

THE SCIENTIFIC THOUGHT OF LAFCADIO HEARN:

A Case of Interpreting Japanese Art

INTRODUCTION

It seems almost 'natural' for most critics to classify Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904) as an expert in literature simply because he wrote many works categorized into the literary field. His artistic aspiration in literature is often emphasized by his commentators. For example, in the preface to Hearn's biography, Elizabeth Stevenson described that he had written works of 'the real pleasure of art' (Stevenson, 1961: xvi). Similarly, in a more recent biography, Paul Murray observes that Hearn was 'in the grip of an artistic imperative' (Murray, 1993: 16). Earlier commentators would express a parallel view; e.g., in his dissertation completed in 1940, Ray McKinley Lawless writes that in Hearn's view, literary texts should be 'something durable, must be written, rewritten, and polished until the thing attempted approaches perfection' (Lawless, 2001: 79). In brief, the common denominator of these critical attitudes is the idea of Hearn as a man of literature, a consensus that may have overshadowed the true complexity of his work.

Hearn wrote many texts that are difficult to categorize simply as literature. For example, in some of his writings he would resort to the findings of science. Scientific thought, based on Spencerian evolutionism, is visible in his studies on two Japanese religions, Buddhism and Shintoism, and—as one of his earliest biographers, Nina Kennard, observes—it is worth remembering that since his first encounter with the philosopher's work in 1885, Hearn had

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been his faithful follower for the rest of his life, attempting to 'harmonize Shintoism and Buddhism with the philosophy propounded by his high-priest, Herbert Spencer' (Kennard, 1912: 138-139, 143). Later, in the 1960s, Beongcheon Yu, who has written the most comprehensive study of Hearn's works to-date, tried to comprehend the interrelation between Buddhism and evolutionism in Hearn's thought. '[I]n Hearn's mind this pair had undergone a sort of dialectical development for two decades—always, though sometimes vaguely, connected with the question of science and faith' (Yu, 1964: 243). More recently, Carl Dawson and Paul Murray have referred to Hearn's scientific approach toward Japanese religions, especially toward Buddhism (Dawson, 1992: 140-41; Murray, 1993: 148-49). Furthermore, Jackson Lears has referred to Hearn's 'Nirvana' as an example of the interpretation of Buddhism through the lens of Darwinism (Lears, 1994: 176-77). Overall, thus far, academic recognition of the scientific orientation of Hearn's thought has been mostly limited to his interpretations Buddhism and Shintoism.

Taking the critical condition into consideration, this article argues that Hearn's scientific thought has also been applied to another field: Japanese art. It is certain that, during Hearn's lifetime, the meanings of terms such as 'science' and 'scientific' had far broader range than today. According to the editors of the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, science is 'based on knowledge about the world, especially based on examining, testing, and proving facts'. However, around the turn of the twentieth century, the semantic field of the term was not identical to that we acknowledge today; it would cover fields such as religion, literature and even (cultural) anthropology, i.e. areas classified today as representing Arts and Humanities, and often construed in opposition to strict sciences. The uncomfortable gap suggested here could be identified as an outcome of our familiar educational system based on professionalization effected along the lines of strict disciplinary distinctions. In Japan, due to the division of individuals (and programs) into 'literary-types' and 'science-types', a division which organizes one's academic development and professional life from high school onwards, most people are forced to function within the framework of strict

academic divisions, whose influence has been so overwhelming that not a few people have come to regard these divisions as 'universal'. However, the flourishing of professionalization of disciplines in such a form is neither universal nor permanent. It is only one paradigmatic framework peculiar to the present time. Therefore, it seems reasonable to argue that the consensus founded on such a paradigm has contributed to Hearn being classified predominantly as a man of letters. However, his thought and works do not lend themselves to being limited in terms of their scope by the label of 'literature'. Today, it seems obvious that authorship, which has come to customarily be perceived as literary, may be studied not only through a single perspective based on disciplinary distinctions, but also, sometimes much more productively, through the trans-disciplinary lens.

This article is organized as follows: the first part focuses on the rise and diffusion of scientific thought and cases of its wider application, mainly in the Gilded Age United States, during Hearn's lifetime in order to demonstrate that the diffusion of scientific thought in the Gilded Age could be interpreted as proto-trans-disciplinary. The first part also addresses the rise of disciplinary professionalization during the same era. The rapid development of science and the birth of professionalism should not be regarded as separate processes; on the contrary, the phenomena under study should be considered as two sides of the same coin.

Drawing upon the discussion presented in the first part, the second part of the article addresses Hearn's use of scientific thought for the interpretation of Japanese art looking mainly at his two works: 'Of the Eternal Feminine' (included in his second book on Japan, *Out of the East*, 1895) and 'About Faces in Japanese Art' published in his fourth book, *Gleanings in Buddha Fields*, 1897). When considering Japanese art's peculiar expression, Hearn especially pays attention to its abstraction, which means simplification of an object drawn by a Japanese artist. He applied scientific thought, including an anthropological approach, to enhance his comprehension of art's meaning.

Finally, the third part of this article deals with subsequent impacts of Hearn's approach to art in light of two case studies: Kakuzo Okakura (1862–1913) and Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959),

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both of whom transgress the invisible, yet important border separating arts and sciences in their work. My hope is that this article will stimulate a discussion on the recognition of academic soundness of trans-disciplinary points of view both in Japan and world-wide.

