

# ***Nothing Matters: Answering the Question 'Where's the Art?' through Ma and Gen***

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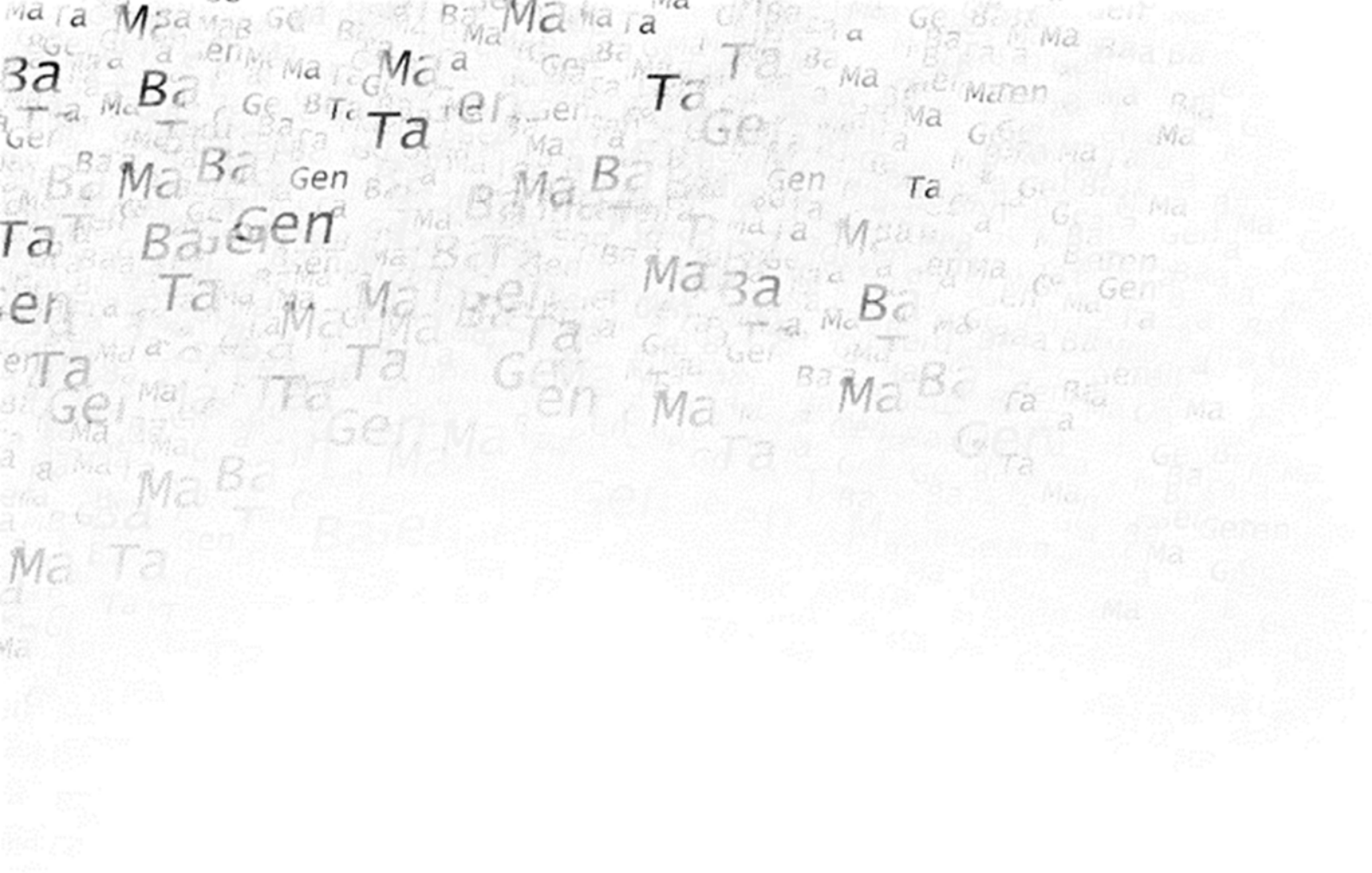
## **Abstract**

This research explores the ontology of Gen, or the being of a 'non-being', through an examination into the Japanese concept of **Ma**. Ma is a Japanese word and concept whose English equivalent does not exist but is usually translated as the 'conscious void/interval', while **Gen (variants: Jen/Zjen/Xen/Zen)** describes the experience of becoming such an interval. Using conceptual art as the core method of investigation and cultural pluralism as its philosophical framework, the practice was documented as a series of essays on relevant ideas, beginning with **the absolute, aestheticism, authenticity, authorship, and autonomy**. The paper builds on the current research on the manifestation and function of Ma by introducing relevant and necessary terms into the discourse, including: Gen, Mu, Ba, Ta, Self/Culture, cognitive (dis)equilibrium, conceptual tipping-point, ontological comfort trap, and self-obliteration.

As the concept of Ma has often been associated with ascetic reduction, manifested as simplicity and silence, the paper begins with a study into the use of **nothingness** and the void in minimalist artworks. It also builds on my MA research and Sachiyo Goda's study into the **intercultural** understanding of Ma as an **intersubjective** phenomenon, by introducing a new concept, Gen, which leads to an enquiry into what it means to become a Ma, a nonbeing. In contrast to the minimalist approach, the study will show that such state of emptiness can be achieved through an alternate method of 'production' (as opposed to re-reduction) by using an authentically embodied methodology of 'becoming' the observed, rather than through mere documentation or representation of the phenomena. The study yields insights of potential interest to artists, philosophers, social theorists, empirical researchers, and indeed any English reader.

The paper forms practical and theoretical contributions to the debates on the nature of art by:

- enhancing our knowledge of Ma and its function in contemporary art;
- introducing such explicitly implicit ontology as Gen;
- extending our knowledge of the complex nature of Ma through an investigation into Gen;
- offering a new strategy i.e. **self-obliteration**, in discerning such notions as an alternate to the minimalistic ascetic reduction method;
- developing the language of such notions, contextualizing and bridging the Western and Eastern understanding and use of such ontology;
- offering a new understanding of research with its **interdisciplinary** mode of practice and through a multidisciplinary body of work presented in and beyond the exhibition space, shifting away from the cerebral mode of comprehension by drawing out a primarily experiential conception of the relationship between art and Gen.



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Please note: this page is absolutely NOT part of the thesis nor an 'artwork'





# **Nothing Matters: Answering the Question ‘Where’s the Art?’ through Ma and Gen**

**- VOLUME ONE -**

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June 2016

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Volumes submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Oxford Brookes University  
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Fig. 1



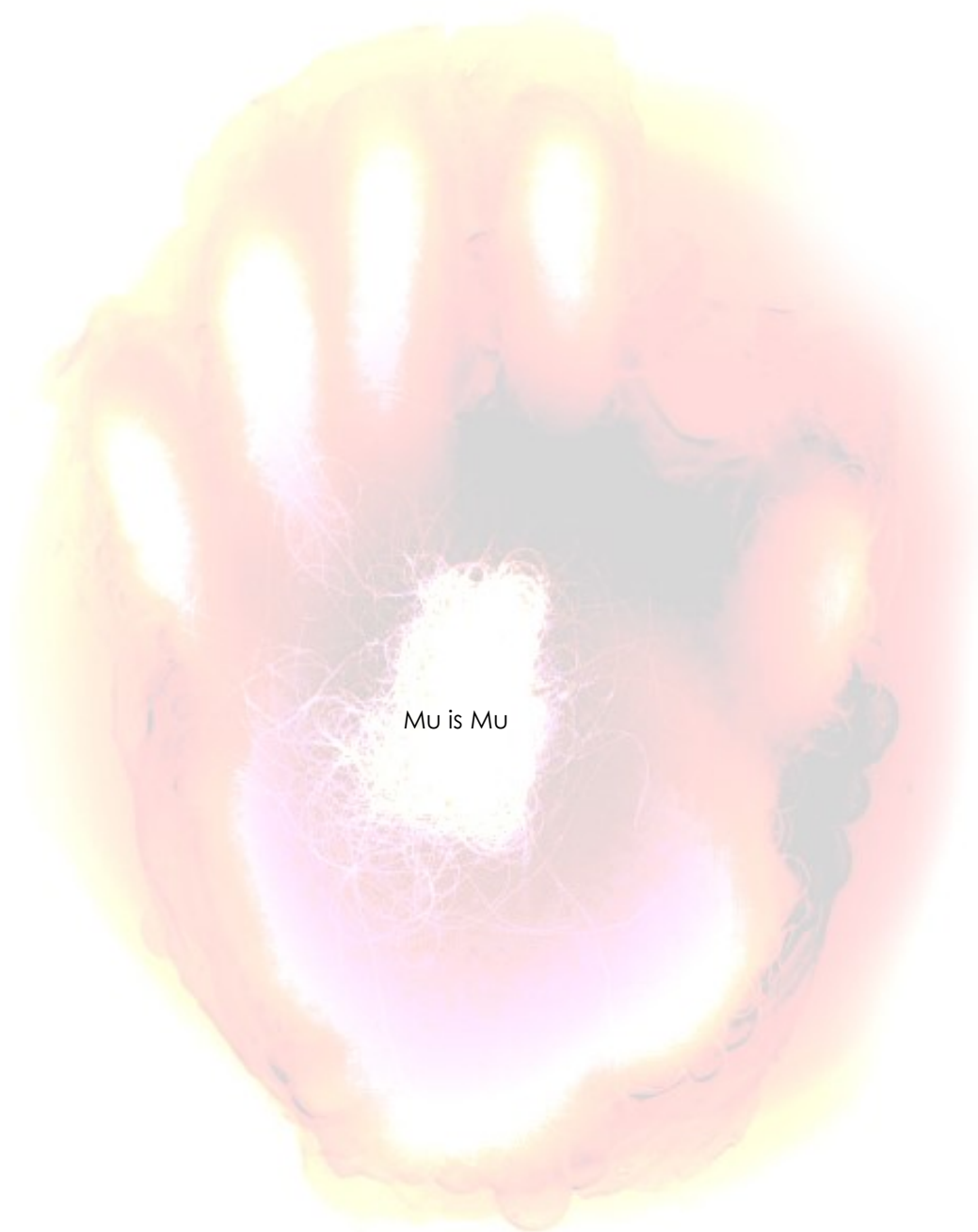


Fig. 1.a

– In Search of Nothing –

*'If you stare into the Abyss, the Abyss stares back at you'*

Friedrich Nietzsche, *'Beyond Good and Evil'*, 1886



**'A Drawing of a Painting of a Photocopy of Albrecht Dürer's Das große Rasenstück ("The Great Piece of Turf")' © (Aya Kasai, 2015)**

(Cover page Fig. 1.Gen; Glossary Fig. 1.c)

Fig. 1.b

'Glossary'

無

Mu = the Nothing

場

Ba = Place

他

Ta = Other(s)

間

Ken = unit of measurement

間

Ma = conscious nothing

間

Gen = cultural space



Ensoh = the Absolute

原 言 幻 現

元 滅 嚴 弦

眩 源 限 間

Gen (variants: Jen/Zjen/Xen/Zen) = becoming a Ma

NB:

Some English words in the research have been modified e.g. hyphens and Capital letters, to emphasise the use of such linguistic tools for the process of conceptual (dis)equilibrium.

Fig. 1.c

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<sup>4</sup> "33 Variations of Infinite Open Forms" accessed August 3 2015 <http://obsart.blogspot.co.uk/2012/11/dibbets-33-variations-of-infinite-open.html>

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Kenya and Mikasa Kasai, who have always supported and encouraged me to pursue my passion for nothing and everything.



*Whoever reaches into a rosebush may seize a handful of flowers;  
but no matter how many one holds,  
it's only a small portion of the whole.  
Nevertheless, a handful is enough to experience the nature of the flowers.  
Only if we refuse to reach into the bush,  
because we can't possibly seize all the flowers at once,  
or if we spread out our handful of roses as if it were the whole of the bush itself  
– only then does it bloom apart from us, unknown to us, and we are left alone.*

Lou Andreas-Salomé<sup>30</sup>

### **Declaration**

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

---

<sup>30</sup> "LOU ANDREAS-SALOME " accessed April 1 2011 [http://www.ebooklibrary.org/articles/lou\\_andreas-salome](http://www.ebooklibrary.org/articles/lou_andreas-salome)

## Abstract

This research explores the ontology of Gen, or the being of a 'non-being', through an examination into the Japanese concept of Ma. Ma is a Japanese word and concept whose English equivalent does not exist but is usually translated as the 'conscious void/interval', while Gen (variants: *Jen/Zjen/Xen/Zen*) describes the experience of becoming such an interval. Using conceptual art as the core method of investigation and cultural pluralism as its philosophical framework, the practice was documented as a series of essays on relevant ideas, beginning with the absolute, aestheticism, authenticity, authorship, and autonomy. The paper builds on the current research on the manifestation and function of Ma by introducing relevant and necessary terms into the discourse, including: Gen, Mu, Ba, Ta, Self/Culture, cognitive (dis)equilibrium, conceptual tipping-point, ontological comfort trap, and self-obliteration.

As the concept of Ma has often been associated with ascetic reduction, manifested as simplicity and silence, the paper begins with a study into the use of nothingness and the void in minimalist artworks. It also builds on my MA research and Sachiyo Goda's study into the intercultural understanding of Ma as an intersubjective phenomenon, by introducing a new concept, Gen, which leads to an enquiry into what it means to become a Ma, a non-being. In contrast to the minimalist approach, the study will show that such state of emptiness can be achieved through an alternate method of 'pro-duction' (as opposed to re-duction) by using an authentically embodied methodology of 'becoming' the observed, rather than through mere documentation or representation of the phenomena. The study yields insights of potential interest to artists, philosophers, social theorists, empirical researchers, and indeed any English reader.

The paper comprises three parts, each with two chapters. Part 1 begins with defining Ma through an investigation into its function in art, particularly in relation to conceptual (dis)equilibrium, through such works as *Translation - x:x (I) Line & Translation - x:x (II) Dot* (2012) and *A Walk I, II, III* (2011/13/15). Part 2 explores the mechanisms of Gen, with a focus on ontological disorientation, through such works as *On the Possibility of Inertia* (2012) and

*Document of Authenticity* (2013-ongoing). Part 3 examines the function of Gen as an unconditional state of production through *CARU | Contemporary Arts ReSearch Unit* (2013-ongoing) and *365: This Is Not A Work* (2012-/13-/14-/15-/16-ongoing). However, all works above are referenced throughout the thesis to elucidate each topic; *CARU | Contemporary Arts ReSearch Unit* and *365: This Is Not A Work* in particular, act as the core research practice throughout.

The paper forms practical and theoretical contributions to the debates on the nature of art by:

- enhancing our knowledge of Ma and its function in contemporary art;
- introducing such explicitly implicit ontology as Gen;
- extending our knowledge of the complex nature of Ma through an investigation into Gen;
- offering a new strategy i.e. self-obliteration, in discerning such notions as an alternate to the minimalistic ascetic reduction method;
- developing the language of such notions, contextualizing and bridging the Western and Eastern understanding and use of such ontology;
- offering a new understanding of research with its interdisciplinary mode of practice and through a multidisciplinary body of work presented in and beyond the exhibition space, shifting away from the cerebral mode of comprehension by drawing out a primarily experiential conception of the relationship between art and Gen.

---

**'No Point'**  
**Ts&Cs: Premises & Promises ©**  
(Aya Kasai, 2015, typed words on a surface)

*pre* (before)  
*pro* (toward)  
*mittere* (to send)

Part 1 HYPOTHESIS: the What of Ma/Gen

**Promise I: No Aestheticism**

**Promise II: No Originality**

PART 2 METHODOLOGY: the How of Ma/Gen

**Promise III: No Virtuosity**

**Promise IV: No Sign-ificance**

PART 3 OUT- COME/IN-SIGHT: the WH- of Ma/Gen

**Promise V: No Meaning**

**Promise VI: No Subject – I will be authentically\* performing the role of the 'I' and, where appropriate, 'Aya Kasai'**

Please note: above promises are based on premises below:

**Premise I: Every-/No-Thing is the 'Point' of Origin & thus Original**

**Premise II: Gen is Authentic\* & Absolute:**

*auto* = the Self

*hentes* = the (conscious) doer / being

**Premise III: The Absolute (gen/Existence of Gen/existence) = Ambiguous**

*ambo* = both

*agere* = to drive

- Eros(creation)/Thanatos(destruction): towards Every-/No-thingness
- The probable Absolute that is simultaneously in-/out-Side, thus Minimal/Maximal
- An infinitely in-/ex-ploding sphere with No (and All) surface area?

Surely

It can only be

The (im)Probable LineDot of the Big Bang!

Where 'Space' meets 'Time' & dissolve

Where 'I' meets the 'Other' & disappear

Where Every-/No-Thing is AND is not

Where the Mobius Strip becomes the circumference of such a 'Point'

The Authentic Theory of No(such)Thing

**('Now Your Mu is Ma' – the mechanism of Gen I © Aya Kasai, now, pre-tens-ion)**

\*\*\* *Praetendere* = to claim

*prae* = before

*ten-dere* = to reach

---

\* dis-claimer I: The 'I' holds the sole authority for the authentication of the work\*\*

\*\* dis-claimer II: In cases where Gen/I is shown to be inauthentic this Dis-claimer will be null & void

**pre-/pro-mise**

*prae* = (pre) from/before

*pro* = to

*per* = whole

*inter* = between

*mittere* = to send

**pre-tens-ion** (*prae-tendere* = to claim)

*in/em/en* = within

*ex* = outward

*ten-dere* = to reach

**per-form-ance**

*per* = whole

*forma* = form

**con-struct-ion**

*re* = again

*com* = together

*in/em/en* = within

*de* = not, off, undo

*struere* = build/pile

**con-cept-ion**

*per* = whole

*com* = together

*re* = again

*in/em/en* = within

*inter* = between

*dis/des/de* = apart

*capere* = (-cipere) to take

**a-ppear-ance**

*ad* = towards

*re* = again

*dis/des/de* = apart

*parere* = to emerge

**the-sis/-ory/-orem/-ology/-atre**

*hypo* = under

*anti* = against

*thea* = to view

*theos* = god

**an-/a-esthetic**

*a* = without

*aisthetikos* = of the senses

**au: thor/-ise/-ity; -thentic/-ate/-ity**

*au* = to sense

*dh* = to grasp

*au-to* = the Self

*au-ctor(itas)* = the Originator

*hentes* = the (conscious) Doer/Being

**val-ue/-iant /-id-ate**

*valere* = métier/gift

**verif-y/-ication**

*verus* = true/real

*viera/Vera* (Russian) = faith

**ambigu-ous/-ity**

*ambo* = both

*agere* = to drive

**re-spect**

*re* = again

*pro* = towards

*per* = whole

*a* = without

*em/in/en* = within

*dis/des/de* = apart

*specere* = to regard

**a-/sym-/em-pathy**

*a* = without

*sym* = with

*in/em/en* = within

*patho* = sense

*o-log-ia/-y* = study of

*logos* = word

*soci-us* = equivalent/equal/parallel

*psycho* = mind

*psukho* = soul/life

**con-scious-ness**

*com* = together

*scire* = to know

**re-sponse-abil-ity**

*re* = again

*spondere* = to pledge

*habilis* = able

**gen -erat-e/-ion**

*gen-us* = birth/origin

無 **mu** = the Nothing

間 **ma** (/kan/ken/**gen**) = space/interval

時 *ji/toki* = moment

時間 *ji-kan* = Time

空 *kuu/sora* = emptiness

空間 *kuu-kan* = Space

人 (*nin/hito*) = human

人間 **nin-gen** humanity/consciousness/inter-subjectivity

**Gen (variants: Jen/Zjen/Xen/Zen)**

= The LineDot state of Every-/No-Thing-ness

Take a sphere with the Mobius Strip as its circumference;  
Minimize/maximize its surface area:

**Gen is where 0 = ∞**

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Please note: this page is absolutely NOT part of the thesis nor an 'artwork'

– In Search of Nothing –

*'If you stare into the Abyss, the Abyss stares back at you'*

Friedrich Nietzsche, *'Beyond Good and Evil'*, 1886



*'A Drawing of a Painting of a Photocopy of Albrecht Dürer's Das große Rasenstück ("The Great Piece of Turf")' © (Aya Kasai, 2015)*

(Cover page Fig. 1.Gen; Glossary Fig. 1.c)

Fig. 1.b

Prologue: Gen as the I as the *Portable Void****Re-Searching nothing, presenting nothing, making nothing, reading and writing nothing  
Seeing, hearing, saying, sensing, thinking, feeling, creating, being nothing***

The key to this research lies in the question of 'being' or, more specifically, the ontology of the 'non-being'. Ma is a Japanese word usually translated as the 'conscious interval', while Gen (variants: *Jen/Zjen/Xen/Zen*) describes the experience of being such an 'interval'. Ma is in everyday use in the Japanese language<sup>31</sup>, widely employed as an umbrella term to take account of other related concepts such as the void, emptiness, nothingness, silence, pause, space, plainness or neutrality. While the notion has increasingly been employed by artists and writers outside of Japan, due to its inconspicuous, 'non-existent' nature<sup>32 33</sup>, like the notion of nothingness, it is an exceptionally difficult concept to define, particularly outside of the original Japanese culture; as stated by Loots, it '*eludes representation and refuses explication*'<sup>34</sup>. Goda claims that, '*Ma is difficult to pin down because it is an entirely relational concept and the word is only intelligible within our most subjective responses to temporal and spatial discontinuities*'<sup>35</sup>.

With these ideas as a departure point and the conceptual framework, the thesis examines the mechanisms of nothingness and how such a presence of an absence is created and experienced in art and beyond. Through a practice-led examination, with conceptual art as its core method of investigation, the project draws out an experiential

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<sup>31</sup> Sachiyo Goda "An Investigation into the Japanese Notion of 'Ma': Practising Sculpture within Space-time Dialogues" (PhD diss. University of Northumbria at Newcastle 2010) 13.

<sup>32</sup> Sachiyo Goda "An Investigation into the Japanese Notion of 'Ma': Practising Sculpture within Space-time Dialogues" (PhD diss. University of Northumbria at Newcastle 2010) 3.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Gardner, *The Colossal Book of Mathematics* (W. W. Norton & Company First Edition edition 2004) 592

<sup>34</sup> Christopher Loots "The Ma (間) of Hemingway: Interval Absence and Japanese Aesthetics in In Our Time" *The Hemingway Review* Vol. 29 (Spring 2010) 74.

<sup>35</sup> Sachiyo Goda "An Investigation into the Japanese Notion of 'Ma': Practising Sculpture within Space-time Dialogues" (PhD diss. University of Northumbria at Newcastle 2010) 3.



understanding of such elusive notions, shifting away from a cerebral and esoteric approach.

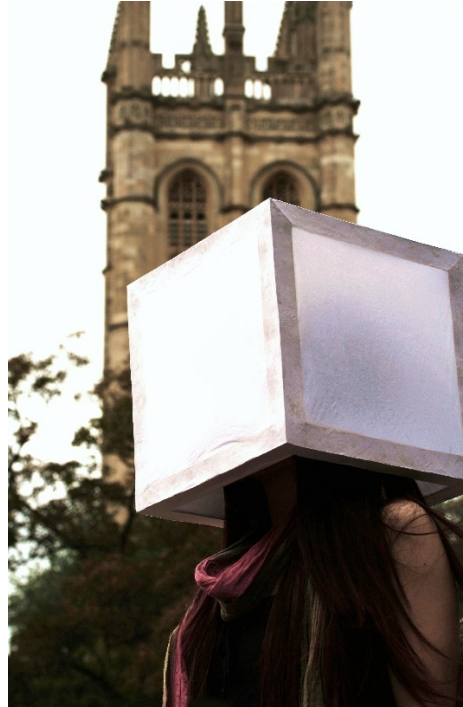


Fig. 3: *The White Cube Gallery*

The thesis builds on current research on Ma, particularly that of Sachiyo Goda, as well as my own earlier studies into the notion of Ma, including *The White Cube Gallery* (2011; Figure 3, Appendix II: 16), *Child as Philosopher I & II* (2011, Appendix II: 17), *A Secret Garden* (2011, Figures 5 & 6, Appendix II: 18), *YokoJohn* (2010, Appendix II: 19), and *The Law: A Line of Morality* (2010/11, Figure 4, hereinafter referred to as *The Law*, Appendix II: 20). As a practice-based research, the project has granted me the opportunity for a theoretical as well as applied examination of such ideas. Through a variety of strands of research (e.g. minimal, plural, observational, phantastical, (non-)symbolic, authentic) with a wide range of communication strategies (e.g. immersive installation, participatory, pseudo-performative, text-based, curatorial, embodied), the study has led to the development of several interrelated works. Extending on Goda's research into Ma as an intersubjective phenomenon, this study will introduce Gen, featuring CARU | *Contemporary Arts*

ReSearch Unit (2013-ongoing, hereinafter referred to as CARU) and 365: *This Is Not A Work* (2012-/13-/14-/15-/16-ongoing, hereinafter referred to as 365) as the core research practice, along with several other works including, *Translation - x:x (I) Line & Translation - x:x (II) Dot* (2012), *On the Possibility of Inertia* (2012), *.I.My.Me.Mine.* (2013), *Document of Authenticity* (2013-ongoing), *A Walk I, II, III* (2011/13/15), and *My I, II, III* (2014). CARU uses (non-)curatorial practice as a method of investigation, whose immediate products are realised as a series of events; with the works presented at these events, together with 365, acting as the foundation, the thesis offers a platform for Ma and Gen manifestation to elucidate such elusive notions. The research practice is summarised in Appendix II, along with other relevant works.

### ***Morality, like art, means drawing a line someplace***

G. K. Chesterton, *The Illustrated London News*, 1928<sup>36</sup>

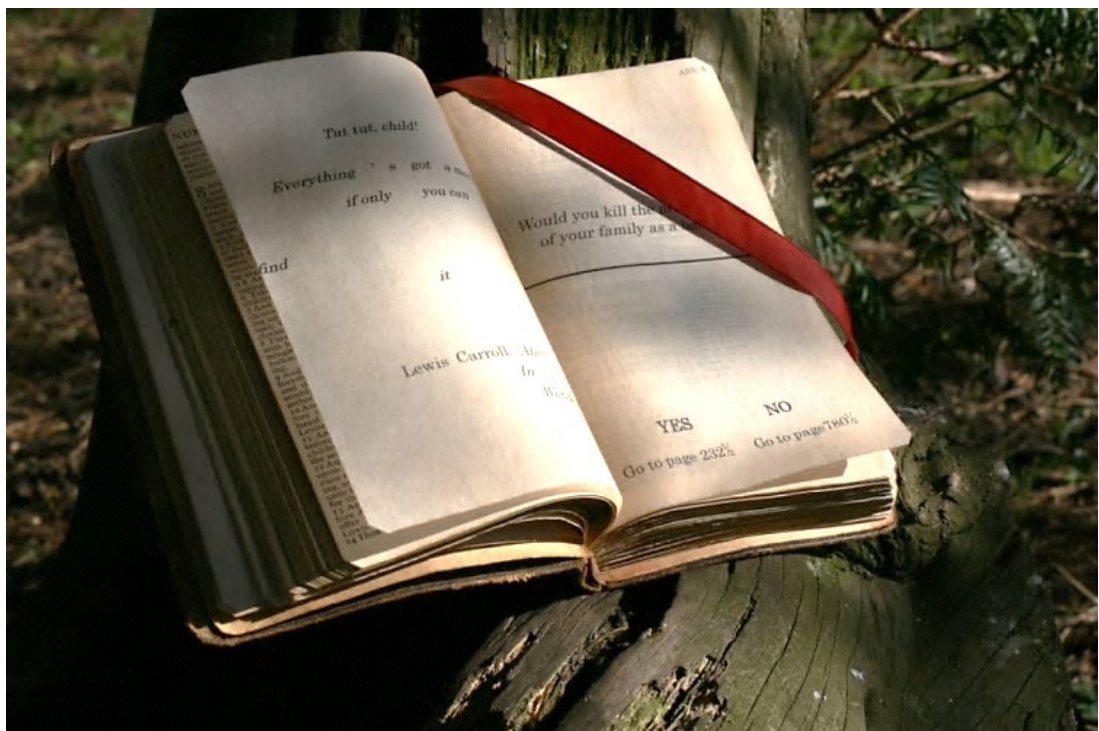


Fig. 4: *The Law: A Line of Morality*

<sup>36</sup> "Oscar Wilde? G. K. Chesterton? Anonymous?" accessed September 30 2015  
<http://quoteinvestigator.com/2014/07/20/drawing>

The resulting thesis consists of three components: Part 1 (Chapters 1 & 2) explores the mechanisms of Ma and Gen, examining how such notions have been articulated within art. It considers the notion of inertia and introduces the method of cultural pluralism as an alternate to the more commonly explored minimalist method in approaching such notions. Part 2 (Chapters 3 & 4) questions the value and validity of such notions, examining how the experience of Ma impacts one's conceptual framework to consider its functions beyond art galleries and the subsequent impact on the conception of Art. Part 3 (Chapters 5 & 6) explores the ontological implications of the very act of explicit articulation and dissemination of such concepts. It will ask, 'can and does such an ontology explored in the arts inform other specialities and vice versa?' These questions are situated in the space between psychology, anthropology, philosophy, and contemporary art, particularly conceptual art.



Fig. 5: A Secret Garden

I began the project with a set of six basic criteria – or promises – for how I was to explore this notion in relation to contemporary art: no Aestheticism, no Originality, no

Virtuosity, no Sign-ificance, no Meaning, and no Subject. As I had anticipated these criteria would become increasingly difficult to fulfil as the art 'objects' were developed, both practically and theoretically, raising further questions over each criterion and the related concepts. Each of these criteria will be discussed in the following chapters respectively in relation to the relevant topics and works.



Fig. 6: A Secret Garden

The study attempts to develop the language of such cultural notions, contextualising and bridging the Western and Eastern understandings and uses of such ontology as nothingness, enhancing our knowledge of their functions in art and beyond. It extends the research into the seemingly culturally and aesthetically specific notion of Ma, by introducing Gen as a useful addition to the vocabulary of wider audiences and researchers (Japanese and non-Japanese alike), underlining the presence and impact of such nothingness in all cultures through its very absence.



## Part I

### Con-Text: Ma & :

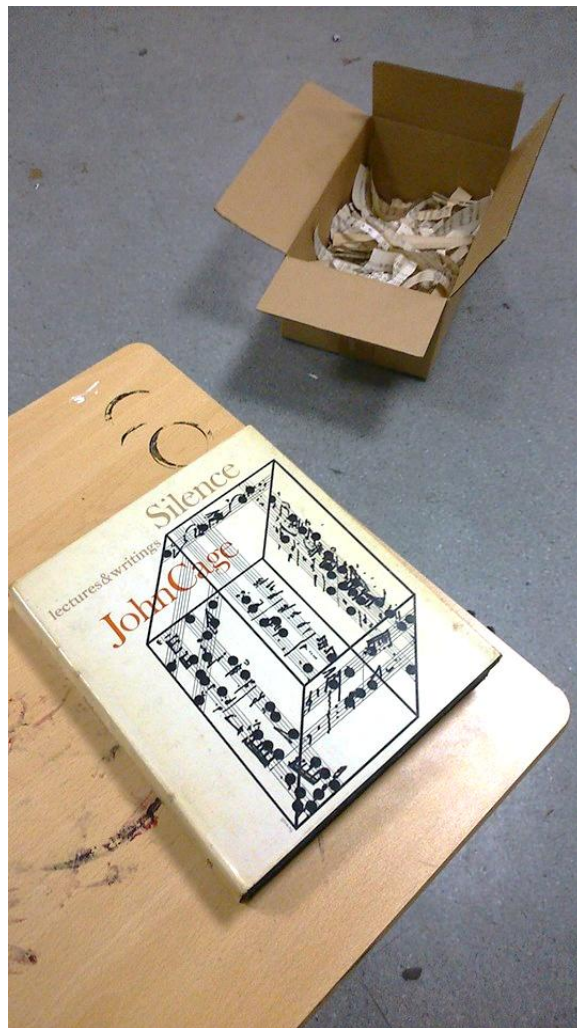


Fig. 7: *Silencing the Silence*

### Re-Cognising Art via Artistic Nothingness

## Chapter 1: Silencing the Silence

### 1.1 Framing Nothing

The Japanese notion of *Ma* has been described as *a meaningfully empty space-time interval*<sup>37</sup>. It is not, however, created by compositional elements in the sense of an enclosed entity; rather, it takes place in one's imagination in the occurrence of *'the simultaneous awareness of form and non-form deriving from an intensification of perception.'*<sup>38</sup> In *A Guide to the Gardens of Kyoto*, Marc Treib and Ron Herman describe *Ma* as: *'the Japanese sense of place; usually regarded as having both a time and space component, space/time.'*<sup>39</sup> Although *Ma* has been used in art for centuries, its mechanisms are still relatively under-explored in the context of contemporary art. Because of its unassuming, 'non-existent' nature, it is awkward to present, demanding certain investment of attention from the audience. In illustrating the use of *Ma* in art, Loots describes Hemingway's use of space in his writing: *'not to understand what is missing [...] but rather "how" we can detect some dark gravity'*<sup>40</sup>.



Fig. 8: A Secret Garden

<sup>37</sup> Christopher Loots "The Ma (間) of Hemingway: Interval Absence and Japanese Aesthetics in In Our Time " The Hemingway Review Vol . 29 (Spring 2010) 74.

<sup>38</sup> "MA The Japanese Spatial Expression" accessed September 4 2011 [www.columbia.edu/itc/ealac/V3613/ma](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/ealac/V3613/ma)

<sup>39</sup> Marc Treib and Ron Herman *A Guide to the Gardens of Kyoto* (New York: Kodansha International 2003) 195.

<sup>40</sup> Christopher Loots "The Ma (間) of Hemingway: Interval Absence and Japanese Aesthetics in In Our Time " The Hemingway Review Vol . 29 (Spring 2010) 76.

It has been suggested that the conditions under which Ma is most likely to be experienced are quietness, calmness and plainness – qualities which many minimalist works share<sup>41</sup>. One of the essential elements in the Japanese aesthetics is the process of subtraction and the consequential simplicity<sup>42</sup>. Traditional Japanese houses used to be made entirely of natural materials such as wood and paper with exceptionally simple designs<sup>43</sup>. In Jun'ichiro Tanizaki's eyes, however, the empty Japanese wall is far from empty, but a surface on which light continually traces its fugitive presence against encroaching shadow<sup>44</sup>. For this reason, in exploring methods of answering the question 'Where's the Art<sup>45</sup>?', the most appropriate place to start in examining the notion was minimalism, where reduction and simplicity are key to both its philosophy and practice. Often directly engaging with the material and the space it occupies, minimalist art encourages the viewer to be conscious of the experience of the encounter with the work itself rather than the associated concepts. The reduction of the artwork to its essential structure was a technique explored by Russian avant-garde artists in the 1910s and 1920s such as Tatlin and Rodchenko<sup>46</sup>. Minimalism in the context of western art is often described to have emerged in the late 1950s through such artists as Frank Stella, whose black Paintings were exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1959<sup>47</sup>. Minimalists, rejecting the idea of art as a unique creation that reflects the personal expression of a gifted individual, craft effective voids through removal of unnecessary and distracting features, cleansing off the creator's fingerprints to allow for a purer reaction to the work itself<sup>48</sup>. Other minimalist artists have since followed in Stella's path.

<sup>41</sup> Sachiyo Goda "An Investigation into the Japanese Notion of 'Ma': Practising Sculpture within Space-time Dialogues" (PhD diss. University of Northumbria at Newcastle 2010) 15.

<sup>42</sup> Masanori Kurokawa *Eight Elements of Japanese Aesthetics* 八つの日本の美意識 / Yattsu no Nihon no Bi-ishiki. Kodansha 2004.

<sup>43</sup> Lesley Millar *Textual Space: Contemporary Japanese Textile Art*. (The Surrey Institute of Art and Design College University 2001).

<sup>44</sup> Jun'ichiro Tanizaki *In Praise of Shadows* 陰影礼賛 / In'ei Raisan (1977) trans. Thomas Harper and Edward Seidensticker (Rutland Vt.: Tuttle Publishing 2008)

<sup>45</sup> It is useful to make the distinction between 'the Art' and 'art(s)' employed in this study at this point: 'the Art' here refers to 'the Way' as used in zen arts and denoted by the Japanese character 道 while art(s) refers to their manifested forms

<sup>46</sup> Tate Archive "Minimalism " accessed October 2 2013  
[http://www2.tate.org.uk/archive/journeys/reisehtml/mov\\_minimalism.htm](http://www2.tate.org.uk/archive/journeys/reisehtml/mov_minimalism.htm)

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Tom Godfrey *Conceptual Art* (Phaidon Press Limited 1998)

Much like the silences between sounds or gaps between physical structures, the spaces between marks in a drawing or breaks in printed words in poetry, a void and the sense of anticipation can be, depending on one's mode of perception, experienced as something as tangible and meaningful as the real and physical. In his book *The Art of Looking Sideways*, Alan Fletcher claims,

*'space is substance. Cezanne painted and modelled space. Giacometti sculpted by "taking the fat off space". Mallarmé conceived poems with absences as well as words. Ralph Richardson asserted that acting lay in pauses ... Issac Stern describes music as "that little bit between each note - silences which give the form".'*<sup>49</sup>

In *Silence: The Hidden Protagonist*, performance artist Stavroula Kounadea<sup>50</sup> discusses the vital role silence plays in theatre and performance art:

*'Harold Pinter's plays are written like music scores with various instructions for "pause" or "Silence" carefully positioned in between the words. Sometimes he would use dashes and sometimes dots. One dash of silence, for example, was shorter than two dashes, two dashes shorter than three dashes and so on ... All these moments filled with unspoken dialogue, are now characteristically known as a "Pinter pause" and a "Pinter Silence".'*<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, referring to the use of the "pregnant pause" in Kabuki theatre, Goda claims that Ma is *'a property of the interpretative moment rather than the material presence of a thing'*<sup>52</sup>. As Robert Morris once stated, *'simplicity of shape does not necessarily equate*

<sup>49</sup> Alan Fletcher *The Art of Looking Sideways* (Phaidon 2001) 370.

<sup>50</sup> Stavroula Kounadea "Silence: The Hidden Protagonist " (presented at CARU: *Silencing the Silence* OVADA Oxford 2013)

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Sachiyo Goda "An Investigation into the Japanese Notion of 'Ma': Practising Sculpture within Space-time Dialogues" (PhD diss.



with simplicity of experience.'<sup>53</sup> However, 'In lieu of admiring aesthetics, the viewer must actively engage with each work in order to experience it'<sup>54</sup>. The notion of the 'white cube gallery space' has always fascinated me for its debatable neutrality. Just how neutral is the colour white, or the cube? I have been examining the colour white as a subject of interest, examining practically and theoretically the question of its blankness, and thus its meaninglessness. Cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett inquired into the presence of the void in relation to consciousness and perception asking, 'What could it be that is present when one "hears" sounds filling silent times, or "sees" colors spanning empty spaces? It does seem something is there in these cases, something the brain has to provide.'<sup>55</sup>

Researching into leukophobia<sup>56</sup> (the phobia of the colour white), sedatephobia (the phobia of silence)<sup>57</sup>, kenophobia<sup>58</sup> (the phobia of emptiness), and the concept of *horror vacui*<sup>59</sup>, I have also wondered if this anxiety experienced is rooted in its emptiness or, quite the reverse, in the potentiality of the pregnant infinity. Dr. Ralph Pascualy, the medical director of Northwest Hospital Sleep Center in Seattle, explains how the hallucinations that occur during sensory deprivation demonstrate the brain's natural need for sensory input; robbed of any stimulus, the brain can begin to create its own<sup>60</sup>. Since '*Natura abhorret vacuum*'<sup>61</sup>, something is necessarily created out of nothing.

