

Tokyo, February 3, 2002

Dearest O,

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,

Eric

*The place where doubtless the first contacts with Portuguese 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).