

BRICOLAGE: TOWARD A SCRPTURE A Proposal of A New Concaept

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For most of the ordinary Japanese public, African contemporary art still remains a remote topic. The dialog between Japan and Africa on cultural issues is far from being intensive, as it is not easy to find common interests that the Japanese can share with African artists. Such is the common understanding of the state of affaires in the Far-Eastern archipelago. And yet, such a perspective loses its relevance once one stays in major metropolises in Europe. From the Western-centered perspective, both Africa and Asia are located at the fringe of the periphery, outside of the Western center. And both Africa and Asia may be classified as the non-Western rest, in opposition to the West. In the so-called world contemporary art scene, both Asians and Africans are searching for their own recognition and fame in the Western market. But, the people from the periphery rarely recognize that they share similar problems in their confrontations with Western criteria. African-Asian cooperation rarely comes to the current agenda.

The exhibition *Le Japon des avant-gardes*, which was held at the Pompidou Center in Paris in 1986–1987, legitimized some of the Japanese avant-gardes in the worldwide context.¹ *Magicians de la terre* followed suit 3 years later in 1989, opening the gate to non-Western creators, who were to be treated as artists thereafter.² Meanwhile, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, an ambitious exhibition at the MoMA in New York in 1987, was welcomed by harsh criticism.³ The distinction between tribal art and Western fine art was declared irrelevant. Since then, almost a quarter century has passed and we

now recognize that the gradual paradigm shift in the last 25 years was necessary before El Anatsui's solo exhibition was to be realized in Japan.

What kind of lesson can Japan learn from the present exhibition? To reply this question, I would like to propose a possible cross-reading of Japanese and African experiences in a triangular observation. My intention consists in showing that the essential lesson that El Anatsui's creation provides us cannot be fully elucidated, so long as we rely on the Western canon of Art History; to the South-North vertical axis between the West and Africa, it will be helpful to add a horizontal axis of Africa and Asia. Indeed, not only Africans, but also Asians, have long been preoccupied with the ethnic identities of their aesthetics. But, little communication has existed between Africa and Japan, in terms of contemporary art. By referring to Africa as the third party, Japan can be liberated from its conventional confrontation with Western criteria. Such must also be the case for Africa. In both Africa and Asia, a search for an appropriate portrait of one's own, to be exhibited in the Western market, has been a pending issue. To this haunting question of ethnic identity in the world art market, El Anatsui proposes an unexpected reply: his creation indicates a way to liberate ourselves from the obsession of ethnic and aesthetic essentialism in which we have been imprisoned for so long.⁴

WANDERING USED TOOLS

Over 15 years ago, in 1995, Kawaguchi Yukiya mounted a pioneering and ambitious

exhibition, *An Inside Story: African Art of our Time*, at the Setagaya Art Museum. Among the exhibits was El Anatsui's *On Their Fateful Journey Nowhere* (1995), which occupied a hemi-circular hall near the entrance. The artist, who started his career as a faithful student of the Western style of art education in sculpture, had had old used mortars, or hand-mills, sitting in his workshop. These mortars had been used by women to extract palm oil and, when they were broken and became of no use, people re-utilized them as benches or for other domestic purposes. The used tools still dwelt in the context of everyday life as home-relics full of family memories. By putting these pieces upside down, the artist inspired in them a new spirit and gave them a third life as pieces of fine art, endowed with messages to be transmitted to the outside world. As Kawaguchi mentions, the 17 mortars, with fragments of wood on the top, evoke the scene of customary firewood gathering, a daily practice for women and children.⁵

A personified interpretation is possible and may be relevant, but the group of mortars with pieces of wood evoke more than everyday toil. The group is advancing to an uncertain destination and some of the mortars at the end of the line are thrown apart as if they have fallen down, fatigued. The dead cadaver-like pieces evoke human fate and destiny, a metaphor of life and death: each of us carries some designated burden for a while and, having fulfilled one's duty or sometimes on their way, people retreat from the scene and disappear, one by one. This fateful or fatal journey of continuous labor and its succession from one generation to another constitutes the whole history of humanity. The work does not show the entirety of this interminable chain of beings, but sheds a spotlight on only these 17 pieces extracted from the whole lineage. The limited number of the presented figures suggests the long trajectories

of the cycle of life and death, which continue beyond our visible field.

While El Anatsui shows a keen Western sense of cohesiveness and integrity in grouping the pieces as a work of art, at the same time he tries to indicate an open-ended system, diverging our attention toward an infinite chain that extends itself out of our limit of visibility. The materials are not thoroughly worked out, nor shaped up so as to meet the expectations imposed upon an accomplished artifact or polished pieces of artwork. The rough pieces of mortar and savage woods are hardly discernable from the trunks of fallen trees or abandoned branches dried up in the desert. Just as the natural woods are decomposed by efflorescence, man-made mortars are also on their way towards decomposition and a return to nature. After having served for human purposes, they are not destroyed, but abandoned as waste and helplessly driven together by chance, as if adrift on a whimsical wind. They are scattered, as it were, in due order, if one may call it so, on the exhibition floor, as if united by the super-human will of accomplishing something unknown. Paradoxically, the group constitutes itself as assembled pieces of work, despite themselves. Their unwillingness to constitute a group of artifacts allows them to become possessively eloquent in their silent presence.

Does the Recycling of Scrap Mean Poverty in Creation?

