

Abstract Art as Impact

The Concrete Genealogy of Abstract Art

Kenjiro Okazaki

(Translated by You Nakai)

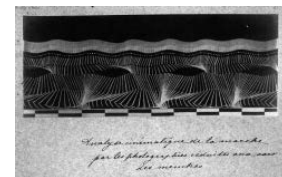
1: Cubism and “What Cannot Be Seen”

Suppose that one were to conduct a research on how Cubism was received in Japan. Surely what needs to be done first, before delving into a hasty search for works of Japanese artists that may appear to resemble Cubism, is to understand what Cubism was. Why did a style called Cubism emerge? How did painters develop this form? Such questions that challenge the researcher’s own understanding of Cubism must be dealt as the premise of research. If, however, the researcher listed up works that merely look like Cubism without reflecting upon how he understands the style, he may conclude that Japanese artists accomplished not much more than a superficial imitation of Cubism. This conclusion is obviously contradictory—for it was none other than the researcher himself who resorted to visual resemblance as a criteria of judgment in the first place.

What the eye as a sensory organ actually perceives is different from the image we believe we are seeing. This gap between the actual information captured by sight and the image it thinks it sees was common knowledge among the painters associated with Impressionism, Post-Impressionism and Cubism. Impressionism attempted to do away with the contours of objects and to immediately arrest on the canvas the continuously shifting motion of light and changes of color. But what became apparent through this endeavor was that the image of objects we thought we were seeing (and identifying) could not be produced from the countless fragmentary and ever-changing sensory data that enter our visual organ. If the image we thought we were capturing was actually not derived from perception, how was it grasped in the first place?

In short, more observation does not result in more knowledge. The image that synthesizes disparate data does not become more accurate or robust as perception accrues. On the contrary, the accumulation of sensory data results in dissolving the stable and singular image of what is being looked at. The Post-Impressionist painters delved into the task of re-organizing such dissolved imagery. Around the same time, Henri Bergson (1859-1941) revealed that what binds the fragmented sensory data was altogether a different faculty. Bergson’s philosophy also corresponded to a contemporary invention by Étienne-Jules Marey’s (1830-1904): the photographic gun. The moving image of humans or animals captured by Marey’s apparatus differed greatly from the still image dissected momentarily from the visible world by a camera (which was the image we believed we were seeing). (fig.1) The photographic gun exposed an abstract trajectory produced by the continuous fragments of light sculpted by time.

As is well known, it was the painter and critic Roger Fry (1866-1934) who articulated the problematics of Post-impressionism and defined Fauvism and Cubism as its development. Fry, who curated the famous Post-Impressionist Exhibition, pointed out that painters moving from Post-Impressionism to



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Cubism had detached themselves from the visual information perceived by the eye.**(fig.2)** Instead, they aimed to logically compose the real and definite imagery of objects that is grasped and recognized beyond the mere sensory input. Cubism was regarded as an exemplary model of this development. Indeed, at the core of Cubism was a disinterest for representational images that vision could grasp at a glance. This is demonstrated quite literally in the paintings themselves which present a pictorial surface that is difficult to recognize immediately.

Generally, however, the endeavor of Cubism is explained as having resorted to a multiplicity of viewpoints to dissolve and fragment the figurative image, traditionally grasped and represented by a singular point of view. But such explanation leaves several critical features of Cubist works unexplained:

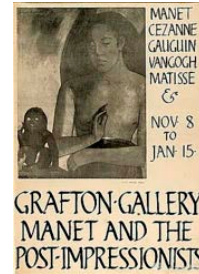
- Why did Analytical Cubism lack color? Why are their canvases covered in monochromatic amber?**(fig.3)**

- Why did artists simultaneously engage in the making of sculptures and reliefs that seem to literally dissolve and recompose actual objects? If the aim was to decompose objects by taking recourse to plural perspectives, it seems redundant to modify the object itself.**(fig.4)**

What must be understood is that Cubism detached painting from its dependence on vision and its effort to represent mere appearances. What it abandoned were familiar shapes—delineation—as well as the specific colors that seemed to characterize objects. Instead, it sought to grasp objects in a more direct, concrete, and realistic manner.

For instance, in his so called "Blue Period," Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) painted people living in the margins of culture, focusing especially on the tactility of blind people.**(fig.5)(fig.6)** In these works that predated Cubism, colors were already restrained, and the canvas filled with a monochromatic blue—the color perceived most strongly under weak light. The painter's interest was clearly in the fact that even when the visible world dismantles, an object could still be grasped as a singular, synthesized figure. It is the texture of details and the immediacy of tactility that is important; not any characteristic shape that binds the whole as one. Similarly, the impact African sculptures famously made on Braque and Picasso (along with many contemporaries including Matisse and Derain) was based on their capacity to strongly invoke the real presence of objects despite the sheer lack of visual similitude.**(fig.7)**

In any case, the premise of Cubism was the fundamental difference between disparate information perceived by sensory organs and the cognition of an object. People grasp objects directly, going beyond the fragmentary sensory data captured by sight. How can painting or sculpture—or artworks in general—make this happen?



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2: Sōseki Natsume and “f+F”

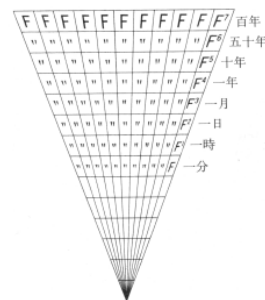
Sōseki Natsume (1867-1916), the literary giant known to have founded the basis of Japanese modern literature, was born in February 1867, just two months after Roger Fry. Sōseki’s greatest achievement was in articulating the fundamental problematic governing the art of twentieth century that went by the name of Modernism, and demonstrating this in practice through the many essays and novels he wrote. It was through Sōseki that the idea of modernist art was installed in Japan simultaneously with the rest of the world.

After three years of study in London from 1900, Sōseki returned to Japan and presented a lengthy lecture where he analyzed the structure of literature using the formula “f+F”.**(fig. 8)** This lecture was later published as *Bungakuron* [The Theory of Literature] in 1907. In Sōseki’s formula, “f” refers to the countless “f”eelings that constantly arise from within, or are impressed upon, us. “F” is “F”ocus which synthesizes the disparate and never-ending accumulation of feelings as one. Literature is constituted as a function between the multitude of sensory impressions “f” and the conceptual imagery “F.” A preexisting concept (“F”) which is shared by others may be questioned and dismantled through actual experience (“f”) while a new assortment of “f” may compose a new form of “F.” It is this process of dismantlement and re-composition that forms literature.

Sōseki’s formula of “f+F” in this way resembled, yet preceded, the theory of the Objective Correlative that T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) would later posit. More significantly, however, the problem Sōseki dealt with corresponded precisely with the theory of Post-Impressionism. The novelist’s keen insight into art is apparent in his work *Kusamakura* [“The Three-Cornered World” or “Grass Pillow”] from 1906. Sōseki was a profound connoisseur of art and architecture who read contemporary European art journals and frequented art museums while he was in England. It is therefore no surprise that his novel can be read as a theoretical manifesto for the emergence of Cubism and abstract art.

The narrator of *Kusamakura* is a painter who escapes conscription and visits an *onsen* town, but is so trapped in his thoughts that he cannot paint anymore. Reflecting the author’s formulation of literature, the painter thinks that pictorial expression is a function between the copying of external objects and the exposing of internal emotion. In Western tradition the former is foregrounded, whereas in the Eastern tradition the latter prevails. But a painting cannot do away with either. Hence, our protagonist thinks that there must be a sentiment that has no corresponding object yet, and if he succeeds in painting this, he would have created an abstract painting.

*If I can achieve it, the opinion of others will matter nothing to me.
 They can scorn and reject it as a painting, and I will feel no resentment.
 If the combination of colors I produce represents even a part of my feeling,*



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if the play of the lines expresses even a fraction of my inner state, if the arrangement of the whole conveys a little of this sense of beauty, I will be perfectly content if the thing I draw is a cow, or a horse, or no definable creature at all. (...) I put my pencil down and consider. The problem lies in attempting to express such an abstract conception in the form of a picture. People are not so very different from one another after all, and no doubt someone else among them all has felt the touch of this same imaginative state and tried to express it in eternal form through one means or another. If this is the case, what means might he have used? As soon as I pose this question, the word “music” flashes before my inner eye.

(Kusamakura, Translated by Meredith McKinley (London: Penguin Books), 69-70)

In this way, Sōseki’s 1906 novel already foresaw the emergence of abstract paintings. The above quote describes the process of forming “F,” but the opposite vector leading to its dissolution is also mentioned in the novel. The painter attempts to draw the face of Nami, the lady owner of the *ryokan* he is staying at, but fails to do so, constantly swayed by the elusive nature of her sayings and doings.

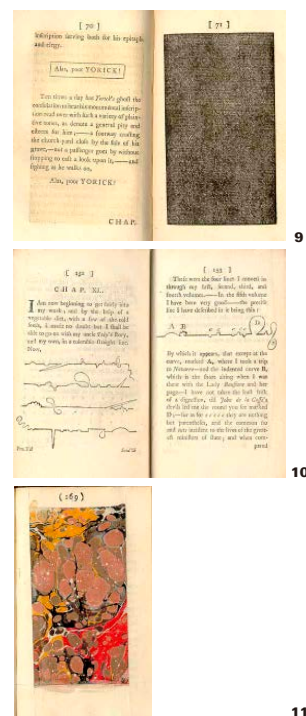
But when I look at the expression of the woman before me, I am at a loss to decide to which category it belongs. The mouth is still, a single line. The eyes, on the other hand, dart constantly about, as if intent on missing nothing. The face is the class beauty’s pale oval, a little plump at the chin, replete with a calm serenity, yet the cramped and narrow forehead has a somehow vulgar “Mount Fuji” widow’s-peak hairline. The eyebrows tend inward, moreover, and the brow twitches with nervous irritability; but the nose has neither the sharpness of a frivolous nature nor the roundness of a dull one—it would be beautiful painted. All these various elements come pressing incoherently in upon my eyes, each one with its own idiosyncratic character. Who can wonder that I feel bewildered?

(Kusamakura, 37-38)

In other words, the individual elements that characterize Nami’s face remain frivolously disparate, each proclaiming a different function without ever merging to form a single synthesized face image. The expression “come pressing incoherently in upon my eyes” perfectly summarizes the general experience of seeing a Cubist painting. Picasso would paint his *Les Femmes d’Alger* only in the following year 1907. Sōseki’s painter reasons in advance: what impedes him from painting Nami is the fact that the concepts he has at his disposal cannot express the distortion apparent on her face. Therefore, in order to paint, another form of sentiment that can bind the given disparity into a whole must be obtained. Later in the novel the painter finds just such a sentiment appear on Nami’s face—which he calls “pitying love”—and the story ends with his conviction: “That’s it! That’s it! That’s what I need for the picture!”

Kusamakura was itself an experimental novel which juxtaposed different

literary styles such as Chinese and English poetry in untranslated form. The reader is forced to drift along a series of disparate fragments of information that the narrator/painter perceives or recalls, as well as the latter's own entangled thought process that attempts to follow all happenstances. But as the protagonist himself says, if the reader wishes to become one with—or in the painter's own phrasing, "to marry"—the author's thinking process, there is no need to follow a novel from its start to the end point where a certain conclusion (corresponding to a certain emotional state) is attained. Sōseki believed that the significance of literature as an expression form lay in the disparity between the narrative teleology of conclusion (the tag line, so to speak) and the accumulation and transition of details. If one were to do away with the notion of conclusion, any part of the novel should be interesting. Even before his study abroad, Sōseki had identified Lawrence Sterne's (1713–1768) *Tristram Shandy* as one of the primordial models for modern literature, and *Kusamakura*'s experimental form follows this great precursor. A literary novel is formed as a resistance against the reduction of happenstances into a determinate logic, against the encompassing of experience within a predetermined ending. To become aware about the domain of potentiality deviating from such conclusion is the essence of experience obtained from reading novels. This was the basic idea encompassed in the abstract pattern Sterne inserted in *Tristram Shandy*—the ineffability conditioning the art of literature.^{[fig.9][fig.10][fig.11]}



3: Morikazu Kumagai's "Optics"

Sōseki started publishing works a few years after his return from London in 1903, exerting a wide influence that transformed younger Japanese artists' understanding of art. For instance, in the famous essay *Bungei no Tetsugakuteki Kiso* (The Philosophical Basis of the Art of Literature) based on a series of lectures at the Tokyo Art School, Sōseki points out that the image of a figure that seems to be in front of one's eyes is actually an illusion composed by the brain. The drastic transition from the previous generation that artists such as Seifū Tsuda, Hanjirō Sakamoto, or Shigeru Aoki accomplished, cannot be explained without the influence of Sōseki's theories they all had direct contact with. Among these painters, the one who seems to have been most radically impacted by Sōseki is Morikazu Kumagai.

For instance, take the well-known recollection by Shintarō Yamashita who was Kumagai's classmate at the Tokyo Art School: Yamashita was puzzled at seeing Kumagai absorbed in drawing, erasing, and overlaying geometrical lines and shapes—triangles and squares—during a life drawing class; it was only when Cubism appeared later in Europe that he understood how pioneering Kumagai was.^[01] But one does not need to wait for the

01: Morikazu Kumagai, *Oil Paintings Catalogue Raisonné*, Kyuryudo, 2004

advent of Cubism to understand what Kumagai was doing. A more adequate reference can be found in the precedence (much removed in time) of Hokusai Katsushika's *Ryakuga Haya-oshie* [Quick Lessons in Simplified Drawing] (1812). (fig.12) The important thing here is that Hokusai himself was referring to Western textbooks on drawings which became popular in Europe after the publication of *Analysis of Beauty* (1753) by William Hogarth who also happened to be responsible for the illustrations of *Tristram Shandy*—a fact that Sōseki obviously mentions—as well as textbooks on Eastern painting such as *Jieziyuan Huazhuan* [The Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden] (1679). Placed in this context, the significance of Hokusai's "Quick Lessons" becomes apparent: similar to Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty*, or the theory of caricature (*Essai de physiognomie*) by the cartoonist Rodolphe Töpffer (1799-1846), what Hokusai presented was a mnemonic technique to arrest an array of floating, unstable visual impressions into one synthesized image. (fig.13) "*Ryakuga*" [Simplified Drawing] was this method for synthesizing the accumulation of visual data obtained through empirical observation of reality, a summarization process from a distance which took recourse to memory. In this way, Hokusai's endeavor corresponded to the function of the "Hogarth Curve," the S-shaped curved line drawn inside a pyramid on the cover of *Analysis of Beauty* (fig.14): a shape that does not exist in reality (for all shapes constantly change depending on the position and the time they are seen), but has the power to encompass all possible changes and thus bring together our disparate perception—precisely the synthesis that Sōseki designated as "F."

Indeed, Kumagai's method of sketching was unusual. Hanjirō Sakamoto testified that Kumagai would first retain a scenery in his memory and only when the image was utterly digested over time would he start drawing. Throughout his long career, Kumagai's interest lay in the gap between Sōseki's "f" and "F"—the directly perceived sensation and the image that is recognized—and his work consisted in organizing the entangled network that connects these two points, fabricating new short cuts that would bring them together in novel ways.

After the painting was denied at Bunten in 1908, Kumagai redrew or created a different version of the same work, painting the canvas almost entirely in black, and presented it at Hakuba-kai. As the critic Tanseishi complained in his review of Hakuba-kai (Kokumin Newspaper): "This painting is too dark to make any sense of what is depicted. It is difficult to say anything about it." The uniformly black surface of the painting made it impossible to see any figure, and therefore to censor or deny its exhibit. In other words, the work appeared to be an almost completely black, abstract painting.

