Alternative Modernity? Playing the Japanese Game of Culture

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> If games both fashion and reflect culture, it stands to reason that to a certain extent a whole civilization and, within that civilization, an entire era can be characterized by its games.
> Roger Caillois, "Les jeux dans le monde moderne"

> The writer's irony is a negative mysticism to be found in times without a god.
> Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*

Introduction: Games as Rational Systems

In 1938, the great Japanese novelist Yasunari Kawabata witnessed a turning point in the history of the game of Go. Kawabata was then a young reporter covering the championship Go match sponsored by his newspaper. Honnimbô Shusai, the "Invincible Master," who had reigned over the world of Go for a generation, was pitted against a young challenger. So popular was Go that Kawabata's newspaper could offer the players substantial sums for participating and pay all the expenses of the match. These were considerable as the match lasted many months.

Kawabata felt he had witnessed the end of an era at that Go match in 1938. Many years later he brought out his old newspaper articles, added new fictional material, and published a novel called *The Master of Go* (*Meijin*). This novel is an elegy for the world the Japanese lost as they modernized. Kawabata's rather sentimental traditionalism is not so simple as it appears at first; nostalgia is a moment in the structure of modern consciousness, and *afortiori*, novelistic form. This is why his story has much to tell us about the nature and possibilities of modern society.

It may seem strange that Kawabata's most sustained investigation of modernity should be the story of a board game, but in fact games exemplify formally rational systems. Like markets, law, scientific and technical research, games break loose from the continuum of social life to impose a rational order on a sector of experience. Modern institutions too are characterized by explicit rules, unambiguous measures, defined times and places of action, equalization of participants' positions. Their game-like structure, with its predictable procedures, absence of predetermined content, and simple principles of equity are all contrasted favorably in modernizing ideology to irrational, dogmatic and biased traditions.

We will see how Kawabata, through his narrative of the great Go match, turns the argument around and develops an implicit critique of the particularity and bias of formal rationality. He accomplishes this by the peculiar literary technique of unfolding layer after layer of meaning in the moves of the game. The apparently neutral forms of play turn out to be loaded with social, cultural and historical content. The Go match can stand for the whole range of modern institutions invading Japan, each of which delivers far more in the way of social change than appears on the surface.

In the concluding portion of this essay, I attempt to enlarge the scope of these reflections in two directions. I will first compare Kawabata's literary technique with Lukács' early theory of the novel. Using different means derived from his own culture, Kawabata achieved a form based on the same sort of layering and double meaning Lukács' analyzes in terms of the category of irony. It is this form which enables Kawabata to carry through his critique of Western modernity. Secondly, I will discuss the larger implications of Kawabata's novel for the question of modernity. Japan's cultural specificity is often mentioned as a factor in its rise to industrial power. Kawabata's novel suggests a new way of thinking about why this might be so.

The Rules of the Game

Millions of Japanese play Go much as Westerners play chess. Kawabata's novel assumes a passing familiarity with the game and, unfortunately, we will not be able to discuss it without at least that degree of acquaintance. I must therefore ask the reader to bear with me for a brief description of the rules of the game.[1]

Go is said to be more difficult than chess. Although the rules are simpler, the play is more complicated if only because the board is more than four times as "big" as a chess board. Black and white stones are placed at the intersections of a grid 19 by 19 lines. (See diagram 1.) The number of possible moves is the factorial of 361, more than the number of atoms in the galaxy.

The aim of play is to capture territory and enemy pieces by surrounding them with one's own pieces. Once placed on the board, pieces cannot be moved; they remain where they were played until they are captured. Every piece covers the intersection of two lines, which themselves intersect with other lines at four adjacent points. Each of these points counts as an "eye" or "breathing space." Adjacent pieces of the same color share "eyes." So long as a piece or a group of pieces has at least one such "eye" uncovered by the opponent, it is "alive." Once all its "eyes" have been taken it is captured and the space it occupied belongs to the opponent's count. (See diagram 2.)

Because the board is so large, it is impossible to concentrate on any one portion of it for long without losing the initiative to a more mobile adversary. Thus contests begin all over the board and the players periodically return to one or another of them, advancing battles toward an eventual conclusion a few moves at a time. Beginners are bewildered by the frequent interruption of these apparently inconclusive struggles, but this is the essence of the game.

The game moves through roughly three phases. At first territory is staked out by posting isolated pieces around the board. Gradually battles emerge around conflicting claims, none of which are entirely secure in the early phase of the game. Finally, the board is filled in, the last ambiguities removed, and the captured spaces and pieces counted. Until the last phase, there are always many incomplete conquests, broken

lines, lost pieces left in place, and so on. Although significant stakes ride on clearing them up properly, these housekeeping tasks are generally left till the end while the players confront more significant challenges.

The rules of Go are a model of simplicity and clarity, but they contain one logical flaw. An oscillating pattern can emerge in which both players have a disproportionately large incentive to repeat their last move. This situation occurs when the piece used to take an enemy piece is itself exposed to immediate capture, reproducing the status quo ante. (See diagram 3.) This situation is called a "kô," from the Sanskrit "kalpa," meaning an epoch or eternity. To prevent endless repetition, the second player is obliged to play away from the "kô" for a turn, breaking the pattern. Then the first player can fill it in. (If white plays in the space on diagram 3 indicated by the arrow after removing the black piece, the "kô" disappears.) We will have to return later to this idea of "playing away."

The Way of Go: Autonomy and Reflection

Go was introduced into Japan from China 13 centuries ago. In Japan, it gradually evolved into a discipline, a kind of sedentary martial art. As such Go came to be seen as a "dô" or Way of self-realization and not primarily as a contest of strength, although obviously the best player was honored. Kawabata writes, "The Oriental game has gone beyond game and test of strength and become a way of art. It has about it a certain Oriental mystique and nobility" (117). And he compares it to the Nô drama and the tea ceremony as belonging to "a strange Japanese tradition" (118).[2] With this background in mind, one is less astonished to learn that the champion of the leading school of Go took Buddhist orders and was called the "Honnimbô."

This characteristically Japanese concept of Way has a two tiered structure. On the one hand, for an activity to support a Way, it must be abstracted from the contingencies of everyday life and constructed as an autonomous "field" with its own logic. Then, this field must become the locus of self-transformation for the agent engaged in activity on it.

