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Aesthetics of Anaesthetics: Western Postmodern Attitude and Japanese *Wabi-Sabi* (侘寂)

Abstract

In Japanese aesthetics, there is a traditionally embraced concept named *Wabi-sabi* (侘寂) which cherishes -in a narrow sense- the beauty that springs from the imperfection or impermanence. At first sight, this understanding -when it is considered comparatively within traditional Western theories of aesthetics- does not find any concrete corresponding western element for itself (even though the theme of “the beauty in the flaw” is a well-known idea in Western literature and philosophy), because of the dominant aesthetic values towards Greek ideals of perfection and symmetry’s beauty within modern Western art. But, especially with the negative approach towards the concept of symmetry in the beginning of modernism within architecture and positive opinions about the concept of Anaesthetics (or un-aesthetics) within postmodern understanding of art, there might be something in western aesthetical theories which can be read in a similarity with *Wabi-sabi*. Western aesthetical themes like “beauty in the asymmetry”, “aesthetic of the Anaesthetic one”, “aesthetic of decay”, “aesthetic of ruins” and “anaesthetically appealing” might have a possibility of a comparative reading with *Wabi-sabi*. Even though it is not explicitly expressed, some opinions in postmodern attitude might provide a philosophical ground for this comparative reading. With the help of some Japanese terms like *Shibusa* (渋さ), *Kintsugi* (金継ぎ), *Mono no aware* (物の哀れ), this paper aims to search and to explain resemblances, differences and interconnections (if there are any) between idea of *wabi-sabi* and some western postmodern theories of anaesthetics.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Anaesthetics, Art, Japanese, Postmodern, *Wabi-sabi*.

Anestetğin Estetiđi Batı Postmodern Tavır ve Japon *Wabi-Sabi*

Öz

Japon estetiđinde *Wabi-sabi* (侘寂) adında geleneksel olarak benimsenmiş ünlü bir kavram bulunur. Dar bir bağlamda bu kavram kusurlu olmaktan ya da geçici olmaktan doğan güzelliđi ön plana çıkarır. İlk bakışta, bu anlayış -geleneksel Batı estetiđi ile karşılaştırıldığında- kendisine Batı dünyasında tekabül eden sağlam bir öđe bulamaz gibi gözükür (her ne kadar “kusurun içindeki ya da kusurun güzelliđi” teması modern Batı literatürü ve felsefesinde oldukça bilinen bir şey olsa da), Batı sanatında baskın olan mükemmelliđin ve simetrisinin güzelliđine dair Grek ideallerinin estetik deđeri dolayısıyla. Ama özellikle Post-modern sanattaki anestetik olana (ya da estetik-olmayana) yönelik olumlu yaklaşımlarda ve sanatta modernizmin mimarideki başlangıcındaki mekân algısı ve simetri kavramına yönelik negatif eleştirilerde, *Wabi-sabi* ile benzerlik ya da paralellik içinde okunabilecek bazı nüanslar bulunabilir gibi gözükmektedir. “Asimetrideki güzellik”, “anestetik olan”, “çöküş estetiđi”, “yıkıntı estetiđi” ve “anestetik olarak çekici” gibi temalar *Wabi-sabi* ile karşılıklı bir okunma potansiyeline sahipmiş gibi gözükmektedir. Her ne kadar doğrudan ifade edilmemiş olsa da bazı post-modern fikirler bu karşılıklı okunma için felsefi bir temel sağlayabilir. *Shibusa* (渋さ), *Kintsugi* (金継ぎ) ve *Mono no aware* (物の哀れ) gibi terimlerinin de yardımıyla, bu çalışma *Wabi-sabi* ile anestetğin güzelliđine dair Batı post-modern teoriler arasındaki benzerlik, farklılık ve karşılıklı ilişkileri (eđer mevcutsa bunlar) araştırmayı ve açıklamayı amaçlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Anestetik, Estetik, Postmodern, Sanat, *Wabi-sabi*.

Kein aisthesis ohne anaisthesis

Introduction

When W. Welsch had written this line above (Welsch, 1990, p. 32), he did something more than just an etymological word play. First, as he emphasizes the Greek cultural and semantic usage of the word *aisthesis*, he reminds that the conception of aesthetics does not have to focus only on elements like art, beauty, artistically pleasing, ugly, golden ratio, aesthetic taste, aesthetic attitude etc. As the Greek word [which means perception] implies, the scope of the study field of aesthetics is bigger and has a wider range as a whole. Welsch’s endeavour’s aim was accorded to -even though different in content- the scale which A. Baumgarten intended this word -aesthetics- to have, as a frame of definition. Both Baumgarten and Welsch wanted -from different perspectives- that aesthetics is not only interest in what is artistic. This emphasize is actually not that important and new. Aesthetics and art criticism are two different things

(Danto, 1997, 87-93), just like aesthetics and artistic aesthesiology are two different things (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 146-160).

Especially with the emergence of postmodern era, enterprises to broaden the borders and definitions of aesthetics and art were like an intellectual challenge and fad. Different thinkers coming from different educational, sociological, philosophical, cultural etc. backgrounds tried to explain [to determine, to clarify, to reduce, to investigate, to extend etc.] and deconstruct the theories on art and aesthetics. While some of them approached the theories with a mind-set emphasizing the relation between world, self and art (Siegel 1997, p. 53), some others pointed toward the relation between art and criticism (Genosko, 2010, p. 13); between art and aesthetic attitude (Dickie, 1964, p. 61-63); and between aesthetics and culture industry (Adorno, 2002, p. 16-18). As a common ground, most of these thinkers aimed to problematize the centralization of the concept of beauty in art and aesthetics (Habermas, 1987, p. 5-12), while some of them saw this problematization as a false direction for aesthetics theories to evolve towards (Danto, 2004, p. 27-30). Most of the postmodern era thinkers (especially thoughts of T. Adorno and W. Benjamin will be mentioned later in a contradictory, even though it's impossible to draw a decisive line between modern and postmodern) had a thing or two to say about the situation of art and aesthetics in their timelines. All these things which are articulated within the postmodern era about aesthetics and art can be seen as both attempts to overcome the unexamined assumptions of traditional aesthetic theories that are mainly based on the thoughts of Baumgarten, Kant, Hegel [and also Aristotle] and as a self-critical continuation of this tradition in a new manner where the idea of aesthetics was one of the possible manners (Andina, 2017, p. 155-162). No matter which one is, one thing is for sure that with postmodern era, comes the radical questionings and shakings of the grounds where the theories of aesthetics and art build themselves on [Even though, it also should be mentioned that there are also plenty of questionings of these grounds in modern theories as well]. The idea of beauty might be well placed with theoretical, intellectual and conceptual supports within a specific understanding of art in Renaissance, but in Postmodern era, it [no matter in which art

and aesthetic understanding it was theorized] (Adams, 2010, p. 30-37) was more fragile, transient and “hanged by a thread”, so to speak, than ever. It is not just that postmodern approaches toward the aesthetics saw it unnecessary and unfit to postulate a universal and permanent idea of beauty but also, with postmodern era, not even one single aesthetic and artistic attitude dared to, or were able to, afford putting all its trust in soundness of their understanding of beauty, and in other elements circling around it.

