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## “Orientalism” Dossier

# On Monkeys and Japanese: Mimicry and Anastrophe in Orientalist Representation\*

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**Submission date:** November 2007

**Acceptance date:** December 2007

**Published in:** May 2008

### Recommended citation:

GUARNÉ, Blai (2008). "On Monkeys and Japanese: Mimicry and Anastrophe in Orientalist Representation". *Digitium*, issue 10 [article online]. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7238/d.v0i10.513>

### Abstract

A number of lines of investigation are presented from a current project into the implications of Orientalism in the stereotypical representation of Japan through the analysis of the discourses of the paradox and inverse civilisation, and the consideration of the animalisation strategies of the Other in the travel literature of Pierre Loti and the fiction of Pierre Boulle.

### Keywords

animalisation, cultural paradox, inverse civilisation, colonial mimesis, Orientalism, *Planet of the Apes*, Japan

### Resum

Es presenten algunes línies de treball d'un projecte en curs sobre les implicacions de l'orientalisme en la representació estereotípica del Japó per mitjà de l'anàlisi dels discursos de la paradoxa i de la civilització inversa, i la consideració de les estratègies d'animalització de l'Altre en la literatura de viatges de Pierre Loti i l'obra de ficció de Pierre Boulle.

### Paraules clau

animalització, paradoxa cultural, civilització inversa, mimesi colonial, orientalisme, *El planeta dels simis*, Japó

\* Certain points in this article have been discussed in B. Guarné (2008), «Imágenes ominosas. Escarnios e injurias en la representación de la “mujer japonesa”», in: E. BARLÉS; D. ALMAZÁN (coords.), *La mujer japonesa: realidad y mito*, Zaragoza: Asociación de Estudios Japoneses en España (AEJE) / Universidad de Zaragoza.



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*If you want to know who we are,  
We are gentlemen of Japan:  
On many a vase and jar  
On many a screen and fan,  
We figure in lively paint:  
Our attitude's queer and quaint-  
You're wrong if you think it ain't, oh!*

*The Mikado*, W. S. Gilbert

*There is nothing surprising in the fact that  
the same people who arrange chrysanthemums  
cast swords.*

*The Interpretation of Cultures*, C. Geertz

## Orientalism and colonial mimesis

Despite being well known, the extraordinary potential of penetration of Orientalist discourse, capable of transforming the Other into what it attributes to it, still comes as a surprise. The operation of power and knowledge of Orientalism defines and shapes the conditions of possibility of a colonised Other, whose existence is reduced to the obsessive reproduction of a repertoire of stereotypical images, which are both ambivalent and long-lasting (Bhabha, 1983); a set of fetish imprints through which the colonised becomes the indisputable evidence of the inferiority attributed to them.

This inferiority has its representational *punctum* in the simian mystification of the colonised. With profound historical implications

(W. D. Jordan, 1968), the image of the monkey constituted a fertile metaphor for both justifying the colonial enterprise and denying its consequences.<sup>1</sup> Two fundamental elements supported this nuclear position: on the one hand, evolutionary primitivism as a symmetric and inverse characteristic to the civilising superiority of the coloniser; and on the other, its pedagogical potential in reforming and transforming the colonised. Imitation of the monkey was therefore an archetype of the natural immaturity of the Other and at the same time a first-class instrument for its correction, the medium whereby civilisation was possible even among the clumsiest and slowest of its beneficiaries.

Since the mid-19th century, *imitation* has been a key concept in the debate on cultural evolution, articulated at the confluence of the natural and social sciences. A century before, Linné's racial classification had established the bases of evolutionary study with the pioneering link between monkeys and humans.<sup>2</sup> Lamarck's evolution model being supplanted by Darwin's conception of natural selection would allow for the identification of imitation as a learning and adaptation strategy common to all animals. Following in the wake of evolution theses, works by Romanes from comparative psychology, the ethnic psychology of Letourneau or the psychology of peoples and the masses of Le Bon would contribute to the establishment of homologues between primatism, primitivism, mental underdevelopment and infancy (N. Dias, 2005). At the end of the century, *Les lois de l'imitation* (1890), by Gabriel Tarde,<sup>3</sup> would evaluate behaviour whose potential of conveyance would constitute a *cause célèbre* in the intellectual debate with Émile Durkheim<sup>4</sup> (1897). Only the genius of Marcel Mauss (1936), after the end of the first quarter of the 20th century, would achieve a complex integration of sociology, psychology and biology into the cultural reflection on imitative practices.<sup>5</sup>

Yet the representational resorts of imitation had been deeply established in the imagination of colonial domination. The image

