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**Implied Movement: The Dance of
Sculpture**

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The engine of the senses fires outside the corporal body. Sensing the world we inhabit comes from a feeling of all the elemental senses in an envelope around the body projected outwards from the mechanical means of sight, sound, smell, touch. Intuition and instinct both reside in this realm of space. Why it is important has as much to do with the spirit as well as survival. The artist Lee Ufan describes this space well:

My body has its own atmosphere that surrounds and spreads out beyond it to a certain distance. This atmosphere is made up of waves of my energy, scent, colors, and personal idiosyncrasies. There is a certain space in which I can extend my arms and legs, breathe, and feel things. Sometimes it expands and sometimes it shrinks. The outer perimeter of this atmosphere is a sensitive membrane, and I feel pressure on this interface with the outside world when I am alert. This membrane is permeable to the outside world and can be opened and closed. The elastic atmosphere around me possesses life and a sense of existence.¹

The shock of the encounter of sculpture is one of pure primal sensation. When the eyes meet an object, there begins not only involuntary calculations in the mind but also aesthetic ruminations that follow. In as much, as it takes time to see, the rate at which we comprehend varies and the artist makes a gamble that his hand and our eye will meet on a level plane where artistry is seen, felt and heard at that moment his eye and ours comprehend this transformation we know as art. The artist regardless of materials, pigments of Cobalt blue and Cadmium reds, Cor-ten steel, basalt stone or the body, must be a kind of alchemist.

During the construction of certain works of art, the movements of the hands create a visual history that sometimes can be read as a language not unlike a layered graphology in handwriting. Beyond the intention of an artist to portray some form of cadence or movement through mark-making, an equally compelling gesture can arise from the fundamental processes involved in the human touch. A compelling comparison is the act of improvisation in music. This action has

¹ Ufan, Lee. "The Art of Encounter." Trans. Stanley N. Anderson. London: Lisson Gallery publications no. 42, 2004. 229 (85.)

historical roots in all musical forms East and West. Traditionally in Western music, the “Cadenza” was a portion of a concerto in which a soloist was allowed the freedom to improvise freely for a section of a work before returning to the written score.

In Gagaku , Japanese Imperial Court Music, a soloist was considered to be a professional player and composer in that he was the master of his instrument technically as a performer and creator of inspired passages of music within the framework of a score. Two such instruments that were considered the instruments of soloists are the Biwa, a four stringed lute, and the Shakuhachi, a wind instrument played like a clarinet. An open space of time in an ensemble existed for these soloist to create an improvised portion of the performance. On improvisation it can be said that:

Highly skilled players are able to retrieve the smallest fragments of patterns and, again with split second timing, combine them and recombine the new combinations in part or whole with amazing continuity.²

In sculpture the hands perform an improvised movement with the same precision to construct forms that are variations on themes remembered and recreated to achieve the desired form. It is an improvisation or dance of the hands that creates art in the purest sense, uncorrupted or contrived. For the viewer with a trained eye, the honest work of art is obvious.

Some sculptors are filled with a nervous energy, others sedate and others without direct touch albeit this touch is present in drawing, a sculptor’s method of *tuning* a sculpture or finding its *pulse*. The methodology on which this psychological forming transmutes itself into a material represents the clearest personification of the sculptor’s fingerprint. Working with the body, shaping material with the hands that memorize certain movements and repetitions, the form is extracted, extruded and given a life. As with music, sculpture requires its listener to assemble the parts to create the whole. Even a sculptor as Giambologna requires one to circle round the base of marble or bronze and analyze the hand that removed the unnecessary material. Underneath are

² Chase, Mildred Portney. Improvisation: Music from The Inside Out, Berkley, CA, Creative Arts Book Co. 1988. 30.

fugues, dance forms such as the Bourrée, Sarabande, Courante, Allemande. Dance forms from European folk music are fundamental for most all classical music and the basis for this grid of sound in folk music is generally at the core of classical sculpture replicated by hands with that memory intact. The hands do in fact have memory, a memory that lies in the nerves and muscles not only the brain. Any trained pianist understands the memory within the hands and how a certain touch and movement over the keys of a piano follows a linear path that the brain does not engage. The movement is fluid only because the hands remember. Minute details and nuances of a work of music are brought to life with a spirit and fundamental artistry that exists outside the realm of *controlled* thinking.

There exists a primal fingerprint which is the cultural hallmark and perhaps the salvation of this specie's voice. It is the eternal question of this species, *if intelligence can exist beyond matter*. In art, there is always a desire to connect the human body and mind to this state of being beyond materiality. Humans need a thread beyond craftsmanship to connect a lineage or body of art that shares an ability to communicate a motif, unwavering and essential regardless of the historical period. The perfection of the music of Johann Sebastian Bach must be achieved without imitation but with an authentic honing and originality. In the same manner that Bach consumed folk dances and made it *his* music, artists must train their minds to take from the past or the natural world *what moves him* and use his talent to give some material a lasting voice. There is this inevitability that some artists will pass on their spirit and intelligence from one time period to another beyond the shared medium. The material becomes immaterial. Passing on this *fingerprint*, which like a strand of DNA, is invisible to the naked eye, but contains the complete essence of an idea. The obligation of the artist consists of the creation of something intangible by material means.

“Articulation”, a word best suited for the description of musical precision also has fundamental implications in the crafting of dance and sculpture. The articulation of the sound produced by the human voice or an instrument of wood and strings possesses the same significance in choreographing and the appearance of sculpture. Space as *space* in sculpture or silence in music is also an

articulation. “Think of the dancer who has moved through various steps and come to a stop, poised in a position. Isn’t that pause as valid as the movement?”

