Beyond the East and the West:
An African View of Japanese Aesthetics

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Abstract

Taking Kyoto architecture as a research pretext, this paper moves back in the long Japanese architectural history in order to find out variables and constants that contribute to Japanese aesthetics' standards. The equation constructed around variables and constants noticed in Japanese architecture becomes clearer through another historical survey having with the first the same disturbing presence: the West. Whereas the Japanese architecture considers a negotiation area with the West, the African colonial adventure blocked for long all possible cultural exchanges and negotiations, and obstructed African creativity.

Japanese aesthetics seems to get its genuine character through assuming its independence capacity, its choice responsibility, and especially its conscientiousness of a perishable but constantly reproduction archetypal and mythological aesthetics. African aesthetics, on the contrary, has still to work hard in order to cover the colonial fissure and reach out to its pure, responsibly selected, designed, socially incorporated architecture and, and ipso facto partaking in its general aesthetics. African music and textiles are so far forerunners whose timid successes and coherent organizations will slowly and slowly give a chance to other artistic fields and aesthetics to develop very much independently in African originalities, tasteful presentations, and bodies representing the African experience.

Introduction

In their book, George Dickie and R. J. Sclafani (1977) underline two basic features that concur in the appreciation of artistic beauty and aesthetics. They consider, on the one hand, theories of art and aesthetics and, on the other, they put much stress on philosophy and art history all along centuries.[1] They insist that

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1 George Dickie and Richard J. Sclafani, Ed., *Aesthetics: Critical Anthology*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977. pp. 6–8. This book offers an overview of aesthetic understanding from Plato. It particularly presents texts that insist on form, contents, emotions and many theories that discuss aesthetics from the old antiquity. If metaphysical trends seem to put much stress on mind activities, critics are presented as they strive to find and organize people's access to and understanding of beauty. Sometimes, governments try to take control of the main lines that would express national pride and productions. But whatever the presentation lines agreed upon, artists have the last word in their capacity to present a vehicle that offers a national medium. They behave as personal creators whose works go very far in the human mind, history and reflect their own creative capacities. Artists express the unknown and every beauty that attracts not only their contemporaries, but also well beyond times, other

art and beauty often come within a contextual, historical and philosophical frame. These scholars look at art and beauty as an outcome of artistic commitment to sensibilities, philosophical understanding and critics' participation all along times, and as essentially a personal expression that successfully attracts people's attention. Such beauty is at the crossroad of artistic productions, critical analysis, philosophical and historical motivations that different artistic trends expand and influence throughout times. The public recognizes artistic achievement through its visual satisfaction.[2] With the insertion of art in the world context, its value is no longer perceived simply in its relation to a specific homogenous local culture, but extends to parameters including artists' fame, messages and connections to nature.[3]

The topic of this paper could certainly extend on theories of Japanese aesthetics in selecting a precise artistic field of study such as literature, music, visual art, philosophy, culture and religion. The work would mainly consist in the application of different worldwide well-known theories to Japanese artistry as observed in Japan in general, or in a city of the archipelago such as Kyoto in particular. However, of all those possibilities, I have rather found my motivation elsewhere in a source that seems to respond the best to my quest from my first contact with the city of Kyoto. I will rather make use of a theory that uses a very simple application of a peculiar understanding of aesthetics—understood as beauty—and its impact on the observer's eye.

Indeed, Santayana's statement, "In all human products of human industry we notice the keenness with which the eye is attracted to the mere appearance of things: great things of time and labor are made to it in the most vulgar manufactures, nor does man select his dwelling, his clothes, or his companions without reference to their effect on his aesthetic senses".[4] My contact with Kyoto's architecture follows Santayana's paradigm and describes how human eyes react and captivatingly stick to what stands for beauty, out passes comparisons and earlier judgment in time, and justifies the peculiarity and uniqueness of given local designs. For such beauty and attraction power, Santayana adds in very simple words what he believes to be present in the human nature, "There must therefore be in our nature a very radical and wide-spread tendency to observe beauty, and to value it. No account of the principles of the mind can be adequate that passes over so conspicuous a faculty".[5] Santayana's beauty understanding and attraction power easily justify daily, ordinary

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people from other civilizations and cultures.

2 Enerst Fischer, *The Necessity of Art: a Marxist Approach*, translated by Anna Bostock, Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964. This book, especially in its first chapter, goes through the impact of art on the audience. The writer considers all together literary and other artistic productions in their capacity either of permitting people reach what they may not have had otherwise the opportunity to achieve, or again a guiding support with regard to what they should appropriately react to in one way or another in other to achieve a social life of their dream.

3 Rita Gilbert, *Living with Art*, Fifth edition, Boston Massachusetts: McGraw-Hill, 1998 has a complete chapter devoted to the definition of art and its understanding by the public. More and more, the artist's fame counts a lot and participates in the determination of art's value. The book also insists on artistic messages and their closeness with nature as assets of their value.

4 George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty: Being the Outline of Aesthetic Theory*, New York: Dover Publication, Inc., 1955, p. 3. All throughout this book, the author presents beauty as it affects different parts of human life including moral life aspects, human social organizations, artistic and literary productions. However, he puts much stress on artistic productions using different principles that lead to artifacts that definitely attract everybody's attention and often meet with social agreement.