1. "It was a strange and eventually tragic happenstance of nature that the Negro's homeland was the habitat of the animal which in appearance most resembles man. The animal called 'orang-outang' by contemporaries (actually the chimpanzee) was native to those parts of western Africa where the early slave trade was heavily concentrated. Though Englishmen were acquainted (for the most part vicariously) with monkeys and baboons, they were unfamiliar with tailless apes who walked about like men. Accordingly, it happened that Englishmen were introduced to the anthropoid apes and to Negroes at the same time and in the same place. The startlingly human appearance and movements of the 'ape' – a generic term though often used as a synonym for the 'orang outang' – aroused some curious speculations" (W.D. Jordan, 1968, pp. 28-29).
2. A scientific context that it was felt had found in the idea of race a solid base for human classification. Linné, *Systema Naturae* (1735); Bufón, *Histoire naturelle* (1749); Blumenbach, *De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa Liber* (1775); Cuvier, *Le règne animal distribué d'après son organisation* (1816).
3. Tarde defines *imitation* as "celui d'une action à distance d'un esprit sur un autre, et d'une action qui consiste dans une reproduction quasi photographique d'un cliché cérébral par la plaque sensible d'un autre cerveau [...] Le psychologique s'explique par le social, précisément parce que le social naît du psychologique [...] J'entends par imitation toute empreinte de photographie inter-spirituelle, pour ainsi dire qu'elle soit voulue ou non, passive ou active" (G. Tarde, 1993, p. viii).
4. "Il y a imitation quand un acte a pour antécédent immédiat la représentation d'un acte semblable, antérieurement accompli par autrui, sans que, entre cette représentation et l'exécution, s'intercale aucune opération intellectuelle, explicite ou implicite, portant sur les caractères intrinsèques de l'acte reproduit." (E. Durkheim, 1930, p. 115).
5. It was in his study into body techniques where Mauss set out this idea: "Et je conclus que l'on ne pouvait avoir une vue claire de tous ces faits, de la course, de la nage, etc., si on ne faisait pas intervenir une triple considération au lieu d'une unique considération, qu'elle soit mécanique et physique, comme une théorie anatomique et physiologique de la marche, ou qu'elle soit au contraire psychologique ou sociologique. C'est le triple point de vue, celui de 'l'homme total', qui est nécessaire". In the imitative act, Mauss recognises a triple dimension : social, psychological and biological. "Mais le tout, l'ensemble est conditionné par les trois éléments indissolublement mêlés" (M. Mauss, 1993, p. 369).



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of the Negro, of the coolie, of the oriental, was called to carry out a process of reform in which the mimesis of the coloniser would be seen as the last of its consequences, when in reality it would constitute the first and most persistent of its threats.

In the colonial system, the universal dignity of the coloniser was only seen in relation to the natural inferiority of the Other in the civilising process. It was a relationship founded on the maintenance of the *bonne distance* (E. Saada, 2005), the manifest distinction between the reformer and the reformed, the officer and the subordinate, the original and the copy, as a means of making the latter an "authorized version of Otherness" (H. K. Bhabha, 1984). An impossible effort for "similarity", to "become another" (A. Memmi, 1971, p. 186-189), turned the colonised into a subordinate copy of the coloniser, rushing them into the imbalance of a "non-existence" (F. Fanon, 1993, p. 139) trapped in the constant renunciation of their own identity.<sup>6</sup>

Paradoxically, the colonial discursivity contained the germ of its own subversion. Beyond its more proclamatory values, the reform of the colonised was only efficient on the surface, enclosed in a level of mechanicism that, avoiding their mutation into an equal, kept them in a state of "pure colonised" (A. Memmi, 1971, p. 146).<sup>7</sup> Yet the imitative practice implied an uncontrollable competence in use, diluting the difference between *imitator* and *imitated*. The *trop bien* imitation (E. Saada, 2005) of the coloniser by the colonised would then be revealed as a more worrying and disturbing effect than its own failure. If, on the one hand, it tested the eclosion of a system that denied the colonised the originality that they took on as their own, on the Other, it undermined producing a perturbing scenario: the dismantling of their privileges. Thus, imitation became in turn "un vecteur essentiel de l'assimilation des indigènes et une menace pour la reproduction des identités européennes outre-mer" (E. Saada, 2005, p. 29).

Beyond the untiring mimesis of the coloniser, the colonised, recognisable Other insofar as a "subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (H. K. Bhabha, 1995, p. 86), thus integrated a menacing presence in the mimetic tension with the Westerner.<sup>8</sup> A disturbingly close resemblance to similarity made him a subject of ambivalence between mimesis and mimicry, the reply and the replication, the copy and the parody. Ultimately, the imitation of the metropolitan meant a strange victory that presaged an inexorable defeat.<sup>9</sup> In this context, the image of the monkey would contribute to re-establishing the confidence of a

discourse that found in "pantomime simiesque" (A. Memmi, 1966, p. 124) a fruitful means for reducing anxiety at the successful metropolitisation of the colonised.

