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Artistic Visions and the Promise of Beauty

Cross-Cultural Perspectives

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Chapter 5
Beauty, Religion and Tradition in Post-Nuclear Japanese Arts and Aesthetics

Mara Miller

Introduction

There was no concept of "beauty (*utsukushisa, utsukushii*)" per se in Japan before the introduction of the Western idea in the Meiji period (1868–1912). Yet there are many kinds of beauty, or concepts commensurate with beauty, within traditional Japanese categories of aesthetics.[1] The role of beauty in Japanese aesthetics is peculiar by Western standards; it often seems incidental, and goes unremarked, though not unnoticed. I do believe it is central, even essential, within several aesthetic spheres – tea, gardens, literati painting – even when it may be subordinated to other aesthetic qualities possessing ethical, emotional (Miller 2004), or epistemological claims, such as harmony, elegance, or calm (Miller 2010). An excellent recent book on gardens, *Japanese Gardens: Symbolism and Design* (Goto and Naka 2015), for instance, makes no mention of beauty, not even in its discussions of aesthetics, despite six pages on "calming effects."

In fact, beauty is one of the main attractions of traditional Japanese aesthetics, and to the surprise of many it remains so even in the modern period, when the "interesting" has supplanted the beautiful internationally as the predominant characteristic of art (Harries 1979).[2] Japanese artists, moreover, have been leaders in the international avant-garde (Munroe 1994, plates 90–93, 182, 183, and 184; Munroe

[1] I use the plural to refer to the various Japanese "categorical aesthetics"; for an explanation, see Miller 2010. These categories also include other types of positive aesthetics with little or no relation to beauty, ignored in this chapter. The term "aesthetics" is generally translated *bigaku*; this is, however, a late nineteenth-century neologism to accommodate Western philosophy.

[2] I would like to thank my friend, philosopher Dr. Kristin Pforbath, for reminding me of Harries's discussion of this issue and for a provocative conversation about it.

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and Hendricks 2000) even in the post-modern period, when the horrifying, the "cute," and varieties of the reassuring that either remind us of childhood or normalize a perpetual immaturity have replaced both the beautiful and the interesting as the salient aesthetics, as in the work of Nara (Chambers 2003).

So I start with a fact I find fascinating. In spite—or perhaps because—of the pressing needs posed by the modern, the nuclear, and the post-Modern era(s), Japanese and Westerners alike have for the past century and a half been as fascinated with "traditional" Japanese arts and aesthetics (Tanizaki 1933, 1977) and with their roots in religion, especially Zen in various ways, as with their most innovative and experimental (and seemingly more "secular") aesthetics.[3] Both Western and Japanese audiences and artists feel this fascination, which is also attested by the support of official and unofficial patrons.[4] For their part, Western artists are inspired by, and sometimes devote years to studying, pre-modern Japanese arts such as music and pottery. Meanwhile, in what I call the "radical traditional," Japanese artists in all media—visual arts, music, theatre, architecture, literature, gardens, and others—often explore the techniques, materials, methods, and values of the past, even a discontinuous or even prehistoric past, with the same verve, imagination, and determination they bring to their cutting-edge work and that have made them standard-setters in the international art scene and in film (Fischer 2008). Yet surely events like the atomic bombings, world wars, modernization, not to mention more recent situations such as global warming, nuclear accidents and horrific natural disasters, require new approaches. They do, and they get them. But paradoxically some of the most important of these new approaches simultaneously appropriate the antique and archaic in new ways.

The prevalence and impact of such work raise important questions. What are the reasons behind the return to archaisms, and what are the roles of beauty within it? Why do artists persist in archaic forms (as in the cases of Noh and gagaku performers, among others, whose arts are passed down in families), or deliberately return to them, as in the case of contemporary painters, novelists and film-makers, who utilize processes that are often extremely inconvenient, even physically painful, and that frequently require painstaking research and experimentation? What are the effects and objectives of these efforts? What do these approaches offer the artists and their intended and unintended publics? Is there anything beyond the now-often bewailed pleasures of creating for our own purposes a "timeless Japan" with mystical connections to nature for either domestic or foreign consumption–pleasures that have justifiably come to be berated as "Orientalizing" when they attempt to create an "other" who serves our purposes to the exclusion or at the expense of their own?

[3] Throughout this paper when I use the term "arts" or "art" (*bijutsu* or *geijutsu*) I am talking about all the arts—visual, performing, literary, and even martial arts, and specifically crafts, which in Japan have been of exceptionally high beauty.

[4] Official support includes various components of the Japanese government as well as private (and government-subsidized) industry. Government support has included the imperial court, which has continuously sponsored types of performance dating back a millennium or more; the agency supporting the photography of ancient Buddhist temples and shrines and its publication; the support of school children's field trips to sites such as the Temple of the Golden Pavilion, etc.

The questions become more complex, moreover, when we recognize that many of these approaches have religious dimensions. Given the secularism of modernism and modernization, the amount, variety, and persistence of the religious may seem surprising. While the agendas of modern and contemporary artists are only rarely religious per se, many of the reasons, effects and objectives for art-making are, as we shall see, related to religion (*shūkyō*)—which is, like "beauty" and "art," another Meiji neologism devised to accommodate a Western concept.