Kumagai's seminal work *Rekishi* [Death by Being Run Over], which was submitted to Bunten (Ministry of Education Art Exhibition) in 1908 but denied (subsequently redrawn and presented at Hakuba-kai in 1910), was a controversial painting with a gloomy subject. (fig.15)

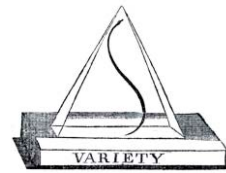
However, Kumagai's diaries reveal that the painter's interest lay elsewhere:



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October 5, 1908. Looked at the work Rekishi. The feeling you get when the painting is positioned on its side. Hanging down from a giant cliff. Very active and seems like a dream. Seems demonic. A different world. In other words, a work of nature that seems impossible to exist.

(Diary of Morikazu Kumagai (from Meiji 35 to Taisho 11), Collection of the Gifu Prefectural Archives)

[fig.16]



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What Kumagai states here is clear: If one took this painting depicting a dead body ran over by a train and turned it 90 degrees sideways, as if it were hanging off a cliff, the body suddenly appears active and lively.

It is an episode that resonates with the later and more famous anecdote of Kandinsky discovering abstract painting—which took place 1911: when the painter got home late afternoon one day, he could not recognize his own painting laying sideways in his studio which looked utterly lively. Or, we can also recall Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending the Stairs No. 2* (1912). [fig.17] The phrase “a work of nature that seems impossible to exist” seems to attest Kumagai's view that the human body itself is no more than an assembly of various organs, and what binds these disparate components into one organic body must be a principle operating on a different level—what Bergson would have called *Élan Vitare*.

“Death by Being Run Over” no longer retains its original form, but Kumagai developed his ideas in a more explicit manner in his subsequent work *Suishitai* [A Drowned Person]. [fig.18] The drowned body has lost the appearance of its organic wholeness and decomposed into dots of strongly contrasting colors—nevertheless, the color dots shine vibrantly, endowing an uncanny lively impression onto the painting.



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* In *Kusamakura*, there is a scene where the painter protagonist likens police investigation on thought criminals in Tokyo to analyzing the inherently amorphous nature of farts by measuring the shape—square or triangular—of the asshole. The Buddhist monk who hears this responds by saying it is necessary to train oneself to be able to expose one's guts on the street in the heart of Tokyo. He then goes on to suggest to the painter that the elusive sayings and doings of Nami might indeed be the result of attaining that ultimate state. Amorphousness can be achieved simply by exposing the various functions of the body organs to plain sight. For there would be no synthesized shape that can be measured by vision. Sōseki's other novel *Sanshirō* also focuses on the elusive female, and contains a memorable scene where the main character *Sanshirō*, upon arriving to his boarding house in Tokyo, hears the scream of a woman run over by a train at a nearby railroad crossing. Although it is not certain whether Kumagai derived his subject of a “Run-over Dead Body” from Sōseki's novel, the connection is not entirely implausible, especially given the fact that the next subject he chose to paint was a drowned body, a version of which happened to be discussed in *Kusamakura*: the floating *Ophelia* painted by Millais. [fig.19] The painter of

Kusamakura, after questioning the possibility of painting a drowned body in an objective manner, shifts his viewpoint and ponders how things would look if seen from the side of the drowned body floating in the water. He speculates that it could be elegant, the distinction between the subject (the observer) and object (the observed) would disappear. Incidentally, Redon painted *Ophelia among the Flowers* (1905-08) in the same year, in which he tilted his own painting of a flower vase sideways and drew in the face of Ophelia. [fig. 20]



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To reiterate, it was the experience of intensity derived from the gap between what is sensed and what is recognized that lay at the core of Morikazu Kumagai's work. In reality, the object our senses perceive is already decomposed in multiple ways. Precisely therefore, the same object can be revived countless times in our minds.

September 14, 1910. Rain for consecutive days. In my dream I see the mid-day light. Afternoon, I open my eyes and look at the ceiling. In the darkness, I see a vague light (I can count things). Afternoon, too dark to see. Interesting. Probably a replay of something that was caught by the eyes before.

(Diary of Morikazu Kumagai (from Meiji 35 to Taisho 11))

Kumagai here states that he saw an afterimage of the mid-day light he dreamed about after waking up in total darkness. This afterimage of a dream can be neither optical nor physiological. What Kumagai reported was light as an intellectual composition directly grasped by his brain.

* Kumagai later recounted how he was influenced by the work of Herman von Helmholtz (1821-1894), who also provided the theoretical basis for the optics of Post-Impressionism. Interestingly, what seems to have arrested Kumagai's interest was not so much Helmholtz's physiological optics, but rather his idea of free energy that led to his research on Acoustic Physiology and Statistical Mechanics. For some time, Kumagai even devoted himself to the study of radio frequencies, almost abandoning painting for good. Kumagai appears to have learned Helmholtz's theory from Shōhei Tanaka who studied under the German scientist and created a pure-tuned organ in Germany, or the phonetician and music theorist Kotoji Satta.

Like Sōseki showed, the synthesized object does not pre-exist as an entity in the physical world. An object is a composition created intellectually inside the brain from disparate and fragmentary sensory stimulus. It is this process that endows painting its power.

4: Kōshirō Onchi and “Sentiment”

The history of Modern Art generally holds that abstract art appeared between the years 1910 and 1914.

* In Alfred Barr’s famous chart of Modernism[fig.21] presented for the “Cubism and Abstract Art” exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1931, the origin of abstract art is specified circa 1910. Kandinsky’s *Composition V*, which the painter himself declared as the first abstract painting in the world, was made in 1911 and shown in December of the same year.[fig.22]

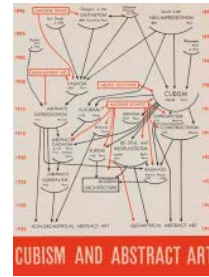
However, if abstract art is defined by the absence of corresponding visual reference in the exterior world—a work that is not a mere copy of an exterior referent—then it must be said that the problematic that gave birth to abstract art had existed from much earlier on, and that this approach was not exclusive to Western art. The pursuit of visual resemblance does not necessarily lead to the grasp of a given object’s reality. That is to say, artworks can express something that does not have any distinct visual appearance or imagery.

Sōseki’s formulation of “F,” T.S. Eliot’s notion of “Objective Correlative,” or Ezra Pound’s theory of Imagism—these were all attempts to bring together, represent, and express the disparate sensory and emotional fragments through an external (tentative) apparatus. It is only through the act of expression that the multiplicity of elusive sensation and emotion can be regulated as one specific concept. This understanding also reflects and develops the ideas of Symbolism (and Anarchism) extending from Charles Baudelaire to Félix Fénéon. An expression (representation) already established in a visible form is always contingent and temporary—a mere appearance. This implies the existence of a broader latent domain that cannot be represented or expressed in a visible form.

Symbols or abstraction attempt to answer the very question of how this domain can nevertheless be apprehended.

* Ezra Pound edited *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, written by Ernest Fenollosa who claimed the distinct characteristic of Japanese art and was instrumental in the establishment of Tokyo University of the Arts. Fenollosa saw the idiosyncrasy of Chinese characters in their ability to endow an image to even a sequence of abstract concepts or actions that lacked definite form, thereby allowing them to be dealt as a singular object.

In this sense, abstract art did not emerge as a development of Cubism—the former cannot be derived directly from the latter (as the works of Picasso and Blaque make clear). On the contrary, it would be more accurate to say



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that Cubism and abstract art shared the same doubt towards the system of representation—the mechanism of representing something through visible form—and were parallel developments that bifurcated from this same platform.

The interconnected development of Cubism and abstract art was manifested in an explicit manner in Japan. Whereas the first Japanese work that adopts the style of Cubism is *Motarete Tatsu Hito* [Leaning Woman] (1917) by Tetsugorō Yorozu (fig. 23), the first abstract work created in Japan is considered to be *Akarui Toki* [Light Time] (1915) (fig. 24) and other prints in the *Jyōjyō* [Lyric] series created by Kōshirō Onchi (fig. 25 | fig. 26 | fig. 27 | fig. 28). The parallel emergence of Onchi’s abstract works and those in Europe (Onchi created his first abstract works around the same time as, or even slightly in advance of, Malevich’s non-objective painting (fig. 29)) has resulted in many critics puzzling over the former’s seemingly abrupt appearance (and as usual, the premise of research has been the assumption that Onchi must have referred to a Western precursor, although no supporting proof, such as images he could have referred to, has been found). As stated above, however, the theoretical platform that necessarily demands the creation of abstract expression was already fully established in Japan before the stylistic reception of Cubism.

* Even if we limit our scope to fine arts, the manifesto of Italian Futurists was translated immediately after its publication into Japanese by Ōgai Mori, even before the introduction of Cubism. The claims of Futurists were easy to comprehend within the context of Japanese literary theory of the times.

There are two conditions that enabled Kōshirō Onchi’s creation of abstract works.

The first is the influence from Symbolism and Occultism. This was a penchant of the poetry journal *Tsukuhae* [Moon Reflection] that Onchi started with Kyōkichi Tanaka and Shizuo Fujimori (fig. 30 | fig. 31). *Tsukuhae* was formed in resonance with the works of contemporary poets such as Hakusyū Kitahara, Sakutarō Hagiwara, Saisei Murou, Bochō Yamaura. The innovative works of these poets bridged Symbolism to Imagism by evoking and connecting the heretofore unexpressed flow of emotion and thought through the intensity of visual images. In response, *Tsukuhae* aimed to produce evocative images that had no correspondence with the familiar exterior world. The works of visionary artists such as William Blake, Odilon Redon, Edvard Munch were already popular, and spiritualism resonating with new European developments including Theosophy was even becoming a trend.

* As demonstrated in the above-mentioned diary of Morikazu Kumagai, the interest towards the integrity of image grasped internally (or apprehended intuitively) within the domain of the unconscious in detachment from external reality was shared by young artists. The leaning towards the occult



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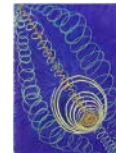
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as the theoretical basis or the extreme edge of expressionism which sought to express the visual correlative (i.e., symbol) of interior experience from within, rather than merely reflect the exterior world captured by sight, was deemed inevitable.

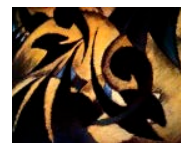
* From this perspective, the seemingly abrupt creation of abstract painting by Onchi can nonetheless be understood as emerging from the same basic matrix of problems shared with other forms of abstract expression that suddenly appeared discretely in various parts of the world: the works of Swedish painter Hilma af Klint which was one of the first abstract artworks created (already in 1906) without any direct association with mainstream European art world [fig.32//fig.33//fig.34//fig.35//fig.36//fig.37//fig.38//fig.39//fig.40//fig.41//fig.42], or the abstract paintings created in America by Arthur Dove (1880-1946) and subsequently by Georgia O’Keefe (1887-1986). [fig.43] [fig.44]

Hilma af Klint (1862-1944) graduated from the Swedish Art Academy in 1887 and initiated a career as a professional portrait and landscape painter which was unusual for a woman at the time (meaning her situation was contrary to the so-called outsider artists). Her works however changed drastically through her contact with Helena Blavatsky’s Theosophy. She formed a group called “The Five” with four other women, participated in seances, and through the study of latest technology such as X-ray or new scientific knowledge of genetics, Klint trained to sharpen her ability to sense invisible forces. As a result, she began making abstract paintings based on a method that allowed an automatic expression of the spiritual order grasped intuitively. Many of the 197 works composing Klint’s “Painting for the Temple” series, which she began in 1905, were already purely abstract paintings. In 1908, Rudolf Steiner visited Klint’s studio in Stockholm and was impressed by her works. Subsequently, Klint and Steiner began communicating. It must be noted that all the artists now regarded as founders of abstract art—Kandinsky, Mondrian, Malevich, or Robert Delaunay—were influenced by spiritualism in general, and Steiner’s Anthroposophy in particular. The latter in turn had discovered the abstract works of Klint in Sweden, outside the epicenters of European art, appreciated and theorized what she was doing, and probably discussed her approach in relation to the development of his own theories of color and form. In addition to the fact that the number of people who knew about her works while she was alive was already limited, Klint left a will to not make her paintings public for 20 years after her death. It is not known if this decision was based solely on Klint’s own beliefs, or followed advice from Steiner.

* For instance, Muneyoshi Yanagi, who was a member of *Shirakaba*, the most influential literary journal of the times (which counted *Tsukuhae* as one of its followers), and who later led the Mingei movement, developed his own philosophy through a study of William Blake. Incorporating also

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the theory of life posited by Bergson and William James, Yanagi’s first book *Science and Life* (1911) focused on the “pseudo” science of occultism—which he termed “new science”—including the research on spirits that was taking Europe by storm. Yanagi’s interest lay in spiritual phenomenon established as direct communication between matter and body, as opposed to the indirect knowledge based on rational control. The idea that direct contact with objects, unmediated and unperceived by consciousness and interpretation, brought forth particular ethics and knowledge transcending the limits of reason, was carried on into his later thoughts on Mingei—artifacts made by anonymous craftsmen.

The second condition that enabled Onchi’s abstract expression was the influence of educational toys for children, such as Friedrich Froebel’s “Gabe” [Gifts]./fig.45//fig.46/ This second condition is obviously related to the first, for Froebel’s pedagogical method built upon his occult philosophy of “Life Unity” or “Spherical Law,” evolved out of the same lineage of thought that extended from Romanticism to Symbolism.

Froebel’s pedagogy was already introduced to Japan by 1876, when the Kindergarten attached to Tokyo Women’s Normal School (present Kindergarten attached to Ochanomizu University) was founded based on the Froebel method./02//fig.47//fig.48//fig.49//fig.50//fig.51//fig.52/ In 1889, the American female missionary A. L. Howe opened the Glory Kindergarten in Kōbe which employed a flexible curriculum based on Froebel’s philosophy. By the early 20th century, Froebel-styled kindergartens were popular all around the country.

Onchi’s father, Tōru, was a former prosecutor turned into an educator, who, after serving as the steward for the Kitashirakawa-no-miya house of the imperial family, became the tutor for the Higashikuni-no-miya and Asakano-miya houses. Hakushū Kitahara, who Onchi admired, led the Children’s Free Poetry Movement and was known for his focus on child education. Onchi’s first book was titled *A Child’s World and Childcare* (which he published as “Kou Onchi” from Rakuyoudou in 1919). He also collaborated in various projects related to child education with Shōzō Kurahashi who was the leading scholar of Froebel and became known as the “Japanese Froebel.” One example of such collaboration was the publication of *Kodomo no Kuni* [Country of Children] which involved many avant-garde painters and functioned as a cultural hub for artists in the 1920s Japan. Onchi’s son Kunio was classmates with Hakushū Kitahara’s son, the later Zen scholar Ryūtarō Kitahara, at Myōjō Gakuen, a school that represents the Taishō-era Free Education Movement. He then graduated from Tokyo Art School and continued his career as a painter while teaching at Myōjō Gakuen where he later became the headmaster. Kōshirō’s daughter Mihoko Onchi was a



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02: Tomoyoshi Muyarama graduated from this kindergarten (*Theatrical Autobiography 1, 1901-21*, Tohō Shuppansha, 1974).

is the place where my lyrical drawing is established, that is where the cause of painting lies.

(Kōshirō Onchi “On the Lyric Paintings” *Sentiment*, 20, 1980)

It is not only humans and animals that have feelings. All things, including bricks and paper, are endowed with liveliness through which they inspire and act upon other things.

