



**THE PRESENCE OF
ABSENCE**

Keiko Oyamatsu - Dogtime FA5 - 2013

Introduction

'Ma' (間; pronounced "maah") is a Japanese word for which there is no equivalent word in English or in Dutch. It can be roughly translated as 'negative space' or 'space in-between' e.g. a gap, interval, pause or the space between two structural parts. Ma includes both time and space. The character for Ma is a composite of two characters, one representing a gate (門), and in between the gate, the character of the moon (月). It depicts a scene that the moon is at the middle point under the gate; the crossover between light and darkness.

Ma is the essence of the Japanese aesthetic and is a concept representing the pure and essential void between all things. Ma is a field within which things can exist, stand out and have meaning. A total lack of clutter, Ma relates closely to Mu (nothingness/emptiness/ void), a keyword in Buddhism, especially in Mahayana/ Zen traditions.

Ma has always been a central concern of artistic expression in Japan, as things which are not seen, which are intangible have a much bigger impact on the human psyche than things which are seen.

Power of the invisible

Take as an example, the situation in Japan after the nuclear disaster in Fukushima following the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami on 11 March 2011. The country seems to have entered an age of 'fear of the invisible'; fear of radiation. A mother living 50 km away from the nuclear site is quoted as saying that "radiation has been occupying my mind the whole time". It prevents her from allowing her children to pick flowers, jump in puddles, or touch wet umbrellas. She does not like taking her newborn daughter out for walks. She knows this impacts badly on her children's well-being, but she cannot stop taking precautions. Overwhelming fear throughout the country caused by uncertainty about the invisible toxicants frequently manifests as physical ailments with many people reporting cases of

heart disease and panic attacks. Even in areas where radiation risks are very low, people are still deeply concerned and worried. Rational or irrational, it is seriously threatening the country's economy, and the very future of its society.

Quite the opposite yet equally true is the perception of the 'things which are not seen' as belonging to the highest divinity, the concept of God, which evokes a sense of supreme beauty, truth, grace, and wisdom in the minds of believers. Billions of people throughout the world believe that God has the power to save the world; God being the creator of the world and true hope for infinite eternal life. "Put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption" (Psalm 130:7). Faith in God can console people even in the face of death. However, God has of course never been seen. Muslims ban the depiction of the Prophet Mohammed. Jews have for the most part avoided visual representation of the deity. The Christian Orthodox Church uses religious icons and symbols for worship. Since God became unified

with Jesus, Jesus and other holy figures can be represented, but God above cannot be represented pictorially. Some Protestant traditions like Calvinism banned images entirely and today there is little imagery to be found in Baptist churches. In Buddhism too, although denying the existence of a creator God, their primary conceptual tenet is the lack of a central essence or substance to the self: emptiness, or nothingness.

In the scientific world, quantum physics has demonstrated that our physical reality consists of nothingness, that the atoms are mostly empty space, that atoms are energy. The model of any atom is nothing materially, but all things potentially.

Arguably therefore, the greatest motivational force in human activity is the invisible intangibles. In art, Ma, as the space and time of the invisible intangibles, can lead to magic. Art is a form of communication. One could even say that the art of art lies in Ma, the "realm of freedom and

creativity, a space where sensibility is evoked and endlessly recognized, a zone of nothingness and everything, where there are no names, rules, boundaries or definitions" (1).

In recent years, but notably since the 1960's with a rising economic power of Asia, more and more contemporary artists in the West are exposed to and fascinated by the East. They have begun to explore Eastern philosophy and Ma in their artistic creations. The first work that rose to prominence is probably the musical piece '4'33"' (1952) by John Cage, his most famous and controversial creation. Cage's strong aspiration to Zen Buddhism came forth as a critical methodological and philosophical influence in the post war Avant-garde. Many artistic creations and activities of Dada, Fluxus, and Happenings followed the mediation of Cage's approach.

As an artist born in Japan, but now living and studying in the Netherlands, I myself have developed a particular viewpoint, which is born of

merging and integrating two contrasting cultures. My intention and the purpose of this paper is to evaluate contemporary art, largely governed by Western values, from my Eastern point of view and personal perspective. My analysis will center around the concept of Ma with its origins deep in Japanese culture but with its global meaning.

In the first chapter of this paper I start with an investigation of the cultural differences between Ma in Japan and Ma in the countries of the West, as context. Chapter 2 examines how Ma plays an essential role in art and how it manifests itself in the work of some prominent contemporary artists. Finally, I present final insights and my conclusion about Ma and its transformative power.

(1) Thomas McEvelley (1939), "Empyrhical Thinking (And Why Kant Can't)", Artforum, 27, no.2 (New York, Oct. 1988)

Chapter 1

Cultural differences: perspectives on Ma in Japan and Western countries

In the domain of human interaction

I have lived in European countries (U.K. and Holland) for almost 20 years. During the years, I have learnt many rules and protocols in communicating with European people, whose communication style (even the grammatical structure of the language) is distinctively different from the Japanese one. I do not intend to create stereotypical dichotomies between eastern and western communications, as the individuals have his/her own personal communication style. Nevertheless the general difference includes many aspects such as physical gestures, intonation, and non-verbal communication. Here I would like to focus explicitly on the difference in general perception of Ma (pauses, silence) in human interactions between Japan and the Western countries.

The West: explicit words- orientated communication

It seems to me that the words are of primal significance in the western countries, of course including Holland. I know many Dutch people are atheist but the basic culture still resonate in Christianity, where the bible states; "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1). This is the first verse in the Gospel of John. The word is Father God, and is also Jesus Christ (God in the flesh). It existed at the very beginning. Interestingly, the original Greek for the "Word" was "Logos" which can be taken to mean "reason". Therefore the "Word" might be supposed to mean "Reasons". In the western world where the reason is the foundation and guide of pursuing the truth, to loose reasons (words) must mean to loose everything. I wonder if this could be one of deep seated subconscious reasons why western people put so much emphasis on verbal/written communication. Above all, the western society is consisted of high racial and cultural diversity - that means you must

use many words to explain in order to be understood by the other people who come from totally different cultural backgrounds-.

Everything must be uttered in words, moreover, in a good conversation, there should be no 'gaps' or 'silence'. You must keep talking and attend well to the conversational flow. In my own experience in the first few years in Europe, I was not aware of this rule and would perplexed people with my pauses and silences in the conversation. You must keep the conversation running even when you have got nothing to say. Some people are even phobic to silence. And people who are naturally tacit and quite, called "introverts", suffer from prejudice that they are 'stuck up', anti social, boring, and there is something wrong with them. In the western countries, Ma (pauses, silence) in communication seems typically perceived as 'lack of communication' and is something negative.

Awkward silence/ Silence for no more than 4 seconds

"There are even 'rules' about silence. It has been said that, in a conversation between two English speakers who are not close friends, a silence of longer than four seconds is not allowed (which means that people become embarrassed if nothing is said after that time--they feel obliged to say something, even if it is only a remark about the weather"(2).

Generally, the western people feel so uncomfortable with silence in conversation, so they try to constantly fill in the gap with words. The 'awkward silence' can bedevil human interaction. Silence in conversation is perceived as "those 'tumbleweed' moments, those 'angels passing', those thoroughly awkward vacuums in the conversation where everybody looks at the ground and hopes like hell that someone else is going to step in or else suddenly starts blurting out anything that comes to mind just to get rid of the silence" (3).

They feel more comfortable when there is a constant stream of sound, as the modern day

culture has developed so many ways of ensuring that we practically never experience real silence for any length of time. Everybody is listening to radio, watching TV, or on a cellphone (or an mp3 player) to their ears. The shopping malls and streets play continual music at us. And this sense that sound should be continuous must be carried over into conversation. Once they start talking with others, they seem to feel the need to 'keep talking' without a pause until the conversation is formally ended. Quite a few people even find 'ending the conversation' hard to do - because it invites silence.

A Dutch psychologist, Namkje Koudenburg, of the psychology department at the University of Groningen, have uncovered exactly what it is that makes those disruptions in conversation so awfully uncomfortable: They elicit deep-seated, primal fears of social acceptance and belonging. In her academic article , she suggests that silences threaten social needs. She found that the conversational flow is very pleasant; it informs people that things are all right: they belong to the

group and agree with one another. As such, conversational flow serves social needs. That is, the need to belong, the need for self-esteem and the need for social validation (4).

The study consisted of two experiments, involving the total of 162 undergraduate students. In one experiment, participants watched one of two versions of a six-minutes video clip, in which a group of three female students were talking about relationships. The participants were to imagine themselves being one of the three female students in the video, a woman named Linda. The three talked for four minutes, and then "Linda" said that teachers who have sex with students should be fired immediately. (silence)

In one version of the video, the other members of the group smoothly steered the conversation to a topic that wasn't directly related to what Linda had said, and the conversation continued for two more minutes, never returning to the subject she had broached. But in the "disrupted flow" version of the video, Linda's words were followed with four seconds of silence, and then the conversation continued in a similar way to the first video. In a

questionnaire, those who imagined themselves as Linda in the 4 seconds silence scenario reported feeling more rejection and more negative emotions, and fewer feelings of belonging or self-esteem, than those who watched the conversation that kept going without skipping a beat. People who experienced the silence reported feeling "distressed, afraid, hurt, and rejected," according to the paper. Koudenberg says in the interview by NBC News: "Even when people are not consciously aware that there is a silence, they immediately sense that there is something wrong".

Japan: implicit silence- orientated communication

Japan is a homogeneous island that had not experienced colonization or invasion, therefore did not need to develop linguistic communication extensively throughout the history. Its society has existed from the very long time ago, Japanese people share common sense and context. When someone talks to the audience, the speaker expects them to know these things and takes it for granted. This mutual understanding is called

"unspoken agreement". This major differences between Japan and the West can be summarised in the anecdote of a Japanese manager explaining the difference between Japanese and Western communication as: "We are a homogeneous people and don't have to speak as much as you do in the West. When we say one word, we understand ten, but here you have to say ten to understand one."

