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Lee Ufan and the Art of Mono-ha

in Postwar Japan (1968–1972)

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Art History

by

Mika Monique Yoshitake

2012

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Lee Ufan and the Art of Mono-ha

in Postwar Japan (1968–1972)

by

Mika Monique Yoshitake

Doctor of Philosophy in Art History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor George Thomas Baker, Co-Chair

Professor Miwon Kwon, Co-Chair

Lee Ufan and the Art of Mono-ha in Postwar Japan (1968–1972) is the first English-language study on the late 1960s Japanese artistic phenomenon, Mono-ha (School of Things). Appearing at a moment of political crisis during the period of protests against the Vietnam War, Mono-ha stands at a juncture when the utopian energies of Japan's postwar avant-garde had reached an endpoint. Trained in continental philosophy, Mono-ha's key ideologue, Lee Ufan introduced a theory of perception that was informed by an integration of structuralism and phenomenology. Based on Lee's interpretation, Mono-ha strove to radically redefine the relationship between man and nature beyond the foundational dualism in western metaphysics and modern aesthetics. His theory rejected the act of

creating as an expression of the subject's will and emphasized the *structure* surrounding the work's existence instead.

This dissertation charts the Japanese avant-garde prior to Mono-ha and maps the transitional moments when artists began to destabilize visual perception through distortions of dimensional space in order to separate the real and the perceived. Beginning with Lee's interpretive analysis of the work that launched the movement, *Phase-Mother Earth* (1968) by Sekine Nobuo, the dissertation presents Lee's notions of gesture, corporeality, and topos, all foundational to an understanding of Mono-ha. The dissertation further analyzes Lee's *Relatum* series through his theorization of "encounter," another key concept in which the very idea of an object shifts from a permanent body to an anticipatory passage. Finally, the dissertation considers Mono-ha's other central artist/theoretician, Suga Kishio, whose interest in semantic structures distance his practice from Lee's focus on the phenomenology of seeing, offering a different interpretive framework for Mono-ha.

In addition to archival and contemporary art historical analysis, the dissertation includes an appendix comprised of brief biographies of relevant artists and new translations of selected texts on Mono-ha from 1969 to 1987.

The dissertation of Mika Monique Yoshitake is approved.

Seiji Mizuta Lippit

George Thomas Baker, Committee Co-Chair

Miwon Kwon, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012

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VITA

Mika Yoshitake received her Bachelor of Arts in Art History and Political Science from the University of California, Berkeley in 2000, and Masters of Arts in Art History from the University of California, Los Angeles in 2004. She worked as a teaching assistant in the departments of Asian Languages and Cultures (2003–2004) and Art History (2005–2006), as well as an editorial assistant in the Publications Department at the Getty Research Institute (2004–2005). She received the Edward A. Dickson History of Art Fellowships (2006–2008) and Japan Foundation Doctoral Fellowship Award (2008–2009) to conduct dissertation research in Japan. Mika has coordinated museum retrospectives on artists Takashi Murakami and Lee Ufan, and has published catalogue essays in © *MURAKAMI* (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2007); *Target Practice: Painting Under Attack, 1949–78* (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 2009); *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2011); and *Tokyo 1955–1970: A New Avant-garde* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, forthcoming). She is the curator and catalogue editor of *Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha* (Los Angeles: Blum & Poe, 2012). Mika is an Assistant Curator at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is on Mono-ha (もの派), a Japanese vanguard artistic movement centered

in Tokyo that emerges in the context of a self-critical turn against modern rationalism in

late sixties avant-garde art circles. Collectively, Mono-ha represents a tendency to present

transient arrangements of natural and industrial materials—such as charcoal, cotton, dirt,

Japanese paper, stones, wood, glass, light bulbs, and steel plates—directly on the floor or

ground and interacting with their architectural spaces or outdoor sites. This interaction

comprises a central formative principle that presents all elements (subject, material, and

site) as inseparable and nonhierarchical, bringing about a key condition to open and be

opened by the work. Key artists associated with the movement are: Lee Ufan, Sekine Nobuo,

Koshimizu Susumu, Narita Katsuhiko, Suga Kishio, and Yoshida Katsurō. Affiliated artists

include Takamatsu Jirō, Honda Shingo, Enokura Kōji, Takayama Noboru, and Haraguchi

Noriyuki.

The dissertation covers the period from October 1968, when Sekine Nobuo's *Phase-

Mother Earth*, an outdoor earthwork was exhibited, to the end of 1972 when many of the

artists began to to pursue different projects: they returned to conventional media of

painting, sculpture, and printmaking, stopped artistic production to focus on teaching or

went on to establish a public art practice. The first published mention of "Mono-ha" was in

March 1973, and hence signals the beginning of its historicization. The movement took

shape in 1969 in the wake of the enormous impression made by *Phase-Mother Earth* as

like-minded artists were selected in numerous juried museum exhibitions and gallery

exhibitions. This moment was canonically fixed in the February 1970 issue of the leading

Japanese art journal, *Bijutsu techō* (Art Notebook)*.* The roundtable discussion among the

six key artists published by the journal, along with the publications of Lee Ufan's "In Search

of Encounter" and Suga Kishio's "Existing Beyond Condition" in the same issue, served as

Mono-ha's theoretical pillars. Sekine's participation as Japan's representative in the 35th

Venice Biennale of 1970 and the *August 1970—Aspects of New Japanese Art* (August 1970)

in Tokyo signaled the movement's "arrival" onto the Japanese vanguard scene. In January

1971, Lee published *In Search of Encounter: At the Dawn of a New Art* (『出会いを求めて：

新しい芸術のはじまりに』 *Deai o motomete: Atarashii geijutsu no hajimarini*),[1] an

anthology of critical writings that outlined a critique of modern rationalism and its legacy

to contemporary art that presented a philosophical model for the movement. Mono-ha

remains of interest today as it offers different but related phenomenological insights to

parallel formations in the Euro-American practices of Minimalism and Post-Minimalist

practices.

     In an effort to define the operational parameters of Mono-ha, this dissertation is

premised on the idea that Mono-ha's historical formation can best be seen through the

philosophical lens of its key ideologue, Lee Ufan. Lee's ideas are foregrounded by a

fundamental concern over the viability of the art object amidst the political context of

ideological challenges against the Japanese government, which had seen the failure of the

New Left. In tandem with the end of the utopian Left, the Japanese artworld was also

undergoing a crisis of identity vis-à-vis the privileging of American avant-garde art

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[1] Lee Ufan, *Deai o motomete: Atarashii geijutsu no hajimarini* (In search of encounter: At the dawn of a new art) (Tokyo: Tabata shoten, 1971). Revised edition, *Deai o motomete: Gendai bijutsu no shigen* (In search of encounter: The beginnings of contemporary art) (Tokyo: Bijutsu shuppansha, 2000). Lee revised these texts in 2000 and reflects important clarifications and changes such as his incorporation of Nishida Kitaro's philosophy in particular.

practices. I begin by setting up this background in Chapter 1, "Pre-Mono-ha: The Language

of Things," which considers three broad but interconnected themes: the *thing vs. event,* the

optical turn, and *the return to relation.* The primacy of these themes defines developments

within the Japanese artworld from the period between 1955 and 1970. Our narrative

begins in the aftermath of Japan's defeat with a decree by eminent socialist art critic Haryū

Ichirō on the "failure" of sculptural imagination and the limits of the medium's capacity for

representation and historical experience. The central issue that concerns the avant-garde

artists who experience this failure is the dichotomy between the object and the event,

however that dynamic was interpreted, as fundamental agents of art. Taking this as a

departure point, we see how early innovations in inter-media practices lead to alternative

terms such as *three-dimensional object*, *objet*, *thing*, *substance*, and *matter* distinct from

those associated with sculptural development in Western history. An aspect of this

development is embodied by the tactic of destruction, implemented through performative

installations and happenings staged by the Anti-Art generation of the early to mid 1960s.

However, this destructive tendency takes a curious turn when artists turn back to the

nature of vision. Critics such as Ishiko Junzō theorize this turn through what he calls "the

thinking eye," to destabilize visual perception through distortions of dimensional space in

order to separate the real and the perceived, as exemplified in the 1968 *Tricks and Vision:*

Stolen Eyes (*Torikkusu ando bijon: Nusumareta me*) exhibition at Tokyo and Muramatsu

Galleries. What emerges is the convergence of the visual/corporeal and actual/virtual

"image" (虚像 *kyozō*). This development proves to be an important precursor for the early

work of Mono-ha, but also a counterpoint that urges a return to the relational field upon

which the artwork is situated in order to evaluate both the viewer and the world at large.

This new mode of perception inevitably centers on issues regarding the agency of a work and how the object comes to be defined and built upon contingent experience.

Following this pre-history, we turn to the formation of Mono-ha in Chapter 2 "Mono-ha: Historical Formation," which begins with the February 1970 *Bijutsu techō* artist roundtable discussion that marked their understanding of the term *mono* (もの things): 1) the explicit rejection of creation and individuality, which the artists associated as part of a broad artistic category known as "Non-Art" (非芸術 *Hi-geijutsu*); 2) an attempt to locate the work not in its objective form as a physical object (物 *butsu*), a tactile material (物質 *busshitsu*), or a found object (オブジェ *obuje = objet*), but in the structures through which things reveal their existence; 3) affective sensations arising from charged "encounters" (出会い *deai*); 4) the liberation from intentions, methods, or concepts in order to reveal the essential state of things; and 5) one's intimate contact with the world through *shigusa* (仕草), an interactive act that dissolves the subject and object as distinct entities. The second half of the chapter, reviews the fateful meeting between Lee Ufan and the art community of Tama Art University, tracing the connections between these artists through their academic situations as students and teachers, and elaborates on their exhibition history. Key galleries and museum exhibitions are introduced.

Chapter 3 "Introducing Lee Ufan," begins with an introduction to Lee Ufan's decisive role as an artist, thinker and writer in connecting the movement to broader cultural issues arising out of the close of the era of modern art, and the difficult end not only of the paradigm of representation, but the autonomy of the art object. Lee's key texts "World and Structure" (1969) and "In Search of Encounter" (1970) are framed within a larger, radical

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critique of modern rationalism; this critique entails the collapse the false ontological status of the *object*. The larger critique comes from a strain of phenomenology and the Frankfurt school that targets a way of thinking about technology common to modernisation in both its capitalist and socialist guises: that is, as the elevation of the instrument above any purpose it may serve. The world created by the culture of technology is justified by the ideological separation of man from nature; technology was the means by which man "tamed" nature. This process creates a self-alienation in which, on the one hand, the self, which is really part of nature, flees inward, while the exterior world of which the human body is part is subjected to the total environment created by technology. Lee finds one of the entrances to the complex of modernity in the phenomenology of perception, which returns to the body as a central mode of being-in-the-world. He crosses this strain of philosophy with structuralism, which was in vogue in the sixties as the program by which the human sciences could be unified. From structuralism, Lee takes the notion of an intermediary "structure"（構造 kōzō）as a new model in which the world becomes a site to *encounter* a direct experience. It is important to understand the connotations of the "intermediary" at this moment. Postwar Japan is based on a specific context in which the philosophical struggle over "mediation," waged by Nishida Kitarō and the Kyoto school of philosophy and Japanese leftists under the influence of Marxist class theory, rehearses, in philosophical terms, the real dilemma of Japanese self-understanding. Since the 19th century opening to the West and the Meiji era program of adopting Western technology and the ideal of modernity, Japan has been traversed, periodically, by crises of self-doubt. Modern Japan, in this light, had either been in a mediating position between oppositions or producing a unique intermediary structure that evolved into an alternative to these

polarities. These connotations in Lee's work had been well understood by contemporary Japanese intellectuals. The politicized attack of his ideas (as a return to fascist tradition of aestheticism at the time), which arose out of a highly charged New Left atmosphere, ignore another model of intermediacy that may have been more experientially important to Lee: the profound impact of his real-life experiences as a Korean existing between two different worlds and the politics of his own position as an "outsider," a foundational impetus for his writings.

In Chapter 4 "Lee Ufan's Discovery of Sekine Nobuo and *Phase of Nothingness*," Lee's discovery and subsequent theorization of Sekine Nobuo and his *Phase–Mother Earth* in 1968 eventually comes to cement Mono-ha's interpretive framework to an extent in which one could argue that Mono-ha came out of Sekine's work and Lee's response to it. Much of Lee's thinking in these essays derives from his training as a philosophy student. Through Lee's interpretation we come to recognize the manner in which *Phase-Mother Earth* serves as an endpoint for Sekine's engagement with optical tricks, and the non-hierarchical, relational structure of subject, object, and site that characterizes Mono-ha. Lee's primary text on Sekine, "Beyond Being and Nothingness" (1971) offers insights into his philosophies as a model for how direct experience can be activated through three conditional modes: Gesture (the reciprocation of action), Corporeality (the ambiguous structure of the body as both self and other), and Topos (the situational engagement of perception). These conditions are drawn from Nishida's philosophy, which Lee translates into his own aesthetic language.

Turning from Lee's theories proper, Chapter 5 "*Relatum*: Lee Ufan and the Condition of Ambiguity (*Ryōgisei*)" gives an account of his practice and his signature series, *Relatum,*

which develops in connection to the onto-ethical condition of ambiguity (両義性 *ryōgisei*)

that remains central in the experience of "encounter." Lee considers *Relatum* as a form of

an art of margins (余白 *yohaku*), in which anticipatory experience is privileged over

certainty. The *Relatum* series are considered in relation to Minimalist and Post-Minimalist

practices (specifically Robert Morris and Barry Le Va) in order to bring out the particularity

of Lee's ambiguity, which never settles into a certain meaning or a privileged position of

perception, but continually returns us to a situation in which full encounter is possible.

Finally in Chapter 6 "*Law of Situation*: Suga Kishio and the Alternative Theorization

of Activation," we investigate the writings and practice of Mono-ha's other theoretician,

Suga Kishio and his work, *The Law of Situation* (1971), moving away from Lee's encounter

to Suga's activation. As opposed to Lee, in Suga's framework, practice activates the object

as a dynamic part of a total structure: key terms in his texts are release (放置 *hōchi*) and

condition or situation (状況 *jōkyō*). Suga's interests in the semantics of language and

subverting our expectations concerning the nature of phenomena and aesthetic recognition

divide his practice from Lee's phenomenologically oriented construction of encounter.

Suga's interest in linguistic structures is seen in his work titles and photographic

documents. However, in the end, both share an abiding interest in the interstitial passages

that open up the relational experience of things (*mono*).

This dissertation serves not as a comprehensive examination of Mono-ha, but as a

historical examination into Lee Ufan's formation and theorization of their practice through

his dialogues with other artists and a critical alternative theorization by Suga. I will be

especially attentive to the vocabulary employed by Lee as a way of developing a sense of

the thematic evolution of their art in its cultural, conceptual and institutional contexts.

Lee's position as both an artist and writer play a unique and central role in both shaping

and propelling the group towards a phenomenological model. As Reiko Tomii has pointed

out recently, Mono-ha has challenged Japanese art specialists due to discursive

contradictions inherent to the movement. These include Mono-ha as once: a group and not

a group, discursive and inscrutable, performative and object-centered, object-based and

object-negligent, world-conscious and world-oblivious, and convention-defying and

institution-dependent.[2] While these categories offer criteria to assess and validate the

historiographic problems that face Mono-ha, they ultimately undermine the complexity of

the aesthetic, philosophical and cultural concerns of the artists and their practice.

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[2] Reiko Tomii, "Mono-ha as Contradiction," *Voices of Mono-ha Artists: Contemporary Art in Japan, Circa 1970. A Panel Discussion*, USC, Los Angeles. February 24, 2012. This conference gathered together five Mono-ha artists: Lee Ufan, Suga Kishio, Sekine Nobuo, Koshimizu Susumu, and Haraguchi Noriyuki on the occasion of *Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha* (February 24–April 15, 2012), an exhibition curated by the author at Blum & Poe, Los Angeles.

CHAPTER 1

PRE-MONO-HA: THE LANGUAGE OF THINGS

In 1959, art critic Haryū Ichirō declared: "Sculptors must throw away concepts and illusions and lend their ears to the language of things: they must search the *relation* between mass and space and extract a decisive form. Unfortunately, however, there is nothing that lacks this 'power of imagination regarding things' more than Japanese sculpture."[3] Haryū was in sync with new ideas in the Japanese artworld, where the idea of articulating the "language of things" (*mono no kotoba*) and exploring the multiple ways in which the work of art engages the physical experience of the viewer had become the (vaguely envisioned) next step in the evolution of the avant-garde.[4] Haryū was reflecting a shift in the stylistic lexicon of the avant-garde as well as his own from the ideology of socialist realism.

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[3] Haryū Ichirō, "Gendai chōkoku no kadai" (The subject of contemporary sculpture), *Yomiuri shimbun* (*Yomiuri* newspaper) 22 (August 1959), repr. in *Geijutsu no zen'ei* (Art's avant-garde) (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1970), p. 155. This chapter is an expanded version of my essay "The Language of Things: Relation, Perception, and Duration," *Tokyo 1955–1970: A New Avant-garde* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, forthcoming). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the author.

[4] Yoshihara Jirō, leader of the postwar Japanese avant-garde group, Gutai founded in Ashiya in 1954 also proclaimed: "Under the cloak of an intellectual aim, materials have been completely murdered and can no longer speak to us. Lock these corpses into their tombs," showing that no material is permanent and that the vulnerability of materials—including human flesh--is intrinsic to their being. Gutai's playful and ephemeral approach to materials were critical to the expansion of the "sculptural imagination." Iconic works presented at the Ōhara Kaikan hall in Tokyo from 1955 to 1958 include: Shiraga's *Challenging Mud* (*Doro ni idomu*) and Murakami Saburō, *At One Moment Opening Six holes* (*Isshun ni shite rokko no ana o akeru*) both in 1955; Motonaga Sadamasa *Work (Water)* [*Sakuhin (Mizu)*] and Tanaka Atsuko's *Electric Dress* (*Denki-fuku*) both in 1956. Yoshihara Jirō, "Gutai bijutsu sengen" (Gutai Art Manifesto), *Geijutsu Shinchō* (New Wave in the Arts) 7 (December 1956), p. 202. Reprinted in Alexandra Munroe, *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky*, trans. Reiko Tomii (New York: Harry Abrams, 1994), p. 370.

That engagement between art and experience underwent a radical reconceptualization in the period 1955–1970, most symptomatically in the changes that befell the making and reception of three-dimensional art objects. Although Haryū was speaking in the context of late-1950s Tokyo, a time in which painting still held sway as the center of Japan's art world, his words held prescient pertinence for the coming generation of artists who would transform avant-garde sculptural practices and the hierarchy of the Japanese art scene. The 1950s multidisciplinary avant-garde group Jikken Kōbō (Experimental Workshop) and its prominent associate, Yamaguchi Katsuhiro, were already pressing on the boundaries of the spectator's expectations with provocative performances, events, ephemeral works, and installations. This heralded the advent of the many art collectives that formed in the 1960s, dedicated to pushing the limits of their audiences' perceptive capabilities—and further, newly defining the very nature of the art-spectator relationship.

The many experiments that were tried in the arena of multidimensional art during this period may be considered under three broad but interconnected categories: the *thing vs. event* dichotomy (considerations of the object and event as fundamental agents of art); *the optical turn* (investigations into the nature of visuality and its crucial role in questioning conventions of perception); and finally *the return to relation* (critical explorations of art's interactions both with the viewer and with the world at large). In its own way, each approach borrowed from Japan's situation in the Cold War and the rapid changes taking place on the personal, cultural and economic level, under a political establishment (the Liberal Democratic Party) that, in coordination with major corporations, ruled hegemonically over the entire period.

Mono vs. *koto*: Thing vs. Event

At a roundtable discussion in 1953, artist Tsuruoka Masao stated: "I think paintings in

Japan in general do not depict things [*mono*]. Rather I believe they depict events [*koto*].

Although events must be expressed through things, [Japanese artists] forget things and try

to depict events."[5] Implicit in Tsuruoka's words is a reaction against the desensitized,

photorealistic depictions of war atrocities (government commissioned war campaign

record paintings between 1937–1945),[6] and the consequent loss of a tactile and corporeal

encounter with things themselves. In the post-atomic moment during the Allied occupation

of Japan (1945–52), the very terms of artistic practice concerning the ethics of

representation—how to reconcile the psychosocial aspect of defeat through a different

"realism" rather than rendering social reality through traditional mimetic means—were

forcibly put into question.

Though Tsuruoka's statement was mainly directed at painting, the roundtable

included figures working in other modes, such as the constructivist artist Saitō Yoshishige.

Additionally, Tsuruoka was addressing a key point about the *object* (*jibutsu*, a term that

comprises the Japanese characters *koto* and *mono*) that in effect transcends painting: that is,

the tactile relation of the viewer to a physical "thing." That relation entails a fundamental

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[5] Tsuruoka Masao, in discussion with Saitō Yoshishige, Oyamada Jirō, Komai Tetsurō, and Sugimata Tadashi, "'Koto' dewa naku 'mono' o egaku to iū koto" (To paint "things" not "events") in *Bijutsu hihyō* (Art criticism) (February 1954), p. 17. Quoted in Minemura Toshiaki, "Shokkaku no riarizumu—Funshutsu shita mō hitotsu no nihon" (The realism of tactility: Another Japan that erupted), in *1953 raito appu: atarashii sengo bijutsuzo ga mietekita/1953: Shedding Light on Art in Japan* (Tokyo: Meguro Art Museum and Tama Art University, 1996), p. 107. The roundtable was organized by editors of *Bijutsu hihyō*; artists were asked to discuss the exhibition *Abstraction and Surrealism: How to Comprehend Non-Photorealistic Painting* (*Chūshō to gensō: hi-shajitsu kaiga o dō rikai suru ka*), presented at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (December 1, 1953–January 20, 1954), but the topic reflected the artists' statements on the current state of Japanese art.

[6] See Asato Ikeda, *Envisioning Fascist Space, Time, and Body: Japanese Painting During the Fifteen-Year War (1931–1945)*, PhD diss. (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia, 2012).

shift in the artistic labor, the process through which the work comes into being: the object

was no longer to be conceived, as it had been in the modernist mode, as a physically

permanent and static entity that represented a certain meaning and expression. Could

anything be rescued out of that obsolescence? The turn to the "thing" was the front on

which that question would be answered, through the agency of three-dimensional works,

ephemeral objects, assemblages, and installations that no longer represented a universal

value, but critically engaged vision and the body on the plane of the relations that lent all

things use, sense, and value. On that plane, processes of destruction and decay, the optics of

perception, and a renewed conception of the encounter with the world of matter would

displace representation as the art producer's means. Thus, the relation between the three

thematic categories enumerated above, with one category or another dominating the

others, gives us a diagram of the forces that organized the understanding of the purpose of

art in the period 1955 to 1970.

What, in fact, is the agency of a work? How do we conceive of a "thing"? Pointing to

the perceptive faculties through which artists encounter the world, Tsuruoka's invocation

of "things"—indicative of a larger debate about realism in general—foregrounded new

attitudes toward three-dimensional objects (in Japanese *obuje*, derived from the French

word *objet*, connoting the elevation of found or appropriated objects to the status of art by

their transposition into the aesthetic context).[7]

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[7] See Reiko Tomii, "'Art Outside the Box' in 1960s Japan: An Introduction and Commentary" in special feature, "1960s Japan: Art Outside the Box," *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 17 (December 2005): 1–12; "Glossary," comp. by Reiko Tomii, in *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (New York: Abrams, 1994), p. 397. Niimi Ryū cites the early use of *objets* by the critic Takiguchi Shūzō in his *Kindai geijutsu* (Modern art) of 1938, without page reference, in "The Modern Primitive: Discourses of the Visual Arts in Japan in the 1960s," in Louise Allison Cort, Bert Winther-Tamaki, et al., *Isamu Noguchi and Modern Japanese Ceramics*, exh. cat. (Washington: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithonian Institution, 2003), p. 92. The relevant discussions are found in Takiguchi Shūzō, *Yuibutsu-ron zensho 18: Kindai geijutsu* (A series on materialism 18:

The need, as Haryū phrased it, for a "new language of things" was demonstrated early on with Yamaguchi Katsuhiro's *Wire Mesh Sculpture* (*Kanaami chōkoku*, 1961; Fig. 1), an ethereal wire piece that hangs from the ceiling, floating in midair. As natural light glides through the interstices of the mesh, the delicate form mutates like a living thing as one moves around it. This circumambulatory experience is critical: the viewer's engagement is an aspect of the work, but can never constitute a "complete" experience. Yamaguchi was one of the fourteen members of Jikken Kōbō (Experimental Workshop), an avant garde group consisting of composers, painters, a poet/critic, a printmaker, a photographer, a lighting designer, as well as an engineer – collaborated with dancers and film directors to create multimedia events that collectively opened up certain radical possibilities of art beyond painting. [8] Yamaguchi's consciousness of the viewer—signaled, for instance, in his *Vitrine* series (*Vitrine—Vacant Eye*, 1952; Fig. 2), by his placing refractive glass in front of abstract paintings so that forms shift in accordance with the viewer's position in relation to the piece—derive from his sense of the mutable and fragmented experience of the present, which refused to coalesce into a single totality. The object's tactility seems to push the limits of Haryū's mandate to "extract a decisive form" by exploring the perceived weightlessness and perpetual play of form with the senses. While this interest in the play of corporeal-visual perception would return in the later 1960s with Op art, kinetic art, and

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Modern art) (Tokyo: Mikasa shobō, 1949), 137–46n, 221–23n.

[8] For more on Jikken Kōbō, see Miwako Tezuka, *Jikken Kōbō (Experimental Workshop): Avant-garde Experiments in Japanese Art of the 1950s*, PhD diss. (New York: Columbia University, 2005); Doryun Chong's "Tokyo 1955–1970: A New Avant-Garde," and Miryam Sas' "Intermedia," in *Tokyo 1955–1970: A New Avant-garde* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, forthcoming).

environmental art, in 1958 the piece anticipated the highly destructive and confrontational

tendencies of an art culture on the threshold of one of its most experimental moments.

In the larger Japanese avant-garde of the era, the "new" as an artistic principle was

realized in conjunction with various "violent" stylistic strategies, including the physical

assault against representation, the obliteration of the permanence of the self-enclosed

object, the rupturing of form, the collapse of authorial presence, and eventually a raw

engagement with notions of loss and failure. For an avant-garde eager to be part of a

Japanese culture undergoing the shocks of the "economic miracle" while remaining firmly

subordinate to its ally in the Cold War system, there was a tendency to turn away from the

country's recent encounter with destruction and to focus on postwar prosperity—a

syndrome that historian Yoshikuni Igarashi has characterized as the "postwar Japanese

paradigm."[9] The lack of confidence in mimesis was an aspect of the general retreat from the

monumental and totalizing projects of the imperialist period. The idea of *destruction* was,

however, fresh in the minds of Japanese people, denoting the geopolitical and psychosocial

forces embodied in the atomic bombs, the firebombing of the cities, the massive loss of life

in the war, and the final defeat and collapse of the entire imperial structure during World

War II. The price exacted for the economic miracle in accordance with the strategy of the

political establishment was the managed process of forgetting. This official culture

celebrated its triumph in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and the city's massive reconstruction

and sanitization efforts.

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[9] "Loss was being lost in quotidian life, while the trajectory from destruction to material wealth became part and parcel of the postwar Japanese paradigm." See Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945–1970* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 189.

Tokyo in this period, with its lively print culture and prosperous sheen, was a mecca

of avant-garde art collectives that pitted themselves against the celebratory order of the

mainstream establishment. The Yomiuri Indépendant (an annual exhibition sponsored by

the *Yomiuri* newspaper)[10] was important to these groups as a venue for artistic

performance and experimentation. (Many artists also took advantage of Yomiuri's

sponsorship to stage and disseminate their actions through the newspaper itself and other

print media.) Among the groups that formed in this period were Neo Dadaism Organizer

(later renamed Neo Dada), Kyūshū-ha (Kyūshū school), Zero Jigen (Zero dimension), and Hi

Red Center. Common to these collectives was a fascination with deploying the body as a

site of self-degradation and spectacle, in order to elicit a corresponding oppositional public.

Each of these collectives attended to such issues in its own way, but it was perhaps Neo

Dada's projects that fully emblematized the air of the times.

Neo Dada announced itself in 1960 with an aggressive manifesto proclaiming its

decisive break with modernist tradition and establishing its explicit political stance. The

manifesto participated in the burst of resistance that had greeted the U.S.–Japan Mutual

Security Treaty (better known in Japan as *Nichibei anzen hoshō jōyaku* or *Anpo* in short), an

agreement that ultimately allowed U.S. military bases to continue operation on Japanese

soil. Demonstrations, especially of young people, broke out against it, signaling the end of

the political somnolence of the fifties. Neo Dada's manifesto, which was read aloud at the

demonstrations, invoked the "blood-soaked ring" of "a century that has trampled on

sincere works of art," and concluded menacingly: "The only way to avoid being butchered is

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[10] For more on the Yomiuri Indépendant, see Chong, "Tokyo 1955–1970."

to become butchers ourselves."[11] Neo Dada seemed suspended between art and guerrilla warfare—their text was clearly modeled on post–World War I Dada treatises, and also echoes the inflammatory rhetoric of radical movements. Artist Yoshimura Masanobu famously promoted Neo Dada's exhibitions in the streets of Tokyo with fliers bearing the group's name wrapped around his entire body (Fig. 3).

Such provocative responses to the era's political climate also gave rise to strategies of appropriation that seized the detritus of consumer culture through assemblage, performance, and installations, reflecting a growing kinship with the European and American neo-avant-garde (for example, Robert Rauschenberg's Combines and Arman's junk accumulations). Like Japan's original Dada movement, Mavo (1923–25), which in its day intruded rudely upon an art scene that had assimilated the abstraction of Expressionist and Cubist works, the artists of Neo Dada advocated a departure from the "sublimity" of the leading fifties movement, Abstract Expressionism, and the tactile existentialism of Informel, both of which the Neo Dada artists disparaged for having lost their destructive aura.[12]

The central tool of performance is of course the body, and the impulse to utilize the body as a test site for stamina – imitating and parodying the military use of the body for this purpose - was particularly marked in the work of Neo Dada artist Arakawa Shūsaku, as

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[11] The manifesto, written by one of Neo Dada's leaders, Shinohara Ushio, was read aloud by Akasegawa Genpei to reporters during the Anpo protests. Shinohara declared: "As we enter the blood-soaked ring in this 20/6th century [the sixth decade of the twentieth century]—a century that has trampled on sincere works of art—the only way to avoid being butchered is to become butchers ourselves." Shinohara, *Zen'ei no michi* (The avant-garde road) (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppan-sha, 1968), pp. 56–57. I am grateful to Nick Kapur for sharing an early draft of his dissertation chapter on the Anpo period and the arts in 1960s Japan.

[12] See Fumi Tsukuhara, "Dada, Mavo, Néo Dada: Histoire abrégée du dadaïsme japonais et de ses environs" (Dada, Mavo, Neo Dada: Abridged history of Japanese Dadaism and its context), in Henri Béhar and Catherine Dufour, eds., *Dada, circuit total* (Lausanne: L'Age d'homme, 2005), and Gennifer Weisenfeld, *Mavo: Japanese Artists and the Avant-Garde 1905–1931* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

seen in his *Untitled Endurance* (1958; Fig. 4). Before leaving Japan for New York on a

Rockefeller grant in 1961, Arakawa created a series of pieces that are generally referred to

as *kan'oke* (coffins), rectangular containers inside of which he placed large, white, fetuslike

"carcasses" made of cement mixed with cotton and gauze, on beds of shiny, synthetic fabric.

These casketlike pieces were often propped against the wall, their presence thus

destabilized in relation to the viewer, as though calling upon the spectator to identify them.

The materiality of the *kan'oke* elicits a response somewhere between the desire to look at

them and repulsion and fear over what one might see—a disjunctive sensation that

sometimes occurs in the presence of a corpse. Here, the affective device of *taktura* is

pushed to an extreme limit, testing our endurance (as the work's title suggests) of the idea

of death in a state of perpetual suspension.[13]

Certain conceptually oriented groups of the early 1960s, such as Hi Red Center (Hai

Reddo Senta, inaugurated in 1962), focused on the destruction of social mores or other

boundaries that permitted the autonomy of art to be predicated upon the disinterest or

detachment of the observer, insulating it from any real social affect. Takamatsu Jirō's

project *String: Black* (*Himo: Kuro*, 1962 (Fig. 5) evolved from his earlier series of relief

paintings *Point* (*Ten*, 1961) (Fig. 6), which consists of tangles of black wire with spiraling

protrusions that explore the point as a dense "void" embodying continuous fission toward

"anti-existence."[14] At the fourteenth Yomiuri Indépendant in 1962, he placed coiled string

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[13] *Taktura* was defined in 1924 by Mavo artist Shibuya Osamu as "the sense of touching something directly
with one's skin." The concept was inspired by the Russian Constructivist notion of *faktura*: "the visual tactile
sensation of light—color, line, mass, concave and convex surfaces" or the perceptual interaction with the
viewer through the sensual investigation of material constructs. See Shibuya Osamu, "Takutora oyobi
Fakutora" (*Taktura* and *faktura*), *Mizue*, no. 237 (November 1924): 33.

[14] Takamatsu Jirō, "Danpenteki bunshō 1960–72" (Fragmented texts 1960–72); repr. in *Bijutsu shihyō*
(History and Criticism of Art), inaugural issue (Summer 1972), pp. 13–17; 23. See also Yuri Mitsuda,

("point") inside a box with gloves and instructions for viewers to pull and "unravel" along sheets of paper. The following year, these string pieces were expanded into *On Anti-Existence According to Curtain* (*Kāten ni kansuru han-jitsuzaisei ni tsuite*, 1963) (Fig. 7), in which a long string bound with detritus was pulled from under a white curtain hung along a wall inside the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, then out into the streets of Tokyo, finally making its way to Ueno Station. This work circumvented any potential viewer disinterestedness by demanding both attention and participation.

By the mid-1960s, the spectacular and often "violent" attributes with which the art object was endowed – fusing the object to its violent extinction and removal from the circulation of art objects - began to shift toward intellectual concerns surrounding the cognitive faculties of perception. The deployment of the body in early-1960s performance as an agent of shock and "destruction," directed against an autonomy perceived as a guise of numbness and against the conformity of everyday life, splitting the consciousness into an instrumental self enmeshed in routines and a private self powerless to act, anticipates a shift in the later years of the decade in the perceptual conditions of the object itself.

The Optical Turn

By the midpoint of the 1960s, in certain art circles, there was a sense that the body had been exhausted as a discursive site of pure negation, and there was a pull back from a confrontational attitude toward political reality. In tandem with the stance of political

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Takamatsu Jirō kotoba to mono: Nihon no gendai bijutsu 1961–72/Words and Things: Jirō Takamatsu's Issue with Japanese Art 1961–72 (Tokyo: Suisei-sha, 2011), pp. 29–44.

disengagement there grew a renewed interest in the destabilization of vision—an "optical

turn." The term *imēji-ron*, or *image theory*, came into the critical parlance around this time.

The focus on visuality, and on the eye itself as a technical device, was to a large

extent promoted by art critics associated with the monthly newsletter *Me* (Eye) (published

1965–68), [15] among whom Ishiko Junzō deserves special mention for serving as a conduit

between Genshoku (1966–71), a group based in Shizuoka whose trompe l'œil works

evinced a Pop-Surrealist aesthetic such as Suzuki Tadanori's *Tableau of Non-Existence*

(Based on de Chirico) [*Hizai no taborō (Kiriko ni yoru)*], 1967 (Fig. 8, and the artists later

associated with Mono-ha.

Ishiko Junzō (1928-77) became known mostly for his advocacy of manga comics,

theories on kitsch and the image. Ishiko's concerns ran parallel to the notions of the *optic*

and the *haptic* in American Op art—in particular with regard to what art historian Pamela

Lee refers to as the "vulnerability of the body in relation to what the eye brings to it, as

signaled by the change in time in that body experienced as a certain physical duress."[16] In

Tokyo at this moment, Op, kinetic, and light works had moved to the forefront of the art

scene. One of the first significant exhibitions was *From Space to Environment* (*Kūkan kara*

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[15] Thirty-four issues of *Me* (Eye) were published by Ogikubo Gallery in Tokyo in the form of a newsletter from June 15, 1965, to November 15, 1968. Some of the most influential art critics of the period—most notably Ishiko Junzō and Miyakawa Atsushi, as well as critics/curators Nakahara Yūsuke and Tōno Yoshiaki—used it as a forum to push their agenda against the boundaries of the Japanese art scene. Journals featuring topics on vision and visuality began appearing at the same time in other publications, including *Bijutsu techō* (Art notebook)*, Miru* (Gaze), a monthly newsletter published by the Kyoto National Museum of Modern Art, and the artists' journal *Genshoku*, nos. 1–4 (1966–1971).

[16] Pamela M. Lee, "Bridget Riley's Eye/Body Problem," *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), p. 176.

kankyō) (November 1966),[17] which took place at Matsuya department story gallery. In May 1968, Op art was presented at the *8th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan* (sponsored by Mainichi Newspapers) at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum. The exhibition gathered what critic Minemura Toshiaki (1936-) would refer to as three major trends: reflections and movements of light; "poor quality" primary structures; and Japanese-style intellectualism that fused Pop Art and influence of Magritte to produce "tricky deceptive art."[18] These exhibitions invited the spectator to rethink the certainties of vision, understanding it not as a "natural product" of the optic nerve but as information processed on a higher neurological and social levels through the phenomenon of matter. Ishiko introduced two visual models: 1) the "thinking eye" that consists in the convergence of two modes of reflections; and 2) the dual tactics of *mewaza* (techniques of the eye) and *tewaza* (techniques of the hand). His idea of seeing relates to the sixties catchphrase, the "extensions of man" (the subtitle of Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* from 1964) and the social effects of the technologies of the senses. According to McLuhan, the senses were hierarchical and gave cultures different understandings of space and time. McLuhan famously maintained that the new media dethroned visual space-time, which organizes around linearity, and is replaced by aural space-time, which organizes around

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[17] See Midori Yoshimoto "From Space to Environment: The Origins of Kankyō and the Emergence of Intermedia Art in Japan," *Art Journal* 67, 2008.

[18] Minemura Toshiaki, *Chōkoku no yobikoe* (The call of sculpture), (Tokyo: Suiseisha, 2005), p. 109. Minemura Toshiaki (1936-) is a Japanese art critic who, after receiving his B.A. in French Literature from the University of Tokyo in 1960, began working in the Cultural Enterprises Department for Mainichi newspapers from 1960–1971. He was closely involved in the organization of the *10th Tokyo Biennale: Between Man and Matter* and served on the international juries for the 1971 Paris Biennale and Sao Paolo Biennale 1977. He was the first critic to establish Mono-ha as an important Japanese artistic phenomenon through his curatorial efforts, *Mono-ha* at Kamakura Gallery (1986 and 1994), *Mono-ha and Post-Mono-ha* at the Seibu Museum of Art (1987), and *Monoha: La scuola delle cose* (1988), which he co-organized with Barbara Bertozzi at the Museo Laboratorio di Arte Contemporanea in Rome.

multiplicity.[19] In a sense, the artists who were fascinated with the optic were trying to

carve out a non-linear visual space.

In the fall of 1968 Ishiko, together with critic Nakahara Yūsuke, curated *Tricks and*

Vision: Stolen Eyes (*Torikkusu ando bijon: Nusumareta me*; see exhibition poster designed

by Sugiura Kōhei, Fig. 9, and installation view, Fig. 10). Presented at two spaces, the Tokyo

Gallery and the Muramatsu Gallery, the exhibition featured work by nineteen artists, six

from the Genshoku group, as well as Takamatsu Jirō and Nakanishi Natsuyuki. Also shown

were two reliefs by Mono-ha artist Sekine Nobuo from his *Phase (Isō)* series, which he was

exhibiting a month after he obtained his master's degree from Tama Art University's

painting department. During this period the Genshoku group and Takamatsu, in particular,

had begun exploring perceptual tricks (*torikku*), or the production of distorted optical

illusions in real space. Their works in *Tricks and Vision* involved experiments with trompe

l'œil devices—flat representations of three-dimensional shapes, cylinders and angled boxes

hung slightly off the wall, a distorted table and four chairs constructed along a one-point

perspective grid—and the use of mirrors, measuring tapes, and shadows to create optical

distortions. Through this play with perspective and dimensions, the artists attempted to

construct vertiginous zones in which objects crossed over, overlapped, appeared,

disappeared, and reappeared.

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[19] Another major international exhibition was *Electromagica '69: International Psytech Art* (*Electromagica '69: Kokusai saitekku ato ten*), presented April 26–May 25, 1969, at the Sony Building in Ginza, Tokyo. Many of the kinetic and light art works, gathered from Japan, France, Germany, and the United States, were seen as anthropomorphic extensions of new media. See Ishiko Junzō, "Gendai bijutsu no shikaku—<Miru> kara <Miru> e" (The sight of contemporary art—From "seeing" to "examining"), *Biiku bunka* (Magazine for art education) 19, no. 7 (July 1969): 7.

In Ishiko's 1966 essay "Kangaeru me" (The thinking eye), the concept of reflection is discussed in terms of the mediatedness of perception.[20] In describing this process, he cites two forms of reflection discussed in philosopher Nakai Masakazu's 1930s text "'Mirukoto' no imi" (The meaning of "seeing").[21] The first form, *utsusu* (うつす) or "to reflect," involves an active process in which the object is recognized through the continuous movement of sensory phenomena and grasped in terms of a still visual frame. As in a mirror, the objective form of the object seems to be synonymous with its perceived form, and this process is referred to as an "equal projection" (等値的射影 *tōchiteki-shaei*). The second form, *utsuru* (うつる) or "to be reflected," presents the perceived element and object as discordant and involves the absorption of undifferentiated sensory phenomena that flicker along the threshold of our perceptual frame.[22] For Ishiko, the "thinking eye" operates in the overlapping structure between the two reflections; that is, "to see" is to experience both projection and absorption. Through this convergence, Ishiko wants to take the viewer into the roots of perception as it emerges from "pictorial, non-verbal thought"[23] by both

[20] Ishiko Junzō, "Kangaeru me" (The thinking eye), *Me*, no. 8 (January 15, 1966): n.p.

[21] Nakai Masakazu (1900–1952) was a philosopher of aesthetics, critic, and activist closely involved with the Kyoto School of Philosophy (Kyoto gakuha). He was one of the first philosophers to integrate the sensory dimensions of film, technology, and sports by introducing such concepts as the "projective structure of consciousness" and "technological time." See Hiroshi Nagata, ed., *Nakai Masakazu hyōronshū* (Collected writings of Nakai Masakazu) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1995).

[22] The mirror is essential to the experience of *reflection* (both to reflect and be reflected), a term Ishiko, Nakahara, and Miyakawa were exploring at the time. Nakahara Yūsuke, *Miru koto no shinwa* (The myth of seeing) (Tokyo: Firumu Āto Sha, 1972); Miyakawa Atsushi, "Imēji-ron" (Image theory) (1966), repr. in *Miyakawa Atsushi chosakushū* (Miyakawa Atsushi collected writings) (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppansha, 1980 ed.) pp. 168–202.

[23] Ishiko, "Kangaeru me," n.p. Language is a key factor in determining the intelligibility of this structure, and although Ishiko is not explicit, the two operations can be conceived in terms of the signifier and signified, or the shifter and referent in linguistic signification. Further, this idea is closely linked to Miyakawa's image theory as a dynamic process that conceives of images as an infinite regress between the signifier and signified. See Miyakawa, "Imēji-ron," pp. 168–202.

revealing and extending the limits of visual, sensual and tactile perceptions. Thus forces of

time and movement are encoded in the visual field received and projected by our optical

neurology.

The mirror is an essential technology in our mediated experience of reflection (both

to reflect and be reflected), a term Ishiko, Nakahara and Miyakawa were exploring at the

time.[24] In *Half & Half* (1968) (Fig. 11),[25] a work by Genshoku artist Iida Shōji, a pair of high-

heeled shoes, one painted white and the other blue, are placed inside a birdcage and split in

the center by a vertical two-sided mirror to create an illusion of two complete pairs (blue

and white). Despite the simplicity of the mirror device, by carefully spacing each pair

equidistant to the mirror, Iida deliberately plays on the idea of counterparts, in which the

incongruent counterpart of a pair of shoes (as shoes are not normally singular, but pair

incongruently, one being left and one being right) and the incongruent counterpart formed

by an image seen in a mirror (which reproduces the incongruent counterpart relation by

reflecting right as left) are, in a sense, experientially mixed. This construction is similar to

mirror boxes used as a therapeutic device to relieve paralysis in amputees who experience

phantom limb pain. In mirror box therapy, a vertical mirror is placed in an open box and

the patient inserts his/her intact limb and its reflection stimulates the brain into believing

in the presence of a second active limb. While the mirror box functions to produce the

illusion of a whole, *Half & Half* reveals a crack in our normal assumptions of the either/or

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[24] Nakahara Yūsuke, *Miru koto no shinwa* (The Myth of Seeing) (Tokyo: Firumu āto sha, 1972); Miyakawa Atsushi, "Imēji-ron" (Image Theory) (1966) *Miyakawa Atsushi chosakushū* (Tokyo: Bijutsu shuppansha, 1980).

[25] Other works from Iida's *Half & Half* series consist of ping-pong balls suspended inside the cage, split by a mirror with white balls on one side and the other black. For "Tricks and Vision," he displayed a single glass cup that was split it in half by a two-sided mirror to create wholes seen from either side of the caged box.

logic of pairing, in that the complete left and right pair seen from either side of the cage

(the blue pair from the left, or the white pair from the right) have a different color from the

"real pair" when viewed straight on. Like the mirror box effect, the mind is tricked into

believing in the physical existence of the counterpart that appears in the mirror's reflection.

But unlike the play of counterparts in the mirror therapy associated with the phenomenon

of phantom (amputated) limbs,[26] with which the work displays an evident kinship, *Half &

Half* produces a counter-therapeutic effect by imposing the possible convergence of two

simultaneous wholes/reflections into one on the spectator's sensory field.

Iida's *Half & Half* was not an epochal piece; however, it is worth considering in

retrospect in relation to what the Mono-ha artists gained from the optical moment, which

in some ways seems at the other end of the Mono-ha ideology – a style of extreme artifice

instead of Mono-ha's anti-subjective bareness. For what is at stake in this piece is the

destruction of mimetic trust, the automatism of seeing, and the substitution of a "phantom

eye," which operates in disjunction from our consciousness of the trick, so that we see, in a

sense, more than we see – we see the trick – and at the same time we see less than we see –

our gaze is captured by a geometrically simple device.

It is interesting to trace the development of another important artist, Takamatsu, in

relation to the nexus between art and object. Takamatsu had drastically shifted his practice

in the mid-1960s from the conceptual performances he had joined in with other Hi Red

Center artists to object-based practices that began to explore the liminality between

absence and the residual presence of everyday objects and figures. By 1968, he began

working on a new series of mise-en-scène installations that challenged conventions of

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[26] See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Body as Object and Mechanistic Physiology," "The Spatiality of One's Own Body and Motility," *Phenomenology of Perception* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

spatial dimensionality. In 1967 he began working on a series of installations that grew out

of his backwards turn. *Chairs and a Table in Perspective* (*Enkinhō no isu to tēburu*, 1967)

(Fig. 12) in the *Tricks and Vision* show, was one of the products of this move. This

installation consisted of four white chairs and a table placed on top of a slanted base

leading to a point at the lower-right corner that transferred the trompe l'oeil technique of

single-point perspective to a three-dimensional space, deliberately distorting the seamless

continuity of Albertian perspective. Takamatsu drew orthogonal lines directly on the chairs

and the table to create the illusion that the objects were receding onto a single-point axis.

The legs of the chairs to the right of the table are longer than those on the left and thus even

if the viewer is standing directly in front of the work, the slanted base and elongation of the

chair legs make it seem as if the viewer were looking at the piece slightly from the right. All

of the edges of the chairs and tables are cut according to a perspectival grid and diagonal

lines are drawn along the surface to indicate continuity between the forms, thus creating a

reversed perspective.

Echoing Takamatsu's experiments in optical distortion but taking the work into a

social dimension, Maeda's *Enkin no monosashi* [A Measuring Tape in Perspective] (1967)

(Fig. 13), also featured in the show, displayed a distorted yellow measuring tape, divided

into six segments, flat against the wall. Each segment is marked by numerical increments

that recede further into space from left to right. When observing the work straight on, the

physicality of the wall seems to "disappear" in order for the viewer to experience the

illusion of spatial depth. The eye oscillates between seeing a flat, linear object in real

space/time, and the *representation* of a flat object gradually receding into the distance.

Given that the laws of dimension are represented one degree lower (volumes represented

by lines, lines represented by points, etc.), these works operate a strange reversal in our visual processing through the collapsing of dimensions: Maeda's points are represented by lines, which simultaneously represent recessive space; Takamatsu's linear grid is represented through volume, which is flattened by conforming to perspectival lines.

Measurement, as Marshall McLuhan pointed out in 1962, was made possible by the instrumental understanding of visual space, and had developed in that space to the point that measurement dominated the visual world even as the Euclidian foundations of that world were overturned: the science of physics and the world of technology were all servants of measurement. The Renaissance period that perfected the principles of perspectival painting was also fascinated by exact measurement, while being unaware of the possibility of non-Euclidian space. In contrast to such hyper-optical societies, McLuhan quotes an anthropologist about the way Eskimos, who have a "non-visual" sense of space, measure things: "They don't regard space as static, and therefore measurable; hence they have no formal units of spatial measurement just as they have no uniform divisions of time. The carver is indifferent to the demands of the optical eye, he lets each piece fill its own space, create its own world, without reference to background or anything external to it."[27] What attracted artists like Takamatsu to optical 'tricks' was not the tradition with which it is associated in modern art, but rather the search, again, for inlets into the world of ordinary perception that would allow one to exteriorize it in the world and thus work with it outside of already used up aesthetic routines.

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[27] Marshall McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), p. 66. In 1967, Takemura Kenichi's book, *Makurūhan riron no tenkai to ōyō* (Development and application of McLuhanism) was a bestseller in Japan. See also Goto Kazuhiko, "Erekutoronikusu jidai no kankyō: Māsharu Makkurūhan no komyunikēshon ran" (Environment in the age of electronics: the communication theory of Marshall McLuhan), *Bijutsu techō* (November 1966).

Sekine, who worked under Takamatsu as a graduate painting major from 1967 to

1968, was influenced by his teacher's interests in theories of relativity, non-Euclidean

geometry, cosmology, and eventually topology.[28] Sekine differed from Takamatsu, however,

in his view of space: he was not interested in visual conventions and ruptures, but rather

viewed space as a single malleable entity that could be manipulated into an infinite variety

of structures: space, in essence, contained no "tricks." One of Sekine's first "thought

experiments" entailed re-imagining a sheet of paper as a piece of flexible rubber or wet clay

that could be manipulated into a range of configurations. After all possible configurations

were tested, he concluded that at the other end of the flat sheet was the transformation of

the paper into a sphere with a cylindrical hole through the center. The significant thing for

him was that both were identical, only their form had been redistributed. His *Phase-*

Drawings (Topology 14–16) [*Isō Dorōingu* (*Toporojī 14–16*)], 1968, Fig. 14) consist of three

different studies of open cylindrical structures, in each of which the exterior surface splays

out into a rectangular shape and the cylinder's hole weaves into a Möbius strip. Each

visualized from a different angle, these Möbius waves are positioned variously above the

center (*Topology 14*), at upper left-hand corner (*Topology 15*), and inside the rectangle

(*Topology 16*). Thus, by stretching the cylindrical form out, the interior and exterior

surfaces form an endless network that essentially results in a spatial continuity between

flat and volumetric planes. Expanding on these devices, Sekine contributed to *Tricks and*

Vision a relief sculpture titled *Phase No. 4* (*Isō No. 4*) (Fig. 15), consisting of a three-

dimensional cylinder built of lacquered plywood, painted in a fluorescent red-orange

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[28] Takamatsu was Japan's representative at the Venice Biennale in 1968, and Sekine (along with fellow Mono-ha artist, Narita Katsuhiko) began working specifically on Takamatsu's Perspective (Enkinhō) series for the exhibition. Sekine fondly recalls Takamatsu's presence to be "an unsurpassable wall that one could not avoid." Interview with Sekine, May 17, 2008.

fading into yellow and hung slightly off the ground on the wall. This deliberately creates the illusion of a flat plane, which forces us to see in rapid sequence the oscillation between planar and volumetric structures.

These continuities, rearrangements, and reorientations were picked up in Sekine's term *phase*. Nakahara Yūsuke explored this notion in Sekine's work as follows:

> Each physical object exists in relation to a situation. Sekine grasps a bit of what must be called an infinite situation, and shows forth that phase. *Substance is not treated as object; rather the situation in which the object exists is the entirety.* The phase does not happen to be completed in the work of art displayed, but is connected with all the phases exterior to it. That is, as far as Sekine is concerned, *a work of art is not the conclusion of the process, but its starting point.* From topology to topography to phase—this is Sekine's route of procedure, and this is a route from a self-limiting artwork to a series of interconnected intermediary works. And that route as it is, is connected closely to the fundamental culture of plastic vision itself. The phase embraces nothingness, or rather it embraces everything. The two basic theories of existence or non-existence have no effectiveness here. Sekine has been inspired in calling his recent works "phases of nothingness."[29] (Emphasis mine.)

Sekine's works "unbind" the three-dimensional form by playing on and expanding the limits of the spectator's perception. In privileging the idea of the *continuum* over the discrete, Sekine's phases bring the ocular back to its biological foundation as a mode of

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[29]. Nakahara Yūsuke, "From Topology to Phase," trans. Joseph Love, *Sekine Nobuo* (Tokyo: Tokyo Gallery, 1969), n.p.

experiencing space in time. Moreover, inasmuch as a phase refuses to conform to one

definitive angle of vision—one privileged viewpoint—the viewer's experience exemplifies

the shift from the object-as-substance to the object-as-situation, the phenomenological

'moral' of the piece. In this sense, the view is undeceived rather than tricked. Sekine was, in

short, reinventing the very terms that vision occupied in the narrower optical conventions

of modernity.

The paradigmatic transition from object-as-substance to object-as-situation can also

be traced in the pre- Mono-ha work of other Mono-ha artists, such as Suga Kishio. In

November 1968, the year Suga graduated from the painting department at Tama Art

University (with Sekine Nobuo who received his Master's in Painting the same year and

had just debuted *Phase-Mother Earth* the month prior),[30] Suga had his first exhibition at

Tsubaki Kindai Gallery. Entitled *Space Transformation* (*Ten'i kūkan*) (1968) (Fig. 16), the

show included ten works of shaped panels and lacquer-painted plaster assemblages.[31]

Among these works stood a freestanding rectangular structure built out of painted red

wood divided into three rectangular modules one beneath another, each proportionately

smaller, and slanting gradually at each interval as it reached the floor. At the bottom of the

structure lay a flat black square framed in red supporting the entire assembly, which made

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[30] Significantly, all but one of the artists associated with Mono-ha at Tama Art University (Sekine Nobuo, Suga Kishio, Narita Katsuhiko, and Yoshida Katsurō) graduated from the painting department. Koshimizu was the only sculpture major. As it is the case today, one's departmental affiliation did not preclude the artists from working in different media. However, being in the painting department allowed these students to work with two star artists during this period, Saitō Yoshishige and Takamatsu Jirō, who in turn helped the artists gain direct exposure in the artworld (i.e. Sekine and Suga began exhibiting their work before graduating in 1968).

[31] The assemblages were made of everyday materials such as bins, cans, and plastic strips containing hardened plaster cubes. On the floor, elongated shadows of a figure's body painted lengthwise to widthwise on shaped panels were propped against the wall. Echoing this interest in deformation, four shaped panels in gradations from dark green to white displayed overlapping images that began on the right with a profile of a female head cut inside a positive-shaped frame of a blouse. Morphing across the panels from right to left, the image is gradually transformed into a shoe cut inside a male head. See background wall of Fig. 16.

it appear as if the structure were slowly collapsing under its own weight into the virtual

frame beneath the surface of the gallery floor. Suga's reference to a moment within the

process of structural movement is arguably Suga's equivalent of Sekine's notion of a phase;

this is all the more plausible in as much as there is evidently a close dialogue between

Suga's works and Sekine's early *Phase* reliefs (1968) (Fig. 17), even as they move in two

different directions: Sekine's topological experiments represent a move away from gravity

into virtual space, while Suga's *Space-Transformation* lays bear the burden of gravity,

revealing an early interest in exhibiting the entropic pull of gravity on mass that leads to

the decomposition of form.[32]

Return to Relation

By the late 1960s Japan's student movement and the radical New Left had both been

stymied in their attempts to challenge the Japanese state, its economic and educational

policies, and its support for U.S. security arrangements in Asia––most notably, its

complicity in the Vietnam War. The movements' frustrations resonated with worldwide

political unrest—including the 1968 student riots in Paris and antiwar protests in the

United States—but, unlike those international occurrences, which ultimately effected some

change, Japan's radical movements ended in failure.

In the Japanese art world, the moment of interest in the play of optical distortions

soon passed, unable to sustain its position vis-à-vis the ongoing critique in avant-garde art

circles of all forms of aesthetic complicity with the institutionally promoted passivity of the

spectator. An art of liberation could only accept distortion as a way station on the journey

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[32] Other works included Koshimizu's *Waku (Frame)* and *Packaged Space* akin to Sol Lewitt's modular cube progressions.

to reconceptualizing totally the "relation," (関係 *kankei*) between art and viewer. In the art press, 1968–70 witnessed a resurgence of the notion of "relation" in the discourse on where art should be headed. Relation and plays on the Japanese character for between (間), which can be read as *aida, hazama,* or *ma*—were thematized in connection to ideas of tension, liminality, intersection, or contact.

An early example of this is Nakahara's subtitle for the seminal 10th Tokyo Biennale, *Between Man and Matter,* in 1970. This was an international exhibition at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum in which a majority of the contributions were made of raw and ephemeral materials, installed in and around the museum.[33] Nakahara's idea was to create a large sample of contemporary trends in the global art community, and to that end he brought the work of Arte Povera, Minimalist, post-Minimalist, and Process artists to Tokyo. Thematically, Nakahara saw the commonality in these schools in their approach to matter, and in their relation to the socius: this between-space was not, however, the space of mastery, of the mediation of the built environment under the guidance of the artist, as in the dream of high modernists like Le Corbusier. Rather it was the between of the marginal urban figure, taking up the dross of commercial society and re-circulating it. The overall tone was irony, not triumphalism.

Relation was also a common theme in the practices of the artists associated with Mono-ha. Suga Kishio's work titles, such as *Condition of a Critical Boundary* (*Rinkai jōkyō*, 1970) (Fig. 22) and *HAZAMA—Condition of Between* (*Hazama no jōkyō*, 1971) (Fig. 23) plainly evoke liminal conditions, while the work implements a series of balancing acts

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[33] See Narita Katsuhiko, *SUMI,* Enokura Kōji's *Place* [*Ba*], *Circulation* (1969) and *Tokyo Trickle* (1970) by Hans Haacke and *Demagnetization of a Room* [*Demagnetizzazione di una stanza*] by Giuseppe Penone, all 1970; Figs. 18 through 21)

between different states. In his *HAZAMA—Condition of Between,* a stone balances precariously on a wooden board floating in a pond—thus creating a moment of fragile stability among opposing elemental forces – matter and water. Both works evince an interest in the threshold *between* intersecting surfaces. Suga describes this notion of "between" (*hazama*) as possessing "the ability to extract a monumental substance" and "to enable 'seeing' the work's system and the substance that intervenes in the 'opening' and its idea."[34] Relation in the form of intersection is also seen in Enokura's *Untitled* (*Mudai*, 1970) (Fig. 24), a corner piece consisting of an equilateral triangle made of leather with a slit across the center, like a wound between body and space. Takamatsu's series *Oneness* (*Tantai*, 1969–72)—including his *Oneness of Concrete* (*Konkurīto no tantai*, 1971) (Fig. 25)—in which broken fragments of concrete are pieced together inside a container made of the same concrete, explores the infinite possibilities in opposing conditions of part and whole, absence and presence.

This fascination with the relation between ground and figure was explored also in Ishiko's well-known July 1969 article "Bi, sekai, hakken" (Art, world, discovery).[35] Lee's performance *Things and Words* (*Mono to kotoba*) of the same year set the stage for Ishiko's piece, which advocates a new form of visual perception that consists in "seeing" the

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[34] "Ryōiki no atsumi" [The Depth of the Terrain] (1996) in *Suga Kishio chosaku senshū: "Ryōiki wa tojinai"/ Selected Writings of Suga Kishio: "Spheres Will Not Be Closed."* (Yokohama: Yokohama Museum of Art, 1999), p. 157. The full quote is as follows: "I realized that one of the devices that I have continued to possess is the concept of 'between' (*hazama*) or 'opening' (*sukima*). The distinction maintained between a thing and a thing, or between dimensions of a space, is no doubt the recognition of this 'between' or 'opening.' However narrow the gap is, I always believe it has the ability to extract a monumental substance. By illuminating the area between the air, water, and the soil, my aim is to enable "seeing" the work's system and the substance that intervenes in the 'opening' and its idea."

[35] Ishiko Junzō, "Bi, sekai, hakken" (Art, world, discovery), *Geijutsu seikatsu* (Artistic life), no. 239 (July 1969): 33–36.

emergence of art from the interactive material textures arising from the world.[36] In "Bi, sekai, hakken," Ishiko charts the formation of modern dualism (that is, the subject-object dichotomy) through a consideration of objectification and the formation of art under the cover of an appeal to universal values based upon the individualization of the self. The couple originality-universality comes out of this dualism, fundamental not only to art but also to the sphere of production and consumption in all domains of social life. Ishiko proposes an escape from this syndrome: art must be both equal to the self and *already existent* in the world; the process of the object's coming-into-being must take place through the integration of the viewer with the object-as-world. Ishiko's earlier writings, too, had called for a renewed act of seeing (*miru*) as a form of "discovery." Citing Japanese literary and philosophical references to articulate his notion of "discovery," he refers to the writer Kawabata Yasunari's revelatory encounter (邂逅 *kaikō*) with a set of glass cups glistening under the morning sun, as well as Daruma's (Bodhidharma) teaching of perfect enlightenment (正覚 *shōgaku*) and the eclipsing of rational logic and expression.[37] The anonymity of existent forms, he argued, engages the act of affective observation as a part of a natural process—and thus fundamentally changes the way we perceive works of art.

There is a certain notion of "distance" from material that operates in the logic of Ishiko's essay, with the break from the optical manipulation of material. This concern

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[36] The single remaining photographic document of *Things and Words* appears in a grainy black and white photo-illustration in the July 1969 issue of *Geijutsu seikatsu*. While Ishiko does not make a single reference to the work in his text, the transient quality visible in *Things and Words* illustrates Ishiko's advocacy of an art form adapted to rethinking the nature of visual perception.

[37] Ishiko, pp. 33, 35. Ishiko's reference is drawn from a public lecture that Kawabata gave at the University of Hawai'i in May 1969. The lecture were published in Mainichi Newspaper, and subsequently translated into English in Kawabata Yasunari, *The Existence and Discovery of Beauty*, trans. V.H. Viglielmo (Tokyo: The Mainichi Newspapers, 1969).

toward non-alteration and transformation in the artistic moment seem to lead to various

stages of coexistence between the art object and the subject (whether creator or spectator).

In this manner, art may already *be* existent in the world; and provide a reason for why we

must necessarily try to get the "viewer" to see and integrate with the object. Here, as the

spectator's own unconscious alteration of vision—one's understanding of oneself as

looking at art—must be stripped away so that the object-as-world actually eventuates.

As we come to the end of the 1960s and reflect back on the evolution of the object

over the previous fifteen years, we thus seem to have come full circle, from Tsuruoka's

insistence on "things" in opposition to "events" to a phenomenological rethinking of matter

as event—a condition in which "things" and "events" have in essence become

interchangeable. The terms of artistic practice radically shifted over this decade-and-a-half

period, from concerns with the ethics of representation to a language that probes a

specified *relation* through which things reveal their existence. Over time this language

pursued the visual and corporeal limits of perception and the essential operations of

tactility, destruction, optical distortion, and intuiting of matter.

One may say these approaches are attempted responses to Haryū's early declaration

of the failure of the sculptural imagination. In this sense, "sculpture" has defied a modernist

trajectory of medium-specificity, having been replaced by the use of alternative terms such

as *three-dimensional object*, *objet*, *thing*, *substance*, and *matter*. Critical to this development

are the ways in which the fundamental issues of the agency of a work and how we perceive

an object have come to be defined and built upon contingent experience. This notion of the

object's transfiguration, from *mass* to *matter* and from *thing* to *event*, interrogates the

work's activation as a generative site for the capacity of historical experience.

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CHAPTER 2

MONO-HA: HISTORICAL FORMATION

A black-and-white photo published in the February 1970 issue of the art journal *Bijutsu*

techō (Fig. 26) depicts twenty-six year old artist Sekine Nobuo and two female colleagues

unraveling nine, large plywood boards that had been tightly attached to a 2.7m high by 2.2

m diameter cylindrical mold of earth.[38] The sculptural work entitled *Phase–Mother Earth*

(Fig. 27), comprised of a large hole from which dirt was extracted and mixed with concrete

in order to form a positive cylindrical shape identical to the hole's negative volume. At the

end of the exhibition, Sekine requested the dirt be returned back into the earth, filling up

the hole, thus completing the work and erasing traces of its existence.[39] Alongside the

photo was a headline boldly announcing the arrival of a new generation of artists: "Voices

of Emerging Artists—From the Realm of Non-Art,"[40] and the article featured artists and

their work. The editors of *Bijutsu techō* chose *Phase–Mother Earth* to represent the horizon

(地平 *chihei* - literally, the earth's horizon) of a new artistic terrain elusively labeled "Non-

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[38] The dimensions of the cylinder and hole were determined by the largest plywood board available at the time: 90 x 180 cm. In an effort to not "waste the materials," Sekine used every inch available and joined nine plywood boards (three by three) in order to produce a form that was slightly larger than the average human height: 2.7 meters high (8.8 feet) x 2.2 meters (7.2 feet) in diameter. Interview with the artist, February 26, 2012.

[39] Sekine's installation of the work at the 1st Kobe Suma Rikyū Park Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition had been sponsored by Asahi newspapers, which had given it an award. This generated a great deal of publicity, bringing Sekine instant recognition.

[40] "Hatsugen suru shinjintachi—Higeijutsu no chihei kara" (Voices of emerging artists: From the realm of Non-Art), *Bijutsu techō* 22, no. 324 (February 1970): 12–55.

Art" (非芸術 *hi-geijutsu*).[41] The implication was that art was no longer to be seen as the

product of an individual artistic creator but instead as the explicit rejection of creation and

its ideology of individuality. These "emerging artists" would come to form the core of an

artistic practice now known as "Mono-ha." "By presenting everyday materials directly," the

editors of *Bijutsu techō* wrote, "in a non-quotidian manner, these artists strip the concepts

that lay embedded within these materials and in turn attempt to see the opening of a new

world."[42]

In the pages following the photo of *Phase–Mother Earth*, the article featured many

other color photographs of works shot in natural daylight, attesting to transient

arrangements that emphasized physical contact or tension between unprocessed natural

and industrial materials:[43] a large steel pipe stuffed with cotton placed in the middle of a

street casting a shadow on the pavement (Yoshida Katsurō's *Cut-off*) (Fig. 28), a plywood

board and a glass pane propped against one another and wedged between two stones

(Suga Kishio's *Standing*) (Fig. 29), a meteoric rock placed on top of a shattered plate of

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[41] *Hi-geijutsu* was a term first coined by the editors of *Bijutsu techō* based on Sekine's use of the term in a roundtable discussion from the same issue, "*Mono* Opens a New World." Sekine was referring to artists working with unprocessed *mono* [thing, matter, material]. This label is still used in contemporary art historical discourse by Reiko Tomii, a scholar of postwar Japanese art, who describes Non-Art in terms of a nihilist rejection of artistic production. She states: "In the latter half of the 1960s, practitioners continued to push forward, cutting a wide swath of experimental terrain into the Non-Art of conceptualism and Mono-ha, wherein the mandate no longer concerned with 'making' in the conventional sense but explicitly with 'not making.' (To be more precise, Non-Art even rejected Anti-Art's 'rebellion against making.')" Here, Non-Art's explicit interest in "not making" encompasses the distinct practices of the late-1960s movement of Japanese conceptualism, or *kannen bijutsu* (観念美術) inspired by Buddhist metaphysics on the one hand, and Mono-ha's interest in presenting the bare and actual condition of "things" on the other. See Reiko Tomii, "After the 'Descent to the Everyday': Japanese Collectivism from Hi Red Center to The Play, 1964–1973," *Collectivism After Modernism*, eds. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 52. See also Tomii, "Geijutsu on Their Mind: Memorable Words on 'Anti-Art'," *Art, Anti-Art, Non-Art: Experimentations in the Public Sphere* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007).

[42] "Hatsugen suru shinjintachi," 14.

[43] These color photographs were shot by Nakajima Kō (1941–), a fellow Tama Art University graduate and a pioneer in avant-garde animation and video art.

glass reflecting the clouds above (Lee Ufan's *Relatum,* [formerly *Phenomena and Perception B*]) (Fig. 30), a three-ton, rectangular, granite boulder tucked inside a large bag of Japanese paper with its edges fluttering in the wind (Koshimizu Susumu's *Paper*) (Fig. 31), and mounds of oilclay precariously stacked on top of one another (Sekine's *Phase of Nothingness-Oilclay*) (Fig. 32).[44] Collectively, materials included canvas, charcoal, cotton, dirt, Japanese paper, oil, rope, stones, wooden logs, glass panes, electric bulbs, plastic, rubber, steel plates, synthetic cushions, and wires. These materials were carefully configured through actions such as stuffing, dropping, stacking, slashing, breaking, suspending, or propping—emphasizing a temporary "phase" (suggested by Sekine's title) of tension conditioned by the materials' physical properties. This attempt was to locate the work not in its objective form, but in the structures through which things revealed their existence. These works were emphatically situated in a space defined by the bare facticity of materials, the inter-relativity of the viewer's consciousness, and the site or space, including the surrounding light and shadows if any.