The autonomization of Go involves the following features which it shares with other board games:

1. Every move in the game must conform to an explicitly formulated, unambiguous rule.
2. Moves are stripped of semantic content and reduced to unambiguous acts that can be represented diagramatically with precision.
3. The purpose of each move and of the game as a whole is clearly defined and immanent in the rules.
4. The game discriminates between winners and losers by a precise quantitative measure leaving no room for doubt about the outcome.
5. Moves can always be clearly distinguished from other events in the social surroundings of the game, and can therefore be assigned a specific "space" and "time" of play.
6. Insofar as the rules are concerned, players' positions in the game are equivalent in every possible respect, the major and unavoidable exception being the first move.

7. The game is a collaborative performance requiring various forms of reciprocity, from the simplest--alternating and mutually responsive moves--to the most complex--attention to the competitor's state of mind or physical needs.

Two features of this list seem particularly significant. They are: the evident care with which ambiguity has been eliminated from the field of play through such means as explicit rules and quantitative measures: and the artificial equalization of the players who, in everyday life, are sure to be subtly differentiated in ways the game ignores. These features of the game indicate its remoteness from the surrounding social world in which ambiguity and inequality are the rule. And by this very token, these features seem to echo strangely our modern notions of scientific and political rationality. We will return to this surprising coincidence.

Autonomy is not an end in itself, but is linked to reflexivity. Because the game can be separated from its environment, its characteristic situations can be endlessly retrieved and studied. Self-criticism, repetition and practice can refine specialized abilities. Performance can be judged, play can be perfected, degrees of competence measured in matches.

Reflection not only improves performance but also situates the autonomous game in the player's life process. The act of play is a practice of self-realization modifying the player through discipline. This is the core of the notion of Way; in Western societies the idea of "vocation" plays a similar role, describing the effect on the subject of its own activity in a relatively autonomous domain.

The recontextualizing practice of the game as a Way has the paradoxical effect of reinforcing its autonomy. The game is wholly absorbed in a way of life that is itself wholly absorbed in the game. As Kawabata says of the old Master, he was "a man so disciplined in an art that he had lost the better part of reality" (32).

In effect, what Erving Goffman calls "rules of irrelevance," that anchor attention on play and abstract it from the social surround, have taken over his whole life (1961: 20). This is a well known hazard of the game. There is an ancient Chinese tale of a woodcutter who comes upon two old men playing Go in the forest and stops to watch. Eventually the game ends and the players disappear into thin air. The astonished woodcutter discovers that his own hair has turned white during the play, and the handle of his axe has rotted through. For Kawabata the game has a demonic quality.

From the veranda outside the players' room, which was ruled by a sort of diabolic tension, I glanced out into the garden, beaten down by the powerful summer sun, and saw a girl of the modern sort insouciantly feeding the carp. I felt as if I were looking at some freak. I could scarcely believe that we belonged to the same world (27).

No-Mind: The Structure of Conflict

The Way of the game is not about victory but about self-realization through discipline. Kawabata tells the story of two high ranking young players who ask the advice of a clairvoyant on how to win. "The proper method, said the man, was to lose all awareness of self while awaiting an adversary's play" (42).

One immediately recognizes here the Zen concept of "no-mind" as it appears in Japanese martial arts. It describes the peculiar form of self-forgetfulness involved in effective sport or combat. But this is surely an odd application of Buddhism, a religion of

ascetic detachment from the world. As Suzuki (1970) explains it, "non-attachment" can be extended down to the level of attentive processes, freeing the actor from inhibiting concentration on either self or other. This loosening of focus banishes hesitation and fear and improves fighting performance. "'From this absolute emptiness," states Takuan, "comes the most wondrous unfoldment of doing'" (Herrigel, 1960: 104).[3]

This is not the place to discuss the religious implications of no-mind. What interests me more in any case is the structure of the concept which is derived, by a subtle transformation, from the traditional Hindu and Buddhist notion of non-duality. According to the traditional notion conflict is illusory, as in Emerson's famous poem, "Brahma:"

> If the red slayer think he slays,
> Or if the slain think he is slain,
> They know not well the subtle ways
> I keep, and pass, and turn again (Suzuki, 1970: 207).

Borges' story, "The Theologians," reaches a similar conclusion. Here is the heavenly coda to this account of a metaphysical dispute that ends tragically with one of the disputants burned at the stake: "In Paradise, Aurelian learned that, for the unfathomable divinity, he and John of Pannonia (the orthodox believer and the heretic, the abhorrer and the abhorred, the accuser and the accused) formed one single person" (1964: 126).

These works appear to invite us to occupy a "third" position above the fray: the "I" of Brahma or the theologians' God. Presumably, if the swordsmen and the theologians could occupy this position themselves, their strife would cease and they would be reconciled in perfect understanding.

The doctrine of no-mind agrees that apparent dualities reveal a more fundamental unity. But what makes it so interesting is the elimination of the third position. It is conflict itself which is shown to be prior to the parties it joins, an underlying unity of which they are mere projections. True non-duality therefore cannot be achieved by *observing* the conflicts in which others are plunged, no matter how dialectically. Such an observer would still stand in dualistic opposition to its object.

Rather, no-mind is a particular way of living duality, an existential position *within* it, and not a modality of knowledge transcending it. Hence the Zen master's reply to the impertinent question of how the enlightened deal with hunger and cold: "When hungry, I eat, and when cold I put on more clothes" (Suzuki, 1973: 75).

This reply indicates why Zen turned out to be peculiarly available to the martial arts, and ultimately, I will argue below, to literature as well. For this doctrine, the goal is not to rise above conflict in reconciliation but to achieve total identification with the context of struggle in the very course of playing one's own conflictual role. If conflict can be transcended, it must be from within, without setting up a third consciousness above the fight.

The same point can be made in relation to Go. Insofar as the players identify completely with the situation of the board, i.e., with the "whole," they can assume their role unreservedly and carry it out apart from any concern with survival or victory. This no-mind is not a mystical unconsciousness, but a consciousness that has become one

with the formal requirements of the activity frame and that sees its role within that frame as in some sense "logically" entailed rather than personally motivated.

