

## CHAPTER 2: A HISTORY OF DISCOURSE – EAST WEST AND BACK AGAIN

If I had been born in China, I would have been a calligrapher, not a painter.  
Pablo Picasso<sup>1</sup>

The salient feature of Taoism's influence on Western art is its oblique 'infusion' rather than direct impact, yet from first contact between Europe and China each society powerfully influenced the other. The objective of this chapter is to provide a time line in historical terms that signals the significant events that drove this exchange, and the aspects of China's philosophical and material culture derived from Taoism that as an outcome of contact, were a fascinating stimulus to Western artists and thinkers. Taoism, as one of China's principle indigenous philosophies, from early contact to now, has had an accumulative effect upon the development of Western culture. These "rhizomes" of influential exchange will be followed in turn to the present.<sup>2</sup> Arguably, this influence in hybrid and watered down forms is now so intrinsic to the norm in the West, that to distil it, to define it, is a forensic task with a high degree of ambiguity. My approach is to look to the visual arts as a mirror of the rich resonances this mingling and merging have wrought throughout approximately six hundred years of discourse, despite initial, seemingly impenetrable difference, periodic cultural misunderstandings, clashes, wars, trade embargos, revolution and policies of isolationism.

The method used to trace the history of Taoist influences in this chapter closely parallels the structural, multi-dimensional process metaphorically described as a rhizome in *One Thousand Plateaux: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* by French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, and the psychoanalyst, Félix Guattari.<sup>3</sup> The rhizomes map an expanding network of dissemination from the East to the West then back again, with repercussive seepages. Similarly, the chapters interlace and overlap at

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon S. Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 2002, University of California Press. Pp 11, 53, 57. Picasso made this observation when he met Prof. Zhang Ding, President of the Central Academy of Design, Beijing, in Paris, 1956.

<http://www.fathom.com/course/21701734/session1.html> Cited May 2008

<sup>2</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari. (1993) *A Thousand Plateaux: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by B. Massumi: University of Minnesota Press. Page 8 of Introduction. See the paragraph below for a summarised explanation of the term, "rhizome"

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. See page 86 for the detailed rationale for this methodology.

many points of commonality and inter-relatedness, so the “rhizomes” thread through the whole document showing the complexity of this cultural exchange.

Central to this research is the early cultural impact in colonial times of the West’s contact with China and its principal indigenous cultural practice, Taoism, expressed in European artefacts through Chinoiserie (*Fig. 2*).<sup>4</sup> It is proposed here that this has had a profound influence on Western contemporary sculptural practice.<sup>5</sup> The history of the direct



*Fig 1:* English willow pattern showing the spatial features of a Chinese garden based on feng shui principles such as meandering paths, a narrative structure, architectural follies, latticed walkways, and complex interactions of the elements water, earth and air (see page 14). Swirling dragon fumes on the plate’s border pattern quote the longevity character (see Chapter Four).

and indirect influences of the complex spatiality, placement, materiality and narrative structure in Chinese gardens is traced and elaborated upon in the analysis of earthworks, or land art, and installations of artists such as Ian Hamilton-Finlay, Isamu Noguchi, Donald Judd, Fiona Hall, Rachel Whiteread, as well as my own art practice, from 1969 to 2009, which threads throughout the document. The development of my artwork during this extended period tracks the influence of Taoism on an Australian artist engaged in installation art from the late nineteen-sixties.

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<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the most well known Chinoiserie is crockery decorated with the blue and white Willow Pattern. It was designed by Englishman, Thomas Minton circa 1790 and depicts a love fable, perhaps based on an ancient Chinese story. Plates feature the quotation of a Chinese longevity character around the border (see Chapter Four). Ref. Lucienne Fontannaz, Barbara Ker Wilson, 1978, *The Willow Pattern Story*, Angus and Robertson, Australia.  
<http://www.thepotteries.org/patterns/willow.html> Cited June, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Jurgis Baltrusatis, *Aberrations: an Essay on the Legend of Forms*, (1989). Trans. Richard Miller. Pub., Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press. See Chapter entitled *Gardens and Lands of Illusion*. Pp 138 – 181.

The various rhizomic tendrils of Taoist influence on the West began with traders bringing exotic curiosities and stories of wondrous marvels back to Europe. The Jesuit missionaries followed. Communication of their understandings of Taoist concepts and methods included *feng shui* garden art, which was interpreted in European gardens as Chinoiserie. It will be proposed in this chapter (page 3) that aspects of this eighteenth century fashion informed the development of contemporary installation art in the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> The influence of Taoism on the sixteenth century German philosopher, Leibniz, is outlined in this chapter (page 31), whose monad theories began a non-Cartesian strand of Western philosophy pointing to future developments such as sub-atomic physics in science, and the relational philosophy of Whitehead in the early twentieth century which influenced his contemporaries, including artists. Significant thinkers such as Carl Jung were similarly influenced by Taoist texts. How Jungian theories, arising from this discourse, influenced artists is examined in this chapter (page 34). The influence of the Taoist art form, calligraphy, and Chinese brush and ink painting on Modernist artists in Europe and Australia is described, as is the implications of it, leading to Abstract Expressionism in the United States of America.

The historical relationship of Zen Buddhism to Taoist philosophy and practices is established in this chapter (page 16), and through this, the indirect impact of Taoism on post World War Two art movements, focusing on the Fluxus Movement as an international development in experimental visual arts practice which is of immense future consequence for installation art (page 42). The relationship of these Taoist strands on the development of installation art are drawn to a complete circle in the homeland of Taoism with the emergence in the mid nineteen-eighties of the New Wave Movement, a dynamic development of contemporary experimental art in China (page 61).

### **RHIZOME #1: Chinoiserie and Zen, installation art and earthworks**

Western traders journeyed to East Asia as early as the sixteenth century but reliable records of European contact started with the arrival in China of Jesuit missionaries in the last years of the sixteenth century.<sup>7</sup> The Jesuit Order was created in 1534 by

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<sup>6</sup> Jacqueline Baas, *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today* (2005), University of California Press. Pp 4 – 8; P 13, “Almost three centuries ago Chinese Taoist and Buddhist concepts of landscape design played a role in changing the character of European gardens from Classical order to Romantic disorder.”

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, translated by J. R. Foster and Charles Hartman, (1982), Cambridge University Press. Chapter 21.

Ignatius Loyola specifically for the conversion of 'pagans'.<sup>8</sup> Jacque Gernet, in *A History of Chinese Civilization*, quantifies an equal exchange of knowledge, the Chinese having superior technologies in aspects of agricultural technologies and methods, weaving, ceramics, iron and steel processing and manufacture, suspension bridge building, river transport and boat design, some armaments, inventions such as the umbrella, compass and wheelbarrow, inks, brushes, papers and wood block printing.<sup>9</sup> Jesuit missionaries held important advisory positions to the Emperor as mathematicians, astronomers, cartographers, interpreters, painters and musicians.<sup>10</sup> They sent documents and artefacts back to their home countries describing what they understood of this exotic culture. For example, in the eighteenth century, French Jesuits living in China sent descriptions of Chinese gardens back to Europe where they coincided with many of the Roccoco ideas adopted in English landscape gardening, most famously associated with the stroll gardens, also called pleasure gardens, and philosophical gardens.<sup>11</sup> Chinoiserie proved to be an enduring phase in European garden art; various books on the subject, notably Georges-Louis Le Rouge's *Jardins Anglo-Chinois* (1776),<sup>12</sup> and William Chambers's *Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (1772),<sup>13</sup> were published and repeatedly re-printed.

Chinoiserie is the first rhizomic tendril to be followed to trace the influence of Taoism in the West on contemporary experimental art practice. The concept of the 'untamed' garden<sup>14</sup> was essentially an exotic concept in Europe that often represented the four corners of the earth, a celebration of the West's exploration and colonisation of hitherto unknown cultures. "Of the four corners of the earth contained within the garden, one, the Orient, China, began to assume a predominant importance, not only with its monuments but also in hidden ways," wrote William Temple, an architect,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. P 449.

<sup>9</sup> See also, Robert K. G. Temple, *The Genius of China: 3,000 Years of Science, Discovery and Invention*; Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, 1954, University of California Press.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, translated by J. R. Foster and Charles Hartman, (1982), Cambridge University Press. P 450.

<sup>11</sup> Susan Stewart, *Garden Agon*, Representations, No. 62 (Spring, 1998), pp. 111 – 143. Pub. University of California Press.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.flickr.com/photos/pruned/1454431872/in/set-72157602182085548/> Image of the Chinese Pavilion at Desert de Retz, seen from the entry side, as recorded in *Jardins Anglo-Chinois* by George Le Rouge, 1785. Cited June 2008.

<http://www.geocities.com/rwkenyon/welcome.htm> Cited August, 2008

<sup>13</sup> William Chambers, *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening*, (first published, London, 1772). Pub. Farnborough, Gregg, 1972.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. P157. Also called a pleasure garden, philosopher's garden, and stroll garden as above.

who had travelled to China three times between 1742 and 1749 on the boats of the Swedish East India Company (*Fig 2, Fig 3, Fig 4*).<sup>15</sup> He wrote:

The Chinese devote their entire minds, which are extremely inventive, to imagining shapes that will be of great beauty and that will astonish the eye, but which will not be redolent of the order and arrangement that immediately attracts the attention. ... Beauty of this sort ... is in no way regular or orderly.



*Fig 2:* Chinese house at Desert de Retz, photographed circa 1900. This stroll garden (1774) outside Paris, was created by wealthy aristocrat, François Racine de Monville (1734-1797). It represented the known world featuring a residence in the form of a broken Doric column, a Gothic ruin, a pyramid ice house, Tar Tar tent, a Greek pagoda used for music performances, and a wooden Chinese house, the first in Europe, that unfortunately disintegrated and was destroyed.

Winding paths, seemingly randomly placed features such as natural rocks, and rocks that were sculpted into fantastic shapes, pavilions and bridges, arbours, punctuated Chinese gardens' spatiality. The origin of this emphasis on studied placement was Taoist *feng shui*.<sup>16</sup> The objective of *feng shui*, known as 'the art of placement', is to balance and integrate the binaries symbolic of earth and the firmament using *noumenon*, or intuitive perception, rather than rational measurement. The objective is

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. Pp 158, 162.

<sup>16</sup> *Feng shui* (Ch). *feng* – wind, *shui*, - water; it is a method of balancing energy to harmonise surroundings by the placement of objects to articulate spatiality. Also known as geomancy.

to create an ephemeral, spontaneous unity of elements endowed with a controlled but free flow of *ch'i*, the energy of life forces, to represent wild nature.<sup>17</sup>

Chinese gardens were inhabited, incorporating domestic architecture and cultural venues, whereas European gardens were designed principally for leisure activity and aesthetics (*Fig 2*).

The style of Chinese gardens was quite a departure from the geometry of formal European gardens such as André Le Nôtre's design for the gardens of Versailles, the residence of Louis XIV,<sup>18</sup> which signified a mastery of nature, "order in opposition to nature" (*Fig 3*).<sup>19</sup>



*Fig 3:* Garden of the Chateau de Versailles, by Andre Le Notre, at Versailles, France, 1661 to 1774. The close clipped lawns, parterre, symmetrical geometry expressed a mastery of nature's disorder, an imposition of rationality in contrast to Taoism's articulations of the garden as a poetic, habitable fantasy. The first critique of the Versailles garden in 1755 described it as sad and boring.<sup>20</sup> Photo by Paul Payad

A special expression was used to refer to the beauty of Chinese disorder – *Sharawadji*, which has three interpretations: *sa-ra(k)wai-chi* (China), meaning 'disordered grace'; *sarowandji* (Japan), meaning 'asymmetrical design'; *san-lan-wai-*

<sup>17</sup> It is here that garden art coalesces with the objectives of Chinese landscape painting and calligraphy, to be discussed below in the section, Garden Art, Chinese Painting And Calligraphy Coalesce, page 43.

<sup>18</sup> André Le Nôtre, 1613 – 1700. French landscape architect for Louis the Fourteenth. See Frances Ya-Sing Tsu, (1988) *Landscape Design in Chinese Gardens*. McGraw-Hill Book Company, United States of America. Chapter Three, *Comparison of the Chinese and European Garden*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* P 24.

<sup>20</sup> Père M. A. Laugier, *Essay sur L'Architecture*, (Paris, 1755), pp 241 ff. From Jurgis Baltrusatis, *Aberrations: an Essay on the Legend of Forms* (1989). Translated by R. Miller, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press. P 161.

*chi* (China), meaning 'large and dispersed compositions'.<sup>21</sup> These compositions created scenes of fantastic diversion, some designed to enhance seasonal change, some the time of day; a setting might capture aesthetic contrasts such as light and shade, or life's drama and entertainment. Words and text take part in this theatre. A Chinese garden is completed by a naming ceremony where participants, after perambulating the garden, decide upon the most appropriate word to encapsulate a literary allusion. The calligraphic word or poem is then cut in stone and set in the garden.<sup>22</sup> Together the cultivated episodes create a narrative animated by architecture, specific plantings, geological features, and above all an articulation of spatiality in which the Chinese gardeners' imaginations are given "free reign ... like poets, and even fly beyond the limits of imagination."<sup>23</sup>

One of the immediate legacies of this exposure to Chinese artefacts was an exuberant flowering of European imaginations. For example Watteau's fabulous interpretations of all things Chinese were secular, romantic, distorting space and proportion with a freedom the usual subjects, religious, historical, did not allow. "... Western decorators found that the apparent freedom of oriental art from all rules of proportion and structural logic, and its rich variety of novel motifs, made it peculiarly adaptable to a purely ornamental role".<sup>24</sup>

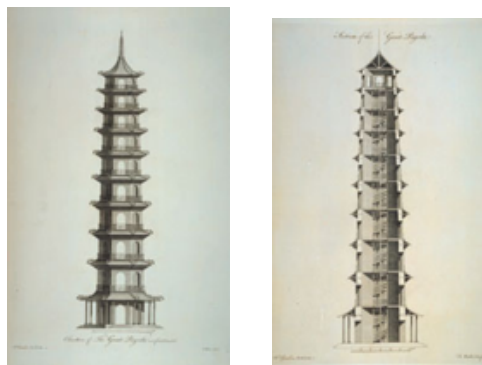


Fig 4: Illustrations of the Chinese Pagoda designed by Sir William Chambers for Kew Gardens, Kew, England, 1762.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. P 158.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Jencks, *The Garden of Cosmic Speculation* (2003), pub. Francis Lincoln Ltd. London. Pp 44, 45.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p 162. William Chambers quoting a Chinese painter, Lepqua, whom he had met, who placed garden art at a very high level.

<sup>24</sup> Prudence R. Myer, *Images and Influences of Oriental Art: A Study in European Taste*. Art Journal, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Summer, 1961). Pub. College Art Association. Pp 203 – 210.

Samual Coleridge's poem *Xanadu*,<sup>25</sup> written in 1798, expresses the episodic composition of Chinese gardens, and an Englishman's imaginative fascination with Chinoiserie.

The shadow of the dome of pleasure  
Floated midway on the waves;  
Where was heard the mingled measure  
From the fountain and the caves.  
It was a miracle of rare device,  
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!<sup>26</sup>

The eighteenth century Chinoiserie that survives in English gardens today is no match for Coleridge's conception. For example, the Chinoiserie dairy at Woburn Abbey, England, has Chinese-like motifs on the tip-tilted eaves of the tower and latticed railings (*Fig 5*).



*Fig 5:* The Chinoiserie dairy at Woburn Abbey, England, reflected in a pond. Photo. B. Ely, 1996.

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<sup>25</sup> [http://www.poetry-online.org/coleridge\\_kubla\\_khan.htm](http://www.poetry-online.org/coleridge_kubla_khan.htm) Cited July 2008.

<sup>26</sup> Narrative episodes in the composition of Chinese gardens reportedly included foundries and glass kilns in caverns from which flames and smoke poured, contrasting the abject and sublime with the exquisite and vernacular.