A l'effort obstiné du colonisé de surmonter le mépris (que méritent son arriération, sa faiblesse, son altérité, il finit par l'admettre), à sa soumission admirative, son souci appliqué de se confondre avec le colonisateur, de s'habiller comme lui, de parler, de se conduire comme lui, jusque dans ses tics et sa manière de faire la cour, le colonisateur oppose un deuxième mépris: *la dérision*. Il déclare, il l'explique au colonisé, que ces efforts sont vains, qu'il n'y gagne qu'un trait supplémentaire: le ridicule. Car jamais il n'arrivera à s'identifier à lui, pas même à reproduire correctement son rôle. Au mieux, s'il ne veut pas trop blesser le colonisé, le colonisateur utilisera toute sa métaphysique caractérologique. Les génies des peuples sont incompatibles; chaque geste est sous-tendu par l'âme entière, etc... Plus brutalement, il dira que le colonisé n'est qu'un singe. Et plus le singe est subtil, plus il imite bien, plus le colonisateur s'irrite. Avec cette attention et ce flair aiguisé que développe la malveillance, il dépistera la nuance révélatrice, dans le vêtement ou le langage, la «faute de goût», qu'il finit toujours par découvrir. Un homme à cheval sur deux cultures est rarement bien assis, en effet, et le colonisé ne trouve pas toujours le *ton* juste. (A. Memmi, 1966, p. 160-161)

The accusation of imposture, of grotesque imitation or subversive simulation, thus degraded the colonised to the level of mere copy, which made preservation of the domain possible, of the coloniser's *privilege* in the *colonial drama*. (A. Memmi, 1971, p. 211). The case of Japan is particularly revealing. Not having been formally colonised, Japan would integrate itself with the strength of an equal into the European-Atlantic order, which drove its opening-up during the second half of the 19th century. In this process, the colonial imagination would have to articulate specific forms of domination that adjusted Japan to the idea of "Oriental" shaped in the "absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior" (E. Said, 1980, p. 300).

Essentialising Japan in terms of a particular, unusual and paradoxical characterisation constituted a productive strategy

6. We can see in this exercise the violence that makes up the *mimetic desire*, in the sense put forward by R. Girard (1978).

7. As "être de carence" (A. Memmi, 1966, p. 148), "hors de l'histoire et hors de la cité" (A. Memmi, 1966, p. 129). "La véritable raison, la raison première de la plupart de ses carences est celle-ci : le colonialiste n'a jamais décidé de transformer la colonie à l'image de la métropole, et le colonisé à son image. *Il ne peut admettre une telle adéquation, qui détruirait le principe de ses privilèges*" (A. Memmi, 1966, p. 106).

8. An uneasy *partial presence* (H. K. Bhabha, 1995, p. 88) that plunged the superiority of the coloniser into the bottomless *mimetic vertigo* referred to by M. Taussig (1993, p. 237).

9. In a similar sense, B. Fuchs (2003) analysed how imitation eroded imperial power from the start of European colonialism: "By exposing the constructedness of homogeneity, challenging and ironizing narratives of difference, and effectively enabling subjects to cross boundaries, mimesis introduces or reserves cultural variance under the guise of similarity" (B. Fuchs, 2003, p. 166).



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to introduce its entity into the political order articulated by Orientalism “as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (E. Said, 1980, p. 3). An order based on the non-Western/Western, pre-modern/modern, particular/universal dichotomy (N. Sakai, 1988),<sup>10</sup> which configures the “non-Western” from the lack of something which defines it negatively compared with Western completeness (B. Turner, 1994).<sup>11</sup>

Japan would therefore integrate an Orient that would be Orientalised “not only because it was discovered to be ‘Oriental’ in all those ways considered common place by an average nineteenth-century European, but also because it could be –that is, submitted to being– made Oriental” (E. Said, 1980, p. 5-6). In this political project, discussions on paradox and inverse civilisation (B. Guarné, 2007b) constituted seminal representational strategies<sup>12</sup> in the characterisation of Japan.

## From Japanese paradox to Japanese oxymoron

The essential language of paradox was historically a unique means in the Western representation of Japan, covering the different levels that occurred between contradiction and antagonism. The first chronicles of the Jesuit missionaries already bear witness to the difficulty in accommodating their experience to the premises of the Savage/Civilised dichotomy that constituted the classification of the world in the 16th century.

The society discovered offered many of the elements attributed to the savagery of the infidel: geographical remoteness, strange customs, “aberrant” and, evidently, ignorant of the “true faith”, but their presence was paradoxical in a culture sensitive to the arts and learning, divided into hierarchical forms of government, with

religious institutions and a profound sense of honour. Elements of civilisation exclusively assumed by Christian Europe. The cultural complexity of the discovery and, fundamentally, the ability of its chroniclers to tell of it, presented the image of Japan as a paradox, or indeed, an oxymoron, going as far as establishing in its characterisation the particular forms of this discourse.

Traditionally used in the description of non-European peoples,<sup>13</sup> the resource of the counter position would therefore acquire specific characteristics in the idiosyncratic representation of Japan. Both the *contrarieties* highlighted by Alessandro Valignano<sup>14</sup> (1583, 1592) and the *contradictions* recorded by Luís Fróis<sup>15</sup> (1585) emphasised the idea of Japan as the opposite to Europe, but not necessarily “savage” or “barbaric”. Beyond these notions, Japan was only decipherable in its antagonism with Europe. The structure of the counter position would therefore contribute to shaping “the Japanese” into a mirror image, the opposite of “the European”. From that point on, Western imagination of the exotic would represent Japan as a cultural anastrophe, between the fascination for the peculiar and the unease at the equivalent.