It is also a common knowledge in Japan that people who keep talking all the time or saying 'the obvious' are considered 'shallow', 'thoughtless', and 'tiring'. The Japanese value silences and pauses in between the conversation. Pauses and silences are the essential part of our communication, which is not to be felt threatened but to be 'sensed' 'read' and even 'enjoyed'. Historically in Japan, silence has been associated with truthfulness. This belief originated in Zen Buddhism, where the spoken word was discouraged and silence was encouraged, as it was believed that enlightenment can not be attained by talking. Furthermore, repetitive Buddhist chants enabled people to realize the

emptiness of words. This belief is exemplified by the concept of "Ma".

The eastern religions and philosophy - Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism - have long cultivated an appreciation for silence. In their teachings, silence is essential to spiritual life. They see silence as a mark of spiritual maturity. The Chinese scripture called the Tao Te Ching says, "Those revered as the holiest people in the East - gurus, bhikkhus, and Zen Masters - are people of few words. They speak little because they believe, as Gandhi said, that 'In the attitude of Silence the soul finds the path in a clearer light, and what is elusive and deceptive resolves itself into crystal clearness.' That's why Zen and other Eastern meditations are best practiced in total silence" (5).

In Eastern belief silence is a prior condition to spiritual purification and growth. Eastern belief teach that silence leads to inner awareness, wisdom, compassion, and enlightenment. The Indian philosopher and spiritual leader, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (Osho), describes silence as follows:

-Interviewer-

One of the things i enjoy most in this life
is hearing you describe the state of
enlightenment.

For those of us who love to listen,
can you once again say something about the
unsayable?

-Osho-

It is true
that there is nothing
more beautiful,
more blissful
than enlightenment
even the talk of it,
even the faraway echo,
even the shadow of it.

The moon reflected in water
is not the real moon,
but still it has tremendous beauty;
and if the water of your mind
is silent,

then the moon reflected
in the water
is exactly the same.

It is not your experience,
but it is someone's experience you love,
it is someone's experience you trust.

And just because you love and you trust,
you start sharing the experience in a subtle way.

It is certainly difficult to say anything about it,
although my whole life I have been saying things
about it
and only about it.

Even if, though, I am talking about other things,
I am only talking
to lead you
towards an understanding of enlightenment.

It is your
state of silence,

it is your
state of universal-hood.

It is you
without the ego
and its problems.
It is you
without any questions
and without any answer either
simply silent.

And there is no joy
which can transcend this silence.

It is pure light,
it is pure delight.

I can understand your question.
Just to hear about it again and again
is a necessary need,
so you don't
forget
why you are here (6).

Ma in daily conversation

Ma (pauses, silence) in the conversation, the Japanese people has always considered -as well as speech- conveys emotions, shows respect, creates personal distance, avoids conflict and even changes the meaning of speech completely. There is a number of Japanese proverb that warn against the use of the spoken word. The proverbs such as: "a bird who don't sing don't get shot" and "spoken words make one feel abandoned (=it is better to leave many things unsaid)" highlights this belief. Verbal expression is considered untrustworthy and has consequences for the speaker. This is relevant in politics, too. Japanese politicians are still judged by virtues such as silence rather than their oratory skills, where the contrary is mostly true in the West. In Japan, on the intra-personal level, the outer realm of a person concerns one's outer body, which includes one's speech and verbal expression. Silence is associated with the inner realm, which the Japanese equate with truthfulness. This socio-psychological idea is central to the Japanese mindset. To further illustrate this I would like to

refer to the three major Japanese concept regarding Ma in interpersonal communication:

1. "Haragei" (= lit. stomach art= implicit communication)

Haragei is a concept in Japanese interpersonal communication. The term literally can be translated "stomach art" and means an exchange of thoughts and feelings that are implied in conversation, rather than explicitly stated. It can also denote charisma or strength of personality. It is considered difficult for non- Japanese, particularly Westerners, to fully understand. In negotiation, Haragei is characterized by euphemisms, vague and indirect statements, prolonged silences and careful avoidance of any comment that might potentially give offense. Information is communicated through timing, facial expression and emotional context, rather than through direct speech. It also functions as a method of leadership, replacing direct orders to subordinates with subtle, non-verbal signals. It is considered a desirable trait in a leader in Japan. In martial arts circles, Haragei refers to those arts

which supposedly enabled the practitioner to sense threats or anticipates an opponent's movements (7).

2. "Reading the air"

The term "reading the air" means 'getting a read on situations and see what's really going on by feeling the atmosphere', and is representative concept of Japanese culture in general. In this context "the air" refers to the unspoken thoughts and feelings among any group of people. "The air" is not articulated as such, but it is implicitly understood that people should follow "the air" by trying to work out what everyone else is thinking and feeling, thereby not go against the unspoken consensus. It should be able to be understood without words. People without this skill are viewed as bad and socially awkward, and most Japanese do what they can to avoid being labeled as 'incapable of reading the air'.

3. "Ishin-denshin" (=tacit understanding, telepathy, sympathy, or heart to heart communication)

"Ishin-denshin" is a Japanese idiom which denotes the traditional concept of interpersonal communication through unspoken mutual understanding. It literally translates as "what the mind thinks, the heart transmits". This expression is often used to convey a style of nonverbal communication between two people that is felt to be characteristic of Japanese culture. It refers to a passive form of shared understanding, as sincere, silent communication via the heart or belly, as opposed to overt communication via the face and mouth, which is seen as being susceptible to insincerities. Such concepts are related to the traditions of Zen, where the term refers to direct mind transmission. It continues to influence many aspects of contemporary Japanese culture, ranging from business practices to end-of-life care. The Japanese people believe the "real" relationship should function better without uttering a word, which signifies a mature relationship of the deeper

understanding between people who have gotten to know each other so well (8). Furthermore, in social relations, Ma, in the sense of distance, is considered a decisive factor in Japanese interpersonal behavior. One takes care of being neither too attached to nor too distant from people. One pays close attention to Ma between oneself and others. As a social psychologist, Minami Hiroshi put it: "In the Japanese approach to everyday life, the 'Ma' between people, and especially 'Ma' in the sense of psychological distance between the self and the others, has always played a significant role in smoothing human relations".

Conscious creation of "Ma" in daily life in Japan

'Ma' manifests in all aspects of Japanese daily life. As an example, when we are taught to bow in early age, we are told to make a deliberate pause (approx. 3 seconds) at the end of the bow before raising back our faces. It is to make sure there is enough 'Ma' in our bow for it to have meaning and show respect and gratitude to the other person standing in front. These crucial moments of 'Ma'

exists in all kinds of traditional rituals, such as tea ceremony, scents ceremony, haiku reading, etc.

-
- (2) Peter Trudgill (1943), Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society 4th edition (2000), U.K., Penguin
 - (3) Uncommon knowledge (Website): "Awkward silence", U.K. © 2014 Uncommon Knowledge Ltd.
 - (4) Koudenburg, N. & Postmes, T., & Gordijn, E.H. (2011). 'Disrupting the Flow: How Brief Silences in Group Conversations Affect Social Needs', Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 47 (2), 512-515 (2011), The Netherlands. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2010.12.006
 - (5) J. Brent Bill (1951) Holy Silence: The Gift of Quaker Spirituality, Paraclete Press (U.S.A., Massachusetts, 2005) Copyright © 2005 by J. Brent Bill ISBN 1-55725-420-6
 - (6) Transcript from Youtube: OSHO: The Joy of Silence, Copyright© OSHO Int
 - (7) Wikipedia "Haragei", <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haragei>
 - (8) Wikipedia "Ishin Denshin", <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ishin-denshin>

In the domain of subjective self

The concept of 'self' in the West and the East / independent self vs. relational self

The social psychologist, Richard E. Nisbett, proposes that Easterners and Westerners have significantly different styles of thought and perception. The differences also include how one perceives oneself ; the concept of 'self'. In Japanese word, the character for a 'human being' consists of two words 人間, one indicating a person standing up (人) and Ma (間). This indicates the notion that a human being is a being in between human beings. The Chinese philosopher Hu Shih states that "in the Confucian human-centered philosophy man cannot exist alone; all action must be in the form of interaction between man and man" (9).

On the contrary, the western 'self' is composed of fixed attributes and can move from one setting or context to another without significant alteration; the notion of 'isolated mind' of Descartes' invention. It ascribes to man a mode of being in which the individual exists separately from the

world of physical nature and also from engagement with others, 'The isolated mind' is also called 'solitary self', strongly linked with radical individualism. Descartes made a radical separation of the mind from the body (and from the physical world in general); a cornerstone of his entire philosophy. The mind (self), according to him, is complete in itself. It has no need for anything physical to be what it is. It knows itself directly and with absolute certainty. The self as mind exists as a distinct substance, as 'thinking matter', and it enjoys a supreme independence from the world of 'extended matter' that is subject to the laws of physics. This philosophy dominated the western world for decades.

For East Asians the person is so connected to others that the self is literally dependent on the context. As philosopher Donald Munro describes it, East Asians understand themselves 'in terms of their relation to the whole, such as the family, society, Tao Principles, or Pure Consciousness' (10). If an important person is removed from the individual's social network, that individual literally becomes a different person.

What we call 'self' is merely a conventional term not referring to any real independent entity; there is only to be found this psycho-physical process of existence changing from moment to moment.

