Voices of Mono-ha Artists:
Contemporary Art in Japan, Circa 1970

Reiko Tomii (Section Editor)

From a panel discussion at the University of Southern California, February 2012
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This issue of the *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* inaugurates the special feature section "Art in Focus," with Reiko Tomii serving as Section Editor. Over the years the *Review* has featured issues devoted to art and art history including "Japanese Art: The Scholarship and Legacy of Chino Kaori," edited by Melissa McCormick (vol. XV); "1960s Japan: Art Outside the Box," edited by Reiko Tomii (vol. XVII); "Expo '70 and Japanese Art: Dissonant Voices," edited by Midori Yoshimoto (vol. XXIII); and "Beyond Tenshin: Okakura Kakuzō's Multiple Legacies," edited by Noriko Murai and Yukio Lippit (vol. XXIV). Although art is a specialized discipline, it has a broad range of sister disciplines—architecture, design, and visual culture, to name just a few—and interdisciplinary scholarship is one of the most exciting recent developments in the field of art history. Another important development is the robust presence of contemporary Japanese art in today's globalizing culture, which poses a new set of questions to scholars of art history and its sister fields. The *Review* has therefore decided to institute the "Art in Focus" section as a regular feature of the journal in order to have a sustained and timely engagement with the fast-evolving field of art historical study.

The inaugural focus is "Voices of Mono-ha Artists: Contemporary Art in Japan, Circa 1970," based on a symposium of the same title held at the University of Southern California on February 24, 2012 (pl.1). The program was organized by Miya Elise Mizuta and Reiko Tomii and presented by the University of Southern California's Shinso Ito Center for Japanese Religions and Culture in association with PoNJA-GenKon (a scholarly listserv for postwar Japanese art; www.ponja-genkon.net), and in conjunction with the exhibition *Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha*, held at Blum & Poe from February 25 to April 14, 2012.

The artist participants were Haraguchi Noriyuki, Koshimizu Susumu, Lee Ufan, Sekine Nobuo, and Suga Kishio. The group of scholars who engaged the Mono-ha artists

in discussion was headed by Mika Yoshitake, Assistant Curator at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washingon, D.C., who curated the exhibition *Requiem for the Sun*, and Reiko Tomii, an independent scholar and a co-founder of PoNJA-GenKon. They worked together with Joan Kee, Assistant Professor in the History of Art at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and Hollis Goodall, Curator of Japanese Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The team was assisted by Rika Iezumi Hiro, a Ph.D. candidate in Art History at the University of Southern California, who served as an interpreter for the artists.

What Is Mono-ha?

Mika Yoshitake

Representing a key art historical turning point in the late 1960s to the early 1970s, the exhibition *Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha* (Blum and Poe, 2013) brought together over fifty works including major outdoor works, installations, reliefs, works on paper, photographs, and a film, as well as rare photo-documentation of the artists' production process critical to their practice.[1] The exhibition introduced the growing tendency of Mono-ha artists to present transient arrangements of raw, untreated natural and industrial materials—such as canvas, charcoal, cotton, dirt, Japanese paper, oil, rope, stones, wooden logs, glass panes, electric bulbs, plastic, rubber, steel plates, synthetic cushions, and wire—often laid directly on the floor and interacting with the existing architectural space, or in an outdoor field. The title of the exhibition refers to the death of the sun as emblematic of the loss or failure of symbolic expression and permanence immanent to the object itself. The title is also a reference to the aftermath of a tumultuous era that saw political upheaval against the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, anti-Vietnam War protests, and the oil crisis that complicated the artists' own cultural position and relationship to the nation itself. It does not refer to a holistic "return to nature," tradition, or Japanese uniqueness. For many of the Mono-ha artists, identity itself is especially defined by the condition of ambiguity. The aim of the exhibition was to re-evaluate this internationally historical moment from the standpoint of our present moment.

Reiko Tomii raises a provocative set of contradictions in her introduction to the panel, which makes evident the art historical complexities and the challenges that have surrounded the study of Mono-ha both historically and in the present. Indeed, like Arte Povera, Minimalism, and post-Minimalism, Mono-ha was not a self-defined movement, but a discursive phenomenon coined retroactively by critics around 1973.[2] Here, I would like to briefly introduce the development of Mono-ha, the core elements of its "practice" and present some distinct characteristics of the phenomenon as a whole.

Mono-ha's Discursive Emergence

As a discursive movement, Mono-ha's beginnings can be traced back to February 1970, when six artists were featured together for the first time in the art journal *Bijutsu techō* (Art Notebook), in a section titled "Voices of Emerging Artists: From the Realm of Non-Art" (fig. 18.1).[3] The issue acknowledges the place of Sekine Nobuo's now legendary *Phase—Mother Earth* (Isō—Daichi, 1968, pl. 2), which is generally credited as the first Mono-ha piece, by reproducing on its title page, not its final result but one scene from the process of its production. To present this work, Sekine extracted dirt from the ground, preserved that earth in a cylinder that towered over the hole, and at the end of the exhibition, returned the dirt back into the earth. The image *Bijutsu techō* editors selected depicts Sekine and his art school colleagues unraveling large plywood boards from the cylinder of *Phase—Mother Earth*. In doing so, *Bijutsu techō* boldly announced the arrival of a new generation of artists. The special feature included a roundtable discussion between Sekine and his colleagues from Tama Art University (Koshimizu Susumu, Narita Katsuhiko, Suga Kishio, and Yoshida Katsurō) titled "*Mono* Opens a New World," moderated by Japan-based Korean artist and writer, Lee Ufan.[4] The term *mono* (thing) was printed with brackets and written in Japanese hiragana (もの) to distinguish it from a physical object denoted by its Chinese characters (物, also read *butsu*). Their agenda, the artists claimed, was distinct from other anti-art movements of the post-war period, and in particular from that launched by Yoshihara Jirō, leader of the 1950s action-based art group Gutai, who identified the tactile substance of matter (*busshitsu* 物質) with the human spirit.[5] The term *mono* was also distinct from *obuje*, derived from the French word *objet*, which emerged as a preferred term in the Anti-Art context of the early 1960s in Japan to describe the found or appropriated objects that artists elevated to the status of art by transposing them into an aesthetic context, a gesture with its roots in the ready-mades of Duchamp in the 1910s.[6] Rather, their discussion provoked affective sensations arising from encounters with matter, which they expressed through colloquial words such as *dokitto* (heartstopping), *zokutto* (spine-chilling), or *shibireru* (thrilling), indicating a charged discovery and engagement. When Lee asked the artists in the roundtable to state what stage they found most critical in their working method (the plan, process, or result), Sekine emphasized that each stage engendered a state of *liberation* that was

Figure 18.1
Sekine Nobuo, Koshigemachi Yoriko, and Uehara Takako with *Phase-Mother Earth*, 1968. "Voices of Emerging Artists—From the Realm of Non-Art." *Bijutsu techō*, no. 436 (February 1970): 11–12. Photo: Koshimizu Susumu.

important in revealing the essential state of things. *Mono* would seem to constitute a *passage* (a phase or an intermediary) that located meaning not in its objective form, but in the structure in which things reveal their existence. This process further involved rejecting the notion of a work as a "mirror onto which you projected your ideal or concept."[7] Koshimizu cited as a precedent Duchamp's "art coefficient," which Duchamp defined as "the arithmetical relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed."[8] Lee summarized the artists' attempts to define their work as a "structure of acts" that "allows us to perceive a world that transcends the initial intention or method, as well as all concepts."[9] For the roundtable discussion, *shigusa* (仕草)*,* which can be translated as "act" or "gesture," proved to be a key term for Lee during this time in defining Mono-ha.[10] *Shigusa*, as Lee defined it, is not simply an expression of an intention, but initiates a process of enacting and being acted upon and dissolves the distinction between the subject and the object in an intimate contact with the world. The February 1970 feature, along with the self-published booklet, *Ba sō ji/Place-Phase-Time: Open)* in May 1970, which included black and white reproductions of works by Lee, Sekine, Yoshida, and Honda Shingo as well as critical texts by Lee and Tokyo-based American art critic Joseph Love, further positioned the artists on the local artistic map, revealing their shared interest in exploring the contingency of the objects' material and spatial structures.

The Artists of Mono-ha
These artists who worked together on the *Bijutsu techō* feature and the contributors to *Ba-Sō-Ji OPEN* never officially claimed the term "Mono-ha." Instead, critics applied the term retroactively in 1973 as a pejorative referring to the artists' lack of fabrication and merely presenting objects.[11] From an art critical and art historical perspective, Mono-ha was thus a temporary phenomenon that developed out of the close relationships between Lee, a Korean-born, Japan-based artist who had moved to Japan in 1956 and graduated with a philosophy degree from Nihon University in 1961, and Sekine Nobuo, a Master-of-Fine-Arts graduate in painting from Tama Art University (referred to as Tamabi) in March 1968. Tamabi was the locus of the movement, and the early Mono-ha group included fellow students at the university including Yoshida Katsurō, Narita Katushiko, Suga Kishio, Honda Shingo (all painting majors) and Koshimizu Susumu (a sculpture major). At Tamabi, these artists studied with Takamatsu Jirō, a prominent artist who taught at the university from 1968 to 1972 and represented Japan at the Venice Biennale in 1968. Takamatsu's work in the mid- to late 1960s was associated with intellectualism,[12] a form of conceptual art produced in reference to the hermeneutics of absence, time, and language, as well as cognitive studies in reverse perspective and experiments in optical distortion. Takamatsu's "trick art" inspired the early work of his students: Sekine's *Phase No. 4* (Isō No. 4) and Suga's *Space Transformation* (Ten'i kūkan) (both 1968) signal this turn to optical distortion or permutation. Another artist who taught at Tamabi from 1964

to 1973, Saitō Yoshishige, was a pioneer of Constructivism in Japan. Sharing Saitō's conviction that illusionism and individual expression were obsolete, the Tamabi artists used materials to articulate impermanent sites or (*ba*) and situations (*jōkyō*).[13] Saitō encouraged Sekine in particular to explore fields beyond visual art including natural science, set theory and topology in contemporary mathematics, classical Eastern and Western philosophy, Marxism, structuralism, and pragmatism, as well as contemporary literature, film, and manga.[14]

Outside of Tamabi, Sekine, Koshimizu, and Lee began teaching at an independent art school called "B-Semi" (Contemporary Art Basic Seminar) run by the abstract painter Kobayashi Akio. Located in Fujimichō, Yokohama near the artists' studio, the B-Semi program began as a collaboration with Saitō and the participation of his Tamabi graduate students. The curriculum was built around guest artists, who posed conceptual tasks for the students to experiment with and discuss. Sekine who began teaching in 1968, focused his lesson plans on the awareness of space, with tasks such as "create a thin form," and "conceive two forms as one,"[15] in direct relation to his interest in topological inquiries and the continuity of space, which he was also working with in *Phase—Mother Earth*. Lee, in contrast, was interested in bodily perception and in the stages leading up to the work. Careful to place his emphasis on "things" rather than "concepts," he would have his students ponder the movement of their hand, the possibilities of gestures, or the perception of phenomena while grasping a pencil, crushing paper, or twisting clay, as well as the dynamics of one's relationship to space (outdoor/indoor, public/living).[16] Koshimizu explored the limits of one's sincerity toward materials, putting the students to task by simply filing down a wooden beam for hours, or proposing to "observe craft paper and turn it into something that perfectly suits you."[17] Enokura Kōji and Takayama Noboru (both graduates of Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, now Tokyo University of the Arts) and Haraguchi Noriyuki (a Nihon University graduate), though taking a more political, industrial, and darkly material line that often involved saturating surfaces with waste oil or grease, or using railroad ties, also began teaching classes at B-Semi and exhibited in many of the same galleries and group exhibitions, namely the prominent Tokyo and Muramatsu Galleries, and Pinar, Tsubaki Kindai, Ogikubo, Tamura, and Walker Gallery. Most significant was Tamura Gallery**,** a rental gallery that showcased Mono-ha's experimental works such as Lee's *System A and System B* (figs. 18.2 and 18.3)—two works that paired cotton with rocks or stainless steel bursting out of a cube, Suga's *Soft Concrete* (fig. 18.4), comprised of four steel panels in a precarious open cube structure wedged inside a mound of gravel and concrete softened with motor oil, Enokura's mortar wall covering the entire entrance of the gallery, Takayama's cut-out floor installation, and Haraguchi's first oil pool, *Matter and Mind* (Busshin, 1971, fig. 18.5), a large flat container filled with thick waste oil paired together with an oil-soaked steel panel on the wall. Tamura Gallery thus helped pave the way for Mono-ha to develop their site-specific activities such as Haraguchi's *I-Beam and Wire Rope* (1970), outdoor
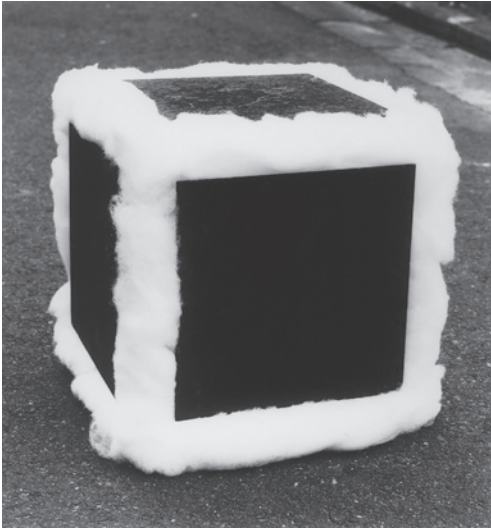
Figure 18.2
Lee Ufan, *Relatum* (formerly *System A*), 1969. Steel, cotton; approximately 170 × 160 × 150 cm. Installation view, Tamura Gallery, 1970. Photo courtesy of Anzaï Shigeo.

Figure 18.3
Lee Ufan, *Relatum* (formerly *System B*), 1969. Cotton, wood, stone; approximately 80 × 180 × 40 cm. Installation view, Tamura Gallery, 1970. Photo courtesy of Anzaï Shigeo.

Figure 18.4
Suga Kishio, *Soft Concrete*, 1970. Concrete, oil, steel plates; plates: 120 x 240 x 10.2 cm each, approximately 122 x 540 x 540 cm overall. Installation view, Tamura Gallery, 1970. Photo courtesy of Anzaï Shigeo.

Figure 18.5
Haraguchi Noriyuki, *Matter and Mind*, 1971. Steel, oil; steel bin: 105 x 140 x 200 cm, panel: 200 x 140 x 0.5 cm. Installation views, Tamura Gallery, 1971.

events at their studios such as *Space Totsuka '70* and *Points* exhibitions, which took advantage of pre-existing sites.

Through their pedagogy and experiments, these artists shared an attitude toward phenomena that was tested through serial composition, emphasizing the development of works over time. Sekine began using *isō* or "phase" in reference to his spatio-temporal experiments in topology in 1968 and *kūsō* or "phase of nothingness" to further emphasize systems of impermanence and an equilibrium of fullness and nothingness in 1969. Beginning in 1972, Lee would rename all of his sculptural works *Kankeikō* or "relatum," signaling an ongoing pursuit to activate the relation between visible and invisible structures. Suga's titles often included compounds with terms like *hōchi* (release) and *jōkyō* (situation), indicating the manner in which he set up his materials and left them in their bare state to illuminate their force field and interdependence with the surrounding space. Yoshida titled all of his early works from 1969 "Cut-off" (in English), referring to the process of bracketing off the object from its conventional structures. Koshimizu engaged with the fundamental resistances inherent to sculpture while also emphasizing the materiality of their surfaces, leading him to title his works *Hyōmen kara hyōmen e* or "from surface to surface." In Narita's ongoing *SUMI* series, the artist investigated the metamorphic process in which wood is transformed into charcoal by being burnt, thus mediating between artistic intent and the wood's natural properties, evoking its continuous state of decay and its eventual disappearance.[18] Enokura chose the term *yochō* or "symptom," and *kanshō* or "intervention" to mark visceral interventions into space, while Takayama's works were named *Chika dōbutsuen* (Underground Zoo) referring to his deployment of railroad ties as the single recurrent medium, significant not only as an underground support structure for mine tunnels, but as "human pillars" similar in size and weight to the coalminers; their organic qualities contrasted with their being saturated in tar and creosote for preservation.[19] Finally, Haraguchi's "Matter and Mind" (Busshin) series marked his engagement with both the external physicality and perception of industrial materials, including steel, tent canvas, and waste oil. Thus, the core understanding of *mono* led to various strategies for dissolving the traditional idea of art as being added to, or mastering, a thing, and releasing the thing into the world, the consciousness of the world, and the potentially infinite situation in time and space.

The artists produced a prolific amount of work between 1969 and 1971, which they presented at numerous galleries in Tokyo and major annual and biennial museum exhibitions of contemporary art throughout Japan and abroad. Most notably:

- *9th* and *10th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan* in 1969 and 1971 (Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum)
- *Trends in Contemporary Japanese Art* in 1969 and 1970 (Kyoto National Museum of Modern Art)

- *August 1970: Aspects of New Japanese Art* in 1970
  (The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo)
- *Tokyo Biennale '70: Between Man and Matter* in 1970
  (Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum)
- *6th, 7th,* and *8th Paris Youth Biennales* in 1969
  (Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris), 1971 (Parc Floral de Paris,
  Bois de Vincennes), and 1973 (Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris
  and Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne)

Many of these exhibitions were comprised of materials that were carefully configured to activate the surrounding space, often through gestural acts of dropping, stacking, slashing, breaking, pulling, ripping, suspending, propping, or floating—emphasizing a "phase" of experience in which the object was to be displayed temporarily (limited within the timeframe of an exhibition), subsequently discarded (due to lack of space or interest in collecting such works) and re-created. This process points to the nature of an iterative structure at work possessing neither beginning nor end, activating a renewal of the viewer's encounter with the work at each given site. Their works often defied linguistic signification and focused instead on perceiving a perpetually passing present in which all elements (subject, object, and site) are inseparable and non-hierarchical, opening the materiality of the work beyond what was simply seen.