Good play thus has nothing to do with one-sided personal aggression; at the height of the most intense competition, the players are joined in harmony in the construction of the board, much as singers respond to each other in a piece of complex choral music. Their unity, expressed in their mutually responsive moves, takes precedence over their struggle. Ultimately, they "form one single person."

The Pattern Disturbed

In Japanese culture, the pursuit of self-realization through a Way manifests itself aesthetically, in this instance as the beauty of the board on which the dance of adversaries produces a magnificent and complex pattern. Of course the aim of Go is to win, however, Japanese commentators always note that this aim is transcended by a higher interest in the aesthetic achievement of "harmony" and pattern. Go is the collaborative production of aesthetic form through competitive play. Both moments, collaboration and competition, are equally important for without struggle there is no beauty. The weak player who offers no resistance is incapable of collaborating in the production of a satisfying board, full of symmetry and surprise. There is thus a promise of aesthetic redemption contained in the hard fought game; Kawabata's novel is the story of the betrayal of that promise by the modern focus on victory and defeat for its own sake.[4]

That new focus becomes apparent in the climactic move of the great match of 1938. After many months of difficult play, interrupted by the illness of the Master, the game seems perfectly poised with no advantage to either side. A struggle breaks out in the center of the board that promises to be decisive. As the day comes to an end, the challenger, Otaké, seems unsure of his course. He writes his final play of the day--move 121--on a card and seals it in an envelope, to be opened by the referees the following morning, and with that the players retire. (See diagram 4).

When the seal is broken at the next session, the move is not in the central battlefield at all, but strikes at the Master far away near the top of the board. Yet it compels at least a brief response of the housekeeping sort; it resembles the move the disadvantaged player makes away from a "kô" to distract the adversary with a sharp diversionary blow. Soon the players return to the center of the board where the Master plays poorly, making the mistake that costs him the game.

What is the meaning of this incident? The organizers of the match granted each player 40 hours to consider their moves. Sealing the final move of the day is supposed to prevent the players from adding the time between sessions to this already generous total. But by tying the master up for a turn with his trivial sealed play, Otaké appears to have frozen the most important action so as to have a leisurely look at it overnight. The Master is convinced that Otaké used the sealed play to gain time to reflect on the difficult position in the center of the board, time he desparately needed as he was rapidly using up his allotment.

Despite the suspicious appearance of move 121, it is not certain that the challenger actually used it to gain unfair advantage. Although at one point the narrator says that Otaké "would avert defeat even if in the process he must chew the stones to bits," he is not portrayed unsympathetically (178). He is even described as reading the *Lotus Sutra*

to calm himself before playing. And the narrator, who is full of admiration for the Master, also respects his challenger and, at one point, intervenes effectively to prevent him from forfeiting the match.

This ambiguous situation crystallizes the action of the novel. And because the human significance of the climactic move is ambiguous, the specificity and the concreteness of the actual play persists even after the novel appears to assign it a meaning. It remains in fact a permanent stumbling block to final interpretation, an ambiguous intersection of the multiple codes that structure the novel.

But whether Otaké made good use of the extra hours or not is ultimately irrelevant since the Master is so upset by the sealed play that he can no longer concentrate properly on the game. The challenger's apparent thrust toward victory disturbs the pattern and undermines the spiritual significance of the game. It is as though the delicate work of producing the board, which has as its secondary consequence victory and defeat for the players, was interrupted by a mere tug of war in which participants have no conscious relation at all to the combined effects of their labors and no purpose other than winning. The incident brings out into the open the potential conflict between collaborative and competitive dimensions of the game and thus between its roles in supporting a Way and in discriminating between winners and losers.

Because the Master is upset, his feelings come out momentarily in the presence of the reporter. Kawabata writes,

The Master had put the match together as a work of art. It was as if the work, likened to a painting, were smeared black at the moment of highest tension. That play of black upon white, white upon black, has the intent and takes the forms of creative art. It has in it a flow of the spirit and a harmony as of music. Everything is lost when suddenly a false note is struck, or one party in a duet suddenly launches forth on an eccentric flight of his own. A materpiece of a game can be ruined by insensitivity to the feelings of an adversary (164).

Later the Master has his doubts or in any case is more reticent. His published account of the game, like that of the new champion, contains no criticism of this decisive move which, despite its odd timing, is perfectly ordinary in other respects. Thus the waves quickly cover over the suspicions that ruined the match; all rally around to protect the image of their art.

Meta-Rules: Etiquette or Equity

Modernity does not introduce rationality into social life for the first time. Every culture has domains governed by formal rules. These rules can be considered "rational" in the sociological sense of the term on two conditions: first, that they employ tests of experience or impose principles of equivalence, implication, or optimization on action, and second, that they do so with an unusual degree of precision. So it is, for example, with accounting rules designed to insure the equality of income and outgo, or legal rules that affix punishments to crimes. Or the rules of Go that create a domain in which the difference between better and worse play is not open to dispute.

Although the production of such domains is not characteristically modern but essentially human, modernity can nevertheless be clearly distinguished from every other type of society. In modern societies certain of these formally rational activities are liberated from recontextualizing strategies that reconcile them with traditional rituals

and social distinctions. In the case of a game like Go, potential conflicts between the requirements of the one and the other are resolved in advance by what I will call "meta-rules" that regulate the social relations of the players congruent with the requirements of play.

In the old Japan, etiquette inscribed agents' identity in all their activities without exception. The constraints of etiquette were perhaps more strongly felt in this society than one can imagine in the West. True or not, only in Japan could the story be told of the feudal general who washed and perfumed his hair before battle in case, in the event of defeat, his decapitated head were to be presented to the victor and the ladies of his court.

Etiquette recontextualizes formally rational activities to insure that they take a subordinate place in a world ordered according to quite different principles, e.g. ranking by age which relates all human activity to the mortality of the agents and their role in family life. Deference in this context not only expresses a social prejudice but *contains* the socially dangerous equalizing potential of formal rationality.[5]

This cultural framework had completely enveloped Go in complicated quasi-religious rituals until the match of 1938. That match marks the breakdown of an older vision of the game as a spiritual discipline and the emergence of a new one in which it is essentially a test of strength. The processes of modernization that had been gnawing at traditional Japanese culture in every domain since the Meiji Restoration finally reached this odd holdout that had been ignored until then.