Sekine and his art school colleagues from Tama Art University (Tamabi) Koshimizu Susumu, Narita Katsuhiko, Suga Kishio, and Yoshida Katsurō participated in the issue's roundtable discussion entitled "*Mono* Opens a New World," which was moderated by Japan-based, Korean artist and writer, Lee Ufan. The term *mono* (thing) was printed with brackets and written in Japanese hiragana (<もの>) to distinguish it from a physical object denoted by its Chinese characters (物, also read *butsu*). Their agenda, the artists claimed,

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[44] These works all from 1969 had either been submitted or included in juried museum exhibitions, *9th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan* (Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, May 10–30, 1969) and *Trends in Contemporary Japanese Art* (Kyoto National Museum of Modern Art, August 19–September 23, 1969) and were re-staged outdoors for the magazine feature.

was distinct from other anti-art movements of the post-war period, and in particular from

that launched by Yoshihara Jirō, leader of the 1950s action-based, art group Gutai, who

identified the tactile substance of matter (物質 *busshitsu*) with the human spirit.[45] The term

mono was also distinct from *obuje*, derived from the French word *objet*, which emerged as a

preferred term in the Anti-Art context of the early 1960s in Japan to describe the found or

appropriated objects that artists elevated to the status of art by transposing them into an

aesthetic context, a gesture with its roots in the ready-mades of Duchamp in the 1910s.[46]

This point is articulated in Yoshida's notes from the period as follows:

> When we think about new expressions, our ways of seeing things and the meaning
>
> that words possess change. For example, the meaning that "things" (*butsu*) possess
>
> for artists of the previous generation is different from the meaning that I use for
>
> "things" (*mono*). When one says "things" (*butsu*), it belongs to the realm of the
>
> artist's hand, and is a substance (*busshitsu*) that the artist can transform into as
>
> many ways as possible. When I say "things" (*mono*), it lies outside of the artist, and
>
> whatever I do it will still be matter. At times however, it will bring a type of
>
> recognition or impressiveness into my consciousness . . . [47]

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[45] Yoshihara Jirō would advocate that the "human spirit and the material shake hands with each other" so that the "material never compromises itself with the spirit; the spirit never dominates the material." Yoshihara, "Gutai bijutsu sengen" (Gutai art manifesto), *Geijutsu shinchō* 7 (December 1956): 202; translated by Reiko Tomii and published in Alexandra Munroe, *Scream Against the Sky* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1994), p. 370.

[46] See Minemura Toshiaki, "The Realism of Tactility: Another Japan That Erupted," in *1953: Shedding Light on Art in Japan*, trans. Reiko Tomii (Tokyo: Tama Art University, 1997).

[47] Yoshida Katsurō, "Notes" (c. 1970) quoted in "Chotto shita chigai ga zōfuku sarete" (Slight differences that became expanded), "Tokubetsu kiji. Shōgen: Mono-ha ga kataru mono-ha" (Special article. Testimonies: Mono-ha speaks on Mono-ha). *Bijutsu techō*, no. 707 (May 1995): 260.

As Yoshida notes reveal, the Tamabi artists sought to provoke affective sensations arising from encounters with matter, which they described through colloquial words such as *dokitto* ("heartstopping"), *zokutto* ("spine-chilling"), or *shibireru* ("thrilling"), indicating a charged discovery and engagement. When Lee asked the artists in the roundtable to say what stage in their working method (the plan, process, or result) was the most critical, Sekine emphasized that each stage brought about a state of *liberation* that was important in revealing an essential state of things. This process further involved rejecting the notion of a work as a "mirror onto which you projected your ideal or concept."[48] Koshimizu cited Duchamp's "art coefficient" as a precedent. Duchamp had defined this as "the arithmetical relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed."[49] Lee summarized the artists' attempts to define their work as a "structure of acts" that "allows us to perceive a world that transcends the initial intention or method, as well as all concepts." For the roundtable discussion, *shigusa* (仕草), which can be translated as "act" or "gesture," proved to be a key term for Lee during this time in defining Mono-ha.[50] *Shigusa*, as Lee defined it, is not simply an expression of an intention, but initiates a process of enacting and being acted upon, and dissolves the distinction between the subject and the object in an intimate contact with the world.

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[48] Sekine, "*Mono* Opens a New World." *Bijutsu techō* 22, no. 324 (February 1970): 38.

[49] Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act," (lecture, Session on the Creative Act, Convention of the American Federation of Arts, Houston, TX, April 1957). The lecture was published in Duchamp, "The Creative Act," *Art News* 56. no. 4 (Summer 1957): 28–29.

[50] Lee would go on to use the term in an exhibition review from October 1969. See Lee Ufan, "Shigusa no sekai 'Gendai bijutsu no dōkōten' ni sanka shite: Kyoto kokuritsu kindai bijutsukan" (The world of *shigusa*: Participating in the "Contemporary Art Exhibition" Kyoto National Museum of Modern Art), *SD,* no. 59 (October 1969).

Gesture, of course, has historical connotations with the American and European art of the 50s, especially Abstract Expressionism. Here the term is transposed into another context, one in which the artist's impress is not the shadow of his or her subjectivity, but the measure of his or her surrender to the things themselves.

Mono-ha's characteristics thus far can be summarized as follows: 1). the explicit rejection of creation and individuality that represented part of a broad emergent artistic category known as "Non-Art"; 2) an attempt to locate the work not in its objective form as a physical object (*butsu*), a tactile material (*busshitsu*), or a found object (*objet*), but in the structures through which things revealed their existence; 3) affective sensations arising from charged *encounters*; 4) the liberation from intentions, methods, or concepts in order to reveal the "essential state" of things; and 5) the intimacy of contact with the world through *shigusa*, which is equally a matter of the world, the maker, and the thing, in which the boundary dividing subject and object as distinct entities dissolves.

The brief mention of the currency of "gesture" in the artworld vocabulary of the U.S. and Europe should remind us that Mono-ha emerged in a context. This was the global avant-garde's reaction to heroic modernism (embodied by Abstract Expressionism), which expressed itself in a number of ways, from parody (embodied by the "cool" styles of Pop art) to chance (Fluxus, etc.) to Minimalism. When *Phase–Mother Earth* first graced the January 1969 cover of *Geijutsu shinchō* magazine (Fig 33),[51] the issue included an article on seven contemporary artworks selected by renowned critic Nakahara Yūsuke, who noted that many had interpreted Sekine's piece, with its play of mass and void, positive and

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[51] Nakahara Yūsuke, "Hihyō-ka no me 1: Nakahara Yūsuke shijō gyararī. Geijutsu to iū kokyō " (Critic's eye 1: Nakahara Yūsuke magazine gallery. "A national border called art"), *Geijutsu shinchō*, no. 233 (January 1969): 36.

negative, as an extension from the optical play or trick art so popular at the time. Nakahara

connected this to the new media practices of Op, Kinetic, Light Art in Japan, which were

about to reach a peak in such exhibits as *Electromagica '69* at the new Sony Building in

Ginza district of Tokyo. Specifically, discussions concerning actual (実在 *jitsuzai*) vs. virtual

(虚像 *kyozō*)[52] or false notions of the object's dematerialization (非物質化 *hibusshitsuka*)

were bound up with the an uncritical tendency to welcome technological development in

itself. Just prior to making this work, Sekine served as an assistant to Takamatsu Jirō

(1936-1998), a pivotal figure in the performance group Hi Red Center, whose explorations

of shadow and reverse-perspective (i.e., three-dimensional representations of two-

dimensional space) had triggered a renewed discussion in art circles regarding vision and

opticality. Art critics such as Nakahara, Ishiko Junzō, and Miyakawa Atsushi in the years

preceding 1968 focused on these issues. When Sekine broke with this art tendency with his

own work, it was not an absolute repudiation of the art context that had gone before, but a

displacement of the illusionism and Anti-Art practices in Japan. Instead of translating a

non-art object into an aesthetic context as the heir of the Duchampian tradition, or playing

with the eye's creation of space as the op art movement did, Sekine used a non-art object (a

hole in the earth and its double, closing with the re-filling of the hole) to set in motion the

relationship between material, process, and site as integral parts of an aesthetic whole. The

flux encoded in the entire process of the piece is analogous to the fluctuations of daily life,

while the moment of monumentality, when the hole and its double were situated next to

each other, figured a stasis that is analogous to death. This philosophical attitude resided in

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[52] Haryū Ichirō, "Hihyō-ka no me 3: Haryū Ichirō shijō gyararī. "Jittai to kyozō o meguru dansō" (Critic's eye 1: Haryū Ichirō magazine gallery. Fragmentary thoughts on actuality and illusion), *Geijutsu shinchō*, no. 235 (March 1969).

an aesthetic detachment that emphasized the "conditions" and "situations" (状態 *jōtai*) of

the object itself extended in time, understood through the lens of Eastern and Western

phenomenology.

Many of the debates in Japan reflected parallel American art practices introduced to

Japan in the sixties. Minimalism was a particularly important intervention in the Japanese

art scene. The 1966 *Primary Structures* exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York

attracted a lot of attention from Japanese art critics.[53] In 1969 several important texts

were translated and/or introduced by critics in Japan: Robert Morris' "Notes on Sculpture

Part 1"[54] Michael Fried's "Art and Objecthood,"[55] as well as articles about Land Art

("Earthworks"),[56] an introduction to Morris' "anti-form" and the Whitney Museum's show,

Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials in October 1969.[57]

Lee and Suga each, as well informed artists, were aware of what was happening in

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[53] The Mono-ha artists were exposed to Minimalism through black-and-white reproductions in the catalog for the seminal *Primary Structures* exhibition.

[54] In March 1969, *Bijutsu techō* dedicated an issue to Robert Morris with translated sections from his "Notes on Sculpture, Part 1." See Robert Morris, "Chōkoku ni tsuite no nōto—kankaku no shikakuka" (Notes on sculpture: Concerning the visualization of the senses), trans. Yamaguchi Katsuhiro, *Bijutsu techō* 21, no. 310 (March 1969): 62–65.

[55] Critic Fujieda Teruo provided a lengthy overview of Fried's critique of theatricality in his article on land-based art in the U.S., Europe and Japan. See Fujieda Teruo, "Kannen no romanchishizumu—busshitsu no shōmetsu" (A romanticism of concepts: disappearance of matter), *Bijutsu techo*, no. 315 (July 1969): 78–113.

[56] Land Art was featured in the July 1969 issue of *Bijutsu techo* in the feature "'Atarashii shizen' Āsuwāku" (Feature: 'a new nature' Earthworks). "Daichi no shita wa umerareta bijutsukan—tsuchi o meguru geijutsuka no kotoba" (Museum buried under the earth: artist's words that explore the earth), *Bijutsu techo*, no. 315 (July 1969): 114–121.

[57] The Whitney's *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* was reviewed as part of *Bijutsu techo*'s October 1969 feature on the developments in contemporary sculpture that began with Henry Moore to Anti-Form. See Okada Takahiko, "Jitsuzō to zentaisei o motomete" (Toward actual forms and totality); Fujieda Teruo "Shikaku ni yoru shikaku no hihan—Anchi forumu no riron" (Critique of perception based on perception—Anti-form theory); and Kondō Tatsuo, "Anchi irūjon/Tetsuzuki to sozai" (*Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials*), *Bijutsu techo* (October 1969): 30–83.

New York, and both were familiar with key Minimalist texts as we will discover. Each

published a key essay in the same February 1970 issue of *Bijutsu techo,* and, conveniently,

the two essays offer two different interpretive frameworks for the Mono-ha aesthetic,

exploring different but related theoretical domains. Lee Ufan's "In Search of Encounter"

singled out *Phase–Mother Earth* for marking a revolutionary shift: instead of perceiving its

positive-negative spatial relationship purely optically, the viewer had a corporeal

encounter with the phenomenon of the earth's existence and disappearance. He defined

"encounter" as: In the same February 1970 issue, Lee and Suga each published a key essay,

which set up two different interpretive frameworks for the Mono-ha aesthetic. Lee Ufan's

"In Search of Encounter" singled out *Phase–Mother Earth* for marking a revolutionary shift:

instead of perceiving its positive-negative spatial relationship purely optically, the viewer

had a corporeal encounter with the phenomenon of the earth's existence and

disappearance. He defined "encounter" as:

> the place and moment of self-awareness (spiritual enlightenment) when man,
>
> transcending modern 'man,' touches and is held spellbound by the vividness of
>
> the world as-it-is. To the artist who manipulates image and signification, the
>
> world serves as material. But to the *deaisha* [one who experiences an interactive
>
> encounter] everything is but a phase that reveals the appearance of a state of the
>
> world. . .[58]

In this essay, which later provided the title for his book, *Deai o motomete* (In Search of

Encounter) published in January 1971, Lee left behind the terms of debate generated by the

optical moment in 60s art, and shifted the emphasis from visual recognition to somatic

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[58] Lee Ufan, "Deai o motomete" (In search of encounter), *Bijutsu techō* (February 1970): 17, 23.

experience that activated the totality of the body's extension in real time and space. In Lee's

logic, encounter was conditioned by the body's passivity in the moment of awakening that

allowed the veil of the self to briefly fall.

In contrast to Lee's focus on encounter as a moment of awakening, Suga's essay

"Existence Beyond Condition" aimed to discover a vocabulary that extended beyond

linguistic signification. That is, Suga presented the "existence" of a thing as a nameless

entity outside the subject's fundamental desire to "produce" objects. The primary issue for

Suga was to defamiliarize objects that function as symbols, concepts, and signs, as well as

devices that attempted to manipulate a thing's "presence." All elements (subject, object, and

site) are inseparable and non-hierarchical. Art's impulse to break through to the primary

level is continually thwarted by its imprisonment in some schema of representation. The

point of Suga's work was to take the artwork out of the trap of the subjective perceptual

system and return it to its primal condition of existence.

Lee and Suga's writings reveal two fundamental aspects of the group's practice that

are disguised in the dialectical play of technical conceptual differences. First, they *challenge*

the value of conceiving the art object as a permanent thing that *expresses the artist*. Second,

they reject the notion of the art object as a *repository of projected ideas*, as a vehicle upon

which meaning is imposed. By rejecting these two fundamental tenets of modernist

aesthetics, Lee and Suga called for a deconstruction of the legacy of modern dualism. Lee

laid out the core of the problem with the Cartesian subject in his earlier text, "World and

Structure" (1969), in which he discussed the manifestation of Cartesian rationalism within

the artistic and intellectual landscape of modern Japan, linking Western rationalism,

industrial capitalism, and modern technology to human subjects' desires to make new things.

Taking up Lee's ideas, Sekine himself voiced a concern with the impossibility of "creating" new objects in the historical context of his moment. In a conversation with contemporary art critics, Sekine raised the importance of questioning what is meant to create in his own time:

> Once one admits the existence of a thing, humans twist and make ways to convert them to one's own desires, and the foundation of a thing's existence is lost. That is, we may no longer be able to "create," but what we can do is *to wipe the dust off the surface of things and let the world that it is a part of appear* [emphasis mine].[59]

Sekine's concern with the impossibility of creating new objects—a fundamental hostility to the notion of the "new" as a hallmark of art—is symptomatic of the political, economic, and cultural turmoil in late 1960s Japan. The New Left in Japan, as elsewhere in the non-Communist world, opened itself to the anti-subjective current of philosophy and criticism that was being articulated, for instance, in France (viz. the "death of the author" theorized by Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes).

On another front, the rising political distrust of both U.S. and Japanese governments among its citizens was being channeled in political and student movements, for instance in the student upheavals over the renewal of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (1969). As the Japanese economy boomed in the sixties, traditional political and social structures were

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[59] Sekine Nobuo in conversation with Horiuchi Masakazu, Ikeda Masuo, Sugai Kumi, and Tōnō Yoshiaki, "Zadankai: <dai 9 kai Gendai Nihon Bijutsuten o megutte> Ashita no geijutsu o kangaeru, <Tsukuru to iu koto, Tsukuranai to iu koto>" (Symposium: 9th contemporary Japanese art, contemplating the art of tomorrow, "The meaning of creating, the meaning of not creating"), *Bijutsu techō* 21, no. 315 (July 1969): 180–81.

under a broad attack signaled by university upheavals, anti-establishment and anti-

Vietnam war activism and the mobilization of leftist movements against US imperialism. In

September 1969, a nationwide student coalition called the *Zengaku kyōtō Kaigi* (the Joint

Struggle Committee), or *Zenkyōtō* for short, launched violent protests in response to the

Ministry of Education's intervention in taking greater bureaucratic control over the

university education system. In response, the coalition demanded control of student

facilities, free-speech rights, and revamping of the still feudal authoritarian system that

regulated Japanese higher education. In support of the coalition, the Tama Art University

art collective, *Bikyōtō* (*Bijutsuka Kyoto Kaigi*, or Artists' Joint-Struggle Council) built and

lived inside barricades on campus during the anti-*Anpo* demonstrations, which the police

violently repressed with tear-gas and water cannons. In March 1970, Bikyōtō turned their

attention toward art institutions (Tokyo Biennale, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, The

National Museum of Modern Art, and public competition systems), to which end it

organized "Crash Expo" rituals. These were provoked, in particular, as a reply to the Osaka

Expo of 1970, which flaunted Japan's modern, technological developments.[60] In this

atmosphere of suspicion, many younger people, members of the postwar generation,

embarked on a romantic quest for more meaningful life, rejecting the perceived sense of

closure amidst the rapid change in values and lifestyles that seemed to be the price of

Japanese capitalism.[61] In particular, Lee's critique resonated with the socio-political

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[60] See Alexandra Munroe, "Mono-ha: The Laws of Situation and Beyond the Sculptural Paradigm," *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky*, trans. Reiko Tomii (New York: Harry Abrams, 1994), pp. 257-59.

[61] See Yumiko Iida, "Rapid economic growth and romantic resurgence," *Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan*: *Nationalism as Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

debates among New Left intellectuals who critically re-examined subjectivity within their

broader critiques of nationalist, imperialist, and Marxist state ideologies.[62]

Mono-ha thus represents an art-historical turning point that paralleled Japan's

political upheaval and *Phase–Mother Earth* served as a moment of crystallization within the

Japanese avant-garde art scene. If *Phase—Mother Earth* is defined by its entire life cycle,

unrecuperable, unique, and yet without define boundaries, one could even say the work

existed in its prolongation in the practices of the artists that responded to it, who went on

to fundamentally reevaluate the value and ontological status of art during this critical

moment in the development of Japanese modernity. Because the Mono-ha artists, were

educated in, or at least sensitive to, the philosophical currents of the time, one must be

especially attentive to the vocabulary employed by Lee and the artists as a way of

developing a sense of the thematic evolution of their art in its cultural, conceptual and

institutional contexts. The philosophical and critical themes were not always consistent,

and sometimes their tension one against the other caused a theme to either be dropped or

to deepen. The dialogue of the artists with each other and with their own work is vital to

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[62] A key writer among them, Yoshimoto Takaaki, revised the older left's narrative of the history of Marxist resistence in 20th century Japan. *Tenkō* (intellectuals who renounced Marxism) was a phenomenon in the nationalist 1930s that had traditionally been seen as the result of authoritarian coercion. Those who did not renounce Marxism endured long periods of imprisonment and torture by state officials, until they were eventually forced to convert to nationalist state ideology. But Yoshimoto wrote, "I do not believe that political enforcement or oppression [by the authority] were major factors for the external conditions of Japanese *tenkō*. Rather, the most significant factor was the fear of alienation from the masses. This is the axis of my theory of *tenkō*." Yoshimoto argued that *tenkō* was a social phenomenon that resulted from the recognition, by radical thinkers, that they had become internally alienated from the masses who, according to their theory, were the subject of history. The relevance of Yoshimoto's argument on the Japanese scene of the 60s was to drive intellectuals and artists away from the traditional parties and institutions of the Left, which were, objectively, compromised by their accords with the establishment and with what he called the "fake system" of the Cold War, and to explore alternative discourses, bypassing the traditional political oppositions between Left and Right, in order to pursue a true mental break with the capitalist order. Yoshimoto's alienation— rather than advocating its overcoming—prefigured Lee's alienation of subjective agency (and the subject/object binary) as the ground for Mono-ha's practice. See Yoshimoto Takaaki, "Tenkō-ron" [A theory of tenkō] (1958), *Yoshimoto Takaaki Zenshūsen* [Yoshimoto Takaaki Complete Writings] (Tokyo: Daiwa Shobō, 1986), 14; and Yoshimoto, *Gisei no shūen* [The end of sacrifice], (Tokyo: Gendai shichō-sha, 1962).

understanding the terms in which the works emerge, as well as how their work is open to
its own closure, or disappearance.

Lee Ufan and the Tama Art University Circle

Mono-ha as a school could be said to have emerged from the dialogue between Lee Ufan, a
Korean-born, Japan-based artist who had moved to Japan in 1956 and graduated with a
philosophy degree from Nihon University in 1961, and Sekine Nobuo, a master-of-fine-arts
graduate in painting from Tama Art University (Tamabi) in March 1968. Tamabi was the
locus of the movement, and the early Mono-ha group included fellow students at the
university including Yoshida Katsuro, Narita Katushiko, Suga Kishio, Honda Shingo
(painting majors) and Koshimizu Susumu (a sculpture major). At Tamabi, these artists
studied with Takamatsu Jirō, a prominent artist who taught at the university from 1968 to
1972 and represented Japan at the Venice Biennale in 1968. Takamatsu's work in the mid-
to-late 1960s was associated with intellectualism,[63] a form of conceptual art produced in
reference to the hermeneutics of absence, time and language, as well as cognitive studies in
reverse perspective and experiments in optical distortion as discussed in Chapter 1.
Takamatsu's "trick art" inspired the early work of his students: Sekine's *Phase No. 4* and
Suga's *Space Transformation*, from 1968 signal this turn to optical distortion or
permutation. (Figs. 15–16) Another artist who taught at Tamabi, Saitō Yoshishige (1904–

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[63] Despite Takamatsu's method of creating plans and diagrams, which most of the artists did not believe in
making, his practice emphasized a phenomenological experience of materials. See Lee Ufan, "Ninshiki kara
chikaku e—Takamatsu Jirō-ron" (From knowledge to perception—On Takamatsu Jirō), *Deai o motomete:
Gendai bijutsu no shigen* (In search of encounter: The beginnings of contemporary art), rev. ed. (Tokyo:
Bijutsu shuppansha, 2000), p. 71–104.

2001), was a pioneer of Constructivism in Japan.[64] Sharing Saitō's conviction that

illusionism and individual expression were obsolete, the Tamabi artists used materials to

articulate impermanent sites or (場 *ba*) and situations (状況 *jōkyō*).[65] Saito encouraged

Sekine in particular to explore fields beyond visual art including natural science, set theory

and topology in contemporary mathematics, classical Eastern and Western philosophy,

Marxism, structuralism, pragmatism, as well as contemporary literature, film, and manga.[66]

Yoshida, Koshimizu, and Suga eventually began sharing a studio with Sekine in back

of a wood shop in the Furōchō district of Yokohama. In early fall of 1968, Sekine asked

Koshimizu to serve as technical advisor for *Phase–Mother Earth* and he and Yoshida went

to Kobe for a week to assist Sekine in making the work for the 1st Kobe Suma Rikyū

Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition. They took along their three partners, who were also

students at the university. Two of them ended up in the photograph with which we began

our account. The sheer impact of the work on Yoshida and Koshimizu was so strong that

they were unable to produce art for the next several months.[67] Lee, who had met Sekine in

1968, was also deeply impressed by *Phase-Mother Earth.* The work would serve as the

impetus for Lee's first texts on Mono-ha.[68] Lee met Yoshida, Koshimizu, Narita, and Suga

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[64] Saito Yoshishige (1904–2001) taught at the university from 1964 to 1973.

[65] As characterized by Alexandra Munroe in 1994, these Tamabi artists learned that "the operation of phenomena, rather than their appearance, is the subject of art." See Alexandra Munroe, "Mono-ha: The Laws of Situation and Beyond the Sculptural Paradigm," *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream against the Sky* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), p. 259.

[66] Sekine, *Fūkei no yubiwa* (Ring of nature) (Tokyo: Tosho shinbun, 2006), p. 47.

[67] Interview with Koshimizu Susumu. May 17, 2008.

[68] Lee, "Hapuningu no nai Hapuningu" (A Happening without a Happening). *Interia* no. 122 (May 1969): 44–45; "Sonzai to mu o koete—Sekine Nobuo-ron" (Beyond Being and Nothingness—On Sekine Nobuo), *Sansai* no. 245 (June 1969): 51–53; "Chokusetsu genshō no chihei ni: Sekine Nobuo ron-1" (The Horizon of Immediate Phenomena—Essay on Nobuo Sekine, No. 1), *SD* no. 74 (December 1970): 92–96; "Chokusetsu

through Sekine, and the artists began to meet regularly at Top, a coffee shop in Shinjuku,

Tokyo, where Lee would hold forth on ideas that he put into his writings starting in 1969,

with the encouragement of art critic, Ishiko Junzō.[69]

Outside of Tamabi, Sekine, Koshimizu, and Lee began teaching at an independent art

school called "B-semi" (Contemporary Art Basic Seminar) run by an abstract painter,

Kobayashi Akio (1929–2000), which was located in Fujimichō, Yokohama near the artists'

studio. The program began as a collaboration with Saitō and the participation of his Tamabi

graduate students. The curriculum was built around guest artists, who posed conceptual

tasks for the students to discuss and experiment. Sekine who began teaching in 1968,

focused his lesson plans on the awareness of space, with tasks such as "create a thin form,"

"conceive two forms as one."[70] (Fig. 34) This was in direct relation to his interest in

topological inquiries and the continuity of space, which he was also working with in *Phase-*

Mother Earth or *Phase of Nothingness-Water* (1969) (Fig. 35). The latter involved two forms

of equal volumes that could be interchanged. Lee, in contrast, was interested in bodily

perception and in the stages leading up to the work. Careful to place his emphasis on

"things" rather than "concepts," he would have his students ponder the movement of their

hand, the possibilities of gestures, or perceiving phenomena while grasping a pencil,

crushing paper, or twisting clay as well as the dynamics of one's relationship to space

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genshō no chihei ni: Sekine Nobuo ron-2" (The Horizon of Immediate Phenomena—Essay on Nobuo Sekine, No. 2), *SD* no. 75 (January 1971): 119–23.

[69] Sekine, *Fūkei no yubiwa,* p. 65.

[70] Sekine Nobuo, *B-Zemi 'Atarashii hyōgen no gakushū' no rekishi 1967–2004* (A history of B-semi "a study for new expression" 1967–2004), Kobayashi Haruo eds. (Yokohama: BankART 1929, 2005), p. 18.

(outdoor/indoor, public/living).[71] (Figs. 36–37). Koshimizu explored the limits of how honest one could be toward one's materials, putting the students to task on simply filing down a wooden beam for hours or proposing to "observe craft paper and turn it into something that perfectly suits you."[72] (Figs. 38–39). Enokura Kōji and Takayama Noboru (both graduates of Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, now Tokyo University of the Arts) and Haraguchi Noriyuki (a Nihon University graduate), though taking a more political, industrial, and darkly material line that often involved saturating surfaces with waste oil or grease, or using railroad ties, also began teaching classes and exhibited in many of the same galleries and group exhibitions.

Through their pedagogy and experiments, these artists shared an attitude towards phenomena that was tested through serial composition, emphasizing the development of works over time. Sekine began using *Isō* (位相) or "Phase" in reference to his spatio-temporal experiments in topology in 1968 and *Kūsō* (空相) or "Phase of Nothingness" to further emphasize systems of impermanence and an equilibrium of fullness and nothingness in 1969. Beginning in 1972, Lee would rename all of his sculptural works, *Kankeikō* (関係項) or "Relatum," signaling an ongoing pursuit to activate the relation between visible and invisible structures. Suga's titles often included compounds with terms like *Hōchi* (放置) (Release) and *Jōkyō* (状況) (Situation), indicating the manner in which he set up his materials and left them in their bare state to illuminate their force field and interdependence with the surrounding space. Yoshida titled all of his early works from 1969 "Cut-off" (in English), referring to the process of bracketing off the object from its

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[71] Lee, Ibid., p. 15.

[72] Koshimizu, Ibid., p. 23.

conventional structures. Koshimizu engaged with the fundamental resistances inherent to sculpture while also emphasizing the materiality of their surfaces, leading him to title his works, *Hyōmen kara hyōmen e* (表面から表面へ) or "From Surface to Surface." In Narita's ongoing *SUMI* series, the artist investigated the metamorphic process in which wood is transformed into charcoal by burning, thus mediating between artistic intent and the wood's natural properties, evoking its continuous state of decay and its eventual disappearance.[73] Enokura Kōji's chose the term *Yochō* (予兆) or "Symptom" and *Kanshō* (干渉) "Intervention" to mark visceral interventions into space, while Takayama Noboru's works were named *Chika dōbutsu-en* (地下動物園) or "Underground Zoo," referring to his deployment of railroad ties as the single recurrent medium, significant not only as an underground support structure for mine tunnels, but as "human pillars" similar in size and weight to the coalminers; their organic qualities contrasted with their being saturated in tar and creosote for preservation.[74] Finally, Haraguchi Noriyuki's *Busshin* (物心) "Matter and Mind" series marked his engagement with both the external physicality and perception of industrial materials, including steel, tent canvas, and waste oil. Thus, the core understanding of *mono* led to various strategies for dissolving the traditional idea of art as being added to, or mastering, a thing, and releasing the thing into the world, the consciousness of the world, and the potentially infinite situation in time and space.

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[73] *Sumi* is the transliteration for charcoal.

[74] The Underground Zoo series also referred to the forced labor of Korean minorities in Japan during World War II. The artist has described his installations as "requiems for the people of Asia who were washed away with the tides of Japan's modernization." One notices that modernization, not Japan's imperial ambition, is ultimately responsible.

Between 1969 and 1972, this group of artists exhibited their works at numerous galleries in Tokyo. After achieving recognition from *Phase-Mother Earth*, Sekine began exhibiting at Tokyo Gallery, one of the oldest blue-chip galleries in the city. Launched in 1950 with an exhibition of Nouveaux-Realistes artists from France and Italy, this gallery also represented his teachers, Saitō and Takamatsu. Here, Sekine exhibited *Phase of Nothingness-Oilclay* (Fig. 40) from April to May 1969. As Lee wrote in one of his earliest essays, this work, consisting of 2.5 tons of dark, lard-like mounds of oilclay nearly reaching the height of the gallery ceiling, was the occasion for *shigusa*, materialized interaction, between the artist and the oilclay in which the body of the artist and the object that this body brought forth could be conceived as one and inseparable.[75] Muramatsu Gallery (another major gallery established during the war, in 1942) also became a venue through which these Mono-ha artists received a larger audience. It was in this space that Koshimizu exhibited his influential *Perpendicular Line 1* (1969) (Fig. 41), a simple conical brass weight hung from the ceiling by a piano wire, as part of a three-person group exhibition in February 1969. This was the first work that he made after assisting Sekine with *Phase-Mother Earth,* and thus a transitional work that questioned the disjunction between physical versus virtual properties of space. The artist's initial intent was to put the vertical axis so fundamental to sculpture into question, highlighting the fact that the earth's gravitational pull does not always conform to a 90-degree angle against the ground plane. The conical weight continued to move ever so slightly, upending the perceived stability of a perpendicular axis.

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[75] Lee, "Chokusetsu genshō no chihei ni: Sekine Nobuo ron-1" [The Horizon of Immediate Phenomena—Essay on Nobuo Sekine, No. 1], *SD* no. 74 (December 1970): 93.

While exhibitions at such established commercial galleries were important, most of

the artists displayed their work at non-profit, rental galleries (in which artists would pay a

flat fee to have their work shown for one to two weeks), including Tsubaki Kindai, Ogikubo,

Pinar, Tamura, and Walker galleries located in Tokyo.[76] Significant among galleries was

Tamura Gallery, an approximately 500 square foot rental gallery that allowed artists to

freely experiment with all parts of the space, using its ceilings, doorways, corners, and even

soaking or cutting through the floor.[77] Since works were displayed temporarily (limited by

the timeframe of the exhibition), they were subsequently discarded due to the lack of space

or interest to store the works. Key installations at Tamura Gallery included Honda's *No. 16*

(1969) (Fig. 42), exhibited for a week in July 1969, in which the artist suspended a piece of

canvas from all four corners of the gallery space and dropped a stone in the fabric's center

that showed the gravitational pull and tension on the materials. In a similar fashion, he

displayed a giant log split in half and bound by a thick hawser, examining the log's

structure of one versus two halves through its material tension. Yoshida's *Cut-Off (Hang)*

(1969) (Fig. 43) was also shown at Tamura from July 14 to 20, 1969, a week after Honda's

exhibition. Yoshida displayed a large wooden beam hanging from the ceiling at an angle by

a rope with its bottom edge touching the floor and connected to a stone. Yoshida described

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[76] The rental gallery (貸画廊, *kasha garō*) system arose in the 1950s due to the lack of private patronage or commercial value of contemporary avant-garde art. However, these spaces provided a platform for experimental work and were later replaced by alternative spaces. See Nakajima Izumi, "Rental Galleries," *From Postwar to Postmodern, Art in Japan, 1945–1989: Primary Documents. (MoMA Primary Documents)*. Doryun Chong, ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), forthcoming.

[77] Located in the Kanda district of Tokyo, Tamura Gallery was founded by Yanagishi Nobuo (1929–2008) who ran the gallery from 1969 to 1990. The gallery joined forces with Maki Gallery in 1991 becoming "Maki-Tamura Gallery" and continued until 2001. The artists who consistently exhibited at the space was Takayama Noboru who had fifteen shows at the gallery including group exhibitions. See Wada Kōichi, "Takayama Noboru—Makuragi, kokyū suru kūkan" (Takayama Noboru: Railroad ties, a space that breathes), *Takayama Noboru 1968–2010 Yūsatsu* (Headless scenery) (Tokyo: Akaaka Art Publishing, 2010), p. 145n15.

his materials as "not much of anything," but in fact "everything, including man…[that he longed to come into contact with an] open world."[78] Tamura Gallery was also the space where Suga first exhibited his two organic, cube installations, *Parallel Strata* (1969) (Fig. 44), an open, rectangular wax structure with a solid stack of wax in the center made entirely out of 200 fixed units (482 x 302 x 42 cm) of paraffin wax (ordered from Japan's oldest wholesale wax company, Nippon Seirō) and *Soft Concrete* (1970) (Fig. 45), comprising four steel panels in a precarious open cube structure wedged inside a mound of gravel and concrete softened with motor oil. Other works equally challenging for any gallery to accommodate, were realized at Tamura Gallery: Takayama's cut-out floor installations, *Spy* and his 8mm films (Fig. 46–47); Haraguchi's first oil pool, *Matter and Mind* (1971) (fig. 48), a large flat container filled with thick waste oil and paired with an oil-soaked steel panel on the wall; and Enokura's *Quantity of Intervention* (1972) (Fig. 49), a thick mortar wall constructed directly behind the entire glass-walled entrance of the gallery, appearing to have been ripped open or caving into a spatial vortex. Tamura Gallery also helped facilitate works by artists who were developing their projects site-specifically in studio spaces outside such as *Space Totsuka '70* (Fig. 50–52) at Takayama's studio. In early December 1970, Takayama organized the outdoor group exhibition *Space Totsuka '70* and invited Enokura Kōji and two other artists Habu Makoto and Fujii Hiroshi. All took part in plowing and digging the land, installing their works in relation to the ground site. The show take place one week after Mishima Yukio's ritual suicide, which had a profound impact on the artists. The conflation of death and landscape was reflected in Takayama's titles, *Drama Underground Zoo* referring to the underground world where the dead rest.

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[78] Yoshida, quoted in Haryū Ichirō, "Yoshida Katsurō no koto" (On Yoshida Katsurō), *Yoshida Katsuro.* May 15–29, 1971, Exh. pamphlet. Translated by Joseph Love (Tokyo: Pinar Galleries, 1971) n.p.

CHAPTER 2

Black-and-white photographs of works by Lee, Sekine, Yoshida, Honda, and Terada

Takehiro were compiled and featured in a bilingual booklet *Ba-Sō-Ji OPEN (Place, Phase,*

Time) (Fig. 53) in May 1970. Edited by Sekine, with texts written by Lee ("The World As-It-

Is" [*Soku no sekai*]) and Tokyo-based American art critic Joseph Love, the booklet had the

air of a Mono-ha manifesto.[79] This publication defined the artists as a group sharing an

interest in exploring the contingency of material and spatial structures of objects. Joseph

Love's text, "Places, Phases, Time" emphasized the works' living presence as an effect of

material juxtapositions and interaction with space.[80]

Another venue, Pinar Gallery, further introduced the work of Lee, Yoshida, and

Koshimizu in a series of solo exhibitions in January, March, and May of 1971.[81] An essay by

Haryū Ichirō was included in each exhibition pamphlet accompanied by English

translations by Joseph Love. Haryū recognized the artists' shared interest toward "a gestalt

found in the matter they used in their work" noting their materials, "rocks, sand, wood,

steel, paper, cloth, water, air, etc. – in forms, positions, and connections that have nothing to

do with ideas or images, showing forth the material's identity directly to the viewer, [and

[79] See *Ba-Sō-Ji OPEN (Place-Phase-Time)*, ed. Sekine Nobuo (Tokyo: self-published, 1970). The association of Terada Takehiro (1933–) with Mono-ha was short-lived. His work, *Hen'i* (変位, Displacement) was first exhibited at the 5th Japan Art Festival (1970, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo) and also illustrated in Suga's Feburary 1970 *Bijutsu techō* essay, "Existence Beyond Condition." In 1973, Terada began producing monumental stones sculptures for public sites, with which he widely known today.

[80] Joseph Love (1929–1992) was an American artist and critic based in Japan from 1956. After receiving his M.A. in theology at Sophia University in 1964 and second M.A. in art history at Columbia University in 1967, he returned to Japan and taught art history at Sophia University until 1989. One of the first critics to champion Lee's philosophical and artistic practice within the context of systems or process art, Love wrote reviews of Lee's early solo exhibitions at Tamura Gallery (1970 and 1974) and Pinar Galerie (1971) for *Art International* and *Art Spectrum* and published in Japanese art magazines *SD* and *Bijutsu techō*.

[81] See Haryū Ichirō, "Lee Ufan no koto" (On Lee Ufan), *Lee Ufan.* Jan. 1–29, 1971, Exh. pamphlet. Translated by Joseph Love (Tokyo: Pinar Galleries, 1971); "Koshimizu Susumu no koto" (On Koshimizu Susumu), *Koshiimzu Susumu*, March 1–13, 1971. Exh. pamphlet. Translated by Joseph Love (Tokyo: Pinar Galleries, 1971) "Yoshida Katsurō no koto" (On Yoshida Katsurō), *Yoshida Katsuro.* May 15–29, 1971, Exh. pamphlet. Translated by Joseph Love (Tokyo: Pinar Galleries, 1971).

what] Gaston Bachelard calls 'material imagination,' which implied a distrust of ideas and rules, and a trust in one's own sense perceptions."[82] In reference to Yoshida's *Cut-Off* series, which were comprised of bracketing off brute matter from ordinary life, Haryū wrote that the works "inevitably brought about the realization of the awakening of matter, and the problem of a questioning of the structure of a world that goes beyond recognition."[83]

As important as the galleries were, museums would be even more significant. Exhibitions came about as the Tamabi artists began submitting their work to major annual and biennial museum exhibitions of contemporary art throughout Japan and abroad. The 1st Kobe's Suma Rikyū (Detached Palace) Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition and 1st Open-Air Hakone Sculpture Park that opened in 1969 were among the many early public exhibitions devoted to outdoor sculpture, which came into vogue in Japan in the 1970s.[84] Sculpture at this moment was losing its identity as the vertical block in interior gallery spaces and becoming, instead, an installation within the natural environment, often on a larger-than-life scale. Sekine's *Phase of Nothingness* (Fig. 54) was selected for the 1st Contemporary International Sculpture exhibition for the inauguration of the Hakone Open-Air Museum in Shizuoka prefecture (just west of Tokyo). The work consisted of a granite boulder balanced on top of a reflective, stainless steel column, which created a continuous mass that made the boulder seem like a weightless cloud, harking back to the perceptual

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[82] Haryū Ichirō, "Yoshida Katsurō no koto" n.p.

[83] Ibid.

[84] The Henry Moore exhibition at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (August 27-October 12, 1969) served as a counterpoint to this rise of sculpture in urban landscape. Okada Takahiko, "Sei to shi o musubu kūkan: 'Henri Mūa-ten' Tokyo kokuritsu kindai bijutsukan" (A space that connects life and death: The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo's "Henry Moore" exhibition), *SD* (October 1969): 60-62.

tricks of the *torikku* period. In his review of the show, art critic Fujieda Teruo (1936–),[85]

who had translated American art critic Clement Greenberg's formalism into Japanese terms,

criticized the artists' presumptions in attempting to transform the landscape through the

scale of the work or its site-specific features, which, he claimed, only resulted in creating

"ornamental placements."[86] Sekine's work was singled out as "a variation on the surrealist

tradition of a *discovered object.*"[87] Fujieda's criticisms aside, Sekine was experiencing

enormous success for a young artist at this time: he was selected to represent Japan at the

Venice Biennale, where he exhibited a new version of *Phase of Nothingness* using a granite

sourced from the Alps (Fig. 55).[88] Another outdoor exhibition was the *Modern Japanese*

Sculpture Biennial at the Open-Air Museum in Ube city in the southern Japanese region of

Yamaguchi prefecture.[89] Suga Kishio participated in the 4th exhibition with one of his most

famous pieces, the *Law of Situation* (1971) (Fig. 56), a twenty-meter long rectangular bed

of plastic upon which ten flat stones lay afloat in Tokiwa Park lake.

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[85] Art critic, Fujieda Teruo (1936–) began writing regularly for *Bijutsu techō* in the late-1960s and introduced Clement Greenberg's formalist art criticism into Japanese art journalism. His publications during the period include *Kūkan no ronri: Nihon no gendai bijutsu* (Theory of space: Contemporary Japanese Art) with Hara Eizaburo and Shinohara Ushio (Tokyo: Bronzu-sha, 1969); *Gendai no bijutsu 9: Kōsei suru chūsho* (Contemporary Art 9: Constructed abtraction) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1971); *Gendai bijutsu no tenkai* (Developments in contemporary art) (Tokyo: Bijutsu shuppansha, 1977); and *Jackson Pollock* (Bijutsu shuppansha, 1979).

[86] Fujieda Teruo, "Mori no koyagi 'Dai 1-kai gendai kokusai chōkoku ten' chōkoku no mori bijutsukan 1969-nen 8-gatsu 1-nichi – 10-gatsu 31-nichi" [A young goat in the forest '1st contemporary international sculpture exhibition' the forest of sculpture museum (hakone open-air museum) August 1–October 31, 1969] *SD* (October 1969): 67.

[87] Ibid., 69.

[88] This Venice version of *Phase of Nothingness* was eventually acquired by the Louisiana Museum in Denmark and is still on view in its sculpture garden today. Sekine stayed in Italy for the next three years exhibiting around Europe.

[89] The biennial began in 1961 with the opening of the Open-Air Museum as part of Ube city's urban renewal initiative for artists to re-engage with nature through sculptural projects (along with landscaping and horticultural programs) amid reconstruction efforts after the city's devastations after World War II.

The selection of artists at these government-sponsored, large-scale group museum

exhibitions often composed of a jury of established art critics from around the country

including the big three, Haryū Ichiro, Tōno Yoshiaki, and Nakahara Yūsuke,[90] who reviewed

hundreds of submissions over a one to two-day period. (This was in stark contrast to the

legacy of radical Yomiuri Indépendant, an annual exhibition sponsored by the Yomiuri

newspaper from 1949 to 1963 that took place at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum and

one of the first venues where artists could freely exhibit their work without a presiding

jury.[91] The Yomiuri exhibition closed in 1963 after artists refused to comply with a list of

ordinances.)[92] By the late 1960s, national museum exhibitions continued to be sponsored

by major national newspaper companies, such as Mainichi Newspaper. The selected works

were displayed in annual exhibitions in salon style format in major national museums.

1969 and 1970 were critical years for Mono-ha, as the artists works participated in

the *9th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan* at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum and

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[90] Tōno Yoshiaki was a prominent art critic and curator who first introduced postwar American art to the Japanese art world through the article, "Amerikano bijutsukai" (American Art World) in *Yomiuri newspaper* Aug. 25, 1959. This article along with Haryū Ichirō's "Akushon peintingu o meguru mondai-gendai amerika kaiga o chushin to shite" (Issues in american action painting—centering on contemporary american painting" and "Gendai amerika bijutsu" (Contemporary american art) in the January 1960 issue of the art journal, *Mizue* introduced the works of Jackson Pollock, Robert Rauschenberg, and Jasper Johns and the terms "action painting" and "neo-dada" into the Japanese lexicon of postwar American Art.

[91] The Yomiuri newspaper company sponsored the Yomiuri Indépendant, which was held annually between 1949 and 1963 at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Art, one of the first venues to allow artists to freely exhibit their work without a presiding jury. See Segi Shin'ichi, *Nihon andepandan ten zenkiroku: 1949–1963* [Complete Records of the Japan Indépendant Exhibitions: 1949–1963] (Tokyo: Sōbisha, 1993), *Nihon andepandan ten no nijūgonen: rekishi to sakuhin* [25 Years of the Japan Indépendant Exhibition: History and Works] (Tokyo: Nihonbijutsukai, 1972), and *Nihon no natsu – 1960-64* [Japan's Summer – 1960–1964], exh. cat. (Mito: Contemporary Art Center, 1997).

[92] In 1963, the Yomiuri management censored the artists by presenting rules forbidding "works that involve loud, unpleasant sounds, that smell bad, that decompose, that are dangerous or potentially toxic, that are installed either direction on the floor or hung from the ceiling." Charles Merewether, "Disjunctive Modernity: The Practice of Artistic Experimentation in Postwar Japan," *Art, Anti-Art, Non-Art: Experimentations in the Public Sphere in Postwar Japan, 1950-1970* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2007), p. 18.

the *Trends in Contemporary Art* Kyoto National Museum of Modern Art).[93] Lee Takamatsu,

Koshimizu, Enokura and Narita were among those selected in *Between Man and Matter* at

the Tokyo Biennale '70 (Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum) commissioned by Nakahara

Yūsuke.[94] Mono-ha's expanded public presence received its most significant recognition,

marking the "arrival" of a shared aesthetic and heightened engagement with space, when

Lee, Suga, Yoshida, Koshimizu, Narita, and Honda were featured in the *August 1970—*

Aspects of New Japanese Art exhibition, curated again by Tōno at the National Museum of

Modern Art, Tokyo.[95] Lee was a key advisor to Tōno in conceiving the exhibition of thirteen

relatively unpublicized artists. As the word "aspects" suggests, Almost all of the works were

placed directly on the floor, as though to activate a sense of gravitational pull, or situated as

to interact with the architecture of the museum. In keeping with the processual thinking of

Mono-ha, these works were presented as phase "events" whose spatial presence in the

museum was part of the totality of their phenomenological cycle. Thus, the viewer's

engagement with the phenomenon of the materials was an engagement with the topos of

the work as well, its temporary locus. For example, Lee presented three new large-scale

works, *Relatum I*, *II*, and *III (In a certain situation)* (fig. 57). Several steel plates stood

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[93] See Lee Ufan, "Shigusa no sekai 'Gendai bijutsu no dōkōten' ni sanka shite: Kyoto kokuritsu kindai bijutsukan" (The world of *shigusa*: Participating in the "Contemporary Art Exhibition" Kyoto National Museum of Modern Art), *SD,* no. 59 (October 1969).

[94] The was among the most high-profile international exhibitions that included many of the same artists associated with Conceptual, Minimal, Post-minimal Art, and Arte Povera from U.S., Europe and Japan included in the Whitney's *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* and *When Attitudes Become Form* organized by Harald Szeeman (both in 1969). "Naze kore ga geijutsu ka?" (Why is this art?), special feature on *Tokyo Biennale 1970*, *Bijutsu techō*, no. 329 (July 1970): 1-79.

[95] See Fujieda Teruo, "1970-nen 8-gatsu—gendai bijutsu no ichidan men. Hitori dachi surumono" (*August 1970—Aspects of New Japanese Art.* Walking on its own), *SD* (October 1970), 103–5; Okada Takahiko, "1970-nen hachi-gatsu—gendai bijutsu no ichidanmen' ten ni furete: michi naru monono sakidori to jujutsu to no hazama" (Commenting on *August 1970: Aspects of New Japanese Art*: The gap between the unknown path of things and magic), *Bijutsu techō* 22, no. 333 (October 1970): 91–104.

propped against a wall while others aligned with it across the floor. Wooden beams stood

in various configurations along the walls and floor, and across the room another set of

beams were positioned around a square column and tightly bound by rope. In Narita's *6mm*

from the Surface of Plywood (fig. 58), thin steel poles were stacked in a grid, suspending a

sheet of plywood. Here Narita attempted to dislocate the stability of the ground by "raising"

the floor five feet off the ground. The title points to the surface of this new plywood

"ground," which is 6mm (a fifth of an inch) thick. For *August 1970 – Splitting a Stone* (fig.

59), Koshimizu cracked a massive granite boulder using traditional methods, an act that

took place at the opening of its exhibition. Suga's *Unnamed Situation* (fig. 60) featured

plywood boards attached in a vertical line alongside the exterior of the museum building

from ground to roof, and for his *Thing-Situation* (fig. 61), he wedged thin plywood beams

diagonally along the museum's window blinds. In each case, the works are formally

determined by the physical geometry and natural conditions of their siting; meaning is

derived from the relationship between the viewer's engagement with each gesture or act

(process) as it is manifested in real time and space.

Critic Okada Takahiko's October 1970 review of the *August 1970* exhibition in

Bijutsu techō emphasized the works' capacity to make viewers aware that opticality and

tactility are experienced as equal elements. Okada used the notion of correspondences,

read through Charles Baudelaire's poem of the same name, which connected the works to

the spheres of nature and the social. He also commented on how artistic labor was

redefined—and in fact replaced—by a set or field of relations, which alluded to how these

works further the phenomenological model of site-specificity akin to Minimalist sculpture

in the way they reverse the modernist sculptural paradigm of severing the work from its

site and colonizing that site with a cleared, idealized aesthetic space dominated by the work's autonomy and self-referentiality.

The following year, in May 1971, Miki Tamon and Haryū Ichirō, Japan's preeminent socialist art critic, organized the biennial survey exhibition 10th Contemporary Art Exhibition with the theme "Man and Nature." The show presented work in a variety of media including painting, sculpture, prints, drawing, and video and was divided into four didactic sections: Landscape (Nature as Image), Abstraction (Nature as Structure), Situation (Dialogue between Matter and Action), and Information (Nature as New Language). Among the eleven artists included within Situation were Enokura, Haraguchi, Honda, Koshimizu, Lee, Sekine, Suga, Takayama, and Yoshida. Highlights of this show included Lee's *Situation* (fig. 62) and Honda's *No. 49* (1971) (fig. 39), for which he installed plywood boards on the floor, lifting some of the ends up with short square beams. At night after viewers had left he would enter the galleries and change the location of the beams beneath the boards to alter the work from day to day.

In a symposium held in conjunction with the exhibition, Haryū referred to this exhibition as a follow-up to the 1970 Tokyo Biennale *Between Man and Matter*, which in his view insufficiently addressed the fundamental relation between man and matter, choosing rather to address the theme of man and nature. In an effort to reconsider the binary opposition between nature and artifice and the increasing role of mass-produced images in Japan's information society, Haryū attacked those who "think that by seeking a nameless entity beyond image and meaning [through the one-time contact between man and raw materials] they will reach a site of nature in which there is a pre-established harmony

between man and the world."[96] Haryū instead urged artists to discover and build "a new

language through matter, color, sound and form beyond theoretical language."[97] Lee, who

was obviously the object of Haryū's criticism, countered by stating:

> I oppose your description of our work. . .as simply displaying natural objects
>
> without manipulation. I'd like to ask if there has ever been a time when one
>
> claimed this to be nature…. Nature is about overcoming one's confrontation with
>
> artworks. Experiencing art is about our desire to be surrounded by this
>
> environment of a shared space *with* artworks. To confront only leads to projecting
>
> one's own image of what one wants to see out of the work by objectifying nature
>
> and the world.[98]

Haryū's attack on Mono-ha was characteristic of one hostile critical response, based on the

notion that the artists' use of found natural materials was a gesture leading us back to a

suspect ideology of essence. What Haryū failed to see was the distance between Lee's

practice and the nostalgic reclaiming of essence. Lee, in contrast, based his thesis precisely

on the limits of linguistic mediation and sought to dissolve from within the subjective

longing that is reified in the search for essence. Lee's new aesthetic ethos, by displacing the

traditional subjective moment, displaced the entire traditional aesthetic system.

For the 1971 *Man and Nature* exhibition, Lee presented *Situation* (Fig. 62), in which

he placed three natural stones at different intervals on stretched white canvases laid

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[96] Haryū Ichirō, "Tokushū: gendai bijutsu arugamama. 'Ningen to shizen' shinpojiumu zenshūroku, Ningen to shizen o megutte" (Feature: Contemporary art as-it-is. Full transcript of 'Man and nature' symposium. Concerning 'Man and Nature'), symposium with Lee Ufan, Sugaya Kikuo, Nakamura Yūjirō, Haryū Ichirō, and Miki Tamon, *Bijutsu techō* 23, no. 344 (July 1971): 108.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Lee, "Tokushū: gendai bijutsu arugamama," pp. 122–23.

directly on the ground. The placement of the three stones on the canvases metamorphoses

their self-contained forms and allows for a sense of relation between them, the canvas, and

the viewer's haptic space. As Lee stated, the internal tensions of the materials serve to

mediate the encounter:

> Man will try to think up of ways to turn nature into art. However, it is impossible
>
> to turn nature itself into art. Let's attempt to create something that can be
>
> communicated, or opened to the world like a large window where we build a
>
> relationship between man "and" nature. Let's call this "structure.". . . The tense
>
> tautness of the canvas from the heavy stone shows a situation by which nature is
>
> a *mediation*. This is just one of many meanings that can be interpreted through
>
> structure.[99]

Lee's term, *structure*, which he defined as a great intermediary, through which one can

encounter the world more vividly, was one of the guiding principles for Mono-ha. As

opposed to essence, his thesis continued to interrogate new modes of perception that

incorporated structuralist and phenomenological principles.

The artists received their first international exposure at the Paris Youth Biennale in

October 1969. Commissioner, Tōno Yoshiaki curated the Japanese section entitled *Bossot*

de Quatres (The Four Indolents). (The term "Bossot" was the French transliteration of the

Japanese colloquial term, *bosotto* or indolent.) As Tōno explained, the term was intended to

be humorous, but also signaled an idle quality to fully articulate a language other than the

simple fact that there was nothing more to the works other than their stark, naked

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[99] Lee, "Tokushū," p. 123.

presence.[100] Tōno deliberately selected four artists, two established and two younger

artists. Of the former, Takamatsu showed *Slack of Cloth* (Fig. 64), a single piece of square

cloth laid flat on the floor with a pocket of air in the center, and Tanaka Shintarō exhibited

Relation I, II, which consisted of two parts of a dirt cube sliced at an angle. The two younger

artists were Narita Katsuhiko whose *SUMI* (Fig. 65), comprised charcoal blocks leaving

flakes of charred wood on the floor, and Sekine Nobuo, whose *Phase of Nothingness-Water*

(Fig. 35) presented one black, steel cylinder container and one rectangular container each

filled to the brim with water.[101] The containers held the same volume of water, thus

referencing the same topological preoccupation with spatial continuity and equilibrium as

the *Phase-Mother Earth* piece. Two years later, in September 1971, Lee was included in the

Korean section at the *7th Youth Paris Biennale* and exhibited *Relatum* (formerly *Phenomena*

and Perception A) (Fig. 66), a stretched rubber, rectangular sheet with three stones placed

inside each corner with one stone placed outside a corner. The Japanese section included

works by Yoshida Katsurō, Koshimizu Susumu, and Enokura Kōji selected by commissioner,

Okada Takahiko. For his project, Enokura selected a site in Bois de Vincennes park and

constructed a mortar wall filling the negative space between two trees (Fig. 67). This was

the first European exhibition for Lee, Koshimizu, Enokura, and Yoshida and all stayed for

several months after the exhibition traveling through France and Italy.

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[100] See Tōno Yoshiaki, "Hihyō-ka no me 6: Tōno Yoshiaki shijō gyararī. 'Bosotto āto no tanjō'" (Critic's eye 6: Tōno Yoshiaki magazine gallery. "The birth of bosotto art"). *Geijutsu shinchō*, no. 235 (June 1969): 33–36.

[101] According to Koshimizu Susumu, who studied under Tōno at Tama Art University, the strategy of this pairing was about introducing a new interpretive framework for Takamatsu and Tanaka, who were associated with conceptual avant-garde, while creating an artistic lineage for the younger artists that positioned them as artistic descendents of these established artists. Interview with Koshimizu Susumu May 17, 2008.

In September 1972, Tono selected twenty artists to participate in Pierre Restany's

Operazione Vesuvius at Il Centro Gallery in Naples. According to the Minami Gallery

exhibition pamphlet, which shows two black-and-white photos of the volcanic crater on its

recto and verso (Fig. 68), the project called for artist interventions that aimed to transform

Mt. Vesuvius, a volcanic crater, into a cultural park.[102] Enokura, Koshimizu, Lee, Sekine,

Suga, Takamatsu and Yoshida were among those selected. The artists were sent a postcard

of the crater and asked to come up with proposals for an intervention: Koshimizu proposed

to hang a green line from the edge of the crater; Suga and Yoshida each submitted collages

of a city map; and Enokura submitted a poster of eight photographs showing a lead cube

floating in the sky in various natural areas (based on photos he took in the mountainous

region and lakes in Nagano prefecture) (*Vesuvio Project 1*, Fig. 69), and another plan to

pour oil along the inside of the crater (*Vesuvio Project 2*, Fig. 70). The Minami Gallery

exhibition displayed the artists' notes, plans, collages, prints and photographs, which were

then sent to Restany in Naples for consideration.[103]

Mono-ha's practice, which crystallized in the period between 1968-1972, began to

dissipate by the end of 1972 when many of the artists began to pursue different directions,

returning to conventional medium of painting, sculpture, and printmaking, stopping

production entirely to focus on teaching or establishing other practices. After his return

from the Europe in 1972, Lee embarked on a new series of abstract paintings called *From*

Point and *From Line,* which he exhibited at Tokyo Gallery in September 1973, Koshimizu

relocated to Kyoto to focusing on traditional sculptural techniques, Yoshida moved to

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[102] See Minemura, "The Chronology," *Mono-ha* (Kamakura: Kamakura Gallery, 1986), n.p.
[103] Unfortunately, no extant documentation exists of the Japanese artists' proposals at Il Centro Gallery in Naples or actual projects, which leads one to presume that none of the projects were selected at the time.

London for a year on a governmental grant from the Ministry of Culture in January 1973 to focus on printmaking, Narita had stopped producing and exhibiting work from 1970 to 1986 to focus on teaching, Sekine, who returned to Japan after an extended period in Italy, established the Environmental Art Studio in October 1973, primarily focusing on large-scale public art projects.

These individual turns instigated the publication of critical articles in 1973. Though the term "Mono-ha" had been circulating among art circles for some time, the first published mention was in a March 1973 article entitled "Mono-ha's Mistake"[104] by formalist art critic Fujieda Teruo. Fujieda's article comments on the return of two-dimensionality in recent art, and under this theme he took issue with how the Mono-ha artists had uncritically turned to prints and canvases after a period of engaging with bare materials. This led the critic to claim that despite the pretense of the artists to encounter objects (*buttai*) in "actual reality" or "situations," they were still using the conceptual lexicon of formalist art analysis that recirculated objects back to the institutional art system. Fujieda further criticized the artists' refusal to forge a critical visual consciousness; without this consciousness, he noted, objects were nothing more than subjective ("personal") projections. Fujieda's framing of Mono-ha in formalist terms depended on conflating them with a particular visual approach, which severed the work from the site, and thus relegated the artists' works to the subjective projection of the makers. In particular, Fujieda refused to consider Lee's ideological and philosophical warnings against just this kind of projection or at least he treats the work as though Lee's warning had failed. Another critic Minemura Toshiaki, also writing in 1973, identified the limitations of Mono-ha's one-time, finite

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[104] Fujieda Teruo, "Mono-ha no sakugo" (Mono-ha's mistake), *Bijutsu techō* 25, no. 365 (March 1973): p. 10.

encounters ("onceness" or *ikkaisei*).[105] Minemura advocated the progressive principles of repetition and process found in time-based and systems art, using conceptual photographs published in artist-run journals such as *Kirokutai* (run by Bikyōtō), which he presents as counter examples to Mono-ha.

These articles significantly marked both the end of Mono-ha's formation and the beginning of its historicization. These critics ignored the Mono-ha artists' own sense of what they were doing, incorporating them instead into a formalist (Fujieda) or ungrounded art historical framework of temporality that was based on entirely separate set of terms. These interpretations tended to dissolve Mono-ha's specific terms surrounding the object and perception. Since, as we have pointed out, it was Lee Ufan who was the Mono-ha lead theoretician, in the next chapter we attempt a close reading of his key writings.

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[105] Minemura Toshiaki, "<Kurikaeshi> to <Shisutemu>–"Mono-ha" igo no moraru" ("Repetition" and "system"—The moral after "mono-ha"), *Bijutsu techō* 25, no. 375 (December 1973): 170–75.

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCING LEE UFAN

Although several high profile artists were associated with Mono-ha, it was Lee Ufan who

did the most to define the movement through his philosophical writings, journalism, and

artistic practice. Lee connected the art movement to broader cultural issues that arose out

of the close of the modern era, and the end of the paradigm of representation and the object.

His key interpretations of certain categories (among them encounter, structure, and the

body) had a profound relationship to his real-life experiences as a Korean moving between

two different worlds. Born in Korea as it underwent Japan's colonization attempt (1910–

45), he migrated to Japan illegally following the Korean War, and eventually found his

footing there in high cultural circles. He made Japan his permanent base as an artist, and at

present he splits his life between Paris, France and Kamakura, Japan. Although he became a

major figure in the Japanese and the international art world, he came at art as an "outsider"

in all contexts. Lee's biography is a stumbling block to those Japanese art critics like

Minemura whose narrative of post-war Japanese art positions Mono-ha as a return to

Japanese nativism. Certainly there are references in Lee's work to Nishida and members of

the Kyoto school, who under the nationalist government in the 30s made a radically right

turn––as did Heidegger in Germany at the same time. However, this political moment by no

means determines the use of either Kyoto school philosophy or of the existentialism (and

deconstruction) that came out of a reading of Heidegger's work. Minemura trivializes the

complex layers of Lee's theories by giving them a political import that they do not have.

Other critics and artists charged that Lee's writings and perspectives continue a fascist

tradition of aestheticism.[106] This particular criticism arose in the highly charged, New Left

atmosphere in Japanese circles in the late sixties; it is no longer expressed with such

certainty after the collapse of these movements. However, the charge has left a taint on

Lee's reputation. While Lee's viewpoint on modernity grew out of a particular engagement

with the philosophy of technology and the "forgetting of Being" that was articulated by

such thinkers as Heidegger, it was not condemned to come to Heidegger's political

conclusions, or to Nishida's. This chapter constructs Lee's biography in tandem with the

development of his thinking, focusing in particular on two key texts that helped define

Mono-ha discourse: "World and Structure" (June 1969) and "In Search for Encounter"

(February 1970). These texts historically concretize the terms under which Lee saw Mono-

ha's potential—one based on a radical critique of modern rationalism that aimed toward a

rigorous collapse of the *object*, as well as a positive perspective that endowed *structure*

(intermediary) with a key role in terms of being-in-the-world. Lee contrasts these theses to

parallel contemporary Euro-American art discourses and practices.

Early Years

Lee Ufan was born June 24, 1936, in a rural mountain village in the southern province of

Kyungsang Namdo, Korea, which was then under Japan's colonial rule. Lee's father, a liberal

newspaper journalist, often traveled to Manchuria and Tokyo; his mother, who stayed

home, was a highly educated woman, well versed in classical Korean literature. The second

child and only son among the family's four children, Lee's early years were shaped by his

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[106] See Hikosaka Naoyoshi, "Lee Ufan hihan—'Hyōgen' no naiteki kiki ni okeru Fascism" (Critiquing Lee Ufan—Fascism based on the interior danger of 'expression'." *Design Hihyō/Design Review*, no. 12 (November 1970): 129–153.

strict Confucian upbringing under the wing of his paternal grandfather. Lee's extended

family made a living from producing and selling Chinese herbal medicine.

From around age five, Lee attended a local village day school. His earliest contact

with art began at home under the tutelage of Dongcho (Hwang Kyunyong), a family friend

and distinguished scholar of Chinese classics, who often stayed with the Lees on protracted

visits. From Dongcho, Lee learned the three Chinese classical arts of *shi* (poetry), *seo*

(calligraphy), and *hwa* (painting), beginning with the task of drawing points and lines. The

calligraphic application of points and lines functioned not only as the basis of writing and

painting, but also as an organic microcosm in which he would learn that "the entirety of the

universe begins and returns to one point."[107]

At the height of the Pacific War, Lee and his family moved to nearby Gunbuk village.

He began attending the town's primary school in 1944, registering under the Japanese

surname Michikawa (the Japanese reading of the Chinese characters of his ancestral home,

Incheon) in accordance with the *Sōshi-kaimei* or "Name Order" policy instituted in 1939.

Careful not to speak Japanese at home due to its condemnation by his family members, this

process meant conscientiously splitting his self between his home life and the world of his

school.

After Japan's defeat in 1945, the United States Army Military Government in Korea

(1945–48) took power, followed by the establishment of the First Republic of South Korea,

a democracy that soon became an autocracy under President Syngman Rhee. In 1950, as

the Korean War began, Lee left Haman to attend the elite Kyungnam Junior High School in

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[107] Lee interviewed by Nakahara Yūsuke, "Lee Ufan to kataru: zettai teki na keiken no ba toshite no kaiga seisaku" [Conversation with Lee Ufan: Producing Painting as the Site of Absolute Experience], *Mizue* no. 875 (February 1978), p. 99.

Busan. There, he developed a serious appreciation for books and music, which served him well when he moved to Seoul to take classes at the prestigious Seoul National University Senior High School. Among his teachers and his peers, this was a time of division between some who were urging a new revolution against "American imperialism" and some who were advocating Rhee's model of South Korea, to which Lee responded by withdrawing into himself, studying a vast amount of literature, Greek classics, and social history on his own. Lee did enjoy certain social activities: he joined a group to reform the school library and participated in literary circles, submitting poetry to the school newspaper. But as a result of his rebellious attitude toward the school's curriculum, he failed to earn him sufficient marks to apply for a college degree in literature. Luckily, the principle spotted his artistic talent and advised him to apply himself in the fine arts. Learning quickly under prominent Korean ink painters Jang Dugun and Suh Se-ok, who taught at the school, Lee entered the College of Fine Arts at Seoul National University in 1956.

Move to Japan: 1956–64

In summer 1956, at his father's request, Lee traveled to Yokohama to smuggle Chinese medicine to an ailing uncle. This relative persuaded Lee to continue his education in Japan, away from South Korea's repressive government. In spring 1957 Lee began to study Japanese at Takushoku University, which was founded in the prewar period to educate colonial subjects and foreigners living in Japan. On the recommendation of a friend, he also decided to apply to a new philosophy program at Nihon University in Tokyo, believing that he could use a broader knowledge of aesthetics and social thought in his literary work. To

earn a living, Lee began selling figurative and landscape paintings to friends' families, though he did not seriously consider a career in art.

In 1958, Lee transferred to Nihon University and the following year became founding editor and publisher of the university's philosophy journal, *Pathos.* "The Gate of Solitude," his first essay for the journal and his first published work as an adult, casts solitude as an active affirmation of life in opposition to its description of an isolated, unsuccessful self as a product of one's fate.[108] Drawing on the writings of Rainer Maria Rilke, the essay represents the beginning of a topic that Lee will return to often, how to open up to the world without falling into conformity, an understanding later echoed in his landmark text "In Search of Encounter" (1970). Lee's early emphasis of active solitude reflected not merely a philosophical position, but also testified to his status in a foreign country that had recently colonized his birthplace. After he completed his philosophy degree in 1961, he became involved in the Korean unification movement, wrote political plays against the South Korean military regime for a theater group he formed, organized reading groups on socialist thinkers, and wrote fiction. However, even as he undertook these efforts, he became disillusioned with the efficacy of political activism and the possibility of ideology to deliver on its promises.[109] The leftist notion of solidarity was certainly in conflict with Lee's valorization of solitude.

Lee followed art and art magazines from abroad, having kept his interest in art even while studying philosophy. Enthused by the similarity between contemporary artistic

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[108] Michikawa Kiyohiro [Lee Ufan], "Kodoku no mon" [The Gate of Solitude], *Pathos*, no. 1 (June 20, 1959), p. 23–28. Lee initially registered at the university using the Japanese name Michikawa Kiyohiro, that of a relative who resided in Japan. He began publishing under his given name beginning with *Pathos* no. 3 (1960) after he was granted a re-entry permit into Japan.

[109] Lee, *Oral History Archives of Japanese Art,* December 18, 2008. n.p.

modes and the ink painting he had studied, he began to experiment with his own brand of

gestural abstraction inspired by Mark Tobey and Jackson Pollock. One of his first

evocations of Tobey was *Untitled* (*From Point*) (1959), in which Lee flicked dabs of ink from

the center of the paper to its periphery, leaving a significant amount of empty space. From

1962 to 1965 Lee became affiliated with the Nihongafu, a Japanese-style painting

association, partly for utilitarian reasons – he wanted to obtain his resident visa while

making extra money selling art – and partly out of his real interest. In these years he

learned traditional *nihonga* (Japanese-style) techniques of brushwork and the mixing and

application of mineral-based stone pigments and *nikawa* (animal-based glue) on paper and

silk supports. While studying h Abstract Expressionism and Art Informel on his own, Lee

opened himself up to larger experiments in the arts: he began to use repetitive marking,

piercing, and chiseling to investigate the textural qualities of materials, moving away from

both representation and from abstract expressionism's single-minded focus on paint,

rather than the whole set of materials involved in making art. In 1964 Lee produced a

number of drawings, such as *Untitled* (1964) (Fig. 71), that exhibited a certain violence in

the relation of the mark to the substratum, at times puncturing the surface. Inspired by Art

Informel, he also experimented with thick accumulations of white oil paint dripped onto

the canvas as in *Untitled* (1967), leaving raw canvas visible along the margins.

Early Artistic Career: 1965–68

In February 1965 Lee married Kim Sungsoon, a Korean national born in Japan. Their first

daughter, Mina, was born the following year, and the couple would go on to have two more

daughters, Soona and Bona. That year, Lee began working part-time at the Korean

Scholarship Foundation,[110] where he had rare access to North Korean contemporary

literature and began researching and writing about both North and South Korean

contemporary literature. In 1965, under the pen name Woo Janghong, Lee published

"Twenty Years of Liberation Literature in North and South Korea" in the Japanese-language

volume *Tōitsu Chōsen nenkan 1965–66* (Annals of Korean Unification).[111] The book's

controversial content would have made it unpublishable in Korea. At the same time, Lee

was active in various Korean unification organizations.