The importance of the February 1970 *Bijutsu techō* feature was that the journal editors chose *Phase—Mother Earth* to represent the *chihei* (literally, the earth's horizon) of a new artistic terrain elusively labeled "Non-Art" (*Hi-geijutsu*). Non-Art can be characterized as a tendency away from an art that is a product of individual artistic expression, toward an art that explicitly rejects the willful act of creating. In other words, Non-Art signaled a radical reconception of art's aesthetic and institutional foundation. Based on the artists' own insistence that Japan's avant-garde had not gone far enough to transgress art's ideological and institutional frame, Non-Art is distinguished from the 1960s "Anti-Art" (*Han-geijutsu*) generation.[20] Centered predominantly in Tokyo, Anti-Art constituted a plethora of performance-based collectives that attacked institutionally-sanctioned categories of the dominant mainstream (conventional Japanese painting and sculpture). Often designating a negative or nihilistic condition, critics position Mono-ha's practice as recognizing the impossibility of circumventing not only the museum, but the ideological institution of "Art" itself.

This attitude of Non-Art in general and Mono-ha specifically resonates internationally with Process Art and Postminimalism of the 1960s and early 1970s —in particular, the ways in which questioning the autonomy of the art object prompted a reevaluation of the practice and function of art. By rethinking categories and institutional frameworks and shifting inquiry about the basis of art from the ontological to the phenomenological, Mono-ha undertook a critique of modernism's relation to systems of power rooted in the episteme of representation.

Critical of both Western intervention—and in particular, the role of the U.S. in Vietnam and the Japanese government's uncritical support for America—and its own cultural nationalism, Mono-ha was part of a larger phenomenon of Japanese literary, artistic, and political circles reconsidering the nation's own modernist development, including the adoption of Western enlightenment philosophy. They sought to open up a critically expansive third space that evaded dichotomies such as Japan versus the West and left versus right in which the world system seemed caught. In this spirit of critique, the artists engaged in a fundamental revision of the philosophy of perception to encompass aspects of traditional Japanese philosophy and contemporary thought in order to redraw, or abolish, reified dualistic boundaries.

Rather than validating itself through its opposite, upon which it becomes dependent, the artists were more interested in the way opposites can become complicit and co-exist—exemplified in Sekine's practice in the balance between displacing the earth in a hole and retaining that earth as the hole's substance in *Phase-Mother Earth,* creating a tension between the heavy and the weightless in *Phase-Sponge* (Isō-Suponji), or between reflection in a mirror and the violent force of a boulder set atop a mirrored column in *Phase of Nothingness* (Kūsō).

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

Mono-ha's Afterlife

The first scholarly overview of Mono-ha was written by the critic Minemura Toshiaki and appeared in the thirtieth anniversary issue of *Bijutsu techō* in July 1978."[21] Minemura identified three emergent tendencies of Japanese art around 1970. The first involved moving away from artistic production ("making") toward artistic presentation ("showing") of art.[22] In other words, Minemura recognized that the artists were increasingly aiming to undo institutional attitudes that reified skill and technique in the work's execution, turning to a more performative sense of the spatio-temporal parameters surrounding the display of their work. The second trend involved de-hierarchizing visual perception ("seeing") and physical production ("making"). The artwork, as understood in this second trend, occurred as an element in dismantling the relationships between "subject, expression, idea, matter, medium, work, and reality."[23] These two tendencies, he noted, were "not necessarily new" as some of these same elements were already visible in

avant-garde art practices prior to 1970.[24] The third and perhaps most radical trend involved "a denial or reluctance of 'making'" and thus a refusal to engage with "given artistic mediums and forms," which in turn "de-historicized the medium, forcing it to split into the two opposing poles of idea and *mono* (things)."[25] Minemura's argument further presented a dialectic between two poles, one of which was text-based, conceptual practice (represented by figures of Japanese conceptualism such as On Kawara, Yoko Ono and Matsuzawa Yutaka), and the other of which was raw, unaltered forms of *mono,* "a sub-medium category" referring to material used for a medium. The latter was what Minemura described as Mono-ha. For Minemura, by denying "making," the artists took issue with the limited economy of the critique of art institutions to undermine and replace all established forms in any given medium with a radically anti-subjective, anti-projective project.

Following this overview, Minemura began preparing the first official exhibition on Mono-ha as a historical artistic movement in 1986 at Kamakura Gallery in Kanagawa Prefecture.[26] The exhibition entitled *Mono-ha* was divided into three parts and included nine artists in total (Part 1: Yoshida Katsurō, Sekine Nobuo, Lee Ufan; Part 2: Narita Katsuhiko, Suga Kishio, Koshimizu Susumu; Part 3: Enokura Kōji, Takayama Noboru, Haraguchi Noriyuki).[27] Minemura provided an illustrated chronology of the group beginning with works from 1967 prior to *Phase—Mother Earth* and ending with the exhibition *Japan: Tradition und Gegenwart* (Yoshida, Lee, Sekine, Narita, Suga, Narita, and Haraguchi) at the Stadtische Kunstalle in Dusseldorf in January 1974, which traveled to the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark and Stockholm that September. The exhibition introduced the artists according to their university affiliation (the core artists from Tamabi plus Lee; associated artists Enokura and Takayama from the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music; and Haraguchi from Nihon University). This university-based categorization inspired younger critic Chiba Shigeo to classify the artists according to "strict" versus "broad" Mono-ha, obscuring the formal and conceptual concerns and characteristics of each artist.

Mono-ha also began to be introduced abroad in 1986. In December of that year, the artists participated in *Japon des avant-garde 1910–1970* at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, organized by Germain Viatte and Takashina Shūji. The first large-scale museum exhibition on Mono-ha in Japan occurred the following year in 1987 with *Mono-ha and Post-Mono-ha,*[28] curated by Minemura at the Seibu Museum of Art in Tokyo. This exhibition, inspired by Impressionism and Post-Impressionism as a model, was an attempt to chart how younger generation artists either "extended" or "detracted" from Mono-ha in order to define the group. The post-Mono-ha artists were represented by large-scale installations using organic materials, public art projects, or the return to decorative and ornamental arts. The Italian scholar Barbara Bertozzi (who wrote her doctoral dissertation on Mono-ha in 1986[29]) and Minemura co-organized a pared down approach with *Monoha: La scuola delle cose* at the Museo Laboratorio di Arte Contemporanea in

Rome. The exhibition introduced twelve works from 1969 to 1971 (most of which were recreations with the exception of four works) by the six core artists (Koshimizu, Lee, Narita, Sekine, Suga, and Yoshida) from the February 1970 roundtable. The catalogue included Italian translations of Lee's "In Search of Encounter" and Suga's "Condition Beyond Existence,"[30] which were presented as manifesto-like texts. (These two texts were originally published in the February 1970 issue of *Bijutsu techō* as part of the special feature.) Mono-ha was also included in Alexandra Munroe's landmark 1994 survey exhibition, *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky*, which was first shown at the Yokohama Museum of Art, travelled to the Guggenheim Museum SoHo, New York, and finally shown at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The most comprehensive exhibition and catalogue on the movement to date is *Matter and Perception 1970: Mono-ha and the Search for Fundamentals* from 1995, organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Gifu. The exhibition included eleven artists (including Nomura Hitoshi and Inumaki Kenji, two Kyoto-based artists who now deny their association with Mono-ha) and toured nationally to Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art, and The Museum of Modern Art, Saitama. The following year in 1996, the exhibition traveled to France to Musée d'art moderne de Saint-Étienne with a French-language catalogue, *Japon 1970: Matière et perception. Le Mono-ha et la recherché des fondements*. In 2000, *Mono-ha (School of Things)* was organized by Simon Groom at Kettle's Yard at the University of Cambridge. In 2005, *Reconsidering Mono-ha* was organized by Nakai Yasuyuki at the National Museum of Art, Osaka. This exhibition emphasized the links between Mono-ha and the 1960s Shizuoka-based art group Genshoku (Tactile Hallucination), which is associated with an aesthetic of optical "tricks." The dates graph an after-life in an art scene that has radically changed since the late 1960s period. Exposure to Mono-ha outside of Japan has predominantly been in Europe (France, Italy, and the UK). Lee, perhaps not only due to his artistic practice but owing as well to the translation of his writings into French, has maintained a high profile particularly in France and Germany, where he has spent half his time since the 1980s. The Guggenheim retrospective dedicated to Lee in 2011, *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, signaled the first major introduction to the artist's life work in the United States at age 75.

Today, in the aftermath of *Requiem for the Sun*, Mono-ha has become critical to the transnational discourse surrounding minimalist and post-minimalist contexts.[30] In order to maintain and deepen the terms of this dialogue beyond a comparative analysis, we must further examine the circumstances under which Mono-ha was historically presented, how the object's iterative structure operates, and lastly how we might rethink the object as a transformative site that engages our awareness of the present.

Mika Yoshitake

Notes

1.

Mika Yoshitake, *Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Blum & Poe, 2012). Sections of the current text are adapted from and expand on my catalogue essay.

2.

See Fujieda Teruo, "Mono-ha no sakugo" [Mono-ha's mistake], *Bijutsu techō* [Art notebook], no. 365 (March 1973): 8–11, and Minemura Toshiaki, "<Kurikaeshi> to <shisutemu>: 'Mono-ha' igo no moraru" ["Repetition" and "system": The moral after 'Mono-ha'], *Bijutsu techō*, no. 375 (December 1973): 170–75.

3.

"Hatsugen suru shinjintachi: Higeijutsu no chihei kara" [Voices of emerging artists: From the realm of Non-Art], special feature, *Bijutsu techō* [Art notebook], no. 324 (February 1970): 12–53.

4.

Koshimizu Susumu, Lee Ufan, Narita Katsuhiko, Sekine Nobuo, Suga Kishio, and Yoshida Katsurō, "'Mono' ga hiraku atarashii sekai" [*Mono* opens a new world], *Bijutsu techō* [Art notebook], no. 324 (February 1970): 34–55. For the English translation, see "Voices of Emerging Artists: 'Mono Opens a New World' (1970)," trans. by Oshrat Dotan, James Jack, and Mika Yoshitake, in *Requiem for the Sun*, 211–17.

5.

Yoshihara Jirō advocated that "The human spirit and matter shake hands with each other while keeping their distance. Matter never compromises itself with the spirit; the spirit never dominates matter." Yoshihara, "Gutai bijutsu sengen" [Gutai art manifesto], *Geijutsu shinchō* [New wave in the arts] (December 1956): 202; trans. Reiko Tomii, in *Primary Documents: From Postwar to Postmodern: Art in Japan 1945-1989*, ed. Doryun Chong

et al. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2012), pp. 89-90; and in Ming Tiampo and Alexandra Munroe, *Gutai: Splendid Playground*, exh. cat. (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2013), 18.

6.

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

7.

Sekine, "*Mono* Opens a New World," 38; *Requiem for the Sun*, 213.

8.

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

9.

Lee, "*Mono* Opens a New World," 38; *Requiem for the Sun*, 213.

10.

Lee would go on to use the term in an exhibition review from October 1969. See Lee Ufan, "Shigusa no sekai 'Gendai bijutsu no dōkōten' ni sanka shite: Kyoto Kokuritsu Kindai Bijutsukan" [The world of *shigusa*: Participating in the "Contemporary Art Exhibition," Kyoto National Museum of Modern Art], *SD*, no. 59 (October 1969). See also Lee Ufan, "Beyond Being and Nothingness: On Sekine Nobuo," trans. by Reiko Tomii in the present issue.

11.

According to Nakahara Yūsuke, the term had been circulating as early as 1967 [Interview with Nakahara, September 20, 2010, Tokyo], but the earliest published mention of "Mono-ha" to date is in 1973 (note 1).

12.

Despite Takamatsu's method of

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

13.

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

14.

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

15.

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

16.

Lee, *B-Zemi*, 15.

17.

Koshimizu, *B-Zemi*, 23.

18.

Sumi is the transliteration for charcoal.

19.

The *Underground Zoo* series also refers to the forced labor of Korean minorities in Japan during World War Two. The artist has described his installations as "requiems for the people of Asia who were washed away with the tides of Japan's modernization." Takayama quoted in Wada Kōichi,

"Noboru Takayama Railroad Ties/ Breathing Space," *Takayama Noboru 1968–2010 Yūsatsu* (Headless scenery), trans. Stanley N. Anderson (Tokyo: Akaaka Art Publishing, 2010), 147. One notices that modernization, not Japan's imperial ambition, is ultimately responsible.

20.
See Reiko Tomii, "Geijutsu on Their Mind: Memorable Words on 'Anti-Art'," in *Art, Anti-Art, Non-Art: Experimentations in the Public Sphere* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007).

21.
Minemura Toshiaki, "15: Mono-ha ni tsuite" (15: On Mono-ha), in "Nihon no gendai bijutsu 30-nen" [Three decades of contemporary Japanese art], special supplementary issue, *Bijutsu techō* [Art notebook], no. 436 (July 1978): 225–35. For an English translation, see "On Mono-ha," trans. Reiko Tomii, in *Requiem for the Sun*, 120–23.

22.
In Minemura's words: "A desire to seek changes in the institutional system concerning the shift from 'making' of art to 'showing' of art." Minemura, "15: Mono-ha ni tsuite," 225; *Requiem for the Sun*, 120.

23.
Minemura, ibid.

24.
Minemura is referring to action-based experimental performances (beginning with the Gutai group, the kinetic, staged theatrical experiments of Jikken Kōbō/Experimental Workshop in the 1950s and the street happenings of Neo Dada, Hi Red Center, Zero Dimension, and land-based performances of Group "I" and The Play in the mid-1960s) that had already incorporated this shift from production *as* presentation and aimed to dismantle the artistic subject as a privileged site of expression.

25.
Minemura, "15: Mono-ha ni tsuite," 226; *Requiem for the Sun*, 120.

26.
Kamakura Gallery was established by Nakamura Michiko in 1980 and became the principal gallery for artists associated with Mono-ha after this 1986 exhibition. Lee Ufan, who also lived in Kamakura, helped advise the gallery, introducing European artists such as Claude Viallat Niele Toroni, Günther Uecker, Joseph Kosuth, and Bertrand Lavier.

27.
Mono-ha, exh. cat. with text by Minemura Toshiaki (Kamakura: Kamakura Gallery, 1986).

28.
Mono-ha to posuto Mono-ha no tenkai: 1969-nen ikō no Nihon no bijutsu/ Art in Japan since 1969: Mono-ha and Post Mono-ha, exh. cat. (Tokyo: Tama Art University and and Seibu Museum of Art, 1987).

29.
See Barbara Bertozzi, "Il linguaggio delle cose teoria e produzione artistica del Gruppo *Mono-ha* 1968–1972" (Ph.D. diss., Università degli Studi di Venezia, 1985–86).

30.
See Lee Ufan, "Alla ricerca dell'incontro," trans. Barbara Bertozzi; Suga Kishio, "Oltre la situazione," trans. Bruno Forzan, *Monoha: La scuola delle cose* (Rome: De Luca; Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1988), 75–80; 81–84.

31.
Signature Mono-ha works are included in *Prima Materia* at the Punta Della Dogana in Venice, Italy (2013-2014) as well as *Other Primary Structures* at the Jewish Museum in New York (Spring 2014), which recontextualizes minimalism from a global perspective by revisiting the museum's seminal 1966 exhibition, *Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptors*.

Six Contradictions of Mono-ha[1]

Reiko Tomii

Mono-ha, which emerged at the tail end of the 1960s in Japan, is not an easy subject to encapsulate in a few words. What is Mono-ha? Why does Mono-ha matter? These were the central concerns that prompted the panel discussion "Voices of Mono-ha Artists: Contemporary Art in Japan, Circa 1970" (University of Southern California, February 24, 2012), conceived in conjunction with the exhibition *Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha*, curated by Mika Yoshitake for Blum & Poe in Los Angeles in 2012.

The second question is probably much easier to answer. Take one look at any Mono-ha work, and it is immediately apparent that Mono-ha belongs to world art history. The works, as it has been pointed out many times, strongly resonate with American Minimal Art and Italian Arte Povera, as well as global post-minimalism, while defining its own distinct voice. Indeed, Mono-ha is a key component of what marks 1960s Japan as a critical battleground of new art in the global context.

All the more so then is my first question, "What is Mono-ha?" important to ask. I would like to be thought provoking, to complement Mika Yoshitake's overview of Mono-ha in her introductory remarks ("What Is Mono-ha?") and the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition, *Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha* (Blum & Poe, 2012).

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Mono-ha is difficult to explain in a few words, because it is rife with contradictions. Consequently, to understand its contradictions is to understand Mono-ha at its most fundamental level. Mono-ha's contradictions can be described according to six seemingly conflicting statements.

Mono-ha was at once *not* a group and a group.
Mono-ha was at once discursive and inscrutable.
Mono-ha was at once performative and object-centered.
Mono-ha was at once object-based and object-negligent.
Mono-ha was at once world-conscious and world-oblivious.
Mono-ha was at once convention-defying and institution-dependent.

Let us look at each contradiction.

Contradiction 1: Mono-ha was at once *not* a group and a group.

This contradiction is of first and foremost importance, for it concerns Mono-ha's art-historical definition.

Within the landscape of twentieth-century Japanese collectivism,[2] Mono-ha is not a group in the sense of Gutai, Neo Dada, or Hi Red Center, to name just a few well-known collectives dating from the 1960s. While Gutai mounted twenty-one "Gutai Art Exhibitions" over the eighteen years of its existence and Neo Dada three membership exhibitions during just one short year of its activity, there was no such thing as a "Mono-ha exhibition" that signaled the formation and evolution of Mono-ha as a group. This is significant, for in the modern history of Japanese collectivism, mounting an exhibition serves as a standard way of declaring publicly a group identity. Instead, Mono-ha emerged from museum-organized exhibitions and similarly large-scale institutional exhibitions beginning in 1968, when Sekine Nobuo produced *Phase—Mother Earth* at an outdoor sculpture biennale near Kobe (see Table 1). (This is also a factor in Contradiction 6.)