1. THE RISE AND DIFFUSION OF SCIENTIFIC THOUGHT IN THE GILDED AGE AND PROGRESSIVE ERA US SOCIETY AND CULTURE: HEARN'S LIFETIME

The Gilded Age and the early Progressive Era United States, during which Hearn published prolifically, witnessed the expansion of the application of evolutionism in a number of spheres of intellectual life, which, interestingly, did not always energize positions of fatalistic gloom. For instance, a rather clear hint of optimism is apparent in the following article posted in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1898, which aptly shows its author's trust in science:

I think [...] the statement is justified which I made at the beginning of this paper, that it is to science we must look for the thoughts which, in the nineteenth century, have dominated and fructified all other thinking. The illumination of the century has proceeded from that source, and the light that has been shed especially by the study of nature has been carried into every nook and corner of human history and human life. But the consequences of the general scientific attitude toward nature which is characteristic of this century have been twofold. Not only has the scientific method furnished a philosophy of nature and of human life, but, by the great increase in man's knowledge of natural law to which it has led, it has resulted in endless inventions, and these, in turn, have changed the face of the world. (Low, 1898: 156)

In the above excerpt, the author suggests that the impact of science has penetrated outside scientific fields. His vision makes one notice the arbitrariness of the academic divisions which seem 'natural' in the Japanese intellectual culture of today. As another example, American engineer Robert H. Thurston (1839-1903) contributed an article titled 'The Scientific Basis of Belief' for the *North American Review* in August 1891. In this article, Thurston maintains that '[s]cientific truths can never conflict with moral or religious truths. There can be no conflict between religion and science; though there has often been

discordance between scientific men and theologians' (Thurston, 1891: 186). Within the frames of strict disciplinary divisions characteristic for the model typical for contemporary Japan, a number of intellectuals could possibly find the concept of such 'fusion' between religion and science hard to rationalize. However, such a vision was hardly unusual for people living in the Gilded Age United States. According to Jackson Lears, after the eighteenth century, religion and science began to fuse through the rise of the Enlightenment (Lears, 2003: 56–62). For example, the thought of Henry Ward Beecher (1813–87), who was one of the most prominent Congregationalist clergymen in the United States, testifies to the dialog between science and faith. While enjoying his ecclesiastical fame, Beecher was at the same time an ardent advocate of Darwinism (Lears, 1994: 7; Tweed, 2000: 114, 135; Werth, 2010: xxix–xxx, 30–33, 62, 167–68, 230–31, 259–62, 290–95).¹ John Fiske (1840–1905) optimistically proposed the possibility that Christianity and Darwinism do not have to be comprehended as mutually exclusive (Tweed, 2000: 135; Werth, 2010: 111–12). In brief, some intellectuals believed that it would be possible for them to unite scientific proof with religious belief seamlessly. Consequently, it is appropriate to understand that the word 'science' used to have a broader meaning than it does currently. At the time, the term 'science', as Lears suggests, was recognized not as specialized knowledge or 'systematic philosophy', but, as 'a cultural tendency' shared widely by contemporary intellectuals (Lears, 1994: 20). More recently, Louis Menand provides a similar vision of the turn of the twentieth century in the United States. In *The Metaphysical Club*, while discussing Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. (1841–1935), Menand insists that Holmes had the ability to integrate science with religion (Menand, 2001: 26–27, 58–59). In the second part of the book, mainly dealing with William James (1842–1910), Menand states that Harvard scholars with whom he interacted found it 'perfectly possible to believe in Darwin and God at the same time' (127). In the third

¹ Henry's older sister Catherine Beecher (1800–78) also published in 1841 a monumental book about home management entitled *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, which was filled with 'a wealth of scientific information and practical advice' (Tompkins, 1986: 143–144).

part of his book, Menand point to the fact that Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), who taught mathematics at Harvard, would consider his own discipline ‘the language not just of scientific thought, but of all thought’ (156), thus further contributing to the growth of ‘transdisciplinary’ perception of strict sciences and humanities at the time. Moreover, according to Warren I. Susman, Peirce thought that proper scientific pursuit would lead us to ‘a glorious aesthetic experience’ (Susman, 2003: 71). In summary, for historians of our age to understand the intentions of the intellectuals of Gilded Age America, it is indispensable to adopt a trans-disciplinary point of view despite, or perhaps against, the norms of our own academic discourse.

In the late nineteenth-century United States, the anthropological approach began to establish its academic position as ‘science’, too. In an article posted to *The Atlantic* in 1898, a geologist William John McGee (1853–1912) overviewed seven academic fields (astrology, physics, meteorology, psychology, geology, biology, and finally, anthropology) that had developed remarkably throughout the nineteenth century in the United States. According to him, anthropology could secure a foothold of science corresponding to the prevalence of evolutionism (McGee, 1898: 318–19).

As a result, scientific anthropology based on evolutionism gained larger influence in the late nineteenth century. In the final chapter of her book *The Literate Eye*, to find some continuity between modernism and Victorianism, Rachel Teukolsky discusses the relationship between the criticism of Roger Fry (1866–1934), who was curator of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1906, and Clive Bell (1881–1964), an English critic and member of the Bloomsbury Group, in light of the research carried out by anthropologists in the beginning of early twentieth century. Teukolsky maintains that Fry and Bell, who are famous for their praise of post-impressionists, partially inherited the anthropological framework based on the scientific thought of the previous era. In her consideration of Bell’s criticism of ‘primitive art’, Teukolsky argues that he intended to extract the common and universal underlying ‘the primitive arts of many cultures’ regardless of their geographical or cultural

difference (Teukolsky, 2009: 211–12). She also examines Fry's reflections upon the African cave artworks and evaluates them using the methodological tools of scientific anthropology that regarded the West as the center of civilization (214–19). It is worth observing that their critical efforts reflect the idea of generalizing a universal formula on the basis of experimental data, which is, essentially, the *modus operandi* of strict and experimental sciences. Accordingly, the procedure of seeking to determine a common denominator of art on the basis of the analyses of abstract, 'primitive' artworks, can be understood as a manifestation of the tendencies in science, prevalent around the turn of the twentieth century.