Re-utilization of abandoned tools and scraps may well give negative impressions. However, to see in them a sign of the economic disadvantage of Africa or its lack of creative imagination, would be an arbitrary and reductive shortcut. By seeing there a sign of poverty or artistic inferiority, the observer reveals their own inferiority and poverty in thinking. However, trying to see in

the recycled a similarity with the readymades of Marcel Duchamp or proof of ecological thinking (the so-called Eco Art), would also be a narrow-sighted view. Such an interpretation is no less reactionary than the former, as it tries to satisfy itself by recuperating the works of El Anatsui in the Western definition of fine art and reducing its potentiality in the framework of politically correct thinking.⁶

The materials chosen by the artist are endowed with the memory of sub-Saharan human life. The broken and split mortars are pieces of wood whose individual life stories are marked in their abrasions and cracks. Being the sediment of flux and the transmigration of all that exists in the universe, the abandoned objects and tools are privileged relics, especially chosen for artistic purposes. I cannot help indicating here, a similarity with an idea fostered by Matsuura Takeshiro.⁷ Being a great traveler in the northern islands, in his final years Matsuura asked for donations of pieces of wood from the abandoned material of historical architectures from around Japan. By composing these wooden fragments, Matsuura realized a tiny one-tatami-mat tea house, as his infinitesimal paradise. Within this small space, historical and geographical memories from all over Japan are accumulated by way of metonymy and intimately concentrated within Matsuura's personal dwelling. Traces of the Ise Shrine are also included. The wood pieces used for the shrine accomplish their primary function for 20 years and then, after that time, the wooden structure is dismantled and its wood is disseminated all over Japan to its second destination. After finishing its second life as construction material, a tiny fragment of it is finally integrated into Takeshiro's study and tea house to play a symbolic role in a personal mnemonics. The itinerary of each of the fragments is meticulously recorded in the miniaturized tea house, so as to trace back their origins.⁸

In some Asian folklore, spirits are believed to stay in old tools.⁹ They have individual characters and cannot be replaced by another homologous tool. A similar belief in spiritual materiality may be traced in El Anatsui's recycling of old scraps. The artist is not choosing materials for the purpose of abstracting his own intentional form from them. He is not working on the material so as to uniquely manifest his personal creative intention, at will. On the contrary, he is listening to the voices of the souls staying in the abandoned pieces of wood and he tries to extract from the discarded material, its career and itinerary as a tool. Far from being a self-assertive action motivated by an individual *Kunstwollen*, we see here the artist's concern to "educate" the material. As is well known, the verb *educare* originally meant to extract the potential talent from within the pupil. Similarly, a particular talent is also sleeping in the material, and the task of the educator consists in letting the material speak of its own personal experience, in its own voice, which has remained sealed in the silence of materiality. Endowing the old abandoned tool with new artistic life partakes of this act of "education," and there we see the life of a tool, as it has been witnessed, reveal itself, as a matter of course.

An allusion to Buddhist tradition will be helpful: the garments of Buddhist monks are transmitted from one generation to another and respected by the posterity. Clothes that were once worn by a venerated abbot are especially highly appreciated. Some ancient specimens were transmitted from the medieval age as irreplaceable treasures of high value. In later years, some of the fragments were recycled into tea caddies, like the imported gold-brocade clothes, called *Kinran*.¹⁰ It seems that respect for the ancient materials is combined with a belief in the magical power of the transmitted material. The chronological divide may be overcome by the imaginary identification

with one's ancestors and the possession of their relics can easily foster the affectionate sense of atemporal solidarity. El Anatsui seems to be familiar with this sense of tradition or transmigration of ancient spirits, as one of his solo exhibitions is named *Artempo*, an Italian neologism combining art and tempo (time).¹¹

BEYOND THE LIMIT OF SCULPTURE

In this way, if we can understand El Anatsui's working process, we have to recognize its divergence from the common understanding of sculpture in the Western tradition. The disposal of the wasted material and its recycling are no longer a secondary parasite-like dependency on the market economy. One may rather refer to the Buddhist idea of metempsychosis: assisting at the transmigration of life, one can grasp the truth of material circulation in the universe. Following the flux of life, beyond the limit of individuality, one may observe the eternal cycle of birth and death.¹²

In this view, what is intended is no longer a sculpture, in so far as sculpture means the outcome of an individual human will, which projects its plastic intention on the material, thereby cutting and carving the material according to the will of the artist. It cannot be reduced to the idea of casting either, in so far as casting means filling the form conceived by the artist with the plastic material, be it a bronze casting or another technique.¹³ As the term "sculpture" is no longer relevant, let us propose a neologism, "scapture," as it consists of recovering the proper "structure" of objects that would otherwise be threatened to be disdainfully named "scrap."¹⁴

There will be at least three reasons why I want to propose this term "scapture." First of all, the idea of bricolage, which was elaborated by Claude Lévi-Strauss (who has left us in 2010 at the age of 100). Bricolage consists of inventing a solution by

relying on disposable tools and available materials to meet urgent necessities.¹⁵ Why should one be ashamed to make use of scraps? Be it liquor bottle caps, empty beer cans, tobacco boxes, or the tin lids of evaporated milk cans, these materials are the final wrecks of the end-products, the waste metal resources that are massively abandoned at the terminal phase of the current system of material distribution management. Not only in the so-called First world, but also in Africa, there is no living without being involved in massive material consumption. Forced to be a passive consumer, Africa is still more seriously touched and damaged by mass-consumption culture than the successfully industrialized countries.

