

## Appreciation and Environment

\_\_\_\_\_ a Japanese way to 'not to die': \_\_\_\_\_

### 1. Search for the uniquely Japanese

In recent times there have been in Japan many symposia and conferences with titles such as 'Japanese art and Internationality'. Implicit in such titles and themes is the assumption that one can identify artistic or cultural phenomena which are "characteristically" or "uniquely" Japanese and others which are not. While it is usually assumed in Japan that such phenomena exist, there is no general agreement on what they are. The tradition of such discussions is quite old in Japan but they seem to be rarer in most other countries and even the Japanese not so long ago felt no need to talk about such things.

Japanese fine arts, architecture, literature, law, social legislation, political organization etc. are nowadays often discussed and sometimes even created with the question of how Japan is or ought to be perceived by foreigners in mind. Why do the Japanese care so much about how they, and particularly their culture are seen abroad? Why are they so self-conscious? This self-consciousness shows itself in the constant need to re-assure oneself about the uniqueness and exceptionality of one's own culture. Surely such an attitude can be found elsewhere, but in Japan it seems to be particularly noticeable at least as far as public discussion is concerned. The study of "Japanology" -- *Nihonjinron* is one of the most popular academic disciplines as well as a regular feature in the mass media).

Other people, for example the Chinese, may be equally convinced of their exceptionality and uniqueness, but they do not seem to be

discussing this point nearly as much as the Japanese. Recently a Korean scholar Li wrote a book about the Japanese in which he showed how a lot of what is often in Japan claimed to be uniquely Japanese is shared with Korean culture and sometimes is even more characteristically Korean than Japanese. He says that this sort of attitude comes from the Japanese pre-occupation with the West, which leads them to view everything non-Western in their culture as "typically Japanese". He added that only characteristic that could be said genuinely Japanese is the tendency to make things 'shrink', to minaturize (!)

I think there is a lot of truth in this, but it seems to me that there is another reason why discovering things which are "purely" or "genuinly" Japanese has proved so hard. It seems to me to lie in the fact that important elements of Japanese culture are derived from other, very different cultures, while the Japanese people are basically homogeneous. This is in fact the opposite of the situation that has prevailed (perhaps until recently) in the United States: a heterogeneous people united by a mor or less homogeneous culture. The American culture is is a genuine amalgalm of contributions off he various ethnic groups that make up the American people, but it is not possible to view the Japanese culture in this way. In fact, as I shall try toi show, the Japanese culture is not an "amalgalm" but rather a "transformation" of foreign and native ingredients.

Although the presence of elements derived those derived from China and Korea, and those of Western origin, in the Japanese culture is beyond dispute, it is very difficult to separate them from "what is genuinly Japanese". As a result the Japanese find themselves feeling quite unsure whether they belong culturally to Europe or Asia, or to the pre-modern, modern or even post-modern world. Or rather, each of these possibilities has been at one time or another presented as the best way to describe what is "genuinely Japanese" in Japanese culture.

It has even been suggested that the most truly "Japanese" aspect is precisely this cultural eclecticism, the ability to borrow patches from others and seamlessly join them together to create a whole that is unlike any of its parts. In fact putting things in this way reminds you one of the way in Japanese wood cutting, Ukiyoe: the shapes of women and man represented in Ukiyoe wood prints have conspicuous flowing outlines. These lines have the function of uniting smoothly the various parts of the body: face, hands, legs, feet which without them would appear to be drawn separately, without a unifying perspective.

The recent preoccupation on the part of Japanese with "what is truly Japanese" may also be a result of the long history of imitation and the fact that Japan has begun to feel that the time has come when she should begin to export, rather than importing culture.

In this talk I would like to try to partially answer the question why it is so difficult to identify these "genuinely Japanese" elements of Japanese culture. At the same time I would like to try to show how the Japanese culture managed to maintain its identity and survive in spite of what appeared at times to be overwhelming impact of great foreign civilizations, that of ancient China and of modern West. Finally, I would like to discuss the challenge that faces Japanese culture these days and how it is met by some Japanese artists.