In some, religious themes are explicit, as with the Buddhas, bodhisattvas or kami featured as subjects in some of Mayumi Oda's paintings, Shikō Munakata's prints, and Midori's installations and performances (e.g., *Mumyogami*, or "God of No Name"). Other times they may be tacit or overlooked, even disavowed; as one scholar has noted, religion in Japan can be "difficult to notice" (Reader 1991).[5] Wildly successful contemporary painter Hiroshi Senju's waterfalls pick up a religious theme held sacred over hundreds if not thousands of years. Reiko Mochinaga Brandon's *Guardians* clue us in with their title, as nothing in the form or decoration suggests their protective function; yet once acknowledged they are among the most deeply moving works of religious art I've seen. Many of the Noh plays commonly performed or read today, written in the late fourteenth to fifteenth centuries, revised the stories of much earlier secular fiction or history narratives to give them Buddhist themes and morals. While some contemporary films, such as Juzo Itami's *A Taxing Woman Two* (*Marusa no onna*) and *The Funeral* (*Ososhiki*), criticize contemporary religious institutions and their practitioners (in very different ways in these two cases), others, like Yojiro Takito's 2008 *Departures* (*Okuribito*), tease religious significance from the utterly mercenary or profane expectations of modern man, while Yoshiko Okuyama has shown that traditional religious beings and values, beliefs and practices are recurring themes even in anime for children (Okuyama 2015).[6]

[5] The reasons for this difficulty are complex: (1) the original religion, later called Shinto (the "Way of the Gods"), was originally fully integrated into daily life—and continues to be, for many, to this day; (2) what is meant by "religion" in Indo-European languages barely applies to some of the Japanese religions, in that (a) there is often no insistence on either creed or belief, making it hard for people to distinguish between religious and other kinds of thoughts, (b) there is little competition between the various religions, whose tenets often overlap and whose boundaries are often obscured, and (c) there may be no sense of deity; (3) historically, the government declared Shinto not a religion (for political purposes—so as to be able to require Shinto participation while still championing the Western ideal of "freedom of religion;" (4) Buddhism (imported from Korea and China) and Shinto underwent at least two periods of deliberate fusion, while Buddhism itself came to be deeply integrated with Confucianism and Daoism in China in the so-called "Song (Dynasty) synthesis, so that forms of Buddhism brought to Japan later often were integrated with these two religions/philosophies as well (which had also been imported in their earlier, pre-synthetic forms). In addition, many Japanese people simultaneously belong (in one way or another—that is, through practice, prayer, belief, or registry with a temple or shrine) to more than one religion—even while disavowing being religious (which they may do even while evidencing participation), which disavowal is facilitated by the government's disavowal.

[6] Given the complex tasks performed by religion in its various guises, this paper ignores all except those that are related to beauty and to the intertwining of the traditional and the modern in art and society.

Such art serves many purposes, including a search for, or assertion of, authenticity; a need to reconnect with ancestors during a period when so many of one's "contemporaries" (to use Alfred Schutz's term (Schutz 1973) and cohort had been killed (in combat, as civilians in the atomic and "carpet" bombings, and in natural disasters such as the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake); the reestablishment of social and historical context that predates both the twentieth-century chaos and destruction and the nihilism ensuing from the war; and, in the aftermath of a war that discredited political, military, and religious leaders (Miller 2010; Dower 1993; Lifton 1967; Munroe 1994), a re-connecting to credible and deeply entrenched authority figures in the form of earlier master artists.

This last phenomenon should be recognized as religious in its underlying values—in the desire to connect with ancestors, both by honoring them and by seeking succor or nurturance from them.[7] It is further strengthened by the Japanese view of arts not only as aesthetic pleasure but as contributing to spiritual development (Carter 2008) and to cognition, a fact that makes artists far more formidable figures there than in the West. For centuries, moreover, the Japanese sense of "filial piety" or "ancestor worship," with separate roots in Buddhism, Shinto, and Confucianism, has extended to include teachers, literal, spiritual, or artistic.

Art in such a cultural context and in such circumstances thus embraces multiple agendas simultaneously. Yet here for once a superficial answer is also correct: beauty is a goal of much of this art, for it is both an inherent value (for once I agree with Kant) and instrumental in the accomplishment of many other goals. One of the most obvious of effects is the beauty of the resulting work and the resulting pleasure of the experience—a position I elaborate below, paying attention to the categories or kinds of beauty created and preserved by (some of) the traditional aesthetics, and to two special contextual issues. First, however, let us consider some caveats regarding our study; second, some examples of the paradoxical turn to radical traditional aesthetics; and then, some of the traditional aesthetic categories most closely related to beauty.

Caveats

First, it has become common to interpret the Japanese penchant for ancient Japanese arts and aesthetics as essentially political, in three ways: (1) in the West as "Orientalizing," or in Japan either (2) as part of centuries-old attempts to define Japanese identity against the onslaught of foreign culture or, (3) in the twentieth century, as right-wing attempts to reassert the superiority of Japan over other nations, with concomitant rights and responsibilities to dominate others. And indeed

[7] This nurturance-seeking, known as *amae* and *amaeru* (noun and verb forms), is recognized by social scientists as one of the most deep-seated Japanese values; its relevance vis-à-vis ancestors in contemporary religious practice is attested by Reader and Tanabe (1998).

Japan's perceived and alleged superiority was employed to do this during the Pacific War—and beauty was a crucial tool in this project:

> ...fascist aesthetics—including artistic evocations of beauty and the aesthetic response to them—...attempted to resolve the conflicts of modernity by calling for complete submission, either to absolute order or to an undifferentiated but liberating experience of violence. Such an aesthetics exalted mindlessness and glamorized death (Tansman 2009, 2).

Second, this pursuit of the traditional must be distinguished from nostalgia, which also of course often has a political or ideological agenda. While all of these dimensions of Japanese aesthetics can pertain, their importance is often exaggerated to the point where there seems to be no legitimate roles left for aesthetic pleasure. These legitimate roles are the subject of this chapter.

