

Change and Continuity: the Influences of Taoist Philosophy and Cultural Practices on Contemporary Art Practice

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Doctor of Philosophy

2009

University of Western Sydney

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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Many thanks to my supervisors, Dr. Peter Dallow, Dr. Noelene Lucas and David Cubby for their support, knowledge and guidance. The Chinati Foundation, Marfa Texas, and the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales gave essential support to this research. Thanks also to Marina Grounds Ely, Huy Ky Do, Sandy Edwards and Sue Goldfish, and my colleagues, Allan Giddy, Sylvia Ross, Martin Sims and Emma Price for their support.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to identify in contemporary art practices the inflections that have either direct, or indirect origins in Taoism, the conceptual source of China's principle indigenous, cultural practices. The thesis argues that the increasingly cross cultural qualities of contemporary art practice owe much to the West's exposure to Taoism's non-absolutist, non-humanist tropes, a cultural borrowing that has received slight attention despite its increasingly pervasive presence. This critical analysis is structured by Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the rhizome as a metaphor for cultural influences that are pluralist permeations, rather than a linear hierarchy.

The thesis tracks discourse between the West and China from early contact to the present, tracing manifold aspects of Taoism's modes of visual representation in Western art. Chinese gardens, Chinoiserie, calligraphy, and their coalescence in Chinese painting, are analysed to locate Taoist precepts familiar to the West, principally citing the *Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tzu, Taoism's founder. Here Taoist philosophy, as synthesised in Western thought, is proven to be a source of identifiable innovations in contemporary art practice. For example, spatial articulation as a dominant element of expression in installation art is traced to Western artists' exposure to the conceptualised spatiality of Sinocised artefacts.

Taoist precepts are analysed in the Chinese tradition of improvising upon calligraphic characters as a key factor. This model is deployed using the skills set of studio-based research, to identify the experimental nature and degree of improvisation in Western artists' adaptations of Taoist methods in innovative painting, then sculpture. Investigations of artworks are structured upon correlations between Deleuze's theories of representation and Taoist theories of creativity. A thematic connection with Taoism located in contemporary art, namely, notions of continuity and change, assists this detailed unravelling of creative processes, aesthetics, metonymy and meaning derived from Taoism in global, contemporary art.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the influences of Taoism¹ on the development of contemporary visual art practice, focusing on the traditional Taoist art practices of calligraphy,² brush and ink painting, and Chinoiserie, the European interpretations of Chinese artefacts and cultural practices, which have served as vehicles for Taoist precepts.³ The objective is not to quantify these influences but to identify the qualities, both in Taoist philosophy and Taoist cultural practices that have opened up new ways of thinking in the West about the nature of reality. How these experiences and insights may be represented in the visual arts through Taoism's spontaneous processes of graphic improvisation and elements of expression, spatiality, temporality and placement, is explored. This thesis will demonstrate that the Taoist's reverence for nature, Chinese garden art, brush and ink landscape painting, and the calligrapher's resolution of the binary opposites, continuity and change, coalesce as underlying influences on the experimental development of contemporary art as an outcome of the West's long exposure to Taoism's aesthetic processes, and artists' digestion of Taoist ideas and their synthesis into Western paradigms.

The pathways of the Chinese diaspora into neighbouring East Asian countries and to the West will be traced to establish the magnitude of Taoism's legacy. This line of critical enquiry develops in relation to a body of creative work, which serves as a practice-based means of research, complimenting and extending this perceived link between the principals of the Taoist 'Way' and the practices of contemporary visual artists.

¹ Also 'Daoism'.

² Calligraphy was first recognised as an art form in China in the first century AD. Gordon L. Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 2002, University of California Press. The origins of this form of writing, symbols on tortoise shells in graves that resemble Chinese characters discovered in Jiahu in Henan Province, are dated 6500 BC. Jeff Hecht, *Oldest Known Chinese Script Discovered*, New Scientist magazine, issue 2393, 3/5/03, p 16. Chinese archaeologists contend this is the first evidence of a written language, predating the cuneiform writing of the Sumerians of southern Mesopotamia (3500 BC).

³ Chinoiserie in eighteenth century European gardens is of particular pertinence to the thesis.

Taoism, translated into English as *The Way*,⁴ is an indigenous Chinese philosophy attributed to the teachings of philosopher, Lao Tzu.⁵ His teachings are recorded in the *Tao Te Ching (Classic of the Way and its Virtue)*, circa 500 BC.⁶ Represented by the symbol, *yin* and *yang*, (translated as *dark side*, *light side*), Taoism paradoxically presents phenomena as “neither being nor non being”, as “chaos and cosmos”, “nature and culture”, “meaning and nonsense”, yet “the sum of all order” and universal totality (Fig 1).⁷ Each binary contains a little of the other. In a state of continuously revolving flux, the binary opposites are not conflicted, rather, the symbol represents an integrated harmony of opposites.



Fig 1: Yin yang symbol.

In relation to philosophical and religious considerations, humanity is seen as inseparable from nature and a unified cosmos. Thus the Tao could be described as:

the spontaneous process regulating the natural cycle of the universe. It is in this process, along this way, that the world as we see it, the creation of which we are an integral part, finds its unity.⁸

Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* emphasises *The Way* as an integration of humanity with nature, which “acts with complete spontaneity”.⁹ We must spontaneously surrender to

⁴ Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary.

⁵ Also Lao Tzi, born Li Erh. 6th century BC. <http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/Philosophy/Taichi/lao.html> Cited June 2008.

Note: “A growing body of scholarship supports that ... both the *Chuang Tzu* and Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* are ... collections of writings by differing persons in differing times, rather than the single work of any one person”. H. G. Creel, *What is Taoism?* Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. 76, No. 3. (Jul. – Sept. 1956). P 139. See also Lin Yutang's translations of *Chuang Tzu*: <http://www.religiousworlds.com/taoism/cz-text2.html>

⁶ Unless indicated otherwise, throughout this document I quote from Jonathan Star's translation of Lao-Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*. Published by the Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin Group, 2008.

⁷ The *yin* and *yang* were first mentioned in the *Hsi Tz'u* (circa C4th BC), an appendix to the *I Ching*, or *Book of Changes*. See also N. J. Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism*, 1983, University of California Press. Pp 2, 3.

⁸ Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, 1993, University of California Press. Translated by Karen C. Duval. Pp 3, 4.

⁹ Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations*, 1989, Cambridge University Press. P 113. Another seminal text is *Chuang-tsu*, fourth century BC, authored by Chuang Tzu,

the cosmos in order to reach an *experience* of Reality. This distinguishes Taoism from religion where we see ourselves as a special case in Nature, capable of life after death through salvation or enlightenment, martyrdom, or ‘second chances’ through reincarnation.¹⁰ The most Taoist philosophy offers in this respect is the possibility of serene longevity by living a healthy, engaged and harmonious life.¹¹ Then, through natural forces, death brings an integration into a universal wholeness, emptiness, described in Lao-Tzu’s *Tao Te Ching*, as “the return”:

See all things flourish and dance
in endless variation
And once again merge back into perfect emptiness -
Their true repose
Their true nature
Emerging, flourishing, dissolving back again
This is the eternal process of return¹²

The opening words of the *Tao Te Ching* are:

The way that can be walked is not The Way
The name that can be named is not The Name¹³

As this suggests, the Way can be seen in all things rather than a particular ‘path’. It is defined as indefinable. *The Way* cannot be explained or taught, it must be experienced; the more forceful the effort, the more elusive the quest. The Taoist requires a quietist life of passive meditation to cultivate utter serenity in response to all circumstance (non action) rather than the pursuit of control and empirical knowledge; an anarchic response

whose personal name was Chou. Very little is known of him, which is typical of Taoist authors and texts, which are usually undated and attributed without certainty.

¹⁰ In this thesis I refer to Taoism as a philosophy only. Taoism developed a religious dimension, over time “influenced by shamanic practices, Chinese folk religions, Confucianism, Buddhism, Islamic and Christian missionaries ... It is not a dogmatized creed”. (Lee Irwin, *Daoist Alchemy in the West: the Esoteric Paradigms*. <http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeVI/Dao.htm> Cited May 2008.

¹¹ Longevity may be achieved by “a whole apparatus of personal discipline mingled with magical alchemy” (including the use of talismans). See Chapter Two, Ninian Smart, *The World’s Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations*, 1989, Cambridge University Press. P 127. In his revue of Taoist literature from the 1980s, *Taoism*, (Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 54, No.2, (May 1995), pp.322 – 346), Fransciscus Verellen wrote, “down through the centuries, the mission of Taoism was to remain associated with the instruction of rulers, with political prophesy and legitimation, utopianism, messianism, and occasional insurgency”. He describes how the sage, Lao-tzu, “revered as the founder” became deified and the creation of Taoism as an “*ex nihilo*” religion evolved, along with alchemical, physiological and mental practices to aid in the attainment of immortality (pages 322, 326, 330). The integration of animist, or shamanic practices further complicates the study of Taoism for the disciplines, History and Theology, but these issues are irrelevant to this thesis.

¹² Lao-Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 16.

¹³ Ibid. Verse 1.

to order and convention (often Taoists have been viewed as subversive);¹⁴ an intuitive rather than rational response (the integration of mind and body rather than intellectual objectivity detached from feeling and the corporeal).

If, in the above paragraph, the reader substitutes the word 'art' for 'the Way', and artist for 'Taoist', the precepts underlying the nature of creativity in Taoism are illustrated. This thesis will argue that in essence, many creative people and Taoists employ comparable methodologies.¹⁵ More particularly, Taoist qualities arguably hold a key to understanding the meaning and processes of experimental contemporary art that is characterised by an engagement with corporeality, spontaneous improvisation, the deployment of spatiality and temporality to embed meaning in the artefact. Established research has identified Taoism as a major influence on the latter (page 55). Experimental approaches to sculpture led to innovation in sculptural practice after the Second World War coinciding with a more populist awareness in the West of the philosophy and cultural practices of Taoism following the increased and direct dialogue with East Asian countries with strong cultural ties to China,¹⁶ that is, countries adjoining China and influenced by Chinese culture through invasion, occupation, trade, and religious conversion - Vietnam, Japan and Korea (page 62). The conceptualisation of spatiality found in Taoist artefacts, it is argued, was a factor in these innovations and the development of installation art.

Taoist improvisation upon calligraphic characters is a visual art form practised in all Sinicised cultures. This creative process embodies the conceptual qualities of Taoist paradigms. In improvised calligraphy ceaseless change, metamorphosis, co-exists with continuity. Continuity is expressed through the meaning of the character, which remains the same in contrast to the state of flux represented by grids of one hundred, or one thousand different characters, all signifying the same thing.¹⁷ It is significant that longevity is also pictorially represented by a young maiden in the company of a wizened old man in Eastern iconography. This interpenetration of tradition, the past, and the

¹⁴ Kristofer Schipper. *The Taoist Body* (1993), Pub. University of California Press. "The priority given to the human body over social and cultural systems may be seen in the predominance of the internal world over the external world and in the refusal to seek the absolute in our mind. Taoism is always rooted in the concrete, indeed the physical". P 4.

¹⁵ This is elaborated upon in the section, Studio Methodology, in Chapter Three.

¹⁶ See Chapter Two for background to this opening up, particularly in the United States of America, to Eastern philosophies at this time. In summary, increased translation of Taoist and Zen literature, travel to East Asia, the occupation of Japan, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the introduction of Asian studies in universities all contributed to this broadening awareness.

¹⁷ The characters signifying longevity and happiness are most commonly improvised upon in this way as talismans.

temporal immediacy of the present are typically found in installation art where the context may signify historical readings that are combined into an artist's contemporary intervention, or transgressive disruption. The former is exemplified by Donald Judd's site specific artwork, *Untitled* (1982–1986), an installation of one hundred boxes installed in two decommissioned artillery sheds in Marfa, Texas,¹⁸ the latter in Xu Bing's installation, *Book from the Sky* (1987 – 1991).¹⁹ The past, present, and imminent continuation in the future are metabolised into a single artistic experience.

The distinction, 'contemporary', in the thesis distinguishes visual art practices that respond to "events and tendencies"²⁰ current at the time of the artwork's creation rather than continuing a traditional or established forms of visual art practice, impervious to new developments or consideration of contemporary issues.

The distinction 'West' refers to countries whose dominant culture has its origins in Europe, such as Australia and North America, as well as England, Germany, Italy and such like. The distinction 'Western' applies to cultural practices that are identified with the West. The distinction 'East' or 'Far East' refers to the countries China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam. The distinction 'Eastern' or 'Far Eastern' applies to cultural practices that are identified with the East.

Disciplines such as painting, performance and video art, will be discussed when pertinent to the influence of Taoism on contemporary art but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to analyse all experimental, contemporary Western fine art to diagnose the influences of Taoism. Likewise, this is not research of the influence of Taoism on a survey of Western installation art. Rather, the specific parameters of this research topic have been applied to selected examples of installation art. However, my artworks completed during the candidacy, which test the hypothesis at the beginning of the twenty-first century, are examples of contemporary art that is interdisciplinary, experimental, cross-cultural, sometimes site specific, and include the disciplines of painting, video, and photography, created with the sensibilities of a sculptor.

¹⁸ Donald Judd, *Untitled*, (1982–1986), mill aluminum, each box 104 x 129.5 x 185.5 cm, 100 boxes. Installation, Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas. Discussed in depth in Chapter Five.

¹⁹ *Book from the Sky* (1987 – 1991), woodblock prints, wood, leather, ivory, string, cloth. This installation is discussed in depth in Chapter Six.

²⁰ Jim Supangkat, from his discussion of definitions of 'contemporary' in traditional artwork, quoting Klaus Honnef's book, *Contemporary Art*, in his article, *Contemporary Art: What/When/Where* (1996), catalogue for the Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art. Pub. Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane. P 26.

The broad relevance of Taoist art forms to this interdisciplinary field of visual arts practice lies in both the relevance of Taoism's abstract concepts at a tipping point in Western history as a non-absolutist model towards considerations of non-humanist philosophy after the devastations of the Second World War, and the methods, or processes, deployed to embody these concepts in visual language. For example, the Taoist calligrapher's art emphasises the ephemeral and ambiguous, rather than a sense of permanence and empirical realism. It combines aesthetic articulations of spatiality, improvised gesture and invention, serial imagery that embody an expression of an integration with, rather than a domination of, one's medium. The Chinese calligrapher, in common with the subjective approach of contemporary Western artists, creates using dynamic, corporeal gesture, a "technique of attack"²¹ and nuanced retreat out of a mastery of qualities of resolution to ensure a "strong internal organization".²² Here, a memorised familiarity with thousands of different characters is combined with a specific, taut balance of mark and spatiality. The calligrapher must simultaneously create recognisable script whilst animating the space of the blank page, that is, be able to perceive, SEE, the creation of spatiality and imagery simultaneously, to energise the characters (and blank page) with "a life even more intense than the object to which it refers".²³

The installation artist similarly articulates real space, placement of form and imagery, temporal elements of expression – serial variations, 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, a relational self, rather than perceiving from the outside, looking at, from a supposedly objective view point.

In *The Chinese Art of Writing*, Billeter articulates Taoist calligraphy's corporeal and spatial qualities by comparing it to music:

What the calligraphic element and musical note have in common is that they are bodied and create a space. To the phenomenon of projection whereby we attribute a corporeal reality to an inked form, corresponds the phenomenon that we spontaneously relate a well-tempered note to a corporeal presence. The

²¹ Jean Francois Billeter, *The Chinese Art of Writing*, 1990, Skira Rizzoli International Publications, NY. P 72.

²² Ibid. P 33.

²³ Ibid P 33. See also David J. Clarke's discussion of Abstract Expressionist, Mark Tobey's use of the blank page to "represent an unbounded space" in his *Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture* (1988). PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute. Pub. Imprint, New York. P 162.

human voice, especially a fine voice, forcibly conveys the idea of a physical presence in space.²⁴

This ready reference to binary metaphors such as space/body (or imagery), spontaneity/rules, repetition/variation, continuity/change, mark/blank, figure/ground, form/space, attack/retreat, and poetic similes, such as voice/body, silence/space, silence/nothingness, movement/time, gesture/corporeality, characterise the structure and abstract content of a calligrapher's expression, which when resolved as a symbiosis, or fusion, manifest the manifold totality that is the Tao.²⁵ In relation to this, the fusion of binaries expressive of 'continuity and change' will be identified in discussion of representative examples of contemporary art throughout the thesis as vehicles for Taoist precepts.

Increasingly cross-cultural, or global qualities of contemporary art practice also owe much to the West's historical exposure to Chinese Taoist philosophy, a cultural borrowing that has received superficial attention in consideration of its pervasive conceptual, representational and process based presence in Western art. In particular, the research for this thesis has identified the influence of Taoism in concept-based contemporary art practices that deploy narratives of paradox, and are charged by an intuitive yet intellectualised imagination to represent ideas.

A key to relevant theories of representation to Taoist precepts are those developed by Gilles Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*,²⁶ where he perversely collapses that which, on the surface, appears as binary opposites to seamlessly interlace a web of correlation – a very Taoist strategy. 'Difference' is commonly defined as *not the same; distinct; separate*. 'Repetition' is defined as the *iteration of the same act; the act of repeating; reproduction; replica; copy*.²⁷ *Difference and Repetition* emerge as mirrored binaries, bookends, to create a repetition of differentiation that defines the nature of

²⁴ Jean Francois Billeter, *The Chinese Art of Writing*, 1990, Skira Rizzoli International Publications, NY. P 90. This correlation of calligraphy to space and/or sound will be explored in detail in an analysis of Donald Judd's artwork, *Untitled*, at Marfa, Texas (Chapter 5), Xu Bing's artwork, *The Book from the Sky* (see Chapter 6) and works produced through the candidacy (see Chapter 7).

See also, Gordon L. Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 2002, University of California Press. P 15.

²⁵ Kisho Kurakawa, *Rediscovering Japanese Space* (1988). Pub. John Metherall, New York, Tokyo. Pp 39 – 41.

²⁶ Gilles Deleuze (1925 – 1995), is a key figure in postmodern philosophy. Deleuze drew upon the writings of Franco-German philosopher, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646 – 1716), who was profoundly influenced by exposure to Taoist philosophy in his correspondence on Chinese culture with Jesuit missionaries. Deleuze's *Repetition and Difference* was written in 1968. It was translated into English in 1994 by Paul Patton. Pub. Columbia University Press, New York.

See <http://www.iep.utm.edu/d/deleuze.htm>

²⁷ Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary. My italics.

representation. In short, repetition equals representation, which equals difference. Representation, which could be said to be the primary function of art,²⁸ is the expression of, or an actualisation of manifold concepts or ideas, so infinite they are groundless, paradoxically inverting the sense of a stable identity inferred by 'repetition'.

Repetition thus becomes a 'groundless', that is, metamorphic, infinity of possibilities for discerning a concept's relation to its object, which is dependant on the viewer's associative memories, or recognition, and a self consciousness that aspires to original thought through the comprehension of a concept. Alone, repetition only defines itself. "Repetition thus appears as difference without a concept, repetition which escapes indefinitely continued conceptual difference".²⁹

Novelty [difference] passes to the mind which represents itself: because the mind has memory or acquires habits, it is capable of forming concepts in general and drawing something new from the repetition it contemplates.³⁰

When self consciousness, or the "I", is applied to interpreting representations, it functions as a freedom to the future ... the new. Consciousness "relates the representation to the "I" as if to a free faculty which does not allow itself to be confined within any one of its products".³¹

Deleuze's theory of representation describes a reverberation of new, or differentiated concepts, originating in the mind of the individual viewer. The viewer's "I", or particular memories, experiences, knowledge, recognitions, associations, draw from the representational, or repeated object, the possibility for infinite conceptual interpretations. This theory of representation will underpin the analysis of calligraphic art, Chinese garden art, Chinese landscape painting³² and experimental contemporary art practice³³ that I propose are resonant of Taoist paradigms.

Chapter Two provides the historical background of Taoism's diffuse and direct influences on Western cultural practices, cosmology, epistemology and ontology from

²⁸ Art being the expression of culture, defined as "simply the sum of a particular group's characteristic ways of living, learned from one another and passed down the generations". Christine Kenneally, *So You Think You're Unique...*, New Scientist, Vol 198 # 2657, 24th May 2008. P 28.

²⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Repetition and Difference*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1968. P 13.

³⁰ Ibid. P 14. My bracketed insertion.

³¹ Ibid. P 14. Deleuze qualifies this by listing blockages to this free association.

³² Frances Ya-Sing Tsu, *Landscape Design in Chinese Gardens* (1988), McGraw-Hill Book Company, United States of America. Pp 18 – 19.

³³ See Chapters Two, Four, Five, Six and Seven.

the seventeenth century onwards. The Taoist cultural practices drawn out for scrutiny are calligraphy, brush and ink painting and garden landscaping,³⁴ including the aesthetic principles underlying *feng shui*, (translated as *wind water*, the source of universal energies; also known as geomancy), imported to the West and interpreted as Chinoiserie, the imitation of Chinese motifs for novel, exotic effect in Western artefacts, including eighteenth century European garden design. *Feng shui* can be defined as the 'art of placement', and aligns the topography of a garden to natural forces and elements resulting in an aesthetic of asymmetrical placement, complex, episodic, spatial articulation, a stimulating yet harmonious flow of energy (*chi*).³⁵ These Taoist influences on Western culture, from colonial times, of Chinese garden art, calligraphic art and Chinese painting are forms characterised by an articulation of spatiality as a principal element of expression, which, it is argued, have had a profound impact upon Western epistemology, imagery, form and methods of art production.³⁶ Examples of Isamu Noguchi's installations and Zen-style gardens, and the garden art of Ian Hamilton-Finlay, who was influenced by eighteenth century stroll gardens, are cited.

Chapter Two addresses the expansion of Taoist influence from China to neighboring countries, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, with a particular focus on the influence of Taoism upon Ch'en Buddhism, to identify Taoism's footprint in Japanese and Vietnamese Zen Buddhism. Acknowledgement of Taoism as a cultural influence expressed through certain precepts and practices of Zen Buddhism has received scant attention in the analysis of Eastern cultural practices' influences on Western artists.

Chapter Three describes the methodology of this research, which combines orthodox academic research with the research tools of the practising artist. Deleuze's theory, summarised above, that underpins the structure of the thesis's argument, is described in detail in Chapter Three, *Mixed Methods*, with its correlations to the practising artist's deployment of studio practice as a research tool. Deleuze's text, *Difference and*

³⁴ Frances Ya-Sing Tsu., (1988) *Landscape Design in Chinese Gardens*. McGraw-Hill Book Company, United States of America, pp 18 – 22. Tsu describes five different ways the landscape, or nature is represented: landscape painting with its subjective, semi-abstract brush work derived from calligraphic technique; *pun-sai*, or miniature potted garden, a Chinese horticultural invention from the Chou Dynasty, 900 – 250 BC, commonly known by its Japanese name, *bonsai*; a scene framed by a window; a miniature landscape composition of rocks and plants in a courtyard; the large scale stroll garden that uses the natural features of the terrain along with artificially constructed motifs to simulate the vastness of nature.

³⁵ Maggie Keswick, *The Chinese Garden: History, Art and Architecture* (with contributions and conclusion by Charles Jencks). 1978. Academy Editions, London. St Martins, New York. Pp 55, 56; Chapter Four: *The Gardens of the Literati*. Pp 73 – 90.

Also:

http://www.gardenvisit.com/history_theory/garden_landscape_design_articles/design_methods/feng_shui

³⁶ Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, 1982, Cambridge University Press. Chapters 21, 24.

Repetition,³⁷ which also has links to the seventeenth century mathematician and philosopher, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz³⁸ and Taoism, is used to illuminate Taoist understandings in the West. Four key studies of studio practice³⁹ will identify the scope of the Taoist method of creativity to represent complex concepts through binaries in unified flux, expressed in Taoist art's improvisational structure.

Deleuze and Guattari's *Rhizome* as a metaphor for the method of infiltration of Taoist precepts into Western culture is the key to the art historical aspect of the methodology, described in Chapter Three: Mixed Methods.⁴⁰

In Chapter Four, to establish the foundations of calligraphy's Taoist trope, correlations between Deleuze's theoretical analysis of the qualities of 'repetition' and 'difference' will be established with N. J. Girardot's interrogation of the structure of imagery and meaning in Taoism.⁴¹ The 'synchronicity' (to borrow Jung's Taoist phrase)⁴² of both scholars' outcomes is contained in the *yin* and *yang* symbol. This icon graphically illustrates that, when a force (the singular) is balanced with an opposing force, (the two) a numinous and cosmological merging of phenomena occurs (the three, represented by a merging of the *yin* and *yang*). Calligraphic art practice embodies this tensile, unified harmony. In the fourth chapter, thousands of graphic improvisations upon the calligraphic character that signifies *longevity* as it appears on architecture and artefacts in Hué, Vietnam, is analysed to elaborate upon the methodology used to express Taoist precepts.⁴³ The binary opposites, *continuity* and *change*, will be identified in the graphics of this study to demonstrate the calligraphic representation of temporality embodied in the artefact's conceptual meaning.

In Chapter Five, correlations between the improvisational process of traditional calligraphic art are made with Donald Judd's creative process in the planning and

³⁷ Giles Deleuze (1968). *Repetition and Difference*. New York: Columbia University Press.

³⁸ Giles Deleuze (1993) *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, University of Minnesota Press. Leibniz was profoundly influenced by Taoist axioms leading to his theory of 'monads', where phenomena is made up of multitudes of basic units that make up perceptual reality, foreshadowing atomic structure.

³⁹ The four key studies are traditional Taoist calligraphic art; Donald Judd's *Untitled* installation of aluminium boxes, Marfa, Texas; Xu Bing's installation, *The Book from the Sky*; the development of my own art practice, focusing in detail on major works produced during the PhD program.

⁴⁰ From Giles Deleuze, Félix Guattari. (1993) *A Thousand Plateaux: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by B. Massumi: University of Minnesota Press. See Chapter Three.

⁴¹ N. J. Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism*, 1983, University of California Press.

⁴² Karl Jung, Preface, *I Ching: the Book of Changes* (1949). German translation, Richard Wilhelm (1923), English translation, Cary F. Baynes (1949), Arkana Press, 1967.

⁴³ As capital of the Nguyen Empire, which adopted Chinese civil organisational methods to maintain unity, Hue has multitudes of examples of improvised longevity characters adorning Imperial, sacred and vernacular architecture and artefacts. See Chapter Four (page 104).

installation of *Untitled* (1982–1986), his permanent, site specific installation of one hundred aluminium boxes in two decommissioned artillery sheds in Marfa, Texas. Possibilities of cultural exchange in countries associated with Taoist philosophy and cultural practices in his life experience, and his own writings and statements, are drawn upon to argue implicit and explicit Taoist influences upon the sculptural ideas of this artist. This broadens the discourse surrounding Judd's practice in general, and analyses graphic improvisation as a methodology specific to the Marfa installation, associations that have not been explored in the literature surrounding Judd's practice.

The invented calligraphy of Chinese contemporary artist, Xu Bing, in his seminal installation, *The Book from the Sky* (1987 – 1991)⁴⁴ will be analysed in the context of Taoist precepts and traditional Chinese cultural practices in Chapter Six. It is ironic, given the nationality of the artist, that Taoist content in his artwork has not been discussed in depth in the literature surrounding his practice. Lui Weijan's article, *The Dao in Modern Chinese Art* is the exception pointing out that "consciously or not" Chinese artists use "Daoist views of the world and the arts which were subsequently taken over by the West".⁴⁵ Lui gives examples to illustrate his point in very general terms. This thesis elaborates upon this observation and addresses this fundamental gap in the understanding of Xu Bing's oeuvre. Perception of *Book from the Sky* by readers of Chinese calligraphy, compared to non-readers, is also explicated in an interview with Xu Bing in Chapter Six, contributing to a greater understanding of this seminal contemporary artwork.⁴⁶ Now, in the twenty-first century, there is direct exposure within the West of unfiltered Taoist paradigms orchestrated by homegrown, international Chinese artists such as Xu Bing.⁴⁷ These artists bring to their practice an innate knowledge of Taoism that arguably endures as the structural underpinning of

⁴⁴ Xu Bing (born 1955, Sichuan) *The Book from the Sky, (Tianshu)*, 1987 – 1991. Xu Bing is one of the world's most prominent contemporary Chinese artists engaging in radical experiments with language and linguistic structures. He was part of the Chinese New Wave art movement in the mid 1980s. After graduating from Beijing's Central Academy of Fine Arts, in 1988 his calligraphic installation, *Book from the Sky*, was shown in Beijing. In 1990, he moved to the United States of America where he continued to experiment with language, codes and meaning. For his artistic inventions, Xu Bing was awarded the McArthur Genius Award in 1999. He was also the first living artist ever to be given a solo exhibition at the Smithsonian's Sackler Gallery in Washington, D.C. He is now Vice Chancellor of Beijing's Academy of Fine Arts, living and working in Brooklyn and Beijing.
http://www.artzinechina.com/display_vol_aid107_en.html Cited May, 2008

⁴⁵ Lui Weijan, *The Dao in Modern Chinese Art*, pp 55 – 69, in *China Avant-garde: Counter Currents in Art and Culture* (1993), Ed., Jochen Noth, Wolfger Pohlmann, Kai Reschke. Pub. Oxford University Press, Hong Kong.

⁴⁶ The interview was conducted with ethics approval from the University of Western Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee. Project Title: *Continuity and Change: Practice based research on the influence of Taoist concepts and calligraphy on contemporary visual art practice*. The Protocol Number for this project is H6569.

⁴⁷ Many eminent Chinese artists, including Xu Bing have migrated to the West since 1985.

their creativity, despite the best efforts of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution⁴⁸ to obliterate China's ancient culture.

In Chapter Seven, my artworks produced during the candidacy are analysed to demonstrate different ways Taoism manifests in a Western artist's visual arts practice. Chapter Seven explores in detail references to specific Taoist precepts, setting them beside comparative examples of iconic artworks by other practitioners to illustrate a wider perspective and application. Throughout the thesis, examples of artwork from my oeuvre from 1969 to 2009 are drawn upon as examples that insightfully locate the impact of Taoism threading through the processes and conceptual terrain of an Australian contemporary visual artist. An additional outcome is a demonstration of how experimental contemporary Australian art has become increasingly cross-cultural due to past policies to promote multiculturalism in Australia, plus globalisation.

This research will identify a gap in accounts of colonial, post colonial, cultural exchange that informed the Modernist canon. Few art historians have recognised Taoism as a factor underlying Modernism's *zeitgeist*. For example in Daniel Belgrade's *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation in the Arts of Post War America*, which focuses on improvisation, the essence of Taoist art practice, mentions Taoism only in passing.⁴⁹ Texts analysing the Fluxus Movement, such as *The Fluxus Reader*,⁵⁰ give slight attention to the influence of Taoism as a vehicle for paradox, or its ontological relationship with Zen Buddhism. Both Taoism and Zen were demonstrably studied by many Fluxus artists as alternative ways to approach an understanding of the nature of reality. However, background to Taoism's influence on Abstract Expressionism is provided by David J. Clarke's doctoral thesis, *The Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture* (1988).⁵¹ Clarke identifies specific artists, roughly between the mid-nineteen forties and nineteen sixties, who expressed interest in Taoist, Zen Buddhist and Hindu principles and practices. He suggests that rather than mimicking superficial aspects or adopting Eastern ideas wholesale, artists succeeded in synthesising concepts and forms with Western traditions to achieve

⁴⁸ "Critics say Xu Bing's experiments are a profound and compelling commentary on the deceptions and cultural miscues that come from language." http://www.artzinechina.com/display_vol_aid107_en.html Cited May, 2008. I would add into the mix Mao's injunctions to destroy Chinese traditional culture during the Cultural Revolution (1964 – 1974). Refer to Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China*, Simon and Schuster, (London, 1991); Anchor paperback, (London, 1992).

⁴⁹ Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Post War America*, University of Chicago Press, 1998.

⁵⁰ *The Fluxus Reader*. Edited by Ken Friedman. Chichester UK: Academy Editions, 1998.

⁵¹ David Clarke, *The Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture* (1988). Garland Publishing, Inc., New York and London. Pp 22 – 23.

innovation. My thesis continues Clarke's Taoist narrative to trace the threads of Taoist influence from the nineteen-eighties to the present, also emphasising how artists have *digested* and *synthesised* Taoist ideas from disparate sources, sometimes applying conventions drawn from Taoist axioms unknowingly, therefore indirectly passing on past influences.

The more recent migration of Chinese artists to the West shifts the emphasis of cultural exchange between East to West, which began through the overlaid, filtered conduit of Western paradigms in the mid to late seventeenth century. In past analysis of the avant garde, the impact of the East was overlooked or down played,⁵² and in the assessment of Asian modernist artists, it has been inferred that they, Asian artists, have been Westernised, whereas the Western artists have been *influenced*, or *inspired* by Asia.⁵³ This patrician attitude is reflected in Roger Benjamin's description of 'indigenous'⁵⁴ artist, Azouaou Mammeri's artwork as "quasi-modernist landscapes of an angular graphic style", whereas he quotes Matisse saying, "My revelation came from the Orient". One is revelatory; the 'Other' is 'quasi'.⁵⁵ This thesis aims to redress the hegemonic imbalances often inherent in cross-cultural commentary.

The next chapter, Chapter Two: A History Of Discourse – East West and Back Again, provides a history of the discourse between the West and East that underpins the thesis. It tracks salient strands of Taoist influence upon the West during the colonial period, examining significant factors with their origins in Taoism that contributed to avant garde artists' innovations in the Modernist and Post Modernist periods. Taoist currents and progenitors for the present will be identified, where the impetus of globalisation has allowed unprecedented discourse between cultures, including the direct impact of émigré artists after China's Cultural Revolution, from China to the West then back again.

⁵² For example, *Avant Garde Art* (1967), edited by Thomas B. Hess and John Ashbury, MacMillan, New York, does not discuss the influence of the exotic at all; it is essentially Eurocentric. Another example, in *The Invention of the Avant Garde: France, 1830 – 80*, Nochlin focuses on the upheaval of political revolution in France and democratic Realism whereas colour theory, symbolist scientism and anarchy are the causes discussed in Françoise Nora's essay, *The Neo-Impressionist Avant-Garde*.

⁵³ This will be discussed in Chapter Two, illustrated by Thiat Diem Phung's modernist sculpture, based on calligraphic modules. Ref. Duong Dinh Chau, Ed., *L'Art de Diem Phung Thi*, 1997, pub. The Fine Arts Association of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

⁵⁴ Benjamin's inverted commas.

⁵⁵ Roger Benjamin, *Orientalism – From Delacroix to Klee*. (1997), Catalogue, Art Gallery of New South Wales. *The Oriental Mirage*. P 28.

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 Picasso⁵⁶

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.⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸ 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 many points of commonality and inter-relatedness, so the "rhizomes" thread through the whole document showing the complexity of this cultural exchange.

⁵⁶ 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

⁵⁷ 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"

⁵⁸ Ibid. See page 86 for the detailed rationale for this methodology.

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*).⁵⁹ It is proposed here that this has had a profound influence on Western contemporary sculptural practice.⁶⁰ The history of the direct

methods included *feng shui* garden art, which was interpreted in European gardens as Chinoiserie. It will be proposed in this chapter (page 25) that aspects of this eighteenth century fashion informed the development of contemporary installation art in the twentieth century.⁶¹ The influence of Taoism on the sixteenth century German philosopher, Leibniz, is outlined in this chapter (page 51), 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 55). 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 37), 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 62). 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 81).

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.⁶² The Jesuit Order was created in 1534 by Ignatius Loyola specifically for the conversion of 'pagans'.⁶³ Jacques 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,

⁶¹ 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."

⁶² Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, translated by J. R. Foster and Charles Hartman, (1982), Cambridge University Press. Chapter 21.

⁶³ *Ibid.* P 449.

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.⁶⁴ Jesuit missionaries held important advisory positions to the Emperor as mathematicians, astronomers, cartographers, interpreters, painters and musicians.⁶⁵ 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.⁶⁶ 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),⁶⁷ and William Chambers's *Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (1772),⁶⁸ 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' garden⁶⁹ 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, who had travelled to China three times between 1742 and 1749 on the boats of the Swedish East India Company (*Fig 3, Fig 4, Fig 5*).⁷⁰ 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.

⁶⁴ 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.

⁶⁵ Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, translated by J. R. Foster and Charles Hartman, (1982), Cambridge University Press. P 450.

⁶⁶ Susan Stewart, *Garden Agon*, Representations, No. 62 (Spring, 1998), pp. 111 – 143. Pub. University of California Press.

⁶⁷ <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

⁶⁸ William Chambers, *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening*, (first published, London, 1772). Pub. Farnborough, Gregg, 1972.

⁶⁹ Ibid. P157. Also called a pleasure garden, philosopher's garden, and stroll garden as above.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Pp 158, 162.

Fig 3: 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*.⁷¹ 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 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.⁷²

⁷¹ *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.

⁷² 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.

Chinese gardens were inhabited, incorporating domestic architecture and cultural venues, whereas European gardens were designed principally for leisure activity and aesthetics (*Fig 3*).

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,⁷³ which signified a mastery of nature, "order in opposition to nature" (*Fig 4*).⁷⁴

the most appropriate word to encapsulate a literary allusion. The calligraphic word or poem is then cut in stone and set in the garden.⁷⁷ 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."⁷⁸

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".⁷⁹

Fig 5: Illustrations of the Chinese Pagoda designed by Sir William Chambers for Kew Gardens, Kew, England, 1762.

Samual Coleridge's poem *Xanadu*,⁸⁰ 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!⁸¹

⁷⁷ Charles Jencks, *The Garden of Cosmic Speculation* (2003), pub. Francis Lincoln Ltd. London. Pp 44, 45.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p 162. William Chambers quoting a Chinese painter, Lepqua, whom he had met, who placed garden art at a very high level.

⁷⁹ 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.

⁸⁰ http://www.poetry-online.org/coleridge_kubla_khan.htm Cited July 2008.

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 6*).

Fig 6: The Chinoiserie dairy at Woburn Abbey, England, reflected in a pond. Photo. B. Ely, 1996.

Fig 7: 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

⁸¹ 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.

bridges spanning from earth to earth, the path winding through to slow the passage of energy, or *ch'i*, to a harmonious pace (*Fig 7*).

The origin of these devices in China, are to be found today in Gongwangfu, the traditional garden of Prince Gong in Beijing (*Fig 8, Fig 9, Fig 10, Fig 11, Fig 12*).⁸²

Fig 8: 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.

Fig 9: At Stourhead, England, the grotto is similarly constructed from imported stones, but contains a Greek goddess. Photo. B. Ely, 1996.

⁸² Peter Valder, *Gardens in China* (2002), pub. Florilegium, Sydney, Australia. Pp 148 – 153.

Fig 10: 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 11: 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 12: 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*,⁸³ which is a garden combining concrete poetry, plantings, installed sculpture and follies (*Fig 13, Fig 14*).⁸⁴ In her article, *Garden Agon*, Susan Stewart describes Hamilton-Finley's garden as:

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.⁸⁵

Stewart cites the following eighteenth century stroll gardens, William Shenstone's The Leasowes, Stowe under Richard Temple (Lord Cobham) and William Kent, and Stourhead (*Fig 1*), designed by Henry Hoare II and Henry Flitcroft, architect (1741 to 1765), as precedents for Hamilton-Finley'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."⁸⁶

Fig 13: That which joins and that which divides is one and the same. Ian Hamilton Finley'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.

⁸³ Ian Hamilton-Finley (1925-2006). *Little Sparta*, Pentland Hills of Southern Scotland. Begun in 1966.

⁸⁴ 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.

⁸⁵ Susan Stewart, *Garden Agon*, Representations, No. 62 (Spring, 1998). Pub. University of California Press. P 119.

⁸⁶ http://www.ianhamiltonfinlay.com/ian_hamilton_finlay.html Cited, July 2008.

China,⁸⁹ 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.⁹⁰

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 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 paradox⁹¹ 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,⁹² 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 15*), intermediary zones between public and private spaces in architecture, garden design and urban planning, tones of grey,⁹³ 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.⁹⁴ The ambiguous, the non-absolutist qualities of *ma* characterise the strategy of the

⁸⁹ Also known as Ch'an, Chen and Chan Buddhism.

⁹⁰ 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.

⁹¹ Kishu Kurokawa, *Rediscovering Japanese Space* (1988). Pub. John Wetherall Inc., New York. Pp 19 – 21, 55.

⁹² 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.

⁹³ 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.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* Pp 19 – 21.

installation artist, where the viewer is both observer and participant, and aesthetics are deployed to achieve paradox rather than orthodox.

Fig 15 : 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*,⁹⁵ may be seen to be implicated in contemporary experimental art practice (*Fig 103*). *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.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Ibid. Pp 70 – 77.

⁹⁶ See Chapters Five, Six and Seven for further discussion and examples.

Like the Eastern garden designer, the installation artist articulates real space, the placement of form and imagery, temporal elements of expression – serial variations, 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.⁹⁷ 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.⁹⁸ 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.⁹⁹ An examination of its compatibilities with Taoism explain its rapid penetration of Chinese culture by the fourth century, and the development of a Chinese

⁹⁷ 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>

⁹⁸ 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.

⁹⁹ 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.

Buddhist sect that owed much to Taoism.¹⁰⁰ Correlations were close, for example, “Buddhism described itself as a path, or *tao*; it had its immortal, the Buddha; it practised acting by non-acting, that is, acting in the centre between extremes”,¹⁰¹ 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.¹⁰² 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*)¹⁰³ and other practices such as yoga and the t’ai chi¹⁰⁴ “as a means to spiritual concentration and longevity”.¹⁰⁵

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,¹⁰⁶ known as Zen Buddhism in Japan (page 39). Indian Buddhist *dhyana* (a meditation technique “by which we stop all thinking and seek to realize truth in all its essence”)¹⁰⁷ 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.¹⁰⁸ Ch’en Buddhists believed sudden enlightenment could be achieved through a system of exercises aimed at seeing things “as they are” through direct experience.

¹⁰⁰ Heinrich Dumoulin, *A History of Zen Buddhism*, 1963, translated by Paul Peachy. Pantheon Books, Random House, NY. P 54.

¹⁰¹ Ninian Smart, *The World’s Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations*, 1989, Cambridge University Press. P 120.

¹⁰² Ibid. P 54.

¹⁰³ *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.

¹⁰⁴ *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.

¹⁰⁵ 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.

¹⁰⁶ Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, (1993), translated by Karen C. Duval, University of California Press. P 13.

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.abuddhistlibrary.com/Buddhism/C%20-%20Zen/Ancestors/Master%20Chih%20-%20Dhyana/Dhyana%20I.htm> Cited June 2008

¹⁰⁸ Ninian Smart, *The World’s Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations*, 1989, Cambridge University Press. P 63.

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).¹⁰⁹

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.¹¹⁰ Irrational conundrums known as *kung an* in Chinese,¹¹¹ *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.¹¹² 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".¹¹³

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.¹¹⁴

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

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. P 123.

¹¹⁰ 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.

¹¹¹ "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.

¹¹² 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.

¹¹³ Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations*, 1989, Cambridge University Press. Pp 13, 122.

¹¹⁴ 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*),¹¹⁵ 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 16: Sung fan showing cursive style calligraphy.

This was the Sung period in China,¹¹⁶ when Ch'en cultural creativity was at a height of achievement. Monks were amongst the greatest of Chinese painters and calligraphers (*Fig 16*). The fine, artistic methods of Ch'en, along with ways of attaining enlightenment, both appropriated from Taoism, were introduced to Japan at this time.¹¹⁷

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.¹¹⁸ In comparison, Zen Buddhism is a religion that similarly describes all things as

¹¹⁵ Born 1141, died 1215. Eisai is acknowledged as the founder of Zen Buddhism in Japan.

¹¹⁶ 12th and 13th centuries C.E.

¹¹⁷ Heinrich Dumoulin, *A History of Zen Buddhism*, 1963, translated by Paul Peachy. Pantheon Books, Random House, NY. Pp 123, 124, 140.

¹¹⁸ 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 control through means of non-interference, and of transcendence as a result of physiological and mental regimes." P 322.

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.¹¹⁹

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".¹²⁰ 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 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

¹¹⁹ O. N. Krishnan, *In Search of Reality*, (2004). Pub. Motilal Banarsidass Pp 277 - 282

¹²⁰ 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.

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.¹²¹

Fig 17: 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.¹²² The islands are quoted in *karesansui tei'en*, 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 17*).

¹²¹ 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.

¹²² *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.¹²³

GARDEN ART, CHINESE PAINTING AND CALLIGRAPHY COALESCE

Fig 18: 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.¹²⁴ The design of Zen gardens such as this were an equivalent of the aesthetic ideals, subtle moods, atmospheric effects and practices of brush and ink paintings imported from China.¹²⁵ The style of gestural, suggestively spare painting in turn has its origins in the skill and vitality of China's calligraphic art (*Fig 18*). It is in Zen gardens like Daisen-in that Taoist calligraphy, brush and ink painting and garden art coalesce (*Fig 19, Fig 25*). Typically, small, shallow gardens such as this are viewed frontally from a veranda, which frames the garden like a landscape painting.

¹²³ 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.

¹²⁴ 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.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* P 80.

Fig 19: 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 21*). 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 21*). The water flows on under a curved footbridge to an extension from the temple's architecture, which frames the garden (*Fig 22*). On other side another boat-shaped rock floats in slow water (*Fig 23*).

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 Tao¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 30.

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 24*).

Fig 20: 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.