5 George Santayana, p. 3.

curiosity and judgment even though it may not be enough to represent essential criteria and indicators for an academic curiosity and detailed study. Rita Gilbert equally recognizes art's power through its impact on the beholder's eye.[6]

Santayana's statements are rather general and much welcome to any scholar whose study of aesthetics responds to general principles rather than to one art in particular. My quest intends to avoid putting much attention on moral and psychological aspects, historical explanation, but rather considers immediate perceptions of value, standards of physical conditions and their attraction as beauty per se.[7] It is very much a question of beauty standing, imposing its presence or the perception of an external existence that offers a specific approach for "beauty is pleasure regarded as the quality of a thing valued positive, intrinsic and objectified".[8] In fact, the perception of something good and beautiful provides for visual pleasure, procures visual satisfaction, and certainly leads to much understanding and admiration of the achieved work.[9] It is in this very way that my curiosity on Kyoto architecture and buildings especially is still increasing from the first sight dating some years back now and has led me to the understanding of local culture, ancient religions and folktales— and their particular constructions—in specific ways participating in the general aesthetics.[10]

My readers should consider my selection of Kyoto architecture and buildings as a pretext to access Japanese aesthetics and hence another way to get in the aesthetic presentation that puts beauty in a continuing frame from the past to the present. As an African visiting Kyoto, a reference to Africa offers the best chance of comparison in order to point out indicators that construct Japanese aesthetic particularities in its dealing capacity with the West. The text will therefore present the Japanese aesthetics as perceived from an African background experience, and in its independent distancing capacity from the West.

Both worlds'—African and Japanese—aesthetics constantly come to my mind as I move all around Kyoto and determine the western impact here and there. As an African scholar, a possible comparison of both architectural presentations has to go deeper in the past in order to understand their present state, and the western impact on their present situation. Understanding them does not mean justifying one state or

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6 Rita Gilbert, op cit, pp. 20–22 essentially describes how the work of art finally has a kind of appreciation bridge linking it straight to the beholder's eye. An example of a much neglected work by the artist Willem de Kooning on toilet seats in New York in 1954 came to the public attention after his death in 1984. It was put on auction. Because it bore the artist's name— signed by his wife—what the artist had never intended to present as art as such became very important and very expensive. It is world known today.

7 Santayana (p. 26) offers a very similar analysis and presentation of beauty as mediated through eyes' observation. The observer looks at what is around without necessarily the application of a theory. The beauty of what he/she observes strikes him/her. Theories may come on later to justify or discourage personal evaluation.

8 George Santayana, p. 31.

9 George Santayana goes on with the idea of aesthetic impact on the viewer as he points out how immediate perception leads to satisfaction, p. 32: "In the presence of something good whose pleasure is its immediate perception as a ultimate good, something that gives satisfaction to a natural function, to some fundamental need or capacity of our mind".

10 In my last stay in Kyoto, 2008–2009, I devoted my time to the study of shamanism in a global context and concentrated specifically on the study of the Itako shamans in a comparative study with the Mikishi of the southeastern Democratic of Congo in Africa.

another or even finding in between any possible compatibility, but certainly a projection of what could happen here and there if new parameters are taken into account or were added to the scenarios all along the past.

1. Japanese Architecture or Progressive Perishable Aesthetics

The architecture of Kyoto struck me at first for its widely different aesthetic values. Forms and spaces play a very important role as they lead eyes to move in one way or another especially around circles and all along time certainly reaching out to the archetype, mythico-religious source in the "Illo Tempore".[11] From a mere sight, the understanding of symmetry or asymmetry in Japanese architecture imposes a rhythm that not only attracts attention and recognition but raises as well many questions of curiosity and necessarily of aesthetic particularities that go far back in Japanese history. Kyoto architecture strikes eyes through its multiplicity of forms and a regular break of monotony, a negotiation of space not only with other civilizations, but also with artists of many different generations, and trends. A firm grasp of this architecture as art plunges back in long traditions and reach out to the oldest antiquity.[12]

The past of Japan can easily be understood through roof representations. Ancient houses mainly used posts buried directly in the ground.[13] Already from this long past, houses are perceived as the family symbol.[14] From this long tradition, a specific stress is put on architecture perceived at the crossroad of cultural and environmental forces. The cultural force stresses Japanese identity whereas the environmental force shows the relationship to the immediate outside, nature and all its details perceived as a part of a mythico-religious experience, and the sine qua non transitions to world civilizations.[15] These two forces—culture and environment—have always been in presence in order to reach out to a given equilibrium and integration between house and life styles (folklore, religion, philosophical and social organizations), on the one hand, and environment (geographical treatment, social exchanges), on the other.[16] In other words, the foreigner critic

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11   Mircea Eliade, *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*. Ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1985, pp. 69–72, looks at "Illo Tempore" as a long journey to the sacred and reversible time, a primordial mythic time made present and whose re-actualization is made possible through rituals. Visible architecture, visible art, serve as an opportunity to move back in Japanese cultural history that is also expressed in other fields. Japanese move to the past and re-actualization is, in the case of Ise shrine reconstruction made very possible and visible.

12   In his text "Determining Aesthetic Values", Henry Geldzahler considers that history of art gets a better sense of artistic value in getting a firm grasp on the object of study, quite often in its environment. Viewing Kyoto architecture in Kyoto is far better than seeing it on slides. Spaces, connections, forms become more meaningful when (re)placed in such a way that they give some historical perspective. Time, management, negotiation, decisions taken become then meaningful.

13   Norman F. Carver Jr, *Japanese Folkhouses*, Michigan: Documan Press LTD, 1984, pp. 14–15.

14   Norman F. Carver Jr, Ibidem, p. 7.

15   "Shinto: the way to the Kami" in Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions*, Eighth Edition, Boston: Prentice Hall Published by Pearson Education, Inc., © 2011, Pp. 218–219. Under the subtitle "Kinship with nature", this book explains how the concept nature came very late in the nineteenth century in Japanese. Nature has always been part of social life rimed by seasons' succession, and the insertion of every single element that builds up daily sceneries believed to be of religious nature, and sharing spaces with households and deities.

