Seeing and Knowing

Seeing and knowing are often separate. Nothing could be more admirable than when they coincide, but only too often they remain estranged. In some fields this does not matter, but in the areas of aesthetics or art history or the like, any gap between perception and knowledge assumes fatal proportions. This is an obvious fact that is too frequently overlooked. Similar cases are common in other fields as well.

The critic of religion, for example, who has no religious feelings has no force in his criticisms. In the same way, the moralist who does not live by his theories carries no weight, however brilliant he may be. I know many famous art critics who have no feeling of beauty, and I cannot therefore respect their knowledge. They may be learned, but it avails nothing. It is the same with philosophy and history. The student of philosophy and the philosopher should be distinguished; a man who knows a great deal about history is not necessarily a historian.

Doubtless many would reply that intuitive perception of beauty is incomplete without learning, that without knowledge one does not see a thing as a whole. Socrates saw the identity of action and knowing. To see and at the same time to comprehend is the ideal, but in practise we are far removed from this unity. The things to be seen and the knowledge to be gained have so vastly increased in this modern age that man’s activities have been pushed either into one direction or the other. But of the two, those forced into the field of knowledge are in the worse position as far as beauty is concerned.

To be unable to see beauty properly is to lack the basic foundation for any aesthetic understanding. One should refrain from becoming a student
of aesthetics just because one has a good brain; to know a lot about beauty is no qualification. Seeing and knowing form an exterior and an interior, not a right and a left. Either way, they are not equal. In understanding beauty, intuition is more of the essence than intellectual perception.

The reversal of these two faculties stultifies vision. To "see" is to go direct to the core; to know the facts about an object of beauty is to go around the periphery. Intellectual discrimination is less essential to an understanding of beauty than the power of intuition that precedes it.

Beauty is a kind of mystery, which is why it cannot be grasped adequately through the intellect. The part of it available to intellection lacks depth. This might seem to be a denial of aesthetics, but it is as Aquinas said: "No one shows such a knowledge of God as he who says that one can know nothing". Aquinas was one of the greatest minds of medieval times and knew well how foolish his own wisdom was in the face of God. No one could rival the wisdom with which he acknowledged the poverty of his own mind. Though he is renowned as a theologian, he was surely still greater as a man of faith; without that fact he would have been a commonplace intellectual.

He who only knows, without seeing, does not understand the mystery. Even should every detail of beauty be accounted for by the intellect, does such a tabulation lead to beauty? Is the beauty that can be neatly reckoned really profound? The scholar of aesthetics tends to base his ideas on knowledge—or rather, he tries to make seeing proceed from knowing. But this is a reversal of the natural order of things.

The eye of knowledge cannot, thereby, see beauty. What is the beauty that a man of erudition sees as he holds a fine pot in his hands? If he picks a wild flower to pieces, petal by petal, and counts them, and tries to put them together again, can he regain the beauty that was there? All the assembly of dead parts cannot bring life back again. It is the same with knowing. One cannot replace the function of seeing by the function of knowing. One may be able to turn intuition into knowledge, but one cannot produce intuition out of knowledge. Thus the basis of aesthetics must not be intellectual concepts. For this purpose all the classification in the world avails nothing, and the scholar does not even become a good student of aesthetics. There are so many whose voices invariably rise round works of art, trying to pin them down in neat categories, always preceding the verification of beauty with such questions as "who made it.
when, and where”. The recognition of date and school, etc. is a matter of pride for them. They are intensely ashamed of leaving any mystery unaccounted for in their explanations. This is commonly referred to as the “academic conscience”. In fact, I suspect it is because they have not better work to do, or cannot do it properly.

The man in the street is hoodwinked, he thinks he is being informed by a man who really does know everything. Should we apply the adjective “good” to such critics and art historians? How their writings on art are flooded with exaggerated and strained expressions. They use words, too, in remarkable numbers. They cannot suggest beauty without great heaps of adjectives.