Postmodern mentality indeed helped humanity to take into consideration the main questions like “what is beauty?”, “what is beautiful?”, “what is art?”, “what is aesthetics?” in the most thorough and comprehensive way that was seen in the history of human so far. But they incorrectly thought that they also had to give up the credibility and substantiality of what art is and what aesthetics are alongside with their conditions of universality and generality [alongside with so many other methodological problematics (Crasnow, 2007, p. 779-790)]. Still, the late era of postmodern situation can be seen as the effort to put the artistry, substantiality, aesthetic value and meaning of the art [and aesthetics] in light, while trying to keep the dogmatic and false assumptions of traditional aesthetic theory [and history] such as universality, permanency, inalterability from perspectives etc. away. For today, this is a long-going and still in effect debate, therefore in this article we are not intended to deal or get involved with these fields of discussion.

In here, we aimed to contemplate on [or at least start to contemplation with] what Welsch’s aforementioned line did secondly. The connection of *aisthesis* with *anaisthesis* is not that important for now. Even though it is still unknown for this article to what *anaisthesis* really means, it is almost for sure that it can’t be something unlearnable. Once the meaning of *anaisthesis* reveals itself, that remark of Welsch will reach its destination.

However, the important thing in here is the chosen conjunction. The importance here belongs to the *kein-ohne* relation. This conjunction with the usage of prefix *-an* in the remark reminds the reader Hegelian dialectics or maybe even Heraclitusian unity of opposites and the opposite flux. Even though postmodern attitude was somewhat

against this type of thinking [i.e., thinking in dualities and dichotomies with intense severity and decisiveness], it is still for sure that Welsch knew something better by this remark. Moreover, this thing that he knew was the very reason which he deliberately chose the *kein-ohne* relation. For this thing to manifest, one first should look at the rather philosophical definition of *anaesthesia*.

***Anaesthesia* Comes into Scenery**

Since we have started with Welsch’s remark, we can continue from the same intellectual lineage and understanding, which also gives us the way to problematize it in a philosophical manner.

For Donna Kerr, the anaesthetic is an obstacle to aesthetic utopia, arising from either ‘routines and understandings which are psychologically too comfortable’ or ‘abrasive environmental conditions – conditions that can psychologically deafen and blind or psychologically numb or disable.’ Neil Leach’s anaesthetic is the effect of the ‘intoxicating world of the image’ which he sees as characterising contemporary architectural and general cultural practice. This cultural veneer is seen, by Leach as well as by Welsch, to erode critical awareness and to precipitate mindless consumption and a protective indifference in the face of overstimulation. In opposition to this involuntary response, Monica Sassatelli refers to the anaesthetic as a strategy whereby art reacts against this ‘banalization of the aesthetic.’ A similar idea to this art as anaesthetic is also central to Welsch’s investments in the anaesthetic. The main thing to point out here is that there seem to be two key conceptions of the anaesthetic: firstly, as an involuntary response to the excess of aestheticised experience or the inoculation of routine; secondly, as an intentional and strategic response to or thematisation of this state of affairs in art (Carroll, 2006, p. 37-38).

Now, at first look, the terminological meaning -within the field of aesthetics- of the word *anaesthetic* seems like it derives from somewhere close to its general usage. It points towards a kind of numbness, indifference, emotionless, and insensitivity. While also associating with the medical meaning, Welsch seems like he wanted this word to have a power of a defense mechanism, both on conscious and subconscious level. *Anaesthetic* seems like both as an uncontrollable state of being [or state of unaware attitude] to the overdoing of something and as a deliberate and intentional reaction [or mind-set] to approach with, to that overdoing. This overdoing can be summarized as

aestheticisation to the point of meaninglessness. It is not like the meaninglessness when someone repeats a word over and over again so much and so fast in a short period of time that the word starts to sound empty and meaningless to ear, like no semantic meaning is attached to the word at all. But, it is like the meaninglessness when one decides to transform everything around into something a little bit artistic, or art-sy, so to speak (Welsch, 2003, p. 8). It is the meaninglessness which comes after being overwhelmed and being psychologically, spiritually and mentally suffocated to the point of inertia or apathy by something (Buwert, 2017, p. 39-41). Something that causes the exact opposite of what it is aimed to cause. Loss of the sense of aesthetics which is caused by the very act which aims to create the sense of aesthetics. This loss can be created by both in the manner of a lack (an absence) and in the manner of an excess (excess of something). It is the loss of aesthetics which is happened because of the aestheticisation itself. Is it true that everything needs its counterpart to be meaningful? Is it true that light can't build its meaning without the concept of dark? Is it true that where everything is art-sy, then nothing is art-sy? These unanswerable questions belong to a mentality which is stuck between modern and postmodern condition. And, the idea of *anaesthetic* comes from that condition of being stuck. So, it seems like anaesthetic is kind of a numbing dystopia that happens to humanity.

But in Adorno's writings, the world which might make sense of that authorial sensibility, the world of the 'heroic' phase of an entrepreneurial capitalism, is fast disappearing and is being supplanted by a monolithic, rational-technical commodity of capitalism. The poisonous gas of that 'totalitarian' world, its *anaesthetic*, is the dream-stuff pumped out by the culture industry, by the Hollywood dream machine, Tin Pan Alley, advertising jingles, 'lollipop' music concerts, jazz, radio and so forth (Witkin, 2005, p. 1).