Elements of methodologies developed in strict and experimental sciences, which would often—and quite successfully—be adopted by specialists in the fields that in today's Japan would be considered 'non-scientific', have penetrated into other, non-academic areas of daily American life. To understand the process, it is necessary to examine processes related to professionalization as it developed in the United States. The diffusion of scientific discourse and professionalization are interlinked. The entire trust in science, characteristically recurring as a motif in modern art, is, in a sense, the product of professionalization itself, especially the professionalization of the middle classes. In the late nineteenth-century United States, the middle class became increasingly influential as modernization gained momentum after the Civil War. According to Robert H. Wiebe, the elusive concept of the middle class can be described as follows:

Covering too wide a range to form a tightly knit group, it divided into two broad categories. One included those with strong professional aspirations in such fields as medicine, law, economics, administration, social work, and architecture. The second comprised specialists in business, in labor, and in agriculture awakening both to their distinctiveness and to their ties with similar people in the same occupation. (Wiebe, 1967: 112)

The rush to establish state and private universities indirectly helped promote the professionalization of society at the national

level (Trachtenberg, 2007: 63–64).² At the same time, older universities gradually followed the same path by reforming their curricula to adjust them to the era of specialization and professionalization (Goodman, 2011: 89). Charles William Eliot (1834–1926), president of the Harvard University from 1869 to 1909, contributed an essay titled ‘The New Education’ to *The Atlantic*, in which he advanced the idea of curriculum reform in higher education (Eliot, 1869: 203–20, 358–67). During his long presidency at Harvard, Eliot reformed its curricula based not on liberal arts but on practicality (Goodman, 2011: 89–90). The prototype of the modern higher-education system based on the professionalization principle, which seems to be ‘natural’ in Japan today, can be traced back to the late nineteenth-century United States. Alan Trachtenberg aptly summarizes the period’s new social conditions under professional management:

The schools, the professional societies, the new roles of responsibility within corporate hierarchies, fostered a new quality of mind and outlook: disciplined, systematic, administrative. Trained to combine the findings of formal science with economic, legal, and logistical considerations, the new engineers brought into industry an apparently detached objective, and highly specialized approach to solving problems. (Trachtenberg, 2007: 64)

To illustrate the trend of professional management redefining its role, Carolyn Mervin provided the example of the beginnings of the construction of the electric power grid in the postbellum United States. She emphasizes the fact that professionals in the field of electrical engineering were white, male, and middle class. These individuals would create professional positions for themselves, quoting a multitude of texts published in periodicals of the time to justify the logic of such jobs (Mervin, 1988: 9–62). This was not a case unique to electrical engineering; art appreciation, central to this essay, became professionalized in the same way (Lears, 1994: 187–88). Under the energetic but exclusive management of university graduates, the whole

² Massachusetts Institute of Technology was established in 1865 and Johns Hopkins University in 1876 as the first graduate universities. Moreover, many land grant universities, most of which focused on science, were established after the Civil War.

of US society came to gradually be organized and systematized into professional categories.

Not coincidentally, between the onset of the Reconstruction and the end of World War One the dominant trend in the American aesthetics of the period, realism, emerged on the philosophical substrate of American Pragmatism, represented chiefly by such thinkers as William James, Charles Sanders Peirce, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead. The transformation of the realist/pragmatist visions of the world into the determinist worldview of naturalism would largely be a function of the increase of the popularity of Darwinism, Spencerianism, Marxism and the birth of Freudianism at the turn of the century. Like the belles-lettres, newspapers would also reflect the ongoing transformations. According to Michael Schudson, newspapers gradually became fact-based media rather than speculative ones; under the strong influence of Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) most journalists came to be more ‘scientific’ than ever before (Schudson, 1978: 72).

Reporters in the 1890s saw themselves, in part, as scientists uncovering the economic and political facts of industrial life more boldly, more clearly, and more ‘scientifically’ than anyone before. This was part of ‘the broader Progressive drive to found political reform on ‘facts’. (71)

These fact-based attitudes shared among journalists can be understood as a manifestation of the realist turn. Moreover, according to Robert Wiebe, in the late nineteenth century the United States government gradually shifted its policy from idealism to realism. Wiebe maintains that contemporary realistic bureaucrats began to rely on mechanical data or calculations to make their opinions objective. It seems important that this shift occurred during the culmination of social Darwinism. This transformation was driven by a newly emerged fundamental trust in science; ‘[b]ureaucratic thought [...] made “science” practically synonymous with “scientific method”’ (Wiebe, 1967: 147).

Therefore, progressive reform can be regarded as the reflection of the idealized vision of the emergent middle class. As mentioned before, a growingly significant proportion of the middle class were managers and professionals with advanced, univer-

sity level education. According to Paul Boyer, Lears, Susman, and Wiebe, with their criticism of contemporary social conditions, progressives prompted the establishment of systems based on professional and scientific knowledge (Boyer, 1992: 278–79; Lears, 2009: 299–300, 327; Susman, 2003: xxii; Wiebe, 1967: 168). For instance, Lears and Menand refer to the case of Hull House, one of the well-known foundations in the social reform movement. At first it was a kind of ‘educational institution’; however, the involvement of Florence Kelly (1859–1932), who graduated from Cornell University and studied overseas in Switzerland, transformed Hull House to ‘a center of reform advocacy and sociological investigation’ (Lears, 1994: 79–80; Menand, 2001: 308–309).