When the power to see does not accompany the power to know—when the power to see is blunted—art historians, critics, and collectors fall into the same kind of confusion. Even assuming that they correctly praise beautiful things, they will also, without fail, praise the ugly as well. This shows that, ultimately, they are not even praising the beautiful for the right reasons. Their blurred eyesight is incapable of distinguishing beauty and ugliness. They have not grasped the yardstick of beauty. They study things that have no place in history and cheerfully rank the good and bad side by side. They have no sense of values, when they are right, they are right by luck. Beauty is essentially a matter of values; if values are confused, if there are no standards, if valueless things are admitted among the valued, judgements of beauty lose their basis.

The number of collectors of art in the world is constantly increasing, but there are few whose perceptions are developed enough to gather various types of art together with a uniformity of standard and taste. This is undoubtedly due to the foot-rule approach that I am decrying. As great an importance is placed on secondary issues, for example the idea that because something is expensive it is necessarily good. It may be rare, or unblemished, or be inscribed with the name of a famous artist, but these are all tradesman’s arguments or tactics, after all, and have nothing to do with beauty. These good people are deceived in this way because they have not got eyes to see with. If they had, they would not be concerned with rarity, perfect condition, or former ownership. There is no real point in collecting unless for the sake of beauty, nor is it truly possible for those who cannot see, for if they persist, their collections are bound to be a jumble of good and bad. This is the inevitable result of putting a foot-rule between one’s eyes and an object.
To look at the question from a different angle, seeing relates to the concrete, knowing to the abstract. Let us say that we have a painting by Tawaraya Sōtatsu in front of us: it is an object that the eyes see and research, and to which one’s heart can respond, but the knower with the foot-rule is immediately busy with a dozen questions as to age, authenticity, previous ownership, technique and the like. These secondary and circumferential matters are all very well only if they lead to a better appreciation of Sōtatsu’s painting. Without such appreciation all the knowledge in the world will take one nowhere. Thereby it becomes clear that both to see and to know is best, but that in any case seeing comes first. See first and know afterwards.

Seeing is a born faculty, knowledge is acquired. To a point anyone can acquire knowledge, but the potential of seeing is born with us. Although some are more gifted than others, it is generally accepted that the musical or the artistic gifts are born with us and that there is nothing to be done about it if one is not so fortunate. The gift of seeing is of the same order. This leaves the ungifted forlorn. I would like to give them three pieces of advice.

First, put aside the desire to judge immediately; acquire the habit of just looking. Second, do not treat the object as an object for the intellect. Third, just be ready to receive, passively, without interposing yourself. If you can void your mind of all intellectualization, like a clear mirror that simply reflects, all the better. This nonconceptualization—the Zen state of mushin (“no mind”)—may seem to represent a negative attitude, but from it springs the true ability to contact things directly and positively.
Pattern

Some years ago I attempted to write on this very difficult subject, but gave up in dissatisfaction with my own grasp of the matter. Yet whenever I consider the question of beauty, I return to this subject, so close, I feel, is the relationship between transformation into beauty and transformation into pattern. To divine the significance of pattern is the same as to understand beauty itself. So, at least, it seems to me. The relationship between beauty in the crafts and pattern is particularly profound.

As a concrete example, take the five-leaf bamboo grass crest motif (Plate 28) used on our Japanese clothes. To most of us it is so commonplace as not to be given any thought, but I think it is an excellent example of what I mean. What sort of pattern is this? Why is it beautiful? What are the conditions for a "good pattern"?

Comparing this pattern and the plant, the pattern immediately suggests bamboo grass, but even a first glance shows that it is not a literal representation. A pattern is both true to nature and artificial.

Where lies the essential difference between the plant and the pattern? The plant is a product of nature. The pattern is this plus a human viewpoint. The original plant is still "raw", nothing more than the given material. The viewpoint is what gives it content. Without a viewpoint, seeing is no different from not seeing. Everybody can see the plant; but not everybody sees it in the same way, much less perceives its beauty. Beauty only emerges in the plant with the addition of a viewpoint that sees it as beautiful. Bamboo grass pattern is, in a sense, bamboo grass provided with order by a viewpoint. All patterns are products of a viewpoint. For that reason, patterns are not reproductions of nature, but new
creations. What is this viewpoint? What should man look at? In what way ought he to look?

