

TECHNO-ORIENTALISM

Japan panic

Every western politician has either actual or cinematic experience of the brutalities Japan inflicted on its prisoners-of-war. No one, whether in Asia or beyond, has fond memories of Japanese expansionism. Which is why, as Japan's economic power expands anew, the Japanese would do better to face up to the darker aspects of their past.

(Leader article in *The Economist*, 24 August 1991)

Today, the modern era is in its terminal phase. An awareness of its imminent demise has made Americans, the most powerful Caucasians since World War II, increasingly emotional, almost hysterical, about Japan.

(Shintaro Ishihara, 1991)

Our concern in this chapter is with what has been called 'the problem of Japan', that is to say Japan as a problem for the West. Our interest here is in tracing a set of discursive correspondences that have been, and are still being, developed in the West between 'Japan', the 'Orient' and the 'Other'. More specifically, we want to explore why, at this historical moment, this particular Other should occupy such a threatening position in the Western imagination. The former French prime minister, Edith Cresson, publicly declared her belief that 'the Japanese have a strategy of world conquest'. The Japanese, she said, are 'little yellow men' who 'stay up all night thinking about ways to screw the Americans and Europeans. They are our common enemy'. Most tellingly, Mme Cresson likened the Japanese to 'ants'. Her fear was that those 'ants' were colonising the world and taking possession of the future. What are these fears and anxieties that Japan arouses in the Western psyche?

THE JAPAN THAT IS SAYING NO

For nearly five centuries now, Japan has been among the West's Others. It has been seen as the exotic culture (zen, kabuki, tea-ceremonies, geishas) of aesthetic *Japonisme*. And it has been seen as an alien culture, a dehumanised

martial culture (kamikaze, ninjutsu, samurai), to be feared. Its difference has been contained in the idea of some mysterious ambiguity. Japan is both 'the chrysanthemum and the sword':

The Japanese are, to the highest degree, both aggressive and unaggressive, both militaristic and aesthetic, both insolent and polite, rigid and adaptable, submissive and resentful of being pushed around, loyal and treacherous, brave and timid, conservative and hospitable to new ways.

(Benedict, 1974:2)

It is this complexity and ambiguity in the image of Japan that has given it a particular resonance in Western fantasies. But, if it has been complex, it has always been possible symbolically to control this image of Japan. As Mark Holborn writes:

The dialogue between Japan and the West is frequently described in terms of Japan's absorption of the West. The pattern of imitation, absorption and finally reinterpretation of Western ideas is explicit. ... In contrast, the West's absorption of Japan is inconclusive and rarely described. *Japonisme* was the first stage in the imitation of a Japanese aesthetic. It was primarily decorative and involved the borrowing of Japanese motifs and design elements. Oriental views provided the West with spectacle.

(1991:18)

Japan absorbed the culture of the West because this was its 'destiny'. This was the logic and the nature of history, development, progress. The West's absorption of Japan is 'rarely described', or is only described in a displaced and sublimated way, through the discourse of exotica and aesthetica. The dialogue between Japan and the West was not one between equals, and the integrity of the West was never challenged by Japanese culture.

But no more. That integrity is now being assaulted by a Japan that is no longer content only to provide the West with spectacle. This became most dramatically apparent with the appearance of *The Japan That Can Say No*, by the Liberal Democratic politician and former Minister of Transport, Shintaro Ishihara (1991). Ishihara directly accuses the United States of adopting a racist attitude towards Japan, even suggesting that American planes used atom bombs against the Japanese, and not the Germans, 'because we are Japanese' (ibid.: 28). He also suggests that the bases of Western economic and cultural supremacy are being undermined. If it is the case that 'Caucasians deserve much credit in the creation of modern civilisation' (ibid.: 107), it is also true that their creative energies are being exhausted. Japan has a growing lead in new technologies, to the extent that the US nuclear

weapons industry is dependent on Japanese suppliers. Technology is the key to the future:

Technology gives rise to civilisation, upon which, in time, culture thrives. Nations decline when they self-indulgently let life-styles become more important than workmanship and neglect their industrial and technological base. That is the lesson of history.
(ibid.: 57)

According to Ishihara, Japanese technological superiority now puts it 'on the verge of a new genesis' (ibid.: 29). Europe and the United States, in contrast, are on the verge of decline. The modern era that was shaped by the West is now in its terminal phase:

Americans should realise the modern era is over. Their cherished beliefs in materialism, science, and progress have borne bitter fruit. The defeat in Vietnam, despite raining Napalm and Agent Orange on the countryside for ten years, showed the futility of military power. America harnessed science and technology and spent a fortune to get to the moon, only to find a barren rock pile. All that money and effort and what does the nation have to show for it?
(ibid.: 123)

Japan is held up as the future, and it is a future that has transcended Western modernity. 'How preposterous', Ishihara suggests, 'to assert that somehow modern Japan sprang full-blown from Western seeds!' (ibid.: 107). He appeals to 'our national gift for improving and refining everything from Buddhist art to semiconductors', and celebrates Japan's 'Eastern ways and values' (ibid.: 58, 123). 'We are', writes Ishihara, 'in and of the Orient' (ibid.: 124). According to Ishihara, Japan is of the future; it is riding on the crest of a great historic wave and will shape the next age, a more human age beyond Western modernity.

STEALING AMERICA'S SOUL

Japan is calling Western modernity into question, and is claiming the franchise on the future. And this has provoked a defensive response from the West. As Akio Morita, ex-chairman of Sony, points out, 'they have the feeling that strangers, or something foreign, has entered their midst. This gives them strong feelings of fear and anxiety' (*The Sunday Times*, 29 October 1989). Anti-Japanese feeling grows strong as Japan seems to invade the symbolic strongholds of the West. Nippon Television Network paid around \$3 million for the restoration of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, making it 'an unlikely symbol of the new balance of East-West power' (Januszczyk, 1990a: 194). Manhattan's Rockefeller Center has been acquired by Japanese real-estate

interests. And, most symbolically of all, Hollywood has now been ‘invaded’ by Japanese corporate capital. Having acquired CBS Records for \$2 billion in 1988, Sony went on to purchase Columbia Pictures in 1989 for \$3.4 billion. Then, in 1990, followed Matsushita’s ‘copycat’ purchase of MCA-Universal for a massive \$6 billion. If there were other Japanese infiltrations—\$600 million of Japanese investment in Walt Disney Corporation; JVC’s investment of \$100 million in Largo Entertainment; Pioneer Electronics’ acquisition of a ten per cent share in Carolco Pictures—the Sony and Matsushita manoeuvres were ‘most potent and symbolic’ (Aksoy and Robins, 1992).

Both Sony and Matsushita were involved in a strategy to achieve global dominance in the new image industries through control over both hardware and software markets. Both companies use the term ‘synergy’ to describe their objective of controlling different media products (books, records, films, television programmes) across different distribution channels. As one commentator puts it:

Now Sony can control the whole chain. Its broadcast equipment division manufactures the studio cameras and the film on which movies are produced; in Columbia it owns a studio that makes them and crucially, determines the formats on which they are distributed. That means it can have movies made on high definition televisions, and videoed with Sony VCRs. It can re-shoot Columbia’s 2700-film library on 8 mm film, for playing on its video Walkmans.

(Cope, 1990:56)

What Sony and Matsushita have both recognised is that a successful industry depends on having appropriate software to support hardware. They have also recognised that the industry is becoming a global one, and that economies of scale and increasing corporate integration are necessary to control world markets. Sony describes its strategy now as one of ‘global localisation’, meaning that while it operates across the globe it aims to gain ‘insider’ status within regional and local markets. They are set to conquer the world.

