

# winnie teschmacher

spring 2020

'Push far towards the Void, Hold fast enough to Quietness.'

These opening lines of a verse from the *Tao Te Tjing* have played on my mind for days, if not weeks. The cities and streets are empty and, suddenly, different sounds become audible. Birds make merry in the heart of the empty city, the sky is void of white lines, returned to the reign of feathers.

Emptiness is one of my favourite topics, and with it all that it might contain. I prefer the term *Void*. It sounds so much more capacious. In 1945, in *The Book of the Void*, Miyamoto Musashi writes: 'What is called the spirit of the void is where there is nothing. It is not included in man's knowledge. Of course the void is nothingness. By knowing things that exist, you can know that which does not exist. That is the Void.' Another one of those glorious conundrums.

Musashi's book lies atop the ever-growing pile of Japanese books. From *The Tale of Genji* via *Kokoro* to everything by Haruki Murakami. The Japanese culture enthralls me endlessly and I spend these 'empty' days submerging myself in its books, temples, gardens, art ... and then there's my Japanese travel experiences.

It is simply impossible to walk a straight line through it all and, quite honestly, I enjoy the ever-recurring detours that lead me to places where I can refresh my eyes, from whence to behold the world anew. It all feels very close to my being, even though that culture is so very different from my own. Perhaps that's what makes it so surprising and mysterious.

I find Japan to be the epitome of 'emptiness', so it's fitting to spend this 'empty' time roaming the country, her philosophy, her stories and inspirational places. The photographs transport me to moments of beauty and inspiration that I am now able to experience even more deeply. It's not a recollection but a new, fresh, deeper look. I allow myself to be carried away by my own thoughts and stories. I spend time in the 'void', allowing me to be everywhere. Again I read the thought of Musashi: 'Polish the two-fold spirit: heart and mind, and sharpen the twofold gaze; perception and sight. When your spirit is not in the least clouded, when the clouds of bewilderment clear away, there is the true void.'





'Far away, in the rural village of Katsura, the reflection of the moon in the water is clear and calm.'

– *The Tale of Genji*, 11th century

The area where the Katsura Imperial Villa has stood for centuries is traditionally a stylish location for moon-viewing. Platforms have been set up for that purpose in various locations across Japan. In May, when the Flower Moon (the last supermoon of 2020) adorned the skies, I would have loved to have sat on one of those platforms.

During my visit to the villa I quickly disappear into the universe of the garden and the buildings. It is a landscape in which everything is represented: mountains, water, forests, tea houses, bridges and paths that invite you to hop from one stone to the next. Room dividers allow the empty spaces in the buildings to assume different shapes. The spaces have been created to serve the views. As I roam this magical place, I finally understand where some of my favourite architects got their inspiration from. Nature here is 'small-scale', but it feels as though one is in 'the great'.

I re-encounter the moon at the Silver Pavilion in Kyoto. The beauty of the temple matches that of the moon. The moon allows the world to bathe gently in the

reflected sunlight. I think one could wander through Kyoto endlessly, in search of the void. It is in the gardens, in the 1600+ temples and even in the old alleyways.

When I am in one of the famous gardens, I gaze at the large boulders, positioned amidst the raked gravel. The garden is supposed to look as though nature created her that way. Every tree and every stone seems to have been placed at random, but all has been perfectly orchestrated.

As I sit there, I remember the words of Haruki Murakami on the correct method of writing: observe, observe and observe once more, postponing judgement for as long as possible. Luckily, this phrase also applies to artists. I disappear into the void of the garden and the temple, experiencing space for the most marvellous ideas, which I later find, after a few glasses of sake, to have forgotten.

A following day, I find myself at the Fushimi Inari Shrine, with its iconic and endless series of scarlet arches, named the Torii. The shrine is amongst the oldest and best known Shinto shrines in Kyoto and is dedicated to Inari, the *kami* of rice, often depicted as a small fox. The entire

mountain is covered with thousands of Torii and there are foxes everywhere, holding all manner of items in their mouths. I spend the entire day wandering through the gates, across the mountain, visiting the shrines. Reality is so much more impressive than the photographs I see in my books on Japan. Now, when I look at the images I can recollect my own experience and I am happy to have been able to take the time to absorb the spiritual power of this place.