Fig 21: 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 22: Daitokoji monastery, Kyoto. An architectural extension frames the garden. Photo: B. Ely, 1993.

Fig 23: 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 24: 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 25: 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, inter-connectedness, heightened aesthetic, has prompted their articulation of spatiality, using placement as a dominant element of expression in installation art.

Fig 26 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.¹²⁷ 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.¹²⁸ Noguchi introduced these precepts to American artists, through his use of Zen garden principals as a sculptural form, leading to installation art.¹²⁹ He wrote, "I like to think of gardens as sculpturing of space".¹³⁰ 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.

¹²⁷ See Chapter Five.

¹²⁸ *Isamu Noguchi, A Sculptor's World* (New York and Evanston: Harper Row, 1968). P 116.

¹²⁹ Jacqueline Baas, *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today* (2005), University of California Press. P 110.

¹³⁰ 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).

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*.¹³¹ The former was contextualised by an urban environment, and defined as an 'urban intervention', the latter was exhibited in the 18th 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.

Fig 27: 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 27*).

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 28*).

¹³¹ 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 28: 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 29*).

Fig 29: Bonita Ely, Sleepers/Ties II (1994), cloth, paper, salt, plaster. New Gallery. 18th 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 30*).

Fig 30: 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 31*).

Fig 31 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."¹³²

GOTTFRIED LEIBNIZ

Arguably the West's "rapid progress" began with the great German philosopher and mathematician, Gottfried Leibniz (1646 – 1716),¹³³ 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.¹³⁴

Leibniz was describing a Confucian society¹³⁵ based on "reason and natural law [where] a "system of examinations [merit] ... for the recruitment ... for the public services"

¹³² Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, translated by J. R. Foster and Charles Hartman, (1982), Cambridge University Press. P 523.

¹³³ Gottfried Wilhelm Freiherr von Leibniz, (1646 – 1716).

¹³⁴ From Leibniz's Preface to the *Novissima Sinica* (1697/1699). (Cited May 2008) http://east_west_dialogue.tripod.com/id12.html

¹³⁵ 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

contrasted with Europe's feudal social structure based on nepotism and hierarchies of class.¹³⁶ 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.¹³⁷ Descartes 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 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.¹³⁸

In part from this exposure to Taoist precepts, Leibniz developed his theory of monads,¹³⁹ 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]"¹⁴⁰ the multifarious substances that make up existence. Following along Needham's research¹⁴¹ of Leibniz's monad theories, J. J. Clarke writes in *The Tao of the West: Western Transformations of Daoist Thought*:

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.

¹³⁶ 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.

¹³⁷ Ibid. P 526.

¹³⁸ 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.

¹³⁹ Gottfried Wilhelm Von Leibniz (1744 – 1829) *Monadology*, written in 1714, published 1867.

¹⁴⁰ 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

¹⁴¹ 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.

[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 thought¹⁴²

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.”¹⁴³

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.¹⁴⁴

In his book on Leibniz, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*,¹⁴⁵ Gilles Deleuze returns to a Sinetic theme he had explored earlier in *Repetition and Difference*.¹⁴⁶ 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”.¹⁴⁷ 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.¹⁴⁸ 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.

¹⁴² J. J. Clarke, *The Tao of the West: Western Transformations of Taoist Thought*, (2000). Pub. Routledge. P 70.

¹⁴³ 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.

¹⁴⁴ 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.

¹⁴⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, 1993, University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁴⁶ 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.

¹⁴⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, 1993, University of Minnesota Press. P 24.

¹⁴⁸ 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

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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.¹⁴⁹

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:

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.¹⁵⁰

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".¹⁵¹ 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 97), how in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze paraphrases the Taoist principals that underlie

¹⁴⁹ 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

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. P 1.

¹⁵¹ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1988, English version 1993). Translator, Tom Conley, pub. University of Minnesota Press. P 14.

Chinese calligraphy described by sinologist N. J. Girardot in his *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism*.¹⁵²

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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.¹⁵³ Western interpreters' and lay readers' inability to penetrate the poetic language also occluded meaning.¹⁵⁴ But, interpretations infiltrated the thinking of early twentieth century avante-gard artists via visionary, influential thinkers.¹⁵⁵ For 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, Gottlieb, 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),¹⁵⁶ Baziotes, Krazner, Roszac, Graham, Ossorio, Francis, McCracken, Mullican.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² N. J. Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism: the Theme of Chaos (hun-tun)* (1983). University of California Press.

¹⁵³ Lee Irwin, . *Daoist Alchemy in the West: The Esoteric Paradigms*.
<http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeVI/Dao.htm> (cited March 2008).

¹⁵⁴ 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).

¹⁵⁵ 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 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.mythsdreamsymbols.com/Iching.html> (Cited March 2008).

¹⁵⁶ 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.

¹⁵⁷ 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.

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*,¹⁵⁸ in the summer of 1920. He later wrote the Forward for the English translation of Richard Wilhelm's German translation of the *I Ching* in 1949.¹⁵⁹

... I encountered amazing coincidences which seemed to suggest the idea of an acausal parallelism (a synchronicity as I was later to call it).¹⁶⁰

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",¹⁶¹ 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.

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.¹⁶²

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:

¹⁵⁸ *I Ching, or Book of Changes*. Pantheon Books (1950). The Richard Wilhelm German translation rendered into English by Cary F. Baynes. New York. Forward by Carl Jung, Zurich, 1949.

¹⁵⁹ Jung also wrote the Forward 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.

¹⁶⁰ 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.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p 477.

¹⁶² C. G. Jung, Forward to Richard Wilhelm's translation of the *I Ching*, Zurich, 1949. Pantheon Books [1961, P xxiv.

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.¹⁶³

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 dry¹⁶⁴

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.¹⁶⁵ 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

¹⁶³ Lee Irwin, *Daoist Alchemy in the West: The Esoteric Paradigms*.

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

¹⁶⁴ 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.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.* P 69.

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.¹⁶⁶

In contrast, after 3000 BC, cuneiform script, the origin of Western phonetics, was written using a 'wedge shaped stylus',¹⁶⁷ 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.¹⁶⁸ 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.¹⁶⁹ 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 China where meaning could be subservient to aesthetics, and abstract, or non-representational imagery expressed philosophical concepts.¹⁷⁰ 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.¹⁷¹

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.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁶ Jean Francois Billiter, *The Chinese Art of Writing*, 1990, Rizzoli International Publications. Ch. 3.

¹⁶⁷ 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.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. P 184.

¹⁶⁹ Jean Francois Billiter, *The Chinese Art of Writing*, 1990, Rizzoli International Publications. Ch. 3.

¹⁷⁰ *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.

¹⁷¹ Laszlo Legeza, *The Secret Language of Diagrams and Calligraphy*, pub., Thames and Hudson, London, 1975. P 22.

¹⁷² 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.

Calligraphic artists selected their four tools for making their marks and lines with care - *mao bi* (brush),¹⁷³ *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.¹⁷⁴ 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 62).¹⁷⁵ 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 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.¹⁷⁶

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.¹⁷⁷ 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).¹⁷⁸

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,

¹⁷³ *Sumi* brush in Japanese. The same tools are used by calligraphers in Japan, Vietnam and Korea.

¹⁷⁴ 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/>

¹⁷⁵ 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.

¹⁷⁶ Gordon S. Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 2002, University of California Press. Pp 24, 25.

¹⁷⁷ 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.

¹⁷⁸ 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.

has been traced by David J. Clarke general terms.¹⁷⁹ Clarke lists the European artists, Arp,¹⁸⁰ 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 Dada¹⁸¹ were possibly made in retrospect by various artists, including Breton, who become 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 32*).¹⁸²

Fig 32: 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".¹⁸³

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 11th, 1917) to French Dada artist, Suzanne Duchamp, (also his sister):

¹⁷⁹ David J. Clarke, *Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture* (1988). PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute. Pub. Imprint, New York.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. "Arp was acquainted with the *Tao Te Ching*". P. 52.

¹⁸¹ 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.

¹⁸² Ibid. P 55.

¹⁸³ A. D'Harnoncourt, K. McShine, [ed.], *Marcel Duchamp*, 1973, pub. Museum of Modern Art, New York, Philadelphia Museum of Art. P 283.

One of my women friends, using a masculine pseudonym, Richard Mutt, submitted a porcelain urinal as a sculpture.¹⁸⁴

The woman friend was Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven, a member of the New York Dada movement.¹⁸⁵ False or ambiguous authorship adds another layer to the Taoist and Zen attributes of “indifference” in Dada.¹⁸⁶ Other attributes shared by Surrealism and Dada with Zen and Taoism are non-rationality,¹⁸⁷ disregard for authority,¹⁸⁸ 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 spontaneity of Surrealist automatism”.¹⁸⁹ 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”.¹⁹⁰ 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 33*).¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁴ 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.

¹⁸⁶ 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*.

¹⁸⁷ David J. Clarke, *Influence of Oriental Thought on Postwar American Painting and Sculpture* (1988). PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute. Pub. Imprint, New York. P 23.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.* P 56.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.* Pp 200 - 202.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.* P23.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* Pp 205 – 206. For example, “Describing *Reconciliation Elegy* (1978). Motherwell states that he has attempted to retain ... ‘the immediacy of Oriental calligraphy’ ”.

Fig 33 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'.¹⁹² The deployment of chance,¹⁹³ the creation of art as a meditative object for the viewer,¹⁹⁴ a consciousness of spatiality as a representation of the cosmic void, or emptiness, nothingness,¹⁹⁵ and the expression of "continuum",¹⁹⁶ and process¹⁹⁷ 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, 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.

¹⁹² Ibid. Pp 80 – 124 regarding artists such as Reinhardt, Motherwell, Noguchi, Tobey, Cage.

¹⁹³ Ibid. Pp 124 – 131.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. Chapter Four.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. Pp 145 - 173

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. Chapter Six.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. Chapter Seven.

The Fluxus Movement was a post Second World War phenomenon, contemporaneous to Abstract Expressionism.¹⁹⁸ 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 was 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,¹⁹⁹ and spontaneous improvisation, which are key factors in both the Taoist artists' credo, and in the development of installation art.

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.²⁰⁰ Belgrad's thesis is to expose the history of spontaneous creativity, or improvisation in the American avant-garde.²⁰¹ 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.²⁰² He devotes some discussion to Ezra Pound's enthusiasm for Chinese calligraphy and notes the "calligraphic styles of Tomlin or Mark Tobey",²⁰³ Motherwell's 'plastic autism',²⁰⁴ Pollock's figure ground synthesis',²⁰⁵ Rosenberg's 'action painting as a kind of dialogue between the painter and the work of art',²⁰⁶ but without drawing correlations to Taoism. He writes, "Many artists also investigated Taoism (which was another of Goodman's primary sources)."²⁰⁷ This was in reference to the influence of gestalt psychology, not

¹⁹⁸ 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

¹⁹⁹ David I. Hall, *Process and Anarchy: A Taoist Vision of Creativity* (1978), Philosophy East and West, Vol. 28. No. 3. P 273.

²⁰⁰ Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Post War America*, University of Chicago Press, 1998.

²⁰¹ This will be expanded upon in the next chapter.

²⁰² Ibid. Pp 28, 61, 117, 143.

²⁰³ Ibid. P 95.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. P 105.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. P 111.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. P 111.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. P 114.

Taoism. These references tease at Taoism's significance but never explicate 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,²⁰⁸ their study of Jung²⁰⁹ and gestalt psychology,²¹⁰ their rejection of surrealism and existentialism,²¹¹ and their interest in Alfred Whitehead's philosophical explication of process.²¹² Bebop²¹³ 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 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.²¹⁴

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].²¹⁵

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.²¹⁶ 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:

²⁰⁸ Ibid. P 55.

²⁰⁹ Ibid. P 61.

²¹⁰ 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.

²¹¹ Ibid. P 113.

²¹² 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.

²¹³ Ibid. Ch 8.

²¹⁴ 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.

²¹⁵ *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.

²¹⁶ 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.

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.²¹⁷

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 America (USA) in 1854, and after trade treaties were negotiated - with the United States, and Britain in 1856, and with France in 1858.²¹⁸

Principally, Japanese Zen Buddhism's origins in China's Ch'en Buddhism, outlined above (page 39), 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 69). 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 34*).²¹⁹ 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

²¹⁷ 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.

²¹⁸ 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.

²¹⁹ Whilst artist in resident in Künstlerhaus 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 2nd World war and met German artists, such as Joseph Beuys and Wolf Vostell, members of the German Fluxus movement.

response to the lunacy of the First World War,²²⁰ and Zen Buddhism and Taoist philosophy, which provided alternative philosophical and aesthetic models.

*Fig 34: Joseph Beuys (German, 1921-1986), I like America and America likes me, 1974*²²¹ 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.²²² Photo Caroline Tisdall.

In his essay, *Zen Vaudeville: a Medi(t)ation in the Margins of Fluxus*,²²³ 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:

²²⁰ See above. S. Lemoine, *Dada*, 1987, Art Data. P 10.

²²¹ <http://www.artlex.com/ArtLex/f/fluxus.html> Re. the Fluxus `performances of Joseph Beuys.

²²² <http://www.walkerart.org/archive/5/9D43B5DB685147C46167.htm>

²²³ *The Fluxus Reader*, (1998) Ed., Ken Friedman. Pub. Academy Editions. David T. Doris, *Zen Vaudeville: a Medi(t)ation in the Margins of Fluxus*.

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'. ²²⁴
<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". ²²⁵
<i>Corporeal gesture, attention, meditative presence</i>	Takihisa Kosugi,	<i>Chirinomy 1</i> (1961)	Instructions: 'Put out a hand from a window from along period of time' ²²⁶ . "The artist becomes the creator of a matrix" and the viewer completes the work, "and creates it <i>anew</i> with each performance". ²²⁷
<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. ²²⁸
<i>Creativity in an everyday activity</i>	Alison Knowles	<i>Proposition</i> (1962)	Instructions: 'Make a salad'. ²²⁹
<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

²²⁴ Ibid. P 102.

²²⁵ 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%20New%20Japan) Cited Sept. 2008.

²²⁶ *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.

²²⁷ Ibid. P 105, quoting Dick Higgins.

²²⁸ Ibid. P 106.

²²⁹ 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).

			not choosing not wanting not owning aware of self wide awake SITTING QUIETLY DOING NOTHING ²³⁰
<i>Absurdity:</i>	Daniel Spoerri	<i>Fakir's Spectacles</i> (1965).	Spectacles with spikes poking back towards the eyes that would blind the wearer. ²³¹
<i>Paradox</i>	Yoko Ono	<i>Sun Piece</i> (1962)	Instructions: Watch the sun until It becomes square ²³²
<i>Intuition, immediacy of experience, sensory perception</i>	Yoko Ono	<i>Wind Piece</i> (1962)	Instructions: Make way for the wind ²³³
<i>Austerity, simplicity:</i>	Yoko Ono	<i>Light ning Piece</i> (1965)	Instructions: Light a match and watch Till it goes out. ²³⁴
<i>Inter relatedness, cyclic totality, inter- media:</i>	June Nam Paik	<i>TV Buddha</i> (1982).	Video and sculpture installation. ²³⁵
<i>Chance</i>	Ben Vautier	<i>Total Art Sculpture</i> (1967)	Instructions: Pick up anything at your feet ²³⁶
<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. ²³⁷

²³⁰ Ibid. P 109.

²³¹ Ibid. P 111. Doris compares this work to Man Ray's *Cadeau* (1921), a clothes iron with spikes.

²³² Ibid. P 113.

²³³ Ibid. P 115.

²³⁴ Ibid. P 114.

²³⁵ <http://faculty.etsu.edu/kortumr/HUMT2320/postmodern/htmldescriptionpages/30paik2desc.jpg> Cited May, 2008.

²³⁶ Ibid. P 118.

²³⁷ Happening at the Sydney Myer Music Bowl, Melbourne, 1969, when studying at Prahran College of Fine Art.

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 of the Absurd*,²³⁸ 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.²³⁹

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',²⁴⁰ 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.²⁴¹ 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

²³⁸ 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 Dali Lama' 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.

²³⁹ See Chapter Five.

²⁴⁰ The English refused to kow tow to the Emperor.

²⁴¹ 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.

were exposed to European art, studying in Hong Kong and 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 35*).²⁴²

Fig 35: 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 1878,²⁴³ and in 1900, the Exposition Universelle in Paris continued this populist exposure to Chinese culture (*Fig 36*).

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.²⁴⁴ His gallery, L'Art Nouveau - Maison Bing, commissioned

²⁴² Bob Speel, *The Great Exhibition of 1851*.

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

²⁴³ Jacqueline Baas, *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today* (2005), University of California Press. P 8.

²⁴⁴ *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

artists such as Edward Vuillard to produce artefacts inspired by his imports from China and elsewhere in the 'Orient'.²⁴⁵ 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 36: Japanese lacquer samples from the Victoria and Albert Museum, c.1850 – 75.²⁴⁶ 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.²⁴⁷

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 European and American artists, described above, were

²⁴⁵ 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

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.

²⁴⁶ Ibid. P 41.

²⁴⁷ See the significance of this to the thesis in Chapter Five.

diluted.²⁴⁸ 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.²⁴⁹

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.

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.²⁵⁰ A great traveller, 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,²⁵¹ 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 37*).²⁵²

Australia’s peripatetic émigré artist, Ian Fairweather²⁵³ 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.²⁵⁴ 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.²⁵⁵

Ian Fairweather returned to China in 1935 and spent time with a master calligrapher outside Peking.²⁵⁶ 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 38*).²⁵⁷

²⁵⁰ 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’”.

²⁵¹ <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

²⁵² <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.

²⁵³ Ian Fairweather, England, Australia. (1891 – died in Australia 1974).

²⁵⁴ http://www.queenslandartgallery.com/exhibitions/current/fairweather_room/ian_fairweather4 (Cited May 2008)

²⁵⁵ 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.

²⁵⁶ www.niagaragalleries.com.au/artists/artistpages/theartists/ian_fairweather/documents/Fairweather.pdf (Cited May 2008)

²⁵⁷ Ian Fairweather (1891- 1974), *The Drunken Buddha*, (1965). University of Queensland Press.

*Fig 38: 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.²⁵⁸ 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 39*).

*Fig 39: Diem Phung Thi, *The Silence*, 1988, wood, 170 x 80 x 45 cm.*

²⁵⁸ 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

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 40, Fig 41, Fig 42*).

and Vietnamese artists selected for the series of Asia-Pacific Triennials from 1993 In the Queensland Art Gallery.

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.²⁶¹

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 46: 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.²⁶³

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 45, Fig 46, Fig 47*). 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".²⁶⁴

²⁶³ 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.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.* P 32.

Fig 47: Martin Wong (1946 – 1999), Fairy Tale (1967).
Ink on paper, 81¹/₂ x 12³/₄ 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.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁵ 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.²⁶⁶ 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.²⁶⁷ 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 48*).

Fig 48: 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 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.”²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Croizier, 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. Pp 137 – 154.

²⁶⁷ 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.

²⁶⁸ Croizier, 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.

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 197). Suffice to say, the controversy was symptomatic of the lack of direct dialogue between China and the West up to this time.²⁶⁹

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,²⁷⁰ Wu Shan Zuan, Qui Zhijie, Song Dong and, Huang Yong Ping, Wenda Gu (*Fig 49*).

In his book, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*,²⁷² 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.²⁷³

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 187). 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.²⁷⁴ 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 50*). Barrass writes:

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.²⁷⁵

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 Bing²⁷⁶ kept alive their covert fascination with calligraphy by writing

²⁷² Gordon S. Barrass, *The Art of Calligraphy in Modern China*, 2002, University of California press.

²⁷³ Ibid. P 15.

²⁷⁴ 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.

²⁷⁵ P 111.

²⁷⁶ Ibid. P 146, 36.

sanctioned material such as propaganda, village newsletters and copies of Mao's poetry during the Cultural Revolution (page 197). The teaching of calligraphy and Taoism continues its central role today in contemporary China,²⁷⁷ artists having a "deep understanding of traditional painting and calligraphy".²⁷⁸

Fig 50: 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.

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

²⁷⁷ Ibid. Refer to : Qi Gong (1912 -) Pp 146 - 152; Wang Dongling (1945 -) P 163; Huang Miaozi (1913 -) P 172; Gu Gan (1942 -) Pp182, 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.

²⁷⁸ Ibid. P 256.

CHAPTER 3: MIXED METHODS

This chapter describes the methodologies used to investigate the porosity of Western culture towards Taoism, China's indigenous philosophy, a discourse identified in Chapter Two: A History of Discourse – East West and Back Again, with a view to establishing the nature of this cross cultural influence and describing its qualities.

To summarise, the research methods described below have produced an expanded history of the influence of Taoism on experimental, contemporary art practice in the West. The method uses the frame of Taoist principals that correlate with Deleuze's Post Modern theories of representation²⁷⁹ to demonstrate how notions associated with Taoism are now seamlessly embedded in Western, experimental, contemporary visual arts practice. Combining art history and art theory with the insight of an artist's visual intelligence, plus fieldwork and an interview with a key artist, these research methods reveal original material in case studies that draw upon the examination of artworks to determine the direct and indirect influence of traditional Taoist art forms and concepts on experimental contemporary art.

The methodologies employed to explore this complex cultural field are derived from three disciplines: art theory, art history, and visual arts practice. Within this interdisciplinary enquiry the approach taken to theory and history is less than an orthodox academic one, as that of a practising visual artist. That is, the disciplines of art theory and history are combined with the multitudinous probings of a conceptual visual artist. It is argued below that this interdisciplinary approach may be seen to reflect a Taoist methodology aligned with the practice of the 'Way', which illustrates the intrinsic circularity and porosity of this topic.²⁸⁰ This practice-based, interdisciplinary methodology is explained in the following sections: History as a Rhizome; Combining Scholarly Research with Visual Literacy; Capacity to Demystify Mythology; Capacity for Originality; Metonymy, Artists' Heightened Awareness of Aesthetic Qualities; The

²⁷⁹ Giles Deleuze, *Repetition and Difference* (1969). English translation, 1994 by Paul Patton, pub. 1994, Columbia University Press, NY.

²⁸⁰ David L. Hall, *Process and Anarchy – a Taoist Vision of Creativity*, from *Philosophy East West*, Vol. 28, No. 3, (Jul., 1978). P 278.

Physiological Mechanisms of the Studio Research Method; The Studio Research Method in Practice; Creative Research Parallels in Taoism and Deleuze; The Application of Taoist Theory Concerning Creativity in the Thesis; Spontaneous Graphic Improvisation as a Taoist Art Form; Fieldwork, Marfa, Texas, New York and Beijing.

History as a Rhizome

The methods used to trace the history of discourse between the West and Far East closely parallel the process metaphorically described as a rhizome in *One Thousand Plateaux: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* by French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, and the psychoanalyst, Félix Guattari.²⁸¹ The influence of Taoism on Western cultures resembles the non-hierarchical, non-linear, multi-dimensional, inter-relational tendrils of a rhizome growing above and below ground. Deleuze and Guattari use this metaphor to dismiss ordered, hierarchical models for an understanding of how reality is structured. They describe reality as multiplicitous levels of energy and intensity, tendrils that interconnect each part to each other and the whole, encompassing movement, aggregations, polymorphous materialisations, metamorphosis. This theory conjures an evolving, organic-like system that perfectly describes the gradual reach of Taoism into Western thought, aesthetics and processes, just as the rhizome's structure might be accurately illustrated by the precepts of Taoism. By comparing the following quotes from Deleuze and Guattari on the rhizome, and Lao Tzu, author of the *Tao Te Ching* on the Tao, the relationship is clear:

... any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be.²⁸²

... unlike trees and their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to the traits of the same nature.

It is composed not of units but ... of dimensions in motion.

... the rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots ... [it] is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entry ways and exits.²⁸³

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*.²⁸⁴

This clearly correlates with the principles of the Tao:

²⁸¹ Giles Deleuze , Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaux: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, 1993. Translation to English, Brian Massumi. See the first chapter, *Introduction: Rhizome*.

²⁸² Ibid. P 7.

²⁸³ Ibid. P 21.

²⁸⁴ Ibid. P 25.

Though formless and intangible
 It gives rise to form
 Though vague and illusive
 It gives rise to shapes
 Though dark and obscure
 It is the spirit, the essence,
 The life-breath of all things²⁸⁵

The movement of Tao is to return
 The way of Tao is to yield²⁸⁶

The most yielding thing in the world
 will overcome the most rigid
 The most empty thing ...
 Will overcome the most full²⁸⁷

Such is their unity
 that one does not exist without the other²⁸⁸

Similarly, the theory of representation formulated by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*²⁸⁹ is deployed as a methodology to elaborate upon the rhizome as metaphor for new ways of perceiving and thinking by avoiding the repetition of habit, by representing new connectivities in an atomistic, relational manner to fashion new concepts. This model, used in concert with an analysis of Taoist art forms such as calligraphy, explicates the nature of the strands of Taoism's influence. Throughout the thesis the methodology traces the nature of the influences of discourse between East and West as either a direct synthesis into Western culture, or as indirect, building upon previous discourse.

Combining Scholarly Research with Visual Literacy

The research methodology employs the orthodox skills of scholarly research combined with the visual artist's primary method of studio research - *visual literacy*, or visual intelligence - "the ability to create, use and understand visual images".²⁹⁰ This includes the artist's observational acuity and heightened aesthetic sensibilities. For this reason detailed discussions of the key artists' works include first hand descriptions of the artworks supported by detailed visual documentation to build a complete account of details pertinent to discerning the influence of Taoism. That is, the decision making in the studio by other artists is analytically dissected in the manner of a maker rather than

²⁸⁵ Lao-Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 21.

²⁸⁶ Ibid. Verse 40.

²⁸⁷ Ibid. Verse 43.

²⁸⁸ Ibid. Verse 52.

²⁸⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Repetition and Difference*. 1968, Columbia University Press, New York.

²⁹⁰ K. L. Krause, S. Bochner, S. Duchesne, *Educational Psychology for Learning and Teaching*, 2003, pub. Thompson. P 367.

a theoretician. The artist's dominant cognitive style, and hence research style,²⁹¹ are a combination of spatial/visual, tactile/kinetic skill sets interconnected to auditory awareness and logical thought. These are the complex interconnections between conceptual and sensory modes evident in the methodology used for this research project.

Capacity to Demystify Mythology

The mythology surrounding the 'intuitive', 'inspired', subjective, even 'mystical' processes traditionally associated with the artist's methodology as a creative maker may cloud an appraisal of the validity of research undertaken in the studio compared to the iterative processes of disciplines such as humanities and science, even though methodical experimentation associated with problem solving in the scientist's laboratory often aligns with that of the studio. Functionally, a practice-based methodology employs the first hand knowledge of the visual artist from the inside, so to speak, to analyse their own and other artists' works. To demystify the practising artist's introspective and wide ranging, investigative ways of thinking through to insightful outcomes, research results of neurological science's investigations of the activity of the brain when people are engaged in creative activities compared to routine activities are included here. These findings in the laboratory verify Taoism's and Gilles Deleuze's insistence upon a complexity that embraces the subjective rather than the West's mythologising of the creative process that places the artist outside the norm, or its simplifying, reductive analysis.²⁹²

Capacity for Originality

Peter Dallow's explanation of the value of the artist's research methodology as "an active cultural *process* for intellectually and technically organising and deploying certain knowledge and skill into new conceptual and effective *forms*" further supports art practice as a research tool.²⁹³ In his article, *Outside 'The True'?: research and complexity in contemporary arts practice*²⁹⁴ Peter Dallow investigates the nature of originality and creativity in visual arts research. Against the Post Modern credo that nothing *new* can happen, that everything has been done before, he asks where the

²⁹¹ James W. Keefe, *Assessment of Learning Style Variables: the NASSP Task Force Model*. Theory into Practice, Vol. 24, No. 2, *Learning and the Brain* (Spring, 1985). P 141.

²⁹² Gilles Deleuze, *Repetition and Difference*. 1968, pub. Columbia University Press, New York.

²⁹³ Peter Dallow, *Outside 'The True'?: research and complexity in contemporary arts practice*, Chapter 11, P 133 of *New Practices, New Pedagogies*, 2005. Ed. Malcolm Miles. Routledge.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.* P 133.

visual arts sit as a research activity, particularly as, unlike empirical disciplines such as science, “its products, material and seemingly immaterial cannot be reproduced or tested under controlled conditions”.²⁹⁵ This thesis will demonstrate the verity of Dallow’s location of original thought as “new conceptual and effective forms” in the visual artist’s studio research.²⁹⁶

Metonymy

Art is speculative. Its meaning is produced by an improvised testing of the illusive effectiveness of visual poetics that can become unhinged by an over-determined use of fact. Yet metaphor, the alternative to fact is not a reality; metaphor ‘stands for’ the truth the artist seeks. The *difference* Deleuze identifies as the artist’s objective is born of repeating reality in a metamorphised state, as a constructed representation.²⁹⁷ Dallow suggests that art practice as a research tool can be viewed as *performative*, quoting Mikhail Bakhtin’s description of the aesthetic world as “but a moment of Being-as-event”, brought about “through an answerable consciousness – through an answerable deed by a participant”.²⁹⁸ If so, art as a research tool conveys new knowledge *metonymically*, centred in a realism of associative action. That is, “art is still best viewed as an active cultural *process* for intellectually and technically organising and deploying certain knowledge and skill into new conceptual and effective *forms*”.²⁹⁹

The over riding objective of the visual arts practitioner’s methodology is to inject IS-NESS into aestheticised, conceptually encoded materiality, into spatiality, into imagery and form. Who ‘answers’ this conceptual ‘deed’? Without taking account of the viewer’s response, that is, second-guessing another’s response, the artist “experiment(s)” and “play(s)”,³⁰⁰ willfully manipulating aesthetic qualities, imagery, articulating spatiality to create an unexpected zone in which the viewer *performs* in response to artist’s communicated intent. And in the process the viewer is brought alive through their senses and intellect to the artwork’s is-ness, and through this, “learning something we did not know”, that is, perceiving for themselves through subjective associations using the artist’s research outcome as a metonymic catalyst.

²⁹⁵ Ibid. P 133.

²⁹⁶ Ibid. P 134.

²⁹⁷ Gilles Deleuze, 1968, *Repetition and Difference*, Columbia University Press, New York.

²⁹⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, 1993, *Towards a Philosophy of the Act*. Trans. Vadim Laipunov. Austin: University of Texas Press. P 18.

²⁹⁹ Peter Dallow, *Outside ‘The True’?: research and complexity in contemporary arts practice*, Chapter 11 of *New Practices, New Pedagogies*, 2005. Ed. Malcolm Miles. Routledge. P 134.

³⁰⁰ Ibid. P 137.

Artists' Heightened Awareness of Aesthetic Qualities

In the studio an exploratory trial and error approach to aesthetic, conceptual problem solving combined with the contemplation of lateral connectiveness, is powered by a spontaneity harnessed to a mastery of skills. An energised, almost hallucinatory perception of the reality of what *is* in front of us in the making characterises an artist's heightened awareness of aesthetic qualities.³⁰¹ For example, for artists, spatiality's aesthetic qualities are as keenly perceived as objects³⁰² to assess the relationship of figure/ground. This ability is demonstrated in the diagram below. The artist's eyes look at the whole image, including the background, not just the subject of the photograph (*Fig 51*).

Hall garden taken in 1996,³⁰⁵ whilst researching architectural follies in European stroll gardens as a precursor to installation art, focuses on the spatiality of the placement of the spectacular topiary rather than the topiary as object, demonstrating the installation artist's 'eye' (*Fig 52, Fig 53*).

Fig 52: Rachel Whiteread's photographs (left, above) are described as "predatory" in that they capture spatiality as an intrinsic aspect of her projects' preparatory research.³⁰⁶

Fig 53: Bonita Ely's photograph of Levens Garden, England, and Ryoanji Garden, Kyoto, focusing on spatiality rather than objects.

A comparison could be drawn between the installation artists' photography and the emphasis on spatiality in the Zen dry garden, Ryoanji in Kyoto. Its narrative form is derived from Taoist mythology and the Islands of the Immortals. The design demonstrates an application of principles of placement from Taoism's *feng shui*, where every aspect of the garden is energised by Taoism's *ch'i*, the life force animating all

³⁰⁵ Established in the 1690s, designed by Guillaume Beaumont, Levens Hall garden began as a French parterre garden. The plants were allowed to grow to become more like a stroll garden, a design that became fashionable after accounts were published on Chinese gardens in the late seventeenth century, eighteenth century. Gervase Jackson-Stops, *The Country House Garden: a Grand Tour* (1995). Pub. Pavillion Books, London. Pp 17, 59, 60, 177.

³⁰⁶ Fiona Bradley, *Introduction*, from *Rachel Whiteread: Shedding Life* (1997). Ed. Fiona Bradley, pub. Tate Gallery Publishing, London. Pp 10,11.

things, from the articulation of the ground plane to represent water, the placement, scale and imagery of the rocks to represent the element 'earth', to the wall enclosing the garden where moulds and weathering have been allowed to flourish to represent the infinity of space found in the tonal washes of traditional sumi brush and ink landscape paintings.

Thus the artist's cognisance of these correlations of installation art to Zen Buddhism, which is, historically, a hybrid mix of Taoism and Indian Buddhism (page 38), are used to diagnose the influences of Taoism on installation art. Although crudely argued here, it can be seen that the methodology uses a combination of imagery of the site of an artwork, the artwork itself, and its history, to trace the threads of influences into the present, supported by Post Modern theories of representation that correlate with Taoist precepts.

Physiological Mechanisms of the Studio Research Method

The value of methodologies deployed in the studio are also verified by neurological research of people's brain activity whilst engaged in creative activity, which indicates the ability of an artist to make unusually complex connections between different areas of the brain and their different functions. For example, Ingegerd Carlsson, a psychologist from the University of Lund in Sweden and her colleagues have found the frontal lobes are significantly more active when people are engaged in creative activities, which allows a flexibility of focus and co-ordination of connectivity between different parts of the brain.³⁰⁷ David Beversdorf of Ohio State University in California has discovered that, during creative problem solving exercises, low levels of a brain signalling chemical, noradrenalin, associated with dreaming, allow broad networks of neurons to communicate. The chemical is released by the frontal lobes, encouraging neurons to 'talk' to each other.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ Reported by Helen Phillips, *Looking for Inspiration*, From the *Creativity Special*, New Scientist journal, 29 October, 2005, issue 2523. P 40. Phillips cites Ingegerd Carlsson Peter E. Wendta and Jarl Risberga, *On the Neurobiology of Creativity. Differences in frontal activity between high and low creative subjects*. Department of Clinical Neuroscience, Division of Psychiatry, Lund University, Lund, Sweden. http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B6T0D-3YMFJC914&_user=10&_rdoc=1&_fmt=&_orig=search&_sort=d&_view=c&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=10&md5=f5be529dfdceedd50382ddebe36b207d

Accepted 6 September 1999. Available online 21 February 2000. Cited Sept 2008

³⁰⁸ David Q. Beversdorf, Jessica K. Alexander, Ashleigh Hillier, Ryan M. Smith, Madalina E. Tivarus, *Beta-adrenergic Modulation of Cognitive Flexibility During Stress*. Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience archive, Volume 19, Issue 3 (March 2007) MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, USA.

The physiological mechanisms of this studio research method are further explained in the research of psychologist, Colin Martindale.³⁰⁹ Using electroencephalograms to record the pattern of brain waves whilst people were engaged in creative activities, he observed a switch from a quiet, relaxed state, similar to the alpha waves of dreaming when thinking about ideas, showing a low level of cortical arousal. Increased cortical arousal and organised thinking began when art making began. “Increased cortical arousal and organised thinking” probably reflect the masterful control of mediums perversely matched by a readiness for serendipitous accidents, an ability to “sense oneself making sense”,³¹⁰ an ability to be subjective and objective simultaneously. These paradoxical, liminal states, where mind and body act in free unison, may be the creative source of insight that cannot be articulated in words.

The Studio Research Method in Practice

An early example from my practice, *C20th Mythological Beasts: at Home with the Locust People* (1975), provides an account of the creative process of the research methodology employed in the studio.³¹¹ The project’s research question was: *Which life form combined with the human form best represents our contemporary belief system?*

Research included the study of mythological beasts in the sculpture of Egyptian and Greek antiquities; entomological studies of the locust’s life cycle; human anatomy; metaphoric relationships of stereotypical gender and materiality; puppetry and doll making; strategies to lure the viewer into the ‘sacred space’ of an artwork;³¹² video and sound production. The outcome was an installation, called ‘environmental art’ at this time, composed of the three hybrid figures, locust and human, watching sunsets on television, sitting in a lounge room that resembled a museum diorama, furnished with artificial representations of forms from nature (*Fig 54 - Fig 57*).

³⁰⁹ Reported by Helen Phillips, *Looking for Inspiration*, From the *Creativity Special*, New Scientist journal, 29 October 2005, issue 2523. P 40.

³¹⁰ Ibid, quoting Nancy (1997: 162).

³¹¹ *Twentieth Century Mythological Beasts: at Home with the Locust People* became a series of paintings, photographs, video, sound, photocopies, drawings and an installation, executed between 1973 and 1975 in London, New York and Melbourne. Exhibited in 1975, West Street Gallery, Sydney; 1976, *Three Statements on Environment*, Ewing and George Patton Galleries, University of Melbourne; 1976, Post Object Show, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide; 1995, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne. Only the installation is discussed here.

³¹² At the time of its first exhibition, 1975, viewers were reluctant to enter into the space of any artwork.

Fig 54: Bonita Ely, *C20th Mythological Beasts: At Home with the Locust People*, 1975. Mixed media installation, including *Sunset Video*. Here shown in the Sutton Gallery, Melbourne, 1995.

Fig 55: Bonita Ely, *C20th Mythological Beasts: At Home with the Locust People* (detail), 1975. The female locust person with her daughter at Sutton Gallery, Melbourne, 1997.

Fig 56: Bonita Ely, C20th Mythological Beasts: At Home with the Locust People (detail), 1975. Father and daughter, West Street Gallery, Sydney.

The materials, skill sets and technologies used were drawing, painting, sewing, printing, sculptural modeling, fiberglass casts, carpentry, photography, sound and video, found objects.

*Fig 57: Photograph from Sunset Video, taken on the 2nd January, 1974, showing pollution on the horizon at sunset over New Jersey and the Statue of Liberty, New York.*³¹³

³¹³ *Sunset Video* was produced in 1975 at Melbourne's first free community video access workshop in Carlton. Cinematographer, Sue Ford, sound, Mark Freedman. Back projected, dissolving slides of New York sunsets were filmed as if panning and zooming out and into real landscapes. The video has been shown independently of *Twentieth Century Mythological Beasts: at Home with the Locust People* installation in 2004, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne; 2005, Bellas Milani Gallery, Brisbane; 2007, Performance Space, Sydney: Held in Monash University's Australian Video Art Archive. <http://www.videoartchive.org.au/bely/> Cited Feb. 2008.

The concept was influenced by the contrast of my austere lifestyle in London where economic recovery from the Second World War was still underway, in contrast with New York, where the economy was booming, pollution and consumerism was conspicuous. I had experimented with viewer emersion in artworks at art school³¹⁴ and the efficacy of this tactic to enhance viewer engagement was reinforced by an exhibition of work by Ed Keinholz and Nancy Reddin,³¹⁵ American Fluxus artists,³¹⁶ seen at the Institute for Contemporary Art in London in 1971, including *Back Seat Dodge '38*. Their walk-in sculptures were very impressive.

affinity with nature, which was expressed in *Mythological Beasts*, was reinforced reading the *I Ching*. Its intriguing interpretations of a system of hexagrams to determine the actions of the 'superior man' use metaphors from natural phenomena. For example in hexagram 41, Sun / Decrease:

	At the foot of the mountain, the lake:
	The image of DECREASE
Hexagram Number 41: Decrease, loss	Thus the superior man controls his anger And restrains his instincts ³¹⁹

Interpretation: When resources are scarce, superior people remain positive and live within their means.

Conceptually my thoughts about problems of environmental degradation were in accord with Taoist precepts regarding the integral importance of an affinity with nature, and concerns that alienation from nature would lead to disastrous consequences.

Creative Research Parallels Taoism and Deleuze

The methodology identifies parallels with this interdisciplinary process of creativity, described above, with Deleuzian and Taoist theories of creativity. These close parallels arguably account for Taoism's pervasive influence on the development of contemporary art movements that tap into the co-dependency of chaos and order, dynamic, spontaneous activity, and contemplation, to capture a vibrant essence of reality. In his article, *Process and Anarchy – A Taoist Vision of Creativity*, David Hall paraphrases the personal and scientific accounts described above of creative processes as a research method.³²⁰ Hall defines the act of creation as a "concrecence, an act of becoming one".³²¹ To quote scientist, Mark Runco, creative people "have broad interests, providing lots of resources to draw on and knowledge to recombine into novel solutions."³²² Correlating with my own sense of creativity as primarily evoking 'is-ness', Hall writes,

³¹⁸ *I Ching* or *Book of Changes*, Translated by Richard Wilhelm to German, Cary F. Baynes. to English. Pub. Penguin, 1967.

³¹⁹ Ibid. Hexagram No. 41.

³²⁰ David L. Hall, *Process and Anarchy – a Taoist Vision of Creativity*, from *Philosophy East West*, Vol. 28, No. 3, (Jul., 1978), pp. 271 – 285.

³²¹ Ibid. P 273.

³²² Helen Phillips, *Looking for Inspiration*, From the Creativity Special, New Scientist, 29 October 2005, issue 2523. P 40.

Being is characterized in terms of its potentiality for novel synthesis. The “many things” of the world, in accordance with which the growing together of experience (the aesthetic event) *becomes*, constitute *beings*.³²³

This also reflects the rhizome theory of Deleuze and Guattari, described above, and encapsulates my experience, where disparate elements, over time, coalesce to create an aesthetic and conceptual totality of *being-ness*. Hall quotes philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead’s philosophical correlation of science and aesthetics:

The creative process is rhythmic: it swings from the publicity of many things to the individual privacy; and it swings back from the private individual to the publicity of the objectified individual.³²⁴

In other words the artist responds to many factors in their external world and processes them internally as an innovative response. This response is then presented to the world to be interpreted by the viewer.

Hall explains that for the Taoist, “the fundamental characteristics of creativity are freedom and reflexivity, expressed through the self-realization of events.”³²⁵ This describes the unfolding, graphic improvisations upon calligraphic characters practised by Taoist artists which in part led to the immersion in corporeal process of Abstract Expressionists, discussed in detail in Chapter Four and Two respectively.

Quiet times of thinking, diversionary activity, waiting for a coalescence of inexplicable hunches, combined with factual information gathering pertinent to the research topic, however seemingly obscurely linked, leading to dynamic, hyper conscious activity where the brain and senses are firing on all cylinders describes my experience of creative research.

Hall describes the Tao as a process that:

³²³ David L. Hall, *Process and Anarchy – a Taoist Vision of Creativity*, from *Philosophy East West*, Vol. 28, No. 3, (Jul., 1978), p 273.

³²⁴ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: an Essay on Cosmology*, written in the 1920s where Whitehead investigates how reality can be defined as a process of becoming. The provenance of his philosophical position is partly Leibniz’s Theory of Monism. Leibniz was influenced by accounts of Taoist philosophy in correspondence with Jesuit monks in the seventeenth, eighteenth centuries. Pub. The Free Press, New York, 1978. Pp 31 – 32. See also, Alfred North Whitehead’s *Process and Reality*. <http://www.angelfire.com/md2/timewarp/whitehead.html>

³²⁵ David L. Hall, *Process and Anarchy – a Taoist Vision of Creativity*, from *Philosophy East West*, Vol. 28, No. 3, (Jul., 1978). P 274.

... cannot be directly thought due to the static, form-endowing character of reason, anymore than permanence can be directly felt due to the dynamic, form-excluding quality of intuition ... The understanding of Tao-as-process requires the articulation of both the “nameless” and “nameable” aspects of the Tao.³²⁶

For Hall, “Being and non-being produce each other”, and, “Self-actualizing units of becoming contain both passive (*yin*) and active (*yang*) moments”.³²⁷ The contemporary experimental artist’s transgressive tendencies are implied: Hall writes that the Taoist artist does not feel obliged to align with a specific line of reasoning, or social morés. Rather, ideas evolve as seemingly infinite improvisations that present inter-related alternatives rather than a specific end result. These ideas may conflict with convention, confound social mores, break taboos.³²⁸ We should try to discern the true nature of things as they are; nothing is exempt from scrutiny but all knowledge is contingent – true nature is the “uncarved block” of the Tao.³²⁹

Nothing should be done to it. Whoever does anything to it will ruin it³³⁰

Guy Claxton has noted, “Creative synthesis requires a new pattern, to put the brain in a state where a large number of areas are simultaneously active.”³³¹ Hall notes of the Tao, “Intuitive understanding requires that one understands from within that which is intuited in such a manner as to appreciate the world from its perspective.”³³²

Hall illustrates his analysis of the Tao of creativity with a description of the quality of spatiality in Taoist painting. Spatial illusion created by the West’s technique of perspective, where the artist/viewer is on the outside, looking at, contrasts with Chinese artists’ emphasis on middle distances, where the point of view of the artist is not central to an appreciation of the painting. The viewer is drawn *into* the painting rather than looking *at* the painting.

Hall believes that to experience the excellence of the artwork:

it is necessary to experience it ecstatically, to dwell at its centre, and to envisage the universe from that perspective.³³³

³²⁶ Ibid. Pp 275, 277.