At the same time, when we consider Mono-ha in its narrowest sense as posited by the art critic Minemura Toshiaki in his seminal 1978 essay, Mono-ha exhibited a certain undeniable group cohesiveness.[3] As the creation story of Mono-ha goes, as recounted by the Mono-ha artist Koshimizu Susumu, Sekine's *Phase—Mother Earth* constituted the "Big Bang"[4] of Mono-ha in 1968, provoking a strong reaction among his fellow artists from Tama Art University (also referred to by its abbreviated name, Tamabi) who helped him produce it on site (Koshimizu and Yoshida Katsurō) and prompting intense intellectual exchange between Sekine and the Korean-born theorist-artist Lee Ufan. To this mix of artists, Suga Kishio and Narita Katsuhiko, two other graduates from Tamabi joined, and Mono-ha in its narrowest sense was born (fig. 19.1).

Unlike Gutai or Neo Dada, the Tamabi group did not issue a manifesto. Nor did they publish a journal, as Gutai and Kyūshū-ha did. Instead of these standard discursive markers of collectivism, in February of 1970 these six artists appropriated the pages of *Bijutsu techō* (Art notebook), the magazine of choice among contemporary artists, and published a roundtable discussion with the title "Voices of Emerging Artists: *Mono* Opens a New World," which in effect served as the manifesto of the Tamabi Mono-ha group. (The panel discussion at USC was inspired by this roundtable.[5])

Table 1: The Rise of Mono-ha at Museum-Organized and Other Large-Scale Exhibitions

1968	*1st Biennale of Kobe at the Suma Detached Palace Garden* Sponsored by Asahi Newspapers et al.
1969	*Trends in Contemporary Japanese Art* The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto

	Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan
	      Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum; sponsored by
	      Mainichi Newspapers et al.

	Biennale de Paris
1970	*Trends in Contemporary Japanese Art* The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto

	Tokyo Biennale '70: Between Man and Matter
	      Toyo Metropolitan Art Museum; sponsored by
	      Mainichi Newspapers et al.

	August 1970: Aspects of New Japanese Art The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo

1971	*Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan*
	      Toyo Metropolitan Art Museum; sponsored by
	      Mainichi Newspapers et al.

	Biennale de Paris
1973	*Biennale de Paris*

Note: This chronology is extracted from "Exhibitions and Documents: 1968–1972" in *Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha*.

Figure 19.1
Tamabi Group of Mono-ha, 1970. Front, from left: Suga Kishio, Narita Katsuhiko, Lee Ufan; back, from left: Sekine Nobuo, Koshimizu Susumu, Yoshida Katsurō. Photograph by Nakajima Kō.

The second to sixth contradictions primarily concern this group in the narrowest sense of Mono-ha, as opposed to other artists whose works broadly share their intense engagement with materiality. I have elsewhere proposed calling the latter "mono-ha" artists without capitalizing the "M," in much the same way we differentiate Conceptual Art (a Euro-American movement) and conceptualism (a globalized strategy).[6] While "mono-ha" includes "Mono-ha" (whose active period ranged from 1968 to 1973), it can be defined as an "artistic phenomenon" of the late 1960s to

the 1970s in tune with the global post-minimalist tendency but characterized by varied Japanese inflections, as recently explored by Yoshitake in *Requiem for the Sun*.

Contradiction 2: Mono-ha was at once discursive and inscrutable.
The Mono-ha artists' roundtable discussion in *Bijutsu techō* was accompanied by two essays: one was Lee's "In Search of Encounter" and the other was Suga's "Existence Beyond Condition."[7] As a whole, the Tamabi group took decisive control of the discourse surrounding its work. In that sense, Mono-ha is unusual as a consciously discursive movement.

To the uninitiated eye, the work of Mono-ha often stands as inscrutable, seemingly refusing to express anything. If a "work of art," in the modern sense, such as a painting or sculpture, offers itself as an object for our eye to see, the work of Mono-ha rather demands that we deconstruct our ingrained way of seeing art and phenomenologically engage ourselves with it. If we fail to understand or more precisely experience this shift, the work does not offer itself readily to us.

Table 2: Works by Sekine Nobuo, 1968–1970

1968	*Phase—Mother Earth* (pl.3) Exhibited at *1st Kobe Suma Rikyū Park Contemporary Art Exhibition* (Suma Detached Palace Garden, Kobe, October 1–November 10)
	Phase—Sponge Exhibited at *5th Nagaoka Contemporary Art Museum Prize* (Seibu Department Store, Tokyo, November 16–27)
1969	*Phase of Nothingness—Oilclay* (pl.2) Exhibited at solo exhibition (Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, April 18–May 2)
	Phase of Nothingness—Water (fig. 20.4) Exhibited at *9th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan* (Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, May 10–30)
	Phase of Nothingness Exhibited at *1st Contemporary International Sculpture Exhibition* (Hakone Open-Air Museum, Shizuoka Prefecture, August 1–October 31)
1970	*Phase of Nothingness* (fig. 20.5) Exhibited at *35th Venice Biennale* (Japanese Pavilion, Venice, June 22–October 20)

Note: This chronology is extracted from "Exhibitions and Documents: 1968–1972" in *Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha*.

The early alliance between Sekine and Lee was informed by Sekine's frustration with critics' inability to see this shift, on the one hand, and his reckoning that such postwar predecessors as Neo Dada failed as a movement due to the lack of supportive discourse, on the other. A series of memorable works that Sekine created in the short period of 1968 to 1970 was accompanied by an equally prolific series of theoretical publications by Lee, many of which championed Sekine as "a rare Happener (*hapunā*)" who daringly defied the modernist objectification of the expressive process.[8] (See Table 2).

Contradiction 3: Mono-ha was at once performative and object-centered.
"Happeners," mentioned in the previous contradiction, is the Japanese neologism based on the English art term "Happenings" and means "those who do Happenings" parallel to "painters" as "those who do painting," as structurally explained below.

> Derivatives of "to paint" (verb)
>   painting (result of act)
>   painter (person who engages in this act)
> Derivatives of "to happen" (verb)
>   Happening (result of act)
>   Happener (person who engages in this act)

By no means was this terminology limited to Lee's critical writings. As the idea, terminology, and phenomenon of the *hapuningu* (Happenings) became widely popularized in Japanese society,[9] artists and others coined the new term, using a method that they thought was modeled on the construction of the English language. In fact, The Play, an Osaka-based collective contemporary to Mono-ha, also claimed to be a group of Happeners and their Happenings took the form of memorable voyages into landscape.[10]

Lee's understanding of Sekine as a "Happener" points to what is usually invisible to our eye when we view Sekine's work, which is marked by a strong sense of materiality: the performative process in its creation. Be it *Phase—Mother Earth* or *Phase of Nothingness—Oilclay*, no matter how object-centered in its final incarnation, the performativity involved in Sekine's production was significant, and Lee aptly articulated this aspect when he wrote on *nikutai*, or the "body" and *shigusa*, or the "act," in "Beyond Being and Nothingness" (1971) his thesis on Sekine (see the full translation of this text in this volume). In this essay, Lee's most beautifully written prose on Mono-ha, Lee vividly narrates, for example, how Sekine worked with oilclay in *Phase of Nothingness*:

> One day, Sekine packed up a truckload of oilclay from a mud store and after many wrong turns finally arrived at an art gallery. With the help of a large number of friends, he transferred all the oilclay from the truck to the gallery. Walking slowly

around the piles of oilclay, Sekine suddenly stopped, sighed a mysterious sigh, and grinned. How much time had passed since then? Finally, he began to touch these expressionless, wordless piles of oilclay.

He linked one lump to another next to it and caressed them softly. As the soft oilclay submitted itself to his touch, two lumps completely merged as one. Sekine then picked up another lump and threw it 2 meters forward. The thrown lump stuck to an almost life-size pile.

A lengthy narration of Sekine's *shigusa* is followed by Lee's analysis:

Herein, one began to realize oneself no longer seeing the oilclay, or the gallery, or Sekine, but looking at a different kind of "expanse," which had nothing to do with oilclay, the gallery space, or Sekine himself. [. . .] By letting oilclay be oilclay, what was revealed in this expanse was not "oilclay," but space—the world. At that moment, oilclay concealed itself in the world, and conversely revealed the world.

With Mono-ha, *shigusa* is not the goal—thus, always invisible to the viewer—but a means to an end, which is not so much to create an object, as to reveal the world as it is (*aruga mama no sekai*) through the presence of an object. In this sense, Mono-ha is at once performative and object-centered. In addition to Lee's idealized description of Sekine's *shigusa*, Michael Blackwood's 1970 film *Japan: The New Art* and Nakajima Kō's documentary photographs (fig. 19.2), also from 1970 and originally made for and partly published in a *Bijutsu techō* special feature, are two important documents that can help us understand Mono-ha's performative aspect.

Contradiction 4: Mono-ha was at once object-based and object-negligent.
In relation to Contradiction 3, it should be emphasized that the resulting form of an object, in this case oilclay, is not the goal, either. Or to put it another way, Mono-ha works were ephemeral, generally produced without consideration for preservation. They were assembled for an exhibition and disassembled afterward. In this sense, the "originals" remain, if at all, only as a photograph. Re-enactment may and can follow. The recent institutionalization of Mono-ha that has transformed Mono-ha into "collectible objects" held in private and public collections raises some provocative questions. What is the relationship between the agency of the original "Happener" and that of a future enactor? If the original Happener can also be a future enactor, what is the relationship between the original context and the future instance? Without careful consideration of these issues, Mono-ha works may lose their authenticity, although curatorial prudence has been exercised in many cases.[11]

Figure 19.2
Sekine Nobuo working with oilclay, 1970. Photographs by Nakajima Kō.

Contradiction 5: Mono-ha was at once world-conscious and world-oblivious.

The ultimate goal of Mono-ha is to "reveal the world as it is." On the one hand, the "world as it is" is often theoretically and metaphysically understood. On the other hand, Mono-ha artists reveal in their writings—be it Lee's art criticism or the group's roundtable discussion—a keen awareness of the world, that is, society, around them. Yet, Mono-ha has sometimes been accused of being apolitical and oblivious to the world.

This perceived contradiction brings us into tricky terrain. In the Guggenheim Museum's 2011 retrospective of Lee Ufan, curator Alexandra Munroe proposed reconciling Lee's politics and his work by introducing the notion of "the ethics of restraint." Rather than directly expressing a radical activist sentiment in his work, Lee employed the act of restraint as his critique of modern society that formed his ethical conviction.[12] The consideration of an ethical dimension is a viable antidote to literal politicalism. Even the younger artists' collective Bikyōtō (Artists Joint-Struggle Council), which vehemently opposed Mono-ha, especially Lee Ufan's Mono-ha theory, gave up its literal politicalism after 1970, turning their focus to the internalized politics of the art institution.

Contradiction 6: Mono-ha was at once convention-defying and institution-dependent.
It goes without saying that Mono-ha's expressive strategies defied the established notion
of modern painting and sculpture. However, it should also be noted that Mono-ha
appeared after more than a decade-long battle against the modern convention of
art, from Gutai onward through Anti-Art (*Han-geijutsu*) and Non-Art (*Hi-geijutsu*),
the last of which encompassed Mono-ha as one of its central movements. As I have
discussed elsewhere, during the course of this battle, the Museum (that is, the Tokyo
Metropolitan Art Museum) was the battleground for vanguard artists. They lost the
precious once-a-year occasion of showing at the Museum, when the no-jury/no-award
Yomiuri Independent Exhibition was terminated. They then went into the wilderness,
so to speak, focusing on the artist-organized independent exhibitions mainly outside
Tokyo. Yet, they eventually "regained the Museum" by 1970, infiltrating into the
large-scale exhibitions held at the Museum.[13] This was symbolically culminated with
the 1970 *Tokyo Biennale*. As the historical chronology (Table 1) demonstrates, Mono-ha
was the primary player in this drama of taking back the Museum. These institutionally
dependent exhibitions legitimized contemporary artists' active experiments at *kashi
garō*, or "rental galleries," such as Akiyama, Muramatsu, Pinar, Tamura, and Tsubaki
Kindai. Into the 70s and beyond, Mono-ha, far more than conceptualism, another
key component of Non-Art, claimed the ever-expanding institutional stage of *gendai
bijutsu*, or literally "contemporary art."

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What I have provided here is a skeletal view of Mono-ha, as seen through its six
contradictions. To gain a fuller picture of Mono-ha, each aspect of Mono-ha must
be investigated further, while the broader phenomenon of "mono-ha" should also be
reexamined. It is my hope that these contradictions, however, will offer a roadmap
into future scholarship.

Notes

1.
This commentary is a revised and
slightly expanded version of the
introductory remarks that were pre-
sented at "Voices of Mono-ha Artists:
Contemporary Art in Japan, Circa
1970," at the University of Southern
California on February 24, 2012.
2.
For collectivism in modern and
contemporary Japan, see Reiko
Tomii, "Introduction: Collectivism

in Twentieth-Century Japanese Art
with a Focus on Operational Aspects
of *Dantai*," *positions* 21, no. 2 (Spring
2013): 225–67.
3.
Minemura Toshiaki, "15: Mono-ha ni
tsuite" [15: On Mono-ha], in "Nihon
no gendai bijutsu 30-nen" [Three
decades of contemporary Japanese
art], special supplementary issue,
Bijutsu techō [Art notebook], no.
436 (July 1978): 225–35; trans. by

Reiko Tomii, in Mika Yoshitake,
ed., *Requiem for the Sun: The Art
of Mono-ha*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles:
Blum & Poe, 2012), 120–23.
4.
Koshimizu Susumu, "Yami no naka
e kieteiku mae no yabu no naka e"
[Into the thicket before it disappears
into darkness], *Bijutsu techō* [Art
notebook], no. 706 (May 1995): 269.
For accounts of Mono-ha's genesis,
valuable oral-history sources include

this account by Koshimizu (pages 267–70) and that by Sekine Nobuo, "Seishun to dōgigo no 'Mono-ha' to ima" ["Mono-ha," a synonym of youth and its present], in the same issue (pages 261–63), published as part of the feature "Shōgen: Mono-ha ga kataru Mono-ha/Testimony: Mono-ha as Explained by the Mono-ha."

5.
See "Voices of Emerging Artists: "*Mono* Opens a New World" (1970), roundtable discussion by Koshimizu Susumu, Lee Ufan, Narita Katsuhiko, Sekine Nobuo, Suga Kishio, and Yoshida Katsurō, trans. by Oshrat Dotan, James Jack, and Mika Yoshitake, in *Requiem for the Sun*, 211–17.

6.
See Reiko Tomii, "Toward a New Understanding of 'mono-ha': Or Where to Locate Haraguchi Noriyuki in 1970s Art in Japan," exh. cat. (New York, Fergus McCaffrey, forthcoming in 2014).

7.
Lee Ufan, "Deai o motomete" [In search of encounter] and Suga Kishio,

"Jōtai o koete aru" [Existence beyond condition], *Bijutsu techō* [Art notebook], no. 324 (February 1970): 14–23 and 24–33.

8.
For Lee Ufan's writings on Sekine, see "Writings by Lee Ufan," comp. by Alexandra Munroe and Reiko Tomii and trans. by Stanley N. Anderson, *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, exh. cat. (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2011), 102–21.

9.
For Happenings in Japan, see KuroDalaiJee, (Kuroda Raiji), *Nikutai no anākizumu: 1960-nendai Nihon bijutsu ni okeru pafōmansu no chika suimyaku/Anarchy of the Body: Undercurrents of Performance Art in 1960s Japan* (Tokyo: Grambooks, 2010), 67–70.

10.
It is no coincidence that the September 1969 issue of *Miru* [To see], a monthly newsletter of the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, features, side by side, two texts authored by Lee Ufan and Ikemizu

Keiichi, the leader of The Play, as both were at the forefront of contemporary art practice in Japan.

11.
Documentation was carefully conducted to ensure authenticity of the reenactment when the Guggenheim Museum presented reenactments and collections of Lee Ufan's work on the occasion of his retrospective, *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, in 2011 as well as when major Mono-ha works were exhibited and put on sale at Blum & Poe's *Requiem for the Sun* in 2012.

12.
Alexandra Munroe, "Stand Still a Moment," in *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, 20.

13.
Reiko Tomii, "How *Gendai Bijutsu* Stole the 'Museum': An Institutional Observation of the Vanguard 1960s," in *Since Meiji: Perspectives on the Japanese Visual Arts from 1869 to 2000*, ed. J. Tom Rimer (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012), 144–67.

Roundtable Discussion
Edited by Reiko Tomii

Dialogue 1
Sekine Nobuo and Koshimizu Susumu, with Joan Kee
Translated by Rike Iezumi Hiro

Kee: It seems that you regard photography as more than simply a means of documentation. Some images of your *Phase—Mother Earth* (1968) (pl. 3), for example, seem intended to emphasize its size, and perhaps more importantly, the scale of the cylinder in relation to the viewer. A similar effect is evident in Koshimizu's work, where a female viewer is shown crouching next to the work (fig. 20.1). In many instances, the images force the viewer to pay attention to the ground in a way that is at odds with the insistence on verticality that was so visible in mid-1960s Tokyo, especially after 1964 when skyscrapers were first allowed and following the proliferation of Metabolist architecture. What kind of story did you want these images to tell?
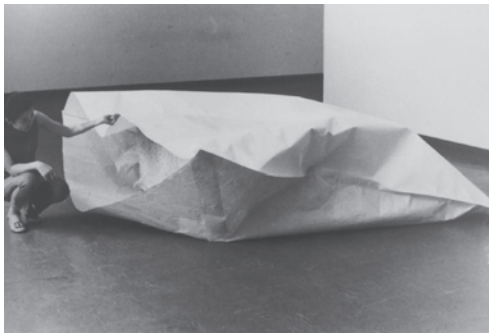

Figure 20.1
Koshimizu Susumu, *Paper* (formerly *Paper 2*), 1969. Paper, granite, paper; 274.3 x 274.3 cm. Installation view, *Trends in Contemporary Art*, National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, 1969. Photo: Koshimizu Susumu.