It is significant that this discourse should be reproduced throughout time. Ultimately, the establishment of a template of formal correspondences between Europe and Japan implied the recognition of a relationship of equivalence, something that sensitively bordered on the weighing up of the central position of the West in the world. Following the forced opening-up of Japan in the 19th century, the homologies were difficult to combine with the geography of imperial domination in the spirit of “the West and the rest” (S. Hall, 1992). In this context, the impossibility of capturing a reality that stubbornly eluded the imagination of colonial domination would lead to absolute estrangement. The celebrated *topsy-turvydom* entry of the work *Things Japanese* (1890), by Basil Hall Chamberlain, demonstrated the intellectual consecration of this extravagant characterisation.<sup>16</sup> As it cannot be

10. “After all, what we normally call universalism is a particularism thinking itself as universalism, it is doubtful whether universalism could ever exist otherwise” (N. Sakai, 1997, p. 157).

11. B. Guarné (2007a).

12. Particular forms of representation set out in *systems of truth*, in the Foucaultian sense, involved in the stereotypical construction of the Other.

13. As J. Bestard *et al.* (1987) explain, from the 15th century on, European seafarers and members of religious orders had used the anti-ethical formula of the us/them in their descriptions. The structure of the counter position allowed decoding in close terms of the peoples discovered by means of a dual distortion, which while condemning the differences as deviations tried to discover similarities, without ceasing to view these societies as “savage”.

14. “Tienen también otros ritos y costumbres tan diferentes de todas las otras naciones, que parece que estudiaron de propósito cómo no se conforman con ninguna gente. No se puede imaginar lo que acerca de esto pasa, porque realmente se puede decir que Japón es un mundo al revés de cómo corre en Europa” (A. Valignano, 1954, p. 33).

15. “La gente de Europa se deleita con el pescado asado y cocido; los japoneses huelgan mucho más de comérselo crudo [...] Nuestros cerezos dan muchas y hermosas cerezas, los de Japón dan muy pequeñas y amargas cerezas, y muy hermosas flores que los japoneses estiman [...] Las [mujeres] de Europa trabajan con todos los medios y artificios para blanquearse los dientes; las japonesas trabajan con hierro y vinagre para hacer la boca y los dientes negros [...] Nosotros enterramos nuestros difuntos; los japoneses en su mayor parte los queman” (L. Fróis, 2003, pp. 121-130).

16. “The whole method of treating horses is the opposite of ours [...] They carry babies, not in their arms, but on their backs [...] Japanese keys turn in instead of out, and Japanese carpenters saw and plane towards, instead of away from, themselves [...] When building a house, the Japanese construct the roof first [...] Japanese women needle their thread instead of threading their needle, and that instead of running the needle through the cloth, they hold it still and run the cloth upon it. Another lady, long resident in Tôkyô, says that the impulse of her Japanese maids is always to sew on cuffs, frills, and other similar things, topsy-turvy and inside out. If that is not the ne plus ultra of contrariety, what is? [...] Strangest of all, after bath the Japanese dry themselves with a damp towel!” (B. H. Chamberlain, 1905, pp. 481-482).





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adjusted to the classification order, Japan would be represented as a paradox as both the sublime and the grotesque seemed possible.

## Between metaphor and reality

The work of French writer Pierre Loti<sup>17</sup> constitutes a paradigmatic expression of the literary conformation of this imaginary.<sup>18</sup> Loti, *l'enchanteur du japonisme*, is responsible for some of the longest lasting passages in the stereotypical characterisation of Japan. In his works we find, among others, the image of the Japanese woman as a dragonfly and a butterfly, origin of endless subsequent adaptations.<sup>19</sup> The Japan described by Loti is the scenario of a continuous *déjà vu*,<sup>20</sup> a country "of enchantment and magic", of tea houses, lanterns, parasols and paper kites, smoking pipes and iced liqueurs of essences of flowers, the "surprising home of all the extravagancies" immersed in the intense "murmur of the cicadas".

In his works *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887) and *Japoneries d'automne* (1889),<sup>21</sup> the images of "the West" and "the East" shape the sensualist description of a landscape dominated by the narcissistic view of the European. A view expressed in concrete narrative forms that would inscribe Japan in the imaginary categories of Orientalism.<sup>22</sup> As metaphoric resources, the obsessive articulation of the diminutive<sup>23</sup> and the sustained practice of animalisation will confine "the Japanese" to the "Oriental" pole of the West/East equation. This equation is represented in specific episodes as the «morganatic marriage» between Loti and Chrysanthème, an expression of the Modern/Traditional inequality in the Male/Female formula.