Froebel’s toys, which he called “Gifts,” can be seen as a concrete implementation of Goethe’s natural philosophy. They aimed to make children grasp intuitively abstract ideas such as harmony, movement, or mathematical order through the physical—concrete and haptic—act of manipulating objects. The significance of Gifts therefore does not lie in the geometrical forms that are visible when the blocks are still. Rather, the focus is on the different geometrical orders that appear when they are manipulated and turned around. The appearance and understanding of this order is only possible through the physical interaction with the objects. The children or the tutor sing in the object’s stead:

*Turn turn, I am happy
Turn this way, I am happy
Baby you are also happy*

(“The Song of ‘Gift’ 2,” *Froebel Complete Works*, Tamagawa University Press, 1989)

Children are thus encouraged to understand the nature of the object from its inside. For instance, the three geometrical figures of Gift 2—cube, cylinder, and sphere/**fig.54**/**fig.55**/**fig.56**—serve to intuitively learn that rotating the cube creates a cylinder; rotating the cylinder creates a sphere and a circular cone; changing the axis of rotation makes the sphere appear inside the cube revealing that the former was included in the latter. By moving together with objects and exchanging emotions with them, children learn that all the things in nature maintain their individuality and variety, while also having the tendency to mutually connect and gradually move towards unity (partial totality).

Similarly, the important point about Onchi’s *Lyric: Hearts in Mutual Faith*(1915)(**fig.57**) is that it is a print, which is to say an image created by overlaying multiple screens. The large isosceles triangle facing one another vertically, or the small triangles in pyramid-form and the hog-backed figure hanging from above, all exist separately on different wood panels. They only meet on the paper where the panels are printed in layers. Just like the rotation of Froebel’s Gifts, the geometrical figures engraved on different panels become unified to make “Hearts in Mutual Faith” appear.

Contrary to the common preconception of prints being a technique of reproduction to create multiples, the most distinct characteristic of Onchi’s print works—which he created throughout his career—was that most times only one complete piece was created. In other words, Onchi was not so



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interested in the multiple nature of prints. Instead, he focused on the process of how multiple panels became composed together like a puzzle—like the color panels of Gift 7 [fig. 58//fig. 59//fig. 60]—to produce a single image. [fig. 61] Indeed, he later wrote that the most important characteristic of print works was that, in contrast to a painting which only has one panel, a print could display multiple panels at once—its seemingly singular panel was always composed by overlaying multiple ones. For this reason, Onchi used the metaphor of the movie theatre, writing that if a painting is a single-run movie, a print would correspond to multiple-runs. (Onchi, “The Nature of Print”)

A print is an art of unification in which the overlay of multiple screens produces a singular image. This means that the unified image that appears as a result does not exist in any of the individual panels—it is a product of chance only generated within the process of printing the panels as one. The correspondence with Froebel’s Gifts—the figure that only appears while rotating the geometrical shapes—is easy to see.

Norman Brosterman’s *Inventing Kindergarten* studied the influence of Froebel’s educational toys on the abstract art of the twentieth century. As this research makes clear, Froebel’s pedagogical system infiltrated various international regions on a much broader scale than any particular artistic movement, and its universal nature allowed his exercises to have deeper influence than any art education. Brosterman lists artists who went to Kindergarten as a child: Frank Lloyd Wright, who confessed the influence of Froebel education his mother gave him, Mondrian, Kandinsky, Klee, and Le Corbusier. Analyzing the correlation between their works and Froebel’s curriculum, such as exercises using the Gifts, Brosterman explained the dismissal of this obvious influence in conventional art history as stemming from the disciplinary bias to trivialize the learnings one has at a young age of three to seven, and remembered only in an ambiguous manner. In this sense, like Froebel himself emphasized, it was the mothers who were given the role of facilitators for conveying the method of Froebel to children who learned the system in a more conscious manner. And the Japanese avant-garde artists such as Onchi or Hakushū Kitahara who delved into the creation of educational toys for children along with the Japanese Froebelian Shōzo Kurahashi could have been more influenced by the same method than the children who were educated through it.

Adding to Brosterman’s insight, we could say that another reason conventional art history has failed to register the significance of Froebel’s toys was because his pedagogical methods as well as the nature of activity using the Gifts—playing—could not be reduced to any visual imagery. Instead, the focus laid in the concrete process of physical interaction with objects. In other words, the understanding attained through Froebel’s exercises could not be situated in terms of what is seen. What the senses of sight or touch perceive while going through the exercises are only part of a greater order that is ultimately experienced. Froebel attempted to show that one could concretely apprehend the reality of the process through which partial perception is



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incorporated into a larger whole. Therefore, if Froebel's pedagogical methods influenced abstract art, neither could the nature of these arts be reduced to visual objects—i.e., artworks in the traditional sense.

What Froebel foregrounded was the physical process of correspondence between objects, as well as the vector and power revealed by this process. No longer is there an asymmetrical relationship between an object and an artist expressing something through it. Instead, we have a network of emotions endowed in each object that enables them to collaborate with one another. The force that moves towards a unity does so by connecting the perceived parts to those that are still absent, until totality is attained. The essence of abstraction for Froebel was in this notion of the “partial whole.” And what art history failed to grasp was also this essence that cannot be comprehended as a visual object.

5: The First World War and Dadaism

The First World War (1914-18) exerted a great impact on artistic expression. In particular, Cubism was forced to change its course—the possibility of continuing to develop in the same style was shattered. This shift of direction, manifested explicitly in Picasso's turn to neoclassical style, was grounded in the transformation of perception brought to the fore by the war.

This change was made evident by the new weapons used for the first time in the Great War: poison gas, trench warfare, submarines, airplanes, tanks. In the new battlefield composed by these weapons, the figure of the enemy became invisible. The traditional model of combat where one faces the object/enemy, sets the aim and attacks, ceased to be valid. In other words, the enemy no longer appeared as a figure—instead, the entire ground turned into the battlefield. The enemy was not an entity one could see, but rather something that existed probabilistically throughout the entire environment.

Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) reported that Picasso, upon seeing a tank painted with camouflage patterns, shouted in excitement, “It is we who have created that!” Indeed, the painters of Vorticism such as Edward Wadsworth (1899-1949) gladly offered their theory and techniques to the making of camouflage patterns. And the pattern they invented was groundbreaking. They came up with an optical illusion that confused the enemy sighter trying to determine the orientation and distance to the target ship in the ocean where there was nothing to hide the vessel.**(fig. 62)** In this way, the dismantlement of the visual figure advanced by Cubism was ill-spent on its application for the battlefield, where it was converted into a visual effect that literally deceived reality. The abuse of Cubism as visual style was further accelerated by the trend of Art Deco style in the aftermath of the war. Neither the streamline shape nor the seemingly digital and rhythmic expression were actually connected to function. Rather, they were used as decorative patterns to emphasize mechanic impression and disguise real function. Cubism thus



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became consumed as a decor and fell out of its role as the exemplar avant-garde visual art.

Many artists during the First World War were not against or even wary of the war. On the contrary, as demonstrated in the Futurist Manifesto, the avant-garde artists considered war as an opportunity to bring the world together into a unified movement to fight back the accelerating process of fissuring and fragmentation. For this reason, many artists also volunteered and headed for the battlefield themselves.

What attracted them all was a mechanical dynamism that forcefully connected all things beyond the narrow confines of perception. As a result, the endeavor to represent or express something through sight lost its significance and allure. Instead, artists started exploring the possibility to connect artworks directly and concretely with the dynamism of machines. In this sense, the inhuman power and cruelty that the First World War revealed became a catalyst to ground art in materialism. On one hand it was Marx, and on the other, Freud. In either case, the theory posits that the mind does not precede matter, but matter precedes the mind. The infrastructure regulating the mind was matter: the conditions of latter determined the nature of the former. Russian Constructivism was a rare example of an overlap between political revolution and artistic revolution through a common goal: the subversion of real, material basis. But new art movements that were born amidst the First World War all shared the understanding that matter regulated the mind. The subject (along with self-consciousness), which heretofore had been deemed as an *a priori* given, could only retain its significance as a proxy agent for political establishment, a mediator of political regulation. It is through consciousness that our bodies become indirectly controlled by the establishment.

In this sense, the most original of all artistic movements that began during the First World War by dealing with these problematics was Dadaism. If Constructivism was a movement that dreamed of the overlap between the innovation of the establishment and that of the arts, Dadaism—particularly Zurich Dada based at the Cabaret Voltaire since 1916—was the sole movement in which anti-war and anti-art activities became theoretically coupled. Dadaism knew neither nihilism nor cynicism. At its basis was the destruction of all subjects and the dismantling of centralized control by consciousness. But what it gave birth to as a result was extraordinary productivity and humor.

Dadaism's philosophy in a nutshell is to oppose any representation of something by another thing. Needless to say, this also includes the representation of the self by the self. All forms of hegemonic struggle for representation were therefore thoroughly criticized. And as long as art works also functioned by representing some authority, these were also condemned.

To repeat, however, such approach by Dadaism did not bring about non-productivity. As is well known, Dadaists focused on various noises of daily life, the ambiguous behavior of people, and seemingly trivial, small artifacts. In this focus on the "Lesser Arts" that compose everyday life, as opposed to

the monumental “Great Arts” which express and represent authority and power, Dadaism continued the lineage that extended from William Morris’ Arts and Crafts Movement to the Wiener Werkstätte. Artifacts which are not prominent as visible objects, but rooted on unconscious sensation or contact built into the physical actions of everyday life, have been looked down upon as applied art or mere craft. However, although they do not represent anything in particular, these artifacts are nonetheless endowed with a specificity for collaborating and co-functioning with the user’s body. The various parts of the body execute an act in collaboration with a given object. At times, a single body can be executing multiple acts at once without being conscious of each other. That is to say, each body part escapes the central tyranny of consciousness, and dissolve or change their organization in an autonomous and unconscious (mutually discrete) manner to collaborate with objects for each action.

Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889-1943) played a decisive role in formulating this idiosyncrasy of Dadaism as avant-garde movement (it must also be noted that many female artists participated in Dadaism, which was unusual for avant-garde art movements at the time). Taeuber-Arp was interested in the culture of American Indians from young age (fig.63), and studied interior and furniture design at the arts and crafts school managed by Wilhelm von Debschitz. (fig.64) From 1911, she became a student of Rudolf van Laban (fig.65), studied architecture, and in 1915 met Hans Arp (1886-1966) who became her life partner. In the same year, she joined a new art school that Laban started at Monte Verita, becoming a dancer for Laban’s dance theatre, along with others like Mary Wigman, the founder of Neue Tanz (fig.66), and Berthe Trumpy. At the Cabaret Voltaire, which started its activities in 1916, Taeuber-arp was in charge of stage design, notated the scores of performances which she also directed, created her own puppet plays, and danced (Wigman and other dancers from Monte Verita also participated in the activities at Cabaret Voltaire in various ways). Many artists of Cabaret Voltaire were poets, and Taeuber-Arp was one of the few, if not the only, principle member who had experience in actual stage works and performances. Therefore, the other Dadaists like Hugo Ball or Tristan Tzara were impressed by Taeuber-Arp’s profound creativity, relied on her capacity as stage director, and intrigued by her performances.

From 1917, in parallel to her Dadaist activities, Taeuber-Arp started teaching architecture and textile arts at Zurich Kunstgewerbeschule (Hans Arp later confessed that he learned all the art theories he knew from Taeuber-Arp). In 1918, she became a principle member of the Das Neue Leben movement founded at Monte Verita with the aim to innovate everyday life.

Through Taeuber-Arp’s career, it becomes clear that Dadaism, commonly understood in negative terms as an anti-art movement, was actually extremely positive in nature and productive within the context of everyday life. This productivity revolved around Taeuber-Arp’s empirical knowledge and techniques which could connect applied arts to body arts. If Dadaism



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is nonetheless perceived as being anti-art, this is due to the discrimination towards both applied and body arts as being minor endeavors at the margins of art. Dadaism, if anything, was a counterattack from such periphery.

For instance, the introduction of chance by Dadaists stemmed from their denial to set a perspective from which the whole can be viewed (and controlled). Instead, one would simply be absorbed in the individual task taking place wherever one happened to be at, without caring about how that would look from the whole which could neither be seen nor thought of. It may seem that such acts would be contingent and arbitrary if the relationship to the whole is indeterminate. However, this kind of process is common for making crafts. Similarly, in producing textiles or mosaics, it is rare for individual artisans to see the whole in advance. Each would simply focus on their part, but nevertheless a total order is established. The same is true for dance. The dancer cannot see her own dancing body nor the entirety of the stage encompassing multiple dancers. But both artisans and dancers are aware of what they are doing even in the absence of an external observer's perspective which sees the whole (that is why a work can be made at all). This awareness, therefore, does not rely on sight.

The individual relationship may seem contingent at a glance, but the seemingly arbitrary (or more accurately speaking, autonomous) disposition of parts actually reveals a necessity that transcends vision. This necessity is concerned with movement: it is the determinacy of change—an object is only here for now, and will transition to somewhere different in the next moment, or switch into other forms or other objects. What is important is that both artisans and dancers have a concrete grasp and understanding of this necessity as the condition of their own body and logic of their actions. This was akin to the mechanism of possession in the Kachina dolls of the Hopi people, which Taeuber-Arp loved since her childhood.^[03]

Taeuber-Arp's teacher Laban is known for inventing a distinct notation for dance called the Labanotation. Taeuber-Arp's involvement in the development of this notation can be sensed from the basic pattern of the system employing geometrical shapes which is reminiscent of American Indian textile design, as well as the correspondence between such shapes and body movement which reminds one of the process of weaving textile patterns (**fig.67**//**fig.68**//**fig.69**) (Taeuber-Arp was in charge of documenting Laban's workshops from 1915).

Laban attempted to understand not only dance but all the scenes of everyday life from a singular structure that determined any kind of physical action. Both the body and space, he thought, were structured through the spectrum of "effort" (intentionality coupled with emotion) composing physical disposition. The method of grasping the relationship between humans and objects, and between multiple objects, as a network of actions corresponded to the structure Froebel attempted to address by the term



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03: Sarah Burkhalter, "Kachinas and Kinesthesia: Dance in the art of Sophie Taeuber-Arp," in *Sophie Taeuber-Arp: Today is Tomorrow*, University of Chicago Press, 2016.

“Gemeingefühl [Common Feeling].” Furthermore, Taeuber-Arp’s working method structurally resembled the exercises using Froebel’s Gifts. The relationship with objects or the relationship between objects is inherent in the object itself and afforded by it. One only needs to intuitively perceive and follow the instructions that reside within the objects (what Froebel called emotion and Laban called effort).

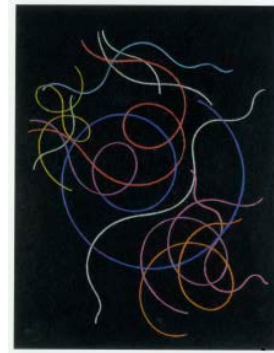
Let us examine one of Taeuber-Arp’s works, *Echelonnement* [Scaling]. We could liken the process of making this work as the task of slicing a semi-cylindrical volume and fitting the slices into a box. One does not need to think about the balance of the whole during the procedure, for even if the angle of each sliced part was tilted, they would all fit the box if one just kept putting them in. Even if each slice’s position and angle were decided arbitrarily on the spot, the position of one part would affect the next, generating a sequence of regulations that squash one another and ultimately render the whole into a singular order. It is far more efficient to work in this way by following the concrete demands raised by individual objects (a haptic order), rather than predetermining a schema by looking at the whole in advance. The result, one could say, is an order organized bottom-up from the mutual relationship of individual parts, rather than top-down from a bird’s-eye perspective. The method is therefore far from arbitrary—it follows the necessities of actual, material procedure.

