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The Space Between: Exploring Shigeko Kubota's SoHo SoAp/ Rain Damage and Yoko Ono's Sky TV in Third Space

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The Space Between: Exploring Shigeo Kubota's *SoHo SoAp/ Rain Damage* and Yoko Ono's
Sky TV in Third Space

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in Art History

by

Jaimie Chanmi Joo

Thesis Committee:
Professor Bert Winther-Tamaki, Chair
Professor Roberta Wue
Professor Roland Betancourt

2019

DEDICATION

To

My Parents

I am forever indebted to your love, support, humor, and kindness.

I do not know what I did in any of my past lives to deserve you both as my parents. My best guess is that I saved a country; that's the only thing that makes sense.

Thank you for everything.

And

To my friends

I am so grateful that you all kept me rooted throughout this project.

I count my blessings every day that our lives intersected the ways they have.

Thank you for all of our adventures. Here's to many more.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Space Between: Exploring Shigeo Kubota's *SoHo SoAp/ Rain Damage* and Yoko Ono's *Sky TV* in Third Space

By

Jaimie Chanmi Joo

Master of Arts in Art History

University of California, Irvine, 2019

Professor Bert Winther-Tamaki, Chair

Shigeo Kubota and Yoko Ono are two Japanese diasporic artists that use video art to engage with the natural world. Kubota's *Soho SoAp/Rain Damage* (1985) and Ono's *Sky TV* (1966) utilize elemental properties to create video landscapes that derive from both the topographical earth as well as their personal narratives. Using third space theory and the third mind construct, I examine the ways in which these transnational artists embrace nature in order to create transcendent spaces within their respective artworks.

I. Introduction: Locating *Sky TV* and *SoHo SoAp/ Rain Damage* in Third Space Theory

The construction of nature as art offers a new way of understanding and engaging with the world around us; furthermore, the production of nature in video art intersects the digital world with the physical world. In 1966, Yoko Ono created *Sky TV*, a closed circuit video that displays a live feed of the sky. In 1985, Shigeo Kubota produced *SoHo SoAp/Rain Damage*, which chronicled her experiences with her flooded studio. Both artists captured deeply personal moments through the aestheticization of nature. Their work does not merely display or mimic nature, but rather, creates a separate version of the natural world altogether. These natural worlds that Kubota and Ono produce are deeply humanistic and ultimately offer a space of transcendence. In thinking about the production of the natural environments that these artists created, one questions the role our tangible, literal world plays in producing such artwork. Additionally, it leads us to acknowledge how differently we engage with the environments created by these respective artworks versus the topographical world. Thus such video art exhibits a sort of hybridity; not only do *Sky TV* and *SoHo SoAp/Rain Damage* create their own unique environmental space, but as video art they very much function in our real, topographical world. In thinking about the meaning of such spaces, Ono and Kubota's work proposes itself as a third space not only because the two are diasporic Japanese artists operating within two different cultures, but also because the two create landscapes as productions through the medium of video art.

The origin of the term "third space" comes from critical theorist Homi Bhabha's landmark book, *The Location of Culture* (1994), a collection of essays which describe cultural hybridity. Bhabha defines *third space* as the "enunciation of cultural difference" which

“problematizes the binary division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address.”¹ As a hallmark of postcolonial studies, Bhabha emphasizes the importance of hybridity within individuals: “the ‘inter’ - the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the inbetween space - that carries the burden of the meaning of culture.”² For urban theorist Edward Soja, third space is where “everything comes together”-- or “the space where all places are, capable of being seen from every angle, each standing clear; but also a secret and conjectured object, filled with illusions and allusions, a space that is common to all of us yet never able to be completely seen and understood, an ‘unimaginable universe[.]’”³ In Soja’s description, third space becomes explicitly more visual. If Bhabha's hybridity relies on binaries, Soja instead accounts for a plethora of variables; this is also due in part because Soja sourced his work heavily from Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre and the “conceptual triad” from his text *The Production of Text* (1974). The conceptual triad consists of the physical (“the nature, the Cosmos”), the mental (“the logical and formal abstractions”), and the social (“the space of social practice”).⁴ Thus, third space is where reconciliation between cultural binaries become possible.

Despite subtle nuances in the respective definitions as given by both Bhabha and Soja, the concept of third space theory could ultimately be deduced as a means of understanding cultural space and identity as a complex product of hybridities, rather than limiting such ideas to originate and be shaped by a singular entity. For example, an individual (specifically one affected both physically and culturally by diaspora) and their cultural identity is comprised of

¹ Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Brantford, Ont.: W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library, 2012. 35

² Ibid. 56

³ Ibid.

