

Time Suspended in the Fluidity

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The first gray of dawn, only the sky is dimly illuminated by the sun which is still under the horizon. Sometimes I get confused if it is morning or dusk. It is only a brief moment, but a wonder all the same. It seems that the time stopped its own task then it opened a door of parallel worlds—.

---Jan Fabre, a moment of stillness

In 1990, Jan Fabre covered the whole of Tivoli mansion in Mechelen using a blue ballpoint pen, the color of the twilight for the brief moment when time is suspended at the boundaries of night and day. He also uses the title 'Blue Hour', which appears in many of his grandfather's writings, who is the great entomologist Jean-Henri Fabre. JH Fabre coined the phrase the 'Blue Hour' to refer to the thought-provoking time when nocturnal insects fall asleep and daytime insects awake. According to Jan Fabre, 'there is a moment of sublime stillness in Nature in which everything rips open, breaks apart, changes. That is the moment I have tried to capture.'¹ I think he found 'inner metamorphosis' in that time. It is an end and a beginning.

Jan Fabre also captures 'Death' as a metamorphosis from the repetition of transformation. 'Life is the beginning of death. Life exists for the sake of death. Death is both termination and beginning, at once a parting from and a closer connection to the self. Death is the consummation of reduction,'² I am unsure if I could agree completely with this perception, which enormously focused on death. However, I like his saying because life and death should be a pair of issues and ought be of equal value but we often focus more on life especially in our daily life. Therefore, many artists, directors and authors attempt the subject of death in their artwork. The arts is a huge dream, a reflected image of 'Oneself', everything about us, our thoughts, bodies and paradoxes. I never know what will happen after death and will never experience it as my own until the day I die. It is a kind of double feeling. An experience of death is always a reflection from others but it is also just next to me. I had my first experience of death when I was around four to five years old. A goldfish, which was my favorite and bigger than normal one, jumped out from a small glass fishbowl. I came back from exploring the neighborhood and found that it kept still next to the glass fishbowl. I called my mum almost



screaming but she was busy at that moment. Even when I touched it, it did not move anymore. I do not remember how long I stood frozen but finally I decided to put back the fish in the bowl. The action of putting the fish back in the bowl worked in a seemingly miraculous way. The fish started to swim in the water immediately. I screamed in delight and I called my mum again.

It remains clear in my memory as I had a sense of breathless silence and the sight of the fish which, for me, this experience clearly represented a distinct split into two functions, 'the inside and the outside worlds.' The water element in the fishbowl did in fact symbolize the inside and the fish the outside. Moreover, I did not belong to either of these worlds but standing in front of the stillness, I was simply observing that momentary reality.

Perhaps, generally speaking, the first experience of Death for most people is from insects or their pets. Their lives are shorter than ours. In addition, since early times, human beings have observed the world of insects with curiosity and a longing for the functional completeness. Jan Fabre is also fascinated by insects including the 'Scarab Beetle', which appears in the archaic civilizations with its multiple meaning as an emblem of death, resurrection and eternity, implies the transition from one life form to another prompted by death.³ He uses the symbolical meaning of insects' behavioral patterns because he thinks they have well-established systems more than humans.

---Noh, Using natural time effect to dreams

Ómagatoki [逢魔の時] is a Japanese term referring to a moment at dusk when the sky grows dark. The meaning of the word is (the time of meeting ghosts, specters and dark creatures)⁴ in the Japanese old folk religion. The Japanese folk religion started before Buddhism came down from India through China. People believed that Gods resided in all of nature and believed in the existence of spirits. Their perspective of the world was dualistic; they believed 'this world' as physical and 'the other world' as an invisible spiritual world where Gods and ghosts lived. Normally, the two worlds are in

completely different dimensions. However, they thought that where the aspect changes dramatically is in landscapes: like waterfalls, forests, the horizon, valleys, rocks, and the time between day and night where the two worlds encounter one another. They had a feeling of awe and respect for these aspects of nature. This perception is strongly underlying in Japanese traditional culture and it makes sense to me why the Takigi-Noh, a traditional theatrical art, had originally been staged outdoors during daylight hours and performed until dusk.

Takigi-Noh is one of the styles of the Noh. Nowadays, it means open-air shows of Noh at night with bonfires and stage lighting. However, in the Middle Ages, the original play they performed before it got dark and when the story came to the climax, dusk would be upon them. I imagine that this composition of the time perfectly transports the audience to the subtle and profound land. There was no electric lighting yet. Gradually, the color of the fire would become so intense, that the figure of the actors would become blurry, fading into the dusk.

Almost all dramas for Noh are classic tragedies from medieval tales and often deal with spirits, ghosts and the supernatural worlds. The actors wore very formalized costumes and masks, and they manipulated their bodies, performing in a symbolic form. In the play, time is often depicted as passing in a non-linear fashion, and action may switch between two or more time lines from moment to moment. This method of the direction is notional and semiotic, and therefore does not describe the detail of the situations surrounding the story to the audience.