METAPHOR OF GLOBAL RESOURCE CIRCULATION

So as to overcome the disadvantages of the African continent, the wisdom of making use of the industrial garbage at one's disposal will become the touchstone for the future. The first step to breaking the vicious circle of mass-production and mass-consumption under the worldwide capitalist rule of monetary economy and the usurpation of natural resources in the process of commercial distribution, may be the recycling system. By recycle, one may mean revolution in its true etymological meaning of undermining the hierarchy of established world order. African art critics are constantly complaining, with indignation, about the excessively raw price with which El Anatsui's works are traded in the current international art market.¹⁶ However, one should not overlook the fact that the absurdly raw price in question is also the source of economic advantage and the secret of competitiveness. Without easily yielding to the temptations of the mechanisms of market speculation, how can one organize a tenacious resistance to the tyranny of price manipulation? How does one secure

local life by creating and maintaining a sound employment condition around the workshop? Here is the challenge El Anatsui is sending to the world through his collaboration with craftsmen in Nsukka.¹⁷

At the terminal of mass consumption, El Anatsui installs a junk dump, so as to accumulate materials. There, garbage and scraps are endowed with new lives. Revitalized as secondary metal resources, they are destined to be re-exported to the West. Here, we may detect a possible symptom of wise and vital revenge from the Third world, which has been the victim of the exploitation of natural resources. Several years ago, I proposed an inventive rereading of a land-marking piece from modern Japanese art history: *Topology Earth* (1969) by Sekine Nobuo.¹⁸ Sekine and his team dug a hole 2.7 m deep and 2.4 m in diameter and, by recycling the dug-out earth and sand, they constructed a tower beside the hole, which was the identical size and shape. This topological replacement may be interpreted as a metaphor for the world economy. The tower is to the skyscraper of the industrialized world, just as the dugout hole is to the abandoned mine of the Third world, from which the necessary metal resources have been extracted. The material prosperity of the former is based on the usurpation of the latter. The contrast between the substance and the void thus stands for the inequality of physical distribution on the earth. Sekine realized a miniaturized model of capitalist consumption without noticing it. One may speculate that, half a century later, El Anatsui succeeded Sekine's endeavor in an African context. If Sekine illustrated the exploitation of primary resources, Anatsui now puts the recycled industrial end product on the track of artistic creation.

WAVERING AND CONNECTING

The second reason to propose the term

“scapture” resides in the specificity of its textural stitching. Collecting scraps can continue eternally, so long as one can secure the disposed materials. Weaving the materials into a texture is potentially open to multiplication, which may extend to infinity. The basic operation is a rather simple repetition of manual labor: collecting the metal pieces, modifying the form of the pieces according to the template, and stitching the pieces together with copper wire into a huge tapestry-like texture. The manual work of connecting the pieces reminds us of the fact that religion stems from the act of connecting: *religio*.¹⁹ The repetition of the connecting operation multiplies in proportion to the increase in the number of craftsmen involved. The gradual spreading in dimension of the huge metal tapestry replays the original state of religious activity, which aimed at establishing solidarity among dispersed people. By recuperating the abandoned materials of commodity goods, accumulating the scattered pieces, and recycling them, El Anatsui weaves a collective memory of the world into his own texture, while letting the texture be woven back into the world. The double-interdependence between the texture and the world is intentionally reinforced in the networking of the collective work. The recycling of metal resources thus results in the re-weaving of the world itself. Here lie the basic ethics of El Anatsui's creation over the last 20 years, since around 1990.

A comparison with a female Japanese artist may be useful. Yayoi Kusama invented soft sculpture: the artist covered a variety of furniture with innumerable sickly protrusions made of synthetic material. The protuberances looks like a huge mass of overgrown fungi, by which tables, sofas, rudders, a rubber boat, and even an entire wall were contaminated to the extent of losing their original identity. Furniture used to be regarded as symbol of femininity, so long

as it served to coordinate the interior domestic space. By covering up female-valued domesticity with penis-like protuberances, Kusama forced the furniture to put on masculine attire in excessive quantity. Covered by an obsessive amount of male symbols, the furniture transfigures itself into sculpture. This trans-sexual skin transplant reveals in a funny, sophisticated, but rude and outspoken fashion, the truth of male domination in modern Western art. The feminist civil-rights movement, so to speak, in Yayoi Kusama's work relied upon the tactic of transforming femininity into a disguised masculinity.²⁰

In classic bronze casting, the feminine mold (vagina) had to sacrifice itself, so as to create the (penis-like) sculpture, which, by definition, incarnates male principles. Metaphorically at least, the bronze casting thus automatically excludes female principles from the exhibition hall. The easiest strategy to overturn this male domination was just to make the axiological opposite through the physical inverse: covering up the feminine with the protruding sign of masculinity was enough to get rid of female subjugation. Through the obsessively repetitive exhibitionism of male genitals, Kusama successfully demonstrates how efficiently the hypertrophy of male principle can transform everyday domesticity into horrifyingly abnormal and abominable spaces.

Kusama's multiplication of the male parasite covering female passivity reveals the plain and simple fact that male domination consisted in obliterating underlying femininity. Kusama's tactful demonstration also efficiently reveals the superficial nature of male domination. With Kusama, the thick accumulation of erected forms of masculinity, spreading over the surface of femininity, allows a piece of furniture to be entitled to be treated as a piece of sculpture. Such an easy-going camouflage was enough to liberate furniture from the yoke of its stigmatized status

as a lesser or decorative art in the hierarchy of the fine arts.

