



# EXISTENCE

Symposium at  
Setagaya Art Museum  
Tokyo, Japan  
2 & 3 April 2008

## SABURO OTA 太田 三郎

Text as presented during the symposium Existence at Setagaya Art Museum in Tokyo, Japan, 2 April 2008

Text edited: January 2009



*Saburo Ota (\* 1950 in Yamagata, Japan) is a conceptual artist. His series such as Date Stamps and Seed Project reveal the core of his concept indicating the continuation and expansion of time and space, and also pinpointing particular places and times in history. In Ota's investigations, for instance his series Post War, questions of human existence and self-identity arise, making time and space visible as central existential categories. Saburo Ota lives and works in Tsuyama, Japan.*

### Date Stamps

In 1980, I had my first solo exhibition. I exhibited portraits of people close to me. During that time I often visited galleries in Ginza, and in that way I encountered contemporary art. At that time, I did not have any questions, I made paintings. But after I saw Minimal art, Conceptual art, New painting, Installation, etc, I lost the foundation for my paintings and I could not draw a line on paper anymore. I tried a new expression, not classical painting, but it was not easy to find out what to do. In the beginning I thought it would be good to learn lithography, so I started going to a print school and although I learned techniques, I could not create art at all.

I had started looking at all kinds of prints existing in ordinary life. For example, shopping receipts, train tickets, account statements from ATM machines and stamps from post offices. Stamps are definitely printed, so we can say 'prints', a postmark also is a kind of stamp, so it can be considered a 'print'. I thought, with stamps and postmarks I have the possibility of many combined expressions. I bought a sheet of 100 stamps, separated them, and I put each stamp on a postcard, which I sent to my own address. To restore to original, I peeled off the glued postmarked stamps from the postcards and they became one sheet of one hundred used stamps.

When I was looking at the postmarks of this sheet, it came to my mind to create the art work, *Hundred Consecutive Days of Postmark Dates*. Postmarks are records of time and place. I thought, if I go to the post office myself and I get the postmark, it will become the proof of my existence. At that time I was busy thinking about how I myself can exist within my work. It was a very important subject for me. I could make clear the issue with a work, which is recording my

present location. But, I did not have any confidence about the question concerning whether postmarked stamps could ever be accepted as an art work. To get over my fear, I had to go to the post office every day. At that time I had just read a book, *American Indian Poetry*, that described how, through repetition you can lose your fear; you should get used to the unknown thing, and by doing so, you can incorporate it in the system of the things which you already know.

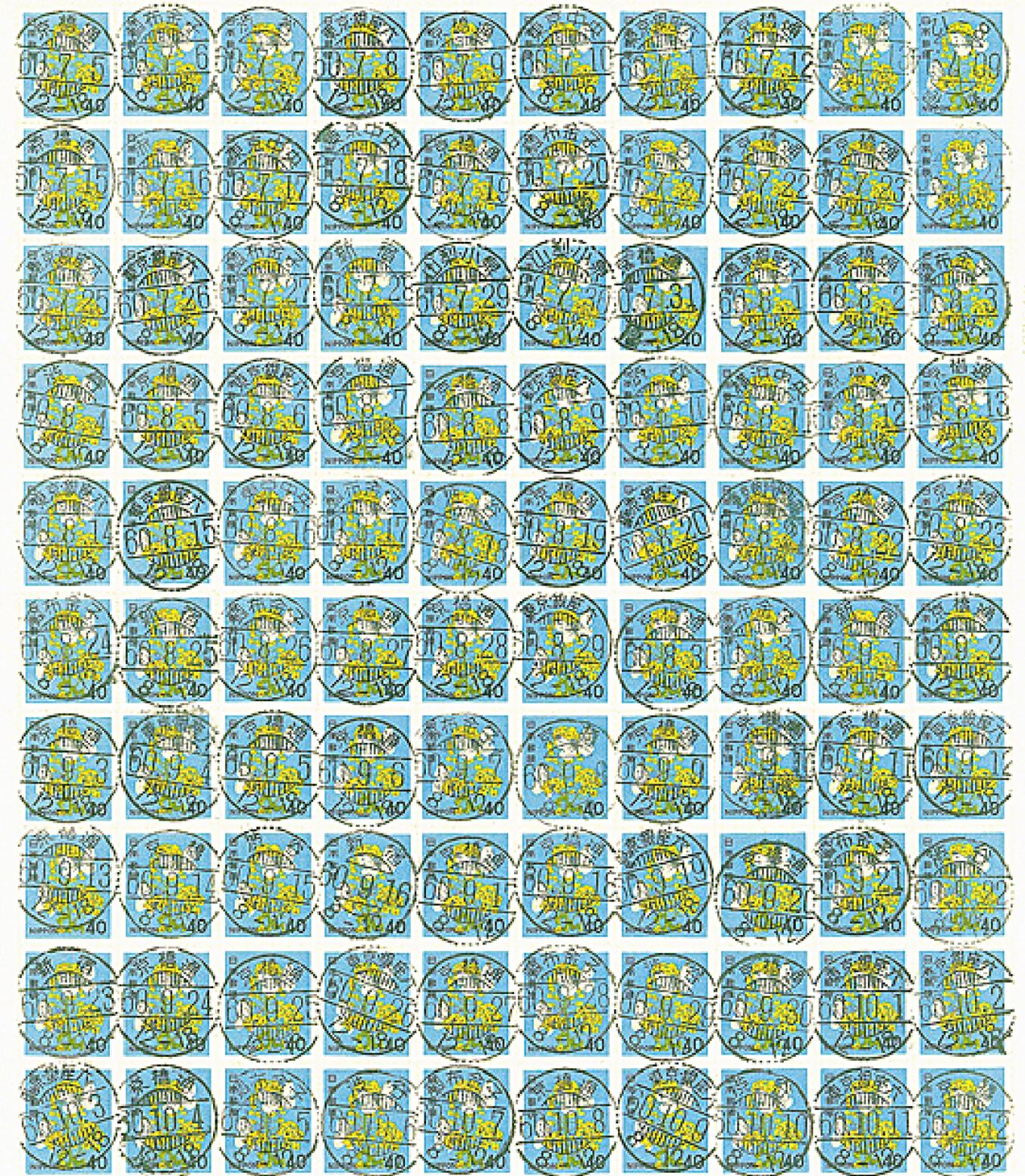
My postmark collection did begin on 5 July 1985, and until now it is an ongoing work of art. The last time I counted, I had collected over 6,500 postmarks. I collected more than 2,000 stamps with the same picture printed on it. I have reckoned that I can do this project until around the year 2015. These small stamps would represent 30 years of my life, and I will leave the footprint of a human.

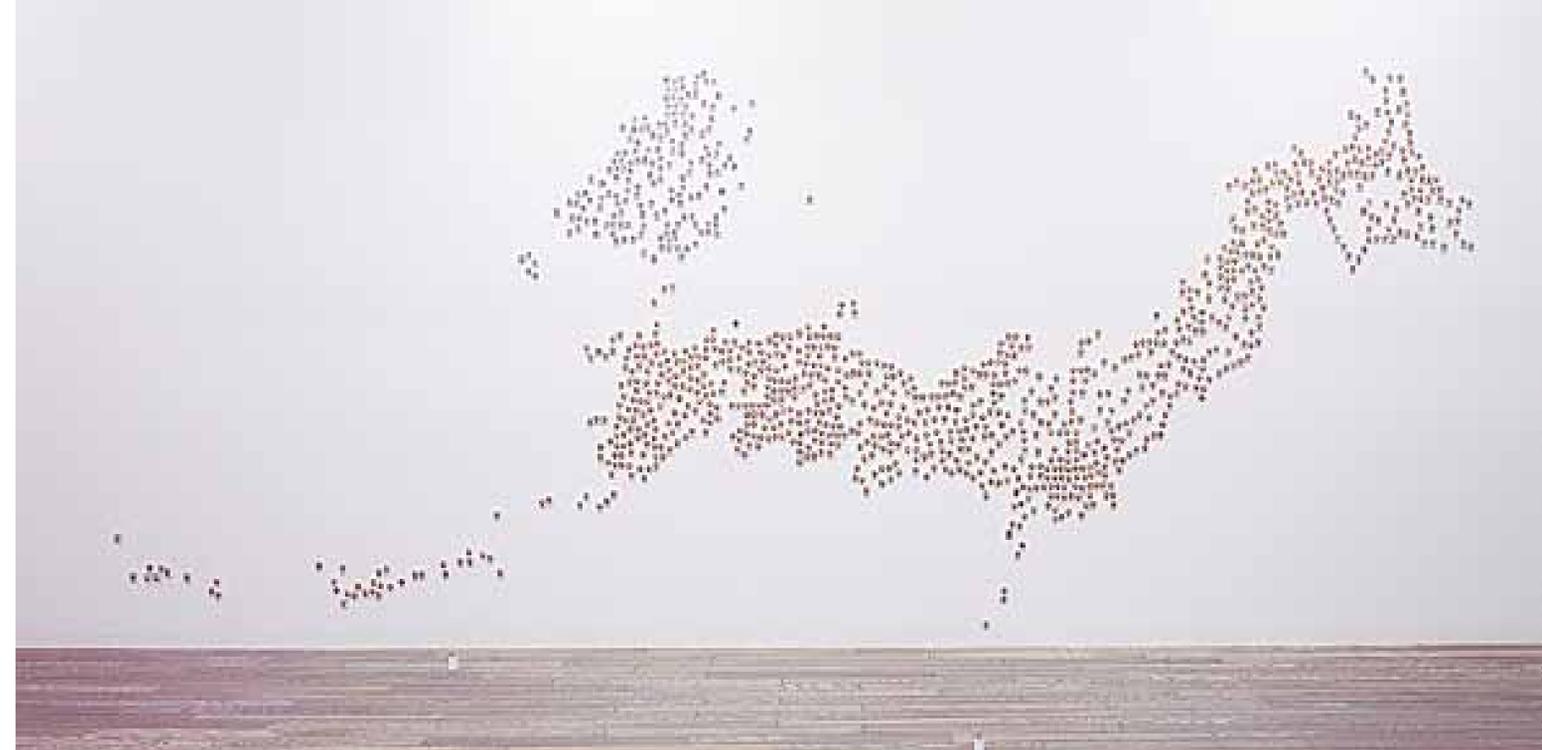
In 2000 I had a solo exhibition at the CCGA, a museum in Fukushima, Japan, and the exhibition title was *Saburo Ota—Daily Existence*. I mainly exhibited the *Date Stamps* there, and after several years the information still exists on the Internet. Rene Rietmeyer, the initiator of the project *Personal Structures* and this symposium on 'Existence', found me on the Internet by searching the word 'Existence'. In fact, what happened here was that, by using the keyword 'Existence', he had found 'my Existence'.

### Stamp-Map of Japan and Korea

From the postmark on the stamp I can find out when and where the letter was posted. If you look at it in a different way, I can say that the postmark proves the 'existence' of that town in the world on that day. On the morning of 6 August 1945, the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. From that day, the 6 August 1945, the postmark from the center of the explosion does not exist, simply because the post office of the city itself had disappeared from the earth.

My work, the *Stamp Map of Japan and Korea* contains postmarked stamps which I collected from all main post offices in Japan and Korea, I put each postmarked stamp on the wall in the position corresponding with the location, where it was postmarked. By doing so, I created a map out of postmarked stamps and it was this work I exhibited. In order to be able to collect all these postmarked stamps, I had sent out a letter with a return postcard inside and in that letter I had written my preferred postmark date





and my explanation of why I wished for the card to be sent back to me on that specific day. I had put a stamp on the return card and had sent them out to post offices in various locations, almost everybody sent it back. The stamps I used were postmarked 6 August 1990, exactly 45 years after the atomic bomb. I wanted the stamps to become a visually present form, creating in our eyes the true existence of all those cities. [The postmark reads 2.8.6, because the official Japanese postmark on stamps displays not our calendar year, but the amount of years that the present emperor is instated, then the month, then the day.] I actually also sent my translated letter with return cards to Korea. The reason why I included a foreign country was that radiation contamination is simply not just one country's issue any more.

For my art work, I chose the 41 yen stamp, *Crystal Light and Promising Clouds*, because I saw an association with the flash light and the mushroom cloud of the atomic bomb. Sometimes there are other stamps on my map, which is because the post office man sent me, for whatever reason, another stamp back, but with the right date. I got back a total of 981 cards from Japan and 174 from Korea. Korea is closer than I thought. If I in my life still have the chance, then I would like to do one more similar work, collecting postmarks from South Korea, North Korea, China, Russia and Japan to create a map of Nihonkai, the Japanese sea.

#### Seed Project

Seeds of plants can ride on a breeze because of their lightness; they burst open and stick on humans and animals with their hooks. Seeds have found many ways to go other places than the places they originate in. Stamps can go further by putting them on a card and mailing them. I thought, if I can put seeds on a stamp, I could bring them more far than by natural power. So, I had started creating works by putting seeds on Japanese paper. At that time, 1991, I was living in Tokyo and on the weekends I took my sons to a large park. Little children like the

tiny things they can pick up. While spending time with them, it looked like I myself, had started to become interested in small seeds.

On the stamps I created with these seeds, I printed the place and the date where the seed was collected, as well as the name of the plant. Plants can only grow in particular places and under the right conditions, and seeds have a specific time to grow. I am recording my existence by collecting postmarked stamps. I think I could say that, seeds of plants themselves also express time and place.

My seed project consists of three parts: collection, conservation and sowing. Putting the seeds in a frame is 'conservation', putting the seed on a stamp, putting the stamp on a special postcard and then mailing that card, that is 'sowing'. At the beginning I was sowing my seeds any time people wanted, so I had no time to put stamps in a frame. I did put separate stamps in a Petri-dish and exhibited that, but later my main form of presentation became eight stamps on a framed sheet. The number of seeds and the structure of the arrangement on the stamp are dependent upon what kind of seeds they are. The smaller grains and flatter seeds are the most useful for my work.

In the spring of 1994 my oldest son was entering primary school. Because of this my family decided to move to Tsuyama in Okayama, Japan. Tsuyama is my wife's hometown. It has a relatively mild climate throughout the year and it is surrounded by fields, a mountain, forest and has a river. It is very green there. The following year, 1 January 1995, I started to collect seeds there as a daily routine. One year, 365 days, each day is somebody's birthday or celebration day, so if I do not miss one day in creating my work, this is how I can connect with all people. Actually, for every season certainly some kinds of seeds exist. It looks like as if all kinds of life die out in the desolate winter fields and hills, but in fact, they contain treasures of seeds. I take the seeds into my hand and when I imagine them sprouting and blooming, I get a positive feeling about the future.

#### Post War 50. Who am I?

In 1931 the Manchurian Incident began with the Japanese invasion of China. Many Japanese were sent into the Manchuria and they were called Manmou (满蒙), Pioneer Immigrants. In 1945, on the Chinese continent, especially in the old Manchu, many of the children and woman were left behind in the chaos of our defeat and these children and women became separated from their relatives. For 33 years, until the conclusion of the peace treaty between Japan and China, they grew up mostly adopted by Chinese families, but because most of the people had broken up with their relatives at an early age, their identity had been lost.

In 1981, 36 years after our defeat, the ministry of welfare had started a program for them to visit Japan, to look for relatives, but of course identification was truly difficult. In 1994, a photograph book called *Who am I?* reached my hands. There were portrait photographs of 1092 people, photos of Japanese orphans in China, photographer by Taku Aramasa, a document from 1981 to 1990. Aramasa, born in 1936, had been in Manchu during his early childhood years, and one year after our defeat, in 1946, he came back to Japan. He took portrait photos of all the orphans who came to Japan to find their relatives, and in 1990 they published the book.

I learned about it from the newspaper, and I realized that even now Japanese orphans exist in China and that they are basically living in China and Japan at the same time. I got the idea to present this in my work. So I asked Aramasa if I could create stamps with the portraits of the orphans based on the documentation in his book, and Aramasa liked that idea. I had chosen from each group of unidentified orphans which visited Japan in their search for relatives, a man and a woman. On my work I printed, the name of the orphan, the separation date and location, blood type, estimated age in 1945 and the title of my project *Post War 50*. I also placed on the stamp sheet their Japanese name, family structure, parents, family's job, life situation

from the time they were still with their family, physical features, the situation of the separation and the date they visited Japan.

In order to express the feelings of the orphans and the disaster of the war, I thought the only title for my work could be *Who am I?*, so I used it. At that time, I just had moved away from Tokyo and I did not have friends, I was lonely. I did not have much work as a graphic designer and that gave me an additional insecure feeling. But after I finished my work and I looked back at it, my loneliness was unimportant compared to the feelings of the orphans, people who do not know themselves, separated from their own country.

#### The End

In November 2008, I had a solo exhibition in my hometown at the Yamagata museum *Saburo Ota—Daily*. There I exhibited my works from after 1985, 27 selected series with 3 concepts, 'War', 'Life/Seeds' and 'Existence'. From that exhibition, I presented in this text four works which all have a strong relationship with 'Existence'. I would like to interpret these four works as follows: *Date Stamps* is: my existence, *Stamp-Map of Japan and Korea* is: the existence of space, *Seed Project* is: the existence of life, and *Post War 50, Who am I?* is: the existence of identity. We are living within Time and Space, nobody can escape Time and Space, I want to continue to create works while watching myself and others as being One Existence in the universe.

## PETER LODERMEYER

Text as presented during the symposium Existence at Setagaya Art Museum in Tokyo, Japan, 2 April 2008



The idea behind this series of symposia is to make the fundamental prerequisites of the production and reception of art a theme in itself. In terms of form and content, the fine arts can deal with the most varying fields, but it is impossible to imagine subjects as being independent of time, space, and existence. These three realities are not only basic themes in art, but apply in general to the way we perceive the world and structure our thoughts. There is virtually no being imaginable, which would not be present in time and space. Time and space are the fundamental forms of our way of looking at the world. And there is no perception or notion imaginable in time and space, which would not immediately have to do with our existential constitution as human beings. Only because of the way we are, which obviously differs considerably from other forms of life, and especially from the essence of non-living things, is there something like a world, which may be perceived, experienced, interpreted, and changed by us. The point of departure for our symposium trilogy *Personal Structures: Time · Space · Existence* was the question as to what these three basic themes mean for contemporary art, what possibilities are presented here for explicitly making them into subjects, and how this in turn reverberates in what and how contemporary art may look like and be perceived today. It seems obvious that what we normally refer to as non-objective art is better suited for dealing with these questions than figurative works, which by their very definition are oriented to identifiable themes, which may be depicted. I do not wish to enter into a discussion here of whether—on a deeper level—something approaching a form of the fine arts that is completely free of representation is at all possible. As a pragmatic solution there was the option to focus the discussion on only those artists who do not work figuratively, and who, using a concentration (I prefer this term to the more customary term reduction) of their formal and conceptual means, make a topic of the basic subjects named above.

The fact that our symposia take place in Amsterdam, Tokyo, and New York not only provides an opportunity to discuss our subject on an international level with as broad a perspective as possible. It is also to make immediately clear that the locations we speak at, and the languages and cultures we move about in, exert a very decisive influence on the contents. The symposium on the subject of time took place in June of 2007 in Amsterdam, a city whose architecture already refers back to historical periods in time. The Golden Age of

Netherlandish Art, the 17<sup>th</sup> century, is still ever-present as an architectural reality today. The Amsterdam symposium took place in the rooms of the society of artists *Arti et Amicitiae*, housed in a building from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Piet Mondrian, one of the key figures in the development of modern art, became a member of this society in 1897, the same year he had his first exhibition there. Certainly, it had something to do with this environment, with the genius loci of Amsterdam, that the lectures of our symposium had a strong reference to history and dealt with the subject of time, above all from the angle of the historicity of art. This made it all the more important to have as a kind of critical counter-pole an artist like Lawrence Weiner as a guest, who in his contribution came out against a contemplation of art using historical criteria. In Amsterdam he defended this counter position. In an interview Dan Graham granted me a few weeks ago in New York, he in turn was critical of Weiner's attitude towards the subject of time, calling it a "60s' utopia of instant present time". This one example just goes to show the importance of placing varying opinions alongside each other in our symposia. The *Personal Structures* project, and the symposia that go along with it, see themselves as an open forum for discussion, where a plurality of views and opinions from various cultural and language backgrounds may be articulated. This is why it is imperative in terms of concept to allow the speakers and artists complete freedom regarding how they approach the basic themes of time, space, and existence.

The fact that the symposium on existence is taking place precisely here in Tokyo always seemed totally obvious and clear to me for one particular reason. The artwork that, in my opinion like no other, formulates an elementary existential statement so concisely, precisely, and convincingly was, after all, made by a Japanese. Of course, I refer here to On Kawara, in particular to his *I am still alive* series—telegrams from the beginning of the 1970s. Granted, Kawara does not come from Tokyo, but was born in Aichi. He did begin his career as an artist in Tokyo in the 1950s, however, before he moved to New York in 1965, by way of Mexico and Paris. It was in New York that he achieved an international career, the first contemporary Japanese artist to secure a place in all the great museums of the world. What I find so fascinating about Kawara's telegram series is that, for all its simplicity, it is so tremendously complex. "I am still alive. On Kawara"—a single sentence and a name, printed in block capitals and sent as a tele-

gram to various addressees. The work has not been certified with a personal signature, but is signed with the mechanical typewriting used by post offices; thus, it is confusingly personal and impersonal at the same time. The sentence "I am still alive" is the confirmation or ascertainment of one's own existence—what could be more important than this? And yet the sentence is empty of content, banal even, since one would have to be alive in order to be able to make any kind of statement at all, artistic or otherwise. Precisely this act of making us aware of what is apparently self-evident is what reveals its tricky depth of meaning. That one little word "still"—"I am still alive"—transforms the banality into subtle, existential drama. It is derived from the quiet implication of what Martin Heidegger regarded as the fundamental structure of human existence. Presence is 'Being-toward-death' [*Sein zum Tode*]. Still being alive means to be conscious of the fact that there will be a time when this will no longer be the case. It is this knowledge, from which all of Kawara's works draw their existential seriousness and conceptual stringency. On Kawara's *I am still alive* series will undeniably take on a different character from that very day on, when the artist is no longer alive.

When the *Personal Structures* symposia assume that space, time, and existence are three fundamental themes for every artistic activity, then we must bear in mind that these themes portray concepts, which have been formed throughout the centuries by philosophical contemplation, but also by the simple practices of life. In their meaning and connotations, concepts are dependent on being embedded in the culture of the respective language in which they were formulated. Such insight brings the whole weight of the problems of translation into the picture, which will characterize our symposium to a large degree. Saburo Ota has just opened the symposium with his lecture. I will only find out what he said when I have had the opportunity to read the transcript of his lecture in translation. On Kawara did not write his telegrams or his other text works in his native Japanese tongue, but rather in English, the language of the international art business after World War II. Takashi Kiraide once wrote in a beautiful article about the works of On Kawara: You have to understand "that by excluding precisely his native tongue, Japanese, the art works of On Kawara have wholly taken on the relationships of language in our century. It is a language, which—being robbed once and for all of its nature as native language—had been blown out into the world and relinquished to the public; [...] a language, which gradually reveals the identity crisis of the ego of the person who is narrating."<sup>1</sup>

Speaking to you here in Japan as a German art historian, I am very conscious of the problem of languages and their questionable possibility of being translated. Since arriving on Monday at the airport in Narita and seeing this country for the first time, it has been impossible for me to ignore that I am moving about in language space that is very foreign to me. In order to have a better chance to make myself understood, I am speaking to you in English, a language which, you will have noticed, I do not have complete command of. When Heidegger refers to language as 'the House of Being' [*das Haus des Seins*] I imagine this house rather to be like the houses 'worked on' by Gordon Matta-Clark: full of cracks and breaks, full of unexpected openings and incalculable risks upon entering. This, too, has directly to do with our way of existence. In an age of globalization, we are more conscious of this than ever.

In speaking here of 'existence', I do not know the entire ramifications and scope of what happens to the meaning of my words once they have been translated into English, and I know even less what will happen with this transformed meaning when it is heard by a mostly Japanese audience. This risk itself reveals, I think, a basic existential condition of mankind: that of being able to be a foreigner and guest. I will return to this subject in a moment.

I have already stated that it is important to leave our symposium speakers complete freedom concerning how they choose to understand and interpret the basic themes of space, time, and existence. For example, the English 'walking artist' Hamish Fulton told me in an interview at the beginning of 2007 that the most important theme for him is time: "Existence then would come into something that, in recent years, has to do with the state of the planet." What he means here is the unpredictably great challenge we all see ourselves faced with due to the worldwide change in climate. It is understandable that the concept of "existence" would cause an artist like Fulton, who is interested in nature and ecology, to first think of the existence of mankind as a species. In addition to the ecological threats to human existence, some artists have made themes of other threats, such as the atom bomb or man's genetic manipulability and his transition to a 'post-human' species. There are two reasons why I perceive the concept of existence differently, namely individually, and related to the person. For one, I am skeptical of attempts to use art for a precise definition of themes that are ethically and politically complex, such as the threat to mankind. Here is where the argumentative procedures of science and philosophy undoubtedly have an advantage. The other thing is that, for me, with my background of studies in Germany of art history and philosophy, the concept of existence is unavoidably linked to the individual because of what Heidegger terms the *Jemeinigkeit* ['mine-ness'] of being. This means I view the concept of existence in the tradition of the European Philosophy of Existence. Contrary to the philosophical system of, say, Hegel, this philosophy views man's being not from a universal concept of reason or intellect, but from the conditions of the individual existence. This individual existence is what we all, each person for him/herself, must live. We may not delegate it, or divide it. It is 'mine-ness'.

(I would only like to state here as an aside that I am aware that existence-philosophy, especially that of Heidegger, found its way to Japan very early. It is nice to know that for decades now, owing especially to the philosophy of the 'School of Kyoto', a philosophical dialogue has been going on between both cultures, among other things between Heidegger's ontological thinking and Zen thinking on the absolute nothing. Recently I came across a fitting remark made by the philosopher Riuji Endo from Tsukuba during a visit to Germany. He says "that we could try to communicate with one another, not 'face to face', but 'back to back'. After all, for all our moving more closely together now, we are still of varying origins."<sup>2</sup> I understand this to be a communication that does not seek consensus, but rather does justice to the various cultural backgrounds.)

In this connection, I would like to stress not only Heidegger's, but also Jean-Paul Sartre's, significance because he makes it especially clear what it means to be an artist, emphasizing freedom and responsibil-

ity in the choice of one's own existence. The artist's existence can serve as a model to illustrate the structure of human existence in Sartre's thought, because it makes clear what it means to choose to be oneself. In my many conversations with artists, it is one of the most exciting topics for me to hear each time how they have found out for themselves that they not only want to be artists, they have to be artists. Often enough this knowledge had to grow and assert itself in the face of an unsympathetic environment, and against the prevailing notions of economic reason. The German artist Wolfgang Laib once told me about his works with pollen, for which he sits in fields for months, laboriously collecting his material. "Collecting pollen is a very special activity, challenging everything in our society that has to do with time, what you do in a day, what you do in a week, in a month, why you do things, and the way you do it. This reverses all such activities." If Laib were to think along conventional economic lines, he would simply hire assistants to collect his material for him. But his art emphasizes precisely the unity of work and life. It grants him the "experience of intensity and independence that allows me to create something from out of my innermost, something no one else does. This is actually the simple mystery of my life."