³²⁷ Ibid. Chapter Two. P 103.

³²⁸ Ibid. P 278. This will be expanded upon in relation to calligraphic improvisation in Chapter Four.

³²⁹ Ibid. P 274.

³³⁰ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 28.

³³¹ Helen Phillips, *Looking for Inspiration*, From the Creativity Special, New Scientist, 29 October 2005, issue 2523. P 40.

³³² David L. Hall, *Process and Anarchy – a Taoist Vision of Creativity*, from *Philosophy East West*, Vol. 28, No. 3, (Jul., 1978). Pp 281. Quote from Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 28.

³³³ Ibid. P 282.

This embodiment of the viewer in the artwork is a central axiom of much experimental contemporary art practice, particularly installation art.

The Application of Taoist Theory Regarding Creativity in the Thesis

Two key artworks have been selected for detailed analysis to identify embodied characteristics that will demonstrate the infiltration of explicit and implicit Taoist influences on Western experimental visual art. These are Donald Judd's *Untitled* (1982 – 1986), a site specific installation in the Chinati Foundation's collection in Marfa, Texas,³³⁴ and Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* (1987 - 1991), a text based installation.³³⁵ Donald Judd's installation is selected for several reasons, firstly because he was dedicated to a strategy of *refusal* regarding the origins and meanings of his artworks. This silence on the part of the artist tests the validity of the thesis with a challenging degree of difficulty to establish the implicit influences of Taoism. This challenge is not presented by an artist such as John Cage who professed an interest in Taoism. Judd was, however, at the forefront of the development of installation art as an art critic, commentator as well as artist. So apart from evidence derived from analysis of his artwork, evidence may be distilled from his writings about the development of installation art.

Field research was carried out at Marfa Texas to analyse Judd's process of creativity in the context of Taoist creative processes. Judd's drawings for the sculptures in his installation were redrawn to more fully comprehend his thinking, then, matched with the actual sculptures to discern an improvisational method (Appendix #3). Judd's writings are also called upon to support the thesis. This methodical analysis of Judd's improvisational process for the Marfa installation is new research, its objective being to trace the nature of the influences of Taoist philosophy and cultural practices on the innovations of this Western artist's practice.

Central to the method used to research Xu Bing's artwork, *Book from the Sky*, is an interview with the artist to clarify issues related to the possibility of Taoist content and processes in his artwork, which arguably continues the Taoist process found in

³³⁴ Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1982 – 1986, a permanent site specific installation of milled aluminium boxes, Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas

³³⁵ Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* was produced between 1987 and 1991. The mediums are: woodblock prints, wood, leather, ivory, string, cloth. 19 boxes: 49.2 x 33.5 x 9.8cm (each containing four books). Posters for the walls (optional). Installation dimensions are variable.

calligraphy of improvising upon imagery.³³⁶ One would assume that Xu Bing's artwork, *Book from the Sky*, naturally lies within the province of the Tao and that, as a contemporary Chinese artist, Xu Bing's artwork lies outside the definition of Western art. First, the literature surrounding his practice refers to Taoism in passing, if at all, so analysis of his artwork from this perspective is slight. Secondly, during the nineteen eighties after the death of Mao Zedong when China opened its doors to contact with the West, experimental contemporary art began to bloom as a result of the influence of Western art forms, including installation art. Without this exposure to Western installation art it is unlikely, it can be said, that Xu Bing would have conceived of or executed such an artwork. What is of interest is the proposal that the Taoist thread implicit in installation art returned to China to be interpreted within the traditional, indigenous domain of Taoism, however assaulted the concept may have become during the Cultural Revolution. Thirdly, an analysis of this artwork, *Book from the Sky*, draws the globalisation of Western contemporary practice into the research topic's focus. These are the methodological reasons Xu Bing's artwork was selected for analysis.

Another aspect of the methodology is to use examples of artworks that illustrate specific aspects of the thesis pertinent to contemporary art from key periods since the nineteen fifties when temporal and spatial extensions of the three dimensionality of the discipline of sculpture began to take a prominent place as a locus for experimentation and innovation. For example, Rachel Whiteread's public installation, *House*, is cited as an example of Taoism's implicit influence on the development of experimental contemporary visual arts, leading to a British artist deploying spatiality as the dominant expressive element in her sculpture (page 223).

In addition, examples will be drawn from my own studio practice for methodological reasons. These examples illustrate direct and indirect factors pertinent to identifying Taoism's influence on a Western contemporary visual artist in Australia whose experimental practice spans the period when installation art emerged as a major subset of the discipline of Sculpture in Australia in the nineteen sixties, to now. Citing works executed from 1969 to 2009 will indicate the evolution of the influence of Taoism on this practice, with a detailed focus upon major works produced during the candidacy

³³⁶ Interview by Bonita Ely with Xu Bing, third of October, 2008 in Beijing. The interview was conducted with ethics approval from the University of Western Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee. Project Title: *Continuity and Change: Practice based research on the influence of Taoist concepts and calligraphy on contemporary visual art practice*. The Protocol Number for this project is H6569.

between 2002 and 2009.³³⁷ In this way it will become clear how my studio research from the late nineteen sixties to the present illustrates the implicit and explicit influences of Taoism on strands of contemporary art practice.³³⁸ Painting, photomedia and sculptural disciplines, which deploy narratives of paradox and engage temporal/spatial qualities, typically use methodologies arguably derived in part from Taoism, of spontaneous, graphic improvisation, conceptualised using an intuitive, introspective yet intellectually informed imagination to represent ideas, or meaning.

Spontaneous, Graphic Improvisation as a Taoist Art Form

Karl E. Weick's analysis of degrees of improvisation (which is usually associated with music) in the visual arts is used in the analysis of this unique aspect of Taoist graphic forms in painting and calligraphy that has profoundly influenced Western visual arts.³³⁹ Calligraphic improvisation upon the longevity character is the case study used in the thesis (see Chapter Four). The influence of this creative methodology of Taoism on experimental contemporary art practice is a prime subject in the history of East West discourse examined in the thesis.³⁴⁰ Weick devised definitions to grade the extent of graphic improvisation employed by visual artists in the planning, execution or fabrication of different kinds of artworks. His definitions are applied to key artworks in the thesis to determine their alignment with Taoist improvisational practices (page 112).

Fieldwork, Marfa, Texas, New York, Dia:Beacon and Beijing

Fieldwork in Marfa, Texas, examined Donald Judd's permanent installation of aluminium boxes, *Untitled*, to analyse relationships to Taoism in his studio methodology and objectives (page 168). For research of the influence of Taoism on Isamu Noguchi's garden and installation art, his artwork was analysed and documented in the Noguchi Museum, Queens, New York State (page 47).³⁴¹ The improvisational methodologies deployed in artworks by Donald Judd, Richard Serra, Agnes Martin, Dan Flavin, On Kawara and Cy Twombly were examined in the Dia Beacon collection, New York State (page 160). Fieldwork in Beijing was carried out to document and analyse, at first hand, examples of garden art based on Taoism's *fung shui* principles, to show visual evidence of its influence on European and English gardens featuring Chinoiserie. Images documented in 1996 of eighteenth century European and English garden design for the

³³⁷ See Chapter Seven and Appendix #1.

³³⁸ See Chapter One, Introduction, P 4.

³³⁹ See Chapter Three for background to this influence.

³⁴⁰ Karl E. Weick, *Improvisation as a Mindset for Organizational Analysis*, for the Special Issue: *Jazz Improvisation and Organizing*. *Organisation Science*, Vol. 9, No. 5 (Sept. – Oct.). Pp 543 – 555.

³⁴¹ <http://www.noguchi.org/>

research of spatiality in garden design as a precursor of installation art have been used (page 25).³⁴²

The following chapter, Chapter Four, details the Taoist qualities embedded in calligraphy as an art form to demonstrate how Taoist principals are a model for the interpretation of contemporary art that features graphic improvisation, and site as a signifier.

³⁴² See Bonita Ely, *The Ancient History of Installation Art*, conference paper, Spatial Cultures Conference, University of Newcastle, 2 -3 June, 2001.

CHAPTER 4: TAOIST CALLIGRAPHY

seemingly endless variations upon a single motif (*Fig 59* and Appendix #2). Unbounded creativity such as this was unknown in the West before exposure to exotic cultural practices such as Chinese calligraphy. Let us be reminded that until the nineteenth century Western artists produced art, usually commissioned, of a specific genre, such as a religious art, in a realist style, working within specified subjects. Creative exploration by the great Western artists such as Michelangelo (1475 – 1564), Rembrandt (1606 – 1669), Falconet (1716 - 1791), and Rodin (1840 – 1917) was limited to the artist's individual interpretation of a traditional subject, the embellishment of an existing style, or at most, the development of a new genre derived from existing forms, for example landscape and still life genres were extracted from the painting of historic themes and religious narratives (*Fig 60, Fig 61*).

Fig 60: Michelangelo's *David*, (1504) is an interpretation of the style of Classical Greek sculpture, such as Harmodius and Aristogiton (477/476 BC, copy by Kritios).

Exposure to the spontaneous approach of Chinese and Japanese artists to painting and abstract calligraphy in the nineteenth century inspired many Western artists to produce unbidden art expressive of their own ideas using tropes derived from the source of influence, such as Taoism (*Fig 62*). This mode became the norm, so artists that followed were indirectly influenced by Taoism. Specifically, in this thesis graphic improvisation upon the calligraphic character that signifies *longevity* will be studied to establish how aspects of the Tao, or the Way, as the key Taoist philosophical maxim is embodied in calligraphy, and from there, in aspects of Modernism, Abstract Expressionism, aspects of the Minimalist canon and installation art.³⁴³

Fig 62 : Henri Matisse, *La Serpentine* (1909), Bronze. The linear, abstracted figure is like a drawing in space, reminiscent of the spontaneous brush marks of calligraphy.

The following verse from the *Tao Te Ching* describes the process of becoming, the ‘creation myth’ of Taoism, that is symbolised in the abstract structure of a calligraphic character.³⁴⁴

*The Way (Tao) gave rise to the one,
The one gave rise to the two,
The two gave rise to the three,
The three gave rise to all the ten thousand things.*³⁴⁵

³⁴³ See Chapter Two for historical background. Examples of calligraphy cited in this chapter were documented in Hué, Vietnam in 2000 (see Page 108).

³⁴⁴ Lazlo Legeza, *Tao Magic: the Secret Language of Diagrams and Calligraphy* (1975). Original edition, Thames and Hudson, London. P 22 – 23.

³⁴⁵ Lao-Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*. Verse 42. From Stephen Little with Shawn Eichman, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, 2000, Art Institute of Chicago, University of California Press.

The 'one' is the totality of the metaphysical principle of chaotic order, the primordial unity, represented by the totality of the calligraphy - the mark intertwined with the space on the whole page – the egg-gourd. This is the “multiplicity of phenomenological existence”.³⁴⁶ The 'two' are the harmonised binaries known as *yin* and *yang*. They are a categorisation of all effects, or phenomena, as polar in essence. In calligraphy the polar categories are the mark and the space. These may be imagined to symbolise, comparatively, elements such as the body (mark) and breath or ether (space); the real (mark) and the imaginary (space); continuity of form (mark) and the intangible, the changeable (space), energy (mark) and stasis (the space). The three is the liminal zone that “centers all polar phenomena”.³⁴⁷ The great variety of entities that make up the tangible and intangible world, “the ten thousand things” are symbolised by many thousand fold sets of improvised variations upon the calligraphic character (*Fig 59*, Appendix #2).

In this archetype of multiplicity, calligraphy's relationships to Deleuze's theory of representation from his book, *Repetition and Difference*, which was summarised in the Introduction, comes into frame to be elaborated upon to further establish its correlation with Taoist precepts (page 116).³⁴⁸ This chapter focuses on the representation of change and continuity as it is represented in calligraphic improvisation using impermanence and context, spatiality and form as the binary metaphors. As Lao-Tzu puts it:

See all things flourish and dance
in endless variation³⁴⁹

Longevity characters are essentially a representation of language: an utterance symbolised in text. Language is the representation of ideas and recognitions. Rather than investigate the characters' repeated, literal significance, which is 'longevity', and self-explanatory, the encoding of their transitional imagery will be interpreted as an outcome of creative improvisations. The improvisations, or transformations, may contain encoded imagery, and are further complicated by placement, that is, their context's encoding (*Fig 64*, *Fig 65*).

³⁴⁶ Girardot, N. J. 1983. *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism: The Theme of Chaos (hun tun)*. Berkeley: University of California. Pp 246, 247.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.* P 246.

³⁴⁸ See page 4.

³⁴⁹ Lao-Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*. Verse 16.

The extraordinary, unbounded creativity of traditional Taoist calligraphers will be explored to demonstrate calligraphy's embodied Taoist precepts. The proliferation of longevity characters found adorning examples of Vietnam's Imperial, Buddhist and vernacular heritage in Hué have been chosen to analyse this Taoist phenomenon. An embroidery of one hundred longevity characters in Chua Van Phuoc,³⁵⁰ Hué, Vietnam, and the longevity characters adorning the arte deco mausoleum of Emperor Khai Dinh³⁵¹ in Hué are the examples referred to here. Karl E. Weick's categorisation of graded degrees of improvisation, the process of graphic improvisation will be applied to the common longevity character,³⁵² categories that differentiate the creative process of visual art practices at one extreme as prescriptive, and at the polar opposite, spontaneous.³⁵³

Parallels between Taoist calligraphic improvisation and an example of Minimalist artist, Donald Judd's improvisations upon the oblong at Marfa, Texas,³⁵⁴ as a representation of 'non-meaning', beyond language, will be examined in Chapter Five. Judd's Minimalist installation art is arguably an example of the rhizomic influence of Taoism on contemporary visual art practice.³⁵⁵ Other examples of improvisation in contemporary, experimental visual arts will be cited to demonstrate the continuation of graphic improvisation as a vehicle for meaning in contemporary, cross cultural, visual arts.³⁵⁶ In Chapter Six an installation that deploys improvisation upon calligraphic characters will be examined, Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky*, to show how this Taoist art form still resonates as an inspiration to contemporary artists.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁰ Van Phuoc Buddhist pagoda (*chua* means pagoda).

³⁵¹ Khai Dinh was the twelfth emperor of the Nguyen Dynasty in Vietnam and reigned for nine years (1916 – 1925).

³⁵² I refer to the unadorned, original longevity character used in everyday script as the 'common' longevity character throughout the document.

³⁵³ See page 5. Karl E. Weick, *Improvisation as a Mindset for Organizational Analysis*, for the *Special Issue: Jazz Improvisation and Organizing*. *Organisation Science*, Vol. 9, No. 5 (Sept. – Oct.). Pp 543 – 555.

³⁵⁴ Donald Judd, Untitled (1982- 1986). One hundred aluminium oblongs installed in two ex-army artillery sheds in Marfa, Texas, in the Chinati Foundation's collection. This artwork was viewed during fieldwork in 2003 and 2008.

³⁵⁵ Deleuze, Giles; Guattari, Félix 1993. *A Thousand Plateaux: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by B. Massumi: University of Minnesota Press.

³⁵⁶ The other examples are: in this chapter, Bonita Ely, *Juggernaut*, 1999; in Chapter Five, Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky*, 1987 - 1991. The processes and content of artwork produced by Bonita Ely during the candidacy pertaining to the influences of Taoist precepts will be analysed in Chapter Seven.

³⁵⁷ Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* was produced between 1987 and 1991. The mediums are: woodblock prints, wood, leather, ivory, string, cloth. 19 boxes: 49.2 x 33.5 x 9.8cm (each, containing four books). Installation's dimensions variable.

BACKGROUND

My interest in Taoist longevity characters began in 1998 in Hué, Vietnam, where many different 'symbols' that all signified longevity were observed. In 2000 I returned to Hué to document these prolific examples of variations upon the longevity character, to assemble a comprehensive archive.³⁵⁸

Amongst artists and calligraphers during the Sung Dynasty [960-1279] there was a flowering of this uniquely non-figurative visual art discipline. Because of this development, which was augmented by the Taoist alchemic search for an elixir of life, the character that signifies longevity (*shou* in Chinese, *tho* in Vietnamese) became the subject of prolific graphic improvisation. It was often paired with the character that signifies happiness, or felicity, (*fu*, Chinese, or *phuoc* in Vietnamese) in grids of ten by ten characters, equalling one hundred longevity and one hundred happiness characters positioned side by side. Common forms of the characters adorn artefacts and architecture, functioning as mystical and secular talismans to promote a long, happy life.³⁵⁹ For the purposes of this research, I have chosen to study the longevity character as it was by far the most prolific in Hué.

A HISTORY OF SINICISATION IN VIETNAM³⁶⁰

Throughout its history Vietnam has been repeatedly invaded and occupied by China. Sinicisation was imposed with varying degrees of force and was always resisted vigorously, so Vietnam retained a strong cultural identity despite the strong influence of China's two indigenous philosophies, Taoism and Confucianism. Ch'en, or Zen Buddhism spread to Vietnam from China in the north and over time became the most widespread and popular religion. The invader's ontology and religion flourished alongside the pantheistic animism of indigenous Vietnamese peoples. Vietnamese folklore absorbed the foreigners' mystical mythologies; hybridity increased as each belief system became integrated into the others' religious cosmology, philosophy, practices and iconography. During the Nguyen Era, bonzes such as Phuc Dien Trin

³⁵⁸ Research was conducted in consultation with Dr. Phan Thuan Anh, Director of Research at the Hué Monuments Conservation Centre, a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage Project. This was the first extensive research project undertaken of Hué's longevity characters. The research outcomes of this field trip were published in the article, *Longevity In Hué* (2001), TAASA Review: the Journal of the Asian Arts Society of Australia, Vol. 9, No. 3. CDs of the documented longevity characters were donated to the archives of the Hué Monuments Conservation Centre.

³⁵⁹ Legeza, I., *Tao Magic: the Secret Language of Diagrams and Calligraphy*. 1975, Thames and Hudson, London.

³⁶⁰ Some of the material in this section has been published previously. See Ely, B. 2001, *Longevity In Hué*, TAASA Review: the Journal of the Asian Arts Society of Australia Vol. 9 (No. 3).

Hué and An Thien wrote treatises that identify similarities between Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism to reconcile their differences.³⁶¹ This supports the premise of this thesis that Taoism's applicability to other indigenous philosophies and religions broadened its scope in East Asia as well as in the West. The bonze, An Thien expresses this universality when he wrote to Dao Giao Nguyen Luu:

Why say there are three religions when they are in fact only one? If one fails to compare them, they are one, if one wants to compare them they are three ... the saints create doctrine depending on circumstances, forces, the times, and the state.³⁶²

In 1802, the Nguyen Imperial Dynasty (1802-1945) united for the first time in two centuries the many conflicting political factions that made up Vietnam. The choice of a central location from which to unify the country led to the creation of the city of Hué as the site for the Imperial City. The Nguyen Dynasty's power base was always precarious so they adopted the political control of the Chinese Confucian civic order that places the Emperor at the pinnacle of authority, with the military and civic mandarins, courtiers, bonzes and citizens subservient to those in the hierarchy above them.³⁶³

Although some Emperors were devout Ch'en Buddhists,³⁶⁴ others saw the grass roots popularity of Buddhism, the strength of community in pagodas, and the authority of bonzes, as a threat to their power. It was therefore in the pagodas' best interests to make conspicuously felicitous references to the Emperor in iconography adorning their architecture and material culture, such as the Taoist longevity characters that quote the dragon, the symbol that signifies the Emperor.

The patronage of Buddhist monasteries by devout members of the Imperial family, powerful courtiers and mandarins supported a tradition of esoteric scholarship. The compulsory mastery of Chinese calligraphy exposed Vietnam's Buddhist monks to other Taoist practices such as geomancy, divination, and shaminist magic. They studied Taoist texts, such as the *I Ching*³⁶⁵ alongside Ch'en Buddhist teachings and the art of *mao bi* brush technique. But by 1920 the vernacular use of calligraphic text in Vietnam

³⁶¹ Bonze: the head monk or resident monk in a temple. Also used for any Buddhist monk or priest. *Bozu* in Japanese. From Helen Josephine Baroni, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (2002), Pub. The Rosen Publishing Group. P 33.

³⁶² Minh Chi, Ha Van Tan, Nguyen Tai Thu, *Buddhism In Vietnam: From Its Origins to the C19th*. (1999). Gioi Publishers, Hanoi. P 212.

³⁶³ *Ibid*, p 180

³⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p184

³⁶⁵ *I Ching*; or *Book of Changes*. Pantheon Books [1961, c1950. The Richard Wilhelm translation rendered into English by Cary F. Baynes. New York] with Introduction by Karl Jung.

had been replaced by a Latinised phonetic alphabet, modified by a system of accents to signify tones, which had been devised in the early years of European contact by French Jesuit priest, Alexandre de Rhodes [1591-1660]. Thus Buddhist schools remained important centres for Taoist calligraphic studies and the continuation of improvised calligraphy as a Vietnamese art form, which continues today (*Fig 63*).

Fig 63: A monk at Tien Mu, one of Hue's Buddhist temples, demonstrating calligraphy.
Photo: B. Ely, 2000

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE LONGEVITY CHARACTER

Chinese characters are composed of several combinations of different ways of forming ideograms. Some are like pictograms that depict in simple line drawings the objects or common phenomena to which they refer. Others are combined lines that express an abstract quality or idea, such as 'end', or 'one'. Compound ideograms combine existing characters using an association between the two to make another word, for example a rising sun behind a tree signifies 'east'. Other characters combine a pictographic character with another character, that when spoken sounds like the meaning as a 'clue'.³⁶⁶ The common character meaning 'longevity' is a combination of six pictograms. It is a complex, poetic combination of pictograms, typical of Chinese calligraphy's compound characters.

³⁶⁶ Jean Francois Billiter, (1990) *The Chinese Art of Writing*. Original edition, Rizzoli International Publications.



The longevity character's constructed meaning can be analysed thus:

1. At the top, one central vertical line is intersected symmetrically by two horizontal lines, the lower line longer than the upper (shown shorter here). This pictogram signifies 'a talented or gifted person, a gentleman' (*shi*).
2. Below this, a single horizontal line with a short vertical "T-bar" at the left end and a short downward stroke at the right end signifies 'a house, cover, or roof' (*gai*).
3. Below this, an "H"-like shape, lying on its side, signifies 'the skilled workman, or craftsman, or worker' (*gong*).
4. Below this, a single horizontal line signifies 'the numeral, one, or unity' (*yi*).
5. Below this, at the bottom left, is an open square shape consisting of a vertical stroke to the left of a "U" shape on its side that signifies 'mouth' (*kou*).
6. Beside this, on the bottom right, is a back-to-front "t"-like shape, with a dot beside it, that signifies 'a unit of measurement' for land (*cuen*).

Together, the six components signify the word longevity. It could be said that these elements come together poetically as the practical prerequisites for a long life – creativity, respect and status, a house or security, gifted people to do work for you, unity, a voice (maybe nourishment?), a piece of land. These pictograms present the creative calligrapher with six elements to endlessly, exponentially, play with, as we shall see below, just as visual artists creatively play graphic improvisational games with thematic elements.

IMPROVISATION – CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

In this section 'graphic improvisation' will be defined, and graded levels of creativity established, culminating in free improvisation. Arguably, these expressive dimensions are the reason calligraphy so fittingly exemplifies the process of graphic improvisation, for it embodies a central Taoist precept that unified, or holistic reality is continuously transforming, a concept expressed by the correlative binaries, continuity and change.

The word improvisation is rooted in the word “proviso” which means to make a stipulation beforehand ... By adding the prefix “im” to the word proviso ... [it] means the opposite... Thus improvisation deals with the unforeseen, it works without prior stipulation, it works with the unexpected”.³⁶⁷

Improvisation is characterised by qualities of unity in transformation, continuity in change, and aptly defines both the essence of graphic improvisation as it is referred to in this thesis as an influence on experimental contemporary art, and the essence of calligraphic art.

In his article, *Improvisation as a Mindset for Organizational Analysis*, Karl E. Weick grades the creative process into four quantitative degrees of improvisation:³⁶⁸

1/ INTERPRETATION: The artist interprets a known subject, often using plans, drawings, sketches and maquettes to prepare for the execution of a pre-planned artwork. For example, the pictograms that make up the common form of the longevity character are recognisable in this degree of improvisation:



2/ EMBELLISHMENT: Embellishment requires a greater use of the imagination with departures from predictable or prescriptive themes, compositions or narratives.³⁶⁹ For example, here the pictograms have been inverted, joined and extended, so that resemblance to the common form is in relation to previous improvisations, such as the extensions above.



3/ VARIATION: The relationship to traditional themes, subjects and narratives is still evident, but are emphasised or extracted as subjects in their own right³⁷⁰. For example one pictogram is emphasised with reference to others so that the relationship to the common form is retained sufficiently for this to signify *longevity*.



³⁶⁷ A definition from Karl E. Weick’s Introductory Essay, *Improvisation as a Mindset for Organizational Analysis*, for the *Special Issue: Jazz Improvisation and Organizing*. Organisation Science, Vol. 9, No. 5 (Sept. – Oct.). Pp 543 – 555.

³⁶⁸ I have used examples of longevity characters to clearly illustrate the process.

³⁶⁹ Ibid. P 545.

³⁷⁰ Ibid. P 545.

4/ IMPROVISATION: Improvisation is more than a paraphrase, modification or embellishment of existing motifs. The artist radically alters conventional forms or completely departs from known subjects, methods, genres and styles. The artist deploys methods of representation to make entirely new creations from the imagination and the properties of the medium, which may also have no precedent in convention. For example here the improvised version has departed so far from the common form it is readable only because of a familiarity with previous improvisational incarnations of the longevity character.



A command of the traditional discipline, continuity, combined with a radical, uninhibited disregard or irreverence of its conventions to discover new forms, change, harnessing chance as an ally rather than hindrance, characterise the true improvisation of Taoist calligraphy that has inspired the imaginations of Western artists.³⁶⁹ The following descriptions of Taoist practices and beliefs reads like a textbook for graphic improvisation upon the theme, *continuity and change* - including the immersion in mental and corporeal oneness, continuity, with the ephemeral qualities of process and medium attained by the Abstract Expressionists - including Donald Judd's spontaneous drawing up of multiple variations upon the interior space of the oblong, discussed in depth in the next chapter:

Tao is the "way": something underlying the change and transformation of all beings, the spontaneous process regulating the natural cycle of the universe.³⁷¹
This movement of transformation is ceaseless, spontaneous, moving through phases...³⁷²

We can intuit the truth that reality is ... a seamless web of eternal change... 'being' and 'non-being' are complementary.³⁷³

Similarly, Isabelle Robinet's description of Taoist beliefs apply equally to Abstract Expressionist painting, calligraphy and the Minimalist sculptors' serial forms:

... transformations are unceasing and the possibilities of change through repetition, renewal, and rediscovery are innumerable. This is an active circular process.... There is a strong idea of progress, of stages, and of development, but more in the unfolding of the destiny of creatures, things and events than that in the world itself... a constant renewal is underway, shown in the different

³⁷¹ Laszlo Legeza, (1975) *Tao Magic: The Secret Language of Diagrams and Calligraphy*. Original edition, Thames and Hudson, London. P 22.

³⁷² Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body* (1993), translated by Karen C. Duval, University of California Press.

³⁷³ Laszlo Legeza, *Tao Magic: the Secret Language of Diagrams and Calligraphy* (1975), Thames and Hudson, London.

successive forms taken by various versions of truth, the constantly changing appearances...³⁷⁴

Fig 64: Many different longevity characters adorn Chua Thien Mu's cast bronze bells in Hué.

Fig 65: These latticed windows signify both Taoism and Buddhism. (Left) The longevity character is octagonal, signifying the eight ways of Buddhist practice, combined with fumes and bats symbolising the Emperor and happiness respectively. (Right) This longevity character combines with swastikas, the symbol of Buddha.

To summarise, in Taoism the world (reality) remains a unified yet ever changing harmony of opposing forces. This resolution of dualities to make a whole is expressed in calligraphy as a fluid relationship between spatiality and mark making, and unending improvisations upon a singular figure. The significance of this for the representation of meaning will be discussed in the following section.

³⁷⁴ Isabelle Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion*. Translated by Phyllis Brooks. Stanford (Cal.): Stanford University Press, 1997. P 14.

DELEUZE, REPRESENTATION, SUBJECTIVITY, CONTEXT

This section focuses on correlating the matrix of subjective “knowledge, recognitions, associations”,³⁷⁵ the cultural, metaphysical and physical factors in Taoism, that combine in Taoist calligraphy with Deleuze’s theory of representation for the interpretation of experimental contemporary art (page 21). It is known that these Taoist qualities have influenced Western Modernists, such as Picasso, and Abstract Expressionists, such as Robert Motherwell (page 62). Subjective responses to art arise from an individual’s memories, personal experiences and personality, which sometimes obscure the stated intention of the artist to such an extent that an entirely new dimension is revealed about the artwork’s capacity as a catalyst for thought. Deleuze described the structure of this effect as:

... the rhizome in opposition to the tree, a rhizome-thought instead of an arborescent thought ...³⁷⁶

In Deleuze’s theory there are no right or wrong responses as all associative thought is inter-connected through the conduit of the artwork. From Deleuze’s perspective, when viewing Hué’s calligraphy, another significant basis for an interpretation of the different longevity characters’ encoding is the context in which they appear with their known vernacular and esoteric knowledge bases, history, cultural encoding, and traditional functions. This enmeshing of all things in Deleuze’s theory, and Taoist ontology, is reflected in the principles of installation art where the significance of context shifts the artwork’s meaning, subjectively, associatively, as all perceptions are relational. Viewers engaging with artworks of this cosmological ilk could be said to experience a cathartic effect, as they place the viewer in a cognizant dimension where a sense of self is heightened, paradoxically, by an immersion in perceptions of a reality of universal dimensions, the ‘I’, not ‘I’ of Zen Buddhism. Girardot tells us Taoism expresses existentialist and cosmological problems not through a “doctrine of immortality”, or “salvation”, but by placing into perspective the destructive disharmonies humanity’s delusional thinking may cause for the psyche, “the sickness and entropy of ordinary human life ... man is destructively out of harmony with the organic and communal life-rhythm of the Tao.”³⁷⁷

³⁷⁵ Gilles Deleuze (1968) *Repetition and Difference*. New York: Columbia University Press.

³⁷⁶ Ibid. Preface to the English Edition, P xvii.

³⁷⁷ N. J. Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism*, 1983, University of California Press. P 42.

Cosmic, cathartic qualities are remarked upon by viewers of Donald Judd's *Untitled* installation in Marfa Texas where the essence of Taoism may be discerned in the aesthetic and methodological composition of his improvised sculpture.

In Taoism, everything is an intrinsic part of the Taoist whole, of infinity, "the 'emptiness' of the undifferentiated"³⁷⁸ so no transcendental solution is possible – humans are not a special case. In essence Taoism is a secular philosophy that puts us in our place. Consequently longevity characters have a "medicinal", or cathartic, rather than spiritual function – promoting "psychic and bodily health" to maintain a balanced wholeness in human nature and society, where conflicted binaries are resolved, equalised. The marriage of yin (the ONE) and yang (plus one is TWO – opposition and discord) is a metaphor for the THIRD state, a co-existence and co-penetration of opposites, where liminal in-between exists, in which there is dynamic, synthesised truth. A life lived to achieve longevity is more likely to have this balance and connection to 'concordant discord', creativity. These cathartic qualities are arguably present in Western artworks derived from the same creative process deployed by the calligrapher to invest the artwork with *ch'i*, the universal life force. Placed amongst Buddhist, animist, secular and Christian paraphernalia, Taoist knowledge and practice is meshed into the fabric of Vietnamese life. These are the "knowledge, recognitions, associations", the contexts and meanings, of Deleuze's responding 'I'.

The following applications of Deleuze's theory of representation to Hué's Taoist longevity characters as cultural signifiers is arguably a method that carries over to the interpretation of contemporary experimental art, which developed in part from the West's exposure to Taoist philosophy and cultural practices, a rhizomic connection that will be followed in detail in following chapters.

CALLIGRAPHY AS A SIGNIFIER IN HUÉ

The following section demonstrates how Taoism has been seamlessly adapted to the metaphysical belief systems of Vietnam as an over arching philosophy of practical and ontological applications. In this respect its flexibility illustrates how Deleuze's pluralistic theory of representation works in practice when applied to the porosity of the Tao.

³⁷⁸ N. J. Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism*, 1983, University of California Press. P 42.

The tradition of inventing calligraphic characters is a Chinese art form that has its origins in animist beliefs and their influence upon Taoist practices.³⁷⁹ Secret diagrams, talismans, and characters were believed to be mystical mediums containing spirits that could be called upon to aid or protect people from misfortunes such as evil forces, illnesses, natural disasters, and malicious acts. Because the configurations were secret, the artist/priest often strategically transgressed the rules governing Chinese brush technique, creating free, nonconformist ideograms that were sometimes performed by illiterate writers whose interpolations further modified their origins in conventional written form. Contextualised in an animist belief system, the longevity characters' significance changes from text to magic.

My fieldwork in 2000 revealed that this cultural hybridity has complicated and extended the meaning of longevity characters in Hué as they proliferate in Taoist, Animist, Christian and Buddhist contexts, places of worship. These decorative motifs appear on the most sacred architecture, shrines, temple bells, ritual paraphernalia and furnishings. For example the garments of Buddha and bodies of animist spirits are invariably inscribed with longevity characters.

The multitude of calligraphic references to longevity in Imperial iconography and architecture in Hué are expressions of felicitation and subservience to the Emperor in the Confucian system of civic order. But also, they refer to the belief that the Emperors attained immortality after their death, no doubt with the help of Taoist calligraphy as talismans. The Citadel, the Emperors' residence, and their elaborate mausoleums, feature a multitude of different longevity characters.³⁸⁰

Ancestor worship, with its obligations to family and reverence for the aged members of the community is also integral to Vietnamese culture. As an expression of a connectedness to life's continuity, ancestor worship brings subtle nuances to notions of longevity and imbues the longevity character with an emotional dimension.

Taoism is a pragmatic, non theistic belief system concerned with day to day matters as much as cosmology. A long happy life is a practical aim in life. The Chinese characters signifying longevity as a reminder and talisman, are inscribed commonly on secular clothing, objects, artefacts, architecture, and public places, such as the family business

³⁷⁹ Laszlo Legeza, *Tao Magic: the Secret Language of Diagrams and Calligraphy* (1975). Thames and Hudson, London. Pp 19 – 21.

³⁸⁰ See below, case study, Lang Khai Dinh.

and home. Scrolls, greeting cards, jewellery and such like inscribed with longevity are common gifts.

Surprisingly given Vietnam's fraught colonial history, some longevity characters use the French fleur de li as a motif (*Fig 66*). The style of European art deco was also used in Hué.³⁸¹

Fig 66: Chua Bang Cu's longevity character featuring the fleur de li on a painted metal lattice. The fleur de li is the emblem of the French monarchy. Here the curling petals echo the dragon fume theme of many longevity characters that signify the Nguyen emperors. Photo. B. Ely, 2000

The confluence of all these religious, historical, personal, cosmological factors have resulted in an extraordinarily rich repository of examples of multifarious longevity characters in Hué, to demonstrate French theorist, Deleuze's theory of representation.

CATEGORIES OF IMPROVISATION FOUND IN HUÉ

The following section looks at other strategies deployed by artists to enable such a profusion of variants that factor into the significance of Hué's longevity characters, just as these strategies do for all context based art forms such as installation art.

Artists and artisans in Hué have quoted the six pictograms that make up the common longevity character in isolation, absented them altogether, rearranged or distorted them, repeated and mirrored them. They have added to and subtracted, embellished, simplified and contextualised them. Donald Judd used similar methods designing the

³⁸¹ See Lang Khai Dinh.

boxes for *Untitled* in Marfa, Texas. He composed variations within given parameters (continuity), by combining elements, subtracting, reversing, re-arranging them (page 179).

In a freestanding wooden frame on the alter of a small private shrine in the Chua Van Phuoc, a Taoist embroidery is on display which demonstrates other aspects of improvised calligraphy not seen in the previous architectural examples (*Fig 67*). All the characters are depicted in the "ancient" style of Chinese writing, called *co*. In this style each character fits within a rectangle and is the Chinese equivalent of printing, as opposed to cursive writing. All one hundred characters in the embroidery signify longevity.

Fig 67: Chua Van Phuoc, embroidery of one hundred longevity characters. Photo: B. Ely, 2000.

Firstly the edge of the embroidery is decorated with stylised dragon fumes that have multiple meanings; they signal a Confucian context for the characters. The dragon fumes refer to the creationist myth of ancient Vietnam in which the country was created by a dragon. They refer to the dragon that protects a sacred place or dwelling from evil

spirits. They refer to the dragon as the ancient, mysterious creature that brings rain and a favourable crop. The fumes also refer to the Taoist concept of *ch'i*, the life force which is often symbolised by the curling smoke of burning incense.

All of these meanings contextualise the longevity characters. We shall see in Chapter Six where Xu Bing's artwork *Book from the Sky*, derived from calligraphic conventions is analysed, that signs on the margins signify an honouring of ancient knowledge and scholarship (page 194). The embroidery of longevity characters signify for the chua Van Phuoc community the pagoda's standing as a centre of scholarship in Vietnam's ancient tradition of pedagogy.³⁸²

Row 1, #4

Row 1, #7

Row 1, #10

Row 7, #5

Row2, #6

Row2, #7

Row3, #3

Row 4, #3

Row 6, #5

Row 4, #10

Row 5, #1

Row 5, #7

Fig 68: These longevity characters have departed a long way from the common longevity character. Some are abstract, others bring to mind imagery such as landscape, dancing, martial arts. Photo: B. Ely, 2000.

The improvised text is sometimes only recognisably related to the common longevity character if the viewer has knowledge of the range of its previous permutations, which can be far removed from their source. The characters' permutations can be self referential, austere, ornamental, non figurative. The examples above have an obscure relationship to the common longevity character (*Fig 68*). The pictograms bottom left and right originate from the t-like character that signifies 'measurement', and the top two

³⁸² Vietnam's first university was established in Hanoi in 1076. Called Van Mieu, the Temple of Literature, it has eighty-two stelae, each inscribed with a commemoration of the achievements of the university's doctoral alumni set upon the shells of tortoises, symbolic of longevity. Hué also has a Temple of Literature, with avenues of similarly inscribed stone stelae on tortoises.

quote other permutations of the upper pictograms of the common longevity character, but as a pictorial composition the character resembles dynamic forms signifying the Taoist's reverence for nature and creativity. Thus the invented characters may be stylisations of figurative Taoist iconography, ritual, paraphernalia, and places of contemplation such as the body, constellations, architectural structures (temples), sacred dance diagrams, landscape, trees, the vessel or gourd symbolising longevity.

The characters are sewn in a meticulous satin stitch; red silk thread on yellow cotton cloth. The Taoist symbolism of colour has its origins in *feng shui's* five elements of nature, believed to be the source of all phenomena.³⁸³ Red signifies the element fire, puberty, energy, good fortune and joy. Yellow symbolises the earth, the centre, the emperor, and summons the *yin* and *yang*. The same style of embroidery frames an alter in a Taoist temple in Beijing (*Fig 69, Fig 70*).

Fig 69: The alter in the Taoist, White Cloud Temple, in Beijing has exactly the same style of calligraphy as the embroidered screen in the Van Phuoc pagoda in Hué, Vietnam, showing the enormity of Taoism's reach in East Asia. Photo: B. Ely, 2008

The following examples of characters from this hanging show their pictographic qualities derived from Taoist iconography, such as landscape, the body, the sage, architecture, the vessel. They show the role of the imagination in Taoist art forms to create a meshing of nuanced, polylinear imagery that creates in the mind of the viewer the same infinity of inter-relationships as Taoism figures in the makeup of the universe. The characters also demonstrate Taoist calligraphy's graphic abstraction and the

³⁸³ Also, black signifies the element air, therefore water, wind, heaven and sky. White signifies metal, purity, gold, fullness, the adult years of life. Green symbolises the element wood, therefore spring and vitality.

dynamic quality of line in Taoist calligraphy that influenced Modernist artists in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

Fig 70: Detail of the White Cloud Temple's embroidery in Beijing showing a diversity of characters of great imaginative invention, evoking Taoist iconography such as the vessel, architecture, landscape, dancing. Photo: B. Ely, 2008.

The "precious gourd" in *feng shui*, considered a receptacle of good fortune³⁸⁴ is often referenced in the shape of actual metal urns, which then signify longevity. Many vessels in pagodas reflect this shape and are adorned with longevity characters.

Fig 71: Bas relief mosaics in the mausoleum of Emperor Kai Dinh, Hué. The urn (left) and vase (centre) quote gourd shaped longevity characters, and are inscribed with longevity characters. (Right) The crane and tortoise signify longevity. Photo: B. Ely, 2000.

³⁸⁴ <http://altrigion.about.com/library/glossary/symbols/bldefsgourd.htm> Cited August, 2007.

Another bewilderingly ubiquitous reference to Taoist longevity is incorporated into the symbolic design of decorative borders³⁸⁵. These are found on architectural features, furniture, family graves, planters for bonsai, scrolls, religious paraphernalia, metal work, ceramics, textiles; inlay, carving, embroidery, lattice work, filigree, appliqué... The horizontal format combines quotation of the pictogram at the top of the common longevity character, depicted by curling flowers, tendrils and leaves of symbolic plants, for example the chrysanthemum which symbolises good luck and a life of ease, which in turn quotes the curling fumes of the Imperial dynasty's dragon, or the swirling smoke of incense signifying ch'i, the life force. The calligraphy is often accompanied by traditional imagery symbolic of longevity, such as the crane, the tortoise, an old man accompanied by a young maiden, or the bat, symbolic of happiness (*Fig 72*).

Fig 72: Chua Tuong Van, wood carving on the edge of a table. Plant tendrils like dragon fumes are combined with a bat signifying 'happiness'. The central longevity character is a curvilinear vessel shape. Photo: B. Ely, 2000

³⁸⁵ *L'Art à Hué*, new edition. Originally authorised by the Association of the Friends of Hué, (French), now distributed at the Citadel, Hué.

Certain plants signify longevity, such as the pine tree, and are grown in gardens surrounding pagodas, or as bonsai in pots, which are adorned with longevity characters.³⁸⁶

Buildings, such as the Citadel's architecture, the Emperors' mausoleums and Buddhist pagodas, as well as contemporary domestic and commercial architecture feature mandala shaped windows with lattices that configure longevity characters (Fig 73). Mandalas are symbols of totality and continuity in Buddhism, but here feature Taoist text signifying longevity, an example of cultural hybridity. The latticed windows filter the light, illuminating interior spaces with a mysterious, transcendent quality. These longevity mandalas are also woven into textiles, and adorn domestic items, such as crockery and tiles.

Fig 73: Chua Truong Lac, window lattice. Circular (mandala), angular longevity character with spherical spacers. Photo: B. Ely, 2000.

³⁸⁶ The peach tree, pine tree, tortoise, crane, stork, dove, stag, and bamboo all symbolise longevity.

Longevity characters are configured to fit architectural or geometric formats – the octagon, square, rectangle, and ellipse. For example, in Emperor Minh Mang's mausoleum alongside the Perfume River, geometric figures are used to inscribe the landscaped garden. On either side of a straight path there are raised, symmetrical garden beds in the shape of squared off spirals that represent the upper section of a longevity character (*Fig 74, Fig 75*). In the centre of each there are plantings of particular long living, evergreen palms that also signify longevity. The straight, central path continues to a sacred bridge across a lake to Minh Mang's sepulchre, a circular "earth work" mound that represents Heaven. The architecture and landscaping of each Emperor's mausoleum have symbolic or poetic significance, but Minh Mang is the only Emperor who inscribed the landscape with longevity text. In the mid twentieth century, cultural inscriptions of landscape derived from Taoist garden art informed the development of 'earth works', which were foreshadowed by gardens inscribed with Taoist themes.³⁸⁷

Fig 74: Plan of Minh Mang's tomb. KEY - #14, Landscaping in the shape of a longevity character; #16 Sacred bridge between Heaven and Earth; #18 Circular grave symbolising the Heaven/sky where the Emperor returns after death.

³⁸⁷ See Chapter Two and Five. See also David A. Slawson's *Secret Teachings in the Art of Japanese Gardens: Design Principles, Aesthetic Values* (1987), Kodansha, New York, Chapter 4, *The Art We See: Cultural Values*.

Fig 75: Minh Mang's tomb showing the distant mound-shaped sepulchre, the sacred bridge and the longevity character's squared off, scroll shaped plantings in the foreground on the left.

Another example of this provenance in Taoist garden art for earth works and installation art is found in Slawson's *Secret Teachings in the Art of Japanese Gardens: Design Principles, Aesthetic Values*.³⁸⁸ He describes different qualities of rocks in Japanese gardens, which were given poetic names, including rocks signifying Chinese symbols of longevity. These rocks resemble the turtle, smooth, recumbent, mound-shaped, and the crane, jagged vertical rocks reflective of the folded cranes of origami. When placed together, they form an aesthetic of contrasts resonant of the qualities of *yin* and *yang*, a conceptualisation of forms from nature and the placement of objects in space.

