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The Australian National University



Faculty of Arts

School of Art



Visual Arts Graduate Program

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Key Buddhist Concepts in the Work of Hiroshi Sugimoto

Noelene D. Lucas

**Dissertation
Presented in Fulfillment of the Requirements of
the
Doctor of Philosophy**

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Abstract

This thesis is composed of two parts: the Studio Practice component, which takes the form of an exhibition held at the School of Art Gallery from February 1 to February 10, 2006, and the Studio Report, which documents the nature and development of the research undertaken during the course of study. The Studio Practice component, together with the studio Report, comprises 66% of the thesis. The Dissertation comprises 33% of the thesis. The Studio Practice component has been based in the Sculpture Workshop and examines the embodied experience and the manifestation of key Buddhist concepts in Contemporary Art. This dissertation discusses the embodiment of the key Buddhist concepts in the work of Hiroshi Sugimoto, and shows that a Zen meditation-like experience can be gained through the encounter with the work, and how this experience is built into the work.

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Noelene D. Lucas, hereby declare that the dissertation here presented is the outcome of the research project I have undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the sources of ideas, references, quotations or paraphrases attributed to other authors.

Signature

Date

24/04/2006

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Finally to my parents Norman and Dulcie Lucas who sacrificed for me and supported me all the life we had together; the debt of gratitude is great. This achievement is theirs too.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation will discuss the work of the contemporary artist Hiroshi Sugimoto. My thesis is that not only are key Buddhist concepts embodied in the photographic installations of Hiroshi Sugimoto, but a Zen meditation-like experience can be gained from the work, through the encounter with the work, and this is an experience that is built into the work.

I will argue that there are other ways of knowing, of understanding some contemporary art, that are not dependant on formalist or Western readings. Both these readings of much contemporary art leaves a gap, and gives only a partial understanding and appreciation of the work. Other approaches to reading art are essential, especially those based on lived experience. Another approach relevant to Sugimoto is through an understanding of the key Buddhist concepts of impermanence, dependent origination and *sunyata* (emptiness).

Sugimoto Background

Sugimoto, who was born in 1948, grew up and was educated in Japan but gained his art training in USA in the 1970s at a time when the influence of Minimalism was strong. He has lived and practiced in the USA since then. Sugimoto is an artist with a substantial international reputation and exhibiting record; he has had major solo shows at the Serpentine Gallery, London (2003), the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art (2003), Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria (2001), the Guggenheim Museum, New York (2001), the Guggenheim Museums in Bilbao, Spain (2000), the SFMOMA, San Francisco (2000), the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane (1999), the CCA Kitakyushu, Japan (1998), Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and the Metropolitan Museum, New York (1995). He has also been selected for major photography survey shows at the Hara Museum of Art, Tokyo (1994), the Hirschhorn Museum, Washington DC (1999), the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo (1995), and The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, (2004), among others.

My intention is to show that Sugimoto combines the use of contemporary Western art practices (Minimal and Conceptual) and aspects of Japanese culture such as Buddhism,

plus a deep knowledge of other Japanese art forms, such as literature and *Noh* drama¹. He has used Buddhist imagery, in the *Sanjusangendo* photographic series, and embodies in his work Buddhist concepts particularly in relation to time. Notions of time are inevitably imbedded in the photographic process itself, as the photo is always of the past - an instant which was captured, immediately becomes the past. Because of the simplicity of his work it is often referred to as Zen-like and metaphysical. The *Seascape* series in particular are often referred to in terms of western ideas of the sublime². The seriality of his work parallels the work of Minimalists like Robert Morris, Carl Andre, Sol Lewitt and Don Judd.³ For over twenty years Sugimoto has worked with a limited number of series, *Theatres*, *Seascapes*, museum dioramas, wax images and architecture. As a photographer he is well known for his technical ability, long exposures, traditional techniques of the large format camera and the silver gelatin process⁴. Sugimoto's work is important from the perspective that it combines aspects of both eastern and western culture.

The work of Hiroshi Sugimoto is also important because the photographs subtly embody Buddhist philosophical content; they speak powerfully in a cynical, secular world. As Tucker points out:

...although the spiritual dimensions of late twentieth-century contemporary art have been explored in recent years in a variety of museum exhibitions, for the most part the focus has been on the stylistic commonalities of art with 'spiritual' overtones rather than on deep parallels of intent, philosophy, methods or practice. That's because it's become increasingly hard to find artists who publicly acknowledge spirituality as a primary impetus for art making.⁵

¹ Sugimoto, Hiroshi *Architecture of Time*, Bregenz, Austria: Kunsthau Bregenz, 2002.

² *eyestorm* article "The Sleepless Photographer." © 2003 whiteground Ltd., [cited August 2004]. Available from http://www.eyestorm.com/feature/ED2n_article.asp?article_id=135&artist_id=13 Hiroshi Sugimoto, Artfacts, ©2002, [cited August 2004] Available from <http://www.artfacts.net/index.php/pageType/exhibitionInfo/exhibition/13359>.

Hiroshi Sugimoto: Architecture. Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, © 2003 [cited August 2004] Available from <http://www.mcachicago.org/MCA/exhibit/past/sugimoto.html>.

³ Spector, Nancy *Sugimoto Portraits*, New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2000, p.13.

⁴ Winner of the Hasselblad Award – 2001.

⁵ Tucker, Marcia "NO TITLE", "WHITE PAPER II" presented to the *Awake* Exhibitions Consortium Meeting, June 2001, ©, 2001, [cited August 2004]. Available from http://www.artandbuddhism.org/papers/wp2_mt.html

In a postmodernist de-centered world of travel in which artists of diverse backgrounds participate in the international contemporary art scene, many art works embody the codes and strategies of Western contemporary art. However, they also bring formative influences, cultural experiences and understandings specific to the artist's country of origin, including the spiritual. These can be seen as strange elements giving exotic color to the work and can be referred to in the most superficial manner, read in relation to a similar Western concept, dumbed down, or ignored rather than given greater interpretative depth.

There are nine extensive catalogues of the work of Hiroshi Sugimoto⁶ but only three have lengthy, substantial texts, something more than a four or five page essay on his work.⁷ However, none of these texts examines the Buddhist aspects of the work in any depth, although some acknowledge a spiritual or religious aspect in his work.⁸ Sugimoto's work is written about as: "timeless, elemental and mysterious"⁹ or that he is a "mystic in quest of the infinite."¹⁰ One of the defining texts on Sugimoto's art is *Time Exposed* by Thomas Kellein. In this he summarizes the work as "having little enough to do with our knowing and believing, our achievements and failures: its homage is paid to no specific cause, but to all the untold multitude of hollow things in our world. It is for us to decide what to make of them."¹¹ Liam Gillick in *White Cube* looks at Sugimoto's work in terms of Conceptual and Minimalist strategies of seriality and formal methodologies. The most he has to say about the Buddhist philosophic content of the work is to refer to the work as evoking "a sense of the sublime, of timelessness."¹² One of the better essays is Kerry Brougher's five page essay in the catalogue *Hiroshi Sugimoto: Memories in Black and White* in which she suggests that

⁶ Sugimoto, Hiroshi *Hiroshi Sugimoto*, Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2005.
 Sugimoto, Hiroshi *Conceptual Forms*, Paris: Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, 2004.
 Sugimoto, Hiroshi *Sugimoto: Architecture*, Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 2003.
 Sugimoto, Hiroshi *Architecture of Time*, Bregenz: Austria: Kunsthau Bregenz, 2002.
 Sugimoto, Hiroshi *Sugimoto: Portraits*, New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2000.
 Sugimoto, Hiroshi *Theaters*, New York: Sonnabend Sundell Editions, 2000.
 Sugimoto, Hiroshi *Sugimoto*, Houston: Contemporary Art Museum Houston, 1996.
 Sugimoto, Hiroshi *Hiroshi Sugimoto. Time Exposed*, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995.
 Sugimoto, Hiroshi *Hiroshi Sugimoto: Memories in Black and White*. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1993, unpaginated.

⁷ There are a number of short reviews where a Buddhist term is used, not acknowledged as Buddhist, and not explained, eg. Denson, G. Roger "Satori among the Stills", *Parkett*, no. 46, May 1996, p.120-2.

⁸ Spector, Nancy *Sugimoto Portraits*, New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2000.

⁹ Brougher, Kerry *Hiroshi Sugimoto: Memories in Black and White*. Unpaginated.

¹⁰ Morris Hambourg, Maria *Sugimoto*, Houston: Contemporary Art Museum Houston, 1996, p.11.

¹¹ Kellein, Thomas, *Time Exposed*, p.14.

¹² Gillick, Liam *White Cube*, Gottengen: Steidl Press, 2002, p.152.

his work “is a world filled with essential ‘truths’ beyond human comprehension.”¹³ Brougher adds, in reference to the *Seascapes*, “they are metaphysical images that speak of immateriality and conjure up ancient memories of mankind.”¹⁴ None of the literature surveyed looked beyond a superficial analysis of the spiritual aspect of the work. None have explored the implications of a Buddhist analysis, which signals a significant gap in the literature. Perhaps art critics in the West are not informed enough about Buddhism to write comprehensively about it or are reluctant to speak of such things in a predominately secular society. I plan to redress this by an examination of key Buddhist concepts, to see how they are manifested in two series of Hiroshi Sugimoto’s photographs. A survey of the literature shows that the Buddhist aspect or reading of his work has been overlooked. To sum up, there is a lack of Buddhist discourse in relation to the works of Hiroshi Sugimoto.

In particular in this paper I present an alternative reading of Sugimoto’s work by providing an analysis of the fundamental concepts of Buddhism and how they apply to his work. There seems to be a reluctance to speak of the work in the context in which Sugimoto himself places it. In an interview, Thomas Kellein stated that he thought the work covered the “fields man, nature and culture” and Sugimoto replied “I was thinking more of art, science and religion.”¹⁵ Sugimoto goes on to state that for him the *Seascapes* series is “not representing man and nature only, they are also very religious.”¹⁶ The gap between existing writing on Sugimoto and his own comments provides a basis for me to explore.

This paper proposes that through an analysis of the *Seascapes*¹⁷ and *Sanjusangendo*¹⁸ series plus the nature of the perception of the work, the Buddhist content in the work of Sugimoto’s is revealed. I argue that this Buddhist content is embodied in the work and structures the experience so that the viewer has an experience similar to Zen meditation. The viewer’s experience in time reveals the Zen content: in particular Dogen’s¹⁹ notion of time, dependent origination, impermanence and emptiness. The thesis is that

¹³ Kerry Brougher, *Hiroshi Sugimoto: Memories in Black and White*, Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art., 1993, Unpaginated, first page of the essay.

¹⁴ *ibid*, third page of the essay.

¹⁵ Killein, *Time Exposed*, 1995, p. 92-3.

¹⁶ *ibid*.

¹⁷ I saw a large installation of the *Seascapes* in the Museum of Modern Art Tokyo in 1998.

¹⁸ I saw the *Sanjusangendo* photographs installed Queensland Art Gallery in 1999.

¹⁹ Dogen, Kigen, (1200-1253) Zen philosopher and founder of Soto Zen.

Buddhist meaning is embodied in the art of Sugimoto at multiple levels, which the viewer can experience even without knowledge of the Buddhist doctrine.

Buddhism and Contemporary Arts

Buddhism is a philosophy and a way of life; its meditation practice emphasizes refining and training the mind to achieve clarity, stability and the ability to be in the moment and to see things as they are²⁰. The emphasis is on experience as opposed to thoughts and opinions. These practices are similar to those some artists employ in the production of their work, and I maintain that they are also similar to those employed in the work of Hiroshi Sugimoto.

The first substantial influence of Buddhism on the arts of the West, as distinct from the stylistic²¹, was with the artists of the Beat Generation. The Beat Generation were a group of American artists in the 1950s and early 1960s who travelled widely and experimented with free sexuality, Eastern religions and drugs. The everyday details of life and social activities became the material for their art. It is often viewed as a literary movement, but the Beat generation produced a wide variety of art.²²

The movement's origins were in New York City where Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and William Burroughs first met in 1944, where the café scene of Greenwich Village fostered the avant-garde artists, writers, musicians and filmmakers of the 1950s. It later developed in San Francisco and Los Angeles. Another significant location was the Black Mountain College in North Carolina²³, where the staff included John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Franz Kline, Josef Albers, Robert Rauschenberg and Cy Twombly. The poet Robert Creeley taught and edited the influential *Black Mountain Review* between 1955-7. And when he left two years later for San Francisco, he became the link between the east and west coast poets and writers. Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and Gary Snyder integrated aspects of Buddhism into their lives and work and "...all the works Kerouac wrote after the mid-

²⁰ Or "suchness" (*immo*), is to see the world free of "mental construction and fixed labels." Cleary, Thomas *Shobogenzo*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986.

²¹ for instance Japanism.

²² Keig, Alan University of Adelaide Library Guide, *The Beat Generation and the Sixties*, [cited 2004]. Available from <http://www.library.adelaide.edu.au/guide/hum/english/beats.html>

²³ Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), *American Masters. Black Mountain College*. [cited 2004]. Available from http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/black_mountain_college.html

fifties, particularly *The Dharma Bums* and *Big Sur*, can be interpreted as Buddhist parables.”²⁴

John Cage’s work *4’ 33”* (1952) consisted of a pianist silently sitting at the piano for that amount of time while it “emphasizes the music of the sounds of the concert hall”²⁵, it equally could be interpreted as a primary Zen Buddhist meditation exercise (*shikantaza*), that of silently sitting and being in the present, aware of what is happening now, outside and inside the hall and oneself, living in the now. *Music of Changes* (1951) was another Cage work which depended on chance, the “elements were derived by use of the *I Ching*, and *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (1951) scored for 12 radios tuned at random.”²⁶ Cage was influential on the minimalists and performance art, while his use of chance and a disinterested or neutral attitude brought aspects of the everyday into art.

The social conditions of the 1960s and 1970s led many young people to adopt Buddhism and other non-mainstream spiritual practices as a protest against the Vietnam war and to broaden their minds. The influential commentator, Marcia Tucker,²⁷ links some of the changes in the art of the 60-70s to Buddhism:

Historically, the impact of Buddhist thought and practice was evident most recently in that period of the late 1960s and early ‘70s, documented by Lucy Lippard in her classic reference book *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. The premise of this ‘dematerialization’—partly in reaction to formalism and its emphasis on the art object to the exclusion of all else—was the value of the idea or concept behind the object, and the notion that the process of making was more important than its product.²⁸

At that time artists were interested in concept, multiplicity, the ephemeral

²⁴<http://www.fb10.uni-bremen.de/anglistik/kerkhoff/beatgeneration/BG-Glossary.htm#Buddhist%20Philosophy>.

[cited August 2004]. Study Guide, Glossary *The Beat Generation*. Bremen University.

²⁵ Charters, Anne *The Portable Beat Reader*. Bremen University. [cited August 2004]. Available from <http://www.fb10.unibremen.de/anglistik/kerkhoff/beatgeneration/BGGlossary.htm#Buddhist%20Philosophy>

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Marcia Tucker is a free-lance art critic, writer, and lecturer, former Founder and Director of the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York and *AWAKE: ART, BUDDHISM, AND THE DIMENSIONS OF CONSCIOUSNESS* participant.

²⁸ Tucker, Marcia “NO TITLE, “*WHITE PAPER II*” presented to the *Awake Exhibitions Consortium* Meeting, June 2001, © 2001 August, [cited August 2004] Available from http://www.artandbuddhism.org/papers/wp2_mt.html

(impermanent) and art's relation to the everyday. There was a reaction to the materialism of Formalist art and the art market.

The American art critics Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried and Rosalind Krauss defined and articulated late modernist art practices. Fried and Greenberg delineated the formalist modernist ideas that art could be read universally and that there was a universal viewer and content, that the art object was autonomous and the perception of the art work was primarily visual. The minimalist artists such as Robert Morris, Don Judd essentially rejected the formalist view of the purity of the art object, its autonomy and the notion of the disembodied viewer. At the core of this debate on perception of art is time, duration and experience in time. Chapter One examines the formalist views in Michael Fried's essay "Art and Objecthood"²⁹ and the minimalist perspective through Robert Morris's "Notes on Sculpture".³⁰ Morris challenged the Greenberg and Fried position, by placing the art object and the viewer together in the situation where the viewer was in a corporeal, phenomenological relationship with the work. Furthermore, the work constituted the totality of the object in the space/site as well as the conditions of the viewer's perception. Chapter One presents the arguments of Fried and Morris on perception and outlines the conceptual background of the thesis in relation to the encounter with the art object. These issues are used in chapters two and three for the examination of the work of Hiroshi Sugimoto.

Chapter Two will explore the relationship between the *Seascape* installation by the Japanese American photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto and key Buddhist concepts. I argue that the installation is structured to provide the viewer with an embodied awareness, which parallels a Zen meditation experience. This awareness can be seen as similar to the embodied awareness, which was a part of the Minimalist move away from the formalist analysis of the autonomous art object.

As will be made clear in Chapter One, time is the central issue in the perception of minimalist work. In Chapter Two and I will also show time to be key to the image of the *Seascape* Series, to the nature of photography, to the structure and the experience of

²⁹ Fried, Michael. "Art and Objecthood", *Artforum*, Vol. V, no. 10 (June, 1967): p. 12-23.

³⁰ Morris, Robert. "Notes on Sculpture. Part 1", *Artforum*, Vol. IV, no. 6 (Feb. 1966) and "Notes on Sculpture. Part 2", *Artforum*, Vol. V, no. 2 (October, 1966): p.21-23.

the installation. Through my analysis of Sugimoto's *Seascape* series I will draw out the relevant aspects of Buddhist philosophy. These are the three key concepts of interdependent arising, impermanence and emptiness plus the concepts of time and being present to now, derived from the teachings the Zen philosopher and teacher Dogen (1200-1253).

Chapter 3 will discuss the *Sanjusangendo* photographs of Hiroshi Sugimoto and examine the relationship of the image content, the symbolic content, the installation, and the experience of the installation, to argue that the symbolic and philosophical content is contained at all levels of the structure of the work. The perception of the installation of the *Sanjusangendo* photographs, I will argue, makes clear the formalist notion of the autonomy of the art object and of art forms, as well as the notion of the primacy of the optical over other means of experience, is insufficient for a reading of this work. My reading of the *Sanjusangendo* photographs also makes the point that the minimalist position, with its emphasis on sensory perception and empirical knowledge, rather than more religious, philosophic content (such as Buddhism), limits the reading of the work. Implied in this is the recognition that we are already embedded in a "symbolic order".³¹ Analysis of the photographs will reveal their content and key to this are the Buddhist concepts of multiplicity, oneness (*zenki*) and impermanence.

The *Sanjusangendo* series in particular has explicit connections to traditional Buddhist art through the use of the traditional Japanese image of the Kannon³² and this will be explored to see how the content of the images carries over to the contemporary photographic work. This chapter will show that Buddhist content is embodied in the work on a number of levels to be experienced and comprehended through more than one mode of perception. These levels of perception are necessary in order to account for the complexity of the art work. Through examination of the *Seascape*, and the *Sanjusangendo* photographs in relation to these Buddhist concepts, I will show that Buddhist content is structured in the work and embodied in the encounter.

³¹ Foster, Hal *The Return of the Real*, p.43.

³² Bodhisattva of compassion.

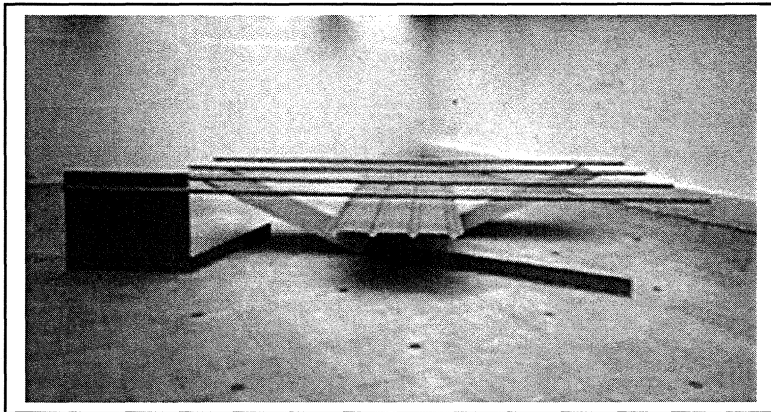


Fig:1 Anthony Caro, *Prairie*, 1967.

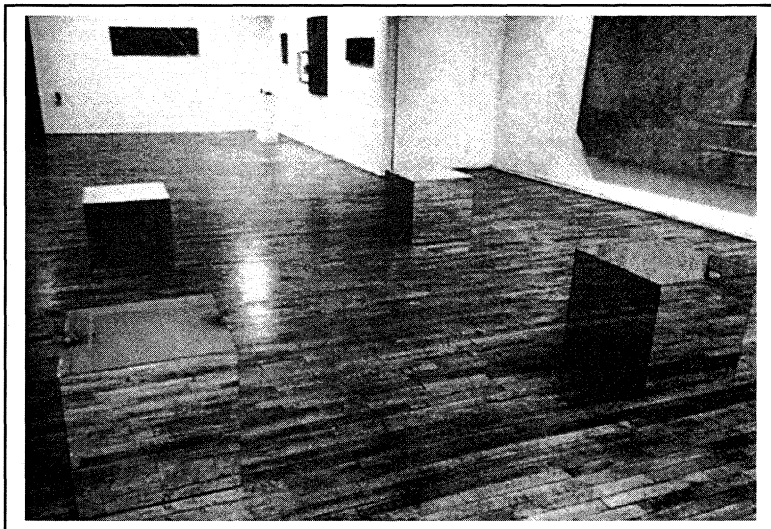


Fig:2 Robert Morris, *Mirror Cubes*, 1965

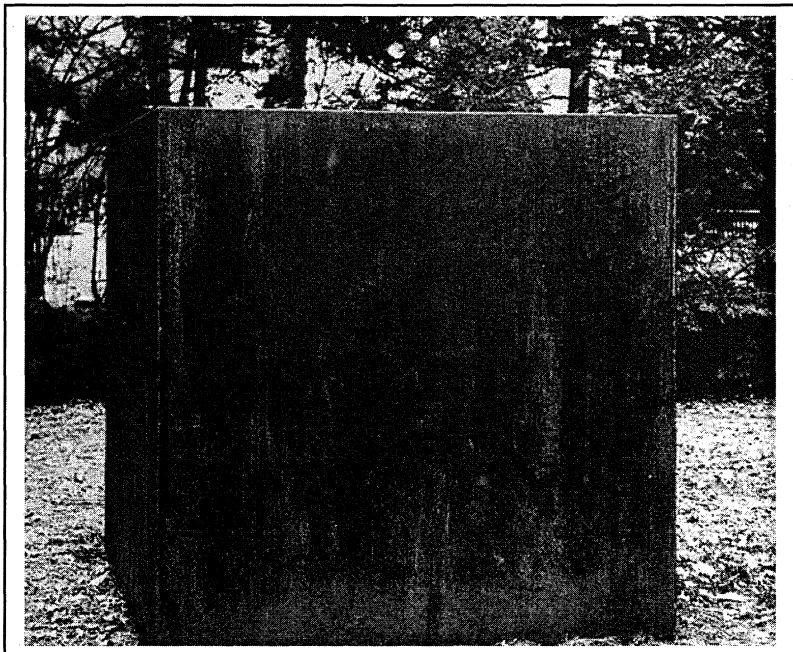


Fig:3 Tony Smith, *Die*, 1962

CHAPTER 1

The Theatrical and Encountering Art

This chapter will outline the key issues in the 1960s debate on the nature of the perception of art. Formalism dominated the debate on the nature of art and its perception. Specifically, this chapter examines the formalist analysis as articulated in Michael Fried's essay "Art and Objecthood". In this, Fried carried forward Greenbergian modernism, but he went further and developed theatricality as the central issue for the critique of minimalism, and cast theatricality in a negative light. Strangely, this critique can be seen in a positive light; one that made a contribution to the analysis of minimalism. Seen positively, Fried's articulation of theatricality was a thorough analysis of what the embodied encounter with minimal art entailed, and it was this very thoroughness that clarified the issues at stake.