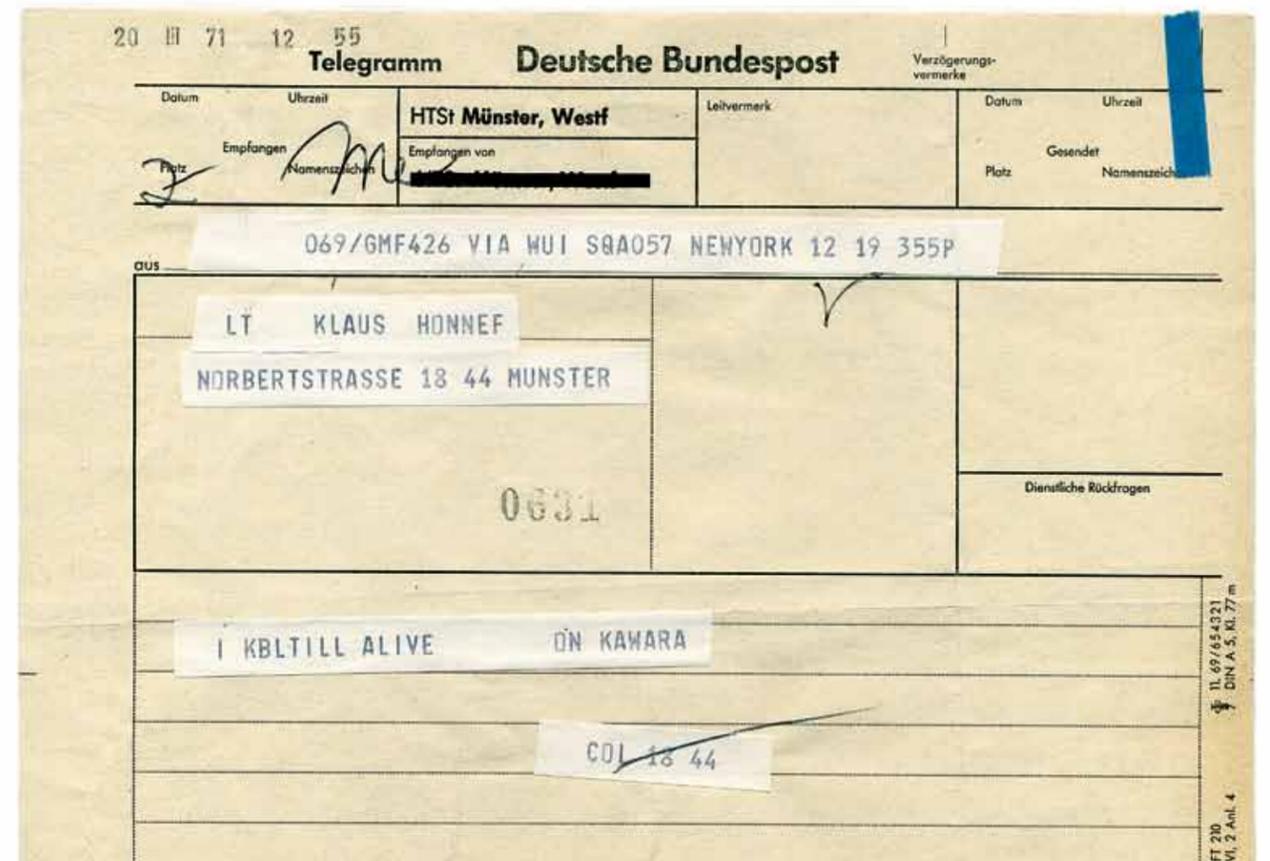
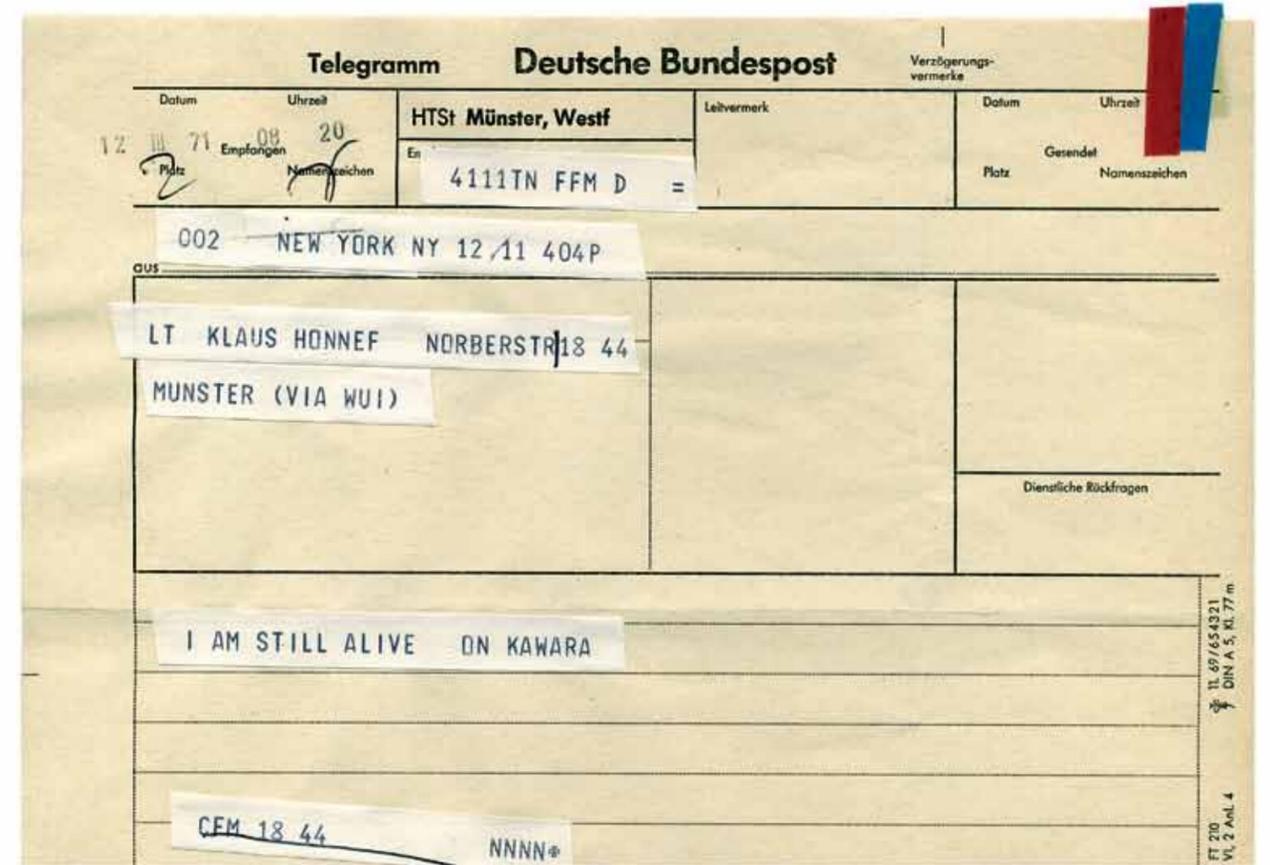
Whenever artists connect their activity to the existential experience of time, it comes to such reevaluations of the conventional notion of economy. I think, for example, of Roman Opalka, who has been painting pictures with rows of numbers for more than forty years now. Nothing new is produced here; it is rather merely one's own existence, the experience of time in one's life that is made visible here. The rows of numbers do not hold any surprises in store. There is no recognizable goal, only a linear progression that comes to an end at some time or other, simply because life comes to an end at some point, without us being able to document this end. This unfinished quality is what Opalka refers to as infinity. Some critics referred to Opalka's concept as craziness, but what often goes unrecognized here is that it has the purpose of making the absurdity of life bearable (these were Opalka's exact words to me in Amsterdam).

I consider the work of Heartbeat-Sasaki, who will be performing here tomorrow, as closely affiliated to both On Kawara and Roman Opalka. Sasaki also holds no surprises in store. In his works ever since 1995, he has been repeatedly making visible the heartbeat in a simple arrangement of oscillating marks. And they are always red, the color of blood. Making his marks go up and down as the visualization of the rhythm of systolic and diastolic actions, this is existential 'music' that accompanies us from our prenatal existence to our last day. (That this really can be music has been demonstrated to us by the great Russian dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov, who once danced to the rhythm of his own heartbeat, made audible with amplifiers.) The apparent self-evidence that our hearts beat for as long as we live is illustrated in these works in all its amazingness. We are moved precisely because we are conscious of the fact that this rhythm will one day end. Only because of this, does each individual mark the artist draws attain its special significance as a document of a certain, fleeting moment in a time series, which—we all know, and yet are not, for the most part, wholly conscious of—is terminal.

I mentioned already that the artist's existence is especially suited for demonstrating certain basic principles of our existence. I cited as a reason first the fact that artists must develop and define themselves, often under adverse social conditions. In conjunction with this I will now return to a subject I mentioned above, that it is part of the essence of our human existence to be a foreigner and a guest.

Joseph Kosuth, whom I am particularly delighted to welcome here in Tokyo as a guest of our *Personal Structures* Symposium, dealt with this theme extensively with his threefold installation in Frankfurt, Dublin, and Oslo in 1995 and 1999. In his book *Guests and Foreigners. Goethe's Italian Journey*, he speaks about the role of the artist. "There is the experience of the artist as 'guest', and the artist as 'foreigner', working with a language he/she does not speak nor read, yet 'speaking' with that language within another system (art) which has a cultural life within an international discourse. [...] One can be a celebrated cultural guest and have the socially foreign profession of the artist. One can be the guest of the art market and equally easily its foreigner. One can be, as well, art history's guest as well as its foreigner. The artist works in an interface which is between the two. Being one makes the other all the more an organizing presence."<sup>3</sup> With these words Kosuth refers to texts written by the philosopher Hans Dieter Bahr in Vienna, who has studied the state of being a guest, recognizing it as an existential, fundamental structure of our existence. When Kosuth says that the artist is working in an interface between guest and foreigner, we can add that this is transmitted to the viewer of the art as soon as he or she seriously confronts himself/herself with the works of an artist. By entering into a dialogue with the work of an artist, getting into it, so to speak, the artist becomes the host. When looking at art, I feel over and over again as if I were a guest of the art, a foreigner to it. In recent years, I have visited dozens of artists in many countries. Very often I have found myself a guest at their studios. And I have repeatedly perceived very clearly in their works the core of foreignness, of something, which cannot be wholly grasped with my concepts and my interpretations. What we somewhat casually refer to as the subjectivity of the artist is revealed to the viewer as a complex set of characteristics of the work of art, which is not at our disposal, and not completely transferable to us in meaning and understanding. That there is always an element of the foreign between the work of art and the viewer is nothing we need to lament. The idea of a complete understanding with nothing left unresolved is mere utopia. Precisely in perceiving what is foreign and unavailable to us lies the chance of forming and giving profile to one's one subjective existence. The subject experiences itself in the dialogue encounter with the other, the foreign element. Only by means of this encounter do we have the chance to meet as guests again and again, and thus, the chance to grow. Exactly here is where I see the existential meaning of the sensual and intellectual encounter with art.

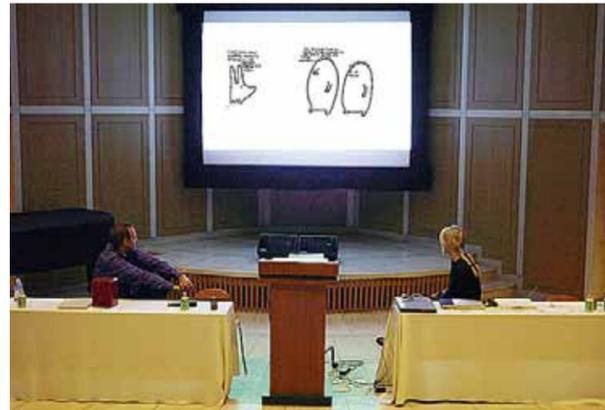
1 Takashi Hiraide, Die Revolution des Augenblicks. On Kawara als Sprache, in: *On Kawara. Erscheinen – Verschwinden*. Mit einem Text von Takashi Hiraide. Herausgegeben von Udo Kittelmann, Cologne 1995, pp. 31-46. Quote, p. 45.  
 2 Quoted after: [www.capurro.de/zen.htm](http://www.capurro.de/zen.htm).  
 3 Joseph Kosuth, Second Memorandum, For Guests and Foreigners, in J.K., *Guests and Foreigners: Goethe's Italian Journey*, Frankfurt a. M. / Basel 1999, pp. 56-71, quote p. 59-60.



## SANNA MARANDER

Film presentation at the Setagaya Art Museum,  
Tokyo, Japan, 2 April 2008

Text by Peter Lodermeyer



Sanna Marander (\*1977, Sweden). She lives and works in Rome, Italy.

### Nothing to Communicate—Sanna Marander

The most astonishing thing about Sanna Marander's drawings—provided this genre designation applies at all—is the contrast between her simple, linear figures redolent of children's book illustrations and the highly complex speech and thought situations these figures are involved in, and into which they draw us as viewers/readers. For example, when she has one of her typical bunny-like figures say: "I have nothing to communicate", the abyss opens to what linguists refer to as 'performative contradiction'. The statement that you have nothing to convey is itself a communication—and as such it precisely does not say 'nothing'. The statement and the act of stating it contradict each other. It is most likely no coincidence that it is an 'animal' that speaks here. This belongs to the topoi of philosophical anthropology that man, as a zoon logon echon, a being with the gift of speech, differs fundamentally from animals; the speechless animal has nothing to communicate. But when it speaks nevertheless, like it does in fables, fairy tales, and children's stories (or in dreams) then it is mostly an allegory for human, all too human characteristics. One of the prerequisites for a text to function—and I indeed regard Sanna Marander's works as texts—is what studies of literature oriented to the aesthetics of reception call the "basal expectation of meaning constancy."<sup>1</sup> This expectation by the viewer/reader, that a constant layer of meaning runs through the course of the text, is perhaps most striking where it is duped the most. Only at a very superficial glance do Marander's drawings seem like cartoons, drawn jokes. Their structure, however, is much closer to that of the dream. Sigmund Freud once described the difference between dream and joke as follows: "The most important difference lies in their social behaviour. The dream is a completely asocial, psychical product. It has nothing to communicate to anyone else. (...) A joke (...) is the most social of all the mental functions that aim at a yield of pleasure."<sup>2</sup> Sanna Marander's works do not pull the viewer over to her side by her coming up with a successful punchline for him, through which the text and picture may suddenly be 'understood', revealing their 'meaning'. Quite the contrary, in general they allow all such expectations of meaning to collapse, virtually denying any kind of communicable idea and dissolving them in paradoxes and indeterminable ambiguities. This is what creates their enigmatic character—and their artistic meaning. They do not function by illustrating contents stipulated by someone else; precisely because they

communicate 'nothing', they clarify, at least somewhat, how pictures and texts function as a communicative means in the first place. This is—like the interpretation of dreams—an 'asocial' process (in the Freudian sense) in as much as it only happens very individually, since each viewer/reader must create his own context (or rather: may playfully create it). Let's put it to the test: The same drawing six times seems simple enough, a snail and its shell. Does the snail approach it or does it remain in place? Is it its own shell or a different one? The texts are neither speech bubbles nor picture captions; they have been added more like footnotes to the drawings. Their reference to the scene portrayed remains ambiguous, if not completely mysterious. How would it be if we looked at these drawings in the context of philosophy? Because, for example, Horkheimer and Adorno once claimed in a text associated with their famous *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "The emblem of intelligence is the feeler of the snail, the creature 'with the fumbling face'"<sup>3</sup> Or because Sanna Marander reads Kierkegaard and likes to view her drawings as a "Kierkegaardian landscape", "that is to say a construction where human situations, reflections, and in particular different world views are confronted"<sup>4</sup>, and because the fairy-tale writer Hans Christian Andersen allegorized his critical relationship to Søren Kierkegaard, six years after his death, in the fairy tale *The Snail and the Rose Tree*—with the snail as the personification of an introspective Kierkegaardian philosopher.<sup>5</sup> Above all, because the lines of the text reveal themselves to be quotes by Nietzsche to his steadfast interpreter, or rather, they are fragments of sentences Nietzsche wrote in various essays and fragments that have come down to us. Does this knowledge help us to discover the meaning of this drawing? Not at all! A work of art is not a crossword puzzle that can be solved. No possible context per se offers a privileged access. But by placing these drawings in the context of philosophy, at least it becomes clear what Sanna Marander's drawings have to say on the theme of 'existence': In quite a humorous way, they make clear—entirely in the sense of Nietzsche—that all life, all living existence, even the simplest organic form of life (such as the slug, for example), presupposes interpretation. Life is interpretation.

1 Wolfgang Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens*, Munich 1990, p. vi.

2 Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, SE 8:179.

3 Max Horkheimer & Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*. Edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noer. Translated by Edmund Jephcott, Stanford 2002, p. 213.

4 E-mail to the author, 17 August 2009.

5 Hans Christian Andersen, *The Snail and the Rose Tree*, in: H.C.A., *Complete Fairy Tales*, London 1997, p. 853 ff.



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1. THERE IS NO FORM IN NATURE.



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2. THIS IS HOW THINGS ARE HIDDEN FROM US.



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3. THE INVENTION OF THE LAWS OF NUMBERS  
WAS MADE ON THE BASIS OF THE ERROR.



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4. THE WILL TO IGNORANCE, TO THE UNCERTAIN, TO THE UNTRUE!



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5. INFINITE SEAS.



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6. IS THERE STILL ANY UP OR DOWN?

## TOSHIKATSU ENDO

Text as presented during the symposium Existence at Setagaya Art Museum in Tokyo, Japan, 2 April 2008

Text edited: April 2008 - January 2009



*Toshikatsu Endo (\* 1950 in Takayama, Gifu Prefecture, Japan). Endo's sculptural work stems from the realization of "a certain sense of absence, a feeling of something lacking" and the unattainable desire to fill this 'lack' in human existence. He offers images and interpretations of such elementary forces as fire and water, addressing the most basic human energies. Inspired by excavations of age-old sacrificial places and 'primitive' sacrifice ceremonies, the works of Toshikatsu Endo draw the viewer to them through their powerful, elementary shapes (mostly circular), scale and textural energy. Lives and works in Saitama, Japan.*

### About Existence and Concerning Phenomena of the Empty Space

#### Introduction

Existence, the theme for this symposium is, as you are aware, a complex theme. It is a universal and eternal philosophical issue, and we cannot reach a simple, satisfying answer for this subject. In fact, I would claim there are as many answers as there are humans in this world. The reason why each human lives within his or her own context and each is only able to think of those things he or she is able to question, that is a very difficult theme.

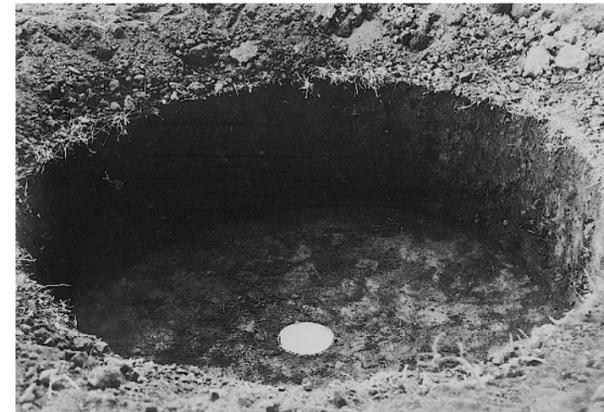
It is not up to me as an artist to solve this question. I am only in a position to address it, to try to expand the discussion of the individual by using my personal context as an artist. Furthermore, wherever there is a place where I am attached to art, like in this symposium, art itself already provides a platform for the question of existence; we cannot remove ontology as a basic requirement, as a medium of outgoing correspondence. Art is the special field that oscillates intensely between a linguistic and a non-linguistic aspect, in which we often move to duplicate an ontological manner through exposition, construction and destruction.

#### Existence and language

In art, questioning existence is a matter of questioning the human condition, and questioning the human condition also entails a questioning of language. Furthermore, our human consciousness of things that happen serves as a point of view of objectifying ourselves as well as having the possibility for us to see ourselves objectively, like gaining a perspective of ourselves from the out-

side. I think, for this reason, we should first talk about language as the foundation of ontology. As mammals, why are we humans distinguished from other mammals? As I just said, because of the inherent human desire that we are relentlessly driven to the objectification of things, but it is not because we are highly developed mammals, the reason is rather because we are defective. Because of failure, for example, we are born prematurely, and so, for that reason we had to come up with an incubator, a close relationship to a mother, for a long time. And through the process of mirror images, called education with language as a medium, the sense of the self as well as our subconscious region began to form. Then, gradually we created for ourselves a very complex artificial environment, which is a mental structure, and this structure grew to become part of ourselves. I think that that is the origin of existence and our roots. Because of such a starting point, the artificial environment became very unstable, and this is why we are in search of temporary stability and we are always driven to exist and to the objectification of the outside world. And for humans, who are dominated by language, the result of there being no limits to the language mechanism, has been that existence has become endlessly open. On the other hand, disengagement from reality is one side of the language mechanism and we have therefore become close to an illusionary existence. The fact is, we have lost our realistic base as given to us by nature, using culture now as a replacement; in other words, because of the constructing with language we have started living in an illusionary, artificial environment. Ultimately, we have become first and foremost a virtual existence. I think it is here that we exist in ontology.

In the beginning we humans were in close contact with reality, but a world built by language is strong in altering phenomena. Language changes the original meaning of the actual situation. We started to separate and become distanced from realistic bases, over time becoming increasingly abstract. And, because the language mechanism is filled with abstraction, humans began to understand and recognize the world. We humans have no consciousness without language. Without language we do not believe existence exists. That means for us, we perceive the world and gain our experiences through seeing with our eyes and our other senses, and this is mediated by language. In other words, how we see the world can



be endlessly extended, and because of that, any world can be possible. It follows that there is no firm structure of the world, nor is there any abstract concept such as a concrete 'thing' in the world. Before our eyes there stands a constructed language, made up by the combination of a collective language filled with false appearances and the illusionistic experienced world, which, in the process, only takes on a more diffusive reflection. Basically in the first place, there were polymorphous perversions, such as those noted by Freud, and then later a certain value structure was shared as an illusionary combination. Ever so gradually, it has become something that could only exist in the world as shared values.

I will try to cite a specific example of this as an explanation. For instance, there is a thing, a stone. This object has been named stone, for us this object now exists in front of our eyes. But, we wonder if we really are looking at a stone or not, we start noticing. If we are looking at the stone, then this is really true, in reality it looks like we are looking at a stone, but are we really looking at an object called stone or more precisely, are we merely looking at something defined by the word stone? Between the thing called a stone and the origin of the object itself there may be a gap, which is not easy to span. These questions have arisen in me. We begin to see things perceptibly by giving them a name first. But, if we see something similar in nature to the stone, we then become very uncertain. What is the stone itself? What are the differences between things referred to as stones and why is it not easy to recall a thing in front of your eyes when it has not been named, not been identified? What are the differences between 'giving something a name' and the 'essence of existence'? First of all, for us existence is defined through language, so in the case of the stone, is it possible to understand it, without having previous experiences? No, in reality that is already impossible, isn't it? Moreover... do we have the possibility to see the stone for the first time only through the mediation of language...? If I understand it in this way, for us, the existence of the thing is only possible by giving a name to the thing. On the other side, without language mediation we could not begin with our understanding of it. I think that, considered from this viewpoint, there are no contradictions. As you can see from what I have said, in certain steps of the image of existence, my personal context is involved.

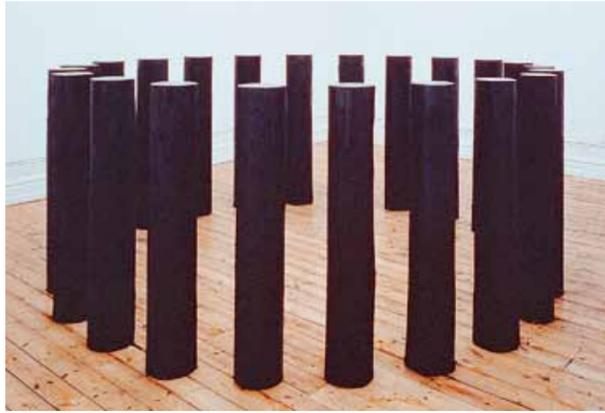


### About Mono-ha

In Japan there is an art movement called 'Mono-ha'. One of the members of that movement is the artist Lee Ufan. Ufan has written about the theory of Nobuo Sekine, in which he has expressed important thoughts. One statement is "wipe the dust from Mono (the thing)". Later, the term Mono-ha came to represent the movement. I take that word myself as being essential for the encounter between humans and things. In his article Lee Ufan mentioned a real encounter with Mono (the thing) by wiping the dust from (Mono) the things. He says you have to start with that first. We are human, and exist just as (Mono) the thing itself exists or perhaps I should say both we and things exist. How may we have a pure encounter with things? First of all, we need to wipe the dust deposited on the surface of Mono (thing), and confront the thing itself as a naked form not attached to any impurities. This is how he expresses it in a metaphorical sense. Back when Lee Ufan first stated this, it became the base line for the art of Mono-ha.

'Dust' is related with Mono or 'dust', which is related in turn with existence. It means the 'deposit of too much used, dead language' This is how I understood it. The thing covered by 'too much used, dead language' became an impossible thing to have an encounter with. We can only look to a non-mediated pure thing through a fixed set of thoughts. If that is so, it can never become a fundamental pure encounter, a path towards opening a new dimension. It does not amount to bare existence being confronted in a direct way. Thus, from the other side, when we desire a primary encounter with Mono (the thing), we first wipe off the 'dust' covering the surface, which is in fact, wiping off 'too much used, too much dead language'.

Conversely, are there encounters with ultimate existence? Actually, I would claim we can only achieve it subjectively by approaching it in a form as exposed possible. An absolutely successful mediated encounter with a thing or an existing form means: The 'covered existence', the 'language of the dust' has been completely removed, so that the bare existence phenomena are fully exposed. Please try to imagine in this case that the reality of the situation is the exposed gap area itself, the scorching heat that uncovers everything, burning away all taboos, like an open volcano. It is impossible to keep on doing this. The unseen thing, the hell, you must not look at it. If



you look at it, you might collapse in total fear. I could venture that this area also marks where the exposure of the contradictory dimension of the disclosure of existence begins.

I will try to explain this from another angle using the stone as an example. The stone exists everywhere in daily life. Normally when we see the stone, we immediately recognize it as stone. With our eyes, we consider a stone to be a stone; this is an ordinary method. It is the gray area of security and immobility, relaxed, as it contains no disclosure or crises. By the way when from the stone, as an axiomatic classification of stone, the deposits of dust on the surface have been wiped away, and all customary perceptual notions have been removed; what then is left over, is the stone which is not covered with any dust and has now reached the state of absolute purity. It can be assumed as being a stone, as the stone in the world of absolute purity. Perhaps for us it is an impossible perspective to imagine, isn't it? For us, who have become humans existing with language, therefore the thing reduced to purity and the world of direct encounter has been shut off from the beginning on. The only direct encounter that seems possible is mediated by language. The first encounter opens the door to the next dimension, a realistic stone encounter with language. We can reach an approximate value through the process of removing the dust of too much dead language. I think this is the only way possible for us.