16   In *Japanese Folkhouses* (p. 8), Norman F. shows how all along the history of construction, Japanese artists and architects have faced the need of keeping a national identity and have managed a negotiation space with the outside including nature, and

has to notice that house style and tradition styles have always been perceived in terms of inside life and its transfer to the outside, or rather its communication with the outside and the world.

The archetype of the Japanese architecture already put much stress on the inside space that was big, subdivided but completely turned around a central pillar that had a sacred characteristic (Fig. 1). Beside, other evocative symbols from a very distinctive Ise style were the Chigi that represented the tied roof ends supporting the Katsuogi
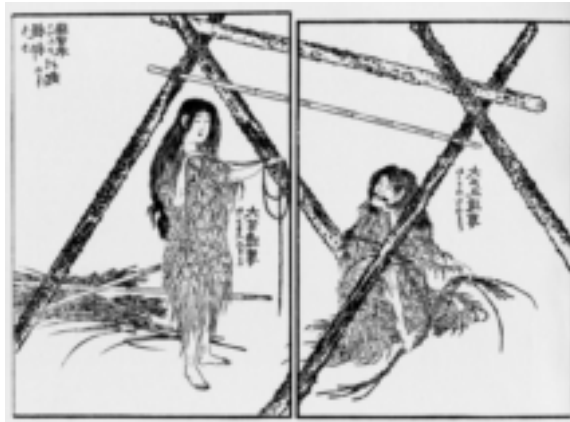

Fig. 1   Archetypal presentation of Japanese architecture: Norman F Carver Jr, *Japanese Folkhouses*, Michigan: Documan Press, Ltd., 1984, p. 15.

that were put through crosstied parts.[17] These ancient house and store forms served for more than thirteen centuries for the sanctuaries of the Ise shrine, the sacred center of the Shinto religion.[18] The archetypal style remains very present in many instances and especially in the historical pagoda.[19] This integration of a religious dimension and construction within the household, thus, confirms its architectural impact on culture and its archetypal role in the Japanese future architecture as a medium celebrating natural materials, plain surfaces, the integration of nature, creativity and social organization for an identity well grounded in a long past and open up to a given level to world communications.[20] (Fig. 2, Fig. 3)

The integrated religious dimension in early Japanese architectural understanding also justified the existence of two major shrine complexes, inner Naiku and the outer Geku. Apart from the Ise, some other examples of temples and shrines also testify of a close link between the inside and outside space organization essentially through repetition and modularity.[21] The latter ensure a backbone role and a perpetual presence all along the architectural evolution still "designed to serve specific functions… and fulfill its purpose".[22]

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other exchanges with world civilizations.

17   *Japanese Folkhouses*, p. 14 gives details of the archetypal building and its continuation in through centuries…

18   Norman F. Carver Jr, Op Cit, pp. 14, col 2.

19   Rita Gilbert (1998), p. 518 gives an example of five-storied pagoda of Horyuji, Nara, Japan, from Asuka period, 7th century. The archetypal very simple form of cross-fixed sticks of the roof is very much repeated even where there is much sophistication.

20   For further information on the Ise Shrines, Michiko Yusa, *Japanese Religious Traditions*, Religions of the World Series Editor: Ninian Smart, Western Washington University, Prentice Hall In., 202, pp. 19–30; H. Byron Eahart, *Religion in Japanese experience: Sources and Interpretations*, second edition, Western Michigan University: Wadwordworth Publising Conpany, an International Thomson Publishing Company, 1997, offer detailed explanations on the times and practices.

21   Professor of architecture at Massachusetts College of Art and Design understands modularity as the main Japanese architectural strategy that has survived all along centuries and has finally permitted negotiations with other cultures and civilizations' contribution to peculiar aesthetic presentation and understanding.

22   Rita Gilbert (1998), p. 323.

Fig. 3 Norman F Carver Jr., op. cit, pp. 88. While keeping the same forms as an image 2, image shows a change of material from thatch to tiles.

Fig. 2 Norman F. Carver Jr., op. cit, p. 17.

This long time legacy has gone through years and is still very much present in villages where houses have a very big space extending from the hearth. Such kind of Minka houses or Japanese folkhouses survived through the twentieth century and made a clear difference from the refined sukiya and shoin styles of the upper class as largely documented in Norman's books (1993). With time, the expansion of modern media, especially TV and radio, acting specifically through women, village life has changed very quickly and adapted new components including gas use, electricity, refrigerator, washing machine. In spite of so many changes accumulated through time, mats (tatami) and movable rooms are still very much respected, a link to the old past.[23]

Norman (1993) also informs his readers of an important link to the past in village life organization.[24] Sticking to long traditions, villages still follow structural patterns that left land spaces between individual household and the collectivity. Rice and vegetable farming were important activities for fighting hunger. Geographical spaces always expressed the tension between private family opening and the community of public experience and interest. The house interior had some raised smooth surfaces whereas the other places serving for different kinds of work were consequently prepared. In continuation of the inside neat space reserving a place to Ise sanctuary as a clear cultural landmark, tea ceremony spatial organizations duplicated idealized spaces as places of safety and a shelter of the Zen. The latter, once again, stands for another cultural landmark somehow duplicating the original archetypal cultural architecture carried throughout times. As a metaphorical cover and protector of the inside space conception, the roof keeps its historic place in the

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23 Norman F. Carver (1993) gives a historical survey that sends back to the long past, but still pinpoints elements that are still visible in constructions and modern edifices justifying the long past and the long evolution.