In general, Taeuber-Arp’s work (similar to Hans Arp’s) is characterized by a lack of center or an immobile plane (substrate) where components are fixed. Instead, various components form units of relationships which are then connected to create a lattice or network wherein they become further entangled and superimposed. [fig.70/fig.71](#) Because it is a network which lacks a center and is not fixed to a particular support, the structure can be retained even when it expands and contracts, or moves around—just like the order that is preserved when several dancers form micro-relationships with one another creating units that each move in different ways. If the individual relationships are retained, the overall structure can be preserved even if multiple people collaborated. This allowed Taeuber-Arp to work with Hans Arp, and many other artists such as Theo Doesburg. On the other hand, her works which extended broadly into many fields—textile, interior, choreography, puppet theatre—were regarded as a development into applied arts, a marginal activity, which resulted in them not being acknowledged as serious art works of art. What became disregarded in such assessment was the physical concreteness—the power and the movement—that connected the individual field units.

* Although the author never explicitly framed it as an essay on Dadaism, E.H. Gombrich’s “Meditations on a Hobby Horse” (1951) is an essay that has been praised as an insightful analysis of Dadaist expression (the word “dada” literally means Hobby Horse in French). Gombrich posits that there is an alternative model to artistic expression besides the representational model we are accustomed to. This model is not about imitating something, but focuses



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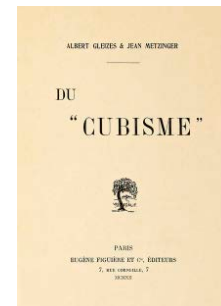
on organizing the very relationship between the object used and the subject who uses it. For instance, a hammer is not determined by its shape but rather by its use as a hammer—its very function as a tool. Obviously, even if hammers already existed in the world, the making of a new hammer is never considered to be an “imitation,” and its authenticity is rendered simply through its use as a hammer (even if the shape was entirely different from all other hammers). Similarly, a mere stick that does not resemble a horse in terms of shape can nonetheless turn into a horse for children because they can ride and run on it. A horse is therefore the relationship between the children and the object—it is the very act (the play) of riding it. The cognition of object is conditioned by this relationship, and a mere resemblance on the level of appearance is actually insignificant. Abstraction is not the distillation of some exterior shape, but rather the process of cognition and judgment based on such concreteness.

In other words, abstraction it is like a tool that is embedded within a physical action. Or more accurately speaking, a tool is what regulates physical action, and guides the movement of the body in an efficient manner (this is no different from a hammer, for instance, relating to other tools such as nails or a wooden panel. Humans also participate in this association as an equal tool/object). Since the various characteristics of the body is initially generated through the interaction with tools, we could even say that the body remains latent inside the tools. No matter whose body it is, holding a specific tool makes a given body act in a similar way. A body is a latency that is made concrete through tools.

6: The Puteaux Group

As stated above, the influence of Cubism as a visual art revolution recedes with the First World War. How the aftershock of Cubism developed can be observed in the activities of Section d’Or group (1912-14)—also known as the Puteaux Group after the the region outside Paris where they met—that emerged out of Cubism. The members of this short-lived group assembled before the war included the following artists: Frantisek Kupka (1871-1957), Fernand Léger (1881-1955), Albert Gleizes (1881-1953), Jean Metzinger (1883-1956), Louis Marcoussis (1883-1941), Francis Picabia (1879-1953), André Lhote (1885-1962), Alexander Archipenko (1887-1964), Raymond Duchamp-Villon (1887-1918), Juan Gris (1887-1927), and Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968).

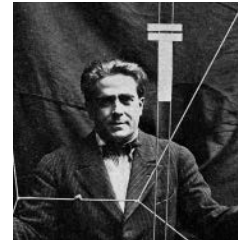
The essay “On Cubism” (1912)(**fig.72**) written by the principal members Gleizes and Metzinger, presents one of the theoretical underpinnings of this group. Taking non-Euclid geometry as reference, they claim that the core of Cubism was based on the totality of senses including that of touch and motion—but not necessarily focused on sight—and that its aim was in the apprehension of a transformable, mobile space. The shapes and colors on the exterior can be destroyed or emphasized, proliferate or disappear,



through connection with other shapes, but a polygon that includes an ellipse retains the identical essence amidst the transformation into other polygons by continuing to encapsulate the ellipse. Vision cannot apprehend the dynamism of shape transformation. This task rather belongs to the sensory domain of haptic or motion. We can clearly detect the influence of Henri Poincaré’s projective geometry here (or more accurately, the influence of Maurice Princet, the mathematician who participated in the Puteaux group and taught Poincaré’s theory to the other members).

Poincaré, who also wrote popular books on science such as *Science and Method* (1908), relativized Euclid geometry as being one of the many forms of geometry that exist with equal relevance. He claimed that the problem of how to extract identical forms from innumerable different phenomena was equivalent to the task of intuitively grasping—that is to say via aesthetic judgment—the various phenomena as mutually mappable transformation groups, and execute their map transformations. In his theory, that is to say, mathematical cognition consisted in an active endeavor of manipulating such transformation. What appears in reality is only one of the transformed figures, and a domain which makes possible the very act of transformation exists separately—which Princet and others tentatively termed “The Fourth Dimension.”

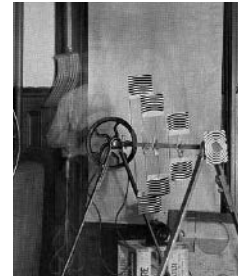
It must be noted that Francis Picabia (fig. 73) and Marcel Duchamp (fig. 74) were members of this Puteaux Group. For instance, Duchamp’s famous proposition to “deny retinal paintings” reveals that he was interested, following Poincaré, in the mapping relation (that is to say, function relation) between objects, or the time-space as extension (delay or distance) of map transformation, rather than the existence of objects *per se* as primary information. Duchamp’s idea of regarding phenomena as contingent or probabilistic—similar to the approach of Dadaists such as Tadeusz Kantor—can be seen as having developed out of discussions in the Puteaux Group.



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7: Poincare and “the Uncanny”

Following the first 1909 translation of *La Science Et L'hypothese* (1902), many writings of Henri Poincaré were translated into Japanese and widely read. His series of books for the general public were popular and influential among Japanese novelists and artists, just as it had been in France. For instance, there is a scene in Sôseki Natsume’s unfinished last novel *Meian* [Light and Darkness] (1916) where the protagonist Yoshio Tsuda talks about Poincaré’s concept of “coincidence” (like all other works by Sôseki, the illustration for this book was done by Seifû Tsuda, who was the same age as Morikazu Kumagai. Sôseki must have borrowed the illustrator’s family name for his protagonist). Tsuda suffers from anal fistula, and on his way home from the hospital he starts thinking how the existence of his body is so alien that even he himself can never predict what it does. Soon,



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He remembered a story about the French philosopher Poincare he had heard from a friend two or three days earlier. In explaining to him the meaning of the word ‘coincidence,’ his friend had told him: ‘That’s why we often say something’s a coincidence, but what we call a coincidence, according to Poincare’s theory, is imply the term we use when the causes are so complex we can’t discover them easily. For example, for Napoleon to be born, the combination of a certain special egg and spermatozoon was necessary, but when we try to think a bit further about what conditions were necessary for such a combination to take place, we can hardly imagine them.’

(*Light and Darkness*, translated by V.H.Viglielmo, Perigee Book, 3)

This explanation given by a friend corresponds to the section on “Fact and Choice” in Poincare’s *Science and Method* that the physicist Torahiko Terada (1878-1935) who was a student of Sōseki and a good friend of Seifū Tsuda had translated in the same year as Sōseki wrote *Meian*. Hence, this “friend” may well be Torahiko Terada.

He could not overlook what his friend had said or consider it merely a new fragment of knowledge. He sought instead to apply it exactly to his own case. As he did so, he could imagine some dark, mysterious force pushing him to the left when he had to go right, and pulling him back when he had to advance.

(*Light and Darkness*, 3-4)

Sōseki (or his protagonist Tsuda) thus claims that since our lives are composed by a body that we ourselves can only grasp probabilistically, our thoughts, intention, as well as behavior, must also be at the mercy of coincidence at all times.

Sōseki passed away on December 9, 1916, leaving *Meian* unfinished. Two years later, Terahiko Torada wrote an essay on Seifū Tsuda (“On the Paintings of Seifū Tsuda and the Artistic Value of Nanga,” *Chuō Kōron*, 1918). This essay starts with a passage that faithfully follows Poincare’s idea of “coincidence” that Torada himself had translated: “If the sun was revolving around the Earth, the motion of exterior planets must be thought as being extremely complex, and the laws of gravity would likewise be terribly difficult.” If the function that establishes a phenomenon becomes too complex, the law that is extracted from therein in order to enable prediction cannot be singularly determined. Therefore, the choice of law itself must become a philosophical endeavor aiming to constitute a world based on a scientist’s hypothesis. Terada writes that similar to the scientists’ process of conducting experiments based on hypothesis in order to establish a new principle, Tsuda’s painting is a “Gedankenexperiment [thought experiment]” which tries to compose and manifest a new artistic world through experiments.

As written above, Morikazu Kumagai, who was around the same age as

Tsuda or Terada, and similarly influenced by Sōseki, studied Helmholtz’s acoustics and statistical mechanics, writing out pages of calculations instead of drawings in his notebooks.^[04//fig.75//fig.76//fig.77] It can certainly be said that the idea of understanding the mechanism of the world in a probabilistic or statistical manner was already wide-spread among the young Japanese artists of this generation.

But we have to wait for the following generation to see the ideas that Terada expected from Tsuda to be manifested explicitly in actual works. Kazuo Sakata (1889-1956) **fig.78** is about ten years younger than Tsuda or Kumagai, and two years senior than Kōshirō Onchi. Onchi was the same age as Ryūsei Kishida (1891-1929), who was already well-known by the end of his teenage years. Both Onchi and Kishida were in the cultural milieu of *Shirakaba*, which represented this new culture. As is well known, the influence of Kishida was outstanding among them.

Compared to these two, the activities of Kazuo Sakata, who was two years senior, began far removed from the center of culture and much later than others. Sakata, who was born into a family of doctors and aspired to become one himself, was an extremely logical person. His transition to becoming a painter was in parallel with a nervous breakdown due to too much studying as well as his conversion to Protestantism.

In 1921, Sakata went to Europe and became the student of Fernand Leger the following year. Going to Europe at age 32 is late even in the standards of the time, but this might have worked to Sakata’s benefit. Sakata was a year younger than Le Corbusier (1887-1965) and Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948), two years younger than Marcel Duchamp and Amédée Ozenfant (1886-1966), the same age as Jean Cocteau (1889-1963) and Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889-1943), two years senior than Giorgio Morandi (1890-1964) and Max Ernst (1891-1976), who were the same age as Ryūsei Kishida and Kōshirō Onchi.

Sakata admired Leger, but felt more connection with the above artists from his generation. Not only Sakata knew the theory of Metzinger and Gleizes, but he also realized the underpinnings of non-Euclid mathematical logic, and therefore understood that more than just a visual pursuit was at stake. What Sakata, already in his thirties, had been thinking in Japan, gave him the capacity to discern where the potential of these movements was.

Since his move to France and encounter with the Section d’Or (Puteaux) Group, until his later years, Sakata’s works retained a coherent character:

- 1: In contrast to positively depicted figure (for instance “a”), to treat the surrounding ground (“non-a”) as being substantial.
- 2: To differentiate between the ground “non-a” created by depicting figure “a,” and the ground “non-b” created by depicting figure “b.”



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04: Morikazu Kumagai, *Heta mo E no Uchi*, Heibonsha, 1971.

- 3: To superimpose not figures, but the differentiated grounds “non-a”, “non-b”, “non-c” etc.

Since neither “non-a” nor “non-b” are regions where something is depicted positively, this is a highly abstract manipulation. Even though they could not be objectified visibly, the grounds were not merely blank spaces surrounding the figure, but deemed as a positive and substantial region by themselves.

[fig.79]

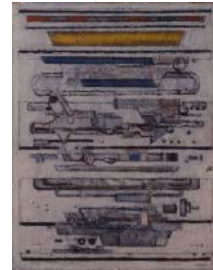
Even to this day, the standard routine of banal modernist painting consists in the presentation of a neutral space (most of them a white blank space), upon which multiple shapes and disparate objects are positioned either in an orderly manner or randomly, as if they were floating. Otherwise, the various shapes are depicted as transparently superimposed. That is to say, there is always a difference of levels between the object-figures and the neutral space wherein they are placed; and the neutral space is always on the higher level containing objects and shapes as components of a lower level. Sakata’s paintings presented an utterly different focus from the start. The experiments conducted numerous on his canvas were dedicated to giving a positive feature to the space regarded as neutral, to stop seeing it as a singular domain, and letting it co-exist in its multiplicity. Instead of an encounter and co-existence of disparate objects as figures, Sakata’s paintings foregrounded the multiplying of the space deemed as ground, and their mutual encounter and co-existence.

If one sees two or more figures overlapping one another, and each of them claims for itself the common overlapped part, then one is confronted with a contradiction of spatial dimensions. To resolve this contradiction one must assume the presence of a new optical quality. The figures are endowed with transparency; that is, they are able to interpenetrate without an optical destruction of each other. Transparency, however, implies more than an optical characteristic, it implies a broader spatial order. Transparency means a simultaneous perception of different spatial locations.

(Geogy Kepes, *Language of Vision*, Paul Theobald and Company, 160-161)

This definition of “transparency” by the Hungarian art theorist Geogy Kepes corresponds to the works of Purism—Le Corbusier or Ozenfant. /**fig.80//fig.81**/ Kepes is claiming here that when multiple objects that cannot exist simultaneously in the same space nevertheless are perceived as existing there at the same time, the viewer’s imagination, in an attempt to sublimate the contradiction, fabricates the attribute of transparency as a space that is neither domain “a” nor “b” but where those two mutually interpenetrate.

What Sakata attempted to do, however, is more complicated. For he wanted to present the simultaneous existence of domains “non-a”, “non-b”, or “non-c” that essentially cannot be seen and therefore depicted or presented as positive figures. This approach of arresting a negative space as substantial was shared



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by another artist of Sakata’s generation: The Italian artist of the Metaphysical Painting school, Giorgio Morandi (1890-1964). (fig. 82)

Sakata explained that the reason he could understand the most cutting-edge expressions of Europe that he saw for the first time after going there, was because he already knew the works of Ryūsei Kishida and others from Japan. (fig. 83) Among the works of contemporary Japanese avant-garde artists, the only one that Sakata claimed to be worth seeing was that of Kishida. In other words, Sakata was confident that artists like Kishida or himself working in Japan shared the common problematics with the European artists of the same generation.

Ryūsei Kishida is known as a painter who invented the prototype of Japanicized Fauvism style of painting that would burgeon in the 1930s. In other words, his influence is reduced to the conservative intention and position of indigenizing Western modernist painting. The fact that Kishida’s work was contemporary with Post-Cubist Dadaism, Constructivism, or even Surrealism, has not been considered. Sakata’s perspective allows us to recognize that Kishida’s paintings were contemporary enough to be comparable to the works of Morandi, Purism, or even Duchamp.