Furthermore, the practice of the anticipation of the future events with reference to statistical/calculation-based models began in this era. Trachtenberg points out the emerging importance of anticipatory modeling and calculations by professionals:

Calculations of economy and of science developed into professional processes with their own skills and rules, but in the end their effects were felt in the changing relations between human labor and machines, in the steady encroachment of mechanization on the forms of work, of everyday life, and social transactions throughout America. (Trachtenberg, 2007: 63)

People began to recognize calculation founded upon scientific and economical basis as more rational and persuasive than intuitive predictions based on the experience that would not apply to the new sociocultural, political and economic configuration of the western world of the turn of the century. According to Wiebe, Americans of the time tended to be attracted to numerical largeness. Businessmen as well as people engaged in religion, architecture, and even literature were enchanted with numeric proofs. Wiebe interpreted this tendency as rooted in contemporary anxieties arising from living in uncertain social conditions (Wiebe, 1967: 40–43). However, trust in numbers was supported by the emerging professionals, who for their part ardently advocated scientific thought. In other words, their ascendancy triggered the increase of dependence on numerical data, that is to say, numerical abstraction.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, at the onset of modern progressivism, professionals' social influence increased more than ever. During this time, academic disciplinary divides and requirements concerning professional classification became more pronounced. Wiebe, after defining the new middle class, enumerates some careers that experienced further professionalization along the 'modern' lines: doctors, lawyers, teachers, journalists, and social workers (Wiebe, 1967: 111–132). William Leach discusses the curriculum reform at universities in the United States, which gradually became more practical in the 1920s than at the turn of the century. For example, New York University established the School of Retailing to train teachers who were going to 'teach retailing in the city stores and high schools' by offering focused instruction in the areas of 'distribution and management, textiles, color and design, store organization, and business ethics'. Harvard University, under Charles Eliot's leadership, founded its Master of Business Administration course in 1908, and the Harvard Bureau of Business Branch three years later (Leach, 1993: 155–163; Lears, 2009: 297). As these two examples suggest, progressivism marks the large-scale beginning of social reform based on management by university-educated professionals (Levine, 1988: 195–200; Wiebe, 1967: 118–119). The educational reforms suggested above reflect progressive vision founded on scientific thought. Consequently, both the increasing trust in science and the development of professionalization were interdependent processes in the United States in the late nineteenth century.

The necessarily brief overview of the processes responsible for the transformation of the intellectual culture in the Gilded Age United States allows one to understand the sociocultural background of Lafcadio Hearn's position as an author. To summarize our observation, we may refer to the observations by Lawrence W. Levine who demonstrates that the overall cultural change brought about the fragmentation of professional knowledge into discrete fields (Levine, 1988: 207–219, 228). Such fragmentation was further promoted by the reform of higher education departing from liberal arts and moving in the direction of specialization; this led to vertical divisions in most academic fields, much like the evolutionary trees used in biology. Furthermore,

the fragmentation of academic disciplines, adopted by many cultures and often considered 'universal' in some intellectual traditions of the world today, still causes problems in contexts, in which phenomena once classified within the frames of strict disciplinary fields need to be reconsidered with the view to doing justice to the historical realities from before the onset of professionalization. The trans-disciplinary point of view, 'natural' to Gilded Age America, returned to the center of the western academic stage as a valid perspective in the latter part of the 20th century. If phenomena or individuals under study had been conditioned by a culture yet uncompartmentalized into strict disciplines, the prioritization of monodisciplinary perspectives will effectively preclude an acknowledgment of the impacts of such individuals or phenomena outside of the speciality. Though specialization has brought considerable benefits, scholars and non-academics trained by them in some intellectual traditions have become too accustomed to taking such conceptual and existential categories for ultimate truths. The era when Hearn lived and worked was only the beginning of the process of professionalization of the disciplines; it is thus necessary to reconsider the academic disciplines of our time, because it is not always a sufficient framework to investigate the intellectual legacy of our past.

2. HEARN'S USE OF SCIENTIFIC THOUGHT TO INTERPRET JAPANESE ART

Hearn, as has been pointed out in the introduction, wrote many kinds of works that do not conform to the strict categorization of literature developed by the rise of professionalization. He chose diverse topics. Among them, Spencerian evolutionary science, whose prevalence was decisive and overwhelming around the turn of the twentieth century, comes to the fore as an important and frequent theme in his works. In Hearn's lifetime, as has been demonstrated earlier, the scope of terms such as 'science' or 'scientific' were far broader than today. Taking this idea into consideration, this article will henceforth focus upon the study of Hearn's application of scientific thought to his interpretation of Japanese art. Utilizing some of the scientific

theories of his day, he is able to offer a complex, sophisticated interpretation of Japanese art.

