

ROLAND
BARTHES



EMPIRE OF SIGNS

Translated by Richard Howard

The Three Writings

Bunraku dolls are from three to five feet high.

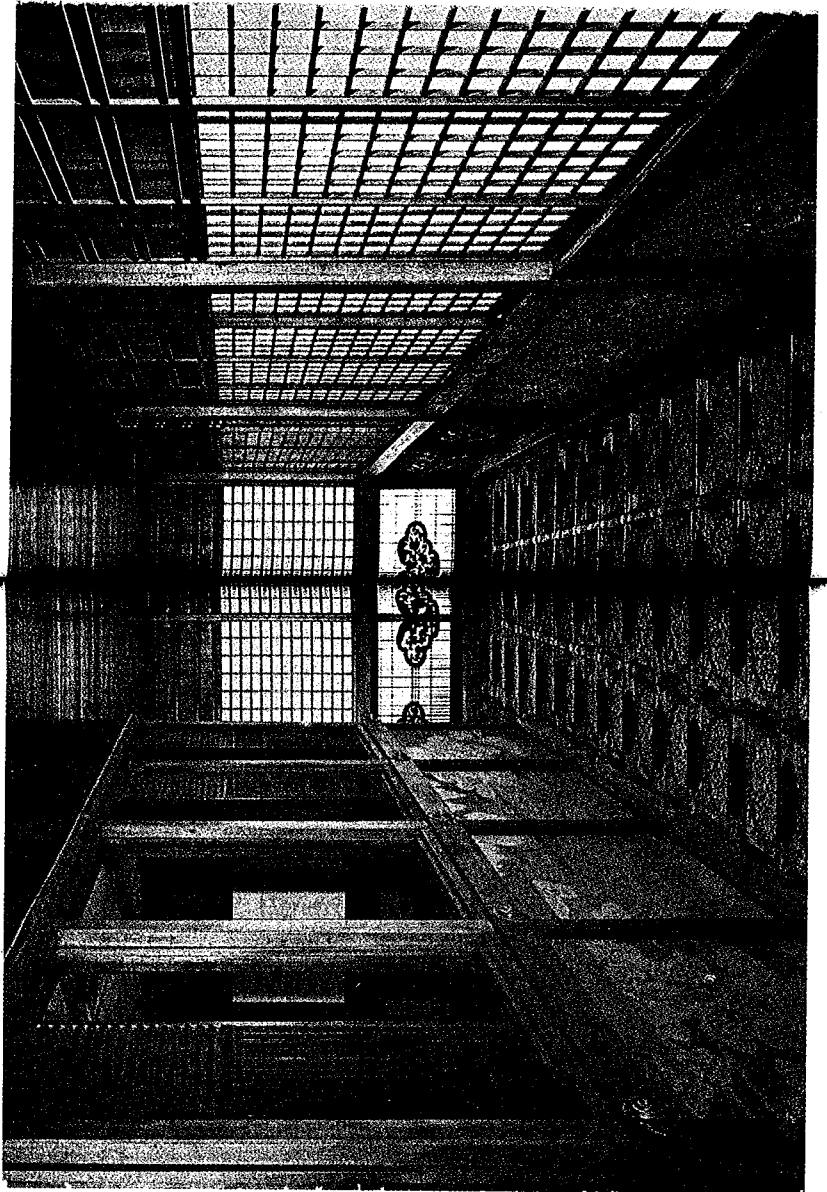
They are little men or women with movable hands, feet, and mouths; each doll is moved by three quite visible men who surround it, support it, accompany it; the leader works the upper part of the doll and its right arm; his face is apparent, smooth, bright, impassive, cold as "a white onion that has just been washed" (Basho); the two helpers wear black, a piece of cloth conceals their faces; one, in gloves but with the thumb showing, holds a huge pair of shears with which he moves the doll's left arm and hand; the other, crawling, supports the body, and is responsible for the doll's walking. These men proceed along a shallow trench which leaves their bodies visible. The setting is behind them, as in our theater. To one side, a dais receives the musicians and the speakers; their role is to *express* the text (as one might squeeze a fruit); this text is half spoken, half sung, punctuated with loud plectrum strokes by the samisen players, so that it is both measured and impassioned, with violence and artifice. Sweating and motionless, the speakers are seated behind little lecterns on which is set the huge script which they vocalize and whose vertical characters you can glimpse from a distance, when they turn a page of their libretto; a triangle of stiff canvas, attached to their shoulders like a bat's

wing, frames their face, which is subject to all the throes of the voice.

Bunraku thus practices three separate writings, which it offers to be read simultaneously in three sites of the spectacle: the puppet, the manipulator, the vociferant: the effected gesture, the effective gesture, and the vocal gesture. The voice: real stake of our modernity, special substance of language, which we try to make triumph everywhere. Quite the contrary, *Bunraku* has a *limited* notion of the voice; it does not suppress the voice, but assigns it a very clearly defined, essentially trivial function. In the speaker's voice are gathered together: exaggerated declamation, tremolos, a falsetto tonality, broken intonations, tears, paroxysms of rage, of supplication, of astonishment, indecent pathos, the whole cuisine of emotion, openly elaborated on the level of that internal, visceral body of which the larynx is the mediating muscle. Yet this excess is given only within the very code of excess: the voice moves only through several discontinuous signs of the tempestuous; expelled from a motionless body, triangulated by the garment, connected to the text which, from its desk, guides it, strictly punctuated by the slightly out-of-phase (and thereby even impertinent) strokes of the samisen player, the vocal substance remains written, discontinuous, coded, subject to an irony (if we may strip this word of any caustic meaning); hence, what the voice ultimately externalizes is not what it carries (the "sentiments") but itself, its own prostitution; the signifier cunningly does nothing but turn itself inside out, like a glove.