Third, as mentioned, "beauty," "art," and "aesthetics" (*bigaku*) per se are not traditional Japanese concepts; they were adopted, along with "religion," and many others philosophers might consider essential, during the Meiji era to accommodate the Western thinking. Nonetheless, I think we can apply them retroactively to earlier aesthetics provided we retain awareness of our anachronism.

Fourth, since so much of the twentieth century was preoccupied with violence, destruction, loss, and trauma, we may look to the aesthetic and to arts for consolation. Which it sometimes legitimately provides. (I intend that "may" in the previous sentence of this paragraph to be both descriptive and prescriptive.) The issue can highly problematic, however, and even controversial, particularly when the violence and trauma have been caused intentionally, as with the case of art about the Holocaust. And "closure" is not always the goal. Some things should not be moved past or forgotten, even if we do need to continue to live. Not all trauma should be or is intended to be overcome; some must be kept alive if we are to mature and/or grow as individuals or as a society. In such cases, arts and aesthetics *must not* offer consolation. As with the Holocaust and other genocides, consolation must be refused, along with transcendence, although transcendence is less of a temptation in Japan than in the West, given that most forms of Japanese religion do not promote it and there is also little or no philosophical idealism.

Finally, in terms of Japanese aesthetics, I use "beauty" to refer to several distinct phenomena and responses, as works often employ more than one kind of beauty at a time.

Examples: The Radical Traditional in Aesthetics and the Arts

The radical traditional emerges in four contexts. First is the straightforward continuation of generations-long arts, such as Noh or Bunraku performance in ways that have (traditionally) been updated as time went on. Incremental though changes may have been, imperceptible as they may have become, such perpetuation has required renewal through the re-creation of props, costumes, masks, and the tools of the trade (Marvin 2010, Miller 2014c). But replication is also being given new life in a new

context, as with arts of the Ainu, where Ainu artists are encouraged to replicate – after being allowed to handle them physically – museum-owned antique works of Ainu art (Miller and Yamasaki 2016, Yamasaki et al. 2012, Yamasaki and Miller 2017). A third approach is that of groups or individuals, either audiences or artists, who had lost touch with traditional aesthetics but who rediscover some aspect of the past, find themselves fascinated by it and appreciating its distinctive aesthetics, in ways that vary from antiquarian interest to a compelling need to learn the art themselves and pursue it, all the while following its traditional ways.

Then (fourth) there is the selective appropriation of a specific aspect of traditional arts and aesthetics for what is unquestionably modern or post-Modern work, as in the work of printmakers Takehiko Hironaga, Yasuhiko Higa, Haku Maki Yoshi to shi Mori, Tadayoshi Nakabayashi (Smith 1985, plates 10, 23, 33, 41, 43, and 64, respectively).[8] Particularly intriguing are the cases where artists combine ancient and modern approaches in a single work, for unlike the situation with ancient religious laws, which different groups of modern followers (of various religions) either continue to follow or discard, it is often the very same artists who use *both* archaic and modern/post-modern methods or materials. Examples from a variety of arts show a variety of traditional purposes, styles, materials, techniques, and aesthetics, many of which seem independent of beauty. Masami Teraoka uses eighteenth- and nineteenth-century woodblock-print style to express complex and urgent political messages about AIDS or commodification in post-industrial consumer capitalism. Not only is the subject new, but so is the critical stance, while the scale is a hundred times that of a print (Munroe 1994, plate 198). Senju's waterfalls are painted in vibrant, almost neon colors, using a single hue per painting, often in an enormous format, as much as eight or fifteen feet high—thus offering, despite the hallowed Japanese theme, three deviations from traditional waterfall paintings in a single work (Senju 2006). Yet his white pigment is made in the Neolithic way, with ground shells, and often applied in an ancient manner —by literally spitting it onto the surface as prehistoric ancestors did, although he could get similar effects with a spray gun.[9] Sculptors/installation- and textile-artists Reiko Mochinaga Brandon and Kei Tsuji weave by hand although they could purchase fabric cheaply and easily. Theirs is not a simple matter of historical accuracy for political ends, for even the Japanese court uses modern fabrics dyed with modern chemicals for the twelve-layer kimonos required for court ceremony.[10] Different as they otherwise are, Teraoka, Senju, and Tsuji value not only being in contact with the ways of their predecessors but

[8] For twentieth-century Japanese the family name (first in Japan), is given last, following Western usage.

[9] Senju does not hesitate to update his medium and manner, however, when the climate for an installation, cannot accommodate the Japanese materials. This information is based on conversations with the artist regarding his installation at Shofuso Japanese House and Garden, Philadelphia, and at Kyoto University of Art and Design, Kyoto, in 2007.

[10] This is based on a presentation on *junihitoe*, the twelve-layer kimono worn by court ladies, by a member of the Imperial Household Agency responsible for them, given at the Japan Society in New York City.

also the incorporation in the work of the impact of their own bodies. Tsuji's lengths of silk are woven to the dimensions of her own waist. Brandon's Guardian series uses as weft both current fine-gauge industrial copper wire and twists of long-discarded hand-made paper from farmers' accounts from abandoned agricultural villages – the impact of the bodies of others (conversation, June 2015; Miller 2014b and in press; Munroe 1994, 268 and plates 159, 160–1 and 160–2). Recognizing the significance of place, we can also identify Kei Tsuji's silk installations in volcanic, riparine, and marine landscapes as part of the return to place rather than as simply "site-specific" sculpture—the religious theme as also present in Senju's work, based as it is on waterfalls, a common embodiment of *kami* and therefore common in Japanese religious art.

