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Beyond Orientalism:
— Historicizing the Geisha as Fetish and Spectacle —

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オリエンタリズを超えて
— 崇拝物と見せ物としての「ゲイシャ」—

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This paper poses the problem of the historically changing images of the geisha. In particular it focuses on the renewed interest outside of Japan (especially in the U.S.) in the past 10 years. Two possible approaches to understanding the increase in imagery of geisha are proposed; 1) fetish and 2) spectacle. While neither approach is satisfactory by itself, when combined they allow us to understand certain dynamics of the imaging of the geisha that are otherwise difficult to fathom.

この論文は「ゲイシャ」のイメージの歴史的変化の問題を提言し、とりわけ過去10年において日本以外の国々（特に米国）で再び起こったゲイシャに対する関心に焦点をあてている。「ゲイシャ」のイメージの増大を理解するために二つの考えられるアプローチは崇拝物と見せ物である。この二つのアプローチはひとつひとつ独立して使用することはできず、二つのアプローチを同時に使用することで「ゲイシャ」のイメージの確かなダイナミック性を理解することできる。

How does one provide a historically contingent account of the image of the geisha from an intercultural perspective? Where is the standpoint for such an account? Given the multiplication of images of the geisha in books, movies, and internet sites (Bradley, 2006), it is difficult to find the entry point to assembling layers of interpretation relating the proliferative quality of geisha to the social world(s) in which the image making originates and to which it refers, often in an ephemeral manner. In this paper, I introduce two possible approaches, neither of which is satisfactory on their own, but both of which cause us to consider the relation between the image making and the intercultural consumption/production of such images. While I try to avoid privileging either term of the consumption/production equation, both are necessary to point out since the conclusions of this paper in fact challenge such a narrowing into the binary of production and consumption.

The worldwide bestselling book, *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Golden, 1997), alludes to the history of an idealized past, a hybrid 'half-history' between fiction and re-historicized facticity; an ambiguous telling of an ambiguous role-player based historically on the life of a woman in Kyoto

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before and after World War II. Part of the appeal of the novel is that it alludes to the multiple histories and visages of geisha beginning with the de-centering of the institution itself, disappearing at various stages in history (notably at the end of World War II), only to be resurrected and reanimated. Perpetual concern about the impending demise of the institution of geisha serves to highlight the invented traditions that are part and parcel of geisha.

Golden's account of a particular geisha, Sayuri, provoked a strong dispute from the woman on whom the 'fictional' story is based (Iwasaki, 2002). The battle over the right to speak authoritatively, at least in the case of this particular 'memoir' ended in a settlement out of court, which prohibits Iwasaki from discussing it further (Prasso, 2005, p. 208). However, Iwasaki is evidently free enough, in the terms of the settlement, to be able to criticize Golden in a general way (as well as Liza Dalby and Leslie Downer, other authors who have written extensively about geisha) for learning about geisha as they used their "preconceived ideas and set out to build a case around them ... They equated geisha with prostitutes, spread falsehoods and misimpressions, and refused to grasp the nuances of very sophisticated, very adult relationships" (Prasso, 2005, p. 202). My argument would be that some of the analyses of these authors (particularly Downer and to a lesser extent Dalby) has been helpful in understanding geisha and their lived situations, while simultaneously building images that correspond to translated cultural exchanges. While such translation is part and parcel of all cultural analysis, the question has to be raised, to what purpose? Or as a geisha asked another researcher recently, "why are they so interested in us anyway?" (Foreman, 2005, p. 45).

The history of the image of the geisha involves two overlapping sets of palimpsests; one, the question of historical placement of the geisha within/outside the bounds of Japanese 'high' society (e.g. Inoue, 2003, has described how many of the early leaders in Meiji Japan married former geisha) and the other the construction of the image of the geisha herself. In the present paper, I will focus on some of the issues of the second set.

A palimpsest is a parchment which has been erased and then overwritten by a different text. The analogy is used here to suggest the variety of interpretations given to the images of the geisha both from the point of view of providing a historical field of interpretation and of showing the geisha to the outside world, through text, both fictional and anthropological, photographs, movies and videos. While a comprehensive analysis of the wide range of material (see Bradley, 2006, for exposition of these materials) is considered beyond the scale of this paper, an attempt is made to outline a set of relations, that ranges from the anthropological to the autobiographical to fictional and imaging[1]. Strictly speaking, none can be said to be a more accurate depiction of the geisha than the next, however, the continuum allows us to point out the responsibility for speech or representing. In other words, imaging or images at their most extreme have only the imperative that they catch our attention, that they be spectacles, not that they be in any way ultimately true. Noting that there is a continuum does not mean that I necessarily argue for privileging anthropological readings/images of the geisha, as I show there are similar spectacularizing devices at work

in various of those texts as well.

