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Yanagi Muneyoshi's Philosophy of Aesthetics

The Social Implications of Art from an Adornian Perspective

Yanagi Muneyoshi's Philosophy of Aesthetics, rooted in Pure Land Buddhism, posits that beautiful objects embody Buddhahood, transcending dualities of pretty and ugly. Yanagi believes true art arises from "non-creation," free from deliberate action, and draws parallels between this and Pure Land Buddhism's emphasis on Other-Power salvation. He emphasizes the importance of meaningfully collecting objects for the Art of Tea and highlights the significance of societal relevance and immediate observation. Yanagi's concept of "immediate observing" emphasizes the need to prioritize objects that can be appreciated by everyone, rejecting elitist perspectives and emphasizing the connection between art and everyday life. Despite differences in philosophical approach, Adorno and Yanagi share similar conceptions of art. Both highlight the importance of observing art from a contemporary perspective, detached from its original context. Yanagi's concept of the Art of Tea highlights the true beauty of everyday objects, liberated from their functional purposes, as a means of social critique and a rupture from the logic of exchange.

KEYWORDS: Yanagi Muneyoshi—Sōetsu—Theodor Adorno—philosophy of aesthetics—Pure Land thought—Art of Tea—art and society

Yanagi Muneyoshi (柳宗悦, 1889–1961, also known as Sōetsu) is perhaps best known in the context of the "folk craft movement" (民藝運動) that is closely associated with his name. His distinctive approach, particularly in relation to the Art of Tea (*sadō* 茶道), played a crucial role in the reevaluation of art created by individuals who had no political influence in cultural circles. Specifically, his approach is reflected in his work on pottery from the Korean Peninsula. In addition to his writings on art in the narrow sense, Yanagi produced numerous books and articles on the philosophy of religion in which he developed an aesthetic deeply influenced by Pure Land teachings. His understanding of this Buddhist tradition directly informed his argument for the value of his concept of art.

While most major "classical" Japanese philosophers showed some interest in Buddhism, the majority focused on Zen Buddhism, at least initially. However, many of them, such as Nishida Kitarō, began to explore Pure Land Buddhism in their later careers. One notable example of this can be found in Nishida's final article, "Logic of Place and Religious Worldview" (「場所的論理と宗教的世界観」), which marked his first significant engagement with Pure Land Buddhism. Other examples include Tanabe Hajime's *Philosophy as Metanoetics* (『懺悔道としての哲学』), Miki Kiyoshi's *Shinran* (『親鸞』), Nishitani Keiji's "Pure Land Teachings and the Present" (『浄土教と現代』), and "The Problem of 'Time' in Shinran" (「親鸞における《時》の問題」); and Suzuki Daisetsu's (『浄土系思想論』), "Introduction to Shin Buddhism" (「真宗概論」), and *Wondrous People* (『妙好人』). The influence of Pure Land Buddhism was likely facilitated through academic connections with Shin Buddhist institutions, such as Ōtani University. Although Yanagi shares an interest in Pure Land Buddhism with these authors, he differs in that it was his primary point of reference from the outset.

This article proceeds in three stages. First, I provide an overview of Yanagi's life and network. Second, I analyze Yanagi's philosophy of Pure Land aesthetics and its relationship to the Art of Tea. Finally, I consider the extent to which Yanagi's perspective can be interpreted by Adorno's idea of art as a critique of society, without being overtly political, and his critique of art as a commodity. While Adorno's thoughts are primarily developed through the lens of music, they offer a useful framework for refining Yanagi's philosophical ideas about the nature and purpose of art.

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF YANAGI'S LIFE

Yanagi, born in Tokyo, received an excellent education both in school and at university. During his time at school, he came into contact with notable figures such as Nishida Kitarō, who taught him German, and Suzuki Daisetsu, who taught him English.[1] Although this interaction may not have been primarily focused on intellectual exchange, it likely had a significant impact on his development. Before entering university, Yanagi joined the journal *Shirakaba* (『白樺』) in 1910,[2] which provided a platform for interaction with prominent novelists such as Mushanokōji Saneatsu 武者小路実篤 and Shiga Naoya 志賀直哉. Then, in 1913, he graduated from Tokyo Imperial University, where he submitted a graduation thesis entitled "Can Psychology be a Pure Science?" in the Department of Philosophy.

Six years after graduating, in 1919, Yanagi began teaching the study of religions at Tōyō University, a position held until 1923. He also worked as a lecturer in ethics and English at Meiji University in 1921 and English literature at Dōshisha University in 1925. His teaching career continued until 1944. However, as his biography suggests, academic pursuits were not the central focus of his career. This is unsurprising, given that his criticism of the tea society centred on the institutionalization which, in his view, distracted its members from the core concerns of their profession and their objective approach to the subject matter.