24 Norman F. Carver (1993), pp. 44-45.

evolution of Japanese architecture.[25]

When the German architect Bruno Taut launched a critical study of the Katsura Villa, he came essentially across the Kobori Enshū principles. With them, he was able to retrace the architectural evolution to the late 13th century in a very clear evolution. However, with a very careful study, he found out details that ended around the 7th century. Taut came to the conclusion that, given that famously solid past, the Japanese modernist movement over passed major political conditions of the 20s, sticking to its commitment to negotiate the passage from the inside to the out spaces and vice versa as its most essential challenges.[26] Artists had to base themselves on Japanese taste in order to develop a style of the East, thus confirming a very old functional architecture. It is through this backbone, essentially based on tradition, novelty and creativity,

Fig. 4 Norman F. Carver Jr., *Form & Space in Japanese Architecture*, Michigan: Documan Press Ltd., 1939. p. 200. This image is an excellent illustration of Japanese architecture, and its adaptation to the environment.

that the critic can view that the "accommodation and integration of all parts is so striking. It is clear that both parts and whole have been arranged in such a way as to fulfill certain functions".[27] Architects' most important challenges have always turned around the suitability of a living style, not so far from the ordinary life and easily transiting to the outside world (Fig. 4). In this vein, Sutumi Horiguchi coined "style without style", the architect's quest of a combination of modernist acceptable trends with highly appreciated national landmark identities. Thus, for instance, the European-Style (modernist) and the Japanese sukiya in architecture do not stand for a strong wish to weld two forms together. The critic should rather perceive a kind of synthesis, with both forms existing side by side in the same structure as long as they are functional, do not contest Japanese identity, easily accept asymmetry and find enough space for new materials.[28] It is a similar observation and leading idea that led Hamaguchi Ryuichi to consider "Japanese People's Architectural style" in what he essentially viewed as a combination of different mediums in order to produce a particular style,

25 Norman F. Carver, 1984, p. 138, further extends on house subdivision structures and depicts the inside world different from the outside, but still a place from which movement to the outside is possible and somehow facilitated since the outside stands for a part of the environment.

26 Bruno Taut, "Modernist Reading 1" in Arata Isozaki, Katsura Villa: Space and Form, pp. 4-6.

27 Arata Isozaki, *Katsura Villa: Space and Form*. Translated from the Japanese by John D. Lamb. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1987, p. 5.

28 Ara Isozaki (1987), p. 7 essentially extends on Taut as he brings to the attention of the world what came to be understood as a rediscovery of Japanese architecture and art. The world was too much concentrated on Europe and did not notice the originality of what was going on for many years in Japan.

Fig. 5 Norman F. Carver Jr., op. cit., p. 17.The flying geese form may be perceived through the triangle form.

a conceptual property of the Japanese people. Hamaguchi considered the outcome of such an endeavor in national aspirations and ambitions, and especially the contant feeling of control and property ownership.[29]

A common denominator well preserved and developed from the archetypal structure turns around the use of space. The latter is considered in its maximization dimension principle application. In the bigger houses, the maximization principle permitted the opening to other very national features, identity, creativity and inspiration of different activities such as garden walks, music, theater, shamanism, poetry, and literature within an evolution very much based on the archetypal space and its connections to the outside world. The archetypal structure offered a kind of triangle form later on identified closely with flying geese in a kind of asymmetric triangle.[30] (Fig. 5)

Closely observed, I would rather compare that archetypal form to the Roman military battle-line order once called "Acies" with a top shaped head or edge and a bigger basis within a triangular presentation. The geese-flying like form has continued through times with slight asymmetric considerations, and slight changes while serving in a very useful way for ventilation structures in a place where extreme weathers are often present. At the same time, the consideration of a central axis has also persisted throughout time. It operates as the opening center to spaces involved in different activities and in the building of staggered buildings. This development also comprises another feature inherited from the long past and turning around layers offering different spaces from the same axis. With the assistance of sliding doors giving the possibility of adapting inside spaces to many uses, on the one hand, and the easy light transfer, on the other, the inside opens on a garden subdivided in walk spaces and nature that gives the impression of being very large and completely connected to the inside world.[31]

In order to wrap up the ideas retaken in the above paragraphs, repetition of motifs and modularity

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29   Ara Isozaki (1987), p. 9, Hamaguchi's words and explanation have been able to over pass conflicts and misunderstanding of Japanese architecture. Over decades of discussions, it had become obvious that Japanese architecture had its specificities that went far in the past but still offered more and more room to exchanges with the outside world.

30   Ara Isozaki (1987), pp. 13–14 continues the idea of an archetypal design that has gone throughout times but was able not only survive but to get in a particular kind of evolution: keep its originality and accepting what seems important to keep its life style, culture and personality progressing all through modern times.

31   Ara Isozaki (1987), p. 17 under the subtitle "Layers of construction—space" explains how many innovations insert themselves within an archetypal frame whose roots seem to go as far back as what Mircea Eliade calls "Illo tempore" but have adjusted to time conditions and historical evolution.

seem to have remained constant all along Japanese architectural development from its antiquity. Its most important stress turned around a central axis opening to functional utilities including a vision of a somehow complete inner space. The latter, through diverse mechanisms manages a transition to the outer space conceived in such a way that the impression of opening to a wider outside space leaves a negotiation possibility between a very strong local, national identity and the functional moving world. The same organization consideration reaches out to nowadays houses where quite often spaces would be shared between the modern (or postmodern) constructions and Japanese national identity development jealously conserved and worked upon all along times. It is this understanding—better this configuration—that permits Kyoto to keep moving on what would seem slightly opening to western but very much adapted to the Japanese media contextualized, and responding to local needs. It is also that aesthetics that strikes my mind for its beauty. It has finally resisted political calls, but has traced its way back to the archetypal structures, and to mythico religious representations. From my African world vision, the question still remains to find out how such peculiar aesthetics doubtlessly organizes its way from aesthetics to aesthetic, i.e., from beauty to philosophy. A quick survey of the African architectural evolution from its avatars may prove to be very helpful in the understanding process of Japanese peculiarities, aesthetic and "world vision".

