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An Investigation into the Japanese Notion of '*Ma*': Practising Sculpture within Space-time Dialogues

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An Investigation into the Japanese Notion of '*Ma*': Practising Sculpture within Space-time Dialogues

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Abstract

The ancient Japanese space-time idea of *ma* has many aspects, not only in

philosophical and artistic pursuits, but also in everyday life. *Ma* is difficult to pin

down because it is an entirely relational concept and the word is only intelligible

within our most subjective responses to temporal and spatial discontinuities: its

key characteristic being a unity of experience across two fields of aesthetic

encounter usually kept apart in the West. These subtle shifts of meaning and

attribution within a single spatio-temporal domain have made *ma* difficult to adapt

for Western purposes. Whereas the cultural critic Mark C. Taylor (1997)

recognizes *ma* as the art of 'spacing-timing', the art historian James Elkins (2003)

confines *ma* to our appreciation of negative spaces in the visual arts. Both fail to

note the broader field of references used by the Japanese and my doctoral project

was initiated as a response to the rich spatio-temporal ambiguity of the term and

the subtle forms of dialogic awareness it can introduce into the everyday routines

of a creative practitioner who is, like myself, from Japan. Because *ma* operates at

so many levels, throughout this thesis I relate my discussion to historical and

contemporary artists, performers, writers, film-makers, architects, gardeners,

psychologists, philosophers and theologians.

The resulting thesis consists of three components. The first part (in chapter 1 and

2) offers an introductory explanation of *ma* and its attendant vocabulary in various

fields, in order to grasp the complexity of its usage, from the philosophical to the

everyday. At the same time, Western ideas, which are similar to *ma*, are examined.

It is here that I begin my exploration of how this term allows the Japanese to unify

experiences that Europeans place either *in* time or *in* space, a discussion that attempts to contribute new knowledge to the vocabularies of Western artists. The second part (in chapter 3 and 4) is an exploration of the pauses and hesitations that add so much expression and communicability to human dialogue. I call this conversational *ma*, a term that allows me to develop a theoretical focus which, as far as I know, has not been used before in Japanese discussions of the visual arts, let alone in the West. Here I am particularly interested in the psychological dimension of my topic which has, I propose, a cross-cultural affinity to the concepts of: 'separate sense' from the British psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas (1997); 'intersubjectivity' from the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964); and 'I-Thou' from the German theologian Martin Buber (1958). The discussion in this section reveals that we all, as social beings, unconsciously live in a web of complex spatio-temporal relations, even when we are alone. The third part (in chapter 5) involves an innovative transfer of Buber's 'I-Thou' concept outside its usual interpersonal frame to the intimate relationship between an artist, her studio materials, and the creative dimension of her tool-using activities. This component of the thesis addresses the core practice-led investigation of my project in which Buber's idea allows me to demonstrate a dialectic 'I-Thou' relationship within the technique of 'distressing' polythene, a process I developed through an interest in traditional Japanese fabrics and papers in order to illustrate what happens when *ma* impacts upon the studio routines of a contemporary artist.

Having used myself as a research vehicle I begin in chapter 6 to conclude my thesis by framing my studio adaptations to bad-*ma* and good-*ma* with a discussion of the various forms of action research methodology (Lewin [1946], Reason [2000],

Marshall [2001], Kemmis [1996] and Whitehead [1989]) used by the fine art practice-led researchers at Northumbria University. The conclusion of my thesis concerns the potential of conversational *ma* beyond my studio environment. I consider some *ma*-like experiences with exhibited artworks but, following a visit to the Parks collection of Japanese paper at the Sir Joseph Banks Centre for Economic Botany in Kew, I identify the *ma* of museum storage (or 'off-display') as the most appropriate vehicle for prolonging the poignant sense of incompletion I experienced in my studio research. I cross-reference the *ma* of storage to the composer John Cage's important late work *Rolywholyover A Circus* (1993), a project that extended his musical use of chance and random effects to the display and storing of artworks. As a result, I resolve my ambition to promote *ma* as a useful addition to the vocabulary of non-Japanese artists by linking the *ma* of storage to contemporary revivals of Cage's sudden, surprising moments of musical silence and museum absence. As always *ma* is best understood as the heightened insinuation of time into space and space into time and the state of being 'off-display' seems to embody, in the very Western context of a museum archive, a research theme that explores the poignant yet-to-be-fulfilled nature of archival material. Thus the conclusion to my thesis offers the final insight of my research by pointing to the archive, rather than the exhibition, as the best way of experiencing conversational *ma* as a vehicle for practice-led research by artists.

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Please note that all pictures or images in which no source is mentioned are my own.

Acknowledgements

Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

CHAPTER 1. Introduction: what is *ma*?

1.0 Bad-*ma*

> When I was listening to a story…a serious story from my close friend, I yawned
> carelessly. And she looked at me as if she blamed me. That is an example of the
> kind of moment in which I feel 'bad-*ma*' (the actor Kotomi Takahata in discussion
> with the researcher).

This thesis is an investigation into the creative dimensions of sudden interruptions,
poignant intervals and other kinds of meaningfully discontinuous experiences, the
kinds of experiences that come into focus by using the Japanese word *ma*.
Takahata's example of bad-*ma* is a typical way for a Japanese to express a
moment of conversational awkwardness. She might, however, equally have used
the same term to describe the uncomfortably cramped spaces of commuter trains
in Tokyo. Bad-*ma* can be either a temporal or a spatial experience.

Throughout my career as an artist I accepted the aesthetic value of this term. As a
native Japanese I have grown up knowing that *ma* is an affect of rhythm or timing
in poetry, drama or music and a quality of composition or disposition in a painting,
sculpture, or architectural design. I have incorporated it into my creative practices.
It is second nature to me. And yet, having decided on *ma* as a topic for my
practice-led PhD I was, for the first time, confronted by the ambiguity of the
concept. It is rich in implicit meaning but slippery in definition. I suddenly had the

problem of providing parameters for a term I had always 'felt' but never explained. I wondered how I would ever communicate my ideas about *ma* outside the context of Japanese culture. In a sense this issue has dominated my goals as a researcher and, as a result, it is important to admit that, from the beginning, my struggle to understand and explain the intuitions I have about *ma* has filled my project with many moments in which I myself have had to pause, take a deep breath, and start again. The whole venture has been dominated by the nature of what my English colleagues at Northumbria call a pregnant pause. It has been therefore my decision to allow this thesis to be shaped by this suggestive and expressive character.

1.1 Good-*ma*

In a survey of the use of the word *ma* amongst Japanese colleagues at Northumbria University, a range of disagreements emerged. Asked to cite examples of *ma*-rich things, rather predictably, almost all forms of the traditional arts of my culture were described. For example, the type of garden ornament known as a *shishiodoshi*[1] (Fig.1) was mentioned because the unpredictable pause between each moment when the water is released generates *ma*. In a similar vein, an ink painting by the sixteenth century artist Musashi Miyamoto (Fig. 2) has *ma* because one expects the depicted bird to fly away following an implied, *ma*-like pause. Beyond the visual arts (calligraphy was also a popular example) the music of the *Koto* (Japanese harp), the *syamisen* (Japanese violin) and the *taiko*

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[1] Water pours from a tube or pipe into the arm. When the arm gets full, the weight of the water causes it to tip over and empty, making a sharp sound when it hits the hard surface below it.

