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THE AESTHETICS OF REPAIR: THE WAY OF ZEN AND APPRECIATION

A Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of requirements

for the degree of Master of Arts

in the Department of Philosophy

The University of Mississippi

by

TYLER DOBBS

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ABSTRACT

The nature objects and how beings interact with them has long been a debate in the philosophic tradition. One aspect of this I have taken a look at is the aesthetic qualities entailed in this with particular attention paid to repair. In particular I explore the blurring of the subject-object distinction and the role of narrative in human engagement. I based my research and arguments primarily from Buddhist and Japanese Zen theories and ideas. Special attention was paid to the philosopher Kitaro Nishida and the Kyoto School philosophy tradition and ideas from Mahayana Buddhism.

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“But when we consider how small after all the cup of human enjoyment is, how soon overflowed with tears, how easily drained to the dregs in our quenchless thirst for infinity, we shall not blame ourselves for making so much of the tea-cup.”¹ – Okakura Kakuzo

I. INTRODUCTION

Ever since humans have been interacting with objects they have been repairing them. The art of repairing may have begun from practical purposes but now extends to aesthetic reasons to the simple pleasure of doing it. Though it may first appear as a simple action the nature of repair is inherently tied to the nature of objects. We cannot understand what repair does till we have at least some grasp of the object itself. Zen Buddhist tradition and mindfulness takes into heavy consideration the nature of objects and our relationship to them. Through this thought we can come to better understand what objects mean to us, how we interact with them, and why we find them appealing.

I will look at the traditional idea of object repair as well as ones done for aesthetic or restorative purposes. A particular tradition I will pay attention to that is worth noting now is the Japanese practice of kintsugi². Kintsugi is the practice of mending broken objects such as pottery with gold or silver to not hide the break but draw attention to it. It will be of particular importance as it focuses on the importance of the break and repair of the object simultaneously.

¹ Kakuzo, *The Book of Tea: Beauty, Simplicity and the Zen Aesthetic*, 36

² My Modern Met (blog), *Kintsugi: The Centuries-Old Art of Repairing Broken Pottery with Gold*

In this paper I wish to address the nature of repair and its effect on the nature of an object. I will explore the ontology of objects and the relation of repair to objects. I will be adopting an Eastern philosophical lens for this purpose; in particular I will be using Japanese Zen philosophy and philosophies derived from it. Of particular influence will be Kitaro Nishida and the Kyoto School philosophic tradition. I believe that the Zen approach gives a unique insight to the qualities found in everyday objects. I will also explore the implications of Zen theory on aesthetics and how repair effects this. I will argue for the case that I believe repaired objects are not the same objects they were before hand and that when we talk of objects we talk of their history and not of the object itself.

II. THE KYOTO SCHOOL

The Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida (1870 – 1945) used Zen Buddhist concepts as an influence when establishing a philosophy that was carried on by his students called The Kyoto School tradition. Nishida proposed that our interaction with reality is composed of intuition and thinking, at our core is nothingness (or no fundamental self) and that the self is in response to our experience. In the common idea of experience, the subject and object (self and thing being experienced) are separated; but Nishida says that they cannot be fully separated because there is only an individual before there is an experience. When we are experiencing an object, we are also experiencing the self so experience is even more fundamental than the individual. A rough model of this runs as, experience 1(pure experience) -> Self-> Experience 2. The first experience is called pure experience and it is the raw experience that the self is made in response to and the second experience is the self and experience together. As the pure experience is filtered through the self and the force of past experience the pure experience is not experienced directly; pure experience is lost the moment a thought or intuition ultimately changes it. The threat of solipsism is here but Nishida believes he has circumvented it,

“Over time I came to realize that it is not that experience exists because there is an individual, but that an individual exists because there is experience. I thus arrived at the

idea that experience is more fundamental than individual differences, and in this way I was able to avoid solipsism.”³

The primary aspect for the purposes of this paper I want from Nishida’s thought is from the way he formulates experience that the subject and object are unified in an experience;

“A true intellectual intuition is the unifying activity in pure experience. It is a grasp of life, like having the knack of an art or, more profoundly, the aesthetic spirit ...it is an extremely ordinary phenomenon ... from the standpoint of pure experience it is actually the state of oneness of subject and object, a fusion of knowing and willing.”⁴.