In this paper, I will begin by elaborating on ideas from studies of Orientalism and the Other, illustrating what they have debated about the use of images from other cultures. Next I will outline the method of a 'history of the present' drawing on conceptions first suggested by Michel Foucault, but followed up by others more recently. Then, I will introduce two alternative conceptualizations of geisha images, geisha as fetish and geisha as spectacle. Finally, I conclude by showing that reverse ethnography (Kuwayama, 2004) is a strong possibility as a candidate for explaining the cross-cultural image of the geisha.

Orientalism and the Other

Orientalist accounts of the East, originating in the West, conceptions first outlined by Said (1979) in his pioneering work, drew attention to the use of the discourse of the Orient to manufacture historical understandings. Many who have written on the images of Japanese culture in other countries have employed some account of Said (if, in some cases, only to dismiss his work as inadequate) and his totalizing categorical technique of knowledge production about the Orient and Orientals, while elaborating a more specific relation of the epistemology of knowledge production to Japan simultaneously. As Allison puts it, Said's concept has been "deeply influential ... [in] Japan studies. Yet orientalism has also been critiqued and rethought, particularly in terms of the articulation it poses between power and othering, and also various changes in the world today," (2001, p. 384).

Reiterating Said's argument briefly, Orientalism is a political construction utilizing discourse "for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (1979, p. 3) based on a "flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing *him* the relative upper hand" (first italics in original, second added, p. 7). This theoretical stance allowed Said to illuminate the way in which ethnographers, travelers, missionaries, and anthropologists had, to varying degrees, participated in the colonialization of the East (and Said is looking here primarily at the Arab Middle East and to a lesser degree South Asia) by packaging knowledge in cultural difference and ultimately presenting "a system of absences" of the essences (i.e. historical Capitalism, industrial and military technologies, etc. of the West; see Turner, 1993; Fabian, 2006, p. 9, ft. 9 also references the concept of 'absences,' noted by Said earlier).

Said's level of analysis has been extended in the past twenty five years to East Asia as well, with the caveats mentioned above. For some orientalism is part and parcel of a generalized critique of othering (Ben-Ami, 1997; Hammond, 1997) which is applied particularly ferociously to Japan because of its potential to rival the West, at least until the mid-90s. Fabian (2006) provides a current and historical account of the inflated currency of the Other and asks "will the thought and argument we put into exploring 'the Other' become worthless?" (p. 148). I argue, in contrast, for the continuing relevance of the Other as a technique for self-construction of identities in a

global world, particularly with respect to culture and cultural determinancy.

In direct relation to Japanese culture, for other authors, the issues of knowledge production are tied up with the complicated questions of *Nihonjinron* (Revell, 1997) and the self-orientalizing or "auto-orientalizing" (Befu, 2002) which Said (1977, p. 325) had noted already in another form, "the modern Orient, in short, participates in its own Orientalizing." Different accounts illustrate a much more aggressive manner in which Japan uses its own version of Oriental Orientalism as a discursive strength (Kikuchi: 2004). And for still others Orientalism is part of the global "consumption of 'Japanese culture'" (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2005), in a global market place, in which the "displaying of the culture of the other as a spectacle," (Citing Hall, 1997, p. 168) is a key factor, at least as her research on Japanese culture commodifiers/producers in Israel shows.

It must be acknowledged at the outset that the notions of East and West have been relentlessly critiqued in the intervening period as, in addition to being inexact and too large to be of any other than rhetorical use, historically flawed in ascribing qualities of historical initiative to the West (Bonnett, 2004; Hobson, 2004; 2006). No doubt as the previous quote from Said intimates as well, there was a lack of analysis of gender difference which overlays the Oriental/Occidental divide in complex ways, something that Said has acknowledged in subsequent work (Lewis, 2002, p. 212). This is particularly important for this paper, as one of the arguments here is that many of the images of the geisha derived from Western women studying geisha reinforce the binary logic of Orient and Occident, by reproducing sexist codes (a possibility raised in Lewis, 2002, p. 217). However this is by no means uniformly the case as many other feminist critiques show (Allison, 2001; Eisenstein, 2004; Lewis, 2002; Morris, 2002).