2. African Architecture

From the African world (understand essentially Sub Saharan Africa), the first impression is quite mitigated. Generally speaking, its architecture comes in a world within which contingent history brought about a strong break from a continuum to the "Illo Tempore". The fissure has since then failed to weld back, or to create a negotiation spot for many generations now leaving just a possibility of much confusion close to chaos in many places. The history of colonization had a specific mission of bringing "civilization and light" often hidden under religious conversion, itself inserted in a trio of colonial political authority, the army and the police, and missionaries in charge of diluting a general invading ideology. Writing on colonial expansion in the Congo Basin, for instance, Ndaywel and Gondola document on that period very much characterized by forced religious and cultural conversions.[32] Even though the Belgian colonial experience may seem very different from the Portuguese, English and French, they had in common their imposition on natives, and

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32   The first writings on the Congo as a geographic zone go as far back as the 15th century when the first Portuguese explorers reached the Congo Basin. The meeting turned at first around Christianity that was brought as a new religion. Many people converted—that part of the Congo even gave a bishop—but later on much opposition made it impossible for the missionaries to continue as controversies continued on so many issues. Missionaries had to leave and stay away for almost two centuries… In the meanwhile, local artists and witchdoctors inserted through a demythologization process many of the Christian features in the local artistry and religious objects. The most important writings dealing with the Congo's exploration were given in the reports, books and the diaries of Henry Morton Stanley (1845–1904) whereas American Baptist missionaries gave the first writings criticizing Belgian colonization and the involvement of the Roman Catholic Church missionaries' passivity or indirect responsibility in the colonial system. Ndaywel è Ziem (1998) and Didier Gondola (2001), among African historians, largely document different periods of the Congo and the entire region. The colonial experience was very violent and made people feel like foreigners on their own land as they were forced to adapt to a new culture and to a new environment conceived by westerners.

the reduction of local populations into puppets usable at will. In fact, the first colonial operation in whatever part of Africa was mainly a complete "Tabula Rasa" process of whatever was in Africa in general with the only major exception of the Maghreb that Jan Vansina tenderly calls the "oikoumene" or the meeting world of many civilizations.[33] Elsewhere, in spite of some significant African cultural life survival here and there or apparently negotiations with local chieftains (often forced in different ways), the "other" colonial – and late neocolonial – powerful presence continued a kind of "divide et impere" emphasizing a political situation that had absolutely to put an end to the African traditional life, creativity and genius in favor of whatever Europeans wanted. The occupation operation went slowly, but steadily through a "Tabula rasa" reducing everything to inexistence and uselessness, and annihilating every possible local resistance for a complete submission. Everything was done to prove a prejudice produced and developed in Europe, and that considered Africa as a space that had nothing to offer to the world, philosophically, artistically, aesthetically and certainly architecturally.[34]

Unfortunately the same ideological and political principles based on "Divide et Impere", continued all along the postcolonial period. Badly deconstructed patrimonial polities still add to the consecrated division in the name of power, a well established division in the geophysical urban stratification, the once European constructions being reserved to new leaders, especially to politicians and other business men, and the shanties, and slums considered as the absolute and logical property of the population that does not agree with the ongoing power.[35] The opponents are said to be waiting for their turn, thus building an ideology recognizing political leaders as the absolute owners of a country. It is quite important to notice that the development of shanties in these African cities does not follow the same logic seen in many other cities around the world. Here, they participate in a deliberate decision duplicating the colonial strategy to a colonial city built far from the domestics often needing a pass to transit temporarily in the masters' area, and constructing myths on the impossibility to be alike the masters. At the same time, these shanties become a strong metaphor of a continent; the forgotten Africa leads its own chaotic life full of confusion without much reference to social structures, or to socio-political construction that can change its environment. My introductory note on the African situation has not extended much on what Africa had in its long past and that was blocked from any opportunity to extend harmoniously in modern times. A quick survey will demonstrate how from

33   Jan Vansina, *Art History in Africa: An Introduction to Method*, New York: Longman, 1999 mentions the word "Oikumene" several times in this book. He pinpoints how the Maghreb received several migrations of different kinds. Apart from difficulties sometimes due to war and violence, the area got many artistic contacts that are expressed through an architectural presentation of very different cultures.

34   This well known trend developed since the 17th century and supported racist theories with regard to Africa. Even very important philosophers forgot their intellectual responsibility and easily contributed to racist ideologies.

35   Patrick Chabal et al., ed,. *Is Violence Inevitable in Africa?: Theories of Conflict and Approaches to Conflict Prevention*, Boston: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005. This book uses the concept patrimonialism to describe a new political evolution in Africa, inherited from colonialism and that reconstructs power through ethnic influence. Politicians behave as patrons elevated by their ethnic groups—or some other closely emotionally linked groups—to which they are accountable. The state building idea often becomes impossible in such context. At the same time, society continues to be divided on a very much colonial pattern that reserves difficult and undeveloped structures to others.

the various cultural backgrounds, many opportunities were possible, and could easily facilitate, through a clear transition, dialogue, and collaboration with western architectural media and aesthetics.