Fig 6: Chinoiserie at Wilton House, England.

Photo. B. Ely, 1996.

The Chinoiserie in the garden of Wilton House, England, shows an understanding of how a Chinese garden might be composed of a wandering stream of water with curved bridges spanning from earth to earth, the path winding through to slow the passage of energy, or *ch'i*, to a harmonious pace (Fig 6).

The origin of these devices in China, are to be found today in Gongwangfu, the traditional garden of Prince Gong in Beijing (Fig 7, Fig 8, Fig 9, Fig 10, Fig 11).<sup>27</sup>



Fig 7: The grotto in Prince Gong's garden in Beijing is constructed from imported natural rocks and contains a stone inscribed with a calligraphic character written by the Emperor. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

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<sup>27</sup> Peter Valder, *Gardens in China* (2002), pub. Florilegium, Sydney, Australia. Pp 148 – 153.



*Fig 8:* At Stourhead, England, the grotto is similarly constructed from imported stones, but contains a Greek goddess. Photo. B. Ely, 1996.



*Fig 9:* Prince Gong's garden in Beijing. An architectural folly is raised high above a lake where rooftops become integrated like the ground plane space of a continuing landscape. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.



*Fig 10:* Prince Gong's garden in Beijing. A boat house reflected in a small lake is joined to the bank by a curving bridge, linking the elements, water and earth. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.



*Fig 11:* Prince Gong's garden in Beijing. A folly in the form of the Great Wall of China gives an aerial view of the garden. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

It is argued in this chapter that the episodic narratives and conceptualised form of Chinese gardening, described above, has influenced contemporary installation art and earthworks (or land art). For example, Scottish artist, Ian Hamilton-Finley's profound understanding of the tradition of these eighteenth century English gardens that were compositionally influenced by Chinese garden art provides a model for the episodic narrative of his artwork, *Little Sparta*,<sup>28</sup> which is a garden combining concrete poetry, plantings, installed sculpture and follies (*Fig 12, Fig 13*).<sup>29</sup> In her article, *Garden Agon*, Susan Stewart describes Hamilton-Finley's garden as:

<sup>28</sup> Ian Hamilton-Finley (1925-2006). *Little Sparta*, Pentland Hills of Southern Scotland. Begun in 1966.

<sup>29</sup> For references to text in Chinese gardens and their influence on Hamilton-Finley see Charles Jencks, *The Garden of Cosmic Speculation* (2003), pub. Francis Lincoln Ltd. London. P 44.



a living repository of the history of gardens in their poetic and philosophical aspects ... The themes of justice and virtue extend ... to the great philosophy gardens of the eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

Stewart cites the following eighteenth century stroll gardens, William Shenstone's The Leasowes, Stowe under Richard Temple (Lord Cobham) and William Kent, and Stourhead (**Error! Reference source not found.**), designed by Henry Hoare II and Henry Flitcroft, architect (1741 to 1765), as precedents for Hamilton-Finlay's *Little Sparta*. His garden cannot be categorised as an earthwork, and if another category is to be applied, it is that of a concrete poem inscribed upon the landscape: "an ideal and radical space, a space of the mind beyond sight or touch."<sup>31</sup>



Fig 12: *That which joins and that which divides is one and the same.* Ian Hamilton Finlay's *Little Sparta*, showing his use of concrete poetry and binaries, which are reminiscent of Taoist gardener's strategies to integrate artifice with natural order, order with disorder, and inscribe landscape with meaning.



Fig 13: Ian Hamilton Finlay's garden, *Little Sparta*, featuring concrete poetry and sculpture.

<sup>30</sup> Susan Stewart, *Garden Agon*, Representations, No. 62 (Spring, 1998). Pub. University of California Press. P 119.

<sup>31</sup> [http://www.ianhamiltonfinlay.com/ian\\_hamilton\\_finlay.html](http://www.ianhamiltonfinlay.com/ian_hamilton_finlay.html) Cited, July 2008.

“Space”, or more precisely *spatiality*, defined as encoded qualities of space as an element of expression comparable to colour, line, and form in the visual arts, rather than space as a common, generalised phenomena, is the key to discerning the Taoist precepts embedded in this garden, in which winding paths, borrowed landscape and unexpected features conceptually and aesthetically engage the viewer. Text punctuates the viewer’s perambulations; plaques, benches, headstones, obelisks, planters, bridges and tree-column bases all carry words or other signage, and although *Little Sparta* is devoted to questioning “assumptions of historical knowledge as a model for virtuous action”,<sup>32</sup> using allusions in the style of text to the Enlightenment to amplify his anti-war concrete poetry (driven by Hamilton-Finlay’s experiences during the Second World War), the formal composition of the garden’s spatiality has its origins in the influence of Chinese gardens upon eighteenth century garden design.

Past research of the articulation of spatiality as both a vehicle of expression and a cultural construct as it appears in specific sites, included European stroll gardens in 1996, and Japanese Zen gardens in 1993. This research established a provenance for aspects of installation art.<sup>33</sup> With reference to the section *Rhizome #2: Buddha to Tao, to Ch’en to Zen* (page 16), which details how Zen Buddhism, called *Ch’en* Buddhism in China,<sup>34</sup> evolved from a melding of India’s Buddhism, and Taoism, a summary of this past research of spatiality and the provenance of installation art follows.<sup>35</sup>

#### KU – NOTHINGNESS, THE VOID

The *void* or *nothingness* of Taoist iconography is the equivalent of the Japanese spatial concept of *ku*, metaphorically expressed in both cultures by the blank page in the calligrapher’s art, silence in drama and music, the placement of objects to enhance the perception of qualities of spatiality in gardens. These aesthetic, formal

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<sup>32</sup> Susan Stewart, *Garden Agon*, Representations, No. 62 (Spring, 1998). Pub. University of California Press. P 122.

<sup>33</sup> This research was published in TAASA journal, the peer reviewed journal of the Asian Art Society of Australia in the following articles: Ely, B. (1998), *Two Gardens and a Wasteland In LA*, TAASA Review: the Journal of the Asian Arts Society of Australia, Vol. 7, No. 2. Ely, B. (1997), *The Spatiality of Hindu Temples, Southern India*, TAASA Review: the Journal of the Asian Arts Society of Australia, Vol. 6, No. 4, P. 10 -11. An outcome of this research was a series of installations entitled *Sleepers/Ties* executed in Los Angeles in 1993, 1994, that investigated Zen Buddhist concepts, with their origins in Taoism.

<sup>34</sup> Also known as Ch’an, Chen and Chan Buddhism.

<sup>35</sup> Material from this earlier research is excluded as irrelevant to this research topic about the conceptual construction of spatiality in non-Eastern cultures such as in Hindu temples in Southern India and the story lines of Ngaanyatjarra peoples of the Gibson Desert, West Australia.

devices in Taoist and Zen Buddhist art are a metaphor for a state of unity where existence and non existence co-exist, a non dualistic way of thinking about the nature of the cosmos. *Ku* represents a perception of the universe that embraces contradiction and paradox<sup>36</sup> and is captured most precisely by the *yin yang* symbol, which frequently appears in Zen iconography. Unlike the Western sculptural tradition where the object (positive, figure) is emphasised and spatiality is perceived as the background (negative, ground), in Eastern art forms the encoded object acts as a formal catalyst to animate and emphasise spatiality as the subject of meaning and contemplation. This switch of emphasis as an objective of installation art,<sup>37</sup> where the *ground* becomes a positive, aesthetic vehicle for meaning, can be attributed to Western artists' exposure to Eastern tropes, with their origin in Taoism.

#### MA – THE IN-BETWEEN ZONE

Another significant concept embedded in Taoist and Zen spatiality is expressed in the Japanese word, *ma*, which expresses the quality of being *in-between*. This is expressed as a spatiality that is neither inside nor outside, such as a latticed open corridor (*Fig 14*), intermediary zones between public and private spaces in architecture, garden design and urban planning, tones of grey,<sup>38</sup> a temporal interval between two contrasting phenomenon, such as water and land, or dimensions of varying nature, such as the depth of a pond's still water and its reflective surface of the space above.<sup>39</sup> The ambiguous, the non-absolutist qualities of *ma* characterise the strategy of the installation artist, where the viewer is both observer and participant, and aesthetics are deployed to achieve paradox rather than orthodox.

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<sup>36</sup>Kishu Kurokawa, *Rediscovering Japanese Space* (1988). Pub. John Wetherall Inc., New York. Pp 19 – 21, 55.

<sup>37</sup> See Donald Judd's statements that align with Taoist cultural practices, about the development of his changing perceptions of spatiality, along with other similar statements by Minimalist artists, in Chapter Five.

<sup>38</sup> Kishu Kurokawa, *Rediscovering Japanese Space* (1988). Pub. John Wetherall Inc., New York. *Rikyu nezumi* (tones of grey) is the restrained colour of traditional clothing for the Japanese tea ceremony. P 61.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* Pp 19 – 21.



*Fig 14* : A latticed covered walk way in Prince Gong's garden in Beijing provides a space expressive of the Japanese spatial concept of *ma*, in between the garden and architecture, simultaneously inside and outside, an ambiguous space that provides the experience of being in accord with the Taoist precept that opposites unify to form a harmonious whole. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

#### WABI SABI – SOLITUDE AND AUSTERITY, CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Another aesthetic form commonly associated with Japanese Zen, *wabi sabi*,<sup>40</sup> may be seen to be implicated in contemporary experimental art practice (**Error! Reference source not found.**). *Wabi sabi* is by no means a concept expressed in the aestheticised processes of aging and decay in Taoist art forms as it is in Japan, but conceptually, it has resonance in Taoism. Aesthetically, *wabi* has become associated with the austere, unadorned, simple qualities of Japanese tea houses and traditional farm house architecture. In his book *Rediscovering Japanese Space*, Japanese architect Kishu Kurakawa argues that it is more complex than that. Qualities of light and setting may produce the effect of *wabi*, defined as the *renunciation of luxury and a feeling of solitude*, by subduing the unrestrained, highly decorative, so that it may be a context that denotes solitude and restraint. Qualities of *sabi*, denoting *ceaseless change within continuity*, are matched with *wabi* to evoke a sensibility that appreciates the aging process, and the solemnity of traditional forms, alongside phenomena of the present, of 'Now', and possibilities for the future. The installation artist 'borrows' the existing context of their artwork, its *wabi sabi*, or creates an immersive context for the viewer as a signifier for contemplation conjoined with active interaction that may include kine aesthetics, moving image, performance, sound. That is, ceaseless movement within stasis, continuity.<sup>41</sup>

Like the Eastern garden designer, the installation artist articulates real space, the placement of form and imagery, temporal elements of expression – serial variations,

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. Pp 70 – 77.

<sup>41</sup> See Chapters Five, Six and Seven for further discussion and examples.

duration, narrative, movement or kine-aesthesia, proprioception - to provide a metonymic catalyst for viewers' interpolations derived from their peripatetic engagement, if not physical immersion in the space, perceiving into as a part of the whole, rather than perceiving from the outside, looking at.

Perhaps most significantly for experimental contemporary art practice, the influence on the art form, installation art, of these aspects of Taoism's concepts of temporality and spatiality, derived in part from the *feng shui* of Chinese garden art, is the shift to metonymy instead of metaphor to embody meaning.<sup>42</sup> Direct, corporeal, subjective experience of the artwork as a perceptual encounter of real, not illusionary, temporal and spatial dimensions, where the viewer brings to the artwork's precise, conceptualised structure their own interpretations, the voice of the artist is a catalyst for the viewer's response, rather than a authoritative directive laced into a lexicon of metaphor that often requires a particular cultural knowledge.<sup>43</sup> This shift is particularly pertinent to the globalisation of experimental contemporary art in that cross cultural interpretations of artworks, from inside a culture or outside, are equally valid.

Having introduced these formal tropes common to Taoist and Zen Buddhist cultural practices (*ku, ma, wabi sabi*), the inter-relationship of Taoism and Zen, and their impact on experimental contemporary Western art is the next historical *rhizome* to be followed.

## **RHIZOME #2: Buddhism to Taoism to Ch'en to Zen**

Buddhism began to make its way into China from India in the first and second centuries of the Christian era.<sup>44</sup> An examination of its compatibilities with Taoism explain its rapid penetration of Chinese culture by the fourth century, and the development of a Chinese Buddhist sect that owed much to Taoism.<sup>45</sup> Correlations were close, for example, "Buddhism described itself as a path, or *tao*; it had its

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<sup>42</sup> Maaretta Jaukkura, *With Other Eyes* (1996). International Artist-In-Residence New Works 96.3. Pub. Artspace, San Antonio. <http://www.artpace.org/aboutTheExhibition.php?axid=176&sort=artist>

<sup>43</sup> Roland Barthes, *Death of the Author* (1968). *Image, Music, Text*. Ed. and trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill, 1977. In this essay Barthes diagnosed this approach, typified by artists such as Donald Judd, where the artist refuses to give categorical conceptual explanations of their artworks. Deleuzes also explored the subjective domain of art interpretation in *Repetition and Difference*, written in 1969. English translation, 1994 by Paul Patton, pub. 1994, Columbia University Press, NY.

<sup>44</sup> Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, translated by J. R. Foster and Charles Hartman, (1982), Cambridge University Press. P 153. See also Jacqueline Baas, *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today* (2005), University of California Press.

<sup>45</sup> Heinrich Dumoulin, *A History of Zen Buddhism*, 1963, translated by Paul Peachy. Pantheon Books, Random House, NY. P 54.



immortal, the Buddha; it practised acting by non-acting, that is, acting in the centre between extremes”,<sup>46</sup> the Middle Way of Mahayanist philosophy. The Primal Nothingness of Taoism prepared the way for an understanding of Buddhism’s void and *nirvana*; *sambodhi*, or Buddhist enlightenment to the Absolute, had been conceived by Chinese thinkers as unity with the Great One, the experience of cosmic universality. Buddhist scriptures were translated using Tao language, or idioms.<sup>47</sup> The more pragmatically inclined Chinese found the naturalism of Buddhism compatible with their desire to penetrate the secrets of nature, from which humanity is inseparable, through meditation, mastery of breathing (*pranayama*, *chi*, *qi*)<sup>48</sup> and other practices such as yoga and the t’ai chi<sup>49</sup> “as a means to spiritual concentration and longevity”.<sup>50</sup>

#### BUDDHISM TO TAOISM

Different Buddhist sects developed over time. In the eighth century the most enduring sect called Ch’en arose. The methods and objectives of Ch’en Buddhism reveal its close borrowings from Taoism to create a distinctively Chinese Buddhism,<sup>51</sup> known as Zen Buddhism in Japan (page 18). Indian Buddhist *dhyana* (a meditation technique “by which we stop all thinking and seek to realize truth in all its essence”)<sup>52</sup> is a slow, gradual practice requiring years of disciplined control of the mind to progress through various stages of consciousness to reach enlightenment, where thought ceases and the practitioner experiences saintly, blissful nirvana.<sup>53</sup> Ch’en Buddhists believed sudden enlightenment could be achieved through a system of exercises aimed at seeing things “as they are” through direct experience.

Such direct experience of nature reflected early Taoist thinking, and in Ch’an there is a fine fusion of Buddhist and Taoist thought (or non thought).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ninian Smart, *The World’s Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations*, 1989, Cambridge University Press. P 120.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. P 54.

<sup>48</sup> *pranayama*, Sanskrit word meaning breath (*prana*) extension (*yama*). *Qi* (Mandarin) *Ch’i* (Cantonese), means breath or gas, and by extension, life force, the active principal forming part of any living thing. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qi> Cited June, 2008.

<sup>49</sup> *Yoga* means unite; *t’ai chi ch’uan* means ‘supreme ultimate fist’. Both practices are a form of moving meditation to benefit health and longevity.

<sup>50</sup> Heinrich Dumoulin, *A History of Zen Buddhism*, 1963, translated by Paul Peachy. Pantheon Books, Random House, NY. P 55. Regarding the significance of longevity, see Chapter Two.