While acknowledging the importance the critique of Orientalism that Said made available, it has been noted quite a few times that Said's recourse to Foucauldian methods means that the ultimate source of the problem of image making remains elusive. In other words, if the Orientalist discourse is pervasive, then how is it escapable? How is it possible to think otherwise? However, it would appear that even non-academic viewers of the image of the Orient are aware of the trap that is set by the binary hegemonic relationship that is established by West producing East, as illustrated in *Memoir*s, "distant intimacy," in Allison's (2001) term. Even if such a binary could be argued as continuing to be relevant, it would be rather facile to suggest that most image producing texts fall so easily into naïve reproduction of such tropes. Discursive critiques that are utilized in academic production of knowledge to open up analysis of power and domination are not limited to academic discourse. Everyone loves to turn the typical images on their head to prove that, yes, there is a universal understanding – who really needs the anthropologist any more anyway? This echoes Fabian's question above.

For example, among indigenous insiders realizing that the movie is in fact made for Americans ("if it can wow the folks in America, it can wow the world," which turns out to be only partly true as the film sales show)[2] can serve as a strong critique (Shoji, 2005). Others turn to indigenous outside insiders, (a Japanese woman, living in Maryland who was interviewed to be a

"dance consultant" for the movie, see Kaufman, 2005) to critique the lack of authenticity. Director Rob Marshall is allowed his rejoinder, and states that the movie "is an impressionistic painting of the geisha world ... as an artist that's what I do" (Kaufman, 2005). Some reviewers (Pulvers, 2006) look at the social and historical conditions that existed in the times that are referenced by the *Memoirs* story and criticize the movie for its lamentable glossing over of inconvenient truths, such as the source of the industrialists' (e.g. the Chairman) wealth in the pre-WWII era (a brief aside indicates factory production in Manchuria).

All of these accounts, while serving to highlight the importance of reviewers who are attuned to the social conditions of image making, nevertheless fail to confront the bigger question of why the movie could be popular enough in the first place. It would be as if to assume that the majority of viewers are just too ignorant to care, or like these reviewers they went to tick off the divergences between their notions of reality and the images that made it to the silver screen.

Further, I suggest that we need a more profound explanation of the diverse interests and attractions that are bound up in this image-making, a project that I commenced in an earlier review of the geisha images and in which I suggested there were four broad categories of interest (Bradley, 2006; 1) salvaging culture 2) commercial interests 3) hegemonic struggles over feminism and 4) reverse ethnographic reading). In contrast, here I explore the way that both fetish and spectacle can serve as unifying explanations for the first three categories while reserving the last category for a final elaboration on the history of the present. In the next section, I outline the use of the term history of the present and the theoretical ground it provides for cultural analysis.

History of the Present as a Method

In recent years there is increasing reference to a new type of historical methodology utilized in the social sciences and which has come to be called the history of the present. Intellectual projects as disparate as grounding a pragmatic social sciences (Baert, 2005), a critique of constructivist pedagogy that focuses on inclusion/exclusion practices in education (Popkewitz, 1998), and an analysis of political power relations (Deacon, 2002; see also History of the Present Research Network, 1996) have used this methodology.

History of the present has become a method of analysis since Foucault used the phrase in *Discipline and Punish* (1977). Foucault was keen to work "from a question posed in the present" (cited in Prado, 1995, p. 159). However, he outlined his project also in the form of a question about his own method, "*if* one means writing a history of the present" (italics added, 1977, p. 31). In one of Foucault's most methodologically-oriented works, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), he describes the use of a historical method of studying "discontinuity" or "ruptures." "The problem is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits; it is no longer one of the lasting foundations, but one of transformations that serve as new foundations, the rebuilding of foundations" (1972, p. 5). The "series of series" of heterogeneous objects that allow an analysis of what Foucault refers to as the document, is not meant to be transformed into "monuments" but

used to "constitute series" in order to "fix ... boundaries and reveal ... relations" (p. 7).

One such technique that is central to Foucault's method is to look at discursive formations, to investigate whether "statements different in form, and dispersed in time, form a group [by] refer[ing] to one and the same object," and the example he gives following this statement is madness (drawn from an earlier research he had conducted).

> History has altered its position in relation to the image: it has taken as its primary task, not the interpretation of the image, nor the attempt to decide whether it is telling the truth or what expressive value, but to work on it from within and to develop it: history now organizes the image, divides it up, distributes it, orders it, arranges it in levels, establishes series, distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not, discovers elements, defines unities, describes relations (1972, pp. 6-7).