There are many ways of seeing, but the truest and best is with the intuition, for it takes in the whole, whereas the intellect only takes in a part. Pattern is born when one reproduces the intuitively perceived essence. When the intuition weakens, pattern becomes no more than a formal design. Design as such is no more than an intellectual composition. The decay of this capacity of pattern making today is due to a loss of the intuitive faculty.

Pattern is not realistic depiction. It is a “vision” of what is reflected by the intuition. It is a product of the imagination, in the sense in which Blake used the word. Pattern is non-realistic. It may be called irrational. In a sense, it is an exaggeration. Pattern is not a scientific rendering of the original. Everyone knows that a bamboo grass pattern shows a plant that never could be. The pattern is a symbol of the plant, not the plant itself. It is an emblem of the bamboo, and yet the living bamboo is there in it. A pattern is a picture of the essence of an object, an object’s very life; its beauty is of that life. In fact, it would be truer to say that its beauty is that life staring at the pattern maker in the face. A pattern may lie on a table inert, just ink on paper, but it is the child of vision. Springing thus from life it must itself be alive or it is nothing. From the bamboo leaf to the pattern there is a transformation, as from chrysalis to butterfly, taking life with it into a new form. This metamorphosis is its significance. A good pattern is pregnant with beauty. The maker of a pattern draws the essence of the thing seen with his own heartbeat, life to life.

Since pattern is a portrayal of essence, all non-essentials must be stripped away; the pattern is what remains. There is no wordy explanation. There must be the “speech without words” of Zen. Good patterns are simple, if they are cluttered, they are not yet patterns.

The kind of pattern I am speaking of is not primarily decorative; it comes of Zen emptiness, of mu (“void”), of “thusness”. The more the significance contained in a pattern, the more its vitality. In its placidity there must be movement; it lives in that no-man’s-land where eloquence and silence are one. Without both it dies.

How is it that one sees the bamboo in the pattern? Because the essence of bamboo is there, just as prolonged boiling renders a concentrated flavour. The process of making a pattern out of raw material is similar, it is an extract, so when we look at a good pattern we perceive something
Beauty is the transformation of the world into pattern.

Pattern is an ugly country, a country that does not care for beauty. Pattern is the world and our hearts are made beautiful. A country without the spirit of the viewer. One never tires of looking at it. Through pattern we learn how to look at nature. Without good patterns is an age that does not look at nature carefully. Thus, nowhere do we contact nature more vividly than in pattern. Nature converted into pattern is far more beautiful than nature as it is given. Why should pattern be so beautiful? It provides unlimited scope for the imagination. Pattern does not explain; it leaves things to the viewer; it may be compared to a spring of water that can be drawn on externally. To provide a source of imagination that never dries up—that's true beauty. A beautiful pattern is a mirror. Pattern is the best light. Pattern is a medium of attraction. Pattern depends on nature. Pattern contains nature at its most wonderful. In a sense, an age without good patterns is more vague and equivocal than its. Pattern is the power of beauty. Pattern is the power of beauty, which is not merely exaggeration, but an enhancing of what is true. Without this enhancement, a pattern is not true, it lacks conviction. This is why good patterns are beautiful. Every great age of art has shown elements of the grotesque. A weak, easygoing era lacks such power. Conversely, all true distortion, is in-pattern. Pattern is the crystallization of beauty. To understand pattern is to understand beauty. To see nature as a beautiful pattern, is to see nature as more beautiful than a bamboo grass pattern. We can never see nature as more beautiful than a bamboo grass pattern. We can never see nature as more beautiful than a bamboo grass pattern.
Let us consider the meaning of pattern afresh. On the whole, patterns tend towards symmetry. Symmetry is a natural and inevitable principle for pattern, since it has its distant and profound origins in nature itself. In nature, a basic symmetry can be observed, for example, in branch, leaf, and flower. They represent order. Order means numbers, laws. Laws give a point of repose. When the thing given matures into a pattern, an order has been realized. The making of pattern involves a strict observance of principles, otherwise confusion arises and ugliness instead of beauty results. When we simplify something, we can realize how simplification involves a return to the world of numbers. Numbers are expressed in symmetry. To make symmetrical and to simplify have the same significance. Without symmetry, simplification cannot be achieved. Good patterns cannot be made without observance of laws.

