Edited by
Andrew Gerstle and Anthony Milner

Recovering the Orient

Artists, Scholars, Appropriations

ROUTLEDGE

Recovering the Orient

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Recovering the Orient

Artists, scholars, appropriations

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Dr Peter Kornicki has taught at the University of Tasmania and Kyoto University. He now lectures in Japanese studies at the University of Cambridge and is chairman of the Faculty of Oriental Studies. He is the author of numerous articles and of *The Reform of Fiction in Meiji Japan* (1982) and *Early Japanese Books in Cambridge* (with N. Hayashi, 1991, awarded Japan Foundation Special Prize). He has also been the general editor of *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Japan* with R. Bowring (1993). He works mainly on the history of the book in Japan.

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Preface

The essays in this volume were presented in draft form at two conferences held in the Humanities Research Centre of the Australian National University. The theme of these conferences, "Europe and the Orient", provoked a vigorous exchange of ideas across disciplines and areas of interest; Europeanists debated with Asianists, one discipline took the measure of another. Following the conferences, authors went away to reflect again on their topics on preparing their essays for publciation.

A wide range of people contributed to the success of the conferences and to the process of producing this volume. Ian Donaldson and Graeme Clark, Director and Associate Director of the Human Research Centre at that time, could not have been more helpful. Funding from the HRC allowed most of those giving papers to spend time at the Australian National University. Jodi Parvey and Christine Szokalski of the HRC have from the beginning been involved in the preparation of the essays for publication. We would also like to thank the Australian National Gallery, the Canberra School of Music, Studio Altenberg in Braidwood and Riley Lee for their cooperation. Many others from within the ANU and from further afield participated in the success of the conferences. We hope that the publication of this volume will revive for them memories of an exciting and stimulating event.

CHAPTER 1

Recovering the Exotic: Debating Said

Anthony Milner and C. Andrew Gerstle

The project which generated this collection of essays was designed to reassess the significance of cultural difference. It aimed to counter one specific consequence of Edward Said's widely influential work *Orientalism.*[1] Said, as is well known, applies the notion of discourse (developed largely by Michel Foucault) to the analysis of Western writing about the "Orient". Said focuses on Middle Eastern studies where, he argues, there has been a tendency for scholars and other commentators to address a tradition of interpretation rather than the actual data which they claim to be describing or investigating: the books which they write are concerned not with the Orient but with the discourse of Orientalism. This discourse, of course, is not merely disinterested. One of Said's strengths is his identification of ways in which "Orientalism" has served the purposes of power, particularly European colonial power. He points out that Western formulations of Asian culture and Asian society were integral to European ideological and political domination, and this observation has provoked a tremor of critical self-reflection through the entire "Asian studies" profession.

In commissioning the essays in the present book we were reacting to this tremor. Said's *Orientalism* has encouraged a sense of embarrassment among those scholars concerned with the investigation of culture. In drawing attention to the essentializing tendencies of some writing about Asia and to its potential political consequences, he made us wary of delineating cultural difference. This wariness is not merely moral in origin: indeed Said's stress on the constructed character of the Oriental "other" brings into question the theoretical basis of all cultural analyses.

Said's *Orientalism*, as James Clifford has noted[2], communicates an homogenizing view of humanity. The argument of the book is underpinned by a strong humanism which, despite its attraction as a counter to colonialist stereotypes, can also be constricting in its analytical impact. It is this compulsion to

[1] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978)

[2] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard, 1988).

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constrict, amounting sometimes even to a denial of "the other", which the following essays challenge. The essays themselves tend to promote not closure but sensitivity to cultural difference. In some cases they portray the exotic as a creative stimulus and offer, as well, added insight into the way exotic phenomena participate in the creation of the Western discourse about Asia.

Two types of cultural process are considered in this book: the first concerns the relation between the artist and a field of stimulus; the second involves the scholar's encounter with, and response to, the object of study. Both types of process are often present in the same essay.

The first three essays — by Bromfield, Howat and Tatlow — deal, respectively, with the painter Monet, the composer Debussy, and the playwright Brecht. In each case the artist is described as encountering and then exploiting the exotic. Bromfield observes that unlike European painting, Japanese painting determines:

> ...the subject directly from its techniques, not from an analysis of the infinite perceptual possibilities of the subject. Moreover it leaves the means of this determination inscribed in the finished work in the form of visible systems of brush strokes.

The encounter with exotic Japanese art gave Monet the means to free his subject from the Western conventions of referentiality and free the artist himself to concentrate on the artistic process.

The Oriental "other" has an equally structural impact on the art of Debussy. Howat takes seriously Debussy's fascination with the Javanese *gamelan* orchestra. "Javanese music" declared Debussy, "obeys laws of counterpoint that make (the compositions of the sixteenth-century Italian composer) Palestrina seem like child's play". And in his architectural *Images* of 1906–12 Debussy employs (in Howat's words) "a rhythmic counterpoint or layering" which is "nearer to *(gamelan)* technique than to any prior Western habit".

In the case of Brecht, Tatlow suggests that the influence crosses genre. Brecht was intrigued by the lack of a fixed perspective in Chinese painting: "the Chinese composition", he noted

> ...lacks an element of compulsion to which we are completely accustomed. This order requires no force. The designs contain a lot of freedom. The eye is able to go on a voyage of discovery.

Such multiperspectival art, of course, upset Western categories and thus stimulated Brecht to produce a dialectical rather than mimetic drama, one which "incorporates movement and change and so decentres any static hierarchical perspective ...".

In the fourth essay in the volume, Anthony Forge portrays the British scholar-official, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, as an Orientalist who attempted to deny difference. In his highly influential *History of Java*, the illustrations of Javanese

men and women suggest that Raffles was consciously attempting to "present the Javanese in a way that he knew would make them appear attractive to his English audience, different of course but fundamentally civilized and nice". Forge shows how this graphic material was painstakingly designed to fit the Javanese into the emerging European concept of "economic man". In domesticating the exotic in this way Raffles was engaged in a project which, despite its imperial purposes, has ironic affinities with Said's polemic in *Orientalism*.

None of the essays in this volume follow Raffles, or Said, in suppressing cultural difference and yet the very fact of Said's deconstruction of Orientalist discourse makes analytical innocence impossible. Said compels Asianists to reflect on both the motives and the categories which underpin their cultural investigation. Indeed the four essays which follow the study of Raffles are specific exercises in such reflection.

Hay, Day, Gerstle, and Kornicki observe critical differences between European and Asian art forms and in so doing, question the use of Western categories in analysing, respectively, Chinese painting, Javanese reliefs and epics, Japanese drama and the Japanese book. For Hay, "space" is not a universal concept. In Chinese landscape art (as Brecht also observed) "there is not abstracted, optical system generating the pictorial structure". Hay stresses the participatory aspect of Chinese art. The paintings tend to "narrate a route". For the viewer a painting is for "living in" not "looking at".

