International Association for Aesthetics
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Editor: Jale N. Erzen

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Editors Introduction

Aesthetics in the Plural

The theme of the 2008 IAA Yearbook is not focused on any one concept or issue, but takes its incentives from the rather ad-hoc, but variedly representative pluralism of aesthetic concerns today. In general we can say that these handful of texts refer to some recurring questions on criteria of beauty or social engagement, classical western theoretical approaches vis a vis cultural specificity, ways of seeing and understanding, origins of image and script, or questions of political power and artistic worth and of course, interpretation. Certainly these questions do not exhaust the possible array of inquiries into the use and worth of art, historically or cross culturally. Yet, I believe they give us a sense of the infinitesimal concerns of aesthetic discourse and how these are all somewhat related across millennia and geographies.

I come from a painting background, but find myself also involved in architectural teaching. I see now that I have been able to connect these, today, two non reconcilable realms through aesthetic discourse. Therefore, I strongly feel that aesthetics as a discipline of apprehending, understanding, interpreting and judging is one of the most able forms of thought that can connect varieties of concern in culture and the arts.

These texts reflect aesthetic concerns of various approaches from different cultural realms. The first paper which belongs to Wolfgang Welsch contributes to find connections between these. Three of the papers concern Japanese culture but reflect questions that can be valid universally: interpretation, image and script and assimilation of modernism and traditional arts. Texts concerning Turkish, African and Indian contexts show how similar problems are of concern in the world of art, anywhere on the globe. Tom Rockmore addresses the question of art's social function which has been a priority for many philosophers since Plato. Richard Woodfield's discussion of approaches to interpretation deals with a question that has been one of the basic concerns of aesthetics and criticism.

Prof. Wolfgang Welsch, known both to philosophers and aestheticians applies almost a scientific method for explaining the why and how of the universal appreciation of beauty, in spite of cultural differences. In this, the

basic argument relies on humanities' common origins and the initial common concern for survival which has created similar genomes in all mankind. The deep universal strata from which common appreciation of beauty arises, can be found in responses to landscape, to the human body and also to varieties of objects. This detailed analysis also contributes to connecting this yearbook's texts from many different cultures. Certainly, Prof. Welsch's choice of images known to most aestheticians, will confirm his arguments.

Michael Marra affronts the problem of the willful eradication of meaning in some trendy Japanese contemporary arts, through the problem of interpretation as it originated in Christian theology and was elaborated in hermeneutics. The analysis of the hermeneutical background of some early 20th century Japanese literature brings Marra to the question of texts that defy interpretation and to the notion of non-sense. Marra then is faced with the problem of how history has shaped the present, and the whole hermeneutic quest becomes involved in the politics of the present since it has to start with the author, now. Yet, the way contemporary arts in Japan, since 1950 have dealt with meaning and identity has been an 'explosion of meaning'. In the last phase of his paper Michael Marra gives examples of contemporary Japanese art such as Neo-Pop and Superflat, and against such resistance to meaning and flattening out of existence and the 'aesthetics of the absence of meaning' Michael Marra advances only negative solutions denying the validity of any such 'particular 'Japanese' aesthetics, or any theological or theoretical approach. The only possibility to redeem any depth of meaning again, would be for Marra just to take a walk 'outside'.

Michael Marra's in depth analysis of hermeneutics applied to a contemporary non-western culture with a very complex and profound history, which also meets skepticism as it meets western hermeneutics, can be universally valid for many other contemporary cultural studies.

Yuko Nakama's text is on contemporary Japanese artists Akio Suzuki, Yoshihiro Suda, and Hiroshi Sugimoto and their modern interpretation of Japanese aesthetics. All these artists as Nakama explains, use notions of a modernist approach such as the notion of time, geometrical nature and the pursuit of purity drawing upon the history of Buddhist art, traditional crafts and the ritual of preparing tea. In creating their work, aesthetic concepts such as oto-date, assimilation of oneself into nature, aesthetics of discovering. Yuko Nakama's claim is that it is especially now in the post-modern times that Japanese artists "seem especially conscious of Japanese traditional culture".

Haruhiko Fujita's text on 'Letters on Images' in Japanese art concerns the origins of calligraphy and image and the aesthetic and practical questions involved. To the Chinese idea the 'writing and painting share the same origin', Fujita responds that for the Japanese case it would be more appropriate to claim that 'writing and painting share the same space'. With this claim, he elaborates on the fact that this is one of the most typical aspects of all Japanese art, small or large, and on how painting is related to poetry. After a general history of Japanese writing and collections of poetry we are given descriptions of the Genji-Monogatari scrolls' poetry, calligraphy and painting and their subdued lyricism. Haruhiko Fujita gives us a sense of the very delicate aesthetic sensibility of medieval Japanese illuminated manuscripts and how they would differ from those of the west in the same era. Prof. Fujita stresses the reference to Chinese culture and script by the Japanese, all the while that a very particular sense of Japanese writing and painting was developing. His last example is from the 17th century 'poem scroll of 4 Seasons' painting by Tawaraya Sotatsu and Honnami Koetsu, where letters are also superimposed and where the calligrapher's and the painter's work harmonize, Prof. Fujita defines this very special aesthetic sense as "...intimacy between letters and nature, words and nature, or voices and nature, in other words, man and nature", which formed a basis of Japanese art.

Tom Rockmore questions art's claim to truth and to social engagement, ending in the conclusion that it is not art but only the artist who could be engaged. Tom Rockmore searches the relation between art and social engagement historically in western monotheism. On the other hand, the fact that social engagement depends on a knowledge of truth wipes out the possibility of the artist's social role since art (according to classical philosophy) cannot have a claim to truth. Tom Rockmore's paper lists several approachetices as to the relation of art and truth, namely the Platonic, the anti-Platonic or Christian, the Marxist, the Hegelian and recently Arthur Danto's view. Professor Rockmore further investigates the relation between epistemology and representation and introduces different types of realism and concludes by referring to Kant's claim that to know the real as it is can only be claimed on dogmatic grounds. Rockmore's conclusion, after analyzing Marx's and marxist claims is that art can play a social role only in telling us about ourselves.

Pulak Dutta who is teaching in the famous Santiniketan school in Bengal, that was founded by Rabindranath Tagore, is very much concerned, in much of his work, for the survival of Indian culture within contemporary practices and the evolution of a modern India. As he has explained in his paper at the

17th International Congress of Aesthetics, this was also the conception upon which the Santiniketan school was founded. In the present paper Pulak Dutta, who is also a musician coming from a family of musicians, and who therefore knows public arts quite intimately, gives us examples of what he defines as real public art in India; art which is created and participated in by the public.

Kiymet Giray, art historian and well known scholar of Turkish art also deals with visual problems common to East and West. Her recent publications have also involved western art. With this background, Giray introduces a Turkish artist who was active in the Republican era. She tries to give us an intimate understanding of his relation to Modernism and to the art of his times in the west. The analysis of the work of Ali Avni Celebi exposes to what extent the assimilation of western art principles have shaped his forms and subject matter, while his background excluded him from joining the western art milieu in a real sense.

Mohamed Abusabib's paper which was also presented at the 2008 Scandinavian Aesthetics Conference' "Aesthetics and Politics of Artistic Creation in the African Context" exposes many problems that we are faced with today in comparative aesthetics, especially in dealing with cultures outside the west. According to Mohamed Abusabib, there are several areas of tension in deciding about any definition of African aesthetics. One concerns the tension between 'self and the other', and the other, between African philosophies and African Arts and aesthetics. Africa, with its many diverse cultural paradigms and expressions cannot be reduced to a normative definition; on the other hand, claims to signal out specific cultural aesthetics like Benin or Nigerian to represent African aesthetics would be equally wrong. Prof. Abusabib also mentions complications due to globalization. In conclusion Prof. Abusabib mentions arguments from the evolutionist approach and concludes with discussions showing the weakness of attitudes of cultural supremacy. The images that accompany the text are also used as examples of how African symbols can be interpreted.

Prof. Richard Woodfield's essay which concerns a comparison of the interpretative methods of Panofsky and of Gombrich brings valuable insights to the question of interpretation in western art. Thus, it can be seen as furthering Michael Marra's analysis. Prof. Woodfield takes issue with the two texts of the art historians, namely Gombrich's "symbolic Images" which appeared in 1927 and Panofsky's "Studies in Iconology" which appeared in 1939. Commenting on Sir Kenneth Clark's commentary that Gombrich was concerned in subject matter rather than in form, as was the case with

Panofsky according to Clark, Prof. Woodfield discusses the attitudes of the authors in relation to the necessity of the knowledge of texts to decipher symbols. Professor Woodfield who is a well known scholar on the work of Gombrich, with many publications on Gombrich to his credit, also compares the relation of both authors to the Wargburg Institute where both spent important periods of their career. Professor Richard Woodfield's contribution to the Yearbook does not only concern the detailed analysis of these two important art historians' approaches, but is also informative about methodologies of interpretation.

I would like to thank all authors for their valuable contribution to this volume. I am also grateful to the International Association of Aesthetics for the offer to edit this Yearbook. Heartfelt thanks to Yeliz Ozmetin, my technical assistant, for her untiring efforts and for not having been discouraged with such work after a year of working on the first book of the 17th International Congress of Aesthetics.

Jale N. Erzen
November 30, 2008

On the Universal Appreciation of Beauty

Wolfgang Welsch

In this paper I am concerned with answering one single question: Are there universal forms of experiencing beauty? Concentrating on this point means leaving aside other problems associated with the topic of beauty, for example the distinction between natural beauty and beauty in art or the question of whether or not beauty is constitutive for art. The question in what follows pertains exclusively to whether the appreciation of beauty conforms to universal types and, if so, what they are.

I. The fact: Universal esteem of beauty

1. Universality despite cultural variance

My initial thesis is very simple. It is that beauty is valued in every culture. All humans value beautiful things. The appreciation of beauty is universal.

Of course that does not mean that all humans consider *the same things* to be beautiful. In differing cultures altogether different things may be perceived as beautiful.[1] Tattoos, for example, are held to be beautiful by some cultures, while in others they are felt to be repulsive. And within one and the same culture, the judgment whether something is beautiful or not is subject to historical change. In Europe, for example, mountains were for a long time regarded as abhorrent, and only during the Eighteenth Century did they come to be seen first as sublime, and afterwards as beautiful. In short, although in all cultures some things are esteemed as beautiful, what is regarded as beautiful in any given case can differ.

This might incline some to think that beauty is at bottom a cultural construct, and hence that while the desire for beauty as such might be universal, the concrete determination of beauty is purely the affair of the individual culture. This point of view would accord with the mode of thought dominant in contemporary social science and cultural studies which

[1] The mere fact that in different cultures the terms which stand for ‘beautiful‘ have divergent semantics is itself indicative of such relativity. Cp. Crispin Sartwell, *Six Names of Beauty* (New York: Routledge 2004).

suggests that everything (even nature) is a product of cultural construction.

But that is not the way it is. Rather, there are indeed *universal* patterns of appreciation of beauty – aesthetic preferences valid for humans in *every* culture. All humans evaluate objects that correspond to these patterns as beautiful. – In the following, I will present three such universal types of appreciation of beauty.[2]

2. A first type of universal appreciation of beauty, concerning landscapes and the human body

The first type bears on only two kinds of objects: landscapes and human bodies.

It has been discovered during the last decades that all humans value savannah-like landscapes, regardless of whether such landscapes are familiar to them as part of their habitat or whether they have ever experienced them in the course of travel. The unanimity of this preference for savannahs cuts across both cultural and class-specific differences.[3]

This is not to imply that other types of landscape cannot be aesthetically valued, say for instance mountain landscapes. It is only that their appreciation is not universal, but can vary from culture to culture and, within a given culture, from class to class and from individual to individual. As regards human bodies, a distinctly symmetrical build and facial features are considered beautiful.[4] In addition, unblemished skin and thick, shiny hair are universally ranked as beautiful.[5]

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[2] I am not implying that my list is comprehensive. There might be more universal types of appreciation of beauty. I restrict myself to the types I am presently sure about.

[3] Cp. Gordon H. Orians and Judith H. Heerwagen, "Evolved Responses to Landscapes", in Jerome H. Barkow, Leda Cosmides, John Tooby (eds.), *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 555-579; Stephen Kaplan, "Environmental preference in a knowledge-seeking, knowledge-using organism", in *The Adapted Mind*, pp. 581-600; Roger S. Ulrich, "Biophilia, Biophobia and Natural Landscapes", in Stephen R. Kellert u. Edward O. Wilson (eds.), *The Biophilia Hypothesis* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1993), pp. 73-137; Judith H. Heerwagen and Gordon H. Orians, "Humans, Habitat, and Aesthetics", in *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, pp. 138-172.

[4] Cp. Nancy Etcoff, *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), pp. 185-187.

[5] Cp. ibid., pp. 91f.

Furthermore, there are preferences in regard to the anatomical proportions. Thus a study by Devendra Singh (1993) showed that men worldwide consider a waist-to-hip ratio of 7 to 10 to be ideal in women.[6] This finding may seem hardly credible in light of the fact that some cultures prefer bodacious forms while others prefer leaner ones – a fact which might seem to imply the impossibility of a universal, ideal proportion. Taken in itself, this observation is correct, but it in no way contradicts the finding that a waist-to-hip ratio of 7 to 10 is universally preferred. For this ratio can, of course, be realized in different absolute numbers – in the ratio 60:90 preferred in Europe, as well as in the 80:115 ratio valued in some other cultures. Thus what appears as different on the cultural surface is rooted in an interculturally shared, deep metric, namely the proportion 7:10.

We should interpret facts such as this both as a warning against assuming that cultural differences are ultimate in themselves and thus license a blithe cultural relativism and anti-universalism, and as an admonition to examine in every case whether an obvious difference is, after all, just the realization of a universal underlying pattern.

Of course this first type of aesthetic universals is, in terms of the kinds of beautiful objects that may conform to it, quite limited in scope. Only landscapes and bodies are pertinent. So it is the most simple but also the most limited type of universal appreciation.

3. A second type: The universal appreciation of breath-takingly beautiful works of art

The second type of universal esteem is not subject to such a limitation in scope. It bears on exceptional cultural artifacts, on works of art for instance. Consider, for example, the Taj Mahal or the Mona Lisa or Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Works such as these also enjoy universal appreciation. They fascinate humans of every background, humans of all cultures.[7]
In these cases, obviously, the scope is not limited to landscapes and bodies, but may include creatures of fancy, the things of everyday life, abstract

[6] Cp. Devendra Singh, "Adaptive significance of female physical attractiveness: Role of waist-to-hip ratio, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65 (1993), pp. 293-307.

[7] When I speak of 'great' or 'breath-taking' beauty, I mean to underscore the fact that in contrast to more ordinary cases of beauty, we here experience not merely the pleasure to be taken in correspondence, but that great beauty strikes us with a force that carries us beyond our usual or habitual state. Standard cases of beauty, by contrast, are always in danger of degenerating into mere cuteness.

configurations, etc. With this second type, the field of aesthetic valuation is potentially open for *objects of any kind*.

Now the fact that exceptional works are universally esteemed is highly astonishing in itself. For we are dealing here with *artifacts* which are to a high degree *culturally specific*: The Taj Mahal could not have originated in Bavaria; the Mona Lisa would have been unthinkable in the Japan of its time and could only be painted in the course of the Italian Renaissance; Beethoven's Ninth is as deeply rooted in Vienna's classical period of composition as Éluard's poetry is in French surrealism. Nevertheless, though, these highly culturally specific works are the subject of *transcultural appreciation*. [8] They are esteemed as magnificent works *universally* – across cultures – without regard to the cultural background and education of the recipient.[9]

An example of what I am talking about is the Ginkaku-ji Temple in Kyoto (Figures 1 and 2). Many people who come to Japan for the first time and see this temple complex are deeply fascinated by it and remain there for hours. They are captivated by the magnetism of the place. This fascination – and this is the point I wish to make – occurs independently of cultural preconditioning. It takes hold of foreign and domestic visitors equally. And it obviously does not presuppose prior, culturally specific knowledge: most foreign visitors lack such knowledge in any case, but even most Japanese visitors are likely to know little of the culture of the Fifteenth Century, not to mention the particular situation which led the shogun Yoshimasa to erect this complex.

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[8] I first examined this fact in "Rethinking identity in the age of globalization - a transcultural perspective" (in Hiroshi Okabayashi, ed., *Symposion of Beauty and Art. Festschrift für Tsunemichi Kambayashi*, Tokyo: Keiso, 2002, pp. 333-346). A revised version was published in the *International Yearbook of Aesthetics*, Vol. 8: "Aesthetics and/as Globalization" (2004), pp. 167-176.

[9] This does not mean that every single recipient must *de facto* be seized by the exceptional quality of such works. There may well be individual barriers linked with age, habituation or social class. Potentially, however, every human being is in a position to experience this fascination. In this sense Baudelaire had already pointed out the fact that everyone possesses the sense for universal beauty to some extent and can further cultivate it (cp. Charles Baudelaire, "The Exposition Universelle, 1855" [1868], in *Art in Paris 1845-1862. Salons and Other Exhibitions*, Oxford: Phaidon, 1965, pp. 121-143 , esp. pp. 121 f.).

Figure 1. *Ginkakuji-Temple*, Kyoto.

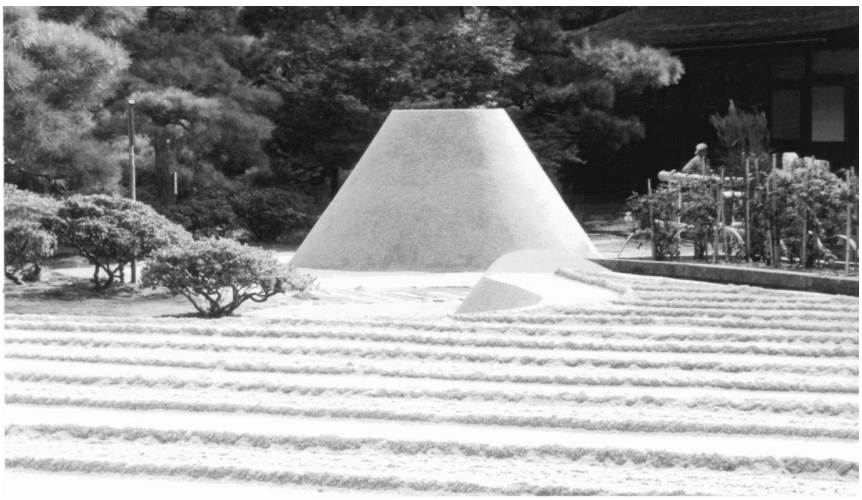

Figure 2. *Ginkakuji-Temple*, Kyoto.

So the big question is this: How can it be that something so culturally *specific* can at the same time exercise *universal* attraction? Apparently, it addresses a stratum of our existence that lies deeper than our cultural imprint and which is therefore more universal and thus allows for a transcultural understanding. The human constitution seems to exhibit (at least) two levels: On the one hand, the *piano nobile* which normally fills our attention and which is determined by the imprint of the specific culture in which we were raised and to which we feel ourselves to belong; on the other hand, an often overlooked foundational zone which lies beneath the first level, supporting it without being determined by it. In contrast to the culturally specific *piano nobile*, this deep stratum is universal.[10, 11]

[10] On the doubling of cultural specificity and the transcultural deep stratum cp. Wolfgang Welsch, "On Acquisition and Possession of Commonalities", *Asnel Yearbook: Transcultural English Studies* (2008), pp. #.

[11] I find the attempt to explain this transcultural fascination with exceptional cultural

The Twentieth Century's theory of culture long refused to acknowledge the existence of such a foundation and smiled condescendingly at the very notion of universals – until at last the dearly held axioms of cultural relativism began to collapse like a house of cards in light of empirical research, so that at length it has become impossible to shut one's eyes to the existence of universals.[12] Emotional and mimic universals, then aesthetic universals successively moved into the focus of attention.

II. Explanations

Having so far sketched two universal types of the appreciation of beauty, I shall now turn to the task of explanation.[13]

1. Patterns of beauty explainable by evolutionary biology (preferences for landscape and anatomy)

The first type, i. e. the universal appreciation of certain types of landscape or anatomical proportion, finds its explanation in *evolutionary biology*.

In the case of the preference for savannahs, the explanation goes like this: Our preference for savannah-like landscapes commanding a broad view, possessing a stream or other source of water as well as some trees to provide shade or refuge from animals, is rooted in the fact that for a long

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artifacts not as a consequence of this deep stratum in the human species but as the effect of the culture industry highly dubious. That a globalized industry of culture and tourism jumps on works like the Taj Mahal, the Mona Lisa, or Beethoven's Ninth is obvious. Yet the fact that it is such works that get singled out is to be attributed to the works' own inherent potential for universal esteem. One mustn't confuse cause and effect. It is not the attentions of the culture industry which create the universal fascination these works exert; rather, it is the inherent universal potential of these works which makes them into prime candidates for exploitation by the industries of culture and tourism.

[12] Freeman refuted Margaret Mead's myth of Samoa in 1983 (Derek Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*, Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 1983), and in the same year Malotki demolished Benjamin Lee Whorf's once highly influential claims about the language of the Hopis (Ekkehart Malotki, *Hopi Time*, Berlin: Mouton, 1983). For the contemporary state of the debate on universals see Christoph Antweiler, *Was ist den Menschen gemeinsam? Über Kultur und Kulturen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007).

[13] I will introduce the third type announced above in the course of the following discussion.

period of human existence, during which savannahs were human beings' chief habitat, such areas were favorable to survival.[14] In those times, whoever was programmed to react positively to such landscapes was a good leader when it came to finding new habitats. Thus in the long run, this preference came to be selected in the human genome. And since our genome has barely changed since the Stone Age, this imprint is still alive and active in us today. Hence we too continue to value landscapes of this type, even though most of us have long since ceased to live in savannahs.[15]

In similar fashion, anatomically relevant patterns of preference (for instance the preference for symmetrical form or smooth skin or a waist-to-hip ratio of 7 to 10) are to be explained in terms of evolutionary biology. These anatomical features were, as the theory holds, signals for good genes or for fertility and were accordingly selected.[16] And here again: Because the human genome has barely changed during the period of culture, contemporary humanity continues to be shaped by these imprints. The old schemata form a basis for our evaluations which, though liable to cultural modifications, cannot simply be suspended or superseded by them.

Donald Symons has coined a memorable phrase to sum up evolutionary biology's explanation for the universality of these patterns of beauty in landscapes and bodies: "Beauty is in the adaptations of the beholder."[17] Until now, the received wisdom in aesthetics had been, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." The phrase was intended to express the subjectivity of the beautiful. From the vantage point of evolutionary biology, however, it is evident that our eye is by no means an innocent eye, but rather an eye imprinted by age-old biological adaptations. It is adaptations of this kind which form the basis of the perception of beauty – hence, "Beauty is in the adaptations of the beholder."

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[14] Cp. Gordon H. Orians and Judith H. Heerwagen, "Evolved Responses to Landscapes", op. cit., p. 558.

[15] Consider the fact that we are all the descendents of ancestors who developed over a long period in such a habitat (initially in Africa).

[16] "Symmetry is tied to beauty because it acts as a measure of overall fitness" (Nancy Etcoff, *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty*, New York: Doubleday 1999, p. 186); "symmetry is an indicator of health and fitness" (ibid., p. 162).

[17] D. Symons, "Beauty is in the adaptations of the beholder", in P. R. Abramson and S. D. Pinkerton (eds.), *Sexual nature / sexual culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 80-118.

2. More general patterns of beauty: Symmetry and more complex forms of self-similarity

As regards the second universal type of the perception of beauty, however, i. e. the fascination of breath-takingly beautiful cultural artifacts, we clearly must seek the explanation elsewhere. Here, patterns rooted in evolutionary biology such as the preference for a 7:10 anatomical ratio or for savannahs will not suffice.

Thus the marvelous proportions of the Taj Mahal (Figure 3) obviously have nothing to do with the waist-to-hip proportion just discussed, and so the fact that the proportions of the Taj Mahal strike us as beautiful cannot be explained as an effect of a pattern of preference in the case of human, or more specifically female, bodies having been transferred to the case of architectonic bodies. Analogously, we may be fascinated by the landscape which forms the background in Leonardo's Mona Lisa, but that landscape is precisely not a gentle savannah, but the contrary type, a raw mountain landscape.

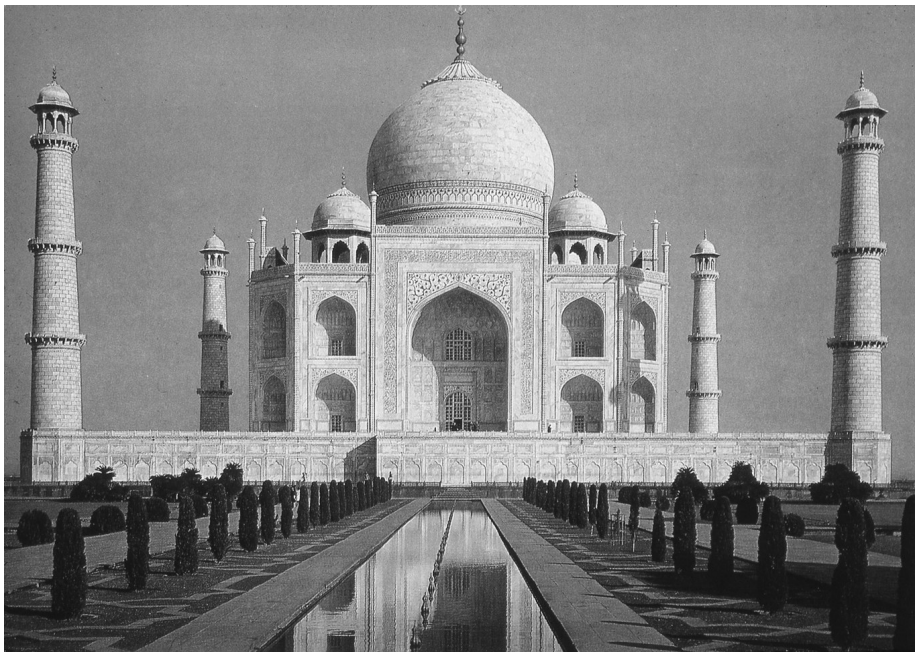

Figure 3. *Taj Mahal.*

If we wish to explain the fascination of cultural artifacts, then, we will need to look for significantly more general criteria which are not limited to specific objects (landscapes and bodies), for as we noted before, in the sphere of art all possible kinds of objects are to be met with as candidates for the experience of beauty. In consequence, then, and very much in keeping with the whole aesthetic tradition, the criteria we seek will have to

be *formal* rather than material, and therefore such as to be pertinent to the beauty of *objects of any kind*. Which criteria suggest themselves?

a. The preference for symmetry

To begin with, we might consider our preference for symmetry. (The Taj Mahal is of course an impressive case in point.) Although symmetry also plays a role in the aesthetic evaluation of potential sexual partners, we obviously do not value symmetry merely in the case of anatomical and facial forms, but in myriad other cases, too – in plants as in architecture, in geometrical forms, and even in numeric series. It is highly unlikely that this universal preference for symmetry can be explained as the effect of generalizing a preference that was originally geared exclusively toward the body.[18] It would seem rather to have a far more universal basis. – What might that basis be?

b. The general preference for self-similarity

We must recognize that symmetry exists in various forms. The simplest case is that of mirror or axial symmetry in which the right and left halves of an object are identical in relation to a central axis.

But this elementary form of symmetry is incapable of affording sufficient aesthetic satisfaction. Indeed, we perceive perfectly symmetrical faces as boring. In order to persuade oneself of this, one need only consider Dürer's *Self Portrait* of 1500 (Figure 4). No one will deny the unusual beauty of this face – yet, is it symmetrical? If we separate the two halves of the face and then use a mirror to create a whole face from each half (Figure 5), we not only discover how very different the two resulting faces are, but we also find that these perfectly symmetrical faces are far less attractive than the original face, which, being anything but symmetrical, seems all the more lively for it. Thus it cannot be axial symmetry as such which arouses our

[18] It could have been exactly the other way around. The preference for symmetry in regard to the bodies of sexual partners could merely be a special case of a much more universal preference for symmetry. The majority of objects relevant to the life-world are symmetrical: dangerous beasts of prey, the hunted quarry, and sexual partners are all equally symmetrical. It could therefore have been advantageous to develop a kind of early warning system for relevant objects in the form of a general attentiveness to symmetry. Human bodies would thus have been merely one application of this general sensitivity to symmetry, without the choice of a mate being its primary origin.

aesthetic fascination.[19]

Figure 4. Albrecht Duerer, *Self-Portrait* (1500).

[19] The advertising industry is well aware that perfectly symmetrical faces lack interest and it uses this effect in advertisements for hair products. Models with highly symmetrical faces are chosen so that the face slips through the gaze of the observer, as it were, and all the attention comes to be focused on the hair.

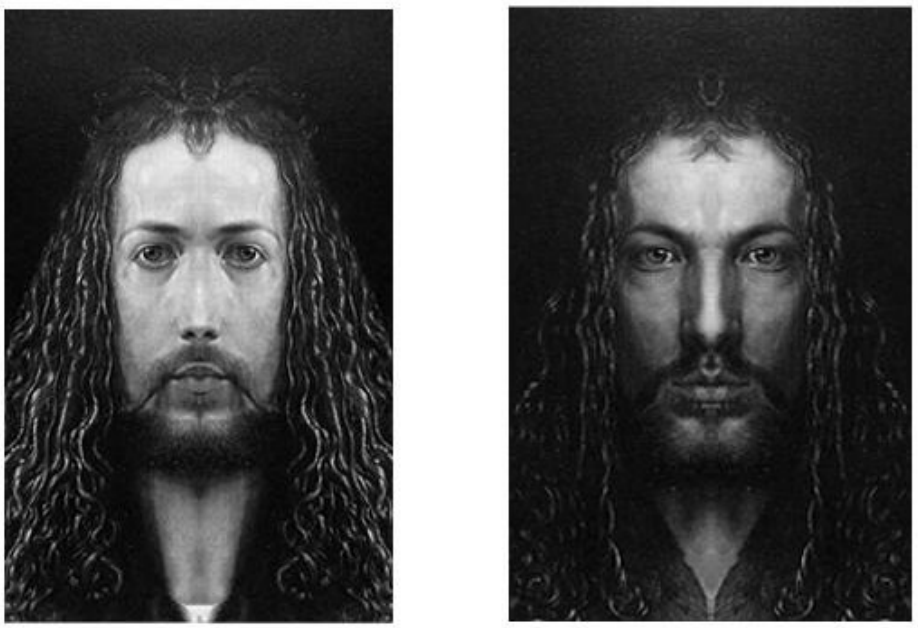

Figure 5. dito – Montage.

How is it, then, with the next more complex type of self-similarity, the golden section? In contrast to axial symmetry, here the division of the line occurs not in the middle, but in such a way that the resulting shorter line segment stands to the longer segment in exactly the ratio in which the longer segment stands to the whole.[20]

For a long time, proportioning in accord with the golden section was highly esteemed in western art. It was even spoken of as the "divine proportion".[21] Examples stretch from Greek architecture to the Twentieth Century.[22] However, the golden section is not only preferred in Western culture, but as recent studies show, it is judged as especially pleasing in all cultures.[23] So

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[20] The two segments stand to each other in a ratio of 1:1.618 . . . .

[21] The term first occurs in Luca Pacioli's work *De Divina Proportione* (1509) and again in Johannes Kepler's *Harmonices Mundi* (1619). For the entire history see Albert van der Schoot, *Die Geschichte des Goldenen Schnitts* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2005).

[22] The dimensions of the Parthenon's columns and pediment are such that they can be inscribed in a rectangle corresponding to the golden section. Le Corbusier developed a system of measurement ("modulor") based on a combination of the dimensions of the human body and the golden section.

[23] "Psychophysical experiments show that irrespective of culture and education, people prefer golden rectangles, the lengths of whose sides are related by the golden section, to any other shape of rectangle" (Frederick Turner, "The Sociobiology of Beauty", in Jan Baptist Bedaux and Brett Cooke, eds., *Sociobiology and the Arts*, Amsterdam: Rodopi 1999, pp. 63-81; p. 75 is quoted here).

this preference, too, is universal. An impressive non-Western case in point is the rock garden of the Ryoan-ji in Kyoto – probably the most famous rock garden worldwide (Figure 6). For a long time, the algorithm which underlies the arrangement of the stones was a source of puzzlement, as was the source of the perfect harmony which the stones express despite the seeming randomness of their placement. Recent findings show that the dimensions of the rectangular ground of sand, and the distances of the stones both to each other and to the enclosure accord with the principle of the golden section.[24]

Figure 6. *Stone garden of Ryoan-ji*, Kyoto.

But what is so special about the golden section? Why do its proportions trigger our aesthetic pleasure? The golden section goes beyond axial symmetry, in that in this case, self-similarity occurs not merely between the parts, but between the parts *and the whole*. In the golden proportion we

[24] Cp. György Doczi, *Die Kraft der Grenzen. Harmonische Proportionen in Natur, Kunst und Architektur* [1981] (München: Dianus-Trikont 1984), pp. 138 f. Van Tonder and Lyons give a different interpretation but nevertheless arrive at the same conclusion that structures of self-similarity are the decisive factor (Gert J. van Tonder and Michael J. Lyons, "Visual Perception in Japanese Rock Garden Design", *Axiomathes*, 15/2005, pp. 353-371, esp. p. 363 and 366).

encounter the first form of *holistic* self-similarity.[25] And it is just this attunement of the individual parts to the whole which is decisive for our perception of beauty.

c. Self-similarity and self-organization – How the calibration of our sense of beauty to self-similarity makes it into a detector for self-organization

Examples of such holistic self-similarity abound in nature. Patterns of growth, for instance, often accord with the application of the golden section to a circle (and the resulting principle of the "golden angle").[26] The function underlying these golden proportions is expressed by the Fibonacci series, in which each successive number results from adding the two preceding ones. The same generative function can be found at work in the arrangement of the scales of pine cones or of the seeds of a sunflower, and also in the arrangement of the eyes of a peacock's fan and the structure of sea-shells (Figure 7).[27]

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[25] One could also express this by saying that here equality has become an equality of relations rather than of parts. Thus in contrast to axial symmetry what we find here is inequality at the level of the parts while equality is established only at the meta-level. In that sense, the golden section combines rupture at the phenomenal level with harmony at the rational level (a relationship which would have been very dear to Heraclitus and Hegel). – In this connection we must not fail to mention that numerical expression for the ratio of the golden section is both the most irrational of all numbers (the number which is least susceptible to approximation by ratios of rational numbers) and the most noble of all numbers (the series of fractions representing this number comes to consist of only ones sooner than any other such series).

[26] In fact, any time a form is proportioned in accord to the golden section it intrinsically contains instructions for generating further 'goldenly' proportioned forms. For if one adds the longer line segment to the whole, the result is a new form proportioned according to the golden section: what before was the longer segment is now the shorter one, and the entire length now forms the longer segment. This fact makes it readily understandable why the proportion can serve as a growth function.

[27] Cp. Friedrich Cramer, *Chaos und Ordnung: Die komplexe Struktur des Lebendigen* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, third ed. 1989), pp. 195-202. See also Friedrich Cramer and Wolfgang Kaempfer, *Die Natur der Schönheit: Zur Dynamik der schönen Formen* (Frankfurt/Main: Insel, 1992), pp. 264-283.

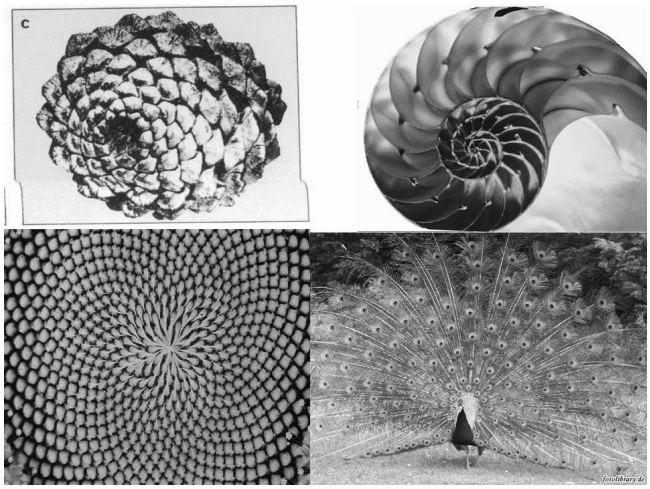

Figure 7. Self-similarity.

And we perceive all these formations as beautiful. Our aesthetic predilection for holistic self-similarity thus represents the *third universal type of aesthetic value judgments* alluded to above. This type is in a certain sense intermediate between our predilection for certain landscapes and bodies on the one hand, and our fascination for breath-taking beauty on the other hand.

Now in physical terms, the forms of holistic self-similarity we have been considering are all formations that result from feedback processes. Thus they all rest on the principle of self-organization. This principle is the most universal process principle by which nature brings forth structures of order – from galaxies to organisms to cultural formations.[28]

The self-similarity we perceive and experience as beautiful in forms of the kind just described is therefore an indication that the object in question resulted from a process of self-organization.[29] To this extent, our aesthetic perception involves a markedly cognitive component.[30] In cases of this type,

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[28] "The fundamental tendency or theme of the universe . . . is reflexivity or feedback" (Turner, "The Sociobiology of Beauty", op. cit., p. 79). "The process of evolution itself is a prime example of a generative feedback process. Variation, selection, and heredity constitute a cycle, which when repeated over and over again produces out of this very simple algorithm the most extraordinarily complex and beautiful lifeforms" (ibid., p. 80).

[29] Cp. Turner: "The iterative feedback principle which is at the heart of all these processes is the deep theme or tendency of all of nature . . . and it is what we feel and intuit when we recognize beauty" (ibid., p. 80).

[30] The perception of beauty is "the expression of an implicit knowledge . . . which enables us perceive regularity in complexity and thus to reduce complexity" (Bernd-Olaf Küppers, "Die ästhetischen Dimensionen natürlicher Komplexität", in Wolfgang

'beautiful' is the aesthetico-emotional stenograph for the cognitive apprehension of self-organization.

d. The cognitive aspect: Easy management of complexity

In light of these observations we may well ask why it is so important for us to be able to recognize self-organization – why it is important enough for us to have developed, in the form of our sense of beauty, a special detector responsive to self-similarity. In what way might a capacity for intuitively recognizing self-organization have been advantageous to our ancestors?

In cognitive terms, a detector for self-organization is doubly advantageous. First of all, it allows for rapid, virtually instantaneous apprehension of an informational complex which, were we to lack such a detector, we would have to read off point by point and then synthesize – an extraordinarily laborious and fallible procedure. By comparison, the abbreviated aesthetic procedure is easy and foolproof. It therefore represents an excellent means of managing complexity. Secondly, since numerous natural forms are based on self-organization, such a detector is widely deployable and of obvious usefulness. It offers what is in effect a universal cognitive key to a world in which the majority of objects are based on self-organization. It allows for a swift and reliable sorting of the informational complex according to mutually related figures, thus identifying the actual objects. It seems to be the case that, in the form of our aesthetic sense, the fundamental logic of the physical world has been made available to cognition. – Given both its rapidity and its wide range of application, the ability spontaneously to recognize phenomena of self-organization thus might well have been subject to an especially intensive process of positive selection.

e. The pleasure of cognition in general: The pleasure of coherence

Now, if the aesthetic decoding of forms of self-similarity is in truth a kind of proxy for cognitive functions, then we might expect that the underlying causes of the pleasure associated with it are cognitive in nature too.