The basic principle of the Shinto shrine is to embrace emptiness. In its original form, four pillars are erected, the tops of which are connected by holy ropes. An empty space has been left in the centre. That space has been designed to be empty, so that something can enter at any time.

Before one enters the courtyard, one must first 'purify', as the ordinary human world is unclean - something the Japanese have known for much longer than the rest of the world. I wash my left hand, then my right hand and I rinse my mouth. Then I perform a greeting by the Torii and cast some change into the large wooden box by the main hall. I bow twice, clap twice, then

put my hands together and make my wish in silence. I bow again. It is a delightful ritual.

Of the thousands of shrines in Japan, the most important one is the Amaterasu Shrine in Ise Jingu. Amaterasu is the *omikami* (supreme god) of Shinto. Not only is she the goddess of the sun, she is also seen as the direct ancestor of the Japanese imperial family. Every twenty years, the temple is rebuilt according to a strict ritual. Thus the temple differs in nothing from that of 1300 years ago. The next *Shikiken Sengu*, as the ritual is called, will be in 2033. At that time, there will momentarily be two temples. As I stand here there is only one. Where the old one stood is a bare building site with a fence around it. I am here in a world where time does not exist and I end my visit amongst a large group of Japanese watching a *Noh* performance.





'Silence, I discover, is something you can actually hear.'

– *Kafka on the Shore*, Haruki Murakami

The first time I visited Japan, I was expecting Murakami's Japan, whilst at the same time thinking: it can't possibly be like that. The tilting realities, parallel worlds, talking cats, flying fish and time being stretched, condensed and bent in all possible directions: impossible. But Japan turns out to be just that world. My favourite book, *Kafka on the Shore*, is set largely on the island of Shikoku and in capital Takamatsu. This city is known to serve the best *udon*, which I was able to have a taste of.

From Takamatsu I take a boat across the Seto inland sea to Naoshima, one of the Setouchi islands. The area contains many tiny islands where extraordinary art projects have been executed over the past thirty years. Visionary Soichiro Fukutake wanted to revitalise the islands, with culture as a beacon. His aim was to create a paradise that harmoniously bound art, nature and local community. Although I have not been able to see everything (this would take weeks), I have come to the conclusion that the project has been highly successful. I felt like I was in paradise.

It once began with the opening of Benesse House in 1992 and it has since grown

into a pilgrimage site for true art lovers. I had been wanting to visit ever since I bought a book on the Chichu Museum, years ago. As I stood in the building by Tadao Ando, I was in utter awe. I viewed the works of Walter De Maria, James Turrell and Claude Monet, as it is for these artists that the site was created. The building surrounds the works. What a choice.

Tadao Ando was truly able to put his mark on the island, because the Lee Ufan Museum and Benesse House are also by his hand. The wind blows everywhere and it is a blessing to move from submersion to stupefaction. Over lunch at Benesse House I savour Hiroshi Sugimoto's photographs: they are my view.

Before I leave the island, I honour the *kami* in the Go'ō Shrine, where the daylight guides me via a glass staircase to a mysterious underground space. Sugimoto re-erected the small, centuries-old shrine here in 2002. It is a gem of light, emptiness and silence.

The next day I sail to the island of Teshima, where Christian Boltanski's *Archives du Coeur* can be found in a

small building with stunning views of the sea. After visiting a number of other installations, I can once more fill my head and heart with emptiness in the Teshima Art Museum. Like a giant drop of water, the building lies atop a hill, featuring yet more imposing sea views. Phones off, no photos, limited number of people, silence. For what seems like hours, I stare at the drops of water slowly bubbling up from the concrete surface as they form puddles that stream over the ground into nothingness.

Above me is an oval that opens up to the sky. The wind and the light rein freely there. The entire building has been designed to emphasise the power of the void.

Another favourite of mine is sculptor Isamu Noguchi. His Garden Museum is in Takamatsu and after much emailing back and forth I am able to visit.