<sup>51</sup> Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, (1993), translated by Karen C. Duval, University of California Press. P 13.

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.abuddhistlibrary.com/Buddhism/C%20-%20Zen/Ancestors/Master%20Chih%20-%20I/Dhyana/Dhyana%20I.htm> Cited June 2008

<sup>53</sup> Ninian Smart, *The World’s Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations*, 1989, Cambridge University Press. P 63.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. P 123.

Borrowing Taoism's principal of the inability of language to define the qualitative, metaphysical dimensions of the Tao, plain speaking had no place in the Ch'en pedagogical method.<sup>55</sup> Irrational conundrums known as *kung an* in Chinese,<sup>56</sup> *koans* in Japanese, replaced an emphasis on meditation and the study of scriptures. The master responded to novices' questions with esoteric or nonsensical, improvised answers and actions, such as shouting and beatings, or silence, silly humour, the abject transgressiveness of Taoism, to shock or jolt them into lateral thinking, to achieve sudden insights.<sup>57</sup> Ch'en Buddhism was opposed to luxury and parasitism, preaching a return to intuition, spontaneity and nature, and novices were provoked to do their own thinking, be open to unexpected cues, detach from the habitual and security by leaving their monastery to encounter the everyday, to wander homeless in search of knowledge, to come to sudden experiences of insight into their own "original nature".<sup>58</sup>

A special transmission outside the scriptures;  
No basis in words or writing;  
Direct pointing to the mind of people;  
Insight into one's nature and attainment of Buddhahood.<sup>59</sup>

#### CH'EN TO ZEN

Ch'en Buddhism was first brought to Japan from China in 552 C. E., which coincides with Japan's written history. Japan did not have an indigenous writing system so Chinese calligraphy was used, and Chinese words were adopted to signify new

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<sup>55</sup> Key sources for this section: Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, (1993), translated by Karen C. Duval, University of California Press. Hu Shin, *Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism in China: Its History and Method*, Philosophy East West, Vol. 3, No. 1 (January, 1953). Pp 3 – 24. University of Hawaii Press, USA. Heinrich Dumoulin, *A History of Zen Buddhism*, 1963, translated by Paul Peachy. Pantheon Books, Random House, NY. Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, translated by J. R. Foster and Charles Hartman, (1982), Cambridge University Press. Joseph S. Wu, *Chinese Language and Chinese Thought*, Philosophy East and West, Vol. 19, No. 4. (Oct 1969). Pp 423 – 434. *The Fluxus Reader*, (1998) Ed., Ken Friedman. Pub. Academy Editions. David T. Doris, *Zen Vaudeville: a Medi(t)ation on the Margins of Fluxus*. P 100. Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations*, 1989, Cambridge University Press. Jacqueline Baas, *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today* (2005), University of California Press. P 4.

<sup>56</sup> "A legal case constituting a precedent" or "a controversial or mysterious case". Source: *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion*, 1989, Shambala, Boston. Translator, Matthew Miller.

<sup>57</sup> In contrast to Confucianism's social conformity, Taoism urges individualism and anarchy. Frederick W. Mote (Princeton University), *Intellectual Foundations of China* (1972), pub. Alfred A Knopf, New York. Pp 68 – 71, 80 – 81.

<sup>58</sup> Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations*, 1989, Cambridge University Press. Pp 13, 122.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. P122. A summarised description of Ch'en Buddhism attributed to Bodhidharma, legendary monk from the sixth century C.E. who was assimilated into Chinese folklore as a Taoist Immortal, just as Buddha had been.

concepts. Over time a Japanese lexicon developed from the Chinese. Thus Ch'en became Zen. With Ch'en Buddhism came a flourishing of art specifically related to Zen concepts in the twelfth century Sung period. At this time a Japanese monk, Zenko Kokushi (*Eisai*),<sup>60</sup> journeying to China where he visited Ch'en Buddhist centres, became convinced of the Ch'en method, and attained enlightenment on his second visit to China. Returning to Japan, assisted by a steady exchange of Japanese and Chinese monks, Eisai promoted Zen Buddhism until his death in 1215 CE.



Fig 15: Sung fan showing cursive style calligraphy.

This was the Sung period in China,<sup>61</sup> when Ch'en cultural creativity was at a height of achievement. Monks were amongst the greatest of Chinese painters and calligraphers (*Fig 15*). The fine, artistic methods of Ch'en, along with ways of attaining enlightenment, both appropriated from Taoism, were introduced to Japan at this time.<sup>62</sup>

The differences between Taoism and Zen Buddhism can be well defined. Taoism is a secular philosophy that provides a guide for conduct leading to the highest, most purist form of people's nature. The aim is to live in submissive accord with the inter-relationship of all things, a matrix of creation, in which people are an integral yet infinitesimal part. Their birth and death is a part of Nature's cyclic impermanence.<sup>63</sup> In

<sup>60</sup> Born 1141, died 1215. Eisai is acknowledged as the founder of Zen Buddhism in Japan.

<sup>61</sup> 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E.

<sup>62</sup> Heinrich Dumoulin, *A History of Zen Buddhism*, 1963, translated by Paul Peachy. Pantheon Books, Random House, NY. Pp 123, 124, 140.

<sup>63</sup> Franciscus Verellan, *Taoism* (1995), *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (May, 1995). Here the Taoism of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu is described as "a doctrine of liberation through submission, of

comparison, Zen Buddhism is a religion that similarly describes all things as interdependent, with its difference from Taoism located in its belief in reincarnation and karma, where things and people are believed to arise in dependence of their circumstance. This concept is known as *dependent origination*, or *pratitya samutpada*. According to the theory of dependant origination, humans are the highest form of sentient being, therefore they reincarnate continuously in circumstances determined by their moral and spiritual standing, and only through the attainment of enlightenment, a return to universal emptiness, are they emancipated from reincarnation to exist in eternal bliss.<sup>64</sup>

Another important difference in artistic terms is the aesthetic of Taoism and Zen's cultural practices. Taoism is often expressed in colourful, figurative exuberance, whereas in Japan, over time, a distinctively austere, subtle and abstract aesthetic evolved to express emptiness, the state that allows all possibilities to occur in the theory of dependant origination. Zen's aesthetic is arguably the reason for its prominent acknowledgement as a conduit for the synthesis into Western thought and art forms of Eastern paradigms. Nevertheless, as discussed above, without the influence of Taoism on Indian Buddhism in ancient China, Zen Buddhism would not have evolved, so Zen is a significant tendril, a critical link to Taoism's influences on Western experimental contemporary art.

Zen and Taoism are ways of life, so mundane activities such as cleaning and gardening, walking and breathing, along with painting and calligraphy, were forms of meditation and pedagogy. "Brush work is therefore an ideal vehicle for conveying ... enlightened vision ... with its hallmarks of simplicity, naturalness, harmony and precision ... the elimination of all that is unnecessary, so that nothing stands in the way of the intuitive grasp of reality".<sup>65</sup> These qualities are the hallmark of Taoist/Ch'en/Zen calligraphy, and philosophy, which came to be such strong influences on twentieth century Western art.

In the early years of the establishment of Zen Buddhism in Japan in 552 C. E., communication back and forth between Chinese Ch'en Buddhist monks and the

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control through means of non-interference, and of transcendence as a result of physiological and mental regimes." P 322.

<sup>64</sup> O. N. Krishnan, *In Search of Reality*, (2004). Pub. Motilal Banarsidass Pp 277 - 282

<sup>65</sup> Clare Pollard, *Zenmind: the Development of Zen Buddhism*, catalogue essay for the exhibition, *Zen Mind Zen Brush: Japanese Ink Paintings from the Gitter-Yelen Collection*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2006.

newly converted Zen Buddhist monks was very close and co-operative and advice about appropriate forms of architecture and gardens was very prescriptive. Projects in Kamakura and Kyoto seem to have been supervised by Chinese experts. Over time, Japanese monasteries adapted Chinese forms to local conditions, including Shinto, Japan's indigenous, animist religion.<sup>66</sup>



Fig 16: Ryoanji Garden, Kyoto, showing the aesthetic importance of weathered stains on the walls of the garden, an example of *wabi sabi*. Photo: B. Ely, 1993.

An additional Taoist influence that characterises Zen gardens originates in Chinese mythology: reference to three mythological islands off the East coast of China where the Immortals, Taoist sages, unapproachable by men, live forever in paradise.<sup>67</sup> The islands are quoted in *karesansui teien*, or dry gardens, where rocks surrounded by raked gravel to represent water are placed in aesthetic spatial tension belied by their seemingly random relationships. The world famous dry garden, Ryoanji, in Kyoto, demonstrates the influence of this Taoist symbolism as well as the importance of spatial placement in Zen gardens, an extrapolation upon Taoist garden art principals (Fig 16).

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<sup>66</sup> David A. Slawson, *Secret Teachings in the Art of Japanese Gardens: Design Principles, Aesthetic Values* (1987), pub. Kodansha International, Tokyo, New York, London. Slawson suggests the worship of nature in landscape clearings in Shinto practices was a precedent for the adoption of Chinese garden art in Japan. P 57.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. P 57.

Frequently, rocks representing islands introduce Daoist connotations of paradisiacal bliss and longing for salvation to the basic statements of such Zen gardens.<sup>68</sup>

#### GARDEN ART, CHINESE PAINTING AND CALLIGRAPHY COALESCE



*Fig 17: An Immortal*, by Liang K'ai (twelfth century). A Taoist immortal is painted in the abstract, gestural style of the calligrapher to resemble a mountainous landscape.

In the small dry garden of the sub-temple, Daisen-in, in Kyoto's Zen monastery, Daitokuji, created in 1513, another Taoist influence on Japanese culture is felt, that of Chinese landscape painting.<sup>69</sup> The design of Zen gardens such as this was an equivalent of the aesthetic ideals, subtle moods, atmospheric effects and practices of brush and ink paintings imported from China.<sup>70</sup> The style of gestural, suggestively spare painting in turn has its origins in the skill and vitality of China's calligraphic art (*Fig 17*). It is in Zen gardens like Daisen-in that Taoist calligraphy, brush and ink painting and garden art coalesce (*Fig 18, Fig 24*). Typically, small, shallow gardens

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<sup>68</sup> Clare Pollard, *Zenmind: the Development of Zen Buddhism*, catalogue essay for the exhibition, Zen Mind Zen Brush: Japanese Ink Paintings from the Gitter-Yelen Collection, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2006.

<sup>69</sup> David A. Slawson, *Secret Teachings in the Art of Japanese Gardens: Design Principles, Aesthetic Values* (1987), pub. Kodansha International, Tokyo, New York, London. P 74. Daisen-in garden was analysed and documented in 1993 for my research of spatiality in Zen gardens.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* P 80.

such as this are viewed frontally from a veranda, which frames the garden like a landscape painting.



*Fig 18:* At Daitokoji monastery, Kyoto, the design of Daisen-in temple's garden is based on the motifs of Chinese landscape painting. The vertical rocks in the background resemble a waterfall flowing under a stone bridge to the foreground.

The Daisen-in garden is enclosed by a white wall running parallel at a depth of approximately four metres to the veranda around two sides of the temple. It begins as a youthful stream, its 'water' represented by raked gravel, with pools of actual water in scooped rocks. It flows swiftly around island-like rocks, and where it turns the corner of the veranda, passes under a flat, bridge-like stone (*Fig 20*). Behind the stone bridge, tall, vertical rocks surrounded by bushes represent a waterfall. The bridge casts a dark, hollow shadow that draws it into the foreground, the 'waterfall' to the background.

The raked gravel broadens to form a large body of water. This is achieved in part by the placement of two prominent rocks beside the veranda, one a low, broad, marbled representation of swirling water rising not ten centimetres above the gravel. Alongside it is a rock that resembles a solid boat, its flat-topped surface linking and extending the horizontal plane of the veranda, the viewer's real space, out into the foreground of the garden (*Fig 20*). The water flows on under a curved footbridge to an extension from the temple's architecture, which frames the garden (*Fig 21*). On the other side another boat-shaped rock floats in slow water (*Fig 22*).



Rivers and streams are born of the ocean  
All creation is born of Tao  
Just as all water flows back to become the ocean  
All creation flows back to become Tao<sup>71</sup>

An illusion of the sky's infinite depth in the distance is achieved by the planting of stylised trees silhouetted against the wall, their foliage cloud-like. Tonally graded with a light spray of earth at ground level like a pale wash, the wall represents a distant, misty atmosphere (*Fig 23*).



*Fig 19*: Top left, Daitokoji monastery, Kyoto. A flat, solid, boat-shaped rock level with the veranda brings the viewer's space into the garden. Photo: B. Ely, 1993.

<sup>71</sup> Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 30.



*Fig 20:* Top right, Daitokoji monastery, Kyoto. Shallow rocks describe a slowing and spreading of the water, the bridge masking the transformation. Photo: B. Ely, 1993.

*Fig 21:* Daitokoji monastery, Kyoto. An architectural extension frames the garden. Photo: B. Ely, 1993.

*Fig 22:* Below right, Daitokoji monastery, Kyoto. The broadening out to open water from its beginnings as a swift stream is symbolic of the life cycle. Photos: B. Ely, 1993.



*Fig 23:* Daisen-in garden's stylised trees with foliage that represents clouds, silhouetted against a misty atmosphere created by the tonality of the white wall. Photo: B. Ely, 1993.



*Fig 24:* The garden of Kinkakoji, the Golden temple in Kyoto, features sculpted gravel forms representing the landscape of Mount Fuji. Photo. B. Ely, 1993.

#### SPATIALITY, ZEN GARDENS AND INSTALLATION ART

Western artists' exposure to these expressions of harmony, bliss, the *is-ness* of aesthetic tension created by a sense of motion in dynamic stasis, interconnectedness, heightened aesthetic, has prompted their articulation of spatiality, using placement as a dominant element of expression in installation art.



*Fig 25* Isamu Noguchi, *Garden of the Future* (1964) at the IBM Headquarters, Armonk, New York.

The Japanese American artist, Isamu Noguchi, brought to his practice an innate understanding of Zen spatiality, supported by an apprenticeship with Brancusi, the

grandfather of installation art.<sup>72</sup> It is noteworthy that for eight months in China in 1929 Noguchi studied calligraphy, with its training of practitioners to simultaneously perceive the space of the paper and the making of marks.<sup>73</sup> Noguchi introduced these precepts to American artists, through his use of Zen garden principals as a sculptural form, leading to installation art.<sup>74</sup> He wrote, "I like to think of gardens as sculpturing of space".<sup>75</sup> Just as Ian Hamilton-Finlay was influenced by gardens that feature aspects of placement in Chinoiserie, on the other side of the Atlantic, Noguchi brought the Taoist principles of Zen gardens to fruition in America. His emphasis on the articulation of spatiality distinguishes his oeuvre as a significant contribution to the development of installation art.

To illustrate how the influence of Taoism as an outcome of my research in Kyoto in 1993 manifested in my installation art practice I will analyse two installations executed at that time in 1993 and 1994 entitled *Sleepers/Ties I* and *Sleepers/Ties II*.<sup>76</sup> The former was contextualised by an urban environment, and defined as an 'urban intervention', the latter was exhibited in the 18<sup>th</sup> Street Art Centre's New Gallery in Santa Monica, Los Angeles. In my article, *Two Gardens and a Wasteland In LA*, I describe an overgrown urban space near my studio that contained a remnant of a railway track that had once formed part of Los Angeles's public transport system.



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<sup>72</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>73</sup> *Isamu Noguchi, A Sculptor's World* (New York and Evanston: Harper Row, 1968). P 116.

<sup>74</sup> Jacqueline Baas, *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today* (2005), University of California Press. P 110.

<sup>75</sup> The Noguchi Museum website: <http://www.noguchi.org/intextall.html#gardens> Cited Nov. 2008. Excerpts from *Isamu Noguchi, A Sculptor's World* (New York and Evanston: Harper Row, 1968).