Minimalist toys, including sandpits and Lego, allow for an autonomous emergence of the subconscious. In explaining the function of the simple features of Steiner (also known as Waldorf) dolls Connie Grawert says:

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University of Northumbria at Newcastle 2010) 15.

<sup>53</sup> Simon Wilson *Tate Gallery: An Illustrated Companion* (Tate Gallery London revised edition 1991) 262.

<sup>54</sup> Rhianon Star "Invisible: Art About the Unseen 1957-2012" accessed June 3 2014 <https://rhianonstar.wordpress.com/2012/07/14/invisible-art-about-the-unseen-1957-2012/>

<sup>55</sup> Christopher Loots "The Ma (間) of Hemingway: Interval Absence and Japanese Aesthetics in In Our Time" *The Hemingway Review* Vol. 29 (Spring 2010) 81.

<sup>56</sup> "Leukophobia – Fear of the Color White" accessed July 6 2014 <http://www.remediespoint.com/phobias/leukophobia-fear-of-the-color-white.html>

<sup>57</sup> "Fear of Silence Phobia – Sedatephobia" accessed July 6 2014 <http://www.remediespoint.com/phobias/leukophobia-fear-of-the-color-white.html>

<sup>58</sup> "Kenophobia" accessed April 13 2012 <https://hypnomanchester.co.uk/kenophobia-fear-of-voids-or-empty-spaces>

<sup>59</sup> "Horror Vacui" accessed November 8 2013 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horror\\_vacui](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horror_vacui)

<sup>60</sup> "White Noise and Your Brain: The Science of Sound Machines" accessed April 1 2015 <http://www.apartmenttherapy.com/sleep-better-the-science-of-sound-machines-168208>

<sup>61</sup> "Nature abhors a vacuum" accessed March 24 213 <http://www.quotecounterquote.com/2010/02/nature-abhors-vacuum-famous-writers.html>

*In order to stimulate the imagination of the child, these dolls have only an indication for features such as eyes and mouth. In this way the child is able to transform the doll using his or her imagination, so that the doll can be happy or sad, sick or tired, as the play scenario unfolds. The child must be able to use their own imagination to create the play, rather than the toy dictating the course of play because of the way it is constructed.*<sup>62</sup>



Fig. 9: Examples of Steiner dolls

Within the 'no face', children see 'all faces'; its non-being-ness allows them to perceive it in all its conditions, everything through nothing, all through none. In talking of Hiroshi Sugimoto's photographic series, *In the Praise of Shadow*<sup>63</sup>, Mizuta<sup>64</sup> claims that the blackness that encompasses the flickering flame is itself a presence, a background against which, as Yukio Mishima's Mizoguchi says in *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 'I could conjure up my vision at will'<sup>65</sup>.



Fig. 10: Ma

<sup>62</sup> Connie Grawert "Steiner Dolls: Why the Difference?" Steiner Education Australia accessed August 30 2015 <http://www.steinereducation.edu.au/resources/dolls-in-steinerwaldorf-kindergartens-preschools-and-playgroups>

<sup>63</sup> "In the Praise of Shadow" accessed 2 August 2012 <http://www.sugimotohiroshi.com/praise.html>

<sup>64</sup> Miya Elise Mizuta "Luminous Environment: Light Architecture and Decoration in Modern Japan" *Japan Forum* 18(3) (2006): 339-360.

<sup>65</sup> Yukio Mishima *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* 金閣寺 /Kinkaku-ji trans. Ivan Morris (London : Penguin 1989)

## 1.2 Cognising Nothing

***Thirty spokes  
meet in the hub.  
Where the wheel isn't  
is where it's useful.***

***Hollowed out,  
clay makes a pot.  
Where the pot's not  
is where it's useful.***

***Cut doors and windows  
to make a room.  
Where the room isn't,  
there's room for you.***

***So the profit in what is  
is in the use of what isn't***

Lao-tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 11<sup>66</sup>

Despite its non-existence, 'nothingness' can be framed into existence, into a being, with its own qualities<sup>67</sup>. Placing the void in a particular context and contrasting the physical and metaphysical, one can imply the ontology of the 'is' and 'is not'. It can also raise the question whether there exists another state between the two which might be inferred by their simultaneity. The lack of existence/form forces a re-cognition of own subjective conceptions; it emphasizes and makes one aware of one's own perception and the possibilities of everything outside of the existing framework. The question of 'framing', and its deconstruction, has hence been of utmost importance in my research particularly regarding that of perception.

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<sup>66</sup> The feminine Tao "Tao Te Ching: Chapter 11 " accessed April 21 2014 [http://earlywomenmasters.net/tao/ch\\_11.html](http://earlywomenmasters.net/tao/ch_11.html)

<sup>67</sup> Martin Gardner, *The Colossal Book of Mathematics* (W. W. Norton & Company First Edition edition 2004) 596

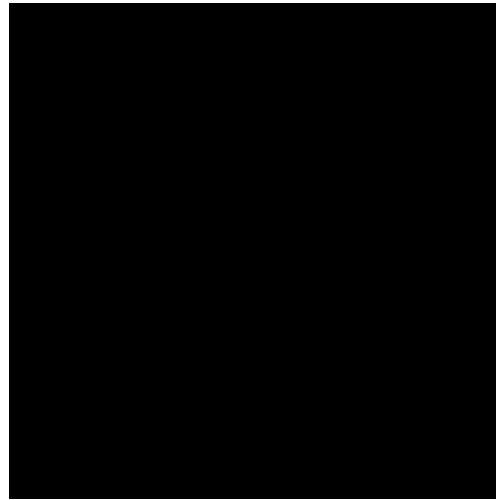


Fig. 11: An example of a Sliding Block Puzzle

Martin Gardner describes how the absence of a thing can become a presence in its own right. The simplest example of this may be the bubbles in a lava lamp: the bubbles of absence move around, contorting and interacting with each other just as you would expect from beings with 'solid' existence. Although Gardner uses Sam Loyd's Sliding Block Puzzle<sup>68</sup> (Figure 11) to describe the phenomenon<sup>69</sup>, I have chosen a different example in order to focus on the interaction between the voids and our perception of it. Unlike the void in the block puzzle, in the case of the lava lamp the malleable nature of the void allows them to split and merge as the voids are deformed by the movement of the heated wax. This is not possible within the confines of the concrete framework stipulated by the Sliding Block Puzzle; if another empty block was introduced and you find the two empty blocks next to each other, the base premise of the puzzle still stands and the two separate nonbeings would stay separate – you would not be able to move the two together as one. Our recognition of the void's beingness is more easily comprehended if we can observe its con-figuration, dis-figuration and re-figuration, such as the case in the example of the lava lamp.

<sup>68</sup> NB While Gardner also uses the example of a gold atom diffusing through lead. I chose to further simplify and replaced the example with a more familiar accessible object

<sup>69</sup> Martin Gardner, *The Colossal Book of Mathematics* (W. W. Norton & Company First Edition edition 2004) 596

*The Duchess: 'You're thinking about something, my dear, and that makes you forget to talk. I can't tell you just now what the moral of that is, but I shall remember it in a bit.'*

*Alice: 'Perhaps it hasn't one'*

*The Duchess: 'Tut, tut, child! Everything's got a moral, if only you can find it.'*

– Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*<sup>70</sup>

Framing of our world is a necessary process for survival. Simply by being, every moment in life requires us to make decisions; this continuous decision-making is what defines us as conscious beings. In cognitive psychology, framing refers to schema<sup>71</sup>, which, akin to the psychoanalytical Kleinian theory of phantasy<sup>72</sup>, is an internal representation of the world that acts as a framework on which the child bases its knowledge of the environment and its essential 'reality'. Schema is crucial as it enables us to interpret and predict events<sup>73</sup>. According to Piaget we are born with some functional invariants (processes that remain constant throughout our lives), including sucking and grasping and the development of schemata (plural of schema). Later as we grow older, the schemata become more complex as we encounter new experiences. It has been further proposed that schemata are not so much the categories themselves but the act of categorising. Piaget introduced the theory of cognitive equilibrium and disequilibrium, which describes the continuous process of schemata, the con-/de-/re-figuration of the existing understanding of the world. The child requires a stable internal world which is maintained by the process of equilibrium – however, new experiences create mismatches, which in turn lead to a state of disequilibrium. Equilibrium works to accommodate the new information to restore the balance by updating the conception of the world. Piaget saw this endless process as the core to our learning and referred to the process of equilibrium as a functional invariant, a quality that remains constant and unchanged throughout the

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<sup>70</sup> Lewis Carroll *Alice in Wonderland* (Diamond Books 1993) 98.

<sup>71</sup> "Framing (social sciences)" accessed June 5 2014 [http://psychology.wikia.com/wiki/Framing\\_\(social\\_sciences\)](http://psychology.wikia.com/wiki/Framing_(social_sciences))

<sup>72</sup> Melanie Klein Trust "Unconscious phantasy" accessed April 2 2014 <http://www.melanie-klein-trust.org.uk/unconscious-phantasy>

<sup>73</sup> "Development and Cognition" accessed March 2 2015 <http://www.psychology4a.com/cognition-and-development.html>

entire developmental process. Schemata and its operations, however, are variant structures, which are in a constant state of change, accumulating and updating throughout life<sup>74</sup>.

The whether and how of the decision-making is the necessary 'action' required of us all for as long as we live (or, more specifically, 'for as long as we "are"'). From personal to political, the questions are unavoidable; we are faced with moral dilemmas everyday, necessitating us to define and redefine our own identity, constructed upon our conduct. Every action has a reaction, which in turn becomes an action; our choices are therefore, (both and neither) an action and a reaction simultaneously. Without such a process of conception one could not orientate and thus comprehend one's own existence. These sets of 'moral actions' and parameters of consciousness are what I in this thesis refer to as the Self/Culture<sup>75</sup>. The thesis proposes that one of the functions of contemporary art is to manifest the experiential research into one's own Self/Culture, as it iterates such conceptual outlines through dis-/re-orientation. To explore this idea in relation to cognitive disequilibrium, I began my study with experimenting with the spatial dimensions, e.g. colour and shape, in such works as the *Translation - x:x (I) Line & Translation - x:x (II) Dot* (2012, Figures 12 a & b, Appendix II: 1), with the temporal dimensions, e.g. sound and theatre, through such pieces as the *Language Study* series (2012, Appendix II: 2) and *.I.My.Me.Mine.* (2013, Appendix II: 6), and with the conceptual, through such works as *Document of Authenticity* (2013-ongoing, Appendix II: 8), *Bright Tailed and Bushy Eyed* (2015, Appendix II: 13) and *Making an Art Manifest* (2016, Appendix II: 15). In examining the ontology of the Ise shrines in Japan, which are rebuilt every twenty years, and quoting Boggs, Lopes proposes that the cycle of rebuilding reconciles impermanence with permanence: 'ephemerality ... can paradoxically yield lasting or enduring achievements'<sup>76</sup>. He compares the ontology of the Ise shrines (whose process of

<sup>74</sup> "Development and Cognition " accessed March 2 215 <http://www.psychology4a.com/cognition-and-development.html>

<sup>75</sup> With Self-Concept as the recognition of Self/Culture and its physical manifestation i.e. the Body

<sup>76</sup> Dominic McIver Lopes "Shikinen Sengu and the Ontology of Architecture in Japan " in *Global Theories of the Arts and Aesthetics*, ed. Susan L. Feagin (Blackwell Publishing Inc. 2007) 83.

manifestation will be discussed further in Chapter 6) as a 'real object' with that of a theatre, as opposed to that of a statue<sup>77</sup>. *'While many cultural institutions and sites in Japan have elected to register with UNESCO as pieces of world heritage, Ise Grand Shrine has resisted this trend, as the traditions and rituals that take place there, far from being relics of the past, are still very much alive.'*<sup>78</sup> Similarly, I relate the rebuilding of the Ise shrines to the continuous process of ontological equilibrium, where the permanence that is manifested through the impermanence is the sense of Self/Culture, a temporal 'object'.



Fig. 12.a: Translation - x:x (I) Line



Fig. 12.b: Translation - x:x (II) Dot

Just as transiency and evanescence is only possible with form and formality however, the 'nothing', or the no-thing-ness, is only possible with the framework of (some)thingness. For this reason, my practice has focused on examining and trying to realise this framework of somethingness in order to manifest the nothing. Another idea related to cognitive framing is the process of perceptual filtering. Differential psychology explains human perception and behaviour based on a personal and individual matrix, through which we comprehend the present. I believe that to create an effective

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 81.

<sup>78</sup> All About Japan "Living Heritage: Ise Grand Shrine " last modified December 8 2015 <http://allabout-japan.com/en/article/1077>

contemporary artwork, it is vital that the artist remains objective over their own subjectivity and the necessarily biased frameworks and filters. *A Walk I, II, III* (2011/13/15, Figure 13, Appendix II: 9) consists of getting lost on a walk. The aim here is purposely disorientating oneself and simply experiencing one's surroundings for what it is without a planned route or a goal, maintaining all senses open to all with no perceptual hierarchy of relevance or significance<sup>79</sup>. No matter how many times I repeat the practice, I find this to be a particularly challenging and enjoyable exercise as I am forced to become aware of my own perceptual discriminations and how difficult it is for one to traverse through these boundaries, further reinforcing the idea of perceptual petrification and the limits of the 'random'. The notion of perceptual filtering is often explored through the cognitive theory of the 'cocktail party effect'<sup>80</sup>, where we dismiss information assessed subconsciously as irrelevant. The phenomenon demonstrates our tendency and ability to observe more than we are aware of, and to disregard information that may be unfitting to the overall image of the existing schemata constructed, making us blind/deaf to some vital information that may be beneficial to our understanding of the world. I have noticed this process occurring in myself and find it difficult to shift myself outside of this system of conception and perception, which we as individuals and as humanity developed over the long course of history and distinguish us as cultural beings.



Fig. 13: A Walk

<sup>79</sup> The phenomenological practice resembles the act of Flaneury albeit the notion of flaneur usually being applied to describe such act and experience within cityscapes

<sup>80</sup> Andrew Conway Nelson Cowan and Michael Bunting "The Cocktail Party Phenomenon Revisited: The Importance of Working Memory Capacity " *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review* 8: 2 (2001) 331-335



### 1.3 Questioning Nothing



Fig. 14: Austin Sherlaw-Johnson *Running South in as Straight a Line as Possible*

Some phenomena, such as those presented through contemporary artworks, are so outside of our existing framework that we may refer to them as absurd, sometimes even humorous. The surreal, such as the strange and fantastical (such as that created in *.I.My.Me.Mine.*) or hyperbole via *reductio ad absurdum* re-production (such as that created in *Document of Authenticity* or in Austin Sherlaw-Johnson's *Running South in as Straight a Line as Possible*, Figure 14) can highlight the ordinary. Humour and absurdity, as techniques for discourse, reveal and activate alternative perceptions by conceptually disorientating us. Consciously or not, whatever drives the invariant equilibrium necessitates the analysis of what makes it funny or absurd and, in turn, the reassessment of our own discernments, revealing the framework of subjectivity beyond the objectively given (in the work itself). The method of *reductio ad absurdum*, through overt explicitness and exaggeration, has been a key strategy used in my examination of framing, particularly in the case of *Document of Authenticity* (Figure 15) and *Bright Tailed and Bushy Eyed*. With

such a severe approach however, the craftsmanship of the objects was critical in conveying that my act of enquiry was not in any way a flippant gesture. The relationship between craftsmanship and authenticity will be discussed further in Part II.

Document of Authenticity  
as part of:  
The Phenomenological Interaction between the Being and the Non-Being  
on Intercultural Investigation into the Notion of 'Mi' and its Function in Art

Researcher:  
Name: Aya Kasai  
Authority/Organisation: Silencing the Silence; Gen Project  
Position: Principal Investigator  
Tel: 07723 362 281  
Email: ayaxoxykasai@gmail.com

Please initial box:  
Permission Granted Rejected

I hereby authorise Aya Kasai to think about me, if she so wishes, whenever and in any way imaginable. ☒ ☐

I hereby grant Aya Kasai the authorship of my future silences, so long as all compositional components are silent. ☒ ☐

I, Aya Kasai, hereby authorise the holder of this document to think about me, if they so wish, whenever and in any way imaginable. ☒ ☐

I, Aya Kasai, hereby grant the co-authorship of my future silences to all holders of this document. ☒ ☐

Please tick box:  
Yes No

I agree to the use of the researcher's copy of this authorisation document for the purpose of the said research. ☒ ☐

that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to without giving reason. ☒ ☐

Fig. 15: Document of Authenticity

In the case of *Document of Authenticity*, an official ethics permission form was used as an instigator and as an example of standardization to draw out the subjective framework. In the piece, the participants are asked for their permission for the artist to 'think about them whenever and however the artist wishes' and to 'compose their silence with silence' in return for the same and equal right for them to do so with the image and the silence of the artist. The piece has been described as a 'conceptual' artwork, as the manifestation of the aesthetic experience occurs beyond the artistic (or physical), only when the participants and/or the viewer contemplate whether they would like to sign the document or not. And while I use the term "to contemplate", this process does not necessarily need to be a "contemplative" moment. In fact, only a few participants took more than five minutes on the decision to sign. The impact of having done so, however,

has evidently been a deeper experience, albeit not a 'serious' one. Even now, after almost three years, the agreement is still referenced by those who signed whenever the thought of silence and their image and presence is mentioned. How can an experience and action be lasting and thus perhaps, dare I say, "meaningful", without being serious, to the point of being almost flippant and entertaining? The questions and the terms of agreement on the document were made to be obviously humorous yet sincere, a balance I strove for in making almost all my pieces during the course of the research. The importance of this fine balance had initially occurred to me before I began my PhD studies when I was making *The Law* (2010/11, Appendix II: 20). At the time however, my understanding of the use of humour and its intrigue as a vehicle for serious content was that of a mere invitation (and occasionally a trickery) for further discourse. While I still believe this to be the case to a large extent, the more I made pieces using the technique, the more I have come to realise that it is not the only reason why I instinctively felt it was so vital as a method.

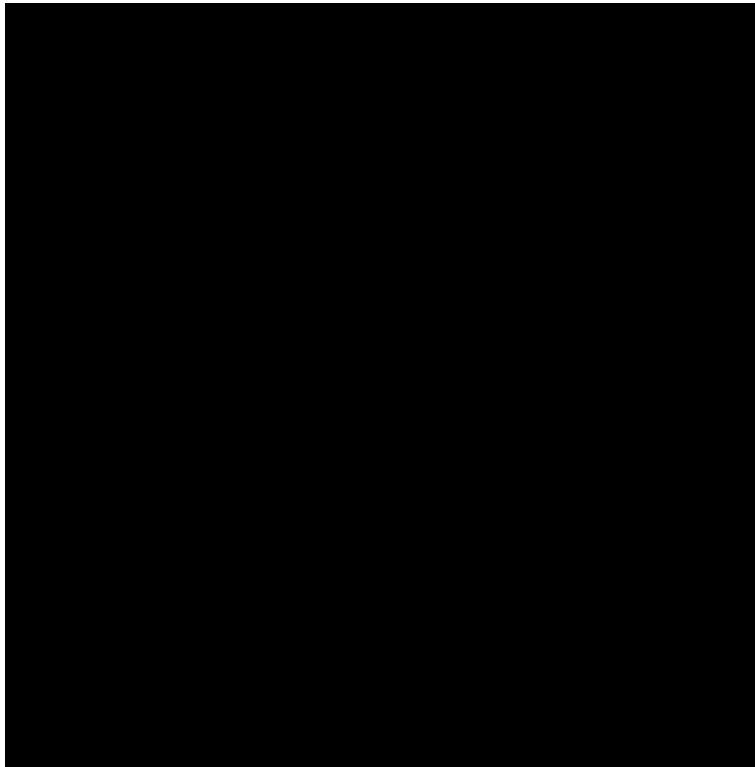


Fig. 16: Sol LeWitt *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes*

Conceptual reconfiguration, mentioned above in relation to cognitive equilibrium, has been the focus of my research in comprehending the function of Gen. Inspired by works such as Carl Andre's *Equivalent* series<sup>81</sup>, Sol LeWitt's *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes* (1974, Figure 16)<sup>82</sup>, and Takahiro Suzuki's *IKIRO – Be Alive Project*<sup>83</sup> (Gallery GEN, Tokyo, 2010/11/12/13/14/15), the strategy of repetition and accumulation was used in this project for such reconfiguration in revealing the Self/Culture in this project, through the method of presentation for *Document of Authenticity* (Figure 17), and through the action in *On the Possibility of Inertia*, *.I.My.Me.Mine.*, and 365.



Fig. 17: *Document of Authenticity*

<sup>81</sup> "Equivalent VIII " accessed July 6 2013 <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/andre-equivalent-viii-t01534/text-catalogue-entry>

<sup>82</sup> "33 Variations of Infinite Open Forms " accessed August 3 2015 <http://obsart.blogspot.co.uk/2012/11/dibbets-33-variations-of-infinite-open.html>

<sup>83</sup> "IKIRO Project 1996 - 1998 / Takahiro Suzuki " accessed September 5 2012 <http://www.ikiro.net/ikiro.html>

In discussing the function of failure in the manifestation of the self, Priest quotes Ross: *'Depressive affects become a strategy by which one shapes one's individuality'*<sup>84</sup>. In their writings Ross and Priest relate the notion to Vanessa Beecroft's performance installations<sup>85</sup> (Figure 18), in which the *'self is differentiated and expressed not by mastery or affirmation of a prefigured quantity ... but rather by its manner of coping'*<sup>86</sup>.

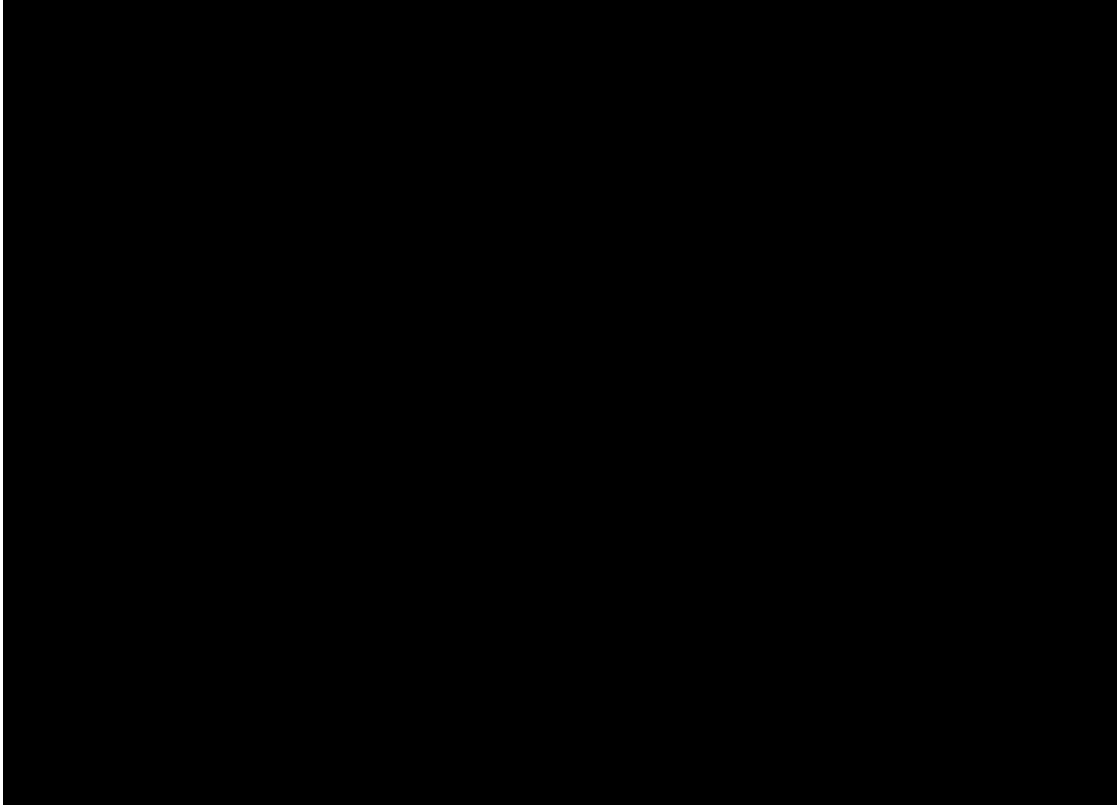


Fig. 18: Vanessa Beecroft VB46.017

Similarly to the philosophy of kintsugi<sup>87</sup> (Figure 19), where damage is cherished and emphasised rather than disguised, failure and imperfections are understood as necessary parts of being one's Self/Culture, an *'optimal functioning self in a world that expects and prohibits nothing but that you demonstrate your right, and your (in)capacity, to create/perform your 'self''*<sup>88</sup>.

<sup>84</sup> Christine Ross *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression* (University of Minnesota Press 2006)

<sup>85</sup> "Vanessa Beecroft " accessed April 21 2014 <http://www.vanessabeecroft.com/frameset.html>

<sup>86</sup> Eldritch Priest *Boring Formless Nonsense: Experimental Music and the Aesthetics of Failure* (Bloomsbury Academic 2013)

<sup>87</sup> "Kintsugi 金継ぎ " accessed May 17 2015 <http://www.thebookoflife.org/kintsugi>

<sup>88</sup> Eldritch Priest *Boring Formless Nonsense: Experimental Music and the Aesthetics of Failure* (Bloomsbury Academic 2013)

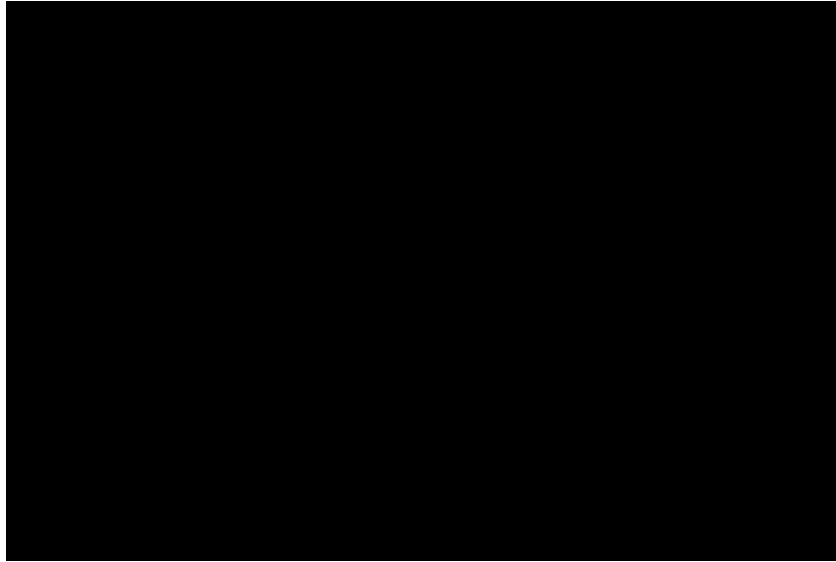


Fig. 19: An example of kintsugi on a bowl

Lee Ufan's *From Line* painting series (1977, Figure 20) features repetitive brushstrokes laid down with the rhythm of quiet breathing. It is in the subtle variabilities of each line that reveals his Self/Culture.

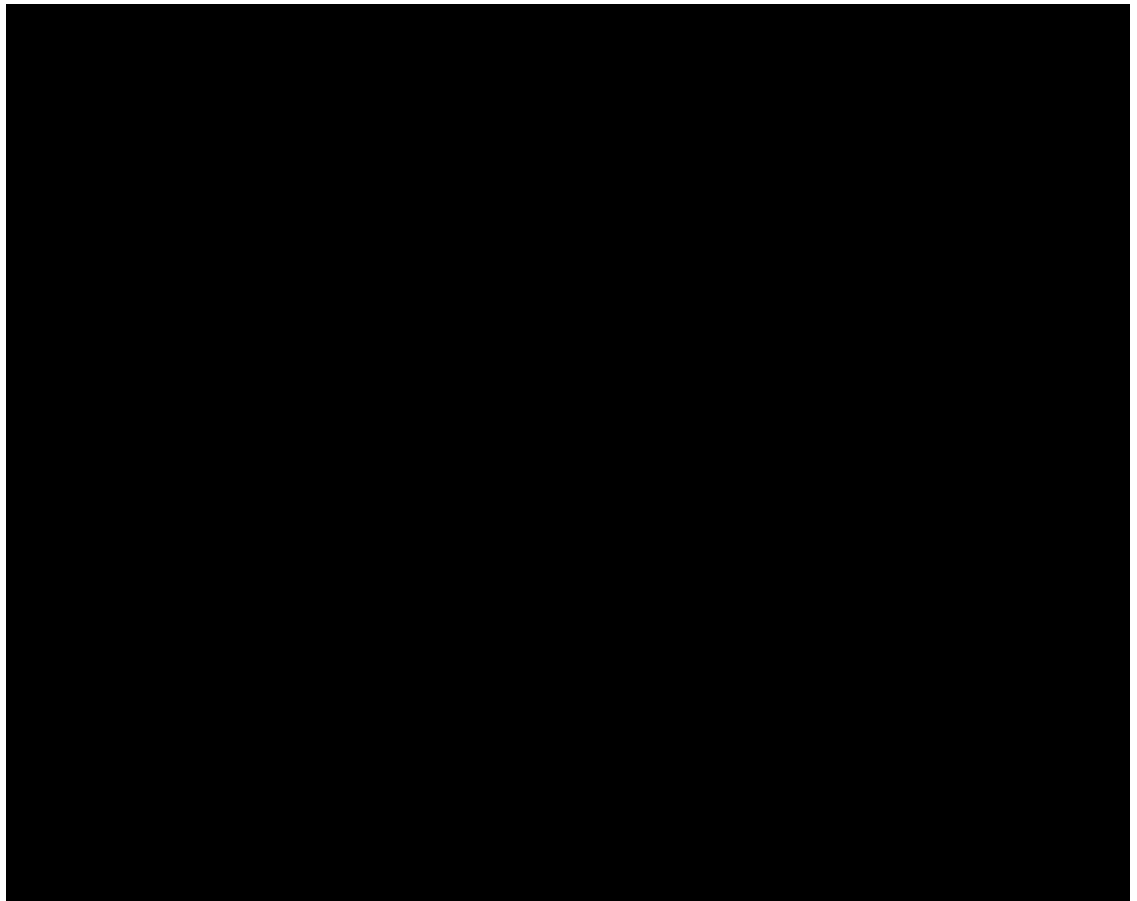


Fig. 20: Lee Ufan *From Line*



This thesis was set out on the basis of my commitment to create art with and within one's environment (Ta / the Other, including the immediate physical/political/social conditions) and my personal definition of 'contemporary art' as a practice-based research in response to one's Ta, or one's own 'contemporary condition'. Although I had no idea as to exactly how the form of the objects in 365 (Figure 21, Appendix II: 3) would develop, from the start of the work, when I laid down the very first layer of the handprint, I was sure that I was to make no effort in making the object in any way "perfect" or "untainted". Each layer is made as quickly as possible, with no aesthetic judgment as to its development. While it has been commented that they could be beautiful sculptural objects if I were to be more careful in making sure that they were left as uncontaminated as possible by keeping out the dust, hair or any other 'impurities', it has been vital for me not to interfere with its development to reveal the purity of its presence (i.e. the Culture/Self), independent of the maker and the maker's conscious effort for "purity".



Fig. 21: 365: *This Is Not A Work*

It quickly became evident, nonetheless, how tricky it is to realise the 'unframed'. In Japanese gardens, what seems 'random' has been carefully edited – there is no possibility

of such concept as 'random' without a particular framework. For the Japanese, their characteristic appreciation of transiency is only possible when its counterbalancing notion of form is accentuated<sup>89</sup>: *'formality affirms the potential chaos of evanescence'*<sup>90</sup>. In the case of 365, my hand has been the framework, with its raw immediacy the method of providing the "empty" space within which my absence (Ma) was to be realised. Kidd describes Hermeneutic phenomenology as *'a method of interpretation and understanding. It is to bring the far near. Put simply: one has to say, "at this time I am seeing this".'*<sup>91</sup> In this respect, the description of Ma as a consciously framed empty space/time interval seems apt. The aim of the project was to use my work as a tool for becoming more aware of these processes on one's own matrix of Ma, in turn suspending the judgment over the objectivity of reality. The authenticity of reality will be discussed further in Part II.

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<sup>89</sup> Charles Shiro Inouye *Evanescence and Form: An Introduction to Japanese Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2008) 213.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 2

<sup>91</sup> Sunny Kidd and James Kidd *Hermeneutic Phenomenology* (1981) accessed November 20 2011  
<http://www.inbetweenness.com/Sunnie's%20Publications/HERMENEUTIC%20PHENOMENOLOGY.pdf>



## Chapter 2: *Nothing in Art*

There is no *Thing* in art  
The *Nothing* in art  
There's nothing in *Art*  
Nothing is Art  
.n.o...t.h.i.n...g.i.n...a.r.t.

### 2.1 Creating Nothing

Victor Vasarely, in his *Notes for a Manifesto* (1955), claims, 'The art product extends from "the pleasant, useful object" to "Arts for Art's sake", from "good taste" to the "transcendental"'<sup>92</sup>. Lopes, in *Shikinen Sengu and the Ontology of Architecture in Japan*<sup>93</sup>, examines the cultural variances in the art ontology, attempting to reconcile the pluralist and monist theories, such as that presented by David Davies, and offers three propositions:

- every work of art is an act of specifying a focus of appreciation (based on David Davies' monism);
- the vehicular component of the focus of appreciation varies culturally;
- the understandings by means of which the vehicular component bears content vary culturally.

Lopes therefore emphasises in his conclusion the importance of cross-cultural studies in understanding the human reality. Classical Japanese philosophy understands the basic reality as constant change, or of impermanence, and the Japanese embrace and

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<sup>92</sup> Kristine Stiles and Peter Howard Selz *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, (University of California Press 1996) 111.

<sup>93</sup> Dominic McIver Lopes *Shikinen Sengu and the Ontology of Architecture in Japan* " in *Global Theories of the Arts and Aesthetics*, ed. Susan L. Feagin (Blackwell Publishing Inc. 2007) 78.

celebrate the transient and evanescent nature of life<sup>94 95</sup>. This is most evident in their appreciation for the fleeting life of cherry blossoms, which is often described in haiku and tanka poetries. Louis Kahn once remarked, '*The sun never knew how wonderful it was until it fell on the wall of a building*'<sup>96</sup>. In looking at one quality, the contrary quality emerges: what makes a shadow a shadow, or a darkness a darkness, is the lack of light. Just as the purity of white is only comprehended through the comprehension of its supposed opposite. Interestingly, however, Tanaka Takako explains that the Japanese conceptions of light (光 *hikari*) and shadow (影 *kage*) were intertwined before the Edo period, and that the perception of each as a discrete value is a relatively recent phenomenon<sup>97</sup>.



Fig. 22: A Secret Garden

Distinguished from darkness as an absolute, the shadow is that which grows out of darkness to encompass light (or, conversely, grows out of light to encompass darkness)<sup>98</sup>. Stoichita explains that the relationship between light and shadow is ambiguous and that

<sup>94</sup> Charles Shiro Inouye: *Evanescence and Form: An Introduction to Japanese Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2008)

<sup>95</sup> Jun'ichiro Tanizaki: *In Praise of Shadows 陰影礼賛 / In'ei Raisan* (1977) trans. Thomas Harper and Edward Seidensticker (Rutland Vt.: Tuttle Publishing 2008) Charles Shiro Inouye: *Evanescence and Form: An Introduction to Japanese Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2008)

<sup>96</sup> Ihan Hassan: "In the mirror of the sun: Reflections on Japanese and American literature Basho to Cage" *World Literature Today* 69: 2 (1995) 306.

<sup>97</sup> Arata Isozaki Sh'uji Takashina and Takako Tanaka: "The Shadow in Japanese Culture 影の日本文化 Kage no Nihon Bunka" (*Japanese Aesthetics 日本の美学 Nihon no Bigaku* 35 2002): 4-25.

<sup>98</sup> Miya Elise Mizuta: "Luminous Environment: Light Architecture and Decoration in Modern Japan" *Japan Forum* 18(3) (BAJS 2006): 339-360.

the shadow cannot be reduced to being a 'negative entity'<sup>99</sup>. The shadow hovers between the strict dialectic of light and darkness as the sum difference of each element as it exists in relation to the other. Furthermore, Zajonc<sup>100</sup> compares the intertwining of our understandings of light with our conceptions of moral space. The Japanese term 'haka-nasa' expresses this ever-changing reality of life: 'haka' is an ancient unit of land measurements used for agricultural purposes, with its negative adjective 'haka-nai' (no haka) indicating the futility of all such rationalization<sup>101</sup>.



Fig. 23: Language Studies IV:  $\leq\{\leq\{\leq\text{Haiku}\}\}$

'Bracketing', a method used in phenomenological observation, allows temporarily to hold in abeyance the foreknowledge of the observer, thus enabling an active and unbiased observation. Priest<sup>102</sup> compares the Husserlian concept of phenomenological bracketing to the brackets in mathematics, used 'to separate one part of an equation from another, allowing you to focus on that part in isolation from the others.'<sup>103</sup> Through epoché, Husserl's preferred terminology for bracketing, one can experience simultaneously the ontology of the permanent and ephemeral, matter and energy, 'is' and 'is not'. John Cage described Robert Rauschenberg's unmodulated white paintings

<sup>99</sup> Victor I. Stoichita *Short History of the Shadow* (London: Reaktion Books 1997)

<sup>100</sup> Arthur Zajonc *Catching the Light: The Entwined History of Light and Mind* (New York: Bantam Books 1993).

<sup>101</sup> Charles Shiro Inouye *Evanescence and Form: An Introduction to Japanese Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2008) 26

<sup>102</sup> Helena Priest "An Approach to the Phenomenological Analysis of Data " *Nurse Researcher* 10: 2 (2002): 50-63.

<sup>103</sup> Conal Hamill and Helen Sinclair "Bracketing – Practical Considerations in Husserlian Phenomenological Research " *Nurse Researcher* 17: 2 (2010): 16-24.

as 'airports for the lights, shadows and particles.'<sup>104</sup> The same could be said of Cage's own work, 4:33<sup>105</sup>. Similarly, I propose that such presence of empty frameworks as Ma and epoché<sup>106</sup> allow us to be free from subconscious filtering of information, enabling a heightened awareness of the schemata processes and one's own being.