Sekine: Part of your question touches upon the issue of scale. I don't think that we were influenced by Metabolism, including Tange Kenzō's architecture. My immediate interest, particularly for *Phase—Mother Earth*, lay in the earth. I dug a hole and piled dirt from the digging right next to the hole. From the beginning, I envisioned their positive-negative states. The tension of this relationship exists at the horizon, at the level of the ground. That is to say, I was strongly interested in Earth and the ground.

Figure 20.2
Sekine Nobuo creating *Phase-Mother Earth*, 1968. Photo: Koshimizu Susumu.

Figure 20.3
Koshimizu Susumu, *Perpendicular Line 1*, 1969. Brass, piano wire; brass weight: 8 x 8 cm, piano wire: 300 cm. Installation view, Muramatsu Gallery, 1969. Photo: Koshimizu Susumu.

Koshimizu: You have just seen some process photographs of making *Phase—Mother Earth*. They capture Sekine, Yoshida Katsurō, me, as well as my girlfriend and Sekine's (fig. 20.2). We all worked together. Day after day, we used our bodies and shovels confronting the ground, that is Earth. We dug and lifted up the dirt, that is, Earth. We kept doing that. We were younger and more energetic back then. I believe that the photographs indicate how affected we were by the earth and the ground. What we captured therein was something that certainly existed in the earth, the extent to which we could approach it and its significance. Therefore, we never considered our work vis-à-vis the contrast between the eternal expanse and vertically rising buildings. What we learned through our labor of hole digging was that the most important thing was that which actually existed there and its relationship to human beings. From this very experience, Yoshida, Sekine, and I started seriously contemplating "What are our own expressions and wherein do they lie?" Through the experience of hole digging, we sensed that we had surely grasped the answer, although invisible, with our hands.

Kee: At times, your works are characterized as "Non-Art" (*Hi-geijutsu*), but that doesn't seem very accurate, because you are still responding to spaces identified as venues for the display of art (e.g., museums and galleries). And your works aren't really everyday objects nor are they appropriations of such. I wonder whether your works are, in fact, a refusal of the distinction between Art

(*geijutsu*) and Anti-Art (*Han-geijutsu*), something that is evoked by the refusal to make, or as you have mentioned, "not making." Could you comment on this?

Koshimizu: "Not making" *mono*, or a thing, to put it another way, means not manipulating or twisting the meaning of the thing (fig. 20.3). Thus, when we express in words the situation that channels the language of the thing as it is, we say, "not making." In reality, we use our hands extensively and what we do is very artistic. However, we do not remove or twist the meaning of things or materials that exist therein.

Sekine: For me, "not making" is defined in relation to creation, and I found it impossible from the very beginning to use the modern concept of creation (*sōzō*), which is a product of modernity. In terms of making (*tsukuru*), we simply move and transport, transform, and add various actions and gestures to things, but ultimately we do not create anything.

Kee: So you are making a distinction from intentional creation (something that's meant to be seen as a standard object). Would you say you *present* your works rather than make them?

Sekine: If you fervently take on the challenge of creating something, you look at something superfluously. Your expectation is always that of a scenario in excess of what it is. I want to see things closely once again by using my body rather than engage in the act of creation. My answer therefore, is that we are more interested in having an interest in things.

Kee: A question to Koshimizu: your *Paper* appears scaled according to the dimensions of the gallery, rather than the viewer. There is also an affinity with the ground, and of groundedness in general, that suggests this work as a response to the question of the base, or pedestal in sculpture (pl. 6). What is also interesting is your choice of using paper, which is actually rather unusual among your colleagues and its relation to the idea of sculpture in general, especially as it was understood in Japan in the 1960s. Could you talk a little about your sense of materiality? Also, you are the only Mono-ha artist who is specifically trained in sculpture. How do you consider your works in relation to sculpture? What prompted your choice of materials?

Koshimizu: I majored in sculpture at Tama Art University. I was still a student when I enclosed a stone in a paper bag to make *Paper*. Sculptural materials that we used in class were all massive and solid. This made me question, for example, "Can a piece of paper or water [in a plastic bottle] be a work of sculpture?" Through my experience of digging Sekine's *Phase—Mother Earth*, I felt certain that anything could be sculpture if I truly understood the things that were there. I therefore tried my best to observe
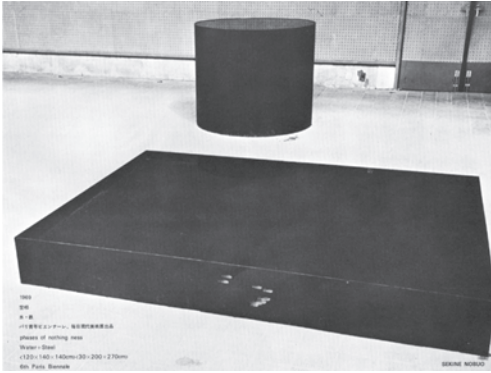
Figure 20.4
Sekine Nobuo, *Phase of Nothingness—Water*, 1969. Steel, lacquer, water; rectangular container: 30 x 220 x 160 cm, cylinder: 120 x 120 x 120 cm. Installation view, *9th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, 1969. Photographer unknown.

Figure 20.5
Sekine Nobuo, *Phase of Nothingness*, 1970. Stainless steel, granite: 450 x 420 x 130 cm. Installation view, *35th Venice Biennale*, 1970. Collection of Louisiana Museum, Denmark.

and sense the thing called paper to make a sculpture with it. Sekine made sculpture with water (fig. 20.4).

Sekine: Thanks for answering for me, too.

Kee: I wonder how both of you regard the role of photography in your work? Did you work closely with photographers in the documentation of your work?

Sekine: I never envisioned *Phase—Mother Earth* as a permanent work. Because I made it in a public park, I expected it to be demolished. So I decided from the very beginning to document it with photographs. When we finished our work, I realized that a photographer was taking pictures. It was Murai Osamu, who specialized in architectural photography such as Tange Kenzō's works. I watched with great interest the way he shot *Phase—Mother Earth* (pl. 3). He appeared strategic and I found this very good. He seemed conscious of framing the work along with people or shadows. He seemed aware of vantage points that I myself had in mind. So I approached him and we became friends. Thankfully, I have been using these photographs for the past forty-four years.

Koshimizu: Sekine is very good at making friends. I am the opposite, so I took my own photographs. The images are mine. As for *Paper*, I asked my girlfriend to pose alongside it and photographed it myself. *Splitting a Stone* was shot by Anzai Shigeo, who is known for documenting contemporary art in Japan. I thought he was a good friend of mine, but he obviously
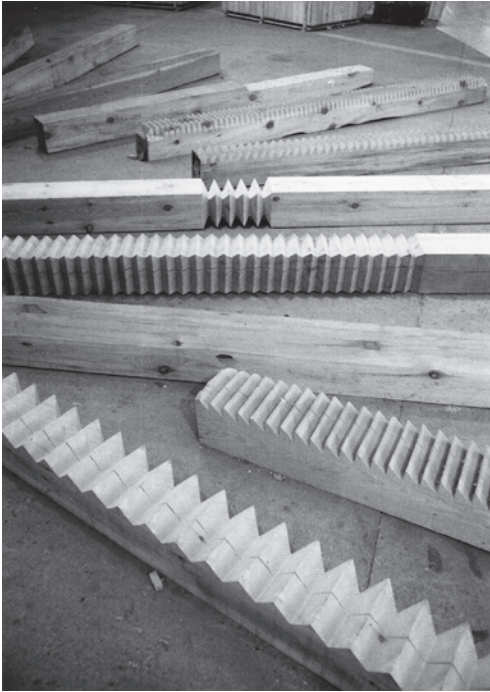
Figure 20.6
Koshimizu Susumu, *From Surface to Surface (Wood Logs Placed in a Radial Pattern on the Ground)*, 1971. 30 wood logs; 12 x 12 x 400 cm each. Installation view, *7th Paris Youth Biennale, Parc Floral de Paris*, 1971. Photo: Koshimizu Susumu.

didn't think so because he charged me for the shooting. It is very difficult to convey the full three-dimensionality of sculpture through photography. Unfortunately, since I do not have the technical skills of a professional photographer, I often make mistakes. I wish I had been a good friend of Murai's.

Kee: I wanted to ask you about the issue of re-enactment, of being presented and re-presented. (Koshimizu reconstructed his work at Tate in 1986; and Sekine, too, recreated *Phase of Nothingness* at Louisiana Museum.) What are your thoughts on re-presentation or re-enactment? If non-making is so integral to your respective approaches, could you briefly describe how you bring works into being?

Sekine: When I embark on a new work, I begin by thinking of a system or a way in which to make it. For example, *Phase of Nothingness* consists of a slab of granite atop a stainless steel pillar. I would begin my work by deciding this much (fig. 20.5).

Depending on where this work is placed, its mirrored surface reflects a number of landscapes around it. As for the granite slab, no two stones in nature are the same. Therefore, although the work is based on a system, the end result is quite different each time.

Koshimizu: The wind blows. It rustles branches and the leaves of trees. Is the purpose of the wind to shake the leaves? Probably not, I think. The wind just keeps blowing. When I worked on *Surface to Surface,* I simply kept cutting wood boards with an electric saw. In the end, as the wind blows the leaves, shapes emerge within the boards (fig. 20.6). What is crucial is not the finished boards, but the involvement that I had in the process akin to that of a mediator prompting something to come about. I would like to be blown about by the wind forever.

Dialogue 2

Lee Ufan and Suga Kishio, with Mika Yoshitake

Translated by Reiko Tomii with Mika Yoshitake

Yoshitake: I would like to first ask about the location of artistic labor in each of your works. Rather than actively "making" objects, you often present and re-present a perceptual structure or situation within which objects exist in relation to space. In both *Relatum* (formerly *Phenomena and Perception B*) (1969, pl. 5) and *Law of Situation* (1971, pl. 4), there is a formal resemblance in the way a stone rests upon a reflective surface.

But in Lee's *Relatum*, one senses a tension between two static objects (stone and glass) based on *prior* acts of dropping the stone and breaking the glass.

For Suga, the "work" begins *after* you have set up your materials by *releasing* the objects to the forces of time and gravity, creating a situation in which the work is activated by the streaming movement of water oscillating between stones and flatbed fiber. Here I am thinking of your concept of release (*hōchi*). For each of you, where does the artistic labor (the "work") reside in articulating each perceptual structure?

Lee: You spoke about "making" and "not making," and indeed, Mono-ha tends to waver between "making" and "not making." I believe this is what constitutes the type of artists we are.

There is a context to this wavering in that "making" is related to the modern idea of production in which a thing is consolidated or completed as an ideal object. Thus, "not making" is a protest against "making" in the modern sense, a protest against production and completion. Of course, we Mono-ha artists use our hands and make things, but we don't call this "making." Our works differ from the modern sense of progressively transforming an idea [and projecting it] onto an object.

As my work titles indicate, I emphasize and hold value in the concepts of relatum, combination, collision, or encounter in my work. This does not entail a one-sided production; there is always a counterpart. There is always an interiority of thoughts from inside myself,

as well as those outside myself in which a dialogue or exchange between them will result in an expression. So I do not single-handedly build my ideas into something perfect.

As artists, we constantly negotiate between the self/ego and nature, and our work (artistic labor) involves being a messenger, a mediator, an intermediary of this. This is what I believe constitutes my, as well as our, position.

Suga: One thing that always concerns me is how a human being unconsciously takes a breath when he or she is born. By breathing, one lives on of course, but this unconscious nature or sensation remains as we grow older. The state of seeing for the first time, or the state of perceiving, the act of grasping something or looking at something—each of these states and acts themselves—is related to a certain unconscious nature.

I think people certainly possess an understanding of their life range, or the realm of capacity in which they will live. That arises naturally. As I have mentioned, we automatically take up our own physical acts/movements once we are born. I believe this to be, no doubt, the best condition and space for ourselves. Also, I think at a certain point in the process of growing older, we begin to recognize what we are interested in and how this is related to ways in which we come to understand and situate the object of our interests.

Suppose we have grasped this realm of our own surroundings, in which we sense that our surroundings are joined together and unified. That is to say, when an entirety is formed by connected elements, we feel this sense of place around us. Most probably, we cannot be interested in each and every part of the whole. We have an interest in some parts but not in others. This is how we create our surroundings. In other words, a surrounding is a kind of world. Some artists say that they make their own worlds. However, I think the world already exists around us in a complete form.

Therefore, making something is not about making a worldview. Rather, I have to turn my eye to the things that surround me very concretely. Within this realm of perception, it is very important to first think fundamentally about what we perceive and do not perceive in our everyday lives.

The first basic thing is to see, then to touch. These things lie at the threshold of expression. In my case, if I don't perform a certain act, I am unable to see things.

Seeing, touching prompts a certain act. When we want to see, we move our bodies and come to recognize certain things. However, even if we see these things, we don't necessarily need all of them. Perhaps just in part or just half of them. I always wonder why that is so. If we take a stone, it has many aspects. That is, many meanings are attached in an multifaceted way. So I have to think about which meaning this particular stone corresponds to.

When we consider seeing, we need to think within our own surroundings in nature, about the system of nature, the being of nature, and the infinite spatiality. Otherwise, we cannot think of limited, finite things. So it is not an overstatement that

how I capture nature and how I place myself within its bounds—that is the first and very critical element of my work.

Yoshitake: Thank you both for your thoughts. I want to turn to how this notion of mediation (i.e. between making and not making, self and nature, objects of interest/disinterest, acts of perception, etc.) plays a key role in both of your works and writings. Lee, for example, in your seminal 1970 essay, "In Search of Encounter," you take up the condition of an intermediary (*baitai*) as a vital force that awakens an interactive encounter that must be constantly renewed. This notion is deeply embedded in the idea of an in-between structure, or *soku*, a term derived from Chinese classical philosophy that refers to the inseparability and the mutual mediation of two beings. Significantly, this term was foundational to your formation of *Relatum* as the title for all of your three-dimensional works, first used in 1970 (figs. 21.1 and 21.2). Many of Suga's works also take up the quality of an in-between structure quite literally: i.e., the water mediating between the stones and plastic sheet of glass fiber in *Law of Situation*, the blocks of wood propped in window sills that act as a liminal border between indoor and outdoor environments in *Infinite Situation I* of 1970 (fig. 21.3) or the stone balancing on a plywood board in a pond in *Condition of Between*, 1971. I wonder if you could comment on the role of mediation in your work and how it is distinct from object as medium?

Lee: This applies not only to my work, but perhaps to all of us here, but we do not try to complete or fully conceive or make our works with our egos. Rather, we continue to

Figure 21.1
Lee Ufan, *Relatum* (formerly *Phenomena and Perception A*), 1969. Stones and chalk on rubber measuring tape; stones: approximately 50 cm high each, overall dimensions variable. Installation view, *Trends in Contemporary Art, National Museum of Modern Art*, Kyoto, 1969. Photo: Lee Ufan.
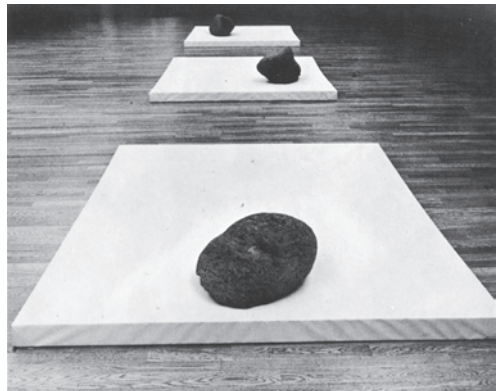

Figure 21.2
Lee Ufan, *Relatum* (formerly *Situation*), 1971. Stones, canvas; 50 x 200 x 1000 cm overall. Installation view, *10th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan: Man and Nature*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, 1971. Photo: Lee Ufan.

Figure 21.3
Suga Kishio, *Infinite Situation I* (window), 1970. Wood, window frame, landscape; dimensions variable. Installation view, *Trends in Contemporary Art, National Museum of Modern Art*, Kyoto, 1970. Photo: Suga Kishio.
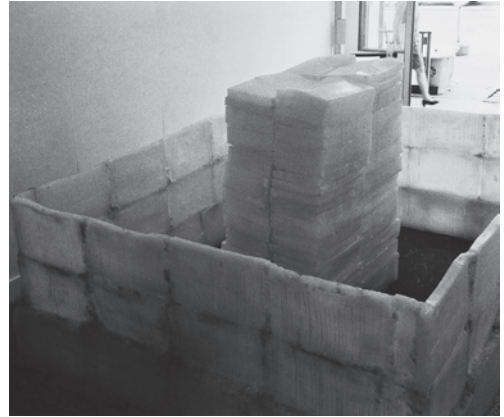

Figure 21.4
Suga Kishio, *Parallel Strata*, 1969. Paraffin; 150 x 300 x 240 cm. Installation view, Tamura Gallery, 1969. Photo: Suga Kishio.

operate between our active and passive states, which encompass many concepts such as nature and infinity. Under these circumstances, we must show that our work is shifting within a certain spectrum, without being attached to one end or another. This involves the attempt to re-present an ordinary thing that already exists. So, the conditions are pretty ambiguous, always mediating, like a neutron in physics, or like a mediator. My work is constantly open, and therefore incomplete. In this respect, I have received a lot of criticism. That is, at a time when Japan was trying to complete its modernization, a group of us showed up in the 1970s and destroyed this attempt. That was another criticism. However, the real intent of Mono-ha's emergence was to stop and reconsider things—both politically and situationally—rather than merely racing ahead, satisfied with the current state of making and artistic production. In music, Takemitsu Tōru and others proposed something similar, and the same can be said of literature and theater. They all actively pursued the duality of making and not making. Rather than representing eternity, for example, Suga and I were both concerned with a sense of tension; Suga, for instance, placed a stone over a plastic sheet on a waterbed while I placed a stone over a glass sheet.

