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娘 rrespondence I.

Dear O,

Tokyo, January 13, 2002

Occidentals like me, children of Roman women raped by the Burgondes, Visigoths and Ostrogoths, through a rich culture of pagan orgies that nearly a millennium of

Christendom only further ignited; Speak, it is not to be forgotten, a language of merchants, of politicians, of cheaters, and of sophists.

Twenty-six letters accomplished there an alphabet without error or absence, in which the cold efficacy is not without recollection of its original nature: To commerce.

If the first known writing is the Sumerian cuneiform script, it is in the Cananeene merchant towns of Ougarit and Byblos that the twenty-two letters of the Phoenician alphabet from which descended the Latin, hence European script, was established.

Only one aim: To commerce on the Mediterranean.

Meticulous language that is written as you align numbers -- isn't it sometimes said in English that one "deciphers" a message? -- in spite of a grammar that meanwhile permits rich poetry.

If in French there are three accepted ways to write the vocable "O": "o", "au", and "eau", (it must be said in passing what a beauty is the French word "eau"; what a nuance in three letters of which none is pronounced alone in the same manner that they will be read once united to form the nuance itself: l'eau), in Japanese there are at least thirty-seven ways to write "O", and that is short for Japan. Language of twenty-six letters that can nevertheless write without difficulty any Japanese words in a manner that a youth may read without deformation, while the Japanese who dispose of a double syllabary of seventy-one letters coupled with thousands of kanji are unable by using them to pronounce my name without transforming it.

Latin languages: languages of merchants, languages of poet-merchants, languages of sophist-merchants.

Distant at least in this, the Occidental affirms where the Japanese infirms himself: misunderstood encounters between a commercialist who might know how to sell without knowing why and a consumer who, without knowing why, might not be able to say no.

娘 rrespondence II.

Belle,

Tokyo, January 23, 2002

A lonely promenade this afternoon in the 新宿御苑 park.

Accompanying you in thought, languor, lying in the short brown grass, blonde, tobacco,

rough as a beast's skin, the dry scalp of mother nature.

Face raised, utter blue.

In the distance, greedy clouds brazen color, with which it is said the shell divers of the 和* country tattooed their bodies to frighten the marine monsters; the clench of wind, constipated from rain, cumulated cumulous.

Did you know that Marco Polo named Japan "Cipango" in his book (testimony), which Christopher Columbus also had in his caravel?

Cipango, an island filled with gold and marvelous treasures, where Marco Polo no doubt never set foot.

Therefore, this name resounds, as Zanzibar under the feather of Arthur.

Doubtless, by the way he speaks it, Arthur: "I will never leave, neither for Zanzibar, neither for elsewhere." (letter, fifth of November, 1887).

Recently, I left toward 箱根, a region at the foot of Mt. Fuji, beside a lake.

I am reminded, four or five years ago I saw a picture of that lake, of that mountain, and of that scarlet red arch: it is in seeing it that the idea of coming to Cipango first arrived to me. Tenacious and sudden.

I had forgotten this, a little bit. But as I came to the foot of Fuji I rediscovered this image, and I have walked inside of it.

An unexpected feeling to have accomplished, something.

On a museum ticket, I show you this picture.

Close by,

*Ancient Chinese name given to Japan (2000 years ago)

娘 rrespondence III.

Dear Maurice:

Tokyo, August 20, 2001

It is hot here. Ordinarily, the exterior of the body is cooler than within, and especially, less humid. But in this period of the Japanese summer it is not the case. This hot and humid air, like urine, envelops the body solarly. Licking the skin, in absence of

sensation: impossible to say where are the limits of the body. The summer is at the same time on, in, and under my skin, that from this fact loses part of its signification to “be skin”. That is all I can say about that.