Emperor Khai Dinh's mausoleum is an example of Vietnamese imperial architecture adorned with a multiplicity of longevity characters in a modernist style. Built between 1920 and 1931, Emperor Khai Dinh's mausoleum was strongly influenced by French Art Deco so has a different aesthetic quality to the other imperial mausoleums in Hué. It stands as a testament to the conflicted history of Vietnam's French colonial past, exacerbated by Emperor Lang Khai Dinh's collaboration with the French occupiers of Vietnam during his reign. It is also an example of the 'return' to Asia of a Western style of design that was initially influenced by Asian art.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁸ Ibid. Pp 128 – 129.

³⁸⁹ See Chapter Two.

At the entrance of the mausoleum, rectangular longevity characters in bas-relief are contained within horizontal panels along the stairways' balusters (*Fig 76*).

Fig 76: Art deco decoration on the Khai Dinh's mausoleum's stairs.

Fig 77: Emperor Khai Dinh's art deco mausoleum: (Top left) Example of a European crest shaped longevity character. (Top centre) A dragon with a longevity character in its mouth. (Top right) Tiny longevity characters are inscribed on the crockery mosaic. (Top right) (Bottom left) Metal lattice with longevity characters and swastikas. (Bottom centre) Mosaics of swastikas and longevity characters cover the walls of the inner sanctum. (Bottom right) Dragons and longevity characters adorn the pagola housing the stele inscribed with Khai Dinh's obituary.

The interior of the mausoleum is lined with brilliantly coloured mosaics made from broken crockery and glass (*Fig 77*). A continuous pattern of interlocking, black

swastikas across the walls and ceilings of three large tiled rooms signify Buddha. The pattern is punctuated by a multitude of different longevity characters configured in geometric shapes of the circle, square, rectangle, ellipse, and the European crest shape.

Fig 78: Golden statue of the Emperor, Khai Dinh, located in the inner chamber of his mausoleum.

The presence of a life sized gilded statue of the Emperor sitting transfixed upon his golden throne is contextualised by this extraordinary incantation in Taoist text (*Fig 78*).

The creative diversity surrounding the citing of longevity in Hué is a creative outcome of precepts concerning ceaseless change that in Taoism is integral to universality. The familiarity of the iconography and the subjective desire for a long life complicates this cultural blending along with the superstition attached to the character as a talisman. These practical aspects of Taoism arguably enhance the synthesis of religions and cultural nuance in countries with a Taoist culture, such as China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam where ritual, iconography and belief systems are merged, appropriated or inter-related. Ancient Vietnamese animists and spirits meet the Hindu kingdom of Champa meets ancestor worship; Confucius meets Buddha meets Lao Tzu meets Catholicism meets Communism. These complexities of context foreshadowed metonymic signifiers in experimental installation art in the second half of the twentieth century, and the hybridity of recent globalised art. But calligraphy's artistry perhaps above all was an exemplar for a decommissioned freedom of expression for Western artists who were restrained by the demands of patrons, by the confines of realism, and the bounds of thematic convention.

In contrast, the following two chapters focus on the installation artworks of two artists, Donald Judd and Xu Bing, who have employed improvisation in their process of planning and production, but little attention has been given to the question of the cultural origins of this process. Judd's refusal to pin point any definitive sources or meaning for his artwork ruled out his public acknowledgement of any such interests and influences. For Xu Bing, the Cultural Revolution and its pragmatic aftermath ruled out associations with China's ancient traditions until recently. Both artists' artworks reside in the silence that surrounds Taoism as an influence on Western visual arts that this thesis addresses. Two installations by these artists, and the artists' life experiences will be examined to determine oblique and direct infusions of Taoist precepts that have informed the meanings and processes of their representative examples of contemporary, experimental, visual art.

This chapter closes with analysis of an installation from my oeuvre titled *Juggernaut*, (1997) that correlates with Taoist calligraphy's creative methodology. In this artwork improvisational play upon the sphere is deployed in a representation of the theme, continuity and change (*Fig 79*).

Fig 79: Bonita Ely, Juggernaut, 1997. Plywood, brass fittings, talcum powder. 2.2 metres high, other dimensions variable. Installation, Bellas Gallery, Brisbane, 1997.

The piece was inspired by research of the cultural inscription of narrative onto landscape by the Ngaanyatjarra people of the Gibson Desert, Western Australia, and

the inscription of the mythology of the Hindu pantheon upon the landscape surrounding Hampi, in Southern India.³⁹⁰

Fig 80: Juggernaut's interior space showing improvisations upon the sphere, changing with each turn of the spiral (see catherine wheel shape). Installation, Asian Biennale of Contemporary Art, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 1999.

Each turn of a plywood spiral transformed into a different configuration of a quartered sphere, by indenting the sections in as many ways as possible, such as the catherine wheel (*Fig 80*) and hour glass (*Fig 79*). The spiraling forms represented continuity, the differently shaped interior spaces, change, whilst the dusting of talcum powder onto the surface of the plywood resonated with viewers' olfactory memories of the intimate body, to problematise the interpretation of the installation.

Fig 81: Juggernaut, showing spacers to separate the turns of the spirals. Installation, Customs House, Sydney, 1999.

³⁹⁰ For reports of the field research in India, see Bonita Ely, *The Spatiality of Hindu Temples, Southern India*, TAASA Review: the Journal of the Asian Arts Society of Australia, 1997, Vol. 6, No. 4, Pp 10 - 11. Also, Bonita Ely, (1998), *Juggernaut*, catalogue, Sutton Gallery, Object Gallery, Bellas Gallery.

The spirals' turns were kept apart in tension by 'spacers' and the cylindrical forms were prevented from rolling across the floor by wedges at ground level, so the whole revolving, gigantist form had a sense of perilous impermanence (*Fig 81*). These ephemeral, subjective qualities were arguably derived from the indirect influences of Taoism on Western culture, reinforced by my on-going interest in exploring modes of expression of the precepts of Eastern philosophy.

CHAPTER FIVE: ONE HUNDRED OBLONGS - One Thing After Another³⁹¹

[The Primary structure is] a vehicle for the fusion of distinct parts into an indivisible whole, for the incorporation of order and disorder, or the replacement of a rational geometric art with an alogical one.³⁹²

Donald Judd

In the Chinati Foundation's collection of installation art in the small south-west Texan town of Marfa, there are two ex-army artillery sheds known colloquially as the North and South gun sheds. The buildings contain an installation of one hundred aluminium boxes, entitled *Untitled*,³⁹³ (referred to as the 'Marfa boxes'), created by Donald Judd specifically for this site.³⁹⁴ The Dia Art Foundation provided funding for the project.³⁹⁵ This chapter examines this installation, the Marfa boxes, to trace direct and indirect influences of Taoism on its development, including factors in the artist's life's

³⁹¹ 'One thing after another', a quote in reference to his 'progressions' from Donald Judd, "Specific Objects, *Arts Year Book 8* (1968), reprinted in Donald Judd, *Complete Writings 1959 – 1975* (2005), Pub. Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design with New York University Press, New York. P 184.

³⁹² Donald Judd quoted by Lucy Lippard in Ann Goldstein's publication accompanying the exhibition, *A Minimal Future? Art as Object 1958 – 1968* (2004), pub. Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Here Judd's ideas correlate with the Taoist cosmology where the unified whole, "a fusion of distinct parts into an indivisible whole", is composed of a harmonious resolution, "incorporation", of polarities, – Judd's "order and disorder", "rational geometric art" and "alogical [art]". This statement accurately describes the aesthetic and meaningfulness of his installation, *Untitled* (1982–1986), of one hundred reflective boxes in the spatiality of Marfa's artillery sheds.

³⁹³ Donald Judd, *Untitled*, (1982–1986), mill aluminum, each box 41 x 51 x 72 inches (104 x 129.5 x 185.5 cm). 100 boxes. The South artillery shed is 63 feet wide, 17,000 square feet. The North artillery shed is 63 feet wide, 18,000 square feet. Built in 1939, they had room for 32 and 34 trucks respectively.

See Marianne Stockebrand, *The Making of Two Works: Donald Judd's Installations at the Chinati Foundation*. P 59. Marianne Stockebrand is the Director of the Chinati Foundation in Marfa. The essay, published in the Chinati Newsletter Vol 9, 2004, was presented as a lecture at the Courtauld Institute, London on February, 26, 2004. Translation, Fiona Elliott.

<http://www.chinati.org/visit/collection/donaldjudd.php> Cited Dec. 2008.

³⁹⁴ Other buildings on the de-commissioned army base provided spaces for other artist's works including large-scale works by sculptor John Chamberlain, installation artists Dan Flavin, David Rabinowitch, Roni Horn, Ilya Kabakov, Richard Long, Carl Andre, Claes Oldenburg and Coosje Van Bruggen.

³⁹⁵ <http://www.chinati.org/visit/collection/donaldjudd.php> Cited June 2008. The DIA Foundation was established in 1974 by art patrons Heiner Freidrich and his partner Phiippa de Menil, and funded by her family's oil drilling corporation, Schlumberger in Houston, Texas. Ref. *Donald Judd* (2004), Editor, Nicholas Seroto, Tate Publishing, London. Pp 259, 261. *Dia* is a Greek word meaning *through*, the organisation being the conduit for creativity in the visual arts. For example, Judd's purchase of properties and conversion of the decommissioned military base, Fort D. A. Russell into a permanent venue for large scale art works in Marfa, Texas was mainly funded by the Dia Foundation's contribution of five million dollars. Judd established the Chinati Foundation after a law suite against Dia, gaining custody of the Marfa project. See *Artillery Sheds* by Donald Judd. This essay first appeared in *Donald Judd*, Architektur, Kunstverein Munster, 1989. <http://www.chinati.org/visit/collection/artilleryshedsbyjudd.php> Cited Aug. 2008.

experience as a source of influence. Judd is an unlikely subject for this investigation. He rarely divulged any spiritual proclivities and refused conclusive statements about his artwork's content. Judd never professed any personal affiliations to Taoism. But in this chapter it is argued that Taoist precepts had so infiltrated Western thinking at this time in the development of a new art form, installation art, of which Judd's artwork in Marfa is a key example.

This analysis of Judd's oeuvre is predicated upon the theories of representation of Gilles Deleuze, advanced in *Repetition and Difference*, in that Judd's Marfa boxes present a creative catalyst for complex, pluralistic readings where the viewer's response is coloured by their subjectivity, aesthetic perception, knowledge base, and epistemological direction.³⁹⁶ An indication of Taoist influence upon Deleuze's theory of representation, that is, exposure to Taoist cosmology's esoteric pluralism juxtaposed to the quotidian, the subjective, the transitional, the contingent, is expressed in the conclusion to Lee Irwin's article, *Taoist Alchemy and the West: the Esoteric Paradigms*:

Post Modern theorists ...have seen in Daoism a theory of non-exclusive mutuality between pairs that undermines all oppositional metaphysics. Daoist theories of inter dependence, harmony and accommodation, its non-logocentric view of natural processes, and a pragmatic theory of immanence and transformation all contribute to a "post-philosophical" discourse that emphasises the value of diversity, alternate perspectives, and multi vocal language.³⁹⁷

This speculative assessment of the influences of Taoism on Judd's thinking and processes calls upon the "value of diversity, alternate perspectives, and multi vocal language"³⁹⁸ expressed by Deleuze to argue the indirect influences of Taoism on Judd's oeuvre.

Without overstating the case, knowledge of Judd's life experience is drawn upon in concert with an analysis of his studio methodology, an examination of his writings on his own and other's visual arts practices, to discern the direct and indirect Taoist influences upon the artist, and traits in the artwork. This is augmented by fieldwork in Marfa that allowed for direct on-site analysis of the major artworks' preparatory drawings for the fabricator, and first hand experience of the artwork itself, supported by detailed photographs of the installation (see Appendix #3). This is in turn compared to

³⁹⁶ Deleuze, G. 1968. *Repetition and Difference*. New York: Columbia University Press. See Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 6.

³⁹⁷ Lee Irwin, *Daoist Alchemy in the West: the Esoteric Paradigms*. P 44. Citing J. J. Clarke 2000, pp 184 – 193. <http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeVI/Dao.htm>

³⁹⁸ Ibid. Citing J. J. Clarke, 2000, pp 184 – 193.

experiential responses of other viewers that noted cathartic, spiritual accord with Taoist precepts.³⁹⁹

A long standing polemic between Judd and Rosalind Krauss about the significance of his artwork has focused attention on his contribution to departures from Modernist sculpture. Hal Foster observes that Krauss described Judd's artwork as an outcome of Modernism, a "modernist epitome".⁴⁰⁰ Foster argues that "minimalism is an apogee of modernism, but it is no less a break with it". The innovative, experimental aspects of Minimalism that Foster espouses are precisely, it is argued, the aspects of Judd's practice that reflect the West's synthesis of Taoist precepts, so will be the focus of this chapter.

Judd's intention to reject the illusionism of European painting and his desire for the real, led to his use of found objects in his early paintings. He finally took the painting, as a geometric object, off the wall onto the floor. Using the vernacular materials of industry to create totally non-illusionistic "literalism, (that is non-symbolic and non-expressive)"⁴⁰¹ objects that he preferred to call neither sculpture nor painting, Judd found his voice.

The installation in Marfa is typical of Judd's reflective works made of aluminium, perspex, or with a lacquered surface. These materials produce a depth of surface associated with the Chinese craft of lacquer painting as the material reality (page 71). The artworks' precise sculptural forms are a continuity, their ambiguous surfaces a medium of changing temporality in tune with precepts associated with Taoism.

Though vague and illusive
[The Tao] gives rise to form
Though dark and obscure
It is the spirit, the essence,
The life-breath of all things⁴⁰²

These correlations with Taoist explorations of the processes of nature and reality are an uncanny presence in Judd's installation of boxes at Marfa.

³⁹⁹ For example, Jim Lewis, *One Hundred Boxes*, 2007, Texas Monthly, Vol. 35, No 10. Pp 128 – 138. Martin Gayford, *Some Aspects of Color in General and Red and Black in Particular*, in *Epic Minimalism* (2004), Modern Painters, Vol 17, No 1, Spring, P 94.

⁴⁰⁰ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: the Avant-Garde at the Turn of the Century*, (1996), MIT Press. Pp 42, 43.

⁴⁰¹ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: a critical History* (2005) Tate Publishing, London. P 53.

⁴⁰² Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*. Verse 21.

INSTALLATION ART – Background:

Fig 82: Marcel Duchamp's installation of *One Mile of String* for the exhibition, *First Papers of Surrealism*, at 451 Madison Ave., New York, Oct. 4th – Nov. 7th, 1942. Sponsored by the Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies.

The installation art of the 1980s, when Judd created *Untitled* in Marfa, had been foreshadowed by aspects of earlier experiments, such as Duchamp's *One Mile of String* in 1942, where he disrupted the space of an exhibition by unraveling string throughout the venue, interrupting the orderly presentation of artworks and drawing attention to its spatiality (*Fig 82*).⁴⁰³

Fig 83: Allan Kaprow, *Words*, (1962), installed in Smolin Gallery, New York.

⁴⁰³ Jacqueline Baas, in *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today* (2005), University of California Press, builds a case that Duchamp was influenced by Eastern philosophy. Pp 86 – 87, 90 – 91, 173.

In the nineteen-sixties artists such as Allan Kaprow,⁴⁰⁴ who was a Zen Buddhist, Claus Oldenberg and Jim Dine moved from two dimensional collage to works like *Words* (Fig 83) where the whole space was filled with the detritus of ordinary life combined with spontaneous action. The viewer participated in the environment, or Happening, with the artist, whether it be an assemblage of things picked up off the street, cooking, writing, making sounds, smells, poetry, music. The genre combined the found objects of Duchamp, the subjective, corporeal action of Abstract Expressionism, the chance elements of John Cage who was a prominent influence at the Black Mountain College where young artists such as Kaprow studied. Here, in 1952, Cage was arguably the composer of the first interdisciplinary performance using dance, slide projection, lectures, poetry and music in one presentation.

At the heart of Cage's teaching was his refusal to impose his will upon the artwork, a radical prescription at a time when the artist's creative intention, decisiveness, and ambition were mythical tenets of post war American art. Having studied with the great popularizer of Zen Buddhism, D.T. Suzuki, Cage was predisposed to sit back, as it were, and witness the emptiness, the silence, the passage of time ... to foreground the ephemera of living.⁴⁰⁵

The same year he performed his most famous piece, *4'33"*, a 'silent' performance that brought the audience's mindful attention to chance sounds - noise as music - during a fixed time span. These creative methodologies of Zen Buddhist practices have their origins in China's Ch'en Buddhism and Taoism (page 39).

Earlier still in the nineteen-thirties, foreshadowing Judd's later preoccupations with spatiality and site specificity in installation art, Brancusi's public sculpture, *Targu-Jiu'* addressed spatiality, intriguingly within the context of Eastern philosophy.⁴⁰⁶ The teachings of eleventh century Tibetan ascetic, Jetsun Milarepa⁴⁰⁷ published in 1925,

⁴⁰⁴ Jeff Kelley, Allan Kaprow, David Antin, *Childsplay: the Art of Allan Kaprow*, University of California Press, 2004. P 16.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid. P 17.

⁴⁰⁶ Constantin Brancusi (1876 – 1957). Born in rural Hobita, Romania, 1876. His sculptural talent was recognised by employers who supported his studies at the National School of Fine Arts, Bucharest. In 1904 he left Romania on foot for Paris. Fell ill near Basil and cared for by nursing sisters. He read Helena Petrovna Blavatski's 'Isis Unveiled', with which he felt an affinity. He sang in the choir of the Romanian Orthodox church in Paris, another indication of his spiritual journey. He lived an ascetic life in Paris sustained by friendships with artists such as Duchamp, Picasso, Leger, Modigliani and composer, Satie. His work was officially supported in Romania and collected privately throughout his life but he received little recognition of his work in Paris until after his death in 1957. He said, 'In art there are no foreigners'. Varia, R., 'Brancusi', 2002, Rizzoli International Publications, NY. P 212. It is significant for this thesis that Noguchi, another innovator in the area of installation art, worked as an assistant to Brancusi in Paris in his youth before travelling and studying in China and Japan.

⁴⁰⁷ *The Book of Milarepa*. See also *The Teachings of Milarepa*.
http://www.kagyusasia.com/1_mila_t_advice_gampopa.html

were for Brancusi both descriptive of his own life's journey and a constant source of philosophical inspiration.

See your true home as dharmata.
Recognize all homelands as illusion.
Experience whatever arises as Dharmakaya.⁴⁰⁸

Brancusi's understanding and belief in Eastern mysticism is an underlying influence on his sublime, abstract works, including the monument in Târgu Jiu, Romania, which is a memorial to Romanian heroes who fought the Germans in World War One.⁴⁰⁹ It comprises of three components placed in precise distances along a walk beside the Jui River. The spatial context and meditative walk performed by the viewer whilst contemplating the work is an integral aspect of the experience. The first ensemble is the *Table of Silence*, the next, *Gate of the Kiss*, then on to the *Endless Column*. Spatiality is at the core of Brancusi's sculptural expression (*Fig 84, Fig 85, Fig 86*).

Fig 84: Constantin Brancusi, *The Table of Silence*, 1937 – 38. Stone. Târgu Jiu, Romania.

Fig 85: Constantin Brancusi, *The Gate of the Kiss*, 1937 – 38. Stone. Târgu Jiu, Romania. The mandala-like base relief imagery is reminiscent of the Taoist *yin yang* symbol.

⁴⁰⁸ Varia, R., 'Brancusi', 2002, Rizzoli International Publications, NY. P 10.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid. *The Monumental Ensemble of Targu-Jui*. P 226.

Fig 86: Constantin Brancusi, Endless Column, 1937 – 38. Târgu Jiu, Romania. Endless Column is 29.33 metres (96.23 ft) high and is composed of seventeen cast iron, rhombus-shaped modules.

Like Brancusi, Donald Judd's life experience and studies were punctuated by exposure to Eastern philosophy and art. It will be established that, however indirectly, Judd's practice was arguably informed by these rhizomic infusions. The emanation of Tao and Zen ideas and rejection of past European philosophy were part of the Post World War Two zeitgeist.⁴¹⁰ In his lecture at Yale University, Judd declared, "There is a breakdown in universal and general values. Grand philosophical systems ... are not credible any more".⁴¹¹ During the twentieth century, alternative, relational ways of perceiving "universal values" developed with the West's exposure to the ontological systems of non-Western cultures, including Eastern philosophies such as Taoism.

One such system was Phenomenology, which argues that the only tangible, reliable reality is that which can be perceived by the senses. The writings of phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponti, have been called upon to address the contribution of Phenomenology to Minimalism as an experimental art practice predicated upon the immersion of the viewer in a corporeal, experiential relationship to the artwork. He wrote about the matrix in which we perceive:

⁴¹⁰ *Zeitgeist*: spirit of the times. As with most visual artists, Donald Judd certainly did not identify as a 'Beatnik' or later, a 'Hippy'. The intellectual climate in which he was an active player turned to Eastern philosophy, including Taoism and Ch'en Buddhism, as alternative to European humanism, which had been discredited for many by cataclysmic developments in the twentieth century, including nuclear warfare, the First and Second World Wars. See Chapter Two for further discussion. Also, Lisa Phillips, *Beat Culture and the New America: 1950 – 1965* (1996). Pub. Whitney Museum, Flammarion. Pp 30, 73, 144, 197.

⁴¹¹ Barbara Haskell, *Donald Judd* (1988), Pub. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Exhibition catalogue. P 42.

I do not see [space] according to its exterior envelope; I live it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is all around me, not in front of me.⁴¹²

This insight, which could be a description of Judd's objectives in his development of installation art, has exact parallels with the objectives of Taoist painters whose deployment of distortions of perspective, known as axonomic perspective, places the viewer inside the artwork's spatiality, not outside looking in as an 'objective' observer, whose singular view point "in front of me" determines their 'centre of universe'. Judd's adamant assertions that immersive spatial qualities are fundamental to his sculptural expression is reiterated by Rudi Fuchs's writing about Judd's Marfa boxes:

The sculptural and spatial rhythm, the geometry created by zones of light and shadow, the reflection of sunlight on the shiny surfaces and the pervasive strength of verticality and horizontality bare witness to Judd's sensitivity to spatial harmony.⁴¹³

Like a Taoist scroll painting's narrative unfolds seamlessly as one image, Judd's Marfa installation unfolds for the viewer as a stream of sequential, seemingly endless, interpolating episodes.

Parallels have been drawn between Phenomenology and the Zen and Taoist meditative practice of 'mindfulness'⁴¹⁴ that suggests, at the least, an osmosis of indirect influence of Eastern perspectives on Phenomenology's core assertions. Proof of the recognisably Taoist view of the verity of our immersion in experience as the source of a discerned reality, has been an objective of research in the cognitive sciences:

The methodological heart of the interaction between mindfulness, awareness, meditation, phenomenology, and cognitive science ... is a change in the nature of reflection from an abstract, disembodied activity to an embodied (mindful), open ended reflection. By embodied, we mean reflection in which the body and mind have been brought together.⁴¹⁵

Exploring Judd's Marfa boxes, and witnessing the approach of others, brings to life the claims for installation art that it can be a phenomenological, experiential activity, a

⁴¹² Merleau-Ponti, *Eye and Mind* (1961), in Merleau-Ponti, *The Primacy of Perception*, Evanston, 1964. P 178.

⁴¹³ *Donald Judd: Architecture Architektur* (2003). Editor Peter Noever. Pub, MAK Centre, Los Angeles. Rudi Fuchs, *The Ideal Museum: An Art Settlement in the Texas Desert*. P 36.

⁴¹⁴ Mindfulness is also a Zen Buddhist practice.

⁴¹⁵ Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (1993), pub. MIT Press. Chapter Two, P 28.

walking meditation (*Fig 87*). In his colloquial account of “living with Judd’s austere sculptures”, Jim Lewis, artist in residence at the Chinati Foundation wrote:⁴¹⁶

... seeing one hundred [boxes] installed at Chinati was a revelation, like listening to Bach for the first time. Walking through the sheds, or even passing them on the path I could almost hear them, working a series of variations on a theme, growing ever more complex and contrapuntal, the aluminum boxes opening, unfolding and recombining, echoing one another in elaborate patterns of rhyme and dissonance.⁴¹⁷

Fig 87: Viewing the North shed.

Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

Lewis’s correlation of Judd’s installation improvisation in music will be elaborated upon later in this chapter. But first, his experience of the installation’s Taoist relationship to time as an element of expression common to Taoist garden art practices will be examined.

The articulation of actual space, not the illusion of space, “space made by somebody, space that is formed as is a solid, the two the same, with the space and solid defining each other”⁴¹⁸ is arguably the core concern of Judd’s experimental practice. He expressed spatiality as inseparable from time, and the companion to both in this installation is movement - the movement of the viewer, the movement of light,

⁴¹⁶ Jim Lewis, *One Hundred Boxes*, 2007, *Texas Monthly*, Vol. 35, No 10. Pp 128 – 138.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.* P 134.

⁴¹⁸ Martin Gayford quoting Judd from his article, *Some Aspects of Color in General and Red and Black in Particular*, in *Epic Minimalism* (2004), *Modern Painters*, Vol 17, No 1, Spring, P 94.

movements in the environment it reflects. Judd wrote of time and space in the essay, *Some Aspects of Color in General and Red and Black in Particular*:

Space and time don't exist; they are made by events and positions.
Time and space can be made and don't have to be found like stars in
the sky or rocks on the hillside.⁴¹⁹

These spatial, temporal concerns, the sculpting of space and time, are shared by the Taoist and Zen garden artists, in particular the concept of *engawa*, an between space that is neither inside nor outside⁴²⁰ that Judd created in his installation using windows that allow an ambiguous melding of imagery and light from inside and outside on reflective surfaces. Qualities of *engawa* have their origins in *feng shui* in traditional Chinese design, described as an “acupuncture of the earth that plugs into positive forces”.⁴²¹

Fig 88: Spatiality and time expressed using consecutive framing devices in the traditional Chinese garden in Beijing of Prince Gong, Qing Dynasty, 1777, echo Judd's use of windows to connect to and serially frame the landscape in his Marfa installations. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

The example above (*Fig 88*) in Beijing, from the garden surrounding Prince Gong's palace from the eighteenth century, shows a series of shaped intervals along a path between two buildings that require a change of pace, a step up over each threshold that slows the passage of energies, or *ch'i*, through the space, framing a measure of the

⁴¹⁹ From Martin Gayford's *Epic Minimalism* (2004), *Modern Painters*, Vol 17, No 1, Spring, p 94.

⁴²⁰ Kishu Kurakawa, *Rediscovering Japanese Space*, John Wetherall Inc., NY. 1988. P 54.

⁴²¹ Lucy Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, 1983, Pantheon Books, New York. P 136.

body of the viewer, and articulating the space through shaped framing. Martin Gayford writes of his direct experience of Judd's spatial articulation as a harmonious engagement with spatial and material ambiguity, and a meditation:

This great symphony of space and light in [the boxes] are real not fictional. And because the light is always changing the work itself is different each time you see it. In certain strong horizontal lights the boxes almost seem to dissolve in light ... This is a function of their physical nature. Under some conditions they seem diaphanous, their surfaces completely composed of soft reflections ... The whole work is a huge meditation on light and space, a meditation in concrete physical terms.⁴²²

Jim Lewis, another witness to the artwork's phenomenological effects compares the installations in the sheds to "sundials, calendars, clocks" (*Fig 89*).⁴²³

Fig 89: Morning light, South shed. The one hundred boxes are milled aluminium, 104.2 centimetres high by 129.7 centimetres deep x 183.2 centimetres wide. Photo: B. Ely, 2008.

These first hand accounts of the experience of viewing Judd's installation at Marfa bring into focus the other major Taoist concern of Judd's practice and life: our relationship to nature.

One of Judd's projects at Marfa was to buy adjoining ranches in the area to restore the endemic ecology by leaving the land to lay fallow, "[engaging] himself actively in the

⁴²² Martin Gayford's *Epic Minimalism* (2004), *Modern Painters*, Vol 17, No 1, Spring. P 96.

⁴²³ Jim Lewis, *One Hundred Boxes*, 2007, *Texas Monthly*, Vol. 35, No 10. P 138.

cause of promoting the protection and preservation of the natural environment".⁴²⁴ This approach is reflective of Taoism's guidance for a life in harmony with Nature.

The world is Tao's own vessel
It is perfection manifest
It cannot be changed
It cannot be improved
For those who go tampering it is ruined⁴²⁵

This quote from Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* serves as a warning of the earth's vulnerability to humanity's exploitation and neglect. Lee Irwin writes:

Daoism provides a genuine integrative perspective on relations with the natural environment and on values of co-operation and balance rather than on issues of control and the exploitative use of resources".⁴²⁶

In relation to this David Ruskin concludes a summary of the dichotomy between Krauss's interpretation of Judd's work and Judd's position, noting that:

... the way in which people comprehend raw perceptions of art and of all things creates the social dimensions of self and world ... Judd's art shows how the self and world correspond and cohere, experience breathing both alive.⁴²⁷

This accurately describes the compatibility with Taoist sentiments with the relationship of Judd's Marfa installation to the viewer's perception of its external natural environment and clearly expresses how, firstly, he wished to draw the natural life forms and energies into this artwork, like the 'borrowed landscape' of Taoist and Japanese gardens, and secondly, to heighten the viewer's sensitivity of the world as their 'vessel'.⁴²⁸

Establishing these Taoist connections to nature in Judd's practice affirms how Taoist precepts and processes may have entered into what is now an exemplar of the canon of experimental visual art practices of the second half of the twentieth century, Judd's installation in the gun sheds of Marfa, Texas.

⁴²⁴ Donald Judd: *Raume Spaces*, 1993, (catalogue). Cantz Publisher, for Museum Wiesbaden. P 13.

⁴²⁵ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 29.

⁴²⁶ Lee Irwin, *Daoist Alchemy in the West: the Esoteric Paradigms*. P 18. Lee Irwin, Religious Studies, College of Charleston, Charleston SC 29455 <http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeVI/Dao.htm>

⁴²⁷ Raskin, David. 2006. *The Shiny Illusionism of Krauss and Judd*. Art Journal (Spring 2006). P 21.

⁴²⁸ See above, Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 29.

DONALD JUDD'S MARFA BOXES

Following is a detailed description accompanied by visual documentation and Judd's testament regarding the Marfa installation, *Untitled*, to provide evidence of Donald Judd's aesthetic and conceptual decision making that pertain to identifying notions associated with Taoism. Firstly, each of Judd's one hundred oblongs has the same outer dimensions, 41 x 51 x 72 inches,⁴²⁹ but the articulation of the interior space of each piece is unique, following an improvisational method developed within certain parameters which has correlations with the improvisation upon characters found in Taoism's art form, calligraphy.⁴³⁰ The oblongs are made from half inch,⁴³¹ milled aluminium that has a satin sheen, giving them a soft, matte, reflective quality. Visible in certain lights, a golden, metallic 'bleed' translucently traces the roll out of the aluminium sheet, aesthetically relating to Taoism's transitionality (*Fig 90*).

Fig 90: Judd, *Untitled*, (1982 – 1985), one hundred boxes, 104.2 x 129.7 x 183.2 cm each, milled aluminium; installation, artillery sheds, Marfa, Texas. Box #66 showing the transparent golden 'bleed' that traces the roll out of the sheet metal. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

Fig 91: Showing the recessed allen head screws, and the precision of the boxes' fabrication by the company, Lippincott, in North Haven, Connecticut. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

⁴²⁹ 104.2 x 129.7 x 183.2 cm

⁴³⁰ See Chapter Four.

⁴³¹ 1.3cm

The visible fittings are flat allen head screws, or socket screws, which are used sparingly and are visible on the boxes' exterior only (*Fig 91*). No fittings are visible in the interiors of the boxes where pins, welding and brackets are used.⁴³² This quality of crafting relates to the mastery required of Taoist artists to capture the perfection of pure phenomena in calligraphy and brush and ink painting.

The boxes are arranged in three rows that run parallel through the two buildings, with forty-eight in the South Gun Shed, and fifty-two in the North Gun Shed, different quantities because the sheds are slightly different sizes, and the interior walls in the sheds are differently configured (*Fig 92, Fig 93*).

Fig 92: North gun shed showing the three rows of boxes, and its walls differently configured to the South gun shed below. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

Fig 93: South gun shed showing three rows of boxes and its central grey wall. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

⁴³² Information from Melissa Susan Gaido Allen's Masters thesis, *From the DIA to the Chinati Foundation: Donald Judd in Marfa Texas 1979 – 1994* (1995), Rice University. Figure 15: Detail of screws in the construction of the Mill Aluminum boxes.

Judd prepared the sheds for the installation by removing all but the structural interior walls, and all the garage doors along the sides, which he replaced with squared, anodised, aluminium windows (*Fig 94*). The semi-circular curve of metal, Quansit hut roofing over what had been a long, squat profile, increased their height and vernacular monumentality in the landscape. The sheds are not aligned, they are at a slight angle to each other, end to end, following the curve in the road (*Fig 95*). Judd wrote of his repair of the leaking, derelict, sheds:

The height of the curve of the vault is the same as the height of the building. Each building became twice as high, with one long rectangular space below, and one long circular space above. The ends of the vaults were meant to be glass, but were temporarily covered with corrugated iron. With the ends open, the enclosed lengthwise volume is tremendous. This dark and voluminous lengthwise axis is above and congruent with the flat, broad, glass, crosswise axis. The buildings need some furniture and some use for the small enclosed space that is within each one.⁴³³

Fig 95: The Chinati Foundation buildings are located on the outskirts of Marfa, and permanently house several artists' installation art, an artist in residence program, internships, archives and administration. The de-commissioned military buildings follow the curve of the access road.

Fig 96: The two gun sheds showing the squared aluminium windows and off set alignment.
Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

Viewers may enter at one end, and wander through, their direct passage obstructed by Judd's boxes, and exit at the other end; the interiors are accessed through humble metal doors at both ends of each shed (*Fig 97*). This is reminiscent of the shaped passageway discussed above in Prince Gong's Chinese garden. Each shed has a single sliding window for maintenance purposes.

Fig 97: (Left) Metal door to North gun shed. (Right) The pathway between sheds with their Quansit hut roofing. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

The sheds are located alongside a row of low-lying, non-descript military buildings on one side, and a large expanse of grassland on the other (*Fig 98, Fig 99*). Scrubby bushes, distant mountains and a long line of Judd's concrete artworks⁴³⁴ that stretch along the fence bordering Highway 10 are seen through the windows. "... Judd had set himself the task of creating one project in the open air and integrating the other into an interior and ... making a connection between the two".⁴³⁵

Fig 98: On the Eastern side of the artillery sheds are military buildings. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

⁴³⁴ Donald Judd, *Untitled*, concrete structures, grounds of the Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas. See Marianne Stockebrand, *The Making of Two Works: Donald Judd's Installations at the Chinati Foundation*. <http://www.chinati.org/visit/collection/donaldjudd.php>

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.* P 55.

Fig 99: The view looking West through the sheds across grassland to Donald Judd's outdoor installation and the mountains beyond. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

The interiors of Judd's artillery sheds are unadorned. The concrete floors have a reflective gloss but show wear and spills. The red brick and concrete walls are in their original state, apart from one central one that interrupts the open flow of spatiality in the South shed. Judd painted it pale grey, presumably to tone down its impact on the continuity of the shed's spatiality (*Fig 93*).

Judd restored the sheds to an immaculate condition without obliterating evidence of their past functions and robust materiality. The palimpsest of history resonates like *wabi sabi*, a humble honest materiality, a sense of time and tradition contrasting with the intervention of Now expressed in the overwhelming aesthetic qualities within the sheds of a metamorphic, shifting, light filled spatiality, animated by the boxes. They draw in colour and imagery from the outside whilst reflecting the buildings' interiors back and forth, distorting the sheds' fixed spatiality (*Fig 100, Fig 101*).

Fig 100: Box # 53: Drawing colour and imagery from the outside in. See Judd's outdoor installation of concrete oblongs in the distance. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

Fig 101: Box #66: Reflections distort the sheds' fixed, interior spatiality. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

Picking up and amplifying every tiny sound like vast industrial cathedrals, visual reflection is matched by an acoustic reverberation. These 'cathedrals' contain objects that twang, ping and creak as they expand and contract with changing temperature, an uncanny sound piece by invisible performers.

The viewer is not so much dwarfed by the installations – the boxes are approximately waist high – as immersed within their spatiality, reflexiveness and sublime beauty. Other viewers, as they wonder through the halls, absorbed, their image polymerises, fragmenting and split then restored by the boxes' shifting reflections, spatial gaps and unexpected obstructions, are like a Taoist demonstration of relativity (*Fig 102*).

Fig 102: A viewer's body is fragmented by reflections.

Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

The process of designing the boxes was similarly metamorphic, spontaneous and seeking to form a unified yet polyphonous entity. Twenty-five of the boxes for Judd's Marfa installation, *Untitled*, were drawn up during April and fifty in May, 1980. Another thirteen followed soon after. The remaining twelve were executed in May, 1984.⁴³⁶ The drawings are a rapid fire, diagrammatic record of his inventive thinking process. The boxes were fabricated and installed between 1982 and 1986 with deep consideration of the complex context a part of Judd's decision making, as he believed the objects could not be seen separately from the space, so permanent placement was critical to the success of the piece. He asserts "there is no neutral space", due to meanings made by the "intentional" function or associations, however unintended. His decision making was guided by Judd's deep conviction that:

Any work of art is harmed or helped by where it is placed. This can almost be considered objectively, that is, spatially. Further, any work of art is harmed or helped, almost always harmed, by the meaning of the situation in which the work is placed. There is no neutral space, since space is made indifferently or intentionally, and since meaning is made, ignorantly or knowledgably. This is the beginning of my concern for the surroundings of my work. These are the simplest circumstances which all art must confront.⁴³⁷

Judd's refusal to pin point any definitive sources or meaning for his work rules out an acknowledgement of influences on his ideas, such as Taoism. Judd even balked at calling his three dimensional artwork 'sculpture', and objected consistently to the label 'Minimalism'.

I've said and written many times that the label 'minimal' is meaningless in all ways ... that my work is definitely not impersonal – whatever that might be in art – and no one listens.⁴³⁸

Judd called all of his works *Untitled* so the viewer is not given an entrée into his thinking through this linguistic means.

⁴³⁶ Donald Judd, *Untitled*, concrete structures, grounds of the Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas, adjacent to the artillery sheds. See Marianne Stockebrand, *The Making of Two Works: Donald Judd's Installations at the Chinati Foundation*. P 57. <http://www.chinati.org/visit/collection/donaldjudd.php> Cited, Dec. 2008.

⁴³⁷ Donald Judd, Rudi Fuchs, *Donald Judd: Large Scale Works*, (1993), Pace Gallery, New York. Essays published in conjunction with a show of Judd's sculpture. P 9. Elsewhere Judd critically compared the temporary exhibition of spatially orientated artworks in museums with the permanent installation of art in sites such as cathedrals in the past. See Rudy Fuchs, *The Ideal Museum: An Art Settlement in the Texas Desert*, in *Donald Judd: Architecture Architectur*, Ed. Peter Noever, pub. Hatje Cantz, Germany, 2003. P 85. Also, Franz Meyer's essay, *Marfa* in *Donald Judd: Raume Spaces*, 1993, (catalogue). Cantz Publisher, for Museum Wiesbaden. P 30.

⁴³⁸ *Donald Judd* (2004), Editor, Nicholas Serota. Pub. Tate. P 262.

Fortunately Judd was a communicator and writer, so we do have his accounts of his approach to his oeuvre generally, and the Marfa installations in particular from which to glean insight into his thinking, passions, knowledge base and conceptualised processes. In an unpublished interview quoted by Melissa Susan Gaido Allen in her unpublished Masters thesis, Judd makes a statement about spirituality in his art as a vehicle for a sense of unique aliveness, energy, “out of the ordinary” or unexpectedness that captures the viewer’s consciousness and sense of “oneness” with all things. He is quoted there as saying:

I avoid illusion, things are what they are. But all forms are spiritual. It is tedious that spirituality has become a contaminated word. I see it as an awareness which stems from reality – a kind of ‘being’. Things and us are part of the same world, factually speaking we are one. Art must therefore be general, but at the same time out of the ordinary, different from different things.⁴³⁹

Verse Fifty-Four of Lao Tzu’s *Tao Te Ching* paraphrases his concept of the spiritual quoted above and accurately reflects the contemplative experience of viewing Judd’s installation at Marfa:

Tao is everywhere
It has become everything
To truly see it, see it as it is

The following section calls upon Judd’s written material in the light of Judd’s direct and indirect exposure to Taoism, to speculate upon his knowledge of Taoism and assess its influences on the development of his oeuvre.

LIFE EXPERIENCE: Encounters with Taoism

In revues of Asian artists’ exhibitions Donald Judd, the art critic and commentator, reveals knowledge of Taoism as it appears in Chinese, Korean and Japanese cultural practices.⁴⁴⁰ For example, the first art revue in the book of his writings critiques paintings by Tao Chi, an artist from the Ch’ing Period. Judd writes:

⁴³⁹ Donald Judd, *Dutch Interview*, (1992, P 1. Quoted from Melissa Susan Gaido Allen’s Masters thesis, *From the DIA to the Chinati Foundation: Donald Judd in Marfa Texas 1979 – 1994* (1995), Rice University, held in the Chinati Foundation archives, Marfa, Texas. P1. See Rice Digital Scholarship Archive: <http://scholarship.rice.edu/handle/1911/17040>

⁴⁴⁰ Judd reviewed eighteen exhibitions of Asian art over sixteen years, more than any other non-American nationality. See Donald Judd, *Complete Writings 1959 – 1975* (2005), Pub. Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design with New York University Press, New York. See Art News, Sept. 1959. Judd’s eighteen revues in sixteen years of Eastern art are: Tao Chi, P1; Yayoi Kasuma, Pp 2, 134, 155, 187; Tseng-Yu-ho, P 18; Tetsuro Sawada, P 29; Kenzo Okado, Pp 51, 120; The Kyoto Hamlet of Fine Arts, P125; Ch’I Pai-Shi, P129; Tadaki Kuwayama, P 133; The Art of Nepal, p 133; Japanese Prints, P 145;

Dissimilar strokes and washes are combined profoundly, and the whole or “oneness”, the Tao, is enlarged by the disparity and increased by the inclusion of qualities resistant to expression.⁴⁴¹

Here, importantly, Donald Judd succinctly reveals his understanding of Taoism. He understands that in Taoist cosmology binary polarities (the “disparity” of “dissimilar strokes and washes”), combine to create a harmonious, unified “ ‘oneness’, the Tao”, where the nature of the Taoist Way is inexplicable, unnamable, “resistant to expression”.

Judd’s refusal to ‘name’ the nature of his own creativity correlates with the Taoist concept that some aspects of our understanding are un-namable:

... they are called mysteries
Mystery upon mystery –
The gateway of the manifold secrets⁴⁴²

Judd’s emphasis on the primal role of spatiality in his artwork, including context, “the meaning of the situation in which the work is placed”,⁴⁴³ arguably has its origins not only in his sensibilities as a sculptor, but resides in his life experiences which included first hand experience of the Taoist cultures of Korea and Japan, and his evident knowledge of the history, philosophy and culture of these countries. The aesthetic articulation of spatiality that is characteristic of Judd’s oeuvre, as a trope for continuity and change, is also a primary characteristic of Taoist art forms such as calligraphy.⁴⁴⁴

In the visual arts of China [Japan and Korea] empty space is as important as line [the object] ... that which is beyond time and change ... the whole, the mystery beyond all mysteries.⁴⁴⁵

What were these life experiences? At the age of eighteen in June, 1946, Judd finished high school and in December, enlisted in the armed forces of the United States of America until November 1947 when, his military service completed, he was honourably discharged. During his military service Judd was posted to Korea where he worked in what is reported to have been a relatively informal regime as a foreman with engineers

Tadasky, P162; Relics of Ancient China, P164; Toko Shinoda, P165; N. Fukui, P169. As an art critic, Judd’s interest in Asian art outweighs his interest in any other non-American culture.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid. P 1.

⁴⁴² Lao Tsu, *Tao Te Ching*, verse 1.

⁴⁴³ Donald Judd, Rudi Fuchs, *Donald Judd: Large Scale Works*, (1993), Pace Gallery New York. P 9.

⁴⁴⁴ See Chapter Four.

⁴⁴⁵ Legeza, I., *Tao Magic: the Secret Language of Diagrams and Calligraphy*. 1975, Thames and Hudson, London.

to establish an airstrip and install prefabricated buildings, the beginning of his interest in architecture and construction.⁴⁴⁶ It was arguably also the beginning of his interest in Eastern art forms, aesthetics and philosophy.⁴⁴⁷ Irrespective of whether, like many American soldiers posted in Korea, he spent time in Japan on leave,⁴⁴⁸ this lived experience of Korean cultural morés that combine Taoism, Zen Buddhism and animism arguably stimulated Judd's life long study and appreciation of Eastern art practices, including Taoism. At the completion of his military service Judd enrolled in the Art Student's League in New York. Later, from 1958 to 1960, Judd undertook studies at Columbia University for a Master's degree, which included the subject, Far Eastern Art.⁴⁴⁹

Judd's library in Marfa contains a significant number of books on Chinese, Japanese and Korean art and philosophy. These include Weber's *The Religion of China*, Joseph Needham's *Science and Civilisation in China* (seven volumes), William Willett's *Foundations of Chinese Art*, Seike's *The Art of Japanese Joinery*. Other titles are *Eastern Philosophy*, Morse's *Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings*, *Japanese Folk Houses* (Carver), *Hiroshige* (Cynthia Bozel and Israel Goldman); *Japanese Art In Transition* (Meiji), *Katsura* (Kenzo Tange Yishai); *The Genius of China*; Nagel's *Encyclopedic Guide to China*; *The Origin of the Chair in China* (C. P. Fitzgerald); *Chinese Domestic Furniture*; *Poems by Zen Masters*; *The Erotic Art of the East* (Rawson); *The Arts of Korea* (six volumes); *Chinese Calligraphy: a History of the Art of China*. Books on Asian architecture, ceramics, handicrafts, Buddhist art, Chinese and Japanese painting are complimented by items in his music collection – *The Buddhist Meditation Music of Korea*, and *Traditional Music of Korea*. Antique kimonos adorn one of the bedrooms in his workshop residence in a converted bank building in Marfa.