This chapter also presents the minimalist perspective through Robert Morris's writing, specifically the "Notes on Sculpture", which were the impetus for Fried's "Art and Objecthood". Minimalism essentially rejected the formalist view of the purity of the art object, its autonomy, and the notion of the disembodied viewer. In contrast, Morris's "Notes on Sculpture" argued for a corporeal viewer in a phenomenological relationship with the work. For Morris the work constituted the totality of the object in space, the conditions of viewing, the site and the viewer's perception. "Notes on Sculpture" and "Art and Objecthood" are analyzed in order to show the nature of the embodied encounter with the art object.

Late modernism was, in many enduring ways, defined and further articulated by three American art critics: Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried and Rosalind Krauss all of whom exerted enormous influence on art criticism from the late twentieth century to the present. Clement Greenberg was one of the most influential critics of the mid to late 20th century. He promoted contemporary American art in the 1940s and 1950s and redefined modernism. Greenberg became known in 1939 with the publication of "Avant Garde and Kitsch" in which he articulated the place of high art in a society of mass culture. High art was maintained, he asserted, by artists who worked in relation to what was relevant to their medium. Greenberg held that with art of "quality", form and

content were integrated.³³ This art of “quality”, he also asserted, was on a path of increasing refinement and purity and because the “[c]ontent is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself.”³⁴ His writing and the art he promoted were called “formalist”. Greenberg promoted the primacy of the eye and de-emphasized the embodied perception of art. The basis of his philosophy was Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, from which he took ideas of aesthetic purity, transcendence, and quality.³⁵ The Greenbergian art object was autonomous and pure and it remained so, regardless of where it was or the context in which it was seen or who saw it.

The height of Greenberg's influence was in the 1960s with the publication of his volume of essays *Art and Culture* and, although he was not a teacher as such, he influenced a younger generation of critics, which included Michael Fried and Rosalind Krauss who were graduate students together at Harvard in the early 1960s. Both were regarded as Greenbergian critics in the 1960s and both subsequently broke with him and with each other.³⁶

Michael Fried further articulated a formalist modernist position in “Art and Objecthood”, which signaled a partial break from Greenbergian formalism. Fried, originally was a controversial modernist art critic in the 1960s, he published criticism from 1962 to 1977 and later became an influential art historian. From 1965 he wrote for *Artforum* magazine and from 1966 until 1973 he was a contributing editor. In 1968, Fried refused to allow Rosalind Krauss on the editorial board of *Artforum*. Nevertheless, she joined it in 1969.³⁷ Fried wrote in opposition to minimalism in his essay “Art and Objecthood” as a response to Robert Morris's “Notes on Sculpture”. In his essay, Morris wrote on the role of the body, the situation and the beholder in the reception of minimalist art. Morris essentially rejected the formalist position of the autonomous and pure art object seen by a disembodied viewer in favour of an art object seen by a

³³ Greenberg, Clement “Avant-Garde and Kitsch”, *Art and Culture*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1961, p. 6.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Summarized from, Grudin, Anthony E. *Michael Fried: History and Criticism*. Last update February 2002. [cited February 2005]. Available from <http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu/bca/grudin.pdf>.

³⁶ Summarized from, Diekman, Kristine. *The Art and Technology of the Moving Image*, 2001 [cited February, 2005]. Available from <http://courses.csusm.edu/vsar422kd/UP/clementgreenburg.html>

³⁷ Summarized from, “A Dictionary of Art Historians”, ©2005 [cited February 2005]. Available from <http://www.lib.duke.edu/lilly/artlibry/dah/friedm.htm> and Fenton, Terry, “Greenberg”, © Dec. 2002. [cited February 2005]. Available from <http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/thecritic.html>

corporeal being engaged in relationship with the work. The position Morris took was one in which the location and the contingencies of the site and the viewer's field of vision were all part of the phenomenological perception of the object and its context.

The phenomenological perception of the art object is what Fried focused on in his argument. His response was that minimalism was theatrical because it emphasized the role of the viewer and the situation, not the work. "Art and Objecthood" moved beyond a discussion of minimalism to further articulate Greenberg's modernism and later it helped make the distinctions between modernism and post modernism. "Art and Objecthood" has become an influential text of contemporary criticism. This was because it was the clearest and most thorough analysis of the issues at the core of minimalism.

Robert Morris was an artist and theorist who, since the 1960s, has been extremely influential both as a sculptor and a writer. He was a key figure in minimalism and later movements. He wrote the first version "Notes on Sculpture" as a spoof on formalist criticism but was urged to do a serious reworking and to publish it. Since then he has contributed to a theorization and definition of minimalist and later movements: "Notes on Sculpture," (1966-8), Process art ("Anti Form," 1968), and Earthworks ("Aligned with Nazca," 1975). Morris's work has been included in numerous important national and international exhibitions over the past 40 years. A major retrospective of his work was shown at the Guggenheim Museum in 1994, which Rosalind Krauss curated. Morris wrote a number of influential essays on Minimalist sculpture.³⁸

Rosalind Krauss was perhaps the most influential art critic after Greenberg. She articulated the break up of American modernism, this tracked and influenced the development of post modernism. By the end of the 1960s, Krauss was opposed to formalism for both personal and ideological reasons. The personal and ideological informed the friendships of Greenberg and Fried as well as Fried and Krauss, causing arguments and rifts. Krauss left the editorial board of "Artforum" in 1975 to start "October" magazine for MIT publishing, a more scholarly publication which opposed

³⁸ Summarized from: Yeghiayan, Eddie. *Speakers Bibliography*. Rosalind E. Krauss. University of California, Humanities Research Institute Conference, University of California Irvine, 1987. [cited February 2005]. Available from <http://sun3.lib.uci.edu/~scctr/hri/visual/krauss.html>

Greenberg, Fried and formalism. Krauss rejected modernism and Greenberg's ideas of historical progress in her book *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, (1977). Later, in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*, (1985), she took a structuralist approach, and a poststructuralist one was taken with *Formless: A User's Guide*, (1997), co written with Yve-Alain Bois.³⁹

The basis for Fried's critique in "Art and Objecthood" were statements by artists like Morris and Judd who articulated what their work was and how they believed it should, or would, be seen. Fried's and Greenberg's arguments centered around painting, consequently their conclusions were more suited to painting than sculpture or installation. Even though the formalists promoted the autonomy of art forms and art objects, they seemed to ignore the separate and distinct concerns of sculpture, its physicality for instance, compared to the pictorial or illusionistic and other optical qualities of painting. The formalist critics did not deal well with the sculptural reality of gravity, materiality, light and space.

Fried's analysis of what he termed "objecthood" was developed and expanded as a response to Morris's essays. Fried argued that objecthood is constituted through the things that surround the object, not the object itself, the things contributing to its existence as an object. And, as he saw it, when the emphasis was placed on those things, rather than the internal relations of the object, the result was theatrical. In Fried's terms, the theatrical was outside the proper concern of the visual arts. For me, it is precisely objecthood, those things outside the object that are often addressed and worked with in art today. For this reason Fried's analysis of the theatrical and objecthood in "Art and Objecthood", along with the series of "Notes on Sculpture" by Robert Morris, can provide a useful tool for the analysis of contemporary practice, particularly in relation the perception of the art.

Fried saw objecthood as negative, as something that needed to be defeated.⁴⁰ He stated that the emphasis should be within the object and that one could go about defeating objecthood by reasserting form and shape and reasserting the formal relations within the

³⁹ Summarized from: Siedell, Daniel A "Rosalind Krauss, David Carrier, and Philosophical Art Criticism." (38.2) *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, [cited February 2005]. Available from http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/the_journal_of_aesthetic_education/v038/38.2siedell.html

⁴⁰ Fried, Michael "Art and Objecthood", p. 12-23.

object. Morris however, rejected the formalist notion of the art object and the place of the viewer, and argued that the viewer's body, the light conditions and the relationship of the object/s to the space were all important to the act of encountering minimal art.⁴¹ In "Notes on Sculpture", Morris argued that the work was the sum total of the object, the site and the viewer's corporeal, phenomenological perception of the situation. "Notes on Sculpture. Part 2" stated a position which was formative in installation art and for the way much contemporary art functions; he recognized that the field of concern had been expanded, to incorporate the context and viewing conditions of the work, those very things that Fried regarded as theatrical. The nature of the site, the context and conditionality of the work and the viewer became features of conceptual and installation art.

The fact that minimal work expanded its concerns and moved beyond the single autonomous object was problematic for Fried to the extent that he saw it signalling the end of art. Fried's analysis in "Art and Objecthood" is laced with strident negatives for the minimalist works and for the kind of activities viewers needed to engage in to perceive the work. Fried's analysis of the theatrical in relation to minimal work is thorough and useful from a contemporary position, because he took some of the points Morris raised in "Notes on Sculpture. Part 2" a few steps further. His analysis and some of his deductions are significant, notwithstanding his general tone of disapproval. For instance, Fried spoke of the durational aspect of encountering the minimal work as an endless activity, because meaning is located outside a single, composed, autonomous object. As I see it, the problem for Fried was that if the meaning was not located in the object it was nowhere and that is a reason why he called their work empty. Fried promoted a single stationary viewing position from where the viewer could instantly, and outside of time⁴², apprehend the work through what Greenberg called the object's "presence".⁴³

Morris, on the other hand, speaks of a roaming viewer, one who, through time, needs to move around to make the associations and connections in a work that may be physically scattered. Fried picks up on Morris's use of the word "literal" in the first "Notes on Sculpture" where Morris points out: "The autonomous and literal nature of sculpture

⁴¹ Robert Morris "Notes on Sculpture. Part 2." p.21-23.

⁴² Fried, Michael "Art and Objecthood", p.22.

⁴³ Greenberg, Clement "Recentness of Sculpture." *American Sculpture of the Sixties*, p.26.

demands that it have its own, equally literal space.”⁴⁴ Morris states a sculptural truism: that sculptors deal with the reality of gravity, changing light conditions and other physical realities. Sculpture deals with real objects, in real space, in real time, not with the illusionistic. Fried did not use this word “literal” to merely describe minimal work, he used it as an insult. He called it literal not because of his commitment to formalism but because of how objects were valued. As he saw it, minimal art eroded the values of autonomous high art and promoted the values of everyday objects. For Fried, what defines art is a particular kind of self-reflexivity, which minimal art objects (“literal” objects) do not have, so they are no more than ordinary objects. By October of the same year, in “Notes on Sculpture. Part 2”⁴⁵, Morris had changed the emphasis of the discussion to include more of the conditions of viewing and the act of experiencing the object/s in a spatial context. His position was that the embodied viewer moved in a spatially extended field of concern, which demanded various viewing positions. It was clearly a more phenomenological approach. This approach examined the difference between what is known about an object and the way it might appear to the senses and the significance of the body in perception.

The point here is that conditions of encountering the work are basically what Fried defined as objecthood, which he saw negatively. I argue that he was not able to take his analysis far enough because of his commitment to a formalist position. Objecthood can be seen in a positive light, as a useful exposition of what happens when a spectator encounters the work. This chapter is an attempt to set out Michael Fried’s criteria of the theatrical, that is, the conditions for encountering art, which I believe became the conditions of much contemporary art.

The seven criteria Fried applies in setting up the theatrical in “Art and Objecthood” may be summarized as:

1. external relations and the circumstances of viewing;
2. the relationship of the spectator to the work;
3. the autonomy of art forms and what is appropriate;
4. the need for an audience;
5. stage presence and distance;
6. temporality and duration; and

⁴⁴ Morris, Robert “Notes on Sculpture. Part 1.”

⁴⁵ Morris, Robert “Notes on Sculpture. Part 2.”

7. endlessness.

It is these criteria that I will use to examine the work of Hiroshi Sugimoto in the next two chapters.

The theatrical.

Initially it is useful to place the term “theatrical” in context. The theatrical is never actually defined in “Art and Objecthood”; the nearest Fried got to a definition of the theatrical is that it lies in objecthood, that it is outside the object, and that it is what lies between the arts, in what Krauss calls a “nonthing”, an empty space.⁴⁶ Krauss’s point is interesting because it is a spatial analogy and makes clear Fried’s point that the theatrical is not part of the visual arts, in fact it has no place. What Fried sets up is a duality of the non theatrical and the theatrical, and judges them to be good and bad respectively.

Fried saw in the theatrical the different modes of operation needed to perceive the new work; work which did not, as he correctly saw, operate within the parameters of modernist sculpture. Over time Fried’s view of theatricality changed little. The theatricality he critiqued in the 1960’s in relation to minimal sculpture was basically derived from an optical painterly perspective. In later writing, for example in *Absorption and Theatricality* (1980)⁴⁷, which is on eighteenth-century French painting, he uses the anti-theatrical ideas of the eighteenth-century philosopher and art critic Denis Diderot. For Diderot, theatricality was concerned with the subjects of the paintings and the nature of the painted surface: figures depicted in paintings who seemed to be aware of an audience, who seemed to acknowledge the spectator were regarded as theatrical and such works were held in low esteem. By comparison paintings in which the subjects of the painting are “absorbed” in their actions, unaware of the audience and where the images were rendered in a thinly painted surface that did not draw attention to itself, were said not to be theatrical. For example, when the figures were painted in a thick and textured way they are thought to draw attention to the manner of their representation, a kind of self-consciousness, which brings the spectator

⁴⁶ Krauss, Rosalind, “Theories After Minimalism and Pop”, in *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, Seattle: Bay Press, 1987.

⁴⁷ Fried, Michael *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the age of Diderot*, Berkeley: University Of California Press, c1980.

to an awareness of the surface, to the production and not the subjects. According to Fried in *Absorption and Theatricality*, this also draws attention away from the subjects and their absorbed activities and brings awareness to the painting's mode of production, thereby destroying the viewer's absorption in the work by taking the viewer out of the image. And that was theatrical.

The writer, Thomas Crow looked at theatricality from another perspective in *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth Century Paris*, one based on dramatic texts and performance.⁴⁸ He saw the work of the eighteenth century as having two sources; work based on texts in revolutionary theatrical performance and others based on theatrical fantasy. Antoine Watteau used the aristocratic *Fetes galantes* which were imitations of common fairground performances. In relation to the work of Jacques-Louis David, Crow makes the case that he imitated the roles and revolutionary gestures of characters in the political plays of, for instance, Voltaire (Francois Marie Arouet). In these cases, the theatre of the time had a direct influence on the paintings.

More recently the anti-theatrical argument was carried further in Fried's *Courbet's Realism*. In this text, Fried claims that Diderot was first to describe the non-absorbed act of viewing art as theatrical, and Fried goes on to say that absorption in front of the image became an issue just at the time it could no longer be taken for granted. Fried asserts that Gustave Courbet's paintings encapsulated Diderot's ideas as they were made by an "embodied being engaged in a particular activity."⁴⁹ A painter who is inside the reality he represents, and whose experience is continuous with it would be regarded by Fried, as embodied. In this continuous experience the artist is not separated or distanced from the activity and the work by the tool he used. It is neither fragmentary nor theatrical, as Fried believes it is with photography. Fried sets up the binary of the viewer and the art object and argues for the elimination of this duality in the embodied artist/observer.

The prime issue for Fried in relation to the theatrical is that the focus of the viewer is no longer just on the object but has moved out to include the circumstances of viewing, the object's external relations, that is, on objecthood. This is the first of Fried's criteria of

⁴⁸ Crow, Thomas *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

⁴⁹ Fried, Michael *Courbet's Realism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1990, p. 46.

the theatrical. Fried argues that minimalist work "is theatrical because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters the literalist work."⁵⁰ Where as, for the formalist what there was to be gained from the work lay in the art object itself, not outside. Morris had expanded the activities of the viewer:

The better new work takes the relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light and the viewer's field of vision. The object is but one of the terms in the newer aesthetic.⁵¹

For Fried, Morris's insistence that the experience of sculpture is the experience of real objects in real space and time and not the single autonomous object, confirmed the theatricality he disliked so much. For the minimalists, the extension of the relations beyond the object to include the space and the viewer did not reduce the object.

The object itself has not become less important. It has merely become less self-important. By taking its place as a term among others the object does not fade off into some bland, neutral, generalized or otherwise retiring shape.⁵²

Morris points out that the consideration of the "expanded situation" does not mean a lack of concern with the object rather "... the concerns now are for more control of/and or cooperation of the entire situation"⁵³ to include a consideration of the context. He goes on to say that the placement of the object to some extent affects the character of the work, and that the "situation is now more complex and expanded."⁵⁴ Fried, however, saw minimalist work as essentially empty of content because the emphasis was on the external relations and the viewer, not the object, that is, the object alone was not the generator of meaning. The implication is that the focus of the situation has moved to the context and the viewer, and for Fried this relocated the meaning outside the object, thus emptying the object of meaning.

Fried argued that minimal sculpture did not "defeat or suspend its own objecthood", its

⁴⁸ Morris, Robert "Notes on Sculpture. Part 2", p. 21.

⁴⁹ *ibid*, p.23.

⁵⁰ *ibid*.

⁵¹ *ibid*.

⁵² *ibid*

⁵³ *ibid*

⁵⁴ *ibid*.

conditions of viewing.⁵⁵ What was at stake here was the distinction between the autonomous, high art object and the minimalist object which he regarded as being in the stream of everyday life. This reaffirmed the formalist opinion that minimalism was non-art. The minimalists were concerned with properties of objects – light, gravity, scale, materiality etc., but the whole situation also included the body of the viewer; nothing shows its “irrelevance to the situation, and therefore to the experience”.⁵⁶ The properties of the real, of the situation, are objecthood and are “a new genre of theatre”.⁵⁷ The experience of the viewer and situation amount to objecthood and theatricality, that is, the totality of the situation constitutes objecthood. That total situation included the viewer, since the minimalist work demanded an audience in the same sense that everyday objects need users for confirmation of their function. The focus on the context and the circumstances of viewing art are recognized today as just part of the way art is apprehended, but Fried saw this as theatrical, as something to be avoided.

Fried wrote that it was pictorial shape which would defeat objecthood; which would take the artwork beyond being an object like all other objects in the world, and make it art. The formalists advocated that sculpture should be pictorial, incorporeal and gravity-defying, that is, it should deny its object character. Fried wrote vehemently against experience and “sensibility” in the perception of art because, as I see it, he was committed to the single viewing position of the disembodied, optical viewer, a viewer who apprehends the work instantly, not as an experience in time.

From the beginning, the minimalists saw their work as something other than paintings or autonomous sculptural objects. What they were primarily concerned with was what Fried called “objecthood”. The minimal work was not made part by part and was not about internal relations as was previous modernist work. In contrast, the minimal artists saw the object as one whole thing located in and dependent on specific conditions. For Fried, sculptures were not objects and when they were seen “as nothing more than objects”,⁵⁸ that was a failure in his terms. Objecthood must be overcome, sculpture must “defeat its own objecthood”.⁵⁹ Minimal art, Fried believed, “aspires, not to defeat or

⁵⁵ Fried, Michael “Art and Objecthood”, p.15.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.16.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.15.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ Fried, Michael “Art and Objecthood”, p.15.

suspend its own objecthood, but on the contrary to discover and project objecthood".⁶⁰ A major part of this was the relationship of the spectator to the object.

Fried insists that the viewer be in an absorbed, continuous, un-fragmented relationship with the object: one that is not possible with minimalist work which, for him, distances the spectator. In the 1960s, when the relationship of the viewer and the object was debated, some commentators saw the theatrical as located in the scattered nature of minimalist objects, as if they were arranged on a stage like theatre props.⁶¹ This would perhaps be an obvious way to look at object-based work, sculpture, or as we call it today, installation.

Fried's notion of stage presence is, according to Frances Colpitt,⁶² based on Greenberg's idea of "presence" that is anthropomorphic. Encountering minimal work was disquieting for Fried who likens it to "the silent presence of another *person*", which is theatrical.⁶³ For him it was not unlike being in the presence of strangers, a situation which can give the uncomfortable sensation of being alone, observed and distanced. The viewer experiences being distanced from the work in an "indeterminate, open-ended – unexacting – relation *as subject*."⁶⁴

In the case of modernist work like that of the painter Kenneth Noland or the sculptors David Smith or Anthony Caro, Fried supposed the work treated the viewers as if they were not there. In Fried's terms, such work was not theatrical. He regards the work of these sculptors as pictorial and the content of the work to be ever-present, in what Greenberg called "presentness". For these reasons pictorial sculpture could be appreciated instantly from a single stationary position. A case in point is Anthony Caro's *Prairie*, 1967, (Fig.1) a yellow painted steel construction of planes and lines. It is composed of a waist-high floating plane, 582 x 320cm, which forms the top of the work and defines its width and length, containing the work in that rectangular space. *Prairie* is a play with horizontal lines, vertical and diagonal planes. Two diagonal planes and a vertical one support the four horizontal poles, which form a table-like top, making it appear to float. The vertical supports are balanced, cantilevered and welded in an

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ Corrine Robbins, Lucy Lippard.

⁶² Colpitt, Frances *Minimal Art*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990, p.90.

⁶³ Fried, M "Art and Objecthood", p.16.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

attempt to create an illusory floating plane, denying the materiality of steel and exemplifying the incorporeality that Greenberg and Fried desired. *Prairie* deals with the relationship of part to whole, of plane to line to the internal space. It is composed and contained; contained as if it were in a frame, separate from the everyday world. Fried would have it that this work could be perceived optically and instantly from one position because of its contained, composed nature.

In contrast, minimalist sculpture required a moving viewer who perceived both in time and in relation to a particular viewing body. Robert Morris's four *Mirrored Cubes*, 1965, (Fig.2) were intended to affect the viewer's experience; they reflected the floor and walls and even the viewers themselves. They also seemed to dissolve into the floor, thus merging with the environment and incorporating the viewer. And because of the reflections, the cubes would be different and have changing perspectives from whatever position the viewer was in. The work was in effect contaminated by and integrated with the world around it; this included the viewer.

For the formalists, sculptures like Caro's *Prairie*, could be apprehended instantly because of the contained nature of the composition it could be communicated as a whole and be complete in any one single view. By comparison the minimal position was one of open and endless associations; Donald Judd used seriality and repetition, not composition, with parts dispersed in space. It was not whole and was therefore not complete. The formalist view that in sculpture "matter is incorporeal, weightless, and exists only optically like a mirage"⁶⁵ revealed for Krauss that the aim of modernism was to:

produce the illusion in the viewer that he is not there – an illusion that is set up in reciprocity with the status of the work as mirage: It is not there and so consequently he is not there – a reciprocity of absence that the author of "Art and Objecthood" would go on to call in other contexts a 'supreme fiction'.⁶⁶

But the art object is not completely absent, it is there in an incorporeal, optical state, so "the viewer is there in a mirror condition, abstracted from his bodily presence and reorganized as the non corporeal vehicle of a single stratum of sensory experience". So the viewer, like the object, is a "pure cognitive", "abstracted presence" a disembodied

⁶⁵ Krauss, Rosalind in Foster, Hal ed. *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*. p.60.