The modalities of this shift are linked to what I will call the textuality of Go as a board game. The decontextualized character of the play, which suits it to be a Way, also makes it possible to define the state of the game at any moment by simply recounting the sequence of moves. In fact games resemble writing in that they produce an object that can be separated from any particular material support, such as a piece of paper or a board, and circulated as a system of signs.

The quasi-textual nature of the game suits it for dissemination through a newspaper. Like his earlier reporting, Kawabata's novel dramatizes the Go match, the twists and turns of which it follows exactly despite the poetic license he took with many human details. This exactitude is in itself significant: the narrator is a reporter, like Kawabata, and the same kinds of charts that appeared in the newspaper articles are reproduced throughout the novel.

The involvement of a newspaper in the championship match results in a significant shift in emphasis. The game, which used to be a unique spiritual performance, is reduced to a mechanically retrievable spectacle, a "match." Of course there was always an element of show in it, but a transformation occurs when mediated mass spectatorship replaces the burdensome ritual of personally following the players to their meeting place and remaining silent in their presence. Newspaper readers are in immediate contact only with the contextless chart of the unfolding game, the thrust and parry of successive moves, the final drive toward victory, all of which can be printed exactly as played. This change, made possible by the formal autonomy of the game, eliminates its "aura," and diminishes interest in it as a Way, which now becomes a kind of folklore or ornament of the record in the press (Benjamin, 224-225).

The newspaper and its readers are less interested in these traditional aspects of the game than in its fairness, so new meta-rules are introduced designed to ensure the

victory of the better player. "The modern way was to insist upon doing battle under conditions of abstract justice, even when challenging the Master himself" (52). The uniformity of the game, in which nothing distinguishes the players but the color of their stones, must be reflected in their roles in play. The social institution that corresponds to this notion of equity is the contract, and the organization of the match is therefore settled contractually.

Several of these new rules are imitated from Western chess, such as time limits on play, and sealed plays at the end of the day. The players are even sequestered to prevent outsiders from contributing advice. Of this code, with its cold rationalism, Kawabata says "It later came to seem like a foreshadowing of death" (58).

One could hardly object to such conditions, especially not if, as one of the players, he wished to receive the generous rewards for playing the game under conditions that would increase newspaper sales. Yet these new rules ran roughshod over precious Japanese sensitivities in their exclusive concentration on the question "Who is the best player?"

Traditional etiquette prescribed not an equal but an unequal relationship between the older and the younger player, the champion and his challenger. Accordingly, the Invincible Master had the right to expect that his age and eminence would be recognized not merely through outward signs of respect but through obedience to his decisions about the play, the length and timing of sessions, and related matters. There is a certain conflict of interest implied in this arrangement, but the Master's position is too visible and his responsibility too heavy for him to abuse his power. Considerations of honor limit the asymmetry between the players. Was it not rude then to place them both on an equal footing? Was it not demeaning to the art of Go to imply, by imposing these rules, that the players are mainly interested in victory? Was finding out who plays best important enough to excuse these offenses?

In one sense the answer is obvious. Kawabata's narrator is a good newspaperman and knows all the dirt, even on the Old Master. He does not hide from us that the Master abused his discretion to avoid a match with his challenger's teacher, Suzuki, who might well have beaten him. One of his disciples is suspected of having whispered the winning move to the Master in a previous match. And worst of all, he treated his own position as "a commercial asset" and "sold his last match to a newspaper at a price without precedent" (53). So much for virtuous old Japan!

And yet the narrator nevertheless describes the Master as "forever true and clean," which he is by comparison with slick modern players (109). Kawabata explains that the disappearance of favoritism is not the innocent gesture it appears to be, for, "New rules bring new tactics" (165). And he notes, "When a law is made, the cunning that finds loopholes goes to work. One cannot deny that there is a certain slyness among younger players, a slyness which, when rules are written to prevent slyness, makes use of the rules themselves" (54). The sealed play containing move 121 is an example.

Rules that claim universality in the equal treatment of all are applied in a world of particular circumstances. Far from standing above the struggle, they end up being instrumentalized in individual strategies as means to the end of victory. The shrewd grasp of loopholes in the new rules replaces the honest subtlety of the really insightful player. Thus the ideal of fairness as a quasi-mechanical equality between players is never achieved. Once again, therefore, one must rely on the force of honor to restrain

abuse. But now honor has been weakened by the alibi of conformity to the letter of the rules which takes its place in the modern mind.

There is a further unfortunate consequence of the introduction of the new rules: the loss of aesthetic values. Etiquette is of course extrinsic to the structure of play itself and as such may interfere with the logic of the game. But in fact the novel is not about the struggle between ascriptive values such as age, and a new achievement oriented ethos. Far from emphasizing the unfairness and distortions deference causes, the novel presents etiquette as a context of play uniquely suited to bringing out the aesthetic achievement of a truly heroic match. Meanwhile, it is the orientation toward success that is shown to distort play through introducing extraneous considerations that depend on mere technicalites. The narration thus deconstructs the opposition of ascription and achievement.

The novel lets us understand that the mere establishment of the bureaucratic framework already marked the Master for defeat. It is not just that he is bound to be less clever than a younger man at manipulating the system. No, it is more the distrust embodied in the very nature of the rules which was bound at some point to demoralize and upset him beyond endurance. Against this background some event was sure to cast doubt on the position and lead to the collapse of the Master's spirit. Kawabata writes,

It may be said that the Master was plagued in his last match by modern rationalism, to which fussy rules were everything, from which all the grace and elegance of Go as art had disappeared, which quite dispensed with respect for elders and attached no importance to mutual respect as human beings. From the way of Go the beauty of Japan and the Orient had fled (52).

Because etiquette privileges the collaborative over the competitive dimension of play, it opens up a space within which the aesthetic ideal of Way can flourish. But in the new Japan, the social context of play is a matter of simple fairness, abstracted from all personal considerations. Fairness projects other aspects of the game, such as equality and struggle, into the social environment. When social activity is treated as a mere competition, the structure of the game, with its clear decision between winners and losers, reaches out to simplify life itself.