In Java, too, the point of view (according to Day) is "not-naturalistic and symbolic: it is that of the gods or of those who meditate on mountain heights in order to contact divinity". Day entices the reader to see interrelationships between writing, painting and sculpture: "we need to concentrate on the movement across the surface of the design, even though our eye wants to move into it, toward an horizon which is not represented there". This movement, as Day sees it, has a political significance: "the effect of writing on a flat, natural surface is like that of a king on a tour of the natural world... 'rescripting' all that he saw and all who saw him in terms of his own Indicized ancestry and political ambition".

Gerstle is equally concerned to deepen our experience of an Asian art form. He challenges European dramaturgy as being text rather than performance-oriented, and most traditional approaches to "tragedy" as being consequently restrictive. In Japanese tragedy, where the conflict lies within rather than between individuals, the climax is built upon a musical structure. In all such drama the audience is led to a "moment of extreme musical intensity, not unlike, in effect at least, the Dionysian music feared by Plato".

Kornicki raises questions about the concept of the commercially printed "book", challenging the Marshall McLuhan view that such printing is a neutral universalistic medium. The Japanese wood-block printed books:

> ...were and are genre specific by virtue of the size and style of the calligraphy, that is to say the print, but they are also specific in that they reproduce a unique sample of a unique calligraphic hand; a hand that can be judged in terms of its aesthetic appeal, or assessed in terms of the character or age of the calligraphy, or confidently assigned to a given decade on stylistic grounds. There is, in other words, a more particularistic relationship between reader and text than is possible with movable type.

It is precisely because these features of the wood-block book fulfilled a cultural and social need that, despite the availability of movable-type technology in the sixteenth century, it was not until the late nineteenth century that the newer technology was applied. In such an analysis the concept of "book" is brought under investigation, just as the previous essays had questioned the notions of "space", "landscape" and "tragedy".

The final five essays of the volume are also concerned with analytical concepts, but here the encounter with "the other" provokes reflection on sociological context. Clifford Geertz considers a number of collective performances, some amateur or improvisational — some expressing a "chatter of cultural voices" — which take place in a country town in rural Java. He asks why certain performances are classified as high art, others as low. The hierarchical distinction between "fine" and "unfine", Geertz suggests, is "a product less of intrinsic differences, formal or contextual, than of the hectic flow of social discourse. It is common life, diverse and irregular, that divides, sorts, ranks, and arranges".

For Masao Miyoshi, who writes in the context of his own experience as a Japanese living in the United States, the exotic is perceived from a Japanese perspective: the term *"shutaisei"*, was used after the Second World War to indicate the essence of Western civilization. It means "subjectivity, subjecthood, independence, identity" and alludes to the individualism which was seen to underlie the democratic Western tradition. Miyoshi examines the post-war conditions in which *"shutaisei"* was persistently developed; the term, he argues, was a Japanese construction which ignored the realities of Western political hegemony: for the Japanese intellectuals the "program of *shutaisei* is from the beginning deliberately, and hopelessly, severed from the world which they in fact inhabit". What is required in any society, Miyoshi seems to ask, if there is to develop a genuine *"shutaisei"*?

Concert music, that is to say the "secular ensemble music performed outside the theatre", is the topic of William Malm's paper. Listening to nineteenth-century music in Tokyo provoked Malm to reflect on the parallels between the rise of concert music in Japan and in Europe. In both areas theatre music dominated in the eighteenth century but in the 1800s the development of bourgeois, urban wealth brought a new patronage for music outside the theatre. This art form, Malm suggests, is firmly grounded in sociological circumstance. Emerging independently in both Japan and Europe, the growth of

concert music is thus an example of the way art forms arise from specific social formations.

In discussing Malay oral and written traditions, Sweeney questions a whole range of Western critical terms, including such fundamental classifications as "art", "philosophy", "epic" and "literature": "the danger is that our being classified thus by Western university systems leads to the notion that the cultures we study possess the same classifications". In the case of the Malays, Western scholarship has "concentrated on turning Malay performance into Malay literature", and indeed Sweeney explains many of the characteristics of Malay "writing" in terms of its oral orientation. The way European scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have reacted to Malay "literature" — criticizing its tediously repetitive language — is again the consequence of their failure to comprehend the nature of orality.

Finally, James Boon, confronted by the extravagance of Balinese ritual, finds an analogy in the "expanding, carnivalizing, multilingual, polynational genre of 'opera' ". The parallel refers not merely to the rich heterodoxy of both culture forms but also to the way they have each resisted powerful historical forces. For Boon the analogy is indeed two edged. Encountering the exotic draws him into reflection on both the European and the Balinese art form, and in particular, on the social significance of "extravagance".

Boon revels in "the Exotic", yet every paper in this volume explores, in some form or another, cultural difference. Such concern with "the other" suggests affinities with European Orientalism, and indeed all of our authors are physically located in Western universities. Unlike the discredited Orientalists, however, our investigation of Asian cultural forms is not linked to confident assumptions about European power or European civilization. The fact that the conferences which led to this volume were held in Australia is significant in this regard. In a "Western" Australia, situated somewhat uneasily within the economic domain of Pacific-Rim Asia, the passing of the European and American Age has an immediacy rooted in the facts of geography. For Australians, it is now especially true to say that the term "exotic" in reference to Asia can only with difficulty be made to connote inferiority. Within Australian society new immigrants from culturally distant Asian countries are achieving dramatic educational and commercial success. In international terms it is not the problems of "development" but rather the economic and technological triumph of Japan and other "Confucian" states which is currently provoking research on Asian cultures. Affirmations of underlying cultural sameness, in this context, appear less important than knowledge of the critical difference which might be projecting Eastern Asia to growing economic hegemony. In some instances the interrogation today of an "Oriental" culture has about it the urgency with which East Asian, Indian and Arab reformers of the nineteenth century combed European literature

in search of the secrets of Western military and technological supremacy.

The new discourse of "the other", of course, emerges not merely from shifting balances of power and commercial prowess. The intellectual origins of the greater ambivalence and self-consciousness with which we now approach the study of Asian societies include Said's seminal book and much else besides. In recent decades we have questioned (in what increasingly has been described as a post-modern mode) many of the fundamental tenets of modern Western thought. Today we bracket such concepts as "humanism" and "progress"; we suspend judgement, as well, concerning both the moral value of Western society and also the efficacy of the conceptual tools that we have developed to interpret other societies. It is in this spirit that a number of the essays in the present volume investigate such concepts as "space", "landscape", "tragedy" and "high and low art". In each case the interrogation of "the other" takes place in the context of sustained reflection upon the "ways of seeing" which operate generally in cultural analysis.

Our authors, therefore, are not only influenced by, but also help to determine, the shifting ground upon which "Asian Studies" is currently based. In debating with Edward Said, in seeking to recover the "exotic", this volume nevertheless participates in that critical self-reflection which he has prompted.