This section concentrates specifically on two of Hearn's works regarding Japanese art: 'Of the Eternal Feminine' and 'About Faces on Japanese Art'. However, before considering them, it is necessary to mention his earlier works. According to one biographer, Hearn's first encounter with Japanese artwork is traceable to his visit to the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition, held in New Orleans in late 1884 (Kennard, 1912: 138). Following his arrival in Japan in 1890, Hearn offers his interpretation of Japanese art in 'Of a Dancing Girl' in his first two-volume book, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (1894). It is a document dedicated to dancing girls (*geisha*), which begins with a detailed description concerning their backgrounds: their lives, performance and education. Later in the work, referring to an old 'custom' of Japanese young artists who travelled 'on foot through various parts of the empire in order to see and sketch the most celebrated scenery', Hearn discusses the difference in artistic expression between Japanese art and Western art (Hearn, 1894: II 534). Hearn argues that, unlike Western painters who exclusively depend on 'clear-cut realities', Japanese painters mainly depend on their own 'recollections' and 'sensations' (II 535). Even though Impressionism would gradually become more influential in the West, Hearn realized that most painters of the time would produce realistic works, which is why Western audiences in the late nineteenth century would be accustomed to seeing realistic paintings (Teukolsky, 2009: 208–209). Criticizing Western realism as dull, he praises the 'suggestiveness' of Japanese painters (Hearn, 1894: II 534). This idea is suggested in Hearn's 'Stone Buddha', published in the collection titled *Out of the East*, where he discusses the absence of shadow in Japanese printings. At the same time, he criticizes the indiscriminate adoption of Western realism by the Japanese artists. For him, Japanese printers seem to have grasped the nature of art much more than their Western contemporaries (Hearn, 1895: 157–163).

Hearn's fundamental appreciation of Japanese art would bring him to compare Japanese artworks with those

of the West in 'Of the Eternal Feminine'.³ He opens his discussion with the description of his Japanese students' disinterest in Western artistic expressions and offers the following interpretation to their position:

[A]ll such sweeping criticisms seem to me due to a very imperfect recognition of the fact that Japanese thought and sentiment have been evolved out of ancestral habits, customs, ethics, beliefs, directly the opposite of our own in some cases, and in all cases strangely different. Acting on such psychological material, modern scientific education cannot but accentuate and develop race differences. (Hearn, 1895: 86–87)

Hearn's search for Japanese 'ancestral habits, customs, ethics [and] beliefs' would produce a significant collection of materials for his writings that would come into existence later in the Japanese period of his life. His method of research reminds one of the transformations that Bill Brown posits to have affected anthropology in the 1890s. According to Brown, in the 1890s, anthropology became more 'regionalized' and based on 'the environmental reconstruction' of 'person, place, and thing into an absorbing drama, supposedly bringing a local culture to life' (Brown, 2003: 88, 92). In brief, the anthropological approach began to advance from theory to participation. All of Hearn's objects of study listed above were intangible; therefore, it was necessary for him to not only construct *some* theoretical framework, but also to participate in the culture while doing his field research. His writings became documents that were quite different from the standard research on non-European cultures of the time. Throughout his years in Japan, Hearn's endeavors were in fact, field work. Its results, however, have proven to be more influential after Hearn's death when they affected the directions of Franz Boas' (1858–1942) anthropological approach. Especially, bearing in mind that the entire body work Hearn produced during his time in Japan narrates the 'drama' of Japanese peoples' customs.

Hearn's fieldwork on Japanese race and culture finally came to fruition in his posthumous book titled *Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation* (1904), which is largely founded on his field

3 Beongcheon Yu discusses in detail this work to explore Hearn's 'aesthetic speculation' (Yu, 1964: 205–221).

work and his immediate experience of Japan. His fourteen years of research in Japan led Hearn to an important conclusion: the Japanese in Meiji Japan were a regulated society, whose individual members' traits would be subsumed making them thus, effectively, behaviorally indistinguishable. In one chapter of *Japan*, providing a number of examples of excessive regulation in Japanese society, Hearn explains its influence on the country's population as follows: 'The tendency of such regulation was necessarily to suppress all mental and moral differentiation, to numb personality, to establish one uniform and unchanging type of character; and such was the actual result' (Hearn, 1904: 180). Moreover, in another chapter considering the etiquette of the Edo Period (1603–1867), he evaluates its social conditioning:

Only a society under extraordinary regulation and regimentation,—a society in which all self-assertion was repressed, and self-sacrifice made a universal obligation,—a society in which personality was clipped like a hedge, permitted to bud and bloom from within, never from without,—in short, only a society founded upon ancestor-worship, could have produced it. (362)

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It is worth emphasizing that, in the quotation above, Hearn attributes the repression of 'all self-assertion' among the Japanese to their long-cherished ancestor-worship. Therefore, a reflection upon the meaning of ancestor-worship was central to him. In some sense, his work in Japan was largely propelled by his need to understand this phenomenon. 'Of the Eternal Feminine', which can be recognized as one of the important progress reports for Hearn's 'dissertation', *Japan*, includes his reflections on ancestor-worship (Yu, 1964: 195). In this work, through his comparison of the psychological difference between the Japanese and the Westerners, Hearn explores the meaning of the emotional suppression characterizing the Japanese, who have substantially held on to ancestor-worship even after the rapid modernization of the Meiji era. At the same time, the Westerners have gradually marginalized the importance of the ancestor-worship (the traces of which could be claimed to have survived in some pre-Christian rites) with the onset of Christianity and arguably abolished it altogether as a result of processes of modernization and scientific development. Through this comparison, based

on the presence or absence of ancestor-worship, Hearn attempts to explain the reason for the cultural rift responsible for the lack of intercultural understanding.