(Japanese drums) were an obvious choice but my respondents emphasized that the occurrence of *ma* in all time-based arts depended on the skill of the performers. In Kabuki Theatre it would also involve the sensitivity of the stage direction. This implies that *ma* is a property of the interpretative moment rather than the material presence of a thing.
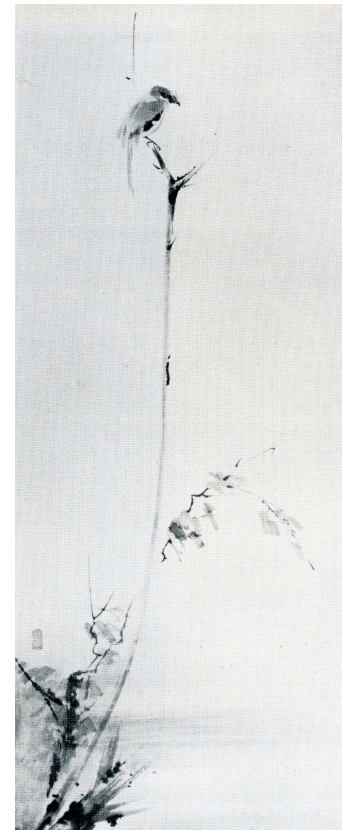
Fig.1 (Left): *Shishiodoshi,* Photo by Hana (2007).
Fig. 2 (Right): Musashi Miyamoto (mid of 17c.) *Shrike on a tree-stump* [Ink Painting]. Izumi City Osaka, Important Cultural Property.

It is therefore not surprising that my survey suggested that the conditions under which *ma* is most likely to be experienced were quietness, calmness and simplicity. Although it seems illogical in relation to the objects cited above, many thought of *ma* as a feature of unadorned nature rather than the manmade environment. For

example, the use of self-contained geometric shapes (such as circles) in architectural or garden design was thought to inhibit *ma*-like feelings. Given that everyone I spoke to could recall *ma* experiences related to artworks, this was something of a contradiction.

As I progressed with my *ma* discussions it became clear that my Japanese colleagues often found it difficult to agree on what constitutes a concrete example of *ma* even though there is an in-built agreement about the scope of the term. For example, one respondent described the *ma*-like qualities of architecture using a photograph of the glass cupola of an art nouveau department store in Paris (Fig. 3). No one else present was convinced. In fact, even when it came to discussions about the works of celebrated Japanese artists: the painter Jyakuchu Ito (Fig. 4); the performance works of Genpei Akasegawa; the films of Takeshi Kitano; and the photographs of Yoshinobu Araki and Ihei Kimura were all hotly debated. For example, it was the approach and style of Araki's photography, not the pictorial content of his images that evoked a sense of *ma*. Disagreement became more frequent when examples of artworks by non-Japanese were cited. Many, but not everyone, thought that Dani Karavan (Fig. 5), Richard Serra (Fig. 6) and Gordon Matta-Clark (Fig. 7) had produced *ma*-rich works but a long debate about paintings by Toba Khedoori (Fig. 8) and Olafur Eliasson (Fig. 9) led to no consensus in a group of six Japanese art students.

Fig. 3 (Left): Cupola of Department store in Paris, photo by Take (2009).

Fig. 4 (Right): Jyakucyu Ito (late 18c.) *Golden pheasants on a tree in the snow* [Japanese Painting]. Ministry of imperial household.

Fig.5: Dani Karavan (1987-88) *Way of Light* [Sculpture]. Olympic Park, Soul, South Korea.
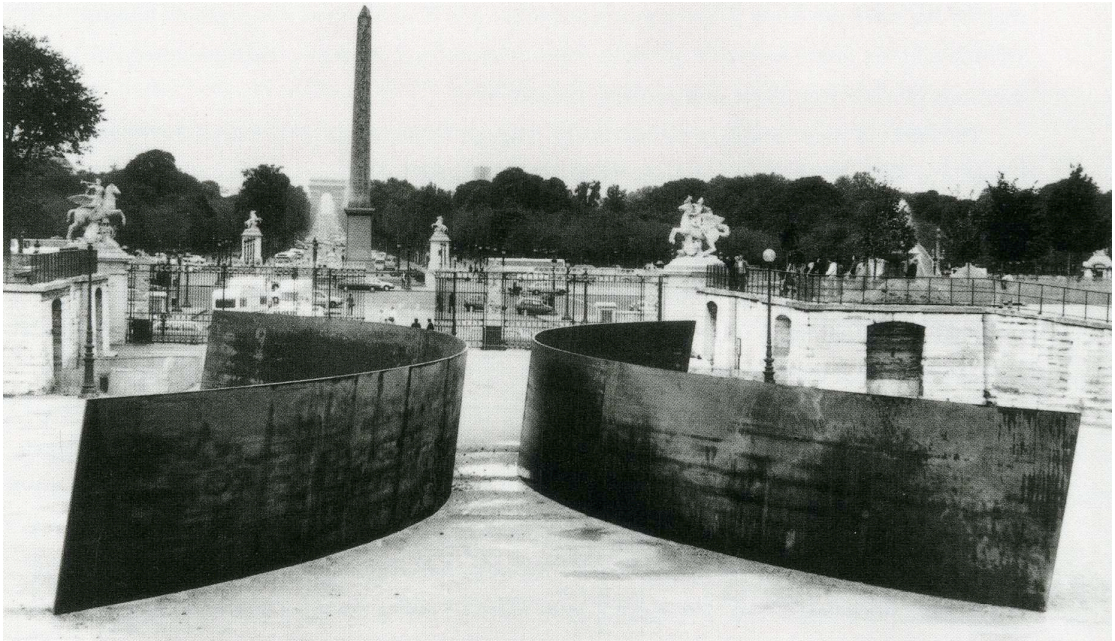
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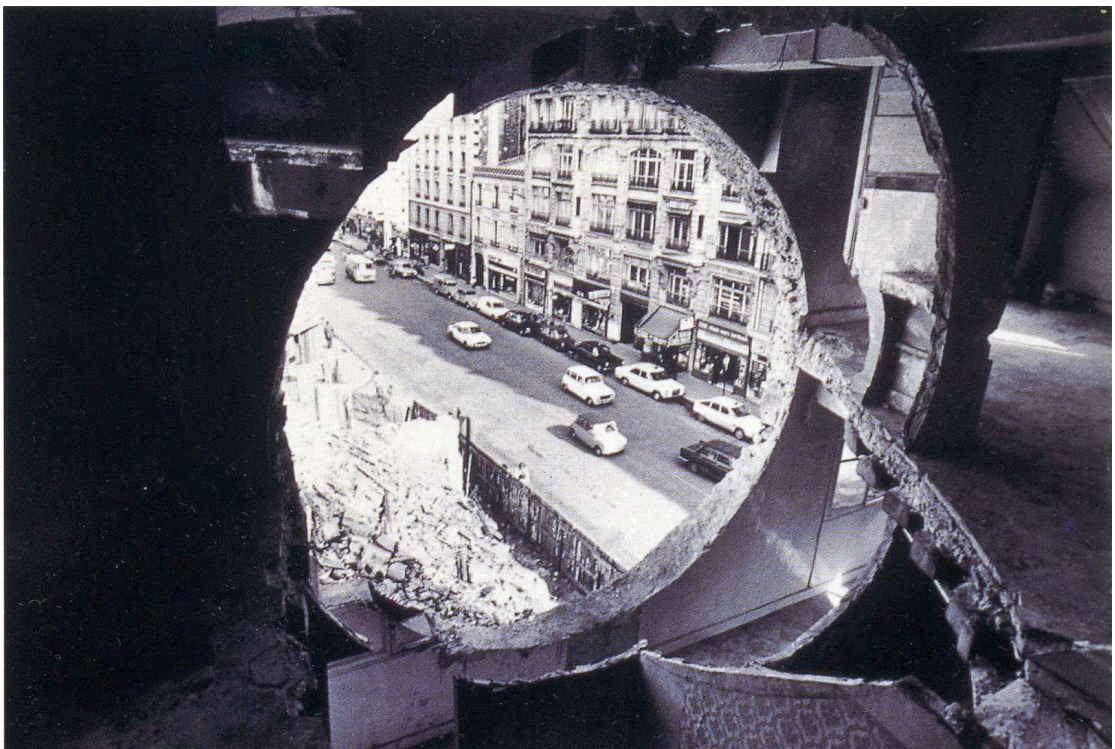
Fig.7: Gordon Matta-Clark (1975) *Conical Intersect* [filmstill]. The Gorden Matta-Clark Estate and David Zwirner Gallery.
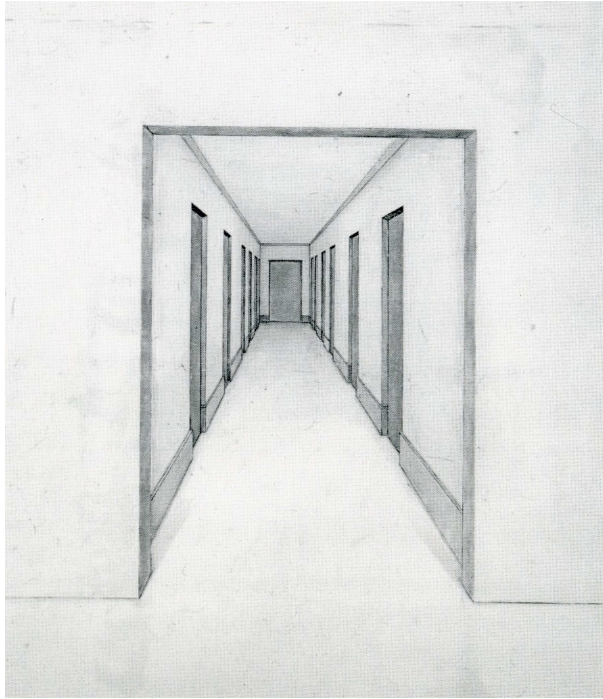
Fig. 8 (Left): Toba Khedoori (1997) Detail of *Untitled (hallway)* [Oil and Wax on Paper]. Los Angels County Museum of Art.