Roy Behrens, in *How Form Functions: On Esthetic and Gestalt Theory, anesthetic and aesthetic states of being*<sup>107</sup>, distinguishes aesthetic and anesthetic experiences. Both terms are rooted in the same Greek word *aisthetikos*, which describes all sensory stimuli. Aesthetic refers to experiences that are '*stimulating, exciting and stirring, while anesthetic is more concerned with that which is numbing or stupefying. The aesthetic is not so much interested in the pretty or the beautiful, but that which excites the emotions.*'<sup>108</sup> More importantly in the context of Ma examination, the aesthetic can also be experienced from '*exposure to extreme diversity (ecstatic trance through hyperarousal)*'<sup>109</sup>, such as the effects of visual and aural white noise. The term white noise comes from its analogous relationship to white light, which is a combination of all frequencies or wavelengths in the visible light spectrum. Similarly, white noise '*contain[s] a blend of all the audible frequencies distributed equally over the range of the frequency band*'<sup>110</sup>. I propose that, rather than seeking merely for the aesthetic in the balancing of the senses, there may be an alternate method through the hyperarousal-induced anesthesia. Just as sensory deprivation can alter your state of mind, so can sensory overload. Beyond the '*numbing ... trace-like state*'<sup>111</sup>, there is an alternate state of being: '*If something is boring after two minutes, try it for four. If still boring, then eight. Then sixteen. Then thirty-two. Eventually one*

<sup>104</sup> John Cage *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (London: 1968)

<sup>105</sup> "4'33" App for iPhone™ " accessed May 4 2015 [http://www.johncage.org/4\\_33.html](http://www.johncage.org/4_33.html)

<sup>106</sup> Alex Arteaga "Knowledge as Transformation – and How Aesthetic Practice Can Contribute to It " Paper presented as part of *Agents of Change* hosted by Social Sculpture Research Unit Oxford Brookes University Oxford 2011.

<sup>107</sup> "The Aesthetic and Theoretical Dimensions of Understanding Architecture " accessed May 7 2014 [http://lfe-projects.umd.edu/arch170bl/Part\\_4\\_\\_The\\_Aesthetic\\_and\\_Theoretical\\_Dimensions\\_of\\_Understanding\\_Architecture/Aesthetic\\_and\\_Anesthetic.html](http://lfe-projects.umd.edu/arch170bl/Part_4__The_Aesthetic_and_Theoretical_Dimensions_of_Understanding_Architecture/Aesthetic_and_Anesthetic.html)

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> "white noise " accessed November 5 2013 <http://www.yourdictionary.com/white-noise#websters>

<sup>111</sup> "The Aesthetic and Theoretical Dimensions of Understanding Architecture " accessed May 7 2014 [http://lfe-projects.umd.edu/arch170bl/Part\\_4\\_\\_The\\_Aesthetic\\_and\\_Theoretical\\_Dimensions\\_of\\_Understanding\\_Architecture/Aesthetic\\_and\\_Anesthetic.html](http://lfe-projects.umd.edu/arch170bl/Part_4__The_Aesthetic_and_Theoretical_Dimensions_of_Understanding_Architecture/Aesthetic_and_Anesthetic.html)

discovers that it is not boring at all'<sup>112</sup>. While this quote by Cage is usually applied to deprived conditions, such as that realized in minimalist works, the phenomenon of white noise silence of Gen that lies beyond the anesthetic is best expressed by rearranging Salomé Voegelin's words, 'When there is nothing to hear, so much starts to sound'<sup>113</sup> to 'When there is everything to hear, so much starts to silence'.

## 2.2 Collecting Nothing

***There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smokescreen. When true silence falls, we are still left with echo but are nearer nakedness. One way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness***

– Harold Pinter, 1962<sup>114</sup>

Throughout this research process, while the creative practice was designed to manifest a state of nothingness, Ma was used as the eraser, rather than the erased (as is the case with the minimalist approach). My favourite version of Gormley's *Two Times II* series<sup>115</sup> is one situated in the foyer of Tokyo Opera City (1995, Figure 25). While I had seen the series installed in various environments, when I accidentally encountered the sculpture that stands in the middle of the busy Tokyo crowd suddenly I felt as though I finally understood its being. In comparison to other versions, the one in Tokyo was "unframed", almost unnoticed and unappreciated, despite the fact it stood in the middle of the space, solid and tall, all seven feet of the iron body. It was a concrete nothing, listening to the sound of its own listening.

<sup>112</sup> John Cage *Silence* (Wesleyan University Press 1961) 93.

<sup>113</sup> Salomé Voegelin *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (New York: Continuum 2010) 83.

<sup>114</sup> Harold Pinter "The echoing silence " accessed April 2 2015 [http://www.senscot.net/view\\_art.php?viewid=7781](http://www.senscot.net/view_art.php?viewid=7781)

<sup>115</sup> "ANTONY GORMLEY: TWO TIMES (TWO) 1999 " accessed February 2 2014 <http://www.antonygormley.com/sculpture/chronology-item-view/id/2343/page/403>

Fig. 24: Antony Gormley *Two Times II*

While *Ma* has most frequently been used by minimalists, who studied such a notion by the erasing of something, my interest here lies with its function in the process of 'self-obliteration'. The *Ma* concerning this thesis occurs within the *I*, and in the simultaneous recognition of the lack thereof - what one may suddenly experience in the middle of a crowd. It is created through repetition and overloading of significance, to the point of a significant insignificance, perhaps what Junichiro Tanizaki calls '*the beautiful grime*'<sup>116</sup>, the grime of being and nothingness. Although I began experimenting with accumulation as a method of obliteration, works such as *On the Possibility of Inertia* and *.I.My.Me.Mine.* proved too 'meditative'. In order to counter such effect and impression, I began working on 365, upon which my doctoral research developed. The 'piece' was never designed to be an artwork in itself to be exhibited but intended as a research tool and material. While many of my works produced during the course of the study overtly emphasise the form

<sup>116</sup> Jun'ichiro Tanizaki *In Praise of Shadows* 陰影礼賛 / *In'ei Raisan* (1977) trans. Thomas Harper and Edward Seidensticker (Rutland Vt.: Tuttle Publishing 2008)

and framework in order to manifest its counterpart nature of evanescence as discussed by Inouye, this particular work was created with no formal form in mind; not to emphasise the process but to manifest the transiency through a non-form form by negating the idea of design or presentation.

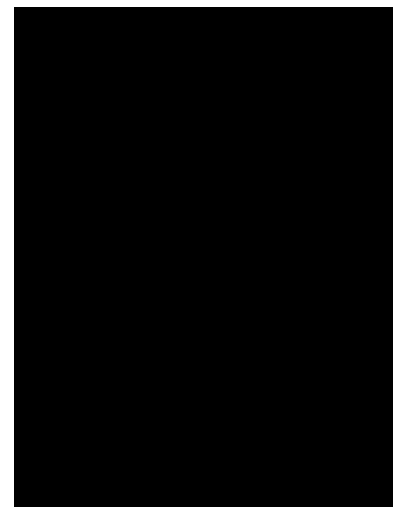


Fig. 25: 365: *This Is Not A Work*

### 2.3 Realising Nothing

Originally named 'New Material/Method', the second promise explored in this chapter was supposed to communicate my intentions to not use art as a means of exploring or presenting anything new, in terms of material, tool, method, technique, form etc. With 365, while the work has never been 'exhibited' in the course of the research, each handprint is clearly recognisable as a sculptural object and could be presented in a gallery space on a plinth. PVA glue is used in arts and crafts in various ways with paper, paint, sand etc. beyond its original purpose as an adhesive, though rarely is it used as a material in its own right. I became fascinated with PVA glue and its behaviour when I was

making papier-mâché sculptures and began wondering if it could be a form in itself. However, I was not interested in using it in creating a designed object; rather I wished to see its purest form through my engagement with it. Similarly, the strategy of recreating one's own body is nothing new. Throughout his career Antony Gormley has been using human body, particularly his own, as his key theme and material<sup>117</sup> (Figure 26). I will return to Gormley's use of the body as a vessel in Chapter 5 when I discuss the body as a place, or, as the Japanese may call it, 'Ba'.

Fig. 26: Antony Gormley *Lost Horizon*Fig. 27: Marc Quinn *Self*

In *Self* (1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, ongoing, Figure 27), Marc Quinn famously casts his own head as a sculpture. As further iteration is made every five years, the series begin to present '*a cumulative index of passing time and an ongoing self-portrait of the artist's ageing and changing self*'<sup>118</sup>. More importantly, the sculptures are made with his own blood, which means that: '*the materiality of the sculpture has both a symbolic and real function.*'<sup>119</sup> For 365 however, the piece is made with a synthetic material (PVA glue) that has no relation to my body. Although I had contemplated using my own hair for a similar accumulative piece for a while before I began working on 365, in order to explore the

<sup>117</sup> <http://www.antonygormley.com/resources/essay-item/id/112>

<sup>118</sup> <http://marcquinn.com/artworks/single/self-1991>

<sup>119</sup> <http://marcquinn.com/artworks/single/self-1991>



phenomenon and the very moment of my Self/Culture becoming 他 / *Ta* (a Japanese word for the "Other"), and thus an independent ontology, it felt vital that the material itself was not literally a part of me. Nor, unlike Quinn, the accuracy of the representation important so not to focus on the actual form of my body.

My fascination with the perceptual/ontological decentralization of framing is based on the idea of judgment-reservation and liberation through 'self-obliteration', a phrase coined by Yayoi Kusama, who, in an effort to overcome her fear of being obliterated by her schizophrenic hallucinations of patterns, used the phenomenon and the consequential mode of being as a means of defence by covering everything in patterns, as a proactive stance against her experience of existential angst<sup>120</sup>. Kusama's use of repetition will be discussed further in Chapter 3. As discussed above, the *Ma* in this context refers to the ontological disequilibrium, the ever-changing (/non-existent) perimeters of the Self/Culture. It is the place/time (ontological dimension thereafter referred to as *LineDot* in this thesis) where/when one is absolutely lost in the void, without an authority, guidelines, or in the case of *Gen*, schemata of any kind – true aesthetic anarchism; where all are as (in)significant and (ir)responsible as each other since, with the diffusion of conceptual framing, such distinct, static concepts as *Ta* (the Other) become irrelevant. In the absolute void, we are left condemned, as Sartre words, to freedom. However, as claimed by Nagarjuna in the vein of Nietzschean affirmation, "emptiness" (*sunyata*) does not mean "nihility" (*abhava*) but rather the lack of autonomous existence (*nihsvabhava*)<sup>121</sup>. The Kierkegaardian dread of nothingness can be, as is the case of Kusama's proactive self-obliteration, a form of self-authentication, since the ontological emptiness can only make sense and be experienced as a manifestation of mutual determinacy that permeates all things.

<sup>120</sup> Charles Avery Thomas Hirschhorn Yayoi Kusama Bo Christian Larsson Mark Manders Yoshitomo Nara Jason Rhoades Pipilotti Rist Chiharu Shiota and Keith Tyson *Walking in my mind* (London: Hayward Publishing 2009)

<sup>121</sup> Douglas Berger "Nagarjuna (c. 150-c. 250) " accessed April 1 2016 <http://www.iep.utm.edu/nagarjun>



Fig. 28: *.I.My.Me.Mine.*

In examining the idea of Self/Culture, I first used this ephemeral form of making in *YokoJohn* in 2011, which eventually led to the exploration of curatorial practice as a core research method for my doctoral research. While I initially began by presenting a collection of my own works to play with the fine line of ambiguity and collective dissonance through, for instance, *On the Possibility of Inertia*, it became apparent that I was in the way – the artist, my presence, got in the way of the audience's conceptual view, for seeing it for what it is. When I looked into the tunnel of supposed infinity in the mirror in *.I.My.Me.Mine.*, as in Kusama's *Infinity Mirror Room* (2013, Figure 29), I was always getting in the way of infinity.

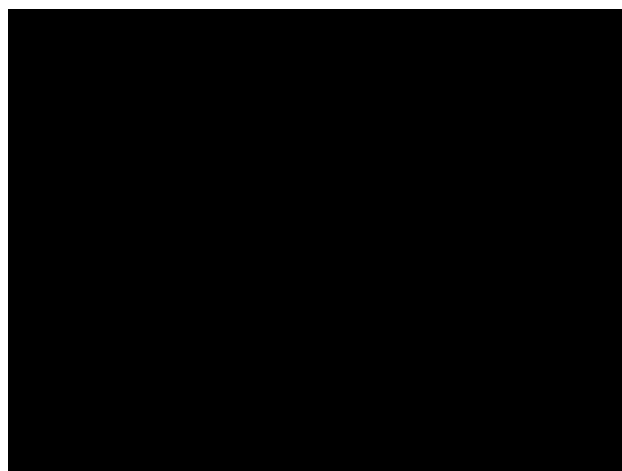


Fig. 29: Yayoi Kusama *Infinity Mirrored Room – The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away*

In order to erase the I and 'gain' the state of *tabula rasa*<sup>122</sup>, the I must first recognise its outline and thus its context. I took the next logical step and set off to remove the artist by producing a conceptual and ontological ambiguity by assembling Ta – others and their works. The problem was, what is all/random and thus dissonant enough needs to be situated within a framework. I needed to create a framework within which LineDot could occur. Subsequently, in September 2013, I created a logo; for I had observed its ontological power in framing a phenomenon, in and beyond the art world. For better or for worse, simply by being present in the peripheral, it creates enough conceptual framework in the context. Nonetheless, as the notion of authenticity was also key to my research, the existence embodied within the logo needed to be further 'authenticated'. To this end, I, as CARU, has since preceded to produce over thirty activities and events, involving hundreds of artists and researchers, to authenticate its ontology.



Fig. 30: A view of Where's the Art? CARU Anniversary Show

<sup>122</sup> Robert Duschinsky "Tabula Rasa and Human Nature " *Philosophy* 87 (2012): 509-529 accessed June 4 2015  
doi:10.1017/S0031819112000393.

I also became ContemporaryArts ResearchUnit on Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/contemporaryarts.researchunit](http://www.facebook.com/contemporaryarts.researchunit)

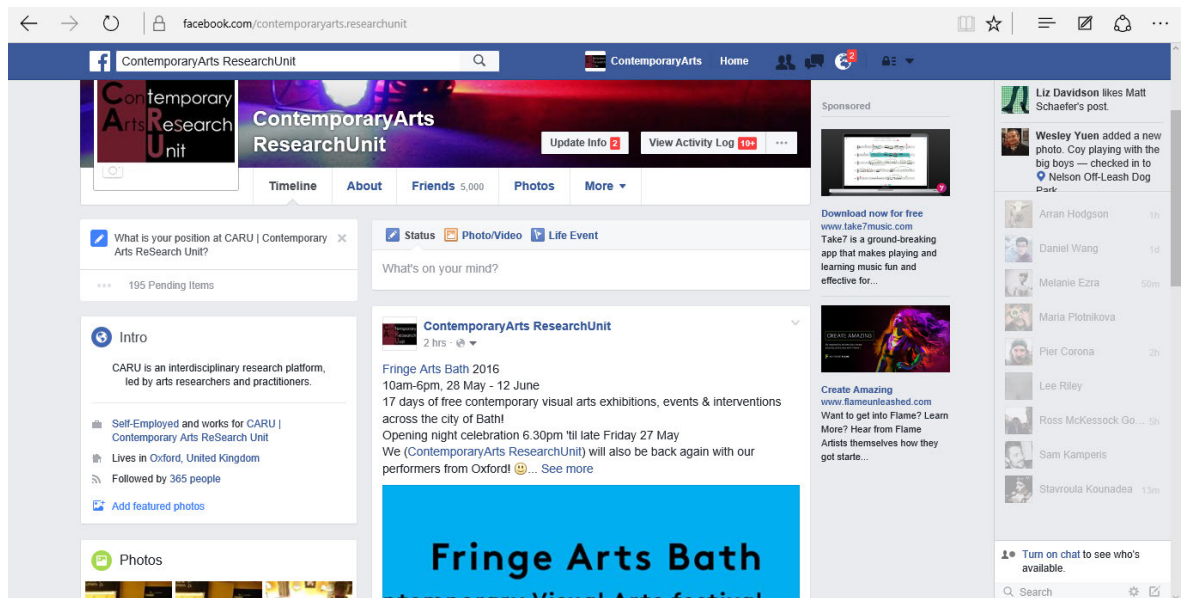


Fig. 31: A screenshot of the Facebook account for CARU

With its 5,000 'friends' (maximum number the account can have) and almost 700 followers on Facebook and Twitter, it now has a much larger social network, real and virtual, than the I as Aya Kasai. I am finally disappearing. Using the process of (non-)curatorial production through CARU, I feel that I have finally begun to create an artistless context, upon which Gen manifests.

## **PART II**

### **Pre-Tension: Gen & :**

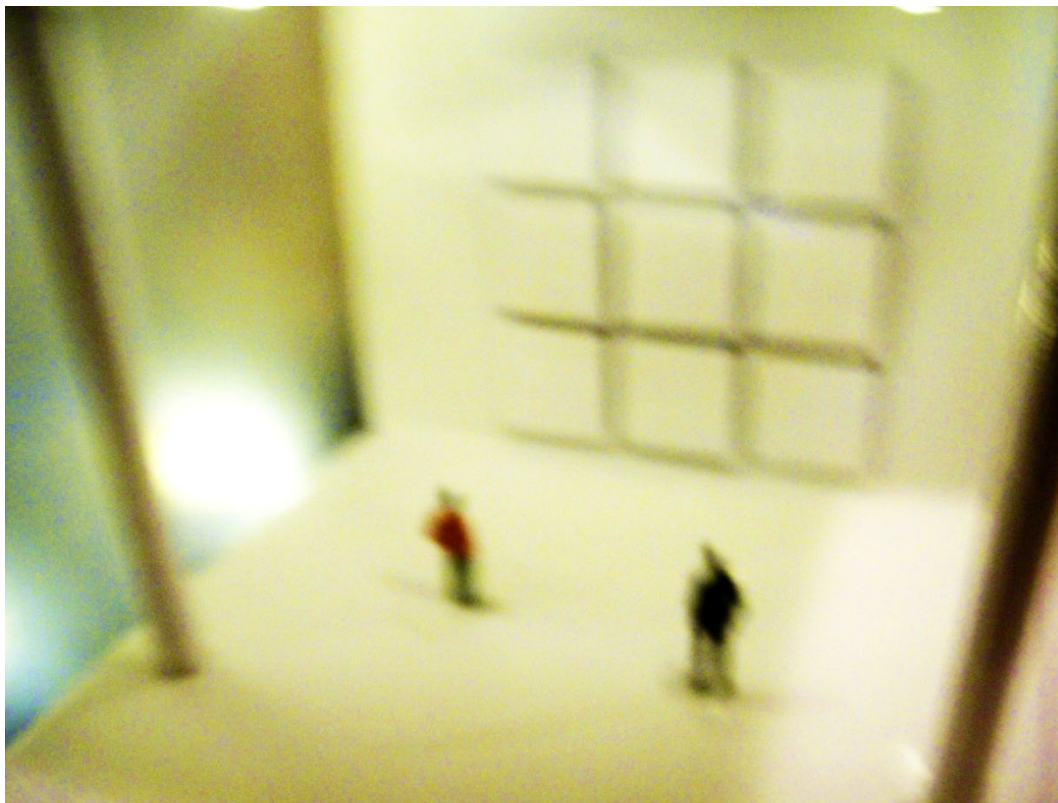


Fig. 32: A Real Exhibition

### **Re-Cognising Art via Ontological Nothingness**

## Chapter 3: of Art of Culture of

### 3.1 Perceiving Nothing

As stated by Rugoff, "*th[e] idea of maybe by unmaking something you can make something is one of the paradoxes of invisible art*"<sup>123</sup>. In exploring alternate methods of manifesting Ma, I searched further into what it means to create and thus to 'not create'. As Ma has already been explored extensively by various artists and researchers, including Goda and Loots, this essay summarises and utilises the definition offered by such existing research to overcome the inevitable issues regarding the evident elusiveness and subjectivity of the notion<sup>124</sup>. The function of Ma as a tool for revealing our conceptual outlines was summarised in Part I. Part II explores Gen and the re-cognition of the mechanisms of naming such a notion in the process of cognitive disequilibrium.

Gen means to become a Ma. But how does this happen? The biggest challenge in this project in terms of methodology centred in the shifting of the method of investigation from my tendency for cerebral observation and analysis towards a more experiential and embodied one. For this purpose, I initially used the unique and strange substance of corn flour as the primary material of inspiration and contemplation (rather than as a material for 'art object' making). John Cage described music as '*purposeless play...simply to wake up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord*'<sup>125</sup>. I strove to focus on the process of aimless play and continue to engage with the material intuitively and stop when things begin to make sense and play turns into thought. My effort for the childlike spontaneous and intuitive play had further led to my wish to view my entire world through the same mode of fluidity. In an effort to regain the ability to perceive without preconception and to

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<sup>123</sup> March Brown "Haywards gallery's invisible show: 'the best exhibition you'll never see' " posted on May 18 2012 <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/may/18/hayward-gallery-invisible-show>

<sup>124</sup> Sachiyo Goda "An Investigation into the Japanese Notion of 'Ma': Practising Sculpture within Space-time Dialogues" (PhD diss. University of Northumbria at Newcastle 2010)

<sup>125</sup> Tom Godfrey *Conceptual Art* (Phaidon Press Limited 1998) 63



experience the childlike creativity despite the developmental petrification of our senses, we utilize tools such as the arts as means to activate alternative states of mind. Alex Allmont explores this idea through *Play House* (2014, Figure 33)<sup>126</sup> or, as I like to call it, the rhythm 'un-maker'.



Fig. 33: Alex Allmont *Play House*

With its continuously changing rhythms, the piece forces the audience to maintain their perceptual fluidity, never reaching what Alex refers to as a 'comfort trap'. Alex and I have been discussing this notion, together with the cognitive 'tipping point' (which will be explored further in Chapter 6) for several years as our common interest. These notions in this context is closely linked to Piaget's theories of schemata and perceptual filtering. Alex's machine defies prediction – by using randomisers, the instrument makes it impossible to use the schemata filters or reach a state of equilibrium. Moreover, by erasing the musician and the composer through the use of the random, the piece raises the question of the position of the composer. While the position of the composer through the use of chance has been explored extensively by the likes of John Cage and Austin Sherlaw-Johnson (Appendix II), the resulting works are often considered "conceptual" rather than musical – *"the philosophical underpinnings are clearly more significant than any mere*

<sup>126</sup> "Mind-Blowing Music Machine Created with Lego " accessed December 20 2014  
<http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2014-04/26/lego-music-alex-allmont>

sound”<sup>127</sup>. Allmont's *Play House* (2014, Figure 33) however, refuses to compose by never declaring the ‘edges’ of the compositional framework; the process of musical creation is left to the audience in the listening necessarily, in the sound beyond the philosophy. By making the Self/Culture (the listener's rhythm recognition in this particular case) its context, the work makes everyone ‘the artist/creator’: ‘Music is not determined by its performers; what sounds are deemed as music or not is left up to the listener’<sup>128</sup>.

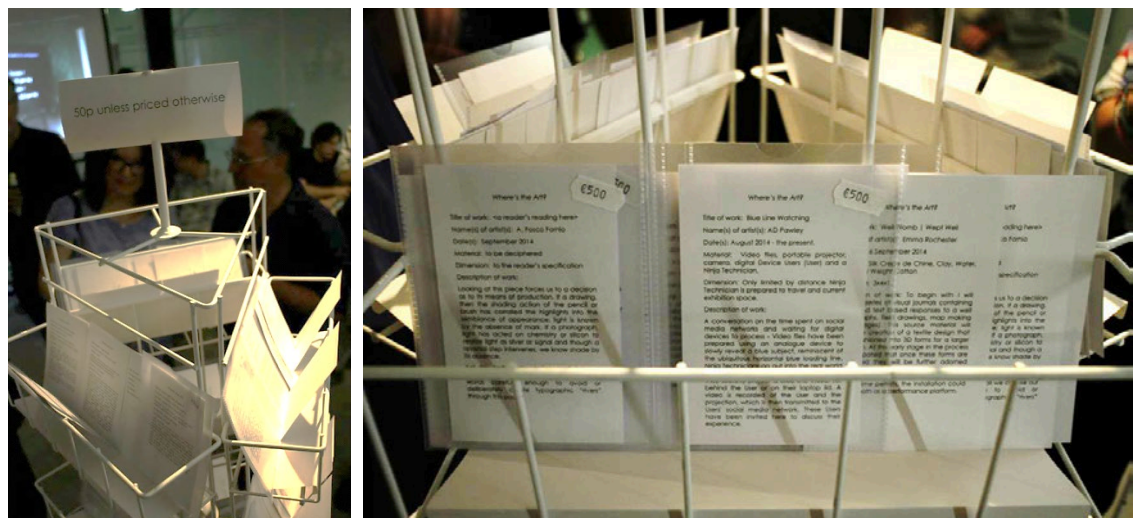


Fig. 34: CARU *Where's the Art?*

Craftsmanship has been another criterion that has been discussed extensively amongst my peers in relation to the making of art, particularly in terms of technical skills. What are the skills in crafting nothing? The Japanese value craftsmanship over uniqueness or antiquity<sup>129</sup>; however, within the Japanese culture, craftsmanship means consideration and in turn linked closely to morality<sup>130</sup>. Extra attention to detail in terms of the workmanship and accuracy of the object was paid to the construction of *Document of Authenticity* and *Bright Tailed and Bushy Eyed*, as I believed, and was indeed shown to be

<sup>127</sup> James Pritchett "Introduction to The music of John Cage " accessed March 3 2016 <http://rosewhitemusic.com/piano/writings/introduction-music-john-cage/#fn5ref>

<sup>128</sup> Yoshihide Otomo 2004 "Onkyo to wa nan datta no ka" [What was onkyo?] <http://www.japanimprov.com/yotomo/yotomoj/diary/diary-kiku16.html> (26 December 2006) as quoted in Lorraine Plourde "Disciplined Listening in Tokyo: Onkyo and Non-Intentional Sounds " *ETHNOMUSICOLOGY* 52(2) (2008) 270

<sup>129</sup> Dominic McIver Lopes Shikinen Sengu and the Ontology of Architecture in Japan " in *Global Theories of the Arts and Aesthetics*, ed. Susan L. Feagin (Blackwell Publishing Inc. 2007) 80.

<sup>130</sup> Yuriko Saito "The Moral Dimensions of Japanese Aesthetics " ed. Susan L. Feagin *Global Theories of the Arts and Aesthetics*, (Blackwells Publishing Inc. 2007) 94



the case, that the more time and effort I spent in the physical making, the more the piece was to be valued by those who encounter it and that the sincerity of my motivation in the making would be best conveyed; that the piece was not in any way a flippant gesture, even with the playful delivery. For this reason, for these particular pieces, even with the very conceptual core, it was vital that the objects were ultimately physical and, more importantly, that it gave the illusion of authenticity and thus authority. It was also crucial that my intervention was seamlessly interjected; in the case of *Bright Tailed and Bushy Eyed*, for instance, the piece had to assimilate the rest of the “real” posters. As the only artwork on the notice board/windows/doors, its authenticity and the consequential value was dependent on its disappearance. Furthermore, peer-review during a seminar showed that, once ‘noticed’, this subtlety in the intervention also induced a careful inspection of the object by the audience and hence an intimate and prolonged engagement with the piece. With *CARU*, I learnt (and am still learning) that its production takes more ‘skill’ and this ‘Art of’ authenticity than any other form of art I know. I do and am, whatever makes *CARU* (and thus the Gen experienced) authentic. In 2014, for its first anniversary show held at Modern Art Oxford, *CARU* put out an open call for an exhibit(ion) called *Where’s the Art?* (2014, Figure 34) for which “participants” sent in their “proposals” for invisible works to be “exhibited” at the event. The works (i.e. the submitted proposals) were printed on postcards and ‘sold’ on the night on a stand, all for 50 pence but for those in clear plastic sleeves (otherwise identical), which were priced at 500 Euros. The “crafting” skill with this piece lay in making the whole event, including the “open call” and the exhibition authentic as the producer. This function of authenticity is more explicit in 365, where almost no skill or subtlety of craftsmanship are required in creating the objects; it is produced simply by putting a layer of PVA hand print. I make a conscious effort not to craft or design the objects. While my ability to lay the hand print fast and cleanly may have improved as a “skill” in the last few years through the repetitive “practice”, one would hardly call it an “artistry”. The art in the object then, must lie elsewhere-n/-re.

### 3.2 Con-ceiving Nothing



Fig. 35: *The White Cube Gallery*

During my MA studies I became interested in the notion of inertia and began to use observation as a method of 'making', the result of which manifested as *A Secret Garden* (2011) and *The White Cube Gallery* (2011, Figure 35). While both of these works were ultimately exhibited as photographic series, I was left with the question as to the ontology of their art. My feeling was that the core of what I had created during the course of the investigation was not the photographs, which in my mind were mere documentation of my 'making', akin to Song Dong's photographs of his actions in *Writing diary with water* (1995-present, Figure 36)<sup>131</sup> or Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking* (1967, Figure 37)<sup>132</sup>. The question of documentation will be revisited later in Chapter 6 but first my interest was how else to realise (rather than convey) my observation directly. While I have also considered drawing, painting, writing, dance and video as a method for encapsulating my observation, none of those felt quite right for the purpose of the research. The motivation is not about showing off my technical skills as a fine artist; rather, it was about finding an 'observation' for me to embody and that embodies my observation, my act of the Art. Gen is where nothing changes; and I was to find a way to share this experience of

<sup>131</sup> "SONG Dong " accessed May 4 2015  
[http://visualarts.qld.gov.au/content/apt2002\\_standard.asp?name=APT\\_Artists\\_Song\\_Dong](http://visualarts.qld.gov.au/content/apt2002_standard.asp?name=APT_Artists_Song_Dong)

<sup>132</sup> "A LINE MADE BY WALKING " accessed June 8 2014 <http://www.richardlong.org/Sculptures/2011sculptures/linewalking.html>

pro-creative inertia. With this in mind, in the second year of my PhD studies I began my work on 365. It was not intended to be a work in itself as previously stated, as I wished to engage with it as a research material much like my approach to the corn flour mixture (the role of the corn flour mixture will be discussed further in Chapter 5).

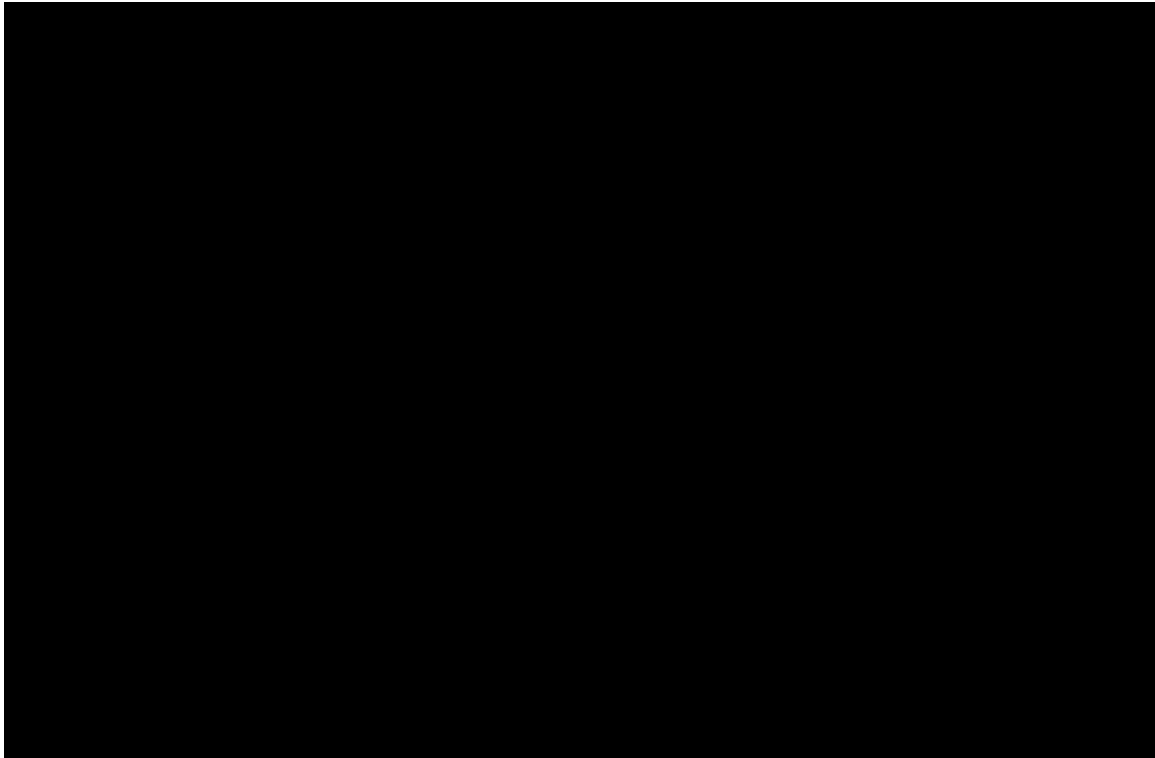


Fig. 36: Song Dong *Writing diary with water*

The physical aspect of *Document of Authenticity* was important as a contemporary art piece since, as discussed by Lopes<sup>133</sup>, its physicality is the only the 'fact' of its ontology. However, the theatre (i.e. the temporal ontology) of the object was where my interest lay and was the focus of my research. This thesis therefore focuses on Gen as an alternate method of art-making (or of non-art-making as it may be the case) – a type of Ma specifically manifested by producing nothing, rather than by reducing to nothing. As opposed to the minimalist approach of reduction, which exposes the movements of the surroundings by standing still (as the anxiety experienced in *horror vacui*), I propose that,

<sup>133</sup> Dominic McIver Lopes 'Shikinen Sengu and the Ontology of Architecture in Japan' ed. *Global Theories of the Arts and Aesthetics*, ed. Susan L. Feagin (Blackwell Publishing Inc. 2007): 77-84.

by dissolving such fundamental dichotomous relationships one could be the still Point/Line, where one “is” a non-position, with no spatiality nor temporality.



Fig. 37: Richard Long *A Line Made by Walking*, England

While Goda claims that the conditions under which Ma is most likely to be experienced were quietness, calmness and simplicity<sup>134</sup>, this paper suggests an alternate ontology of Ma through a pluralist over-signification and conceptual overload. In relation to the issue of creating a space as a platform and controlling its neutrality, the method quickly moved from considered reduction towards indiscriminate accumulation. 365 and the non-curatorial curation method of CARU (Figure 38) are examples of my practical exploration into such production technique. As opposed to Rauschenberg's white paintings (the Cagean plain plane) or Ad Reinhardt's Abstract Painting series (which, interestingly, according to Gardner, '*come as close as possible to pictures of nothing, certainly much closer than the all-white canvases of Robert Rauschenberg and others*'<sup>135</sup>), the pro-duction technique creates a void within the viewer through the non-void. Unlike the experience through reduction, the fascination evident in contemporary art with

<sup>134</sup> Sachiyo Goda "An Investigation into the Japanese Notion of 'Ma': Practising Sculpture within Space-time Dialogues" (PhD diss. University of Northumbria at Newcastle 2010) 15.

<sup>135</sup> Martin Gardner, *The Colossal Book of Mathematics* (W. W. Norton & Company First Edition edition 2004) 599.

repetition, accumulation, and the random in search of the pregnant nothing then seems to make sense.



Fig. 38: CARU, *Silencing the Silence*

Yayoi Kusama, whose work not only represents but is in itself the manifestation of her effort to overcome her fear of being obliterated by her schizophrenic hallucinations (Figures 39 – 44).

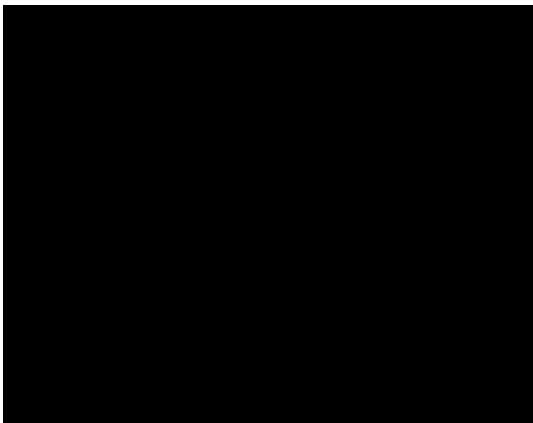


Fig. 39: Yayoi Kusama *Accumulation No. 2*

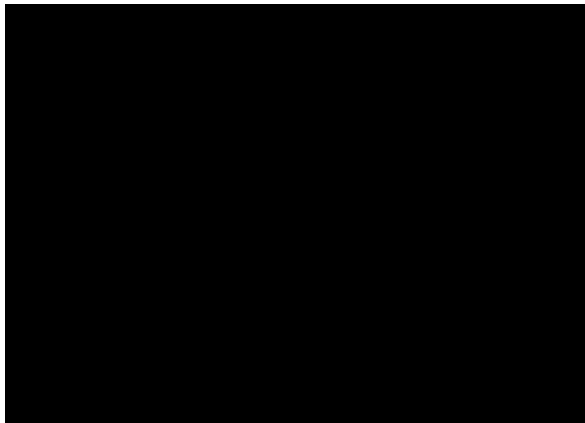


Fig. 40: Yayoi Kusama *Untitled*

*'One day I was looking at the red flower patterns of the tablecloth on a table, and when I looked up I saw the same pattern covering the ceiling, the windows and the walls, and finally all over the room, my body and the universe. I felt as if I had begun to self-obliterate, to resolve in the infinity of endless time*

*and the absoluteness of space, and be reduced to nothingness. I knew I had to run away lest I should be deprived of my life by the spell of the red flowers'*<sup>136</sup>.

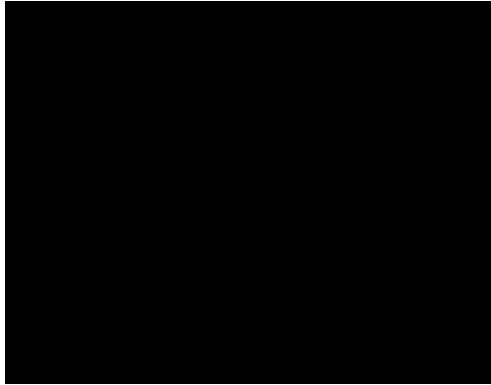


Fig. 41: Yayoi Kusama *Horse Play in Woodstock*



Fig. 42: Yayoi Kusama *Compulsion Furniture (Accumulation)*

Kusama, however, did not run away; she instead stared right back at it and ran into it. She describes herself as an 'obsessive artist'; her paintings, collages, soft sculptures, performance art and environmental installations all share a fixation with repetition, pattern, and accumulation. Whether flowers, nets or dots, the infinite repetitions of patterns and her compulsive exertion is founded on her neurotic energy:

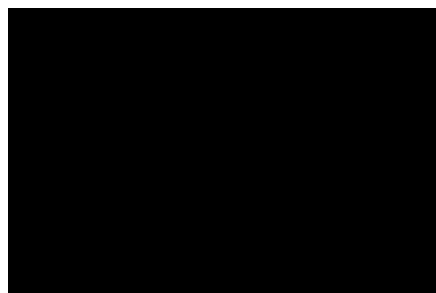


Fig. 43: Yayoi Kusama *Peep Show or Endless Love Show*

*'They are about obsession. I feel as if I were driving on the highways without ending until my death. I am deeply terrified by the obsessions crawling over my body, whether they come from within me or from outside. I fluctuate between feelings of reality and unreality'*<sup>137</sup>.