Europe and the United States have been put on the defensive. Herbert Schiller points to the irony of the situation:

The buyout of MCA/Universal—one of the Hollywood ‘majors’—by the Japanese superelectronics corporation Matsushita has already had one beneficial effect. It has caused the American news media, along with the government foreign-policy makers, to recognise a problem whose existence they have steadfastly denied for the past twenty-five years—cultural domination by an external power.

(1990:828)

Suddenly there is an anxiety about exposure to, and penetration by, Japanese culture. The fear is that Japanese investors are ‘buying into America’s soul’.

There is a fear that, in contrast to Western openness, Japan is characterised by a culture of self-censorship: 'It is not that any overt censorship takes place, but rather that the norms of a society well attuned to subtle signals make unnecessary rigid rules about what is acceptable discourse' (Sanger, 1990). Would Sony or Matsushita be prepared to make a movie about a taboo subject such as the war-time role of the late Emperor Hirohito? There is also a fear that Japan might turn 'cocacolonisation' into 'sake imperialism'.

What is apparent, too, is the sense that Japanese culture is incompatible with the Hollywood ethos. Whereas America is characterised by 'ethnic democracy' and pluralism, Japan is seen as a culture of 'ethnic purity' and homogeneity. Japan is seen as a consensus and conformist society, the obverse of the individualistic and creative ethos that made Hollywood a world culture. Most vocal of all is Jeffrey Katzenberg, chairman of Disney Studios. 'Film-making at its essence', he asserts, 'is about the conveyancing of emotion'. And what is clear about the Japanese is that they are lacking in emotion. The Japanese

culturally err on the side of withholding emotion. In saying this, I am not simply offering an American perspective. The Japanese are the first to tell you this about themselves.

This sense of discipline and self-control has no doubt been a major factor in achieving the Japanese economic miracle that has turned a small island nation into one of the world's pre-eminent industrial powers.

But it is also why I firmly believe that the recent marriages between Japanese hardware makers and American moviemakers may not be ones made in entertainment heaven.

There will be a chasm in the fundamental understanding of the movie business that will likely prove exceedingly frustrating for Japanese and Americans alike.

(quoted in *Variety*, 4 February 1991:26)

If the Japanese are investing in Western popular culture it is, according to a vice-president of Disney, because 'they respect us for our ability to create magic—I think they admire something about the American spirit of ingenuity—almost a wildness or recklessness, a sense of fun—that the more conservative cultures aren't capable of (quoted in Huey, 1990:54). Respect—respect from an inferior culture—is one thing. The 'invasion of Hollywood' and the loss of a 'national heritage' are quite another.

At one level, the response is obvious, and it is made forcefully by Ishihara: 'The sentimental attachment to a Hollywood institution like Columbia Pictures and a New York landmark like Radio City Music Hall is understandable. But the American public...should realise that it takes two to make a deal: Americans put these properties on the market' (1991:89). What is made clear is that Japan

is not in the business of making movies, but in the business of making money. Within the United States, too, there has been criticism of cultural and economic protectionism. 'Bruce Springsteen doesn't lose his value because he's working for Sony Chairman Akio Morita instead of CBS Chairman Larry Tisch', says economist Robert Reich (quoted in Tran, 1990). According to Reich, this kind of defensive cultural chauvinism and technonationalism is no longer appropriate to an era in which frontiers and borders are being eroded. In the context of rapid globalisation, the question 'who is us?' is increasingly problematical and perhaps even irrelevant (Reich, 1987; 1990).

At one level, perhaps, this is true. But, at another level, America still believes it has a 'soul', a national soul, and to see Japan as the enemy now is one way to bring the identity of that soul back into focus. Despite the apparent logic of Ishihara's and Reich's arguments, what seems clear is that the West both needs and wants its Japan problem. The idea of 'the coming war with Japan' seems to meet a desire of some kind.

JAPAN RISING?

At the psychic level, the question 'who is us?' arouses profound disquiet. That the Japanese are unlikely to hijack Bruce Springsteen or Michael Jackson is beside the point. What is so disturbing is the manner in which Japanese interests appear to work behind the scenes, remotely manipulating Western concerns, operating through the chameleon-like strategy of global localisation. Japanese economic strategies appear to be unfair and adversarial. Rather than buying American or European products, they prefer to buy raw materials or even whole businesses. And they operate with an unnerving dedication to this cause. James Fallows (1989a) sees this in terms of 'Japan's lack of emotional connection to the rest of the world', in terms of a kind of asceticism and dedication that is almost inhuman (cf. van Wolferen, 1988; 1989). In *You Only Live Twice*, James Bond's police contact, Tiger Tanaka (who had hoped to be a kamikaze pilot during the war), describes the martial art of *ninjutsu*:

My agents are trained in one of the arts most dreaded in Japan—*ninjutsu*, which is, literally, the art of stealth or invisibility. All the men you will see have already graduated in at least ten of the eighteen martial arts of *bushido*, or 'way of the warrior', and they are now learning to be *ninja*, or 'stealers-in', which has for centuries been part of the basic training of spies and assassins and saboteurs.
(quoted in Johnson, 1988:108)

The villain, Shredder, in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, hidden away in the darkness of the sewer system, operates by the same ninja principles, to erode and undermine American civilisation. What these popular cultural

expressions reflect is an anxiety about the 'stealth' of Japanese corporations. The Japanese stealers-in are perceived as having a robot-like dedication to achieving world hegemony and to undermining the principles of Western modernity.

These anxieties must be seen in the context of an increasing sense of insecurity about European and American modernity. Modernity has always been that 'mysterious and magical word that puts a barrier between the European [and American] ego and the rest of the world' (Corm, 1989:14). If it was the West that created modernity, it was also modernity that created the imaginary space and identity described as 'Western'. As Agnes Heller and Ferenc Feher (1988) argue, however, the very dynamism of modernity also worked to undermine its Western foundations. The modernisation project was cumulative, future-orientated, based upon the logic of technological progression and progress. Its various elements were also designed to be exported and to transcend their European origins and exclusiveness. Modernisation and modernity, with their claims to universalism, could be transposed to other host cultures. In Japan this project found a fertile environment. The technological and futurological imagination has now come to be centred here; the abstract and universalising force of modernisation has passed from Europe to America to Japan. 'In the future', Jean Baudrillard writes,

power will belong to those peoples with no origins and no authenticity, who know how to exploit that situation to the full: Look at Japan, which to a certain extent has pulled off this trick better than the US itself, managing, in what seems to us an unintelligible paradox, to transform the power of territoriality and feudalism into that of deterritoriality and weightlessness.

(1988a: 76)

Japan has now become modern to the degree of seeming postmodern, and it is its future that seems to be the current measure for all cultures. And, thereby, the basis of Western identity is called into question.

From 1848 to 1914 Great Britain was the leading creditor nation in the world. Then the United States assumed that role for the next seventy years. In 1985, it became the turn of Japan. It is the largest creditor and the largest net investor in the world, and its surplus on current and capital accounts is the highest ever recorded. Half the world's goods and services and half its population now come from the fifty countries that rim the Pacific—and the world's economic centre of gravity has begun to shift, from the Atlantic to the Pacific—from the Greenwich Meridian to the International Date Line (Wilkinson, 1983; Shibusawa, Ahmad and Bridges, 1991).