Layers of Meaning

Such ideas were accessible to many Japanese writers and intellectuals, caught in the midst of a modernizing movement they lived simultaneously as a response to both the Universal--scientific truth--and the Particular--Western power. How does Kawabata develop such a dialectic in his novel? *The Master of Go* is based on multiplying codes in terms of which to interpret an apparently simple move in a game. The order and connection of meanings at each level parallels that at the other levels. The same action can be identified at all levels, unchanged except in terms of its contextualization and significance. It is not possible to order these levels causally, to explain one level by another because each has its own "logic." Such multi-layered entanglements are characteristic of formalized fields. Double or triple meanings can always be constructed around any act which has an aparently technical or formal motive in terms of its involvement with its social environment.[6]

The novel is an attempt to understand and encompass the increasingly intrusive lower levels of the dialectic, privileged by modernity, in a higher aesthetic form. The

game is a formal-rational system that can be isolated from its practical context as a set of spatial coordinates, a chart. Recontextualized as a performance, the abstract chart is animated by a practice of play; it becomes *this* particular game played by these players in a definite time and place. A completely self-sufficient account of the action is possible at the level of the game, its rules, and the strategy of play, and such an account is plausibly offered in official published descriptions of the game.

Of course there is always more going on than is deemed fit for presentation in such publications. The novel takes us behind the scenes by revealing the psychological meaning of the player's actions. At this level the game appears as a structure of social relations, mixing respect, fairness, aggression and anxiety in a surprisingly complicated narrative flow.

But even this description is incomplete; it abstracts from a still wider context: the social background. The players, after all, are not isolated beings but members of a society. The game is thus further encompassed in the wider practical field of social, cultural and historical meanings animating the play. These meanings reflect the different meta-rules of etiquette and equity with their different emphases on Way and winning.

The conflict between the newspaper's rules and the old etiquette reflects a larger historical conflict dramatized in the match. The Honnimbô Shusai was not just a Go champion, but the champion of a dying civilization, the old Japan, a world in which a certain kind of aristocratic idealism and aestheticism prevailed over modern worries about success and money. For the Master, the game is the occasion for an aesthetic revelation beyond any merely personal contest. But in modern times there is no longer any "margin for remembering the dignity and the fragrance of Go as an art," and the challenger plays simply to win (52). As Kawabata writes, "The Master seemed like a relic left behind by Meiji" (63). In fact he died shortly after the finish of the match. His challenger, however decent a man, was the agent of the modern world. His victory would mean the end of the old Japan and the emergence of a new spirit, dominated by business and the media.

For Kawabata the 1938 championship match was thus emblematic of the modernization of Japan. He repeats the usual contrast between modernity and tradition familiar from Japanese literature: the struggle between ideals and interests, feeling and reason, beauty and power, etc. But despite the clichés, his narrator cannot entirely disapprove of the modern; it will bring, he says, "new vitality in the world of Go" (145).

If the narrator is ambivalent, the novel as a whole tends, as we have seen, to soften the epochal differences between its two principle characters. No doubt we are intended to discount the rumours about the Master and to believe the worst of his challenger. But the ambiguities indicate that the problem of modernization is not just about psychology or ethics; the game has different potentialities that are reflected in historically typical forms of personality. The personal level thus depends on an underlying change in the place of the game in social life.[7] A perfectly respectable move from one standpoint is an outrage from the other. The players are in effect playing different games. Their encounter must lead to a profound misunderstanding, a conflict of "doubles" in which each participant operates according to a different code.[8]

It is the journalist narrator who carries the burden of explaining these larger implications. He can do so because he embodies in his person the very ambiguity of the

match. On the one hand, just as the Master reduces himself to nothing before the game, so the narrator says "I reduced myself to nothing as I gazed at the Master" (115). On the other hand, his relation to Otaké is characterized by egalitarian affection and esteem. His doubleness reflects the doubleness of Japan itself (Pilarcik, 1986: 16-17).

The profound ambiguity of the narrator's identity opens a space that encompasses all the lower fields in a sort of literary no-mind. In his Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, Kawabata endorses such a view of his writing. He quotes the poet Saigyô: "Confronted with all the varied forms of nature, his eyes and his ears were filled with emptiness. And were not the words that came forth true words" (1969: 42)? And he concludes, "My own works have been described as works of emptiness..."(1969: 43).

Aestheticism, East and West

The Master of Go represents a type of aesthetic critique in which Japanese spirit survives outside of history, as a peculiar and quite contingent doubt haunting triumphant modernity and revealing its limits. Perhaps this is the sort of thing Tanizaki foresaw already in 1933 when he wrote his famous essay *In Praise of Shadows*. Despairing of the survival of traditional Japanese culture under the brightness of electric light, he writes,

> I have thought that there might still be somewhere, possibly in literature or the arts, where something could be saved. I would call back at least for literature this world of shadows we are losing. In the mansion called literature I would have the eaves deep and the walls dark, I would push back into the shadows the things that come forward too clearly, I would strip away the useless decoration. I do not ask that this be done everywhere, but perhaps we may be allowed at least one mansion where we can turn off the electric lights and see what it is like without them (42).

The aestheticism of these Japanese writers has interesting similarities with the early Lukács' theory of novelistic irony as a kind of "negative mysticism.[9] The coincidence is important because it suggests a still wider context for Kawabata's critique of modernity: the novelistic tradition. Furthermore, Lukács' theory indicates a way of distinguishing Kawabata's novels, as aesthetic forms, from mere sentimental nostalgia for the past.

According to Lukács, the novel is the original and most profound critique of modernity. That critique, at least in the French and Russian novels Lukács took for typical, is aesthetic rather than moral or political. These novels are the product of an irony that is half within, half without the conflicts of the world. The novelist neither stands in polemic opposition to modern society on the ground of tradition or passion-- usually exemplified in the hero--nor justifies modernization and its costs with a "grand narrative" ending in the present or leading to a shining future. Indeed, were the writer to identify purely and simply with either the world or the hero, the novel would lapse into the pamphlet or the lyric.