Without being eliminated (which would be a way of censuring it, i.e., of designating its importance), the voice is thus set aside (scenically, the speakers occupy a lateral dais). *Bunraku* gives the voice a counterpoise, or better still, a countermove: that of gesture. This gesture is double: emotive

voice
DESCRIPTION.



Turn the image upside down:

nothing more, nothing else, nothing



The Oriental transvestite does not copy Woman but signifies her: ²¹⁴ not bogged down in the model, but detached from its signified; ^{BTM} Femininity is presented to read, not to see; translation, not trans-
 gression; the sign shifts from the great female role to the fifty-year-
 old paterfamilias: he is the same man, but where does the
 metaphor begin?

215: Best
 260/270/280/290
 300/310/320
 330/340/350
 360/370/380
 390/400/410
 420/430/440
 450/460/470
 480/490/500
 510/520/530
 540/550/560
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 780/790/800
 810/820/830
 840/850/860
 870/880/890
 900/910/920
 930/940/950
 960/970/980
 990/1000/1010

ALIVE!
MRS. BROWNE
PARANOID
SEPARATION
OF ACTION
AND STRINGS

gesture on the level of the doll (audiences weep at the mistress-doll's suicide), transitive action on the level of the manipulators. In our theatrical art, the actor pretends to act, but his actions are never anything but gestures: on stage, nothing but theater, yet a theater ashamed of itself. Whereas *Bunraku* (this is its definition) separates action from gesture: it shows the gesture, lets the action be seen, exhibits simultaneously the art and the labor, reserving for each its own writing. The voice (and there is then no risk in letting it attain the excessive regions of its range) is accompanied by a vast volume of silence, in which are inscribed, with all the more finesse, other features, other writings. And here there occurs an unheard-of effect: remote from the voice and almost without mimicry, these silent writings, one transitive, the other gestural, produce an exaltation as special, perhaps, as the intellectual hyperesthesia attributed to certain drugs. Language being not purified (*Bunraku* is quite unconcerned with ascesis), but one might say collected to one side of the acting, all the impotinate substances of Western theater are dissolved: emotion no longer floods, no longer submerges, but becomes a reading; the stereotypes disappear without, for all that, the spectacle collapsing into originality, "lucky finds." All this connects, of course, with the alienation effect Brecht recommends. That distance, regarded among us as impossible, useless, or absurd, and eagerly abandoned, though Brecht very specifically located it at the center of his revolutionary dramaturgy (and the former no doubt explains the latter), that distance is made explicable by *Bunraku*, which allows us to see how it can function: by the discontinuity of the codes, by this caesura imposed on the various features of representation, so that the copy elaborated on the stage is not destroyed but somehow broken, striated, withdrawn from that