El Anatsui seems to proceed in a similar, but opposite, way: he domesticates metal materials through the techniques of textile production, which are usually confined to the domain of female occupation in the Western tradition. In other words, one sees disqualified male elements (waste metal) rescued and recycled by the female principle of weaving and stitching, so as to be integrated into a huge membrane covering the surface of the world. This process reveals how arbitrary the conventional distinction between female and male principles is.²¹ The distinction only points to the limits of Western axiological categories. The forced opposition between masculinity and femininity overlaps the classification separating the fine arts from the applied arts.²² The dichotomized hierarchical constraint of Western Modernism (known as high versus low) has long since continued to damage non-Western creative vitality. Some sectors, like textile arts, have been disqualified as not belonging to the high arts.²³ The notion of "sculpture," which I want to put forward here, discloses the slavery to which the discriminatory category of "sculpture" has been imposing on the so-called Third world. Scapture is destined to accuse sculpture of its tacit connivance with Western cultural hegemony.²⁴

METAL TEXTILES FULL OF ETHNIC MEMORIES

This leads me to the third intention of the neologism scapture. The studio-workshop of El Anatsui stitches and weaves metal textiles as self-organized structures. The structure composing the scraps may well be named scapture. Natural fibers, like cotton or silk, or synthetic fibers in the industrial age, are here replaced by used waste metals. In the patterns of the structure, or

scrapture, one can discern the motif of Adinkra, a type of cotton cloth woven by the Akan people of southern Ghana. The decorative patterns of Adinkra are known to be stamped designs. The stamps, which are made from gourds, narrate historical events, refer to cosmology, or dictate aphorism.

Used generally in religious ceremonies such as funeral, the [Adinkra patterns] are communal, traditional, and noted in everyday life. Impressed by the form and the social meaning of these symbols, Anatsui attended the Adinkra workshop for five years, learning techniques and the meaning of the symbols.²⁵

As for the structure of textile composition, El Anatsui's scrapture refers to Kente cloth, another representative craft of the Akan people. Shôichirô Takezawa also remarks, "Kente cloth is made by unraveling the threads of silk cloth brought into Africa as a trade good by the Europeans and weaving it together with local cotton thread to produce a delicate and luxurious fabric."²⁶ It is known that the economic base of the Asante kingdom was the gold and slave trade with England and Holland, while local economic activities were dominated by northern Muslim merchants, who are said to have monopolized the weaving and selling of the cloth. We see the reality of the local commercial transaction literally repeated and woven in the textual composition of the Kente cloth. Kente cloth was a faithful scale model of the reality of the economic structure (and reality itself).

These observations provided by cultural anthropology allow us to understand the origins of El Anatsui's scrapture. On the one hand, the patterns of the metal tapestry remind us of Adinkra, with which the artist was familiar, and which was used to convey African symbols of which Muslims would not make use. On the other hand, we see with some astonishment that the

very textile structure of the scrapture, i.e. the integration of scrap metals into a woven structure, is also identical to the composing principle of the Kente cloth. El Anatsui simply replaced the silk cloth fragments with such materials as empty beer cans, the lids of liquor bottles, or aluminum containers. Instead of cotton thread, he used the copper cord at his disposal. Scrapture thus turns out to be a legitimate heir of the local practice of fabricating the Kente cloth; its substitute and successor in the age of global mass consumption.

The artist himself is keenly conscious of this substitution. He intentionally tries to weave in (instead of build in) the relationship that Africa entertains with the West. The resulting scrapture reveals itself as a miniaturized synecdoche of the world economic structure, which provides the western coast of Africa with all sorts of scraps, including metal junk and plastic garbage. To return to Sekine Nobuo's *Topology-Earth*, one can now understand what happened in the last 40 years. Sekine's *Topology Earth* metaphorically pointed out the inequality and contrast between the under-developed countries and the industrial countries. The piece of earthwork consisted of a cylindrical hole dug from the ground and a tower made from the evacuated earth, positioned next to the hole, in the exact shape and size of the hole. The contrast between the vacant hole of poverty and the towering skyscrapers of prosperity was a metaphor for the world at the end of 1960s.

Now, with El Anatsui, 40 years later, the relationship between what used to be the providers of natural resources and the Western consumers who made a profit off of them, has drastically changed with the globalization of the world economy.²⁷ The African continent has also become a garbage dump, no less than the industrialized countries themselves. But, Africa is no longer a passive victim of exploitation. By its alchemical magic of transforming metal

scraps into art pieces, scrupture becomes a living metaphor of the recycling process of worldwide material circulation.

By exporting scrupture to the Western art market, El Anatsui radically modifies the relation between Africa and the West. An aesthetic structural orchestration made of metal scrap now proudly declares itself as a trademark, reunifying in its own account the two continents of Africa and Europe. Hisashi Matsumoto notes that El Anatsui “has spoken of how the act of linking bottle caps and labels into a single textile sheet is an act of fusing the situation of the two different continents together in a state of uncertainty.”²⁸ His scrupture literally weaves fragments of the European end product into the African structure and unites the two in a direction opposite from the traditional pattern of the Western consumption of African resources.

THE AMORPHOUS MUTABILITY AND MALLEABILITY OF IRON TEXTILES

Textiles do not have their own stable form. They are transformable, elastic, and extensive. As Bisi Silva wisely points out, their propriety consists in their mutability and malleability.²⁹ The Western modernist creed has long requested that the artistic expression be crystallized into a solid form that should be eternalized in a stable material (like bronze or marble), which is resistant to decay and decomposition. The cloth with an unstable form and ever-changing silhouette has been doomed to “femininity,” because of its apparent febleness. Textile pieces have long been indexed as lesser art forms and qualified as handicrafts, belonging to the category of applied art, and to be exhibited as arts and crafts. However, such male-dominated criteria, combined with Western prejudices, have been questioned in the last several decades.³⁰

The transformability and mutability of textiles and their supple and flexible adaptability to the

outer circumstances have gained positive acclaim in the post-industrial era. The sophistication of gender theories has contributed to the rehabilitation of cloth as a generating matrix. Supplementing the masculine principle and softly enveloping its rigid shortcomings, cloth is capable of neutralizing the aggressiveness of male domination. Venus, the divinity of love, shows her ability to disarm Mars, the divinity of War; she knows how to treat and pacify him without any conflict. The pliant nature of cloth is apt to taking heterogeneous elements into its own texture and it fosters their potentiality with care, as if nursing a tiny animal or a human baby by covering it with a towel.