While working at the Korean Scholarship Foundation, Lee assisted with the opening

of a gallery (Shinjuku) on the first floor of the building. Through Gallery Shinjuku Lee came

into contact with important members of the Japanese contemporary-art community,

including critics Ishiko Junzō, Nakahara Yūsuke, Yoshida Yoshie, and Tōno Yoshiaki and

artists Takamatsu Jirō and Akasegawa Genpei (both Hi Red Center members). Ishiko

organized a notable show, *Exhibition According to Group "Genshoku"*, there in September

1967.[112] The exhibition was a step towards the optical "tricks" moment in the sixties. It was

spearheaded by Takamatsu, and it experimented with trompe l'oeil devices that relied

upon the kind of double take later made famous by the *Tricks and Vision* show described in

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[110] Founded by the Korean government in 1900 and followed by Japan's colonial government, the Korean Scholarship Foundation was established to assist and keep track of Korean exchange students in Japan. The organization exists today under the sponsorship of Japan's Ministry of Education.

[111] Woo Janghong (Lee Ufan). "Kaihōgo bungaku 20-nen ryakushi" [Twenty years of post-liberation literature]. in *Tōitsu Chōsen nenkan 1965–66* [Annals of Korean unification 1965–66]. Lee Youngkeun, ed. Tokyo: Tōitsu Chōsen shimbunsha, 1965.

[112] Based in Shizuoka prefecture, Genshoku comprised of a group of artists active from 1966 to 1971 under Ishiko Junzō's leadership. "Genshoku' derives from the characters *gen* (phantom, illusion) and *shoku* (touch, feel), or literally, "to touch a phantom."

Chapter 1. Significantly, Lee was impressed by this movement towards showing the

constructed nature of supposedly natural visual space.[113]

Lee's first solo show was held at Satō Gallery, Tokyo, in 1967, and it was dominated

by a series of small canvas paintings and a gridded configuration of black and white stones

used in the game of Go. The show was perhaps more significant in that it triggered Lee's

decision to finally commit himself wholehearted to an artistic career. (For practical

purposes, he would conduct that career primarily in the Japanese language.) At the

recommendation of Quac, Lee was included in the exhibition *Contemporary Korean Painting*

in July 1968 at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, presenting one of his first

experiments with optical effects, the work *Landscape I–III*. (fig. 72) Three large sheets of

paper spray-painted in monochrome gradations of fluorescent pink, red, and orange hung

in the gallery, the bright hues reflecting off the floor and extending into the space of the

viewer. Despite the work's sensual, immersive quality, Lee declared in a symposium

devoted to the exhibition the need for "a theoretical inquiry, as opposed to a sense-based

incorporation of Op Art, for the birth of a distinct Korean art-form."[114] This comment casts

a light both on Lee's self-identity with Korean art (which may have been heightened

because of the show) and his refusal of pre-existing art styles. In a sense, Lee's first public

showing as an artist occurred under the sign of liminality, his between state that defined

both his geopolitical identity and his artistic one.[115] That fall, Lee produced two optical

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[113] Lee, "Lee Ufan intabyū" [Lee Ufan Interview] in *Grūpu "Genshoku" no kiroku (1966–1971)* [A Record of Group "Genshoku" (1966–1971)], (Shizuoka, Japan: Niji no bijutsukan, 2005), p. TK.

[114] Lee, "Zadankai: Kankoku gendai kaiga" [Symposium: Korean Contemporary Painting], *Gendai no me*, no. 165 (August 1968), p. 4.

[115] Through the exhibition, Lee met Park Seobo, who like Lee would become an active figure in both the Korean and Japanese art worlds.

works: *The Fourth Structure A* (Fig. 73)*,* a large Möbius band is painted in red and purple

indicate the continuous shift of a single, open surface. The Möbius strip is rendered as a

diamond-shaped square in *The Fourth Structure B* (Fig. 74) whereby through a strict

geometric rendering of light and shadow, the artist creates a visual play between flat and

volumetric planes. In March 1969 *The Fourth Structure B* won the Japan Cultural Forum

Award at the Fifth International Youth Artist Exhibition.

Lee's First Events and the Birth of Mono-ha: 1968–72

Around this time, at Ishiko Junzō's recommendation, Lee submitted an essay, "From Object

to Being," for the sixth annual art criticism competition sponsored by Bijutsu shuppansha,

publishers of the influential art magazine *Bijutsu techō*. The essay won honorable mention

in March 1969 and launched Lee's career as a critic.[116] He embarked on a prolific period of

writing, publishing twenty essays in various art and culture journals between May 1969

and March 1971.[117] Many of these essays would eventually be published in his signature

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[116] The award was announced in the journal's April 1969 issue with a review by juror and eminent critic Haryū Ichirō. See Haryū, "Sengo hyō: Atarashī ronri no mosaku" [Review of Selections: In Search of New Theory]. *Bijutsu techō* vol. 21, no. 311 (April 1969), pp. 176–77.

[117] Lee Ufan, "Happening no nai Happening" [A Happening without a Happening]. *Interia* [Interior], no.122 (May 1969): 44–45; "Sonzai to mu o koete: Sekine Nobuo ron" [Beyond Being and Nothingness: On Sekine Nobuo]. *Sansai,* no. 245 (June 1969): 51–53; "'Tsukuru koto no fukanōsei' ga shuppatsuten de wa naika" [Is Not the Departure Point 'The Impossibility of Making']. *Interia*, no. 123 (June 1969); "Sekai to kōzō: Taishō no gakai (gendai bijutsu ronkō)" [World and Structure: Collapse of the Object (Theory on Contemporary Art)]. *Design hihyō/Design Review*, no. 9 (June 1969): 121–133; "Ilbon hyŏndae misul ŭi tonghyang" [The Direction of Contemporary Japanese Art]. *Space*, 4:7 (July 1969): 78–82; "Konsepushon to taishō no inra-nihon gendai bijutsu ten oyobi saikin no nijūsan no koten o chūshin ni" [Hidden Conception and Objectification-Centering on the 'Japan Art Exhibition' and 23 Recent Solo Exhibitions]. *SD* [Space Design], no. 57 (August 1969): 83–86; "'Komento': Gendai bijutsu no dōkō ten" [Comment: "Trends in Contemporary Art Exhibition"]. Kyoto National Museum of Art, 1969; "Dekaruto to sēyō no shukumei" [Descartes and the Fate of the West]. *SD,* no. 58 (September 1969): 117–122; "Hitaishō sekai e no jikaku" [Awareness of a Non-Objectified World]. *Miru* (Kyoto National Museum of Modern Art News)*,* no. 28 (September 1969); "Chōkoku kara hi chōkoku e" [From Sculpture to Non-Sculpture]. *Interia*, no. 127 (October 1969); "Shigusa no sekai 'Gendai bijutsu no dōkōten' ni sanka shite: Kyoto kokuritsu kindai bijutsukan" [The World of *Shigusa*: Participating in the "Contemporary Art Exhibition" Kyoto National Museum of Modern Art]. *SD,* no. 59 (October 1969); "Kannen no geijutsu wa

critical anthology, *In Search of Encounter* in January 1971. Not unlike Robert Smithson in

U.S., this body of written work exemplifies Lee as having operated on a number of planes in

the art world.[118]

In 1968 Lee saw Sekine's *Phase–Mother Earth*, the effect of which we indicated in

the introduction. At this point Lee's works began to change dramatically. In May 1969 the

artist staged a happening consisting of three, square sheets of Japanese paper, each

measuring roughly two meters square, fluttering in the wind in front of the steps of the

Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum. Initially titled *Things and Words* (Fig. 75–76), the work

was an homage to Foucault's *Les mots et les choses* (1966). *Things and Words* marked a

departures from opticality and the artwork as a discrete object toward an experience of the

physical process of a work's formation in real time and space. As in Foucault's work, Lee

seemed to want to liquidate the era of representation and of "Man," conceived of in the

society and social sciences of the 19th century. Lee's philosophical background was attuned

to the sense of French theory at the time, with its attack on the author, its doubts about the

universality of structures, its sense of the construction of the natural. Presented at the *9th*

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kanō ka: Obuje shisō no shōtai to yukue" [Is Conceptual Art Possible? The Character and Direction of Ideas on the Object]. *Bijutsu techō*, no. 319 (November 1969); "Takamatsu Jirō: Hyōshō sayō kara deai no sekai e." [Takamatsu Jirō: From the Work of Representation to the World of Encounters]. *Bijutsu techō*, no. 320 (December 1969); "Gendai geijutsu no teiryū 1: Ningen no kaitai." [Undercurrents of Contemporary Art 1: Dismantling Man]. *SD,* no. 63 (January 1970); "Deai o motomete" (Tokushū: Hatsugen suru shinjin tachi: Higeijutsu no chihei kara) [In Search of Encounter (Special Issue: Voices of New Artists: From the Realm of Non-Art)]. *Bijutsu techō,* no. 324 (February 1970): 14–23; "Preface: Soku no sekai/The World As It Is." *Ba-So-Ji OPEN (Place-Phase-Time).* ed. Sekine Nobuo. (Tokyo, 1970); "Mushiro 'aimaisa' ga jūyō" (Of Importance Rather is 'Ambiguity'). *Bijutsu techō*, no. 333 (October 1970): 106–107; "Chokusetsu genshō no chihei ni" (Sekine Nobuo ron-1) [From the Horizon of a Direct Phenomenon (On Sekine Nobuo-Part 1)]. *SD*, no. 74 (December 1970); "Chokusetsu genshō no chihei ni" (Sekine Nobuo ron-2) [From the Horizon of a Direct Phenomenon (On Sekine Nobuo-Part 2)]. *SD*, no. 75 (January 1971); and "Henkaku no fūka: Geijutsu wa korede ii no ka" (Tokushū: Posuto '70 no hyōgenshikō) [The Erosion of Change: Is Art Fine The Way It Is? (Special Issue: Post '70 Thought Expression)]. *Bijutsu techō* (March 1971): 67–75.

[118] Jack Flam's preface on Smithson applies to Lee as well: "His art and his writings are so closely related that they can be understood to be very much part of the same undertaking." Jack Flam, *Robert Smithson, The Collected Writings* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), p. xiii.

Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan (May 1969), the event was paired with a separate

work of the same title exhibited inside the museum in which the artist placed three sheets

of paper in a line on the gallery floor, fixing them with glue and leaving the edges curled up.

The vitality of both works lay in their function as interactive, "living" structures. The *9th*

Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan was also important for the fact that Lee exhibited

with the artists of Mono-ha for the first time. The identity of the group was sealed in art

circles by this exhibition, and Lee's writings began to seem like doctrinal pronouncements

defining Mono-ha.[119] Lee had also begun to gain recognition in Korea as a critic, beginning

with an essay on contemporary Japanese art that appeared in Korea's leading

contemporary art journal, *Space*, in 1969.[120]

In his art, Lee began to explore the physical and tactile relationship of forms through

juxtapositions between stones and other materials, such as glass, steel plates, cotton, ropes,

cushions, and canvas. In *Phenomenon and Perception B* (1969) (Fig. 77), exhibited at *Trends*

in Contemporary Art (August–September 1969) at the National Museum of Modern Art,

Kyoto, Lee placed small boulders on rectangular plates of broken glass, giving the

impression of some residue of a previous act in which the stones had been dropped onto

the plates. The work was shown with *Phenomena and Perception A* (Fig. 78), in which three

stones were spaced on top of a five-meter rubber measuring tape laid out on the floor,

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[119] Not all artists were comfortable with Lee's role as ideologue and output. As early as January 1970, Koshimizu recalls that just prior to the artist roundtable in the February 1970 issue of *Bijutsu techō*, Lee distributed a preview copy of "In Search of Encounter" for the artists to read. The text had consolidated many of their discussions. However, he along with Yoshida Katsurō felt a certain uneasiness and questioned the point of having a "roundtable" with the publication of Lee's essay. Koshimizu decided to distance himself (intellectually) from the group from that point forward. See Koshimizu Susumu, "Yami no naka e kiete yuku mae no yabu no naka e" (Entering the thicket before disappearing into the darkness), *Bijutsu techō* (May 1995).

[120] See Lee Ufan, "Ilbon hyŏndae misul ŭi tonghyang" [The Direction of Contemporary Japanese Art]. *Space* 4:7 (July 1969): 78–82.

stretched so that a one-meter segment became three meters, and two meters stretched to two-and-a-half. Later that year the work was later staged as a live event at Shinjuku Plaza, a public square outside Shinjuku station.

As Lee began to question the bluntness of his juxtapositions (reflected in the didactic culling of his work titles *Things and Words* and *Phenomena and Perception* from Foucault and Merleau-Ponty), he also began consider how to reconcile the gap between the intellectual nature of his practice and its connection to experience:

> I cannot be reality itself, and yet neither can I live in a nonreality. Therefore I sense reality in the space of my life when I become conscious of a constant "between," when reality "and" nonreality intersect and spark an "instant sense" of relationship. The ever-continuous search for reality involves abandoning the certainty of the present while also seeking the desire for an encounter with a spontaneous moment.[121]

Lee's notes about between-ness could evidently be given an autobiographical cast, or correlate to the history of the left's opposition to the dualisms of the Cold War. But it was also a philosophical theme that he had long been working on, situating the encounter – the moment of the uncovering of being – in the complex that holds between betweenness, the instant, and encounter. His solution to the problems faced by trying to strip the thing of those encumbrances that interfered with the encounter led Lee to postulate an in-between structure, or *soku* (即), a term he used in his May 1970 "Soku no sekai/A World As-It-Is" in a pamphlet, *Ba-Sō-Ji OPEN (Place-Phase-Time)* (Fig. 53) that also contained an article,

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[121] Lee, "Notes," [No date.] cited in Haryu, "Ri Ufan no koto" [On Lee Ufan], *Lee Ufan*, exh. brochure (Tokyo: Pinar Gallery, 1971). n.p.

"Processes, Phases, Places" by Tokyo-based American critic Joseph Love. The pamphlet

attempts to codify some of the principles of a Mono-ha-type practice by referring to Kyoto

School philosopher Nishida Kitarō, from whom Lee borrowed the concept of *soku*.[122]

Nishida opposed the Hegelian logic that reified and separated antitheses as contradictions

and posited a logic in which they are mediated in terms of synthesis, since contradiction

and synthesis are ultimately dualistic. *Soku* is a term within a non-dualistic structure, from

the point of view of which we can see separation and reification as ultimately artificial and

false forms imposed on moments that are inseparable even in their tension one with the

other and that mutually mediate each other.[123] In political terms, the turn to Nishida is

away from the Hegelian tradition that is particularly strong in Marxism and the Japanese

left.[124] The term was foundational to Lee's formation of the concept of *relatum*, the title he

began to use for his works in August 1970, and which he decided, in 1972, to designate for

all his past and future three-dimensional works. As he later stated, "A work of art, rather

than being a self-complete, independent entity, is a resonant relationship with the outside.

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[122] Lee, "Preface: Soku no sekai/The World As It Is," in *Ba-Sō-Ji OPEN (Place-Phase-Time)*, ed. Sekine Nobuo (Tokyo, 1970).

[123] Nishida Kitarō, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldviews*, trans. David A. Dilworth (Honoloulu: University Hawai'I Press, 1987), pp. 5–6, 130–131. Cited in Jin Baek, "From the 'Topos of Nothingess' to the 'Space of Transparency': Kitarō Nishida's Notion of *Shintai* and its Influence on Art and Architecture (Part 1)," *Philosophy East & West*, vol. 58, no. 1 (January 2008): 99.

[124] An influential Marxist philosopher who followed Nishida and took Marx as a thinker who broke with Hegel and created an "ontology of social relations" was Hiromatsu Wataru. Hiromatsu's vocabulary parallels Lee's, for instance in his notion of the primacy of relations, and his demystification of subject/object dualism. This to indicate that the accusation of nationalism, arising from Lee's appropriation of the rightwing vocabulary from Nishida, is by no means conclusive, when one considers Hiromitsu's appropriation of that same logic and using it to understand Marxist alienation and reification. See Hiromitsu Wataru, *Hēgeru soshite Marukusu* (Hegel then Marx) (Tokyo: Seidō-sha, 1991).

It exists together with the world, simultaneously what it is and what is not—that is, a

relatum."[125]

In September 1971, Lee participated in the *7th Youth Paris Biennale* and exhibited

Situation and *Phenomena and Perception A* (Fig. 66). Lee then traveled in Europe for three

months, beginning in Milan where he met Luciano Fabro through artist Nagasawa

Hidetoshi, who was based in the city. In Paris, he stayed with Korean artist Kim Tschang-

Yeul and met Daniel Buren and Claude Viallat, and saw works by Lucio Fontana and Yves

Klein for the first time.[126] After this, Lee began traveling to Europe regularly, finding a

studio where he could work in Paris as well as serving as an advisor for the Paris Youth

Biennale to recommend artists from Japan and Korea in 1973, 1975, and 1977. In March

1972, Lee and his family moved to the Setagaya district of Tokyo, west of the city center

and to Kamakura in 1980 where he currently keeps his permanent residence and has

continued to maintain studios in both Kamakura and Paris.

Lee's Writings

Lee laid out a philosophic program in a series of articles published in journals such as *SD*

(Space Design*)*, *Dezain hihyō* (Design Review), *Bijutsu techō*, and *Japan Interior* between

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[125] Lee, *The Art of Encounter*, ed. Jean Fisher. trans. Stanley N. Anderson. (London: Lisson Gallery, 2008), p. 244.

[126] Lee returned to Japan by way of New York, where he saw the Barnett Newman retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art. Newman's vertical, white abstractions in particular left a strong impression on him, for he felt that they both sustained and transcended painting's two-dimensionality by activating a strong sense of their insistence in space and their materiality. These experiences inspired Lee to make a series of paintings in 1972. For an extensive account on Lee's painting practice, see Joan Kee, *Points, Lines, Encounters, Worlds:* Tansaekhwa *and the Formation of Contemporary Korean Art,* Ph.D. diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, New York, 2008, and Kee, "Points, Lines, and Encounters: The World According to Lee Ufan." *Oxford Art Journal* 31, no. 3 (2008).

June 1969 and February 1970, with which his aesthetic practice was closely linked. One

could date the Mono-ha phase in his writings from his essay on Sekine Nobuo, "A

Happening without a Happening" published in May 1969, followed by "Beyond Being and

Nothingness," in the June 1969 issue of *Sansai* magazine. The latter text was revised into a

two-part essay, published under the title, "The Horizon of Immediate Phenomena—Essay

on Nobuo Sekine No. 1 and 2" in the December 1970 and January 1971 issues of *SD*, an

avant-garde journal founded in 1965 to cover design, architecture and art.[127] Lee added a

section on "topos" (場所 *basho*) to the *SD* texts in his critical anthology, *In Search of*

Encounter published in January 1971. *Phase-Mother Earth* was a crucial work for Lee that

crystallized his thoughts about work as a living event and the nonhierarchical relationship

of subject, object, and site, with the subject conceived as a direct part of the

phenomenological reality of matter.

　　　These essays began from a point of negation: pointing to the barrenness of

contemporary art criticism and the inability of critics to deal with this new generation of

"unfamiliar forms" that emerged in a world of "expressionless expression" (implying the

work of Mono-ha), Lee traced the problem of incomprehension to the dominance of a

rationalist and dualist framework that blinded critics to the art's dynamic. In "World and

Structure: Collapse of the Object (Thoughts on contemporary art)" (June 1969), Lee laid out

his reconception of the aesthetic subject, first by subjecting Cartesian rationalism to a

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[127] Lee, "Hapuningu no nai Hapuningu" [A Happening without a Happening]. *Interia* no. 122 (May 1969): 44–45; "Sonzai to mu o koete—Sekine Nobuo-ron" [Beyond Being and Nothingness—On Sekine Nobuo], *Sansai* no. 245 (June 1969): 51–53; "Chokusetsu genshō no chihei ni: Sekine Nobuo ron-1" [The Horizon of Immediate Phenomena—Essay on Nobuo Sekine, No. 1], *SD* no. 74 (December 1970): 92–96; "Chokusetsu genshō no chihei ni: Sekine Nobuo ron-2" [The Horizon of Immediate Phenomena—Essay on Nobuo Sekine, No. 2]], *SD* no. 75 (January 1971): 119–23.

fundamental critique, one that included the core of the contemporary artistic and

intellectual landscape in as much as they had absorbed and assumed subject/object

dualism. He critiqued both the belief in consciousness as the highest form of existence and

the standard version of signification, whereby objects inevitably signify the human self. He

wrote,

> When humans interpret the world before us, objectify the world, and affirm
>
> objects objectified by consciousness, a rational dualism is born. This theory of
>
> placing humans on one side, and objects on the other, involves a circumstance
>
> that informs the essence of the process of signification by consciousness…. We
>
> must learn to see all things as they are without objectifying the world by means of
>
> representation, which is imposed by human beings.[128]

Here, Lee's fundamental issue with signification was part of a larger critique of the place of

the object (対象 *taishō*, defined by the German term *Gegenstand*, "that which stands

against") in mainstream metaphysics as an entity that man uses as a means for

representation. Staked against the systems of power, the text offered a two-part prognosis,

one on the evolution of modern rationalism and the second on its effects upon

contemporary art practice. Balancing the negation entailed by his analysis, Lee held that

the world and our existence in it is nevertheless amenable to theory if we understood the

in-between *structure* (an intermediary that reveals the state of the world as-it-is) of

engaging with the world that ultimately depended on the collapse of objectification (対象の

瓦解 *taishō no gakai*). Published in June 1969 during the height of the nationwide anti-

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[128] Lee, "Sekai to kōzō: Taishō no gakai (gendai bijutsu ronkō)" (World and structure—Collapse of the object [Thoughts on Contemporary Art]), *Dezain hihyō/The Design Review*, no. 9 (June 1969), p. 122, 130. Translated by Stanley Anderson in *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2011), p. 105, 111.

Vietnam war, anti-government protests, the text's fundamental attack on signification and representation (which echoes similar attacks coming from French theory) was explicitly directed at the commercial society and political changes that had occurred in postwar Japan, and that steadily infiltrated the way the art world was organized in Japan.

Lee's text is a standard account of the evolution of modern dualism from Descartes to Sartre, taking up the Heideggerian theme of the forgetting of being and the ideas of Nishida. Lee cited Sartre's claim that a thing's existence is made actual through consciousness to make the case that a view of rational representation and objectified will both conditions capitalist society and is conditioned by it. For Lee, the "insatiable desire for representation" in the modern era was reflected in the "worship" of material things (物象 *busshō*) that led to the reification (物象化 *busshōka*) of labor and the alienation of the individual, as signaled by Marx. The advent of modern industrial production, which continually searched for ways to reduce the cost of labor by automatizing manufacturing and services, resulted in overproduction and a population too stunned by work discipline to enjoy its opulence (operating in an "automatic, autonomous world").[129] Lee narrated this separation of the object from human will/desire—citing Foucault's "end of man" discourse[130]—which he defined as a transition from "personification" (擬人化 *gijinka*), in

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[129] See Lee, "World and Structure," *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, trans. Stanley N. Anderson (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2011), p. 105–106. Lee draws from American sociologist, David Riesman's essay on accumulation of wealth See David Reisman, *Abundance for What?* (1964, translated into Japanese in 1968) and Herbert Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution* (1941, translated into Japanese in 1961). See David Riesman, *Gendairon-shū (2) Nan no tame no yutakasa* (Writings on contemporary theory (2) Abundance for what?), trans. Katō Hidetoshi (Tokyo: Misuzu shobō, 1968); Herbert Marcuse, *Risei to kakumei—Hēgeru to shakai riron no kōryū* (Reason and revolution—The prosperity of Hegel and theory of society), trans. Masuda Keizaburō (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1961).

[130] Lee's draws from Foucault's *Order of Things*: "Today we must say that the words of Michel Foucault, who pointed out the illusory dualism of 'consciousness and existence,' affirming everything while hoping for the "birth of the nonhuman" and declaring the "end of man," foretold a new way of seeing the world." Lee, "World

which things are objectified by consciousness, to "thingification" (擬物化 *gibutsuka*)

through which the physical object (物体 *buttai*) begins to operate according to its own

system of production. "It is a system of things as such, which have become automated so

that they can generate their own power…[and] will lead to a situation in which humans will

be left with nothing to do."[131] The basic problem of contemporary art lay in this reversal of

the power relation between subject and object, a reversal in the very purpose of production

itself, which no longer served human needs but rather made humans serve the product's

"needs."

Lee then proceeded to map the effects of the emergence of the autonomy of the

object on the course of modern art. He began with the dominance of the human figure and

canvases used to sacralize a certain image of the aristocracy and the nobility, beginning

with the Renaissance in Europe. The complement to the divination of the human form was

the anthropomorphizing of nature, even as the tools were being created, in physics, that

would decisively wrest the physical world from the human. The latter would become an

important feature of the Industrial Revolution and the beginning of consumerism on a mass

scale, which he noted was reflected in the Cubist use of distorted things and the patchwork

of an advertising and print culture. At the same time that Cubism made an implicit plea for

the sovereignty of the aesthetic perspective, Duchamp's readymade *objet* provided an

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and Structure," *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, p. 106. At the time of this publication, Lee had access only to an unpublished manuscript of the Korean translation from which he took this reference. The Japanese version, *Kotoba to mono—Jinbun kagaku to kōkogaku* (Words and Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences), trans. Kazutami Watanabe and Akira Sasaki, (Tokyo: Shinchō-sha, 1974) appeared five years later. Interview with artist, August 6, 2010. Takamatsu designed the cover for the translation of Foucault's *Order of Things.* According to Joan Kee, Lee attended a lecture of Foucault's in Tokyo in 1969.

[131] Lee, "World and Structure," *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, p. 106.

ironic countermove. Duchamp's *Fountain* replaced the *Mona Lisa* as the iconic

representation of art's mission.[132] While the heroic enterprise of modernism proceeded

through Picasso and the abstract expressionists, another enterprise clung more closely to

the development of perspectives in capitalism: the "material objects" (物像 *busshō*) of Pop

Art ironically counterpoint, with their marked emptiness, the fetishized commodities of

developed consumer society. He cited Claes Oldenburg's hamburgers and Jasper Johns'

flags and beercans as examples of "imaginary monuments. . .caught in the net of

representational recognition by the human mind."[133]

Turning to the contemporary art scene, Lee noticed a momentous change that

occured with the "brute, unadorned" forms of Minimalism (i.e., Phillip King, Robert Morris,

Ellsworth Kelly, Frank Stella, and John McCracken), in which, by virtue of refusing the cool

irony of Pop's engagement with the system of signs and things that have evacuated any

value in themselves beyond that of consumption, art returned to the physical properties

that refused exchangeability and substitution, separating the object from the realm of

representation (human consciousness) and restoring it to its topos. Take for example Lee's

reading of John McCracken's work.

It may not be appropriate to refer to John McCracken's extremely simple metal

plank, with its smooth, shining surface, as a thing or material object. It is a neutral

body with very little presence. The viewer has difficulty getting a sense of having

seen it. One has the strange feeling of having seen *some sort of event* taking place in

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[132] Here Lee is referring to Alfred Stieglitz' photograph of Duchamp's *Fountain* in 1917, "It was not accidental that a photograph was produced in which a urinal occupied most of the pictorial space against an entirely black background." Lee, "World and Structure," p. 106.

[133] Ibid., pp. 107–108.

midair, something that is not an actual thing. . .A three-dimensional structure that is

extremely minimal, almost too minimal, is presented with the claim that it is nothing

but what it is, an anonymous entity unrelated to anything else. It seems almost

wrong to call it a work of art because it is an *expressionless thing* that might be found

both anywhere and nowhere . . . In Minimal art, nonrelation effectively means

having no relation to the manipulations of representational human consciousness. It

is a position that rejects human representation. Therefore, what we *see* is neither an

idea nor a substance. It is something that might be described as *that sort of thing*, a

floating nonobject space.[134] (Emphasis mine)

Lee makes a strategic move here. Rather than returning to the old notion of aesthetic

autonomy to rally some kind of resistance to the appropriation of human representation by

the endless system of capitalist exchange—the route of heroic high modernism, with its

notions of the autonomous, concrete, self-sufficient form of the art object—Lee shifted in

another direction towards the immaterial effects of the work as a type, a "sort" of thing,

outside of any circuit of representation. The reflective surface and neutral body (i.e., "*some*

sort of event taking place in midair") of McCracken's work was exemplary for its extreme

existential deference—it, in effect, bowed out of any pre-existing system of relations, and

thus refused to be seen as anything but a three-dimensional structure (立体 *rittai*) akin to

an event or space. While in the American discursive context, these experiential features

marked the work's phenomenological "presence," for Lee, the term "presence" was used to

imply a connection between human intention (signification) and the physical object, of

which there was "very little" in McCracken's work. This absence of intention was the basis

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[134] Ibid.

for his interpretation of "non-relation" (in reference to Donald Judd's definition of "specific object"): the separation of idea from substance (consciousness from existence). The "floating," non-objective (non-representational) space thus reflected the ambiguity of locating concrete meaning, of which he saw a literal parallel in the immaterial works of kinetic and light art. These broke with the circuit of objects formed specifically to represent the human whether by abstraction, figuration, or by playing with the boundary between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic, like the readymade. Yet these works were visibly culled from the sphere of contemporary industrial technology, an apparatus of modern reason and the object's self-automation. These objects indicated a whole, a totality that was implicated in the "mechanized objectification of the world."[135] The attitude of the subject's objectification of the world that Lee had so condemned was now transposed onto the object and led to the possible eradication of the subject. He described Robert Whitman's laser beams as an extreme example of a case in which a neutral, transitional, pre-signifying space emerged that would lose the viewer in a spatial void. "The three-dimensional space had lost its object quality and no longer had room for the insertion of human language. The result was a peculiar 'third space.' There was nothing but empty space, seen as is, with neither things nor human beings in it."[136] The viewer consequently lost sight of an ontological ground continuous with the world.[137]

       This philosophical history of the development of art foregrounded Lee's positive

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[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid., p. 107.

[137] Lee also condemned Conceptual Art's attempts to remove the focus on materiality and obscure the representational will of the artist, as the works were bound within the realm of artistic intention. Lee, "World and Structure," p. 108.

agenda: the need for a wholesale shift in the conception of the artwork from medium to

structure (構造 *kōzō*). Structure was one of the keywords of the sixties. Lee, however, did

not refer to well-known structuralists, like Claude Levi-Strauss or Roland Barthes, but

rather referred to the definition used by the lesser known Belgian mathematician and

philosopher, Jean Ladrière. Lee paraphrased Ladrière's thinking: "a great intermediary that

clearly shows and conveys the gestures and condition of the way of being of everything as

it is, of the world just exactly as it is."[138] Structure was thus a matter of relating live

intermediaries as centers of indetermination within the matrix of occasions that form a

world. The reason why structure was an indispensable mediation in living collectives was

because it made the emergence of meaning possible. Meaning was not based upon certainty,

but rather upon such structured arrays of variables.

Having succinctly outlined the contradictions inherent in modern rationalism and

the social consequences of the radical break between subject and object, Lee's turn to

"structure" as a means of avoiding absolute ontological foundations led him to an aesthetic

that emphasized the symbiosis between consciousness, or self reflection, and bare

existence, which allowed the world space to reveal itself. He gave two iconic instances of

such world-revelation: the Buddha (functioning as an intermediary of Enlightenment and

one who exists as part of this world) and Sisyphus (the endless and unfailing struggle to act

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[138] Lee quotes from Ladrière: "Structure intimates things like an oracle, indicates certain directions, and opens paths to understanding. The meaning formed by structure, because of its nature, remains unstable and embraces a world of possibilities. We can begin with these possibilities and rediscover within reality its own condition. Structure is an intermediary." Jean Ladrière, "Imi to shisutemu—shisutemu wa ikiteiru" (Meaning and system: a system that is living) in *Kōzō shugi towa nanika: sono ideorogī to hōhō* (What is structuralism: ideology and method), Jean Marie Domenach, ed., Itō Morio and Yagame Riichi, trans. (Tokyo: Saimaru shuppankai, 1968) quoted in Lee, "World and Structure," *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, p. 109. Ladrière's essay was included in the volume, "Structuralismes: Idéologie et Méthode" *Espirit* (May 1967), a compilation on structuralist linguistics and Marxism by Yves Bertherat, Pierre Burgelin, Jean Conilh, Jean Cuisenier, Mean-Marie Domenach, Mikel Dufrenne, Jean Ladrière, Claude Levi-Strauss, and Paul Ricoeur.

upon and be enacted by the world). Lee obviously had Albert Camus' widely cited essay on

Sisyphus in mind with its use of the endlessness of the rock as the vehicle of Sisyphus's

relation to the world. The context of Camus's essay, which took Sisyphus as the "proletarian"

of the Gods whose punishment—to roll a rock up a hill from the peak of which it always

rolls down—was about lucidity in the face of the absurdity of his task, emblematic in his

relationship to his rock. (This, of course, echoed with the use of rocks in Lee's artwork). Lee

used both examples to demonstrate the activation of structure in the form of a body (an

ambiguous medium) that simultaneously integrated and nullified consciousness and

existence. To his religious and mythic example of encounter, Lee added a third: Sekine's

Phase-Mother Earth. It was the mark of its impact that Lee was able to write of it as "the

most awesome of Happenings since Sisyphus." One immediately sees the structural

similarity between Sisyphus's task, in which the rock is both the tool and the cause of the

perpetual deferment of the purpose, and Sekine's removal and placement of the dug-out

earth, and its eventual return into the ground: both ritualize a deferment of purpose that

transcends the purpose, simultaneously canceling and revealing the state of the world *just

as it is* (あるがまま *arugamama*). The body in these performances acts as an intermediary

agent, a center of indetermination, which, given one direction or another, reveals in a flash

the entire structure. Similarly, the artwork must be a "scene of an open world that breaks

through the structure and a place that also envelops it."[139]

The key source for Lee's formulation of the symbiotic aspect of structure was

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body. For Lee, Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body as

a site of perceptual intersection between the subject and object, whereby the very

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[139] Lee, "World and Structure," *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, p. 111.

condition for perception occurs prior to the intervention of consciousness, provided a key

to access the Being (existence) of the world. Lee described this as follows:

> In particular, Merleau-Ponty does not trust in the epistemological horizon of
>
> consciousness, and stands in its stead on the field of perception occurring prior to
>
> cognition. He redefines man as a corporeal being that exists at the very tangential
>
> point between the external world and the interiority of the self. In so doing, he seeks
>
> to see the movement of consciousness within the perceptual relationality between
>
> the world and the self. The task of contemporary philosophy for him is to
>
> defamiliarize man as the being of consciousness and the subject of cognition so that
>
> he may be redefined as the being of corporeality in the perceptual relation with the
>
> world."[140]

Here Lee drew from Merleau-Ponty's notion of the dual aspect of the body as belonging

simultaneously to the interior self and the external world, the contradiction between them

immediately synthesized in the body's "seeing" and "being seen." In Lee's narrative, the

space of the body nullified the hegemony of the subject over the object by denying its

foundation in phenomenological fact and restored, in the moment of encounter, the ability

to engage with the world in which the subject and object were in parity.

> The reason one can encounter the other is none other than this dualistic aspect of
>
> the body. The fact that the body is I and simultaneously the other and, at the same
>
> time, I, indicates that the body is the mediating being of simultaneity, which
>
> transcends the dichotomous framework between subject and object. It goes without

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[140] Lee, "Dekaruto to seiyō no shukumei" (Descartes and the fate of the west), *SD* (September 1969): 121 translated in Jin Baek, "From the 'Topos of Nothingess' to the 'Space of Transparency'," p. 92.

saying that is it the body that enables man to perceive the world before one

recognizes it as an object.

The significance of Sekine's *Phase-Mother Earth* was not in following the high modernist

tradition of the heroic authorial presence subduing the world to his presence, nor in

impersonally appropriating the earth as a material of the world (object), but rather in

bypassing that dualistic problematic and opening up structure on the "trans-objective

horizon" (非対象的地平 *hitaishō-teki chihei*) of the subject and object.[141] Lee interpreted

Phase-Mother Earth as opening a new path that is unexplored by Minimalism, Kinetic, or

Environmental Art, in spite of surface resemblances. Lee saw the latter movements as

perceiving the world through objectification even as they eliminate representation. Instead,

much in the same manner as Ishiko's notion of discovery, the structure that Lee was talking

about must be activated in order to make visible the existent aspects of a transparent world.

The artwork may only be a structure, or a way of being, even in a world without

being or nothingness, where both being and nothingness appear transparent. Of

course, what human beings see in structure is neither the distance between the

structure and the eye nor the structure itself as an object. Nor is the artwork a

complete idea upon which the structure is based. Rather, it is the scene of an open

world that breaks through the structure and a place that also envelops it. . .[142]

Lee's vocabulary here was close to Heidegger's idea of *alethia*—a moment of pure

disclosure—in the "The Origin of the Work of Art": "In the midst of beings as a whole an

open place occurs. There is a clearing [*Lichtung*]… Only this clearing grants and guarantees

[141] Lee, "World and Structure," *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, p. 111.
[142] Ibid.

to us humans a passage to those beings that we ourselves are not, and access to the being

that we ourselves are."[143] Just as Heidegger's *Lichtung* was suggestive but allusive, so too is

the notion of *structure* in Lee's writing, in as much as it is never totally embodied in a

concrete idea or object, but precluded all concreteness and must be activated by an

encounter. Drawing again from Merleau-Ponty, the artwork was a site through which

structure became discernible by way of a "mute Being which itself comes to show forth its

own meaning" ("Eye and Mind"). He concluded: "Today's urgent tasks are to denounce the

thing-dominated condition of contemporary art, overcome objectivism, liberate art

mediums and urge them toward structure, and see a new ontology."[144]

  While "World and Structure" betted heavily on *structure,* as defined within the

broad tradition of phenomenology, as a means to move away from the dualism that

underwrites the paradigms of signification and objectification that run through modernity,

giving us a model of intermediation that allows us access to the opening of the world, Lee's

"In Search of Encounter" (February 1970) investigated how exactly we were to accomplish

this end. Lee thought of his structures not as passive entities but as something that can be,

or not be, activated. Instead of drowning the significance of human acts in a deterministic

monism, Lee located the aesthetic act in the viewer's corporeal *encounter* with the work

within a larger structural relationship. In other words, the encounter was not a one-to-one

relationship, because we can quantify, or determine, neither the subject nor the object;

both come with the infinite burden of their situations. Their convergence in the encounter

gives us a triadic relationship between the artistic/viewing subject, the object, and the

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[143] Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935), *Basic Writings: from Being and time (1927) to The task of thinking (1964)*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993), p. 178.
[144] Lee, "World and Structure," *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, p. 111.

work's surroundings—and thus, the world. However, having liquidated the dualism that would simplify the boundaries between all three elements, Lee turned to a more entangled account of how this triadic relationship should actually work.

Lee began by attacking the way this relationship is foreshortened in modernity. In particular, he critiqued the objectification of ideas (which concerned the domain of objects in "World and Structure") more specifically in the perceptual domain of images, as a vehicle that served to create a pathological narcissism, a projection of the self that sought, in a media-saturated society, to eternally view itself, as though the world were a mirror for "an enlarged self." This was in direct response to the obsession with media that was one of the hallmarks of sixties cultural discourses.[145] The correlate of the media utopianism was the enthusiasm for virtual images (虚像 *kyozō*) in contemporary art (i.e., media spectacles such as *Electromagica '69* and the Sony Pavilion of Osaka Expo '70), which lent themselves to television and new media technologies, always on the lookout for sensation. In this simulacral world, the arbitrary relationships between the thing and the sign were internalized into a system of self-referential differences. The difference between essence and appearance, that is, the mental image and the thing's exteriority became naturalized. This semiotic system blocked the possibility that one may experience the world by revealing the character of things through bodily relation. By parasitically colonizing the sensorium, it bended the subject to the representational system itself, putting everything outside it under the tedious, of what doesn't "sell." This is the moment Lee characterized as

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[145] Lee refers to McLuhan's axiom "medium as the message" as a "reckless language of idealism." See "World and Structure," p. 109.

the "revolt of images" (像の叛乱 *Zō no hanran*).[146] As architectural historian Jin Baek puts it,

Lee viewed the invasion of the triadic relationship at the base of art by a media that

essentially polluted the human sensorium as a crisis moment, to which his own work must

respond by activating a new model of experience in which "the signifier, the signified and

the referent are one and the same."[147] This collapse would, Lee thought, repel semiotic

illusions.

"In Search of Encounter" contained Lee's fullest account of what the crucial term

encounter meant for him. He defined it as a momentary, interactive exchange between two

entities "who happen to be present at a site of mediation." However, unlike Hegel's logic,

which trapped mediation in a continual deferring of the direct, Lee viewed the encounter as

a leap to directness, a moment of direct experience with the other. Lee further discussed

methods of sustaining an encounter, which became the critical process in the work.

> The encounter is an event of exchange between two parties who happen to be
>
> present at a site of mediation. . . .They are sites of interactive events and at the same
>
> time experiences that mediate directness. . . An encounter occurs at certain site at a
>
> certain moment. It disappears again in the next moment, and the person having the
>
> encounter cannot remain present at the same site forever. At the same time, an
>
> encounter cannot be elicited immediately, just the way one wants, at a desired
>
> moment. At that very juncture, unique methods are available to conscious beings so
>
> that they can engage in a world of open encounter. There must be awareness of the
>
> exposed nature of the site of encounter and a structuring through gestures, acts that

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[146] Lee, "Descartes and the Fate of the West," *SD* (September 1969), p. 121.

[147] Baek, "From the 'Topos of Nothingess' to the 'Space of Transparency'," p. 94.

perpetuate and universalize the relationship of the encounter. The primary reason

for engaging in expression can be described as a desire to sustain the encounter and

to universalize the relationship that produces it.[148]

Encounters thus allowed one to "to reexamine the ambiguity of self and other in a

relationship involving interiority and exteriority."[149] Lee's vocabulary and vision, here,

borrowed heavily from Nishida Kitarō's logic of *soku* (the correspondence of absolute

contradictories), which played a key role in shaping the self and in understanding

encounter.[150] Interiority was not defined through a self-affirmation that lay claim to a social

space, but through self-negation, in which the self emptied itself to accept and internalize

the other to fill its secure void. This involved a moment of self-awakening, which occurred

not on the level of consciousness (conceived, here, in terms of a gap between the conscious

self and the self-conscious self, who sees consciousness), which can only lead to the infinite

regresses outlined in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but via the body (a reciprocal matrix

of actions between the subject and the world), which, thrown into the world and part of it,

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[148] Lee Ufan, "Deai o motomete," *Deai o motomete: Gendai bijutsu no shigen* (In search of encounter: The beginnings of contemporary art), rev. ed. (Tokyo: Bijutsu shuppansha, 2000), pp. 60–61, translated in *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, p. 116. Originally published as "Deai o motomete" (Tokushū: Hatsugen suru shinjin tachi: Higeijutsu no chihei kara) [In Search of Encounter (Special Issue: Voices of New Artists: From the Realm of Non-Art)]. *Bijutsu techō,* no. 324 (February 1970): 19–20.

[149] Lee, "In Search of Encounter," *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, p. 116. Lee employs Merleau-Ponty's notion that both are part of a continuum, fully integrated parts of a world in which everything is related. This view is opposed to the rationalist conception in which the human subject creates its own self-contained world of objectified images. Exteriority extends beyond human concepts and interiority is more than the mind's attempt for a mastery of the world. See also Dorothea Olkowski and James Morley. *Merleau-Ponty: Interiority and Exteriority, Psychic Life and the World* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999).

[150] Nishida Kitarō, *Nishida Kitarō zenshū* (Complete Works of Nishida Kitaro) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1947–1979), vol. 11, p. 237, cited in Baek, 102. Although Nishida is not directly cited in the 1970 version "In Search of Encounter," references appear in the 2000 revision of the text. This revision does not mean that the inclusion of Nishida's writings were a retrospective decision, as Nishida's ideas had already begun to figure prominently in 1969 beginning with Lee's "Descartes and the Fate of the West," *SD* (September 1969).

was finally and existentially not subject to such a regress. This was the process of self-awareness of one-body-mind, in which the self will throw itself into the world of action. In "The Human Being," Nishida wrote of the body as a term in which passivity and activity intersect. "Acting is seeing, and seeing is acting. . .Body exists where acting and seeing are integrated.[151] In other words, encounter was substantiated through the body (*shintai*) and act (*shigusa*), and *soku* was the ambiguous relation that sustained the encounter.

Reflecting on the task of describing and prolonging an encounter, Lee takes a cue from the performative function of the reader as theorized by Roland Barthes in "The Death of the Author."[152] "The writing will not be a finished 'work' that provides some kind of definitive explanation but what Roland Barthes calls a 'text'; that is, a living structure that makes an encounter possible. For the reader does not come equipped with the structure of a self-contained world but becomes, in a different sense, a universalized intermediary who enables correspondence or encounter through the relational mode of reading."[153] In this pursuit to mediate between identity andnonidentity, and interiority and exteriority, the mode of encounter is decisively *relational* and the *act*, or gesture, to see the world more vividly.

One of the most corrosive attacks on Lee's encounter was by artist, political activist, and one of the prominent leaders of *Bikyōtō*, Hikosaka Naoyoshi. In his essay, "Critiquing

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[151] Lee, "Deai no genshō gaku josetsu" (Preface to the phenomenology of encounter). *Deai o motomete* (In search of encounter), p. 201.

[152] Barthes had achieved critical acclaim among Japanese intellectuals after his travels there in 1966 and subsequent publication of *Empire of Signs* in 1970. Lee was a very interested reader of his essays during that time. Interview with artist, August 6, 2010.

[153] Lee, "In Search of Encounter," *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, p. 116.

Lee Ufan—Fascism Based on the Interior Danger of 'Expression'"[154] published in November

1970, Hikosaka declared that Lee's proposition of "material" encounters was nothing other

than a form of apolitical mysticism that suppressed human agency and representation

amidst the crisis of expression in the late 1960s. Situating Lee in the tradition of a Fascist

aesthetic that dissolved the power of the self, he argued that:

> [Under Fascism] the structure of the world continues to be expressed as if it is
>
> liberated within the condition of non-continuity and the loss of universal
>
> connectivity. And the escape from the regulation of history called "the modern"
>
> comes to structure our internal gestures and our primordial expression as
>
> historically prescribed rules. Under this condition, we are unable to even question
>
> this escape and in turn, follow a terrain that lacks the boundaries of time or space,
>
> and simply dream of trying to confirm our own existence.[155]

Targeting Lee's ahistorical terms as a form of escapism, Hikosaka devoted the brunt of his

critique to the lack of agency of expression.[156] He criticized the a priori nature of Lee's

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[154] Hikosaka Naoyoshi, "Lee Ufan hihan—'Hyōgen' no naiteki kiki ni okeru Fascism" (Critiquing Lee Ufan—Fascism based on the interior danger of 'expression'." *Design Hihyō/Design Review*, no. 12 (November 1970): 129–153. Hikosaka was actively involved as a student at Tama University in the anti-*Anpo* demonstrations against the second renewal of the Security Treaty of 1970 as well as in the widespread university upheavals of 1968–1969, headed by the militant, left-wing coalition *Zenkyōtō* (All-Campus Joint Struggle Council). In order to effectively break the institutional bounds from within, Bikyōtō conducted individual performances in 1971 (operating under the name Bik yōtō Revolution Committee). Hikosaka's *Floor Event* (a live performance enacted over a 10-day period at the artist's home) was one of four solo exhibitions performed at sites outside the museum space; other sites included performances on campus, in an underground theater, and a film projected on a riverbank. Through these performances, they tried to expose the institution of "art" itself as an internal mechanism of practice. Referring to this process, critic Reiko Tomii writes, "Even when art-making occurs outside of institutional sites (i.e. museum/gallery), 'art as institution' inevitably presents itself within one's 'internal museum,' which is characterized by the 'impossibility of dissolution.'" Tomii, "Concerning the Institution of Art: Conceptualism in Japan," *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), p. 25.

[155] Hikosaka, "Lee Ufan hihan," p. 145.

[156] This stems from Hikosaka's reflections on the viability of artistic expression after experiencing political defeat. He stated: "What was revealed was not the death of subjectivity, but the meaningless emptiness of the

condition of "as-it-is" (*arugamama*) as having descended from the Fascist conditioning of the subject as the passive bearer of commands and ending up in a state of *non-mediation*. He tried to point out the manner in which Lee's "encounter" ironically inserted meaning into the "directness of the moment" in an attempt to unify the loss of universal connectivity and the collapse of the structure of the world through a self-determined space, and concluded that Lee's anticipation for an encounter is a form of mysticism.

While the notions of self-awakening may have led Hikosaka to see Lee's encounter as a form of mysticism, his reading of the political and ethical attitude that underlies Lee's adoption of Nishida's notion of consciousness assumes that it can't help but be determined by Nishida's political stances. Hikosaka did not so much argue with Lee's notion of the body as a form of intermediary (as opposed to non-mediation) as claim that the two logically negate each other. Furthermore, Lee's preoccupation with alterity in this text was not entirely aesthetically driven. Lee stated:

> the world was seen as material for the execution of ideas, as nothing but a territory
> to be colonized. . .In the history of modernity, "man," who was given special status in
> many different ways, became an active agent who applied imperialist ideas that
> gave meaning to the world in history. (In some regions of the world, colonization

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space of everyday life that was built from our daily existence inside the barricades." Here he conceived "meaningless emptiness" as a productive mode of daily existence that "wiped the dust off" the cycle of repetition and "descent into daily life." In this passage, the artist not only recognizes himself as a subject of an empty imperial order in a nation that has succumbed to capitalist imperialism, but also questions his function as an artistic subject bound within this ideological structure, as a producer of symbolic value. His daily struggle in the barricades was a means to achieve a tabula rasa, a clean slate, an attempt to shed his subject formation in order to locate, once again, the political agency of "expression." See Hikosaka, "Senryaku-teki kōtaiki no shūen" (The End of Strategic Retreat), *Bijutsu techō* (March 1971).

has been seen as necessary for modernization, and it has even been advocated as a

way of overcoming the modern West).[157]

Lee, here, signaled his opposition to any use of the critique of instrumental reason in

support of Japanese imperialism, supposedly directed by an alternative Asian ideal. Lee's

real-life experiences endured forced cultural assimilation under Japan's imperial rule in

pre-war Korea, U.S. intervention in Korea during the Cold War, and violent interrogation by

Korean Central Intelligence Agency.[158] As a minority in Japan, Lee's constant struggle with

the legacy of colonial power fed his own thought about how systems codify their

recognition and subjection of the Other. While not taking himself as the embodiment of the

Other—that is, making victimhood one more excuse for the narcissistic projection of the

self—he was able to reflect on the Ego-Other relationship from his experience on both sides

and to generalize that experience as typical of a certain system of rationality.

> Just as countries that have broken free of the chains of imperialism strive as much as
>
> possible to recognize each other as equals, in the territory of art, attention is being
>
> given to the types of boundaries and relations of expression where self encounters

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[157] Lee, "In Search of Encounter," *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, p. 113.

[158] During this period Lee's relationship to his home country took complicated turns. Lee's essays from *In Search of an Encounter* (1971) began to be translated into Korean and garnered critical interest within the Korean art community. However, Lee's relation to Korea was still tense: on a trip to Seoul in March 1974, at the height of the government's crackdown on dissent under its Anti-Communist Law, he was taken into custody and subject to violent interrogation for six days on suspicion of having ties with North Korean spies. Park Seobo, the Korean artist with whom Lee was staying, was also arrested but released the following day and submitted a letter to South Korean police affirming Lee's critical importance to the art communities of both Japan and Korea. Lee was placed under surveillance by the Korean Central Intelligence Agency for the next four years and did not travel to Korea during this time. Interview with artist, August 6, 2010. See also Lee, "Y no taiken" [Y's experience], in *Toki no furue* [The trembling of time] (Tokyo: Ozawa shoten, 1988); rev. ed. (Tokyo: Misuzu shobō, 2004), pp. 227–30. For a detailed discussion on the political circumstances surrounding Lee's detainment and state surveillance, see Kee, *Points, Lines, Encounters, Worlds*, pp. 62–69.

other (rather than constructing a painted empire on canvas through representation of the self).[159]

Furthermore, in Lee's quest for a strict attitude of parity between self and other within the realm of contemporary art, he drew from a key concept of *nonidentity* central to the thought of Theodor Adorno, a central Frankfurt School philosopher. Adorno's criticism of modern rationalism in *Negative Dialectics* was mounted outside of the Heideggerian ideology of authenticity, which Adorno violently criticized. Adorno started from the fact that everything in nature or society is identified in terms of universal concepts or categories, which creates fictions, entities that are falsely harmonized or that have been shorn of their differences.[160] Things that do not fit dominant concepts are ignored or considered unreal and serious conflicts in society are masked, to the advantage of an administrative power that seeks to dominate every realm of life. The notion of nonidentity thinking accepts its own limitations, recognizing differences and the reality of things outside rationalist categories. A world of nonidentity (非同一性 *hidōitsu-sei*) contains elements beyond the grasp of reason and evades the control exercised by the social system of late capitalism. "The issue today," Lee proposed "is how to make people perceive the nonidentical world, in all its externality, as different from the illusory world of identity that has been internalized."[161]

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[159] Lee, "In Search of Encounter," p. 113.

[160] Lee refers to as follows: "The illusion of identity between ideas and the world is in the process of dissolving. It has been some time now since Foucault declared the end of "man," which was an invention of modernity, and Adorno spoke of the need for nonidentity in his criticism of modern rationalism." Lee, "In Search of Encounter," p. 113.
[161] Ibid., p. 115.

Our reading of Lee's texts is not meant to be a lesson in philosophy, but inevitably incorporates the philosophical problems with which Lee was concerned in his art practice. That practice was elaborated in tandem with an attempt to lay out a technically sophisticated aesthetics and ontology. These, in turn, help us understand the way Mono-ha artists represented what they were doing, developeding a criteria that helped them judge whether their work was successful or not. Lee's philosophical essays follow a classic form: they begin in critique, arguing against dominant theories and concepts, then and they move towards positive claims that construct a worldview out of certain ontological principles. Thus, he issues a critique of modern rationalism beginning with Descartes' strict subject-objection dichotomy. Like his predecessors—Heidegger, Nishida, the French structuralists, including Foucault—he shows how subjectivity has been constructed out of the fictional premise of an absolute ontological divide. The result of the Cartesian move, historically, is the creation of systems that reflect the Hegelian dialectic, where the problem is to confirm existence solely through consciousness or its extensions (the media), thereby allowing existence to be administered. Meanwhile, developments in technology have located humans increasingly in a system of arbitrary signs and a virtual reality that does not account for, or even feel, the "exterior" world. This condition results in the phenomenon of self-alienation. Lee proposes that we meet this situation by shifting our fundamental starting point from epistemology to the phenomenology of perception in which the central mode of identification is the body. Humans encounter the world through perception, and the body is an intermediary condition, simultaneously self and other, in which the world becomes a site for direct experience. Lee's aim is to search for a structure, a system

connecting centers of indetermination (variables, or, what Nishida calls, *basho* – topos) to

each other that could intermediate the encounter with the opening up of the world.

CHAPTER 4

LEE UFAN'S DISCOVERY OF SEKINE NOBUO

AND *PHASE OF NOTHINGNESS*

An intuition is a skybound journey of a world embraced by the situatedness of presence itself.

–Sekine Nobuo, *Genshoku*, no. 4 (May 1969)

Described as "a Big Bang,"[162] "a revelation,"[163] and "an indestructible masterpiece,"[164]

Phase-Mother Earth (Fig. 2) is now known as the work that launched "the Mono-ha

moment."[165] Yet the story of this ephemeral work and its resonance within the history of

postwar Japanese art still has many facets that perplex scholars. This chapter narrates the

gestation of *Phase-Mother Earth*, and the critical meeting between Sekine and Lee Ufan and

the dialogue between Lee and the other Mono-ha artists that took place in the critical

window from 1968 to 1969. That dialogue is important: though Lee is taken to be the

spokesman for the group, in reality these artists had different views about what they were

doing. The chapter will follow Lee's theorization of Sekine and Mono-ha's practice in

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[162] Koshimizu Susumu, "Yami no naka e kiete yuku mae no yabu no naka e" [Entering the Thicket Before Disappearing into the Darkness], *Bijutsu techō* (May 1995): 279; Reiko Tomii, "'International Contemporaneity' in the 1960s: Discoursing on Art in Japan and Beyond." *Japan Review.* No. 21 (2009): 126.

[163] Ishiko Junzō, "Gendai bijutsu no shikaku—<Miru> kara <Miru> e" (The Sight of Contemporary Art—From 'Seeing' to 'Examining'), *Biiku bunka* [Art Educational Culture] (July 1969): 8.

[164] Ōtagaki Minoru, "Mu kara yū e" [From Nothing to Being], *Kyoto bijutsu no shin/ko/kin* [The New/The Past/The Present in the Art of Kyoto] (Kyoto: Tankosha, 2006), p. 12.

[165] Thomas Havens, "The Monoha Moment," *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Non-Verbal Arts, The Avant-Garde Rejection of Modernism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'I Press: 2006), p. 189.

"Beyond Being and Nothingness" (1971). In particular, Lee defined Mono-ha practice

through three key terms: *shigusa* (仕草, gesture), *shintai* (身体, body), and *basho* (場所,

topos), all of which served as discursive frameworks for subsequent interpretions of Mono-

ha works.[166]

In the politically significant year 1968, Sekine Nobuo was beginning his independent

career as an artist after gaining his master's degree in painting from Tama Art University.

During this period, Sekine had been working on a series of reliefs derived from topology

and had submitted some of them, under the generic name *phase* (*isō*) to the painting

section of the juried *8ᵗʰ Trends in Contemporary Art Exhibition* at the Kyoto National

Museum of Modern Art (August 6-September 22, 1968). The works, *Phase No. 4*, *Phase No. 5*,

and *Phase No. 9* (Fig. 71)*,* being cylindrical reliefs, were mistakenly submitted to the "three-

dimensional art" section and, to Sekine's surprise, won the grand prize. Based on this

unexpected turn of events, Sekine was invited to submit a "sculpture" to the *1ˢᵗ Kobe Suma*

Rikyū Park Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition. One month before the exhibition, the

organizers contacted him to ask when they could schedule to pick up his sculpture for the

exhibition, and the artist was startled as he had no money and had never made a proper

sculpture prior to that date. After telling the staff the exhibition organizers that there was

no need to come by to pick up a "sculpture," Sekine spent a month thinking about what to

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[166] See Minemura, *Chōkoku no yobikoe* (The call of sculpture) (Tokyo: Suiseisha, 2005); Chiba, "Mono-ha," *Gendai bijutsu itsudatsu-shi 1945–1985* (A history of deviations in contemporary Japanese art 1945–1985) (Tokyo: Shōbun-sha, 1986); and Reiko Tomii, "Thought Provoked: Ten Views of Tokyo, Circa 1970 (1967–1973)," *Century City* (London: Tate Modern, 2001).

make for the show while riding the Yamanote train.[167] Finally, the plan for a work came to

him, which he entitled *Phase-Mother Earth*.

The artist's 1968 diagram for the work (Fig. 79) consisted of two congruent forms, a

2.7 by 2.2 meter mass of earthen cylinder mixed with concrete, placed adjacent to a hole of

the same shape and volume dug into the ground. This was born out of an extreme and

improbable thought experiment: what if one carved into the earth and hollowed out the

interior (somehow avoiding piling it up on the surface), so that the planet became a shell?

He put this idea down in a note: "If one were to open a hole into the earth, and from there,

dig the dirt out for a lengthy period of time, eventually the earth would turn into the shape

of an eggshell, and if one then removed its outer layer, the earth would become reversed

into a negative earth."[168] Extending his fascination with topology to this quixotic thought,

he applied the formula for the kind of spatial transmutations necessitated by his thought

experiment to envision the result upon the earth's topographical plane. Thus, we can see

how the visual nature of the work itself was conceived as a formal process of variation of

the kind that occurs when we make the convex surface of a cylinder and the hole's inverted

concavity into congruent and reversible counterparts. These themes were definitely

consistent with the optical moment in Japanese avant-garde art with which Sekine had

been involved and which was discussed in Chapter 1. But if the thought experiment was at

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[167] It is interesting to note that the work was first conceived while the artist was riding the Tokyo's Yamanote line, a train line that forms an ellipse around the Imperial castle, otherwise known as the empty center. It is no coincidence that the experience of riding a train that loops endlessly around another elliptical moat that protects and surrounds the castle may have subconsciously served as a source of inspiration. Sekine did not identify himself as a politically engaged artist in 1968, but the form of the ellipse and the political symbolism of the castle may have served as a stimulant to his thinking about the emptiness of the center and the dynamism of the margins. See Sekine Nobuo, "*Isō-Daichi" no kōkogaku* [Archaeology of *Phase-Mother Earth*]. Exh. cat. (Nishinomiya: Ōtani Memorial Art Museum, 1996), p. 8.

[168] Sekine, *Fūkei no yubiwa*, p. 56.

first merely a large projection of a dynamic process that could be mapped topologically, the result, the visual suggestion that they complete each other in a cyclical continuity, had an inevitably symbolic feel. The formal structure, in other words, carried a cosmological charge.

On the adjacent page of Sekine's notes (Fig. 79), the artist also made a formal reference to a specific conical garden mound, Kōgetsudai (光月台, Moon Viewing Platform) (Fig. 80) situated at the historical Ginkakuji (Silver Pavilion) temple in Kyoto. Kōgetsudai's perfectly conical structure is lopped off at the top to create a pool-like surface, and this form has been implemented to contain an optimum amount of lunar illumination on full moon nights. This formal quality has a symbolic effect: the pool stands as a synecdoche of the full moon. The structure, in the age before telescopes, could even be imagined to have functioned as a way to perceive the actual moon itself.[169] Kogetsudai was not only a formal inspiration but also presented a perceptual device (namely the moon's displacement onto the Kōgetsudai platform) that involved the planetary equilibrium Sekine sought to remap onto *Phase-Mother Earth*.

Sekine and his friends from Tama Art University (Koshimizu Susumu, Yoshida Katsurō, and their partners, Koshigemachi Yoriko, Uehara Takako, and Ōishi Momoko) arrived in Suma Rikyu Park ten days before the exhibition opening (October 1, 1968) (Fig. 81). They borrowed shovels from the Park administration office, drew a circle on the

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[169] See Ōtagaki Minoru, "Mu kara yū e" [From Nothing to Being], *Kyoto bijutsu no shin/ko/kin* [The New/The Past/The Present in the Art of Kyoto] (Kyoto: Tankosha, 2006), p. 20. Okamoto Tarō, "Kyo to jitsu no kukan" [The Space of Virtual and Actual] *Kikan Gendai Chokoku / Sculpture*. no. 15 (January 1978): 21–28. This same journal issue featured a seminal conversation between Lee Ufan and Suga Kishio concerning Mono-ha. "Mono-ha o megutte–1970-nen zengo" (Concerning Mono-ha–Before and After 1970), *Kikan Gendai Chokoku / Sculpture*. no. 15 (January 1978): 38–63.

ground, began digging into the earth, and built a mound 4.4 meters (twice the distance of

the diameter) from the hole in one week. They poured concrete powder into the mixture to

harden the positive form as they continued to dig and pile the dirt. In order to further

sustain the mold, they constructed a wooden scaffold and wrapped nine plywood boards

and rope around the mold to keep its form. The moment they took off the plywood boards,

the immediate material presence of the earth completely overwhelmed them. They had not

imagined the force of the cylinder.[170] Whatever the work's inception in Sekine's mind, any

sense of a priori meaning or use of the work to prove an artistic point was shattered in the

process of making.

Phase—Mother Earth won the Asahi newspaper award, which gave him both the

confidence and the financial means to embark upon a series of works under the *Phase*

rubric. The first was *Phase-Sponge*, a thick, cylindrical piece of white foam (130 x 120 x 120

cm) (Fig. 82) crushed under the weight of a black, steel panel, which the artist exhibited at

Seibu Department store in November 1969.[171] *Phase of Nothingness—Oilclay* (Fig. 40)

followed, a thick 2.5 ton mound of oilclay shown at his first solo exhibition at Tokyo Gallery

in April 1969. *Phase of Nothingness—Water* (Fig. 35), consisting of two containers, one

cylinder and the other rectangular, filled to the brim with water was shown at both the *6th*

Paris Youth Biennale and the *9th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan* at the Tokyo

Metropolitan Art Museum. A *Phase of Nothingness* (fig. 54) at the 1st Hakone Open Air

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[170] Sekine Nobuo, "Seishun to dōgigo no 'Mono-ha' to ima" ("Mono-ha" as a synonym of youth versus the present), "Tokubetsu kiji. Shōgen: Mono-ha ga kataru mono-ha" (Special article. Testimonies: Mono-ha speaks on Mono-ha). *Bijutsu techō*, no. 707 (May 1995): 261.

[171] The work was nominated for an award at the Nagaoka Museum (a privately owned museum) and the won the grand prize.

Museum exhibition in August 1969, a wide granite boulder balanced on a 4 meter rectangular, mirrored column, rounded out this burst of creativity. Critics mostly saw these works in formal terms, as plays on binary oppositions such as positive and negative, or softness and hardness, or they related the works to process art. But none of these interpretative frameworks satisfied Sekine.[172] One of the few exceptions was Haryū Ichirō who saw Sekine's *Phase-Mother Earth* as a breakthrough in transcending the impulse to represent events (concepts) versus things (form), opening up the possibility of imagining nothingness (虚無 *kyomu*). The critic saw the work as a moment of pure negation of the actuality of the world, and a decisive break between concepts and objects, which as we will see was in sharp contrast to Lee's reading.

Sekine met Lee in October 1968, few weeks after *Phase-Mother Earth* had been unveiled, at a gallery in Tokyo. Sekine felt a tremendous affinity toward Lee's interpretation of his work, feeling that he had finally found the intellectual reception he desired, and the two began meeting on a daily basis at Top café in East Shinjuku. Eventually, Sekine brought along his colleagues Koshimizu, Yoshida, Suga, and Narita. Together, these artists began to see themselves as a group, and as such, began to plan on intervening to "change the current" of the Japanese contemporary art world, which in their view was still passively importing concurrent avant-garde Euro-American practices, and thus failing their responsibility to respond to the reality around them.[173] As Sekine stated, "we wanted to determine our own language. . .we wanted to draw from thought and formal languages that

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[172] Haryū Ichirō, "Hihyō-ka no me 3: Haryū Ichirō shijō gyararī. "Jittai to kyozō o meguru dansō" (Critic's eye 1: Haryū Ichirō magazine gallery. Fragmentary thoughts on actuality and illusion), *Geijutsu shinchō*, no. 235 (March 1969).

[173] Sekine Nobuo, "Seishun to dōgigo no 'Mono-ha' to ima," p. 262.

further deviated from 'modernity.'...What is characteristic about our movement is that we developed our own practice, conceptual tenets, and texts all on our own. Therefore, there is no other movement that brought forth critiques, rebuttals, and discussions more than Mono-ha."[174] This comment was connected with Mono-ha's interest in breaking with the remnants of modernism in general, as these were associated with the West's Cold War culture. Questioning how to articulate this *language* and their attitudes towards matter, Sekine began examining and absorbing his discussions with Lee, interrogating and searching for a way to transcend the foundational values of modernity, such as creation, uniqueness/originality, and the emergence of "images" based on the expression of concepts.[175] He took his interrogations further into the realm of Japan's traditional and customary arts such as the tea ceremony, flower arrangements, garden aesthetics, traditional architecture, and Japanese uses of space as well. Instead of an instrumental approach to materials, he felt a need to arrest the desire of instrumental rationality, its resolution of all things into a system of substitutable commodities, and to think in terms of their sheer manner of existence and fluidity of relationships that stand outside of the social definition of utility. Sekine's interests in topology evolved through the Taoist philosophy on nothingness espoused by Laozi.[176] He was particularly struck by Laozi's teachings on water,

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[174] Ibid.

[175] Ibid.

[176] Laozi (老子) was an ancient Chinese philosopher, believed to have lived in the 6th century BC, best known as the author of *Tao Te Ching* and founder of Taoist philosophy.

which flows from high to low, possess no form or color, can conform to any container, and is transparent.[177]

Lee became a key dialogic partner for Sekine, whose own approach to his work was informed through *henkei* (変形 variations) of space. However, as we have seen in Chapter 3, Lee would take up this notion of variation in a more distinct and multi-layered language that borrowed from various philosophical sources, but primarily from that of Nishida's topos of nothingness. This topos of nothingness involved a form of revealing an "open, nonobjective, transparent world"[178] through the symbiotic relationship between self and other espoused in "World and Structure" and "In Search of Encounter." After witnessing *Phase-Mother Earth*, the work not only became the basis for Sekine and Lee's conversation, but also instigated the turn in Lee's critical writing that has since been seen (to the dismay of some of the artists) as the program of Mono-ha. Sekine was the major reference in Lee's "A Happening without a Happening" published in May 1969, followed by "Beyond Being and Nothingness" in the June 1969 issue of *Sansai* magazine. The latter text was revised and expanded into a two-part essay, published under the title, "The Horizon of Immediate Phenomena—Essay on Nobuo Sekine No. 1 and 2" in the December 1970 and January 1971 issues of *SD*, a 60s avant-garde journal on design, architecture and art.[179] Lee added a

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[177] Interview with artist, February 26, 2012.

[178] Lee, "World and Structure," *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, p. 111.

[179] Lee, "Hapuningu no nai Hapuningu" [A Happening without a Happening]. *Interia* no. 122 (May 1969): 44–45. "Sonzai to mu o koete—Sekine Nobuo-ron" [Beyond Being and Nothingness—On Sekine Nobuo], *Sansai* no. 245 (June 1969): 51–53; "Chokusetsu genshō no chihei ni: Sekine Nobuo ron-1" [The Horizon of Immediate Phenomena—Essay on Nobuo Sekine, No. 1], *SD* no. 74 (December 1970): 92–96; "Chokusetsu genshō no chihei ni: Sekine Nobuo ron-2" [The Horizon of Immediate Phenomena—Essay on Nobuo Sekine, No. 2]], *SD* no. 75 (January 1971): 119–23.

section on "topos" (*basho*) to the *SD* texts in his critical anthology *In Search of Encounter,* published in January 1971.

