najita raises the question that a culture controlled by technology not only removes the principles of certainty that had guided people to embark upon meaningful and purposive political action but will result in the “possibility of mechanical reproduction, or the continuous reconstitution of things as they are, only more or less.” Alan Wolfe discerns in suicide the ultimate form of resistance still capable of escaping reification and co-optation. Marilyn Ivy, in her discussion of how critical texts in Japan are consumed by an insatiable consumer public the moment they are produced, entertains the possibility claimed by postmodern spokesmen like Yoshimoto Takaaki that consumption might be employed as a form of critical intervention, that deconstruction, even in late capitalist commodity cultures like Japan, might still reveal “new critical extremes in deconstructing hegemonic modernism—what Hal Foster has called a ‘postmodernism of resistance.’” Yet Norma Field’s reading of the consumerist novel about consumption, *Somehow, Crystal*, demonstrates that even the language used to discuss exchange and consumption forecloses the possibility of resistance in favor of passive acceptance. Ivy and Brett de Bary both show that deconstructionist texts of writers like Karatani Kōjin and Asada Akira, the most serious voices among postmodernist critics in Japan, risk being reduced to exceptionalist dimensions precisely because they will be consumed by Japanese consumers and thereby forfeit whatever critical possibility they may have promised. And Karatani himself concedes that his criticism of modern literature (presented by de Bary in her reading of Karatani’s *Kindai bungaku no kigen*), paralleling the work of younger writers such as Nakagami Kenji and Shimada Masahiko who seek to fashion new possibilities for literature, lost its “subversiveness” as “it spread and merged with the popular discourse of a full-blown consumer discourse”—that is, an endless consumption of literary and



critical artifacts. "It may be said," Karatani contends, "that the paradise of idiots has been revived, so to speak."

This "paradise of idiots" is the precinct of all of those critics of modernity in Japan who, now occupying the site of an entirely new space (what Karatani calls a "new phase of capitalism" and others the "scene of the postmodern"), continue to aim their critique against modernity on the mistaken belief that they have, like their predecessors before the war, overcome the modern. But these critics invariably recuperate and re-present the views of conservative nationalists to deliberately affirm the claims of the status quo, which must be read in the figure of Japan as Number One. What concerns Karatani most, as it did Takeuchi, is the contemporary Japanese penchant for eliminating the Other altogether and suppressing all signs of the heterogeneous or different for a new "science of the same," called "Discussions on Being Japanese" (*Nihonjinron*). Yet he quickly warns against a formal wordplay that privileges difference over identity within the terms of a philosophic discourse that avoids considering genuine exteriority or otherness which remains beyond the formal reading of the text. By referring to an otherness beyond the immediate boundaries of discourse, Karatani returns to the promise of the modern discourse on the social which marked the Japanese effort to steer a course between the "poetry of the past" and the "poetry of the future." One practitioner who might fit such specifications is Isozaki Arata who in "Of City, Nation, and Style" retraces the problematics posed by the Tsukuba Science City project. In so doing, he redefines the ideological terms and architectural expectations that have been drastically revised as a result of the new economic and political conditions of Japanese society.

The postmodern "scene" that emerges in these essays is not to be grasped simply as a permanent refusal which escapes received narrative representations only by narrativizing what Jean Baudrillard called the "implosion of meaning" or, worse, by envisioning a new division of opposites. Unfortunately, this is precisely the way it has been understood by many Japanese and foreign interpreters who have managed to recuperate, in the process, the very terms of cultural exceptionalism (*Nihonjinron*) which Japanese have always appealed to as a form of defensive reaction to distinguish Japan from the West,

and as the surest protection from the desire of the Other. Yet this response, a consequence of Japan's latecomer experience, was an effort to make Japan appear as something more than a pale double of the Western ratio, a lack that needed to be filled, made complete somehow. What this reflex produced was a conception of Japan as a signified, whose uniqueness was fixed in an irreducible essence that was unchanging and unaffected by history, rather than as a signifier capable of attaching itself to a plurality of possible meanings. It is this sense of a Japan as signified, unique and different from all other cultures, that is promoted by the most strident and, we should say, shrill spokesmen for Japan's postmodernity. Yet the invocation of Japan as signified discloses the same reactive and fearful impulse that propelled the earlier attempt to show that Japan was as full and complete as the Western self. The contemporary reproduction of this conception of Japan, now clothed as uniquely postmodern and therefore superior to the West, has resulted in the banal and scandalously racist fulminations of Kurimoto Shinichiro, who has presented Japan's economic success as the sign of ethnic uniqueness (and, thereby, reaffirmed Nakasone's own views concerning the baleful effects of American racial heterogeneity), and the absurdist conviction of Yoshimoto Takaaki that consumption constitutes a new form of resistance against the powers of the status quo—capitalism—as if to imply the possibility of rearticulating reification as a revolutionary force for our time, but managing only to unintentionally replay Marx's famous observation that history the second time around leads only to farce, without even the hint of irony. Even the more measured discourse of Asada, as presented here in his exposition of "infantile capitalism," risks recuperating the binary opposition of the West and Japan, modern and non-modern, that plagued the earlier discourse on modernity and which he is pledged to put under erasure. What seems clear from these several papers is that when any consideration of Japan's postmodernity is yoked to the larger discussion concentrating on Japan and the West, and when the postmodern "scene" in Japan is seen as merely another way to express Japan's cultural uniqueness in order to explain its superiority to the West, the discourse on the postmodern can never hope to be anything more than an inexpertly concealed attempt to cover up the aporias that

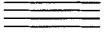
dogged the earlier modernist discourse, even as it seeks to fulfill the role of a simulacrum.