In the first half of 'Of the Eternal Feminine', Hearn compares the difference in Western and Japanese cultural patterns along anthropological lines. With the potential for misunderstanding in mind, he explores the meaning of Japanese disinterest in Western love romances. According to Hearn, in Japan, '[a]ffection must, in every time and space, be subordinated to duty' (Hearn, 1895: 100). Then he explains to Western readers the Japanese customs concerning affection. For example, in Japan, private issues should not be discussed in public; marriages are decided not by couples themselves but by both sets of parents. To provide an example, he mentions an episode from the story of Shuntokumar, in which the protagonist of the story, after a long separation with his beloved, expresses his joy by merely tapping his lover's shoulder at their reunion (93-103). On the whole, for Hearn, the Japanese hardly express their affection and passion, keeping them under strict control. In contrast to the Japanese, Westerners express these feelings more directly.

Taking this cultural difference into consideration, Hearn discusses the subject of the ideal feminine beauty in the West employing scientific perspective. According to Hearn, this ideal, contributing to developments in art in the West, has entered the next phase of its transformation with the introduction of 'the new philosophy of evolution' (Hearn, 1895: 111-12). What is important in this argument is his attempt to associate the development of the ideal of beauty with that of evolutionary theory. With its aid, the search for the feminine ideal could be further accelerated:

Even from the beginning it is probable that the perception of human beauty has been the main source of all our aesthetic sensibility. Possibly we owe to it likewise our idea of proportion; our exaggerated appreciation of regularity; our fondness for parallels, curves, and all geometrical symmetries. And in the long process of our aesthetic evolution, the ideal of woman has at last become for us an aesthetic abstraction. (112-113)

Hearn lists many characteristics relevant to the Western ideal of femininity, such as 'proportion, regularity, parallels, curves,

and symmetries', all of which are notions loaned from science, especially geometry. Moreover, he admits that the ultimate beauty is the 'abstraction', which is equal to the simplification or reduction of redundancy with reference to the concepts he lists above. At least for Hearn, the process of abstraction inherently hinges on scientific thought.

In the next chapter of his book Hearn applies a scientific lens to the interpretation of the expression of Japanese art by referencing two examples: flowers and insects. Concerning floral paintings, he states as follows:

An English or German flower painting, the result of months of trained labour, and valued at several hundred pounds, would certainly not compare as a nature study, in the higher sense, with a Japanese flower painting executed in twenty brush strokes, and worth perhaps five sen. The former would represent at best but an ineffectual and painful effort to imitate a massing of colours. The latter would prove perfect memory of certain flower shapes instantaneously flung upon paper, without any model to aid, and show, not the recollection of any individual blossom, but the perfect realisation of a general law of form expression, perfectly mastered, with all its moods, tenses, and inflections. (Hearn, 1895: 118-119)

For Hearn, the 'English or German flower painting' is realistic and detailed work, which inevitably requires close observation and a long period of time for completion. Hearn contrast it with floral painting by a Japanese artist, which is performed with cursory brushwork and which, therefore, it is more abstract (i.e., simplified) than its Western counterpart. It is hardly as accurate as Western realistic paintings and it chiefly depends on its author's subjective memory/recollection rather than on the actual shape of the model.

It is remarkable that it is this abstraction that enables Japanese paintings to express 'the perfect realization of a general law of form expression'. In the West, an author draws an image of one particular model and the work could be its faithful mimetic reproduction. In this sense, it may be claimed to be both arbitrary and subjective. In contrast, a Japanese painting, which depends not on one particular model but on the author's subjectiveness based on memory, might be understood as more objective and universal. As Hearn suggests in one of his texts, as his experience of Japan became richer, he came to believe that

the self was a composite of countless souls (Hearn, 1897: 91). Because of this understanding, subjective memory can become objective; therefore, the simplified and abstract expression adopted in Japanese paintings includes universality parallel to that of the rules of grammar, determining the recognition 'moods, tenses, and inflections'.⁴ Here, Eastern art comes to gain the quality of the abstract, like the feminine abstract ideal of the West. It could be said that ancestor-worship, which has long contributed to the formation of the cultural characteristics of the Japanese, may have also (indirectly) contributed to the development of Japanese artistic abstraction, that is to say, to the formation of what could be paradoxically dubbed 'repressive expression'. The argument presented above allows one to observe that while acknowledging the cultural difference in artistic expression, Hearn attempts to present the rift between the two traditions by reference to science, which has been the most significant promoter of the Western civilization since antiquity. His interpretation of Japanese art actually conforms to the Western point of view and reiterates it, thereby confirming the validity of the claim.

To further examine the development of Hearn's of recognition of Japanese art, it is necessary to consider his text 'About Faces in Japanese Art' from the collection *Gleanings in Buddha Fields*. In this work, Hearn studies facial expressions appearing in *ukiyo*e pictures. The study shows the development of both Hearn's comparativist instrumentarium and the scientific coloring of his reflection. As to the former, Hearn attempts to understand Japanese art through what he would claim to be its racial characteristics. In the first place, he applauds an adventurous presentation made by an English art critic, who claims that Japanese art subordinates particularity and individuality to generality, and resolves that the Japanese depend on their own, unique aesthetic sensibility (Hearn, 1897: 97, 101). Hearn completely agrees

4 Walter L. Adamson explains in detail Wassily Kandinsky's struggle to find a 'grammar of painting' in the early twentieth century. Hearn's words here duplicate such idea (Adamson, 2007: 151-157). There is one more thing worth remarking; here Hearn attempts to interpret Japanese art with the criterion of universalism, which is far closer to the art connoisseurship argued already in the previous chapter.

with this idea, and, in his final chapter, concludes that Japanese art has reflected 'the sense of life made harmonious by social order and by self-suppression' (121). What is to be stressed here is that it is only in 'About Faces in Japanese Art' that Hearn overtly associates the emotional repression characterizing the Japanese with their abstract artistic expression.