Fig. 9 (Right): Olafur Eliasson (1998) *Fivefold Tunnel* [Installation]. Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, Austria.

I also had discussions with non-Japanese colleagues at Northumbria. In these cases, I was often given Eastern examples such as the scarf joints in Ming Dynasty furniture, which are held together, not by glue (a very Western idea, I was told), but by the force of separation (in the shape of a wedge driven between the two halves). This was described as *ma* because a strong and solid join is formed when, paradoxically the wedge drives the interlocking parts more firmly together. My non-Japanese respondents seemed to find the films of the Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky *ma*-rich. I think myself that his film *Nostalgia* is an outstanding example of *ma*, particularly in relation to the embedding of spatial and temporal qualities. As Tarkovsky wrote in *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*:

> If one compares cinema with such time-based arts as, say, ballet or music, cinema stands out as giving time visible, real form. Once recorded on film, the phenomenon is there, given and immutable, even when the time is intensely subjective. (Tarkovsky, 1986: 118)

However, other Japanese artists I consulted found the film too full of silence (apparently in contradiction to the 'quietness' discussed above) and so I was left feeling uncertain about the qualities I had experienced whilst watching Tarkovsky's long sequences of visible time. Since expectation is a key component in *ma*, the fact that the film is so steeped in Russian history, so informed by specific cultural anticipations related to the 'fatal attachment of Russians to their national roots' (Tarkovsky, 1986: 202), that Japanese viewers may have found it difficult to respond to the subtle, highly subjective nuances of a filmmaker who turns memory into a 'time-thrust in the frames'. (Tarkovsky, 1986: 119) This 'time-thrust' is a rhythmic pace inherent to the filmic images rather than the sequential montage created by the editing process. Tarkovsky was convinced that it is 'rhythm, and not editing, as people tend to think, that is the main formative element of cinema'. (Tarkovsky, 1986: 119) In *Nostalgia*, it seems to me, that the filmmaker deliberately intended to make his audience feel uncomfortable and this is, as we shall find later in this thesis, an attribute that the Japanese mind always links to the notion of conversational *ma*.

One respondent pointed out that *ma* is often felt when people communicate with each other without speaking. This enigmatic description draws out the entirely relational dimension of *ma*, another concept that we will return later in the thesis. In this sense *ma*-rich tensions are not simply the property of an uncomfortable

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break in conversation (as introduced by the actress Kotomi Takahata at the top of this chapter) but an inter-personal space experienced between two subjects, a mutual tension established without verbal communication.

1.2 The archeology of *ma*

With all these varied and inconclusive ideas about *ma* in mind, the design of my research project, and the structure of the resulting thesis, have come to resemble an archeological process. I have been increasingly fascinated by the most enigmatic aspects of the term *ma*, a word I have grown up with, and which I thought was familiar, but the more I tried to investigate the concept in a Western art school setting, the more mysterious it seemed. The survey of Japanese and non-Japanese colleagues at Northumbria described above set me off on a quest: not outwards as I expected, toward the goal of cross-cultural translation and improved understanding, but inwards, down through the accumulated layers of *ma* meanings in my (very Japanese) mind. As a result, the chapters of this thesis represent a personal archeology in which I attempt to dig through the cultural and psychological strata of the word. My research has been an excavation rather than an expedition. This was partly caused by the reflective nature of practice-led research. My project grows out of my interests as an artist, I have not tried to turn myself into a cultural historian and when I encountered different fields of knowledge during my investigations I always kept 'digging' to see what I could find next. However, my project has also been shaped by the continual state of incomprehension I experienced as I moved between the Japanese and English languages (particularly when translating the Japanese publications used in this

thesis). My research is dedicated to the ineffable qualities that lie beyond the scope of linguistic expression.