However, in Suga's case, he very aptly shows the flow of time, or fluidity (figs. 18.4 and 21.4). In my case, in cracking a sheet of glass, time may appear to be arrested at that moment, but this very moment will, in a sense, continue as the viewer follows this experience and stands within a certain kind of infinity (pl. 5). Our orientation in the 1970s may appear to be different, but in facing the political situation of the times I think that what emerged was the intent to try and think about this in a straightforward manner and to show that an alternative existed.

Dialogue 3

Haraguchi Noriyuki with Reiko Tomii

Translated by Rika Iezumi Hiro

Tomii: Are you a Mono-ha artist? I am asking this question, partly because you are not a member of Mono-ha in its narrowest sense, as defined and codified by the critic Minemura Toshiaki to include the four artists who preceded you in this panel, and partly because you participated in the recent Mono-ha retrospectives of 1995 and 2005.

Haraguchi: Strictly speaking, I am not a Mono-ha artist. However, I gradually developed a relationship with Sekine Nobuo and Lee Ufan during my college years. We also share the specificity of the year 1968, when there was a student movement, in which universities were locked down or barricaded and Zenkyōtō (All-Student Joint Struggle Councils) occupied the campuses. I was around nineteen or twenty years old, and I was strongly affected by this context.

Back then, in that situation, I sensed that a change in the era was taking place in society as a whole. As an art student, I began to question what art was and what art meant. Rather than thinking about it myself, I confronted such things as a series of relations, just as others have been talking today.

There was of course the avant-garde and the Anti-Art movement through the mid-1960s. I thought about resistance, the issue of being anti, and the avant-garde, which all concerned "distance." I would observe things, but rather than observing things as a Mono-ha artist, I became extremely interested in matter, taking up industrial materials, including ready-made products.

I also thought about how I myself engage with space, time, site, and my own body.

Tomii: In a twofold sense, your biography intersects with the political situation of the late 1960s in Japan. First, you were born and raised in Yokosuka, the location of a large American military base. Second, you were a student at Nihon University, a flashpoint
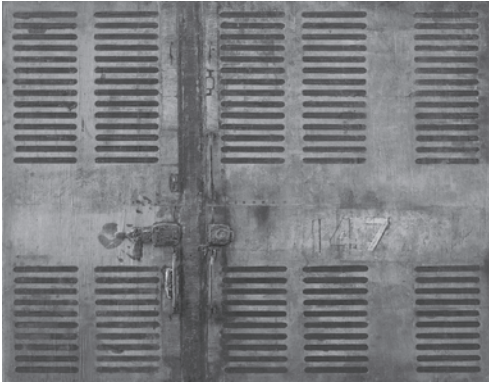
Figure 22.1
Haraguchi Noriyuki, *Tsumu 147*, 1966. Mixed media on panel; 134 x 179 x 9 cm. Photo courtesy of Fergus McCaffrey.

Figure 22.2
Haraguchi Noriyuki, *Untitled (Corsair)*, 1972. Silkscreen on *washi* paper, edition 7/50; 54 x 81 cm. Photo courtesy of Fergus McCaffrey.
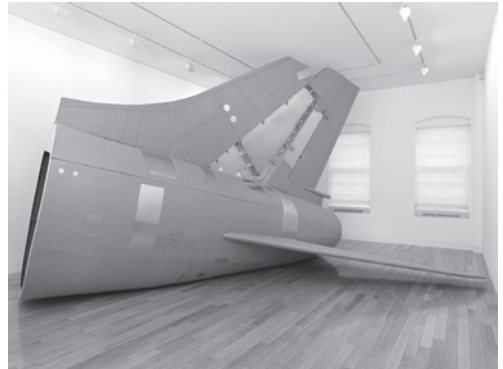

Figure 22.3 (2 views)
Haraguchi Noriyuki, *A-7 E Corsair II*, 2011. Raw canvas, graphite, aluminum, wood, plywood; 430 x 553 x 400cm. Photo courtesy of Fergus McCaffrey.

of the radical student movement Zenkyōto and, as such, a center of the nationwide antiwar and anti-American movement. Your early works that reflect this background were exhibited in 2011 at McCaffrey Fine Art in New York (figs. 22.1 and 22.2). At the same time, your subsequent works appear to have shed their political elements, focusing on minimalism in expression (pl. 7, fig. 18.5). What does "art and politics" mean to you?

Haraguchi: It was a tumultuous time, when I was an art student. I found it nonsensical to be confined within the framework of art education and thus stepped outside of it. I then encountered the contemporary art scene. I made *Battleships* (1963–65), when I was nineteen, while *A-7 E Corsair II* (2011, fig. 22.3), is a recent work, based on a work from that time. These came out of deliberating on what our society and the era had been, and what it is. Your question touched on minimalist form, which for me operates as a kind of measure, or a scale with which to gauge gravity. The function of my work *Oil Pool* (1973–ongoing) is to measure the perfect level. In these works I place verticality and horizontality or a natural or physical phenomenon within a certain site, space, and under a certain amount of light, in a direct and simplified manner, and the result is a minimalist appearance. Yet, as I mentioned, my central concern is not so much the minimal object or form but the pursuit of observing, grasping, and connecting with the world and the era through my body.

I am the youngest among those artists who are called Mono-ha, and things have been difficult for me at times—even these past few days [*laugh*]. This situation has continued for nearly forty years. The slight difference between our ages has never disappeared, and we will forever live in parallel. Perhaps I constantly live in parallel with things, too. The gap will always remain, that is to say. Understandably, I guess.

I want to end by saying, however, that in the larger and broader sense I am a Mono-ha artist.

Roundtable

Haraguchi Noriyuki, Koshimizu Susumu, Lee Ufan,
Sekine Nobuo, and Suga Kishio, with Hollis Goodall
Translated by Rika Iezumi Hiro

Goodall: I am a curator of Japanese art at Los Angeles County Museum of Art, not a curator of contemporary art. When I have spoken to contemporary art curators about Mono-ha, they instantly compare Mono-ha with other art forms, Minimalism, James Turrell, or Arte Povera, for example. Since we are here in front of an audience that is mixed with many non-Japan specialists, how would you convey to all present the specific defining qualities of Mono-ha and how these differ from superficially similar approaches to art elsewhere? What was essential to Mono-ha?

Lee: In a word, Mono-ha is about the aesthetics of relationality. We combine neutral materials and express the relationship with a space or a site in such a way as to create a sense of presence. A sense of ephemerality is very strong in our work, as opposed to Arte Povera, Earthworks, or Minimal Art. Additionally, our work is not a mere art-historical protest against the institution of art. Our work operates like a shift-and-slip that does not immediately engage history but instead creates unusual scenery with considerable impact. In this sense, our approach definitely differs from other artistic isms.

Koshimizu: Too many answers will only confuse people; I think Lee's response is sufficient.

Goodall: If ephemerality, time-specific gesture, and site-specific construction of the work are key to the understanding of Mono-ha, is the work for all intents and purposes a thing of the past? What is it that remains relevant to each of you?

Koshimizu: I have heard that hundreds of millions of human cells die and are reborn every day. In me, too, cells die and are reborn, accumulating in my gut. For instance, here

in Los Angeles [for the current exhibition at Blum and Poe], we made works initially created forty-years ago. It's like cells being reborn. It's a fresh act for us each time.

The end result, including the final form and physical existence of the work, is not *the* work for us. This is very important to remember. Rather, the work concerns all the relationships, thoughts, and senses that led to the very expression of the work. In this respect, while the works remain, they are constantly renewed. Unfortunately, when Yoshida Katsurō and Narita Katsuhiko died, their work became physicalized. They turned into things.

Suga: I am in complete opposition to what Koshimizu has just said. In his view, *mono* disappear in the end, but I do not believe that *mono* ever disappear. Human beings do not narrate meaning, using words to establish *mono*. Rather, the presence of *mono* itself draws forth words or actions from human beings. This is essentially how it should be. Therefore, we do not create something with *mono* and add meaning, but because *mono* exist there bearing a sense of eternity, humans are moved by them.

Koshimizu: I think our ideas are not so different.

Suga: Very different.

Lee: I would like to make a comment. What Suga and Koshimizu are saying differs slightly, but their core concerns are not so different. In other words, what Koshimizu is saying is that a performance or an action by a "Happener" stops there [when the artist dies]. Therefore, re-creation or re-enactment entails a different meaning. It is in this sense, I believe, that Koshimizu says that only things are left behind. When Suga says things remain eternally, he means that which is fundamental or the world itself does not so easily disappear. They are thinking along similar lines. What must be noted is that in the case of Suga, the world appears and disappears in his bodily relationship with things, as emphasized through an aspect of a Happening or a physical act of his. Ultimately, I believe that the difference here is a matter of expression, in essence they are the same.

Goodall: What is the meaning of Mono-ha now? I am not talking about the objects but in the contemporary present.

Sekine: You are asking a very difficult question, for us to consider the meaning of Mono-ha. I personally think it would be more appropriate and objective for the viewer to do that. However, as Mono-ha is being spotlighted like this and discussed in many different venues, multiple aspects of Mono-ha are being revealed. This is the fourth time that I have made *Phase 1/m Mother Earth*. Each time I return the work back to the earth. I sometimes wonder what I am doing. But I guess this indescribable sense of emptiness is what my art is.

Lee: There is one thing that I feel the need to add, although I completely agree with Sekine about the meaning of Mono-ha. Why is Mono-ha so relevant to our time? For example, last year there was an accident in Japan at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. This is not an issue that merely affects Japan, the whole earth and humanity are at stake. In other words, Mono-ha questions anthropocentrism—the glorification of industrial society and the total reliance on technology that accompanies increased production. I firmly believe that the significance of Moho-ha exists therein. Mono-ha offers an alternative to the faith in "making," and proposes to reconsider the relationship between nature and humankind by looking at both.

Suga: A number of inexplicable things and phenomena exist in the space we inhabit. In a sense, our work salvages or engages these uncertain elements and indistinct existences. Mono-ha is therefore also concerned with the process of always revealing in concrete terms this difference in sensibility, how each one of us thinks about these things.

Beyond Being and Nothingness:
On Sekine Nobuo (1970–71)

Lee Ufan

Translated by Reiko Tomii

On Act[1]

I

One day, Sekine packed up a truckload of oilclay from a mud store and after many wrong turns finally arrived at an art gallery. With the help of a large number of friends, he transferred all the oilclay from the truck to the gallery.

A tidy rectangular room of some 70 square meters[2] with pure white walls and a gray floor, the gallery was immediately filled with lumps of black and pasty oilclay. The smell of oil, expounded by a raw sense of materiality, made the room feel stuffy. Masses of oilclay, with a typically expressionless "oilclay"-like character, were thrown about here and there. Oilclay seen at the gallery barely differed from that at the mud store. There in the gallery was a lump of a thing, which to anyone's eye was simply oilclay. An everyday thing that speaks of nothing other than mere "oilclay," a noun connoting a certain kind of matter. Somebody murmured: "Even when delivered to a gallery, oilclay really just looks like oilclay."

Sekine's friends looked at each other and then watched Sekine, as they all wondered what he would do with these 4 tons of oilclay. Walking slowly around the piles of oilclay, Sekine suddenly stopped, sighed a mysterious sigh, and grinned. How much time had passed since then? Finally, he began to touch these expressionless, wordless piles of oilclay.

He linked one lump to another next to it and caressed them softly. As the soft oilclay submitted itself to his touch, two lumps completely merged as one. Sekine then picked up another lump and threw it 2 meters forward. The thrown lump stuck to an almost life-size pile. He approached it, caressed and slapped it, made an undulating rectangle and extended it to the center of the room, where larger piles lay. Noting a lump the size of a head, he quickly lifted it. After taking a few steps, however, he suddenly

looked around and stalled. Finally, when he noticed a gigantic pile near the entrance, he slowly placed the small lump on top of it. He then gathered the small chunks scattered around it and piled two or three of them together. Several lumps left in the rear corner of the gallery were also brought there—one after another. However, when he lifted the last chunk, he unexpectedly looked back, returned it to where it had been and quietly put it down. Some of the masses he had just moved were also returned to their original locations. Having completed this process, he then walked to an area hidden behind the gigantic pile. When this pile grew in size similar to the one in the center, his hand somehow began to remove the chunks from it, instead of piling them together. Thus, there emerged another small assembly between the center pile and this large pile.

It seemed that the piles were finally thus sorted into five or six groups. However, what then happened completely betrayed the expectation of those watching. Five piles became four, four became three, three became two…. The oilclay was eventually turned into one huge mound in the center of the room. Not a single small chunk was left astray as masses were put together as a whole. The view of piles in complex configurations placed at certain distances from each other was erased all at once. Instead, there arose a distinct, condensed, grand figure near the center of the rectangular space.

Sekine paced around the room over and over again, lighting up a cigarette and occasionally gazing at the mountain of oilclay. Inhaling and exhaling deep puffs of smoke, his face appears a little flushed.

"So is this the end of your act?" A friend asked him. However, he continued to silently smoke the cigarette down to its butt. Constantly looking at the mountain of oilclay, he finished his cigarette and slowly shed his jacket and running shirt. He then approached the oilclay.

A huge pile of oilclay, torn and kneaded bit by bit, began to be dispersed again, chunks placed here and there.

Soon, the oilclay was divided into numerous lumps large and small, in roughly four sets. A set nearest the center encompassed the largest lump. A mid-sized set, 3 meters from it, was placed at the rear left corner. To its right, more centered in the room, a set of 7 or 8 lumps was being made. At the foot of a wall opposite to this, another set consisted of several lumps.

As the lumps of oilclay were touched and kneaded with his sweaty hands, they acquired a luster, revealing an animated expression—as though we could hear them breathe. Nothing could be heard other than Sekine's heaving sighs from time to time and the sound of the oilclay and his hands coming together. Even amid the quiet event, we could feel the space moving with a degree of certainty and the air around us was filled with a strange sense of will power. From this moment on, Sekine's movement became more regular, as he increasingly repeated the same acts. He tore, combined, and kneaded. From there to here, from here to there. His shoes, trousers, his naked upper body, his face: they were all covered in oilclay. His eyes glinting below the sweaty brow were like

a mad man's, losing their focus on the object.[3] He was not so much seeing with his eyes as his body's movements were transformed into sight, determining his acts.

Even though Sekine was repeating the same acts, every time his hand touched the oilclay, it changed its expression, appearance, and position. Its glistening, blackened, fleshy body ripened. A round shape became squarish, an angular chunk became a round stick. One lump was divided in two, in three. Ten or twenty masses were combined into two or three large piles. And then moved, from there to here, here to there.

How long did such repetitions last? One hour? Or three or four hours? No, it felt like it had nothing to do with such clock-time, it was pure duration. Or it was like an infinitely opened expanse between time and time.

A portion of a large lump near the center. A mid-sized set, 3 meters from it, at the rear left corner. To the right of this, more central to the room, a set of three piles. At the foot of a wall opposite to this, a lump the size of a bull's head.

Finally, he stopped his act. The forms were surprisingly simplified, with the space made to feel transparent as though completely sorted out by the principle of repetition. Still, this transparent expanse apparently did not result from the austere gallery space or from the oilclay alone, nor was it controlled by Sekine's image-space.[4] Herein, one began to realize oneself no longer seeing the oilclay, or the gallery, or Sekine, but looking at a different kind of "expanse," which had nothing to do with oilclay, the gallery space, or Sekine himself (provided that he was not mean-spirited enough to render a judgment to the work). By letting oilclay be oilclay, what was revealed in this expanse was not "oilclay," but space—the world. At that moment, oilclay concealed itself in the world, and conversely revealed the world. That is to say, the eye did not stop and see the everyday oilclay but first perceived the expanse of space. From the beginning, Sekine, who performed the act, was not fascinated by the "oilclay" as a thing, but had an encounter with the world thus opened.

II

At one time, Sekine encountered the earth that is the world. Therein, too, he began the act of revealing the earth concealed in the everyday through an unnamable event. Just as he transmogrified oilclay to oilclay, he sublimated the earth to the earth, through his act.

The act of digging up the earth at a plaza in a park and piling the dirt up in the exact shape of the hole from which it was dug. He dug and piled it up, dug and piled it up. Day after day, he repeated this childish, comical, nonsensical act, which resulted in a huge pair of concave and convex cylinders (2.5 meters in diameter and 3 meters high and deep) that ended his work. Herein, too, his act merely turned the earth into earth. It added nothing, it subtracted nothing. To merely turn the earth into earth. That is to say, he undertook the act merely to open the earth and place it into the state of the world. Therefore, what one sees there is no longer the objectified forms of concave and convex earth. There, one cannot discern an object built from human representation.