Pictures are often distinguished from patterns, pictures being considered a depiction of nature and patterns as human compositions. Yet the two have only parted company in comparatively modern times. In olden times, there was no “realistic painting”, the birth of which marked a stage in history. And yet, I believe that any good picture, even today, is also a pattern. This idea is not current nowadays, but I believe that history will eventually bring about a return to it.

Why have painting and pattern separated? The same cause underlies the idea that divides fine art and craft: the growth of individualism. Everything to do with painting has become more and more personal. Painting avoids pattern. The craftsman is essentially a communal worker; when individualism arises, the paths of “artist” and “craftsman” diverge. Also, the craftsman, as I have shown, is tied by natural laws. Our epoch is at the height of concern for individualism. Pattern, as we have seen above, obeys laws, for which reason it is impersonal. In many cases, a good pattern has become the communal property of a nation: in Japan, the pattern of plum, bamboo, and pine; in China, the arabesque; in Korea, the peach; in Egypt, the water lily; in Europe, the lion rampant—these are examples of patterns born of the people and in constant use by everybody. These are the reverse of individual productions. It is not enough to seek the sources of a good picture’s beauty in the individual. Most beauty is related to laws that transcend the individual. The power of that individual is puny compared with the power of the laws. The difference between former times and ours is that the individual remained unobtrusive until recently. All once used the same patterns without any
question of jealousy. The separation of picture and pattern, arts and crafts, is one of the tragedies of modern times.

Crafts are of and for the great mass of people and are made in great quantity for daily life. Expensive fine crafts for the few are not of the true character of craftsmanship, which, being for everyman, are appropriately decorated with the patterns of everyman. It is natural that craft objects should be associated with patterns that are also, in a sense, communal. Painting today is prized far more than pattern, but the time will come again when this position will be reversed and beauty that transcends the individual will come to be accorded more importance.

What is the power at work in good pattern? Pattern is a product of man's skill, the true mission of which is to turn to use the laws of nature. Thus, while pattern is in a sense an artificial product, it is not so much man-made as a technique for reducing nature to something more "natural" still. It is not a vaunting of man's humanity, but a hymn to nature's mysterious power. In a good pattern, man is faithful to laws; one detects in it a true humility. It is good to the extent that it is free of any arrogance of personality. A very strange consequence of obedience to these laws is the increased freedom that then results. The acceptance of limits produces ease of mind. One may well ask why this should happen. Some insight may be gained from examining three natural limitations that every craftsman must consider: the purpose for which a given article is used; the nature of the materials employed; the appropriate techniques. With proper attention to these three limiting factors, patterns displaying that ease of mind come into being.

Use determines the nature of pattern in the first place, otherwise the pattern will be inappropriate. Let me use as an example of what I mean the coats used by farmers daily all over Japan. They are made usually of two layers of indigo dyed cotton material, hemmed and bound together by stitching in very thick thread (Plate 26). This needlework looks like added decoration but it is nothing of the sort. Its charm is in its appropriateness to use and the strength of the stitching. The delightful patterning is incidental and utterly suitable. There is no concept of decor for its own sake. From this it should become clear that the origins of pattern are inextricably sewn into the fabric of use.

It is also correct to state that pattern emerges from the texture of raw materials. If the material is poor, pattern will suffer. This does not imply that the craftsman should not adapt his patterns to the nature of his
material. How very different is the painting of patterns on lacquer from painting on pots, and textile stencil dyeing from the batik wax-resist process. To disregard these innate disciplines of raw material and to think that patterns can be put anywhere with freedom of fancy is our unrecognized modern disease. We have to learn once again how to make friends with the natural raw material from which pattern blossoms.