CHAPTER 2. *Ma*, the vocabulary

2.0 A room between heaven and earth

An imagined room positioned uncertainly between heaven and earth is said to be the original way of picturing the concept of *ma*. We are simultaneously imagining both spatial and temporal uncertainty: the room is neither in one place nor in the other - an indescribable place to be. The earliest pictograms for this term were constructed using the signs that represented either the moon or the sun set within the sign for a gate. (Nitschke, 1993: 49) Here the concept suggests an impossibly expansive world seen through the limited frame of an ordinary, everyday opening. A *ma*-like gap will be greater than its earthly dimensions.

According to the historian Seigou Matsuoka, usage seems to date back to AD770 when it appeared in a *tanka* (a short poem) entitled *Manyoshu,* the oldest short poem collection in existence. (Matsuoka, 1994: 280) However, the *Kojien* dictionary claims that the word already appeared in a poem in the *Kojiki*.[2] Additionally, there is also a reference to the 'art of *ma'* in *Kyokunshou*, written by Komano Chikazane about *Gagaku*[3] around 1233. (Nishiyama, 1983: 119) Since the Japanese Muromachi era (1392-1573) the word was also used in

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[2] The oldest Japanese history book in existence, edited around AD 712.
[3] A general term used to describe the forms of court music and performance rooted in ancient Japanese Shintoism.

books on swordsmanship (for example, the *Heiho kadensho* by Yagyu Tajimanokami and the *Gorin no sho* by Musashi Miyamoto in the early seventeenth century) and widely applied in the traditional Japanese arts, especially in relation to the appreciation of music, dance and theatre, where it designated an aesthetically placed interval in time or space. (Nishiyama, 1983: 119) By its very absence, a *ma*-like gap helps to accentuate the rhythm or design of the whole. It will already be obvious from this discussion that the concept of *ma* has a history of referring to a complex of experiences that cover time and space. At this point in my attempt at explaining *ma* I want to emphasize the way the concept has, from the beginning, fused temporal and spatial affects into a single aesthetic idea.

Any attempt at describing this long-established, and specifically Japanese, aesthetic requires a continual cross-referencing of examples from both the time-based and the plastic arts. It may be that there is something particularly Japanese about this. For example, in relation to the European traditions, Japanese musicians have long had the liberty to lengthen or shorten a rest according to their interpretation of a given composition[4] and Japanese painters have a history of creating meaningful voids through the deliberate use of blank unpainted surfaces (Uemura, 2007), ideas much less explicit in the history of visual art in Europe until the nineteenth century and even then, to my knowledge, not combined as a single quality.

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[4] According to Akio Arimoto (no date) Western music strives to achieve a state of 'absolute music' in which tuning and tempo are standardized. In contrast, Japanese traditional music is a 'relative' art form that does not require instructions for the production of musical experiences.

One can tell the same unifying story in relation to other art forms. In traditional Japanese dance and drama performers have long had the freedom to insert or extend a pause in their singing, speech, and bodily movement. For example, in the ancient practices of *No* drama (fig. 10),[5] an actor is expected to attain highly dramatic expression by stopping all motion during an act. This deliberate suspension of action, undertaken at a moment chosen by the actor, plays an important role in establishing the expressive power of a performance. In the history of gardening in Japan, it has been recognized for a millennium that spatial gaps and vista openings can be used to strategically enhance our engagement with the design of the garden as a whole (Isozaki, 2001: 8) and, finally, in poetry, the overtones that create a sense of mystery and depth had definitions in medieval literary concepts such as *yojo* (for overtones) and *yugen* (for mystery and depth): all these qualities were considered by Japanese as variations of the concept of *ma*.

Fig. 10: *No* theatre, photo by Joe (2008).

In Europe the appreciation of spatial and temporal qualities seems to achieve explicit definition at a later historical date. For example, the kinds of practices that celebrate and promote improvised pauses come to the fore in twentieth century

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[5] *No* theatre is derived from *Sarugaku* performance practices that originated in the *Heian* era (794-1185) and became a ubiquitous and popular style in the fourteenth century.

European performance techniques.[6] Similarly, spatial gaps and vista openings only become obvious in European gardens with English designers such as William Kent during the eighteenth century and the only comparable European version of the poetic concepts of *yojo* and *yugen* that I can find are in the work of twentieth century practitioner-critics such as the poet William Empson (see, for example, his influential book *Seven Types of Ambiguity*). With these examples, the reader can appreciate a parallel Western development to the Japanese aesthetic tradition described in the paragraph above. In the history of Europe ways were found to define and communicate the power of spatial and temporal discontinuities, however I propose that there has been no parallel attempt outside of Japan to treat these qualities as a single family of experiences. The unifying spatio-temporal scope of *ma* was commented on by the cultural critic, Mark C. Taylor, in his catalogue essay for a Richard Serra exhibition, *Torqued Ellipses*, at the Dia Center for the Arts, New York (1997). Taylor wrote that '*ma* insinuates time into space by exposing the space of time' and is thus 'spacing that is a timing and a timing that is a spacing'. (Taylor, 1997: 36) For Taylor '[t]he art of *ma* – and there is no other art – is the art of spacing-timing'. (Taylor, 1997: 36) Therefore, there is no European, and therefore no Western, equivalent to *ma*.

The point made here is that the act of describing *ma*, particularly in relation to its possible Western cognate forms, involves an endless journey back and forth between spatial and temporal modes of expression and aesthetic appreciation. If, for example, the gap between two temple pillars is felt to evoke a greater

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[6] Since the late nineteenth century, improvisation has become popular stream in acting training and rehearsal under theorists and directors such as Konstantin Stanislavski and Jacques Copeau, founders of two major streams of acting theory. See Hodge, A. ed., 2000, *Twentieth Century Acting Training*, New York: Routledge.

spaciousness than the actual dimensions of the architectural space between two upright forms, then this seems to be an entirely spatial matter. But when this experience is embedded, as it is in the Japanese mind, in a spectrum of meanings that extends to an interval in the *Manyoshu*, in which temporal eternity is expressed within the rhythmic stops and starts of written and spoken language, then it becomes clear that there is no comparable Western concept. The power of the Japanese word *ma* is that it cannot really be divided into the separate properties of time and space since it is an entirely integrated notion – one understands *ma* through all its manifestations, spatial or temporal.

It may be helpful to look at a list of standard dictionary definitions in order to explore this spatio-temporal richness. One Japanese dictionary, the *Gendai Shinkokugojiten* (2001), says that *ma* is:

1. space, room

2. an interval

3. a pause

4. a room

5. time, awhile

6. leisure, spare time

7. luck, chance

8. timing

In contrast, the *Kojien* (2005, no page) dictionary says *ma* is:

1) An interval between two things or two events

    a) a space in between. Chink. (*"…inasa no yama no ki no ma…"*, "…in between the trees of Mt. Inasa…") from *Kojiki*, (*ma wo tumeru*, to shorten an interval or an distance), (*ma wo hakaru*, to try to achieve an appropriate distance)

    b) a time in between. (*"ouka chiru ma wo…"*, a moment cherry blossom scattering…) from *Kokinwakashu* (a tanka poem collection edited around 905), (*ma mo naku*, soon), (*mada ma ga aru*, to still have a time)

    c) the continuous time of a certain event (*neru ma mo nai*, no time to sleep), (*a tto iu ma*, in a twinkling), (*tuka no ma*, momentary)

2) A measuring system

    a) of the spaces between architectural pillars.

    b) of the size of *tatami* mats

3) A room in a house, divided by doors or screens

    a) a room (*madori*, a plan of a house), (*ita no ma,* a room with wooden floor)

    b) a unit of a room

    c) a number of rooms

4) A silence or a pause between in the rhythm of traditional music and performance. Derivation: a sense of rhythm throughout a whole performance (*ma no torikataga umai*, the timing of pauses is excellent)

5) A pause or silent interval between the spoken lines of a dramatic performance that creates a resonant 'afterglow' of unspoken meaning.