Judd periodically accompanied exhibitions to Japan and Korea from 1979 to 1992.⁴⁵⁰

In a revue of Tetsuro Sawada's paintings⁴⁵¹ Judd points out the inter cultural connections between Abstract Expressionism, traditional Japanese spatiality, sumi ink painting and calligraphy:

⁴⁴⁶ Donald Judd. 2004. Edited by N. Serota. Pub. Tate, London. P 248.

⁴⁴⁷ In one of his Marfa studios there is a disc of Korean meditation chants (see below).

⁴⁴⁸ During the Korean War, 1950 – 1953, soldiers took their Rest and Recreation Leave in Seoul and Tokyo. Ref. Stanley Sandler (Editor), *The Korean War: an Encyclopedia*, (1995) (Garland Reference Library of the Humanities) Garland Pub., New York. P x.

⁴⁴⁹ Donald Judd. 2004. Edited by N. Serota. Pub. Tate, London. P 248.

⁴⁵⁰ *The Sculpture of Donald Judd*, Watari Gallery, Tokyo, 1978; Gallery Yamaguchi, Osaka, 1989, 1990, 1992; Inkong Gallery, Seoul, 1991, 1992; Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art, Shizuoka, 1992; Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art, Kitakyushu, 1992; Gallery Seomi, Seoul, 1995. From *Donald Judd Colorist*, (2000), catalogue, pub. Hatje Cantz, Germany.

Wash drawings in sumi ink and occasional colour succeed last season's large oils which were painted in a synthesis of traditional Japanese space and Abstract Expressionist methods – a frequent amalgam whether the painter works in Japan, as does Sawada, or in New York.⁴⁵²

This expression of awareness of the centrality of spatiality in Japanese cultural practices reflects his abiding frustration that spatiality was neglected as a primal element in the sculpture and architecture of his time. Expressed in the following quote, his frustration that the West's turning away from the totemic object had not turned to an understanding of spatiality as an alternative element of expression, given that, significantly, he knew of "the vocabulary of space" in the East, which he recommends should be considered anew. He wrote in 1993:⁴⁵³

Space is new in art and is still not a concern of more than a few artists. It is generally accepted that vertical, anthropomorphic, totemic sculpture is no longer acceptable ... but an interest in space has not replaced the interest in such solids. ... There was a traditional vocabulary about space ... about proportion, volume and sequence, *East and West* ... For both art and architecture, the vocabulary of space of the past should be reconsidered and in relation, but *newly* ...

It is to be presumed that this new, experimental approach to spatiality in relation to the history of Eastern traditions was Judd's objective, leading to the development of installation art such as the Marfa boxes.

The sensitivity Judd expressed to "traditional Japanese space" in Sawada's paintings is reiterated in his detailed description of his research of placement and spatial articulation in his own practice:

I found that if I placed a work on a wall in relation to a corner, or both corners, or similarly on the floor, or outdoors near a change in the surface of the ground, that by adjusting the distance the space in between became much more clear than before, definite like [the object] ... it's logical to desire the space in all directions to become clear.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵¹ Tetsuro Sawada (1935 – 1999) Born in Hokkaido, Sawada graduated from Musashimo Art University where he majored in Western painting. In 1960 he began painting abstract oils and in 1973 began producing lithographs and then silkscreen prints. In 1966-67 he travelled in North and South America and in 1969 studied in France and Spain. His works are in numerous collections, including the British Museum, Cleveland Museum, Cincinnati Art Museum and the Honolulu Academy of Art. http://www.castlefinearts.com/Japanese_fine_arts_woodblock_prints/Tetsuro_Sawada_Biography.aspx Sited November, 2008.

⁴⁵² Donald Judd, *Complete Writings 1959 – 1975* (2005), Pub. Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design with New York University Press, New York. See Art News, Sept. 1959. P 29.

⁴⁵³ Donald Judd, Rudi Fuchs, *Donald Judd: Large Scale Works*, (1993), Pace Gallery New York. P 13. My italics.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid. P 10.

Lee Irwin asserts that during the nineteen sixties and seventies, “eastern religions” were part of an emerging “new age” paradigm that was impacting many currents within American and European esotericism”.⁴⁵⁵ A direct Taoist influence at this time in America was the publication by “outstanding authors” of scholarly and popular books on Taoism.⁴⁵⁶ For example, Alan Watts published *Cloud Hidden, Whereabouts Unknown* in 1968, and *Tao: The Watercourse Way* in 1975. He also had radio and television programs about Taoism and was on the lecture circuit to “about 100 cities”.⁴⁵⁷ Fritjof Kapra’s *The Tao of Physics*, published in 1975, a very popular book, drew parallels between modern physics’ relativity paradigm and Taoist principles such as holistic transformation, non-action, and brought a “credibility to Taoism by aligning it with science”.⁴⁵⁸ Joseph Needham’s book, *Science and Civilisation in China* (seven volumes), which is in Judd’s library in Marfa, does the same thing.

The following cultural practices and processes that have their origins in Taoism, some of them through Zen Buddhism, are arguably deployed in Judd’s installation at Marfa as a direct outcome of his knowledge, or the implicit diffusion of Taoist ideas into the creative ‘tool box’ of artists at this time. Judd’s decision to leave evidence of the artillery sheds’ past functions is reminiscent of the Japanese aesthetic, *wabi sabi*, where the aging of materials is preserved to represent both the past and the currency of present detritus, a Taoist paradox expressive of continuity and change (*Fig 103*).⁴⁵⁹

Fig 103: (Left) The stained concrete floor in Judd’s sheds, Marfa Texas. (Right) The window frames show exposed applications of glue. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid. P 12.

⁴⁵⁶ Lee Irwin, *Daoist Alchemy in the West: the Esoteric Paradigms*. Pp 11, 12, 13. <http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeVI/Dao.htm>

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid. P 12.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid. P 12. The Television series was called *Eastern Wisdom and Modern Life*.

⁴⁵⁹ ⁴⁵⁹ Kurokawa, Kishu. 1988. *Rediscovering Japanese Space*. New York. Pub. John Wetherall Inc. Pp 70 – 77.

Intriguingly this “original state” includes two signs in German stenciled on a wall in the North shed, a contextualising reference to a history of interned German nationals who were employed in the artillery sheds during the Second World War (*Fig 104, Fig 105*). One suspects that Judd, who was involved in the anti-Vietnam War protests, was bemused that these decommissioned military installations were to be used, in perpetuity, for his art’s serene purposes.⁴⁶⁰ He wrote in reference to purchasing the property, “It had been an army base, which is not so good.”⁴⁶¹

Fig 104: Above and below: Signs for German detainees that Judd retained from the Second World War when German nationals were detained in Marfa. Large sign: *Zutritt für Unbefugte verboten*: No unauthorised access. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

Fig 105: *Den Kopf benutzen ist beser als ihn zu verlieren*: It’s better to use your head than to lose your head. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

⁴⁶⁰ In 1971 Judd designed a signed poster “to benefit the Peace Activation Coalition and the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam”. *Donald Judd*. 2004. Edited by N. Serota. Pub. Tate, London. P 256.

⁴⁶¹ *Artillery Sheds* by Donald Judd. This essay first appeared in *Donald Judd*, Architektur, West Kunstverein Munster, 1989. <http://www.chinati.org/visit/collection/artilleryshedsbyjudd.php>

However inadvertently, in keeping with Taoism's non-hierarchical structure, Judd endeavored to integrate the processes of art making into his everyday life and the art itself into liminal zones that removed the work from traditional contexts. In a critique of the exhibition, *Twentieth Century Engineering*, which featured work by architect/engineers such as Buckminster-Fuller, he wrote:

The forms of art and non-art have always been connected: their occurrences shouldn't be separated as they have been ... It is better to consider art and non-art one thing and make the distinctions one of degree.⁴⁶²

In this respect Judd followed the Taoist practice of integrating the prosaic and esoteric, the creative and practical, the diurnal and specialised. His life style is indicated by his pointed inclusion of kitchen and sleeping facilities in all of his studios as he did not separate work from the needs and routines of day to day living.

Deal with a thing when it is still nothing;
Keep a thing in order before disorder sets in.
The tree that can fill the span of a man's arms
Grows from a downy tip
A terrace nine stories high rises from hodfuls of earth;
A journey of a thousand miles
Starts from beneath one's feet⁴⁶³

It is also reflected in his art practice, which embraced furniture design, architecture, landscape gardening and perhaps above all, established an abstract genre for sculpture that echoes the everyday world of engineering, construction, and building technologies.

IMPROVISATION

One of the major strands of Judd's oeuvre is known as 'progressions', where he made a series of sculptures that have the same external geometric form with a sequence of different spatial interventions. To use an analogy from music, Judd retains the rhythm of identical external forms, symmetrically placed, and improvises upon the melody, the changing interior of the forms. An analogy can also be drawn with calligraphic improvisation. Like the example of Taoist improvisation upon the longevity character discussed in the previous chapter, sculptural changes to the forms' interior spatiality are not erratic, they stay within the parameters of Judd's 'melody'. This improvisational method is described by Judd as not "based on ... *a priori* systems".⁴⁶⁴ A reminder of

⁴⁶² Ibid. See article *Month in Revue*, Arts Magazine, Oct. 1964 on P 138.

⁴⁶³ LaoTzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 42.

⁴⁶⁴ Foster, Hal. 1996. *The Return of the Real: the Avante-Garde at the End of the Century*: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA. P 40.

Taoism's description of creation is apt here in its perception that from a primordial wholeness, the Tao, here symbolised by the artist, comes the creation, a flowering, of tuned yet different versions of phenomena – the serial sculptures, or 'progressions'.

*The Way (Tao) gave rise to the one,
The one gave rise to the two,
The two gave rise to the three,
The three gave rise to all the ten thousand things.*⁴⁶⁵

Returning to Karl E. Weick's analysis of degrees of improvisation in the visual arts,⁴⁶⁶ Judd's progressions are an example of true improvisation, spontaneous creativity, where ideas flow to create new forms:

IMPROVISATION: Improvisation is more than a paraphrase, modification or embellishment of existing motifs. The artist radically alters conventional forms or completely departs from known subjects, methods, genres and styles. The artist deploys methods of representation to make entirely new creations from the imagination and the properties of the medium, which may also have no precedent in convention.⁴⁶⁷

This is an accurate description of Judd's methodology for the boxes at Marfa.

Judd's improvised progressions embody the Taoist theme, continuity and change: an element is continuously repeated without change - continuity, whilst other elements undergo metamorphosis - change. This style of practice is not unique to Judd. For example, many of the works of his contemporaries held in the Dia Beacon collection⁴⁶⁸ are based upon either a graphic, or sculptural, improvisational premise upon a constant

⁴⁶⁵ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*. Verse 42. From Stephen Little with Shawn Eichman, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, 2000, Art Institute of Chicago, University of California Press.

⁴⁶⁶ See Chapter Three. Karl E. Weick, *Improvisation as a Mindset for Organizational Analysis*, for the *Special Issue: Jazz Improvisation and Organizing*. *Organisation Science*, Vol. 9, No. 5 (Sept. – Oct.). Pp 543 – 555.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.* . P 546.

⁴⁶⁸ <http://www.Diabeacon.org/> Dia:Beacon is a museum for Dia Art Foundation's renowned collection of art from the 1960s to the present. Beacon is a small town on the Hudson River, north of Manhattan. The building originally belonged to the Nabisco company and was a factory for manufacturing and printing cartons. Without the Dia Foundation's sponsorship of these distinctly American, extremely expensive, large scale works and their sites, it is possible that Minimalist art would not have developed to its extreme magnitude, expressed through a monumental, industrial scale. "Dia was supporting almost a dozen Minimal and conceptual artists, including such towering figures as Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, and John Chamberlain, with stipends, studios, assistants, and archivists for the individual museums it planned to build for each of them. It was also funding an array of monumental, site-specific artworks ranging from Walter De Maria's mile-wide The Lightning Field in New Mexico and James Turrell's 600-foot-high Roden Crater in Arizona to La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela's six-story Dream House in Tribeca. Along the way, it amassed some 900 artworks by those artists as well as by Barnett Newman, Joseph Beuys, Cy Twombly, and Andy Warhol."

<http://www.vanityfair.com/magazine/archive/1996/09/colacello199609> Bob Colacello, "Remains of the Dia", *Vanity Fair*, September 1996. Cited Dec. 2008.

element – a graphic figure, a form, or process. Dan Flaven's series of placed fluorescent lights, Agnes Martin's and Sol Le Witt's drawings follow sequential graphic patterns and permutations. Serra's large scale, immersive iron forms are improvisations upon a particular spatial configuration, the truncated cone. On Kawara repeats the daily process of recording the date of each day noting differences, as in his *Today* series.⁴⁶⁹ All these works manifest the theme, continuity and change (*Fig 106, Fig 107, Fig 108, Fig 109*).

Fig 108: Dan Flavin. “Monument” to V. Tatlin XI, 1964; “Monument” to V. Tatlin, 1966; “Monument” to V. Tatlin, 1966—69; and *Untitled*, 1970. Dia Beacon exhibition, 2008. © Estate of Dan Flavin/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Bill Jacobson.

Fig 109: On Kawara, JUNE 16, 1966, Two Tankers and two tugboats crashed in a fiery disaster in Lower New York Bay, 1966, from *Today* series, 1966 - present. Dia Beacon exhibition, 2008. © On Kawara. Photo: Bill Jacobson.

This improvisational development in the experimental art of Post World War Two America has been attributed to the influence of Afro-American jazz on the visual arts.⁴⁷⁰

Lisa Phillips writes in *Beat Culture and the New America*:

Like jazz performance, Beat art is essentially temporal in its understanding of experience and process-orientated in its forms of presentation. ... One result of this process-orientation was the embrace of additive and linear forms of presentation.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁷⁰ See Lisa Phillips, *Beat Culture and the New America: 1950 – 1965* (1996). Pub. Whitney Museum, Flammarion. P 198. Barbara Zabel, *Assembling Art: The Machine and the American Avant-Garde*, 2004, pub. University of Mississippi. Chapter 7. *The “Jazzing” of the American Avant-Garde*, Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Post War America*, University of Chicago Press, 1998.

⁴⁷¹ Lisa Phillips, *Beat Culture and the New America: 1950 – 1965* (1996). Pub. Whitney Museum, Flammarion. P 198.

A complementary cultural influence is arguably the improvisational practices derived from the Taoist calligraphy and painting underlying the performative in Abstract Expressionism,⁴⁷² as discussed in Chapters Two, Three, Four, Six and Seven. Applied to sculpture, this free elaboration upon constant elements, or themes, extended the three dimensional object into active relationships to its formal and physical contexts of space, opening up the object to a spatial interiority. The foundations of this sculptural 'improvisation in stasis', is the preparatory, spontaneous drawing up of ideas, as we shall see below.

Fig 110: Richard Serra, installation view of Torqued Ellipse II, Double Torqued Ellipse, and Torqued Ellipse I, 1996, and 2000. Dia Beacon exhibition, 2008. Here the viewer enters the internal spaces of a series of huge, iron, truncated cones.

The artists and viewers are all inter-active, curious, improvising players. Phillips describes this as the "present-minded, Zen-like fluidity of the experience".⁴⁷³ She attributes the indirect influence of Zen to the "return of US servicemen from occupied Japan, often accompanied by Japanese Buddhist wives; the relaxation of immigration laws in 1960, which permitted [the migration of] religious leaders from ... Japan"; the publication and popularity of D. T. Suzuki's books on Zen."⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷² Phillips writes of Pollock's 'action painting': "Pollock substituted process and performance for narrative pictorial space, acting out body rhythms and primal motions on canvas." *Beat Culture and the New America: 1950 – 1965* (1996). Pub. Whitney Museum, Flammarion. P 37.

⁴⁷³ Ibid. P 197.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid. P 144.

Jacquiline Baas in her book, *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today*⁴⁷⁵ which is essentially about the influence of Zen Buddhism, tracks publications in America and Europe on Eastern Philosophy, including Taoism from which Zen Buddhism is derived, back to the nineteenth century, beginning with the publication of Marco Polo's thirteenth century account of his observations of China.⁴⁷⁶

Of the *Tao Te Ching*, Agnes Martin wrote:

My greatest spiritual inspiration came from the Chinese spiritual leaders, especially Lao Tzu.⁴⁷⁷

These accounts of Taoism's rhizomic infusion into mainstream Western paradigms supports Irvine's claims for its popularisation through Watt's, Needham's and Kapra's publications, translations and publication of Chinese texts, the media and Eastern art and philosophy lectures and studies in Post World War Two in America.

One such text was the *I Ching*. The artist's improvisational method described above is reminiscent of the calibration of the sixty-four hexagrams that provide the derivation of the commentaries in the Taoist *I Ching*, or *Book of Changes*. Here a line and a broken line are the constant elements that are combined to form eight trigrams, that is, eight different combinations of the line and broken line in vertically stacked combinations of three lines each.⁴⁷⁸ The 'constants' are then differently combined to make the maximum number of combinations - sixty-four hexagrams - where trigrams are paired off to make different stacks of six linear elements.

John Cage said about his use of the *I Ching* for his compositions:

The mechanism by which the *I Ching* works is, I think, the same as that by means of which the DNA – or one of those things in the chemistry of our body – works. It's dealing with the number sixty-four, with a binary situation with all of its

⁴⁷⁵ Jacquiline Baas, *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today* (2005), University of California Press.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid. P 21. The influential publications she writes of specifically on Taoism include, Henry Yule's translation of Marco Polo's *Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East* (1871); Ernest Fenollosa's *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*; Laurence Benyon's *The Flight of the Dragon: An Essay on the Theory and Practice of Art in China and Japan* (1911; *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, first published in German in 1929; Ananda Coomaraswamy's *Transformations in Nature and Art*.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid. P 215.

⁴⁷⁸ "These eight trigrams were conceived as images of all that happens in Heaven and on Earth" and were given names, attributes, an image and family relationships, which represents different kinds of movement (for example restful movement, dangerous movement) and devotion (for example a gentle penetration, adaptable devotion). They were conceived as transitional, "tendencies in movement". When combined to make the sixty-four hexagrams, the inter-relationship of their significance composed not only an oracle, but a book of wisdom. From Richard Wilhelm's *Introduction* to his translation of the *I Ching*.

variations in six lines. I think it's a rather basic life mechanism. I prefer it to other chance operations ... I feel that I am liberated by it.⁴⁷⁹

Like this Taoist method for maximising possibilities for intertwining relationships, Judd and his fellow artists' improvisational method used unchanging, constant elements to create multiplicitous variations, such as Sol LeWitt's vertical, diagonal and horizontal lines. Arguably, the *I Ching* may have inspired as a model for the graphic, improvisational games so fundamental to experimental art making of this time.

At Marfa, Judd authored both the installation's objects, and their site specific venue with its Taoist qualities of metamorphosis, inter relationships to nature, articulated spatiality, temporality, placed within a complex, encoded, built environment.

Fig 111: Donald Judd, Untitled, Marfa, Texas. South gun shed looking South-West in afternoon light. Photo: B. Ely, 2008.

Judd's creative extemporisations for the design of the boxes for the Marfa installation are concealed in the installation. His drawings' sequential flow of ideas are concealed in the mixed composition of their placement (see Diagram below, *Placement of 100 Milled Aluminium Boxes, Marfa Texas*).⁴⁸⁰ The boxes were installed in the sheds as they were delivered so Judd must have stipulated the order of production. Installation of the works in the South gun shed was completed before the North shed. Judd "ensure[d] that

⁴⁷⁹ From a 1980 interview with Cole Gagney and Tracy Caras, excerpted in Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, 233, 234. Jacqueline Baas, *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today* (2005), University of California Press. Re Cage, the *I Ching* and chance see pp 168, 169, 174, 175.

⁴⁸⁰ Marianne Stockebrand published a map of the boxes' placement in her article, *The Making of Two Works: Donald Judd's Installations at the Chinati Foundation*. P 57.
<http://www.chinati.org/visit/collection/donaldjudd.php>

different kinds of boxes were placed directly next to each other so that ... optical multiplicity would be immediately apparent".⁴⁸¹

The next section, The Fieldwork: Judd's *Untitled* Installation, Marfa, Texas (page 167), unpicks this "optical multiplicity" to analyse Judd's improvisational methodology. By examining Judd's drawings in numbered order for *Untitled*, to some extent we can 'get inside' his thinking and his process of improvisation at conception. The parameters Judd adhered to in the articulation of the boxes' internal spatiality of the otherwise identical boxes, also becomes apparent.⁴⁸²

Marianne Stockebrand writes of his intent that:

... he always viewed seriality as a chance to develop the potential of a form. His systems were strictly non-didactic. During the design stages of the aluminum pieces, he had ensured that approximately the same number of boxes were open at the sides, the ends, or the top and he mingled these different versions in the hall so that the light could refract in the ensuing angles and corners, transforming their infinitely clear structures into magical moments of amazement.⁴⁸³

This suggests an editing process accompanied or concluded the development of ideas. However, in the following section, an analysis of the numbered order of conception is predicated upon an apparent order of conception, arguably based on the discernably lucid development of ideas evident in Judd's numbering of the drawings as they were executed. I suggest his selection process to ensure "approximately the same number of boxes were open at the sides, the ends, or the top" was a 'tweaking' rather than a major edit. As I entered into the domain of Judd's creating mind by re-drawing Judd's drawings, a flowing lucidity became apparent.

Judd's methodology for creating a sequence of improvisations upon the oblong also appears to follow closely the 'rules' of graphic improvisation, evidenced in the Taoist art form of calligraphy: the original common form of the character (for Judd, the repetition of identically proportioned oblong forms) is quoted as a creative parameter imposed on the improvisational 'game'.⁴⁸⁴ The result is a harmonised relationship of the binaries, continuity and change.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid. P 60.

⁴⁸² From fieldwork undertaken in Marfa, at the Chinati Foundation, 2008, following an earlier viewing in 2002.

⁴⁸³ See Marianne Stockebrand, *The Making of Two Works: Donald Judd's Installations at the Chinati Foundation*. Pp 61, 62. <http://www.chinati.org/visit/collection/donaldjudd.php> Cited Dec. 2008.

⁴⁸⁴ See Chapter Four.

THE FIELDWORK: JUDD'S *UNTITLED* INSTALLATION, MARFA, TEXAS

The detailed account of fieldwork carried out in Marfa, Texas, included here, is intended to assist in articulating how the complex outcomes of my practising artist's research methodology was employed in the analysis of another artist's studio practice. The skills set of the visual artist was deployed in this analysis. By redrawing Judd's drawings, then comparing them to the actual sculptures in order of their conception, a detailed understanding of his creative process was achieved.

The genesis of the fieldwork was my attendance of an Open Weekend at the Chinati Foundation in 2004 to thoroughly explore all of the Foundation's permanent Minimalist installations, including Judd's Marfa boxes. This first encounter made a similar impression as my first encounter with the prolific variations upon the longevity character in Hué in 1998 – an overwhelming sense of artists' capacity for exponential creativity in the visual arts, expressed by means of an improvisational methodology. However, as a visual artist, I knew that the *spontaneity* of this methodology is not to be found in Judd's perfectly formed, completed sculptures, but rather in the wellspring of his ideas – in his drawings.

These drawings have not been published and so access is permitted only through viewing in person photocopies of the drawings held in the Chinati Foundation's archive. The prime objective of this fieldwork was to analyse, in relation to the boxes, the conception of the boxes evident in the execution of Judd's drawings. These were not highly finished formal studies or precise mechanical drawings, but rather, spontaneous sketches. Judd's method of creative invention as evidenced in his preparatory drawings arguably indicates his direct and indirect exposure, as discussed in the previous section, to the improvisational Eastern methodologies that have their origins in, and characterise, Taoist art practices.

His completed, drawn ideas - for the fabricator - were found to be a series of rapidly executed sketches containing the absolute minimum amount of information necessary for the production of the geometric forms. This method was further confirmed by comparing the drawings with the information supplied on the Purchase Orders for the fabricator. From my experience in the studio as a practising visual artist, the drawings clearly demonstrate that Judd's invention of one hundred different spatial interiors for his one hundred identically proportioned boxes may be compared to the rapid fire, bounteous outpourings of the calligrapher - combined with his extraordinarily masterful capacity for spatial perception.

OBJECTIVES OF THE FIELD RESEARCH IN MARFA

- Research the context and background of the Marfa installation, *Untitled*.
- Research Judd's improvisational method regarding his one hundred articulations of the internal spatiality of an identically scaled solid, the oblong, for *Untitled*, the installed series of 100 aluminium boxes at Marfa, Texas.
- Analyse the above using Donald Judd's preparatory drawings, which he made sequentially for the fabricator.
- Document the sculptures' sequential progressions as they appear in Judd's drawings.
- Research the aesthetic and conceptual elements contributing to the artist's successful combination of sculpture and site in the artwork.

BACKGROUND: JUDD'S PREPARATORY EXPERIMENTS

Fieldwork at the Dia Beacon Museum, Beacon, New York and at Donald Judd's studios in Marfa revealed that Judd had experimented with improvisations upon the oblong leading to the untitled, site specific installation in Marfa's artillery sheds. Judd's improvisational system, developed in 1975 for a series of fifteen identically proportioned plywood boxes, held in the Dia Beacon Museum, New York State, was documented using drawing as the medium (see below) to make a comparison with the boxes in Marfa (*Fig 112, Fig 113*).⁴⁸⁵

Judd's artwork of 1975 at Dia Beacon foreshadows his installation of aluminium boxes in the gun sheds at Marfa, although not all of the ideas here are included in Marfa's one hundred boxes. Like the Marfa installation, they are placed in precisely proportioned rows (see the Diagram, *Judd's 15 Boxes, Dia Beacon*, below). Unlike the Marfa boxes, the Dia Beacon boxes are not reflective. They are made of fir plywood, a particularly decorative, knotted wood that contrasts with the austerity of Judd's boxes, yet like the aluminium at Marfa lend the sculptures a striking material aesthetic.

Like the Marfa improvisations, the interior form of the Dia Beacon boxes established several rules, or parameters, within which changes were made to the boxes' spatiality (see below), a method that Judd continued at Marfa:

Box # 1 and 3	A single Diagonal plane
Box # 2, 5, 9	4" indent into the wall/top of the box

⁴⁸⁵ Photography is not permitted, but for my purposes, drawing was a better research tool.

Box #4, 6, 7, 14, 15	Box in a box
Box # 6, 13	4" rim around the top edge of the box.
Box #8	An open/closed box
Box # 10, 11, 12	A single horizontal plane

Fig 112: Donald Judd, Untitled, 1975, fir plywood, Dia Beacon exhibition, 2008. These oblongs are a more square form than the ones at Marfa, which were drawn up five years later.

Judd repeated several of the Dia Beacon parameters in 1980 when drawing up the Marfa project.⁴⁸⁶ They are marked with an asterisk on the Diagram below.

⁴⁸⁶ His play with variations on a 4 inch rim around the box was not repeated at Marfa.

Fig 113: Bonita Ely, 2008, drawings of Donald Judd's 15 wooden boxes, from 1976, *Untitled*, at Dia Beacon. The drawings show Judd's improvisations upon the oblong and their placement.

For the Marfa installation, before proceeding to manufacture, Judd made several individual aluminium boxes of the same scale to test different metallurgical formulas for milled aluminium. The rejected experiment was darker and less reflective.

FIELD RESEARCH OF JUDD'S IMPROVISATIONAL METHOD

To retrace Judd's method of improvisation, his drawings were re-drawn to follow intimately Judd's thinking as he developed his sculptural ideas (*Fig 114*).

Fig 114: Bonita Ely, re-drawing of Judd's Box # 31. **Description** - Box# 31: Diagonal divide from centre to end corner, length wise. **Notations** (left to right, top to bottom): Drawing executed May 1980; 6 screws; top overlaps sides; Box # 31's Purchase Order number - 81-22. Open ends; North shed; Northern orientation (N) at bottom of drawing; plan.

The drawings were checked against the Purchase Orders made by the fabricators, who included a sketched plan and elevation diagram from Judd's drawings. A verbal description of each piece was recorded (see the caption for *Fig 114* above).

To photograph the boxes in order of conception, the individual boxes were located in the artillery sheds using the Chinati map of where Judd placed the boxes.⁴⁸⁷ They were documented from as many angles as required to capture the complexity of each box's three dimensionality (*Fig 112*).

Looking North West

Looking West

⁴⁸⁷ Using Marianne Stockebrand's published a map of the boxes' placement in her article, *The Making of Two Works: Donald Judd's Installations at the Chinati Foundation*. P 57.

Looking South West

Looking West

Looking East

Looking East

Fig 115: Box # 31, showing the changes to a specific box's appearance when the viewer moves around the box at a specific time of day. Photo: B. Ely.

Finally, the Chinati Foundation's map was used to locate each box again and compare the actual sculptures with my drawings of Judd's drawings, in his numerical sequence of execution, to check accuracy and identify anomalies. Information about the sculptures not recorded on Judd's drawings was added to my drawings to make a complete, notated and graphic documentation of each sculpture.

On his drawings, Judd usually recorded information such as:

- the date of execution;
- either a plan or elevation;
- the number of the box;
- some written instructions for the fabricator to clarify the drawings.

A Chinati researcher has recorded the purchase order number and some written instructions to clarify the photocopied drawings.

My drawings include the following additional information:

- The gun shed where the box is located.
- The boxes' orientation regarding cardinal points.

- Fabrication details such as the number and location of screws; how the sheet metal overlaps at the edges of the boxes.
- Written descriptions and measurements where required for clarification.

OUTCOMES OF THE RESEARCH OF JUDD'S DRAWINGS

Observations:

Judd's drawings are surprisingly spontaneous and rudimentary. They were drawn up in sequence on several occasions as he gradually conceived of the final scale of the project and organised sponsorship (*Fig 116, Fig 117*).

Fig 116: Photocopy of Donald Judd's drawing for Box #11, April, 1980, held in the Chinati Foundation's archives for researchers. The heavy lines are Judd's notations. Pale pencil notations have been added by Chinati Foundation researchers.

Fig 117: Photocopy of Donald Judd's drawing for Box #52, May 1980, held in the Chinati Foundation's archives for researchers.

The drawings arguably demonstrate that Judd's invention of the one hundred variations upon one form evolved as a sequential, rather than a randomly formulated series. Each change is based on a previous configuration within certain parameters, or rules, such as variations upon how a diagonal plane cuts across the space.

For example, for the diagonal planes the parameters were:

- extend from a top edge to the opposite bottom edge;
- extend diagonally across the space from a four inch inset parallel the top side or top end of the box;
- extend diagonally from a four inch inset from the bottom side or bottom end up to the box's opposite top edge.
- Extend diagonally to and from four inch insets, top and bottom.

Judd's method significantly changed the quality of light within these boxes, as well as the form of the sculptures. For example, blocking off the light into a space increases the tonal range of reflections from black to shiny white, whereas making openings draws light into the box to multiply reflective possibilities. These changes also transform with shifts in sunlight's direction throughout the day.

The following specifications demonstrate Judd's improvisational process for Marfa's site specific installation.

The Constant Specifications:⁴⁸⁸

1. The external measurements of all boxes are 41 x 51 x 72 inches.
2. The thickness of all interior and exterior planes is approximately 1 cm.
3. When two sides are open, they are always facing one another (E and W may be open on one box but never E and N [as well]).
4. When two planes are used in the interior, they are always four inches apart and always parallel to each other.

The Ten Parameters of Judd's Marfa Variations:⁴⁸⁹

1. An open/closed box
2. Box within a box
3. 4" indent into the wall/top of the box
4. A single horizontal plane
5. A single vertical plane
6. A single Diagonal plane
7. Two parallel horizontal planes 4" apart
8. Two parallel vertical planes 4" apart
9. Two parallel Diagonal planes 4" apart
10. A Diagonal shelf

The following photographs are examples of each colour coded category (*Fig 118 - Fig 127*):

⁴⁸⁸ These four constants are from Melissa Susan Gaido Allen's Masters thesis, *From the DIA to the Chinati Foundation: Donald Judd in Marfa Texas 1979 – 1994* (1995), Rice University, Figure 14, held in the Chinati Foundation archives, Marfa, Texas. P1. See Rice Digital Scholarship Archive:

<http://scholarship.rice.edu/handle/1911/17040> Allen analysed Judd's variations upon the oblong, making two types of analysis. One description contains the following categories: sides open or not; the box within a box; elevated/floating lid; half an open side; a bent [sic] Diagonal plane; one open side; two open sides. Other descriptions give more information, such as whether bisections are diagonal or not, whether there are two parallel planes or not. Allen invented her own numbering system and visual code to locate Judd's placement of different types of boxes in the sheds, but Allen's research does not reveal the sequence of Judd's improvised invention of the different oblongs from his drawings, which was the main objective of my fieldwork. See Rice Digital Scholarship Archive <http://scholarship.rice.edu/handle/1911/17040>

⁴⁸⁹ The colour coding here is used in all diagrams to identify these ten parameters.

Fig 118: Box #2, an open/closed box.

Fig 119: Box #55, Box within a box

Fig 120: Box #14, 4" indent into the wall/top of the box

Fig 121: Box # 24, A single horizontal plane

Fig 122: Box # 33, A single vertical plane

Fig 123: Box # 28. A single Diagonal plane

Fig 124: Box #66, Two parallel horizontal planes 4" apart.

Fig 125: Box #90. Two parallel vertical planes 4" apart

Fig 126: Box #51, Two parallel Diagonal planes 4" apart

Fig 127: Box #100, A single Diagonal shelf

Below, the improvisations are categorised according to Judd's parameters. They are grouped in colour coded sequence to show the parameters Judd adhered to throughout the process of invention; the variations are colour coded to show how he followed one, then switched to another, another, then back again as ideas flowed. Switching from one variation to another usually followed a related pattern of improvisation, for example, from # 20 to #25 he bisects the box from the centre diagonally, then vertically, then horizontally, so the sequential flow is not as ruptured as it appears here.

ANALYSIS OF JUDD'S IMPROVISATIONS

BOX #	PARAMETER	SUM OF IMPROVISATIONS WITHIN A PARAMETER
1 – 3	An open/closed box	(3)
4 – 7	A single Diagonal plane	(4)
8	Box within a box	(1)
9 – 11	A single horizontal plane	(3)
12 , 13	An open/closed box	(2)
14	4" indent into the wall/top of the box	(1)
15	Box within a box	(1)
16 - 19	4" indent into the wall/top of the box	(4)
20 – 21	A single Diagonal plane	(2)
22, 23	A single vertical plane	(2)
24, 25	A single horizontal plane	(2)
26	A Diagonal shelf	(1)
27	A single vertical plane	(1)
28 - 32	A single Diagonal plane	(5)
33, 34	A single vertical plane	(2)
35 – 39	A single Diagonal plane	(5)

40	A single vertical plane	(1)
41 - 47	Two parallel Diagonal planes 4" apart	(7)
48	Two parallel vertical planes 4" apart	(1)
49 – 51	Two parallel Diagonal planes 4" apart	(3)
52	Two parallel vertical planes 4" apart	(1)
53 – 56	Box within a box	(4)
57, 58	A single Diagonal plane	(2)
59 – 62	Two parallel Diagonal planes 4" apart	(4)
63, 64	Two parallel vertical planes 4" apart	(2)
65 – 66	Two parallel horizontal planes 4" apart	(2)
67, 68	An open/closed box	(2)
69 – 74	A single Diagonal plane	(6)
75, 76	Two parallel Diagonal planes 4" apart	(2)
77, 78	A single Diagonal plane	(2)
79 – 82	Two parallel Diagonal planes 4" apart	(4)
83, 84	A single Diagonal plane	(2)
85 – 88	Two parallel Diagonal planes 4" apart	(4)
89	A single vertical plane	(1)
90	Two parallel vertical planes 4" apart	(1)
91, 92	A single Diagonal plane	(2)
93, 94	An open/closed box (using two parallel planes 4" apart)	(2)
95, 96	A single Diagonal plane	(2)
97	An open/closed box	(1)
98, 99	An open/closed box (with a single horizontal plane)	(2)
100	A Diagonal shelf	(1)

This sequential development is shown in graphic form in *The Sequence of Judd's Improvised Variations* (below). These diagrams, typical of the plans and elevations drawn on Judd's drawings and the purchase orders for Judd's boxes, show his train of thought. The following chart, *Placement of 100 Milled Aluminium Boxes, Marfa, Texas* (page 185), shows how Judd distributed the boxes to maximise the unexpected in the viewer's encounter with each box. This placement deletes evidence of Judd's initial, sequential conception.

PLACEMENT OF 100 MILLED ALUMINIUM BOXES, MARFA, TEXAS

North Artillery Shed			South Artillery Shed		
45	71	51	7	15	3
50	23	75	54	27	4
49	40	37	67	52	1
68	31	20	9	12	2
44	58	24	13	5	48
25	86	47	16	8	10
88	34	66	79	11	14
22	62	74	32	39	73
65	38	57	83	72	78
====		====		=====	
61	36	60	35		26
87	43	28	77	80	82
53	85	59	69	6	76
91	96	21	63	30	55
17	56	93	84	42	29
19	92	95	70	89	64
94	90	18	=====		=====
=====		=====		41	33
	97	98			
	100	99		46	81

KEY: The numerical identification of the boxes is the Chinati Foundation's archival method, calibrated from Judd's drawings. For the key to the colour coding refer above to the diagrams: *The Ten Parameters of Judd's Variations*; *Analysis of Judd's Variations*; *The Sequence of Judd's Improvised Variations*.

RESEARCH OUTCOMES

Judd seems never to have professed a personal interest in Taoism, although he arguably was exposed to its processes and precepts both directly and indirectly. The literature on Judd's work has not made this connection, although references to meditation and other spiritual, or metaphysical associations accompany descriptions of experiential encounters with his Marfa installation. The field research of Judd's method based on analysis of the drawings in numerical sequence to establish a correlation with the free flow of Taoist creativity must be described as speculative. At worst, we have no record of the conditions in which the drawings were executed, no definitive statement from the artist, no time frame other than the months, at best, in which they were executed, no record of his rejected ideas, and no record of whether he numbered the drawings in retrospect, or whether the numbering is in order of execution. Marianne Stockbrande claims he edited his ideas to equalise, approximately, the types of variations.⁴⁹⁰ However, the mark making of his numbering is consistent with the drawings' rapid fire aesthetic, so it seems inconceivable that the drawings were not numbered as he drew them, and therefore drawn, conceived, for the most part, in the numerical sequence Judd notated on the drawings.

The speculative conclusion that Judd's drawings reflect a spontaneous approach to invention reminiscent of calligraphic technique introduces to this evaluation Judd's insistence on a subjective dimension for his artwork. This is supported by the drawings for his installation at Marfa, which, with great energy, intensity and spontaneity, express a playful game to discover every new permutation of the oblong box within a set of self imposed rules. Judd's sculptural improvisations' conceptual rapport with the site may be described as a perfect resolution of co-existing binaries, an intellectual and emotional engagement. This integration of mental gymnastics, heightened sensibility and masterful creativity certainly is expressed in the completed installation and relates completely to the methodology of a Taoist art practice (page 258).⁴⁹¹

To add another speculation – Judd could have fitted more boxes into the smaller spaces at the southern end of both sheds. Could the number of boxes be an unstated reference to the Taoist practice of creating one hundred variations upon a calligraphic character, or just a neat one hundred? ... We will never know.

⁴⁹⁰ See Marianne Stockebrand, *The Making of Two Works: Donald Judd's Installations at the Chinati Foundation*. Pp 61, 62. <http://www.chinati.org/visit/collection/donaldjudd.php> Cited Dec. 2008.

⁴⁹¹ See Kiyohiko Munakata and Yoko H. Munakata (1974), *Ching Hao's Pi-fa-chi: A Note on the Art of Brush*. *Artibus Asiae Supplementum*. Vol. 31. Pp 1 - 56.

CHAPTER 6: BOOK FROM THE SKY - TIANSHU

This magnificent installation symbolises aspects of the old and the emerging China. While the medium and technique are traditionally Chinese, the scale and intent of the work align it with contemporary artistic practice.⁴⁹²

This chapter returns to the Taoist art form, calligraphy, to examine its application in experimental contemporary installation art to thematically signify ‘continuity and change’. It also returns, back to their origins in China, an acknowledgement of the Taoist influences that contributed to the development of Western installation art that were identified in the previous chapter. Xu Bing’s artwork, *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991)⁴⁹³ represents this direct, inter-cultural development in Western visual art practice, and therefore seamlessly fits the particular focus of this thesis (*Fig 128*). The artwork is experimental, contemporary, and as installation art, uses a Western form of expression; it is arguably a direct, and indirect outcome of the influence of Taoism.

In this it signals a further expansion of contemporary, experimental art beyond Western national borders into ‘global art’. Let it be noted at the outset that Xu Bing is by no means a practising Taoist. He has expressed an appreciation of the relationship of his artwork to China’s Ch’en Buddhism, the Chinese practice, *fang fa*, which translates as “work method”, and generally, “traditional Chinese philosophy”, which has its foundations in Taoism.⁴⁹⁴ It is aspects of the content of the artwork, aspects of the process used in its production, and aspects of the form of *Book From the Sky* that arguably place it within the province of China’s Taoist heritage.

⁴⁹² This description of the cultural origins of Xu Bing’s artwork, *Book from the Sky* is from the Queensland Art Gallery website. Cited Dec. 2008.

http://qag.qld.gov.au/collection/contemporary_asian_art/xu_bing

⁴⁹³ Xu Bing (1955 -) lives and works in Beijing, where he is Vice President of the Academy of Fine Arts, and Brooklyn in the United States of America where he maintains a studio. *A Book from the Sky* was produced between 1987 and 1991. The mediums are: woodblock prints, wood, leather, ivory, string, cloth. Banners: 103 x 6 x 8.5cm (each, folded): 19 boxes: 49.2 x 33.5 x 9.8cm (each, containing four books). Posters for the walls (optional). Installation dimensions are variable.

⁴⁹⁴ Xu Bing spoke of Zen Buddhism and koans, *fang fa* (translation: the traditional Chinese “method”) and ancient Chinese philosophy as motivational aspects and themes of his practice in an interview between Bonita Ely and Xu Bing on the third of October, 2008 in Beijing. The interview was conducted with ethics approval from the University of Western Sydney’s Human Research Ethics Committee. Project Title: *Continuity and Change: Practice based research on the influence of Taoist concepts and calligraphy on contemporary visual art practice*. The Protocol Number for this project is H6569.

This chapter argues that central to this premise is the artist's deployment of a Taoist means of expression, calligraphic art, yet the literature surrounding the interpretation and critique of this artefact has not examined in detail its placement within this cultural context. Neither has the meaning of the artwork for readers of calligraphy been examined in depth in Western literature about *Book From the Sky*. The aim of this chapter is to contribute a deeper understanding of these two aspects of this iconic artwork. Based in part on first hand observation,⁴⁹⁵ the background information pertinent to interpreting *Book from the Sky* against a Taoist background will be established, including an account of the process of production. Then a Taoist analysis of the artwork will inform a contrast of interpretations from the perspectives of readers of calligraphy and non-readers, with reference to an interview with the artist.⁴⁹⁶

In the following sections, to distinguish discussion of the text-like images Xu Bing created for *Book from the Sky* from discussion of genuine calligraphy, references to his artwork's imagery as 'calligraphy' will be placed in inverted commas.

DESCRIPTION AND PROCESS OF PRODUCTION

THE INSTALLATION

The installation consists of books and paper scrolls printed with a representation of calligraphic text in a style from the Ming Period. The scrolls and books are installed to make an imposing, room-like space, its ceiling defined by suspended scrolls looped like a canopy, the floor plane defined by open books laid out in a formal grid pattern to define a rectangular shape beneath the canopy. The walls alongside this space may be hung with printed scrolls like posters.⁴⁹⁷ In front of the rows of books are purpose built, wooden boxes that store the books.

THE BOOKS⁴⁹⁸

The books are made of off-white *zangjing* paper, which is used for printing classic texts of great import, such as books on philosophy and religion, medicine (*Fig 129*).

Fig 129: Book binding method showing jacquard silk corners and string sewing. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

In discussion of his process making the books Xu Bing recalled:

... each section, each chapter really follows some [particular] book. This is why it stops here, why it stops there [pointing to aspects of a photograph of one of the books]. I don't want [to make] decision[s] by myself. I follow[ed] some [existing] book, because I don't want to give any meaning, any ideas from my mind.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁷ Xu Bing printed four versions; these do not have exactly the same components so within the convention are not editions. For example, the version of *Book from the Sky* in the Queensland Art Gallery collection has no hanging wall scrolls, and four suspended ceiling scrolls whereas other versions have wall works as well as books and suspended scrolls that make a canopy. The canopy scrolls and books with their wooden boxes are in all versions. Extra sets of books were also printed. Versions of *Book from the Sky* are in the Queensland Art Gallery, Hong Kong Museum, Ludwig Museum. Sets of the books are in the collections of Princeton University, Harvard University, Fukuoka Asian Art University, the British Museum, and private collections. From the Booklyn Artists Alliance website.