As previously mentioned, "folk craft" is a pivotal concept that permeates

1. NAKAMI 2013, 19.

2. Unless otherwise labelled, all biographical information is taken from YANAGI 1992, 228–97.

much of Yanagi's writing, both in works directly on the topic (such as *What is Folk Craft?* [『民藝とは何か』, 1941]), as an exemplary model in his studies on the Art of Tea (for instance, *Thinking about the Art of Tea* [『茶道を想う』, 1936]),[3] and as the underlying context for more abstract topics such as the philosophy of religion (as seen in *The True Gate of Beauty* [『美の法門』, literally "Dharma Gate of Beauty," 1949]).[4] According to anecdotal evidence, Yanagi coined the term "folk craft" (*mingei*) while *en route* to Tsu City in 1925, during a field trip to Wakayama Prefecture.[5] His theoretical explorations were complemented by numerous field trips across Japan, including visits to Okinawa and Hokkaido. In addition, his interest in folk craft extended to Korean and Taiwanese art, which was probably influenced by Japan's colonial period. Notably, Yanagi highlighted the significance of Korean tea bowls (高麗茶碗) in the Art of Tea, considering them an exemplar of intuitive creativity.[6] While his travels often focused on Japan, he also visited Europe and America for intellectual exchange. However, his ethnological interests appear to have been largely confined to East Asian cultures, possibly for practical rather than systematic reasons.

In terms of politics, Yanagi had roles in various organizations. Most notably, he founded the Japanese Society for Folk Craft (日本民藝協会) in 1934 and became its president. This led to the establishment of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum (日本民藝館) in Tokyo in 1936, with Yanagi serving as its first director. Fortunately, the museum survived the air raid in May 1945 and became a hub for various activities, including lectures, journal publica-

3. In this work, he still uses the term "craft" (*kōgei* 工藝). In Yanagi's terminology, *mingei* emerges as a term that makes explicit what he was beginning to hint at by using the term *kōgei*.

4. Similarly to the great significance of the concept "folk craft" for Yanagi, the volume of research literature is vast. Representative examples include: Namimatsu 2025, Takenaka 2024, Kumakura/Yoshida 2005, and Satō 2002. For recent research that focuses more on the intellectual-historical and religious aspects, see Wakamatsu 2025 and Shimanuki 2024. While these publications develop their arguments within the framework of the concept of "folk craft," research that focuses on his writings on religion is quite rare. Two examples are Okamoto 2022 and Sasa 2022. However, even in the first case, the author enters into the discussion through the lens of "folk craft."

5. Toyamashi Satō Kinenbijutsukan 2019, 75.

6. Notably, the connection between Korean pottery and the Art of Tea was not an original invention by Yanagi. It was present at the very beginning of the Art of Tea itself, when Korean pottery received much attention during the second half of the sixteenth century.

tions, and tea gatherings (茶会). In 1947, Yanagi embarked on a lecture tour in the Hokuriku region (northwestern Honshu) with Suzuki Daisetsu that, with Suzuki's support, prompted his appointment as chief director of the Matsugaoka Bunko 松ヶ岡文庫 archive in 1948.

This biographical outline highlights the interconnected nature of Yanagi's work in the philosophy of art, folk craft research, and philosophy of religion, which form three cornerstone aspects of his thought that cannot be considered in isolation. These areas encompass both theoretical and practical dimensions, and underscore the complexity and depth of his intellectual contributions.

Yanagi's philosophy of pure land aesthetics

As previously noted, Pure Land thought forms the foundation of Yanagi's philosophical framework for aesthetics. Notably, his works confirm that he does not reject Zen Buddhism, particularly in the context of texts that emphasize the nondual awakening. However, references to other types of Japanese Buddhism, such as Esoteric Buddhism or Nichiren Buddhism, are scarce, and the vast majority of references stem from the context of Pure Land Buddhism.

In his book *Beauty Religion* (『美の宗教』), Yanagi provides an unconventional definition of a "beautiful object," that is, an object that has attained Buddhahood (成仏). This implies that the object has revealed its original form. Yanagi's approach is remarkable in that he does not define aesthetics solely from the perspective of the observer. While, as will become clear later, his concept of direct observation is crucial to understanding his concept of art, he also attributes an aesthetic dimension to the objects themselves. Consequently, he avoids the pitfall of an aesthetic that is entirely dependent on the viewer, wherein any object can be deemed "beautiful" as long as the viewer perceives it accordingly. However, in the case of exceptional objects that embody Buddhahood, these can represent the Pure Land itself, as they transcend the dualism of pretty and ugly appearances.[7]

Within the context of Pure Land Buddhism, the aspect of non-duality is paramount for Yanagi. This is noteworthy, given that Pure Land Buddhism

7. Yanagi 2011, 88, 93.

typically emphasizes the distinction between unawakened and awakened beings. In this regard, the Pure Land is a realm where one can practise without hindrance, provided that the individual has established faith and a connection with Amida. Yanagi adopts the perspective of the Pure Land and applies it to the human world, thereby representing a radical form of realism that renders the distinction between this world (此岸) and the other world (彼岸) obsolete.