As to the relationship between artistic abstractedness and communal regulation, anthropologists have accumulated interesting interpretations. According to Sally Price, some anthropologists have interpreted abstract art produced by the natives of Africa and Oceania as the manifestation of the absence of 'individuality', conceptually replaced with 'community' (Price, 2001: 60–61). Abstraction, which is equal to the elimination of excessive decoration, can also be regarded as the 'repression of expression' as it is apparent in the field of art. For Hearn, however, abstraction seems to be one of the variables among the racial characteristics of the peoples under study. For Hearn, as well as for some of the anthropologists quoted by Price, artistic expression appears to faithfully reflect the social conditioning of the artist.

Besides the advancement of his anthropological approach, Hearn makes remarkable progress in his scientific interpretation of Japanese art. Before introducing his main subject, Hearn again explains the aesthetics underlying the Japanese representation of insects and flowers, which he had formerly analyzed in his essay 'Of the Eternal Feminine'. He restates here that Japanese painters do not draw individual motifs, but present what could be called more general types. Hearn summarizes these cases as follows:

A very minute detail is rarely brought out except when the instant recognition of the type is aided by the recognition of the detail; as, for example, when a ray of light happens to fall upon the joint of a cricket's leg, or to reverberate from the mail of a dragonfly in a double-colored metallic flash. So likewise in painting a flower, the artist does not depict a particular, but a typical flower: he shows the morphological law of the species, or to speak symbolically, nature's thought behind the form. The results of this method may astonish even scientific men. (Hearn, 1897: 108)

For Hearn, insects and flowers reduced to the 'general type' represent 'the morphological law of species' so well that the painting could leave a scientist at awe. A little further in his text, Hearn

refers to a comment by Alfred Russell Wallace (1823–1913), whom he regards as ‘one of the greatest living naturalists’ (Hearn, 1897: 109). Wallace reflects that in Japanese sketches of plants, Japanese masters draw their objects in a ‘most scientific’ manner (Hearn, 1897: 109). Having made this reference, Hearn returns to the main line of his argument, focusing upon the reasons underlying the success in the Japanese expression in light of the scientific proof. As noted before, he thinks that, while the detail is eliminated in most Japanese paintings, ‘the general character has been more aptly expressed’ (109). Even though Hearn may seem to have revisited the concept of abstract generality developed in ‘Of the Eternal Feminine’, one thing is apparently different; in this work, Hearn’s trust in scientific thought is far greater than in his previous works.

From the fourth chapter onwards, Hearn focuses primarily on the studies of ‘faces in Japanese art’, specifically faces of abstraction appearing in *ukiyo-e*. Hearn classifies facial expression in *ukiyo-e* into four types: ‘youths’, ‘female figures’, ‘maturer [sic] types’, and ‘old age’ (Hearn, 1897: 110–112). He summarizes a general tendency in works created by *ukiyo-e* artists as follows:

The Ukiyo-ye artist drew actualities, but not repellent or meaningless actualities; proving his rank even more by his refusal than by his choice of subjects. He looked for dominant laws of contrast and color, for the general character of nature’s combinations, for the order of the beautiful as it was and is. Otherwise his art was in no sense aspirational; it was the art of the larger comprehension of things as they are. Thus he was rightly a realist, notwithstanding that his realism appears only in the study of constants, generalities, types. And as expressing the synthesis of common fact, the systematization of natural law, this Japanese art by its method scientific in the true sense. (115–116)

This is the climax of Hearn’s scientific reflection on Japanese art. He uses the term ‘realist’ for seemingly nonrealist *ukiyo-e* artists, not for realistic Western artists. Moreover, he tries to understand the abstraction expressed in *ukiyo-e* as ‘scientific’ with the use of such words as ‘synthesis’ and ‘systematization’. Soon thereafter, he refers to Herbert Spencer, whose work had methodologically inspired his own scientific thought, to understand *ukiyo-e* more profoundly (Hearn, 1897: 116).

Bearing this in mind, one is hardly surprised that, as one of the pioneers of the scientific approach to the interpretation of art, Hearn

never denies the importance of the detail in artistic expression completely. Rather, as already stated, he claims that the best art always has the 'minuteness of detail', and refers to Greek art, which he deems as one of his ideals (Hearn, 1897: 114). He declares that Greek art and *ukiyo*e share one central characteristic:

Where the scientific and the aspirational extremes of art touch, one may expect to find some universal aesthetic truth recognized by both [the higher art and aspirational art]. They agree in their impersonality; they refuse to individualize. And the lesson of the very highest art that ever existed suggests the true reason for this common refusal. (116)

Beongcheon Yu, quoting one of Hearn's lectures in Tokyo Imperial University, maintains that '[a]rtistic creation must [...] be the artist's conscious impersonalization of the natural and the personal', and that artists can make personal affairs 'become universal' (Yu, 1964: 149). According to Yu, artists whom Hearn recognized as supreme have the capacity to remove individualization from individual cases and thus are able to attain 'universality'. Yu's critical viewpoint can be applied to Hearn's interpretation of both, eastern and western, artistic formulas. In Hearn's view, however, the way to attain this universality is different in both cases. On the one hand, Hearn sees the universality of prominent Greek artists in the super-mundaneness of their art, or, in other words, in their capacity to transcend the mundane. On the other hand, the universality of *ukiyo*e works depends upon 'refusal', i.e., their reduction/abstraction of the detail. Moreover, Hearn sees that the meaning of the latter can be understood with the aid of contemporary scientific theory. His scientific reflection on artistic abstraction, reduction, and simplification in the study of Eastern art forms largely unknown to the Westerners of the time seems to have sifted through to the innovation in painting that ensued soon after Hearn's death in 1904.