Mesdames les poupées [...] Presque mignonnes, je vous l'accorde, vous l'êtes, -à force de drôlerie, de mains délicates, de pieds en miniature; mais laides, en somme, et puis ridicu-

lement petites, un air bibelot d'étagère, un air ouistiti, un air je ne sais quoi... (P. Loti, 1990, pp. 61)

[...] la petite, la minuscule madame Touki-San; haute comme une demi-botte, celle-ci; treize ans au plus, et déjà femme, importante, pétulante, commère. Dans mon enfance, on me menait quelquefois au théâtre des *Animaux savants*; il y



Photograph of Pierre Loti in the garden of his mansion in Rochefort, France

17. Pseudonym of Louis Marie Julien Viaud (1850-1923).
18. "Toujours du bizarre à outrance, du saugrenu macabre ; partout des choses à surprise qui semblent être les conceptions incompréhensibles de cervelles tournées à l'envers des nôtres..." (P. Loti, 1920, p. 87). "Comme nous sommes loin de ce peuple japonais, comme nous sommes de race dissemblable!..." (P. Loti, 1920, p. 229).
19. The image of the dragonfly foreshadowed the butterfly of the different versions of this work in the musical adaptation of André Messager (1893), as well as in the story of *Madame Butterfly*, by John Luther Long (1898), and in the theatre version of David Belasco (1900), precedent of Puccini's famous opera (1904). "...Elle dormait à plat ventre sur les nattes, sa haute coiffure et ses épingles d'écaïlle faisant une saillie sur l'ensemble de son corps couché. La petite traîne de sa tunique prolongeait en queue sa personne délicate. Ses bras étaient étendus en croix, ses manches déployées comme des ailes -et sa longue guitare gisait à son côté. Elle avait un air de fée morte. Ou bien encore elle ressemblait à quelque grande libellule bleue qui se serait abattue là et qu'on y aurait clouée [...] Quel dommage que cette petite Chrysanthème ne puisse pas toujours dormir : elle est très décorative, présentée de cette manière, -et puis, au moins, elle ne m'ennuie pas" (P. Loti, 1990, pp. 108-109). "Leurs corps frères, posés avec une grâce exotique, sont noyés dans des étoffes rigides et des ceintures bouffantes dont les bouts retombent comme des ailes fatiguées. Elles me font penser je ne sais pourquoi, à de grands insectes rares ; sur leurs vêtements, des dessins extraordinaires ont quelque chose de la bigarrure sombre des papillons nocturnes" (P. Loti, 1920, p. 228-229).
20. Loti feels "en plein dans ce petit monde imaginé, artificiel, que je connaissais déjà par les peintures des laques et des porcelaines. C'est si bien cela! [...] Je l'avais deviné, ce Japon-là, bien long temps avant d'y venir" (P. Loti, 1920, p. 30).
21. Also part of this study is the consideration of *La Troisième Jeunesse de Madame Prune* (1905).
22. I develop this question in more detail in B. Guarné (2008), «Imágenes ominosas. Escarnios e injurias en la representación de la "mujer japonesa"», in: E. Barlés; D. Almazán (coords.), *La mujer japonesa: realidad y mito*, Zaragoza: Asociación de Estudios Japoneses en España (AEJE) / Universidad de Zaragoza.
23. What Loti considers an image of "Japon physique et moral" (P. Loti, 1920, p. 220).



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avait là une certaine madame de Pompadour, un grand premier rôle, qui était une guenon empanachée et que je vois encore. Cette Touki-San me la rappelle. (P. Loti, 1990, p. 95)

D'ailleurs je reconnais le charme des petits enfants japonais; il y en a d'adorables. –Mais, ce charme qu'ils ont, comment passe-t-il si vite pour devenir la grimace vieillotte, la laideur souriante, l'air singe?... (P. Loti, 1990, p. 155)

Petites mousmés très mignonnes, vieilles dames très singesques, entrant avec leur boîte à fumer, leur parasol couvert de peinturlures, leurs petits cris, leurs révérences; caquetant, se complimentant, sautillant, ayant toutes les peines du monde à tenir leur sérieux. (P. Loti, 1990, p. 174)

Un peu trop dorés, trop chamarrés, ces innombrables messieurs japonais, ministres, amiraux, officiers ou fonctionnaires quelconques en tenue de gala. Vaguement ils me rappellent certain général Boum qui eut son heure de célébrité jadis. Et puis, l'habit à queue, déjà si laid pour nous, comme ils le portent singulièrement! Ils n'ont pas des dos construits pour ces sortes de choses, sans doute; impossible de dire en quoi cela réside, mais je leur trouve à tous, et toujours, je ne sais quelle très proche ressemblance de singe. (P. Loti, 1890, p. 88-89)

Despite the eccentricity of these passages, it is not a marginal characterisation that, renouncing a stance of discursive centrality, comprises an isolated portrayal. The simian representation of the non-European constituted a common place in the system of colonial visibility. A year before the publication of *Madame Chrysanthème*, Henry Adams (1886) was surprised not to have found signs of *monkeyism* among the Japanese. This was a frequent myth that, with regard to imitation, had to be refuted by Sidney L. Gulick (1903), even at the start of the century. The image of the monkey constituted a powerful metaphor of the colonised Japan, which also found in the cultural habit of dress an efficient element to emphasise the distance with the West. In this sense, in their travel journals and among several authors, D. Sladen (1892, 1903, 1904), G. Waldo Browne (1901) and Sir Henry Norman