We find the radical traditional also in the work of lacquer artists who continue a ten-thousand-year tradition (Shiraishi 1990) that began with the pre-historic hunter-gatherers of the Jomon period (14,000-300 B.C.E.); and in the work of several of the female potters celebrated in the recent Soaring Voices exhibition, including Ikuko Ando, Kaku Hayashi, Nanako Kaji, Kyo Tsuji, Kiyoko Koyashi, Keiko Hayashi, Ikuko Ando, Nanako Joji, and Takako Araki, who run post-Modern experiments using Neolithic materials and techniques (Shigaraki Ceramic Art 2007; see also Earle 2005, and Kaneko and Toubes 1996). (Others, of course, work in continuously traditional ways, using porcelain and glaze, and throwing on the wheel.) Such use of Neolithic or prehistoric materials and/or methods, what I call "radical traditionalism," searches out long-dead methods, as opposed to those like Teraoka's that have been in continuous usage. Other examples of radical traditionalism are Yukinori Yanagi's *Hinomaru Illumination (Amaterasu and Haniwa)* (which combines an alignment of clay soldiers in the style of unglazed terracotta grave figurines called *haniwa,* with a gigantic neon replication of the World War II-era Japanese flag (Munroe 1994, pl. 205)), and the twentieth-century *haniwa* figurines juxtaposed in the Maruki Gallery with the Maruki's paintings documenting the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Maruki Gallery 1972, 2004).[11]

Examples of the uses of archaic beauty in literature are also legion. Fumiko Enchi in her novel *Masks* (1958) and Jun'ichiro Tanizaki in his novella "The Bridge of Dreams" (1963) integrate themes, motifs, and styles from *The Tale of Genji* (1000–1014 C.E.), Murasaki Shikibu's eleventh-century novel. The diary (*nikki*) form and the casual, disjointed compendium style of Sei Shonagon's Heian-era *Pillow Book* (c. 990–c. 1005) (1967, 2016)of the medieval *Essays in Idleness* (1330–1332) by Yoshida Kenkō (Yoshida 1998) and *An Account of My Hut* (1212) by Kamo no Chōmei (Kamo 1972, 1996) persist in all genres.[12] Two works as different as Yasunari Kawabata's novel *The Sound of the Mountain* (Kawabata 1970, serialized 1949–54) and the anime film *Barefoot Gen* (Shinzaki and Mori 1983) and the comic it is based on (Nakazawa 1973–74), about the bombing of Hiroshima, both deal with the aftermath of WWII in Japan; both also employ "traditional" aesthetics (among others) in complex

[11] For fuller examination of the Marukis' work see Dower and Junkerman 1985.

[12] For a recognition of the general relevance of *Genji* and *An Account of My Hut* to modern literature, see Washburn (1995).

ways[13] while pursuing equally innovative, inventive, Modern/post-Modern, and experimental methods at the same time. And both do things that no work had done before them—for which both have received the highest praise world-wide.

Finally, as I write this, the University of Hawaii at Manoa has recently hosted a performance by Keiko Matsuzaka, one of Japan's premier actresses, of a dramatization by Makoto Ueno of a poem from the Nara-period (712–793), *Man'yōshū*, from Japan's first imperial anthology of poetry (759 C.E.), a case of beauty resuscitated and reinterpreted:

> *Ame no umi ni / Kumo no namitachi / Tsuki no fune / Hoshi no hayashi ni / Kogikakiru miyu*
> If the heavens are the sea
> The clouds are its waves,
> The half-moon, a boat,
> The stars a forest.
> That half-moon boat
> Is seen, rowing through and disappearing into the forest of stars.[14]

Setting aside the rather literary question of just how such a poem, written by Princess Nukata (Nukata no Ōkimi, second half of the seventh century), can be dramatized (and it was, though that need not concern us here), one wonders about the desire to modernize it in this way, to make it comprehensible to twenty-first century young people. Regardless of intentions and motivations—and transformation of the poem from lyric to dramatic and from a personal musing to the revelation of a relationship not evidenced in the poem itself—one of the effects was in fact the creation of an experience of beauty for the audience: the beauty of the performance, the beauty of the poem which we heard several times, both intact and in some modifications (in Japanese and in English), and the beauty of the original images (of heavens, sea, clouds, waves, moon, boat, stars, and forest) which Princess Nukata saw and calls up for us.

Traditional Categorical Aesthetics

As many have noted, the preservation of old aesthetics, along with old styles, techniques, media, themes, methods, etc., is a distinctive feature of Japanese artistic practice since ancient times. As Goto and Naka put it with regard to gardens, "new styles of Japanese garden embraced earlier styles. Moreover, the old styles were never repudiated when a new style emerged, and so were passed on to the next generation" (Goto and Naka 2015, 6). Nonetheless, a number of old categorical

[13] An earlier version of the argument about *Barefoot Gen* was read to the Center for Japanese Studies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in September 2011; I would like to thank listeners for their insights and questions. Articles based on that talk, "Making Historic Terror Tolerable to Children: *Barefoot Gen* and *Grave of the Fireflies*" (Miller under review and "Reinventing Values: Aesthetics as Philosophical Exploration of Self, Subject, and Moral Agency in Kawabata's *The Sound of the Mountain*" (Miller 2015) analyze the uses of traditional aesthetics for presenting nuclear horror and moral responses to it.

[14] University of Hawaii at Manoa, performance sponsored by the East Asian Languages and LIteratures Department, spring 2015. Translation by Robert Huey.

aesthetics offer kinds of beauty that had/have been largely eclipsed by Modernism and by Westernization.