No phones or photographs here either, but instead the silence to fully experience the sculptures and the place itself. There are large stone statues in the barn and garden. Beside it lies an artificial mountain, every detail of which has been thought out. At the end of my visit, the

director invites me to enter Noguchi's former residence. Sacred ground. All that is missing is the artist himself, although he is present in everything.

Some time later I find myself on the holy mountain Koyasan, where I am staying in a *tatami* room in one of the oldest temples. I take part in the rituals, nearly get burned in the hot bath (*onsen*) and delight in the wonderful food served by the monks. The layer of mist that drapes the temples in a hazy blanket adds to the mysterious atmosphere of this sacred place. I roam the renowned graveyard for hours, astounded by its beauty. Some of the higgledy-piggledy gravestones are covered in moss. Beside the traditional graves there are bizarre contemporary ones in the shapes of rockets and other folly. There is room for all of it to co-exist peacefully. If ever I walk the 88 temple pilgrimage on Shikoku, I will begin here by honouring Kobo Daishi. But meanwhile I lose track of time. Time is a circle.





'Were it not for the shadows, there would be no beauty.'

– Junichiro Tanizaki

Blown away by typhoon Hagibis I drive past the raging Chikuma river. By the side of the road I see the slipstreams that have dragged many houses in their wake. Despite the destruction, the journey is stunning. I serpentine through the mountains where the Echigo Tsumari Art Field has realised many works of art. This is yet another part of Japan where art has been applied to infuse extinguished villages and neglected areas with new life. First I stop off at *The Tunnel of Light* by MAD architects, a 750 metre historical passage that cuts through remarkable rock formations and offers a panoramic view of one of Japan's three great gorges. One can walk to the end of the tunnel across the water, where one could simply disappear into the great void. It is a spectacular experience.

Something very different indeed is Marina Abramović's *Dreamhouse*. The hamlet where the house is supposedly situated turns out to be on a mountain in the middle of nowhere, where I am told that the house has been closed for months. The next day, however, I receive the key along with permission to look around the converted farmhouse. I see dream rooms in various colours, a spirit room,

a telepathic phone connection, copper bath tubs with gemstone headrests, a writing room to take note of your dreams. There are colourful, warm suits made of down, ready to take you into dreamland.

It turns out to be a stepping stone to the true place of my dreams, *The House of Light* by James Turrell, the wizard of light. I arrive there at 3pm and don't need to leave until 11am the next day. And there I am, for an afternoon, a night and a morning, by myself. It is an extraordinary experience. The kindest of ladies explains the do's and don'ts and then I am left to my own devices.

For his installation, Turrell was inspired by the book *In Praise of Shadows* by Junichiro Tanizaki. After reading it he decided to create a house in the traditional architectural ways of the region. He wanted to realise Tanizaki's 'world of shadows we are losing' in a space where one can experience life in light, through relating the gently transforming light inside to the natural light outside.

Turrell created the 'beauty of shadows' by using well-known Japanese idioms, such as the *shoji* (paper sliding doors) and the *tokonoma* (alcove). The blue of the sky, the

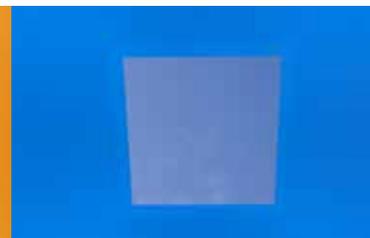
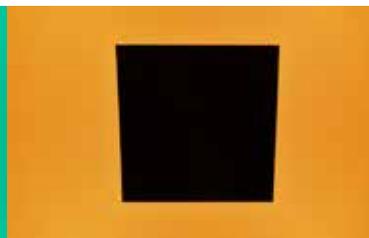
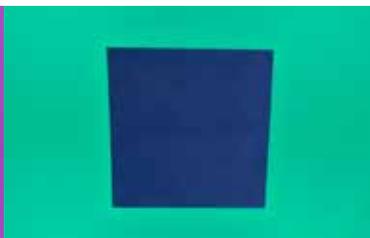
gold of the walls, the red of the alcove, the green of the bath and the black of the entire space make for subtle contrasts. This is a western artist's approach to Japanese culture. For someone like Turrell, who is in search of the 'perception of light', *The House of Light* is an attempt at capturing every light contrast and nuance between day and night, and merging eastern with western, traditional with contemporary. Tanizaki writes: 'In order to create ourselves a place to live, we spread out a parasol to cast a shadow onto the earth, and in the pale light of the shade we put a house together. (...) If the roof of a Japanese house is a parasol, the roof of a western house is no more than a baseball cap.' For *The House of Light* Turrell designed a roof in the shape of a parasol, in order to be able to cover the space and open it up again. Turrell wanted the roof to slide, allowing one to see the sky through the open ceiling.