Japanese women are perched on stiletto talons, high and thin. A certain complex of smallness might be the reason for it, meanwhile there is perhaps something else. Most of them have feet, calves, from the extremity of the legs to the beginning of the thighs, just above the knees, damaged or bruised by incessant shocks, as these thin shoes don't protect them at all. Their legs are strong and hard from daily walking “on tip-toes” and corns appear in places of constant friction. Their feet take the shape of the Occidental aesthetic's constraint, twisted, swollen: it is a woman's foot. Little by little, the throbbing idea comes to me that these stiletto talons, most of the time fine and narrow, hung under the Achilles heel, represent well “the actual state” of Japanese women. Judged on these points, long as these legs they don't have but feel they must invent for themselves, they have as a base these fragile batons that permanently give them the demeanor of collapsing. The appearance of falling is, after all, maybe part of the excitement these shoes produce, or are supposed to produce, among men: something about torture, forced unbalance, forced pity, almost commensurate as these shoes make the women, or men sometimes, who wear them, limping and forcibly fragile, prey: upon the opening of a hunt, under the hegemony of perversion.

We know that what is beautiful, fragile and crippled, is perceived as an appeal to whither, to deny, to break, and we also know the crudity of sex finds its reason or its echo in these definitions. Less and less in contact with the ground, searching to flee, or maybe to refrain from it, the Japanese women perched on these one centimeter square bases in this country where earthquakes are frequent, tragic, give a metaphorical vision adapted to this post-war Japan that remains post.

In friendship,

Morice

娘 rrespondence IV.

Dear Dominique,

Tokyo, June 10, 2002

Japanese are sleeping.

At the seam, pedestrian's passage

At the zones of ebb tide, of the crowd, there where sometimes the nervous stream of displacements bring them immobile as in a shock, because in peace for some minutes, in a bus or on a train, Japanese are sleeping.

It has always appeared to me that they do more than rest, heads tipped by their own weight, heavy cheeks, disabused heroes of tiresome modernities. Propped on obstacles that serve as supports, it is really the drowsiness that surprises them, suspends them. Rocking with the swells of the finally accepted constraints. Pitching with the regular disillusion, by the rubbing of their intimacy with those of others, always numerous, they are sent to sleep, their spirits glossed, peaceful with their drowned faces.

The great Kabuki master Nakamura Tomijuro is supposed to have said "You should never reveal tiredness or effort, because the art of acting must be similar to the clothing of the celestial creators: with invisible seams."

The seams of modern Japan are visible, and its creators have only celestial reflection of the human condition's infinite tragedy, daily and unnoticed as the beauty of a pool of water.

Another echo maybe of what they call here "monono aware" (the poignant beauty of things) and that Christine Buci-Glucksmann called "new Icarism" in her book "The Aesthetic of Time in Japan".

The time to sleep.

I think I am remembering that Merleau-Ponty sewed eroticism in a collar that yawns; in the same way I voluntarily admit finding immanence in the ringed-eye faces, the abused foreheads and the tired spines of this modern folk of Amaterasu.

In friendship,

娘 rrespondence V.

Hello Pierre,

Tokyo, June 26, 2001

Here are some words.

You had told me that Japan "doesn't please" you.

I must acknowledge that it pleases me more and more.

The light of the streets in evening is quite particular, the materials used here, which proceed until the infinity of the banal, reflected in a strange manner, soft, absent, almost incredible.

The form of the streets "make" sculpture.

Something proportional.

To what . . . I don't know exactly.

There are a lot of earthquakes here, as you know.

That has consequences for urbanism: houses don't touch each other, they skirt each other.

It is without a doubt a precaution; if a house falls apart, its neighbor inevitably does not.

Moreover, movement is possible when separated.

This forms some very beautiful places: Slits between houses, interstice, houses like spread legs.

These spaces are truly sculptural.

Too narrow for one to pass through, too wide for one to forget, too practical for one to discard.

Some bitter herbs, doubtless respected in this Asian country like in many others, end up growing there, inaccessibly.

Most astonishing or logical (maybe it's the same), is that it appears to me that it goes with Japanese people as with their houses: a space is to be found in between them that makes one guess, a rumbling.