CHAPTER 2

Japanese Art, Monet and the Formation of Impressionism: Cultural Exchange and Appropriation in Later Nineteenth Century European Art [1]

David Bromfield

> "Look at that flower with its petals turned back in the wind, is that not truth itself?" said the great colourist, "and here, next to this woman by Hokusai look at this Bathing scene: look at these bodies can you not feel their firmness? They are made of flesh and bone yet are described only by their outline. What we appreciated above all in the West was the bold fashion of defining their subjects: Those people have taught us to compose differently; there's no doubt about it."

Claude Monet discussing his collection of Japanese prints with the Duc de Trevise in 1926, translated by the author.[2]

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[1] Much of the material used in this paper was first presented at the Art Association of Australia Conference Sydney University, 1981. It was refined in my unpublished paper *Monet and the Reception of Far Eastern Art*. Despite a plethora of publications on Monet since that time, including that of his collection of Japanese prints (G. Aitken and M. Delafond, *La Collection d 'Estampes de Claude Monet Maison de Monet Giverny*, n.d.) very little thought has been given to the role of the Japanese example in the artist's development.

All illustrations have been reproduced by kind permission of the Musée Monet Giverny.

Much of the argument of this paper depends on visual examples. Unfortunately the circumstances of its publication have not allowed for the illustrations I would like to have used. I have included references to of the most important images and their locations in the footnotes at the end of the paper.

[2] Voyez de pres cette fleur dans le vent, et dont les petales sont retournés, n'est-ce pas la verité même? dit le grande coloriste, et ici près de cette femme d'Hokousai, voyez *le Bain*: regardez ces corps dont vous sentez la consistance, n'est-pas pas? Ils sont en chair et ne sont indiqués que par le contour. En occident ce que nous avons surtout apprécié, c'est la façon hardie de couper les sujets: ces gens là nous ont appris à composer differemment cela est hors de doute.

Duc de Trevise, 'Le Pelerinage de Giverny', *Revu de L'Art Ancien et Moderne* January–February 1927, p. 132.

This interview is translated in full in C. F. Stuckey, *Monet: A Retrospective* (New York, 1985) p. 318 ff. The interview is of considerable importance because Trevise submitted it to Monet for approval before publication. Since I first made use of this quotation in discussing Monet's involvement with the Japanese example, several misleading translations and half quotations have appeared. Stuckey's is amongst these. I discuss the problem below.

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> Once the impression is grasped and fixed they declare their work done. The name *Japanese* which these painters were given at first had no meaning. If it is necessary to define them by one word it is necessary to forge the new term *impressionists* because they reproduce not the landscape but the sensation evoked by the landscape.

Jules Castagnary reviewing the first Impressionist exhibition April 29, 1874.[3]

> The appearance on the scene of Japanese prints and watercolours completed the change by introducing us to a totally new system of colouration. Without the techniques revealed to us by the Japanese a whole methodology would have been closed to us. There must be something psychological about it, the special acuity of the Japanese eye, exercised in admirable light and in an atmosphere of extraordinary limpidity and transparency has discerned in nature a gamut of clear transparencies which the European eye has never captured — and that left to itself it probably never would have discovered . . .
>
> Among our landscape painters Claude Monet was the first to have the boldness to go as far as the Japanese in the use of colour. It was this pursuit that aroused the loudest scoffing, because the lazy European eye — notwithstanding its utter truth and great delicacy — still finds the breadth of colours employed by the Japanese somewhat gaudy.

Theodore Duret in the preface to the catalogue of an exhibition of paintings by Monet at the offices of *La Vie Moderne* 1880.[4]

> The point is that we do not know enough about Japanese prints. Fortunately we know more about the Japanese of France, the Impressionists.

Vincent Van Gogh to his brother Theo, August 1888[5]

The Fragmented Body

It would seem that the different types of relations that modern painting has entertained with non-Western cultures and arts (Impressionism and post-Impressionism with Japanese etchings, Cubism with African masks, Matisse with the Orient: 'my revelations always came from the Orient') have never been adequately investigated. And although there is no shortage of dissertations on this theme, they are far more likely to minimise or avoid the problem than to examine it. This is due to the fact that approaches to this

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[3] L'impression une fois saisée et finée, ils declarent leur role terminé. La qualification des *Japonais* qu'on; leur a donné d'abord n'avit aucun sens. Si l'on tient à les caracteriser d'un mot qui les explique il faudra forger le terme nouveau d'impressionistes en ces sens qu'ils rendent non le paysage mais la sensation produit par le paysage.

Castagnary, *Le Siecle* 29 (Avril 1974).

[4] Translated in Stuckey *Monet: A Retrospective* p. 70, reprinted in *Critique d'Avant Garde* (Paris 1885).

[5] See *Letters of Vincent Van Gogh* (Second Edition, London, 1959), Letter 511, Vol.II.

> question are treated in part by literary people (philosophers, sociologists and other writers) or by art critics. In other words in the first case it is studied with a discourse that deliberately avoids the specificity of the discipline of painting that it examines, and in the second case it is studied with the aid of formal or historico-formal analyses that at best reduce to abstraction all the relations that painting inevitably shares with every field of knowledge. On the one hand an irrational metaphysical discourse and on the other an approach determined by a mechanistic type of rationality; these are the two types of investigation....
>
> Rather than repeating the cliches of the 'end of civilisation' or 'endurance of the history of Western Culture' sort we had best try to situate the phenomenon as accurately as possible within the history that produced it — that is the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth — or in the context of the ideological consequences that resulted from the upheaval of the Industrial Revolution. The revolutionary transformation of the means of production and its ideological repercussions determined in the order of signifying practices a 'theoretical' assessment that confronted these practices at different levels of their social activity and implicitly questioned and problematized their autonomy....
>
> Although it has constantly been presented as the background and objective of the history of modern painting, this problematic has never been addressed adequately. And it is from this critical lack of focus on the autonomy of pictorial practice as a signifying act of production that all the misunderstandings have arisen.
>
> Marcelin Pleynet, *Painting and System* 1977[6]

WHAT MONET 'LEARNT' FROM JAPANESE ART

One of the most striking features of nearly all accounts of the relationship between the changes in the nature and scope of European painting which took place in the later nineteenth century, and the progressive discovery of Japanese culture during the period, is their dismissal, implicit or explicit, of the possibility that this discovery played the major part in a fundamental redefinition of the Western project of painting. There is considerable evidence to suggest that the discovery of Far Eastern cultures during this period may indeed have been the most important stimulus towards the complete recasting of the Western criteria for the aesthetic coherence and acceptability of a work of art.

In painting at least, such a recasting would necessarily involve, no less than a complete redefinition of the nature and role of the subject.[7] The progressive

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[6] Pleynet, *Système de la peinture* (Paris 1977), translated by Sima N. Godfrey, University of Chicago Press, (1984), pp. 30–31.