El Anatsui’s scrupture also makes particular use of this flexibility of covering, as his scrupture is a textile made of hard, but malleable, metals. The masculine vocabulary of metal fragments is now integrated into a feminine grammar of textile weaving. By this subtle shift and combination, El Anatsui shows another theoretical reach of deconstructing the heretofore-dominant masculine value judgment inherent in Western fine art. By transgressing the frontier that has separated the domain of textiles from that of metals, El Anatsui successfully revealed one potential field, which has been concealed and suffocated by Western Modernism.³¹

Here, in the first decades of the twenty-first century, we keenly feel that the Western modernist creed of the past century has become obsolete and anachronistic. We have also come to recognize how oppressive Western Modernism was. Indeed, it was founded on the exploitation of non-Western resources and it arrogantly imposed its own criteria to judge non-Western things, suppressing and excluding non-Western values.³² The scrupture project, combining metal and textile, has crossed over the limit of the conventional genre framework of twentieth-

century Modernism.

It seems as if the medieval coat of mail has overgrown into El Anatsui's scapture by taking nourishment from the new recycled resources provided by today's massive commodity consumption. Its amorphous expansion and infinite proliferation serve as an ironic metaphor for the hypertrophy of the world economy. So long as the material is provided, it can theoretically continue to propagate without limit. Scapture assembles the resentment of the quantity of thrown-away metallic garbage. Cans or tins at the Dream Island in Tokyo Bay or at the Smoky Mountain in the outskirts of Manila, have certainly experienced similar remorse and have charged their materiality with a sentiment of pity and chagrin. By uniting such a feeling of the sorrow of wasted objects, scapture sublimates their potential into an intensive and collective artistic expression.

The iron coat constituting scapture is flat, like a piece of cloth, but each of the tapestries is composed of thousands of tiny metallic pieces, which retain their own three-dimensional structure. Three-dimensional elements are meticulously stitched into a two-dimensional flat structure.³³ Because of this specificity, scapture is ready to constantly change its physiognomy. Its surface swells or sinks, undulates and folds on itself, according to the façade of the building on which it is hung and exposed. The composing metal fragments also cast reflecting light in ever-changing directions, in proportion to the lighting conditions and oscillations caused by the wind. Sometimes it looks as if it has swelled by virtue of its virtual energy, just like a sail that swells with the wind.³⁴

Here lies the secret that promises scapture a persuasive power of expression. At the Venice Biennale, in the Arsenale as well as in the Palazzo Fonrtuny in 2007, or at an exhibition at the Alte

Nationalgalerie in Berlin in 2010, El Anatsui's scapture has shown its majestic and noble charm, as witnessed by Tsutomu Mizusawa.³⁵ Art critics often express their amazement at the overwhelming splendiddness of the realized piece of work. Their amazement comes from the knowledge that the tapestry is in fact made of a rag-like wrapping, composed of re-used everyday metallic items. And yet, it seems that professional art critics tend to overlook the plain fact that the metal work of scapture is a kind of secretion of the reality of today's world economy; it is nothing but a metaphorical wrapping sheet spreading over the surface of the earth, the natural resources of which were what made the scapture.

REVIVAL OF *SARTOR RESARTUS*

Almost 180 years ago, Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) wrote *Sartor Resartus*. In it, he proclaimed that the garment covering the naked body is equivalent to the original sin of mankind.³⁶ Garment is the metaphor of culture, a surplus that Homo sapiens have to put on, because they can no longer live within the limits of their genetic information. The cloth in Thomas Carlyle is what Richard Dawkins calls *mene*, which covers and supplements the insufficiency of *gene*.³⁷ Culture is nothing other than the means of transmitting information that overflows the limit of genetic information.³⁸ Horrifyingly enough, Carlyle did not forget to add that clothes cannot precisely fit the body, as they would prevent the body from behaving smoothly. One should wear more or less loose-fitting baggy clothes, so as to assure freedom in behavior. In other words, there is always a gap between the outfit and the body; hence culture inevitably constitutes a trouble-making hindrance.

Carlyle did perceive that Homo sapiens are abnormal in the sense that they cannot help wearing an excessive epidermis of the clothes

of culture; people misleadingly takes these unessential and additional excretions as proof of man's inner spirituality. Homo sapiens live on the illusion that culture constitutes the essence of humanity; they believe in God, truth, or progress (in Marxism), despite the fact that all these ideas are secondary products of culture. This is the destiny of the human being, contaminated by culture, *homeo dement* by definition, because of its acquisition of language.

Cloth or clothes thus represent mankind as a cursed existence. El Anatsui's scrupture is a screen to project the reality of this cursed species (*espèce maudite*) at the present state of world history. This screen is neither white nor transparent; it is inscribed by the countless signs and marks of the merchandise that came all the way to the Nigerian coast through commercial distribution, up to Nsukka, facing the Niger River, where the artist is now working. The metallic fabric is shining triumphantly, with all the colors with which its composing fragments are painted.