3. THE 'AFTERLIFE' OF HEARN'S SCIENTIFIC REFLECTION ON ART: A NEW BEGINNING

Generally, modernism has been recognized as a definite reaction against the excessive rationality of the Progressive Era, to which Jackson Lears and other critics have referred (Lears, 2003: 273–319). This idea appears to be fundamentally correct; however, as Teukol-

sky suggests, in the case of England, modernism seems to inherit a rational point of view from the antecedent aesthetic and intellectual formation. It may be argued that most modernists may be claimed to have inherited something important from their predecessors: an element of scientific reflection may be detected in the intellectual substrate of their aesthetics. As pointed out in the first half of the present article, in the United States between the Gilded Age and the onset of the Progressive Era, the trust in professionalized disciplinary divisions and confidence in science increased on an unprecedented scale. Modernism could therefore be regarded as a twofold movement.

To illustrate this duality, this article will briefly focus on two cases of texts written immediately after Hearn's death in 1904. The first case is the case of *The Book of Tea* written in 1906 by the Japanese art critic Kakuzo Okakura. As soon as the book begins, Okakura refers to Teism's 'worship of the Imperfect' (Okakura, 1964: 1). In the book he applauds Teism's imperfectitude, its 'regular irregularity', and the 'relativity' of Zen Buddhism (27, 31, 34). Throughout this book, Okakura criticizes traditional Western criteria of beauty such as symmetry or perfection, which for centuries would define the standards of western artistic expression. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to analyze Okakura's book in greater detail, it is worth mentioning that he elevates Hearn as a 'chivalrous pen' (4), which might arguably be related to Hearn's praise for the irrational 'irregularity' of a Japanese garden, as suggested in 'Of the Eternal Feminine' (Hearn: 1897, 123). Furthermore, he seems to follow in Hearn's footsteps by adopting evolutionism as his elementary argumentative framework with reference to which the critic attempts to explain the development of Teism in Japan. Finally, it is impossible not to notice that in the beginning chapter of *The Book of Tea*, Okakura combines the terminology of arts and science proposing the concept of 'moral geometry' (Okakura, 1964: 1), thus effectively crossing the boundaries of professionalized disciplinary fields.

The second case is that of 'The Japanese Print' written in 1912 by famous American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, who attempts to look at Japanese prints (*ukiyoes*) through the prism of science. For him, they become 'a lesson especially valuable to the West' (Wright, 2008: 66). Wright defines this Japanese art as 'thoroughly

structural' and emphasizes the importance of geometry (and mathematics in general) within its form (66–67). Moreover, like Hearn, after he relates the geometrical character of Japanese art to linguistics (referring to 'grammar' or 'syntax'), he insists that 'stringent simplification by elimination of the insignificant and a consequent emphasis of reality', i.e., abstraction, is the aesthetic principle of this form of Japanese art (66–68). In brief, for Wright, Japanese prints have their own 'scientific' structure (69): explaining aesthetic principles of the *ukiyoes*, he finds them as 'immutable as those of elementary physics' (72). Simultaneously, while suggesting the scientific order underlying Japanese art, Wright makes a passionate effort to explain its 'simplified' beauty using terms like 'intrinsic poetry' and the 'poet', which relate far closer to the intuitive, irrational, characteristics of arts rather than sciences (68, 71). Along with the knowledge of the arts, in Wright's view, the knowledge of science is necessary for a deeper interpretation of the aesthetics of the unfamiliar art of the East.

From these cases, one important critical question emerges: how can one relate Okakura's and Wright's premodern discourses concerning art to (high) modernism that flourished after World War One? Responding to this question, one could argue that Okakura and Wright, who shared both irrational and rational points of view upon artistic expression, foreshadowed the birth of the principles of modernist criticism, and, in some small scale, they may have provided some inspiration for the following generation. Ultimately, modernism includes two antithetical aspects: a backlash against, and confidence in, scientific rationalism.

CONCLUSION

The dramatic social transformations of the Gilded Age United States was never irrelevant to Hearn's works. Shaped by his time, he attempts to explain the unique characteristics of Japanese artistic expression resorting to the discourse of scientific thought, thus transgressing strict disciplinary thresholds. Of course, this is not to argue that Hearn was one of the leading figures of the Western modernist movement. All this article can do is to draw the reader's attention to his input in the shaping of modernism. However, to observe that, it is necessary to reconsider one's own

position, especially if one's worldview has been formed by an academic culture based on professionalization and intradisciplinary regime. The conclusion, therefore, is dual. On the one hand, it is not only through his trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific experience, but also through his trans-disciplinary works, that Hearn offers us significant clues as to why the pros and cons of professionalization should be reconsidered. On the other hand, adopting a monodisciplinary position excludes the possibility of appreciating the multidimensionality of the vision of the author-thinker, who himself would not hesitate to venture into the territories of other disciplines, and who therefore could not be pigeonholed merely as a writer. In his own search of new wor(l)ds, Hearn reminds us, seekers of the same, of the dangers of professionalization, simultaneously stressing the necessity of professionalism in observing methodological regimes.

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