Makoto refers to "Truth, sincerity, immediacy or genuineness of response, lack of art or guile[;] [a] recurrent artistic and ethical ideal, usually in response to what is deemed artificial, sophisticated… one of the most meaningful ideals in Japanese art." *Shiori* is "that in the configuration of a haikai stanza which seems spontaneously to reveal sensitive observation of the human or the natural." *En* is "charm, beauty…a style more lovely than profound, or a central principle of aesthetic beauty"; *yōembi*, ethereal beauty; *sama* a term used by Ki no Tsurayuki, poet, critic, diarist, and editor of the canonic Heian poetry anthology *Kokinshū* (905–914 or 920), for distinctive alternatives of style; and *ushintei*, a style with heart.[15] There are various terms for the aesthetics of elegance. *Miyabi* (also pronounced *ga*) is "courtly beauty, elegance", "the elegant or truly artistic… the true (or official)," and often "contrasted with *zoku*, the common (or not worth considering)." *Miyabi* is

> The aesthetic ideal of art and life during the court period [Heian 794–1186], exemplified by the hero of the *Genji Monogatari*. It entails fundamental good taste, sound language and responses, and avoidance of the low or ugly. [It is a] more Japanese version of *fūryū*.

Fūryū (Ch. *feng-liu*), more Chinese in feeling, was "stylishness; style or conduct of an admired, artistic kind; during the Heian period the term meant something like *miyabi*, with overtones of *kokoro aru* and *imamekashi*, up-to-date, [which] later came to represent either artistic endeavor in general, or the stylish in particular, as with *iki* and *sui*"; *kokoro aru* itself means "with or having heart, mind, spirit, or conception… the capacity for being affected, the conception resulting, and the informing cognitive element," contrasted with *kotoba* (word, *logos*); (Miner et al. 1985). (Others, such as the Heian-era *imamekashi* and the Edo concept *iki*, style or chic, do not, to my mind, participate in beauty per se.)

Several varieties of beauty are steeped in Buddhism, though they may have native origins. Most notable is *aware*, also called *mononoaware*, a sense of the poignancy of things, an awareness of evanescent beauty, heavily infused with Buddhist sensibility of transience (Meli 2002). Impermanence is fundamental to Buddhism, but the primary religious insight stemming from it is that impermanence produces suffering. *Aware* refashions the sense of loss and pain into an aesthetic experience and a virtue, one that reveals our deepest humanity; thus it enables us to enjoy an experience that is heightened precisely due to its temporary existence or presence in our lives. The spiritual side of this experience may be derived from the early Theravada/Hinayana notion of *samvega* (from the Pali), an aesthetic shock that could trigger enlightenment (x 1943, 1977). Moving in a different direction, the importance of aesthetic/artistic experience to Mahayana Buddhism is borne out by the Lotus Sutra, which advocates making sculpture and music as a means to reaching enlightenment.

Like *aware*, several types of beauty that evolved during the middle ages and are also steeped in Buddhism (particularly Zen) barely fit the Western senses of beauty,

[15] Unless otherwise specified, definitions in this section come from Miner et al. 1985.

however: *shibui*, (an ascetic quality of astringency); *wabi*, (powerlessness, loneliness, shabbiness, wretchedness); and *sabi*, (beauty accompanying solitude, quiet).[16] These three concepts have spread around the globe. Even before the full triumph of minimalism in art, architecture, and interior design, *shibui* had become familiar on both the elite and popular/mass levels of American culture (it was the featured theme of a special issue of a prominent interior design magazine in the mid-1960s), while *wabi* and *sabi* have become common descriptors in certain advertising niches. The concepts are notoriously difficult to explain—partly because they have changed over time and tend to be used differently in different arts. As Miner et al. explain it, in relation to the haiku poetry of Matsuo Basho,

> One major explanation holds that the *sabi* ideal implies stillness; another that it involves deterioration. Perhaps both are involved, and with them, or as part of them, the posing of one element against another that is different, typically something relatively high in estimation, such as we expect from *waka* and *renga*, against something lower or humbler that they provide. It is an ideal producing an art that is very difficult to achieve, and yet more difficult to maintain.... (Miner et al. 1985)

But I have also gotten the impression from conversations over the years that their permutations and permeable boundaries result partly from the fact that these qualities require people to think about them, observe for themselves, discuss them with others—keeping them fresh and vital in people's lives. And *shibui, wabi*, and *sabi, like aware*, all make a virtue of the awareness of loss that is inherent in Buddhism, particularly with Zen. In addition, they stem from a period in which so many people lost so much, and they comprised ways of continuing to live and even enjoy life in spite of horrific losses. Recent scholarship has also elaborated the ways in which the authors who developed them were accommodating themselves to loss of political power and prestige. Thus they proffer an ideal that many can relate to.

They are precisely ways of dealing with problems many of us face—problems that defined the post-War period (and modernization and Westernization): loss of identity, deracination, overwhelming trauma, loneliness, poverty. These aesthetic capabilities are found also in performance dating the Japanese middle ages, such as Noh theatre. Noh utilizes several forms of beauty, the most important of which is *yūgen*, which Miner et al., following the great Noh author and theorist Zeami, describe as "mystery and depth.... deep or mysterious and powerful beauty." *Yūgen* is, they continue:

> one of the most enduring but changing ideals in Japanese poetry and aesthetics. It was introduced positively by Fujiwara Shunzei, who associated it with *sabi* and a deep, mysterious beauty accompanied by sadness or deprivation. In *renga*, *noh*, and *haikai* aesthetics, it comes to mean something more like ideal beauty. Its earlier overtones were darker, more religious.