⁴ Lefebvre, Henri, and Donald Nicholson-Smith. *The production of space*. Vol. 142. Blackwell: Oxford, 1991. 11-12.

many different aspects from multiple cultures, rather than just being defined with a totality by one culture. As two diasporic Japanese women, Kubota and Ono exist within this theoretical third space, rather than operating between binaries. There is not one individual cultural identity that can claim Kubota or Ono with absolute totality; the two artists hold multiple cultural identities because of their migrations within the world. This is further exemplified in both *SoHo SoAp/Rain Damage* and *Sky TV*; the former, as the piece documents a part of Kubota's life in North America, and the latter because the sky becomes a sentimental constant in Ono's life regardless of her geographic location.

Within the field of visual culture, however, the concept of "third space" has a myriad of interpretations. For example, media artist Randall Packer has used the term to describe a phenomena in digital art that describes the possibilities that technology has allowed for users and engagement. Rather than involving any sort of postcolonial practice, Packer's definition of "third space" is instead a digital space that is created not only by the existence of the physical world, but also the advent of the digital world. Thus, the "fusion" of these two worlds is what precisely creates the "third space" which can then be "inhabited by remote users simultaneously or asynchronously."⁵ Packer's definition suggests that third space is the interlocutor between the physical world and the digital world. Like the postcolonial definition, Packer's third space emphasizes its own sort of hybridity, however one that forces humanity into a sort of monolith. Packer is not interested in culture so much as the way people (of past, present, and future) are able to engage and occupy a space that is tangible because of the creation of the media world. The ways in which Bhaba and Soja describe and define third space is much more conceptual and

⁵ Packer, Randall. "Third Space Place of Other." Reportage from the Aesthetic Edge. January 15, 2017. Accessed February/March, 2019. <https://randallpacker.com/third-space-place/>.

theoretical in nature-- Packer proposes an environment where a more literal sense of engagement is possible, especially because of the advent of a media-based era.

A different concept in the visual art world that is similar to that of third space theory is that of the third mind. In 2009, the Solomon R. Guggenheim art museum in New York City held an exhibit titled *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989*. The exhibition set to explore how Asian art, literature, and philosophy transformed the American psyche, and how such cultural exchange was expressed within American art and visual culture. Per the exhibition's curator, Alexandra Munroe, "[t]he creative and historical phenomenon of how ideas were mediated, recombined, and rearranged between the shifting mirages of East and West is what we call "the third mind."⁶ Similarly to Bhaba and Soja, the third mind brings forth focus to humanistic and cultural exchange, but differs in that the third mind operates within the "East" and "West" binary. Hybridity is then extracted from a more direct form of cultural exchange with visual art as product, rather than individual identity. Thus, whilst still meditating on the relationship between two topographic regions, the concept of "third mind" offers an answer to how we might examine the visual culture that is produced as a result of exchange between the "East" and the "West."

The exhibition itself featured many prominent artists of Asian ethnicity, including Nam June Paik, Isamu Noguchi, Yun Gee, and Yayoi Kusama. Both Shigeo Kubota and Yoko Ono were featured in the exhibition, which is fitting because the two artists precisely exemplify the "third mind"; the two artists were born in Japan with transnational careers. Additionally, the two artists were members of *Fluxus*, a community of international artists experimenting with a plethora of different mediums. The trajectories of their careers express the very sort of global

⁶ Munroe, Alexandra, and Ikuyo Nakagawa. *The Third Mind American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989*. New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2009. 26

exchange that Munroe highlights. Again, rather than working between binaries, Kubota and Ono are active contributors to the historical and cultural process that is “the third mind.”

Packer and Munroe present a form of third space that can be aesthetically expressed through visual culture, and both are particularly beneficial as ways for us to think specifically about Ono and Kubota’s artwork. Conversely, Bhaba and Soja’s definitions of thirdspace are more so a means of understanding social culture in a postcolonial world. In this essay, I will explore the ways in which Shigeeko Kubota’s *SoHo SoAp/Rain Damage* and Yoko Ono’s *Sky TV* actively create the natural world as a production of third space through the medium of video art. The environmental worlds that are made within their video art speak to the hybridity of both natural and digital landscapes as well as the hybridity of two diasporic Japanese women who have prolific artistic careers that have expanded globally.