What is the source of cognitive pleasure? Our cognition generally aims toward coherence. The achievement of coherence is what leads to cognitive satisfaction or pleasure. Now in addition to its objective correlation, this

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Welsch (ed.), *Die Aktualität des Ästhetischen*, Munich: Fink, 1993, pp. 247-277, p. 248 is quoted here).

coherence also has a subject-internal aspect. When the objective data (for instance by application of the self-similarity pattern) come together to form the right configuration, one result is objective coherence (identification and discrimination of individual objects both from each other and from the background environment). This objective coherence, however, is at the same time just the external side of an internal coherence. For perceptual processes always occur within the dynamic context of anticipation and data scanning: certain patterns are pre-activated and the act of perception consists in matching the data to the patterns (and vice versa).[31] Now when in the course of this matching congruence arises, then we are, for one, cognitively and objectively convinced that we have correctly apprehended a state of affairs; and at the same time we also find ourselves in an emotional, subjective state of satisfaction and happiness. (Indeed, even in the simplest judgment, coherence always connotes pleasure.[32]) Thus external and internal coherence go hand in hand.

This congruence between objective and subjective coherence is not, by the way, the result of our constructing the world according to our image (i. e. our cognitive needs), but rather occurs because the patterns of anticipation that are pre-activated in the process of perception are in turn the result of our phylogenetic and epigenetic adaptation to and experience of the world. This experiential imprinting of our perceptual apparatus is what guarantees that our subjective criteria of coherence – which regulate our perceptual acts – agree with the objective requirements of coherence.

f. Distinguishing features of the perception of beauty at the neural level: The resonance of cortical areas

Recent neurological research has linked the specific character of our aesthetic enjoyment of symmetry, the golden section, and self-similarity to

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[31] We have been aware of this since the Gestalt theory of the previous century and it has been reinforced by recent neurological findings. On the role of anticipation (top-down factors) see Manfred Fahle, "Ästhetik als Teilaspekt bei der Synthese menschlicher Wahrnehmung", in Ralf Schnell (ed.), *Wahrnehmung - Kognition - Ästhetik. Neurobiologie und Medienwissenschaften* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2005), pp. 61-109. On the internal evaluation of brain states in connection with anticipation also see Wolf Singer, "Das Bild in uns - Vom Bild zur Wahrnehmung", in Christa Maar and Hubert Burda (eds.), *Iconic Turn. Die neue Macht der Bilder* (Köln: DuMont, 2004), pp. 56-76.

[32] This connotation may be faint to the point of indiscernibility in ordinary cases of cognition; it is distinctly manifest only in the case of the aesthetic and in extraordinary cases of cognition (‘eureka!’).

the fact that in these cases a satisfaction occurs which is not narrowly localized (as is the case with simple perceptions, say the perception that a putative exit really is an exit), but is amplified by the resonance with other cortical areas beyond the local occurrence of coherence.[33]

In itself, the initial phenomenon hardly differs from that of normal perceptual functions: a prior anticipation comes to be confirmed. However, in the aesthetic case, the perceptual act has ramifications beyond the given sense modality. Local coherence produces collateral coherence. The coherent activation of the *one* sense modality simultaneously induces a kind of harmonic oscillation in *other* sense modalities and cognitive areas. Apparently, in the initial area a fundamental tone of our entire cognitive apparatus has been struck, its fundamental attunement brought into vibration. And thus the other areas resonate with it. Because of these cortical resonances, a far more comprehensive resonance results than in the case of ordinary perceptions.[34] It is this additional, multidimensional coherence which we experience as specifically aesthetic enjoyment or pleasure.[35]

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[33] Cp. Fahle, "Ästhetik als Teilaspekt bei der Synthese menschlicher Wahrnehmung", op.cit., p. 107 f. – By `local' I mean 'related to a specific function'. To be sure, numerous and far-reaching networks can be involved in the fulfillment of such a function, so that the activation may achieve its maximum at a specific spatial location without being confined to that location. The phenomenon of resonance is distinguished by the fact that not only distant but indispensable networks directly involved in the specific function come to be activated, but also neural complexes which contribute nothing to the initial function as such.

[34] It should be noted that cognitive coherence demands far more than merely a single match between schema and datum. In addition, coherence between many such matches throughout the sense modalities, indeed throughout all the dimensions of our apprehension of the world is necessary. Put differently, not only the vertical matching between schema and datum is called for, but the horizontal coherence between the various cognitive fields, as well. The latter is precisely what we find in cases of resonance among distinct cortical areas. Thus for example Redies points out that aesthetic stimuli lead to maximally synchronized responses in distinct neural networks (Christoph Redies, "A universal model of esthetic perception based on the sensory coding of natural stimuli", *Spatial Vision*, Vol. 21, No.1-2, 2007, pp. 97-117, here p. 106).

[35] Cp. Ramachandran's and Hirstein's suggestion that the reinforcement of already existent temporary connections between cell groups (so-called "feature binding") is essential to aesthetic experience. This kind of reinforcement involves an activation of the limbic system. See V. S. Ramachandran and William Hirstein, "The Science of Art - A Neurological Theory of Aesthetic Experience", *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6, 1999, pp. 15-51, esp. p. 21f.

The phenomenon of resonance unmistakably distinguishes this second universal type of the perception of beauty – the one referring to self-similarity and self-organization – from the first type that was linked to our perception of landscapes and bodies. For in the latter case, only very specific regions of the brain are activated (namely those in which the relevant patterns of preference are anchored). In the case of aesthetic enjoyment of forms of self-similarity, however, what's decisive is precisely the resonance of several different cortical areas and hence a far more integral activation of our cognitive apparatus.

And the most fully integral activation of our brains occurs in the case of great, breath-taking beauty. In the concluding section of this paper I turn to this phenomenon.

3. Great, breath-taking beauty

a. Distinctive features of the experience and their Kantian interpretation

Let me first give a short phenomenological description. What distinguishes our emotional state when we encounter great beauty? We feel delighted. We think, "How beautiful." We have always wanted to see something like this. One desires to see suchlike often, even constantly. The perfect delight is the crucial point – for the experience, and for the explanation as well.

Kant, who was the first to analyze the judgment of taste with scrutiny, recognized this point with great clarity. According to him, we experience those things as beautiful which are *as we desire to perceive things*. This subjective aspect is crucial. The beautiful corresponds with our most general and most fundamental perceptual need.

What is that need? Kant answered this question in terms of cognitive faculties: We seek a harmony between the conceptual and the sensible (what I have just been calling 'coherence'), in Kantian terms: a harmony between the imagination and the understanding. Whenever this harmony comes about spontaneously, we have the experience of beauty. Kant accordingly defines aesthetic enjoyment or pleasure as pleasure taken "in the harmony of the cognitive powers."[36]

In ordinary cases of cognition we are forced to bring about such a harmony

[36] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* [1790], B 29 [sect. 9].

between the conceptual and the sensible by means of conceptual activity (i. e the synthetic functions of the understanding). In the exceptional case of the aesthetic, by contrast, it comes about spontaneously. This gives rise to the privileged status of the aesthetic and its joyous character.

To underscore the crucial point once again: In aesthetic experience we are given exactly what *we long for by our own nature*. That is what the experience "beautiful" represents. An object is not beautiful as such, it is not objectively beautiful; rather, we perceive it as beautiful because the perception of it fulfills our most fundamental perceptual need – the need for cognitive harmony. The experience of beauty rests on this subjective condition. We long for something – *by our own nature*. And in the case of beauty it is wholly given to us.

b. The neural explanation

After the brief phenomenological description and the Kantian analysis, what is the *neural* explanation for the experience of breath-taking beauty?

The striking fact is that in this case the neural excitation takes hold of our perceptual apparatus *as a whole* (and does so to an even higher degree than in the case of collateral resonance associated with the phenomena of self-similarity). The experience of great, breath-taking beauty is concurrent with depolarization waves that spread over the entire cortex. Although they have their starting point in a particular sense modality (say the visual or acoustic sphere), they induce a harmonic oscillation in our entire aisthetic and cognitive apparatus that is in tune with its basic configuration and anticipations. Therefore we find ourselves integrally and optimally activated. Hence the great joy we sense in the case of breath-taking beauty.[37]

4. Overview of the three universal types of the perception of beauty

Let us once more compare these three types of universal appreciation of beauty, starting with their neural characterization and then moving on to the sources of their universality.

[37] The phenomenology, the Kantian analysis and the neural explanation of beauty all agree that the element of subjective delight resulting from a holistic activation of our basic constellation is crucial to the perception of beauty.

a. Neural differences

When we perceive a body or landscape as beautiful, that perception rests on the highly localized activation of a specific neural pattern. When, by contrast, we perceive forms of self-similarity as beautiful, the resonance of contiguous cortical areas produces a significantly more far-reaching activation of the cortex. The experience of great, breath-taking beauty, finally, rests on an integral activation of our entire aesthetic and cognitive architecture.

Now in each of these three cases the implication is that beauty is actually brain-happiness.[38] The structure and intensity of this happiness differ however in characteristic ways: they are local, when a biological program is activated; collateral, when our cognitive program is activated; and integral in the case of overwhelming beauty.

And not only does the extension of neural excitation alone differ, rather the quality of the experience is also characteristically different. We experience attractiveness in the case of local excitation, significant pleasure in that of collateral excitation, and breath-taking beauty in the case of integral excitation. – So much on the neural grammar of beauty.

b. The diverse sources of universality

Let us turn to the question of universality again. Why can the three types of aesthetic appreciation we have discussed truly be said to be universal? – The reasons for that are as diverse as the types themselves.

The preferences for bodies and landscapes are universal because they resulted from selection effects that impacted the very genome of *Homo sapiens* prior to any cultural differentiation. That is why they have been handed down to us and remain universal still today. This type of beauty crystallized in the proto-cultural period of humanity which lasted from

[38] That is the general thesis of neuroaesthetics. It might seem trivial, but it is not. One need only consider how different the use would be to which we put art exhibits and museums if we placed trust in this claim. We would no longer view them as temples of devotion or duties reserved for Sunday afternoons, but as training centers for our brains. We would use them for the purpose of modifying neural receptors, creating new connections, achieving integral neural activation. We would no longer explore a movement in a sonata mainly in musicological terms, but would listen to it in order to find out what it is doing to our brain. And it doesn't have to be a movement in a classical sonata, either; Cage or Feldman will do just as well.

about 2.5 million years ago until about 40,000 years ago. This type is specific to the human race. It is clearly geared toward reproduction and ecology and thus, within the aesthetic sphere, it may be said to represent the Good.

The aesthetic preference for forms of self-similarity indicative of self-organization also developed and was selected in the course of phylogenesis. Its present universality results from permanence of the corresponding genetic structures. This type of beauty, however, has an origin older than that of humanity, developing in the course of the cognitive development of animals possessing a dorsal nervous system and a brain. Darwin linked it to the very genesis of the perception of beauty in the animal kingdom long before the advent of humans.[39] The function of this type of beauty lies in the cognitive sphere. Within the aesthetic realm, it may be said to represent the True.

The universality of our fascination with great beauty, finally, is likely to originate in the fact that this enthusiasm is *anchored in the very architecture of the cortex*. Since this architecture is basically identical in all members of *Homo sapiens*, we are all capable of having this perception of beauty regardless of cultural background, and hence this type of aesthetic perception is universal. This type probably did not develop until humanity's cultural period, i. e. in the last 40,000 years. It is the most recent of the three types.[40]

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[39] Consider for example this passage: "The perception, if not the enjoyment, of musical cadences and of rhythm is probably common to all animals, and no doubt depends on the common physiological nature of their nervous systems" (Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* [1871], Princeton: Princeton University Press 1981, II p. 333). On Darwin's theory of the genesis of aesthetic appreciation in its entirety see Wolfgang Welsch, "Animal Aesthetics", in *Contemporary Aesthetics*, Forum: Science in Aesthetics (2004), www.contempaesthetics.org/pages/article.php?articleID=243.

[40] Unsurprisingly, this type, which rests on the activation of the cortex' own architecture is not bound up with any specific content: neither the superficial contents of the first type (landscapes, bodies), nor the more profound ones of the second type (self-similarity, self-organization), nor again any specific cultural contents. This is precisely the reason why the fascination is universal both in its foundation and its extension, despite the fact that it is always occasioned by works with a specific cultural imprint. We must nevertheless assume that this type first arose, or at least was first cultivated, in the period of culture, for it was only at this stage that the elementary biological and cognitive necessities had been furnished so that the 'free play' of perception and invention could begin. The *reason* for our fascination with breath-takingly beautiful works is thus more deeply rooted than

In contrast to the other types, however, I do not believe that the fascination with great beauty serves a specific purpose. Rather, in this latter case it is as though the brain were celebrating itself, internally exulting. Great beauty unleashes purposeless neural fireworks – independently of any biological or cognitive advantage. To this extent it is really only with this type that we enter into the sphere of the purely beautiful, the sphere of beauty for its own sake. Within the sphere of the aesthetic, then, this type represents the Beautiful as such – or the hyper-beautiful if you will.

III. Review and Wider Prospect

1. Universality and Individuality

What have we gained by these reflections? For aesthetics as a whole, I think, quite a bit. For the detailed analysis of single objects of beauty, a work of art for example, relatively little.

My findings teach us better to understand why so many of us humans are fascinated by beauty – not only the beauty of other humans, but also that of nature and art. We are addicted to beauty because beauty plays an important role not only for our sexuality, but for our cognition and indeed for our very well-being. In the experience of the beautiful, our most important, our only holistic 'organ', the brain, comes to achieve its optimal state.

That humans in all times and all cultures have sought out beauty is a familiar fact to aesthetic theory. All in all, however, there has been too much emphasis on cultural diversity – on differences in the production and appreciation of beauty in various cultures. The praise of aesthetic diversity has caused us to overlook and even deny that the beautiful products that are characteristic for one culture can be experienced as equally beautiful by members of a different culture. We have failed to recognize the potential universality of the beautiful. Culturalism – the notion that all human works rest exclusively on cultural foundations and have no deeper, precultural roots – has led to a form of ghettoism tethering cultural products to the leash of the culture which produced them and limiting the possibility of genuine understanding and genuine appreciation to members of that culture.

The aim of this paper, by contrast, is to point out the precultural basis and the deep transcultural dimensions of the aesthetic that both explain why the same patterns of aesthetic preference are active in highly divergent cultures

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anything cultural; but it was only fully and freely realized under the conditions of culture.

and help us understand how members of one culture are able to appreciate the aesthetic achievements of a very different culture. There is both a productive and a receptive universality of the aesthetic. It is time that we overcome our culturalist prejudices and confront the existence of these universal dimensions of the aesthetic.

However, despite the importance of these dimensions for the aesthetic realm in its entirety, we must not expect them to contribute much to the detailed analysis of individual phenomena. The *types* of aesthetic appreciation discussed here are universal, yet thousands of phenomena can fall under one of these types while nevertheless differing significantly in their aesthetic quality. When we are concerned with giving reasons for the quality of a given phenomenon (which certainly is the task of aesthetic analysis), appeals to typology are useless; here we must draw on other criteria – criteria which, depending on circumstances, may be specific to the point of having been brought into existence by the very work at issue if it happened to have originated a style. Numerous Greek temples and a number of Japanese rock gardens conform to the golden section, but that alone is not sufficient to explain what is special about the Parthenon or the Ryoan-ji. And the magnificence of Beethoven's Third Symphony does not lie merely in its conformity with the sonata form and the principles of symphonic composition, but in the discovery of a previously unheard of pathos.

Here, the aspect of universality has distinct limits. It can explain the universal fascination with aesthetic *types*, but not why individual manifestations of the type are of higher or lower quality. It must however be conceded that any pattern of aesthetic explanation which is universal in scope will be subject to limitations of this kind. Whether we are dealing with general principles such as *'variatio delectat*' or '*ut pictura poesis'* or with semi-general principles such as three-dimensional perspective or diagonal composition – in each case it is crucial that in addition to conforming to such guidelines, the work in its individuality also prove worthy of our attention. And it would be preposterous to expect the aspect of *universality* of all things to be a source of explanation for everything *individual*.

2. Mere subjectivity of the experience of beauty?

a. The Convergence between the Classical and the Neural Subjectivity Thesis

One could view the neural explanation of beauty I've presented here as a wholesale endorsement of the thesis that the aesthetic is subjective. This

latter thesis has been widely held since the Eighteenth Century at least. Kant, to whom I referred above, articulated it most clearly. According to him, being beautiful is not a property that objectively inheres in appearances (as, say, magnitude does); rather, it is a thoroughly relational quality which can be attributed to certain appearances only in reference to the human faculty of cognition and to human ways of looking at the world. Things are not beautiful because they are beautiful in themselves; rather they are beautiful for us because we ascribe this quality to them on the basis of our perspective on the world and in accord with the needs that inform that perspective – we confer it on the basis of our constitution as subjects.[41] – Analogously, recent brain research also teaches that the experience of the beautiful is determined by the internal architecture of the brain, that our subjective neural disposition is decisive for beauty - that beauty is indeed brain happiness.

Of course even by the end of the Eighteenth Century objections were being raised to the subjectivity thesis. Schiller, for example, thought that beauty was at least in part something objective and that it ought to be described as "freedom in the appearance".[42] It has frequently been pointed out that beauty could not be a purely subjective matter for the simple reason that not every random object can appear to us as beautiful and hence that certain conditions must obviously be met by an object in order for it to count as beautiful. Symmetry and the golden proportion, for example, have been offered as objectively verifiable properties of several beautiful objects.

Though I will soon go on to advocate the existence of objective aesthetic dimension, I must first pause to reject this all too simple objection to the subjectivity thesis. The objectivity thesis can gain no ground by taking this route. It is not the case that a proponent of the subjectivity thesis must deny that the experience of the beautiful can be based on objective properties of the objects. He merely claims that the objective features are at the most necessary, but by no means sufficient conditions for the aesthetic experience. Objective features can at most *trigger* the experience, but they cannot *cause* it on their own. And they can in turn trigger the feeling of beauty only because we humans' sensory and mental constitution creates in us a predilection for beauty; we are, so to speak, *out for it*. Only within this

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[41] 'Subjectivity' here refers to the species subjectivity common to us all, of course, and not the individual subjectivity later to become so popular *in aestheticis*.

[42] Friedrich Schiller, *Kallias oder Über die Schönheit. Briefe an Gottfried Körner* [written in 1793, first published in 1847], in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 5, ed. by Gerhard Fricke and Herbert G. Göpfert (München: Hanser ^{6}1980), pp. 394-433, here p. 400 [letter from February 8, 1793].

intentional horizon, determined by our subjectivity, can suitable features of objects have the effect of triggering the experience of beauty. Thus despite the fact that objective elements do play a secondary role, the subjectivity thesis nevertheless maintains its validity.

b. The Objectivity Hypothesis – the Evolutionary Flip-Side of Subjectivity

If we are to move beyond the thesis of the mere subjectivity of the aesthetic we must therefore take another tack. The proper approach is in fact readily apparent. One need only shift attention to the flip-side of subjectivity. Why is it the case that human subjectivity, which is crucial for the experience of the beautiful, has just the constitution that it does? Why is it made up as it is? Proponents of the subjectivity thesis are prone to wave aside or just ignore this truly fundamental question.

As long as one does so, it inevitably seems as though our enthusiasm for beauty were a purely human idiosyncrasy having much to do with us, but little with the world. At the same time, though, the idiosyncrasy thesis is highly implausible for at least two reasons. First of all, our receptivity to beauty is anchored deep in our cognitive architecture, so that to find our aesthetics idiosyncratic is to place our cognition as a whole under general suspicion of idiosyncrasy. Secondly, human aesthetics (as Darwin argued) is the continuation of an animal genesis and history of aesthetic experience far older than humanity, so if we downgrade human aesthetics to an idiosyncrasy, we really also have to relegate the aesthetic sensibility of animals – indeed the entire nervous systems and brains of animals who rely on them for their relation to the environment – to the status of an idiosyncrasy.[43]

In contrast to such a general suspicion of idiosyncrasy, I have tried here to argue for the plausibility of our aesthetic sense being thoroughly grounded in objective conditions, despite the fact that its schemata are subjectively anchored. This emerged with particular clarity in the case of the second universal type, our fascination with forms of self-similarity. We immediately experience as beautiful such forms as are characterized by a self-similarity that indicates their origin in the feedback processes typical of self-organization. Now self-organization is the most general ontological principle of nature, and to this extent our aesthetic sense is objectively oriented in the extreme – and therefore anything but idiosyncratic. It

[43] Cp. the author's text, "Animal Aesthetics", loc. cit.

responds with pleasure and delight to what drives the world in its innermost. It pulses, as it were, to the rhythm of the world. It is both a human and an ontological or cosmic sensorium.

How such a congruence of subjective experience and objective relevance is possible can be explained in terms of evolutionary theory. For ultimately nothing stands the test of time in the course of evolution except what fits into the world in which it has to get by. This is not to imply that we should advocate a simplistic adaptation theorem. Stephen J. Gould and others have persuasively argued that the evolutionary dynamic of organisms is to a high degree internally regulated and should not be understood as simply and exclusively determined by external factors. Only, whatever emerges from the internal developmental logic must ultimately be such as to escape deselection under environmental pressure; it has to be such as to withstand such pressures or even, ideally, to *cooperate* and *coevolve* with its environmental conditions – the key to evolution's success stories.

I do not intend here to decide the question of subjectivity or objectivity. However, against the modern axiom that the aesthetic is merely subjective, I would like to strike a blow for the possible objectivity of the aesthetic. And I would like to indicate how objectivity and subjectivity can go together. My observations in Part II showed how neural dispositions that are part of *homo sapiens*' constitution are responsible for the universal types of our experience of beauty. Up to this point, the subjectivity thesis is right. But then, in Part III, it was necessary to point out that our subjective dispositions are not the be-all and end-all, as the theoreticians of subjectivity would have it, but that they are determined by an evolutionary flip-side which explains both their existence and their design. When we shift attention to this flip-side, the connectedness of our constitution with the world and the way it is determined by the world emerge. This is the source of our dispositions' potential for objectivity.

This is true of the aesthetic sense too. It is not exaggerated to say that, in a certain sense, it is the world that finds itself in this sense. Why? The sensible and our sensory faculties are of the same kind, which from an evolutionary point of view is hardly surprising. When we encounter sensible things in such a way that our sensory faculties attain their optimum condition, then we experience beauty – the subjective delight of beauty. But this event can also be read as an objective process. When our aesthetic sense experiences something beautiful, then it is because that sense is undergoing a self-reinforcement. Here too, then, we are dealing with a feedback process. Thus what is occurring in our aesthetic sense is precisely the basic

ontological dynamic of the world itself. Put differently, this basic dynamic happens here as aesthetic perception. In the experience of beauty, it is not (as one might naively believe) the beauty of the world which finds expression, but rather its self-generative character. The experience of beauty is a self-experience of the world that happens in us.

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The Dissolution of Meaning:
Towards an Aesthetics of Non-Sense

Michael F. Marra

Today I would like to raise the issue of the relationship between text and interpretation in the case of texts whose ultimate purpose is utmost resistance to interpretation. By interpretation I mean a desperate effort to make sense of texts—in other words, continuous experimentations towards the construction and reconstruction of meaning. To make sense is an odd expression. Sense derives from the Latin "*sensus*," which means perception, either aesthetic or emotional. If we want to attribute to the expression the meaning usually given to it (i.e., to explain rationally something that is ambiguously perceived by the senses), we should rather talk about "making sense of sense," and give sense a rational explanation. To make sense is perceptual understanding, an understanding based on perceptions, a fluid understanding if you wish, but still a form of understanding. Meaning is more rational than sense. The word "meaning" comes from the Middle English *menen*, which means "to have a purpose, to intend." And yet, even the German "*Meinung*" is nothing but an opinion. The need to interpret came about as a result of making perceptions and opinions acceptable to people other than the bearers of the original perceptions and opinions. By interpreting, one had literally to mediate among prices and values (*inter-pretium*), but, in order to do so, he had to establish a currency against which to judge the value of the merchandise, as well as to calibrate the value of other currencies. Like most scholars of my generation and older I was trained in the currency of hermeneutics—a sustained effort to make sense of texts in light of their historicity. It goes without saying that the hermeneutical project which flourished in the nineteenth century became the object of fierce attacks in the twentieth, to the point of risking becoming a fading memory of the past in the twenty-first. By hermeneutical project I mean the very construction of this sentence—to give meaning to a body of thought in which a common denominator is found that is called hermeneutics, or attention to interpretation.

The Latin word *hermeneutica* did not emerge until the 17th century when it was first introduced by a theologian from Strasbourg, Johann Dannhauer, as a necessary requirement of all the sciences that rely on the interpretation of

texts. He distinguished two kinds of truth: hermeneutical truth, which strives to discover what is meant; and logical truth, which seeks to find out if what was meant is true or not. Already in Aristole's *Peri Hermeneias* (*De Interpretatione*), interpretation dealt with propositions that could be either true or false. The history of interpretation exhibits a noteworthy obsession with uncovering allegedly hidden truths--a fact that explains the race among interpreters of later ages to establish complete monopoly over specific interpretations, the truthful ones. While philological hermeneutics concentrated on the *sensus litteralis* or *sensus grammaticus* in which a mediator (translator) uses his linguistic knowledge to make intelligible what is not understood, what is *no longer* understood, theological hermeneutics opened the door to a *sensus spiritualis* based on allegorical exegesis. This basic scheme opened the doors to searches for all possible meanings hidden, first in the Greek mythological accounts, and then in the West's sacred text, the Bible. It became possible to say one thing and mean something else, as the grammarian Pseudo-Heraclitus (fl. first century A.D.) theorized in describing the rhetorical trope which he called "*allegoria*," allegory. Someone, like the Greek Father of the Church Origen (c. 185-254), found three levels of biblical meaning: a literal (historical-grammatical), a moral, and a spiritual (allegorical or mystical) meaning. Someone else, like John Cassian (360-430/35), made a fourfold distinction between levels of meaning: a literal, an allegorical (or typical), a moral (or tropological), and an anagogic (or mystical) meaning. In other words, a reader was invited to find in the literal meaning what happened, in the allegorical meaning what to believe, in the moral meaning what he ought to do, and in the anagogic meaning what he was striving toward.[1]

In the Middle Ages the cosmos became a puzzle in need of interpretation. Language itself came to be seen as an act of interpretation pointing at a deeper truth. In the words of St. Augustine (354-430), the *actus signatus* or verbal sign was an incomplete translation or faulty interpretation of the inner word, the *verbum intimum* or *verbum cordis*. In a sense, St. Augustine was going back to the original hermeneutical problem of meaning prior to the establishment of any sense, either literal or spiritual. The political implications of interpretative acts signed the pages of the history of the Reformation in which a rejection of allegoresis meant a rejection of the Pope's authority as unchallenged interpreter. When Martin Luther (1483-1546) proclaimed the primacy of scripture (*sola scriptura*) he aimed at bringing back to the Bible the authority that Roman Popes were claiming

[1] In this brief outline I follow Peter Szondi, *Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

for themselves. The problem was that, even if the scripture was the interpreter of itself, based on its alleged literal meaning (*sensus literalis*), someone still needed to explicate this meaning to others. In other words, the notion of an absolutely clear and univocal scripture was absurd, as the Catholics pointed out by noticing marked variations among Protestant interpretations.

The remaining history of hermeneutics coincided with the development of the field of philology—whether one concentrates on Johann Chladenius' (1710-1759) study of obscurities, Georg Friedrich Meier's (1718-1777) theory of signs, Friedrich Ast's (1778-1841) notion of the author, Friedrich Schleiermacher's (1768-1834) idea of misunderstanding, or August Boeckh's (1785-1867) minute classifications of the philological sciences in his *Enzyclopädie und Methodologie der phologischen Wissenschaften* (Encyclopedia and Methodology of the Philological Sciences, posthumous 1877). Boeckh provided the most complete account of methodologies associated with historicism--methodologies which are still very much alive in our daily scholarly practices, including the way I am structuring this lecture. His vocabulary is immediately recognizable, since I believe most of us are indebted to it, as one can see from Boeckh's differentiation between,

1—a formal theory of the science of philology, which included,
1a) the theory of hermeneutics (grammatical interpretation, historical interpretation, individual interpretation, and generic interpretation);
1b) the theory of criticism (grammatical criticism, historical criticism, individual criticism, generic criticism),

and 2—material disciplines of the study of antiquity, which included,
2a) generic antiquity (national life, private life, religious art, sciences);
2b) specific antiquity (public life of the Greek and Romans, their private life, their religious art, and the sciences of ancient times).

I would not have spent so much time giving an outline of the history of hermeneutics if I thought that this was irrelevant to the study of Japan. Instead, the hermeneutical model had a profound impact on how philology, history, and the humanities came to be articulated in Japan. In other words, whatever goes under the umbrella of Japanese literature, art, religion, history, philosophy, and so on, would not exist in its modern form without the paradigms that hermeneutics provided in forcing Japanese authors to talk about Japan with a language which was originally devised for a reading of the Bible. Haga Yaichi (1867-1927), one of the founders of *kokubungaku*

(Japanese national literature), spent most of 1900 studying Boeckh's *Encyclopedia* in Berlin. For Haga, in order to be a good critic and a good interpreter, a philologist must master disciplines which are still well known to us today: bibliographical studies, studies of manuscripts, paleography, epigraphy, prosody, grammar, archeological material, ancient geography, chronology of ancient history, weights and measures, antiquities, mythology, archeology of the fine arts, ancient philosophy, literary history, and numismatics.[2]

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), who is considered one of the major voices in the history of hermeneutics in the twentieth century, challenged traditional views of this discipline, eventually questioning the overall validity of the enterprise. In a *Dialogue on Language Between a Japanese and an Inquirer* (1959) Heidegger pointed out that already in *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time, 1927) he had gone beyond Schleiermacher's general distinction between hermeneutics ("the art of understanding rightly another man's language") and criticism ("the art of judging rightly the genuineness of written works and passages"), as well as Wilhelm Dilthey's (1833-1911) idea of hermeneutics as the theory of the art of interpretation of written artifacts. Heidegger argues that "In *Being and Time*, hermeneutics means neither the theory of the art of interpretation not interpretation itself, but rather an attempt first of all to define the nature of interpretation on hermeneutic grounds."[3] Heidegger confesses that eventually he had done away with the concept altogether, since there cannot be a fixed standpoint in what can only be a stop along the way.[4] And yet, even in Heidegger, the project of *destruktion* is still very much linked to a recovery of authenticity which the interpretative process of Western metaphysics had allegedly hidden from sight and forgotten. The quest for a recovery of the ontological difference—the difference that Being makes to everybody's life—is still based on interpretative acts that Heidegger increasingly turned toward

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[2] Michael F. Marra, "Fields of Contention: Philology (*Bunkengaku*) and the Philosophy of Literature (*Bungeigaku*)," in Joshua A. Fogel and James C. Baxter, eds., *Historiography and Japanese Consciousness of Values and Norms* (International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 2002), pp. 197-221.

[3] Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 11.

[4] "It can hardly have escaped you tat in my later writings I do no longer employ the term 'hermeneutics.' … I have left an earlier standpoint, not in order to exchange it for another one, but because even the former standpoint was merely a way-station along the way. The lasting element in thinking is the way." Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p. 12.

poetry after the compilation of *Sein und Zeit*.[5] Despite Heidegger's repeated statements on his attempts to overcome metaphysics and all the disciplines based on metaphysical interpretations of reality, it would be hard to deny the profound impact that theology had on the shaping of Heidegger's thought, as he himself admitted.[6] Such a theological ground which informs all acts of hermeneutical interpretations, and which has constituted the basis on which Japanese texts have been read in the academic traditions established in the late nineteenth century, can be useful in reading texts which were produced with such a background in mind. However, it is questionable whether this can be equally applied to a fruitful understanding of texts which purposefully try to escape the limits of a reality shaped by historicist concerns. It would be sufficient to compare the two following poems to notice that while we are justified in following the hermeneutical path to understand the first, an interpretation of the second along the same lines would be much more problematic. The first poem is by Aizu Yaichi (1881-1956):

Ōtera no	Walking on the ground,
Maroki hashira no	Over the shadow of the great temple's
Tsukikage o	Round columns
Tsuchi ni fumitsutsu	That the moon casts,
Mono o koso omoe	Absorbed in thought.[7]

The second poem is by Yamamura Bochō (1884-1924):

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[5] In addition to the essays included in *Unterweg zur Sprache* (On the Way to Language, 1950-59), I am referring to *Erläuterrung zu Hölderlin Dichtung* (Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry), *Heimkunft/An die Verwandten* (Remembrance of the Poet), *Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung* (Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry), *Wozu Dichter* (What Are Poets For?), *Hölderlins Hymnen 'Germanien' und 'Der Rhein'* (Hölderlin's Hymns "Germany' and "The Rein'), *Hölderlins Hymne 'Andenken'* (Hölderlin's Hymn "Remembrance"), and *Hölderlins Hymne 'Der Ister'* (Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"). See, Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1975); Martin Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry, tans. Keith Hoeller (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2000); and Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* trans. William McNeill and Julia Davis (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996.

[6] "Without this theological background I should never have come upon the path of thinking." Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p. 10.

[7] Aizu Yaichi, *Nankyō Shinshō* (New Songs from the Southern Capital, 1908-1924), in Aizu Yaichi, *Jichū Rokumeishū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1998), p. 51.

Geigo	Nonsense
Settō kingyo	Theft goldfish
Gōtō rappa	Robbery trumpet
Kyōkatsu kokyū	Blackmail sitar
Tobaku neko	Gambling cat
Sagi sarasa	Fraud calico
Tokushoku birōdo	Bribery velvet
Kan'in ringo	Adultery apple
Shōgai hibari	Assault skylark
Satsujin churitsubu	Murder tulip
Datai in'ei	Abortion shadow
Sōzō yuki	Riot snow
Hōka marumero	Arson quince
Yūkai kasuteera	Abduction sponge-cake.[8]

Although I personally believe that hermeneutics can be applied to untangle the second poem as well, Yamamura Bochō's surrealist approach to poetry forces the reader to question the need to make sense of poetry, as the title of his poem, "Nonsense," indicates. On the other hand, Aizu Yaichi's poem, which was composed at about the same time as Yamamura's, requires a "monumental" reading of the round columns which he observes while walking through the Tōshōdaiji temple in Nara—columns which, as he confessed, were actually infused with his memory of the Parthenon in Athens.[9] Not only is Athens inspiring Aizu to write about the columns of a famous temple in Nara; Greece and Western hermeneutics were at work in Aizu's entire career as an art historian, an aesthetician, and a poet who wanted to resurrect in the twentieth century a vocabulary devised by poets anthologized in a poetic collection of the eighth century, the *Man'yōshū* (Ten Thousand Leaves, 759). Yamamura Bochō's verses were meant to dismantle the monument of language, as well as all traces traditionally

[8] English translation by Miryam Sas, *Fault Lines: Cultural Memory and Japanese Surrealism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 19, with slight modifications.

[9] In *Konsai Zuihitsu*, Aizu state, "When I closely search for the cause of my deep love for the columns in the temples in Nara, it seems to me that it lies neither in Tōshōdaiji and Hōryūji but in a sanctuary in a distant country in the distant past, namely Greece…The columns in the Parthenon and the Theseion seem to have made a very deep impression on my young heart so that even now they seem to keep me interested in those columns in Nara." (April 24, 1941). English translation by Ono Michiko, "'Tōshōdaiji no Marubashira' Eigoyaku ni Tsuite," *Shūsō* 11 (1995), pp. 21-22.

conveyed by such language. The question remains whether one can use the language of hermeneutics, which developed over centuries with the explicit purpose of establishing a meaningful sense to things, to make sense of poetic nonsense.

While in the 1960s Heidegger's disciple Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) launched a stern defense of hermeneutics in *Wahrheit und Methode* (Truth and Method, 1960),[10] Susan Sontag waged a fierce war against this most German of all German sciences by stating that "in place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art."[11] Since then it has become increasingly difficult to talk about hermeneutics, mainly because of its associations with discourses on historicism. These reservations have stemmed from a naïve reading of hermeneutics in terms of a theory that attempts to make one re-live the experiences of the past, as this came to be experienced by authors within past contexts and background. Such a view flattens the richness of the hermeneutic lesson by leveling against the practitioners of such a method the charge of an alleged belief in the possibility of putting oneself in the shoes of the dead. This skepticism tends to ignore the validity of one of the major tenets of hermeneutics, which is the impossibility of dealing with either the past or the other without beginning from the self in the present. It is not a question of trying to figure out what went on in the past; it is a question of how the present is constantly shaped by the past. This applies to newer countries as well, such as, for example Susan Sontag's native land, the U.S., which makes massive efforts to delete the past in order to live in the utopic promise of an economically prosperous future.

I personally experienced the uneasiness that the topic of hermeneutics raises when in 2003 I organized at UCLA the twelfth annual meeting of the Association for Japanese Studies on the topic of "Hermeneutical Strategies: Method of Interpretation in the Study of Japanese Literature." The conference provided a forum for a variety of methodological approaches to texts, such as postcolonial theories, feminism, cultural criticism, intertextuality, narratology, psychoanalysis, poetics, and aesthetics. [12]

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[10] "Every work of art, not only literature, must be understood like any other text that requires understanding, and this kind of understanding has to be acquired. This gives hermeneutical consciousness a comprehensiveness that surpasses even that of aesthetic consciousness. Aesthetics has to be absorbed into hermeneutics." Han-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1992), p. 164.

[11] Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (New York: Octagon Books, 1961), p. 14.

[12] See, Michael F. Marra, ed., *Hermeneutical Strategies: Methods of Interpretation in the Study of Japanese Literature*, Proceedings of the Association for Japanese

However, when it came to hermeneutics the reservations, although politely formulated, were nevertheless quite palpable, as one can observe from the exemplary remarks on the part of a speaker that "her-meneutics" should rather be called "his-meneutics." Evidently, there is a wide perception of hermeneutics as the most conservative, male-biased, homogeneously non-hybrid, homophobic, colonial, capitalistic enterprise. In other words, hermeneutics is currently associated with the mummified "ancient" in the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns. If we follow this train of thought, then, Aizu Yaichi would be inevitably classified as ancient, while Yamamura Bochō would undoubtedly qualify as a modern. Although this classification holds some truth in terms of the loyalties that these two poets showed towards past and present, it would be disingenuous to think that Yaichi's interest in the past was not geared to the betterment of the future, given his utter mistrust of the present.[13] At the same time, Yamamoto's rejection of the past was equally sustained by a mistrust of the present. Although the two poets followed different methods (integration and continuity in Yaichi, deconstruction and discontinuity in Bochō), their aims remained quite similar.

If one follows the reminder by the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo that, aside from being used as a specific kind of interpretation, hermeneutics stands today for a *koiné* of interpretative languages, then, there would be no reason not to include within hermeneutics vocal examples of political resistance, such as feminism, post-colonialism, trans-nationalism, post-capitalism, and queer studies.[14] In other words, by definition hermeneutics requires the presence of the modern in the *querelle* between ancients and

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[13] "My mature tears of indignation for the pitiful scene of our present century, a century filled with *deformity* as a result of the abuses of the division of labor, are mixed occasionally with the cold smile of the cynic." This statement which Yaichi made in a letter addressed to a friend on September 2, 1906, after graduating from Waseda University appears in Kambayashi Tsunemichi, "The Aesthetics of Aizu Yaichi: Longing for the South," in Michael F. Marra, ed. and trans., *A History of Modern Japanese Aesthetics* (Honolulu: The University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), p. 138.