Other central terms in Noh are *hana* (flower), "Zeami's term for the highest realization of expressive and affective art in Noh," and *hosomi* (fineness) which, along with *sabi*, and *shiori* (see below), are also ideals of Matsuo Basho's *haikai* (haiku) poetry.

[16] Miner et al. (1985) is an excellent introduction to the terms especially in literary practice.

In his last period (1691–1694), however, Basho's style was characterized by "lightness, *karumi*, a metaphor for which there has been no great agreement as to signification, beyond the fact that it implies a release of some of the tension, a greater simplicity."

Several key aesthetic categories come from Shinto values and attitudes. *Hon'i* signifies the "essential character.... [It is a]n aesthetic principle... conventionally entailing the character of certain things [such as]...flowers [entailing] spring, the moon, autumn." Significantly, "the associations were derived from Shinto beliefs, from the annual observances of court [both Shinto and Chinese]... [as well as] from Chinese principles, and from various literary formulations such as Sei Shonagon's in the opening section of her [*Pillow Book*]" (Miner et al. 1985). Shinto values are also evident in the concept *harai*, ritual purification; purity can be "gained from contact with natural things such as water, hills, and so on and their individual *kami* or divinities. This element ... deeply affects Japanese literature and aesthetics in numerous... ways." Purity (*sei*) is one of the four principles of tea as developed by Sen no Rikyu in his Zen-based rebellion against the ostentatious, gorgeous beauty of then-current elite tea aesthetics. The others are *wa* (harmony), *kei* (respect), and *jaku* (tranquility). These principles Rikyu introduced have become well-known through the ever-expanding literature (Varley and Kumakura 1989), through actual practice via the Urasenke schools which teach the tea ceremony throughout the world, and through recent large-scale demonstrations to the U.S. Congress and state legislatures dedicated to world peace by Sen Genshitsu, the retired head of the school. Rikyu's celebration of the simple beauty of folk art and craft (*mingei*), meanwhile, continued through Yanagi Sotetsu and British potter Bernard Leach to modernists wood-worker George Nakashima and sculptor Isamu Noguchi, and to twenty-first century museums, art schools, and craft galleries.

Are these all truly forms of beauty in the Western sense(s)? Some of them emphasize moral (*harai*, *sei*) or epistemological (*makoto*, *shiori*) dimensions, issues such as "sincerity, lack of guile," like some of the aesthetic categories associated with African-American based music, such as the famed "authenticity" of blues, jazz, gospel, rock'n' roll. I would suggest they comprise an expansion rather than a distortion of the category of beauty.

Beauty and Its Effects

What are the effects of such experiences of such beauty? Poet Nukata no Ōkimi noticed the beauty of nature and a set of similarities between sky, land and sea. She created something new that is beautiful: this poem, which someone now in the twenty-first century has noticed and has chosen to call to our attention by writing a dramatic script elaborating it. This script and its performance are also beautiful. Though they by no means distract us from the original poem, they create something new and quite different from it. We, watching, hearing, experience the beauty of all three—of the poem, of the performance, and of nature, which we see everyday, but

so often ignore. We are reawakened to our world, then, through these literary and dramatic works.

I was also refreshed by this experience; during a busy, frenetic, and even distressing time, something new and beautiful happened. To the extent that its "aesthetic object" is the components of nature she considers, this is probably a near-universal experience, derived from our biological dependency upon nature. To the extent that it is literary, the experience is reinforced by my awareness that other people have had this experience: it creates me anew as part of a community (one that embraces both Japan and the seventh century!). The language itself, using very simple, everyday structure and vocabulary (in spite of the archaism that it has inevitably acquired over the past millennium), dazzles with its imaginative leaps.

Yasunari Kawabata, Japan's first Nobel Laureate for Literature, seized the heart of the conundrum when he explicitly declared that he saw no contradiction between the post-atomic situation and experiences of pre-modern aesthetics. Indeed, he asserted that the post-atomic situation presented a special need for experiences with old works of art after the destruction of Hiroshima by the atomic bombing, insisting that, in that context "looking at old works of art is a matter of life and death" (Kawabata 1980–1983; Keene 1984).[17] (He made this declaration after he was criticized for stopping in Kyoto to view arts and scenery on his return home from an official visit to the ruins of Hiroshima.) The claim is extreme, and runs counter to the intuitions and explicit theories of most Western philosophers, although artists often say things like "the theatre saved my life"—and mean it quite literally. My article about his claim examines a number of questions prompted by Kawabata's statement, including whether it can be true, under what conditions, and the foundational question of what Kawabata might have meant by this statement (Miller 2014a). Kawabata's claim is phrased very broadly, seeming to apply any old art—and any circumstances—leading us to wonder whether there might there be something about the *kinds* of old art he was looking at that made the claim true, and whether the post-atomic situation might have made art more effective, important and urgent than usual. Kawabata was referring to (among others): (A) Japanese art, (B) arts in Kyoto, (C) both religious and secular art, and (D) environmental and landscape arts. Many of these arts are, inter alia, incredibly beautiful. Could this beauty play an important role? Might there be things about Japanese art and/or the kinds of beauty it brings into the world or draws attention to that made it true, whereas we who had suffered through the carpet bombings of Europe or the Holocaust might not receive the same benefits by looking at *our* old works of art?