6) An appropriate opportunity. Good timing. Good Luck. Chance. (*ma wo ukagau*, trying to catch a right timing), (*ma ga ii,* when timing is good)

7) A situation. A sense of good or bad timing by which something good or bad

happens.

8) An anchorage (archaic)

With the word *ma* the Japanese seem to have developed a unique way of defining and uniting a complex range of space-time experiences. The dictionaries forge a single encompassing meaning out of, not only spatial gaps and temporal pauses, but also the skills we employ in responding to the poignancy or awkwardness of these experiences and the benefits that might, or might not, arise in such situations. As the architect Arata Isozaki (1931-) explains:

> … in Japan space and time were never fully separated but were conceived as correlative and omnipresent.… Space could not be perceived independently of the element of time. Likewise, time was not abstracted as a regulated homogeneous flow, but rather was believed to exist only in relation to movements or spaces…Thus, space was perceived as identical with the events or phenomena occurring in it; that is space was recognised only in its relation to time-flow. "MA" is the natural distance between two or more things existing in continuity or the space delineated by posts and screens (rooms), or the natural pause or interval between two or more phenomena occurring continuously, given to both spatial and temporal formulations. Thus the word *MA* does not describe the West's recognition of time and space as different serialisations. Rather, in Japan, both time and space have been measured in terms of intervals. Today's usage of the word *MA* extends to almost all aspects of Japanese life -for *MA* is recognised as 'the art of *MA*'. (Taylor, 1997: 35-36)

European thinking has given greater prominence to the distinctive character of our experiences *in* time and *in* space. For example, Isozaki's 'different serialisations' surely refers to the mechanistic values of Western science that, in turn, reflect a European ability to compartmentalize and sequence the flow of experience. Think of the development of standard time following the growth of the railway network in

nineteenth century Britain. ('Time zones', 2008) In eliminating regional differences in timekeeping, the spatial extension of railway travel had the effect of creating, for the first time, a single time zone across localities in which all clocks had previously kept slightly different time based on local solar time. In effect the development of a comprehensive system that united train passengers in different geographic locations was the triumph of time over space. Presumably Isozaki would think this level of spatial-temporal independence inconceivable in Japan without the growing Western influence that occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. On the other hand, the French historian Augustin Berque (1942-) notes that Europe also once treated space and time as correlatives. He claims that the French word *espace* was used to describe both spatial and temporal dimensions until the seventeenth century. (Berque, 1982: 70) The current expression *en l'espace de 3 minutes* seems to reflect this archaic usage. It is common practice to say 'in the space of 3 minutes' in English as well and so perhaps the point to make here is that a more prominent interest in separating space and time developed in Europe that eclipsed older intuitions that embedded spatial movement within time-flow. As a result, Westerners have created a disparate range of terms to conceptualize qualities of space and time whereas the Japanese are still in a position to unify these experiences with concepts such as *ma*.

Whilst investigating *ma* in the context of Northumbria University I have often wondered why it is that the English can say 'in the space of 3 minutes' but not find it easy to understand what I mean when I say that a particular architectural space has the qualities of a pregnant pause. To be fair the other artists and designers at Northumbria have much stronger appreciation of spatio-temporal qualities. The

German architect Gunter Nitschke is an example of a Western creative practitioner who has naturally grasped the way in which space and time are both correlative and omnipresent. He explains that the dual relation of *ma* to space and time is not simply semantic, it reflects the fact that we all experience space as a time-structured process and experience time through the spatial dimensions of our existence. (Nitschke, 1993: 54)

2.1 Space and time words

In thinking about space and time, it is clear from the discussion above that both Japanese and Westerners have similar conceptual understandings of spatio-temporal qualities but very different histories when it comes to developing and applying the language that represents this thinking. Even though the Japanese can keep space and time interdependent, they still read space, as Europeans do, by perceiving the arrangement and disposition of physical things. Here it is as if space is a world without words, an entirely material domain. For me this is a fundamental difference between space and time. Spatial experiences surely would be the same for all sensate and peripatetic beings whereas time is established through the conceptual frameworks of thought. It is the product of thinking creatures. Time seems to be a mental experience.

Have you ever looked at the clock and, with surprise, said 'it is already 8 o'clock!' or, while listening to a boring talk, frequently checked the time on your watch. We experience the passage of time in the gap between our interpretations of our inner expectations and our externally oriented perceptions. In this way we feel that time

can pass at a fast or slow rate. Time is revealed in the comparisons we make between different kinds of measuring concepts, between symbolic rates attached to innate body functions (the 'body clock', bouts of hunger, degrees of tiredness, etc), external environments (the changing sources of light through the day), and mechanical devices (i.e. clocks).

According to the historian Seigou Matsuoka, the conceptual frame we call time was probably first given institutional status by the ancient Egyptians who attached a great importance to the seasonal flooding of the River Nile. Flooding was vital for local agriculture and the incidence of floods was regular enough for farmers to develop agricultural practices based on the cyclical return of high water. However, it was the coincidence between flooding and the appearance of Sirius in the eastern sky that allowed farmers to mark and calculate the cycles that kept the land fertile and productive. (Matsuoka, 1994: 262) They used the star in the same way that we use a calendar. It seems that our sense of time was born from the coincidence of earthly and heavenly signs in which the movement of Sirius became a measuring concept that indicated movement of water levels in the Nile valley. The Druids, for example, are also said to have used astrology in order to know the timing of planting and harvesting grain. Stonehenge, an iconic architectural arrangement of spaces between stones, may have been a device for knowing the correlation between the exact movements of heavenly bodies. Within the spaces of this structure the Druids may have been able to calculate the coincidence of the periodicity of the movement of heavenly bodies and the periodicity of what happened on the ground. Although these kinds of historical speculations are not sound they do help us picture the emergence of a time-like

conceptual framework from man's physical occupation of the spatial environment. Before we had calendars our external environment provided us with a system of signs that helped us map the passing of time.

The European history of time owes a great deal to the cohering territorial expansion of the Roman Empire. Here the story is about calendars. The interesting thing is that the Romans used a calendar that, in relation to mapping heavenly periodicity onto earthly periodicity, had in-built errors because they assumed that the year was only 364 days long. Until Julius Caesar, in his office as Pontifex Maximus, reformed the Roman calendar about 50 years before the birth of Christ, institutionalized time-keeping in the Empire was always about three months out of sync with the movement of the heavenly bodies. The organization of the calendar was a high priority because it enhanced and disseminated the ability to coordinate agricultural activities in the annual rhythms of planting and harvesting across the whole Roman sphere of influence.