Empty pronouns

This lack of 'independent/disconnected self' shows in the very use of the Japanese grammatical structure distinctively. The Japanese anthropologist, Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney points out that in Japanese language, subjects are often missing or absent, transitive verbs do not have objects, including pronouns, and the word order is quite flexible. Furthermore, it lacks authentic third person pronouns. The 'I' represented by an absent first person pronoun in Japanese is defined in relation to the other(s) in the context of the situation (11). For example, to say "I have come to you" in Japanese, the speaker can just state the verb "Kimashita (has come)" to the listener, and depending on the context, the listener understands if it is she or he or they who has come to you or her or him or them. In the western case of the 'I', the indexical 'I' is the

specific subject, I or Mary or Paul, without explicit reference to the context. In contrast, the indexical unspoken 'I' in the Japanese language is an explicitly relational 'I' in a given context or conversation. The unspoken 'I', pushed in the field of 'Ma', can only exist with the other person or in the context. Moreover, the absent subject can also represent the social self who is specifically constructed in relation to others. Depending on the form of the spoken verbs, the speaker can change her social position to the receiver. The unspoken absent 'I' in Japanese therefore is modified in each situation and conversation, and the same individual changes her/his expressed social identity depending on the other(s) and the social context. I, in Japanese, can be said it is empty, fluid, and changing all the time, in stark contrast to the Western definitive sole 'I'.

In the domain of physical environment

Ma as a symbiotic 'in-between' space

The concept of 'Ma' carries great value in traditional Japanese architecture, too. It can also manifests as a tangible space in the architecture

design of housings. A good example of a space representing physicalized 'Ma' is the 'Engawa' (the images below), which is the space underneath the extension of the eaves in Japanese housing.



(Engawa)

This space between the outside and inside; 'engawa' is used for many purposes. As it runs all the way around the house it is used as a corridor between the other rooms of the house, as a welcoming place for guests. It is also used as a space for having a cup of tea, appreciating the garden, reading, daydreaming, taking a nap,

playing a game, etc. It is the space where you can do anything and nothing. It does not have any specific purpose.

The Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa mentions about 'Engawa' as follows :

"I was struck by Japan's traditional architecture and its space, which was one in which inside and outside interpenetrated. In the countryside where I spent the war years, for example, we always opened the sliding exterior door from the first light of morning, no matter how cold it was. The garden would be filled with snow; or in another season, the buds of spring would be opening and the air filled with the fragrance of flowers. In Japanese homes of the shoin and sukiya styles, there was always this kind of "unobstructed interpenetration" and symbiosis of inside and outside, a symbiosis with the world of nature. In the West, in contrast, they have the picture window: the window as a frame, with nature as the painting it frames. This is a view of nature as something "out there," and is very different from the traditional Japanese house, where house and

garden are one. The Japanese house has another important feature that intermediates between inside and outside -- the engawa verandah. The engawa runs around the house as a projecting platform under the eaves. It is different from the terrace in Western architecture in that it serves as an exterior corridor. While it protects the interior from wind, rain, and, in the summer, the strong rays of the sun, it also functions as a place to entertain guests and as an entranceway from the garden into the house. The space known as the engawa takes on a wide variety of functions that are left unsolved in the conventional plan of a series of rooms linked by interior hallways".

But in addition to that, the engawa possesses its own meaning as a third type of space, an intermediary space, in addition to interior and exterior space. In that it is beneath the eaves, the engawa is interior space; but in that it is open, it is part of the exterior space, the garden. In the country house that I lived in during the war, special and formal guests would be received in

the guest room, but local merchants and neighborhood friends would come cooling to the engawa, sit down there, and have a cup of tea and chat. Thus the way of receiving guests was distinguished spatially according to the meaning and the role of the guest.

The engawa is a space, Ma, inserted between nature and building, exterior and interior. This type of intermediate zone functions as "Ma" to permit two opposing elements to exist in symbiosis. Intermediate space makes a discontinuous continuum possible, so that a plurality of opposing elements can continue in an ever-changing, dynamic relationship. The nature of intermediate space is its ambiguity and multivalency. It does not force opposing elements into compromise or harmony; it is the key to our living and dynamic symbiosis. (12)

Ma as a central empty core

The Japanese traditional houses often have courtyards (called Nakaniwa: the inside garden).



Nakaniwa

If you go inside of the houses, you would come into the entrance room, go through guest room, several private rooms, and then be welcomed into the sunlight of the courtyard. There are trees, plants, a little pond, rocks, and sand, all changing its shapes and colors according to the seasons. The courtyard is often parted by paper-made sliding doors called Shoji. It locates in the very center of the house, the empty space in the center, the space of Ma where outside (nature) is captured in the inside (house), creating symbiosis of the both. This empty space is the very life force

for the entire building. The invisible energy, the spirit of nature is breathing and radiating spiritual force into the building.

The void as core

This concept of 'central empty core' is also embodied in the design and layout of the capital city of Japan; Tokyo. At the center of Tokyo's hustle and bustle is the Imperial Palace - an empty space of Ma, which served as a meditative and spiritual focus and anchor for the people of Tokyo.



(View of the Imperial palace in Tokyo)

The French philosopher Roland Barthes, describes his observation of this empty core in his book *L'Empire des Signes*:

"The entire city (of Tokyo) revolves around a place that is both forbidden and indifferent, an abode masked by vegetation, protected by moats, inhabited by an emperor whom no one ever sees: literally, no one knows who does ever see him.....Its centre is no more than an evaporated ideal whose existence is not meant to radiate any kind of power, but to offer its own empty centre to all urban movement as a form of support, by forcing perpetual traffic detours. Thus, it appears as an image that unfurls again and again in endless circles, around an empty core" (13).

To the philosopher who came from Paris where monuments stand at the end of large boulevards and where there is a distinct center, the composition of Tokyo's center, a deep forest that no one could enter, must have seemed strange. Tokyo is a capital that revolves around this ancient forest where the politically impotent emperor -Japan's spiritual symbol- resides.

Western city centers; densely concentrated center of human activities

In contrast to Barthes, when the first Japanese traveled to a Western city, what surprised them most was the central square (plaza). The Campidoglio in Rome, Dam square in Amsterdam, any square in a European city is a face of the city. The royal palaces, the churches, the city halls, restaurants, department stores, buses, trams, performers, and pedestrians are gathered in and around the square. The Western city developed with the square full of activities as its center. From that center, streets spreads out in a radiating pattern.

In the West, the city centers are the major commercial intersection, the brightly illuminated hub, and the busiest pedestrian intersections. It is a major center of the city's entertainment and the most visited tourist attraction.

The void in the center

The Japanese psychologist Kawai Hayao has introduced the concept of the 'hollow center' as the key to the Japanese mind. Beginning with the

ancient Japanese mythology, he claims that the structures of Japanese culture, society, and human relationships are characterized by emptiness at the center. When forces crushes one another on either side of this void, the void serves as a buffer zone that prevents the confrontation from growing too intense. The role of the emperor over the centuries can be cited as a prime example of the hollow center. The Japanese emperors, unlike European kings, did not make political or military decisions, as the Shogun was the real source of power and action. Yet it was the emperor who represents the country of Japan, as he supposedly descended from the ancient Sun Goddess Amaterasu, a major deity of the Shinto religion.

The void in the center is none other than Ma. And the key point in Kawai's theory is that Ma, which is void, is at the very center of everything in Japan. This Ma is not merely the absence of something but the actual core of everything. Where we see two points in opposition to one another, the underlying essence is in the invisible Ma that makes these points appear as such (14).

-
- (9) Shih, H. (1919) *Chung-kuo che-hsueh shi ta-kang* (An Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy) (Commercial Press, Shanghai)
- (10) Munro, D. (1985) in *Individualism and Holism: Studies in Confucian and Taoist Values*, ed. Munro, D. (Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor), pp. 1-34
- (11) Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney. *The power of absence, zero signifiers and their transgressions* (1994, *L'Homme*, volume 34, issue 130, pp. 59-76)
- (12) Kisho Kurokawa(1934-2007) *Unobstructed Interpenetration: The Symbiosis of Interior and Exterior Space Provided by the Engawa Verandah* (<http://www.kisho.co.jp/page.php/305>)
- (13) R. Barthes (1915) *Empire of Signs* (1996), Japan, Chikuma bunko
- (14) URL: Japan echo, Kumakura Isao 'The culture of Ma' (2007), <http://www.japanecho.com/sum/2007/340114.html> © 2007 Japan Echo Inc.
- Relevant literature:*
- Nisbett. R. E. (1941) 'Geography of thought' (2003), U.S.A. Free Press
- Kawai. H. (1928-2007) 'Hollow structure in Japan' (1999), Japan, Chuokoronsha

Chapter 2

Ma and art: how it manifests itself in art

In the domain of traditional arts

Ma constitutes temporal absence between words in discourse, or spatial units purposely left 'empty' in architecture, gardens, etc. The 'Ma' has been well developed in aesthetics of Japanese traditional arts that remains an important concept cum practice. I would like to introduce some of the most prominent artistic practices in order to see how 'Ma' manifests in works of art.

Calligraphy

The empty brushstrokes (kukaku) of calligraphy, which is practiced even by children offer an example. The empty brushstrokes, of vital significance in calligraphy, represent the movements of the brush which have become invisible to the eye. They represent "the empty background as an additional carrier of meaning in the text." It is for this reason that

calligraphy invites at once a visible and tactile involvement, as well as imagination, both for the calligraphers and for viewers/readers.



(Roseki Saito "Wind" 2010)

Compared with Western painting, this Japanese art form involve large unpainted areas. If you practice calligraphy, soon you will realize that proficiency lies not only in mastering the form of the characters, but also in the relationship of the form to the surrounding non-form. This balance of form and space will always be taken into account in the final artistic judgement.

To practice calligraphy, one must focus intensely and become one with the meaning of the characters they create. Becoming one with what you create, essentially, is the philosophy behind Calligraphy.

The proper appreciation of calligraphy also takes note of the dimension of time, for calligraphy is more than simple painting or drawing. It is an intricate mixture of poetry, dance and action painting. It is not only the placing of form into space, but also the marking of rhythm in time - the traces of the movement and speed of the brush.

Haiku

The silent beats in the traditional Japanese poems such as haiku and waka are often sited as examples of temporal 'Ma';

Ecclesiastes

In Spring, cherry blossoms,
In Summer, the cuckoo,
In Autumn, the moon,
In Winter the snow,
Cold, and clear.