According to *The Larger Sutra on [the Buddha of] Immeasurable Life* (『大無量寿経』), the Buddha Amida erected 48 vows while in the state of a Bodhisattva, aiming to save all beings who sought refuge in him. Hōnen 法然 and Shinran emphasized the 18th vow, known as the Primary Vow (本願), while Shinran also highlighted the significance of other vows. However, Yanagi bases his aesthetic theory largely on the fourth vow, which is remarkable, considering the relative lack of discourse on this vow within the Buddhist community. This choice suggests that Yanagi is not primarily concerned with the question of salvation through Buddhist practice but instead utilizes the fourth vow to expound his understanding of true beauty. The title of this vow, "the vow that there is neither prettiness nor ugliness" (無有好醜の願), is reinterpreted by Yanagi as the "vow of non-dual beauty" (不二美の願), which resembles the "deep desire of artworks" (藝術の悲願).[8] In verse, Yanagi defines his concept of "non-dual beauty":

> There is neither ugliness nor prettiness.
> It is the state prior to the distinction between prettiness and ugliness.
> It is the state where prettiness and ugliness are aligned.
> On the other hand, there is no ugliness; [only] beauty out of itself.[9]

These verses clarify that true beauty is neither the ideal form of prettiness nor entirely separate from the duality of prettiness and ugliness. Instead, they describe an unconditioned and unjudging state of perception that refers to an autonomous value that does not recreate the duality of property A and property not-A. Yanagi's approach resonates with a well-known concept from Zen Buddhism by emphasizing that one cannot attain purity by eliminating impurity because the act of purification itself contains impu-

8. In Buddhist contexts, *higan* is usually translated as "compassionate vow."

9. Yanagi 2011, 134, 137.

rities. True purity can only be achieved by transcending the duality of the decision-making act. Consequently, Yanagi views aesthetics as fundamentally distinct from morality, as it cannot be characterised by a deliberate decision to act. For him, aesthetics is marked by "a depth that even morality cannot reach."[10] Therefore, true beauty cannot be the result of an intentional act involving the selection and rejection of options.

This perspective is closely tied to the creators of art. According to Yanagi, true art must conform to his concept of non-dual beauty. He addresses the question of creation by asserting that art must arise from rough "non-creation" (無造作). To fulfil this requirement, the object must not be the result of an individual's deliberate action. Yanagi resolves this paradox by stating that Buddha himself creates beautiful things: "beauty means that Buddha becomes Buddha." This notion is rooted in a central concept of Pure Land Buddhism, which posits that the origin of human salvation must lie outside human agency, as true purity can only emanate from an external source. Yanagi draws a parallel between this logic and a quote from Ippen 一遍, who said, "The *nenbutsu* performs the *nenbutsu*."[11]

Notably, despite his extensive connections with Jōdoshin Buddhist temples and priests, Yanagi regards Ippen's interpretation of Pure Land Buddhism as the most advanced. He critiques Shinran for placing excessive emphasis on faith, thereby excluding individuals who lack faith or are less gifted in salvation. In Yanagi's view, true Other-Power Buddhism must save people regardless of their faith. The name of the Buddha Amida (名号) symbolizes the element that connects the unawakened being and Buddha, rendering them non-dual (不二).[12] This understanding of Pure Land teachings diverges from the Jōdoshin Buddhist perspective, where the incompatibility between the unawakened and awakened states is a prerequisite for salvation.

The significance of Ippen's stance becomes evident at a pivotal moment in his biography, *Illustrated [Biography] of Saint Ippen* (『一遍聖絵』). Upon

10. Yanagi 2011, 148.

11. In the context of Pure Land teachings, *nenbutsu* 念仏 refers to the invocation of the name of Amida (e.g. *Namu Amidabutsu* 南無阿弥陀仏, literally "I take refuge in the Buddha Amida') or its visualisation.