[7] Pleynet, ibid, speaks of the production of the artist as subject. This is a little too simple not to say slightly confusing. The issue is addressed at the end of this paper.

discovery of Japanese culture and the necessary construction in Europe of a network of information and assumptions about Japan are deeply implicated in this redefinition because this network supplied many of the cues and the clues through which the new art was to be read.

The reluctance of Western art historians to address this issue suggests that far more is involved than the simple acknowledgment of the value of Japanese art for the formation of Impressionism as a system of practice and critical expectations for painting. What is at stake is the credibility of the Western view of the artist as a coherent expressive artistic personality whose practice always refers primarily to an internally coherent, seamless Western artistic tradition and to a Western construction of 'Nature' that lies at the centre of that tradition. The very nature of Western cultural history is in question.

The claim made by Duret in 1880 that 'left to itself' European painting would not have discovered the range of techniques and attitudes which became Impressionism is repeated time after time by almost all who write on the theme between 1870 and 1900. The presence of the Japanese example is constantly referred to as the sign of something new, a different understanding of the nature of painting and of art itself.

From the 1860s an interest in Japanese art was universally identified with one version or another of Baudelairean modernity. In his work *Impressions sur la Peinture* Alfred Stevens, a popular painter and friend of Manet and the other impressionists, echoed his colleagues' experience of twenty years when he wrote 'Japanese Art is a powerful element of Modernity' and declared the Japanese to be the true Impressionists.[8] As Castagnary noted, Monet and his colleagues were identified as *Les Japonais* before 1874.

This paper sets out to take Duret and his colleagues seriously and in doing so seeks to offer some suggestions as to the problems of redefining the historical relations between European painting and Japanese culture. Their claims that the Japanese example was indispensable to the development of Impressionism, and of Monet in particular, are investigated and an account of the changes in the practice of painting from 1860 to 1900 (which can explain these claims) is proposed. Many of the difficulties with this project arise from the basic inflexibilities of Western art historical methods. Nothing much has changed in the fifteen years since Pleynet characterised the options available to those who wish to study intercultural influences as either a vulgar and irrational metaphysics derived from formal analysis or a mechanistic rationality imprisoned in the narrowest empirical perspective.

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[8] See A. Stevens, *Impressions sur la peinture* (Paris 1886), in particular aphorisms 96–100 which deal with the relation of Japanese art to impressionism and modernity. For the suggestion that Baudelaire looked to Stevens rather than Manet to fulfil the future of modernity in painting. See J. Adhémar Baudelaire, Stevens et la Modernite', *Gazette des Beaux Arts* (1958) p.124 *et seq*.

Recent writing in the field offers many examples of both failings. Before proceeding it may be as well to address one of them. In his book *Japonisme*, first published in 1980, Siegfried Wichmann reproduces a tall, narrow painting by Monet alongside a whole range of Japanese pillar prints and leaves from Japanese screens, together with works by Klimt and other artists who may have been influenced by the pillar print format. Wichmann asserts that this format arose in 14th century Japan and that:

> ... The physical format determines the content and all further Japanese tall, narrow paintings are conditioned in content by the pictorial field.
>
> Monet took on this genre of painting as early as 1865. In his *Dejeuner sur l'herbe*, 418 cm high and only 150 cm wide, he is already beginning to stack his figures and cut them off, rendering the picture surface more dense and compact with tree trunks.[9]

However, Wichmann is employing a misleading formal analogy. For in 1865 the painting to which he refers was the left-hand section of a large, rectangular work which Monet hoped to exhibit at the Salon. Monet eventually cut the painting up into its present sections after 1884, nearly twenty years after it was composed.[10] Moreover, it would have been almost impossible for Monet to have seen any of the Japanese works Wichmann uses for comparison during the 1870s. Yet there must be some insight in the assertion for it has survived unchallenged into a second edition. It is possible to save it by restoring a critical and historical perspective to Monet's decision to cut his canvas. By doing this, one can show how Wichmann's 'method' has worked to conceal the central role the Japanese example played in Monet's development.

There is a Japanese source for the 1865 form of *Dejeuner sur l'Herbe*. It is to be found in the prints made of the European visitors to Japan in the 1850s and early 1860s, which were readily available in France and Britain in the 1860s. Monet owned a number of these, such as *The Prussian Couple* and *Portugal* (1861) by Gountei Sadahide. These works observe Europeans as genre subjects and all rely on references to actions or incidents of a specifically new kind to the Japanese. Their conception exactly paralleled the tenets of Parisian modernism in citing new events as the key to a new reality. I believe Monet was acquiring these prints from around 1865. He certainly could not have avoided seeing them at

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[9] See S. Wichmann, *Japonisme: The Japanese Influence on Western Art since 1858* with 1105 illustrations, 243 in colour (English translation first published 1981 by Thames and Hudson, London, reprinted 1985), see pp. 170–173 in the second edition.

[10] W. 63. All references to works by Monet are taken from the catalogue by Wildenstein, *Claude Monet: Biographie et catalogue raissoné* (published from 1974), in three volumes to date, by La Bibliotheque de Arts, Paris. Henceforth (W).

For the account of the division of the canvas which Monet had left as security with his former landlord see Wildenstein Vol. 1, pieces justicatifs nos 57 and 58.

this time.[11] In the 1860s Monet, like his colleagues, believed works such as those by Sadahide to be exemplary indications of a new realism which would supplant the current aesthetic impasse. Here is Ernst Chesneau expressing this sentiment in 1868:

> One could say that the Japanese have a profound respect for reality which in their case is linked to an admirable aesthetic intelligence. They have the gift of bending the real to the most astonishing caprices of the imagination, without ever denying or betraying that same reality which is the principle and unfailing point of departure for all their combinations of forms.[12]

Monet had abandoned *Dejeuner sur l'herbe* when it became clear that he had failed to achieve the overall pictorial unity between subject, composition, colour, and tone that this new poetic realism required.[13] The effect of the new understanding of realism voiced by Chesneau was to fragment traditional Western means of securing the coherence of a work of art into a series of relative propositions incapable of aesthetic unity. Paradoxically, just as the discovery of Japan contributed to the relativisation of European culture so Japanese visual culture appeared to offer new means of regaining this lost coherence, in the aesthetic

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[11] Aitken and Delafond *La Collection*, nos 163 and 166. Monet gave various dates for the beginning of his Japanese print collection from 1856 to 1871, none are a reliable guide as a *terminus ante* for his use of the Japanese example in his painting. I was able to examine the whole of Monet's collection at Versailles while it was deframed in 1976. This was of great help to me in forming some opinions as to when Monet collected them. Briefly, port prints (such as those by Sadahie) appear to have only been available on the open market in Japan and Europe for a short time after they were made, say 1862–1870. Moreover, Monet's port prints, unlike some of the more prestigious in his collection, have been subject to much rough treatment. This suggests an early purchase date. In my doctoral thesis, D. J. Bromfield, *The Art of Japan in Later Nineteenth Century Europe: Problems of Art Criticism and Theory* (Leeds University, 1979), I was able to show convincingly that the spectrum of availability of Japanese artefacts in Europe evolved consistently in relation to social and political change in Japan during the period 1862–1883. In general terms, it began with the most common contemporary work in 1862 and ended in 1883 with the full range of the most sought after masterworks of all periods of Japanese art being made available through dealers such as S. Bing and Hayashi. For an early record of the presence of these prints in Europe, see J. Leighton, 'On Japanese Art Illustrated by Native Examples' *Proceeding of the Royal Institution of Great Britain* Vol. IV part II no. 38 (Friday May 1, 1863), p.102.