The roles have been reversed in other spheres, too. In the nineteenth century, Europeans and Americans regarded Japan as an exotic playground,

while the Japanese regarded Europe and the United States as disciplined, group-orientated societies possessing the secrets of efficient industrial production. Today, it is the Japanese who flock to the United States and to Europe for exotic tourism, and it is the Americans and Europeans who regard Japan as an austere and disciplined society, with frighteningly efficient industries. In a reversal of the traditional aestheticised image of Japan, its people are now increasingly seen as workaholics, as 'economic animals' under the governance of a 'Japan Inc.' pursuing GNP growth at the expense of everything else, spreading pollution and spawning intimidating futuristic megalopolises.

If the 'Pacific era' is finally coming into being, then it has been long and anxiously anticipated. In 1903, its imminence was announced by President Roosevelt: 'The Mediterranean era died with the discovery of America; the Atlantic era is now at the height of its development and must soon exhaust the resources at its command; the Pacific era, destined to be the greatest of all, is just at its dawn' (quoted in Knightley, 1991). This geo-economic and geo-political ascendancy of Japan has always seemed an awesome prospect. The (potential) rise of Japan has always threatened to put 'us' in danger. From the late nineteenth century onwards, fears of the 'Yellow Threat' have constantly resurfaced in the popular imagination. At its most fantastic, there is an image in which 'Japanese and Chinese hordes spread out over all Europe, crushing under their feet the ruins of our capital cities and destroying our civilisations, grown anaemic due to the enjoyment of luxuries and corrupted by vanity of spirit' (René Pinon, quoted in Wilkinson, 1983:59).

The early years of the twentieth century saw the growing popularity of *Fu Manchu*- and *Yellow Peril*-type literature in Europe and the United States. The basic fear has long been of a Japan that is seen as being engaged in an inexorable struggle with the West, whether by military means, or, more recently, through trade wars (cheap, 'shoddy' goods from Japan have been a persistent source of anger and anxiety). The image of 'Japan Inc.' can readily be seen as an echo of the West's age-old fear of 'Oriental Despotism'—a phrase first used by the ancient Greeks to describe the Persians, but one which still provides the inherited script according to which the West now imagines (post)modern Japan.

SEMITES AND ORIENTALS

Edward Said's premise in *Orientalism* was that

as both geographical and cultural entities—to say nothing of historical entities—such locales, regions, geographical sectors as the 'Orient' and the 'Occident' are man-made.... Therefore, as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition

of thought, imagery and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West.

(1978:4–5)

Naoki Sakai develops the point further:

the Orient does not connote any internal commonality among the names subsumed under it, it ranges from regions in the Middle East to those in the Far East. One can hardly find anything religious, linguistic or cultural that is common among these varied areas. The Orient is neither a cultural, religious or linguistic unity. The principle of its identity lies outside itself: what endows it with some vague sense of unity is that the Orient is that which is excluded and objectified by the West, in the service of its historical progress. From the outset the Orient is a shadow of the West. If the West did not exist, the Orient would not exist either.

(Sakai, 1988:499)

The ‘Orient’ exists because the West needs it; because it brings the project of the West into focus.

Until the Renaissance, Europe belonged to a ‘regional tributary system’ that included Europeans and Arabs, Christians and Muslims. Before then, the countries of Western Europe only occupied the north-western edge of a geographical complex whose centre was at the eastern end of the Mediterranean basin. Subsequently, however, a ‘North-South split, running through the Mediterranean—which only replaced the East-West division at a late date—[was] falsely projected backward’ and was ‘presented as permanent, self-evident and inscribed in geography (and therefore—by implicit false deduction—in history)’ (Amin, 1989:93; cf. Corm, 1989). In this transition, northern Europe became redefined as the centre of the system, and all other regions were relegated to the status of its peripheries. In all of this, history is rewritten: Christianity is annexed arbitrarily to Europe, and becomes one of the central terms by which Europe understands itself (despite the fact that Christianity is Middle Eastern in origin). A further crucial step involved the arbitrary annexation of Hellenic culture to Europe. As Samir Amin emphasises, the history of ‘Western thought’ is conventionally traced back to ancient Greece, and it is generally considered to come of age with the Renaissance reappropriation of Greek culture and philosophy (Amin, 1989:90, 94). The problem with this ‘fabrication of ancient Greece’ is that the ancient Greeks themselves were quite clear about their Oriental roots, claiming significant Phoenician and Egyptian cultural ancestries quite at odds with the ‘Aryan’ definition of Greek culture constructed by nineteenth century ‘Hellomania’ (see Bernal, 1987). In this connection Kearney reminds us that the very name ‘Europe’ is itself ‘derived from a tradition lying somewhere

between Africa and the Middle East' (1992:10) in so far as, in the legend, Europa was carried by her father across the Mediterranean to Greece, without ever abandoning her non-European origins.

It has become a commonplace to observe that, from the time of the Crusades, and then, more dramatically even, from the moment of the Ottoman army's arrival at the gates of Vienna in 1683, it has been the 'threat from the East' which has produced attempts at European unification, both as a defensive response and as a rationalisation for aggressive policies of expansion and the consolidation of white, Christian, 'civilised' Europe against its Other. Indeed, historians of late antiquity have been known to assert that, without Mohammed, there could have been no Charlemagne, in so far as attempts at the unification of what we have come to know as 'Europe' have always developed in response to perceived external threats. However, the 'East' is not always or necessarily 'outside'. It can also designate the 'Other within'. German writers referred to Jews as 'Asiatics' or 'Orientals' right up to the present century, and both Samir Amin and Edward Said stress the way in which the category 'Europe'—through the category 'Aryan'—has, at least since the time of Renan, been defined by way of contrast with the category 'Semitic' (a category which includes both Jew and Arab). We are, as Robert Young argues, forced to consider the relation of anti-Islamic and anti-Arab feeling to its 'dark shadow', anti-Semitism: 'in this context the Jews came to represent the Orient within, uncannily appearing inside when they should have remained hidden, outside Europe: thus the logic of their expulsion, or extermination, becomes inextricably linked with Orientalism itself (1990:139). Within the terms of European racism, both Arab and Jew are subsumed together in the figure of the Orient, against which the Western world struggles to differentiate itself.

As if all that were not enough, there are yet further complications. To speak of 'the Jews' is not only to specify a particular racial or ethnic group. It is also to invoke a figure of suspicion within Western culture. In fact, it identifies a symbolic space that can be occupied by different groups at different times. A number of commentators have recently shown that it is the Japanese who are now coming to occupy that space in the imagination of the West. In a short discussion of the new European nationalism, Ian Buruma (1991a) quotes from a disturbing piece of recent racist propaganda: 'With the wholesale appropriation of western ways, Jewry struts about in borrowed plumage, as does foremost Japan in the world at large'. Slavoj Žižek draws attention to the dangers:

Our perception of 'real' Jews is always mediated by a symbolic-ideological structure which tries to cope with social antagonism: the real 'secret' of the Jew is our own antagonism. In today's America, for example, a role resembling that of the Jew is being played more and more by the Japanese. Witness the obsession of

the American media with the idea that the Japanese don't know how to enjoy themselves. The reasons for Japan's increasing economic superiority over the USA is located in the somewhat mysterious fact that the Japanese don't consume enough, that they accumulate too much wealth.

(1990:156)

Similarly, Judith Williamson (1990) has pointed to the parallel between anti-Semitism and anti-Japanese racism:

Anti-semitism fed off notions of 'rich Jewish bankers'; anti-Arab mythologies blossomed in the seventies with the buying up of British landmarks by oil sheikhs. And now we have Japan take-over fear, alongside a popular fascination with inscrutable customs, currant-eyed criminals and bad guys on Suzukis.

