

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

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On Act¹

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 meters² 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 occasioned⁷ 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 situatedness⁸ 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 earth⁹ 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-objective¹⁰ 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 gallery *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 Corporeality¹³

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 iron¹⁶ 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 object 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

Situatdness 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 thirteenth-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

III

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 Place²⁸

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 objects. 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 relations 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 relations 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 breathe. 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 white 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 flowers³¹ 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 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.

Originally published as Lee Ufan, “Chokusetsu genshō no chihei ni: Sekine Nobuo-ron 1”/“The Horizon of Immediate Phenomena—Essay on Nobuo Sekine, No. 1” and *Ibid.* 2/No. 2, SD, no. 74 (December 1970), 2–96, and no. 75 (January 1971), 119–23. Revised and expanded as “Sonzai to mu o koete: Sekine Nobuo-ron” [*Beyond being and nothingness: On Sekine Nobuo*] in Deai o motomete: Atarashii geijutsu no hajimari ni [*In search of encounter: At the dawn of a new art*] (Tokyo: Tabata Shoten, 1971), 117–73.

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 benefited 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. *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 Schönen Künste, 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 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 structuralism?]/*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.