<sup>136</sup> Nilesch Patel "The Self-Obliteration of Yayoi Kusama " accessed December 13 2014  
<http://theculturetrip.com/asia/japan/articles/the-self-obliteration-of-yayoi-kusama>

<sup>137</sup> Yayoi Kusama *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama* (Tate Publishing 2013)

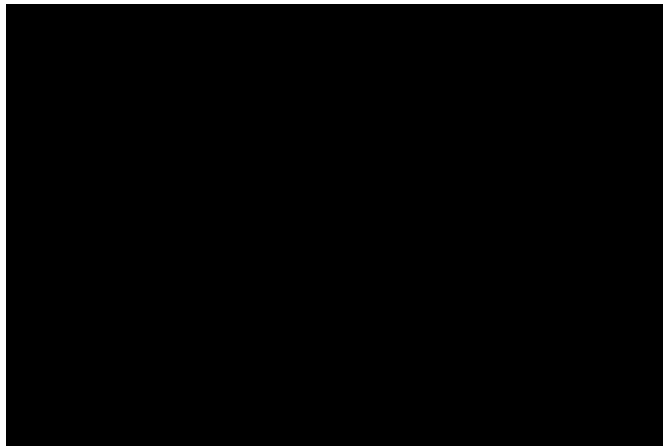


Fig. 44: Yayoi Kusama *The obliteration room*

Gripped by the idea of being passively obliterated by the world, at around age ten she began painting patterns as a proactive stance, creating paintings of repetitive patterns and covering all surfaces (walls, floors, canvases, and later, household objects and naked assistants) with polka dots, which were to become the trademark of her work. While her work has been attributed to feminism, minimalism, surrealism, pop art, and abstract expressionism, Kusama maintains that there are no conscious intentions as claimed in her art; rather her work is infused with autobiographical and psychological content; it is the materialization of her schizophrenic self-annihilation and, simultaneously, a form of self-cure through self-affirmation that proclaims 'I exist'. Art, as a proactive existential act, is therefore a form of self-therapy to Kusama for overcoming the fear of becoming nothing, what Kierkegaard called the 'dread'<sup>138</sup>. She commented in a 2000 interview with art historian, writer, and poet Akira Tatehata, "*that's why I am not concerned with Surrealism, Pop Art, Minimal Art or whatever. I am so absorbed in living my life.*"<sup>139</sup>

George Michelsen Foy, the author of *Zero Decibels: The Quest for Absolute Silence*, says, '*With this excess of noise in my life — I lived in the middle of New York City — the concept of absolute silence seemed like a balm, a refuge. I desired it physically with*

<sup>138</sup> Martin Gardner, *The Colossal Book of Mathematics* (W. W. Norton & Company First Edition edition 2004) 602

<sup>139</sup> Laura Hoptman Udo Kultermann and Yayoi Kusama *Yayoi Kusama* (London: Phaidon Press 2000) 14.

every cell of my being. Then it became an intellectual quest.'<sup>140</sup> For me, however, having spent most of my childhood in Tokyo, there's nothing quieter than the noise of the city. Nothing louder than the quiet of the countryside; as described by Gardner, '*gradually your ears became attuned to a delicate web of sounds, inaudible elsewhere, which George Eliot called "that roar which lies on the other side of silence"*'<sup>141</sup>. I love humans and all its noise; the effervescent life of cityscape wraps me up, melting me into an 'aesthetic' Ma i.e. Gen. Like Kusama, I explored various strategies for pro-creating, in order to share this experience of Gen no-thing-ness: by experimenting with cognitive disequilibrium through such works as *On the Possibility of Inertia* (Figure 45), *Document of Authenticity* and *.I.My.Me.Mine.*; through 365, by exploring the idea of the (non-)observational approach to research and production; and, more authentically, through CARU, with its (non-)curatorial approach to research and production.



Fig. 45: *Language Studies III: ≤[≤(≤Haiku)]*

<sup>140</sup> Nancy J. White "The search for absolute silence " posted July 24 2010  
[https://www.thestar.com/life/2010/07/24/the\\_search\\_for\\_absolute\\_silence.html](https://www.thestar.com/life/2010/07/24/the_search_for_absolute_silence.html)

<sup>141</sup> Martin Gardner *The Colossal Book of Mathematics* (W. W. Norton & Company First Edition edition 2004) 601



### 3.3 Imagining Nothing



Fig. 46: Albrecht Dürer *Great Piece of Turf* (*Das große Rasenstück*)

***The effect is to put brackets or inverted commas around this pocket of wild nature. It makes you feel that, for all its disorder and lack of boundaries, it is also a "something", contained and defined. A random stretch of undergrowth is made into a distinct and singular thing, as if it were an individual organism or a mysterious symbol.***

– Tom Lubbock, *Dürer, Albrecht: The Large Turf (1503)*<sup>142</sup>

Albrecht Dürer's *Great Piece of Turf* (*Das große Rasenstück*, 1503)<sup>143</sup>, within its tiny image, encapsulates its entire universe. We are offered its entirety, its whole worldview, through a very conscious partial (Ma) view, humbling us like a mammoth jungle. 一期一会

<sup>142</sup> Tom Lubbock "Dürer Albrecht: The Large Turf (1503) " posted January 18 2008 <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/great-works/d-rer-albrecht-the-large-turf-1503-770976.html>

<sup>143</sup> "Albrecht Dürer " accessed April 1 2013 <https://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2013/durer/fullscreen.shtm>

/ Ichi'go Ichi'e is a Japanese proverb that describes this phenomenon: in the flash encounter, therein lies an encapsulated entirety. In discussing the Japanese appreciation of the beauty of the incomplete, Charles Shiro Inouye makes a comparison between the Versailles Palace in France (Figure 27) and the Katsura Imperial Villa in Kyoto (Figure 48).

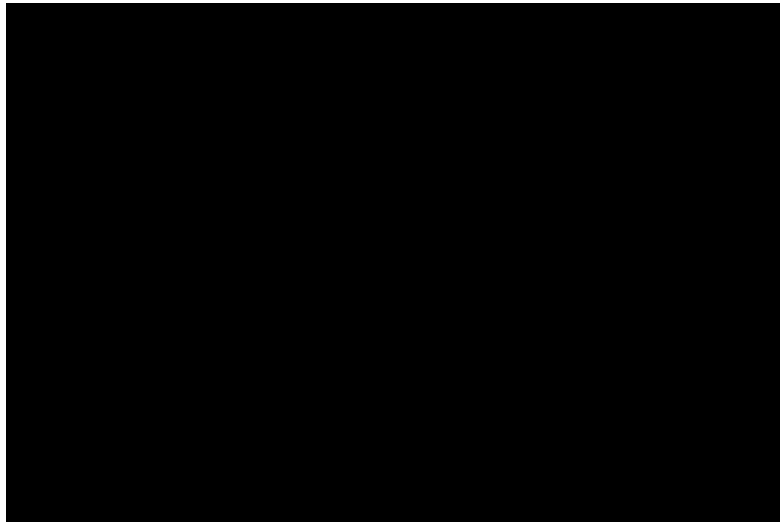


Fig. 47: A view of Versailles Palace France

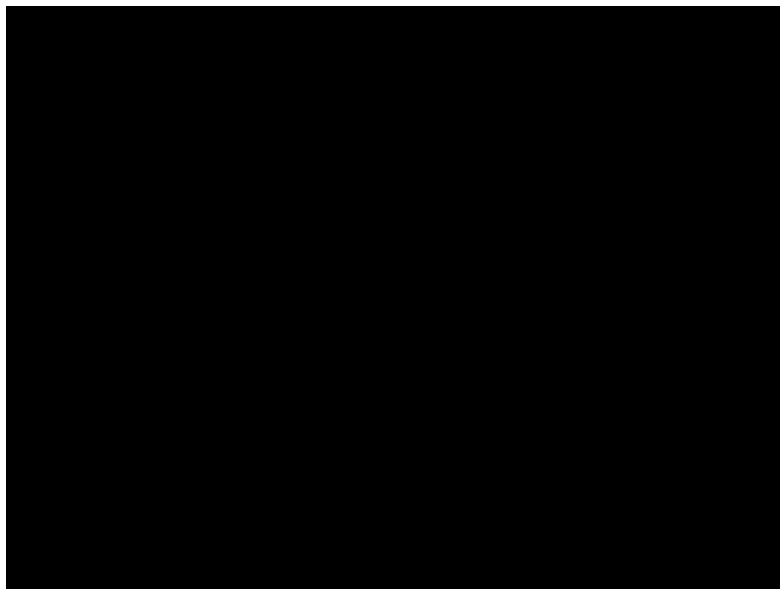


Fig. 48: A view of Katsura Imperial Villa Kyoto

The garden path at Katsura is designed in such way that one is unable to view it in its entirety, with trees and mounds placed strategically to block the view so to prevent

the visitor from getting the 'whole picture' at a glance. While the vast and grand space created at Versailles is designed to 'conform to us, to our point of view. We do not conform to it'<sup>144</sup>.



Fig. 49: An example of Ensoh

*Ensoh* (variants: *enso*, *ensō*, Figure 49) is a hand-drawn circle that symbolizes the absolute, the universe, and *Mu* (the void)<sup>145</sup>. It is usually made with a single, uninhibited brushstroke to express a moment when the boundaries between the mind and the body, the I and Ta (the Other), the *is* and the *is not* are thawed. While *ensoh* may be open or closed, when the circle is closed it is often seen as representing the Western notion of perfection, akin to the Platonic perfect form. However, my interest in terms of this thesis lies in the case where the circle is incomplete, with the *Ma* allowing for movement and development, which is often associated with the idea of *wabi-sabi*, the beauty of imperfection. In Zen practice, drawing *ensō* is a disciplined-creative practice of Japanese ink painting. The tools and mechanics of drawing the *ensō* are the same as those used in traditional Japanese calligraphy and ink paintings, using a soft Japanese brush (筆 *fudé*) and charcoal ink (墨 *sumi*) on *washi* (和紙 very thin Japanese paper), equipment I chose to use for *Language Studies III: ≤[≤(≤Haiku)]* (2012, Figure 50) for my performative actions.

<sup>144</sup> Charles Shiro Inouye *Evanescence and Form: An Introduction to Japanese Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2008) 96

<sup>145</sup> "Ensō 円相 – El Círculo Zen " accessed April 1 2015

<https://mariaeugeniamanique.wordpress.com/2013/02/08/enso%E5%86%86%E7%9B%B8-el-circulo-zen>



Fig. 50: *Language Studies III: ≤[≤(≤Haiku)]*

The room was arranged in such way that the audience was not able to get close to the corner where I performed, sitting on a low stall faced away from the audience. They were, however, able to gain a close-up view of my actions through the live streaming of the video projection on the wall above. Moreover, as the performance lasted continuously all day for the duration of the exhibition, what the audience experienced was further 'reduced' to a partial view. Not only did they have to trust that the video projection was indeed streamed "live", but also that I would carry out my action throughout without a break; for the "timelessness" mentioned repeatedly in the audience feedback, I believe, lay in the fine balance between the ambiguous space for imagination and the faith in the authenticity of *their* encounter (with a specific emphasis on 'their').

Schrodinger's Cat thought experiment has always interested me for its ontological ambiguity – the idea that one could both "be" and "not be", as an absolutely "ambiguous" (from Latin: ambo = both, agree = to drive) suspended state of being. Tom Cox's work, *Superposition* (2014, Figures 51 & 52), explores this idea of 'absolute uncertainty' (a phrase and concept that was to become key to my research method and

framework, particularly for my (non-)curatorial practice through CARU) regarding the notion of a multi-universe<sup>146</sup>.



Fig. 51: Tom Cox *Superposition*



Fig. 52: Tom Cox *Superposition*

Reviewing Douglas Hofstadter's *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*,

Gardner describes the infinity of the absolute:

*One aspect of that reality is the formal structure of mathematics: a structure that, as Gödel's famous undecidability proof shows, has infinitely many levels, none of which are capable of capturing all truth in one consistent system. Hofstadter puts it crisply: "Provability is a weaker notion than truth".<sup>147</sup>*

Upon contemplating Behren's definition of aesthetics in relation to Søren Kierkegaard<sup>148</sup> and Fernando Pessoa's<sup>149</sup> use of heteronyms as a strategy for transformation by revealing alternative realities, I was further inspired to question the physicality of Art; through *YokoJohn* (2010), for instance, I had begun exploring the method of storytelling to draw attention to the realms of imagination and their impact on

<sup>146</sup> Tom Cox "Superposition " (presented at CARU: Arts re Search Headington Hill Hall Oxford 2014 and at CARU: Nothing in Art Fringe Arts Bath Festival 2014 Bath 2014)

<sup>147</sup> Martin Gardner, *The Colossal Book of Mathematics* (W. W. Norton & Company First Edition edition 2004) 662.

<sup>148</sup> Ryan Bartholomew *Kierkegaard's Indirect Politics: Interludes with Lukacs, Schmitt, Benjamin and Adorno* (Rodopi 2014)

<sup>149</sup> Carmela Ciuraru "Fernando Pessoa & His Heteronyms " accessed December 1 2010

[https://www.poetrysociety.org/psa/poetry/crossroads/tributes/fernando\\_pessoa\\_his\\_heteronyms](https://www.poetrysociety.org/psa/poetry/crossroads/tributes/fernando_pessoa_his_heteronyms)

our perception of reality. Is reality possible? Probable? Quoting William James, 'There is no possible point of view from which the world can appear an absolutely single fact' and analogizing the Zen rock garden of Ryoan-ji, Hassan<sup>150</sup> discusses the pragmatist truth: 'it remains contextual, perspectival, fully conditioned by value and belief. The result is a perception of reality as something not given, not even discovered, but dynamically constructed.' All experiences are interpreted and thus created; individual senses mean individual memories on which to base the interpretations and thus creation of our current reality. How certain is our sense of knowing, particularly of our own being and our own reality? Perhaps what makes a phenomenon real is its response to, and its impact on, its surroundings. Rather than questioning the empirical authenticity of its independent ontology, it may be more beneficial to question the construct of the individual reality and its potential impact.



Fig. 53: Professor Beverley Clack

In 'After Freud: Phantasy and Imagination in the Philosophy of Religion'<sup>151</sup>, presented at CARU's symposium, of Art of Culture of, Professor Beverley Clack of the Department of

<sup>150</sup> Ihan Hassan "In the mirror of the sun: Reflections on Japanese and American literature Basho to Cage " *World Literature Today* 69: 2 (1995): 304-312

<sup>151</sup> Beverly Clack "After Freud: Phantasy and Imagination in the Philosophy of Religion " *Philosophy Compass* 3/1 (2008): 203-221

Religion and Philosophy at Oxford Brookes University, examines the relationship between religion, imagination and creativity (Figure 53). While Freud has in the past been accused of reducing religion to an illusion, Clack argues that Freud in fact considered the meaning and impact of religion to be absolutely significant in understanding the human experience. According to Clack, Religion is a manifestation of our deeply rooted wishes and anxieties, with imagination and creativity as the very act of this manifestation; to understand the mechanisms of religion therefore, is to understand the essence of the human animal.

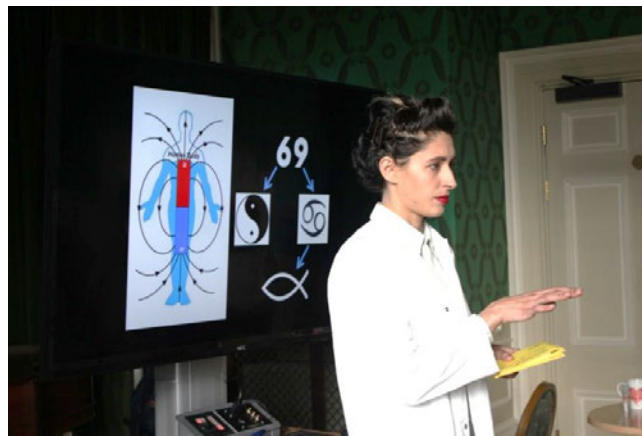


Fig. 54: Dr Misha Maglev

The key to the idea of superposition is that it is a state of being, a way of (dis)orientating oneself, where the I is positioned everywhere and nowhere simultaneously in the LineDot dimension. Kounadea<sup>152</sup> (Figure 54, performing as Dr Maglev) claims that the Art, like a kiss, does not reside in the physical or conceptual – rather it lies in the real encounter between the subjects. The notion of 'I', in relation to 'others', gives meaning to existence and the vital secure base, the sense of centred foundation upon which to construct our understanding of the here and now. From the moment of self-recognition in infancy, the awareness of oneself develops, into a Cartesian self-concept: 'Cognito ergo sum'. But does one's consciousness, in this case the sense of own self, really guarantee any

<sup>152</sup> Stavroula Kounadea "Silence: The Hidden Protagonist " (paper presented at *Silencing the Silence* OVADA Oxford 2013).



kind of reality? The oft quoted Chinese proverb 'If a tree falls and nobody is around to hear it, does it make a sound?' prompts the question, does existence equal being? How real is a being without existence and vice versa; in other words, how important is relativity with regards to being a being, beyond mere existence?



Fig. 55: Roger Perkins



Fig. 56: Dr Margret Godel

Can an existence be more or less real because of this degree of beingness? How real, for instance, are Pessoa and Kierkegaard's heteronyms, Lana Newstro<sup>153</sup>, Richard Layzell's imaginary collaborator Tania Koswycz<sup>154</sup>, the 'art' of *A Real Exhibition* (2013; Figures 32, 58, 86, 89), Dr Margret Godel's *Toidi Project* and its research into Liporaptor<sup>155</sup> (Figure 56), or Roger Perkins' *Greenham Holiday Resort*<sup>156</sup> (Figure 55)? What does it mean for something to be actual? And thus become a being or a phenomenon? How much do our emotional responses mean to our judging of the realness of phenomena? Can one somehow 'dilute' truth through the process of creating the fiction of fiction like John in *YokoJohn* (2010)?

<sup>153</sup> Jonathan Jones "Invisible art: the gallery hoax that shows how much we hate the rich " posted September 30 2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2014/sep/30/invisible-art-hoax-lana-newstrom-cbc>

<sup>154</sup> "Cream Pages: The dialogues of Tania Koswycz and Richard Layzell " accessed June 15 2014 [http://www.rescen.net/publications/cream\\_pages.html#.WBJ-mIXLIU](http://www.rescen.net/publications/cream_pages.html#.WBJ-mIXLIU)

<sup>155</sup> "The Toidi Project " accessed July 4 2014 <https://toidiproject.wordpress.com/about>

<sup>156</sup> "History of The Greenham Holiday Resort " last modified May 2013 [http://www.rogerperkins.com/current\\_work/greenham\\_resort.htm](http://www.rogerperkins.com/current_work/greenham_resort.htm)



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Please note: this page is absolutely NOT part of the thesis nor an 'artwork'



Fig. 57: CARU

With the recent advances in technology, it seems that this perpetual question of dualism regarding the “actual” has been further complicated by the expanding boundaries of our reality. How real and hence how much of a ‘being’ is a virtual avatar, for instance? CARU (Figure 57) was, and still is, just a logo; with its many virtual ‘friends’, it stands precariously on the edge of reality. It is, however, absolutely authentic. Upon considering the reality of the unreal, the question of quality e.g. concentration, depth, intensity etc., of truth was raised: does truth lie on a quantifiable continuum if we consider it to be something that can be somehow weakened, diluted or reduced?

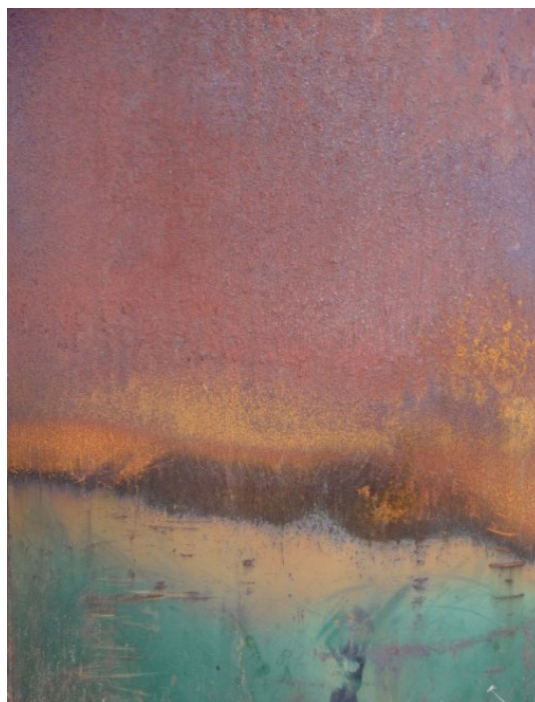


Fig. 58: A Real Exhibition

Within the debate between the phenomenological against the empirical observation in relation to the authenticity and validity of experience, in discussing mystical/spiritual experiences, like Freud, William James maintains that, as long as it has real effects, all experiences are as real as any reality can be<sup>157</sup>. This is echoed by R.D. Laing by his description of the monologue of patients with schizophrenia; to some, they are incoherent murmur, while to others they represent crucial pieces of the puzzle that show glimpses of the usually concealed internal worlds and their 'authentic' reality. Laing valued the content of psychotic behaviour and speech as a valid expression of distress, albeit wrapped in an enigmatic language of personal symbolism which is meaningful only from within their situation<sup>158</sup>. Outside of Gen, NoBody occupies the same place/time, the non-existent LineDot; together with our remarkable adaptability, our most valuable survival tool, such ontological idiosyncrasies are inevitable. Lopes emphasises the importance of cross-cultural studies in understanding the human reality and its impact. By extending the definition of culture to Self/Culture, this paper necessarily further extends this argument in support of the value of such approach to the function of language and representations, including the ontology of the 'Art' and Gen.

Goda, reflecting on the difficulty of defining Ma through language – any language – for her cross-cultural study, dedicates her research *'to the ineffable qualities that lie beyond the scope of linguistic expression'*<sup>159</sup>. Interestingly, one notable aspect of Japanese religious practice is a relative lack of what one may call scriptural habit<sup>160</sup>. Shinto religion has no particular 'holy book(s)' as one may find in other religions. Rather,

*'a continuing affirmation of space, maintained even to the point of losing awareness of the fundamental religiosity of one's cultural movements, defines*

<sup>157</sup> William James *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (Penguin Classics New Ed edition 1985)

<sup>158</sup> Ronald David Laing *The Divided Self* (Pelican 1965).

<sup>159</sup> Sachiyo Goda "An Investigation into the Japanese Notion of 'Ma': Practising Sculpture within Space-time Dialogues" (PhD diss. University of Northumbria at Newcastle 2010) 22.

<sup>160</sup> Charles Shiro Inouye *Evanescence and Form: An Introduction to Japanese Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2008) 54

one. This kind of spatial orientation devolves towards the inclusion of every act as an expression of meaning and identification'<sup>161</sup>.

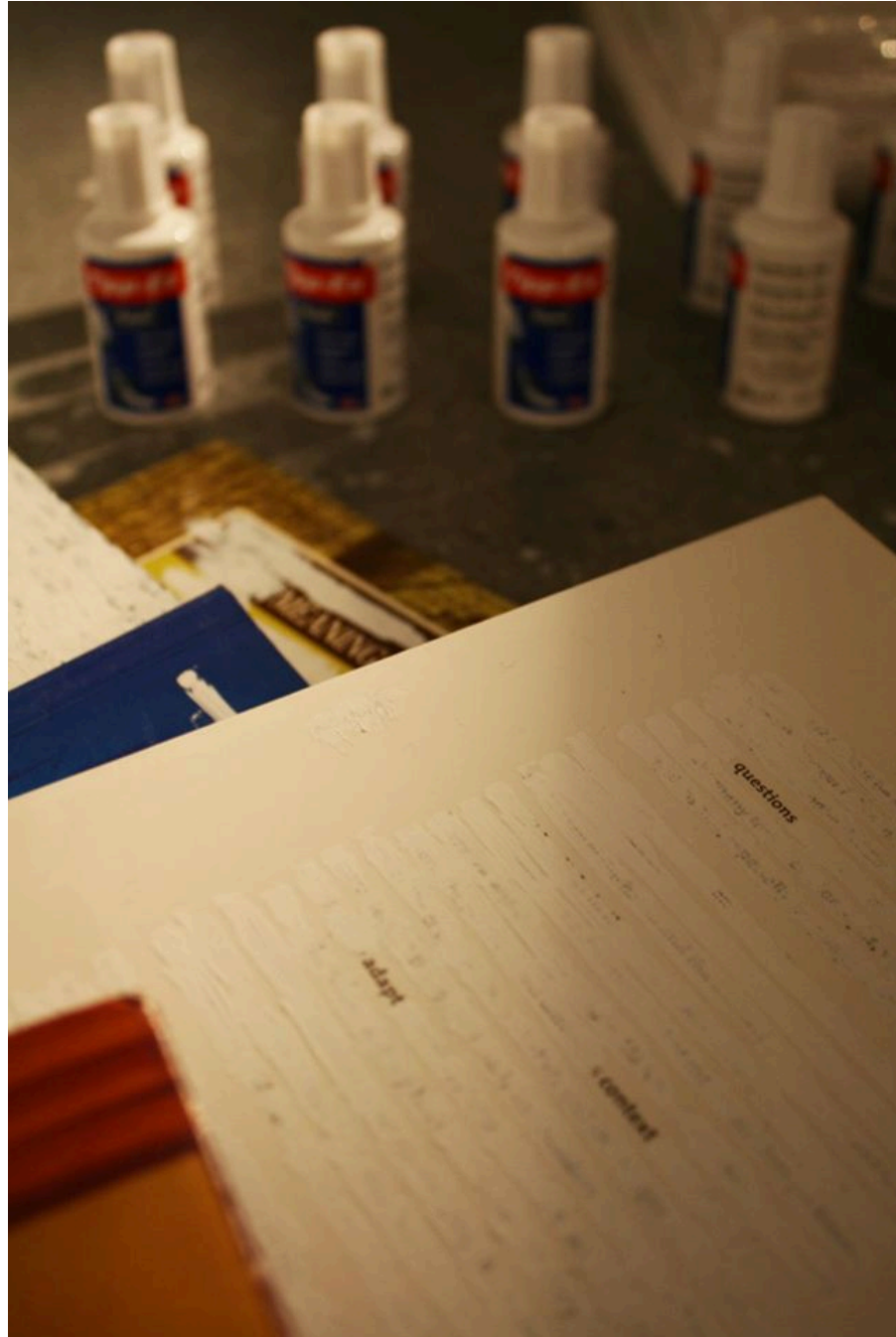


Fig. 59: Language Studies III: ≤[≤(≤Haiku)]

Watsuji contrasts the Japanese term 存在 *sonzai* (existence) against its European counterparts. The character 存 (*son*) designates preservation, while 在 (*zai*) designates

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<sup>161</sup> Yukiko Saito. *The Moral Dimension of Japanese Aesthetics* p.57

the subject's staying-in-place against departure. Taken together, unlike "is" or *sein*, *sonzai* hence means '*the self-sustenance of the self as between-ness*'.<sup>162</sup> Ethics, then, is the manner of being for such a subject as its activities unfold in the practical actions of the everyday.

***A row of trees in the distance, toward the slope...***

***But what is a row of trees? There are just trees.***

***'Row' and the plural 'trees' are names, not things.***

***Unhappy human being, who put everything in order,***

***Draw lines from thing to thing,***

***Place labels with names on absolutely real trees,***

***And plot parallels of latitude and longitude***

***On the innocent earth itself, which is so much greener and full of flowers!***

*'XLV', Alberto Caeiro, A Little Larger Than The Entire Universe*<sup>163</sup>

Framing through 'naming' of our world is necessary as an evolutionary cultural tool. I have always been interested in language and its function in framing, and thus impacting, our experiences. For Vygotsky<sup>164</sup>, language has a particular role in learning and development. Language is used by children as a vital cognitive device for making sense of their world. It is essential in solving problems, overcoming impulsive actions and planning a solution before trying it out. However, it is argued that the main purpose of language for children is social<sup>165</sup>; even theorists of *cogito* necessarily think through language. The very use of language reflects the essential communality of human existence: '*the notion of individual consciousness is no more than an abstraction in the face of the practical everydayness of [human] activities.*'<sup>166</sup>

<sup>162</sup> Jeffery Wu "The Philosophy of As-Is: The Ethics of Watsuji Tetsuro " *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs* (2010) 99.

<sup>163</sup> Fernando Pessoa *A Little Larger Than The Entire Universe* (Penguin Books 2006) 41.

<sup>164</sup> "Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) " accessed October 21 2008 <http://mennta.hi.is/starfsfolk/solrunb/vygotsky.htm>

<sup>165</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> Jeffery Wu "The Philosophy of As-Is: The Ethics of Watsuji Tetsuro " *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs* (2010) 99.



Fig. 60: A view of Translating - Pairing Practices workshop

Though language may be key in the development of culture and civilization, it can be a double-edged sword; for its advantages are, in fact, also its limitations. By simplifying and condensing potentially complex notions for the purpose of communication into compact symbols, it inescapably narrows the perceived range of its meaning. Alternatively, because of its potential incapability to convey the exact meaning, it leaves the receiver with too many possible interpretations. Last year, Oxford Dictionaries selected an emoji as the Word of the Year<sup>167</sup>. While the decision has been ridiculed by some, artist, designer, and author Joe Hale, who translated Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* into emojis, claims that *'the prevalence of emoji indicates we're trying to transcend language and achieve some higher form of communication'*<sup>168</sup>.



Fig. 61: A view of Translating - Pairing Practices workshop

<sup>167</sup> Vyvyan Evans "Beyond words: how language-like is emoji?" accessed October 8 2015  
<http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2015/11/emoji-language>

<sup>168</sup> Beckett Mufson "Author Translates All of 'Alice in Wonderland' into Emojis " posted Jan 2 2015  
[http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/en\\_uk/blog/author-translates-all-of-alice-in-wonderland-into-emojis](http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/en_uk/blog/author-translates-all-of-alice-in-wonderland-into-emojis)

In response to the Word of the Year (or 'Symbol' of the Year in this case) news and discussing the importance of language despite the infinite variations and changes in its forms, Vyvyan Evans claims, '*In the absence of telepathy, humans have language*'<sup>169</sup>. He talks of two key functions of language: first being the descriptive, ideational function, where language is used to communicate an idea, and the second being the active, interactive/interpersonal function, where language is used as an action to affect the world<sup>170</sup>. In the vein of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis<sup>171</sup> concerning the impact of language on our perception, this research proposes that changes in the perception of notions as Gen could in turn alter the perception of one's own being and thus the relationship with own surroundings. In *The Significance of Ethics as the Study of Human being*, Watsuji focuses on the Gen 間 of NinGen 人間 (human being) in examining Japanese ethics<sup>172</sup>. Emphasising the sense of 'in-between-ness' that the character for Gen (which is also the character for Ma) represents, Watsuji claims that NinGen contains three meaning strands:

- as individual human being
- as socially enmeshed human beings
- as the space (Ma) between beings in which the enmeshment occurs

In such a condition, '*one must see the two sides of [being both/neither individual and/or social] the person as being in a constant state of tension*'<sup>173</sup>. Human being is hence a "*unity of contradictions*"<sup>174</sup>, an ontological condition, and Ma is the space where such delicate ambiguity is temporarily held in between the ontologically schizophrenic states.

<sup>169</sup> Vyvyan Evans "Beyond words: how language-like is emoji?" accessed October 8 2015 <http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2015/11/emoji-language>

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> "Sapir-Whorf hypothesis " accessed July 7 2015 [http://psychology.wikia.com/wiki/Sapir-Whorf\\_hypothesis](http://psychology.wikia.com/wiki/Sapir-Whorf_hypothesis)

<sup>172</sup> Robert Edgar Carter *Encounter with Enlightenment: A Study of Japanese Ethics* (State University of New York Press 2001): 126.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid: 127

<sup>174</sup> Jeffery Wu "The Philosophy of As-Is: The Ethics of Watsuji Tetsuro " *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs* (2010) 98.



Fig. 62: Language Studies II: ≤(≤Haiku)

During the course of the research, in addition to attending relevant exhibitions, concerts, seminars, symposia and workshops in both Europe and in Japan, I have had the opportunity to present several new pieces that I have been developing based on my thesis, which have led to some productive reflections, feedback, and discussions. Several new terms have since emerged in relation to 間 *Ma*, including 無 *Mu* (Nothingness), 場 *Ba* (Place), 他 *Ta* (Other), and 間 *Gen* (/Jen/Zjen/Xen/Zen). While all translations in the bracket are as broad as the understanding of *Ma* as 'space', *Gen* stood out to me for its intangibility. The impact of its presence however, has been very much tangible in my observation. Moreover, the fact that the concept exists at all in itself indicates substantial ontological impact. Unless for academic purposes, as is the case with Watsuji's study<sup>175</sup> for

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<sup>175</sup>



instance, Gen is not often spoken of by the ordinary Japanese as a concept in itself but usually only as part of its context; yet, whether definable or representable, there must be enough in its essence for the notion to manifest at all, significant enough to warrant our attention.

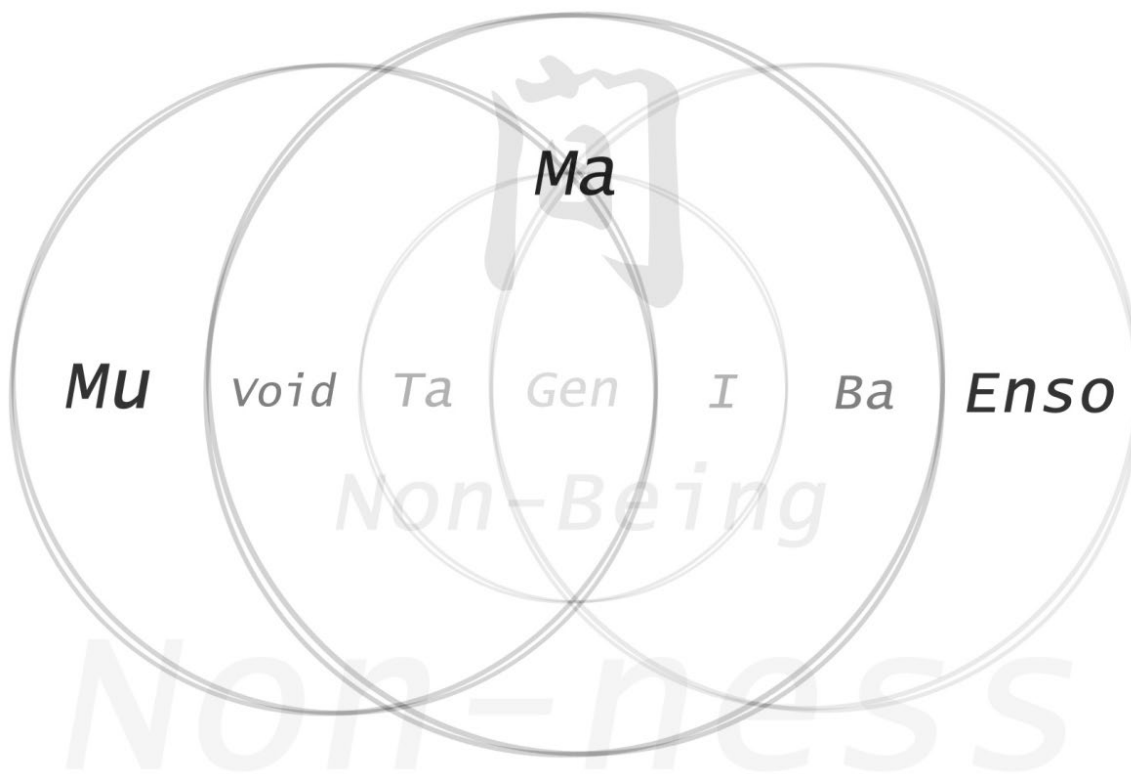


Fig. 63: Gen diagram

This peculiar ontological position is similar to that of 'silence'. Cage's 4'33" was inspired by the notion of tacitness and by Rauschenberg's work where he spent a month erasing an artwork by Willem de Kooning, with the resulting 'artwork' being a framed white paper<sup>176</sup>. We tend to acknowledge and accept silence's 'fact', despite our knowledge that the condition for its existence is near impossibility<sup>177 178 179</sup>. The idea and its impact seem to suffice as to its validity, at least as a 'relative' fact (and accept the 'authenticity'

<sup>176</sup> March Brown "Haywards gallery's invisible show: 'the best exhibition you'll never see' " posted on May 18 2012 <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/may/18/hayward-gallery-invisible-show>

<sup>177</sup> Salomé Voegelin Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art (New York: Continuum 2010) 83.

<sup>178</sup> "Is it possible to make a perfect vacuum?" accessed April 3 2016 <http://www.physlink.com/Education/AskExperts/ae290.cfm>

<sup>179</sup> George Michelsen Foy Zero Decibels: The Quest for Absolute Silence (Scribner 2014)

of such a grey area). Artworks have been created, books have been written, research has been conducted (including this very paper) on the idea of silence – all based on its assumed validity, fundamentally rooted in hypothesis and intuition rather than empirical facts. Its 'proof' and validity lies in our implicit acknowledgement of its hypothetical presence. *'In every field, a principle direction of the 20th century was the attempt to capture the "non-perceptible"'* observed Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia<sup>180</sup>.

***Do you know that even when you look at a tree and say, 'That is an oak tree', or 'that is a banyan tree', the naming of the tree, which is botanical knowledge, has so conditioned your mind that the word comes between you and actually seeing the tree?***

– Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Freedom From The Known* (1969)<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Rhiannon Starr "Invisible: Art About the Unseen 1957-2012 " accessed June 3 2014  
<https://rhiannonstarr.wordpress.com/2012/07/14/invisible-art-about-the-unseen-1957-2012>

<sup>181</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti *Freedom From The Known* (HarperCollins Publishers 1969) 25.

## Chapter 4: Arts re Search

### 4.1 Valuing Nothing

The situation regarding the factual ontology and validity of language is similar in the research on Ma, including that of Loots'<sup>182</sup> and Goda's work<sup>183</sup>. Ralph RugoffIn, Hayward Gallery's director and curator of the show *Invisible: Art about the Unseen 1957-2012*, claims, 'In music you only have one person do a piece of silent music but somehow in art, artists have kept coming back to the subject and are always loading different content on to the idea of invisibility or emptiness'<sup>184</sup>. The truism regarding the ontological validity of concepts as silence, Ma, and Gen revealed above led me to question the function of such unstable "authenticity". Ray Lee, in discussing the creative and conceptual drive behind his work (Figure 65), highlights the idea of the 'wonder', particularly in contrast to the Kantian conception of the 'sublime'<sup>185</sup>, describing it as offering a temporary suspension of disbelief and thus freeing us to all possibilities of "what if". Annelinde Kirchgaesser and Markus Stefan also explore this idea through their work, using observation as a method of creation, as was the case in *The first act of creation* (2014), presented at CARU's of Art of Culture of (Figure 64).



Fig. 64: Annelinde Kirchgaesser & Markus Stefan *The first act of creation*

<sup>182</sup> Christopher Loots "The Ma (間) of Hemingway: Interval Absence and Japanese Aesthetics in In Our Time " The Hemingway Review Vol . 29 (Spring 2010)

<sup>183</sup> Sachiyo Goda "An Investigation into the Japanese Notion of 'Ma': Practising Sculpture within Space-time Dialogues" (PhD diss. University of Northumbria at Newcastle 2010)

<sup>184</sup> March Brown "Haywards gallery's invisible show: 'the best exhibition you'll never see' " posted on May 18 2012 <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/may/18/hayward-gallery-invisible-show>

<sup>185</sup> Raymond Asgeir Lee "Sound and Wonder: the Sonaesthetic Theatre of Ray Lee" (PhD diss. Oxford Brookes University 2014): 25.