⁶⁶ *ibid*, p.61.

viewer.⁶⁷ Krauss argues that there are two viewing subjects underlying the whole argument in "Art and Objecthood", "two representatives of the same beholder"⁶⁸ who do two different things. One is the optical subject, "the subject of alienated vision";⁶⁹ the other is the subject developed in relation to the "theatrical"; it is the one who is attempting to re center the viewing self, attempting to make the viewer whole in all his or her faculties, as the "the embodied, the corporeal, subject."⁷⁰

Modernism denied the differences of gender and race and supposed a universal viewer. We do not all see the same thing or make the same meaning from an art work, all positions are encoded and particularized. Is Fried asking for an objective viewing position, one in which all viewers will understand the work in the same way? We do not go to see art as a blank sheet, each one of us has a subjective position based on our life experiences; what has happened immediately prior to seeing the work and one's belief system all impinge on the art, on the reception of the art. One is contextualized in one's life, time and society.

What Fried and the formalist critics did not consider, because they applied different principles, was that the internal relations of an artwork interact with forces outside that internal system. The application of formalist principles in reading a work also overlooks the viewer's competence with images, built up over years of the lived experience of looking and using visual codes. We make meaning daily from images, from their content and also from what they refer to outside themselves. Norman Bryson points out:

What we have to understand is that the act of recognition that painting galvanizes is a production, rather than a reception of meaning. Viewing is an activity of transforming the material of the painting into meanings.⁷¹

Of course this is the function of all art works, not just painting. Part of the problem for Fried was the body in perception, the embodied viewing self. In effect, it was a viewer who remained aware of the self as separate from the object. Minimal sculptures "evoke in the spectator an awareness of his or her body within the space shared by the object

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p.62.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.63.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ Bryson, Norman, *Vision and Painting*. London: Macmillan, 1983, p. xii-xiv.

and the viewer.”⁷² The viewer’s awareness of the phenomenological relations in the context of the artwork (space and scale, etc), Fried saw as distancing the viewer from the art object. From his point of view, the right relationship to the viewer therefore involved overcoming distance and duration, which I shall discuss later in this chapter. The right relationship of viewer to object was just a part of the greater formalist scheme of correct relations formulated primarily by Greenberg, in which each art form should remain within what was particular to it.

At the base of Fried's notion of the theatrical is the belief that things have a place, in terms of the appropriateness of concept, methods and material to particular art forms. According to Greenberg, an art form “must try in principle, to avoid dependence upon any order of experience not given in the most essentially construed nature of its medium.”⁷³ The formalist view is that each art form should adhere to what is appropriate to it and not utilize aspects of other art forms; they should retain purity. Each should be self-sufficient in terms of physicality, content and imagery, according to Greenberg.

From the formalist viewpoint, art works should be autonomous in all respects. An art work and an art form should be ‘self-sufficient’ should exist “for and by itself literally as well as conceptually.”⁷⁴ In this view of art, once the artwork is subject to the vagaries of time and context it loses its integrity, its autonomy. According to Greenberg, modernist works are best seen in “the continuity and neutrality of a space that light alone inflects, without regard to the laws of gravity.”⁷⁵ The prime location for an exhibition, as seen by him, was the “neutral” white box of the gallery or museum, where the object could remain in its pure form, uncontaminated by the world outside. The formalists propose that sculpture, for instance, should only concern itself with what was intrinsically within the nature of sculpture and should not be concerned with or include things which they regarded as outside the realm of sculpture. This would include things like gender, religion, social issues or historical narrative, all of which, I argue, are the substance of art. Greenberg goes on to say: “The arts are to achieve concreteness, 'purity', by acting solely in terms of their separate and irreducible

⁷² Colpitt, Frances *Minimal Art*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993, p.96.

⁷³ Greenberg, Clement *Art and Culture*, p.139.

⁷⁴ *ibid*, p.145.

⁷⁵ *ibid*, p.144.

selves.”⁷⁶ As a spatial art, sculpture’s “separate and irreducible” self would not include time. In the formalist view of art, time did not belong to the visual arts; time belonged on the stage not in the gallery. And the same would be said of the theatrical because it was seen as time based, and it also fell between the art forms. For the formalist, as stated above, the artwork should not acknowledge the viewer in its production or exhibition. It should not need to have an audience and in this respect, as in all others, it was to be autonomous.

Both Fried and Morris were involved in what Fried distinguished as the object/objecthood complex and the audience’s relationship to the object and the location. They approached the issue of the viewer from different perspectives. For Fried, the minimal art work was incomplete because it was not a composed whole. It needed the viewer to make meaning from the experience of the situation, a meaning that would be particular to each. Experience is the key here; Fried seems to be against experience and sensation, preferring a more optical, cerebral appreciation of art. Morris’s opinion was contrary he wanted the audience to be in relation with the elements of the site. Fried, however, wanted the viewer in an “intimate”, absorbed relationship with the object. Morris saw it this way:

Every internal relationship, whether it be set up by a structural division, a rich surface, or what have you, reduces the public, external quality of the object and tends to eliminate the viewer to the degree that these details pull him into an intimate relation with the work and out of the space in which the object exists.⁷⁷

Morris wanted the viewer in conscious embodied interaction with the elements of the work and the site/space. He points out here that the very thing Fried wanted, removed the viewer from the situation, from interaction with the artwork and its context, and in effect ‘eliminated’ the viewer from the site. The formalist view as stated by Fried is that the “object, not the beholder, must remain the centre or the focus of the situation”.⁷⁸ The active participation of the viewer would mean the end of art, as Fried saw it.

The difference between the object and the relevance of experience is personalized in and encapsulated in the famous story of Tony Smith’s night drive in the early 1950’s, on

⁷⁶ *ibid*, p.139.

⁷⁷ Morris, R “Notes on Sculpture. Part 2.” p.21.

⁷⁸ Fried, M “Art and Objecthood”, p.15.

the incomplete New Jersey Turnpike. This issue was so important to Fried that he quoted the whole of Smith's account of the drive, in "Art and Objecthood". Why would Fried spend so much time on this journey in an essay that was ostensibly about art objects? Perhaps because that drive encapsulated the problem of objecthood and the relationship of the viewer to the work, in particular to minimal objects.

What the drive revealed in Fried's terms, was an experience, a personal one from which each person made their own meaning, in which there was no object, only conditions of viewing/objecthood. And it brought up profound implications for both Fried and Smith who saw that it may have meant the end of art. Fried saw in this event an example of the theatricality that threatened art. For Smith, the conclusion was similar; "it ought to be clear that's the end of art."⁷⁹ So they both believed that this drive was so significant that it spelt the end of art, but from different perspectives. For Smith this was such a profound experience he had no frame in which to place it. He also said: "All art today is an art of postage stamps".⁸⁰ There is a tone of uncertainty in Tony Smith's famous account of this journey in which he travelled at high speed, at night, along a then unfinished, unlit, unmarked section of the Turnpike; that part which is through flat, highly industrialized environment (oil terminals etc). Smith had a powerful experience of this huge artificial landscape and realized that what he experienced had hitherto not been embodied in art, and that it made most art look tame and pictorial. How could this experience be framed? There was "no way to make sense of it in terms of art, to make *art* of it, at least as art was then."⁸¹ If art is about making sense of life, how then can "postage stamp" art come to terms with the intense experience of this modern reality of enormous mass transport infrastructure, terminals and freeway networks. As Smith says, "you just have to experience it".⁸² It was an experience both overwhelming and everyday, and as such, one which was possible for all; this Smith makes clear in relation to our experience of architecture which is something we experience and understand on a daily basis. And this was the issue for Smith: how to embody the experiences of the everyday in art.

For Fried, the experience of the everyday was not suitable material for art: it was an

⁷⁹ Smith, Tony in Wagstaff, Jr., Sam, "Talking with Tony Smith," *Artforum*, Vol. 5, no. 4, December, 1966, p.19.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ Fried, M "Art and Objecthood", p.19.

⁸² Smith, Tony in Wagstaff, Jr., Sam, "Talking with Tony Smith.", p.19.

experience which for him was outside the field of visual art, the fact that "there is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it,"⁸³ as Smith stated, placed the viewer at the centre of the event, where meaning was made and in Fried's terms that was theatrical. What Fried thought Smith's journey on the New Jersey turnpike revealed was the theatrical character of minimal art. In the journey, there was no art object, only objecthood, just the sensation of space and time flying by; as with minimal art it was "experience, conviction and sensibility"⁸⁴ that seems to trouble Fried and he regarded them as theatrical. It is:

the sheer persistence, with which the experience presents itself as directed at him from outside (on the turnpike from outside the car) that simultaneously makes him a subject – makes him subject – and establishes the experience itself as something like that of an object, or rather, of objecthood.⁸⁵

The experience exists for the viewer and makes the person the subject of the situation: in the case of the journey on the turnpike, it was an objectless experience of objecthood. Objecthood, as Fried outlines it, is not the object but rather what frames its existence. In Fried's terms, it was the experience that was theatrical and if art came to be about experience then that was the end of art.

To Fried, the minimalist sculpture distanced the viewer from the work. The minimalist work Fried critiqued was large; one needed to move around it and get back from it, a matter of distance in time and space. As Fried saw it, the viewer was distanced "not just physically but psychically."⁸⁶ And it was this distance that made the viewer the subject and the art work the object of the situation. We have here two opposing views of distance and the viewer. Fried argued that minimalism distanced the viewer because it took them out of an absorbed relationship with the art work, whereas Morris maintained that an absorbed viewer was not embodied, was not present to the situation and was therefore distanced from what was happening to them, then and there in the site.

The perception of minimalist art required an embodied viewer. It acknowledged the body of the viewing subject in relation to the matter, form, physicality and space of the work. That is one reason why Fried called it 'literal', because the work was partly

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ Fried, M "Art and Objecthood", p.20.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.15.

about the body which moved, which co-perceived itself and the conditions of the space all features of the of the everyday. It was work that recognized the interconnectedness of all sensory stimuli with lived everyday experience. So “an abstracted visuality could make no more sense than an abstracted tactility”.⁸⁷ The corporeal viewer of the sixties was a “body-in-general within a rather generalized sense of space-at-large”.⁸⁸ With minimalist art what was to be gained from the work was no longer just in the work; the light, the quality of the space and the politics of the place were read.

In “Art and Objecthood” Fried acknowledged that the various aspects of the situation of encountering the work were important, but not as part of the work, rather as part of the background that establishes the object’s objecthood. The minimalist work was in these terms about being in relationship with the everyday conditions of objecthood, and the experience of this in time.

Earlier I discussed time generally and now I will relate time to the gestalt. Time is the key to Fried’s concept of theatricality. As discussed earlier, in the formalist view each of the arts should be pure, autonomous and work with only those things that are proper to it, so the minimalist involvement with time was inappropriate. “The literalist preoccupation with time – more precisely with the *duration of the experience* – is, I suggest, paradigmatically theatrical.”⁸⁹ In Fried’s view, temporality is suited to the arts of literature, theatre, dance and music but is inappropriate to the spatial arts of painting, sculpture and architecture. What “theatre addresses is a sense of temporality, of time both passing and to come, *simultaneously approaching and receding*, as if apprehended in an infinite perspective”.⁹⁰ According to Fried, the infinite number of relations which occur as one moved around the minimal object, was an experience that was carried out in time and which potentially gave an endless experience of the artwork.

The minimalist intention was “diametrically opposed to the Cubist with its concern for simultaneous views on the one plane.”⁹¹ What was important here was that with cubist work a number of views were simultaneously and instantly apprehended. The work is to be viewed by a disembodied eye, from a stationary position, whereas for minimalism,

⁸⁷ Krauss, Rosalind in Foster, Hal ed. *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*. p.63.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ Fried, M “Art and Objecthood”, p.22.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ Morris, R “Notes on Sculpture. Part 2.”, p.23.

an embodied viewer was required to move around the art work and experience it in time. Fried contends that the instantaneous apprehension of painting and pictorial sculpture is, in principle, outside of time. He understands that the perception of the work unfolds over time but insists that at any time the work is wholly there, because it is complete.

Formalist works are not experienced in time because, according to Fried "*every moment the work itself is wholly manifest*".⁹² It is "wholly manifest" due to its compositionally complete nature. This instantaneous apprehension of sculpture is quite a different matter to the one referred to by Morris. As Colpitt⁹³ points out, the gestalt perspective was one of the central issues of early minimalism, but its presumptions were unlike the formalist view. Simple geometric forms could be comprehended at once as a gestalt.⁹⁴ Morris said that the simpler the form the stronger the gestalt because "their parts are bound together in such a way that they offer maximum resistance to perceptual separation".⁹⁵ In the first of a series of "Notes on Sculpture", Morris writes that the gestalt of the cube is known before we see one, we know what is on the other side, we know what to expect. We in fact would not need to move around it because our understanding of the form is the "result of the experience of the visual field".⁹⁶ But as Morris went on to say "only one aspect of the work is immediate: the apprehension of the gestalt", the full phenomenological experience of the work is in time.

On the other hand, for Fried, modernist work can be apprehended in an instant because it is in "a continual and perpetual *present*".⁹⁷ This is quite a different thing to the perception of the gestalt Morris wrote about. The two men once again speak about the same issue, time, from quite different perspectives. For Fried, viewing the art work is instantaneousness, outside of time and for Morris the instant of the gestalt is just one of the modes used to apprehend the minimal work, which occurs in time. For the minimalist, the experience of the work occurs through space, in time and it has duration. The art work persists in time as the viewer moves around to experience the work, the

⁹² Fried, M "Art and Objecthood", p. 22.

⁹³ Colpitt, F *Minimal Art*, p. 7.

⁹⁴ *gestalt*, according to Arnheim is the "common German noun for shape or form" which has been used since the early twentieth century for experiments in sensory perception. Arnheim, Rudolf *Art and Visual Perception*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954, p. 4.

⁹⁵ Morris, Robert "Notes on Sculpture. Part 1", p. 44.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ Fried, M "Art and Objecthood", p. 22.

space and the relationships to the viewing body.

The apprehension of some works, like Donald Judd's cubes, may be recognized instantly as the gestalt, but the various relationships of viewer to object and object to its conditions is achieved by the viewer changing his position and this experiential aspect of the work requires time.⁹⁸ "The constant shape of the cube held in the mind, but which the viewer never really experiences, is an actuality against which the literal changing perspective views are related".⁹⁹ As a consequence of these changing perspective views, Morris says, we apprehend art through two ways of viewing: "There are two distinct terms: the known constant and the experienced variable."¹⁰⁰

The experiments of the gestalt psychologists also provided evidence that we see through "the apprehension of significant structural patterns."¹⁰¹ "Gestalt experimentation was to prove that the appearance of any element depends on its place and function in an overall pattern."¹⁰² According to Rudolf Arnheim, we use more than one way to see a work of art: we see "structural features" before detail, we see a form as a unified whole, a gestalt, before we see the detail. However, he makes the point "a whole cannot be attained by the accretion of isolated parts..."¹⁰³ Rather we proceed in a logical way from the simplest patterns to ones of increasing complexity.

The visual concept of the object derived from perceptual experiences has three important properties. It conceives of the object as being three-dimensional, of constant shape, and not limited to any particular perspective aspect.¹⁰⁴

That is, we move around objects, synthesizing the information we get and I, as the embodied viewer, perceive from this body, whatever shape and size it is, in the space of this site. It is a matter of scale, not just of the space and the body of the viewer, but of the viewer and the objects in the space as well as the space between the viewer and the objects. The "inclusiveness"¹⁰⁵ of the minimal situation, requires duration.

⁹⁸ In the early 1960's Morris was influenced by Anton Ehrenzweig's *The Hidden Order of Art* and Gestalt theory. His later writing was influenced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception*.

⁹⁹ Morris, R "Notes on Sculpture. Part 2", p.23.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Arnheim Rudolf *Art and Visual Perception*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974, p.6.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p.5.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p.106-7.

¹⁰⁵ Fried, M "Art and Objecthood", p.22.

While experiencing the work, the viewer synthesises what they see and what they know, which may include the gestalt of the object for instance Merleau-Ponty states:

From the point of view of my body I never see as equal six sides of a cube, even if it is made of glass, and the word 'cube' as meaning: the cube itself, the cube in reality, beyond its sensible appearances, has its equal sides."¹⁰⁶

Merleau-Ponty also speaks about a house as seen from a number of different positions but "the house itself is none of these appearances: it is, as Leibnitz said, the flat projection of these perspectives and of all possible perspectives, that is, the perspectiveless position from which all can be derived, the house seen from nowhere."¹⁰⁷ It could also be from everywhere, for when the viewer synthesizes the object it is pieced together as a whole. The viewer remembers and synthesizes the phenomenological experience of place, the object and the self in the context. It is clear, as Morris says, that more than one mode of operation is in action.

In "Art and Objecthood", Fried expressed the superiority of painting and pictorial sculpture because of the immediacy of the apprehension, compared with minimalist sculpture which needed time to be perceived. The minimalist work "*persists in time*"¹⁰⁸ and the modernist work "*has no duration*". One experiences it "in no time at all" because it is always "wholly manifest",¹⁰⁹ and continually present in what Greenberg called the "presentness". The "instantaneousness" of apprehension of modernist art was what Fried believed would defeat the theatrical.

"What unfolds in time is the experience."¹¹⁰ The infinite number of relations gives a potentially endless experience. For Fried, the viewer or "the beholder knows himself to stand in an indeterminate, open-ended – and unexact – relation as *subject* to the impassive object on the wall or floor."¹¹¹ That is, the viewer is presented with what Fried believes to be un-composed material, which the viewer has to make sense of; the viewer generates meaning for this situation which makes him or her the subject.

¹⁰⁶ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice *The Phenomenology of Perception*, London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1974, p.203.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*, p.66-7.

¹⁰⁸ Fried, M "Art and Objecthood", p.22.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*.

¹¹⁰ Colpitt, F *Minimal Art*, p.97.

¹¹¹ Fried, M "Art and Objecthood", p.15.

But for Morris, the viewer's position is a more empowered one, not the bewildered one Fried suggests. Morris argues "One is more aware than before that he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context."¹¹² The viewer makes the relationships: the experience of the object is never the same as you go around it. As Fried would have it, you could go around and around and infinitely make relationships, with no beginning or end, as opposed to modernist painting which "has no duration," and exists in a "continual and perpetual present".¹¹³ In Freud's terms, when the perceiver is in time, in relation to the work, this makes the perceiver, in part, the location of meaning and the subject of the experience.

Morris believed that "intimacy-producing" or "intimacy-making situations" like the evidence of the hand of the artist on the surface, or "impressively high finishes" draws the viewer out of the space in which the object and the viewer exist and into the isolated object",¹¹⁴ so that the viewer is no longer present to the situation in which they find themselves. Fried noted in "Art and Objecthood" that Tony Smith's black cube *Die* (Fig. 3) was "always of further interest", its interest is inexhaustible, because "there is nothing there to exhaust."¹¹⁵ The experience is endless because we are always looking for what is not there. That may be so, if all you were looking at was in the object. Work like *Die* is impassive and forces the viewer into an awareness of the conditions of the object.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that what separates formalist modernist and minimalist work is fundamentally an understanding of time, and it is the specific usage and emphasis on the temporal that makes minimalist work theatrical in Fried's terms. Specifically, the chapter addressed the terms and criteria of spectatorship that were debated by Morris and Fried: external relations and the circumstances of viewing, the relationship of the spectator to the work, the autonomy of the art object and art forms and what is appropriate to each, the need for an audience, stage presence and distance, temporality and duration and endlessness. These issues have become part of the dominant way

¹¹² Morris, R "Notes on Sculpture. Part 2", p.21.

¹¹³ Fried, M "Art and Objecthood", p.22.

¹¹⁴ Morris, R "Notes on Sculpture. Part 2", p.21.

¹¹⁵ Fried, M "Art and Objecthood", p.22.

contemporary art is now perceived and conceived.

Fried saw the elements of the theatrical negatively, and still does, but now they have become part of the way we view art. The formalist modernist conviction that each art form should work within the modes and concepts that are particular to that art form was the basis of Fried's critique of minimal art. Now, some thirty years later, the use of elements from other art forms is a commonly established practice in contemporary art. With much contemporary art related to discourses outside of art the formalist idea of the autonomy and purity of art and art forms no longer seems relevant.

The work of the photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto, which is related to discourses outside of art, can be seen as theatrical in Fried's terms when the work is set up in large numbers for exhibition. As installations they are designed to be appreciated through changing positions and perceptions in space and this, of course, involves time. Fundamentally, this is what Fried would call the theatrical. Viewers must walk around the space to apprehend the work, make relationships between the object and the environment as they go, and consider the size and light of the space, scale and material, as well as the social and/or political nature of the space. Further, the perceiving body plays a part, which involves being aware of and making relationships between the work and the body, that is, co-perceiving.

At the base of the theatrical, the experiencing of the embodied encountering of art in time parallels the experience of Zen meditation in its call for the viewer to be present to the situation, to the experience happening now, to be in the moment. This was what John Cage was asking with his composition 4'33", in which the performer, in a recital hall, walked to the piano, sat down, lifted the lid to the keyboard and sat still for four minutes thirty three seconds. At the end of that period of time he closed the lid, stood up, bowed and left the stage. People heard the sounds of the environment. Cage was asking people to be present to the situation, to be part of the situation, to hear the sounds around them which were "allowed to resonate freely within the composition"¹¹⁶. This happened fifty years ago and it brought Zen ideas into Western art. The Zen experience of art works continues in the work of Hiroshi Sugimoto as an embodied experience of the whole self.

¹¹⁶ Joseph, Branden, W. "White on White", *Critical Inquiry*, no. 27 (Autumn 2000) p.107.