Lee's reading of Sekine's practice was an exemplary piece of art theory, joining his philosophical training to his sense of his own aesthetic mission and the kind of utopian moment he wanted Mono-ha to be. Knowing that modernism was exhausted, he wanted a rupture that would diagnose where it may have failed. He felt he had the tools in his increasingly complex notion of structure, but he recognized that the critiques of the subject that were common in the sixties and that were coming out of French theory at the time were, in a sense, in disjunction with any practice: what Lee sought was a new way forward, both for his own art, for Japanese art in general, and for the social whole within which that art existed. In turn, one could go as far as to state that Sekine's *Phase of Nothingness* series was inspired by Lee's writings. But the two practices (Sekine's work and Lee's writings) developed symbiotically.

Lee's essay, "Beyond Being and Nothingness—Thoughts on Sekine Nobuo,"[180] was a major statement. It was divided into three parts with manifesto like titles 1) On Gesture, 2) On Corporeality, 3) On Topos. Lee's terms are consonant with Nishida's, although he was reluctant to reference Nishida—perhaps due to the political connotations of the latter's writing—until "Preface to the Phenomenology of Encounter," the last chapter included in his *In Search of Encounter* (1971 and revised in 2000). In addition, like Nishida, Lee also

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[180] The first version of this text appeared in June 1969 in the journal *Sansai*. See Lee Ufan, "Sonzai to mu o koete—Sekine Nobuo-ron" [Beyond Being and Nothingness: Thoughts on Sekine Nobuo], *Sansai* (June 1969): 51-53. An expanded version was then published in Lee's book of collected writings from 1969 to 1971 in *Deai o motomete: Atarashii geijutsu no hajimari ni* [In Search of Encounter: At the Beginnings of a New Art] (Tokyo: Tabata shoten, 1971), pp. 117–174. Finally a slightly revised version appeared in the 2000 re-edition of the book, as "Sonzai to mu o koete: Sekine Nobuo ron" (Beyond being and nothingness: On sekine nobuo). *Deai o motomete: Gendai bijutsu no shigen* (In search of encounter: The beginnings of contemporary art). (Tokyo: Bijutsu shuppansha, 2000). All further citations refer to this final version.

took ideas and themes from Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Lee's desire to break with a

modernity theorized elsewhere in order to struggle with the constants of the reality faced

by Japanese and Korean artists is in tune with Nishida's own synthesis of Western and

Japanese philosophy that placed great importance on traditional Japanese Buddhist

metaphysics of "emptiness" or "nothingness."[181] Critic Miyakawa Atsushi who was sensitive

to the parallels between Lee's philosophical interests and the larger structuralist and

phenomenological ideas of the period, was in fact the one who suggested he look into

Nishida's theories on *basho* (topos).[182] The text follows Lee's major theses from "World and

Structure" and "In Search of Encounter," examined in Chapter 3. There, he had affected the

negative work of showing how the crisis of modern rationalism derives from a dualism that

both creates an ideology of authorship and related ideas of representation and expression

and creates a system of instrumentality in which these ideas are inevitably undermined

and contradicted. In his essays on Sekine, theories of structure and encounter are not only

put to a more concrete use in analysing the artist's iconic works, but also are meant to

break out of the narrow circle in which Japanese aesthetics (and social tendencies) are

caught, and to bring back the possibility of encountering the world.

On Gesture

Lee begins by narrating his experience as a bystander to Sekine's production of *Phase of

Nothingness—Oilclay* (Fig 16)*. He describes how Sekine brought a truckload of oilclay

weighing 2.5 tons from a mudshop, and how, with the help of his friends, carried the

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[181] See Nishida Kitarō, *An Inquiry into the Good*, trans. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

[182] Lee, "Kigen matawa Monoha no koto" [Origins of mono-ha], *Bijutsu techō* 47, no. 707 (May 1995): 256.

massive lumps in crates into the 200 square-foot space of Tokyo gallery. Eventually, the white gallery space is filled with black lumps of oilclay from floor to ceiling. Lee continued to watch as Sekine combined two lumps into one, threw another lump two meters away, and sticks to a larger than human-size mound. According to Lee, Sekine proceeded to pat and pound the mass. As he repeated these actions of splitting, patting and pounding, moving back and forth, Sekine's body and skin were covered in sticky oilclay and streaming with sweat. Lee continues to observe how Sekine's eyes, having become immersed in the process, glowed like a madman, as though he had lost sight of the goal. The movement of his body had become synonymous with vision and dictates the actions.[183] Lee, watching, has lost track of time – has it been one, two, or maybe three, four hours?—while feeling a sense of infinite expanse between each moment.[184]

What Lee discovered was not oilclay but a *space-world* (空間世界 *kūkan-sekai*). "At that moment, the oilclay, by hiding itself from the world, in turn inversely illuminated the world. In other words, the eye did not stop and look at the everyday oilclay, but [prehended] a type of expanse. Through this action, Sekine was not fascinated by the oilclay as an object, but encountered an opened world."[185] The reflection on the medium, so important to modernism, is discarded for reflection on the opening up of a space that becomes the "trans-objective horizon" (*hi-taishoteki chihei*) through which a series of acts (*shigusa*) gain their import. Sekine's subjective intention, while it may have existed,

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[183] Lee, "Sonzai to mu o koete: Sekine Nobuo ron" (Beyond being and nothingness: On sekine nobuo). *Deai o motomete: Gendai bijutsu no shigen* (In search of encounter: The beginnings of contemporary art). (Tokyo: Bijutsu shuppansha, 2000), p. 110.

[184] Ibid., p. 111.

[185] Ibid., p. 112.

becomes replaced by an inseparable and mutual interaction (relationship between the soil

and himself). Sekine is being played by the soil as much as he plays with it. Lee emphasizes

the conjunctive function of Nishida's key term *soku*, "Sekine remains Sekine, and, the oilclay,

oilclay," yet simultaneously, "Sekine is the oilclay, and conversely, the oilclay is Sekine" (関

根即油土、油土即関根 *Sekine soku yudo, yudo soku Sekine*).[186] In this process, the body

and mass in question repeat, in some way, the transformative mass and hole of *Phase-*

Mother Earth, except that here it is the body of the artist who is caught up in the topological

transformation. He is in a sense emptied out, and at the same time filled up by a residue of

the energy he has dispersed. The distinction between Sekine and the oilclay dissolve while

the two simultaneously remains discrete. Here we begin to see *shigusa* as a key trigger to

this state of contradiction. The repetitive act of *shigusa* itself is not simply a systematized

operation (a state in which perception is lost) but a process of reciprocation, of playing and

being played by the oilclay. Lee cites Nishida: "while the thing and self will continue to be in

reciprocal contradiction, the thing will move the self, and the self will move the thing in a

simultaneous contradiction."[187] Thus, *shigusa* does not merely function to trigger this

contradictory state according to the will of the agent but enables a state of perception that

is distinct from subjective mastery over the object. The agent becomes, him or herself, a

space in question as the transobjective space-world opens up.

In a similar vein, Lee moves to *Phase—Mother Earth*, describing the manner in

which Sekine has "encountered the earth that arises from the world."[188] By repeating the

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[186] Ibid., p. 117.

[187] Nishida, *Ningen no sonzai* (The human being), quoted in Lee, "Deai no genshōgaku josetsu," p. 214.

[188] Lee, "Sonzai to mu o koete," p. 113.

same "nonsensical" acts of digging and piling the dirt into massive positive and negative

shapes, Sekine's *shigusa* reveals the "earth as *earth*." Lee is careful to note that this

operation is not open-ended. It involves a delimited act between Sekine and the earth,

which continues to sustain "the live workings of an ambiguous perception."[189]

In going back to Nishida, Lee's aim is to detour around the hegemony of the optic in

order to thrust the art event into a domain where *encountering* the structure surrounding

the work's existence becomes possible as a total bodily fact. His interpretation of Sekine's

two works shows an explicit lineage to Martin Heidegger's essay, "The Origin of the Work

of Art" (1935). Going counter to the tradition that finds the character of the work of art in

the ways that it conforms material to a system of symbols, Heidegger takes the radical

promise of art as being its ability to open us up to the bare facticity of the earth's material

and, beyond that, to the event of opening itself, the already present revealing of things

through their bare material form:

> The essence of the earth, in its free and unhurried bearing and self-seclusion,
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> reveals itself, however, only in the earth's jutting into a world, only in the opposition
>
> of the two…We come to know its [the work's] equipmental character specifically
>
> only through the work itself…The fact that we never know thing-ness directly, and if
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> we know it at all, then only vaguely, and thus require the work – this fact proves
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> indirectly that in the work's work-being, the happening of truth, the opening up of
>
> beings, is at work.[190]

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[189] Ibid., p. 115.

[190] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935), *Basic Writings: from Being and time (1927) to The task of thinking (1964)*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993), pp. 194-5.

The primary concern in this passage is the "thing," which, prior to our act of constituting

objects within a technical structure, does not exist in relation to the subject as a directly

known thing. The cognitive grasp of the thing is always on the thing fundamentally "closed"

in itself. For the thing to be "dis-closed," for it to reveal its openness, requires that the

being-there, Heidegger's *Da-sein*, to allow the thing to open, thus engaging the Dasein in the

movement between what Heidegger calls the "thrownness" [*Geworfenheit*] of the thing and

Gelassenheit, the letting be of the thing.[191] Here, the subject's "passivity" is the disposition

through which the object's existence is informed. These terms, as Lee saw, gain an

unexpected formal meaning in Sekine's art, where the "thrownness" of the thing (the

oilclay and the artist) is literal, and the bare facticity of the earth's jutting into the world

exactly describes *Phase-Mother Earth*. The coincidence of thought and act is not a manner

of the latter symbolizing or emblematizing the former but rather points to a relational

structure of the work that is accessible through the delimiting gesture of *shigusa*.

The reception of Heidegger in Japan was immense. Heidegger first made contact with Kyoto School philosophy in 1922 when Tanabe Hajime, Miki Kiyoshi, Kūki Shūzō, and Nishitani Keiji went to meet him in Europe. The first substantive commentary on Heidegger's philosophy was published in October 1924 in Tanabe Hajime's "Genshōgaku ni okeru atarashiki tenkō: Haidegā no sei no genshōgaku" (A New Turn in Phenomenology: Heidegger's Phenomenology of Life), and Kūki's book-length study *Haidegā no tetsutgaku* (*The Philosophy of Heidegger*) in 1933. The first Japanese version of *Sein and Zeit* was published in 1939 (twenty-three years before the English language version) with five further translations over the next thirty years. See Reinhard May, *Heidegger's Hidden Sources: East-Asian Influences on His Work* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. viii-ix.

[191] In order to articulate the possibility of being, Heidegger defines thrownness (together with projection) as follows: "Thrownness, *Geworfenheit* is understood as an existential characteristic of Dasein, human being, its thatness, its "that it is," and it refers to the facticity of human being's being handed over to itself, its being on its own responsibility; as long as human being is what it is, it is thrown, cast, *im Wurf*. Projection...is the projecting of possibility in human being that occurs antecedently to all plans and makes planning possible. Human being is both thrown and projected; it is a "thrown project," a factical directedness toward possibilities of being." See Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935), *Basic Writings,* 196n.

On Corporeality

One can say that something like an artistic object is equal to the pure body of the artist.

Nishida Kitarō, *Self-delimitation of Nothingness* (1932)[192]

While Sekine's repetitive actions in throwing oilclay mats and digging the earth in *Phase of Nothingness—Oilclay* and *Phase—Mother Earth* emblematize an articulated gesture (*shigusa*), their importance for the work is not simply a matter of how the work was prepared. Instead, the gestures operate within the totality of the work as a symbiosis between self and other in order to open up the world. Lee takes up the way the body is inserted into the situation in his reading of Sekine's work. Drawing from Sekine's notes: "When encounter senses the world directly, that is because in that moment, man is simply situated in the world."[193]

Looking at *Phase of Nothingness* (1969), a granite boulder balanced on top a reflective stainless steel pillar, Lee did not to compare it to the surrealist vision of a boulder "floating" like a cloud in the sky as in Magritte's *Le Château des Pyrénées* (1959), as was common among many critics at the time.[194] Instead, he moved beyond the play of alterations in the perception of the object by going back to the way it is a pillar placed between the earth and a boulder, recognizing the particular relationship between the three

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[192] Lee quoting Nishida in Lee, "Deai no genshōgaku josetsu," *Deai o motoemete* (2000), p. 214.

[193] Lee, "Sonzai to mu o koete," pp. 126–7.

[194] See Fujieda Teruo, "Mori no koyagi 'Dai 1-kai gendai kokusai chōkoku ten' chōkoku no mori bijutsukan 1969-nen 8-gatsu 1-nichi–10-gatsu 31-nichi" [(A young goat in the forest "1st contemporary international sculpture exhibition" the forest of sculpture museum (hakone open-air museum) August 1–October 31, 1969), *SD* (October 1969): 68. *Phase of Nothingness* was exhibited twice. Lee is referring to the work when it was exhibited for the first time at the *1st Contemporary International Sculpture* exhibition at the Hakone Open-Air Museum exhibition in 1969. The work gained international exposure when it was displayed in front of the Japanese Pavilion at the 35th Venice Biennale in 1970.

elements (earth, boulder and pillar) that reveals the "situatedness of the world."[195] This

interpretation does not exclude the comparison with Magritte, as Sekine, after all, had

recently participated in an exhibition where the intent to deceive the eye had a Magritte-

like dimension. But rather, it points out that these three elements formed a complex in

which their property as variables leads us to see through the choices that hoists the

boulder up on the pillar to the total effect of the situation on the spectator, letting the

process become a trigger for a more prolonged encounter with the weight of the world. As

Lee notes, the way this disclosure works can't be reduced to the characters of the physical,

self-contained objects themselves, but must be related one with the other in a critical

state—on the edge of falling and yet not falling at all. The deferred moment, the

thrownness of the boulder on the pillar, is felt virtually in the spectator. Here, Lee borrows

Nishida's notion of *soku* in which "To see something as nothing in order to see" is also a

world that "delimits its being through nothingness."[196] In other words, the self must once

become empty in order to accept the world in, to fill its void in full sympathy. Lee

redescribes this as a situatedness that emerges from "mutual or inter-corporeality."[197]

Sekine's appeal to corporeality, as Lee reads him, is further pronounced in

another work, *Phase of Nothingness—Water* (1969) (Fig. 15). Instead of commenting on the

topological inquiry of interchangeable volumes as has been discussed up to this point, Lee

notes the manner in which the highly-refined surface in the brimful of water in the jet black

steel containers are in stark contrast to the vast expanse of the clear blue skies, grass, and

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[195] Lee, "Sonzai to mu o koete," p. 120.

[196] Ibid., p. 121.

[197] Ibid.

trees.[198] This structure (as seen in the reflection of atmospheric phenomena onto the subtle ripples of the water's surface) heightens an atmospheric tension, playing with the subjectivity of objectification (in the whole history of reflections as at once real and not real, illusions exterior to the eye) in a liberating and vivid manner. That is, each element (water, steel container, sky, grass, trees, and even the earth) maintains their bare state and simultaneously loses their condition as a sign in an objectified landscape. By dissolving semiotic illusions (the signifier, signified, and referent into one), Lee points to the body's mediating structure (possessing the unique character of being simultaneously I and other) that activates relationality by joining presence with absence. In addition to being dual—body and the feeling of body—the body's material substance leads perception to a state of self-awakening (encounter). The work *awakens* the subject to perceive that one is part of an "opened situatedness" that reveals its relationality and directness of the world.[199] Only in this mode of strict perceptual encounter through the body can consciousness function as a living structure. This non-reductive materialism is also active in *Phase-Sponge* (Fig. 37), comprised of a stainless steel panel placed on top of a large white foam in the shape of a cylinder. For Lee, the work does not simply imply the vivid apprehension of the inexorability of gravity as the steel panel crushes down on the weight of the foam, forming a contrast between the hard industrial weight of the steel and the yielding mass of the

[198] Sekine exhibited *Phase of Nothingness—Water* twice. The first at the *9th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan* at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum (May 10–30, 1969) and the second at the *6th Paris Youth Biennale* (October 2–November 2, 1969) as part of Tōno's project, "Quatres Bossots" at the Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris. In the latter exhibition, the cylinder was displayed outdoors and the rectangular container indoors. While Lee is referring to the latter version of the work, Sekine has recently noted that the Paris installation was the result of insufficient indoor space at the museum. In hindsight, the artist has commented that he was not adverse to the separation due to the nature of the work evoking a different experience at each installation. Conversation with Sekine, February 15, 2012.

[199] Ibid., p. 126.

sponge. Rather the theatrical play of the elements in their relationship converges into a total structure that is activated – awakened - at the moment the body (*shintai*) "encounters the world."[200]

On Topos

Lee's turn to Nishida was a way of helping himself beyond the limitations of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, with its final, stubborn return to the subject and the object as the essential and finally unentangled elements of perception. That situation looks different in Nishida's vernacular, where place (*basho*) is infiltrated by a long, complex tradition of reflection in East Asian Buddhism. *Basho* has been variously translated in English, as place, locus, or *topos. Topos* suggests its irreducibility to notions of place. *Topos* surrounds not only the object, but the subject whose perception is *situational*. What emerges is "the *appearance* of a thing in this situational engagement," that is actuated in the topos—in the being of the perceiver(s)—out of which emerges the "intertwined-ness between the subject and thing."[201] The truth of this appearance, to which reflection, or spiritual exercise, leads, is understood as emerging from the subject's disengagement (when the self empties to accept the wholeness of the situation) while perceiving the object.[202] Lee reinterprets this as a form of situatedness (状態性 *jōtaisei*), a transparent space that activates an encounter and enables the world to be seen more vividly.

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[200] Ibid., p. 124.

[201] Ibid.

[202] Ibid.

Lee uses the example of a piece of lacquerware used by his family.[203] As the

lacquerware is repeatedly used to place and store food, cleaned and polished by various

family members, the lacquer gradually becomes worn down through these "inter-corporeal

correspondences." Yet, through its accumulation and shared usage over time, its

situatedness becomes ever more apparent and no longer serves wholly as a vessel of use. Its

status has transformed beyond simply an independent object within the household

structure. To look at it or represent it only in terms of its aesthetic quality, according to Lee,

would be "To see the soil, while not being able to see the earth."[204] Rather the lacquer

becomes an "irreplaceable part" of the family. Its appearance involves seeing not its object

quality but its "abstraction into an object"[205] as it is passed along among the family

members. At some point, the separation between consciousness and existence becomes

dissolved (a dialectic of seeing/being seen), and the two are one. According to Lee, this

sense of oneness in turn leads to a renewed perception of space, which he calls, "place of

nothingness" and "transparent fullness."[206] That is, the lacquer empties itself in order to

serve the function of daily life; the higher its self-effacement, the more effective it is in

sustaining the situation and its situatedness within this structure of lived space.

Following this understanding of topos, Lee applies a dynamic interpretive frame

not only to Sekine's work, but also to the work of other Mono-ha artists, such as Takamatsu

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[203] This passage is included in "Preface to Phenomenology of Encounter" in *In Search of Encounter.* Jin Baek uses this passage to adeptly connect Lee's notion of situatedness and Nishida's topos of nothingness. See Baek, "From the 'Topos of Nothingness' to the 'Space of Transparency'," pp. 94–95.

[204] Lee, "Deai no genshō gaku josetsu" (Preface to the phenomenology of encounter), p. 207.

[205] Ibid.

[206] Ibid., p. 208.

Jirō's *Oneness of 16 Pine Logs* (1970) (Fig. 83). Takamatsu's piece consists of a set of sixteen

vertical pine logs, installed in a gridded configuration, whose top sections have been

chiseled off into rectangular edges exposing or letting the bare wood "emerge" from the

logs, Lee also refers to another piece by Takamatsu, *Oneness of 36 Logs* (1970) (Fig. 84),

where three pine logs are each sliced into twelve vertically-stacked slabs. Both were

displayed at the *Tokyo Biennale: Between Man and Matter* exhibition in May 1970.[207] These

works were part of a series called *Oneness*, in which Takamatsu would select a single

material (i.e., glass, granite, wood, paper) and chisel, shatter, break, or tear them into

fragments. He then retained in the final work each fragment and combined all the parts

together.[208] By doing so, he explored the infinite variations that lay *between* part and whole,

absence and presence, and void and mass. Lee perceives Takamatsu's manner of showing

the relationship between the cut and uncut elements as part of one and the same whole

(oneness), as a situatedness that enables the discovery of the violence inflicted on the

forest that transcends even as it conditions the objectified nature of wood.[209]

      A similar phenomenon is further noted in Terada Takehiro's *Displacement* (変位

Hen'i) (1970) (Fig. 85), in which thousands of chopped wooden fragments lay at the base of

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[207] See Joseph Love, "The Tenth Tokyo Biennale of Contemporary Art." *Art International* 14, no. 6 (Summer 1970): 70–74.

[208] From 1969 to 1972, Takamatsu had been concentrating on a series of works named *Oneness.* Minemura and Chiba have commented that this series reflects Takamatsu's status as his work alienated him from his students when he began shifting gears and becoming a part of the emergence of the Mono-ha unprocessed, natural, and relational aesthetic. This reached its high point in 1970, after which Takamatsu believed he had exhausted Mono-ha's possibilities.. See Chiba, "Mono-ha." In *Gendai bijutsu itsudatsu-shi 1945–1985* (A history of deviations in contemporary Japanese art 1945–1985) (Tokyo: Shōbun-sha, 1986); and Minemura, *Chōkoku no yobikoe* (The call of sculpture). (Tokyo: Suiseisha, 2005).

[209] Lee, "Sonzai to mu o koete," p. 142.

a large wooden log from which the pieces were chopped. Though similar to the part/whole logic of Takamatsu's *Oneness*, in this instance the work exposes the dynamic process of displacing or transforming the material by the inference to the repetitive bodily *act* of chopping. Like Sekine's *Phase of Nothingness—Oilclay*, this *shigusa* conditions the depth of the relationality between the thing and the subject. Further, the act, according to Lee, stimulates a contact between the work's interiority and exteriority that shifts one's perception from seeing the work as merely a static object toward a structure that opens up its vulnerable situatedness. Through these structures, in which centers of indetermination, or *basho*, leading to an ever larger apprehension of the modal opening of the world in space and time, these works guide the spectator and the artist to an increased awareness of relation between objects and space, "a situatedness that gives a certain depth and thickness of space."[210] In this sense, the monopoly of vision on spectatorship has to be replaced by a more humble sense of encounter in which the spectator does not proceed with the routine of grasping the situation for "knowing." Yoshida Katsurō's radiant encounter between two electric bulbs with different degrees of brightness [*650 W x 60 W* (1970) at Tokyo Gallery] (Fig. 86) as well as Suga Kishio's *Infinite Situation I (window)* (1970) (Fig. 87), modestly placed wooden beams inside existing open window frames at the Kyoto National Museum of Modern Art, are also cited by Lee for their quality of situational expanse. Through each situation, the works help propel a mode of perception that implicates the spectator in an encounter that necessarily entails the awakening of a nonobjective world – one within the situation that absorbs or awakens to the situation - beyond the confines of the object itself.

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[210] Ibid.

Lee cites the Heideggerian concept of a "nonobjective" world from which the work emerges,

> The world is not the mere collection of the countable or uncountable, familiar and unfamiliar things that are at hand. But neither is it a merely imagined framework added by our representation to the sum of such given things. The *world worlds….* World is never an object that stands before us and can be seen. World is the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject.[211]

Sharing Heidegger's concerns over the threat modern rationalism poses to art—in fact, accepting that in the epoch of modern rationalism, as Hegel said, art is finished—Lee's aim to collapse the objectified entity involves negating the subject-object dichotomy by locating the viewer's encounter within a larger structural mediation through gesture, body, and place—and, thus the world ("the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject").

Critics such as Haryū, as we have seen in the Introduction, misinterpreted Lee, and by extension Mono-ha, as pushing a pure and unfettered engagement with the unmediated physicality of matter itself, as though history didn't matter. But as we have outlined, for Lee, there is no such thing as "unmediated" physicality in as much as physicality is inevitably conditioned by its topos. The moment of direct transparency comes from awakening to the structure in terms of its intermediation; that is the "through" property by which we are able to encounter the world. In a sense, we encounter the world's encounterability—the world *worlds*. The "nonobjective world" that Lee points to is the inevitable occurrence of the world's opening, conditioning the event of the encounter for the spectator humble

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[211] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935), p. 170 quoted in Lee Ufan, "Sonzai to mu o koete: Sekine Nobuo-ron" (Beyond being and nothingness: Thoughts on Sekine Nobuo), *Deai o motomete* (In search of encounter, 2000), p. 152.

enough to allow it to happen. In doing so, Lee draws our attention to a passage from

literary critic and philosopher, Karaki Junzō, that appears in Sekine's notes:

> The Gods have disappeared, and while anxiously we wait, they still do not arrive.
>
> This is the historical period that he (Heidegger) referred to as *dürftige Zeit* (lacking
>
> divine presence). It refers to a period of simultaneously lacking and longing, and a
>
> longing that is never fulfilled. Hölderlin would say that it was precisely in this
>
> 'between' period, that we reminisce for things passed, and compose within this
>
> passage of expectations for things to come. These two states of nothingness enabled
>
> the abundance of reminiscences and expectations for the poets.[212]

Thus, for Lee, it is precisely within this intermediary period of nothingness in which the

fullness of the world's transparency is disclosed.

For Lee, *Phase-Mother Earth* marks the moment not only in Sekine's career but also

in the Japanese avant-garde art world in general, when the emphasis on visual perception

(against the background of optical tricks) became exhausted, and in its place arose an inter-

corporeal one focusing on the earth's uncovered existence in real time and space that took

its lessons from the alteration of vision suggested by the artists around the *Tricks and

Vision* exhibition. As such, *Phase-Mother Earth* pointed to the non-hierarchical, relational

structure of subject, object, and site. This shift, as we have seen, is echoed both in

Heidegger's notions of the "letting be" and "thrownness" of the thing in addition to

Nishida's notion of body and topos from which the work's appearance is realized.

Lee's concern with a renewed perceptual attitude reveals a level of conceptual

mixture of marginal and oppositional currents in Western ontology that link with currents

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[212] Lee quoting from Karaki Junzō, *Kamono chōmei* in Sekine's notes. Lee, "Sonzai to mu o koete," p. 156–7.

that protest against elements of modernization in Japan, and points beyond an Asianist reading of Sekine's work. We might point to the shift happening in the very way Sekine described the work, which begins with the image of the dug out earth, the Cartesian projection of dominating nature, and ends in the astonishment of what the work disclosed to Sekine and to onlookers.

CHAPTER 5

***RELATUM*: LEE UFAN AND**

THE CONDITION OF AMBIGUITY (*RYŌGISEI*)

I sense reality in the space of my life when I become conscious of a constant "between,"

when reality "and" nonreality intersect and spark an "instant sense" of relationship.

The ever-continuous search for reality involves abandoning the certainty of the

present while also seeking the desire for an encounter with an instant moment.

—Lee Ufan, "Notes" (1971)

This chapter examines the condition of "ambiguity" (*ryōgisei*), the notion of an in-

betweenness, taken up by Lee Ufan in his seminal 1970 essay, "In Search of Encounter."

Lee's notion of ambiguity is deeply embedded in the idea of an in-between structure, or

soku, a term derived from Nishida that is foundational to Lee's concept of *relatum*, which,

Lee used since 1972 to name all his three-dimensional works. As he later stated, "A work of

art, rather than being a self-complete, independent entity, is a resonant relationship with

the outside. It exists together with the world, simultaneously what it is and what is not, that

is, a relatum."[213]

Focusing on Lee's early *Relatum* works of 1969, this chapter questions the viability

of the condition of ambiguity central to his theory of "encounter." That is, how does body's

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[213] Lee, "Fragments from the catalogue 'LEE UFAN, Painting, Sculpture,' 52nd International Art Exhibition –La Biennale di Venezia, Palazzo Palumbo Fossati, Venice, published by Fondazione Mudima, 2007, No. 101–No. 124" (2004–2007), in Lee, *The Art of Encounter,* ed. Jean Fisher, trans. Stanley N. Anderson, rev. and expanded ed. (London: Lisson Gallery, 2008), p. 244.
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ambiguity (understood as a dual structure) constitute a boundary at which an encounter is experienced? How does one come to perceive the mediation of a direct experience with the Other by dialectically integrating opposing terms such as interiority and exteriority, identity andnonidentity? Ambiguity is the logical result of an aesthetic that integrates indigenous and contemporary philosophical worldviews to come to grips with the contemporary predicament of an artist whose project is to cut through the modern system of alienation to create enlightenment about our true ontological condition through art. In this chapter, I examine Lee's notion of ambiguity as part of a wider artistic and philosophical condition that operates discursively with post-minimalist practices internationally.

Throughout his career, Lee followed a moral respect for the thing that gives access to the viewer to perceive what lies before and around him/her (even things that are invisible to the eye). Ultimately, the subject is brought into contact with the world of things to form an affective relationship. This idea stems from a term that the artist has come to describe as "art of margins," or *yohaku*, pointing to the relationships between the visible and not visible, the made and unmade, that permeate and reverberate in an organism's surroundings like a resounding echo or tidal flow. In the artist's words,

> *Yohaku* (margins) is not empty space but an open site of power in which acts and things and space interact vividly. It is a contradictory world rich in changes and suggestions where a struggle occurs between things that are made and things that are not made. Therefore, *yohaku* transcends objects and words, leading people to

silence, and causing them to breathe infinity.[214]

One can trace this idea of *yohaku* back to a happening Lee staged in May 1969, consisting of three large square sheets of Japanese paper each measuring roughly two-by-two meters that were left to flutter in the wind in front of the steps of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum. Initially given the title *Things and Words* (Fig. 75–76), the work was an homage to Michel Foucault's epic book *Le Mots et Les Choses* (1966) and later re-titled *Relatum*.[215] Capturing the immense size of the sheets against the thick Doric columns of the building in the photograph that records the event are six distant bystanders scattered in and around the building: two standing at the top of the steps in front of a sign announcing the exhibition, a woman pausing for a moment while walking down the steps, and the artist in black running past the work. A breeze lifts the sheets off the ground like large autumn leaves, shivering them in the band of sunlight cast on the asphalt. The thin yet enormous scale of the papers (which prevents them from being simply carried off by the breeze) enters this starkly cool atmosphere like a ghostly presence. The event involved Lee fighting against the wind to lay these sheets flat on the pavement, but the sheets kept lifting and whirling in the wind, causing Lee to run after them. After several rounds of repeating this back and forth process, Lee grew tired as the paper became more and more tattered. Eventually, as Lee has put it, the psychic distinction between the papers and me became

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[214] Lee, "Yohaku no geijutsu," *Yohaku no geijutsu* (The Art of Margins), (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 2000), p. 4.

[215] Lee refers to Foucault's *Les mots et les choses* (1966), published in English as *The Order of Things* (1970). Lee's reversal of Foucault's original French title "Words and Things" to "Things and Words" points to both his preference for the examination of "things" and his skepticism towards language. See Michel Foucault, *Kotoba to mono-Jinbun kagaku to kōkogaku* (Words and Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences), trans. Kazutami Watanabe and Akira Sasaki, (Tokyo: Shinchō-sha, 1974).

unrecognizable.[216]

While the ephemerality of this event brings to light the modernist critique of the permanence of the work of art as well as the object as a symptom of its surrounding environment, the work reflects Lee's notion of gesture (*shigusa*) as a reciprocal act, and the production of the "and" or in-between structure between the paper and his body. The ambiguous condition signals the departure from the method of exploring the optical space employed by the artists in the *Tricks and Vision* exhibition of the year before. Lee, instead, sought to ground the interactive structure of the *event* upon an expanded sense of perception as a matter of relations in a field.

Presented at the "Ninth Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan" (April to May 1969) in the juried section *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, the event was staged as a prequel to a separate indoor work in which the artist transferred the three papers directly on the gallery floor, laying them in a flat line affixed by glue where the edges are left curled up. The installation photograph shows how the piece vividly contrasts with the striped and star-bursting op canvases hung along the wall to the right. This juxtaposition emphasizes an unfinished tableau-like quality in Lee's papers that seem to speak of nothing more than its nominal materiality, emphasized by the size and thinness of the sheets. The outdoor event remains curiously omitted from subsequent articles, catalogs, and publications, which only document the indoor work and pay no attention to the work as a whole and as a potential investigation into the structure of process.

Lee's *Things and Words* (1969) was a departure point for the artist's sculptural *Relatum* series (1969-present). What is most pertinent to our discussion here is how

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[216] Interview with artist, October 14, 2010, New York.

ambiguity places the perceptual event within a spatial relationality that is at the root of

Lee's practice. In seeing the thing through the lens of a Heideggerian disclosure, we can

understand why Lee prefers to use apparently unaltered materials: the alteration that

occurs in the work is relational. In fact, the transformations of the relational are of the

essence of the three structurally important moments in Lee's work. The first moment is

that of an interactive *encounter,* which involves Dasein, or a human agent; the second is

yohaku, the interaction between the visible and non-visible, which involves the categorical

mode of the existents in the artwork; and finally, the last is *relatum*, the fragment or a

phase of relations that arises out of the given forms. Taking these three moments into

account, my aim is to begin assessing *Relatum* through the condition of ambiguity

(neither/nor) given the shift in the negative critique directed against the subject – the artist

– and to the negation physically endogenous to the object – the thing.

In a recent interview, Lee made special reference to *Things and Words* as a

"happening":

> There is one time when I staged a happening. But not a typical happening with
>
> human bodies. I had three pieces of paper that I laid outside and was working
>
> against the wind. No matter how hard I tried, I was unable to control the papers
>
> against the wind's massive force, and thus I came to realize the physicality of chance
>
> and how it overpowered my intentions in a radical way.[217]

While this reference, perhaps not accidentally, calls to mind the Anti-Art performances of

the earlier half of the decade, Lee clearly does not have in mind the provocative street

performances of Neo-Dada and Hi Red Center. Rather, the work's affinities lay in the vitality

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[217] Lee Ufan interviewed by author, May 13, 2008.

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of the work of art as an interactive living structure, demonstrated in the dynamic force of the wind, its interaction with the fragility of the paper, the effects of the sun, and eventual process of weathering. To recall one of the key terms discussed in Chapter 3, Lee was discovering the structure of the work, which was held together not by his way of defining it, but by way of indeterminate centers. In order to chart the significance of these vital forces, let us examine Lee's practice laid out from his philosophical agenda.

The Primacy of Encounter

In *Phenomenon and Perception B* (1969) (Fig. 77) presented at the "Developments in Contemporary Art" exhibition at the National Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto,[218] Lee placed boulder-sized stones on rectangular plates of broken glass to create the illusion that the stones had been dropped onto the plates, capturing the discord between chance and intention (a nod to and reversal of Marcel Duchamp's *The Large Glass*).[219] Later renamed *Relatum*, Lee began exploring the phenomenal encounter between natural and industrial materials and their surrounding environment.

In the Kyoto Museum version, a rectangular stone recapitulates the shape of the broken glass on which it rests. The semi-coherent reflection of the stone on the broken glass suggests that the cracks were either carefully cut or pieced back together after the glass was shattered. In contrast, the later 1971 version (Fig. 88) consist of heavy, circular stones dropped directly on rectangular glass plates; the cracks spread outward from

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[218] *Developments in Contemporary Art* was a survey of young contemporary art in Japan. At the time, museums were embracing avant-garde practices with the influx of non-juried, independent art exhibitions.

[219] The broken plates of glass were initially placed on top of a steel plate of the same size that remained "camouflaged" underneath the glass.

underneath the stone to the edges of the glass. In these works, the act of "breaking" not only indicates the physical properties of each material— the cracks index the fragility of the glass plates, and the velocity and gravity of the stone—but in both cases, the two materials stage a relational encounter between viewer and object, presented continuously in different sites and in renewed circumstance of events. As in a phenomenological encounter, both entities are changed and transformed by and at the moment of the encounter.

Relatum was one work in the series that was unified by the exploration of physicality and tactility of forms through various juxtapositions between stones and other materials, such as rubber measures, glass, steel plates, cotton, ropes, cushions and canvas. In *Phenomena and Perception A* (Fig. 78), exhibited with the glass plates at the Kyoto National Museum of Modern Art, three stones were spaced on top of a five-meter rubber measuring tape laid out on the floor. Each of the linear segments is distorted so that a one-meter segment is stretched to three meters, and two meters stretched to two-and-a-half meters, a nod to the optical "tricks" movement.

Stones thus act as markers that deform the given rules of linear measurement, introducing a moment of uncertainty in the precise universe of measurement, which questions the absolute divisibility of space. Measurement, which is usually incorporated into the formal aspect of the artwork, is extruded, here, and made visible as content, marking itself, and in the process undermining its utilitarian purpose. For instance, the space between two stones can be measured as a circumference around the earth, through perimeters encircling the stones, or even by undulating lines floating above the ground surface. Measurement is no longer conceived as reliant on a given mathematic certainty but

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as a variable model contingent upon perception. One recalls here the spatial convergence that we previously commented upon in Maeda Morikazu's *Enkin no monosashi* (A Measuring Tape in Perspective) (1967) (Fig. 13), but here Lee reconfigures the quantification of space into a qualitative condition based on a multiplicity of elements that condition that space. How different one might ask is this from Maeda's work, which uses the apparent quantification of space to separate the semblance given by the eye's information—the gestalt—from the reality of the physical phenomenon?

In each of these works, Lee experiments with the triadic physical interplay between the hard surface of the stones, the feathery softness of cushions and cotton, and the tautness of the white canvas. As such, he engages in procedures of alteration, varying the application of each stone. *Language* (Fig. 89) (exhibited in January 1971 Pinar Galerie, Tokyo) consists in a meditative display of stones on *zabuton* cushions and in *Situation* (Fig. 62) (April 1971, *10th Contemporary Japanese Art Exhibition*: *Man and Nature*) stones are placed on three white canvases laid directly on the floor. The lateral placement of the three stones on the white canvases supplant painting's self-contained form and open onto a continuity with the actual space of the viewer. The specificity of each stone's placement on the *zabuton* cushions versus its placement on the canvases, for example, demonstrates not only the specific character of the stone's gravitational weight, but intensifies the material attribute (*tautness* and *softness*) of the other object. Far from being confined to an internal play of the object, the action of *shattering* in *Relatum* collapses the conventional concepts associated with *mono*. Over time, Lee's *Relatum* series moved from a rigorous search for the precise stone, to the juxtaposition of industrially-produced, weathered steel plates. The plates are at times scattered on the floor to form a capacious field, leaned toward one

another like an embrace, or propped against a wall with the plate acting as a shadow bringing forth the stone's bodily profile. Lee, as we pointed out in Chapter 3, had learned a lesson from Minimalism the difficulty to *see* in the traditional terms of art spectatorship. They demanded to be seen otherwise. Overall, Lee's works stage physical *encounters* between stones and other materials in an open structure among the viewer, the object and the surrounding space.

> Encounter is the place and moment of self-awareness (spiritual enlightenment) when man, transcending modern "man," touches and is held spellbound by the vividness of the world as it is… A structure is a visible aspect of the site where the world is manifest vividly as it is, in its natural state …Characteristics particular to the age for a mediation have an important influence on whether it becomes a living structure or is reduced to an object.[220]

Lee's notion of the encounter, though distinct in his negation of subjective agency and objective presence, is in dialogue with Minimalism in the West, especially with the phenomenological emphasis of Robert Morris' gestalt theory. The Mono-ha artists had access to a translation of Morris' "Notes on Sculpture" (in particular, sections on unitary form and gestalt) in the March 1969 issue in *Bijutsu techō* magazine.[221] This interest in gestalt surfaces for the first time in an early work by another Mono-ha artist, Koshimizu Susumu. In *Suisen* (*Perpendicular Line*) (1969) (Fig. 41) Koshimizu hangs a wire from the ceiling of a gallery that is pulled down by a conical metal weight. Through a simple effect,

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[220] Lee, "In Search of Encounter," *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity.* p. 118.

[221] See Robert Morris, "Chōkoku ni tsuite no nōto – kankaku no shikakuka" (Notes on Sculpture – Concerning the Visualization of the Senses), trans. Yamaguchi Katsuhiro, *Bijutsu techō*, vol. 310 (March 1969), pp. 62-65.

he activates the space of the gallery by the presence of the singular line down the central

axis of the space. Similarly, Lee maximizes this spatial experience in *Relatum* (formerly

Language (1971) (Fig. 89), where large, individual stones are each placed on *zabuton*

(cushions) and dispersed around the floor of the room. The position of the stones dictate

the viewer's coordination around them in the space, and this choreographed experience

with the object is also permeated by the lighting, which is cast from above.

This kind of aesthetic experience is very much in keeping with the new conception

of sculpture proposed by Robert Morris in his seminal essay, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2,"

where objects are seen as an element within a larger framework of apprehension, including

the surrounding elements of walls, lights, and floor. Morris is interested in creating an

aesthetic experience that depends on the awareness of the body's moving engagement with

the object.[222] However, what is distinct between Lee and Morris is the role of the subject in

forming this aesthetic experience. For Morris, the subject's phenomenological awareness is

dependent on the experience of the gestalt, in which one's experience of the three-

dimensional object is amplified by the known shape of the whole form. He states,

> There are two distinct terms: the known constant and the experienced variable.
>
> While the work must be autonomous in the sense of being a self-contained unit for
>
> the formation of the gestalt, the indivisible and undissolvable whole, the major
>
> esthetic terms are not in but dependent upon this autonomous object and exist as
>
> unfixed variables that find their specific definition in the particular space and light

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[222] Morris articulates this aesthetic experience as follows, "One is more aware than before that he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context. . . For it is the viewer who changes the work constantly by his change in position relative to the work." See Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2," reprinted in *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 15-16.

and physical viewpoint of the spectator. Only one aspect of the work is immediate:

the apprehension of the gestalt.[223]

For Morris, the apprehension of the gestalt works through one's visualization of the

object's spatial extension. As Morris's language shows, however the aesthetic divisions and

dynamics here are still implicated in dualism. In Lee's case, aesthetic experience is not

based on confronting a whole shape. Rather, emphasis is on the materiality of the objects

(glass, cotton, stone) and the relational structure among the materials, subject, and site that

results from their physical encounter. For Lee's Relatum, the things have the power, not the

viewers. Thus, Lee negates an essential moment in Morris's description: "For it is the

viewer who changes the work constantly by his change in position relative to the work."[224]

This idea is operative in Morris' *Untitled (Three L-Beams)* (1965–66) (Fig. 90), in

which the different configurations of the three structures lead the viewer to believe that

they are different, while the shapes are in fact all the same. In fact, the same logic was also

in Koshimizu's 1972 work *From Surface to Surface (a Tetrahedron*) (Fig. 91). Composed of

four triangular cement pyramids, the work was placed in an outdoor sand garden at the *4th*

Suma Rikyū Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition. Each unit was placed at alternate angles,

marked by the narrowest point of the pyramid facing in different directions. In fact,

Koshimizu had devised a system for the four pyramids to be placed in a pre-determined

orientation in which the long sides connect each work to the next in a zigzag configuration

on the ground. As the viewer walks around the work, each unit looks as though they are

completely different based on the gestalt, and our mind's ability to complete each shape.

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[223] Ibid., p. 17.

[224] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

In Lee's work however, the things have to, as it were, give permission, so that the viewer cannot "change" the work alone. The symbolic power of the stones *sitting on pillows* while *the viewer stands*, here, should not be underestimated. Lee's encounter works to de-center the subject who is to be conceived as part of a circumstantial context of events. With each installation, Lee rearranges the configuration of the work (much in the same way Morris reconfigured his fiberglass pieces of 1967–1968), so that meaning is transformed each moment the viewer experiences the work.

Anticipatory Time

It is precisely through Lee's submitting the stones to a series of procedural gestures as they come into contact with other materials that the *specificity* of each stone is brought to light. In *Phenomena and Perception B*, the rock's gravitational weight on the shattered plates of broken glass introduces the works as no longer separate entities in a given space, but a process of visualization that re-enacts the gesture produced by the artist. The rock's static form is submitted to a vertical axis the moment it is dropped onto the floor and smashes the glass into shards. The work resides in the aftermath of that impact. In fact, there is some mystery here, in that the rock was not necessarily the object that shattered the glass. This expansion of the limits of sculpture as a spatial medium through the materiality of its process, is in close connection to the use of ephemeral materials and the operation of chance and time that lay at the heart of Process Art in the U.S., particularly in the work of Richard Serra and Barry Le Va. While Process Art introduced disjunctures between subjective perception and objective representation, Lee's work introduces this disjuncture through a different mode of temporality.

Counteracting the spatial limits of sculpture, Lee's works are in dialogue with

methods of de-objectification found in the work of Barry Le Va, in particular. In Le Va's *On*

Center Shatter–or–Shatterscatter (Within the Series of Layered Pattern Acts) (1968–1971)

(Fig. 92), instead of a stone, we see an index of a heavy object dropped in the center of five

layered sheets of shattered glass. The artist dropped the object on a sheet of glass, then laid

down another sheet in precisely the same position, and dropped the object again. The

placement of each sheet was determined by the shift that occurred when the object hit the

glass. The absence of the object and visual shatter produce a visual trace that invokes the

combination of the artist's activities at a given time in the past. The work thus presses us,

through the manifest evidence of breakage, towards a backward tracing of time in contrast

to the anticipation of "encounter" that is repeatedly enacted by Lee in the various series of

Relatum. Velocity is also a greater presence in the violent shattering of the glass in *On*

Center as opposed to *Relatum*, where gravity had a greater role, and the glass is, in some

instances, carefully pieced back together into a rectangular whole. The principle of

encounter is thus approached by the two artists in very different ways: one is characterized

by the need for the viewer's retroactive tracing of time and the other is anticipatory. The

variations in Lee's work indicates that the stone's encounter with the glass is not so much

about the process of the work through the operation of chance and time as in Le Va's case,

but an exercise in revealing the relational structure of the two materials.

These comparisons demonstrate that the principle of encounter and its elements of

open structure are operative of the critical strategies associated with the move from

Minimalist to post-Minimalist practices in American art of the same period, albeit under a

different name. That is, Lee partakes in the liberation of the self-enclosed, statically

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dominant form associated with modernist sculpture and activates the phenomenological

structure of the surrounding space through the notion of *encounter*. Through this

encounter, he aims to reveal a durational element, an anticipatory factor that relies on a

continuity that is consequently opened up from one work to the next.[225]

This anticipatory factor relates to a key device that guides Lee's working method is

the notion of lived time (the perpetual passage of the present) in which the boundaries

separating the visible and invisible change both in the production and the reception of his

work. Lee's entangled relations, which he has worked out as he has thought through the

phenomenological tradition as it was filtered and altered through Nishida, becomes, in his

aesthetic practice, a method for disclosing things. The rhythm that is articulated in the

preparation of each work apprehends, at every stage, the future stages: the strict choice of

materials, the consciousness of each breath and bodily stance, and the strict positioning

and application of each material element. In *Relatum*, the light, air and shadows that fall in

and around his objects are integral to the work's breath-like contraction and expansion of

matter embodied for example in the millions of years of erosion the stone has endured that

are manifested in its present moment.

Why stone? One must pay close attention to the significant character that the stone

inhabits throughout each of these works. A natural medium that Lee chose from the river

creeks of mountainous regions in central Japan, each stone is unique, having been shaped

for millions of years by the metamorphic cycle, and finally by weathering. Weighing nearly

a ton, each constitutes a condensed mass characterized by its dull and ragged exterior

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[225] This difference should not be confused with any contention that Mono-ha's work is derivation of artistic developments in the West. Rather their work operates in between East and West with convergences and divergences from the Western developments of Minimalism and Process Art.

surface. Varying from smooth to coarse, spherical to triangular to rectangular in shape,

nothing about the rock's surface or shape has been interfered with; the artist has not cut,

chiseled, pierced, or gouged the stone in any shape or form. Rather, the artist's presence is

relational, witnessed by the search for, selection, and transporting of each stone to his

studio or gallery site.[226] The stone's status as found matter that has processed through the

body of the earth and its given shape, which manifests traces of the interface between itself

and the world, regardless of geographic location, render the stone an exemplary general

thing.

> On the specific nature of Lee's use of stones, fellow artist, Suga Kishio remarked:
>
> Lee takes up the specificity and generality (this also can apply to the stone's
>
> essential nature) that each stone possesses in each project one by one, and his
>
> ability to seek out a new point of view for each stone, is evidence that he is not
>
> bound within the general concept of a "stone," but holds a perspective that seeks
>
> each stone's individual specificity. This perspective applies to other materials as
>
> well.[227]

This remark of the stone's attribute as both specific and general is crucial as it constitutes a

shift in recognition (actualization) that opens the relational elements of the work. In

Phenomena and Perception B, a certain ambiguity is born when the stone is placed in

relation to the glass plates, as the plate mirrors the stone's rectangular shape and gives

birth to the stone's exteriority: its condition as both general (object) and specific (other).

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[226] Lee, "Ishi o tazunete" [Visiting Stones], *Yohaku no geijutsu* (The Art of Margins) (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 2000), pp. 28–30.

[227] Suga Kishio, "'Sozai' no ichi" [The Location of Materials], *Mizue*, no 909 (December 1980): 38.

This dual condition is what Suga refers to as its "essential nature." The shattered fragments constitute a multiplicity of distortions that marks the stone's extension into a virtual expanse indicated in each of the shard's reflections.

In *Relatum* (1969) (Fig. 30), a light blue, meteoric, crystalline rock sits on a golden reflection of moving clouds above. Recalling Lee's notion of gesture, the stone's divided reflection emphasizes a world beyond the protest against the dualism defining artist and art object, where the particularity of its site is made up of the circuit of the stone's relationship to other things. The human eye does not control this scenario. This phenomenological experience is intimately tied to Merleau-Ponty's experience of seeing in "Eye and Mind,"

> Every visual something, as individual as it is, functions also as a dimension, because it gives itself as the result of a dehiscence of Being. What this ultimately means is that the proper essence of the visible is to have a layer of invisibility in the strict sense, which it makes present as a certain absence.[228]

Here, one's perception of the thing "through" the interacting elements is marked by the body's spatio-temporal extension into the site.[229] Meaning exists only at *that* specific moment even "beyond any identical, specific place." It is no coincidence that given Lee's initial title for the work (*Phenomena and Perception*), the work engages in the foundations

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[228] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," Thomas Baldwin, ed., *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 313; 318. Emphasis mine.

[229] I am referring here to the extension of spatial immersion described in the following statement: "I live in it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is all around me, not in front of me." Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," p. 319.

of perceptual experience that Merleau-Ponty speaks of here, existing in an external space and continually lying outside the perceiving subject.

When Lee draws from Merleau-Ponty, he speaks of the "dehiscence of being," a bursting open of a certain absence, the shift from general to specific thus involves recognizing how our depth of perception lies in the relational layers specific to the interactive structures of that site. Furthermore, when we re-construct the act of shattering, we see how it constitutes a literal demonstration of the will to destroy the object-as-medium (for expression or signification) into the object-as-other. This birth of the object-as-other is formed through the shift experienced from general to the specific as a triadic relation set up between the stone, the glass, and its given site. The most poignant description of this shift is described by Lee in his early notes cited in the epilogue as follows:

> I cannot be reality itself and yet, neither can I live in a non-reality. Therefore, I sense reality in the space of my life when I become conscious of a constant "between," when reality 'and' non-reality intersect, and sparks an 'instant sense' of relationship. The ever continuous search for reality——involves abandoning the certainty of the present while also seeking the desire for an encounter with an instant moment. The duty to sustain the openness of the 'and' and to see the discovery of 'language' as a work of extensity, is to live based upon a struggle that seeks to actualize these multiple structures.[230]

In this passage, as Lee also emphasized in *In Search for Encounter*, encounter must activate

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[230] Lee, "Notes," cited in Haryū Ichiro, "Ri Ufan no koto" (On Lee Ufan), *Lee Ufan* exh. pamphlet (Tokyo: Tamura Gallery, 1971).

"the duty to *sustain* the openness of the 'and'."[231] The maintenance of encounter is

necessary for the co-existence between elements chance vs. intention, and relational

structure. Furthermore, this prolonging simultaneously contracts and expands the present

(in distinction to the phenomenological retention of the present as an accumulation of

static past instants that is still presupposed in Merleau-Ponty's examples). Encounter is

thus a continuation from one work to another and filled with an experience of anticipation.

Each stone constitutes a permeation from one passage flowing into the next and back again

from the present. This refers to the ambiguity of Lee's work, which melts into the world

and yet remains discrete from it.[232]

Here we can recognize the importance of the reciprocal relation between the artist

and material with regards to Lee's own formation of ambiguity based on the notion of

permeability, "I am in Japan, I do not exist in Japan; while I exist in Japan, I am not in Japan.

Am I only able to exist as a phase? The point regarding the contradiction of ambiguity is

neither resolved nor sublated, but continues to expand."[233] This is not just an exercise in

existential questioning for an artist who came to Japan as a Korean immigrant, and was

well aware of Japan's history with Korea. If we imagine that the rocks in Lee's *Relatum*

(1971) could speak, they may say something similar. The ethical moment of integrity, here,

which, in modernism, was imposed upon the artist as a responsibility to be true to his

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[231] In reference to this "in-between" structure, Lee elaborates further on the space between man and nature in "Ningen to shizen o megutte" (Concerning Man and Nature) Symposium with Sugaya Kikuo, Nakamura Yūjirō, Haryū Ichirō, and Miki Tamon. *Bijutsu techo* vol. 23, No. 344 (July 1971).

[232] There is a Japanese 'tie between things" at work here from which Lee draws. See Josef Kyburz's Le Lien et des choses: engimono et omocha (L'homme, 1991) for a consideration of the metaphysics of 'en' (lien, link) in Japanese language and culture.

[233] Lee, "Notes," 1971.

materials, becomes a matter of letting the materials be true to their thing-ness. Under the sign of integrity, the human and the inhuman let each other be.

Minemura's "Fear of Memory" (1971) was one of the first critical texts to problematize Lee's concept of encounter as an experience that lies outside of time. Minemura begins by praising Lee's personal investigation of the uncertainty between reality (as a Korean living in Japan) and the non-reality (an ideal condition of dwelling) as he sees this anxiety of "un-homeliness" (ikyō) as symptomatic, not only of Lee's personal circumstances, but also of the contemporary subject in general. He senses an impossibility however in what he calls Lee's "festival of the 'moment'" because it lacks time, and experience must always be embedded in language that possesses time. Along with the rise of process-oriented works after Minimalism (and reflected in the 1970 Tokyo Biennale exhibition) came a linguistic refinement to define the temporality of the present. He sees this process as tied to one's confrontation with the actuality of memory embedded in the process of perceiving new images (forms). Lee's lack of time he argues comprises a "fear" or refusal to confront memory. While Minemura in fact overlooks the anticipatory nature of encounter and Lee's emphasis on the intersection between reality and non-reality and the capacity to expand this intersection (between-ness), his critique opens an essential inquiry into Lee's practice: the condition of ambiguity as a durational process.

Lee's works operate as a process of perceiving a perpetually passing present and opens the materiality of the work beyond what is simply seen. Like a shadow, the works make visible the passage of time they profile. And through this synthesis, each work presents a temporal structure that mediates a phenomenological encounter among viewer, object, and site. This cycle can thus be seen as a mode of eternal recurrence that unbinds

the seemingly opposing elements of detachment and relationality, finite experience and

infinite expanse present in Lee's oeuvre as a solemn affirmation of life.

CHAPTER 6

***LAW OF SITUATION*:**

SUGA KISHIO'S ALTERNATIVE THEORIZATION OF ACTIVATION

I do not create the limits of a thing, but rather they are created by the circumstances

that determine its optimum position when existing in its most natural state.

–Suga Kishio (1971)[234]

In this final chapter, I focus on the practice of Suga Kishio, beginning with the artist's

outdoor work *Law of Situation (Jōkyō-ritsu)* (1971) (Fig. 56) and another model of

perception in Mono-ha's practice. Suga's semantics of activating the limits of perception

within a larger relational structure offer a somewhat different view from Lee Ufan's. We

will trace this model through Suga's writings, the structure of language employed in his

work titles, and in a special feature on the artist's practice in the journal *Kirokutai* (Art &

Document). We are concerned with the specific concepts that define this activation, and we

will show how Suga differed in his approach from Lee toward visuality, matter and

language. Ultimately, while Lee and Suga shared an awareness of the possibility of a new

art that awakened the existence of a place (situatedness) between things *(mono)* rather

than objects (*buttai*) themselves, Suga placed emphasis on situations (*jokyo*) and "events,"

while Lee used matter as a means to open up situations.

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[234] Suga Kishio, "Hōchi to iu jōkyō" (The condition of release), *Bijutsu techō*, no. 344 (July 1971): 144.

Law of Situation

In *Law of Situation*, ten flat stones lie afloat in water in serial order on a twenty-meter (approximately sixty-five foot) long rectangular bed of woven glass fiber.[235] Reflecting the blue sky and smoke-white clouds above, the shimmering fiber appears camouflaged as it glides along the sapphire surface of a lake in Tokiwa Park located in Ube City in the southern Japan region of Yamaguchi prefecture. The weight of the stones causes the fiber to sink just below the water's surface; water is a material that mediates between the fiber and the stones, signaling their delicate balance. Suga released this assembly as part of the 4th Modern Japanese Sculpture Exhibition in 1971 under the theme, "Materials and Sculpture—Based on Reinforced Plastic," where all of the works were exhibited inside Ube City's Open-Air Museum or in an outdoor area adjacent to the museum.[236]

The formal configuration of the stones resting on the reflective fiber and the interactive nature of the material elements closely recall Lee's stone and glass *Relatum* series. Where the two differ is how their structural elements are articulated, as well as in the conditions of their experiencing. Lee's *Relatum* constantly seeks to sustain the tension activated by the contact between two static objects (stone and glass) in the experience of the viewer. This tension relies on the viewer's instant induction of some *prior* gestural

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[235] The complete measurements of the fiberglass are: 45 cm deep x 200 cm wide x 20 m long (1.5' x 6.5' x 65.6' long).

[236] Taking place every two years, the Modern Japanese Sculpture exhibition began in 1961 with the opening of the Open-Air Museum in Ube city (Yamaguchi Prefecture). The biennial took place as part of the city's urban renewal initiative, under the premise that the artists invited were to re-engage with nature through sculptural projects (along with landscaping and horticultural programs) amid reconstruction efforts after the city's devastations after World War II. Other artists associated with Mono-ha included in this exhibition were Yoshida Katsurō, Kawaguchi Tatsuo, and Inumaki Kenji.

action of dropping and breaking performed by the artist. This anticipation contains an integrity with which things produce an awareness of a perpetually passing present in the consciousness of the spectator. The work that presented the single exception to Lee's project, however, was the one-time outdoor happening, *Things and Words*, as discussed in the previous Chapter. In this work, agency was submitted to the natural material processes of the paper from the effect of its interaction with the external force of the wind. Suga's *Law of Situation* is composed along the lines of Lee's version of the happening, where the "work" begins *after* the artist has set up his materials. Yet it inverses the elements: instead of thin paper, heavy stone, and instead of invisible wind, visible water. The artist and the spectator in Suga's piece share a common ground of letting the work go – that is, of letting it work. Based on the "tendencies" inherent in a materials/process interaction,"[237] or in other words, releasing the objects to the forces of time and gravity, Suga creates a situation in which the work's relational structure is determined by the object's "optimum position when existing in its most natural state."[238] To a different degree than Lee's structure of anticipation, the production of the work is activated by the element of an external force, directed by the streaming movement of the water, oscillating the internal balance between the rocks and the flatbed surface as well as the external balance of the parts to the whole. Curator Dehara Hitoshi compares Lee and Suga as follows: "Suga's sculptures used gravity to reveal how materials exist in relation to one another and their environment, whereas similar assemblages by Lee Ufan 'presented the results of gravity,' such as glass shattered

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[237] Robert Morris, "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated," *Continuous project altered daily* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), p. 77.

[238] Suga, "Hōchi to iū jōkyō," p. 144.

by rock."[239] As we have seen, Lee's works characteristically have a stronger degree of

spatial cohesion. This is perhaps due to his interest in seeing things in direct contact and

relation; a structure in which one senses a total condition beyond things. Whereas Lee's

materials are solid and non-transparent and retain more of a spatial cohesiveness, Suga

uses unfixed, fluid forms in open-ended arrangements.

The Start of Disappearance

In his essay "The Start of Disappearance," published in *SD* in 1969 under the penname

Katsuragawa Sei—Suga asks the fundamental question: How do we become conscious of

objects? He begins by explaining how we have come to perceive objects simultaneously

through both their *form* ("optical matter") and *idea* ("abstract linguistic space"). He

challenges his readers to seek the point at which form and idea begin to disconnect and

lose identification. Suga uses the example of Sekine's *Phase of Nothingness*, the large four-

meter wide boulder weighing fifty tons rests on top of a tall, reflective, stainless-steel

column. While Sekine's aim is for the stone to look as though it were floating like a cloud in

the sky on top of a mirror reflecting everything in its path, Suga noted that when one stands

beneath the work and looks up at it, there is an impending sense that the massive stone will

fall to the ground. The potentiality of falling that arises within the experience of the work

itself produces a gap between the *idea* of the stone as a thing that is usually on the ground

and its current *form* in which it exists as a floating entity. The floating stone then critiques

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[239] Dehara Hitoshi, "Interrelationships within the Aspect of Time," *Suga Kishio* (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shinbunsha, Bijutsu renraku kyōgikai, 1997), p. 309. Quoted in Thomas Havens, *Radicals and Realists in Japanese Nonverbal Arts: The Avant-garde Rejection of Modernism* (Honolulu: The University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), p. 202.

its own natural state of resting on the ground, and thus our instant recognition of the stone

(where form and idea are linked) begins to dissolve. The "start of disappearance" is

activated in this sense of potential.

Suga's Terminology: Setting the Conditions of *Mono*

What was *mono* for Suga in *Law of Situation*? In Lee's *Relatum*, meaning was experienced

not in the material itself, but in the viewer's *encounter* with the relational structure

between two objects and the effects of surrounding elements upon the things. Suga focuses

on perceiving the surrounding condition *through* the objects themselves. In order to show

what is distinctive about Suga's notion of activation in relation to the other Mono-ha artists,

we must first consider several inter-related concepts that the artist introduces during this

period that expand his concept of *mono*. They include: presence (有る *aru*) vs. existence (在

る *aru*), release (放置 *hōchi*), and existing condition (情況 *jōkyō*). From 1969-1972, Suga

published a series of essays in art magazines, *SD* (Space Design) and *Bijutsu techō* that

elaborated on these central terms as key terms for the philosophy of his practice, which

were further reflected in his work titles.[240]

      In "Existence Beyond Condition" (1970), Suga distinguishes between two models of

the object's being: its "presence" (有る) versus its mode of "existence" (在る). The former

involves the object's actual physical presence based on the artist's intentionality and

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[240] The texts I reference are as follows: Suga Kishio, "Mienai sekai no mienai gengo" (The Invisible Language of an Invisible World). *SD* (October 1969): 75–77. Published under penname: Katsuragawa Sei, "Jōtai o koete aru" (Being Beyond a Condition) *Bijutsu Techō* (February 1970); "Hochi to iu jokyo" [The Condition of Being Released], *Bijutsu Techō* (July 1971); and "Mumesei no kanata no mumei: Naze 'mono' nanoka?" (Nameless Beyond Namelessness: Why Mono?). *Bijutsu techō*, no. 355 (May 1972): 299-310.

realization of a concept. This would correspond to a subject-oriented model that

hypostasizes the presence of human thought. The latter comprises an object-oriented

model where such ideation has been eliminated and emphasizes the object's ontological

existence in actual space and time. The ultimate model of "existence" would comprise an

untreated natural object that exists as an unnamed condition.[241] One sees a logical

continuity with Ishiko's "Art, World, and Discovery" of an art that exists apart from the self.

"'Existence' means . . . nothing more or less than that which is seen is in fact there."[242] Suga

is trying to seek out ways to maintain this nameless entity that extends beyond linguistic

signification and the subject's fundamental desire to "produce" objects. His project would

seem thus to involve displacing the idea of "presence" by showing the process in which an

object exists within a total field ("existence"). Here, he does not wish to impose meaning as

an organizational category upon the specificity of objects distinguished among each other

(i.e., Lee's *Relatum*), but wants, instead, to subsume under the term "existence" all objects

in the ideal creator's field of vision, including those that extend beyond the range of one's

visual field, which he would call *jōkyō*.

With those principles in mind, we turn to *Infinite Condition II (Steps)* (Fig. 93), a site-

specific installation presented at the "Trends in Contemporary Art" exhibition at the Kyoto

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[241] In one of his earliest texts, Suga's makes a clear claim against the epistemology of language, stating that in the process of linguistic expression, "Words are the ruin of an unseen space of the world." For Suga, words are concrete signification of something that can't be perceived, and in this moment of naming an object, one loses the ability to perceive the unseen aspects of things such as the "temporality of space" of a natural stone or tree. Suga, "Mienai," p. 77.

[242] Ibid., p. 29.

National Museum of Modern Art in 1970.[243] For the exhibition, Suga poured piles of sand

onto a flight of stairs inside the museum, smoothing the surface into a flat diagonal incline

with the stairs' outer edges remaining slightly visible. While the sand blocks the stairs'

utilitarian function, its reliance on the museum's existing features allows the material to

bring the quotidian passageway into focus. That is, the physical and material "presence" of

the sand functions to conceal the presence of the staircase. Through this concealment,

however, the staircase intrudes into the awareness of the museum's visitors, making an

architectural structure that exists "for" passage into one that, by not functioning, becomes

an "existing" condition that gives the formless sand its basis.[244] This attempt to fill an

architectural section of the museum with natural materials (bringing nature into the space

of the institution) was a conscious effort to not only eschew the conventional display of a

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[243] The works' reliance on the architectural site warrants an explanation of the type of site-specificity at work here. In *Infinite Situation*, the work is formally and literally determined by the physical structures and natural conditions of its site, and thus meaning is derived from the relationship between the viewer and the work in real time and space. His work thus inhabits the early phenomenological model of site-specificity theorized by Miwon Kwon especially in the way it reverses the modernist sculptural paradigm to sever the work from its site in an idealist aesthetic space through assertions of autonomy and self-referentiality. While Suga's ontological commitment to "presence," "existence" and "release" does not overtly imply any social, economic, or political position, his work shares the imperative, as Kwon notes, to transcend the conventional limits of media and their institutional site, re-position meaning from that inherent in the work to one that is contingent to its total context, which is envisioned in terms of a lived phenomenological experience. This naturally resists its circulation into the forces of capitalist market economy. See Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), p. 12.

[244] The issue of a thing's utility is further discussed by Heidegger in his notion of the "background," which is the way the world is assumed in technology and comes out when something doesn't function, for instance, when a tool is broken. "The structure of 'in order to' contains a *reference* of something to something. Only in the following analyses can the phenomenon indicated by this word be made visible in its ontological genesis. At this time, our task is to bring a multiplicity of references phenomenally into view. In accordance with their character of being usable material, useful things always are in terms of their belonging to other useful things: writing materials, pen, ink, paper, desk blotter, table, lamp, furniture, windows, doors, room. These 'things' never show themselves initially by themselves, in order then to fill out a room as a sum of real things. What we encounter as nearest to us, although we do not grasp it thematically, is the room, not as what is 'between the four walls' in a geometrical, spatial sense, but rather as material for living. On the basis of the latter we find 'accommodations,' and in accommodations the actual 'individual' useful thing. A totality of useful thing; is always already discovered before the individual useful thing." Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 69.

work on the gallery walls or floors, but also to engage the work in a new relationship between interior and exterior space of the museum.

While the sand is bounded physically by the walls and angle of the stairway, giving it entirely, as a material heap, a form, the work itself, as a play of surfaces, is not completely bound by these architectural limits. Rather, as the documentary photo of the artist observing his work shows, he utilizes the stair's dynamic incline to amplify the endless spatial continuity that arises from the sand's smooth planarity. This amplification extends past the walls and into a broad expanse envisioned beyond the space of the museum, thus obscuring the limit of the structure's perimeters. The body's absorption into the surging incline of this slope like an impending tide transforms the structural limits of the space into a dynamic sensory affect (often experienced in nature) transposed to the space of the museum. The ephemerality of the sand's given form functions much like the streaming lake bed in *Law of Situation,* an "in-between" condition that expands the limits of the existing structure through the processes of concealing and exposing. Just as the water simultaneously supports and mediates the weight of the stones, shifting its "presence" to a state of "existence," so the sand both hides and heightens one's awareness of the quotidian passageway, transforming its physicality into a dynamic movement that exists beyond its utility in an "*infinite situation*".

This idea of movement counteracts the most extreme application for *mono* that Suga theorized, which was the condition of *hōchi* or release. In "The Condition of Being Released" (July 1971), he remarked:

Sometimes, things (*mono*) speak more eloquently, and so much more imaginatively

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than humans, that the imagination the things themselves possess must first be

smashed. Consequently, I have no choice but to leave things and their situation

alone. . . The first step is to stop "placing" and "presenting," as is common practice in

the display of artworks. Instead, we have to "leave things alone" (*hōchi*). Leaving

things alone need not entail scattering whatever is actually visible . . . What I mean

by "left alone" . . . seeks to remove any idea of things (*mono*) and situation from

existing systems of art.[245]

Hōchi begins with the act of stripping the thing caught in the grid of its art setting all pre-

assigned meaning that would situate it a place in a system of linguistic or aesthetic

signification (just as the staircase in *Infinite Situation* is rejected from its meaningful

position in the world of useful objects). This would negate the framing work we

unconsciously use to differentiate between materials that exist in nature and their

appropriation within an artistic context. This attitude with regard to symbolic meaning,

traditions of display ("placing" and "presenting"), and the object's non-differentiation from

the natural environment undermines the idealist conventions of artistic signification and

identification.[246] Nonetheless, Suga's radical approach of "leaving the object alone," an

attitude consistent with Sekine's idea of "not creating," consciously engages the

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[245] Suga, "Hōchi to iu jōkyō," p. 147.