#### Things and Language

I have spoken about the relationship between the thing and the language. Next it is the thing itself and the name of the thing. I would like to explain a little bit about this, which amounts to expressing doubts concerning classification. I will take granite as an example. Please try to imagine certain minerals. For instance, there is this huge piece of rock sticking out of the sea, which we generally refer to as the land. And when it becomes a bit smaller, it is a mountain, and then at a moderate size it is the rock, if the pieces are even smaller than that, they are known as stones, and then they become sand... Although it is all the same granite material, the change of scale changes its name and meaning completely. In fact, depending upon which part of the substance we are seeing, which context we are seeing them in, such things become very unclear indeed. Certainly since these things share the same scientific, chemical symbol, we are

looking at the same thing in each instance, but in reality we identify them differently. Under such circumstances, a world constructed by language seems vague, illusionary, and doubtful. And in fact, consider the daily life we live, we think we live in a world that has established a certain position, but in reality we live in a vague area. Such is the life of humans and the evidence that the uncertainty we live in brings a characteristic increase in fantasy, passion, and eroticism.

#### Anima and Language

I have referred to us as humans who essentially live a linguistic existence that I have explained in basic detail; I would like to proceed to the next stage, which initially concerns the mechanisms we have constructed through language. If I speak in this context, we attribute value to words and we recognize the world we live in, even as we continue that process. And this language of the world, the artificial or cultivated world, is not the way it is in the natural world, one defined by instinct. The two can be imaged as being opposite poles. Because of artificiality there is no limit, and there is no 'having a break'. By way of illustration, non-linguistic animals such as the dog or the zebra do not have culture. Their specific instinct keeps their species going through reproduction. And this is the reason they do not change their lineage. The surviving form cannot be changed; the same form is virtually repeated from the very beginning when the species occurred. We as humans, however, don't have such form phenomena anymore or rather, since the form is considered to be unlimited and uncertain in its continuation, it brings us, on the contrary, a variety of development. For example, we create magnificent cities, establish systems and institutions, and develop many kinds of tools. Also, many architectural buildings and other constructions have evolved, we are developing space.

But, within that process, there is only one thing that can stop the chain of language construction. There is something limiting the phenomenal world of language. I feel it is an extremely important part of it, namely, the thing we call: life. In fact, it literally means it is the vital body of the human and its living physical form. Only here do we connect with the non-linguistic life form of the wild animal, only here is the part we share with them. We are separated from the wild because we have advanced. So, before the language departed, and far away from the humans we are today, our living body and with the left over parts of instinct have come down to us from ancient times along with an increase of sadness. But this is the sadness of existence, by all kinds of meaning, for us that are the roots of life, attached to the sacred passage deep inside.

What is then the living human being? What is the body itself, which we can maintain for our species and which must repeat itself in the reproduction process, independent of human's choice and our activities? That body of course is not created by humans, and certainly not by human language, but it was acquired and has been successful since long before the linguistic creature. Understood like this, it might be said we belong to otherness. That point of human existence we deny unlimited language and attach limitation to. At the same time, on the other hand, it connects with eroticism as the roots of energy and activity of the human world.





When I define the existence of the human being for myself, I would say we are defined by language at the same time, as I just mentioned, the living body is also limited by this. There is, I think, a polarity between human's insane beauty and its embodied antipode, between passion and reason. In fact, individuals as an organism and the limits of that continuation, the human's spiritual transcendence and the time limit of the existing human body, the end of its physical presence, induce the cycle of sadness and embody the dynamics of sadness. And life and death, the existence of the two sexes, eroticism going together with the excitement of their association, gradually brought such opportunity to a magnificent dimension. Life, sex, god and death, those associations are the only things that prove our existence and they are deep inside us.

#### Language and Sacrifice

We humans are linguistic animals, and at the same time we exist we have a physical life as well. Both of these poles cross each other, a form of existence that has continued since ancient times. This bipolarity gets overheated and creates a spark, this dimension is being located in our innermost existence. Within us this most fundamental area has been created and this is space-time itself. I look at this as it has been done since ancient times; it is accompanied with the destruction of life as a religious act. I assume that that act is fundamental, this phenomenon is seen early on by all religions and is unevenly distributed in the depths of any of the cultures. These are the reasons for the spiritual attributes of humans. The destruction of life as a religious act within a communal act or inherent act, is the general definition of sacrifice. Sacrifice is a collective ceremonial act, to offer a sacrifice is to be considered transcendental existence. An act of killing, to be chosen by fellow men of a community or acted upon one self, the destruction act of the living body appears to be sacrifice. And gradually, those definitions generally shift towards the destruction of animals, a doll or a sculpture

of animals, which were made as objects for representation. All such acts are carried out in relationship with a divine thing.

This act of destroying life in a ritual space, is part of primal human nature, a cruel act whose potential has not been lost even in these modern times; it has merely changed shape, changed location. I think its meaning has been updated and its appearance dismantled. Although accompanied by a kind of barbarianism, without it being tradition, in daily life we do not recognize the situation. It has changed shape like it is trying to avoid that it can be predicted and I think that it might have erupted in many places. The mystery of this sacrifice is that this object of fear, without our being able to reason it logically, attracts people very much. But in the end, that eternal mystery, since it has two opposite poles within us, is tearing us apart with its ambiguous power. Rejecting this interpretation is blocking one's way and brings us to the place of silence.

#### Context of the Works

I would like to talk about this based on the context of my own works. First of all, the work on the first photo shows the origin of the concept I was talking about before. It was made for an outdoor exhibition in Tokorozawa in 1978. At the onset of making this work, I had a completely different plan but, by trial and error and several accidents, at the end it turned out in this form. First, I made the hole with a diameter from about 2 meters (7 feet) in the ground and in the center I placed a container filled with water. I repeated this work, making several holes. As I continued with this method, I was seized with a certain illusion. It was like images of excavated remains, and at the same time because of the substance of water, I saw images of archaeologically-excavated ruins. I became obsessed with this illusion. This water which I had just poured in was no longer simply water now. Not water as in H<sub>2</sub>O anymore. It became rather cultural, human history and memories cumulated from layers began to appear. Special water, the water of a culture, a substance with the

accumulated set of meanings, a collection of symbols, I saw it as if it was the representation of the collection of the unconscious. I myself was in doubt and surprised by the sudden appearance of an illusion or angle for viewing the world. I was overcome with dizziness, spinning around to see the world. I felt like I had excavated water in an archaeological manner, that water became the intensified representation of the primal. And at the same time, I began to remember another important thing. It was the memory about the remains of the Buddhist temple at my home town. From that temple only one stone was left and it was said to be a big stone from the foundation of the five floors high pagoda. I remembered this stone. A circular hole was dug for the stone foundation, said to be for the main pillar of the tower. Now these days, the building and pillar are both gone, only this stone is left and the hole is always filled with rain water. This was a place where I played when I was young. When I was creating the work I mentioned before, I was reminded of this stone. Furthermore, there had been a tradition in which a woman was buried under this foundation stone. In Japan when building a strong building meant to last for a long time, it had been a custom to bury a girl under the pillar as a kind of sacrifice. This is the concept of animism with superstition in the background. Indeed, could a girl have been buried under there...? I remembered the story of this tradition. At that time in my mind, I felt a constant flow of fragments of connected unconscious images. The water, which filled the hole that had lost its pillar, that water itself and this image of the dead body are vertically connected, I felt the full context of all kinds of intuition, the continuity had been established. That water, the circular form of the hole, and the representation of death, this kind of meaning managed to become connected with unusual life, religion, sacredness. I claim that it connected vertically.

The anthropological meaning of the act of burying a girl alive is sacrifice. In Japan it is called 人柱 [human pillar], which means human sacrifice. That ritual, I could say, is a kind of sacrificial ceremony and, the water that filled up the area above the foundation stone, above the girl who had been sacrificed, that water is clearly not just water. The phenomenon that appeared to me was that it sounded like the water was whispering to me to tell me to read the signals of the depths of what had happened to the girl. In that context, this water and the water mentioned in my work also appears in a representation-related context, not just as a chemical material condition, not just as H<sub>2</sub>O, the essential meaning of water. This is not limited to Asia and the Japanese culture; I think that Europe and Africa are also basically connected, although at the surface they look different. Water is used as a symbolic material and in many cases, treated as such. It occurred to me that water as a substance contains those different meanings. After some time, the story of the sacrifice became unrelated to the foundation stone of my hometown Buddhist temple, but while I was using water in my work, I began to think that ignoring the cultural factor would be impossible. Therefore, I often use water now.

#### About the Circle

For this event, as shown in the second photo, I used water. I buried several round containers in the ground in the shape of a circle and I made a water circle. This was just a one-day event, I had started working in the morning and I worked until sunset, and then I

destroyed it. I returned home that night. I had made my first work as a circle structure. Some months later in the gallery, I used old utility poles and lined them up and installed them in a circular form, this circle being composed of wooden pillars. I carved the top part of the pillar and placed water on the top, just at the height of my eyes, the circle-shaped surface of the water placed on top of the pillars created a circle of water... as shown in the third photo. In the midst of installing this work, I had a strange physical experience. While I continued working, going in and out of the circle, as I approached the circle center, a feeling of power began to exert itself. As I went to the center, I felt as if a vertical power extending downwards was penetrating me. Like with the energy of the circle shape, I thought this may be just an illusion; but I was strongly affected by it. This energy, felt like places with a magnetic field.

During the time that I made these works, I heard the news of the remains of a circle structure being excavated from the Jomon period (5000 years ago) on the coast of the Sea of Japan. That shape was almost the same as my circle work which I mentioned. I made a replica of these Jomon period remains. I divided a chestnut tree into halves, each with a diameter of about one meter (40 inches) and lined them up into a circle shape. This form was also a common structure, similar to the stone circle in England [Stonehenge].

What I remember from that time was a feeling I had experienced during my last installation as well, energy like a magnetic field within that circle. This time I might have experienced close by the center of this work some kind of vertical power of the constructed object of the circle structure from the Jomon period. I think that the meaning of the circle structure of the Jomon period, might be connected at some point. I understood that this circle structure was repeatedly rebuilt in the same place. The trees would always rot; and then they would rebuild at the same place. I think that they repeated this several times, the circle was rebuilt at the same spot. This circle structure had totally different pillar traces from a normal house, a house around a dwelling pit, and they were scattered around the center, the circle structures, of the village. That means, and here I speculate, the circle structure must have been a certain kind of special place. The remains were only leftover parts from the wooden pillars, the top part did not exist anymore. So, how high was the top, what kind of structure was it...? I cannot know this, but for me, considering the structure and the place it was built in, I think it must have been a special place or ceremonial space for a symbolic religious service. A religious, service-like event may have been performed...

Further excavation results, digging deeper, showed remains of an ancient circle structure from where archaeological findings discovered large quantities of the bones of creatures. It was a very fascinating and important discovery that strongly attracted me. There were innumerable dolphin- and human bones and a wooden sculpture, which looked like a totem pole. It was understood to be from the local life of the late Stone Age. The dolphin at that time had been an important protein source. Wherever circle remains of ancient structures are found, there are also abandoned places with the bones of dolphins. It had been a place such as those known places containing large mountains of shells. How-



ever, later in the knowledge of the study of Confucianism, most of the shell mounds, which seemed to be merely a garbage place, had included memorial services for the shellfish. These were special places, a notion, which is generally gaining in strength. That is why this place may also have been a ritual place of mediation for the dolphin, and a place made for establishing contact on a transcendental level. I think it was a special place running vertically through space-time. In this context, unknown, undefined sculptures could be made. These remains are called 'Mawaki Iseki', located on the coast of the Sea of Japan, similar remains are excavated intensively, for example in Niigata and Toyama in Hokuriku and also in the area of Shiga. Up to now, I would guess they have discovered about 10 places. Probably underground in other places there are many more tree-pillar-circle structures asleep under ground. Whether or not they are excavated sometime soon, I think that outlines of the primitive religion from the Jomon period will be gaining in clarity. In the north-east district of the Japanese island, Honshu, there are more stone circle remains. It becomes clear that the stone circles from the north of Japan are graves of leading figures of the area. So, it shows that the use of circularly arranged wooden pillars is concentrated only near the Hokuriku area. In one way or another, they have religious purposes pertaining to death, which seems logical to me.

From the fact that the dolphin bones appeared as archaeological finds, the natural hypothesis is that this was the place where the world of the death spread through space, with the bones of the dolphins as representation. Perhaps that place was the particular place for the sacrificial ceremony for the dolphin... The sacrificial location surrounded by the circle of wooden pillars, this structure was the space which included the empty, hollow, space, which comprised the inside place surrounded by a circle. And the inside of the circle is the concentration of the peculiar magnetic energy

that towers in the center. I mentioned before, as the energy whose magnetic field appeared as shape and as death, life, sex, violence and destruction, this turning place is a representation for a deeply related and affected ritual. It embodies a combination of the vertical representation, and the place and form that strive to reach holiness. All the power of my imagination joined together here.

**Uneven Distribution of Empty Space Phenomena—  
Eastern and Western Types**

These empty spaces are about life and death, the place where non-routine religion was founded. The interpretation, which arises, is that here is where sacrifice developed. So, it is my belief that sacrifice has connections with the empty spaces, with their dynamic force, their energy. This vertical energy and the strength for opening up human's living body have parallels. That is why that place where we fall into the depth of human existence is the dimension where the place of sacrifice is opened. But, what I should not fail to state is how important it is to open the physical level as a place of sacrifice, and we must also bear in mind the importance of the existence of the language structure. Sacrifice is nothing more than an artificial and cultural act. Even by falling into the depth of human existence, without language we cannot create our structures about existence. So, for instance, the extent we are seeing the non-verbal world on the surface, that essence exists only as a linguistic event. For example, animals which do not have language cannot have complicated customs like sacrifice. That is also why the vision of sadness appears at our side, in humans with language. Language is obtained in the process of creating some kinds of system such as the custom of sacrifice and those dealing with the relationship to life; I am convinced this had to arise from necessity. In that space-time, empty space phenomena appear that are directly related to and associated with the four elements of fire, water, earth and air. Since the beginning of humanity, these have always accompanied our environment and are related to

materials. I think that it is in connection with them that we have established our view of the world since ancient times.

A characteristic of my Japanese culture, or Eastern culture in general is, that this culture, as has often been pointed out before, has empty space in its very center. For example, Roland Barthes indicated that there is an empty space called Imperial Palace in the center of Tokyo, the Japanese capital. Shinto, the Japanese religion, animism, uses a mirror as Goshintai - 御神体 (an object representing a god). Goshintai - 御神体 is central to the representation of what is inherent to religion (sometimes another Goshintai is used). This mirror normally stands on the other side of the door and that round mirror which is a two-sided mirror, is hidden quietly. That mirror, the two-sided mirror, is an amazing thing. It shows everything and thereby empties itself, getting into becoming empty space itself. Roland Barthes points out that that is the shape of representation in Japanese culture. In addition, the mirror takes away the center by having empty space in it, embodying the unique construction of society.

According to Roland Barthes, in western culture there is God, monotheism, seated at the center of society. It is the acquired order of the circle that has a center point. European culture all began from that structure he said. I think, by comparing it, there are surely clear differences in the structures, but, I think the center of the empty space phenomena is also there, hidden in the European culture. For example, there are stone circles in England, or also the amphitheatres can be seen as representations of these phenomena. Or even the structure of the European streets, which are the expanse of the concentric circles from plazas, for the most part rectangular in shape. There are places where there is nothing in the center of the Plaza, the circle, and there are the empty places. In fact, I think, on a fundamental basis, Eastern and Western structures correspond with polytheism and monotheism. We may define these cultures by having the empty space phenomena in the cen-

ter and cultures, which are packed with rules and norms. However, I wish to get closer to the bottom of this, to the level affecting the depths of the human society where the empty space energy exists that appears in the center of the circle. I think in this respect both Eastern and European cultures have a lot in common.

**Sacrificial Ceremony in the Work (1)**

The concept with the burning empty space phenomena exists in one of my works [the circle shape on the full-page photo]. Of course, this concept theory is a contradiction, this burning of the empty space phenomena, it's not possible to burn a non-existing substance. Therefore this is only symbolic, a metaphoric expression. The title of the work is *EPITAPH*. It is created with wood; a tube-shaped form which is about four meters wide, hollow and the thickness of the wood is about 60 centimeters. I built the wood up and put oil over it and after that I burned it on the field. The tube-shaped form was a symbol for the empty space phenomena and at the same time a representation of the grave monument. It is also the representation of the body. And burning it with fire is, to burn the symbol which is the empty space 'as the sacred place' of the community, and at the same time burning the representation of death. The burning of the dead person's bodies continuously destroying it and then sacrificing it, those are the only reasons for it. Driven by emotion from this action and experiencing my innermost, if I had to express my emotions in words, it would be ecstasy, enjoyment with a sexual undertone, suffering, overflowing with enthusiasm and fear, this major confrontation, set against a fountain of multiple and conflicting interpretations about a situation, I can only express it like this.

In any case to burn the hollow, so to speak, the 'sacred place', is paramount to burning god. In addition, it is on a par with the sacrifice of god. From this composition, destroying the body as sacrifice, as well as an Gogh cutting off his ear, as it is dealt with by Georges Bataille, I might venture, it touches the sacrifice of god. In Georges Bataille's

opinion, the most pure form of sacrifice is the sacrifice of oneself. The pure form of sacrifice is: to organize a sacrificial ceremony, to execute the sacrifice and to receive the sacrifice. It is the shape in which those three parts unite together, and by space-time transformed from a sacrifice to god into the sacrifice of god. As a thing following the sacrificial ceremony, Georges Bataille cites sacrificial body mutilation as an example. For me, Van Gogh cut off his ear as a gift to a person, perhaps Gauguin. In essence, what Van Gogh did, he must have felt like being the sun itself, god itself, he sacrificed himself like the sun. This is why most of his pictures from his late stage are turned towards the sun. Van Gogh sacrificed his own ear and he turned into the sun itself, to which he continued to devote his entire existence. The sun is slowly destroying itself, burning itself and it keeps on continually giving selflessly itself as the only one existing thing for us. Symbolically the sun is making a sacrifice, is god, priest and, at the same time, sacrifice as existence. The sun is the character of existence, sacrificing itself to god and by sacrificing itself it became god, and therefore it became a sacrifice of god. Van Gogh, who himself by nature is sacrifice religion, in the end by sacrificing himself, I would say, he moved to the other side of the wheat field and he arrived at space-time, a sacred place. I think that the sacrifice of the empty space contains those momentums.

#### **Sacrificial Ceremony in the Work (2)**

The origins of my works may be traced to my student days in my human body sculpture class. A certain experience is related to that. I noticed the connection years later, that strong mental relationship or continuity that I have deeply rooted in my memory. At that time, I experienced difficulties with the sculpture practice of using clay to make sculptures of nudes. Because the submission deadline was coming close and I had continual doubts about how to make a sculpture of a nude, I stopped working with the clay. I switched to a direct method of applying plaster. At first I welded a support rod and made a rough form and I attached plaster to that and started modeling. I used newspapers so that the plaster wouldn't leak from the gap of the reinforcing rod, packing them inside the reinforcing rod. I worked in that way and I pushed forward the modeling work. The next difficulty was that I could not unite the bust of the sculpture well with the lower half of the body, so I severed the bust from the lower half of the body. The next step was to remove little by little the pieces packed inside of the work and hollow it out through that process, but I wanted to shorten my work time, so I placed the flame of the gas burner inside my sculpture and burnt it. The result was that the smoke which was coming up by the burning paper and the smoke of the acetylene gas, spread over the inside and the outside of my sculpture, meaning that I ultimately mutilated and scorched it; it became a miserable human body. During that process, I actually experienced certain emotions and a sense of destruction, like setting a living human body on fire and destroying it. In that rough work, I felt my own intoxication by excitement being immersed from that mood. And I had a completely incoherent reality experience, I understood that I would not have experienced these emotions if I had created human sculpture as figurative art and at the same time, I felt a kind of fear and loneliness, a guilty consciousness. The act I had performed was taboo in art.

Unexpectedly I had been trying to reach a taboo place. However, I felt excitement there and I even remember sexual pleasure and that condition extended very deep and distanced me. I continued the experienced sacrifice through space-time, scared by deviation phenomena. After that I stopped such actions.

#### **The manifestation of Sacrifice**

A life-and-death related invasion, violence, sexual pressure, transcendence and holiness, I think that these elements, colored by space-time, appear in the now and the past and come up in various forms and in unusual places. For example some time ago in Japan a crime was committed, a life destroyed; a 14-year-old boy had cut off the head of another 10-year-old boy and hung it on the wall of the school gate. The boy's confession was a declaration of the action of his work as a sacred ceremony and in the statement after his arrest he declared, "When I was in the fifth grade of elementary school (ten years old), I had my first erection while I dissected a frog, and later in my first year of Junior High School (thirteen years old), I imagined dissecting a human being and greedily devouring the intestines, then I masturbated." That is what he said. And he said about the crime, "I did get an erection while I tightened his neck, I ejaculated at the moment I cut off his neck", and further, when I hung his neck on the front gate of the school, "I got excited without giving any stimulation to my genitals and I had an orgasm, many times". That is what he said. Across this story of the young boy's crime there seems to be some kind of anthropological primitivism, I think I can say there is something in it which is connected with the ancient form of sacrifice. For example, a famous custom from ancient Central America is the sacrificial ceremony of the Aztecs. They believed that honoring the sun god always called for blood. They thought if they did not sacrifice blood, the sun would stop shining. Prisoners of war or members of the community were chosen for sacrifice by their priest. These persons were laid upon the stone altar, tied down, and then a stone blade was driven into their chest and their heart, still beating, was removed and offered to the sun, while they screamed facing the sun. Also, the flesh of the sacrificed person was eaten by members of the community. In fact, I think there is something those ancient ceremonies have in connection with the story from the young boy.

#### **Concerning the Empty Space Theory**

I return to what I said earlier 'about the circle'. In the first half of this article, I spoke about the inherent power acting inside of the circle structure. Jomon-ruins were discovered at the coast of the Sea of Japan, the remains of a complex of circular structures, which had been built by lining up wooden pillars. It contained the empty space in the center and at the same time, the bones of innumerable dolphins were discovered directly beneath the empty space, which I have spoken about before. And this fact shows these ruins were a special place that was extended vertically with spirituality. I also spoke about the inherent power acting inside of the circle, which is somehow related. In finding out what is important for questioning the meaning of existence, the crucial elements are: language, life, sacrifice and the circle with its empty space. I imagine this to be the final arrival point of my text. Therefore, now I am going to conclude by explaining the 'empty space theory'.



First of all, I would like to explain why I connect sacrifice with the excavation of the collected dolphin bones brought together in the Jomon remains. Life during the Jomon period was similar with the life form of the Eskimos, they lived on a diet of marine species such as dolphins and seals. In the northern part of the Japanese islands, the Ainu way of life had continued until modern times, these culture forms are overlapping with the Jomon culture. By referring to these two examples, I think we can see this more clearly. For example, I refer to the Eskimo way of life according to what was written by Marcel Mauss in his book of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Seasonal Variations of the Eskimo*. I think there we can see the situation. Of course it cannot be made directly equivalent to the Jomon society, their fighting with nature, or their hunt without the use of modern weapons, or the communication with nature, but I think there is the possibility to speculate upon their homogeneity with the Jomon society. There is a particular importance in the Eskimo society attributed to the time between the warm summer period and the dark hard winter period, in between changes, almost anything that is continuing to live in the same form, is changing its way of living. During summer, each family spreads over the inland area, engaged in normal family life. But when winter comes, their family structure is dismantled and reorganized into another framework. For example, men gather along the coast and create a life group with a big, shared house. They live in a cooperative housing arrangement and regardless day or night, feast continually, staying high, and often going crazy in such situations. Marcel Mauss sees it expressed in beautiful thoughts, such as sorrowful poems, and as a result he regards the situation as religious life. Every day they are exposed to risking their lives because of the continuous group hunt activities, their half-trance states, where they conquer their fear and then go out for hunting. This is how they reached a passion for religion. The feasts, prayer, play, and work—all of these things we cannot easily separate from each other. They are shared together, as are the possessions of the person, the captured

animals, and also concerning women, there is no individual 'ownership'. Everything is shared by the cooperative of society members. Through the communal properties there are no fights over ownership. The fear of death due to the dangers from hunting is the most prevalent, but by getting into a state of emotion, you can overcome fear. When the winter is over, however, this way of living is spontaneously dissolved again and the members go back to their other family life. Perhaps by illustrating these details of the dolphin and seal catches by the Eskimos, the state of Jomon society becomes transparent. I think, furthermore, we can see a parallel relation of the religious feeling and the deposited bones of the dolphins.

For the Ainu, the people who used to live in the north of Japan, it was not the dolphin, but rather their life form had always relied upon the brown bear as their primary source of protein. For them, the brown bear was also a significant religious animal. In a religious context, they would capture a bear cub and respectfully over time, raise it separately from the brown bears they usually eat. So, this cub was given the finest food, better than the regular meal for themselves, and it was attributed the greatest respect as it grew. Then they waited for the right moment, and the community commenced with the ritual. They built the altar and killed the bear that grew up entirely in the center of their human circle. It was killed by a group of people and then the head of the bear was cut off and worshipped on an altar and prayed to. After that, the animal was skinned and tanned and the meat, organs, brain and all those parts included were given separately to community members so that everyone could partake. I think the implication of this ritual is to get in touch with a transcendental meaning. For example, the Aztec gave a heart as task of sacrifice to the sun, and for the Ainu, sacrificing the bear to the community of god was an offering proffered for successful bear hunting and thanksgiving to the bear. The slaughter was the continuing devotion to the divine and also joy. It was a sacrificial cere-

mony. This is one of the reasons on which we might agree that the mental state of the Ainu and the mental state of the Jomon society, overlapped with each other. The group action must be deeply connected with the same kind of mind-set in the Jomon culture. Although, with the example of the Eskimo and Ainu, there the concreteness of the empty space phenomena or circle structure almost never occurs. But, for instance, there were indeed examples where the Eskimos and the Ainu in unusual space-time circumstances appeared as ceremonial sacrificed space-time in the inverted world in an everyday space-time construction, it is certain that it is not possible to see from the outside what the hidden area is, the interior of the empty space, but I think it is safe to say there is no doubt that the empty space phenomena themselves exist within there.