Real pattern is also the consequence of a series of technical processes. A pattern thought out on paper is unreliable. Pattern evolved in the work itself avoids the pitfalls of paper-thought.

The knotting or weaving of rugs presents a good example of the way in which the disciplines of process decide the character of the pattern. Mere freedom of design clearly will not do; the limitations of procedure have to be followed, both strictly and willingly, to produce good pattern.

The reason why the patterns on the thread dyed kasuri textiles (Plates 2, 30) of the Ryūkyū Islands are so lovely is just because these limitations have been observed with zest. [How arithmetically exacting this work is can only be imagined. The weft and warp threads are dyed in calculated, appropriate lengths and colours so that, when woven, their crossing produces the desired technique-controlled pattern.—B.L.] Such patterns would never have come into existence without this peculiar technique. As this is a time-consuming and complicated process, it has been often replaced in Japan by the shortcut of printing such patterns, but the results are utterly different. Thus it should be evident how important technique with its safety rules is to the making of good pattern.

Usefulness, material, and technique, if given their due values, automatically give us calm and friendly beauty in the crafts we use from day to day. By and large, good pattern is of communal parentage. The more so the better, and the further the disciplines of nature are accepted the better the results will be. I cannot lay sufficient stress on this last behest, for our undertaking as craftsmen is to act as humble and loyal agents of the divine will inherent in nature.

In pattern man gets a view of a mighty world transcending man. In pattern we touch on the mystery of beauty. It is a strange thing that nobody seems to have stated boldly that pattern and beauty are identical. To make something beautiful and to create a pattern are not two different things. I dare to prophesy that although people's eyes are closed at the present, this profound truth will eventually be realized.
A conspicuous trend in modern art movements is the pursuit of deformation, discarding conventional form, as an expression of man’s quest for freedom. In referring to this avoidance of the regular in the widest sense, I shall speak here of “asymmetrical” or “irregular”.

Although the contemporary accent is on deformation, expression, in both East and West, was always achieved by departing from regular form. The term “grotesque”, which has an important—rather, a solemn—significance in aesthetic history, has unfortunately been misused and debased in modern times. All true art has, somewhere, an element of the grotesque. Thus the principal of irregularity, or departing from fixed form, is not new; it is merely that it has come to be employed consciously.

Why has this powerful phenomenon appeared? The irregular is in a sense something to which all who pursue true beauty resort. But primitive art from Africa, the Americas, and the South Seas was an astonishing revelation and had a magnetic effect on artists like Picasso and Matisse. Such art, as nothing else, freely expressed the beauty of deformation, of the irregular, that they sought. This resuscitation from primitive sources surely ranks with the revelation afforded by the colour prints of Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Thus “irregular” beauty is in no sense a new mode of expression; the characteristic of modern art, rather, is the fresh look it has taken at such beauty and the conscious emphasis it has placed on it. The profound truth in this emphasis is that freedom always resolves into irregularity in the end. “Free” beauty of necessity boils down to irregular beauty.

Among the earliest people consciously to appreciate this beauty of
irregularity and take it as the principle underlying their creative work were the Tea masters of Japan who lived three or four centuries ago. This becomes clear immediately if one refers to the bowls used in the Tea ceremony, not one of which fails to show irregularity somewhere. Nothing, to put it the other way round, was selected for use in the Tea ceremony if it was perfect and regular. In this sense, the great masters of Tea may be considered as very modern. The so-called literati painting of the Southern school in China, so much prized in the past here and so little in the West, is also of this order of asymmetry, and the pity is that the young painters of Japan, engrossed as they are with the arts of the West, neglect their own Oriental inheritance.

In America of late years the potters in pursuit of "free form" have made a sharp and deliberate turn towards asymmetry and deformation. But already two or three centuries ago in Japan a similar tendency and preoccupation took place in the making of Raku Tea-bowls and other wares. Also, the porcelain Tea-bowls made in Ming China to the order of Japanese Tea masters, of which many still survive, often show a deliberate irregularity that is essentially foreign to China. Such pieces are the result of conscious demand from the Japanese side and, as such, occupy a rather special place in the history of ceramics. My observation in America makes me think that most of the handmade individual craftsmen's pots now being produced are mainly influenced in their irregularity and deformation by Japanese Tea taste.