Kishida was born as the fourth son of Ginkō Kishida (1833-1905) known as the pioneer of modern journalism and an editor of the English dictionary. Ginkō was the patron and organizer of the so-called “Yokohama School” which included Yuichi Takahashi, known as the father of Japanese modern painting, (fig. 84/fig. 85) Hōryū Goseda, or Renjō Shimooka. (fig. 86) As the strong connection with the visual news agency “Beato & Wirgman, Artists and Photographers” suggests, the activities of this group extended from the collection of new visual information based on journalism to the pursuit of media forms to organize the visual world—thus covering all the conditions for the emergence of modernist painting as described by Charles Baudelaire. In this sense, their activity also corresponded with those of Gustave Courbet (1819-1977) and Edouard Manet (1832-1883) in France, or Adolph Menzel (1815-1905) in Germany. In short, they pursued realism as a problematic arising from the differences, contradictions, and conflicts between the multiplicity of facts produced by various expression forms including photography, print, painting, and language. For instance, Yuichi Takahashi’s *Oiran* aimed to produce a reality through the emphasis of gap between different forms of expression, an approach that which resonated with Courbet’s endeavors. Namely, Takahashi made use of the two main—though mutually exclusive—advantages of oil painting, the power to express tactile quality and the power to express transparent space, while also amplifying the flat visual impression that was characteristic of Ukiyo-e and the then-contemporary method of portrait photographs.

Kishida precisely understood the significance of these preceding works as the problematics conditioning modernist painting. The nature of Kishida’s own work can be summarized using his own terminology from his book *Syajitsu-Ron* [Theory of Realism] (1920):



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Syajitsu[realism]: According to Kishida, the basis of his art is in the pursuit of realism.

Shokkan[tactile sensation]: the basis of realism is in the feeling of matter that appears as tactility.

Mukei[formless or *informel*]: this tactility is derived from “the various formal and formless negotiation between the object and man.” The possibility of negotiation that is revealed as tactility/feeling of matter, is where the “formless feeling of something that seems visible but is not” resides—the eternal *Mukei* which transcends visible form and assaults the viewer, the sense of infinity that is beyond the objectivity of realistic object. And as long as it pertains to the negotiation between man and object, the sense of infinity and the mystical must emerge from the “spiritual domain.” What is described as the spiritual domain revealed through *Mukei* would be paraphrased in his later writing “Shajitsu no Ketsujo no Kousatsu” [Observations on the Absence of Realism] (1922) as the sense of “hyper-realism” that is felt as the absence of realism.

* If one thoroughly pursues realism, the impression of exterior appearance dissolves and starts to feel strange. Ultimately, what appears is a plastic, formless, material truth that exceeds familiar appearance of the visible figure. However, since that plastic, material substance that is grasped intuitively is only obtained by subverting the prediction we projected upon the object (the familiar figure), we can understand this as the emergence of the unconscious domain attached to the object.

In other words, the nature of *Mukei* is derived from the plasticity of “the negotiation between the object and man.” The reason a familiar appearance suddenly transforms itself into something grotesque and strange is because the relationship between the viewer and the object becomes unstable. This is the outburst of the domain of unconsciousness or potentiality that is directly coupled with the dimension of materials. Kishida’s insight corresponds exactly to the sense of the “Uncanny” (Das Unheimliche) that Freud described in 1919.⁰⁵ What Kazuo Sakata saw in Giorgio Morandi’s metaphysical paintings was probably similar to the “metaphysical world” that Kishida saw in the classic Chinese paintings from the Song and Yuan dynasties (“Tōzai no Bijutsu wo Ronjite Sōgen no Syaseiga ni Oyobu” [Discussing the Art of the West and East All the Way Up to the Realism Paintings of the Song and Yuan Dynasties]). Kishida wrote, “the crux of realism is in the area of beauty that coincides exterior form with *Mukei*.” (ibid.)

05: Sigmund Freud, “Das Unheimliche” (1919). Freud had been translated into Japanese sporadically from the 1910s. In 1922, Yoshihide Kubo’s *Seishin Bunseki Hou* [The Method of Psychoanalysis] which presented a comprehensive analysis of the Freudian theory was published and became popular. The newest theories of Freud such as the Death Drive were also already introduced. In the 1930s, the complete works of Freud was published from Shunyoudo and Arsha, thus making the entire corpus of Freud’s writing available to the Japanese readers.

Kishida’s following description of realist paintings from the Song and Yuan Dynasties can be applied to Morandi or Ozenfant’s paintings: “If one used the outlines and colored the insides of the contour flatly, it creates a strangely strong, and somewhat thick feeling. This feeling evokes a peculiar, mystical sensation, which, through the realness of the outline makes us also perceive the feeling of quality. That is to say, the beauty of quality is the mystical aesthetics of the feeling of matter (...) and when one colors flatly, the mysticism of that flatly painted color is enlivened as the mystic sense of quality through the realness of the outline.” (Ibid.)

8: The Surreal as the “Absence of Realism”

Ryūsei Kishida’s paintings certainly aligned themselves with Post-Cubism problematics in the endeavor to realize *Mukei*[formless]—something that cannot be localized as visual object.

The “absence of realism” that Kishida mentions referred to the dissolution of the binding between pictorial expression and its object—a separation between the signified and the signifier, so to speak. The reason this gives rise to the feeling of grotesque as well as the mystical sense of hyper-reality is because a latent possibility that transcends the routine, daily negotiation with the object is exposed therein. The feeling of the uncanny or grotesque stems from the revelation that a familiar figure is merely contingent and bound to disintegrate instantaneously. It was the appearance of this potentiality that cannot be arrested into a fixed form that Kishida called the “absence of realism.” This focus on probabilistic contingency, plasticity, and transformability connects his interests with the Puteaux Group, as previously mentioned.

However, as his use of the term “hyper-reality” indicates (and this was before the Surrealist Manifesto of 1924), Kishida’s work can be seen as a precursor of works like Salvador Dalí’s *Basket of Bread*(1926)(**fig.87**) that served as a starting point for Surrealism. Furthermore, the term “*Mukei*” quite literally connects Kishida’s endeavors with the aesthetics of “Informel” [formless] which aimed to reveal the contingency of the surface exposed to sight and present the invisible domain hidden behind or around it as more substantial. The movement of Informel preceded Morandi’s works and was developed by Jean Fautrier (1898-1964)(**fig.88**) and Lucio Fontana (1899-1968)(**fig.89**)

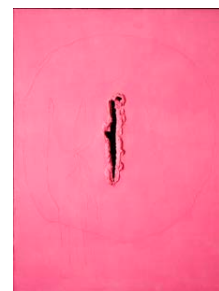
In “Observations on the Absence of Realism,” Kishida claims that there are two methods related to the “absence of realism” or “sense of hyper-reality” in which the contingency of visible expression is exposed. The first is to thoroughly pursue realism until it collapses (this was the method Kishida inherited from Yuichi Takahashi, and as mentioned above, he writes in “Discussing the Art of the West and East All the Way Up to the Realism Paintings of the Song and Yuan Dynasties” that its effects can also be found in the classic paintings of the Song and Yuan dynasties or in the works of Jan van Eyck). The second method is to consign the work to childish or savage



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whim and chance. This latter way is only fun and does not serve to attain deep emotions or insights. However, Kishida does write that "the exclusion of reality that is felt through such childish audacity, haphazardness, and intensity" "can provide a hint for an advanced artist." When the realistic element of a phenomenon is removed, what foregrounds in both methods is the decorative forms of simplification, emphasis, or repetition. But such formative rule of *Mukei* is a necessity derived from materialistic conditions/constraints such as specificity of material component or technical limitation. This last argument can be read not only as foreshadowing the emergence of Surrealism, but also as a criticism towards the expressive forms of Constructivism or Dadaism that Kishida was already witnessing (this text was written in 1922). Kishida writes, "Simply put, this world is a world of relativization, a world of discrimination, a world of material constraints, and it is precisely because of this that beauty and the absolute and nirvana are what they are." "I think it is interesting that art is made through materialistic limitation or constraint of meaning."

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In 1922, David Burliuk (1882-1967), who penned the "Russian Futurist Manifesto" with Mayakovsky, escaped the Russian Revolution, and arrived to Japan with his family. Burliuk's plan was to make enough money there to immigrate to the United States (he had been informed that Japan after the First World War was blooming in economy and art books were selling like hot cakes). Calling himself "the Father of Futurism," Burliuk frequently

organized lectures funded by newspaper companies and gathered a huge crowd. At the same time, he made an astounding number of works and wrote novels. Kishida sarcastically depicted the fad around Burliuk and the young Japanese overnight Futurist cronies. On Burliuk side, however, while putting on the act of a Futurist performance for the younger students, he was actually interested in the specific style of Japanese modern painting which was reaching its apex through the works of Kishida or Narashige Koide, who were around the same age as Burliuk. The self-professed Father of Futurism made works that resembled these Japanese painters, and even participated in the Nika-ten which many of them were involved. (fig.90) For Burliuk who was already in his forties, Futurism was a fad of the past, belonging to the era before the Great War and the Revolution. He understood its limitations. It must be from that perspective that he saw in the paintings of Kishida and other artists of his own generation the direction toward which Post-War paintings should head. What he discovered was materialistic plasticity and formlessness that transcended the surface differences of style such as Concrete Art or Constructivism. In short, this was a haptic quality—what the Italian art historian Roberto Longhi described as tactility. Burliuk later moved to the U.S., and just like John D. Graham (1886-1961) (fig.91) who was also from Ukraine and provided guidance to the Post-Abstract Expressionism artists, organized salons of avant-garde artists and exercised a great influence not only on young artists but also on collectors and gallery curators who wanted to deal with new art. By positioning Burliuk as a mediator, it becomes apparent that modern Japanese Western painting which reaches its peak in the 1930s shared a common ground with the lineage of American art from Regionalism to Pop Art. In 1944, Katherine Dreier and Marcel Duchamp who co-organized Société Anonyme published the biography of Burliuk. Dreier wrote the text and Duchamp illustrated.



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9: The Transformed, Deformed, Practical, Concrete Objects of Shinkankaku-ha

The terms “world of discrimination” and “world of material constraints” that appear in Kishida’s “Observations on the Absence of Realism” reveal that even Kishida was influenced by materialism that swept Japanese culture of the time. However, although Kishida was aware of the formless and infinite nature of negotiation between objects and humans, this only demonstrated the endless possibility of how the mind can interact with matter, and in no way led to bringing down the privileged status of the mind.

The Great Kanto Earthquake which hit Tokyo on September 1, 1923, however, made the dominance of matter decisive. The earthquake completely transformed Japanese avant-garde culture. Both Marxism and Freudian Psychoanalysis were widely read. And it was the “Shinkankaku-ha” group that connected Marx and Freud through the common insight that matter

determines mind, summarizing further that matter inspires and makes one think, and created literature out of this philosophy. Riichi Yokomitsu (1898-1947), a principal member of Shinkankaku-ha, later wrote that the earthquake's influence on Japanese culture was equivalent to that of the First World War on European culture. He reminisced how Shinkankaku-ha was a movement that was born out of the shock caused by the earthquake.

A speedy monstrosity by the name of bicycle started wandering around the world, immediately afterwards a freak with vocal sounds called radio appeared, and a bird-like model called airplane started flying in the air for real. These are artifacts of modern science that emerged in our country right after the earthquake. The sensation of an adolescent human being for whom such cutting-edge modern science products appeared as an extension of the devastated land must be transformed in some sense.

(Riichi Yokomitsu, "In Lieu of Commentary," *Anthology of Riichi Yokomitsu*, Kawade-Shobō, 1941)

The distinct characteristic of Shinkankaku-ha is the lack of subjective unity. There is no privileged, transcendental narrator.^[06]

F puked blood from his mouth. M cut his belly for appendicitis. H contracted erysipelas from the wound after plucking his nose hair. When he let these three reports into his ears at the same time, he had a sudden outburst of hemorrhoid and bled. Lifting his bleeding head up amidst the ring of three misfortunes, he wandered around thinking which way he should go. The second report came in from F, "They got me, but." From H, "My face is double-sized now." From M: "This is the end." He said, "Me, from the bottom."

(Riichi Yokomitsu, *Mouchō*[Appendicitis], 1927)

There is no unified, singular subject here. Each bodily organ carries its own problem, which inspires and creates different subjects—F, M, H—each of whom report on its own problem without any regard to any others. I am merely a site in which this confusion takes place. The anarchic nature of body thus presented, could be likened to the theory of death drive—precisely the nature of "Es" [Id]—that Freud posited after his theoretical turn following the First World War (Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*(1920) was

06: For instance, Yasunari Kawabata (1899-1972). Of particular importance is Taruho Inagaki (1900-1977) and Motojirō Kajii (1901-1932). Inagaki depicted the subject being tossed about by the astronomical correspondence exceeding the spatial scale of small daily objects. Kajii described how the entangled network of city streets could directly link to the circuitry of the mind and was capable of changing thoughts. In order to transform the world, one needs to intersect and distort the preexisting articulation of circuitries. This can be accomplished, for instance, by the simple act of leaving a lemon taken from the grocery store on top of a book in a Western bookstore.

introduced to Japan immediately after its publication).

Even if Riishi Yokomitsu had been influenced by the writings of Marx, he was not fond of the leftist ideology. For him, contemporary leftist literature (Proletariat Literature) was not a proper materialism based on correct understanding of Marx. For they dissected the superstructure from the material basis of infrastructure, claiming a subjective control and guidance of the movement by the avant-garde as the superstructure. For Yokomitsu, that was an idealism which grounded itself on the precedence of the subject (the autonomy of the subject in relation to matter).⁰⁷

Tomoyoshi Murayama, who was from the same generation as Shinkankaku-ha and would become active around the time of the earthquake, also shared the idea that the subject/consciousness was merely a phenomenon that emerged as a result of interference between innumerable circuits of matter. Murayama (1901-1977) went to study in Germany in 1922, and voraciously absorbed the newest art, architecture, theatre, and philosophy in Berlin. After his return to Japan in June 1923, the year of the earthquake, he immediately started presenting works.

The platform of Murayama's activity was the children's magazine *Kodomo no Tomo* edited by his partner and collaborator, Kazuko Murayama (1903-1946), who was a fiercely talented poet and author of children's literature, as well as its publisher Jiyū Gakuen (then a girl's school).

* Tomoyoshi Murayama went to the Kindergarten attached to Tokyo Women's Normal School which had introduced the education system of Froebel to Japan. He writes in his *Theatrical Autobiography 1* (1970) that his favorite exercise was paper cutouts (i.e., Gift 13).

Along with other schools like Myōjō Gakuen, Jiyū Gakuen was the most advanced representative of the Taisho Free Education movement which not only advanced radical child education since Froebel, but also incorporated the methods of John Dewey who made critical improvements on Froebel's approach (and who had visited Japan in 1919). The building of the school, which opened in 1923, was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright who was visiting Japan at the time. It is said that Wright, who assented with the visions of the school's founder Motoko Hani, took on the design work for free. The experimental curriculum of Jiyū Gakuen combined sewing, woodwork, gardening, cooking and science experiments, storytelling and theatre, and regarded art as being involved in all these activities. In this way it shared many similarities with later Black Mountain College.