I spoke from different angles about what sacrifice means, but even at present it does not change its eternal mystery. Sacrifice is to cause a mental state of the imagination to switch to another dimension of possibilities. Violence and cruelty exist as an attribute of sacrifice. They are reversed psychological dimensions located in the limitlessly deep beyond. Sacrifice is a kind of a violent mechanism, which has been brought up to the visible world. The sacred dimension is the part of the community, which normally lives as taboo. We experience it when it revives on this side of the community, and its experience becomes fear and joy, as appears with the shared psychological experience involved with life and death. The construction of the process in which the world has been reversed, this level is a metaphor-like image, even if visual from the inside of space-time, when you look from outside, it itself is invisible, it is the thing which is not there, in fact it is only the area of the perception of the empty space. There is no specific thing to be seen, at the place of the community, only space-time is inspiring a sense of magnetic field, it is an implicit recognition.

Until now I have spoken about the empty space characteristic mainly as it appears in Japan, as I mentioned before I think it is also hidden in Western context. There, for example, the existence of Jesus Christ, that should be read in context with sacrifice and the empty space phenomena and that gives us an indication. Jesus, executed on the cross, this clearly takes on a sacrificial character. This sacrifice started before he was born. He received attention but when he died they buried Jesus in a rock tomb, a cave, to show the true meaning of his sacred existence, to work he exists in a quiet way. In fact, from the beginning on he was holy, but he stayed on this side of the world, so to speak as a normal human existence. Through Jesus's execution he disappears; the location where Jesus was buried became hollow and void, empty, the empty space. And by becoming the empty space, he attracts thoughts of people who pursue the hollow. They create questions for the hollow void and answer them themselves and the empty space itself becomes a movement. This process repeats itself and accelerates. The thoughts of the people back then matured in their process of development and as a result a thing called the New Testament was written. This is the point where I would claim that systematized Christianity had begun. The energy that is coming up from that bible was to be further accelerated by the presence of the empty space, the absence of Jesus.

Also in parallel with this revival story, I have come to believe in the existence of 'The Zone' as in *The Stalker* of Andrei Tarkovsky. 'The Zone', which has the supposed potential to fulfill a person's innermost desires, when seen in parallel with the absence of Jesus, provides for the first time a concrete image of the empty space character. This movie, *The Stalker*, does not say much. A certain place appears but it does not disclose what kind of place it is. Because of certain circumstances the place was closed as being taboo. It was suggested that it is a place where something seems to have happened, falling meteorites or visitors from outer space, and it all goes quiet as an alien world which only is called 'The Zone'. But, there are guides for anonymous people who somehow managed to get into it illegally, and it brings up questions as to why they have the wish to go there illegally. What does 'The Zone' mean for those anonymous people with their guide who want to try to get in? This film does not show anything related to that. We are just at the beginning, only to be encouraged to think about this, eventually the region called 'The Zone', no one comes up with meaning or is expecting answers, and it leads to the thought that the empty space itself does not have the will to simply answer the question of meaning. I think, 'The Zone' is the representation of the empty space phenomena. It shows a 'room', in the center of 'The Zone', where humans are granted a wish. The opportunity to realize the desire is in a certain sense a miracle and a sacrament that reminds us of a sacred center. Therefore the location for 'The Zone' involved the centralized dynamic forces as such, the distant location, the invisibility, indicated by the illusion from the daily world we normally live in. I imagine that this perhaps could emerge for the first time in space-time. It is as if the thoughts separate from the consciousness of individuals, like the sea of Solaris to be actualized as a visual thing, the insides of the thoughts in the community, these thoughts are like small fires lighting up the place. I would like to say, this is a place where the illusions that have been eliminated from daily life are collected. When the intruder from 'The Zone' was brought back by the guide and returned to the original location, he noticed that not a thing about him had changed, the nature of 'The Zone' does not allow to look into the inside without violating taboo. Therefore, the person who had returned was the equivalent of having sacrificed himself. The specific location phenomena of 'The Zone' or the empty space phenomena, by any meaning, does not allow an invasion by a member which is living on this side of the world, it only appears to members from outside of the community.

If we can create a sculpture as an entity, including the complete essence of the nature of these empty space phenomena, it would be the ultimate sculpture. But at the same time, ironically, these works of art are only possible as invisible things. In that sense, the sculpture of the empty space phenomena occurs only in its conception. In reality it is not possible to create this; only the thoughts of the possibility for creating the ultimate sculpture exist. So, for an artist, 'Sonzai' 存在 [Existence], which are thoughts deep inside humans or an illusion, is the ultimate sculpture, you might find a light on the horizon by maintaining an awareness concerning all thoughts that are hidden deep inside.



## 遠藤利克

2008年4月2日、世田谷美術館において行われたシンポジウム、「存在」についてのトーク

テキスト補足：2008年4月 - 2009年1月



遠藤利克、1950年岐阜県高山市生まれ。

「存在」から、あるいは空洞性について

はじめに  
「存在」について。今回与えられたこのテーマは、御承知のように、永遠普遍の哲学的課題であり、納得のいく解答が容易に得られる類のものではありません。むしろ答えはそこに言及する人間の数だけあるとすら言える。個々の人間が、どのような文脈において、どのように考えたかということだけが問われる、困難なテーマなのです。

だからこの課題は、一介の美術作家である私の手に負えるものではありません。唯一、私に取り組むことができるのは、ひとりの美術家の個人的な文脈において個人的な議論の展開を試みることに以外にはありません。さらに今回のシンポジウムのように美術に引き付けたところであると、すでに美術そのものが存在への問いかけに促された領域であり、存在論を発信し続けるメディアであるという大前提は外せません。美術は、言語的側面と非言語的側面のあいだを激しく振動する特殊な場です。そこにおいてわれわれは常に、解体と構築という、二重化された存在論の様態へと促され、晒されているのです。

存在と言語

美術において存在を問うということは、とりもなおさず人間を問うことであり、人間を問うことは言語を問うことであります。さらに、われわれ人間が事物を認識しうるのは、事物を対象化すると同時に自己を対象化する視点をもったからであり、自己を対象化しうるのは、われわれが言語という手段によって自己を自己の外へ置く視点を獲得したからです。だからわれわれはまず、存在論の大本である言語についての言及から始めるべきだろうと思います。

ところで、哺乳類としての人間が他の哺乳類から区別されるのは、いま述べたように、事物の対象化へと執拗に駆り立てられるわれわれ人間固有の欲望ゆえですが、それは人間が進化した哺乳類だからではなく、むしろ、できそこないであったためだと言われてます。できそこない故にわれわれはある時期から超未熟児として生まれるようになり、未熟児であるがゆえに、長期にわたり母親

との密接な関係性の保育器の中で養育されざるを得なくなった。そして養育という鏡像のプロセスを通して自我が、また同時にその背後においては無意識領域が、言語を媒介として形成されるようになった。そして、極めて複雑な人工環境である心的構造が徐々に内面化されていった。それが我々の、存在の本源であり、根っ子なのだろうと思います。そうした成り立ちゆえに、その人工環境は極めて不安定なものとならざるを得なくなったわけで、ゆえにわれわれは、かりそめの安定を求めて外界の対象化へと常に駆り立てられる存在となったのです。

そして言語の介在を被った人間が、いかなる結果になったかということ、われわれは、言語機構に伴う際限の無さによって、無限にひらかれた存在となったわけです。また他方、言語構築のもう一つの側面としての現実との遊離性において、われわれは限りなく幻想的存在となった。つまり人間は、自然的所与としての現実的基盤を失い、その代用品としての文化、つまり言語によって構成された幻想的な人口環境の中に暮らすようになった。要は、われわれは本源的にバーチャルな存在となったわけです。ここにこそ、われわれの存在論の在り処があると思うのです。

言語によって構築された世界は捏造性が強く、本来の意味での実態というものは無い。言葉は、最初のあいだは現実と密着して機能してゆく。けれど、しだいに現実的基盤から遊離してゆき抽象度を増してゆく。そしてその抽象性に満ちた言語機構により、人間は、世界を認知、把握するようになってきたわけです。かといって、われわれ人間には言語が介在しない認識、言語なしで成立する存在のありようというもの、無いわけです。ということは、われわれにとっての世界とはひとえに、言語を介在させることによって始めて経験し得るもの、目に見えるもの、知覚できるものなのです。逆に言えば、すべては無限定的であり、可能性においてはどのような世界もありうる。何か確固とした世界の構造、あるいは物象化世界が存在するのではなく、われわれの目の前には、言語によって構成された、つまり、言語共同体の共同幻想が立ち上げた現象世界が、仮象性に満ちてきらめき、乱反射するのみだということです。つまり、まずはフロイトのいう多形倒錯場のようなものがある、そのあとに、一定の価値構造が共同幻想として共有されてくる。そして、しだいに共有された価値だけが、世界において唯一、存在しうるものとなっていったということです。



それを具体的な例をあげて説明してみます。たとえばここに物があるとします。たとえば石。石と命名されたこの物体が、我々にとっていま目の前に在る対象です。しかしわれわれは果たして、本当に石を見ているのだろうかということが気になってくる。われわれは石をみている、それは確かなのだけれど、しかし実際には、石を見ているようでいて、本当は石と命名された事物を、さらには石という言葉に規定された何かを見ているのに過ぎないのではないか。石と名付けられた事物と本来の石自体の間には、もしかしたら埋めがたい断絶があるのではないのか。そのような疑問が湧きあがってくるのです。

われわれは名付けることにおいてはじめて、事物を知覚可能なものとして見るができるようになる。でもそれは、石自体の本質をみることと並行しているのかということ、そのあたりはきわめて不確かになってくるのです。石自体とは何なのか。石と名付けられた事物と、名を剥奪されて目の前に投げ出されて在る、名状しがたい事物とのあいだの違いは何なのか。「名づけること」と「存在の本質」のあいだにひろがる差異とは何なのか。そもそも言語的存在であるわれわれにとって、石を先入観なしで経験することは可能なのか。いや、ほんとうはもはや不可能ではないのか。というよりわれわれは、言葉を介在させることによって初めて石を見ることが可能となるのではないのか……。

このように考えてくると、われわれにとっての存在とは、むしろ、名付けることにおいてはじめて立ち上がってくるもの、逆に言語の介入なしでは作動を開始しないものと捉えた方が矛盾がないのではないかと思います。以上述べてきたことが、私の個人的な文脈における、存在についてのある段階までのイメージです。

モノ派について

ところで、日本にはモノ派と呼ばれる美術のスクールがあります。そこに属する、李禹煥という作家は、彼の書いた関根信夫論の中で重要な言葉を語りました。「モノの埃をはらう」という言葉です。それはその後、モノ派を象徴する言葉だと考えられるようになりましたが、私としてはそれを、人間がモノと出会うことの本質的な在りようについて語った言葉だと捉えています。そこにおいて李禹煥は、モノとの本当の出会い、事物から埃を取り払うことにおいて始めて達成されると語っています。われわれ人間がモノ自体——あるいは存在自体と言ひ替えてもよいと思うのですが——



と直接、純粹に出会うためにはどうすべきかということ、まず、モノの表面に堆積した多くの埃をはらう必要があるだろうと、そして何の不純物も付着しない裸形のモノ自体と対峙する必要があるだろうと、そのように、比喩的に表現したわけです。それがある時期のモノ派の制作基準となっていました。そして私はその「埃」とはすなわち「言葉」のことではないかと解釈したのです。

モノに纏わりつく「埃」、あるいは存在に纏わりつく「埃」、それらはつまるところ、「手垢にまみれた言葉の堆積」である。このように、私は解釈しました。「手垢にまみれた言葉の堆積」によって覆われた事物は、事物との純粹で無媒介的な出会いということ是不可能にし、むしろわれわれは、使い古され固定化された観念を通してしか、事物を眺めることができなくなった。それではけっして、新しい次元を開いてゆくような根源的な出会いとはならない。むき出しの存在性と直にまみえることにはならないのだと。だから逆に、モノとの本源的な出会いを達成するためにはまずその表面を覆う「埃」を払うこと、つまり「手垢にまみれた言葉」を払うことだと……。

では他方、そのような究極的な存在との出会いがあるかといえば、現実的には、漸近的な接近の度合いにおいてしか達成され得ないと言えます。逆に、事物あるいは存在なるものとの完全なる無媒介的な出会いが達成された姿とは、存在を覆う「言葉の埃」が完全に取払われた剥き出しの存在性が露呈した状態です。想像してみてください。そうなった場合の実態とはすなわち、禁忌の覆いを剥ぎとられた溶解と灼熱の煉獄、むき出しの開口部そのものなわけです。耐えられるものではありません。見てはいけない冥界です。われわれはそれを覗いたことによって、むしろ絶対的な恐怖の中に墜落せざるをえない。ここにもまた、存在の開示をめぐる矛盾性の次元が露呈してくると言えます。

角度を変えて説明してみます。ふたたび石を例に挙げます。石は、日常いたるところに存在しています。通常われわれは、石を見た瞬間に、それを石として認識する。その、石を石と見る我々の視線は、常套化したものです。何の危機も何の開示ももたらすことなく、安全で惰性化し弛緩した灰色の世界です。では、その石の上に堆積した埃を払って、石を石とする自明の命名性、習慣化した知覚を全部とり去っていった場合、最終的に残るのは、何の埃にも覆われない絶対純粹性の事物へと至った石そのものであると想定できま



す。ところがその絶対純粋界に入った石は、おそらくわれわれにとっては知覚不可能な次元ではないでしょうか。逆にいえば、言語的な存在となったわれわれ人間には、純粋還元された事物や世界との直接的な出会いはあらかじめ封じられており、われわれに許された出会いとは唯一、言語を介することにおいて始めて扉が開かれる次元でしかないのではないかと…。そして、世界との実存的出会いは、言葉という埃の除去作業の過程において近似值的に達成されるほかに、可能性はないのではないのでしょうか。

#### モノと言語

さて、それがモノと言葉の関係のありようということなのですが、次に、そのモノとモノの名前、つまり命名ということの怪しさについて少し触れてみたいと思います。例えば花崗岩なら花崗岩でよいのですが一定の鉱物を思い描いてみてください。たとえばそれが、海から突き出た巨大な岩の塊であった場合、我々は通常それを陸と言うわけです。そしてそれが少し小さくなってくると、山、それがもっと小さくなると岩、適度な大きさであれば石、それがもっと砕かれてくると砂になって、粒子状になってくると土になると…。同じ花崗岩性の物質であっても、その大きさによって名前が変わり、意味がぜんぜん違ってくる。ここにおいて、実際は、われわれは物質のどの部分を見ているのか、どの文脈を見ているのか、そうしたことが、非常に曖昧になってくる。たしかに科学的な元素記号としては同一のものを見ているのだけれど、実際的なイメージとしては、それぞれ違うものとして認識している。このような具合で、言語によって構築された世界の曖昧性というか幻想性というか怪しさというものが、図らずも漏出してくる。要するにわれわれは日常において、世界を、確立された確実なものとして思い込みがちですが、実際にはこのあたりの曖昧さの中に住み込んでいる。逆にそれこそが、人間の世界であり、いかに幻想性に満ちていて、情念的で、エロティックなものであるかということの証左となっているのです。

#### 生命と言語

ここまでは、われわれ人間が本質的には言語的存在でありそこに根源的に規定されているということについて話をしてきましたが、そのことを前提として、次の段階に行きたいと思います。まず、言語によって世界を認識し構築してゆく機構についてですが、ここではとりあえずそれを、言語分節という言い方で統一させていただきます。

その文脈でいえばわれわれは、世界を言語によって分節し、認識して、そのプロセスの連続性において世界内部に住み込んでいるわけです。しかもその言語分節された世界は、人工の世界あるいは文化化された世界であって、対極としてイメージされる、本能に規定された自然世界ではない。だからそのプロセスは、人工的であるがゆえに限界がなく、歯止めというものがないのです。わかりやすい例としては、たとえば非言語的な生物、たとえば犬やシマウマは文化を持たず、本能に規定された行動形式を繰り返すことで種を維持しています。だから彼らは、けてその循環からはみ出すことはない。生存形式が変化することはなく、種が発生した当初から同じ形式をくりかえしているわけです。しかしわれわれにはそうした形式性はもはや無い。そしてその限界がない不確定な生存形式が、逆に、われわれに多様な展開をもたらし、たとえば壮大な都市を創出させ、システムや制度を作らせ、さまざまな道具を発明させてきたのです。また、いろいろな建築物、構築物へと向かい、さらには宇宙開発にまで進展させてきたわけです。

でもその過程において唯一、その際限のない言語構築の連鎖を止めるものが存在する。その言語的現象世界を限定する何かがあるのです。私はそこがひじょうに重要な部分だと感じているのですが、それこそが生命とよばれるものだと思っています。つまり我々人間における生身の肉体、生身の身体です。そこが唯一、われわれが、非言語的生命体つまり野性性に満ちた動物世界へと繋がりと、また彼らと共有する部分であるわけです。われわれはあらかじめ

め野生からは隔てられている。だから、言語発生以前はるか彼方から継承し続けているこの生命、身体、本能の残滓には太古から立ち昇る悲しみがあります。しかしこの存在の悲しみこそ、いかような意味においてもわれわれを、生命の淵源性、内奥性に結び付ける聖なる通路だと思うのです。

では、その生身の身体とはなにか。人間の意志からは独立して生命活動を維持し、生殖作用を繰り返し、種を持続させていくその生身の身体というものは何なのか。それはもちろん人間が作ったものではなく、人間の言語が作ったわけでもなく、我々が言語的な生き物になる以前から獲得され継承されてきたものです。その意味では他者性に属しているといつてよい。そこが人間存在の言語的無際限性というものを否定し、限定付けているのです。それと同時に他方では、人間世界の活動性というか、エネルギーの根源としてのエロティシズムにも繋がってゆく。

人間存在を、私なりに定義すると、われわれは明らかに言語によって規定されていると同時に、いま述べてきたような生身の身体性によっても限定されている。そしてその両極性こそが、人間の狂おしくも美しい、情念と理性の対極性を体現させてきたと思っています。つまり、生命体としての個体とその存続の限界、人間の霊的超越性と肉体性の限界は、死滅し消滅する物質的存在が引き起こす悲の循環性というか、悲のダイナミズムを体現させてきたのです。またそれは、生と死、そして生殖する二つの性の連関の坩堝の中で、エロティシズムを伴いながら次第に超越的な次元へと吹き上がる契機ともなったのです。生と性と聖と死の連関運動が、われわれの生の深奥を、また存在を保証する唯一のものとなったのです。

#### 言語と供犠

われわれ人間は、言語的な生きものであると同時に生身の肉体的生命を持った存在でもある。そしてその両極が交錯するような生存形式を古代から持続してきたわけです。さらに両極が過熱しスパークし、存在の深部に下降してゆくような次元が現れ、その時空こそが、われわれにとってのいちばん根源的な領域を形成している。そして私はそれを、古代からおこなわれてきた、生命の破壊を伴う宗教的行為に見るのです。ではなぜその行為を根源的と看做するかといえば、それはこの現象がどの宗教に始まりにおいてもみられること、また、世界のどの文化の深部にも偏在する、人間の霊的な属性であること、以上の理由からです。そしてそれこそが、一般的に供犠として定義付けられる、共同体内に内在する行為に他なりません。

供犠は、超越的のみなされる存在に対して犠牲をささげる共同体的儀式行為です。具体的には、選ばれた同胞の殺害行為として、あるいは供犠当事者の身体毀損行為として現れます。そして次第に代理としての動物の破壊へ、さらに工作された人形や動物の像あるいは物体へと移行して行くのが一般的です。そしてすべては神的なるものとの関係性において実行されるのです。

一方、このような、生命を破壊するという非日常的な儀式空間は、古代的心性にいろどられた残虐行為ではありますが、そのポテンシャルは現代においても失われているわけではなく、それはかたちを変え、場所を変えて、ひそやかに出現し、その意味は実現されているのではないかと思います。装いは解体され、ふつうには目

に見えない状態で、風習ですら無く、一種の野蛮性をともないながら、予測を裏切るような形に変容し、いろいろな場所に噴出しているのではないかと考えるのです。

この供犠の謎は、人々を詠もなく、狂おしく惹きつけるのですが、その謎は最終的にはその両義的なパワーをもってわれわれを引き裂き、一様な解釈を拒絶して立ちほだかり、われわれをして沈黙の場所に呪縛するほかないものでもあります。

#### 作品の文脈

このあたりで気分をかえて、私自身の作品の文脈に即した話をしたいと思います。

まずこの写真の作品(英訳頁-図版1)は、今まで話してきたような考え方の発端になるような作品だと考えています。1978年に所沢の野外展のために制作した作品です。制作当初、私はこの写真にあるようなものとは全く別のプランを持っていました。しかし、試行錯誤を繰り返してゆく過程で、いくつかの偶然も加わって、最終的にこのようなかたちになりました。まず、地面に直径2m位の穴を掘り、その中心に器を埋める。そして、器に水を満たす。この作業を繰り返し、私は複数の縦穴を掘りました。

私は、その作業を続けながら、ある幻想にとらわれていきました。それは、あたかも遺跡を発掘するようなイメージ、また同時に水という物質を考古学的な埋蔵遺産として発掘しているようなイメージでした。私はそうした錯覚にとらわれていったのです。いま満たしたこの水は単なる水ではない。H<sub>2</sub>Oとしての水ではない。むしろ文化的に、人間の歴史と記憶が堆積する地層から湧き出してくる特別な水、むしろ文化的な水、あるいは水という物質に仮託されて蓄積されてきた意味の集合、象徴の集合、まさに集合的な無意識の表象としてみえてきたのです。私は突然現れた幻想、あるいは世界の見え方の角度に、自ら訝り驚きました。世界のみえかたがぐるぐると回転し、眩暈のような気分襲われました。古代から蘇った表象としての水を考古学的に発掘したと感じたのです。

そしてそれと同時に、もうひとつの重要なことを私は思い出しました。それは、私の生まれ故郷のある仏教寺院の、ある遺物についての記憶でした。その寺院には一つ石が残されていて、それは五重の塔の礎石だといわれる大きな石でした。私は、この石のことを思い出したのです。礎石には塔の芯柱が埋め込まれていたとされる円形の穴が掘られていました。いまでは建物も柱も無くなっているにも関わらず、この石だけ残り、穴にはいつも雨水が溜まっています。子供のころいつも遊んでいた場所なのですが、先ほど述べた作品を作った時、この礎石のことを思い出したわけです。

さらに、この礎石の下には少女が埋まっているという伝説がありました。日本には、建物を作るときに、建物を強固な永遠の建築にするため、一種の生贄として柱の下に少女を埋める風習があります。迷信というかアニミズムを背景にした考え方なのですが、確かにこの下には少女が埋められていたはずだと…。私はその伝説を思い出したのです。そのときに私の中で、断片的で無意識的なイメージが、一定の流れを伴って繋がった気がしました。柱が無くなったこの穴に溜まった水、その水というものと、この死体のイメージが垂直的に結びあうような、一種の直感に満

ちた文脈というか、連続性が成立したのです。その水と、穴の円環形態と、死の表象が、意味として垂直に直列したのです。

人類学的な意味としては、少女を犠牲として生き埋めにする行為―日本では人柱というのですが―も、供犠の一種だと言えるのではないのでしょうか。だが、その供犠された少女の上の礎石にたまった水。それは明らかに、ただの水ではない。そこに現れた事象は、現れた記号を深層の思考において読み込めと囁いているように思えたのです。その文脈においては、この水も先ほど述べた作品の水も、H<sub>2</sub>Oとして規定される化学物質ではなく、表象性の文脈において現れる―それはアジアや日本の文化に限定されたものではなく、ヨーロッパにも、アフリカにも通底するものだと思いますが一意味の総体としての水なのだと。水というものは、一つの象徴的物質として使われ、扱われる場合が非常に多いわけですが、そうした意味を含みこんだ物質ではないかと考えたのです。

私はその後、作品に水を使用するとき、つまり美術の文脈において水を用いる時、その水が歴史的に持っている背景、意味性、その他文化的要素を無視しては成り立たないと考えるようになったのです。そして、以降、私は水を使うことが多くなりました。

（その後、生まれ故郷の仏教寺院の礎石と人柱の話は無関係であり、近隣の城の建設時における伝説と、記憶が混同されていたことが判明した）

円環について
これは水を使ったイベントです(英訳頁-図版2)。丸い器を、地面にサークル状にいくつも埋めて、水の円環を作りました。これは、一日だけのイベントだったのですが、朝から作業を開始して日没までかかり、解体して帰ったのは夜でした。先ほど穴の作品の話をしました
が、それを引き継いで、ここでは水による円環を作りました。このとき初めて円環構造の作品を作ったのです。さらに数カ月後、画廊において、今度は古い電信柱を用意し、それもまた円環状に並べ設置しました。木の柱による円環でした。柱の上部を彫り貫き、その頂点に水を満たして、ちょうど視線の位置に、柱の上部に貯められた水が円を描き、サークル状の水面になるように…(英訳頁-図版3)。

この作品の展示作業中、私は、ある身体的な奇妙な経験をしました。円環の外と内を出入りしながら仕事を続けるうちに、円環の中心に近付くにつれて、微妙な力が働き始めるような感覚を覚えたのです。たとえてみるなら、中心にゆくに従い垂直的な力が上方と下方に突き抜けて行くといった感じでした。これはまったく錯覚かもしれないと思いましたが、それよりも、円環が持つ形態的な力ではないかという考えに強く捉えられてゆきました。そういう場の持っているちから、いわゆる磁場なのではないかと…。

さらに、その作品を制作した時期に、私はあるニュースに出会いました。それは、日本海沿岸の入り江において、縄文時代の円環状の構造をもった遺跡が発掘されたというニュースでした。そのかたちは、先に述べた円環の作品とほぼ一致していました。その後、縄文時代の遺跡を再現したレプリカを制作しました。直径1mぐらいの栗の木を半分に割って、円環状に並べた、イギリスのストーンサークルとも共通した建造物でした。

そのとき私が思い出したのは、私が以前に感じた円環がもつ磁場のようなちからでした。もしかしたら作品の中心で経験した、

垂直的なある種の力というものと、縄文時代の円環構造の構築物に仮託された意味とが、どこかの点で繋がっているのではないかと…。

発掘調査を続けていくうちに、何回にも渡って同じ場所に同じものが繰り返し建て替えられていることが解りました。木は朽ちてなくなるものですが、なくなるとまた同じ場所に建て替える。そういうことの繰り返しのなかで、何回も同じ場所に同じ円環が作られたのだと思うわけです。しかもこの円環構造の構築物というものは、周辺に散在する竪穴式住居などの普通の住居とはまったく違う柱跡を持っていて、しかも集落の中心あたりにある。ということは、ここが、ある特別の場所であったのではないかという推測にゆきつくわけです。遺跡としては柱だけが腐らないで発掘されて、その上は腐ってしまっ存在しない。だから上の方がどの程度の高さだったのか、どういう構造だったかということは定位できないのですが、でも私としては、その建造物およびそれが建てられていた場所が、特別な、象徴的な祭祀空間というか儀式的空間だったのではないかと考えるわけです。そこで祭祀的な行事が行われていたのではないかと…。