From the Seventh century to the mid-eighteenth century the Christian Church dominated the temporal organization of the European year, producing almanacs that listed all the key dates for religious functions and celebrations. These books were similar to calendars and included astronomical or astrological information about the movement of constellations in the night skies and views of agriculture. At a day-to-day level, the sense of time in the Christian era was controlled by the ring of a bell from the church, which let people know the key times of the day, though this was not precise until clocks were invented in the Middle Ages.

From the Industrial Revolution, with the expansion of ocean navigation, then the development of railways, motorcars, and air travel, it became necessary, as described above, to unify the technologies of time keeping. Precision was required to enable ever more accurate coordination of men and their machines, a development that seems to have irrevocably divided the ancient understanding that space was time and time was space. Throughout the modern world, under the impact of a revolution in communication technology, most people now mark the passing of time with mechanical systems that make only conventional references to geographic location, to our spatial experiences.

In relation to these mechanical systems, it is clear from the history sketched out above that even in Europe the basis of the conceptualized framework of time was fundamentally linked to the spatial movement of heavenly bodies. An example is the familiar sundial which transforms the movement of a shadow cast by the sun around divisions marked on a planar surface. As I said at the beginning of this section, when thinking about space and time, it seems to be true that both Japanese and Western cultures start with the same conceptual understandings of spatio-temporal experiences but have very different histories when it comes to turning these understandings into time-keeping mechanisms. For example, in Japan the first clock invented was a water clock made in 671. There is an interesting contrast between the idea of time presented to us by the mechanism of a sundial and that of a water clock. A mechanical device that marks the passing of time by water dripping through a tiny hole is, perhaps, unlike a sundial in the same way that cardinal numbers are unlike ordinal numbers: the sundial breaks up time into regular divisions; the water clock accumulates time in little packages, which

collect in a basin. The sundial is ordinal – the water clock is cardinal. The different time notion arising from these clock systems has been explained by Toshiro Kido as following:

> Having observed the French, I noticed that their code for judging time and space was the ordinal number. There are two types of codes for judging a natural number, ordinal and cardinal. The same natural number acquires a completely different character by using a different code. (Kido, 2000: 26)

Ordinal numbers are for ordering, and cardinal numbers are for measuring amounts. As Kido explains 'what we can see from this is that an absolute decision of rhythm and sound in a [musical] score is based on a sense of ordinal numbers. Taking a pause in music, making an empty space in architecture and a void in painting are all based on cardinal numbers. The construction of a clock can be said to be a source of this difference'. (Kido, 2000: 26)

Therefore imagine the Japanese water clock. Why is it so different from a European sundial? Unlike the movement of a shadow, the dripping of water from a feeder vessel through a tiny hole gathers as a volume of water in a holding vessel below. If one drop represents one second, the second drop will also represent one second, the third as well. And we can watch this process continue until, say, the 123rd drop has fallen into the holding vessel. At this point you would know that the volume of water collected is now the equivalent to 123 seconds, a visible sign for the volume of 123 seconds of past time. In this way, time is seen to arrive from an unmeasured volume of future time (in the feeder vessel) and accumulate as a measured volume of past time. Time is an entity that does not disappear or pass

away once it has appeared. This is a particular way of, as Kido says, 'judging time and space'. (Kido, 2000: 26)

The aspect of the water clock that most resembles a sundial is the sound made by the drops as they hit the surface of the water in the holding vessel. This rhythmic sound functions as a reminder of time going by: it has, as Kido describes, an ordinal rather that a cardinal presence. An ordinal system cannot make time itself present; it cannot represent time as an entity, as a volume passing through our lives. Unlike the sundial, time is embodied in every aspect of the water clock's functioning: for example, in the silence 'heard' between each sound of a drop hitting the water in the holding vessel. The sundial only shows you instances in the changing direction of the sun's shadow. Of course, the Japanese also used sundials and Europeans also used water clocks and so one should not generalize about historical differences between the West and Japan. The familiar Western egg timer, for example, is a device based on the cardinal presence of passing time. However, Kido's point is that the development of water clocks in Japan seems to fit well with the development of *ma*. The interdependence of spatial and temporal qualities revealed by the extensive range of references generated by the term *ma* suggests a cultural empathy with cardinal rather than ordinal values. The Japanese seem to have mined the aesthetic potential of the cardinal presence of time, the sort of conceptual framework in the water clock.

2.3 Music words

How did this non-European notion of time influence Japanese music, which may be said to be a time-based art? In Western Classical music a score strictly controls the tempo, pitch and qualities of the sounds. Japanese Classical music, on the other hand, has no score and the formal structures of the performed works, handed on through rigorous training, encourage a tacit understanding of how to begin, progress and resolve a piece; how to vary the lengths or pitches of sounds; and how to complement and integrate the different strands of music produced as each musician follows their own creative path. As with a great deal of music in both the East and the West, the aim is to produce a rich web of musical experiences within a sense of tight ensemble. In the Japanese Classical tradition there has been an emphasis on extemporization for much longer than in Europe and the West. For concert audiences in Japan these techniques are not associated with 'free' improvisation as they are in Western Jazz. Each Japanese instrumental player has been trained to contribute a different sense of rhythm to an ensemble piece. For example, if two Japanese educated in this tradition beat quarter and triple time together, they will explore ways of co-adapting one rhythm to the other as they move in and out of supporting and leading roles. The important thing here is that players pay attention to a shared rhythmic complexity that is unique to the moment of performance rather than to a unifying pulse which someone else is beating. It is the interaction that is important here. The musicians should produce a sense of ensemble out of their difference. Each accommodating shift in rhythm, each attempt at resolving rhythmic tensions would be an opportunity to experience the kind of discontinuity in which *ma* would occur. The

ma feeling would result from the space felt to exist between two conflicting temporal rhythms, a space-time experience in which the pressure of difference is maintained (just) against the pressure of uniformity.

2.4 Social conduct words

Much of the aesthetic pleasure of Japanese music lies in the formality used by the performers as they interact and accommodate their differences. The maintaining of just the right amount of difference between different rhythmic systems or harmonic structures is almost a matter of appropriate manners; it is not at all 'free' (like, for example, the explosive soloing in the jazz improvisations of Ornette Coleman). In this sense *ma* is the poetic dimension of the 'rightness' that should occur across a vast range of formal relationships and interactions generated in space and time. Indeed, for the Japanese, such formalities are a highly ritualized aspect for our everyday social lives. For example, when meeting a friend it is good manners to arrive promptly. This is called *ma ni au*: that is, 'to be on time' or, more literally, 'to meet the time'. If you are prompt your friend should also arrive *mamonaku*; that is, 'in no time'. Having arrived promptly you and your friend have to bow to each other simultaneously. A slight hesitation will make one of you appear uncouth; the mistake would make you *ma nuke*; that is, someone missing *ma*. Whilst bowing, you and your friend should keep an appropriate distance from each other (*ma wo toru*; to take a distance) and when talking, your conversation should be *hanashi no ma ga umai*: that is, full of well-placed pauses. However, if you are at a loss for words or generate awkward silences the Japanese will describe the situation as *ma ga motanai*; that is, 'unable to fill the gaps'. As a result, both you and your

friend will feel *ma ga warui*; that there has been 'a bad placing of pauses'. If all these levels of social formality have been satisfactorily accomplished, there will be a good sense of *ma* (*ma ga ii)*; if not, you will get a reputation for being impolite or uncivilized (*ma nuke*).