Like other Japanese students in Germany at the time, including the

07: This is the 1928 argument between Yokomitsu and Korehito Kurahara or Hatsunosuke Hirabayashi who were the main proponents of the theory of Proletariat Literature, known as "The Dispute of Formalist Literature."

philosopher Kiyoshi Miki (1897-1945), or the architect Kikuji Ishimoto (1894-1963), Murayama benefitted from the tremendous strengthening of the Japanese yen brought by the drop in the exchange rate (which had brought Brulieu to Japan in the first place). He was able to see all kinds of art performances, purchase all kinds of art books that were available, and acquire vast amount of information. Murayama's initial goal was to study the philosophy of prehistoric religion, but what he discovered in post-WWI Germany was how materialism, which regards material condition as being the basis and source of inspiration for the spiritual, actually functioned as the philosophical basis for avant-garde art. What he saw as the central driving force of new art, after going through Dadaism, Constructivism, and New Objectivity [Neue Sachlichkeit] in architecture, were the body arts and stage arts like Neue Tanz. For Murayama, artworks were no longer visual (no need to consider visual balance or harmony), but apparatuses that directly inspired the body and the brain.

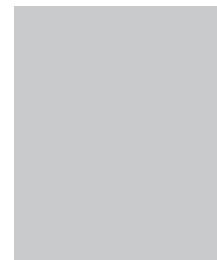
After returning from Germany, Murayama wrote many books that introduced the European Avant-garde to the Japanese public, but these were not merely overviews of the various art movements but rather their critical assessments. For instance, Murayama claimed that although Russian Constructivism appears to be utterly productive and shows the infinite possibility of combination in regards to the construction of objects, it ultimately relies on subjective selection (aesthetic sense) in the phase of choosing actual construction among the many possibilities. Therefore, he criticized it as being constrained by intellectualism (the same criticism Yokomitsu posited against Proletariat Literature). In order to go beyond this limitation, Murayama posited the method of "Conscious Constructivism" which aimed to re-construct consciousness and subjectivity itself through the composition of matter. Later he reminisced that his intention was "to consciously stoke up contradiction, and seek a higher unity through the conflict of such contradiction. To construct one's own consciousness in order to overcome this agony." (*Theatrical Autobiography 2, 1921-26, 1974*).

This approach is explicitly manifested in the works he began to present after his return from Europe. The emphasis of tactility through the pasting of hair, shoes, and diverse materials was criticized by newspaper reviews as being against the principles of modernism, but this was a deliberate move on Murayama's part. What he aimed for was not a visual disposition, but a material connection and inspiration that influenced the body and the mind in a more direct manner. The drawing *Mudai (Bakuhatsu/Fau)* [Untitled (Explosion/Fau)] (1923) [fig. 92] comically displays his idea of the body and the mind as material circuits.

Mudai (Ningyō 4 Chiisana Onna no Ko) [Untitled (Doll 4 Little Girl)] (ca. 1923) [fig. 93] contains a shape in the form of a dress pattern, but as the faint depiction of the hanger wire tells, this is a portrait of a person without a body—a doll figure. This approach of re-constructing the human body only with material fragments that frame and surround it—without depicting the actual body—can also be seen in *Sadistisch na Kuukan* [Sadistic Space]



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(1922-23) **(fig.94)** and *Utsukushiki Shōjora ni Sasagu* [For Beautiful Girls] (1923) **(fig.95)** in which a clothes sleeve is pasted directly onto the canvas. By dismantling the human body in a “sadistic” manner, it turns it into something more functional and straightforwardly “beautiful.” In any case, a human being (including the mind) was for Murayama a material construction. It should therefore be perceived not through vision but tactile contact. It can be said that Murayama’s works, rather than being visual artifacts, were apparatuses that inspired the body and made them operate in a concrete manner.

The combination of body art, textile, and needlecraft that Murayama’s work displays obviously reminds one of Sophie Taeuber-Arp’s works. Murayama had gained confidence in his approach by seeing the dance works by Mary Wigman and others (the dance that he was most interested in and saw frequently was by Niddy Impekoven **(fig.96)**). The idea of re-constructing the subject via the physical body and matter veered Murayama away from plastic arts towards theatre where the human mind could be inspired and constructed in a more direct manner.

Construction (1925) **(fig.97)** was made after Murayama’s principal field of activity had moved to theatre (and architecture). A quick comparison with *Sadistic Space* and *For Beautiful Girls* from several years before may give the impression that the work is dowdy, and Murayama’s sense of composition has seen a set back. However, a closer inspection reveals that what he aimed here cannot be reduced to intentions concerning visual composition.

The screen is articulated by multiple frames. **(fig.98)** The interior of each frame is divided according to a different order (emphasizing its flatness). There is an actual hole that connects to the back inside the upper left and lower left frames. The lower right frame contains symbols and numbers that look like some kind of instruction. **(fig.99)** The upper right frame sediments photographic collages, and an actual button is pasted along side the manhole cover or the car lamp shot from the front, emphasizing its frontality as well as the fact that it is an aperture connected to the back, just like the other parts of the screen. **(fig.100)** In other words, the composition of photographs inside this frame corresponds to that of the entire panel. Many of the photographs used are taken from the National Geographic magazine that Murayama presumably was reading at the time.

All in all, the entire screen resembles a control panel upon which terminals/entry points of various circuits extending to the back of the panel are placed. It is like a telephone switchboard, an interface that connects to some other place in the world. **(fig.101)** A similar approach is found in stage props that Murayama constructed around the same time. For instance, the apparatus he made for *Asa Kara Yonaka Made* [From Morning to Midnight]—whose photographs remain—appears to be a control panel (controlling all events and time that take place on stage). **(fig.102)** Similarities also extend to the buildings Murayama designed.

The variety of windows that characterizes *Yamanote Biyōin* [Yamanote Beauty Salon] seems like a cross-section of a body filled with various organs.



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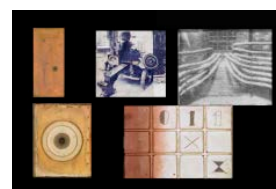
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[fig.103] Each aperture is connected to different organs. These circuit-like expressions were shared by other members of the avant-garde art group MAVO that Murayama formed. For instance, take the work by Shūichirō Kinoshita—who accompanied Burliuk on his visit to Japan and co-authored the book *Miraiha Towa? Kotaeru* [What is Futurism? Answer] with him—titled *Kindaiteki Toshi Soshiki no Ichibu Zōki Shisetsu* [A Part of Modern City System, Organ Facility] (1925). [fig.104] Even just the title makes the similarity of concepts clear. It is easy to see the correspondence between Murayama's *Untitled (Explosion/Fau)* and the cover for the third issue of MAVO designed by Michinao Takamizawa: along with human hair, an actual firecracker was pasted onto the paper (and thus this publication was banned).

In all cases, what Murayama and his fellow artists produced was no longer visual art. The works did not represent something nor were pleasurable to see. They were designed as circuits connecting the body to the world in concrete ways, as well as apparatuses that subverted and re-organized such connections.

One architecture built in 1927 in Sukiwabashi, Tokyo, seemed to embody the philosophy of MAVO: *The Central Tokyo Office of Asahi News Paper*. [fig.105] The architect Kikuji Ishimoto was a good friend of Murayama who had accompanied him to Berlin. He was also a member of “Architects Association Bunli-ha,” a group of young architects who aimed to build avant-garde architecture corresponding to the new architecture in Europe—the first of its kind to be formed in Japan—which can be considered as the equivalent of Shinkankaku-ha for architecture. The former building for the Central Tokyo Office of Asahi News Paper had been destroyed by the earthquake in 1923 while it was being reconstructed, and the young Ishimoto who had just returned from Germany won the competition for designing the new building.

Ishimoto, who had experienced European architecture first hand, was very ambitious. The famous competition for the new headquarters of Chicago Tribune—another newspaper corporation—in which European avant-garde architects like Walter Gropius (1883-1969) or Adolf Roos (1870-1933) participated, had been held in 1922. Ishimoto obviously thought about this precedence when he set to work on the Asahi News Paper building (*Kenchiku-fu* [Architecture Scores] which Ishimoto published upon his return to Japan assembled new Western architectures, among which was Gropius' rejected plan for the Chicago Tribune competition [fig.106]).

“Adding a magnificent view to the great capital of our empire/the inauguration of our new headquarter building/the grand sum of cutting-edge technology and art”—like these words from the frontline of the Asahi News Paper announcing the completion of construction, Ishimoto's building was a media center making full use of cutting-edge technology, perhaps similar to Centre Pompidou in the later years. The members of MAVO participated in the interior design of the theatre in the building, and there was a feeling that the most advanced architecture in the world had been constructed in Japan, even for a moment. The reason this feeling had to be momentary was



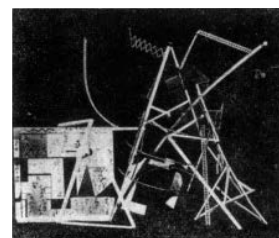
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because Ishimoto's philosophy, which resonated with Murayama's, regarded architecture as a bundle of organs—his design was intended to be organic.^[08]

The variously shaped apertures in the building expressed the variety of interior organs each having a different function. In this sense, Ishimoto's building was similar to the architecture of Bruno Taut (1860-1938) or Adolf Roos, rather than Gropius'. The façade of Shirokiya^[fig.107] that Ishimoto designed subsequently in 1928, consisted in the juxtaposition of different orders of apertures each showing an entirely different expression, as if the building was a collection of multiple buildings. In other words, it was akin to, or a profound sophistication of, Murayama's concept for *Construction*.

In 1936, Riichi Yokomitsu traveled to Europe and visited the house of Tristan Tzara in Paris, designed by Roos. It is known that Yokomitsu told Tzara that "we did not need Surrealism in Japan, because we had our earthquake" (Yokomitsu himself wrote a novel based on this experience in 1936 called *Chûbô Nikki*[The Kitchen Journal]). But more accurately, what Yokomitsu conveyed to Europe was that in Japan, the battle against the self-as-nature was more serious an affair than the conflict with others. Yokomitsu regarded the earthquake as a manifestation of such destructive nature within the self—the death drive.

The idea of death drive also haunted another novelist of Shinkankaku-ha and later Nobel laureate Yasunari Kawabata, as well as his painter friend Harue Koga. Just like Yokomitsu's criticism of Proletariat Literature, Koga criticized Surrealism as intellectualism.^[fig.108] His argument was that the activity of Surrealists, despite referring to Freud, appeared as nothing more than a colonialist's attempt to take over the domain of unconsciousness. In other words, it was merely an expansion of self-consciousness. Freud also influenced Koga and Kawabata, but their focus was more in the theory of the death drive and the notion of "das Es" [Id]. Following Koga's death, Kawabata cited his friend's words "to die is to live," and wrote that the death drive predominates Surrealism ("Matsugo no Me" (1930), or "Japan the Beautiful and Myself" (1968) written forty years after). These were attempts to theorize Japanese culture via Freudian theory. The death drive is therein transformed to the leniency or pining towards animality and nature that is dominated by the Id.

Meanwhile, Murayama underwent two big changes of direction. First there was the turn towards Proletariat Theatre and Socialist Realism painting in the mid-1920s, which was then followed, after several arrests and detentions, by the abandonment of communist activities in 1933. What is important, however, is that despite these series of turnarounds, it appears Murayama's theoretical core remained unmoved. This is clearly demonstrated in Murayama's literary work *Byakuya*[White Nights] (1935) generally referred



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08: Other architects such as Bunzō Yamaguchi, Seiichi Shirai, or Michizō Tachara, who had worked with Ishimoto, can be seen as sharing Ishimoto's approach in one way or another. Shirai and Yamaguchi were also friends with Tomoyoshi Murayama's step-brother, during their time in Germany.

to as a “conversion novel.” The protagonist, who resembles Murayama himself, is arrested because of his activities and abandons communism. However, just like the character from Riichi Yokomitsu’s *Kikai*[Machine] (1931), he cannot be sure about what he himself is thinking, nor even feel he is thinking something at all. The novel reads like a precursor of Absurdist Fiction. What persists here is the basic philosophy of Shinkankaku-ha, which posits that for materialism there is no significance in the coherency of the subject, since there is no singular “I” who thinks in the first place. It may seem that as artistic expression this is a huge step back and hard to distinguish from mere irony, but Murayama therefore managed to preserve the source of his active energy and actually continued to work vigorously.

Indeed, Murayama’s activities did not cease after his so-called turn. In 1934, he gathered progressive theatre people who were on the edge of being dispersed by the repetitive pressures from the authorities, and started the “Shinkyō Gekidan.” Murayama himself continued the routine of being arrested and released repeatedly, but he never stopped writing scripts and directing plays, sometimes anonymously and other times remotely through instructions. What is interesting is that the wider the area of his activity grew, the more difficult it becomes to accurately trace his trajectory.

One example is his interaction with progressive theatre people from Korea. In 1938, the Shinkyō Gekidan staged the play *Chunhyangjeon* at the Kikujī Theatre.^[09]

This was an adaptation by Kakuchu Chou, a Korean poet residing in Japan, of one of his solo “Pansori,” a traditional form of Korean song-theatre, which was directed by Murayama. The play became a hit and traveled around Japan and Korea. In 1940, Shinkyō Gekidan was forced to dismantle and Murayama was again arrested. Upon this arrest, however, the judge advised him to flee mainland Japan where regulation and censorship were strict, and continue his activities in the Korean peninsula. Murayama followed this advice and moved to Keijō (now-Seoul) in March 1945. There he created a “Pansori Opera” which was based again in *Chunhyangjeon*, this time all in Korean, and staged as a traditional song play mixed with visual arts. In his autobiography, Murayama boasts that turning a Pansori into an opera was his invention (needless to say, what was important was that the performances were all conducted in Korean, and the composer as well as all the actors were Koreans).

Sixty years later, in 2005, Tanztheater Wuppertal led by Pina Bausch created and presented *Rough Cut* in Seoul. Bausch stated she was strongly inspired by Pansori Opera. After Bausch’s death, Tanztheater Wuppertal staged the Pansori Opera *Sugunga*[Mr.Rabbit and the Dragon King] under the direction of Achim Freyer. It was as if two lineages that developed out of Neue Tanz—Murayama and Bausch—reencountered one another at the Water Palace [*Sugun*].

09: Emiko Kita, “The Communist Artists’ Conversion and Chosun, Manchuria: Focusing on Tomoyoshi Murayama and Shirin Yorimoto,” *Aida/Seisei = Between/becoming*, 6 (2016).

10: Art Concret Goes Dada

In contrast to the intellectualism of Surrealism or Russian Constructivism, abstract art in the vein of Dadaism abandoned the subject and delved into the concrete intellect and ethics residing in objects—in other words, it based itself on anarchism, derived directly from the encounter between Dadaism and applied arts. For instance, in daily life, emotions and thoughts are generated as a matter of course from the interaction between objects and the body. The nature of objects is to resist forces that attempt to interact with it from the exterior. Therefore, the interaction with objects disciplines the body and adjusts the bias of the mind. Since this process is not based on the subject, it is continuously renewable. In other words, to form and interact with objects lead to the regulation and formation of one's own self. This links to the inherent ethics within the process of craft manufacture that Muneyoshi Yanagi discovered (*Mingei towa Nanika* [What is Mingei] 1929). The lessons learned from interacting with objects was of course the central philosophy that was passed from Froebel to Maria Montessori or Steiner's educational toys.

However, the educational toys of Froebel were also criticized for the overly formal and ritualistic nature of their exercises. The excess of accompanying detailed instruction for how to interact with the objects could lead to the restraint of a child's initiative and freedom. The educational toys by Maria Montessori (1870-1952), on the other hand, were based on her astounding success in the nourishment of intellectual gain for mentally handicapped children, and were designed so that mere interaction with the objects in the absence of detailed instruction could automatically aid the development of thought and emotion. (fig. 109) In other words, Montessori's educational toys were based on the idea that even in the absence of intellectual guidance, the objects themselves could inspire the body and generate intellect.