The idea I want to further focus on is the role that is played by the past when we experience objects; “Ordinary perception is never purely simple, for it contains ideal elements and is compositional. Though I am presently looking at something ... I see it as mediated in an explanatory manner through the force of past experience.”⁵. Nishida’s thought here can be compared to the notion of temporality that can be found in phenomenological thought. We can extrapolate from this that our experience of objects is also determined by our past with the object and it is distorted somewhat from its past self. A notion not explored by Nishida that I want to ponder for a moment is how we clear the mist of experience. In Buddhism the ultimate goal is to recognize your attachments to the world that surround your nothingness so that you can become more in tune with your nothingness; other branches of Buddhism focus on the detaching from these attachment/relationships but Zen instead says that you only need to detach the harmful ones and that you should instead treasure others but be aware of them so you can parse them. I want to put forth that by using such tools as

³ Kitaro Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, Reprint edition (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992). Page xxx

⁴ Kitaro Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, Reprint edition (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992). Page 32

⁵ Kitaro Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, Reprint edition (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992). Page 30

logic, mathematics, and the sciences we can recognize some of the “noise” experience makes and get adjacent glimpses of pure experience, though I do not believe we can obtain “pure” pure experience. For comparison, it would be similar to reduction to pure phenomena found in phenomenology.

It is worth noting that in the standard Western approach to aesthetics the subject is the person and the object is the art. I find this notion unsatisfactory and using Nishida’s thought embrace the idea that the subject object distinction is blurred if not disappearing completely. Through the unity of the subject and object in pure experience they negate each other;

“The self is that which acts. Action arises in, and from, a mutual relationship between things. Action presupposes a relationship of mutual negation, wherein one negates the other and the other negates the first. The mutual negation is simultaneously a mutual affirmation. Each thing realizes its own uniqueness. That is, each thing becomes itself. That two things maintain their uniqueness as they stand opposed to each other and negate each other means that they are mutually conjoined and compose one form. Conversely, for the two to interrelate, to be conjoined and form one whole means that they maintain their mutual opposition and negate each other. It is according to this formula that we actually think about mutual interaction of things, namely, the material world. Therefore what I call the ‘logic of contradictory self-identity’ is already at work”⁶.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that there are a handful of Western theories that deny the subject object distinction when it comes to aesthetics. Some examples would be Neoplatonism, Mysticism, Phenomenology, and philosophers such as John Dewey. For example Dewey says

⁶ Nishida, *The Logic of ‘Topos’ and the Religious Worldview*, 3

“Experience in this vital sense is defined by those situations and episodes that we spontaneously refer to as being "real experiences" . . . In such experiences, every successive part flows freely, without seam and without unfilled blanks, into what ensues. At the same time there is no sacrifice of the self-identity of the parts. A river, as distinct from a pond, flows. But its flow gives a definiteness and interest to its successive portions greater than exist in the homogenous portions of a pond. In an experience, flow is from something to something. As one part leads into another and as one part carries on what went before, each gains distinctness in itself.”⁷

Dewey goes on to discuss how different episodes of experience go onto fuse and melt into unity and thus inform each other. Dewey deemphasizes works of art in favor in favor of the experiences of the viewer and how they are influenced by their previous experiences.

⁷ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 37-38

III. THE EXPERIENCE OF OBJECTS

Now that a basic background has been established, I want to move on to my main topic of the nature of repair. When an object is broken it can be mended and an attempt is made to restore it. When it has been repaired a question arises, is this the same object that it was prior to its repair? I would like to argue that the object is no longer the same object but is in fact a new one. On a basic physical level the object has fundamentally changed; the break has changed the physical integrity and substances have been added to its composition to mend it or it has been resituated. Though this is much more prevalent in repair it can quickly be challenged that this position would mean an object would be a new object whenever aging or deterioration occurs; to which I would say yes it does. As we saw in my discussion of Nishida the self is made in response to experience, so this means the self is not permanent and a new one is made experience to experience (but informed by past selves). I would extend this to objects as every change in an object is then a new object to be experienced. When my phone receives a scratch, it is no longer the phone without a scratch but the phone with a scratch.