(1908), would censure the Japanese insistence on incorporating Western dress.<sup>24</sup> European fashion constituted a sign of civilisation; its adoption by the Japanese, a form of *lèse-majesté* (I. Littlewood, 1996, p. 25), a *hybrid masquerade* (H. T. Finck, 1896)<sup>25</sup> which plunged Japan into le grotesque et la bouffonnerie pitoyable" (P. Loti, 1920, p. 299). Compared with Western modernity, Japan was only tolerable in its Orientalist representation,<sup>26</sup> "Japanised" as an exotic *tableau vivant* populated by *samurais* and *geishas* in *kimonos*.

The Japanese female costume undoubtedly has its disadvantages in practical life (it hampers the gait), but it is infinitely more picturesque and becoming than a Parisian costume on a Parisian woman; and when the Parisian costume is transferred to a Japanese woman, the effect is usually deplorable—an utter absence of fit, style, ease, and naturalness (H. T. Finck, 1896, p. 251).

Here you saw how Western civilisation had eaten into them. Every tenth man was attired in Europe clothes from hat to boots. It is a queer race. It can parody every type of humanity to be met in a large English town. Fat and prosperous merchant with mutton-chop whiskers; mild-eyed, long-haired professor of science, his clothes baggy about him; schoolboy in Eton jacket, broadcloth trousers; young clerk, member of the Clapham Athletic Club, in tennis flannels; artisans in sorely worn tweeds; top-hatted lawyer with clean-shaven upper lip and black leather bag; sailor out of work; and counter-jumper; all these and many, many more you shall find in the streets of Tokyo in half an hour's walk. But when you come to speak to the imitation, behold it can only talk Japanese. You touch it, and it is not what you thought. (R. Kipling, 1988, p. 169).

This view would take on a unique entity in specific episodes of history such as the Russo-Japanese war or during the conflict on the Pacific. American war propaganda articulated the most baneful images of the strangeness of the enemy, portraying the Japanese as animals, primarily "yellow monkeys" hiding in the jungles of Burma<sup>27</sup> or raping white women in a characterisation that put them in the category of the subhuman (J. W. Dower, 1986)<sup>28</sup>. The

24. D. Sladen (1892), *The Japs at Home, Queer Things about Japan* (1903), *More Queer Things about Japan* (1904), written together with N. Lorimer; G. Waldo Browne (1901), *Japan: the Place and the People*; Sir Henry Norman (1908), *The Real Japan*.

25. The Orientalist view of Finck allows him to recognise surprising similarities: "In Kyôto even more than in Tôkyô, I was struck by the fact that, when Japanese girls are very pretty they greatly resemble Spanish beauties in their sparkling black eyes, dark tresses, olive complexion, petite stature, and exquisite grace, at least from the waist up. The resemblance would be greatly heightened if they would copy Spanish ways of arranging the hair and give up their stereotyped style of combing it back from the forehead—the most trying and least becoming of all modes of coiffure" (H. T. Finck, 1896, p. 262).

26. In his correspondence with B. H. Chamberlain, Lafcadio Hearn wrote: "The country is certainly going to lose all its charm, -all its Japaneseness; it is going to become all industrially vulgar and industrially common-place. And I feel tired of it. In short, the pendulum has swung the wrong way recently" (E. Bisland (ed.), *The Japanese Letters of Lafcadio Hearn*, Boston / New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1910, p. 132.).

27. In films such as *Objective, Burma!*, by Raoul Walsh (1945), or *Bataan*, by Tay Garnett (1943), and *Back to Bataan*, by Edward Dmytryk (1945).

28. "The variety of such metaphors was so great that they sometimes seemed causal and almost original. On the contrary, they were well routinized as idioms





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pedagogy of hate that had permeated North American popular culture for centuries in the shameful image of the *black monkey* was thus adapted to the portrayal of the Japanese in the formulas of the *yellow monkey* and the *Japes (Japs & apes)*, reproducing the White/Black racist structure in the White/Yellow opposition (R. Slotkin, 1992).

The implications of the visual dehumanisation of the Japanese would be profound and its consequences devastating for millions of people. In a historically popular imaginary fascinated with the extravagant description of Japan, the systematic and deliberate repetition of these images would contribute to exceed the limits of the myth shaping reality itself. As has been shown, despite the fact that in reality no one believed that the Japanese were monkeys, "once the metaphor is accepted, it becomes that much easier to erase the line between image and reality" (I. Littlewood, 1996, p. 17).