<sup>76</sup> See Bonita Ely (1998), *Two Gardens and a Wasteland In LA*, TAASA Review: the Journal of the Asian Arts Society of Australia, Vol. 7, No. 2.

*Fig 26:* Bonita Ely, *Sleepers/Ties I* (1993). Shag pile carpet laid on the sleepers of a decommissioned length of railway line in Santa Monica, California. Photo. B.Ely, 1994.

An established encampment of homeless people nearby lent an air of feral domesticity to this public space, which I enhanced by placing strips of lime green shag pile carpet on the railway sleepers. Its grass-like texture and orderly progression through the space alluded to 'garden'. The cast of Los Angeles's cinematic, desert light illuminated the strips of carpet, creating a sublime spatial passage through the parked cars and human wasteland (*Fig 26*).

By chance, on the day following the completion of *Sleepers/Ties I*, the precise length of line encompassed by the piece was unceremoniously ripped out to make way for more carpark (*Fig 27*).



*Fig 27:* Workmen inadvertently rip up *Sleepers/Ties I*. Photo. B.,Ely, 1994.

The unpredicted, dynamic temporality of this installation that, in relation to qualities of Japanese *ku*, paradoxically juxtapose the supposed longevity of history, corresponds precisely with Taoist themes of the ephemeral, chaotic nature of reality, and many forms of contemporary art to be discussed in following chapters: the only continuity here is change.

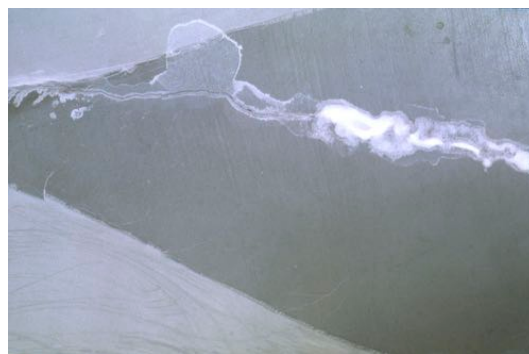
The second *Sleepers/Ties* installation spatially embodied continuity, change, and the ephemeral differently. The theme of the installation was of equal vulnerability; it was a cathartic response to the Los Angeles earthquake of 1994, which occurred during my residency (*Fig 28*).





*Fig 28: Bonita Ely, Sleepers/Ties II (1994), cloth, paper, salt, plaster. New Gallery. 18<sup>th</sup> Street Arts Centre, Santa Monica, California. Photo. B.Ely, 1994.*

I articulated a liminal spatiality (*ma*) by placing objects, made from the ambiguous materiality of delicate and translucent materials, in precise relation to each other to create a narrative slice of dynamic tension holding the diverse elements in a stasis expressive of a greater totality (*ku*). The work was contextualised by both the trauma viewers had experienced, and the fabric of the architecture – columns of luminous white silk streamed out of the air ducts, liquid salt was poured into the ‘wound’ of the cracked gallery floor (*Fig 29*).



*Fig 29: Bonita Ely, Sleepers/Ties II, showing crystalline salt in the crack in the floor caused by the 1994 Los Angeles earthquake. Photo. B.Ely, 1994.*

The iconography referred to the human endeavour of work, the built environment, and obliquely to the historic East West railway line that joined Los Angeles to the rest of America. The spatiality of the floor plane was articulated by the placement of a broken wedge made of useless plaster tools, scattered salt casts of railway line along

with railway sleepers made from dampened, ruined tissue paper and vertical towers made of insubstantial organza (*Fig 30*).



Fig 30 Bonita Ely, *Sleepers/Ties II*. Columns of silk attached to the gallery's air ducts.

Photo. B.Ely,

1994.

The artefacts radiated a luminous, white natural energy; the installation's cathartic qualities were metonymically embedded in a reminder of nature's processes of continuity and change.

Having explored the thread of the influences of Taoist material culture derived from the spatiality of *feng shui* on experimental contemporary art, and expressed in Zen garden art, in the next section the rhizomic threads of Taoist philosophy as an influence on Western thinking and experimental art practice will be examined.

### **RHIZOME #3: Taoist Philosophy, Western Thinkers**

The longevity of the West's contact with China, and more recent isolationist policies of the Communist Party in China, have fused to render nearly invisible the impact of Taoism on the development of Western thinking, and placed the verities of Taoist philosophy into the background of recent Western commentary. In this section these impacts will be identified and placed into perspective. Gernet, in *A History of Chinese Civilization* agrees that China's contribution to the modern world has been underestimated in the West, which "prides itself on its rapid progress."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, translated by J. R. Foster and Charles Hartman, (1982), Cambridge University Press. P 523.

GOTTFRIED LEIBNIZ

Arguably the West's "rapid progress" began with the great German philosopher and mathematician, Gottfried Leibniz (1646 – 1716),<sup>78</sup> who greatly admired *Tshina* (China), which he described as a country where civil society had established harmonious social structures, unlike the conflicted morés of European social interaction. Leibniz wrote:

it is difficult to describe how beautifully all the laws of the Chinese, in contrast to those of other peoples, are directed to the achievement of public tranquillity and the establishment of social order, so that men shall be disrupted in their relations as little as possible.<sup>79</sup>

Leibniz was describing a Confucian society<sup>80</sup> based on "reason and natural law [where] a "system of examinations [merit] ... for the recruitment ... for the public services" contrasted with Europe's feudal social structure based on nepotism and hierarchies of class.<sup>81</sup> This method of recruitment was adopted by the French revolutionary regime in 1791.

Leibniz also understood, from correspondence with Jesuit monks, Taoism's notion of a chaotically spontaneous order as the reality in nature, compared with the West's notion of nature being a mechanical action, able to be controlled by and exploited in the service of superior humanity, a belief system that is based on conflicted, or oppositional binaries: body/soul, body/mind, the machine, the driver.<sup>82</sup> Decartes expressed the corporeal aspect of this dichotomy in his *Meditations*:

... my essence consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing.... I am only a thinking and unextended thing, and ... I possess a distinct idea of body, [and] inasmuch as it is only an extended and unthinking thing, it is certain that

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<sup>78</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm Freiherr von Leibniz, (1646 – 1716).

<sup>79</sup> From Leibniz's Preface to the *Novissima Sinica* (1697/1699). (Cited May 2008) [http://east\\_west\\_dialogue.tripod.com/id12.html](http://east_west_dialogue.tripod.com/id12.html)

<sup>80</sup> The pragmatic relationship of Confucianism and Taoism can be expressed as follows: "through cultivating his mind-heart, a noble man [the aim of a Confucian is to become a noble man] not only aligns himself with the cosmic rhythm and lives in tune with Heaven; he can also complete Heaven's course and serve as an instrument of *Dao* in the human world". Hao Chang, *Some Reflections on the Problems of the Axial-Age Breakthrough in Relation to Classical Confucianism*, from *Ideas Across Cultures: Essays on Chinese Thought in Honour of Benjamin L. Schwarz*, editors, Paul A. Cohan and Merle Goldman (1990). Pub. Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University and Harvard University Press. P 26. Citing *Xunzi* in *Sibu congkan zibu*, IV, 44; V, 56.

<sup>81</sup> Gernet, Jacques. *A History of Chinese Civilization*. Translated by Charles Hartman J.R. Foster. Second ed: Cambridge University Press, 1996. P 525. My brackets. This is a Confucian ideal, where any citizen may rise up to the highest ranks of society through education and diligent application.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* P 526.

this I [that is to say, my soul by which I am what I am], is entirely and absolutely distinct from my body and can exist without it.<sup>83</sup>

In part from this exposure to Taoist precepts, Leibniz developed his theory of monads,<sup>84</sup> where the universe, created by God, is a matrix of 'monads', discrete entities that are indestructible and indivisible. They form matter by joining together in various series that converge to make a unified harmony. Different forms of matter cannot be destroyed or created, but are composed of an inexhaustible number of monads that form, by "densification and rarefication[s]"<sup>85</sup> the multifarious substances that make up existence. Following along Needham's research<sup>86</sup> of Leibniz's monad theories, J. J. Clarke writes in *The Tao of the West: Western Transformations of Daoist Thought*:

[Leibniz was] a significant point of influence, a gateway through which Chinese thought could be seen to have entered ... a significant, albeit unorthodox stream of modern Western thought<sup>87</sup>

Gernet concludes that "Leibniz, the Sinophile, is at one end of the chain that leads to the most recent developments in scientific thought ... It would be surprising if the conjunction were the effect of chance alone."<sup>88</sup>

Certainly a comprehension by Leibniz of Taoism's correlative thinking where elements at different layers intertwine to form a mutually harmonious and creative whole, seems to be reflected in his theory of monads, which, without the influence of Eastern thinking, seems to have arisen out of no where.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Philosophical Works of Descartes, trans. E. S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931; unabridged republication of 1931 ed., New York: Dover, 1955), 1:190.

<sup>84</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm Von Leibniz (1744 – 1829) *Monadology*, written in 1714, published 1867.

<sup>85</sup> J. J. Clarke, *The Tao of the West: Western Transformations of Taoist Thought*, (2000). Routledge. P 70.

[http://books.google.com.au/books?id=rAtpRDax4LIC&pg=PA70&lpg=PA70&dq=leibniz+taoism+monads&source=web&ots=JzUVM1xpFv&sig=fhqtQR\\_fX7VvcP0ODhvXJBHtFLU&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&resnum=2&ct=result#PPA84,M1](http://books.google.com.au/books?id=rAtpRDax4LIC&pg=PA70&lpg=PA70&dq=leibniz+taoism+monads&source=web&ots=JzUVM1xpFv&sig=fhqtQR_fX7VvcP0ODhvXJBHtFLU&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=2&ct=result#PPA84,M1)

<sup>86</sup> Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*. Volume 2: *History of Scientific Thought*, with the research assistance of Wang Ling, PhD NY: Cambridge University Press, 1956.

<sup>87</sup> J. J. Clarke, *The Tao of the West: Western Transformations of Taoist Thought*, (2000). Pub. Routledge. P 70.

<sup>88</sup> Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, translated by J. R. Foster and Charles Hartman, (1982), Cambridge University Press. "The experimental sciences that developed from the sixteenth century onwards were in accord with Chinese concepts (magnetism, the notion of a field of force, the idea of corpuscular vortices, the idea of propagation by waves, the concept of an organic totality and of the self-regulation of organisms, and so on) which were absent from the Western tradition." P 525.

<sup>89</sup> Clarke points out that Needham's theory is a speculation. Needham is careful to point out that the origins of Leibniz's ideas require further research. J. J. Clarke, *The Tao of the West: Western Transformations of Taoist Thought*, (2000). Pub. Routledge. P 71.



In his book on Leibniz, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*,<sup>90</sup> Gilles Deleuze returns to a Sinetic theme he had explored earlier in *Repetition and Difference*.<sup>91</sup> In *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, Deleuze explores Leibniz's concept of the monad, a "name ... ascribe(d) to the soul, or the subject as a metaphysical point". Their nature is multiplicitous yet together, they form a unified whole, "an infinity of individuated souls of which each retains its irreducible point of view".<sup>92</sup> This structure prefigures the atomistic structure of matter we take for granted today.

The lineage of thinkers listed by Needham from Leibniz are: Herder, Hegel, Shelling, Coleridge to Smuts, Alexander and Whitehead.<sup>93</sup> In this chapter's historical signposting of Taoism's philosophical impact in the West I have passed over Needham's list to Alfred North Whitehead as his writings drawn from Leibniz in the early twentieth century had a direct bearing upon significant artists and thinkers, in a long view of the development of installation art.

#### ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD

Whitehead's ontology develops Leibniz's theory of monadic entities where variable entities are in continuous movement and alteration. In Whitehead's view, the universe is a permanent flux of possibility, where eruption and discord are resolved in a sense of unity made up of dichotomous accord. From a perceptual, psychological perspective Whitehead believed that the perpetual motion, cognitive dissonance and endless transformation of abstract, visual surface, condition our perceptions and thought. This theory is known as 'perspectivism' and foreshadows the pluralist, subjective allowances for diverse self referential ontologies in contemporary art interpretation.<sup>94</sup>

#### GILLES DELEUZE

Arguably, Deleuze may be added to the list of Leibniz's philosopher descendants as he furthers the argument for a pluralist, non-absolutist approach to creative paradigms that mirrors the Taoist axiom. In his essay, *Deleuze's Aesthetics: Curvature and Perspectivism*, Ted Kafala writes:

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<sup>90</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, 1993, University of Minnesota Press.

<sup>91</sup> Defended in 1969 as Deleuze's main thesis toward his doctorate at the Sorbonne. English translation, 1994 by Paul Patton, pub. 1994, Columbia University Press, NY.

<sup>92</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, 1993, University of Minnesota Press. P 24.

<sup>93</sup> Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*. Volume 2: *History of Scientific Thought*, with the research assistance of Wang Ling, PhD NY: Cambridge University Press, 1956. P 70

<sup>94</sup> Ted Kafala (2002), *Deleuze's Aesthetics: Curvature and Perspectivism*. Pub. Enculturation, Vol. 4, No. 2, Fall 2002. P 1.

[http://enculturation.gmu.edu/4\\_2/kafala.html](http://enculturation.gmu.edu/4_2/kafala.html)

By adopting some aspects of Leibniz's pluralist ontology, Deleuze resists Cartesian clarity, the manifestations of optic science, and rationalist assumptions of transparency and realism in art.<sup>95</sup>

Instead, Deleuze theorises a method of representation where the verity of creativity is spontaneous, active, which Deleuze likened to Paul Klee's non-Cartesian conception of "taking a line for walk".<sup>96</sup> A diversity of points of view is invited from viewers who subjectively bring to the artwork their own imaginative interpolations, drawn from infinitesimal personal histories, as the basis for equally valid, multifaceted interpretations.

I will return to aspects of this lineage throughout the thesis to reiterate the pervasive resonance of Chinese philosophy in Western philosophy that began with the Jesuit monks and Leibniz in the seventeenth century, spanning across to Deleuze in the late twentieth century. We shall see for example in Chapter Three (page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**), how in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze paraphrases the Taoist principals that underlie Chinese calligraphy described by sinologist N. J. Girardot in his *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism*.<sup>97</sup>

#### CARL JUNG

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the esoteric character of Taoist texts impeded their scholarship in the West. They were often dismissed as superstition and magic.<sup>98</sup> Western interpreters' and lay readers' inability to penetrate the poetic language also occluded meaning.<sup>99</sup> But, interpretations infiltrated the thinking of early twentieth century avante-gard artists via visionary, influential thinkers.<sup>100</sup> For

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid. P 1.

<sup>96</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1988, English version 1993). Translator, Tom Conley, pub. University of Minnesota Press. P 14.

<sup>97</sup> N. J. Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism: the Theme of Chaos (hun-tun)* (1983). University of California Press.

<sup>98</sup> Lee Irwin, . *Daoist Alchemy in the West: The Esoteric Paradigms*.

<http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeVI/Dao.htm> (cited March 2008).

<sup>99</sup> Jung refers to this in his Forward to Richard Wilhelm's translation of the *I Ching*:  
...it is not easy to find the right access to this monument of Chinese thought, which departs so completely from our ways of thinking." (Zurich, 1949).

<sup>100</sup> Harold Coward, *Taoism and Jung: Synchronicity and the Self*. Philosophy East and West, Vol. 46, No. 9. 4 (Oct., 1996), pp 477 – 495. University of Hawaii Press.