> The larger efforts in colours show what the Japanese thought of us and our ladies; crinolines being faithfully depicted, also beards, chimney-pot hats, and other peculiarities of the Western race.

[12] E. Chesneau, *Les Nations Rivales dans l'Art* (Paris, 1968), pp. 421–422. He is writing principally about Hokusai as the leader of a Japanese realist movement. Chesneau had first advocated a revised poetic realism in 1863 see, 'Le Realisme et l'Art Francais' *Revue des Deux Mondes* CXLVI 1863.

[13] For an account of the development of this painting, See J. Isaacson, *Monet: Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe* (London, 1972). As to the belief that the Japanese were the best pointer towards a new realism, Zola's deliberate rejection of Epinal prints as a model for Manet's work and his suggestion of Japanese prints instead in his review of Manet's work in *L'Evenement* 1867 is a good indication of prevailing artistic attitudes to the possible place of Japanese art in the Western tradition.

realm, at least. In 1884, when faced with the damage that *Dejeuner sur l'herbe* had sustained after being kept rolled up and unseen for six years, Monet was able to divide it in such a way as to create at least one element, the left-hand one, which appears to us to have a unity of form, colour, and tone consonant with its subject in the manner advocated by Chesneau.[14]

Yet the form he used for this division would have been unacceptable in 1865. The Monet of 1884 was able to see through many of the dualities of form and content which had resulted from his earlier attempt to fit a new experience into a narrative composition and new techniques into traditional organic formal criteria. He simply eliminated the requirement that the work should attain a particular type of complex internal coherence. This was achieved largely as result of the Japanese example. By 1884, Monet was well aware of the extended height and form of the pillar print and of the scroll paintings. In 1883, he had visited an enormous 'retrospective' exhibition of Japanese art organised by Louis Gonse at the Georges Petit Gallery (where Monet was to have major exhibitions in the 1880s). He refers to the opening date of the show in a note to his dealer Durand Ruel dated eighth March 1883:

> Dear Mr Durand Ruel,
>
> The opening of the Japanese exhibition is not Wednesday, but tomorrow, Monday. Therefore, I will come from Vernon tomorrow at about half past five. I hope it will be possible for you to give me what you promised before I return on Wednesday to Vernon to finish up my house there.
>
> Until tomorrow, your devoted.
>
> Claude Monet[15]

The exhibition was a 'retrospective' of the progressive discovery of Japanese art by Parisian artists, critics, and collectors which had taken place since the first official appearance of the Japanese in Paris in the International exhibition of 1867.[16]

When he faced the task of cutting up *Dejeuner sur l'herbe* Monet deployed all that he had learnt of Japanese form and the discourse which had grown up around it since 1867. By using the criteria of practice which the discovery of

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[14] It is, of course, always possible that Monet was forced to divide the work up in exactly this way by the damage it had sustained but this is most unlikely as the remaining sections make clear that he could have chosen to make two much more conventional images by making a vertical cut further to the left and reducing the height of the left hand portion.

[15] See Wildenstein, op. cit .,Vol. 227, letter 339, *Claude Monet*.

[16] For the 1883 exhibition, see L. Gonse, *Catalogue de Exposition Retrospectif de l'Art Japonais aux Galeries Georges Petit* (Paris, 1883). Amongst other examples of paintings on show, T. Duret was showing a Seroll *Dharma Kakemono signe Korin* and the Japanese dealer, Wakai, whose seal appears on many of Monet's collection of Japanese prints, was showing a ninth century painting by Kanaoka of Jizo, the god of good luck and good health. There were a large number of paintings and screens in the exhibition.

Japanese art supplied, he was able to cut the integrated subject out physically and aesthetically from his earlier failed work. In doing this he did not employ a series of arbitrary, formal, and compositional devices as guidelines. Rather, he simply read his artistic aspirations through the failed form of his old *realist* work to a newly-defined subject within it.[17] This required that he sacrifice some aims of the earlier painting in order to realise some others. In particular, the new work has lost any basis for compositional unity which might derive from a psychological or narrative relationship of the figures it portrays.

It can no longer be interrogated in relation to the tradition of Western images of *Dejeuners sur l'herbe*. Monet has substituted an assertion of simultaneity through compositional devices and an overwhelming stress on brushstrokes and coloured marks. The figures in the left-hand fragment now have an air of momentary self sufficiency united with the light and foliage which surrounds them, as it were, by an arbitrary coincidence of the moment and, in fact, by the artist's selective, decorative vision which cut them out from a larger whole.

This act can be taken as a paradigm for the redefinition of the subject within the Western practice of painting as exemplified by Monet's career between 1865 and 1884. During these years–when Monet painted in the open air–his visual stance, his perceptual set, his technique were all similarly dedicated to 'cutting' the subject of his painting out of what he experienced and out of the expectations associated of the Western tradition of representation. A particular Western genre of painting, such as landscape, ceases to have a separate existence in Monet's practice. In doing this he relocated the balance of the relationship between that which was to be depicted and the artist and his actions. He redefined the role of the artist in relation to the subject in favour of the artist.

When discussing his Japanese print collection with the Duc de Trevise in 1926, Monet used the idiomatic French 'couper' to cut:

> En occident ce que nous avons surtout apprécié, *c'est la façon hardie de couper les sujets* ces gens là nous ont appris à composer differemment cela est hors de doute.[18] (my emphasis)

Recent writers have interpreted this passage as referring to the strong outlines of some Japanese prints or to the supposedly 'Japanese' habit of allowing the frame of a painting to cut off an aspect of a major image within it. In doing this they have followed a prior prejudice about Monet's assigned role in the grand

[17] It would be interesting to know whether Monet retouched any elements of the left-hand section in 1884 or later. The brilliant breadth of some of the broad, red brushstrokes and their placement suggests that he might have heightened their 'Japanese' effect when he saw the cut-up section. Professor Isaacson op. cit. believes they represent the final state of the work in 1865. However, the other remnant does not have such a treatment, which it surely would have had given Monet's working method of covering the entire canvas with a particular tone and hue wherever it was required. A technical examination of the painting would resolve this question.

[18] See n. 2 above and my translation at the beginning of the text.

scheme of art history. They have all ignored Monet's problematic reference to subject matter.[19]

Fortunately, we do not have to rely on such 'mechanical rationality' to determine what Monet meant. The prints he pointed out to Trévise make clear that by 'subject' Monet meant the integrated presence of all the elements of a work, both form and content. For him, the act of composition was the means of bringing this about in the work.