This method known as “emotional education” consisted in encouraging the understanding of abstract concepts and rules through physical movement and sensation. The repetitive physical interaction nourishes a concrete sensation and sensorial perception that lead to the acquirement of highly abstract notions. That is to say, the interaction with objects serves as a trigger to develop and maintain intelligence. It is the object that inspires one to think. The sensation and inspiration from objects enables one to grow.

Although Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) may seem distant from Montessori, he was also focused on the hypersensorial sensation that is derived from the interaction with objects. This was a sense of balance and responsibility that regulated the prolonged act of involvement with the objects.

Steiner's educational toys are characterized by their lack of fixed contours and sharp edges. (fig. 110) The shape and outline of an object only emerge in the process of interaction between multiple objects or between an object and the human hand. The thickness of the surface allows the object to change flexibly;



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it receives the energy that is conveyed from other objects, and dissolves or hardens its form. Children take part in the process of transformation and grasp the energy of objects through bodily actions.

For instance, in the aftermath of World War I, the Futurist Marinetti underwent a drastic change through an influence from Montessori.^(fig.111) Marinetti, who praised the war before it happened, married Benedetta Cappa, one of the few female members of the Futurist movement^(fig.112), and started collaborating with her. In 1921, together with Cappa he declared “Tattilismo” [Tactilism], which was based on the notions of love and fraternity. Benedetta had already been engaged in the education of poor children based on Montessori’s method during the war, and Tattilismo was inspired by Montessori’s “emotional education.”

In 1919, Bauhaus was established in Weimar Germany. As is well known, the platform for the pedagogical program of early Bauhaus was a mixture of Froebel and Steiner’s theories. Johannes Itten’s (1888-1967) exercises made this explicit: The medium which connects the various arts was thought as the space in which individual physical acts unraveled.^(fig.113)

Bauhaus as a pedagogical institution, however, could not fully develop these attempts. Instead of building individual spaces by initiating from the body, the focus became the standardization and normalization of products and production process that facilitated the reduction of its program to existing establishments—a similar path that was taken by the Russian Constructivist’s art school Vkhutemas. Hannes Meyer (1889-1954) who became the director of Bauhaus after Gropius, even thought that human beings could be standardized following the order of objects.^(fig.114)

Sophi Taeuber-Arp was more methodical and substantial than Benedetta and her Tattilismo. Although political themes never appeared on the surface of her works, she kept working at the core of abstract art.

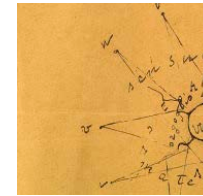
Theo van Doesburg who established the De Stijl group thought his country, Holland, was always marginal to the avant-garde movement. This was not true, since it was Doesburg and others around him who correctly understood that the potential of Dadaism lay in the connection between abstract and concrete effects.^(fig.115)

Bauhaus was forced to shut down by the Nazis in 1933. In the political climate that saw the rise of fascism and Nazism, eventually leading up to the Second World War, Surrealism further leaned towards the politicization of art in response to Fascism’s aestheticization of politics, as Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) articulated. In any case, art was dragged into the political totalitarianism and the conflict over regional hegemony.

In 1929, the sole platform of abstract art resisting such situation was established in Paris by Doesburg: Art Concret.^(fig.116) In the manifesto written in 1930, the term “concret” is defined as a direct workings on the mind in the absence of any referent in reality, or of any mediation by symbols, poetics, and narratives. Art was thus deemed as a tool or machinery that physically operated upon the mind.



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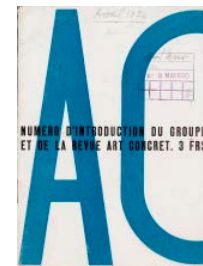
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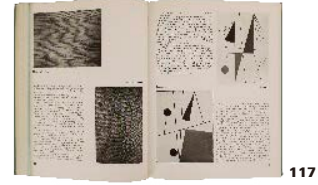
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In 1931, Art Concret developed into Abstraction-Création.^[fig.117] It should be noted that the principle members Doesburg chose for Art Concret were Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Joaquín Torres García (1874-1934), an artist from Uruguay who was active in Catalonia.^[fig.118] Taeuber-Arp invited Doesburg to collaborate with her and Hans Arp on designing the dance hall Café de l'Aubette in Strasburg. García was an astoundingly productive theorist with more than 150 publications under his name. He worked with Gaudí, and constantly moved from one city to another: Barcelona, New York, Paris. In New York, he collaborated with Société Anonyme created by Duchamp and others. García's singular style which he had attained by the mid-1920s appeared to be an attempt to reconstruct the world digitally, or resembled abstract yet tactile building blocks that also bring to mind the Kachina dolls of the Hopi people. In fact, around this time, García also created toys which became extremely popular. Similar to the toys made by Taeuber-Arp, the Futurist Fortunato Depero (1892-1960)^[fig.119], Rodchenko, or the puppets Klee made for his son Felix^[fig.120], García's toys exemplified the fundamental connection between the concreteness of avant-garde art and children's toys. Doesburg and García eventually parted ways, and Art Concret was disbanded. In the immediate aftermath, García created another group *Cercle et Carré*, which Doesburg followed by founding Abstraction-Création. Hans and Sophie Taeuber-Arp participated in both groups.

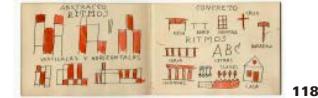
Also in 1931, parallel to Abstraction-Création, the British art critic and anarchist Herbert Read (1893-1968) created *Unit One* ^[fig.121] in England. In this way, abstract art with concrete impact (that worked upon children) spread in the eve of World War II.

We can say that the formation of Nika Kyūshitsu-kai in 1933 and the Jiyū Bijyutsuka Kyōkai [Free Artist Association] in 1937 corresponded precisely to what was happening with the new abstract art in Europe. At the center of this development were artists of the generation after Murayama: Yoshishige Saito (1904-2001), Jirō Yoshihara (1905-1972), Saburō Hasegawa (1906-1957), and Ei-Q (1911-1960). These younger artists had completely internalized the concrete abstract perspective which regards the world as a transformation group.

Jirō Yoshihara, who established the Gutai Art Association after the war, had been interested in the British avant-garde movement since Vorticism (Yoshihara derived the concept of Gutai from Abstraction-Création and other similar approaches). *Unit One*, edited by Herbert Read, was his favorite journal. In Yoshihara's works up to the mid-1930s, one can observe a resonance with Ben Nicholson (1894-1982)^[fig.122] or Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975)^[fig.123] who regarded landscape as a topological structure in which the real and imaginary spaces could be inverted.^{[fig.124]/[fig.125]} Around the same time, Yoshihara also painted beaches with diving equipment or anchors, or still life entangled with intestine-like clothes.^[fig.126] These paintings were deemed as being Surrealistic, but more accurately corresponded to the works of Edward Wadsworth (1889-1949), a member of *Unit One*, who painted a



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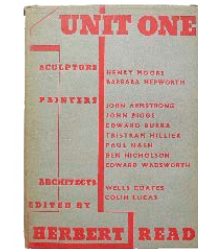
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harbor as if the scenery was the inside of a body with scattered organs.^[fig.127]

Saburō Hasegawa was an extremely speculative artist whose theory cast greater influence than Yoshihara's. Hasegawa was in Europe from 1929 to 31 and visited Mondrian's studio in Paris.^[fig.128] This visit was revelatory for Hasegawa, similar to Alexander Calder's experience who also visited Mondrian's atelier around the same time and received the inspiration for his "mobiles."^[fig.129]

What is significant about Hasegawa's works is their structure. As implied in the titles, *Chou no Kiseki*[Locus of a Butterfly] (1937)^[fig.130], *Tosei*[City Plan] (1937) [frontispiece 5], or *Shin Butsurigaku B*[New Physics B] (1937)^[fig.131], Hasegawa's works were based on networks—transportation systems or the eco-system of insects. As in Cat's Cradle, a game Hasegawa was fond of, space can freely be expanded, contracted, and folded, as long as the identity of the topological structure governing the activity of life is preserved. What Hasegawa focused on was a topological space devoid of determinate figures or scale. This was a highly flexible development of the method Duchamp initiated in *3 Standard Stoppages*(1913-14).^[fig.132]

In *Shu*(1936), rubber-band shaped irregular figures are scattered around two rectangular figures overlaid in diagonal, and footprints which were probably stamped with shoes with paint on the sole randomly spread across the canvas. This kind of structure which overlays contingent elements was most explicitly presented in the photographic series *Shitsunai*[Indoor], which Hasegawa collaborated with the photographer Minoru Sakata from Nagoya around 1940. This work, whose details were finally brought into light by meticulous research by Eri Taniguchi^[10], will probably become the most important key to understand what Hasegawa did. ^[fig. 133, 134] The works in this series were taken by Hasegawa rolling a sheet of newspaper (though crumpled, obviously reporting the tense political situation of the times^[11]) and throwing it randomly onto a tatami reminiscent of a Mondrian composition. This must have been the most adequate way to capture the contemporary world. Methodologically speaking, this presentation of events thrown into everyday life exceeds any realist painting.^[12]

When film, which excels photography by far, increasingly brings out its potentials, photographs— which must express in a single screen in an agglomerated manner— will need to turn to an extremely concentrated

10: Eri Taniguchi, "The Rehearsal Prints for *Shitsunai* Series and the Photographic Works of Hasegawa," *Bulletin of the National Art Center, Tokyo*, 3 (2016).

11: Eri Taniguchi verified that the crumpled newspaper was the Nagoya edition of "Osaka Mainichi Newspaper." (ibid)

12: Tomoko Yabumae writes: "For Hasegawa, taking a photograph was analogous to the creation of abstract paintings in its "scrutiny of reality"—the grasping of what lies beyond form. ("The Silence of Abstract Painting: Classicism and the Avant-garde for Saburō Hasegawa," *Classic Modern*, 2004)



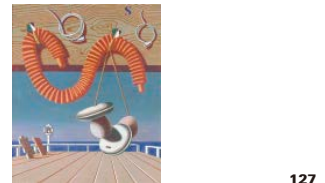
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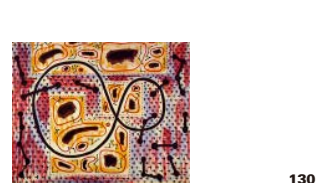
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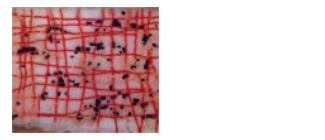
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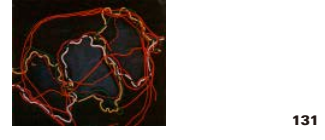
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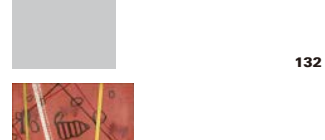
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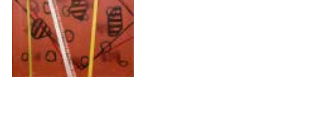
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form of expression. And it is for this reason that much more “abstraction,” so to speak, is demanded for photographs now than before film appeared.

(Saburō Hasegawa, “Atarashii Shashin to Kaiga” [New Photograph and Painting])

In general, what films can express and photographs cannot, is movement (recall the aforementioned attempt by Marey). Through this comparison with film, the significance Hasegawa conveyed in the term “abstraction” becomes evident. The weak point of the photographic device is the same as that of a classic painting employing perspective. Photographs singularly map objects from the exterior world onto the photographic screen via a fixed point of view. As long as the apparatus depends on this mechanism, photography, like the traditional painting of realism, is not an apt medium for expressing the contemporary world of perception. Hasegawa’s *Shitsunai* series opens up the fixed point of view to a variable function between the world and objects. The newspaper that is crumpled and thrown (like Duchamp’s *Stoppages*) denounces the contingent nature of daily events imprinted on it. On the contrary, the production method of this photograph series reveals a structure that is constant precisely because of its variability—like the one presented by the I Ching.

To live inside Mondrian’s patterns means to move around inside it. And if we move around, our system of perspective must change, leading to the emphasis and the enrichment of what is interesting about this extremely precise, straight line composition. The calculation of such change is based on I Ching (Book of Changes) from ancient China, which is a book on mathematical relationships with the material world. The rules of standard measurement are rigid, but contains all the possibilities of true creation.

(Saburō Hasegawa, “Watashi no Ie” [My House])

This passage reveals what the new structure that Hasegawa acquired from his 1930 visit to Mondrian’s studio was. The works by Wladyslaw Strzeminski (1893-1952)—who developed the theory of Unism in Poland—most approximates Hasegawa’s approach in the 1930s. Getting away from the influence of Suprematism by Malevich (also from Poland), Strzeminski attempted to install a non-Euclidian space inside his works along with his partner Katarzyna Kobro (1898-1951) and others. The space is variable, without having definite size or limit, and continues to transform itself. The work was conceived as a matrix that allowed perpetual transformation. Strzeminski and Kobro were friends with Taeuber-Arp and participated in Abstraction-Création.

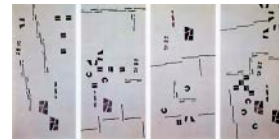
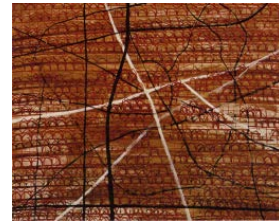
In order to create variable topological structures, Hasegawa developed a technique for prints he called “Multi-Block.” **[fig.135]** This method consisted in randomly scattering sculpted blocks of wood to produce different pictorial surfaces each time. Hasegawa used the term “environment,” but this was a method that could be applied to the composition of music or environmental



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design. The graphic notation of John Cage (1912-1992), who became friends with Hasegawa after the war, may have been inspired by the structure of the latter's work. (fig.136)

In the essay "New Photograph and Painting," Hasegawa discussed the potential he saw in the work of Ei-Q. Indeed, the most miraculous achievement in the grim period of the 1930s was attained by Ei-Q's photo-dessins.

Ei-Q began writing art criticism in 1927, when he was only 16, and started making photo-dessins from 1930 at age 19 through the influence from Man Ray's Rayographs or Moholy-Nagy's Photograms.

In January 1936, Ei-Q visited Hasegawa to show him a series of photo-dessins that would subsequently be brought together as *Nemuri no Riyū* [The Reason of Sleep] (1936) (fig.137)—and of course Hasegawa was not blind to their potential. In the following year, Jiyū Bijyutsuka Kyōkai [Free Artist Association] was established with Ei-Q as its member.

In Ei-Q's photo-dessin, objects pertaining to different temporalities (obviously lacking any common spatial scale), as well as the light shining on them which similarly pertains to different times, fill up a single screen, becoming an impossible single ray of light reflecting all components—a space and time that cannot be localized in any specific where and when. Nevertheless, these objects belonging to different dimensions breathe the same light together in the "here and now." This certainty is manifested with an astounding reality.

Ei-Q hated being compared to Man Ray's Rayograph. What probably resonated more with the thoughts of this artist, who like Ray learned Esperanto, was instead the Dimensionist manifesto which the Hungarian mathematician, poet, and art critic—and Moholy-Nagy's friend—Charles Sirató (1905-1980) published in Paris in 1936. (fig.138)

The manifesto claimed that literature must leave linear narrative and enter into a plane where multiple events can occur at once; paintings must leave the limitation of the plane and enter into space; sculptures to leave the closed, immobile forms and enter into a movement of distribution and density of particles. In short, it aimed to emancipate artworks from being situated within the tyranny of Euclidian space and time. Artworks thereby lose a fixed outline that can be measured definitely by the establishment, and become instead a universe which contains and generates the exterior world.