Is it because he split the earth into two? No, it's because he made it into one. No, it looks like two *and* it looks like one *and* it looks like none. If one tries to see the object "be" there, it "is not." And if one tries to see it "not be" there, it "is." Not that nothing is visible. It is vividly visible. Because the phase of the earth is in such a state, what one sees there is not an object but an expanse of space, the condition of a non-objective world. Instead of turning the world into an object of cognition, like an *objet*,[5] the act releases the world into a non-objective phenomenon (the horizon of perception). That is, the act points to the manner in which the world "worlds."[6] Even though a structure occasioned[7] by his act remains oilclay or dirt as a physical object and its phase undergoes no change, it opens a strangely transparent expanse in the horizon of perception, because it reveals the state of the world itself that is not an image of anything. It is natural that as an objective fact that Sekine's act may frequently appear recklessly and endlessly in repetition (without creating an object). To "do" nothing. To purposelessly divide and combine, raise and lower, dig and pile. Out of this "repetition," the situatedness[8] of the world will be emphasized and the world "made visible." Such is the secret rite of repetition. (In actuality, even in other works that do not involve acts of repetition, one discovers—on the basis of emphasizing their situatedness—that they are fundamentally structured through repetition.)

However, the repetitive act can be considered a rewardless act. And all the more so, the act itself becomes aware of its law and its state and gains its own order (the situatedness) in the repetitive process. Following the law of repetition, oilclay and dirt drastically simplify their shapes, appearances, and positions, revealing the "style of the visible."

An act ends when it senses that repetition is almost law itself—because it has become law and is no longer repetition. If the repetition of an act is a process of encounter by the subject of perception, law for the sake of law is no more than perception-less idling. In other words, the repetition of an act constitutes the duality of the living function of perception, wherein at once it is acting and being acted upon and at once being acted upon and acting. In the world of the act, the distance between oilclay masses, the relationship between Sekine, space, and the masses, the location of the masses in space, and the encounter between the earth and Sekine set in motion the act of looking at and delimiting each other in repetitive motion. In this communal event, Sekine has become a man who performs an act and lends muscular hands only because he wants to call upon the world as the subject of perception and keep encountering. As a result, the whole event can be seen as a stylization of the world into one state, one in which Sekine, oilclay, and the earth restrict their shape, appearance, and position unto themselves.

Rhetorically speaking, not only the act with the earth that caused the earth to earth[9] and Sekine to Sekine but the act with oilclay also has similar causal elements that literally opens itself in the mutual restriction. This act causes oilclay to oilclay, space

to space, Sekine to Sekine, oilclay to space, space to oilclay, Sekine to oilclay, oilclay to Sekine, space to Sekine, Sekine to space. The event thus unfolding is nothing but a phenomenal scene of the world worlding (not a landscape, but a perceptual in-the-world event). That is why one does not see bare masses of oilclay lying around, but "begins to see" a trans-objective[10] situatedness—in which oilclay masses call each other and influence each other from within their various appearances, shapes, and positions—that is, (as) the state of the world. When disparate bodies bring themselves back into the world and order themselves within it, space opens up and the situation grows more transparent. At that very moment, order arises from indefinite chaos and an inexplicable word becomes visible from within the phase of silence. This unnamable event finally sheds its everyday veil that is the gallery, the oilclay, the earth, and the artist, as its situatedness is structured. Only then does it reveal itself as a vivid scene.

Of course, Sekine must have had some plan in mind from the very beginning. However, the plan serves merely as a cue for his act, the way he engages with the world. Certainly, the plan is directly linked to the structure of delimiting himself in the world. However, in the midst of an event, the plan tends to be totally forgotten in the space of perception. In order for an event to become an event, the act must not objectify the plan but become an organic and dual way of being that is mutually acted upon by the world and the human, just like the mutual relationship of actors in a play. Neither does the earth reveal its situatedness according to Sekine's plan, nor is Sekine buried in the earth's indefiniteness. Likewise, neither is oilclay arranged according to Sekine's plan, nor does Sekine act only alongside the oilclay piles. No matter what is happening, the earth *is* Sekine and Sekine *is* the earth.[11] The world becomes visible only when an event vividly takes place between Sekine *and* oilclay, or the galley *and* Sekine *and* oilclay, whose relatums are of equal value and weight.

In the dual state of *at once* acting and being acted upon, *at once* being acted upon and acting, the plan is either purified as a methodology or dissolved in the situatedness. Accordingly, it is implausible to unilaterally "express" or to "make" in the modern sense of "objectifying the world through representation." As they engage in a dual relationship, when the earth has become the earth, oilclay has become oilclay, and Sekine has become Sekine, a situatedness that transcends the earth, oilclay, and Sekine, that is, the open world (space) is revealed. As Sekine writes in his notebook, "Turning *mono* into *mono*, in order to transcend *mono*," wherein *mono* generally means "things."[12]

In conventional art oilclay and dirt are materials used, for example, to model in sculpture or create an *objet*. Oilclay and dirt have long been deemed useless themselves; rather, they have been considered materials or tools for the artist to make an image or materialize an *objet*. When oilclay or dirt is turned into an image of a human, or used for the representation of an image of a thing, they close off their own expressions and beings, prompted to turn into materials for image-making or tools for cognition. To begin with, in the modern conception, to "express" or to "make" means objectification into an *objet*.

However, with Sekine, oilclay becomes more oilclay and dirt becomes more dirt, they are never objectified into images. Through an event with Sekine, oilclay and dirt undergo "phenomenological reduction," so to speak. By becoming more oilclay and more dirt, they transcend being oilclay and dirt. To release everyday insignificant "oilclay" and "dirt" into the "visible," to open them as phenomena of perception—. What makes this possible is the act and therein arises an event. Needless to say, what I mean by "event" here signifies no mere physical occurrence or accidental incident.

An act without an event is idle. An event without perception is empty too. An event signifies a scene of the act through which the world has become the world, thus it is not a landscape of expression that objectifies the world. Therefore, when an event is vividly occasioned, the state of the world is at once vividly visible and perceived in tangible immediacy. That is why an event is considered a perceptual phenomenon of being within the world. It is thus different from representation through consciousness.

On Corporeality[13]

I

On one occasion, Sekine created a spectacular event on a vast hillside by placing a 4-ton rock on a transparent 3-meter-high stainless steel column. The scene of an enormous rock floating in the air, however, went beyond the imaginary sort in a Magritte painting. Placing a rock on a pillar is indeed nonsense, but as a state the scene is remarkably banal. By inserting a pillar between the rock and the earth, the relationship between the three reveals the situatedness of the world, and becomes a site that enables us to see the world as it is.

Indeed, a rock has become a rock, a pillar has become a pillar, and the earth has become the earth. Today, they still breathe as organic relatums, enabling passersby to encounter the world of vast expanse. People can't possibly pass by without seeing these things, aside from those close-minded people who refuse to see them. Yet, they do not see the everyday "rock," "pillar," or "earth"—let alone the outline of the objects in such shapes. (They recognize their thing-ness only after seeing them.) No doubt, they see some things, but the way they see clearly differs from the everyday manner in which they recognize things as objects. Indeed, those who see them see no object. Rather, what they see is non-objective space, a state of the world, the vivid existence of the world. That is to say, what is there is not a self-sufficient object, but an open structure of perception that also encompasses those who see it. The world is seen but no object is seen therein. Heidegger calls this "the world illuminated by being."[14] According to the philosopher Nishida Kitarō, it is the dimension of *soku*[15] wherein "one sees what to see by turning it into nothingness," the world in which "one defines what is by what is not (nothingness)." In other words, to see means to be "in the midst of the world" in which one sees. This world can be understood as a world of the perceived body of a communal subject that transcends the objectivity of the self. Either way, it is notable that it shows a space that

is a site but not an object, accordingly, the situatedness in which a structure causes an encounter beyond the object.

On another occasion, Sekine installed two large black iron[16] containers, one rectangular and the other cylindrical (30 x 220 x 160 cm, 120 x 120 x 120 cm) in a certain location of a large grassy garden, filled to their brims with water. Into an indefinite space covered with green grass and trees, the method of delimitation was introduced by pouring water into the pitch-black clearly delimited cylindrical and rectangular containers and making the water's surface taut. Through this act, the surroundings began to breathe as visible space. The usually nondescript space, with the staging of this event, suddenly engendered extreme tension. This tension then released the objects into a more liberated, lively expanse. The water was still water, the iron containers were still iron containers, the grass, the trees, and the earth around them were still as they were. Nonetheless, in this place they were no longer visible as things and no longer appeared as an objective landscape. They were now seen as endlessly open objects, revealing the immediate world and making the viewer aware of occupying that situatedness. This structure suggests that situatedness "has become its own scene only by being no landscape at all" (Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'esprit*[17]).

Therefore, what the event occasions is not a self-contained object but relatums that awaken to externality, a way of living that reveals the world, an "opened situatedness." Of course, this situatedness does not express the form of the state of the world itself—which is essentially an utter impossibility. To begin with, the eternally immutable and whole state of the world cannot be expressed as a manmade form. The only thing man can do is to "see"—that is, "encounter"—the state of the world through perception in the situatedness of an event occasioned by Sekine's act in relation to the world. The structure of situatedness of the world brought forth by the event is nothing but a way to encounter the world as a phenomenon invoked by the subject of perception. In this respect, situatedness is neither an objet that is a congelation of an ideal nor the state of the world itself, but a more direct structural relation with the world within the world—that one may describe as a perceptual structure.

This is what Blaise Pascal defined as *milieu*, and is akin to Hegel's conceptualization of the "intermediary." However, it is never an indirect intermediary that separates humans from the world in that it is a phase of the world that indicates and allows humans to encounter the direct state of the world. Humans need structure and to occasion it, precisely because their cognition is restricted in such a way that they can only engage the world through the mediation of consciousness (that delimits perception). Therefore, to engage the world most directly does not mean the nullification of consciousness through elimination of an intermediary. Rather, we need perceptual delimitation—by working our consciousness as a living intermediary to encounter—to forge an engagement with the world that is direct. So long as the function of consciousness is intermediary, it is inevitable that perception cannot be occasioned without some intermediary element.

Therein lies the necessity of structure. However, as Jean Ladrière observed in *Meaning and Structure*, structure is "no copy or representation of reality resulting from the manipulation of a form of reality," and "structure is an intermediary and it is indispensable as such solely because it enables the arrival of meaning."[18]

A phase of oilclay produced when Sekine stops his act cannot be considered in itself a condition of the world, yet it is certainly not a copy of something. It is not an image of anything, for it was structured as a manner of encountering the world through Sekine's engagement with oilclay. It is nothing other than the situatedness of an event. That is why we neither see oilclay as an object nor Sekine, but we see an opened space that is not an image of anything, perceiving ourselves within it.

Sekine also made a structure with a heavy iron plate (22 x 150 x 150 cm, 280 kg) placed on a large sponge cylinder (170 x 140 cm), which also saliently occasioned the situatedness of an event, thus the meaning and the state of the world. In response to the heavy weight of the iron plate, the sponge was deformed and engendered an elaborately curved surface. Illuminating the situatedness of an event, those present encountered the state of the world. One can say that the situatedness of the world occasioned by the relation between the solid and heavy iron plate and the soft and light sponge at once embodies the being of an exposed structure and brings forth "a way to encounter the world" of one who engages in an act.[19]

When a human engages with the world, his engagement engenders an act and occasions an event as a specific form of perception. To form a certain situatedness of the world in such a manner decisively demonstrates how and where the being of a human itself is fundamentally made present. Therefore, in his discussion of Pascal, the philosopher Miki Kiyoshi writes as follows in *The Study of the Human Being in Pascal*:[20]

> Situatedness is precisely our "way of being" in the world, or our "way of encountering" the world. Humans exist in a situatedness at once in the world and with the world. In this situatedness, the state of the world has become real for us. However, this situatedness does not objectify the world but *possesses* it. (*Author's note: Here "possess," which is as much part of Miki's thinking as part of Pascal's and [Gabriel] Marcel's vocabulary, means to obtain the corporeality of the world itself actualized in its self-realization.*) In this relationship of possession (*Author's note: A relationship of the body as expressed in a self-identifying point of unity between those who work and those who see*), the first form of actuality of human existence is achieved. That man is an actual being is an essential definition and it is given together with the fact that he is a being in the world. Since the relationship of the state of the world and the situatedness of man is direct, we therefore sense our selves as we sense the world.

It is clear that for Miki, the world is not an object of cognition but discerned as a horizon of perception. He does not refute cognition but emphasizes that prior to cognition the

world must first serve as a site of perception where encounters can be achieved. In the face of objectifying thought, it is even suggestive that he sought to locate an essential structurality in the relationship between the world and man. Significantly, Sekine comments along similar lines in his notebook: "To have an encounter means to realize the world (directly), because at that moment, man is simply situated in the midst of the world."

"And yet . . . ," some may retort. Although the world may always appear as a horizon of perception to a thinker with deep insight or an encounterer,[21] that is not the reality of an ordinary person. Everyday life forms an imperceptible, almost frigid dimension of perception, rather than offering perceptive merging. It demands the function of objective knowledge and compels us to form judgments through cognition before anything else. Furthermore, unless there is some sort of an event, even when we roam the streets, we notice nothing. Worse, we hardly see the scenery around us. In everyday life, when we walk toward the object in our job, the world is no more than an unrelated landscape, which is as good as nonexistent and thus alienated from us.

II

This is why an encounterer occasions an act and structure. It is because he first "encountered" the world (*at* a certain moment and place). He "saw" the world that ordinary people believe cannot be seen. Not that an ordinary person has an encounter. (He may notice that a familiar tree appears vivid one day, or he may be enthralled by the vivid surface of lacquerware polished through everyday use.) However, the encounterer has far more numerous experiences—distinguished by his desire to live in constant engagement with the world. The encounterer may suddenly experience an encounter, thanks to the training of his sharp intuition and perception of that poetic moment, upon sighting a sewing machine juxtaposed with an umbrella, or a motion of a tiny insect, or even tobacco ashes, depending on the time and place. Having suddenly experienced such encounters, he begins to undertake an intermediary act that universalizes and maintains it.

Some may stomp on the earth, some may erect buildings on it, and yet others may fly up from the earth into the sky. Countless others live their lives on the earth, making various things. Ordinarily, people use the earth to make tools, instinctively and indifferently, busily turning the earth into *objets* in accordance with their image of objectification. However, although they may unconsciously represent the world as an object with everyday use value and functionality, they rarely see or engage the world as a living being, a mutually related scene, as an open world. Only when they happen to become encounterers, do they sense, notice, and see it. In everyday life, while ordinary people barely notice the earth, an encounterer sees the earth breathing, its expression, its language, its history, and its being.

This is precisely what Heidegger examines in *The Origin of the Work of Art*[22] in his reading of van Gogh's portrayal of a pair of peasant shoes. Many wear or see a pair

of peasant shoes as equipment without perceiving it. However, van Gogh alone noticed the pair of shoes, was moved by it, and saw what it opened up—how its meaning arrived. The pair of peasant shoes was realized and attained meaning through the continued act of seeing (painting) it. To borrow Rilke's words, only when the pair of peasant shoes encountered van Gogh, did it become a *Dinge* (of phenomenological reduction). Sekine, too, writes to a similar effect in his notebook: "We want to turn *mono* into *mono* because we've seen the expanse of being there."

An encounter, that is, "a chance meeting, a place of beginning and the simultaneous rise of the law," writes the thinker Karaki Junzō insightfully in his treatise on the thirteeth-century monk Dōgen.[23] He further writes in this treatise, "With an artist, an encounter necessarily entails the figuration of what he has encountered. Art or *Kunst* as *techne* concerns the realization in form. However, without encounter there is no *techne*. Art without encounter is mere technique. Encounter must come first in essence. Otherwise, it makes for mere imitation." In the beginning, there is an encounter. He first sees it, encounters it, and so he makes an act. In the desire to maintain a more direct, more concrete, more enduring, and more universal engagement, an event occasions an intermediary structure. An intermediary without encounter is empty, yet an encounter without intermediary is equal to being blind. In the act of maintaining and universalizing an encounter as a horizon of perception, an intermediary called the "work of art" is born.

Sekine writes in his notebook: "Sometimes, I see a *mono* very vividly, as if it is magnetically charged. A fresh encounter with an ordinary, everyday *mono*. This encounter is momentary, shutting down immediately. 'We then try to have the feeling of this encounter maintained and universalized' (Lee Ufan). Here, we have the desire to 'create in order to see' and give flesh even to those *mono* that pass through our selves. This is called the structuring of an encounter, the work…. This by no means constitutes 'making form,' but rather removes the dust that is the concept adhering to *mono*, to render it onto itself, and to reveal the world in which it is enclosed. To render the invisible visible. To illuminate the world overlooked in everyday life through the language of encounter" (quoted from his 1969 essay, "Encounter with *Mono*"[24]).

An artist must be a poet in spirit in the sense that he is a guardian of being, an encounterer. In other words, an artist is not a special being, but in essence he who seeks to keep perceiving the world of encounter deeply and directly based on the experience of poetic moments and he who tries to be a discoverer of language. As I have discussed, we call him an artist when he stakes himself on the act of occasioning an intermediary structure of encounter to illuminate the world, which we think is invisible, on the horizon of perception. An encounterer cannot but occasion a structure of relatums through his act, because he desires to maintain and universalize the engagement of encounter. Conversely, an act exists and a structure is occasioned as a task to maintain the engagement of encounter. Wanting to keep seeing it, wanting it to keep being visible.

An event in which a structure is brought forth through an act invites a stylization of the visible so long as it is a way to keep seeing. This is the continuous manifestation of an encounter being invoked. As the philosopher Merleau-Ponty writes in "Eye and Mind," "The 'world's instant' that Cézanne wanted to paint, an instant long since passed away, is still hurled toward us by his paintings."[25]

<h1 style="text-align:center">III</h1>

To maintain and universalize an encounter is the task of engaging the world. An act engenders an intermediary structure, which transforms a person into a seer and has him encounter the world. Then the *techne* of structuring—through which what he saw is drawn out to where it can be seen—is the task of illuminating the visible body by making itself visible transparently (like a pane of glass) and *at the same time* making the world visible. (Herein, *techne* is not the technique of objectification, or transforming the world into an image, but technique in the ancient Greek sense of digging up, to reveal the world in one's own form.) Everyday things that are passed over as part of a world that we look at but do not see have forms, though their corporeality is alienated. They therefore constitute invisible space, as fictitious objects. So, the poet and the artist devote themselves to the intermediary task of giving bodily forms to things through dismantling the curse of the fiction of daily existence and illuminating things on the horizon of perception as visible phenomenon.