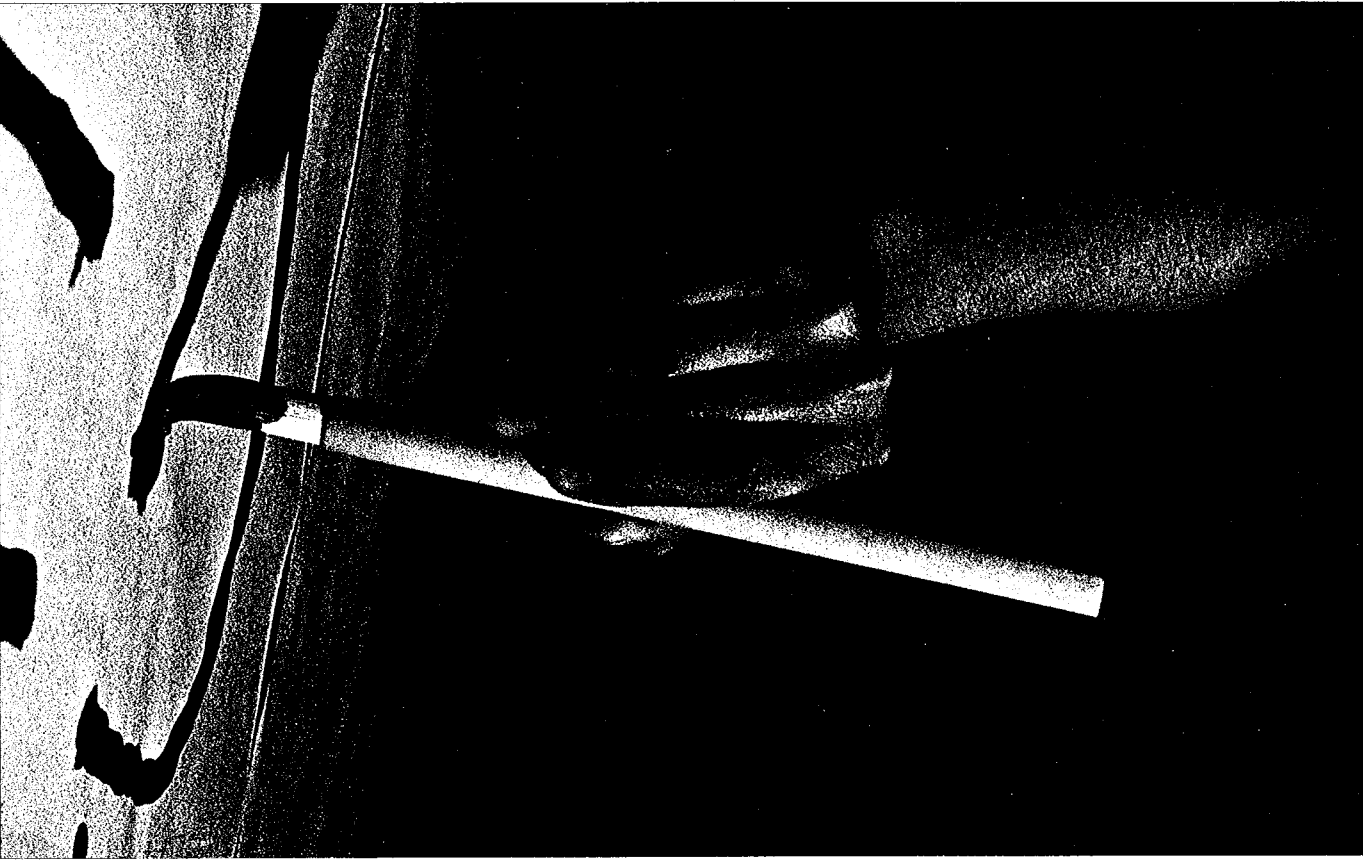
ALIAS
MRS. BROWNE
PARANOID
SEPARATION
OF ACTION
AND STRINGS

ALIVE!
MRS. BROWNE
PARANOID
SEPARATION
OF ACTION
AND STRINGS

metonymic contagion of voice and gesture, body and soul, which entraps our actors.

A total spectacle but a divided one. *Bunraku* of course—^{1/2} excludes improvisation: to return to spontaneity would be to return to the stereotypes which constitute our "depth." As Brecht had seen, here citation rules, the sliver of writing, the fragment of code, for none of the action's promoters can account in his own person for what he is never alone to write. As in the modern text, the interweaving of codes, references, discrete assertions, anthropological gestures multiplies the written line, not by virtue of some metaphysical appeal, but by the interaction of a combinatoric which opens out into the entire space of the theater: what is begun by one is continued by the next, without interval.

ALIVE!
MRS. BROWNE
PARANOID
SEPARATION
OF ACTION
AND STRINGS



Writing, then, rises from the plane of inscription because it results from a recoil and a non-regardable discrepancy (not from a face-to-face encounter; inciting from the first not what is seen but what can be traced) which divides the support into corridors as though to recall the plural void in which it is achieved—it is merely *detached* on the surface, it proceeds to weave itself there, delegated from depths which are not deep toward the surface, which is no longer a surface but a fiber *written from beneath vertical to its upper surface* (the brush stands straight up in the palm)—the ideogram thereby returning to the column—tube or ladder—and taking its place there as a complex bar released by the monosyllable in the field of the voice: this column can be called an “empty wrist,” in which first appears as a “unique feature” the breath which passes through the hollowed arm, the perfect operation necessarily being that of the “concealed point” or of the “absence of traces.”

Philippe Sollers, *On Materialism*, 1969

Animate / Inanimate

Concerned with a basic animomy, that of *animate* / *inanimate*, *Bunraku* jeopardizes it, eliminates it without advantage for either of its terms. In the West, the puppet (Punch, for instance) is supposed to offer the actor the mirror of his goatry; it animates the inanimate, but the better to manifest its degradation, the unworthiness of its inertia; caricature of "life," it thereby affirms life's moral limits and claims to confine beauty, truth, emotion within the living body of the actor, who, however, makes this body a lie. *Bunraku*, however, does not sign the actor, it gets rid of him for us. How? Precisely by a certain idea of the human body, which the inanimate substance here controls with infinitely more rigor and inspiration than the animate body (endowed with a "soul"). The Western (naturalist) actor is never beautiful; his body seeks to be a physiological essence and not a plastic one: it is a collection of organs, a musculature of passions, each of whose devices (voices, faces, gestures) is subject to a kind of gymnastic exercise; but by a strictly bourgeois reversal, although the actor's body is constructed according to a division of passional essences, it borrows from physiology the alibi of an organic unity, that of "life": it is the actor who is the puppet here, despite the

connective tissue of his acting, of which the model is not the carass but only visceral "truth."

The basis of our theatrical art is indeed much less the illusion of reality than the illusion of totality: periodically, from the Greek *choros* to bourgeois opera, we conceive lyric art as the simultaneity of several expressions (acted, sung, mimed), whose origin is unique, indivisible. This origin is the body, and the totality insisted on has for its model the body's organic unity: Western spectacle is anthropomorphic; in it, gesture and speech (not to mention song) form a single tissue, conglomerated and lubrified like a single muscle which makes expression function but never divides it up: the unity of movement and voice produces the one who acts; in other words, it is in this unity that the "person" of the character is constituted, i.e., the actor. As a matter of fact, beneath his "living" and "natural" externals, the Western actor preserves the division of his body and, thereby, the nourishment of our fantasies: here the voice, there the gaze, there again the figure are eroticized, as so many fragments of the body, as so many fetishes. The Western puppet, too (as is quite apparent in our Punch and Judy), is a fantasmal by-product: as a reduction, as a grim reflection whose adherence to the human order is ceaselessly recalled by a caricatural simulation, the puppet does not live as a total body, totally alive, but as a rigid portion of the actor from whom it has emanated; as an automaton, it is still a piece of movement, jerk, shock, essence of discontinuity, decomposed projection of the body's gestures; finally, as a doll, reminiscence of the bit of rag, of the genital bandage, it is indeed the phallic "little thing" ("das Kleine") fallen from the body to become a fetish.

It may well be that the Japanese puppet keeps something of this fantasmal origin; but the art of *Bunraku* imprints a

Inside / Outside

different meaning on it; *Bunraku* does not aim at "animating" an inanimate object so as to make a piece of the body, a scrap of a man, "alive," while retaining its vocation as a "part"; it is not the simulation of the body that it seeks but, so to speak, its sensuous abstraction. Everything which we attribute to the total body and which is denied to our actors under cover of an organic, "living" unity, the little man of *Bunraku* recuperates and expresses without any deception: fragility, discretion, sumptuousness, unheard-of nuance, the abandonment of all triviality, the melodic phrasing of gestures, in short the very qualities which the dreams of ancient theology granted to the redeemed body, i.e., impassivity, clarity, agility, subtlety, this is what the *Bunraku* achieves, this is how it converts the body-as-fetish into the lovable body, this is how it rejects the animomy of *animate / inanimate* and dismisses the concept which is hidden behind all animation of matter and which is, quite simply, "the soul."