Although third space is certainly not the only interpretation applicable to these artists and artworks, I implore its utility when considering the historical narrative of approaching the “East and “West” as oppositional binaries of one another. In direct reference to Shigeeko Kubota’s work, art historian John Hanhardt has stated that the “reflecting and bending” in her video imagery “transform[s] [the video] itself and in the process transform[s] our relationship to it and plac[es] video as the art of our time and our cultures East and West.”⁷ Hanhardt implies that Kubota’s video art is a means of understanding the changing relationship between the topographical binary that is the “East” and “West.” However, as evidenced by Munroe, these two geographical regions are not a dichotomy. Defining Kubota’s work (and by extension, Ono’s work) through this distinct “East” and “West” binary is overly simplistic of the reality of cultural exchange. To claim that video could “transform” the relationship between “East” and “West”

⁷ Hanhardt, John G. “Video Transformations.” *Shigeeko Kubota/Taka Imura: New Video*. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1979.

suggests that the two regions are then completely oppositional cultural bodies, rather than two geographical regions with an extensive history of cultural exchange. Ultimately, acknowledging the third space or the third mind allows us to understand these artworks as products of exchange and transmission.

Furthermore, understanding these respective artworks as a product of third space allows viewers to more deeply engage with the power in bringing to the forefront the properties and qualities of a singular earth. Although both artworks maintain a deeply personal narrative, the creation of earthen properties via video art speaks to the unifying capacity of nature. Thus, both artworks inhabit a sort of third space that derives from both the natural world and the unique lives of the artists. And through such hybridity, similar to the same exchange that is described in third space discourse, the world created in *Sky TV* and *SoHo SoAp/ Rain Damage* is selectively transcendent of the topographical world through its hybrid nature.

II. Transcendence in the Rain and in the Sky: Examining *SoHo SoAp/Rain Damage* and *Sky TV*

The similarities between Shigeko Kubota and Yoko Ono extend beyond their inclusion in the *Third Mind* exhibition. They were contemporaries and they also experienced critical acclaim for their artwork almost simultaneously. 1965 was a defining year for both Ono and Kubota, as it was when their performance pieces, *Cut Piece* and *Vagina Painting* debuted in the United States-- both of which were monumental works in their respective careers. In *Cut Piece*, Ono sits on stage with only scissors in front of her. She invites audience members to take the scissors and cut off pieces of the clothes she is wearing-- while she sits silently, unmoving. Through audience

participation, Ono explores the female body and its passive and vulnerable positioning.⁸ Like *Cut Piece*, *Vagina Painting* brings the female body to the forefront. In *Vagina Painting*, Kubota situates a paintbrush between her legs and made markings on white paper.

Both Kubota and Ono were also active participants in the *Fluxus* group. Fluxus was comprised of a group of artists that participated in highly experimental art. Artist George Maciunas founded Fluxus. Maciunas, with whom both Yoko Ono and Shigeko Kubota had strong ties, stated in his 1963 manifesto that the intent of Fluxus was to “purge the world of dead art,...abstract art,... [and] illusionistic art” as well as to rid the world of “bourgeois sickness.”⁹ In explaining *Fluxus* to Ono in July 1961, Maciunas read her the dictionary definition of fluxus, focusing on its meaning of change or flow; “a continuous moving or passing, as of a flowing stream; copious flow, the setting of the tide towards the shore.”¹⁰ Maciunas derived such definition with focus on the description of fluidity, per his own interest in bodily anatomy and fluid. However, Ono and Kubota would both tap into different notions of fluidity via their artworks. Maciunas’s attraction and interest in fluidity is not unfounded, as fluidity speaks innately to the elemental properties of water itself. In the Chinese philosophical tradition of Daoism, water is emblematic of the *dao* itself. Water is not only “flexible in form and embracing in scope,” but the element also has the “extreme power for self-transformation and transformation of its resistant opponents.”¹¹ For Kubota especially, as water is frequently featured within her later artwork.

⁸ Re.act.feminism. Re.act.feminism - a Performing Archive. January 10, 2012. Accessed March/April, 2019. [http://www.reactfeminism.org/entry.php?l=lb&id=121&e=.](http://www.reactfeminism.org/entry.php?l=lb&id=121&e=)

⁹ Barr, Jim, Barr, Mary, and Fluxus. Fluxus. Dunedin, New Zealand: Fluxus Contemporary Jewellery, 1992.

¹⁰ Kellein, Thomas. *Fluxus*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1995. 120.

¹¹ Cheng, Chung-ying. "Chinese philosophy and symbolic reference." *Philosophy East and West* 27, no. 3 (1977): 317.

Additionally, Fluxus was very much a global network, bringing together artists from the United States, Europe, and Asia; Fluxus had “no respect for either geographical or cultural distances.”¹² As referenced earlier, Kubota and Ono’s involvement in the group exemplified their role within the third mind construct. Fluxus was a point of direct interaction for artists all over the world, fostering a connection between intellectual currents on a global scale. For Maciunas, Fluxus’s philosophy promoted art as an everyday experience, available to everyone and produced by anyone.¹³ Kubota was considerably more involved in the group, so much so that Maciunas had dubbed her the “Vice President of Fluxus,” speaking to her heavy involvement within the group.¹⁴ Both the concept of fluidity that Fluxus’s name was derived from, as well its international reach provides an apt mirror for both Kubota and Ono’s respective careers.