An *objet*, too, can be deemed a structure, for it catches the gaze, though unilaterally, and constitutes a contraption of seeing. Oilclay at a mud shop, stones, and the earth are all seen and are things to be seen. In this sense, they have something to do with seeing. However, even though our gaze is directed toward them, we are unable to encounter the world that is open and visible therein. All we can do is confirm that what is there is something to be seen, that is, an objective fact. Which is to say, the gaze that caresses the surface of the form stops at capturing the object itself, merely placing the object in a visible state. It never occasions the corporeality of the dual nature of *and* because it fails *at the same time* to open up the world. In the dual body, wherein at once we see it and it is visible, seeing becomes possible for the first time. We call that which occasions it a true structure. Rilke called it transference.

Now, it must be noted that the human being is, in and of itself, a bodily being. This is why it is possible for us to engage or see the external world. For the body constitutes a boundary between interior and exterior, and is equipped with both interiority and exteriority. Merleau-Ponty argues for this intermediary cognition in *Phenomenology of Perception*.[26] "The body is of dual nature in that it belongs to me and links to the external world." Since the body is a being that straddles the interior and the exterior, it intermediates between the self and the other. Nishida Kitarō recognized that the transcendental self-awareness of the body was underscored by its dual nature of being at once passive and active. The body's dual nature enables us at once to see and to be seen, to be at once

seen and to see. The presentation of a living structure and an open place is thus demanded to activate the body's intermediary role and reveal its self-awareness.

To at once make the body transparent and make its surroundings visible. Such structuring therefore means to expose the secret—the transcendence of corporeality. As with all things and images, when we see it unilaterally as an object, it appears possible without being mediated by the body. However, in order to open a non-objective world where interior and exterior meet, it must be equipped with a body (an intersection of *and*, as in "at once to see *and* to be seen"). Structure becomes an intermediary for the immediate world only because it is a living body.

Sekine saw the world in the earth. The concave-convex phase he occasioned was afforded corporeality and structured through his act of making visible the world he saw. Beginning with the construction worker, many people dig holes in the earth to achieve labor value. However, even though they confront the earth in their physical act, they hardly touch upon the living body of the earth that is the direct world. They *do not see* it. Since they never have the bodily sense of being enveloped by the earth, they never manifest it as a visible body. Encounter means to perceive the touch in corporeality. Seeing itself is intermediary, in that in its dual nature seeing is itself visible and at the same time it renders visible the surrounding world. Revealed through the desire to give seeing a style of seeing, to see and keep seeing is the corporeality of an intermediary structure that is "at once to see and to be seen." If there is nothing visible, there is nothing to see; if there is nothing to see, there is nothing visible. That which sees has become that which is seen and that which is seen has become that which sees—the earth has become visible via the world and the world via the earth, the earth via Sekine and Sekine via the earth, Sekine via the world and the world via Sekine. The "structure *through* X," that is, the concave-convex body that lives "at once" seeing and being seen is illuminated, as its surrounding is transformed into a vividly open space.

To reveal the body that occasions an encounter is in other words to reveal the thickness of visibility in which structure is a living body. Seeing becomes possible always as a relation between that which sees and that which is seen. The corporeality of this dual relationship is called a space—that is, a depth—opened by intersecting perspectives. A structure devoid of depth or thickness is an objectified fiction, or an *objet*. It has nothing to do with seeing.

What Sekine illuminated and materialized through his repetitive act with oilclay is precisely the depth and thickness of the space—for as he engaged himself with oilclay and space, he released oilclay, space, and himself into a mutual relationship through his repetitive relational task with oilclay, space, and himself. Oilclay and space begin to breathe, when, even though they are transparently visible (i.e., objects), they acquire a dual nature by making themselves visible (i.e., non-objects) and even their surroundings, thus locating themselves within these relatums, whereby the world reveals its thickness and gains its depth.

When Sekine said: "Sometimes, I see a *mono* very vividly, as if it is magnetically charged," he is referring to the animated depth of space that surrounds *mono*. When a *mono* is visible vividly, what is visible is not the object itself but the space breathing around it, the depth of tangible density. Oilclay, one of many invisible things in everyday life because it does not present—or it lacks—a tangible expanse to be mutually seen and touched, that is, corporeality. Sponges and iron plates that can be easily found at a local hardware store are things, not bodies. Oilclay, a sponge, and an iron plate, for the first time gain a body, when Sekine's act occasions the structure of oilclay, or the situatedness of a sponge or an iron plate. It can be said that these things were transmogrified into bodies through the act of Sekine, who aspired to keep engaging through an encounter.

If to see is to encounter the world, to see its nonobjective space is in other words to experience an intuition, or a perception, of the depth and thickness of the world of encounter. Not to see the object of oilclay in its structure. Not to see the object of the world in its structure. Yet, despite that, he who sees, sees something, and the world exists in an expanse around it as something visible. It goes without saying that the corporeality not only transcends the object but it also constitutes the depth and thickness of the expanse of the world. If the object is vividly visible yet one does not see it, that is precisely because he is inside the depth of its expanse, that is, the corporeality.

Merleau-Ponty writes in "Eye and Mind": "Vision is the meeting, as at a crossroads, of all the aspects of Being," and "After all, the world is around me, not in front of me."[27] Therefore, value judgments are not formed in a way that sees the other unilaterally. When what is visible is seen with its objectivity nullified, he who sees also nullifies the objectivity of his self and resides in the same body. That is why an encounter can be understood to represent the dual state of *soku* wherein, "something is at once that which sees and that which is seen, and it is at once that which is seen and that which sees."

There is no seeing without corporeality. What lacks corporeality cannot constitute a visible world, no matter how massive, vast, spectacular, exquisite, or beautiful. It is a space devoid of expanse and unable to evoke real feeling, one that is merely thrown out there to lie around with no relationship to the world. That is why we call that which lacks corporeality "abstraction." When stones that lie around can only be seen as "mere stones," similar to things that are barely noticed in everyday life, they are abstractions severed from an organic relationship with the world. Only when a thing transcends its contours and starts being sensed as an expanse and a thickness, does it gain reality. If a thing is merely placed as an object of intellect or information—with a certain form and weight in a certain place at a certain time—it is as good as nothing in terms of the world and encounter, if it does not present a structure that reveals a vivid expanse and thickness.

(In the final year of high school, I experienced the following world. At the yearend party of a literature club, each of us sang a song. One of my friends sang "Arirang," a song whose origin, meaning, and tune everybody knew. He sang it rather well, but it didn't sound convincing to me—no, actually to any of our ears. Many of us then sang

different songs. Toward the end of the party, Teacher A, a poet who taught us the Korean language, began singing.

He sang "Arirang." He made a mistake with the lyrics and stopped there midstream. His voice, in terms of its vocalization, was not that good. And his delivery, too, was far poorer than that of our friend who had sung the same song earlier. Yet, Teacher A's singing had an unexpected effect. After he stopped midstream, we became so quiet that you could have heard a pin drop. His voice was dense and deep, enveloped the whole room and resonated in our souls. His voice was not grand, but it transformed the whole room into a thickness of the song, that is, its corporeality. When his voice gained depth, resonating, the space was opened as a depth that could be seen (heard). Even though I had heard the song many times since childhood, I felt as though through this poet's voice that "Arirang" became "Arirang" for the first time.

What the thinker Maurice Blanchot calls "the space of literature" is not a space in which the literary work is an objective image, but a space in which language gains thickness and depth in the foregoing sense and has become visible—a structure that constitutes a site of corporeality. He aptly writes, "Language is the body of the world." In order for all things to be at once visible and to exist as non-objects *through which* the world becomes visible, they must, as a structure, become an open place gleaming with vivid corporeality.)

On Place[28]

I

With an *objet*, we fail to capture its contours with our eyes and are destined to continue questioning its meaning as an object. In what is called "idea art"[29] the objectivity of an object is concealed in the cave of ideas, so much so that it is forced to sever all its relationalities with the world. All things are regarded as representing ideas. Accordingly, what we see in them are ideas themselves, not the state of the world. Since the world is objectified to show what the artist wants to represent, the world is self-contained as a false image and is world in name only. An object that is a false image constitutes a manipulated world so long as it is self-sufficient and cannot escape being fundamentally the product of cognition and the congealment of value. That is to say, it is not placed in front of us as a structure of open perception of the world but as an image transformed into a closed object ready for cognitive judgment. When everything is objectified into an image, the world becomes an incarnated space of representation and accordingly the world loses its non-manmade directness and reality. This is the state in which everything is turned into information as observed in today's civilization of false imagery resulting from industrial society. In art, too, this phenomenon induces a state of invisibility that greatly forces humans into a space of ideas that is recalcitrant to perception.

An age of immense objectification. No matter what we see, we are uncertain. Through abstraction and informationization, everything has become an image, lacking

concrete corporeality with depth and thickness. We are placed in a state of complete alienation. The world does not appear visible, a vivid living state with reality, but is turned into an unrelated landscape that we all pass by, barely noticing it. Even if we try to see it, it does not arouse our perception, for it remains a thing to recognize as such, in its frigid state. Today's information theory attempts to objectify everything into an index of information and precisely aspires to the justification and rationalization of such a state. Accordingly, under the name of idea art, some artists conceal objects with ideas to make them obscure and invisible. Their work is saliently a revisionist task that participates in a highly institutionalized modernism.

The sublimation of the modern and the postulation of the contemporary begin where we abandon the thought of objectification, whereby an artist turns the world into an object he wants to represent. However, by removing things from our eyes or concealing them with ideas, we merely distort the problem on hand. An even more futile attempt is to misrepresent things as Surrealist *objets* do, by vanishing or burying them in everyday landscape. Yet, needless to say, it is out of the question to leave them be, for that would be tantamount to neglecting reality and is far from how things should be. Overcoming object-centrism concerns releasing things from the gaze of cognition and questioning how to make them transparent in the surrounding expanse, for the world must be realized in a situatedness in which it can be perceived as it is; we must not willfully vanish it or turn it into an instrument of cognition.

In this context, I find the recent works by young Japanese artists highly notable for their attempts to honestly engage the world and direct the viewer's gaze to this engagement. That is to say, they attempt not to direct the gaze to capture the contour of things, that is the object, but to focus on the situational relationality as to how they exist there. They try to understand the world not as an object but as its manifestation through its relationship and its being.

For example, the artist Takamatsu Jirō chiseled the top of logs with their bark intact to reveal square-shaped lumber within, suspending this process midway. Although the logs retain most of their shape, a small amount of delimitation makes us see that the logs are composed of ordinary yet large lumber. The image of wood does not change into something else, yet it does not remain in its everyday state. What is there is visible to us, no longer as wood, lumber, or any other such similar thing. In this state, the wood's internal idea intersects, dually and reciprocally, with its externality. By exposing the relationship between lumber and log, Takamatsu occasions a situatedness in which wood can be seen beyond (its objectivity as) wood. That is why most people will gradually notice that they are looking not at mere "wood" but at a "relationship" in the delimited situatedness of the wood. For the first time, Takamatsu saw, discovered, and encountered the state of the world—through wood. In Takamatsu's approach of continuing to engage the world, wood is not objectified, but becomes a structure that makes us see that relationship.

Wood reminds me of a structure by the sculptor Terada Takehiro. He, too, spent days breaking up a huge log with an axe but stopped when one third of the wood was still intact. Wood pieces lay scattered around the log and glittered in a strange way, in relation to the remaining log. In this case, too, a situatedness occasioned by the broken part and the part intact prevents the viewer from just seeing the log or broken pieces. In the relatum of wood's exteriority and interiority, we become aware of the state of the world revealed through Terada's act. This would not be the case if the log were located in an everyday place—which would be tantamount to hiding it in a veil of everydayness as an unrelated object that invokes no perception. Still, if the whole log were broken into pieces, the result would be just about the same: no relatums of perception would be brought forth. We would see unrelated, ordinary pieces of wood, which in this respect, would be considered the self-sufficient phase of an object—that is, an *objet*—one that will never allow us to see or sense the expanse around it.

Now, the attempt to free the gaze from the contour of an object is not limited to illuminating the self-relation in the phase of a thing itself. It can easily be imagined that the moment a thing is placed there, it evolves to form a relationship with the site.

Imai Norio, a young member of the Gutai group, nonchalantly threw one ton of cement into a corner of a gallery. After it solidified, he pulled it off the wall about 17 centimeters or so. The contact surfaces of the perpendicular walls and the cement showed complementary marks. On the walls, we see the trace of cement, while the concave and convex marks of the walls are vividly imprinted on the perpendicular sections of the cement and include their blemishes and the texture of the wall cloth. The two are in confrontation, as though pulling and distancing each other. In these relatums, each occupies its rightful place in the state of the world. He who views the work cannot just look at either the walls or the cement. He will inevitably see their relationality, and will be surprised to learn that a state he would ordinarily be oblivious to offers an unexpectedly fresh discovery.

The walls remain walls, the cement remains cement, yet, by revealing such structural relations, Imai makes their objectivities transparent. As their structure makes visible the relationality of a state, that is, the being of a state, we can see that they transcend objets. If he had left the cement tightly attached to the walls or removed the cement too far from the walls, we would not have seen the relationality but rather their objectivities as such in these states. Our attention would be attracted to the gap between the cement and the walls. The artist's ability to instead create a certain tension points to his profound insight into the world and his power to illuminate a structure. At any rate, we can learn much about how to transcend objectivism by looking at the work of Imai, whose engagement with the world, that is the way he delimits it, occasions relatums in the relationship between things and the site.

In addition, Sekine's fellow artist Yoshida Katsurō casually combines a glass plate and electricity in relation to a site. Another colleague of Sekine's, Suga Kishio purposefully keeps open an open window (which can stay open itself) with a large, coarse, square

piece of lumber. Needless to say, among Sekine's structures, a sponge compressed by an iron plate on a large floor especially concerns relatums between things and a site.

However, it must be pointed out that the situatedness of the site, for that matter the structure of the relationship itself, carries an insurmountable limitation. In the above examples, you may have tacitly noticed that most of them presuppose the institution of "art," a fact that may prompt you to consider them to constitute an epistemological methodology. Even if this presumption is eliminated, it is unlikely that they can form relatums of perception, that is, a situatedness that occasions depth and thickness in the surrounding space. Even if they can occasion an expanse, so far as they continue to concern only the relationship between a thing and a site, what we see there is no more than a phase of the relationship. I wonder if they can still invoke a perception of the world that transcends everyday objective knowledge.

In order for a site to become a significant space of perception outside the context of the art exhibition, I feel there must be a more fundamental and essential issue than can be revealed by relationality. Put simply, this can be thought to result from the lack of place-ness that occasions an encounter. This is precisely because a horizon of encounter in the space of transference is opened when a living corporeality makes an object transparent, reviving the breathing depths of the surrounding.

II

Even while burdened with many limitations and real-life contradictions, in trying not to be an epistemologist but an encounterer, Sekine continues to engage in acts and occasions a structure. That his structure somehow manages to resonate in the mind of the viewer making him comprehend an unknown horizon, is because it is materialized through the place-ness of the site *occasioned through* encounter. The place can be a gallery, a park, or a hill that constitutes an open place, wherein logical cognition and scrutiny are transcended to perceive a direct phenomenal scene.

Therefore, the greatest characteristic of Sekine's structures is that they indicate a specific being and situatedness of openness that is almost impossible to conceive without a certain sense of place. I just wrote "a certain sense" because place is not simply geographical or designated space, of a here and there. It is a "specific place" mediated by consciousness and being and is without question distinct from an ordinary space or situation. And of course, to speak of a "specific place" refers neither to predetermined space nor sacred eternal space.

A structure consisting of a huge rock placed on a stainless steel pillar at a crossroads on a vast hill stands tall against the sky. The appearance of a structure opens the surrounding space, which has become a place of encounter. It can't be helped if this structure appears in a museum or atop a fence, and some consider it to be no more than a sculpture, for having lost a place to be placed it will have become an ornament. Sekine had an "encounter" and conceived of this structure in a nearby field. He then began to

look for a location in which to erect it and this hill became its first site where he opened a place. At the center of a crossroads, on a vast hill where the ground rose a bit and it was breezy, commanding a good view. Rocks similar to his lay nearby and four paths extended in four directions. Because of his structure being placed there, the space of the hill took on a larger expanse, the crossroads looked more like crossroads, and the rocks around it appeared to breath. Its placement felt so natural that we even forgot to ask why it stood there. With the stainless steel pillar separating the rock from the earth, an unusual tension filled the surroundings, creating a space of inexplicable atmosphere. He who saw it there sensed the thickness of being inside this place-ness and saw the depth itself that penetrated the structure and extended around it.

Not just any such-and-such site makes for a place that is open and visible. If one aimlessly places a rock on a pillar, it won't make for a structure that is transparent and indicates the depth around it, that is, a body occasioned. First, there is an encounter. He "sees" it. Then, through the event of his act, a structure is formed and a place opened. Without place, there is no structure; without a structure, there is no place. In other words, a structure without place is blind, and a place without structure is empty.

The place-ness found in the structure of oilclay is also established by the structural relations therein that cannot be removed In a precisely measured hard rectangular white space, formless soft black masses are figured in large and small sets. Tension created by the placement and distance between the ceiling, walls, floor, corners, and the patterned oilclay are precisely the place-ness of the phase occasioned. Of course, it is not impossible for another place-ness to be revealed if the structure is given another appropriate place. For example, three large and small piles of oilclay were once figured in a corner garden carpeted with while pebbles, and two mountains of oilclay also figured in a spacious lobby of a building. In either case, located in a different place and phase, Sekine certainly confirmed that the oilclay revealed a different place-ness that made the surrounding breath, rendered the world transparent, and brought forth a thickness.