Yves Klein understood that faith is necessary in the practice and appreciation of art as it is to religion. Both art and religion require an ability to make a leap of faith into a human experience with no immediate material dimension<sup>186</sup>. In appreciating art, we often willingly fall down the esoteric rabbit hole, trusting the doubt and the internal consistency of the world created. The wonder of performance, as posited by Lee such as that of theatre and magic, or of literature such as novels and poetry, offers a temporary suspension of disbelief<sup>187</sup>. *Making an Art Manifest* (2016, Appendix II: 15) has not yet happened at this point in time as I type these words. I know however, that the event will have happened by the time this thesis is published. I am listing this as an actualised piece in my list of works in Appendix II and III. Not because I know that the event will happen. But because I intend it to. The piece exists in the LineDot.

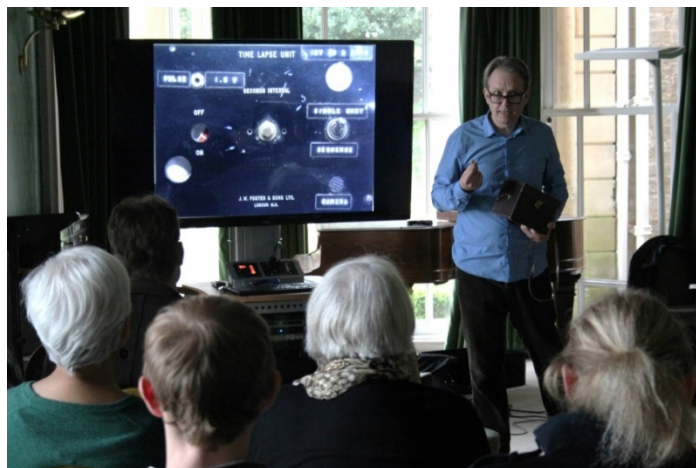


Fig. 65: Ray Lee *The Ethometric Museum*

The role of imagination is vital in creating and discerning manifold realities. Based on these ideas I began exploring the impact of such suspended reality through *On the Possibility of Inertia*, *Document of Authenticity* and *CARU*. In working with the idea of actuality I had discovered that the embodied method of production and presentation,

<sup>186</sup> Richard Dormant "Invisible: Art About the Unseen 1957-2012 Hayward Gallery review " posted June 12 2012 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-reviews/9325152/Invisible-Art-About-the-Unseen-1957-2012-Hayward-Gallery-review.html>

<sup>187</sup> Raymond Asgeir Lee "Sound and Wonder: the Sonaesthetic Theatre of Ray Lee" (PhD diss. Oxford Brookes University 2014)

albeit pseudo-performatively occasionally, was vital in allowing the audience to 'directly' experience the metaphysical presence of the nothing. However, due to the very direct nature of the 'making' method, the question of power-relationships between the artist and the audience was raised in response to my earlier work, such as *YokoJohn*, challenging me to further experiment with new strategies. This, together with questions raised regarding the ethics documents for my practice, led to the creation of *Document of Authenticity*. In countering the power relationship created by the artist-audience dynamic, *Document of Authenticity* sought to render such distinction meaningless through explicitly defining the outline of the (improbable) Self/Culture.

#### 4.2 Signifying Nothing

***That is the fact; that we don't see the fact. There is a higher order of fact – which is that we are not seeing the direct fact. This is the fact from which we must start***

– David Bohn, *On Dialogue*<sup>188</sup>

Wonder in terms of self-concept offers a LineDot space/condition, where the not knowing of the being and the uncertainty of the I are proactive acts of ontological liberation and creation, rather than a limitation or its negation. In explaining the reason for preferring the idea of wonder over the 'sublime', Lee points to the fact that wonder is a verb, while sublime is a noun<sup>189</sup>. Yayoi Kuasama's Self-Oblietration, then, is indeed an existential strategy, an act of ontological wonder. A proactive act of erasing the I, led by the I, which in turn authenticates it. Alex Arteaga<sup>190</sup>, claims that ontological schizophrenia is an innate existential strategy, describing the process of sensuous framing as the act of shifting from the action mode to the receptive mode; relating in particularly to the notion

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<sup>188</sup> David Bohn *On Dialogue* ed. Lee Nichol (Routledge 1996) 55.

<sup>189</sup> Raymond Asgeir Lee "Sound and Wonder: the Sonaesthetic Theatre of Ray Lee" (PhD diss. Oxford Brookes University 2014): 25.

<sup>190</sup> The lecture 'Knowledge as Transformation – and How Aesthetic Practice Can Contribute to It' presented as part of Agents of Change hosted by Social Sculpture Research Unit in January 2011 on Headington Campus Oxford Brookes University 2011.

of epoché, he maintains, akin to Watsuji's argument regarding the Japanese Ontology of the Self in relation to the Gen (Ma) of NinGen (human), that we are all schizophrenic in that we all possess the ability to oscillate between the two modes of being while sustaining the essential variability that allows creativity and aliveness<sup>191</sup>. Wonderment then, can be understood as a fundamental existential drive for the NinGen.

***Taking ningen's condition of intersubjective betweeness as the point of departure, the laws of ethics are to be located in the double structure of human existence as both individual and totality. This structure is essentially a movement of negation that unfolds through the dialectic between individual and totality, the movement of absolute negativity returning to itself in the form of the nonduality of self and other.***

– Jeffrey Wu, *The Philosophy of As-Is: The Ethics of Watsuji Tetsuro* (2001)<sup>192</sup>

Watsuji believes that NinGen represents simultaneously the public (世間 se-ken) and the individual human beings living in it. The character 世 se/yo is equivalent to "generation" thereby giving the term "public" a historical dimension, while 間 Ken, which is also the character for Ma and the second character of 人間 NinGen (humanity), implies 'living and dynamic betweeness, as a subjective interconnection of acts.'<sup>193</sup> The ontology of NinGen 'entails the unity of the sociality and individuality of humanity'<sup>194</sup> and that the self is fundamentally rooted in the intersubjective in-between-ness and thus cannot be defined without the network of social space<sup>195</sup>.

I have come to realise that the core to my practice is the articulation of this phenomenon. Art is often said to be the subjective response to our experiences<sup>196</sup>; my re-

<sup>191</sup> The lecture 'Knowledge as Transformation – and How Aesthetic Practice Can Contribute to It' presented as part of Agents of Change hosted by Social Sculpture Research Unit in January 2011 on Headington Campus Oxford Brookes University 2011.

<sup>192</sup> Jeffrey Wu "The Philosophy of As-Is: The Ethics of Watsuji Tetsuro " *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs* (2010) 99.

<sup>193</sup> Jeffrey Wu "The Philosophy of As-Is: The Ethics of Watsuji Tetsuro " *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs* (2010) 98.

<sup>194</sup> Joshua A Fogel *The Emergence of the Modern Sino-Japanese Lexicon: Seven Studies* (East Asian Comparative Literature and Culture) (Brill X 216 Pp. ed. Edition 2015) 34.

<sup>195</sup> Senko K. Maynard *Linguistic Emotivity: Centrality of Place, the Topic-comment Dynamic, and an Ideology of Pathos in Japanese Discourse* (John Benjamins Publishing Company 2002) 67.

<sup>196</sup> Kevin Mak Rabida "Why Contemporary Art Sucks " posted on March 4 2015 <http://www.ucreative.com/articles/why-contemporary-art-sucks>

search represents my personal attempt at reforming the perception and conception of 'Art'; art being not for the sake of art, but for the sake of being. One of the major insights from the research has been the realization that, unlike the Cartesian approach where one can be aware of oneself through oneself, the study into my own experience of art and my methods of being can only be examined in relation to my Self/Culture, and all else that defines it; cogito does not lead to Sum. As expressed by the term, 'ubuntu' (a Zulu word loosely denoting the idea of "human-ness", "human kindness"<sup>197</sup>), 'without you, I do not exist'<sup>198</sup>.

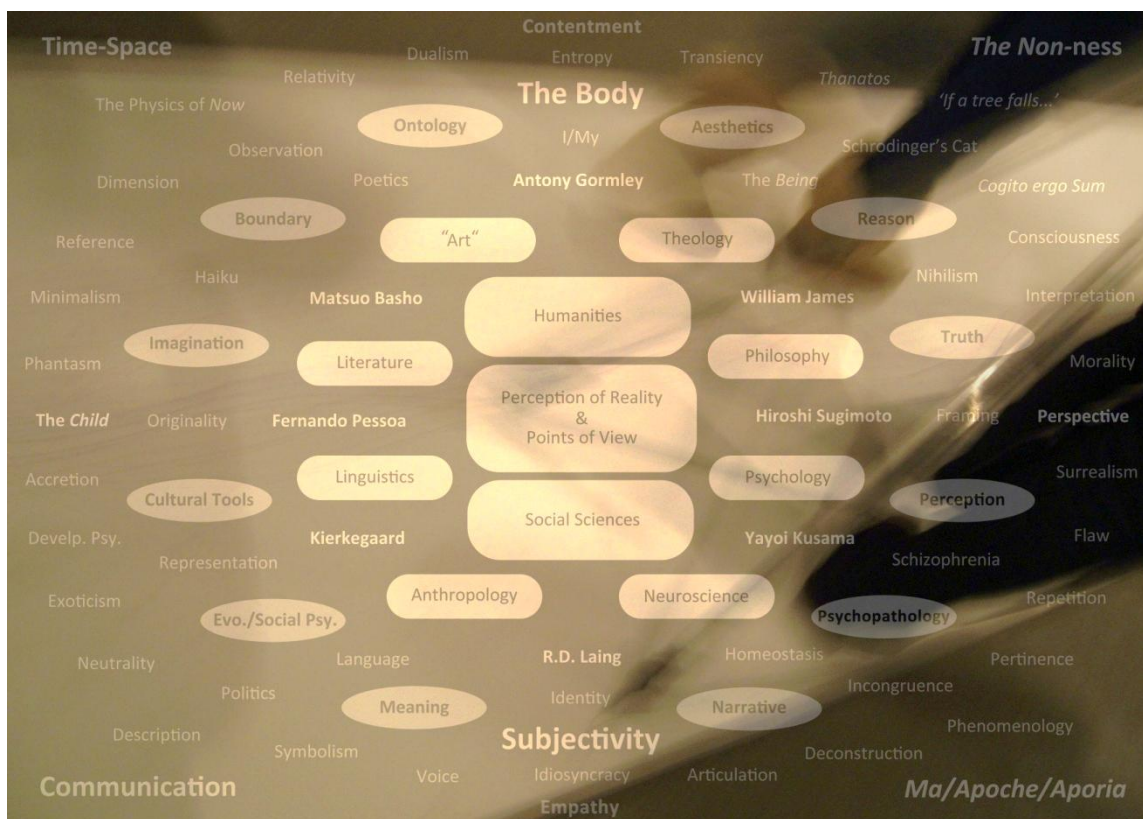


Fig. 66: Research visual map

Nam June Paik's *TV Buddha* (1976)<sup>199</sup>, with its loop of self-seeing, examines the nature of the endlessly self-reflexive nature of the 'I', as explored theoretically by Douglas Hofstadter in *I Am a Strange Loop*<sup>200</sup>. Like the Zen riddle, 'a one-handed clap', it would be

<sup>197</sup> "Ubuntu (philosophy)" last modified on May 4 2016 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu\\_\(philosophy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_(philosophy))

<sup>198</sup> "Global Citizenship Workshop " posted on April 3 2014 <http://openbrookes.net/global>

<sup>199</sup> "TV Buddha." Accessed April 1 2014 <http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/342.2011.a-f>

<sup>200</sup> Douglas Hofstadter *I Am a Strange Loop* (Basic Books 2008)

foolish to search for the I only within itself, for I can only exist in the context of the Self/Culture, since the I can only manifest within the very subjective conceptual parameters of perception. Upon reviewing *The Other Side of Nothingness – Toward a Theology of Radical Openness* by Beverly J. Lanzetta, Michael Sells writes,

*'Lanzetta illustrates how the annihilatory mystical experience draws the seeker to a place beyond a tradition's self-understanding to new dimensions of the sacred and, in some cases, to new revelatory paradigms. It is here that she provokes our thought in her statement that the divine nature is itself pluralistic, non-absolute, and continually giving birth to new traditions. By showing how nothingness functions in mystical experience as a catalyst for the liberation of our hearts, we are brought to a vision of theology that is nonviolent and inclusive of all creation.'*

– Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*<sup>201</sup>

Heidegger believes that, 'there is no essential "I" that is distinguishable from the "they" [...] As he enigmatically suggests: "Everyone is the other, and no-one is himself".'<sup>202</sup> The fundamental proposition of existential thinking is that one is relative and manifests in a 'with-world'<sup>203</sup>. With a proactive intention to 'be', we create a phantasy of the self, and find ourselves in what Alex Allmont and I call the ontological comfort trap. Like a phantom limb; regardless of its logical non-existence, we feel as though we are certain of its being and its autonomy. This ontologically positions us in the world and presents us with meanings and the reasons to 'be' as the foundation for our cognitive schemata. And through the act of wonder and flaws we re-cognise and authenticate it, continually. In discussing the method of phenomenological observation, Goble and Yin Yin claim,

<sup>201</sup> Michael Sells "The Other Side of Nothingness " accessed March 4 2016 <http://www.sunypress.edu/p-3351-the-other-side-of-nothingness.aspx>

<sup>202</sup> Jack Reynolds *Understanding Existentialism* (Acumen 2006) 30.

<sup>203</sup> Stephen Palmer ed. *Introduction to Counselling and Psychotherapy* (Sage Publications Ltd. 2000) 77.



*'the object of our interest is experience before it is put into language and yet that experience cannot be accessed other than through descriptive account. We are always "too late" (Adams, 2014), unable to directly access the object of our interest. The "how" must be found anew with each study (van Manen 2014), making phenomenological researchers "perpetual beginners" (Merleau-Ponty, 2006)'<sup>204</sup>.*

#### 4.3 Re-Searching Nothing

In discussing Hemingway's use of emptiness and silence, Loots claims that, *'for this nothingness to carry its fullest implicit meaning, it must paradoxically remain unexplored and unsounded.'*<sup>205</sup> To fill in the interval is to solve a riddle, but *'the empty, pure, open spaces [of ma] are not riddles to solve'*<sup>206</sup>. This might seem to be an argument against analysis itself; Loots argues that Hemingway offers the voids in hopes his readers would feel them by ignoring them, not try and fill them in by focusing on them. I do not see this research as merely a theoretical exercise with abstract ideas. On the contrary, it was the most practical way for me to begin understanding the condition of the real. What I struggle to comprehend through textbooks and theoretical descriptions and analyses of human experiences such as schizophrenic conditions, art effectively reveals to me the actuality and the Art of such phenomena. It is a much more authentic and "effective" understanding of its nature, by dislodging me from the comfort trap of the phantom I and its conceptual constructs that are continually created, the I is maintained in the peripheral LineDot dimension.

<sup>204</sup> Erika Globe and Yin Yin "Introduction to Hermeneutic Phenomenology: A research methodology best learned by doing it " posted on October 16 2014 <https://iiqm.wordpress.com/2014/10/16/introduction-to-hermeneutic-phenomenology-a-research-methodology-best-learned-by-doing-it>

<sup>205</sup> Christopher Loots "The Ma (間) of Hemingway: Interval Absence and Japanese Aesthetics in In Our Time " The Hemingway Review Vol . 29 (Spring 2010): 74

<sup>206</sup> Pilgrim R. B. Intervals (Ma) in Space and Time: Foundations for a Religio-Aesthetic Paradigm in Japan. 1995. Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives. Ed. Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Steven Heine. Albany: SUNY P p. 55–80.

Fig. 67: 365: *This Is Not A Work*

My fourth non-art-making promise was regarding the significance of the art created. Significance, in this case, includes the notions of value and validity which are, inevitably, almost synonymous to authenticity. For 365 (Figure 67), I chose PVA for its accessibility and low cost. Unlike Damien Hurst's *For the Love of God* (2007)<sup>207</sup> – which is a platinum cast of an 18th-century human skull encrusted with 8,601 flawless diamonds – for this particular project, in order to investigate the manifestation of value, it was crucial that the material itself was not rare nor expensive. Cleared of such a variable, in terms of validity, much like in Dong's *Writing diary with water*<sup>208</sup>, trust in the authenticity more readily presents itself to be the most important factor. This brings us back to the idea of the direct act as the art 'object'. Based on this idea, the core to the problems I had encountered with my earlier pieces became apparent: since I had not truly understood what the created objects were, the method of presentation in communicating the role of the raw material in my practice was not thought through, particularly in terms of what, where or when the Art was. In the case of 365 however, I began to realise that perhaps it is my very act of authentic non-making, rather than the physical piece in itself, whe-re/-n the manifestation of my phantom Self/Culture and where the wonder, and thus the Art, occurs.

<sup>207</sup> "For the Love of God 2007 " accessed January 29 2015 <http://www.damienhurst.com/for-the-love-of-god>

<sup>208</sup> "SONG Dong " accessed May 4 2015

[http://visualarts.qld.gov.au/content/apt2002\\_standard.asp?name=APT\\_Artists\\_Song\\_Dong](http://visualarts.qld.gov.au/content/apt2002_standard.asp?name=APT_Artists_Song_Dong)

## PART III

**Pro-Duction:      &      :**

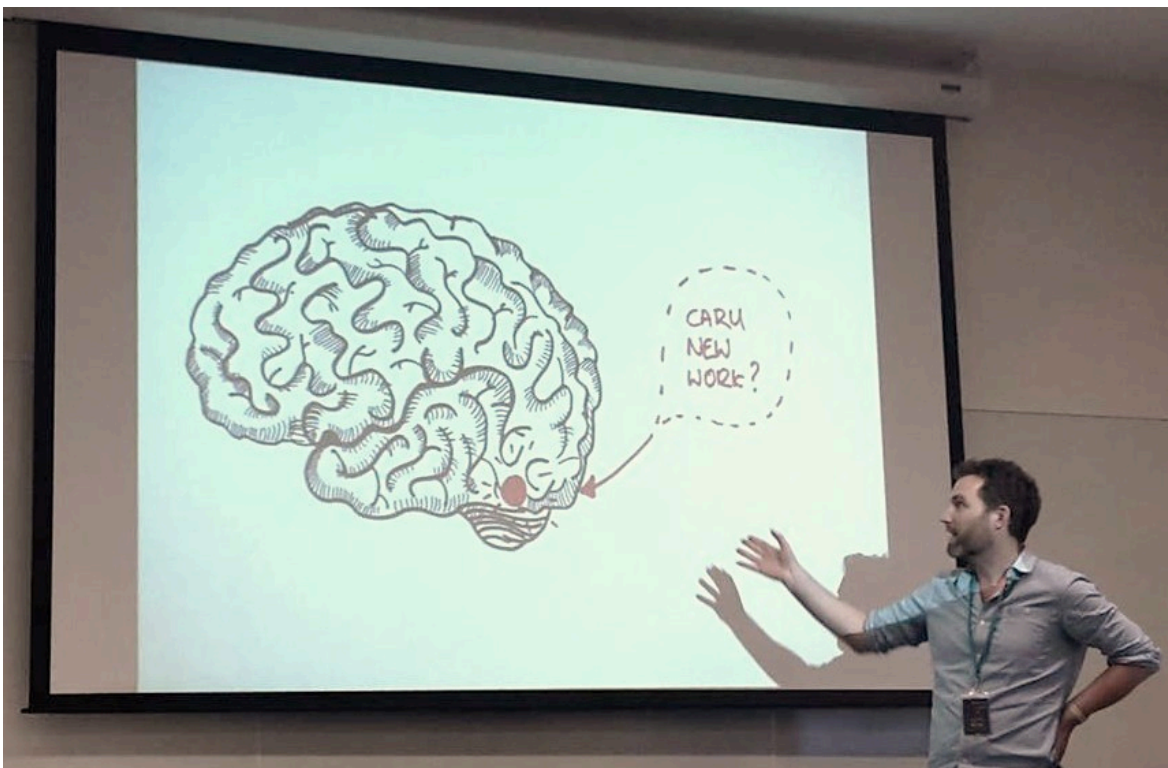


Fig. 68: Tom Cox *How to make work*

**Re-Cognising Art via Aesthetic Nothingness**

## Chapter 5: Where's the Art?

*We do not see things as they are, we see them as we are.*

Anonymous<sup>209</sup>



Fig. 69: My

### 5.1 Becoming Nothing

Inouye, in examining the aesthetics of impermanence, contemplates the ontology of the self, stating that no such 'thing', with a 'traditional permanence<sup>210</sup>', exists: *'on the one hand, the relative permanence of our bodies formulate a sense of who we are ... on the other hand, nothing teaches us the truth of change than our bodies'*<sup>211</sup>. Antony Gormley speaks of skin as "a vessel for personal space", regarding the body as a place in which we reside<sup>212</sup>. In researching into Gormley's work in relation to *Ma*, I discovered his use of his own body as a *Ba*<sup>213</sup>. *Ba* is a Japanese word for 'place', which, similarly to *Ma*,

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<sup>209</sup> <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2014/03/09/as-we-are>

<sup>210</sup> Charles Shiro Inouye *Evanescence and Form: An Introduction to Japanese Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2008) 36

<sup>211</sup> *ibid* p 36

<sup>212</sup> <http://www.antonygormley.com/resources/essay-item/id/112>

<sup>213</sup> Antony Gormley: *Making Space*. Beeban Kidron documentary 2007 shown on Channel 4 UK November 2009

may or may not be a physical, architectural space. Gormley's use of his body's *Ma* as a *Ba*, seems to echo the seemingly contradictory simultaneous occurrence of a heightened awareness and a disintegration of the self.<sup>214</sup>



Fig. 70: MUE *welcome to the good life*

Producing events through CARU offered me plenty of opportunity to widen my network and converse with practicing artists, including butoh dancers (Figures 70 & 74), for whom “becoming a nothing” is key to their practice. I have explored this through theoretical research into the history and development of butoh, which then led to a practical research through *My I, I & III* (2014, Figure 69). The practice of using my own body at this point felt essential in investigating such an idea, particularly in combination with discussions I was having with my colleagues regarding non-representational and embodied practice. Peta Lloyd (Figure 71, Appendix II), in her exploration of the relationship between text and image, uses her own body as the direct vehicle for deciphering language. In her presentation at the *Oxford Brookes TDE Research Student Conference 2016*<sup>215</sup>, she asks, ‘*is text more precise than image?*’, as she writes backwards towards the audience with a pen in her mouth on a Perspex panel. Her action was, beyond an illustrations or a representation of the question. As she obscures text and in turn

<sup>214</sup> Antony Gormley *Blind Light* (Hayward Gallery Publishing 2007)

<sup>215</sup> Oxford Brookes TDE Research Student Conference 18 May 2016 JHB Oxford Brookes University Oxford.



becomes it, blurring the line between text and image, the encounter with her act itself becomes the focal temporal object.

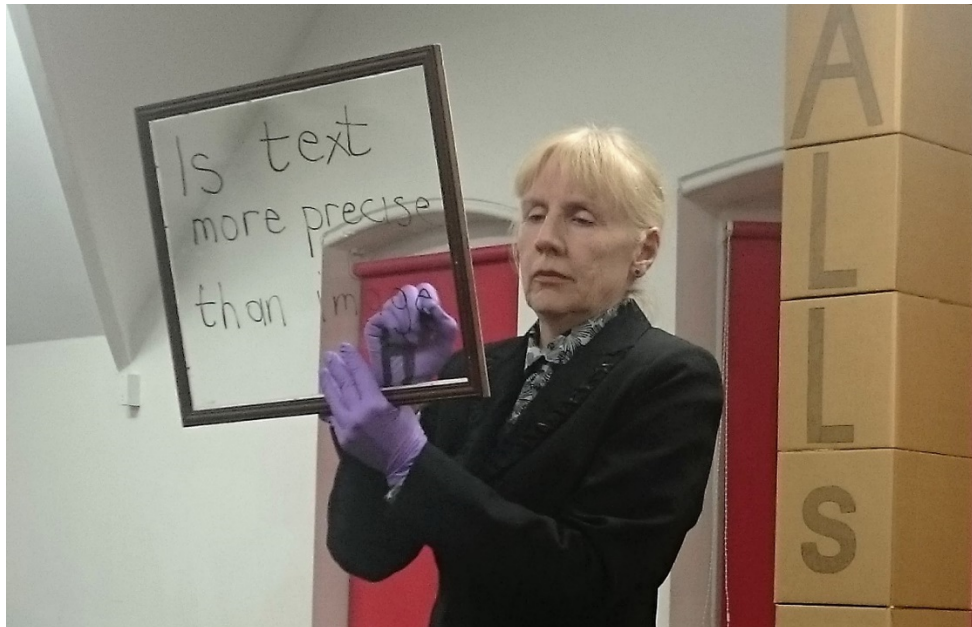


Fig. 71: Peta Lloyd *Text+Body+Action=TextAct Reading*



Fig. 72: Ryan Quartermann *Equivalence*

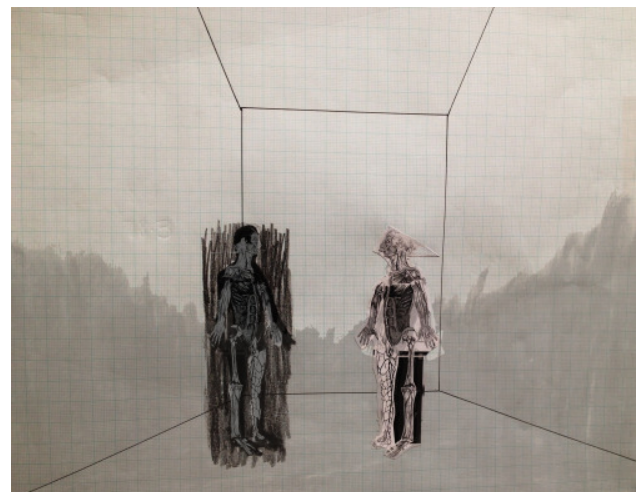


Fig. 73: An illustration for *Equivalence* (2013)

Ryan Quartermann, in *Equivalence* (2013, Figures 72 & 73)<sup>216</sup>, also uses his body as a comprehending being, rather than a mere vessel his self occupies. In his durational

<sup>216</sup> Performed at Emerge November 2013 OVADA Oxford "RYANCQUARTERMAN.CO.UK " accessed December 3 2015 <http://ryancquartermann.co.uk>

performance piece, Quarterman drags and pushes about a lump of charcoal weighing the equivalent of his own weight all over the performance space, smearing the blackness of himself over himself and on the white surfaces of the space. Similarly, the repetitive actions in my own work (e.g. *Language Studies III: ≤[≤(≤Haiku)]* and *.I.My.Me.Mine.*) were used to investigate this notion of describing and comprehending one's Self/Culture through the body and its actions. With 365 and CARU, I wished to further reduce my Self/Culture, down to the phantasy I, by eliminating my Self/Culture beyond the body.



Fig. 74: When My Grandfather Was A Fish

## 5.2 Presencing Nothing

I like to consider art practice as not only a valid form of research but as an essential, if not the only, method of investigating subjects as ones concerned in this thesis. When I asked my PhD peer group at a seminar presentation what my thesis was about, one of my colleagues answered that they thought that my study has been an exploration into the notion of the invisible artist. I feel however, that the phrase 'invisible artist' in this context is insufficient for its emphasis on the 'visibility' of the artist. Perhaps a more apt summary of the project is 'an exploration into methods of becoming a non-Artist (in a context where

'to be' means 'to art' and the 'be-ing' is the Art). The presence of the artist has been used in countless contemporary artworks. The notion of over-/pure-presence was explored in Marina Abramavić's *The Artist is Present* (2010, Figure 75)<sup>217</sup>, while the presence of the invisible artist was the idea behind Chris Burden, who hid in a purpose-made platform in the gallery space during the exhibition in *White Light/White Heat* (1975, Figure 76)<sup>218</sup>.

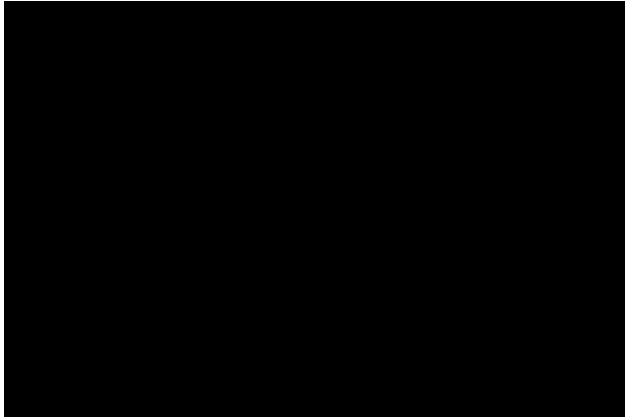


Fig. 75: Marina Abramavić *The Artist is Present*

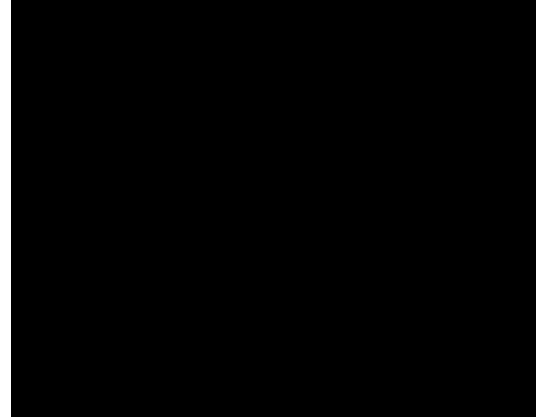


Fig. 76: Chris Burden *White Light/White Heat*

'Zen arts' (e.g. Butoh dance, kadoh/Ikebana flower arrangement, Shodoh calligraphy writing, Haiku poetry, Sadoh tea ceremony) emphasize the importance of the awareness of one's own body and its relationship to its surrounding environment. While Abramavić's use of the presence leads back to the question of the where/when of the Art, for the purpose of this research, my interest in the body lies in the idea of authentic presencing as examined by Kounadea<sup>219</sup> through the example of a kiss. I use the term 'presencing' as utilized by Jo Thomas, based on Scharmer's view that the I 'operates from a future space of possibility'<sup>220</sup>. It is not an action but a drive that pulls from an imagined dimension away from here/now. It impacts the core of our being as the Self/Culture is dissolved into the Gen of LineDot and one becomes absolutely ambiguous as a being.

<sup>217</sup> "Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present " accessed April 1 2015 <http://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/964?locale=en>

<sup>218</sup> "Everything You Need to Know About Chris Burden's Art Through His Greatest Works " accessed October 9 2015 <http://uk.complex.com/style/2013/10/chris-burden-art-new-museum/white-lightwhite-heat>

<sup>219</sup> Stavroula Kounadea "Silence: The Hidden Protagonist " (paper presented at Silencing the Silence OVADA Oxford 2013)

<sup>220</sup> Jo Thomas: Presencing Place: an Enquiry into the Knowing and Shaping of Place Through Expanded Art Practices " accessed November 1 2015 <http://www.social-sculpture.org/jo-thomas>



### 5.3 Meaning Nothing

Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* (1915) has been described as 'radically non-representational'<sup>221</sup>. As the main challenge has been the manifestation of the abstract without the use of representative forms, 'documentation as evidence' has been a recurring issue, both conceptually and in relation to my actual practice as an artist as well as theoretically and pragmatically as a researcher. Unlike the use of photography in Yves Klein's *Saut dans le vide* (*Leap into the Void*) (1960)<sup>222</sup>, or Richard Long's *A Line Made By Walking* (1967)<sup>223</sup>, I wished to explore its alternate function as a method of realising the work in the documentation themselves, closer to the approach taken by Malevic. This began in 2008 with *XYZ + T* (2008, Appendix II: 24), inspired by Hiroshi Sugimoto, and the *Twenty Images* (2010/11/12, Figure 77) series, before moving onto the *Translation* series, inspired by Wakae Kanji's work at *Concerto Museo* (1978, Figure 79)<sup>224</sup>, in which the (un)reality of the dots and lines is manifested on the photographs – and on the photographs alone.

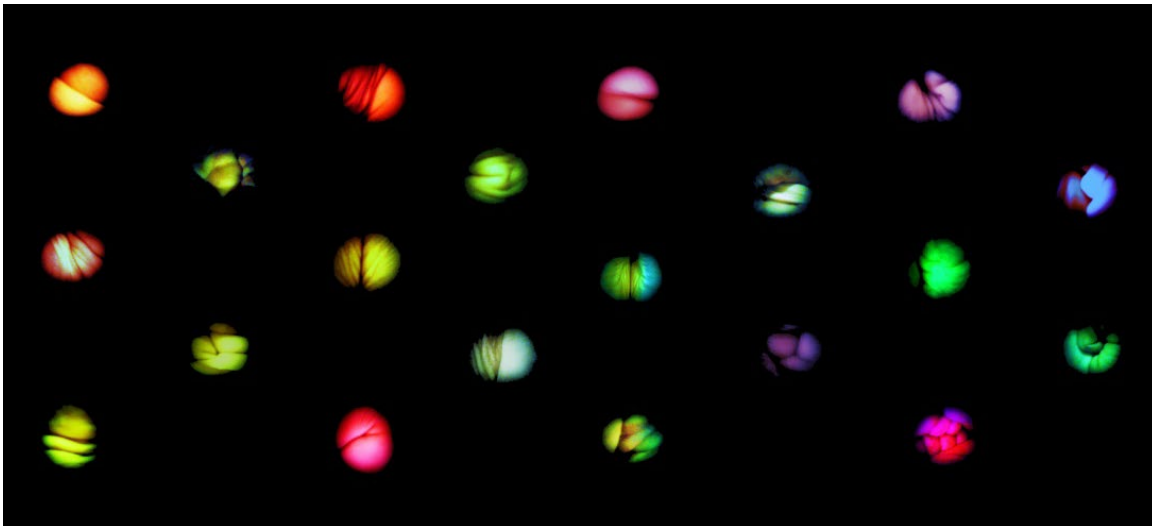


Fig. 77: Twenty images

<sup>221</sup> "The Art of the Sublime " accessed March 22 3012 [www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/philip-shaw-kasimir-malevichs-black-square-r1141459](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/philip-shaw-kasimir-malevichs-black-square-r1141459)

<sup>222</sup> "Leap into the Void " accessed March 2 2014 <http://metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1992.5112>

<sup>223</sup> "A LINE MADE BY WALKING " accessed June 8 2014 <http://www.richardlong.org/Sculptures/2011sculptures/linewalking.html>

<sup>224</sup> "東京国立近代美術館 60 周年記念「Concerto Museo / 絵と音の対話」 " The National Museum of Modern Art Tokyo 2012 [http://archive.momat.go.jp/Honkan/concerto\\_museo/index.html](http://archive.momat.go.jp/Honkan/concerto_museo/index.html)

This manifestation of the (un)reality through photography initially intrigued me when I was researching into Hiroshi Sugimoto's work a few years ago when I was studying photography. Sugimoto's *Seascape*' series<sup>225</sup> encapsulates the non-space/time of LineDot manifested in the (un)real through an accumulation of its seemingly ambiguous dimensions of space and time, becoming a reality in its own right. Such function of 'documentation' led me to explore the authenticity created through text and performance, as that realized in Cage's *4:33*, Alvin Lucier's *I Am Sitting in a Room*<sup>226</sup>, or Ishu Han's performance, *Untitled* (2012, Figure 78)<sup>227</sup>.



Fig. 78: Ishu Han *Untitled*

At one of the CARU writing groups, I invited Daniela Cascella as the guest artist. One reading material by Salomé Voegelin, in particular, instigated an interesting debate

<sup>225</sup> "Hiroshi Sugimoto's 'Seascapes': Measuring Time in Repetition " accessed November 26 2015  
<http://www.americansuburbx.com/2015/10/hiroshi-sugimotos-seascapes-measuring-time-in-repetition.html>

<sup>226</sup> Murtha Joseph "Collecting Alvin Lucier's *I Am Sitting in a Room* " posted January 20 2015  
[http://www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/2015/01/20/collecting-alvin-luciers-i-am-sitting-in-a-room/](http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2015/01/20/collecting-alvin-luciers-i-am-sitting-in-a-room/)

<sup>227</sup> "OPEN STUDIO 2012/8 月 " accessed January 17 2013 <http://www.tokyo-ws.org/archive/2012/07/open-studio-20128.shtml>

regarding the idea of “a *thing thing-ing*”<sup>228</sup>. Daniela and I have been conversing about nothing for a number of years and through those dialogues I have gained a key insight into the nature of words: text can be performative beyond the theatrical use. One of the dialogues led to the topic of primary and secondary sources, and whe-re/-n a secondary source becomes a primary source. Text can do more than describe or instruct, be more than a vehicle, by being a thing in itself; perhaps Art lies in the framing of the thing simply *thing-ing*, as Gen is the state of a being simply but authentically *be-ing*.

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<sup>228</sup> Salomé Voegelin *Listening to Noise and Silence: towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (New York: Continuum 2010)

## Chapter 6: *Nothing Matters*

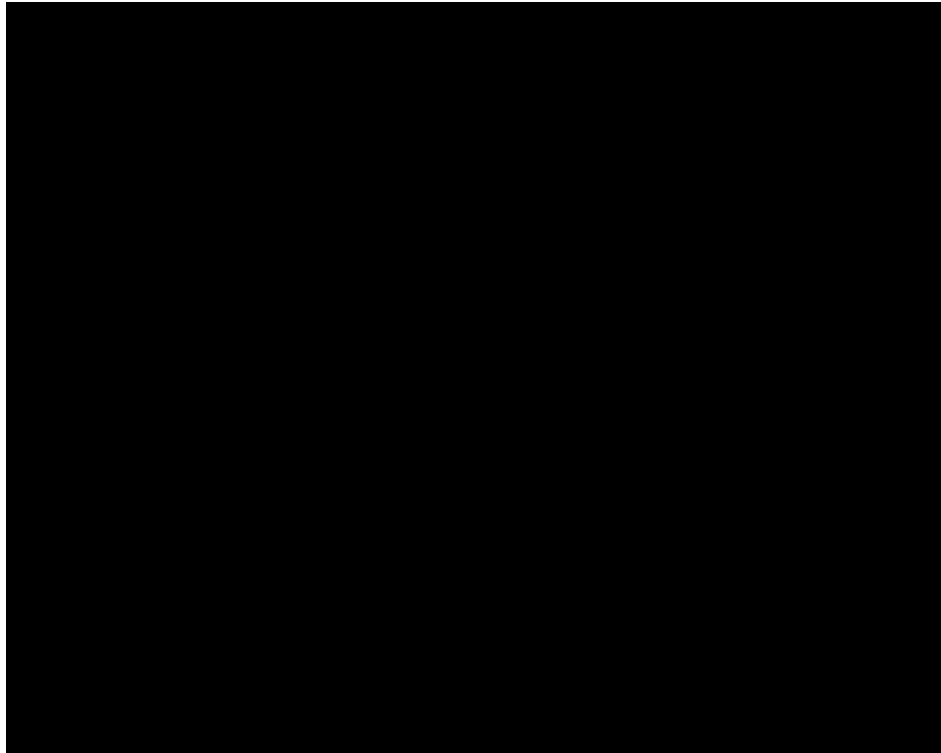


Fig. 79: Kanji Wakae *Seeing and Looking – Branches*

### 6.1 Orientating Nothing

Miller claims that Ma lies beyond the time-space dimension<sup>229</sup>. In this respect, “timelessness” as a description for the ‘space’ created by the performative installations such as *On the Possibility of Inertia* (2012) and *.I.My.Me.Mine.* (2013), with reference to Heidegger and his approach to the “here and now”<sup>230</sup>, seems apt. The actions in all my pseudo-performances are designed to create this sense of the “beyond”, using repetition, accumulation, and indeterminacy as the primary method. I first began my exploration into the childlike fluid conception and creativity using corn flour as my primary research tool and material in 2011 (Figures 80, 81 & 87). The mixture, like quicksand, acts like a solid and a liquid simultaneously. It is an example of non-Newtonian fluids, for its viscosity changes when a pressure is applied rather than heat as claimed by Newton’s law of viscosity. Once

<sup>229</sup> Wreford Miller “Silence in the Contemporary Soundscape” (Masters of Arts diss. Simon Fraser University 1993) 39.