<http://www.booklyn.org/artists/Xu%20Bing.%20Brooklyn.%20NY.php>

⁴⁹⁸ From a detailed description of all traditional aspects of *Book From the Sky* on the Hanshan Tang Books website: <http://www.hanshan.com/specials/xubingts.html>

⁴⁹⁹ Bonita Ely's interview with Xu Bing, 3/10/2008, Beijing. Protocol #H6569.

The books resemble the form of “a major work, a 'Classic' or 'Collectanea' of Heaven, a work with a long exegetical history which has deserved and received the close attentions of many scholars for a millennium or more”,⁵⁰⁰ such as the Taoist sage Lao Tzu's, *Tao Te Ching*.⁵⁰¹

Traditional wooden boxes were made to contain the books (*Fig 130*).

movable type press was not adopted as a mass production printing method in China as it was in the West, because it did not provide the same efficiencies when applied to printing calligraphy. In contrast to Western script, which is formed from twenty-six modular units, or letters, which are repeated to make up words, Chinese script is made up of thousands of individual pictograms, or characters. Setting up the type of thousands of characters requires enormous time and labour. Instead, whole blocks of text were carved and printed. Xu Bing's use of the moveable type method for printing foregrounds his intention to use technologies from China's history that demonstrate how advanced China has been in the past.⁵⁰³ The wooden blocks depicted one 'character' each. Xu Bing created approximately four thousand different 'characters' of four different sizes and hand carved them, in reverse, using the same technique used for fine art woodcut printing.⁵⁰⁴ The different sizes of 'characters' quote the conventions surrounding the layout of traditional, classical, Chinese manuscripts (*Fig 131*).

Fig 131: A book's title page showing all four sizes of 'text'. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

⁵⁰³ From Bonita Ely's interview with Xu Bing, 3/10/2008, Beijing. Protocol #H6569: "A *Book from Sky* uses a lot of technique... Chinese smart. Not only the art form, not only technique, also the communication, how the piece touches to the people's mind, how the piece is in communicates with the audience. [It] all uses Chinese way.

⁵⁰⁴ Xu Bing trained as a print maker, achieving a Masters degree from the Central Academy, Beijing, 1988.

The precise folding of the paper to make the pages of the book is registered using a traditional shape called a 'fish tail' (*Fig 132*).

Fig 132: The fish tail shape for registering folds.

Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

THE IMAGERY

As described above, the imagery printed on the scrolls and books resembles Chinese calligraphy from the Ming Period called *songti*.⁵⁰⁵ This is a plain, formal font-style reflecting the dispassionate voice of authority, and shares the delicacy and precision of brushed calligraphy without its emotional signature (*Fig 135*).

Fig 133: (Left) The printing often has a haptic quality from an unevenness of pressure, or the application of the ink. (Right) An edge of the block the 'characters' are carved from is sometimes accidentally printed – see the mark, upper left side. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

⁵⁰⁵ <http://www.hanshan.com/specials/xubingts.html>

The printing process however is haptic in character because, although great skill was applied to produce even inking and pressure on the tiny woodblocks carved by Xu Bing, slight irregularities produced tonal variation in places, and an edge of a block is sometimes printed. For these reasons the manual process of printing is visible in the work (*Fig 133*).

Fig 134: Wooden blocks racked for printing.

The woodblocks were assembled by hand onto trays to be printed (*Fig 134*). On the scrolls there is some repetition of the arrangements of 'type'. Xu Bing, when asked about the role of chance and repetition in the assemblage of his 'characters', described the process as follows:

Xu Bing: Some scrolls are very repetitious, some scrolls probably changing a lot. ... Part of it was [thought] about, part was random. For example, some words maybe I carved two, three of them to look like in English, [for example] 'yes' or 'of' - in English they always repeat. Some busy, some simple, pretty like ancient, or official Chinese writing system. Some are, for example, title words, some page words, something I chose, you know. But while I was working on them, each wooden block on the back side would have a mark, So first time I'm making a book, there would be some marks there. So the printers they follow the marks [drawing a diagram].

Fig 135: The 'characters' are "busy" and "simple".

Photo. B. Ely, 2008..

Of the different sized 'characters' Xu Bing said:

The little ones are especially for the notes. In ancient Chinese books, they have a lot of small words that explain about the sentence, right? After the sentence, or after some words, they put some small words like notes. Like footnotes, yes. ... You read the book and put some notes in here. ... In China they re-issue the book, including the famous people's notes.

Bonita Ely: Yes, like a commentary?

(00:40:50) Xu Bing: Yes yes, commentary.

THE SCROLLS

The scrolls are printed with compositions of Xu Bing's 'calligraphy' in rectangular blocks of potentially four hundred and six 'characters' (fourteen 'characters' across by twenty-nine down). The one scroll examined in the Queensland Art Gallery collection was printed in repeated series of three identical print runs, followed by a another series of three identical runs, then another series of three identical print runs (*Fig 136*).⁵⁰⁶

The 'text' is framed by a border along both sides of the scroll and its size and rows copy that of a classic manuscript.

⁵⁰⁶ For conservation reasons only one scroll was examined and only a section of it was unrolled. The photographs are taken without professional lighting, a flash or tripod, so the images are distorted and the colour inaccurate.

Fig 136: Borders along the length of the scrolls frame the 'text', which is composed differently using different sizes in printed sequences, mimicking traditional scholarly manuscripts. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

To hang the canopy, the scroll's printed paper is secured simply to a length of wooden dowel, with eye hooks at each end (*Fig 137*).

Fig 137: Rolled up scroll showing the hanging method. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

THE POSTERS

Defining the walls of the installation, the posters are reminiscent of Chinese outdoor newspapers, and are printed using the movable type method described above. In an earlier version of *Book from the Sky* in 1988 Xu Bing printed his 'calligraphy' onto pages of the most popular Beijing newspaper, *The Peoples Daily* (Fig 138).⁵⁰⁷

Fig 138: A detail of a poster printed on the Peoples Daily newspaper, 1988.

THE TITLE

The title for *Book from the Sky* went through several permutations that reflect Xu Bing's evolving perception of the work. At first he called it, *An Analyzed Reflection of the World – the Final Volume of the Century* (*Xi shi jian – shiji mo juan*), also translated as *The Mirror of the World – An Analyzed Reflection of the End of this Century*. Both translations have an apocalyptic feeling, and certainly reflect Xu Bing's expression of Chinese traditional culture undergoing a massive upheaval. Not long after the artwork was shown to the public it became known as *Book from the Sky*, or *Book from Heaven*, which refers to heaven as symbolic of nothingness in the Taoist cannon; the 'words' from the sky in the artwork signifying nothing.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁷ Britta Erickson, *Words without Meaning, Meaning without Words: the Art of Xu Bing* (2003). Pub. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and University of Washington Press. Pp 51.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.* P 38, 39.

BACKGROUND⁵⁰⁹

Xu Bing's earlier artworks reveal the beginnings of his critical approach to the history of Chinese tradition, so evident in *Book from the Sky*, along with his desire to make art relevant to the times and reflective of his experiences. It is well known that *Book from the Sky* was created during the time when China opened up to the outside world after a long period of turbulent isolationism and deprivation, the Cultural Revolution, when Mao Tse Tung attempted an enforced, chaotic, industrialisation of China's economy, and the obliteration of its traditional culture. Xu Bing's childhood had been spent in the intellectual milieu of Beijing University where his father, who taught him calligraphic writing, was a Professor of History. His mother worked in the Department of Library Sciences. His school, where he was instructed by demoted university lecturers was on the university campus. At first, after witnessing the humiliation of his 'reactionary' family, as the "bastard son of a reactionary father" he attempted to redeem himself working in the Propaganda Office using his 'pen as a weapon'. In 1974 at the age of nineteen, he was sent to the country to work as a labourer for two years where, using his education and calligraphic skills, he and other students from Beijing published a community newsletter.⁵¹⁰ He also began sketching his experiences and experimenting with calligraphy for festivals and ceremonies at the behest of the illiterate peasants.⁵¹¹ Through these means he began to build a reputation as an exceptional student of art.⁵¹²

He returned to Beijing in 1977 having been accepted into the May Seventh College of Arts as a peasant applicant.⁵¹³ Mao died in 1976 and the Cultural Revolution ended. Xu Bing devoured as much classic Chinese literature as he could in the Beijing University library, and translations of material from the West. It was a confusing time to be an avid reader. During the Cultural Revolution Mao Zedong revised the writing system, simplifying some characters, discarding old characters, then revising the simplifications and bringing back into use some old characters. This disorder struck at the foundations of China's cultural certainty. Central to all learning in China is a reverence for the book, *shou*, and the "cultural conditioning" of mastering the brush to write calligraphy,

⁵⁰⁹ Information from Karen Smith, *Nine Lives: the Birth of the Avant-Garde in New China* (2006). Pub Zurich : Scalo ; New York : Distributed in North America by Prestel. Chapter, *Xu Bing: in a Word*, Pp 311 – 357. Also, Xu Bing's website <http://www.xubing.com>

⁵¹⁰ http://www.xubing.com/index.php/site/projects/year/1975/cultural_revolution_magazine

⁵¹¹ From Xu Bing, *The Living Word*, translated by Ann L. Huss, from Britta Erickson, *Words without Meaning, Meaning without Words: the Art of Xu Bing* (2003). Pub. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and University of Washington Press. Pp 14 – 16. For an account of his experiences in Huapen Commune, see P 22.

⁵¹² Karen Smith, *Nine Lives: the Birth of the Avant-Garde in New China* (2006). Pub Zurich : Scalo ; New York : Distributed in North America by Prestel. P 325.

⁵¹³ May Seventh College of Arts reverted to its previous name, the Academy of Fine Arts after Mao's death.

memorising by rote learning thousands of characters.⁵¹⁴ This experience of a disassembling of knowledge became the inspiration for *Book from the Sky*.⁵¹⁵

in 1977, Xu Bing honoured the hard working peasants with whom he had lived in a series of greatly admired student prints (*Fig 139*). His woodblock prints depicted rural landscapes, humble abodes, domesticated animals and farmers at work.⁵¹⁶ Xu Bing's title for this work, *Broken Jade*, foreshadows his installation, *Book from the Sky*, in that it critiques the weight of China's ancient culture and the currency of the symbolism of the gemstone, jade, which is associated with the privilege of the Emperor and aristocracy along with preciousness, beauty, love and virtue. To call such sincere imagery depicting the humble lives of peasants, *Broken Jade*, creates an ironically metamorphic zone of Taoist dimensions between a homage to the rural poverty and the extreme hardship he had witnessed, a reference to the breakdown of the symbols of ancient power structures in Communist China and perhaps, a critical commentary on the demise of precious aspects of Chinese culture in rural China.⁵¹⁷

encountered for the first time the work of contemporary Western artists such as Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg, and books such as Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre* after which Germano Celant had named the Italian avant-garde installation art movement, *Arte Povera*.⁵¹⁸ This publication emphasizes audience participation and confrontation as a methodology in contemporary theatre. Young artists began experimenting with different forms of art practice, including installation art.⁵¹⁹ For Xu Bing this allowed an intellectual engagement with traditional processes as a contemporary vehicle for his insights on the "events and tendencies"⁵²⁰ in society and politics taking place around him.

stamp a graphic imprint of an industrial equivalent of Taoism's balancing *yin* and *yang*.⁵²¹ This change in his practice caused consternation amongst authorities in the Academy.⁵²²

The lucid mark making deployed in *Five Series of Repetitions* (1987) also alludes to agricultural landscape but using more abstract imagery than *Broken Jade* (Fig 140). It depicts fields of shapes of different patterns. As Xu Bing cut away then printed the surface of the blocks in five stages, he records the obliteration of the artefact to a blank, a *nothingness*. Like *Big Tire*, this action also has a Taoist structure, a gradual, cosmic dissolution of substance into nothingness expressed in the *Tao Te Ching* as:

Emerging, flourishing, dissolving back again
This is the eternal process of return⁵²³

Xu Bing's large scale exploration of underlying Taoist tropes embedded in Chinese culture in this work shows the ambition of his vision, his absorption of the aesthetic methodology of Western installation art, and his interest in abstract concepts as well as socio-political content, for another apt, political interpretation of this work can also be found in the *Tao Te Ching*:

Sharpen a blade too much
And its edge will soon be lost

In this respect Xu Bing was continuing a lineage of protest through art practice and cultural interaction with the West from the turn of the century to the nineteen thirties in China when, in concert with a controversial leaning towards Western styles of both realism and the experimental approach of modernity such as the work of German Expressionist, Käthe Kollwitz, artists believed art could be a force for social change (page 74).⁵²⁴ This blending with Western Modernism was supplanted by Social Realism, introduced from the Soviet Union after the defeat of the Japanese in 1945 when Mao's communist regime gained control of China from the Nationalists, and modernist experimentation was suppressed as counter revolutionary. However, in the mid nineteen-eighties with an opening up to the West, these earlier artists were an

⁵²¹ Britta Erickson, *Words without Meaning, Meaning without Words: the Art of Xu Bing* (2003). Pub. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and University of Washington Press. P 24, 25.

⁵²² Karen Smith, *Nine Lives: the Birth of the Avant-Garde in New China* (2006). Pub Zurich : Scalo ; New York : Distributed in North America by Prestel. Pp 331 – 333.

⁵²³ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 16.

⁵²⁴ Ralf Crozier, *Post Impressionists in Pre War Shanghai: the Juelanshe (Storm Society) and the Fate of Modernism in Republican China* (1993). From *Modernity in Asian Art* (1993). Ed. John Clarke. Pub. Peony Press, Sydney. Pp 135 – 154.

inspiration to the group of young artists who became known as the New Wave (page 81).⁵²⁵ In 1987, amidst this exciting time of potential political change, Xu Bing began work on *Book from the Sky*. It took four years to complete.

First exhibited to great critical success in the National Museum of Fine Arts in Beijing in February 1989 in an incomplete, preliminary state, *A Book from the Sky* was included in the government-sanctioned group exhibition at Beijing's National Museum, *China/Avant-Garde*. Four months later, the massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators in Beijing's Tiananmen Square signaled a return to repression. *Book from the Sky* was condemned as subversive and Xu Bing was described as a 'ghost pounding the walls', an allusion to a folk tale where a traveler wanders around and around like a ghost, bewildered and lost, trying to find a way home, pounding on walls to find a way. Xu Bing, labeled a "bourgeois liberal", was placed under surveillance. He migrated to America in 1990 when offered a position as Honorary Fellow at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the United States of America.⁵²⁶ He returned to China in 2008 having been appointed Vice Chancellor of Beijing's Central Academy of Fine Arts where he studied and taught during the nineteen-eighties, and now lives and works between New York and Beijing.

BOOK FROM THE SKY: Taoism's Direct Conceptual Influences

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Although there is little discussion in the literature about this seminal work of the influence of Taoism on Xu Bing during his childhood, or discussion of the traditional Taoist content or processes present in *Book from the Sky*, close analysis reveals that, although Taoism as a religion had been banned by the Chinese Communist Party and places of worship destroyed or converted for secular use, Xu Bing was raised in a very traditional community where Taoist philosophical principles were ingrained.⁵²⁷ In his interview he said:

... parents, their friends... or the people around you... they are everyday the routine life... so they are talking, so they are in communication with other people.

⁵²⁵ Ralph Crozier, *Art and Revolution in Modern China: the Lingnan (Cantonese) School of Painting 1906 – 1951* (1988) University of California Press, Berkley, Los Angeles, London. Pp 152 - 153. Karen Smith, *Nine Lives: the Birth of the Avant-Garde in New China* (2006). Pub Zurich : Scalo ; New York : Distributed in North America by Prestel. P 328 – 329.

⁵²⁶ Britta Erickson, *Words without Meaning, Meaning without Words: the Art of Xu Bing* (2003). Pub. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and University of Washington Press. P 10.

⁵²⁷ The traditional Chinese culture includes animism, Taoism, Confucianism and Ch'en Buddhism just as Western cultures are an amalgam of animist, Judaic, Christian and scientific traditions.

... The relationship between, the sense of the relationship ... how they handle the relationship... how they handle the case... you come through any routine work you can get the sense of the traditional way, traditional ideas, traditional style... that's the way we learn the tradition. Even during the Cultural Revolution in China, we broke the tradition BUT we still learn a lot [about] tradition from the routine of life.

As discussed previously, *yin* and *yang* are the key symbols of Taoism, seeing the opposite complementary forces inside all things and entities which lead everything to change toward its opposite (*Fig 1*). For both the non-Chinese reading viewer and the reader of calligraphy, *Book from the Sky* presents the theme, 'continuity and change', the paradoxical essence of a Taoist sense of reality. For the viewer who has no understanding of Chinese calligraphy it is stating the obvious to say that the 'text' has no meaning. It is infinitely silent (continuity), yet it clearly exudes the authoritative voice of classical Chinese wisdom through multitudinous 'Chinese characters', small, metamorphic things, (neither this nor that - change) meshing together to make a unified, silent void. In her thesis, *Radical Emptiness: the Spiritual Experience in Contemporary Art*, Melinda Farris Wortz writes, "mankind's limitations can become opportunities if one is willing to forsake the certainty of the past".⁵²⁸ Here the legacy of a continuity from the past is enshrined, yet poetic ambiguity opens its legacy to questions for the future that effect change. As Xu Bing says in the interview:

It made the people think this is ... like the holy book, important book. Why can't I get any meaning from the book? The people, they don't understand, why [has the artist] seriously made the book? Each character ... carved in by themselves, and hand-made prints. Beautiful! Why are they non-sense?⁵²⁹

Opposite types of silence that result from philosophical discourse are defined by Frank J. Hoffman in his article, *Dao and Process*. The first is termed "exploding", that is, philosophical argument that builds endlessly upon critical thinking that cannot be conclusively proven, and therefore may continue undecided, infinitely. The voice, or text, is reduced to no spoken words in its inconclusiveness.⁵³⁰ The second silence is "implosive". It can conclude a complete philosophical position, not through the discourse of argument or critical thinking, but through "the implosive process of sagely silence and reversion to silent illumination".⁵³¹ Xu Bing has achieved a sense of

⁵²⁸ Melinda Farris Wortz, *Radical Emptiness: the Spiritual Experience in Contemporary Art* (1990), dissertation for Doctor of Philosophy, Berkley, California. Pub. UMI Dissertation Services. Pp 69 – 70.

⁵²⁹ Bonita Ely's interview with Xu Bing, 3/10/2008, Beijing. Protocol #H6569.

⁵³⁰ Frank J. Hoffman, *Dao and Process*, *Asian Philosophy*, Nov. 2002, Vol. 13, No. 3. Hoffman is citing Godel's Incompleteness Theorem regarding explosive silence. Ref. Michael Detlefsen (1999), Godel in Audi, Robert (editor), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd edition, Cambridge University Press, p 347.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

implosive silence in *Book from the Sky* for both readers and non-readers of Chinese calligraphy using the Taoist precept of *wu wei*, wordless teaching, non-action (*Fig 141*). For Chinese readers of calligraphy, as we see below, the *Book from the Sky* is wordless but there are incoherent sounds. This is the wordless teaching related to the pedagogic method of Ch'en Buddhism using koans to challenge the novice's sense of reality, and has its origins in Taoism.

The sage acts without action
 And teaches without talking
 All things flourish around him⁵³²

For non-readers of Chinese calligraphy, *Book from the Sky* is an inscrutable vision of wisdom. The artwork has the appearance of a silent, sacred space, a solemn temple. In the interview Xu Bing said, "It needed to be big. ... people have [the] idea that something printed out is ... official, ... must have an important meaning. ... I thought of the book to look like a temple".⁵³³ Xu Bing's "temple" is dignified, serious. However it is a parody of seriousness, of scholarship of officialdom, the continuity of stability. In this respect it is also Taoist in its spirit of egalitarian significance for both readers and non readers - the illiterate peasant, the unknowing Westerner, and the Chinese intellectual are on the same footing in front of the *Book from the Sky*. Xu Bing's conceptual objective signaled the extraordinary changes in China's culture.

Fig 141: Books lying open on the floor.

⁵³² Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 2.

⁵³³ Bonita Ely's interview with Xu Bing, 3/10/2008, Beijing. Protocol #H6569.

The *Tao Te Ching* observes:

Heaven and earth coalesce and it rains sweet dew.
The people, no one ordering them, self balance to equality.⁵³⁴

Xu Bing's artwork expresses his belief that art should be 'for the people'.

BOOK FROM THE SKY: For the Reader of Calligraphy

Very little commentary on *Book from the Sky* in the West includes a depth of analysis, in relation to Xu Bing's statements about possible readings of his 'calligraphy', of how the work is perceived by people who can read calligraphy. He has described it as "empty", without "any clear message", a "pretense" and "true absurdity".⁵³⁵ However, in two interviews he qualifies this by saying:

I actually used some real Chinese partials or radicals. For example, when I make a fake word, I put the water radical with the radical of the mountain: two radicals together. People see this word, and think it should talk about nature. They think this word should have some meaning, but they cannot read the word aloud. It looks like a familiar face but no title, no name. I use a lot of these quotations in Chinese.⁵³⁶

Speculation about Xu Bing's method of invention for this thesis was calibrated upon two aspects of calligraphic text. First, calligraphy, unlike Western text, is based on a visual system where the characters are constructed as amalgamated pictograms that together make a meaning (page 57).⁵³⁷ Knowing this, I surmised that there was a possibility that Xu Bing may have used existing pictograms, or radicals, to make some 'characters' using meaningless combinations, or that some of his 'characters' might allude to existing characters in some way so that for readers of calligraphy, the 'text' is encoded with an incoherent silence, rather than a mute silence. Another possibility was that Xu Bing created imagery in the style of calligraphy that would imaginatively elicit a 'reading-like' response from the viewer. In my interview with Xu Bing he was asked to comment on this theory.

⁵³⁴ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 28.

⁵³⁵ *Persistence and Transformation: Text as Image in the Art of Xu Bing*. 2006. Edited by Jerome Silbergeld: P. Y. and Kinmay W. Tang Centre for Eastern Art, Princeton University Press. See the interview with Xu Bing, *An Artist's View*, p 99.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.* P 117 This explanation is paraphrased by Xu Bing in my interview with him (see the following paragraph).

⁵³⁷ See the Introduction, Chapter Two, and Chapter Four for analysis of Chinese characters.

He said that people who read Chinese recognise that some of his invented characters “look like” certain real characters (*Fig 142, Fig 143*). “It’s like you see some people’s faces [are] really familiar but you couldn’t call their name, you don’t know their name”. Because Chinese writing is based on imagery, the “image is ... working at the same time with the meaning”. Pointing to several of his invented characters in a photograph of some of the ‘calligraphy’ from *Book from the Sky*, Xu Bing said, “Reading this – they see this ‘word’, they look at this artwork, they can get some sense of the image. It gives you some meaning. It LOOKS like this, but they couldn’t really CALL it what it is.”⁵³⁸

Fig 142: Xu Bing, Book from the Sky (detail). Queensland Art Gallery collection.

Xu Bing pointed out some of his invented characters that “look like” real characters: (top left) officer, or official; (fourth down on left) little girl; (fourth down on right) the verb “do something”; (fifth down on right) cloth. My own investigations into these characters suggest that readers will see different correlations in the same image, for example the ‘character’ Xu Bing relates to “little girl” has also been identified with the ‘character’ meaning ‘male’. These imaginative responses to the invented ‘calligraphy’ indicates how closely related to Taoism’s theory of creativity, characterised by ambiguity, free association and graphic improvisation is Xu Bing’s method (see the characters below).

官 officer, or office, or official
 女 girl, woman (c/f 子 male)
 指 do something (also ‘middle finger’)
 布 cloth

⁵³⁸ Bonita Ely’s interview with Xu Bing, 3/10/2008, Beijing. Protocol #H6569.

Fig 143: Two combined 'characters' at the bottom of this image have been identified in Xu Bing's imagery.

九 nine (right)
开 open (left)

This recognition of some 'characters' in Xu Bing's imagery demonstrates the conditioning of our mind to find meaning in text.⁵³⁹ However, this does not diminish the extraordinary inventiveness of his artwork. Rather, it magnifies a literate viewer's engagement with the Taoist nature of Xu Bing's visceral imagery.

Fig 144 Xu Bing's diagram, drawn during the interview, to show how he invented some 'characters'. (Top left) shows a drawing of water flowing over a rock; (below to the right) the water and rock are abstracted; (third below to the right - circled) a pictogram-like image is added to make the circled 'character'. This method mimics the way actual calligraphy was invented. (Beside that, on the right) an image for iron, on the right, a knife; (below) how they could be put together to make a 'character'). My notes to the far right made during the interview in English.

After some explanation of the history of calligraphy Xu Bing described the way he played with Chinese calligraphy as the equivalent of Western art's "concrete poetry", where meaning inhabits a "grey layer", a mixing together of traditions associated with Chinese writing. Xu Bing said meaning is obliquely alluded to, not clearly defined, as it is in real calligraphy. He said he might put a sign for *water* together with a sign for *rock*, and viewers may see that it alludes to *nature* - "you know it doesn't talk about electronics". Whereas if "a metal with a knife are put together you know it is not talking

⁵³⁹ *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*, where he discusses this phenomenon known as the *Stroop Interference Effect*, which shows how "literate people have great difficulty ignoring the printed word". P 33.

about nature, it is talking about human made. So I use a lot of that kind, this way, to play with my ‘words’” (Fig 144).

Xu Bing further elaborated that communication through his characters is like the Ch'en Buddhist's use of *koan's*, (with their origins in Taoism), to make the student think more deeply.⁵⁴⁰

Chinese Zen Buddhists, they use [a] way [to] contact, communicate to people, or the way the master lets the students understand something. They are not really directly teaching you what it is. They just talking [about] something [that] really look[s] like it but not relate[d] to the question. They just talking something else and make students really thinking hard.⁵⁴¹

This device for encoding meaning is discussed in the context of Western experimental poetry in John Caley's essay, *Writing (Under) Sky: On Xu Bing's "Tianshu"*. John Callay calls upon poet, Charles Bernstein's distinction between “absorptive” and “antiabsorptive” writing for insights on Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky*. The former, “absorptive” writing, is reading as an artifice that immerses the reader “opening onto signification”, the latter is an artifice that confronts and resists both “reading and readability”.⁵⁴² This is achieved through “extralexical means” where devises such as onomatopoeia, rhythm, typography, line breaks, acrostics, express meaning, such as in poetry. He points to Xu Bing's use of “extra or missing strokes, unrecorded [in Chinese dictionaries] combinations of elements” within entirely canonical forms. In this respect Xu Bing's extra-lexical ‘writing’ differs from the West's concrete poetry because it disrupts convention, whereas Xu Bing is at great pains to mimic it. Yet it is this mimicry that obfuscates meaning. These paradoxes place the work within the tradition of Taoist thinking where enlightenment, or insight, is achieved through confrontational means, such as using koans as cited by Xu Bing. The continuation of tradition in China is disrupted by a fierce questioning of its value for a changing present. Yet State imposed values about ‘correctness’ and ‘incorrectness’ cannot be applied to the subversive incoherence of *Book for the Sky*, unlike Mao Zedong's revisions of traditional

⁵⁴⁰ *Gong'an* in Chinese. An important agent of Taoist, Ch'en and Zen Buddhist education towards enlightenment, where the student is challenged to use lateral rather than logical thought to find solutions to paradoxical questions. Ref. Helmut Brinker, Hiroshi Kanazawa, Andreas Leisinger. 1996. *Zen Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings*. Artibus Asiae. Supplementum Vol. 40. P 14. See Chapter Two also.

⁵⁴¹ Bonita Ely's interview with Xu Bing, 3/10/2008, Beijing. Protocol #H6569. Christian Monks, in his article *A Visual Koan: Xu Bing's Dynamic Desktop*. *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Art*, Winter, December 2005, writes: “a Chan perspective is present in Xu's practice even when it is not explicit”. P 99.

⁵⁴² John Calley, *Writing (Under-) Sky: On Xu Bing's "Tianshu"* (1990). This essay was first published (in Italian) in *In Forma de Parole* 1999.1, pp. 143-153; also in English in Jerome Rothenberg and Stephen Clay, eds. *A Book of the Book*, New York: Granary Books, 2000. See: <http://www.shadoof.net/in/ts.html>

calligraphy (page 197) and his calls to “smash the four olds” – old habits, old customs, old culture, old ideas.⁵⁴³

BOOK FROM THE SKY: For the Non-Reader of Calligraphy

For the viewer who cannot read Chinese calligraphy, it is self evident that the ‘text’ has no meaning. To the informed viewer the artwork appears like a monument to exceptional creativity and a homage to the traditions of Chinese culture, with the twist that the text had no meaning for literate Chinese either. We enter the installation space, it is hushed, silent, no words disturb our mental absorption of the artwork. It is a silent testament. The work is mute, bringing to mind the correlations with sound discussed in the introduction to calligraphy, where text is correlated to the embodied voice (page 17).⁵⁴⁴ Here no sound represents the continuity of the void, the nothingness, at the foundation of all possibilities, all creation, the source of all that exists in Taoist philosophy:

Words and names are not the way
They can't define the absolute
It's better that you look within
Hold your tongue and just be mute

Look within and look out too
You will not find a separation
Out there you see appearance
Within you see origination
Look within with wonder
At emptiness and bliss
For wonder names totality
Where nothing is amiss
The space within is always there
If you can moderate desire
A place of utter emptiness
And possibility entire⁵⁴⁵

Again in Verse 2, Lao Tzu advises us to “stay within the emptiness” to come to our true nature, detached from superficial and transitory life events.

Can you see the vacant place
Where good and bad and sad and merry
Disappear forevermore?
Where nothing ever is contrary

⁵⁴³ *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 Perry Link, *Whose Assumptions Does Xu Bing Upset and Why?* Pp 49, 55.

⁵⁴⁴ Ref. Jean Francois Billeter, *The Chinese Art of Writing*, 1990, Skira Rizzoli International Publications, NY. P 90.

⁵⁴⁵ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 1.

So stay within the emptiness
 Unless you rise you never fall
 Accepting that which comes your way
 You are forever all in all⁵⁴⁶

Xu Bing's created text-like imagery represents an abundance of changing phenomena, the richness of creativity and creation, Lao Tzu's *one thousand things* of nature, the Tao is the source, where we may find a true sense of reality. This reading also ties into Zen Buddhist principles, to which Xu Bing does not profess any alliance, but he sees Ch'en, or Zen Buddhism as a way [method, *fang fa*] to live life:

For example, Zen Buddhist by my idea, it is not really Buddhist. It is not really a philosophy. It is one kind of life's idea about life... *fang fa*, about the life.⁵⁴⁷

In the ways described above, *Book from the Sky* conceptually embodies the Taoist precepts 'continuity and change' as the basis of reality in both Taoism and Zen Buddhism, and expressed in the structure of installation art.

IMPROVISATION

To elaborate upon the discussion above, the Taoist tradition of improvising upon the common form of a Chinese character discussed in Chapter Three, is the method used for Xu Bing's invention of 'characters'. *Book from the Sky* falls within this Taoist genre. Using Karl E. Weick's categorisation of graded degrees of improvisation,⁵⁴⁸ the process of graphic improvisation upon the form of Chinese characters in Xu Bing's artwork exemplifies true improvisation, rather than "variations". Like the artists who played with the form of the longevity character, Xu Bing radically alters traditional form to make entirely new 'characters' from his imagination, scholarship and the properties of the woodblock print medium. Here Xu Bing's improvised, changed, version of calligraphy's continuing form has departed so far from the common form it is unreadable as text, yet, because of a familiarity with this tradition, the Eastern and non-Eastern viewer both can interpret Xu Bing's imaginative, speculative, contextualisation of that tradition.

⁵⁴⁶ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 2.

⁵⁴⁷ Bonita Ely's interview with Xu Bing, 3/10/2008, Beijing. Protocol #H6569.

⁵⁴⁸ Karl E. Weick's Introductory Essay, *Improvisation as a Mindset for Organizational Analysis*, for the *Special Issue: Jazz Improvisation and Organizing*. *Organisation Science*, Vol. 9, No. 5 (Sept. – Oct.). Pp 543 – 555

BOOK FROM THE SKY: Indirect Influences of Taoism

INSTALLATION ART

During the early years of China's open door policy to the West, beginning in the mid nineteen-eighties, Xu Bing and his fellow artists were exposed for the first time to information about contemporary art from Europe and America, including the relatively new art form, installation art. Xu Bing's *Big Tire* and *Five Series of Repetitions* from 1987 are believed to be among the first installations to be seen in China.⁵⁴⁹

It is serendipitous yet predictable in some ways that Xu Bing's installation, *Book from the Sky*, resembles aspects of Donald Judd's artwork in the artillery sheds in Marfa (*Fig 145*). Both artists activated the ground plane by placing objects in a formal grid pattern, yet subverted this order with visual confusion, a Taoist paradox. Both artists deployed Taoism's improvisational methodology, Xu Bing to create imagery, Judd to create form and spatiality. Their artworks shift and change notwithstanding the stasis of the material elements. Both artworks define or are defined by the spatiality of temple-like rooms.

Fig 145: Comparison shows similarities between the formal, symmetrical spatiality of a ceremonial hall in Beijing's Forbidden City, and the temple-like spatiality of Judd's *Untitled* at Marfa and Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky*.

However indirectly endowed, arguably this commonality has its origins in the Taoist processes and tropes evident in both artworks. Installation art, as discussed in depth in the chapters Chapter Two: A History of Discourse – East West and Back Again, Chapter Four: Taoist Calligraphy, and Chapter Five: 100 Oblongs: One Thing After Another, continues the architectural provenance of articulating a relationship between the encoded context, or venue, and the spatial placement of artefacts or objects, exemplified by Taoist Chinese garden art and the calligraphic adornment of architecture in Hué. Perhaps Xu Bing's easy adoption of installation art can be directed to his

⁵⁴⁹ Britta Erickson, *Words without Meaning, Meaning without Words: the Art of Xu Bing* (2003). Pub. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and University of Washington Press. P 28.

intrinsic knowledge of Taoist architecture, Tao and Ch'en Buddhist temples and the Taoist *feng shui* of traditional Chinese gardens. Here, in *Book from the Sky*, Xu Bing has created his own spatial venue and context from the fabric of the artwork itself, whereas Judd refined an existing venue to house his fabrications. Xu Bing's imagery is a shifting, ambiguous feast not because of its materiality, like Judd's reflective surfaces exposed to diurnal changes, but because of the uneasy inter-relationship he achieved between deceptive familiarity and unexpected obfuscation. Viewers of both works are led on a journey like a walking meditation to investigate the multifarious aspects of the artworks, their perceptions heightened, their intellect challenged by the conceptual complexity, intrigued by the artists' prolific invention.

In summary, this chapter locates the traditional context of Xu Bing's artwork, *Book from the Sky* in China's ingrained Taoist culture, identifying the embedded processes and concepts derived from Taoist philosophy and art forms. This contributes to the literature surrounding this artwork the fundamental origins of these forms in Taoism, which, to now, have not been analysed. A further contribution is the origins in Taoism of Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky*, as a Western art form that has been indirectly, and directly influenced by Taoism. The interpretation in the literature of the artwork from the perspective of readers of calligraphy has also been clarified from a contemporary perspective as a form comparable to the West's concrete poetry. In the context of the artwork's underlying Taoist thematic content, its sense of metaphysical reality simultaneously embodies both continuity, tradition, and change, improvisation.

In the following chapter the quickening pace of intercultural, global amalgamations of Eastern and Western cultures since Judd completed *Untitled* in the artillery sheds Marfa in 1986, and Xu Bing completed *Book from the Sky* in 1991, will be examined in the art work produced during the candidacy from 2002 to 2008. The focus of the chapter is to demonstrate how Taoism's rhizomic influences flow back and forth from East Asia and the West, seamlessly embedded in experimental, contemporary art practice.

CHAPTER 7: THE STUDIO PRACTICE

In this chapter, a sample of five bodies of artwork produced during the doctoral studies will be presented as exemplars of Taoist influence, direct and indirect, on the conceptual and aesthetic development of the work.⁵⁵⁰ Specifically, this is considered without a history of direct contact with mainland Chinese culture, or any formal affiliation with Taoism as a philosophical or mystical practice. The objective is to discern evidence of Taoist concepts and processes in Western art from the perspective of the artist, that is, viewed from the 'inside'. This method exploits the artist's intimate knowledge of the creative process and knowledge of the origins of ideas in the making, and of how the development of complex meanings in the artwork unfolds through the stages of making (page 88).⁵⁵¹

Factors central to the significance of this chapter will be articulated under the section, "Background", including a clarification of any formal scholarship and research undertaken on Taoism before the candidature that cannot be categorised strictly as 'rhizomic' (see below) and in terms of these case studies.

Under the sub-heading of "Inter-disciplinary Art: an Indirect Taoist Factor", the Taoist approach to the common denominator, discipline, in all the artworks discussed in this chapter, will be analysed. Site specific installation art and time based installation art call upon an inter-disciplinary, multi-sensory approach to art making. In support of the thesis, examples of other artists' inter-disciplinary works will be cited where appropriate to further establish commonalities in relation to Taoism's influence on contemporary, experimental art practices.

The theoretical approach to establishing the parameters and nature of creativity that characterise both Taoism and the experimental contemporary art practice analysed in this chapter is outlined under the sub-heading, "Theoretical Approach".

⁵⁵⁰ The major pieces produced during my PhD candidature have been selected for discussion: *Longevity: Scissors and Sickles* (2002); *Bonsai Landscape* (2003); *Wild Life Documentary* (2004); *Lake Thunder* (2006); *The Murray's Edge* (2007- 2009).

⁵⁵¹ See Chapter Three, *Mixed Methods*, for a description of the studio methodology.

Under the sub-heading, “Global, or Cross Cultural Art”, a mitigating factor of inter-cultural discourse during the development in Vietnam of two of the artworks, a country historically exposed to Taoism, is discussed in relation to the increased porosity of cultural influence and the currency of ‘global art’.

Reference to Taoist concepts in the artworks produced during the candidature will be categorised as either derived from ‘direct’ knowledge of Taoist principles, that is, consciously studied or researched during doctoral studies and before undertaking doctoral studies, or an ‘indirect’ application of Taoist principles that are encoded in Western thought through the rhizomic means outlined in Chapters Two and Three. To reiterate, those influences of Taoism, now identified as cultural norms in the West, with their origins in the rhizome-like infiltration of Taoist concepts and processes since first European contact with China, will be categorised as ‘indirect’ influences.

The grading will be made on the basis of the degree of improvisation employed in the creative process of each piece, as related to the Taoist art form, calligraphy, using Karl E. Weick’s categories (page 112).⁵⁵² The analysis of each artwork will be preceded by a verbal description to accompany visual documentation. A detailed elucidation of the conceptual content of the artwork including the thematic subtext of ‘Continuity and Change’, will follow as background to arguing how Western art practice has been influenced by Taoist thought and Taoism’s cultural practices. The analysis of the source and nature of Taoist influences on each piece, categorised as “Direct Taoist Inflections”, and “Indirect Taoist Inflections” will then be identified.

BACKGROUND

DIRECT STUDY OF TAOISM

Research in Hué, Vietnam, prior to my candidature in 2000, of the calligraphic practice of improvising upon the common longevity character alerted me to Taoism as the source of an immense repository of graphic improvisation, and initiated this current enquiry of the Taoist art of calligraphy as an influential factor in the development of Western art. This research is described in Chapter Four. Another research project undertaken prior to my candidature, in 1993, that included inadvertent exposure to Taoist concepts related to the development of Ch’en Buddhism, was an investigation of the spatiality of Japanese Zen gardens and the conceptual significance of *ma*, or *in*

⁵⁵² Karl E. Weick, *Improvisation as a Mindset for Organizational Analysis*, for the *Special Issue: Jazz Improvisation and Organizing*. *Organisation Science*, Vol. 9, No. 5 (Sept. – Oct.). P 545

between-ness for the articulation of space as an element of expression in installation art (page 35). In my research project for the Master of Arts in Visual Arts entitled, *Relationships between Our Contemporary Psyche and Culturally Impacted Landscape*, various belief systems were cited, including Taoism.⁵⁵³ A vernacular familiarity with Taoist concepts began during the 1960s, 'going with the flow', and consulting the *I Ching* as a curious oracle and profound philosophical text, followed a lecture about chance and the use of the *I Ching* to make aesthetic decisions by Alun Leach-Jones, a painting lecturer at the College of Fine Arts in Prahran, Melbourne (1968).

Apart from the above, and the accumulating knowledge of Taoism accompanying this present investigation, my experience of Taoism has been mostly through the indirect means applied to what is arguably the West's increasingly porous culture, described below, and elaborated upon in the Introduction, and Chapter Two.

INTER-DISCIPLINARY, MULTI-SENSORY ART: AN INDIRECT TAOIST FACTOR

All artworks produced during the candidacy analysed in this chapter are interdisciplinary and multi-sensory, and lie within sub-sets of the discipline of sculpture, namely, site specific installation art, and time based installation art. These modes of practice have been examined in previous chapters in relation to Taoism's rhizome-like influence on Western experimental art practice.⁵⁵⁴ To reiterate, the form of this interdisciplinary approach to aesthetics and conceptualisation is arguably underpinned by cosmological verities central to the Taoist text, *Tao Te Ching*. In essence, time based installation art deploys sound, duration and motion in time as principal elements of expression to emphasise the ephemeral nature of phenomena, the transitional, transformational, all central Taoist precepts. Similarly, site specific installation reinforces the Taoist verity that all things are inter-relational, that the aesthetics and encoding of the spatiality of site, a trope for the void or the immaterial, is as significant as the materiality of object-ness. Further, Taoism's insistence upon the body and all its senses as a vehicle for enhanced awareness is present in the viewer's subjective responses and corporeal, kine-aesthetic engagement during exploratory perambulations of the artwork.

⁵⁵³ Conferred, 1991, Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney.

⁵⁵⁴ Donald Judd's *Untitled*, installed aluminium boxes in two remodeled artillery sheds in Marfa, Texas; Xu Bing's calligraphic installation, *Book from the Sky*; Ian Hamilton-Finlay's *Little Sparta*; Isamu Naguchi's *Garden of the Future*.

The creative process for the viewer of an open-ended approach to art interpretation is strengthened by this meditative, multi-faceted method of discerning meaning described in Ted Kafala's analysis of relationships to Deleuze's pluralist theory of aesthetics from his treatise on representation, *Repetition and Difference*.⁵⁵⁵ Kafala establishes its provenance in the writings of Leibniz and Whitehead, and given the influence of Taoist cosmology on Leibniz, correlations to Deleuze's Post Modernist approach to non-didactic interpretation with Taoism's embracing of plurality as an outcome of the omnipotence of the transitional are note worthy:

Like the ideas of Leibniz and Whitehead, this aesthetics is premised on a perspectivism that accepts the possible existence of numerous profiles, styles, interpretations, and scenographies. Perspectivism encourages the diversity of ontological realities - constructed, plastic, and self-referential universes of the mind's inner space. As an important precept of the postmodern moment, perspectivism provides a viable explanation for a diversity of subjectivity and point of view in contemporary art.⁵⁵⁶

The meanings, or 'point of view', represented in inter-disciplinary installation art through the structural agencies of paradox - continuity and change, permanence and temporality – arguably have purchase in Western thought in part as a result of the longevity of Taoism's infiltration of Western philosophy, through the agency of Leibniz, his non-Euclidean theories, in his sixteenth century "monads of relation" and "pluralist ontology".

THEORETICAL APPROACH

To amplify the previous section, multiple references and paradoxical dualities problematise the artworks discussed in this chapter with the imperative of creating a conceptual complexity and the openness to change espoused by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*.⁵⁵⁷ The thematic perimeters of each piece synthesise fluidly ideas and objects, quotation and imagery, to avoid a fixed, over-determined, singular meaning. Nuances, different sensations, fresh aesthetic delights (*is-nesses*) and alternative interpretations may present themselves to the viewer on each viewing. Deleuze puts it:

... pluralism is a more enticing and dangerous thought: fragmentation implies overturning. The discovery in any domain of a plurality of coexisting oppositions is inseparable from a more profound discovery, that of difference, which

⁵⁵⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Repetition and Difference*. 1968, Columbia University Press, New York. Chapters 4 and 5.

⁵⁵⁶ Ted Kafala, *Deleuze's Aesthetics: Curvature and Perspectivism*. Enculturation, Vol. 4, No. 2, Fall 2002. http://enculturation.gmu.edu/4_2/kafala.html Cited June 2008

⁵⁵⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Repetition and Difference*. 1968, Columbia University Press, New York. Chapters 4 and 5.

denounces the negative and opposition itself as no more than appearances in relation to the problematic field of a positive multiplicity.⁵⁵⁸

This “problematic field” of synthesised yet differentiated possibilities is reflected in the following observation of creative complexity from Lao Tzu’s *Tao Te Ching*:

When the opposing forces unite within
 there comes a power abundant in its giving
 and unerring in its effect
 Flowing through everything
 It returns one to the First Breath
 Guiding everything
 It returns one to no limits
 Embracing everything
 It returns one to the uncarved block⁵⁵⁹

The “uncarved block” presents unlimited possibilities, whereas the singularity of the ‘carved block’, that is, a figure permanently fixed in form and meaning, is an anathema to creativity in Taoism’s paradigm, an alignment that points to its implicit, historic influences on contemporary thought and creativity.