Novelistic irony is thus peculiarly ambivalent. On the one hand, it demystifies modernity's claim to universality by revealing the contrast between the facade and the realities of economic, political and legal institutions. Often (in Dickens or Balzac, for example) this leads to a certain sentimentalizing of tradition. But, on the other hand, the novel's ironic structure subverts any idea of a return to the past by showing how deeply tradition has been intertwined with modernity. Indeed, tradition, like other hopeless

ideals the heroes oppose to modernity, serves primarily as a marker for an impossible transcendence which can only be indicated *from within* the tensions and oppositions of society. The novelist may seem to take sides but his irony nevertheless situates him in what Lukács calls a "transcendendental place" from which alone the whole is visible.

Formally, this ironic stance resembles the consciousness of Way, the no-mind that plays its role to the fullest while identifying with the whole to which it contributes its conflictual share. Just so, Kawabata's narrator sides nostalgically with the old Master and yet manages to depict the contradictions of Japanese tradition and Western modernity in a way that avoids tendentious polemic. He is a mysteriously neutral observer of the real struggle of the book, which produces the aesthetic patterns suitable to literary representation, the graceful move and countermove in a conflict of cultures. To depict this struggle in a "work of emptiness" is to transcend the opposition of tradition and modernity aesthetically. Lukács' remarkable intuition of the novel's religious content is confirmed by this echo from another culture.[10]

There is however an important difference between Western and non-Western forms of ironic consciousness of modernity. In the West, one typical heroic type embodies ideals out the past that are doomed by social advance. But the old Master, a similar heroic type depicted in a non-Western setting, exemplifies not merely the tragedy of historical lag, but a contemporary clash of cultures. That clash takes place in the context of Western cultural imperialism in which Japan appears doomed to defeat, not so much because its time has come as because it has met a superior force that has acquired a corresponding but perhaps undeserved prestige. The later development of Japanese society shows how important it is not to overlook this difference.

Today, in a world in which Japan has become a leading industrial power, we can ask whether the continuing signs of the vitality of Japanese culture do not refute the aestheticizing pessimism of Japanese authors such as Tanizaki and Kawabata. Their position belonged to the period of cultural trauma that began with the Meiji restoration and culminated in the Occupation.

The novel prospered as a literary form during this period. It opened a space within which Western modernity could be exposed in its particularity without regression to discredited theological or ideological prejudices. Its structure was thus modern even though the surface message was often traditionalist. But if the novel, an imported form after all, could achieve such critical distance from its Western origins, why despair of the possibility that similar adaptations and amalgams might occur in other spheres, giving rise to a specifically Japanese form of modern society?

This speculation recalls a rich tradition of reflection on the possibility of alternative modernities that has been invoked since the 1930s to explain how Japan can preserve its cultural originality inside the modern project rather than through reactionary retreat (Nishida, 1958; Ohashi, 1992). Despite Kawabata's despair over the apparent defeat of this prospect, it can find an ambiguous support in the underlying structure of his novel. It shows us that modernity too is a culture, or, as we will see, several possible cultures confronting each other through a process of generalized "contamination" (Vattimo, 1991: 158).

Cultural Genealogy

What is meant by the notion of an alternative modernity, and is it really plausible? What I will call the "content approach" to alternative modernity emphasizes such ethnic and ideological differences as the kinds of food people eat, the role of family or religion, the legal forms of property and administration, and so on. These distinctions are weak bases for an alternative because modernization, as we have learned since Weber at least, consists precisely in erasing or incorporating such ethnic and ideological contents in a convergent model of civilization. The universalist view, which uncritically confounds Westernization and modernization, is still persuasive compared to this.

If there can be an alternative modernity, it must be based not on such contents but on deeper differences in cultural forms. Nietzsche's "genealogical" method suggests an approach because it succeeds in following the progress of a way of life from one historical periods to the next. Judeo-Christianity in this Nietzschean sense is not a particular religion but a way of being in the world that can reappear in different ideological and institutional guises over thousands of years of history. Nietzsche would claim that this form is still active in the West as capitalism, socialism and democracy.

Inspired directly or indirectly by Nietzsche, other philosophers such as Heidegger and Derrida have developed farreaching models of the most fundamental metaphysical assumptions of Western culture. These philosophers tend to assume tacitly that modern institutions and technical rationality are essentially incompatible with other cultures.[11] As "postmodernity" or "multiculturalism," this view leads to a revalorization of tradition and ethnic particularity, and in the worst case collapses back into the content approach Nietzsche should rather help us to transcend.

The Master of Go practically invites such a traditionalist reading, at least to Westerners who tend to see in it a struggle between Japanese particularity and the universality of modern culture. On those terms, Kawabata would be arguing that etiquette, self-realization and aesthetics are substantive ends that must be sacrificed for instrumental efficiency in a modern society.

This interpretation of the novel agrees with a commonplace universalist view of Japanese culture as different precisely insofar as it is still essentially feudal. These survivals presumably will dissipate as modernization proceeds (Morley, 1971: 19). Of course it is harder to believe this today than it was when the theory was originally proposed by Marxists in the 1930s. Now that Japan is the most advanced capitalist country, it seems unlikely that feudalism could be alive and well there, but the universalist view is still widely held by many observers who find Japanese culture oppressive and authoritarian.

Kawabata's novel appears deceptively compatible with the universalist framework because the old Japanese values it endorses share the pathos and fragility of the Master whose defeat marks the entry of Japan into modernity. But despite this the novel is incompatible with the Weberian framework. Its Japanese elements are not merely substantive "contents" sacrificed to formal rationality since they include a specific strategic practice of the game. Thus the fateful necessity of the outcome does not flow smoothly from an Enlightenment grand narrative of progress, even in Weber's disillusioned form.

In sum, it is not easy to fit Kawabata's novel into the currently fashionable paradigm of ethnic protest against totalitarian rationality. I believe that Kawabata is not

so much a defender of particularity against universality as he is a critic of the pretensions of false universality. In this too he is true to the novelistic tradition as Lukács defined it.

The reorganization of Go around Western notions of fairness is not a move from particular to universal but merely shifts the balance of power in favor of a new type of player. As deference falls, it carries down with it the values of self-realization and aesthetics that flourish in the context of traditional etiquette. Henceforth Go will be played more as a business than as a spiritual discipline. The best player, in the sense of the one who produces the most perfect game, will be replaced by the player who is best at winning--not precisely the same thing as we have seen.