The immediate problem and objection that comes in response to this is then if these objects are constantly in flux then why do they seem to be the same. In response I will say that when we talk about an object, we are not talking about the object itself but about our experience with the object. Our relationship with an object is not to the actual object but to the experience of the object. When an object undergoes a change we experience the new object but it gets added to the our overall experience of the object. In this way to object is not the object but it is many objects at

once unified in a narrative, Nishida touches on this aspect of the many but none object and Robert Carter explains

“The one is self-contradictorily composed of the many, and the many are self-contradictorily one. The world can be viewed in two directions – the double aperture – and its unity is not the unity of oneness, as the mystic would likely express it, but the unity of self-contradiction. It is both one and many; changing and unchanging; past and future in the present. Nishida’s dialectic has as its aim the preservation of the contradictory terms, yet as a unity ... This is the logic of soku, or sokuhi – the absolute identification of the is, and the is not. In symbolic representation: A is A; A is not-A; therefore A is A. I see the mountains. I see that there are no mountains. Therefore I see the mountains again, but as transformed. And the transformation is that the mountains both are and are not mountains. That is their reality.”⁸.

To clarify the position, I have taken I am not saying we are lacking an objective object with which we all interact, there is the empirical mountain with which we all interact. If we were both to observe the same mountain, we would both be receiving the same initial pure experience, we both have the A is A experience. After this point is where our experience diverges, the experience of the mountain is converted into data and is no longer the mountain only this raw sensory and sensation. The mountain has transitioned to A is not-A. This data is filtered through our past experience such as our past experiences with mountains, with this mountain, maybe experiences that are tangentially similar, etc. Once the experience has gone through this process it has become the experiential object or the previous experiential object has been modified; we may have an

⁸ Carter, *Nothingness Beyond God: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nishida Kitaro*, 58

experiential object of this particular mountain formed but we might also have the more general experiential object of mountains modified by this experience. This experiential object is what we interact with and what we think of when we think of the mountain, but we are aware that it is connected and informed by the empirical object of the mountain even if that is not what we are directly interacting with, as we recognize this connection but still hold the view of our experiential object of the mountain and has returned to A is A. When we both have viewed the mountain and each possess our own experiential object of it we are both experiencing the same object but at same time not experiencing the same object.

Empirical objects may always be in a constant state of change, but we recognize this through the formation of experiential objects as this is what gives them permanency. This is not to say that that the experiential object is not also always changing as we constantly gaining new experiences that may modify experiential objects. Experiential objects are distinct from empirical objects, but they are informed by empirical objects. The states of objects are largely informed by the experience, such as an object being broken. If I were to drop my favorite *Star Trek* coffee mug and it is shattered the empirical object has changed, it is not broken but its composition and spatial arrangement has changed. What makes the object broken is that its experience is now that it is broken, its is the application of this experiential concept that makes an object broken. We recognize the history of our past experiences with this object having a form we would call whole, with the new pure experience after its shattering I apply the narrative it is now broken. Theoretically if I did not know that the object had changed states my experiential object would not possess the condition of broken. If I were not home and my cat was a *Star Wars* fan and threw my mug off the counter my experiential object would not be broken. When I returned home and found the object

or if my other cat texted me and told me what had happened then the experiential object would now be broken. The state of the empirical changes immediately but the experiential does not.

IV. THE AESTHETIC OF REPAIR

How does this nature of repair affect the aesthetic qualities of an object? Does repairing an object harm or return an object to its previous aesthetic qualities? First, if we accept that our experience of an object is of it as an experiential object then this would entail that our aesthetic experience of it is also as an experiential object. What would be our aesthetic reaction to an object is in relation to an aspect our relationship with it. I would put forward this is always the case even with aesthetic perception of seemingly new aesthetic experiences. Even when having a new experience, it is informed by previous similar experiences or even other non-related experiences. If you had a previous experience you can relate to your new one, then it will affect the new one you are having for positive or negative. Bias is a part of the formation of experiential objects and one that we are capable of recognizing but it still informs. For example, let's say the only music you had heard in your life was Motley Crue, Insane Clown Posse, and Train so you had come to the conclusion that music is not a pleasant experience; when you hear new music it will be less pleasant as your historical experience of music is unpleasant.

I do need to address that the standard conception of narrative is the experience of someone else that is being relayed. I am instead talking about narrative as something created by me about an object. Due to the way I have explored in how we interact with objects I believe that our relationship with them is a narrative one. Unlike the narrative of say a story which has a beginning, a middle, and an end, the narrative I am talking about is more infinite. The narrative is constantly being added to or even revised; it definitely does not have an ending and though it might have a

start it is hard to say it has a beginning. This narrative is what helps shape the experiential object. Let us say you get two kittens and name them Hamlet and Ophelia; though this might appear as the beginning of these experiential objects I do already possess a narrative object of cats, since I already have this this narrative of cats that informs my narrative of these kittens its hard to say my narrative object begins with the empirical object of the kittens. I can go further and say because of name choice they are informed by my narrative objects of the play *Hamlet* and even the works of William Shakespeare. I do not have a direct relationship with the empirical objects that are my cats but with narrative objects of my cats that is informed by the empirical one.