Ben-Dasan (1972) writes of how 'the position of being a middleman or go-between invites persecution'. The Japanese, he argues, 'known to the great masses of the non-white peoples of the world for the excellence of their products and services, are in a position similar to that of the Alexandrian Jews. They are honorary white men as the Jews were once, in a sense, honorary Greeks in Alexander's city' (ibid.: 164-5). The Japanese, he goes on to say, 'may one day find themselves facing a general hostility that will differ little from that which has inspired persecution of the Jews in many lands' (ibid.: 166). From a Jewish perspective, Shillony (1991) offers an analysis of the analogies between the experience of the Japanese and the Jews, in their interactions with the Christian West.

In relation to American anxieties about the Japanese takeover of Hollywood, the analogy is quite apt. As Gabler (1988) notes, historically, it was Jews who played the key roles in 'establishing' Hollywood: Adolph Zukor (the founder of Paramount Pictures), William Fox (founder of the Fox Film Corporation), Louis B. Mayer (founder of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) and Benjamin Warner (founder of Warner Bros) were all from Eastern European Jewish families. As Gabler puts it: 'the American film industry...the quintessence of what we mean by "America", was founded, and for more than thirty years operated, by Eastern European Jews, who themselves seemed to be anything but the quintessence of America' (ibid.: 1). In Gabler's analysis, the point is that it was the anti-Semitism which proscribed their entry to more established industries, which effectively directed these entrepreneurs to new areas, like the burgeoning film industry, where such proscriptions held less force. Gabler's argument is that, having established their own companies,

Within the studios and on the screen...[they] could simply create a new country—an empire of their own, so to speak.... They could

fabricate their empire in the image of America, as they would fabricate themselves in the image of prosperous Americans.... This was *their* America and its invention may be their most enduring legacy.... Ultimately, American values came to be *defined* largely by the movies the Jews made. Ultimately, by creating their idealised America on the screen...[they] reinvented the country in the image of their fiction.
(ibid.: 6–7)

From our point of view the crucial question is not so much whether the category ‘Jewish’ and the category ‘Japanese’ share some common substance, or display any essential similarity; it is, rather, that they increasingly occupy a comparably unfavourable position in the demonology of the West.

In 1989, the Japanese overtook the Russians in opinion polls as the nation which Americans fear most. The ‘official’ explanation of this is in economic terms. As McKenzie Wark (1991) says, this scenario reflects the loss of American mastery: a scenario in which ‘manifest destiny’ turns out to lead ‘from Fordism to Sonyism’, and, thereby, to the premature end of the American century. It is, however, not simply a matter of economic hegemony. More significant is the racism and paranoia evoked when the Japanese are seen to be buying up things—Hollywood studios, record companies, the Rockefeller Center and so on—that are somehow felt to be properly or quintessentially ‘American’. It is a question of strangers ‘stealing in’ on the American Dream. And the Japanese are, as Waldemar Januszczak (1990b) says, now the ‘ultimate 20th century strangers’ (cf. Mme Cresson, quoted on p. 147). As he observes:

if the Canadians (rather than the Japanese) had bought Columbia Pictures or Mickey Mouse or the Rockefeller there would have been no point in an outcry. Canadians, after all, are just like Americans, only less so. The Japanese, according to the occidental popular imagination are aliens from the East who are probably trying to take over the West.
(ibid.)

This, as Januszczak goes on to argue, is

a position in the Caucasian imagination that has hitherto been occupied by freemasons and foreign agents and Rosicrucians and little green men from outer space cunningly disguised as humans; and, of course, Jews. Like the Jews, the whole Japanese nation seems to add up to one huge secret society, bent on making money out of Christians.
(ibid.)

Contemporary expressions of anti-Japanese feeling incorporate a long tradition of racist fascination and fear, one whose language and imagery is being

reforged in contemporary political and cultural rhetoric. As Judith Williamson (1990) notes by way of example, at the centre of Ridley Scott's highly successful film *Black Rain*, there is the antagonistic interplay of American cultural imperialism and Japanese 'economic' expansion. Michael Douglas complains: 'You Japanese sit on what you've got so tight I can't even pull it out of your arse'. His Japanese co-star, Ken Takakura, dismissively retorts: 'Music and movies are all your culture is good for. ... We make the machines'. There is, of course, a specificity to American-Japanese relations. When *The Japan That Can Say No* was officially published in English in 1991, one of the most contentious (and most often cited) passages was that in which Ishihara claims that there was a 'virulent racism' in the American decision to drop nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is hardly incidental, in this context, that the motive for *Black Rain's* chief villain swamping America with counterfeit dollars is revenge for the 'black rain' which fell on Hiroshima.

MODERNITY AND ETHNICITY

We must recognise how abruptly and dramatically the histories and geographies of the dominated were fissured by their encounter with the West. National and regional geographies were disrupted by this contact, and histories and stories of the past had to be retold in a new light:

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.... A new history and [a] new geography combined to produce the magical peripheries of the primitive.

(Miyoshi and Harootunian, 1988:388)

Naoki Sakai (1988) stresses the involuntary nature of modernity for the non-West: modernity for the 'Orient' was primarily about subjugation to the West's political, economic and military control. The modern Orient was born only when it was invaded, defeated and exploited by the West; only when the Orient became an object for the West did it enter 'modern times'. For the non-West, 'modernity means, above all, the state of being deprived of its own subjectivity'; it is possible, then, 'to define the Orient as that which can never be a subject' (ibid.: 498-9). What is clear is that the 'West' is not simply and straightforwardly a geographical category: 'it is, evidently, a name always associating itself with those regions, communities and peoples that appear politically or economically superior to other regions, communities and peoples' (ibid.: 476-7). Onto the geography of 'East' and 'West' is directly

mapped the distinction between the 'pre-modern' and the 'modern'. The category 'West' has always signified the positional superiority of Europe, and then also of the United States, in relation to the 'East' or 'Orient'.

It is on this basis that we can begin to understand the contemporary hysteria and panic about Japan. Japan has come to exist within the Western political and cultural unconscious as a figure of danger, and it has done so because it has destabilised the neat correlation between West/East and modern/pre-modern. If the West is modern, Japan should be pre-modern, or at least non-modern. That is the case if it is to fit the terms of the established scheme by which 'we' order our sense of space and time and allocate their place in it to 'them'. The fact that Japan no longer fits throws the established historico-geographical schema into confusion, creating a panic of disorientation (if not yet, to be sure, of dis-Orientalism).

Western social science has understood 'modernisation' as a unilinear process of economic and social transformation, stretching from the cultural and intellectual world of seventeenth-century Europe to the post-1945 United States. It finds the emergence of Japan as an economic superpower hard to reconcile with this model (based as it is on a Euro-American definition of modernity). The scandalous and unthinkable possibility is raised that the West may now have to 'learn from Japan'—that is, to 'Orientalise' itself in order to become economically competitive with the emerging economies of a 'Confucian zone' in the twenty-first century. The unpalatable reality is that Japan, that most Oriental of Oriental cultures, as it increasingly outperforms the economies of the West, may now have become the most (post)modern of all societies.

What Japan has done is to call into question the supposed centrality of the West as a cultural and geographical locus for the project of modernity. It has also confounded the assumption that modernity can only be articulated through the forms the West has constructed. Indeed, what it has made clear are the racist foundations of Western modernity. If it is possible for modernity to find a home in the Orient, then any essential, and essentialising, distinction between East and West is problematised. Japan can no longer be stereotyped as the 'Orient'; it is not possible to marginalise or dismiss Japanese modernity as some kind of anomaly. Its distinctiveness insists that we take it seriously. And, at the same time, it insists that we seriously consider the implications of this for the West's own sense of privilege and security.