While some of the problems of such an approach have been highlighted above in the discussion of Orientalism and the relative importance of Said's reliance on discourse, (here the main question may be whether one prefers the poststructuralist critique of Foucault or the humanism of Said; Turner, 1993, pp. 45-6), the notion of history of the present is important for at least four reasons in the account I provide below. First, such a history refuses to be theoretically totalizing. There is no singular geisha, as I will argue below, nor has there ever been one. From the disputes over the lines between geisha and prostitutes to the historically changing neighborhoods and locales of geisha, to the appropriation in imagery of the geisha, there is contestation over how geisha are to be conceptualized. According to Dean, such histories "give explicit acknowledgment of their own immersion within an existing, mobile field of knowledge" (1994, p. 24). Second, the history of the present critiques the taken-for-granted, the "natural within contemporary social existence" (Dean, 1994, p. 35) for example in the composite type of role player status often given to geisha, as the bearer of the traditions of arts and entertainment.

Third, the history of the present allows us to see the discontinuity of geisha imaging in its many forms. It allows us "to reflect upon the contingency, singularity, interconnections, and potentialities of the diverse trajectories of those elements which compose present social arrangements and experience" (Dean, 1994, p. 21). The story of the geisha told in one imaging is often quite different from the next. Indeed it would be obvious to say that individuals have wide ranges of experience, even within a field known as geisha.

Fourth and perhaps most importantly, the history of the present allows us to ask the questions of how the geisha became the symbolic construction of Japanese imaging, not as a line of linear descent but as recursive projections of othering that have been continuously and flexibly adjustable and necessary for the political and economic relationships engendered by Japan's position in the global order. Morris's (2002) overview of this remarkable flexibility in image making premises this type of analysis but it fails to ask why it should be necessary in the first place.

Geisha as Fetish

Both Allison (2001) and Morris (2002) use a form of the word fetish to describe the imaging of the geisha (for Allison it is 'fetishized, while Morris uses 'fetishization' in her title). However neither elaborates on how they are using the term. Prasso (2005), in a journalistic account of the interlocking stereotyping of Asians (primarily Japanese, Chinese, Thai and Filipino) based on race and gender and exhibited through sexual behavior, focuses on fetish and "fever," in a long discussion of why some Western (in particular American) men seem to be obsessed with Asian women. She defines fetish as an "unusually obsessive preoccupation or attachment; a fixation" (2005, p. 140), and points out the use of the word in web sites and popular expression.

I will try to distinguish here between this popular usage, with a focus on sexuality (which does nonetheless have an origin in academic work, including a short essay by Freud in the 1920s) and a more technical and historical anthropological usage. A third form of fetishism derives from the use made by Marx in Volume I of *Capital* of "commodity fetishism." Especially in regard to sexual fetishism, I argue that, for example, Prasso's uncritical treatment of the terminology "Asian" in particular is not sufficient. Attachment to a slightly perverse indifference to objectifying, especially in relation to sexuality, seems to be her closest meaning, and here we can ask whether it is necessary to develop a more technical definition? However I would argue, given what I have noted above about the ongoing debate over culture and its incommensurability through othering, geisha as images constitute more than simple indifference. They are active symbols for manipulation into objects of culture, and can thus be analyzed as fetishes.

Since there is an extensive history of research on fetish (Apter and Pietz, 1993; Pels and Samelink, 1999), it is important to locate this discourse, at least initially, in its original context. Pels and Samelink trace the anthropological origin of the word to research carried out by de Brosses resulting in a 1760 manuscript, *Du culte des dieux fetiches* (Pels and Samelink, 1999; also see Kurasawa, 2002). The English term thus derives from a Portuguese word form 'feticio,' which was used to describe objects of spiritual value to inhabitants of Western Africa (particular Guinea) in the early 18th century. Such objects, however, quickly expanded to include hybrid types of materials-in-use, such as the wearing of Christian rosaries, together with indigenous fetish objects (e.g. beads, stones) by Portuguese-speaking mediators involved in trade relations and living in Guinea. Hybridity, therefore, was central to the concept of fetish from the beginning as marine technologies, indigenous commodities, as well as objects with no economic value for Europeans, became marked as fetishes necessary for the trade relationships to develop (Pels and Samelink, 2002, pp. 11-12).

According to some authors (Gaman and Makinen: 1994), it is crucial to distinguish between at least the three often interrelated yet distinct histories of usages of fetish; 1) anthropological 2) Marxist, and related to capitalist commodity production and 3) psychiatric and psychologically sexual. For others (Spyer: 1998, p. 1), the concept is incontrovertibly bound up with "the history

of European expansion, [and] to the discourse of power relations developed within novel cross-cultural landscapes, as well as Englightenment elaboration of fetishism to typify precisely that which was held to be irrational, misguided, founded on fancy or 'caprice.'"