## **2 Japanese 'heart' as an enduring container**

My answer to the question of what is "truly Japanese" in Japanese culture is basically that such elements have to be found not so much in concrete arts, practices or objects but in a certain constancy of attitude, which was precisely what made it possible to repeatedly adopt radically different influences and yet preserve the essential feeling of continuity.

The process that is usually called "assimilation of foreign influence" can be, in the case of Japan, more accurately described as expanding and then transforming the Japanese concept of "Nature" and with it the entire cultural environment, while preserving the basic Nature-centered viewpoint. In other words, although the Japanese taste has obviously undergone many changes, under the influence of all kinds of new things and ideas from the West the Japanese people continued to believe in a continuity between modern and ancient Japan, feeling that its "heart" and "naturalness" has remained the same. For example, what they valued in art was not so much "art-objects", as rather feelings and effort that had gone into their creation, believing that all the time the same "heart" is at work. This concept of "heart" (kokoro) has not been logically formulated nor explicitly systematized, but has been used continually from the most ancient days to the present. Budding artists and disciples of great masters in Japan have always been told that they should follow the hearts of the ancient masters, not their works. Even if at the beginning you have to imitate a master's work exactly, eventually a stage must come when you are imitating the master "heart", which is not imitation any more.

This heart was often manifested through various "ideals", that the Japanese used to assign to various art genres at different times of their history. These ideals were discussed using peculiar aesthetic jargon, or cliché, and were confined to particular arts or genres. This kind of jargon, or jargons are special kinds of languages which are peculiar to "aesthetics", or to particular fields of human activity where action and experience are not or cannot be "captured" by description and theory. In other words these languages are used in order to organize and "systematise" particular, perhaps esoteric experiences. They may not neatly fit in into a wider body of language, a theory or a cosmology. Thus a Japanese concept like say Wabi has essentially specified application to Japanese tea ceremony. This kind of context dependent ideals are nothing but the heart that work throughout the aesthetic activities, and serve as the symbolic, unifying, guideline.

### 3 Nature and naturalness as container

The words "Nature" (often identified with "heart") and "natural" are the most commonly used words in Japanese writings on art, and it was through their concept of "nature" that the Japanese maintained the identity of their spiritual and aesthetic values, while they underwent various changes and transformations. In Japanese cultural history "nature" served as a kind of "container". Various foreign "contents" would be put into the container and thus transformed into something that fitted in with the Japanese culture. In between the times when new concepts entered from outside and was assimilated through "the container" Japanese culture tended to be basically stable. The Japanese artists would follow the ideal of "naturalness" and "heart", concentrating on achieving greater and greater degree of perfection and "naturalness", pursuing the established ideals. It was most of the time (though not entirely) contact with outside culture that led to an expansion of these ideals.

Thus Japanese culture had a subtle way of changing while maintaining its identity, by means of this very flexible concept of Nature. At each stage everything that belonged to Nature tended to be thought of as simple, spontaneous, and unaffected and contrasted with things that were foreign, artificial, and new. But the new and artificial could itself become a part of nature by being "enclosed" in the container. Once something had been assimilated it began to be called "natural", and could even serve as a "container" itself.

In fact to say that something was 'natural' was not even always a term of praise. Thus the terms "nature" or naturalness was sometimes used to refer to Japanese "backwardness" compared with foreign

cultures and sometimes to that which was supposed to be the most valuable and unique quality of the Japanese culture.

Next, I would like to discuss on some concrete examples how the concept of "nature" which has been repeatedly identified with Japanese heart functioned in Japan's cultural history. Especially in the area of Japanese taste and aesthetics .

#### **Intrtroduction of Buddhism,**

One example is provided by the introduction of Buddhism . Buddhism which originated in India, then went to China and from there to Korea in the 4 century and then in 6 century the Japanese Court (of Emperor Kinnmei ) formally received a Buddha's statue and a sutra. Until then Japan had only rather naive, art and aesthetics based on the native religion Shinto , a kind of animistic , religion of nature, involving the worship of goddess of Sun and of various gods of mountains, of fields, wind, crops etc. as well as ancestor -worship. As is often seen in this kind of mythical world, 'life' was the basis of holiness and of aesthetic beauty. And in the case of Japan 'life' was usually seen in the shape of green leaves of trees and plants, or in running , pure and purifying water.