WSP
Bunraku
Bunraku

Take the Western theater of the last few centuries;

its function is essentially to manifest what is supposed to be secret ("feelings," "situations," "conflicts"), while concealing the very artifice of such manifestation (machinery, painting, makeup, the sources of light). The stage since the Renaissance is the space of this lie: here everything occurs in an interior surreptitiously open, surprised, spied on, savored by a spectator crouching in the shadows. This space is theological—it is the space of Sin: on one side, in a light which he pretends to ignore, the actor, i.e., the gesture and the word; on the other, in the darkness, the public, i.e., consciousness. *Bunraku* does not directly subvert the relation of house and stage (though Japanese theaters are infinitely less confined, less enclosed, less weighed down than ours); what it transforms, more profoundly, is the motor link which proceeds from character to actor and which is always conceived, in the West, as the expressive means of an inwardness. We must recall that the agents of the spectacle, in *Bunraku*, are at once visible and impassive: the men in black busy themselves around the doll, but without any affectation of skill or of discretion and, one might say, without any paraded demagoguery; silent, swift, elegant, their actions are eminently transitive; operative, tinged with that mixture of strength and subtlety

② Page
F.M.C.

which marks the Japanese repertoire of gestures and which is a kind of aesthetic envelope of effectiveness; as for the plaster, his head is uncovered; smooth, bare, without makeup, which accords him a civil (not a theatrical) distinction, his face is offered to the spectators to read; but what is carefully, precisely given to be read is that there is nothing there to read; here again we come to that exemption of meaning (that exemption from meaning as well) which we Westerners can barely understand, since, for us, to attack meaning is to hide or to invert it, but never to "absent" it. With *Bunraku*, the sources of the theater are exposed in their enigma. What is expelled from the stage is hysteria, i.e., theater itself; and what is put in its place is the action necessary to the production of the spectacle (work is substituted for inwardness).

Hence it is futile to wonder, as certain Europeans do, if the spectator can ever forget the presence of the manipulators. *Bunraku* practices neither the occultation nor the emphatic manifestation of its means; hence it rids the actor's manifestation of any whiff of the sacred and abolishes the metaphysical link the West cannot help establishing between body and soul, cause and effect, motor and machine, agent and actor, Destiny and man, God and creature: if the manipulator is not hidden why—and how—would you make him into a God? In *Bunraku*, the puppet has no strings. No more strings, hence no more metaphor, no more Fate; since the puppet no longer apes the creature, man is no longer a puppet in the divinity's hands, the inside no longer commands the outside.