It would not be until the imminent end of the war that the need to prepare the American administration after victory would re-humanise Japan in its antithetical relationship with the West. Again, the discourses of the paradox and of the inverse civilisation would permit an interpretation of a disconcerting culture, of aesthetes and warriors, as refined in the cultivation of chrysanthemums as brutal in the forging of *katanas*.<sup>29</sup> In this project, the relativist twist introduced by R. Benedict in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946) would have the virtue of shaking the cultural certainties of the West,<sup>30</sup> completing a circular and autopoietic discourse that would end up being implied in the self-characterisation of the Japanese themselves.<sup>31</sup>

## Cultural anastrophe and inverse civilisation

Half a century after the first edition of *Madame Chrysanthème* appeared, another French writer, Pierre Boule,<sup>32</sup> was to publish a no less fantastic travel journal. Boule would describe an "inverse civilisation" where chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans enslaved



Japanese advertising of the film, *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (1970), the first sequel in the film series

humans. A few years before Barthes wrote his naïf ethnography on Japan, *L'Empire des signes* (1970), Boule published *La Planète des singes*<sup>33</sup> (1963), the story of a non-human, primate civilisation where apes had appropriated human technology.

The stunning episode of the archaeological discovery of a human doll that could speak, pronounce "a simple word, a two-syllable word: 'papa'" (P. Boule, 1968, p. 182), the exclusive

of everyday discourse, and immensely consequential in their ultimate functions. At the simplest level, they dehumanized the Japanese and enlarged the chasm between 'us' and 'them' to the point where it was perceived to be virtually unbridgeable" (J.W. Dower, 1986, pp. 81-82).

29. In this sense, R. Benedict (1946) wrote: "All these contradictions, however, are the map and woof of books on Japan. They are true. Both the sword and the chrysanthemum are a part of the picture. The Japanese are, to the highest degree, both aggressive and unaggressive, both militaristic and aesthetic, both insolent and polite, rigid and adaptable, submissive and resentful of being pushed around, loyal and treacherous, brave and timid, conservative and hospitable to new ways. They are terribly concerned about what other people will think of their behavior, and they are also overcome by guilt when other people know nothing of their misstep. Their soldiers are disciplined to the hilt but are also insubordinate" (R. Benedict, 1946, pp. 2-3).

30. As has been pointed out, in the Benedict monograph "a mesura que els japonesos van deixant de ser éssers estranys i erràtics, són els nord-americans els qui comencen a semblar-ho" (T. Aoki, 2006, p. 83), to the extreme that "What started out as a familiar sort of attempt to unriddle oriental mysteries ends up, only too successfully, as a deconstruction, *avant la lettre*, of occidental certainties. At the close, it is, as it was in *Patterns of Culture*, us that we wonder about. On what, pray tell, do our certainties rest? Not much, apparently, save that they're ours" (C. Geertz, 1988, p. 121-122). See also the studies compiled in: "Chrysanthemum and the Sword". *Dialectical Anthropology*, vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 141-233 June 1999.

31. On this subject, see: B. Guarné (coord.), "Identitat i representació cultural: perspectives des del Japó", *Revista d'Etnologia de Catalunya*, no. 29, December 2006. <<http://www.raco.cat/index.php/RevistaEtnologia/issue/view/4633/showToc>>

32. Pierre Boule (1912-1994).

33. P. Boule, (1963) *The Planet of the Apes*. New York: Vanguard.



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cultural skill of the monkeys, would reveal a terrible truth: the appropriation of human technology by their natural Other, apes, going so far as to surpass them and make the old dominator the dominated; the coloniser becomes the colonised.

Donna Haraway (1989) pointed out the historical development of Western primatology as “colonial knowledge” that defined “the human” according to “the simian”, in a project similar to the Orientalist construction of the “West” in relation to the “East”. For Haraway, the study of primates, as “*simian orientalism*” (D. Haraway, 1989. pp. 10-11), constituted scientific knowledge in that the dramatisation of the differences between “the animal” and “the human” was shaped in the broadest scenario of the oppositions of power: Nature/Culture, Woman/Man, Savage/Civilised, East/West.<sup>34</sup>

The society described by Boule confronts us with a totalitarian system, where a profound sense of honour and a deep respect for hierarchy and traditional values run parallel to the unease about identity that arises from the encounter with human civilisation.<sup>35</sup> Contrary to the film adaptation directed by Franklin J. Schaffner<sup>36</sup> (1967), Boule describes an ultra-futuristic civilisation where simians dress like humans, drive motor vehicles and live in skyscrapers.<sup>37</sup> Boule’s works enjoyed publishing success in a world, which, still persuaded by the positive nature of Western/Eastern classification, expectantly observed the Japanese miracle. The recovery of a country historically shaken by “modernity” that now relocate the desire to achieve political equality with the West, projecting itself into a technological future as an economic equal or superior.

Almost a decade before the *La Planète des singes* was published, Boule had come to the public attention with a novel that reflected his experience as an Allied prisoner during the war against Japan. Entitled *Le Pont de la rivière Kwaï*<sup>38</sup> (1952), Boule would capture his memories as a combatant in China, Burma

and Indochina through the moral experience of the captivity of a group of British soldiers condemned to forced labour in a Japanese POW camp.<sup>39</sup> What would eventually become his most famous work, situated the reader in a position of unease when confronted with their own brutality in the escape from the Other –faced with the abyss of discovering that the absolute difference with this Other is simply one of the multiple expressions of a shared reality.