This poetry is Haiku written by Dogen Zenji (1200-1253), a Japanese Zen Buddhist teacher born in Kyoto, and the founder of the Soto school of Zen in Japan. In this poem Dogen beautifully expresses the fundamental essence of Japan. Here the reader is indispensable to the working of Ma. The reader must notice the Ma and sense the heart feelings of the poet (Ishin-denshin). A haiku is not completed by the poet. The poet creates half of the haiku, while the remaining half must wait for the appearance of a reader. Haiku is

literature created jointly by the poet and the reader, unlike Western poem which is the product of the poet alone, thus here also the way of thinking about haiku is different. On this poem written by Dogen, a Japanese writer Oyama Koryu comments as follows:

"In Spring, a hundreds of flowers bloom and this gives beautiful hues of color to the mountain fields. When summer comes, the cuckoo brings a feeling of purity in the scorching heat. The autumn sky is high and the color of the moon is singularly beautiful. Seeing the snow in winter, the cold is deeper, and the purity passes through and covers everything. In a few words, Dogen Zenji poetically expresses the principles of "the real nature of all things;" in other words that all things including seasons and natural phenomena present the Truth as-it-is. The way these short Japanese poems are composed is by aligning concrete images and then taking up an irregular expression, thereby putting the meaning of the poem perfectly in order" (15).

Noh

The most apparent manifestation of Ma can also be seen in Noh theater. Zeami (1363 -1443), the Japan's most celebrated formulator of the Noh theater, said "What [the actor] does not do is of interest". Indeed, Komparu Kunio (1926-83), the famous Noh actor and the author, regards Noh as no more nor less than the art of 'Ma': the staging is meant to "create a constantly transmuting, transforming space "Ma" of action"; the acting, to do "just enough to create the 'Ma' that is a blank space-time where nothing is done": the music , to "exist in the negative, blank spaces generated by the actual sounds" and the dance, to "acquire the technique of non-movement." He describes the concept of Ma in his book as follows:

"Ma, as well as being the negative space or interval between actions in the Noh theater can also be used to generally refer to an artist's sense of timing. An essential element of Buddhist thought, particularly Zen Buddhism, is the concept of no-mind (sunyata), which basically stated is the original mind, the one without distinctions that flows uninterrupted as the mind unconscious of

itself. Obtaining the flowing mind, uninterrupted with conscious thought is the ideal state of performance that each Noh actor aspires toward and represents the actor's ability to perform from a deeper level of being that is 'in-tune' with the universe.

The actors first attempt to be 'in-time' with the audience occurs when the actor stands at the brink of the stage, awaiting the ideal moment for his entrance. Knowing when to move is a developed sensitivity that each actor must acquire with his audience, as explained by Zeami.

The actor must find the proper moment to seize the attention of the audience. It is bad either too quickly or too slowly. When the actor hears in his inner ear that instant of silence when the audience waits in expectation, thinking "ah, now he is going to sing!" he must begin" (16).

To appreciate 'Ma', or how it works in Noh theater, it becomes important to understand that Noh is an art form that underneath is pointing to something beyond what we are seeing with the eyes. Noh, through its theatrical design and symbolic choreography between action and stillness are

working to draw superficial consciousness into deeper consciousness. In Zeami's Kakyo (A mirror held to the flower) he explains why often an audience will state "many times a performance is effective when the actor does nothing." Zeami states that at these moment of intervals between actions, if the audience is moved, is a result of the actor's "greatest, most secret skill". Zeami attributes this moment to the inner tension that is created when an artist maintains his concentration between actions. In other words if a movement is performed and brought to a resting place, and there is a pause (Ma) before his next action, the actor does not at any point in the whole performance drop or lose the internal tension that is created through the "one-intensity of mind", but sustains the flow of energy throughout even moments of stillness.

"The actor must rise to a selfless level of art, imbued with a concentration that transcends his own consciousness, so that he can bind together the moments before and after that instant when "nothing happens." Such a process constitutes

that inner force that can be termed "connecting all the arts through one intensity of mind."



"Thinking is useful in many ways, but there are some occasions when thinking interferes with the work, and you have to leave it behind and let the unconscious come forward. In such cases, you cease to be your own conscious matter but become an instrument in the hands of the unknown. The unknown has no ego-consciousness and consequently no thought of winning the contest, because it moves at the level of non-duality, where there is neither subject or object"(17).

The relationship between action and non-action in Noh theater is a paradoxical one that is cornerstone to Japanese art. The key point to understand is that in non-action there is action, there is the one-intensity of mind, the internalized tension of the performance. It is not visible, but can be felt and communicated through spirit, as stated earlier. Likewise, within action there is also non-action, not in the literal sense but rather there is the quality of stillness in action. If the actor has acquired the 'secret skills' of performance then in these moments of stillness we the audience can experience the actor's internal motion and heart. The actual negative space that is created by the non-action of Ma in performance is necessary for the expression of the inward motion that would otherwise be eclipsed by action.

Toyo Izutsu beautifully describes the notion of Ma in Noh theater as follows: in his book, "The theory of beauty in the classical aesthetics of Japan":

"The senu-hima (lit. interval of not acting) may be visualized as a blank space or void between two acts. The blank space is, in this view, an internal continuum connecting the two externally

intermittent acts. The theatrical stage the player embodying this state naturally puts emphasis not so much on external movement as on the internal. As long as an external motion affirms itself positively as an external motion that the internal motion finds an external locus in which to affirm itself in a positive way"(18).

Noh is the supreme expression of the art of Ma, and it epitomize the Japanese artistic preoccupation with dynamic balance between object and space, action and inaction. sound and silence, movement and rest.

(15) Rev. Gengo Akiba, 'Zen and culture', September 2006, No. 18, USA <http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/pdf/dharma-eye/18e.pdf>

(16) Konparu Kunio (1926-83) 'The Noh Theater: Principles and Perspectives' (N.Y. Weatherhill. 1983)

(17) 'Sources of Japanese tradition: volume 1', edited and compiled by Theodore de Barry, Donald Keene, George Tanabe, and Paul Varley, 1893, Columbia University Press, U.S.A.

(18) Toyo Izutsu 'The theory of beauty in the classical aesthetics of Japan', 1981, Springer -science + business media B.V.

In the domain of contemporary art

To see the first true glimmers of Eastern influence in the Western art scene, especially in the United States, is to go back to the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau in the mid-nineteenth century, who introduced to the Western art world various aspects of Eastern philosophy and religion, especially the cultivation of deep questioning and the emphasis on intuition, and the comprehensive view of the interdependency of humankind and nature. Helena Blavatsky and a few other scholars, emphasized on individual intuition through the movement of theosophy. The theosophists, with integrated view of Buddhism and Hinduism, influenced many Western artists, including Kandinsky, Klee, Mondrian, Gauguin, Frantisek Kupka, etc.

John Cage attended the first seminars in 1949 which Columbia University offered on Zen by D.T. Suzuki, who is a masterful Japanese Zen scholar whose numerous books and seminars in the US provided many artists with the opportunities to

encounter philosophy of Zen and Buddhism. The seminars were attended by many prominent philosophers, psychologists, and artists such as Erich Fromm, Carl Jung, Allen Ginsberg, Thomas Merton, etc. At this point, very few artists knew anything about Zen or Buddhism. Cage played a major role in turning the tide, exploring Zen for the rest of his life in process-orientated art and music, and introduced its philosophy through his art. He had a great influence on many American post-war avant-garde artists who formed the basis of the Fluxus movement. His approach and philosophical tenet was followed by many dadaists and conceptual artists. Ellen Pearlman, artist and critic, points to the fact that what we now label as conceptual and process art has a profound intersection with the growing popularity of Zen Buddhism and the philosophical reflection that stimulated artists and intellectuals in New York's bohemian circles in 1950's and 60's (19).

Blurring the boundaries between art and life

Zen has long been teaching the philosophy that there is no boundary between Zen and life.

Cooking, eating, drinking, sweeping, walking, every daily activities are the very practice of Zen itself. Cage and other modern artists implemented this principle and tried to unify art and life; everyday objects and activities are regarded as art, such as brushing teeth, cutting hair, writing letters, etc.

John Cage and Marcel Duchamps in relation to Ma

Now, I would like to investigate and analyze how Ma seems to be implemented in the works of contemporary artists, starting with the two of the most prominent artists of the 20th century; Marcel Duchamps and John Cage.

Ma and Duchamp (1887-1968)

Fountain, 1917

Gap/ relational empty core

- Art transformed into void-

'It's not art that you see that is art, art is the gap' (Marcel Duchamp, 1957)

It is not clearly evident if Duchamp had been influenced by the Eastern philosophy, as he

obviously had not mentioned about it in his writings or interviews. But Duchamp was exposed to various Buddhist ideas, some apparently through Frantisek Kupka, who was his neighbor in Paris and perhaps a mentor to the young Duchamp. In his later life, he was also a close friend of John Cage, with whom he frequently played a chess. Cage sometimes quoted Duchamp as a 'western Zen master', attributed it to his quiet, unaggressive, and comforting personality. Beatrice Wood, a lifelong friend who knew the artist for over fifty years, recalls that his very presence was a calming force. "We had wonderful moments of silence", she remembers, "There are times when we would spend the entire evening together, exchanging only a few words. I just assumed we were on the same wavelength. Marcel was not the kind of person you would argue with. Whenever an issue came up, he would simply say 'Cela ne pas d'importance'"(20). I presume that Duchamp

must have had many opportunities to learn about the Eastern philosophy. There are in fact so many similar correlations between Duchamp's ideas and Ma (which resonates with Zen). According to Duchamp, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in

contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act. This is exactly the same as the spirits of Haiku; with which the reader's participation is essential in the working of 'Ma'. Michigan based curator Jacquelyn Baas

writes about this as follows: the

realization of a work of art, according to Duchamp, has two aspects. "In the creative act", he said "the artist goes from intentions to realization."