For Kubota, 1965 is additionally significant because it is the same year that Sony released the portapak, which was a video recording device prominently used in the beginning of the Video Art genre. The portapak was a portable recording tool; on the device, Kubota has stated that she “traveled alone with [her] portapak on [her] back, as Vietnamese women do with their babies.”¹⁵ Kubota’s words evoke imagery of the Vietnam war, which was occurring simultaneously to the conception of video art as a medium. Her statement also implies a maternal, protective relationship with the recording device, perhaps bringing to mind Kubota’s own hand in creating the genre itself. When Kubota was equipped with her portapak, she embarked on a journey, accompanied only by her kin. On the medium of video itself, Kubota has stated that video is “a ghost of yourself” and that “[i]t’s like your shadow. It reveals your

¹² Oliva, Achille Bonito. *Ubi Fluxus Ibi Motus: 1990-1962*. Milano: Mazzotta, 1990. 35

¹³ Ibid. 13, 15.

¹⁴ Barlow, Melinda. "Red, white, yellow, and black: Women, multiculturalism, and video history." *Quarterly Review of Film & Video* 17, no. 4 (2000): 302

¹⁵ Ibid.

interior. It still exists after you die.”¹⁶ These sentiments convey that video is deeply ingrained into oneself, while containing its own spirit altogether.

Like her intimate relationship with the portapak itself, Kubota’s earlier works express her deeply personal interests and inspirations. In 1976, for example, Kubota would create *Duchampia: Nude Descending a Staircase*. This was a pivotal piece in her early career. The work speaks to Kubota’s long standing admiration of the French artist Marcel Duchamp. Kubota’s piece directly references his conceptual artwork *Nude Descending a Staircase*. The video features a scene with actress Hideko Takamine from the 1960 film *When a Woman Ascends the Stairs*. Kubota places monitors playing the video of Takamine within a plywood staircase. Duchamp’s original artwork is a cubist painting that attempts to depict the kinetic energy of a body theoretically moving across the canvas.¹⁷ Duchamp’s work was groundbreaking because of its attempt at expressing movement through two dimensional medium of painting-- Kubota reconciles this by fully capturing the body’s movement through video.

Kubota’s work was significant in its own right as the piece would be the first video sculpture acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.¹⁸ Duchamp’s life and artwork would continue to be an influence on Kubota, as she would later create the video sculpture *Duchamp’s Grave* (1972-1975), after Duchamp’s passing in 1965. Although Kubota clearly engaged with Duchampian material throughout her early career, she would eventually move away from the French artist.

¹⁶ Kubota, Shigeko, and Shigeko Kubota. "Interview with Shigeko Kubota." Post. Accessed March/April, 2019. https://post.at.moma.org/content_items/344-interview-with-shigeko-kubota.

¹⁷ Art, Philadelphia Museum of. "Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)." Philadelphia Museum of Art. Accessed April 10, 2019. <https://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/51449.html>.

¹⁸ Kubota, Shigeko, and Shigeko Kubota. "Interview with Shigeko Kubota." Post. Accessed March/April, 2019. https://post.at.moma.org/content_items/344-interview-with-shigeko-kubota.

Unlike *Nude Descending a Staircase*, *Vagina Painting* would prominently display Kubota's own body as the subject. And despite the fact that her performance piece *Vagina Painting* gained her initial attention in the art world, Kubota has stated herself that she "was not so interested in performance" and that she performed *Vagina Painting* because she was "begged to do it" by Maciunas and Paik.¹⁹ As illustrated by her artistic career, Kubota continued to work extensively with video art and video sculpture, rather than the genre of performance. Because of the overtly feminist themes in the work, it comes at a surprise that two men in Kubota's close circle are the artwork's catalyst. Furthermore, such context partially undermines the meaning of *Vagina Painting*. If the piece is meant to express a reclamation of the female body, the notion that Kubota performed in part to the chidings of two men is ironic at best. The impetus for the artwork, however, perhaps signals the utmost necessity for a greater control of artistic autonomy, one that exhibits the capacity to expand beyond the body and the pressure exerted by figures like Paik or Maciunas. Ultimately, both *Duchampia: Nude Descending a Staircase* and *Vagina Painting* are works that operate in spaces that are not fully owned by Kubota. *Duchampia* is a response to Marcel Duchamp's work, while *Vagina Painting* was prompted by Paik and Maciunas. In 1976-1979, Kubota created *Three Mountains*, which was noteworthy because it "is a break from the visual/metaphoric extension of Duchampian ideas which shaped her earlier work."²⁰ It is also break away from Kubota's focus on the human body, and signals towards her eventual interest in nature.