[246] Obviously, there are inconsistencies in Suga's argument. The artist 'places' and 'presents' natural matter within the existing structure of a museum as part of an exhibition of a select group of artists from around the nation. This would posit the artist's specific disposition within a shared ideological framework (cultural habitus) that involves recognizing and actively participating in the symbolic value of artistic exchange.

metaphysical implications of objects in relation to site and causality in order to reveal the

relative and interdependent nature of existence.[247]

The idea of *hōchi* is best articulated in another work of the same title (*Infinite Situation*) (1970) (Fig. 87), a work in which Suga propped blocks of wood at different

lengths diagonally throughout the open window frames of the Kyoto National Museum of

Modern Art as part of the same "Trends in Contemporary Art" exhibition. From the outside,

the wood acts as a border between the interior and exterior space. In a sense, Suga is

inverting the exercise of the first *Infinite Situation*; instead of blocking the utilitarian, Suga

is making the aesthetic utilitarian. The material is simultaneously present and absent as it

inhabits the space of the window an allegorical reference to the liminal zone between

actual and virtual space. By detaching the wood from its functional utility and asserting its

role as a "border" among its surrounding elements, Suga creates a relational structure

through which the work appears in a state of release. The wood suggests what Lee would

call a "modest gesture" as a kind of random prop to keep a window open that makes

something wholly functional. In fact, what seems to be let go here are the pretenses of the

art object. It is returned to its materiality as something that randomly fits in a space, just as

one might use the corner of the frame of a painting to hang a coat on. In other words, Suga

seeks to release the ambiguity within things that are determined by two different and

opposing cultural codes. Suga's incorporation of the window, air, landscape and light as

part of his list of "materials" reflects the fact that the object operates with an expansive

field beyond the museum's interior frame. The extreme passivity of the wood used as a

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[247] Suga Kishio, "Yorikakaru mono no shikō/Thoughts on Interdependent Things," *Suga Kishio/Kishio Suga*, exh. cat. (Tokyo: Tōkō Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), cited in Munroe, *Scream Against the Sky*, p. 265.

prop, presenting it as a "thing" in its bare state, a state that is even pre-artisanal, requiring no particular skill to craft is a device to illuminate the infinite expanse of the object and its interdependence with the surrounding structure. This expanse is what Suga terms *jōkyō*.

> Just as the word *mono* distances itself from a realm of stabilized meaning—although *mono* is in the company of everyday signifiers, some of which have strong conceptualizing tendencies, such as "water," "soil," and "grass"—so, too, does the word *jōkyō,* which rather than signifying a certain condition or state, embodies a holistic view of the world. It encompasses not only the sign, concept, epistemology, and Buddhist theology, but also temporality and spatiality. In this context, even consciousness of *mono* is reduced to one aspect of present *jōkyō*'s reality in its entirety rather than the essence of individual *mono*...[248]

For Suga, *jōkyō* is akin to an unbound totality through which *mono* passes. The concept of *mono* is identified not as the thing in its isolated concrete state (i.e., the stillness of the wood blocks or compacted sand), but as the thing in its time and environment, where it exists as part of a larger spatial totality that continues to change in relation to the surrounding structure. Thus, one begins to understand what activation means. It is not something that happens in the subject but an ontological insight into the "existence" of *mono.* For instance, in *Law of Situation* the total thing becomes activated through the mediating element of the water as a passage that continues to disrupt the gravitational stability of the stones' balance on the fiber. Not only do the shifts having to do with the materials stresses in the world determine the work, but these stresses are not exogenous

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[248] "Mumesei-sei no kanata no mumei: Naze 'mono' nanoka?" (Nameless Beyond Namelessness: Why Mono?). *Bijutsu techō*, no. 355 (May 1972): 301.

themselves. They exist conditioned by the atmospheric affects of the wind, air, trees, etc.,

pulling into the work the total setting of the work. Thus, the concept of *mono* begins to

expand into a fluctuating entity, given form by and through the total structure of *jōkyō.*[249]

The seeming passivity of Suga's terms *aru* (existence, presence), *hōchi* (release) and *jōkyō*

(existing condition) in fact are principles that work to activate the dynamic flow of

phenomena.

Curiously, he had been engaged with decomposition in a very different mode,

Layered Space (Fig. 94), earlier that year in April in which the artist layered sawdust,

powdered plaster, ashes, and air into a plexiglass cube. The process of layering the ashes of

destroyed objects created sedimentation of time much in keeping with the spirit of *Phase-*

Mother Earth.[250] Continuing to explore the play between matter and geometric

arrangements, Suga, in *Parallel Strata* (1969) (Fig. 44), stacked rectangular layers of

paraffin wax enclosed inside an igloo-like wall made of the same soluble material. The wax

remains are visible along the bottom edges of grid structure at each conjoined segment of

the panels. While both shapes reference the fixed geometric order of Minimalism; the

works contain a structural tension between order versus disorder, form versus

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[249] This is in reference to Suga's characterization of Mono-ha in 1995 as a "form made from indefinite form" (*mukeishiki no keishiki*). See Suga Kishio, "Ba no mukei ni sotte iku" (Treading along a Formless Site), *Bijutsu Techō* (May 1995), p. 265.

[250] *Layered Space* was never exhibited and a photograph taken by Nakajima Kō [fig. 4.5] documents the work outside the artist's studio. Curiously, the work was created the same month (April 1968) as the opening of the "Tricks and Vision." Due to influence of Ishiko Junzō and fashion for visual distortions of the time, Suga had found a venue to exhibit *Space Transformation*, but not for *Layered Space*. *Parallel Strata* (1969) would mark a substantial transition and the first public display of Suga's interest in the decomposition of form, materials and space.

formlessness, unity versus decay, and permanence versus impermanence, all indicating an emphasis on material transition.

Suga's work titles exemplify the substitution of the static noun by the dynamic verb,[251] for they are always made up of three to four character phrases that go into peculiar compounds. Suggesting the interaction between the behavior or manner of things and the laws that guide them, we see the reappearance of *jōkyō* = "situation or condition" [*Infinite Situation (*1970), *Limited Condition* (1970), *Condition of Between* (1971)] and *hōchi =* "release" [*Condition of Release* (1971)*, Zone of Release* (1972)]. Making the words in one title to the next interchangeable, as though they were part of a coded system, Suga pairs spatial designations (i.e. law, boundary, zone) with the circumstantial designations of "condition" and "release" that double as transitive verbs: "to condition/to be conditioned" or "to release/to be released." Through these formulations, Suga seeks to erect a boundary between the active and passive states of the object within a larger structure of relational circumstance. In *Law of Situation*, this boundary is maintained by the gravitational shifts of the ten stones on the surface of the lake (actuality) and the immanent structures that condition this configuration, or its total arrangement (potentiality). The maintenance of the tension between the object's active and passive states thus can be re-conceived in terms of activating the actual and potential conditions of the object in relation to a larger structure. This dual operation is what I define as the activation of perceptual experience. What

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[251] I owe this reading to Minemura Toshiaki who is the only critic to note the peculiarity of Suga's titles in an unpublished manuscript from 1970. Specifically, he notes how the titles prioritize action rather than static objects. Minemura Toshiaki, "Uki kotoba ga kataru koto" (Things Which Floating Words Speak), 1970. Handwritten Manuscript, Minemura Toshiaki Archive, Research Center for the Arts and Art Administration, Keio University.

follows is an examination into this emphasis on activation through the introduction of his work in the underground art journal, *Kirokutai*.

Kirokutai

In 1972, artist-run journal *Kirokutai* (Art & Document) (Fig. 95) featured Suga's works in its second issue, articulating the critical tie between Suga's sculptural installations to the larger milieu of conceptual film and photography during the period. *Kirokutai* was published from 1972 to 1973 (with one feature issue on artist Hori Kōsai appearing in 1977) by Bijutsu shihyō-sha, a non-profit artist-run press operated by Hori Kōsai, Hikosaka Naoyoshi and Kashiwara Etsutomu. The press simultaneously published a journal under the same name, *Bijutsu shihyō* (History and Criticism of Art, 1971-72; 72-78). While *Bijutsu-shihyō* functioned largely as an arena for Bikyōtō's dogmatic deconstruction of conventional terms fundamental to art (such as "practice," "expression," "event," and "art/artist"), *Kirokutai* functioned primarily as an art magazine, with black and white documentations of process-based drawings, performances, films, photographs, sound experiments paired with commentaries by both artists and critics. The participants included art critics Tani Arata and Minemura Toshiaki and many of the artists associated with Japanese conceptualism, such as Nomura Hitoshi, Yamanaka Nobuo and Kitzono Yoshio.

The front cover of issue number 2 showed a profile shot of Suga, looking straight into the camera with a deadpan stare, while on the back cover a bird's eye view of the artist is seen producing *Infinite Condition* (1970) with his back turned to the camera as he

smooths a pile of sand on the stairwell of the Kyoto National Museum of Modern Art (Fig. 96). These photographs correlate ironically with the feature's critical emphasis on the vacant gaze and passive approach to process found in Suga's works. The feature was one of the first comprehensive overviews of the artist's work, including a chronological list of seventeen works in descending order from April 1972 to April 1968. The journal included a black-and-white installation photograph of *Law of Situation* next to a similar work entitled, *HAZAMA—The Condition of Between* (1971) (Fig. 23). In *Condition of Between*, Suga balanced a large natural stone on one end of lauan wood in a pond in Inokashira Park. One can see the plywood counteracting the weight of the stone with the board tipping slightly up from the surface of the water. This work was part of a series called *Ya-ten* (outdoor exhibitions) that were underwritten and photographed by the artist himself as a personal exhibition. The public would only have access to the works through photographic reproduction (in fact this was the earliest example of a public record of one of Suga's *Ya-ten* events). One could argue that the photographs functioned more as notes or experiments for a public work such as *Law of Situation*. The formal similarity and the date of *Condition of Between* exhibited three months before *Law of Situation* provide evidence that this was probably the case. However, based on Suga's calls for an elimination of the system of notes and plans in his 1970 text "Existence Beyond Condition," the distinct titles designate each event.[252] An archive of *ya-ten* photographs found in correspondence files between the artist and critic Minemura Toshiaki partially erases the line between the public installations and

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[252] See Suga, "Jōtai o koete aru" (Existence Beyond Condition) *Bijutsu techō* (February 1970), p. 24–26.

private photo documents.[253] This lack of distinction becomes even clearer with the

inclusion of this work in an art journal that was exploring the very notion of "document,"

which leads us to problematize the function of "process" at play in Suga's practice.

At the same time as Suga was producing sculptural installations that derived from

his construction principles of *jōtai and hōchi*, he was also taking photographs that were

infused with the same spirit, from 1970 to 1974, in Inokashira Park, west of central Tokyo

and Fujimichō, Yokohama. The photographs record temporary interventions into the urban

landscape. In *Knowledge Situation* (1970) (Fig. 97), a thick, unbroken line of splashed water

swerves through a residential alley appearing to split the street in half like a giant crack in

the asphalt. The limitless nature of this line extending past the vanishing point in the

photograph and its associations as a border between passive and active states (again

making water, a substance that has three states—liquid, solid, gas—and evaporates a part

of the tension between the active and the passive) place the work in direct dialogue with

Law of Situation. Located Situation (1971) (Fig. 98), reflects the artist's growing interest in

activating the condition.

The photographic image of the latter piece is both outside of *hōchi* (release) and

inside it, in as much as the field of the relational structure surrounding his materials

includes a photograph. The photo shows flat oval objects tied together by a string, which

lies just under the surface of the pond. If we take the photograph as being within the field of

the work, then we have to consider it as more than a means to an end, a transparent record

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[253] A full notebook of *ya-ten* photographs are archived at Keio University in the correspondence letters between the artist and Minemura Toshiaki between 1970-1973. The photographs were never exhibited at the time and have only surfaced in recent solo exhibitions over the last few years. Minemura Toshiaki Archive, Research Center for the Arts and Arts Administration, Keio University.

of the piece. The idea of release brings up the problem of a hermeneutic gap between the

artist's physical act and the objective reproduction of these acts through film and

photography, which seems, in a sense, to cheat on Suga's fundamental principle,

recuperating *hōchi* for art. An example of how the filmic record could become an extension

of an art piece is given in the same issue: a photograph showing Bikyōtō artist Yamanaka

Nobuo's *Quadrangle of a River* (1972) (Fig. 99), which projects two overlapping images (the

film of a river onto an actual streaming river) onto multiple layers of vertical transparent

vinyl sheets. Here, the dust-filled light projection echoes the streaming river, and the image

becomes imperceptible as it expands beyond the space of the screen. Nevertheless, the

screen's frames allow a means to make this image perceptible. Critic Tōno Yoshiaki

described the action as giving off "a strangely negative presence," alluding to the

appearance of an authorial presence emerging within the object rather than directed by the

artist or viewing subject.

These works of course coincided with the convergence of conceptual art and

photography, as well as sculpture and film elsewhere (exemplified in Richard Serra's *Hand

Catching Lead*).[254] There, the durational element of process did not develop out of a

conscious destruction of the conditions of each medium, but rather as a way to expand the

limits of perceptual experience in real time and space through reproductive media.[255] This

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[254] Richard Serra's *Hand Catching Lead* is central to both Rosalind Krauss and Benjamin Buchloh's critical texts on experience of time in sculpture and its convergence with film. See Rosalind Krauss, The *Double Negative*: a new syntax for sculpture," *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981) and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Process Sculpture and Film in the Work of Richard Serra," *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955–1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

[255] Here I am thinking of the expansion of the perceptual limits of the sculptural medium in terms of a limit transgression proposed by George Baker. Describing the transition from film to sculpture in his analysis of Anthony McCall's films of the 1970s, he states, "Methodologically, we seem then to face not a dialectical

was directed in two ways: to destabilize subjective experience of form from its objective

representation on the one hand, and to locate a new form of intentionality through the

dimension of process on the other.

The transgression of perceptual limits provides a substantial context for responses

to Suga's work in the *Kirokutai* feature. The journal's founders, Hori Kōsai and Hikosaka

Naoyoshi who were central figures of the art group Bikyōtō (Artist Joint Struggle Council),

[256] and Kashiwara Etsutomu a conceptual artist closely associated with the group each

published separate critiques against the passivity of Suga's artistic practice: the alienating

effect of release (*hōchi*), the devaluation of meaning, and the hegemony of the gaze. Despite

the undercurrent of contention that is palpable in the voices of these artists, their charges

expose key changes in the location of artistic labor, meaning, and visuality opened by Suga

during the period. In Hori Kosai's "Stand-by Art—Suga Kishio—On *Limited Situation*," the

artist based his text on the following quote:

In front of us he signals the arrival of those people who await. We realize suddenly

that that being will perhaps never arrive until the very end, and we stand by upon

this realization, and the actors on stage endure this time. And with a diligent gesture,

they fill this inconsumable absence, showing that they are determined to do so

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historical development, as the art historian might have us believe, but a moment in history when 'development' was precisely thrown into question, when the expansion of forms rather began to circulate around a limit and its transgression." George Baker, "Film Beyond its Limits," *Grey Room* 25 (Fall 2006): 103.

[256] The name Bikyōtō (an abbreviation of Bijutsuka Kyōtō Kaigi) is derived from the militant, left wing coalition, Zenkyōtō (All-Campus Joint Struggle Council), which headed the nationwide university upheavals of 1968-1969. Bikyōtō's practice reflected a politicized stance to Fluxus events, consisting of task and process-oriented performances, films, photographs, sound experiments, and drawings that attempted to undermine unitary systems of experience and representation.

protectively with peace at heart. Enjoying the spectacle in this manner is unique to

the "audience of modernity."[257]

Hori describes a sense of endlessness in Suga's *Limited Situation* (*Rinkai jōkyō*) (1970) (Fig.

100), a work in which a large iron pole rests diagonally inside a large, hollow plywood box,

protruding out from the frame as if one had encountered an abandoned sandbox at sea. Six

rocks lay at the foot of the pole while one carefully rests on the box's edge. Describing an

exhausting sense of incompleteness, Hori remarked further that the work was a flat

assembly of "depthless, surface forms" that "follow the laws of gravity (and) . . . the

centrifugal force of the earth's rotation. His wood, stones, and metals all in all are spiritless

materials that do not provide a sense of history. . . The fulcrum of his self disappears into

the mist, and he has lost his brakes in the process of deconstructing and dispersing his

individuality."[258]

Hori's charge against the arbitrariness of Suga's materials as "depthless," "spiritless,"

and the disappearance of self reveal the work's resistance against the logic of any formal,

expressive, or linguistic interpretations. His evocation of Beckett's destruction of a

narrative climax in *Waiting for Godot* signals a disjuncture between process and purpose

(where the loss of beginning and end are symptomatic of the process of waiting itself). In

terms that recall Michael Fried's attack on the experience of temporality as a mode of

theatricality in Minimalist work, Hori's position, his desire for a work that fills in an

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[257] Tsuno Umitaro, "Tōrai no itsutsu no shunkan" (Five Moments of Arrival), *Mon no mukō no gekijō* (A Theater Beyond the Gate) (Tokyo: Hakusui-sha, 1972), cited in Hori Kōsai, "Sutanbai no bijutsu—Suga Kishio – 'Rinkai jōkyō' ni," (The art of standing by—Suga Kishio's *Limited Situation*), *Kirokutai* no. 2 (1972): unpaged.

[258] Hori, "Sutanbai no bijutsu," n.p.

"inconsumable absence," is turned on its head by Suga's project, which fundamentally reassesses the processes that hinder our perception of the object (and de-activate "completeness and incompleteness" as normative aesthetic categories). Perhaps it was the exposed floor, the seeming tension between the heavy weight of the pole and the rocks that appear to sustain its balance, or the strange placement of the lone rock lingering on the box's edge. Each of these elements reflects an exposure of the work's material processes and a mode of aesthetic detachment characteristic to Suga's mode of presenting objects in a state of "being left alone" (or "release") (*hōchi*). Suga presents situations where materials are relegated to a condition that constantly evolves along a *limit* or *boundary*.

Meanwhile in Kashihara's text "Sensibility as a Starting Point" interrogates the root of Suga's sensibility, which he sees as guiding us toward a renewed notion of perception. He states, "It doesn't seem like he is thinking simply about the existence of things or their relationality as much as he is trying to see things in a new manner through his work. . . [which] has to do with sensibility." Recognizing Suga's awareness of the contingency of the objects' material and spatial structures, he remarks: "If the drive to insert meaning and value in every possible means, and totalize this former illusion is nonsense, then I believe the idea to strip total meaning and value, and to relate 'man' and 'things' at equal levels is none other than a new illusion."[259] This rejection of locating meaning on the basis of equal values between subject and work, and the devaluation of meaning in Suga's practice, both of which are dismissed as "illusions," in fact makes a case for the enactment of the potentiality of all meaning.

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[259] Kashihara Etsutomu, "Sensibility as a Starting Point," *Kirokutai* no. 2 (1972): unpaged.

What is illusory about Suga's idea? Is it an illusion that we are set up to make meanings for? Or does it represent an illusion about the world, in as much as human meanings are irreducibly part of the world and thus not equal to the non-meaning of rocks? This goes back to Ishiko's phrase about the thinking eye, and the tension of making an art that appears as something totally natural, untouched by the human.

In "Towards the Crudity and Thrust of Ashes!," Hikosaka finally takes up the passivity of the expansive "gaze" which Suga's works make explicit. Hikosaka is particularly keen to identify Suga's work with the tendencies found in the 1970 Tokyo Biennale "Between Man and Matter," whereby artworks had become indistinguishable from non-art objects for having instituted "the gaze" rather than the simple act of "looking." The pamphlet of the exhibition includes a photograph of figure standing on the edge of a boardwalk observing the horizontal expanse of the waterfront. According to Hikosaka, this sublime gaze was the equivalent of the traditional bourgeois gaze that had always inhabited the domain of "landscape" in painting and photography is now once again imposed upon us, under the guise of a radical aesthetic, as the mode of perception under which the art does its work. . .And thus Hikosaka retaliates, "In the realm of activism. . . destroy everything, reduce it to ashes, and blow it off with the thrust of the wind."

The assault on Suga orchestrated by Hori, Kashihara, and Hikosaka, which picks out the alienating effect of release (*hochi*), the devaluation of meaning, or the hegemony of the gaze, exists in a certain contradiction with itself, in that Suga's work, and in particular his valorization of *hōchi*, seems to make even the radical part of the art world uncomfortable by showing the tensions in the presuppositions that underlie the common sense use

meanings attributed to perception, signification, and visuality. As is normative in the game

of radical discourse, Suga's critics try to reduce his work to a reactionary formation, where

Suga is then judged guilty of continuing the work of bourgeois ideology in the aesthetic

realm. Suga's critics identify Suga's detachment with loss and the negation of the very

foundation of meaning, which is contrary to Suga's own understanding of his work. This

sentiment is expressed in a statement published in the journal's 1973 issue, "When

investigating the issues that artists must face today, we find that it is neither a search for

'meaning' nor an immersion in the 'object' itself. . . Art as an end in itself (*jiko mokuteki ka*)

results only in the loss of the direction of meaning, which burdens the work. This loss can

be rectified by way of visualizing the work's spoken elements. And thus, we must

interrogate the degree of this loss of meaning itself."[260] This dialectical gambit fails to

understand Suga's idea of regenerating the actual and potential conditions of experience

through cognitive and sensorial devices that structure the "spoken elements" of the work,

thus negating the art for art's sake potential of mono-ha practice. It must also be seen as

part of a positive program, that of re-engaging with new modes of meaning.

Hazama (Between)

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[260] This statement was published in the 1973 issue of the journal *Kirokutai.* This issue functioned as a documentary pamphlet for an exhibition called, "Affair and Practice," in May 1973 at Pinar Gallery in Tokyo. The full statement was as follows: "When investigating the issues that artists must face today, we find that it is neither a search for 'meaning' nor an immersion in the 'object' itself. This exhibit is a visualization of practice resulting from artistic labor as well as practice as something intrinsic to art itself. It is perhaps a way of passing through the condition of art as an end in itself (*jiko mokuteki ka*). ...Art as an end in itself results only in the loss of the direction of meaning, which burdens the work. This loss can be rectified by way of visualizing the work's spoken elements. And thus, we must interrogate the degree of this loss of meaning itself." *Kirokutai* no. 3 (1973): n.p.

In *Law of Situation*, our assumption about the weight of the stones makes us further

assume that they will naturally submerge underneath the surface of the lake; and yet they

seem to 'float', contrary to our assumptions. The artist has 'tricked' our immediate visceral

expectation about the relation between the elements by configuring a way for the stones to

float above the surface. For Suga, activation on the side of the subjective observer consists

in, firstly, subverting our expectations concerning the nature of phenomena. The second

level concerns codes of aesthetic recognition. Rather his work is structured under

programmatic categories (*hōchi, jōkyō*) that both rely on these codes and liquidate them as

tendencies in the art world of the last thirty years – the emphasis on chance, the reference

to art history, the importance accorded to media – lead up to the leap of the opening, a

Heideggerian term that Suga shares with the other Mono-ha artists such as Lee and

Yoshida.[261] This opening is what he refers to as *hazama.* Recalling Lee's aim of creating

material relations that sustain within the interstice between reality and non-reality, Suga

remarked the following in the process of creating *Law of Situation*:

> I realized that one of the devices that I have continued to possess is the concept of
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> "between" (間 *hazama*) or "opening" (隙間 *sukima*). The distinction maintained
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> between a thing and a thing, or between dimensions of a space, is no doubt the

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[261] I see this concept as an extraction of Heidegger's *Gelassenheit*, "letting-be," based on the doctrine of intentionality, or to see phenomena as released through its bare presence and openness. (See Chapter 4 for Sekine and Gelassenheit). Historically, Heidegger's concept comes out of the aesthetic philosophy that, beginning with Kant, identified the autonomy of the aesthetic sphere with disinterestedness. Ignoring the frame of autonomy, Heidegger takes the idea of Gelassenheit as an ontological mode of understanding the truth, in which truth is not a matter of correspondence between things and words, but rather, truth references themoment in which things disclose themselves and come into the open. Unlike Sekine or Lee, however, Suga does not make any specific philosophical, historical, or theoretical references, and thus I try to maintain this focus when referencing Suga's writings throughout the body of the text. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, vol. 1: The Will to Power as Art*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), p. 109.

recognition of this "between" or "opening." However narrow the gap is, I always

believe it has the ability to extract a monumental substance. By illuminating the area

between the air, water, and the soil, my aim is to enable "seeing" the work's system

and the substance that intervenes in the "opening" and its idea.[262]

Whether manifested in the architectural structures of the stairway, windowsills, through

the enclosed cubes and grid wax structures or out on an open body of water, Suga operates

within the field of mainstream codes, even those that have underlain moments of the avant-

garde liberation from representation, authorial authority, and chance, in order to create the

kind of art that could only exist, as such, within a new relationship to the object and the

system. The activation of this interstitial space of *hazama* (between) would come to define

the arena where the work's labor resides. This in-between passage for both Lee and Suga is

the ultimate definition of Mono-ha's language of *mono*.

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[262] Suga, "Ryōiki no atsumi" (The Depth of the Terrain) (1996) in *Suga Kishio chosaku senshū: "Ryōiki wa tojinai"/ Selected Writings of Suga Kishio: "Spheres Will Not Be Closed."* (Yokohama: Yokohama Museum of Art, 1999), p. 157.

CONCLUSION

MONO-HA'S AFTERLIFE

The first scholarly overview of Mono-ha appeared in the thirtieth anniversary issue of

Bijutsu techō in July 1978 by critic Minemura Toshiaki. Minemura identified three emergent

tendencies of Japanese art around 1970. The first involved moving away from artistic

production ("making") toward artistic presentation ("showing") of art.[263] In other words,

Minemura recognized that the artists were increasingly aiming to undo institutional

attitudes that reified skill and technique in the work's execution, turning to a more

performative sense of the spatio-temporal parameters surrounding the display of their

work. The second trend involved de-hierarchizing visual perception ("seeing") and physical

production ("making"). The artwork, as understood in this second trend, occurred as an

element in dismantling the relationships between "subject, expression, idea, matter,

medium, work, and reality."[264] These two tendencies, he noted, were "not necessarily new"

as some of these same elements were already visible in avant-garde art practices prior to

1970.[265] The third and perhaps most radical trend involved "a denial or reluctance of

'making'" and thus a refusal to engage with "given artistic mediums and forms" which in

turn "de-historicized the medium, forcing it to split into the two opposing poles of idea and

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[263] In Minemura's words: "A desire to seek changes in the institutional system concerning the shift from 'making' of art to 'showing' of art." Minemura, "<Mono-ha> ni tsuite" (On "Mono-ha"), Special supplement issue, *Bijutsu techō* (July 1978): 225.

[264] Ibid.

[265] Minemura is referring to the action-based experimental performances beginning with the Gutai Group, the kinetic, staged theatrical experiments of Jikken Kobo (Experimental Workshop) in the 1950s and the street happenings of Neo-Dada, Hi Red Center, Zero Dimension, and land-based performances Group I and The Play in the mid-1960s that had already incorporated this shift from production *as* presentation, and aims to dismantle the artistic subject as a privileged site of expression.

mono (things)."[266] Minemura's argument further presented a dialectic between two poles, one of which was text-based, conceptual practice (represented by figures of Japanese conceptualism such as On Kawara, Yoko Ono and Matsuzawa Yutaka), and the other of which was raw, unaltered forms of *mono,* "a sub-medium category" referring to material used for a medium. The latter was what Minemura described as Mono-ha. For Minemura, by denying "making," the artists took issue with the limited economy of the critique of art institutions to undermine and replace all established forms in any given medium with a radically anti-subjective, anti-projective project.

Following this overview, Minemura began preparing the first official exhibition on Mono-ha as historical artistic movement in 1986 at Kamakura Gallery in Kanagawa Prefecture.[267] The exhibition entitled *Mono-ha* was divided into three parts and included nine artists in total (Part 1: Yoshida Katsurō, Sekine Nobuo, Lee Ufan; Part 2: Narita Katsuhiko, Suga Kishio, Koshimizu Susumu; Part 3: Enokura Kōji, Takayama Noboru, Haraguchi Noriyuki).[268] Minemura provided an illustrated chronology of the group beginning with works from 1967 prior to *Phase-Mother Earth* and ending with *Japan—Tradition und Gegenwart* (Yoshida, Lee, Sekine, Narita, Suga, Narita, and Haraguchi) at the Stadtische Kunstalle in Dusseldorf in January 1974, and traveled to the Louisiana Museum in Denmark and Stockholm that September. The exhibition introduced the artists according

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[266] Minemura, "<Mono-ha> ni tsuite," 226.

[267] Kamakura Gallery was established by Nakamura Michiko in 1980 and became the principal gallery for artists associated with Mono-ha after this 1986 exhibition. Lee Ufan, who also lived in Kamakura, helped advise the gallery, introducing European artists such as Claude Viallat Niele Toroni, Günther Uecker, Joseph Kosuth, and Bertrand Lavier.

[268] *Mono-ha*. Part 1: Yoshida Katsurō, Sekine Nobuo, Lee U-Fan; part 2: Narita Katsuhiko, Suga Kishio, Koshimizu Susumu; part 3: Enokura Koji, Takayama Noboru, Haraguchi Noriyuki. Text by Minemura Toshiaki. (Kamakura: Kamakura Gallery, 1986).

to their university affiliation (the core artists forming "Tamabi + Lee" and associated artists Enokura and Takayama forming the Tokyo Art University of Fine Arts and Music, and Haraguchi as Nihon University affiliation). This university-based categorization inspired younger critic, Chiba Shigeo to classify the artists according to "strict" versus "broad" Mono-ha, obscuring the formal and conceptual concerns and characteristics of each artist.

Mono-ha also began to be introduced abroad in 1986. In December of that year, the artists participated in *Japon des avant-garde 1910–1970* at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, organized by Germain Viatte and Takashina Shūji. The first large-scale museum exhibition on Mono-ha in Japan occurred in 1987 with *Mono-ha and Post-Mono-ha*, curated by Minemura at the Seibu Museum of Art in Tokyo. This exhibition, inspired by Impressionism and Post-Impressionism as a model, was an attempt to chart how younger generation artists either "extended" or "detracted" from Mono-ha in order to define the group. The Post-Mono-ha artists were represented by large-scale installations using organic materials, public art projects, or the return to decorative and ornamental arts. A pared down approach was made the following year when Italian scholar, Barbara Bertozzi (who wrote her doctoral dissertation on Mono-ha in 1986) and Minemura co-organized *Monoha: La scuola delle cose* at the Museo Laboratorio di Arte Contemporanea in Rome.[269] The exhibition introduced the twelve works from 1969 to 1971 (most of which were recreations with the exception of four works) by six core artists (Koshimizu, Lee, Narita, Sekine, Suga, and Yoshida) from the February 1970 roundtable. The catalogue included Italian translations of Lee's "In Search of Encounter" and Suga's "Condition Beyond

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[269] See Barbara Bertozzi, "Il linguaggio delle cose teoria e produzione artistica del Gruppo *Mono-ha* 1968–1972" (Ph.D. diss., Università degli Studi di Venezia, 1985–86).

Existence,"[270] which were presented as manifesto-like texts. Mono-ha was also included in

Alexandra Munroe's landmark 1994 survey exhibition, *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream*

Against the Sky, which was first shown at the Yokohama Museum of Art, the Guggenheim

Museum SoHo, New York, and finally the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The most

comprehensive exhibition and catalogue on the movement to date is *Matter and Perception*

1970: Mono-ha and the Search for Fundamentals from 1995, organized by the Museum of

Fine Arts, Gifu. The exhibition included eleven artists (including Nomura Hitoshi and

Inumaki Kenji who now deny their association with Mono-ha) and toured nationally to

Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art, and

The Museum of Modern Art, Saitama. The following year in 1996, the exhibition traveled to

France to Musée d'art moderne Saint Etienne with a French-language catalogue, *Japon*

1970: Matière et perception. Le Mono-ha et la recherché des fondements. In 2000, *Mono-ha*

(School of Things) was organized by Simon Groom at Kettle's Yard at the University of

Cambridge. In 2005, *Reconsidering Mono-ha* was organized by Nakai Yasuyuki at the

National Museum of Art, Osaka. This exhibition emphasized the links between Mono-ha and

the 1960s Shizuoka-based art group Genshoku, which is associated with an aesthetic of

optical "tricks." The dates graph an after-life in an art scene that has radically changed since

the late 1960s period. Exposure to Mono-ha outside of Japan has predominantly been in

Europe (France, Italy, and UK). Lee Ufan, perhaps not only due to his artistic practice but to

the translation of his writings into French, has maintained a high profile particularly in

France and Germany, where he has spent half his time since the 1980s. The Guggenheim

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[270] See Lee Ufan, "Alla ricerca dell'incontro," trans. Barbara Bertozzi; Suga Kishio, "Oltre la situazione," trans. Bruno Forzan, *Monoha: La scuola delle cose* (Rome: De Luca; Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1988), pp. 75–80; 81–84.

retrospective dedicated to Lee in 2011, *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, signaled the first major

introduction to the artist's life work in the United States (at age 75).

Current scholarship, taking a broad view of the post-war history of Japanese avant-

garde art, locates Mono-ha in a line that goes back to Gutai in the fifties and succeeded by

Hi Red Center and Fluxus. Chiba Shigeo, for example, published an historical account of

Mono-ha in *Geijutsu shinchō* magazine in 1983 (reprinted in his book 2000 book, *Art as*

Deviation: Japanese Contemporary Art 1945-1985),[271] which is embellished with dismissive

criticisms of Lee and Suga's writings. Chiba appropriated Minemura's theory to place

Mono-ha on the opposite end of the spectrum of Japanese conceptualism, where he

conceived it as a nihilist rejection of artistic production. While striving to lay out a detailed

exhibition chronology, Chiba creates categories in which artists are ranked according to

university affiliation, and based on a purist aesthetic concerning especially the

manipulation of materials. Further, he sees Lee's rejection of expression and production

(and assertion of "opening up the world as-it-is" through Lee's particular lexicon of "an

encounter") as a dead-end solution to the problems confronting contemporary art in

modernity. For Chiba, Lee's efforts were aimed at redeeming the Japanese art scene from

being colonized by Western, or "modern," models that fit with *kindai hihan* (近代批判), or

critique of modernity. According to Chiba, targeting Western modern thought enabled

Mono-ha artists "for the first time" to carve out a unique, interpretive context that was not

overlain with an instrumentalist Western ontology. However, Chiba assimilates this to his

general thesis that posits postwar Japanese art as a story of "deviations," a linear history of

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[271] See Chiba Shigeo, "Mono-ha" *Geijutsu shinchō* (November 1983) and "Mono-ha," *Gendai bijutsu itsudatsu-shi 1945-1985* (Art as deviation: Japanese contemporary art 1945-1985). (Tokyo: Shōbun-sha, 1986): pp. 118–164.

practices that are defined by their ambition of subverting the paradigms of the art

establishment in order to forge a Japanese narrative out of materials that do not derive

from the West.

Lee's philosophic ambition to re-evaluate the foundation of art in Japan through a

critique of the Cartesian subject was the subject of much heated criticism in Japan by critics

and artists who detected hints of a radically Asianist or nationalist agenda. These critics

have argued that the group's central motivation stems from a romantic desire to assert a

Japanese authenticity against the country's long-standing "blind" appropriation of modern

Western culture.[272] The most notable advocate of this view is Minemura Toshiaki. In the

essay, "A Blast of Nationalism in the Seventies" (1984),[273] he links the desire for an

alternative path with a fetishization of the Asian sensibility and contextualizes Mono-ha as

part of a nascent nationalism in Japanese art of the 1970s. He asserts that artists of the

period sought a spiritual secession from Western thought and culture, the necessity of

which is shown by the "contemporary sicknesses" of Japan deriving from " the excessive

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[272] The issue of Japan's modernization was debated in a conference entitled "*Kindai no Chōkoku* (Overcoming Modernity)," which took place in July 1942. The conference gathered scholars from disciplines ranging from literary to film criticism, poetry, music, philosophy, science, psychology, and history. Thirteen members convened from the Japan Romantic School, Kyoto School of Philosophy, and the Literary Society. The principal purpose of the conference was to question the meaning of Japan's war in light of its modernizing experience, but discussions largely focused on the historical influx of Western knowledge into Japanese intellectual thought since the late 19th century. The debates presented complex binaries, most explicitly, between the utilization of Western knowledge as an operational instrument for progress since the Meiji period versus the intellectual movements behind Japanese native wisdom. In the postwar period, Takeuchi Yoshimi problematized the conferees inability to distinguish conflicting claims of Westernization and modernization, and in particular, between Japan's intellectual struggle with the West versus its own colonial expansion in Asia. See Harry Harootunian, "Visible Discourses/Invisible Ideologies," *Postmodernism and Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 63; Takeuchi Yoshimi, "Kindai no chōkoku" (1959) *Kindai no chōkoku* (Tokyo: Fūzanbō, 1979).

[273] Minemura Toshiaki, "A Blast of Nationalism in the Seventies," *Art in Japan Today II 1970-1983* (Tokyo: Japan Foundation, 1984), p. 17. This text was written for a publication on contemporary Japanese art in 1984 and sponsored by the Japan Foundation, a governmental organization funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

anthropocentricism and modern rationalism which originated with the West." He describes

Lee's contributions in particular as "eradicating the remnants of modernism"[274] and

liberating the art-making process from Japan's dependence on Western models. Although

Minemura recognizes the historical necessity for the assimilation of Western art as a basis

for the development of the modern art scene in Japan, he emphasizes its corruptive

influence on Japanese art and situates Mono-ha's activities as an affirmation, rather than a

critique, of Japanese culture. Minemura's nationalist rhetoric and essentializing discourse

conflates the political attitude of certain of Lee's influences with Lee's marginalized

presence as a Korean national working in Japan, his reception of contemporary Western art,

and Lee's consciousness of marked differences between his predecessors and the

ideological and philosophical themes running through Mono-ha's work.

Another influential assessment of Mono-ha's art is offered by American curator,

Alexandra Munroe. In her seminal survey exhibition of postwar Japanese art, "Japanese Art

After 1945: Scream against the Sky," Munroe, like Minemura, locates the "avant-gardism" of

the group as tied to the reclaiming of "Asian-ness." She argues in the exhibition catalogue

essay, "The Laws of Situation: Mono-ha and Beyond the Sculptural Paradigm" (1994), that

the group aimed to give "form and meaning to their particular world view" by positing Asia

as central. According to Munroe, Mono-ha's work was an "historic effort generated by the

passions of cultural nationalism to deconstruct the monolith of modernism."[275] Referencing

the postwar critique of modernity, which she says, "called for the installation of a genuinely

comprehensive Japanese culture," she claims that a new division emerged in the sixties

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[274] Ibid.

[275] Munroe, "Mono-ha: The Laws of Situation," p. 257.

between Japanized versus Westernized views that did not reduce to the old nationalist

opposition between Japanese tradition and the modern West. Following Minemura,

Munroe too finds Mono-ha's discourse Asia-centric, ignoring the signs that Lee and Suga

were taking concepts from Western *and* Eastern thought that disactivated a predominant

dualism, she relies on the modernist binary of West and East to understand what Mono-ha

artists were getting at. Lee's critique, in Munroe's hands, becomes one of the most

thoughtful "protests against dominant Euro-centric art theory in favor of a radically new

artistic standard."[276] In a somewhat paradoxical move, Munroe attributes a Euro-centric

model of avant-gardism onto the group in order to characterize their effort as a restitution

of Asian centrality. Both Minemura and Munroe make the problematic claim that Mono-ha's

emphasis on the local is the equivalent of asserting Asia/Japan against the West. But this

identification is problematic, in as much as the group's core critique of modernism is

clearly situated in the context of Japan and as part *of* a Japanese thematic. Minemura and

Munroe continue to replicate a Self-Other binarism that asserts a clear-cut opposition

between Asianist or nationalist practice and Western modernism, as though the

phenomenological and existential theories of "Western" thinkers, appropriated and

integrated into "Eastern" ontologies by Nishida, were not of decisive importance for Mono-

ha.

With the advent of a version of that allows us to split up the supposed homogeneity

of such analytic units as "West" and "East", we can come at Mono-ha from a different angle.

My point here is not that Mono-ha was oriented towards what has become known as

"hybridity." I refer to Homi Bhabha's definition of the term, which he defines as the "result

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[276] Ibid.

of a paradoxical form of colonial resistance," whereby "the local community strengthens its

ability to withstand the universalizing influence of hegemonic Western culture by

deliberately learning those of its rhetorical and technological skills unavailable in the

indigenous environment."[277] Most recently, U.S.-based Japanese art critic Reiko Tomii has

condensed Mono-ha, Japanese conceptualism, and Bikyoto into the category of "Non-

Art."[278] She states: "In the latter half of the 1960s, practitioners continued to push forward,

cutting a wide swath of experimental terrain into Non-Art of conceptualism and Mono-ha,

wherein the mandate no longer concerned 'making' in the conventional sense but explicitly

'not making.' (To be more precise, Non-Art even rejected Anti-Art's 'rebellion against

making.')"[279] The distinction between Non-Art and 1960s Anti-Art (*han-geijutsu*), according

to this account, is a matter of degree: the former artists insisted that the latter, and indeed

all of Japan's avant-garde, had not followed the logic of transgressing art's ideological and

institutional frameworks to its ultimate end. Centered predominantly in Tokyo, Anti-Art

encompassed a plethora of performance-based collectives that attacked the institutionally

sanctioned categories of the dominant mainstream (i.e., conventional Japanese painting

and sculpture). Tomii adds a sociological dimension to Chiba's description of the logic of

Non-Art, placing it in the context of a struggle between internationalism and national

identity. Tomii credits the Non-Art artists with recognizing the need for a new vocabulary

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[277] See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994) quoted in Matsui Midori, "Beyond Signs: Hybridity in Japanese Art," *The Age of Anxiety* exh. cat. (Ontario: Harborfront Centre, 1995), p. 65.

[278] She states, "In Japanese art, the 1960s began with Anti-Art, which was replaced by Non-Art toward the end of the decade, typically pursued by the artists of conceptualism, Mono-ha, and Bikyōtō." See Reiko Tomii, "Geijutsu on Their Mind: Memorable Words on 'Anti-Art'," *Art, Anti-Art, Non-Art: Experimentations in the Public Sphere* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007).

[279] See Reiko Tomii, "After the 'Descent to the Everyday'," p. 52.

to "transcend" the patterns of thought associated with older forms of art. At the same time, she is sympathetic to Bikyōtō artists, notably Hikosaka Naoyoshi, who criticized "Lee's negation of consciousness's agency of representation [for leading] to his absorption in modern irrationalism and mystic naturalism, as well as a disregard of artists' social and historical contexts."[280]

The Non-Art attitude resonates internationally with Process and Post-Minimal art of the 1960s and early 1970s—in particular, the ways in which questioning the autonomy of the art object prompted a reevaluation of the practice and function of art. By rethinking categories and institutional frameworks and shifting inquiry about the basis of art from the ontological to the phenomenological, Mono-ha undertook a critique of modernism's relation to systems of power rooted in the episteme of representation. In the case of Japan, national and international political pressures during the late 1960s resulted in a critique that was marked by its cultural differences with the U.S. and Europe. Critical of both western intervention—and in particular, the role of the U.S. in Vietnam and the Japanese government's uncritical support for America—and its own cultural nationalism, Japanese literary, artistic, and political circles reconsidered the nation's own modernist development, including the adoption of western enlightenment philosophy. Japanese modernism involved the emergence of cultural nationalism and the political oppositions between progressive left and right state ideologies concurrent with the nation's drive for economic prosperity and political power. Some cultural practitioners determined that these structures only worked to reinforce the "self" or "state" in relation to an "other." They sought to open up a critically expansive third space that evaded dichotomies such as Japan

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[280] Tomii, "Historicizing 'Contemporary Art': Some Discursive Practices in Gendai Bijutsu in Japan." *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 12, no. 3 (Winter 2004): 634.

versus the west and left versus right in which the world system seemed caught. In this spirit of critique, many cultural practitioners engaged in a fundamental revision of the philosophy of perception to encompass aspects of traditional Japanese philosophy and contemporary thought in order to redraw, or abolish, reified dualistic boundaries.

To clarify further, rather than positing "Asia" or "Japan" as central and opposed to the West, Mono-ha's work, in fact, carves out liminal zones in which Japan, the West, and a non-geopolitical entity co-exist. Their work attempts to simultaneously break out of not only the construct of a "universal" stance (West) but a *nationalist* stance (Japan) as well.[281] In other words, Mono-ha's cultural resistance is against the dominant cultural self-image of Japan *itself*, which manifests itself in the nation's incessant drive rooted in the historic Meiji opening to the West that imposed rational utility and instrumentality as the foundation of socio-economic life. However, it is a mistake to identify the West solely with instrumental rationality, for a vital current in Western modernity is concerned with the critique of instrumental rationality. In the same way, Mono-ha did not articulate its critique of contemporary Japan in reference to a romantic vision of a pre-contact Japan, as presumed by many critics. Lee's assimilation of Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Nishida is too sophisticated to allow him to fall back on an unreflexive nostalgia. He does critique the foundation of Japan's modernization process, but he does so by attempting to de-structure the hegemonic and essentialist notions of "Japan" and the "West." His theory actually denies the nationalist move, and thus, the critics' positing of Mono-ha's work as nationalist

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[281] My point here is not that Mono-ha was oriented towards what has become known as "hybridity." I refer to Homi Bhabha's definition of the term, which he defines as the "result of a paradoxical form of colonial resistance," whereby "the local community strengthens its ability to withstand the universalizing influence of hegemonic Western culture by deliberately learning those of its rhetorical and technological skills unavailable in the indigenous environment." See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994) quoted in Matsui Midori, "Beyond Signs: Hybridity in Japanese Art," *The Age of Anxiety* exh. cat. (Ontario: Harborfront Centre, 1995), p. 65.

or Asianist misses the point. Japan itself is an "object" that activates a history, validating

itself through the West. It creates itself through its opposite, upon which it becomes

dependent. Lee disputes the validity of that logic of opposition. Mono-ha was more

interested in the way opposites can become complicit and co-exist—exemplified in Sekine's

practice in the balance between displacing the earth in a hole and retaining that earth as

the hole's substance in *Phase-Mother Earth* creating a tension between the heavy and the

weightless in *Phase-Sponge*, or between reflection in a mirror—which has no substance—

and the violent force of a boulder set atop a mirrored column in *Phase of Nothingness*.

An Asianist interpretation of Mono-ha as in Minemura and Munroe distorts Mono-

ha's program and so does the characterization of the group as a form of "Non-Art" as

proposed by Tomii, which imposes a minimalist framework on the group that is foreign to

its outlook. Furthermore, in the domestic narrative of Japan's post-war art scene as

structured by "deviations," Chiba's linear history of practices that subvert the conventions

of the art establishment in an attempt to forge a Japanese narrative separate from the West

ends up producing a discourse that is a wholly reactive enterprise. My analysis has gone

back, instead, to the Mono-ha artists themselves, and how they articulated their art in a

particular artistic, social, and historical context from 1968 to 1972. I have accorded Lee

Ufan, a central role in the discoveries and theoretical framework that make up the Mono-ha

moment because in many ways he was the theoretical leader of the group.

Unfortunately, scholarship on the group's practice is virtually non-existent in the U.S.

and Europe, aside from the groups' inclusions in survey exhibitions, until recently. My work

serves to counteract the works' loss discursively and articulate the central role played by

Mono-ha in the postwar Japanese art scene after Gutai and Fluxus, groups that have loomed

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large in the scholarship on contemporary Japanese art and the global avant-gardes. Given

the synchronicity between Mono-ha's program and practice and post-minimalist practices

in the U.S. and Europe, I frame the group's works both within and beyond the particular

socio-political condition of Japan after World War II. While English language art

scholarship of this area is sparse, due to its position between the geographic fields of

Japanese art and contemporary Euro-American art history, my work, in tandem with that of

a handful of new scholars such as Ming Tiampo's work on Gutai and Midori Yoshimoto's

work on Fluxus women artists in New York,[282] seeks to challenge this neglect (and the

historical distortion that it creates) by introducing a methodology that complicates the

reductive binary exoticism under which Japanese art is so often received (Japan vs. the

West, tradition vs. modern) and to specify how Mono-ha might ultimately be positioned at

the wake of Japan's contested postmodernity.

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[282] Ming Tiampo, *Gutai: Decentering Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Midori Yoshimoto, *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

FIGURES

Fig. 1 Yamaguchi Katsuhiro, *Wire Mesh Sculpture* (*Kanaami chōkoku*), 1961. Wire mesh, 54 x 32 x 35 cm. Private collection
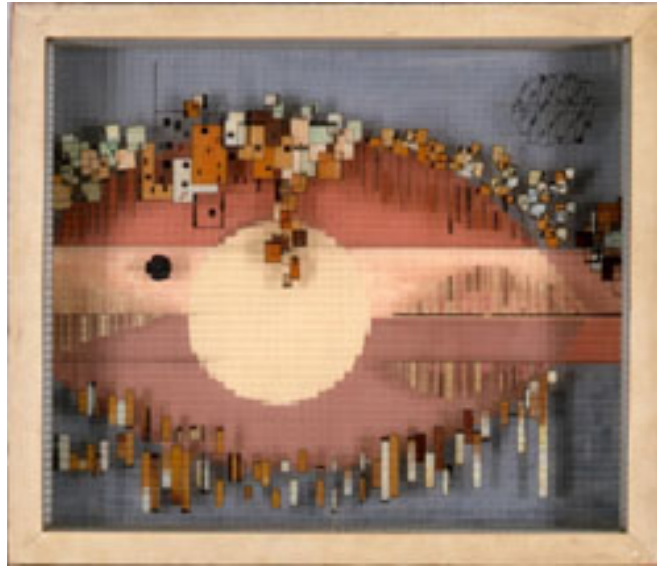
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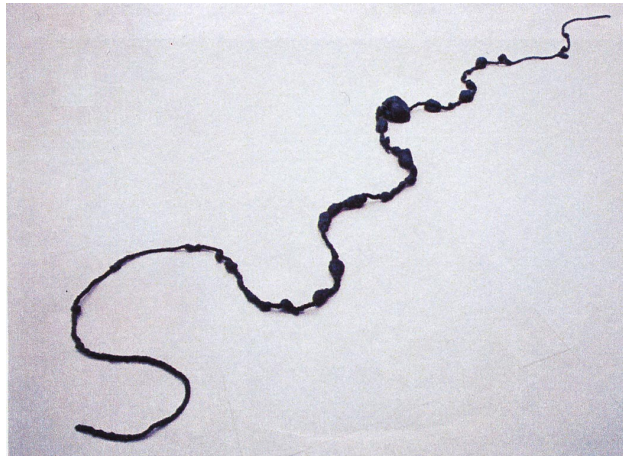
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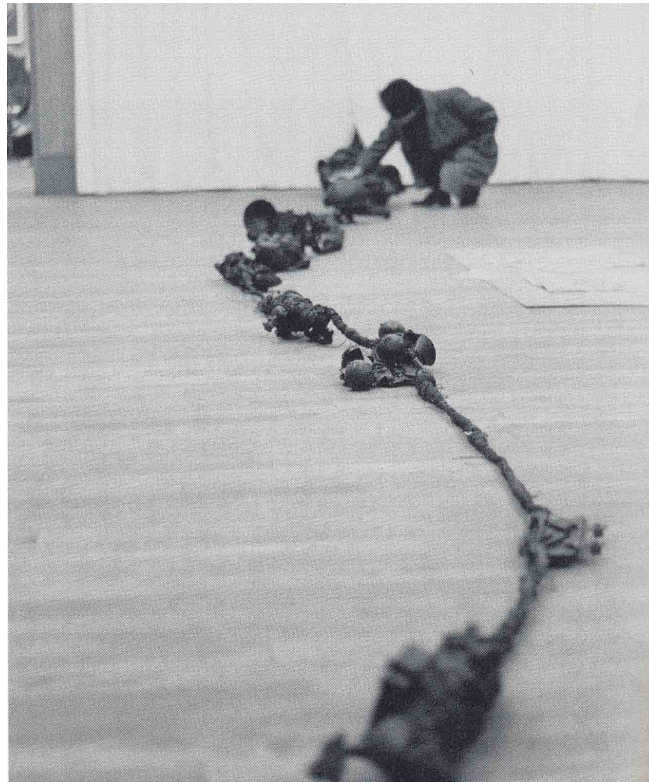
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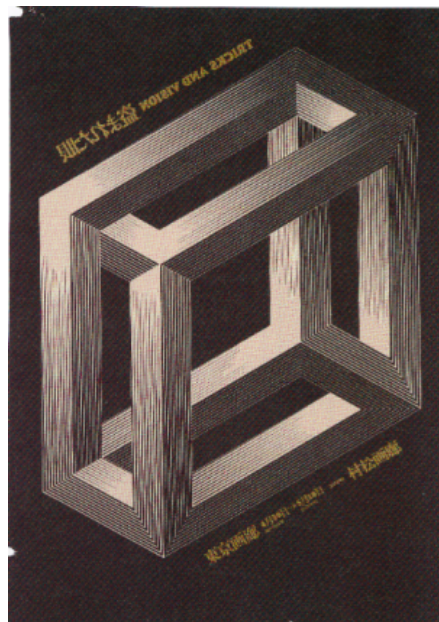
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Installation view, *10th Tokyo Biennale—Between Man and Matter*, Tokyo
Metropolitan Art Museum, May 10–30, 1970
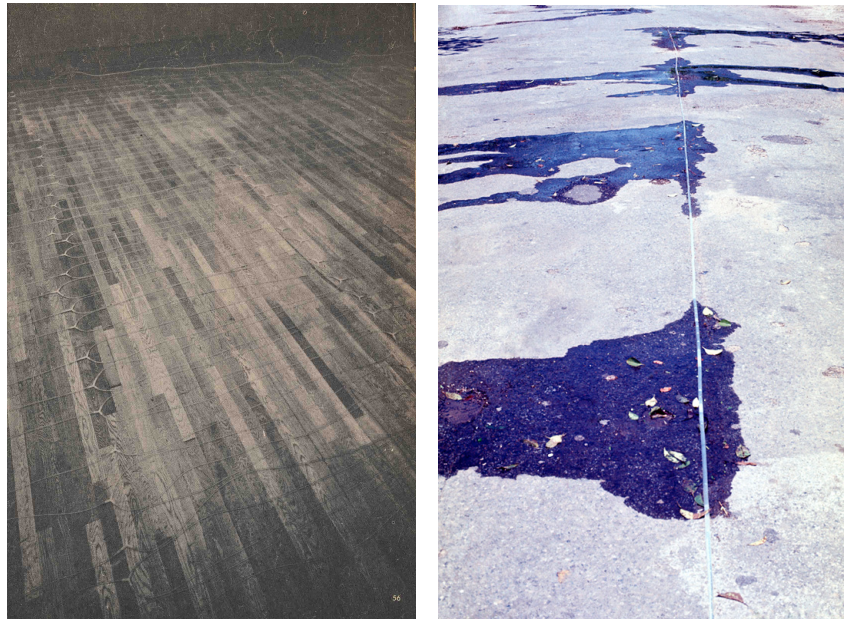
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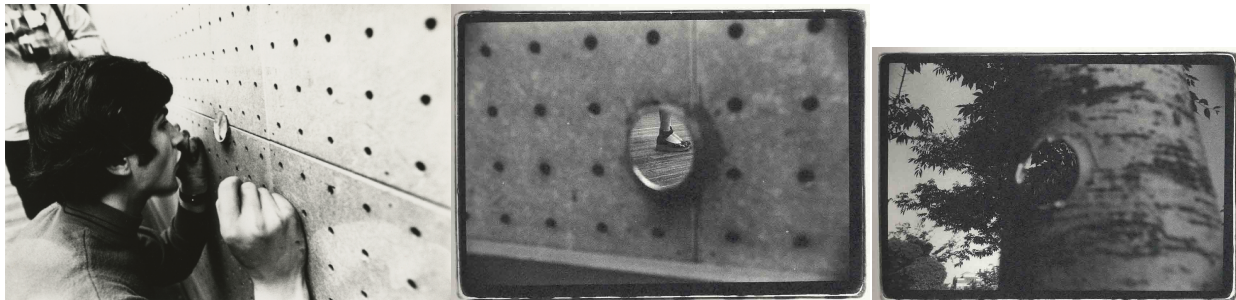
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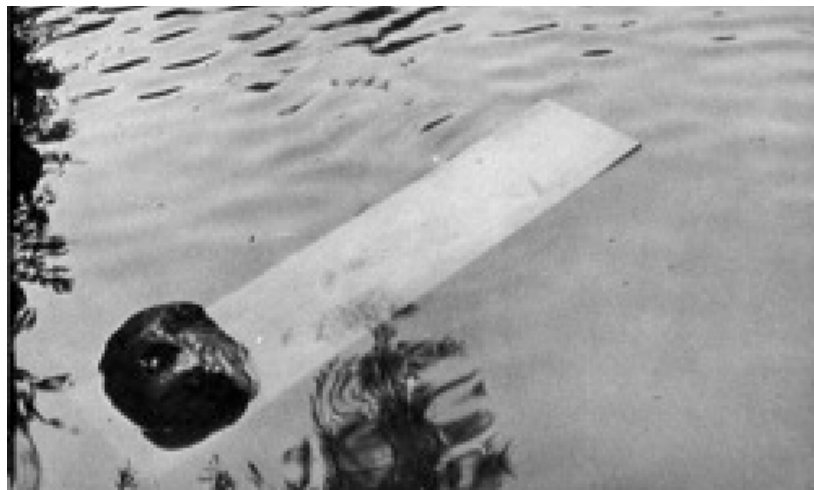
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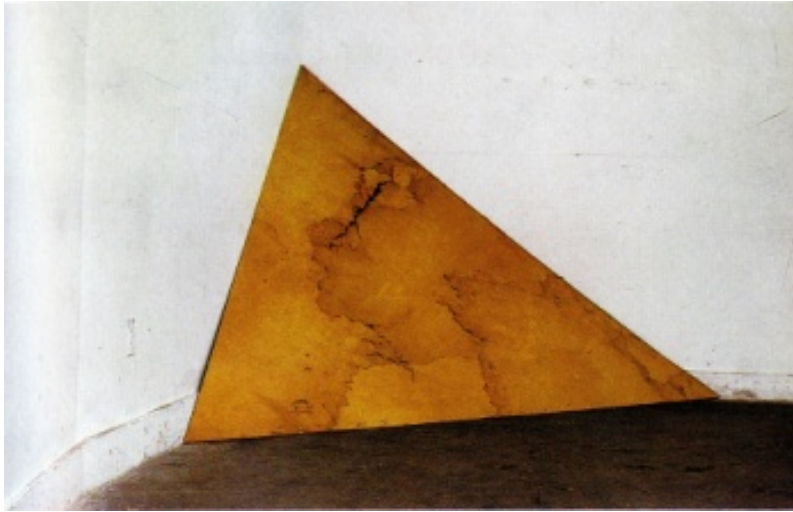
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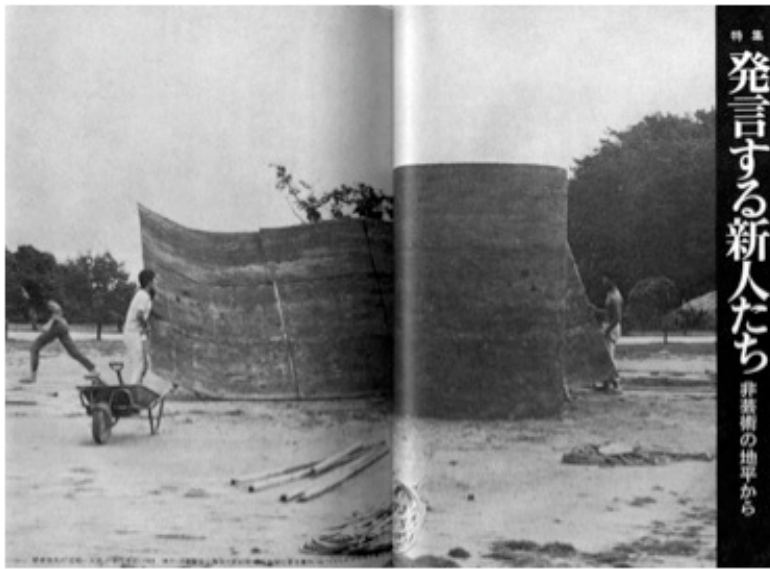
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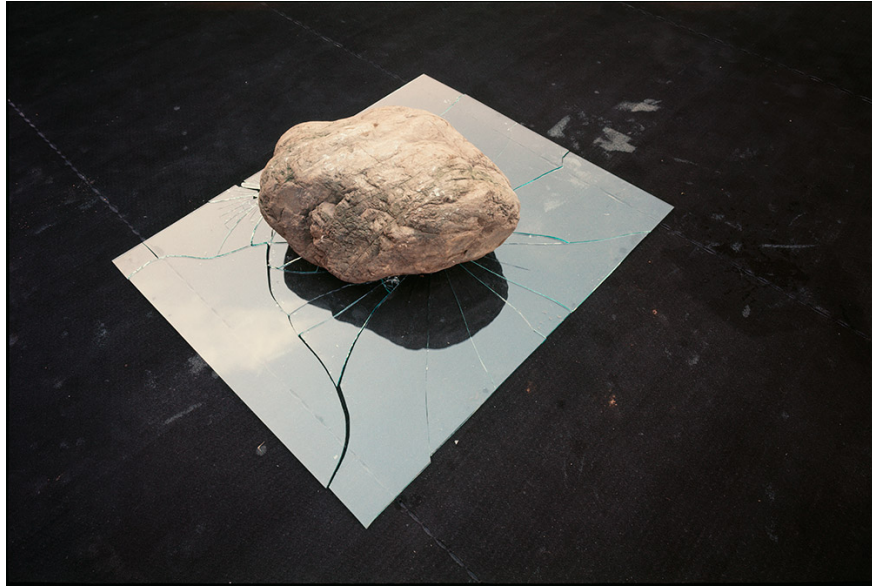
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Published in *Bijutsu techō*, February 1970. Photo: Nakajima Kō
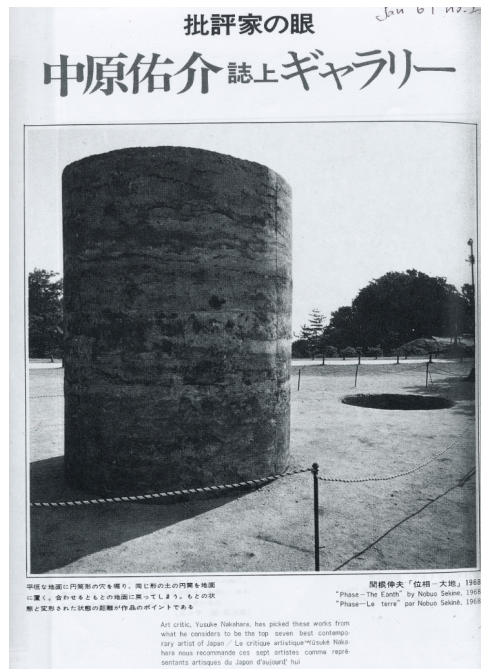
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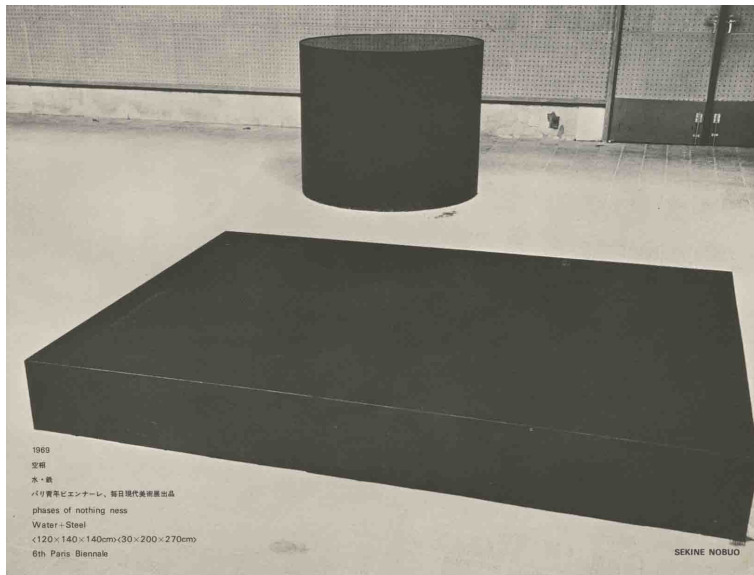
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Fig. 36   Lee Ufan (right) with students at "B-semi," Fujimichō, Yokohama. July 8, 1971
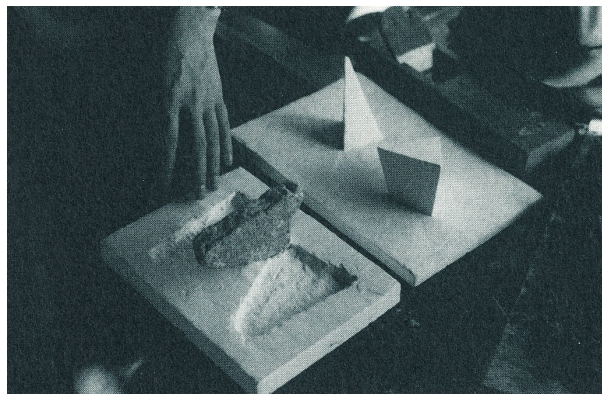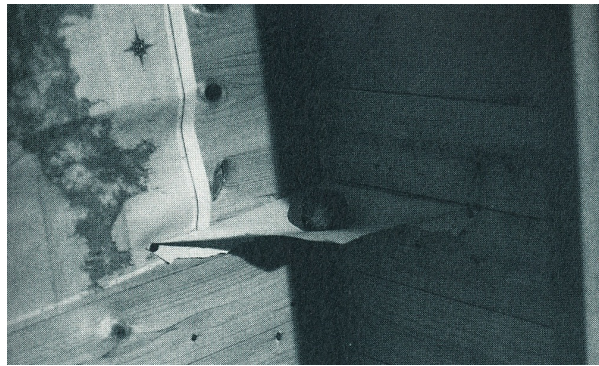
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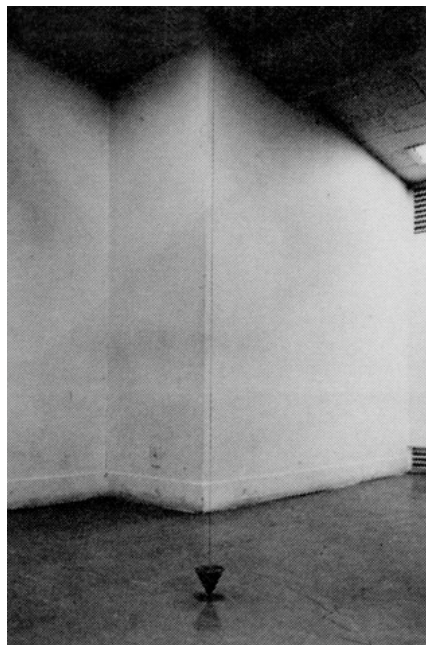
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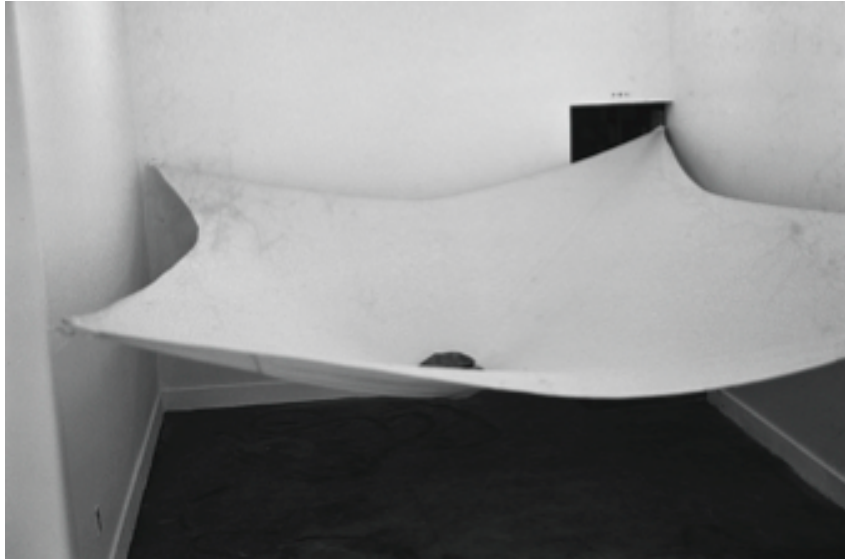
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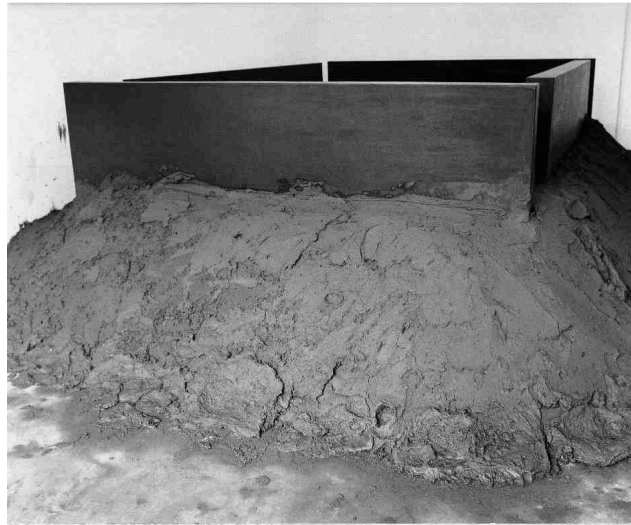
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250 x 150 x 160 cm. *1st Contemporary International Sculpture Exhibition*, August 1–
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1970. Collection: Louisiana Museum, Denmark.
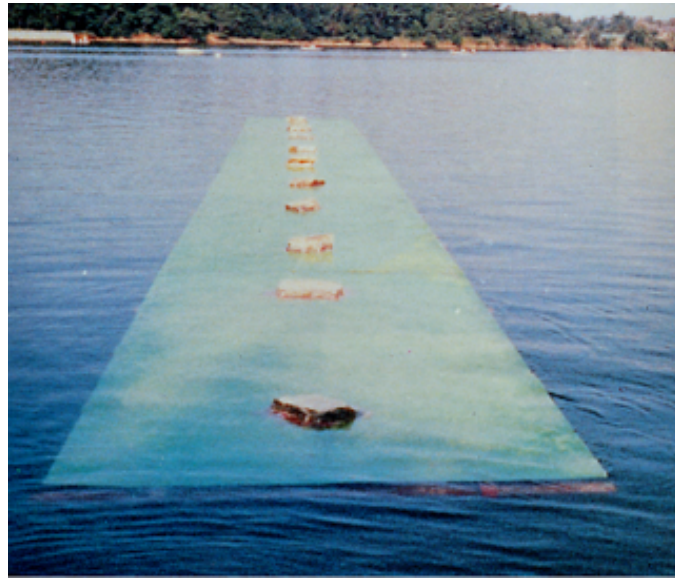
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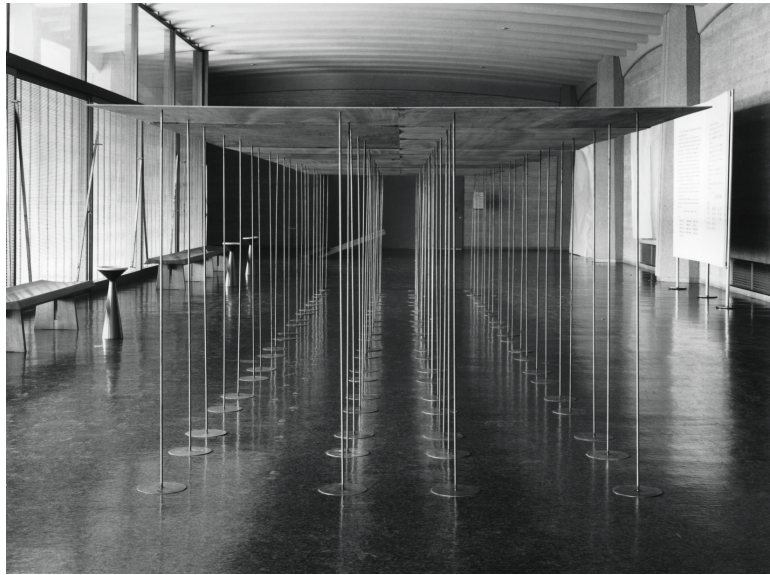
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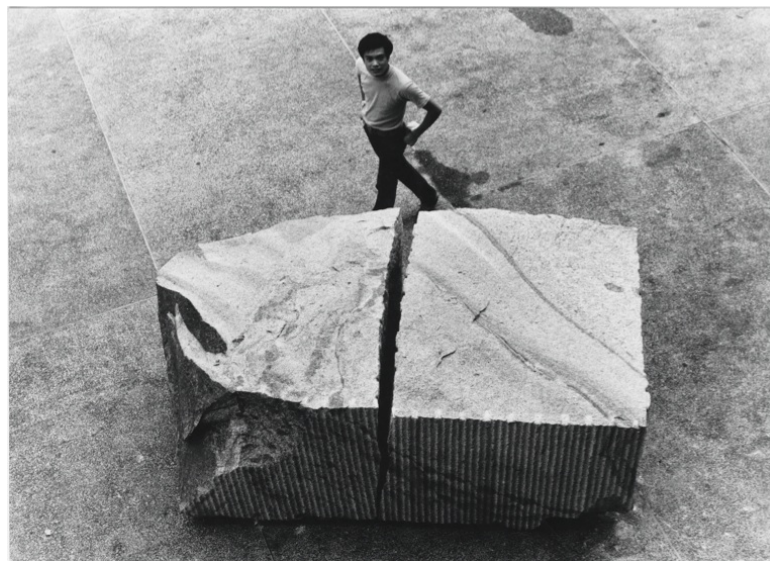
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Fig. 60   Suga Kishio, *Unnamed Situation* (*Mumei jōkyō*), 1970. Wood, walls.
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view, *August 1970—Aspects of New Japanese Art*, The National Museum of Modern
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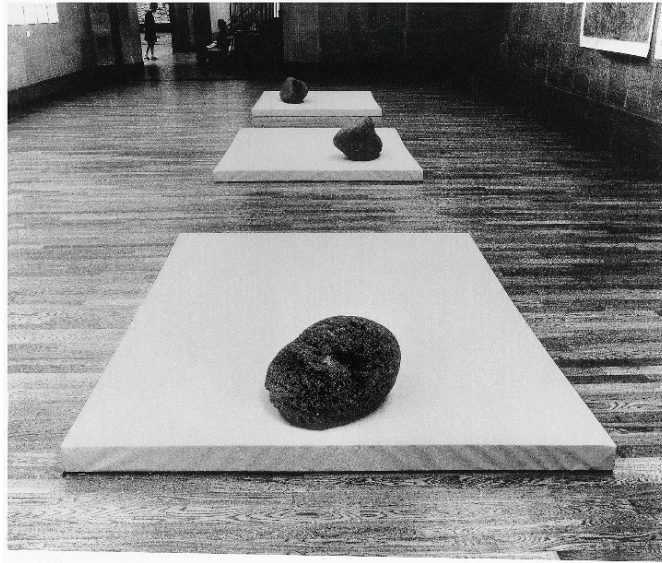
Fig. 62   Lee Ufan, *Relatum* (formerly *Situation*) (*Kankeikō*), 1971. Stones, canvas, 50 x 200 x 1000 cm overall. Installation view, *10th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan—Man and Nature*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, May 10–30, 1971