[14] "The hypothesis of the mid-eighties that hermeneutics had become a sort of *koiné* or common idiom of Western culture, and not only a philosophy, seems yet to have been refuted. This may of course be due, at least in part, to its being a weak hypothesis that does not affirm a great many precise shared philosophical beliefs, but rather describes an overall climate, a general sensibility, or simply a kind of presupposition that everyone feels more or less obliged to take into account." Gianni Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation: The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*, trans. David Webb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 1.

moderns, since it always begins from the interpretative act, i.e., the author in the present. Vattimo continues to be one of the most convincing advocates of hermeneutics—a task which is particularly welcomed by someone like me who was trained in classical studies and, as a result, was deeply inspired by the hermeneutical approach in the Biblical sense of the word: loyalty to the text, respect for its author, attention to philology, obsession with linear time which provides order to thinking; in other words, a careful search for meaning devised along hermeneutical lines. My article, "Japanese Aesthetics: The Construction of Meaning," strictly follows such lines: it looks for a series of categories—either rhetorical (*sugata*, *yūgen-tai*, *ushin-tai*, and the triad *omote-ura-sakai*), aesthetic (*yūgen*, *yojō*, *mono no aware*), religious (*mushin*, *shintai*, *santai*, *kotodama*), and ethical (*makoto*, *mawaza*) in order to explain how interpretative strategies work in the reading of Japanese literary texts, mainly poetic texts.[15]

Research on these categories furthered my interest in the particular nature of Japanese modernity—especially the encounter between the pliant, supple groups of ideas coming out from a Buddhist philosophy of non-permanence, non-subject subjectivity, non-substantial substance, and the patterns of strong permanence, strong subject, and strong substance sustaining modernity in all its variations, western and not. On the one hand we find in Japanese tradition elements which could easily be included in Gianni Vattimo's philosophy of weak thought, as I indicated in a lecture I gave here in Kyoto in 1997, "*Yowaki Shii: Kaishakugaku no Mirai o Minagara*" (Weak Thought: A Look at the Future of Hermeneutics): the notion of a soft subject (no–mind or *mushin*)—a self that "is seen by others, that sees itself, and that sees itself as other," which is Zeami's definition of the Nō actor; or, the concept of soft time (*mujō*)—all elements that are part of a philosophy of Nothingness developed by Buddhist thinkers in pre-modern times, and re-grounded in logic in modern times by Nishida Kitarō.[16] At the same time, once these supple elements are made into categories, such as aesthetic categories which impose an uncomfortable universality over an untamable particularity, they lose their pliant nature and are reconfigured into patterns

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[15] "Japanese Aesthetics: The Construction of Meaning," *Philosophy East and West* 45:3 (July 1995), pp. 367-386.

[16] "Yowaki Shii: Kaishakugaku no Mirai wo Minagara" (Weak Thought: A Look at the Future of Hermeneutics) (in Japanese), *95th Nichibunken Forum* (December 1997), pp. 1-39. For revised versions in English see my articles, "The New as Violence and the Hermeneutics of Slimness," *Proceedings of the Midwest Association for Japanese Literary Studies* 4 (Summer 1998), pp. 83-102, and "Japan's Missing Alternative: Weak Thought and the Hermeneutics of Slimness," *Versus*, 83/84 (May 1999), pp. 215-241.

of violence, power, homogeneity: the nation, the emperor, the national language, the nation's laws, the national subject, inside (Japan) and outside (the West) with no place for East Asia, frontside (*omote/tatemae*) and underside (*ura/honne*) with all the implication of participation and exclusion.

Looking at trends in contemporary scholarship in the arts one is bound to wonder whether the hermeneutical premises of critical discourse have the ability to fit artistic expressions that are meant to defy such basic hermeneutical categories. Vattimo's project of slimming down the heavy weight champions of metaphysical tradition was undoubtedly inspired by the historical avant-gardes of the twentieth century, as one can see from a book that he published in 1967—probably the book among the many written by the Italian philosopher that is most related to the arts, and one of the few that has not yet been translated in English, *Poesia e Ontologia* (Poetry and Ontology).[17] This book reflects a certain uneasiness on the part of a teacher of aesthetics in dealing with his academic subject matter in light of the poetics of the 20th century which were a response to and a resistance against Hegel's proclamation of the "death of art" in the sense that art was allegedly superseded by philosophy. Vattimo argues that poetics in the 20th century has replaced philosophy (and especially aesthetics), by producing what philosophy has ceased to produce: reflections on the arts. By challenging the notion of "meaning" as conceived within the frameworks of big narratives, the avant-gardes have challenged the notion of aesthetic pleasure which derived from the immediate understanding of such meanings. No meaning is relevant to the arts of the avant-gardes aside from an ontological one, which is the fact that art "is"—that is to say, an alternative between the intuitive knowledge of art and the discursive knowledge of thought. Following Heideggerian lines, Vattimo notes that in art the happening of a radical novelty takes place on the level of being-in-the-world. As a result, by experimenting with new linguistic forms, and also by engaging with a variety of political and ideological stances, the 20th century avant-garde movements have strongly emphasized the breaking of continuities. Whatever "meaning" might be left in the works of impressionists, cubists, and surrealists is a production of difference, distance, discontinuity. In order to be explained, artistic experiments need an aesthetics of dis-identification—a disruption of the logic of continuity and identity brought about by the poetics of the 20th century. To put it in Vattimo's terms, "it is art that configures itself today as the privileged place for a negation of identity, and, therefore, the privileged place for the

[17] Gianni Vattimo, *Poesia e Ontologia* (Milan: Mursia, 1967).

happening of truth."[18] It goes without saying that for Vattimo truth is a weak one, an uninterrupted process of interpretations that undermine the possibility of a strong, unified truth.

The lack of a unifying focus, the blurred vision of refracted images, the neutralization of meaning, the discontinuous relation to the real, the search for the avoidance of a totality of visibility, the construction of chaotic sites where different arts collide, the proliferation of everyday objects, and meaning burdening the work of art, were the common threads running through the presentations at a three-day conference at the Getty Center in Los Angeles last April. Titled "Rajikaru! Experimentations in Japanese Art 1950-1975," this conference was part of a three month long series of events on Japan called, "Art, Anti-Art, Non-Art: Experimentations in the Public Sphere in Postwar Japan 1950-1970."[19] The latter title came from the classification that Reiko Tomii presented of post-war Japanese art in which the anti-art movements of the late '50s-mid '60s aimed at dismantling art, as one can see from the works of the Gutai (Concrete Art Association) group. The non-art movements of the mid '60s-ca.'70 presented critiques of the production of art, as well as of the institution of art, as exemplified by works of the Monoha (School of Things) group. Discussions followed on the reduction of meaning to a displacement of joints, as in the case of the Butō dances of Hijikata Tatsumi (1928-1986). In their questioning of modernity and the challenge of its values, efforts were made on the part of post-1945 Japanese artists to replace the idea of "meaning" with the notion of "situation," which fits more correctly post-modern perceptions of a reality in constant flux. "Art is explosion," in the famous words of Okamoto Tarō (1911-1996)—an explosion of meaning, among other things, to the point that speech becomes nonsense, and Akatsuka Fujio's (b. 1935) world of nonsense gag *manga* of farts is born. In a world in which meaning is lost, even nonsense becomes problematic, as the *manga* of Katsumata Susumu (b. 1943) shows in its refusal to hear, since "the one who declares nonsense is full of it."[20]

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[18] Gianni Vattimo, *Poesia e Ontologia*, pp. 199-200.

[19] The conference, organized by the Getty Research Institute and the PoNJA-GenKon (Post-1945 Japanese Art Discussion Group), took place on April 27-28, 2007, at the Getty Center, and was followed by a Graduate Workshop on April 29 at the UCLA Armand Hammer Museum. The three-month series of events, which included exhibitions, a video series, and the conferences, took place from March 6 until June 3, 2007 at the Getty Research Institute, Exhibition Gallery.

[20] Presentation by Ryan Holmberg, "*Nansensu*: The Practice of a Word Circa 1970 (Meow!)."

The brittleness increasingly experienced by the notion of meaning over more than a century is also reflected in the porosity of borders in postmodern societies which resist more and more ideas of nationhood and national borders. The themes of exile and diasporic movements reverberated through a conference held at UCLA last May, titled, "Migration, Empire, and Transformation."[21] This conference also analyzed the role of artists in the global settings of post-modernity. It opened with the screening of *Fresh Kill*, the 1994 movie by the Taiwanese-American artist Shu Lea Cheang. *Fresh Kills* (from the Middle Dutch word *kille*, which means "riverbed" or "water channel") is a stream and freshwater estuary in the western portion of the New York City borough of Staten Island. It is the site of the Fresh Kills Landfill, formerly New York City's principal landfill. In the words of Gina Marchetti,

> The film revolves around the detritus of an urban consumer society in which transnational corporations bring raw materials from the Third World, contaminating goods and people in the process, and dump them in the borough. *Fresh Kill* makes sense out of this refuse by exploring connections among people on the edges of corporate capitalism and off-center in a white, bourgeois, heterosexual world. From the beaches of Taiwan's Orchid Island, used as a nuclear waste site in the 1980s, to the shores of New York's Staten Island, *Fresh Kill* collapses the globe in solidarity against racism, sexism, and the excesses of transnational corporate capitalism as resistance circulates through networks originally designed to facilitate the exchange of labor, commodities, and capital.[22]

Hybridity is the keyword of this movie which deals with two young lesbian parents raising a five year old daughter in the midst of a multi-cultured New York City which is polluted by a multinational corporation producing a sushi scare and nuclear waste; it is definitely a genre- and gender-bending masterpiece.

Among the many artworks presented at the conference was Yanagi Yukinori's (b. 1959) *The World Flag Ant Farm* which Yanagi worked on while studying at Yale University and won him an award in the Invited

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[21] This conference, which was held on May 16-18, 2007, was the first annual conference of The Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowships in the Humanities, "Cultures in Transnational Perspective."

[22] http://www.vdb.org/smackn.acgi$tapedetail?FRESHKILL

Artists Section at the Venice Biennale in 1993. A collage of different flags from all over the world, the *World Flag Ant Farm* reduces the imposing structures of strong nations to the labor intensive world of little ants, thus deconstructing national ideologies in the process. Midori Yoshimoto presented the work of Nagasawa Nobuho, who transformed the military structures of bunkers used in World War II to defend Denmark into motels in a project titled, "Bunker Motel/Emergency Womb" (1995). Nagasawa was inspired by the fact that these bunkers had been used by boys and girls after the war for much more peaceful purposes: to find a few moments of intimacy. All the furnishings of the motels are made of military cloth, while each bunker is filled with five hundred eggs in the size of a human womb—a testimony to the fragility of life in the form of as many eggs as a woman produces in her lifetime, five hundred.[23]

Even if one still feels some reticence to follow Susan Sontag's invitation to have hermeneutics replaced by an erotics of art, it is becoming increasingly questionable to have modern artistic expressions discussed in terms of an aesthetics—maybe a non-aesthetics, or an anti-aesthetics--which is not ready to deal with new media and new interfaces. One of the reasons I accepted your kind invitation to this conference was to get a glimpse of the major issues underlying the aesthetic discourses which deal today with contemporary arts produced in non-Western countries, especially Japan and East Asia. Given the immense creativity shown by Asian artists in current international scenes, this might be an especially fruitful occasion for aestheticians from China, Korea, Japan and other East- and South-East Asian countries to develop new critical approaches to the contemporary arts. The urgency of the matter is highlighted by what is currently available in the West in terms of contemporary Japanese aesthetics. Today, in the United States, Japanese art is preponderantly represented by forms of popular culture such as cartoons (*manga*) and anime. Therefore, critical discourses on the arts have tended to follow an extremely profitable market that should raise a few eyebrows among art historians who still cling to the notion of high art.

In the United States, Master and Ph.D. dissertations have begun to be written on icons of popular cultures such as, for example, Murakami Takashi (b. 1962), whose trilogy *Superflat* was a hit in the United States. As Murakami himself indicates, the trilogy began with the question, "What is art?" in an attempt to understand the meaning of art in Japan.[24] This project

[23] Midori Yoshimoto's presentation was titled, "Public Art as Catalyst of Social Action: Transnational Collaborations in the Art of Nobuho Nagasawa."

[24] Takashi Murakami, "Superflat Trilogy: Greeting, You are Alive," in Takashi

started in the year 2000 with the publication of the book *Super Flat* and an exhibition with the same name, first at the Shibuya branch of the fashion department store Parco, and then at its Nagoya location; it eventually traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. The second part was held in 2002 at the Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art in Paris with the exhibition "Coloriage" (no catalogue available). The project ended in 2005 with the publication and exhibition of *Little Boy* in New York. The theoretical underpinnings of the project already appeared in a 1999 manifesto titled "Tokyo Pop" which appeared in the April issue of *Kōkoku Hihyō* (Advertisement Criticism). This was an invitation to leave behind the "childish, irresponsible society" following the collapse of the bubble economy. The word "Superflat" goes back to the myth of immanence that for centuries has accompanied Western perceptions of Japan: Japanese culture cannot transcend the flat surface. Murakami was inspired with the name by the comment that a gallerist in Los Angeles made about his work: "It's super flat, super high quality, and super clean!"[25] The basic principle behind this project is emphasis on the flat surfaces of the contemporary world, which is made of computer graphics, flat-panel monitors, and the compression of data in images. The reference to the idea of Superflat also hints at the leveling and the dissolution of the hierarchy between high art and subculture—a hierarchy that Murakami states did not exist in Japan prior to the importation of the notion of "art" from the West. In other words, the powerful eruption of Japan's subculture on the stage of high art in the West stands as a resistance to the Western institution of art—a resistance which is predicated on continuity between, on the one hand, the artists of the Superflat and their consumers (the *otaku* generation), and, on the other, the entertainers and craftsmen of Japan's past, who excelled in the arts while being shunned as outcasts. If we follow these lines of thinking endorsed by the art critic Sawaragi Noi, then, one should see in the struggle for "leveling" on the part of Superflat artists a critique of hierarchies and discriminations, beginning with the hierarchic notion of "art."

Murakami, ed., *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture* (New York and New Heaven: Japan Society and Yale University Press, 2005), p. 151.

[25] Takashi Murakami, "Superflat Trilogy: Greeting, You are Alive," p. 153.

Figure 1. Takashi Murakami, *Superflat*.

Figure 2. Takashi Murakami, *Hiropon,* 1997.

However, if the Superflat project allows itself to be explained so simply with the traditional language of hermeneutics, then, it might not be as revolutionary as it claims to be. Or, hermeneutics should be given more credit that it has been given for its ability to articulate revolutionary programs of resistance. The question remains whether the "art" of Superflat is as revolutionary as its program is meant to make it. Is the so-called "*otaku*" generation endowed with the aspiration for change, or isn't it rather an expression of self-destruction? By *otaku* (lit. your home) I mean a generation of young people who spend most of their time secluded in their rooms, passionately gathering anime and *manga*, especially pornographic

ones, and naively taking the virtual world of computers to be the real world. In other words, *otaku* are maniacs whose excesses extend to personal computer geeks, video games, graphic novels, and so on. These are the recluses of the contemporary super flat world—a world of total alienation that finds political expression in the terrorist acts of groups such as the Aum Shinrikyō (Aum Supreme Truth) which in 1995 launched a Sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway. Sawaragi Noi has argued that the achievement of Japanese Neo Pop is to have provided the *otaku* youth with an alternative outlet to their obsessions that is not as potentially violent as the charged statements of religious cults. Or, in Sawaragi's eloquent words,

> The true achievement of Japanese Neo Pop is that it gives form to the distortion of history that haunts Japan—by reassembling fragments of history accumulated in *otaku*'s private rooms and liberating them from their confinement in an imaginary reality through a critical reconstitution of subculture. In doing so, these artists have refused to take the delusional path of resorting to warfare like Aum; instead, they have found a way out through the universal means of art, transferring their findings to the battlefield that is art history. In essence, Japanese Neo Pop, as exemplified by the work of Takashi Murakami among others, visualizes the historical distortion of Japan for the eyes of the whole world.[26]

Maybe, a jet of milk shut from the bulging breast of a cute little girl in Murakami's *Hiropon* (1997), or the spurt of semen of *My Lonesome Cowboy* (1998), are not as fatal as a handmade bomb, particularly if one looks at the cute, dreamy eyes of the boy and the girl. Seen from the genealogical perspective of erotic *manga* of the Edo period in general, and of Katsushika Hokusai's (1760-1849) *manga* in particular, these works can even find an aura of respectability. Murakami's little figurines can be found in Los Angeles and New York at the Giant Robot stores, an extremely successful chain of stores selling control designer flash drives, brickwall rings, Giant Robot mesh caps, Viking T shirts, stationary, clothing, and "works of arts" at a very modest price. Giant Robot is also the title of a magazine which is extremely popular among younger Asian Americans and the large numbers of fans of *otaku* culture in the U.S. One of their founders, Eric Nakamura, was recently recognized in Los Angeles at a fundraising

[26] Noi Sawaragi, "On the Battlefield of 'Superflat:' Subculture and Art in Postwar Japan," in Takashi Murakami, ed., *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*, p. 205.

dinner for the Japanese American National Museum as a young, successful Japanese American entrepreneur. The event was given luster by the presence of the former Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta, and the reading of a letter of good wishes from Senator Daniel K. Inouye of Hawaii. Evidently, the economic impact of these sub-cultures is massive. However, such impact cannot be disassociated from the transformation of the cultural values of our youth, whose role models risk flattening an entire history of search for depth and meaning, reducing that history to the banal, the vulgar, and the mediocre—a vulgarity which emerges quite clearly from the blog of Eric Nakamura, publisher and co-editor of *Giant Robot*:

> One reason why I don't go to big events is Ticketmaster. They are crooks, and a bunch of losers. Do you work for them? I know it's a job, and it sort of blows when people criticize your line of work, but Ticketmaster is fucked up….American Airlines? Do you work here? This company at least at LAX is one of the worst in their field.[27]

It might well be that the possibility of explaining Superflat with the language of hermeneutics indicates the lack of avant-gardism in this project, and emphasizes the cooptation of subcultures by big markets and corporations. After all, Murakami Takashi sits on a multi-million empire. In other words, Superflat could easily be associated with the multinational corporation of *Fresh Kill*, rather than with the lesbian parents turned activists. The links of *otaku* culture with Japan's traditional past also re-inscribe this alleged postmodern phenomenon within the cultural framework of categories developed by Japanese hermeneuticians in late-Meiji. The reclusive youth of *otaku* obsessed with gathering objects in the cramped space of their undersize rooms, could easily be associated with Japan's tradition of reclusion that put *inja bungaku* (literature of reclusion) at the center of the Middle Ages. The heroes sung in the anecdotal literature (*setsuwa*) of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were known as "*sukimono*"—people completely dedicated to one art, either poetry, archery, music, painting, or religious enlightenment, to the point of obsession and madness. As in the case of Kamo no Chōmei's (1155-1216) ten-foot square hermitage, or Saigyō's (1118-1190) mountain retreat, their little huts were filled with books on poetry, Buddhist scriptures, images of Amida and other bodhisattvas, and musical instruments.[28] The solitary environment from

[27] http://www.giantrobot.com/blogs/eric/index.html, June 30, 2007.

[28] In his *Hōjōki* (Account of My Hermitage, 1212), Chōmei describes his life alone in the hut he built for himself on the hills outside the capital: "After settling on my present place of retirement in the Hino hills, I extended the eastern eaves about three feet to provide myself with a convenient spot in which to break up and burn

which these recluses draw utmost enjoyment, especially aesthetic pleasure, is not unrelated to the virtual spaces inhabited by the lonesome youth in dialogue with their computers all day long. *Suki* (obsession for one thing) has been replaced by "*moe*," which literally means "budding"--a new aesthetic category describing a person who is attracted to fictional characters. For example, "*meganekko moe*," or "glasses-girl *moe*," indicates someone who falls in love with fictional girls wearing glasses. A "*tetsudō-moe*" (train *moe*) is someone who has a passionate interest in trains.

While the aesthetic categories of *yūgen*, *sabi*, and *wabi* came to be used to portray the sadness, lonesomeness, mystery and depth of the recluses who cut their ties from society—a sensibility that the practitioners of the tea ceremony are enabled to re-live today--new aesthetic categories have been devised to talk about Japan's New Pop and Superflat. For example, "*kawaii*" (cute) best describes the child-like character of the faces depicted by Murakami, sometimes scary, as in the case of work by Nara Yoshitomo (b. 1959), but constantly cute. *Kawaii* characters appear all over Japanese cartoons and anime from Hello Kitty to Pokemon, from Doraemon to TarePanda (Drooping Panda) and Anpanman (Bean Paste Bread Man). "*Yurukyara*" is another category which combines a sense of looseness and lethargy (*yurui*) with *kyara*, which stands for "characters." Coined by Miura Jun (b. 1958), a multitalented popular illustrator, this term conveys a sense of impotence, of sexual incapacity, which makes these characters embrace opportunism by default. Murakami Takashi explains *yurukyara* with the aid of traditional aesthetic categories, mimicking the language of nationalistic aestheticians who stressed the particularism of aesthetic discourses. He says,

> Like *wabi* and *sabi*, synonyms for Japanese aesthetic sensibilities, *yurui* evades ready translation. The best way to comprehend the term is to place it along the extended

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firewood. On the south side of the building, I have an open bamboo veranda with a holy water shelf at the west end. Toward the north and of the west wall, beyond a freestanding screen, there is a picture of Amida Buddha, with an image of Fugen alongside and a copy of the *Lotus Sutra* in front. At the east end of the room, some dried bracken serves as bed. South of the screen on the west side, a bamboo shelf suspended from the ceiling holds three leather-covered bamboo baskets, in which I keep excerpts from poetry collections and critical treatises, works on music, and religious tracts like *Collection of Essentials on Rebirth in the Pure Land*. A zither and a lute stand next to the shelf. The zither is of the folding variety; the handle of the lute is detachable. Such is the appearance of my rude temporary shelter." English translation by Helen Craig McCullough, *Classical Japanese Prose: An Anthology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 388.

> lineage of words such as *aware* (sensitivity or subjective emotion) and *okashi* (emotional attraction), which appeal to human emotion.[29]

These artists seem not to realize that by relying on the abused language of the hermeneutics of the nation they deprive their works of the global aspect that they want to infuse into their works. This might be due to the unresolved tension between universalism and particularism—a tension that might need a new vocabulary if it wants to escape the pitfalls of oversimplification. I am afraid I do not have a language to describe postmodern artistic phenomena aside from the language of hermeneutics. Therefore, I might not be able to make sense of non-sense without the proper non-sensical vocabulary. At the same time, I do not believe that the contemporary representatives of Japan's popular arts do possess such a language. In conclusion, I can only advance negative suggestions of what this aesthetics of the absence of meaning could be:

1) It cannot be an aesthetics of the strong subject, either "Japanese," or "Chinese," or "Korean"—it will have to pay attention to the diasporic elements of geographic and emotive configurations (gender studies, queer studies, lesbian studies, transnational studies, etc.). It will have to be an anti-aesthetics of resistance dictated by the social realities of the contemporary world. The supple elements of Japanese traditional aesthetics will need not be reshaped into categories, and should be kept as fluid as the migrations of people from the countryside to the city, from foreign countries to Japan, from Japan to foreign countries, and so on. Like *Fresh Kill*, it must be a gender bender. In other words, it cannot be exclusionary.

2) It cannot be theological—it will be a fierce attack on fundamentalisms of all types, including all kinds of churches and institutions working as categories. Examples of fundamentalism are bureaucratic democracies and legalistic democracies of the American type, or the imperial institution, or theocratic forms of governments called terrorism by other types of terrorists. This will be difficult and unpleasant since monarchies (including Roman Catholicism with which I sympathize from an aesthetic perspective in the etymological sense of the word) tend to offer so much aesthetic appeal to subjects in need of behavioral/ethical models (this last point applies to the Japanese monarchy more than to the English one, although the appeal factor is enormous in both monarchies).

3) It cannot be theoretically specific in the sense of embracing a theory at the expense of another. This is where hermeneutics as interpretation is still quite valid, although, eventually, after all

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[29] Takashi Murakami, "Earth in my Window," in Takashi Murakami, ed., *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*, p. 137.

interpretations are on the table, decisions will still need to be made. Japan can play a decisive role in this area, because of the fluidity of theoretical orientations based since antiquity on the acceptance of different epistemic systems (Shinto-Buddhist, Shinto-Taoist, Shinto-Confucian types of syncretism)--systems that do not operate as exclusionary categories such as Christianity, which explains the expulsion from Japan of the Portuguese and Spaniards during the period of national closure. However, Japan should make sure to avoid keeping all theoretical orientations in the guest room on the first floor, and keep living their lives in the secrecy of their study-room on the second floor. In other words, the *otaku* who is filled with information from the virtual world might want to leave his room for a while, and take a walk outside, so as to make the art of Superflat obsolete. At that point, we might learn to overcome once again our fears of confronting ourselves with a world of depth. Who knows? We might even be able to make deeper products that are appealing to the general public and that are, as a result, economically profitable. Life might become once again worth living.

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The Aesthetics of Japan as Self-References in Contemporary Art

Yuko Nakama

Although, ever since the Meiji Period, Japan has had repeated experience of art led by the western world, what is noticeable today is that contemporary arts in Japan are increasingly focusing on the subjects of Japanese aesthetics. This is one of the phenomena against the globalization of the arts nowadays which at the same time, in contents and processes, clearly differs from the *Otaku* culture, now world renown subculture of Japan, mainly animation and comics.

In this paper,[1] I discuss contemporary Japanese aesthetics through the recent works of Akio Suzuki (1941-), Yoshihiro Suda (1969 -), and Hiroshi Sugimoto (1948 -). These three artists not only respect the concept of modernism, namely the notion of time, geometrical nature, and the pursuit of purity. They have also constructed a new Japanese aesthetic of their own, by drawing upon the history of Buddhist art, traditional crafts and *Sado*, the ritual art of preparing tea.

Oto-date, an art method to assimilate oneself into nature

Suzuki's art of *oto-date* – a word coined by the artist himself – owes its origin to *no-date*, a term that describes the act of making and enjoying tea outdoors. Responding sensitively to nature, our ancestors sharpened their senses, namely to taste, see and hear their natural surroundings. It is not surprising that the aesthetic of *no-date* became a source of inspiration for Suzuki, who says, "I was so relieved when I realized that listening is, fundamentally, to 'assimilate oneself into nature'".[2] Suzuki's works bring together installations and sound to create 'Sound Art'. His recent works, such as *From One Bamboo* and *Bamboo Harp*, not only present us with the

[1] This paper is based on my presentation at the 5th Congress of Asian Society of Arts held in Kyoto in August, 2007.

[2] *"NOISELESS" - Akio Suzuki+Rolf Julius*, The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, 2007, p.7.

beauty of the natural form of bamboo, but also awaken us to its wider potential as an artistic medium as an instrument, like the *Shakuhachi,* a traditional Japanese bamboo flute.

In his *oto-date* 'Actions', Suzuki marks the place where he stands and listens with a sign depicting a pair of white, foot-shaped ears, modelled on the ears of 20th century composer, John Cage, who was also known to have been influenced by Zen-Buddism. Suzuki says that to find an echo in pure form is almost impossible; however, the fascination of discovering something is limitless.[3] As Bernd Schulz commented, "Suzuki's art works have undoubtedly contributed to the development of contemporary art, just as Fluxus, or Conceptual Arts and Minimalism, which play important roles for Sound Art. On the other hand, Suzuki's openness to sounds in nature is bound up with his meditative attitude….No one is like Suzuki who searches after the sound quality, which belongs to the atmosphere of the place, space and certain materials…, and at the same time, he does it with the certainty of himself harmonized with old collective experience as embodied in the temple architecture in Japan. The echo points Suzuki chooses are places of special perception, so to speak, the foci of the atmosphere, where the most intensive attention and calmness are integrated in the observer / listener."[4] Suzuki is searching for a way to find a purity of form as a modernist using plural senses; however, his efforts are not anti-traditional. Also in traditional Japanese music, as Schulz depicts, instrumental tones support the spatial perception of sounds while in the west they are organized under linear music developments.[5]

Homage to Space (figure 1), which formed part of the night exhibition *Noiseless* at the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, in 2007, consists of a sequence of *oto-date* plates, which gave us the impression of waves and clouds. The setting of a mirror among the plates also emphasized the continuity of the space. The materiality of the white concrete of *oto-date* plates is somewhat alien to the images, introducing a technique of contemporary avantgardism. However, the cherry blossoms outside the museum building and reflecting on the windows, also created the effect of *yozakura*, the Japanese tradition of appreciating cherry blossoms in the night.

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[3] *Ibid*., p.66.
[4] Bernd Schulz, Werfen und Folgen – Zum Klangkonzept von Akio Suzuki, in: *Akio Suzuki, „A" – Sounds Works*, Saarbrücken, 1998.
[5] *Ibid.*

Figure 1. Akio Suzuki, *Homage to Space*, 2007, portland cement, mirror.

Visitors to the *Noiseless* exhibition sat on the floor surrounding *Homage to Space*. There was no moving line typical of the western exhibition style, and it seemed like a re-presentation of *no-date*, where tea participants sat almost directly on the earth surrounding the tea master. Some of my seminar students of Ritsumeikan University collaborated with the museum in a project called *Another Space*, which allowed visitors to see Suzuki's works from outside, through the museum windows, providing an interactive and environmental perspective similar of *no-date*.

Traditional implications in the way of perceiving nature are also seen in Suzuki's *MITATE/The Meter to the Shumi* (2006) (figure 2). Here Suzuki employs his *oto-date* method in the artistic installation representing Buddhist cosmology, in which Mount Shumi towers up in the midst of the world. The faintly fragrant pine needles scattered around the mountains are reminiscent of *no-date*, since *Nanboroku*, the "bible" of tea, tells us that *no-date* was also called *fusubecha*, a word which originally came from the smokes produced by burning pine needles for boiling water for tea. The emerging smoke was seen from an aesthetic perspective.[6]

[6] Sokei Nanbo, *Nanboroku*, ed. Hisamatsu Shinichi, Kyoto, 1975, p.312f.

Figure 2. Akio Suzuki, *MITATE/The Meter to the Shumi*, 2006, concrete, pine needle.

In *MITATE/The Meter to the Shumi*, pyramid-shaped forms, different in height, are placed rhythmically, which conjours up the image of mountains and sea. Its geometrical composition reminds us of a waterless, dry landscape garden, *Karesansui*. *Karesansui* appeared in the genre of the Japanese garden in the Higashiyama Culture of the Muromachi Period (1392-1573) mainly owing to the influence of Zen. The innovation of *Karesansui* consisted in its simplification, its austereness and in the ingenuity with which it constructed space, a discernible turn away from the naturalistic waterpond-gardens. Mirei Shigemori, one of the best known historians of Japanese gardens, interpreted *Karesansui* as "eternal" and "modern", developed internally with an abstract, symbolistic and sur-natural character.[7]

The *mitate* of the title, *MITATE/Meter to Shumisen*, is a traditional Japanese aesthetic device whereby an object, while retaining certain resemblances to another thing, shifts our attention to its significance. Suzuki's art is to use the device of a *mitate* of *Karesansui* to bring back the significance of the traditional aesthetics within the contemporary approach of art.

The Aesthetics of Discovering

Yoshihiro Suda is an artist who transfers the Japanese aesthetic of crafts into the field of contemporary art. His works make us recognize that in Japan, we have basically not established the same hierarchy that exists

[7] Mirei Shigemori, *Karesansui*, Kyoto, 1965, pp.58-96, p.232.

between crafts and high arts in the west.

Suda's carvings of plants and flowers are so realistic that one sees them as 'living' pieces, although he is not just concerned with the concept of 'simulacrum', one of the main themes in modern aesthetics. The artist asks us to discover their subtle presence and recognize the space where they belong. Thus, the art magazine *Frieze*, published in London, sees Suda's subject as the "dramatic moment"[8] of discovery, and the *New York Times* describes his art as "philosophically suggestive installation".[9] His sculptures such as *Magnolia-Leaf* and *Magnolia Branch* unravel the contrary relationships between ordinary perception and discovery, nature and artifice, eternity and transience, leading to a new awareness of their existence in spatial and temporal perspectives.

The main subject in Suda's sculptures is *Sado*; in a very famous episode in the history of *Sado*, guests who were invited to take part in the tea ceremony by Sen No Rikyu (1521-1591), a well-known tea master, sought in vain for a flower which is usually put in a simple vase for the guests' appreciation. To their surprise, they found a beautiful camellia dropped in a hole dug under the eaves of the tea hut.[10] The episode sums up to the 'dramatic moment' of discovery.

Suda himself confessed that the concept of his works is based on the episode *Asagao no Chakai,* morning glory tea party, written in Soan Kusami's *Chawashigetsushu* in 1701.[11] According to the tea story, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598) a ruler of Japan who finally ended the Sengoku period (Warring State Period) was one time invited to be Rikyu's guest. Hideyoshi had anticipated an abundance of morning glories in the garden, but found only one sole flower in the *tokonoma,* a traditional Japanese alcove. Hideyoshi was deeply moved by its beauty and the subtlety of Sennorikyu's idea. Suda's representing of a wooden camellia and a wooden bamboo-like flower vase is clearly not only meant to decorate the limited space of the alcove: it can also be appreciated in the context of the history of *Sado,* evoking the aesthetics of simplication, purity and also of discovery.

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[8] Ronald Jones, "Yoshihiro Suda", in: *Frieze*, June-August, 2000.
[9] Ken Johnson, "ART IN REVIEW; Yoshihiro Suda", *The New York Times*, March 17, 2000.
[10] Tsutsui Hiroichi, *Cha no yu Kotohajime*, Tokyo, 1992, p.176f.
[11] Akiko Kasuya, "Once in a Lifetime:Yoshihiro Suda", in: *Three Individuals:Zon Ito, Hajime Imamura, Yoshihiro Suda*, The National Museum of Art, Osaka, 2006, p.50.

As in Suzuki's works, Suda's selected motif is itself often related intentionally to the tradition of Buddism. His *Sleeping Lotus* (figure 3) is a key work in this respect. The lotus is indeed a symbol of purity in Buddhism, used to decorate the pedestals, halos etc. of Buddist sculptures, and was an essential image in paintings of paradise. As we see in the *Kyouyouchi*, a famous pond at *Ryoanji* Temple in Kyoto, the temple gardens are mostly flowered by lotus.

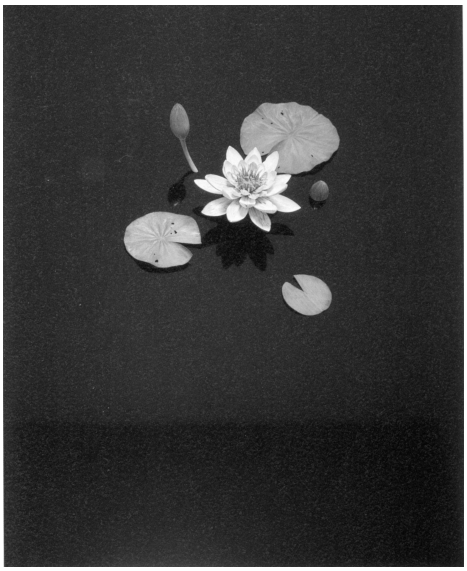

Figure 3. Yoshihiro Suda, *Sleeping Lotus*, 2002, painted on wood.

In the leaves of Suda's lotus even traces of parts eaten by insects are notable, which could be interpreted as an expression of the artist's sense of mortality (vanitas) and his philosophy of transience and eternity. The artist's craftmanship enables the materiality of wood to fuse in the entire image of a pond; however, at the same time, it is decomposed into the fragments of a flower, buds and leaves on a black tray, and this dialectic between the binary nature of the material and spiritual aspects of his art suggests Suda's works could be seen in the context of contemporary critical approach.

Suda's style indeed is not unrelated to globalized western art history. Pop art widened the object concept, and the discussion on 'original' and 'copy' is already a cliché in western modernism. Moreover, the lotus as a motif evokes an association with Claude Monet's *Water Lilies*. In fact, at one of his exhibitions,[12] Suda put his own sculpture intentionally alongside

[12] *Mizu no Nagare, Mizu no Kasanari* exhibition at Asahi Beer Oyamazaki Villa Museum, Kyoto, 2002. *Three Individuals: Zon Ito, Hajime Imamura, Yoshihiro Suda* exhibition, The National Museum of Art, Osaka, 2006.

Monet's paintings. In *Sleeping Lotus,* the artist's viewpoint was lowered almost as far as the water surface, reminiscent of the later paintings in Monet's *Water Lilies* series. Monet's intention to focus on the water and Suda's top-down perspectives seem to have a common philosophy in the way of seeing, so that painting and sculpture can be integrated into a single, unique installation.

The fundamental difference between the two works, however, can be revealed in their notions of time. Monet's *Water lilies* shows the 'emerging' of the present, in the linear running time of past, present and future. Suda's *Sleeping Lotus*, on the other hand, shows the 'solidification' of the present, which leads to the ultimate stillness of time and space, i.e. eternity. The parallel exhibition of *Water Lilies* emphasizes, therefore, that in *Sleeping Lotus* the self-reference is to Japanese aesthetics in contrast to the modern aesthetics of the west.

Time's Arrow or transforming the oldest into the newest

Hiroshi Sugimoto once wrote that for him the purpose of artistic processes is to trace time, to recall where we came from and how we were born.[13] This issue of the notion of time was presented in his photography collection and essay *L'Histoire de l'Histoire* published in 2004. He also dealt with the issue earlier, for example in his *Seascape* series. The various seas on earth show the same deceptively simple composition. The artist focuses on his objects from the same point of view to extinguish the differences between the images. His purpose is to assimilate the meaning of sea, returning all seas to their fundamental state. Kerry Brougher, who organized Sugimoto's one man show at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington states that, "Through the nearly abstract, almost sacred geometric composition and the repetition of this yin-yang relationship from image to image, from ocean to ocean around the world, the sea is returned to a kind of primordial state untouched by humankind."[14] Brougher's comment confirms that the return to 'primordial' is achieved nothing but by the techniques of modernism, namely by abstract, geometric composition and repetition.

The *Conceptual Forms* series of 2004 comprises photographic works of "stereometric exemplars" fabricated in Germany in the 19th and 20th centuries. These mathematical models are sculptural renderings of

[13] Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Koke no musumade - Time Exposed*, Tokyo, 2005, p.46.
[14] Kerry Brougher, "Impossible Photography", in: K.Brougher, D.Eliott, *Hiroshi Sugimoto*, Washington, Tokyo, 2005, p.23.

trigonometric functions, created to show the dynamics of Industrial Revolution-age machinery.[15] Sugimoto acknowledged the influence of dadaist Marcel Duchamp, who focused on mathematical concepts and the artistic potentialities of machines in his masterpiece *The Large Glass* (1915-23), not to mention various mathematical notations left in his *Green Box* (1934).[16] In the history of western art, the mathematical and geometrical concern has been fundamental, which was symbolized specifically in works such as Albrecht Düres's *Melencolia I* of 1514.

Sugimoto's *Conceptual Forms* series can be characterized, moreover, as a representation of the modernism in sculpture starting from Constantin Brancusi and his successors, who aimed to reduce forms to simplicity. In *Conceptual Forms* the geometric and somewhat biomorphic forms are balanced in a unity, and their form-beauty is successfully emphasized through the clear contrast between the white (forms) and black (background) actualized by the photographic technique.

However, Sugimoto's form creations are not unrelated to a traditional viewpoint. One of his sources of inspiration was the Tenpyo period (710-794), seen, for example, in the Miniature Pagoda at Horyuji temple in Nara. Sugimoto wonders at the beauty of the curved lines of the 3-storied pagoda and the powerful impression they make.[17] He once commented on the attractiveness of the architecture of the Tenpyo and Heian Period (794-1184) as follows: "I much prefer buildings that reflect Japanese sensibilities, like our fondness for dignified, subtle beauty against a background of delicateness."[18]

Bruno Taut, a German architect who made an important contribution to the development of 20th century architecture, once said that what western architecture learned from Japan was an "idealized concept of purity, clarity, simplicity and sincerity towards natural materials."[19] He recognized *Katsurarikyu*, a villa in Kyoto built for an imperial family in the late 17th century, as an embodiment of "modernity" as well as "the beauty of the infinity".[20] Taut was a typical modernist who found the common matrix of

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[15] *Ibid.,* p.273.
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] Sugimoto, *op.cit.*, p.87.
[18] Naohiko Hino, "Interview with Sugimoto Hiroshi:Self-appointed inheritor of orthodox modernism", in: *Art iT*, Tokyo, Fall/Winter 2005, p.48.
[19] Bruno Taut, *Nihon Bi No Saihakken*, Tokyo, 2004 (First Edition, 1939), p.9.
[20] *Ibid*., pp.139-160.

the modern in both cultures.[21] So the modernist Sugimoto like Taut, sees simple and pure forms in certain architecture in the past history of Japan, and seems to have found a self-presence in such 'modernism' not experienced by the west — a modernism based on another idea of now-time, as unchangeable identity.