Which brings us to the question of the modern in the construction of Japan's postmodern "scene." What these papers show, above all else, is a general conviction that any effort to define the scene of Japan's postmodernity requires undertaking the dangerous task of re-tracing the meaning of the modern as the Japanese have confronted it since the fateful decision to transform society in the image of Western "enlightened" wealth and power. Nearly all of the papers consider the spectacle of the modern and how the Japanese have tried to extract the guarantee of stable meaning from a ceaselessly changing landscape and wrenching social transformations in daily life. Combined, they offer what Masao Miyoshi calls the "chronopolitical" dimension of the current controversy on postmodernism in Japan. The chronopolitical refers to the relationship between the premodern, modern, and postmodern or non-modern, according to Sakai's reading of Takeuchi's discourse. Yet a concern with chronopolitical relationships recalls the earlier Japanese discourse on modernism, and how it sought to resolve the problems of identity and difference induced by the introduction of new forms of knowledge, modes of production, and social relationships. The various ways this discourse attempted to relate these terms not only prefigured later discussions on postmodernity but bequeathed to them an unfinished agenda which still demands completion. As a result of this genealogy, the questions that still preoccupy Japanese today, in the search to define the space of the postmodern as a radical difference, echo the earlier discussions pre-possessed by the relationship of Japan's new modernity to the past, to the West of the present, and to a shapeless future. It is precisely because Japanese did not always accept the Western conceit of a privileged unilinear relationship attesting to succession and progressive development that the discourse on the modern was able to provide a range of sanctions for both resistance to the requirements of the "universal" ratio masking a Western imperial ethos and surrender to it. Hence, Miyoshi shows how received literary forms, derived from an oral tradition, were able to resist being totally incorporated into imported and imitated Western forms, while Karatani and de Bary demonstrate how, through "inversion," Japanese literary criticism be-

came the site of contestation. And J. Victor Koschmann discloses, in the often perilous itinerary followed by the thinker Maruyama Masao in the postwar years, the way Maruyama and his generation of “modernists” sought to constitute a modern subjectivity in Japan free from the domination of Western metaphysics as a condition for imagining the “intervention of the pragmatic will.” Comparing Maruyama’s conception of a subject that is no longer “hypostatized” or “essentialized” to Richard Rorty’s “praxis-oriented form of social engineering,” Koschmann sees in Maruyama’s discourse a still productive alternative to Western theories of subject-centeredness and a lasting reminder of the earlier modernist project. In this connection Ōe Kenzaburō remains the eloquent modernist spokesman who has consistently resisted aspects of postmodernist theories as they have traveled to Japan.

By the same measure, Asada Akira reads the prewar Kyoto philosopher Nishida Kitaro, whose conception of the “topos of nothingness” (*mu no basho*) became the ground for “denying the self” altogether and establishing the “place of emptiness.” Accordingly, Nishida “regarded the imperial court” as the occupant of this “place of extreme nothingness,” empty and insubstantial yet capable of operating as a whole that ceaselessly incorporates the parts in the interest of harmony. Asada is convinced that this image derived from the prewar Kyoto school is currently serving in the capacity of an enabling principle to promote the reactionary conservatism of contemporary Japanese political society. This argument, as Tetsuo Najita shows, was at the heart of the writer Mishima Yukio’s later (1960s) denunciation of contemporary society and his desperate call to revive imperial sovereignty before Japan lost all cultural mastery. Finally, H. D. Harootunian argues that we have in the figure of Takeuchi Yoshimi and a number of Japanese thinkers an ambiguous silhouette of intellectuals who accepted Japan’s modern status and rejected the spurious claims of returning to a premodern tradition. Nevertheless, Takeuchi sought to envisage a realm that was neither modern (West) nor premodern (Orient), capable of simultaneously resisting being incorporated by the past and absorbed by the present in order to imagine a future free from the constraints of both. Their effort resembles the “chance” which, according to Stephen Melville, “would then

be to know” themselves “as living within quotation marks and not thereby ceasing to live.” Japan’s chance and risk, Melville concludes, is “to live between itself—refusing to find itself in the embrace of the postmodern even as it poses the possibility of a movement beyond modernism.”



Most papers collected in this book were originally written for a workshop organized by a group of scholars—mainly Japanologists—in the spring of 1987. With the help of the Social Science Research Council, The University of Chicago, Cornell University, and the University of California, San Diego, the participants met in Boston and later separately in Chicago and Ithaca to discuss the papers. The Japanese version of the collection was published in a special issue of *Gendai shiso* in December 1987, and the *South Atlantic Quarterly* published the English version in the Summer 1988 issue. The papers by Isozaki Arata and Ōe Kenzaburō were added for this book with the belief that the practitioners—one in architecture and the other in fiction—would expand the scope of discussion so far limited to academic scholars. We are grateful to Jonnathan Arac and Michael Ryan for participating in the workshop as discussants. We express our debt to Stephen Melville who not only commented on the papers but also wrote a paper himself, which serves here as a postscript. Knowing how difficult it is to be an outsider, we indeed appreciate his assuming the role of the Other during this conference. Finally, we thank Melissa Lentricchia and Emily White of SAQ, Cathie Brettschneider of Princeton University Press, and Reynolds Smith of Duke University Press for their assistance that has been well beyond their usual territory of performance.