SoHo SoAp/Rain Damage (1985) continues Kubota's work with video art and constructed environmental elements, while also speaking intimately to a specific incident in the artist's

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Hanhardt, John G. "Video Transformations." *Shigeko Kubota/Taka Jimura: New Video*. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1979.

personal life. The work is also notable because it is not a piece of video sculpture, unlike much of her earlier works. Rather, it is a part of her *Broken Diary* series.²¹ The video recounts the tragedy Kubota experienced when a roofer's mistake caused severe rain damage in her (and her husband's) studio at 110 Mercer Street in Manhattan, which is referred to in the title. In the piece, Kubota reflects over the powerful and fluid property of water, lamenting that the same element that brought her fame and recognition (referencing her pieces *River* and *Niagara Falls*) would also destroy her own practice. The video begins with the text, "Broken diary" overlaid with shots of rain, with bottom left text labeling the date and time of the filming (AM 4:35. 11.5.85). A few seconds later, the text "Chapter 12" appears on the screen, and then the title of the piece follows. Nam June Paik provides oral narration-- he recounts that Shigeko was away in Stockholm, working on a project for the Guggenheim. The video splices different shots of the flood damage in the studio-- empty buckets, lined up to capture the dripping of excess water, plastic haphazardly covering stretches of tapes and material in an effort to protect the studio from further damage. Paik recounts that before the rain destroyed the studio, "Shigeko had a hunch to cover up everything" elaborating further that "if Shigeko didn't cover it up I could have killed myself" while on screen text provides supplemental information to convey what has happened. The video reads like a documentary; at the one minute and 56 second mark, the text reads "November 5, 1985: Rain started in the evening, and neighbors on the 4th floor discovered water leaking from their ceiling." Next, the text states that Paul Garrin (Paik's assistant and later collaborator) and Mitsuru Hayashi (a video artist) have come to "battle the growing leak." Visually, the video then overlays a smaller video of large consoles over video of individuals attempting to clean up the mess in the studio. At the two minute and 57 second mark, the text

²¹ To provide further context, another work from this series is *Broken Diary: Trip to Korea* (1984). This piece chronicled her husband's homecoming to Korea after thirty-four years of living and working abroad.

states that the “last, original videotapes of Julian Beck, lay under the wet plastic that covered [their] videotapes-- all priceless and irreplaceable.” Julian Beck was the cofounder of The Living Theater in New York City; he also a prominent actor, director, poet, and painter. The videotapes were significant because Beck passed away in 1985-- if the tapes were lost, so would the last few remnants of Beck himself. The video depicts footage of Beck’s face (in color) transposed over the flooded studio (in black and white); his face becomes spiritual, ghostlike, and divine, as if watching over the mayhem that occurred in the co-op. Similarly, stills of video tapes are transposed over footage of water collected in bins and buckets, evoking the destructive fate that these tapes almost underwent.

At the three minute and 35 second mark, Kubota reflects on her piece *River*. Spliced between her own narration is the audio of water dripping, while the screen shows the viewers different shots of the piece. In an almost ominous voice-over, Kubota speaks of Niagara Falls’ “great energy” and that she “never imagined Niagara Falls in my studio,” and that “art imitates nature, nature imitates art.” The video includes clips of the crashing waters of Niagara Falls, with the steadier stream of her own artworks, to the flooding of her own studio space. Despite the vast topographical and literal distance of the filmed sites, the nature of video art has physically brought these landscapes within proximity to each other, while a symbolic threading exists through water as an elemental property. In Kubota’s narrative, water has spiritual implications and holds power that both elevates and destroys; part of the video’s text states that “Water is an important element in my artworks. My Video/Water works, RIVER and NIAGRA (sic) FALLS, brought me success--but “Niagara (sic) Falls” through my roof brought only destruction.” Eventually, the video focuses on an interview of SoHo lawyer, John Koeger, which was conducted by Kubota, who was off screen. Koeger states that the case was harder to maneuver

legally as Kubota and Paik's studio was not seen as an average "office" and that "there's less of an appreciation" for an artist's studio. The following text then describes the legal obstacles that Kubota and Paik endured, with one lawyer going so far as saying that they were "too poor to sue." Koeger's filmed support for Kubota is contrasted with the text that describes the couple's legal hardships.