<sup>230</sup> Jack Reynolds *Understanding Existentialism* (Acumen 2006)

thickened its strength is dependent on the amount of pressure put upon it; under no pressure it behaves much the same as single cream, it can be swilled around and poured out like an ordinary liquid<sup>231</sup>. Under stress, however, it becomes hard as if it has set; it fractures when scraped, looking like a blomme briefly before becoming liquid again. When you squeeze a handful of the mixture, its viscosity increases and it acts like a solid; once the pressure is released the viscosity decreases and it behaves like a liquid and flows out of your hand. You can roll it into a ball between your hands but the second you stop, it “melts” between your fingers. The sudden application of force—for example by stabbing or punching the surface, or rapidly inverting the container holding it—leads to the fluid to behave like a solid rather than a liquid. The mixture hence models the behaviour of quicksand, allowing the simulation of its sensation: the harder one fights, the harder it gets. More gentle treatment, such as gradually inserting a hand and moving slowly through it, will maintain it in its liquid state. Left alone, the cornstarch would settle to the bottom of the bowl and separated from the water as microscopically the mixture is in fact in a state of suspension, meaning that the grains of starch are not dissolved; rather, they are merely suspended and dispersed in the water<sup>232</sup>.



Fig. 80: *Child as Philosopher*

<sup>231</sup> A liquid is a state of matter in which atoms move freely and take the shape of their container while a **solid** is firm and compact is thus of definite shape and volume due to the tightly bonded atoms

<sup>232</sup> Stuart Brown "Play is more than just fun " (presented at Serious Play 2008) accessed April 21 2014  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/stuart\\_brown\\_says\\_play\\_is\\_more\\_than\\_fun\\_it\\_s\\_vital](https://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital)

The ephemeral quality of the cornstarch mixture immediately appealed to me as it encourages the kind of spontaneity I aspired to achieve; it is more direct and hands on than painting or drawing and more fleeting than sand or clay. Opposed to the judgment of quality or value, John Cage rejected our apparent psychosocial obsession with hierarchy: *'...don't you see that when you get a value judgment, that's all you have? They are destructive to our proper business, which is curiosity and awareness.'*<sup>233</sup> Through the use of such material, which does not behave like it is supposed to and seems to defy logic, one is offered a temporary suspension of cognition, thrown into a state of disequilibrium, leading to a purer engagement with the continually new Ta. One is able or, left to, appreciate through experience, rather than to analyze and understand through reason – *'in place of its "comprehension", we advocate its "presence"'*<sup>234</sup>. Stuart Brown of National Institute of Play remarked, at the *Serious Play Conference*, that *'the human hand in manipulation is a hand in search of a brain and a brain in search of a hand. Play is the medium by which those two are linked.'*<sup>235</sup>



Fig. 81: *Child as Philosopher*

<sup>233</sup> Tom Godfrey *Conceptual Art* (Phaidon Press Limited 1998) 63.

<sup>234</sup> Kristine Stiles and Peter Howard Selz *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, (University of California Press 1996) 111.

<sup>235</sup> Mercury and Vulcan are the sons of Jupiter whose realm is that of the unconscious

It quickly became apparent that its purpose was not for the physical making; rather, it was for its metaphoric quality that the corn flour mixture was to stay as my constant muse for the research. Like the melting wings of Icarus or Pegasus, born of the blood of Medusa: *'...and so the heaviness of stone is transformed into its opposite'*<sup>236</sup> The choice of this particular substance as the primary material was questioned by my colleagues; if the aim is to simply play with a tactile material, why not sand, mud, clay, or anything else? It was commented by a workshop participant *'the hardened weight may be overcome by the lightness of dialogue and imagination; perhaps the material allows this process'*<sup>237</sup>.



Fig. 82: 365: This Is Not A Work

In *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Italo Calvino speaks of the balance between “heaviness” and “lightness”<sup>238</sup>. Similarly, my intrigue lies with the equilibrium of dichotomies, the balance or the oscillation between such conditions: these qualities may be considered both contrasting and complimentary, perhaps akin to Andre Virel's interpretation of the symbiotic relationship between Mercury and Vulcan<sup>239</sup>, who, according to Virel, represent syntony and focalization, respectively<sup>240</sup>. To maintain perceptual and conceptual fluidity is

<sup>236</sup> Italo Calvino *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (Penguin Books 2002) 5.

<sup>237</sup> Comment received at InWithBetween Festival 2011.

<sup>238</sup> Calvino I. *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (Penguin Classics 2009).

<sup>239</sup> Mercury and Vulcan are the sons of Jupiter whose realm is that of the unconscious

<sup>240</sup> Andre Virel *Histoire de notre image* 1965 as quoted in Italo Calvino *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (Penguin Books 2009)

to maintain the ability to actively shift between these two seemingly distinct worlds and phenomena. In *I am a Strange Loop*<sup>241</sup>, philosopher and mathematician Douglas Hofstadter discusses the dichotomous relationship between macro and micro perceptions. A phenomenon can be viewed or explained macroscopically or microscopically, objectively or subjectively, none can be more valid than its counterpart, or any more real. No I found in a single one of those methods, therefore, can be used to authentically observe a phenomenon, which requires an absolute ambiguity.



Fig. 83: 365: *This Is Not A Work*

## 6.2 Stating Nothing

***Go to the pine if you want to learn about the pine, or to the bamboo if you want to learn about the bamboo. And in doing so, you must leave your subjective preoccupation with yourself. Otherwise you impose yourself on the object and do not learn. Your poetry issues of its own accord when you and the object have become one – when you have plunged deep enough into the object to see something like a hidden glimmering there. However well-phrased your poetry may be, if your feeling is not natural – if the object and yourself are separate – then your poetry is not true poetry but merely your subjective counterfeit.***

Matsuo Basho, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (1966)<sup>242</sup>

53.

<sup>241</sup> Douglas Hofstadter *I Am a Strange Loop* (Basic Books 2008).

<sup>242</sup> Matsuo Basho *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* trans. Nobuyuki Yuasa (London: Penguin Books 1966) 43.



In *Tao Te Ching* (translated as 'the way of power'), an ancient Chinese book of philosophy written in 500BC, the eighty-one poems present the importance of unity in diversity, reconciling the universal opposites "Yin" and "Yang": '*all things partake of the one; all come from being, the origin of being is non-being, to which it is necessary to return in order to have total being*'<sup>243</sup>. I see my practice as an investigation into ways of dissolving the Yin Yang dichotomy of ontological positions, using art(ist) as the trickster who blurs the existing lines<sup>244</sup>. In examining the tipping point of conception i.e. Watsuji's Gen or Arteaga's epoché, my practice moved from relatively more literal representations of the notion in *Tipping Point* (2013), to a subtler and conceptual approach in *Document of Authenticity*, towards the more experiential methods in *On the Possibility of Inertia* and *.I.My.Me.Mine.*, and further embodied in 365 and CARU. The methodological challenge in the practice lay in the idea of aesthetic suspension of the be-ing; a manifestation of Gen through ontological inertia, within which nothing changes.



Fig. 84: *Language Studies III: ≤[≤(≤Haiku)]*

<sup>243</sup> Gen could perhaps also be described as lying somewhere on the tipping point between Goda's 'good' Ma 'bad' Ma.

<sup>244</sup> Duco A. Schreuder *Vision and Visual Perception: The Conscious Base of Seeing* (Archway Publishing 2014).

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Please note: this page is absolutely NOT part of the thesis nor an 'artwork'

In the context of Art appreciation, the 'I' within the I-Thou relationship<sup>245</sup> is the 'existing knowledge', everything that we 'know' (i.e. 'comfort trap' e.g. habits, culture, personal memory of experience), including Gen itself – so the "new" is Ta (the Other), everything outside of such a framework – hence the idea of "the moment you get it is the moment it eludes again" (i.e. the conceptual tipping point). Comprehending Gen is, as is the phenomenological observation, a continuous process of disequilibrium without an equilibrium – once a phenomenon is manifested it becomes an object, no longer the actual phenomenon. Similarly, once a concept has been conceptualized it becomes an object. This is the basis of the value of embodiment as not only a method of realization, but *the only* way of realizing Gen. The 365 has been 'presented' twice in the course of the research. I used the term presented, rather than exhibited, with speech quotes as the objects were not situated in the exhibition space as artworks. On both occasions, almost no information was given regarding the process or the intension in order to diminish the significance of the artist's motivation behind the making. I had observed that when abstruse contemporary artworks are presented with little or no description (by the artist or by others), the audience can be left frustrated by the obscurity. I wished to explore exactly how much the audience may gain experientially from the objects themselves. Although the layers of handprints can be seen clearly on each of the objects, it is impossible to tell that each of the layers had been accumulated daily since 2012. For this reason, the process was unclear when it was presented in the first year with only one object after 11 months of making. The situation was very different when four sets of the objects were shown, with each set of handprint labeled with the commencing year (e.g. 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015), where the process was made more evident, but still with minimal description. While I was unsure whether this simple comprehension of the process of making was enough to cease the question of motivation, it became evident that there are methods

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<sup>245</sup> "Martin Buber (1878—1965)" accessed March 3 2015 <http://www.iep.utm.edu/buber>

for satisfying this aspect of art/object appreciation – by engaging the “audience” in the process of art-making directly. Although I had begun exploring this method with *Document of Authenticity* by keeping the audience engaged in the process through the questions posed in each of the pieces, I felt that I needed to distill what it means to be “engaged” further by taking away such direct involvement and participation. As a result, I was left with the question, “is the artist’s engagement with the context or material on its own enough?” A colleague of mine once commented that the question of motivation was inevitable in contemporary art while in the fine art world the object itself is always enough, as this is what separates the two art forms. I had found in the past however that there are some works that can float somewhere in between – and this was what I hoped to examine through 365. I have never been asked for the “why” regarding the 365 objects, as an art piece or as a research material. Nor has anyone tried to attribute any distinct interpretation to the objects or my process. Those who like the objects like them for what they are as a presence, pregnant with an ineffable lure. This wordless appreciation is comparable to the appreciation of a fine art object, the experience that occurs in between the technical discussions as to the empirical value of the object itself. They see a validity, and thus a value, in its Art, whe-re/-n-ever it is; it seems to be somewhere beyond the artists’ own engagement with the ‘work’ and its authenticity, forever in the “just beyond”.



Fig. 85: 365: *This Is Not A Work*

Lopes, based on the questions raised by such thought experiments as the *Ship of Theseus*<sup>246</sup>, where the assembled parts that makes the object are replaced gradually, examines the ontology of the Ise shrines. He claims that the building uniquely exists as a piece of theatre. Unlike traditional Western architectures whose ontology manifest as sculptural objects with the emphasis on the spatial aspects of their existence, the Ise shrines, which are rebuilt every twenty years, manifest through their temporal presence. This idea began to shed light on my fascination with "performative" installation as a form of art. Like the omnipresent smile of the Schrödinger's cat, Gen as an ontology is incredibly fragile and resilient simultaneously, manifesting itself only via action and continuously changing as the conceiving I changes. As the layers of handprint and the form began to manifest, it felt vital that I considered the importance of its very presence. Why was it necessary for the layers to exist? How important are each of the layers – in its own right, and as part of the whole? When did the process become a form and, for those who saw it as 'work', a work? For Song Dong, while he photographed his daily ritual of writing on a stone with water for exhibition purposes, the act was first and foremost a personal, meditative experience<sup>247</sup>. For me however, though personal, it was never about the meditative practice. I chose to do it with as little care or conscious sense of aestheticism as possible for artistic virtuosity or skill was not my concern. Neither was the preciousness of the material; for this reason, I chose a material that was easily accessed anywhere so to make travelling with it possible (though it did become cumbersome to transport once the number of handprint pieces accumulated annually). Far from being a meditative process, I give myself no time to think about its meaning nor its value as I place my hand on them every evening. I am merely doing what I had decided to do, nothing more, nothing less. I felt that only then the work is left with nothing but itself. Once my PVA covered hand is lifted off, it is no longer mine. Though it is undoubtedly a print of my hand and a part of my

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<sup>246</sup> Dominic McIver Lopes "Shikinen Sengu and the Ontology of Architecture in Japan" in *Global Theories of the Arts and Aesthetics*, ed. Susan L. Feagin (Blackwell Publishing Inc. 2007) 81

<sup>247</sup> "SONG Dong" accessed May 4 2015  
[http://visualarts.qld.gov.au/content/apt2002\\_standard.asp?name=APT\\_Artists\\_Song\\_Dong](http://visualarts.qld.gov.au/content/apt2002_standard.asp?name=APT_Artists_Song_Dong)

self, through the very act of re-cognition, it becomes Ta (the Other), independent from me, manifesting away from me, as a Gen ontology.

### 6.3 Pro-Creating Nothing



Fig. 86: A Real Exhibition

Despite all the issues rooted in the elusive and ineffable nature of Ma, there have always been artists prepared to investigate such notion and the qualities it can bring to an artwork and the viewer's way-of-being. In this context, art is considered a method for and of being, a condition through which to manifest Gen. Generally for humans, physical interaction with the world, particularly that of a social kind, has a vital ontological function in the affirmation of our existence, albeit perhaps temporarily.

*'What characterizes a person as human is that one is always together with other humans. In Japanese history, the only physical escape from the community was through withdrawal into the mountains, and in that case a person was referred*

to as sen-nin (山人) "hermit", a world of otherworldly nuance. There never has been a Japanese word for "privacy."<sup>248</sup>

Watsuji, who defines Gen as the cultural space between NinGen (human beings), argues that, 'the structure of existence (sonzai) appropriate to human beings (ningen) expects and depends on trust and truth in human relationships ... human relationships are those of trust; and at a place where human relationships prevail, trust is also established'. Ma, as a relational ontology, is only possible in between beings<sup>249</sup>. Conversely, be-ing can only be possible through the Ma outline.



Fig. 87: Child as Philosopher

**Only because of our interdependence with everyone and everything can we become thoroughly condemned and, therefore, endlessly compassionate and moved**

– Charles Shiro Inouye<sup>250</sup>

<sup>248</sup> Gunter Nitschke "Ma: Place Space Void " (Kyoto Journal 8 1988) accessed December 20 2015 [www.kyotojournal.org/the-journal/culture-arts/ma-place-space-void](http://www.kyotojournal.org/the-journal/culture-arts/ma-place-space-void)

<sup>249</sup> Watsuji Tetsuro "Watsuji Tetsuro's Rinrigaku " trans. Yamamoto Seisaku and Robert E. Carter (Albany: SUNY Press 1996) 343 quoted in Jeffery Wu "The Philosophy of As-Is: The Ethics of Watsuji Tetsuro " *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs* (2010) 100.

<sup>250</sup> Charles Shiro Inouye *Evanesence and Form: An Introduction to Japanese Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2008) 39

Mindfulness as a notion and practice, brought over from the Eastern philosophy by artists such as Cage, has been made fashionable in the West in recent decades<sup>251</sup>. The opportunity to develop my practice during the project has been a valuable experience, expanding my understanding of my own practice in relation to other spheres of arts, with an increased emphasis on more social contexts. If making art is to authentically engage with the phantasy of reality and thus transforming the relationship between the I and Ta, rather than the mere conception and construction of physical objects (including audio, video and conceptual work), and that being an artist means having these abilities, then, not only are we all artists as Beuys claimed<sup>252</sup>, everything we are and do are, and can only be, all art, as the existence itself is dependent on these 'acts'. In the vein of the Stuckist anti-anti-art approach to art<sup>253</sup>, this is a profound negation of art for the Art's sake, as Gen is a negation of being for the sake of the Being. We are all naturally anthropologists and philosophers. However, to become an 'operational' artist/human (NinGen) one must be authentic in being and, furthermore, becoming an 'effective' artist/human' requires a phenomenological (unconditional) approach to be-ing. Or non-being. No subject – the last of the six criteria (or what I otherwise call promises) began as the authenticity of the Artist's role: *Promise VI: I will be authentically\* performing the role of Aya Kasai and, where appropriate, the 'I'*. With regards to 365 specifically, this became the question of the body and the use of the artist's own body in their work, which were explored in Chapter 5. In CARU, I further explored my "self" and observed its obliteration, in order to simply "be".

[Zen master]: ***I do not understand Zen. I have nothing here to demonstrate; therefore, do not remain standing so, expecting to get something out of nothing. Get enlightened by yourself, if you will. If there is anything to take hold of, take it by yourself.***

*An Introduction to Zen Buddhism, Chapter III: Is Zen Nihilistic?*<sup>254</sup>

<sup>251</sup> Daniel Larkin "How Zen Catalyzed Conceptual Art " accessed May 4 2015 <http://hyperallergic.com/63002/how-zen-catalyzed-conceptual-art>

<sup>252</sup> "Joseph Beuys: The Revolution Is Us " accessed May 20 2014 <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/joseph-beuys-revolution-us>

<sup>253</sup> Billy Childish and Charles Thomson "Anti-anti-art " accessed April 1 2016 <http://www.stuckism.com/StuckistAntiAntiArt.html>

<sup>254</sup> Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press Inc. 1964) 49.



To manifest Gen means for the Self/Culture to become the context, cause and effect, where no such notions as I/Ta, time/space, art/non-art, making/non-making etc. make sense. The aim of my research and my pro-creative practice has been to manifest this disorientated nature of Gen, a state of temporary *tabula rasa*<sup>255</sup>, as that exposed in Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Seascape* images (Figure 88) or in Alvin Lucier's *I Am Sitting in a Room*, but without mediation (e.g. Sugimoto's photographs or Lucier's sound) and only with direct action as the material, process and product. While art may be able to activate alternative modes of perception and thought, this has in turn led me to ask if I can gain this level of response from the general public, and how one could engage the audience to consider how they relate to the presupposed in daily life. For this reason, this research focused on examining how the inconspicuous "spaces" beyond art galleries can impact perceptual hierarchy and ontological equilibrium. What began as a search for the Art in art, consequently became a search and re-search for the Being in be-ing.

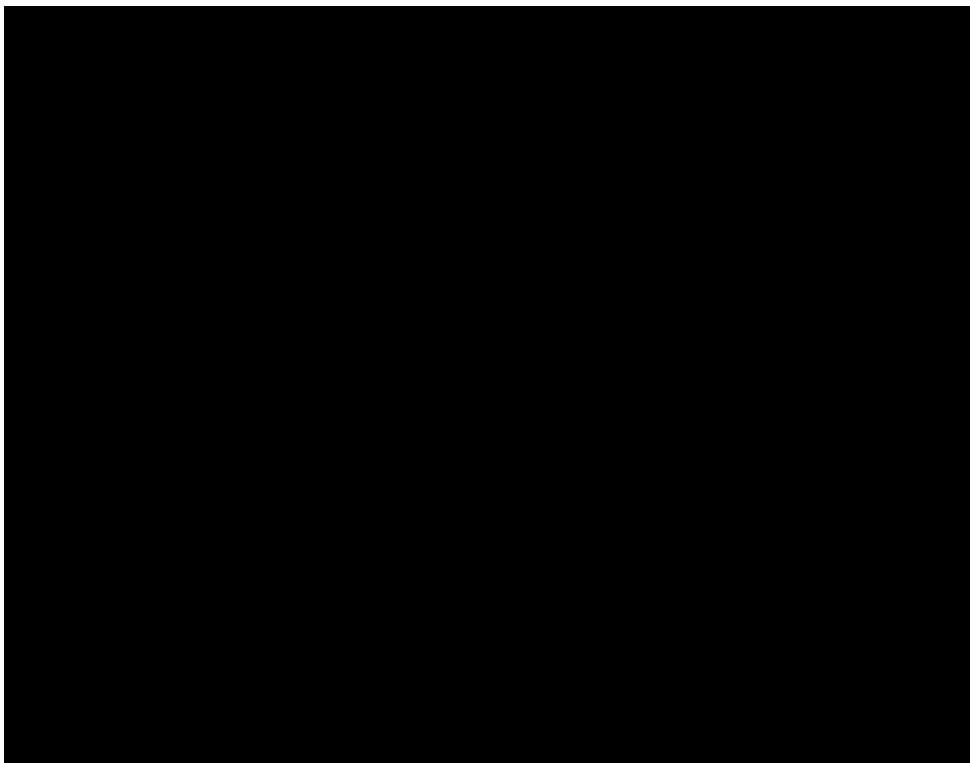


Fig. 88: Hiroshi Sugimoto *Seascape: Tyrrhenian Sea Priano*

<sup>255</sup> Robert Duschinsky "Tabula Rasa and Human Nature " *Philosophy* 87 (2012): 509-529 accessed June 4 2015 doi:10.1017/S0031819112000393.

**Never lived  
and Never died  
Never was born  
Whole  
Thus  
Never lived  
and Never died**

Ronak Khakban, *Never* (2011)<sup>256</sup>

The discussions above have shown that Ma is a hypothesised (non-)presense, whilst Gen is an unintelligible concept or, rather a non-concept that describes the condition of the unconditional, whereby the Self/Culture, and consequentially the comprehension of all notions including Gen, dissolves. Gen therefore cannot be an object or an act; rather, Gen is a condition under which the Self/Culture is revealed through its very non-existence. Furthermore, the Art, given that it rises out of the Self/Culture, must be a condition of Gen – the Art is an unconditional process of pro-duction as opposed to conditional re-duction, and aesthetic pro-creation as opposed to anesthetic re-creation. Gen occurs within the framework of mortality where notions of infinity and nothingness are authentic, with a significant affective impact on our ontology. It almost seems an inherent nature for us, as beings, to contemplate “who” and “why” we are. What criteria does one need to fulfil to come to “existence” and “be”? It is the universal and timeless question of what it means to “be” and, inevitably, what it means to “cease” to be; the question lies beyond the human constructs of time and space, transcending all cultural boundaries. As the significant pawn in an insignificant game, the nothing of the I matters. Nothing matters because, ultimately, nothing matters.

Be-ing makes marks. The re-cognition of one's own mortality in turn leads to the re-cognition of own mark-making, for the act is not merely for future's sake but, out of its own be-ing, necessarily for the sake of the here and now, within all the heres and nows, as a

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<sup>256</sup> Exhibited at *Silencing the Silence* (2013) OVADA Oxford.

form of ontological orientation. As we make sense of the world in which we exist in relation to our sense of “self” and vice versa, the notion of “mapping” transpires to be a human way of positioning ourselves, an innate survival skill and existential effort in comprehending and asserting our own position in the world. We often accept the version of reality with which we are presented. You really only have a choice when you know all your options – which are, in “fact”, infinite. I hope for my work to act as a tool for revealing such multilaterality of truth. ‘Be-ing’, akin to Lee’s distinction of the sublime and wonder, is a verb. It is an act of pro-creation, which is dependent on, and is thus the manifestation of, one’s own ontological relativity, for the concepts ‘reality’ and ‘I’ are only possible in relation to Ta. By the Ma of Gen, one becomes the corn flour mixture in a human form, dropped into an ocean of the mixture; how is a ‘self’ to form in such a condition? By becoming aware of own subjectivity and limits of perception, one is left to exercise the reponse-ability actively towards an embodied mark-making, a willful pro-creation of the Self via no-One-ness.

***He fell through the hole and there at the bottom was a light.  
What had happened to him was like the sensation one sometimes experiences in  
a railway carriage when one thinks one is going backwards while one is really  
going forwards and suddenly becomes aware of the real direction.***

Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886)<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Oswald Hanfling *The Quest for Meaning* (John Wiley & Sons 1988) 179.

## Conclusion



Fig. 89: A Real Exhibition

The Japanese term for space, *Ma*, together with *Gen*, has been used in this thesis as an investigative tool for answering the core question 'Where's the Art?' The thesis forms practical and theoretical contributions to the debates on the nature of art by:

- enhancing our knowledge of *Ma* and its function in contemporary art;
- introducing such explicitly implicit ontology as *Gen*;
- extending our knowledge of the complex nature of *Ma* through an investigation into *Gen*;
- offering a new strategy i.e. self-obliteration, in discerning such notions as an alternate to the minimalistic ascetic reduction method;

- developing the language of such notions, contextualizing and bridging the Western and Eastern understanding and use of such ontology;
- offering a new understanding of research with its interdisciplinary mode of practice and through a multidisciplinary body of work presented in and beyond the exhibition space, shifting away from the cerebral mode of comprehension by drawing out a primarily experiential conception of the relationship between art and Gen.



Fig. 90: 365: *This Is Not A Work*

Ma is a Japanese term broadly translated as a 'gap, space, pause etc.' while Gen could be defined as 'the consciousness thereof'. To manifest such an elusive ontology, the study used repetition, accumulation, observation as core methods of investigation. The study examined, through such works as 365 (Figure 90) and CARU (Figure 91), ontological variances and irregularities such as that embodied in Japanese gardens that awaken the lethargic mind to '*scratch on the imagination*'<sup>258</sup>. The experience induced by such cognitive (dis)equilibrium helps the I in remaining objective over its own subjectivity and the necessarily biased frameworks and filters. Such disorientation can thus be a useful

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<sup>258</sup> "Our Methodologies " Social Sculpture Research Unit accessed April 1 2016 [www.social-sculpture.org/category/our-focus/our-methodologies](http://www.social-sculpture.org/category/our-focus/our-methodologies)

existential strategy, and Gen (re-cognition of the function of such naming) can work as an effective aesthetic tool for becoming more aware of these processes of our own personal matrix, selective attention and subjective interpretation. This fundamental dis-orientation in turn encourages the suspension of judgment over our perception of 'reality'. As my fascination with the ontological decentralization is based on the idea of judgment-reservation and existential liberation through self-obliteration, the question of 'framing' (and its deconstruction) has been of utmost importance in my research particularly regarding the framing of perception and thus the framing of one's ontology and its relationship to the surrounding environment.

***If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite.  
For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.***

— William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*<sup>259</sup>

Given that Gen is explicitly a phenomenological state of being based on the absolute (non-)subjectivity, the challenge in framing Ma in this project was recognizing where and how to draw the lines. Self-annihilation was a term coined by Yayoi Kusama, who creates works directly inspired by her schizophrenic condition and her method of overcoming the existential angst. The question of author(-ity) came into play, as this subjectivity extends to the Artist's presence in relation to the drawn lines. The multi-/inter-disciplinary mode of research used in this project has for this reason been particularly essential. In order to relinquish the power of authority, indiscrimination was used expressly to amplify the absolute ambiguity. Part II explored the question of val-ue/-idity, particularly in relation to the mechanisms of auth-enticity, and found that significance must ultimately be rooted in faith. Value is both/neither every-/no-where; it can hence lie even in the most common and ordinary. Furthermore, rather than the value placed on certainty based on

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<sup>259</sup> "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell object 14 (Bentley 14 Erdman 14 Keynes 14) " accessed 1 March 2016  
14<http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/transcription xq?objectid=mhh.c.illbk.14>

repeatability in the sciences, the sense of “what if” based on ambiguity seems to be critical as to the significance in the case of the arts. In investigating the idea of meaning, Chapter 5 dealt with The Body as a useful material and tool for researching such seemingly abstract ideas. The study found that the notion of Ta (the Other), in relation to the I, is essential in the comprehension of its meaning as we make decisions everyday, drawing the outline of the I that separates One from Ta. Through acts of wonder, One is jolted out of the phantasy of the I, which in turn is itself indeed an I-making. The Japanese define Art as this process of moral I-making enquiry. Each One is a LineDot, a methodology, and this thesis represents Gen as a One, an absolute-dimension canvas, thus a Non-Being. Moreover, the LineDot of the One, and thus the ontology of the Art necessarily lies in the peripheral since its ontology would contradict its Self if acknowledged. It remains forever in the non-consciousness, with an intensified non-intensity.

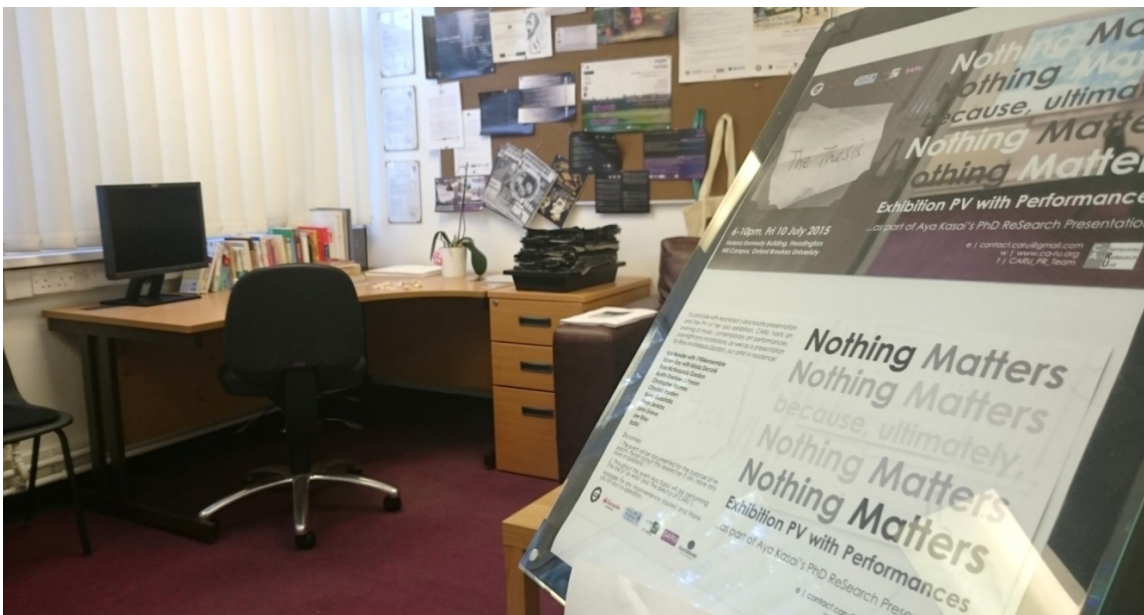


Fig. 91: CARU HQ

The study found Nothing – with findings in the improbability of inertia such that, with be-ing, pro-creation/-duction is unconditional. So where indeed is the Art in the promises made in the non-making? Stripped down to the ‘core’ of the corn flour sphere, the research found that the more appropriate question should include the rest of the wh-

questions i.e. wh-en/-at/-ich/-o, of the Art. Using production as the key strategy as an alternate to the minimalist ascetic reduction method, the study showed that the notion of conceptual naming was critical as a framework in exploring the ontology of the Art. Gen describes a state of consciousness, within which existing framework of conception is rendered irrelevant and allows the manifestation of such non-existing ontologies as Ma through the perception of their very beings. It was shown that the recognition of Gen revives the Self/Culture by disorientating one's perceptual hierarchy and ontological equilibrium, placing the Art absolutely ambiguously in the LineDot. As a valuable temporal object, such insight gained in arts research can be a useful contribution to other specialties by offering alternate methods of investigation and presentation, particularly given that said 'knowledge object' can only manifest via aesthetic (i.e. will-full and response-able) act of pro-creation.



Fig. 92: CARU: Making an Art Manifest

***And he who wants to remain pure among men must know how  
to clean himself even with dirty water.***

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885)<sup>260</sup>

<sup>260</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* [1885] trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin 2003) 164.



Most Importantly, the research examined the mechanisms of language as a cultural tool and material for manifesting something out of nothing (and thus demonstrating the presence of nothing) by introducing new symbols and observing their development and impact. Through Gen, I explored methods of sharing an experience without using representational means. Gen in this thesis, therefore, became the end and means. When I point at a ball, my dog looks at my finger. To my dog, the object is the finger. The gesture symbolises nothing. Equally, when I speak of Gen, it does not re-present a separate ontology; in relation to the “subject” I, the word and concept is itself both the “object” and the “subject” simultaneously. Martin Gardner says of nothing,

*‘the closest a mathematician can get to nothing is by way of the null (or empty) set. It is not the same thing as nothing because it has whatever kind of existence a set has, although it is unlike all other sets. It is the only set that has no members and the only set that is a subset of every other set. [...] The null set denotes, even though it doesn’t denote anything. [...] symbolized by  $\emptyset$ , it must not be confused with 0 [...] Zero is (usually) a number that denotes the number of members of  $\emptyset$ . The null set denotes nothing, but 0 denotes the number of members of such sets.’<sup>261</sup>*

As I began writing up my thesis a colleague asked me what I was submitting as my ‘practice’. I responded, ‘nothing’. In relation to the Ise shrines (here referred to as ‘sengu’) and its ontology, Lopes asserts, *‘However plausible or implausible the explanations ... the sengu is a fact.’*<sup>262</sup> As a being, the sengu is, as actual as the Self/Culture’ is. It matters as much as Nothing. As valuable as the Art and, inevitably, as authentic as Gen (2013-ongoing).

<sup>261</sup> Martin Gardner, *The Colossal Book of Mathematics* (W. W. Norton & Company First Edition edition 2004) 592.

<sup>262</sup> Dominic McIver Lopes ‘Shikinen Sengu and the Ontology of Architecture in Japan ’ in *Global Theories of the Arts and Aesthetics*, ed. Susan L. Feagin (Blackwell Publishing Inc. 2007) 80.

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Please note: this page is absolutely NOT part of the thesis nor an 'artwork'



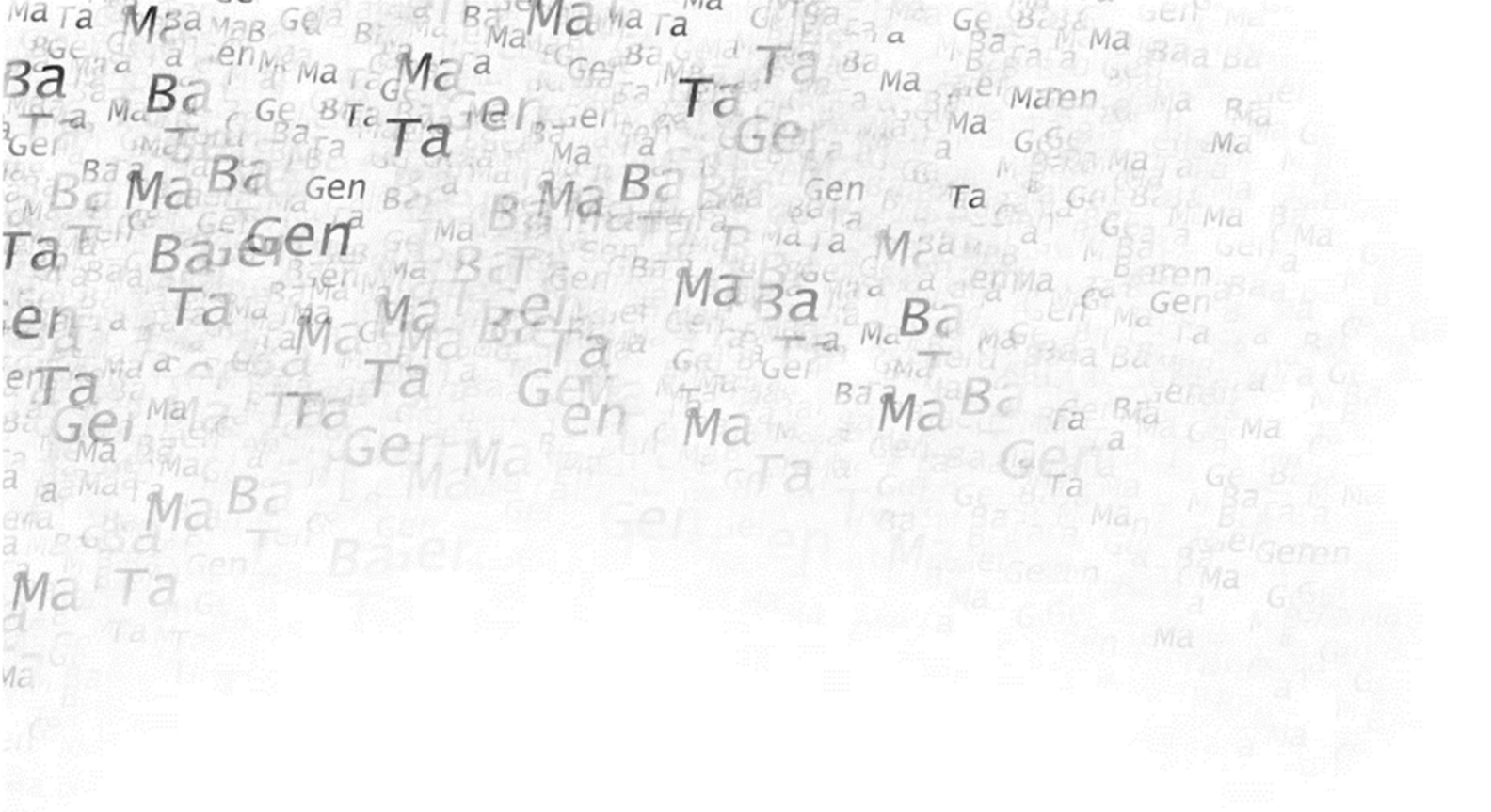
## Nothing Matters: Answering the Question ‘Where’s the Art?’ through Ma and Gen

- VOLUME TWO -

Aya Kasai

June 2016

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Appendix I – On Ma & Gen: Artist Contributions

**Malcolm Atkins**

**Daniela Cascella**

**Tom Cox**

**Dot23**

**Patrick Farmer**

**Paul Glynn**

**John Grieve**

**Bruno Guastalla**

**Stavroula Kounadea**

**Peta Lloyd**

**AD Pawley**

**Roger Perkins**

**Mohan Rana**

**Dianne Regisford**

**Lee Riley**

**Austin Sherlaw-Johnson**

**Annette van der Hoek**

**Yoko Shinozaki**

Thank you so much to all the artists for your inspiring contributions.  
I love you all.



**Malcolm Atkins**

Composer & performance artist

*The creation of real artistic work is like love in that these two alone can create a temporary oasis of meaning within the relentless and awesome void that surrounds us. Ironically they do this by entering that void through the exclusion of self – not the pretence of any permanence or cosmic sense but an acceptance and embracing of transience and the frightening insignificance of human aspiration.*

Below is a summary of a paper delivered by Malcolm Atkins on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2013 at CARU's *Silencing the Silence*:

**Cage is dead (and Schoenberg is dead although Boulez is still alive).**

**The problems with the canonisation of the work of an experimentalist.**

The paper questions why we have made Cage such a authoritative figure about sound and music when his definition of music does not correspond in any way to any accepted definition. I use his statement that in terms of constructing music 'a structure based on durations...is correct...whereas harmonic structure is incorrect' as a basis for debate.