Marx used the idea of fetishism of commodities to describe the processes by which commodities came to be naturalized and how the relations between humans that went into capitalist production change and become 'hidden' in the exchange value of the product. Lukacs called this process "reification" (Vandenberghe, 2001) and Debord wrote similarly about spectacle (described in the next section). Marx's first use of the phrase has been traced to 1842, and again in 1859, but it was in Volume I of *Capital* (first published in 1867) that he gave its fullest definition.

> There is a definite social relation between men, that assumes in their eyes the *fantastic form of a relation between things. . .* [In religion,] the productions of the human brain appear as *independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race.* So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour" (Marx, cited in Godelier, 1977, p. 159, italics in original).

Godelier (1977, p. 159) summarizes this as "the effect in and for consciousness of the dissimulation of social relations in and behind their appearances." Later work followed Marx's original observations with further theorizing on reification, or the commodification of humans (Lukacs in 1923, followed by work done by writers of the Frankfurt School). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to pursue these distinctions, suffice to say that this 'thingification' of persons, "the transformation of human properties, relations, processes, actions, concepts, etc. into *res*, into things that act as pseudo-persons" and turning "metasubjects into megasubjects" (Vandenberghe, 2001, p. 12993) has been a long-standing critique of capitalism production and consumption since Marx introduced it. In terms of the analysis here, it is important to realize that many millions have been made on the images of geisha both from Golden's book and the movie, *Sayuri* (the Japanese title), which was less than a big box office success but still wound up paying for its production costs and making a tidy profit, even before DVDs and other derivative products are factored in.

However, commodity fetishism, important as it is to elucidate, accounts for only a partial conceptualization of the imaging of the geisha as fetish. The cultural aspect of difference is of equal, if not more, importance and in the next section I return to the anthropological basis of fetish.

Pels and Samelink (2002) argue that in the forms of anthropological study during the colonial period in which the term fetish emerged, a necessary technique of such ethnographic reflection was distancing oneself from the object of study. As such, anthropology has been complicit in the essentializing through mythical qualities of othering. While this observation has been made repeatedly for the past thirty years and has therefore generally become the common currency of

anthropological historical reconstruction, Pels and Samelink argue that original ethnographic reflection nonetheless often contains the seed of novel and important theorizing which subsequent academic anthropology has then succeeded in downsizing (if not obliterating) through relentless self-critique of anthropology's historicized methodologies.

What they try to reintroduce in their analysis of fetish (following more detailed work by Pietz) is understanding of the unstable nature of such objects of worship and their constituent human relations. Fetishization is in its corresponding context "hybrid not just because two 'cultures' meet (this opposition is, in itself, an essentialization) but because the 'cultures' that meet are themselves fragmented, multiple, and contradictory" (Pels and Samelink, 2002, p. 13). "Practical relationships" become "ethnic essences" and thus, as for the earlier ethnographers, the fetish becomes a substitute for "African society" or, at the least, that particular African society of interest (Pels and Samelink, 2002, pp. 15 and 35). Or put in another way, an analysis of the image making potentiality of the geisha, as the example under study here, needs to take into account the renewed interest in the social sciences of "the performative and integrative capacity of 'things' to help make what we call society" (Pels, Hetherington, and Vandenberghe, 2002, p. 2).

Before attempting to integrate the three dimensions of fetishism in relation to a discussion of images of geisha, one needs to look at some other perspectives that have been attempting similar theoretical projects, albeit with very different objects of interest.

Kaplan (2006) is interested in the "fetishism strategy." This is based on her background as a practicing psychologist, and she describes how humans use objectification and subordination to control dangerous and enigmatic people/things. It is a normalizing technique for sexual practices and other forms of human experience to produce conformed relations and behaviors which perpetuate "enslave[ment] to cultural norms" (Kaplan, 2006, p. 14). One of the objects of analysis presented is of the new form of media known as 'reality TV.' Such shows reveal the mechanisms of human beings turned into commodities through competition and barely concealed, in some cases openly celebrated, greed.

Another anthropologist (Graeber: 2005), who has focused on the sites of the original African fetish work, notes that fetishism also describes what is "weird, primitive, and rather scandalous customs" (for which reason it was originally abandoned by later 'modern' anthropologists, such as Marcel Mauss). In trying to revalorize the creativity of the concept, he writes of, "material objects [which] are transformed by becoming objects of desire" (Graeber, 2005, p. 410). Graeber goes on to argue in his research that fetishes were instead "the means of creating new social responsibilities, of making contracts and agreements, or forming new associations" (Graeber, 2005, p. 411).