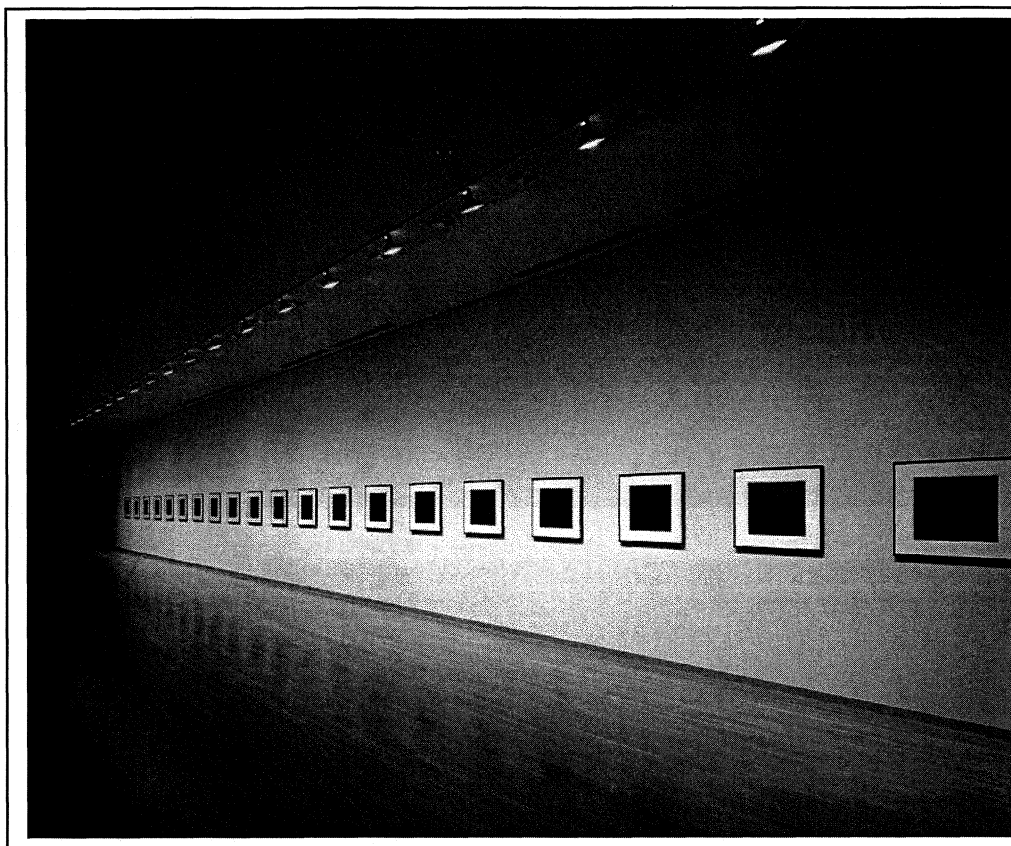


Fig:4 Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Seascapes*, Installation view, MoT, 1995
Art in Japan Today, Tokyo: Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo

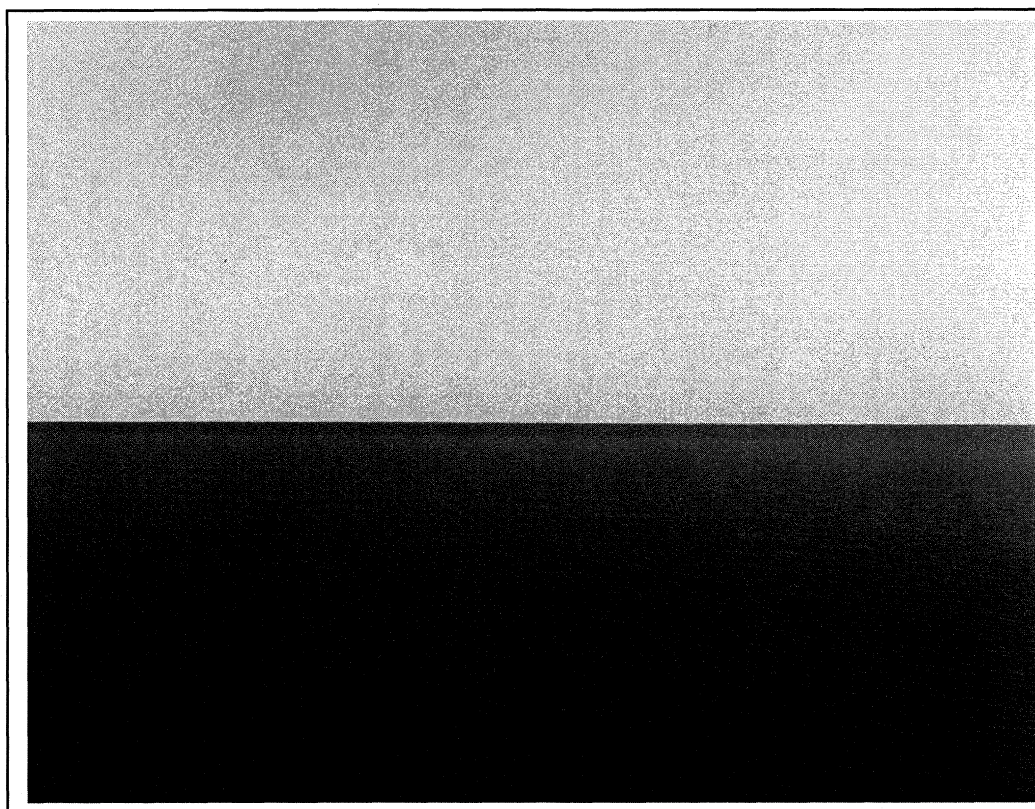


Fig:5 Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Tyrrhenian Sea, Conca* 1994



Fig:6 Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Bodensee, Uttwil* 1993



Fig:7 Hiroshi Sugimoto *Celtic Sea, Boscastle* 1994

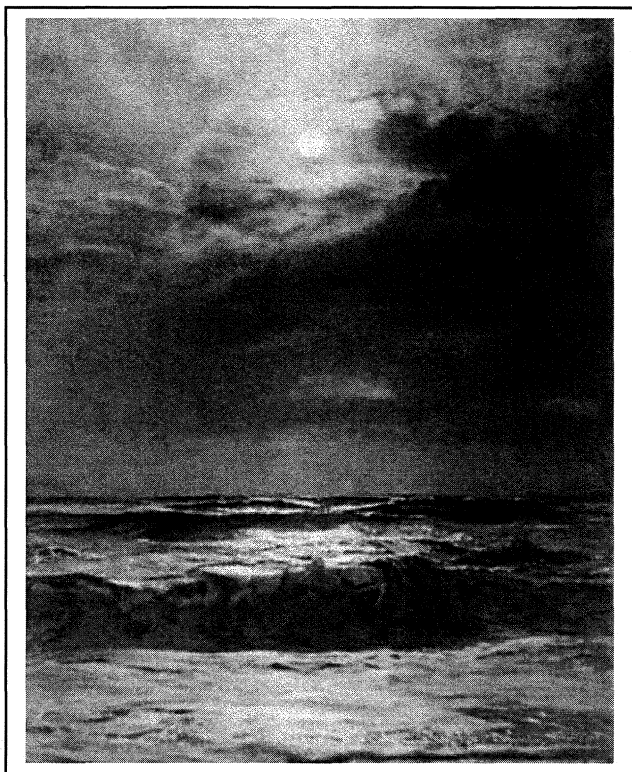


Fig:8 Charles Job *A Sea Study*, circa 1900

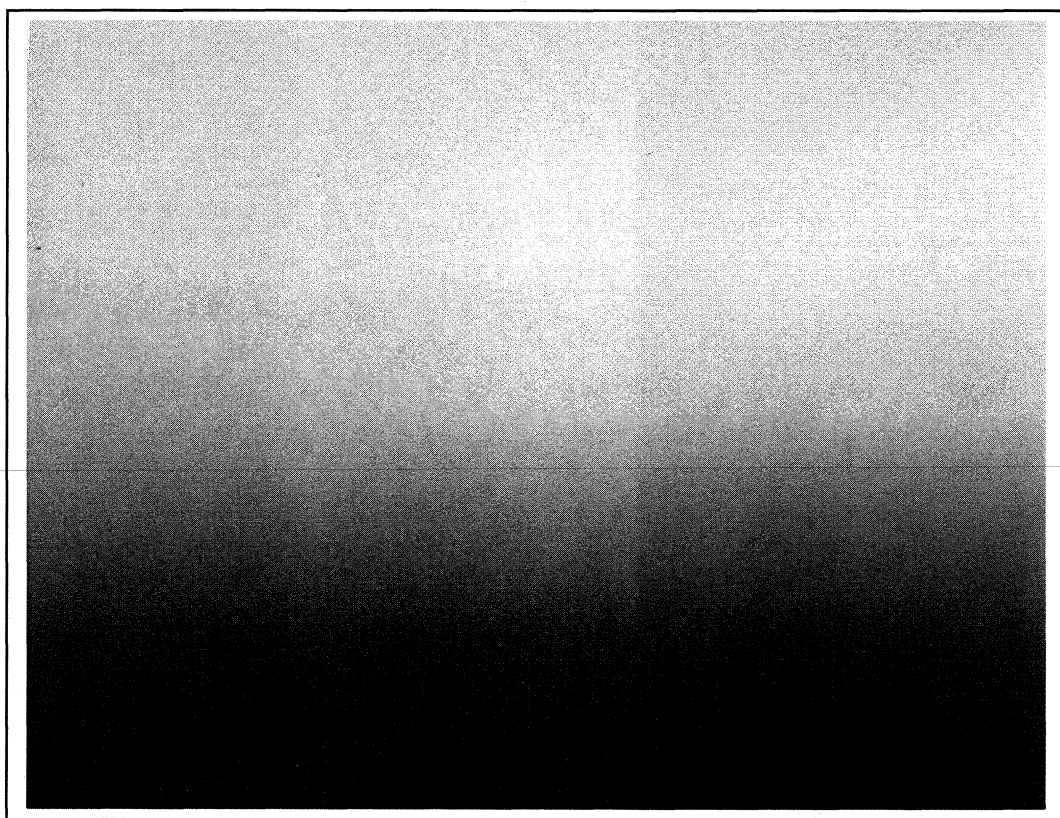


Fig:9 Hiroshi Sugimoto *Aegean Sea, Pilon* 1990

CHAPTER 2

The Seascapes

This chapter explores the relationship between the *Seascape* installation of Hiroshi Sugimoto and key Buddhist concepts, I thus argue that the nature of the installation demands or requires that the viewer operate in a particular fashion which parallels a Zen meditation experience. In effect, the work is structured on a number of levels to produce an embodied awareness. Buddhist principles can be mysterious but, I will argue, that they are embodied in the structure of the work and are experienced in the perception of the work. As was made clear in chapter one, time is the central issue in the perception of minimalist work. Time is also central to this chapter. It will be shown to be key to the image, the nature of photography, the structure and the experience of the installation. Time is also central in relating the experience of the work to Zen Buddhist philosophy.

In order to do this, I will examine one particular installation of the *Seascapes* photographs. The installation occurred at the Tokyo Museum of Modern Art in 1995, and this installation was chosen because it made a strong and lasting impression on me. The large number of photographs in the installation provoked a different interaction to exhibitions that contain only small numbers of photographs. Through an examination of the encounter with this installation, I will draw out the implications of that encounter in relation to the body located in time and space and the three key Buddhist concepts of interdependent arising (*zenki*), impermanence (*mujo*) and emptiness (*sunyata*). For this it will be necessary to discuss just what these are, in particular to look at them in relation to the Zen philosopher and teacher Dogen (1200-1253), specifically his concepts of time and “being present”.

I went to the newly opened MoT (Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo) with no expectations, rather with a need to escape myself. I thought it would be interesting to see the architect Takahito Yanagisawa’s controversial building with its large empty spaces and opulent display of spatial wealth in a land of tiny domestic spaces. Firstly, I entered the huge, empty, turbine-like hall which is the foyer; its scale is reminiscent of the London’s Tate Modern Gallery. It was a weekday; there were no busloads of tourists or school children; this was a new museum for contemporary art and it was nearly empty. I walked through the foyer and then went left into the three story atrium where I

saw the first work in the a large survey exhibition, titled *Art in Japan Today* (1995). This work was by the Chinese artist Cai Gao Qiang; titled *The Orient (San Jo Tower)* it was a nine metre tall structure made of weathered wood. A *jo* is a unit of measurement for the interior floor area of house, it is generally used as a measurement for the horizontal plane; however in this work it was used for the vertical. The *Art in Japan Today* catalogue states that *jo* refers to eternity because it points to heaven. The work also had a seismograph which marked the earth's movement second by second, so the work spoke of eternity and the instants of time. *The Orient (San Jo Tower)* was sterile, unsuited to its location; the windows of the upper floors marked regular intervals in the height of the space. The tower was architectural but did not work with and was overpowered by the architecture of the gallery. Perhaps it should not have tried to challenge the scale of the building.

I took the escalator upstairs to the top floor and the first room I entered was a very large rectangular gallery which housed Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Seascapes*. Along one long wall were the *Seascapes* photographed by day and on the opposite wall were *Seascapes* by night. At first, it looked rather like a Modernist painting exhibition about refinement of the surface and flatness, perhaps referencing ideas of the monochrome. On one side there appeared to be just black squares on white mounts in black frames. On the other side the white mounts and black frames contained images of various shades of gray divided in half.

When the awareness is taken out of the object and we are instead attentive to the conditions of viewing, we could be said to be present to the situation we are in. As with other kinds of installation, this exhibition of *Seascapes* makes one aware of distance, separation, placement, height, repetition. The relationship of the photographs with each other and between the two opposite walls, day and night (not alternating night/day) is significant. Placed like this, twenty or more on a wall, they appear as one work, and their meaning extends beyond the individual units. Each *Seascape* is named: the place from which it was shot and the particular sea that is the subject matter.

Each of the *Seascapes* could exist as individual works and I have also seen them hanging in galleries alone or in small groups. The images are clear, peaceful and are complete in their vast openness, but individually they do not produce the same response

as they do in large numbers. I believe that a fuller, Buddhist reading of the work depends on their presentation as a group and the nature of the encounter with a large number, so that the viewer's awareness is taken away from the individual photographs and placed on the conditions of viewing; being aware of being here now. If wholly present, we are aware of what affects our perception; we are aware of the rhythm of our breathing, our walking, and the beat of the heart. We are embodied beings, embedded in the context of our place and time. The body is inextricably linked to the phenomena around it; interconnected and enmeshed in location and time. Being present means being fully conscious of the self in the situation and of the physical reaction to what is happening around and in oneself.

Dogen Zenji (1200-53) was the Japanese Zen Buddhist philosopher-teacher who founded Soto Zen (the other Zen Sect is Rinzai). He is also the author of *Shobogenzo*. The body, in Dogen's view, is "the very vehicle through which enlightenment is realized."¹¹⁷ Everything we need to do for enlightenment we do with and through the body. This is how we know the world. For Dogen spiritual progress must involve the body and mind. Body and mind are inseparable, are united and are continuous with the world. Non-duality is a key concept for Buddhism and in relation to meditation. Thich Nhat Hanh says, it is not sufficient to just sit "we have to *be* at the same time" and "to be is to be something, and that something is to be *what is going on*: in your body, in your mind, in your feelings, in your world."¹¹⁸ This is true for the perception of these photographs; Sugimoto's work produces this response.

A fundamental issue for Buddhist Doctrine has always been nonduality or the oneness of body and mind; "body, mind and nature are inextricably interpenetrated so as to constitute the totality of reality."¹¹⁹ Understanding comes from involvement in this total reality; one overcomes the nonduality of subject and object, self and the world. *Shikantaza* (just sitting) is the meditation of awareness of what is happening at that moment, of being in the present moment, and seeing things just as they are without the mental habits, desires and preferences that prevent one from seeing the self and the world as it is. Zen meditation can take several forms, one of which is the alert

¹¹⁷ Kim, Hee-Jin *Dogen Kigen Mystic Realist*. Tuscon: The University of Arizona Press, 1987, p. 96.

¹¹⁸ Nhat hanh, Thich *Being Peace*, Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1987, p.39.

¹¹⁹ *ibid*, p. 97.

awareness of *shikantaza*. In Soto Zen *shikantaza* is not the path to enlightenment, doing it is enlightenment. *Shikantaza* cultivates non-thinking and freedom from illusion, that is, the aim is to see things just as they are. Another form of meditation is walking meditation in which awareness of the body in movement is used to locate one in the present. Both are embodied, aware experiences that are the practice component of a vast body of thought. Buddhist principles can be mysterious but in the experience of daily practice they are not difficult to understand. And it is this aspect of Buddhist philosophy that is structured in Sugimoto's photographic installations and experienced in the perception of the work.

When one sees things as they are and not in the habitual, self-centred way "delusion ends, the mind is clear and myriad forms that make up the whole simultaneously appear."¹²⁰ Thomas Cleary likens this to the ocean: "due to the wind there arise waves; if the wind stops the ocean water is calm and clear, and all images can reflect in it."¹²¹ This is what Sugimoto's photographs do. The calm clarity of the *Tyrrhenian Sea, Conca, 1994*, uninflected by emotional content, reflects the self as empty and interdependent.

Zen meditation is about interdependent being. According to the Buddhist concept of dependent origination, all things in the universe are interconnected and all things come into existence, continue to exist, and eventually dissolve because of causes and conditions. All things are impermanent and are therefore empty of a permanent nature. The self is also part of this dependent arising and as such is empty of a permanent and abiding nature: this is called no-self. There is no soul as is understood in the West, rather, one is like all phenomena, a compounded thing which arises, exists and dissolves according to conditions. These impermanent aspects of the self are described as the five "aggregates" (*skandha*): form (body), feelings (emotions), discriminations (preferences), consciousness (mind/thinking), and compositional factors (construction of self). According to Buddhism, these impermanent things are what we mistakenly view as the self.

¹²⁰ Cleary, Thomas *Shobbbogenzo*, Zen Essays By Dogen. Translated by Thomas Cleary. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986. p.76

¹²¹ *ibid*

The *Seascapes* reflect this view of existence and present to us an image of the world free of emotions or preferences, and one which is in continual change - impermanent. I am aware of my body as I look at these photographs. I see the photographs as I co-perceive my body, that is, the body perceives itself as it perceives the art: my thinking, remembering, and walking become part of the perception. Walking from one photograph to the next, stepping slowly and carefully, I am aware of every millimetre of my foot as it touches the earth, like a walking meditation.¹²² As in mindfulness meditation, I am aware of each breath going in, going out, as one by one I see the photographs. I breathe and alternatively stand and walk. In Sugimoto's work, the viewer is a roving embodied one; the nature of the work demands this. It resembles minimal work, like Donald Judd's, with its order of one thing after another, and in Fried's terms this sort of work is not a composed whole; one can endlessly make connections and relationships. The viewer of Sugimoto's photographs in installation is not an optical, stationary, disembodied eye experiencing the work instantly outside time. In contrast, the embodied Buddhist and minimalist participant needs to be aware of the total situation and one's part in it. The viewer needs to perceive in time and is necessarily required to be in tune with the present situation: what is happening in the space and to this embodied being right now.

Distance and the Horizon Line

I was stopped in my tracks by Sugimoto's *Seascapes*. I scanned the horizon line in the *Seascapes* by day and I searched for it in the night *Seascapes*. I walked along, back and forth with no directional priority other than the imperative to walk along the line of photographs, at one time compelled forward to the next and the next photograph. At another time I was compelled to move back or to slow down. I walked in close and away. Was I distanced in Fried's sense? Probably, but the question remains, does it matter? I was fascinated by the relationships in the space; the horizon line in the photographs formed one continuous horizon line. The *Seascapes* were about sixty centimetres apart, and probably hung rather low by Western standards. The space between the photographs is roughly the same as the size of the photographs but because of the black frame that surrounds the mount and the photograph, the space between the

¹²² One does walking meditation not in order to arrive but just for the walking to be present to the moment. In the *Satipatthana Sutta* (Foundations of Mindfulness) the Buddha said that to meditate is to be aware of what is going on in the body, feelings, mind and the things of the world as reflected in the mind.

Safaga, 1992, had barely visible horizon lines in the deep darkness of the night, while in others like *South Pacific*, *Tearai*, 1991 the division of sea and sky is clear, lit by the glow of the sun below the horizon.

From a distance, I saw a repetition of tonal grays in black frames. I could take in the gestalt instantly, but not all is revealed in the gestalt. What starts to unfold is repetition of the half-sky half-sea format with variations of light quality. Empty skies or ones with small puffy morning-like clouds that hug the horizon line, as in the *Sea of Okhotsk*, *Hokkaido (D)*, 1989, or wispy striated ones clinging to the horizon in *Bodensee*, *Uttwil*, 1993, or the horizon line disappearing in the mist, as in *The Celtic Sea*, *Boscastle*, 1994. Walking past the photographs or at a long distance, you are aware of the horizon lines continuing across the gaps from one sea to another, sites with no markers of location to distinguish one from another. All these *Seascapes* are connected by the horizon line, a narrative of places, one sea after another, seas and seas, all sea, the sea, altogether to be one thing: oneness.¹²³

The surfaces of all these images were absorbing, the fine grain of the paper revealed the subtle details of the waves and the sky. The fine detail pulled me into the images. The details have to show up for, according to Sugimoto, “[u]nless I get the detail of the scenes on the surface of the paper, it will not make sense.”¹²⁴ Sugimoto uses fast exposures as he wants “to capture the movement of the waves which are constantly moving”.¹²⁵ Great technical skill is required to get the detail and the quality of the waves. People often suggest that Sugimoto uses long exposures but if he did that with the sea the surface of the sea would be smooth, as the movements of the waves would merge but this is not the case. “I want people to be drawn in to my pictures”.¹²⁶ At a print size of 55 x 44 cm, “people can get very close to the image and truly study the waves”.¹²⁷ If they were larger, the detail would be lost to the grain of the paper and the dot-like texture of the emulsion. The sort of detail that Sugimoto requires causes the viewer to pause, to slow down, it takes time to see all the detail available in one of these *Seascapes*. And because I see one after another my pace gets slower and slower, it takes

¹²³ Oneness in Buddhism is the concept that all things are part of the interconnected, interdependent whole. This forms a significant part of Chapter Three and will be discussed in detail there.

¹²⁴ Hiroshi Sugimoto, “Hiroshi Sugimoto: The Sleepless Photographer.”

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Sugimoto, Hiroshi *Time Exposed*, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995, p. 95.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

longer and longer to see a photograph, and I am there with each cloudless sky, scanning and pausing over the detail of the swells on the surface of the ocean, absorbing the detail and not wanting to miss anything; this is an activity that involves duration.

Technique

Such detail is achieved through the use of the traditional large format 8 x 10 inch camera. Also, the wide open spaciousness of the photographs is possibly attributable to the use of a wide angle lens. A wide angle lens for an 8 x 10 camera is 90 mm. A wide angle lenses extends the angle of vision which in turn creates the perception of increased depth of field. Even with relatively large apertures the wide-angle lens has a greater depth of field than a standard lens. The inherent exposure problems of the 8 x 10 camera means that usually small apertures are used, so exposures with an 8 x 10 camera are longer than for smaller cameras. In an interview with Thomas Kellein, Sugimoto said his exposures were "straightforward": in the day it is "1/30 or 1/60, during the night sometimes between five and ten minutes."¹²⁸ These daytime exposures are quite slow exposures.

To get the desired effect with the night *Seascapes* Sugimoto needs to plan the image: "I calculate the passage of the moon and its lighting, also the degrees of the moon by the season and the time of the night. the direction of the moon is very important, it has to be south or south-east of the position of the camera."¹²⁹ These calculations are made so the light will, for instance, not dominate the image. Consequently, we see the interconnection of light, exposure time, time of day, the alignment of the heavenly body (the moon), with the earth and the position of the camera. In Buddhist terms, therefore, each photograph could be said to be dependently originating,¹³⁰ that is, they each demonstrate the interconnectedness of all. The fact that the conditions for each photograph are unique and exist only momentarily, shows that phenomena arise and decline as a consequence of causes and conditions.

To elaborate this point, according to Buddhist doctrines, the phenomena of the world originate dependently and are dependent on interconnections for their continued

¹²⁸ *ibid*, p. 94.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*.

¹³⁰ Dependent origination is variously called, in the sutras and in the commentaries, dependent co arising or mutual interdependence.

existence. We can see around us that all of life and things exist in a matrix of interrelations. Things come into existence and cease to be through interaction with other things and the nature of things changes through interaction. "A thing becomes that thing because of contributory causes and conditions."¹³¹ This is the Buddhist theory of causation.¹³² As the origin and continued existence of things is contingent on changing conditions, they are therefore empty of an essential and permanent nature. It is precisely because things have no permanent essence that they can function, adapt and be affected by other things in a matrix of causal interrelationships. This is in contrast to the view that things and people exist in isolation, "without depending on parts, causes and mental imputations for their existence".¹³³ The self, the mind and conditions are "in a constant state of momentary change and this depends upon the infinite number of moments that constitute its continuity."¹³⁴ A single year for instance, is interconnected with the years before and after and with the moments that compose it, in the infinite flow of time.