At the six minute and 41 second mark, the footage depicts a foggy, gloomy city skyline with the text that scrawls "IT RAINS IN MY HEART IT RAINS ON MY VIDEO ART". The last scene of the video then shows Shigeko and Fluxus member, Yoshi Wada. The two are outside, with the two playing around with one another. Kubota is laughing and teasing Wada; then the credits begin, ending the tragedy on a profoundly happy and intimate note. Although the piece focuses on a rather a tragic event that occurred in Kubota's professional life, the documentary-style approach that Kubota uses in this video art piece points to a somewhat comical tone. The seriousness of Kubota's meditation upon water conveys hints of humor, perhaps the irony and absurdity of it all. Ultimately, *SoHo SoAp/Rain Damage* offers Kubota control. Not only does Kubota control and reveal a personal narrative, but she also controls the depiction of water through the editing process that is made possible through video art. She creates montages and overlays, bending the video of water to her free will.

Unlike Kubota's video art production, Yoko Ono's artwork is more conceptual in nature. As an influential conceptual and performance artist, *Sky TV* is one of Yoko Ono's video art pieces and features a closed-circuit television set. Having first worked on *Sky TV* in 1966, the artworks would retain Ono's conceptual philosophy, as the piece itself rarely maintains the same physical form. Whatever institution that the piece is installed within would have a camera located outside, pointed at the sky-- which would then be showing inside the gallery via live feed

on the television set; each installation would feature a different type of television monitor, contemporary to the respective year it is installed. The artwork encapsulates the endless expanse that is the sky in the installation space. Seemingly never ending in both time and space, *Sky TV* transforms the sky into easy consumable viewing, readily available in its respective installation space. The artwork is more conceptual in nature as its form changes depending on its installation space and date; different museums and exhibits have different iterations of *Sky TV*. In photographs, while *Sky TV* is remembered through different types of televisions, the piece always features the same bright and beautiful blue sky.

It is important to note that there is only one permanent installation of the artwork, which is titled *Sky TV for Hokkaido*. The piece is located in Sapporo, the capital of Hokkaido. The installation site is an unoccupied old house located near the very edge of the Tokachi Millennium Forest and can be readily visited via appointment. The house contains fifteen television sets, all of which also depict a live feed of the sky. Thus exists a permanent version of *Sky TV*, in addition to its ever fluid counterparts. Regardless, in conception it is the same seemingly never ending sky that continues to greet viewers in front of its television monitors. Beyond the aesthetic differences between monitors or the different physical regions that separate each iteration or even the different points of time in each installation-- all versions of *Sky TV* still transmit the same sky.

For Ono, who grew up during World War II, the sky was supposedly a source of refuge. Ono has stated “there was not many beautiful things in [her] life except the sky” and that “the sky was always changing, bright, beautiful.”²² Conflictingly, however, it is unlikely that Ono experienced such a peaceful sky in her youth. By 1933, the year Ono was born, citywide air

²² "Yoko Ono. To See the Sky. 2015." MoMA. Accessed April 09, 2019. <https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/15/377>.

defense drills were conducted in full force.²³ Such drills prepared civilians for the possibility of terror brought forth via the skies. As Japan's skies were a source of constant threat and anxiety in wartime, there is discrepancy in the "bright, beautiful" sky that Ono idealizes and the skies in war, where doom was imminent. Ono has stated that she had been "getting into the sky" from "even before [she] was a teenager"; while such discrepancy is not acutely accounted for, perhaps Ono was able to differentiate nature's skies from wartime atrocities, as the sky would continue to become a form of escapism in Ono's life. At the time of *Sky TV*'s conception in 1966, Ono was living in New York, in a windowless apartment, and her "need" for the sky became palpable. Television presented a solution, a means of accessing the infinite sky in such an enclosed space. Photographs that document the artwork typically depict an ideal sky-- bright blue, filled with fluffy white clouds. However, because the television feed of the sky was a live one, there were likely days when the sky was not so perfect. The live feed could capture the sky in all of its different forms and moods, whether it was rainy, stormy, snowy. Every moment could be transmitted-- from dusk to dawn. Through Ono's video art, the sky is able to hold different meanings and introduces such meanings to spaces where the sky could not have previously entered.

For both Kubota and Ono, nature and natural elements elevates their video art to become a space of transcendence. In fact, both Kubota and Ono were born in Japan years before the start of World War II (Ono in 1933 and Kubota in 1937). Such early years in wartime would prove to be formative; Kubota felt as though she had "escaped death"²⁴ while Ono identified as a "war

²³ Weisenfeld, Gennifer. "Gas Mask Parade: Japan's Anxious Modernism." *Modernism/modernity* 21, no. 1 (2014): 182.