ORIENTALISM AND OCCIDENTALISM

In his book, *White Mythologies*, Robert Young emphasises 'the relation of the Enlightenment, its grand projects and universal truth-claims, to the history of European colonialism' (1990:9). 'The appropriation of the other as a form of knowledge within a totalising system', he argues, 'can thus

be set alongside the history (if not the project) of European imperialism, and the constitution of the other as “other” alongside racism and sexism’ (ibid.: 4). Drawing on Derrida, he makes the point that, through the development of Western culture, ‘the white man [has taken] his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own *logos*, that is, the *mythos* of his idiom, for the universal form of that he must still wish to call Reason’ (ibid.: 7). In the deconstruction of this Europeanisation of culture and knowledge, the work of Edward Said has clearly been of particular importance. *Orientalism* offers a cogent analysis of the process through which the ‘Orient’ has been produced as an object, not only of knowledge, but also of power, inscribed in both the discourses and the institutions of imperialism and colonialism.

Said’s work on the ‘Middle East’ is clearly of relevance in looking at the West’s construction of a Far East’, but as Richard Minear rightly stresses, ‘the historical relation between “the West” and Japan was very different from that which obtained between “the West” and Said’s Orient’ (1980:508). Thus, whilst it did succumb to Western force in the nineteenth century, and also in the middle of the twentieth, ‘Japan did not become a colony’. ‘Nor’, Minear adds, ‘did the abiding cultural ties which bound the West to the Orient exist between Japan and the West. Japan held no special interest’. This meant that the particular relation between Orientalist knowledge and imperial and military power, which has been so important in the case of the Middle East, did not hold in the case of Japan: Japanese studies ‘never experienced the naked “authority over the Orient” which Said sees as an integral part of Orientalism’. ‘Nor’, Minear continues, ‘did Japan wait for the West to discover its own past, its history, its identity’. Japan was always a sophisticated and literate culture, and, indeed, some of the most widely read books on Japan in Western languages were written by Japanese. What is clear is that ‘the West had very little to teach Japan about itself’ (ibid.: 514–15). This apparent hermetic integrity of Japanese culture has been crucial to the way it has functioned within the Orientalist *imaginaire*.

Its irreducible difference has been the source of both fascination and anxiety. Far Orientalism—from Lafcadio Hearn’s *Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation* through to Roland Barthes’ *The Empire of Signs*—has been seduced by the elaborate and arcane rituals of Japanese culture; this Orientalism has been one in which Japan functions as a locus of self-estrangement and cultural transcendence. In his account of *The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature*, Earl Miner suggests that ‘Japan, a civilisation as highly refined as the West, is familiar and congenial in its modern conveniences, in addition to having the additional grace for a world-weary Westerner of new and idealised forms of behaviour and art’ (Miner, 1958:270; cf. Melot, 1987/8). In contact with this refined exoticism, the world-weary Westerner has indulged in

unashamed aestheticism, eroticisation and idealisation. Japan has been the 'proper meeting-ground of East and West', where Western rationalism might seek fulfilment through its 'marriage' with Eastern mysticism (Miner, 1958:271).

Yet this uniqueness of Japanese culture, which makes it exceptionally seductive, may also provoke fear and anxiety. There is a fear of what lies behind the enigmatic façade of Japanese aestheticism and spiritualism. There is a fear that Japan's irreducible difference will remain aloof from, and impenetrable to, Western reason and universalism. A fear, too, that Western culture might itself be overwhelmed by the Oriental Other. This is now a fundamental issue in discussions of the 'Japan problem'. A leader article in the *Financial Times* (19 September 1991) symptomatically suggested that 'Britain, though not Britain alone, fears some emasculation'. Bruce Cumings reveals the existence of an unpublished report, commissioned from Rochester Institute of Technology by the CIA, which tries to address the question of how different the Japanese are from 'us':

The report deems the Japanese 'creatures of an ageless, amoral, manipulative and controlling culture...suited only to this race, in this place.' Which 'creature' do they most resemble, you might ask. Well, the Japanese get along 'as does the lamprey eel living on the strength of others.' The lamprey eel will not stop sucking the lifeblood of the rest of us, this 'treatise' implies, until it has devoured the entire world.

(Cumings, 1991:365)

This represents a kind of response to Ishihara's *The Japan That Can Say No*. What we have here, as Cumings puts it, is 'the America that can say yo!' It may be ludicrous, even comical, but it is racist. It may be extreme, but it reflects a prevailing attitude towards the Japanese 'Other'.

'The most consistently interesting questions caused by Japan', according to James Fallows (1991a: 7), 'involve its differentness'. If difference can be seductive, it is always disturbing, dangerous, and ultimately intolerable. The 'Other' must be assimilated or excluded: within 'our' universe there is no place for difference as such. 'What is at issue', writes Cornelius Castoriadis (1992:4), 'is the apparent incapacity to constitute oneself as oneself without excluding the other—and the apparent inability to exclude the other without devaluing and, ultimately, hating them'. It is almost always the case in the encounter between cultures, Castoriadis argues, that the Other is constituted as inferior:

The simplest mode in which subjects value their institutions evidently comes in the form of the affirmation—which need not be explicit—that these institutions are the only 'true' ones—and that therefore

the goods, beliefs, customs, etc., of the others are false. In this sense the inferiority of the others is only the flipside of the affirmation of the *truth-proper* of the institution of the society-Ego.

(ibid.: 6)

The sole foundation for the institution of ('our') society 'being belief in it and, more specifically, its claim to render the world and life coherent, it finds itself in mortal danger as soon as proof is given that other ways of rendering life and the world coherent and sensible exist' (ibid.). Difference is not easy to live with. But what if another culture were to seem, and to claim itself, 'equivalent' or even superior to 'ours'? What if it will not be excluded or converted? What if, as is the case with the Japanese, it seems to flaunt its differentness?

The 'Japan problem' is, in one sense, the problem of Japan's irreducible difference. Japan's differentness is a very particular problem for the West. The Japanese Other plays the West at its own game. Western Orientalism appears to have found its match in what seems to be an 'Orientalism in reverse'. In his discussion of Said's *Orientalism*, Sadik Jalal al-'Azam addresses the question of Islamic revivalism and fundamentalism. Its discourses on the inherent superiority of Islamic culture, he argues, 'simply reproduce the whole discredited apparatus of classical Orientalist doctrine concerning the difference between East and West, Islam and Europe. This reiteration occurs at both the ontological and epistemological levels, only reversed to favour Islam and the East in its implicit and explicit value judgements' (1981:22). The 'dichotomising' tactic of Orientalism is by no means the hallmark of Western thought alone, and 'Orientalism in reverse' is, in the end, 'no less reactionary, mystifying, ahistorical and anti-human than Orientalism proper': a tendency well demonstrated in recent Islamic fundamentalist critiques of 'Occidentiosis' (defined as the 'infection' of Islamic cultures by 'corrupt' Western values).

In this case, however, the argument is posed abstractly and is divorced from the question of power—here the institutional power of the West, which has ensured the authority of its Orientalism. As Lata Mani and Ruth Frankenberg argue,

it is within the context of a specific set of unequal economic, social and political relationships between West and East that Western descriptions are produced. It is these relationships that lend them strength and endurance. Until this world-historical context changes, it does not make sense to speak of a 'reverse Orientalism'.

(1985:187)

Where power is missing, it is not really meaningful to talk of 'Orientalism in reverse'. But what about Japan?