When an object is repaired the repair is part of the experiential object and your relationship with the repair also influences it. If an object I possess is broken and then repaired my experiential object is informed by both my past experience of the pre broken object and my current experience with the repaired object. If an object was broken and then repaired before I had an experience with it (maybe a family heirloom) then my relationship is with the object as I know it but might also possess some influence from awareness of its previous state. I might possess a narrative of value that influences my attitude towards an object; though I did not know an object before its repaired state my awareness of its repair might make think of it as “lesser” as I might see an object never broken as more valuable. The one who does the repairs to an object will possess a unique relationship with an object as they would be trying to grasp the experiential historical object they possess and somehow exert this onto the empirical object.

As I stated earlier as I stated earlier empirical objects are constantly in flux as they are different moment to moment as they are ageing, deteriorating, etc., even microscopically making it always inherently different. This makes means the practice of empirically repairing an object inherently impossible, as even an unbroken object will not be the same empirical object. Instead,

the repairer is trying to repair an object to be more reminiscent of its previous experiential states. The standard desire is to have the empirical object to continue to produce experiential objects as close to as it did before its broken state. We desire to maintain a continuity in our experiential objects and when it is broken, we desire to have it repaired as we to continue our narrative unimpeded. For example, the narrative of the company Apple (an easy example as it tries to present itself as having aesthetic qualities) is majorly influenced by the object of Steve Jobs. After the death of Steve Jobs, the company tried to have Tim Cook emulate aspects of Jobs to help continue an unbroken narrative but many would consider Cook an imperfect “repair” of Jobs and many have found their experiential relationship with Apple less aesthetically pleasing.

V. ZEN AESTHETIC

In Japanese philosophy there is a classical aesthetic tradition called Wabi-sabi that is influenced by Zen Buddhism. It is a tradition of focusing on the imperfection and impermanence of objects and appreciating the beauty that arises from it. Wabi-sabi is meant to reflect our nature in the world and the tranquility we find with accepting it. That our existence and reality is temporary, ever changing, and imperfect. For example, a teacup made in the wabi-sabi style is made by hand and made simply in one attempt. The cup will probably not be perfectly symmetrically and not perfectly smooth on the lip, but this is considered more beautiful and aesthetically interesting. The glaze that is put on it will wear with time when you use it, but this is seen as a beautiful history of its use and is desired rather than seeing it as the cup wearing out. This introduces an interesting possibility, that aesthetic pleasure is derived from the history and relationship of an object. A beautiful reflection on this aesthetic is put forward by Okakura Kakuzo (1862-1913),

“Much has been said of the aesthetic values of chanoyu- the love of the subdued and austere- most commonly characterized by the term, wabi. Wabi originally suggested an atmosphere of desolation, both in the sense of solitariness and in the sense of the poverty of things. In the long history of various Japanese arts, the sense of wabi gradually came to take on a positive meaning to be recognized for its profound religious sense. ...the related term, sabi,... It was mid-winter, and the water's surface was covered with the withered leaves of the of the lotuses. Suddenly I realized that the flowers had not simply dried up,

but that they embodied, in their decomposition, the fullness of life that would emerge again in their natural beauty.”⁹

A tradition derived from wabi-sabi is kintsugi that I mentioned in the introduction, the tradition of mending broken objects with gold or silver. For example, if a vase is broken when it is mended back together there is not an attempt to hide the crack but accentuate it with gold. The break in the object is seen as part of the history of the object and to try and hide it would be disingenuous. For me this reinforces that the objects we interact with are the experiential identity of the objects and not so much the empirical object. This also means that repair does not restore an object but is only part of its experiential history. If an object is passed down for generations, the aspect we appreciate is the aesthetic narrative more than the object itself. For example, of the three pieces of the Japanese Imperial Regalia, a sword, a mirror, and a jewel, only one is believed to be the original one (the jewel). The sword and mirror are treated as if the real thing because they carry on the experiential identity of the real lost objects. Some wabi-sabi thought even posits that these replacement objects hold value as they give us the aesthetic of loss and appreciation.