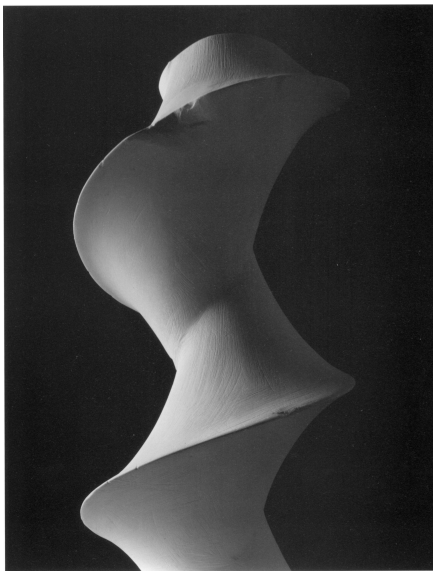

Figure 4. Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Mathematical Form: Surface 0003, Dini's surface: a surface of constant negative curvature obtained by twisting a pseudosphere*, 2004, gelatin silver print.

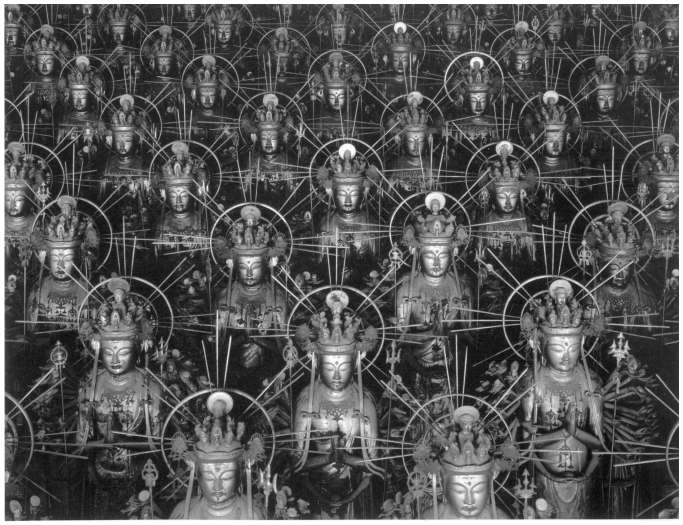

Figure 5. Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Sea of Buddha*, 1995, gelatin silver print, 48 prints.

[21] Taut's reception of the imperial architecture, *Katsurarikyu* as 'modern' is welcomed by Japanese internationalists, in order to save modernism from the claims of conservative nationalism. (Isozaki Arata, *Kenchiku ni okeru 'Nihonteki na mono'*, Tokyo, 2003/ Isozaki Arata, Japan-ness in Architecture, translated by Sabu Kohso, 2006)

Sea of Buddah (1995) (figure 5) was said to have been stimulated by the problem of minimal and conceptual art in 1970s of how to visualize abstract concepts.[22] The 1001 figures of "Thousand-Armed Merciful Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara" completed in 1164 comprise one of the largest-scale representations of the Buddhist afterlife, the Pure Land Western Paradise. In the rigid line-up of these figures, we see again the artist's enthusiasm for the geometrical abstract which in itself has the potential to represent eternity — an eternity, needless to say, which is apparent in 'here and now'.[23]

These photographic works also reflect another aesthetic of Japan, that is to say, the admiration for shadows and darkness. Sugimoto chose to take these photos in the early morning, around 5:30, when the gold of the figures shines most in the morning sun and mingles with the shadows. The aesthetic of shadows is derived from the Japanese liking for vagueness, perhaps best articulated by the eminent Japanese novelist, Junichiro Tanizaki in his essay, *In Praise of Shadows* (1933, 1934).

> Artisans of old, when they finished their works in lacquer and decorated them in sparkling patterns, must surely have had in mind dark rooms and sought to turn to good effect what feeble light there was. Their extravagant use of gold, too, I should imagine, came of understanding how it gleams forth from out of the darkness and reflects the lamplight.
>
> Lacquerware decorated in gold is not something to be seen in a brilliant light, to be taken in at a single glance; it should be left in the dark, a part here and a part there picked up by a faint light. Its florid patterns recede into the darkness, conjuring in their stead an inexpressible aura of depth and mystery, of overtones but partly suggested.[24]

The aesthetic of shadows is the main subject of Sugimoto's *Pine trees* (2001). This photographic work is related to Noh, the Japanese traditional drama incorporating music and dance, developed to its present form by Kanami (1333-1384) and Zeami (1363-1443). The pine tree is the motif painted on the Kagami-ita, the board that decorates the face of a Noh stage. The work is an example of the so-called 'ink photography' that Sugimoto produced after *Pine Forest Screens* of Hasegawa Tohaku (1539-1610). This

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[22] Brougher, Elliott, *op.cit.*, p.163.
[23] cf. Shuichi Kato, *Nihon Bunka ni okeru Jikan to Kukan,* Tokyo, 2007. Kato characterizes Japanese culture as the culture of 'now' and 'here'.
[24] Junichiro Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, trans. Thomas J. Harper, Edward G. Seidensticker, London, 2001, p.23f.

masterpiece in the late 16th century depicted pine trees in the morning mist. It is said that Tohaku's free touch attained the japanization of ink painting which originated as a genre in China, and which flourished in Japan in the Muromachi Period. Sugimoto's ink photography reminds us of the time of Tohaku when an ink screen painting would have been seen by lamplight or candlelight. Candlelit Noh was actually performed at Sugimoto's Noh installation in New York.

In *In Praise of Shadow* (1999), a condensed time image of a flaming candle in shadow till it burns out, Sugimoto drew direct inspiration from Tanizaki's work of the same name. The presence of the flaming candle was fixed on to a film plate, and the shadow of the film plate was then fixed simultaneously on to a wall, a process that signifies the essence of Sugimoto's art philosophy, rendering eternity in the present tense through fixation and condensation. This philosophy of time and space has been developed in his former works such as *Time's Arrow* and *Kegon Waterfall*.

The art object *Time's Arrow* (1987) (figure 6) which, as mentioned above, appears on the front cover of the essay *L'Histoire de l'Histoire*, expresses Sugimoto's unique philosophy and symbolizes his artistic intention to unify traditional Japanese craft and contemporary photography. A photo of the sea, just like *Seascape*, his image of the origin of human beings, is inserted in a fragment of a Buddhist reliquary from the Kamakura period (1185-1333). Sugimoto observes, "A time arrow shoots from the primordial sea through a Kamakura period frame straight at your eye."[25] To reveal this notion of time he is trying to establish a link between the time we are living in and the age in which our ancestors lived. Not only the time span of past and present are bound together, but the divinity of the past is transferred to the present.

[25] Hiroshi Sugimoto, *L'Histoire de l'Histoire*, Tokyo, 2004, p.18.

Figure 6. Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Time's Arrow*, 1987 (*Seascape*, 1980/reliquary fragment, 13th Century), gelatin silver print, gilded bronze.

A photographic work, *Kegon Waterfall* (1977) focused on a waterfall in Nikko, which has been a symbol of deities since ancient times. The inspiration to create this work came from *Nachi Waterfall* (figure 7) painted in the middle of the Kamakura Period, at the end of the 13th century. This is an exceptional work within the *Suijyakuzu* genre of paintings, which succeeds in showing sacredness itself by emphasizing the deity=nature, instead of depicting holy shrines in detail in the landscapes.[26] Sugimoto's admiration for this painting was enhanced by its critique by André Marlaux. This world-renowned writer and the French Minister of Culture in the 1960s, saw the painting during his visit to Japan in 1958 and it had a profound impact on him. Marlaux considers this figure of waterfall as the *signe* of immobility and non-temporality. He says that "The winter landscape of Sesshu (Zen monk, Water ink painter, 1420-1506) and also *Nachi Waterfall* are equal in stabilizing the spirit of eternity" and he continues, "French Impressionists paintings caught the light of the moment; however, Japanese water ink paintings try to reach the eternity of *signe.* These paintings address the conversation of the moment and eternity without any confrontation…the Japanese artist tries to take the *signe* out of the waterfall, and through this action he discovers the *signe*, and then he painted the platonic idea of waterfall". Marlaux concludes that for the

[26] Shinichi Miyajima, Nachitakizu Kaisetsu, in:*Nihonbijyutuzenshu*, vol.9. Tokyo, 1993, p.180.

Japanese artist, the aim is not to compose unity as Cezanne does, but to attain unity, and thus the Cezanne's concern with volume is thoroughly denied.[27]

The effectiveness of this art concept is remarkable in Sugimoto's earlier work, the *Theater* series. His camera shutter was fixed at a wide-open aperture for the duration of a movie. The photo plays a role in condensing the flow of time technically, and this also has the effect of stabilizing time. As a result, a mysterious eternity emerges in the form of a shining hallucination. Brougher states that, "The screen holds within its stark whiteness an entire film, an entire narrative, with characters and sets, all absorbed into a luminous rectangle frozen for all time. The cinema, Sugimoto seems to suggest, is not an extension of photography, but it is bound up with a photographic vision; it is a way of perceiving a world already at work before the development of cinema, even before the invention of photography." [28] This view summarizes Sugimoto's time concept , 'frozen for all time', an indispensable element for his vision of the world connected with his own history and the history of all human kind.

"A Postmodern experienced pre-postmodern Modernist"

In Japanese modern art, traditional art and culture are inherited by different ways and methods. Even *Gutai,* the avantgarde group after the Second World War led by Jiro Yoshihara is no exception. Yoshihara's *White Circle* (1970), for example, is often described as a form reminiscent of the *Enso*, a circle painted in ink by Zen Buddhists as a symbol of enlightment. *Gutai* was an art movement parallel to the post-war Abstract Expressionism in the USA, which was influenced by transcendental thinking and partly also by Zen and Japanese calligraphy, as in Mark Tobey's *White Writings*.

However, it is now, in the postmodern period, that Japanese artists seem especially conscious of Japanese traditional culture, from Buddhist arts to Zen, from *Karesansu*i to *Sado*. As already mentioned, the Japanese artists discussed here have experienced the international style of modernism or avantgardism, and have subsequently pursued 'modernity', which is, however, at the same time 'traditional' and a phenomenon peculiar to our history. Such a view of history is indeed quite different from that of the west, where 'modern' has always been centered on 'innovation' and seen as

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[27] André Marlaux, Nihon Kuuso Bijyukan,trans. Tadao Takemoto, *Geijyutu Shincho*, Tokyo, 1977, pp.170-187.
[28] Brougher, Elliott, *op.cit.*, p.27.

the anti-thesis of 'tradition'.

These specific circumstances are what characterize the post-modern era of Japanese art. As we have seen, Suzuki's *MITATE/The Meter to the Shumi* is finally a form of self-reflection — a way to arrive at consciousness of himself and the world to which we belong. He sees *Karesansui* as a space which reflects "eternal now", so that this traditional form of Japanese garden art has existed as 'eternal' and 'modern'. This is clearly a different perspective from that seen in David Hockney's photocollage, *Sitting in the Zen Garden at the Ryoanji Temple, Kyoto* (1983); though using the same motif of *Karesansui,* his collage aimed to discover the stimulating fragmental and complex perceptions of time and space of the mysterious garden. Hockney is one of those artists who, after the Impressionist, have explored the 'fragmentality' of perspective of western modernism.

Japanese artists now are pursuing a culture of their own, not as a negative atavistic return to the past. Sugimoto describes himself as a "Postmodern experienced pre-postmodern modernist" or "Self-appointed inheritor of orthodox modernism".[29] What we see here, therefore, as I discussed, is the self-reference of the aesthetics of Japan.

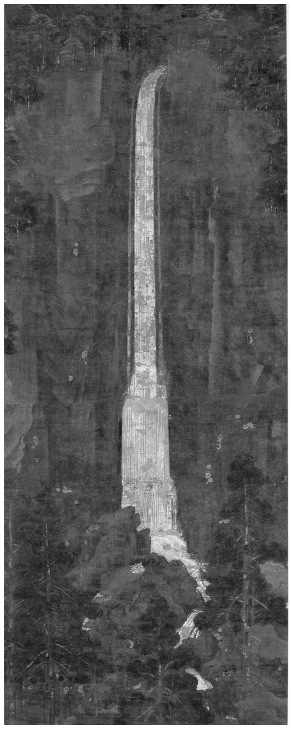

Figure 7. *Nachi Waterfall*, 13th Century, colour on silk.

[29] Hino, *op.cit.*,p.42,45. Sugimoto explains further: "The modernist element in Japanese-style architecture is something I'm personally interested in keeping alive. Because things really have taken a turn for the worse since postmodernism".

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©Hiroshi Sugimoto/Courtesy of Gallery Koyanagi (fig.4－6)

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Letters on Images: Concerning Japanese Art

Haruhiko Fujita

Since calligraphy and painting share many of the same materials and techniques, the relationship between the two forms of art or writing and painting has always been a close one in China and its neighboring countries where Chinese characters have long been used. The earliest examples of Chinese calligraphy in a broad sense of the word are writings found on the so-called "oracle bones," turtle shells, cattle scapula or some other animal bones used for divination during the Shang dynasty (16-11th centuries BC), when the early development of systematic writing in China started. Along with "oracle bones," inscriptions on bronze artifacts are the first significant Chinese characters. Over the following two thousand years, five major script types – seal script (zhuanshu), clerical script (lishu), standard script (kaishu), running script (xingshu), and cursive script (caoshu) – developed.

It was, however, in the 9th century AD when a clear description about this close relationship was made in Zhang Yanyuan's *Record of Famous Painters of All the Dynasties*, as Gao Jianping points out in "The Relationship Between Writing and Painting in Ancient China" published in the *International Yearbook of Aesthetics*, Volume 11 (2007). In this paper, he discusses that most of the advocates of a Chinese popular saying "writing and painting share the same origin" are painters and critics and historians of painting. He asserts that the connections between writing and painting were not naturally formed, but deliberately made in order to establish a theory of painting by the ancient Chinese. After referring to E. H. Gombrich's claim that painting's breakaway from writing is an indication of progress in painting, he concludes as follows: "In ancient China, on the contrary, a sense of brushwork developed in writing was transplanted into the field of painting and promoted a real revolution in this art."[1]

Japan is a country which introduced not only Chinese writing system but also Chinese arts of brush and ink. Therefore, some Japanese artists, art critics/historians, and art itself may also stand on the same idea with

[1] Gao Jianping, "The Relationship Between Writing and Painting in Ancient China," *International Yearbook of Aesthetics*, Volume 11, 2007, pp. 88-110.

Chinese that "writing and painting share the same origin." As for Japanese art, however, it is more proper to say that "writing and painting share the same space." By propounding this new theory, I would like to show three aspects of Japanese art. First of all, if we think about some pieces of art which are more proper to Japan and could be more clearly distinguished from Chinese art, writing and painting share the same space rather than the same origin. Secondly, this aspect was formed as early as the 9th-12th centuries, when the Chinese idea of "writing and painting share the same origin" was formulated. Finally, I would like to show that "writing and painting share the same space" became unique sensibility in Japanese culture as a whole, not limited to a particular age or a particular realm of art. Though not clearly asserted, "writing and painting share the same space" from smaller pieces of art to larger views of landscape.

Japanese calligraphy had been under the strong influence of Chinese calligraphy, Wang Xizhi (c.303-c.361) being the most esteemed calligrapher even in Japan in its early years. It was during the Heian period (794-1195) when Japanese calligraphers developed their own styles intrinsic to Japan. It was also the time when the Japanese unique phonograms, *katakana* and *hiragana* were developed. Particularly with the latter, Japanese people for the first time became able to freely express their own thinking, feeling, and poetic mind in written forms. As Gao pointed out in his aforementioned paper, character-writing means not only what is being written about but also how it is written. Calligraphy is not writing in general but beautiful writing as an art. From this point of view, he reached his conclusion that a sense of brushwork promoted a real revolution in Chinese painting. It is also partly true in Japanese painting as well. To fully understand the meaning of a revolution in Japanese art, however, we need another point of view, "how it is poetically written." Poetry is also touched upon by Gao, but very briefly in his paper.

As for the origin of Chinese saying "writing and painting share the same origin" and its development in art, there is an interesting difference of viewpoints between Gao and myself.[2] It could be a difference between Chinese and Japan arts in general. In my case, another idea which relates poetry and painting is also very important. An 11th century poet, Su Shih (1036-1101) praised the poet-painter Wang Wei (701-761) with the following lines, "Savoring Wang's poetry is (like having) a painting in a poem. Looking at Wang's painting is (like having) a poem in a painting."

[2] Fujita Haruhiko, "Genesis of Kana and its Relationship with Japanese Arts and Nature," *INFO BOOK, XVIIth INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF AESTHETICS*, Ankara, 2007, pp. 85-86.

Then, it was also said that "Poetry is painting without form, and painting is poetry with form." "Painting is in poetry and poetry is in painting" as well as "Three perfections in poetry, calligraphy, and painting" were ideas also shared by Japanese literati painters in the Edo period (1600-1867) at the latest. Although based on the almost same ideas with Chinese which relate poetry, calligraphy, and painting, Japanese art rapidly developed through a different course as soon as the relationship between two cultures was established. In this paper, I would like to show the cultural backgrounds and process of this early development as well as a uniquely Japanese sense of art and its historical significance which might be related to some aspects of contemporary art and culture.

1. ANTHOLOGIES OF JAPANESE AND CHINESE POEMS

To trace the development of Japanese tradition of two artistic writings, namely poetry and calligraphy, the genealogy of collections of Japanese and Chinese poems compiled in Japan is very important. Poetry was a center of everyday life for aristocrat and intellectual in the Heian period. The collections of poems and their hand copies are essential materials for the study of poetry and calligraphy, as well as painting in the case of illuminated manuscripts.

The *Kaifūsō* is the oldest anthology of *kanshi*, Chinese poetry written by Japanese poets who learnt *kanji*, Chinese characters, and *kanbun*, Chinese texts. It was compiled in 751 AD, some years before completion of the *Man'yōshū*, the oldest extant anthology of *waka*, Japanese poetry written in Japanese. The compiler of the *Kaifūsō* is unknown. Though historically important, the poems included in the anthology are largely nothing more than imitations to Chinese poetry.

The oldest extant anthology of Japanese poetry, *Man'yō-shū*, contains 4,516 *waka* poems. Though the final date of completion is unknown, its last and most recent poem is dated New Year's Day of the old Japanese year corresponding to 759 AD. Mainly compiled by Ōtomo-no-Yakamochi (718-785), it contains a large variety of poems written by people of almost all social classes, from exalted emperor to commoner levy, recruited soldier. The *Man'yō-shū* literally meant the "Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves." It is written with Chinese characters to represent sounds rather than meaning. It was afterwards called *man'yo-gana*.

Man'yo-gana, the writing system used in the *Man'yō-shū*, are set of unmodified Chinese characters used as phonetic symbols to represent

Japanese syllables. Most attempts to write Japanese, a totally different language from Chinese, prior to the Heian period, fall into the category of *man'yo-gana*. Though first limited to the representation of proper nouns such as place or personal names, it was later used to write phrases, sentences, and verses as well.

By the 9th century, the Japanese has more or less completed a method of writing the sounds of their own language with phonetic symbols called *kana*. "Ka" meant "temporary, borrowed, or informal," "na" being "name or writing." To write the sounds of their own language, they chose certain Chinese characters, *kanji*, whose pronunciation approximated Japanese syllables, mostly disregarding their ideographic meanings. Though looked very complicated because it was outwardly *kanji*, *man'yo-gana* was the earliest and most basic *kana*, "ga" being a voiced consonant of "ka." Although most of the *kana* for Japanese syllabic writing, were based on *kanji* simplified in ways that the Chinese themselves had taken in their *sōsho* (*caoshu*, cursive script), some were radically changed, stroke very much simplified. This kind of *kana* syllabary written in flowing cursive script was afterwards called *hiragana*, which meant "commonly used" *kana*.

There is another form of *kana* script, called *katakana*. It meant "fragmentary or partial" *kana*, its form being angular, using only a part of a Chinese *kaisho* (*kaishu*, standard script) character, or in a sense a part of *man'yogana*. While *hiragana* had a rounded shape because it was made to increase the speed of writing, *katakana* got an angular shape because it was made to be used along with the main lines of Chinese writing, and in harmony with their angular shapes. While *hiragana* was used, not only commonly but also perhaps more artistically, *katakana*'s use was relatively limited. *Katakana* was used in supplemental positions to main texts in *kanji*. The fact it was used in such a way and still being used to transcribe the sounds of foreign words may show its foreign or auxiliary position. Therefore, it is generally admitted that *hiragana*, rather than *katakana*, represents the more authentic aesthetics of Japanese writing. Some may even claim that *hiragana* is an essence of Japanese aesthetics.

The *Kokin-shū* or *Kokin-waka-shū*, "Collection of Japanese Poems from Ancient and Modern Times," completed about 905, was the first in a series of anthologies of native verse compiled by royal command. Among more than 30 existing hand-copies of the *Kokin-waka-shū*, the "Gen'ei-bon" of 1120 is the oldest manuscript to contain all twenty volumes. Its pages are composed of a variety of "ryōshi," specially made or selected, and

decorated papers for calligraphy. Those papers are backed with various kinds of gold leaf and silver spangles. Its calligraphy is presumed to be that of Fujiwara-no-Sadazane, a great-grandson of Fujiwara-no-Yukinari (972-1027) who was a renowned calligrapher of the mid-Heian period. It is mostly written in *hiragana*. The use of *kanji* is very limited. Approximately 400 sheets of "ryōshi" are used.

The *Wakan-rōei-shū*, "Collection of Japanese and Chinese Poems for Singing," was compiled around 1012-13 by Fujiwara-no-Kintō (966-1040/41). It contains 588 couplets by Chinese and Japanese poets, and 216 Japanese *tanka*, 31-syllable *waka*, by Japanese poets. Divided into two books, one on the four seasons, the other being "miscellaneous," the *Wakan-rōei-shū* is sub-classified by common topics. Within the same subjects such as wind or clouds, Chinese couplets are alternated with Japanese *tanka*. While the former are written in *kanji*, Chinese characters, the latter are mostly in Japanese *hiragana* with much less numbers of *kanji*. Therefore, the *Wakan-rōei-shū*, which was repeatedly reproduced during the Heian period, was an elegant competition between Chinese and Japanese poems as well as Chinese ideograms *kanji* and Japanese phonograms *kana*.

The competition was of course a friendly one or even a Japanese homage to Chinese culture. The poems included in the *Wakan-rōei-shū* were widely memorized, and some of them repeatedly alluded to in novels, plays, and even in popular literature of the Edo period. It was used as a text for teaching composition, particularly of Chinese verse, and as a copybook for calligraphy practice. In the *Wakan-rōei-shū* "detchō-bon" version, its calligraphy being attributed to Fujiwara-no-Yukinari, various Chinese papers, *karakami* are used. Chinese poems are written in Chinese characters, and Japanese poem are dominantly in Japanese *hiragana* (Figure 1).

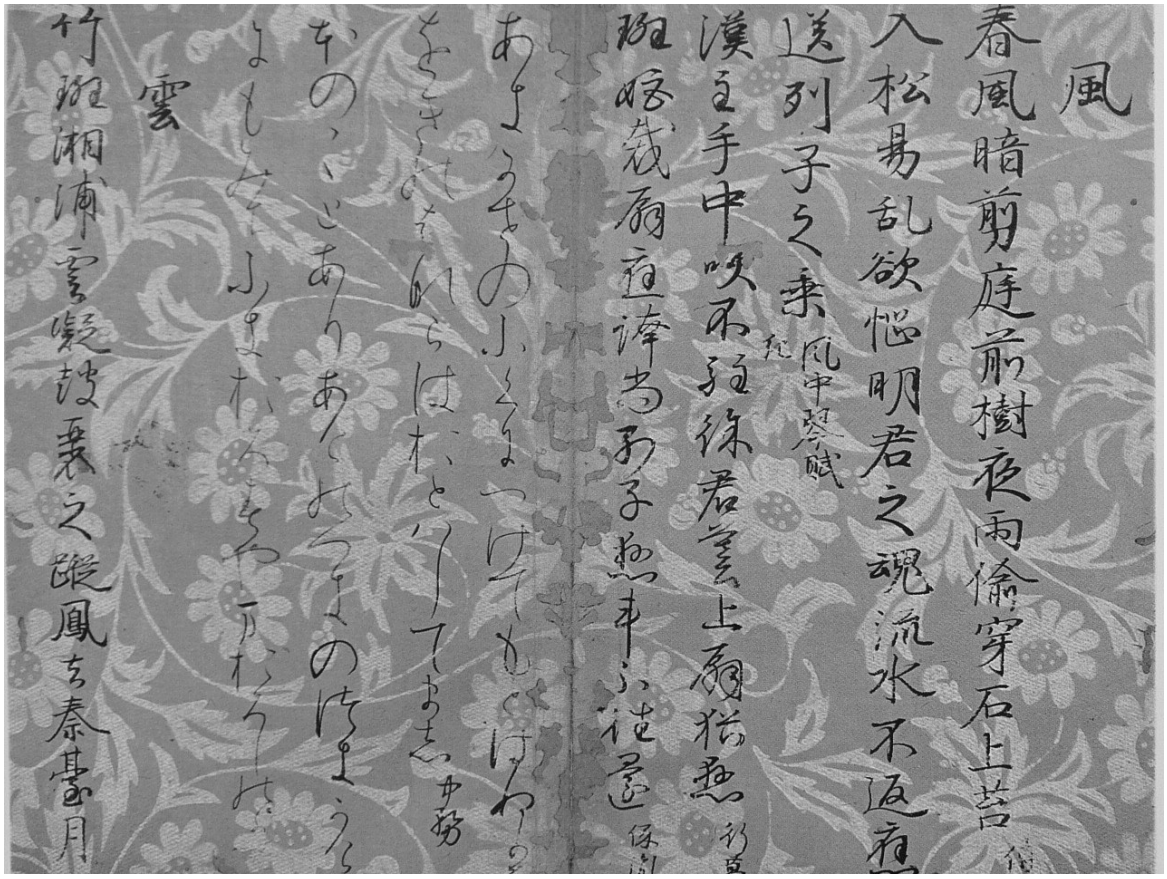

Figure 1. Collection of Japanese and Chinese Poems for Singing, *Wakan Rōei-shu*, "Detchō-bon" version, early 11th century. Chinese poem in Chinese characters (right) and Japanese poem in Japanese *kana* (left), written on a Chinese paper.

Around the time when the *Kokin-waka-shū* "Gen'ei-bon" version was produced (1120), the *Nishi-honganji Sanjūrokunin-shū*, "Anthology of Thirty-Six Poets" was made. The major part of this illuminated poetry book is housed at the Nishi-honganji temple of Kyoto. The anthology *Sanjūrokunin-shū* itself was compiled by Fujiwara-no-Kintō who also compiled the *Wakan-rōei-shū*. The poems are written mostly in cursive *hiragana* on sheets of fine papers "ryōshi," each differently decorated. The decorations of the paper include brown, red, blue, and yellow colors; with delicate underdrawings of grasses, flowers, branches, leaves, and birds; as well as gold and silver leaf in the form of small squares "kirihaku," hair-like threads "noge," or tiny dots "sunago."

Among various papers used for the *Nishi-honganji Sanjūrokunin-shū* are white and colored *karakami* imported from China, *michinoku-gami* produced in northern Japan, and *kamiya-gami* made in Kyoto where most of these illuminated poetry books were produced. We can find that some very similar papers are used both in the *Nishi-honganji Sanjūrokunin-shū* and the *Kokin-waka-shū* "Gen'ei-bon" version. In the former, however, various

special techniques difficult to be found any other books are used. Various calligraphers involved in the completion of the *Nishi-honganj Sanjūrokunin-shū*. Some spreads of pages are not single sheets of paper but collaged papers combining various sheets, called "tsugigami." They are also dyed in beautiful colors and sumptuously decorated. Some poems are written in a casual but expressive ways, not necessarily starting from the top of the collaged paper (Figure 2). This style of writing is called "chirashigaki" which literally means "scattered writing." With these unique characteristics, painstakingly elaborate drawings and decorations, the *Nishi-honganji Sanjūrokunin-shū* is a culmination of Japanese art in the Heian period.

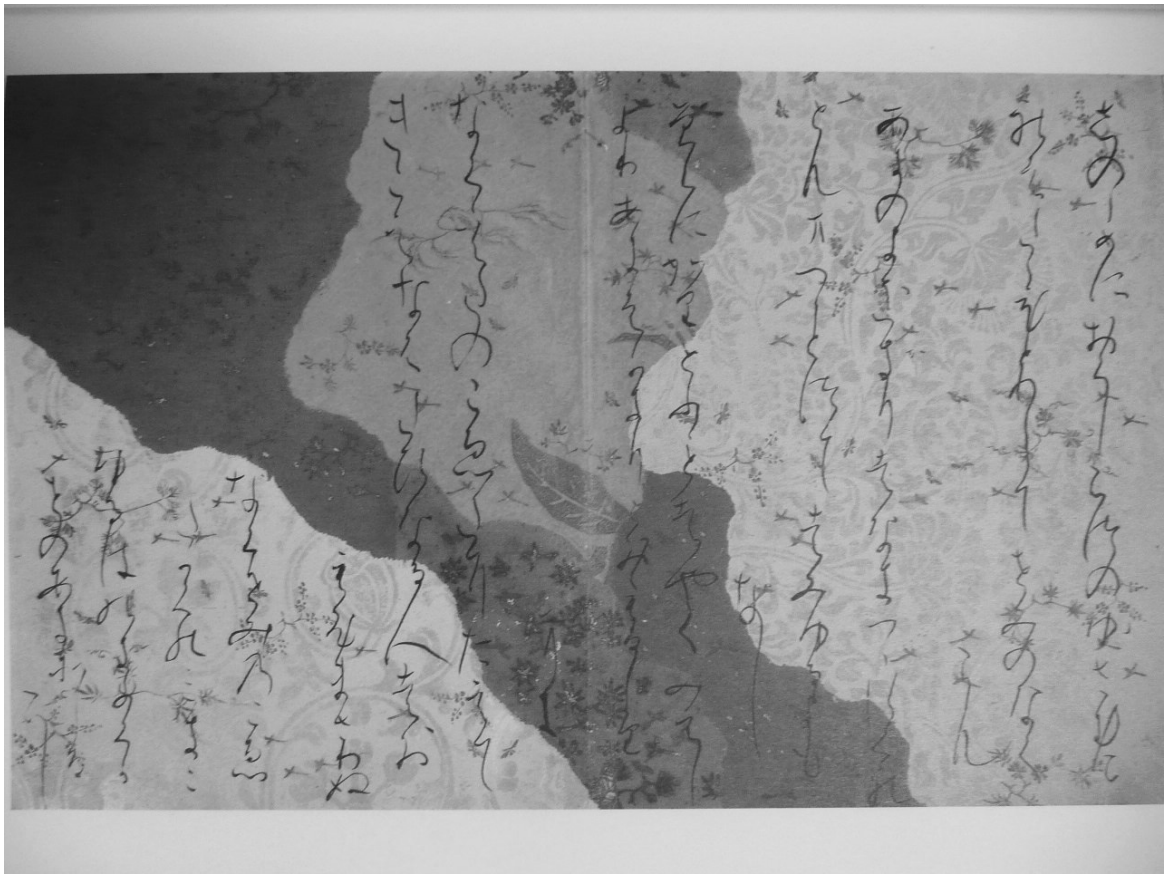

Figure 2. Anthology of Thirty-six Poets, *Sanjūrokunin-shū*, Nishi-honganji, Kyoto, early 12th century. Japanese poems in Japanese *kana* written on a *ryoshi*, composed from Japanese and Chinese papers.

2. GENJI-MONOGATARI-EMAKI AND THE TALE OF GENJI

It was also around 1120 when the best and oldest extant *Genji-monogatari-emaki* was produced. It is general term for hand scrolls portraying scenes from the 11th century novel Tale of Genji, *Genji-monogatari*, written by a court lady, Murasaki Shikibu or the Lady Murasaki. She wrote this novel

slightly more than a hundred years before the oldest *Genji-monogatari-emaki* in existence. The earliest and finest pieces of this painting scroll exist only in sections in the Tokugawa Art Museum of Nagoya and the Gōtō Art Museum of Tokyo, with a few additional fragments in some other collections.

The "Tokugawa-Gōtō-bon" *Genji-monogatari-emaki* contains illustrated scenes from the Tale of Genji together with cursive and continuous *hiragana* letters in its text sections. The use of Chinese characters, *kanji*, is extremely limited. These letters are written over decorated papers (Figure 3). It is asserted that even these "ryōshi" ornaments such as gold and silver leaves or small figures like crests or butterflies for these text sections suggest their relationship with the story of each chapter.[3] The scenes chosen for illustrations are generally static, depicting not dramatic events themselves but the moments just before or after them. The characters depicted seem to pause to contemplate and possibly compose poems expressing their sentiments. This subdued lyricism is very much in keeping with the spirit of the novel and with the artistic sensibilities of the courtly society where the author lived.

[3] Egami Yasushi, *Ryōshi Sōshoku and Haku Chirashi*, Nihon-no-Bijutsu, No.397, Shibundo, Tokyo, 1999, pp.55-62.

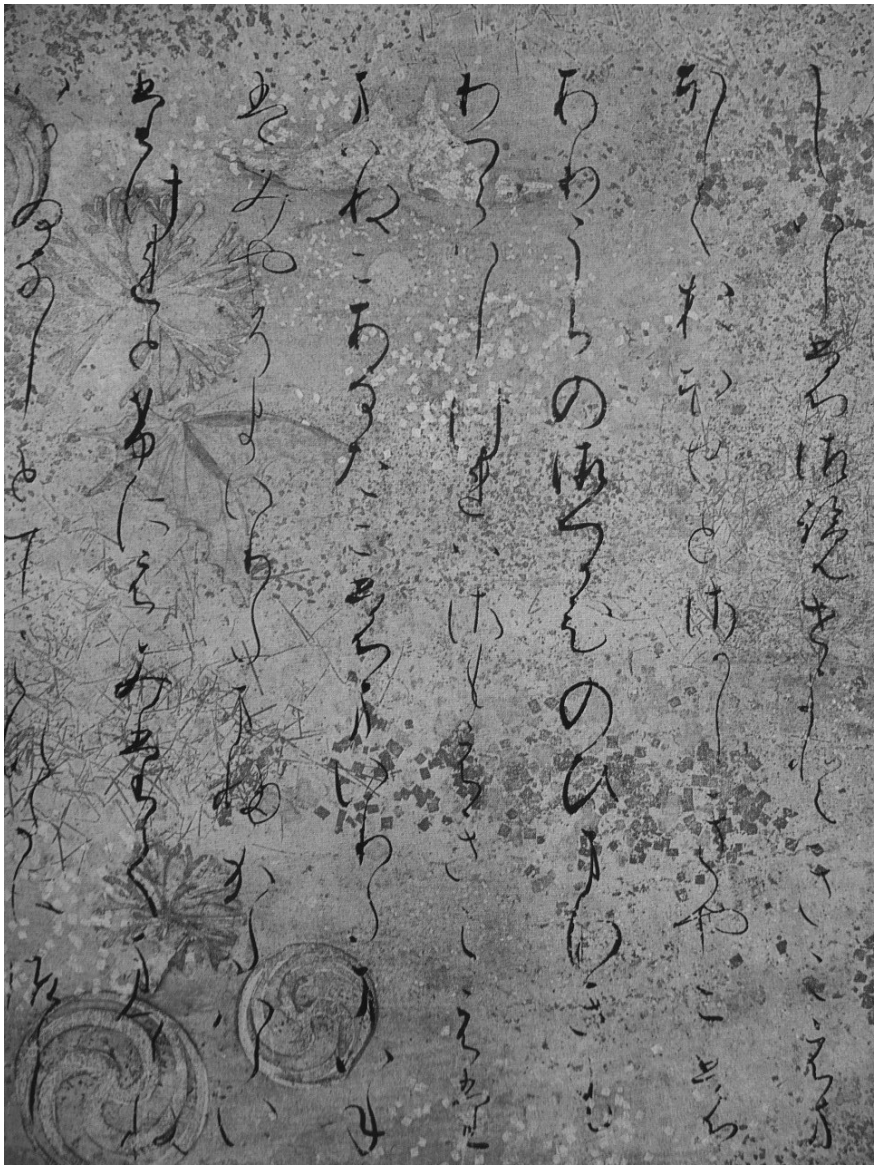

Figure 3. *Genji-monogatari-emaki*, Text "Minori", "Tokugawa-Gōtō-bon," early 12th century.

Even in the novel Tale of Genji, *Genji-monogatari* itself, this special taste for poetry, calligraphy, and painting, as well as papers are described. The tale concentrates on Hikaru-Genji's romantic life and describes various customs of the courtly society of the Heian period. As for these aspects, Chapter 32 "Umegae" describing a few months from New Year's of Genji's 39th year, is very interesting and important for this study:

> "We live in a degenerate age," said Genji. "Almost nothing but the "ladies' hand" seems really good. In that we do excel. The old styles have a sameness about them. They seem to have followed the copybooks and allowed little room for original talent. We have been blessed in our own day with large numbers of fine calligraphers. Back when I

> was myself a student of "ladies' hand" I put together a rather distinguished collection."[4]

Because it was thought that women did not need to learn Chinese characters, *kanji*, they wrote most texts in *hiragana*. It was called "on'na-de" which literally meant "women's hand" and translated "ladies' hand" in the above cited E. G. Seidensticker's translation. However, like Genji, men also learned and used *hiragana* in daily life. It was also used in Japanese poetry, *waka*, including some love songs. Since *hiragana* was apt for the writing of everyday language, it was used in the writing of narratives and essays, the most famous example being the Tale of Genji.

> Selecting the finest inks and brushes, he sent out invitations to all his ladies to join in the endeavor. Some at first declined, thinking the challenge too much for them. Nor were the "young men of taste," as he called them, to be left out. Yūgiri, Murasaki's oldest brother, and Kashiwagi, among others, were supplied with fine Korean papers of the most delicate hues.
>
> "Do whatever you feel like doing, reed work or illustrations for poems or whatever."
>
> The competition was intense. Genji secluded himself as before in the main hall. The cherry blossoms had fallen and the skies were soft. Letting his mind run quietly through the anthologies, he tried several styles with fine results, formal and cursive Chinese and the more radically cursive Japanese "ladies' hand."[5]

The late medieval times were the age of decorated manuscripts both in the East and the West. However, there were some differences in the East. Noblemen/women in Japan at least preferred to write and even draw themselves, or they were expected to do so at the royal palace. The "reed work" in Seidensticker's translation is *ashide*, which literally means "reed-hand" or "reed-script." It was developed during the 9-10th centuries, in which running/cursive *kanji* and particularly *hiragana* are rendered as pictures associated with marshland scenery such as reeds (*ashi*), streams, waterfowls, rocks, flowers, and so forth. The term appears in literature from the early 10th century onward. In the *Utsuho Monogatari*, "Tale of the

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[4] Murasaki Shikibu (translated by Edward G. Seidensticker), *The Tale of Genji*, Volume One, Charles E. Tuttle Company, Tokyo, 1976, pp. 517.
[5] *Ibid*., pp. 517-518.