Duchamp spoke of the 'gap' (Ma) that represents the inability of the artist to express fully his intention., a gap that is filled by the participation of the spectators whose own realization is a "phenomenon of transmutation", an act of "transmutation" in which inert matter is experienced as a work of art. The Duchamp's viewer-response theory of art says that art resides not in the artist

or the object, but in the viewer- just as

the taste of foods exists not in the chef or in the foods itself, but in the one who eats it (21).



(Duchamp's "Fountain"
in the "Dada" exhibition in Pompidou)

When Duchamp entered the urinal in a gallery, he was obviously raising the question; "what is it?", and "is it art?" His point seems to be that it all depends on the context; how "it" is seen by the spectators. It therefore mirrors back to us: we do not see things as they are, we see them as we are (Zen quote). So, if it is defined and perceived as art by the viewers, then it will be perceived and responded to differently than if it is seen as "just a urinal". If something is seen as "art", it brings a special mode of attention that is different from simple "objects". This is actually a visual representation of aforementioned 'relational self'. Very interestingly, it perfectly fits in the phrases mentioned there, so I repeat the sentences by replacing 'self' with 'a work of art': "the person (a work of art) is so connected to others (the context) that the self (the work) is literally dependent on the context.....what we call 'self' (a work of art) is merely conventional term not referring to any real independent entity; that there is only to be found this psycho-physical process of existence changing from moment to moment. Even the definition of art is constantly changing.

So, to me Duchamp's urinal is a physical representation of 'Ma'/ emptiness'. I even suspect this work was actually a copernican shift from western perspective to eastern perspective in the art world. Since the urinal, as anything and everything can be art, the artists are not firmly planted on the ground. The artists can only try in vain to find their own feet.

Ma and John Cage (1912-1992)

The encounter with Dr. D.T. Suzuki



(John Cage and D.T. Suzuki in Japan, 1962
courtesy of the John Cage Trust)

John Cage saw art "not as a vehicle for self expression, but self alteration." He produced many works of both music and visual art inspired by the Zen philosophy. For Cage, space and emptiness (=Ma) - like the core theory of 'voidness' in Buddhist metaphysics - were precious material for artistic exploration. Ma; space, or silence, reverberates through his artwork and musical composition. At the time he attended the seminars by Dr. D.T. Suzuki at Columbia University, he was in a state of desperation. His personal life went through a big turmoil, divorcing his wife and starting a new relationship with a dancer Merce Cunningham. He was also coming to a conclusion that communication in art, the hallmark of an expressive musicality, was not possible. The lectures on Zen seemed salve to both the personal and artistic problems. Dr. D.T. Suzuki taught Cage something essential about breaking the bounds of western culture's most destructive paradigm; its toxic ultra-individualism and attachment to ego. The Zen-inspired call to attentiveness to the present, with its transparency

to doctrinal or dogmatic claims led Cage out of the swamp of his problems and towards a new relationship with his 'disturbances'. He called this new attitude 'nobility'. To be noble is to be detached, at every instant, from the fact of loving or hating. His first visit to Ryoan-ji temple (the temple rock garden where Ma is considered fully realized) in Japan in 1962 had a dramatic lifelong impact on his artistic vision and working process. He created artworks and musical compositions based on the concept of Ma, such as 'One' (1987-1992), 'Ryoanji' (1983), 'empty words' (1974), etc.

He carried around 15 stones (of which Ryoanji garden consists) in a small bag. The stone drawings would occupy him for the rest of his life. Cage developed some of his tracing into 'chance notations' for musical compositions. However, the most provocatively expressed work on Ma is the 'musical' piece 4'33" which consisted entirely of silence.

4'33", 1952

Non dualistic approach to sounds / blurring the gap between art and life

On August 29, 1952, David Tudor walked onto the stage of the Maverick Concert Hall, near Woodstock, New York, sat down at the piano, and for four and a half minutes, made no music. It was called 4'33", a conceptual work by John Cage. It was his first performance in which he sat at the piano and opened the lid of keyboard and seated silently for around thirty seconds, and closed the lid. He again sat and reopened the lid. He repeated the activity for two more times and after that he went off the stage. The whole performance took four minutes thirty three seconds.

The matter that makes the event so compelling is the simplicity of concept addressed by John Cage. In this scenario, the composer created nothing. The performer goes to the stage and does nothing. The audience perceives this very basic act, the act of sitting tting quietly and doing nothing, and this entire event was taking place in the western concert hall. The title is called the

'silent piece', but paradoxically, its purpose is to make people listen. "There is no such thing as silence", Cage said, recalling the premier. "You could hear the wind stirring outside during the first movement. During the second, raindrops began pattering the roof, and during the third people themselves made all kinds of interesting sounds as they talked or walked out." In this piece, Cage also collapsed the usual duality between subject and object; performer and audience.

He has said many times that silence is impossible. You can have musical sounds, you can have non-musical sounds. You can have sounds you like and sounds you don't like; noise and music. But there is no silence. For this he reports one incident; before this incident he thought that silence is a possibility, but he had not given a deep consideration on it. Once he entered an anechoic chamber in the Harvard University which is built particularly for a scientific engineering purpose; the chamber was made perfectly soundproof and echo-proof. He entered the hall, but he began to hear two sounds; one a

high sound, another a low sound. So, he said to the engineer-in charge, "you said this hall is absolutely soundproof and echo proof. But I hear two sounds: one high and one low." The engineer said, "the high sound is your nervous system working and the low sound is your blood in circulation." Cage said: "that day, I became absolutely certain that unless I die silence is impossible. The reason I did not expect to hear those two sounds was that they were set into vibration without any intention on my part. That experience gave my life a direction, the exploration of non intention." The 4'33" is manifestation of this experience: by silencing the music, the silence becomes rather life-affirming 'presence', pointing to all the rest of live sounds, which are there as they happen to be. This insight is also beautifully explained by Bruce Nauman, when he created a show called 'Mapping the Studio I (Fat chance John Cage)' triggered by his discovery that he had mice in his studio. "In the studio, things happen by chance. A mouse runs by. A moth flutters through space. These 'chance events' are random and filled with non-intention -

the buzz of small creatures, caught on film, in the midst of their busy eventful lives. As far as a mouse is concerned, its life is the center of the universe. By watching through a neutral eye of the camera, we are able to see what we might not glimpse otherwise; that a 'silent' space is an invisible game of billiards played by beings, each at its own center, each responding to all other beings. The mice, dashing here and there, are playing out their expectations about the cat. Life fills the gap"(22).

Fluxus and Zen; emptying the meanings

"The goal of aspiration of much of the tradition of Western thought has been directed towards the establishment of meaning and presence as an outgrowth of fixed abstract essences or higher conceptual ideas.... Fluxus rejects this tradition and posits instead a view of the world and its operations which celebrates an absence of a higher meaning or an unified conceptual framework....If there is an end of goal in the Fluxus world view, it is to have no fixed end of goal"(23).

"John Cage", as Fluxus artist Ben Vautier mentions, "has done two brain washings. The first, at the level of contemporary music by the notion indeterminateness, the other, by his teaching through the spirit of Zen and his will to depersonalize art." In a 1963 issue of the German magazine *Magnum*, the "demonstrations and manifestations", Fluxus were described as intending "to enmesh life, which they perceive as nonsensical and absurd, with nonsensical and absurd activities, gestures, words and sounds- in order to make it livable. Dadaism serves as their paragon- if defined, Zen Buddhism delivers the basis of their world-view." George Maciunas, a founding member and central coordinator of Fluxus described Fluxus "as being more Zen than Dada." His preference of Zen over Dada is explained by its implication of the movement's integration into a history of ideas rather than into an art-historical development, that would contradict Fluxus' claim for anti-art as much as it did for Dada.

In fact, this link between Fluxus and Zen can provide us with a useful nomenclature for

describing Fluxus's artistic endeavors. Fluxus's concept of the senseless-ness can be defined with reference to the Zen distinction between discursive and intuitive knowledge. Zen considers discursive knowledge to be based on "the self-identification of contradictions and not the unification or synthesizing of opposites." whereas intuitive knowledge encompasses "the Buddhist logic of self-identity." it is no longer confide to the limits of dualisms. "When we say a thing is, it is an affirmation; when we say it is not, it is a negation. This is true in the world of distinction, it is the very nature of distinction that it is so; negation and affirmation cannot be together all at once"(24).

Fluxus strived for the momentary manifestation of intuitive knowledge, defined as non-discriminative, void of concepts, and based on dissolving the distinction between subject and object (empty pronoun). Its enterprise could be described as the temporary suspension of the ever-dominant discursive approach, continuing with the Zen attempt to "foster a direct, unmediated relationship between the mind and

the reality"(25). Fluxus uses anti-rational approach, in the same way that Zen uses anti-reason to produce the blinding flash of understanding.

Manifesto:

2. To affect, or bring to a certain state, by subjecting to, or treating with, a flux. "Fluxed into another world." South.
 3. *Med.* To cause a discharge from, as in purging.
flux (flŭks), *n.* [OF., fr. L. *fluxus*, fr. *fluere*, *fluxum*, to flow. See FLUENT; cf. FLUSH, *n.* (of cards).] 1. *Med.*
 a A flowing or fluid discharge from the bowels or other part; esp., an excessive and morbid discharge; as, the bloody *flux*, or dysentery. b The matter thus discharged.

Purge the world of bourgeois sickness,
 "intellectual", professional & commercialized
 culture, PURGE the world of dead
 art, imitation, artificial art, abstract art,
 illusionistic art, mathematical art, —
 PURGE THE WORLD OF "EUROPANISM" !

(A part of Fluxus Manifest by
 George Maciunas, 1963)

Ma and Francis Alys (1959-)

The Belgian artist living in Mexico city, Francis Alys, is the central figure of a new movement in art, melting minimal art, fluxus, and dadaism into a new contemporary aesthetic. When I visited a major exhibition of his works; 'A Story of Deception', at the Wiels contemporary art museum in Brussel, I was triggered a strange sensation inside. To me his works somehow resonate well with Zen philosophy, as it often focuses on the very process itself, -without the end goal-, which is expressed with various ways of walking/proceeding. The very simple, poetic gesture of his action reminds me of Haiku in physical action, and the irrational and seemingly absurd attempts are like the one that Zen promotes as anti-reason. Ephemeral yet thought provoking events he creates in politically charged places. His works are silly and serious at the same time; encompassing the opposites. Moreover, I can also see interesting variations of 'Ma' operating in some of his works. I will try to explain that hereafter.