²⁴ Kubota, Shigeko, and Jacob, Mary Jane. *Shigeko Kubota Video Sculpture*. Astoria, N.Y: American Museum of the Moving Image, 1991. Print. 8

child” whose life was “transient.”²⁵ Despite the total destruction that war can bring forth environmentally, the landscapes that Kubota and Ono exuberate a sense of peaceful control. For example, in narrative, *SoHo SoAp/Rain Damage* is a lamentation on the power of water and the destruction of Kubota’s personal studio-- however, in mediation through video, Kubota seeks not to control water but its mediation, choosing to depict its fluidity across its various forms. Kubota opts to orally relinquish control over the element itself but possess authority on the landscape she creates within the video itself. Similarly, Ono does not attempt to control the sky itself in *Sky TV*. Rather, she controls its mediation and brings the sky’s existence and fruition in sites that cannot otherwise access such beauty. The same sky that had provided Ono with a sense of beauty in wartime is now made easily accessible via transmission with *Sky TV*, unlocking an infinite sense of space and sky in an enclosed (and possibly windowless) room.

Through video these constructed environmental spaces be meditated upon and become a living force. Earthly elements are not reminiscent of a “Copernican” earth, but more so that of a Gaian myth, where elemental properties have a sort of spirit on their own.²⁶ Rather than expressing a relationship to the earth that is copernican, which is a more literal and topographical in understanding, the relationship both Ono and Kubota expresses in their artworks appear to be more like that of the Gaian myth, meaning that their work is more spiritual and implies the divine. *Sky TV* appears to have remnants of both-- the work is copernican particularly in its technical production; the closed circuit mechanism captures the sky as it exists, in the simultaneous moment the viewer is observing the piece. In terms of its capacity to express a gaian earth, *Sky TV* relies on the viewer’s ability to perceive and experience the healing

²⁵ Obrist, Hans Ulrich, and Yōko Ono. *Yoko Ono-Hans Ulrich Obrist*. König, 2009. 11

²⁶ Knebusch, Julien. “Planet Earth in Contemporary Electronic Artworks.” *Leonardo* 37, no. 1 (February 2004): 18–23. doi:10.1162/002409404772828003. In this essay, Knebusch examines a selection of electronic artworks that relate to the planet Earth. Knebusch is concerned with how the Earth is represented.

capability in the sky's vast expansiveness. Both artworks focus on the ways nature can engage with humanity. At first glance, perhaps utilizing video art as means of elevating natural elements is counterintuitive; the advent of technological progress is at times perceived as conflicting with appreciating the natural world. With almost a sacred spirituality, however, both Kubota and Ono create environmental landscapes in their video art that stress the absolute power of the natural world and its various properties. In Ono we see the healing properties in the sheer aesthetic existence of the skyscape, and in Kubota we ponder how water can take as it gives.

In fact, elemental forces are a defining aspect of Kubota's artistic career, as she alluded to herself in *SoHo SoAp/ Rain Damage* when she wrote that water was an "important element" in her artworks. In 1979, Kubota created the artwork *River* (one of the pieces referenced in the aforementioned *SoHo SoAp/Rain Damage*) which featured a stream of flowing waters over a succession of video art pieces. Kubota's *Three Mountains* (1976) consisted of three wooden structures shaped like mountains with built in television monitors. Plastic mirrors were placed on the surface of the monitors, thus creating a refraction in image. A speaker would emit sounds of wind, along with other natural sounds; the monitors reflect a four-channel tape with various sights from the Southwestern landscape, including the Grand Canyon.

Sky TV has in itself been interpreted and defined as Land Art, which emerged as part of the conceptual art movement in the 1960s and 1970s.²⁷ The artwork was most notably demarcated as part of the genre through its inclusion in MOCA's 2012 *Ends of Earth: Land Art to 1974* exhibition, which aimed provide a broad and inclusive look into land art in the years before it had been fully defined and acknowledged as a type of art.²⁸ Although perhaps an

²⁷ Tate. "Land Art – Art Term." Tate. Accessed March 01, 2019. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/l/land-art>.

²⁸ Bryan-Wilson, J. (2012, 11). "Ends of the earth: Land art to 1974". *Artforum International*, 51, 269-270. Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1143630298?accountid=14509>

unconventional form of land art, *Sky TV* does indeed convey the meditative power of sky while also showcasing the nontraditional ways we can engage with nature as technological sophistication increases. Furthermore, if land art as a genre is defined as artwork that interacts, engages, and utilizes the earth and its environments directly, then *Sky TV* does precisely that. Ono captures the image of the sky via a live feed, while the projection of the sky from the television monitor transforms such image. *Sky TV* not only produces an image of the sky from the source itself, but creates its own unique environment via video. Ono has stated that the property of water “thinks, feels, and heals.”²⁹ Scientifically, water will naturally cycle through to become the clouds that fill the earth’s skyline. Thus, *Sky TV* revolves around a very humanistic interpretation of the sky.