I first contextualise Cage's ideas by suggesting their source in:

Contemporary ideas of the post war avant-garde

His interest in Eastern philosophy music is 'to sober and quiet the mind'

His engagement with other art forms

I argue that all he espoused was of his time but his conflation of different ideas was unique to any musician of his time.

I question his statement that music is only meaningful in the contrast of sound and silence as follows:

This just doesn't equate to what we mean by silence

Cage over privileges silence to ignore other aspects of the sonic environment (such as timbre)

Is Cage an apologist for an unjust capitalist world?

Even people Cage admired in using silence (such as Morton Feldman) use it as part of an unfolding sonic construction

Cage did not really embrace all sounds in the way he often advocated for others. He was selective on what he would allow.

I conclude by emphasising the importance of Cage and the questions he raised but suggest that if we uncritically accept his ideas we devalue his artistic and philosophical contribution.

The full text of the paper is in the Vibrations Journal at:

[https://issuu.com/veronicacordova9/docs/vibration\\_ii\\_ef5088c79d302b/3?e=1](https://issuu.com/veronicacordova9/docs/vibration_ii_ef5088c79d302b/3?e=1)

**Daniela Cascella**  
Writer

Let these words: curl, wither. Let them be heard in their thinning.

Let me syphon them boney, let me drain them until a skeletal presence is left, no tomes, no weight, only necessary filament-words to creep up and haunt the secret thickness of thoughts.

I no longer write much and sometimes I no longer write.

Because I could not be clear I got here. For the well-determined minds I descended and drowned in the waters of wordy. For the well-determined thoughts I drowned in the narrow well of linear. Determined by their thoughts I drowned and descended.

The well-determined mind, the consequential. The, well, determined wordy mind that overwhelms. Well determined wordy linear writing, when my words began to find their withering ways I would stare at the knots on the page and think of you.

What great conviction, what clarity. I was repelled into silence.

And what did I do when aphasic temptation came?

What I did: I received it, as it silently moved subterraneous and eroded these words.

**Tom Cox**  
Artist

Superposition.

Why is there something rather than nothing? Simply put this sentence describes the human condition. Superposition is a quantum effect that exists as a threshold between light and dark, between something and nothing.

Superposition leads to multiplicity, all outcomes are possible. Superposition is fleeting, empirically it doesn't exist, the cat cannot be dead and alive, once we shed light on the matter.

But, what happens if we never open our eyes? When the stars move far enough away from each other that their light cannot reach us, space and time will cease to exist.

Tom Cox 2016

**Dot Twentythree**  
Artist

Where can we find nothing in the universe? Nowhere! There is always something, once you drill down far enough (even if it's just quantum foam or the Higgs field!). Even black holes can't truly said to be nothing, it's just we can't see inside them to know what is within.

Then there is spiritual nothingness: nirvana, nirguna, the underlying void. Yet again, most ritual practices say God is everywhere, the Atman breathes gods in and out over eons and underpins all existence (however Maya deludes us into thinking there is some form of physical reality when actually everything is emanations from the dream of brahma.)

The Turks have this word, Huzun, which means the void one feels when one has been abandoned by God. I am aware of this constant emptiness in my soul, which has been filled only a few times; most memorably in Rumi's mausoleum in Konya - on entering I felt a sudden sense of something pouring into me, something sad and old and infinite.

Have you seen Barefoot Gen? About the boy who survives Hiroshima? I wonder if his name was chosen because it means becoming nothing?

I am interested in Ukiyo-e in Japanese art, the contrast between white nothingness and natural simple brush strokes. It is the nothingness which makes works of artistic genius; outsider artists afflicted by mental disorder fill their pages from edge to edge with meticulous detail, creating a flat uniform plane where individual features of the work are impossible to distinguish. As the paper is filled, the meaning decreases, tends to nothing. Conversely, feted contemporary artists submit holes in the ground, empty canvasses, blank walls, silence as art, with similarly lack of semantic content. The bell curve of space filling in art.

I am interested in transience in art; the Tibetans make sand mandalas which they meticulously pour over days or weeks, then totally destroy. I still have some sand somewhere from the one they did here in Oxford at the Pitt Rivers.

Often I create live soundscapes online with no listeners. Sometimes this feels perfect rather than disappointing.

What about moral nothingness? Nihilism? Nothing can't even be an entity, else it wouldn't be nothing. Perhaps there's no such thing as nothing as the fact we have a word for it makes it into something, if only in our minds, which is where everything exists.

One of my concept art pieces was going to be called "This news, Just In" - in it I would take a news bulletin from the World Service & edit out everything except the inhalations of breath before the newscaster spoke. I wanted to listen closely to the difference in sound between the breaths taken before frivolous or non-lethal news items, and those taken before reporting on disasters or murders. Whilst the voice remains neutral, the breath is uncontrolled.

...Where next?

**Patrick Farmer**

Writer, composer & performer

...that nothing matters is an oxymoron, that nothing matters is not an oxymoron, that nothing matters is a subject, that nothing matters is an object, that nothing matters is a circle, that nothing matters is a myth, that nothing matters is an origin, that nothing matters is a continuous present, that nothing matters is undone, that nothing matters matters, that nothing matters is not nothing, that nothing matters is a thing, that nothing matters is perpetual, that nothing matters is waiting, that nothing matters is a fallacy, that nothing matters is an ontology, that nothing matters is twice removed, that nothing matters takes nothing from matter, that nothing matters takes matter from nothing, that nothing matters, that nothing matters is a proposition, that nothing matters is a sentence, that nothing matters is a statement, that nothing matters is a declaration, that nothing matters undoes itself, that nothing matters is not sexy, that nothing matters is nothing that matters, that nothing matters matters nothing, that nothing matters is a ruse, that nothing matters is an omni-sentiment, that nothing matters is to proclaim there are no poles, that nothing matters is predicated on something once having mattered, that nothing matters is a matter, that nothing matters is a state, that nothing matters cannot escape itself, that nothing matters matters, that nothing matters is not nothing, that nothing matters is something that matters, that nothing matters is inescapably political, that nothing matters is space between things, that nothing matters is five syllables, that nothing matters is heard everyday, that nothing matters is to be avoided, that nothing matters denies teleological imperative, that nothing matters is an oxymoron, that nothing matters is not an oxymoron...

**Paul Glynn**  
Artist

These words are now your material.

I suffer from autism and the abstract is something I cannot get my head around.

These words are now your material.

The idea of going into questions of being and nothingness gives me the heebee jeebees.

These words are now your material.

Some minds cannot comprehend the ineffable.

These words are now your material.

I cannot.

These words are now your material.

Nobody who is autistic can comprehend that which is not material.

These words are now your material.

I have been trying to step outside my autism with no success.

These words are now your material.

**John Grieve**

Musician & sound artist

**Bruno Guastalla**  
Musician & violin maker



*Leaving Aberdeen (2015)*



**Stavroula Kounadea**

Theatre maker

## **Silence: the Hidden Protagonist**

Today I am going to talk about Silence as the Hidden Protagonist in theatre and performance. One of the first playwrights to use silence as an integral element of the linguistic function of theatre was famously Harold Pinter. It's impossible for anyone to understand Harold Pinter's genius in his use of silence and pause without reading all of his work. For that reason I think it's a good idea for me to spend the next two hours reading to you all of Harold Pinter's plays.

[start reading]

*Pause*

[stop reading]

Actually, you know what? This is going to be really boring. I haven't even read all of his plays. This was going to be my first time. Right here, in front of you. We were going to have a moment, me and you. But if you're not interested I'll stop it.

By the way, have you heard of Andy Kaufman? He was one of the world's most famous stand-up comedians. He was also an actor, writer, presenter and performance artist. Some people say that he was the world's only Dadaist Comedian! There is a brilliant film called "Man on the Moon" that is based on his life and Andy Kaufman is played by Jim Carrey. Watch it when you get the chance.

Andy Kaufman was very much into Transcendental Meditation.

One day, allegedly, he asked his meditation guru:

"Is there... Is there a secret to being funny?"

And the guru, after giving it a lot of thought, said:

"Yes. Silence."

[Play Mighty Mouse clip]

And what you just saw, was Jim Carrey playing Andy Kaufman playing Mighty Mouse.

Andy Kaufman never described himself as a comedian. He used to say that he wanted to give "experiences" to people. And it's mostly because of Kaufman's mastery of silences and pauses that this was achieved.

I don't know if Harold Pinter and Andy Kaufman ever met, but I would like to think they did at some point.

Harold Pinter's plays are written like music scores with various instructions for "pause" or "Silence" carefully positioned in between the words. Sometimes he would use dashes and

sometimes dots. One dash of silence, for example, was shorter than two dashes, two dashes shorter than three dashes and so on. And we're not talking about a few pauses here and there. He actually wrote 144 pauses into his work *The Betrayal*, 149 into *The Caretaker* and 224 pauses into *The Homecoming*.

Yes, I know what you're thinking, that there are people out there who have the job of counting pauses for a living.

All these moments filled with unspoken dialogue, are now characteristically known as a "Pinter pause" and a "Pinter Silence" (depending on the length) even when are found in other writers' plays.

I want to read you something that Harold Pinter said in one of the talks he gave in a Theatre Conference in 1962 in Bristol. And then maybe you will see why I think that Andy Kaufman and Harold Pinter could essentially be two sides of the same coin.

*"There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smokescreen. When true silence falls, we are still left with echo but are nearer nakedness. One way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness."*

Harold Pinter, 1962

Right now, I am standing in front of you now, sometimes talking to you, sometimes not. Some of you I have never met before in my life. This is our first time. This is our first encounter. This is real. What we're having right now, this moment *is* the beginning of theatre. Theatre *is* an encounter.

Andy Kaufman knew that. He didn't shy away from silence, he didn't cover his nakedness. Harold Pinter knew that. He didn't dress up his plays with trivia linguistic jewellery. They knew that theatre is a human encounter. Every word is like a kiss. And every silence that precedes the word is like the silent, lingering moment before our lips touch. Or, sometimes like the moment before the knife goes deeper.

[Pulp fiction Clip]

In theatre, as actors, as performers, we ask: Why does a character speak? Not why the writer made them speak but, *why* does this character start speaking right now, at this specific moment in time? Why don't they let silence just be? What is the motivation? What is her intention? Why does she have to silence the silence? In theatre, silencing the silence always comes from a necessity.

Let's take a simple example:

"I am going to put the kettle on."

Why did I say that? Maybe I am thirsty; maybe I really want a cup of tea. But why did I have to announce it? Why couldn't I just silently put the kettle on and make myself a cup?

"I am going to put the kettle on."

Maybe I really want to have a sit down and hang out with you. Maybe what I am actually saying is "Do you want to hang out with me for half an hour? I'll make you a cup of tea."

Maybe the kettle was broken yesterday and you promised to fix it. I don't want to ask you if you've fixed it already because I don't want you to think that I am checking on you so, instead I say "I am going to put the kettle on." But, what I really want to know is "Can I use the kettle? Does it work now? Did you fix it?"

"I am going to put the kettle on."

Maybe I have already told you that I am thirsty, that I would love a cup of tea, waiting for you to get up, go to the kitchen and make me one. When I realise that probably you're not going to do it, I get up and say "I am going to put the kettle on." But what I really mean is "I want you to take care of me", "I want my needs to be heard", "I want you to love me".

In this case, silencing the silence comes out of my necessity to be loved.

In theatre every character is looking for something. And that's what makes the words exist. That's what makes the play exist. Every phrase, every word that is spoken has a reason; a reason to break the silence. It's a necessity.

Theatre is difficult to document properly, because theatre's strength lies in the fact that what takes place between performer and audience is a real time, real space human encounter. It's like a kiss. Can you document a kiss? What does it feel like to be kissed? What does it feel like to be kissed by the person you love for the very first time? You were there, you can remember everything, you can probably still feel it. But you will never be able to properly document the experience.

Every word in a theatre play is like a kiss.

Have you watched the film "Before Sunrise"? It's a beautiful film with Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy. This is the first time that these previously complete strangers kiss for the very first time. Pay attention to the gaps in speech, to the timing and to the silences. But especially pay attention to the moments just before the silences are broken.

[play Before Sunrise]

I am still here, in front of you. Talking. My words are embraced by moments of silence.

And every pause, however short, however long, however loud the silence is, however frantic the stillness, this is the space where my words are born from. Like the few fleeting moments before we first kiss, in those moments that we finally certainly know that we are indeed about to kiss. In this split second just before our lips touch, this is where our kiss will be born. It's not born on our lips but in our silence.

**Peta Lloyd**  
Performance artist

BODY 1 BOX 1 BALANCE LEGS

ARMS X2 BALANCERIGHT PEN

PENLEFTUPBALANCEUPWORD

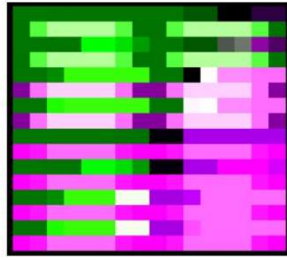
WRITE BODYSTAIRS BALANCE

STAIRS WORDS BOX BALANCE

STAIRSUPBODYBALANCEDROP



**AD Pawley**  
Artist



## **In the Beginning was the Glitch The Glitch was All The Glitch was Error**

The Glitch came from nowhere, from the void. With no intention or pre-meditation on my part, the technologies of DV Tape and Video Editing Software conspired to create an image for me. I felt no sense of authorship but identified strongly with its form.

## **The Glitch Became my Identity**

I use the Glitch as my on-line, virtual identity. I hide behind this image, which now defines me. I do not have a face anymore, its been replaced with a .jpg file.

## **The Glitch is Everywhere**

It haunts me and refuses to go away I am obsessed with the Glitch. I've made it into a film, cut it into slate, made t-shirts and tattooed it on my arm. It is my only true work of art, not consciously conceived but part of me. In conclusion I do not understand its meaning, or even worry if it means anything at all, yet it means everything to me.

*AD. Pawley*

[www.adpawley.com](http://www.adpawley.com)

September 2015



**Roger Perkins**  
Sculptor & installation artist

Empty, but not empty.



Each one lists the number of specific molecules held within the volume of a matchbox – oxygen, carbon, nitrogen etc.

**Mohan Rana**  
Poet

## पारगमन

मैं अतीत था फिर भी मैं सबको भूल जाऊँगा  
मैं सब सुन लेता हूँ अब, मैं अनहद हो गया हूँ  
दूर तक देख लेता अब, मैं क्षितिज हो गया हूँ  
सबसे दूर चला गया मैं ; अगोचर इतना पास कि  
एक हो गया हूँ अब तुम्हारी सांस में,  
मिट्टी का पुतला मैं मिट्टी हो गया हूँ।

(अप्रैल 2016)

## The Crossing

I'll forget all, even though I was the past  
I hear all now, I have become the Primal Sound.  
I can see afar now, I have become the horizon.  
I went away from all  
Yet so close that inconspicuous; now I am one with your breath,  
Effigy of clay, I have become the earth.

(April 2016)

Translated from Hindi

**Dianne Regisford**  
Social Sculpture practitioner

**Sensing 'gen' voids to 'ma'**

That, luscious incantation  
To... empty soul-space  
To... quell soulfyah  
To... dwell desirous  
For moments voided

A dawning moment  
Standing sentinel to...  
Portals holding promise

Rebirth encounter  
Holding court  
No jesta  
Jus pure...imbibing  
Pure soul soil etching  
Diving deep within...

That, rousing tempo  
Shrieks under moonlight  
Salving daytime missives  
Hawkers on soul-time  
Unite

Ecstasy be  
Ribbons weaving she  
Wefting sensory pathways  
Sheer ignition...  
Flight...

Moist...  
My morning foot  
Steps...  
Misty...tentative  
Spent...

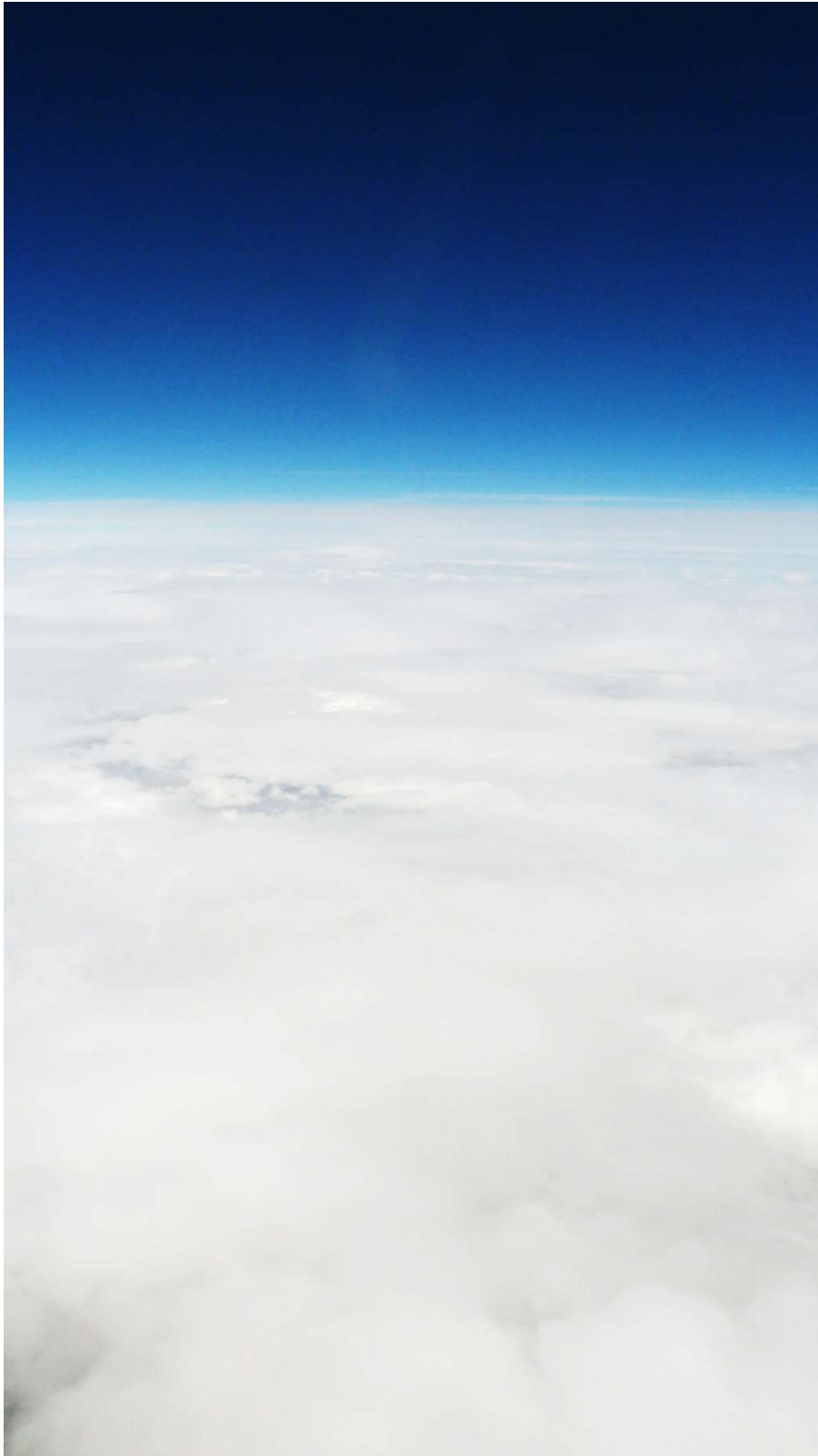
That...delectable imbibing  
Ode to well-heeled  
Rapture to...  
Sweet spaces  
Intimate  
Sweet nothings

Only heated soliloquy  
Smelted reverie  
Holds me brittle  
Triumphant, missioned

An entered  
Being...



**Lee Riley**  
Sound artist & performer



Up here for miles and miles there is just white nothingness, nothing has to be something, but up here although being on a plane I feel so small within this vast landscape of white nothingness, lost looking to find something of nothing.

**Austin Sherlaw-Johnson**

Composer & performance artist

**THIS  
PIECE OF  
WORK IS MUCH  
BETTER THAN ANYBODY  
ELSE'S**

**Annette van der Hoek PhD**  
Indologist

## **Zero or the Importance of Emptiness**

Where there is time, there must be timelessness. Where there are manifestations, there has to be emptiness. Where there is one there must be zero...

Indian thinking does seem to have stumbled upon a law of completeness early on. Of opposites that are co-dependant. Of opposites that constitute a whole. Of opposites that are prerequisite for each other's existence.

Poetry sings of it. Philosophy speaks of it: opposites and the need to transcend them. Back into the source from which they once sprang: divinity; the first sound; awareness; the creative principle; emptiness. Early Indian philosophy isn't stingy when it comes to naming the source.

With later -religious- development however, Hinduism stayed closer to the principle of divinity - and divinity's numerous manifestations- while Buddhism -also rooted in Indian philosophy- ran along with the idea of emptiness: void as the seed from which all creation sprang. An absence of manifest form into which all creation will return: the ultimate goal. Sunyata, or emptiness, is indeed a concept steeped deeply in Indian thinking.

A standard work of reference for the Sanskrit language (Monier- Williams dictionary of 1899) gives for the verbal root-derivative 'shun': 'hollowness', 'absence', but also: 'a swollen state', 'growth', 'prosperity'. For the noun 'sunya' both the translations 'empty', 'void' and 'a cypher' are given.

The pair of opposites that are thus united in the term 'sunyata', or 'sunya-ness', are emptiness on the one hand and manifestation, prosperity on the other. This apparent contradiction gets overcome nicely in the mathematical adage heard in India: by adding zero the value of the preceding figure gets increased by ten times.

Emptiness thus seems to equal or enhance 'prosperity'. Both in philosophy and in mathematics.

About sunyata's philosophical background and application we know quite a bit. But when and where was sunya as a mathematical concept first applied?

Frits Staal has this to say about it: "[between 1000 and 600 BCE a linguistic term] 'lopa' [was used] to refer to omissions, disappearances and things that are lost. It is here that the origins of the mathematical concept of zero seem to lie. It is a long period and with smudgy edges but there it is..." he writes in *Studies of the History of Indian Mathematics* (Hindustan Book Agency, 2010).

According to the *Epigraphica Indica*, the official publication of the Archaeological Survey of India (volume ii, 1894) the earliest inscription using a system of nine digits and a zero comes from Gujarat and is dated 595 CE.

Between these two (and a lot of other references) there is quite some ground to cover. Especially when our research question is not only to find fresh evidence for zero's earliest appearance but also to locate its connection to philosophy.

Retracing zero's steps in the world; following it back to its source: a philosophical journey to the origins of a mathematical concept.

**Yoko Shinozaki with John**  
NinGen (human BE-ing)

I love you, unconditionally

Once upon a time

in a place far  
far away

or indeed right here and right now

there was a boy who  
come rain or shine  
searched for four-leaved clovers on the land

I love you

Every  
Day

He would rejoice for each and every one he found  
gifted it to the Other to dance together

And with a grin  
would continue his search

Again

I love you

and

Again

Searching  
Re-searching  
Re-researching

Unconditionally

He was  
and indeed still is  
the happiest NinGen in the world

*Stop Being So Defeatist, Silly*

*No-thing  
can be  
and is  
ineffable  
if it  
can be  
and is  
described as      ineffable*

*No-thing  
can be  
and is  
non-existent  
if it  
can be  
and is  
described as      non-existent*

– Anonymous

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Please note: this page is absolutely NOT part of the thesis nor an 'artwork'



On Ma & Gen: Artist Contributions

Appendix II: Case Studies

1. **Translation - x:x (I) Line & Translation - x:x (II) Dot**
2. **'On the Possibility of Inertia'** Solo Show
3. **365: This Is Not A Work**
4. **Suikinkutsu** (in collaboration with Michael Blow)
5. **Tipping Point** (in collaboration with Alex Allmont)
6. **.I.My.Me.Mine.**
7. **CARU (Contemporary Arts ReSearch Unit) / Gen Project**
8. **Document of Authenticity**
9. **A Walk I, II, III**
10. **My I, II, III**
11. **The Art of NinGen**
12. **NinGen**
13. **Bright Tailed and Bushy Eyed**
14. **No Point: Ts&Cs: Premises & Promises II**
15. **Making an Art Manifest**

Other referenced works:

16. **The White Cube Gallery**
17. **The Child as Philosopher I & II**
18. **A Secret Garden**
19. **YokoJohn**
20. **The Law: A Line of Morality**
21. **Gaia: Self-Obliteration**
22. **Suspended Flexibility**
23. **The Making of a Monster**
24. **XYZ & T**
25. **Austin Sherlaw-Johnson** | Composition & the Random
26. **Peta Lloyd** | Language & the Body



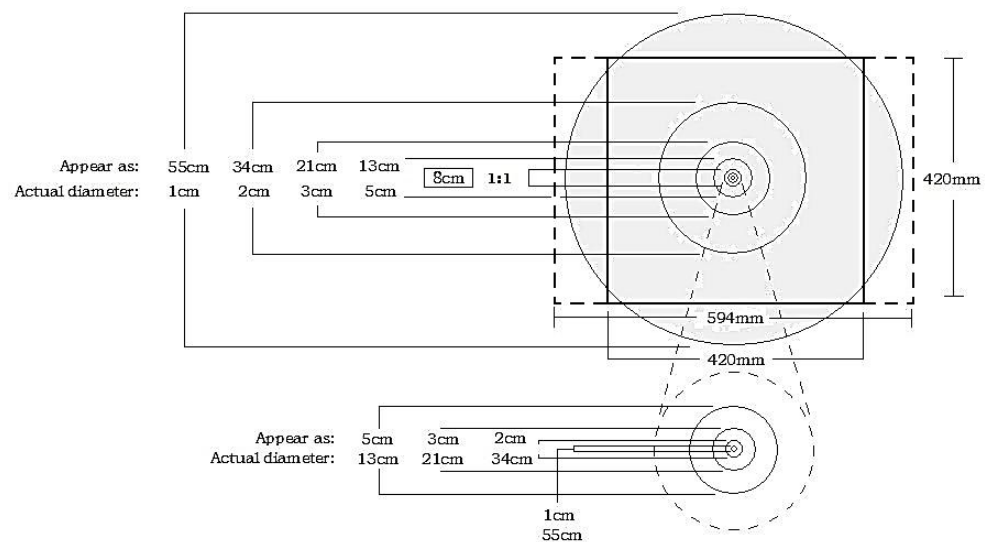
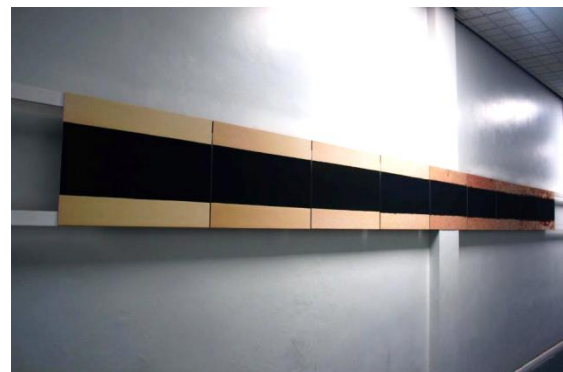
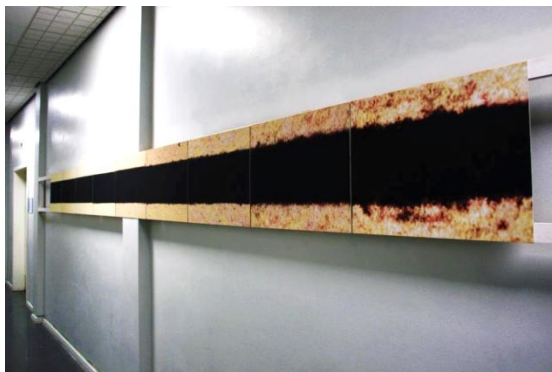
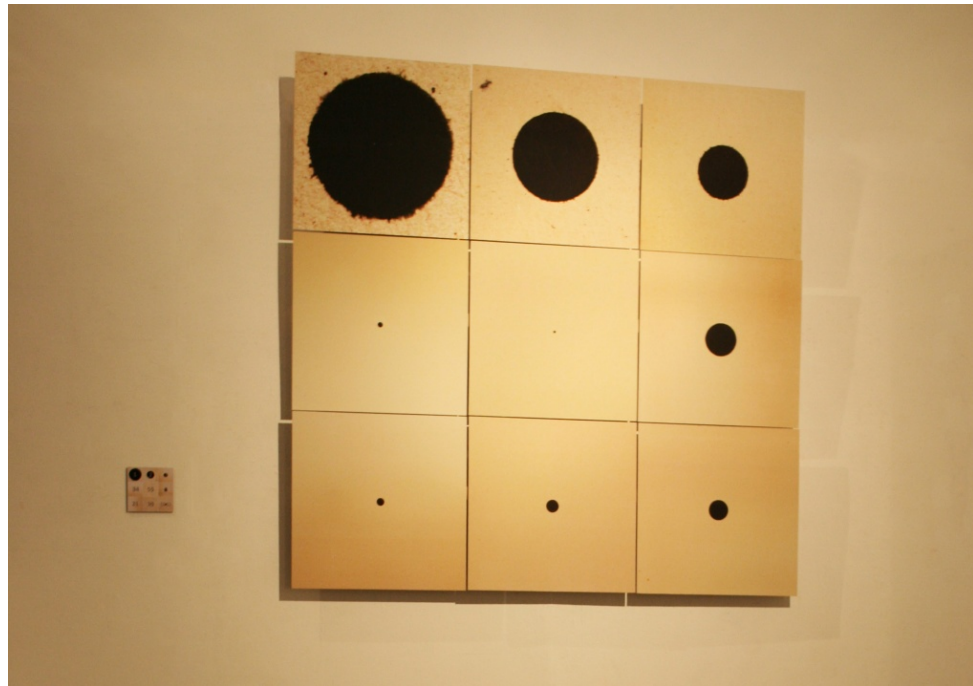
1. **Translation - x:x (I) Line & Translation - x:x (II) Dot**

Nov 2012 | *On the Possibility of Inertia*

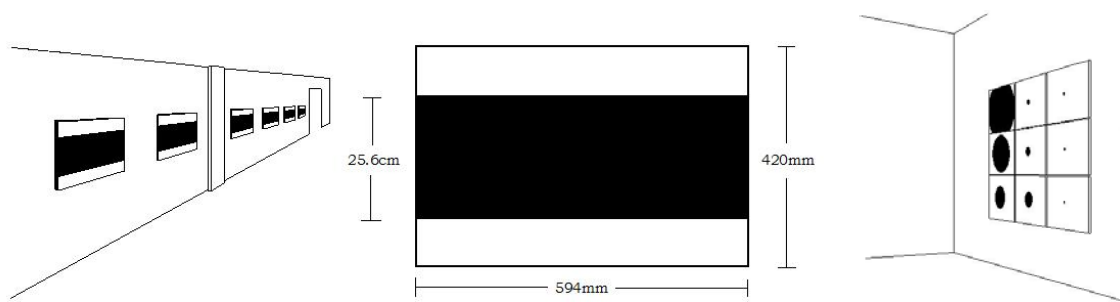
Richard Hamilton Building, Oxford Brookes University

May 2013 | *On the Probability of Inertia*, *Amazing Acts Festival 2013*

Pegasus Theatre, Oxford



(cont.)



<div>1.6cm 1:16</div>	<div>8mm 1:32</div>	<div>4mm 1:64</div>	<div>1.6cm 1:1</div>	<div>8mm 1/2</div>	<div>4mm 1/4</div>
<div>3.2cm 1:8</div>	<div>1mm 1:256</div>	<div>2mm 1:128</div>	<div>3.2cm 1:2</div>	<div>1mm 1/16</div>	<div>2mm 1/8</div>
<div>6.4cm 1:4</div>	<div>12.8cm 1:2</div>	<div>25.6cm 1:1</div>	<div>6.4cm 1:4</div>	<div>12.8cm 1:8</div>	<div>25.6cm 1:16</div>

Investigated Concept: Perceptual perimeters

Description: Photographic series.

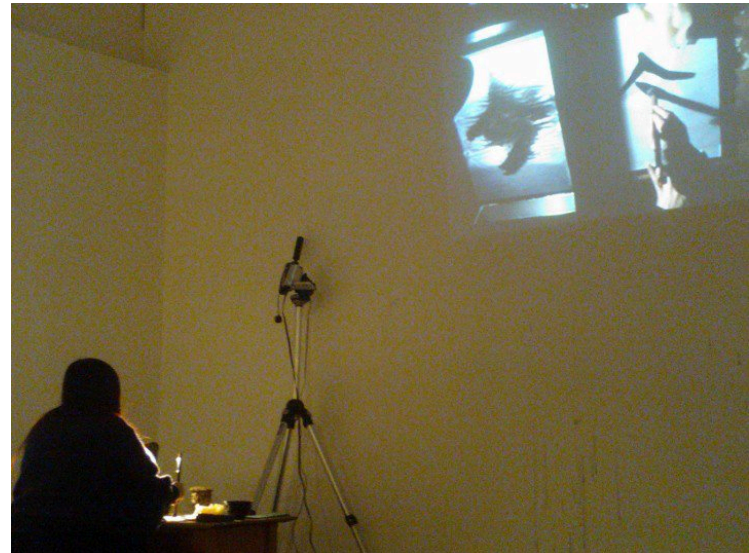
*Translation - x:x (I) Line:* A set of 9 images of a black line/area, seemingly the same width of 25.6cm but in reality ranging from 1mm to 25.6cm (actual width).

*Translation - x:x (II) Dot:* A set of 9 images of a black dot/area, the largest actual diameter appearing to be the smallest and the smallest actual diameter appearing to be the largest.

2. **'On the Possibility of Inertia'** - Solo Show with:

365: *This Is Not A Work* (2012-ongoing)  
Coffee & Cigarette  
*Phenomeno•logy (I): The Object*  
*Phenomeno•logy (II): The Subject*  
*Translation - x:x (I) Line*  
*Translation - x:x (II) Dot*  
*Language Studies I: ≤Haiku*  
*Language Studies II: ≤(≤Haiku)*  
*Language Studies III: ≤[≤(≤Haiku)]*  
*Language Studies IV: ≤{≤[≤(≤Haiku)]}*  
Interpretation

Nov 2013 | Arena, Richard Hamilton Building, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford



Investigated Concept: Inertia

Description: The artist sits and writes 今 (the Japanese character for 'now'), using traditional Japanese calligraphy tools, then sinks each written sheet into a trough of black ink. The action is intermittently switched, to erasing of words on books with Tip-Ex. Every now and then a word is missed out randomly, left as meaningless marks floating on blank pages. The performance continues for 6 hours over 3 days. Every 4 minutes 33 seconds a loud click from *Language Studies IV: ≤{≤[≤(≤Haiku)]}* sounds and echoes. The action is captured on camera and streamed live on to the wall above from a projector.



3. **365: This Is Not A Work**

1 January 2012-, 2013-, 2014-, 2015-, 2016-ongoing



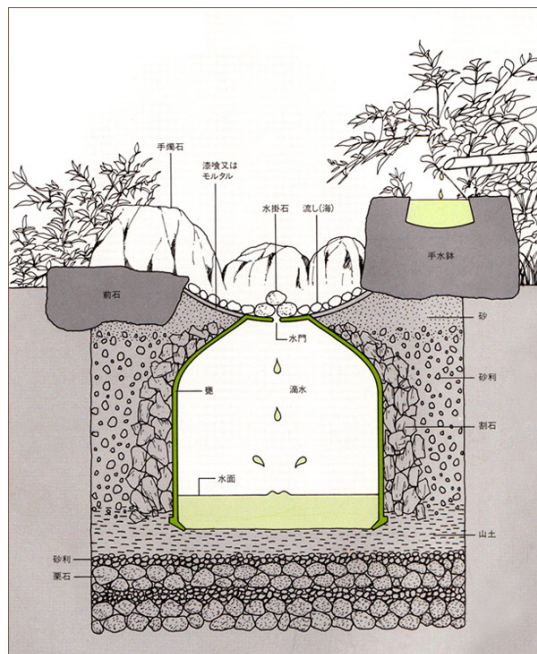
Investigated Concept: Observation

Material: Human hair and PVA glue

Description: Each year, on 31<sup>st</sup> December, the artist showers at midnight and combs her hair, which is collected and covered under a layer of PVA handprint. Every day, another layer is applied on top. Currently there are five sets, all of which are ongoing.

#### 4. Suikinkutsu

February 2013 ~ (permanent installation) | Audiograft 2013  
Richard Hamilton Building Garden, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford



Investigated Concept: composing silences

Material: Large dish, large pot, square flowerpot, rocks, stones, pebbles, sand, edging, slate chips

Description: Permanent installation in collaboration with Mike Blow and the Oxford Brookes Estates team. Suikinkutsu is an outdoor musical instrument, played by pouring water into a pot buried underground. The delicate reverberative sound is often enjoyed through a bamboo listening stick. The piece was created accordingly to the traditional Japanese method, with a large upside down pot buried on a dish, surrounded by rocks and stones of varying sizes.



**5. Tipping Point**

Feb-Mar 2013 | Audiograft 2013

Richard Hamilton Building, Oxford Brookes University



Investigated Concept: 'Tipping Point'

Material: PVA glue, paper clips, strings, MDF, white paint

Description: Installation in collaboration with Alex Allmont for SARU's Audiograft Festival 2013.



6. *.I.My.Me.Mine.*

May 2013 | *On the Probability of Inertia*, Amazing Acts Festival 2013  
Pegasus Theatre, Oxford



Investigated Concept: Self-Obliteration

Description: Performance-installation. The darkened room is filled with the sound of a loud applause of an excited audience. The artist sits in front of a mirror, dressed in a black sheet, folding the pages from Kafka's *Metamorphosis* into faces – continually, for six hours each day, for three days. The artist puts on each face as it is formed, discarding the old for a new mask. Behind, on the opposite end of the room, a mannequin sits dressed and positioned identically to the artist. The head of the mannequin holds a video camera under the mask and is pointed directed at the mirror in front, capturing and streaming live the installation footage to the large TV monitor in the main foyer of the theatre.

## 7. CARU (Contemporary Arts ReSearch Unit) / Gen Project 2013-ongoing



Silencing the Silence poster



Arts re:Search poster



Nothing in Art poster



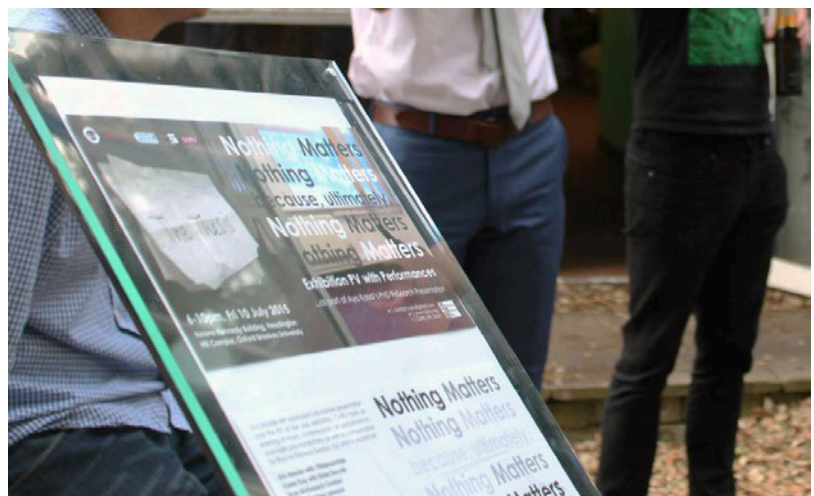
of Art of Culture of poster



Where's the Art poster



CARU logo



a view of the Nothing Matters event. Photo by Aya Kasai

Investigated Concept: Authenticity

Description: A logo was created, with relevant activities performed to legitimise its authenticity.