Jung read Richard Wilhelm's translation of the *I Ching* and invited him to Zurich to learn more about Chinese thought. He later wrote commentaries for Wilhelm's translations of *The Secret of the Golden Flower* and the *I Ching*. Conversations about acausal time and relativity with his friend, Albert Einstein, during the period 1909 – 1913, profoundly influenced both thinkers. Einstein was writing his first theory of relativity at this time. Jung went on to write his theory of synchronicity. Wilhelm was translating the *I Ching* at this time. It is significant that later, Jung interpreted the dreams of Wolfgang

example, Carl Jung's writing and his interest in art as a psychological therapy, made Eastern thought, including Taoism, accessible to American artists, some of whom were inspired to study further. David Clarke in his PhD thesis, *Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture* (1988), lists artists who knew of Jung's writings on Oriental themes: Pollock (who underwent Jungian psychoanalysis), Reinhardt, Gottleib, Graves, Lassaw, McDonald-Wright, Jenkins, Onslow-Ford, Lippold, Motherwell, Rothko, Tobey (who travelled in China and Japan in pursuit of his fascination with Eastern art and philosophy),<sup>101</sup> Baziotas, Krazner, Roszac, Graham, Ossorio, Francis, McCracken, Mullican.<sup>102</sup>

Jung's writing includes themes that developed his theory of *synchronicity* after experimenting with the ancient Chinese oracle, the *I Ching*, or *Book of Changes*,<sup>103</sup> in the summer of 1920. He later wrote the Foreword for the English translation of Richard Wilhelm's German translation of the *I Ching* in 1949.<sup>104</sup>

... I encountered amazing coincidences which seemed to suggest the idea of an acausal parallelism (a synchronicity as I was later to call it).<sup>105</sup>

The *I Ching's* predictive and advisory functions as an oracle are predicated upon "meaningful connections between the inner psychic realm and the external physical world",<sup>106</sup> where opposites correlate and reflect the balance of natural reality, just as balance may be established in the psyche. This paradigm led Jung to believe there is a field of "psychophysical continuum" throughout the cosmos that creates a dynamic unified whole.

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Pauli, the Nobel Prize laureate and famous physicist who discovered Quantum Mechanics, which further developed Einstein's ideas. In 1931 Pauli sought psychiatric treatment from Jung who was his colleague at the Federal Institute of Technology (Eidgenoessische Technische Hochschule, ETH) in Zurich, Switzerland.

<http://www.mythsdreamssymbols.com/Iching.html> (Cited March 2008).

<sup>101</sup> Tobey's main interest was in Zen Buddhism at this time as his experience of Shanghai was too chaotic to derive any benefit from his visit. From David J. Clarke, *Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture* (1988). PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute. Pub. Imprint, New York. A Garland series of outstanding theses in the Fine Arts from British Universities. P 58.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. P 58. Clarke's list is based on information that these artists were known to have read books by Jung, were aware of his ideas, or owned a book[s] by Jung.

<sup>103</sup> *I Ching*, or *Book of Changes*. Pantheon Books (1950). The Richard Wilhelm German translation rendered into English by Cary F. Baynes. New York. Foreword by Carl Jung, Zurich, 1949.

<sup>104</sup> Jung also wrote the Foreword to Wilhelm's translation of *The Secret of the Golden Flower* (London 1939), a Taoist alchemical text that was of interest to many artists. David J. Clarke, *Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture* (1988). PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute. Pub. Imprint, New York. A Garland series of outstanding theses in the Fine Arts from British Universities. P. 68.

<sup>105</sup> Harold Coward, *Taoism and Jung: Synchronicity and the Self*. Philosophy East and West, Vol. 46, No. 9. 4 (Oct., 1996), University of Hawaii Press. Pp 477 – 495.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, p 477.

The ancient Chinese mind contemplates the cosmos in a way comparable to that of the modern physicist, who cannot deny that his model of the world is a decidedly psychophysical structure. The microphysical event includes the observer just as much as the reality of the *I Ching* comprises subjective, i.e., psychic conditions in the totality of the momentary situation.<sup>107</sup>

This is significant because Jung's theory of synchronicity, conceived from the influence of Taoist literature, profoundly shifted theories of representation in contemporary art. For example, artists such as Jackson Pollock, Helen Frankenthaler and Brice Marden aimed to spontaneously channel this balanced energy field to attune the body/mind to their paint/brush medium/tool, to become the conduit for connections to cosmological integration. The description below of the spontaneous action of a Taoist calligrapher precisely fits the corporeal, action painting process of the Abstract Expressionists and the reductive, structural abstraction of the Minimalists. Lee Irwin poetically expresses an inter-relationship to the Tao:

The flow of brush and ink, like the appearing and dissolving of a snowflake, reflected the dynamic reality of the Dao underlying static, perishable, physical phenomena.<sup>108</sup>

Another Jungian theory of interest to artists, according to David Clarke, was the 'collective unconscious', derived in part from Taoism's meshing of levels of the mind with a universal matrix. Jung envisaged the collective unconscious as a repository of archetypal symbols common to all, for example the mandala as an expression of psychic totality and harmony. An additional interest for artists was the notion of purely abstract, universal symbols to represent a concept, for example, the circle.

Jung's concept of the 'Anima' as the creative female principle, the muse, in the collective unconscious inspired artists and relates to this verse in the Tao Te Ching:

The Valley Spirit never dies  
It is named the Mysterious Female  
And the doorway of the Mysterious Female  
Is the base from which heaven and earth spring  
It is here within us all the while,  
Draw upon it as you will  
It never runs dry<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> C. G. Jung, Forward to Richard Wilhelm's translation of the *I Ching*, Zurich, 1949. Pantheon Books [1961, P xxiv.

<sup>108</sup> Lee Irwin, *Daoist Alchemy in the West: The Esoteric Paradigms*.  
<http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeVI/Dao.htm> (Cited March 2008).

Jung's ideas were also interpreted by Joseph Campbell in his studies of symbols and myths of cultures and religions of the world. Campbell's central location in New York and friendships with many artists broadened the dissemination of Jung's ideas partly derived from Taoism on creativity and the psyche.<sup>110</sup> Through these means Jung's writings brought Taoist philosophy, and iconography, such as calligraphy, to the attention of many artists.

#### **RHIZOME #4: Calligraphy and Abstraction**

There is little doubt of the impact of exotic paradigms arising from European exposure to the material cultures they encountered through exploration, colonisation and trade. Western cultures became increasingly responsive to, and challenged by, different ontological paradigms. In short, Western culture became progressively more permeable, perhaps by stealth as much as intention, during colonial times. Exposure to Chinese calligraphy introduced several adjustments for European artists to the concept of writing, painting methodology, and visual representation. Notably, the Chinese had invented pictographic symbols to represent their spoken language, and a specialised brush, paper and ink with which to write it.<sup>111</sup>

In contrast, after 3000 BC, cuneiform script, the origin of Western phonetics, was written using a 'wedge shaped stylus',<sup>112</sup> or stamp by the Sumerians to duplicate fixed impressions onto clay tablets, which were then fired. From these beginnings evolved a phonetic alphabet and a numerical system of prescribed symbols reflective of an accumulative, causal mode of communicating meaning and calibration.<sup>113</sup> On the other hand Chinese calligraphy was pictographic, interpretive, the meaning communicated through inter-relationships of single, graphic ideograms, compound combinations of these ideograms, and sometimes puns that also draw upon sound as a signifier.<sup>114</sup> Chinese writing conveys the meaning directly, represented by a distinct character. These signs became more and more abstract as time distanced them from their representational genesis. Writing was considered a high art form in

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<sup>109</sup> David J. Clarke, *Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture* (1988). PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute. Pub. Imprint, New York. P 63. David Clarke is quoting the artist, Lassaw: I. Lassaw, *Perspectives and Reflections of a Sculptor*, Leonardo, Vol. 1, 1969, P 351.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. P 69.

<sup>111</sup> Jean Francois Billiter, *The Chinese Art of Writing*, 1990, Rizzoli International Publications. Ch. 3.

<sup>112</sup> V. Gordon Childe, *Man Makes Himself*, pub. Watts & Co., London, 1951. P 182. Also, Gordon S. Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy*, 2002, University of California Press. Ch. 1.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. P 184.

<sup>114</sup> Jean Francois Billiter, *The Chinese Art of Writing*, 1990, Rizzoli International Publications. Ch. 3.

China where meaning could be subservient to aesthetics, and abstract, or non-representational imagery expressed philosophical concepts.<sup>115</sup> Laszlo Legeza argues that:

... Taoist graphic art ... provided the foundation for a high level of abstraction in Chinese art as a whole, creating forms of a primarily graphic nature for the basic concepts of Taoist teachings, which were metaphysical rather than ethical, embodying such concepts as Change, Movement, and Energy.<sup>116</sup>

Abstract imagery of this kind was novel to eighteenth and nineteenth century European eyes, and gradually contributed to the development of stylised, non-realist ways of constructing imagery. This critical awareness is further expressed by Virginia Spate and David Bromfield, who indicate that:

(Monet's) ... study of Japanese art taught him ... close observation of calligraphic marks ... He made use of their marks, their lines, their colour schemes, their modes of constructing space.<sup>117</sup>

Calligraphic artists selected their four tools for making their marks and lines with care - *mao bi* (brush),<sup>118</sup> *mo* (ink), *zhi* (paper), or a more refined, archival paper, *xuan*, and the inkstone became known as *werifang sibao*, the four treasures of the studio.<sup>119</sup> The brush as writing tool, compared to the West's quill, pen or printing press, allowed fluidity as a "direct expression of personal character", a subjective dimension of great import to developments in the West as we shall see below (page 42).<sup>120</sup> The brush's point can be as fine as a needle, spreading to widths up to a metre, depending on the size of the brush, which can be body height. Chinese ink is made from soot mixed with resin diluted to a liquid by rubbing the resin stick on the wet surface of an ink stone. When it dries it is a dense, rich black that will not fade, and is waterproof. Diluted with water, subtle tones of grey are achieved. The white Chinese paper, *xuan*, absorbs the ink into its fibre, a quality amplified if the paper is damp, which

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<sup>115</sup> *Persistence and Transformation: Text as Image in the Art of Xu Bing*. 2006. Edited by Jerome Silbergeld: P. Y. and Kinmay W. Pub. Tang Centre for Eastern Art, Princeton University Press. See Robert E. Harriste Jr., *Book for the Sky at Princeton: Reflections on Scale, Sense and Sound*. P 35.

<sup>116</sup> Laszlo Legeza, *The Secret Language of Diagrams and Calligraphy*, pub., Thames and Hudson, London, 1975. P 22.

<sup>117</sup> Virginia Spate, David Bromfield, *A New and Strange Beauty. Monet and Japanese Art*, from *Monet and Japan*, catalogue, 2001. National Gallery of Australia. P 5.

<sup>118</sup> *Sumi* brush in Japanese. The same tools are used by calligraphers in Japan, Vietnam and Korea.

<sup>119</sup> Chinese Culture Centre of San Francisco website. Cited January, 2009.

<http://www.c-c-c.org/archives/1997/10/25/chinese-scholars-treasures-from-the-jizhen-zhai-collection/>

<sup>120</sup> Clare Pollard, *Zen Mind: the Development of Zen Buddhism*, from *Zen Mind Zen Brush: Japanese Ink Paintings from the Gitter-Yelen Collection*. Exhibition catalogue, pub. Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2006. P 15.

achieves a soft blurred edge to line. By reducing the ink's fluidity using a dry brush, the line is streaked with white as the hairs of the brush separate.<sup>121</sup>

The *mao bi* brush is the perfect tool with which to represent, through text, the ontological precepts of Taoism, such as fluidity, relationality and change, yet continuity.<sup>122</sup> An exemplary model, an ultimate expression of dynamic permeability in Taoist art practice, calligraphy will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four as a direct influence on Western painting, and a more indirect influence on the development of installation art in relation to its methodology of graphic improvisation. Specifically, a case study of the expression of 'change and continuity' through the Taoist calligraphic practice of improvising upon a singular character to create hundreds of pictographic versions of one word, *longevity*, will be analysed as a conceptual precursor to the concerns of avant-garde artists (see Appendix #2).<sup>123</sup>

The influence of Taoism and calligraphy on the development of Modernist Western art as background to his focus on post World War Two American painting and sculpture, has been traced by David J. Clarke general terms.<sup>124</sup> Clarke lists the European artists, Arp,<sup>125</sup> Whistler, Kandinski, Masson, Michaux, Bissier and Alechensky as artists who were interested in Oriental thought, and cites *Chinese Mysticism and Modern Painting*, published in 1936 by George Duthuit, Matisse's son-in-law, as an indication that the artists discussed in this book, Matisse, Picasso, Masson, Miró, Cézanne and Whistler, may have been aware of Duthuit's ideas, if not Oriental philosophy. Kuni Matsuo's publication, co-authored with Steinilber-Oberlin, *Les Sectes Bouddhiques Japonaises* (1930) and the third issue of *La Revolution de Surrealiste* are cited as other sources of information about Eastern thought in Europe, but Clarke cautions that these associations with Surrealism and Dada<sup>126</sup> were possibly made in retrospect by various artists, including Breton, who become

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<sup>121</sup> Gordon S. Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 2002, University of California Press. Pp 24, 25.

<sup>122</sup> Kang-Nam Oh, *The Taoist Influence on Hua-yen Buddhism: A Case of the Sinicization Of Buddhism in China*. Chung-Haw Buddhist Journal. No. 13.2 (May 2000). P 3. <http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-BJ001/93608.htm> Cited March 2008.

<sup>123</sup> In this thesis the term avant-garde, a French word meaning *vanguard* refers to innovative developments in contemporary art leading to new concepts, genres and techniques.

<sup>124</sup> David J. Clarke, *Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture* (1988). PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute. Pub. Imprint, New York.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. "Arp was acquainted with the *Tao Te Ching*". P. 52.

<sup>126</sup> The Dada movement was formed in Zurich by German refugees, Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings in 1916 as a revolt against Western civilisation, which the Dada artists saw as the cause of the horrific war. S. Lemoine, *Dada*, 1987, Art Data. P 10. Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) was associated with the Dada movement in France then immigrated to America, where he produced iconic artworks that continue as benchmarks for this anarchic movement.

interested in Zen and Taoism later in his career. But David Clarke does compare Dada's absurdist methodology to Zen's use of the *koan* to shock the viewer into awareness through "indifference", giving the example of Duchamp's *Fountain* ( *Fig 31*).<sup>127</sup>



*Fig 31: Marcel Duchamp, Fountain, 1917. The urinal was submitted to the jury free, Society of Independents exhibition in New York, but was suppressed by the hanging committee. An anonymous article in the second issue of *The Blind Man* (published in May 1917 by Duchamp, Beatrice Wood and H. P. Roché), defended the piece: "Now Mr. Mutt's fountain is not immoral, that is absurd, no more than a bath tub is immoral. It is a fixture that you see everyday in plumbers' show windows".<sup>128</sup>*

Photo, Alfred Steiglitz

*Fountain* is a urinal purchased from a plumbing shop, placed on its back on a plinth and crudely signed, 'R. Mutt 1917' on its outer rim. Marcel Duchamp wrote in a letter (April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1917) to French Dada artist, Suzanne Duchamp, (also his sister):

One of my women friends, using a masculine pseudonym, Richard Mutt, submitted a porcelain urinal as a sculpture.<sup>129</sup>

The woman friend was Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven, a member of the New York Dada movement.<sup>130</sup> False or ambiguous authorship adds another layer to the Taoist and Zen attributes of "indifference" in Dada.<sup>131</sup> Other attributes shared by Surrealism and Dada with Zen and Taoism are non-rationality,<sup>132</sup> disregard for authority,<sup>133</sup> and importantly for the following discussion, Surrealism's automatic writing, or linear automatism. However Clarke notes that the linear mastery of Chinese calligraphers was not matched by "the unconscious and untrained

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid. P 55.

<sup>128</sup> A. D'Harnoncourt, K. McShine, [ed.], *Marcel Duchamp*, 1973, pub. Museum of Modern Art, New York, Philadelphia Museum of Art. P 283.

<sup>129</sup> W.A. Camfield, *Suzanne Duchamp and Dada in Paris*. From *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender and Identity*, ed. Sawelson-Gorse, 1998, MIT Press. P 82.

<sup>131</sup> Amelia Jones, *Irrational Modernism: a Neurasthenic History of New York Dada*, MIT Press, 2004, P. 42. The Dada movement's love of puns may support this attribution to Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven, – in German, the signature "R. Mutt" is a pun for 'poverty', or *Armut*.