119 (B) EXTENSIVE FORCES
 COVERING THE MARCH FORCES

WORKS VS. INTERVENORS
 62

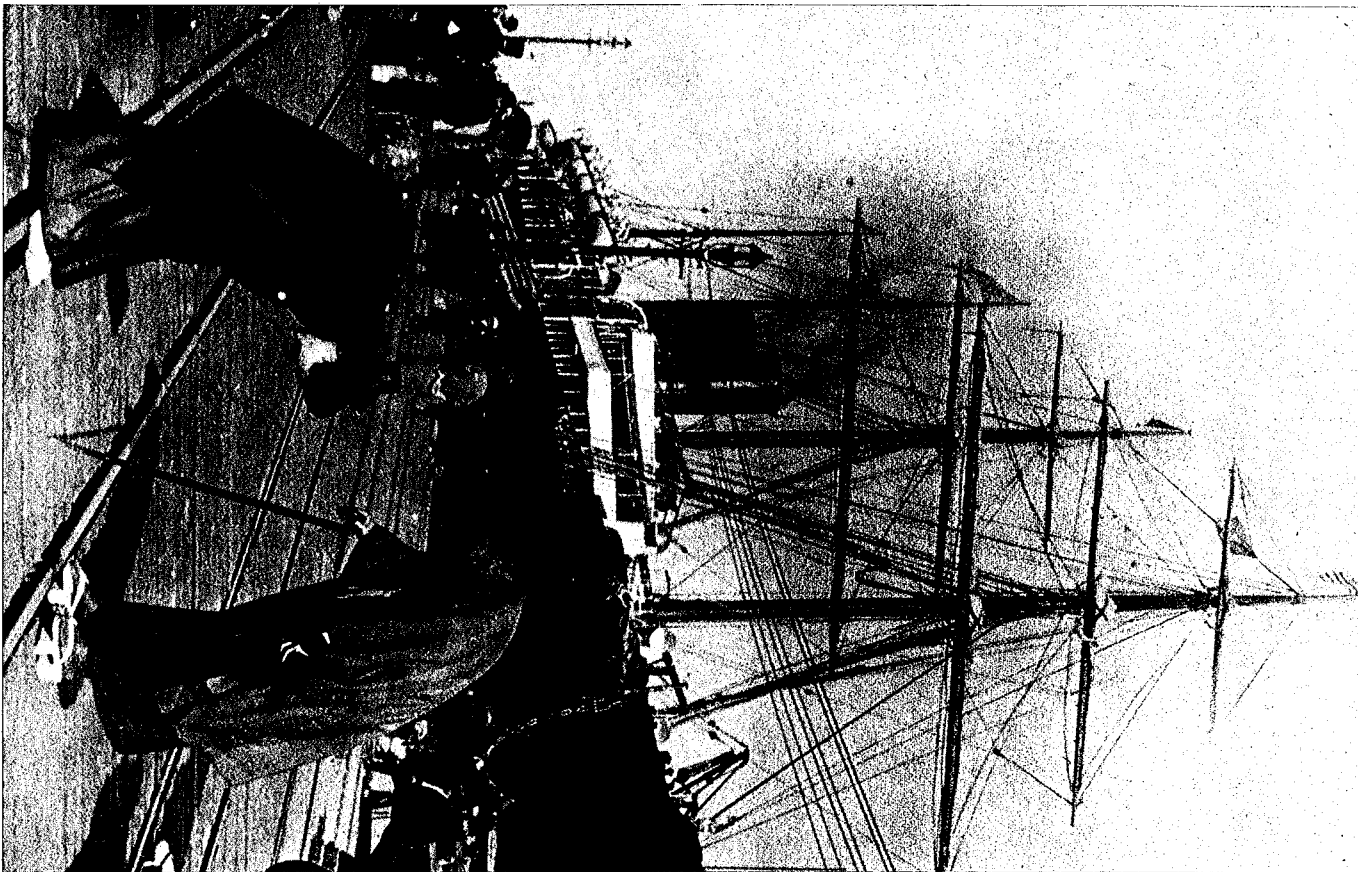
Boeing

Why, in the West, is politeness regarded with suspicion? Why does courtesy pass for a distance (if not an evasion, in fact) or a hypocrisy? Why is an "informal" relation (as we so greedily say) more desirable than a coded one?

Occidental impoliteness is based on a certain mythology of the "person." Topologically, Western man is reputed to be double, composed of a social, factitious, false "outside" and of a personal, authentic "inside" (the site of divine communion). According to this schema, the human "person" is that site filled by nature (or by divinity, or by guilt), girdled, closed by a social envelope which is anything but highly regarded: the polite gesture (when it is postulated) is the sign of respect exchanged from one plenitude to the other, across the worldly limit (i.e., in spite and by the intermediary of this limit). However, as soon as the "inside" of the person is judged respectable, it is logical to recognize this person more suitably by denying all interest to his worldly envelope: hence it is the supposedly frank, brutal, naked relation, stripped (it is thought) of all signalistics, indifferent to any intermediary code, which will best respect the other's individual value: to be impolite is to be true—so speaks (logically enough) our Western morality. For if there is indeed a human "person" (dense, emphatic, centered, sacred), it is

FORGOTTEN
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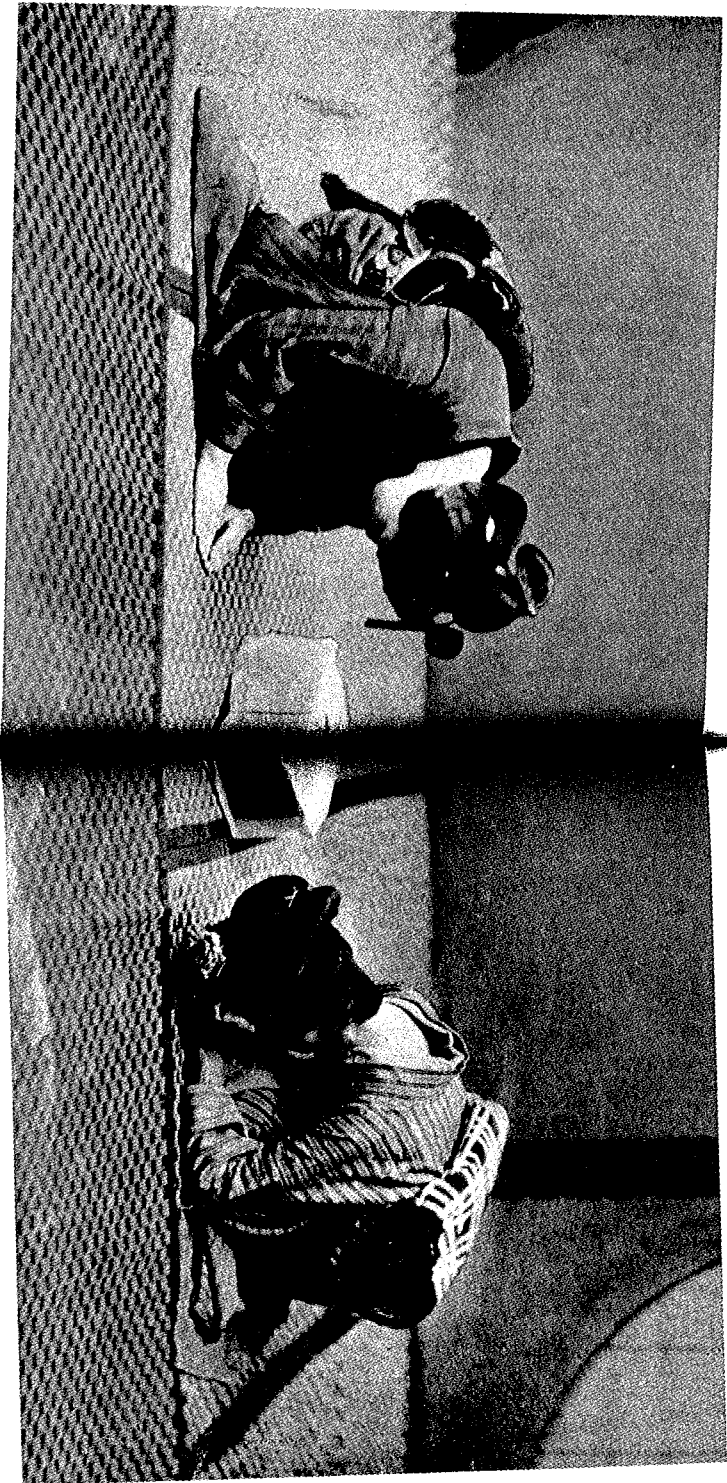
119 (B) EXTENSIVE FORCES
 COVERING THE MARCH FORCES



doubtless this person which in an initial movement we claim to "salute" (with the head, the lips, the body); but my own person, inevitably entering into conflict with the other's plenitude, can gain recognition only by rejecting all mediation of the factitious and by affirming the integrity (highly ambiguous, this word: physical and moral) of its "inside"; and in a second impulse, I shall reduce my salute, I shall pretend to make it natural, spontaneous, disincumbered, purified of any code: I shall be scarcely affable, or affable according to an apparently invented fantasy, like the Princess of Parma (in Proust) signaling the breadth of her income and the height of her rank (i.e., her way of being "full" of things and of constituting herself a person), not by a distant stiffness of manner, but by the willed "simplicity" of her manners: how simple I am, how affable I am, how frank I am, how much I am *someone* is what Occidental impoliteness says.