But, as Welsch thought, it can also be an intentional and deliberate attitude for an awareness (awareness of the aesthetic numbing). It can also hold the possibility of exiting from that dystopia. But for this exiting to emerge, one should look at the first remark again and pay more attention to what has been said: *Kein aisthesis ohne anaesthesia*. To understand what this remark is really saying, maybe it is time to take a step back and look at the other contexts involving this term and mentality. “Cultural

anaesthesia is my gloss of Adorno’s (1973) insight that in a post-Holocaust and late capitalist modernity the quantitative and qualitative increase of objectification increases the social capacity to inflict pain upon the Other -and I would add- to render the Other’s pain inadmissible to public discourse and culture. It is upon this insight that a political anthropology of the senses in modernity can be elaborated.” (Feldman, 1994, p. 90).

It can clearly be seen that the idea of anaesthetics does not just belong to the field of aesthetics. For Adorno, it is a matter of something social, political, ethical, industrial just as much as it is a matter of something aesthetical and artistic. It is a matter of morality and subjectivity. “In Aesthetic Theory Adorno notes that, ‘[b]rutality towards things, is potentially brutality towards people’ He believes that something similar is true of sensitivity. For Adorno the greatest moral failing, which allowed Auschwitz to happen, was indifference. It is interesting to compare him with Primo Levi, who considered that the greatest moral failing of the Germans was to have been silent, to have failed to speak out” (Finlayson, 2002, p. 23). For Adorno, the idea of anaesthetics, [i.e., not being able to feel, sense or be bothered] can show itself in social and moral sphere which are deeply connected to each other (Tonon, 2015, p. 190-195). Just like these social, political, moral and ethical aspects [and it should also not be forgotten that it has an ideological aspect to it (Eagleton, 2004, p. 370-378)], with the remark of *kein aisthesis ohne anaisthesis*, Welsch pulls the aesthetics into the field of perception, or to say more precisely, to the field of epistemology, with the idea of anaesthetics. Moreover, this remark [which is saying “without anaesthetics, there is no aesthetics”] fundamentally means that aesthetics is not just only about judgements of taste or artistic concerns but it is also about how we perceive and experience the reality itself. With the idea of anaesthetics, aesthetics became more entangled in [and involved with] ontology and phenomenology. But, how so?

As said earlier, anaesthetics comes around as the result of the aestheticisation of art and of the world. The anaesthetics is the aestheticisation which is cancelling itself. It is the aestheticisation which got sick. But, how can an aestheticisation cancel itself? How can a thing be anaesthetical just because it is aesthetical? Can a thing be

anaesthetical? How can anaesthetics manifest when a thing is aestheticized? These questions are deeply related to the questions of “what is art?” and “what is that thing which turns the work into an artwork?” The terms like creativity, authenticity, originality, genuineness, uniqueness, specificity come into play here. Most of these terms can be read with the context of difference. Aestheticisation cancelling itself means aestheticisation losing its difference. This means that aestheticisation can no longer create the sense of the aesthetical when it doesn’t include the difference.

Adorno argues that thought separates the subject from the object and reduces the object to the subject’s concept of it. Difference is thus collapsed into identity: the difference of the object and its complexity are collapsed in the simplified identity that the subject gives to it. This reductionism is what Adorno calls the problem of identitarian thinking [...] This modern subject is intolerant of contradiction, nonidentity, and difference in the object and strives to understand the object’s complexity through the familiarity of homogenizing conceptual thought. Against this modern mode of thinking that falsely categorizes the world, Adorno is interested in developing a philosophy that examines the nonidentical, that is, the difference that identity logic erases [...] phenomenologists have long since emphasized [...] our experience of the world is irreducible to those concepts and categories (Fritsch, 2013).

So, the problem of the aestheticization [which results in causing the anaesthetics] is actually rooted in the famous postmodern problem of difference and identification, even though there are also some modern criticisms towards the dominance of symmetry and beauty in the art. The aestheticisation which doesn’t have difference is problematic because it doesn’t act like itself. It is emptied by itself. When the aestheticisation is no longer creative [authentic, original, genuine, unique, specific etc.], it can no longer create what is aesthetical, hence comes the anaesthetics. When the aestheticisation loses its aesthetical essence and becomes a technical formula which is applied forcefully to every aspect of art [and of word], hence comes the anaesthetics. When aestheticisation loses its difference, hence comes the anaesthetics.

Postmodern attitude was well aware how these kinds of paradoxical situations can emerge within both modern and postmodern life (Pippin, 2005, p. 105-110). Then, this means that for something to be aesthetical, it can be discernible. Difference makes it

discernible. Without the difference, the same sense of artistic and aesthetic application can be repeatedly experienced again and again. It is just like structuralism and post-structuralism had told about those underlying patterns and structures which shape the reality and everything around. It is the formula as a structure. If one starts to sense the formula, then all those things which that formula was applied to become [turn into] the facets of the one same thing, simply because they lose their difference. And when they lose their difference, they also lose the ability to make someone feel something, hence comes the anaesthetics. This is the main reason why we choose to focus on the postmodern discourses, because these discourses are the main examples which philosophically problematize the concept of difference.

Someone Save Aesthetics!

Since it is a little clear what anaesthetics is now, the question arises: How can aestheticisation be saved? How can aesthetics be saved? How can this aesthetical and artistic deadness disappear? Actually, this rescue was already well imagined and discussed.

Adorno's desire to “rescue” repressed affect finds perhaps its most extreme test, a sort of limit-case, in a 1959 lecture in which Adorno speaks feelingly of “the emotional force of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*”. Most readers today, I wager, will raise eyebrows at this characterization. It was apropos of Kant, after all, that Terry Eagleton joked that in the tradition of philosophical aesthetics, “the aesthetic might more accurately be described as an anaesthetic” (196)--and indeed Adorno himself characterizes Kant's aesthetics elsewhere as “a castrated hedonism, desire without desire” [..] Eagleton's “anaesthetic” notwithstanding, for Adorno, Kant's “emotional force” lies in the ineradicable felt force of the agon itself, the drive for “domination” of emotion and affect [..] Adorno's project is heavily invested in an ambition to undo this anaesthesia or (Adorno's own frequent protest-word) “ataraxia”--that is, to redeem the numbness programmatized in modern, bourgeois, enlightenment projects, whether aesthetic or scientific; or, if “redeem” seems too messianic, to “rescue” (Adorno's own word) for “critical” and “conceptual” purpose the affective force normatively repressed in our culture's sundering of thought and feeling (Helmling, 2009, p. 20-21).