また発掘調査において、その環状遺構をさらに掘り下げていった結果、そこからは生物の骨が大量に出土したのです。これは極めて興味深く重大な発見であり、私を強く惹きつけました。まず、無数のイルカの骨、そして人骨、そしてトームポールのような様相をした木の彫刻などでした。その事実からわかるのは、石器時代後期のその地域の生活の中で、まずはイルカが重要な蛋白源であったとこと、もう一つは、その環状遺構のあった場所が、イルカの骨の捨て場所。たとえば貝塚のような場所であったらうということです。しかし最近の考古学的知見においては、多くの貝塚が単にゴミ捨ての場であったという以上に、貝の供養も含めた特別のトポスを形成していたのではないかという説が有力になっています。だからこの場所もまた、イルカを媒介とした祭祀性というか、超越的なレヴェルとのコンタクトを目的とした場所。垂直的に時空を貫く特別の場所であったのではないかと思うわけです。その文脈の流れにあって、こういった不思議な彫刻も、作られたのだろうと。

この遺跡は「真脇遺跡」と呼ばれていますが、真脇だけではなく、その遺跡に近接する日本海沿岸各地、例えば新潟、富山、北陸、それから滋賀県を跨ぐ地域にも、同じ構造をもった遺構が集中的に発掘されています。現在まで発見されているのはおそらく10数箇所くらいだろうと思うのですが、おそらく他の場所の地底にも、遙かに多くの同じような環状木柱列構造の遺構が眠っているはずで、いずれさらに発掘されていくだろうと思います。そしてそのあかつきには、縄文時代の原始宗教形態の輪郭がもっと明らかにされてゆくのではないかと考えます。

ところで、日本列島の東北地方に行くと、石の円環遺構が多くなってきます。そして、北日本のいわゆるストーンサークルは、土地の有力者の墳墓であることが明らかになってきています。だから、その用途の明らかになっていない、北陸近辺だけに集中する環状木柱列遺構も、何らかのかたちで死にまつわる祭司的的目的をもっていたと考える方が無理が無いのではないのでしょうか。その下にイルカの骨が出土しているという事実からしても、そこは、イルカの



縄文時代の環状木柱列遺構。このように、環状木柱列の中心に、イルカの骨が捨てられていた。

骨に表象される死の世界がひろがる空間であったという仮説は不自然ではないはずです。おそらくその場所は、非日常的な聖なる場所であった。さらに言えばそこは、イルカをめぐる供犠の場であったと…。

また、環状木柱列に囲まれた聖なる場所性は、構造的には空洞性を内包する空間でもありました。空洞とは円環に囲まれた内側の場のことです。そして円環の内側とは、中央に向かって磁場が集約する特異な場所です。だから、前に触れたように私はその形態が現わす磁場としてのちからと、死、生、性、暴力、破壊といった祭祀的表象が循環する場が、深く関連付けられて成立しているだろうと考えるのです。その場は共同体の垂直的表象性へと収斂してゆき、聖性に至りつく場所であり、形態だったということです。ここに、私のすべての想像力は集約してゆくわけです。

空洞性の偏在・東洋と西欧
かの空洞の場が生と死をめぐる祭司的な非日常の場であったという前提にたてば、続いてそこから導き出される解釈としては、その場所がかなりの確率で、供犠が展開される場であったということです。だから供犠は、空洞が内包する力動性と表裏一体だったと考えられるのです。存在の深みに降りて行くことと、生身の身体が開かれてゆく強度は比例します。だから、その深みに降りていった場所こそが、供犠という次元が開かれる場所であるといえるわけです。でも見逃してはいけないのは、いかほどに身体的レヴェルへと開かれた供犠の場であるとしても、そこもまた厳粛に、言語的構造の中にしか存在しないという側面なのです。供犠もまた人為的、文化的行為に他ならないということなのです。ゆえにわれわれの、存在の深みに降りてゆく構造的もまた、常に言語というものを抜きにしては考えられないということです。だから、仮に表層的にはいかに非言語的な世界に見えようとも、その本質は言語的な出来事でしかありえない。たとえば人間意外の言語をもたない動物が供犠のような複雑な習俗を持ち得ないというのが、その反証に

縄文時代の環状木柱列遺構。このように、環状木柱列の中心に、イルカの骨が捨てられていた。

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なるだろうと思います。ゆえにそれは、人間の言語的側面が現わす荘重なる幻像だといえるのです。

供犠という風習は、言語が、ある種のシステムを作り上げてゆく過程で派生してきて、生命との関係においてどうしても発現せざるを得なかった必然性を、どこかに持っているのだと私は確信しています。その時空間に、空洞性が現れてくる。同時に、火と水そして土と空気というような、四元素といわれる原初的な物質が直接的にかかわってくる。人類の発生以来、常に付き従い関係してきた物質、そして環境。それらとの対応関係のなかで、われわれは古代からの世界観を蓄えてきたと考えるわけです。

日本文化、あるいは東洋文化の特徴は、その中心に空洞をかかえた文化だと、たびたび指摘されてきました。例えばロラン・バルトは、日本の首都である東京の中心には皇居という空洞が存在すると指摘しています。また、日本のアニミズム宗教である神道は、その御神体(神そのものではなく、神の表象としての依代)に鏡を用いています。御神体とはこの宗教固有の中心的表象(鏡以外が御神体である場合もある)のことですが、それは普段は扉の向こう側にあって、その丸い両面鏡はひっそりと隠されている。鏡は、周りをすべて写し込み自らを空虚にして、空洞そのものとなりきる不思議な事物です。ロラン・バルトは、それが日本文化を表象するかたちであり、加えて、なかに空洞を擁することで中心を不在化した、固有の構造性を体現しているのだと指摘するのです。

しかし、それに反して西欧文化というものは、中心に共同体の核としての一神教の神が場を占め、そこが中心となってすべては同心円状に秩序つけられている、ヨーロッパ文化のすべてはそこから始まっている、そういう構造だと彼はいつています。確かに比較すればその構造的差異は明らかだと思います。でも私は、中心の空洞性は、ヨーロッパ文化の中にも潜在しているのではないかと考えています。たとえばイギリスのストーンサークル。あるいは円形競技場などにみられる表象性。また、ヨーロッパの街路の構造、そ



大友啓史

大友啓史の「空の洞」

れは正方形の広場を中心に同心円状の広がりを持ちますが、その円の中心の広場には何もない場所がある、そこは空っぽの空間になっているのです。

それで、私はこのように考えます。つまり、基本軸としては東洋的構造と西欧的構造は、多神教と一神教に対応し、それは中心に空洞性をもつ文化と中心が超規範によって充填された文化として定義付けてもよいと考えます。しかしそうした次元をさらに下方に降りていった、人間の共同体の深層に連なるレベルにおいては、その円環の中心部に現れる空洞の力というものが存在し、そこにおいては東洋もヨーロッパも、その作用は同質のものとして共通しているのではないかと思うのです。

大友啓史の「空の洞」

作品における供犠（1）
ところで私の作品のひとつに、空洞性を焼くというコンセプトを持った作品があります（全頁写真）。もちろん空洞性を焼くなどとは論理矛盾であって、物質として実在しないものを焼くことなどできません。だからこれはあくまでも象徴的、比喩的言い方ではありますが、その作品のタイトルは「EPI TAPH」というものです。空洞を内包した円筒状の形態で、木材によって制作されています。直径は4m、壁の厚みは0.6m程あります。それを原野に組み上げてオイルをかけて焼きました。垂直に立った円筒形態は空洞を表象するものであり、同時に、墓碑を表象するものです。さらに、身体を表象するものでもあります。それに火をかけて焼くということは、空洞という、共同体の「聖なる場」としての記号を焼くことであり、同時に死の表象を焼くことであり、あなたと私自身を、そして死者に連続する身体を焼くこと、そして破壊し供犠することに他なりません。その行為のうちに働く感情、そして私の内に経験される感情をあえて言葉にするなら、それは、狂喜、悦楽、苦痛、熱狂、恐怖といった、相矛盾し、対立し、相反する多義性の泉としか言いようのないものなのです。

ともあれ、空洞といういわば「聖なる場」を焼くことは、神を焼くことに等しいといえます。さらには神の供犠に等しいといえます。この構図は、「供犠的身体毀損とゴッホの切られた耳」においてパティユが語るところの神の供犠に近接すると言えなくもない。そこを、パティユは、供犠のもっとも純粋な形態として評価し、自己自身の供犠という言いかたをしています。

供犠の純粋形態とは、供犠するものと、されるもの、そして供犠を執行する祭司という三者が一体化したかたちであり、また、神への供犠が神の供犠へと反転する時空でもあります。そしてその供犠に準ずるものとして、彼は供犠的身体毀損をあげます。ゴッホはゴーギャンへの贈与として耳を切り落としますが、本質のところゴッホが見続けていたのは、自己供犠者の表象としてその頂点に立つ太陽そのものでした。だから彼の晩期の絵は、その殆どが太陽に向かっています。ゴッホは自らの耳を供犠し太陽自体に向かって全存在を贈与し続けたのです。

太陽とは、自己を破壊し、自己を燃焼させ、自己を無償に贈与しつづける唯一の存在者の表象なのです。象徴的には、太陽は、供犠する者であり祭司であり、同時に供犠されるものでもある存在者なのです。そうした、太陽的存在へと同一化した者は、神へ供犠する者から瞬間的に神へと同一化し、そして神を供犠するものして反転する。天性の自己犠牲的宗教者であるゴッホは、最終的には、自己を供犠することによってはじめて麦畑の向こう側へと反転し、聖なる時空へ消尽していったのだと言えるのです。そして空洞の供犠とは、同様の契機を孕んでいるものだと思うわけです。

#### 作品における供犠（2）

はなしは飛びますが、この作品系列の背景には、学生時代の人体彫刻制作時における、ある体験が関与しています。関与に気付いたのは後年になってからなのですが、その強い心的同質性というか連続性に深閑とした記憶があります。

当時、彫刻実習の粘土を用いた裸婦像制作の課題が難航していました。提出期限が迫っていたことと、裸婦像を制作することに疑義が湧き続けたことで、私は、粘土による制作を切り上げ、急遽、石膏の直づけ工法に切り替えました。その工法を説明しますと、まず鉄筋を溶接しておおまかなかたちを作り、そこに石膏を盛り付けてモデリングしてゆくのです。そのとき、石膏が鉄筋の隙間からもれないように新聞紙などをまるめて鉄筋の内側に詰め込んでいきます。そうしておいてモデリング作業を進めてゆくわけです。ここにおいてさらに、彫像の上半身と下半身の造形を統一できず、私は、上半身と下半身を切断してしまいました。

そのあとの工程としては、なかに詰め込まれた紙片を少しずつ除去していったなかを空洞にしてゆくわけですが、私はその手間を短縮するために、ガスバーナーの炎を内部に吹き込んで燃やしました。

結果として、紙が燃焼する時に発生する煤と、アセチレンガスの煤が彫像の内と外に蔓延し、結果的に、切断され黒こげになった、悲惨な人体ができあがったのです。その過程で、いつしか、生身の身体を火にかけ破壊しているような感覚に、そしてある種の情念に、私はとらわれていました。その粗暴な作業のなかで、歓喜と陶酔の気分浸されてゆく自分を感じていました。そして、造形芸術

としての人体彫刻制作の文脈では決して生きられることのない、まったく異質のリアリティーを経験していたのです。

同時にそのとき、恐れというか孤独な罪悪感のようなものも感じていました。自分がやっていることは、美術において実現させてはいけない行為であり、図らずも禁忌の場所に到達しようとしている。にもかかわらず私はそこに喜びをみていて、また、性的な快楽すら覚えつつあり、その状態が深々と恐ろしく見離されたものでした。

いまから思えば、これは供犠の時空において経験される何ものかと連続していると考えられるのですが、そのときはあまりの逸脱性に怯え、以降、そうした行為を封印してしまいました。

#### 現れとしての供犠

こうした、死と生をめぐる侵犯性、暴力性、性的快楽性、超越性、聖性にいるどられた時空は、今においても、あるいは過去においても、日常の閾を超えてゆく場所に、さまざまにかたちを変えてあらわれるだろうと思います。

たとえば日本で起きた「酒鬼薔薇事件」と呼ばれる、14歳の少年による犯行においては、被害者である10歳の少年の頭部を切断して、小学校の校門の扉の上に設置するという生命破壊が実行されました。犯行声明文において少年は、聖なる儀式としての作品行為だと表明しており、また、逮捕後の供述においては、「初めて勃起したのは小学5年生で、カエルを解剖したときです。中学一年では人間を解剖し、はらわたを貪り食う自分を想像して、オナニーしました」と語っている。また彼は、被害者の少年の「首を絞めながら勃起し、首を切断する瞬間、射精した」と、さらに、首を小学校正門に置いた時、「性器に何の刺激も与えていなのに興奮し、何回もイってしまった」と語っています。

ここには単なる少年犯罪を超えて、どこかで原始心性というようなものに、供犠の祖形というようなものにつながってゆく何かがある気がします。

たとえば古代中米の有名な習俗、古代のアステカの供犠の儀式。彼らは崇拜する太陽神が常に血に飢えていて、血を捧げないと太陽が輝きを止めてしまうと信じていた。そして彼らの祭司は、戦争捕虜や、犠牲として選ばれた共同体の成員を石壇の上に寝かせ、身体を押さえ、黒曜石の短刀を胸に突き立てる。そしてまだ鼓動をつづけている心臓を抉り出して太陽に捧げ、太陽に向かって咆哮する。また生贄の肉は共同体の成員によって食される。つまり私は、こうした、古代の儀式と通底してゆく何かがあるのではないかと考えるのです。

空洞説について
前半の「円環について」の項で述べたことに話を戻します。ここでは円環構造の内側にはたらく固有の力について語ってきました。そして日本海沿岸の縄文遺跡では木の柱を円形に並べて建てた環状遺構が複数発見され、その遺構の中央部は空洞を内包すると同時に、空洞直下の地層からは無数のイルカの骨が発掘されたことを語ってきました。またこの事実は、この遺構が霊的なものと垂直に連続する特別な場所であったことを示しており、さらに、こうした霊的な性格を持つ場所に、円環構造、あるいは空洞性の構造が導入されたのは、円環の内側にはたらく固有の力と何らかの関係を持っているのではないかとこのことを語って

きました。そして、言語、生命、供犠、円環、空洞といった諸要素が、存在への問いかけにおいて重要な意味を投げかけているのではないかと……。これが今回の話の終着点として私がイメージしているものです。そこで、最後に、「空洞説」なるものへと、向おうと思います。

先ず、縄文遺跡におけるイルカの骨の集積的発掘を、なぜ供犠と関連付けるかについて説明したいと思います。それはたとえば、イルカやアザラシなど、縄文時代の民と類似した海洋生物を食料としてきたエスキモーたちの生活形態、そして日本列島の北方において、縄文文化と重なる文化様式を近世まで続けてきたアイヌ民族の生活形態、それら二例の習俗を参照することによって、より鮮明に見えてくるものがあるのではないかと思うのです。

たとえばまず、エスキモー民族の生活形態に関してですが、それは、マルセル・モースが20世紀初頭に著した、「エスキモー社会―その季節的変異に関する社会形態学的研究」によって窺い知ることができると思います。もちろん縄文社会と直接的に結び付けるわけにはいかないのですが、機械力を使わない狩猟のなかで自然と戦うこと、あるいは自然と交感することにおいて、彼らは縄文社会との同質性を共有していたと推測することが可能なのではないかと思うのです。

そこにおいてとりわけ注目されるのは、エスキモー社会が、温暖な夏の期間と、暗く厳しい冬の期間のあいだで、連続性が感じられないほどにその生活形態を変容させるといふ、行動の特異性についてなのです。夏のあいだは、それぞれの家族は内陸の地域に分散し、気ままな家庭生活を営んでいる。ですが、冬になると彼らの家族構成は解体され、別の枠組みへと再編されてゆく。たとえば男たちは、海岸沿いに集結し、大きな共同家屋で集団生活を営むようになる。そこにおいて彼らは、共同住居に住みこみ昼夜を問わず熱に浮かされ饗宴を繰り返し、熱狂状態に陥ってゆく。モースは、惻惻と迫る詩篇のように美しい論考のなかで、その状態を、宗教的生活として位置付けています。彼らは毎日の集団的狩猟活動において継続的な命の危険に晒されており、それゆえに、宗教的熱狂に至り、なかばトランス状態に入り込むことで恐怖を克服し、狩猟に出かけてゆく。饗宴と祈りと狂騒と労働は、そこでは分かちがたく結びついており、また、個人の資産も、捕獲した獲物も、女性すらも個々の所有権は放棄され、共同社会成員によって共有される。しかし、共有されながら所有権をめぐる争いはない。そこには狩猟の危険への恐怖、命の危機への切迫がすべてに先行しており、熱狂に入り込むことで、はじめてそれは、のり超えられるものとなるわけです。

しかし冬が終わる頃になるとその生活形態は自然に解消され、個別の家族生活に戻ってゆく。そして、これらの暮らしのその先に、縄文社会のイルカ漁のあり様が具体性をもって透けて見えてくるのではないのでしょうか。さらに、堆積したイルカの骨と宗教的感情の関係についても、平行して見えてくるのではないかと思うのです。

他方アイヌ民族は、イルカではなく、ヒグマを主要な蛋白源とする生活形態を継続してきました。彼らにとって、ヒグマは宗教的に特別な動物でした。その宗教的文脈において、彼らは、ふだん常食するヒグマとは別に、小熊を捕獲し時間をかけて丁寧に育ててゆくわけです。だから、自分たちが食べるものより上等の食料を与え敬



い育ててゆき、充分に育ったのを見計らい、共同体は祭儀を開きます。祭壇を作り、そして、人の輪の中で心をこめて成長したクマを殺してゆく。集団で屠殺し、頭部を切り落とし祭壇に祀り、祈りをささげます。その後、肉、内臓、脳ミソを含めすべての部位が共同体の成員に分け与えられ、全員によって食される。そして皮ははがされ保存されるのです。

この祭儀の意味するところは、超越的なものとのコンタクトだろうと思います。たとえばアステカ族が太陽に気使い犠牲者の心臓をささげたように、ここでは共同体の神に対して、クマの狩猟拡大の祈願とクマへの感謝を込め、大切な犠牲が供される。その殺戮は、神的なるものと連続するための祈りであり熱狂であり、供犠であったのです。だからここにおいて見てとれる心的状況と北陸の縄文社会にみられる心的状況は、同じ縄文的心性を濃厚に引き継いだ共同体的行為であり、それらは互いに重なり合うと判断できるのです。

ただ、エスキモーとアイヌの例においては円環構造や、空洞性は具体的には現れてはいません。でも仮に、エスキモーやアイヌの例に現れる非日常的な時空間の在り様が日常の時空構造を反転した世界の現れであるとするなら、その供犠の祭儀の時空間は明らかに外側からは不可視な、空洞の内に隠された領域であることは間違いないと言えるわけで、空洞性そのものはそこにも内在されていると考えても良いのではないのでしょうか。

供犠とはなにかについて、いくつかの角度から語ってきましたが、それが現在においてもなお、永遠の謎であることには変わりはありません。ですが、強引さを承知でいえば、供犠とは次元の転換をもたらすための、仮想としての心的装置ではないかと考えるのです。供犠の属性として在る暴力性、残虐性は、限りなく奥深い無の彼方に吸引されてしまいかねない心的次元を反転させて、こちら側の可視的世界まで引き上げてくる一種の暴力装置なのだと。聖なる次元とは、ふだん禁忌としての共同体に生きられていない部分

を、共同体のこちら側に再生させてくる時に体験される、恐怖と歓喜に染め上げられた発現性なのだと。つまり、共に死に、共に生かされる心的共同体験の噴出なのではないかと思うのです。

こうしたレベルはいわゆる比喩的なイメージとしてしか伝えられないものなのですが、世界が反転されてくるその過程の構造は、時空の内側では可視的であるとしても、外側から見た場合には不可視そのものであり、何もないもの、つまり空洞として知覚されるだけの領域なのです。そこには具体に見える物は何もなく、共同体のある場所において、ある磁場の感覚として、暗黙に認知され示唆されるだけの時空でしかないのです。

これまで、主に日本の中に現れる空洞性について語ってきましたが、先ほども申し上げましたように、西洋の文脈においてもそれは潜在していると私は考えます。そのなかでたとえば、イエス・キリストの在りようも、供犠と空洞性という文脈において読み込まれるべき構造性を擁し、われわれに示唆をもたらすものだと思います。イエスは、十字架上で処刑されたわけですが、これは明らかに供犠的性格を帯びたできごとだと言えます。さらに、この供犠は、生前から奇跡を行い注目されてはいたが市井に埋没した存在であったイエスを、真の意味での聖なる存在へと転化させるための、密やかな機構として働いたとすら思われるのです。つまり、イエスは当初から聖人ではありましたが、こちら側の世界に留まる、いわばありふれた存在でした。でも、処刑を契機として、イエスはこちら側からは姿を消し、向こう側の世界に向けて、はじめて真に出現を果たしたと言えるのではないのでしょうか。かの、イエスの十字架上の処刑は、イエスを真の唯一無二の聖なる存在へと復活させることに寄与した、そう言えるのではないかとと思うのです。

イエスが処刑されて不在になること、それはイエスのいた場所が空洞になることです。そしてそこが空洞になることによって、残された使徒たちの思いはその空洞に吸引され始める。彼らは空洞に

むかって言葉をなげかけ自問自答し、さらに空洞性そのものが、その自問の運動を促進し、加速させてゆく。その過程において使徒たちの自発的な思想は熟成し成就し、結果的にはいくつもの福音書というものが書かれていくわけです。まさにそのとき、キリスト教の体系化は始まったと言えるのではないのでしょうか。だから福音書が立ち上げられてくるエネルギーというものは、イエスの不在、空洞の出現によってよりいっそう加速されていくものであったわけです。

また、この復活の物語と並行して、私はタルコスキーの「ストーカー」におけるゾーンの存在を思わざるをえません。ゾーンはイエスの不在と並行して読み込まれる時、それははじめて、空洞性について多くの具体的なイメージを提供してくれるのではないのでしょうか。

この映画は多くを語る作品ではありません。ある場所が現れますが、ここがどういう場所であるかは明らかにされない。しかし何らかの事情によってそこは立ち入りが禁止されており、禁忌の場所として閉じられている。隕石の落下か、それとも宇宙からの来訪か、何かが起ったらしきことを暗示させる場所は、ただゾーンと呼ばれる異界として静まりかえっている。しかしそこには無名の道案内人が潜り込んでいて、どうやら非合法的に侵入を希望する者を案内するらしいのです。

ではこのゾーンなるものは立ち入ろうとする者にとって、また、無名の者たちを道案内しようとするこれもまたひとりの無名者にとって、何を意味しているのだろうか。この映画においてはそのことに関してなにひとつ明かされはしません。われわれはひたすら堂々めぐりの思考に促されるのみで、やがて、このゾーンと呼ばれる領域が、期待される解答や事物を何ひとつもたらすことがなく、ただ単に意志を持たない空洞そのものではないのかという問いと思考に導かれてゆきます。

ゾーンは表象としての空洞であり、無為の空洞なのだと思います。ゾーンの中心には人間が切望する願いをかなえる「部屋」が存在することが示唆される。思うことが実現してしまうという契機は、ある意味で奇跡であり秘跡であり、聖なる中心を想起させるものです。ゆえに、そうした中心に向かう力動性を内包するゾーンなる場所は、われわれが通常に暮らす日常の世界からは隔たった不可視の場所であって、ある場所を、ある共同幻想のもとで指し示すことにおいてのみ、始めて現れ出る時空ではないかと想像されるのです。それはあたかも、意識から隔てられた個人の想念を、可視的な事物として現実化するソラリスの海と同様に、識閥下の共同体の想念を埋火のように輝きださせる場所、つまり日常から排除された幻想が集約する場所なのではないのでしょうか。そして、道案内人に連れ戻されて元の場所にもどった侵入者はなにひとつ変化していない自分に気付く、でも、ゾーンなるものの本質は、禁忌を犯して内部を視てしまったものを許すはずはありません。なぜならその帰還者は、すでに自己を供犠したものと等価だからです。

ゾーンは、あるいは空洞性はどのような意味においても、こちら側の世界に暮らす成員の侵入を許さないものであり、唯一、その外側から共同体の成員によってさし示されることにおいてのみ現われる、特異な場所性なのだろうということです。

仮に、この空洞性の本質を、彫刻作品として完全に実体化できるならば、それは究極の彫刻ということになるだろうとおもいます。でも同時に、皮肉なことに、そのような作品は美術という領域においては、不可視のものであらざるを得ません。その意味で、空洞性の彫刻とは観念の内にもみ出現する彫刻であって、現実的には不可能性に閉ざされ、たとえば可能態としてのみ位置付けられる最終彫刻というほかありません。ゆえに、一人の美術家にとって、存在とは、この最終彫刻という想念というか幻影に、執拗に拘わり続けることにおいて始めて仄見えるかもしれない何かなのだろうと思います。

## MASAO OKABE 岡部 昌生

Text as presented during the symposium Existence at Setagaya Art Museum in Tokyo, Japan, 2 April 2008

Text edited: February 2009



*Masao Okabe (\* Japan, 1942) creates an awareness of our cultural history by showing this history through the technique of frottage: by rubbing with a pencil or crayon over paper, he brings forward the texture of the object underneath.*

### In Touch with Cities—Rubbing Hiroshima

Pencil and paper, this simple and elemental method, is what I used to get into touch with cities. I put paper on the irregular street surface, and using pencils and crayons I rubbed over the paper and I got this intriguing feeling of surprise, like the shape itself was going through the paper and emerging above. I think, also the recollection of memories came with the sense of touch being transmitted through my fingers. Only through the movement of my hand did the shape appear, and at the same time, by the act of me moving, I myself was transferred on the paper. These two factors connected to create the appearance on the paper. By my hands, the form was transferred, recorded, and transmitted: this is the frottage technique. It is similar to the Oriental tradition of ink impression (拓本), which was a very popular method of old typography and print technology.

I have been working for the last thirty years with this technique. By using this method I have made rubbings of many cities. They are traces of the forms of the cities and traces of the activities of people's lives. Places where layered deposits of the happening of time and traces of history have been engraved. For me, in my art work, I have brought the past to the present in Paris, Rome, Venice, Lyon, Noosa in Australia, Taipei, Kwangju in Korea, and many parts of Japan, but I would say my life work was born in Hiroshima.

I had been asked by the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art in 1986 to make a work with the theme of 'Hiroshima'. It seemed that the museum people were interested in my art by seeing my project from the streets of Paris in 1979, and they approached me with the suggestion for the project *On the streets of Hiroshima*. But I was strongly concerned about making a work with Hiroshima as topic. As a person who had not experienced the bombing of Hiroshima, could I create art work with Hiroshima as the theme? For my answer, I had to recall my memories of experiencing the air strikes during the war. I was born in Nemuro, at the tip of the eastern end of

Hokkaido, and just three weeks before the atomic bomb was dropped, there were air strikes for two days by aircraft carrier-born planes which came up all the way through Japan, up to the north. The war had also extended to the eastern cities in Japan. Eighty percent of my city was burned to the ground and we lost many houses. I was three years old at that time, and there were scenes of burning fire; it was my personal experience and it has stayed in me as memory. Without having my old memories inside me, I could not have gone to Hiroshima. After that, *After Hiroshima*, Hiroshima remained attached to me and has accompanied me through my lifetime and its feeling has stayed in me and I have felt the connection inside me because of my art having the theme of Hiroshima.