L'ABIME infranchissable que certains regards voient creusé entre l'âme occidentale et l'âme orientale n'est peut-être qu'un effet de mirage. Peut-être n'est-il que la représentation conventionnelle d'un lieu commun sans base solide, un jour perfidement travesti en aperçu piquant, dont on ne peut même pas invoquer la qualité de vérité première pour justifier l'existence? (P. Boule, 1958, p. 9)

If we consider *La Planète des singes* in the light of the biography of its author –French colonist in Southeast Asia and combatant against the Japanese– the dystopia that he proposes is revealed as the backdrop on which are projected both the terrors of the colonial experience<sup>40</sup> and the anxiety for a colonised who overcomes the coloniser with their own weapons.<sup>41</sup> In this sense, Ulysse Mérou, the protagonist of the story, bitterly agrees:

A bien réfléchir, pourtant, je ne sais si je dois m'enorgueillir de cette découverte ou bien en être profondément humilié. Mon amour-propre constate avec satisfaction que les singes n'ont rien inventé, qu'ils ont été de simples imitateurs. Mon humiliation tient au fait qu'une civilisation humaine ait pu être si aisément assimilée par des singes. (P. Boule, 1990, p. 154)

34. “The Orient has been a troubling resource for the production of the Occident, the ‘East’s’ other and periphery that became materially its dominant. The West is positioned outside the Orient, and this exteriority is part of the Occident’s practice of representation [...] Simian orientalism means that western primatology has been about the construction of the self from the raw material of the other, the appropriation of nature in the production of culture, the ripening of the human from the soil of the animal, the clarity of white from the obscurity of color, the issue of man from the body of woman, the elaboration of gender from the resource of sex, the emergence of mind by the activation of body” D. Haraway (1989, pp. 10-11).

35. Common places that find a surprising expression in the visual reference to Japanese culture, eg in the recreation of the image of the *San Zaru*, the three monkeys of Nikko (*Mizaru*, *Kikazaru*, *Iwazaru*), during the trial scene. Also added to this is the fact that to mould the simian prosthesis, make-up artist John Chambers used an Asian face.

36. Born and educated in Tokyo –son of American missionaries– and a combatant in the War of the Pacific, Schaffner’s biographical link to Japan is an interesting element when we look at his work. It is this feature that he has in common with Boule, in whose work the Oriental theme will be a constant from his early novels, such as *Le Sacrilège malais* (1951).

37. In this adaptation for the cinema, the first in an extensive film and television series, budgetary reasons were a determining factor in the decision to set the simian civilisation in a caveman society.

38. *The Bridge over the River Kwai*. P. Boule (1952). New York: Vanguard, 1954.

39. As the author himself says in *Aux sources de la rivière Kwaï*. P. Boule (1966), *My own River Kwai*, New York: Vanguard Press, 1967.

40. European colonialism, the historical experience of slavery and the slave trade, segregation and racial conflict, are themes present both in Boule’s work and in the film adaptation by Schaffner. For more information on these subjects, see the study by E. Greene (1996) on the impact of the film saga of *The Planet of the Apes* on North American popular culture.

41. The most outstanding of the “children of the West”, Japan, organised the Tokyo Olympics in 1964, just nineteen years after the military defeat, six years later the Osaka World Expo (1970), a symbolic milestone in the new Japan as an economic and technological power, and in 1975, the Ocean Expo in Okinawa.





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The words of Mérou resonate in those of Memmi when he writes:

Un colonisé conduisant une voiture, est un spectacle auquel le colonisateur refuse de s'habituer ; il lui dénie toute normalité, comme pour une pantomime simiesque. (A. Memmi, 1966, p. 124)

When with the benefit of hindsight we link *La Planète des singes* to the works of Loti, a strange tension is established in the Western tradition of narrating Japan as a paradoxical and inverse civilisation. A tradition in which its representation as cultural anastrophe finds in the image of the monkey a metaphor of polysemic nuances, both in the definition of "the Japanese"<sup>42</sup> and in the characterisation of "the Western".

Finally, the stories of Boulle and Loti confront us with the representation of an absolute Other, natural or cultural, simian or Japanese, inverse copy of human civilisation or of Western civilisation. With the challenge of a mimetic, grotesque and threatening presence, which –beyond the *denotated*– inquiries us about the sense of "the Western" and "the human" as identical and exclusive categories in the representation of the world.



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42. E. Ohnuki-Tierney (1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1991) has identified in the monkey the figure of the trickster or clown in Japanese cultural tradition: "Macaques are uncannily similar to humans —at least the Japanese thinks so— both in their bodies and in their behaviour. No other animal has figured more prominently in deliberations about who the Japanese are as humans vis-à-vis animals and as a people vis-à-vis other peoples. The meanings and tropic functions assigned to the monkey therefore enable us to tap essential dimensions of the Japanese conception of self. The monkey provides us with a strategic window into the Japanese world view and ethos" (E. Ohnuki-Tierney, 1990, p. 91).



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