Of course, it should not be forgotten that anaesthetics, for Adorno, has always an epistemological and political aspect which is as dominant as its ethical aspect

(Bernstein, 2001, p. 340). Whether these aspects are more dominant than philosophical and aesthetical aspects or not is still open to debate (Foster, 2016, p. 111-112). And also, aesthetically, with an optimistic manner, it can be said that anaesthetics isn't really a curse which humanity should be saved from but actually a transition gate which enables future generations to create purer aesthetics and art. No matter from which point of view, the questions of “where does this leave the humanity at?” and “how can the difference be given back to aestheticisation?” await. In this paper, the necessary insight which was best uttered by Aristotle and Tolstoy is needed to be emphasized. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 2 Aristotle says: “Again, it is possible to fail in many ways (for evil belongs to the class of the unlimited, as the Pythagoreans conjectured, and good to that of the limited), while to succeed is possible only in one way (for which reason also one is easy and the other difficult- to miss the mark easy, to hit it difficult); for these reasons also, then, excess and defect are characteristic of vice, and the mean of virtue; For men are good in but one way, but bad in many.” (Aristotle, 2009, Book 2.6). Almost the same insight is articulated by Tolstoy in *Anna Karenina*: “All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way” (Tolstoy, 2002, p. 12). When Aristotle says “good in but one way, but bad in many”, or when the *Anna Karenina* principle is taken into consideration, is it possible to create a metabasis here? Can this insight be taken into the field of aesthetics? Can this insight be rethought with the idea of anaesthetics? What if the focus themes and elements in art and aesthetics are turned 180 degree? What if the focus is not beauty but ugly, not perfectness, but flaw, not symmetry but asymmetry? We are not talking about the asymmetry when there is an underlying symmetry is hidden but present (McManus, 2005, p. 157-160), but rather the elegant and delicate usage of asymmetry. We point toward not proportion but disproportion, not excellence but failure, not splendid but incomplete. Flaw, fault and defect might be the thing which is able to give the difference back to the aestheticization. Perfectness might be in common, but flaws are unique in their specific, own way, just like Tolstoy and Aristotle said.

Actually, this is not a new point of view. K. Rosenkranz had famously problematized the idea of “ugly” with regard of how it is considered within aesthetics and within its relation with beauty. He suggests that thinking and understanding the ugly as the counterpart or the inverse of beautiful (or the beauty) gives an incomplete picture. He deals with the relationship between ugly and beautiful with other aesthetical elements like formlessness, disfiguration and deformation. (Rosenkranz, 2015, p. 31-50). And when Adorno said “scars of damage and disruption are the modern’s seal of authenticity; by their means, art desperately negates the closed confines of the ever-same; explosion is one of its invariants” (Adorno, 2002, p. 23), he also points toward the same mentality which assumes the flaws, faults, scars, damages, disruptions can hold a possibility of authenticity. Of course, what he meant as “authenticity” should be explained here at first:

[..] Adorno identifies the accepted notion of authenticity as ‘being-so-and-not-being-able-to-be-otherwise’. However, it is clear that he is not using the concept in any of its more familiar senses when he maintains that, after Auschwitz, the authentic works are the failures and that ‘the authentic artists of the present are those in whose works there shudders the aftershock of the most extreme terror’. Revealed here are the polarities we come to expect in Adorno: On the one hand, authenticity concerns the way a work appears to be what it is because it can be no other way, an idea which contains a range of related concepts, including those of self-contained structural consistency and of totality; on the other hand, pitted against this is the idea that the authentic modernist work is characterized by the failure in these terms and that the social and the historical impinge on the apparently autonomous world of the work of art, fracturing its integrity and making its consistency look suspect [..] (Paddison, 2004, p. 198-199).

While Adorno expands and characterizes the meaning of authenticity with social and political aspects according to his own thoughts, he emphasizes terms like self-consciousness, self-reflexivity, ability-to-criticize within art and aesthetics. The positive understanding of “failure” in aesthetics and art surfaces related to this emphasize.

Such a notion of authenticity, however, whereby a work attempts to achieve consistency of form (which implies integration) through a critical relationship to the handed-down material (material which, since the period of the late Beethoven and Berlioz, has tended increasingly toward fragmentation and disintegration), leads to failure, according to Adorno – a

kind of failure which is not simply the result of technical inadequacy on the part of the composer but rather comes from the impossibility of succeeding in the task to be faced, a task which must be undertaken nevertheless. (Paddison, 2004, p. 216).

What Adorno is partly saying that, some failures can be a sign of the path of a great artistically and aesthetically successful work. Heidegger brought out the same mentality towards failures when he once said “he who thinks greatly must err greatly” (Heidegger, 2001, p. 9). Flaws and failures can be effective and decisive parts of an aesthetic attitude, instead of being unwanted outcomes. They can be the key elements which create the aesthetic and artistic sense, instead of being left out of aesthetic and art theories by being something irrelevant, something unimportant, something which has to be hidden, something that has to be covered. It is an understanding of aesthetics and art which welcome the flaw. It is an aesthetic and artistic mentality which cherish the flaw.

Maybe an aestheticisation which is fundamentally reshaped with this attitude can have its difference again, so the anaesthetics prevail no longer. This is the aesthetics of decay, aesthetics of ruins, aesthetics of vanishing (Virilio, 2009). The appealing of nostalgia and remembrances, the aesthetic value of ruins and wrecks have their own ground in this attitude. Beauty of the flaw is the beauty of the incompetence. Beauty of the ruins is beauty of the rotting. Ruins, decay and rotting represent [and remind] humans their own imperfection as being a human. Biological mortality of humans and phenomenological vanishing their cultures, governments, ideas, histories etc. off from the face of the earth can be thought within this imperfection. This imperfection might be a nauseating and disgusting curse [and even a blasphemy to the human life and essence], but it is still something that can be aestheticized. This is the reversed-beauty and aesthetics of the ultimate metaphysical insult to human soul. This is the aestheticisation of a flaw and failure. This is the aestheticisation of what is ugly and anaesthetic. Embracing the element of flaw in aesthetics might transform aesthetics into something which belongs more to the condition of being human, more natural, more in

accord with the universal and cosmic change and becoming, more fit to the idea of eternal recurrence within nature.

By dint of aesthetic appreciation, the physical manifestation of decline, be it the classical ruin, the disused boatyard, or the charred pier falling into the sea, creates a unity between space and the idea dormant in that space. In the gaze of decayed place, decline individuates itself. What we see in the place rouses the imagination. Through an imperceptible yet dormant correspondence between consciousness and the ruin, an uncanny dynamic emerges in which ruin and subject are recognized in each other. As the ruin mirrors the fragmentation of reason, so subjectivity bears witness to the future of rationality [...] Though the manifestation of decay has been suppressed and celebrated according to the ontological configuration of different historical epochs, decay presupposes the very experience of a narrative form [...] When Rome was verging on collapse, a concession to failure was made which enabled decay to become aesthetic [...] Under this atmosphere of thick melancholy, the ruin becomes an object of aesthetic contemplation. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the ruin was used as an ornamental motif, encouraged by the Renaissance’s rediscovery of Rome (Trigg, 2009, p. 97-104).