<sup>132</sup> David J. Clarke, *Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture* (1988). PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute. Pub. Imprint, New York. P 23.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. P 56.



spontaneity of Surrealist automatism”.<sup>134</sup> In contrast to the Surrealists, the American Abstract Expressionists were aiming to achieve a consciously refined yet dynamic aesthetic as well as the sense of flux and spontaneity in common with Taoist calligraphy.

In his thesis David Clarke explains the greater synthesis of Eastern cultures by American artists as a matter of geographical proximity as well as distance from the “roots of Western thought”.<sup>135</sup> Perhaps American artists appeared more open to exotic influences, living amongst the diverse cultures of migrants who had either no roots in Europe, or a sense of independence from Europe, is another way of accounting for this openness. Certainly the American Abstract Expressionists pushed the influence of Taoist calligraphy’s spontaneous, abstract, brush technique to an innovative form in painting. For example, Robert Motherwell retained the individual identity of his text-like mark making, often used black on white in gestures of attack like traditional Chinese calligraphers, and he acknowledged the influences of calligraphy on his practice (*Fig 32*).<sup>136</sup>



Fig 32 Robert Motherwell, 1915-1991, *Elegy to the Spanish Republic, No. 57* (1957-60) 84 x 108 inches, oil on canvas.

David Clarke asserts that calligraphy in fact presented philosophical alternatives to automatism, defining the painters’ creativity as an outcome of passivity, or non-action, where a connectedness to Nature is the “active agent” with a methodology of meditation used by many artists to achieve this state of ego-lessness and absorption in the ‘here and now’.<sup>137</sup> The deployment of chance,<sup>138</sup> the creation of art as a

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid. Pp 200 - 202.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid. P23.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. Pp 205 – 206. For example, “Describing *Reconciliation Elegy* (1978). Motherwell states that he has attempted to retain ... ‘the immediacy of Oriental calligraphy’ ”.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. Pp 80 – 124 regarding artists such as Reinhardt, Motherwell, Noguchi, Tobey, Cage.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. Pp 124 – 131.

meditative object for the viewer,<sup>139</sup> a consciousness of spatiality as a representation of the cosmic void, or emptiness, nothingness,<sup>140</sup> and the expression of “continuum”,<sup>141</sup> and process,<sup>142</sup> are all explored by David Clarke as new ways of seeing reality adopted by many Abstract Expressionist artists, derived from Taoism and Zen. These Taoist conceptual concerns and techniques arguably reverberated as an influence on painting internationally, and on re-thinking approaches to sculpture leading to the development of installation art.

#### **RHIZOME #5: Tao the Invisible – Fluxus**

As we see above, David Clarke’s thorough research established the verity of his theory that Taoism influenced many post World War Two American artists, focussing on Abstract Expressionism. However, Taoism seems to have become invisible in research of this time period of other fields of practice, such as the Fluxus Movement, described below. Here the attribution of Taoism as an Asian influence is eclipsed by Zen Buddhism, so this rhizome follows Zen Buddhism as the indirect conduit through which Taoist precepts influenced the Fluxus Movement, which was one of installation art’s starting points.

The Fluxus Movement was a post Second World War phenomenon, contemporaneous to Abstract Expressionism.<sup>143</sup> George Maciunas, the default organiser and disseminator of Fluxus art, inadvertently named it as a movement in 1962. It was the first global, cross cultural avant-garde, the first group to achieve ‘non groupness’ in that there were no manifestos or group consensus as the artists identified with the anarchic counter culture movement of the nineteen-sixties and seventies. Fluxus art is characterised by interdisciplinary, anti elitist, anarchic, absurdist and/or paradoxical interventions and events, *action* or performance art, often outside the gallery system. Above all the Fluxus artists valued corporeal responses to spatiality, a sense of impermanence or ‘becoming’ and its potential for novel synthesis<sup>144</sup> and spontaneous improvisation, which are key factors in both the Taoist artists’ credo, and in the development of installation art.

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid. Chapter Four.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. Pp 145 - 173

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. Chapter Six.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. Chapter Seven.

<sup>143</sup> Ref. Anne Kirker, *Engaging Discontent*. Curator of the exhibition, *Fluxus and After...* (1993). Queensland Art Gallery, with Roger Butler and Francesco Conz.

[http://www.artspacemackay.com.au/artists\\_books/focus\\_on\\_artists\\_books\\_2/anne\\_kirker\\_paper](http://www.artspacemackay.com.au/artists_books/focus_on_artists_books_2/anne_kirker_paper)

<sup>144</sup> David I. Hall, *Process and Anarchy: A Taoist Vision of Creativity* (1978), *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 28. No. 3. P 273.

In his book, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Post War America*, Daniel Belgrad attributes this shift towards spontaneous expression to everything but the influence of Taoism, giving marginal status to evidence that expanded research of Taoism might have exposed.<sup>145</sup> Belgrad's thesis is to expose the history of spontaneous creativity, or improvisation in the American avant-garde.<sup>146</sup> He describes American artists' disaffection with corporate and liberal humanism and the American Way, which was regarded by artists as an unthinking conformity focused on nationalistic hubris, phobic anti-communism, and materialism.<sup>147</sup> He devotes some discussion to Ezra Pound's enthusiasm for Chinese calligraphy and notes the "calligraphic styles of Tomlin or Mark Tobey",<sup>148</sup> Motherwell's 'plastic autism',<sup>149</sup> Pollock's figure ground synthesis;<sup>150</sup> Rosenberg's 'action painting' as a kind of dialogue between the painter and the work of art,<sup>151</sup> but without drawing correlations to Taoism. He writes, "Many artists also investigated Taoism (which was another of Goodman's primary sources)."<sup>152</sup> This was in reference to the influence of gestalt psychology, not Taoism. These references tease at Taoism's significance but never explicate upon it in any detail.

American artists interested in alternative approaches to conceptualising reality often examined other cultural models of thinking and expression. Belgrad rightly focuses on artists' studies of Native American art as a pictographic model,<sup>153</sup> their study of Jung<sup>154</sup> and gestalt psychology,<sup>155</sup> their rejection of surrealism and existentialism,<sup>156</sup> and their interest in Alfred Whitehead's philosophical explication of process.<sup>157</sup> Bebop<sup>158</sup> and Afro American jazz, the Beat Generation, poets such as William Carlos Williams, are cited as equivalents in music and literature of the Abstract Expressionist artists. In this respect Belgrad mentions Taoism in passing, with the

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<sup>145</sup> Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Post War America*, University of Chicago Press, 1998.

<sup>146</sup> This will be expanded upon in the next chapter.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. Pp 28, 61, 117, 143.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. P 95.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. P 105.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid. P 111.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. P 111.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. P 114.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid. P 55.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. P 61.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. P 114, Chapter 6. On page 167 Belgrad describes gestalt as "synthesised existentialism and Taoism, which was also an important influence on Zen", but gives little detail of what that means.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. P 113.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. Chapter 5, Pp 124 – 127 in reference to Alfred Whitehead's *Process and Reality: an Essay in Cosmology*. The Free Press, New York, 1929.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. Ch 8.

example that Robert Motherwell wrote of Taoism in 1944 about the “governing trope of Abstract Expressionism”:

All my works [consist] of a dialectic between the conscious ... and unconscious ... resolved into a synthesis.<sup>159</sup>

In *The Fluxus Reader*, another key history of Fluxus, David T. Doris mentions Taoism in relation to Zen Buddhism:

Chuang-tzu, one of the founders of philosophical Taoism, an important influence on the development of Zen in China, [who suggested] that words be regarded as a net which is employed to catch fish [the net being words, the fish, that is, enlightenment, the objective].<sup>160</sup>

Zen Buddhism is cited throughout Belgrad’s and Doris’s books as the strong Asian influence on radical international art movements, post World War Two.<sup>161</sup> This raises a pivotal question for this assessment of the influence of Taoism at this critical period in the evolution of cross cultural, experimental, contemporary art after World War Two:

*Are Taoist precepts channeled through Japanese Zen in Fluxus art?*

In essence, the following outlines reasons why Japanese Zen cultural practices eclipsed Taoism in the mid-twentieth century. Throughout periods in the nineteenth century when China’s disrupted and fraught relations with the West slowed productive interaction, Western artist’s exposure to Taoism continued obliquely via the culture of Japanese Zen, a factor of great significance for the proposition of this thesis.<sup>162</sup>

Japanese works of art and *objets d’art* had filtered into Europe from the late eighteenth century, but they attracted real interest only after Japan’s self enforced isolation was ended by the intervention of the United States of

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid. P 37. This objective, to achieve a unity of binaries is pure Taoism, which Motherwell repeatedly cited as an influence in interviews, lectures and writings.

<sup>160</sup> *The Fluxus Reader*, (1998) Ed., Ken Friedman. Pub. Academy Editions. David T. Doris, *Zen Vaudeville: a Medi(t)ation in the Margins of Fluxus*. P 100.

<sup>161</sup> For example, a section is devoted to *Pottery and Zen*, (P 165) where ceramics at Black Mountain College, the visit of Bernard Leach and Japanese potters, demonstrations of Zen ceramic practices that influenced Abstract Expressionist potters such as Peter Voulkas, are examined at length by Belgrad.

<sup>162</sup> In her book, *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today*, Jacqueline Baas focuses on the influence of Buddhism on Western art, and also acknowledge the influence of Taoism on the development of Zen Buddhism and its art forms, including calligraphy.

America (USA) in 1854, and after trade treaties were negotiated - with the United States, and Britain in 1856, and with France in 1858.<sup>163</sup>

Principally, Japanese Zen Buddhism's origins in China's Ch'en Buddhism, outlined above (page 18), and the cultural practices associated with Ch'en and Zen Buddhism became freely accessible to artists through examples of calligraphy and woodcuts in public collections, expositions, and galleries, to be discussed in more detail in the following rhizome (page 49). The influence of the former, calligraphy, has been outlined above, with a thorough analysis to follow in Chapter Four.

After its defeat in World War Two Japan was occupied by the United States of America, leading to first hand cultural exchange at unprecedented high levels. Similarly, the United States army was stationed in Germany, fighting in Korea and later in Vietnam. For artists, this international situation developed direct ties across national boundaries, the circumstance for truly cross-cultural exchanges and collaborations (*Fig 33*).<sup>164</sup> Meanwhile in China Mao Zedong's communist revolution was established in 1949, enforcing isolationist policies against Western influences. Reacting against the insanity and destruction of war, social conformity, consumerism and materialism, young Western artists were drawn to both the absurdity of Dada, an art movement formed in response to the lunacy of the First World War,<sup>165</sup> and Zen Buddhism and Taoist philosophy, which provided alternative philosophical and aesthetic models.

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<sup>163</sup> Virginia Spate, David Bromfield, *A New and Strange Beauty. Monet and Japanese Art*, from *Monet and Japan*, catalogue, 2001. National Gallery of Australia. P 3. Ref. Phylis Floyd, *Documentary Evidence for the Availability of Imagery in Europe in Nineteenth-Century Public Collections*, *Art Bulletin*, March 1986, pp 105 – 110.

<sup>164</sup> Whilst artist in resident in Kunsterhaus Bethanien in Berlin during 1981, 1982, I met Wolf Vostell, and expatriot American artist, Ed Keinholz, and American artist/poet Emmett Williams, who lived in Berlin and identified as Fluxus artists. Emmett Williams had been stationed in Germany after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World war and met German artists, such as Joseph Beuys and Wolf Vostell, members of the German Fluxus movement.

<sup>165</sup> See above. S. Lemoine, *Dada*, 1987, *Art Data*. P 10.



Fig 33: Joseph Beuys (German, 1921-1986), *I like America and America likes me*, 1974<sup>166</sup>  
 Joseph Beuys was a Fluxus artist in strong communication with American Fluxus artists. In this performance, or *action*, he spent several days in Renée Block's gallery in New York with a coyote, an animal of spiritual significance for Indigenous Americans. He did not touch American soil. He was wrapped in felt to be transported back and forth to and from the airport in an ambulance.<sup>167</sup>  
 Photo Caroline Tisdall.

In his essay, *Zen Vaudeville: a Medi(t)ation in the Margins of Fluxus*,<sup>168</sup> David Doris analyses the works of Fluxus artists in relation to Zen principals, thereby threading the development of Western art into the continuation of a pervasive, Taoist resonance. The following diagram provides Doris's examples of Fluxus *actions*, or performances, happenings, and defines how Taoist qualities and precepts, described above, are shared by the Zen precepts listed by David Doris:

Taoist/Zen precept	Artist	Artwork, date	Description of work
<i>Conundrum, improvisation</i>	George Brecht	<i>Piano Piece</i> (1962)	The score reads simply, 'centre'. <sup>169</sup>
<i>Being present, temporality</i>	On Kawara	<i>I am still alive</i> (mid-1960s)	Postcards and telegrams with the message, "I am still alive". <sup>170</sup>

<sup>166</sup> <http://www.artlex.com/ArtLex/f/fluxus.html> Re. the Fluxus `performances of Joseph Beuys.

<sup>167</sup> <http://www.walkerart.org/archive/5/9D43B5DB685147C46167.htm>

<sup>168</sup> *The Fluxus Reader*, (1998) Ed., Ken Friedman. Pub. Academy Editions. David T. Doris, *Zen Vaudeville: a Medi(t)ation in the Margins of Fluxus*.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.* P 102.

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<i>Corporeal gesture, attention, meditative presence</i>	Takahisa Kosugi,	<i>Chirinomy 1</i> (1961)	Instructions: 'Put out a hand from a window from along period of time' <sup>171</sup> . "The artist becomes the creator of a matrix" and the viewer completes the work, "and creates it <i>anew</i> with each performance". <sup>172</sup>
<i>Meditative work, transgressiveness:</i>	Ken Friedman,	<i>Scrub Piece</i> (1956)	Instructions: On the first day of Spring, go unannounced to a public monument. Clean it thoroughly. <sup>173</sup>
<i>Creativity in an everyday activity</i>	Alison Knowles	<i>Proposition</i> (1962)	Instructions: 'Make a salad'. <sup>174</sup>
<i>Unification of body and mind Non-action</i>	Robert Filliou with Alison Knowles.	<i>Yes – an action poem</i> (1965)	PART 1 - Knowles read an encyclopaedic account of the functions of the poet's body. Part 2 - Filliou rose to his feet and recited: Yes. As my name is Filliou, the title of the poem is: LE FILLIOU IDEAL It is an action poem and I am going to perform it. Its score is: not deciding not choosing not wanting not owning aware of self wide awake SITTING QUIETLY

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<sup>170</sup> David Elliott, *The New Japan* (pdf).

[www.moriart.org/english/contents/tokyoberlin/about/img/The\\_New\\_Japan](http://www.moriart.org/english/contents/tokyoberlin/about/img/The_New_Japan) Cited Sept. 2008.

<sup>171</sup> *The Fluxus Reader*, (1998) Ed., Ken Friedman. Pub. Academy Editions. David T. Doris, *Zen Vaudeville: a Medi(t)ation in the Margins of Fluxus*. P 103.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid. P 105, quoting Dick Higgins.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. P 106.

<sup>174</sup> This artwork could be seen as a precursor to Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, where art has a practical social function (see Chapter Eight, Conclusion).