³ Comprehending these various methodologies concerning the construction of a work of art allows one to move freely among the arts as many artists have learned. Claude Debussy’s measure of silence in the beginning of Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune is the first instance in the West that silence became written as music. The power of this space of silence changed music and the listener who if asked would not have intellectualized this silence but certainly felt it as part of the fabric of the music, a crucial embroidery in the partition or score.

The artist Isamu Noguchi has participated directly with all forms of art discussed from dance, music, sculpture and drawing. What he brought to each form was his touch that was distinctly his touch regardless of the form. He had an implicit understanding of space which allowed his work to flourish in the natural world of the garden and on stage. Both spaces share in common a central humanity which plays a vital role in both theaters. Noguchi says of the garden, “I like to think of gardens as sculpturing of space. A man may enter such a space. It is in scale with him. It is real.” ⁴ Noguchi’s collaboration with the choreographer Martha Graham allowed him the opportunity to develop his ideas about sculpture in live time using the human body as an element of movement that relates to his sculptural inventions for the stage.

Dore Ashton, a writer and friend of Noguchi describes in her book Noguchi: East and West, Noguchi’s collaborations with dance and music:

Noguchi’s long association with Graham drew him into many experiences that would later flow into his overarching metaphor of the garden. Among them were his works with Merce Cunningham and John Cage, both of whom were directly inspired by what they had learned of Eastern aesthetics (including, possibly, the custom in Noh and Kabuki for actors, writers and musicians to work separately toward a final unity), and his

³ Chase, Mildred Portney. Improvisation: Music from The Inside Out, Berkley, CA, Creative Arts Book Co. 1988. 25.

⁴ Noguchi, Isami. Isamu Noguchi: Stone and Paper. Dir. Narita, Hiro. 1997, American Masters PBS Series, 56 Min.

collaboration with the dancer Erick Hawkins, who also, later in his career, evolved a philosophy of art that came close to Noguchi's own.⁵

What all of these individuals shared was a pursuit of the essential qualities of sound, light, movement. The choreography of Erick Hawkins is very much about what the body *can* do in the same way Noguchi arrived in his late human-scaled stones an acceptance of the materiality and natural forms of a particular stone. There is great theater in these late stones returning to the ideas discussed of Giambologna: movement, twisting, turning, compression, release. The human body may not be figuratively represented, but Noguchi's late stones all have a focus on humanity and the artful nature of what it is to be human and vertical on this earth: what it means *to escape one's-self* and make work free from a dominating, domineering ego.

In his text for training actors the rudimentary forces that are in play on stage, Michael Luger speaks in his book, The Expressive Actor, of the paradox of self. In the same manner in which an artist must *loss himself* in his work to create clean, honest, works, an actor must focus on the same kind of authentic actions to complete a character, a substantial character than contain a complete presence. Luger says,

Expressive actions have a special transformative power that is often overlooked: they create character and personality. The personality of an individual can best be understood by examining their actions. *Who we are* is directly linked to *what we do*.⁶

A making and unmaking action is required in all the arts to arrive at what is essential, underneath the sequins or brushstrokes of paint. It is not always a comfortable precipice. When an artist understands the validity of his actions, movement or creations then he is forced to reflect on the quality of what is there before his eyes.

As graphology reveals the handwriting of an individual, chisel markings in stone like a pencil line on paper is an action that distinguishes artists one from the

⁵ Aston, Dore. Noguchi: East and West. Berkley, CA, 1992. University of California Press. 229.

⁶ Luger, Michael. The Expressive Actor. Portsmouth, NH. 2007, Heineman 182.

other. Both actions can project information with immediacy through sight as well as vision through memory. In music it is the accumulation of “a drawing”, notation on a score that accumulates in the memory before art is revealed. Dance is cumulative and sculpture requires the viewer to *intuit* the movement to complete the image. *Reading* a sculpture is an action required of the viewer to not be passive in order to comprehend the visual language before him. The same is even said of painting that we only fully appreciate the dynamics of a painting by moving through it, looking at it from the side, sitting... Action in time is required to unfurl the past actions that create a work of art where as in dance this action requires a mental transcribing in time and memory. They work from a point that precludes the other in terms of direction: one moving forward in time and the other backwards. In Matter and Memory, Bergson explains with great cogency,

In learning physical exercise, we begin by imitating the movement as a whole, as our eyes see it from without, as we think we have seen it done. Our perception of it is confused; confused therefore, will be the movement whereby we try to repeat it. But whereas our visual perception was of a *continuous* whole, the movement by which we endeavor to reconstruct the image is *compounded* and made up of a multitude of muscular contradictions and tensions; our consciousness of these itself includes a number of sensations resulting from the varied play of the articulations. The confused movement which copies the image is, then, already its virtual decomposition; it bears within itself, so to speak, its own analysis.⁷

Why is this important? Why? Paul Valéry best answers this question, “So the whole question comes down to this: can the human mind master what the human mind has made?”⁸ For the curious individual a deeper awareness of art can only arise from active participation. Going to the cinema and watching a film for the first time one truly only manages to comprehend twenty percent of the dialogue and imagery, music and sounds. In the visual arts the same analogy can be made. With the work of Isamu Noguchi it is only after multiple viewings of the same works that one begins to comprehend the gesture and articulation in space

⁷ Bergson, Henri. Matter and Memory. New York, 2002. Zone Books, 111.

⁸ Valéry, Paul. The Outlook for Intelligence. Trans. Denise Folliot. New York, 1962. Harper & Row,

of particular sculptures. Dance as metaphor in art and armature in sculpture holds richness in ruminations for any curious mind and sensitive soul. Here is the beginning of a worthy investigation where metaphor can play the role of guide, leading to a discovery in art of inexhaustible resonances.

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