What does the cloth shining with metallic glare mean? We have observed that cloth is deprived of its own autonomous plastic form. By covering something other than itself, cloth presides over form, decorates it, and embellishes the naked body with a fallacious "essence," according to Thomas Carlyle. However, when cloth is woven with metal, it all of a sudden stands up on its own will, against gravity. El Anatsui's *Drainpipes* (2010) or *Peaks* (2010) are such examples (peak and bottom are the two extreme limits that Nobuo Sekine's *Topology-Earth* has indicated). The metal scraps gain their own three-dimensional form and structure. And yet, the resultant scrupture does not search for an eternally fixed form. As the titles *Gravity and Grace* (2010) or *Fresh and Fading Memories* (2007) suggest, it slowly adapts itself under the planet's gravity. When it is hung, it gradually elongates, because of

its own mass. When composing a mount on the ground, it slowly lowers its peak and ultimately returns to the ground level (just as Sekine's work disappeared after the exhibition, by returning into the hole out of which it was dug). And, once the mission is accomplished, it is folded or furled up like a cloth and makes its departure to the next destination.³⁹

Is it too hazardous to recall the case of the *Hiroshima Mural* by Maruki Iri and Toshiko?⁴⁰ This famous series of huge scenes of atomic bombs literally made a world tour, thanks to its foldable and lightweight structure (water-resistant Chinese ink painted on tough Japanese paper), allowing tens and hundreds of millions of people to contemplate in front of them. Indeed, it was enough to furl and wrap the paintings, like carpets, to transport them to whatever destination, with ease. Similarly, El Anatsui's scrupture is gaining the reputation of a hanging scroll that circulates all over the world as an apocalypse of the twenty-first century. It no longer narrates the cruel experience of atomic bombing; instead of transmitting the depicted subject-matter, the scrupture lets its composing and stitched metal fragments speak of their own origin and destiny. Intensively compiling contemporary consumer culture, the scrupture thus triumphantly substitutes for the modern Holy Scripture, emanating magnificence of its own and keeping viewers in silent rapture.⁴¹

NOTES

- 1 Shigemi Inaga, "L'impossible avant-garde au Japon," in *Transcultura, Connaissance et réciprocité*, ed. Alain le Pichon (Louvain: Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 1988), 197–207; English translation: Shigemi Inaga, "The Impossible Avant-garde in Japan: Does the Avant-Garde Exist in the Third World? A Borderline Case of Misunderstanding in

- Aesthetic Intercultural Exchange,” trans. Margaret Flinn, *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 41 (1993): 67–75. In this article, I develop a theoretical reflection on the Pompidou exhibition. See also Shigemi Inaga, “L’invisible avant-garde au Japon, essai d’une redéfinition,” *L’Écrit-voir* 10 (1988): 38–61; which provides an historical overview of the question in connection with the exhibition.
- 2 Jean-Hubert Martin, “Who is Afraid of Redskins, the Yellow Peril and Black Power,” in *Memory and Oblivion, Proceedings of the XXIXth International Congress of the History of Art*, ed. Wessel Reinink, Jeroen Stumpel (Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 961–964.
 - 3 Kenji Yoshida, “Exhibition and Publication as an ‘Event’: The Primitivism in 20th Century Art;” and William Rubin, “A Reply to the Afterwords by Kenji Yoshida in the Japanese edition;” both of which are included in the Japanese translation of William Rubin, ed., *Primitivism in 20th Century Art* (Kyoto: Tnakōsha, 1995). My critical overview of the issue is Shigemi Inaga, “Is Art History globalizable? A Critical Commentary from a Far Eastern View,” in *Is Art History Global?*, ed. James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2006), 249–279.
 - 4 For the critical reexamination of essentialism in Japanese aesthetics, see Shigemi Inaga, “Images changeants de l’art japonais: Depuis la vue impressionnistes du Japon à la controverse de l’esthétique orientale (1860–1940),” *JTLA, Journal of the Faculty of Letters, The University of Tokyo, Aesthetics* 29/30 (2004/2005): 73–93.
 - 5 Yukiya Kawaguchi, “Africa in the Works of El Anatsui: Locating a Site Where Multiple Narratives can Coexist,” in *A Fateful Journey: Africa in the Works of El Anatsui*, ed. Yukiya Kawaguchi (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shimbun and the Japan Association of Art Museums, 2010), 23–24.
 - 6 Bisi Silva, “The Politics of Re/Presenting: Within and Without,” in Kawaguchi, *A Fateful Journey*, 203; Charles Gore, “El Anatsui and His Art Worlds,” in Kawaguchi, *A Fateful Journey*, 181. On Eco Art, see Shōichirō Takezawa, “El Anatsui: Working between History and Art,” in Kawaguchi, *A Fateful Journey*, 196.
 - 7 Tomoko Ishiguro, ed., *One-mat Study of Takeshiro Matsuura, 19th Century Explorer* (Tokyo: Innax Booklet, 2010).
 - 8 Arata Isozaki, “oto, Rubin (are included in the “oto, Rubin (are included in the ‘Japan-ness’ in *Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); Shigemi Inaga, “La Vie transitoire des formes: ou l’instant qui prend de la patine, le Sanctuaire d’Ise vu depuis la France” (paper presented at the Centre culturel du Japon à Paris, France, 14 February 2009).
 - 9 See the Kaii-Yōkai Denshō Database, which compiles stories of yōkai and mysteries collected from Japanese folklore, published by International Research Center for Japanese Studies. The prototype was created on March 19, 2002, and the first proper version was released on 20 June 2002. Its supervisor is Kazuhiko Komatsu, a Japanese folklorist who is specialist on *yōkai*.
 - 10 Aki Yamakawa, “Hidden Memories: Two Histories Told by Kasaya,” trans. Monica Bethe, in *Transmitting Robes, Linking Mind: The World of Buddhist Kaşāya* (Kyoto: Kyoto National Museum, 2010), iv–xi.
 - 11 On the spiritual migration, see Takezawa, “El Anatsui,” 196. On the *Artempo* exhibition, see Tsutomu Mizusawa, “Enthroning the Void,” in Kawaguchi, *A Fateful Journey*, 49.
 - 12 Shigemi Inaga, “La naissance de la médiance à l’état embryonnaire ou l’origine de l’écoumène entre utérus et fœtus,” *Ebisu, études japonaises* 40/41 (2008/2009): 189–204.
 - 13 On the ontological specificities of Western sculpture and its limit, see Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbachie, “El Anatsui’s Intercultural Aesthetics and the Representation of Africa in Global Context,” in Kawaguchi, *A Fateful Journey*, 40; and Shigemi Inaga, “Spirits emanating from Objecthood; Or the Destiny of the In-formed materiality,” in *Monokeiro*, ed. Monogaku, Kankaku Kachi Kenkyukai Art Bunkakai (Tokyo: Bigaku Shuppan, 2010), 64–82.
 - 14 The author owes the coining of the term “scapture” to discussions with Shōichirō Takezawa