What happened was that the Japanese Shintoist ideal of beauty, *kiyoshi*, which meant *the* purity and cleanness of life not yet defiled by the dirt and the smell of death, had to face the impact of the gorgeous, shiny, decorative "artificial " beauty of Buddhist art. Some felt this newly introduced objects disturbing and menacing . They called the effects of those golden Buddha's images and other imports which arrived with them "kirakirashi", a half-pejorative term suggesting gaudiness but also involving a trace of admiration for colourful foreign flashiness. These techniques of working with bronze had been completely unknown to the Japanese earlier. What was described as *kirakirashi* went against Japanese "traditional" aesthetic sense and moral ideal, which were simplicity, purity and 'naturalness'. Buddhist

teachings themselves seemed even more menacing and overwhelming. The logical theory they were based on seemed devastatingly superior to the primitive animism of Shinto, which did not have any systematic theology or cosmology. The Japanese did not even have a writing system to write down the stories of the births of their Shinto gods. It is not surprising that the arrival of Buddhism created a crisis in Japan. After a period of struggle within the Japanese elite between those who wanted to ban Buddhism and those who wanted to adopt it lasted for some time and eventually the latter side won.

As a result the Shintoist ideal of *kiyoshi* eventually merged with the formerly somewhat pejorative *kirakirashi* and gave rise to a 'genuinely Japanese' ideal of a person: *kiyoge/kiyora* (pure in heart and fair in appearance).

Thus *kiyoshi* served as a "container" for "kirakirashi" to produce "kiyoge". This new ideal, which originated in something that was once thought highly "artificial" was in fact closely related to the famous *mono no aware* ("pathos of thing"), which became the main Japanese aesthetic ideal, expressing the deepest truth of "Nature". We shall see a little more detail about this concept of *mono no aware*. Here first we should quickly survey the social and political structure that characterize Japanese way of "Japanization".

### **The Japanization of Buddhism**

As is already suggested, introduction of Buddhism from China, epitomise the basic pattern of the Japanese attitude. What came from outside was strong, ornamental and "advanced", what was native was spontaneous, simple and weak. Something artificial merged with the natural (from the Japanese viewpoint). Seen from another angle the importance of the adoption of Buddhism for Japan lied in the fact that it provided a means for unifying the country. Various folk religions and practices were united as part of new Buddhist ceremonies. The government rather than local people built temples

and statues and used this to centralize political and cultural life of the state.

Then came the Heian period, when the once great Tang empire declined and Japan ceased to send messengers to China. The Japanese gradually digested Chinese influence, and made Buddhism more 'Japanese.' There appeared Japanese style of building temples, Japanese style of writing, Japanese style painting, and Japanese style poetry (waka) in contrast (and side by side) with, Chinese style building, writing, poetry etc.

As we have seen, when Buddhism was imported it was used as the weapon of building and uniting a nation. Buddhism was expected to be useful in uniting various different talk worships and local rituals and thus inevitably "harmonizing" aspect, rather than challenging, fighting aspects, of Buddhism was emphasized there.

The distinction of sacred and secular had been also blurred in Japanese society. The people of the Middle Ages, in Japan (like in Europe) tended to believe that the end of world was approaching. A similar belief in "the latter day of Law" is found in India but while in India emphasis was on the importance asceticism and training in self-denial, in Japan in the Heian period, it was almost always took the form of emotional loathing for the war-like world. The feeling of aversion to this world, and of yearning for another in Tale of Genji, for example, must have been widely shared among people of high and low birth. This atmospheric general ennui and emotional resignation and awareness of non-permanence of everything made the distinction of death and life vague and gradual: shadow of death in life, shadow of another world onto this world, thus connecting of two worlds, eliminating the contrast.