Nagajuna (Nagarjuna), c150-250 CE, is one of the most significant Indian Buddhist philosophers who was "the Indian originator of the complete view point of emptiness."¹³⁵

For Nagajuna, all entities, including the dharmas,¹³⁶ originate entirely in dependence upon mental construction. All entities whatsoever are thus empty of unconstructed existence. So Nagajuna's philosophy of emptiness is not simply a re-statement of the basic teaching of dependent origination; emptiness means, furthermore, that all dependently originating entities... have a conceptually constructed existence.¹³⁷

According to David Burton, Nagajuna would have relied on the early Mahayana sutras like the *Prajanaparamita*, or Heart Sutra, , in which the main theme is that all entities are empty and have nothing more than a conceptually constructed existence: "Entities as they really are exist without *svahava*..."¹³⁸ [*Svahava* means to have an innate

¹³¹ Harada Sekkei Roshi *Everyday Mind*, Mahabodi Tipitaka Press, Bangalore, 1991, p.5.

¹³² *ibid.*

¹³³ Batchelor, Stephen *Echoes of Voidness*, London, Wisdom Publications, 1983, p.139.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, p.31.

¹³⁵ Van Bragt, Jan in Nishitani, K. *Religion and Nothingness*. Berkeley, UCLA Press, 1982, p.xxvi.

¹³⁶ A "term rich in meaning and admits of no one translation in English" it can mean the "law" (Dharma) or things (dharmas)." Nishitani, Keiji *Religion and Nothingness*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982, p.295.

¹³⁷ Burton, David F. *Emptiness Appraised*, Richmond, UK: Curzon, 1999, p. xi.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p.37.

independent nature]. Burton then goes on to make the distinction: “The nihilist would misunderstand emptiness to mean that entities do not exist, rather than that entities with *svabhava* do not exist.”¹³⁹ That is, things exist dependent on conditions, and therefore lack permanent individual natures, but we place on them concepts which appear to give them substance, or a substantial existence. Substantial existence, however, is illusory.

We can regard things as having two aspects: conventionally, people and things appear to have solid, discrete and abiding natures. This view is necessary for our operation in the world. But in Buddhist terms, at an absolute level everything is empty. “Voidness is the essential quality of everything that exists. All phenomena have two distinct modes of being: the ultimate and the conventional. Voidness is the ultimate mode of being of every phenomenon: it is the way phenomena actually exist.”¹⁴⁰ This is what is called the “Two Truths Doctrine”. In the West, the Absolute is seen as eternal, by contrast, in Buddhist terms, Absolute reality is the void.

It is a Buddhist emptiness that is revealed in the photographs. They also reveal the interconnection and impermanence of all things. The Kyoto philosopher and preeminent Buddhist scholar, Nishitani states, in *Religion and Nothingness*, that emptiness is the core issue of Buddhism and it is essential to have an appropriate understanding of this, often misunderstood, aspect of Buddhism. According to Thomas Cleary one needs to understand three basic principles - emptiness is not nihilistic nothingness, it is not something separate from reality and it is not an entity in itself.

I started to think that the photographs were not just individual, framed images of daily life, but were perhaps an installation, using a minimalist strategy: that there was a purpose to this repetition, that it was not just a matter of displaying large numbers, but the artist was asking that I engage more fully. I was engaged in what Fried called a distanced interaction. I was required to perceive the relations between the elements in the space and not just be absorbed in each work, one after another. In this process I needed to make use of connections beyond those that the eye and the mind make and be aware of the situation phenomenologically. In Zen practice, one simply observes the body and what is in front of one, without comment, whatever may be happening. And

¹³⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Batchelor, S *Echoes of Voidness*, p.30.

this is how the viewing of the photographs as an embodied Buddhist experience can be explained, as an embodied experience in which one is being present to that situation. The photographs function as a concentration device for clarifying and sharpening awareness and for understanding the differences between appearances and the absolute reality of emptiness through seeing one after another.

Photography can be a representation of a time and a place, a particular sea, *Indian Ocean, Bali, 1991* for instance. The crystal clarity of the sea and the faint wispy clouds are a frozen instant of time; clouds which existed as such for the length of the exposure, never to be the same again, even an instant later. This is impermanence. Sugimoto gives us the place in the title but not the time. In the image however, we can see the specific instant as just one in an infinite number of instants that make time. The sea is never the same from one instant to the next, but is shown to be eternally the same. The sea is being the sea; water behaving like water, the waves move, the swell rises and falls. That is what the sea does, what it is. The more *Seascapes* I see, the more I am moved by the slight changes, drawn into each image. Sea after sea, the sea, water, here, is it any different to anywhere else? One becomes aware that each one of these photographs is an imprint of the light of the past; it was once an instant in a continuous flow of time, but also it is an eternal instant. What the sea shows us is that there is no permanence, that all is changeable and therefore emptiness is its nature.

Art Historical context

In early photographic history, photographs of the sea often have moody skies, rough and troubled waters. An example of this is the *Sea Study*, 1903 by the “amateur” photographer Charles Job,¹⁴¹ which has the horizon line almost two thirds of the way down the image. It was shot from a standing position on the beach and we see the waves from that familiar position; they appear close, with the largest one at full height poised to break. Job’s image of the sea is uncharacteristic, as most images from that time involve people or engineering structures such as bridges, pleasure piers or ships. Edward Fox’s views of the sea have a similarly distanced, open perspective to Sugimoto’s *Seascapes* but they are moody and have tiny images of man and his engineering feats. *Sea and Sky*, 1865, has a minute image of two men in a boat on the

¹⁴¹ Illustrated in *A Seaside Album*, Phillipe Garner, London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2003, p.76.

lower edge with the weight of the rest of the image bearing down on them. In this photograph, the horizon line is also two thirds of the way down the photograph. In Sugimoto's *Seascapes* we do not see the waves close enough for them to have character, individual shape or form. We see the waves from a distance, elevated, as if from a cliff, so the individuality of a wave is lost in the textured surface of the sea. The myriad things become one.

How the horizon line is placed in the image and how the image is structured also reveals a direct experience paralleling the real. If one were standing on the sand at the beach and one's eyes were 1.7 m above the ground, the horizon line would be 4.7 km away, not very far really. However, if one was at an elevation of 100 m, it would be 36 km away.¹⁴² So, for Sugimoto's photographs, an elevated camera position gives increased distance, the result being that the waves become texture, and do not have individual character. Another obvious result is the greater distance to the horizon line that gives an enhanced sense of depth and spaciousness.

At first the *Seascapes* could have seemed unremarkable beyond the wide clear space they portrayed, but the density of tone, the clarity and their beauty was a hook that drew me into the image to contemplate them further. They are apparently simple, open and reductive, still and silent. They slowed down perception until I seemed to be watching myself watching; the work seems to be designed to slow down perception, to prolong the process of looking at one after another in that long line of detailed absorbing images.

A horizontal line divides the earth and sky, it is the level used to indicate zero elevation, that is, it has a slope of zero degrees. The line is the most at rest a line can be. With this line bisecting the photograph, each *Seascape* is a work at rest, furthermore there are no objects to disturb the peace of the image, no activity at all but the arrested movement of the waves in the calm seas. These are not the Romantic view of the vast sea dwarfing man, or depicted the death of the hero, the barbarism and pathos of the human condition, as in Theodore Gericault's 1819 painting *The Raft of the Medusa*; rather the artist created works which are empty of emotional content and appear to have the

¹⁴² "Horizon", *Wikipedia Encyclopedia*, last modified 15 June 2005, [cited July 2005]. Available from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horizon>

indifference of the sea itself.

Seascapes and Buddhism

These calm, peaceful works appear to have none of the subjectivity often associated with modernist artistic expression; that is, they can be seen to have no authorial presence. Sugimoto's *Seascapes* seem simple, objective shots that use no photographic tricks. The personal subjective issues of the photographer are given up for a clear and uninflected picture of the scene. The lack of the marks of obvious self expression, of an authorial signature in Sugimoto's work is appropriate to the basic Buddhist notion of no-self, meaning a lack of permanent identity (emptiness/*sunyata*) that would preclude such manifestations of the self. Sugimoto's *Seascapes* reflect the world as it is, not the self. Nature is not used here for self-expressive purposes, the antithesis to Sugimoto's *Seascapes*. They are empty of that sort of content: there are no looming clouds or troubled seas, no images of man pitted against the vast forces of nature. These seas are calm, wide, open and clear. It is just the sea as it is, not the ocean as symbol. Sugimoto's work is uninflected with emotional content and it does not draw that out in the viewers.

The *Seascape* photographs present the emptiness of Zen Buddhism. It is particular emptiness, it is the emptiness of the sea just as it is with no emotional overlays. It is the emptiness of being in the moment. The photographs present the self as no self; they point away from suffering, and exemplify dependent origination (*zenki*), impermanence (*mijo*) and emptiness (*sunyata*). They place the self in a non self centered place, no self (*anatman*).

Perhaps the most straight forward way to understand emptiness intellectually is in terms of relativity, interdependence, and impermanence - the nonabsoluteness of existence.¹⁴³

Emptiness and permanence can be viewed from different perspectives. For instance, in relation to space, positions in space and perspectives in space are very subjective and changeable things. Objects can appear to be quite different from different places and at different times. So we can see that a thing may have no permanent intrinsic nature and

¹⁴³ Cleary, Thomas *Entry into the Inconceivable*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1983, p.18.

things are not necessarily just as we conceive of them. Consequently a thing may have very many natures depending on the context in which it is seen. Our experience can give us different positions to see the world according, for instance, to conceptions based on perceptions which are in turn based on our sensations, so for each of us, the same situation will have very different meanings. According to Hua-yen philosophy there are three natures to all phenomena; mental constructs we place on things, their workable relative nature and their absolute nature.¹⁴⁴ For example, we place our attachments and meaning/value on a thing, it has its material/functional existence for us in our lives and it has an ultimate nature which is the emptiness of the absolute.¹⁴⁵ It is emptiness “which allows things to exist relatively and interdependently”.¹⁴⁶ The Buddha observed worldly existence and noted three realities: through time he realized impermanence, through space he realized interrelationships of forms and that they arise and disappear, and from these he realized that the true nature of all beings is emptiness. The world may appear to be static or in a state of equilibrium but when observed from another perspective, things change in the briefest moment. This is the state of rising and falling. Everything is always moving and changing. And this is what the photographs show us. It is an instant in the endless flow of time: impermanence. The waves dependently originate, are impermanent and thus they are empty of a permanent nature.

The Heart Sutra (in Sanskrit *Prajna Paramita Hrdaya Sutra*) is the key Buddhist text on the insubstantiality of all things and is regarded as the heart or essence of wisdom.¹⁴⁷

The Heart Sutra describes a way to take us beyond duality. In it, the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara says that form is not different from emptiness and emptiness is not different from form. Therefore, form and emptiness, phenomena and the transcendental are all alternatives that are relative to each other and, as such they have no independent existence. Because they are relative to each other they are all ultimately empty. Hence

¹⁴⁴ Hua-yen (meaning “flower ornament” or “beautiful garland”) philosophy flourished in the T’ang Dynasty (618-907). It provided the intellectual basis for Chinese Buddhism and for Zen. Hua Yen philosophy is based on the Flower Garland Sutra the most important Chinese Buddhist text. It is basically a philosophy of “totality”.¹¹ Summarized from Suzuki, D.T. *Zen and Japanese Culture*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959, p. 49, and Chang, Chung-Chi, *The Practice of Zen*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959, p.168.

¹⁴⁵ Cleary, T *Entry into the Inconceivable*, p.25.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *The Prajna Paramita* literature (38 volumes) was composed in India between 100 B.C. and 600 A.D. Two of these are regarded as highest, the *Diamond Sutra* and the *Heart Sutra*, and the Buddhist commentator, Conze, estimated both to be from the 4th century A.D.

all dualities are dissolved in emptiness. For instance, conscious awareness of something implies the separation of the subject and object of awareness. Dualities are included in this emptiness, in fact nothing is excluded in its fullness.

Zen meditation makes one aware that fundamentally the watcher and the watched do not exist separately. In the preliminary stage of Zen meditation one is just watching, watching things coming and going, as is the case with John Cage's 4'33". Later, when the chatter in the mind dies down, all that remains are the bird sounds as they pass through one as though one is empty space. There is a time before one knows one hears the sounds, when one is continuous with them, passing through the empty space that is one. And there is then the profound question of who am 'I' in that situation. The realized answer, of course, is the sounds of the birds are not separate from me, the only separation is the illusion of a separate self. There are many ways to speak about emptiness - it could be the empty, concentrated mind of Zazen¹⁴⁸ which is free of stimulation, or emptiness could be a way of speaking of impermanence and of ultimate reality.

Suzuki Shunryu roshi¹⁴⁹ speaks of the "big mind"¹⁵⁰ as the no mind. In his commentary on Suzuki roshi's *Sandokai* lectures, Sojun Mel Weitsman roshi¹⁵¹ (Abbot of the Berkeley Zen Center) likens the big mind to a blank screen. He says: "we're not concerned with the projection on the screen; we're only concerned with the screen itself, like the vast sky."¹⁵² That is, we should watch the "vast sky" not our projected story. It is common Soto Zen practice to watch the thoughts go by without attachment; watch whatever happens, notice it, acknowledge it and let it go, one does not become emotionally involved. Suzuki roshi said that if you "watch the waves of your mind" dispassionately, gradually they will become calm and one can see that the big mind and the small mind are one, just as the sea and the waves are one: "Waves are the practice of water".¹⁵³ The big mind is no mind, it is the dropping off of "body-and-mind"¹⁵⁴, as

¹⁴⁸ Zazen is Zen meditation.

¹⁴⁹ Suzuki Shunryu roshi, Soto Zen, direct dharma descendent of Dogen, 1905-1971, came to USA in 1958 and started the Zen Center in San Francisco.

¹⁵⁰ In meditation, the big mind is the mind that includes everything but is troubled by nothing.

¹⁵¹ Abbot of the Berkeley Zen Center, San Francisco, He was ordained by Suzuki roshi in 1969.

¹⁵² Weitsman roshi, Sojun Mel, *Commentary on Suzuki Roshi's Sandokai lectures*. Last revised June 17, 2000. Berkeley Zen Center. <http://www.berkeleyzencenter.org/Lectures/june2000.shtml>

¹⁵³ Suzuki roshi, Shunryu, *Zen Mind, Beginners Mind*, New York: Weatherhill, 1981, p.34-5.

¹⁵⁴ Nishitani, K *Religion and Nothingness*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982, p.185.

Nishitani calls it. The big mind is what the photographs present, it is the mind clear of passions and attachments. It is a spacious, clear, open mind, and like the *Seascapes*, is unimpeded by the things of the world, like planes, ships, birds, whales; there is nothing with which to spin a narrative and project on to this vast sky. The clear open mind sees things just as they are, not distorted through our conceptions. The big mind can contain all but not be affected by it: not experience things through the filter of the self, but rather just see things as they are.

Time Exposed - Buddhist time and the Seascapes

The first portfolio of *Seascapes* photographs Sugimoto published was entitled *Time Exposed* (1995) because he believed “time is revealed in the sea.”¹⁵⁵ The titles of the individual works might perhaps indicate that the work is about space and place. Time is exposed in these works. And I contend that it is a particular notion of time that is relevant to a reading of Sugimoto’s *Seascapes*.

As we saw above, central to Buddhism is the belief that all compound things appear and disappear as a consequence of interconnections (dependent origination), impermanence and emptiness. Dogen, the founder of Soto Zen,¹⁵⁶ saw impermanence as intrinsic to the nature of the self and all of existence. Impermanence is one of the three qualities of existence along with suffering and the “nonsubstantiality”¹⁵⁷ of all matter. Another way of saying it is that all compound things are subject to dissolution. Although time is central to this, until Dogen, it was not to the fore of Buddhist philosophy.¹⁵⁸ At the heart of Buddhist reality is emptiness (*sunyata*), which makes everything possible. The two realms of existence, the absolute and the everyday, exist and are reconciled in emptiness. The *Seascape* photographs are also often regarded as empty images, empty of overt content (such as boats, people) and meaning whether they are of the sea at night or in the day. A traditional way of reading the sea in terms of Buddhist doctrine is this one by Inada:

To use an old metaphor, events are taking place like waves in the vast ocean. In mid-ocean the myriad waves are appearing and disappearing as if each is

¹⁵⁵ Sugimoto, Hiroshi “The Sleepless Photographer.”

¹⁵⁶ After 1227 Dogen established a number of temples in Japan following his return from studying with the Ts’ao-Tung school in China.

¹⁵⁷ Kim, Hee-Jin *Dogen Kigen Mystic Realist*, p.138.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*

the mind.

Dogen's ¹⁶⁵ concept of "being-time" (*uji*)¹⁶⁶ basically means time is existence and existence is time; it interlocks being and time and *sunyata* (emptiness) which makes possible the co-existence of the everyday and the absolute. A Buddhist notion of temporality necessarily involves dependent originality and emptiness, as all things are interconnected, contingent and therefore empty of a permanent nature. The waves in the ocean that Sugimoto photographed are an expression of time as they emerge from and slide back into the ocean. Each has duration, an instant, before it becomes part of the greater existence of the ocean, and as such its nature is emptiness. It is interconnectedness and emptiness which permits a wave to appear and disappear. If things were not impermanent then they could not arise and disappear.

Water is "being-time" being water, doing what water does in time: it could be a river, the sea, rough or smooth, blue or gray or a million other variations. Or it may be cloud or mist: this is how being time manifests in water. "Flowers do not bloom in the spring. Flowers in bloom are spring!"¹⁶⁷

That is how time manifests itself in spring, plants sprouting and flowering, for as Dogen says "in spring there are numerous appearances – this is called passage."¹⁶⁸ Passage is subjective because it is from a particular individual position, whether that is spring, you or I. Passage is relative "to any given dharma-position"¹⁶⁹ as an absolute now. And because not all of these dharma-positions¹⁷⁰ in which the absolute now is placed are living beings, they can be objects or other phenomena, Dogen points to the changeable nature of all reality, not just ourselves.

Being-time or "*uji*" itself is a four-dimensional matrix of the three spatial dimensions and **time**. Each particular phenomenon is a four dimensional point of space-time and constitutes a unique thing-time distinct from all other thing-times

¹⁶⁵ Inada, Kenneth K. "Time and temporality--A Buddhist approach", p178.

¹⁶⁶ Dogen's word *Uji*: is usually translated as "Being-time." "*Ji* means "time" or "moment". "*U*" means "Being," or even "has"; that something has something." Anzan Hoshin roshi, *Wild Time*, <http://www.wvzc.teisho/wildTime.html>, June 18, 1995, accessed June 2005.

¹⁶⁷ Inada, Kenneth K. "Time and temporality--A Buddhist approach", p178.

¹⁶⁸ Dogen, *Shobogenzo*, p.107.

¹⁶⁹ Vorenkamp, Dirck "B-Series Temporal Order in Dogen's Theory Of Time." *Philosophy East & West*, July 1995, v45, p.6.

¹⁷⁰ "...a dharma-position is comprised of a particular here and a particular now (a spatio-temporal existence in the world)..." Kim, Hee-Jin *Dogen Kigen Mystic Realist*, p.149.

(ie. dharma-positions).¹⁷¹

A dharma-position would then be the place and time of any one or all of the photographs. For example, *Black Sea, Ozuluce, 1991*, the Black Sea at Ozuluce on a particular day in 1991 at the time when the ripples of the sea were just so, when a mist hid the horizon line, when there was a gradual transition from the deep dark grey of the sea to the light grey of the sky. It is a particular place at a particular time with particular conditions. This photograph is not in the same dharma-position as the *Ionion Sea, Santa Cesavea I, 1990* which is a photograph of this area of sea on a particular, crystal clear day in 1990 with feathery waves, sharp horizon and cloudless sky, that was the dharma-position this photograph records. So a dharma-position is where a thing is located in space and time, with all the particular manifest qualities of that space and time, but as Dirck Verenkamp points out, this time is not measurable time, but the time of these circumstances. In the case of the sea this is a fleeting thing, perhaps not the case for a mountain. It is these conditions that Dogen calls dharma-positions. So the photographs are being time at a particular dharma-position that once was, and the photographs are light trace evidence of this fact. This direct connection to the past means, in Charles Peirce's terms, the photographs have an indexical relationship to the past.¹⁷²

"In being time there is the passage",¹⁷³ it flows from today to tomorrow, and it flowed from yesterday to today and also from today to today; where ever we are in time it is now, and events flow through now. There are two kinds of time, the movement from today to tomorrow and also the ceaseless flow of today to today, of now to now. How does one reconcile changes in time with changes of time (and dharma-positions)? Time and passage are relative to that particular person or thing. "Because it is *being time*, it is *my being time*."¹⁷⁴ For Dogen it is not just about people, it is to do with all things in existence: "the *passage* of spring necessarily *passes through* spring".¹⁷⁵ Like spring, my time is what passes through me. He points out that passage is not spring "... *passage* has *accomplished the Way* in the *time* of spring".¹⁷⁶ This means that those

¹⁷¹ Vorenkamp, Dirck "B-Series Temporal Order In Dogen's Theory Of Time", p.4.

¹⁷² Charles Sanders Peirce, (1839-1914), the founder of American semiotics, he devised three categories of signs, "icon," "index," and "symbol". White, Jeff. *Hypersuasion and the New Ethos*. [cited June 2005]. Available from <http://www.bsu.edu/classes/white2/hyper/theory/peirclang.html>

¹⁷³ Dogen, *Shodogenzo*, p106.

¹⁷⁴ Dogen *Shobogenzo*, p.106.

¹⁷⁵ *ibid*, p.107.

¹⁷⁶ *ibid*.

special circumstances are correct for that time but time changes in what Dogen calls passage, so that the present moment becomes the past.

We are always situated in the present, it is a position that includes the past and the future. When we see the photographs, we are aware of past, present and future as three distinct tenses. We see one and move on to the next and the previous one becomes the past, and the ones we know are ahead are our future; we cannot see them all at once, close up and in detail. This all requires us being in the passage of time. As Masao Abe, one of the great Zen Buddhist philosophers of the twentieth century, points out the past is realized “as the past in the “present”, and from where we stand now in time, the present is realized as the present in the “present”, and the future is realized as the future in the “present”. This “present” is not a temporal present but a “transtemporal present”, wherever we are positioned in space and time it is always in the present and that present is the transpersonal present.”¹⁷⁷ There are thus two levels of time: the transtemporal and the temporal. Within the temporal are the three tenses of past present and future. When what Dogen calls “passageless - passage” occurs, it does so in the transpersonal present; that is, when he speaks of the passage of today to today, it is “passageless – passage”. This is in the ever present, the transtemporal present. But when he refers to today becoming tomorrow it is the “passageless passage” of the temporal day to temporal day.

Abe has a spatial image for seeing how the temporal and the transtemporal work together. He refers to the transtemporal as “the vertical dimension”, the depth of time, and what he calls the horizontal dimension of time is “the dimension of temporal past, present and future moving directionally”.¹⁷⁸ Horizontal time is perceived as duration, unidirectional, irreversible time. We are always at the junction of the horizontal and the vertical dimensions of time, that is, we are always at the position in space and time where the temporal and the transtemporal meet (0). “Nikon, the absolute now, is nothing but the now realized at this intersection.”¹⁷⁹ The *Nikon* is the ever present now, absolute now. So Abe says that once we understand the vertical (1) as *Nikon*, and the passageless passage from today to tomorrow as the horizontal, it is clear that we are at these intersections (0).