GLOBAL, OR CROSS-CULTURAL ART

Qualities of Taoist influences on twenty-first century experimental visual arts identified in my artworks that are intentionally cross-cultural, and coined ‘global’, will be identified. The artworks produced in Vietnam and the United States of America illustrate how site specificity may enhance cultural cross-pollination. The previous chapter examined in detail one of the outcomes of cultural hybridity - the West’s easy reading in the late twentieth century of a Taoist modality as a familiar, yet unidentified trope in the work, *Book from the Sky*, by Chinese artist, Xu Bing. Similarly, Taoist qualities are invisible in a Western artist’s twenty-first century’s artworks as we shall see in the following examples.

To summarise, this proposal argues that historically Taoism has influenced Western thinking and the development of Western art practice as a pervasive assimilation rather than as a powerful, direct force for change. This chapter identifies traces of the influence of Taoism in my site-specific installation art and time based installation art, as an Australian artist. Using the following series of artworks as exemplars, extrinsic and intrinsic references to Taoism as an influence on a particular Western contemporary, experimental artist’s practice will be identified and analysed from my perspective as the artist.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid. P 204.

⁵⁵⁹ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*. Verse 28.

THE ARTWORKS

LONGEVITY: SCISSORS AND SICKLES

This public sculpture, entitled *Longevity: Scissors and Sickles*, was produced in Hué, Vietnam in 2002 (*Fig 146*).⁵⁶⁰ It is a filigreed three dimensional structure, 2.8 metres high and 1.26 metres in diameter, composed of casts of scissors, sickles and machetes. A local foundry cast the tools in a 'bronze' composed of scrap metal, including shrapnel gleaned from the fields and bombed sites after the Vietnam War. The tools are braised together to form a three dimensional interpretation of a gourd-shaped longevity character. The longevity character was selected from a screen of one hundred embroidered characters from the Buddhist pagoda, Chua Van Phuoc (*Fig 67*).

Fig 146: Bonita Ely, *Longevity: Scissors and Sickles* (2002). Sand cast bronze; 2.8 metres high, 1.26 metres, diameter. Public sculpture commission, 3rd International Sculpture Symposium, Hué, Vietnam.

The idea of the artwork is to celebrate Vietnamese women's hard manual work and the resilience of the feminine. The scissors used to construct it are different shapes and sizes - embroidery snips, dress maker's shears, hair cutting scissors, large kitchen

⁵⁶⁰ Bonita Ely, *Longevity: Scissors and Sickles*, 2002. Sand caste bronze; 1.26m. diametre x 2.8m H. Public sculpture commission, *Third International Sculpture Symposium: Hué, Vietnam*. Location, Thuy Tien Lake, Thien An, Hué.

shears, small nail scissors, and general purpose paper scissors - all associated with women's work, including midwifery. The sickles, machetes and knives are tools that are also used by women for agricultural labour (*Fig 148*).

All the tools have historical significance as traditional, handcrafted objects, fashioned by local blacksmiths to be sold in Hué's open markets (*Fig 147*). The second time I visited Hué, in 2000, I noticed factory-made scissors were beginning to appear, so, predictably, the artwork is becoming a record of the everyday tools that historically were crafted by blacksmiths in Hué.

Fig 147: Blacksmith at work in Hué, 2002.

Photo: B.Ely 2002.

Fig 148: Examples of Hué's hand made scissors and sickles.

Photo: B. Ely, 2002.

Longevity: Scissors and Sickles is located in a garden outside Hué, at Hué Huy Tien Lake, Thien An. Now a recreation area with a large commercial tourist development, the lake with its surrounding natural environment endures in the community's memory as a

historically significant place where, during the Vietnam War, people collected pinecones for their cooking fires when the usual sources were depleted.

Longevity: Scissors and Sickles is shaped like a gourd symbolising 'longevity'. Different forms of the longevity character are commonplace in Hué as familiar, resonant, Taoist symbols.⁵⁶¹ The longevity character shaped like a gourd has additional significance as a sign for 'good health', 'good fortune' in *feng shui*, and is associated with 'release', as "it is the emblem of Li Tie Guai, one of eight immortals of Taoist mythology. Li Tie Guai was a powerful magician who possessed not only the secret to immortality but the ability to travel outside his body. Li carried the elixir of immortality in a gourd, which is an allegory for the body as the container of the soul".⁵⁶²

Fig 149: Example of a gourd-like vessel and furniture signifying longevity at the mausoleum of Emperor Khai Dinh. Bas relief mosaic using broken crockery. Photo. B.Ely 2000.

⁵⁶¹ See Chapter Three.

⁵⁶² <http://altreligion.about.com/library/glossary/symbols/bldefsgourd.htm> Cited, Oct., 2008.

For Westerners, sickles as miniature Grim Reaper scythes have been associated with finality, the Big Snip, death.

Conversely in Communist Vietnam the sickle is also a symbol associated with the Communist Party. Cultural exchange between Vietnam and Russia was commonplace before 1996. After 1996, *doi moi*, an opening up to the West, became foreign policy along with a distancing from the Soviet Union.⁵⁶³ The multiple meanings associated with the sickle are a feature of cross-cultural artwork where familiar tropes from the viewer's culture arguably factor into interpretations as much as the artist's intentions, as discussed in Chapter Six regarding the reception of artworks by Xu Bing in the West.

The sickles at the top of the sculpture look like horns, or weapons, in contrast with the contained, maternal shape of the gourd. The 'horns' bring to mind Vietnam's historic struggles for independence. Responding as an Australian to Vietnamese culture and the graciousness of the people, it is impossible to forget Australia's part in the 'American War', the Vietnamese people's history, their prolonged, tenacious defense of their country.⁵⁶⁴ It is noteworthy that the Taoist accepts that war is at times unavoidable, but peace is desired above all, which explains the Vietnamese people's capacity to proceed in peace despite justifiable grievances, without the rancour that so often poisons other cultures. Lao Tzu wrote in the *Tao Te Ching*:

One who knows the Tao
 never turns from life's calling
 When at home he honours the side of rest
 When at war he honours the side of action
 Peace and tranquillity are what he holds most dear
 so he does not obtain weapons
 But when their use is unavoidable
 he employs them with fortitude and zeal⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶³ <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Asia-and-Oceania/Vietnam-HISTORY.html> Cited, Oct. 2008.

⁵⁶⁴ Before the French and America and its allies, the Chinese had invaded and occupied Vietnam for the most part of a thousand years. "111 BC: The Nam Viet kingdom (spreading from the Red River delta to north of Canton) is annexed by the Han and becomes the Chinese district of Giao-chi. The next thousand years is marked by progress in civilization, but also in the national sentiment. Numerous uprisings most notably the Trung sisters (40-43) and Ly Bon (542-545) rebellions, are crushed. During the entire Vietnam history, China remains both a model and a threat."

<http://www.terrageria.com/vietnam/info/timeline.html> Cited August, 2008.

⁵⁶⁵ Lao-Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*. Verse 31.

The 'horns' on the sculpture also signify the male principle in duality with the female form of the gourd. This harmonic duality is an intrinsic quality of the original Taoist longevity character, carried over to the sculpture.

In *Longevity: Scissors and Sickles* the gourd is fashioned from objects that paradoxically signify both cutting, and creating. This construct embodies continuity (enduring creativity) and change (the cut, the finish) – the tools for cutting, scissors and sickles, infer the end, mortality, yet cutting tools make up the symbol of longevity, signifying long life.

DIRECT TAOIST INFLECTIONS

My research in 2000, outlined in depth in Chapter Four, investigated graphic improvisation upon the longevity character, along with its interpolation in three dimensional forms, as a reflection of the Taoist philosophy of creativity. The form of the sculpture, *Longevity: Scissors and Sickles*, is derived from one such longevity character, selected for its feminine, vessel-like imagery (*Fig 150*).



Fig 150: A gourd shape (row 1, #5) from the embroidered screen of longevity characters, Chua Van Phuoc, compared to the common longevity character (left) from which it is derived.

Returning to Karl E. Weick's categorisation of graded degrees of improvisation⁵⁶⁶ (page 112), an examination of improvisation in the artworks discussed in this chapter will

⁵⁶⁶ Karl E. Weick, *Improvisation as a Mindset for Organizational Analysis*, for the *Special Issue: Jazz Improvisation and Organizing*. *Organisation Science*, Vol. 9, No. 5 (Sept. – Oct.). P 545

underscore the direct influence of Taoism upon my artworks. The degree of improvisation deployed in *Longevity: Scissors and Sickles* falls within Weik's second category, embellishment:

Embellishment requires a greater use of the imagination with departures from predictable or prescriptive themes, compositions or narratives.⁵⁶⁷

The common Longevity character is composed of seven pictograms. This version of the character quotes five of the pictograms from the common longevity character.⁵⁶⁸

From the top, pictogram #1 is inverted, opening up like a vessel's brim:

Pictogram #2 is extended down and curved, left and right, to describe the shape of a gourd.

Pictogram #3 is combined with pictogram #5.

Pictogram #7, the square shape is made into a circle.

Pictograms #4, 5, 6, and 7 are removed from my representation of this character, emptying the form. The conceptual significance of this emptying is discussed below.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid. P 545.

⁵⁶⁸ See the section, *The Construction of the Longevity Character* in Chapter Three, page 111.

My research of Taoist longevity characters in 2000 directly informed my manipulations of this motif for the artwork, *Longevity: Scissors and Sickles*.

INDIRECT TAOIST INFLECTIONS

The sculpture as vessel arguably emphasises spatiality as a Taoist vehicle for meaning, signifying the feminine principle. There are several sources in Taoist practices and iconography for the conceptual origins of this trope, principally in *feng shui* and the *yin yang* symbol. The following quote from the *Tao Te Ching* correlates cosmic emptiness (*wu*) with space, relates space to the vessel, the vessel (womb) with life (birth), implicating the duality of the Taoist *yin* and *yang* symbol,⁵⁶⁹ where form is the male principle and spatiality signifies the feminine:

Wu is nothingness, emptiness, non existence

Thirty spokes of a wheel all join at a common hub
yet only the hole at the centre
allows the wheel to spin

Clay is molded to form a cup
yet only the space within
allows the cup to hold water ...

Thus, when a thing has existence alone
it is a mere dead weight
Only when it has *wu*, does it have life⁵⁷⁰

An extreme application of spatiality as a metaphor for the female principle can be found in the artwork, *House* (1993), by Rachel Whiteread (*Fig 151*).⁵⁷¹ Here the male principle, the house as object, is removed to reveal a cast of the subjective space in which families' intimate memories, nurture, domestic dramas and abject privacies are concentrated – emotional time condensed in base matter - a monumental home, naked for all to see, as James Lingwood expresses it:

It set a familiar past in the space-time of today; it made present something which was absent; it was the space of a house no longer there. Secondly, however, it worked spatially: it turned the space inside out. The private was open to public view....the intimate was made monumental and yet retained its intimacy.⁵⁷²

⁵⁶⁹ See Chapter One.

⁵⁷⁰ From the *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 11. NB. *Wu* - nothingness.

⁵⁷¹ Rachel Whiteread (1963 -), best known for her casts of the spaces of objects, rooms and most famously, a whole house for which she won the Turner Prize in 1993.

⁵⁷² James Lingwood (editor), Rachel Whiteread's *House*, Phaidon Press, 1995. P 36.
http://www.damonart.com/myth_uncanny.html

Fig 151: Rachel Whiteread, *House*, (1993), concrete. The cast house was the last terrace left after demolition for urban renewal in East London. After much controversy the council demolished the sculpture.

Although other factors, such as metaphoric associations with the casting process may be read into the interpretation of Whiteread's oeuvre, such as absence, death, it could be argued that a reading of spatiality as the feminine principle, extending to associations with the female, is expressed and is powerfully present in *House*, indirectly linking it to Taoist symbology. The same sentiment of emphasising the female principle symbolised by a familiar Taoist trope is present in *Longevity: Scissors and Sickles*.

Fig 152: An example of Chinese lattice design showing interlocking linear elements to build tensile strength, a structural system symbolic of how small things come together to make a whole.

Longevity: Scissors and Sickles depends for its engineered strength on the structural properties of the Chinese lattice (*Fig 152*), a system that demonstrates the Taoist belief that the whole is dependant on the inter-relatedness of all things:

The pieces of a chariot are useless
 Unless they work in accordance with the whole
 A man's life brings nothing
 Unless he lives in accordance with the whole universe⁵⁷³

Longevity: Scissors and Sickles quotes the aesthetics of Arte Nouveau and Arte Deco which were significantly influenced by the West's exposure to Chinese culture in the Modernist Era.⁵⁷⁴

Quotations of the lattice, Chinoiserie and English pleasure gardens also underpin Fiona Hall's pagoda entitled *Folly for Mrs. Macquarie* (2001) in Sydney's harbourside Botanical Gardens.⁵⁷⁵ Here the imagery that makes up the lattice is barbed wire and endemic plants of the Sydney Basin (*Fig 153*). Her ironic combination of the 'masculine' imagery associated with colonial intrusion with the pagoda's feminine form relate closely to the Taoist tropes from Europe's colonial era discussed above – binary polarities that exploit the significance of place and spatiality for their reading and aesthetic.

Fig 153: Fiona Hall, Folly for Mrs. Macquarie, (2001)metal, Sandstone. Sydney Botanical Gardens, 2001. Photo. B. Ely, 2008.

⁵⁷³ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 39.

⁵⁷⁴ See Chapter Two, page 69.

⁵⁷⁵ Fiona Hall, born 1953, Sydney. *Folly for Mrs. Macquarie* was commissioned by the City of Sydney for the Sydney Sculpture Walk, on the occasion of the Sydney Olympic Games.

Both *Longevity: Scissors and Sickles*, and *A Folly for Lady Macquarie* call upon the context of place, the enduring landscape, for a sense of continuity in which the changes wrought by historical events and humanity's endeavors are represented.

LAKE THUNDER

The public sculpture, *Lake Thunder*,⁵⁷⁶ is a towering metal structure in the form of a zig-zagging thunder bolt (*Fig 154*). It is painted electric blue using photovoltaic paint. During the day the paint stores solar energy so it glows in the dark at night. It is sited beside Thuy Tien Lake, outside Hué, Vietnam. Suggested by the following associations, the image has multiple meanings. Most obviously it is the international, industrial safety sign warning of the danger of electric shock. In an armoury, it is a warning of the danger posed by static electricity. The zig-zag also colloquially signifies thunder and lightning, energy and life. The zig-zag form quotes the sign used to indicate loud sound, violence or pain in the graphic language of comics. Here the thunderbolt is a complex sign rising up out of the earth, signifying the threat of global, environmental degradation, and its opposite, the abiding, mysterious power of nature. It sits ambiguously as a celebration of natural forces and an environmental warning signal.

Fig 154: Bonita Ely, *Lake Thunder* (2006). Tube steel, photovoltaic surface; 6 metres high. Thuy Tien Lake, Thien An, Hué, Vietnam. Photo: B. Ely, 2006.

⁵⁷⁶*Lake Thunder* (2006). Tube steel, photovoltaic surface; 6 metres high. Public sculpture commission, Fourth International Sculpture Symposium, Hué, Vietnam. Located at Thuy Tien Lake, Thien An, Hué, Vietnam.

This reading is amplified by the luminous electric blue surface glowing in the dark at night, like a scepter (*Fig 155*).

Fig 155: Bonita Ely, *Lake Thunder* (2006) showing the effect of photovoltaic paint at night.
Photo: Tien Le Thua, 2002.

DIRECT TAOIST INFLECTIONS

Like *Longevity: Scissors and Sickles*, the sculpture, *Lake Thunder*, is an interpolation of existing imagery but here it is derived from a sumi brush and ink drawing executed in 1987 (*Fig 156*).

Fig 156: Bonita Ely, *Thunderbolt*, (1987). Sumi brush and ink painting on water colour paper.

This sculptural interpretation of two dimensional imagery corresponds with the Taoist practice of interpreting calligraphic characters in three dimensions. Here the interpretation is direct rather than embellished, so it corresponds with Weick's first category of improvisation, interpretation:

The artist interprets a known subject, often using plans, drawings, sketches and maquettes to prepare for the execution of a pre-planned artwork.⁵⁷⁷

The painted image was first converted to three dimensions in 1991 for an exhibition composed of three installations entitled, *We Live to be Surprised*.⁵⁷⁸ The first installation, a group of nine repeated forms entitled, *Thunderbolts*, stood 2.2 metres high, the sculptures' components slotted together without need for metal fittings like the joinery used in traditional Chinese architecture (*Fig 157, Fig 158*).

Fig 157: Bonita Ely, Thunderbolts (1990), the first of a trilogy of installations for We Live to be Surprised. Nine sculptures, stained plywood, 2.2 metres high.

⁵⁷⁷ Karl E. Weick, *Improvisation as a Mindset for Organizational Analysis*, for the *Special Issue: Jazz Improvisation and Organizing*. *Organisation Science*, Vol. 9, No. 5 (Sept. – Oct.). Pp 543 – 555.

⁵⁷⁸ Bonita Ely, *We Live To Be Surprised* (1991). Sculptural installation, Performance Space, Sydney. Examination presentation for the degree, Master of Art (Visual Arts), Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney. Conferred in 1991.

Fig 158: Bonita Ely, *Thunderbolts* viewed from the yellow lit corridor.

The exhibition's composition as a whole intentionally reflected the Taoist *yin yang* diagram.⁵⁷⁹ In the West this symbol is colloquially interpreted as a balance of opposites, which is essentially an overlay onto the symbol of the West's tendency to see wholeness as balanced yet conflicted binaries. The symbol's original Taoist meaning is significantly different. Rather than a symbol of static polarities, the Taoist *yin yang* symbol describes two complementary, interdependent phases that alternate in space and time. They evoke the *interplay* in a state of flux, of the binaries that make up the universe, each containing something of the other, never totally opposed, in harmony, not conflicted.

The *yin* and *yang* arise from the Chaos of the creation time. This chaos is inherently ambivalent and continues to inhabit all dualities, which may be distinguished in terms of 'nature', 'culture'. These opposites connect, the one subverting the essence of the other so that in Taoist cosmology order may be found in the chaos of nature, which brings to mind the example of fractals, and nature may disrupt the artificial conventions imposed

⁵⁷⁹ See Chapter One: Introduction.

by culture. In his Introduction to *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism: the Theme of Chaos (Hun Tun)*,⁵⁸⁰ Girardot describes the nature of Taoism in relation to chaos as:

The acceptance of 'civil' order as the definitive and true meaning of all order, as well as the basis for the very structures of reality, is to efface the intrinsic mythological connection between the wild and polite orders of chaos and cosmos, nature and culture. The gulf spontaneously created by the primal grin of formless matter is the empty source of the light and sound of created nature and human culture.

The Tao is therefore seen as a regenerative system where the sage's goal is to cultivate flexibility to circumstance, transgressively returning to the chaos condition, the Great Unity, rather than live unthinkingly in conformity to social convention. It is seen as a cyclic regeneration, a way of living creatively in the world, by knowing the secret of creation.

Thus chaos, rather than order, provides a way of viewing the world. The Tao is the primal Mother of all things. The Tao brought into existence a chaotic wholeness before the creation of the world, which occurred when Heaven and Earth separated. "The two mingle, penetrate, come together, harmonise and all things are born thereof".⁵⁸¹ The *yin* and the *yang* together, where opposites merge, embodies the amorphous primal chaos where they merge and return to the Tao.

In 1990, Performance Space had two almost identically proportioned spaces that were divided by a corridor.⁵⁸² This architectural layout was used like a squared off version of the *yin yang* symbol for *We Live To Be Surprised*.

Placed in the first room, the fiery red, dynamic *Thunderbolts* reared up out of the 'ground', signifying both the forces of Nature and the Earth's distress signals. Rather than free flowing power of electric energy from the firmament, the lightning bolts had an ominous relation to the earth. The viewer experienced a changed corporeal state as they moved from this *yang* room through the corridor illuminated with dense, yellow light. The space was a void, a place of metamorphosis between fire and water, nature and culture, present and future. In the opposite room, hybrid creatures hid in towers made from watery, white washed timber. The decrepit towers, eroded by natural forces, represented past cultural endeavours, past architectures of an unknown function, now

⁵⁸⁰ N. J. Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism: the Theme of Chaos (Hun Tun)* (1983), University of California Press.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid. Lao Tan explaining the cosmic scenario to Confucius.

⁵⁸² Performance Space in 1990 was upstairs in the Cleveland Street, Redfern address.

inhabited by *Snabbits*: improbable creatures genetically engineered from the rabbit and snail – nature perverted (*Fig 159*).

Fig 159: Bonita Ely, *Snabbits* (1990) from *We Live to be Surprised*, installation, Performance Space. Plaster, wood, white wash.

INDIRECT TAOIST INFLECTIONS

The initial translation of the thunderbolt image made with a sumi brush into a three dimensional figure in 1990 unknowingly followed the Taoist practice of converting two dimensional calligraphic forms into three dimensions. The gestural sumi painting, made spontaneously during a session of 'stream of consciousness' idea building in 1987, was converted using this Taoist method. Similarly, the spontaneity of the sumi brushwork, with its origins in Taoist calligraphy and brush and ink painting, endow the proportions of the lightning bolt image with dynamic energy, a conceptually sound, aesthetic basis for sculptural interpretation.

The title, *Lake Thunder* brings the sculpture's site into focus as an essential aspect of the work in accordance with the precepts of *feng shui* described previously in relation to the Taoist influence on landscaping and garden design, that arguably has so profoundly influenced earth art and installation art. The conjunction of lake and thunder refers to traditional Taoist philosophical tropes:

THUNDER stands for our true essence, LAKE stands for our true sense, WATER stands for our real knowledge, and FIRE stands for our conscious knowledge. These four are the true 'four forms' inherent in us ...⁵⁸³

During the making of the piece, spectacular thunderstorms rent the sky above the lake. *The Inner Teachings of Taoism*⁵⁸⁴ described the Taoist symbolism in the quote above, of the lake and thunder, water and fire. A site was chosen for the artwork in a grove of delicate pines beside the lake. The title, *Lake Thunder*, juxtaposes natural features observed at the site, and those dualities that in Taoist philosophy make up humanity's ideal, inherent nature.

The sculpture, *Lake Thunder*, intuitively embodies within a single integrated form, a complex intertwining of dualities that correlate with the Taoist symbol, *yin* and *yang* – the aggressive upward thrust of energy (male) is sited amongst gentle nature (female); a 'hot' form is painted icy blue; it simultaneously images creation and destruction, fire and water (*Fig 160*).

Fig 160: Bonita Ely, Lake Thunder, viewed from below.

The theme, continuity and change, is expressed in a dynamic image signifying the transitional, seasonal phenomenon of lightning storms, and fluid energy forces, within a place signifying the enduring qualities of the endemic, natural environment. The location is of historical and emotional significance about times of upheaval and deprivation for the local people.

⁵⁸³ Chang Po-Tuan, *The Inner Teachings of Taoism*, commentary by Liu I-Ming, translated by Thomas Cleary, Shambala Books, 1986. P 18, 19.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.* P 18, 19.

BONSAI LANDSCAPE

Hundreds of small, crisp, white cardboard cut outs, folded and glued like free standing, 'point of a sale' advertisements make up the sculptural component of this installation.⁵⁸⁵ The repeated objects are precisely placed in rows so they turn in increments of 45 degrees to the left, then to the right, robot-like, in controlled conformity. From one particular viewpoint the viewer can see only a dense forest; from the opposite vantage point the folded sculptures form an intricate, non-figurative, tonal panorama, emptied of imagery - a blank (*Fig 161, Fig 162, Fig 163*).

Fig 161: Bonita Ely, *Bonsai Landscape*, view showing the images. Photo B. Ely, 2004.

⁵⁸⁵ Bonita Ely, *Bonsai Landscape* (2003 – 2004), installation for the survey exhibition of Australian site specific installation art, *Outside Inside: Fragments in Place*, Museum of Art, Brigham Young University, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA. Curated by Dr Campbell Grey, Director of the Museum of Art. The invitation to exhibit in the survey exhibition requested a site specific artwork in response to research of Salt Lake City, its contextual environs, including its Mormon context. During preparatory fieldwork iconic sites throughout the state of Utah were explored, along with observations of the Mormon religion, society and culture. The artwork, *Bonsai Landscape*, was adapted in 2005 for the National Sculpture Prize exhibition, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Fig 162: Bonita Ely, *Bonsai Landscape*, view showing the images all facing away from the viewer like the backs of point of sale advertisements to reveal the landscape as a facade. Photo B. Ely, 2004.

Fig 163: The forms transform and shift like a slowly unfolding animation as the viewer perambulates around the ensemble. Photo B. Ely, 2004.

The most numerous image is of a bonsai tree derived from a shaped grove of trees on the hillside opposite the exhibition venue, the Museum of Art, that resembled a brush and ink painting of a bonsai tree (*Fig 164, Fig 165*).⁵⁸⁶

Fig 164: View from the Museum of Art, Brigham Young University, Salt Lake City. The incidental observation of the bonsai-like grove of trees (see below) on the hill outside the venue formed the basis for the installation of sculpture and video, *Bonsai Landscape*, for an exhibition in 2003 of Australian site specific art at the Museum of Art, Brigham Young University, Salt Lake City. Photo: B. Ely, 2003.

Fig 165: Bonsai tree imagery isolated from the photograph in *Fig. 164*.

This image was paired with a photograph of a rock and fire hydrant taken in a Salt Lake City suburban shopping mall.⁵⁸⁷ A beautiful pink quartz rock had clearly been transported to the site as a decorative element for the car park's 'landscaping' and

⁵⁸⁶ Correlations between Taoist calligraphy and brush painting will be examined in the section, *The Art of the Brush*, on the artwork, *Wild Life Documentary*, page 258.

placed beside a bright yellow fire hydrant with two blue rectangles like masked eyes painted above its nozzle, on a small manicured shape of green lawn beside the vast, stark, asphalt surface (*Fig 166*).

Fig 166: Car park landscaping, Provo, Salt Lake City.

Photo: B. Ely, 2003.

Scattered randomly throughout the installation are the anthropomorphised protagonists described above: a brain-like, inscrutable rock 'in dialogue' with a wicked-looking, masked fire hydrant on a neatly mowed nature strip. They are secured to a stem from the bonsai image to make a morphological sign (*Fig 167*).

Fig 167: The two protagonists randomly dispersed.

Photo: B. Ely, 2004.

These cardboard sculptures together inscribe a huge bonsai shape on the gallery floor (*Fig 168*).

Fig 168: Plan showing placement of the installation in the gallery space.

Two video monitors are located on the staircase above the installation (*Fig 169, Fig 171*).

Fig 169: Monitors framing repetitions of the 'bonsai' image as it appears on the hill outside the gallery in real time and a time-lapse video of a particular day. Photo: B. Ely, 2002.

A time-lapse video shows the transformations of this landmark outside the museum on a particular day, from the dark before dawn, to the dark of night. The footage was shot for fifteen seconds at thirty minute intervals so the viewer sees the shifting sunlight and shadow metamorphise colour and tone, sees the weather changing with cloud shadow, a tree rustling in the rising wind, birds flying into shot.

Alongside the repetitions of time-lapse is a closed circuit television (CCTV) that shows the hillside in the viewer's real time, now, outside the museum, as they watch. This component in the installation quotes Yoko Ono's *Sky TV* (Fig 170). A Fluxus artist, Yoko Ono made perhaps the first video artwork of a similar theme, certainly her first and only video piece, in 1966. Foreshadowing the use of closed circuit television for surveillance, Yoko Ono placed a camera on the roof of the venue, trained onto the sky to transmit live footage of the ever changing sky to a monitor in the gallery, electronically penetrating architecture from outside to inside. The artwork focuses not on people, but on the infinity of space and the transience of natural phenomena, referring to the Zen and Taoist precept of contextualising the human ego with a greater matrix. Yoko Ono says of the piece:

The sky shines equally to us so it doesn't care who is rich. Everyone can share the sky all the time. When we got poor and have a hard time, the sky shines eternally.⁵⁸⁸

Fig 170: Yoko Ono, Sky TV (1966). A Fluxus artist, Yoko Ono's artwork often draws the viewer's attention in simple ways to their place within nature and its riches.

⁵⁸⁸ <http://www.orbit.zkm.de/?q=node/24> Cited, Feb. 2009.

A direct, real time broadcast of pilots' radio communications with Salt Lake City airport's control tower is the soundtrack of the video works in *Bonsai Landscape*.

The form of *Bonsai Landscape* evolved with exposure to the Salt Lake City environs and culture. The frequent use of biblical names to identify landscape features in Utah was noted during field trips to locations such as the Zion National Park, with its Virgin River, Angels Landing, Great White Throne, Cathedral Mountain, names superimposed over the landscape by early settlers to mythologise their sublime, unfamiliar environs. Mukuntuweap was the indigenous people's name for the canyon.⁵⁸⁹ The title of the installation, *Bonsai Landscape*, ironically refers to the settlers' aggrandising culturalisation of the natural environment. The ironic reference to bonsai art, a 'virtual' tree, within the context of the American West's grand narrative of taming the wilderness against great odds uses the same imaginative method to culturalise a natural landscape feature used by the early European settlers, and before them, the Indigenous American inhabitants.

Fig 171: The installation, Bonsai Landscape, showing the video works on two monitors on the staircase landing, with radio transmitted sound of pilot's flying overhead, overlooking the bonsai shaped sculptural component.

⁵⁸⁹ "The biblical name of Zion National Park was given by the Mormons, who convinced President Wilson in 1918 to change the existing name of Mukuntuweap National Monument to Zion National Monument." <http://www.zionnational-park.com/zion-national-park-landmarks.htm>

The installation alludes to the high level of social conformity demanded by ideologically based strictures, which are by no means exclusive to the Mormon faith.⁵⁹⁰ The grid structure also relegates life forms to the efficient systems of commerce. Both these meanings are an anathema to Taoist philosophy, which encourages spontaneity and individualism. Quoting advertisements, the installation's objects were commercially manufactured, using the same methods to make point of sale advertisements - free standing objects made from printed flat surfaces and folded cardboard. This alludes to the natural environment as a consumer item and reflects the aesthetic of mechanical repetition in commerce's visual environment.

Representing a regulated, cultivated, facade of nature, the installation philosophically invites meditation upon humanity's sense of separation from wild-ness, its perceived superiority over other species, that for the Taoist is delusional thinking. The ensuing compulsion to control and tame nature, humorously signalled by the rock and fire hydrant component, is accentuated by perambulation like a Colossus over the tiny landscape and the discovery that the reverse of the image reveals a facade, a blank, and alienation.

The fascinating quality of an otherwise banal image of a fire hydrant and a rock is its role as a catalyst for our compulsion to anthropomorphise vernacular objects – the viewer, like the artist, imagines that the rock resembles a brain, the fire hydrant a mechanised gangster-like figure. They seem to be in dialogue. Humanity's inventions of tools and accoutrements that extend the body to increase our corporeal capacities, is further extended by our imaginative projection of psychological narratives upon inanimate objects. This creative imagining is integral to Taoist brush and ink painting.⁵⁹¹

Using repeated, highly processed imagery, this artwork expresses controlled yet fantasised constructions of concepts of Nature. The ironic image of a fictional, reproduced and mechanically repeated bonsai tree derived from Utah's 'as big as Texas' landscape alongside the fanciful fire hydrant and rock - a Zen, car park-style, Utah dry garden - suggests that, like Leonardo da Vinci's stains on a wall,⁵⁹² meanings can be ascribed to anything. This artwork examines our complicated ontological

⁵⁹⁰ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

⁵⁹¹ See section on the Bithry Inlet paintings, *Wild Life Documentary*. Kiyohiko Munakata and Yoko H. Munakata (1974), *Ching Hao's Pi-fa-chi: A Note on the Art of Brush*. Artibus Asiae Supplementum. Vol. 31. Pp 1 -56.

⁵⁹² Leonardo da Vinci, from his *Treatise on Painting*: "just by throwing a sponge soaked with various colors against a wall to make a stain, one can find a beautiful landscape".
http://www.mirabilissimeinvenzioni.com/ing_treatiseonpainting_ing.html

relationships to the natural environment. It reminds us that the transcendent sensations associated with our subjective experience of the aesthetic of 'wild-ness', where we feel a small part of a great unity, are matched by our impulse to culturalise nature. The transcendent sensation of 'is-ness' converges with concepts of 'wilder-ness' as we travel through the landscape, viewing it through glass windows, pointing out the names of features, feeling the restorative properties of nature as a psychological resource, consuming a compressed and packaged commodity called 'wilderness'.

Nature's actuality as a biological, geological phenomenon, an organic entity independent of our manipulations is alluded to in comparative imagery.

The sound of pilots communicating in the sky above the museum with Salt Lake City airport's control tower is a reminder of the hidden, multi-dimensionality of contemporary tendency towards social control, where the earth's atmosphere serves as a cultural conduit of the virtual. Spaces between the actual, mediated by technology, and the virtual, mediated by materiality, temporality and stasis, real time and representations of time passing, enjoins the viewer in a slippage between change and continuity.

Deleuze writes of the virtual:

Perhaps the highest object of art is to bring into play simultaneously all these repetitions, with their differences in kind and rhythm, their respective displacements and disguises, their divergences and decentrings; to embed them in one another in illusions the 'effect' of which varies in each case. Art does not imitate, above all because it repeats; it repeats all the repetitions, by virtue of an internal power (an imitation is a copy, but art is simulation, it reverses copies into simulacra).⁵⁹³

Lao Tsu wrote in the *Tao Te Ching* that:

Seeing your own smallness is insight⁵⁹⁴

By 'bonzai-ing' the natural environment, yet amplifying it by repetition to make a field of imagery, the installation shifts the corporeal scale of the viewer to that of Gulliver⁵⁹⁵ as a catalyst towards contemplation of Deleuze's "internal power" of "simulation" and the Toa's "smallness" as "insight".

⁵⁹³ Gilles Deleuze, *Repetition and Difference*. 1968, Columbia University Press, New York. P 293.

⁵⁹⁴ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 52.

⁵⁹⁵ Jonathan Swift, *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World by Lemuel Gulliver*, common title, *Gulliver's Travels* (pub. 1726, amended in 1735) where a traveller experiences being tiny and giant in comparison with the inhabitants of different 'worlds'. <http://www.jaffebros.com/lee/gulliver/> Cited Aug 2008.

The time-lapse video of the bonsai image showing its transformations over a day's duration is an animation of change, temporality, the metamorphosis of organic, natural processes. Compared to this, the closed circuit televising (CCTV) of the actual hillside outside the venue, and the radio transmitted sound of the pilots overhead, accentuated inescapable presence of 'now', as well as the hidden, continuous surveillance of CCTV as a feature of contemporary, civic control.

The cardboard cut outs are static and unchanging. They represent social conformity and the efficient commodification of nature. But as the viewer perambulates around the piece, the static image transforms making the viewer a participant in change, bringing the sculptures 'to life', and, paradoxically, revealing the installation's simulacrum – a facade of nature.

DIRECT TAOIST INFLECTIONS

Returning to Karl E. Weick's categorisation of graded degrees of improvisation outlined in Chapter Three,⁵⁹⁶ the degree of improvisation employed in *Bonsai Landscape* falls within Weick's third category of variation:

The relationship to traditional themes, subjects and narratives⁵⁹⁷ is still evident, but are emphasised or extracted as subjects in their own right.⁵⁹⁸

Correlating this degree of improvisation to calligraphy, the original character is still recognisable, but aspects would be transformed sufficiently to create a distinctly different image. Applied to *Bonsai Landscape*, the origins of the imagery are evident but transformed to a degree that as signifiers, they are extended beyond their visual and conceptual origins.

INDIRECT TAOIST INFLECTIONS

The Taoist garden art of bonsai is the forced miniaturisation and aesthetic shaping of a tree in a pot to create a tiny representation of an aesthetically 'untamed' landscape, akin to the imagery of Taoist landscape painting. Bonsai gardening is commonly associated with Japanese culture, however it is a Chinese horticultural invention from

⁵⁹⁶ Karl E. Weick, *Improvisation as a Mindset for Organizational Analysis*, for the *Special Issue: Jazz Improvisation and Organizing*. Organisation Science, Vol. 9, No. 5 (Sept. – Oct.). P 545.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid. P 545.

⁵⁹⁷ Here this refers to genres such as landscape, the journey, the vernacular.

⁵⁹⁸ Karl E. Weick, *Improvisation as a Mindset for Organizational Analysis*, for the *Special Issue: Jazz Improvisation and Organizing*. Organisation Science, Vol. 9, No. 5 (Sept. – Oct.). Pp 543 – 555.

the Chou Dynasty, 900 – 250 BC known as *pun-sai*. It was introduced to Japan by means of Ch'en Buddhism during the Kamakua period (1185 – 1333).

... the practice of creating miniature trees and landscapes should be viewed against the backdrop of two of China's great philosophical traditions, Daoism (Taoism) and Zen Buddhism ... Tuning into the rhythm of Nature and understanding the interrelatedness of all things around us are key components of Daoist teachings.⁵⁹⁹

At the time I made *Bonzai Landscape* I was not aware of the origins of the bonsai form in Taoist gardening practices, only its apt philosophical significance for the artwork.

A full appreciation of the artwork, *Bonsai Landscape* is largely achieved by perambulation so that the viewer experiences its transformation from a field of imagery to a blank. Experimental contemporary installation art is characterised by the necessity for the viewer to explore the artwork rather than be a passive viewer, just as all aspects of a Chinese garden must be experientially discovered over time.⁶⁰⁰ Installation art draws upon the practice of 'walking meditation', associated with Zen Buddhism, which has its origins in the Taoist's belief that the seeking of truth accompanies everyday activities. The Taoist practice of engaging in prescribed physical activity, such as *tai chi*, breathing exercises, includes the meditative engagement in everyday activities, such as walking and gardening.

Together the imaging of the theme, continuity and change, summarises the complex nuances of *Bonsai Landscape's* conceptual content using the conceptual structure of Taoism's *yin* and *yang* symbol. Earth is represented by the inert rock (*yin*); the tree represents living nature as changing and transitional (*yin*) yet here the image is mechanically reproduced, an inert facade of nature. The binary elements, fire (*yang*) and water (*yin*), are represented by the fire hydrant. Yet fire and water, the most volatile and changing of nature's forces, are represented by a mechanised object that embodies humanity's efforts to subdue the volatile, and preserve continuity. The rock is in stasis, bound by gravity and represents nature as continuity, yet is crystalline, delicately metamorphic, changing. Thus each element paradoxically contains its opposite, which can be ascribed as symbolic of continuity and change.

⁵⁹⁹ <http://www.venuscomm.com/Penjingdef.html> Cited August, 2008.

⁶⁰⁰ See discussion of Chinoiserie and Ian Hamilton-Finlay's garden, *Little Sparta* in Chapter Two, page 25.

WORLD WILD LIFE DOCUMENTARY

This body of artworks, presented as a time based installation under the ironic title, *World Wild Life Documentary*, is composed of sumi brush and ink paintings on paper, depicting one relatively unknown location, Bithry Inlet on the South Coast of New South Wales (Fig 172, Fig 173, Fig 174, Fig 175).⁶⁰¹ Works on paper, produced over approximately twenty years, are contextualised by videos, and presented as an equivalent, time based medium. The videos combine real time and time-lapse footage so the viewer can see how the landscape transforms throughout a particular day, in a particular place⁶⁰². The time-lapse videos are placed alongside a narrative based video entitled *Wild Life Documentary: Including Blue Heeler Buckley's Map of Australia*.

Fig 172: Bonita Ely, brush and ink painting of Bithry Inlet.

Comparative examples of the works from *Wild Life Documentary*, painted on different occasions, illustrate the seemingly unending variations of meaning achieved by a spontaneous Taoist approach to interpretive landscape painting using the expressive qualities of sumi brush technique.

⁶⁰¹ Exhibited in Sutton Gallery, Melbourne, 2004, Bellas Gallery, Brisbane, 2005, Performance Space, Sydney, 2006, in *The Cleveland Street Project*, a group exhibition to mark the closing of Performance Space's Cleveland Street venue in Redfern, and the opening of Performance Space at Carriage Works.

⁶⁰² The same method was used for the Bithry Inlet videos as for the time lapse/real time documentation for the installation, *Bonsai Landscape*.

Fig 173: Bithry Inlet, dusk, 2006.

Photo. B. Ely, 2006.

Fig 174: Bithry Inlet, low tide, January, 2007.

Photo. B. Ely, 2007.

Fig 175: Bithry Inlet, dawn, March, 2008.

Photo. B. Ely, 2008

In January, 2007, on a crystal clear sunny day the treetops on the headland at Bithry Inlet were sharply defined by the direction of sunlight and shadow. I began with a simple tonal render of the headland opposite showing its form and tonal shifts using an economy of strokes (*Fig 176*).

Fig 176: Bonita Ely, Bithry Inlet, January, 2007. Ink on water colour paper.

During the second version I focused on the treetops' crenulations, thinking about our neighbour of past times, Manning Clark,⁶⁰³ whose family property was the subject of my painting. I imagined his headland property looked like his large brain's folds contemplating Australia, thinking its way through our past, a brain pulsating with ideas in the Australian bushland opposite (*Fig 179, Fig 178, Fig 181, Fig 182*).

Fig 177: Bonita Ely, Manning Clark's Brain (2007). Soft strokes containing incisive marks suggestive of the folds of a brain. Ink on water colour paper.

Fig 178: Bonita Ely (2006). Crenulations of the tree tops. Ink on water colour paper.

⁶⁰³ Manning Clark (1915-1991), Australian historian. Manning had died when the paintings were executed. His family holiday home nestles in the bush opposite the Grounds family property, Penders, where the paintings were made. <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/150/150people/clark.html>

The tide was receding to expose a narrow channel through an unusually large expanse of exposed and undulating sand. The channel became a spinal cord attached to the 'brain' (*Fig 179, Fig 180*).

Fig 179: Bonita Ely (2006). Cranium with spinal cord. Ink on water colour paper.

Fig 180: Bonita Ely (2006). The paper was moved too soon, the ink ran, the 'brain' became a slug with a snail trail.

Fig 181: Bonita Ely (2007) Brain-like trees on Manning Clark's headland.

Fig 182: Bonita Ely (2007). Manning Clark's headland with trees that look like the crenulations of a brain in a certain direction of sunlight.

In comparison, a very wet and windy Easter in 2008 produced the following artworks (*Fig 183, Fig 184, Fig 185*):

Fig 183: Bonita Ely (2008). Bithry Inlet. Wind. Ink on water colour paper.

Fig 184: Bonita Ely (2008). Bithry Inlet. Rain. Ink on water colour paper.

Fig 185: Bonita Ely (2008). A numinous fulcrum. Bithry Inlet. Ink on water colour paper.

Storms had carried away sand at the mouth of the estuary exposing rocks that were often buried (*Fig 186*).

Fig 186: Bonita Ely (2008). Rocks, water, waves. Bithry Inlet, Ink on water colour paper.

Fig 187: Bonita Ely (2008). Exposed rocks. Bithry Inlet. Ink on water colour paper.

The objective of this repeated activity is to capture my *experience* of and thoughts about the landscape rather than a *realistic* image of it.⁶⁰⁴ The Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* metaphorically describes this imaginative bounty:

How the universe is like a bellows!
Empty, yet it gives a supply that never fails;
The more it is worked, the more it brings forth.⁶⁰⁵

These images are accompanied by videos that contextualise the temporal nature of the paintings with the time based medium, video. For example the video, *World Wild Life Documentary: Including Blue Heeler Buckley's Map of Australia* is composed of a bricollage of footage recorded over ten years that records uninformed and informal observations by the artist of natural phenomena, including the activities of human beings as a member of the animal kingdom. This video presents the artist as an amateur observer of nature. The autobiographical, episodic, anthropomorphic content is in ironic contrast to scientifically based wildlife documentaries such as those of David Attenborough,⁶⁰⁶ to which the title of the video ironically alludes.

⁶⁰⁴ Alva Noë, *Experience and Experiment in Art*, *Journal of Consciousness Studies* (August-September 2000), 7(8-9): pp 123-136.

⁶⁰⁵ <http://alandpeters.tripod.com/taoteching> Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse Five.

⁶⁰⁶ http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/programmes/who/david_attenborough.shtml Sir David Attenborough is a BBC television broadcaster, conservationist and writer who has specialised in producing informative, populist documentary nature programs such as *Life on Earth* (1984), *The Private Life of Plants* (1995) and *The Life of Mammals* (2002).

Fig 188: Showing off blue heeler Buckley's map of Australia.

Narrative episodes showing the intimacy of family and friends present the human as an animal intent on social interaction, and significantly, a compulsive desire for inter species communication (*Fig 188*). Aesthetic, rhetorical, disjunctive and subjective interventions overlay acute, yet affectionate observation to define our stance when engaged in interactions with nature.

In contrast, time-lapse videos documenting the passage of time and change at Bithry Inlet record a day of nature's unedited processes from before dawn and after dusk. The artist is removed from the interpretive, selective process that usually determines art production, allowing natural phenomena to dictate aesthetics, action and content. For example, the fifteen seconds of the chanced activities occurring every thirty minutes may capture birds flying through shot, people, wallabies on the beach, changes of light, sounds, wind, weather and tide.

The removal of human determinism gives the viewer objective information on what actually occurred on a specific day, rather than the ultra subjectivity of the painting process and that of the video, *World Wild Life Documentary: Including Blue Heeler Buckley's Map of Australia*.