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			DOING NOTHING <sup>175</sup>
<i>Absurdity:</i>	Daniel Spoerri	<i>Fakir's Spectacles</i> (1965).	Spectacles with spikes poking back towards the eyes that would blind the wearer. <sup>176</sup>
<i>Paradox</i>	Yoko Ono	<i>Sun Piece</i> (1962)	Instructions: Watch the sun until It becomes square <sup>177</sup>
<i>Intuition, immediacy of experience, sensory perception</i>	Yoko Ono	<i>Wind Piece</i> (1962)	Instructions: Make way for the wind <sup>178</sup>
<i>Austerity, simplicity:</i>	Yoko Ono	<i>Light ning Piece</i> (1965)	Instructions: Light a match and watch Till it goes out. <sup>179</sup>
<i>Inter relatedness, cyclic totality, inter-media:</i>	June Nam Paik	<i>TV Buddha</i> (1982).	Video and sculpture installation. <sup>180</sup>
<i>Chance</i>	Ben Vautier	<i>Total Art Sculpture</i> (1967)	Instructions: Pick up anything at your feet <sup>181</sup>
<i>Time, space, corporeality, surrender, spontaneity</i>	Bonita Ely	<i>Hill Roll</i> (1969)	Take some friends to the top of a hill. Roll down the hill together. <sup>182</sup>

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These Fluxus artworks are characterised by an informal, multi-sensory aesthetic, often anti-aesthetic structure, driven by radical applications to sculptural domains of Dada, the confrontational anti-realist theatrical approach of Antonin Artaud's *Theatre*

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid. P 109.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. P 111. Doris compares this work to Man Ray's *Cadeau* (1921), a clothes iron with spikes.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. P 113.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. P 115.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. P 114.

<sup>180</sup> <http://faculty.etsu.edu/kortumr/HUMT2320/postmodern/htmldescriptionpages/30paik2desc.jpg>  
Cited May, 2008.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. P 118.

<sup>182</sup> Happening at the Sydney Myer Music Bowl, Melbourne, 1969, when studying at Prahran College of Fine Art.

of the Absurd,<sup>183</sup> and Taoist and Zen precepts, including improvisation, the transitional (*flux*), spatial and corporeal articulation. The Minimalist sculptors, represented by Donald Judd in this thesis, endeavoured to embed these philosophical ideas into sculpture's formal aesthetic, using innovative sculptural modes, which became known as installation art.<sup>184</sup>

## **RHIZOME #6: Colonisation, Grand Expositions and Seigfried Bing**

After the mutual curiosity, exchange and collaboration of early contact with Jesuit missionaries, China's trade and cultural inter relations with Europe in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries were fraught. A change of approach from the Vatican in the eighteenth century generated by a dogmatic intolerance of Chinese traditions, exacerbated mutual mistrust.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Christian missionaries were either banished or conducted their activities covertly. China rejected early European overtures to formally establish trade, considering the foreigners 'barbarians',<sup>185</sup> which created barriers to free inter-cultural exchange. This was exacerbated by the chaos of continued internal strife and wrangling power struggles within China. During the nineteenth century the British East India Company imported fabulously lucrative Indian opium into China against the decree of the Emperor, causing widespread addiction, unequal, and devastatingly corrupt trading, and finally the protracted Opium Wars, which were eventually won abjectly and decisively by the British. The Qing Dynasty's prestige was severely undermined.<sup>186</sup> A treaty negotiated by Prince Gong, the exiled Emperor's brother, gave the British unprecedented access to the country and a new era of reportage on China began from the 1860s. The Dynasty fell in 1912 giving way to a period of conflicted Nationalist Federation led by Sun Yat-sen, when Chinese artists were exposed to European art, studying in Hong Kong and

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<sup>183</sup> Antonin Artaud (1896 – 1948). French actor, playwright, theatre director and theoretician, author of *The Theatre and Its Double*, (translated by Mary Caroline Richards. New York: Grove Weidenfeld), first published in English in 1958, which advocated a confrontational involvement with the audience rather than the traditional separation of audience from performers upon a stage presenting a scripted illusion of reality. Artaud was influenced by Asian cultural practices, including Buddhism. See his 'letter to the Dahli Lhama' and 'Letter to the Buddhist schools', David J. Clarke, *Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture* (1988). PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute. Pub. Imprint, New York. P 55.

<sup>184</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>185</sup> The English refused to kow tow to the Emperor.

<sup>186</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\\_Opium\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Opium_War) (Cited May, 2008) See also, Peter Valder, *Gardens in China* (2002), pub. Florilegium, Sydney, Australia. Pp 32 - 33. Prince Gong's garden in Beijing is cited below.

Europe. This was followed by the repressive, increasingly isolationist perversity of Mao Zedong's communist regime from 1949.

For the most part, a consequence of this history of suspicion, conflict and turmoil between China and the West was disrupted inter-cultural communication. Instead, earlier influences were distilled and transformed through processes such as the philosophical developments described above, punctuated by the continued stimulus for Modernist innovation drawn from imported Taoist art forms, household wares and ephemera by artists and connoisseurs. Throughout the nineteenth century in France and England, Grand Expositions that featured curiosities from the colonies, such as the 1851 international exhibition in the Crystal Palace, included Chinese artefacts (Fig 34).<sup>187</sup>



Fig 34: Interior of the Crystal Palace, London, venue for the Grand Exhibition of 1851, which featured artefacts from China and Chinoiserie.

Popular trade expositions, such as the Paris World Fair in 1878,<sup>188</sup> and in 1900, the Exposition Universelle in Paris continued this populist exposure to Chinese culture (Fig 35).

In Paris at the turn of the nineteenth century Siegfried Bing, an influential art dealer and collector, was responsible for bringing Chinese aesthetics and art forms to the attention of artists and craftspeople.<sup>189</sup> His gallery, L'Art Nouveau - Maison Bing, commissioned artists such as Edward Vuillard to produce artefacts inspired by his

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<sup>187</sup> Bob Speel, *The Great Exhibition of 1851*.

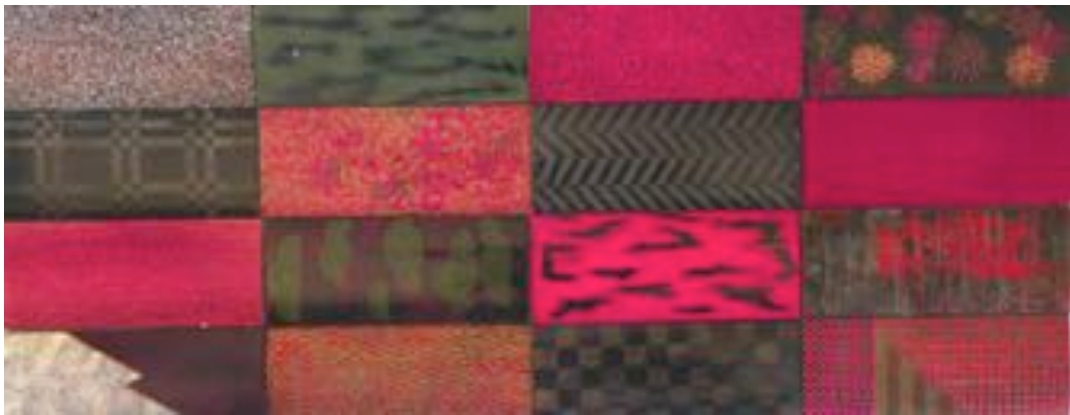
<http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/speel/otherart/grtexhib.htm#beginning>

<sup>188</sup> Jacqueline Baas, *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today* (2005), University of California Press. P 8.

<sup>189</sup> *Introduction: Tastemaking in the Age of Art Nouveau: The Role of Siegfried Bing* by Gabriel P. Weisberg with the assistance of Edwin Becker, Curator of Exhibitions, Van Gogh Museum. [http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/summer\\_05/articles/intro.shtml](http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/summer_05/articles/intro.shtml)

imports from China and elsewhere in the 'Orient'.<sup>190</sup> Art Nouveau continued as Art Deco to the beginning of the Second World War.

While the above accounts for the export of culture from China, Western travellers, and the Chinese Diaspora to and from countries such as America and Australia present another rhizome to follow to track the influence of Taoism.



*Fig 35: Japanese lacquer samples from the Victoria and Albert Museum, c.1850 – 75.<sup>191</sup> The Chinese lacquer technique was deported to Japan, Vietnam and Korea and later, Europe, with examples such as these introducing a new technique for artists and designers. In the twentieth century, Donald Judd used the spatially ambiguous translucent surface of lacquer on some of his Minimalist sculptures.<sup>192</sup>*

### **RHIZOME #7: Travellers**

Although there is no place here to pursue the idea in detail it suffices to speculate that during the first half of the twentieth century, Australia could be seen to be a test case to demonstrate the paucity of stimulus towards innovation provided by Eurocentrist training and influence. Because of the White Australia policy, which in effect stopped the migration of Asians to Australia from the turn of the nineteenth century, Australian artists were cut off from strong influences from Asia in their home country, and sought training and stimulation mainly in Britain and France. Direct encounters with the exotic paradigms that stimulated the European and American

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<sup>190</sup> Refer to *Mr Bing And L'Art Nouveau* - ABC1 Television, 11:10pm Sunday, 03 Aug 2008.

Documentary.

<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/guide/netw/200808/programs/zy8207a001d3082008t231100.htm>

See also, *Introduction: Tastemaking in the Age of Art Nouveau: The Role of Siegfried Bing* by Gabriel P. Weisberg with the assistance of Edwin Becker, Curator of Exhibitions, Van Gogh Museum.

[http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/summer\\_05/articles/intro.shtml](http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/summer_05/articles/intro.shtml)

Gislaine Wood, *Sources of Art Deco* (2008), from *Art Deco 1910 - 1939*, catalogue for an exhibition organised by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. pub. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Pp 41, 42, 54, 55, 230, 231.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid. P 41.

<sup>192</sup> See the significance of this to the thesis in Chapter Five.

artists described above, were diluted.<sup>193</sup> Arguably, this could be a factor to account for the conservative nature of early Australian Modernism. Capon concludes her catalogue essay as follows:

By incorporating Chinese artefacts, calligraphic characters, architectural detail, stylistic themes and symbols in their work, Australian artists have demonstrated how the aesthetic influences of Chinese culture had become part of the Australian artistic idiom, and by osmosis, had become absorbed into the universal language of art.<sup>194</sup>

This certainly supports the proposition that the influences of Taoism have become so invisibly meshed in Western paradigms that they are now universal verities, but perhaps overstates the case for Australia's early modernists with the exception of Margaret Preston.



Fig 36: Margaret Preston, *Flying Over the Shoalhaven River*, 1942, oil on canvas, 50.6 (h) x 50.6 (w) cm. National Gallery of Australia collection.

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<sup>193</sup> Jill Graham, *Rebels and Precursors by Richard Hause and Murray/Murundi by Bonita Ely*, book review, *Art and Text*, Autumn, 1982. Graham wrote, "The early heroes (sic) of modernism in Australia hardly presented an organised modernist *putsch* but rather held in common and intense sense of the traditional values of European culture". P 73. Roger Benjamin in his catalogue essay for the exhibition, *The Oriental Mirage* describes it as learning "at a remove from the centre". Pub. Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1997. P 22.

<sup>194</sup> Joanna Capon, *The Influence of China on Australian Art*, from *Yin-Yang: China in Australia* (2008), catalogue, pub. National Trust, S.H. Irvine Gallery, Sydney. Curator, Zeny Edwards. P 54.

Margaret Preston (1875 – 1963), one of Australia’s most innovative Modernists, could be seen as the control for this hypothesis. Preston had admired Chinese art since 1915 when she acquired her first books on the subject.<sup>195</sup> A great traveler, she visited China on two occasions, and also Japan. Chinese elements such as abstraction, oblique projection where the picture plane is tilted to place the viewer *in* the image,<sup>196</sup> a lyrical use of line, brushwork and shape, the flux of change and continuity may be found in her paintings, for example, *Flying Over the Shoalhaven River*, 1942 (Fig 36).<sup>197</sup>

Australia’s peripatetic émigré artist, Ian Fairweather<sup>198</sup> lived and studied in Peking (sic) from 1929 to 1933, learnt Mandarin, and painted the busy streets and landscape surrounding the city, to form a tendril of the Deleuzian rhizome of Taoism’s influences to Australia.<sup>199</sup> Joanna Capon, art historian and archaeologist whose specialty is China, writes in her catalogue essay, *The influence of China on Australian Art* for the exhibition catalogue, *Yin-Yang: China in Australia*, quoting Fairweather, that he understood that:

‘in China the art of writing and that of painting were closely interlocked by history and aesthetic values’. This marked a momentous discovery for him and it was this realisation that became one of the great influences on his ... work.<sup>200</sup>

Ian Fairweather returned to China in 1935 and spent time with a master calligrapher outside Peking.<sup>201</sup> Fairweather’s translation in 1963 of the Ch’en fable, *The Drunken Buddha*, illustrated with his increasingly calligraphy-like, semi-abstract paintings, exemplify an artist’s unmediated intellectual and aesthetic study of Taoist principals applied to Western painting during the mid twentieth century (Fig 37).<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid. “Preston ... read *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* as well as a translation of a book by Guo Xi, one of the great North Sung landscape painters whom she greatly admired, ... following his advice, ‘not to imitate nature as it is, but to represent it as it appears’”.

<sup>196</sup> <http://books.google.com.au/books?id=UAKljsHF2DkC&pg=PA55&lpg=PA55&dq=oblique+projection+japanese+art&source=web&ots=ZuEdm-IhPK&sig=fI0AsDfDexJU9IDXysvn2JC0uuw&hl=en#PPA54,M1> Cited June 2008

<sup>197</sup> <http://www.nga.gov.au/Preston/essay.cfm> From Roger Butler’s catalogue essay for the exhibition, *Margaret Preston Australian Printmaker*, 18 December 2004 – 25 April 2005. National Gallery of Australia (NGA) Cited June, 2008.

<sup>198</sup> Ian Fairweather, England, Australia. (1891 – died in Australia 1974).

<sup>199</sup> [http://www.queenslandartgallery.com/exhibitions/current/fairweather\\_room/ian\\_fairweather4](http://www.queenslandartgallery.com/exhibitions/current/fairweather_room/ian_fairweather4) (Cited May 2008)

<sup>200</sup> Joanna Capon, *The Influence of China on Australian Art*, from *Yin-Yang: China in Australia* (2008), catalogue, pub. National Trust, S.H. Irvine Gallery, Sydney. Curator, Zeny Edwards. P 53.

<sup>201</sup> [www.niagaragalleries.com.au/artists/artistpages/theartists/ian\\_fairweather/documents/Fairweather.pdf](http://www.niagaragalleries.com.au/artists/artistpages/theartists/ian_fairweather/documents/Fairweather.pdf) (Cited May 2008)

<sup>202</sup> Ian Fairweather (1891- 1974), *The Drunken Buddha*, (1965). University of Queensland Press.





Fig 37: Ian Fairweather (1891- 1974), Painting to illustrate his translation of *The Drunken Buddha* (page 27), entitled, *Suddenly Feeling Dizzy, Chu-Tien Fell from the Seat*. (1963).

### **RHIZOME #8: The East Asian Diaspora**

The traffic was not one way. For example, Vietnam's Diem Phung Thi (1920 – 1999) migrated to France from Vietnam taking with her a sculptural vocabulary based on modules derived from Chinese calligraphy.<sup>203</sup> Like many artists from colonised Eastern countries, her immersion in Europe's modern art ironically drew as much upon her own culture's influence upon European Modernism, which she transported back to her home country, completing the circular blending of an increasingly global dialogue (Fig 38).

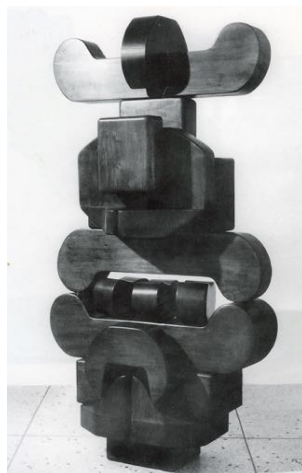


Fig 38: Diem Phung Thi, *The Silence*, 1988, wood, 170 x 80 x 45 cm.