My prior analysis of Kawabata's statement about the importance of "looking at old works of art" focuses on the value of these arts being their ability to (A) inspire, (B) give pleasure (and thus counteract the alexithymia or dysthymia endemic after disasters and trauma), (C) transmit and generate knowledge of at least five kinds: knowledge (as historical facts) of the suffering of one's predecessors; knowledge of the means by which predecessors survived, such as their sustaining ideals and their

[17] The incident is described in Keene (1984), 827. Keene's observation is based on Kawabata's remarks in Kawabata (1980–1983), 457.

means of attaining those ideals; knowledge that people faced similar situations before—felt that everything they loved was gone, their form of living, their whole culture; knowledge of our place in the landscape; and knowledge of our place in history,[18] (D) promote and inculcate wisdom, and (E) impart skills necessary for *successful* survival. By "successful" survival I mean survival that goes beyond simple blind luck followed by a depressed existence in which one has lost pleasure, joy, and the ability to connect meaningfully with others and with the environment. Both inspiration and the reigniting of pleasure may obviously, if not invariably, make use of beauty. A recent article by Halle O'Neal points out a role of beauty of critical importance in traditional Japanese arts, in this case the mandala paintings of medieval Buddhism, with respect to the third value, inculcation and dissemination of knowledge. She argues that their beauty is vital to the task of drawing in viewers, engaging them so that they continue to look and begin to penetrate the intricate and complex meanings of the work—whose formal intricacy and complexity mimic the qualities of the beliefs and teachings it is their task to make evident:

> ...the very production of the surface asks a certain level of engagement from its viewers. The recent revival of attention paid to art's surface rejoices in the sometimes beautiful and always compelling artistic qualities of the object and asks not only what it takes to engage the surface but also how such encounters complicate the putatively straightforward activity of viewing (O'Neal 2015, 279–300).

Her point was borne out by my recent experience taking classes to the Honolulu Museum of Arts, after which a large number of students wrote their papers on the complex mandalas of this type. In this case, the formal intricacy and complexity—and the spatially and temporally intimate relationship with the viewer they demand—are clues that teach viewers what they need to know to prepare for the teachings, the points of the text. Beauty thus not only compels our attention but mirrors or symbolically represents both the inner significance of the subject matter and the forms of action and attention required for its comprehension. Such mimicry is often replicated by artistic objects: the formal organization of works of art that take their shape from an underlying riverbed or stone or lava field, for instance, draw us in visually, imply in their mimicry the very tactility that is their point, and insist on a recognition of those forms of the earth itself, preparing us for a relationship with the earth.

[18] Regrettably I had not yet read James O. Young's study, *Art and Knowledge* (Young 2001), when I wrote that article. Young argues that most of those who believe art has little or no cognitive value believe that to have such value, it must contribute to knowledge in similar ways to science, but that in fact, "although both art and science can contribute to our knowledge, they do so in radically different ways" (65).

Traditional Environmental Aesthetics and the Special Nature of Japanese Environments

Japanese aesthetics often rely heavily on the environment. In general, physical environments affect us in special ways, because they carry such strong messages about the possibilities of our physical, social, and mental survival (Miller1993). When environments create miniature worlds, microcosms that emulate (or create) an ideal world or paradise, as do many Japanese traditional environments, such as (Buddhist) temples, (Shinto) shrines, and gardens, they carry special weight, in that they (a) convince us of the possibility of a (b) perfect or at least desirable, that is, beautiful, (c) *world*. This has important implications for understanding aesthetics in general—and also for our sense of ourselves and of what it means to be in the world—in general but especially when our world is changing as dramatically and as fast as it has during the past century and a half, and even more especially after widespread destruction with its resulting mass trauma. And the physical environment is not simply one perceived object among others; it contributes to our constitution as persons, both individually in terms of personal history, and as members of societies and communities of varying kinds (Miller 1993). The environment requires us to be engaged, rather than distanced; it offers multi-sensual interactivity. It is full of implications of survival value (rather than being "distanced" or "disinterested"), and can put us in the literal positions and situations of predecessors so we can have the same perceptions and sensations as they. It therefore sets us within a historical context.

Environment in Japan is religiously informed, created as it was from the body parts of the gods; arguably the entire country is sacred space. The sacred character of space is defined in Japan not only by special events that transpired there or by a sacralizing ritual, as in the West, but is recognized as inherent in the landscape in general and in specific places or landscape features such as mountains, waterfalls, trees, or rocks. Many sites are recognized as housing—or comprising—native deities, *kami*. Japanese natural environments, moreover, are allusive and intertextual. They intertwine sites, literary works from the *Man'yōshū* through *Ise Monogatari* to Kawabata's *Beauty and Sadness*, and paintings and prints into a rich tapestry of personal and shared experience and identity. Beauty in the environment contributes authenticity, due to the sacredness of nature and the landscape. The connection with the earth is itself sacred and authenticating, as witnessed by the Buddha's "touching the earth" mudra.

Japanese built environments and their artistic representations develop and/or emphasize a number of sensuous and aesthetic characteristics to an unusual extent (Saito 2005). They are especially multi-sensual, accommodating and cherishing sound in the garden and both sound and smell in buildings. They are often exceptionally sensitive to the evocation of kinaesthetic experience, as with paths whose stones are uneven. They are especially allusive. They may bring out the inherent divinity of environments and natural "objects." In Japan, much of the environment is considered sacred, spiritually alive, full of gods and spirits (*kami*), though without

implications of transcendence typical of monotheistic religions. For all these reasons, landscapes and environments have unique capabilities. Consider the Japanese Buddhist phrase *Sōmoku kokudo shikkai jōbutsu*, "the plants, trees, and the earth itself will all attain Buddhahood."