12. Yanagi 2011, 116/119–121. For an analysis of the relationship between the idea of non-duality and Ippen's teachings, see Hasegawa 2022.

arriving in Kumano, Ippen encountered a monk who requested a *nenbutsu* talisman for him.[13] Initially, Ippen declined, as he believed the monk was not yet ready to receive the talisman without awakening to faith. Following a discussion on this matter, Ippen hesitantly handed over the talisman. He then proceeded to the main shrine of Kumano (Shōjōden 証誠殿) and sought the deity's guidance. Ultimately, the deity appeared and revealed to Ippen that no one receives salvation only because Ippen had taught them. Instead, the deity assured Ippen that the birth of all individuals in the Pure Land was guaranteed through the compassionate practice of Buddha Amida in the form of a Bodhisattva. Consequently, there was no requirement for faith as a condition for birth in the Pure Land, and Ippen was advised to distribute talismans to everyone, regardless of their level of faith.[14]

Yanagi's admiration for Ippen is evident in his work *Namu Amidabutsu*,[15] in which he establishes a hierarchical relationship between key figures in Japanese Pure Land Buddhism, namely Hōnen, Shinran, and Ippen. He values the contributions of the first two figures to the development of Pure Land thought, viewing them as necessary precursors to Ippen's teachings. Using the analogy of a house, Yanagi describes their relationship: "Hōnen lays the groundwork, upon which Shinran builds the pillars, and Ippen erects the ridge." To extend this metaphor, the edifice of Pure Land thought is only inhabitable due to Ippen's contributions, despite the foundational work of Hōnen and Shinran. This perspective is reflected in Yanagi's statement that "The thought of the *nenbutsu* reaches its culmination through the holy Ippen."[16] *Nenbutsu*, thinking of the Buddha Amida or reciting his name, represents the principal practice of Pure Land Buddhism and the three figures, Hōnen (1133–1212), Shinran (1173–1263), and Ippen (1239–1289), are included in chronological order. However, only Hōnen and Shinran are known to have had a teacher-disciple relationship. There is no confirmed contact between Shinran and Ippen. Consequently, Yanagi comprehends this lineage in terms of teachings rather than in relation to direct

13. This act of distributing talismans is still practised in the Jishū 時宗, where it is called 賦算.

14. Shōkai 2000, 23–25.

15. For a clarification of the connection between *Namu Amidabutsu* and folk craft, see Ī 2006.

16. Yanagi 1991, 6/34.

relationships. Thus, he understands Ippen's teachings as a continuation and improvement of the teachings of Hōnen and Shinran, rather than as an entirely new programme.

Yanagi assigns great importance to the role of religion in modern societies. However, in his opinion, addressing these societal needs requires a fundamental transformation of what is understood as religion. His approach to this issue is counterintuitive, as he does not refer to Buddhist temples or Shintō shrines and their long history in Japan. Instead, he refers to the numerous Catholic churches constructed since the Meiji Restoration, criticizing them for lacking both religious and artistic value. He then contrasts them with the smaller, rural (foreign) churches that feature humble depictions of Mary and that he praises for possessing a profound religiosity and artistic depth. According to Yanagi, the disparity between these examples stems from whether the act of construction is accompanied by genuine faith.[17]

Simultaneously, Yanagi recognizes a strong demand for religion in the modern era, which, in his view, can be more effectively fulfilled by a novel form of art rather than traditional religions could. This attributes a responsibility to art, as Yanagi asserts that true art cannot be non-religious.

Furthermore, to discharge this duty, art must be as inclusive as possible, untethered from national boundaries and specific ideologies.[18] This view reflects Yanagi's global perspective on art, including the Art of Tea, which transcends national or ethnic affiliations. Yanagi's connection to Pure Land Buddhism is also evident in his emphasis on laypeople's religion (在家宗教),[19] and he proposes a radical idea: art museums should be the new churches. This vision underscores his comprehension of the contemporary significance of art and its relationship with religion. He writes: "In the past,

17. Yanagi 2011, 81–2.

18. It is worth noting at this juncture that Yanagi's own ability to consistently adhere to this ideal is open to question. Moreover, his characterizations of so-called Eastern and Western art, which occasionally resort to simplistic stereotypes, are informed by a specific ideological framework. Nonetheless, this does not undermine the universal aspirations of his aesthetic theory, the underlying structure of which is inherently transnational. For a discussion of the pacifist dimensions of Yanagi's thought, see Nakami 2011.

19. Although this concept fits Yanagi's theory of art in general, it should be noted that the article was originally published in the journal *Lay Buddhism* (『在家仏教』).

religion gave birth to art. Now, the situation is reversed: art gives birth to religion.'[20]

Ultimately, Yanagi distinguishes between two primary forms of "beauty religion" (美の宗教): self-powered art (美術) and other-powered craft (*kōgei*).[21] Accordingly, he identifies two approaches to understanding beauty religion. This dichotomy is notable, as although Yanagi creates a hierarchy between these two types of art, he establishes one form as superior (other-powered craft) *without* dismissing the lesser form (self-powered art). By applying the basic structure of existing Buddhist institutions to the new realm of aesthetics, Yanagi attempts to supplant traditional notions of religion. His core argument is that art as such, particularly in the sense of craft, should be the origin of religion. Thus, he implicitly suggests that conventional religious institutions, including Other-Power and Pure Land Buddhism, are ill-equipped to provide people with meaningful religious experiences regardless of the specific sect. This critique stems from his perception of institutionalized religion as feudalistic.[22]