The idea of welcoming flaw, failure, decay and ugly in the aesthetical theory might rescue art from the crisis that it is drowning in, from the drowning that characterizes the art since the so-called transition from modern to postmodern era (Sorčan, 2013). What was anaesthetic in the first place now has the ability to create what is aesthetical. Moreover, what was anaesthetic (as something lacks of aesthetic) is now aesthetical by itself. Even though it is also possible to find this mentality within modern art theories, it is possibly fit more to that transition. Things which were not meant to [or able to] create aesthetic feeling inside are now responsible for creating it. The sense of aestheticisation now can spring from what it had thrown out of aesthetics. The creative importance of the element of flaw in aesthetics is now well-established. But, as said before, anaesthetics does not only surface when the aesthetics lacks. It also emerges when excess of aesthetics is present. With this excess, another problem emerges within the relation between aesthetics and anaesthetics.

The key word for this development is phantasmagoria [...] It describes an appearance of reality that the senses through technical manipulation [...] These nineteenth-century forms are the precursors of today’s shopping malls, theme parks, and video arcades, as well as the totally controlled

environments of airplanes (where one sits plugged in to sight and sound and food service), the phenomenon of the “tourist bubble” (where the traveler’s “experiences” are all monitored and controlled in advance), the individualized audiosensory environment of a “walkman,” the visual phantasmagoria of advertising [...] Phantasmagorias are a technoaesthetics. The perceptions they provide are “real” enough-their impact upon the senses and nerves is still “natural” from a neurophysical point of view. But their social function is in each case compensatory. [...] It has the effect of anaesthetizing the organism, not numbing, but through flooding the senses [...] The role of “art” in this development is ambivalent because, under these conditions, the definition of “art” as a sensual experience that distinguishes itself precisely by its separation from “reality” becomes difficult to sustain. Much of “art” enters into the phantasmagoric field as entertainment, as part of the commodity world [...] Benjamin describes the flaneur as self-trained in this capacity of distancing oneself by turning reality into a phantasmagoria: rather than being in the crowd, he slows his pace and observes it, making a pattern surface. He sees the crowd as a reflection of his dream mood, an “intoxication” for his senses (Buck-Morss, 1992, p. 22-24).

Now, there is a problem of reality [or to be more precise, a sense of real] at hand. When aestheticisation (both meaning referred) infested all the reality (for the arguments sake, let’s assume that the aestheticisation includes difference), anaesthetics appears. This anaesthetics is not because of the lack of aesthetical difference but it is because of the congestion of the aesthetical senses. If what is aesthetical and artistic can create its aesthetic-ness and artistic-ness with its ability to non-discern itself from the reality [ordinary, everydayness of the reality in here is presumed, (Markin, 2016, p. 87)], then the realness of the artwork can’t be separated from its artistic-ness, or at least they have to give up being two different attributes. From this point of view, the reality and the art can merge (half-negatively for Adorno, half-positively for Benjamin) within the concepts of aestheticization and anaesthetics. This situation of being separated and merging is what confirms Benjamin’s understanding of aura when the art and reality are thought with regard to mechanically reproducible artworks (Gasché, 2002, p. 183-186). Because without this merging, the liberation of artwork from its property of ritual and cult would never realize (Franks, 2006, p. 194-196). Negatively, aestheticization might bring the danger of turning artworks into something generic (and hyperreal or hypermodern at most) pastime activity which is already alienated and altered deep down, by merging what is artistic into daily life. Positively, aestheticization might bring

what is artistic to the reach of people with its mass society, so the art won't have to be under the monopoly, hierarchy and specialty of small coteries.

But again, with this interrelation between reality and art, the dilemmatic and paradoxical situation of Greek *aisthitikos* and *aisthisis* again shows itself here. Does the term “aesthetic reality” belong more to aesthetics or the ontology? (Buck-Morss, 1992, p. 6-8). This problematic situation finds itself a place in everywhere with different contexts alongside the postmodern attitude. What is the approach of postmodern thinking to aesthetics? There is no right answer, nor there is only one. There are contradictory layers and understandings about what postmodern aesthetics is.

I want to deal with two main kinds of postmodernist aesthetics and a third kind which can be located between them. First, I want to look at the ideas of Lyotard and Welsch, writers arguing for a postmodernism which is clearly connected with the avant-garde tradition. The second kind of postmodernist aesthetics I associate with the works of Jencks and Oliva: these authors treat postmodern aesthetics as essentially new and opposed to the avant-garde heritage. The third, middle approach is represented by Eco's conception of what postmodernist aesthetics should be. In what follows I will juxtapose the three approaches and at the end pursue two important questions: What was modern aesthetics for?; and: to what degree do the postmodernist attempts have anything to do with aesthetics? (Morawski, 2003, p. 49).

So, even though it seems not likely to pinpoint what postmodern aesthetics is in its poly-forms and singularities, it is still possible to highlight the controversial and contradictory aspects of different aesthetics (plural) about a given subject (Foster, 1987, p. xi). Even though both W. Benjamin and T. Adorno were somewhat postmodernist thinkers, they thought differently and almost opposite at some points about popular culture and mass media (McBride, 1998, p. 465-467). But it can be said that [about the over-aestheticization and this over-aestheticization's link to anaesthetics], they approach the matter from the same mentality, from the same postmodern attitude. The interaction between real and art is precisely the erasing or blurring the lines between art and life, converting life into an artwork and overfill ordinary life and its sociological, institutional, phenomenological aspects with so-called aesthetic and artistic elements. Of course, it is debatable whether this “blurring of the lines between art and life” is

really an approximation, a closing up the gap between, or not. Maybe, conversely, it is the falling further away which happens on both art and life, because the process of aestheticization turns them into something they essentially are not and they can't cope with this kind of *sensitization* and *de-realisation*. Without entering this debate, it is enough for now just to point that it might be indeed an unplanned and automatic ideology. It might be indeed an unplanned and automatic economy. But moreover, it might be carrying the possibility of a total redesign and social engineering which is able to reshape the understanding of human and life (Lyotard, 1984, p. vii-x). Even though it is not crystal clear to define the exact point of friction between a modernist thought and a postmodernist one, this ambiguity doesn't hold a critical significance now.