It seems to me that the method was coming to Noh rationally, not only in the pursuit of ideal beauty of expression. It represents the essence of the story properly. In general the Japanese spiritual world has been regarded as a timeless world or having a completely different concept of time and space. It resembles the perception of time and space in our mind as we do not have any points of reference, which reflect the passage of time. For instance, when people think of someone they know, who is apart from them, their mind can be flying anywhere, which includes the past and possible future. Their perception of time during dreaming can be quicker or slower than reality. It is very stretchable and there is nothing that can be clearly defined. This is exactly the same as the structure used in the plays of Noh. The structure gives a dream like effect, although the audience stays awake, and some of them actually doze off. It is said by some of the Noh experts that having an actual short sleep during the performance is acceptable and not rude. The audience becomes unified with the dream of Noh, which is provided by the movement and the sound. The sleeping would bring them a blessed sense of peace.

1. 'So what's the Bic idea?' Article in *The Independent*, by Phil Johnson
2,3. 'Fabre's unusual study of life & death', Article in *Athens News*, by Christy Papadopoulou

4. 'Kójiien' Japanese dictionary, by Iwanami Shoten

5. 'Time and Free Will' by Henri Bergson, Japanese edition, Iwanami shoten, p97

6. 'In Side of White Cube', by Brian O'Doherty, *The lapis press*, p87-88

7. 'The Dream of a Butterfly' Wikiquote, translated by Lin Yutang

--- Marina Abramovic, Dream house

Marina Abramovic made a work named 'Dream House' in 2000 for the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale in Japan. The visitors of the house, which was an old local house renovated for her artwork, are contractually invited to stay for a night for having a dream sleep and will write down their dream that they had the last night in a dream journal, which is provided by Marina. In 2002, she also made 'Dream Bed' as a part of her performance 'The House with the Ocean View' at Sean Kelly Gallery, New York. The visitors participate in the ritualization of sleep, dreaming and/or lying in a coffin-like box for complete an hour. The conditions of the two works for dreaming are rather different, so it opens additional contexts by the contrast, such as the condensing experience of sleep and the completed regular time movement from the night to the morning. However, I like that she captured 'Dream' as a physical moment in our activities.

--- A timeless world "The Passing" by Bill Viola

Mental landscape——. Bill Viola, a video artist, expressed his experience of his mother's death in the work named 'The Passing'. He compounds in the work his fragments of his childhood memories and projections of his emotions onto landscapes such as the desert with horizontal line and mountains, the light passing on the line of the horizon and the half buried houses and cars in the ground by some flood disaster. It is an inner catastrophe expressed in a way of visual poem calmly.

The phrase of 'The Passing' reminds me of the depiction of memories in a Japanese animation, 'Akira' by Katsuhiro Otomo, which is a science fiction film and set in a futuristic and post-war city. In the film, which is based on a cartoon version, there are children who are physically not growing



and they have psycho-kinetic ability created by the government as a new military power. At the end of the story, one of the children, Akira, cannot control his ability anymore, then his body becomes hypertrophic. The body absorbs other children who have the same ability. Finally Akira implodes like the theory of the Big Bang. The memories of the people who were absorbed into Akira appear like a nonlinear dream in the stillness; the view from the child's perspective, the image of the long shadow of the child, the sensation of the speed by driving across a highway with motorbikes. I think the story is talking about the balance of the body and the mind. If one leans to one side too much then we lose control.

On the other hand, Viola sublimates his emotional moment into calmness. He looks back at his life from a distance and puts it into a philosophical life cycle. It is like the feeling of sitting in front of a Japanese Zen-garden. In the static gardens, there is no water usage; only space, stones and some moss. Each of these elements expresses the mountain and water, metaphorically, and when you see the entire garden, it appears like the cosmos. They are not only objects but there is also an inter-space connection between them. People cannot actually walk through the garden but when they stand or sit down in front of it, they will walk there imaginarily and also have an inner dialogue, confronting oneself in silence.

--- Darkness, gradational transition, 1+1=3

It is generally accepted that everyone assumes that time is working in a continuous manner. However, we can only recognize the passing of time by picking up the footprints from the passage of time.⁵ Then, we imaginarily connect between the footprints and perceive the passing——.

Since ancient times, the movements of the sun, the moon and the shadows were primary indicators of the universal passage of time. For ancient people, dawn and dusk would be major aspects for having the perception of a universal passage of time. Further to that, I see that the transition from daytime to night compounds that sense of fear and awe, leaning towards a sense of spirituality. It could be said, naively, that the coming of the darkness and the vanishing of the sun may cause fear. Especially in a world where no electricity exists, the darkness comes to people with no way to