In friendship,

娘 rrespondence VI.

My Dear Morice,

Tokyo, December 6, 2001

Happy to receive your writings the other day.

Ah my friend, master, those of the Japanese don't have the inflated curves of Occidental women, nor the bolemic aggressivity of the libertine roundness; more than some

inevitable hills, it is a field where you are seeking something.

They are plain, hardly can the eye catch their presence nor the hand contain their scarcity; but the tension of the skin, its prude opening to those tentative to reach it, make this, almost nothing, far more than opulence.

Just a depression, nothing more than a thickness, but what can hardly be found, one hardly tries to find.

The Nippon breast: one suspects it.

The eyes: I am still too involved with them to speak with you about it.

But of course, to speak of it one escapes the brutality, avoiding the simple crudity of flesh. This, without any recourse to the text, nor discourse, is what would otherwise make it disappear.

"Suck the grapes, but by grace, don't speak about it."

You know as I do, this discomfort that submerges you when suddenly you hear yourself: being suddenly so far from truth at the very time when you were walking on a serene path with it as the destination.

(By chance, the writing in Japan is not speaking, nor discoursing; it is unto itself. Writing or drawing, is moreover the same verb, the same nuance: in Japanese: 書きます)

Warmly,

Maurice

娘 rrespondence VII.

Oliver,

Kyoto, August 14, 2001

Today I climbed a mountain Northwest of Kyoto, 大山 “daisen” (high mountain), pinnacling at about 1,730 meters. A young mountain geologically speaking, its flanks abrupt as those of a young lady, astonishing, it knocks your air out.

“だいせん” is covered with ancient Shinto shrines at its foot, called “jinja”, surrounded by old stones, graves with illegible inscriptions, green moss climbing on the base of enormous and centenarian trees; everywhere, the sound of water drenching everything, inundate decor.

And sometimes while contemplating “beautiful” stones spewn from the depths of ages returned (or is it me who goes?), I was seized by immanence, “silence of being”.

The Temple of Ogamiyama, at the edge of an endless path of moist steps, as some legs opening on an elusive, the “Origin of the World” of Courbet, a “zip” of Newman, appeared, made of grey wood polished by fingers you can only notice by the matter they took away: Caressing, touching, hitting maybe.

“Then I laid on grass, skull resting on the plain stone and eyes upon the Milky Way, strange gap of astral sperm and celestial urine through the cranial vault of constellations: This opening failure at the top of the sky, apparently formed of ammonia vapor become brilliant into immensity – into the empty space where they are torn apart as a rooster`s crow in full silence – an egg, a poked eye, or my dazzled skull sticking to the stone, which recycles into infinity symmetrical images. Disheartened.” (p. 136, History of the Eye, by George Bataille).

And in the depths of all this forest, so pure it decays, an enormous and bulging bell, that after rinsing your fingers with fresh water you strike with a horizontal beam, to ring forth its empty sound, like a mysterious and divine clitoris willing to yell.

I stayed open-mouthed.

Say hello to Michel for me,

娘 rrespondence VIII.

Dear Maurice,

Tokyo, June 25, 2002

The “sense of duty” is effectively the private idol of Nippon`s consciousness, that at every hour you guess, impeccable and silent.

Far from having the biding brightness of an order, the imperative frankness of the injunction one obeys, it is rather this personal intuition that obliges one to do something.

No other master nor terse authority invests within, the “sense of duty” is formed by what germs from society in the hollow of one’s intention, and which from there constrains.

“Every gain of civilization for society is achieved at the price of a great reduction in individual freedom” said Stephan Zweig. Here is Japan, absolutely civilized, enclosed loops, into its island, onto its natives.

Now if the foundation of Latin thought, then European, until Sade, Diderot, or even Stephan Zweig, essentially entails the duty of saying “no” (it is there that resounds for us the meaning of the word, freedom), those from the Nippon society seem to have a “duty to say yes”.