Monet's principle example was a print from Hokusai's series of Large Flowers *Peonies and Butterfly* [20] in which a butterfly is struggling upside down against a strong gust of wind which is also bending the leaves and petals of the peonies. What Monet admired in this print was the interrelationship of all the formal elements of the composition and the manner in which they came to make up the subject as an example of *la verité*. This print seems to have been a favourite talking point with him for he made a similar remark to Marc Elder in 1924:

> "Hokusai", he said slowly, "how powerful his work is. Look at this butterfly which is struggling against the wind, the flowers which are bending. And nothing useless. The very economy of life."[21]

Monet hung this print in a prominent place in his salon because it acted as a token of his relationship to Japanese art in general. Form did not determine content in this relationship, as Wichmann would have it. The requirements of content, that is to say, of a new definition of the subject of painting called forth certain forms and practices from Japanese art to perform new roles as signifiers

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[19] See, for instance Stuckey, *Monet: A Retrospective* who translates the above passage as:

> What we Westerners have particularly valued is the bold manner in which subjects are outlined. These people have taught us a different way of composing no doubt about it.

Thus shifting the emphasis onto Monet's identity as 'Westerner,' rather than artist, and avoiding the tricky problem of what he meant by subject. Monet did not refer to 'images', which would have been more natural if he was simply talking about the employment of outlines. In any case, would someone so definitely determined to use colour for describing nature have seen the outline as the principal aesthetic value of Japanese art and the best means of describing nature? J. House in *Monet Nature into Art* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1986), p. 46 translates the same passage as:

> In the West what we have most appreciated is their bold way of cutting off their subjects; those people have taught us to compose differently there is no doubt of that.

It a matter of which formal cliche of the reception of Japanese art, outline or cut-off image our authors are willing to substitute for serious thought about Monet's meaning. In this case, at least the attitude of both Stuckey and House to such clear evidence of the value of the Japanese example for Monet qualifies them to join Pleynet's second category of art historical inadequates, those who follow an approach determined by a mechanistic type of rationality.

[20] See Aitken and Delafond no. 70.

[21] M. Elder, *Chez Claude Monet à Giverny* (Paris 1924) pp. 612–662:

> Hokusai, dit il lentement Comme c'est fort -regardez le papillon qui lutte contre le vent les fleurs qui plient. Et rien d'inutile. La sobrieté dans la vie.

in the practice of Western painting. Monet took far more than a few formal compositional tricks from the Western experience of Japanese art, he took a coherent new attitude to painting and its subject. In restoring the historical context to Wichmann's unfortunate analogy, I have suggested a critical framework in which to view Monet's division of his early painting. To understand Monet's development it is necessary to define accurately what the Japanese example taught him about 'composition' and to describe the means whereby this occurred.

'CUTTING THE SUBJECT': THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF APPROPRIATION AND EXCHANGE

It is remarkably easy to parallel developments in Monet's career to 1884 with episodes from the progressive discovery of Japanese art in Paris. Compositional strategies, motifs, and brushmarks all appear in his work at exactly the time their Japanese equivalents became well known in Paris. It is more difficult to supply an account of the two series of events which supports the view that they are conclusively linked by the substance (content and form) of Monet's paintings at any given time. For this, one must show that Japanese art was necessary to the formation of Impressionism in the way that Duret and others suggested during the 1870s.[22] To do this it is necessary to argue simultaneously at the broadest and most detailed, specific levels about the circumstances of the reception of Japanese culture in Europe and Monet's relations to them.

It is not sufficient to see Monet's development in terms of an extension of the categories of subject and the definitions of technique used by earlier nineteenth-century artists. The critical challenge is to supply a coherent and necessary reading of Monet's development which retains a concern with subject matter. It must be demonstrated that changes in Monet's most elementary technical procedures, his most general artistic concerns and the responses of critics and the public to his work, could all be linked to the European reception of Japanese visual culture. Such a detailed argument is possible, but no more than a sketch, with a few examples, can be offered in this paper.[23]

The unique circumstances of the entry of Japanese art objects into Europe are still barely appreciated by art historians. Japan had tremendous prestige in Europe as the only non-European civilisation to resist the depredations and

[22] I take my notion of necessity from Panofsky, whose work, as we shall see, offers many methodological possibilities for the study of cultural exchange.

[23] I have reviewed much of the evidence in my unpublished paper, *Monet and the Reception of Far Eastern Art* (see above) but I have not yet found an adequate critical account of Monet's practical development during the 1870s. In this, however, I am not alone. In House *Monet Nature*, despite his fascinating deployment of Monet's practice and work methods, J. House fails to offer any but the general, undirected, and descriptive account of Monet's changes of method and attitudes. It is not sufficient to see Monet's development in terms of an extension of the categories of subject and the definitions of technique used by earlier nineteenth century artists.

decadence of formal colonisation and to begin an independent modernisation. Nearly all European travellers who visited China and Japan in the 1870s compare China adversely to Japan for that reason. Furthermore, from 1867, the Japanese embarked on a systematic campaign of diplomatic, commercial, and cultural self representation in the West. This resulted in a considerable number of Japanese artists and scholars coming to Paris. In the 1870s, artists such as Hayashi and Wakai became well known in avant-garde art circles.

Moreover, the Japanese often assimilated their culture to the known preferences of Europeans. This was particularly the case in major international exhibitions, as can be seen in a blue and white dish in imitation of Hokusai's *Great Wave* print which was exhibited in the 1878 exhibition in Paris. Objects and events such as this raise the general question of the lasting effects of informal colonisation through trade and the appropriation of non-European cultures for purely European ends. Certainly, much Japanese art was physically appropriated in the decade 1865 to 1875 either by direct theft, as in the case of the removal of the Megouro Buddha to Paris by Duret and Cernuschi, or through the exploitation of economic change brought about by the Westernisation of Japan.

There is also the case of the supplanting of the totally internal dynamic within Japanese culture with a series of European myths about that culture. The myth, for instance, of a medieval organic culture in which art had a pure role unsullied by the division of labour.

It may be that these effects, the effects of a specific kind of Western appropriation, are ultimately the reason for our tremendous difficulty in acknowledging the strength of non-European cultural concerns in Western art practice and culture after the mid-nineteenth century. If interrogated, they are like a highly reflective mirror giving back only the concerns of Western art and artists and hiding the non-artistic pressures which formed these concerns. It is necessary to enquire whether cultural practices are communicating vessels or hermetic structures accessible to interventions only at the level of technique.