In the case of Japan, it is of some interest to interrogate the recent flourishing of what might actually be understood as a form of 'Orientalism in reverse'. We are referring to the rise of *nihonjinron* discourses of 'Japaneseness', 'Japanese uniqueness', 'Japanese superiority' and 'Japan as Number One'. *Nihonjinron* discourses are works of cultural nationalism concerned with the ostensible uniqueness of Japan. They display a number of assumptions, centred principally around the idea that the Japanese constitute a culturally and socially homogeneous racial entity, the essence of which is both unchanged throughout history and quite different from all other races. *Nihonjinron* discourses are by no means new: these 'discussions of the Japanese' (a literal translation of *nihonjinron*) have been going on for at least the last hundred years (Dale, 1987). As Richard Minear observes,

with or without power in its favour, Japan has a long tradition of racist and ethnocentric behaviour; what nation does not? Perhaps European and American ideas about the 'non-Western' world are exceptional only in that during the past several centuries Europe and America have had the military power to put them into action.

(1980:516)

What is at stake now, however, is the changed function these discourses have in the new context of a shifting balance of power between Japan, Europe and the United States. As Japan comes to assume a hegemonic position in the spheres of technology, manufacturing and finance, and as the question of Japanese military capacity increasingly comes onto the political agenda, there are growing fears about whether Japan might now have power in its favour and might now be inclined to put its ideas into action. In the context of these changing power relations, *nihonjinron* discourses are taking on a new significance, as are European and American reactions to them.

Historically, the West has provided the universal point of reference in relation to which Others have been defined as particular. Thus, Japan has existed 'as a particularity, whose sense of identity is always dependent upon the Other. Needless to say, this Other is a universal one, in contrast to which Japanese particularism is rendered even more conspicuous' (Sakai, 1988:484). If the discourse of *nihonjinron* has stressed innumerable cases of Japan's difference from the West, thereby defining Japan's identity in terms of deviations from the West, 'this is nothing but the positing of Japan's identity in Western terms, which in return establishes the centrality of the West as the universal point of reference' (ibid.: 487). None the less, the desire has been to change this situation so that the Japanese would occupy the position of the centre and of the subject which determines other particularities in its

own universal terms. In more recent developments of *nihonjinron* discourse what we are seeing seems to be a series of 'tryouts in rewriting world history and geography with the first world and Japan as the joint master-narrators' (Miyoshi and Harootunian, 1988:390). Western anxieties about Japan are an expression of resentment at this emergence of a threat to what has been seen as the West's natural and proper claim on universalism.

Japanese culture has developed a kind of reverse Orientalism, what Roland Robertson (1991:192) describes as 'Occidentalism', based on claims as to the selfish individualism, materialism, decadence and arrogance of Westerners (particularly Americans), and also on an explicit pride in Japanese racial purity, which has been contrasted with the allegedly debilitating consequences of American racial and ethnic heterogeneity. This kind of Japanese self-projection and self-assertion can assume highly provocative and confrontational forms. When, in the context of the Gulf War, one Japanese commentator described the Americans as 'our white mercenaries' (Buruma, 1991b: 26), it was difficult for the Western forces to take. When Ishihara throws out a warning to 'the Caucasians' that their creative energies are becoming exhausted and their civilisation is in its terminal phase, this can be decidedly unnerving and destabilising. To be warned that the future belongs to those who are 'in and of the Orient' exposes a raw nerve.

There have been two kinds of Western response to these 'Occidentalist' challenges. The first has been defensive, reflecting a certain disorientation and loss of self-confidence. Perhaps Japan has become Number One? The 1980s saw a quite significant shift in American perspectives on Japan, especially following the publication of Ezra Vogel's widely read *Japan as Number One* (1979), and the emergence of the question of what America could 'learn from Japan'. This has also translated itself into attempts to reassert national self-image and self-esteem by recovering the essence of American difference. Indeed, what one sees is 'something like an American equivalent of *nihonjinron*, with much debate about the ways in which American national culture could be enhanced and protected from global relativisation. In certain respects the idea of American exceptionalism is the equivalent of the idea of Japanese uniqueness' (Robertson, 1991:189). Thus, James Fallows (1989b) has argued that America could be made great again by capitalising upon the 'American talent' for disorder and openness and by rejection of the 'Confucianism' which he says has taken hold of American society in the form of credentialism, reliance upon educational testing and so on. This is not to suggest that the idea of American exceptionalism is new. Manifestly, it is not. What is new is the centrality of Japan as the point of reference in relation to which (or against which) 'Americanness' is being defined.

But if there have been such responses of adjustment, there has also been a more aggressive retaliation against what is seen as Japanese provocation.

An outburst of 'Japan-bashing' flared up around 1987, and it did so as an immediate consequence of the thawing relations between the West and the Soviet bloc. It is the transformation to the so-called New World Order that is now changing American and European attitudes to Japan. Now there is a growing hostility to what is seen as its ruthless and dedicated economic expansionism, anger at this insensitivity to global concerns (the environment, famine) and resentment about its lack of political solidarity (the Gulf War). Ishihara (1991:77–8) reports a conversation in which a US congressman said: 'US-Soviet ties have dramatically improved and it's quite possible that the partnership between Washington and Tokyo might be dissolved'. 'Do you mean that Americans and Russians have rediscovered their mutual identity as Caucasians?', Ishihara responded. The congressman nodded in agreement.

Two recent Japan-bashers, Michael Silva and Bertil Sjögren, suggest that we have to cast our minds back to the wartime period if we want to gain insights into 'the Japanese mind set' (1990:156). In trying to understand Japanese economic strategy, these authors explicitly use Pearl Harbor as a reference point, one that 'more than vaguely parallels today's economic confrontations'. And, in a much-cited article, James Fallows points to 'Japan's ever-present fears that the rest of the world is about to gang up on it and exclude it' (1989a: 40). The last time Japan felt like this, Fallows goes on, was the moment of Pearl Harbor, when the country's military leadership 'was convinced that the West had decided to choke Japan to death, with boycotts, so Japan might as well strike' (ibid.). Japanese 'narcissism', a 'weakness of universal principles' and a 'lack of emotional connection to the rest of the world', all add up to make Japan seem a powerful figure of danger. Japan is different: a natural enemy. The Western mood is resentful and belligerent. The talk is of 'the coming war with Japan' (Friedman and LeBard, 1991).

Orientalism and Occidentalism head to head: cultures in contestation. Who is to be the 'unmarked' (the natural) point of universal reference? Who is to occupy the 'centre', in relation to which the 'Other' must define its particularity and marginality? 'West' against 'East'. We could say that it should not, need not, be like this. In the words of Ihab-Hassan, Occident and Orient 'have "contaminated" one another, and this is, mainly, to the good' (1990:74). These interactions, we might say, 'hint at the possibilities of human understanding, an understanding neither universal nor stubbornly local' (ibid.: 83). And yet what we have is mutual paranoia: 'This idea that the others are quite simply others, which in words is so simple and so true, is a historical creation that goes against the "spontaneous" tendencies of the institution of society' (Castoriadis, 1992:6). There are powerful psychic investments in the desire to exclude the Other.

TECHNO-ORIENTALISM AND THE FUTURE OF MODERNITY

In one sense, then, the West's 'Japan problem' is about the confrontation between cultural narcissisms. But to leave it at that would be too easy. There is something that is even reassuring about the possibility that Japan's phenomenal economic and technological success is attributable to 'the Japanese mind'. To invoke Oriental conformity, stealth and ruthless dedication is to suggest that Japan does not play by the rules. The comparative lack of success of the European and North American economies must then be a consequence of abiding by universal principles and moral codes. Through such reasoning, it is possible, even in the face of competitive failure, to reaffirm the essential (that is, civilisational) supremacy of Western culture.