Wabi-sabi: Beauty of the Flaw at the Edge of Nothingness and Time?

Now that the situation of aestheticization and anaesthetics in western postmodern attitude has been investigated, at this point of the article, it seems fit to digress from the path a little, to both widen the discussion field and to gain a new point of view to look at the issue. There is a parallel but another context to the mentality about the relation between flaws and aesthetics summarized above. This can both strengthen the situation of flaws being welcomed in an aesthetical theory and help to solve the problematic and paradoxical condition [uttered with the terms of sensitization and derealisation] between art and life which is the result of the process of aestheticization. A context that comes from North-east Asia, mainly from Japanese and Chinese aesthetics with Buddhist and Taoist background, especially with the ideas about relation between absence and presence (Jullien, 2009, p. 1-14). The understanding of Wabi-sabi (侘寂).

Philosophically, wabi-sabi (侘寂) designates a world-view or a mind-set towards life and everything inside it with an attitude of accepting the transient state of things and their imperfections, accord with the understanding of the place of nothingness in universe, nature and life. It is based on the Buddhist teaching of the three marks of existence, namely impermanence (*aniccā*), unsatisfactoriness or suffering (*dukkha*), and

non-self (anattā). In Japanese terms, these are impermanence (無常 mujō), suffering (苦 ku) and emptiness (空 kū).

It is also related to the realizing, comprehending and valuing the emptiness and imperfection before the Kenshō (見性) and Satori (悟り), which is the awakening or the enlightenment especially in the context of seeing the true nature of all universe with every little thing, human and phenomena in it. In aesthetics, it emphasizes the idea and presence of beauty that is created by the state of imperfection, impermanence, and incompleteness; a beauty which is itself because of its flaws, a beauty which is itself because it is flawed (Koren, 2008, p. 15-39). This welcoming of the flaw also cherishes asymmetry, roughness, simplicity, austerity in artistic and aesthetic manner.

Even though its roots go back to Chinese influences, in modern world, *wabi-sabi* is seen as one of the most important elements of Japanese aesthetics, including the senses of wisdom in (or of) natural transience, flowing and ever-changing nature of things (Keene, 1998). It is also well-connected with other three Japanese aesthetics terms: (1) *Kintsugi* (金継ぎ) [repairing broken things -especially potteries- by mending the broken parts together with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. The fractured and cracked parts of the thing are not thought as something to be hid or disguised, but on the contrary, by staying visible, they are cherished and welcomed, as part of the history of that thing] (Santini, 2019). (2) *Shibusa* (渋さ) [an aesthetic attitude that cherishes the elements like irregular forms, simplicity, subtlety, naturalness, serenity, quietude, spontaneity, everydayness with especially merging contrasting elements to create a sense of timelessness and tranquillity] (Casebier, 2006, p. 227-230). And, (3) *mono no aware* (物の哀れ) [a term from Japanese aesthetics which designates the awareness of impermanence of things or transience of the reality and flow of nature. It can be thought as sensitivity to ephemera or the feeling of empathy toward the natural state of things, their constant state of decaying, which is precisely the beauty of those relevant things. This empathy is also accompanied by a feeling of wistfulness or compassionate sorrow about how things slowly vanish and disappear in life, and also by a gentle sadness

which comes with the realization that this vanishing and disappearing is the true and unchanging nature of nature. It is the sincere and longing sense of beauty which is the result of the awareness of that nothing in nature lasts forever. It’s the sweet melancholy and appreciative of transience of life. It is the aesthetics looking at the point where life and death meets (Kempton, 2018).

Of course, when it is read linguistically, this phrase has also a sense of surprise. The word *mono* (物), which generally means “thing”, and *aware* (哀れ), which was an ancient usage of vocative for being surprised (similar to “ah”, “oh” or “what” in today’s world). Thus, *mono no aware* might also be translated as “the ‘ahh-ness’ in the flow of things in nature and life”. It is the sense of surprise which comes along with the realization of ever-changing nature of things (Khoo Choy, 1995, p. 138-145). This surprise out of the appreciation of transience (which means true) nature of things creates a sense of beauty. This surprise creates a sense of beauty in a thing because that thing is in decay, in dissolve. That decay makes the thing ever-flawed. There is no such state where a thing in nature holds a flawlessness. So, flaw and beauty belong to the thing in its true nature. Seeing this belonging increases the awareness of both flaw and beauty. Sensing the flaw heightens the gentle sadness. Seeing the beauty heightens the appreciation. They both belong together intrinsically. There is no beauty without flaw. There is no flaw without beauty (Izutsu, Toyo – Toshihiko (1981, p. 29-54). *Wabi-sabi* is like a center element which binds these four terms (three terms plus *wabi-sabi*) together. These are not about the intrinsic and objective features of the things, but they are about an aesthetical happening which happens when things are composed in a right way.

To understand the meaning and scope of this word, it is also better to investigate it from etymological, lexicographical and historical aspect. This term, which became very popular in western world through interior architecture and interior design especially in the beginning of 21th century [“beauty at the edge of nothingness” is generally said about the understanding of *wabi-sabi*] consists of two characters, *wabi* 侘 and *sabi* 寂.

Even though the characters are hard to translate into English, their associations and connotations might reveal its aesthetical and philosophical importance deeper.

The first character *wabi* -which has a sense of subdued taste- is associated with originally referred to the loneliness of living in nature, remote from society. There is a linguistic connection to poverty, insufficiency and despair in this character [since the Japanese verb *wabiru* (侘びる) means to worry or to pine, and related adjective *wabishii* 侘びしい means wretched, lonely or poor]. This situation gives the word *wabi-sabi* an underlying sense of negativity, which creates that melancholy and sorrow. *Wabi* implies a stillness, with an aura of rising above what is mundane. It is an acceptance of reality, and the insight that comes with that acceptance. It allows us to realize that whatever the situation is, there is beauty hiding somewhere. *Wabi* can describe the feeling which is generated by recognizing the beauty which is found in the creation of simple flaws. It is a sense of quiet contentment which has found a way from the materialistic side of the aesthetics.