This mitigation of sharp contrast between sacred and secular



was repeated in the Kamakura period, in 12 century. Kamakura Zen Buddhism, which provided spiritual values for the Kamakura warriors, insisted on self-salvation, which went against the Heian belief in the ideal "Pure Land". In its early days the warrior government of Kamakura had revolutionary character, and the various Zen sects associated with it also had revolutionary nature. But eventually Kamakura and Zen became a part of the established order. Partly because of its close relationship with the government, and partly because of weakness in its logical system, Kamakura Zen Buddhism did not preserve its identity.

In the Edo period religious shrines and temples were used by the government for control and supervision of the population, and this attitude basically continued until the end of the second world War. In the post war period the thoroughly assimilated Buddhism followed the path of the rest of the Japanese society, taking on an increasingly commercialized and perfunctory character.

This story of Buddhism in Japan shows a typical pattern. Foreign ideas introduced into Japan were rarely accepted or challenged on the grounds of their "truth" or "rightness". The primary question was whether they were natural or not, in other words, could they be fitted in and made use of within the existing social framework. When in the beginning of the 17-th century Christianity was banned and Christians became to be severely persecuted, it was not on grounds of "falsity" of the Christian religion but because of its perceived threat to the social order. On other occasions very radical and seemingly subversive ideas (like Zen or Taoism) could be successfully adapted and made use of. Of course all this was a key element of the very effective means of social control that the Japanese authorities have enjoyed over centuries. In fact the same phenomena can still be seen in present day Japan. The most "subversive" and "rebellious" ideas and fashions are adopted and transformed into something non-threatening

and often undisturbing. Any one who has seen "cute" Japanese punks will understand what I mean.

### **Double structure of Japanese writing**

Another example characteristic way of adoption by "naturalization" can be seen in the double structure of the Japanese system of writing. The emergence of the Japanese style of writing, *Kana*, or *hiragana* is another typical example. Chinese characters, which were originally used by the Japanese as phonetic signs, gradually got transformed into katakana, and hiragana (or Japanese letters) to produce simpler, feminine, "natural" way of writing phonetic syllables. Until this day the Japanese writing consists of a mixture of Chinese hierographic characters and hiragana. Chinese characters express mainly nouns but adjective and small Japanese particles which are needed to make sentences are written in hiragana. Thus the container or grammar is provided by hiragana, while the content is expressed in Chinese characters. This is rather symbolic of the spirit in which the Japanese have received foreign ideas and techniques. Hiragana, the Japanese nature heart "contains" Kanji, the new origin and heart of civilization.

By the 10<sup>th</sup> century the system of Kanji and Kana mixture was established and it has continued until today. Since then many foreign words have been imported into Japanese, most of them English. When they are adopted for usage in Japanese they are written in katakana, and put into the hiragana container .....*suru*, (do). Although one hears from time to time complaints about the large number of such words they fit in smoothly into the everyday speech of the Japanese. This suffix which is attached to these new words seems provide them with the necessary degree of "naturalness".

Next I should like to expand a little more the traditional meaning of "naturalness" for the Japanese. It turns out that what the Japanese

have meant by "Nature" has always, in a certain sense, been highly artificial. In other words, it had little in common with "naturalism" in the Western sense, which to the Japanese throughout all of their history would have seen as a unacceptably vulgar concept. The "artificiality" of the Japanese concept of "nature" accounts for the smoothness with which it could serve as a "container" of foreign, "artificial" imports.

#### 4 Artificial Naturalness

As I said above, the principal aesthetic-moral concept of pre-modern Japan, became *mono-no-aware* after the introduction and permeation of Buddhist thought.

To put it short, *Mono no aware* (pathos of things or sadness of nature) could be said to be an emotional interpretation of the Buddhist principles. The essential Buddhist teachings assert that there is no independent entity which is the cause of itself. Buddhism denies substance as the base of our knowledge or perception. Thus from the point of view of logic there is no point in lamenting no permanence of life, youth, beauty, since they are mere appearance, and the very awareness of their being a mere appearance is the way to the salvation from all the sufferings of life.

#### Nature as revelation of Buddhist principle

*Mono no aware* is the awareness of non-permanence of things, and the feeling of compassion which comes from this awareness. Nothing is permanent your life, my life, the bird which sings so beautifully today will not sing tomorrow, this beautiful flower will be withered when the evening comes. Because we share this feeling of non-permanence our love and appreciation for every living thing deepens.