Francis Alys, Paradox of Praxis: Sometimes doing something leads to nothing

Mexico city 1997



In this piece, the artist becomes the performer; Alys walks the streets of Mexico City, pushing around a block of ice. The length of this 9-hour performance is determined by the time required for the ice cube to melt away completely, to vanish; the footage is subsequently edited into a 5-minute video.

The work is said to parody Minimalism, general notions of progress and the economic stability whose indefinability bedevils Mexico. This piece, "Paradox of Praxis I (Sometimes Doing

Something Leads to Nothing)," illustrates one of Alys' favorite axioms, "Maximum effort, minimal result." This piece reminded me of the story from Zen tradition; "A Zen master was walking the bottom of a mountain one day and found an empty well. It was a snow capped mountain, and he took a teaspoon and walked to the top of the mountain, filled the teaspoon with snow, walked back down and put the snow in the empty well. He then turned around and went back up the mountain and filled the teaspoon again, and came back and put it in the well. He did that all day. At the end of the day there was still hardly anything in the well". This "senseless" exercise is similar to Francis Alys's art- futile, heroic and ingenious-. He saw a problem and he did what he could do about it without caring much about the result. Even though the result is nothing, the action and process can still have something profound to tell. Also, simply pushing the ice in the street for 9 hours is a very meditative action. The mind is in a state of flow: totally focused on the act of pushing and nothing else. Back in childhood, we used to play this kind of game without thinking what gain

we would have. A playing child is not concerned about the end result or whether it leads to something useful. In modern society where effectiveness and productivity counts most, we adults have lost the ability to simply enjoy 'the game' itself. This work reminds me of the importance to let go of judging mind, but to do our best in the process. It presents art as play. However, much like Haiku, the essence of this work lies in the simplicity of action and ambiguity of its meaning; it therefore leaves us much empty space to fill in. He creates the half of work and leaves half of the work for our interpretation. The artist himself quotes this work in the interview with Carla Faesler as follows: "Take, for instance, Paradox of Praxis 1 (Sometimes Doing Something Leads to Nothing) [1997], for which someone (myself) pushes a block of ice out on the street all day until it melts into a puddle. The eventual success of such a script is that you do not need to witness this action in order to imagine it; you do not need to see photos, videos, or drawings of the event in order to more or less visualize what may have happened. This kind of

method allows for the free circulation of the product, which is much more effective than any image, regardless of the fact that we're in the digital era. You can immediately assimilate the narrative. Perhaps my goal has always been to strip down my scenarios to a few words only, so they can be liberated from the burden of documentation, of its physical weight"(26). So, in the way Francis Alys himself likes it, the performance work can be translated into Haiku as follows:

<Sometimes doing something leads to nothing>

Pushing a huge block of ice
In the street of
Mexico city

Till it melts and disappears

Francis Alys, The Green Line: sometimes doing something poetic can become political and sometimes doing something political can become poetic

2005, Jerusalem



Again with such Simplicity and directness, he draws one green line on the border, which raises much confrontation and reflection from the audience. In this work he also combined the other

With this work he tries to introduce some poetic distance into highly politically charged situations so that we can see them from the outside, from a new angle. The purpose is to create a intermediary gap (Ma) in which there might be room for reflection and the possibility of change. In that sense, by drawing one green line, -almost as a child would do-, he managed to join the minimum and the maximum at the same time.



**Francis Alys, Re-enactment, two channel
video projection, 5:20 mins, color, sound, 2000**



In this work "Re-enactment" he buys a 9mm Beretta in a gun shop and hits the crowded Mexico City streets, walking purposefully and urgently, the gun held conspicuously at his side. The piece is presented on two screens. One shows the actual event as it happened; the other shows a reenactment of it. It's a commentary on the ambiguities within documentary and fiction. The piece incorporates themes of doubling, urban play and provocation, whimsy, violence and failure in Mexico city. It takes a disturbingly long amount of time for the police to arrive. The first time they do their jobs, but the second time they become collaborators in Alys' performance.

Figuring out which half of the synchronized projection is a re-enactment and which is "real" is virtually impossible. The gap between this juxtaposition is Ma that blurs the line between the fact and fiction. The viewers are left in this grey, non-dual zone wondering if this is all fictional or not. Is there still a line to be drawn, or have the fact and fiction blurred irretrievably? Truth has morphed into 'truthiness', facts into 'factoids'. The unreliability of reality is the self-evident matter of our digital age.

Ma and On Kawara (1933-)

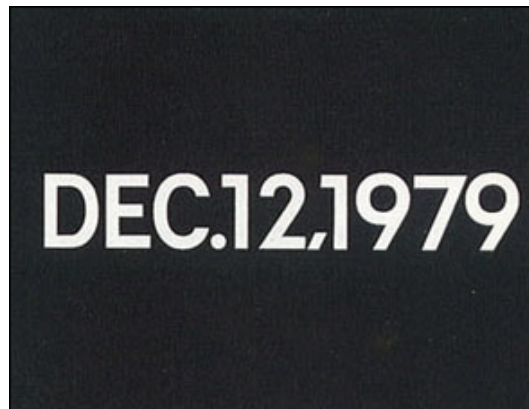
The artist is absent

The Japanese artist On Kawara, born in Aichi prefecture in 1932, has lived and worked in New York since 1965. A philosophical artist whose work addresses the very nature of consciousness and the passage of time. Kawara has erased all personal trace of his life, which is instead documented solely through his daily art-making practice. This includes thousands of his well-known 'date paintings' (the 'Today' series. ongoing since 1966), extremely carefully and precisely

painted works which consist simply of the date on which the work is made, sometimes boxed with a page from the day's newspaper. Since starting his "Today" series, he has refused all interviews or public appearance or to sit for any photos. He never comes to the opening of his own exhibitions, nor reveal himself to collectors or fans. Even in the Phaidon catalogue of his works, he replaces the interview section with a section called 'tribute', a collection of short statements from individuals- poets, fellow artists, collectors, critics, philosophers and friends- forming an indirect 'portrait of the artist'. He prefers to let his repeated assertion of his presence by these Date paintings stand for everything he is. At most, he will release his age as the number of days- 28,867 of them as of his first opening on Jan. 4 1966, meaning he has just turned 80. "The most seductive thing about art is the personality of the artist himself" is a famous quote by Paul Cezanne, but Kawara goes the opposite way; offering nothing, but a silent, empty portrait (Ma) which have been filled with rumors, myth, and anecdotes other people speak about him. "He

does not want to be known as a person but as his works. For him, that's enough"., according to Angela Choon, the Zwirner partner, who has been dealing with Kawara for the last 14 years. "You get to know this amazing information about this person's life- but you don't get to know his emotions, or his physiognomy", says Charles Wylie, a curator at the Dallas Museum of Art, who organized a big Kawara's show in 2008. Yet, people who know him tell that he is no agoraphobe or misanthrope. "He is very available, when you are working with him. He talks about the work, and tells stories." says Lynne Cooke, chief curator at the Reina Sofia museum in Madrid, "He prefers privacy to publicity, and worries about the extra filter that might come between viewers and his work if they had known persona to relate to the paintings to, or the artist's words to take into account". But of course his empty portrait only intensifies its effect on it, his unrelenting enigmatic absence registers more strongly than the average artist's presence.

On Kawara, "Today "series - Date Paintings ongoing from 1966-



("Today" series by On Kawara, Each painting is painted on the day that it features, as a record of the artist's presence and life)

There is nothing visually to be said about these date paintings. They look more like data inscriptions rather than paintings. Stripped clean

from conventional artistic expression, narrative, or aesthetic manipulation, they just keep redirecting our attention to biggest themes; self, time and space. The work is factual and organizational/ daily and historical/ personal and universal. The series is repetitive and consistent, bearing neither progression nor regression. They are so austere that it has an almost anonymous presence, and yet it is utterly distinct and recognizable. As Jonathan Watkins quotes, "the work's eloquence is in what it doesn't say".

On January 4th 1966, On Kawara began the first Date painting in his "Today" series. The unframed canvases are painted in monochrome with acrylic colour, and each one bears the artist's carefully hand-painted "dates"- the day's dates in white, written on the day whose date it bears. If Kawara is unable to complete the painting on the day it was started he immediately destroys it. When a date painting is not exhibited, it is placed in a cardboard box which is custom-made for the painting, which is lined with a clipping from a local newspaper from the city in which the artist made

the painting. Each year, between 63 and 241 paintings are made. Each Date Painting is registered in a journal and marked on a One Hundred Years Calendar. When Kawara finishes a painting, he applies a swatch of the paint mixture he used to a small rectangle that is then glued onto a chart in the journal. Under each colour is a number showing the painting's sequence in that year and a letter indicating its size. The journal therefore records the details of the painting's size, color and newspaper headline, while the calendar uses colored dots to indicate the days in which a painting was made, and to record the number of days since the artist's birth. Kawara has now created date paintings in more than 112 cities worldwide in a project that is planned to end only with his death. It's a Zen like idea that advocates for paying attention to something as basic as time passing.