All over the streets in the city of Hiroshima, life and death are buried. The ruined city lies just fifty centimeters beneath the earth's surface. I thought the only way I would be able to deal with Hiroshima, the Hiroshima that had lost so many and so much through the atomic bomb, was to make a direct rubbing of the street with a pencil on a boiling hot summer day.

I made the work *Danbara area* (about 2000 meters from the hypocenter). This is an area where there were survivors from the bomb, because people were living very close to each other in that old part of the town and it was within the shadow of the mountain. I took the frottage from that area, slowly going towards the center of the explosion. I called it *Stroke on the Road in Hiroshima* (1987-1988). It was a big project and it took two years to finish.

Because the technique of frottage is simple and direct, by using this work concept you can bond with the city itself. I could develop the collaboration and a workshop with the citizens in the city. With the concept and technique of myself and while sharing the creativity with the people, I could look into their history and their lives from that region and city. With my work I could expose the connection with time and the memories of the past. The best thing I was able to do is that I could share with the people the pleasure of touching their city by hand.

In the summer of 1996, I had a workshop, the *Hiroshima Memoire 96* (Hiroshima city museum of Contemporary Art), with 90 people, adults and children living in Hiroshima. The workshop consisted of two different works from two places in Hiroshima.

One piece was the Hiroshima memorial park, near the A-Bomb Dome, the monument for the A-bomb victims; the approach to this place is a street, a hundred meters long, paved with flagstones. I did a rubbing of it using red oil chalk, touching the ground with my hand, thinking of the connection with what lies underneath.

The second piece was the platform of the former Ujima Station. That was the last station before reaching the military port, the Ujima harbor, where there were 560 meters of remains: it was large. In doing this project I thought of the assailant and the victim. *After fifty one years of Hiroshima* was a collaboration with the participants in order to think together about the meaning of Hiroshima.

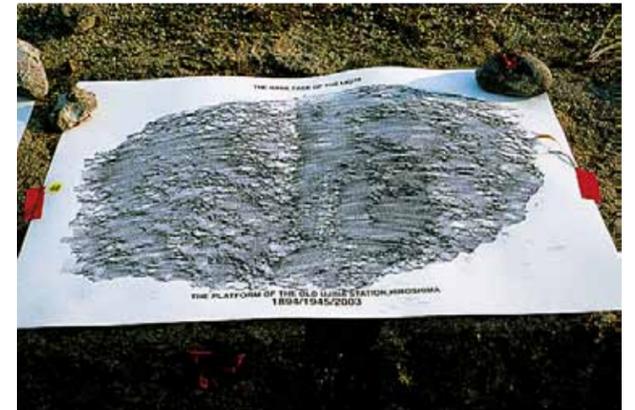
It was the summer school holiday time and the weather was boiling hot. I had many children who participated, and spent a magnificent time with them. Traces we took from two places touch Hiroshima. They were made by our hands and became print art on a huge scale, but for me it was not just a print, it memorized each participant. Since then, my project, workshop and exhibition in Hiroshima, has begun a life of its own, supporters gather together and have started the project *Rubbing Hiroshima, the ten thousand people's workshop*, and this art project is still continuing and active.

In 2007, at the 52<sup>nd</sup> Biennale di Venezia, I exhibited works from Hiroshima at the Japanese pavilion; I displayed them on the walls of the space. I also presented the stones from the Ujima Station platform. My exhibition describes history, shown by the collected stones from the place and by recording the time of past through frottage on paper, 'Making art with the body'.

These stones are from the Kurahashi Island in Hiroshima. The whole island is made out of volcanic stones. Sixty-three years ago the inhumane nuclear fire burned on these stones, they became atomic bomb stone. This is the place where numerous soldiers and major weapons left to fight three big wars in Asia and, on August 6, 1945 it was also the place where the atomic bomb hit. It is like a symbol of the boundaries between the perpetrators and the victims of wars of all sorts. I stayed there for nine years. I faced these stones and I was rubbing their past by making the frottages. It turned out to be over 4000 pieces in all, 'The skin of Hiroshima'. I thought the audience of my Venice exhibition should get an impression of the traces of that place, and get caught up in its atmosphere.

Also, in the center of the exhibition space, I placed three tons of stones from the Ujima platform, which had been hit by the bomb, on a rusted iron exhibition stand and displayed them there.

I often heard, "This space does not need any explanation". The atmosphere of the place within that space went straight into the audience themselves. I had created a place for it, this exhibition is the memory of Hiroshima, *HIROSHIMA • 1945*, by seeing these two words printed in the work, the audience could understand it. They looked silently into the works and gently touched the stones. They went back to the entrance and after carefully reading the message from Commissioner Chihiro Minato by the 'Hiroshima damage map', *Is there a future for our past?*, they left the space; it was an impressive sight for me.



Also in the Venice pavilion, every day I had a workshop rubbing atomic bomb stones. This gave an even stronger impression to the people. The rough textures of the irregularly shaped stones were taken into their hands together with the sounds of the movement. We take things in with our body and we understand the subject. It was not showing the devastation of the atomic bombing at all, but the feelings from the hands, that solid feeling which recalled memories, quickened imaginations. I got the feeling that by my presentation in the Biennale space, I could share the history of that time.

I touched many traces of Hiroshima. Fragments of figures of the city emerged on paper. To record all the responses, the movement of my hand, the sound, the making visual of the past, that is my art and without the people of Hiroshima, I could not have achieved that art. One of the participants said, "Frottage is a universal act, through which we can come in touch with the presence of our life." The project *Rubbing Hiroshima* is a collaboration with citizens and the artist, we touch the memory of Hiroshima and the acts which we create can be inherited by the next generation.

Chihiro Minato said in his opening speech in Venice, "This exhibition is just one form of the question, the question which we probably can never answer. We only have the possibility to achieve ongoing questioning for hope and peace, we have to believe that our power remains to continue to question together with other people."

My art has a relation with the 'energy of others', I also could say, with the city. Traces of life of people from the city. These traces were made through repeating life and death. I touch with my hands the deeply deposited layers of memory and history, and I rubbed it out to reveal it. Through the response of the city transmitted through my fingers, I became excited and at the same time I was deeply moved, "the city itself is a huge place".

It was in 1979 that I had begun on the streets of Ivry-sur-Seine in Paris. Since then, for thirty years, I have focused my art on the 'energy of others', the 'response from others'. With the frottage-collaboration with the people of the city, I touch the city. By moving my hand, I create an opportunity to give eyes to the city, with its life and history. It is also sharing the pleasure of learning through art. I would like to say, "My art connects the people and the city."

## YUKO SAKURAI

Text as presented during the symposium Existence at Setagaya Art Museum in Tokyo, Japan, 3 April 2008

*Yuko Sakurai (\* 1970 in Tsuyama, Japan) grew up in Tokyo. Her work addresses traveling as an existential experience of time and space. Although she mainly uses oil paint on wood panels, she doesn't consider her work as painting, but rather as objects. It is always about her personal and emotional relations towards the places she has visited or where she has stayed for a longer period of time. Consequently she lives in various places in Europe and the USA.*

When I think about 'Existence', what comes to my mind first, is my own existence. My thoughts about the meaning of 'existence' are based on my consciousness about the passage of time and the acknowledgement that I, although living in the present, cannot detach myself from the past. My present being as a person is an accumulation of the past. The history of my own life and my surroundings and life environment are deeply related, that is my own existence and that is connected to the future in a natural way. Therefore, taking good care of my everyday life is very important in order to recognize the existence of myself.

Outside of Japan I often have been asked the meaning of my name: Yuko. The meaning of my 'Yu (由)' is freedom, 'Ko (子)' is child. Yuko means 'freedom child', freedom (自由) in Japanese means 'accept self', it means 'conforming one's own intention and original nature'. Therefore freedom (自由) is its own fundamental concept. It is not like there is freedom somewhere else and we can get it or we can do what we want. Freedom has to have a strong base within you, within oneself. Freedom, responsibility, self-consciousness. They all connect with existence. They mean that I have to face my own existence, and lead my own life, and to be aware of my own life. I want to connect with my art and I want to express myself in my work.

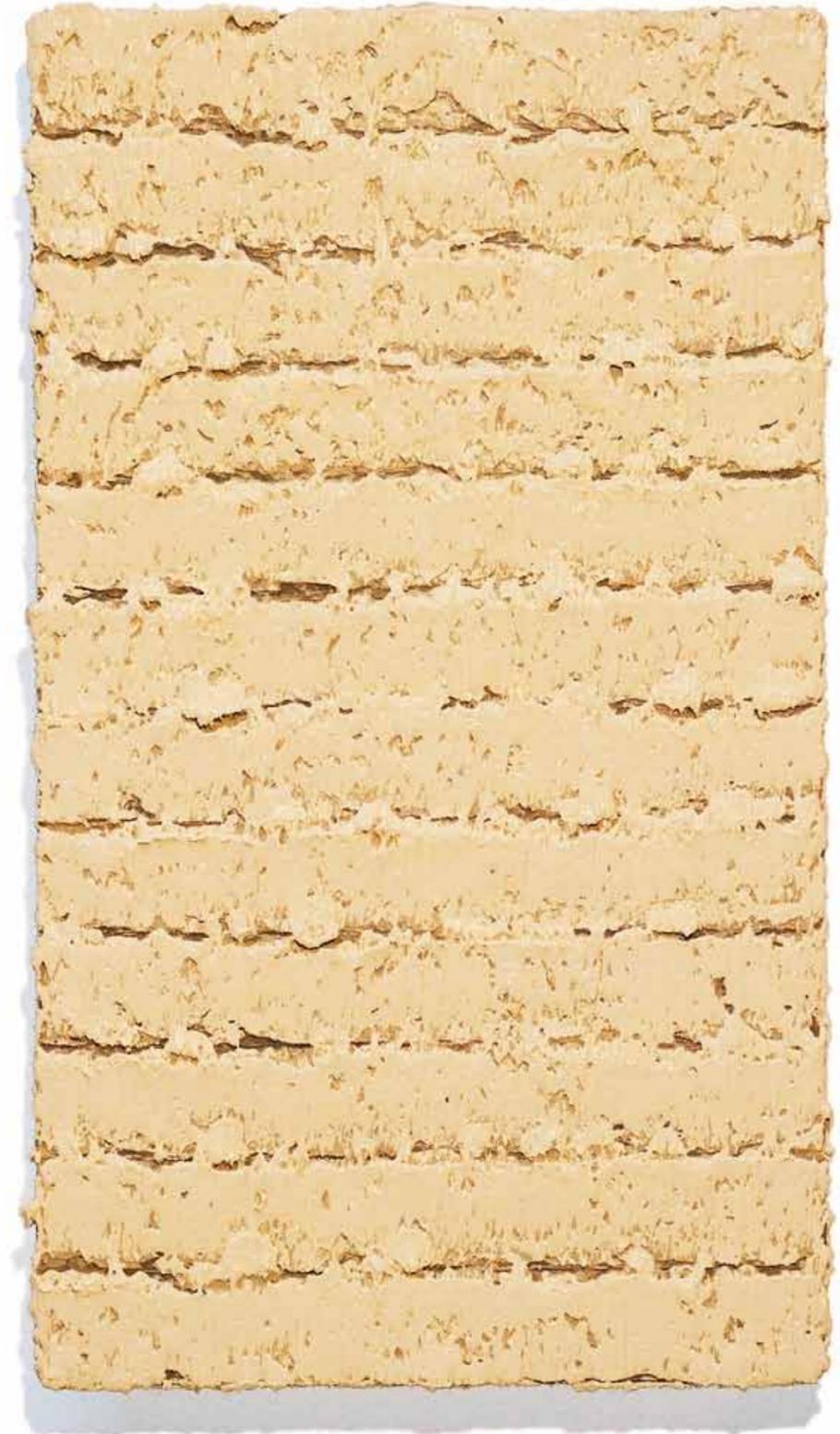
My existence, Yuko Sakurai, started in Setagaya, Japan, and several months later I was born in my parents' hometown of Tsuyama and I grew up in Machida, Tokyo. When I was young, each summer we left Tokyo and went to Tsuyama. My family spent their vacation there, at my grandparents' home in the countryside with cousins, uncles and aunts all together in the same house. The living environment in Tsuyama is the total opposite of Tokyo and the experiences there had a substantial impact on me, and contributed to who I am today.



Learning from nature, having a life with cousins from a completely different environment, sharing a room and everybody sleeping together on futons, living together, having a sense of sharing and receiving. Real life experiences, hearing and seeing the history of my grandparents, all these experiences which I can never adequately describe in words—this is what I gained every summer in Tsuyama when I was young. Even though I grew up in Machida, Tsuyama is my hometown, the foundation of my own existence and a base. My grandparents passed away some years ago, but whenever I go back to Japan, I always try to visit Tsuyama. From those childhood traveling and life experiences I learned how important it is to have interaction with people through traveling. Travel, adventure, meeting with people, and connecting with nature is now deeply tied to my existence, and has a strong influence on my life and the creation of my art works.

I have two main concepts in my art. One is 'self-expression' from the daily routine of my own life and my 'relation' to the circumstances surrounding me. The other comes from my traveling in which I have experienced 'impression', 'touching' and 'myself' which are all embedded in my work. Also the title of my work, I take from the name of the place, the name of the mountain, river, bridge, or street. For me, because I have a day-to-day life, going on a journey brings me much excitement. And from the journey I go back to the ordinary routine of life, I then rediscover more of the inspiration and the impression from the journey. So for me, both are very important to experience the journey. I can be conscious of subtlety, dedication and sensitivity by using all my senses, and I am able to move my feelings, going deep into nature and also experiencing the joy of the interaction with people. I create my art as a way of transferring with abstract language. It is my way of expressing my feelings.

Because my father is a sculptor, I grew up with art in a natural way and it was always close by. I was always interested in art, but I also learned that as an artist it is not easy to survive and I never had enough confidence, so I did not do it and instead I went into making French pastry. I think, one of the characteristics of the cuisine world is, when you eat, it's gone, so, it has a moment of excitement, and one can keep that taste only as memory. Art, however, can



keep the form a long time, the emotion stays present and one can have a dialogue with the object, there is a sense of coexistence.

The creation and respect for the essence and the materials—these are points where the art and the food world display similarities. To express my own existence in my work and share my activities with people, I felt that that has value. I wanted to create my own art work. To create my own language for expressing my feelings was to put my life into the art work by using my own form language and I began to feel very comfortable and felt fascinated. By creating my own work and continuously observing my work, gradually I developed a sense of myself. Because of my presence and my own consciousness in my work, I can share myself with the viewer for many years to come. I hope that I can transfer a little bit of my intentions to the people through my works. I am grateful to feel that my art will age over the years, as a part of myself, together with the person who has acquired my work.

The Japanese have a strong relationship with nature. We care about feeling the four seasons and that is deeply tied to life. We are excited to have contact with nature in our daily life and are moved by it and we also share those emotions with other people, I think that is beautiful and that is the beauty of being Japanese. Because I left Japan, I am looking into Japan from the outside. I feel I have a distance. For that reason I can now better understand the beauty of Japan.

During a trip through Japan in March-April 2008, I had an amazing Japanese cultural experience. Overnight, an ordinary local shopping street appeared transformed with lanterns and pink flags, it had changed completely to the 'Hanami' (cherry-blossom festival) mood, this also occurred in all other cities which I visited. There was a Hanami atmosphere everywhere. Not only on the national news where they were showing the cherry-blossom's weather front every day, and following the situation of the flowers already some months ahead of Hanami. I felt that we, as a whole country, were being influenced by the Sakura, the cherry-blossom. It had a big impact on me, especially after not having seen the Hanami season for nine years. The Hanami event in Japan is one of the biggest seasonal events in Japan. I realized very deeply on this trip that the cherry-blossom festival is so important. I understood that enjoying the life of Sakura (cherry-blossom) in those short moments, is the awareness of our existence. The beauty of magnolia, plum, peach, cherry-blossoms and the beauty of fresh young green leaves, I enjoyed each moment. I was moved by the short period in which the season seemed to change. Getting a sense of those changes of nature, while being conscious of its role in life, as in Japanese life, I felt a high sense of beauty. Japanese sensitivity may come from being conscious about the progression of the seasons, and this being in their life.

For a long time I have been interested in the work of Hamish Fulton and for our project I was able to visit him at his studio in England. In preparation for that visit I studied his work more deeply and by doing so, I found that Haiku have influenced his work. In the process of understanding his work, I also had to re-discover my Japanese culture. When I was at school I learned Haiku but only as memorization and I could not really understand the meaning of the Haiku poems, so, after my studies were finished, they

were gone from my life. But during my study of Hamish Fulton's work, the meaning of Haiku came to me in a very natural way. While creating my works, I realized I have similarities with Haiku and with the landscapes of Hokusai. It is just a different way of expressing oneself by traveling. I am discovering my own thoughts, my consciousness of my own existence by traveling, I felt that the simple and profound message in Haiku has a common point with my activities and creation.

I got the opportunity to interact with many interesting artists from all over the world. Getting in touch with the outside, and by having stimulation from others and sharing moments together, I became more aware of my own existence. I think thereby I started to find my own identity. I would like to continue creating art as a medium to express the consciousness of my existence. Therefore it is very important to interact and be stimulated by people, who show me the awareness of my own existence, as well as staying connected with nature, to stay aware of the existence of the universe, I would like to keep exploring, keep discovering existence.

In addition to this, I would like to say something about Time and Space. When I think about 'Time' as a subject in my work then, time is not just a single moment. For me time is continuity. I gain my experiences by traveling and by my surroundings of my daily life I use 'city', 'street' and 'area' for my work as subjects. Traveling gives me new experiences, new situations that are fascinating in my life, but I also center my daily life very much around my base. When I get back to my base, I can feel more strongly the differences between where I have been and my base. Awareness of beauty and appreciation for having been there on that location, I get those feelings because I came back to my base.

My work is not just an impression of a single moment, take for example my work: *La route vers la Bretagne*. My first destination abroad, in 1996, was France, which I visited again in 1997, and after that I have always had a very special feeling towards France. In the summer of 2004 I finally got a chance once again to visit France, Brittany. I started my trip by car in the Netherlands, driving towards France and the excitement stayed with me through the whole trip. All the impressions which I got on that 800 km [500 miles] road along the coast until I reached Brittany became a work. Measuring 120 x 220 x 10cm, [47" x 86" x 4"], warm yellow ochre colors contain my happiness, the peaceful feeling I had gazing out at the Normandy coast, the strong wind against my body, the smell of nature, etc..., six horizontal lines on the surface—this expresses the streets needed to get to the destination, up and down, the hilly atmosphere, the long way... continuity. I do not express myself just by giving a visual impression, I get impressions by using all my senses and it is that what I express in my work.

I care about time. When I see a chance before me, I try to take it, while using my full consciousness to get the maximum experience with all my senses. For this reason I can create work also from just a one-hour trip by bicycle, or just sitting on the backseat of a car. I do not decide upon the subject for my work until I get back from my trip. I put all information in myself when I am somewhere. Then after that, most of the time, I chose the subject at my



base in a relaxed situation and I look on the map at where I have been and follow all the streets I took. Until 2009, in Europe many decisions were taken in Heusden, and when I was in Miami, decisions were often made at the beach. When somebody asks me where my home is, I answer that I do not know yet, that I am still searching for my home myself. I do not feel as if Japan is my home anymore, I feel Japan is where my roots are, my origin, even my Japanese language has become halting. One day I would like to find my base, my space for daily life. Until now, I am open for all directions, I am still looking for my space. But I am enjoying my kind of gypsy life, to get all experiences from this world inside of me. I do not recollect merely beautiful visual experiences for my work. I express myself using all my experiences, how much impact they had on me and what I learned from these places. I also always include my own present time into my work. I do not make a work about where I have never been as a dream or desire... It is nice to have wishes in life, and make them happen, but I care much more about the reality of myself and of my existence.

I use the same subject in different times, but I do not repeat the same content in my work, not at all. I gain something more in me, in myself by time, and you get always different experiences even in the same place, also feelings change, the atmosphere is different each time. For this reason I have many works related to Heusden, Netherlands, since it was my base in Europe for several years.

My works express my development as a human being and I like this way of creating a time document. Perhaps I have this consciousness

about time because I am Japanese. Japan has four very beautiful seasons and by tradition we have many ceremonies and an appreciation for each season and each month of nature and also for season related food. I now live in a Western society, so I do not perform any of those ceremonies, but I still am conscious about them, and I carry the meaning of day and month in me. I think for the last couple of years now... finally I have felt I can go more back to my own culture. I feel much stronger who I am as a Japanese now, and it is a nice feeling to have, I can recognize different cultures and I can take it inside me from different directions. Before, I thought when I adopt other cultures, over time I will lose my personality as a Japanese, but it has not been that way. Now, I can say I am a Japanese woman who likes to travel the world, who likes to be in and out of Japan. Because of traveling to many different places, I can now, looking from outside, see more of the beauty of Japan. I can learn faster from new places, and I can see differences much easier, I gain my life experiences. How much you can see, you can hear, you can experience... this is all about your consciousness, and awareness of yourself, for your time.

For me, my work is part of myself, because it contains my deep and honest emotion. My work contains the time in which I made it, but when I see work that I made 5 years ago, I notice that it grew older over time. Yet feel that I see that time, I recall my experiences, the recollection of me, myself. My work is self-evidence, a time document. And I am aware of the present time in which I am living now, by seeing myself.

## 桜井 由子

2008年4月3日、世田谷美術館において行われたシンポジウム、「存在」についてのトーク

テキスト補足：2008年4月 - 2009年9月



1970年岡山県津山市生まれ、東京都町田市育ち。1999年より、海外をベースとして生活を始める。

「存在」について考えるとき、最初に頭に浮かぶのは、自己の存在です。私の考える存在とは、過去から現在に至るまでの経過を、意識した上で成り立ったものであり、切っても切り離せないものだと考えます。現時点での自分自身は、過去からの積み重ね、その歴史、生活環境、が深く結びついています。そしてそれが己の存在であり、自然な形で未来へ繋がっていると、私は考えています。そのため、日々の生活を大切にすることが、己の存在を認識するために、重要だと思えます。

私の名前の由来を、海外でよく聞かれます。由子の由は、自由の由。子は、子供の意味。フリーダムチャイルドです、と簡単に説明しますが、日本語では、自由とは、本来、「自らに由とする」、つまり「自らの意志や本性に従っている・さま」のことです。自由とは、自分におおもがあること。どこかにあってそれを手に入れるのではなく、自分の「おおもと」がしっかりと有る、ということなのです。父に授けられた、由子という名前は、非常に一般的な名前ですが、私は、自分の名前の由来を非常に光栄に思っています。そして、この、自由における責任感、自己意識は、存在と結びつきます。自分自身の存在としっかり向き合いながら、人生を歩み、それを自分の作品へと結び付けて、表現して行きたいと思っています。

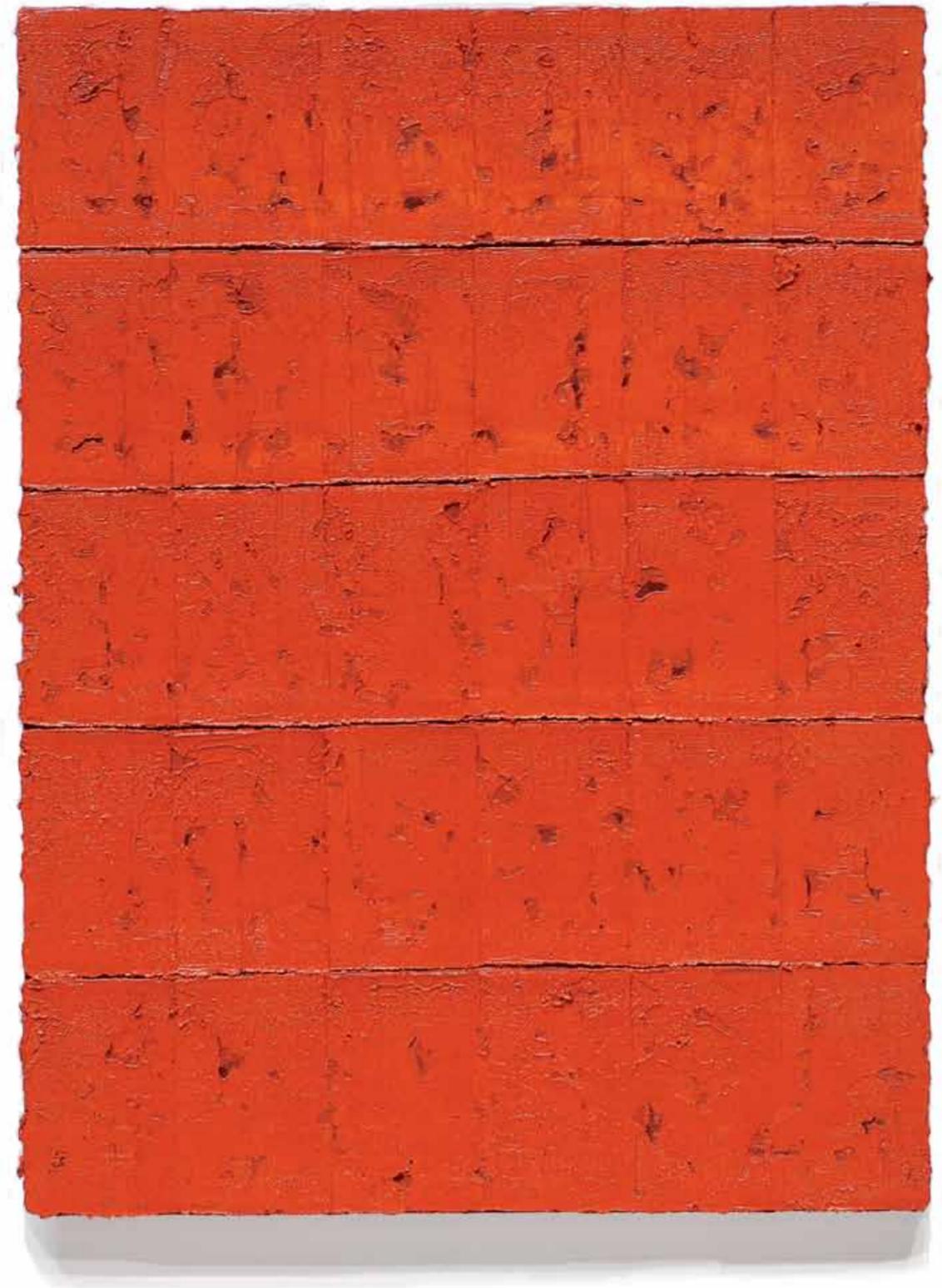
私、桜井由子という存在は、世田谷の経堂で始まります。母の胎内に宿り、母の実家がある岡山県津山市で誕生し、東京の町田市で育ちました。幼年期、私は、毎年夏に、家族と共に東京を離れ、その津山での片田舎の生活をいとこ達と過ごしました。いろんな所から集まった生活環境の違ういとこ同士と同じ部屋に布団を並べ生活を共にしました。そして彼らと共に自然から多くのことを学びました。その共有感、祖父母から受ける歴史の重み、この実体験は、言葉では表せない経験でした。この都会と地方という異なった生活環境が、私自身の成長にかなり影響を及ぼし、今の私となっています。そのため津山は、生活の場であった町田以上に、私にとっては、故郷であり、自分自身の存在の基盤、源と感じています。祖父母は他界してしまいましたが、帰国する際は、今でも津山を訪れようと、心がけています。そして、このような幼年期の旅の経験から、旅にでることが、私の人生にとって重要な事となって