**8. Document of Authenticity**September 2013 | *Silencing the Silence*

OVADA (Oxford Visual Arts Development Agency), Oxford

May-Jun 2014 | *A Given Structure, Fringe Arts Bath 2014*

FaB Gallery 1, Bath

Nov-Dec 2014 | *Writing Sound 2*

Lydgalleriet Bergen, Norway

**CONSENT FORM**
 silencing  
the  
silence

Title of work:

**Document of Authenticity**

as part of:

Full title of Research:

*The Phenomenological Interaction between the Being and the Non-Being  
- an Intercultural Investigation into the Notion of 'Ma' and Its Function in Art*

Researcher:

Name: Aya Kasai  
Authority/Organisation: *Silencing the Silence; Gen Project*  
Position: Principal Investigator  
Tel: 07723 362 281  
Email: [ayakasykasai@gmail.com](mailto:ayakasykasai@gmail.com)

Please initial box:

 Permission  
Granted

 permission  
Rejected

I hereby authorise Aya Kasai to think about me, if she so wishes, whenever and in any way imaginable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I hereby grant Aya Kasai the authorship of my future silences, so long as all compositional components are silent.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I, Aya Kasai, hereby authorise the holder of this document to think about me, if they so wish, whenever and in any way imaginable.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I, Aya Kasai, hereby grant the co-authorship of my future silences to all holders of this document.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please tick box:

Yes No

I agree to the use of the researcher's copy of this authorisation document for the purpose of the said research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Any amendment or additional clause assumed by either party will only be binding if evidenced in this agreement in the space below:		

Name of Participant (optional)

Date

Signature

Aya Kasai

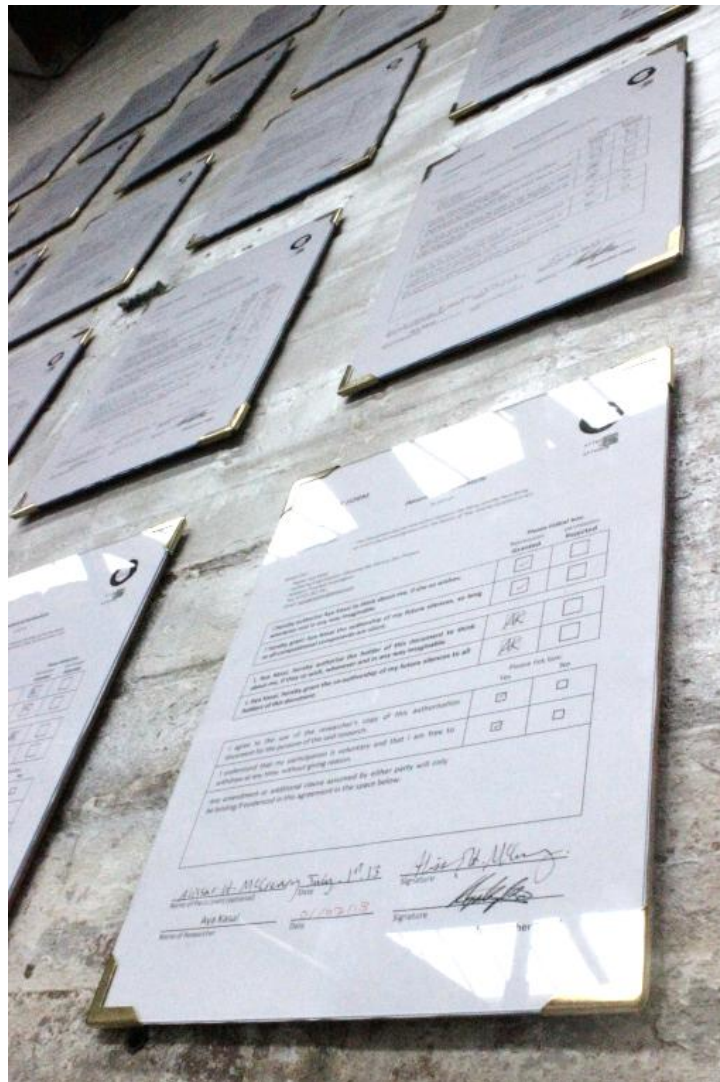
Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

[Researcher Copy]

(cont.)



Investigated Concept: Authority

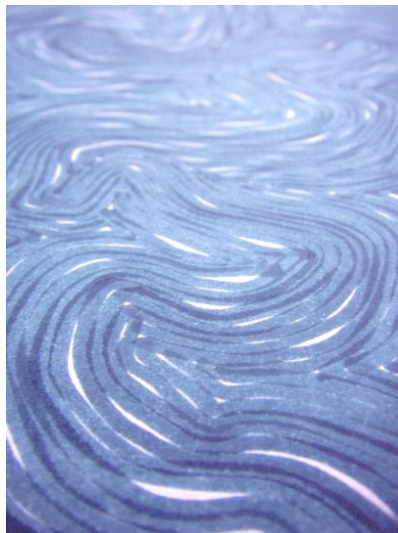
Description: The piece is essentially a set of A4 documents, each paired and labelled as [Participant copy] and [Researcher copy]. The pairs are presented to the 'audience' for them to read and potentially sign. If signed, the page marked researcher copy was returned. If specific conditions were raised with regards to the requests for permissions, discussions were offered for added clauses to be agreed and initialed. The returned pages were framed and can be installed in various configurations depending on the dimension of the space. A blank copy can also be remotely printed, framed and exhibited, as was the case for a show in Norway in 2014.

**9. Walk I, II, III**

Oct 2011 | Oxford

Oct 2013 | Oxford

Oct 2015 | Oxford

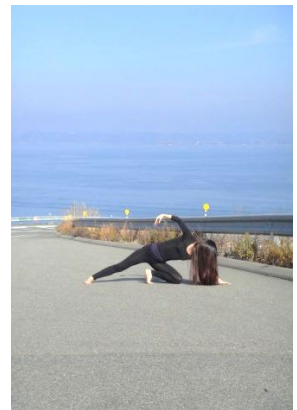


Investigated Concept: In-discrimination

Description: Drawing series on various paper with pens and pencils. A single line was drawn for a specific walk, mentally tracing down the treaded path. Accumulative lines were drawn, trailing as close to the preceding line as possible, until the pages were filled to the edges.



10. **My I, II, III**  
2, 3 & 4 Jan 2014 | Teshima, Mukoujima & Naoshima, Shikoku, Japan



Investigated Concepts: No-Body

Description: A performative study into the notion of becoming a nothing in relation to butoh.

11. **The Art of NinGen**

Jan 2014 | *Vibrations* Online Art Journal

<https://vibrationsartjournal.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/aya-kasai11.pdf>

(limited not-for-sale copies in print)

Mar 2014 | *Home & Belonging*, East Oxford Community Centre, Oxford

**The Art of NinGen**

A few years ago an artist friend of mine, Yoko Shinozaki, told me about NinGen,  
a Gen artist she met on a remote island in the south of Japan.

Yoko, who is no longer with us, had at the time  
been travelling, trying to find Her Art.

NinGen didn't believe in Art.

NinGen simply lived

observing

smiling

人  
N  
i  
n

'Gen' denotes the *place* between beings

Gen  
間

NinGen was not strictly an artist – but was considered as such.

Two years ago I finally had the opportunity to visit the island.  
I searched for NinGen for days on end, infatuated.

It was on the last day of my visit that I found  
the place where Yoko met NinGen.

Seeing NinGen's smile I perished.

We sat. And smiled in silence.

At my silly humanness.

At my desperation

to find NinGen

– the place in between.

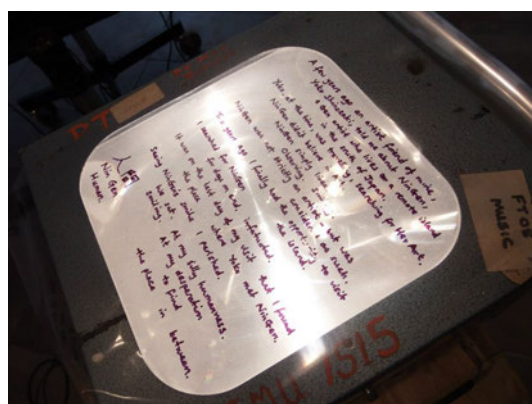
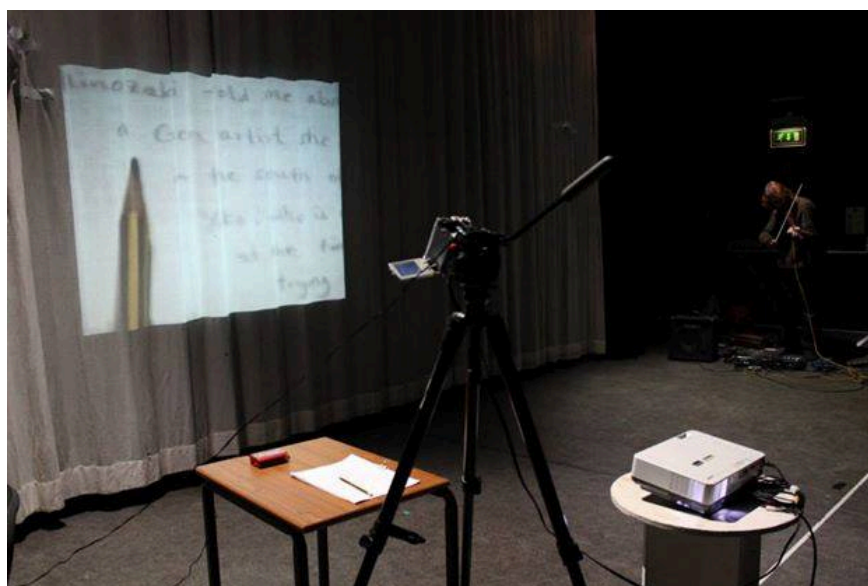


Investigated Concept: NinGen

Description: Text. The piece was first published online as part of the *Vibrations* journal, then printed as an A1 poster and framed to be exhibited at *Home & Belonging*.

## 12. NinGen

Apr 2014 | *An Evening with John Cage, Erik Satie & Oxford Improvisers* – supported by CARU  
 Stammtisch, OVADA (Oxford Visual Arts Development Agency), Oxford  
 May-Jun 2014 | *Dialogue on Nothing in Art, Fringe Art Bath 2014*, FaB Gallery 3, Bath  
 Jun 2014 | *Recital de Piano: um noturno*, video Broadcast (Oxford - Rio de Janeiro)



Investigated Concept: NinGen

Description: Co-performance with Malcolm Atkins, music by Malcolm Atkins; first performed with Oxford Improvisers, with live transmission to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The *Recital de Piano* performance with Késia Decoté was also a live transmission between Oxford & Rio de Janeiro.

The artist writes the text from *The Art of NinGen* (2014) on OHP with a contact mic attached to the pen, accompanied by music i.e. *NinGen* by Atkins or improvisation by Oxford Improvisers.



13. **Bright Tailed and Bushy Eyed**

Nov 2015 | Interdisciplinary Arts Studio, Richard Hamilton Building, Oxford University

OXFORD  
BROOKES  
UNIVERSITY

# Bright Tailed & Bushy Eyed Solo Show

**24 - 30 November 4031**  
**10am - 7pm**

Private View:  
**23 November 4031**  
**5.30 - 7.30pm**

**Venue:**  
**Interdisciplinary Arts Studio**  
Richard Hamilton Building  
Headington Campus  
Oxford Brookes University  
OX3 0BP

Curated and produced by 'them'

Supported by 'us'  
In association with 'you'

For tickets and more information visit:  
[www.facebook.com/IAM.CARU](http://www.facebook.com/IAM.CARU)

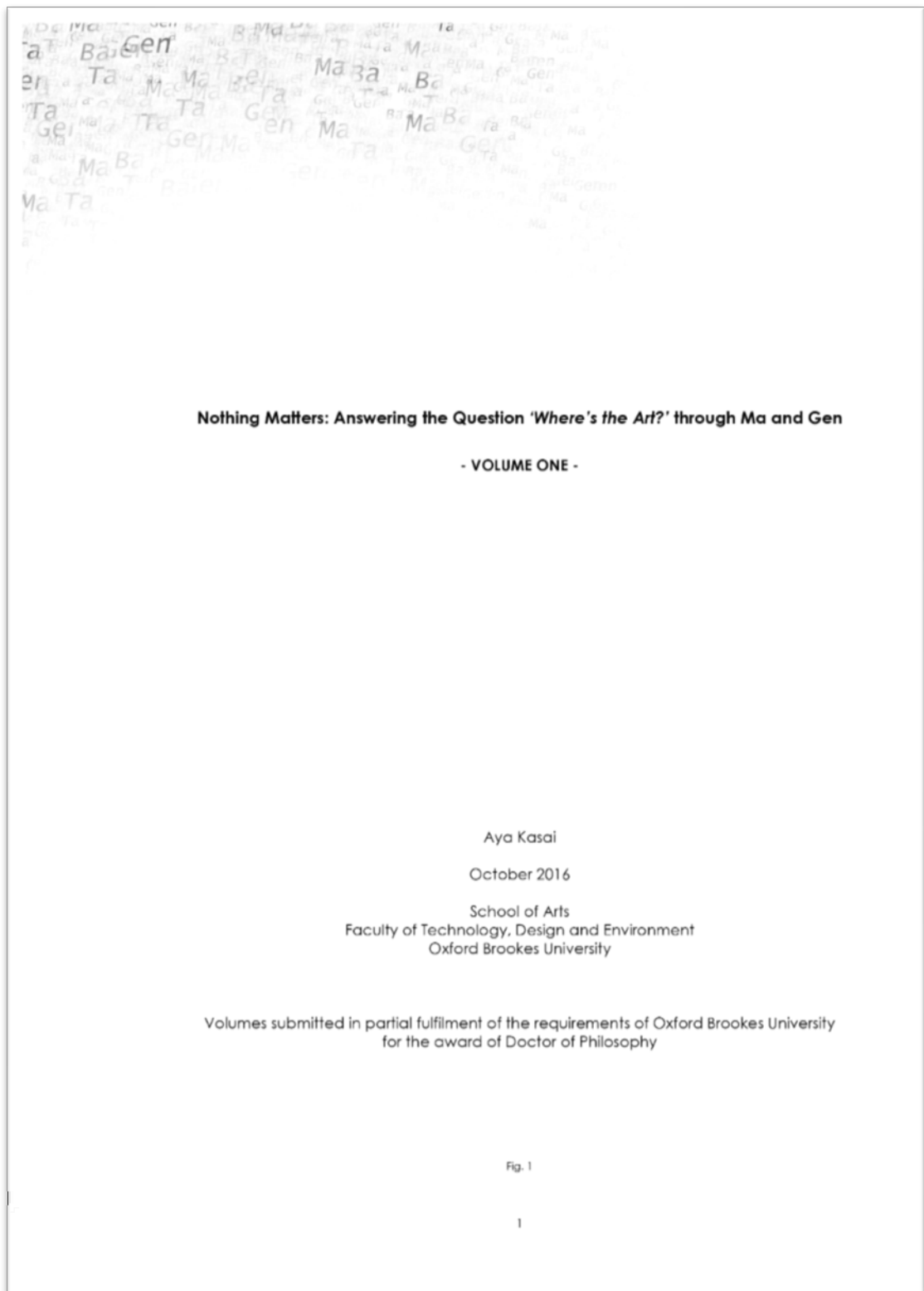


Investigated Concept: Documentation

Description: A poster intervention. The exact format of the Oxford Brookes University posters with its formally registered colours, logo, font and measurements were used as the base design. Three A2 copies were printed and displayed around the School of Arts at Brookes. A Facebook page and a petition page were created by CARU under the subject 'Interdisciplinary Arts' for open dialogues.

#### 14. No Point: Ts&Cs: Premises & Promises II

As this is read  
(excerpts from the authentic copy of the original duplicate)





(cont.)

Mu is Mu

Fig. 1.a

(cont.)

– In Search of Nothing –

*'If you stare into the Abyss, the Abyss stares back at you'*

Friedrich Nietzsche, *'Beyond Good and Evil'*, 1886



*'A Drawing of a Painting of a Photocopy of Albrecht Dürer's Das große Rasenstück ("The Great Piece of Turf")' © (Aya Kasai, 2015)*

[Cover page Fig. 1.Gen: Glossary Fig. 1.c]

Fig. 1.b

(cont.)



Investigated Concept: Authenticity

Description: A word was introduced, with relevant activities performed to validate its authenticity.

15. **Making an Art Manifest**  
May 2016 | *Stammtisch* with CARU, Joe Perks, Oxford

**Stammtisch**

## CARU: Making an Art Manifest

8pm, Thursday 26 May 2016, Joe Perks & Co., St Clements, Oxford

Answer each question with less than 5 words:

Name (optional):






How is Art made & shared?
Where is Art made & shared?
Who is Art for?
When did Art begin/end?
What is an Artist?

### Why is it (not) Art?

How: *Art is... made and shared by/with/through...*  
 Where: *in/at/on...*  
 Who: *for...*  
 When: *Art began/ended with...*  
 What: *I am (not) an Artist because...*

### Your Manifesto:

Summarise in a single sentence:

Stammtisch

## CARU: Making an Art Manifest

Why is it (not) Art? – example:

	Abramović	Emin	Cage	You
<b>How</b> is Art made & shared? e.g. with passion, labour, skill, imagination, wit, by theorists/critics, with/for money etc.		✓	✓	
<b>Where</b> is Art made & shared? e.g. in a Gallery, schools, the market, on a plinth, with people, with nature, etc.			✓	
<b>Who</b> is Art for? e.g. the artist (financial, emotional etc.), for other people, for the environment, for our society etc.	✓	✓		
<b>When</b> did Art begin/end? e.g. with cave paintings, aboriginal art, religion, language, theorists, the art market etc.	✓			
<b>What</b> is an Artist? e.g. craftsman, innovator, trickster, damaged, thinker, rebel, obsessive, educator, conman etc.				✓




- The Artist Is Present (2010) Marina Abramović
- My Bed (2015) Tracey Emin
- 4:33 (1952) John Cage
- Your work...?
- Stammtisch / CARU: Making an Art Manifest (May 2016) Aya Kasai – in collaboration with Sam Kamperis, OVADA, Klick: Oxford-Leiden, and Playground.







Investigated Concept: Pro-duction

Description: A group activity was planned under CARU (2013-) – in collaboration with Sam Kamperis, OVADA, Klick; Oxford-Leiden, and Playground – and framed with a title.

The event has not yet happened at this point in time.

The event will have happened by the time this thesis is published.



Other referenced works:

**16. The White Cube Gallery**

Sep-Oct 2011 | *InWithBetween Arts Festival*, Blackwell's Art & Poster, Oxford

The Old Boot Factory, Oxford

The Mill Gallery, Mind, Oxford

Nov 2011 | Café Nero, Blackwell's Bookshop, Oxford



Investigated Concept: In-discrimination

Description: Photographic series. Modelled by Ronak Khakban, Lee Riley, and Aya Kasai; with a Ma head-box made with recycled pizza box and tissue paper.

**17. The Child as Philosopher I & II**

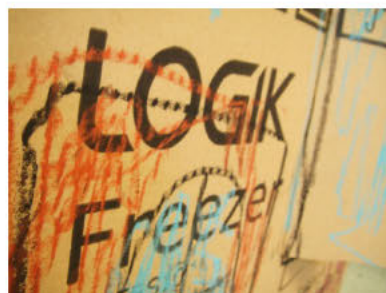
Apr 2011 | *Portable Void* series, Commarket Street, Oxford

Sep 2011 | *InWithBetween Arts Festival*, St. Clements' Family Centre, Oxford



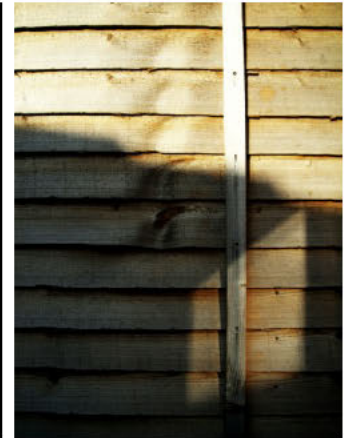
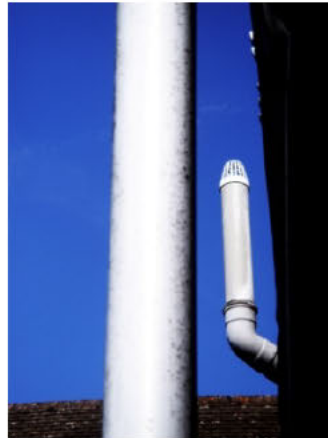
Investigated Concept: The Child

Description: Workshops for children in collaboration with Ronak Khakban, Roshi Khakban, and Lee Riley. The activity explored ways of facilitating open dialogues through a direct engagement with a raw material i.e. corn flour mixture. Documentation was made in forms of audio recordings and photography, which was later used as part of *Thinking Outside of the Box Inside The Box* (2011).



18. **A Secret Garden**

Sept 2011 | *InWithBetween Arts Festival*, St Clements, Oxford, Oxford

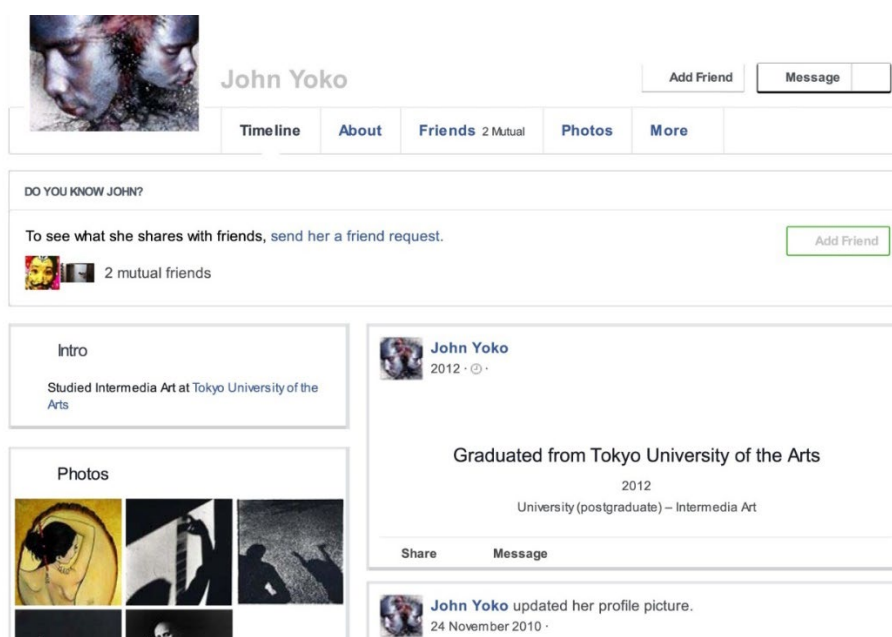


Investigated Concept: Observation

Description: A space was observed over a period of 10 months (September 2010 – July 2011). A series of documentation photographs were presented in the space.



19. **YokoJohn**  
Dec 2010 | Oxford



Investigated Concept: Authenticity

Description: For two weeks the artist speaks of Yoko Shinozaki (a friend from university and a schizophrenic with an imaginary friend, John), who would be joining the group for the presentation day to help with the project. Yoko friends some people in the group on Facebook before her visit. She runs late on the day however, so the artist introduces her and the project on her behalf for those who were not informed during the two weeks. The introduction ends with: '*...and she is helping me with my work by, being here, now, with us*'.

20. **The Law: A Line of Morality**

Sep-Oct 2011 | *InWithBetween Festival*

Philosophy Department, Norrington Room, Blackwell's Bookshop, Oxford  
Oct-Nov 2014 | '*Paradise Lost*' by tactileBOSCH, *Cardiff Contemporary 2014*  
Former Customs & Immigration Building, 56 Bute Street, Cardiff Bay, Cardiff



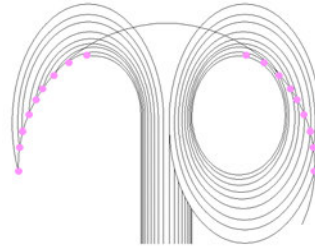
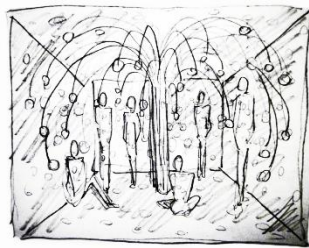
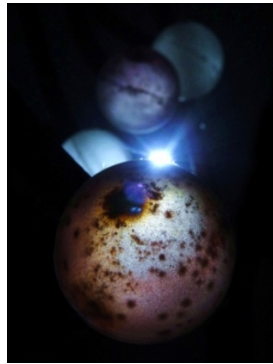
Investigated Concept: Morality

Description: An intervention in book form. Two bibles and one poetry book were deconstructed and pieced back together as one, with extra pages and a new gold title 'The Law' embossed on a recycled leather cover. Extra pages have quotes on morality and ask increasingly absurd questions, navigating the reader between the 'half-pages' towards their unique line of morality. The piece has been exhibited in various contexts: on a library bookshelf in the philosophy section, labelled authentically and security tagged; on the cashier's counter in the Norrington Room at Oxford Blackwells bookshop; on a tailor-made shelf for a public exhibition.



## 21. **Gaia: Self-Obliteration**

May 2010 | Project: Fourth Bridge Show 2010, Kensington, London

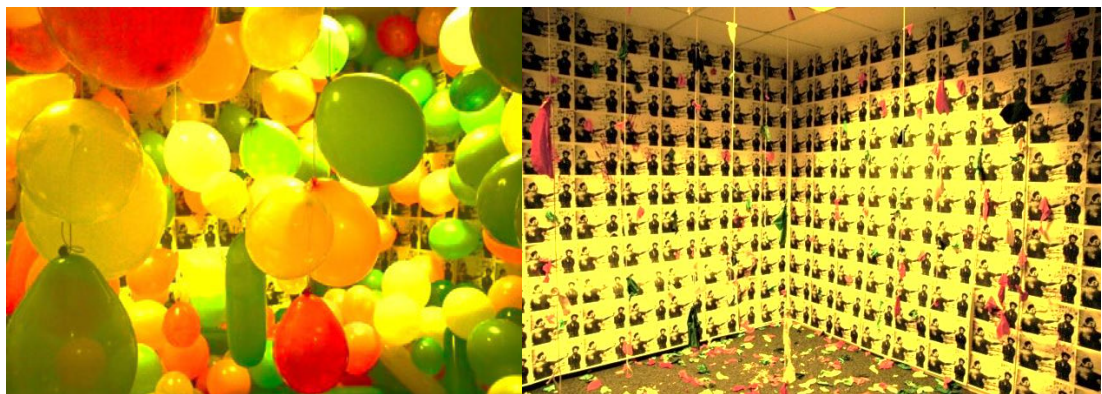


### Investigated Concept: Self-Obliteration

Description: Performance installation (for maximum 12 people) in collaboration with the Natural Science Department of Richmond, the American International University in London. The garden contains 72 spheres, each bearing mould, hanging on the ends of garden hose bunched together as a tree trunk. The hoses are painted and spheres are sprayed in UV light-activated paint. The room is made light-light with the walls and ceiling covered in black tissue, on which glowing dots (of similar size to the spheres) are painted. The floor is covered in mirror-foil. The audience is invited to wear a black t-shirt, also with glowing dots, before led into the darkened room as a group. The door is closed and Massive Attack's *Teardrop* plays. The tree shakes intermittently, making the floating spheres shake and sway as the audience explores the space.

## 22. **Suspended Flexibility**

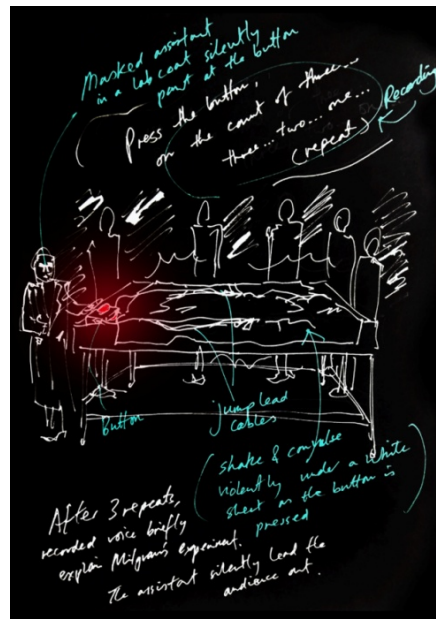
2009 | Kensington, London



### Investigated Concept: Utopia

Description: Installation performance with audience participation. The room is crammed with colourful balloons. The lights are manipulated with yellow cellophane. Coca Cola jingle, *I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing (In Perfect Harmony)*, plays loudly. The audience is provided with cotton wool for their ears and syringe pens (whose ink cores have been replaced with needles). The audience enters the room altogether, popping the balloons with the syringes. For a few seconds the room is filled with loud bangs of popping balloons. As the last balloon is burst the walls become visible, which are covered in hundreds of photocopies of the infamous Saigon execution image, splattered with red paint and small red hand prints. The strings, to which some of the balloons were tied, now hang like empty nooses.

23. **The Making of a Monster**  
2009 | Kensington, London



Investigated Concept: Morality

Description: Performance installation with audience participation, which transcribed the Milgram Experiment – in collaboration with Kengo Kasai. The original experiment in the early 1960s demonstrated the subtle yet significant nature of authoritative instructions. The artist lies under a white sheet in the centre of the room, holding jump-lead cables connected to a black box with a large button. A masked assistant in a lab coat silently leads the audience into the room, stands by the sink and indicates to the box. A recorded male voice reads: 'on the count of three, please press the button...three...two...one...' (pauses, and repeats). The button glows red as it is pressed, and the box buzzes loudly. The body under the sheet shakes violently. After the few 'shocks', the recording pauses for a while and the room falls silent. The recording starts again, briefly explaining Milgram's experiment in a monotone voice. As the recording ends, the assistant silently escorts the audience out of the room.

24. **XYZ & T**  
2008 | Kensington, London



Investigated Concept: Space/Time

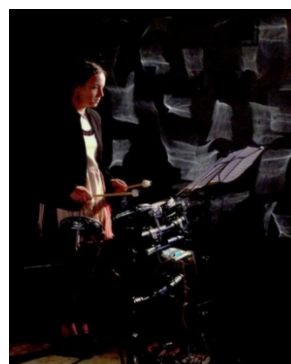
Description: Long-exposure b/w photography series.



25. **Austin Sherlaw-Johnson** | Composition & the Random



*Non-Musical Piece for Bells – Text Triggered Bell Sounds* (2013) Performed by Austin Sherlaw-Johnson Mike Blow Ryan Quarterman Charlotte Heffernan Alex Allmont Lee Riley Veronica Cordova de la Rosa and Aya Kasai  
Photo by Pier Corona



*Filling Space – Then Emptying It Again* (2013) Performed by Io Latta Scaf



*I am Sitting in a Room – Are you feeling better yet?* (2013)



*Ma piece – for Aya* (2013)

All images except for *Non-Musical Piece for Bells* by Aya Kasai taken at *Silencing the Silence*

26. Peta Lloyd | Text & Image



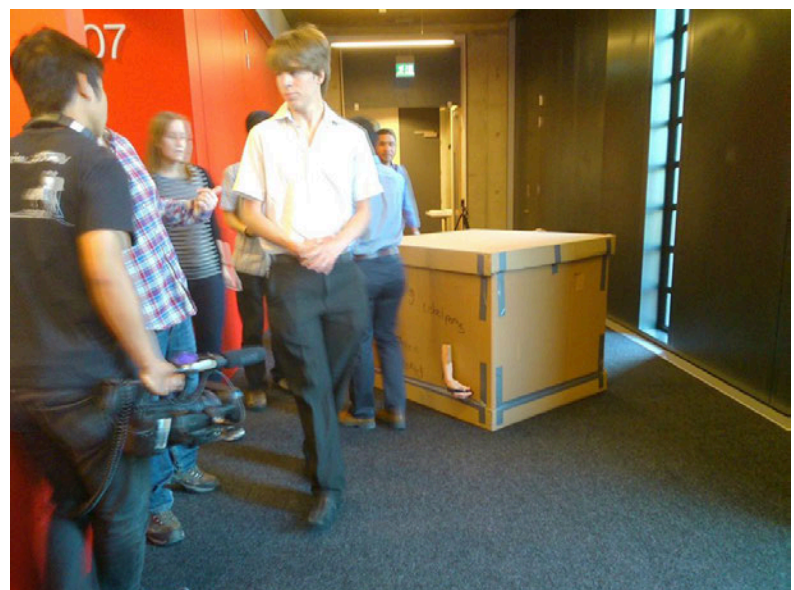
Method(ology)4 (2014) / Nothing in Art



It just is (2015) / FaB Intervention, Fringe Arts Bath Festival 2015



Lonely Cup (2014) / Nothing in Art



Method(ology) 1 (2014) / Oxford Brookes TDE Conference

All images by Aya Kasai

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Please note: this page is absolutely NOT part of the thesis nor an 'artwork'







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Please note: this page is absolutely NOT part of the thesis nor an 'artwork'



2016:

**CARU: Making the Art Manifest** / Stammtisch, Joe Perks, Oxford  
**Now Your Mu Is Ma** © / Headington Hill Campus, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford  
**No Point: Ts&Cs: Premises & Promises II**  
**Ego-logy** / www.ca-ru.org

2015:

**Bright Tailed and Bushy Eyed** / Richard Hamilton Building, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford  
**'A Drawing of a Painting of a Photocopy of Albrecht Dürer's Das große Rasenstück ("The Great Piece of Turf")'** / Headington Hill Campus, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford  
**No Point: Ts&Cs: Premises & Promises I** / Richard Hamilton Building, Headington Hill Campus, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford  
**reSearch Material: Found Object – the mechanism of Gen II** / Richard Hamilton Building, Headington Hill Campus, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford  
**'Nothing Matters'** / 'CARU HQ', Oxford  
**'Untitled'** | Ora 22: F.M.R.L., reFMRL 3 (curated by Daniela Cascella & Salomé Voegelin) / Resonance 104.4FM  
**2 x 4 Bells** co-performance, composition by Austin Sherlaw-Johnson | *Playground on Fire Festival* 2015 / Arts at the Old Fire Station, Oxford

2014:

**Document of Authenticity** | 'Writing Sound 2' / Lydgalleriet Bergen, Norway  
**Metal and Rubber Band** group performance, composition by John Grieve | Oxford Improvisers Monthly Concert / The Old Fire Station, Oxford  
**The Law: A Line of Morality** (2010/11) | 'Paradise Lost' by tactileBOSCH, Cardiff Contemporary 2014 / Custom and Immigration Building, Cardiff  
**Document of Authenticity** | 'A Given Structure', Fringe Arts Bath 2014 / Bath City Centre  
**NinGen** | in collaboration with Malcolm Atkins | 'Dialogue on Nothing in Art', Fringe Arts Bath 2014 / Bath City Centre; 'Recital de Piano - "...um noturno"', Rio, Brazil & Oxford, UK; 'An Evening with John Cage, Erik Satie & Oxford Improvisers – supported by CARU' | OVADA: Stammtisch, OVADA, Oxford  
**Six Myths of Contemporary Art** / co-performance, written by Austin Sherlaw-Johnson, 'Dialogue on Nothing in Art', Fab2014, Bath; SoA @ TDE Conference, Oxford Brookes University, John Henry Brookes Building, Oxford; Arts Re Search', Oxford Art Weeks 2014, Headington Hill Hall, Oxford  
**The Art of NinGen** | 'Home & Belonging' / East Oxford Community Centre, Oxford; *Vibrations* Online Art Journal (<https://vibrationsartjournal.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/aya-kasai11.pdf>)  
**My I, II, III** / Shikoku, Japan (Jan)

2013:

**A Walk II** / Richard Hamilton Building, Headington Hill Campus, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford  
**Twenty Images II** / Arena, Headington Hill Campus, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford  
**Three Random Notes Slowing** / group performance, composition by Alex Allmont | *Silencing the Silence* / OVADA, Oxford  
**Non-Musical Piece for Bells - Text Triggered Bell Sounds** group performance, composition by Austin Sherlaw-Johnson, | *Silencing the Silence* / OVADA, Oxford  
**Document of Authenticity** | *Silencing the Silence* / OVADA, Oxford  
**Gen Project** (ongoing)  
**'On the Probability of Inertia'** | Amazing Acts Festival, Pegasus Theatre, Oxford:  
**.I.My.Me.Mine.**  
**Translation - x:x (I) Line** (2012)  
**Translation - x:x (II) Dot** (2012)  
**Claude** in collaboration with Alex Allmont | *Amazing Acts Festival*, Pegasus Theatre, Oxford  
**Suikinkutsu** in collaboration with Mike Blow | *Audiograft 2013* / Oxford Brookes University, Oxford  
**Tipping Point** in collaboration with Alex Allmont | *Audiograft 2013* / Richard Hamilton Building, Headington Hill Campus, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford

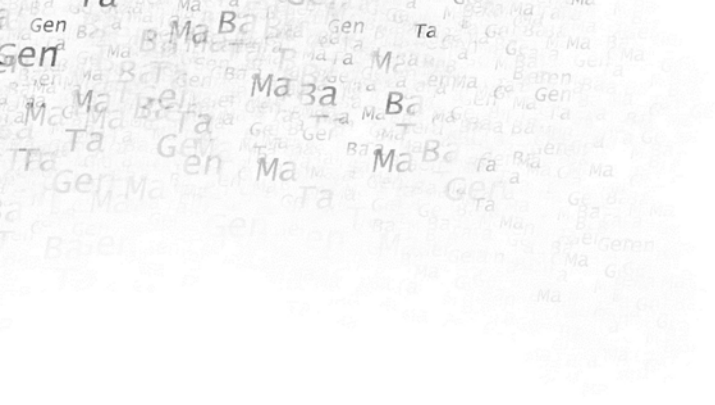
2012:

**'On the Possibility of Inertia'** Solo Show / Arena, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford:  
**365: This Is Not A Work**  
**Coffee & Cigarette**  
**Phenomeno • logy (I): The Object**  
**Phenomeno • logy (II): The Subject**  
**Translation - x:x (I) Line**  
**Translation - x:x (II) Dot**  
**Language Studies I: ≤Haiku**  
**Language Studies II: ≤(≤Haiku)**  
**Language Studies III: ≤[≤(≤Haiku)]**  
**Language Studies IV: ≤{≤[≤(≤Haiku)]}**  
**Interpretation**

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## Appendix III: Overview of ReSearch Practice

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Now Your Mu is Ma ©



A word cloud featuring the words 'Ma', 'Ta', 'Ba', 'Ge', and 'Gen' in various sizes and orientations, creating a textured, abstract background. The words are scattered across the entire page, with some appearing larger and more prominent than others. The colors are muted, including shades of grey, blue, and green, giving it a soft, artistic feel.