This discussion of the routines of polite conversation reveals the ubiquity of the space-time concept of *ma*. The predominance of the word in the Japanese phrases quoted above shows its role in accomplishment of seamless everyday interactions between people. The combination of a well-judged entry into a communal space and some well-placed pauses in the conversation that follows that entry make the customs and practices of social life more interesting, more delightful, more entertaining. For example, if you give your interlocutor time to think this is said to be *ma wo oku* (to put in a pause). Whereas anything that makes your interlocutor feel uncomfortable is said to be *ma wo kaku* (to lack *ma*) or *ma ga nukeru* (to come out *ma*). For example, if you tell an anecdote that goes on and on without arriving at a conclusion your story is said to be *ma ga nobiru* (overextended *ma*). Given these many interesting applications of the word *ma*, it is possible to see how the embedded nature of spatial and temporal experiences in the Japanese mind makes the unconscious levels of communication described in Western concepts such as 'body language' or 'Freudian slip' much more explicit: as one can see above, the expressiveness of all aspects of human behaviour are spelled out in the phrases used to categorize Japan social formalities. All these phrases employ the word *ma*.

The celebrated Japanese psychiatrist, Bin Kimura, is a useful source of insights concerning the contrast between non-vocal communication in Europe and Japan. Having practiced in both countries he is acutely aware of how differently inter-personal formalities (and the breaking of those formalities) operate in the contrasting cultural context. According to Kimura the omnipresent sense of a sin, which is liable to appear in patients suffering from depression in both countries, is, in the case of the Japanese, embedded in social relationships (shame before others) rather than religious duty (shame before God). (Kimura, (2) 2000: 46) Perhaps the strength of the Japanese context is that, given the inter-personal frame in which a sense of sin is experienced, it is difficult to make firm judgments (all humans are, to varying degrees, sinful). Kimura's many publications on psychoanalysis suggest to me that the meaning of the self, and the stability of that 'meaning', is deeply rooted in cultural identity. The Japanese idea of the self seems to be revealed in terms such as *ma* and Kimura has developed a theory of psychoanalytical practice that recognizes the *ma*-values that map out the optimum relationship between the self and the world. The struggle to maintain an appropriate personal space in the midst of a demanding, perhaps antagonistic, social or family environment is reflected in the many *ma* phrases cited above. For Kimura, *ma* is a key concept in his Japanese patient's efforts to find a mental place in which to live in peace. Here the positive and negative aspects of *ma* become important. Kimura's skill as an analyst involves a sensitivity to the good- and bad-*ma* that emerges within the story the patient tells: how the narrative is kept going; how often it falters; how new stories replace older, more negative versions; how discontinuities disrupt the overall shape of what has been said; and so on. This is a very Japanese way of doing psychoanalysis in which the

occurrence of *ma*-like moments is a way of understanding people's minds and emotions. There seems to be some commonality here between Kimura's thinking and the discussion about Japanese Classical music above. The description of two musicians adapting their rhythms to each other is a model of the analyst and the analysand modifying and revising the content of their conversation for therapeutic purposes. In this case the *ma* feeling also results from the space felt to exist between the conflicting parts of the stories told. Presumably, a healing outcome would be the good-*ma* generated when the pressure of difference is maintained against the pressure of uniformity.

According to Seigou Matuoka the Chinese character for *ma*（間）was originally 真 which indicated an ultimate truth or fact. Its cognate terms were 'sincerity' and 'fidelity'. (Matsuoka, 1998: 282) During this section we have explored a complex term which, whilst it may reflect a sense of profound sincerity or truth, has a unique ability to reference the paradoxical movement or process whereby two individual things or moments seem to be held apart and together at the same time. The word *ma* was born from the interpenetration of our spatial and temporal experiences and it retains the revelatory power of our earliest insights about time: that is, the correlation of movement in the heavens, the stars and the planets keeping their own time, with changes in the immediate environment, earthly things keeping their own time. The development of the concept of time allowed us to recognize, and then predict, periods in which these movements work together and periods when they fall out of sync. What the Japanese have come to call *ma* is a similar dynamic relation between moments of unity and difference. In the same way that we can speculate that the notion of time first appeared when heavenly

and earthly signs were read in relation to one another, *ma*–values can be said to have emerged when we first took pleasure in the accidental relations between independent entities (things or occurrences).

2.5 Space words

Having explored *ma* as a space-time idea, it is time to engage more specifically with *ma* as a quality of our spatial experiences. Before doing this we need to consider some differences between the general notions of space in different cultures. From the perspective of someone brought up in Japanese culture, the Western environment tends to make clear definitions about, and boundaries for, everything. The obvious example is the traditional methods of architectural construction in Europe. Architectural materials and structures impact on both the possibilities for physical movement and the relationships between people when using a building. In the case of the stone houses I see in rural Northumberland, the structure inside the building, the size and shape of the rooms, is unchangeable without reconstruction. In the traditional wooden architecture of Japan the rooms are partitioned by *shoji* and *fusuma* (sliding doors), which are removable (fig. 11). As a result there is a very different sense of personal space inside a Japanese house. This suggests that the boundaries (for example, between various kinds of domestic activities) are relatively clear in the West, whereas, in Japan they are more ambiguous. The flexibility of Japanese living arrangements is the basic condition of the Japanese sense of space.

Fig. 11: *Shoji* (Sliding doors). *Zuiho-in Temple* (Hymas, 1997).

The Japanese geographer Hideo Suzuki (1932-) has written about how the environment influences the formation of religious ideas. He says that global belief systems can be roughly divided into two opposing zones: one was generated in desert-like environments, which produced monotheistic beliefs (e.g. Judaism, Christianity and Islam); the other developed in forest-like environments, producing multiple-deity belief systems (e.g. Shintoism and Hinduism). According to Suzuki, the kind of cultures that formed in desert landscapes (for example, in the Middle East) required a God, or some similarly ultimate power, to transcend the hostile barrenness by bestowing special blessings (for example, rain to keep people alive). Desert dwellers were likely to think that everything good that surrounded them had been created through the intervention of this strong God, so strong that even time and space have been willed into existence at 'his' command. (Suzuki, 1994: 72)

Everything in existence, including human culture, was thus seen as part of God's plan to confer increasing fortune on the previously unproductive environment.