Japanese environmental aesthetics elaborates four separate components. Most renowned is the aesthetic appreciation of nature (in philosophy and in the arts) permeating Japanese aesthetics (Saito 1985); it should be understood as informing this entire chapter. It is reflected in special poetic vocabulary, such as *kasumi* (haze) referring to spring, or *yūzumi* (evening cool) for summer, and in the aesthetic we find in the work of the medieval monk Saigyō, who, through Buddhist lenses, used the moon and blossoms as ways of understanding his life (and life in general) (Saito 2005). His approach is aptly described and recreated in Kawabata Yasunari's Nobel Address (Kawabata 1968). Second are the effects of the environment on other arts, such as the nuanced interactions between place and poetry or painting, the importance of the garden to the tea ceremony, seasonal specificity, familiar from literature and painting but also found in music, and the relationship between humidity and sound in music, as in the relationships between the appearance of the moon, affected by humidity, on the sound of a *koto*, discussed by Murasaki Shikibu in *The Tale of Genji*. Variations in the sound of wood and bamboo instruments under different conditions of humidity was a recognized part of the aesthetic linking music, nature, literature, and painting from at least that period. Third are built and natural environments, which exemplify distinctive aesthetics, with profound impact on modernist and other modern/contemporary architecture, particularly minimalist. Garden aesthetics, though participating in both "nature" and architecture, are sufficiently specialized to justify a category of their own. Though Zen dry-rock and tea gardens are the best-known genres in the West, there have been many other types. Murasaki in *The Tale of Genji* may be the single-handed inventor of the garden based on individual taste rather than on mythic, religious, and Chinese paradigms (Miller 2012), a type on which both Ashikaga shogunal gardens, such as one pictured on a pair of painted screens sold at auction in the 1990s, and aristocratic gardens such as that at Katsura Detached Imperial Villa, capitalized. Finally, the aesthetics of sacred space—the awareness of the inherent value of landscape–require fuller attention. In Japan, much of the environment is considered sacred, spiritually alive—full of *kami*; it therefore has unique capabilities.

Beauty, Place and Environment

Several recent developments highlight the continued relevance of place to aesthetic experience, even that of the radical traditional. The Kodo Drum Group went to live on Sado Isle, created by the gods according to mythology, in order to regain the traditional grounding in place as well as utilize traditional instruments, techniques, and music:

> In the early 1970's, in the days of student revolt, Kodo had a youthful dream to build a school for the traditional Japanese performing arts and crafts (Nihon Kai Daigaku, The Sea of Japan College). Sado Islanders' receptiveness to that dream encouraged the original members to move here. To achieve this goal the group needed to develop the necessary resources and so 'Sado no Kuni, Ondekoza' was established and set out to bring the sound of the Japanese taiko to the world.
>
> In 1981 the group re-launched our group under the name 'Kodo' and eventually moved to their current home on the Ogi peninsula, Kodo Village. In this beautiful natural environment Kodo is developing a centre devoted to creativity and exchange.
>
> In 1988 Kodo moved to 13.2 hectares of land on the Ogi Peninsula and established the Kodo Village. Now completed are the Main Office Building, Rehearsal Hall, Residential Building, Guesthouse, Workshop and Recording Studio. The lives of 60 Kodo members from throughout Japan are centered on this village. Other Kodo facilities on the island include the Kodo Apprentice Centre and the Old Rehearsal Hall in an former schoolhouse which served as the group's previous headquarters (Kodo 2015).[19]

For such artists, the traditional is integral—although the result is absolutely contemporary. Similarly, the textile artists Masakazu Kobayashi, Naomi Kobayashi, Jun Tomita, Hiroyuki Shindo, Chiyoko Tanaka chose to return to the cedar forests north of Kyoto, an area hallowed in Japanese literature and legend (Zañartu 1996, 1998). Kei Tsuji's flamboyant lengths of gleaming scarlet silk stretched along fields of black lava rock on the Big Island of Hawaii are similarly dependent on the environment.

Conclusions: Distinctive Features of Japanese Types of Beauty and the Radical Traditional

Although my analysis of Kawabata's position largely overlooked the importance of beauty, much "radical traditional" art is in fact created for and appreciated because of its beauty. Speaking from personal experience, some of the most memorable, even earth-shattering, experiences of beauty come from modern or contemporary works of Japanese art that participate generously in the traditional. Beauty in Japan is often a by-product of another search, such as self-cultivation, the pursuit of relationship (to the earth, to loved ones far away…).

Particularly given the Western penchant for understanding aesthetics as unrelated to truth (since Plato and Kant) and goodness (since Kant), as a luxury rather than a necessity, and/or as "superstructure" (since Marx), many have seen beauty as a palliative, or a distraction. This runs contrary to Japanese understanding of art, which has seen even visual art as capable of transmitting truth—even better than language does, in some ways; one might well consider some arts types of cognitive prostheses. Japanese aesthetics is also closely intertwined with ethics (Carter 2008). Arts and aesthetics also provide, and may even define, paths for religious understanding, action, and growth. In all these ways they provide invaluable tools and inculcate skills for many different aspects of life.

[19] Kodo's official website. The paragraphs have been rearranged to reflect chronological order.

While, according to Roger Scruton, the judgment of "beautiful" singles out the *individual* object (or environment, if I may add a friendly amendment) (Scruton 2009), Japanese aesthetics, especially when they are Zen-based, insist on the intrinsic value, and therefore beauty, of *any* object. Thus the fruits in Mu Qi's *Six Persimmons*, a Chinese painting that has been in a Japanese temple collection for centuries and exemplifies a Sino-Japanese Zen orientation, are beautiful because they *are*, not because of any special qualities. This carries through even to works of art that are beautiful in more familiar terms, such as ikebana flower arrangements, where our attention focuses not on the beauty of the flowers, seed pods, and grasses, but on the space in between.

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