Reflection on Kawabata's novel thus shows the limits of the identification of rationality with Western culture and offers starting points for a genealogy of non-Western cultural forms investing the process of modernization and altering its direction. From that standpoint the progress of Japanese modernity would roughly parallel Western developments, which saw the emergence of new secular expressions of basic cultural forms amidst the gradual decline of the feudal-Christian tradition that had once been a vigorous expression of that same culture (Dore, 1987).

Admittedly, given the recentness of the opening and modernization of Japan, there inevitably hangs a certain ambiguity over its situation. It is difficult to decide the relative importance of survivals as opposed to the more basic cultural forms. That ambiguity emerges as a central theme of Kawabata's novel. I want to turn now to the task of unraveling it.

The Culture of Place

To this end, I will focus briefly on the category of "place" which plays such an important role in Japanese philosophy and social thought.[12] This notion underlies the concept of no-mind which we have seen at work in Kawabata's novel. As a general cultural phenomenon, it articulates an everyday experience available to every member of the society. This is the experience of seeking one's "place" in the system of social relations in which one finds oneself.

It would be easy to assimilate this category to the notion of social status and to treat it as evidence of the persistence of hierarchy in Japanese culture. This is Chie Nakane's famous theory of the *tate shakai* (vertical society) which is proposed to explain Japan's success in the modern world (Nakane, 1970). This theory has come in for much criticism because of its implicit appeal to culture to justify submission to authority (Dale, 1986: 44-45). It is tempting to reject the whole notion of place as an artifact of an ideologically contaminated cultural theory, a pseudo-traditionalism in the service of rampant exploitation.

The ambiguities of Nakane's social theory are similar to those we encountered in *The Master of Go*. In both cases a quasi-feudal deference is joined to the rational manipulation of a formal system (economics, Go). But if anything the novelist is a more provocative observer than the social theorist. He enables us to see clearly the unique formal rationality that is already present in traditional Japanese culture. This raises the question of whether values and practices linked to that rational dimension of the traditional culture might survive the disappearance of the old deference and accomodate themselves to modern conditions.

This is not a question that occurs to Kawabata, but I would like to consider whether the logic of place may not be independent of traditional authoritarianism. It seems to be built into the structure of Japanese culture and language at a much more basic level than differences in prestige or power and signifies a far wider range of distinguishing attributes attached to the various "places" occupied by the individuals. Perhaps, like Western individualism, it is a cultural form in the broad genealogical sense capable of reproducing itself across epochal institutional changes, including changes in the distribution and exercise of authority.

There is considerable evidence for this interpretation. For example, the Japanese language (like several other Asian languages) requires one to choose pronouns, verb forms and forms of address which reflect differences in age, gender and status that might be signified only tacitly, for example by dress, in the West. There is a clear enough distinction between the way in which men and women speak--one of the most important differences of place--that some grammar books actually offer dialogues in both male and female versions. Masculine and feminine speech no doubt reflect gender hierarchy, but they are experienced as exemplifying the whole range of connotations of masculinity and feminity, not merely an authority relation. A similar observation applies to formal language which persists despite the rapid softening of distinctions in social rank (Miller, 1971).

Linguistic coding appears to add tremendous force to social differences or perhaps reflects an unusual force present in social reality. The Japanese belong to a culture in which you have to know your place in the social setting in order to open your mouth. This can be quite inhibiting for them when they first arrive in the West and speak a language like French or English that does not offer any obvious way of signifying place.

The notion of place does not imply unquestioning submission to the authority of social superiors. In institutions such as companies and government agencies a good deal of attention is paid to building consensus through group discussion. When things go smoothly, such consensus building is a two way street that constrains the authorities as well as subordinates.

Naturally, things do not always go smoothly. Self-assertion is necessary in many situations, and while it is often more restrained than it would be in the West, the Japanese certainly did not have to await the arrival of Western individualism to discover it. It is already present in their own culture, but qualified and concretized by the demands of place rather than conceived, as typically it would be in the West, in universal terms as role transcendence. Place is thus not about whether one plays one's Place not only shapes everyday speech and social relations but also religion and art. As we have seen, Japanese martial arts have evolved into spiritual disciplines in part under the impact of this concept, reinterpreted through the Buddhist concept of no-mind. The combatants are trained to concern themselves less with winning than with immediately and swiftly interpreting their place in the system of moves so as perfectly to fulfill situational requirements. In aesthetic terms, each gesture of combat is part of a pair, the other part of which must be and can be supplied only by the adversary. Every move in the game is in some deeper sense an element of a larger pattern produced through the collaborative competition of the players. In these artistic and religious applications of place, it is especially clear that traditional authority relations overlay a more fundamental cultural form that could perhaps survive without them.

Something like this martial approach to place is at work in Kawabata's depiction of the traditional game of Go, with its emphasis on the values of self-realization and aesthetics. He contrasts a way of life based on playing out one's position in a larger system, with the Western focus on fairness and winning.

The difference between the two is not that one is tradition-bound while the other concentrates on the logic of play. Both are totally involved in the logic of play; both are therefore "rational" in the broad sense, although one emphasizes aspects of play most relevant to a culture of place and the other aspects that complement an individualistic The novel shows us two alternative ways of playing Go constructed around different *formal* dimensions of the game. Both ways aim at victory but under different aspects. The Western emphasis on equality stems from the equivalence of "sides" in the game, which does indeed conflict with traditional deference. But the Japanese concern with aesthetics is not opposed to the formal rationality of the game; it realizes another immanent dimension of it, the essential dependence of the players exemplified in the thrust and parry of struggle.

The aesthetic values that predominate in traditional Japanese play are thus not extrinsic to the essence of the game but rather represent dimensions of it that only appear clearly in a non-Western context. Nor are these values merely particularistic. Aesthetics is usually understood as a matter of subjective taste, but mathematical and technical systems have aesthetic qualities rooted in objective rationality. A glance at any Go textbook immediately shows this to be true of games as well. The aesthetics of Go flow from the conditions of formally rational action just as rigorously as the values of the young challenger while fulfilling a very different cultural agenda.

Here modernity defeats tradition not because it is more rational, but because it is better at manipulating the new meta-rules set up to institutionalize rationality, because it is more ruthlessly oriented toward winning at any price, even if it means sacrificing the intrinsic rationality of the game, i.e. the production of a unique sequence of optimal moves in terms of the position of the pieces on the board. Kawabata reestablishes the symmetry between tradition and modernity by showing that success as such is no more rational than deference. Both are external to the inner logic of play, differing primarily in which aspects of that logic they privilege.