Hollow Tree," written in the late 10th century, there are descriptions of Chinese *kaisho* (*kaishu*, standard style) and *sōsho* (*caoshu*, cursive style) characters, as well as five different *kana* styles. Though these descriptions of *kana* writings permit various interpretations, *hiragana*, *katakana*, and another style *ashide* are at least included.[6] In *Genji-monogatari*, a strong interest in papers on which those letters and characters are written is also apparent:

> Genji could not very well hide the manuscript he had been at work on himself. They went over it together. The cursive Chinese characters on unusually stiff Chinese paper were very good indeed. As for the passages in the "ladies' hand," they were superb, gently flowing strokes on the softest and most delicately tinted of Korean papers. A flow of admiring tears threatened to join the flow of ink. The prince thought that he could never tire of such pleasures. On bright, bold papers made by the provisioner for our own royal court Genji had jotted down poems in a whimsical cursive style, the bold abandon of which was such as to make the prince fear that all the other manuscripts must seem at best inoffensive.[7]

As Chinese paper was called *karakami*, Korean paper was *koraigami*. Though Seidensticker did not translate, "papers made by the provisioner for our own royal court" is *kamiya-no-shikishi* in the original text. "Shikishi" means "color paper." There was a government paper mill, called Kamiya-in or Shioku-in. In this case, "Kamiya" is not a generic but specific paper mill, established in Kyoto at the beginning of the 9th century.

> As the conversation ranged over the varieties of calligraphy and manuscripts, Genji brought out several books done in patchwork with old and new papers. The prince sent his son the chamberlain to bring some scrolls from his own library, among them a set of four on which the emperor Saga had copied selections from the *Man'yo-shū* and a *Kokin-shū* at the hand of the emperor Daigo, on azure Chinese papers with matching jade rollers, intricate damask covers of a darker blue, and flat Chinese cords in multicolored checkers. The writing was art of the highest order, infinitely varied but

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[6] *Utsuho-monogatari*, 3, Nihon-koten-bungaku-taikei, Volume 12, Iwanami-shoten, Tokyo, "Kuniyuzuri" chapter, 1962, pp. 101-102.
[7] *Op. cit., The Tale of Genji*, Volume One, p. 519.

always gently elegant.[8]

"Patchwork" is collaged "tsugigami," a technique used for the *Nishi-honganji Sanjūrokunin-shū*, which might have been produced during the same decade when the Tale of Genji was written. In the Tale of Genji "Umegae" chapter, we read various important aspects of the courtly life in Kyoto in the 10-11th centuries.

3. HEIKE-NŌKYŌ AND "REED SCRIPT"

There is another description of *ashide* in the following part of the Tale of Genji's "Umegae" chapter.

> The "reed work" was very interesting, each manuscript different from the others. Yūgiri had managed to suggest the flow of water in generous, expansive strokes, and his vertical strokes called to mind the famous reeds of Naniwa. The joining of reeds and water was accomplished very deftly. There were sudden and bold variations, so that, turning a page, the reader suddenly came upon craggy, rocklike masses.[9]

It is not easy to find any scenes which might be related to this kind of description among existing parts of the "Tokugawa-Gōtō-bon" *Genji-monogatari-emaki.* But, this reminds us some scenes in the *Heike-nōkyō*, "the Lotus Sutra of the Heike," donated to Itsukushima Shrine of Hiroshima by the Heike or Taira clan leader, Taira-no-Kiyomori (1118-1181) in 1164. The clan ruled the country at the end of the Heian period. The dedication of the Sutra was initiated as an expression of Kiyomori's faith. The Threefold Lotus Sutra, along with Kiyomori's invocation and copies of the Amida Sutra and the Heart Sutra, were bound as hand scrolls by thirty-two members of the Heike clan. The Sutras were written in Chinese characters, *kanji*. They are separated from background images, framed by thin golden lines and frames. But, if we take a close look at each background image, we can also find various letters on or among images. These letters are *ashide*.

The *Heike-nōkyō* is totally different from the *Genji-monogatari-emaki* in their categories, intensions, and social meanings. But, some aspects including the style of painting are very similar. Kiyomori might have associated himself with the main character of the *Genji-monogatari*, Hikaru-Genji, by producing and presenting a beautiful set of illuminated

[8] *Ibid*., p. 519.
[9] *Ibid*., p. 519.

manuscripts. Appearances of illuminated sutra, anthology, and picture scroll are rather similar. In *Eiga-monogatari* which relates events in the life of Fujiwara-no-Michinaga (966-1027), who exerted de facto reign over the country in the early 11th century, Michinaga remarks on a set of illuminated sutras, hand-copied by 30 court ladies who served the empress Kiyoko, the second daughter of Michinaga, that they look like some collections of poems or illustrated books rather than sutras, showing excellent beauty and workmanship.[10] The Lady Murasaki began service to empress Akiko, the first daughter of Michinaga and wife of emperor Ichijō, around 1005, when she was writing the Tale of Genji.

Some influences from the *Genji-monogatari-emaki* are evident in the *Heike-nōkyō*, one of them being the "fukinuke yatai," or "blown-off" technique, whereby roofs of buildings are omitted to make clear overhead views of the inhabitants. In the opening chapter "Jo-hon" of the *Heike-nōkyō*, we can see a part of wooden building drawn by the "fukinuke yatai" technique (Figure 4). Three disciplines of Buddhism are depicted there. A lady below right is perhaps reading sutra, a gentleman above right is probably copying a sutra by hand, and a monk near the center is praying in a simple shed. Beneath the monk in a simple shed, there are three letters, from right to left, "sho" "shu" and "gyō" in *kanji*. "Sho" means "various," while "shu" and "gyō" together means "training." On the bottom, there are another set of three characters, "toku," "do," and "sha." They altogether mean "learners," particularly those who comprehend the teaching of Buddha through religious training. Therefore, these two sets of *kanji* are a kind of captions for this painting. But, it is curious to find these letters among plants and rocks or stones, as if these letters are hiding or born from nature. A box depicted on the right of a lady reading a sutra could possibly be a bronze sutra case with gold dragon and silver clouds ornamentation in which whole set of sutra manuscripts were going to be placed.

[10] *Eiga-monogatari*, ge, Nihon-koten-bungaku-taikei, Volume 76, Iwanami-shoten, Tokyo, Chapter 16, 1965, pp. 41-42.

Figure 4. *Heike-nōkyō*, "Jo-hon", Itsukushima shrine, c. 1164.

Among numbers of *ashide* in the "Hoto-hon" of the *Heike-nōkyō*, *hiragana* "a" is included as a plant, reed. (Figure 5) It is "a" of "ashi" which means "reed" in Japanese. If it is in English, it should be "r" of reed or rush, and a letter "r" could be placed among reeds in this painting. But, it is strange for English and many other European languages, because alphabet is a set of pure symbols, mostly without any particular meaning. It is the same in *hiragana*. In Japan, however, we can somehow understand the intension of this strange practice, *ashide*, because *hiragana* are children or grandchildren of Chinese characters, *kanji*, which were born from nature.[11]

[11] Around 100 AD, Xu Shen (c. 30-124 AD) classified Chinese characters into six categories. Though pictograph is only one of them, the other five categories are somehow connected with natural world as well. Logograms or ideograms represent abstracts concepts such as directions, compound ideographs putting two or more

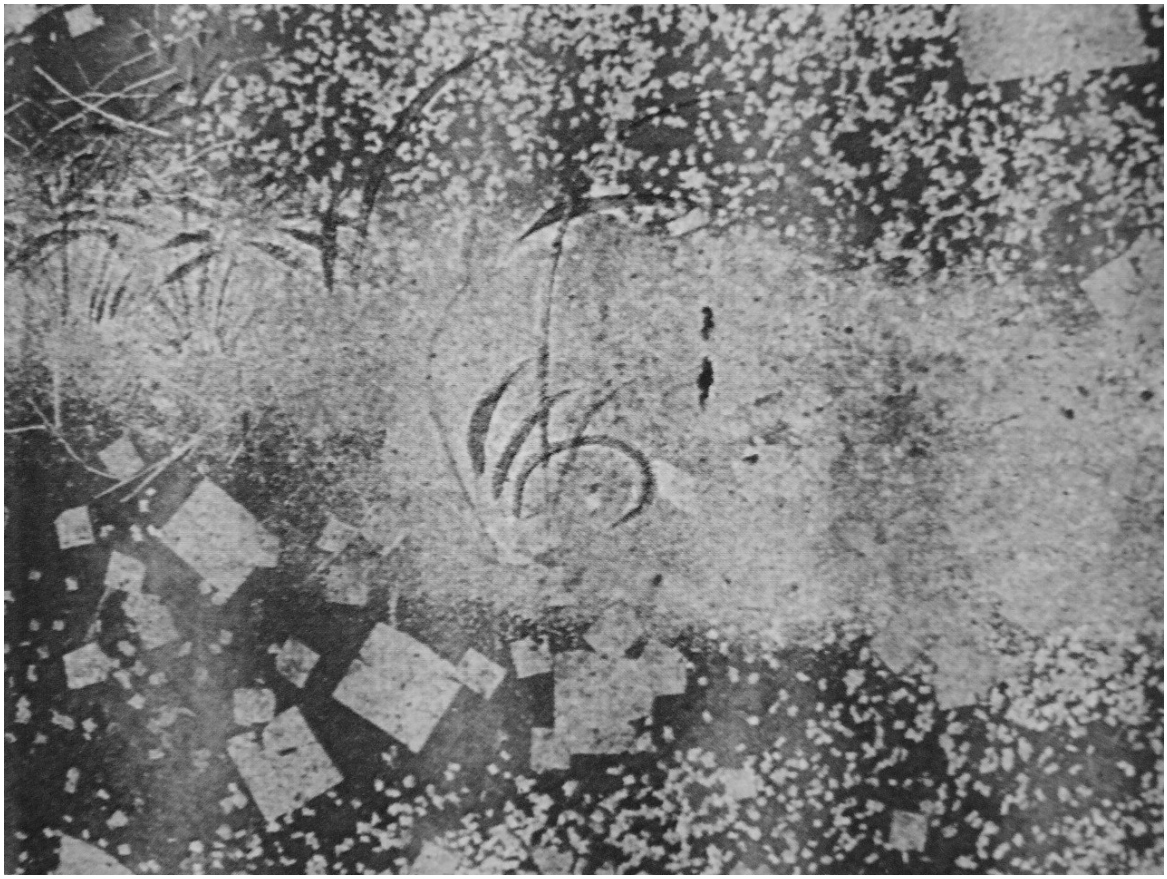

Figure 5. *Heike-nōkyō*, "Hotō-hon", Itsukushima shrine, c. 1164.

There is a description about *ashide* even in the oldest existing treatise on garden making in Japan, *Sakuteiki*, attributed to Tachibana-no-Toshitsuna (1028-1094). The author gives us his explanation about five major styles of garden; "Taikai-no-yō" like an ocean, "Taiga-no-yō" like a great river, "Sanga-no-yō" like mountains and streams, "Numachi-no-yō" like a pond, and finally "Ashide-no-yō." [12] Unlike ocean-, river-, mountain/streams-, or pond-garden, the "Ashide-no-yō" garden is a representation of marshland or waterside landscape, which could be the most familiar scenery among those five styles. Both the garden depicted in the "Jo-hon" and a waterside scenery in the "Hoto-hon" of the *Heike-nōkyō* could be "Ashide-no-yō," though the former is a kind of "Shinden-zukuri Teien," Shinden style gareden, and the latter, together with a landscape in the "Daiba-hon" following the "Hoto-hon," looks like a "Jōdo Teien," Pure Land garden. Toshimitsu must have been well acquainted with these garden types as a son of Fujiwara-no-Yorimichi (992-1074) who built the Byōdōin of Uji in 1053.

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characters together, phono-semantics combining characters to indicate meanings and pronunciations, though the other two categories are more complex.

[12] "Sakuteiki" in *Nihon-Shisō-Taikei*, Vol.23 (Kodai-Chūsei-Shisō), Iwanami-shoten, Tokyo, 1973, pp. 226-228.

I interpret *ashide* like this. While the people of ancient China made *kanji* from nature, the people of medieval Japan returned its children or grandchildren to nature. At least, they tried to return *hiragana* to nature. In Japan, writing and painting, or letters and images shared the same space, from smaller pieces of art to larger views of landscape.

4. "WRITING AND PAINTING SHARE THE SAME SPACE"

From the very first, it was difficult for Japanese to fully convey what they thought, spoke, and how they felt in Chinese ideographic writing system developed in an oversea land with different language, history, and life. Though very much appreciated the usefulness of Chinese writing system, they before long started making their own hybrid writing system with phonographic *kana*, partly using ideographic *kanji*, Chinese characters. Also started was the domestication of writing materials such as brush or paper.

At first they might have tried to make similar brushes and papers to Chinese items as close as possible. But, they must have realized that it is not easy to mass-produce them in Japan where the same raw materials as used in China were difficult to get. Though perhaps highly prized, some Chinese items might not have been to Japanese taste either. They naturally started to use raw materials and domestic techniques easier to obtain inside Japan to make writing materials. Domestication of writing system and the arts of brush must have been promoted from these materialistic and aesthetic reasons as well, in addition to practical reason for linguistic communication. As for papers on which a combination *kana* and a smaller numbers of *kanji* were written, it was also the same. For instance, various combinations of Japanese and Chinese papers are intentionally included in collaged "tsugigami" of the *Nishi-honganji Sanjūrokunin-shū*. In both writing system and writing materials with which, and particularly on which letters and characters of the hybrid system were written, Japanese artists searched after both harmony and interesting contrast of Japanese and foreign cultures.

An equally important historical fact is that they did not totally give up Chinese characters. While establishing Japanese writing system, they continuously used them incorporated into their own system. For the people of medieval Japan, giving up Chinese characters was almost same as throwing away major parts of their culture. In this cultural relationship, a uniquely hybrid writing system was almost completed during the early years of the Heian period. Also started to grow in this age was the Japanese aesthetics or taste for contrast and variety rather than a forceful unity and symmetry.

In the history of *ashide*, the *Ashide-e Waken-rōei-shū*, kept at the Kyoto National Museum is very important. In this anthology, renowned Chinese poems were written in *kanji*, while renowned Japanese poems were written in *hiragana*. As mentioned above, this kind of practice was not unusual. In a version of the *Manyō-shū*, *manyōgana* rather than *kanji* and *hiragana* were reciprocally written. In *kana* preface included in a version of *Kokin-waka-shū*, "Anthology of Ancient and Modern Japanese Poetry", Japanese poems were written on Chinese papers with Chinese motif. The Japanese people and their artists of the Heian period became conscious of this kind of contrast between China and Japan, and seem to have liked it very much. In the *Ashide-e Waken-rōei-shū* made in 1160, however, what this particular collection of renowned poetry means is very different from that of the *Manyō-shū* and the *Kokin-wakashū*. The *Ashide-e Waken-rōei-shū* is a total artistic competition of Chinese and Japanese culture; Chinese versus Japanese poetry, and *kanji* versus *hiragana*. Moreover, the most interesting aspect of this collection is the fact that *ashide-e*, a kind of landscape painting consisting of various *ashide* scripts used as underdrawings for the collection of Japanese and Chinese poems, is almost mediating between two cultures and two writing systems (Figure 6).

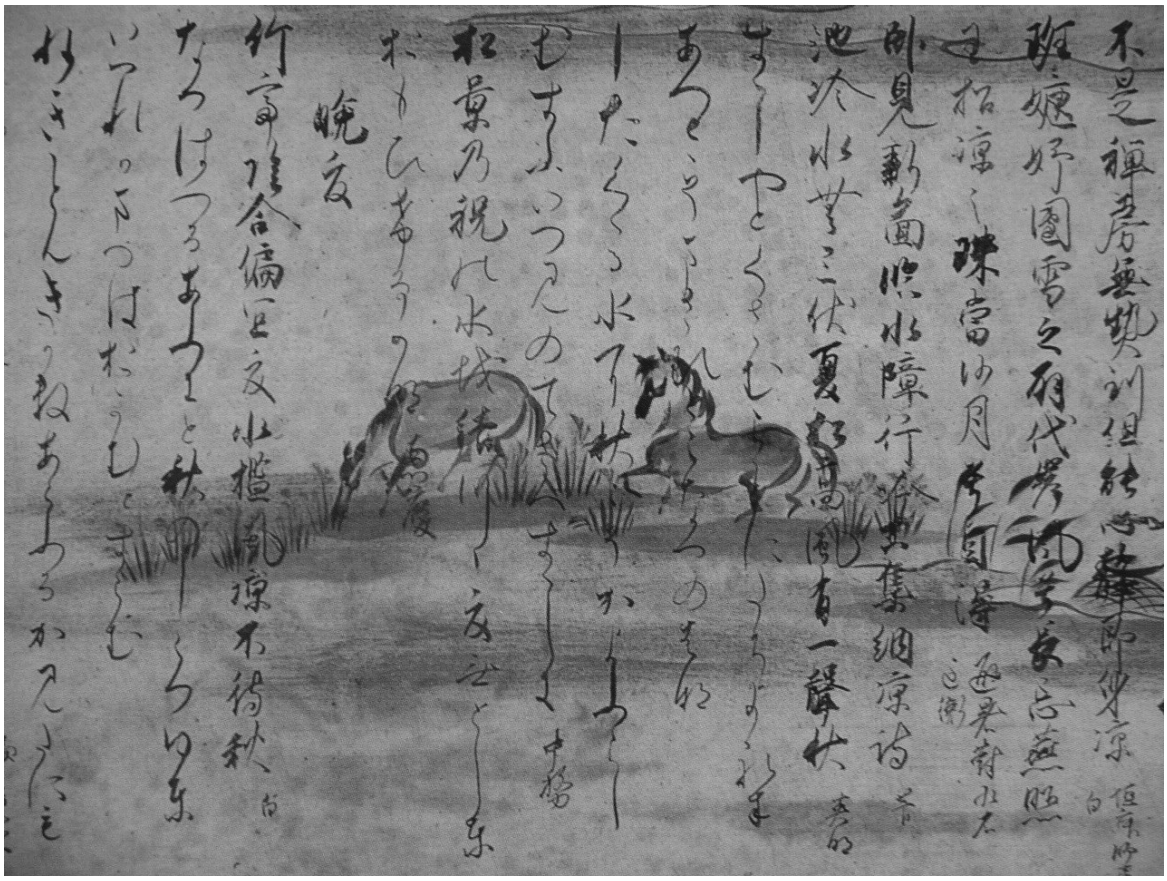

Figure 6. *Ashide-e Wakan-rōei-shū*, c.1160.

The *Ashide-e Waken-rōei-shū* is written by Fujiwara-no-Koreyuki. The *Ashide-e* drawing for the collection is also attributed to Koreyuki, a grandson of Fujiwara-no-Sadazane, to whom the "Gen'ei-bon"*Kokin-waka-shū* is attributed. As mentioned before, Sadazane is a great-grandson of Fujiwara-no-Yukinari, one of three major calligraphers who established Japanese style calligraphy. These three calligraphers of the Fujiwara family were among the leading artists and intellectuals of the Heian period who promoted more unique art and culture proper to Japan, but at the same time understood their cultural and historical relationship with China.

The cover illustration of the *Motosuke-shu*, kept at archives of the Reizei family in Kyoto, is an important example that suggests a possibility of the existence of full line-up of *ashide* as a nearly complete syllabary in the 10th - 11th century. Though copied in 1175, the cover of the *Motosuke-shu* seems to have illustrated an earlier practice of *ashide*, which afterwards turned into a set of ornamental motif, losing its former function as a writing system.[13]

Lastly, I would like to analyze one of the best examples of "letters on images," *Shiki-sōka-shitae-wakakan*, or *Sōtatsu-shiki-kusabana-shitae-Kōetsu-sho-kakan*, "a poem scroll of four seasons painting" by Tawaraya Sōtatsu and Honnami Kōetsu (1558-1637). In China, though often juxtaposed side by side or above and below, Chinese characters and images are rarely overlapped. In Japan, letters and images are not only juxtaposed but also superimposed. Although not very usual even in Japan, there is an essence of Japanese art and culture in this kind of superimposition. This poem scroll by Sōtatsu and Kōetsu is among the best examples to show the superimposition and its legitimate genealogy.

By request, Sōtatsu added his painting of deer to the *Heike-nōkyō* kept at the Itsukushima shrine. This addition and some other restoration were done around 1602 for Fukushima Masanori who governed the related areas. Therefore, at least Sōtatsu, or perhaps both Sōtatsu and Kōetsu, knew its *ashide* and Japanese tradition of "letters on images," which must have been a part of knowledge shared by most artists and craftsmen in Kyoto where various illuminated manuscripts and craftworks with *ashide* decoration or superimposition were produced since the Heian period.

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[13] Originally compiled by Kiyohara-no-Motosuke (908-990) around 985-986, the *Motosuke-shu* now kept at the Reizei family in Kyoto was copied in 1175 by Hachijōin-Bomon-no-Tsubone, a half-sister of Fujiwara-no-Sadaie. Goto Shoko, *Motosuke-shū-chūshaku*, Nihon Koten Bungaku-kai (supervised), Kichōbon Kankokai, Tokyo, 2000, pp. 504-506.

Shiki-sōka-shitae-wakakan is a work of the early Edo period. Painted by Sōtatsu, poems written on it by K**ō**etsu, the picture scroll was completed in the mid-1620's. Twenty-five poems of cherry blossom by celebrated Japanese poets were written in cursive *kanji* and *hiragana*. Kōetsu sometimes avoided overlaying letters on images painted by Sōtatsu, but, in some cases, he audaciously superimposed bold letters on beautifully drawn plants by Sōtatsu. Papers for the scroll, "ryōshi," are of four colors; beige, light sky blue, sky blue, and white. Ten papers are connected together to form an approx. 9 meter long scroll. This combination is not only for variety, but also for subtle but logical effect. The scroll starts from spring when cherry blossom is in full bloom (Figure.7). Paper changes from white to light sky blue, while drawing changes from cherry blossom to cherry trees. Then, paper changes to warm beige, wisteria replaces cherry trees. The season is changed from late spring to early summer.

Figure 7. *Shiki-Sōka-Shitae-Wakakan*, Sōtatsu and Kōetsu, "Spring" part, mid-1620's.

White paper comes again, *kikyō*, Japanese bellflower of late summer and early autumn appears on the bottom. Then, paper changes into sky blue, wisteria hangs above, bellflower grows from the bottom. *Hagi*, an autumn flower starts to appear on its left. When paper changes into beige again, the season is cool autumn. *Hagi* is added by another autumn plant, silver grass, *susuki*. The next paper is white expressing the season is even cooler fall. Then, it changes into sky blue, and a big half moon appears behind autumnal leaves and flowers. This change of color paper signifies not only seasonal change but also time change from afternoon to evening, in this case. On the next white paper, forests of old pine trees are drawn in gold, while a large flock of plovers are represented by numberless small silver crosses. They fly up toward sky. The last two papers are both white. This is the only exception in this scroll. This is perhaps to gorgeously conclude the picture scroll even in a cold winter scene by using long white paper, twice as long as before, and with gold and silver (Figure 8).

Figure 8. *Shiki-Sōka-Shitae-Wakakan*, Sōtatsu and Kōetsu, "Winter" part, mid-1620's.

It is perhaps very strange to know all twenty-five poems written on four seasons nature scenes are all on cherry blossom. But, we could perhaps interpret it that they tried to mean that there are four seasons even in a short life of cherry blossom, most beloved flower by the Japanese people for its beauty, fragility, and transience. There is a Japanese sense of seasonal change. The Japanese saw letters and words in nature, among forests and even in a flock of small birds on seashore or riverside. They were finding poems in nature and in everyday life.

Twenty-five poems are written in a combination of Chinese ideograms and Japanese *hiragana* phonograms. They are written in some cases alongside but in many cases directly on images. The relationship between images and letters here are in a sense comparable to that of ancient/medieval text written in Chinese ideograms and small phonograms given alongside these *kanji* in Japanese *kana* in a different color, for pronunciation and/or supplementary explanation. After more than one thousand years from the introduction of Chinese characters, used together with Japanese phonograms *hiragana* developed from their cursives, they harmonize well with Japanese painting on which Japanese *waka* poems are written with a dual mode of writing. If we look at this work of art as a scroll of visual information, it is highly complex, its texts or verses written in a dual mode, and forming another dual mode with images or paintings. This complexity hidden behind the simple and austere surface is characteristic to Japanese art.

At the end of the scroll, black signature of Kōetsu and red seal of Sōtatsu appear side by side (Figure 8). This scroll is a result of harmony between not only letters and images but also a master of calligraphy and that of painting. Kobayashi Hideo (1902-1983) who laid a foundation of modern creative criticism in Japan, described this scroll as follows:

> Happiness of collaboration with others without losing self. Happiness of friendship to harmonize but not agree. What this poem scroll expresses might be a secret of happiness. Happiness neither asserts itself nor provokes others. It is, so to speak, an untold wisdom.[14]

CONCLUSION

It is not the aim of this paper to assert that "letters on images" or "writing and painting share the same space" is the hallmark of Japanese art. There are not so many examples of "letters on images" even in Japanese art. The collaboration of two masters, Kōetsu and Sōtatsu, is an evidence of their kindred spirits. At the same time, however, this dual work in a double meaning is a record of artistic duel between a master calligrapher and a master painter. Only Kōetsu could write black letters directly on Sōtatsu's beautiful color drawings. It is a very rare masterpiece, which could not be realized if there was no real mutual respect between the two masters. These limited pieces of arts show an essence of Japanese art.

Though turned into a set of ornamental motif more or less five centuries before Kōetsu and Sōtatsu, *ashide* remained as an important element in the work of Japanese artists and craftsmen. It was in a sense a symbol of intimacy between letters and nature, words and nature, or voices and nature, in other words, man and nature, which formed a basis of Japanese art, culture, and everyday life. Intimacy between letters and images is a common base of Japanese culture still living today, when picture scrolls seem to have been replaced by animations. Superimposition of images and letters is quite usual in today's media and manmade environment. *Manga* is also an art of superimposition.[15] Before them, however, we had even more significant works of art and literature, which clearly show the foundation of a whole culture.

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[14] Nihon Koten Bungaku-kai (supervised), *Sōtatsu-shiki-kusabana-shitae-Kōetsu-sho-kakan*, Kichobon Kankokai, Tokyo, 1988. Fig.7 and Fig.8 of this paper are from this publication.

[15] Takano Fumiko, *Bō ga ippon*, Magazine House, Tokyo, 1995, and *Ki'iroi Hon* (Yellow Book), Kodansha, Tokyo, 2002. Takano Fumiko is one of the most representative *manga* artists dealing with various possibilities of the superimposition of images and letters.

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Figure 1. Segment from the Collection of Japanese and Chinese Poems for Singing, *Wakan Rōei-shu*, "Detchō-bon" version, Attributed to Fujiwara-no-Yukinari, Imperial Collection, early 11th century. Chinese poem in Chinese characters (right) and Japanese poem in Japanese kana syllabaries (left), written on a Chinese paper, *kara-kami*. (From Horie Tomohiko, *Genshoku Nihon-no-Bijyutsu*, Vol. 22, "Sho," Shogakukan, 1970)

Figure 2. Anthology of Thirty-six Poets, *Sanjūrokunin-shū*, Collection of Poems by Yamabe-no Akahito, Nishi-honganji, Kyoto, early 12th century (c.1112-13). Japanese poems in Japanese *kana* syllabaries, written on a *ryoshi*, composed from Japanese papers, *atsuyo*, *michinoku-gami*, *kamiya-gami*, and Chinese paper, *kara-kami*. (From Baba Ichiro ed, *Bessatsu Aizōban "Sho"*, Heibonsha, Tokyo, 1979)

Figure 3. *Genji-monogatari-emaki*, "Minori" text, "Tokugawa-Gōtō-bon," early 12th century (c. 1120). (From Shirahata Yoshi ed., *Nihon-Bijutsu-Zenshu*, Vol.9, "Ōchō-no-Bijutsu," Gakushū-kenkyūsha, 1977)

Figure 4. *Heike-nōkyō*, "Jo-hon" c. 1164. Itsukushima shrine (From

Shirahata Yoshi ed., *Nihon-Bijutsu-Zenshu*, Vol.9, "Ōchō-no-Bijutsu," Gakushū-kenkyūsha, 1977)

Figure 5. *Heike-nōkyō*, "Hotō-hon" c. 1164. Itsukushima shrine (From Shirahata Yoshi ed., *Nihon-Bijutsu-Zenshu*, Vol.9, "Ōchō-no-Bijutsu," Gakushū-kenkyūsha, 1977)

Figure 6. *Ashide-e Wakan-rōei-shū*, 1160, Kyoto National Museum (From Egami Yasushi, *Ashide-e to sono shuheni*, Nihon-no-Bijutsu, No.478, Shibundo, Tokyo, 2006)

Figure 7. *Shiki-Sōka-Shitae-Wakakan*, Tawaraya Sōtatsu, painter, and Honnami Kōetsu, calligrapher, First "spring" part, mid-1620's. (From *Sōtatsu-shiki-kusabana-shitae-Kōetsu-sho-kakan*, Kichōbon Kankōkai, Tokyo, 1988.)

Figure 8. *Shiki-Sōka-Shitae-Wakakan*, Tawaraya Sōtatsu, painter, and Honnami Kōetsu, calligrapher, Last "winter" part, mid-1620's. (From *Sōtatsu-shiki-kusabana-shitae-Kōetsu-sho-kakan*, Kichōbon Kankōkai, Tokyo, 1988.)

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Art, truth and social responsibility

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Art and art objects of all kinds have frequently arisen in extreme circumstances. Berthold Brecht created "Mother Courage" in response to Nazism, Pablo Picasso painted "Guernica" in answer to fascism, Arthur Miller wrote "The Crucible" in reaction to McCarthyism and Dmitri Shostakovich composed his Seventh ("Leningrad") Symphony in protest against the Nazi invasion of Russia and Stalinist totalitarianism. Yet the idea that artists should respond to social crisis [1] raises a number of conceptual puzzles, which require discussion.

It makes sense to ask ourselves how to understand the relation of art to the social world, how to understand the social responsibility of the artist. Different responses are possible. One is to point out that by no means all art is born of crisis. Another is to point to the difficulty of formulating an adequate response to the most extreme social situations, such as, to take Adorno's example, poetry after Auschwitz.

The view that art should or can respond to a crisis situation, or even that it has a specific social role to play, derives from often unexamined assumptions about the relation between art conceived very broadly, including art works and literature on the one hand and social life on the other. One answer lies in the historical connection, at least in the West, between art and some types of religion, especially Christianity, but not Judaism or Islam, where the artist can be said to inform us reliably about an invisible sacred realm.

This view depends on Western monotheism. It presupposes a conception of the world as emanating from, hence dependent on, God. I believe that for most observers this view is out of date. Yet the very natural tendency to turn to art to tell us about the world and ourselves, but also to help us cope in a wide variety of circumstances, suggests that even in our increasingly secular

[1] See Anne Midgette, "Responding to Crisis, Art Must Look Beyond It," in *The New York Times*, Sunday, March 3, 2002, Section 2, p. 1. These examples are taken from Midgette's article.

age the artist continues to play an important, arguably undiminished social role at a time when the link between art and religion has been decisively weakened.

This assessment is countered by a well known, overly intellectual, specifically Western view, which implies that social responsibility is based on access to truth, and that in the final analysis truth is the exclusive province of philosophy. To state this view provocatively: only philosophers can reliably be said to know and philosophy is the only source of knowledge in the full sense. According to this view, the artist does not and cannot know, and hence, for that reason, cannot play a socially responsible role. This theoretical view of art runs counter to artistic practice. The aim of this paper is to suggest a way to bring our normative, or theoretical, conception of art more closely in line with artistic practice in identifying and criticizing this view and suggesting another one, closer to what we know about the acknowledged social role of art.

On the Platonic view of art

Over the centuries, roughly since Plato the Western intellectual tradition has tended to presuppose what I will be calling a "fenestral" conception of art as in effect a failed effort to construct a window on reality. This "fenestral" view of art leads to two well defined, but conflicting cognitive views of its social function. On the one hand, there is the well known Platonic, mimetic conception according to which art objects and literary works of any kind simply fall short of truth and knowledge, which are understood as correctly grasping the mind-independent invisible reality. According to this view, there is truth, which, under the right conditions, philosophers can have, but others, including artists simply cannot attain. Roughly since Plato, at least in the West it has often been thought that art makes an unsustainable cognitive claim to truth. This Platonic vision of art as laying false claims to truth about mind-independent reality echoes throughout the entire later discussion in different ways such as Hegel's idea of fine art, which is representational, as falling short of philosophy, which is conceptual.

This broadly Platonic vision of art contrasts with the anti-Platonic effort to revalorize art, or at least some types of art, as an anti-Platonic source of truth and knowledge in the full sense. The anti-Platonic view is exemplified by a variety of strange bedfellows. One, already mentioned, is the Christian view of sacred art, which is intended to tell the faithful about the transcendent sacred realm. It is worth remembering that for centuries when most people could not read, or read at best haltingly, they could be reliably

informed about invisible religious reality by fluently "reading" Church windows in a way that only an erudite student of the history of religious art can carry out today. Another is the Marxist conception of social realism as possessing unique access to (non-ideological) knowledge. Still another is Heidegger's view of the great artist strips away the trappings of modernity to finally (and dramatically) tell us who we are, even what we should do. Then there is the idea, attributed variously to Hegel and Nietzsche, that when art loses its theological function, when it can no longer lay legitimate claim to unveiling hidden reality, art somehow comes to an end, or dies. Or Danto's conviction, based on his reading of Hegel, that art has come to an end since its very possibilities are now exhausted.

In my view Platonic and anti-Platonic views of art are both incorrect. The former unjustifiably denies any cognitive function to art in teaching us about what is; and the latter limitlessly exaggerates the cognitive function of art in asserting dogmatically that in the final analysis only the great artist really knows or can know. The latter view, which is a variation on the Romantic view of the artist, has most recently been restated by Heidegger. Both the Platonists, who diminish art, and the anti-Platonists, who exalt it, are committed to the unwarranted idea that the only real measure of artistic worth lies in grasping what is as it is, in grasping the real.

This same point governs different Platonic and anti-Platonic attitudes toward aesthetic beauty. Platonists, who do not deny beauty, believe it should be equivalent to truth but it is not; and anti-Platonists, who also affirm beauty, believe it should be equivalent to truth and that it is.

Art, representation and truth

From a cognitive perspective, the anti-Platonism of someone like Heidegger is influential, but relatively uninteresting. The best he seems to be able to do is to claim that a so-called national poet like Hölderlin—notice he does not mention Goethe, who might be a more obvious choice—has access to what is without being able to argue for his point.

Heidegger's aesthetic claim presupposes his view of truth as disclosure which he later conjoins with the claim that the artist, but not the philosopher, possesses comparative advantage in disclosing what is. For Heidegger's claim to be successful, it would have to overturn the well known Platonic, representational view of art in showing us how to know the real as it is. This would mean supplementing the dogmatic claim through an argument tending to support the idea that a great poet not only tells us who

we are, which we might want to grant, but also what being is as it is, which appears more doubtful.

The canonical, "fenestral" view of art as either succeeding or failing to depict what is as it is presupposes that artistic creation of all kinds is representational. At a minimum, correct representation means getting it right about the represented. Just as, it is said, historians turn to Pieter Sanraedam to find out the contents of churches in the seventeenth century, one can also imagine them turning to certain writers, but not others, say Georges Simenon, an otherwise minor writer, to find out about life in Paris in the mid-twentieth century.

This canonical view of art simultaneously rules out non-representational forms of art as not worthy of the name, at least not if the aesthetic function is to depict what is. And it further holds art to a standard arguably more rigorous than any cognitive domain can meet if knowledge requires us to analyze the relation between the representation and the represented, in Kantian language the relation between the representation and the object that can be thought without contradiction but not given in experience.

The same mystery that prevails in general about the relation of the representation and the represented is reproduced in aesthetics. Although we can indeed claim that one or another representation correctly depicts according to one or another standard in use in a given time and place, as Goodman usefully points out, we cannot know that this is an instance of truth.[2]

Realism and representation

Those who take a cognitive approach to art are not interested in representational verisimilitude according to current standards, or in description according to a pre-selected canon, but in representational realism as a cognitive warrant. It is worth calling attention to a key difference between aesthetic realism, which is an artistic style, and cognitive realism as it affects aesthetics. Dutch painting of the seventeenth century, say the portraits of Frans Hals, offers realistic depictions of what the painter arguably sees and strives to depict through so-called pictorial realism. Yet there is a clear difference between depicting the real on a canvas through the painter's use of appropriate techniques, various colors,

[2] See, on this point, Nelson Goodman, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 130-132.

paints, brushes and so on, and in allegedly grasping the real, not as it appears but as it is. Just as some scientists, and many philosophers committed to scientism, are convinced that science and only science uncovers the real as it is, so the claimed link of art and truth implies that art gets it right about what is through correctly representing the mind-independent independent real, in another formulation the way the world is.

There are different types of realism, different conceptions of the real, hence of what it means to grasp it as it is. Roughly from Plato to Kant, the debate on knowledge relies on Platonic realism, or the idea that to know is to know what is as it is. In working out his critical philosophy, Kant usefully distinguishes between empirical realism, or the conditions under which appearances can appear as phenomena, and the world as it can be thought but not experienced, hence not known.

In suggesting that we do not and cannot know that we know what is as it is, Kant maintains we know only according to the limits of the human mind. This crucial distinction simultaneously allows him to reject claims to know the real as it is while preserving a kind of realism as well as the objectivity of cognition. Applied to aesthetics, Kant's attack on cognitive realism denies that either the artist (or indeed anyone else) can claim on other than dogmatic grounds to know the real as it is.

Social realism and cognition

This inference counts against social realism, which is favored by Marxism, but not by Marx, who has a dialectical theory of knowledge. Marx's theory, which is post-Hegelian, presupposes the need to work out a viable conception of knowledge while denying any ability to know the way the world is, or really is. Yet social realism, the Marxist's stock in trade, which is linked to the reflection theory of knowledge, remains pre-Kantian in claiming that knowledge is possible by correctly "reflecting" on the level of mind what is as it is.

This Marxist thesis is an updated version of Francis Bacon's view that the mind must successfully reflect the world in order to know it. The Marxist preference for social realism follows from the supposition that this style and only this style correctly reflects, or mirrors, social life, which is otherwise hidden from view. It makes sense to say that a non-ideological account provides a more global, less partial narration, hence to rely on the idea of the whole as a normative criterion of knowledge. Yet no account has ever been given of how a given analysis can actually reflect what is the case.

Marxism is at its strongest in showing the social roots of art, its multiple links to the context in which it arises, but at its weakest in forcing all forms of art into a political straitjacket on dogmatic grounds. The unfortunate tendency of Marxist authors to indulge in narrow, philistine rejection of non-realist art, as in Lukács' rejection of Beckett as symptomatic of bourgeois decadence, points to the limits of this approach. The "subsumption" of art, like philosophy, under politics, makes it difficult to acknowledge the genuine interest of even the most impressive forms of art, which are simply rejected if they depart from the favored model.

Marxism, which favors social realism, a form of metaphysical realism, that places it in the Platonic camp. It suffers from the weakness of other forms of metaphysical realism in being incapable of justifying claims to know. The apparently insuperable cognitive problem at the heart of all commitments to metaphysical realism, including social realism, lies in the well known inability to show, other than through party fiat, when social realism does better than some other aesthetic style to reveal social truth. Other than the fact that it runs against the preference for social realism, there is no aesthetic reason, say, to prefer Sholokhov, a very bad novelist, to Pasternak. And there is also no cognitive reason to prefer Sholokhov to Pasternak, or artists who exemplify social realism to those that do not.

On representing historical events

There is an obvious difference between representing invisible reality, whatever is held to lie outside experience, and representing the contents of experience. This problem is particularly important in times of catastrophe, whether of natural or human etiology. The more important the event to be represented, the more delicate the choice of how best to do so.