います。旅、人との出会い、自然とのかかわりが、私の存在に深く結びつき、自分自身の生活と作品制作に密接な関係を生み出しています。

私の作品には、2つのコンセプトがあります。コンセプトの一つは、私自身の毎日の日常生活の中における「自己表現」と、自身を取り巻く環境における「関わり合い」を表現することです。もう一つは、旅の行く先々で、私が経験した「印象、感動」と「自分自身」を作品に挿入することです。作品のタイトルには、土地、山、川、通りの名前などを使用しています。日々の日常生活があるからこそ、旅に出ることへの興奮が生まれ、そして、旅から平凡な日常生活へ戻ること、旅での感動を再認識することができます。また、できる限り無駄なものを削り取り、質素に生活することで、些細なことを意識することができます。つまり、繊細で、かつ敏感な感覚を磨き続けることにより、物事に感動し、自然を堪能でき、人々との交流に喜びを得られるのです。このような経験を、私の自己表現手段、伝達手段として、作品を制作しています。

私にとってアートは、父が彫刻家であるため、常に、身近なところにありました。しかし、あまりにも身近にありすぎたため、芸術の道へは進まず、料理の道に進みました。芸術は好きだったのですが、自らの創造性に自信がなく、自立できるかを恐れ、その方向へ進むことができませんでした。そして、料理の世界、フレンチ菓子業へと進みました。しかし、フランスを経験したことのない私が、フレンチ菓子が作れるのか、本物を見たい、という疑問と願望が次第に高まり、1996年、フランス一ヶ月ラウンドトリップに出かけました。一日に一個その土地の郷土菓子を食べる事と、芸術に触れる事、この2点を目標に旅をしました。本場の味は、とても新鮮、しかし素朴。毎日発見を楽しみました。しかし、それ以上に芸術があまりにも生活と密着していることに感動し、その途上、フランスでアート活動をしているアーティストとの出会いから、アートの世界が、私自身の生活に、より身近なものとなりました。

料理の特質として、食べたら消えていくという瞬間的な感動が挙げられます。その後、その感動は、視覚的印象、味わいが記憶としてのみ残ります。一方でアートは、形を残すことができ、その存在感そのものへの感動があり、また、作品と対話ができるという共存感があります。私は、大変新鮮に、且つ自然にそのことを受け止めることができました。創造するという点、エッセンス、素材を大切にするという点では、アートも、料理も同じですが、自分の存在



を形に残すという表現方法、表現行為を人々と分かち合うことができるアートに、私は、非常に価値があると考えようになりました。自分にふさわしい表現方法だと感じ、自分の存在、自分の意識を、人々と月日を経て分かち合うことができると思いました。日本人は、自然との関わりが強く、季節感を重要視します。その関わり方は、生活にいまだに深く結びついています。自然と触れ合うことへの感動や、思いは、大変美しいものです。その思いに日本人らしさを感じます。海外に出たからこそ、日本の良さをより理解できるようになったと思います。

2008年3月中旬、約一ヶ月日本に帰り、素晴らしい日本の文化を実体験しました。普通の商店街が一夜にして、提灯やピンクの旗が掲げられ、お花見ムードとなるのです。どの町を辿っても、桜祭りの雰囲気を感じられました。桜前線のニュースだけではなく、国を挙げて、桜のために動いていることを感じました。これには、さすがに驚きました。桜祭りが、日本人にとって、こんなにも大きなことなのだと改めて感じました。私は、時々日本に帰って来てはいましたが、9年ぶりの日本での春となりました。モクレンの美しさ、桜の美しさ、新緑の美しさを堪能しました。短時間に移りゆく、季節。それを意識しながら、生活している日本人。その喜び、感動を周りの人と分かち合う日本文化、自然に対する美意識が高いと私は感じました。

私はヘーミッシュ・フルトンさんの作品に以前から興味を持っており、このプロジェクトのために、イギリスのアトリエを訪ねる機会を得ました。その準備で、フルトンさんについて勉強していると、彼の作家活動において、俳句の世界からの影響が大きいことを知りました。それと同時に、彼の作品を理解していく過程において、日本文化を再発見しました。学生時代に習い、暗記のためだけだった俳句は、私にとって忘れ去られていたものの一つですが、フルトンさんのことを、勉強していく中で、俳句を自然に受け入れられるようになりました。私自身、俳諧に関心があったとか、北斎の風景画に特に惹かれていたということはないのですが、自分自身の制作活動を続けていく中で、最近気づいたことがあります。それは、表現方法が違うだけで、自分自身を表現する俳家と、似通ったことをしているということです。旅を続けながらの自分探しや、存在の認識を、シンプルで、かつ奥深い言い回しを使用する俳句の表現方法に、私の制作活動との、共通点を感じています。

私は、幸運にも、世界中の素晴らしいアーティストと触れ合う機会を多く持つことができている。アーティスト、そしてアートに関っている人々との触れ合いの中で、また、彼らと一緒にプロジェクトに取り組む中で、私自身の存在をより認識するようになりました。自分が今まで踏み込んだことのない場所で、他の人と関わり合いそこで刺激をもらうことで、私自身を少しずつ見出し、私の存在を発見することができるようになりました。私は、ようやく日本の外でも、私自身の個性を表現できるようになりました。私は、私の存在性、存在のあり方を、これからも意識しながら制作活動を続け、私自身を表現し続けたいと思っています。そのためには、他者と刺激しあうこと、影響しあうことが、大変重要であると思っています。私自身の存在を気付かせ、そして導いてくれる人々との関係、自然との関わり合いは、より大きな次元で存在を意識するために大切だと考えます。私はこれからも、旅を続け、存在を発見し続けて行きたいと思います。

- 追加として、Time そして Space について -  
私が、Timeについて、考えた時、一瞬の時ではないと考えます。私にとって、時間とは、継続しているものです。

旅を重ねるうちに、私は様々な経験を積み、その日々の環境から発生することを、街、道、そしてその背景を、作品の題材として使います。旅は、旅ごとに、新しい経験を私に与え、新しい状況を生み出し、それは大変、興味をそそることであります。しかし私は、私の生活のベース、日々の生活も非常に大切なものだと考えています。旅先から、自分自身のベースに戻ることで、普段の自分にもどって、冷静にその旅を分析、比較することによって、そこで得た経験をはっきり浮かびあがらせることができるからです。素直に感じとる美意識、旅ができたことへの喜び、そしてその場に居合わせたことへのありがたみは、ベースの場所に戻ることににより、強みを増します。

私の作品は、瞬間の私の印象を取り入れ、表現したものではありません。例を、「La route vers la Bretagne」で挙げます。私の最初の海外旅行は、1996年のフランスから始まります。1999年に、オランダで、生活を始めたものの、フランスには、常に特別な感情を抱いていました。2004年の夏、ようやくフランスのブルターニュを訪れる機会を得ることができました。興奮は既に車での旅の出発地点のオランダから始まり、道中、その興奮は途切れることはありませんでした。このオランダからブルターニュへ800km、海岸沿いを走るその旅が、一つの作品になりました。120x220x10cm、温かい黄土色系の黄色、それは私自身の歓喜、ノルマンディー海岸沿いで感じた平和的な心とまます穏やかさ、自然から受ける香り、そして体全身に吹き付ける強い風、作品の表面にあらわれる6つのラインは、目的地に向かう道のり、上り下りの地形、丘陵的雰囲気、継続する長い道のりなどを表わします。私は、私自身の視覚的印象を表現するのではなく、作品の中に、私の全ての感覚を使って表現しています。私は、時を大切に捉えています。私の目の前に、チャンスがあると、出来る限りその時を逃さないように反応し、その時間を捕らえようと環境に飛び込みます。意識を集中させ、私の全ての感覚を使って可能な限りの経験をしようと努力します。例えば、一時間あまり自転車にのった経験からの作品、車の後方座席から感じ取った旅からの作品などが例に挙げられると思います。しかし、私は、作品のための題材は、旅行から戻ってくるまで、決めません。旅行中、もしくは外に出ると、取り込める限りの情報を体全体で吸収し、その後、私のベースに戻って、落ち着いた環境の中で、私が訪れた道のりを地図の上で辿り、旅を振り返りながら、題材を決めます。2009年初頭まで、ヨーロッパにいるときはオランダのヒューステン(Heusden)で、アメリカのマイアミ(Miami)にいるときは、海岸にて、多くの題材を決めました。

ここ数年、生活の場を転々として来た私は、しばしば「あなたは、どこがベースなのですか」と聞かれます。「自分自身でも、まだわかりません。いまだに、私自身の場所を探しているところです」と答えませす。日本は、私自身のルーツであり、私の根源であります。アーティストとしてチャレンジを続けていくには、日本を自分のホームベースとして考えられなくなってきています。私の日本語も崩れて、会話もうまく出来なくなってきています。いつの日か、私のベースを見つけない、毎日の日常生活のスペースをいまでも探し続けています。しかし、今はスーツケースを抱えながらのジプシーのような生活、この環境において得られる全ての経験を私は楽しんでます。



私の作品は、視覚的な美しい思い出から発生したものではありません。私の得た経験からどのような影響を受け、どのようなことを学んだか、ということを含んでいます。私自身の作品には、現在の自分が常に含まれるのです。願望、将来的なこと、未来的なことなどは、作品の題材には、使いません。希望を持つことは生きる上で大変大切なことで、それが叶えば素晴らしいものですが、私は、私自身の存在に関る、今を生きる、という現実性をより大切に考えています。同じ題材を使った作品を何度か、異なった時、異なった年に制作しました。しかし、同じ意味合い、印象を作品にしたものは全くありません。時間の経過により、何かしら自分自身は経験を積んでいます。同じ題材を使っても、毎回違った環境に身を置いている訳であり、違った経験をしています。エッセンス的なものは、含まれますが、決して連続するような作品にはなりません。オランダのHeusdenに関する作品が、これにあたります。

私の作品は、一人の人間として己の発展を表現しています。タイムドキュメンを創る、それが、その方法なのです。時間に、意識を持つのは、日本人だからなのかもしれません。日本には、素晴らしい四季があり、伝統的な多くの行事があります。それぞれの季節、月々に自然を敬う行事、また季節ごとに、さまざまな料理があります。私は、西洋社会で生活している時は、伝統的な日本の行事は全くしませんが、日本での月々あるいは、日々の営みが、潜在意識として残っています。ほのかに大切にしているものでもあります。私は、ここ数年、ようやく日本の文化を素直に感じることができるようになって来たと思っています。今日、日本人としての自分自身を強く感じるようになり、それと同時に様々な文化を感じ、吸収できるよ

うになりました。その受け入れ枠が大きくなったことを感じながら、これは素晴らしいことだと思うようになりました。以前は、他の文化を身に付けると、時間と共に、私自身の日本人としての個性が、失われるのではないかと思っていたのですが、それは間違っていました。今の私は、世界と日本を行き来しながら、また、世界を旅しながら、今までにも増して日本人であることを感じています。私は、新しい場で、学ぶことが早くなり、違いをわかることも、以前より容易になりました。生活の場が広がり、出会いが増えることによって、さまざまな経験ができるようになってきたのは、一生懸命生き、努力してきた証だと思っています。いかに多くのことを見ることが出き、聞くことができるか、どれだけの経験をすることができるか、これは己の意識のもち方と自覚が、すべだと思えます。

私にとって、作品は、自身の一部であり、私の深層にある、正直な感情が含まれているものです。作品は、私が生きたその時を記録したものです。

私の作品は、己の証であり、己のタイムドキュメントです。私は、今を生きる私自身を見つめながら生活をし、現在の己を自覚していきたいと思っています。

## RENE RIETMEYER

Text as presented during the symposium Existence at Setagaya Art Museum in Tokyo, Japan, 3 April 2008



*Rene Rietmeyer (\* 1957, Netherlands) creates objects, which he calls 'Boxes'. His works are, as he says, ultimately nothing other than the proof of his existence.*

### About Existence, Coexistence and Art.

Historians, philosophers, archaeologists and many others, have long been debating the question of what is it that distinguishes us humans from animals, and up until now, we have not reached a clear, universally accepted answer.

### Humans

All animals learn how to obtain access to food and other resources from their environment, but when an animal dies, the only knowledge that does not die is the directly transferred knowledge. All other knowledge the animal has accumulated in its lifetime dies with the animal. For humans, though animals as well, the case is somewhat different. Many animals can use gestures and sounds to communicate with each other, but it seems that only humans can communicate information in so many different ways and with such nuances, and only humans have learned how to preserve knowledge for generations to come.

Knowledge can be transported over generations not only through writing or other means, but also through Art. Art provides probably the most powerful evidence of how humans perceive their world. The existence of art is one of the signs that humans most likely have a broader and more complex ability to communicate than other animals. It seems to be that only humans can communicate things that are abstract or that do not exist. I believe that the art humans make is also proof that humans are capable of a certain awareness concerning their own existence.

The earliest indication of the existence of art among humans is the physical evidence of powdered pigments that has been left behind. Humans seem to have ground up pigments and used them to paint themselves or their surroundings. Evidence of the use of pigment in southern Africa has been dated back over 100,000 years. My belief is that the use of language goes back even much earlier than this, but that the development of art by humans must be related to the development of a constantly improving use of language and

increasingly refined communication. The human need to communicate, not only through spoken words, but also with and through art, seems to have been in existence at least since that time.

Around 40,000 to 50,000 years ago, the first figurative objects no longer created for purposes of daily survival as well as the first musical instruments and cave paintings were made. These forms of communication show some of the ways in which humans expressed themselves. From then on, in many parts of the world, human artistic expression developed fast. Humans began to produce not only paintings and carvings, but also ornamental items to wear on their body. Through their art, humans created a figurative as well as symbolic representation of their world.

First through the cave paintings, and much later through writing, photography, sound and other methods, the knowledge individual humans gained during their lifetime could be preserved from now on, which provided an enormous advantage to future generations. When exactly this process of preserving knowledge started is not clear, but this process has not changed even today, and because of the availability and increasingly easy accessibility to the growing amount of knowledge, this process is reaching ever more humans and continues to accelerate.

During the Early Stone Age a positive difference in knowledge acquired by each subsequent generation, was not very great, or most likely, not present at all. Now, generally speaking, each successive generation already has significantly more knowledge and has developed further than the previous generation, whereas 'further' is not to be understood as necessarily 'better'. This state of being more developed also does not seem to have made us any more satisfied or to guarantee us a better life quality. We can only hope that we humans will finally accept the consequences of the knowledge and awareness of the fact that we do coexist with other living beings and we should soon come to a global consensus and begin to use all available knowledge for the better of the planet as a whole. Although humans can now easily adapt to big changes in our environment, this 'coming to a global consensus', will even prove necessary for the majority of the human race in order to continue living under so called quality circumstances.





#### Communication

Communication is a basic need for all human beings, at least for me it is. My need to communicate is mainly driven by curiosity and my will to interact with other humans. My will to communicate is probably inherent to human nature. Here and now, I am trying to communicate with you, but here in Japan, and in several other countries I have traveled in, the people I meet do not seem to really understand my language and gestures. Therefore, I mainly try to communicate through the objects I create, but communication with another living being still needs the use of some kind of language. Although several other artists seem to have no problems doing so, I do not want to make artworks by using words I might not even understand myself. I do not want to use a language that uses words, also because I think that such a language reaches a too limited number of people and I would like to reach many people. Therefore, even now, I have to use words and sentences which can be easily understood by many. So, when you create an artwork with the use of words, the only solution to reach many people seems to be to translate the artwork, the words, in as many languages as possible. That just doesn't seem efficient and accurate enough for me to transport the contents I wish to communicate. The quality of art in general lies in the possibility for experiencing different people expressing similar or different contents while presenting the meaning they wish to communicate by choosing different forms of communication.

Reaching everybody in the world is impossible, but some people, not taking into account human creations, like God, have managed to reach many people with their words, and some of them had a positive, some had a negative influence on the development of significant parts of mankind. There are many ways to reach, communicate with, other humans. There are many languages and forms of expression. Because of the way I have decided to live my life, I cannot reach

many people. But in order to reach as many I can, without offering up my own personal life quality and being able to maintain my own personal egoism, I decided to create objects. By doing so I decided to make use of an abstract language with formal elements like color, shape and material. With this type of communication, it may not be possible to convey thoughts as precisely to another person as when both people speak exactly the same verbal language, but the use of an abstract language in an art work seems to reach many people in a more location-independent and timeless manner than other means of expression in visual art. This was one of the reasons why I chose this abstract language as my main form of communication.

Several conceptual artists say that the form of presentation of an art work should have no value, but if you want to give an idea a physical presence, then you have no other choice than to use formal elements and it is impossible to create a form of physical presentation without value. The best you can do is to try to transport the intended meaning with a reduction of formal elements. Since there is no escape for acknowledging this and dealing with it anyway, it is the best option we have. Besides, it seems that, at this point in time, the reduced use of formal elements does represent me, is me and also seems to communicate better with the audience my works encounter, much better than the use of them in a more baroque way. However, of course, I am aware that no language is universal. The use of whatever language and the perception of whatever language remains a very subjective and personal matter. Therefore, explaining the 'meaning' of art is always very difficult, because so much depends on the cultural context of the work and on the ideas we ourselves bring to the interpretation. Even if an artwork consists only of words, the observer can hardly do more than speculate on the given meaning. I claim that the objects I make are first of all about the meaning they represent. They contain my awareness of my existence and because I want to communicate my awareness to myself as well as to you, I created those objects and I had no other choice than to use formal elements. Amongst other formal elements, I had to use color, shape and material.

#### Awareness

I am aware that I exist and that time passes, therefore I know that my present existence becomes past, and I therefore know that I have existed in the past. At the moment of the actual execution of my works, I always express my subjective memory of my existence in that past. The conscious action of the creation of each of my objects themselves is an expression of my awareness of my momentary existence. While making my works, they express my existence and my coexistence in the past and present. But as time passes, my works might be nothing other than the proof that I have once existed. But at this moment in time, I still do exist, and you still seem to exist as well.

I believe that gaining awareness about time, space and existence can be of great help in creating a more satisfying personal way to live our lives. Many people claim to have read texts by philosophers or other great thinkers, but reading and even understanding the knowledge acquired is not enough. This acquired knowledge should actually have an influence, real consequences, on how we live our lives. This all sounds so 'logical' and easy, but in reality it seems that



most people still do not really reach sufficient awareness of their own being in order to be able to self-define their own existence. Only to a certain extent can you make accountable that through limitations owing to the physical circumstances you are in, you were left no better choice and were forced to come to the choices you made.

Here, in this conference space in Tokyo, we see and experience several different human beings and many of them have come from very different parts and cultures of this world. And although we are all humans, we are not the same. Our brains do not operate exactly the same and during our lives we have all lived through many different experiences. Therefore, we have often come to very different thoughts, opinions, philosophies and choices.

To be human includes being surrounded by and being part of the physical, factual, concrete everyday world. Our world is here, now and everywhere around us. We are totally immersed in it, we are nowhere else, we are here and now, and we have to make the best out of that. Once we arrive at the realization that each of us is a distinctive entity, we have to fulfill our own destiny. We should start to question the input from our culture and start to rethink all values we have been taught in order to create, to self-define our own identity, our own being. To try to understand all the different identities represented in as many humans seems essential for developing a global human existence with quality.

At least since the times of Socrates, philosophers have raised and discussed many questions and sometimes they have even come to conclusions. We cannot create any awareness without the use of language, but several philosophers lose themselves in words and definitions. Although these philosophical discussions about existence stimulate our intellect they have not yet helped us to really comprehend the subject matter. There are no answers. But, whether we agree with all the thoughts about time, space and

existence or not, without a doubt, in their search for truths, they at least have helped to create a greater awareness. So, we might not have gained any knowledge but we certainly have created opinions. There is no reason why we exist, and we ourselves will have to give value and meaning to our existence.

I exist and you exist. Regardless of all the different thoughts and points of view about existence, I simply have no other choice than to come to this conclusion. This means, I exist amongst other objects and living beings that exist at that same moment in time as well. The awareness of my existence always includes the awareness of my co-existence. There was a time when I did not exist and there will come a time when I will not exist anymore, but at this moment in time, I do exist.

The awareness a person has established for himself cannot be measured, but it can be expressed, in words, sounds or objects, for others to read, hear, see or feel, and to be understood by those who have reached a certain level of awareness themselves. I am not sure if we are the only animal aware of its own existence and of the fact that each of us will die in the not so distant future. We like to believe we are the only creatures who can reach this level of consciousness, but elephants for example, seem to respond with grace when they encounter the remains of a deceased family member. Do they not have any awareness at all, or can it be that we just have great difficulties in communicating with the elephants because we do not speak the same language as they do and so we must guess what they think. Is it because I come from another culture and I do not speak Japanese well enough to understand what you are thinking and why you think like that? Can I ever find out what you are really thinking? How can I find out how aware another living being is about himself and his surroundings? I need communication. Communication seems to be the key factor, not only communication with the other living beings, but also the communication with oneself.

## JOSEPH KOSUTH

Lecture given during the symposium Existence held at Setagaya Art Museum in Tokyo, Japan, 3 April 2008



*Joseph Kosuth (\*1945, Toledo, OH, USA) is one of the pioneers of Conceptual art and installation art, initiating language based works and appropriation strategies in the 1960s. His work has consistently explored the production and role of language and meaning within art. Kosuth lives in New York City and Rome, Italy.*

### 'Existence' Applied | Joseph Kosuth

'The self posits itself, and by virtue of this mere self-assertion it exists; and conversely, the self exists and posits its own existence by virtue of merely existing. It is at once the agent and product of action; and hence the 'I am' expresses an Act.'

J.G. Fichte.

What I will do today is to briefly outline a certain view; it's my view of art and it will attempt to underscore an aspect of its relationship with philosophy, both implicitly and explicitly. What I say begins with a necessary understanding by you that it is grounded in a practice of art. My comments should be seen as part of a kind of manual or handbook for a device, but they shouldn't be confused with the device itself. That device, that practice of art, has dialectically evolved along with the handbook itself over a forty-year period. If you've seen my installation last summer at the Venice Biennale, or the installation at the Sean Kelly Gallery in New York last year, or my last installation at this moment visible on the facade of La Casa Encendida in Madrid, you already know that updates on my practice are ongoing and continuous. However, I won't be speaking of my present work today. For our purposes here I need to go to the beginning.

The evolution of my handbook is more than consistent and even more sporadic. It emerges when and where needed. Today we add a chapter because I have been asked to address the question of 'existence'. To do that this chapter of the handbook will attempt to look at the origins of my practice with an elliptical view of what may constitute the origin of its 'theory' and, simultaneously, possibly provide a better understanding of its history. What I say should be understood as framed by the issue of 'existence' even when it is only an argumentative presence just out of view. This is our context today. What a philosophical discipline might feel obliged to con-

front directly and explicitly within one or another of many established discourses, my writing, which is itself philosophically homeless outside of the practice which goes with it, is not compelled to participate within or satisfy. It qualifies itself on other grounds as part of a larger context than an academic discipline would permit. And please take that as an explanation, not an apology.

I was asked by The Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1969 to describe my work for the catalogue of a rather quick and imperfect attempt to give a public presentation of what they saw as a phenomenon, taking place way downtown, called 'Conceptual art,' by participating in a group show called Information. This is how I put it then, and please forgive the pretensions of a 24 year old: 'Every unit of an (art) proposition is only that which is functioning within a larger framework (the proposition) and every proposition is only a unit which is functioning within a larger framework (the investigation) and every investigation is only a unit which is functioning within a larger framework (my art) and my art is only a unit which is functioning within a larger framework (the concept 'art') and the concept of art is a concept which has a particular meaning at a particular time but which exists only as an idea used by living artists and which exists only as information. To attempt an 'iconic' grasp of only a part or unit of the above paragraph (which means to consider one action a potential 'masterpiece') is to separate the art's 'language' from its 'meaning' or 'use'. The art is the 'whole' not 'part'; And the 'whole' only exists conceptually." No question, that's at least part of what I had to say in 1969.

Whatever one would want to say now about that project called Conceptual art, begun over 40 years ago, it is clear that what we wanted was based on a contradiction, even if an intellectually somewhat sublime one. I wanted the act of art to have integrity (to this end I discussed it in terms of 'tautology' at the time) and I wanted it untethered to a prescriptive formal self-conception. So, in my talk to today I will return, in a sense, to the origins of my thinking as I approach the question of 'existence'. One could say that it is both the starting point of how I began to form my own conception of my existence as an artist, and thus a man, and it constitutes the tool by which I, if not also society itself, can reflectively approach those issues which form our conception of existence.

(Meaning)



**time**, *L.* n. *1.* *tempus*, *-oris*, n. *die* (= the day), *spatium* (= — as a period) *lucrum*, *terrenum* (= interval), *actus* (= ago), *tempus* (= season), *seculum* (= a long —, a generation), *otium* (= leisure), *occasio*, *opportunitas* (= opportunity); the most celebrated general of his —, *clarissimus imperator suus actalis*; in our —, *notitia memoria*; at the right —, *tempore* (*tempore*, *tempore*) *ad tempus*, *temporivus*, *opportune*, in *tempore*; in ancient —s, *antiquitas*; from the — when, *ex quo* (*tempore*); at every —, *omni tempore*; from — to —, *interitum* (= now and then); for all —, in *omne tempus*; in good —, *maturo* (e.g. to rise, *surpere*); against the —, *ad* or *ad tempus*; in the mean —, *interim*, *interim*; according to — and circumstance, *pro tempore* or *pro re*, *ex re et tempore*; to require — for, *tempus postulare* *ad*; it is — to go, *tempus est ut venis et ire*; eight —s eight, *octo octies multiplicata*;

**machination**, n. = a secret, malicious design, *machina*, *conatus*, *-is*, *dolus*; to make —s, *conspicere* (*conspicere*); to do a thing through anyone's —, *alio amore* *fradre* *aliquo*. **machina**, n. *machina*, *machinatio*, *machinamentum* (= machinery); *compages*, *-is*, f. (= framework); the —, fabric of the human body, *compages corporis*. **machinery**, n. *machinatio*, *machinamenta*, *-orum*, n., *machinae*.