Whereas the installation *Bonsai Landscape* addresses concepts of continuity and change primarily through stasis, metamorphosis and temporality, this body of work, exhibited as a time based installation, has one continuous subject, the location, Bithry Inlet, representing continuity, yet an accumulating collection of sumi brush paintings, produced over approximately twenty years, contextualised by the videos of this location, depicting different responses with each new encounter with the same landscape. Continuous phenomenological and perceptual change is in accord with Taoism's conception of the universe as a ceaseless flow of energy.

DIRECT TAOIST INFLECTIONS:

Returning to Karl E. Weick's categorisation of graded degrees of improvisation characteristic of Taoist art forms such as calligraphy,⁶⁰⁷ the degree of improvisation employed in the *Wild Life Documentary* sumi brush paintings falls within all of Weick's categories – interpretation, embellishment, variation, and improvisation (page 112).

INDIRECT TAOIST INFLECTIONS:

A profound infusion of Taoist philosophy into Western thought concerns the sharpening of Western artists' sensibilities towards natural phenomenon and its conservation. The West has a tradition of romantic regard for nature as a sublime force that fundamentally, humanity wrestles with, either as a hapless victim, or as a tested but ultimately victorious superior being aided by a deity whose approbation is sought and received. Taoism in contrast integrates humanity within natural processes as one factor amongst a multitudinous, infinite, complex, cosmos.

The West's perception of humanity as *opposite to* nature is further problematised, as the paradigm carries over to build a construction of reality composed of conflicted binary correlations such as:

EITHER	OR
humanity	nature
culture	nature
masculine	feminine
mind	body
intellect	instinct
analytical	irrational
order	chaos
us	other
conscious	unconscious
rational	emotional
clear	obscure

⁶⁰⁷ Karl E. Weick, *Improvisation as a Mindset for Organizational Analysis*, for the Special Issue: *Jazz Improvisation and Organizing*. *Organisation Science*, Vol. 9, No. 5 (Sept. – Oct.). Pp 545 - 555.

science	arts
light	dark
good	evil
white	black
spirit	matter
day	night
open	enclosed
exterior	interior
phallus	vagina

This dualistic, oppositional way of ordering phenomena results in 'difference' being perceived in a way that has formed hierarchical cultural values based on simplistic oppositions. Social conflicts arising from Fascism [them/inferior/democratic - us/superior/authority], racism [black - white] and sexism [female - male] for example, are supported by these oppositional perceptions. Similarly, natural phenomenon is associated with the female principal, that is, 'Mother Nature', an instinctual entity of nurture, yet needing to be controlled, vulnerable to exploitation.

In this model, the complexities of the transitional, similarity within difference and the transgressive, that is, the indeterminate and non-conforming, the similar, the changing, are not factored in. Serendipitous complexities are also unaccounted for.

In contrast, the Taoist binary model is aimed at achieving a harmony of shifting oppositional forces to create a concept of unified universality, where opposites are perceived as making up the 'soup' of a chaos from which they emerged, and to which they belong as a shifting flux of intertwined inter relationships. Here nature is seen as the revered source of reality, not just sustenance.

Every return to Bithry Inlet revealed a changed character of landscape and a different imaginative response (*Fig 189*). This playful, metamorphic approach to painting aligns with Taoism's theme of the importance of a primordial accord with nature as a metamorphic totality, each particle transforming and returning, expressed in Taoist painting through imaginative innuendo rather than the realism of traditional Western art. Miranda Shaw summarises this as follows:

... motifs, in which energy spirals and becomes mountains, clouds and animals, express a vision of the unity of life in which all things are transformations of a universal substance moved by a single, unifying principal⁶⁰⁸ ... even things often

regarded in the West as inanimate – such as rivers, rocks , and clouds – are considered to be alive and sentient.⁶⁰⁹

Fig 189: Bithry Inlet as an imaginary sea creature from 1989. Ink on Water colour paper.

Atomistic visualisations of life forces characterise the history of Chinese metaphysics.⁶¹⁰ Joseph Needham⁶¹¹ describes this as a “philosophy of organism”, which Joseph Wu points out was initiated by Leibniz, developed by Hegel and completed by Whitehead.⁶¹² “This type of philosophy is obviously not static metaphysics, but process philosophy”.⁶¹³

Joseph Wu, in his article *Chinese Language and Chinese Thought*, compares scientific and artistic method, the former describing the particular in general terms whilst the artist reveals universals by means of the particular, producing “the pleasure of empathy and the enjoyment of sensory qualities”.⁶¹⁴ It may be argued that the calligraphic approach to painting deployed by Modernists such as Bonnard and Matisse, the Abstract Expressionists, meets this definition, synchronistically spanning across to scientific

⁶⁰⁹ Miranda Shaw, *Buddhist and Taoist Influences on Chinese Landscape Painting*. Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 49, No. 2. (April – June, 1988). P 192.

⁶¹⁰ Joseph S. Wu, *Chinese Language and Chinese Thought*, Philosophy East and West, Vol. 19, No. 4, (Oct. 1969), p 431.

⁶¹¹ Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, (1956), 4 vols. New York, Cambridge University Press, II, Pp 291, 496, 505.

⁶¹² See Chapter Two.

⁶¹³ Joseph S. Wu, *Chinese Language and Chinese Thought*, Philosophy East and West, Vol. 19, No. 4, (Oct. 1969), p 431.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid. P 432.

thought to what Fritjof Capra coined as *The Tao of Physics*,⁶¹⁵ his exploration of relationships between quantum physics and Taoist principals.

In Verse Five of the *Tao Te Ching* Lao Tzu writes:

The Sage is unkind:
He treats the people like sacrificial straw-dogs.⁶¹⁶

This verse expresses Taoist views upon the 'species-centric' beliefs of humanity as separate from and superior to other species. Straw dogs, used in ceremony, are discarded after their purpose is over. The Taoist philosopher believes humanity is part of the process of life like all other biological phenomena, not a special species. In this way Taoist principles have contributed to an increased awareness in the West of a need for humanity to realise the consequence of an ontological paradigm that sets humanity apart from nature, that arguably, has resulted in the rampant destruction of the natural environment. Taoist principals clarify the urgent need for environmental conservation against the increasing pollution of earth and atmosphere, the destruction of natural environments, global warming, species devastation and depletion of resources.

The video, *Wild Life Documentary: Including Blue Heeler Buckley's Map of Australia*, takes this secular view of the human condition, affectionately exploring humanity's interactions with nature, and unwitting status as a pest, the mammalian equivalent of cane toads.

The following investigation of relationships to Taoist calligraphy found in the Bithry Inlet sumi brush paintings is structured by Kiyohiko Munakata's and Yoko H. Munakata's⁶¹⁷ translation and analysis of the ancient text, Ching Hao's *Pi-fa-chi*, or, *A Note on the Art of Brush*, which they describe as "one of the most important documents in the history of Chinese art theory".⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁵ Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism* (1975), Shambhala Publications, Berkeley, California <http://www.spaceandmotion.com/Philosophy-Fritjof-Capra.htm>

⁶¹⁶ <http://alandpeters.tripod.com/taoteching> Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse Five.

⁶¹⁷ Kiyohiko Munakata and Yoko H. Munakata (1974), *Ching Hao's Pi-fa-chi: A Note on the Art of Brush*. Artibus Asiae Supplementum. Vol. 31. Pp 1 -56.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid. P 1. The principles described in this text apply to the West's adoption of China's gestural, abstracted, and spontaneous painting technique, such as in Abstract Expressionism. See Chapter Two.

The Art of the Brush

For the sage, Ching Hao, the aim of painting is not a matter of representing forms:

..but of capturing Reality or Truth, and the Reality is only brought into painting when the artist in the process of painting is mystically unified with the Cosmic act of Creation. Through this process, the artist can create in his painting a true microcosm which is filled with *ch'i* [life force, or vital force] ... We can compare this idea with the Taoist concept of "inner elixer", which is this same microcosm developed within one's own body.⁶¹⁹

This correlates with a summary in the Great Treatise of the *I Ching*:

... in this way man comes to resemble heaven and earth and its order ... His wisdom embraces all things, and his tao brings order in the whole world.⁶²⁰

Ching Hao's document takes the form of a series of lessons in the art of painting by a Taoist sage who encounters a poor, untutored young farmer attempting to paint. The sage expounds upon Six Essentials that must be mastered to execute a painting of quality:

Ch'i – spirit or universal life;

Yün – resonance, or the resonating life force in individual objects;

Ssu – thought, or selectiveness in the defining of essential forms in nature;

Ching – Scene, or compositional or meteorological setting;

Pi – Brush, or movement and force of brushwork;

Mo – Ink, or the use of ink for naturalistic representation.⁶²¹

The Six Essentials have their origins in Taoist calligraphy, which traditional Chinese artists mastered as a prerequisite for painting. There are six main strokes, with nine variants, that embody the Taoist principals of tensile strength, balance and aesthetic spatiality⁶²² as an expression of figure and ground, form and space, *being and nothingness*, in calligraphy. The horizontal stroke for instance must have the tensile strength of a bone, or bamboo bending slightly under its own weight – attenuated, bowed, elegantly thicker at each end. The action of making each stroke requires a balance of movement, back and forth: to go forward one must begin in reverse. To end

⁶¹⁹ Ibid. P 3.

⁶²⁰ Ibid. P 4. Quoting from translation of *The Book of Changes* by Richard Wilhelm/ Cary F. Baynes [Princeton, 1967, pp. 293 – 295].

⁶²¹ Ibid. P 5.

⁶²² Prof. W. Simon, *How to Study and Write Chinese Characters: Chinese Radicals and Phonetics* (1967), pub. Percy Lund, Humphries and Co. Ltd, London. Pp xxviii – xliv.

a stroke, one expresses a balanced, linear energy. This action expresses equilibrium, the *yin* and *yang*, creating a characteristic 'knob' at the beginning of a stroke, and a defined yet free ending.

Fig 190: Calligraphic mark making comprises of combinations of six different strokes.

There are rules to follow in the construction of a character. For example, the top graphic units of a compound character must be written before the bottom units, working from left to right. These rules and subtleties combine to enliven the brushwork, creating *ch'i*, the *resonance* and *force* described in Ching Hao's *Six Essentials* for painters.

A master calligrapher may break all these rules.

Whist relatively untutored, I have, since art school, practised sumi brush painting using ink on rice paper and water colour paper to make rapidly executed works on paper (*Fig 191*). Pursued since approximately 1989 for relaxation each year at Bithry Inlet during family vacations, this activity could be described as a 'hobby', or 'bus driver's holiday'. This vernacular context need not diminish the artistic objective of the activity: to capture spontaneous responses to landscape by mastering the calligraphic brush, which is very different to the manipulation of a Western paint brush.

Fig 191: Bonita Ely, Bithry Inlet. Ink on Vietnamese rice paper.

The technique requires a different way of holding the brush: it is held vertically by laying the handle upright along all four fingers, holding it in place with the thumb. The action of painting engages the whole hand, wrist, arm and torso as the brush moves horizontally across the page to create directional lines, whilst simultaneously moving vertically, up and down, to create the line's thicknesses and thinness. At times the brush is rolled between fingers and thumb, or is rotated, daubed and flicked by the wrist to splay the ink.

This requires a proprioceptive⁶²³ mastery of a very different kind to Western painting technique as the mark making must be precise – there are no second chances offered by corrective over painting. A controlled spatial relationship between the tip of the brush and the surface of the paper must be maintained throughout the process, effecting a melding of body and mind, reconciling the mind/body split encouraged by the West's wilful, analytical thinking, the favouring of intellectual analysis, and concomitant unconsciousness of the corporeal as the vehicle of biological wholeness.⁶²⁴

The mind must be instantaneously cognoscente of the quality of line, *and*, simultaneously, the spatiality created by the lines on the blank page. The spatiality is the 'void' from which the image emerges as an abstracted, temporal phenomenon. In Taoist thinking the void, the amorphous flow of energy, represented by the blank page, is the reality. The compositional interplay of line and spatiality is compounded by the interpretative representation of the subject before the artist.

Fig 192: Bonita Ely, Bithry Inlet, low tide. Ink on water colour paper.

⁶²³ Definition: proprioception, n: the ability to sense the position and location and orientation and movement of the body and its parts. <http://dictionary.die.net/proprioception> This includes an innate awareness of the position of the brush in motion in relation to the body and paper's surface.

⁶²⁴ Descarte's maxim, "I think, therefore I am" epitomises this disjuncture of mind and body.

Serendipity tempers this process – the recognition of chance in concert with intentionality dictates rapid, discerning decision making during the process of creativity. This is in accord with the Taoist maxim to bend with and exploit circumstance rather than apply force to achieve a positive outcome, the foundation of the Taoist martial art and meditative exercise, *t'ai chi*. This holistic engagement of mind and body in subject, form and medium enables the expression of an imaginative immersion in the surroundings, cognitive processes and actions.

To conclude, this activity has been a meditative, rejuvenating process with the ecstatic dimensions of experience produced by “dwell[ing] at [the] centre”.⁶²⁵ Hall promotes Taoism’s *t'ai chi* to reach centred-ness. He writes, “To be centred one must be relaxed, yet intent, focused and congruent with each aspect of one’s psychophysical being”,⁶²⁶ a perfect description of sumi brush painting whilst on vacation.

THE MURRAY RIVER PROJECT

In this section the Taoist process of creativity as an anarchic activity aimed at provoking social discourse will be examined in relation to environmental issues.

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 Tao⁶²⁷

In 1977, in response to reports of rising levels of salination and a lowering water table - the cause of die back of red river gums, and the loss of arable land in the Murray River Basin - I drove from a location upstream from Corryong where the Murray River is a swift flowing, fresh mountain stream, downstream to the Coorong, stopping to document five locations that typify the different geological characteristics of the Murray River. They were:

Near Corryong: mountain stream with pebbled bed;
 Barmah Forest: slow, wide meandering river with a clay bed;
 Junction of the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers near Boundary Bend: sandbar;
 Near Swan Reach: cliffs of limestone combined with sandstone;
 Coorong, Lake Alexandrina and Lake Albert: the river’s estuary

⁶²⁵ David Hall, *Process and Anarchy: a Taoist Vision of Creativity*, Philosophy East and West, Vol. 28, No. 3, (July 1978). P 282.

⁶²⁶ Ibid. P 282.

⁶²⁷ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 32.

To document these sites, an archeological, or cartographic-like method was used. Grids constructed momentarily from sticks and string at the river's edge were photographed from above to capture and map the microcosm of the location's characteristic features, along with photographs of their context. This experience, and accumulative visual material, provided a rich resource for *The Murray River Project*, which continued from 1977 into the 1980s.

MURRAY RIVER PUNCH

The most provocative artwork from 1980 was a performance entitled *Murray River Punch*⁶²⁸ - a "smooth talking cooking demonstrator"⁶²⁹ whose punch recipe comprised all the pollutants entering the river at that time, including sewage, European carp, salt and insecticide (*Fig 193, Fig 194, Fig 195*).

Fig 193: The recipe for the Murray River Punch performance published in Lip magazine, 1980.

⁶²⁸ Exhibition history of *Murray River Punch*: 1980 George Paton and Ewing Gallery, Melbourne University. *Women at Work*, a festival of women's performance art; 1981 *Murray River Punch*, performance, Rundle Street Mall, Adelaide, during an Experimental Art Foundation artist in residency. DOCUMENTATION: 1983, Continuum, Survey of Australian Art, G Art Gallery, Tokyo, Japan; 1994, *25 Years of Performance Art in Australia*, survey exhibition of performance art and documentation, (travelling) Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australian Centre of Contemporary Art, Melbourne; 2003, *This was the Future: Australian Sculpture of the 1950s, 60s, 70s and Today*, Heidi Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne; 2008, Solo exhibition, Milani Gallery, Brisbane; *Heat: Art and Climate Change*, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne.

⁶²⁹ Linda Williams, *Heat: Art and Climate Change* (2008), catalogue, pub., RMIT University, Melbourne. P 9.

Fig 194: Bonita Ely (1980). Performing *Murray River Punch*, 1980, in the Melbourne University Union building; adding human faeces to the mixture.

Fig 195: Bonita Ely (1980). Cheers", the Murray River Punch performance concludes in Rundle Mall, Adelaide.

THE MURRAY'S EDGE

The Murray River Project has been revisited thirty years later in 2007, 2008 and 2009 in response to the critical disassembling of the Murray Darling Basin's ecology during thirty years of mismanagement, exacerbated by prolonged drought.⁶³⁰

The recent project, in addition to photographing the original 1977 locations to repeat the performative enactment of cartographic documentation, examined other locations where environmental damage is at crisis point (see Appendix #1). Lake Boga, Lake Benanee and Bottle Bend are uniquely endemic subsidiaries of the Murray River system. Normally, the lakes are fed by the Murray. The creeks bringing water to these lakes have been blocked to save the water for irrigation. Bottle Bend, a billabong near Mildura, has urine coloured water turned to sulphuric acid, an outcome of the severity of the drought and the lowered water table, which is now out of reach of the vegetation's root systems.

Other locations near Tooleybuck, Robinvale and Euston were spontaneously photographed to present socio-psychological causes, an archeological approach, and the aesthetics of environmental indications of the severity of the river's degradation.

The Murray River works arise from a personal concern for the river as I was brought up in Robinvale, a Second World War Soldier Settlement town producing grapes and oranges by irrigation from the Murray River.

The most didactic of the artworks produced during the candidature, the objectives of *The Murray's Edge* project are twofold: to visualise for the viewer the severity of the environmental destruction of the river system, and the psychological attitudes that underlie the river's exploitation and neglect.⁶³¹

The Murray River is the largest river in Australia, is the border of the two most populated States, Victoria and New South Wales, and as an outcome of its critical condition has often been featured in the media, but people remain ignorant of the river's location, its characteristics, and the reasons for its deplorable condition. The artworks bring to the viewer the aesthetic power of the river, the tipping point it has reached

⁶³⁰ Research for *The Murray's Edge* funded by a Faculty Research Grant, College of Fine Arts (COFA), University of New South Wales (UNSW).

⁶³¹ These were also the objectives of the research for the previous *Murray River Project*.

environmentally, and emotive evidence of humanity's disregard for essential natural resources.

The objective of the Murray River research project is to capture a holistic sense of the why, how and what of the Murray River's parlous state. Comparison of the river in 2008 and 1978 through the *Murray River Punch* performance and *The River's Edge* bring to reality the sublime natural force of the river, and, paradoxically, the abject state of its degradation.⁶³² The tragic, aesthetic majesty of the river juxtaposed with evidence of its rapid, depleted decline reflects with urgency the Taoist thematic, 'continuity and change'.

INDIRECT TAOIST INFLECTIONS

David Hall writes in his essay, *Process and Anarchy: a Taoist Vision of Creativity*:

The reality of things is comprised by *aesthetic events*. These events are free, novel and transitory. Creativity, as the spontaneous realization of novelty, requires that there be freedom to produce the novel.⁶³³

That is, the artist's creative practice spontaneously captures our perception of the temporal as it brings new insights carried by unexpected, aesthetic experiences. Like Deleuze, Hall describes creativity as a "novel synthesis" of Lao Tzu's "many things of the world" that are in constant transition – as soon as a novel idea is realised, it is no longer a novelty. This paradox underlies the artist's drive to continuously unfold variations, improvisations upon ideas, returning again with fresh insights to themes, such as social and political issues.

The latter brings to mind Girardot's metaphoric description of the transgressive Taoist's table manners which suggests that we must transgress "polite" approaches to knowledge in order to surrender, unrestrained, into processes that uncover truth, or insight, the metaphoric "soup":

It is not ... polite to grin with a gaping mouth at a formal banquet. Civil and proper table manners require the control of one's bodily functions ... Taoists ... tend to grin somewhat idiotically while slurping their soup.⁶³⁴

⁶³² In addition to the 1977 locations, places were documented in 2007, 2008 where the degradation of the river is particularly acute, at Lake Boga, and Bottle Bend in Victoria, and incidental locations indicative of people's attitude towards the river near Toolybuck and Robinvale. In 2008 the headwaters of the Murray River in the Mount Kosciuszko National Park were documented.

⁶³³ David Hall, *Process and Anarchy: a Taoist Vision of Creativity*, Philosophy East and West, Vol. 28, No. 3, (July 1978). P 273.

⁶³⁴ See N. J. Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism: the Theme of Chaos (Hun Tun)* (1983), University of California Press. P 6.

Experimental contemporary art practice is arguably characterised by transgressive action and thinking. In many ways the social role of a contemporary artist is to be transgressive, to think for themselves rather than reify convention, the established hierarchies of power, including a religion or ideology, politics or rationality.

It could be argued that exposure to Taoism's visualisation that "the fundamental characteristics of creativity are freedom and reflexivity, expressed through the self-realization of events"⁶³⁵ supported visual arts practitioners' intuitive and independent resolve when questioning social convention in the aftermath of Post World War Two, when Taoism first powerfully entered the vernacular of Western thought (page 62). This social enquiry in the visual arts relates to the description of the Tao as an "uncarved block", that is, the cosmos in a continual state of flux. If this 'block' is carved, that is, made into a permanent form, it goes against the natural processes that are the wellspring of creativity and the natural order of things. Similarly, the artist must shun the habitual, and 'see' phenomena, including society's morés, afresh.

The Murray's Edge,⁶³⁶ although ostensibly a photographic project, is interdisciplinary, combining ecological research of the river with a performative, and sculptural sensibility that substitutes the click of a camera for the immediate, corporeal response whilst wielding a sumi brush.⁶³⁷ Ching Hao's lessons in the art of painting expounding upon the Six Essentials are here applied to photography as a spontaneous, observational, immersive, meditative activity aimed at imaginatively capturing a sense of pluralistic universality.

For the Taoist, the mother is a metaphor for nature. Taoist cosmology places humanity in a familial relationship to nature and has thus guided Western conservationists in the formulation of policy and implementation of ecologically sound practices.⁶³⁸ *The Murray's Edge* is a communication of the river's significance as a resource, but perhaps

⁶³⁵ David Hall, *Process and Anarchy: a Taoist Vision of Creativity*, Philosophy East and West, Vol. 28, No. 3, (July 1978). P 274.

⁶³⁶ 2008, Solo exhibition, Milani Gallery, Brisbane; *Heat: Art and Climate Change*, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne. 2009, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; COFA Gallery, UNSW, Sydney.

⁶³⁷ See *Wild Life Documentary* above, and Kiyohiko Munakata and Yoko H. Munakata (1974), *Ching Hao's Pi-fa-chi: A Note on the Art of Brush*. Artibus Asiae Supplementum. Vol. 31. Pp 1 -56.

⁶³⁸ For example, see http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/daoism/projects/alliance_religion.html "The idea behind ARC emerged in 1986, when World Wildlife Fund (WWF)-International was celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary. Its President at the time, Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, suggested marking the occasion by inviting representatives of ... religions ... to the event ... [such as] The China Taoist Association." Taoism is described as "international" on the website, acknowledging its penetration of Western thinking regarding conservation.

more particularly, it reflects upon us as delinquent offspring who need to be subservient to nature:

Tranquil, vast, standing alone, unchanging
It provides for all things yet cannot be exhausted
It is the mother of the universe ...
Mankind depends on the laws of Earth⁶³⁹

The following section shows selected images from *The Murray's Edge* (Fig 197 – Fig 204) photographed in 2009 (see Appendix #1 for images from 2007 and 2008).

SELECTED IMAGES FROM *THE MURRAY'S EDGE*:

Fig 196: Bonita Ely (2009) Lake Benanee: Testing the Odyssey. Lake Benanee, near Euston, is now cut off from the Murray because authorities consider that the evaporation from its surface area wastes water. The purpose of this scientific apparatus seems a moot point. January, 2009.

⁶³⁹ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Verse 26.

Fig 197: Bonita Ely (2009) Dry Lake. The trees are not dead because of the drought. Many years ago, Dry Lake, which adjoins Lake Benanee and only periodically filled with water, was permanently flooded for irrigation, drowning a huge lake-shaped grove of red river gums. Now it is a dry lake once more. January, 2009.

Fig 198: Bonita Ely (2009) Near Swan Reach: Channel. This is all that is left of the anabranch of the Murray River near Swan Reach in South Australia. The river would normally spread across the flats forming many anabranches between the sandstone cliffs that define the river's channel in the terrain from the Victorian border near Renmark to Lake Alexandrina. January, 2009.

Fig 199: Bonita Ely (2009) Dust Storm on 'Lake' Alexandrina.. The Murray River's estuary, Lake Alexandrina, is a dust bowl, its shallow water torpid and turning to sulphate acid. January, 2009.

Fig 200: Bonita Ely (2009) Barrage #4: The Coorong Meets Lake Alexandrina. Barrages hold back the ocean and the Coorong (left) from flooding Lake Alexandrina with saline water. January, 2009.

Fig 201: Bonita Ely (2009) Dried Lake Dust Storm: Hindmarsh Island Bridge. This bridge from Goolwa to Hindmarsh Island near the mouth of the Murray was built against the wishes of the Indigenous Ngarrindjeri women, custodians of Hindmarsh Island. January, 2009.

Fig 202: Bonita Ely (2009) Ngarrindjeri Country at Raukkan: Boat Wreck and Tree Fossils. Near Raukkan on Lake Alexandrina the low water level has exposed a wrecked boat and tree trunk fossils. Raukkan, formally the mission, Point MacLeah, is the township of the Ngurrinderi people, traditional owners of the Corrong and Lakes.⁶⁴⁰ January, 2009.

⁶⁴⁰ Location of the Point McLeay mission.

Fig 203: Bonita Ely (2009) *Metal Detritus: Lake Albert*. January, 2009. Compare with *Estuary*, page 332, Appendix 1, the same place photographed eighteen months earlier in Winter, 2007.

To conclude this chapter, it could be noted that threads of socio-political engagement unify what might be described as an eclectic and thematic, rather than stylistic approach to my studio practice. The multiple concerns and processes of my artworks demonstrate how intrinsic the correspondences to Taoist principles may be to a Western artist's practice in the twenty-first century. Described as the holistic, inter-related integration of natural forces in Taoism, the potential for an escalation of environmental damage caused by exponentially interacting natural forces is certainly uppermost in the minds of many artists who endeavor to both promote a greater awareness of these issues, and create mechanism's through which to address them. Citing Bourriaud:

A new game is announced as soon as the social setting radically changes, without the meaning of the game itself being challenged".

A more pragmatic social role for art will perhaps, as Donald Judd the conservationist in Marfa foreshadowed, be viewed in retrospect to be the major, innovative development in the visual arts of the twenty-first century.⁶⁴¹

⁶⁴¹ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), pub. Les Presses du Réel. Translated by Simon Pleasance, Fronza Woods and Mathieu Copeland. English publication, 2002.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Taoism, China's indigenous philosophy, has significantly influenced Western culture from early contact to today, an influence that is embedded in the form and content of contemporary visual art. The sometimes direct, but more often pervasive influences of Taoist cultural practices and philosophy on Western thinking and art forms have been established in the thesis, calibrated upon Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's theory that the structure of organic dissemination is best described metaphorically as rhizomic rather than arborial. That is, cultural practices can be seen as a multi-directional synthesis rather than a linear hierarchy. Taoist precepts have infiltrated Western artists' thinking and processes to the extent that new means of expression, of great relevance to the West's contemporary visual arts language, are derived in part from artists' exposure to Taoist concepts and practices. This exposure has occurred through significant thinkers' interpretation of Taoist precepts, the trade of artefacts, exposure to translations of Taoism's ancient philosophical literature, the study of and direct exposure to abstraction, and Taoist graphic improvisation in calligraphy and painting, and the articulation of spatiality as a positive element of expression in East Asian art practices, derived directly or in part from Taoism. This exposure over approximately six centuries is tracked in a history of inter-cultural discourse between Sinicised Far Eastern cultures, and Western cultures.

The significance of Chinese garden landscaping, known as Chinoiserie,⁶⁴² to eighteenth and nineteenth century European garden design is an integral aspect of the historical influences of Chinese culture on the West and is established in this historical account. Examples of traditional features of Chinese gardens commonly adopted by European garden designers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are narrative devices such as follies, the grotto, text and the episodic perspectives of wandering pathways. The formal devices of Chinoiserie, such as asymmetry, spatial placement, temporal themes, and kine-aesthesis animated these novel European gardens. In the thesis these features in the traditional (*feng shui*) gardens surrounding Prince Dong's residence in

⁶⁴² The term, Chinoiserie, referred to all artefacts from China at this time, including the features of European garden design derived from Chinese motifs.

contemporary Beijing are documented and set beside eighteenth century English gardens and contemporary examples to illustrate how powerfully these Taoist practices have reverberated to the twentieth century, providing for some artists a significant model for innovations in sculpture which led to installation art.

It is noted as part of a broader cultural flow that Taoist garden design was transplanted to Japan in the sixth century of the Christian Era to evolve into Ch'en Buddhist, or Zen gardens, which retain identified aspects of their origins in Taoism. For example, it is in the spatiality, form and narrative of gardens of fifteenth century Muromachi Japan, such as Daisen-in, in Kyoto, that Chinese garden art, calligraphy, and brush and ink painting of the Sung Period coalesce. Reverberations of these three Taoist art practices are outlined and correlated through visual means throughout the thesis. Illustrated by the garden at Daisen-in, a representation of the experimental, spare landscape painting of the Sung Period in China, which was executed with the skill of master calligraphers, the austere, abstract aesthetic of Zen gardens is shown to powerfully influence sculptural innovation in the twentieth century, such as Ian Hamilton-Finlay's *Little Sparta*, and Isamu Noguchi's *Garden of the Future*.

Discourse during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' colonial period gathered pace with Western Modernism's soaking up of new ways of thinking and doing from around the globe, including the influences of Taoism. Taoism first influenced countries neighbouring China, such as Vietnam and Japan, who incorporated Taoist and Ch'en Buddhist principles into their indigenous cultures, Ch'en Buddhism being a synthesis of Mahayanan Buddhism and Taoism. Respectively, Japan's and Vietnam's Zen Buddhism has been analysed and shown to be a significant vehicle for Taoist influence during the West's increasing globalisation, particularly after the Second World War, when artists of the counter culture movement, such as members of the Beat Generation, sought alternatives in Eastern epistemology to Europe's humanist ontology, engaging in an experimental, radical critique of social conformity. The Fluxus Movement also provided a loose affiliation for artists, who proved to be influenced by Taoism and Zen. The transgressive character of these experiments, derived in part from Taoism's anarchic precepts, changed the content and process of art making at this time and continues as a model of social engagement for artists today.

The thesis shows how globalism, multiculturalism, migration of the Chinese diaspora and cross-cultural communications, including the study of European Modernism by East Asian artists in Europe, and the reciprocal study of East Asian art in the West, have

increased the porosity of Western cultures since early contact with China in the fifteenth century.

Calligraphic art and sumi brush painting in China, Vietnam and Japan, with their abstract imagery, exponential improvisations upon graphic themes, imaginative interpretation of motifs, subjectivity, and focus on achieving a centred-ness of mind and body to transmit the energy of life force into the artworks' aesthetics, are now more commonly recognised to be a direct reflection of Taoist concepts and practices. A specific example of this explicit influence is Abstract Expressionism's gestural, improvisational methodology as an extension of Taoist painting and calligraphic art practices. How the premises of this influence on American painters were transferred to sculpture to evolve into the now dominant sub-set, sculptural installation art, is less recognised.

Having established the influence of corporeal, free flowing abstraction as an influence on painting, the Taoist provenance of context as a signifier is examined in relation to the thousands of graphic improvisations upon the one calligraphic character signifying *longevity*, which adorns and conceptualises architecture and artefacts in Hué, Vietnam. Although there is no evidence of direct connections to contemporary art's use of context as signifier in regard to the matrix of artefacts cited from Hué, this phenomena does illustrate the intrinsic, inter-relatedness of the premises of Taoist philosophy. The theories of representation that explicate upon this pluralistic approach to engagement with the visual arts by Gilles Deleuze in his seminal thesis, *Repetition and Difference*, are found to have direct correlations with Taoist theories of creativity. The parallels in Taoism with this Post-Modernist, theoretical account, compounds the complex veracity of the thesis that Taoism is seamlessly synthesised into the contemporary epistemology of the West.

Having established this history of discourse, the manner in which the new discipline, installation art, has its fundamental *raison d'être* in precepts implicitly, or indirectly derived from Taoist philosophy and cultural practices is established in the thesis. Installation art came to be a dominant sculptural form in the second half of the twentieth century, so was selected for detailed, critical analysis. The conceptual concerns and processes of key visual arts practitioners, one from America, and the other from China, were selected to demonstrate how intrinsic Taoist principles are to an artist's experimental installation art practice in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, irrespective of their country of origin.

The first artwork to be examined for this purpose was Donald Judd's permanent, site specific installation, *Untitled* (1982– 1986) at Marfa, Texas. A pioneering representative of the Minimalist Movement, and a key player in the development of installation art, Donald Judd's artwork was selected for analysis because he did not profess any personal alliance with Taoism. Thus he provides a rigorous test case for its implicit influence on a Western artist at this time. Judd's preparatory drawings for *Untitled* (1982–1986), executed in the 1980s, were analysed to discern the relationship of his improvisational methods seen in his articulation of the internal spatiality of identical solids, in this case, the oblong, with the unique, Taoist, calligraphic practice of improvising upon a singular motif as a model for creativity. The ephemeral, temporal qualities of the site for permanent installation of these boxes in two artillery huts, remodeled by Judd for this purpose, were studied and documented also in relation to aspects of Taoist philosophical precepts and aesthetic concerns of the Taoist practice of spatial articulation known as the 'art of placement', *feng shui*.

Retracing Judd's steps by methodically re-drawing his instructional drawings for the fabricator of the one hundred boxes for *Untitled* (1982–1986), and examining the sculptural objects in relation to his drawings' graphic improvisations, made possible a very clear, fresh analysis of Judd's process of creativity. His system, which Judd referred to as 'progressions', has not been unraveled in any previous research in relation to this specific series of drawings for the fabricator. Judd's process significantly reflects his emphasis on spontaneous transformation upon a circumscribed theme, achieved in uninhibited gesture characteristic of Taoist art forms such as calligraphy and ink and brush painting. This sequential way of articulating spatiality and form is also characteristic of his contemporaries' methodology, some of whom, such as Agnes Martin, explicitly expressed a Taoist influence on their visual arts practice. Examples of work by Judd's contemporaries, Sol Lewitt, Dan Flavin, Richard Serra and On Kawara, are also cited to confirm the sculptors' deployment of a contemporary improvisational methodology, which was implicit in the apparent pervasive influence of Taoism on the American zeitgeist at this time.

Further, the inter-relatedness to environs of Judd's carefully composed installation of oblongs in a permanent site is in keeping with his expressed knowledge, in his capacity as a writer and scholar, of the experiential properties that synthesise mind and body for the viewer of Zen and Taoist spatiality and materiality. As a consequence, it is argued that Judd's methodology, asserting immersive spatial qualities, turns away from metaphor as a vehicle of meaning to metonymy, where the viewer interprets the reality

of their experience in space and time. This is in keeping with Taoist artistry, where axonomic perspectives draw the subjective viewer into the spatial experience of the painting, or garden, rather than the realist, singular view point of Western perspective drawing, where the viewer is an observer looking at the subject of the painting. At Marfa, Judd's installed artwork reveals itself and its reflective, episodic environs like an unfolding Chinese scroll painting as the viewer progresses through the interpolated oblongs, installed in their integrated, multi-faceted site.

Xu Bing's installation, *Book from the Sky* (1987–1991), is the next key artwork to be researched. Xu Bing is a Chinese international artist whose installation art developed after the country was opened up to the West in 1985. Paradoxically, Xu Bing therefore received synthesised influences of Taoist cultural practices through exposure to Western contemporary art. In the literature about Xu Bing's artwork, *Book from the Sky*, there is scant attention given to Taoism as a factor in the form and content of his artwork. Rather than claiming Taoism as a direct influence or reference, he stated in an interview for this research that, as Taoism is embedded in the way of thinking and living in China, "Chinese tradition",⁶⁴³ which is significantly influenced by Taoism, has a bearing on his artwork. The thesis critically analyses in detail all aspects of Taoist traditions as they manifest in the development of his oeuvre up to and including *Book from the Sky*.

In Western analysis of *Book from the Sky*, little attention has been given to the perception and interpretation of this artwork by readers of Chinese calligraphy. The acknowledgement of the Taoist context of the artwork, *Book from the Sky*, expands our knowledge of the aural as a trope in the Taoist creative traditions from which the artwork emerged. Taking as its starting point the structure of Chinese writing, that is, pictograms and their combinations to represent the spoken word, the thesis establishes that, for the literate viewer, a significant number of invented 'pictograms' are perceived by the mind's conditioned reflex to find meaning in incoherent text, to relate to or resemble real calligraphic characters. Hence the 'text' produces an incoherent quality of sound. To verify this conjecture, Xu Bing was asked if any of his imagery had meaning for readers of Chinese calligraphy, or resembled existing pictograms so that the text would have a 'sound' for reading viewers, as opposed to non-readers for whom the work is self evidently 'silent'. Xu Bing described the difference in interpretation of his artwork, *Book from the Sky*, by readers and non-readers, as equal but different.

⁶⁴³ Bonita Ely's interview with Xu Bing, 3/10/2008, Beijing. Protocol #H6569

Readers of calligraphy would identify nuanced similarities with genuine calligraphic characters, making the experience like “concrete poetry”. His perplexing strategy uses the Taoist pedagogic method *kung an*, more commonly known by its Zen equivalent, *koan*, to disrupt habitual thinking and responses, to cause the viewer to think more deeply. This clarification of the differentiated, interpretive receptions of the artwork, *Book from the Sky*, by readers of calligraphy and non-readers, adds to the understanding of this major cross-cultural, contemporary artwork.

During the candidature, artworks were produced essentially as an undifferentiated, on-going flow of engagement with my professional, contemporary art practice, rather than as specific illustrations of the thesis. The artworks were critically analysed in retrospect for evidence of explicit and implicit Taoist influences in an Australian Western artist's oeuvre. They are analysed using the first hand knowledge of the artist regarding the origins of creative ideas driving the form and aesthetics of the artworks, intended content, and tacit processes of fabrication in relation to the research that had established Taoism's direct and indirect influences embedded in experimental contemporary art. In addition, past artworks produced before the candidature since 1969 are examined as a chronological discourse running through and informing aspects of the thesis. The artworks are shown to contain clearly identifiable tropes and methods, ideas and tendencies originating in Taoism's influence on Western cultural practices. In particular, the characteristically transgressive stance of contemporary artists in relation to convention was observed, along with a thematic investigation of humanity's relationships to Nature in the light of growing environmental concerns, both of which correlate with Taoist precepts that have influenced Western thinking and creativity.

Another factor identified in contemporary art is the active rather than passive reception of artworks by the viewer because of the artists' use of a metonymic visual language, rather than culturally specific, predetermined metaphors as signifiers. This shift in visual language is gauged to illicit subjective responses. Viewers bring their own knowledge, experience, associations, corporeality and persona to the work's interpretation. Alongside this is an underlying theme distilled as the binary polarity - 'continuity and change'. The contemporary artist creates a place that asserts the transitional, whether in stasis or in ephemeral actuality, yet simultaneously evokes universal verities, placing the viewer in a paradoxical construction of reality fundamental to the Taoist ontology, where the relational self is contextualised by a non-absolutist, unifying matrix. Although speculative, the persistence of this philosophical theme in contemporary art points to the synthesis of a non-Cartesian construction of reality derived from the West's

exposure to Eastern metaphysics, beginning with Leibniz in the sixteenth century, evidenced in the Beat and Hippy movements of the nineteen fifties to the seventies, and expounded upon by Gilles Deleuze in *Repetition and Difference*, his explorations of the nature of representation in contemporary visual arts.⁶⁴⁴

The particular research skills of the visual artist are identified as an enhanced visual literacy, which is applied in the thesis to critically analyse artworks and cultural practices. Illustrated by the photographic documentation of close examinations of the subtle complexities inherent in an artist's clinching of a unique aesthetic totality, the signifiers derived from Taoist sources are identified as explicit, or implicit, direct, or indirect. The experiential insights of the practising artist into the processes of creativity as they are applied to visual arts research, for example the re-drawing of Judd's drawings to help establish the basis of his creative methodology, uses a pragmatic skill set that enhances traditional academic research methodologies.

The thesis contributes knowledge of the influences of East Asian art and philosophy on the West by focusing on Taoism rather than Zen Buddhism, the latter being the subject of most analysis in this field. The thesis also engages with the complexities surrounding the carriage of Taoist creative methodologies to the West by East Asian artists in the Modernist era, who have been disparagingly described as 'influenced by the West'. The nature of this two-way discourse is identified and acknowledged as significantly innovative and insightful in the thesis. Twenty-first century cultures could be described as an ontological mix of huge, radiating, multiple circles, overlapping, entwining, separating, encroaching, obscuring and blending to make a hybrid, global culture. In this thesis Taoism takes its place in this interdisciplinary, inter-cultural language that strives to find innovative ways of embedding experiential comprehension into the visual arts.

One example of where artists are taking this increasingly inter-cultural, exploratory fascination with inter-connectivity and uncertainties may be found in Nicolas Bourriaud's seminal text, *Relational Aesthetics*.⁶⁴⁵ Bourriaud describes artists' approaches to meaning as provisional; there are no philosophical or conceptual certainties in contemporary art practice, but rather, the use of creativity as a tool to interrogate the certainties of science and technology in relation to the subjective. This process is

⁶⁴⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Repetition and Difference*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1968.

⁶⁴⁵ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), pub. Les Presses du Réel. Translated by Simon Pleasance, Fronza Woods and Mathieu Copeland. English publication, 2002.

simultaneously inventing innovative approaches to the social concerns of applied science and technology. The artefact is no longer definable in terms of its pulchritude, or discrete discipline, or particular genre. It is no longer a “system of conceptual mastery”⁶⁴⁶ that defines its independence as a unique master work. Rather, using the collective Superflex as an exemplar, a provenance in Taoist precepts may be found in the performing of collective tasks such as gardening, of valuing soundly vernacular avenues for insight and creative innovation.⁶⁴⁷

The research helps to provide a basis for understanding some of the ways many artists today are working along the boundaries of art, addressing practical concerns through poetic means in order to reach an understanding of the world, using their art making as a tool to better their environment and cultivate social discourse.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid. P 100.

⁶⁴⁷ Superflex is a group of artists who solve environmental problems in collaboration with communities. For example, in Tanzania in 1997 they developed a method of converting biodegradable waste into a source of energy for a farming community, storing it in bright orange sculptural forms described as balloons. The technology is now used commercially. The installation of documentation of the project and its components is their artwork, *Superflex Biogas*. See: http://www.arken.dk/content/us/arkens_collection/installation_and_media_art/superflex

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APPENDICES

1) Bonita Ely, *The Murray's Edge*, 2008 (selection). Ink jet prints on archival matt paper, 120 (w) x 80 cm (h), exhibited for examination. For additional photographs go to www.bonitaely.com, the series in a forthcoming exhibition in the Art Gallery of New South Wales from its collection, June - October, 2009.

2) Examples of calligraphic characters from *One Thousand Ancient Longevity Characters (Gu Shou Qian Fu)*. Published by the Beijing Publishing Company, c.1990. A Japanese, Chinese collaboration edited by Prof. Nakamu Ra and Xuwen Jing.

3) Donald Judd, *Untitled*, (1982–1986), one hundred aluminium boxes installed in two artillery sheds, at the Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas. A sample of boxes (#45 – #62), from the field research at Marfa Texas, 2008, showing Judd's sequential improvisations upon the space of an oblong in his drawings for the fabricator.

BONITA ELY

The Murray's Edge

Appendix 1

Cowombat Flat Track: Victorian High Country

Cowombat Flat: UFO Sighting

Murray Headwaters: Brumby Track

Murray Headwaters: the Pole Marks the Spot

Near Corryong: Foothills

Near Corryong: Winter

Near Barmah: Pash

Near Barmah: Tarp, Snags

Near Barmah: Limbs

Near Barmah: the River's Edge

Lake Boga: WW11 Bomb Shelter for The Catalina Flying Boat Depot's Personnel

Lake Boga Yacht Club's Pier

Lake Boga: Fire Investigation – Keep Out

. Lake Boga: European Carp with Sea Gull Feather

Near Tooleybuc: Walk across the Water

Near Tooleybuc: Agribusiness

Murrumbidgee Murray Junction: near Boundary Bend

Murrumbidgee Murray Junction: Water Levels

Murrumbidgee Murray Junction: Log Slice

The River's Edge: Sandbar

Sandbar: Grid B

Near Robinvale: Euston Weir, Overflow

Near Euston: Fisherman's Camp

Near Robinvale: Latje Latje Country

Euston: Harvest

Near Mildura: Bottle Bend, Billabong near Mildura

Bottle Bend: the Bank of the Billabong

Bottle Bend: Grid B

Bottle Bend: Water Turned to Acid Sulphate

Bottle Bend: Technicoloured Snag

Bottle Bend: Roo Crossing

The River's Edge: Near Swan Reach, SA

Near Swan Reach: Trickle

Near Swan Reach: Ent's Foot

Murray River near Swan Reach: Cave

Lake Alexandrina: the Murray's Estuary

82. Lake Albert: Ute, Meningie Pier

Estuary

Coorong: Rumbelow's Hut

1000 Longevity Characters

Appendix 2

Appendix 3 can be viewed at UWS Library for the purpose of private study and research only

DONALD JUDD
Boxes 44-63, Marfa Texas