A pivotal connection between Yanagi's views on Pure Land Buddhism and the Art of Tea, can be found in his article "On Buddhist Aesthetics" (「仏教美学について」). Therein, he stresses that the same principles underlie both the realms of religion and beauty. By referencing the fundamental distinction between Self-Power and Other-Power religion, Yanagi applies the Pure Land thought to aesthetics, with particular regard to the Art of Tea.[23]

Self-Power	*Other-Power*
Objects with poetic names (在銘)	Objects without poetic names (無銘)
Created by (professional) artists	Created by craftspeople
Genius	Ordinary (普通) people
Individualistic	Non-individualistic

Apparently, the concept of Self-Power art as such did not emerge in the modern era due to the pervasive influence of a personality cult at the foun-

20. Yanagi 2011, 84–7.
21. Yanagi 2011, 88.
22. Yanagi 2000, 271.
23. Yanagi 2011, 289–90.

dation of Japanese culture. In Yanagi's view, the key distinction lies in the fact that the development of individualism in the modern era created a cultural climate in which art created by geniuses receives the most attention. He argues that this trend does not do justice to Japan's rich tradition of folk crafts, which he describes as "other-powered" (他力的). The strength of these crafts lies in the fact that their beauty derives not from individual genius, but from a source that transcends human agency.[24] Consequently, Yanagi's critique of religion and art is, at its core, a critique of a society that is characterised by radical individualism. This is not to suggest that individuals have become more empowered in general, but rather that there is an overemphasis on exceptional individuals. With regard to art and other objects associated with these individuals, this leads to a focus on superficial qualities and neglect of the true nature of the objects themselves. The problems inherent in this form of object fetishism are evident, in particular, in the context of the Art of Tea, where they contribute to the alienation of humans from the objects of their perception.

Yanagi and the art of tea

The significance of the Art of Tea in Yanagi's life and thought has become increasingly apparent. According to Kumakura Isao, Yanagi's theory of the Art of Tea is, in effect, his philosophy, which also bears resemblance to his anthropological views.[25] Yanagi distinguishes between the "Art of Tea" (*sadō* 茶道, literally "the way of tea') and "Tea [ceremony]" (*cha no yu* 茶の湯, literally "hot water for tea'), with the former referring to a type of tea culture associated with what Yanagi terms "religion," and the latter denoting a more superficial form of tea culture, exemplified by modern tea masters and the institutionalisation of tea.[26] Although a comprehensive analysis of this pivotal aspect of Yanagi's thought is beyond the scope of this article, I here highlight three key aspects of his Art of Tea theory.

As to what constitutes the primary act in the Art of Tea, for Yanagi, the

24. Yanagi 2011, 288–90.

25. Kumakura 2019, 10.

26. Tanaka 2003, 453/54. Today, both terms are used without any pejorative nuance or suggestion of a decayed form of practice. Instead, which term is used is determined by the tea school one is affiliated with.

most critical element is the process of collecting (蒐集). He elaborates on the significance of collecting and stresses that a true collection should transcend individual interests. Otherwise, the objects become, in effect, "buried." While collecting originates as an individual act for an individual collection, it must ultimately lead to a collection that can be appreciated by the broader public, such as a museum collection, if it is to be considered a "praiseworthy act." To illustrate this point, Yanagi cites the example of a stamp collector who, in his view, remains an individual hobbyist and lacks significant social relevance.[27] Notably, the value of a collection is determined less by the objects themselves than by the collector's purpose and ability to discern between meaningful and insignificant objects. This act must transcend personal preference to hold meaning for society at large. Consequently, collectors must respond to societal conditions.

As to what should be collected, Yanagi provides various examples of prudent and imprudent choices, and he derives a practical guideline from the poetic names assigned to objects in the Art of Tea. He emphasizes that an overemphasis on these names has led to a neglect of personal judgment that has resulted in a diminished appreciation for the object's inherent beauty. Although the names of bowls and other Art of Tea objects have been integral to the tradition since its inception, Yanagi argues that people have become overly reliant on these designations, thereby losing sight of their own critical faculties. He attributes this development to the growing influence of individualism.[28] In this context, Yanagi draws attention to objects that have been overlooked and lack the prestige of having been named. The issue is not the names *per se,* but the notion that only esteemed objects are worthy of inclusion in the Art of Tea. In contrast to such elitist perspectives, Yanagi posits that there are no external constraints on what can be collected, provided the collector can establish a true connection with the object.