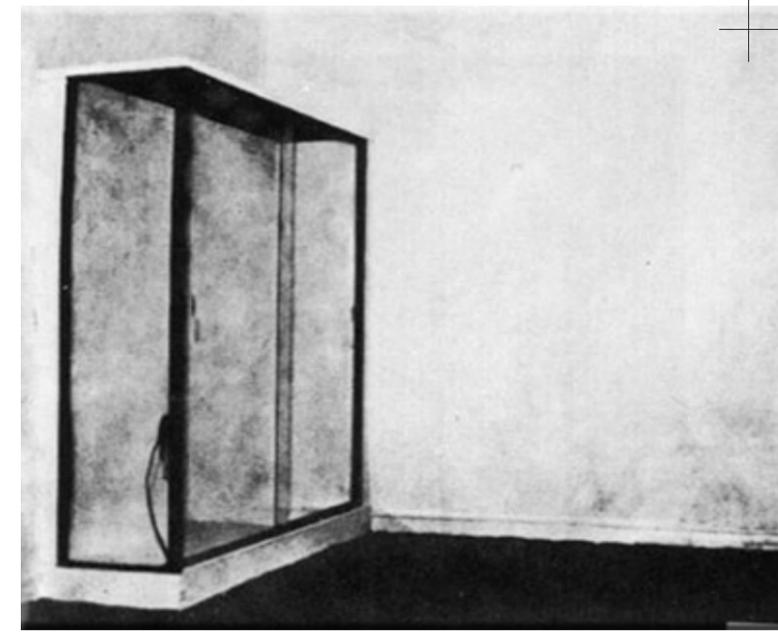
avoid it. People would be enveloped in the gathering gloom, cannot see each other clearly and the air becomes cooler than the daytime. I imagine that people felt it as beyond human understanding. Indeed, there are so many myths about the night and the sun in prehistoric religions all over the world. For example, the Ancient Egyptians thought that the west side of the Nile, where the sun goes down, was land of the dead. They made necropolis there and lived on the east side of the Nile, where the sun rises. However, I think there is another function, which would be a central point of the reason for the people's imagination to lead into spiritual world.

When I saw a work by Bill Viola, which was named 'The greeting,' I was really curious why he made such a slow, almost idle movement. Then I realized that the slow movement makes us lose our physical feelings. When we see some movement we try to understand what has happened and we will have expectations of the next scene as well. However if the movement is very slow, we cannot follow the actual movement but still our brains are working as long as you continue to see it. The presuming system of our brain invites us to an imaginary timeless world. Then, 'actual' time and space becomes irrelevant. In addition, this phenomenon brings about a Zen word, 'Hangan' [半眼], which means incomplete eyelid openings in Japanese and it is for someone who is practicing meditation in Zen Buddhism. The half openings of eyes produce a state, which is a sense of positioning between body and mind.

Therefore the gradational transformation between day and night, which is quite slow, like Viola's video, leads people to have a perception of the time passing as well as imaginary thought. I know rationally why the movements of the sun happen but still it takes me to beyond the rational world. The environmental system from the universe is strongly underling our body system as well as mental system. I simulated, in my head, if the sun suddenly disappears at the end of the day and pops up in the morning, it is like switching electricity on or off. I think we would have a totally different perspective of the world. What do we do when we see some transitions? Perhaps we imagine a next step but also fantasy. One plus one equals two, that is a simple multiplication but one plus one can be three or more.

--- Yves Klein's "The Void"

In Yves Klein's exhibition at the Iris Clert Gallery on April 28 May 1958, which was called 'The Void', but its longer title was 'The isolation of Sensibility in a state of primary matter stabilized by pictorial sensibility'⁶, he made a gradational transition, which was a visibly fragmental phenomenon, but inwardly gradational in the viewers inner world. He painted the façade on the street blue, wrote Pierre Descargues in a Jewish Museum catalogue, served blue cocktails to the visitors, tried to



light up the Luxor obelisk in the place de la Concorde, and hired a Garde Republicaine in uniform to stand at the entrance to the gallery. Inside he had removed all the furniture, painted the walls white, whitened one showcase, which contained no object. The symbolic and mystical signs and supernatural blue would be accumulated in the visitor's inner world like it was snowing, then people entered the gallery and encountered the emptiness. One of the visitors, Albert Camus wrote in the book: 'With the Void, Full Powers.'

The work, 'The Void' reminds me of Japanese architecture for the tea ceremony. The traditional tea room is built in a garden separated from the main house. Even the tea room has an adjacent floor plan to the main house for the sake of the ground capacity, it always has a separate entrance. The garden for the tea room is called 'Roji' [露地], and the Chinese characters mean uncovered ground. The component of the Roji should be a simple form; the stepping stones, Chózubachi and some plants taken from wild nature. The guests will walk through the garden to the entrance of the tea room, and will prepare themselves mentally for the tea ceremony while passing through the garden. So the ceremony already starts when the visitor passes through the first gate of the premises.

--- The Dream of a Butterfly

*"Once upon a time, I, Chuang Chou, dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was conscious only of my happiness as a butterfly, unaware that I was Chou. Soon I awaked, and there I was, veritably myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man."*⁷

As a conclusion, I put a poem by Zhkangze. The poem gives me a question what cognition is, and it gives me potential of our ability as well. Our bodies and mind are always working together, and the collaboration creates broadening of our world beyond our physical limited world.