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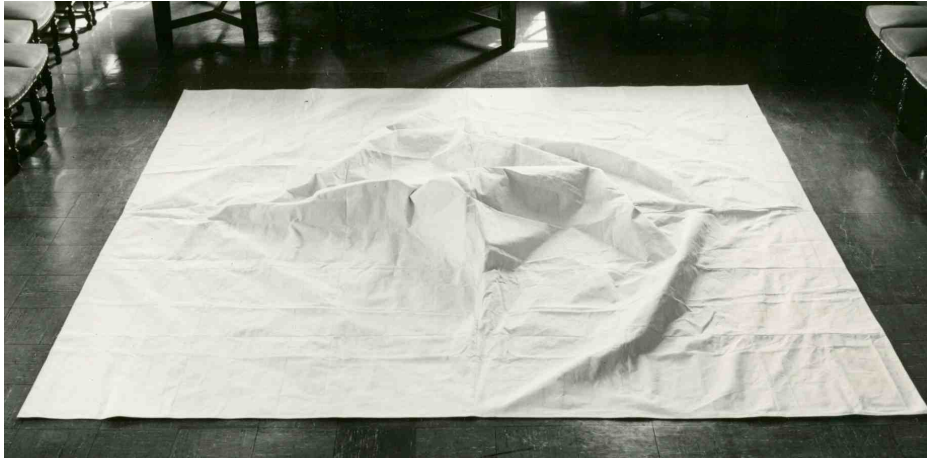
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1969. Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris
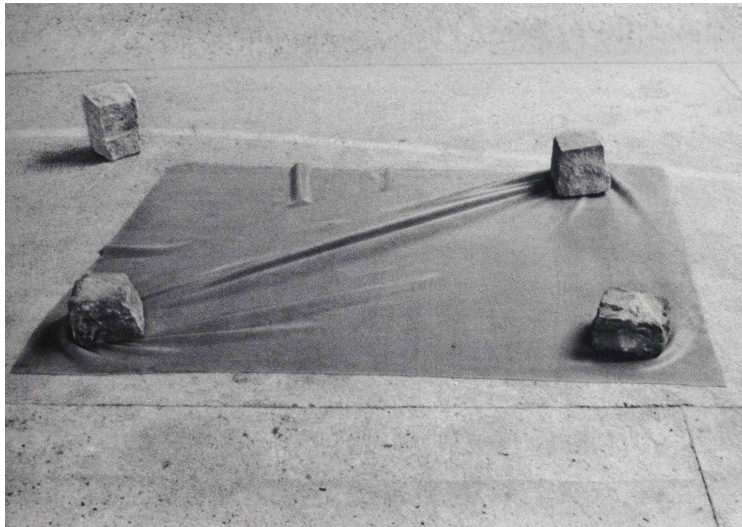
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Exhibition brochure, recto and verso
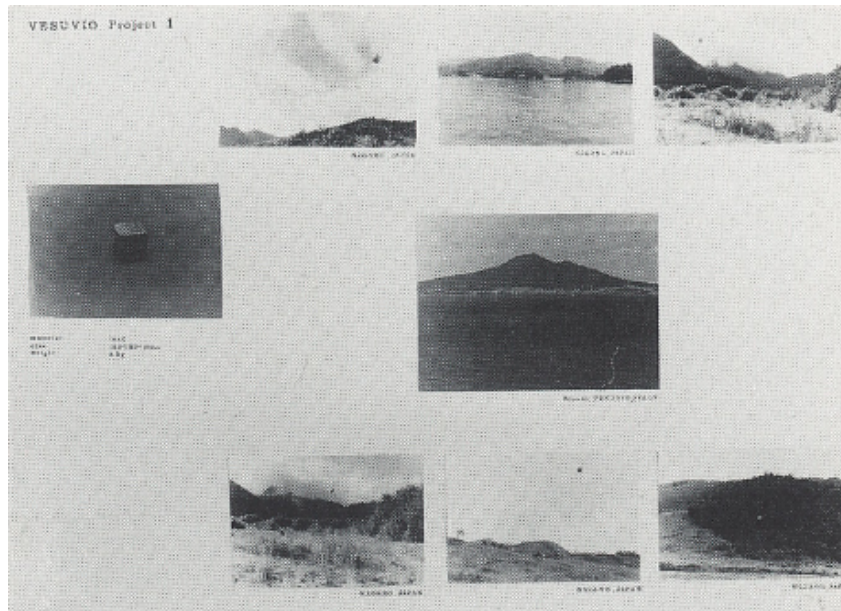
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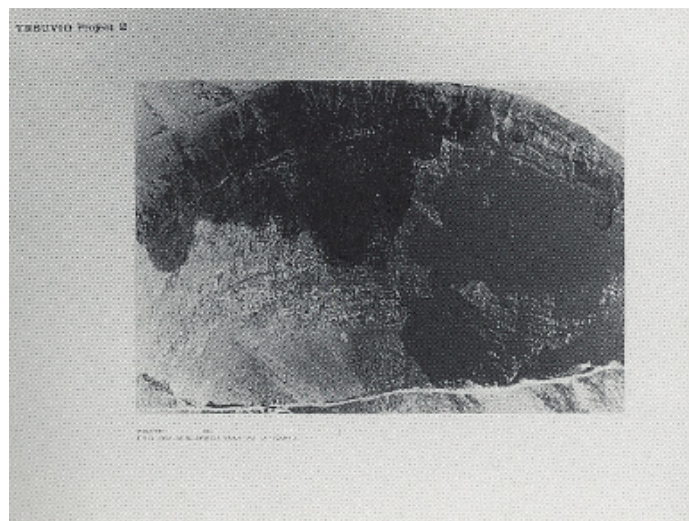
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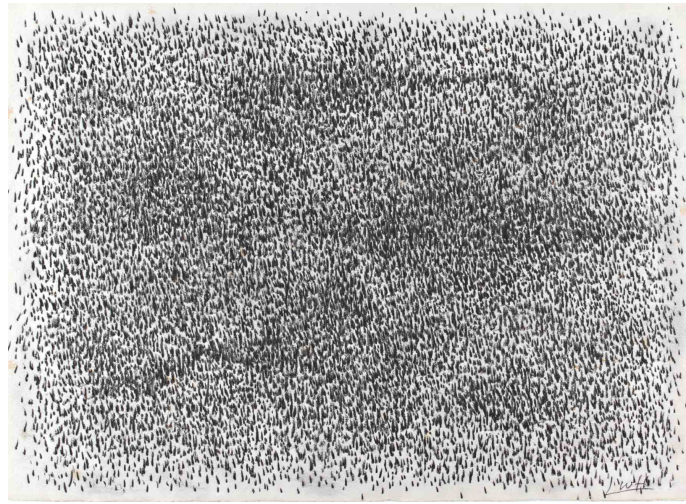
Fig. 71   Lee Ufan, *Untitled* (*Mudai*), 1964, Graphite on paper, 56 x 76.5 cm. Collection
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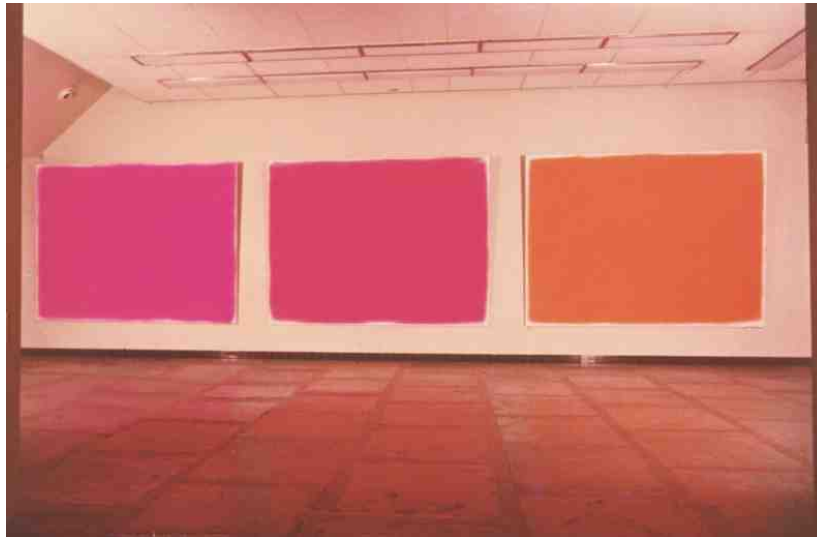
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Spray paint on canvas, three sheets, 220 x 290 cm each. Installation view, *Contemporary
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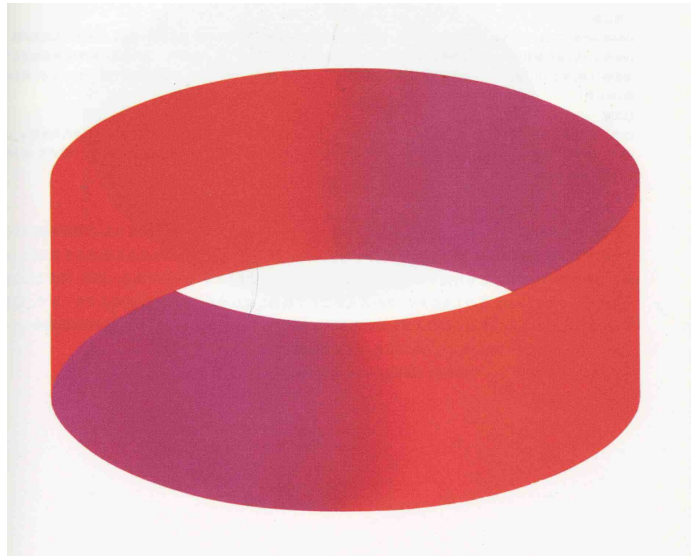
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Fig. 75   Lee Ufan, *Things and Words* (*Mono to kotoba*), front steps of Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum. *9th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, May 10–30, 1969.

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Paper and glue. 15 x 600 x 220 cm overall. Installation view, *9th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, May 10–30, 1969
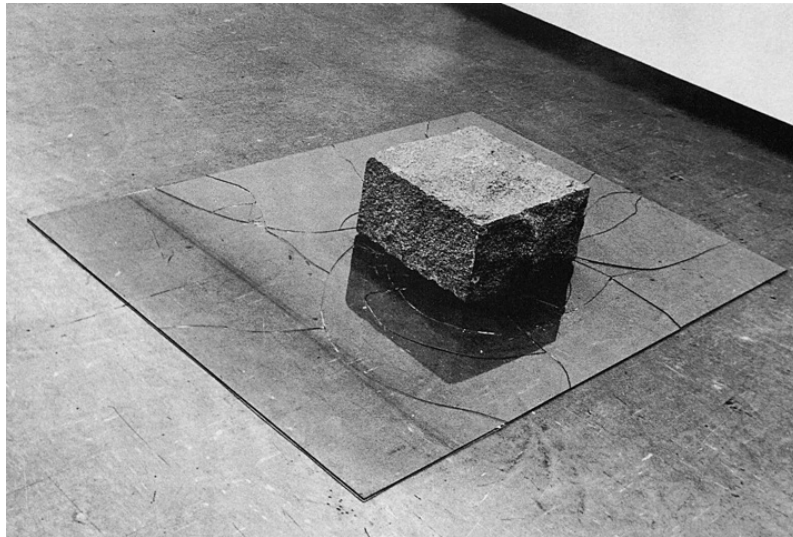
Fig. 77   Lee Ufan, *Relatum* (formerly *Phenomena and Perception B*), 1969.
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Fig. 78   Lee Ufan, *Relatum* (formerly *Phenomena and Perception A*), 1969. Stones and
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Installation view, *9th Trends in Contemporary Art*, National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto,
August 19–September 23, 1969
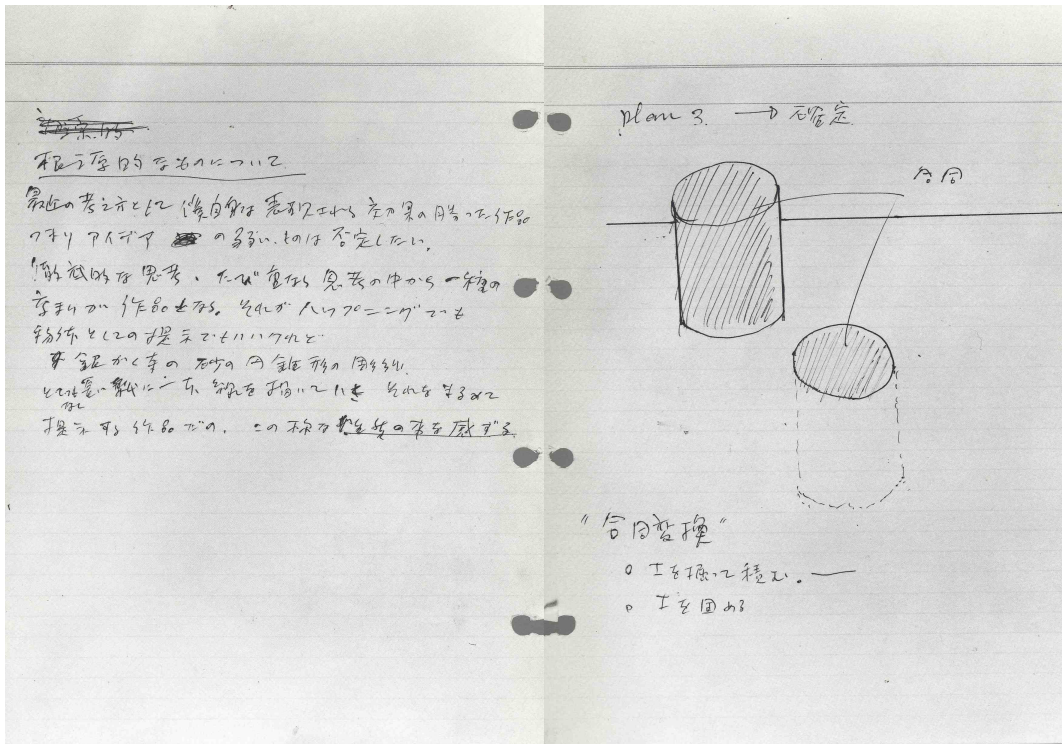
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Left: Sekine Nobuo and Koshigemachi Yoriko digging the hole.
Right: Koshimizu Susumu with cylinder
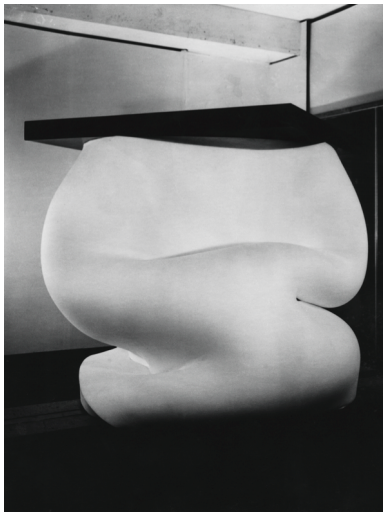
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Store, Ikebukuro, Tokyo, November 16–27, 1968

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Fig. 83 Takamatsu Jirō, *Oneness of 16 Pine Logs* (*16 no sugi no tantai*), 1970. Pine logs, approx. 112 x 42 x 42 cm each. *10th Tokyo Biennale: Between Man and Matter*. Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum. May 10–30, 1970

Fig. 84 Takamatsu Jirō, *Oneness of 36* (*36 no no tantai*), 1970. Pine logs, approx. 50 x 50 cm each. *10th Tokyo Biennale: Between Man and Matter*. Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum. May 10–30, 1970
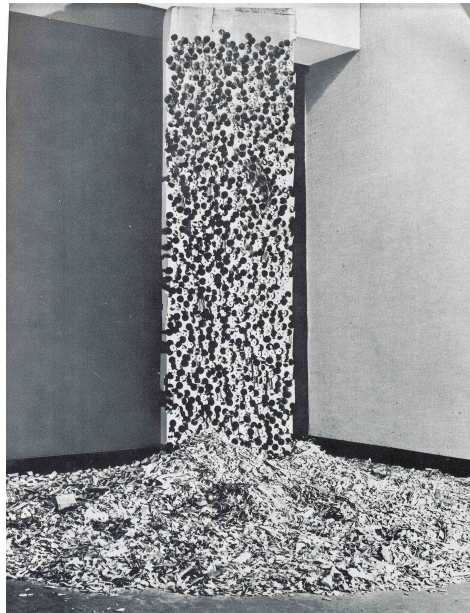
Fig. 85   Terada Takehiro, *Displacement I* (*Hen'i I*), 1970. Chipped wood. Installation view, solo exhibition, Akiyama Gallery, Tokyo. October 27–November 1, 1970

Fig. 86   Yoshida Katsurō, *650W x 60W*, 1970. Electric cord, light bulbs. Electric cord: 60 m, Lightbulbs: 650W and 60W. Installation view, *Human Documents,* Tokyo Gallery, May 11–23, 1970

Fig. 87   Suga Kishio *Infinite Situation I* (window), 1970. Wood blocks, 20 x 20 x 150 cm each. Installation view, *Trends in Contemporary Art*, Kyoto National Museum of Modern Art, 1970, July 1–Aug. 9, 1970

Fig. 88   Lee Ufan, *Relatum* (formerly *Phenomena and Perception B*), 1971. Stones, steel plate, and glass. Installation view, *7th Youth Paris Biennale*, Parc Floral de Paris, Bois de Vincennes, Sept 24–Nov. 1, 1971

Fig. 89   Lee Ufan, *Relatum* (formerly *Language*) (*Kankeikō* [formerly *Kotoba*]), 1971. Cushions, stones, and light, Installation view, *U-fan Lee*, Pinar Gallery, Tokyo, January 9–23, 1971.

Fig. 90   Robert Morris, *Untitled (Three L-Beams)*, 1965. Plywood beams, 8 x 8 x 2 feet. Installation view, exhibition Leo Castelli Gallery, 1965
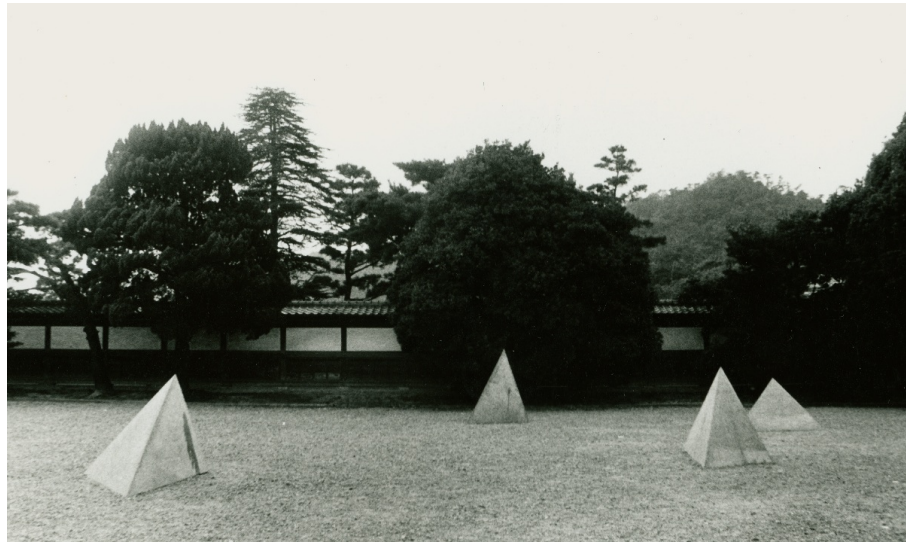
Fig. 91   Koshimizu Susumu, *From Surface to Surface (a tetrahedron)* (*Hyōmen kara hyōmen e* [*tetorahedoron*]), 1972. Cement. Four tetrahedrons, 150 x 120 x 130 cm each. *3rd Kobe Suma Rikyū Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition*, Sept. 10–Oct. 22, 1972. Two views

Fig. 92   Barry Le Va, *On Center Shatter–or–Shatterscatter (Within the Series of Layered Pattern Acts)*, 1968-1971

Fig. 93   Suga Kishio, *Infinite Situation II (Steps)* (*Mugen jōkyō*), 1970. Sand and staircase. Installation view, *Trends in Contemporary Art*, Kyoto National Museum of Modern Art, 1970, July 1–Aug. 9, 1970
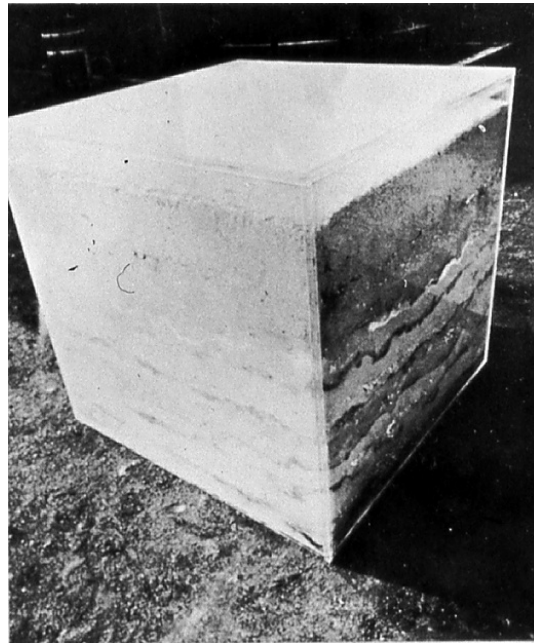
Fig. 94　　　　Suga Kishio, *Layered Space* (*Sekisō kūkan*), 1968. Acrylic board, sawdust, cotton, ashes, plastic dust, soil, 100 x 100 x 100 cm. Artist's studio, Tokyo

Fig. 95　　　Suga Kishio, *Kirokutai (Art & Document)* cover, 1970
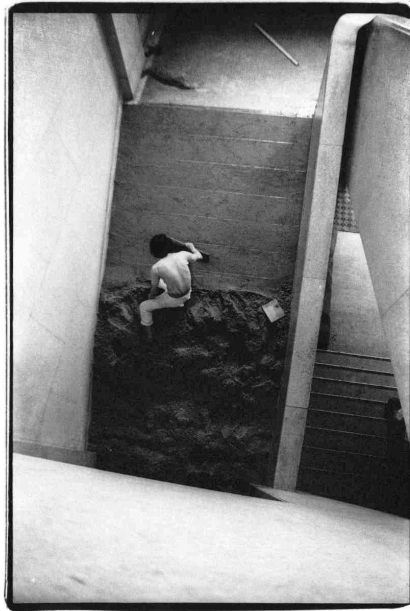
Fig. 96   Suga Kishio, *Infinite Situation II (Steps)*. Production shot. Photo: ANZAÏ

Fig. 97   Suga Kishio, *Knowledge Situation* (*Shiki kyō*), 1970. *Outdoor exhibition* (*Ya-ten*) series

Fig. 98   Suga Kishio, *Located Situation*, 1971.
Outdoor exhibition (*Ya-ten*) series
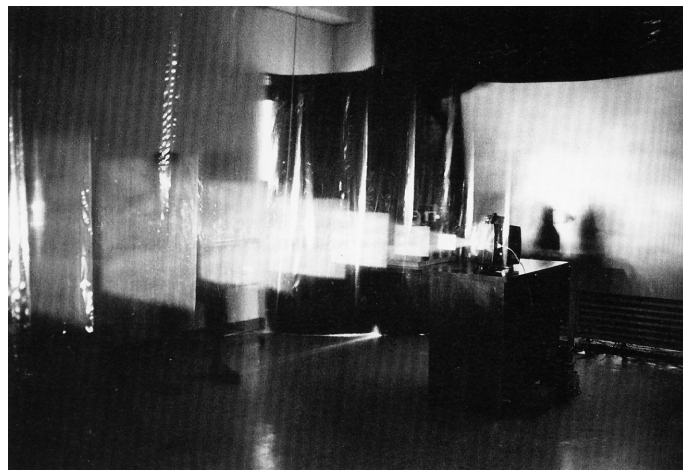
Fig. 99   Yamanaka Nobuo, *Quadrangle of a River*, 1972. Vinyl sheets, slide projector

Fig. 100   Suga, *Limited Situation* (*Rinkai jōkyō*), 1970. Stone, wood, concrete, 47 x 100 x 200 cm overall. Installation view, *5th Japan Art Festival*, The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, July 11–26, 1970. Photo: ANZAÏ

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Enokura Kōji (1942–1995) was born in Tokyo and earned an M.F.A. in painting at Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music in 1969. Enokura's oil blots, leathers, walls, molds, and crevices emphasize the surfaces of prepared materials such as paper soaked in oil and grease, as in *Place* (1970), which was exhibited at the 1970 *Tokyo Biennale: Between Man and Matter*, or a triangular corner bound in leather slashed across the center as in *Untitled* (1970), presented at Tamura Gallery that same year. In 1971, Enokura exhibited *Wall* at the Paris Youth Biennale. A concrete wall roughly 10-feet high constructed between two trees standing about 16 feet apart, the work highlighted the relationship between the two trees, but also the relationship between the wall itself and its natural surroundings. He is perhaps best known for photographs in which he explored the relationship of his body to its surroundings. In his most well known photograph, *Symptom—Sea, Body* (1972), his body conforms to the curve of a sea current. Other images trace the ephemeral passage of a block floating in the air or a knife exploring the tensions between body and matter, serving as "proof of [his] own existence." Until his death in 1995, Enokura taught at the Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music (now Tokyo University of the Arts), where a solo exhibition was held in 1996. Another solo exhibition took place at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, in 2005.

Haraguchi Noriyuki (1946–) was born in Yokosuka in Kanagawa Prefecture and graduated from the oil painting department at Nihon University, Tokyo, in 1968. Haraguchi began exhibiting his works while in college and at Muramatsu and Tamura galleries amidst

the rising political turmoil of campus protests at Nihon University between 1969 and 1970. Haraguchi often used fragments of heavy industrial objects—such as freight wagon doors (*Tsumu 147*, 1966) and jet fighters (*A-4E Skyhawk*, 1969), as well as I-beams, concrete, engine oil, and tent canvas—that strongly evoke the locational specificity of Yokosuka's American naval base where he grew up. Despite their political overtones, his works continued to explore the visceral experience of "matter" through a minimalist aesthetic that engages tension, gravity, tactility, smell, and matter's discordant relationship to the mind. In *I-Beam and Wire Rope* (1970), he leaned a 13-foot I-beam at a 60-degree angle to the ground with a wire rope that formed an equilateral triangle and positioned the metal stakes in three locations. This was his first outdoor work to explore tension and balance through the most minimal means. Haraguchi's *Matter and Mind* (1971), an oil pool basin and steel panel soaked with oil, was featured at Documenta 6 (1977) and has been exhibited in several locations throughout Europe. He has held retrospectives at BankART, Yokohama, Japan (2009), and the Yokosuka Museum of Art (2011).

Koshimizu Susumu (1944–) was born in Uwajima city in Ehime Prefecture. Enrolling in Tama Art University's sculpture department in 1966, he left the program in 1968 due to student protests. In early works from 1967–68, such as *Packaged Space* and *Waku* (Frame), he began exploring permutations of the cube. In 1968, Koshimizu served as a technical advisor for Sekine Nobuo's *Phase-Mother Earth*, which he helped construct on-site. This experience inspired him to shift his practice from representing spatial concepts towards engaging with the phenomenon of space itself. *Perpendicular Line* (1969), presented at Muramatsu Gallery, was a transitional work that questioned the gap between the known

and the actual through a perpendicular line produced by a simple conical weight hung from a ceiling, barely touching the ground. From 1969–1971, he began working with Japanese paper and stones, often at an immense scale that enhanced their material presence and differentiation. At the *1970 Tokyo Biennale—Between Man and Matter*, an international exhibition in Tokyo that brought American and European artists associated with Conceptual, Process art, and Arte Povera together in Japan, he honed the edges of two stainless-steel works by hand, working with the tension inherent in the weight and balance of these objects: *Iron I* was propped against a wall with just one point touching the floor, while in *Iron II* he split a steel plate into three sheets and lifted them off the floor at an angle as if they were floating. For *August '70—Splitting a Stone* (1970), one of Koshimizu's most famous works, first realized at National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo, he brought a granite boulder to a museum and had it split in half by hand on the opening day, thus conceiving the process of splitting as a live event. In the series From Surface to Surface, which began in 1971, he started to engage with the structure of surfaces—such as a pair of recto and verso frames covered in canvas, diagonally sliced logs, and wooden beams cut in various geometric patterns and propped vertically or resting on the ground. In *From Surface to Surface-a tetrahedron* (1972), which received the sculpture prize at the *3rd Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition* in Kobe, where it showed alongside *From Surface to Surface (Wooden logs placed in a radial pattern on the ground)*, he displayed four configurations of a triangular pyramid whose appearance depended on the viewer's movement around the space. Koshimizu has continued to investigate new relationships with objects, most notably his Work Table series from 1983 into the present. A recipient of numerous awards in Japan—including the Prize for Excellence, 11th Teijiro Nakahara

Award (1980); 10th Denchu Hirakushi Prize (1981); Prize for merit, Kyoto Prefectural

Cultural Award (1999); 2nd Enku Award (2003); and the Medal with Purple Ribbon

(2004)]—Koshimizu served on the faculty of the Department of Sculpture at Kyoto City

University of Arts from 1994 to 2010 and is currently president of Takarazuka University.

His work is in institutional collections in Japan, as well as that of the Tate Modern in

London.

Lee Ufan (1936–) was born in Korea and emigrated to Japan in 1956. He obtained a degree

in philosophy at Nihon University, Tokyo, in 1961 and became widely known as the key

ideologue of Mono-ha. His studies were grounded on philosophical inquiries, most notably

that of Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Claude Levi-Strauss, and Kyoto School

philosopher, Nishida Kitaro. In March 1969, Lee received the honorable mention for his

essay "From Objects to Being" in the 6th annual art criticism competition sponsored by

Bijutsu Shuppansha, publishers of the influential art magazine *Bijutsu techō*, and from 1969

to 1971 he published numerous critical essays in art and culture journals. Lee's early relief

works explored the gaps between actual and illusionistic space, spearheaded by Takamatsu

Jiro and the *Tricks and Vision* exhibition (1968). He then began exploring the phenomenal

encounter between organic and industrial materials and their surrounding environments,

bringing to light both the modernist critique of the permanence of the work of art as well as

the object as a symptom of its physical environment, issues also fundamental to post-

minimalist practices in the West. In *Phenomenon and Perception B* (1968, now known as

Relatum), presented at the 1969 *Trends in Contemporary Art* at the National Museum of

Modern Art in Kyoto, Lee placed a stone on a plate of "broken" glass to create the illusion

that the stone had been dropped onto the plate, capturing the discord between chance and intention—a nod to and reversal of Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* (1915–23). He subsequently renamed all of his sculptures to the present *Relatum* and began a series of paintings in 1973. Lee has had solo exhibitions worldwide, most recently *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, in 2011.

Narita Katsuhiko (1944–1992) graduated from the painting department at Tama Art University, Tokyo, in 1969. He began exhibiting with Koshimizu Susumu in group exhibitions and, like Sekine Nobuo, worked as assistant to Takamatsu Jiro between 1967 and 1968, which inspired him to explore perceptual and conceptual approaches to objects. In May 1968, at a group exhibition at Ogikubo Gallery, he exhibited the interactive *Moveable structure* (Kado kōzō, 1968), colorful, malleable, blocks made of sponge with velcro attached to the surfaces so the forms could be re-attached and manipulated by viewers. He also experimented with subtle spatial alterations, such as building a temporary wall in May 1969, in front of an existing wall at Muramatsu Gallery, thereby diminishing the space; wrapping a steel belt around a dividing wall at the *9th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan* (1969); and balancing plywood boards on a grid of steel poles, thus raising the "floor" at *August 1970–Aspects of New Japanese Art* (1970). Narita is best known for his SUMI series, first exhibited at the Paris Youth Biennale in 1969, in which he stacked multiple blocks of charcoal in a line leaving flakes of charred wood on the floor. Emphasizing its own material presence, the work reveals the metamorphic process in which wood is transformed into charcoal by burning, thus mediating between artistic

intent and the wood's natural properties and evoking wood's continuous state of decay and its eventual disappearance.

Sekine Nobuo (1942–) was born in Saitama and obtained his M.F.A. in painting from Tama Art University, Tokyo in 1968. Sekine Nobuo's now legendary *Phase-Mother Earth* (1968) in the first Kobe Suma Rikyu Park Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition is generally credited as the first Mono-ha piece. The work was made by extracting dirt from the ground, preserving that earth into a cylindrical form the same volume and shape as the hole, and at the end of the exhibition, returning the dirt back into the earth. This work, titled Isō-Daichi in Japanese, came out of an early interest in topology, theories of relativity, and permutations of space (*isō* means "phase"), also reflected in his early *Topology Study* drawings and *Phase No. 10* reliefs. Sekine's works—using materials such as oilclay, sponge, water, stainless steel, and stone—inspired Lee Ufan's critical writing, which eventually provided the theoretical foundation of Mono-ha. In 1968, Sekine won the competition prize at the 8th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan and the Asahi newspaper prize for *Phase–Mother Earth*, and he represented Japan at the 35th Venice Biennale in 1970 with *Phase of Nothingness*. After spending two years in Italy, Sekine returned to Japan and established the Environmental Art Studio in 1973, continuing his artistic practice and focusing on creating large-scale public art works.

Suga Kishio (1944–) was born in Morioka, Iwate prefecture, in 1944 and graduated from Tama Art University's painting department in 1968. Suga's early works explored optical and spatial perception and questioned actual and virtual space. (These experiments in

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optical distortion, often called "tricks," were an outcome of the 1968 exhibition *Tricks and Vision*, which brought this type of work to public attention.) His text "Space Transformation (Notes from the Future)," which he wrote under the penname Katsuragawa Sei for the 6th Annual Art Criticism Competition, won honorable mention in March 1969. Suga is best known for emphasizing the relationship between created objects and the surrounding space, as well as the mutual impingement of things placed in relation to one another, resulting in the emergence of a new space. Maintaining that the immediately visible is only part of the complex totality of an object, Suga has tried to capture the object's multiplicity through the changing impressions induced by its surfaces and materials. He considers the spectator an active agent in realizing the totality of the object and attempts to elicit this realization by dividing the space with artificial boundaries or through gestural details or textures that evoke memories of specific cultural experiences. Major museum exhibitions devoted to his work include *Kishio Suga*, originating at the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art (1997) and *Kishio Suga – Stance*, Yokohama Museum of Art (1999). Suga represented Japan in the 38th Venice Biennale with Enokura Koji. His work is in the collections of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum and other museums throughout Japan, as well as that of the Tate Modern in London.

Takamatsu Jiro (1936–1998) was born in Tokyo and graduated from the painting department of Tokyo Art University of Fine Arts and Music in 1958. A prolific writer and one of the most influential artists of the 1960s, Takamatsu began exhibiting his work at the *Yomiuri Indépendant* exhibitions, most notably his series Point (1961–64) and String (1962–65). In 1963, he formed the collective Hi Red Center with Nakanishi Natsuyuki and

Akasegawa Genpei, performing numerous happenings in public spaces throughout Tokyo in collaboration with avant-garde artists including Fluxus members Yoko Ono and Nam June Paik. Takamatsu's philosophical inquiries into language and perception led him to explore absence as an index of everyday life, resulting in his Shadow painting series from 1964. In 1968, he participated in the landmark *Tricks and Vision* exhibition and represented Japan in the Venice Biennale, where he won the Carlo Cardazzo Prize with his work *Table in Perspective.* Significantly, he began teaching at Tama Art University (1968–1972) and hired his students Sekine Nobuo and Narita Katsuhiko as assistants for the Venice Biennale project. During this time, he began investigating the structural phenomena and relationships of materials in works such as *Light and Shadow* (1970) and the Oneness (1969–72) and Compound (1972–78) series, among others. Takamatsu held multiple solo retrospectives in Japan, most notably, at the National Museum of Modern Art, Osaka (1999); the Chiba City Museum of Art, Chiba (2000), Fuchū Art Museum, Tokyo; and Kitakyūshū Municipal Museum of Art, Fukuoka (2004).

Takayama Noboru (1944–) was born in Tokyo and obtained his master's degree in painting from Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music in 1970. The single recurrent medium in Takayama's practice is railroad ties, which he has used since 1968. During his second year of college, he traveled to Hokkaido with a schoolmate, visiting the coalmines and spending several days with the coalminers. While there, Takayama discovered the potential of railroad ties, significant not only as an underground support structure for mine tunnels, but as "human pillars" similar in size and weight to the coalminers; their organic qualities contrasted with their being saturated in tar and creosote for preservation. In 1968

Takayama began experimenting with prototypes at his studio in Totsuka Space, a rundown tract of land in Yokohama framed by high concrete walls. In his first solo exhibition at Tsubaki Kindai Gallery in 1969, he propped three railroad ties against a gallery wall alongside others stacked along the floor, exploring tensions between the supports. In early December 1970, he organized the outdoor group exhibition *Space Totsuka '70* and invited artists Enokura Kōji, Habu Makoto, and Fujii Hiroshi. All took part in plowing and digging the land, installing their works in relation to the ground site and in indirect response to Mishima Yukio's ritual suicide. The conflation of death and landscape was reflected in Takayama's titles, *Drama Underground Zoo* referring to the underground world where the dead rest. His installations at Tamura Gallery, such as *Spy* (1971) and *Village II-Memory Loss* (1972), which cut into the floor of the gallery space, evoke the psychological condition of surveillance facing minorities in Japan and political unrest at the time. Referring also to the forced labor of Korean minorities in Japan during World War II, the artist has described his installations as "requiems for the people of Asia who were washed away with the tides of Japan's modernization." In 1973 at Tamura Gallery, he exhibited short 8-mm films called *Yūsatsu* (Headless scenery) showing images of coalminers alongside desolate landscapes and animal carcasses. Takayama taught at Miyagi University of Education in Sendai from 1981 to 2006 and at Tokyo University of the Arts from 2006 to 2012. A Monbusho research fellow at P.S. 1 in 1991, he has also received the Enku Grand Award of 2011 and has held solo exhibitions at Rias Ark Museum of Art in Kesennuma (2000); Miyagi Museum of Art, (2010); and Tokyo University Art Museum (2011).

Yoshida Katsurō (1943–1999) graduated from the painting department at Tama Art University, Tokyo, in 1968. Along with Koshimizu Susumu, he assisted fellow Tama Art University artist Sekine Nobuo with Mono-ha's groundbreaking work *Phase-Mother-Earth* (1968). Yoshida was best known for his Cut Off series, in which he installed paper, stones, light bulbs, electric cords, and wooden beams in various configurations without manual manipulation. "Cut-off" in essence meant "bracketing" these objects and highlighting their bare facticity, or quality of existence, by presenting tensions in gravity and light. In one of his first Cut-off works, *Cut-off* (1969), he stuffed a steel pipe with cotton and installed it in the streets of Tokyo. In his first solo show at Tamura Gallery, an avant-garde rental gallery where many of the Mono-ha artists exhibited, Yoshida presented *Cut-off (hang)* (1969), in which a wooden beam and stone were suspended from the ceiling and tied together by rope to indicate their continuity. This interest in gravity was also evident in *Cut-off No. 2* (1969), presented as part of *Developments in Contemporary Art* at the Kyoto National Museum of Modern Art, where he balanced four thin sheets of steel on a rectangular beam. This was followed by works that explored the tension between light and space through the use of electric wire and light bulbs, such as *Cut-off No. 9* (1969) and *650 Watt and 60 Watt* (1970). Yoshida is also known for a series of photo-silkscreens depicting urban life and people often photographed from behind. These sometimes include a montaged silhouette of one person from each scene, "bracketing" one figure from the rest in order to re-examine his or her passing movement. Yoshida's work is distinct from the other Mono-ha artists in that he investigated spatio-temporal existence by combining print and photographic media, as well as the natural and industrial materials more typical of the work of other artists associated with Mono-ha.

TRANSLATIONS OF SELECTED TEXTS (1969–1987)

1. Lee Ufan, "World and Structure—Collapse of the Object (Thoughts on Contemporary Art)" (July 1969)

2. Lee Ufan, "The World of *Shigusa* (Gesture)" (October 1969)

3. Katsuragawa Sei (aka Suga Kishio), "The Start of Disappearance: As Things Deny Things" (December 1969)

4. Lee Ufan, "In Search of Encounter" (February 1970)

5. Suga Kishio, "Existence Beyond Condition" (February 1970)

6. "Voices of Emerging Artists: Mono Opens a New World" (Roundtable Discussion by Koshimizu Susumu, Lee Ufan, Narita Katsuhiko, Sekine Nobuo, Suga Kishio, and Yoshida Katsurō) (February 1970)

7. Takamatsu Jirō, "Commentary on cover artwork: Two-Dimensional-type Object" (February 1970)

8. Takamatsu Jirō, "That Which Opposes Front and Back" (April 1970)

9. Takamatsu Jirō, "Comments for August 1970: Aspects of New Japanese Art" (August 1970)

10. Minemura Toshiaki, "Insisting on 'Here and Now'" (August 1970)

11. Takayama Noboru, "Relation with Things" (July 1971)

12. Enokura Kōji, "Origins of Creation" (January 1972)

13. Minemura Toshiaki, "On 'Mono-ha'" (July 1978)

14. Honda Shingo, "Proposal for Restoring 'Art Intuition'" (August 1982)

15. Haraguchi Noriyuki, "Recent Thoughts" (November 1987)

Lee Ufan, "World and Structure—Collapse of the Object (Thoughts on Contemporary Art)" (July 1969)

Translated by Stanley N. Anderson. Edited by Domenick Ammirati, Mina Lee, and Mika Yoshitake.

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What are the realities and fictions of contemporary art? Since it is called contemporary art, it should go beyond modern art. And it should achieve a contemporaneity that differs from modernity and offers a new world. Going beyond the previous age must mean more than a merely physical passage of time. Naturally it should mean the development of a new worldview that overcomes the ideas of history and philosophy contained in the previous period. Can we really say that there has been a change in the course of history so that the formulas and ideas that dominated the previous age have only been slightly revised, without fundamental changes? While the periodic divisions of history are related to changes in ways of life that mark those periods, should they not be essentially determined by innovations in the structure of thought underlying them?

I want to reexamine these seemingly obvious questions because circumstances have arisen that demand a full reevaluation of previous theories of ontology. The ideas that *consciousness determines existence* or *existence determines consciousness* are now in the process of losing validity. Today people realize that statements that consciousness determines existence and that existence determines consciousness are redundant and have the same meaning. The subject and object have merely been switched. We are coming to

realize that consciousness and existence are not distinct at their origins but rather are different formations of one world. It is almost surprising that anyone in the past ever saw as taboo the premise of modern ontology, that existence and consciousness were from the start divided into two different things. Even Marx only reworked this idea after Hegel reversed its terms; one can say that they were simply carrying out a struggle between competing factions within the same category. The role played by Dada in the history of modern art was no exception. With the discovery of the object, contemporary art began brandishing the word "contemporaneity" after having already parted ways with modernity, with the intention of opening up a new world. Nevertheless the new art was, oddly, judged by the rational dualism of the past and ascribed value according to the old way of thinking. We have come down to the present with little doubt having been cast on this major premise, a situation that seems to have been accepted with unexpected ease. Considering the present state of affairs, it is undeniable that the previous ontology is still regarded as legitimate and retains its power.

The situation of art, however, has changed greatly in recent years. Conditions are emerging in which the reasoning of the past cannot be used to make judgments, much less be validated. Of course, some artists and critics have not noticed the change and remain stupified by the fashionable jargon of yesterday. Most sensitive artists and critics, however, have sensed that something unusual is going on, and they are eagerly trying to find new words to describe it. Nevertheless most of them are caught short by the suddenness with which they find themselves standing on uncertain ground, and after all, cannot escape the fate of revisionism. But it seems they are so frightened of fundamental change that it is not difficult to imagine that they will most likely stick to the status quo of the present system.

Still, these people have already begun to advocate what they are calling "conceptual art," so it seems likely that the fate of revisionism will not be a concern for much longer. Perhaps it is for this reason that some observers have pointed out the barrenness of today's criticism.

Times are changing in a very quiet and even routine way, but unfamiliar forms have appeared unexpectedly, and a world of expressionless expression has emerged that cannot be understood in the same terms as the scandals of the past. It is even doubtful whether these new forms of expression should be called art. It does not seem that they can be labeled in the same way as any of the creative acts included in the usual categories of art. So then, what structure of thought is the new development based on? What forms or methods are employed? How does it differ from what is ordinarily called contemporary art? What has made it so significant? And how is it related to human beings? These questions are naturally matters of interest.

In order to deal with these issues, we must begin by examining the process of change and making basic inquiries into what has been termed contemporary art; but even before this, I believe it is necessary to reexamine the structure of thought endemic to modernity. It seems to me that this would be a convenient way of understanding the issues in a broader context and would make it easier to comprehend more intricate matters.

In general, modernity can be said to have started with the self-consciousness of human individuals (individuals), as demonstrated by Descartes' proposition, "I think, therefore I am." Here the conscious subject is the highest form of existence, and the existence of everything else is determined by it. This way of thinking is known as anthropocentrism. Human beings exist first of all as conscious subjects, and subsequently the objective world, which is determined by consciousness, is objectified or made to exist.

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The world is objectified by establishing human existence as prior to the world, and the things objectified by consciousness are defined as objects. This is how dualistic rationalism was born. The logic of placing humans on this side and things on the other is the essence of this mode of representing consciousness. Jean-Paul Sartre, the purported last heir of modern philosophy, wrote in *Being and Nothingness,* "Consciousness is consciousness of something." What is clear from this statement is that the things that ascend into this consciousness of something are precisely the things that, for the first time, become existing objects. In modern metaphysics, things not related to consciousness belong to the category of things that do not yet exist; that is, nothingness.

I think, therefore I am. Therefore if I do not think, I do not exist. Kant created an epistemological method, the categories, for the rational representation of the world. Hegel criticized pure reason, which cannot be consciously manipulated, and stated that humans are possessors of "absolute spirit." Nietzsche announced the "death of God." The rationalist method of reasoning was developed with great consistency. It was given an impetus by the religious Reformation, was a factor in the successes of the Renaissance, led to the Industrial Revolution, and has even enabled today's probes into space. At the same time, this objectified will, meant to be manipulated for human purposes, worked hand in hand with an insatiable desire for representation, caused an endless multiplication of objects. Without intending it, humans ended up surrounded by a myriad of represented things. Conversely it is also a fact that the ironic fate of the subject, to be defined by the object, produces a condition of alienation. Everything that is organized and systematized for human purposes—everyday life, common sense, democracy, sex, physical matter, fads, money, leisure, etc.—makes an eloquent statement about the nature of today's fetishistic,

capitalistic society. It is already clear that the space of modern civilization, systematized by the logic of objectification, can be described with the general term "material things." Therefore we should not overlook the fact that this space of material things, in a very fundamental way, has erected an impermeable barrier between human beings and nature.

Through a reversal of subject and object, the worldview of anthropocentrism was transformed into a focus on material things. Until now, humans have constructed everything in the world to suit their own wishes. Today, however, the world constructed by human beings is declaring the self-logic of things, imposing the will of things, and bringing about the reification of human beings. If humans do not subject themselves to the will of things, their own existence will be erased, whether they like it nor not. This is a law of modern society. Commodity fetishism has led to a general worship of material things.

The philosophical situation described above is recently showing a dramatic shift. In particular, as we watch the spectacular progress of machines and the information industry of advanced capitalist society, the momentum created by the rapid development of technology seems likely to change everything completely. It has led to the greatest accumulation of wealth and the fastest economic growth in human history, and it has made space travel possible. Technology is responsible for it all, for better or worse. Technological advance may also have something to do with the erosion of the concept of creation and the emphasis on playfulness seen in recent art. In *Abundance for What?* David Riesman came to the noteworthy conclusion that people's excessive desire for material things is decreasing in inverse proportion to the proliferation of things themselves, which exceeds the limits of understanding. Things multiply by themselves in a way that is no longer tied to human desire. It should already be clear, because of the nature of technology, that the limits of the

centrality of things may ultimately lead to the joint bankruptcy of both things and human beings. Herbert Marcuse, who noticed the self-generating nature of technology, argued early on that "Modernity can only be overcome by the self-proliferation and greater maturation of dualism itself" (*Reason and Revolution*). Today we must say that the words of Michel Foucault, who pointed out the illusory dualism of "consciousness and existence," affirming everything while hoping for the "birth of the nonhuman" and declaring the "end of man," foretold a new way of seeing the world. Allow me to repeat that technology is originally a mode of representation in which things are objectified by consciousness. Because of things' unlimited will to reproduce themselves, technology has been legitimized and made effectual. It is a system of things as such, which have become automated so that they can generate their own power. Without even mentioning computers, we can see that the progress of technology, which has enabled things to make other things, will no doubt lead to a situation in which humans will be left with nothing to do. Things are gradually constructing an automatic, autonomous world, and these developments may actually have the effect of liberating people from things and may foreshadow the collapse of material fetishism itself. This result could occur because it is becoming possible for material things to exist independently of humans, whether they are worshipped or not. Strictly speaking, it is now essentially contradictory to call things that are not manmade "things." It should also be said that it is a mistake to call someone "human" who does not make things, objectify things. I am one who believes that the key to this age and the problems of what is called "contemporary art" lies precisely in an understanding of this situation.

2

There are probably few fields of human endeavor that so clearly demonstrate this modern structure of thought as art history. The process of transformation from personification to thingification is as obvious and clear as if it had been diagrammed.

The initial subject of modern painting was the portrait, which contrasted markedly with the icons or images of God produced in the Middle Ages. All nonhuman things were pushed into the background. Everything was personalized or made into a toy. Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* is a prime example. The human figure came to dominate the entire pictorial surface and overwhelmed everything else. A human smell even crept into depictions of nature, which could not escape being personalized. As art history passed through Rubens and Rembrandt and arrived at Impressionism, this phenomenon reached a climax. Then, with the coming of the Industrial Revolution, people began to speak of the supremacy of the machine, and Cubism emerged. With Dada, attention turned to things rather than people and images of physical objects instead of portraits; a urinal shown in close-up suddenly took the place of the *Mona Lisa*. Material objects became superior to consciousness, rejecting their subordination to human beings and declaring their essential nature as material objects. It was not accidental that a photograph was produced in which a urinal occupied most of the pictorial space against an entirely black background. It should not be necessary to add that the work of many artists, beginning with Dada and extending through Pop took on the thingification of material objects whether their subjects were the human figure or nature. The Surrealist movement, which emerged during the course of this development, should be seen in historical terms as nothing but a reactionary coup d'état. The Surrealists were unable to live with the momentous change toward a materialistic

society and explored the depths of the subconscious mind in the hope of restoring man and anthropomorphism.

The conventional canvas-painting *tableau* was originally a screen for the presentation of anthropomorphic images. The object, on the other hand, as the word indicates, had the purpose of thingification. In the Middle Ages, paintings existed only as ideas or iconic images on the walls of royal palaces or churches. As the explosive development of trade and industry led to the rise of the bourgeoisie, the canvas was employed as a formal device that seemed to make it possible to cut out a piece of the wall of a palace or church and bring it into the bourgeois home. It was an excellent system of camouflage, concealing the facts that portraits consisted of humans transforming themselves into icons and that pictures were being made to anthropomorphize nature. This was another reason why the canvas was sanctified and in common use. And yet objects refused to remain inside the canvas. It is not as if there have never been any paintings with a strong object quality, as exemplified by the work of Braque and Leger, but they can hardly be said to have satisfied the desire of material things to make themselves more objectlike, which exists because things have a desire and a will to keep their own shape and form. In this sense, one must say that the appearance of the object in art was the inevitable result of material things' desire for their own reification, and it was an excellent method for this purpose. Jasper Johns's flags and beer cans and Oldenburg's hamburger are self-contained worlds. They are things, objects, that exist here as bodies that combine ideas and physical matter. As Leo Steinberg said, "The street and the sky—they can only be simulated on canvas; but a flag, a target, a 5—these can be *made*, and the completed painting will represent no more than what it actually is."

The materials most used for the new art objects, with two or three exceptions, are manmade things, typically recycled products of a world objectified by the consciousness of human beings. Artists have avoided the direct use of natural things such as stones or organic life. That hesitation is undoubtedly because, although they are physical objects, they contain elements that transcend the basic conditions of material things or the concepts surrounding them. In comparison, material things, because of the peculiar circumstances of their origin, have a fixed quality. They cannot be anything but what they are. Nature is difficult to measure or understand, but material things are cut off from it and belong to a world where they are branded as definite and fixed. Because their character is assumed, planned, and grasped beforehand, they form a self-contained world, empty images with no foundation and no connection to nature. Moreover, things come to be just the right materials for an art of thingification. Things or materials as such have no ambiguous elements, and they themselves are naturally able to become self-sufficient works of art, just as they are, as physical things.

The desire of things to self-replicate is not pacified that easily, however. The straightforward self-declaration of objects in brute, unadorned forms moved in the direction of "primary structures" or Minimal art. We should not overlook the fact that this process led to three-dimensional artworks that could no longer be described as objects. The (shift in) thinking that led from objects to the three-dimensional forms associated with Minimalism, seen in the three-dimensional compositions of Phillip King and Robert Morris as well as the work of Ellsworth Kelly and Frank Stella, was a momentous change, and the resulting artworks were entirely unlike the material objects of the past. To speak somewhat boldly, one might say that there were decisive characteristics in these works

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that foretold the collapse of material things. In them, "three-dimensional art" had lost its

objecthood, the quality peculiar to material things, and had taken on meanings that were

more conceptual and nonmaterialistic. Things went on sublimating themselves endlessly,

expressing no image beyond their physical properties as objects and attempting to reduce

themselves to the structural form of the basic logic and concepts of which they were

composed. This tendency could be described as the path to a transitional purity, from the

visible to the invisible, resembling the process by which ancient gods were born. We should

not forget, however, that in the course of this process, there were still continual attempts at

a transformation of human beings into objects through of the ritual worship of material

things. That is why Jackson Pollock danced across the canvas, led by paint—a material

substance—and eventually went mad. Pollock's action-objects naturally ended in failure,

but even so, the attempt went on. Happenings were developed as a serious attempt to

objectify everything, both the consciousness and action of human beings, and were also a

method of transforming things. The goal of Allan Kaprow's *Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts*

and Jim Dine's *Car Crash,* as confirmed by their makers and others, was to objectify the

participants. Oldenburg even said, "The content of a Happening is more like a story written

by the things themselves rather than a depiction of things." (In this respect, the early

Happenings carried out by the Gutai group of Japan can be said to belong to a very different

dimension). In the mid-1960s, as is well known, Happenings went beyond the

objectification of human beings, taking on a more environmental character, and were

transformed into rituals that enabled a new understanding of space. For example, the

object-centered mode of representation disappeared in Geoffrey Hendricks's "Blue Sky"

Happening and was replaced by an attempt to give three-dimensional form to space itself.

Performers of Happenings placed themselves on the altar of things but at the same time adventurously descended to the bottom of the material world. What they finally experienced there, unexpectedly, was not the certainty of things. It was a sense of transition to a nonobjective three-dimensional space.

As artists began creating nonobjectlike environments, it became clear that they were often using technology to present a space without objects. Robert Whitman kept the participation of people to a minimum and used technology to structure a space with nothing but laser beams. There was no attempt to call things by name or proclaim, "This is a thing!" A number of laser beams passed through columns and shot quickly and silently through the darkness. That was all. This work provided an ineffable experience in which one had very little sense of a real object-space. It was like the opening up of a different dimension, one without physical aspects, as if one had entered a world without gravity. It was still a space opened up by things and their logic, but the things did not speak of themselves overtly. The work revealed an anonymous and neutral world. The three-dimensional space had lost its object quality and no longer had room for the insertion of human language. The result was a peculiar "third space." There was nothing but empty space, seen as is, with neither things nor human beings in it.

3

Like these environmental arrangements, new forms of art such as kinetic art, light art, and, of course, Minimal art are generally showing a greater tendency to neutralize material things. A decisive event is concealed behind these words. Material things are now in a critical situation in which ideas are being separated from physical substance. In terms of

the constituent elements of things, it should not be necessary to explain that "idea" here refers to the manipulation of consciousness with modern modes of representation and "physical substance" means the objects apprehended through such operations.

It may not be appropriate to refer to John McCracken's extremely simple metal plank, with its smooth, shining surface, as a thing or material object. It is a neutral body with very little presence. The viewer has difficulty getting a sense of having *seen* it. One has the strange feeling of having seen *some sort of event* taking place in midair, something that is not an actual thing. A three-dimensional structure that is extremely minimal, almost too minimal, is presented with the claim that it is nothing but what it is, an anonymous entity unrelated to anything else. It almost seems wrong to call it a work of art because it is an *expressionless thing* that might be found both anywhere and nowhere. The thing that viewers see cannot be a material object, a simple *that*. It is difficult to squarely recognize the definite existence of something with a substantive name that can receive and respond to a conscious gaze. It is no longer a *material object* like the flags of Pop art that are just flags and the hamburgers that are just hamburgers. It is no longer something that is caught in the net of representational recognition by the human mind. In Minimal art, nonrelation effectively means having no relation to the manipulations of representational human consciousness. It is a position that rejects human representation. Therefore what we *see* is neither an idea nor a substance. It is something that might be described as *that sort of thing*, a floating nonobject space. It may only be natural to feel that "people speak of seeing a work of art, but we may not be seeing at all in the sense of seeing a thing" (Miyakawa Atsushi).

Judd speaks of "specific objects," anonymous, unrelated, and nothing but what they are. These words show his awareness of neutral bodies that produce this kind of nonobjective space. What artists mainly seek in this division of ideas and substance may be neither idea nor substance but a neutral space unrelated to the field of representation, a space that might be described as a non-three-dimensional, transitional world. An example is Flavin's single fluorescent light tube. It is neither a conventional artwork with assigned meaning nor a simple bit of *physical substance* or *light*. Nor does it try to show off an idea. It is a "specific object" that reveals a nonobjective space. Referring to technology and kinetic art, Miyakawa Atsushi has said perceptively, "What we see there most conspicuously is the dematerialization of artworks, or rather, the phenomenon of separating art from the physical entity of the artwork itself."

It goes without saying that a sense of the presence of things is the product of consciousness objectifying the world, giving a sense of unity between the represented idea and a physical substance. The loss of a sense of presence in things, which has occurred without relation to human intentions—the authority to decide—is due to the phenomenon of things trying to exist by themselves through technology, which makes it possible for things to give birth to things. There is no need to repeat that things not made by human beings or not determined by consciousness lack objectivity and lose their sense of presence.

Ideas and substance have been dramatically separated because of the saturated condition of things caused by the overdevelopment of capitalism. For this process of separation to be complete, we will have to wait for the much-awaited birth of the nonhuman, probably with a plastic heart, in a time when all problems are connected to aerospace research and development.

The law of representation, that the world must be objectified, has been thoroughly mechanized, and with the emergence of the technology for making things, it has led to large-scale automation. As a result, things have left the realm of consciousness in which creative acts are carried out with the human head and hands. Initially material things made up a world manipulated by the representational acts of human beings, but today they have begun opening up a new world with self-generated power. Technology has enabled things to the regulate themselves without human representation. Because technology is automatic and autonomous, it seems almost to have moved beyond the condition originally established by human beings. This new condition of technology may be why the world is appearing in a neutral and expressionless form, nonconceptual and nonsubstantial.

The word "creativity" has been bandied about more in the modern age than in any other. The ability to make things has been given as the reason for the predominance of human beings in the world. Now that we have reached a condition in which things are making things, the supremacy of humans in relation to the world can only collapse. A sense of distance is emerging between things and human beings, and ways of thinking that allow one to determine the other have lost their validity.

Recently, however, many people are praising Conceptual art. They say that material objects are not at issue, only concepts, and it is important to dematerialize the artwork through concepts. This thinking is extremely dangerous. The attempt to enlist concepts alone into the cause of consciousness is no better than the reactionary attempts of Surrealism to restore humanity to art. It should be characterized as a desperate struggle that will lead only to despair and nihilism. We should emphasize once again that it is now almost impossible to represent anthropocentric ideas because of the internal

circumstances of contemporary art as well as the condition of the age. Since reality as such

is now recognized as a nonobjective world, a term like "nonconceptual" may even emerge

(with the arrival of a new epistemology that is monistic or pluralistic). Why conceal the fact

that the separation of idea and substance brought about under the influence of technology

has dismantled object consciousness? People can only ignore this situation because they

are unable to stop insisting on a dualism of things and humans and do not fully

comprehend the nature of technological development. Even if artists work with air, water,

earth, light, movement, and sound, it must be said that they do not understand technology

if they continue trying to objectify human ideas. Technology should not be used to make art

objects with the purpose of demonstrating human qualities. At the very least, we need to let

technology speak and illuminate both the world as such, which is no longer composed

entirely of physical objects, and the expanding distance between idea and substance, which

are being split apart.

4

Here I would like to point out once again that, in the modern age, it was the fate of

existence to be determined by consciousness. And, therefore, existing was always under the

jurisdiction of consciousness. Ideas are one mode of representational consciousness, and as

long as this is true, when something is said to exist, it has already been objectified by an

idea arising from the mind. This mode of reasoning was the iron law of ontology from

Descartes to Sartre. If we say that a thing exists apart from ideas, it is equivalent to

announcing the death of modern ontology. In fact, when Michel Foucault said, "Existence is

a world that exists without relation to consciousness" (*Les choses et les mots*),[283] he

declared the end of man.

It should be clear by now that the self-bankrupting of art, which has been made into

an object by the will of things, began with the self-splitting of ideas and substance in

material things. In the process of moving from three-dimensional objects toward

nonobjects, in which the physicality has been removed even further, it is possible to

recognize a new expanse of the world spreading out between ideas and material objects,

and it is now necessary to discard conscious creation as a representational act. With the

appearance of technology, humans have been robbed of their right to reification.

Technology, the apparatus of modern reason, has been a major source of power for

material things, and it has had an immeasurable influence on thought.

The symbiotic relationship between consciousness and existence will continue to

disintegrate from now on. And in turn, humans will lose everything; one after another, all

things will declare their independence from the human. Eventually humans will have to

stop being human and return to a condition in which they are counted as just one thing

among all others. What is important here is to stop objectifying the world via the process of

representation that sets up a confrontation between humans and the world and instead

learn to see the world just as it is, to see all things just as they are. Everything has already

been realized, and the world has always been opened up just as it is, since the beginning of

time. What kind of world can we make and where? From the position of a rocket moving

out into space, this world is just a starting point. Any planet could be a center. Every place

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[283] Lee refers to Foucault's *Les mots et les choses* (1966), published in English as *The Order of Things* (1970). At the time of this publication, Lee had access only to an unpublished manuscript of the Korean translation from which he took this reference. The Japanese version, *Mono to kotoba* (1974), appeared five years after this essay was published.

is nothing but the place that it is. If an astronaut forgot the Earth, where would his rocket fly? No matter where it went, it would be in a place that is what is. It is not possible to think that the universe has thickness or thinness, a front or a back. Flying is simultaneously not flying, because the rocket is a medium of the universe, one of the stars.

Since Minimal art, conscious creation has continued to decline. Good reasons exist for the interest shown in presenting the gestures of humans and things and the *condition* of the world just as it is. The reckless language of idealism—"The medium is the message"— should be buried. The presentation of the condition of the world just as it is should not be limited to "the medium is the message," nor should it be governed by an idealism that leads to materialization according to the will of things. This phenomenon should have ended with Pop art. Now that ideas and substance are split apart, the work of art denies that it is the direct media message that it was in the past. The location (site) of the message is no longer certain; it floats in the air between the artwork and the eye because the artwork is now a "specific object" (Judd) and not an object produced by objectifying consciousness. Works of art are presentations of the condition of things unrelated to consciousness, and their object quality has been reduced to the lowest possible level by technology. The message, an instructional idea, is left suspended in midair. There exists another type of work floating between the artwork as message and human beings. It is a mirror pointed toward a transitional world, and it makes it possible for people and artworks to simultaneously see and be seen.

5

In the type of art I have just described, I see the possibility of a fundamental kind of

structure. What I mean by structure is not what the word usually means in architecture,

mathematics, or sociology; I mean an active entity that reveals the world in a fundamental

and vivid manner. The term is used for both its mechanism and for the entity itself. It can

be described as a great intermediary that clearly shows and conveys the gestures and

condition of the way of being of everything as it is, of the world just exactly as it is. Jean

Ladrière wrote, "Structure intimates things like an oracle, indicates certain directions, and

opens paths to understanding. The meaning formed by structure, because of its nature,

remains unstable and embraces a world of possibilities. We can begin with these

possibilities and rediscover within reality its own condition. Structure is an intermediary"

("Meaning and System"). The Buddha, for example, was a medium who revealed and

communicated the world of Buddhism. But he was not merely a tool for this purpose. He

was also one of the beings in that world. This kind of *ambiguous medium* is what I would

like to call "structure." The world is the world acting as the world with or without the

presence of the Buddha, but it is by the Buddha's presence that the world is revealed. This

is the reason structure exists. The Buddha, because he is the Buddha, could be you or me.

Because he has this kind of flexibility, he is not a dead-end object, a mere media message,

but a person who shows that the world penetrates him and is simultaneously of the world

of reality and the world of cognition. The myth of Sisyphus provides another example of the

nature of structure. The rock pushed to the top of the hill rolls down, and the rock that has

rolled to the bottom is pushed to the top again. It is a meaningless and voluntary act that is

endlessly repeated without excessive effort and without thought of reward. Sisyphus

should not be discussed in terms of the absurdity of existence. Rather we should say that he

performed a great nonsensical structural act, an uneventful occurrence, that showed the world as it is just as it is. Here the performer is also performed upon, which shows existence's ambiguity as a structure.