An attempt to describe this love of asymmetry in modern terms was made by Kakuzō Okakura in his The Book of Tea. He calls it "the art of imperfection". To a younger generation this may be easy to grasp. A glance at the implements of Tea will make this clear. The shapes are irregular, the surfaces dry or sandy, the glazes of uneven thickness; the pieces piled in the kiln remain unglazed where the pots rest upon one another; fire cracks are accepted. All these characteristics are not merely put up with, but are taken as an integral part of pot making and are therefore of potential beauty. The Tea masters found depth in this naturalness. Hence Okakura's phrase.

Why should one reject the perfect in favour of the imperfect? The precise and perfect carries no overtones, admits of no freedom; the perfect is static and regulated, cold and hard. We in our own human imperfections are repelled by the perfect, since everything is apparent from the start and there is no suggestion of the infinite. Beauty must have some room, must
be associated with freedom. Freedom, indeed, is beauty. The love of the irregular is a sign of the basic quest for freedom.

Dissatisfied with Okakura’s theory, the Buddhist aesthetician Shin’ichi Hisamatsu put forward a new idea. He says that the imperfect does not, in itself, constitute beauty, the imperfect is merely a negative concept. True beauty in the Tea ceremony must be more positive. It must go further, to the point of positively rejecting the perfect. This idea certainly goes one step further than Okakura. For example, Hisamatsu’s idea of “rejecting the perfect” is well illustrated in the Raku Tea-bowls. The shape is deliberately deformed—by, for example, not using a wheel—and the surface is left rough. By such means the masters sought to give life back to beauty in the Tea ceremony. All such imperfections are now sought after and refined with deliberation. From the taste of the Tea masters, this custom spread into the design of all sorts of objects throughout Japan.

Can the beauty and truth established by the early masters of Tea be explained either by Okakura’s “art of imperfection” or by Hisamatsu’s standard of beauty based upon the negation of perfection as an ideal? I do not think so.

In a sense such ideas are the precursors of modern deformation and “free form”. Both ideas—of imperfection as a stage on the way to perfection and of the rejection of perfection—are only relative. Beauty in the Tea ceremony does not ultimately reside in imperfection in these senses. Rather, it should be seen in terms of masō, the Buddhist idea of unchanging formlessness behind all phenomena. In this, there is neither acceptance nor rejection.

True beauty in Tea cannot lie either in the perfect or the imperfect, but must lie in a realm where such distinctions have ceased to exist, where the imperfect is identified with the perfect. This is the beauty that I refer to, for want of a better word, as “irregular”—irregular not in the sense of being opposed to the regular, but simply that when one does not consciously aim at either there is always a little something left unaccounted for. For this reason I cannot describe the present craze for deliberate deformation in art as a path towards true beauty.

If I turn to those things that display real beauty, my meaning may become clear. A characteristic Korean bowl made in the Yi dynasty (Plate 58) or a Chinese tea-caddy of the Sung dynasty can be described as neither perfect nor imperfect. They come out of a world that existed before this dualism began—or rather, not “before or after”, but in a
world where the dualism is irrelevant. Neither of them were made for any Tea-rooms, or for any aesthetic reasons, but for ordinary daily use. Their slight irregularities came by chance and not by any deliberation. Skipping of glaze or other imperfection was quite fortuitous. If one visits a Korean country pottery, the mystery attached to the beauty of imperfection in the pots is solved; the whole process of throwing, turning, glazing, and firing partakes of this easy-going naturalness, rough perhaps, but beautiful and imperfect. The making of those pots is very free—but not consciously free—and full to the brim with natural good taste.