The craft lies where it's invisible

Although it is not noticeable at firsthand, the craftsmanship involved in the production of a Date painting is extraordinary. Christian Scheidemann,

conservator of Modern Art based in Hamburg, says that the Today series go far beyond the conceptual gesture of writing dates on a canvas and putting into a cardboard box. They represent an artist who - with the utmost attention and experience- chooses the finest materials, custom-made frames, first quality Belgian canvas, and the finest acrylic paint available. To achieve a lively, dark, but in no way dull, satiated colour for the background, he starts with a layer of reddish brown, adding another layer of burnt amber, and another one of natural amber with a hint of dark blue. Finally, after 4 to 5 layers, this colour turns into a deep, profound, indefinable darkness. This technique of successive layers is also used for the red and blue Today series paintings. All figures are created without reference to existing typography. Each and every letter and cipher is measured and put into place with ruler and pencil; in some parts traces of pencil marks show the corner position of the type. This, with white paint, applied with a fine brush. The flow of the brushstroke shows that the artist has painted all the figures freehand, occasionally correcting

uneven outlines with the dark colour of the background (27).

Ma/ Pure consciousness

Standing in front of a series of Date paintings, I get a feeling that the inscriptions of dates in white somehow imply stars in the vast field of universe; the field of Ma. Then the term 'Pure consciousness' (no-thingness) comes to my mind; the term which Kawara himself used as a title for a social project that re-contextualized seven Date paintings in kindergarten classrooms across the globe. Pure consciousness is a psycho-spiritual state of consciousness for which there is now adequate scientific evidence that exists. 'Pure consciousness' transcends time, space, and self. The experience of pure consciousness is defined by the developmental psychologist, Alexander Chandler and Boyer, as "a silent state of inner wakefulness with no object of thought or perception", "the subjective essence of the unified field, which acts as the ultimate origin of creation". It not only acts as the origin of all individual thoughts, but also all of the forms and

phenomena in nature, that is connected to the stillness of one's sense of consciousness in relation to the constant passage of time.

The absent artist, Kawara, overlaps and dilutes into this field of Ma; pure consciousness, by the fact that his body is totally invisible to us. We have no direct access to his body. He is virtually immaterial in our subjective reality. In that sense, he exists as pure consciousness to us, so to speak, in the sense that he is not accompanied by a physical body. His work is a substitute of his body. With his work, we perceive his virtual presence, through the date as an evidence of his life, and through the brushstroke as a trace of his actions. This means he virtually exists at multiple places at once, every place where his work is placed. He is in the gallery, in the museum, at school, in a cardboard boxes, and so on, all at once, across the globe.

Sooner or later, his physical body will die. He will be no longer able to go to places, meet people, send telegrams, get up in the morning, read the paper, and paint Date paintings. But I have a

feeling that he will not reveal his death to us. He will keep silent and absent in a state of non duality: dead AND alive, fading into the infinite space and time of Ma.

Ma and Rei Naito (1961-)

Rei Naito, born in 1961 in Hiroshima, is a Japanese artist who currently lives and works in Tokyo. Her art is delicate and sensitive, made of light, shadow, and often fragile materials.

Since the mid 1970's, "female art" and a notion about "feminine sensitivity" has been gathering much attention in contemporary art scenes in Japan, largely due to growing increase in the number of women on the labor market.

The most significant focus on female artists was triggered when 'Bijyutu-techo' (Art notes), a widely circulated Japanese art magazine on contemporary art, launched a special issue about the "Super Girls of Art" in August 1986. The phase "Super Girls" was meant to celebrate a large number of young Japanese female artists, born in the late 1950s or early 1960s, who had recently graduated from art universities and were making

their way into the contemporary art scene. The idea of "Super Girls of art" continued to flourish during the first part of the 1990s along with the notion of a specifically feminine mode of expression and a particular feminine subject matter.

Rei Naito is a representative figure of such female artists, and has been especially praised for her sensational evocation of the female body through the use of textiles.

One Place on the Earth, installation, 1991

Pregnant silence

In the artist statement about this work, Naito says: "Being" itself is blessing. I created this belief with light and things in a structure that looks like a tent. By using very materialistic substances, I create a metaphysical world with various elements. Audience can come in alone, and encounter deeper reality of body and soul in this meditative time and space. Each person's being, imagination, and response complete the meticulously planned space and objects"(28).



(One place on the earth, Rei Naito, installation, silk organza, 1991)

Naito's installation 'One Place on the Earth' consists of a 15 meters long and more than 5 meters wide tent-like construction of translucent white silk organza, seven layers, surrounding an enclosure, into which the audience enters one person at a time through a slit of the curtain

draping. Visitors in the gallery cannot look into the tent from the outside, and since only one person is allowed at a time, visitors must wait their turn to enter. The floor area inside is covered with thick felt in shapes of different colours, and the visitor must take off his or her shoes before stepping on the felt carpet. Inside the tent is filled with a large number of small objects; e.g. 1,200 white silk threads tipped by tiny glass beads overhead, shimmering, and in the center is a tall construction made of thin flexible bamboo wire tied together to form a net like three dimensional abstract form. Other objects are tiny and made of wire, thread, paper, textiles, beads, plant leaves, seeds, or other materials. Most of these objects are nonfigurative, although some elements look as if they refer to body parts, evoking especially the female body. These components are illuminated only by natural light. Visited by one person at a time, the work encourages quiet contemplation and attention to its myriad small details. Naito's art is in general conceived as epitomizing the essence of femininity. Central to the notion of a "female" sensitivity is the

handicraft aspect, the use of natural and organic materials as well as proliferating abundance of small objects, the artist's close relationship to the materials during the artistic process. This relationship is seen in the miniature objects and the delicate way in which they were crafted by the artist's own hands. But more than anything, the femininity in Naito's installation is linked to the symbolic representation of the female body, when entering into the enclosed space. Many critics, both Japanese and Western, evoke the image of "entering the womb" when they describe Naito's work. One critic wrote of the work that "this quiet and purified space, which only has run for one person, is a holy womb." Another critic described it as "a womb-like tent," while a third critic recalls the installation with these words: "describing Naito's tent doesn't do the work justice but the sensation was very much like walking into a womb"(29).

Ma (Silence); in relation to solitude/ something small, fragile, and disappearing

Now I would like to see how she creates silence (Ma) with her work. Firstly, needless to say, it demands audience to be physically silent by requesting them to be alone inside of her work. You are not allowed to be with, or talk to someone else, while being inside of the work. She mentions about this particular instruction in the interview as follows: "I realized that my work became something completely different in the presence of even a single other person. You can actually see their expressions and body language, and they sometimes say silly things. As a result, I felt that all things that dwell in the purest, deepest levels of art that were present when I was making the work alone completely disappeared. So I decided to whoever was there should be there one at a time" (30). So, the encounter with her work has to be a serious one. It is 'a place for solitude; a place for silence'.

Secondly, the tiny, fragile, and almost invisible objects inside the tent, calls for our full attention and alertness. The audience needs to be

'psychologically silent', too. Just as if when someone would whisper secret words in the ears, you need to use your full sense and awareness to see and appreciate these tiny, almost invisible, translucent objects.

Japanese curator Fumio Nanjo wrote of her art: "...in the Japanese aesthetic of *hakanasa* (the transiency and ephemeral), fragile and fleeting things, because they are soon to disappear, are to be enjoyed to the fullest while they still exist. The beauty emerging from this 'weakness,' consistently resides in Naito's work." *Hakanasa* (transitory and ephemeral) is a notion that is central to Japanese culture - the word conveys the fragility, or evanescence, of life. It is symbolized and embodied in the cherry blossoms. The cherry flowers are a cause for rejoicing but tinged with sadness, because they fall at the moment of their greatest beauty. It reminds us of life's inevitable finity.

As to why she makes a work so fragile, she says in the interview; "I cherish things that aren't easily noticed and things I don't really understand. Although it could stem from a critical approach

that says it's misleading to think people can understand anything. The world definitely isn't as simple as that, and the whole process of noticing and not noticing things over time is something I have always been caught up in. I am well aware of the ephemerality, my work is on the very limits where it's a question of whether people notice or not, whether they can see it or not"(31).

There is 'an unbearable lightness' to her art, yet, it also evokes a feeling of powerful female energy - the womb-, where life gives birth to itself, where our very being, silence, Ma, originates.

Thirdly, the element of natural light is very important to this installation. Natural anima; such as light, water, heat is often incorporated as a part of her work; that is an element of Ma; ever changing, unpredictable , and uncontrollable.

Overall, this installation reminds me of the aforementioned 'Nakaniwa' (=inside garden/ empty core) of traditional Japanese houses; an empty space as the very life force for the entire space. The invisible energy, the spirit of nature is breathing inside the space.

**Matrix and Teshima Art Museum, Rei Naito
and Ryue Nishizawa, 2010**

Art dedicated to Ma -beyond art's boundaries-

Finally, I would like to introduce her masterpiece which resides on a majestic headland in a remote island called Teshima, in the internal sea of Japan.

Teshima Art Museum

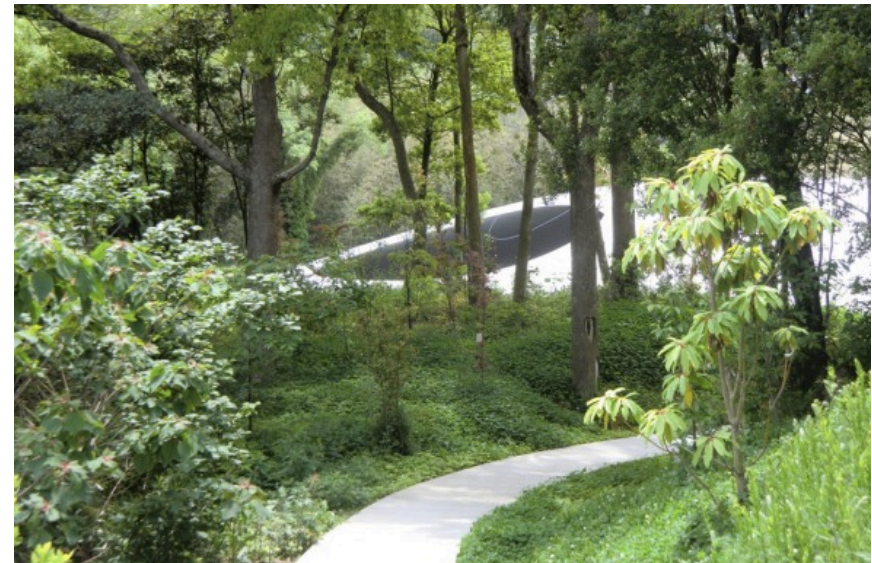
The Teshima Art Museum and Matrix is a six year collaborative project between the architect Ryue Nishizawa and Rei Naito. The museum, entirely dedicated to Naito's Matrix, is made up of a single concrete pod structure with no pillars. The design resembles a droplet of water. And in the same way that rain interacts with the earth, the structure appears to blend and sink into its surrounding hills. It is in fact less a facility to house artworks than a gigantic art installation in its own light, set amid a breathtaking landscape of terraced rice paddies high above sea horizons.