A list of well-known artists who signed the Dimensionist manifesto suggests who Ei-Q might have felt his peers were: Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Hans Arp, Picabia, Kandinsky, Robert Delaunay, Sonia Delaunay, Marcel Duchamp, Ben Nicholson, Alexander Calder, Joan Miro, Moholy-Nagy.



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11: The “Language of Vision” of the Second World War

The Second World War inevitably changed artists’ lives.

Fleeing from the Nazis who invaded Paris in 1940, Sophie Taeuber-Arp started a new art commune with Sonia Draunay and others in the Southern French town of Grasse. In 1942, however, she was forced to abandon the commune and move to Switzerland. Taeuber-Arp continued her work until her accidental death through carbon monoxide poisoning at the country house of Max Bill where she was visiting.

In 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and the war with the US starts. The government’s censorship of culture became increasingly severe, as the media kept pace by reiterating related propaganda. The discussion “National Defense Nation and Art: What Should a Painter Do Now?” published in the art journal *Mizue* in January 1941, 10 months before Japan launched into the Pacific War, is known as announcing a de facto censorship of most expressions by avant-garde artists. Kurazō Suzuki, the intelligence officer from the ministry of information threatened: “A painter who does not reflect upon the life of other citizens and selfishly draws geometric figures is utterly ridiculous. We should stop distributing paint to them.”

Many painters later recounted that they were stunned by this discussion and became anxious. Jirō Yoshihara was one of them. However, this did not lead directly to pandering to the current affairs and creating the so-called “Sensō-ga” [War Paintings]. Most of the abstract painters, including Saburō Hasegawa, Ei-Q, Takeo Yamaguchi and Masakazu Horiguchi, did not engage in the making of War Paintings. Neither did they convert to concrete style. The pressure and misunderstanding from the public were already factored in from the beginning of their activities. For better or worse, they considered themselves as elites and did not think they were expressing for the general public. In this way, the avant-garde artists shut themselves in their shells during the war and became lost in meditation.

But not all were engaged in such inactive forms of resistance. More theoretical abstract painters were determined that abstract expression was the most valid approach to grasp directly the complexity of the new battlefield. For instance, Saburō Hasegawa who visited strife-torn China in 1939, reached a conviction about being an abstract painter there, like Tomoko Yabumae^[13] pointed out: “The trip across the continent made me more of an ‘Abstractist.’ I no longer waver.”^[14]

This insight was also shared on the side of the regulating authority. The ministry of information deliberately criticized and ridiculed the intellectuals in public in order to win the hearts of the general public, but nevertheless was keen to use the most advanced techniques for expression in the actual

13: Ibid.

14: Saburō Hasegawa, *The World’s Classics (6) The Stone Buddha of Yungang Grottoes*.

information war. For instance, since 1934, the cabinet intelligence office had been publishing *NIPPON*, the propaganda journal for Japanese culture, under the leadership of photographer Yōnosuke Natori (1910-1962) who had learned Bauhaus style composition in Germany. (fig.139) After the war with the US started, they launched *FRONT* in 1942, another propaganda magazine for foreign countries designed using more daring Constructivist methods. (fig.140) Tohō-sha, the company commissioned to design and edit this magazine consisted of leftist editors and creators who were fluent in Russian. Despite or rather because of this, the ministry of information gave them the job. The ministry officials were shocked by the magnificent design of the Soviet magazine *СССР НА СТРОЙКЕ* (fig.141) designed by Constructivists such as Tatlin, Lissitzky, and Rodchenko, and wanted to make something that surpassed it. The fact that the leftist editors of Tohō-sha could read Russian and were informed about the most recent Soviet culture was therefore an advantage. The army on their part provided the latest cultural information to them.

What was a Constructivist design? In short, it was an expression of new technology, and of the entirely new spatial perception that such technology brought forth. In 1935, Kōshirō Onchi had already published *Hikō Kannō* [Flight Sensuality] in which he incorporated the new perception of space that airplanes realized. (fig.142) The novelty of space that flight presented was in the absence of a stable ground—in the literal sense of the word—which usually defines the spatial orientation of up, down, left, and right. An airplane loops, dives, flips over, while another plane flying nearby also shifts its spatial axis constantly. There is no stable perceptual space here. *FRONT* realized an expression that went far beyond Onchi's experiment in *Flight Sensuality*. In order to produce the fluid change of perspective, the pages were often divided in two layers, splitting the publication into two different magazines that proceeded following a separate pagination.

Needless to say, however, as Kurazō Suzuki made it explicit in the above-mentioned discussion, the media that the government officials thought most valid in the propaganda war was film. The military spared no expenses in funding film productions.

The most notable accomplishment was a series of films made by Kajirō Yamamoto: *Hawai Marei Oki Kaisen* [The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malaya] (1942), *Katō Hayabusa Sentō-Tai* [Colonel Katō's Falcon Squadron] (1944), and *Raigeki-Tai Syutsudō* [Torpedo Squadron] (1944). The special effects for these films were done by Eiji Tsuburaya who would later be known as the creator of Godzilla and other monster movies. (15) Akira Kurosawa was already active before the war as an assistant director to Kajirō Yamamoto, and had made several war effort movies such as *Uma* [Horse]. The most surprising thing, however, is that many of the aerial combat scenes in these films were shot using real fighter planes (the American planes were also actual



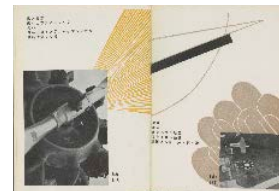
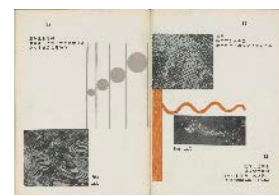
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ones captured in battles). The camera attached to the nose of the airplane realized an incredible view. [fig. 143] But even more than these dogfight scenes, the most impressive visual accomplishment achieved in *Colonel Katō's Falcon Squadron* was the scene of parachute squadron descending from the sky. [fig. 144] International law prohibited attack on descending paratroops because of their vulnerability. The parachuters therefore jumped from airplanes and freely wandered in air—a momentary intrusion of another temporality and space amidst the ongoing fierce battle. No other film has depicted such a scenery so magnificently (the “paratroop” issue of *FRONT* also put many great skills into its making but came nowhere close to this film.)

It goes without saying how much drawing power these national films had compared to paintings. There was no way for traditional, pre-19th century techniques of concrete paintings to express the new perception enabled by the new war—they had become obsolete. Indeed, most of the artists who made War Paintings were forced to merely copy photographs they saw in war journals (since they could not even see actual documentation of battles). In contrast, the expressions in photographic magazines such as *FRONT* or films like *Colonel Katō's Falcon Squadron* applied and further developed the accomplishments of abstract art and Constructivism in a broad sense. The conversion of painters from abstract to concrete painting only signified a backward step.

The designer, film maker, and art theorist György Kepes from Hungary—like Charles Sirató or Moholy Nagy—who had emigrated to Chicago because of the Second World War, thought it was obvious that the revolution of perceptual structure realized during the war was a grand scale manifestation of the new perception that had been announced by avant-garde art. Compared to Sirató, Kepes, who along with Moholy-Nagy was involved in the Dessau Bauhaus and later in the new Bauhaus in Chicago, was a rational realist with an engineer's mind.

As previously mentioned, the painters of Vorticism collaborated with the army to create camouflage patterns during the First World War. In 1942, Kepes and Moholy-Nagy were commissioned by the American army to develop techniques for camouflaging American cities. In the First World War camouflaging battle ships at sea was the most advanced endeavor; in the Second World War the frontline had moved to the disruption of the gaze from the sky. Through this project, Kepes had many chances to participate in experimental flights. Using this experience, he wrote the famous book *Language of Vision* in 1944, while the war was still going on.



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12: The “Specifics” of Post-War Art

In the expression genres whose utility was acknowledged, such as architecture, design, or film, the government made use of modern, and at times even avant-garde, techniques for war purposes. Many architects known as modernists were involved in the war, designing gliders or planning and constructing military facilities including storages and barracks. Of particular note is the fact that young Kenzō Tange, the architect who would lead post-war architecture, won several competitions for the planning and building of facilities to exalt national prestige.**[fig.146]** Similarly, Le Corbusier became close with Vichy France proposing projects to the government.**[fig.147]**

*The severely austere expression of modernist Art saw a useful application in the design of temporary shelters installed in extreme situations. Furthermore, there were perversions such as Italian Fascism which aestheticized Modernism as an ostentation of rationalism, a sublime expression hyperbolizing the expansion of reason.

These were obviously collaboration with wartime regimes, but contrary to artists and novelists whose conformity with or involvement in the war was largely criticized afterwards, designers, film directors, and architects who provided their techniques to war efforts were seldom criticized. The ambiguous attitude of regarding science and technology as being a-political and neutral was also displayed in Hayao Miyazaki’s *Kaze Tachinu* [The Wind Rises] (2013) which centered on the life of Jirō Horigoshi who designed the Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighter aircraft.

On the other hand, the hatred towards technology was displayed, for instance, in Heidegger’s philosophy. But the problem here, beyond the mere encompassment of technology by the establishment, was the Romantic aestheticization of technology which at times even took recourse to Heidegger’s own writings. All architects, designers, and film directors were Romanticists who dismissed their subjective responsibility through an irony backed up with aesthetics of the sublime, and in turn preserved their political position in an opportunistic manner.

In this sense, the last point of resistance against such devourment by technology during the war was in the aesthetics of Informel. As previously explained, Informel was one aspect in the idea of Concrete which thoroughly emphasized the incommensurability of matter—something that exists as an entirely different circuitry, incomprehensible and unconnectable. Even if it thought or felt, there was no possibility to empathize with it.

Nevertheless, its existence as a substantial mass could not be negated. Early expressions of such incommensurable domain can be seen in the works of Jean Fautrier (1898-1964)**[fig.88]** or Lucio Fontana (1899-1968)**[fig.89]** from the 1940s. Fautrier’s work regarded the non-visual space—shadows and



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voids—surrounding visual objects as substantial entities of their own and endowed tactility to them. This was a character that emerged earlier in the works of Kazuo Sakata or Morandi.

The notion of *Mukei* had already been discovered in Japan by Ryūsei Kishida, as stated before. It was Ai-mitsu (1907-1946) who developed Kishida’s aesthetics in Japan during the war. His screen created by crayons and beeswax brimmed with intense reality but was devoid of any explicit form; the texture of the screen was dissolved and became indistinguishable from deep darkness.**[fig.148]**

In the 1940s, Lucio Fontana, who also had participated in Abstraction-Création, moved from the creation of elusive, seemingly aborted figures to the intense presentation of negative space generated by slashing a canvas or some lump material. The autonomy of this negative space as its own world endows it the contradictory characteristic of being void as well as fraught.

Such expressions of Informel became stylized after the Second World War, and many artists appeared as part of the Art Informel movement which went on to dominate the market. This was simultaneous with the rise of Abstract Expressionism in America, which also resonated together in terms of popularity in the art market. Art Informel as a style simplified the former theory of Informel, reducing it to a superficial gesture of negating all forms.

American Abstract Expressionism (if we were to follow the understanding of one of its main critics Clement Greenberg), succeeded in making works that could be appreciated by the public out of abstract art. Its accomplishment consisted in: 1) an adherence to vision, and 2) fidelity to the canvas frame as the regulative media of painting. A modernist painting for Greenberg was one that did not deviate from these two conditions—which are in essence mutually contradictory—and resolved (rendered into oblivion) the limits while remaining within those established boundaries. But his criteria depended on the existence of ideal or transcendental audience/connoisseur who was capable of grasping this accomplishment. The possibility for this audience-subject to change or to be criticized was never assumed.

In any case, both European Art Informel and American Abstract Expressionism demonstrated, more than anything, the emergence of a market where artworks (even those which continued the style of former avant-garde) could be exchanged in a stable manner. All the cries of anti-art or the sublime did not change the fact that audience could now appreciate art from a safe distance.

In the 1960s, such intellectualism became criticized once again.**[16]** Neo-dadaism emerged and works using daily, three-dimensional objects proliferated. The Minimal artist and polemicist Donald Judd (1928-1994) gave a name to these new works that appeared in the American contemporary art scene: “Specific Objects.” But his definition was extremely similar to the notion of “Concret” that Art Concret had previously presented.**[fig.149/fig.150]** Judd did not conduct a detailed inquiry into the question of what gave these new objects their clarity and intensity, but



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it was clear that those qualities were connected to the functional and physical interaction between the objects and humans (indeed, the characteristic of Neo-dadaist or Fluxus works was in their direct influence and inspiration on the body rather than semantic and semiotic significance).

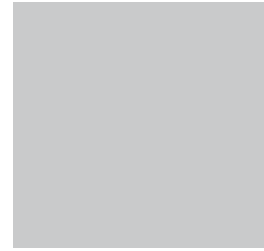
As Judd himself acknowledged, the precursors of Minimal Art already existed in the 1950s, such as Agnes Martin (1912-2004) or Carmen Herrera (1915-), who has only recently been rediscovered and celebrated (she is over 100 years old).^[fig.151] But more accurately speaking, these artists are not the precursors of Minimal Art. Instead, what their works reveal is that the activities and philosophies of Hilma af Klint and Sophie Taeuber-Arp^[fig.152] have been passed on and continued without a break.^[17]17: The list of artist who were influenced, either directly or indirectly, from Sophie Taeuber-Arp is endless. They include, for instance, Louise Nevelson (1899-1988), Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975), Meret Oppenheim (1913-1985), and Eva Hesse (1936-1970).

And if we were to regard Klint and Taeuber-Arp as the true precursors, we must also recognize in a “specific” manner that the roots of Minimal Art lay in the other lineage of modernist art, which extended more broadly and more radically than the narrow confines of “art.”

16: It was the American collectors like Oliver Statler who visited Japan under the American occupation after the Second World War who discovered the potentials of Onchi, Ei-Q, and Hasegawa's works. The mediator of this discovery was the later abstract woodcut artist Ansei Uchima (1921-2000) who was in Japan at the time. Uchima was born in California from Japanese descent, and moved to Japan to study architecture in 1940, just before the commencement of the Pacific War. He went to Manual Art High School, known as the school where Philip Guston and Jackson Pollock also attended. This allowed Uchima to witness in close proximity the rise of Abstract Expressionism among artists who were one generation older than him. Uchima remained in Japan during the war and began his career as a painter. For Uchima, who also studied architecture, the individualism of Abstract Expressionism which solely relies on the subjectivity and improvisational judgment of the painter was something he aimed to overcome. Statler's *Modern Japanese Prints: An Art Reborn* (1959), which Uchima translated and assisted, became a very influential book.

Uchima saw in the creative prints of Onchi and others a potential to overcome Abstract Expressionism. Statler's book begins by quoting Onchi's words: “Hanga print therefore enables the simultaneous expression of phenomena pertaining to different time and space, and structurally organizes all the seemingly contingent phenomena that occurs in a determinate manner (otherwise Hanga cannot be made).” To produce improvisational contingency from a deterministic method may sound contradictory. Yet, Onchi's words were based on the very specificity of the woodcut technique which generates a screen that does not exist in the original panel by arranging multiple different wood panels. Statler's book also presents a detailed analysis of Onchi's *Poem Number 22: Leaf and Clouds* made by his Multi-Block technique.

Many artists associated with Pop Art in the 1960s focused on the creation of prints as the source of their technique. It should be noted that many of them were from the same generation which participated in the Post-War occupation of Japan and Korea when “Sōsaku Hanga [Creative Print]” were becoming popular and related exhibitions were frequently held in institutions belonging to the American military. For instance, Jasper Johns (1931-) was actually in Japan as part of the occupying troops; Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997) is three years younger than Uchima.



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