- and Yukiya Kawaguchi. However, it turns out that the term has already been invented by a Japanese sculptor, Naomichi Kimura (1923-1972), as early as 1968. Kimura made his own “scraptures” by recycling iron scraps for his statues. See “Scrapture Exhibition,” *Pacific Bridge* 12:7 (1968). I owe this information to Mr. Taku Shibuya, curator of the Saitama Prefectural Museum of Art. See also, *Art and Play, Kimura Naomichi* (Saitama: The Museum of Modern Art, 2006). I mentioned the fact in a public lecture I gave at the Museum on 21 August 2011, in a symposium, *Representation of Other Cultures and Politics of Exhibiting Space*, held in conjunction with El Anatsui’s solo exhibition.
- ¹⁵ Koji Sato Koji and Rika Yamashita, eds, *Bricolage Art Now* (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2005).
- ¹⁶ Ogbechie, “El Anatsui’s Intercultural Aesthetics,” 39.
- ¹⁷ Susan Vogel, dir., *Fold Crumple Crush: The Art of El Anatsui* (Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2011), DVD.
- ¹⁸ Reiko Tomii, “‘International Contemporaneity’ in the 1960s: Discoursing on Art in Japan and Beyond,” *Japan Review* 21 (2009): 149–182. My own interpretation, presented here, is inspired by Tomii’s paper, which was originally presented at the International Congress of Art History, Melbourne, Australia, 2008.
- ¹⁹ The idea of “connecting” and “linking” is elaborated in the Buddhist context. See Shigemi Inaga, “Examining the Modern and Contemporary Art History through the Huayan Thought” (paper presented at the Second International Colloquium on Huayan Thought, Belesbat, France, 24 July 2008). The English text will be published as “Kegon/Huayan View of Contemporary East Asian Art: A Methodological Proposal;” the Japanese text is published in *Aida* 152 (2008): 21–27; 153 (2008): 25–35; 154 (2008): 12–20; and the Korean translation is published in Hon Sonpyo, ed., *Modern and Modernity in East Asian Art* (Seoul: Hak Gojae, 2009), 219–250.
- ²⁰ Shigemi Inaga, “To be a Japanese artist in the so-called **postmodern** era,” *Third Text* 9:33 (1995/1996): 17–24.
- ²¹ Here resides the author’s criticism of a certain tendency in feminist art history: Shigemi Inaga, “A Commentary on Ayako Kano’s Review of The Feminist Art History Debate,” *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 19 (2007): 175–180.
- ²² In this context, one may refer to Miriam Schapiro’s work from the 1970s onwards, which consists primarily of collages assembled from fabrics, called “femmages.” See Miriam Schapiro and Melissa Meyer, “Waste Not Want Not: An Inquiry into What Women Saved and Assembled—Femmeage,” in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, eds Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 315–330. “Femmeage” consists of such activities as collage, assemblage, découpage, or montage practiced by women using “traditional women’s techniques—sewing, piercing, hooking, cutting, appliquéeing, cooking and the like.” However, in the West African context, textile weaving is a male profession and does not fall into the Western category of “femininity.”
- ²³ Shigemi Inaga, “La Prise de position critique des arts et métiers traditionnels dans le Japon d’aujourd’hui: le cas du tissage de la soie chez Kôhō Tatsumura” (paper presented at the Maison de la Culture du Japon, Paris, 25 May 2004). The text is published in “Report for the Grant-in-aide,” in *Tradition and renovation in Arts and Crafts*, ed. Shigemi Inaga (report presented to the Ministry of Education of Japan, not diffused, 2007), 80–86. In the creation of Nishiki silk textiles, the weaver is male and, in the process, he may employ more than 60 craftsmen of different techniques. The categories of feminine and masculine are not relevant to collective creation.
- ²⁴ The position of non-Western arts and crafts vis-à-vis Western high art is examined in detail by taking up the ceramic work of Kazuo Yagi. See Shigemi Inaga, “Les Taces d’une blessure créatrice: Yagi Kazuo entre la tradition japonaise et l’avant-garde occidentale,” *Japan Review* 19 (2007): 133–160.
- ²⁵ Takezawa, “El Anatsui,” 193.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 194. Takezawa indicates that “Adinkra” means “farewell,” suggesting linkage as well as

departure in human life. This theme itself is an important factor constituting El Anatsui's metal work of sculpture.