In some way, if “K” of Kafka had been Japanese, he would have no doubt accepted his culpability.

Thus, from the divergence of intentions in these two cultures arise inevitable incomprehension, inexhaustible, feeding in turn their mutual fascinations.

I think that by saying “no”, the individual shows he will never be a cooperative tool (what society of course, by nature, wishes of him), for in our industrial era horror is “produced” by assembly line, as when German fathers sorted teeth in 1943.

Japanese people, with a barely hidden inflection of pride, say “がまんする” (我慢), which can be almost translated as “restrain oneself”: Yes, but until where should one accept being “released from oneself”, to not be oneself, to become in a sense inhuman? And how not to be astonished at understanding that they seem to see there salvation . . .

At least in this, the “sur moi”* of the Yamato zealots is without doubt among the most frightening ghosts “modern” society had birthed.

In deepest friendship,

Morice.

* Lacan`s psychoanalytical term.

娘 rrespondence IX.

Dearest O,

Tokyo, February 3, 2002

When Japanese speak in the first person, they generally end their affirmations with a preposition like が or けれども or けど, which can be translated as "but"

"But"

What a beauty is just that attitude, anticipation of an entire culture,
an archipelago`s language at the end of Asia,
where one affirms nothing without a certain shyness,
at the end of every sentence adding this nothing
which retracts everything.

The Occidental that I am will always wait for a continuation to this "but":

But what? . . . but nothing.

Just suspended.

An undertow of meaning beneath what had just been presented, a silent suspension
there where you rejoin the Other;
suddenly do not rejoin him really, refrain from it;
isolation of Japanese, solitude of deference.

Speaking without ego: is it communicating?

How not to think of Samuel Beckett, who wrote in "The Unnamable":

"Yes, as in my life is it to be called like this, there have been three things, the
impossibility of keeping quiet, the impossibility of speaking, and the solitude, physical
of course; with this I have unraveled."

Conversations in which one occupied the space of it,
circumvented dialogues, surrounding exchange.

While the Latin self who comes from the Occident (symbolized here by 洋, a kanji which means "ocean"*) is by nature a citizen of the Agora, the Japanese, under hegemony of the elder, uses apology, and threads this spontaneity that the Occidental legitimizes.

It is sometimes said that French is the language of diplomats: The French speaker who has manners and needs to respond to aggression can choose to use politeness to the bitter end (which via politeness masks the attack and to the bitter end deploys it).

Japanese would be an Emperor`s language: formal, more than polite, it is from afar that it is spoken and concealed even as it is heeded, as Murasaki Shikibu behind the *paravent*.

Warmly,

*The place where doubtless the first contacts with Portugese ships occurred, a desert place that is ocean nevertheless, wandered over by winds and mobile unto horror: how better to mean the Other (the one who speaks another language).

娘 rrespondence X.

Hello Pierre,

Tokyo, September 17, 2001

Little by little, the sound that came clumsily pounding at my temples before wandering outside, as a drunkard removed from his empty bottle, is transformed into a language.

Japanese makes its significant inroads toward me, from a still hollow significant is birthed the full signifier that I could only suspect until now.

But what is more beautiful than suspicion? Learning finally, is a horror . . . to concur what one could only suspect, "inhale" a flower instead of presuming its perfume – which one cannot be invaded by without violating it.

But to suspect also, isn't it necessary to bring this doubt to knowledge? "Know" sufficiently little that you may be "empowered" to suspect in return.

To only presume the perfume instead of feeling its rapture, at least for an instant, would it not be a crime?

To not violate, is it not an offense to beauty? And violate, is it not to whither the possibility to again offend beauty?

And what to say of experience, the murmur of existence, the essence of all representation and truth of art?

Voila. That's why maybe, even if about flowers or languages, one must advance oneself until suspicion, to delight the lightness, then despairingly seize the cause until it is stifled.

It is the mystery of life. What art can say. Should say. But how to live with such a lack of silence?

Hoping to read you,

Eric