Critics generally found African particularities very much linked to ethno-linguistic groups throughout history. Most of these groups had their own architectural specificities.[36] However, all analysts seem to concur around fractal scaling within which small parts of the structure tend to work very similarly on larger units. In fact, the form of a house or hut up to some extents repeats the very physical presentation of a village and its world vision.[37]

The African environment offered several media that served to express community architectural ideas and channel influences to several neighbors. Thatch, sticks, wood, mud, mud bricks, rammed earth and stones were very much used though in different proportions. West Africa used very much adobe bricks and stones whereas East Africa was very much varied. The north built walls of stones or rammed earth whereas the south developed a lot the use of stones—

Fig. 6 Frank Willett, *African Art: An Introduction*, revised edition, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993, p. 123. This image shows the interior of a mosque in Nigeria very much adapted to African realities.

still identified through the Monotapa remains—thatch and wood. During that time, Central Africa was much visible with its forms based on the use of wood, stone, thatch, and mud.[38] In West, North and East Africa, African architecture, building techniques and decoration sense succeeded to get in an identification process during different exchanges with the Islamic world. Many mosques today still give many proofs of the major exchanges that took place from the tenth century and bear original African identifications.[39] (Fig.

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36 Frank Willet, *African Art: An Introduction*, 1985, pp. 115–136 covers African large spaces and describes specific kinds of architectural constructions that prevailed and responded to local needs: geographical, atmospheric and social.

37 Egalsh, Rom, *African Fractals: Modern Computing of Indigenous Designs*. New York: Rutgers University Press, 1999, pp. 71. This page explains how African housing building was very much determined by the general structure of the village or the city. In fact, there was a very strong philosophy linked to the understanding of the central authority and the role elders had to play in the reinforcement of the Vital Force. At the same time, the structure also represented the local understanding of protection against outside forces of all nature. The village had not only to protect itself against physical enemies, but also and mainly against those invisible forces that could threaten the existence and the understanding of life as shared since the 'Illo Tempore" and continued through the work of close ancestors and elders.

38 Egalsh, Rom, (1999), also describes how different materials are used in traditional Africa in order to get different construction types and architecture. Many architectural forms were developed around local chieftains in an organization that respected the Chain of Being and a hierarchy within the community. The material was also very much adapted to climatic conditions.

39 Frank Willet (1985), pp. 123–131 gives details on mosques that have succeeded to change a lot in bringing together borrowed forms, local media and originality. The writer also covers structural presentation of royal palaces.

Fig. 7 Frank Willett, op. cit., p. 126. This mosque of the 14th century in Timbuktu is another proof of how Africans could adapt styles to their environment.

6, Fig. 7)

Hull (1977) identified about ten broad categories of vernacular hut and houses: domical (beehive), cone on cylinder, cone on polis and mud cylinder, gabbed roofed, pyramidal cone, rectangle with roof rounded and sloping at ends, square, dome or flat roof on clay box, quadrangular, surrounding an open courtyard, cone on ground…[40] However, because of its famous pyramids and its long dynamic history often associated with the Middle East rather than with Africa, the world is very much aware of Egyptian constructions and architecture that were very specific to that part of the world. Temples, houses, tombs, boats and other important religious Egyptian buildings influenced very much all cultures that developed around Egypt and had many contacts with other parts of the world. The entire Maghreb, the Ethiopian area and the Middle East benefitted very much from the development undergone in Egypt. In the same vein, many commercial relations that the Arabs, from the Middle East, had with Africa also favored different cultural exchanges and brought about constructions adapted to a very hot weather.[41]

These cultural exchanges and architectural influences went far beyond the Maghreb borders. West African big empires developed around Nok from the 790 B.C.E with archaeological settlements such as the Tichitt Watala that Sominke built in Ghana. At the same time, the area of Somali in the Horn of Africa had also many architectural traditions. This area was particularly flourishing with castles, mosques, aqueducts, lighthouses and tombs.[42] Of all the progress achieved through exchanges and integrated locally especially in the Maghreb, west, central, southern and Eastern Africa did not benefit of similar big cultural contacts under the colonial period. They did not have the same kind of contacts based on cultural exchanges and mutual respect. Colonization behaved differently as it rather imposed itself on all local structures and self presented as carrying absolute truth on all social structures that expansionist strategies commanded from afar. Nevertheless, it is obvious, as here above pointed out, that there were architectural structures that suddenly went

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40   W. Hull, Richard. *African Cities and Towns before European Conquest*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977, p. 71. These different house constructions are adapted to different environments and testify of their originality and contribution to local culture.

41   Davidson, Basil, *Africa in History*, Revised and Expanded Edition. New York: Touchstone Book, 1974, p. 50 offers information on the constructions of that period. A particular stress is put on the expansion of construction patterns that move from Egypt to all surrounding areas. The Maghreb benefitted a lot of its neighborhood with Egypt. Later on, Greeks and Romans had also a lot of communication and contacts all through that part of the continent. Arabs' trade and conversion missions also touched very much the West and the East. The latter had also contacts with India through the Indian Ocean.

42   Davidson, Basil (1974) covers much of the architectural traditions present in many parts of Africa.

Fig. 8 Frank Willett, op. cit., p. 117. This image shows how African architects could create and protect their harvest from ants.

Fig. 9 Frank Willett, op. cit., p. 119. Similarly to the Japanese originality, this image from Cameroon shows how buildings take place with a natural environment.

under an absolute embargo without any future hope. They came under the items generally considered as savage, primitive, heathen or pagan.

III. African Cities' Architectural Decline

Well before the colonial times, Africa had its own architectural development that drew very much from indigenous traditions, and local creeds. From Mbanza Kongo, the capital of the kingdom of Kongo, to Luba, Lunda, eastern Lunda, Malawi, Shona, Zulu, to the Ashanti, Nok, Nubia, and Ethiopia, for instance, there were building structures using different materials such as thatch, grass, brick, stone, clay, stick and timber (Fig. 8, Fig. 9). They were all arranged in such a way that social communications and religious organizations could work and respond to a local world vision.