If we take a cultural practice such as painting to be a completely autonomous system of interdependent signs embodied in techniques and their relations to the subject, it surely follows that the intrusion of another system of signs, equally autonomous, will produce a new, third practice which has no continuing relation to either of its sources. Pleynet appears to believe that the work of painters such as Monet or Matisse consists in producing just such a limited autonomous system, which can exist only as part of the artist's continuing practice.[24]

However, if we think of all cultural practices as interrelated, communicating particularly at all the levels of production, both material and intellectual, then we are obliged to attempt an account of how such communication might have occurred and what elements of the original sign systems might have survived into

[24] See Pleynet *Systéme*.

the new context.[25] It might even be possible to look at individual Far Eastern cultural practices as *raw materials* which were expropriated and productively transformed by the West in exactly the same manner as tea or gold.

Finally, there is the possibility that the very fragmentary nature of every level of the European assimilation of Japanese visual culture — from the retailing of a few limited accounts of Japanese imagery to the incorporation of specific compositional devices, specific brushstrokes, and specific iconographical references into Western painting practice — may be a factor in the formation of an avant-garde mentality in the visual arts.

These specific elements may have been accepted precisely for their strange beauty, their alien, poetic quality in relation to traditional Western painting. Baudelaire was one of the first to argue that Far Eastern art was a specimen of universal culture and to regard the ability of a man of the world to appreciate it as sign of true cosmopolitanism because it required that he:

> work a transformation in himself which partakes of the nature of a mystery — it is necessary for him, by means of a phenomena of the will acting upon the imagination, to learn of himself to participate in the surroundings which have given birth to this particular flowering ...

and that:

> It would create in him, a new world of ideas which would form an integral part of himself ... several thousand ideas and sensations will enrich his earthly vocabulary.[26]

This talk of *sensations* and *vocabulary* is already indicative of the effect of Far Eastern culture in relativising Western attitudes to culture. It suggests that a work of art may be conceived as an accumulation of separable signs available for co-option and collage, rather than as an indivisible organic whole. Recently, Peter Bürger defined the avant-garde attitude as follows:

> For the avant-gardistes, on the other hand, material is just that, material. Their activity initially consists in nothing other than in killing the 'life' of the material, that is, in tearing it out of its functional context which gives it meaning. Whereas the classicist recognises and respects in the material the carrier of a meaning, the avant-gardistes see only the empty sign, to which only they can impart significance. The classicist correspondingly treats the material as whole, whereas the avant-garde tears it out of its life totality, isolates it and turns it into a fragment.

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[25] This problem bears strong similarities with the philosophical problem of translation. It is *impossible* to translate accurately from one language to another, according to many linguists and philosophers, because each language forms a holistic sign system not represented in the other. The meaning of the original is inevitably lost and replaced with other significations from the language into which it is translated. All translations are, for better or worse, approximations and their existence changes the language into which they are embodied.

[26] C. Baudelaire, *Art in Paris 1845–1862* (London, 1964), p. 120.

> Just as the attitude towards the material differs so does the constitution of the work. The classicist produces work with the intention of giving a living picture of the totality. And the classicist pursues this intention even while limiting the represented reality segment to the rendition of an ephemeral mood. The avant-gardiste, on the other hand, joins the fragments with the intent of positing meaning (where the meaning may well be the message that meaning has ceased to exist). The work is no longer created as an organic whole but put together from fragments.[27]

As we shall see, the Japanese elements in the formation of Impressionism were perforce torn out of their life totality not by the artist but by a much broader historical process. Their fragmentary nature was produced by the same process which was splitting the daily life of Parisians into a myriad of uncoordinated fragments. Moreover, Monet's works of the 1870s make use of them in a process of creating and inscribing a vision which may be described as fragmentary at every level, from technique to its relation to traditional Western painting practice. In particular, it is fragmentary in its selection of views, in its *cutting out*,[28] of images of leisure and momentary effects of light from the endless variety of urban and rural events which confronted Monet as he worked.

However, none of this necessarily defines Monet as an avant-gardiste. The crucial question is the extent to which Monet intended and succeeded in constituting for painting a new, stable relation to the subject.

Japanese artefacts entered Paris with no meaning other than that which current debates about Western art could supply. For Western culture they were, quite literally, forms without content, coherent and complex half signs waiting for something to which they might refer. Meaning was to be given to them by Western artists and critics. That is why Westerners seized very early on representations of Westerners in Japanese prints, so as to begin to manufacture an account, a Westernised understanding of the nature of the work.

The response of Parisian critics to Japanese art in the 1860s attempts to locate it in comparisons with just about every known tradition and school of Western art, save the Baroque, which is avoided because of its reliance on chiaroscuro. Greek, Egyptian, Gothic art, Pre-Raphaelite, eighteenth and nineteenth century painting are all used to give Japanese form a spuriously meaningful location in relation to a Western pictorial tradition. Naturally, different protagonists tend to identify Japanese art with those aspects of the current Parisian debate about style in painting of which they approve. Thus, those who disapproved of the emerging Impressionists but would have liked to save the naturalism of Japanese art, are at pains to point out the relation of Japanese naturalism to the naturalism of Greek

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[27] P. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* translation from the German by M. Shaw (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1984), p. 70.

[28] Monet's selectivity in his views of Argenteuil, for instance, is now established beyond question.

art and to disparage the lack of detail in the work of Monet, Manet, and others.[29]

Japanese art could be said to have been absorbed into the Western tradition before anything very substantial was known about its origins or the specificity of its subjects. There was a particularly strong response to the Japanese exhibit in the Paris International Exhibition of 1867. Most of the material from that exhibition remained on show at 41 Rue Victoire, Paris until late 1869 and some of it until the Franco-Prussian war.[30] Its dispersal occasioned many calls for its retention as the foundation of a Far Eastern Louvre, such as that from the journalist Ernst Feydeau in 1869.[31] For our purposes, it is necessary to look in some detail at the analogies between Japanese art and Western painting offered by those critics who supported the further development of realism and the realisation of the objectives of Baudelairean modernity in the visual arts. Not surprisingly, these critics find resemblances between Japanese art and the painting of the French Romantics and Realists, eighteenth-century French art, and the art of the *Jeune Ecole* itself. In 1869, Champfleury wrote as follows in his book on cats:

> I cannot convey a better idea of the merit of this painter — his name was Fou Kou Say, but he is more popular in Paris under the name of Hok'sai than by likening him to Goya. He possesses the variety and fancifulness of that great artist and even his manner of engraving bears a marked similarity to that of the author of *Les Caprices*.
>
> Hok'sai has done more to facilitate our knowledge of Japan than travellers and teachers of Japanese have effected. Due to the proliferation of his drawings we are able to assess aright the civilisation and intelligence of a people, who instead of slumbering amid the traditions of the past, like the Chinese, press resolutely towards competition with the discoveries of Europe.
>
> Hok'sai was a thoroughly original artist. The institutions of his country, the manners and customs of its inhabitants, his own nature even the popularity of his drawings furnished his genius with matter to work upon.[32]

Champfleury goes on to link *Hok'sai* to Delacroix and Manet whose work is reproduced alongside drawings believed, at that time, to be by Hokusai.[33]

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[29] See Bromfield, 1979, *The Art of Japan*, Section Two: Chapters One and Two and passim for a full discussion of these matters. It is not the case that there is a simple-minded parallel between a critic's position and the range of analogies that he uses. Ph Burty, for instance, uses a great many classical analogies including entasis in his treatment of Japanese art in *Emaux et Cloissonés* (Paris, 1869).

