



# Neurotic Beauty: An Outsider Looks at Japan

*By Morris Berman*

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Neurotic Beauty is a remarkable reevaluation of Japan's role in the modern world. It includes a new assessment of the events leading up to the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima, and of the potential role of Japanese philosophy in creating a dynamic approach to human nature and our understanding of reality. The book also shows the interrelatedness of various facets of Japanese history and society, including psychological orientation, pop culture, and Japan's vibrant craft tradition. Finally, it concludes with a possible prediction, that whereas the United States will not be able to escape from its neoliberal economic categories and its commitment to a self-defeating philosophy of growth, Japan might surprise us, and turn out to be the frontrunner in the development of post-capitalist alternatives in the 21st century. Written in a personal and accessible style, the book is likely to provide a focus for debate about issues of economy, ecology, and sustainability for years to come.

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## Editorial Review

### Review

The history of Japan deserves our attention, since we had so much to do with it after the fateful morning in 1853 when Commodore Perry's "black ships" sailed into Tokyo Bay. Japan was thrust into modernity by us overnight, and suffered greatly as a result. They may be the first nation to opt out of it as the techno-industrial era winds down. Morris Berman does more than anyone to illuminate the arc of this story and the attendant mysteries of Japanese culture, with all its artistry, resilience, and periodic craziness.

--James Howard Kunstler, author of *The Long Emergency* and the *World Made By Hand* novels

Morris Berman's 'Outsider,' looking at Japan carefully and from several perspectives, has seen more deeply than many recent observers, and he recounts the results of his subsequent reflections with intelligence and panache. He's especially good on Japanese crafts and fine arts and their relation to the Zen tradition, and offers keen insights into the many intersections between past and present, East Asia and the West, that he encounters in his travels and conversations. Much is to be learned from his judicious account of the fraught relations between Japan and the United States over the past century, and the last chapter, on 'Japan as a Post-Capitalist Model,' should be required reading for any thoughtful person who's interested in where our deranged world might be heading in the decades to come.

--Graham Parkes, University College Cork, Ireland

In *Neurotic Beauty*, Morris Berman points out a number of significant motifs in the long relationship between America and Japan (beginning in 1853) that go well beyond mere bilateralism. With his customary acumen, Professor Berman shows how that relationship has managed to acquire a world-historical momentum. However, it is not only in the historical arena that modernity is brought to bear on pre-modernity, but also in the cultural sphere, where American hyper-individualism serves to throw Japanese collectivism into sharp relief, and vice versa. Above all, the most important contribution of this book is the contrast the author makes at the civilizational level: the possibility that the capitalist myth of salvation through 'growth' may finally be superseded by the hope of a post-capitalist world. If American civilization is the last outpost of the expansionist myth, then its fateful encounter with Japan, as described by Professor Berman, suggests to us a picture of its final transformation. A vivid and provocative study.

--Yasunari Takada, Professor of Transcultural Studies, University of Tokyo

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## About the Author

Morris Berman is a poet, novelist, essayist, social critic, and cultural historian. He has written thirteen books and more than 150 articles, and has taught at a number of universities in Europe, North America, and Mexico. He won the Governor's Writers Award for Washington State in 1990, and was the first recipient of the annual Rollo May Center Grant for Humanistic Studies in 1992. In 2000, *The Twilight of American Culture* was named a Notable Book by the New York Times Book Review, and in 2013 he received the Neil Postman Award for Career Achievement in Public Intellectual Activity from the Media Ecology Association. Dr. Berman lives in Mexico.

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