(Ryue Nishizawa, Teshima Art Museum, 2010/
photo by Noboru Morikawa)

The first experience of the site is to follow a small winding pathway that leads the viewers around the headland, letting one see the beauty of the space and clear the head, before weaving back to the opening of the work. When first seen from the road, the Teshima museum appears as a strikingly alien presence: two smooth globules, one large and spreading, one small and beadlike, emerging pristine from the ground as if they were the long-buried shells of eggs. You enter the space without shoes through a narrow funnel, which expands to a vast interior cavern, 40 by 60 meters. Two large circular apertures open to the

sky, filling the space with light and birdsong, which travel off the smoothly polished concrete in soft reflections and vibrant echoes. Several translucent ribbons hang from the edges of the holes, registering the slightest movement of air. The space captures and distill its surroundings.



Matrix

Added to this distillate of the real is a slice of pure magic. You soon notice that the randomly accumulating droplets of water dance across the floor, which gather and merge into larger pools under the apertures in the roof. This miniature landscape is in constant motion; glistening rivulets dart from place to place. These puddles and streams are fed by tiny springs: droplets of groundwater are beading out through the concrete floor. These little water droplets are formed from little microscopic holes in the concrete. Each droplet would then go on a very slow journey across the floor. Sometimes they would join with other drops, other times they would separate as they worked their way across the space in all directions, they would eventually make it to larger sink holes in the floor on a journey that might take hours to complete. When the drops reached these sink holes they would fall creating a loud gurgling sound as they disappear into the darkness below. The sound echoed around the space suddenly make you more acutely aware of all the sounds around you -



(Rei Naito, Matrix, 2010 / photo by Noboru Morikawa)

the shuffling of socks on cold cement, a muffled cough, the squawk of a bird flying over and the wind gently rustling in the tree.



Tiny white discs and spheres affixed to the floor and ceiling form another family of elements, using a similar vocabulary of delicate objects that Naito has used elsewhere in her work. All is subtle, yet filled with animation. Every little detail of her work is important to the experience the viewer gets from it. It makes you take the time to be aware of every detail around you and its impermanence. In this creation, there is no boundary between the artwork, the space that enfolds it and the energies

that animate it. The title Matrix (which connotes a mother figure giving birth to life) well expresses this condition.

"Revealing the linkage of all things, the infinite connections of life on earth; its hidden bliss. It is beyond the self, beyond the human; it is a presence that is there in the space. Space is nature itself. I want to reveal the wondrousness of this."

Naito described her artistic goal as such, in the opening press conference for Matrix.

The work is constructed in a way that it would transform with its surroundings taking on the changes in light, time of day, season, weather, etc. You could see, smell, hear and even taste the salty breeze of the outside world and through Naito's work, you are made all the more aware of your senses and your surroundings, and the sense of time passing. The work encourages you to look more deeply at the world around, taking the time to notice your surroundings in a more heightened way. Art critic Mario Kramer

describes that her work "presents us with the opportunity to experience art in a manner rarely encountered when viewing works, especially in the present cultural world with its intrinsic dominance of the short-lived. One comes into contact with a sense of space and time, proportion and light, contemplation and calm, inner silence and astonishment, mysteriousness and the spiritual, the microscopically small and the universally large, the presence of the form and imagination. You inevitably leave such a room as a changed person" (32).

In the interview 'Life is blessing: we are alive however terrible the world may be', Rei Naito discusses this sensation of feeling truly alive, and how important it is to her practice.

'Matrix' and the Teshima Museum is a work entirely dedicated to Ma, to reflect on mother nature's very own light, water, and air. The work is a space that connects us with life's energy, ever changing field of Ma, and the wonder of interconnected world.

(19) Pearlman. E 'Nothing and Everything: The influence of Buddhism on the American Avant Garde: 1942-1962' (2012) U.S.A. Evolver editions (April 24, 2012)

(20) 'Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the century' edited by Rudolf E. Kuenzli, Francis M Nauman, fourth printing, P. 37, 1996, published by the association for the study of Dada and Surrealism, the University of Iowa, U.S.A.

(21) 'Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art' edited by Jacquelynn Baas, Mary Jane Jacob, p.21 the article 'Nowhere from here' by Jacquelynn Baas, 2004, School of Art Institute of Chicago, U.S.A.

(22) Kay Larson 'Where the heart beats/ John Cage, Zen Buddhism, and the inner life of artists' 2013, Penguin Books, U.S.A.

(23) Owen F. Smith, 'Fluxus: the history of an attitude', (P. 116), San Diego University Press, 1998, U.S.A.

(24) D.T. Suzuki, 'Essentials of Zen Buddhism', (P. 387), Greenwood Press, 1973, U.S.A.

(25) Dorothee Brill, 'Shock and senseless in Dada and Fluxus' (P. 126), University Press of New England, 2010, U.S.A.

(26) Carla Faesler, 'Fraicis Alys', Bomb site, 116/ Summer 2011, art interview, <http://bombsite.com/issues/116/articles/5109>

(27) 'On Kawara' Phaidon, 2002, page 30

(28) Kazuo Yamawaki, "Rei Naito: Prayer of being", 1991, published by Nagoya City Museum of Art, Japan

(29) 'Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field', edited by Joshua S Moslow, Norman Iryson, Maribeth Graybill, p.188, University of Hawai'i Press, 2003, U.S.A.

(30) ART iT, 'Rei Naito', 2009, http://www.art-it.asia/u/admin_interviews/BfJsMlveo8jH1tKuray0?lang=en

(31) Ibid.

(32) Kramer. M 'Being called' (1997) page 25, Frankfurt am Main [Germany] : Museum für Moderne Kunst, ©1997

Conclusion

Understanding Ma

"I believe the 21st century will be a world without art in the sense that we have it now. It will be a world without objects, where the human being can be on such a high level of consciousness and has such a strong mental state that he or she can transmit thoughts and energy to other people, without needing objects in between. So there will not be sculptures, or paintings, or installations. There will just be the artist standing in front of a public, which is developed enough to receive a message or energy. They will just sit or stand, like the Samurai in old Japan, looking at each other and transmitting energy. This is the future world I see as an artist: a non-objective world." (Marina Abramovic. Interview with Louwrien Wijers and Johan Pijnappel. 1990)

In this age of obsessive visibility, many contemporary artists now prefer the act of removing rather than adding, inaction instead of action, contention instead of expression.

Practically, the whole of Duchamp's work is based on negation of 'No', which had even threatened the very existence of art. Thereafter the artists went from producing art objects to producing 'thought objects'. These 'thought objects' fully depend on how the viewers perceive Ma in the context surrounding the objects. Though different attitudes and aims can be discerned in the artists who have developed their work with Ma - consciously or unconsciously-, in analyzing how Ma manifests in art, I conclude that it not only stimulates our imagination and provokes intellectual insights, but also carries transformative power.

Ma does not confide to the limits of dualism. It is an 'in-between space' where a paradox can exist. It shows the acceptance and beauty of 'becoming'; the process. It is always changing, undefinable, and uncontrollable; a field where 'things' are being born and disappearing. It does not belong to anything but is inseparable to everything. It is a field of energy of nature and spirits, and a binding force of all things.

The Greek Armenian philosopher, George Gurdjieff, talks about 'two kinds of creativity'. One is an escape from the uneasiness of not doing anything. The whole world is programmed for doing, for work, for efficiency. So, people have to do something and it can take the form of some kind of creation: art, music, poetry, but this is not true creativity.

He says that the true creativity comes out of silence; when you are so totally quiet that there is no thought, no wave in the ocean of your being, out of this silence comes a different kind of creativity. The first can be called composition. The second is authentic creativity. They resemble with each other, but the composer will never be original, he will always be copying. Only the creator can be original, can break new doors into the mystery of existence. Gurdjieff has called the first, subjective creativity; it is mind-orientated. And the second one is called the real objective creativity. Whatever the names are given, is not an issue, but he defined the difference ---for me, one of the most apparent examples of the objective creativity is the rock garden at Ryoanji in

Kyoto. We do not know who created the garden, nor when it was created in its present form. It is a *Karesensui* (dry landscape garden), to be appreciated from a fixed vantage point, on the verandah of the temple. There, the objects - natural rocks- are aesthetically so perfectly arranged in space- the finely raked white sand and surface- that eventually the onlooker ceases to be aware of either the one or the other separately. It was created in order to become an object of meditation. If you sit by the garden in a full moon night, you start becoming silent. The very form of the garden creates a certain quality in you, just as has been found about pyramids -- that the very space of the pyramid is life preserving. It detracts everything negative in life. You sit there and you suddenly find you are more alive, you suddenly find more silence (Ma).

The flow of energy is reversed and you are thrown onto the experience per se- consciousness. This "experience" of consciousness is the "experience" of 'Ma'; of "void", of "no-thingness", of "emptiness". It is

therefore not a philosophical or aesthetic concept, but a notion derived from personal experience, a notion both beside and beyond the personal experience, a notion both beside and beyond the experience of our physical world. It does not deny it. In this way, the form and formless are inseparable.

All in all, I personally see a new direction of art in Naito's 'Matrix', which is a space and time entirely dedicated to Ma, - life-affirming energy and a sense of interconnectedness of 'all things'-, that is beyond 'self' and art's boundaries.