In sum, certain traditional values possess at least as much "universality" as the supposedly modern value of fairness. In a sense what the novel achieves, perhaps without entirely intending it, is to present two alternative types of rationality, each of which is a candidate for modernity although only one is triumphant, only one actually organizes a modern society.

We have here a model for thinking about alternative modernity. Japan is a good test case because it combines a very alien culture and a very familiar technology and institutional framework. As rational systems, technologies, markets, democratic voting, and so on, resemble the game of Go: they too can be practiced differently in different cultural settings. In this context, Japanese culture is not an irrational intrusion but rather differs by its emphasis on different aspects of technical rationality which, as we have seen, includes self-realization and aesthetics as well as the narrow pursuit of success ethnocentrically identified with it in the West.[13] So, in Kawabata's match each move obeys the same rules but has a different significance in the different systems that invest it. Different cultures inhabit the board and influence its pattern of development.

Perhaps all modern institutions and modern technology itself are similarly layered with cultural meanings. Where a vigorous culture, whether it be old or new, manages to take hold of modernity, it can influence the evolution of its rational systems. Alternative modernities may emerge, distinguished not just by increasingly marginal features such as food culture, style, or political ideals but by the central institutions of technology and administration.

Perhaps Kawabata's elegy was premature and something like this is already beginning to occur in Japan. A number of experts have attempted to show that the Japanese economy draws on unique cultural resources to achieve extraordinarily high levels of motivation and effectiveness (Dore, 1987). They point to the importance in Japan of ideals of belonging, service, quality, and vocation by contrast with which the individualistic West appears ethically handicapped.

Unlike certain forms of deference which seem to be in the sort of steep decline Kawabata deplored, these ideals are not survivals doomed by the process of modernization; rather, they are the specific forms in which Japanese culture invests modernity. Indeed, the prevalence of these values may account for both the strengths and weaknesses of the Japanese model. Industrial societies too can use a maximum of vocational self-consciousness, attention to the whole, collaborative competition. But modern political systems function best when they rid themselves of the conformism and deference that still characterizes the essentially bureaucratic ethos of the Japanese state. Hence the peculiar combination of effective economics and mediocre politics that characterizes this model (Van Wolferen, 1989).

What remains to be seen is how far the process of culturally specific modernization will go and how much transformation the Western technical heritage will suffer as Japan liberates itself more and more from its original dependency on the Western model of modernity.

NOTES

1. For more on Go, see Korschelt (1965).

2. For Kawabata's relation to this tradition, see his Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech (1969), and Petersen (1979): 129-132.

3. The reader interested in the concept of no-mind should consult Suzuki (1973), the chapters on swordsmanship in Suzuki (1970), and Herrigel (1960). See also Loy (1988), especially p. 123 for the issue of the "third" point of view discussed below.

4. It is important not to miss the specific emphasis on winning characteristic of traditional play. Ritual is of course significant for it to a degree that differentiates it from modern play, but it would be wrong to describe it as formalistic in opposition to a modern instrumental interest in victory. One would have the same problem distinguishing formal from instrumental motives in evaluating bull fighting. And the same confusion Kawabata describes would arise, but in a ridiculous form, if a new style were introduced that consisted in shooting the bull.

5. Other recontextualizations are of course possible. For example, in the course of history, technical systems have frequently been incorporated into social life through guilds. Socialism

might be interpreted as the demand for a similar recontextualization of modern technology in democratic forms. See Feenberg (1991), chap. 7.

6. Cf. Latour (1987): "If you take any black box and make a freeze-frame of it, you may consider the system of alliances it knits together in two different ways: first, by looking at who it is designed to enroll; second, by considering what it is tied to so as to make the enrollment inescapable. We may on the one hand draw its *sociogram*, and on the other its *technogram*" (138). "Black box" here refers to facts and artifacts produced by scientific and technological research and development. They have an inextricably intertwined social and scientific-technical logic. (The equivalent in Go would be the results of a match.) In my book, I called this a "double aspect" theory (1991: 81-82).

7. Pilarcik (1986) offers a skillful analysis of the various ways in which characterization is used to express the epochal transition. See especially her description of the players use of time (12-13) and their strategies (14-15). Cf. Thomas Swann (1976: 105-106). But for a novel in which the same transition is treated as *essentially* a matter of changing character, compare Endo (1980).

8. The concept of doubles employed here derives from René Girard. For more on his approach, and applications to the role of economics in the novel, see Feenberg (1988).

9. "The writer's irony is a negative mysticism to be found in times without a god. It is an attitude of *docta ignorantia* towards meaning, a portrayal of the kindly and malicious workings of the demons, a refusal to comprehend more than the mere fact of these workings; and in it there is the deep certainty, expressible only by form-giving, that through not-desiring-to-know and not-being-able-to-know he has truly encountered, glimpsed and grasped the ultimate, true substance, the present, non-existent God. This is why irony is the objectivity of the novel" (Lukács, 1968: 90). For an extended discussion of this passage, see Bernstein, 1984, pp. 195 and ff.

10. In the larger context of contemporary world literature, the novelistic turn is reached by different peoples at times reflecting comparable levels of development and carried out with means supplied by their cultures. Thus behind the similarity of the Hungarian Lukács and the Japanese Kawabata, writing a generation apart, lies a deeper cause in the rhythms of modernization in different parts of the world. It is perhaps no coincidence that the Iwakura Mission, which visited Europe from 1871-1873 in search of insight into how to modernize Japan focussed on the example of Hungary, a country which seemed to point the way. Their report notes: "The various nations who today are delayed in their enlightenment will be deeply impressed by studying the circumstances of Hungary" (Soviak, 1971: 15). The artistic and theoretical opening made possible by the novel corresponds to a moment of critique in a process of development undergone by both countries.

11. For a useful evaluation of related issues, see Johann Arnason (1992).

12. See, Nishida (1958) and (1990); Abe (1991); Watsuji (1987); Berque (1986).

13. For more on the different moments of technical rationality, see Feenberg (1991), chap. 8.

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