The other politeness, by the scrupulosity of its codes, the distinct graphism of its gestures, and even when it seems to us exaggeratedly respectful (i.e., to our eyes, "humiliating") because we read it, in our manner, according to a metaphysics of the person—this politeness is a certain exercise of the void (as we might expect within a strong code but one signifying "nothing"). Two bodies bow very low before one another (arms, knees, head always remaining in a decreed place), according to subtly coded degrees of depth. Or again (on an old image): in order to give a present, I bow down, virtually to the level of the floor, and to answer me, my partner does the same: one and the same low line, that of

Who is saluting whom?



The gift is alone:
it is touched
neither by generosity
nor by gratitude,
the soul does not contaminate it

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the ground, joins the giver, the recipient, and the stake of the protocol, a box which may well contain nothing—or virtually nothing; a graphic form (inscribed in the space of the room) is thereby given to the act of exchange, in which, by this form, is erased any greediness (the gift remains suspended between two disappearances). The salutation here can be withdrawn from any humiliation or any vanity, because it literally salutes *no one*; it is not the sign of a communication—closely watched, condescending and precautionary—between two autarchies, two personal empires (each ruling over its Ego, the little realm of which it holds the “key”); it is only the feature of a network of forms in which nothing is halted, knotted, profound. *Who is saluting whom?* Only such a question justifies the salutation, inclines it to the bow, the obeisance, and glorifies thereby not meaning but the inscription of meaning, and gives to a posture which we read as excessive the very reserve of a gesture from which any signified is inconceivably absent. *The Form is Empty*, says—and repeats—a Buddhist aphorism. This is what is expressed, through a practice of forms (a word whose plastic meaning and worldly meaning are here indissociable), by the politeness of the salutation, the bowing of two bodies which inscribe but do not prostrate themselves. Our ways of speaking are very vicious, for if I say that in that country politeness is a religion, I let it be understood that there is something sacred in it; the expression should be caressed so as to suggest that religion there is merely a politeness, or better still, that religion has been replaced by politeness.

hw
 proclama
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The Breach of Meaning

The haiku has this rather fantasmagorical property: that we always suppose we ourselves can write such things easily. We tell ourselves: what could be more accessible to spontaneous writing than this (by Buson):

*It is evening, in autumn,
 All I can think of
 Is my parents.*

The haiku wakens desire: how many Western readers have dreamed of strolling through life, notebook in hand, jotting down “impressions” whose brevity would guarantee their perfection, whose simplicity would attest to their profundity (by virtue of a double myth, one classical, which makes conception a proof of art, the other romantic, which attributes a premium of truth to improvisation). While being quite intelligible, the haiku means nothing, and it is by this double condition that it seems open to meaning in a particularly available, serviceable way—the way of a polite host who lets you make yourself at home with all your preferences, your values, your symbols intact; the haiku’s “absence” (we say as much of a distracted mind as of a landlord off on a journey) suggests subornation, a breach, in short the major

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everconscious, that of meaning. This precious, vital meaning, desirable as fortune (chance and money), the haiku, being without metrical constraints (in our translations), seems to afford in profusion, cheaply and made to order; in the haiku, one might say, symbol, metaphor, and moral cost almost nothing: scarcely a few words, an image, a sentiment—where our literature ordinarily requires a poem, a development or (in the genres of brevity) a chiseled thought; in short, a long rhetorical labor. Hence the haiku seems to give the West certain rights which its own literature denies it, and certain commodities which are parsimoniously granted. You are entitled, says the haiku, to be trivial, short, ordinary; enclose what you see, what you feel, in a slender horizon of words, and you will be interesting; you yourself (and starting from yourself) are entitled to establish your own notability; your sentence, whatever it may be, will enunciate a moral, will liberate a symbol, you will be profound: at the least possible cost, your writing will be filled.

The West moistens everything with meaning, like an authoritarian religion which imposes baptism on entire peoples; the objects of language (made out of speech) are obviously *de jure* converts: the first meaning of the system summons, metonymically, the second meaning of discourse, and this summons has the value of a universal obligation. We have two ways of sparing discourse the infamy of non-meaning (non-sense), and we systematically subject utterance (in a desperate filling-in of any nullity which might reveal the emptiness of language) to one or the other of these *significations* (or active fabrications of signs): symbol and reasoning, metaphor and syllogism. The haiku, whose propositions are always simple, commonplace, in a word *acceptable* (as we say in linguistics), is attracted into one or the other of these two empires of meaning. Since it is a "poem," we assign

it to that part of the general code of sentiments called "poetic emotion" (for us, Poetry is ordinarily the signifier of the "diffuse" of the "ineffable," of the "sensitive," it is the class of impressions which are unclassifiable); we speak of "concentrated emotion," of "sincere notation of a privileged moment," and above all of "silence" (silence being for us the sign of language's fulfillment). If one of their poets (Joko) writes:

*How many people
 Have crossed the Seta bridge
 Through the autumn rain!*

we perceive the image of fleeting time. If another (Basho) writes:

*I come by the mountain path.
 Ah! this is exquisite!
 A violet!*

it is because he has encountered a Buddhist hermit, the "flower of virtue"; and so on. Not one feature fails to be invested by the Western commentator with a symbolic charge. Or again, we seek at all costs to construe the haiku's tercet (its three verses of five, seven, and five syllables) as a syllogistic design in three tenses (rise, suspense, conclusion):

