

article

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Where is my Japanese borderline anyway? Lost somewhere internally, mutating alongside the other cells; or perhaps weaving between my outermost layer of skin and the glimpses of its reflection. With all talk of national identity in the air, I'm content with its evasiveness in being named. It continually resurfaces as a point of difference to negotiate through my everyday.

My own *nihonjinroh*, or Japaneseness, is an itinerant one. Raised by my *isei* (first generation Japanese) mother in the suburbs of Winnipeg, our family is quite displaced from that eastern island. Through the isolation in the midwest of the Midwest my Japan becomes imagined, fantastic. And however assimilative the intentions of my upbringing are, my mother's values and customs are handed down in the slightest of gestures, apologies and moods.

Like many younger generation Japanese currently enraptured by North American consumer culture, I too have a fascination with what lies across that ocean of difference. Not only as it informs and questions my notion of *nihonjinroh*, but as it makes aware its own Western point of view. The literal references in this installation include a traditional Japanese household icon, the *daimaru* doll. In Japan, its popularity has brought it to the verge of kitsch. As a representation of a limbless *samurai* warrior, it refers to obsessive determination. My egg-shaped friend, when pushed, refuses to topple over. Its other more common signification refers to an act of becoming. When received, the owner considers an improvement or achievement not yet attained and inserts a pupil into an eye. The *daimaru*'s cyclops-like stare then serves as an insistent reminder towards the fulfillment of that personal goal.

As a cross-cultural transfer, I'm curious about my own adaptation of this everyday form. I'm opposed to an all too frequent critique of Modern Japanese art as being merely derivative of Western or North American movements. This seems to merely observe a surface of appearances without acknowledging the complex hybridity with which these Western influences operate in a Japanese cultural context. I'm also aware of its otherness - has my Japan become in part an exotic strain of science fiction?

I don't have many answers to the issue of an "appropriate" cultural translation. My Japan lives in my own network of baffles and mirrors. It is for me, about me, not me.

Looking into Japanese spatial conception brought me to texts (in English) referring to the cultural uniqueness of a sense of space created from darkness; a sensibility of impermanence and flexibility; a space of the interval and not merely the absence of the object. In some manner I understand this way of experiencing intuitively. And it makes me reconsider my own upbringing, my own language and home, and how those factors affect my vision. That's about as far as I can name it for the moment.

Another point of departure for this work comes from an interest this summer in the new wave of dance music. Abandoning my punk rock roots, I spent several months undercover trying to piece together the underground house/techno scene. My studio turned into a private discotheque as I worked to the endlessly repetitive loops of electronic beats and disco samples. And somewhere through the sexy, joyful throb of those synthetic rhythms, I found a resonance to my own daily repetitions and pulses. Being out on the dance floor also encouraged me to take on a more physical or affective approach, to experience a meaning through my bones and not just on paper.

My silent soundtrack includes the smokin' beats of Curtis A. Jones aka Cajmere aka Green Velvet, currently one of the reigning royalty of soulful experimental house music.

Finally, the fusion of my concerns, as both whimsical and serious, is not to discredit each other's importance. It is more about the mutability and hybridity of who I am and who I can become. My Japan is about permission, self-love, other-love.

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