Differentness is functional: it cannot be willingly or easily relinquished. Through the manic assertion of difference, the identity of Western culture and identity can be sustained. And if the encounter with difference is painful, what it averts—what it represses, denies or disavows—is something that is more painful still. What it defers is the encounter with Western self-identity and self-interest, as well as the recognition of what is common in both the Japanese and Western experiences of modernity.

The functioning and the significance of technology in Western identity is crucial to understanding what this means. What would the West be without its vaunted technological supremacy? Technology has been central to the potency of its modernity. And now, it fears, the loss of its technological hegemony may be associated with its cultural 'emasculatation'. Technology is held to be the key to the future, and Japan now has a growing lead in key areas of technological development. Symbolically, American military capacity is increasingly dependent on Japanese high-tech components. This Japanese rise to power has been a perfectly conscious strategy. From the nineteenth century, 'Japan's leaders knew the country would be colonised, like Malaya or China, if it did not haul itself into the modern age'; and, following defeat in the Second World War, 'Japan's tattered postwar leadership understood that technology and industry were the only means of recovering independence of any kind' (Fallows, 1991b: 34). Akio Morita has described how he deliberately set out to make Sony's image synonymous with 'technical quality'. This was necessary in order to avoid the negative connotations of products being perceived as 'Japanese', given the level of anti-Japanese feeling in the immediate post-war period. In a BBC interview in the mid-1980s, Morita recalled the task that faced him:

When I first visited Europe in 1953, I discovered that Japan had a very bad image in Europe because of the war...and I thought 'unless we make a real high technical quality product we cannot sell

anything here'. So we have been trying to change our image, to concentrate on quality in technical standards.

Through its strategies of technological innovation, Japan has more than recovered its independence, and has now hauled itself perhaps even beyond the modern age.

Lummis (1984) has argued that this is the society where technology and rationalisation have fused perfectly. Technological prowess has become associated with Japanese enterprise (Sony, Nissan, Matsushita, Panasonic, Toshiba, Toyota...). In Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, Jack Gladney's daughter utters two clearly audible and haunting words in her sleep, 'Toyota Celica':

How could these near-nonsense words, murmured in a child's restless sleep, make me sense a meaning, a presence? She was only repeating some TV voice. Toyota Corolla, Toyota Celica, Toyota Cressida. Supranational names, computer-generated, more or less universally pronounceable. Part of every child's brain noise, the substatic regions too deep to probe.

(DeLillo, 1985:155)

High-technology has become associated with Japaneseness. Out of this a new techno-mythology is being spun. Japan can be projected as 'the greatest "machine-loving" nation of the world', a culture in which 'machines are priceless friends' (Kato, 1991). Japan has become synonymous with the technologies of the future—with screens, networks, cybernetics, robotics, artificial intelligence, simulation. What are these Japanese technologies doing to us? The techno-mythology is centred around the idea of some kind of postmodern mutation of human experience. 'The Japanese are not altering the way we see the real world, they are doing something far more radical', writes Charlie Leadbeater (1991): 'They are taking us further and further into a different world of electronic images and sounds.... In future, the line between the real and the electronic will probably blur even further to the extent that it may not be fully recognisable'. The Japanese are creating a new domain of artificial reality. Karaoke, *pachinko*, computer games, virtual reality. Japanese technologies are 'blurring the line between the real and the simulated...producing the sensation that reality is only part of a world of simulation' (Isozaki, 1991).

If the future is technological, and if technology has become 'Japanised', then the syllogism would suggest that the future is now Japanese too. The postmodern era will be the Pacific era. Japan is the future, and it is a future that seems to be transcending and displacing Western modernity. In so far as a nation's sense of identity has become

confused with its technological capability, these developments have, of course, had profoundly disturbing and destabilising consequences in Europe and the United States. The West has had to try to come to terms with everything that this technological 'emasculatation' entails. As the dynamism of technological innovation has appeared to move eastwards, so have these postmodern technologies become structured into the discourse of Orientalism. Through these new technologies, the contradictory stereotypes of Japaneseness have assumed new forms; the new technologies have become associated with the sense of Japanese identity and ethnicity.

One response is to see *pachinko* and computer games simply as the postmodern equivalents of zen and kabuki. Like 'traditional' forms of Japanese culture, they too embody the exotic, enigmatic and mysterious essence of Japanese particularism. This is apparent in the postmodern romanticisation of Japan as a space somewhere between the real and the imaginary. Tokyo is the centre for a new phenomenon of 'postmodern tourism': 'the paradigm of the modern decentred metropolis. It's not so much that [it] disorientates you—rather that you never get orientated in the first place' (Thackara, 1989:35). In cyberpunk fiction this aestheticism and exoticism become quite apparent. William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, as Yoshimoto Mitsuhiro (1989:18) observes, combines 'futuristic high-tech images of contemporary Japan and anachronistic images of feudal Japan still widely circulating in the popular American imagination'. The same can be said of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*. Stephen Beard describes this as 'the re-invention of Japan as a land of high-tech enchantment':

manga, techno-porn, high-density urbanism, mobile fashion, hyper-violent movies, video-phones, fax cameras, hand-held televisions, video-games, disposable buildings, even a new breed of 'radically bored' teen information junkies, *otaku*, who shun body contact and spend all their waking hours gathering data on the most trivial bit of media.

(1991:25)

Through the projection of exotic (and erotic) fantasies onto this high-tech delirium, anxieties about the 'importance' of Western culture can be, momentarily, screened out. High-tech Orientalism makes possible 'cultural amnesia, ecstatic alienation, serial self-erasure' (ibid.).

But there is another, more resentful and more aggressively racist, side to this techno-orientalism. The association of technology and Japaneseness now serves to reinforce the image of a culture that is cold, impersonal and machine-like, an authoritarian culture lacking emotional connection to the rest of the world. The *otaku* generation—kids 'lost to everyday life' by their immersion in computer reality—provides a good symbol of this. These

children of the media 'despise physical contact and love media, technical communication, and the realm of reproduction and simulation in general' (Grassmuck, 1991:201); they are characterised by a kind of 'vacuousness' and by 'self-dissociation in hyper-reality' (ibid.: 207):

In the age of cyber-medialism with its emphasis on simulation, the hi-tech media become the condition for survival.... The media cyborgs in their electronic womb are also called *aliens*...it's an empty, content-less joy of technology that drives them.

(ibid.: 213)

These kids are imagined as people mutating into machines; they represent a kind of cybernetic mode of being for the future. This creates the image of the Japanese as inhuman. Within the political and cultural unconscious of the West, Japan has come to exist as the figure of empty and dehumanised technological power. It represents the alienated and dystopian image of capitalist progress. This provokes both resentment and envy. The Japanese are unfeeling aliens; they are cyborgs and replicants. But there is also the sense that these mutants are now better adapted to survive in the future. The *otaku* are the postmodern people. To use Baudrillard's phrase, the future seems to have shifted towards artificial satellites.