Within their respective artworks, Kubota and Ono have created a space between the concrete and the abstract, between the expression of earth as copernican and gaian. Moreover, by elevating earth’s elemental properties, both artists reduce the significance of territorial boundaries that symbolically separate different nations. In created spaces that express either the face of healing or the aftermath of destruction, any predefined national identity ceases to exist-- only the earth, in all its infinite vastness and power comes to the forefront. Additionally, through video art as medium is a sense of transience captured-- in video can the earth that Kubota and Ono engaged with live on. Moments of the ever changing earth are caught in video and perhaps aesthetically transformed, but the power still rests in the element at hand.

²⁹ Obrist, Hans Ulrich, and Yōko Ono. *Yoko Ono-Hans Ulrich Obrist*. König, 2009.

III. Conclusion: Elevating Earth-- an Epilogue.

Zeroing into naturalistic properties via video, both Kubota and Ono reconcile the different definitions of thirdspace I have provided earlier. The two artists are women who are part of the Japanese diaspora. Their prominence within the artworld allowed the two artists to move freely as transnational agents within the world, exchanging philosophies and ideologies with other individuals around the world, as the third mind construct describes. Both *SoHo SoAp/Rain Damage* and *Sky TV* exhibit personal narratives that have the ability to occupy different conceptual spaces within our physical world. Additionally, as both pieces utilize video art as a medium, the two artworks tap into Packer's understand of third space, as viewers have the ability to engage and access such artwork through digital means. Perhaps these two works exemplifies the ways in which visual art and the natural work almost effortlessly in tandem with one another, elevating not only the notion of earth but also of art itself, enhancing meaning through the expression of each other.

And perhaps creating art that creates a form reflective of the natural world will continue to epitomize transcendence and enable a form of unification through natural representation-- but this possibility seems dependent on the sociopolitical conditions of the physical world. In 2016, photographer Kanghee Kim began her series, *Street Errands*. The project consists of surrealist photographs that create dreamlike landscapes from the ordinary streets that one could see everyday. Kim, who was born in South Korea, moved to the United States in her adolescence. Due to a legal mishap however, Kim was unable to receive United States citizenship. Under the 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy (otherwise known as DACA), Kim's life in

the United States is protected, but also not fully validated as an American citizen.³⁰

Unfortunately, however, this policy that protects her is the very same policy that severely restricts her mobility. As a DACA recipient, Kim is unable to leave the United States.

Although Kim is forced to remain stationary within the United States, with herself proclaimed wanderlust, she turns to her manipulated photographs to create fantastical places to where Kim can then envision herself escaping.³¹ Kim's practice is not unlike that of Ono's or Kubota's, despite the decades of difference in time. Like her predecessors, Kim's production of nature intertwines the organic and the artificial-- Kim uses a combination of photography and digital manipulation to create her sublime dreamscapes. Her fantastical photographs offer visions of tropical paradises, almost too wonderful for reality. Furthermore, Kim's landscapes are tinged with the melancholy of impossibility, enforced by the political boundaries of the treacherous topographical world.

Herein lies the greatest distinction between Kim and her predecessors Kubota and Ono. The privilege of physical mobility allows for the construction of controlled spaces capable of transcendence. For example, Kubota creates an aqueous world where she is able to control the effects of a personal tragedy. Although she was unable to control the flooding in her studio, in her video art she is able to transform this natural disaster into a space of reflection. Versely, Ono's *Sky TV* brings the healing and limitless sky into rooms where such viewing would be impossible otherwise. The control of these constructed spaces reflect Kubota and Ono's capacity to more freely engage with the world around them. Uninhibited by policies or laws in the physical world, they possess authority over the world they create in their artwork. In Kim's

³⁰ Cohen, Alina. "Unable to Leave the U.S., This "Dreamer" Creates a New World in Surrealistic Photographs." Artsy. June 25, 2018. Accessed April 01, 2019. <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-unable-leave-dreamer-creates-new-surrealistic-photographs>.

³¹ Ibid.

work, we may only find a momentary escape. The political contexts of the contemporary world make transcendence an impossibility, especially for Kim. Part of the third space and the third mind is cultural and intellectual exchange made possible by movement across borders-- something that is absolutely prohibited by DACA. It is within productive capacities of visual art where nature can be reconstructed and transformed into a chimera of escape. The concept of transcendence, however, is not a promise, as it is still conditional and subject to political conditions of the physical world.

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