Whether or not it is necessary to expand the meaning of structure to such an extent, it is certain that artists are paying attention to structure, as demonstrated by the nonobjectified phenomena of today's light art, most Minimal art, Happenings, and environmental art, even if the work is extremely manipulative or poorly executed. As artists produce their work with anonymity and neutrality, a conspicuous tendency to pursue the ambiguity of mediums demonstrates the shift from medium to structure. Artworks no longer have a sense of presence or definiteness and are losing their objectlike qualities. For this reason, the relationship between seer and seen is made ambiguous (because of the loss of vantage point). At the same time, as a result, a remarkable expanse of cognitive space is opened up between the artwork and the spectator. The space where Whitman's laser beams are set up, although it is still a closed, limited area, should be recognized as a structure that enables awareness and unveils a special transitional space. While this shift of interest from medium to structure is admirable, the content of the structure may still be inadequate and pose many problems. This type of art represents a step beyond a focus on mediums, which are nothing but simple tools that justify the condition of material things in capitalist society; but even if a work of art is not an object, it is still subject to manipulation and overdetermination. It cannot be denied that it remains in the unreal, fictional dimension of its own structural form, embedded in its own system and that of object space, and has not yet taken on the qualities of a deconditioned reality and world. If the presenters of structure realize that an awareness of making is

disappearing, it may be possible to expect a shift away from rigid determination toward

presentation of facts (in this case, conditions). In the very midst of reality, the artist should

think of structure as displaying things as they are *just as they are*. No matter how much the

material quality or physicality is removed, if structure is approached as a conceptual

problem, there is a risk, as suggested above, that it will remain a representational space

that continues to encourage the operation of consciousness. Oldenburg and Christo may

have designed imaginary monuments, but in doing so they have not left the realm of a

representation of unseen objects. Although they aim to present a nonobjective world, they

cannot achieve this simply by eliminating physical things or reducing their quantities. It

does not matter how large or small the things may be; what is important is that they do not

precipitate a sense of objecthood and that they plainly reveal the character of a world in

which all things appear just as they are, separate but fused. Considered in these terms, the

supposedly immaterial space of specific objects, seen on the periphery of Minimal art, may

be an escapist, unreal space. It may still have a strong conceptual fixity, so that it is

impossible to go beyond an empty *act of seeing* it as simply "that sort of thing," which gives

no direction or guidance. Things in which ideas and objects are still divided are not yet at

the high level of purity necessary to reach the nonobjective reality and naturalness of the

world beyond things in themselves. Even if one were to set up a space of specific objects

that do not rationalize material things, such an act would be no more than a correction or

revision of modernity unless it expressed the nonobjective reality beyond things and

delivered the message of the world. The presenter of structure runs the risk of not

eliminating the artistic consciousness that involves the worship of material things. If he is

interested only in setting up a structure like a castle in the air, he ends up with mere

conceptual novelty and self-rationalization. A glaring self-contradiction exists in this kind

of work. Structure may fail to break free from the qualities of material things used as art

mediums and as a result function like LSD, producing an aesthetically privileged space

separated from reality.

6

Some creators of Happenings have almost entirely eliminated the material quality of things

to present new structures and are close to being exceptions to the situation I have

described. One is Sekine Nobuo, who has produced structure in his *Phase* series. Anything

can be a constituent element of a structure for him, including plastic, soil, sponge, steel

plates, or fluorescent paint. In the message he conveys, everything has one direction and

reveals one world.

Here is an example. A large rock sits in the middle of a plain. Ancient people would

place one rock on top of another as if to make an altar. Sekine, responding to the

contemporary context, transformed this scene into a big sponge with a large steel plate set

on top of it. If structure is to express its qualities to best advantage, it must reflect the age's

cognitive system and way of life. The message that structure conveys may transcend the

times, but the style of the structure need not depart from them. This approach can be seen

in the way Sekine dug into the earth at Suma Rikyū Park.[2] Ancient people might have

revealed structure just by turning over the earth, and they may have become aware of the

world through such an action. Under the cognitive system of contemporary times, however,

simply digging into the ground does not produce structure. Sekine cut out a portion of soil

in the form of a cylinder. The earth was *removed* neatly and *placed* to the side of the hole to

create concave and convex shapes. This method was no doubt the most optimal one within the current frame of reference for understanding, and only when it was adopted did structure appear and the doors of the world open.

In any case, Sekine's gestures can be described as one of the most awesome Happenings since Sisyphus. The act itself may be somewhat nonsensical , and the forms that are produced are rather humorous. Just as in the case of Sisyphus, there is no discernible cause or result. Sekine is just doing what he is doing. He is not doing anything special. Nor does he try to do nothing. He is only letting what is be *just what it is*. To let what is be *just what it is* has the same effect whether he did something or not, so someone might ask whether it would be all right to do nothing at all. Why is he doing anything? It does not matter whether he does something or not, but it is only by doing something deliberately that the world can be revealed and we can be made to *realize* that doing something is the same as doing nothing. Structure is characterized by nonsense and humor, and through it, the performer is at the same time performed upon. Doing nothing actually means resisting things just as they are, an act of opposing the world, so it is not really doing nothing. The question rather is why anyone should not want to make things just as they are into things *just as they are*.

In Sekine's notebook, one finds the following words: "If the world is the world as it is, how can we create anything? In the midst of the world just at it is, all I can do is make things just as they are and show this vividly." Also: "Recognition of things is not everything; the world of the sky or road that passes through these things leads to the whole." There should be no need to explain the sky or road of which he speaks. It is important to realize, however, that in this world people and things are not in opposition, and a scene of reality

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opens up just as it is. Since there is no concept of opposition here, neither ideas nor material objects can be present.

Fundamentally, the artwork may be only a structure, or a way of being, even in a world without being or nothingness, where both being and nothingness appear transparent. Of course, what human beings see in structure is neither the distance between the structure and the eye nor the structure itself as an object. Nor is the artwork a complete idea upon which the structure is based. Rather, it is the scene of an open world that breaks through the structure and a place that also envelops it. The world, everywhere and always, is open just as it is, but as Rilke says, human beings "ordinarily cannot see even visible things because of the surging of the unique operations of human consciousness" ("Letter to a Russian"). Merleau-Ponty writes, "[Painting] gives visible existence to what profane vision believes to be invisible" and, "It is, therefore, mute Being which itself comes to show forth its own meaning" (*Eye and Mind*), in reference to the structural quality discernable in the world. Structure functions like pillow words[284] and is revealed by a person effecting a happening in the density of the world's silence.

(I would like to add that there is a need to change the way of depicted structure in photographs, in which structure, isolated, is shown as an object in close-up. Structure should not be clutched at with modern objectivism and perspective, as if shouting, "This is a human being!" or "This is a thing!")

There are not yet many artists who reject the rationalism of modern dualism and attempt to perceive structure. Even the small number of people who do present perceptual structures need to find a definite direction for the new ontology upon which they rely or

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[284] Pillow words (*makura kotoba*) are the conventional epithets used before place names in Japanese poetry.

else it will be impossible for them to determine how to develop this ontology or where to go with it. And in spite of the dramatic development of technology, we cannot expect a revelation of the vivid ambiguity of structure without deep insight into methods for changing the system of actual society, which is still dominated by the power of material things. Many modernists and establishment critics still have too much faith in the pragmatism of the system of material things, even though it is disintegrating, and are too involved in the worship of things, all because of their propensity to judge everything with eyes used to Minimal art and its revision, Conceptual art. The veil is finally being stripped away from the *realities* and *fictions* of modernity, but it is likely that modernity will deliberately overlook the possibilities of a new world now springing up.

Today's urgent tasks are to denounce the thing-dominated condition of contemporary art, overcome objectivism, liberate art mediums and urge them toward structure, and seek a new ontology.

Lee Ufan, "The World of *Shigusa*: Participating in *Trends in Contemporary Art* at Kyoto's National Museum of Modern Art"

Translated by Mika Yoshitake

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On the 17th [of August 1969] at noon, I arrive at the National Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto. Some unidentified people are already wandering about. Some seemed to have arrived yesterday or even the day before. One can easily gather that they are [participants] invited to the *Trends in Contemporary Art* exhibition opening on the 19th at this museum, but apart from those artists who produce images, few of them have brought in finished works. Having said that, they don't seem to plan to create beauty by making paintings or objects in this space. All of the acts unfolding here are too ambiguous and intermediary to constitute "making." I try remind myself that creation once involved oneself becoming the subject to force the world inside a prescribed concept; that is, to make it one's object.

Their acts, though I cannot tell whether they are acting or being made to act, are distinct from acts of objectification. They don't seem at all to put the world in self-contained confinement or try to produce condensed responses. They are most likely unable to define what they are doing or explain their acts' meaning because they do not possess any right to make a decision or any sense of value beyond the fact that they undertake these acts by making their bare encounters with the world as mediated relations. Therefore, their acts or gestures (*shigusa*)—which I, for the time being, call tasks of structuring—are themselves neither self-expressive nor self-creative but extremely transparent,

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meaningless, and rewardless. Moreover, perhaps for this reason, the acts can exist as something without institutional premises, whether a museum, an open space, or a park.

One man has ten workers bring in a thick, ten-meter long wooden beam into the museum. In the meantime, he begins to polish with [mineral] oil four steel plates, each of a different thickness. The steel plates gradually turn shiny, and the man becomes more and more alive. I wonder if something like an ancient ritual is about to begin, as the air is filled with a strange energy. The steel plates are no longer simply steel plates as they become ever more vivid, and the man is no longer simply a man as he becomes ever more alive. There, I can no longer recognize the subject-object relationship between human and object. When the wooden beam is finally delivered, the man delicately touches and wipes it, slowly moving it with the help of the workers. Eventually the position and placement of the wood seem to be naturally settled. He then lays the steel plates one at a time in a supple manner. Depending on their thickness, the steel plates either gently bend or tautly stretch, settling into their inner material conditions. As the steel plates, wooden beam, and man move about, an inexplicable sight emerges before my eyes. Granted, the man had no doubt devised a plan to lay steel plates on a wooden beam. Yet that is nothing but his engagement with the world, his call to the world. It does not operate as a determined answer or constitute a self-contained condensed world. This constitutes an act or gesture (*shigusa*) as an aspect of the world itself, the world that reveals that it is a *world*.

Another man prepares a spacious bag made of hemp paper, almost nine square feet in size, and calls numerous workers to help him boldly insert a giant boulder weighing some four tons into the bag. Even here, the paper, boulder, and man are all on the same horizon, and there is no sight of the paper or the stone expressing themselves nor creative

consciousness imposing thought upon the paper and stone. It is as though he makes a

particular encounter in the world manifest itself before us as the structuring of an

ambiguous act. Therefore, for those who witness this, what they see is a mere act that

cannot be translated into words, one that is neither an accepted concept nor a product of

meaning. The materials don't remain mere paper and stone—that is, objects of

representation—but make possible the advent of a far fresher world because of their

neutral intermediary nature.

In another corner, someone is deliberately building a wall directly in front of an

existing wall. Somebody asks him, "What on earth do you want to do by making another

wall?" However, it is almost impossible to respond by stating one's rationale. It is hard to

say this act is either useless or useful. He who stands there in bewilderment begins to smile

unknowingly in acknowledgment while watching the wall—which is not a wall in a

conventional sense—gradually being built. Perhaps this is because the artist has opened a

space in which all walls are at once walls and not walls. In fact, I come to realize that this

Happener[285] is not building another wall. He strips the everyday concept of "wall"—walls

purposelessly made again and again to partition—from the wall, undertaking a

transformative Happening to make it a window to the world. The man is simply doing what

amounts to doing nothing.

Immersed in a world where these nonsensical and comical acts have unfolded, I

am suddenly surprised to see myself somehow obsessed by a worthless farce. The sun goes

down as I run around visiting glass and stone shops in the hot and humid city of Kyoto. The

following day I resume my hurried search for stone and glass shops, and I finally encounter

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[285] Translator's note: "Happener" is a neologism that derives from the rise of street Happenings in Japan throughout the 1960s; Lee used it in a number of essays to refer to those who engage in a Happening or event.

two glass panes about five by nine feet each and several huge rocks, which I carry into the museum with wild joy. Then, I carefully lay the glass on the floor and thoroughly wipe the dirt off with a cleaner, and remove the dust from the stones as well. Then . . . as I barely lift the stone with [the aid of] ten-plus workers, I all of a sudden drop it on the glass. Of course, cracks develop where the rock has hit, the stone and the glass vividly revealing a *place*. In the same manner, I drop another rock in another spot, calling forth again the appearance of *place*. The crack lines conjoin like spider webs. The stones engage in a distance with one another and create tensions with the glass. And I myself experience a spark with all of these things. Through each other's mediation, the stones, the glass, and I become different structures, each of which at once exists as ourselves (the stones and glass and myself), and transcends ourselves. I am no longer unable to judge whether this succeeds or fails, only to discover myself confronting this insane event. There is no way to add anything else or pay any more attention to this. Utterly dumbfounded, I decide to walk around the exhibition and go home.

As I think about it, *shigusa* is a continuing act of encountering meaning. The whole of this act appears to others a universalized structure of encounter. A conscious being sees a stone or glass lying around as just that, no more or no less. In other words, they have become representations that can only be seen in this manner.

The world for the first time reveals its structure through a natural catalytic relation—that is, structure—of an encounter with a conscious being. The world unbound by representational ideas exists as a free and vivid sight. That is a horizon hard to sense without the function of structuring.

I continue to contemplate on the train. At the exhibition, there still seem to be few who possess the tendency for such works. There are still many objectified works that operate as representations: a painting that is two dimensional yet made to look three dimensional, two cylinders in different colors standing next to one another in the mode of Minimal art, the idea of vanishing drawn on the floor instead of canvas, a piece of cloth hanging on the wall in such a way as not to call attention to itself whatsoever, metal wires objectifying the space based on a prescribed rule. And so on and so forth. In addition, I recall some works that would have been overlooked as trash or some mechanical device were they not in a museum.

Hearing me say these things, some may defiantly assert that art is after all entirely equal to everyday events and their effects, nothing more. However, in truth that kind of attitude precisely exposes the shallowness of modern people who try to package the world as a predetermined object—as virtual imagery. That has led to a strange doctrine of art for art's sake that advocates the renouncement or "abolition of art,"[286] that amounts to no effort to clarify and transcend the problems of modern art but merely conceal them. As is well known, "mature modernity" today is mired in a condition in which idea and phenomenon are divided due to self-rebellion. Modern art, premised on the identification of concept and object, cannot naturally help but bring about a complete collapse of such objectification. We can transcend modern revisionism and face the dawn of contemporary times (*gendai*) only when we smash objectification as a representational concept. I truly wish to declare the end of modernity on the occasion of this *Trends* exhibition. Yet the

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[286] Translator's note: This phrase is derived from *L'Abolition de l'art* (1968), a treatise by French writer and poet Alain Jouffroy. Minemura Toshiaki translated the text into Japanese for the progressive magazine *Dezain hihyō/Design Review* in 1969. See Minemura, "Geijutsu no haiki," *Dezain hihyō/Design Review*, no. 8 (1969). Many thanks to Reiko Tomii for alerting me to this reference.

moment I arrive in Tokyo and look around, I must reckon that my hope is still a distant

dream. Soon enough, I myself will likely be involved again in the same old "art

exhibitions"...

Katsuragawa Sei (aka Suga Kishio), "The Start of Disappearance: As Things Deny Things"

Translated by Oshrat Dotan.

Originally published as Katsuragawa Sei (pseudonym of Suga Kishio), "Shōmetsu no kiten: Buttai wa buttai o hitei shinagara" (The start of disappearance: As things deny things), *SD*, no. 62 (December 1969): 51–53; reprinted in *Suga Kishio chosaku senshū*: *Ryōiki wa tojinai* (Selected writings of Suga Kishio: Spheres will not be closed), exh. cat. (Yokohama: Yokohama Museum of Art, 1999), 45–51.

Today, it has become possible to use anything as an object of art. Things of nature, processed or reformed things, and even such elements as fire and gas are directly or indirectly used in art. In this chaotic era, where everything is at once raw material and creation, what is at the forefront of this art-making consciousness? At one time it was technique, at other times methodology, action itself, and imitation. And today, in the second half of the twentieth century, it is dominated by an ambiguous word called "idea" [*kannen*]. This word is invisible to the eye and emerged as an analogical interpretation of the historical language, which is a human convention. All the more because we cannot see it, we think *idea* to be something mysterious yet weighty, affording it a certain status prompted by both the ritualistic nature of language and our blind gullibility. Why must *idea* be suddenly presented in the discipline of art? Perhaps because the act of seeing has always been forced upon humans in a visual culture, to the point that we cannot believe in anything formless. I do not know whether we *see*, therefore a thing to be seen exists, or *seeing* is *idea*'s function of representation—but we can only perceive *idea* by glimpsing it, to say the least. To our eye, even a conceptual construct consisting of numerous ideations

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appears a single idea. But just as ideas have no necessity to produce things, we have no reason to necessarily read a conceptual construct in a visible form.

Many of us artists draw a sense of confidence in our works from the outdated misconception that condones formal but condemns conceptual imitation. But it should be the other way around. Since art is in every respect a visual medium, we should in principle condemn formal imitation.

We confront an idea and produce a form, or attempt to explain it by using signs and words. But should and could *ideas* be explained? What are "these things" that contain both visible aspects and abstract linguistic spaces without contradiction? While things are something to be spoken about, language is something with which to speak. Don't we need that which engages neither of them?

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Recently it has become so common to use things found in nature that few of us are surprised to see rather strange things displayed as art. Why do artists so readily bring in elements that form nature itself, such as wood, stones, soil, and water? I can understand that one sees a parallel in the convention of "making" something of their own and the concept of "choosing"—that is, making by choosing without further intervention. When one chooses a thing, he unconsciously knows that he simultaneously discards something else as an integral counterpart of action. There must be some justification if one chooses and presents as a substitute of *idea* things that have not been chosen or made by humans but long existed in our everyday environment since time immemorial. Natural things are beginning to be used as something in between *ideas* and things that humans conceptually

cognize. When we realize that *ideas* cannot be underwritten by things and events but can only be justified by *ideas* themselves, the object displayed is left hanging between *idea* and the concept of that object, no longer belonging to either.

Humans think that because conceptual thought exists, it can be expressed by an object. However *ideas* and objects exist not on top of each other but side by side. In art I detest such seemingly dignified terms used as Conceptual art. What allows such terms is the premise that *idea* can be expressed by a visible object or event. Art that flaunts *idea* is not necessarily conceptual, nor does it represent an initial thought. So long as human thought moves in a vertical manner, the artist is unable to match up the cognitive and representational functions because humans possess a manner of thinking that can be repeated independently of time and space.

In 1969 stones and dirt from the moon were transported to Earth [by humans] for the first time. The moon became at once present in reality and remained fictional. Even now, as the "moon matter" is being examined, the moon itself remains a mysterious, unknown thing. The stones and dirt that the scientists study are indeed of the moon, but once they were brought here they lost their locational designation "of the moon" and became "simply stones and dirt." When we see such matter, we vaguely imagine the mysterious entity that is the moon but we cannot really sense it in our skin in its historical planetary facts, its structure, its geological data, and its living environment. If we know anything, it is the abstract fact that the matter was transported from the moon to Earth across a vast space and the paltry scientific data relating to them—moon matter, that is, that has lost its specific designation "of the moon." When we say "the moon is round," we have a flat image of the moon rather than the thought that it is purely made up of dirt like

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Earth. Even if we brought the moon down here [for inspection], we would not see much difference in its stones.

When one chooses or discerns something, he references other things or certain ways of thinking. He compares it with similar things, of the same kind or with similar forms, to determine whether it is strange, useful, dangerous, and so on. The stones of the moon gain the label "of the moon" only when they are compared with those of Earth. Without something to give us a relative view, we evaluated the moon only through a name, "moon," that was no more than fictional. When one saw the stones of the moon, one was not amazed because they were different from our own, but because of the recognition that the stones of the moon *are* in fact the moon itself, and because its dust, which can be easily blown away, contains a [different] world, an enormous entity with its own history and time and space.

Robert Smithson, who divided a triangular wooden box [into segments] and filled it with stones from a certain location, no doubt needed not just any stones on the ground but those of a specific American region. They had to be not from Europe or the East, but unmistakably from a specific place in America. His choice points to the most painful aspect of American culture that is based on virtual imagery; this is because the country does not treat ethnic consciousness, climatic features, and linguistic order as fundamental to its formation. Yet even Smithson failed to completely transcend the vices of America's virtual culture. Since he had no clear real entity to transcend, he had to record his collection of stones through its location, date, and situation. Notably, even this record was not handwritten but typed and printed.

When Smithson transferred stones from one place to another, he was one step closer to moving away from object-as-concept, towards a form that was not an object

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framed by the symbolic designation of a stone. That is to say, he felt in the stones the weight of America itself, which could not be recorded by a typewriter. He tried to capture the weight, distance, time, and space all together: that is, the America that cannot be spoken of. He unambiguously placed stones inside the triangular box, but I wonder if what he actually put inside was the nation of America that Americans are forgetting, one consisting of endless muddy wildernesses that will last for years to come as long as Earth continues to exist, and whose culture of fictions will quickly turn back to wildernesses once it is over.

Smithson made a connection with nature through the act of transporting, and he attempted to preserve human-to-human and human-to-culture relationships by making his divided triangular box. In other words, with a simple act of delineating the form, he planted in the viewer the intention of freely choosing this form and invoked the common gesture of creating a box. This means that the viewer at the least unconsciously recognized the America that existed in actuality in the box's stones. Although the viewer does not share any language about stones, he can share with others the common topic of the boxes, because the box is a manmade structure.

Smithson's *Nonsite* work is not so much an expression of material as a product of his actions. Although an object exists there, one cannot see its real entity. Smithson used the stones and the wooden frame because of some *idea*, but he tried to evaluate everything in a side-by-side manner—be it *ideas*, stones, wood, and photographs, as well as typewritten records and actions—in order to make an object present there. The work thus always condemns the real image of America. Today, when raw materials have become part of art-making, we come to know the fact that things are forced to expose their characteristics; that *ideas* are directly connected not to their presences but to their

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characteristics; and that, conversely, *ideas* have no more expanse than things actually presented there. *Ideas* by no means go beyond human thoughts. There must be a good reason if natural things have spread among artists as components of art-making (dependent on exterior elements) in such a short period of time. Japanese people come into contact with nature and see things in such a way as to immerse themselves deep in nature's landscape, deep in time and space. In doing so, they must see everything appear side by side in their alternate vision to see the invisible. Simply put, what enables this immersion is the credo of Eastern metaphysics that everything is nothing. This spirituality, wherein what is present is also absent, prevented Japan from devising *ideas* that allow a shift to the next generation.

The roots of materialism and structuralism date back ages. Because they have been called by different names, we have paid little attention to them. Human action is based on repetition. Why is it that in the midst of doing the same thing again and again, one comes to believe that he does it for the first time and won't repeat it again for the rest of his life? Because humans do not use an act to establish a meaning; that is, because an act only proves the act itself. It is a concept akin to "sound." The space that a single person possesses over his lifetime constitutes a zone of time that flows not vertically but horizontally. One can certainly memorize various events from the past. However, that proves nothing. One memorizes only his act of memorizing.

When we had to break down the concept of an object with the object, what we did was to let "it" be known with minimum human intervention. Only when we clearly recognize a tree as a "tree" and soil as "soil" can we grasp the object for us to break down.

In doing so, we create an artificial nature that the human brain can freely manipulate from the nature in which human consciousness is immersed.

The simplest method for separating individual things from each other is to use different materials under the same thought. This brings out the specificity of each material and results in the unexpected effect that the crux of thought can be instantly visualized. It helps the generalized thought to acquire an absolute super-logic underscored by a specific conviction. Rubber stretches. Glass breaks. Sand, though granular, holds a certain form. All these prompt the viewer in the direction to "feel something" other than the direction to "see." What we want from things is their extreme states, not that they must be in these states. But at the moment when a thing's specificity is revealed, the thing can repudiate and transform itself.

If things can maintain their extreme states, there must also be other relative states they should absolutely never take. The greater the difference between the two, the greater sense we have about the directionality of things to transform into something else. Things can leave a state in which there is something and enter a sensory dimension in which there is nothing.

We have mastered how to freely use other components by applying the same methodology. Yet, in every instance, contrary to our intention, things more and more invade the act itself, thereby deepening their relationship with humans. As a result one has to compete with others for new materials. And by frequently changing materials, one drags the invisible down to the visible world—indeed, a descending operation. This has been the peculiar way in which *ideas* manifest themselves with no methodological foundation.

In this methodology, if something is made based on a separate *idea*, the result is a representation of the characteristics not of a material but an act. Thus, without constantly changing materials, we may change *ideas* and the ones who think them. Just as things have certain characteristics, our gestures and acts also have definitive characteristics, which differ from person to person. Even if the same thing is made from the same material and the same method, we can still clearly see a different act. Only at this point can we discuss whether each case involves thought at all. We then realize that the limits of act are defined not by those of things but by those of thought. We did not question when new materials revealed the same worn and overused ideas. But well-used materials expose the limits of action and confirm that *ideas* must be isolated from each other and move to an invisible dimension.

If artists make things intelligible only to them, this merely exposes a sort of distorted stoicism in them.

As I observed earlier about Smithson's box and natural stones, we should pay more attention to materials that have undergone artificial refinement. Contrary to our initial understanding, natural things have no possibility of transformation in the sense that humans could remake them. We unconditionally accept soil, stones, and water, yet we are unable to think of, create, or use that which may replace them. We never doubted that natural things were the basic source materials from which humans create things. However, as soon as we tried to present and see manmade products, they bounced back to us as false entities. Moreover, they even attempted to shed their non-changeability. Humans hold clear preconceptions about things in terms of their states of being and structure; despite their differences, humans cannot completely hide their conviction [in understanding something

when they say] "I know it,". If one is too uncertain to affirm "I am here," how can one squarely face the presence of things themselves? Humans refuse to see a new world that lies beyond their cognition.

At a gallery in the city I happened to see a work by Suga Kishio, consisting solely of wax, that reveals his non-standard cognition. In this work, we must comprehend not only the changing nature of the era and the extreme state of action, but also his doubt about controlling things with things. Seeing this work, one must squarely confront the "actual existence" beyond natural things.

An attempt to deny things by things through a combination of manmade and natural elements was made by Sekine Nobuo, who once placed a large natural stone on a stainless steel rectangular column. At first glance, the natural stone gives the illusion of floating in midair. But that is a trivial matter. Rather, we must perceive the weight caused by the stone indeed existing over the rectangle. When we come near it, we feel as though the stone may fall on us. At that very moment, when we imagine the stone falling off the column down to the ground, the huge stone disappears from our sight. What we see is no more than "a landscape with a stone." In this sight, the stone has lost its concept as "stone." The stone vanishes the stainless steel column, denying its own being as a "stone." The column merely represents a passive state of bearing the stone. We look at the stone, but not the weight of the artist's *idea* that exists parallel to it. We see a state of emergency (wherein all cognitions are discarded) that necessarily arises when things deny every concept and existence of things. A slim space in which the *ideas* barely coexist depends on the justification that it must be a combination of *that* stone and *that* stainless rectangle, no

matter who sees it. It constitutes an intense moment, when manmade and natural things that merge and are at rest, when this condition itself assumes an actual existence.

When more than two materials exist in a relationship unbreakable by any dynamic force, they possess a sense of crisis. This sense of crisis not only concerns their positioning, but the [state of] humans themselves being adrift and the crisis of *ideas* shown by artists. A Butoh dancer asserts that his body contains a square box. This statement is premised upon the contradiction that while his body and the box are clearly of equal value, there is something that is neither the body nor box and cannot be anything other than the body and box.

We must find a new position when we arrive at the moment when idea no longer becomes an idea, material loses its role as material, existence no longer becomes existence, and action becomes unable to perform its role as action.

Unless art at least aims to drastically change linguistic spaces, fixed concepts, climates and geographies, anthropological structures, religions, and spiritualities—rather than addressing the state of things, human actions, and the petty world of *ideas*—we shall have a sure death in art.

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We are now challenging our times.

We must realize that the fluidity of *ideas* and the changing thinking of things have at last come together in our everyday space; and that making things is not a completed function of representation but constitutes merely the starting point to another space that is enormous and undefined.

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Lee Ufan, "In Search of Encounter: The Sources of Contemporary Art"

Translated by Stanley N. Anderson. Edited by Domenick Ammirati, Mina Lee, and Mika Yoshitake.

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I

The process of the rise and decline of modern art during a short four or five hundred years is a history of a mode of representation in which images are given definite form. The idea of an autonomous power of thought, which celebrated the active independence of humans from God, was revolutionary. But who could have predicted the effect it would have on human history? The only meaning of "making" was the objectification of an idea; that is, the reification and concretion of an image. The unified mode of representation was invented by modern "man," and artists were responsible for implementing it in plastic form. The world became an object to be reworked, manipulated, and reapprehended by the artist on the basis of his ideas and made into something desirable to human beings. More fundamentally, the result was that the world was seen as material for the execution of ideas—as nothing but a territory to be colonized. The basic concern of the modern natural sciences has been to manufacture a technique for objectifying hypotheses based on human ideas rather than studying and conducting a dialogue with nature as such. In the history of modernity, "man," who was given special status in many different ways, became an active agent who applied imperialist ideas that gave meaning to the world in history. (In some regions of the world,

colonization has been seen as necessary for modernization, and it has even been advocated as a way of overcoming the modern West.)

Through a process of representation unique to conscious beings (that is, the idea of unilateral objectification typical of modernity), all things were continuously made into reified conceptual entities, and as a result, modern space has become saturated with ideas. Everything everywhere takes on a human smell, and the prevalence of reified ideas makes it almost impossible to perceive the externality of things. Nothing can be seen but images and human faces. In other words, what human beings continually confront is nothing but themselves. No matter where one goes, one is in a closed world where it is impossible to encounter otherness or new vistas. There exists today a culture of objects called virtual images, temporary forms not based on any fundamental principle. One cannot say that this is a world just as it is, with externality, with which we are capable of engaging. Modern people confront a reality consisting of self-identical phenomena, which are reified ideas; although this reality may seem to resemble actual reality containing otherness and the unknown, it ultimately is not the same.

A piece of canvas in a frame, entitled *Composition*, by Mondrian, hangs on the wall. When seen straightforwardly as a material object, it is very much a simple physical thing. It does not depict some sort of landscape, however, nor does it call attention to the canvas, color, thickness of paint, or frame. It is arranged so that the viewer reads the idea of *composition* in it, and it creates an autonomous world unrelated to any landscape in the outside world. Therefore the spectator is not permitted to form associations with the outside world from the painting but must analyze and understand what is in it. As long as it is a representation of a closed phenomenon without externality, it denies any connection

with the outside and directness of seeing and feeling. If we look at an object that can be

associated, at first glance, with something outside itself, the unreality and self-contained

quality of the representation becomes even more evident. An example is Claes Oldenburg's

giant *Hamburger*, made of plaster and synthetic materials. It appears to be a symbol of an

industrial society in which everything is devoted to the objectification of an image. It is not

the same, however, as the original food item made from natural ingredients in the home

that it resembles. By saying this, I do not mean simply that it is an "artwork" and therefore

inedible. This object may recall a hamburger, but ultimately it has been reduced to an

image of a "hamburger" that is unrelated to those in the outside world. Modern images

have their origin in a world cut off from the outside and are forced into a mode of

representation that leaps beyond reality; therefore the thing represented is obviously

unrelated to the outside world and given its own value. And these things that are unrelated

to reality come to determine and reify the reality in front of us. The standardized

hamburger produced by McDonald's surpasses the concrete, imperfect hamburger made in

a home or by an individual, and all of these aspects of a hamburger are reduced to this form.

The characteristics of various natural materials and the nature of the feelings of the person

making it are ignored, and the name "hamburger" takes on a life of its own. A ghostlike,

insubstantial "hamburger" emerges from an image transformed into information. The thing

made or manufactured through this process of representation necessarily becomes a

virtual image. It has no directness or exteriority, and when it is applied in society, it leads to

alienation of reality and nature.

 Oldenburg's works, which appear humorous and ironic, may be interpreted as

criticisms of everyday reality. And it is not unreasonable to take them this way. As seen in

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the ideology of Pop art, however, because of the essential nature of images, it cannot be denied that they are emblems or symbols of today's industrial society. Even if we see an object as critical of everyday life, as long as it remains in a representational world cut off from the outside, this is no different from the autonomy and completeness of Mondrian's *Composition* When we think of the everyday situation, permeated with the indirect communication of television and computer media and the increasingly hermetic world produced by a systemized mode of image representations, we realize how difficult it is to have a direct relationship with reality. Television and computer media symbolize the fact that human beings live in a world of images in which the world is made identical with ideas and controlled information. There is no reality beyond the knowledge of human beings nor a space-time in which we can make contact with the Other. Even mountains and wilderness are represented spaces that have been turned into images, and perceptions of the unknown and directness are forbidden. Relationship is denied, and we are forced to live inside a world that has been turned into an enlarged self, a kind of closed community. Festivals, dance, theater, and games have all become reproductions of performances that replicate indirect representations of space, and for this reason, their uncertainty as events is no longer allowed to emerge.

In the past, performances had a strong, direct relationship to the outside world and to mysterious entities such as the gods and nature. As a result, trees, rocks, birds, and people could recognize each other's alterity in the process of seeing, feeling, and touching each other in interactive relationships. Even when observing a picture, a mediation occurred that roused the imagination toward things in the surroundings or a distant world.

A work of sculpture was not self-sufficient; it mediated a stimulating effect that vividly illuminated its relationship with the surrounding space and people.

The age of reification. In it, the world that exists is ignored, and space is covered over with images unrelated to that world. Through a process of representation, a world like an artwork, in which images are set up as if they were reality, lacks physicality, and emphasis is placed on reading this world for the purpose of recognition rather than actual seeing. Here all that is sought is understanding while uncertain otherness and exteriority are eliminated. This is an age in which unilateral assignment of value by human beings via representation conceals the layers of contradiction in the world as it is, and the objectified world alone is beginning to come to the foreground.

The essence of this artworklike world is a concept of domination, like that observed in the colonial administration of the great powers, and this fact speaks eloquently of the nature of modernism.

II

Such contemporary phenomena as people performing Happenings and extrainstitutional art events, the Futen tribe,[287] hippies, and violent student protesters are examples of a guerilla-style rebellion against a reified world; they are parts of a movement advocating liberation from a fraudulent system. The most obvious features of this movement are a desire for externality and events aimed at establishingnonidentity between things that are truly different. It can be broadly observed that many contemporary artists are trying to shift away from internalized historical expression; they are more interested in the outside

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[287] The *Futen-zoku*, literally "wandering tribe," were a group of Japanese hippies who gathered in the neighborhood near Shinjuku train station in Tokyo in the 1960s.

world and engaging in a relationship with the Other. Of course, not all contemporary art shows the same tendency. Even though the prosperity of industrial society based on modern technology is beginning to falter, the modernist faith in the illusion of identity has still not been deconstructed. Acts that advocate the abandoning of modern "man" and "art" actually serve to obscure the problem and in some cases reproduce the everyday reality administered by the system and the sea of controlled information. Regardless, the only thing we can do is explore the possibilities arising in the ambiguity of the field of recent expression.

Mounting a sign on the wall reading "The Work Has Not Yet Arrived," placing a photograph on the floor which is a photograph of that very floor, putting a hollowed-out television set in a corner of the gallery, or loosely draping a large piece of cloth on a wall: these are all strategies that seem meaningful (or perhaps meaningless) in the context of an art museum, gallery, or exhibition. If these objects were not placed in an exhibition or gallery space, people would not distinguish them from ordinary, everyday reality and would probably pass by without noticing them. In comparison to conventional, authoritative artworks that are complete in themselves and have a strong sense of presence and autonomy, they are noteworthy for their including external elements related to surrounding things and space.

The most representative example of the peculiar position occupied by a work of art is no doubt the urinal that Marcel Duchamp called *Fountain*. By signing this readymade object with the pseudonym "R. Mutt" and bringing it into an exhibition space, he revealed the secret of how an artwork comes into being in industrial society and suggested the mechanism involved. In the eyes of ordinary people, it is only a urinal, like those ordinarily

found in our everyday surroundings—nothing more, nothing less. But Duchamp placed it under the condition of being seen as a "fountain" and not a urinal. Therefore it might be said that the established character of a urinal is removed from the thing that exists, and in addition, we are asked to see it as something else. This act allows for a variety of interpretations. In any case, we need to pay attention to this method of reversing the ordinary definitions of things and ironically demonstrating how the objective nature of things is threatened by externality.

Can we recognize the expressive power of an artwork to shatter its everydayness when it relies on the context of an art museum or exhibition ? In some cases, we see a tendency for expression to be nullified or dissolved in an everyday context, reinforcing the reification of things. Ultimately, however, we cannot dismiss the significance of showing things in a way that shifts them out of everydayness. In exhibitions and museums, expressive acts no longer culminate in rearrangements within a represented space. They undeniably tend to liberate interiority while showing the exteriority of things.

Zhuangzi said that if you see trees and rocks as nothing but trees and rocks, then you have not really seen trees and rocks. Trees and rocks are trees and rocks, but at the same time they are not trees and rocks. In his view, even trees and rocks in themselves are an immeasurable universe, transcending all definitions and equal to the heavens. When trees and rocks appear as nothing but trees and rocks, the observer is only seeing the embodiment of his own idea, an objectified image of trees and rocks. No assumptions going by the names of trees and rocks exist in nature. These things may appear to be definite objects when an observer takes the role of an artistlike "man" and subscribes to a mode of representation. The expression and appearance of all things continue changing moment by

moment, revealing a world that is quite unlike any name or image assigned by human beings; this is actually something that everyone knows. But even if we are aware of the uncertainty of the outside world, we may remain unaware of the world of identities that are internally agreed upon in everyday life. In industrial society, which is filled with controlled and homogenized information and vast reproduction of objects, it is even more difficult to notice exteriority on the horizon of the everyday.

One can say that, in any age, the problem of artistic expression must take up a discussion that involves awakening. The issue today, I believe, is how to make people perceive the nonidentical world, in all its externality, as different from the illusory world of identity that has been internalized. It is necessary to shift things away from representational space and inject vitality into their exteriority. This can be done by recognizing the Other and opening up a site for lively encounters between things from over there that come into contact with things from here. With ordinary perception, a tree cannot easily be seen just as it is, as containing an abundance of the unknown. In order to confirm that a tree is a tree, it is necessary to perform an act that produces a *tree* in a way that leads to what might be called transcendence. Shifting things in one's surroundings so that they appear not just as they are but *just as they are* comprises the act of expression and artistic production, and through this, it becomes possible to perceive things just as they are in a reflective manner. Therefore a work of art must be an ambiguous mediation that has the effect of cleansing things in the outside world with awareness and instantaneously reconnecting them in a leap to the outside. What I am describing is not a unilateral representation of things nor an act of reproducing images for confirmation as if confronting

one's own face. Multiple elements must live and relations must come alive. This is what

Monet meant when he said, "The outside world exists."

III

Walking along a road after a rain, I see many puddles. Some are large, some small.

Some spread out sideways, some lengthwise. Some show reflections of the sky, some of

buildings. A casual walker may suddenly stop in front of a puddle. It does not seem

especially different from the others, but for some reason he lingers in front of it. Did the

puddle wink at him? Did something in the puddle display characteristics to which his

sensory organs readily responded, leading to his self-awareness? Was there a well-timed

interaction between an erogenous zone in the puddle and his sensory receptors? Whatever

the reason, he suddenly "sees" the vividness of the world in the puddle. Or one might say

there has been a sudden "encounter" between something here and something out there. Of

course it would not do to try to explain the content of this "encounter" or possess it by

making it into an object. At a certain moment, the puddle and the person have an open

relationship in which they communicate with each other. This sort of experience is what

Gaston Bachelard calls the "visitation of a poetic moment," which transcends all fixed

concepts and objective theories.

In an essay, Kawabata Yasunari writes of *encountering*[288] a scene one morning at a

hotel in Hawaii when he noticed a set of drinking glasses set on the railing of the terrace

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[288] In his original, Kawabata used the word "kaikō" [encounter], but here Lee deliberately uses the word consistent with his philosophical vocabulary, "deai." Whereas kaikō refers to an unexpected chance encounter often as if by fate, "deai" designates a first time meeting with someone or something from which one may experience a lasting impression or inspiration.

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glittering in the morning sun. He had probably seen a large number of glasses during the seventy-odd years of his life. He had probably had contact with many types of glass, including some that were very expensive or rare. But this moment marked his first encounter with glasses that revealed the world vividly in an instant. The glasses transcended their conditional character of being reified objects—glasses as merely glasses. He broke through the closed consciousness of the image, and both parties to the encounter were suddenly ushered into an open world filled with light. Or should we say that the encounter opened up the world and made it shine? In any case, the encounter is an event of exchange between two parties who happen to be present at a site of mediation.

No matter how beautiful a puddle may be, or how much a glass shines, it will not make a difference unless its effect reaches the viewer. Even if the viewer has his eyes open, if he cannot apprehend the beauty or the light, the encounter will not occur. And for someone without the desire for expression, the site of this poetic event will disappear instantly in an ocean of forgetting. I am not attempting to analyze this situation or argue over whether a vivid world already existed and things or people were subsequently drawn to it, whether the shining objects made things around them appear more vivid, or whether the encounter was brought about through an accidental relationship between the shining things and the person looking at them.

Kierkegaard and Heidegger describe encounters as events attending the point of rupture between self and other, between consciousness and the world. Bergson and Nishida Kitaro have seen them as "pure experience," Bachelard as "poetic moments," and Baudelaire as "correspondences." A unilateral way of thinking is not involved in any of these approaches. An encounter is a moment mediated by a kind of directness in which an

interactive event involving elements from both here and over there breaks through the systematic shell of the everyday. Why, one might ask, should these things be linked to artistic expression? Of course not all artistic expression is necessarily an encounter. I am paying attention to this issue because I see encounters as expressive acts that shift art away from the modern process of representation and allow us to reexamine the ambiguity of self and other in a relationship involving interiority and exteriority.

Encounters play a fundamental and stimulating role for people who have a desire for expression or a need to make art because they are sites of interactive events and at the same time experiences that mediate directness. Something like a primal experience becomes critical in the search for clues to reaching a mediated expression, which is motivated by a desire for a relatum of a site and the duration of a moment. An encounter occurs at a certain site at a certain moment. It disappears again in the next moment, and the person having the encounter cannot remain present at the same site forever. At the same time, an encounter cannot be elicited immediately the way one wants at a desired moment. At that very point, as I have suggested above, unique methods are available to conscious beings so that they can engage in a world of open encounter. There must be awareness of the exposed nature of the site of encounter and a structuring through gestures, acts that perpetuate and universalize the relationship of the encounter. The primary reason for engaging in artistic expression can be described as a desire to sustain the encounter and to universalize the relationship that produces it.

The act of writing. If it is carried out for the purpose of assigning some sort of value to the encounter or giving it an objectlike meaningfulness, it will fail to be a mode of relationship. Should writing about an encounter spell out the mechanism of mediation

while imagining the encounter between the person and the puddle, or between the morning sun, the person, and the glasses? No, this would be the wrong way of putting it. As a type of gesture, it would be better to think of it as an attempt to prolong the encounter through the method of describing the relationship. If carried out this way, the writing will not be a finished "work" that provides some kind of definitive explanation but what Roland Barthes calls a "text"; that is, a living structure that makes an encounter possible. For the reader, it does not have the structure of a self-contained world but becomes, in a different sense, a universalized intermediary that enables correspondence or encounter through the relational mode of reading. The assertion that a gesture is a self-limiting operation related to the world means that it is an act of desire for greater duration of the interactive relationship found in this kind of encounter.

IV

In earlier times, people placed salt on either side of a gate or wrapped a piece of thick rope around a large tree. Through these gestures, they created a medium- structure that led to an encounter. Even though these magic charms have lost their power of mediation and been objectified into empty forms, one has a strange feeling in their presence even today.

These sorts of past mediating structures can be seen everywhere; one might consider for example, the moon-viewing pavilion, a small building constructed at a certain location for viewing the moon, in a different sense as one type of mediating structure. The moon in the ordinary night sky can be seen as the simple object known as "the moon." In this sense, it is a nonrelational thing that cannot evoke any sort of encounter. The moon as

seen from a certain place at a certain time, however, may happen to enter into an ambiguous relationship, described by the word *soku*, in which, for both moon and viewer, the seer instantaneously becomes the seen and the seen instantaneously becomes the seer. This relationship transcends both moon and human and becomes a site that vividly reveals the world of encounter. The moon-viewing pavilion, a universalized structure, emerges through a gestural operation that sustains the encounter. (The making of an artwork by an artist is just like the construction of a moon-viewing pavilion, since the building of the pavilion does not give solid form to the moon itself.) The specificity of place in the condition of the world produced by such a gesture reveals a state of things open to encounters. In a sense, the person having an encounter with the moon in a moon-viewing pavilion may make deeper and more direct contact with the moon than the Apollo astronauts who fly there and actually touch its surface.

In the past, the Buddha and Bodhidharma were living intermediaries for all living things. Bodhidharma continued meditating in a seated position facing a wall for nine years. In and of itself, this gesture of continuing an encounter generated a structure. Dharma's style of mediating encounters within *zazen*, or Zen sitting, was universalized and continued to be practiced for a long time thereafter. Furthermore, the Buddha himself was an intermediary who showed and conveyed more vividly the world of Buddhist law and therefore a state of open encounter with things just as they are. The world is the world that continues to be the world, whether the Buddha exists or not. The everyday space of all living things is not a revelation of that world. Illuminated by the structure of the Buddha's many gestures, the world discloses its form vividly just as it is. It goes without saying, of

course, that today this revelation has been reduced to spurious statues of the "Buddha," mere religious objects, and has lost its capacity for mediation.

There are all sorts of encounters, gestures, and modes of duration. Consider Sisyphus, who should not be seen as an example of the absurd dimension of the modern human condition. Sisyphus pushed a large rock to the top of a hill, but when he reached the top, the rock rolled down to the bottom again. Then he started all over, pushing the rock to the top of the hill and having it roll down to the bottom once more. And then, he pushed the rock up again and the raised rock rolled down to the bottom yet again. And he continued repeating this action endlessly. Looking at this from the point of view of the world as such, it is more than an action simply repeated by Sisyphus. The rock, Sisyphus, and the hill all have the same status in an ambiguous relationship in which each of them simultaneously performs and is performed upon (these states are equivalent). In a fundamental sense, the ideas of Sisyphus as an individual do not determine what takes place. Neither is it determined by the rock or the hill. The condition of an open world becomes an event through a (self-limiting) aspect of this ambiguous gesture. When looking at Sisyphus, who is the one participant in the encounter with the special quality of a being of self-awareness who possesses the operations of consciousness, one must pay special attention to how gesture becomes a durational operation of an "encounter."

Sisyphus probably experienced an encounter the first time he pushed the rock up the hill, or before that, and perceived and became aware of a disclosure of the world. The fact that he repeats this action tells us that gesture is definitely a durational operation of the encounter. Because this durational operation is always a relational operation, it is neither an objective explanation of what is encountered nor a metaphor. For a third

participant of the encounter, the important thing is the overall gesture performed by Sisyphus' durational operation, which, like pillow words that go beyond objective meaning, presents a structural relationship that reveals the world.[3]

Naturally, there are many possible appearances of modes of mediation and actualization of structure, depending on the time, place, and nature of participants in the encounter. As with Bodhidharma and Sisyphus, there are cases in which mediation emerges from the durational operation of gestures themselves. There are also cases in which the gestures of durational operation, as in the previous examples of writing, the salt at the gate, or the moon-viewing pavilion, have a more compelling effect that lead to a substantial relationship structure whereby encounters perpetuate and are made possible. One also cannot overlook the fact that historically, gestures that mediate effectively often have both of these tendencies. In the playful, nonsensical gestures of Sekine Nobuo, which resemble the gestures of Sisyphus, it is noteworthy that the durational operation itself expresses strong structural characteristics and also that the process throws into relief the successfully universalized form of the mediation. An intermediary is a way of being that discloses the condition of the world and an interactive involvement with the Other and exteriority. If it takes the self-limiting form of a condition of self-consciousness, the mediating structurization produced by the durational operation of gestures is an important matter that reveals characteristics particular to a being of self-awareness . There one may find the self-aware being's unique ways of relating to the world in the world and the possibilities, ethics, and systems needed to universalize these ways.

V

On a certain occasion, Sekine Nobuo and his friends dug into the earth with shovels in the middle of a field, and they piled up the soil they removed on the ground nearby in the same shape as the hole. This mysterious action continued for several days. When Sekine and his friends finally left the site, the mysterious structure that had appeared there expressed an ineffable quality of place. A large cylindrical projection stood next to a cylindrical hole, each more than two meters in diameter. The projection was three meters high and the hole three meters deep. If one saw the earth as being divided in two, it was actually one. If one saw it as one, it was two. If one thought that there was something there besides dirt, there was nothing. If one thought there was nothing, there was something. The structural form produced a scene that was humorous and playful but revealed earth just as it is. Even a person who did not know the first thing about art might stop in front of this condition of the earth and experience an encounter.

The mediating structure takes the concave and convex forms of a cylinder. A person from the ancient past would probably have dug up the earth and placed it beside the hole without giving it a special form; an encounter may have been possible, and this condition may have been sufficient as a mode of continuation. But it was perhaps necessary for structure to take on the form of this cylinder and to be slightly larger than human scale, in order to incite a mode of perception suited to today's historical conditions, a self-limiting method that makes it possible to become aware of the encounter. Another of Sekine's mediations was a heavy steel plate placed on a large cylindrical sponge, and here too, a condition limited to the age is used to present substances and forms that have the greatest potential effect on the sense organs of a participant in the encounter. Ancient people made

dolmens simply by placing rocks on top of other rocks, but in today's industrial society, a cylindrical sponge and a steel plate may be perceived as more natural aspects.

I might add that earth, steel plates, and sponges are no longer mere objective things, nor are they just materials in a mediation that evokes encounters. Through the gestures of person participating in the encounter, earth transcends earth and the steel plate and sponge, by being very much a steel plate and very much a sponge, surpass themselves. In other words, the objectivity of the world is shifted by these gestures. That is to say, gestures are a method of artistic expression makes things just as they are into things *just as they are*, and the mechanism responsible for this shift becomes a mediation that enables encounters. As described by both Rilke and Klee, an ambiguous mediation is produced by a dual relational process in which things considered invisible are made visible by temporarily making visible things invisible.

In the modern age, both inner states and the outside world became materials and were assigned value as worlds for the first time, through certain modes of representation. Therefore today's artistic expressions—and their gestures—must start from humanized objects and an objectified world; that is the situation today's art faces. It goes without saying that the entire world, whether wilderness and natural objects or urban space and industrial products, is already concealed by images that have lost their exteriority. Generally speaking, we can see gesture as an artistic act that cuts into and opens up holes in a false everyday environment determined by assumed values.

Characteristics particular to the age for a mediation have an important influence on whether it becomes a living structure or is reduced to an object. A medium that lacks the quality of its times becomes the object of a recognized circumstance, and is nothing more

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than a fictitious *objet*. Qualities in a medium that are specific to the age apply simply to the gestures themselves, and their use becomes a self-limiting approach to time and space that expresses the condition of encounters. The infinite world linked to the outside is always just what it is. It does not even have a history of existence and nonexistence. Human beings are conditioned by their age, systems, and society, which are limited by the peculiar operations of consciousess. It is only within those limitations that the world presents a variety of modes of being and discloses its condition within the structure of those modes. Therefore if artistic expression is not conditioned by the consciousness of the age or does not reflect the forms of perception of the age, it will not be able to stimulate the sense organs or succeed in having a mediating effect; as a result, it may be misunderstood or overlooked as an ordinary, everyday event.

The illusion of identity between ideas and the world is in the process of dissolving. It has been some time now since Foucault declared the end of "man," which was an invention of modernity, and Adorno spoke of the need fornonidentity in his criticism of modern rationalism. Just as countries that have broken free of the chains of imperialism strive as much as possible to recognize each other as equals, in the territory of art, attention is being given to the types of boundaries and relations of expression where self encounters other (rather than constructing a painted empire on canvas through representations of the self). Artistic expression achieves externality and imagination is liberated by structuring an interactive site where dialogue between inside and outside is possible. Using ambiguous artistic expression that is simultaneously passive and active, I hope to cut into the controlled everyday reality of industrial society, breathing fresh air into it, stimulating an

awareness of infinity that transcends the human, and to awaken a world that is always

open.

Suga Kishio, "Existence Beyond Condition" (February 1970)

Translated by Mika Yoshitake

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When we stand far from ground level and happen to climb to a high place, we sense fear not from realizing the altitude, but from our body not being sustained, that there is nothing there to reinforce us, and that is when we confirm a site of "elevation." Because the fact that we use our feet to stand does not change, we feel that we can fly or jump freely, but there is nothing but the sky a few feet under the floorboards. If we think about it, our freedom is controlled by nothing.

There is no better place to sense the earth than from a place of elevation. We are able to stand straight and walk on land without grasping onto anything. Even if we fall at any instant, we will not fall any greater than our own height at all times, so we do not need to grab onto anything in particular to sustain our body.

For those who make architectural designs and plans for large machines, or for those who produce some type of thing, it is probably necessary to see and draw, but these plans do not necessarily represent the monumental space of buildings and machines or the accuracy of the actual materials used. To state an extreme, even if the plans represent symbols for stones, steels, glass wool, and polyurethane boards, it is difficult to imagine the certainty of the thing/object in our minds other than knowing that these things are represented as symbols. Even if we were able to imagine this, it would be at a condensed level, and enfolded into a flimsy object like paper. There must be a difference between the

recognition of individual materials with which people engage versus the actual gathering of these materials.

The theory of whether plans are ends in themselves must be seen from the perspective that the actual object and its plans are things of a completely different nature [dimension]. Minimal Art and Constructivist objects almost always require plans, and the resulting objects are fed back to fit these plans precisely, which means that people's fundamental actions are being controlled without their knowing. When an uncalculated error occurs to things that we are accustomed to seeing, we feel that something is out of place, or sense a mysterious point of interrogation wondering what this is. The greater the gap between the plan and the actual object, the more we are pulled into the artist's intention. After the objects were made, there was a period two or three years ago when it was popular to present plans and diagrams in the same place as the object. But this was nothing other than a process that completely ignored the artist's conceptual thinking and imagination. In other words, it controlled the freedom of the viewer's thoughts toward the existing object, and points to the obvious progression that contemporary objects have been presented as representations of conceptual thinking itself.

As long as we are conscious of whether plans are precedents for visual objects or processes, these plans will never be complete and there should be no need to display them. When plans are no longer perceived as representations, or possess a perceived meaning, a plan sustains itself as a plan for the first time. If plans were simply diagrams, numerical formula, and symbols easily shaped by the hands of people, there would be no emphatic reason toe objects.

With regards to the function of a plan, the reasoning behind showing the plan disappears at the point in which the shift from imagination to perceived representation becomes generalized. Is it not ironic that only when one denies a creative act, the plan becomes an important beginning for a thing to *want to make objects*?[289]

During a time that a diagram is drawn, even if the symbols, lines, and rectangles *had to become actual* objects or phenomena, or representations of objects envisioned in the near future, they are codes and schemes of imagined phenomena, and not actual codifications or schematizations. These imagined codes and diagrams result not from various spontaneous promises of the mind, but are substituted by *promised* imaginary codes and diagrams.

Ever since we entered the 1960s and members of New York Pop such as Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Claes Oldenburg, and Tom Wesselman came to be introduced to Japan, a critic who had just returned from the U.S. stated that each artist held onto an immense amount of memos and notes, unwilling to show them to people. When we consider the U.S. not as a place to think about styles, but as a place to realize something, we realize how these vast memos and notes have functioned to isolate each of these artists. Furthermore, by possessing [advocating] one's own style, we come to realize how we have continued to make a claim on America and the America that exists within us.

These immense memos and notes were written not only for the purpose of making objects, but more significantly, they were used when one realized a stronghold of emotions arising from things in daily life. One would then organize and actualize these into objects or

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[289] For sake of consistency, I have translated *mono* per the following throughout the translation:
　　　もの (general)＝things
　　　物／事物 (concrete)＝objects

two-dimensional canvases by chance in the final stages of organization. To further clarify, creative acts for American artists came to be conceived from the awareness of regarding these as personal memos, and not from the necessity of making objects. Here we can confirm the indispensable role these immense memos of Jasper Johns, Rauschenberg, and others played as charges of anti-society, anti-man, and anti-self.

One may say that these vast memos are a product of the ideology of American civilization or more emphatically, the course of knowledge in response to the entirety of Western thought. "Immense memos" are an important key for tearing down the overly formalized manner of seeing objects and of conceptual thought, and are meant not to make, but *for the purpose to destroy*.

Young Japanese artists mindlessly carry around thick notepads and are insistent on promoting themselves, but I question whether these future artists should really be exposing their cheap memos. When we jot down memos, we always do so with the intention of making a visual object. So long as we aim for objects to be spatial and temporal media, memos will only exist as secondary value.

If memos and data must be necessary, one must reform something. Americans used memos and data as a reform for anti-society and anti-self. As long as we are still conscious of producing objects, we have lost the meaning to possess memos, and that is why we must directly reform objects themselves.

We take photos to document the final object that remains, but recently we do not maintain the things we have made, or perhaps it is more accurate to say, rather than do not, that we cannot maintain them. The moment a work is made, it is definitively *there*, but as

we begin to lose our conscious awareness towards the object, the object simultaneously breaks down and there is a shift from a state of "presence" toward a condition of "existence."[290] In the state of "presence," emphasis is on the presence or absence of conceptual thinking through the condition of the object's "presence" rather than the object [simply] being present. This is not to say an object's "present" state occurs without the actual manipulation of the hand, but points to the object's present condition after it has been subject to some form of application, whether through artificial assembly, acts of movement, or technology. "Existence" refers to the time, space, and the invariable state of the object, and points to none other than the object that we see precisely in front of us.

Depending on the person, producing a state of "presence" is secondary, and connected with the awareness of producing a thing. Before we comprehend "presence," there is obviously a state of "absence" on the other end, and in order to transition from "absence" to "presence," it is necessary for an element to be visualized. If the state of "presence" constitutes the standpoint of a visualized object, the state of "absence" must no doubt constitute the part of making a non-visualized object.

As long as our knowledge of making objects rests on the understanding that "something must be present," we will without a doubt believe in the element of a "present object". Thus if we do not tear apart the concept of the object's materials, many of which people use to make objects, we will not be able to make new objects from a separate standpoint.

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[290] The terms *aru* are distinguished as follows:
　　　有る= presence
　　　在る= existence (being)

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By imagining a "present" state, we moved from a fictional world and enter into an actual world. This knowledge of "presence" and its relationship to making something clearly cannot be avoided. Furthermore, by acknowledging the presence of a produced work even at a point when the conceptual and symbolic effects are lost, these remnants cannot be completely torn apart.

Knowledge of a work "existing" is that it is evident, and one cannot imagine a state of "absence." Separate from any artificial constraints, in other words, it cannot help but *exist* when a manmade creation is completely ignored. To be "present" is the knowledge of a condition, but "to exist" is the very understanding of something that materially exists. The understanding of "existing" is to obliterate both the idea of transforming something anew, and the sadistic character to create a *unique thing* driven by reality within some sort of structural organization.

One can say that the state of "existing" is a very individual and unique way of being for us. The clue for people to transcend their awareness of making objects is to replace the condition of an "existing" thing with that thing's extreme limit of "existence," and by shifting our usual understanding of the condition of a general thing to each thing's isolated mode of "existence."

Artists at the very least have to begin by breaking free from their potential consciousness or conceptions of making an object. In order to understand the shift from an object's general state of being to "the state of existing" at an extreme limit, it is necessary to view man's acts as an intermediary. Say one artist places a large rock on a steel plate. From the act of placing one object over another, we understand that a thing and a thing, a thing and a human share a similar place. If we go one step further, and if it is necessary for the

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steel and stone to never be placed separately, then the conditional character of the thing and the thing are making this happen.

Say there is a wooden log. There is a difference between a means to make this wooden log stand versus a condition when it is standing without the intervention of a human hand. To make it stand is not about the process of producing something, but rather about the fundamental transformation of something, and perhaps it is more natural if the wooden log were lying on its side, buried in the ground, or broken. To make the wood stand is based on the fact that the wood will stand, and one may say that the characteristic manner in which something stands is reduced and taken from the manner of one's act upon it. However, the condition in which a wooden log stands definitively in a place without the human hand is dependent on the support or retains a state in which it stands without any support; the issue here lies in the fundamental manner in which a thing stands. When this happens, one's act is ultimately tied to the thing, and there should be no remnant of a concept of its having been "made."

In daily life, people are not conscious that they are repeating the same movements when are in the process of repeating these same movements. This is because even if they are the same movements and the situations, objects, and methods surrounding these movements are the same, they each possess a different character. Even if we are conscious of making things, things reveal themselves in some form because they do not evade how the repetitive patterns of these movements attract things.

One artist attempted to conduct minimal interaction with objects by slackening a piece of cloth and writing numbers on rocks, but this approach conversely constituted in a maximum interaction with objects. The piece of cloth itself was not slackened by one's

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hand, but it wrinkled, picked up dirt, expanded or contracted. However, in wanting the

plain surface of the cloth to appear more slackened, the artist in fact produced a condition

for the cloth that required manual manipulation. For the cloth's slackened state is a natural

shape for the cloth, and to inject an unnatural loosening within this recognition of

naturalness, is to be involved in the original proposition of the cloth; the artist's point that

this could only be expressed through cloth is to persist [interact] with the object at a

maximum degree.

Even when the form of an object exists in reality, there are cases when people are

unable to see its substance. This is because, the condition of "existing" does not involve any

signs, and thus marking a stone with numbers is to signal the fact of "existence" itself.

However, [this process] is not skeptical of a manner in which something "undeniably exists."

I do not know whether the stones' numerical markings were comprehended, but if there

was a definite idea for marking these numbers, he must unconsciously believe that

numerical signs apply equally to all of mankind. If numbers are things that we use

personally, then they might in fact function as "signs." If the existence of numbers, stones,

and numbers marked on something, and stones marked by something contain substance,

then at the point in which these stones and numbers in fact "inscribe numbers," there may

have been room for one to enter [the work] without much interaction. But as long as the

stones do not possess the necessity to exist the way it should based on what the numbers

signify, we must say that this is a completely useless gesture even before one interacts with

the work at a minimal level.

In order for a thing to emerge in an invariable state of existence, [usually] it is

accompanied with man's acts. However rather than a means, this showed the constant

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existing state of "having ought to be" by integrating the invariable element of the act itself with the element of the variable potential of the thing itself. If we tried to understand the thing's invariable aspects to a larger degree, we must tear apart the thing's existing concepts.

People see things "as they exist." In contrast, we can also see things "as if they do not exist." Tromp l'oeil and tricks/vision objects that were in vogue a year ago were carelessly presented with the reality of knowledge that the substance of objects premised on change in fact exists, but unfortunately this did not last.

Nowadays, objects are being produced under monikers of conceptual art, natural art, and air art, still relegated but undefined as art. For us, producing objects do not have a purpose; in other words we are doing nothing further than the work of work. Conceptual value exists for the first time when there is a purpose, but our work constitutes "work" itself that cannot possess rules, and while being purposeless, our work preserves our position as work.

When we made a thing (*mono*), it was necessary to discard the knowledge of making because we were accustomed to seeing *mono* as objects of objective existence based on positioning ourselves as subjects. Before "seeing," we must first perceive "the way things exist" when we stand beside others. Based on the objectivity of seeing, people tend acknowledge "the way things exist" by "seeing" "things" in a one-way direction. If we cannot keep in mind that understanding "things" exist as "things," then *"*things" will always be perceived in a state other than "things."

When "things" are denied as "things," we realize that "things" are of equal value and standing with "things." In fact we do try to express such things as concepts through

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"things," but is the thing that is expressed conceptual thinking itself? No, when "things" become non-objectified objects, we merely acknowledge this "thing" as the substance of a non-objectified object.

One way of a "thing" denying a "thing" is to present the inherent character of a "thing" as a "phenomenon" that can only be signaled through those things. For example, by breaking a stone with glass, or placing a metal object on rubber, this is about combining these special traits and letting them be composed of these various elements of "things." However, this phenomenon is different from a natural occurrence, and the persistence of a "thing" is backed by the strangeness of having occurred without any intent of occurring, and continues as long as that condition is maintained without having been naturally destroyed. In addition, as for the physical effects of when this "phenomenon" occurs, when this "phenomenon" is destroyed, the same degree of action is necessary. When a glass plate breaks due to the weight of a stone, or when a rubber tape is crushed by the metal, people know the characteristics of when glass and rubber breaks or when they expand and contract. Although we share the conceptual site of glass or rubber only through these situations, when they break in front of us, and when the glass and rubber have expanded and contracted, we lose the site of a shared concept. For this reason, we must possess a new unknown conceptual terrain of "a broken thing" or "a crushed object." In other words, together when a "thing" no longer becomes a "thing," they possess a new site of encounter.

Another method of investigating "an unknown thing" is to use homogeneous matter, whether it be the mass, volume, temporality or spatiality, and transform it, and to clearly present the sense that they are "different things." In the case of a "phenomenon," materials of different quality were simultaneously replaced by a reciprocal condition, but

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as for homogenous "things," the object of reciprocal interaction is contained in the things

themselves, the subject and object become integrated, and "thing" itself exists as an object

that should be seen. For this "existing thing" to appear, a man-made deliberate act must be

imposed, a mechanical treatment must occur. However this is not enough of an issue for us.

Rather it is sufficient enough to acknowledge an object clearly exists as it transforms.

When a thing to be prescribed and understood tears a thing [itself] apart, it

transforms into something else. From one actuality to another, a "thing" changes into a

"thing" as long as the "thing" never loses its concept as a "thing."

From a world of fabrication to actuality, a fabricated object to an actual object,

from concept to actual object, the converse may also exist. We have constantly thought

about expression while trying to create a relative standard. When we realize for the first

time here that the standard of a "thing" is "thing" itself and measure the degree of

"deliberate and non-deliberate action," we have already fallen into the negative effects that

"one must create" based on the previous modernist thought of creating.

If not only people, but *all things* contained a critical mind, then "things" should be

able to critique people and "things" themselves. If one's awareness to produce a "thing"

involves an oppositional intent, then the final "thing" including oneself, we must

acknowledge that that creative consciousness, effects and its parallel actions must be clear

objects of criticism. Because we believe in creating objects too much, we cannot seem to see

through the essence of a "thing," "act," "the essence of seeing" and essence of "recognition."

When a creative act possesses one principle, we had to tear down that theory and

search for a new methodology. Having lost a sense of the real, a natural collapse occurred

by the manner in which "things" were conceived through the mind as a medium, [causing] a

limit in ideas. The method of slowly pulling on an undercurrent of ideas and continuously

changing one's mode of representation, such as theorizing an extremely old philosophy,

will only consist in uselessly applying oneself inside these principles.

"Voices of Emerging Artists: *Mono* Opens a New World"

Roundtable Discussion by Koshimizu Susumu, Lee Ufan, Narita Katsuhiko, Sekine Nobuo, Suga Kishio, and Yoshida Katsurō

Translated by Oshrat Dota, James Jack, and Mika Yoshitake. Edited by Reiko Tomii. Originally published as Koshimizu Susumu, Lee Ufan, Narita Katsuhiko, Sekine Nobuo, Suga Kishio, and Yoshida Katsurō, "'Mono' ga hiraku atarashii sekai" (Mono opens a new world), in the special feature "Hatsugen suru shinjin-tachi" (Voices of emerging artists), Bijutsu techō, no. 324 (February 1970): 33–55.

Times are certainly trembling with great force. Against a background filled with radical students' *gebabō*,[291] all the "modern" [*kindai*] values gradually established over the past several hundred years are now being questioned from their very foundation. Amid this chaos, we can hear the sure rhythm of something new, the diverse fetal attempts to create the order of a new *world*. In the field of art, too, for the past few years we have witnessed an outstanding phenomenon in our country that cannot be understood by the age-old term "art."

For example, let us recall last year's *Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan* at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, organized by Mainichi Newspaper, or the *Trends in Contemporary Art* exhibition at the Kyoto National Museum of Modern Art, where a set of artists emerged displaying stones, paper, and steel plates or combinations thereof, hardly manipulating them: that is, displaying them merely as *mono* [things] themselves. Viewers were clearly perplexed, asking the question, "Is this still art?"

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[291] Translator's note: *Gebabō* combines *gebaruto*, the Japanese rendering of the German *Gewalt* (violent force), and *bō* (wood sticks), and refers to the construction-grade wood sticks used by Japanese university students as their weapon of choice in the late 1960s.

These artists do not care whether this is called art or not. In short, what is fundamental to them in this age of dismantling and diffusion is none other than their own worldviews. What they select in order to communicate happens to be mono. By presenting everyday things in a direct and non-everyday manner, these artists in turn strip the concepts that lay embedded within these mono and attempt to see the opening of a new world. Let's listen to the voices of this new generation in Japan. We asked Lee Ufan to moderate the roundtable discussion.

—Editors of Bijutsu techō

What Is Your Occupation?

Lee Ufan: What all of you who have gathered here today share in common is that none of you have studios. In addition, neither do you make art nor paint everyday. So, if you are asked, "What is your occupation?" for example, I believe you would all be stumped. In the past, one could have proudly said: I am a sculptor, painter, or artist. But now, you have temporary jobs to make a living; in addition, you most likely don't even think about selling your work to make a living. You can even say that it's very problematic to think about attempting to commodify your work. Some may even refuse to sell your works. How would you reply in your case, Mr. Yoshida?

Yoshida Katsurō: Yes, I would be stumped, too. For example, if I were drinking coffee at that moment, most likely I would just say, I'm drinking coffee. [*Laughs.*] And if someone asks me about my occupation, well, since what I do is sort of like a bum, though not a beggar . . . [*Laughs.*] But, I think there's something I'd really like to do right now. How do you say it, I want to see some *mono* and be thrilled by it.

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Lee: Say you stuff cotton inside a large steel pipe [Yoshida's *Cut-off* (1969, fig. XX)].[292] At that moment, if someone sees that and asks you what you are doing . . .

Yoshida: I want to be in contact with something revealed, an open world through my act of stuffing cotton in the steel pipe. This is very difficult, however.

Lee: So then, doesn't that kind of act already go beyond an "anti" attitude against the existing form of "art?" If so, the term "art" doesn't really matter.

Sekine Nobuo: We have never simply aimed for the position of being anti. Anti-Art [*Han-geijutsu*] aimed for such a position within the category of art, but that is no longer sufficient. If we have to give it any word, it can perhaps be called "Non-Art" [*Hi-geijutsu*]. It is just impossible to put acts undertaken in social reality in the category we define as art. No matter how hard I try, I can't possibly define what I do as simply an artistic act. Yoshida just mentioned drinking coffee at a café, but he can indeed be thrilled by the coffee cup. Whether we burn charcoal, break glass, or dig dirt, we all feel a sense of excitement from these [acts].

Lee: So can you do anything, in terms of your "act"?

Sekine: In one sense, our acts can be regarded as part of a social act: the construction job of laborers or the violence of *gebabō*-wielding radical students. What separates their work and ours—though the way I explain may be misleading—is that I seek a sense of thrill far more in my work than they do [in theirs]. In other words, my act is intended to open up the state of a transparent world that we feel very strongly about. In the past situation of art up until now, be it Dada or Surrealism, it was nothing more than a history of methodologies within the context of art. We have now emerged on a horizon where all that is over.

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[292] Yoshida Katsurō's *Cut-off* was submitted but not accepted to the *9th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan*.

Yoshida: In Sekine's talk, it was mentioned that what we do is in part a social act, but I must qualify [something]. In this case, our acts and what results from them should at once exist as reality itself and show and communicate their transcendence of everyday life. They must be *mono* that are opened.

Narita Katsuhiko: I say this while reflecting on what I've done so far, but I have no interest in objects that have no power to destroy everyday things. Yet these non-everyday things can't just be limited to art or concepts.