We sing , birds sing and tree seems to be singing , lamenting this non-permanent condition of the universe.

Here we find the process of shifting the Buddhist philosophical principle of non-permanence into changeability of Nature. Various changes in Nature, especially in the seasonal changes, affected deeply in people's life and this 'understanding' of non-permanence leads to emotional compassion and resignation to any living things people saw and heard, from short living flower, to the seasonal song of warbler.

Thus Buddhist idea of 'once and nevermore' was interpreted as seasonal change of scene of nature. A typical example is the beauty of a flower, which is intensified and colored by the knowledge that the flower in bloom must soon decay and die. Summer flowers , spring flowers or trees and birds , flourish only when time comes. Beauty of a flower has its own 'sense of occasion' and this concept in various forms plays a great role in Japanese aesthetics. In fact the word hana (beauty , flower ) is used to refer to something very much like sense of occasion, in linked verse and in Noh drama.

In this way Japanese successfully assimilated the idea of Buddhism into something genuinely Japanese

### **Normative Naturalness.**

During the long period of formation of these aesthetic ideals, what happened was that naturalness or changeability was felt as 'normative' and various ways of appreciation become more like a "technique". there emerged also something called "proper meaning". Japanese 'aesthetics' and aesthetic languages grew out of creation and criticism of *waka*-poetry, are highly professional at the Imperial court, in which practically the entire Japanese aristocracy participated.

In court poetry it was not only the themes but even the style and emotion of the poems which were often decided in advance. For example a typical task would be to "make a waka poem about first love, in the *taketakashi* (tall) style". Various poetic themes had their *hoi*, or "proper meaning", which was supposed to be expressed in the poetry. Love, for example, was supposed to be always lost, not fulfilled. The proper meaning (*hoi*) of love was "lost love". The "proper meaning" of the sound of a cuckoo was an object eagerly sought after, i. e. the poet should roam here and there to seek after something, when he hears the sound of a cuckoo. On the other hand, the bellow of a deer must induce sadness and forlornness in one's heart but it should not be longed for. Or, the first snow fall should be awaited by poets, but autumnal showers should not be looked forward to, etc. According to more detailed "rule" books there are more proper meanings concerned with how things should be mourned, lamented, longed for etc. This kind of "convention" survives even today in the modern practice of haiku poetry. For example if you are making a poem of love, you have to lament loss of love, not gained one. You have to say that autumn night long and spring night short, though scientifically speaking that should be equal. There are a lot of seasonal words in Haiku, and things such as frog, fan, wind, has its own season, and should not be used for other season, though obviously frogs will be living and sit somewhere in early spring, as well as late spring, and in summer and in autumn.

### **sophisticated simplicity**

This 'normative' and artificial "naturalness" was the basis of a peculiar Japanese "sophisticated simplicity" (which made a striking contrast with the realism of Western art which entered Japan after it was opened up to the outside world in the second half of the 19-th century).

For example, the preference for straight lines, or, almost straight line, with subtle curvature is also a part of the ideal of simplicity,

which in Japan is considered the highest form of sophistication. The line of the roof, contour of Ukiyoe, the abstract wave lines in rock garden, shows the forces of cutting down unnecessary decoration in order to bring out the essence of nature.

Again it is not recommended to use in a tea ceremony a picture which shows two kinds of flowers in one scene. This recommendation is usually expressed through a Chinese story from the Tang dynasty period.

(Once a poet composed a poem on a cold, snowy morning

The village before me is covered in deep snow  
Unnoticed several plum branches blossomed last night.

This poem's theme is the hidden advent of spring, whose early signs are a few white flowers on the plum tree branches among white snow.

His friend, a great poet, changed the phrase 'several branches' into 'a branch,' and the author was much impressed with the improvement for he realized that early flowers couldn't come out in large numbers in a single night.

The Chinese moral of the story was based on realism: one should attempt to copy faithfully what actually happens in nature.