Regarding how objects should be collected, Yanagi addresses this question through his conception, maybe the most crucial concept for his work, of "immediate observing" (じかに見る or 直観). He defines this term as "observing the true form" or "observing before thinking," implying that cognitive processes obscure one's vision. In the context of the Art of Tea, the crucial

27. Yanagi 2000, 103, 107, 112.

28. Yanagi 2000, 124–25.

point is that the intention to collect an object *for the sake of* the Art of Tea should be absent. Instead, the Art of Tea should emerge organically from collections where objects have been immediately observed. "Immediate" implies not only an unobstructed encounter with the object but also an absence of individual judgment in the collection process; that is, the selection must prioritize objects that can resonate with everyone. In this regard, Yanagi reiterates the importance of universal applicability over any type of individual discovery.[29] Furthermore, the notion of directness encompasses both the act of observing and the act of choosing. Thus, Yanagi criticizes tea cultures that prioritize adherence to traditional schools, their heads, official dealers, market values, or certificates of authenticity, arguing that such approaches neglect the importance of the heart and eye of the subject of selection.[30]

Regarding the purpose of collecting, for Yanagi, the acts of seeing and collecting imply the utilisation of the objects and reflection on their place in everyday life. This idea has two facets. Firstly, it signifies that the objects possess meaning in contemporary life, revealing a beauty that is relevant to actual life rather than some distant, abstract concept. Furthermore, by connecting the objects to everyday life, collectors can gain profound insight into their beauty. Thus, the focus shifts from "art that came into being for beauty" to "craft that came into being for living."[31] Secondly, it implies that an object's original purpose lies in ordinary life. Although this is not a necessary condition, objects like the aforementioned Korean bowls exemplify this principle. Initially, these bowls were humble, "low quality (下品)[32] rice bowls" that were for the "daily use of poor common people." Yanagi notes that "if they had not been rice bowls, they would never have become matcha bowls."[33] The point is that these bowls originated from daily life and were designed for practical *use*. As their creators were unaware of the Art of Tea, they are the best examples of unintentional creation. Thus, Yanagi's core message is that objects for the Art of Tea must occupy a place in the ordi-

29. Yanagi 2000, 139–40, 148.

30. Yanagi 2000, 279.

31. Yanagi 2000, 141–2, 155.

32. Originally, 下品 was used to refer to the lowest rank of people searching for salvation through Amida.

33. Yanagi 2000, 164–5.

nary lives of all people and bridge the gap between the extraordinary setting of a tea gathering and the broader social sphere.

Adornian perspectives

The connection between Yanagi and Theodor Adorno is not immediately apparent. The two philosophers differ in a crucial respect: Yanagi's emphasis on non-duality and Adorno's focus on negative dialectics, which is a fundamentally dualistic concept. Furthermore, Adorno's ideal creator of art is a type of musician and interpreter who embodies what Yanagi calls "Self-Powered" art. According to Adorno, a thorough understanding of art can only be achieved through rigorous study. Consequently, an intuitive approach to art cannot grasp its true meaning.

However, on another level, both philosophers share similar conceptions of art that allow for a productive dialogue between their ideas. Within the context of this article, it is not feasible to provide a comprehensive outline of Adorno's aesthetics. Instead, I engage with Adorno's work while acknowledging the potential limitations of my analysis which cannot address all the key aspects of his philosophy. Unlike Yanagi, Adorno primarily approaches aesthetics through music, frequently referencing composers such as Beethoven, Wagner, and proponents of New Music in a positive light, and jazz (in a negative light). Nevertheless, the normative claims Adorno makes about music and Yanagi's claims about the Art of Tea exhibit striking similarities. Thus, Adorno's aesthetic theory provides a useful tool for refining our understanding of Yanagi's thought, particularly in relation to its social significance. This analysis focuses on three core questions: "How should one approach art?", "What is the meaning of art?", and "What is the relationship between art and society?"

Regarding the first question, there are notable similarities between Yanagi and Adorno, as both emphasize the importance of attentive observation. Adorno critiques the popular music genre known as Schlager, arguing that its value lies in its popularity rather than its artistic merit. He contends that "liking it is almost the same as recognizing it,"[34] implying that listeners are more concerned with associating themselves with the music's popular-

34. Adorno 2003b, 14–15.

ity than with genuinely experiencing it. In such circumstances, the observer engages with the music indirectly, filtered through their preconceived notion of Schlager as a genre. A similar concept applies to the role of the creator. Adorno suggests that exceptional works of art "become so because they detach themselves from their author and what they meant and intended; they become independent."[35] Thus, Adorno adopts a radical stance, asserting that artists have no inherent right to dictate how their creations should be understood. This perspective stems from the idea that the primary goal of engaging with art is uncovering its objective essence.