I was favoured with a rare chance of visiting the Korean village where beautiful lathed wood objects are made. When I got there after a long, hard trip, I noticed at once by their workshop many big blocks of pine wood ready for the hand lathe. But to my great astonishment, all of them were still sap green and were by no means ready for immediate use. To my surprise, a Korean craftsman took one of them, set it in a lathe, and began forthwith to turn it. The pine block was so fresh that turning made a wet spray, which gave off a scent of resin. This perplexed me very much because it is against common sense in lathe work. So I asked the artisan, “Why do you use such green material? Cracks will come out pretty soon!”

“What does it matter?” was the calm answer. I was amazed by this Zen monklike response. I felt sweat on my forehead. Yet I dared to ask him, “How can you use something that leaks?” “Just mend it,” was his simple answer.

With amazement I discovered that they mend them so artistically and beautifully that the cracked piece seems better than the perfect one. So they do not mind whether it cracks or not. Our common sense is of no use for Koreans at all. They live in a world of “thusness”, not of “must or must not”. Their way of making things is so natural that any man-made rule becomes meaningless. They have neither attachment to the perfect piece nor to the imperfect. At the very moment when I got their unexpected answer, I came to understand for the first time the mystery of the asymmetrical nature of Korean lathe work (Plate 57). Since they use green wood, the wares inevitably deform in drying. So this asymmetry is but a natural outcome of their state of mind, not the result of conscious choice. That is to say, their minds are free from any attachment to symmetry as well as asymmetry. The deformation of their work is the
natural result of nonchalance, free from any restriction. Why does Japanese lathe work look hard and cold in comparison with Korean? Because we are attached to perfection, we want to make the perfect piece. But what is human perfection after all?

In modern art, deformation is so often emphasized and insisted upon. But what a difference from Korean deformation! The former is done purposely, the latter naturally. Korean work is but an uneventful, natural outcome of the people’s state of mind, free from dualistic, man-made rules. They make their asymmetrical lathe work not because they regard asymmetrical form as beautiful or symmetrical as ugly, but because they make everything without such polarized conceptions. They are quite free from the conflict between the beautiful and the ugly. Here, deeply buried, is the mystery of the endless beauty of Korean wares. They just make what they make without any pretension.

The aim of the strenuous spiritual efforts of Zen monks is focused always on grasping “thusness”, which is not yet separated into right and wrong, good and evil. The following story recorded in a book by a Zen monk may well illustrate what I want to make clear.

Once there were three people who took a walk in the country. They happened to see a man standing on a hill. One of them said, “I guess he is standing on a hill to search for lost cattle”. “No”, the second said, “I think he is trying to find a friend who has wandered off somewhere”. Whereas the third said, “No, he is simply enjoying the summer breeze”. As there was no definite conclusion, they went up the hill and asked him. “Are you searching for strayed cattle?” “No”, he replied. “Are you looking for your friend?” “No,” again. “Are you enjoying the cool breeze?” “No”, yet again. “Then why are you standing on the hill?” “I am just standing”, was the answer.

The state of mind of just being or “thusness” is not confined in any preconception.

The beauty I call “irregular”, the Tea masters describe as “rough”. I would call attention to the quite extraordinary perspicacity of those old Tea masters in grasping this quality so firmly. A certain love of roughness is involved, behind which lurks a hidden beauty, to which we refer in our peculiar adjectives shibui, wabi, and sabi. Tea-bowls are not a project of the intellect. Yet their beauty is well defined, which is why it has been referred to both as the beauty of the imperfect and the beauty that deliberately rejects the perfect. Either way, it is a beauty lurking within.
Unknown Craftsman

It is this beauty with inner implications that is referred to as *shibui*. It is not a beauty displayed before the viewer by its creator; creation here means, rather, making a piece that will lead the viewer to draw beauty out of it for himself. In this sense, *shibui* beauty, the beauty of the Tea ceremony, is beauty that makes an artist of the viewer.