[30] See Bromfield, 1979, Ibid., Section Two for details of this.

[31] E. Feydeau, 'Vente de la collection d'objets d'Art, de l'Exposition Japonaise' *Revue International de l'Art et de Curiosité*, Vol. 1 (1869) p. 71 *et seq.*

[32] I quote from the English translation of *Les Chats* (Paris, 1869): J. Champfleury pseud Husson *The Cat* (London, 1885, n.p. Trans. C. Hooey).

[33] But in fact by Hiroshige and reproduced as such by Bing in his magazine *L'Art Japonais*.

FIGURE 1 *Utagawa Sadahide (1807–1873) Portugal [A and D. 163]*

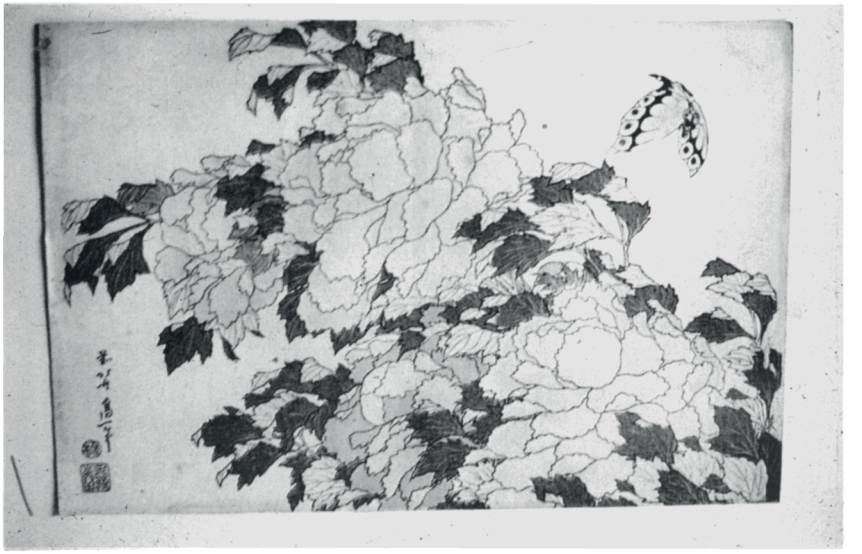

FIGURE 2 *Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849) Peonies and Butterfly from the Large Flowers suite. [A and D. 70]*

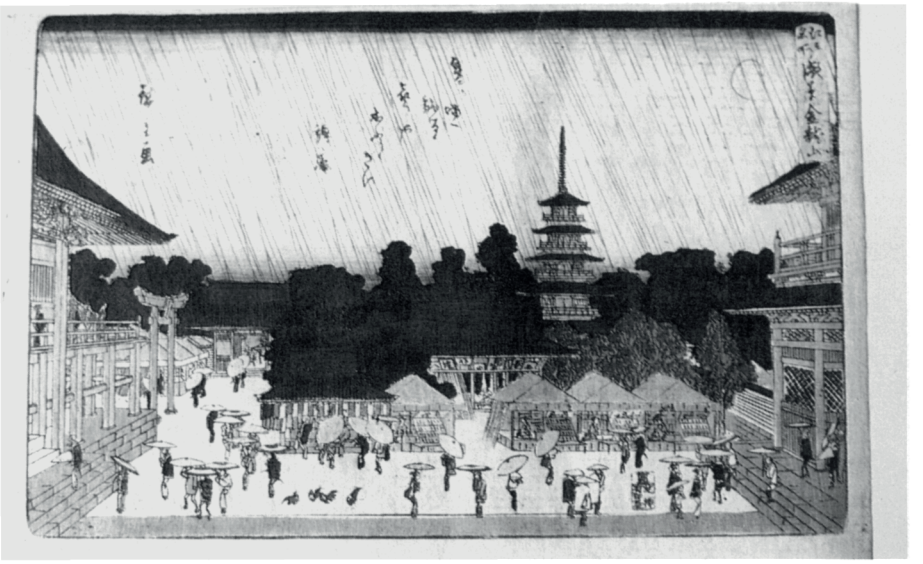

FIGURE 3 *Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858) The temple of Kinryusan at Assaksa from the suite celebrated places in Edo. [A and D. 124]*

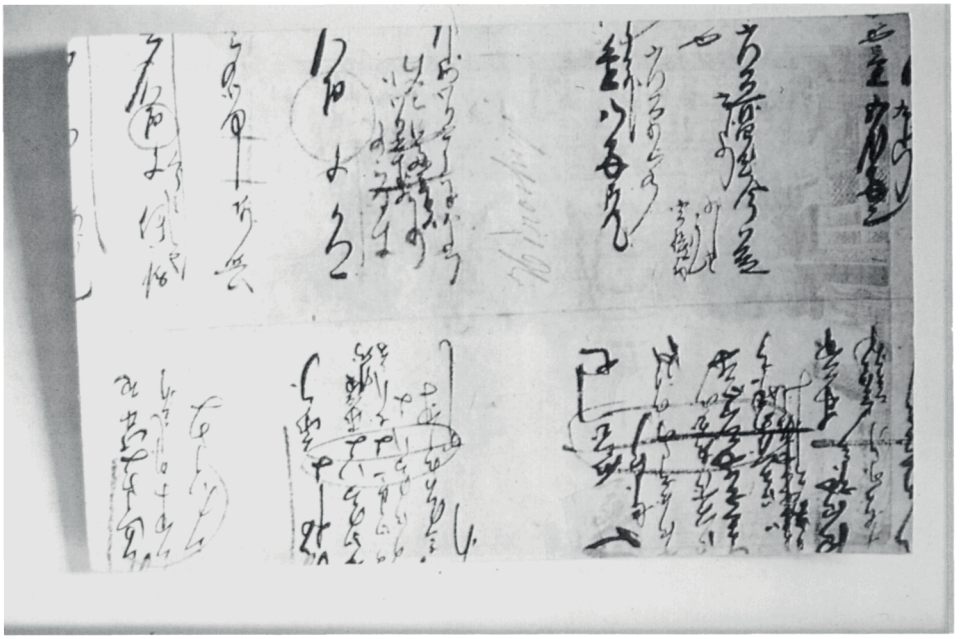

FIGURE 4 *Reverse of Figure 3 to show notes and condition.*

FIGURE 5 *Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849) four pages from the Mangwa Volume XII [A and D. 197]*

FIGURE 6 *Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849) The pavillion of the 500 rakan temple from the suite 36 views of Fuji [A and D. 59]*