Consequently, the objectivity of extraordinary art cannot be revealed through mechanical adherence to established interpretive frameworks. Rather, Adorno advocates for an imaginative approach and urges individuals to "see things differently than convention would have it."[36] The act of overcoming conventional perspectives is essential, as it exemplifies the concept that the reception of art should not be constrained by pre-existing notions that attempt to force the artwork into a rigid identity which suppresses the inherently dialectical nature of art. Adorno describes this direct, unmediated engagement with art as follows: "No gaze reaches the beautiful that is not accompanied by indifference, almost contempt for everything outside the object being gazed upon."[37] Although Adorno does not propose a universal concept of art that enables any member of society to access its deepest meaning, both philosophers concur that one's approach to art must be driven by a quest for true beauty. Similarly, just as Yanagi highlights the significance of tea objects that originated in everyday life, Adorno suggests that the most sublime music often results from an unintentional creative act. Notably, Adorno acknowledges that composers like Bach and Beethoven were well aware of the content of their works. The crucial point lies in the fact that music criticism must respond to societal needs, and the manner in which it addresses these needs varies according to the specific historical context.

The second question concerns the meaning of art. While Adorno does not subscribe to Yanagi's positivistic notion that objects possess eternal

35. Adorno 2003d, 213.
36. Adorno 2003d, 221.
37. Adorno 2003c, 85.

beauty, he emphasizes that objects can evolve into elevated forms of art over time, while others may lose this quality. Adorno suggests that any stagnation that hinders the evolution of objects is not in their best interests.[38] His commentary focuses on positive examples of music, where in-depth analysis reveals, for Adorno, new layers of artistic depth. Adorno criticizes the common assumption of a "leapless continuum of calm development" in art, which neglects the dialectical element. Thus, according to Adorno, modern art should neither be analyzed in isolation from historical developments nor reduced to a mere variation of an existing theme.[39] This process is characterized by a "neither-nor" dynamic, which resonates with Yanagi's concept of "non-duality," illustrating one way to describe the dialectical process of affirmation and negation. Consequently, it can be argued that both philosophers would agree that discovering beauty does not lead to a static description of the object but, due to its entanglement with human experiences, perpetually demands the act of perception.

Adorno also concurs with the notion of separating distinct art from its original context. Although the artwork's former environment remains in the background, both Adorno and Yanagi would argue that "immediate observing/hearing" entails focusing on the object as it presents itself from a contemporary perspective. For instance, Adorno critiques Bach interpreters who attempt to "slavishly imitate the conventional sound." His argument is that during Bach's lifetime, the instruments available were insufficient to fully realize the composer's orchestrations.[40] Similarly, Yanagi highlights a comparable issue when he notes that "it is often the case that people are obsessed with the idea that old tea rooms are inherently beautiful."[41] His approach to Korean bowls shares a similar perspective, albeit with a distinct emphasis on the original purpose of the object. However, the primary point, as Yanagi seeks to elucidate their true beauty, is that these bowls were not designed for use in tea gatherings. Consequently, the beauty is intrinsic to the bowls, yet it remained unappreciated as no one was able to "immediately observe" them. In the context of the Art of Tea, contemporary objects serve as

38. Adorno 2003a, 12.
39. Adorno 2003a, 36.
40. Adorno 2003e, 148.
41. Yanagi 2000, 244.

equivalents in that the respective items are perceived in a new light, long after their initial production, under societal conditions that facilitate an appreciation of their beauty. This beauty is not an eternal value but rather a dynamic entity that confronts the individual and their position within society.

Yet the question remains: What does this connection between art and society entail? It does not imply that art should merely depict society or, worse still, be instrumentalized for political purposes. On the contrary, art is more socially significant when it is less intentional.[42] Thus, capitalist and socialist art represent two examples of depraved forms of art. A crucial aspect of Adorno's concept is that he does not advocate for a *l'art pour l'art* approach, wherein the highest form of art reacts to society unintentionally. This becomes evident when considering that, for Adorno, composers like Bach and Beethoven created music whose significance lies not primarily in their own society but in Adorno's. Therefore, it is essential that someone has approached these objects with a fresh perspective that has revealed their current social meaning, irrespective of their original purposes or the intentions of their creators. This idea resonates with Yanagi's concept of selecting suitable objects for the Art of Tea. A key target of his critique was the tea ware that is intentionally produced for tea ceremonies. According to Yanagi, the Art of Tea can only function as a means to encounter true beauty if the objects used are created without the intention of serving this purpose.

At this juncture, Adorno offers an intriguing insight when discussing the fetish character of those objects. He writes,[43]

> Insofar as a social function can be predicated for objects of art, it is their lack of function.... The truthfulness of objects of art, however, which is also their social truth, presupposes their fetish character. The principle of being-for-other [*Füranderessein*], seemingly the antithesis of fetishism, is that of exchange, and domination is concealed in it.... Works of art are the governors of things that are no longer defaced by exchange, of things that have not been degraded by profit and the false needs of degraded humanity.