Though the empirical object seems to be what is important here I would argue the object we interact with is still the experiential object. The object may have an objective history that we observe but this is incorporating with our other experiences to form the experiential object. For example, at the Mount Koya temple complex in Wakayama in Japan there is a memorial hall for Japanese who were executed or imprisoned for World War II war crimes. If a Japanese war crime denier and a Chinese Nanjing victim were to visit this hall, they would have a different aesthetic reaction to it from its history. History may have objective qualities but when it goes through the

⁹ Kakuzo; *The Book of Tea: Beauty, Simplicity and the Zen Aesthetic*, 151

pure experience processes past experience can make it into the more subjective experiential object. Empirical or objective qualities inform the experiential object, but the experiential object is ultimately what we interact with. We can try to parse out the subjective qualities by focusing on the objective but that will now just be part of the personal experiential object.

When an object is repaired it is an attempt to try and make the empirical object resemble the experiential object, you could say that art in general is an attempt to impose experiential objects empirically. When an object is repaired it is the repairer trying to reimpose the pre-broken experiential object they hold within themselves. The repairer will hold an experiential object comprised of the unbroken object, the object in repair, and the repaired object; though these are different states they quashed into the experiential object. The repairer may hold memories of the unbroken object but they are now informing the experiential object that is being interacted with. Someone who is only acquainted with the object in its repaired state may only have empirical experience with it that state but knowledge of its history can inform and be part of the experiential object.

The practice of kintsugi brings up an interesting aspect of repair, is repair only the attempt to restore an object to its previous state? Often when objects are repaired it is taken as opportunity to improve it or fix something undesirable about it. I would argue this phenomenon happens because since it is the experiential object with which we interact we desire to have it reflected in the empirical object. The experiential object is what we know so when making decisions on “repairing” an object we would want to “repair” it to be as we know, based on tastes and experiences we might want the repair to tweak the item to be more in line with our experiential one. In the case of kintsugi the repairer or owner takes pleasure in the history of the object as part of their experiential object and desires for this to be reflected in the empirical object. To the observer

who lacks experience with the mended object they would form an experience with the objects as presented, in the case of kintsugi if they are aware of the practice they might assume a history or if not form the experiential object with the “mending” as part of its design. When the observer is confronted with kintsugi object there are forced to conclude that there is a story here. History is not necessary for an experiential object, but it does inform it. Our narrative of objects can bring aesthetic pleasure and can influence our approach to empirical objects. When an object has been broken it can be mended but the fact that it has been broken and mended cannot be changed, kintsugi can be said to be taking pleasure in this fact of the experience.

In the case of the Japanese Imperial Regalia, we can consider the cases of experiential objects as being formed more by history than direct empirical objects. When we lack direct experience with an object, we still form experiential objects but through the use of primarily history and description. It should be noted that experiential objects are not guaranteed to be “true” but are just what is formed by the individual and are obviously prone to distortion by belief. I have never been to Nepal, but I have read about Nepalese history, culture, climate, seen pictures, etc. so I have formed a larger experiential object of Nepal and smaller one comprising other aspects. The regalia sword original empirical object no longer exists but we desire to have an empirical object to represent our experiential object or exist to inform others of it, so a replica sword is made in its place. We find our experiential objects aesthetically pleasing and can desire for them to be replaced or repaired when they no longer inform as we find pleasing.

VI. APPRECIATION

An important factor of the Zen aesthetic is appreciation, it tends to decentralize immediate visceral action and focus on more larger picture aesthetic. This is largely due to the Japanese Zen tradition of putting mindfulness as at the crux of its teachings, where other Buddhist traditions have it as side element or tool. As mentioned before this puts an emphasis on reflecting (traditionally through meditation) and realizing your relationships/attachments and cultivating the positive ones. This extends to objects in that to better understand an object is to recognize its relationships to you and other things. To recognize these relationships is to develop a deeper appreciation for an object. I believe that it is from relationships that greater aesthetic enjoyment comes from; that is to say experience increases enjoyment. There may be a baseline of aesthetic enjoyment from things, but they are amplified (or reduced) by our relationships with them and these relationships can be cultivated for increased enjoyment. For example, the Grand Canyon can be beautiful on its own and give a baseline reaction, but when you reflect on the history of its erosion and all the forces that led to its creation it can become more beautiful. The reflection and cultivation of relationships deepens the experiential relationship we possess with the object.