This contrasts in some ways to the notions of "identity fetishism" advanced by Van Beek (2001, p. 527), in her work on Ladakh in India, in which a cultural form of identity is 'naturalized' and cut off from the social and contextual relations. Thus, the degree to which fetishes are simply constraining devices, as Kaplan and to a lesser extent Van Beek argue, and the degree to which they have fundamentally creative aspects, as Graeber argues, is open to argument.

It is clear that many authors have seen the utility in the concept of fetish to explain the power of cultural encounters that smooth economistic capitalist exchanges, while simultaneously controlling the ineluctable difference that threatens to add to the distortions of such exchanges as parodies of more integrative human interrelations. Ordinary people participate in their own fetishization, at least if we follow the Marxian critique. On the other hand, some ordinary people are good at profiting from such fetishization and aware of their double play. That is, in playing a role to which they appear to accede, they may simultaneously be good at resisting their being viewed and used by others as commodities. Consider the excerpt from Foreman (2005, p. 45) with the author discussing her book project:

Geisha 4: "You should write a book about how we are feminists!"
Geisha 1: "Feminists? I'm not a feminist."
Geisha 4: "Yes, we all are. We find our own way, without doing family responsibilities. Isn't that what feminists are?"
Geisha 5: "But I don't dislike men ..."
Geisha 2: "That's right. We like men – we just don't do their laundry!" (everyone laughs).

Geisha fit into such a discussion because they are eminently suitable as carriers of cultural identity, although as the discussion of history of the present has intimated, this identity has never been, nor is now, a unitary phenomenon. Geisha as fetish allows us to see both the features that make them able to be turned into commodities but at the same time calls attention to the hybrid qualities of cultures that allow it to continuously be redefined in service of capital and reinforcement of othering strategies subtle enough not to be entirely resisted but obvious enough that all can play along.

Geisha as Spectacle

The notion of spectacle in modern society is derived from the seminal work, done in the 1950s and 60s in France, by Guy Debord published as *The Society of the Spectacle* (Debord, 1992; Jappe, 2001). The spectacle is defined as the transformation of the living into "representations," and "a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (Debord, 1992, p. 12). Spectacles are an extension of reification (Jappe, 2001, pp. 19-42) and replaces in Marx the role that money had played in fetishization of commodities. Spectacle exists differentially in two types of societies which Debord called "concentrated" and "diffuse." Concentrated referred to state ideology dominated societies such as totalitarian systems of Nazism or State Socialism. In the 1992 introduction to the third edition, Debord states, however that these two have now given way to a third "combined form" that of the "integrated' spectacle" (Debord, 1992, p. 8) by which he appears to mean that global capitalism has made domestic society-wide constraints of image making less important.

Debord's concept also calls attention to the role of culture as in statements such as, "spectacular consumption preserves the old culture in congealed form, going so far as to recuperate and rediffuse even its negative manifestations" (Debord, 1992, p. 136). While this would allow some insight into the daily spectacle of the impromptu crowds and the obsessive waiting with which tourists (both foreign and Japanese) lurk around the streets of Gion during the dusk hours, cameras ready, to take pictures of geisha and maiko departing for their evening assignments, it does not yet answer the question of how such 'congealed' culture became important in the present. On these points, Debord offers further clues such as "culture's self-transcendence as part of total history, and its management as a dead thing to be contemplated in the spectacle" (Debord, 1992, pp. 131-2). Culture's history as a codifying element is thus recalled, however, with the final result that it becomes subsumed by spectacle. While such a conclusion follows from the largely generalized critique that allows spectacle to build on the earlier iterations of commodity fetishism and reification, it nevertheless, totalizes the spectacle into an extreme phenomenon, one that ultimately is only partly explanatory of the compelling continuation of (and for) cultural desires. Jappe (2001) has noted the deterministic nature of Debord's spectacle, a phenomenon which ends up with us denying history since it removes opportunities for people to take any responsibility for their own actions. Hence it is not subtle enough to describe the nuances that exist in the present, the series of discontinuities that characterize the remakings of the image of the geisha or anything else. In short, the spectacle does call our attention to the use of the visual element, the image, to supercede other elements of life in what Debord calls "an enormous positivity, out of reach and beyond dispute... Everything that appears is good; what is good will appear" (Debord, 1992, p. 15). Images end up confirming themselves; as if they shouted to us, this is culture because we can see it!