**object**, *L.* n. *1.* = something presented to the mind by the senses, *res*: the —s around us, *res exterae*; to be the — of is variously rendered; by *esse* and *dat.* (e.g. to be an — of care, hatred, contempt to anyone, *alici esse curam*, *odio*, *contemptum*), by *esse* and *in* (e.g. to be an — of hatred with anyone, *in odio esse apud aliquem*; to become an — of hatred, *in odium venire*, *perire*), by nouns already involving the idea (e.g. — of love, *amor*, *delicias*; — of desire, *desiderium*), by circumloc. with verbs (e.g. to be the — of anyone's love, *ad alio amari*, *diligere*);

**chair**, n hence v; *chaise* (*longue*) and *chay*; (ex) *cathedra*, *cathedral* (adj and n), *cathedratic*; element *-hedral*, *-hedron*, q.v. sep.  
 1. Gr *hedra*, a seat (cf Gr *hezesthai*, to sit, and, ult, E *sit*), combines with *kata*, down (cf the prefix *cata-*), to form *kathedra*, a backed, four-legged, often two-armed seat, whence L *cathedra*, LL bishop's chair, ML professor's chair, hence dignity, as in 'to speak *ex cathedra*', as from—or as if from—a professor's chair, hence with authority. L *cathedra* has LL-ML adj *cathedrālis*—see sep CATHEDRAL; and the secondary ML adj *cathedraticus*, whence E legal *cathedratic*.



At one point in his writing Wittgenstein discusses the question of existence and says the following:

'If I say "I wonder at the existence of the world" I am misusing language. Let me explain this: It has a perfectly good and clear sense to say that I wonder at something being the case, we all understand what it means to say that I wonder at the size of a dog which is bigger than anyone I have ever seen before or at any thing which, in the common sense of the word, is extraordinary. In every such case I wonder at something being the case which I could conceive not to be the case. I wonder at the size of this dog because I could conceive of a dog of another, namely the normal size, at which I would not wonder. To say "I wonder at such and such being the case" has only sense if I can imagine it not to be the case. In this sense one can wonder at the existence of, say, a house when one sees it and has not visited it for a long time and has imagined that it had been pulled down in the meantime. But it is nonsense to say that I wonder at the existence of the world, because I cannot imagine it not existing. I could of course wonder at the world round me being as it is. If for

instance I had this experience while looking into the blue sky, I could wonder at the sky being blue as opposed to the case when it's clouded. But that's not what I mean. I am wondering at the sky being whatever it is. One might be tempted to say that what I am wondering at is a tautology, namely at the sky being blue or not blue. But then it's just nonsense to say that one is wondering at a tautology.'

Obviously Wittgenstein is not arguing against the existence of the world. While he cannot support an assertion of an absolute, compared to a relative, value because it would lie outside the world, he is saying one can however acknowledge the experience of a 'feeling of wonder' at the world. It is simply that the 'wonder' that Wittgenstein feels becomes nonsense when put into words. His sense is that the wonder which he feels when he confronts the nature of existence, shares the same kind of significance as religious and ethical truths. The wonder we have at the world isn't nonsense even if what we would say about it is.

'In a sense this brings us back to the issue of contingency. We begin with 'the existence of something' and would like a verbal explanation

but cannot have one. What then do we face? We have, of course, the famous statement of Jean-Paul Sartre in his book Nausea: "The essential thing is contingency. I mean that, by definition, existence is not necessary. To exist is simply to be there; what exists appears, lets itself be encountered, but you can never deduce it. There are people, I believe, who have understood that. Only they have tried to overcome this contingency by inventing a necessary causal being. But no necessary being can explain existence: contingency is not an illusion, an appearance which can be dissipated; it is absolute, and consequently perfect gratuitousness. Everything is gratuitous, that park, this town, and myself. When you realize that, it turns your stomach over and everything starts floating about...'

So we have nothing less than the contingency of existence itself. We are forced to face the alternative to 'something', which is nothing. The way in which death lurks ahead for all of us forms our experience of existence more than anything else. Martin Heidegger has said that "Only by the anticipation of death is every accidental and 'provisional' possibility driven out. Only being free for death, gives

Dasein its goal outright and pushes existence into its finitude. One has grasped the finitude of one's existence, it snatches it back from the endless multiplicity of possibilities which offer themselves as closest to one — those of comfortableness, shirking, and taking things lightly...!' But finally, as Joshua Schuster, in discussing Derrida, tells us: '...Since we have yet to ask, what is death? We have avoided asking for the simple reason that we do not know who to ask. Who could tell us, guide us to ask the right questions, lead us into familiarity which we presume corresponds with knowledge? Is there a question which can question the non-empirical, what is outside epistemology, what has no thought, what is at the limits of limits? It seems to me a philosophical commonplace now, as many claim, that "death can only be represented." On one level, this assertion may be true, but in order to speak competently about the passage of dying, I must already have an understanding and recognition of death, a pre-theoretical understanding of death. This is already to suggest that death lurks not in representationality, but in between the spaces of what is representable.' Well, this question remains open ended. I could say, more on death later, for all of us.



But, for the moment we shall return to my existence and thus my work. I want to suggest we consider, as a distinction, a rather simple diagram of something far more complex, probably, than tautologies, from a standard textbook on the theory of scientific models. It's one which distinguishes models as being of two types, one being an illustration and one a test. I understood from the beginning that art was essentially a questioning process. What I felt such questioning directed us toward, of course, was not the construction of a theory of art with a static depiction (a map of an internal world which illustrates) but, rather, one which presumed the artist as an active agent in the world, one concerned with meaning; that is, with the work of art as a test. It is this concept of art as a test, rather than an illustration, which remains. In my text of 1968, 'Art after Philosophy,' I proposed for us to see art as an analytic proposition, essentially a tautology whose interior construction could not be put in play as 'content' about the world. What is not often understood is that it is not the same as to say that the process of the practice, culturally, socially and politically does not have effect on the world. Indeed, there is no greater manifestation of our existence in the world than art. What it says, manifested as a process of art, and in the resulting consciousness that it constructs, is the most telling reflection about our existence available.

Yet, for a further look at tautologies, consider Paul Engelman, a close friend of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the collaborator with him on the house for Wittgenstein's sister in Vienna, who has commented about tautologies that they are not 'a meaningful proposition (i.e. one with a content): yet it can be an indispensable intellectual device, an instrument that can help us—if used correctly in grasping reality, that is in grasping facts—to arrive at insights difficult or impossible to attain by other means.'

The tautology was a useful device for me, in both its theory and its practice, in my work of the 1960's in specific ways. To give a concrete and early example I would cite my own work from 1965, from the Protoinvestigations, of which 'One and Three Chairs' (with examples in this series to be found at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Reina Sofia in Madrid) to 'Clock—One and Five' (from the Tate Modern in London) all being representative. This work, using deadpan 'scientific style' photographs which

were always taken by others, employed common objects and enlarged texts from dictionary definitions. The physical elements were never signed, with the concept of the work being that this 'form of presentation' would be made and re-made. Necessary because the floor and /or wall should show the one seen with the object. The reason for this was an important part of my intention: eliminate the aura of traditional art and force another basis for this activity to be understood as art, that is: conceptually. For me as well as for other artists at that time, the issues of modernism were rapidly becoming opaque. One effect of this work was to 'sum up' modernism for me, and once that was visible I was able to use that view to get past it, as the work which followed showed. Thus, for me, this work was both a 'summation' of modernism and the way out of it.

Yet, the use of tautologies in the Protoinvestigations has generated a variety of confused responses. One aspect of this work was my attempt to actualize a Wittgensteinian insight: by drawing out the relation of art to language could one SPACING begin the production of a cultural language whose very function it was to show, rather than say? Such artworks might function in a way which circumvents significantly much of what limits language. Art, some have argued, describes reality. But, unlike language, artworks, it can also be argued, simultaneously describe how they describe it. Granted, art can be seen here as self referential, but importantly, not meaninglessly self-referential. What art shows in such a manifestation is, indeed, how it functions. This is revealed in works which feign to say, but do so as an art proposition and reveal the difference (while showing their similarity) with language. This was, of course, the role of language in my work beginning in 1965. It seemed to me that if language itself could be used to function as an artwork, then that difference would bare the device of art's language game. An artwork then, as such a double mask, provided the possibility of not just a reflection on itself, but an indirect double reflection on the nature of language, through art, to culture itself. 'Do not forget,' writes Wittgenstein, 'that a poem, even though it is composed in the language of information is not used in the language-game of giving information.' Whatever insights this early work of mine had to share, it did, and most agree it initiated within the practice an essential questioning process which, for the past forty years, has been basic to it. It

should be obvious that the 'baring of the device' of the institutions of art would begin at the most elemental level: the point of production itself, the artwork. Seeing the artwork, in such a context, forced a scrutiny of its conventions and historical baggage, such as painting and sculpture itself as an activity. So, first inside the frame and then outside. One goal at the time of work which followed, like The Second Investigation, was to question the institutional forms of art.

Our contradictions illuminate. How can art remain a 'test' and still maintain a cultural, and thereby socially formed, identity as art, that is, continue a relationship with the history of the activity without which it is severed from the community of 'believers' which gives it human meaning? It is this difficulty of the project which constituted both its 'failure'—as Terry Atkinson has written about so well—as well as the continuing relevance of the project to ongoing art production. It would be difficult to deny that out of the 'failure' of Conceptual art's original project emerged a redefined practice of art. Whatever hermeneutic, and I really can't think of a better word for it, we employ in our approach to the 'tests' of art, the early ones as well as the recent ones, that alteration in terms of how we make meaning of those 'tests' is itself the description of a different practice of art than what preceded it. That is not to say that the project did not proceed without paradox. Can one initiate a practice (of anything) without implying, particularly if it sticks, it as having something akin to a teleology? Indeed the very concept of the 'avant-garde' which frames it even if unintentionally, when unspoken and presumed, is teleological. The fact itself of a perceived end of modernism, with Conceptual art playing a major role in that, suggests a continuum, if only in the form of a rupture. This is one of the ways in which Conceptual art's success constituted its failure. What it had to say, even as a 'failure,' still continued to be art. Much art of the past couple of decades internalized the basis of such work, though such work no longer has to call itself 'conceptual,' and if that's not obvious enough I'll say it again later. The paradox, of course, is that the ongoing cultural life of this art consisted of two parts which both constituted its origins, as well as remained—even to this day—antagonistic towards each other. The 'success' of this project (it was, in fact, finally to be believed as art, which obviously is why I am invited here today to speak), was obliged to transform it in equal proportion to its 'success' within precisely those terms from which it had disassociated itself from the practice of art as previously constituted. Within this contradiction one is able to see, not unlike a silhouette, the defining characteristic of the project itself: its 'positive' program remains manifest there within its 'failure,' as a usable potential. One test simply awaits the next test, since a test cannot attempt to be a masterpiece which depicts an implicitly totalizing reflection of the world. Indeed, the art I speak of was finally understood to be only part of the path of a reflective process, ultimately only comprised of some manifestation of thinking, and it is only over the course of time that the process of a practice can make the claim of describing more than the specific initial program of its agenda. Such work, like any work, is located within a community, and it is that community which gives it its meaning. But meaning given is meaning which, as such, implicitly



defines its own limits. And those limits, when understood well, describe what future work might possibly be. Art is always a project on limits. Now I ask you: how can a view of limits ever be reduced to simply being an object?

Going back, we can ask: what is the character of the 'tests' I discussed? As Wittgenstein put it: 'In mathematics and logic, process and result are equivalent.' The same I would maintain, can be said of art. I have written elsewhere that the work of art is essentially a play within the meaning system of art. As that 'play' receives its meaning from the system, that system is—potentially—altered by the difference of that particular play. Since really anything can be nominated as the element in such a play (and appear, then, as the 'material' of the work) the actual location of the work must be seen elsewhere, as the point, or gap, where the production of meaning takes place. In art the how and why collapse into each other as the same sphere of production: the realm of meaning.

As for the project of Conceptual art, we know that what is 'different' doesn't stay different for long if it succeeds, which is perhaps another description of the terms of its 'failure' as much as its 'success'. Thus the relative effectiveness of this practice of art was dependent on those practices of individuals capable of maintaining a sufficiently transformatory process within which 'difference' could

be maintained. Unfortunately practices begun in the past are subject to an over-determined view of art history whose presumptions are exclusive to the practice of art outlined here. The traditional scope of art historicizing—that is, as a style, and attributed to specific individuals—is most comfortable limiting itself to perceived early moments which are then dated and finalized. My discussion of those moments here is precisely intended to suggest another approach, one which suggests their usefulness here in the present. Without that they are doomed to relevance only to historians. While such conventional ‘credits’ provide for the kind of tidy art history both professors and newspaper critics adore, we’ve seen that it stops the conversation just where it should begin. In actual fact, the continued ‘tests’, now, of the original practitioners (in those rare instances where they still constitute a test and not simply a recognizable market entity) should be considered on their own merit equally along with the ‘tests’ of other generations, insofar as all are present now, and all constitute, together, our present reflection on existence. Also, together, they are capable of an accumulative effect as part of the present cultural landscape from which meaning is generated. Indeed, we may be left with the consideration that the meaning we produce in our life is what defines our existence.

Let’s try it from this direction. My work, and Conceptual art later as a general practice, began with the understanding that artists work with meaning, not with shapes, colors, or materials. Anything can be employed by the artist to set the work into play—including shapes, colors or materials—but the form of presentation itself should have no value, formally or otherwise, independent of its role as a vehicle for the idea of the work, even if we must consider that ‘vehicle’ as part of the idea of the work. (Ah, the dialectical beauty of it all!) Thus, when you approach the work you are approaching the idea (and therefore, the intention) of the artist directly. An ‘idea’, of course, as an artwork, can constitute a cultural force that is as contingent (within the web of belief) as it is complex, and when I have said that anything can be used by (or as) a work of art, I mean just that: a play within the signifying process conceptually cannot be established, nor limited, by the traditional constraints of morphology, media, or objecthood, even as what it has to say is shaped by the limits which permit itself to be manifest in the world. It is precisely here where art is a reflection on existence. It is by resisting those limits, confounding them and reforming them that it defines what those less concerned can happily call ‘creativity’. If art has human value it is because it is capable of asking questions which other activities cannot. In art the question of existence is not an academic puzzle, it is actually manifested, reflected upon, and made visible in its own process and result in the world.

Art can manifest itself in all of the ways in which human intention can manifest itself. It is in this regard that human existence is recorded and reflected upon. The task for artists is to put into play works of art unfettered by the limited kinds of meanings which crafted objects permit, and succeed in having them become not simply things of a discourse that demonstrate a search for authority and validation, but the production of artists as authors within a discourse, one concretized through subjective commitment and comprised of the making process. It is the historically defined agency of the artist working within a practice that sees itself as such a process,

wherein an artist’s work becomes believable as art within society. The ability of that process to see itself constitutes the moment of reflection in which humanity’s existence is brought into view. To do that, work must satisfy deeper structures of our culture than that surface which reads in the market as tradition and continuity. Here is where ‘authenticity’ finds its voice and form. As Michel Foucault has said, ‘Indeed, it is along this vertical direction of existence, and according to the structures of temporality, that the authentic and inauthentic forms of existence can best be allocated. This self-transcendence of the existent in its temporal movement, this transcendence designated by the vertical axis of the imaginary, can be lived as a wrenching away from the bases of the existence itself. Then we see crystallizing all those themes of immortality, of survival, of pure love, of unmediated communication between minds. Or it can be lived, on the contrary, as “transcendence,” as an imminent plunge from the dangerous pinnacle of the present.’

The more enriched our understanding of that ‘text’ of art becomes, so does our understanding of culture. A focus on meaning, by necessity, has focused our concerns on a variety of issues around language and context. These issues pertain to the reception and production of works of art themselves. That aspect of the questioning process some thirty years after I began my work, which some have since called ‘institutional critique,’ began here, and it originated with Conceptual art’s earliest works. It is but one of its consequential aspects. As I said at the beginning of my remarks today, these ongoing comments on this process, which some recognize as constituting a theory, really cannot be separated from the works which informed them.

The Second Investigation was my response to this situation. While I felt such work as ‘One and Three Chairs’ had initiated such a questioning process, it was increasingly limited by this new reading being given to work using photography because of the work of other artists in the following years using photography. The Second Investigation work used as its ‘form of presentation’ anonymous advertisements in public media such as newspapers, magazines, billboards, handbills, and, as well, television advertising. This is understood to be the first known use of such a context for the production of artworks, and it should be seen as something specific and quite different from the billboard art which followed in the next decade, where this presentational strategy was often used as an end in itself. The content of the advertisements I utilized in 1968 were based on a ‘taxonomy of the world’ developed by Roget as The Synopsis of Categories for use in his thesaurus. Each ad was an entry from this synopsis, which, in effect, put into the world the fragments of its own description. What this initiated, of course, was a questioning of the ontology of artworks: the role of context, of language, of institutional framing, of reception. For me, the concerns of this work focused clearly on what was to remain a central concern of my art.

Yet, limited as I have acknowledged it was in some regards, the ‘tautology’ which I employed at the beginning of Conceptual art was a useful device in blocking the ‘mirror effect’ which can compromise works which utilize elements from daily life (even if it was language) and do so without telegraphing the knowledge that it



was art to the viewer based on the choice of morphology or media. For my project the meaning of this work could not be established a priori by a tradition which preceded it. The need to re-constitute art as a questioning process necessitated it. The descriptive role of art was put into disequilibrium: one could construct ‘a picture of relations’ (even if dynamic or contingent) and use it as a ‘test’ by putting it into play within the meaning-system of art. Such a work proved not to be an illustration but a demonstration, a test, and in so doing it told us some things about art and culture, and the function and role of both in society.

In summation, it was apparent to me by the mid-60’s that the issue for new work was not around the materialization or de-materialization of a work, in fact, it was not even concerned with materials. The issue which defined my work, as well as that activity which became known as Conceptual art, was the issue of signification. What are the questions pertaining to the function of meaning in the production and reception of works of art? What is the application and what is the limit of language as a model, in both the theory and the production of actual works? Then, following from that, what is the role of context, be it architectural, psychological or institutional, on the social, cultural and political reading of work? It was these issues which separated Conceptual art from the modernist agenda which preceded it, and it is this non-prescriptive practice which has remained flexible enough to endure and, quite obviously, continues to provide a basis for Conceptual art’s ongoing relevance to recent art practice. Indeed, what I alluded to before, I find it interesting that when I started my

activity I had to give it a special name, ‘Conceptual art’ (which was meant to be only descriptive but now seems partly apologetic) but the work of younger artists now can just be called art.

As artists we all begin to construct with what is given. We take, we steal, we appropriate fragments of meaning from the detritus of culture and construct other meanings, our own. In the same sense, all writers write with words invented by others. One uses words, all having prior meanings, to make paragraphs which have a meaning of one’s own. As artists, we steal not only words or images, virtually anything at all. As I mentioned a moment ago, it was clear by the mid-60’s that the existing institutionalized form of art, the paradigm of painting and sculpture, could no longer itself provide for the possibility of making ‘a paragraph of one’s own.’ It had, for artists, become the sign and signage of the ideospace of modernism: an over-enriched context of historicized meaning institutionally signifying itself and collapsing new meanings under its own weight. What I realized, and this is what I believe my work shows, was that by reducing any ingredient of cultural prior meaning to being a smaller constructive element (functioning as a ‘word’ element, one could say) I could then construct other meanings on another level, producing ‘a paragraph of my own’ from what is culturally given and still remain within the context of art sufficiently enough to effect it. Once such work succeeds in being seen as art, it has altered it. This has been a basic aspect of my practice and has, for over forty years, necessitated some form of theft, now called appropriation, as is evidenced throughout my work.



## HEARTBEAT - SASAKI

Drawing performance at the Setagaya Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan, 3 April 2008

Text by Peter Lodermeier



*Heartbeat - Sasaki (\* 1964, Japan). Lives in Tokyo.*

If there is anything at all akin to a soundtrack of human existence, then it is most likely made up of the music of heartbeats. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> or 24<sup>th</sup> day of human embryonic development the heart has already been sufficiently formed so that it begins to beat for the first time. In an average life this will repeat itself two to three billion times. The entire pre-history of our intra-uterine life was based at one time on something the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk refers to as the 'existential beat' or the 'cardiac basso continuo'. "The prose of normal existence is based on the fact that human beings, starting from birth, make such a trivial, but at the same time incomprehensible, discovery: The world is a place carved out of stillness, where the heartbeat and the primeval-soprano [of the maternal voice] have been catastrophically silenced."<sup>1</sup> Heartbeat-Sasaki's artist pseudonym is his program: When during a trip to China, the artist, who lives in Tokyo, suddenly realized that each and every individual among these human masses is the bearer of his or her own built-in rhythm machine, he based his entire subsequent production on making this primal music audible once again. In the rhythm of his own and other people's hearts he draws—in red, of course, as any other color would be ridiculously mannered—on paper, on walls, on plexiglass, on photos... It is always the simple zigzag lines going up and down, in keeping with the systolic and diastolic beats, and slowly expanding to become long lines, surfaces, entire rooms: it is the spatially visible temporal dimension of the pulse. On the basis of this concept Heartbeat-Sasaki combines the media of drawing, painting, installation and performance to form a unique overall work. During the drawing performance at the conclusion of the *Existence* Symposium at the Setagaya Museum in Tokyo the artist used a loudspeaker to amplify my heartbeat. By making the intimate sound public, externalizing the internal, which is at once familiar and foreign, oscillating between soothing and scary, a resonant room full of associations came about, where all the viewers/listeners participated. In the rhythm of this thumping bio-techno-music, and like a teacher with red chalk, Heartbeat-Sasaki drew for around 45 minutes his lines on a blackboard, the most didactic of all media, for as long as it took to cover it completely. The simple and powerful message of Heartbeat-Sasaki is: "To be conscious of the beat is to feel 'life' itself."

<sup>1</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *La musique retrouvée*, in: P.S., *Der ästhetische Imperativ*, Hamburg 2007, p. 8-28, quotes p. 10, 11, 12-13.

*Heartbeat - Sasaki (\* 1964, Japan). Lebt in Tokio.*

Wenn es einen Soundtrack der menschlichen Existenz gibt, dann besteht er am ehesten aus der Musik der Herztöne. Bereits am 23. oder 24. Tag der menschlichen embryonalen Entwicklung ist das Herz soweit ausgebildet, dass es zum ersten Mal pulsiert. In einem Menschenleben von durchschnittlicher Dauer wird sich dies 2 bis 3 Milliarden Mal wiederholen. Unsere gesamte intrauterine Lebens-Vorgeschichte war einmal grundiert von dem, was der Philosoph Peter Sloterdijk den „existentiellen Beat“ oder den „kardialen basso continuo“ nennt. „Die Prosa des gewöhnlichen Daseins hat ihren Grund in der Tatsache, dass Menschenkinder vom Moment der Geburt an eine so triviale wie unverständliche Entdeckung machen: Die Welt ist ein von Stille ausgehöhlter Ort, an dem der Herzbeat und der Ur-Sopran [der Mutterstimme] katastrophisch verstummt sind.“<sup>1</sup> Heartbeat-Sasakis Künstlername ist Programm: Als der in Tokyo lebende Künstler während einer Chinareise sich plötzlich dessen bewusst wurde, dass jeder Einzelne inmitten dieser Menschenmassen Träger einer körpereigenen Rhythmusmaschine ist, hat er seine gesamte anschließende Produktion auf das Wieder-Hörbarmachen dieser Ur-Musik gegründet. Im Rhythmus des eigenen oder fremder Herzen zeichnet er – selbstverständlich in Rot, alles andere wäre ein alberner Manierismus – auf Papier, auf Wände, auf Plexiglas, auf Fotos... Immer sind es einfache Zickzacklinien, ein Auf und Ab im Takt der Systolen und Diastolen, das sich langsam zu langen Linien, zu Flächen, zu ganzen Räumen erweitert: ein verräumlichendes Sichtbarmachen der zeitlichen Dimension des Pulses. Auf der Basis dieses Konzepts verbinden sich bei Heartbeat-Sasaki die Medien Zeichnung, Malerei, Installation und Performance zu einem einzigartigen Gesamtwerk. In der Zeichnungsperformance zum Abschluss des „Existence“-Symposiums im Setagaya Museum in Tokyo verstärkte der Künstler mit einem Lautsprecher meinen Herzschlag. Indem der intime Sound öffentlich wurde, Inneres äußerlich, vertraut und fremd zugleich, oszillierend zwischen Beruhigung und Erschrecken, entstand ein Resonanzraum voller Assoziationen, an dem alle Zuschauer/Zuhörer partizipierten. Im Rhythmus dieser wummernden Bio-Techno-Music zeichnete Heartbeat-Sasaki ca. 45 Minuten lang wie ein Lehrer mit roter Kreide seine Linien auf eine Schultafel, das didaktischste aller Medien, solange, bis sie vollständig bedeckt war. Die ebenso einfache wie eindringliche Lehre Heartbeat-Sasakis lautet: „To be conscious of the beat is to feel ‚life‘ itself.“

<sup>1</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *La musique retrouvée*, in: ders., *Der ästhetische Imperativ*, Hamburg 2007, S. 8-28, Zitate S. 10, 11, 12 f.

No one better defined one important aspect of artistic practice than Kierkegaard, in 1843, when he stated, 'The difficulty facing an existing individual is how to give his existence the continuity without which everything simply vanishes' to which he then provided his own answer: 'The goal of movement for an existing individual is to arrive at a decision, and to renew it.' What we are discussing, of course, is something basic to artistic practice: repetition. Kierkegaard's point, 'The dialectic of repetition is easy; for what is repeated has been, otherwise it could not be repeated, but precisely the fact that it has been gives to repetition the character of novelty.' Perhaps the question, both for artists and for philosophers, is how one can satisfy the decision of our practice and do so without the a priori meaning which our traditions imply by their own forms.

Finally, for reasons quite similar to why Kierkegaard needed literature to ask philosophical questions at one moment in history, those reasons have no less relevance now for me as an artist. The philosopher who turns to art, as Kierkegaard did, shares the same space, is forced to confront the same *modus operandi*, as the artist who sees his or her project as having a philosophical dimension in a period in which speculative philosophy has lost its relevance. It seems to me such speculative questions, which once comprised philosophy completely, must now be manifested, not simply asserted. What I mean by manifested is that they be anchored to the world by locating themselves within that cultural discourse, art, which reflects as it

forms consciousness. That is, such questions must be manifested in a way which reflects what we can acknowledge as 'the real' since they are linked to that horizon of meaning, one we call culture, that is the constructive web of our social reality: it is there where all of our consciousness is formed. Because of that, the once-called 'visual arts' have evolved into being a much larger context, and clearly one no longer limited to one sense, visual or otherwise, if indeed that was ever simply true, in which all our inherited cultural forms are put into philosophical play. It is there that an engaged project on meaning proceeds without an academic or formal prescriptive prejudice or agenda, satisfying at least Wittgenstein and Nietzsche, as well as most likely a few others. One pauses and considers Beckett's comment in *Texts for Nothing*: 'It's the end what gives the meaning' being locked in continuous play with Ad Reinhardt's well-known statement: "In art, the end is always the beginning."

And, to end this, I'll offer two last thoughts. The first is from C.D. Broad, Wittgenstein's first philosophy professor at Cambridge: '...the future is simply nothing at all. Nothing has happened to the present by becoming past except that fresh slices of existence have been added to the total history of the world. The past is thus as real as the present.' And, finally, Willard V.O. Quine: 'A curious thing about the ontological problem is its simplicity. It can be put into three Anglo-Saxon monosyllables: 'What is there?' It can be answered, moreover, in a word – 'Everything'."