The problem of how art should represent life, nature or anything else, real or imagined, has often been examined but has never been settled. It is raised anew as a result of the terrible events in the United States on September 11, 2001. At issue is the proper way, if there is a proper way, or the relatively best way, to depict, narrate, describe or otherwise represent, say, the attack on the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan. Should it be done through a painting, a picture, a collage, a sculpture, a poem, a novel, a film, or in some other way? What style should be employed? Should the artist aim at informational content, accuracy, beauty, or at some combination of different styles? What type of depiction would be adequate to what is to be represented? Should one aim to tell the truth about these events? Is there truth in art? Can it also counter falsity, or false representations, or false

claims about this or another series of events? Or is it merely enough for a depiction of this series of events to move the spectator in some way? And how is that best done? Through realism? Or through some other aesthetic style?

It is difficult, perhaps not possible to know what an adequate representation would look like in time of crisis or perhaps in any other time. But can we decide between adequate and inadequate representations without appeal, say, to prevailing standards? This question is crucial in situations where it is necessary to counter mistakes or outright misrepresentation. For instance, it is sometimes suggested that Holocaust revisionism, which consists either in denying that the Holocoaust occurred at all, or again in denying that it differs in kind from other historical events, can be countered by pointing to items which cannot be denied, such as the train schedules for Auschwitz. But, although the moral intention motivating such efforts may be laudable, there is no reason to believe they successfully counter sufficiently ingenious efforts, which invoke other standards for description. As Paul de Man, who had his own reasons for adopting an ambiguous view of history, points out, no description of whatever kind can definitively remove the danger that someone will assimilate history to mere fiction.

Conclusion: Art, truth, and social responsibility

Platonists and anti-Platonists subscribe to very different views of truth and knowledge. Yet both are committed to a conception of art, which can and should be judged by a cognitive standard that no cognitive domain, none at all, can meet. The solution of this puzzle is not to isolate art from any cognitive function, nor to restrict it merely to a decorative function, nor to mere aestheticism, nor to aim wholly and solely at beauty. It is rather to see art as telling us, not about the real as it is, but about ourselves in all the many ways that art works, literature, architecture, sculpture, tapestries, collages, poetry and other cultural creations can, without however ever reaching the conceptual status, say, of philosophy. In telling us about ourselves, art plays an important social role whether or not it can be said to get it right about what is.

Art does not come to an end when it loses the supposed “fenestral” capacity to grasp the world as it is, or when it gives up a concern to know the transcendent or sacred dimension of existence. It rather continues to function as an important indication, not about hidden reality, but about our own reality, not about the world as it is in itself, but about the world as it appears to us, and about ourselves as we appear within it. To put this same

point in different language, we know ourselves through our cultural artifacts, and the artist, understood in a very wide sense, contributes to society through the very capacity to create works of art of the most varied kinds.

I will end this paper in coming back to the theme which motivates this meeting: art and social engagement. The very idea of social engagement points to politics, or social life. The claim that art cannot be reduced to politics would be misunderstood as suggesting that it has no political dimension. Art is not and cannot ever be apolitical since it is intrinsically political. Despite our best efforts, it can never be isolated from the context in which it arises, to which it belongs, and which it illuminates.

As concerns art, there is a difference between its political dimension and the very idea of social engagement, however understood. Paradoxically, art, which is political, is also politically neutral, able to serve any and all political masters, including those situated on the right, the left and in between. Although artistic creation is one way to be socially responsible, the use one makes of this capacity in the construction of art objects, the writing of texts, the production of images, through performance and whatever else an artist does, does not depend on art itself. For art is not itself engaged. The relation of art to social engagement rather depends on the social engagement of the individual artist.

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Public Nature of Art Practices: Can art have a public life?

Pulak Dutta

One of our friends who comes from a nearby village reported that the first thing a new Headmaster does to make his presence felt in a village, is to paint the school building and then expel a student! He told us the story when our own school building was being painted, which coincided with the joining of a new Principal. It was during a 'face lift' of some of the Santiniketan buildings for the visit of some VIPs to Santiniketan. As the word 'face lift' indicates, only the sides of the buildings that would face the path the VIPs were to take were painted. For the people who inhabit the space it felt really ridiculous.

This, to my mind, reflects a structure or movement of thought which is linear or one dimensional. Linear thought process produces linear communication system and necessarily ends up in a one way communication. It does not leave any space for a dialogue. Originally, the spatial arrangement - for example, the positioning of different buildings or activity centres in Santiniketan - was designed in a way that incorporated dialogue, and encouraged human interaction between the community members. Students' dormitory, kitchen and dining hall, library and research centre, auditorium and out-door classes were situated all around the play ground. One can still see this structure of the original Ashram. It was impossible to move from one place to the other without encountering either the cooks singing as they cut the vegetables or a part of a mural or a football match between students and staff or chance upon a great scholar like Bidhushekhar Shastri or an extraordinarily dynamic artist like Nandalal Bose.

This circularity of spatial arrangement with shifting and multiple attention centres was also applied to the individual activity centres or buildings. Rooms in the students' hostels were not placed one next to the other in a linear spatial arrangement, they were placed in a circular fashion around a courtyard. It was impossible for anyone to ignore the presence of others. Although the individual buildings did have a frontage, they did not have a frontal presence. All the sides of the buildings were equally welcoming, as functional and as beautiful as its front. In the class, students sat in a circle;

as a result the frontality of the teacher was challenged. There was a constant flow of communication or interaction between one another. This is also one of the fundamental qualities of the early Santiniketan murals and environmental sculptures. They did not have a frontal, framed or focussed presence.

I may add as a significant aside that we find a parallel of this cyclical movement in Indian music in general and Indian Classical music in particular. Tagore used the *sthayi-antara-sanchari-abhog* [A-B-C-D] musical structure of Dhrupad as the foundation for his songs. Structurally it breaks the linearity of the movement and in performance becomes A-B [*sthayi-antara*], returning to A [*sthayi*], moving on to C-D [*sanchari-abhog*] and back again to A [*sthayi*] to complete the cycle. Time cycle or *Tal* system in our music is also necessarily cyclical. These smaller spans of time cycles operate within the larger A-B-C-D [*sthayi-antara-sanchari-abhog*] structure, something like the Earth spinning and rotating around the Sun at the same time.

Art in Public Places or Public Art?

Can any work of art situated or performed in a public place be understood as public art? The word 'public' itself has multiple meanings. Habermas explains in 1962,

> We call events and occasions "public" when they are open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs – as when we speak of public places or public houses. But as in the expression "public building," the term need not refer to general accessibility; the building does not even have to be open to public traffic. "Public buildings" simply house state institutions and as such are "public." The state is the "public authority." It owes this attribute to its task of promoting the public or common welfare of its rightful members. The word has yet another meaning when one speaks of a "public [official] reception"; on such occasions a powerful display of representation is staged whose "publicity" contains an element of public recognition. There is a shift in meaning again when we say that someone has made a name for himself, has a public reputation.[1]

[1] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, [First Published in German 1962] Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, pp.1-2.

Miwon Kwon considered "some paradigmatic public art works over the last thirty-five years in the United States … as different forms of publicity, that is, as different models of communicative practices or form of public address (rather than genres of art)" [2] Following four modes of communicative practices outlined by Raymond Williams [3] - from authoritarian, to paternalistic, to commercial, to the democratic - she discusses different public art projects in the USA. As is evident from the terms, the 'democratic' mode of communication "opposes both commercialism and state control. It is a system that maximizes individual participation and allows independent groups licensed to use publicly owned means of communication – theatres, broadcast stations, film studios, newspapers etc. – to determine what is produced. That is, the modes of expression and communication and means of their distribution or dissemination are owned by the people who use them. And what is produced is decided by those who produce it."[4]

The practice of art has been used as a political intervention into public life.[5] There are projects which involve community members or interact with a community.[6] In most of these cases professional artists are involved and cannot totally get rid of the paternalistic attitude towards the community

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[2] Miwon Kwon, 'Public Art as Publicity' in Simon Sheikh (Ed.), *In the Place of the Public Sphere? On the establishment of publics and counter-publics*, Berlin: b_books 2005. Available at http://www.republicart.net

[3] Raymond Williams, 'Communications and Community' (1961), in Robin Gable (Ed.) *Resources of Hope*, London, Verso, 1989, pp.19-31.

[4] Miwon Kwon, 'Public Art as Publicity' in Simon Sheikh (Ed.), *In the Place of the Public Sphere? On the establishment of publics and counter-publics*, Berlin: b_books 2005. Available at http://www.republicart.net

[5] For instance, Group Material's *DaZiBao* poster project from 1983 or projects by 'Guerrilla Girls' – a group of women artists in New York protesting against sexism in the art world in 1985.

[6] We know of the Philadelphia Murals Arts Program, which emerged out of the city's Anti-Graffiti Network in 1984, and was later absorbed in 1996 into the Department of Recreation affiliated to the Mayor's Office of Community Services [see *Philadelphia Murals and the Stories They Tell*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002. The text is by Jane Golden, Robin Rice, and Monica Yant Kinney, with photographs by David Graham and Jack Ramsdale.] or Inigo Manglano-Ovalle's *Tele-Vecindario: A Street Level Video Project,* organised in his own Latino neighbourhood, West Town, to address problems of youth gangs in 1994. Or more recently in 2005 and 2006, Tangencya 1 and Tangencya 2 – a "multi-media, inter-disciplinary, arts-based, public cultural project with site-specific events located throughout the eThekwini Metro precinct. …in the city of Durban" as a part of Create Africa South project. [Visit http://www.cas.org.za/projects/tangencya.htm for further information.]

they are working with. There are other examples of community activity, unlike activity *with* the community members; these are activities *by* the community members. Dipesh Chakrabarty writes about the District Six Museum in relation to 'museums and their evolving relationship to democracies',

> District Six was a well-known 'mixed' neighbourhood in Cape Town that was literally bulldozed between 1966 and 1984 to make it into an area for the Whites. Thousands of people lost their dwellings overnight. Families and neighbours were torn apart and dispersed. The museum grew organically out of the protest movement that fearlessly challenged this brutal act of undemocracy. Started in 1994, the museum developed into a site for communal memory, not a nostalgic monument to a dead past but a living memory that is part of the struggle against racism in post-Apartheid South Africa.
>
> …By opening out to questions of the embodied and the lived, museums address certain formations of the public in modern democracies that academic disciplines do not address. A democracy needs an informed public and public debates. Academic models of knowledge privilege information that, supposedly, the brain processes. These models of knowledge marginalise the senses. Democracies have moved on to a variety of politics in which information is not simply packaged for the brain to process; information is now also what addresses other senses - of seeing, hearing, smelling, and touching. In the democracy of the masses and the media, the realms of the embodied are increasingly politically powerful.[7]

Two things are clear: one, what is known as public places may not be open to free public access and two, anything that is placed in a public place may not necessarily have a public control. As we know, most often 'public art' projects are either state or corporate funded and controlled. As an alternative, artists of a certain kind all over the world have been trying to make art-making a democratic process, that is, a cultural practice that includes the people or tries to maximize public participation. Therefore we hear about categories or movements like 'new genre public art,' 'littoral

[7] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Museums in Late Democracies', *Humanities Research*, Vol. IX, No. 1, 2002.

art,' 'engaged art,' 'community-based art,' 'collaborative art' 'interactive art', 'participatory art', 'dialogical art' and so on.

Public Life of Art: Printmaking

There have been attempts made to make 'art' easily available to the public. Printmaking is one such artistic activity through which one can practice the culture of making art easily available to the public. With its capacity to reproduce and therefore produce multiple originals, the work of art can be simultaneously exhibited in various parts of the world, in as well as outside the gallery space. Printmaking has also been used as a tool for larger political struggle for justice in the past. The thrilling story of Ramkinkar and his associates preparing cement blocks, taking prints, breaking the cement blocks, burying them and sending the anti-British posters through the revolutionary agents is well known now. The whole activity took a span of about 4/5 hours at night in total secrecy. We are also aware of the role woodcut played in the political struggle of Mexico, Germany or China.

Does art have a public life? Can art live outside the professional artist-gallery-media-buyer circuit? And outside the academic circle as well? A large majority of ordinary people is outside this circuit. Can art have a public life?[8] I am not trying to indicate that whatever is learned, researched or produced within the academic circle is insignificant. I am only asking: shouldn't the art learned, researched and produced in academic circle live outside this circle as well? Can there be a system through which one can share this learning and production with the larger section of people? These were some of the questions which provoked a group of artists to come together in the summer of 1984. Most of them had a direct (and some had indirect) connections with Santiniketan and the philosophy behind it.

This group of artists and a few other friends from other disciplines gathered in one of their friends' house at Santiniketan in May/June 1985. They wanted to discover themselves, not just by working individually but in constant interaction with one another. In fact, it was their dissatisfaction with working in isolation that brought them together. They took up an unusual project of working on a single picture together. All of them collectively worked on a scroll, about 25 feet by 6 feet in size, with black and white powder colour. The scroll narrated their own life since the art college days. Interpretation, reinterpretation, self criticism, self

[8] For a discussion on the public life of 'history', see Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Itihaser Janojiban', *Anushtup*, Sharodiyo 1413 (2006).

glorification, embarrassing situations one had encountered, romance, conflicts, frustrations – the work was rich with all these elements. And finally it turned out to be a really revealing and enriching experience. What did they try to achieve through this? There was a web of personality traits as they interpreted one another's life; a basis was created for breaking down the individual formal habits each of them was trapped into; that the practice of art can and should be dialogical in essence was established with the constant understanding and negotiations with one another's approach, attitude, style and preferences. This did make their individual art practices more dialogic in nature – this is precisely what they were looking for.

Summer 1986, they produced another scroll based on the life around a small-town saw-mill. During the next few months each one of them worked on individual woodcuts on the same experience separately to make a portfolio of 10 woodcut prints called *The Saw Mill*.[9] Next year, instead of working separately, they all worked on their individual colour linocuts during the summer camp and produced a portfolio of ten colour linocut prints titled *Servant-Maidservant*. A lot of meaningful exchanges took place between the artists; not only on the technical level - producing large multi-colour linocuts itself was a big technical challenge - but also in terms of art language, philosophy of art practices, distribution system and so on.[10]

By the summer of 1986 most of them came back to Santiniketan and settled there. The same year they put up a stall at the annual fair that takes place in the third week of December every year at Santiniketan. This is a very big fair where a cross-section of society comes and gathers. This group of artists would produce calendars, greeting cards etc. with original prints, paintings and drawings, small terracotta pieces as individual pieces and of everyday use. These products were sold at a low price. The stall would also have a display of their works like in an exhibition. The artists would produce works sitting at the stall during the fair, sharing the process of art-making with the general public. The idea was to make art accessible to the general public and bring down the price within the reach of the educated middle class who, although had a genuine interest and appreciation of art, could not afford to collect them. On the other hand, these activities made their art-making process more dialogical, instead of a one-way linear traffic

[9] Participating artists: Alok Som, Nirmalendu Das, Pinaki Barua, Prabir Biswas, Pulak Dutta, Rati Basu, Sujata Mukherjee, Suranjan Basu, Sushanta Guha and Tarit Bhattacharya.

[10] Participating artists: Alok Som, Nirmalendu Das, Nitai Mazumdar, Pinaki Barua, Prabir Biswas, Pulak Dutta, Ramprasad Bhattacharya, Rati Basu, Suranjan Basu and Sushanta Guha.

from the creator to the spectator.[11] They started calling themselves *The Realists* from their first professional show held in Kolkata in 1990.

Printmaking as an artistic activity and an art practice can intervene quite effectively in sharing the academic learning and production with the larger section of people. This characteristic of printmaking - to create a possible alternative distribution system - has not been explored meaningfully by the contemporary printmakers.[12]

Non-modern Cultural Practices

Reflecting on his book on the bourgeois public sphere almost thirty years after its first publication in German, Habermas acknowledged the existence of a multiple public sphere which he excluded from his book. He writes,

> We may use "excluded" in Foucault's sense when we are dealing with groups that play a *constitutive* role in the formation of a particular public sphere. "Exclusion" assumes a different and less radical meaning when the same structures of communication simultaneously give rise to the formation of several arenas where, beside the hegemonic bourgeois public sphere, additional subcultural or class-specific public spheres are constituted on the basis of their own and initially not easily reconcilable premises.[13]
>
> …This culture of the common people apparently was by no

[11] For *The Realists,* involving in creative activities was the primary concern. They met in 1984 to work together but had their first Gallery/Professional show in 1990, the second in 1991 in Kolkata and the third and the last one in Mumbai in 1994. They tried to be in constant touch with their immediate surroundings - showing and sharing their works with the Bolpur Girls' School students, Revolutionary Socialist Party [RSP] gathering at Bardhoman, at a fair in Howrah. This group helped organizing an exhibition of Santiniketan artists, from the early days to the present at the State Conference of Students' Federation of India [Students organization of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)] held at Bolpur, a small town close to Santiniketan, another at Bolpur College and so on.

[12] On the other hand a lot more energy is spent on trying to promote the status of print to the status of painting, convincing the possible buyers of its re-sale value etc. Scanning of catalogues published in last few years would prove this – most often they are a collection of well known/working printmakers from different parts of India but with no declared agenda.

[13] Jürgen Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', Craig Calhoun (Ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere,* MIT, 1992, p.425.

> means … a passive echo of the dominant culture; it was also the periodically recurring violent revolt of a counterproject to the hierarchical world of domination.[14]

It is not difficult to find out 'subcultural or class-specific public spheres' that are 'constituted on the basis of their own' operating around us. This 'culture of the common people' can not simply be ignored by branding them as either 'pre-modern' or 'pre-political'. Whichever way we look at them, whatever name we call them with, they are living cultural practices of living communities. They live the present political and social life, face and negotiate with the contemporary crises, and celebrate life with a sense of joy through cultural practices that reflect their contemporary experiences; these practices continue to live, and they live a public life.

I will discuss about only one such festival 'of common people' that is common and popular in Rarh Bengal – Dharampuja. Dharmaraj is a non-Aryan regional god and is 'described as the supreme deity, creator and ordainer of the Universe, superior even to Brahma, Vishnu and Siva and at times identified with them…' [15] Goalpara, a village situated about 3 kilometers north of Santiniketan, celebrates it sometime in April every year. Kumkum Bhattacharya describes the Goalpara Dharampuja in 1986,

> Dharmaraj appears to be fond of revelry, music and wine. For music he has the Bayen (a caste of drummers) play their 'dhak' (drums) for all the days of the puja. Revelry and merry-making seem an integral part of his rituals. …there are band parties with dancers … The dancing plumes on the drums, the jumping, sweating players, the dry spell of heat, the eager and intense expressions on all the faces, serve to create an atmosphere of a unique religious experience.
>
> …The 'suri shala' or liquor shops provide the drummers and amateur parties with liquor… In many of the low caste homes … rice beer is brewed at home in large quantities. For these days special permission is obtained from the excise department and the police to brew liquor.
>
> …Dharmaraj puja by virtue of its features, involves a large section of the village in his worship. …Being a puja of not high Brahmanic order, it directly involves people belonging

[14] *Ibid.,* p.427.
[15] Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay, quoted in Amalendu Mitra, *Rarher Sanskriti O Dharmathakur,* Subarnarekha, Kolkata, 2001, p.109.

> to various castes, especially of the middle rank or below who seem to take more of an active role in this puja.[16]

As is clear from the description, almost the whole village takes part in the festival. Dharmaraj is worshipped out of door, under the sky and not in any one place only. There is a simultaneity and multiplicity of events - so many things happening all around the village, all at the same time. On the other hand, performers like the drummers or the band parties or even the Dharmaraj deity move around the village, something like the Earth spinning and rotating around the Sun at the same time. The other important element is that people gather in a circle around most of the activities and therefore have an equal distance from the actual activity centres. These structures break the linear space arrangement; challenge a 'one way traffic' from the performer to the viewer.

The Idea of Santiniketan

Rabindranath's idea of *samaj*[17] or 'face-to-face interactions of localized groups of people', to my mind, can be related to the idea of Santiniketan. Tagore was growing more and more against the idea of Nation and seeing the formation of *samaj* as the only solution to social problems in India. In one of his lectures delivered during his trip to Japan and the USA in 1916 he says,

> This time it was the Nation of the West driving its tentacles of machinery deep down into the soil.
>
> …A nation, in the sense of the political and economic union of people, is that aspect which a whole population assumes when organized for a mechanical purpose. Society as such has no ulterior purpose. It is an end in itself. It is a spontaneous self-expression of man as a social being. It is natural regulation of human relationships, so that men can develop ideals of life in cooperation with one another.[18]

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[16] Kumkum Bhattacharya, 'Bridge Across Castes – Dharmaraj', *Journal of Indian Anthropological Society 21*, 1986.

[17] 'samaj is closer to primordial notions of 'community' and face-to-face interactions of localized groups of people than to 'society', which is how it is normally translated. Even so, in its texture of multivalent associations, it lies somewhere between 'society' and 'community'.' Rustom Bharucha, *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore & Okakura Tenshin,* OUP, New Delhi, 2006, p.56.

[18] Rabindranath Tagore, 'Nationalism in the West', *Nationalism,* Sisir Kumar Das

Quite a lot of discussions and critiques are available today in printed form about Rabindranath's idea and rejection of Nation. For our purpose we will discuss it only in its relation to the formation of Santiniketan. The spirit of 'spontaneous self-expression of man' and 'natural regulation of human relationships' played an important role in developing the Santiniketan community. There was a quality of dialogue, of relating to the world around in a meaningful and concrete way and it was manifested in the methods of teaching, spatial distribution of activity centres, the general day to day activities and above all, the culture Santiniketan produced and practiced.

I will discuss only one aspect of the culture Santiniketan produced and practiced – the festivals - to demonstrate how it cultivated the 'aesthetic life of man' on the one hand and, on the other, by becoming a collective initiative, turned culture into an inclusive practice. Many festivals are celebrated in Santiniketan throughout the year. All the festivals are secular in nature so that anybody from anywhere in the world can take active part in it.[19]

Holi is a well-known Indian festival which has a strong Hindu religious association. It takes place during the spring season, which in Bengal covers two months of the Bangla calendar. *Holi* takes place during one of the full moon days within that period. In Santiniketan it is celebrated as a purely secular festival to celebrate spring and is called the Spring Festival [*Basontotsab*]. As the moon grows larger and brighter; flowers bloom in reds and yellows and oranges; new leaves appear against the sky with different shades of green; as the warm south wind brings the message of spring's arrival, the Ashram's ambience is filled with songs, dances, rehearsals for drama, decoration of the festival area and a host of related activities.

I will try to describe the festival from my own experience in the '60s and '70s. The whole community prepares for the festival for about a month. A cross-section of people, including the visitors, gathers every evening to watch the rehearsals, making it a festival that covers an entire month. Early

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[Ed.], *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore,* Vol. II, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 2004, p.421.

[19] For my reflection on the history and philosophy of Santiniketan festivals, see 'Santiniketan: Birth of an Alternative Cultural Space' in M.D. Muthukumaraswamy, Molly Kaushal (Ed.) *Folklore, Public Sphere and Civil Society*, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Delhi and National Folklore Support Centre, Chennai. 2004.

in the morning on the festival day, people gather at a particular place and go around the Ashram singing a song together, welcoming the spring as the sun rises in the East. Later in the morning a dance procession winds its way around the ashram with a song that asks people to come out of their homes and participate in the process of seasonal changes. Dressed in yellow [*basonti*] and white and red, these dancers, move among the 'spectators' sitting all around the stage, end up at the stage constructed for the occasion. Then a structured programme starts on the stage with people sitting on all three sides. As soon as the programme on the stage ends, the people form small groups, sit under the trees in a circle - sing and dance till lunch time. The day ends with a dance drama later in the evening.

The stage decoration, designing of the costumes of the dancers, composition of the songs and its lyrics, musical instruments used - all these contribute to make the festival participatory. However, I would like to emphasise the particular spatial arrangement that welcomed people to take an active part in the event rather than play the role of a passive, uncritical spectator. The early morning group-singing is an open space for anybody to come and join. Those who have been in such situations know the tremendous sense of participation that it is capable of producing. The procession of dancers moves through the spectators, thereby making it impossible for them to be just consumers of culture. The sitting arrangement around the stage reduces the physical distance between the performers and the spectators – there is a face-to-face interaction between them, making it essentially dialogical. And after the structured programme is over, the spectators become performers. There is a sense of public participation, of public authority. The spirit of 'spontaneous self-expression of man' as well as 'natural regulation of human relationship' finds true expression in these festivals.

It is important to look at and learn from the culture of common people for those interested in understanding the public nature of art practices. Santiniketan, to my understanding, learned from these non-modern cultural practices a lot - particularly from the Vaishnava social and cultural organization and the space arrangement of folk, tribal and people's festivals.

Figure 1. Basontotsab, Santiniketan.

Figure 2. Basontotsab, Santiniketan.

Figure 3. Basontotsab, Santiniketan.

Figure 4. Dharam Puja, Goalpara.

Figure 5. Dharam Puja, Goalpara.

Figure 6. The Realists, 'Servant-Maidservant', 1987, colour linocut.

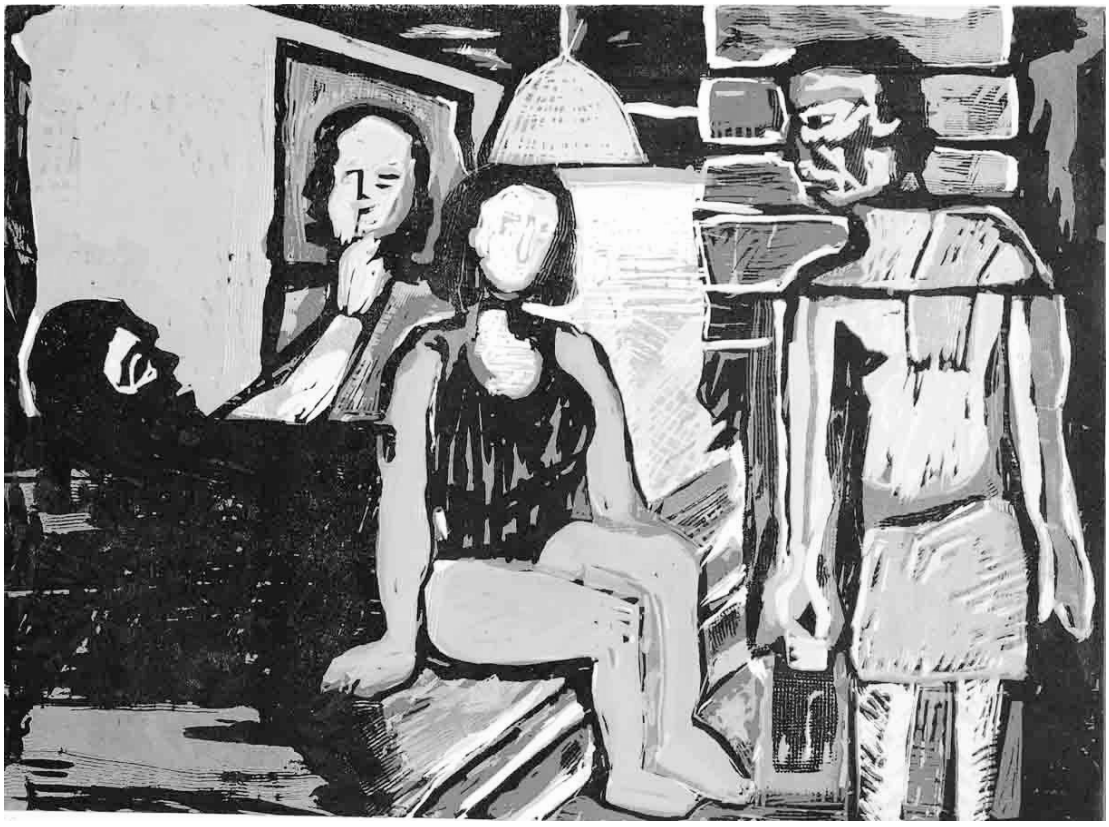

Figure 7. The Realists, 'Servant-Maidservant', 1987, colour linocut.

Figure 8. The Realists, 'Servant-Maidservant', 1987, colour linocut.

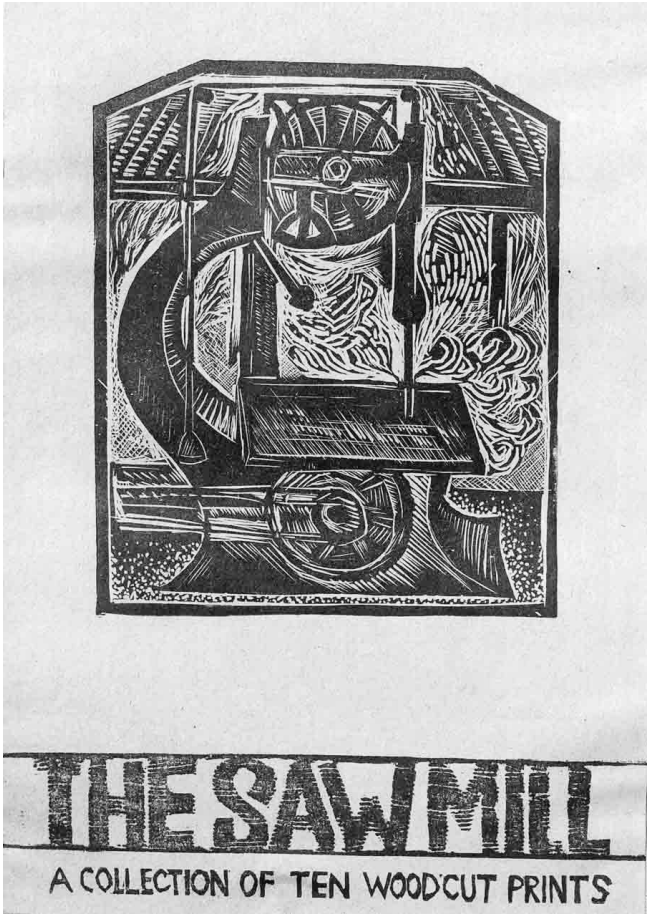

Figure 9. The Realists, 'The Saw Mill', 1986, woodcut.

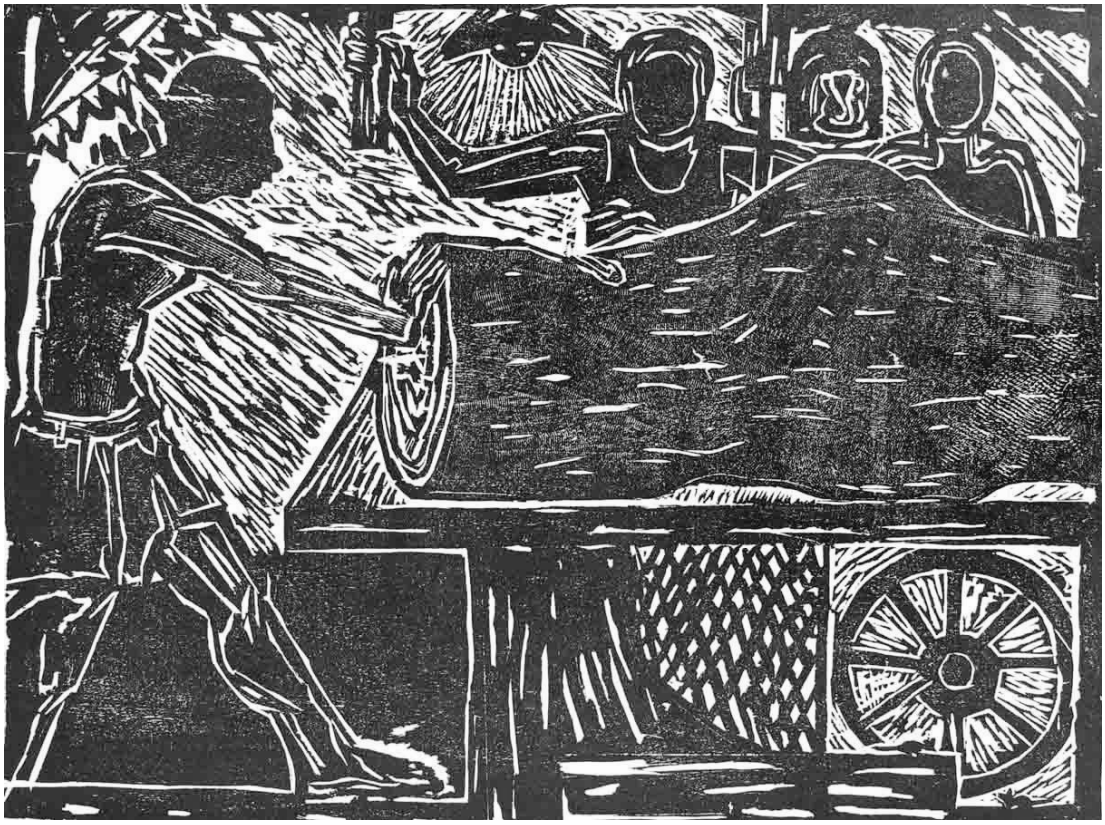

Figure 10. The Realists, 'The Saw Mill', 1986, woodcut.

Figure 11. The Realists, 'The Saw Mill', 1986, woodcut.

Figure 12. The Realists, 'The Saw Mill', 1986, woodcut.

Figure 13. The Realists, 'We', 1985, powder colour.

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The Perception of Modernism in Turkish Painting

Kıymet Giray

It was in the 1920s that Turkish painting would first make the acquaintance of modernism in its history, some 39 years after the Academy of Fine Arts began giving instruction. The latter event materialized during a time of war, and the Academy would attempt to develop and acquire an identity amid the defeats and loss of territory which prepared the demise of the Ottoman Empire. At a time when a host of difficulties were being experienced due to the occupation of the country, especially the Ottoman capital, young people were receiving an education in order to become architects, painters and sculptors.

The years of trial and tribulation would only end with the achieving of victory in the War of Liberation and the founding of the Turkish Republic, whose policy and government program were based on culture and art. It was in such a climate that a program would be instituted, as the first anniversary of the Republic was being celebrated, to send youths trained in painting and sculpture to certain cities of Europe, Paris in particular. Earlier, Ottoman sultans had favored students who were successful in art class at the military academies by sending them to France, and with this precedent the young people of the Republican era would go to European cities to enroll in educational programs for improvement as artists.

However, whereas a handful of artists with contacts at the Ottoman Court had benefited from this privilege, the egalitarianism which characterized the Republic and its democracy would lead to the imposing of a condition that competitions be held for candidates, who were painters and sculptors who had completed their training at the Academy of Fine Arts. In addition, the unit of currency employed in that day would make it possible for some artists to use their personal resources in order to go to France, Germany and Italy. An example is Ali Avni Çelebi, who on May 22, 1922 went to Munich thanks to personal means, with the aim of increasing his technical prowess and gaining knowledge that would deepen his understanding of the painter's art.

The present article will open to discussion questions which have recently

emerged on this point while attempting to offer a fresh take on the developmental targets of Turkish painting. In particular, attention will be devoted to the stages as well as geographical regions and their sources which determine the underpinnings of Turkish artists as they develop into painters and sculptors. Primarily, the study will deal with the qualities which laid the groundwork for the genesis of form as determined by perception, reception and interpretation. There will be a discussion of how youths raised in the rules and traditions of the east and of Islam, and who were children of the Ottoman Empire, perceived the underlying values nourished by social, scientific and religious sources which shaped the intellectual life of the west when they confronted this as they strove to make paintings and sculptures. This will be accompanied by an analysis of the aims and expectations of Turkish painters within the force of attraction exerted by Parisian art circles on young people who wished to leave their stamp on world art. This is a fact that will be opened for discussion in conjunction with an investigation of the reasons why other centers eventually superseded the French capital.

In this context, the primary example in the matter will be Ali Avni Çelebi. The reason for this choice is that the term modernism first appeared in the Turkish press in 1927 referring to a painting by Çelebi entitled "Store Window." Exhibited in the Galatasaray salons, this painting was to astonish Turkish viewers, amaze artists and draw writers into a debate which would occupy them for more than a year. About a year later, with a work called "Masked Ball," Ali Çelebi and his art were to precipitate an investigation of modernism and explorations which would necessitate a reading of the formal values of painting. Founded on the ideal of the landscape and attempting to transfer the perception of daily life to the canvas in an impressionist manner, Turkish painting was to grasp the meaning of modern artistic movements which generated differing departures, and to realize that change would become diverse thanks to sources that fed different ideational perspectives within the same generation. Together with the emergence of the concept of modernism it would become aware of other concepts – avant-garde, progress and innovation, for example. Most importantly, aesthetic theories would be reworked in line with the value underlying art, as an analysis of the differences in the philosophies of east and west led, in a process which has persisted until our day, to a quest for solutions that would create new trends with a common denominator.

Starting out, the main theme worthy of discussion is to ask why Ali Avni Çelebi chose Germany as the place to add new dimensions to his education in art while attempting to determine just how informed and conscious was

his opting for a choice that ran counter to the general trend of the day, which favored Paris.

In deciding to go to Germany, specifically Munich, to augment his training in art, did Ali Avni Çelebi mean to analyze *in situ* the investigations he had made and the preliminary information he had gleaned concerning German expressionism?

But that would imply the adoption of a goal and the acquisiton of new directions within the art movements of the day, and in my opinion Çelebi was well short of such an intention. Certainly Ali Avni Çelebi was familiar with and closely followed not only the First World War, which triggered social change for those living in Europe and plunged the lives of people into bloodshed and unrest, but also the Hitler era which subsequently introduced the ideal of a Greater Germany and resulted in the troubles of cold and hot war. This change on the European continent, directly impacting the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, caused Çelebi to feel deep anxiety, firstly for himself and his country, and then for the future. However, it was only during his education in Germany that he would become aware and attain to a consciousness of the values, reflected in the content and technique of art, generated by the reaction of expressionist painters to the social events they were experiencing. Despite this, because he was brought up in the intellectual climate of the east he was unable to receive the riches that would be reaped from philosophical and intellectual sources by art styles at the stage of establishing form, rather grasping intuitively the plastic characteristics of pictorial values and thus introducing them into his practice. Remaining aloof from expressionism's theory of emotional impact and from its inclination to question social events, he preferred merely to use in his pictures the technical sensibilities and artistic values of this new movement. Far from the tense aesthetic change wrought by the war, he explored fresh alternatives in subject matter in a quest for the new and profound meaning made available to the depiction of the human body by deformations in its shape.

Here we must ask some fresh questions: Was Ali Çelebi aware that the German expressionistic style had, with pure and unadulterated forms the source of which was deep sensibilities, unfolded the zenith of human creativity?

A close examination of Çelebi's painting reveals that the aptest definition of German Expressionism as an artistic style is that its artist or creator rejects the superficial, direct depiction of shallow realities through stilted

perception, and on the contrary combines expressive objects and brilliant images, knowing and implementing them with consummate skill, as he brings to bear extremes of passionate feeling. This artist is aware of how his paintings gain from textures and violent bright colors, and knows that in place of the structural analysis of forms, primitive interpretation, deformation, unnatural profundity, hindrance, alterations embracing and enfolding reality, and subjective values, the depiction of factual developments had enriched the painting style of the day with great meaning; and he brings this idea to the work in hand, making it different and original.

It must have been after he went to Germany that Çelebi learned how the German Expressionist movement in the first half of the 20th century (1905-45) consisted mainly of two groups of painters dubbed Die Bruecke (The Bridge) and Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider). And it is here that he will have added to his stock of knowledge the developments he underwent in Germany and Austria.

The second and still more important question: What sort of method and system of thought must Turkish painters have developed in order, like the artists of other countries, to make a place for themselves in world painting and create universal values? When they went abroad, was it mainly with the goal of proving themselves on the stage of world art?

These questions which we have opened for discussion will create new areas of investigation oriented toward establishing what the system of thought was in which Turkish painting developed, and what aesthetic values informed it.

At this juncture, as the pathbreaking study in the discussions probing the Turkish art of painting, it will be appropriate to treat of the stylistic development acquired by Ali Avni Çelebi, particularly during his Munich years in the studio of Hans Hofmann, for this will elucidate the artistic development of the latter, an intellectual open to the world, and the genesis of Ali Çelebi's artistry in his aspect as an introverted talent. Clarification will be brought to the aims in the life of Hofmann, the studio teacher who was a western painter educated with an openness to the universal system of thought, as well as to the targets in the artistic development of Çelebi, who lived within an eastern system of philosophy which structured his way of thinking. The aesthetic values which shaped the art of both these men will be examined comparatively, and in this context, bearing in mind the temporal difference between them, their perceptions of world art history will be explored.