²⁷ Elsewhere I have already sketched the economic conditions of art creation. See Shigemi Inaga, "Either Useful or Useless: reviving Inventiveness," in *Art for Sale, Intimacy between Aesthetics and Economy* (Fukuoka: Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art, 2003), 13–19.

²⁸ Hisashi Matsumoto, "Life in Present-Day Africa: The Contemporaneity of Nigerian Culture," in Kawaguchi, *A Fateful Journey*, 190.

²⁹ Silva, "The Politics of Re/Presenting," 202–203.

³⁰ For an early example, see for instance Patricia Mainardi, "Quilts: The Great American Art," in Broude and Garrard, *Feminism and Art History*, 330–346.

³¹ Metal sculpture has another specificity: when extended, folded, or shaping up a form, the metal sculpture emanates sound. It serves as an unknown musical instrument. The sound dimension is rarely explored in visual art, revealing one more repression of Western Modernity, which does not allow confusions between artistic genres, except for collaborations of individual artists, each of whom have specific fields of activity, i.e. music, art, architecture, dance, etc.

³² The same is true with academic disciplines. See Shigemi Inaga, "Philosophia, Ethica and Aesthetica in the Far-Eastern Cultural Sphere: Reception of Western Ideas and Reactions to the Western Cultural Hegemony" (paper presented at the conference "Cultures of Knowledge," Institut français de Pondichéry, India, 20 October 2005).

³³ Susan Vogel meticulously points out that the hinges that connect the metal pieces have several different syntaxes, which have been developed by the artist in the process of his creation. The vocabulary to designate different types of hinges has been developed according to the aesthetic nature and purpose of the metal work, and for the sake of folding, elasticity, and other reasons. Furthermore, some of the earlier techniques could not survive in the process of its evolution. See Vogel, *Fold Crumple Crush*.

³⁴ This effect of oscillation and the cricking sound are efficiently demonstrated in the exhibition at the National Museum of Ethnology, with the help of an artificial wind introduced by the ventilation fans.

³⁵ Tsutomu, "Enthroning the Void," 49–50.

³⁶ Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh* (The Project Gutenberg EBook, 2008 [1831]), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1051/1051-h/1051-h.htm>; see especially, chapter V: "The World of Clothes."

³⁷ Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

³⁸ Shigemi Inaga, ed., *Traditional Japanese Arts and Crafts: A Reconsideration from Inside and Outside Kyoto* (Kyoto: Shinbunkaku Shuppan, 2007), 817–820.

³⁹ Sculpture's capacity for transformation seems to reflect and concretize, to some extent, the versatility of the artist himself, who is capable of modifying the explanation of his own creation according to the circumstances in which he is interviewed. Just as the myth is orally articulated and transmitted differently each time, showing its flexibility as a living creature, El Anatsui's narrative, as well as his sculpture, would never be fixed in a petrified form. Western philology has tried hard to petrify the African myths in definitive written versions. However, this desire for fixation is tantamount to killing the living myth, so as to enshrine its immobilized and dead body in the storage of a museum or library. By nature, El Anatsui's sculpture is made against this Western will for collection, as it is made of the scraps that have been cast out of the possible specimen to be incorporated for conservation's sake.

⁴⁰ John Junkerman and John W. Dower, *Hiroshima Murals: The Art of Iri Maruki and Toshi Maruki* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1985). One may also recall the One-Foot Movement, organized in Japan in the 1970s, so as to purchase the documentary films of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombs, which were shot by the occupying American army. Each participant purchased one foot of film and, thanks to this collaborative citizen movement, the public

projection of the returned film was realized. In the same way, it may be interesting that each world citizen prepares a piece of scapture similar to the one conceived by El Anatsui. By donating the small, privately fabricated piece of the scapture (outcome of the domestic consumption of each of the individual household) to the artist, and by connecting them, the whole of humanity will be able to realize (at least in imagination) a huge tapestry of the scapture consisting of all the used metals consumed by all of humankind. The result will amount to a real scale duplication of the Earth itself, as exploited by human beings.

- ⁴¹ One may also put forward the bold hypothesis that El Anatsui's scapture may be located as a synthesis of the *Wrapping* project of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, as well as the *Can Containing the Universe* conceived by Gen'pei Akasegawa (1963). By covering architectural edifices, El Anatsui shows the reality of the twenty-first century: the surface of the planet earth is covered by the junk of consumer commodities. It is no use wrapping the Pont-Neuf or Reichstag with a newly selected huge cloth, as the scraps are already and always everywhere. Akasegawa, in his turn, has already realized the clever re-utilization of a used can. By opening the lid and emptying the content, he striped off the label and reprinted it in the inside of the can, and then re-sealed it. Thus, he declared having successfully put the whole universe into a tiny can, except for a 90 cc portion of air, which still remains "outside" of the can. Here is the limit of minimal and conceptual art, realized at the lowest price imaginable. With this tricky inside-out operation, Akasegawa has put into reality what Christo and Jeanne-Claude never could have realized, and this by virtue of the used scrap of a container can. By combining these two features, El Anatsui insightfully shows that the open-end capacity for multiplication, as well as the infinite potentiality of spreading, which are inherent in his scapture, literally duplicates the hypertrophy and megalomaniacal nature of the current world consumption economy. This is why the recycling embellishment of the used metals by scapture

stands for the apocalyptic scripture of the twenty-first century, in which the traces and fragments of the human exploitation of nature are meticulously inscribed and transcribed.