*The old pond:
 A frog jumps in:
 Oh! the sound of the water.*

(in this singular syllogism, inclusion is achieved by force: in order to be contained in it, the minor premise must leap into

the major). Of course, if we renounce metaphor or syllogism, commentary would become impossible: to speak of the haiku would be purely and simply to repeat it. Which is what one commentator of Basho does, quite innocently:

*Already four o'clock . . .
I have got up nine times
To admire the moon.*

"The moon is so lovely," he says, "that the poet gets up repeatedly to contemplate it at his window." Deciphering, normalizing, or tautological, the ways of interpretation, intended in the West to *pierce* meaning, i.e., to get into it by breaking and entering—and not to shake it, to make it fall like the tooth of that ruminant-of-the-absurd which the Zen apprentice must be, confronting his *koan*—cannot help failing the haiku; for the work of reading which is attached to it is to suspend language, not to provoke it: an enterprise whose difficulty and necessity Basho himself, the master of the haiku, seemed to recognize:

*How admirable he is
Who does not think "Life is ephemerad!"
when he sees a flash of lightning!*

Exemption from Meaning

The whole of Zen wages a war against the prevarication of meaning. We know that Buddhism baffles the fatal course of any assertion (or of any negation) by recommending that one never be caught up in the four following propositions: *this is A—this is not A—this is both A and not-A—this is neither A nor not-A*. Now this quadruple possibility corresponds to the perfect paradigm as our structural linguistics has framed it (*A—not-A—neither A nor not-A* [zero degree]—*A and not-A* [complex degree]); in other words, the Buddhist way is precisely that of the obstructed meaning: the very arcanum of signification, that is, the paradigm, is rendered *impossible*. When the Sixth Patriarch gives his instructions concerning the *mondo*, a question-and-answer exercise, he recommends, in order to confuse the paradigmatic functioning more completely, as soon as a term is posited, to shift toward its adverse term ("If, questioning you, someone interrogates you about non-being, answer with being. If you are questioned about the ordinary man, answer by speaking about the master, etc."), so as to make the mockery of the paradigm and the mechanical character of meaning all the more apparent. What is aimed at (by a mental technique whose precision, patience, refinement, and learning attest to how difficult Oriental thought regards the

The Written Face

W/ITTING
VS.
POWER/INK

② The theatrical face is not painted (made up), it is written. There occurs this unforeseen movement: though painting and writing share the same original instrument, the brush, it is still not painting which lures writing into its decorative style, into its flattered, caressing touch, into its representative space (as would no doubt have been the case with us—in the West the civilized future of a function is always its aesthetic ennoblement); on the contrary, it is the act of writing which subjugates the pictorial gesture, so that to paint is never anything but to *inscribe*. This theatrical face (masked in No, drawn in Kabuki, artificial in Bunraku) consists of two substances: the white of the paper, the black of the inscription (reserved for the eyes).

THE
THEATRICAL
FACE

② The white of the face seems to have as its function, not to denature the flesh tints or to caricature them (as with our clowns, whose white flour and greasepaint are only an incitation to daub the face), but exclusively to erase all anterior trace of the features, to transform the countenance to the blank extent of a matte stuff which no natural substance (flour, paste, plaster, or silk) metaphorically enlivens with a texture, a softness, or a highlight. The face is only: *the thing to write*; but this future is already written by the hand which has whitened the eyelashes, the tip of the nose, the cheek-

W/ITTING
VS.
GRA/SSING

bones, and given the page of flesh/its black limit of a wig compact as stone. The whiteness of the face, not lustrous but heavy, as disturbingly dense as sugar, signifies simultaneously two contradictory movements: immobility (for which our "moral" term is: impassivity) and fragility (which in the same fashion but with no more success we label: emotivity).

Not on this surface but engraved, incised within it, the strictly elongated slit of the eyes and of the mouth. The eyes, barred unhooped by the straight, flat eyelid, supported by no lower circle (circles under the eyes: a properly expressive value of the Occidental face: fatigue, morbidity, eroticism)—the eyes debauch directly onto the face, as if they were the black and empty source of the writing, "the night of the inkwell"; or again: the face is drawn like a sheet of cloth toward the black (but not "somber") pit of the eyes. Reduced to the elementary signifiers of writing (the blank of the page and the indentations of its script), the face dismisses any signified, i.e., any expressivity: this writing writes nothing (or writes: *nothing*); not only does it not "lend" itself (a naively mercantile word) to any emotion, to any meaning (not even that of impassivity, of inexpressiveness), but it actually copies no character whatever: the transvestite actor (since the women's roles are played by men) is not a boy made up as a woman, by dint of a thousand nuances, realistic touches, costly simulations, but a pure signifier whose underneath (the truth) is neither clandestine (jealously masked) nor surreptitiously signed (by a waggish wink at the virility of the support, as in Western drag shows: opulent blondes whose trival hand or huge foot infallibly give the lie to the hormonal bosom): simply *absented*; the actor, in his face, does not play the woman, or copy her, but only signifies her; if, as Mallarmé says, writing consists of "gestures of the idea," transvestism here is the gesture of femininity, not its plagiarism; it follows.