The existence of such adjectives, the more precise meaning of which I have tried to describe elsewhere, is an indication of the unique attention that has been given in these islands to depth in matters of taste. These adjectives come out of a background of Zen thinking and have a pervasive religious flavour of modesty, restraint, and inwardness. They describe an aesthetic based upon simple naturalness and reverence. This does not imply an implacable opposition to wealth and its expression in taste so much as an emphasis upon the treasury of the humble minded. The *shibui* quality is the very skin of *mu* ("void"), its outward form. Thus it may be seen that the beauty discovered in our rooms of Tea, hiding so discreetly behind irregularity, is the very opposite of that beauty un robbed by the Greeks.

For two thousand years or more Greece has dominated European art, hence the great antithesis between East and West in matters of beauty. In the field of ceramics, Western pots are almost always decorated with pattern. The beauty of the plain pot was almost unperceived, and shapes were rooted in symmetry. The ideal of Greek beauty hardly permits of irregularity or asymmetry, for it was founded upon the symmetry of the human body. By contrast the Oriental found irregular beauty in nature outside the human form. From another angle, Western man may be said to be rational and Eastern man irrational; the scientific thinking of Europe is founded in rational thought. In the East the foundation is in the heart and its inspiration, which to the Western mind, with its emphasis upon the intellect, must appear very strange, for Eastern man jumps to his conclusions on wings of intuition, whereas Occidental man arrives at his by a steady progression of intellectual steps. From this causation, man of the West brought about the age of the machine, while the man of the East is still largely dependent upon the hand.

Being founded upon nature, the quality of beauty inculcated by the early masters in the Tea-rooms of Japan was a release into healthy normality, into a freedom without overtones of wilful artistry. The implements of Tea had no overstressed individualism about them. In that respect they were utterly different from objects made today by artist-
IRREGULARITY

craftsmen in search of self-expression, although there is a superficial likeness. They are different, too, from the things favoured by the later men of Tea, who had lost their freedom in the search for formulas. Such deformations as they contain were born, not made, unlike the kind of distortion that is current today. Their oddness was unplanned. Contemporary "free form" is wilful and unfree. In fact it can be said that the pursuit of freedom has led to prison gates—the prison of self.

Perhaps the best way of explaining this is by a comparison of the early and later implements of Tea. The former came from either China or, more particularly, Korea. They had an enormous influence upon Japanese taste, and Japanese craftsmen began to imitate them, mainly under the patronage of the later masters. Art historians have praised and still praise these Japanese crafts; I cannot agree. The implements of Tea made in Japan in this way cannot be compared with those from abroad. The irregularity apparent in both is in fact quite different. They are entirely different in motivation. The difference is between things born and things made. A comparison between the Korean Ido bowls and the Japanese Raku Tea-bowls is sufficient to make this quite clear. The Raku bowls were made with deliberate effort, the Korean bowls were effortless products of daily living and were not even intended for Tea. In theory the Japanese bowls might have been expected to be better, but in actuality the Korean are far better. The reason for this is clear if one considers which follows more faithfully the Zen warning to "avoid the artificial". Even in one of the most renowned Raku Tea-bowls, the famous "Fuji" by Honami Koetsu, this forced quality of taste is not entirely eradicated. Although things made with the motive of taste may charm for a time, one gets tired of them. Raku is not really freedom but captivity, not really "absence of conceptualization" but its result.

The approach to the making of better Raku Tea-bowls would necessitate a complete reversal of thinking. Really good artists and craftsmen are aware of this dilemma, but even they have not escaped from it. To do so is immensely difficult so long as one follows the path of jiriki (salvation through one's own efforts) rather than the tariki (abandonment of attempts at self-reliance; reliance on "grace") that produced the Korean bowls. This is the only way, hard though it be, for the artist, or for the craftsman who is also an artist. In his greater range and awareness he has to strive and strive to the very end to achieve that real freedom where his path joins that of the simple, natural traditional craftsman of whom I
have written so much. "Free form" activity is the equivalent of the deformed Raku Tea-bowl; both suffer from the same sickness, which has to be cured by a complete reversal of thinking. I believe that the early concept of Tea, if properly understood, contains force and truth enough to bring about this transformation. The beauty of irregularity—which in its true form is actually liberated from both regularity and irregularity—the asymmetric principle contains the seed of the highest form of beauty known to man.

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