¹⁷⁷ Abe, Masao, *A Study of Dogen*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1992, p.99.

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Abe, M *A Study of Dogen*, p.100.

The endless repetition of a space/time event, something that once was, is now present in my present.

Once we realize the passageless-passage from today to today in the vertical dimension, naturally we also realize the passageless-passage from yesterday to yesterday as well as the passageless-passage from tomorrow to tomorrow. This is because of the realization of absolute now (*nikon*), the interpenetrating foundation that makes possible the passageless-passage from today to today, opens up completely the vertical dimension of time as such. This dimension encompasses, and therefore refers equally, to any particular point of the horizontal dimension of time regardless of how it appears to be separate from other tenses.¹⁸⁰

Nikon can mediate between the three tenses as being-time's (*uji's*) *Nikon*, and accounts for the changes in dharma-positions in a now, my now, or any "subject's" dharma-position (which is a particular space-time event) and passage that is experienced as constant flow. These are the two kinds of time.

When viewing the photographs, I see each one as an instant, one instant after another instant. And as I look at the photographs time slows down in order for me to see the instant of now that once was and which is present in my present, again and again. *Nikon* is in all the tenses, it is the now that is present now, the *Nikon* that has been and in the now that is yet to come, and the *Nikon* I experience as I encounter the *Nikon* of the photographs. When I encounter the photographs, I encounter a dharma-position that once was. The photographs are not just a space/time event from the past; there is a constant quality about these photographs and that is the sea and the sky, the sea being the eternal sea, that is, sea being-time being sea, a *Nikon*, an absolute time.

On the basis of what Abe says, a photograph is a piece of the past in the present, it is a slice of time that once was. Every photograph is an instant rescued from the horizontal temporal line of time to become a *Nikon*. When my present intersects with the "this once was" of the photograph, my experience of it is in the present. Access to the vertical dimension of time can occur through *zazen* (meditation) when one becomes aware of absolute nothingness as the self, that is; the ego self is negated, it is a "casting of the

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*

body-mind. And this, in turn implies a realization of the beginningless and endlessness of time that exists in the horizontal dimension.”¹⁸¹ So Zazen and the photographs too can give a sense of the endlessness and emptiness of time, of transpersonal time.

Walking past the photographs one after another, can give a sense of horizontal time. Now – passing, now – passing, now – passing. They can mark time like the ticking of the clock. Each photograph in turn becomes the past as I walk along the wall, and the next one becomes my present as I experience it. Every photograph in this *Seascapes* series of Sugimoto is a *Nikon*, and as a *Nikon* it is the sea expressing time as sea. The *Seascapes*, clear or dark, but nevertheless empty of action and emotional content, are just water being water, “suchness”.¹⁸² The blank sky is just a pale shade of gray and I become aware of the reality of the absolute emptiness of all things and the self. In *Nikon*, time is beginningless and endless and multi-directional and is seen as interpenetrating all times; the three tenses of time are seen as distinct in horizontal time. But in vertical time “with the realization of the no self at the absolute present as the pivotal point, past and future are realized in terms of their mutuality and interpenetration, that is, their reciprocity and reversibility.”¹⁸³

In horizontal time, in temporal time, *The Celtic Sea, St Agnes, 1994* intertwines place and time and situates that place/time event in the past, the past in relation to my now. When perceiving the *Seascapes* I am a body occupying space and being time, not that time passes through me or that I am carried along by the ceaseless flow of time, but I am inseparable from time. What I mean by being time, is that I am a body in space and I am what time is, as I change and grow older. That is how I am being time. Time and I, and all things in fact, have their own being time “while simultaneously sharing in the being time of all existence.”¹⁸⁴ In the *Shobogenzo*, in what is called the “ocean seal concentration”, Dogen used the analogy of the ocean, which is being what it is, the sea, in time, so being the sea is being time. So we can see that being time can be particular to individuals or things and time can be seen as eternal, that it runs through all time. And this “ocean seal” meditation is one of being aware of “thusness”, that is, being as it is

¹⁸¹ Abe, M *A Study of Dogen*, p.100.

¹⁸² “Suchness”, or “being-as-it-is”, is to see things as they are as distinct from descriptions and mental attitudes which “interfere[s] with the pure awareness of being as such.” (Cleary, T *Shobogenzo*, p.47).

¹⁸³ Abe, M *A Study of Dogen*, p.101.

¹⁸⁴ Cleary, T *Shobogenzo*, p.103.

without the preferences, neurotic overlays or worries of past or future.

The ocean is also used as an analogy for Zen awareness of the moment to moment flux, something we watch in an unattached fashion without getting caught up in each passing phenomenon. So the *Seascapes* can be seen as the sea as such being as it is, without emotional and interpretative overtones that are marks of an authorial presence.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that Sugimoto's photographs require and produce in their viewers an embodied experience in real time and with this embodied experience, Zen Buddhist content can be revealed. In Zen practice, one simply observes the body and what is in front of one, without comment, whatever may be happening. And this is how the viewing of the photographs as an embodied Buddhist experience can be explained.

According to Pierre Bourdieu¹⁸⁵, artworks are coded in the cultural contexts of their production, so a full reading is dependent on socially acquired knowledge and is possible only when the codes of the viewer and the art work match. But with Sugimoto's work, the images and the installations are designed to give the viewer, whether initiates or not, a Zen-like experience. The Buddhist concepts are part of a complex understanding and philosophy but in the experience, they are simple.

I have demonstrated that the photographs require, in terms of the experience, an embodied awareness, which parallels the Zen meditation awareness. This chapter engaged the issues raised by the experience of the photographs, which included several views on time. Time was seen, in Chapter One, as the essential element in the theatrical, and time is the essential ingredient in the experience of the photographs. The embodied encounter acknowledged that the perceptual body is located in time and space. Time is also central in the state of corporeal awareness, being-time in an ever-present *Nikon*.

In this chapter I have argued that, with corporeal awareness (of what is happening in the situation: the place, the body, the mind, the feelings), one can have a Zen-like experience of the photographs because this is built into the installation. I also made the point that what the minimalist artists were asking of their viewers seemed similar to the

¹⁸⁵ Bourdieu, Pierre *The Field of Cultural Production*, Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1993.

embodied awareness of being in the moment characteristic of Zen meditation. This is a particular kind of emptiness (not just the obvious lack of things); the photographs are empty of symbolic or overt emotional content and of an obvious authorial presence; these photographs show the sea just as it is. These images of the ever-changing sea bring awareness of the sea and existence as interdependent, impermanent and empty. We have come a long way from Thomas Kellein summary of Sugimoto's work as "having little enough to do with our knowing and believing, our achievements and failures: its homage is paid to no specific cause, but to all the untold multitude of hollow things in our world. It is for us to decide what to make of them."¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Kellein, Thomas, *Time Exposed*, Thames and Hudson: New York, 1995, p.14.



Fig:10 Long view, *Sanjusangendo*, Temple Myōhō-in, Kyoto.



Fig:11 Detail of *Sanjusangendo*, Temple Myohoin, Kyoto.

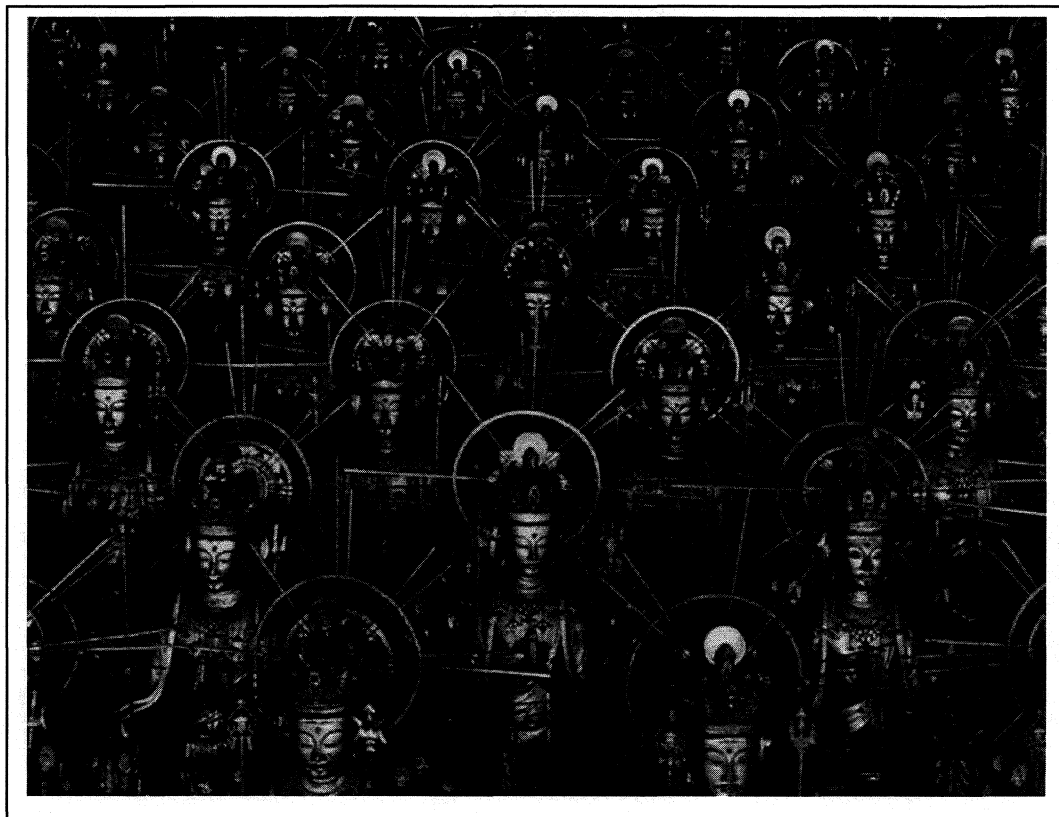


Fig:12 Hiroshi Sugimoto *Sanjusangendo*, 1995

CHAPTER 3.

Sanjusangendo

Chapter 3 will take my discussion a step further and consider the *Sanjusangendo* photographs of Hiroshi Sugimoto in relation the minimalist notions of the phenomenological encounter with the art work, and make the further point that the photographs are already embedded in a “symbolic order”.¹⁸⁷ So that the embodied perception of the work, the image content and the symbolic content can both can lead to a realization of philosophic content.

I will make the case that the *Sanjusangendo* photographs and the Kannon¹⁸⁸ are useful for explaining how embodied encountering can lead to the realization of philosophical content. I will argue that the *Sanjusangendo* photographs make clear that we are beyond formalist autonomy and the notion that all there is to be gained is there in the work to be acquired by the eye. My reading of the *Sanjusangendo* photographs also makes it clear that we are also now beyond the minimalist position of the perceptual experience, that is, beyond the limits of minimalism. Of interest here is the limit of content. What the sculptures of the Bodhisattva Kannon are symbolically, is crucial not only to the Sanjusangendo temple but to the photographs, because there is a double layering of content: in the frame and outside the frame. The image content of the *Sanjusangendo* photographs is the Kannon. The Kannon represent multiplicity, and multiplicity is carried through in the photographs and in the installation of the photographs. With the photographs it is also necessary to consider the nature of photography, the installation of the work and the experience of it. The double layering of meaning has a tradition in the arts of Japan, *mitate*, which is part of a larger concept *kire-tsuzuki*. Cut-continuance (*kire-tsuzuki*) means that the gaps in content, space and time are jumped to form new connections and content. I will argue that through the use of *mitate* and double layering, the artist’s intentions become clear as the new meaning emerges.

¹⁸⁷ Foster, Hal *The Return of the Real*, p.43.

¹⁸⁸ Bodhisattva Kannon is the bodhisattva of compassion, the vehicle of the Amitabutsu, the lord of the western paradise, and according to esoteric Buddhism, this is where souls go to wait for nirvana. Bodhisattvas are neither male nor female, but in Japan they are usually depicted as male. In Zen Nirvana is not elsewhere it is “right here before your very eyes” as Hakuinzen-ji *Song of Zazen* states.

In order to do this I will initially examine the *Sanjusangend* temple: it is necessary to understand what it is, what is there and how it is experienced. Then I will look at what Sugimoto photographed, how he did it and how the photographs are experienced. This will partly be done by comparing an image of the Kannon from the *Sanjusangendo* temple publication and those of Sugimoto.

Multiple layers in the work accumulate multiple and complex readings of the work: photography itself, the experience of the installation, the appropriated image and the context of the appropriated image places the work in a contextual field beyond the purely aesthetic, beyond what the eye sees and the body experiences. The work and the viewer are both enmeshed in conditionality, causes and conditions (*zenki* or the total). And finally, the key to this discussion of the Kannon is the Buddhist concepts of multiplicity, oneness (*zenki*) and impermanence.

The temple and the Kannon

The official name of the temple is *Renge-o-in* and is commonly known as *Sanjusangendo*; it is Japan's longest wooden structure. *Sanjusangendo* is a sub-temple of the *Myoho-in* temple in the south-east area of Kyoto.

I have no recollection of how I came to be in the temple with the one thousand and one Kannon in the hall of the *Sanjusangendo* temple, although people have since told me one enters the building via the north-east corner after a long walk from the gate to a small room where shoes are removed. What I do remember is standing at the end of the temple and being awestruck by the length and number of sculptures of the Kannon arrayed before me, worn golden figures ten tiers deep that form a stage-like altar. The entire arrangement is altogether the object of reverence. A large 3.5 meter tall, seated, thousand-armed Avalokitesvara is the central image with five hundred standing life-size¹⁸⁹ sculptures of the Bodhisattva Kannon placed on either side. The Kannon on each tier alternate position with the next so that the sculptures in every alternate row form a line at right angles to the steps and each one forms part of a diagonal line.

¹⁸⁹ Small life size, 165 cm approx.

Each of these one thousand Kannon figures is the same: a standing figure with two hands clasped in front of the chest in the prayer gesture (*Namaskara Mudra*), another pair of arms form the *mudra* of meditation (*Samadhi Mudra*)¹⁹⁰ with both hands at the hip, palms upwards. Radiating from either side of the upper torso are a multitude of arms, twenty pairs of arms in total; each one of these is in a *mudra* or holding a symbolic object. On top of the head arranged like a crown are ten smaller heads and around the head are two halo-like rings. Radiating out from either side of the head and from the top are three rods. These radiating lines intersect in the space between adjacent figures and overlap the face of the figure above, thus linking the whole altar in a right angle grid and diagonal pattern of faces, halos and radiating lines. Thus the Kannon are all connected to become one.

The Kannon evoked, for me, thoughts of time, of one moment after another, in the endless stream of time. At one moment they are individuals and at another they merge into one whole. I saw the beauty of each one of these Kannon, and through the sameness and difference I saw each one connected to all the rest. Each one is unique but a representation of the Kannon. I thought of Indra's net in the *Hua Yen Sutra*¹⁹¹, where each nodal point in the net is like a pearl in which all the other pearls in the net are reflected. It is about the interdependence (dependent origination) of all, the belief that all things arise as a consequence of causes and conditions. It is the most stunningly beautiful thing, an image so compelling and an experience so moving that I will never forget it.

The temple is 118m long and 16.4 metre wide and almost completely full of Kannon.¹⁹² I walked past 500 of these before I arrived at the central figure of the temple, Avaloketisvara, one thousand armed and eleven-headed (*Ju-ichimen*).¹⁹³ In Japan, the

¹⁹⁰ "The symbolic gestures of the hands of Buddha images, called mudras, are picture tools of identification of deeper meaning." "Mudras", *Buddhanet*, 2005, [cited September 2005].

Available from <http://www.buddhanet.net/mudras.htm>

¹⁹¹ *The Hua-yen Sutra* is known in Sanskrit as Avatamsaka Sutra, one of the most important scriptures in Mahayana Buddhism. National Palace Museum, Taiwan [cited September 2005].

Available from http://www.npm.gov.tw/exh94/buddha/english_version/subject03.html

¹⁹² In this section all the details of the temple: dates, dimensions etc. are from, Misaki, Gisen *National Treasure Sanjusangendo*, Kyoto: Temple Myohoin, 1978. However, I converted the imperial measurements to metric.

¹⁹³ Kannon multi-headed and multi-armed deities came to Japan as early as the eighth century from Indian Tantra via China. Esoteric Buddhism teachings are mysterious, secret & full of symbols. The many heads and objects have symbolic meaning (for greater detail see : Alicia Matsunaga *The Buddhist Philosophy of*

Kannon as an archetypical image, is often depicted with eleven faces (*Jyuichi-men Kannon*), symbolic of offering compassion in all directions.¹⁹⁴ The Kannon is also often shown with a thousand arms (*Senjyu Kannon*), symbolic of the ability to alleviate the suffering in all realms of existence.

It is important to understand what the temple is because it is the symbolic order that the photographs relate to, and the meaning content is carried over to the photographs. I circumambulated this enormous altar, as in the ancient Indian practice of walking around a *stupa*,¹⁹⁵ I remember sculptures in front of the Kannon, the twenty eight *Bushu* figures;¹⁹⁶ they are attendant guardians to the Kannon and include warriors, beautiful women, fabulous creatures. One walks in what is really a corridor, which is not a temple with room for masses of people to sit, but are for people to walk in. Because I could not move very far back from the Kannon, as I walked the length of the temple they appeared like a huge receding wall. The lower figures in the foreground were not a great deal taller than me, each stood on a lotus base and as the first step was not high, one could get quite close to see the detail of what was in each of their hands, or the filigree work on the headdress or figure. As a moving viewer, the whole array changed as I moved. At one point the Kannon would be arranged in a perfectly symmetrical fashion, alternate ones lined up one behind the other, at one and the same time, a strange mix of order and chaos as one moved along the mass of the halos and radiating rays. I was drawn to looking at the luscious detail of each figure in the lower rows, those close to me. I would stop and look, comparing differences and observing ornate detail. There were just so many figures, each the same, yet each different. Their symmetrical beauty gave a calming effect. I felt a push and pull along the temple until the Kannon seemed to merge in the repetition of hundreds and hundreds. One and another, and then the next, until I was overwhelmed, seeing them over time, losing sense of time.

The name of the temple and its structure manifest the symbolism of the Kannon.

Sanjusan means thirty three and *gendo* is the space between the columns of the post and

Assimilation, Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle & Co, 1969.

¹⁹⁴ Originally the Kannon image was male, but in China, and elsewhere in Asia is commonly portrayed as female.

¹⁹⁵ A "dome or pyramid, containing a relic of a Buddha or some other objects of veneration; a meditation support symbolizing the formless body of the Buddha and the essential structure of the cosmos."

Trimondi, Victor & Victoria, Glossary of some Tantric Terms [cited Coctober, 2005] available from <http://www.trimondi.de/SDLE/Glossary.htm>

¹⁹⁶ The *Bushu* are life size 165 cm, approx.

lintel structure. *Gendo* is a unit of measurement for temple architecture; it has the same character as *ma* (which is a character for space). So the name refers to the thirty three spaces that contain the Kannon. There are actually thirty five bays, or *gendo*, but one at each end is for the aisle. The term *Sanjusangendo*, therefore, means thirty-three bay hall. It is the temple of the in-between spaces. The Kannon Bodhisattva brings compassion to mankind by disguising himself into thirty three different forms, that is why the one thousand and one sculptures are arranged over thirty three bays. In this temple a form of esoteric Buddhism is practiced which involves symbolism and repetitive ritual practices. The temple was constructed in 1164 by the retired emperor Go-Shirakawa as an act of faith to perpetuate life in the face of an apocalypse. This Buddhist millennium foretold the fading influence of Buddhism and other kinds of disaster. It was believed to be the time of degeneration of the law, or "*Map-po*", which began in AD 1052. It was also a time of natural disasters (typhoons, floods, epidemics and famine). So the temple was built as insurance in troubled times.

The temple was restored after a fire in 1254 that destroyed all but one hundred and fifty six of the one thousand Kannon sculptures. This thirteenth century building and most of the gilded, carved wooden¹⁹⁷ sculptures are replicas of those made in the twelfth century. The one thousand Kannon were necessarily different, as they were carved by seventy sculptors, over a hundred years, in two culturally different periods. The Hiean period sculptor, Unkei made the original Kannon sculptures, and his son Tankei made the reconstruction pieces. Tenkei's Kamakura pieces are more naturalistic than the ethereal Hiean period ones. So there were many variations and stylistic changes in the sculptures. This gives many differences within the identical iconographical figure. They are the same with slight discernable differences.

Multiplicity and the Kannon

The essential quality of the Bodhisattva is unlimited compassion. This can be seen in the multiplicity and repetition used within each figure and among the figures as a whole. Avalokitesvara has one thousand arms and eleven faces, each one of these saves souls in the twenty five realms of existence. The Bodhisattva Kannon can appear in thirty three

¹⁹⁷ Each sculpture is constructed from many partly hollow blocks of wood which were partly carved and assembled and refined, then painted and covered in gold leaf. In addition to being lighter than ones from solid wood, they shrink differently and are less likely to split. Misaki, Gisen *National Treasure Sanjusangendo*, p.26.

different manifestations¹⁹⁸ in order to show compassion according to the need and the time and place of the person. With the one thousand arms, eleven heads and the thirty three realms “one might look upon the total images as the appearance of 33,033 Kannon.”¹⁹⁹ The Bodhisattva faces all ten directions (eight lateral, plus up and down), and according to Matsunaga, the twenty fourth chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* says these are also multiplied into the equation. Each hand holds a symbolic object, which relates to a particular manner of compassion, so this is also another order of multiplication. As well, each of the forty arms of the smaller Kannon saves in the twenty five realms, so there would symbolically be one thousand arms in all for each one of the thousand Kannon.²⁰⁰ Avaloketisvara often has an eye for each of the one thousand arms, this represents the sight in every direction and the limitless wisdom of the Kannon.²⁰¹ Kannon literally means “watchful listening”.²⁰²

These multiplications go on and on; layers of multiplication into vast numbers, and the outcome of it all is infinite compassion: Avelokitesvara is the embodiment of unlimited compassion. The Kannon are also the embodiment of cyclic time; of the cycles of birth and rebirth. It is their role to take on whatever form is necessary to give compassion and assists beings within the cycle of birth and death. It is also their role to assist them out of the cycle of birth and death. So the Kannon represents the concept of the many equaling the one.

In order to account for its belief in the celestial Buddhas the Mahayana movement developed the so called “three bodies” (trikaya) theory: the Buddha is understood in terms of sheer emptiness... (the “dharma body”) andas a celestial Buddha such as Avaloketisvara (Kannon) and Amitaba: and the third refers to the historical Buddha, Siddharta Gautama.²⁰³

In the fascicle Kannon from Dogen’s *Shobogenzo*, one Chinese master asks another:

¹⁹⁸ “The Avalokitesvara Sutra mentions 33 specific forms of the Kannon. But it is unclear why the number 33 was used. One theory relates to the Buddhist realm called Mt. Shumisen (or Mt. Sumeru, originally from Hindu mythology). In this heavenly palace of the Buddha and all followers, there are 33 deities who guard and protect the realm.” Onmark Productions.com Last Update August 9, 2004, [cited July 2005] available from <http://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/kannon.shtml>

¹⁹⁹ Misaki, Gisen *National Treasure Sanjusangendo*, p.26.

²⁰⁰ Matsunaga, Alicia *The Buddhist Philosophy of Assimilation*, Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle & Co, 1969, p. 196.