It was around these buildings that the main African religion and philosophy were developed. Surviving oral narratives still testify of their cultural richness very closely linked to architectural presentations that contributed to the construction of African wisdom and later on to the Ubuntu philosophy.[43] One of the

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43   Examples of African wisdom through oral narratives can be found in many books and still in some very old Africans and in distant villages. Roger D. Abrahams, *African Folktales: Traditional Stories of the Black World*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1983; and Anthony D. Fredericks, *African Legends, Myths, and Folktales for Readers Theatre*, illustrated by Bongaman, Connecticut: An Imprint of Libraries Unlimited, Readers Theatre, 2008, for instance, give a very large illustration of oral narratives including different genres related to myths, epics, legends, tales and related forms that give details on African wisdom, social organization, life understanding, human relations and world creation around human beings. It goes without saying that such richness could not develop in vacuum. The African world was developed around architectural and social structures.

44   Divided into seven chapters, *Bantu Philosophy* primarily tackles the theory of "Vital Force" before shedding light on divinities, people, and society. Tempels, a Franciscan missionary spent many years in Africa specifically in the Democratic Republic of Congo—during the colonial times and many years after—while trying to convert local populations to Christianity and to western values. In stressing African ontological principles, Tempels questions different theories developed in the West with regards to African beliefs and world vision and treating as Africans primitives and barbarians. The religious scholar points

pioneers in the field who tried to understand African wisdom, Placide Tempels, coined the concept Bantu Philosophy in a world known publication.[44] Tempels, a Franciscan missionary, lived with Africans in their villages—Luba, Bashila, Sanga, Zeela, Mbemba—and was, in fact, the first western intellectual to coin meaningfully the concept African philosophy. The religious scholar managed a meaningful understanding of different relations developed within these African human communities through the Chain of Being perceived as a whole, and mainly through artistic—architectural—and religious rituals held in order to channel the Vital Force from God to different social destinations. Whereas countless gods are venerated through different rituals, they play a large part in the traditional religious life as they stand for life organizers, community defenders, and omnipresent community builders whose names go to different kinds of buildings and sanctuaries. In fact, in such an environment full of gods, Geoffrey Parrinder (1971: 60–68) observes that everything—artistic and functional products as well—is done to get God's blessing and his beautifying spirit. Several house parts are conceived with the main idea of serving as religious sanctuaries. Many families had indeed a domestic sanctuary where family statues were put and were quite often a part of the house architectural structure.

Tempels strongly believed that the Chain of Being displays large structural representation connections of all elements, metaphysical, physical, human, animate, inanimate, material, and immaterial that come into consideration in the African social existence, and that the artists in general, and the architects, in particular, fix them in the collective memory through precise referential building and decorative points. The latter offer a vision that includes God, spirits and divinities, ancestors, elders, and society, and extends to nature, natural visible forces, and invisible forces, all contributing to the same sense of aesthetics. In the same vein, God owns spirits and has absolute control over them as they share life and a sense of beauty all around human communities. Consequently, different channels of communications—especially art and architecture—insert God's presence and will in any visible or invisible, living or dead, natural and material element filling the world. God, it is believed, works from afar but through his many agents, essentially gods and spirits, sharing power, knowledge, secrets, and competences with him. Gods are believed to act through architects and help to build and protect human cities. Architects' works are believed to be possible thanks to the inspiration that gods send, and the guidelines they get in order to organize social life as in a duplication of the divine world.

A complete culture was developed around African buildings through architectures that recognized the

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to social and philosophical keys that converge on God as the primary source of knowledge and every existence, thus very much putting in question the western mission, his very work. Tempels' quest, thus, completely denies the widely spread ideas of animism and superstition as foundations of African society. In using the term Vital Force as a contemporary equivalent of ontology and metaphysics, even though all the same different from the concept "being" as presented in western philosophy, Tempels pinpoints the particular dynamic character of the African whose life—organized in social, geophysical, and architectural communities—goes far beyond death following some hierarchical evolution in which God, spirits, divinities, ancestors, elders, and all of nature participate. There is a high sense of aesthetics and aesthetic leading all the way to the creator, source of all beauty and the source of philosophy understood as wisdom and world vision. African art in general and African art in particular were very much suggestive of this social organization and the sense of beauty as expressed through local wisdom and main thought. The Chain of Being places God on top level that all creatures run after.

existence of God, gods and ancestors as participating in their daily life and the source of all good, beauty and life. In fact, reading Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy* with American students, I was surprised to hear the students raise the question on Tempels' presence in Central Africa. For them, Tempels, and also other missionaries and conquerors could not pretend that they were teaching Africans to know God or to bring them any kind of better civilization. Africans knew God and had a very high sense of aesthetics that inspired well known artists such as Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse and several others.[45] In addition, these American students cannot understand how any part of the world should decide to put an end to a local culture and impose a foreign one. These students' reaction shows how the cultural clash was devastating for Africans, how logically confusion and chaos were the outcome of that cultural meeting.

The western invasion here above presented did not stop to the political arena. It also attacked all cultural and religious aspects of Africa. The artist and with him the architect were uprooted from their natural mould and, de facto, had to accept what was imposed upon them. Consequences were dramatic on creativity, in life integration as architecture continues to be a disputed identity and a loss of national pride. Foreign architecture imposed completely itself and succeeded on the basis of "Divide et Impere" in confining African creativity in the realm unjustly and incoherently labeled savage, heathen, pagan, poor, and unworthy for any modern development.