In 1918 Ali Avni Çelebi was a student in the painting department of the Academy of Fine Arts, and only 14 years old.[1] Passionately desiring to become a painter, he attended the Academy and received instruction in the studios of Hikmet Onat and Çallı, but during the years when Istanbul was occupied by the British could only do so by moving from one building to another as a kind of nomad.[2]

In order to garner knowledge which will illuminate the life of Çelebi, it will be useful to recount Hofmann's life in broad outline, with the purpose of reviewing mistaken information and replacing it by the truth, and also to gain a fresh understanding of the period through examining the life of a German painter who was active at the time.

In 1898 Hans Hofmann entered the art school of Moritz Heymann in Munich, starting to paint in this studio where he met Jules Pacin[3]. During the next four years he worked with the Bulgarian court artist Nicola Michailow, with the Hungarians Károly Ferenczy and Grimwald, with Willy Schwarz of Berlin, who introduced him to impressionism, and in 1902 with Anton Abbé, with whom Kandinsky, too, had previously worked. Here he also met the Ukranian painter David Burliuk. Through the good offices of Willy Schwarz he met the collector Philipp Freudenberg, a

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[1] Ali Avni Çelebi came to the world in Istanbul in 1904, the ninth of twelve children born to Suphi Bey, a retired writer of official letters who had been posted in Baghdad and was also one of the enlightened figures of the day, and to his wife Raziye Hanım. Theirs was a respectable Ottoman family (Kıymet Giray, *Müstakil Ressamlar ve Heykeltraşlar Birliği*, İstanbul, 1997, p.92). While still employed in Baghdad as a letter-writer, Ahmet Suphi Bey felt a keen interest in art and the art environment of Istanbul, and because he closely followed cultural events there was on familiar terms with the intellectuals of the society in which he lived. When Çelebi was still a child his artistic talent attracted the attention of his family and their circle. Çelebi's statement that "My father had a great interest in art, and helped me go into the fine arts" gives some idea of the cultural nature of the family in which he lived. Greatly interested in art, his father felt that Çelebi's talent could be furthered by training and therefore saw to it that the lad enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts.

[2] For further information see Kıymet Giray, *Müstakil Ressamlar ve Heykeltraşlar Birliği*, İstanbul, 1997, p.27.

[3] Hans Hofmann was born in Wissenburg, Bavaria, Germany on March 21, 1880 as the son of Theodor and Franziska Hofmann. In 1886 the family moved to Munich because Theodor Hofmann was employed by a ministry. There, at the gymnasium, Hans developed an interest in mathematics, science and music. He also started to play the violin, piano and organ, and to draw. With his father's help, in 1896 he found a job as a secretary in the ministry where the latter worked. He improved his knowledge of mathematics and attempted a series of scientific inventions, including an electromagnetic calculator.

Berliner who would finance Hofmann's painting career from 1904 to 1914 and enable him to live in Paris. Then in 1914 World War I broke out. Hofmann was rejected from military service for physical reasons, and then in 1915 the war forced Freudenberg to cut off his financial support, so Hofmann went back to teaching, and in the spring opened the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts. Through his wife's friendship with Gabriele Münter, Hofmann was entrusted with a great number of early period Kandinsky paintings for safekeeping while the war lasted. (But Hofmann and Kandinsky never met). Hofmann was part of art circles, as he taught private students and was intimately acquainted with the artists of the day.

In reading the artistic life of Hofmann, let us also bear in mind the 24 years of age difference that separated him from Ali Avni Çelebi as we pursue a system which compares the possibilities presented by their careers in art.

When Hofmann started learning art he was 18 years old, had acquired life experience by working, and chose his new path determined to be an artist, judiciously inspecting studios in order to choose one which would suit him, and indeed making the rounds of studios that might shape his art. Çelebi, on the other hand, was inspired by his love of art to enroll at the Academy of Arts at the age of 14. And there were no other studios to choose from. Living in Istanbul, he had to bow to the circumstances of the day, so the idea of becoming an artist and holding large exhibitions to make an impression in the art market was very remote from him.

In order to acquire fresh knowledge that would deepen his approach to painting, and to improve his technical skills, Çelebi set out for Munich on May 22, 1922, financing the venture himself.

For three months he attended the private school of Moritz Heymann, and it must have come as an intriguing coincidence that his teacher Hofmann had begun his art training in the same studio. Çelebi later entered the Munich Academy of Fine Arts, where he attended the Gröber studio. But after one semester he left this studio, for Grüber's strict adherence to academic precepts, coupled with his utter rejection of the new trends in art, ran counter to Çelebi's artistic inclinations.

As Ali Avni Çelebi headed for Germany he had no advance information about studios and schools where he might develop his understanding of art. Rather than being able to select a suitable studio and go fully prepared to Germany, he would have to make inquiries about a place to study, and the teacher, when he got there and only then make a choice.

It was only through trial and error that he was to learn about the studios and schools he might attend. The loneliness felt by an 18-year-old Turkish youngster surrounded by strangers in Germany was further exacerbated by the fact that the studios he investigated were not suitable, and Çelebi was forced to conduct his search for an environment that would match his individual sensibilities, one where he could work freely, using instinct alone. And he had to make a choice based on an experience of studios gained in a quite brief time.

On the recommendation of Mahir Tomruk he enrolled at the studio of Hans Hofmann, but on this occasion only studied there for two months. It was, however, his first acquaintanceship with Hofmann. For economic reasons he had to withdraw and move in with family friends in Berlin. There he commenced studies at the Klever studio in the Berlin Academy of Fine Arts. But the studio teacher Professor Klever, too, followed an educational system that was foreign to Çelebi, and deciding that with this system he could not further his understanding of art he left the Academy. He explained his desertion of the Klever studio in these words, which reflect the fact that in terms of art and aesthetic sensibility his underlying knowledge was open only to technical instruction:

> "My teacher drew well, but he was not very sensitive when it came to painting"[4]

Ali Avni Çelebi's search, divided between Munich and Berlin, for a painting studio where he could really work came to an end in December of 1922 when he decided to enter the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts at 40 Georgen Strasse in Munich. It was through instinct and intuition alone that Çelebi would conclude that Munich, specifically the Hans Hofmann studio, was the place of study best suited to his individual sensibilities, his approach to art, and his character. Hofmann, meanwhile, since 1921 had been teaching in a school where American students were in the majority, and also giving art lessons at summer schools which he opened in several cities of Europe. These summer art courses were held, for example, on the southern coasts of Europe and at the popular resorts of the French coast in particular.[5]

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[4] Ali Avni Çelebi, "Ben ve Görüşlerim", *Sanat Çevresi*, Sayı: 24, Ekim 80, p.4. Gönül Gültekin, *Ali Çelebi,* Ankara, 1984, p.8.

[5] In 1919 Hofmann held a summer art course in Murnau. In the following summers these painting courses took place at Herrsching (1920), Seefeld (1921), Hechendorf (1922) and Gmund on the Tegernsee (1923). In 1921 the Americans Vaclac Vytlacil and Ernest Thum discovered the Hofmann school and recommended it to foreign students including Cameron Booth, Worth Ryder, Wolfgang Paalen, Glenn Wessels,

It was only after beginning to study at Hofmann's school that Çelebi realized it was known for an educational system which was the best in Munich, producing new names for the art world.

What Hofmann and Çelebi had in common when it came to the first steps, the first doctrines in choosing an art style was that for both artists the initial stage of their educational systems started with artists who came after the Impressionist movement. Not only would Hans Hofmann teach in the studio for many long years, training numerous artists for the benefit of world art, but at the same time his own paintings would make him one of the founders of Abstract Expressionism.

At the Hofmann school, which was mostly attended by students from abroad, Ali Avni Çelebi furthered his training in art. In those years such, then, was the studio where Ali Avni Çelebi shared his learning experience with Zeki Kocamemi. There were painters from many parts of the world at the Hofmann Studio, but although he was working among them he kept aloof from friendships and artistic get-togethers or solidarity, something which cannot be adequately explained by the mere fact that he didn't speak German. His life was spent in a socially closed manner, and his shy personality would be the main cause for not establishing artistic contacts, for despite being in the midst of the world's artists he was not to consider forming friendships, holding exhibitions or participating in group exhibitions around the world as the years went by, or of developing views concerning art.

For Çelebi the only thing that mattered was Hofmann and the program implemented by his Art School. Hofmann's educational program, developing as it did the theory of cubism with analysis at its core, and the school with its avant-garde approach, at the same time laid the foundations for abstract expressionism. With special attention to analytical cubistic explorations of figurative and landscape painting, Hofmann pursued a special training program for newly emerging artists, one that concentrated on an analytical study of the human body. Within this doctrine based on analytical cubism and abstract expressionism, Ali Avni Çelebi began to acquire a new understanding of art. He had grasped Hofmann's artistic doctrine and was sure that this studio was of an artistic nature to give him the training he desired:

> "In his theoretical knowledge of painting, his artistic culture and his power as a teacher, he was one of the strongest

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Louise Nevelson, Carl Holty, Alfred Jensen and Ludwig Sander.

implementers of German Expressionism in the years 1915-1920."[6]

Combining with his approach to art the technical skill and basic theoretical knowledge he had gained in Hofmann's studio, Çelebi began to paint important pictures, in 1926 producing "Store Window," his first large-scale, important work. This painting is ample evidence of how the style acquired by Çelebi had developed, and of the values reflected in his art thanks to this advance.

Çelebi expresses in the following lines his impressions of Hofmann, from whom he learned this style, and of the educational system practiced in his studio:

> "In Hofmann's Academy there were studios for the portrait, composition and night classes. He was a gentleman, both powerful and imposing. But I was a bit put off by the way he painted... He had impetuous brush strokes... A kind of contradiction and contrast... 'That's what life demands. For that's what life is all about'. So he would say. There's music as well in the harmony, construction, character and atmosphere of these lines. He would marshal all of this before him and compose his work accordingly. Painting should be added on top of construction... Like so: Physically someone may be beautiful. But then make-up is added. The make-up is painting... Physically, the construction must be there. Hofmann was friends with Picasso and Matisse. He had worked together with them. Of course, in his pictures he had his own distinct personality."[7]

These statements prove that Çelebi understood and analyzed only intuitively the stylistic and plastic values reflected in Hofmann's approach to art.

Meanwhile Ali Avni Çelebi in 1927 received a document which contained a summons: 'Come back home.' At a time when he was finding everything he wanted at the Hofmann studio, and making major strides in his art, this document grieved him:

> "The summons to return home came one summer's noon.

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[4] Erhan Karaesmen, "Atölyeler İçinden-3-Ali Avni Çelebi", *Gösteri Sanat ve Edebiyat Dergisi,* No. 11, Istanbul October 1980, p.27.

[7] Erdoğan Tanaltay, "Ali Çelebi ile Bir Gün", *Sanat Çevresi*, No. 94, August 1986, pp.24-26.

> The sunny world suddenly darkened. There was so much left to do and learn."[8]

At the time this summons arrived Çelebi, who had distinguished himself in Hofmann's studio, was being offered an assistantship by the older artist. But Çelebi, for whom this offer might have been a major stepping stone in his artistic career, had to turn it down. He had been called back to Turkey to perform the mandatory service required of all people who had benefited from a government grant, and this frightened him. He didn't dare even contemplate remaining in Germany and assuming his grant as a debt, so he was unable to take advantage of Hofmann's offer of an assistantship:

> "I couldn't have stayed with Hofmann, for the Turkish government was paying my way as a student. I had to go back as the instruction stipulated when it came in 1927."[9]

Hofmann had a collector who, from the time Hofmann was 24 years old until the outbreak of the First World War, had collected his works and provided him with a comfortable living. Ali Çelebi, on the other hand, would participate in group exhibitions when he came back to Turkey from Europe, struggling to establish himself in a shallow art climate only just emerging and plagued by jealousies, while at the same time he would be appointed by the government to teach art in Konya, far from Istanbul.

The training he had undergone had made great contributions to Çelebi's art and deciphered figurative expressionism for him, even if only thanks to his intuition. On returning to Istanbul he would contribute works to group exhibitions, works which not only were to exemplify his innovative approach but also demonstrate the fact that new departures were to become part of Turkish art in their intellectual guise.

The Galatasaray exhibition held in 1927 in Istanbul is always mentioned as the start of a new era in Turkish painting. The definition of the beginning was modernism, and the picture which pointed to this definition Ali Avni Çelebi's "Store Window." This painting astonished the viewers. Produced by Ali Avni Çelebi in 1926, "Store Window" indicated both the universal order of the Turkish Republic with the fresh dimensions it was contributing to the contemporary approach to art, as well as development in the artist's style, while at the same time it was a sign of his powerful artistic understanding.

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[8] Zeki Kıral, "Çelebi'yi Yazmak, Çelebi'yi Söylemek", *Sanat Çevresi*, No. 24 Istanbul, October 1980, pp.18-19.

[9] Kıymet Giray, interview with Ali Çelebi. July 10, 1981, Istanbul.

The movement triggered by this picture would usher into the fledgling Turkish art of painting newly emerging viewpoints on the concepts of style and art, and thanks to its aesthetic values would also introduce new programs of reading. The impact was truly incredible. Through well-known, frequently exhibited works by the Soldier painters, the society, writers and individuals particularly drawn to art were on familiar terms with Romanticism, Naturalism and Orientalism, making the acquaintance of Impressionism thanks to the group exhibitions held by the Çallı generation, and this had been quietly accepted as the norm. Çelebi's "Store Window" burst like a bombshell in the world of Turkish painting. Confronted with this picture and its harsh geometrical lines, coming face to face with examples of figurative expressionism, the viewer quite naturally experienced a feeling of shock. At the heart of this situation lay the fact that Turkish art was perceived within its own closed box, confined to slices of nature and remote from any knowledge of movements or theory.

Probing the mystery of the innovative movement created by Çelebi's style as they attempted to analyze its paintings, artists were forced to admit that never again could they think and paint as they had in the past. The fact that they realized this was highly significant in that it meant they would henceforth be exploring the aesthetic concepts of the quest for novelty and innovation.

At this stage Turkish artists were to realize the need for pursuing new ways of thought and embarking on a fresh quest if they were going to create anything new. The solution would be founded on a question: "What studio should be chosen to determine the styles which would further the artist's work, a studio which would be a place where aesthetic values were reinforced?"

"Store Window" is a slice of life from the crowded, bustling streets of a metropolis. The relationship Çelebi establishes with this subject matter is of particular importance because it is the first effort to bring to Turkish painting cross-sections having to do with depictions of the city. This picture is the capturing of a moment of taste on canvas, a moment caught up in the act of transition. It is the momentary conveying of perception. The woman who moves briskly forward with no lull in her schedule emphasizes the temporal continuity of the painting, while the tie she establishes with the dress in the store window indicates that in this picture a second phase has been added to the concept of time. Bringing about the transformation of taste into desire, this phase implies that there will be a return to this spot, that this time she will pause and examine the contents of the window,

indeed go inside and acquire, perhaps even buy, one of these dresses. This pictorial narrative, structuring the flow of time, signals for the first time in Turkish painting an aesthetic sensibility probing the continuity of time and space. It proves that during the time he studied in Germany Ali Avni Çelebi's paintings had gained intellectual depth, and that this development had taken his works to a different aesthetic plane.

In an effort to grasp and interpret, the relationship established with "Store Window" by artists, writers and the society would persist throughout 1927. And the exhibitions held in 1928 confronted viewers with the results they had expected.

The starting point in Turkish painting had been passed, new developments had begun to be awaited, and an awakening had commenced of the awareness that artists would have to establish themselves within the contemporary art of the century at hand. The expressionist and futurist tendencies in Ali Çelebi's style had resulted in "Store Window," which was also the reflection on canvas of explorations parallel to the training he had received in Germany. At the point where this awakening began to stir, along with an awareness and consciousness regarding styles, the first stage of a "great leap forward" in reading and exploration had also begun. Coming on the scene at this initial stage, Çelebi was to shoulder the task of opening fresh horizons for the expectations vis-à-vis the aesthetic values of the painter's art.

Ali Çelebi had painted "Store Window" in Munich, and the subject matter he chose for it overlapped with that of Mache's show window pictures, something which indicates that the artist recognized different aesthetic alternatives, exploring and internalizing them. Mache had produced these pictures based on what he had garnered from Delaunay, and Çelebi had studied them to acquire for his art, with a subjective interpretation, an area of subject matter that jibed with his individual sensibility.[10]

[10] During the period which included the years 1913 and 1914, Mache was to execute cycles of paintings with such titles as Fashion Shop and Fashion Window. At first greatly influenced by the analytical cubism of Delaunay, these works would evolve into examples of Mache's geometrical abstract expressionism (Anna Meseure, Auust Macke 1887-1914, Köln, Benedikt Taschen Verlag, 1993, p.60-63, 2000, p.60-63.

Figure 1. Ali Çelebi, 'Store Window', 1926
(http://www.turkresmi.com/dosyalar/201.htm)

Figure 2. Ali Çelebi, 'MaskedBall', 1928.
(http://www.turkresmi.com/dosyalar/201.htm)

Ali Avni Çelebi was to acquire his first inklings of Mache and his art from his studio teacher Hans Hofmann. He was thoroughly familiar with the paintings of Delaunay, Hofmann's close friend, and aware of Delaunay's window pictures and the fact that they were a source for German expressionism.

The sensibility which Çelebi and Mache had in common stemmed from the desire to transfer the ongoing life of the city onto canvas. Mache's store window paintings, his treatment of women who were interested in the shops on the commercial boulevards which were the foci of consumption – these things must have drawn Çelebi to this subject.

However, the moment Çelebi captured the pace of life on those crowded avenues reflecting the spirit of urban life, his painting "Store Window" exemplified his original style, for into it he had poured the figurative expressions of his art. In channeling the pace of life Çelebi had shaped the fundamental quality of his subjective understanding of art, and it was diametrically opposed to the stillness conveyed by Mache's static figures.

The paintings executed by Ali Avni Çelebi in Konya and later Istanbul were at least as unsettling as "Store Window" and perhaps even more so.

Dated 1928, "Masked Ball" by Ali Çelebi is evidence of the pathbreaking strides he accomplished in Turkish painting, for it attains dimensions through local and subjective dimensions which, developed in the footsteps of existing examples presented by art history, were characterized by a great profundity of observation on Çelebi's part concerning life in the metropolis.

Based on impressions of Faschings in Munich, as he himself put it in an interview about this painting, "Masked Ball" is a reflection on canvas of the observations of urban life made by Çelebi during his time in that city. More importantly, it depicts the night clubs known as Jazz Bands which appeared in Germany before the war and became popular during the war years and especially afterwards.

Not only is "Masked Ball" the first example of daring subject matter in Turkish art, at the same time, with its pictorial values, it defines the forward-looking attitude brought to Turkish painting by Çelebi. With its compositional ordering, an expressionist style brought about by figurative deformation, its pace and a futuristic approach that triggers movement, it displays and sets forth the values that Çelebi's art had acquired as well as the way in which art and aesthetics were perceived at that era.

> "In 1928 [11] the painting which attracted the interest of visitors to the Türk Ocağı exhbition was Ali Çelebi's 'Masked Ball'. With this large picture, made while he was studying in Munich (Berk-Gezer 1973, p. 43)[12], Ali Çelebi introduced a lively vision and technique which would shake Turkish art to the core. Until that year no Turkish painter had taken up and rendered such subject matter. Garbed in carnival costumes, wearing dunce's caps and fashionable hats, men and women cavort in front of a greenish wooden screen, while in the foreground a woman shows off her nudity."

It is interesting that Ali Avni Çelebi painted "Masked Ball" far from Munich, in the central Anatolian town of Konya. When he went to Germany in 1932 to join Hofmann, this painting had been hung in the 1929 exhibitions of the Independents.

In this context it behooves us to compare Çelebi's "Masked Ball" with the Jazz Band painting that constitutes the middle portion of "Metropolis," a triptych (1927-28) by Otto Dix. The date of these two works roughly coincides.

Could Ali Avni Çelebi have seen Otto Dix's exhibition? The latter's first large-scale exhibition took place in 1926 at the Galerie Nierendorf in Berlin. At that epoch Ali Çelebi was in Munich, and what's more "Metropolis" wasn't in the exhibition because it hadn't been painted yet. And just as Çelebi could not have seen the show, so it would have been impossible for "Metropolis" to appear in the art press.[13] Unaware of Otto Dix's work, Çelebi executed "Masked Ball" as the outcome of his own conscious choice.

It is naturally quite surprising that during the same years paintings by artists

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[10] In this chapter Berk gives the date of the Türkocağı Exhibition in Istanbul's Cağaloğlu as 1928. This error is no doubt a slip of the pen. Nurullah Berk-Hüseyin Gezer, *50 Yılın Türk Resim ve Heykeli*, İstanbul, 1973, p.42.

[12] Here Berk says that "Masked Ball" was painted in Munich, whereas it was executed while Ali Avni Çelebi was teaching in Konya in 1928. Nurullah Berk-Hüseyin Gezer, *50 Yılın Türk Resim ve Heykeli*, İstanbul, 1973, p.43.

[13] From 1926 to 1930, Dix worked at the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts. As of 1932 the Nazis branded his work as 'degenerate art' and prevented him from holding exhibitions. For this reason "Metropolis" did not gain exposure in any show. This situation obtained until 1938, after which Dix's works were seized and destroyed.

in different countries depicted the same subject using similar values. In the process of making into a work of art subject matter in harmony with their individual approaches to art, two painters between whom there was no communication crossed paths, and this is intriguing. However, it appears impossible that either artist could have seen the other's paintings, given the crucial tension of the pre-war era and its impact on the at any rate limited resources for communication that existed then. Therefore the presumption that Otto Dix and Ali Avni Çelebi were influenced by each other's work seems highly far-fetched in view of the lack of contact arising from their differing regions, differing social realities and differing cultures.

In the Ankara and Istanbul exhibitions of the Union of Independent Painters and Sculptors, "Masked Ball" is notable for a stance which proved this approach would last. Discussion of the picture's plastic structure and subject matter took explorations in Turkish painting to a new dimension. Indeed, the debate over this work led to developments which were more significant than generally supposed. Ideas focusing on the meaning of the picture, its sensibility, style, and choice of subject matter highlighted the need to turn to new styles and viewpoints as well as different subjects. Thus Turkish painters were compelled to study and probe art and to find new methods of "telling their story."

A bold, radical stance in the choice of subject matter was underscored by the reflection of a striking reality vis-à-vis space and what was experienced within it, as a groundbreaking artist's daring choice was offered up to view.

For the first time in the development of Turkish painting a bar was depicted in an unflinching, striking way. This is very different from the ballrooms and entertainment seen in the paintings of Çallı, and abruptly, without warning, makes the viewer witness to a secluded, hidden, secret moment of amusement.

Among the works dealing with night life in the metropolis are those by Nolde, which emerge as a new attitude, a window onto the objectivity of the city, and at the same time gains a renewed perspective on the city and its problems, both of which were included in the subject matter of German Expressionism[14]. Comparing him to Nolde, we see that Çelebi with his

[14] Among the German Expressionists, it is with the works of Emil Nolde in his Berlin period that pictures depicting the wild amusements of night life appear. Works that reflect in the pictorial cycles which Nolde painted in 1911-1912 based on his impressions of Berlin night clubs are The Masks Cycle / Mask Still Life, Conversation (With Shadows), Encounter (Four Figures), and especially Nudes and

"Masked Ball" is far from resembling him in terms of values, yet one realizes, and this is significant, that during his Munich years Çelebi had studied the sources via which an exploration was possible of the art history relating to artists, their works and German Expressionism.

In Çelebi's painting the reason for the secrecy of the entertainment is found to the right, in the nude woman lolling on the crossed legs of a naked man, his hand covering her face. In the foreground is an arrangement which proves that Ali Avni Çelebi documented not only his circle but himself as well, for he is dealing cards while Kocamemi sits across from him, a nude on his lap. The figurative narration is charged with aesthetic approaches that depict the enrichment of body language through expression. In particular the nude stretched out in front resembles to a degree the nude lying on the left in Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' work "The Turkish Bath."[15] This is evidence that Çelebi had wandered in the corridors and rooms of art history.

The fact that in "Masked Ball" privacy and decency are treated as values revolving around women shows that in his mindset Ali Avni Çelebi was still an Ottoman tied to tradition. While the women's faces are masked, the men seem determined to leave theirs uncovered. This unwavering attitude is clearly underlined by the black figure on the left with mask in hand.

Through the canvasses of Ali Çelebi, Turkish painting continued to experience new interpretations, new directions and fresh debate. The most important aesthetic value in the works of Ali Avni Çelebi must be their analysis of the concept of speed. And among the most important paintings which reflect this characteristic is "The Butterfly Hunters." Depicting the frantic chase after flitting, fleeting butterflies, this work reflects Çelebi's aesthetic sensibility as it brings together the components of time and speed, and also alludes to the sources that inform his style. The deformed nature of the blunt figure conveys the effect of speed and seems at least partly inspired by features in "Two Women Running on the Beach"[16]. What has been picked up by Çelebi in his picture is the depiction of the moment and of time extending into the future. For the first time in Turkish painting an artist explores the concepts of time and the moment and adopts them for his pictorial subject matter. Certainly this is part of what is meant when one says that Çelebi started Modernism in this country.

Eunuch (Keeper of the Harem).

[15] LeBain Turco. 1862. (Oil on Canvas, Musée du Louvre, Paris)

[16] Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) Two Women Running on the Beach, 1922 Picasso Museum, Paris.

Picasso During His Neo-Classical Period

All these characteristics show that Ali Avni Çelebi had closely studied the movements and examples which determined modernism within the line of development of European painting, and that he based his art on the style which he worked up with this study at its core.

The fact that Ali Avni Çelebi turned to themes that accorded with the subject matter choices of the era's famous artists points to the aesthetic ties he felt with western painting. Two works, "Scrubbing in the Turkish Bath" and "Women Bathing in the Turkish Bath", are evidence of the way he treated the subject of bathers. Painted on large canvasses, these works document the place of distinction Çelebi holds among the painters of the day in terms of style and art. Demonstrating that Çelebi cannot be adequately explained by "Masked Ball," "Store Window" and "The Barber" alone, pictures such as "Coffee Houses," "Bird Freak" and "Fishermen" are ample proof of the aesthetic values which Ali Avni Çelebi brought to the Turkish art of painting. Indeed, he inaugurated an era that brought new discussion and debate to Turkish art while it prompted the questioning, probing and examination of aesthetic values.

Meanwhile Hans Hofmann was establishing his first ties with America.[17] In the spring of 1931 he taught at the Chouinard Art School in Los Angeles, and then in the summer at Berkeley. He worked with Glenn Wessels on the translation of Creating in Form and Color: Handbook for Art Teachers, a book he had started in 1904. His paintings were exhibited at the university and in San Francisco at the Palace of the Legion of Honor, the first time his works had been shown in America. Edmund Kinzinger attended summer sessions of the Hofmann School in 1931 and 1932 in St. Tropez. In 1932 Hofmann went back to the Chouinard Art School and moved his class into a fine home in San Pedro for the summer.

In 1931 Ali Çelebi produced a work called "The Barber." He was in straitened circumstances because his paintings were not understood by the art circles in Istanbul, he could not find galleries in which to hold exhibitions, and painting pictures did not provide an adequate livelihood. In particular, he was far from an art environment that could help promote the development of his art, for he was deprived of universal museums, art galleries and the discussions which might have been held if a number of

[17] In 1929 a cycle of collotypes drawn by him were reprinted using a photographic method. In 1930 he met with Worth Ryder. Later, in order to teach in a summer painting course at the University of California in Berkeley, where Ryder was an assistant professor in the Art Department, he traversed America by train with Glenn Wessels. Then he returned to Munich for the winter.

artists could have come together and talked about art. All he could think of was going back to Germany and Hans Hofmann. Although he was by now a full-fledged artist who did highly important pictures and had been responsible for new departures in Turkey, it is perplexing that he was utterly unable to think of other countries and cities he might go to as an artist.

So he returned to Germany and made his way to Hans Hofmann's studio in Munich with the idea of painting there. Hofmann, however, was bound for America. The winds of war were blowing, and while the Hofmann School would continue to provide instruction uninterruptedly, Çelebi remained undecided as Germany was drawn into uncertain times. He did not possess the means to go to America, and more importantly could not work up the courage to do so. Consequently, he went back to Istanbul.

That same year, as Çelebi returned to his homeland, Hofmann settled in New York, earning a livelihood not only through what his pictures fetched in the art market, but also by giving courses in painting. He also traveled around the world promoting his art and holding exhibitions.[18]

Ali Avni Çelebi, on the other hand, was confined as an artist to the triangle Istanbul-Munich-Berlin, and, as far as exhibitions went, to Turkey. Although he had been trained in a universal system of education he was unable to participate in the universal system of art. This stemmed from a restricted range of thought and evinced his shy nature. Meanwhile he had started working at the Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul, where he played a leading role in the training of Turkish painters.

Hans Hofmann continued to give painting classes as he wrote up the theory of his approach to art. Meanwhile, as soon as he got back to Turkey Ali

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[18] Vaclav Vytlacil helped him find a teaching position with the Society of Art Students. At this period his students included George McNeil, Burgoygne Diller and Mercedes Carles (later Mercedes Matter), the daughter of Hofmann's friend Arthur B. Carles. In 1933 Kinzinger taught in the summer art course in Murnau. That fall the Hofmann School in Munich closed. Hofmann spent the summer of 1933 as guest teacher at the Thurn Art School in Massachusetts, and in the fall the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts opened in New York at 444 Madison Avenue. In 1934 he continued to teach at the Thurn Art School, while in 1936 the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts moved to 52 West 9th Avenue, where it would stay until 1938, when it moved again to 52 West 8th Avenue. The "European Summer Painting Course" (a school that traveled between Paris, the Riviera, Italy and Capri) was cancelled when Hitler invaded Austria. In the winter of 1938-39 a series of lectures was given at the Hofmann School of Fine Arts with the participation of such luminaries as Arshile Gorky and the critic Clement Greenberg.

Çelebi started looking for someplace to hold a solo exhibition, but difficulties awaited him. He did have a solo exhibition in the lobby of a movie theater in Beyoğlu, Istanbul, but he lacked the circle in which to market his paintings. So he tried to make a living by building bird cages, and only years later found a job teaching painting at the Academy of Fine Arts. By combining the doctrine of Hans Hofmann with figurative expressionism he channeled Turkish painting into a new era.

Hofmann's theory of Push and Pull had a great influence on art history. Explaining it, he says, "To me, creation is a metamorphosis provoked by reality. In the passion created by the chosen environment of inner sensibility and potential, imagination becomes visible. In the end, it recounts to itself everything that has a concluding image."[19]

At a time when the understanding of art was developing as consciousness and style both underwent changes, Çelebi too pursued a path of internal development sensitive to art, arriving at a view of art open to doing rather than saying. The sign of this approach emerges in Çelebi's elucidation of the contribution made to his understanding of art by the process of study through which he had gone:

> "When I went to Hans Hofmann's studio, I had been influenced by Cubism, Expressionism and Constructiivism, the modern art movements then influential in Germany. I was put off. I was young. I had just embarked on my art journey. Of course this great master's point of view could not be grasped at a single bound. As our studies progressed I began to decipher its secrets."[20]

As he strove to create in Istanbul an environment for his paintings, and to introduce people to his art, Çelebi participated only in group exhibitions of the Union of Independent Painters and Sculptors, and the trails blazed by his work were greeted with puzzlement. Hofmann, meanwhile, as a pioneer of the Abstract Expressionist movement, created a new period in America. In 1941 he became a U.S. citizen.[21]

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[19] James Yohe, *Hans Hofmann*, New York, 2002, p.31 and 52.

[20] Nusret İslimyeli, "Ali Çelebi İle Konuşma", *Ankara Sanat,* Sayı:81, Ankara, 1973, p.14, 16-17.

[21] He arranged for the annual meeting of American Abstract Artists to be held in the Riverside Museum. He held a solo exhibition at the Isaac Delgado Museum in New Orleans. He rented a studio, where he would both live and paint, at 44 E. 8th Avenue. In 1942 his student Lee Krasner introduced Hofmann to Jackson Pollock. In 1944 he held his first New York exhibition at Peggy Guggenheim's Art Gallery, with the title

From 1947 he promoted his art through exhibitions and gained a reputation in America as a theoretician of abstract art.[22]

Throughout his life Çelebi would try to fine a suitable studio, living in Istanbul and struggling to develop as an artist while confined to a small top floor apartment and his studio at the Academy, far from the means that would enable him to closely study the masters of western painting, do practical work based on theirs, and to develop intellectually via new exhibitions at museums. But he would strive to remain punctilious about bringing fresh dimensions to his expressive figurative abstractions.

The big question is this: What artists, one wonders, did Ali Avni Çelebi meet in Munich, apart from those at Hofmann's studio while he was studying there, and which other studios did he visit? As a European painter, Mache met different artists in different countries, joining their art circles, visiting studios and deepening his cultural development. Not just for Ali Çelebi, but for all Turkish painters going abroad, this is the thought-provoking question: Who did they meet, with what artists did they form acquaintanceships and friendships, and what art circles did they join?

Çelebi's claustrophobic studies in Europe, the chains that kept him restricted to his small circle of friends, narrowed the chance for the artist's

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"Hans Hofmann, Paintings 1941-1945." The exhibition was repeated in Chicago at The Arts Club and then toured in affiliation with the Milwaukee Art Institute. Hofmann set up another studio for his own works at 53 E. 9th Avenue in New York.

[22] He participated in exhibitions at the Kootz Gallery in New York. Henceforward Kootz held an exhibition every year (except 1948 and 1956) consisting of Hofmann's works alone. In 1948 Hofmann enjoyed a retrospective exhibition at the Addison Gallery of American Art in Massachusetts (Andover), for which two of his books were published: "Search for the Real" and "Other Essays". In 1949 he traveled to Paris for the opening of his exhibition at the Galerie Maeght, visiting the show together with Picasso, Braque and Brancusi. He helped Fritz Bultman and Weldon Kees with Forum 49, which was to embrace a series of lectures, panels and exhibitions at Gallery 200 in Provincetown. When avant-garde painters were not accepted for an exhibition to be held at New York's Metropolitan Museum, an open letter was written in which he joined the Irascibles, a group formed by Abstract Expressionists. In 1955 Clement Greenberg organized a small retrospective show at Bennington College in Vermont. In 1956 Hofmann did a wall mosaic for the lobby of the new William Kaufmann building (711 Third Avenue, New York), which was designed by the architect William Lescaze. He held a retrospective at Art Alliance in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In 1957 a restrospective was held in New York at the Whitney Museum of American Art and then repeated in Des Moines, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, Minneapolis, Utica and Baltimore.

intellectual perspectives, along with his art, to become more universal in scope. On his return to Turkey he broke off his ties with Germany. This must be why he lost any notion of holding exhibitions or visiting studios abroad. Being in a foreign country becomes meaningful and important provided one mingles with its artists. Only thus can one hope to become universally known and hold international exhibitions.

This reticence on the part of Ali Avni Çelebi was at the root of the fact that once he returned to Istanbul he was able to take part in exhibitions held in Germany and other countries only when they were organized by Turks or the Turkish government. A comparison of Hofmann's international artistic renown and Ali Avni Çelebi's imprisonment as an artist within the borders of Turkey proves something about a truth that holds for all Turkish painters.

In 1958 Hofmann was exemplifying his theory of Push and Pull as he proved that opposing colors create energetic forms. Using them boldly to describe geometric forms literally, the artist employed hand movements to indicate fields of orange, blue, yellow, pink and green. He brought about a massive order which created blocks of color and spatial time voids. This painting indeed sets forth in the clearest manner both spatial relationships generated on the pictorial plane, and at the same time the artist's theory of push and pull.

In 1958 Hofmann quit teaching to paint full time, as he moved his studio to New York and the schools in Provincetown. He did a mosaic façade for the New York School of Printing, and in 1960, together with Philip Guston, Franz Kline and Theodore Roszak, represented the United States at the XXX Venice Biennial.

In 1962 a touring retrospective of Hofmann's work was held in Germany, while the following year William Seitz arranged a retrospective for him at New York's Museum of Modern Art. This exhibition was then shown in various states of the USA before being taken to South America and Europe (including the German cities of Stuttgart, Hamburg and Biefeld).

Also in 1963, an exhibition of works by Hans Hofmann and his Students was held at the Museum of Modern Art, later traveling in the USA and Canada.

While this latter exhibition included painters whom Hofmann had trained and who were pursuing their artistic careers in various countries, Ali Avni Çelebi was not among them. The intervening years had long since taken

Çelebi and Hofmann down divergent paths. In America, the new art center of the world, Hofmann had trained abstract expressionists and attained to a new artistic force among them. As time passed, Çelebi had lost contact with Hofmann and become one of the artists confined to Turkey and holding exhibitions there only.

Surrounded by a pathetic art environment determined not to understand him or the power of his art and bent on producing criticism that aimed to gain importance by ignoring him and denying his existence, Ali Avni Çelebi struggled to bear up and bring new paintings into the world of art.

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Aesthetics and politics of artistic creation in the African context

Mohamed Abusabib

This paper highlights certain aspects of the contemporary aesthetic debate on African aesthetics and gives a general idea of the subject matter and perspectives that have been dealt with. The first part of the paper deals with the "customary" question whether there is an African aesthetics in the first place; the rest of the paper discusses, in a critical mode, the evolutionist approach to African creativity, using a few examples by way of testing it.

It is possible, however, to describe the contemporary debate on African aesthetics as one that has always been characterized by some sort of tension: tension between the "self" and the "other", something that has from the outset determined its general orientation, its main topics and the underlying concepts. Concepts of racism, ethnocentrism, primitivism and postcolonialism, for example, are central to discussions involving theories such as evolutionism, cultural relativism, functionalism, modernism, postmodernism, and globalization. This framework of the debate seems quite natural given the historical facts concerning the distribution of power in our world, in the general Foucauldian sense of power. This kind of tension is reflected in writings of African scholars in other philosophical areas. The African ethicist Kwasi Wiredu, for example, comments on the relationship between African cultures and the colonial legacy as follows:

> Contemporary African experience is marked by a certain intellectual anomaly. The African today, as a rule, lives in a cultural flux characterized by a confused interplay between an indigenous cultural heritage and a foreign cultural legacy of a colonial origin. Implicated at the deepest reaches of this cultural amalgam is the superimposition of Western conceptions of the good on African thought and conduct. The issues involved here are of the utmost existential urgency, for it may well be that many of the instabilities of contemporary African societies are traceable to this

circumstance.[1]

Legitimacy of African aesthetics

According to Barry Hallen, although the first aesthetic and artistic encounters between Africa and the West go back to the beginning of the twentieth century, "in academic (Western) scholarship, the systematic study of indigenous African aesthetic criteria really just began during the last decades of the century."[2] Before that, early Western connoisseurs, some critics, anthropologists and modernist artists have, of course, contributed to attempts to evaluate and interpret African traditional art and artifacts, and their impact is still felt in contemporary works by scholars, both Africans and Africanists, dealing with the question of African aesthetics. However, scholars disagree among themselves over a comprehensive notion of African aesthetics and by extension African art, African culture, and so on. Those who reject this notion contend that in a continent with more than two thousand languages, representing several thousand cultures, each with its own system of logic cannot be characterized by a single aesthetic philosophy, and given such extraordinary diversity any concept of a coherent "Africa" is arbitrary. Furthermore, as they claim, a given culture may possess several aesthetic discourses, and globalization complicates matters even more, for one cannot discuss the aesthetics of contemporary African artists without considering transnational paradigms and hybrid visions. As an alternative, some scholars suggest that key aesthetic concepts of a particular group, such as the Yoruba people of Nigeria, may be considered to demonstrate the specificity of aesthetics.