Fetish and Spectacle in Conjunction

Certainly, the combination of both fetish and spectacle seems unwieldy in conception, so it would be advisable to make some selection of the range of employment of these terms. In regard to sexuality, not surprisingly we will use a term like fetish, not least because of the firmly established meaning in popular usage. However once again we are forced to raise the question of how fetishized objects originally had some meaning of transcendent hybridity invested in them. Thus, banal sexuality seems to not be entirely the best way to encapsulate fetish. Fetish would more appropriately be viewed as a 'thing – ification' process (i.e. reification) by which we redistribute the meaning of social relations. For Marx this was in false consciousness, while others (Graeber, 2005; Pels and Samelink, 1999) argue that fetishizing contains powerful creative motives, which does not pass judgment on their moral goodness or value. Undoubtedly, creative reappropriation is taking place, although I don't focus on it here.

As for spectacle, it is much harder to make a positive assessment, at least if we follow Debord. It is possible to take a rather economistic viewpoint and make a claim for concentration of power stemming from the spectacle. Spectacularizing from the media, after all, exists in many

forms and most of them are quite threatening in so far as the effects on popular ways of thinking often are morally arbitrary in attribution of judgments as to what shall be considered sinister. The carnage of 9/11 was seen in this respect, for example, while the recent and ongoing destruction of city centers in Beirut and Baghdad is largely camouflaged. Spectacle is quite selective in our present period, and it takes little time before interest in it moves on to the next instantiation. While the spectacle of geisha appeals to us as a 'little changing' form of life, the changes are apparent to those documenting the institutional forms of geisha life. One can be reassured, at least it can be argued, by the 'unchanging' image of the geisha. However if I am correct in arguing that the geisha is a sign of a deeper struggle to retain cultural singularity and unadulterated national identities, then its imaging can also reveal a much more negative aspect; that of enforced barriers to a global culture or intercultural understanding, whatever that would look like. One's position on this depends largely on how far the commodity fetishism aspect of the fetishism is emphasized and whether, as Debord argues, one believes that culture is entirely consumed by its economic utility in spectacle.

While there is not the space here for a full consideration of the reasons for culture's ascendancy in the present, it is important to make a few remarks that allow us to then return to the geisha as fetish and spectacle. What are the factors that have given rise to the near obsession with cultural emphases in a variety of social sciences? Certainly one answer could be the fears engendered by the sameness that seems implicit in the spread of cultural globalization. As people around the world become aware of themselves as inhabiting an increasingly smaller place, there arises a resort to defense of culture to assure themselves of the survival of diversity and pluralism. Sartori (2005) describes how the notions of culture (and its twin 'civilization') arrived in different contexts, in the hands of different agents, for different purposes, yet seem to share the same generalized problem of the need to define "subjective autonomy." What does it mean to be able to have control of and for one's identity, in short?

This question, raised in light of the power of capitalist image-making of the cultural industries, as briefly alluded to above in the work of later Marxist authors such as those of the Frankfurt School, has taken on renewed importance with the rise of spectacularization. Whereas fetishization strategies, to use Kaplan's term, may have been intermediary in previous times, they now carry the capacity of to be integrated and circulated by the powerful and rich through increasingly global media. The differential aspects of power both through production and consumption, in a sampling of the imagery of various texts and text/image constellations remain an unexamined corollary to the analysis in this paper and will need more explication in further work.

Similarly there is little enough space here for exposition of exemplary texts from the sample that was introduced previously (Bradley: 2006). However a few excerpts may be taken as a guide to the range of materials.

Dalby's (2000, first published in 1983) account is based on research in which she became a geisha, named Ichigiku, to conduct anthropological fieldwork. While I have highlighted (Bradley,

2006) some of the fetishization of the 'disappearing culture' in both her work and that of Leslie Downer (2000; 2001; discussed in more detail below), it is important to note the ambiguity that comes out in her approach to the world of geisha. In her original 1983 introduction, she writes, "I do not view geisha as constituting a microcosm, a symbol, or a typification of the larger entity: Japanese society. But neither are they a marginal subculture ... Japanese regard them as 'more Japanese' than almost any other definable group" (Dalby, 2000, p. xiii). Here Dalby is keen to distance herself from the simple reductionism of culture to one of its bearers, the geisha, yet she effectively reintroduces it through the back door of Japanese themselves. In an introduction written 24 years later, she describes some of the changes in the intervening years but adds geisha's "chosen function of upholding Japanese tradition – the defining mode of the profession – has not changed" (Dalby, 2000, p. xx). The portrayal of geisha 'out of time' is distinctly in contrast to the ideas advocated in the history of the present method that I have proposed in this paper. It is clear that Dalby considers herself a keeper of the tradition, as her website also shows.

