

## AICA JAPAN CONGRESS 1998

Symposium "TRANSITION : Changing Society and Art "

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### ■ Colloquium I *Memories and Visions : From Tradition to a New Identity*

Session 2 : *The Asian Perspective*

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*The Problems in Reconstituting One's Identity in One's Own Art and the Revitalisation of One's Own Tradition, for example, Korea*

A problem of reconstituting one's cultural identity, particularly, for non-Western countries, the so-called Other, is that this reconstitution is based directly or indirectly on the Western discourses of identity (self, sexual, cultural, etc.). Here we should question the assumed translatability of that Western discourse, in particular, the conditions of the possibility of modern representation systems as such in the first place.

Without scrutinising the representability, reconstituting one's cultural identity through the revitalisation of one's own tradition often results in a reduction of the identity of the Other's art to indigenous materials, techniques or traditions. For example, many of the works of the 1980s in Korea dealt with the issues of rediscovering Korea's own tradition and re-constituting Korean identity only produced or a kitsch folk art or a fetishisation of the tradition.

Once excluded or marginalised Other's art are now included in order to reassure the assumed translatability, or the representability of the modern representation systems. The translatability of the Western discourse of the identity asserts that the difference of the Other's art is always recognisable. However, this difference is figural or unrepresentable (Lyotard), or unsignifiable (Derrida). Therefore, representing the unrepresentable difference (or the Other) within the modern representation on which the Western concept of the identification based would be only to betray that difference.

Translatability here implies Walter Benjamin's sense of pure translatability, that is, that no translation is in fact possible. This impossibility is derived from the irreducibility of difference between an original and its translation. Yet, translation is ongoing, precisely as the necessity to translate. Benjamin's notion of translatability with its double meaning, translatable and, at the same time, untranslatable, is necessarily at work within and against the Western discourse, disrupting the rule of representation. By translating the double meaning of translatability into double strategies, the rediscovering Korea's own tradition may provide a basis of a new possibility for aesthetic practice.