An extension of this phenomenon is that by cultivating our appreciation we can even find beauty in the “ugly” aspects of an object; in fact it can come to be realized that to appreciate only the intrinsic baseline beauty can be somewhat vulgar. It can be argued that nothing is intrinsically ugly but instead individuals develop an initial experiential object that purports it to be,

“If red were the only color, it would not appear to us as such, because for it to do so there must be colors that are not red. Moreover, for one quality to be compared with and distinguished from another, both qualities must be fundamentally identical; two things totally different with no point in common cannot be compared and distinguished. If all things are established through such opposition, then there must be a certain unifying reality concealed at their base.”¹⁰.

Beautiful only exists because of its relationship to ugly and when we realize this as part of the aesthetic experiential identity, we can find beauty in the ugliness. When you reflect on an experiential object you find ugly you will reflect on its relationship to what objects you find beautiful and that it shares an aesthetic narrative with them. The labeling of “beautiful” and “ugly” are only descriptions but don’t inherently define the aesthetic pleasure derived from an experiential object. Let us think of something “ugly” such as Wes Craven’s *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), as a classic slasher horror film we immediately want to assign it as ugly or disgusting but many people derive aesthetic pleasure from it. When you reflect on the work put into designing the character of Freddy Kruger to create disgust or Robert Englund’s performance to accentuate that, we can find beauty in the artistry to create those effects. The Japanese Buddhist monk Yoshida Kenko (1284-1350) reflected,

“Are we to look at cherry blossoms only in full bloom, at the moon only when it is cloudless? To long for the moon while looking on the rain, to lower the blinds and be unaware of the passing of the spring—these are even more deeply moving. Branches about to blossom or gardens strewn with faded flowers are worthier of our admiration.”¹¹.

¹⁰ Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 56

¹¹ Kenko., *Essays in Idleness*, 115

When you appreciate the full cycle of a cherry blossom tree you can find beauty both when it is budding and when it is heavy with dead blossoms, not only for the two weeks it is in bloom. The absence of beauty can create anticipation for the beautiful and make this anticipation becomes part of the experiential object,

“With lacquerware there is an extra beauty in that moment between removing the lid and lifting the bowl to the mouth, when one gazes at the still, silent liquid in the dark depths of the bowl, its colour hardly differing from that of the bowl itself. What lies within the darkness one cannot distinguish, but the palm senses the gentle movements of the liquid, vapour rises from within, forming droplets on the rim, and the fragrance carried upon the vapour brings a delicate anticipation ... a moment of mystery, it might almost be called, a moment of trance.”¹²

The beautiful and ugly are simply part of the experiential object and not intrinsic to an object and can shift with experience with an experiential object. Aesthetic characteristics are not found in the object but rather in the observer, they are constituted jointly by the experience and the narrative.

As for repair this means that the repair of an object can entail a deeper aesthetic appreciation for an object as it deepens our experiential relationship with the object, with one major caveat. I would argue that repair mostly only increases appreciation for an object you already have a developed relationship with. A repaired object with which you do not have a previous experience with will not have the repair as part of its narrative, though reflection and appreciation of the repair may capture some of it. Obviously, this will not be the same relationship as if you had had one with the object before repair. In a way repair is a form of appreciating an object, be it for the

¹² Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, 15

aesthetic pleasure or more mundane uses it supplies. To repair a favorite cup is to appreciate the experiential history and enjoyment of it rather than simply throwing it away and getting a new cup, there is a pleasure in the repair versus the emptiness and loss of replacement. I believe the repair of a personal object can be compared to enjoying a cup of tea, to savor the different flavors of the tea and appreciate the process of making it is the same as appreciating the history of an object.

The appreciation of the non-repairer is going to be different than the one doing repairs. The non-repairer appreciation will be informed by their knowledge of the history of the object, they can appreciate the object as is but might be modified by historical knowledge added to the experiential object. The repairer added appreciation will be sentimental and the non-repairer will most likely only grasp a secondary intuition of the appreciation. It can be said there are degrees of repairers based on sentimentality, for example I would consider the owner of a broken object who hires a professional to be a repairer. The degree of sentimentality will affect the appreciation an individual possesses for the repair; in relation to the 2019 fire of Notre-Dame an American may possess a sentimental appreciation of the repairs but a French person in Occitan may possess a greater one and a Parisian an even greater one. The greatest appreciator would probably be the preserver who cared for Notre-Dame before and now oversee its repair.