There is something profoundly disturbing in this techno-orientalism. Following Castoriadis, we have suggested that Western xenophobia and racism are motivated by the apparent incapacity of a culture to constitute itself without excluding, devaluing and then hating the Other. That the Others must be instituted as inferior, Castoriadis (1992) describes as the 'natural inclination' of human societies. This is the logic of a kind of self-love that constructs itself in terms of a cultural and national narcissism. But there is something more, something deeper, something we might even describe as 'unnatural' in this logic of techno-orientalism. As Castoriadis goes on to suggest, hatred of the Other can also be seen as the 'other side of an unconscious self-hatred'; a hatred that is 'usually for obvious reasons intolerable under its overt form, that nourishes the most driven forms of the hatred of the other' (ibid.: 9). To explore this possibility speculatively, and perhaps only metaphorically, we might suggest that the resentment expressed against Japanese technology (rationality, development, progress) reflects an unconscious and primal hatred of this aspect of Western maturity. There is perhaps a (delirious) refusal, rejection, detestation of that modernity into which our own culture has been transformed; of that (totalitarian) element of modernity that threatens some deep-seated aspect (or cultural monad) in Western society.

Perhaps Japan is just a mirror of our own modernity and of its discontents. Maybe Japan simply reflects back to us the 'deformities' in our own culture. As it asserts its claims on modernity, and as it refuses the investment of

Western Orientalist fantasies, there might just be the possibility really to 'learn from Japan'. We shall increasingly be compelled to take seriously this Japan that can say no. Perhaps we should be less concerned with what we think it reveals about 'them', and more attentive to what it could help us to learn about ourselves and our own culture. Japanese no-saying is important because of the radical challenge it currently presents to our understanding of modernity and of the cultural and ethnic conditions of its existence until now. Japan is significant because of its complexity: because it is non-Western, yet refuses any longer to be our Orient; because it insists on being modern, yet calls our kind of modernity into question. Because of this Japan offers possibilities. It potentially offers us a way beyond that simple binary logic that differentiates modern and traditional, and then superimposes this on the distinction between Occident and Orient. In so far as Japan complicates and confuses this impoverished kind of categorisation it challenges us to rethink our white modernity.

This kind of intellectual and imaginative challenge cannot, and will not, obviate conflicts between Europe and America and Japan, but it could make it possible to handle real differences of interest in more complex ways. What Japan tells us is that we have to move beyond a worldview that confronts Western modernity with its (pre-modern) Other. Contrary to Ishihara's argument, the modern era has not entered its terminal phase with the displacement of 'Caucasian' modernity. Modernity is now, more than ever, the condition of all cultures in this world. The issue is on what terms they are inserted into that modernity, and on what terms they will co-exist. Japan's achievement is that it is now no different from Europe or the United States in terms of its modernity. What is significant about Japan is its ethnicity, and the fact that it is the first non-white country to have inserted itself into modernity on its own terms. In so doing it has exposed the racist foundations of modernity as it has hitherto been constructed.

JAPAN PANIC

The West resents what it sees as the inscrutable, the remote and the ambiguous nature of Japanese culture. What disturbs it most of all is that this alien culture has now become 'Number One', the model of economic and technological progress. In the United States and in Europe there is a powerful sense of Japanese *otherness* and a growing fear of the might and power of that 'Other'.

It is in this context that we can situate the Japan Festival, held in Britain in 1991, described as 'a nationwide celebration of Japanese culture and society'. As Mark Holborn wrote in the catalogue for the Barbican's *Beyond Japan* exhibition, 'the dialogue between Japan and the West is frequently described in terms of Japan's absorption of the West.... In contrast, the West's absorption of Japan is inconclusive and rarely described'. With this festival

we might, perhaps, have been forced to confront and absorb that other culture. The question was whether we would be able to use this opportunity to get ourselves 'beyond Japan', beyond a fantasy of the mysterious and sinister Orient, which says a great deal about the xenophobic and neurotic condition of contemporary Western culture and which works to obstruct any more adequate understanding of, and negotiation with, the Japanese Other.

Western stereotypes of the Japanese hold them to be sub-human, as if they have no feelings, no emotions, no humanity. One way in which this Japanese character is held to manifest itself is in terms of bestial and brutal behaviour. In the late 1980s, the British newspaper *The Star* described a 'Banquet of Blood' in which 'raw whale meat was on the menu at a sickening feast for Jap VIPs'. 'During the banquet in Tokyo', it went on, 'they gorged themselves on chunks of the animal's tongue and uncooked slices of its skin'. The Japanese are held to be cold, callous and threatening because of some 'lack' of emotional connection to the rest of the world. In *The Enigma of Japanese Power*, Karel van Wolferen (1989) describes the active suppression of the personal inclinations of the Japanese through a programme of character-moulding that helps to ensure predictable and disciplined behaviour. Japan has come to figure in our cultural unconscious as the symbol of barbarism.

What seems contradictory is that even while the Japanese are perceived as alien and barbaric, there is also a recognition that they may be more modern and advanced in certain ways than the West itself. Japan is seen as the society where technology and rationalisation have fused perfectly. It is now virtually synonymous with the technologies of the future—screens, networks, robotics, artificial intelligence, simulation. Any contradiction here is only apparent, however. Japanese 'achievements' do not make them seem any less alien. As the dynamism of technological innovation has moved eastwards, so have these new technologies become subsumed into the discourse of racism. As these technologies have become associated with Japanese identity and ethnicity, they have reinforced the image of a culture that is cold, impersonal and machine-like. The barbarians have now become robots.

It seems that the West can never see Japan directly. It is as if the Japanese were always destined to be seen through the fears and the fantasies of Europeans and Americans. Japan is the Orient, containing all the West most lacks and everything it most fears. Against Japanese difference, the West fortifies and defends what it sees as its superior culture and identity. And so the West's imaginary Japan works to consolidate old mystifications and stereotypes: 'they' are barbaric and 'we' are civilised; 'they' are robots while 'we' remain human; and so on.

What is at stake is the identity of Western modernity, no less. It was the West that created modernity and modernity has always been associated with that imaginary space and identity called 'Western'. On this basis, we can say that modernity was endowed with an ethnicity (albeit an ethnicity that

was invisible to the West itself). Modernity was conceived through a barrier between Europe and America, on the one hand, and the rest of the world, on the other. This barrier was always vulnerable, however. The logic of technological progression and progress which underpinned the modernisation project was always dynamic, always expansionary, always threatening to transcend and betray its Western origins and exclusiveness.

Now it seems to have found a new and ideal host culture in Japan. It is as if the future had passed from Europe to America to Japan, from 'us' to 'them'. This has created a disturbing sense of insecurity around Western modernity. If the Japanese can become modern, then what is still distinctive about the West? Where and what is the West now? Who is us? This is what the Japan panic is about. If it is possible for modernity to find a home in the Orient, then any essential, and essentialising, distinction between East and West is problematised. Japan can no longer be handled simply as an imitator or mimic of Western modernity. It is not possible to dismiss Japanese modernity as some kind of anomaly. Its distinctiveness insists that we take it seriously.

As we move into the mid-1990s, some of the paranoia of recent years, concerning the Japanese 'economic miracle' seems to be fading. There are an increasing number of press reports (cf. Rafferty, 1994) and some academic studies which suggest that the Japanese economy itself is now in trouble. More specifically, in relation to the concerns of this chapter, there are also reports that to date Japanese investments in Hollywood have not, on the whole, been profitable (cf. Reed and Rafferty, 1994), as the Hollywood acquisitions have mainly functioned to drain cash out of the Japanese parent companies. The resignation, in November 1994, of Sony's inspirational chairman, Akio Morita, has been interpreted by many as induced by the financial strain put on the company by the string of flops produced by Columbia Pictures since its takeover by Sony. However, even as Japan's star is seen to fade, other stars rise in the West's imaginative firmament of the East: now all the talk is of the threat posed to the West not so much by Japan itself, but by the startling economic growth-rates of its symbolic offspring—the 'Four Tigers' of South-East Asia—Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea and Singapore.