At the time I arrive, the outside light forms a moving square light image in the empty space. Around dusk, there is an hour-long light programme. I install myself under the open roof and disappear into the complementary colour wheel presented to me. It is both magical and heavenly. My perception

is turned completely upside down as the light and the sky play their game. After that I sit on the *tatami* and listen to a posh English voice reading Tanizaki's book. I wander around outside in the quiet darkness and take in the inspirational place. Everything is 'right', every detail is linked to everything else. I take a quick dip in the *fibre optic* lit *onsen*, after which I try to sleep under the skyscape, beneath the stars. A verse by Milarepa aptly describes this moment:

'The awareness of voidness  
Is like the feeling of staring  
Into a vast and empty sky ...  
Thinking of the magnitude of the sky  
Meditate on the vastness  
With no center and  
No edge.'

Tomorrow morning at 5am there is another light programme to celebrate or emphasise the sunrise. All revolves around light.





'An ancient pond/ a frog jumps in/ the sound of water.'

– Matsuo Basho

In Kanazawa is the D.T. Suzuki museum, a hidden gem. It is a very quiet museum where everything revolves around emptiness. A place for self-reflection. Suzuki was a prominent Buddhist philosopher who gained great popularity in the West. Upon entering the building I see a reproduction of the famous drawing made by eighteenth-century monk Sengai. It depicts a square, a triangle and a circle. Suzuki calls the drawing *The Universe*. He uses it to convey the Mahayana concept. The famous Heart Sutra says: 'Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.' A mystical text that is impossible to wrap one's thoughts around, that transports one to not-knowing, to emptiness itself. Suzuki says: The circle symbolises infinity, the source of all forms of existence. But infinity itself is formless. Because we humans have been gifted with senses and intellect, we search for a form we can touch. This is the triangle. The starting point of all shapes. Subsequently, the square appears, which can be seen as the combination of two triangles. As this process continues, it produces all manner of forms in their infinite versatility. I could dwell on that for a lifetime and I

decide to enjoy the incapsulated void of this museum.

The most beautiful place is the contemplative space. Four open walls form a high square structure bearing a flat roof that reaches far beyond the walls' perimeters. This white box is situated in a pond called 'water mirror garden'. At regular intervals, a drop plops up from the pond. It creates circles in the water that slowly dissipate. The smooth surface of the pond awaits the next drop. I sit down and spontaneously plummet into the void. I consider seventeenth-century poet Basho's many haiku about emptiness. His contemporary Nishiyama Soin writes: 'Above all, the way of Haiku is to put emptiness first and substance last.' Indeed.

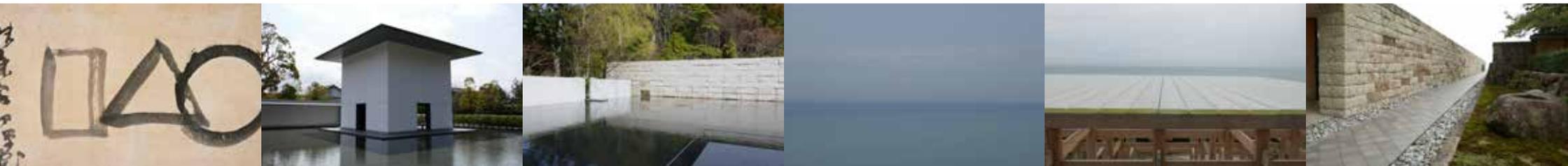
After a train journey that takes me through Tokyo's suburbia and past Sagami Bay, I arrive at an abandoned station where a van from the Odawara Art Foundation awaits me. A short drive brings me to the Enoura observatory, nestled against the steep outer rim of the Hakone mountains. It is a life project of Hiroshi Sugimoto. I am drawn to his open vision, which