Conclusion

This paper chose from its start an exercise consisting in moving from art to understanding aesthetics in general and philosophy in particular. In choosing Kyoto visible architecture as a research pretext, the paper aimed at penetrating the general frame of indicators that have motivated an evolution all along several centuries to the present state, and also the functional strategies that have permitted, all along time, the coexistence of Japanese architecture along a few selected and borrowed western motifs. The challenge was big for an African whose world has followed a rather chaotic evolution.

A survey of the Japanese architecture revealed essentially constants and variables in a long history going as far back as the antiquity. From an archetypal presentation of a simple house (or hut) perceived through its use of cross-joined sticks and an inside space adapted to several functions, the evolution has shown a very constant descriptive role of the house. It is the first sanctuary, the life organizing center and the starting point of cultural and religious life whatever the evolution of temporal challenges. In addition, very conscious of limited spaces, the house is adapted to respond to several needs of work, movement, socialization and privacy while stressing its contact with nature. Through an accurate use of space and devices permitting easy changes and adaptations, the house has progressed through long centuries and finally adapted to modern times in its inside presentation, its outside designs, and communications with the world.

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45   Gilbert Rita, *Living with Art*, fifth Edition, Boston Massachusetts: McGraw-Hill, 1998. This book apart from extending a lot on art definition, covers themes and purposes of art. On p. 47 it gives details on how art services religion, politics, nature, fantasy and pride. Art covers all life aspects, denying Africans any knowledge in the fields here mentioned turns out to putting an end to their aesthetics, art understanding and production with an important impact on aesthetic.

The house stands also for a starting point for any negotiation with the outside world, local and international. Through the use of modularity and many forms, the impression of big spaces is worked on whereas whatever can be accepted from the outside fits—or rather joins—in the forms extending to the outside world. In this way, the Japanese national identity is maintained and has the possibility to extend in other fields. This same identity is very much able to negotiate a communication space with a selected foreign architectural, artistic, or aesthetic contribution.

The African architecture shows another experience. From a very glorious past, it was suddenly stopped to undergo a chaotic colonial experience. The latter insisted on its unique capacity to value aesthetics, art and beauty and impose on the colonized. Consequently, so many architectural possibilities that could contribute a lot to the starting point of new experiences were suddenly stopped, crashed down in many places and survived only in very distant and neglected villages. Consequently, African architectural traditions stopped playing their social leading role and were hidden for many years. In many cases, Western administrative officials continued importing their prefabricated material from Europe, thus obviously showing that nothing local could meet and fit their needs. They divided all cities in indigenous parts and their own accessible only to the Evolués selected from Africans and often exposed to the use of some forced identification.

Unfortunately all throughout the post colonial area, African leaders continued what the colonial powers had started, i.e., viewing beauty and practical answers only in western architecture even when completely inappropriate for the local weather and terrain. President Felix Houphouët-Boigny gave as legacy to his country, Ivory Coast, the famous Basilica of Our Lady of Peace of Yamoussokro completely built on an imported architecture from Italy, Saint Peter Basilica. There are nowadays, here and there attempts through schools of art to stress African genius and creativity, but Africa will still need time to construct its original and genuine aesthetics that will leave a selected communication space with the world. The colonial experience is still very present, and the fissure very much blatant.

From my approach of Kyoto architectural evolution, I can but move to a philosophical understanding. Japan has all along times favored its originality and its ideas have prevailed over time resisting as much as possible foreign impositions. In addition, it has tried as much as possible to stick to its original values while putting much stress on constants and possible variables. The latter were accepted only in so far as they could insert a set of functional indicators clearly responding to what we have labeled as outside, transitional communicative features inclusive in the same environment, once simply viewed as nature.

As for Africa, the break imposed by the colonial presence has disorganized African artists and architects whereas European architects constructed cities that critics call "European eclecticism and pastiche". It is rather an environment within which so many different tendencies lack a common denominator and therefore often lead to disorganized geophysical presentations.

This also reflects on aesthetic understanding and its impact on general social life organization. The outside world—mainly Europe—still believes that it has the monopole of the values that should go to Africa. Unfortunately, European intellectuals have been accomplices of such a vision for many years. More

and more, however, things are changing and the future will certainly be brighter as aesthetics will include many local dimensions for which Japan may serve as an excellent illustration. African music and textile have achieved much in the sense of originality; there is still a lot to except in the other artistic fields that are striving to achieve their African peculiarity. Painting is another area that has had several fissures due to western involvement, but it is now fighting for its presence in a very poor postcolonial context where its life depends much on uncertain patrons and quite often on irregularities unacceptable on other continents.[46] The issue of foreign languages, and literary genres was a very difficult decision that artists had to take, and it blocked for many years African originality contrary to Japan where fundamental thoughts are expressed in the native language. It is still very difficult to ensure a total national communication and artistic perception through the use of a foreign language in spite of some many achievements from well-known writers.[47]

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46 Bogumil Jewsiewicki, "Popular Painting in Contemporary Katanga: Painters, Audiences, Buyers, and Sociopolitical Contexts" in *A Congo Chronicle: Patrice Lumumba in Urban Art* by Bogumil Jewsiewicki with contributions from dibwe Dia Mwembu, Mary Nooter Roberts and Allen F. Roberts, Nyunda ya Rubango, Jean omasombo Tshonda. New York: The Museum of African Art, 1999, pp. 14–22.

47 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, for instance, tried his best to write in Gikuyu, a Kenyan language, but had to face the very nature of his literature supposed to be committed to African causes and addressed essentially to the westerners. Beside, only a part of the Kenyan population speaks Gikuyu.