W/ITTING
VS.
POWER/INK

THE
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89
C/ITTING
VS.
P/ASSION/ISM

W/ITTING
VS.
GRA/SSING

This Western lecturer, as soon as he is "cited" by the *Kobe Shinbun*, finds himself "Japanned," eyes elongated, pupils blackened by Nipponese typography



クラフ・パルト氏

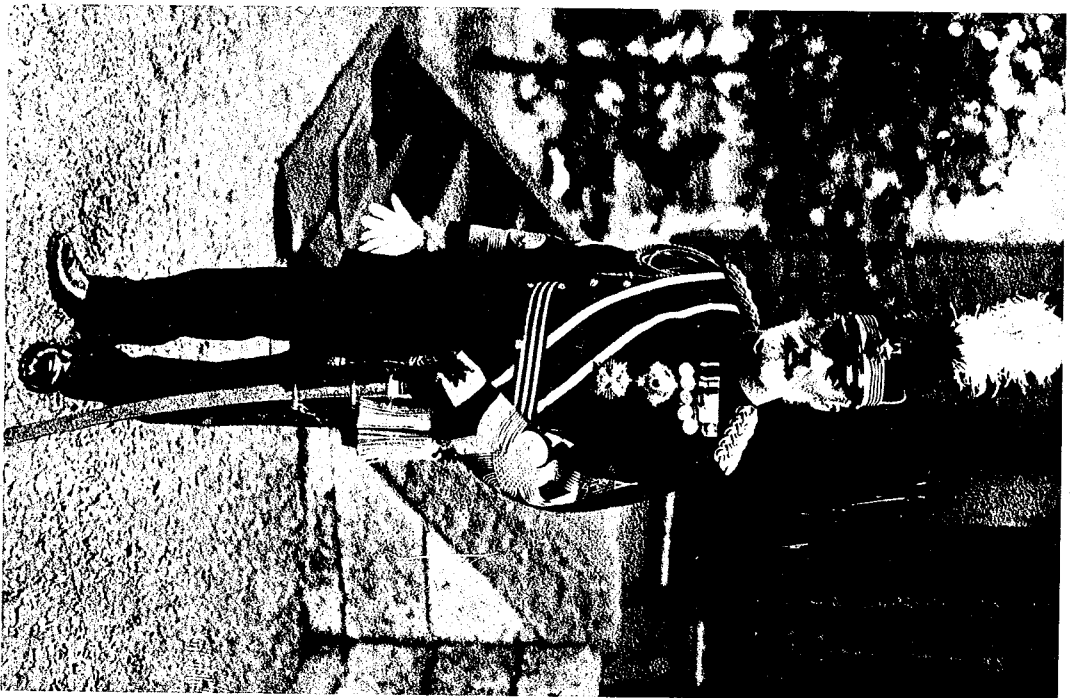
文化傳播として来日した二十
日まで滞在し、その間奥大京
ライオン言
目まで滞在し、その間奥大京
ライオン言
大など新字所を讀を行なう事定
トはラジス
「問題の」批
るだろう。前
パルトの寄附は日本ではほとん
ド知られていない。(孤舟文「文
体」エッセイ「ル」の脚注)が「批
と」まで著
本和表氏によつて「零度」の文



Whereas the young actor Tenuro Tanba, "citing" Anthony Perkins, has lost his Asiatic eyes. What then is our face, if not a "citation"?

that it is not at all remarkable, i.e., not at all marked (a thing inconceivable in the West, where transvestism is already in itself ill conceived and ill supported, purely transgressive), to see an actor of fifty (very famous and much honored) playing the part of a young woman, timorous and in love; for youth—no more than femininity here—is not a natural essence whose truth we madly pursue; the refinement of the code, its precision, indifferent to any extended copy of an organic type (to provoke the real, physical body of a young woman), have as their effect—or justification—to absorb and eliminate all feminine reality in the subtle diffraction of the signifier: signified but not represented, Woman is an idea, not a nature; as such, she is restored to the classifying function and to the truth of her pure difference: the Western transvestite wants to be a (particular) woman, the Oriental actor seeks nothing more than to combine the signs of Woman.

However, insofar as these signs are extreme, not because they are rhetorical (one sees that they are not so), but because they are intellectual—being, like writing, "the gestures of the idea"—they purify the body of all expressivity: one might say that by dint of being signs they extenuate meaning. Which explains that conjunction of sign and impassivity (the word is unsuitable, as noted, because it is moral, expressive) which marks the Asiatic theater. This touches on a certain way of taking death. To imagine, to fabricate a face, not impassive or callous (which is still a meaning), but as though emerged from water, rinsed of meaning, is a way of answering death. Look at this photograph from September 13, 1912: General Nogi, victor over the Russians at Port Arthur, has himself photographed with his wife; their emperor having just died, they have decided to commit suicide the following day; hence, they know; he, lost in his beard, his kepi,



They are going to die, they know it,



and this is not seen

his decorations, has almost no face at all; but she reveals hers entire—impassive? stupid? dignified? peasant-like? As in the case of the transvestite actor, no adjective is possible, the predicate is dismissed, not by the solemnity of imminent death, but quite the contrary, by the exemption of Death's meaning, of Death as meaning. General Nog's wife has decided that Death was the meaning, that she and Death were to be dismissed at the same time, and that therefore, were it to be in her countenance itself, there was to be no "mention" of it.

Millions of Bodies

A Frenchman (unless he is abroad) cannot classify French faces; doubtless he perceives faces in common, but the abstraction of these repeated faces (which is the class to which they belong) escapes him. The body of his compatriots, invisible by its quotidian situation, is a language he can attach to no code; the *déjà vu* of faces has for him no intellectual value; beauty, if he encounters it, is never for him an essence, the summit or the fulfillment of a research, the fruit of an intelligible maturation of the species, but only a piece of luck, a protuberance from platitude, a departure from repetition. Conversely, this same Frenchman, if he sees a Japanese in Paris, perceives him in the pure abstraction of his race (supposing that he does not see him simply as an Asiatic); between these very rare Japanese bodies, he cannot introduce any difference; much more: having unified the Japanese race in a single type, he abusively relates this type to his cultural image of the Japanese, as constructed from not even films, for these films have offered him only anachronistic beings, peasants or samurai, who belong less to "Japan" than to the object "Japanese film," but from a few press photographs, a few newsreel flashes; and this archetypical Japanese is quite lamentable; a skinny creature,