But the Japanese were impressed with the story for a somewhat different reason: they felt that the second version of the poem had depth and sophistication which the original attempt lacked.

### **Naturalness and Naturalism**

Indeed this highly ambitious and demanding attribute of the professionalism is expected of Japanese appreciation. Japanese poetry, traditional theatre, or tea ceremony, etc. Indeed a poet is a spectator of nature, who needs professional training of see what is properly natural. Is this professionalism natural or acquired? What is the relationship between spontaneous and acquired reaction during "performance"? Can we evaluate spectators according to their training, experience and quality of response? Does preparation mean the actual immediate activities before going to the theatre or an uta-awase competition (traditional court poetry competition) or does it also mean the long term "preparation for" the art of theatre going or "art of appreciating nature", training ones body and spirit so that one's own senses may be ready for explicit and implicit stimulations, for subtle suggestions including "suggestion by negation", which is a favorite of the Japanese? Does this professional attitude mean the loss of spontaneous lively response and the creation of an aloof, un-emotional aesthete? Possibly this is why, every younger generation have been attracted by Western individualism and subjectivism in artistic expression, in other words modern Western aesthetics.

##### **5. Modern West and "natural" Japan**

Around the year 1910 a number of artistic and cultural avant garde movements were active in the West: expressionism, cubism, futurism, constructivism dadaism etc. (This was later followed by a long period of "stagnation", in which no new forms were introduced).

In this year Takamura Koutarou, a famous Japanese poet and sculptor, wrote an essay entitled "Green Sun", in which he declared that the then much discussed problem of "local colours" (whether there are "innately Japanese" ways of artistic representation and expression) can be avoided: "the sun can be painted either green or red; all such

schemes are interchangeable".

While holding to this general relativism, however, Takamura felt compelled to state that "I am a Japanese, and when I die, the works I leave will be, after all, works of a Japanese." Here is an early example of viewing being Japanese as one's destiny.

For Takamura, and in his day, this 'destiny of being a Japanese' was a burden, rooted in the perception that Japan was simply historically backward compared with western countries. He was backward as an artist because he belonged to a backward culture and had to follow various new Western ideas and movements, trying to understand and imitate.

A little later in the 1930's, however, the Japanese could already feel that they have largely caught up with the West, in part simply because of the creative impasse that much of Western avant-garde art found itself in that period, while Japanese artists had already absorbed most of its ideas and techniques.

On the other hand a new problem arose. Once originally foreign artistic forms had become fully assimilated there began to be felt a psychological need to try to find something that was "genuinely Japanese", even when expressed within these apparently international or non-national forms. This need was felt even more urgently because it coincided with a period of rising nationalist feelings worldwide and in Japan particularly. Of course, it became common to express this distinction in terms of the "naturalness" of the Japanese way, and the "artificiality" of the West.

In certain ways it is basically the same pattern that is being repeated today in Japan. We are witnessing various attempts to return to Japanese tradition. There are also, as in the past, movements attempting to "support local (village) culture" which is seen as more "natural" and more Japanese. The stage of assimilating Western forms and techniques has basically finished. They have been adopted and



fully internalized. A new concept of "naturalness" has now formed and the Japanese cultural "container" and could be used to adapt new forms in the traditional way.

However, barring unexpected arrival of aliens from outer space, the old pattern, of Japan coming accross an an unknown foreign civilization and experiencing a cultural crisis and stimulation of the kind that took place in the past, is never likely to repeat itself again. There are simply no major civilizations left likely to make this sort of impact. The Japanese are thus forced to rely on themselves.

The most obvious response is to look back, to try to recover "traditional" simplicity and naturality. Of course this does not have to mean going back to building old style temples and rock gardens, but rather a return to the older concept of "Nature". A stiking example of this kind is offered by the work of Aiko Miyawaki or of Kazuo Okazaki at Nagi. These works use modern western materials but still the conception of nature they are based on is unmistakably traditional Japanese.

If you look at the picture you notice immediately the Japanese 'sophisticated simplicity' in Miyawaki and Okazaki, side by side with Arakawa's work, which seems un-japanese and even "kirakirashi".

