

Comments on Papers by OSHIMA Hitoshi and KATO Takahiro

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I find both papers quite readable and informative. South America being a land of syncretism par excellence, many borders between the modern European and the more traditional (or "atavic," to use the word introduced by the Martinican poet Edouard Glissant) elements surface unexpectedly in different locales. The continent in fact has never been a *terra firma*! It has been flowing and fluctuating throughout history, forging many local solutions to different degrees of inter-cultural and intra-societal conflicts. South America is precisely a name given to a thousand plateaus where the conflicts of the past five hundred years are constantly being staged and replayed. Both tango and *niño compadrito* are examples of such plateaus. Both indicate instances of fictitious construction around which cultural identity crystallizes. They are fictitious, to be sure, but it is only through collective projection and verbal reinforcement of such fiction that a cultural group (of any scale) attains effective coordination of its members.

Professor Oshima's central question here, so it seems, is "how can a society procure itself with appropriate ethics?" Only a society with a stable identity can function with proper ethics, he seems to be saying. Ethics here is equated with civility (therefore given a positive value) and one of the most important factors of such ethics is honesty. I may be simplifying, but such simplification is unavoidable in discussing the very vague and vast field often designated as societal identity or ethnicity. Like many decorations employed to evoke collective identity, tango is based on false nostalgia. To participate in such false nostalgia is the sole guarantee of belonging to a group and behaving properly as its member. Societal identity may well be a conscious fabrication, as Oshima says (and I mostly agree), but here also lies a pitfall that I cannot help pointing out.

A person's identity is always over-determined at many different levels. It is tempting and may often be necessary to talk about societal identity, but I am not sure how much it has to do with a person's individual identity endowed with multiple facets. As Oshima, a former analysand in Buenos Aires, must be well aware, in Freudian perspective a person's mind is modeled after the structure of the society. Individual psyche, therefore, is at the same time a miniature of societal psyche and a part thereof.

In talking about a person's identity, then, we are forced to cheat a little in scaling the psyche. This may turn out to be a general condition of any discussion of the social. Taking the example that Oshima refers to, Argentinean *viveza* probably does exist, and it exists as if it were Saussure's *langue*; one needs to express, or perform, *viveza* as one's *parole* to pragmatically make it function on the social stage.

Oshima recently published a nice little book called *Yudayajin no Shikoho (The Ways of Thinking of the Jewish People)* (1999) in which his writing reminded me of the parallels between Freud's and Durkeim's social theories. I am not well read in social sciences, but my hunch is that in theorizing the social, literary and metaphorical intuition has been playing a large part, if in a clandestine manner. As if by a logic of dreams, scales are confused, images are fused; subtle negotiations between alterity and mimesis take place. But some things can only be verbalized loosely. Exactitude is not always the final word in cultural matters. There is a limit, of course, but occasional audacity is more than welcome, and Oshima's I take to be such an attempt.

Professor Kato's paper is a dense ethnographic work dealing with the fascinating subject of religious syncretism through an extremely intriguing example. I am not a practicing anthropologist and I cannot go into any technical problems. Here I would only like to add, by way of illustration or addendum, a little discussion on a case I am rather familiar with.

I have lived three years in the Sonoran desert that spreads over the states of Arizona (on the US side) and Sonora (on the Mexican side). This is the land of the Yaquis. In the village of Pasqua Viejo, just outside of Tucson, Arizona, the annual calendar is organized around the festivities of Easter, or the *semana santa*. During the Easter week, all the villagers are back in the village for family reunions. This is their major occasion for celebrating their collective continuity. People form different groups such as *fariseos* (Pharisees) and deer dancers to participate totally in the village's religious calendar. People practice respective dancing and chanting all year long. Then comes the *semana santa* that culminates in the fight of the flowers, *la Gloria*, between the army of God (entirely composed of young girls) and that of the evil (made up of masked dancers called *Matachines*) that takes place around noon on Saturday of the holy week.

What is remarkable is the topographical figuration of the village plaza. The church is situated on the Western edge of the plaza, facing East. At the eastern end is a big cross where Jesus' resurrection is supposed to take place. In the northeastern corner of the plaza is a *ramada* where the deer dance is performed. People dance through the nights. On one hand, there is a set of dances inspired by Christian mythology and obvious European influence (instruments and music, among others); on the other there

is the deer dance accompanying the Yaqui-language chant in the ramada. The deer dance is archaic; it almost certainly belongs to the pre-Columbian tradition of the land. Seemingly, the dance in front of the church and the dance in the *ramada* have nothing to do with each other. The plaza is surely a stage, but different representations of different time-spaces are performed synchronically. A spectator is not able to view both dances at the same time. One has to move back and forth to experience and reconstruct the movements and their symbolism. Yet there is an implicit understanding that the whole plaza forms a single stage. The domain of the church and the domain of the wild are juxtaposed as a whole and re-designated as the core of the Yaqui tradition of the past several hundred years.

This seems to me to be a synecdoche of the world in which we live. At different points, there are different re-embodiments or re-enactments of the past. What matters is the minimum agreement that all are taking place on a single stage, and this stage (like Derridean 'text') has no outside. This is a total stage where all the totalitarian pulsion is foreclosed; it is a total stage that is composed of a thousand plateaus; it is an omniphone stage where an incomprehensible opacity can survive on its own.

We leave certain rights for the incomprehensible. We take pleasure in learning about the strange. Is this another form of exoticism? Yes, one cannot deny it. But I think there is much good use in exoticism, too. It drives us toward the knowledge of the world; it reconciles us with the foreign. Cross-cultural understanding must be a praxis of a certain form of controlled exoticism, through which we may try to verbalize the fascination and anxiety that others impose upon us. Figuration of the exotic is at the same time a key to the foreign. It opens for us the door of trans-cultural perception.