²⁰¹ Rambach, Pierre *The Japanese Art of Tranzism*, Geneva: Skira, 1979, p.12.

²⁰² Available from <http://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/kannon.shtml>

²⁰³ translators note, Steven Heine, in Abe, Masao *Zen and the Modern World*, ed Steven Heine. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003, p.163.

“How does the Bodhisattva of compassion use his manifold hands and eyes?” The second master answers: “The whole body is hands and eyes.”²⁰⁴ The question could also be how does the compassion of Avalokitesvara function? In this fascicle Dogen says the compassion of the Kannon “should not be restricted to ‘immeasurable’ ‘unbounded’, the compassion of the Kannon transcends the boundary of even the boundless and the unlimited.”²⁰⁵ For Dogen, as well as being unlimited, compassion must also happen right here and now. The actions of the hands and eyes are not to be “expressed dualistically”,²⁰⁶ which means that when the hands and eyes are functioning they are infinite. The manifold actions of the Kannon are a function of the total dynamic whole.

The symbolic meaning of the Kannon as the manifestation of infinite, boundless compassion is crucial not only to the temple but to the photographs because there is a double layering of content: in the frame and outside the frame. The image content of the *Sanjusangendo* photographs is the Kannon image which parallels or echoes what happens outside the frame in the space and the encountering. Following on from the discussion so far, it is clear that the original meaning or symbolism of the Kannon is brought forward in to the Sugimoto photographs. What we also see in these photographs is the experience of the installation and the use of minimalist strategies of seriality and repetition and for encountering the work.

So far, I have looked at the temple and the Kannon. Next, I turn to explore the photographic work *Sanjusangendo* 1995, by Hiroshi Sugimoto. This work photographed all one thousand of the identical Kannon Bodhisattva. This is a twentieth century art work which uses twelfth century imagery. The Kannon are part of a twelfth century symbolic order and in the photographs of Sugimoto these are linked to a twentieth century imagery and content. This double layering of meaning has a tradition; in the arts of Japan it is called *mitate* which will be discussed in more detail below.

The Kannon and the Sanjusangendo Photographs of Hiroshi Sugimoto.

My purpose here is to draw out the nature of the experience of the embodied observer,

²⁰⁴ Cook, F *Sounds of the Valley Streams*, p. 90.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ *ibid*, p. 93.

as discussed in chapter one. The embodied encounter with art works reveals content as it is not just what is in the frame of the image which has meaning. As noted above, content can be more than perceptual, it can in fact lead to Buddhist philosophical content. An examination of the Kannon and the photographs will reveal the content of the photographs, and key to this is the Buddhist concepts of multiplicity, oneness (*zenki*) and impermanence.

In 1999, the Queensland Art Gallery showed the forty eight *Sanjusangendo* black and white silver gelatin prints (50.8 X 61 cm), during the *Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* (APT). Sugimoto expressed his objective thus: "I would like to present this work in a sealed space with four walls. People would feel they were surrounded by this order of Kannon Bodhisattva."²⁰⁷ But that is not how they were seen on the only occasion the whole series was on show in Australia. I saw the *Sanjusangendo* photographs in an extremely long corridor. They were, it seemed to me, placed at a slightly high eye level, in one long line. Suhanya Raffel²⁰⁸ told me in conversation that although Sugimoto wanted the photographs to be in an isolated room it was not possible at the APT so he suggested they hang them on one long wall. At the Queensland gallery the only wall long enough was the upstairs corridor wall. This was interesting as it paralleled the experience of the temple and meant that one could not get back from the work and could only see along the wall of photographs with a very foreshortened view. In this view, the photographs piled up one on another and merged into one as they receded into the distance.

It is not clear, except with careful examination, that some Kannon appear twice along the line of photographs. What is seen initially is a mass of sameness, of halos, crowns, heads and chests, and only gradually can the differences be seen. Because I knew there were overlaps, I tried to pick them: a kind of a game that slowed my pace and caused me to look with considerable care. Drawn to the detail, at one moment the Kannon all looked the same. And at others I could see the "... ever-so-slightly different multiple embodiments."²⁰⁹ I was immersed in finding the minute differences; a slight variance in

²⁰⁷ Kellein, Thomas *Hiroshi Sugimoto. Time Exposed*, p.92.

²⁰⁸ Head of Asian Art, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, [cited 2004]. Available from <http://www.qag.qld.gov.au>

²⁰⁹ Sugimoto, Hiroshi *Prospect-Photography in Contemporary Art*. Frankfurt: Edition Stemmler, 1996, p.304.

the up-turn of the corner of the lips in one figure, a chin slightly more elevated in one and sunk back into the neck in another to reveal difference. There was so much to see and I was torn between lingering on an image and the impossible desire to visually grasp the whole. Distinguishing difference where there was little to distinguish drove me on down the row of photographs, my eye jumping from one face to another in the image and jumping from one photograph to the next along the wall. I oscillated between slowly, looking deeply at each image and the need to speed past one to the next, at the rate of film frames through a projector. Time is the crucial issue here, it takes time to experience work and the viewer as the perceiving subject is at the center of the activity, in real space and in real time, not the illusionistic, but everyday space and time.

Each photograph demanded close viewing, each is differentiated by subtlety of form, of shade and tone, in the repetition of non-identical forms. These beautiful Kannon with their angelic faces are linked by radiating halos of light. There are so many images lined up along the wall, one after the other. It was a similar experience to the one in the temple. It was not just my vision that seemed to be structured by the photographs, they seemed to control my state of being, pushing me on. Even though there were gaps between the figures and between the photographs, they all seemed to interconnect and form a whole. It was as if the eye jumped the spaces and the mind made it whole.

This absorption in detail can mean a fragmented viewing of isolated elements, but here the eye runs across surfaces, a photograph, the photographs and the wall. I see the visual material of the work and I feel the phenomenological experience of the body and the work and my mind processes this, orders it and ascribes meaning based on it and what I know from previous experiences and from acquired knowledge. The photographs have a material presence because of their vast number and because of their dark density and black frames.

An artist's intention can be expressed in the choices made in the work because those choices have meaning. Why did Sugimoto not photograph the central Avalokitesvara figure? Japanese people would know that the central figure was missing because it is a National Monument. Why would he have photographed the Kannon figures in such a way that no other sculptural or architectural elements are included in the photographs?

In the photographs all we see is a continuity of Kannon. The removal of everything except the Kannon from the photographs disconnects them from the original location. So the photographs do not speak of that place. And once disconnected from that place it permits us not to think of that place and to focus on the here and now, with the immediacy of the present encountering. If Sugimoto had included things other than the Kannon in the photographs, those discontinuous elements would have broken the idea of continuity within the images and created breaks. As it is, the only breaks that occur are between the photographs, not in the images. It is the space between the photographs that our eyes jump in order to connect the whole vast array of photographs into one work.

Why would Sugimoto photograph these figures, if who they are was not significant? He could have photographed anything. Why these figures and this temple? If he had wanted massed sculptural figures he could have photographed the small *Jizo*²¹⁰ figures that lie around many temples and temple cemeteries in vast numbers. Why this temple when it took him years to get permission to do it? In an interview with Thomas Kellein in 1995²¹¹, the year he photographed the sculptures, Sugimoto mentioned that this work was “the best extension of the *Seascapes*.” He remarked: “It is the idea of one thousand and one times a one thousand armed Kannon.”²¹² In this interview he also said that what interested him was that each sculpture is different; repetition of difference and sameness. This multiplicity seems relevant to one who works in series. It is also interesting from a Buddhist perspective where multiplicity is central to Avelokitesvara who takes on multiple forms. An artist’s intention can be expressed on a number of levels of organization in the work. Understanding this sets up the parameters for interpreting and revealing content. The multiplicity and repetition are seen on a number of levels; as part of the nature of the Kannon, repetition of the image of the Kannon in the temple, and repetition of the photographs in the installation. The photographs are lined up on the wall along the corridor in the order of “one after another”.²¹³ Because of the repetitive nature of the experience, the viewer is confronted with “... the known

²¹⁰ *Jizo* is believed to be the protector of dead children, the stillborn, miscarried, and aborted fetuses. He has a shaved head is dressed in a monk's robe and often with a bib.

²¹¹ Killein, Thomas *Time Exposed*. p.92.

²¹² *ibid*.

²¹³ Don Judd in conversation with Lynn Cooke. DIA Foundation, 2005. [cited September 2005]. Available from http://www.diacenter.org/exhibs_b/judd/essay.html

constant and the experienced variable”.²¹⁴ Expectations and anticipation means that the sixth photo is experienced differently to the thirtieth.

Mitate

In reference to his *Sanjusangendo* photographs Sugimoto said: “This is a recent idea, but it is not different from my previous work.”²¹⁵ By editing out all architectural elements and the large central Avelokitesvara figure, he made the Kannon discontinuous with their location and their time and connected them to our time; the *Sanjusangendo* photographs bring the historical and the contemporary together in one work and jump historical time. This contemporary photographic work is of an historical artwork: the content of one overlays the other. It is important to recognize in photography the difference between the subject of the image and the photographic work itself. The content resides in both places and in the case of these photographs, it is also in the installation.

To understand the photographs it is helpful to see the relationships with the historical work, in this case the Kannon image and its symbolic content that is brought into the contemporary. So we have here a number of disconnections and connections. There are also historical precedents for this in Japan; it is a long tradition called *mitate*. *Mitate* is part of a much larger concept in Japanese art and aesthetics, *kire tsuzuki*²¹⁶. This concept is significant in this chapter as it operates on a number of levels within the work.

The concept of discontinuous continuity in the Buddhist sense of life/death has its parallel in the Japanese aesthetic term *kire-tsuzuki*, cut-continuance. [*Kire* means cut and *tsuzuki* continuance] *Kire-tsuzuki* is commonly used in poetry and art in general where things are cut out and removed from their natural surroundings. It could for instance be an everyday event cut from life and presented to us as art. In this case, the art world stands in discontinuous continuity with the world. The original meaning of the “cut” is a technical incision by which the immediate naturalness of nature, still untouched by man, is cut off. This, however, means that nature is cut out or isolated

²¹⁴ Morris, Robert “Notes on Sculpture. Part 2”, p. 23.

²¹⁵ Killein, Thomas *Time Exposed*. p.92.

²¹⁶ Cut-continuance or discontinuous continuity.

from its immediate naturalness and appears in its inner or deeper naturalness. The cut does not cease or dissect the flow but connects it to the new flow.²¹⁷

Kire-tsuzuki was first used, according to Ohashi²¹⁸, in relation to poetry where a cut syllable (*kire-ji*) was used "... to interrupt a poem's flow of expression to create a space for a new phase of poetic expression."²¹⁹ "Discontinuous continuity", in the Buddhist sense has historically had two manifestations: Buddhist renunciation and the way of *bashido*, both of which are cuts from everyday life. The former brings insights into the nature of self and the world and the latter, awareness of one's mortality²²⁰. Being cut from the mainstream of life and being connected to another awareness brings realizations about the nature of life; life is seen in a different way.

A Zen approach is to cut a commonplace everyday thing from the life world and use it in art and other forms of continuous discontinuity; when everyday life is brought into art and transforms the way we see life, the cut gives a distance from the flow of life. Watching the breath is the first Zen meditation exercise. Watch the breath, it just comes and goes - cut continuance - it is a way to still the mind, watch the breath come and go, watch the thoughts come and go. Watch the breathing, cut continuance, the space between the breaths, the space before the next one comes, at times one cannot take for granted that the next breath will come. We see it as we wait for the next inhalation of the dead or dying, waiting for the one that did not come. That is life/ death; transmigration or rebirth is another cut-continuance.

Ohashi²²¹ makes the point that cut-continuance can operate culturally, art cut from nature, and historically, through cultural appropriation. As a form of cultural renewal Japanese culture has, over the centuries, appropriated and incorporated aspects of other cultures: China, Korea and more recently the West. A traditional Japanese example of cut-continuance in art is *mitate*, where an original, a widely known image, usually Buddhist or some other element of 'high' culture, is re-worked in popular culture using

²¹⁷ Ohashi, Ryosuke "The Hermeneutic approach to Japanese Modernity: "Art-Way", "Iki", and "Cut – Continuance"." In *Japanese Hermeneutics*, edited by M. Marra. Honolulu: University of Hawaii press, 2002, p.32.

²¹⁸ Ohashi, Ryosuke "The Hermeneutic approach to Japanese Modernity:"

²¹⁹ *ibid*, p.31.

²²⁰ *ibid*

²²¹ *ibid*, pp. 34-5.

parody or humor. In Kabuki it was used for political comment and criticism in repressive times. The doubling of meaning often required an understanding of the classical literature to recognize the original subject matter and often became an elite intellectual game. That is, we may need more knowledge, what Panofsky called “cultural equipment”,²²² to enhance the aesthetic enjoyment of the work.

Mitate happens over time, it jumps the gap from then to now. An example of this would be a Buddhist myth or legend made into a sci-fi anime. Robert Stearns, in *Photography and Beyond in Japan*, notes that *mitate* is often seen as the postmodern practice of appropriation with its challenge to authorship, but as I have tried to show it has long been in Japanese culture.²²³ With *mitate*, the “cut does not merely cease or dissect the flow but connects it to the new flow.”²²⁴ The *Sanjusangendo* photographic series of Sugimoto participates in this tradition. The very nature of photography participates in *mitate* as it disconnects the thing photographed from its world. Susan Sontag makes a point, in opposition to Buddhist aspirations, that photography “is a view of the world that denies interconnectedness, continuity...”²²⁵ precisely because it is an image disconnected from the time and place of the content of the image. But as we have seen, that is not the case with these photographs that make new connections. Sugimoto’s photographs are connected to Buddhist philosophic and aesthetic traditions, that is, they dependently arose; they are in a web of connections that recognizes the broader nature of contemporary art. Contrary to the formalist belief, an art work is not autonomous and does refer to disciplines outside itself.

With minimal art, the artwork was brought back into relationship with the everyday world, subject to the vicissitudes of real space, time, light and gravity. Space was no longer the illusionistic space of formalism, but the space of the encounter. But the minimalist embodied viewer was limited to a perceptual subject. The viewer was not one enmeshed in the greater world, one subject to power relations, gendered, or of a particular cultural or religious background. An artwork, like the artist, is a cultural entity and is in relationship to discourses outside the arts. The artist and the artwork can express the depth and the comprehensiveness of human activities. Sugimoto’s work

²²² Panofsky, Erwin *Meaning in the Visual Arts*. New York: Doubleday, 1955, p.16.

²²³ Stearns, Robert *Photography and Beyond in Japan*, Tokyo: New York: Abrams, 1995, p. 83.

²²⁴ *ibid.*

²²⁵ Sontag, Susan *On Photography*, London: Penguin, 1971, p.23.

necessarily includes the perceptual, but unlike the minimalist, it also includes Buddhist philosophic and religious content. There are more levels of interpretation.

The use of *mitate* makes the artist's intentions clear: what was included and what was not, how the work was framed, shot and presented/installed all reveal content. I will now look at these aspects of the work. *Mitate* brings the image used into the present, to be part of a contemporary artwork. The purpose of the *Sanjusangendo* temple is different to the intention Sugimoto photographs. Artists make images in relation to the context of the images of a culture image order. Sugimoto has made the work in relation to two image orders of two cultures, ones that use the similar strategies of repetition and multiplicity; the twelfth century and minimalism.

The photographs

Now I will consider the *Sanjusangendo* photographs in relation to their perception, repetition and the Buddhist philosophical content.

How we experience art work is complex. It is synthesis of the material existence of the object and its context, the experience of that and its content. The perception of the work depends on our background, which already established our "cultural equipment".²²⁶ The appreciation of an art work which crosses cultures may require us to acquire information. Having acquired more knowledge the perception of the work will change, and perhaps, as Panofsky argued, we will move closer "to the original intention of the work."²²⁷ In the case of these photographs, they are attached to a "symbolic order" whose meaning would not necessarily be readily available, although this could be deduced from an examination of the photographs and the installation, that is, through repetition. Lynne Cooke clearly captures the related issues, in this case using minimalism:

In relentlessly probing issues of similarity and difference, likeness and identity, Judd required that each of his works be closely and attentively scrutinized. The recognition of the specificity of each element informs the viewer's appreciation of the relation of the individual to the collective, of the singular entity to the larger series, and of repetition to order.²²⁸

²²⁶ Panofsky, Erwin *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, New York: Doubleday, 1955, p.16.

²²⁷ *ibid*, p.17.

²²⁸ Cooke, Lynne *Don Judd*, http://www.diacenter.org/exhibs_b/judd/essay.html

As shown earlier, the symbolic order of the Kannon uses repetition and, unlike the repetition of the minimalists, this repetition has a referential function related to the symbolic nature and function of the Kannon. Minimal repetition aimed to keep us in the here and now, the now of the perceptual experience as opposed to the absorbed viewer of formalism. The repetition experienced by the embodied viewer who, step by step, breath by breath and frame by frame, in the here and now, can also experiences these photographs with a Zen-like awareness of being in the present momemt. However, although the experience of Sugimoto's *Sanjusangendo* does this, the experience can go further as it also links us to other levels of thinking, feeling and interpretation. Fried noted that there was an endlessness to the durational experience of work similar to this. As there was an infinite number of relationships that could be made, Fried's conclusion was that it was endless, not because it was full, but because "there was nothing there to exhaust".²²⁹ As the work is not a composed whole the viewer was virtually compelled to continue to make relationships in the manner of a circular road; endlessly. In the case of the *Sanjusangendo* photographs the work is forty eight images that one cannot perceive or comprehend instantaneously. It is necessary to read what happens in the relationships between images and what happens in the duration of the perception of the work, that is, what is outside the image.

Sugimoto's installation work cannot be appreciated just through absorption in the frame but needs to include an awareness of the self in the here and now, as a continuous part of the situation and the time. When the conditions of viewing become part of the perception of the work, the gallery becomes the site of the production of meaning. As discussed in Chapter One, the minimalist perception of art has parallels with meditation as one needs to have "awareness of what is going on: in your body, in your feelings, in your mind, and in the world."²³⁰ Minimal art objects require moving viewers who relate the internal and external factors of the work with an awareness of the experiencing body in space and time (duration). And it is precisely this kind of viewer and this kind of interaction with the art work that the *Sanjusangendo* photographic installation required. This installation needed a substantial amount of time as there were far too many photographs to take in quickly. Also, in the corridor one could not see all the

²²⁹ Fried, Michael "Art and Objecthood", p.22.

²³⁰ Nhat Hanh, Thich *Being Peace*, Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1987, p.106.

photographs at once because of the very acute angle one was to the wall. This meant that the content of the photographs was visible only in those images nearest the viewer. The art work required an active viewer to complete the work. It was necessary to piece together, in the mind, what was being seen over a time, as the viewer moved from one image to the next along the corridor. It was not physically possible to appreciate the work at once in the formalist sense; the work was not a composed whole and its totality could not be seen at once.

The encounter with the photographs has certain parallels to the viewing of the Kannon in the temple; the repetition of forms or frames can have particular effects on the perceiver; exhaustion, over-load, the desire to move quickly, the need to slow down. But what is quite different of course is that the photographs are two-dimensional, black and white, and the Kannon in the temple are a golden three-dimensional experience. Not only are the photographs two-dimensional by nature, the image is also a flattened one. In the temple, I was very aware of the Kannon being a very high receding wall. At first glance these forty eight photographs look identical; they are compositionally the same. It was only on very close examination that I could discern that the sculptures of which they are composed are in fact not identical. The *Sanjusangendo* photographs could be mistaken for mechanical reproduction of identical images – they have identical framing, the photographs are virtually identical, but the internal image, the Kannon images, are not.

The forty eight *Sanjusangendo* photographs by Sugimoto are seemingly objective photographs. One could assume that they were a documentary view of the Kannon in the site, but they are not. What is shown is a very particular view and the choice of framing also has significance. The framing selected only the Kannon and gave a continuity, a seamlessness. There are only Kannon. So what we see with the *Sanjusangendo* photographs is a particular photographic view, which one could assume to be similar to what one sees in the temple. But a comparative analysis of Sugimoto's photographs and the photograph published by the *Renge-o-in* temple reveals they are quite different. In the following discussion I will use one of the photographs from a temple publication to highlight these difference (Fig. 11).

The framing in Sugimoto's photographs is not arbitrary (Fig. 12). He photographed only

eight of the ten stepped tiers of the Kannon, in order to have only Kannon in the image. The figures are placed in alternating fashion on the tiers so that one is positioned in the space between the two in the row in front, thus affording a clear view of each one before the receding tiers become too distant for close examination. The chins of the Kannon in the first row are at the base of the frame. Each figure has a crown of eleven heads, a halo with metal lines radiating out from it. The multitude of arms on either side of the body, are barely visible in the rich dark tones of the photographs.

The photograph in the temple publication on the other hand is framed to give information. At the lower edge of the image are the feet of the first row of Kannon and the posts and beams of the temple above the heads of the Kannon at the upper edge of the image. We see every tier of the Kannon, the first five rows are bathed in bright light to reveal great detail, including the multitude of arms. The full length of the figures in the first two rows can be seen, showing the rhythmic folds of the fabric and the lotus pedestal on which the figure stands. The last five rows of figures are in more subdued light and many of their faces are partly concealed by the ones in front. The image is densely packed with faces, crowns, radiating lines and detail that become textural qualities.

Sugimoto's photographs, by contrast, are more open compositions with space between the heads. The details that can be seen, are on the chests of the Kannon in the second row; the rest is veiled in darkness. Each photograph is clearly composed of horizontal rows of heads and, at the same time, of receding diagonal lines of heads. These lines are echoed by the halos and the diagonal radiation of lines that make linear linkage lines across the surface of each photograph. The horizontal and vertical gridded nature of the composition in the frame gives a regularity and stillness to the image. It also contributes to the overall impression of flatness, notwithstanding the heads receding into the distance. In contrast to this, the official temple photograph conforms to the idea that a photograph frames reality like a window, as it gives a perspective of the Kannon similar to that of the viewer in the temple.

Perhaps the most striking difference between Sugimoto's photographs and the temple publication photograph is the position of the camera. The temple publication photograph is shot from what I might call a naturalistic position, that is, from a position

similar to what one would experience in the temple with the central focus of the image on the figure in the first row. The Kannon in this image appear in a familiar perspective. In Sugimoto's, however, the 1,000 Kannon were shot with a wide-angle lens as indicated by the heads that appear to turn and look sideways. It also makes the heads appear narrower and gives the impression of them being further away. The center of the image is in the space above the head of the central figure in the second row. The Kannon were also photographed from an elevated position, possibly from a ladder or scaffolding, thus isolating each figure to some extent by providing space around each one.

The low light also contributes to the separate nature of the individual figures in the Sugimoto photographs. They were photographed at dawn with frontal framing, not at an angle. As they face east, the filtered dawn light cast a soft glow which caught only certain elements; what was lost in the shadow was a great deal of the ornamentation and detail around the head, the upper torso and the multitude of arms. This reduction of detail added to the sense of calm and stillness which resulted in a much more austere, peaceful and symmetrical photograph with a "mutable structure" to "...defy the vicissitudes of time and place."²³¹ The stillness may seem in contrast with the moving changeable nature of the perception of the work. The detail and the stillness in the photographs helps to slow the roaming, embodied viewer and facilitates the meditation like experience. This brings the content of the image and the experience together. The separate nature of the individual figures enhances the idea of the many composing the one, or oneness. This is where the structure of the photograph relates to Buddhist ideas of the totality in the image and the moving, durational impermanence of the experience.