But a counterargument based on the state of research on African aesthetics seems reasonable. Barry Hallen writes:

> The Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria have one of the most widely studied cultures in sub-Saharan Africa. Among Africanists, it is a commonplace generalization that more material has been published on Yoruba art and aesthetics than that of any other African people. Yet the limited

* I would like to thank Professor Lars-Olof Ahlberg for reading the draft of this paper and for the valuable corrections and comments he made.

[1] Kwasi Wiredu, 1995, "Custom and morality: a comparative analysis of some African and Western conceptions of morals" in Albert G. Mosley, *African philosophy: selected readings*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., p.390.
[2] Barry Hallen, "African aesthetics" in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, vol. 1, p.39.

> intercultural understanding these publications have yielded is an indication that how much remains to be done before a substantive appreciation of an African aesthetic sensitivities is achieved.[3]

It is clear that the lack of comparative aesthetic studies is one important reason for a categorical repudiation of the notion of African aesthetics. Also, aesthetic research has yet to utilize art historical field material accumulated during the last decades which could offer deeper insight into certain African aesthetic phenomena and provide answers to important questions such as why the map of mask carving and masquerade festivals encompasses almost all parts of sub-Saharan Africa and exhibit many similar formal and thematic elements, and why music and dance in Africa have many common traits, and that the majority of Africans have the same conceptions of these artforms. Moreover, some African philosophers view the issue from a broad cultural perspective. Innocent Onyewuenyi defends the existence of African aesthetics as a branch of African philosophy as follows:

> What is generally agreed about philosophy is that it seeks to establish order among the various phenomena of the surrounding world…while these phenomena are the same in all cultures and societies, each culture traces the unity of these, synthesizes, or organizes them into a totality based on each culture's concept of life. If (this) is accepted as true, then we have the basis for calling a philosophy (and by extension, aesthetics) European, Indian, American, African. We can and should talk of African aesthetics because the African culture has its own "standards of value in judging art"; its "own general principles" in explaining the value of any work of art".[4]

Kwame Appiah, a philosopher and critic, supports the same argument maintaining that, "while those methods of philosophy that have developed in the West through thoughtful analysis of texts are not found everywhere, we are likely to find in every human culture opinions about some of the major questions of Western philosophy (including aesthetics)." [5] But perhaps the best words to describe the legitimacy of African philosophy are

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[3] *Ibid*.

[4] Innocent Onyewuenyi, 1995, "Traditional African aesthetics: A philosophical perspective" in *African philosophy: selected readings,* p.422.

[5] Kwame A. Appiah, "African Philosophy", in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online*.

those of Wiredu quoted by Appiah. He affirms that, "the test of a contemporary African philosopher's conception of African philosophy is whether it enables him to engage fruitfully in the activity of modern philosophizing with an African conscience."[6] Here Wiredu has clearly transcended what is known as ethnophilosophy or folk philosophy regarded as the first attempts to explore an African philosophy.

Another important aspect of the debate on African aesthetics is the rigorousness shown by some African aestheticians and critics in dealing with what they regard as misunderstanding or misrepresentation of African creativity on the part of their Western counterparts, thus contributing, as they were, to a more constructive and productive cross-cultural aesthetics. I shall illustrate this by the following example:

In an article titled "Is the post- in postmodernism the post- in postcolonial?", Appiah comments on a show of African traditional art organized by the Africanist and curator Susan Vogel at the Center for African Art in New York in 1987. He refers to the process of selection used by Vogel to pick the pieces for the show, where nine persons with various artistic professions were offered a hundred photographs of different artworks and asked to select ten for the show and indicate their reasons for the selection. Among these persons were the art collector David Rockefeller and a traditional sculptor from the Baule ethnic group in Ivory Coast. But the traditional sculptor was given only photos of works from his own tribe. As stated in the catalogue of the exhibition and quoted by Appiah, Vogel justified her act as follows:

> Showing him the [Baule sculptor] the same assortment of photos the others saw would be interesting, but confusing in terms of the reactions we sought here. Field aesthetic studies, my own and others, have shown that African informants will criticize sculptures from other ethnic groups in terms of their own traditional criteria, often assuming that such works are simply inept carvings of their own aesthetic tradition.[7]

In order to expose the inconsistency of this justification, Appiah picked on what Mr. Rockefeller had to say about one of the pieces he selected, and

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[6] Kwame A. Appiah, *In my Father's House: Africa in Philosophy of Culture*, London: Methuen, 1992, p.170.

[7] Kwame A. Appiah, "Is the post- in postmodernism the post- in postcolonial?" in *Critical Inquiry* 17, Winter 1991, p.337.

ironically reminded us that this Western collector "would surely never 'criticize sculptures from other ethnic groups in terms of (his) own traditional criteria'". Mr. Rockefeller said this about his chosen piece:

> I own somewhat similar things to this, and I have always liked them. This is a rather more sophisticated version than the ones that I have seen, and I thought it was quite beautiful…the total composition has a very contemporary, very Western look to it. It's the kind of thing, I think, that goes very well with…contemporary Western things. It would look very good in a modern apartment or house.[8]

Then in response to this statement Appiah concluded:

> I have quoted much from Rockefeller not to emphasize the familiar fact that questions of what we call "aesthetic" value are crucially bound up with market value, nor even to draw attention to the fact that this is known by those who play the art market. Rather I want to keep clearly before us the fact that Rockefeller is permitted to say anything at all about the arts of Africa because he is a buyer and because he is at the center, while the Baule artist, merely makes art and dwells at the margins…The Baule artist is, in the end, quite exactly an invention, thus literalizing the sense in which "they", and more particularly "their" artists are individuals and "us" and "our" artists are ethnic types.[9]

The evolutionist approach

Evolutionism and the evolutionist approach have attracted many aestheticians such as Ellen Dissanayake, Denis Duton and Gene Blocker when studying pre-industrial societies. In the remainder of the paper I shall focus on Blocker's application of this evolutionary approach to the concept of aesthetic attitude and how he attempts to distinguish, in connection with this notion of aesthetic attitude, between modern and traditional African aesthetics.

Blocker states that aesthetic experiences are relative to the level of sociohistorical development; that modern aesthetic attitude emphasizes detachment and aesthetic distance while traditional aesthetic experiences are

[8] *Ibid*.
[9] *Ibid*., p.338.

more participatory, although, in his view, that does not mean that there is no appreciation of formal beauty. He goes on to explain his view as follows:

> I argue that having an aesthetic sense is not synonymous with and does not require the socially accepted institution, which we know, of adopting in art contexts that degree of aesthetic perception that defines the modern "aesthetic attitude", and that while "primitive" peoples do not possess the latter [the modern aesthetic attitude of the West], they most certainly do have aesthetic sensibilities…These different types of aesthetic expression represent stages in a hierarchy in the sense that the latter [the modern aesthetic attitude of the West] presupposes the former [the participatory aesthetic attitude of primitive cultures] but not the reverse. There can be no verbalization of preference without some initial preference to start with. Nor can there be any institutionalized isolation of aesthetic experience from other types of experience unless there first exist some aesthetic experience to start with…In general, the main difference between the modern aesthetic attitude of the West and the aesthetic sense of "primitive" cultures concerns the *relative* ability and desire of separating aesthetic and non-aesthetic elements originally joined together and detaching the aesthetic more or less from the rest as one element having a character and value of its own. This relative separation is what makes it possible for the Buddist to appreciate the crucifix; the atheist, the B Minor Mass; and the European, the owe terror, and dignity of tribal African mask.[10]

What is interesting in Blocker's view is that he based his distinction between the two modes of aesthetic attitude on what he describes as the "relative ability and desire" of separating aesthetic and non-aesthetic elements, which entails the hierarchical situation, with, of course, the modern one more evolutionarily developed and presupposing the primitive. In spite of Blocker's emphasis on the word *relative* the basis of this distinction immediately shifts the argument from the sociohistorical level of development as influencing the aesthetic experience to a matter of individual human "ability and desire". I think this kind of conclusion is too hasty in comparison to some more cautious and insightful ones. Barry

[10] Gene Blocker, "On the distinction between modern and traditional African aesthetics" in *African philosophy: selected readings*, pp.432-3.

Hallen, for instance, writes:

> How inarticulate and instinctual primitive tribes were able to create sculpted pieces that could be 'discovered' and christened artistic and aesthetic masterpieces by Western connoisseurs is a problem that was never satisfactorily resolved

Then he added this instructive statement:

> although many Western connoisseurs claim that their aesthetic sensitivities are culturally transcendent and in principle universal in scope, it is difficult to reconcile this with the fact that they did not award masterpiece status to such objects from the very beginning.[11]

It is true that Western connoisseurs, critics and modernist artists are a product of historical cultural developments, but why did it take Western culture four centuries – since the arrival in Europe of the African objects in the fifteenth century – to acknowledge the aesthetic and artistic merits of these objects, and, consequently, Western connoisseurs, critics and artists acquired the "ability and desire" to grasp these merits? Here, one must agree with critics like James Clifford on their challenge of the notion of aesthetic supremacy. Another crucial matter of direct relevance to the question is the criterion upon which the objects were granted the status of masterpiece which, admittedly, consisted in the formal qualities of the objects. In this regard, there is, of course, a lot of talk about cultural contextuality and caution against ethnocentrism and imposition of norms, but I think some of this talk wittingly or unwittingly denies, or at least undervalues the visual culture of "primitive" people. That means in one important sense, unless we suppose that being a "masterpiece" still does not mean that its creator possesses aesthetic and artistic experiences in the modern sense, that we would regard the "primitive" artists who created the pieces deemed masterpieces as lacking any aesthetic and artistic experiences in the modern sense and that they continued to create those formal qualities all along quite arbitrarily. They definitely developed and mastered that visual culture without having first to "turn modern" following the logic of the evolution theory.

It is better perhaps to develop and build on what Franz Boas has said a long time ago about a kind of cultural relativism that focuses on the study of cultural institutions and how general human aesthetic and artistic

[11] Barry Hallen, "African aesthetics" in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, vol. 1, p.38.

experiences function within those institutions and occupy certain spaces in the philosophical discourse in a given society at a given moment of history. I think this could spare us the dubious suggestion about a hierarchy of aesthetic experience and its consequence that modern aesthetic experience "essentially" presupposes a primitive stage.

Finally, I have a few examples illustrating how thin and transparent the dividing line is between the modern, the pre-industrial and the primitive when it comes to human aesthetic and artistic experiences, something that reminds us once more of Hallen's statements quoted above.

First, here is a comparison between a traditional proverbial saying which defines the nature of ornament and its particular and subtle aesthetic relationship with form, and a statement on the same issue by Herbert Read. In his book *Art and Industry* Read put it like this:

> [T]he only real justification for ornament is that it should in some way emphasize form. I avoid the customary word 'enhance' because if form is adequate, it cannot be enhanced. Legitimate ornament, I conceive as something like mascara and lipstick - something applied with discretion to make more precise the outline of an already existing beauty.[12]

The traditional Sudanese proverb is transcribed as *Al-ilgi mabtazeed khilgi*; literally translated, "hangings do not add to the natural form." This proverb has two connotations: one is direct, and simply refers to ornament as something that cannot give beauty to the human form if the human form is in itself not beautiful; the other is indirect, and asserts that ornament could not be of help to the ugly. It is clear that the proverb and Read's statement say the same thing; that is, both the industrial and pre-industrial attitudes are based on the same conception of beauty of visual form.

The other example concerns a visual artwork. As a practicing artist I was asked to make an emblem for our small Sudanese society in Uppsala to be used in covering letters and also to be printed on T-shirts, and I suggested the image shown in figure (1). I was told that the people and designers at the printing house were fascinated by the image/design, and even wanted to know the artist who made it. Of course they had no idea whatsoever of the symbolic content of the image. The reality is that I didn't make the image/design. It is actually the head of the lion god Apedemak, the god worshipped by our fathers the ancient Nubians during the third phase of the

[12] Herbert Read, *Art and Industry*, Faber and Faber, 1966, p.33.

Nubian civilization in today's Sudan, more than two thousand years ago. [13] The deity was sometimes depicted as a woman with this lion head. It is clear that one of the main challenges confronted by the artist was how to depict both the front and the profiles of the lion face. For sure, we don't need to read about the Nubian culture or their cosmology in order to appreciate the creative visual solution introduced by the artist. This image shows the artist's mastery and craftsmanship, the calculated proportions and balance in rendering the front and the two profiles of the lion face and how together with the royal regalia and the crown-like shape on top of the head are brought to create a coherent and "significant form", to use Clive Bell's famous expression.

Finally, figure (2) shows two sculptures, one of them modern and the other primitive. In the light of the evolutionist approach as shown above, which of the two pieces "necessarily" presupposes a primitive stage? The question sounds as a bogus one. For the primitive artist who created this primitive piece deemed artistically and aesthetically excellent on the basis of its visual merit would not have made it for primitive people who lack the "ability and desire of separating aesthetic and non-aesthetic elements originally joined together." And, given the fact that the artist (and every artist) has both the artistic and the aesthetic experiences, we should ask whether at the time when the "primitive" artist created his "primitive" objects which now stand neck and neck with modern art objects, a prior primitive aesthetic stage must be presupposed.

[13] The lion god Apedemak is drawn in relief on the wall of his temple at Musawwarat and Naga in northern Sudan.

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Figure 1.

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Figure 2.

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Gombrich and Panofsky on Iconology

Richard Woodfield

It is remarkable that when Gombrich's *Symbolic Images* was published, in 1972, none of its reviewers commented on its relationship to Panofsky's *Studies in Iconology* (1939). To the best of my knowledge, no subsequent commentators on iconology have pursued the matter either. Considering the centrality given to the Panofsky text and the powerful critique presented by the Gombrich volume, this is surprising.

One of the reviewers, Sir Kenneth Clark, was honest enough to admit that while he had eight of Gombrich's volumes on his shelves 'owing to my pitiful inability to follow philosophical arguments, I cannot claim that I have always understood them.' [1] He credited Gombrich with avoiding 'the extravagant interpretation of symbols which sometimes gives the air of a metaphysical fantasy to the writings of Panofsky.' He 'follows the warburgian practice of studying subject rather than form' and '(his) outstanding merit ...is that he makes us look at works of Renaissance art as they were seen by their contemporaries and by the men who commissioned them' giving Gombrich the backhanded complement of being able to do this through 'his prodigious knowledge of contemporary writers'.[2] He went on to say that, 'it would be unjust to say that Gombrich is concerned solely with subject rather than form. On the contrary, his comments on the formal and artistic qualities of the works analyzed are remarkably perceptive. But in the end his chief aim is to discover the meaning, in the fullest sense, of a work of art.'[3]

On close inspection, Clark's review seems rather naive, lacking a sense of what Gombrich was up to, and it would be impolite to probe more deeply. Clark's big problem was his inclination to separate form and content as independent factors in the production of art. The irony is that of all scholars connected with the Warburg Institute, Gombrich has paid the greatest attention to formal considerations governing the possibilities of artistic

[1] 'Stories of Art' in *The New York Review of Books*, November 24th, 1977, 36-9.
[2] *Ibid.*, 36 (my emphasis).
[3] *Ibid.*

practice. And it is precisely the concern with the formal dimension, the appearance, of Botticelli's *Primavera* that marked Gombrich off from Panofsky and Wind. Furthermore, for all of his erudition, Gombrich has been the most concerned to know when to stop being erudite: a stricture which applied neither to Panofsky nor to Wind.

There is a world of difference between Gombrich and Panofsky's views on the study of iconology, which reflects their fundamental differences in philosophy and method. Given the paradigmatic nature of Panofsky's approach it would be useful to sketch that out to provide a background for a characterisation of Gombrich's views.

Panofsky opened his discussion of artistic meaning in *Studies in Iconology* by analysing the case of an acquaintance greeting him on the street by lifting his hat. One interprets the configuration in the visual field to represent a man; one recognises the lifting of the hat as a greeting and one recognises the act as symptomatic of the man's 'period, nationality, class, intellectual traditions and so forth.'[4] As in nature and culture, so in art, Panofsky distinguished between three levels of analysis of the work of art:
1) the pre-iconographic, which identifies configurations as representations of objects, the relation of those objects as events, and features of humans as having expressional qualities. The basis of such recognitions is practical experience regulated by awareness of style.
2) the iconographic, which is based on the connection of motifs with concepts; this leads to the identification of images, stories and allegories. The basis of this level of interpretation is the knowledge of literary sources regulated by awareness of the history of types.
3) the iconological, or iconographic in the deep sense, in which images possessed Cassirean 'symbolical' values and are symptomatic of the times in which they were produced. This is a product of 'synthetic intuition (familiarity with the essential tendencies of the human mind), conditioned by personal psychology and 'weltanschauung' regulated by an awareness of the history of cultural symptoms. The contrast between the three levels of experience may be expressed in terms of sense, intellect and intuition.[5]

The naive Panofskian reader looks at an image, recognises the objects depicted in it, and any activities and expressions and emotions, looks out for visual clues which give away the identity of the motifs, searches for various texts which may be hung on to those motifs and then conjures up the spirit

[4] *Studies in Iconology*, New York, 1957, 5. The summary of Panofsky's views is drawn from the Introductory chapter, 3-31.
[5] The reader is invited to turn to Panofsky's text for further elaboration.

of the age through the image. The tools of such an exercise become a sharp eye, a familiarity with the continuity of motifs, an encyclopedic knowledge of texts, and a view about the way that life was, whenever. But there are many obvious flaws in this approach, not least the division between sense, intellect and intuition in the experience of the historical work of art.

The direct association of the visible world and the pictorial field is invalid on the grounds that the former is natural while the latter is conventional.[6]

Panofsky took the strangely simplistic view that a picture formed a kind of screen through which one saw a depicted view without recognising that the picture itself was a depiction.[7] Another way of putting the matter is to say that a picture is a cultural object, as pictures do not exist in nature, and as a cultural object a picture has a point, a reason for its existence. A picture offers an experience which has to be taken as falling under a concept of a picture. The historian has to be acutely self- conscious as to the nature of that concept - this was one of Gombrich's earliest preoccupations. One of Gombrich's early experiments in testing the appropriateness of concept to experience resulted in a significant criticism of Panofsky's celebrated essay on perspective as symbolic form. This was published in *Kritische Berichte*, in the mid-thirties, as a review of Bodonyi's doctoral dissertation on the

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[6] The earliest artist who drew pictures on cave walls didn't think in terms of boundaries and were happy to draw their pictures across each other; the Assyrians wrote across their pictures; the Chinese considered vacant space, space available for poetry and seals; there has been a variety of framing strategies since classical antiquity. Furthermore, whereas the seen world is composed of light, the drawn or painted surface is constituted of pigment; as we shall see, in the discussion of Art and illusion, there is a fundamental difference between the two.

[7] I claim no originality for this point. See Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing* (1983), 236:

> What then do we make of the pictorial surface itself? In his seminal essay on iconography and iconology Panofsky clearly evades this question. ... What Panofsky chooses to ignore is that the man is not present but is represented in the picture. In what manner, under what conditions is the man represented in paint on the surface of the canvas? What is needed, and what art historians lack, is a notion of representation.

See also David Summers, 'Conventions in the History of Art', *New Literary History* (13), 1981, 111:

> Panofsky's direct transferral of an example from life to art must be questioned right at the beginning ... this transferral assumes too great a transparency on the part of the work of art, assumes that it is more 'realistic' than it actually is or can be.

gold ground.[8]

A number of writers had approached late antique mosaics on the basis of the same assumptions that they had used to analyse earlier wall-paintings. The central assumption was that the mosaicist's field constituted a naturalistic representation of space.[9] Thus the gold ground depicted an object in the same way that a passage of colour might depict a hill or valley: the gold ground was taken to refer to a thing. The question now concerns the decipherment of the phenomenon represented by the gold ground. Pfuhl believed that in the Albani landscape it represented a flood; Sieveking interpreted it, in a different work, as a rocky path from foreground to background.[10] But, as Gombrich pointed out, that kind of passage from foreground to background was not representable. The images consisted in juxtapositions of motifs. But if motifs were juxtaposed, how were they to be understood in relation to each other in a possible depicted space?

Panofsky, in his now classic essay 'Die perspektive als 'symbolische Form''[11] had argued for a shift in the character of spatial representation. If earlier artists had a systemic view of space, as a continuum in which objects were to be depicted and in terms of which they were to be seen in relation to each other, the artists of late antiquity had other objectives in mind. As they did not know 'systemraum' they proceeded from the concrete individual object, generating a 'Dingraum' which was an aggregate, or discontinuous, space. Gombrich objected, however, that a lack of unity is not a special form of unity and there was a fault in Panofsky's logic: the mosaics involved a different form of representational system from the paintings and could not be interpreted as representing a natural spatial field. An image in which one found continuous representation signified a slice of space as little as it signified a moment of time.[12]

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[8] Review of *Entstehung und Bedeutung des Goldgrundes in der spatantiken Bildkomposition* (Archaeologiai Ertesite, 46, 1932/3) in *Kritische Berichte zur Kunstgeschichtlichen Literatur*, 5 (1932/3).

[9] It is arguable that even Riegl's view of the artist's field treated it on the basis of a naturalistically representational model. If, as he would say, the optic and the haptic modes are simply the poles of our normal visual experience of space, the optic mode is as visually valid as the haptic mode. This is, after all, the thought that lies behind the notion of the history of vision, which forms the lynch-pin of his art historiography.

[10] Sources given by Gombrich, *loc. cit*., 69.

[11] *Vortrage der Bibliothek Warburg*, 1924-5.

[12] In *Means and Ends: Reflections on the History of Fresco Painting*, The Walter Neurath Lecture, London 1976, Gombrich examined the problem of framing in relation to narrative.

For Gombrich the perception of form cannot be divorced from the perception of meaning. His psychology emphasises the role that projection has to play in perception and he takes the Kantian view that one has experiences through conceptualisation. Recognising that pictures mediate experience of their created world, it is essential for to understand the nature of that mediation. Hence it is crucial to understand the function of imagery at the time that it was produced. Form follows function. The point of late antique imagery was not to simulate an appearance of reality but to function pictographically; therefore its picture space did not generate illusionistic space, it operated at a symbolic level. Instead of working on the assumption of naturalism one has to scrutinise the pictorial field in terms of its historical psychological possibilities. At the end of the day, any such explanation must count as a hypothesis subject to further empirical and conceptual enquiry.

This is as true of expressive characteristics as it is of spatial construction. Gombrich's first research project after leaving university was on the expressive features of the statues of the founders in the Cathedral of Naumburg:

> 'These lifelike but imaginary portraits appeared to be so full of expression that a whole drama had been woven around them. Ciceroni had developed the legend that all these figures were participants in a story of conflict and murder.'[13]

There was no doubt that the sculptures had enlivening features, in comparison to earlier sculptures, but 'their expression was more complex than clear.'[14] Empirical investigation into spectators' responses concluded that there was not sufficient consensus on the interpretation of the expressions on individual sculptured heads to justify the belief that they did have specific expressions. There could be even less justification for the incorporation of the figures into a dramatic plot. 'The medieval artist may very well simply have accepted the emotional overtones - including the facial expressions - as they happened to emerge.'[15]

Without knowing the context of a particular production it is easy enough to assume that an expressive reading is legitimate. There was the case of an art

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[13] For the context of this research, which was undertaken with Ernst Kris, see 'The Study of Art and the Study of Man' in *Tributes*, Oxford 1984, 224 ff.
[14] *Ibid*, 226.
[15] 'Wertprobleme und mittelalterliche Kunst' originally published in *Kritische Berichte* 1937, translated as 'Achievement in Medieval Art' and published in *Meditations on a Hobby-Horse*.

historian who had falsely assumed an armorial bearer from a piece of furniture to be a statuette of Hercules as a Christian Knight:

> The eyes gaze into the distance, they stand in a face that bears the marks of hard experiences. This man is no longer a wild adventurer, he is sensitive to the suffering destiny has laid upon him; it is with sorrow that he awaits the next test, though he is sure that he will win through in the end.[16]

Figure 1. *Armorial Bearers*

Spurred by a particular reading of the so-called Hercules' physiognomy, the author ascended into the giddy heights of his own fantasies. The fact that he thought it to be Hercules in the first place helped stimulate the reading. Such a reading is misplaced when we realise that the 'statuette' was, in fact, an armorial bearing and as such did not have any expressive characteristics at all.

When, in a different context, Baxandall suggested that in Botticelli's *Primavera*, 'we miss the point of the picture if we mistake the gesture'[17] he has simply got the matter the wrong way around. We cannot interpret the gesture until we know the meaning of the painting, or rather the text that the painting was intended to illustrate.[18]

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[16] 'The Evidence of Images' in *Interpretation in Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles S. Singleton, Baltimore 1969, 71.

[17] *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth century Italy*, Oxford 1972, 70.

[18] The point is admirably demonstrated in what almost stands by itself as an essay in physiognomic interpretation in a footnote to Gombrich's 'Botticelli's Mythologies' in *Symbolic Images*, n. 23, 204-6.

If the reality of perception is that the mind is not a *tabula rasa*, but actively works on its material, the art historian cannot look at a representation at a purely formal level without attributing it any significance. The belief that this is possible is sheer self-deception. The only condition in which one can look at either an object or an image and not see any thing, which would not attribute to its appearance any significance, is when one is completely baffled. Art historians, even of the formalist kind, do not dwell in a state of bafflement, even partial bafflement; they actively project meanings into what they see. Unless they do this self-consciously they run the risk of making grave errors or, more importantly, they take as facts projections fed by their favourite theories. In a long footnote to Gombrich's essay 'Botticelli's Mythologies: A Study in the Neo-Platonic Symbolism of his Circle' there is a compilation of fifteen different descriptions of Venus varying from Pater's 'He ... paints the goddess of pleasure... but never without some shadow of death in the grey flesh and wan flowers' to Muther's 'Flowering branches .. under which the goddess of beauty stands laughing.'[19] One does not attribute expressions to figures simply on the basis of experience but out of knowledge of the pertaining conventions, qualified by expectations concerning the subject of the picture. The contrast between pre-iconographic and iconographic analysis as one of sense and intellect doesn't stand up to scrutiny.

Without attributing some meaning to the depicted object one can have no confidence about its possible relation to a seen reality.

But this is to plunge in at the deep end. Gombrich believes in starting with the known. A didactic strategy, which he used in his lectures and in the introduction to *Symbolic Images*, is to take an object familiar to an audience and recast it within a complex of theory.[20] If Panofsky started with the example of a man walking down a street, Gombrich started with a well-known London statue.
Nothing could be much more familiar to a London audience than the famous statue of Eros in Piccadilly Circus but the question of its meaning poses a number of problems. Over the course of years attitudes towards it have changed and the Picadilly of 1972 was a very different kind of place from what it was in 1893. In his review of *Symbolic Images*[21] Sir Kenneth

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[19] SI, 204-5.
[20] This helps to explain the foregrounding of Constable's painting Wivenhoe Park in *Art and Illusion*. It is in the collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, where his A.W. Mellon Lectures entitled 'The Visible World and the Language of Art' were given.
[21] 'Stories of Art' in *The New York Review of Books*, November 24th, 1977, 36-8.

Clark recalled:

> I first remember it in the peaceful possession of elderly flower-sellers, but gradually the proximity of theaters, cinemas, and restaurants (one of the most respectable restaurants in the district is now called the Sex Center) has given the god Eros a significance more in keeping with our normal idea of him. I doubt if a single one of the young people in blue jeans who mill around the monument has ever heard of Lord Shaftesbury.

Eros was a commemorative fountain dedicated to the memory of the great Victorian philanthropist, the seventh earl of Shaftesbury. The statement of the memorial committee was that it 'is purely symbolical, and is illustrative of Christian Charity.'[22] To say the least, that is very short and to the point.

But, as we have already suggested, it is one of the fundamental characteristics of the human mind that it constantly searches for meaning. The young child's persistent 'why?' is a feature of its behaviour which enables it to turn into an intelligent adult. It is utterly unsurprising, then, that over the course of time the statue has accreted meanings; particularly because it originated in a culture at least three generations old. As the statue's social context changed, it is not surprising that its meaning appeared to change as well; one cannot ignore the phenomenon.

The easiest way of handling different responses to the same image is to deny that there was an original meaning in the first place. This opens the door to complete relativism: any person's interpretation is as good as any others and the historian's pursuit of archival material is simply wasted time. Indeed, there would be little relevance in Clark's observation about the difference between the flower-sellers and the Sex Centre. If the people who maintained the relativist point of view actually believed it, they would stop writing books to persuade readers of their views.

Another way of dealing with the problem is to recognise the distinctiveness of one's own critical position and examine the way in which other environments have shaped their own critical standpoints. In this context, Clark's comments become relevant. One can then either reject the primacy of the artist's originating meaning or one can follow Hirsch[23] and assert the difference between 'meaning' and 'significance'. Meaning is original to the

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[22] Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 1.
[23] E.D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation*, New Haven and London 1967.

production of the object and significances cluster about the object over the course of time, even the time in which it was produced.

The difference between statuette and armorial bearing is one of kind or genre and every kind of work of art possesses its own expressive capacities. These capacities may change over time but at any point in historical time the genre may be identified. To explain this idea, Gombrich had recourse to Karl Buhler's principle of abstractive relevance. All signs and symbols have characteristics which are irrelevant to their communicative functions: 'The letters of the alphabet signify through certain distinctive features but in normal contexts their meaning is not affected by their size, colour or font.'[24] Unlike a written text, however, a painting has a multitude of characteristics which may be taken to have symbolic significance and the application of the principle of abstractive relevance becomes a matter of discretion and tact. In the so-called Garger Review[25] on the subject of medieval art, Gombrich wrote:

> in as far as the recognizability of symbols is not compromised and the sign remains a sign, primitive predelictions may be allowed free rein. This applies to the pure use of precious colours in medieval illumination as much as to that ornamental elaboration of the whole work which leads to such a high decorative achievement.[26]

The historical problem is to determine what can be appropriately construed as possessing artistic significance for the work and that decision is not aesthetic. The figurative image has a manifold set of characteristics which fall beyond the brief given to the artist and the task which he sets himself.

So far, then, we have seen that the constructions of space and expressive characteristics are mediated by history, genre and text. Another problem, not recognised by Panofsky, was that of the relationship between the universal and the particular in the visual image. A photograph of an actor used in an advertising hoarding is that of a specific individual but it is intended to function as a type, a chef for instance. Conversely, a drawing of a generic type might be used in a medieval manuscript to represent a specific person. One cannot tell on the basis of appearance alone tell which

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[24] ''Raphael's Stanza della Segnatura', in *Symbolic Images*, 95.
[25] 'Wertprobleme und mittelalterliche Kunst', a review of 'Uber Wertungsschwierigkeiten bei mittelalterlicher Kunst' (1932-3), published in *Kritische Berichte* (1937) and translated and published in English as 'Achievement in Medieval Art' in *Meditations on a Hobby-Horse* (1963).
[26] *Ibid*, 74.

of the two we have in front of us. This extends in an important way to the matter of topicality.

In his description of the so-called *School of Athens*, Vasari described a figure that 'bends towards the ground, holding a pair of compasses in his hand and turning them on a board. This is said to be a life-like portrait of Bramante the architect.'[27] But as Gombrich remarked, it is a pretty strange portrait of a good friend and is more likely to be a motif drawn from Pinturicchio's painting of the same subject, a geometer.[28]

Artists may well have taken real people as models for figures in their paintings. The presence of contemporary figures has been taken to mean that the paintings were about contemporary affairs. But, as Charles Hope put it, '.. topical meaning would be wholly against the normal justification of religious art, which was to instruct the faithful;... what matters is that in putting on the identity of the historical characters, the models put aside their own. '[29]

One could carry on talking about Panofsky's first stage of pre-iconographic description at some length but space dictates that it is now necessary to turn our attention to iconographic analysis itself.

The idea that motifs have definable meanings in terms of traditions of association with specific texts is very misleading. It has led to the view that one can create a kind of dictionary of meanings of motifs. But 'it is even true of the words of an inscription that they only acquire meaning within the structure of a sentence'.[30] If this is true of motifs it is even truer of symbols. Gombrich quoted St. Thomas Aquinas to the effect that there can be no 'authoritative dictionary of the significance of things, as distinct from words:

> It is not due to deficient authority that no compelling argument can be derived from the spiritual sense, this lies rather in the nature of similitude in which the spiritual sense is founded. For one thing may have similitude to many; for which reason it is impossible to proceed from any thing mentioned in the Scriptures to an unambiguous meaning.

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[27] Vasari, *loc. cit.*, II, 227.
[28] Gombrich, *loc. cit.*, 95.
[29] 'Religious Narrative in Renaissance Art', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, CXXXIV (1986), 812.
[30] 'Aims and Limits of Iconology', *loc. cit.*, 12.

> For instance the lion may mean the Lord because of one similitude and the Devil because of another.[31]

Context is all and the way in which one establishes contexts is to identify habits of understanding.

It was obviously not a habit of understanding in the pre-modern period to examine works of art with the Index of Migne's *Patrologia* in one hand and a photograph in the other. Images had a *habitus*, which would have a bearing on their meaning, and their audiences would have habits of behaviour towards them. The essay on 'Raphael's Stanza della Segnatura' is particularly valuable on this account.

Do we need to read volumes of philosophy, theology and poetry to understand the decoration of the Stanza della Segnatura? Gombrich's answer is negative: one simply needs to understand the purposes behind the decoration of the Papal court. The paintings on the walls were integrated by the figures on the ceiling (a reality which failed to surface through the limitations on reproductions of the room): 'the walls must be seen as expositions or amplifications of the ideas expressed by the personifications on the ceiling.' [32] The personifications of Law, Theology, Poetry and Philosophy are drawn into relation with each other through biblical and mythological scenes.[33] The School of Athens does not exemplify a complex philosophical doctrine but rather creates the presence of exemplary philosophers - beautiful and persuasive figures. On this basis, Gombrich argued, Raphael needed no more guidance than a musician called to set a text to music. The repertoire of appropriate imagery was available for his use and his preparatory drawings prove that he used it.

The terms on which an artist produced a painting, sculpture or whatever were historically specific. Different expectations were placed on artists at different times. A medieval artist worked from a stock of types. During the renaissance the artist was expected to produce inventive *istoria* and in the sixteenth century the so-called programme blossomed. Consequently, the

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[31] *Ibid*, 14.
[32] *Loc. cit*., 88.
[33] 'We know for instance that the personifications on the ceiling are flanked by episodes which Passavant interpreted as linking the various faculties - the Fall as between Theology and Justice, the Judgement of Solomon between Justice and Philosophy, 'Astronomy' or the contemplation of the Universe between Philosophy and Poetry, and the Flaying of Marsyas between Poetry and Theology, assuming that Dante's prayer to Apollo can thus be interpreted.' (94)

degree to which one is entitled to decipher recondite meanings from images is variable. Annibale Caro's programmes for Taddeo Zuccaro's decoration of the Palazzo Caprarola are an excellent example of the degree to which meanings can get quite recondite: the evidence for that is the existence of the programmes themselves. The key issue is, of course, evidence. It cannot be assumed, but has to be proved, that a particular text or method of exegesis was relevant to the production of a particular visual image.

It has often been assumed, for example, that the hierarchical approach to the analysis of biblical texts (in terms of literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical meanings) lay behind the production of paintings. But there is no evidence that the painter had such things in mind. This is not to deny that a spectator might reflect on the symbolic meanings of an image's trappings, but the discovery of such symbolic meanings is secondary to, and elaborative of, the image's dominant meaning. Preachers, no doubt, elaborated and speculated on the significance of the events portrayed on their church walls; but there is no reason to build every speculation or elaboration into the purpose of the original image.

The way in which traditional imagery intersected with the concerns of the world was through the institutional structures within which such images were used. At a lowly level, a fireplace was a suitable site for stories concerning fire; a fountain, a place for stories of water; the entrance of a Bankruptcy Court for tales of folly. There were places for pictures and appropriate ranges of images for those places; the meaning of the images came out of the juncture of the two.

The major implication of Gombrich's principle of intersection is that there are no fixed meanings for individual symbols. In Caro's programme an elephant worshipping the moon features as a symbol of solitude in the study and a symbol of night in the bedroom. The habit of perceiving fixed meanings in symbols is notoriously widespread, though this was never the original intention in the creation of such symbols. Symbols were never intended to function as codes.[34]

Gombrich discussed the question of how symbols were meant to function was discussed at great length in his essay 'Icones *Symbolicae*: Philosophies of Symbolism and their bearing on art'.[35]

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[34] For an excellent technical analysis of this subject see now Dan Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism*, Cambridge 1975.

[35] Originally published as '*Icones Symbolicae*. The visual image in neo-Platonic thought' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 11, 1948.

To return to the matter of the relationship between images and texts, this was something which Panofsky left in a state of some confusion.

Interestingly, although Gombrich's book only appeared in 1973, in 1938 he had prepared an Ur-text on iconology for the students of the Courtauld Institute. Written jointly with Otto Kurz, it had an introduction concerning the relationships between image and text by Gombrich,[36] who also gave examples of the analysis of various genres of secular art.[37] Immediately after the war, and familiar with Panofsky's book, Gombrich wrote 'Botticelli's Mythologies. A Study in the Neo-Platonic Symbolism of his Circle' (1945)[38] which was both a kind of pastiche of Panofskian analysis[39] and a vindication of a scientific approach to a Warburgian subject.[40] Its most important aspect, in comparison with Panofsky's text, was the importance which it gave to formal qualities: something which apparently no-one seems to have noticed.

A crucial turning point in Gombrich's analysis of Botticelli's Mythologies was the section on 'The Typological Approach' opening with the paragraph:

> So far we have only used literary sources for the interpretation of the 'Primavera'. We are therefore not in danger of reading out of the picture what we have just read into it. How far does the picture answer to the ideas we have derived from the texts? How far did Botticelli enter into the spirit of Ficinian allegory and the message his picture was intended to convey? We may feel that he did so, but can we give more concrete reasons for this feeling than did those who saw in the picture a glorification of Love and Spring? We can, by investigating the pictorial terms in which Botticelli expressed the idea.'[41]

This runs in direct contradiction to the opening paragraph of the Introductory chapter to Panofsky's *Studies in Iconology* which reads:

> Iconography is that branch of the history of art which

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[36] Note his remark in the Preface to *Symbolic Images* that 'The number of fresh connections between pictures and texts which might be acceptable to a court of law as evidence remained regrettably rare.' (vii)
[37] These were to surface as later independent publications.
[38] Published in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XI (1945).
[39] Conversation with author.
[40] Compare Gombrich's analysis of the Flora (and the Angels from Gozzoli's *The Adoration*, figs. 40-42) with Warburg's analysis of the Nympha.
[41] *SI*, 62.

> concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form.[42]

Furthermore, like Warburg and unlike Panofsky, Gombrich gave a particular and specific context to the production of the painting: a letter and a mistaken translation of a text. Gombrich's essay was, in a strong sense, archival and not simply textual. The great irony in the difference between the two authors is that while Panofsky claimed to be the representative of Warburg's legacy[43] Gombrich never made that claim for himself, despite having been on the Warburg Institute's staff and later in his career as its Director.

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[42] *Loc. cit.*, 3. This is not to say that Panofsky was unconcerned with the formal qualities of art; see Gombrich's obituary of Panofsky in *The Burlington Magazine*, 110 (1968), pp. 356-360. It is important to stress that he thinks it possible to separate content from form.
I find his account of Michelangelo's style, in 'The Neoplatonic Movement and Michelangelo', systematically suspect insofar as it is described as 'symptomatic of the very essence of Michelangelo's personality' (178) and his Age. See Gombrich's comments on Panofsky in *The Sense of Order*, 199-2.

[43] See my essay 'Warburg's "Method"' in Richard Woodfield (ed.), *Art History as Cultural History: Warburg's Projects*, Amsterdam 2001, 259-293.