Now for a moment I would like to turn to what some might call the cousin of repair, restoration. Does restoration function similar to repair? I do not believe it does. Restoration, I believe, functions in much the same as the cases of the Japanese Imperial Regalia I discussed earlier. When an object is restored there is an attempt to make it more similar to as it was, not simply repair it and carry on as it is but to almost move it through time. When an object is restored it is made similar to its original incarnation but it is still a distinct narrative (though sharing a relationship) from the old form, it is now also possessing the same relationship with its damaged

or aged form. The physical process of repair and restoration may be similar, but the fundamental change of the narrative makes them very distinct, repair is to mend as is and to restore to create an object as was. Particularly in the case of ancient objects the original narrative can be far removed from the current experiential object. For example, the common experiential relationship with Greek statues is of them being white marble, in fact in the modern narrative this is a defining feature, but in their original narrative they were painted with bright colors and had clothes put on them. If they were restored to this state, it would cause a completely new experiential relationship.

There is a fundamental difference between repair and restoration and that is what is being imposed on the broken object. In repair we are trying to restore functionality to an object and impose our experiential object onto it. In restoration instead we are not trying to impose our own experiential object onto the empirical but instead what we conceive as the object's original empirical state. This original state experiential conception is still a narrative but is instead one where an attempt has been made to parse out personal influence. Repair is focused on a future orientation of the object and restoration is focused on the past orientation of the object. If I were to repair a Greek statue, I would reattach a broken arm; and if I were to restore a Greek statue, I would paint it and put clothes on it. The irony here is that we might find the restored state less aesthetically pleasing as it clashes with the experiential object we possess, Yuriko Saito points this out;

“aesthetic concern does not provide a general rationale for restoration. That is, this justification is conditional upon the fact that the aged surface is aesthetically less appealing than the original surface... One might ask whether there are such cases. Can the aged and/or damaged surface of a work of art possibly add more aesthetic appeal to its original condition? Literature on this issue indicates that such an increase in aesthetic value is not

only possible but occasionally the case. This increase in the aesthetic appeal of an aged art object can happen in two ways. One is an increase in a rather negative sense. This is the case in which the original look of the object is so markedly different from what we have been used to that it is distasteful to our present taste”¹³.

So why do we find aged objects more aesthetically pleasing than non-aged? Let us recall the concept of wabi-sabi and the appreciation of simply the existence of objects. We derive appreciation from the fact an object has existed and as such find beauty in the ageing of an object, the aging itself is part of the narrative of the object and that is the narrative we are familiar with. I do not have a relationship with Greek statues as they were but I do have a relationship with things getting older so that is part of the experience of Greek statues as I know them. So, we can say that aesthetically we do not desire to restore objects to how they were but to repair them to how we know them. As the experiential object is what we interact with it is the perception of this object that we wish to preserve. But what of objects we do desire to restore to their original state? Maybe the aged state is not aesthetically desirable, or we derive an aesthetic pleasure from the duty of restoration. Such things as relics of old warfare are more pleasing in the restoration to their original state as we derive aesthetic pleasure from the preservation of the object.

¹³ Saito, “Why Restore Works of Art?”, 142

VII. CONCLUSION

To summarize the position I have taken, I believe that though we react to empirical objects when we think and talk about them, we are talking about their experiential objects. Our understanding and connections to objects is through our relationships with the objects to better understand an object is to come to know the relationships the object possesses. When we repair an object the empirical object is a new object but the experiential objects continues across the states, as subject and object are unified in experience. We derive aesthetic pleasure through the appreciation of the relationships of an object and more knowledge of these relationships can render greater pleasure. Through appreciation of the history and relationships of an object we can find beauty in traditionally “ugly” elements, such as the imperfections left by repair. Ultimately, Zen mindfulness can be a gateway into aesthetic insight. Experiential objects are largely subjective, but we are capable of parsing out potentially objective elements that contribute to their formation.

“For Teatism is the art of concealing beauty that you may discover it, of suggesting what you dare not reveal. It is the noble secret of laughing at yourself, calmly yet thoroughly, and is thus humour itself,—the smile of philosophy.”¹⁴ - Okakura Kakuzo

¹⁴ Kakuzo, *The Book of Tea: Beauty, Simplicity and the Zen Aesthetic*, 42

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