Although the term "fetishism" may evoke connotations of improper attachment to an object, Adorno intends to highlight that fetishism

42. Adorno 2003a, 345.
43. Adorno 2003a, 336–7.

describes objects that derive their meaning from within. In this sense, they exhibit a "lack of function" and remain outside the logic of exchange in capitalism and the culture industry. While Yanagi stresses that his concept of ideal art is grounded in its *function* within daily life, this function is not relevant in the context of the Art of Tea. Rather, it is the negation of their former function that matters. We can interpret Yanagi's description of objects that "attained Buddhahood" as having been liberated from their functional purposes. Consequently, the Art of Tea creates a space in which individuals can engage with objects untainted by their intended purpose. Although objects of everyday use are best suited for this context, the Art of Tea represents a rupture with the everyday, understood as life governed by the logic of exchange. Adorno describes the "de-artification" of art in societies dominated by the culture industry as an attempt to bridge the gap between art and everyday life, thereby reducing art to a mere consumer product.[44] In contrast, authentic art is characterized by its ability to confront the individual with the unexpected meaning of an object. This aspect illuminates a crucial element in Yanagi's Philosophy of Aesthetics. The Korean rice bowls are not only suitable for use in the Art of Tea because their creators were, supposedly, uneducated craftspeople unfamiliar with the Art of Tea. Moreover, participants in a tea gathering, an aspect rarely explored in Yanagi's writings, are confronted with objects that challenge their perceptions of both tea ware and rice bowls. The non-duality of these objects enables them to embody true beauty.

Conclusion

This article elucidates Yanagi's philosophy of aesthetics and expands its scope through the lens of Adorno's writings. For Yanagi, Pure Land thought serves as a rhetorical device to describe his ideal of art in general and the Art of Tea in particular. Although Yanagi contributed to the field of philosophy of religion, his primary concern lay in its application to art theory. Adopting a normative approach, he focused on the process of creation, which, in his view, must be unintentional. While he acknowledges the possibility of "genius art," he regards it as an inferior form of art that is

44. Adorno 2003a, 32.

accessible only to a select few. Nevertheless, as described above, it must be considered that for Yanagi, the various approaches to art do not mutually exclude one another. Similar to the rhetoric of the Pure Land teachings, Self-Power Art is just one approach that can, in principle, yield positive results, although it is scarcely practicable for most individuals. True beauty, Yanagi argues, should not be confined to individual conditions. Beauty should be made accessible to everyone, from both the perspective of an object's creator and its recipient. This appears to contradict Adorno's approach, which is predicated on numerous prerequisites. Nevertheless, both philosophers share common ground, as Yanagi's concept of art reception also requires, when not a natural talent, a complex training process, acquired through engagement with art that develops the ability to appreciate the nuances that the true tea masters were able to observe.

A further similarity lies in the fact that, for Yanagi, the beauty of ordinary objects is only revealed when exceptionally gifted individuals uncover it. Consequently, Yanagi values those he describes as "ordinary" in a positive sense, highlighting the importance of past tea masters in recognising the beauty of, for example, Korean rice bowls. In this regard, the idea of a realm where there is neither prettiness nor ugliness resonates with Yanagi's concept of a negative dialectic, where attempts to fix the identity of (pretty) objects ultimately lead to their negation. Notably, Yanagi does not address the issue of art in the age of mechanical reproduction or the mass production of everyday objects. Presumably, he considered this problem incompatible with the Art of Tea. However, it is a crucial issue, as many everyday objects are unintentionally created. Therefore, a secondary condition becomes necessary that references the biographical elements which were significant for Yanagi himself and which play a substantial role in tea gatherings.

By juxtaposing Adorno's philosophy with Yanagi's writings, we can better elucidate the social implications inherent in Yanagi's focus on the process of creation and collection. His insistence that beauty must possess "value" regardless of an individual perspective, while holding significance in the Art of Tea, can be reinterpreted as beauty that occupies a "valuable" position within society. The process of collecting, directed towards a specific society, enables tea gatherings that conform to the Art of Tea (rather than the tea ceremony) to challenge society's limited concepts of individual identity. Thus, the Art of Tea can function as a tool for social critique by

highlighting objects that are excluded from the discourse on art and revealing the ideological underpinnings of art culture. Moreover, this significance extends beyond the realm of art itself by touching upon the fundamental problem of the alienation of the individual within the culture industry. Through the process of collection outlined by Yanagi, it is possible to escape the logic of commodification without creating an art form that is detached from society, ensuring instead that the art form remains connected to the everyday nature of the objects involved.

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