The second character *sabi* can mean “patina”, “antique look” and “elegant simplicity”. The character can also be translated as “tranquillity”. The adjective *sabishii* (寂しい) means “lonely”, “lonesome” or “solitary”. The verb *sabiru* (寂びる) [with a different logograph, but the same reading] meant to rust, to decay or showing signs of aging. Over time, the word *sabi* started to communicate a deep and tranquil beauty which emerges with the passing of time. This is recognized as the patina, weathering, tarnishing and signs of antiquity. *Sabi* is a condition created by time, not by the human hand, although it often emerges on quality objects that were originally crafted with care. It is interested in the refined elegance of aging. It is beauty revealed in the process of using and decay (Kempton, 2018). It is obvious that the aesthetical power of the understanding of *wabi-sabi* comes from its philosophical background.

These words, *wabi* and *sabi*, have their roots deep in the historical progress of philosophy and aesthetics in both Japanese and Chinese culture. That’s why it can also be described as “worldview” and “way of perception”. It is not just a concept which

belongs to the field of aesthetics and art, but it is a philosophical way of thinking, a way of seeing, a way of experiencing the world around. It is almost a metaphysical understanding toward the inner structure of Being’s truth. This power enables it to get involved with the problematic postmodern aporia about life and art mentioned above.

Now, to understand this sense of wabi-sabi better, and to fully show the resemblances between wabi-sabi and its somewhat western counterpart (anaesthetics) of this Japanese term, we can examine and interpret some examples where these both occur. By examining these examples, we can also deepen and enrichen the philosophical meaning of both terms. Alongside with this deepening and enrichening, we can also make another link possible between Western and Asian thought, or within the comparative philosophy for that matter. These examples consist of different and anonymous photos from all over the world where the sense of wabi-sabi and anaesthetics emerged. With interpreting these examples, we hope that we will have a better grasp of the phenomenality of wabi-sabi and anaesthetics.



1- The Worn Marble Steps - Leaning Tower of Pisa

There is nothing perfect about these steps. They are worn-out, disfigured and out of shape. One might even argue that it is more likely to stumble while climbing these steps than the regular and identically shaped ones. But still, there is an aesthetical beauty in them. Their disfiguration represents the history of the tower and the stories

that happened inside it. This is not the artwork of an artist who made the disfiguration on purpose. So, even though the steps create a sympathetic and aesthetical feeling inside by just looking at them, this can't be seen as something artistic. Or, can it be? What is artistic? Is the condition of these steps beautiful? They are interesting to look at, it's for sure, and they cause a sensation of history and passing of time materializing in physical world inside the tower as steps, as a hyper-reality where past and present merged into one. Disfiguration makes the steps belong to both past and present. Experiences without owners reside on these steps. When subjects left their experiences behind, it is for sure that those experiences don't disappear into thin air, not right away at least. They are the experiences of the steps now. Those experiences create the flaws and flaws bring the beauty. Does everything include beauty have to be within the field of art? Who knows. But, this example of wabi-sabi definitely shows the mentality summarized above: These steps are definitely not something to be replaced with brand new ones.



2- Waiting Room in Gara De Nord, Timisoara, Romania

There are taints and stains on the wall. Should it be painted nicely for a fresh look and feeling? Maybe. The stains on the wall seems like human silhouettes. It almost feels like ghosts are sitting in the chairs, leaning against the wall. But ghosts hardly leave traces of shadows in physical space. Living humans easily can. By leaning against the wall and blocking the sun, they surely can leave a trace on the paint of the wall. This creates a sense of liveliness and vitality to this sitting area. Even when there is no human in this waiting room, it feels like there is still human breath in the air of the

room. A sense of soulfulness which comes with a paint flaw. How can an empty room create a sensation of crowd? An alive room. These traces are the scars of presences which turns this inanimate room into something that has its own characteristic, like an old human. A flaw transforms the room into something authentic. Maybe, it is not something beautiful. But it is for sure not something mundane and ordinary. There is an aesthetic feeling inside the room. Because it triggers the perception and senses with a contradictory attitude. Traces on the wall problematize the philosophical ideas of presence and absence. The well-established lines between presence and absence is blurred in here. It is now impossible to differentiate presence from absence and absence from presence. The situation of the ultimate difference between these elements is now out of the question. They are not in contradiction with each other anymore as they are seen in a classical Aristotelian logic. There is no absolute opposition between these elements anymore. This creates a sense of history for this room. This room has stories to tell. Time passes for this room too, just like the way it passes for humans. Traces on the wall make the room has a past. Just because of this, it also has a future. This is how this room is or happens in phenomenological manner within nature or Being. This gives the room an aesthetical sense. It is not about the beauty and art per se, but it is definitely about what is art and beauty is about on a bigger scale. Wabi-sabi makes sure of that.



3- Footprints Carved into the Floorboards

In the monastery town of Tongren, in Qinghai province [Tibetean region of western China], monk Hua Chi's -who is also a doctor of traditional medicine- footprints are carved into the floorboards of the Rongwo Gonchen Gomba shrine [which dates from 1301], because he has knelt in prayer as his daily ritual at the same exact spot for almost 20 years. This ingrain of foot shape can be seen as a deformation of the floorboards, if wanted. This carving of the wood can be seen as something to be fixed, if wanted. But it can also be seen as something to cherish, something to protect. This deformation of the wood can represent the essence of devotion and faith. This flaw of the floorboard is the materialization of the sincere and self-enclosed relation between the human soul and the realm of divinity.

It is not just a regular carving of ordinary two feet on a casual wood. It is the phenomenological proof of the possibility of something metaphysical and transcendent. It is almost the trace of a bridge between what is natural and what is supernatural. It is the physical mark of a non-verbal and non-written agreement between two parts. It is the result of a silent conversation in physical space which has been on going both for hundreds of years and for 20 years. It is the volumetric and cubical extent of the act of *religere*. This binding or tying is this natural carving. This flaw of the wood is a source of admiration and inspiration for the young monks inside the monastery. This flaw of the wood turned into a ritual where other young monks plan to continue by repeating Hua's movement, after he stops. This flaw brings the monks together into a singular sense of sacredness inside the monastery. This single flaw is what constitutes and constructs the wholeness of the holy inside the monastery. Thanks to this carving on the wood, sanctus is something spatial and locational. Thanks to this carving on the wood, sanctus is something about the life of humans, not some cold, distant, hollow and abstract concept. Thanks to this carving, the holy is something tangible and interactionable. This flaw gives vitalness to the sensation of religion within the monastery and among the monks.