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<sup>203</sup> Nghe Thuat, *Diem Phung Thi*, circa 1997, pub. Agence de la Francophonie. Refer to Chapter Two and the *Sinicisation of Vietnam* section.  
[http://www.vietmanitoba.com/vietpeople/diem\\_phung\\_thi.htm](http://www.vietmanitoba.com/vietpeople/diem_phung_thi.htm)



In Australia, migration from China froze in 1901 with the first of a series of legislations, colloquially known as the White Australia Policy that introduced the use of a dictation test that effectively barred Asian people from eligibility to migrate to Australia; the immigration official could nominate the language to be 'tested'. Chinese Australians residing in Australia were marooned, but because of ingrained racial discrimination, did not integrate significantly into Australia's dominant Anglo culture so dialogue as a conduit for Taoist influence in mainstream Australia was minimal, although Taoist traditions were strongly maintained in the Chinese communities' temples. Like Australia's Indigenous peoples they were not given full rights as citizens.

This legislative marginisation slowly eroded after the Second World War and, following proactive policies to establish multiculturalism enacted in arts strategies in the nineteen-seventies and eighties, artists of Asian heritage now engage with the influences of their heritage, including Taoist art forms, and are amongst Australia's most innovative visual arts practitioners. For example, Lindy Lee, a practising Buddhist, John Young and William Yang, who is a third generation Chinese Australian and a practising Taoist, research and represent their histories, identity, and the significance of belief systems such as Zen and Taoism in their visual art practices (*Fig 39, Fig 40, Fig 41*).



*Fig 39: John Young, Studio #2 (2006), digital print on linen, 143 cm x 134 cm.*



*Fig 40:* Lindy Lee, *Birth and Death* (2007), performance and installation, Cambelltown Art Centre.



*Fig 41:* William Yang, *Objects for Meditation* (2006), performance with slide show.

From the nineteen-eighties non-Asian Australian artists such as Tim Johnson were influenced by Taoist art forms and concepts in response to Post Modern discourse regarding the nature of originality, inter cultural resonances, and the conceptual device of appropriation (*Fig 42*). In 1989 the Hawke government allowed Chinese nationals who were in Australia at the time of the Tiananmen Square uprising to stay on. The artists amongst them brought to Australia the aggressively radical practices they had developed as participants in the Chinese New Wave movement (page 54).

The influence of these artists was reinforced by the stimulus of Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese artists selected for the series of Asia-Pacific Triennials from 1993 in the Queensland Art Gallery.



Fig 42: Tim Johnson and Mi Le Thi, *Seamless* (2002) 30" x 40".

In America race relations and immigration policies for the Chinese diaspora followed the same discriminatory pattern as Australia, but perhaps because of larger populations of Chinese Americans in places such as San Francisco, and the civil rights movement, a survey exhibition of works by Asian American artists entitled *Asian / American / Modern Art: Shifting Currents*, 2008, reveals a "collective juggernaut" of works by Asian Americans (Fig 43).<sup>204</sup>



Fig 43: Yun Gee (1906 – 1963), *Butterflies, Dream of Chuang-Tze* (circa 1930). Oil on canvas, 28<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 23<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches. A cubist portrait of the Taoist philosopher, Chuang-Tze, who dreamt he

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<sup>204</sup> Karin Higa, *The Search for Roots, or Finding a Precursor* (2008), essay for the book accompanying the exhibition *Asian / American / Modern Art: Shifting Currents, 1900 – 1970*, de Young Museum, San Francisco. Pub. University of California Press. P 15.

was a butterfly and when he awoke, wondered if he was a butterfly dreaming he was Chuang-Tze which is perhaps a parable of the trans-national experiences of Yun Gee.<sup>205</sup>

This exhibition demonstrates the more active and varied role of East Asian Americans in the fabric of American culture compared to Australia, including contributions of their knowledge of Asian cultural practices and philosophy to evaluations of Western traditions described above. Daniell Cornell, in his essay for the catalogue, *Journeys into Abstraction: Asia, America, Europe, and the Art of Yun Gee, Alfonso Ossorio, and Isamu Noguchi*, wrote:

As this book and exhibition demonstrate, many artists with ties to both Asia and America have contributed to a range of artistic languages, including the foundational modernist vocabularies in Paris and New York.<sup>206</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to account for the Taoist influences these artists may have brought to American experimental contemporary art but the works in the exhibition are a powerful testament to the artist's voice that records the pulse, the intimacies and insights, from the margins.



*Fig 44:* June Nam Paik (1932 – 2006), an original member of Fluxus, was born in Korea and has been described as the “father of video art and the most important figure in the art and

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid. P 57.

<sup>206</sup> Daniell Cornell, *Journeys into Abstraction: Asia, America, Europe, and the Art of Yun Gee, Alfonso Ossorio, and Isamu Noguchi* (2008), from exhibition *Asian / American / Modern Art: Shifting Currents, 1900 – 1970*, de Young Museum, San Francisco. Pub. University of California Press. P 31.

technology movement of the late twentieth century ... Paik foresaw many of today's technological advances coining the term 'information superhighway'.<sup>207</sup>



*Fig 45: Yayoi Kasama (born, Japan, 1929 - ) Chair (1962). Cloth, chair and enamel. 42 x 27 x 33 inches. Kasama's provocative Fluxus sculptures and installations foreshadowed 1970s feminist art.*<sup>208</sup>

Certainly after the Second World War when America's engagements in Asia, however noble or nefarious, drew non-Western paradigms to the attention of artists, Asian American artists actively engaged in the innovative developments at play (*Fig 44, Fig 45, Fig 46*). Cornell makes the point that Asian American artists, in their day to day lives, carried the stamp of cultural displacement and fragmentation in their physiognomy, so were culturally and psychologically embodied in the process of abstracting "essential properties" and "philosophical principles" rather than prioritising "a recognisable subject".<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> [http://www.decordova.org/Decordova/sculp\\_Park/paik.htm](http://www.decordova.org/Decordova/sculp_Park/paik.htm) Cited May, 2008

<sup>208</sup> Karin Higa, *The Search for Roots, or Finding a Precursor* (2008), essay for the book accompanying the exhibition *Asian / American / Modern Art: Shifting Currents, 1900 – 1970*, de Young Museum, San Francisco. Pub. University of California Press. P 139.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.* P 32.





*Fig 46: Martin Wong (1946 – 1999), Fairy Tale (1967).*  
Ink on paper, 81<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 12<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches. Dated June 22, 1967, the first day of the counterculture Summer of Love in San Francisco, this hand written 'scroll', resonant of calligraphy, is an amusing account of Van Gogh and Gauguin's first meeting in Arles that evokes the psychedelic flavour of the 1960s.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid. P 151.

### **RHIZOME #9: New Waves, West to East**

During the first half of the twentieth century some Chinese artists sought instruction in Europe, Japan and Hong Kong to bring Modernist innovations to what they considered a moribund Chinese visual arts practice. This caused fierce debate and the movement was short lived because of the Japanese invasion of China and consequent priorities of survival. One of the groups, *Juelanche*, which literally translates in English as ‘a great wave’, foreshadowing the naming of events in China in the mid-1980s, was known as the Storm Society in English.<sup>211</sup> The society formed in 1931 in Shanghai. This group of Western educated young artists questioned the role of artists in society, and advocated modernism as an antidote to the stagnation and esoteric obscurity of Chinese traditional art. The artists were in and out of exile as the Japanese advanced in 1937, the Long March gathered strength, then in 1949 as Mao’s cultural vision was enforced, the movement was crushed.<sup>212</sup> The slight impact of this group and others such as the *Lingnan School* (1937–1949), which promoted a fusion of traditional Chinese styles with new Western ideas, is symptomatic of the hostility directed towards Westernised intellectuals at this time (Fig 47).



*Fig 47: Gao Jianfu, Skulls Crying over the Nation's Fate* (1938), a painting possibly influenced by the Expressionist Movement with the Chinese painter's deft control of brush and ink. Gao Jianfu was a member of the Lingnan School. The calligraphic inscription is a poem by Gao Jianfu: "The gentry's tables are loaded with food and wine. In the wilderness there are cold

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<sup>211</sup> Croizier, Ralph. 1993. *Post Impressionists in Pre War Shanghai: The Juelanche (Storm Society) and the Fate of Modernism in Republican China, from Modernity in Asian Art. Modernity in Asian Art*, 1993. Edited by J. Clark. Sydney: Wild Peony Press. Pp 137 – 154.

<sup>212</sup> Re Mao's cultural policy and the Long March: Karen Smith, *Nine lives: the Birth of Avant-Garde Art in New China* (2006) Zurich : Scalo ; New York : Distributed in North America by Prestel. P 312 – 313.



dead bones... Alas, the richer become richer, the poorer become poorer. People of every sort would be better equal. I and the skeletons cry together."<sup>213</sup>

This contrasts starkly with the reception of Western ideas in 1985 after the long drought of no stimulation from the West during Mao Zedong's communist revolution (page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**). Suffice to say, the controversy was symptomatic of the lack of direct dialogue between China and the West up to this time.<sup>214</sup>

Arguably, the next significant thread of Taoist influence came to the West directly from China with the emergence of radical innovation in contemporary art in response to changed social and political conditions in China during the 1980s, when China began opening its doors for contact and commerce with other nations. Taking innovative applications of the ancient art of calligraphy onto the international stage, Chinese artists enhanced the cultural hybridity that characterises the Post Modern, late twentieth century, twenty first century's internationalist contemporary art. For example, calligraphy is the vehicle of innovative expression for the following 'New Wave' artists - Xu Bing,<sup>215</sup> Wu Shan Zuan, Qui Zhijie, Song Dong and, Huang Yong Ping, Wenda Gu (*Fig 48*).



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<sup>213</sup> Crozier, Ralph. 1993. *Post Impressionists in Pre War Shanghai: The Juelanshe (Storm Society) and the Fate of Modernism in Republican China, from Modernity in Asian Art. Modernity in Asian Art.* 1993. Edited by J. Clark. Sydney: Wild Peony Press. P 147.

<sup>214</sup> Crozier, Ralph. 1988. *Art and Revolution in Modern China: the Lingnan (Cantonese) School of Painting 1906 – 1951* Berkley, Los Angeles, London. : University of California Press. Chapter 5.

<sup>215</sup> See Chapter Six.

Fig 48: Wenda Gu, *United Nations- Canadian Monument: the Metamorphosis* (1998), Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. A site-specific installation made entirely of human hair. 20 feet x 85 feet x 30 feet.<sup>216</sup>

In his book, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*,<sup>217</sup> published to accompany the first exhibition of twentieth century calligraphy at the British Museum called *Brushes with Surprise: The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China* (2002), Gordon Barrass's research is significant because it categorises the development of contemporary Chinese calligraphic art since 1947. He describes the styles as Classical, Modernist, Neo-Classical, and the Avant-garde. Classical calligraphers preserved tradition; Neo-classicists sought to revive ancient traditions by making them more in tune with modernity. Modernists radically overhauled the art form structurally and conceptually whereas the avant garde seek to overthrow convention by interrogating assumptions to open up new forms of expression and overthrow conventional forms and thinking.<sup>218</sup>

This thesis amplifies this important publication; it examines these innovations in relation to the Taoist roots from which contemporary Chinese calligraphy is drawn using Xu Bing's artwork, *Book from the Sky* as a case study (page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**). Although Barrass's research is excellent as a time line of twentieth century calligraphic developments in China with insightful accounts of the oeuvre of twenty-five artists, he does not expound upon calligraphy's aesthetic, methodological and conceptual ties to Taoism. However the biographical information accompanying his analysis of the twenty-four artists reiterates each time, the central influence of continued instruction in traditional Chinese cultural practices from older to younger generations despite the Cultural Revolution that condemned this pedagogue. Their instruction centred on calligraphy and Taoism.<sup>219</sup> Some of the older generation were political insiders, or were admired for their scholarship, poetry, and were protected by Mao, who was a highly respected poet and calligrapher (*Fig 49*). Barrass writes:

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<sup>216</sup> <http://www.wendagu.com/home.html>

<sup>217</sup> Gordon S. Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 2002, University of California press.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid. P 15.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid. Refer to: Shen Yin Mo(1883 – 1971), P 67, 71, 72; Ye Gongchuo (1881 – 1968) P 76 – 79; Guo Moruo (1892 – 1978) P 80; Chen Yi (1901 – 1972) P 91; Deng Sanmu (1898 – 1963) P 100; Mao Zedong (1893 – 1976) 1893 – 1976) P105 - 117; Li Luogong (1917 – 1991) P 125; Sha Menghai (1900 – 1992) P 133, 137 – 138; Lin Shanzhi (1898 – 1989) P 140; Wang Shixiang (1914 - ) P 154, 161.

As his [Mao's] technique improved, he increasingly used his calligraphy to enhance his authority and prestige across the country and to intimidate his subordinates.<sup>220</sup>

However many calligraphers were persecuted as elite 'rightists' and were exiled for re-education where they suffered physical hardship and humiliation. Artists such as Qi Gong and Xu Bing<sup>221</sup> kept alive their covert fascination with calligraphy by writing sanctioned material such as propaganda, village newsletters and copies of Mao's poetry during the Cultural Revolution (page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**). The teaching of calligraphy and Taoism continues its central role today in contemporary China,<sup>222</sup> artists having a "deep understanding of traditional painting and calligraphy".<sup>223</sup>

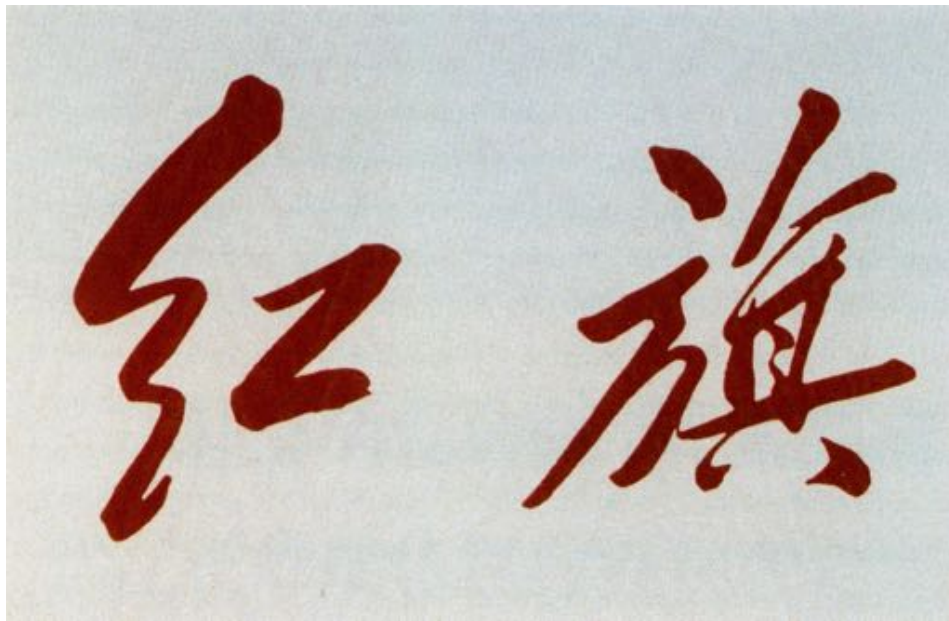


Fig 49: Mao Zedong's first public offering, *Hong Qi (Red Flag)* (1958), written for the masthead of a party journal, was inspired by a red silk dancer.

This chapter's account of the rhizome that is the Tao, outlines the background for a detailed examination of the contemporary art practices that have absorbed and interpreted Taoism.

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<sup>220</sup> P 111.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid. P 146, 36.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid. Refer to : Qi Gong (1912 - ) Pp 146 - 152; Wang Dongling (1945 - ) P 163; Huang Miaozi (1913 - ) P 172; Gu Gan (1942 - ) Pp 182, 187, 192; Zhang Sen (1942 - ) Pp 195, 202; Liu Zengfu (1932 - ) P 203; Han Yu (1931 - ) P 210; Sa Benjie ( 1948 - ) Pp 216 – 225; Zhang Dawo (1943 - ) P 227 – 235; Pu Lieping (1959 - ) P 236; Wei Ligang (1964 - ) P 244; Wang Nanming (1962 - ) P 250; Zang Qiang (1962 - ) P 256; Yang Xianyi (1915 - ) Pp 265 – 273.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid. P 256.

An explanation of the research methodologies deployed in this thesis is presented in the following chapter.