Lee: In the past, art has emphasized aesthetics. However, some of you build a wall even when walls exist in a museum, stuff cotton inside a steel pipe, and place a giant stone inside a paper bag.[293] Koshimizu, what do you think in terms of the relationships between everyday and non-everyday?

Koshimizu Susumu: As for what Narita said about striving for a non-everyday thing, if I can rephrase it as, say, "striving against established concepts," I think that's absolutely true. In my case, when I put a giant stone inside a paper bag, I began with doubting my preconceived notions about paper. The same with stones.

Lee: For example, if Koshimizu's paper and stone were placed not in a museum but on the street, I think people walking by would be startled. Perhaps because it contains something that can't be overlooked.

Suga Kishio: Although paper and stones are understood and exist as individual things, we are surprised when a stone is in a paper bag because we aren't used to looking at such a situation. People are so conditioned by their preconceptions about situations that they are unaccustomed to having an immediate reaction.

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[293] Narita Katsuhiko's *Untitled* (wall and iron belt) and Koshimizu Susumu's *Paper 2*, both from 1969, were exhibited in *Trends in Contemporary Art* at the Kyoto National Museum of Modern Art, August–September 1969.

Lee: Then why do you engage in something so seemingly strange? Why do you stack paraffin wax [fig. XX], Suga?[294]

Suga: In my case, I began by tearing apart the preconceptions that people have toward paraffin wax and its everyday quality. Paraffin itself doesn't surprise anybody. Rather, surprise comes from [seeing] an exceedingly large amount [of it], its pieces being stuck together when they don't have to be. Through such a simple [presentation], I can place the fact that it is paraffin outside our realm of cognition. While I am working on the paraffin, if a stranger comes and asks, "what is that, what are you using that for?" I don't have any answer myself. Since I have no purpose, I can readily tell him that I'm just working with paraffin just the way he sees it. You can buy as much paraffin as you want if you go to a wax shop. You are free to shape what you bought into any form or stack it up, so you can put it anywhere you want. All I did was to expose the fact that it can exist any place: on a tatami mat, on the street, or in a gallery. In other words, there was a situation—that may be called a "site"—in which I needed to set up something as unsuitable as possible.

Narita: I don't think it's just about the unexpectedness of a place . . . For example, burning charcoal and using paint or canvas are really the same thing. It's just a new form of expression. If I should add another, different element there, it must be something actual that can offer a different and fundamental dimension, at once rejecting anything partial, such as intent and action, and forcefully giving itself to the viewer.

Lee: Let's take the example of charcoal. If you show the regular charcoal we are familiar with, no matter how much you use it, it won't surprise us or make us feel a thing. However, it is critical to present the world in an open state, in which even though what you present is undeniably charcoal, it makes us feel something more than just charcoal.[295]

Then, as a result of presenting this charcoal—although it might be problematic to say "result"—you have a result, which used to be called the "work." And there is the process of presenting it and the initial idea that prompted you to do it. Roughly speaking, we can

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[294] Suga Kishio's *Parallel Strata* (1969) was exhibited at the artist's solo exhibition at Tamura Gallery in 1969.
[295] See Narita Katsuhiko's *Sumi* series from 1968 [fig. X].

divide the whole thing into three stages. Which stage interests you most? Or, perhaps I should rephrase, which do you think is the most important?

<u>Thrilled by the Plan, Thrilled by the Process . . .</u>

Koshimizu: For me, three stages are of equal importance. First I want to put a stone inside of a paper bag. Well, it doesn't come about that easy, but . . . I don't know until I actually do it. Before I do it, from my everyday thinking process or from within my life, I feel a flash of insight at that moment; I am totally thrilled, so to speak. Then I buy stones and paper to try it out. While making it, I am so fascinated. After I finish, the next thing is to see it from the viewpoint of someone else. I see it as a thing separated from my hands, something objectified. In doing this, I may find it completely different from what I first thought or when I was making it, or I am often thrilled by some unintentional aspects. Regarding this, Duchamp said something like "art coefficient." [*Laughs.*] I was very convinced by that. It has nothing to do with his work, I just heard it as his words.

Lee: In that sense, what is actualized as a result of your act appears far more *liberated* than the conventional works bound up by ideas . . . Sekine, what do you think?

Sekine: What ultimately differs greatly is . . . before making something, first you have an intention or a plan. When you see, say, a painting, it has something the artist wants to say. By now, in conventional practice, an artist desperately seeks to give a fully realized form to such a plan or an intention of his. However, in my case, when I think of *Phase* (*Isō*) or *Phase of Nothingness* (*Kūsō*),[296] they do not express what I want to express. Things like a plan or an intention are nothing more than a method of presenting occasions to encounter *mono.* I use these plans or intentions as methods to bring about occasions to see something . . .

Suga: When you say "method," do you mean a method about what is already made or about making *something*?

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[296] Sekine Nobuo began his *Phase* series in 1968 [fig. X] and *Phase of Nothingness* in 1969 [fig. X].

Sekine: Well, an intention or, rather, an impetus . . .

Suga: The process of making something always involves a human act. Then, what I want to know is whether an intention or an idea that you have before you undertake an action is attached to the resulting thing. Do ideas always adhere to *things*? When we look at it from the end result, it must transcend your method—that is, it must deviate from your intention or idea, to clarify the essential state of *mono* as they exist. Am I wrong?

Sekine: Of course, the end result can be entirely different [from my intention or idea]. Ultimately, I believe, the intention and the method are means for an encounter. Once the work used be a mirror onto which you projected your ideal or concept. That's impossible now. Before foregrounding what the artist wants to say, we are proposing to begin by giving an honest look at *mono.*

Lee: If I rephrase what Sekine has just said, in the past, no matter who looked at the work, they saw practically the same thing. In contrast, the structure of the actions [*shigusa*] that we do now allows us to perceive a world that transcends the initial intention or method, as well as all the concepts.

Yoshida: I have a craving for seeing or having something, and at some time at some place, I have a chill. The process of sustaining that feeling happens to result in *mono*. In this process, I may encounter something else, too . . . What results ends up differing considerably from what I initially thought. I think this is extremely important.

Narita: This "difference" lies in the complex entanglement of something actualized within a chaotic situation of reality, which separates it from something un-actualized. So, I am more interested in a result with such contradictory connections.

Suga: Planning is entirely useless to those laborers actually hard at work digging a hole. For them, it is more important to eat food and sustain energy for digging the hole. They

may even think of and look at the hole itself. There is no planning as such from the beginning. Since there is none of it, we may crave something visual.

Yoshida: Speaking of planning, I get a thrill at the time of planning, thinking: that is cool. When I am making it, I am again thrilled. And when it is done, I am yet again thrilled. Those thrills are all different, though.

Lee: But that is never about the process of making a work. Each stage must have the same degree of meaning, shouldn't it?

Suga: If so, each of them is not process, all having quite the same importance . . .

Sekine: After all, be it "plan" or "process" or "result," it's not done with some goal in mind, but each is always in a state of liberation.

Lee: So then, when you say you see the invisible through the visible, what is the relationship between the two? If it is a glass, I wonder if it is enough to just present a glass. Yet, we seem to want to see something else.

Wiping the Dust Off *Mono*
Sekine: What you mean is "wiping the dust." That is, making *mono* as *mono*. In concrete terms, for instance, "dusting off" a glass means removing the dust: that is, the concept or name of "glass" from it. Then, *mono* becomes *mono*. Only by doing this, the invisible becomes visible. Or, it is to explicate the one who exists in the direction of existence itself.

Koshimizu: This may diverge from the topic, but I believe people tacitly understand that we are the artists who currently deal with *mono*. But I cannot definitely say I must use *mono* as my tool of expression. It is no good to adhere too much to one's own methodology. In this sense, suppose I have a rather captivating memory. Say it's a mid-summer afternoon, with blazing sunshine. Foliage casts shadows on a cement floor of my house, and I happen to somehow recall that sight, after a long time. Now, this memory is, how can I say, very

nostalgic. Something was there—that is, in the scene itself—that could have had a big impact on me. You may have that kind of memory. No matter how hard I try to explain it with concrete words to another person, I can never communicate the same feeling. So, I try to take a different approach. As far as I am concerned, I am sometimes attracted to that which cannot be easily seen. Still, I don't think it necessary to express this through something visible.

Lee: Returning to Sekine's topic, when we remove the name "glass" from the glass, we can see a freer expanse and feel something other than an ordinary glass. However, when it comes to the task of putting a label on it, à la Pop art, what we see and feel is nothing but a glass. Another example is this ordinary wall, [requiring] nothing more than just a wall be experienced or seen. Yet, if another wall is added to it, we see a totally useless yet unexpected kind of wall. In this world, it's a wall but it's also not a wall. In this case, the everyday is a world compressed with nouns, which make *mono* invisible. So it becomes necessary to destroy, remove, or dismantle the everyday. And when this attitude is heightened to a methodology of revealing things as they are, the invisible becomes visible for the first time.

Narita: Indeed, looking at it now, surely it's no more than *mono* as presented.

Pebbles—Pile One for Mother

Lee: I now want to move the discussion further. I believe that what has emerged here differs substantially from the Earthworks in vogue in America. What do you think?

Sekine: For example, Carl Andre says, "My work is about presenting natural things in their natural state." He has just stacked stones up on a mountaintop with no pretense. However, this is nothing more than gazing at physical nature in its raw state. It boils down to rendering the visible invisible.

Koshimizu: You know about the River of Three Crossings [*sanzu no kawa*, which the dead must cross to enter the afterlife] or the Children's Limbo [*sai no kawara*, where the lost

souls of dead children are sent to atone for the sin of dying before their parents]. Dead children would cant "Pile one pebble for mother, pile two for father," as they piled stones on top of one another in vain. In a sense, what Earthworkers[297] really see are the physical act of piling and the tacit physicality of stones. What we need to confront is along the spirit of "pile one for something" . . . This spirit lies behind one's act of piling stones. When we realize that these two very disparate things are inexplicably linked, unless we closely examine that link we cannot understand the true nature of piled stones. This is what I believe.

Sekine: So, that which is made must in itself reveal and make us feel that [sensibility].

Narita: That is what "true grit" means. [*Laughs.*]

Koshimizu: That's true. In this day and age, we have a shared strategy. Still, it's no use simply piling stones and explaining with words the links they have. If everything isn't included in what is presented, there is no use in presenting it.

Sekine: As far as I can see, those Earthwork guys, after all, do not go beyond using nature as it physically is.

Narita: True. Their method is partial, facile.

Sekine: Nature is totally detached as a counterpart to civilization.

Lee: When each of you perform a certain act in one form or another—which I call *shigusa* [act or gesture]—how do you engage yourself with or react to the current times or today's styles?

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[297] A Japanglish neologism used by the artists in this circle, meaning "Earthwork artists." MY: Reiko put this in, but I was not sure if readers would think the term, Earthworkers, was strange enough that it needed to be explained with a footnote. I almost think this could be cut.

For example, thinking about the outdoor sculpture exhibition on the bank of the Kamo River in Kyoto last fall, many works showed suggestive insinuations or even grave misunderstandings, if I may say so. Those same things could have been done by primitive people in a different time. We live with different lifestyles, so we must have different modes of perception. Today, if we feel nothing when seeing stones piled on stones, that's why. As Sekine did in one of his structures, placing a steel plate on a sponge makes today's nature of today and suits today's mode of perception.[298] That is why it makes a world of immediate feelings. But what do you think?

Sekine: If we fail to clearly comprehend today's era, we may end up making works using magic or something with a bad insinuation. Recent exhibitions are all like that.

Lee: Anyhow, I am sure those artists think they are trying to keep coming in direct contact with something.

Sekine: Ultimately we want direct experiences. Borrowing Lee's words, we want to have an encounter, a direct kind of encounter in contemporary times . . . Today, for example, if one kind of artificial sweetener turns out to be harmful, we don't even want to see it the next day. What fundamentally informs this is an exceedingly information-bound society. A society that controls the masses by suggestions, a society in which the masses are easily hypnotized, so to speak . . . As a result, we have very few chances for direct encounters. What we are doing is finding ways to have encounters today, aren't we? That also becomes a matter of styles and trends.

Koshimizu: Then, in this context, if you do something that primitive people would do, you go all the way back to primitive times. For a person living in contemporary times, this becomes a kind of self-denial . . .

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[298] Sekine's *Phase-Sponge* (1968, fig. X) was first exhibited at the 5th Nagaoka Art Prize exhibition at the Ikebukuro Department Store, November 16–27, 1968.

Lee: If so, if I may exaggerate, we can say that Earthworkers merely shifted the state of civilization or, rather, the exhibition of three-dimensional objects from the museums to the outdoors.

Sekine: Even if we escape civilization, it's no use. Tsuge Yoshiharu, for example, reaches a good level, but after all [what he depicts] is something strange, something you can only encounter in the countryside . . . [299]

Lee: City people go to the countryside and encounter primitive things. But they inevitably come back tasting a sense of defeat and nothing else.

Narita: Yes, exactly, because they disregard all the past conditions. As they do so, it becomes so unbearable and boring that their bodies can't take it. Moving on to another subject, primitive people for example felt awe in front of a huge rock, thinking, "If we harm it, something serious might happen." If we [today] bring a rock in and try to replicate that now, it will be boring. Even if something human could be felt in it, there are tasks that can't be accomplished by using the already tried-out methods.

Sekine: Because, ultimately, we do *not* understand the heart of it now. Many things keep occurring. That's why we want to do it all over again about making [*tsukuru koto*] from the very beginning: to reject everything and start thinking from the system itself.

Yoshida: It's not a matter of going back in time but a more candid, should I say, return to the start. It won't do to just automatically replace paint with stones in the manner of so-called Earthworks.

Falling in Love Not with Artists, But with *Mono*

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[299] Tsuge Yoshiharu is a *manga* artist who became known in the 1960s especially through his works published in the experimental monthly *manga* magazine *Garo*. Many of his *manga* from this period take place in a remote or dreamlike countryside and are often first-person travelogues or reflections on daily struggles. See Ryan Holmberg, *Garo Manga: 1964–1973*, exh. cat. (New York: Center for Book Arts, 2010).

Lee: There are historical and social circumstances. A concrete example is the university conflicts. When Koshimizu needed to photograph his work [in his studio on campus], he had a hard time just entering the school. It is no longer possible to quietly absorb what is taught at school and make your work accordingly. In this situation, we must do something. That's where we are now. If so, how does what you do correspond with these social circumstances?

Koshimizu: This last year, while my school [Tama Art University] was barricaded [by radical students] and then [the students were] locked out [by the school administration], I continued to make and exhibit my "works" [*sakuhin*]. Some people harshly criticized me for this. What I want to say to them in response is that we absolutely must not stop. Just as many students, myself included, continue to oppose the current lockout, we must also continue to make. Otherwise, I am afraid that when the problem grows bigger and becomes a social issue, the essence of the problem may be extremely narrowly construed. In order to explain this properly I need to speak on and on, and I don't want to touch on it lightly here. In this roundtable, it might be just my own thing.

Lee: Recently there was a gallery exhibition of the people of Zenkyōtō [All-Campus Joint-Struggle Councils]. I went to see it. Of course they actively participate in demonstrations, but when I asked them which was more important to them, they answered, "Making art." They feel compelled however to participate in the demonstrations and summation [*sōkatsu*] meetings. When they confront the riot police straight on and discover their bodies shaking, they believe "I'm actually shaking now," and realize that they exist, but *only* in that situation. Once back in school, as they participate in self-criticism meetings and repeat similar acts of self-criticism every day, they feel an oddly empty feeling. In order to escape it, they have to bury themselves in art-making. Such self-contradiction characterizes the condition of today.

On the other hand, some others say that although they too feel the same way, if they make art, that will constitute a defeat. Even if they feel empty, they will break down without keeping up with the demonstrations and self-criticism . . . At that moment I feel that students can no longer accept the idea of schools as they have come to be.

Narita: It is surely testing to put yourself through a political struggle. But once it comes to "making" and "not making," neither matters. It's just the same, isn't it?

Also, we should add our authoritarian critics of contemporary art to the enemy targets for crushing. As they say, I may have been co-opted by the establishment. I don't care for the paradigm of establishment and anti-establishment. I start from things close to me. Because I feel like I'm floating around these days . . .

Lee: But by making our work, can we really feel something that can wrap up the entire condition we are in? What meaning does making our work have? That's what matters.

Sekine: After all, we are witnessing the collapse of ideas and visions. Today, the established ways of thinking have collapsed even in philosophy and science. Even the student movement has no clear prospects. Rather, a movement is viable only if it lacks a prospect or vision. We must start from that.

Lee: Students once had an idea of what kind of artists they wanted to be. Sekine talked about the collapse of ideals. Don't you any longer have an idea of what kind of artist you want to be?

Suga: Well, no. Or, rather, we passed the point of thinking that.

Narita: We cannot fall in love with artists any longer, even if we can fall in love with works.

Suga: It is impossible to clearly define the type of condition that forms an artist. Things are made because there is an idea to make a work. When we make a work, critique, or engage in a [political] struggle, these are all on the same dimension. We fall in love not with artists or works, but with the essence of a thing [*mono*], its state of being.

Lee: Mr. Yoshida, are you conscious about where you stand under these circumstances?

Yoshida: From a broader standpoint, I suppose that my stance is made up by the fact that I am living. But more narrowly, well, you know the word "nonsense." It's extremely interesting. Not the meaning of the word nonsense, but nonsense itself. Students throw the word at an authority, say their professors. Then, the professors are taken aback. The students are also taken aback by their own word. At that moment, the word "nonsense" itself floats in midair. This kind of feeling eludes reason and meaning . . . This type of thing that eludes meaning and reason—I think that's exactly what we do.

Doing Nothing Is "Making"?

Lee: The issue of "making" or "not making" was raised before. I would like us to think about it more now. For example, some say when we are handling *mono*, it's tantamount to creating; others say it's not.

Suga: "Making" is a modern concept. If there's no clear purpose or intention, we can't say that we "made" it. There should be the most straightforward and easy-to-understand way to describe a certain structure or state, and the expression must differ in each case. Then, it's not so much that mono is something that was made, but that mono can be defined simply as mono. In many cases, though explanations are given to the processes or methodologies through which mono were formed, they do not directly concern mono from the beginning. Isn't what we do an attempt to find the most frank expression?

Sekine: "Making" is an act of possessing *mono* through one's own ideas and concepts and objectifying them. But today, when the "modern" worldview is being dismantled, the world can't possibly be a target of objectification. I doubt whether activities in a realm where ideas are collapsing may really qualify as "making." To make a long story short, we should even accept that so far as we use *mono* as material, that may qualify as "making."

Suga: Naturally we manifest *mono* through certain materials, but that's just a means to render *mono* and *mono*, *mono* and man, *mono* and phenomena all at equal value. We should serve as a third party to materials, processes, and *mono* themselves. So long as we have a will to "make"—although it may not make any difference, but since even if we think we

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made *mono*, we are incapable of making them—then that's how we may get closer to *mono* step by step. I hold onto *mono* through processes, but *mono* constitute a point of departure to enter that which cannot be seen and cannot be made.

Lee: [Claes] Oldenburg's *Giant Hamburger* [1962]. For anyone who looks at it, this is [no doubt] "giant hamburger". One can say that he "made" it based on a representation of an intention. But I think this doesn't apply to what we do. For example, even when an extra wall is constructed [as in the case of Narita's *Untitled*, 1969], we can't name it, or call it a result of an iron will. Yet the viewer is free to interpret it any way he wants. That may have something to do with the fact that we can't necessarily say he "made" it. If so, we can also argue that if we just keep quiet—that is, if we leave a glass as it is—that will rather concern "making."

Sekine: But if you just keep quiet without doing anything, it's a kind of escape from reality. It's like concealing a problem and pretending everything is OK. It's tantamount to accepting the everyday.

Koshimizu: Even if it doesn't seem to matter, it's necessary to act, isn't it? That is, if we don't want to accept something. [*Laughs.*]

Lee: Let's change the subject. Sekine's work, for example *Phase—Mother Earth* at Suma Rikyū Park, simply surprised those not in the art world. They would ask, "What on earth is it?" "What does it mean?" It shocks you even outside the context of art.

Narita: That's really important. Something that disables language.

Sekine: It must hold on its own even outside art history.

Takamatsu Jirō, "Commentary on cover artwork: *Two-Dimensional-type Object*"

Translated by Mika Yoshitake.

Originally published as "Hyōshi kaisetsu: Takamatsu Jirō, Heimen-teki Buttai"

(Commentary on cover artwork: *Two-Dimensional Object* by Takamatsu Jirō), *Bijutsu techō*,

no. 324 (February 1970): n.p.

The drawing reproduced on the cover is based on a study for a plan, which I modified for

the dimensions of this magazine. If I am to write about my thoughts regarding this series, I

would like to pose the following two questions.

1. What does it mean to want to make something that is *not* interesting? Despite this

premise, what is the thing of interest that seems to still sustain it? (We also have to

question the definition of "interest" here.)

2. In the objective world itself, there is fundamentally no such thing as *oneness* [*tantai*]. For

example, if we pick a pebble from a gravel mound, it is "one" because we think of it as "one."

But if we think of the mound as one, one pebble is merely its part. Should *oneness* emerge

from a certain consciousness, [and] what kind of conditions sustains it?

I have thought about the first question constantly for quite some time, but the

second question is more recent. Of course, it goes without saying that conscious thought

does not necessarily relate directly to one's work. If I try to think about my own work

through words, my thought shatters into fragments. However, a work always seems to have

something that can be called "an interesting oneness."

Takamatsu Jirō, "Comments for *August 1970: Aspects of New Japanese Art*"

Translated by Mika Yoshitake.

Originally published as "'1970-nen 8-gatsu: Gendai bijutsu no ichi-danmen' ten eno komento," in *1970-nen 8-gatsu gendai bijutsu no ichi-danmen/August 1970: Aspects of New Japanese Art*, exh. cat. (Tokyo: National Museum of Modern Art, 1970), unpaged.

To make an effort to eliminate as much as possible the factors and tendencies involving ideas and emotions, the factors and tendencies involving art and philosophy, and the factors and tendencies involving all other "such and such" things.

One major issue for me lies in the contradiction of this very statement, which expresses my desire to reject all issues as much as possible.

Takamatsu Jirō, "That Which Opposes Front and Back"

Translated by Mika Yoshitake.

Originally published as "Omote to ura ni tairitsu suru mono," *Geijutsu shinchō*, April 1970, p. 41.

People say that there is a backside to every thing. People even say that behind this, there is another backside, then yet another backside. However, the world of "back" seems after all the world of two sides, wherein things are either the reversal of the front or its own reversal, which is the front.

I believe the opposite of front is never the back. As the saying goes, "front and back are one and the same" (*hyōri ittai*), so with slight manipulation, the two become the same thing. When scientists show us new aspects of things by cutting into their interiors or their exterior relationships with something else, at the moment they are understood in some forms, we can say in a sense that they have already come to the surface. Human cognition is after all limited to the surface of things. It's clear that this will be the case forever, yet it is impossible to deny that a world that is not on the surface is also equipped with its own richness and expanse. However, as it has no actual existence, that world still has no name.

Minemura Toshiaki, "To Insist on the 'Here and Now'"

Translated by Mika Yoshitake.

Originally published as Minemura Toshiaki, " 'Ima koko ni hōshite,'" Sansai (August 1970): 70–75.

Most likely it is a mistake to think that the less regard one has towards illusion, the closer one approaches reality. *The opposite of illusion is not reality, but fiction (fabrication).* There is no guarantee that one will arrive at reality by infinitely paring down illusion; far from this, it [illusion] is but one proposition of the mark of nothingness; for those who are liberated from all phantoms, there is no other path but to fill it with another emptiness or another fiction. Conversely, even if reducing fiction is tied to the freeing of illusion, this does not ever mean one is getting closer to reality. To state this conclusively, if one were to try to escape being a passive prisoner of a phantom, one cannot avoid awakening to a fictional state after all is said and done. Whether conscious or not, if one were to discard the intent and self-realization toward fabrication, one has no other choice but to succumb under the phantom's control. Reality does not lie within any aspect of this diagrammatic structure, and like geomagnetic energy, one can say it attracts and absorbs everything.

The above are my thoughts on the conceptual tenets of the term reality, which I am attempting to do away with by not using. I have brought this up in order to warn against the ease attached to descriptions such as "reality" and "realistic" in today's art. These terms pertain to the content of the Tokyo Biennale, which having been called "Anti-Illusion," is made to seem as if there is something in common.

Out of the forty participants in the 10th Tokyo Biennale, I would like to point out the following names: Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Jan Dibbets, Inumaki Kenji, Richard Serra, Narita Katsuhiko, Nomura Hitoshi, and Kawara On.

This list does not reflect my ranking order, but is simply compiled from the content of my text. Having said that however, I have no intention of bringing in other ideas, and so I want to let you know that these are in fact names that cannot be done without and thus comprises a list of particular interest. Arguing whose works I favored, in and of itself, is problematic, and if I were to take up individual artists whose works drew my attention I would have included many others based on their distinctiveness. I cannot deny that the artists whose works I was most attracted to were among these eight. Their appeal not only has to do with individual qualities that each has in fact captured, but with the lure of transcending that state or the tension that comes from postulating that kind of state.

If one were to express a common feature in these artists' works in a few words, one could say that their attitudes are based upon insisting on the "here and now." Although one can admit the same attitude exists in the works of Enokura Kōji, Keith Sonnier, Tanaka Shintaro, Sol Lewitt, and Roelof Louw, this does not cover the overall characteristics of this exhibition. If one were to speak of a very general commonality, it may be appropriate to describe this in terms of Nakahara's [Yūsuke] point, "full-scale works, full-scale actions." Despite this however, when I saw that a third of the participants possessed this characteristic of insisting on the "here and now," I felt that this was the deep foundation of this exhibition.

Literally speaking, "now" points to the present whereas "here" refers to a place that exists in the present. One might think of "here" in terms of the word, "hereness," which

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Richard Serra used to describe his own attitude in an interview with Tōno Yoshiaki (*Bijutsu techō*, July issue), but this is not developed solely out of the concrete evidence of bringing one's body into the exhibition space and producing a work that is intricately tied the particular conditions of that site. Rather, this is the result of an attitude that insists on the "here and now," and even though Dibbets, Kawara, Narita, and Nomura did not produce their works inside the exhibition space, they understood the same conditions as Serra and Inumaki more than anyone else. If one were to raise an opposite example, Hans Haacke is an artist who emphasized the necessity of creating a plan based on physically being in the site himself, and in fact he had planned to produce a work based on the conditions of a park in front of the museum. However, in order to actualize a project in the Saharan desert for example, his theory of presence requires a plan in which he must investigate a site in advance and build a plan according to the desert's conditions. Thus it is difficult to say that this absolutely requires his live physical presence. That is, in terms of his work, while "here" may refer to the conditions of that space, it does not rely on the time absorbed in the life of he who acts.

> Note: In the introduction to the catalogue, Nakahara uses the expression "[an attitude that may perhaps be referred to as the] theory of presence,"[300] which he explains as "the action of checking on the location directly, and proceeding to work upon the knowledge of the situation."[301] He continues, "this . . . does not mean just the display of the work of art. It is the consciousness of that unbreakable relation

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[300] Nakahara Yūsuke, "Ningen to busshitsu" / "Between Man and Matter," trans. Joseph Love, *Dai 10-kai nihon kokusai bijutsuten: Ningen to busshitsu* [The 10th International Art Exhibition, Japan – Between Man and Matter]. exh. cat. (Tokyo: Mainichi Newspapers, 1970), n.p. Translator's note: bracketed quotes are not in Joseph Love's translation of Nakahara's text.
[301] Ibid.

which ties the work to place."[302] However, this theory of presence does not only

apply to Serra or Andre, but also to Haacke and Christo, a rule that only applies to

works concerned with the conditions of space, and needless to say, naturally differs

from what I refer to as the attitude of insisting on the "here and now."

However, the main point of what I am attempting to say in the "here and now" is whether it

relies on the "time absorbed by life."

One characteristic of this exhibition pointed out by many is the appearance of "time."

I have no intention of objecting to this very visible phenomenon itself, but I do not believe

that this phenomenon has been effectively grasped. For example, Dibbets and Nomura

Hitoshi use time as landscape, in other words, one cannot argue that they try to depict

scenes imbued with the possibility of vision based on movement, something that is not

unlike the tail of a Futurist desire. But having said that, it is also not entirely nonsensical to

think according to Fujieda Teruo (*Bijutsu techō*, July issue) that they intend to express an

abstract concept of "time." For them and for artists who seem to incorporate time on serial

panels like Kawaguchi Tatsuo and Kawara On—artists who ought to have departed away

from a concern with image-based "expression"—do not seem to employ the concept of

"time" as an *externally-based* tool of "expression," or devise it into an object of such inquiry.

One must see that the issue lies in an entirely separate domain. While I am on the subject,

just because Dibbets, Nomura, and Kawaguchi equally deploy photographic panels, it is

meaningless to attack them on the basis of their images. If one were to do so, we would lose

sight of how they motivate "that which is not reduced to expression," which intimately ties

together Nomura, Kawaguchi and perhaps even Serra.

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[302] Ibid.

Placing Dibbets aside, one particular similarity between Kawaguchi and Nomura's use of photography is their method of extracting an instant moment. However, if one were to ask what the purpose of recording a moment is, that is where the two differ. I cannot go into detail on Kawaguchi's interesting work, which along with Takamatsu, departs from the central issue of this essay, but I would like to make the following point clear for the sake of comparison. Kawaguchi's twenty-six photographs appear to be sustained by a spatial concept, for example the concept of a "position" and he employs a temporal element to investigate how changes are either arrived at or not based on the shifting indicator of a concrete position. One may say that he sought out this method in order to engage [a temporal element] with the just mentioned indicator of a concrete position—in this case, the shoreline and four plywood boards. The ways in which the depth of this type of work is guaranteed by an analogy are better left unsaid, but Kawaguchi's blade [tact] lies in the fact that, by basing "position" as the concept of investigation, he breaches a rupture between all concepts and corresponding things. Nevertheless, it is not a mistake to state that the abstract concept of time was an issue that was external to his work at the time.

This point applies to Nomura as well. By splitting identical images based on a moment, Nomura's attempt to record each moment has nothing to do with the transformation of dry ice or iodine. His [work] is about the life of the artist himself insisting on the "here and now." On this point, his [work] has nothing to do with the surface-level categories of whether or not he uses an image. One can say that he simultaneously differs from and yet is also close to Kawaguchi.

Now, is there much meaning in arguing that Nomura's work is tied to images and Kawaguchi to concepts? This is just simply stating the facts, and the same as not explaining

anything. Kawara's dates carry equal value with Nomura's shifting dry ice photographs; here temporal continuity and such expressions are not the issue. His dates—life's desire for the absoluteness of each day—is a plan of labor that attempts to extract oneself from the emptiness of time's duration, and without the help of a camera, they are none other than acts to measure one's contraction into once-ness. In fact, while Kawara repeats his work everyday, he also sends a telegram "I am still alive" to his friends on multiple occasion. In relation to the point of recording life's presentness, a telegram, more significant than its date, is similar to the work of a camera shutter. It goes without saying that the delivery date is an important element for a telegram, but it is clear that this does not have any relationship to abstract concepts of time or its duration, and since these are not recorded by the sender himself, one cannot help but to think that this act has nothing to do with expression. A type of *pretension* that lies in this telegram plays a curse and makes this into decisively bad work, but effective in terms of determining the locus of Kawara's concerns.

Incidentally, by insisting on the "here and now," if one desires to act upon pursuing this insistence inside a temporal succession, one cannot stop at one point. Whether Dibbets, Nomura, or Kawara, their multiple-panel formats appear to signify time's passage at first glance. However, they are definitely not passages of external time lined up like one-point perspective paintings. They are narrative passages of the artists' viewpoints themselves and their acts attempt to restore the present, every moment of everyday. Dibbets' thirty-four panels are photographs of shadows shot inside his studio every ten minutes. His perspective is replaced by the still camera lens, but this is perhaps difficult to make out since there is no physical or spatial movement. The important point consists of the shifts in perspective based on time. The images of the thirty-four different shadows are, at the very

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least, evidence of the viewer's existence who attempts to confirm his/her presence of the "here and now" at the thirty-forth point. This point is perhaps more clearly understood in Nomura's case each time he records a date or weight while witnessing the metamorphosis of the dry ice and iodine.

The complexity and ambiguity of Matsuzawa Yutaka still follows the temporal method of one-point perspective, but one might say that in addition, [his work] develops out of an attempt to be omnipresent in a vast space-time. He mentions time more than anyone else and this is the point that decisively differs from the other three that I have taken up here.

To speak of the "here and now" however is not an opportunity for merely a temporal element to appear. For example, it also possesses forms of rejecting reproduction and replication. To preserve each singular moment in life is of course a pretext of the future and not to admit past explanations. For better or for worse, this is the reason I was drawn to Buren's work.

Buren, whose work over the last four years has repeatedly consisted of affixing paper printed with uniform white and gray vertical stripes everywhere from museum walls to around the city, does not seem to carry any intention of "expression." For example, when one hears his explanation of using simple white and gray stripes in order to erase elements such as uniqueness, taste or creativity, one may suspect that perhaps he may still be following Duchampian line of negative strategy. When compared to Serra, I have no intention of denying this point. However, his denial of expression involves not acknowledging reproductions of life, and therefore in another sense, what he has produced

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must not be taken in terms of an image, but exists as itself. In other words, this is tied to his

desire for things to exist and be actually visible to others. One may admit that this attitude

comes from a place of his own fundamental desire and thinking that does not follow any

line of thought.

However, his selection of white and color stripes, which for him do not serve as

reproductions in any sense, and his acknowledging them as products of life that do no

reflect his own "expression," is a bit of a burden. For example, like Mosset a fellow artist

from his former group,[303] he could have chosen a simple circle rather than a stripe. And

further, at each exhibition and demonstration, he could have broken from a continuous

image by selecting a stripe, circle, triangle, rectangle, or a side of a monochrome wall.

Nevertheless, he has stuck with stripes from beginning to end.

There is no way for expression to escape being an exteriorization of life. To think

this in reverse, one can reason that expression can be done away with in order to avoid

life's exteriorization. However, no abstract life has been split from the condition of

exteriorization, and because of this, by ceasing to produce art under the guise of having

discarded expression, it may become necessary to for example endlessly call upon external

things or at least to rely on them—acts that cannot avoid becoming expression. Most likely,

Buren coldly conspired to use white and color stripes. Not feeling any stress or obligation

with regards to [using] these stripes, he perhaps never imagined that they would begin

tapping into the depths of his being and be filled with this danger of encroachment. Still

wanting to ensure that the act of applying stripes did not constitute expression—they could

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[303] Translator's note: The group comprised of Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier, and Niele Toroni when the artists worked collectively as BMPT (using the first letter of their surnames) in Paris between 1966 and 1967.

be applied systematically at any time and place—even if this act could supposedly be filled with a scandalous sense of danger, it constituted a free zone in which he himself would never be reduced to these stripes.

Most likely however, Buren has suffered a profound misunderstanding. Although the white and color stripes have escaped from becoming an extension of his life, have they not lost the chance to reform and revive Buren himself, having become directly tied to his image [identity] and on the verge of fixing him externally? Having consciously avoided defining himself based on a copy, the non-image, which was outside of his own control, is now trying to become his copy and one type of image. When a person sees the white and color stripes on the streets, they will not think these are anonymous acts by someone who intends to destroy image and expression, but they will most likely say Buren's name. Even if they do not know his name, they will see it as a symbol of a certain anonymous act.

I do not believe that Buren was unaware of this trap. However, I must say that it is doubtful whether a Cartesian—who once invoked a hypothesis to reject life's disorder without bearing any burden—can return to the original "here and now" by having avoided life's copies until expression was eliminated. This is because there is no way to ignore the danger of limitless reform that one descends upon when insisting on the "here and now."

There is a major gap between not admitting the process of one's own copies in order to sever expression and to continue to be washed away by those desires.

If we take Buren's case as one type of failure, this would be to tell a story about the complications of linking life's dynamism to a hypothesis on discarding expression. Anyone would raise Rimbaud as a reference. However, one cannot think of the merchant Rimbaud

who traveled to North Africa without considering *Illumination*. This is the same in the case of Duchamp.

If Inumaki, Narita, and Andre appear to be classic, it is perhaps because their work reflects points that comprehend the facts of what I have just mentioned in a fundamental manner. What they have in common is that in the midst of making and arranging things, they do not leave behind the remainders of expression and use such forms to cut away life's branches. The act of making itself is not the issue; rather it is the attitude to endure the reduction of making in order to investigate life's existence. By slicing time, Kawara and Nomura seek each and every existence, but for the other three, one can say that in the midst of their minimal production of matter, they seek to ensure an absolute existence.

Inumaki lays a flimsy brown paper low to the ground (this does not merely mean that the thin portion of the brown paper is low), and the result is a space that is simply broad and empty. He fills a space that has become one with nothing, where useless chatter is unable to suppress the stillness of time. Narita's large charcoals are thorough to the point of compelling silence. For example, Takamatsu Jiro's sixteen pine logs leave behind a trace of labor that cannot escape a conceptual tactic, but we do not experience any sense of conceptual strategy from these charcoals. One does not fear a forced difference between the size of regular charcoal and his charcoals, or pay attention to the arrangement of the multiple charcoal blocks. The charcoal is simply charcoal, just one, and one senses only the extent to which these substances have been burned and processed into charcoal. One is able to assume, as Nakahara has stated, that the works emphasize a certain aspect of man's actions on matter, but needless to say, when considering Narita individually, he did not burn the charcoal just to show the perceptual relationship between people and matter in a

general manner. In short, it is as if his action could not be explained by anyone but himself, and one might that he wanted to test the absoluteness of that action, so to speak. For both him and Inumaki, insisting on "here and now" is not directed towards time, but can be seen within the ethics of action.

My stakes for seeing Andre's work in close relationship to these artists rests on this base. One can see how the steel poles and wires that seem to be spread out at random on the floor are in fact consciously arranged after careful observation. Having said this however, one does not see a model directed by an external source, for example like the placement of Roelof Louw's boat. If Andre was concerned with something other than an aesthetic consideration, certainly this involved not trying to call forth any sense of meaning or illusion in his arrangement. Though this appears as nothing more than a general Minimalist proposition, this aspect is indeed very important. While his work may at first appear "realistic," this is because he set it up in this manner, and the result is not useless. Reality should in fact be filled with illusion. Andre's wire garden is not realistic, but possesses a quality that can be seen as one type of fiction pressured by the limits of only things that constitute meaning.

When outdoor sculpture exhibitions have become a trend, the function of museums have become suspect, and aside from any misconception, while artists who seem to have no talent are running around in nature and the outdoors, Serra has produced rather instructive work in this so-called nature. One comprised a work on a ground in front of a museum, in which he buried a steel circle by combining [two] L-shaped steel plates, only leaving the upper layer visible on the ground surface. The other work involved planting a large pine tree in a shrubbery of the park that he bought in the suburbs.

What these two works have in common is the way in which the double elements of what is "visible" and "not visible" are present in one work. In an interview with Tōno, Serra himself explained the pine tree as a reversal of Duchamp in which he planted a tree that would have originally been in the park. He also stated that the act of planting a tree is an artistic act, but that in fact he did something that could not be satisfied by this explanation. He went outside of the museum and relied on one aspect of so-called nature, but he did not seek for a brutal or raw expression, and yet conversely, his act was not meant to return a natural thing back to nature.

While the shape of the steel circle was constructed based on the artist's concept, only one half of the structure is visible and he buried the other half into the ground. If one were to ask about the pine tree, on the one hand it has fallen and disappeared inside nature, but on the other hand, it confirms its existence as unmistakably man-made. By joining together these "visible" and "not visible" elements into one matter and constructing these in a specific site that is difficult to relocate, this act, as well as the motif and result of expression, is none other than an attempt to make a secret pact with a site of experience in a manner that no one before him has done based on an understanding of a specific site.

In other works by Serra, there is a 16 mm film in which he recorded the movement of his right hand trying to catch falling lead. Although at times his hand catches the lead, for the most part it doesn't catch up to the speed of the fall. The work is the very picture of the relationship between "Man and Matter," but beyond this irritation [inability to capture the relation between man and matter, i.e., hand catching lead], by returning the location of the tree to nature and to hide half a work underground, he rips apart the self-enclosure of expression. If he were able to release what cannot be returned to expression, one must

think that what Serra gained from his stay in Japan was enormously productive. I remember how Serra and Louw were deeply respectful of each other's work and I believe I understand the meaning of it now. In the end, the act of art is an implicit agreement that perhaps involves a deep engagement with how far one is able to realize the area and limits in which it [art] cannot fully encompass expression. The development of Louw's work cuts off at the same stage. Serra went further by imposing a sacrifice that lies inside a gaze from which one can say that he was able to actualize the promise of the "here and now."

Takayama Noboru, "Relation with Things"[304]

Translated by James Jack. Edited by Reiko Tomii and Mika Yoshitake.

Originally published as "Watashi wa 'Gendai ten' ni ika ni kakawatta ka—Jibutsu to no kankei" (In what way was I involved in the *Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan*—Relationship with things), *Bijutsu techō*, no. 344 (July 1971): 160–62. From the special feature "Gendai bijutsu aru ga mama: Dai 10 kai gendai bijutsu ten o kangaeru" (In What Way Was I Involved in the *Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan*? Contemporary art as-it-is: Contemplating the 10th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan)."

"To violate, to be violated" refers to the state of human existence or, if rephrased, my state of being regarding things. This usually points toward a transition from a relationship of interaction to one of infiltration. But for me things do not exist as objective materials. Through an interaction with things, when a territory emerges where interactions are impossible, things can be thought to exist as things for the first time.

When things become compelled to deny human concepts and thoughts, things emerge as things as though a demonic personification. It may be because space behind things seemingly exists [to induce] a space phobia.

If things cannot become more than just things, situations will likely make things visible.

While in the middle of the city, I tend to grasp everything as landscape. Once, I encountered the following scene. It was a noisy midnight in winter. The wind skimming

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[304] Translator's note regarding the essay's title: Takayama's use of the word jibutsu combines the dichotomy of koto and mono, or "events" and "things"; the former refers to the state of things or affairs in actuality, the latter. This dichotomy became a focal point of debate among artists and critics in 1950s Japan in serial publications such as Bijutsu hihyō and other forums. This special issue of *Bijutsu techō*, "Gendai bijutsu aru ga mama: Dai 10 kai gendai bijutsu ten o kangaeru" [Contemporary art as-it-is: Contemplating the 10th contemporary art exhibition of Japan], featured the *10th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan* survey exhibition held at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum in May 1971 and included statements by Mono-ha artist Suga Kishio. In addition to Takayama and Suga, this major survey introduced many of the artists now associated with Mono-ha, including Honda Shingo, Yoshida Katsurō, Sekine Nobuo, Lee Ufan, Koshimizu Susumu, Enokura Kōji, and Haraguchi Noriyuki.

between buildings noisily stirred up the neighborhood, playing trees, electric lines, and paper trash like instruments. The wind seemed like a protagonist in pantomime. Yet, there was one more protagonist: the unknown entity that was the pitch-dark night.

Things do not merely exist as lightness; they also contain darkness. What matters is how this darkness is seen in lightness. Incessant clicks of neon. Fires invading the streets burning grittily. Disharmonies among people. I stood there, as though a pebble pressed onto the earth's surface. Or, rather, I was made to stand there. A frozen mass of vapor covering that neighborhood may have already been prepared—by somebody or something, or by nature or the state, I don't know. At any rate, the vapor also had cracks. The light brightly illuminated a store's interior, seeming to protect the fruit inside. Leaking light slapped shadows, together with the asphalt, onto the things all around.

In the darkness, flames were ecstatically dancing like a savior. In that darkness a person came from nowhere, bearing the darkness on his back. In front of the flames, he began burning. He stood with his iron feet planted, making a creaky sound. But as soon as his feet sucked up the stench of the asphalt, the flames began slicing his body into round pieces in the black vapor and placed them on the street, making sure their cross sections adhered to the road. The body was sliced equally into twelve pieces. The blood that flowed from the cross sections was sucked up by the asphalt. It appeared as if the asphalt did so intentionally. In an instant, the veins were all emptied and the flesh shrank completely. After several hours the flesh began to change color. Then the asphalt began melting, as the veins began to absorb the stench of the asphalt. At the same time the flesh swelled up, turning into massive larvae and torsos.

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The crack of a leaf's vein, from which yellow sap flowed, was burnt. Although a levee was built, as soon as it was completed sap flooded out, breaking the barrier. Levees were layered as they burned, while glowing red lava continued to flow.

Time was left in ruins. Time was thrown away, holding onto no fragment of nature and jumping over the gallows. Then the gallows turned and the jump expanded to all directions, as consciousness turned into a spider's web. Its threads were stretched all around, but the bell announcing the conception never stopped ringing. That premonition. Death of God. A diving board used as [a means to execute] the death of humans cast into a pool. The diving board made cracking noises away in the ocean. Someone jumped towards the diving board. Another person clung helplessly to the jumping board, yelling, "The earth is not round. The globe is flat! There is a horizon. Ice is falling behind the horizon." He screamed to the sky, "There is no way to catch anything in a mousetrap!"

As soon as I saw the horizon, I pasted my photograph to somebody else's death certificate and ran away; all the fire vanished. Only darkness remained there.

Darkness does not exist separately from humans. Even things have darkness. It may sound too subjective, but this is the only clue I have to discover my own existence. At the same time, I think nature itself may be darkness. Darkness has no expanse. It cannot be concealed by things in light.

To me nature, or more appropriately the nature conceptualized by humans, seems anything but illusion. There are all kinds of concepts of nature, but multiplicity is inherently inevitable. All things in the natural world. Or the connections of diverse phenomena that follow all kinds of laws. Or alternate ways of demonstrating the actual existence of the absolute idea in fact involve nature and spirit.

However, is there any reason for humans to think about nature? For the sake of humans? It somehow feels futile. I myself happen to have no concept of nature. What sustains me is nothing but the relationship with things—to violate and to be violated.

Nobody can predict whether the relationship with things can be an entry into the world. However, if I continue to violate and be violated, a state of lethargy arises in an extremely ugly form.

I believe humans can have nothing in the situation where nature is just nature and humans are just humans. I think nature and humans share nothing but darkness. I think a possible contact zone between humans and nature is darkness, the essence of things.

Enokura Kōji, "Origins of Creation"

Translated by Oshrat Dotan. Edited by Reiko Tomii and Mika Yoshitake.

Originally published as part of the special feature "Hatsugen '72: Sōzō no genten"
(Statements '72: Origins of creation), *Mizue*, no. 804 (January 1972): 41–43.

Nowadays we often hear that the center of art is shifting from New York to Germany. I
myself have found it to be true while in Europe. As our modern information society
expands, contemporary art develops extremely rapidly under the banner of "art for art's
sake" and "avant-garde for avant-garde's sake." And most artists and critics absorb this
information into their entire bodies and regurgitate it back out. However, I wonder if this
absorbing-and-regurgitating mechanism has completely broken down in today's art in
Japan. I think this malfunction is not limited to the art world, but is the present condition of
modern information society as a whole. That is to say, each human being can no longer
catch up in an autonomous manner with this human-made monster that is information.
Even if we try we can never escape from this torrent of information—the dozens of books,
newspapers, and magazines that are published every day and the noise of televisions and
radios that broadcast from morning to night—which secretly replaces our view of reality
with an extremely abstract position. There is nothing more frightening than the
accumulation of illusions that becomes a reality. We must not set the view of reality and the
everyday in an abstract or fantastic position. It is impossible to say "the everyday is the
everyday" or extract the world of matter or the world of perception alone. The everyday
flows as it is without understanding the world of matter or perception. If we cannot first
store the everyday itself substantively inside our bodies, we lose the ability to see the flow
of the everyday. We must recognize the sound of printing presses and the dim light of

vacuum tubes that strangely shine within television sets. As I will discuss, such terms as the vanishing of art and originality are also no more than the products of illusion in modern information society.[305]

When we perceive things we encounter in everyday life, we experience them as we brush against the harmonies of real life in the everyday. A glass, television, chair, desk, pencil, desk lamp, sidewalk, telephone pole, sky, air, cigarette, soil, concrete—we must not lose even a single thing within the stunning harmony of the everyday that forms our world. There is no blue sky nor black soil, but there are a cloudy sky and cold sidewalks. We must not lose even a single thing. As long as this everyday—the everyday that clings around us— is reality, we absolutely cannot turn our backs on it.

The everyday slips into the beat of our physical bodies and it is released outside with the beat of the body, passing through that faint skin-like membrane that exists between our existence and the everyday world. What is frightening in our relationship with things is that as we continue to look at them, their names, for example "glass," fade away. A glass becomes the material of glass, the material of glass becomes transparent, and transparency becomes infinite. We need to take hold of this vast expanse between human beings and things and spit it out together with the beat of our physical bodies. Everything is embodied in a glass, a chair, a window. Nevertheless, a glass is a glass, a window is a

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[305] Translator's note: Enokura is referring here to two key concepts raised by Haryū Ichirō in the introduction to which sixteen artists were invited to respond. One is the concept of originality of creation. The other is the "impossibility of the vanishing of art" (*geijutsu no shōmetsu fukanōsei*), the concept that no matter how today's artists attempt to tear apart and redefine the concept of "art" (*geijutsu*), it never vanishes completely. This phrase, originally coined by critic Miyakawa Atsushi, emphasizes Miyakawa's notion that the Anti-Art practices of the first half of the 1960s did not cause art to vanish, but rather revealed its impossibility to vanish. This impossibility to vanish, he claimed, is what defines today's art—it exists as the impossibility to vanish. See Miyakawa, "Fukanō-sei no Bigaku" (Aesthetics of Impossibility), *Chūō Daigaku shinbun*, January 11, 1966; reprinted in *Miyakawa Atsushi Chosakushū* (Writings by Miyakawa Atsushi), vol. 2 (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shūpan-sha, 1980), 174–75. See also Reiko Tomii, "*Geijutsu* on Their Minds," in *Art, Anti-Art, Non-Art*, eds. Charles Merewether and Rika Iezumi Hiro (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2007), 39–41.

window, and light is light—behind these things is the weight of many layers. Therefore, it is impossible for us to possess them, no matter how hard we try.

Regarding originality in art, if art is an act conducted through a *relationship* between human beings and things in a real-life society, then art cannot be included within the scope of the word "originality." I think the differences between our individual experiences constitute originality, but behind our individual experiences lie the everyday. Therefore, creative originality determines no value of an artwork. Behind the word "originality" lies that detestable possessive desire of human beings.

The object never breaks off its relationship with time. When a thing casts a sticky shadow in the twinkling light, when a thing manifests itself in a cold vibration, the parallel situation wherein a thing is a thing and I am I continues forever. It is absolutely impossible to attempt to possess a glass or a stone outside the everyday. A glass is a glass in its layered existence, and a stone is a stone in its layered existence. If I have the illusion that I possess a certain everyday space, the moment I think I possess it it starts to fall from my hand, like a handful of sand falling from between my fingers. I can never grasp it. If I could, all I would have is that faint sensation of sand sliding through my fingers. I continue to sense this faint feeling again and again as I drag the weight of everyday time, and this becomes evidence confirming my own existence.

We should stop manipulating things within the image of the self. Things always exist outside the image of the self. What is important is to approach the order of the existence of everyday things. Just like I exist within the everyday, things exist within everyday space no matter how their forms change. Even if a glass breaks, the material of glass remains; and even if the material of glass shatters, glass powder remains. We cannot

destroy the order of everyday material existence. Let me repeat: the relationship between things and us is only a parallel situation. We should give up the illusion that we possess things. The action of Prometheus carrying the rock should not be taken symbolically.[306] Prometheus carries the rock with agony. He keeps carrying while *sweat*ing and starving.

Such terms as "originality" and "the vanishing of art" belong to an arbitrary language serving modern information society. They are words stretched to form a realm of the illusory notion of "art for art's sake." Layers of illusions gradually deepen the hole of fiction, turning into an uncontrollable *monster* of illusion, becoming a reality and penetrating our everyday life, violating the everyday, penetrating our physical bodies before we know it, sucking our blood, and gradually half-killing us. Rather than inspecting art or originality within the everyday, we should inspect the fear that half-kills the self and vanishes the individual. We should stop being locked up inside rigid theories or possess everyday things against the context of rigid theories. What is important above all is to try to stoop down, to set ourselves inside the flow of the everyday.

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[306] Translator's note: Enokura is most likely referring here to the myth of Sisyphus carrying a rock rather than Prometheus (who was chained to a rock).

Minemura Toshiaki, "On 'Mono-ha'"

Translated by Reiko Tomii. Edited by Mika Yoshitake.

Originally published as "15: Mono-ha ni tsuite" (15: On Mono-ha), in "Nihon no gendai bijutsu 30-nen" (Three decades of contemporary Japanese art), special supplementary issue, *Bijutsu techō*, no. 436 (July 1978): 225–35.

1970: The Turning Point of Postwar Art

The year 1970 was notable for constituting the turning point of postwar Japanese art. Expo '70 in Osaka, which opened to the public in March, offered exposure to the works of the group Gutai and the 1960s avant-garde; by enabling the union of art and technology, both new and old, it made us dream of art for the masses, if only temporarily. However, Expo '70 did not leave anything behind and nothing came out of it, because it did not generate an artistic problem. The reality of the year 1970 can be better understood when we look at the following events: 14th Kyoto Independent Exhibition at the Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art, March 2–16 (organized by the city of Kyoto); Outdoor Festival of Contemporary Art at Children's Land in Yokohama, April 1–May 31 (organized by participating artists); *Tokyo Biennale '70: Between Man and Matter*, at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, May 10–30 (organized by Mainichi Newspapers and traveled in part to Kyoto, Nagoya, and Fukuoka); *Trends in Contemporary Art* at the National Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto, July 7–August 9; *August 1970: Aspects of New Japanese Art* at the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo, August 4–30; and *Nirvana: For Final Art* at the Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art, August 12–14 (exhibition and meeting organized by participating artists).

  These events did not happen randomly or coincidentally. Rather, they resonated and contrasted with each other in an unprecedentedly close manner, reflecting the organizers'

intentions and the participating artists' express directions. Taken together, they represent

almost completely the tendencies of Japanese art around 1970, of which three major

characteristics can be extracted. The first two—a desire to seek changes in the institutional

system concerning the shift from "making" of art to "showing" of art, and to reexamine the

foundation of the system of expression concerning "seeing" and "making" that ensues—

were not necessarily new, having been nurtured throughout the 1960s. However, in the

late 1960s, as the relationships between subject, expression, act, idea, matter, medium,

work, and reality became radically dismantled, a search for theories and ideologies of new

relationships began to take shape. As a result, while the positions of these contradicting

and contesting tendencies were increasingly clarified, they nonetheless momentarily bore

the shared trait of the time—a phenomenon typical of a turning point in history. This third

trait can be summarized as the decisive refutation of given artistic mediums and forms and

the denial or reluctance of "making." These two options necessarily de-historicized the

medium, forcing it to split into the two opposing poles of idea and *mono* (things). The latter

constituted "material for the medium" and, as such, belonged to a category below the

medium. Although the collapse of the preexisting medium [such as painting and sculpture]

was a global phenomenon, the loss of historicity from the medium was in and of itself solely

Japanese.

The exhibitions outlined above—*Between Man and Matter*, *August 1970*, and

Nirvana most vividly—saliently represented these three characteristics, especially the split

of the medium into *mono* and idea. Ideologically neutral, *Between Man and Matter*—which

encompassed issues similar to Arte Povera and Conceptual art—presented the whole

spectrum of artistic tendencies around 1970 as outlined above. Thus, it most completely

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revealed the coexistence of *mono-* and idea-oriented tendencies and, in a sense, best

exemplified the year 1970. In contrast, if *August 1970* gathered the most radical artists

deploying *mono* (although such a focus was not necessarily the intention of its curator,

Tōno Yoshiaki), *Nirvana* represented the opposing ideology of the time by gathering idea-

oriented artists and collectives who centered around artist Matsuzawa Yutaka.

Since the separation of *mono* and idea was a general trait of Japanese art that

resulted from the loss of historicity from the artistic medium, Mono-ha (School of Things),

if broadly defined, can include a vast number of artists. However, if narrowed by the

strictest parameters, the artists of Mono-ha—such as Lee Ufan, Suga Kishio, Yoshida

Katsurō, Sekine Nobuo, and others—stood out because they before anybody else

thoroughly destroyed the historicity of the medium, confronting *mono* in its most naked

form. What made it possible for them to do so was a logic they had already developed,

albeit a contradictory one, that would help them to transcend the delusion concerning

"*mono* itself." That is to say, these artists were not content with merely focusing on the

mono by simply separating *mono* and idea. Instead, they proactively sought to structuralize

the situation in which *mono* could be exposed as *mono* itself; in doing so, they attempted to

overcome the separation between *mono* and idea. Granted, they emphasized the

relationship more than *mono* itself. In practice, however, it is also true that they tried to

render *mono* completely naked in order to expose its being. That is why I group these

artists as Mono-ha in its narrowest sense.

Due to such a contradictory nature, Mono-ha in its narrowest sense had to begin its

trajectory obscured by a thick cloud of misunderstanding. Nothing demonstrates this more

eloquently than *Between Man and Matter*, which almost completely neglected Mono-ha in

its narrowest sense even though it was intended to capture the opposite poles of *mono* and idea.

<u>*Between Man and Matter*</u>

Between Man and Matter was the 1970 presentation of the Tokyo Biennale (initially known as International Art Exhibition, Japan) by the Mainichi Newspapers, which appointed Nakahara Yūsuke as the show's sole commissioner and artistic director. As part of the company's exhibition programming, which had been established over twenty years, it boasted the organizational force, critical spirit, and artistic contents to form an exceptionally innovative direction. In fact, Japan had not seen such an international exhibition in its history.

In determining the exhibition format, the Mainichi organizers perceptively learned from the 1968 Venice Biennale, which had revealed the inadequacy of both the nation-by-nation participation and the award system. They abolished these two traditions and instituted a format in which a "single commissioner" would formulate a theme from an art-critical perspective. In other words, *Between Man and Matter* was not so much a biennale-style large-scale exhibition to present different developmental stages of art from numerous countries, but a mid-scale thematic exhibition that captured certain practices in their contemporaneity. In fact, it was a "borderless exhibition," very similar in terms of form and content to the art-critical exhibitions held in 1969 at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Kunsthalle Bern; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; as well as the Guggenheim International exhibition in 1971. Needless to say, such an exhibition format was made necessary by the highly diversified state of art at the time, wherein the

established mediums were dismantled, expression and material directly linked, and attempts made to deploy thousands of materials to create thousands of expressions. Since the specific situation engendered the format of *Between Man and Matter*, the organizers did not intend to demonstrate a generic exhibition format applicable to any situations.

Key to curating such an exhibition was a critical mind that could capture and conceptualize a diversified art scene by using a certain perspective, idea, or paradigm. As the exhibition's subtitle indicates, Nakahara understood the art of the time not as "works that make such closed systems as painting and sculpture" but that which "emphasizes or allows an experience of the relationship between man and matter that are infinitely fraught with contradiction." He thus successfully presented an aspect of the art scene as comprehensively as possible by contextualizing various practices that had emerged after the collapse of the medium. "Between man and matter" is a post-artistic phrase typical of Nakahara, who aspired to recast the separation of *mono* and idea resulting from the dismantling of the medium—which was specific to art—into a broader context as a change in the way to cognize the world.

However, in his art criticism, he did not define or categorize the *relationship* between man and matter but presented it as a generalized or conceptual viewpoint. Although this attitude allowed him to incorporate artists as disparate as Matsuzawa Yutaka, Enokura Kōji, and Tanaka Shintarō, he failed to convincingly explain why this relationship might constitute a special phase of art. He not only excluded painting and sculpture because they "formed a closed system" but regarded the issue of the medium altogether secondary, prioritizing the act of cognition: that is, the reading of the relationship and its formation. The observation he made in his catalogue essay amply demonstrates his stance:

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"Some artists deployed photography in order to bring outdoor events into the museum. However, the medium of photography has no special significance therein. It merely functions to summarize the flow or time as unfolded in these outdoor events."

These photo-based practices and Mono-ha's approach were both informed by the state of contemporary art after the collapse of the medium. Still, although the artists of Mono-ha in its narrowest sense also equally regarded the relationship to be important, since they desired to directly expose the being of *mono* in the site of perception, they were critical of placing emphasis on the relationship that can be tracked by cognition. Rather, they were more inclined to expose *mono* in a starkly naked manner. A good example is Yoshida Katsurō. Perhaps this is why the artists of Mono-ha in its narrowest sense, Yoshida included, were not represented in *Between Man and Matter*.

Between Man and Matter included the following forty artists: Dietrich Albrecht*, Carl Andre*, Boesem, Daniel Buren*, Christo*, Jan Dibbets, Ger van Elk*, Enokura Kōji, Luciano Fabro, Barry Flanagan*, Hans Haacke*, Horikawa Michio, Inumaki Kenji, Stephen J. Kaltenbach, Kawaguchi Tatsuo, On Kawara, Koike Kazushige, Stanislav Kolibal, Koshimizu Susumu, Jannis Kounellis*, Edward Krasinski, Sol LeWitt*, Roelof Louw*, Matsuzawa Yutaka, Mario Merz*, Narita Katsuhiko, Bruce Nauman, Nomura Hitoshi, Panamarenko*, Giuseppe Penone*, Markus Raetz, Klaus Rinke*, Reiner Ruthenbeck*, Jean-Frédéric Schnyder, Richard Serra*, Shōji Satoru, Keith Sonnier*, Takamatsu Jirō, Tanaka Shintarō, and Gilberto Zorio*.[307] It is reasonable to see the general conceptualizing tendency of art in selecting such a wide range of artists. However, this was a symptom of the dismantling of the medium that must be critically appraised.

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[307] Those marked with asterisks came to Japan to produce, install, or perform their works.

Artists of Mono-ha

I have outlined above the commonality and differences between the artists of Mono-ha in its narrowest sense and those of *Between Man and Matter*. Before concluding, I would like to clarify the identity of Mono-ha artists. At this point in history, the origin of "Mono-ha" is still unknown. However, whether defined narrowly or broadly, its obscure etymological origin does not preclude the existence of a shared tendency around 1970 or a group of artists consciously cultivating this tendency. It can be safely claimed that practices that self-consciously deployed *mono* emerged in 1969 all at once. The previous year, when Sekine Nobuo presented *Phase—Mother Earth* at Kobe's Suma Rikyū Park in October and stunned his generation of artists, his combination of convex (an earthen pillar) and concave (a pillar-shaped hole in the earth) shapes still carried a sign of the intellectualized manipulation of the gap between *mono* and idea, a tendency that peaked with the exhibition *Tricks and Vision* (April 1968) [jointly presented by Muramatsu Gallery and Tokyo Gallery]. However, come 1969, the same Sekine piled oil clay, Lee Ufan arranged three curled sheets of paper on the floor, Yoshida Katsurō placed a small stone in each corner of a sheet of paper, Suga Kishio created interior and exterior with wax blocks, Honda Shingo created a state of equilibrium with a stretched piece of fabric and the weight of a stone, Koshimizu Susumu (who was close to Sekine) wrapped an enormous rock in a paper bag, and Narita Katsuhiko charred huge wood trunks. Thus, Mono-ha artists in its narrowest sense and their allies clearly demonstrated a direction to transcend the physical presence of *mono* and comprehend their state of being.

This group of artists centered on several graduates of Tama Art University who studied with Saitō Yoshishige there. In 1969, when they were joined by Lee, who began to attract attention with his art criticism beginning with "From Thing to Being" (which won an honorable mention in the 6th Art Criticism Competition [of Bijutsu Shuppan-sha]), their ideological position became crystal clear. Their choice of *mono*—which often included such raw materials as stone, wood, paper, fabric, sand, and iron plates—definitely set them apart from the mainstream of contemporary art at the time, which consisted of fabricated works similar to Primary Structures and various kinds of Kinetic and Op objects. If these mainstream artists attempted to hide the collapse of the medium by foregrounding the self-sufficiency of things, Mono-ha artists relentlessly pushed the collapse to its extreme end. This contrast was evident in the competition section of the Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan in May that year.

Mono-ha in its narrowest sense, which completely negated the medium and stripped *mono* bare, had some sympathizers already in 1969. By 1970 it spawned a wide range of variations, and the phenomenon is still unfolding today. Among those who emerged in 1969–70 and demonstrated originality were Enokura Kōji and Tayakama Noboru, two graduates of Tokyo National University of the Arts, who paid attention to *mono*'s historicity and signification, and Haraguchi Noriyuki, a graduate of Nippon University's art school, who emphasized *mono*'s sensory expressiveness. If we should define Mono-ha in a broader manner, these artists must be named first.

Still, it should be noted that even among the narrowly defined Mono-ha artists, we find different temperaments and serious disagreements. Sekine, who showed in the exhibition, had an excellent talent for Magritte-like manipulation of imagery. If it had not

been for his encounter with Lee, he would have headed in a different direction. If Suga

Kishio is situated at the extreme right of the Mono-ha spectrum, Sekine must be located at

its extreme left. Even so, Mono-ha's aspiration for change must have had a certain

universality if artists of such varying temperaments could coalesce together, if temporarily,

and share an ideology.

As amply demonstrated by Takamatsu Jirō's abandonment of idea-based

manipulation around 1970, the rise of Mono-ha rendered a fatal blow to the

intellectualized tendency that had pervaded avant-garde art in 1960s Japan. Nonetheless,

we cannot deny the fact that Mono-ha's most vexing problem lay precisely in its refutation

of the historicity of the medium, which underscores its most original and innovative

achievement.

Honda Shingo, "Proposal for Restoring 'Art Intuition'"

Translated by James Jack, edited by Mika Yoshitake

Originally published as "'Geijutsu chokkan' no fukken o" (Proposal for restoring "art intuition"), Gallery *Te* newsletter, no. 3 (August 1982): n.p.

Through meeting various people, my understanding of my own work deepens. But many people, when standing in front of a work, try to find an entrance into it by getting words from the artist. That is not wrong, but it risks the danger of reducing the fertile world of the work to mere triviality. The artist is a liar, fond of casually telling people what pops into his head. He thinks these words have nothing to do with his work. But I have to at least clearly state the artist's standpoint when facing the work. That "standpoint" means the direction the artist faces, and which "clearly" differs from a "logical" standpoint.

"From My Production Notebook"

When we face a work, if we are bound by the absurd superstition to turn to a monolithic idea of "understanding" [just one idea], it can cause confusion. In that case, in order to untangle the confusion, we may need the assistance of words. If so, however, the work will become an artistic memorial enslaved by them. Words superfluous to understanding must be struck out and eliminated. This is not part of the artist's creative activity, because he begins his work with a creative will that is far more complicated.

When this monolithic idea is eliminated, "art intuition" unfolds a diverse world in its deepest, innermost essence. There is no meaning or distance behind the "world" itself; it just simply "exists" there. Art theory helps to understand the "world" by making it more acutely visible, purifying it. In this process, art intuition that is rich undergoes a qualitative

transformation, generating a completely different world. It will never meld with the initial, brightly shining world; although they are closely related, they merely exist in parallel. At any rate, it is an incontrovertible fact that art intuition shares no measurable standard with art theory. Whether a work is good or bad must be judged through art intuition. The resulting evaluation is completely different from one given by art theory.

The restoration of art intuition entails the departure from one of the superstitions of contemporary art: the linguistic obsession of "posing a critical question." At the same time, what I must state clearly is that art intuition belongs to a realm separate from the aesthetics of enjoying nature. In this realm, the work of art exists autonomously, holding the same value but having nothing to do with nature. Nature's beauty cannot constitute an element of the work and is very singular in its character. Cognition of a world distinct from art theory and nature's beauty is profoundly informed in the way we see things by defining the cardinal concept of "now" or the "present" that transcends a historical sense of time. I think we must take our fear of the pitch-dark abyss, replace it with an everyday moment-to-moment sensibility, and make it our departure point so that we can probe the direction from chaos to creativity.

Haraguchi Noriyuki, "Recent Thoughts"

Translated by Mika Yoshitake

Originally published as "Saikin omou koto," in "Totsuzen otayori: Mono-ha o kataru" (Sudden letters: Discussing Mono-ha), *Bijutsu techō*, no. 587 (November 1987): 126–27.

Lately Mono-ha has become a topic of much discussion. Some attempt to define Mono-ha or create a coherent account for it based on various documents and explanations, as well as several exhibitions. Mono-ha is being defined in a broader or narrower sense or according to which art school its artists graduated from. However, in my opinion, this development is too superficial in that it ignores the artists' accounts.

Under a certain definition of Mono-ha, I have been treated as a Mono-ha artist and cited to reinforce some critics' arguments. But if I should be categorized as Mono-ha, my "Mono-ha" is still rather fluid. Because the artist as a subject creates his work: one can never begin with a work as an end result and retroactively trace it back to anything. Even if one attempts to sort things out and give a concise history, Mono-ha did not autonomously emerge and come to an end. Rather, since Mono-ha reacted within a delicate balance and coexisted with several other concurrent aspects, it cannot be so easily summarized.

For me, it would be more desirable if Mono-ha could be tested and given an appropriate place in due course than its being discussed [this way] now.

Let me point out here a fundamental difference between Mono-ha (that centering on Lee Ufan and graduates of Tama Art University) and myself. While those Mono-ha artists used the times (or a particular worldview) to raise an objection to society and orchestrated a certain dynamism therein, I did not react so intensely to such a situation. While they utilized such materials as wood, natural stones, and Japanese paper due to their need to

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relate to the world through opening or encountering it, I disliked the effect resulting from such natural things. Instead I paid attention to waste matter, cut off from contemporary society's standards of value. My works comprise materials that some viewers may have been completely unfamiliar with, because I did not aim to create a contact toward the outside world but desired to seek the structure of art in my work as an object of investigation.

I attempted to build an individual practice by placing myself at a distance from the context of art. However, because my works took on anonymous forms and structures and I deployed a reductive methodology whereby I needed only a few elements, they were unavoidably mistaken for an expression analogous to Mono-ha (among other ideas).

However, at my core, I always had an urge to compete against the world. It is a healthy sign if an entirely different interpretation or a competing position to define Mono-ha arises in Japan or abroad against its current definition as noted above. I will gladly accept it. However, the lack of capability and quality in art criticism engenders the current situation. Should this situation continue, we will suffer a narrowed subjectivity in our art practice, and we will be left with a sense of impasse.

In the future, we are most likely going to see the history of Mono-ha discussed in the current narrative both domestically and internationally.

With this prediction I fear that, especially abroad, Japanese art will again be interpreted (mythologized) by a handful of art specialists in terms of its expressive particularity. I hope that this will not be the case.

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