4- The Wind and the Plants

What happened is obvious. The wind has blown these plants back and forth so much that the movement worn the wood down. It is just a couple of unimportant plants which are grown just next to the wooden fence. They can be extirpated, and the fence can be repainted, then everything would be good as new. And, this probably wouldn't affect the beauty of the garden that the fence is guarding and framing. The scene that is created by the wind and the plants are not that beautiful anyway. But it is not ugly either. This is not directly about the aesthetics, but it is surely about the way of understanding life, nature and universe. It is about the attitude and behaviour that a human can have towards the essence of environment. Wind and the plants create a pattern together and the wood records it. It is the seizing of what is unseizable otherwise. It is the design result of what happens when nature is let be. The pattern on the wood is indeed a flaw. But it is a flaw where it is better to let it stay as it is than fixing it. It is the scene [which is neither aesthetic nor anaesthetic] that comes from the nature. It is the movement of nature's happening on its own. The sensation of pendulum and cycle comes from the untouched roots of nature's inner structure. Hypnotic to watch. It is the nature and cosmos acting on a minor scale. The miniature show of the nature's dynamism. It gives the hint that every act of creation within nature can be seen as a scar from some aspect. Creating by destroying. Becoming by annihilating. At the same time, nature at rest. Nature in idle. *Wabi-sabi* at work. Sublime in miniscule. The

relation between aesthetics and life has its layers opened up in nature’s various ways of occurring. Is there an artistic aspect to this? Nonetheless, this is an authentic event in the sense of Heideggerian Ereignis. This is the instantaneity of a soulful mechanism where the spectator is also one of the gears, a process which ends up creating the link between ontology and aesthetics. There is nothing artistic about in the traditional sense, but there is everything aesthetical about it. This is the positive manner of anaesthetics. This is the anaesthetics which cleanse the aesthetics. This is the nature taking a step out of its zone to start to create what is cultural. Realization, or to be more precisely, re-realization of one of nature’s possibilities on a new phase. It is the idea of flaw getting into the realm of beauty for the first time ever.



5- The Threshold

Why does a threshold wear thin? This erode and abrade is not only about the material that the threshold is made of. Materials does not only fray out because of time passes. This flaw of the threshold might point towards the amount of time passed since it was first built. But, it might also tell about the amount of welcoming it and the door committed together. This is not only an old gate. This is a gate where lots of welcoming and seeing people off took place. The condition of the gate whispers that decisive differentiations between inside and outside are in vain there. The door might be a border, but, it is a transitive and transparent one, especially when it is let to act. A door is not only something between a wall and a curtain, but it is an act of choosing. A gate chooses when to open and when to close. This ability to choose is what creates the fraying of the threshold out. This gate is not an ornament, nor it is a replica. This gate

has its own truth in being every time it opens and closes. That’s why a gate belongs to the world of human more than a wall or a way does. This is the border which holds the passage from one place to another. Gate is at the both places on its sides at the same time and this is the spot where wabi-sabi happens. Of course, the threshold can be replaced. But, as long as the gate keep acting its essence, the element of wabi-sabi will keep surfacing, manifesting on the same spot. It is almost like nature wants a wabi-sabi at that particular spot. Time goes in, time goes out. People goes in, people goes out. Stories go in, stories go out. True life experiences go in, and they go out. This wabi-sabi is not a matter of antiquatedness or time-wornness. It is a matter of the gate keeping its essence intact and in-use. It is a matter of people mimicking and copying the kinesis of nature. The repetitive loops and cyclic motions which nature is built on also construct what is phenomenological in humans’ and societies’ life fluency. This time, span of wabi-sabi does not come from nature, but it is hand-made. Just like a gate is a gate not when it opens, but when it opens *to* [a gate in the centre of a room can physically be but does not have the ability to happen at all].

This is the precondition of the wabi-sabi here. There is wabi-sabi, because the gate opens to the other. If both sides of the gate were the same, then there would be no gate at all. Then, there would be no wabi-sabi at all. That’s why, this unadaptable and impractical threshold does not bother the aesthetics, conversely, add itself to it to complete it. Because a threshold is never a blockage, barricade or an obstacle. The gap between the threshold and the bottom of the door is not created of nothing, but just enlarged. From that gap, inside and outside is connected to each other [This is the reason why pushing a letter under the door has a ritualistic sense, because that passing is a metaphysical change of realms]. This connection is the same connection wabi-sabi has established between flaw and the beauty. The flaw of the threshold is the proof of the existence of that threshold. By courtesy of that flaw, that threshold lived and realized its essence. And, this is the solemn reason for the truth which tells that threshold is just perfect as the way it is. This is the ultimate calling of the wabi-sabi: Even there is a flaw, nothing is wrong.

Conclusion

It seems like wabi-sabi can be read as it holds the spirit of an antithesis of western idea of beauty in traditional understanding of aesthetics. In the process of postmodernism challenging this very tradition by problematizing and examining this tradition's major themes and ideas, wabi-sabi can be useful to provide a solid and durable ground and mentality to support and maintain this problematizing and examining. Nevertheless, this doesn't have to be the only usage of wabi-sabi in western aesthetic tradition. Understanding of wabi-sabi can also supply philosophical arguments and assertions to both enrichen the relation between aestheticisation and anaesthetics. It can solve the problematic and paradoxical situation between the life and the art. In understanding of wabi-sabi, the artistic and aesthetical value of the thing is not even considered under the dichotomy of life and art. Because life and art is not two separated things trying to merge into one. In wabi-sabi, the worn-out condition which is created by the passage of time is what creates the condition of artistic and aesthetic. Flux of nature and life over the things creates the aesthetical and artistic value and attribute. In wabi-sabi, the beauty is still artificial, but this artificial-ness is not in contrast, conflict or disagreement with natural-ness. It is the sense of artificialness that is created by the nature itself. This is not about the art and aesthetic theories of the North-East Asia where wabi-sabi finds itself a place to blossom and thrive, this is about the phenomenological understanding of the relation between human and nature, more precisely, human and Being, of that cultural pool. This is about the difference between how the concept of subject or subjectivity is understood by these two different cultures. This is about how disconnected or how well intertwined the nature and the human is thought within these cultures. This is about two different mentalities approaching from two different points to this question: To where does the art belong? Out of habit, one hears this question as “to where does the art belong? To nature or to human?” and starts its research and thinking from this perspective. Out of habit, the other hears this question as “where does the art reside belongingly?” and it starts its research and thinking from this perspective. It is not a matter of being right or wrong. It is not about

the answer, but about the how thoroughly, comprehensively and extensively the question can be laid bare. Thanks to this situation, comparative studies result fruitful for the intellectual development, because both sides can heed to the process of the other’s adventure -with the same question- to learn something from it.

IMAGES

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