## **6. To not to die**

Architect and artist Shusaku Arakawa, one of the most interesting artists working today in Japan, shows another way. Arakawa left Japan for the United States over 30 years ago, while in his twenties. There he met the poet Madeline H. Gins, who became his wife and collaborator. He also met other artists, among whom the biggest influence was probably Marcel Duchamps, the founder of Dada. One reason why Arakawa is such an intersting example is that his work usually appears to be very un-Japanese, and in some cases one might even say it involves a kind of denial of Japaneseness. This is how, for

example, one can view Arakawa's "version" of Kyoto's Ryoanji at the Nagi Museum of Contemporary Art. The rock garden of Kyoto's Ryoanji is one of the most famous of Japanese rock garden's, and is often considered to be quintessentially "Japanese". Thus Arakawa's work takes as its subject matter a traditional Japanese theme in the most direct way, so much as to produce the sensation of pastiche and even kitch. The simplicity and naturalness of the original Ryoanji are here replaced by complexity and extreme artificiality, going as far as to replace identity of objects by symmetry. The gentle curving, almost straight lines beloved by generations of Japanese artists are replaced by circles.

There is almost an air of caricature here.

This however is only a superficial view. The problem is that it presents Nagi's Ryoanji as a visual object, while in fact in this example, like in many others of Arakawa's work the visual sense is put firmly in the back seat. The experience of entering Nagi's Ryoanji is a whole body experience, an experience in which all the senses are made to play a role. Inside the strange cylindrical structure the usual laws of space, time and gravitation appear to have ceased to function. One feels disoriented and uncomfortable. All our assumptions, about what constitutes up or down, right or left, back and front, are undermined, nature itself seems undermined. This undermining of assumptions is one of the basic devices of Zen Buddhism, but equally of Dadaism.

Gradually one begins to find one's way, though things never reach the point of stability. One reaches a kind of tentative semi-equilibrium. To those who know the original Ryoanji this place is entirely familiar and at the same time totally new.

Thus Arakawa creates a new environment, a new artificial nature. Into this new environment he has absorbed Western science, geometry and philosophy and joined them with the most classical of Japanese materials. A Japanese temple, which itself is symbolic representation of nature has been subjected to a transformation, which first "de-naturalizes it" and then re-creates in an alternative way. Seen in this

way the result now appears to be within the Japanese tradition of "re-creation of nature", through adoption and transformation.

Whether Arakawa should really be regarded as a "Japanese artist" is of course a point that can be disputed. Certainly he sees his work as something much more universal than merely finding another "transformation" for the Japanese tradition. In fact Arakawa sees the aim of his work as a process of discovery of "how not to die".

However, even in the way he expresses it there are clear echos of the traditional way of thinking:

"With all perceptual, imaging and architectural landing sites precisely locatable, unquestionably clearly situated, Kokoro can at last meet and completely surround and sustain kokoro and teach it how not to die...".

The first Kokoro in the above passage seems to be very close to, if not identical, to the traditional Japanese Kokoro=Heart=Nature. The second is more like the Western concept of individual mind or spirit.

By not dying clearly Arakawa does not mean bodily not dying. What is at issue is the non dying of kokoro, once it has been surrounded and became a part of Nature. In another place Arakawa makes clear that he is not concerned here with "eternity", which he regards as a childish concept.

In the above passage "perceptual, imagining and architectural landing sites" are terms belonging to a language developed by Arakawa and Gins, to describe the kind of "total body experience" that the Nagi Ryoanji is meant to offer, in non-spatio-temporal way.

This language, in fact, the very idea of such a language, is based on Western philosophy and logic (although the phenomenon of a special "language" used to describe certain aesthetic experiences is, as I said earlier, also an element of Japanese culture.)

Like most other successful cases of cross-cultural adaptation Arakawa's work is not a pastiche but a transformation which "creates a new environment".

Finally, I would like to show some slides of the Nagi Museum of

Modern Art, where the work of Miyawaki, Okazaki, and Arakawa is displayed. The contrast between the more traditional though totally original beauty of the former and the "transformative" character of Arakawa's work is, it seems to me, very striking.