Heidegger writes in *The Origin of the Work of Art*: "Where does a work belong? The work belongs, as work, uniquely within the realm that is opened up by itself."[30] In essence, in order for a structure to be that structure, it is nearly impossible to transfer it to another place. When it is transferred to another place, it either reveals another place-ness or in most instances turns into a fictional *objet* that cannot be perceived. The Greek gods must stand atop Olympus and the Greek pantheons atop the Sicilian hills. (If we intend to extend this metaphor, medieval murals are suited to medieval cathedrals in northern Europe; Kano-school screens to Kyoto in the Momoyama era. Even with freely transportable "works," for example, thrown-in flowers[31] are suited to Japanese tearooms and Korean celadons to the Goryeo Kingdom.[32]) A structure opens the world only in a place that occasions an encounter. The pillar and the rock must stand at that crossroads on that vast hill. The two water-filled iron containers must be placed in that quiet and spacious garden.

Moreover when a place has become an object and cannot be made as world, it cannot be called "place." In the fictional accounting of history in which a place is not opened to an encounter but is objectified as a site of representation, a place closes the world and becomes an alien land. If one covers a hill with a large tent instead of opening the hill to the hill, or if one makes a garden as a site for erecting a gigantic sculpture of a rabbit (as with Claes Oldenburg's project) instead of revealing the phase of the garden in the garden, these sites can be thought of as colonized by representation. So long as galleries or museums remain spaces of representation as such (although there are exceptions), they are no more than fictional spaces. When one wraps a space not only with false visual imagery but also with the idea (ideology) of representation, the phase of the world no doubt loses its vividness of being to reveal an alienated state of objectification as a world of imagery.

When one human, or one race, is dominated by another's idea of representation, his dwelling, or country, ceases to breathe and loses its brilliance, turning into a fictional space that is indifferent, expressionless, and abstract. Therein, all things lose their living situatedness and remain at a distance from the light of the world, as abstractions that lack corporeality—as an aggregate of mere facts that show no place-ness, as everyday things that cannot be seen or noticed.

(Heidegger said the following about the world in *The Origin of the Work of Art*: "World is not a mere collection of the things—countable and uncountable, known and unknown—that are present at hand. Neither is world a merely imaginary framework added by our representation to the sum of things that are present. World worlds [. . .] World is never an object that stands before us and can be looked at. World is that always-nonobjectual."[33])

III

Things gain vividness of being only in a place in which an encounterer removes the dust from an object through his act, opening the situatedness of being as it is. Not that there is a world elsewhere. The world manifests itself as the depth and thickness of place-ness. A place that will never be objectified but whose expanse can be comprehended through the transparency of its structure. He who passes through this place encounters the world and in this encounter the place is realized unto the world. For primitive man, a hill topped with a dolmen was the abode of spirits, a holy place where the world opened. Around it, they held their rites of life, pledged battle, and danced madly. In those moments, the space for them became a holistic land of encounter, an open world. If a cave adorned by murals was their cathedral, a hill topped with a dolmen was their living space of history—a grand plaza.

In no times more than today has humankind lost its dwellings and plazas. All we have are dwellings and plazas, materially and in form only, abstract and informational. A representational space of rental buildings and apartments untouched by people's

breathing hands. Parks and recreational grounds where people gather and play sports are also spaces of representation that will rarely occasion encounters and are thus not places where concrete corporeality will be revealed. Even though we are at home, we don't feel at home; even when we are in a plaza, we don't feel like we are in in a plaza. We are in fact in an informational space called "the apartment" or an abstract plaza where the fiction of the "meeting of such-and-such" and a "such-and-such game" unfolds. The fact that we are there but don't feel like we are there, evidences that we find ourselves in a world of objects in which we are place-less (an abstract world of things). In this space, humans also become "*images of humankind*," losing touch with their relationality within the world.

That humans are "in-the-world beings" means that the world is a truly place-like being perceived through an encounter as a non-objective self-manifestation. Humans yearn for encounters, for humans are place-perceptual beings who "live" in the place of encounter. In this sense, an encounterer must be aware of himself as a laborer who cleanses a place and should open the place of dwellings and plazas. However, in these impoverished times as alienation and objectification deepen, it is not easy to be rid of everyday-ness and open a place. Even if we were to illuminate a structure and open a place by maintaining a simple yet pure encounter, that alone would not liberate humans and invoke a shared synchronic sense of being with the world. Our reality is such that in no time, a structure will be objectified and the place, too, will be counted as a part of our bland everyday landscape.

Sekine's anguish, as well as the limitations and contradictions of his structures, can be related to this fact. In the plaza of a scenic park, when he dug a cylinder-shaped hole in the ground and piled up the dirt he had removed in the same cylindrical shape, he created a structure comparable in scale to the statues of Greek gods. Again, in an event at a gallery where he conducted repetitive acts with oilclay, a necessity was revealed comparable to that of Sisyphus's futile repetition. In these structures, Sekine transcended the relationality with things, opened place-ness, and invoked an encounter. Nonetheless, these places cannot be described as dwellings or plazas. They are places that are opened a priori, without allusions or language, an almost empty characterless expanse. Yet something of importance is still lacking therein.

Come to think of it, the places where dolmens stand used to be holy places for prehistoric people to figure their histories. A place where they felt the infinite external world, held and practiced all their rites of life and death, labor and play. For them, these places were ancestral homes of history blessed by the intermediated infinity of the external world. Mount Olympus must have been replete with the soul and dignity of the Greek people. One need not hark back to the cave of Altamira, for even medieval cathedrals and Rikyū's tearoom hold, in some sense, the expanse of the living historical mind. However, the expanse of history as life and death, labor and play invoking infinity will not be revived in today's hills, parks, gardens, galleries, and rooms. In essence, the world today is an era devoid of history, an empty world.

(There is no history as such other than the expanse of communal life space in which a given nation, race, and people are opened. Strictly speaking, chronicles and genealogies are not history. They are phases of history, but not the depth or thickness of its corporeality. Much less, while giving the appearance of history, the dualist dialectics of "Being and Nothingness" that constitute the process representing consciousness, are no more than the history of modernist *objets*.)

That is the reason Sekine does not build pantheons or summon spirits. Not only does he not know how to build or summon, but more importantly, the gods (ideas) that live therein have died and the whereabouts of the spirits to be summoned are unclear. Today, the world has lost its soul and is no more than a reality that presents an empty expanse as "the present of nothingness, that is no longer and yet to be." Sekine transcribed the following words by the thinker Karaki Junzō in his notebook: "The Gods have disappeared, and while we anxiously await, they still do not arrive. This is the historical period (Heidegger) referred to as *dürftige Zeit* (lacking divine presence). It refers to a period of simultaneous lack and longing and a longing that is never fulfilled. Hölderlin would say that it is precisely in this period of the 'between,' that we reminisce for things that have passed and within this passage of expectations compose poetry for those things to come. These two states of nothingness have enabled reminiscence in abundance and the poet's field of expectations" (from *Kamo no Chōmei*). Now, those humans who have already turned into *objets* are thus unaware of and oblivious to the death of God and the loss of the soul, but preoccupied with faith and festivity (what Nietzsche called nihilism). By assuming the posture that that which is no more still exists and burying that which exists as though it were no more, we impoverish our times thereby pushing the world into a phase of emptiness.

Translator's Notes

"Beyond Being and Nothingness: On Sekine Nobuo" is arguably the most poetic and revealing essay among Lee Ufan's theoretical texts related to Mono-ha, many of which are translated by Stanley N. Anderson and anthologized in *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, exh. cat. (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2011). Unlike other texts that feature Sekine's work to support Lee's thesis steep in modernity critique, this essay begins with a narration of Sekine's "act" involving oilclay and seamlessly flows into a theoretical exegesis with a light hint of intellectual sources. The same pattern is repeated in all three sections, each devoted to a key concept—*shigusa* (act/gesture), *shintai-sei* (corporeality), and *basho* (place/topos)—of Lee's theorization. It was this literary quality that attracted me when I first contemplated selecting and translating Lee's text for publication in Alexandra Munroe's 1994 book, *Japanese Art after 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994). At that time, space constraint allowed only an excerpt to be translated. A full translation has since been my dream.

Theoretically dense, Lee's texts are not easy to translate from Japanese to English. This translation has posed a particular challenge because of the elegance and beauty of his prose. There are customarily two schools of

thought in translation. One opts for smooth English and readability that may mask specificities in the original language, while the other emphasizes accuracy and integrity of the original sometimes at the cost of readability. A good translation strikes balance between the two kinds, needless to say, but the dual nature of this text by Lee, at once theoretical and literary, is not what the translator regularly encounters.

No matter who translates it, translation is destined to be an approximation of the original text, and the translator aspires to create the best possible approximation in her ability. In this translation, with much deliberation, the translator and the journal editor, Miya Mizuta, have decided to opt for creating a literary quality in English. Granted, literary qualities in Japanese and those in English are not always the same. In this translation, the treatment of two words in the beginning of the essay represents our approach. The first example is the word *shigusa* in the chapter title. This is one of the key concepts Lee has employed. There are two considerations to make—what it means in Japanese and what it means in Lee's theory—and how it can be transferred into English. Both "act" and "gesture" are possible translations. Indeed, as Mika Yoshitake offers below, Lee's *shigusa* falls somewhere in between. Should I employ the academic convention of keeping the transliteration of *shigusa* with annotative insertion of [act/ gesture] in the text, which might look fussy? Or should I choose one English word over the other for the sake of legibility? In consultation with the journal editor I have decided to go with the latter in this and similar cases, with explanation provided in translator's notes, to keep the text moving smoothly. The second example is the word *doro-ya*, which literally means "mud store." I have

kept "mud store" in the text, even though it sounds strange in English, for *doro-ya* also sounds strange in Japanese. In fact, there is no such thing as a *doro-ya* in Japan. Oilclay is an ordinary artist's material that can be acquired at an art supply store; the word is decisively Lee's linguistic conceit. We have left the translation without annotation here, because I feel the English reader has to figure this word out just as the Japanese reader does.

My work has enormously benefitted from the assistance of Mika Yoshitake, a specialist of Mono-ha in general and Lee in particular, who kindly reviewed my first draft and offered annotations below. They are marked with her initials, MY. Her dissertation, "Lee Ufan and the Art of Mono-ha in Postwar Japan (1968–1972)" (UCLA, 2012) contains a chapter devoted to this essay. I thank the editor Miya Mizuta's astute work, which makes this translation truly a joint effort. Last but not least, I am grateful to Lee Ufan and Lee Mina for their valuable feedback.

1.
Shigusa means both "act" and "gesture" and evokes the body. "Gesture" has an intuitive, unintentional, and poetic nuance as opposed to "act," which contains a conscious and intentional nuance. In Lee's vocabulary, *shigusa* lies somewhere between the two. (MY)
2.
20 *tsubo* in Japanese measurements.
3.
Taishō is a translation of the German philosophical term, *Gegenstand*, which literally means "that which we stand against." Heidegger calls time and space the "realm" in which things encounter us (now and from over there), in which things can be "given" as over *against* us. See Martin Heidegger, *What Is a Thing?* trans. W. B. Barton, Jr. and Vera Deutsch,

with analysis by Eugene T. Gendlin (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1967); "The Thing," delivered as a lecture to the Bayerischen Akademie der Schonen Kunste, 1950; "Building Dwelling Thinking" (1951), trans. Albert Hofstadter, *Poetry, Language, and Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971); and "The Question Concerning Technology" (1954), in *Basic Writings* (San Francisco: Harpers, 1977). (MY)
4.
"Image-space," or *zō-kūkan*, refers to his spatial-bodily presence. (MY)
5.
The Japanese art term *obuje* is consistently translated as *objet(s)*. In Japanese modern and contemporary art, the French word *objet* was adopted to denote: 1) found everyday objects; 2) mainly three-dimensional works incorporating such objects; and, in a popularized form, 3) three-dimensional works that depart from conventional sculptural expressions. *Objet* must be thus be distinguished from "object" (*taishō*).
6.
Sekai suru in Japanese. Here, Lee borrows from a Heideggerian phrase "The world worlds." He wrote: "World is not a mere collection of the things—countable and uncountable, known and unknown—that are present at hand. Neither is world a merely imaginary framework added by our representation to the sum of things that are present. *World worlds*, and is more fully in being than all those tangible and perceptible things in the midst of which we take ourselves to be at home," in Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Off the Beaten Track*, edited and translated by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 23.
7.
Lee's use of the verb, *moyoosu*, which can mean here "to engender" or "to bring forth," is a rather unusual yet

affective turn in the Japanese. In this translation, "to occasion" is adopted with a hint of "to make it happen."

8.

In Lee's use, *jōtai-sei* derives from Nishida Kitarō's use of *jōtai*, which very much has to do with the notion of place (*topos*). For Lee, *jōtai-sei*, or "situatedness," refers to a transparent space that activates an encounter and enables the world to be seen more vividly. See Nishida Kitarō, *Nishida Kitarō senshū* [Complete writings by Nishida Kitarō], vol. 4 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1947), 208–12; Jin Baek, "The School of Things (*Mono-ha*) and Its Criticism of Modernity," in *Nothingness: Tadao Ando's Christian Space* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 47. (MY)

9.

In this paragraph, Lee extends the Heideggerian phrase "The world worlds." Roughly speaking, "to cause the earth to earth [*daichi-suru*]" means "to cause the earth to become earth." Other similar expressions here are: "to cause Sekine to Sekine [*Sekine-suru*]," "to cause oilclay to oilclay [*yudo-suru*]," "to cause space to space [*kūkan-suru*]."

10.

While the literal translation of *hi-taishō* in the original is "non-objective," here the reciprocal engagement and mutual interaction between elements is key. Thus, the word can be interpreted as "trans-objective." (MY)

11.

This *is* echoes the use of *soku*, typified in the Heart Sutra, the most famous phrase reads, *shiki soku ze kū, kū soku ze shiki*, or "Form itself *is* emptiness; emptiness itself *is* form."

12.

Mono, commonly translated as "things," is the central term in the movement of Mono-ha. Yoshitake writes, "The term *mono* (thing, matter, material) was written in Japanese *hiragana* (もの) to distinguish it from the idea of substance or physi-

cal object associated by its Chinese characters (物, also read *butsu*)" in her "Mono-ha: Living Structures," in *Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha*, exh. cat., ed. Yoshitake (Los Angeles: Blum & Poe, 2012), 100.

13.

Corporeality, or *shintai-sei* in Japanese, has a very specific definition for Lee, derived from Merleau-Ponty. Somewhere between a body-subject and a body-object. (MY)

14.

Derived from Heidegger's use of the word *Lichtung* (clearing). Despite its German root as "light," the word is not simply an illumination, but a "clearing," in which some thing or idea can show itself and be unconcealed. (MY)

15.

See note 11 for *soku*.

16.

Here Lee uses the word *tetsu*, literally "iron," although the work is made of steel. Yoshitake has alerted me to the fact that "iron" and "steel" refer to different material states. In modern industry "iron" is refined from rocks and turned into "steel" and thus it is steel that Lee uses in his work. Although Sekine also used modern materials, the fact of modernity is masked in this work by the black paint, as with his sponge and "iron" plate work (in reality a box). Hence I have chosen to use the word "iron" in reference to these works. However, in the rock and pillar work I use "steel," which Lee describes as made of *sutenresu*, referring to "stainless steel." See also, Lee Ufan, "Steel Plates and Stones," in *The Art of Encounter*, trans. Stanley N. Anderson, revised and expanded edition (London: Lisson Gallery, 2008), 125–31.

17.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's 1964 book *L'Œil et l'esprit* was translated into Japanese by Takiura Shizuo and Kida Gen in 1966 and published by Misuzu Shobō.

18.

"Imi to kōzō" [Meaning and structure], in *Kōzōshugi towa nanika* [What is structurism?]/*La pensée sauvage" et le structuralisme structuralismes : idéologie et method*, ed. Jean-Marie Domenach and trans. Itō Morio and Yagame Riichi (Tokyo: Saimaru Shuppankai, 1968).

19.

Shigusa-sha is Lee's neologism that means "he who engages in an act [*shigusa*]."

20.

Miki Kiyoshi, *Pasukaru ni okeru ningen no kenkyū* [The study of the human being in Pascal] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1926).

21.

Deai-sha, or "encounterer," is Lee's neologism that means "he who has an encounter [*deai*]."

22.

Heidegger, ibid., note 6.

23.

Karaki Junzō, "Dōgen ron" [On Dōgen], in Karaki, *Chūsei no bungaku* [Medieval literature] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1955).

24.

Sekine Nobuo, "Mono to no deai" [Encounter with *mono*], *Ohara-ryū sōka* [Ohara School flower arrangement] (September 1969).

25.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, edited with an introduction by Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 130.

26.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's 1945 book *La Phénoménologie de la Perception* was translated into Japanese as *Chikaku no genshōgaku* by Misuzu Shōbō in 1967.

27.

Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," 147 and 138.

28.

For Lee's notion of place (*topos*), see

note 9 on "situatedness."

29.

What Lee calls *kannen geijutsu* has a broader implication than Euro-American Conceptual Art in that he linked it with the thinking concerning *objets*. See Lee Ufan, "Kannen no geijutsu wa kanō-ka? Obuje shisō no shōtai to yukue" [Is idea art possible? The fact and future of *objet*-thinking], special feature on Marcel Duchamp, *Bijutsu techō*, no. 319 (November 1969).

30.

Heidegger, ibid., 20.

31.

Flowers arranged in a *nageire* (thrown-in) style, especially for a tea-ceremony room or a casual residential context.

32.

Korea produced refined celadon wares especially during the Goryeo period (918–1392).

33.

Heidegger, ibid., 23.