Sugimoto's photographs are not a documentation of the Kannon in the temple, rather they show a particular view of the Kannon, taken that way for a reason that has significance in relation to Buddhist Philosophic content. These photographs were taken in the dawn light, not in the full even brightness of a battery of artificial lights as was the official photograph, a brightness that assumed that spaces should be full of light to reveal all. In Japan there is another logic at play which assumes that spaces are filled with darkness, and that forms emerge from the darkness as the Kannon in Sugimoto's

²³¹ Monroe, A. *Beyond the Future. The Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, catalogue. Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, p. 224.

photographs emerge in the soft light of dawn. This has parallels with the darkness in which life was lived before electricity. The novelist and articulator of traditional taste, Tanizaki,²³² would have regarded thousands of watts of electricity on the Kannon figures as vulgar. He maintained that what could be garish in full light becomes muted and refined in shadows. A thing catches faint light to gleam in the darkness in what he called "the beauty in shadows,"²³³ a building, such as *Sanjusangendo*, with large eaves filtering indirect sunlight through paper-screened windows takes advantage of the reflective qualities of gold in the darkness. The somber dark tones of the photographs evoke this "beauty of a shadows",²³⁴ revealing the fragile, fleeting transience of life. Dawn is an in-between time, regarded as a period of transience, when the light gradually increases to reveal the forms of the world. It also implies its opposite, when the sun declines and disappears and with it, the forms of the world. And in this way the photographs clearly embody the Buddhist idea of impermanence. This idea is eloquently articulated by Arnheim:

When darkness is so deep that it provides a foil of black nothingness, the beholder receives the compelling impression of things emerging from a state of non-being and likely to return to it. Instead of presenting a static world with a constant inventory, the artist shows life as a process of appearing and disappearing. The whole is only partly present, and so are most objects.²³⁵

At dawn we see the transformation from night to day. It is at these transitional times that we can come to understand the transience of life. The darkness that Sugimoto chose for the photographs lends itself to a Buddhist view of impermanence, as exemplified by Arnheim's comment. So we see here how the decisions Sugimoto made determined how the photographs embodied the ideas of the Kannon as impermanent. For Dogen, everything is changeable and the Kannon exemplify this with their ability to transform, in order to bestow compassion in all realms.

Perhaps a 1,000 year-old temple of 1,000 Kannon figures is not such a strange object for a photographic work on impermanence. Slowing down and seeing the differences is like the meditation which allows one to slow the thought process. This work parallels the

²³² Tanizaki, Jun'ichiro, 1886-1965, Japanese novelist author of *The Morioka Sisters*.

²³³ Tanizaki, Jun'ichiro, *In Praise of Shadows*, transl. Thomas J Harper, New Haven, Connecticut: Leete's Island Bookshop, 1977, p.18.

²³⁴ *ibid.*

²³⁵ Arnheim, Rudolf *Art and Visual Perception*, p.327.

effect of the flow of consciousness: time gets slowed down and one sees the thoughts as separated bits of awareness. Thoughts that normally run through the mind so fast we see them as continuous and a blur, in meditation are slowed down so we see the thoughts for what they are, small patches in vast time and space. We see the gaps between the thoughts and start to detach from the belief that I and the thoughts are one. It is like the film stills that run at 24 frames per second and appear continuous. And this is the effect of the *Sanjusangendo* photographs as one looks down the corridor or walks by the photographs, one after another. Sugimoto himself emphasizes this slowing down when he said: "I want people's eyes to focus on the differences."²³⁶ In Zen terms, time is about being in the moment in the continual flow of time. These photographs of repetition are different from minimalist repetition because they bring out philosophical meaning. Although both minimalism and the Sugimoto *Sanjusangendo* photographs require an embodied aware viewer and the repetition in both helps to place the viewer in the here and now, it is the image content of the *Sanjusangendo* photographs which encourages the emergence of Buddhist philosophic content. By living in the ever present now, we can perhaps see each moment lived fully in its time.

In the last chapter, I noted that Dogen had two different kinds of time, one is the seamless passage of time from today to tomorrow, which is temporal (horizontal) time. The second one is the ceaseless flow of today to today; now to now, it is the transtemporal (vertical) time. We are always at the intersection of the two, and this is the *Nikon*, the ever present now. It is clear that we are at these intersections as each photograph is encountered. The image in each photograph is a dharma-position that once was. It is a particular position in the temple at a certain time: dawn, one morning in August 1995. The viewer's encounter with each photograph in its dharma-position, the position of the photograph in the line of photographs, in the gallery, in Queensland, in 1999 becomes interconnected with that of the viewer. The viewer and the photographs form part of the interdependent whole, *zenki*. For G. Roger Denson in his short review "Satori Among the Stills",²³⁷ the *Sanjusangendo* photographs of Sugimoto brought realizations of "oneness" with no further explanation as to what that might be, no reference to Buddhism. The interpretation of the photographs cannot, however, be limited to the notion of "oneness". This is because it needs to include an examination of

²³⁶ Sugimoto, H "The Sleepless Photographer", p. 2.

²³⁷ Denson, G. Roger "Satori Among the Stills", *Parkett*, no.46, May 1996, p.145.

zenki and impermanence. The idea of the many in the one, does not take the meaning of the work far enough because the implication of oneness/*zenki* is impermanence and emptiness; so the photographs to some extent, are about oneness which, when realized fully, is emptiness and impermanence.

Generally, in Buddhism, the permanence of Buddha-nature²³⁸ and the permanence of nirvana²³⁹ are contrasted with the impermanence of phenomena. But contrary to the usual view, Dogen equates Buddha-nature with impermanence and vice-versa. For Dogen "... impermanence is the Buddha nature."²⁴⁰ In the general view, ultimate reality was thus exempted from the idea of impermanence but Dogen includes Buddha-nature in the totality of impermanence. Everything must be impermanent or it will be in opposition to impermanence. So Dogen saw Buddha-nature and enlightenment as the "... realization of impermanence as impermanence."²⁴¹ Enlightenment was not an escape from impermanence but rather it is being in impermanence. Nothing in the universe is fixed and immutable, it is always in a state of becoming (*uji*). "Thus the impermanence of the Buddha-nature is that aspect of Buddha-nature which eternally comes into being and out of being with the universe – all existence."²⁴²

Artworks exist in a "web of intentions and meanings"; form, content, technical choices and the nature of the image all exist in this web of conditionality that creates meaning.²⁴³ And we are part of that web too: who we are, what we expect, what our cultural background and understandings bring. Our association and memories inform our reading and interpretation of the work. Meaning is created from all of these, plus what is seen, what is experienced, what is thought in relation to the content and formal qualities of the work. Thomas McEvilley made the point that the artworks create the limits for their interpretation, which is to do with their interconnections in the world.²⁴⁴ "The work has 'placed itself' within a limited range of interpretation. The content is not

²³⁸ Randomly referred to true Nature or original nature.

²³⁹ Nirvana literally means "cessation", or liberation from the cycle of births and deaths..." *BUDDHA: Radiant Awakening*. Glossary, p.190. But from the Zen perspective it also means seeing one's true-nature and that of all existence.

²⁴⁰ Abe, Masao *A Study of Dogen*, p.57.

²⁴¹ *ibid*, p.58.

²⁴² Kim, Hee-jin *Dogen Kigen Mystic Realist*, p.136.

²⁴³ McEvilley, Thomas *Art and Discontent*, New York: McPherson, 1991, p.41.

²⁴⁴ *ibid*, p.50.

added but inherent.”²⁴⁵ This occurs in the visual content, in the experience and in the links to discourses related to the work. Sugimoto’s *Sanjusangendo* photographs are connected to the Buddhist philosophical content of the Kannon. Everything, everywhere in our lives, offers us the possibility to see reality as an expression of the total, *zenki*. Zen is the whole or the totality and *ki* is its functioning or “the works”, as Cleary puts it.²⁴⁶ Cleary made the point that it can relate to both phenomena and noumena. So *zenki* means the dynamic functioning of the totality of existence. Everything is a part of the interdependent dynamic matrix of the whole of existence. Kim defines *zenki* as the total dynamism “of the entire universe and Buddha-nature.”²⁴⁷ So *zenki* can be seen as the dynamic means of everything.

The Kannon could be that one thing which can prompt this realization. The multiplicity of the Kannon also represents the multitude of things that exist, the myriad things of the universe that forms the whole. And this is in fact the *ki* - the working of the total in *zenki*. This total is one and it is impermanent. Abe states that it is not contradictory to say things exist in discrete dharma-positions and at the same time manifests the totality of existence. “[L]ife is the manifestation of the total dynamism.”²⁴⁸ The Kannon are symbolic of life and death, and as the one who brings compassion, the Kannon embody the dualities of life and death.

In the totality, everything is interdependent, arising and ceasing as a consequence of causes and conditions. This interdependence of beings means that nothing has a permanent nature, and impermanence shows their emptiness individually and as a whole. Everything is a part of life, that is, the manifestation of life, everything is part of the dynamic whole, exists within the total matrix of life and is interconnected and dependent. “The entire universe consists of creative processes in which the multiplicity of things and events interact with and interpenetrate one another without obstruction.”²⁴⁹

In the photographs, Sugimoto makes each individual Kannon figure appear more

²⁴⁵ *ibid.*

²⁴⁶ Cleary, Thomas *Shobogenzo*, p.43.

²⁴⁷ Kim, Hee-jin *Dogen Kigen Mystic Realist*, p.82.

²⁴⁸ Abe, Masao *A Study of Dogen*, p.82.

²⁴⁹ Kim, Hee-jin *Dogen Kigen Mystic Realist* p.139.

distinct by taking an elevated position when photographing them. Each Kannon is a separate individual, yet part of the whole. Looking along the line of photographs as far as can be seen, they are undifferentiated, and in the looking I cannot distinguish individuals as separate unique things. The photographs of Sugimoto show the Kannon as interdependent, impermanent and empty. Each Kannon is a distinct dharma-position, yet undifferentiated in the matrix - distinct and undifferentiated at the same time.

This duality of the one in the whole can be seen in visual form in the perception of the photographs. At one time, individuals are seen and at another time the grid pattern, what Deleuze and Guattari call “striated” space which will then slip into a kind of textured, “smooth” space.²⁵⁰ The image goes back and forth between “smooth” and “striated” space, between one and oneness; it is both and neither at the same time. The pairs of opposites exist simultaneously, for according to Kim they are “the one and the many or nondifferentiated and differentiated”.²⁵¹

For Dogen, things in their discrete dharma-positions each exercise total being or realization, “Though not identical, they are not different, they are not one; though not one, they are not many.”²⁵² This is the non-contradictory nature of the one and the whole that we see in the photographs. The multiplicity of Kannon images equals the oneness of being seen as Buddha-nature, as impermanence.

Conclusion

Specifically, this chapter examined the *Sanjusangendo* photographs of Hiroshi Sugimoto and the Kannon in terms of how the embodied encountering can lead to the realization of the Buddhist philosophical content of impermanence, emptiness and interdependence. I argued that the *Sanjusangendo* photographs make clear that multiple modes of perception are necessary. The multiple layering of content in these photographs, in the frame and outside the frame, demonstrates the multiplicity of the Kannon, and this multiplicity is carried through in the photographs and in the installation.

²⁵⁰ Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari, Felix *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p.312.

²⁵¹ Kim, Hee-jin *Dogen Kigen Mystic Realist*, p.140.

²⁵² Dogen, in Kim, Hee-jin *Dogen Kigen Mystic Realist* p.165.

My examination of the temple showed that the symbolic content of the temple paralleled and contributed to the multi-layered reading of the *Sanjusangendo* photographs. This chapter demonstrated that the multiple layers in the work accumulate multiple and complex readings: photography itself, the experience of the installation, the appropriated image and the context of the appropriated image. These various layers in the work required different modes of perception: the aware embodied mode, the visual aesthetic and the viewer who understands Buddhist content. The work and the viewer are both enmeshed in conditionality, i.e. they arise dependent on causes and conditions (*zenki*). The *Sanjusangendo* photographic series reveals its content and key to this is the Buddhist concepts of multiplicity, oneness (*zenki*), impermanence.

This chapter showed that Sugimoto clearly made decisions that permitted the viewer to have a particular experience of the work, as multiple levels of content and meaning are structured into the work which allowed for multiple resonances for the viewer. This in turn relates to the understanding that multiple perceptual modes are in operation which reflect the multiple aspects of the self, the seeing, perceiving, thinking and feeling selves. It could be likened to *zenki*, or taking into account the total functioning of the person in the perception of the work.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have shown that not only are the key Buddhist concepts embodied in the work of Hiroshi Sugimoto, but also that a Zen meditation-like experience can be gained through the encounter with the work, and this experience is embodied in the work. There are other ways of knowing, of understanding some contemporary art that are not dependant on formalist western readings. This type of reading of contemporary art gives only a partial understanding and appreciation of the work. Other approaches to reading art are essential, especially those based on lived experience. And in relation to the *Seascape* and *Sanjusangendo* photographs of Sugimoto, is through an understanding of the key Buddhist concepts of impermanence, dependent origination and *sunyata* (emptiness).

Chapter One examined the basic criteria of the modernist and minimalist perceptual modes used in the subsequent chapters. The criteria that were revealed as relevant to Sugimoto's work are, in Fried's terms, basically that the focus was on things external to the object. This paper demonstrated that the circumstances of viewing are important in the reading of art, but as Morris argued, the art work was not less important just "less self-important".²⁵³ Similar to the minimalists, Sugimoto's work relies on the relationship of the viewer to the work; the aware embodied encounter with the work generates content. And because of the fragmentary nature of the installations examined the appreciation of the work occurs over time. I demonstrated that the content was not wholly contained in the object but was, at least in part, derived from the experience of the viewer and the content that lay outside the object, that is, unlike the formalist art object it was neither self-contained nor autonomous. The *Seascape* series is an embodied encounter in time that reveals Buddhist content: in particular Dogen's notion of time, dependent origination, impermanence and emptiness as shown in Chapter Two. And finally, Chapter Three examined the relationships between the image content, the symbolic content, the installation and the experience of the installation to argue that the symbolic and philosophical content is contained at all levels of the structure of the work. The content of the *Sanjusangendo* series of photographs was revealed to be the key Buddhist concepts of multiplicity, oneness (*zenki*), impermanence.

²⁵³ Morris, R "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2." p.23.

This dissertation demonstrates a Buddhist content is structured into the work and facilitates an embodied encounter with the work, and that Buddhist content is embodied in the work on a number of levels to be experienced and comprehended through multiple modes of perception. This is necessary in order to account for the complexity of the art work and the viewer. From the Buddhist, formalist and minimalist perspectives time is the issue. Time from the Buddhist perspective was being in the moment and seeing things as they are. For the formalist, the appreciation of the art work happened instantly, outside of time, however the minimalist and Buddhist views were similar with the encounter being phenomenological and occurring over time.

Multiple perceptual modes are needed for the perception of the photographs: there was absorbed viewing with individual photographs and embodied experience and memory over time with the installation. Showing the usefulness of the minimalist ideas of perception, I argued that they provided a basis for relating to the Buddhist views of awareness and being present to further reveal Buddhist content. At play are the internal forces of the work in interaction with the external. Fried saw the focus on the external relations as endlessly occurring over time. Significance seems to unfold in time, with memories, knowledge, recollections.

And finally, unlike the formalist object, these photographic works are connected to discourses outside art, that is to external relations; and, unlike the minimalist work, the phenomenological encounter with the photographs does lead to the realization of Buddhist philosophic content. For Dogen, being is being time and if we are being time we are open to what is happening here and now: in the body, mind, feelings and the world for the perception of the art work too. My being time also intersects with the ever present now (*Nikon*) that a photo can reveal. Finally, I argued that the Zen concepts may be obscure but in the experience of the photographic installation they are clear.

The viewer's reactions to the work are determined at two points: by their personal reactions and feelings about it, and by the artist's decisions about what to include or not to include, that is, by the parameters the artist set for the experience and understanding of the work. We are affected by what we allow to affect us and with an art work we are affected by its materiality, ideas, subject matter and content, etc. The key is that we can only be affected by what we allow to affect us. If a viewer simply walked into the *Sanjusangendo* installation and quickly noted that it was about multiplicity and left they

would not have permitted the installation to work its magic. We need to be open to levels of perception; we cannot be affected if we remain closed off.

The focus I have placed on the experience of the work could be seen as a counter to the emphasis in some contemporary art on Buddhist imagery and on the materiality of the art object. Buddhism is not a philosophy that stresses the material; rather, it stresses transience and emptiness, so a more conceptual approach is perhaps more appropriate. The conceptual art of the 1970s may be a fruitful area for further investigation of the possibilities of a concept-based approach to art that uses Buddhist content rather than imagery. The “dematerialization”²⁵⁴ of the art object of the 1970s has certain parallels with the Buddhist notions of lack of a solid self (no self), shifting the focus from the material to interdependence, impermanence and emptiness of all, including the self. Conceptual art was generally art without an object, what Fried called pure “objecthood”. Here I think there are also important issues for present day art where the focus could be more on the concept and less on the image. There is potentially a problem with the use of traditional Buddhist images in contemporary art work like the *Sanjusangendo* photographs, as in the West the content does not necessarily carry over. I made the point in chapter three that Sugimoto’s work did not fall into this category as he built the content into every layer of the work and into the encounter. This work is conceptually, structurally and materially in harmony.

The discussion of Buddhist content in art brings up questions about what Buddhist art is and what Buddhist art might be in contemporary art. Or is it perhaps a matter, as I have maintained, of Buddhist concepts in art, rather than a special class of Buddhist art. The use of what may seem like exotic imagery does not necessarily make for readable art in the West, where the “symbolic order” may not be understood, or could be misunderstood.²⁵⁵ There have been a number of exhibitions of Buddhist art in recent years with the focus being on historic, traditional Buddhist images.

Buddhist art originated in the Indian subcontinent in the centuries following the life of the historical Gautama Buddha in the 6th to 5th century BCE, before evolving through its contact with other cultures and its diffusion through the rest

²⁵⁴ Lippard, Lucy *Six Years: the Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

²⁵⁵ Foster, Hal *The Return of the Real*, p. 43.

of Asia and the world.²⁵⁶

For Jackie Menzies, the Curator of the *BUDDHA: Radiant Awakening* exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2002, “images of the Buddhas belong to the context of worship, ritual devotion and meditation, whether it be in a sacred space such as a temple or monastery, or a private and personal space.”²⁵⁷ They also express a complex cosmology and philosophy. The images are for religious, sacred or meditation practices and had a historical or sacred focus. At the *BUDDHA: Radiant Awakening* show I regularly saw flowers placed in front of certain images which were obviously still seen as sacred images. The first time I saw it I was thrilled, as for someone this was not just an historical object and not only an art object. But for many who saw the show such images were opaque. Unlike many other exhibitions on Buddhist art, this exhibition recognized that contemporary artists continue the tradition and make art that reflects Buddhist ideas in contemporary culture.

Buddhism is adaptable. It is different in the countries to which it has migrated: from colourful ritual images and practices in Tibet, to austere Zen in Japan. Buddhism has also adapted to the West in its modes of presentation, for example, the Ordinary Mind Zen School in the USA, which does not perform the disciplined and aesthetic practices of traditional Japanese temple. An interesting area for further study, but outside the limits of this paper, is what might constitute Buddhist art adapted to and integrated into western culture. I think it would probably not be one that just used the images from another place and another time. With more artists and more of the audience adopting Buddhism this is an intriguing issue. Does the use of Buddhist imagery make for Buddhist art? How to work with Buddhist issues beyond image and materiality is perhaps the issue for some contemporary artists. Buddhist art does not affirm a subjective self/ego but rather sees the ego/self as a hindrance to letting go of the self. The issue is not just what the image is, but rather what the art work invites one to do. The materials have meaning but what they mean for the artist, for instance the use of kitchen foil to refer to gold leaf practices of Buddhist temples in Thailand, may mean little in the West.

²⁵⁶ “Buddhist Art” *Wikipedia Encyclopedia*, 2005 [cited October 2005]. Available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhist_art

²⁵⁷ Menzies, Jackie *BUDDHA: Radiant Awakening*, Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2002, p.12.

Can an Australian artist make Buddhist content available to an audience not necessarily well informed about Buddhism? Perhaps what Sugimoto has done could be a model for understanding what is possible. The *Sanjusangendo* series in particular has explicit connections to traditional Buddhist art through the use of the Kannon image. This could be an overly easy, but somewhat contentious and opportunistic way to bring Buddhist content into the work, were it not for the nature of the installation which can give a meditation-like experience. Bill Viola has related a story that when he was in Japan he wanted to learn to do traditional Zen ink painting, but he was told by a friend to study Zen in the temple: "Then, everything you do will be Zen art!"²⁵⁸ The point here is that once you have a practice-based life the content will manifest itself, perhaps in the most unlikely places. Sugimoto's *Theaters* are an example of this. With this series of work he set the camera up in the balcony of a theatre and left the lens of the camera open for the length of the movie and what the photograph showed was the illuminated interior of the theatre and a rectangle of white light; the whole movie was contained there but was revealed as emptiness, a beautiful expression of the whole (*zenki*) as emptiness.

Australian Cultural background

The globalized, geopolitical, secular, digital world has reduced the obstacles of time and distance, producing a mix of cultures. The world is becoming a small place. The formalist idea of the viewer denied gender, the location and the cultural specificity of the viewer (in a particular geo-political-social space) and the content of work. With the global flow of people and information, access to and understanding of the content of art is perhaps an important issue. We need to be aware that content is not always readily available to everyone and that knowledge may need to be acquired.

Since the late 1980s, the Australia Council directed funding toward residencies and events in Asia. Asialink and ARX²⁵⁹ established and fostered contacts between artists and curators of the region. The Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art defined its particular parameters as its regional art event in relationship to the major source of

²⁵⁸ Bill Viola in *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, eds. Baas, Jacquelynn and Jacob, Mary Jane, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, p.249.

²⁵⁹ Artist Regional Exchange, a series of events around New Zealand, Australia and Singapore.

funding, DFAT,²⁶⁰ and wider agendas. Since 1993, the three Asia-Pacific Triennials of Contemporary Art (APT) have brought art from the region to Brisbane to increase awareness and understanding. Doug Hall, Director of the Queensland Art Gallery (QAG) saw the APT as an opportunity “to provide a new approach to the interpretation of art away from the Western modernist tradition...” He goes on to say, it was the intention of the curators to “reveal an art which can be regionally specific while expressing ideas and issues within an international context and with international relevance.”²⁶¹

Furthermore he recognized “[t]he need for an ongoing series of exhibitions and forums which would initiate dialogue on the art of this increasingly important geo-political region.”²⁶² The Asia-Pacific Triennials of Contemporary Art and other major international exhibitions which focus on the work of artists from diverse cultural backgrounds may not foster an understanding of the work for people who do not necessarily know the specifics of particular cultural groups. And with the curatorial focus on the political, the religious focus is not elucidated. The works are often read without due regard to the cultural, religious background of the artist. In some cases I knew the artists well and I knew that their work came from a deep Buddhist conviction that was rarely acknowledged. I have intended this dissertation as a demonstration of how a fuller understanding of Buddhist concepts can inform and enhance the reading of one artist’s, Hiroshi Sugimoto’s, work. I hope it can then indicate the worth of further investigations of this sort.

²⁶⁰ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

²⁶¹ Hall, Doug *The First Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art Catalogue*, Brisbane: Queensland Art gallery, 1993, p.6.

²⁶² *ibid.*

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