When we peruse the images in her book, there is the assortment that includes, herself with other geisha, her geisha mother, poster advertisements from the Meiji and Taisho periods, and photos of prostitutes (presumably for comparative purposes).

Downer's books (2000; 2001) also indulge in a range of academic and more colloquial material. In the latter category, the scandal that brought down Prime Minister Uno Sosuke in 1989 is recounted. He was accused by several geisha of being greedy and resigned after only two months in office when the ruling LDP party lost seats in a general election. Downer concludes with a tale of morals that the geisha's world, despite these occasional disclosures, remains "secret and impenetrable. But these women are still the stuff of romance in Japan. They still shape the Japanese self-image" (Downer, 2000, p. 208). In Downer's two books, the text is different but the same photographs are used and include both geisha, courtesans, and prostitutes, as well as photos from the 1957 Hollywood movie, "The Barbarian and the Geisha." Also the author is shown in "geisha mode."

From these brief excerpts and overviews of the images in several academic works, we can see the use of the imaging of the geisha to enclose and capture something of the quintessential quality of Japanese culture. It is here that the fetishization of culture is most apparent, and although the authors do not particularly draw on sexual fetishization as a strategy, they participate in making the connection between geisha and other women entertainers of lower ranks, including prostitutes. The use of self-referential imaging, the author's claim to having 'been there,' also suggests another dimension of cross-cultural encounter that is important to add.

Kuwayama (2004) introduced the term ethnographic reading in reverse which I revise here as reverse ethnography. In Kuwayama's analysis of Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword,* he maintains that the possibility always exists that "the describer's culture has been revealed as much as that of the described" (Kuwayama, 2004, p. 112). This is also a possible reading for both Dalby and Downer, but I would argue that it is also a more generalizable condi-

tion of the nature of fetish and spectacle as I have tried to outline above in my discussion of geisha in cross-cultural perspective.

The fetishization and spectacle of culture serve various underlying purposes that are only beginning to be analyzed. Such purposes are apparent in the more commonplace analyses of authors such as Golden (2004) when he writes, "What is unusual about the Japanese is their extraordinary ability to preserve what might be called 'cultural artifacts' and define themselves by reference to those artifacts in order that new ideas and institutions can be readily absorbed" (Golden, 2004, p. 21). Absolutely the same thing might be said of the many American readers of *Memoirs*, searching for cultural trappings to help them make sense of the present in which they find themselves. And Golden, as a packager of cultural fetishism, has amply exploited this source of commodity fetishism. Further, as Allison (2001, p. 385) has put it, the stance of "distant intimacy" and homogenization becomes the versatile technique that allows a "normative imaginary of American 'we-ness' ... which can easily harbor a sense of cultural smugness if not colonial or imperial power."

Conclusion

In her review article, Rath (2004) writes that at the least "there is a loud call for revision in the west's perception of the east. The question is whether the west is ready to respond to this opportunity for self-transformation and update itself, since the old paradigms are dead and defunct and any attempt to keep the old body of assumptions alive will serve no useful purpose" (p. 355).

What needs to be further researched is the degree to which the term geisha refers to any stable historical entity. From the above examples, I have argued that images of the geisha have served flexible roles and continue to cast light on our dilemma of understanding culture in the present. Foucault's phrase could be reworked to suggest a history of the cultural present, one that takes account of the multiple ways that fetish and spectacle provide tools for molding cultural expectations and smoothing the mechanisms of global mobile capitalist production and exchange of images. In this analysis, the geisha has a central role to play as one of the prominently identified markers of difference both inside and outside Japan, both as gendered and as transgendered, both as a repository of tradition and a marker of innovation and change.

Notes

1) The precise nature of imaging and images is beyond the scale of this paper. I am attempting to introduce some considerations that will help to understand imaging strategies in much the same way that Kaplan (2006) suggests "fetishization strategy" as a way to start to understand fetish.

2) While the total production cost of the *Memoirs of a Geisha* was approximately 85 million U.S. dollars, the box office receipts came to about 57.01 million. The total for foreign sales as of September 2006 was more than 105 million, with Spain leading the way at 12 million, followed by Great Britain at 12 million and Japan a tepid third place. For all sales figures in the U.S. and other countries, see Box Office Mojo, 2006

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