questions the concept of time. As I take in the frozen horizon of his seascapes, I lose my sense of the concepts of time, space and location. Seascapes inspire reflection on the origin of cultures, the world and the journey required to arrive where we are now. The place in time and space where we find ourselves is fleeting as life itself. It is simply part of the journey. The very first humans shared the view of these seascapes, a deeply humbling thought.

I am welcomed to a beautiful little building and am given the necessary instructions and restrictions. I then wander through the structures and gardens, constantly accompanied by a 180° view of sea. I am literally looking at his seascape and cannot resist documenting my own onto the digital card.

His buildings are sober. Ancillary. And mainly: timeless. I walk through the seventy-metre-long tunnel that leads to the point where the sun rises during winter solstice. There is a podium there, built of thick blocks of pure optical glass, the material I use for my sculptures. It may be a podium for moon-viewing. There are ancient elements placed everywhere,

collected by Sugimoto over the years. Sacred stones, little temples, religious artefacts: everything has a history and a meaning. I gaze at the horizon. The straight line is a segment of a long curve. Standing on a mountain top on a remote island, following the horizon with your eyes, you notice how the end meets the beginning. It is there you realise that the edge of our field of vision is circular. The sun and the night stars also delineate circles. The world was once drenched in mystery, but now that we have access to so much knowledge about everything, we must seek new horizons for our human consciousness. I read somewhere that all love, language, science and art are born from a necessity to conquer the void. This paradisiacal place offers everything I need to allow the void to fill me up. I have no words for that experience.





'We exist in the empty spaces in between the objects.'

– Bill Viola

I am captivated by the Japanese term *ma* and I am aware of how it permeates the whole of Japanese culture. There is no need to explain such a thing to a Japanese person, but all the more to a Westerner. The simplest explanation of the word might be: the space in between, the interval. In it lay hidden the energy and beauty of that which is hidden from view. When looking for a more complete definition, I find the following.

The character *ma* (間) consists of two elements. 門 means 'door' or 'opening', and 月 may be translated into sun or moon. The two characters together describe the moment at which the moonlight shines through a gap or doorway. This description suggests that the opening - or the void - has the greatest influence on the event. For the light shines through it. The presence of the opening is essential for the moment coming into existence. The emptiness of the opening intensifies the moment at which moonlight is projected onto the ground. *Ma* describes such a moment of transition. It is the interval between two events or things in time. Not a contrasting interval,

but an interval that binds. In music, it is the hiatus or silence between two notes or sounds. It is present in architecture, the tea ceremony, Shinto, the work of cineasts, Kendo swordsmanship, and so on.

In Noh theatre, too, all revolves around the manipulation of *ma*. The movements of the masked performers on stage, the song, the drums: the balance between all of these elements is determined by presence in absence, sound in silence, movement in stillness or immobility. In dance (*buyo*) and *kabuki* theatre, gesture and dialogue are applied for the manipulation of *ma* in order to optimally involve the audience in the performance. This offers a first glimpse of what 'fulfilment' of the void means: maintaining the silence in order to increase tension. We then no longer speak of emptiness, but of complete, alert presence. *Ma* emphasises stillness and silence: that which is not there. I could learn from that, with all these piles of books and words on paper.

During the spring of 2020, De Ketelfactory invited all of her artists to provide content for a cahier. Each artist used words and/or images to form a reflection on the spring of 2020, a period during which much changed and, perhaps, many things remained the same. This process has resulted in a series of fifty cahiers, providing an insight into the imaginative world of these artists during an extraordinary time. This is one of fifty cahiers. The series concludes with a cahier in which De Ketelfactory introduces herself.

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