In contrast, cultures formed in thickly forested terrains think of the plentitude of nature that surrounds them as complete. Everything needed is already present; the blessing of natural abundance requires no further intervention by a transcendent power. The copiousness of the forest is the product of copious creative forces, a multiplicity of gods who look after every aspect of life in the rich forest. In comparison with the environment inhabited by desert dwellers, the forest is an easier place in which to survive. Suzuki thinks that these kinds of cultures look at the world from a down-to-earth human point of view, whereas desert-type cultures are more inclined to abstract their experiences, they tend to look at life from a bird's eye view. (Suzuki, 1994: 118)

A dense forest terrain is just the kind of environment in which the Japanese religion of Shinto emerged with its ambiguous mix of feelings of fear and pleasure derived from the many fragmented practices of local prehistoric traditions. In my opinion, the nearest concept in the West to Shintoism is the Sublime, a pivotal idea in the development of the European Romantic tradition, which refers to the sense of terrifying, and yet inspiring, awe one feels in the face of raw nature. We can understand how the early Japanese forest dwellers might have related the innermost recesses of the subjective mind to the expanse of impenetrable woodland in which they lived. In Suzuki's zone of multiple-deity belief there will be a tendency to focus on the parts rather than the whole, to respond to the patchwork surfaces of sunlit and shadowed spaces, not on the grand vistas. The

Shinto believer responds to half-hidden presences and ignores everything that is clearly visible. The phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard explores a similar area of the Sublime in his influential book *The Poetics of Space* (1958). He quotes Marcault and Therese Brosse in a remarkable chapter entitled 'Intimate Immensity' that, for the Japanese reader is full of Shinto-like resonances:

> Forests, especially, with the mystery of their space prolonged indefinitely beyond the veil of tree trunks and leaves, space that is veiled for our eyes, but transparent to action, are veritable psychological transcendents. (Bachelard, 1958: 185)

Bachelard seems to be interested in our poetic responses to enclosed spaces that parallel *ma*-like qualities. For example, the idea of a forest 'prolonged indefinitely beyond the veil of tree trunks and leaves' reminds me of the original pictogram for *ma*, an immense space seen through the portals of a small enclosing gate-like space. In certain situations this 'veil of tree trunks and leaves' might produce a sense of therapeutic security, a feeling of being safe (like a child in its parental home) which I would associate with good-*ma*. However, in other situations, the claustrophobic forest might produce bad-*ma* because we find it difficult to navigate our way through the dense forest terrain. My supervisor, the artist-curator Chris Dorsett, writes about the poetics of this kind of discomfort in an essay about the impact of arts-science funding initiatives on his practice. (Dorsett: 2007) In the preliminary stages of a curatorial project at Kew Gardens in London, Dorsett spent a month at a botanic field station in the Amazon forest. In *Exhibitions and their Prerequisites* (2007) he describes how the difficult nature of the jungle environment generated ideas for the artwork he would create back in the London Park:

We did a lot of strenuous walking and a great deal of slipping about in wet jungle mud. Every time I moved I embodied physical and perceptual ineptitude. With each stumble, before I was able to catch myself, my movements shrank to a single instinctive attempt to regain my balance in a terrain that afforded no open views, or potential for forward movement, in any direction. My faltering progress through the thorn-bearing undergrowth required tactical, not strategic, skills. In this distant place I began to plan my work as an artist-curator at Kew by writing down codes of instruction for future promenades on macadam pathways and broad grassy vistas. (Dorsett, 2007: 86)

Here the difference between the thorn-bearing undergrowth of the Amazon and the broad grassy vistas of Kew Gardens seems to sum up the contrast explored in Suzuki's two zones of belief. Dorsett's stumbling walk through the jungle is described by him as an attempt at re-establishing his 'habits of interpretation' in an 'uninhabitable' environment. Shinto belief is full of ancient rituals, traditional 'habits', that attempt to appease the spirit figures that inhabit inanimate objects or plants, become animals or, of course, ghosts. In the latter case, the anger and sadness of the ghost has to be assuaged by a ritualistic sprinkling of salt in its path or the erecting of a shrine to purify and protect the haunted habitat. In the Japanese mind this feels like a battle between good and bad spatial *ma.* If Suzuki's theory is right this feeling has its origin the forest people of prehistoric Japan.

2.6 Architectural words

The most obvious area in which to examine the pleasure Japanese take in poignant discontinuity as a spatial quality is in the realm of architecture. It is

traditional to define the size of a room in Japan in accordance with the number of *tatami* (Fig.12), a simple bamboo floor mat, that cover the floor. The size of one *tatami* is said to be *hito-ma* and a half-size mat is *han-ma*. The former is large enough for one person to sleep on and the latter is just the right size for one person to sit on. As a result, the dimensions of a large room might be described as *rokujyou-ma* (a chamber of six *tatami*). A more moderate sized room would be called *yojyou-han-ma* (a chamber of four and a half *tatami*). Although traditional *tatami* vary in dimension from region to region, Japanese still manage to use this measure to establish the approximate size of a room. In the context of defining architectural spaces, *ma* is also combined with other characters to describe the purpose of a room or space. For example, *do-ma* is a workspace, *cha-no-ma* is a sitting room, *kyaku-ma* is a guest room, and *toko-no-ma* is a display alcove in a traditional Japanese guest or tearoom for a scroll and flower arrangement. There is one particular application of the word *ma* in architecture that interests me a great deal. This is where the Japanese speak of the space under the eaves of a house as possessing good or bad *ma* (fig.13). In the West, this space is not significant because it does not have a role or function for the users of the building. However, according to the design historian and architect Teiji Ito, the eaves have come to have a particular value for the Japanese. They form a useful extended peripheral space around a house that lowers interior humidity, keeps off heavy rain (Japan has monsoons) and maintains a comfortable temperature by controlling the angle of the sunlight hitting the exterior of the building. (Ito, 1993: 34-36)

Fig.12 (Left): *Tatami,* photo by Mikub (2009).

Fig.13 (Right): *Space under the eaves*. *Genkoan Temple* (Hymas, 1997).

Let us look at an actual example of the kind of eaves space I am referring to. Figure 14 is the Hoo-do at Byodo-in temple, Kyoto, which was built in the mid 11th century. You can see that the eaves protrude much further out than they do in most Western buildings. The building appears to be a single architectural unit but it is, in fact, four separate structures. The point to make here is that the long sloping roofs and extended eaves have a consolidating effect; they create a sense of unity joining together not just the separate buildings but also their intermediate spaces. Beneath the eaves that create this unity there is a *ma*-rich space in which internal pavilion-like vestibules, foyers and entrance porches are drawn into an aesthetic dialogue with external courtyards, enclosures and gardens. Such spaces offer shelter from rain and wind (and thus make you feel as if you are inside) but also cover unenclosed natural gardens (and thus make you feel as if you are outside). Indeed Japanese architects and gardeners celebrate the ambivalent character of

these kinds of space. They take pleasure in the fact that the eaves space cannot be easily categorized. It is ma-rich because it is both inside and outside: it can be both at once or neither.

Fig.14: *Hoo-do, Byodo-in Temple*, Kyoto 1053 in Tsuji, N. (2000)

Ambiguity is the kind of words that comes to mind in relation to this inside-outside *ma*. Figure 15 shows one of the most famous gardens at Ryoan-ji temple in Kyoto: a desert-like example of Japanese visual culture that does not sit comfortably with Suzuki's claims about forest abundance shaping the history of Japan. It is possible to describe a similar dialogue between inside and outside in relation to the interaction of a garden and its surrounding environment. Monks made these 'dry' gardens in the late 15th century. They have been maintained for centuries as a form of ascetic contemplation but the original motive for creating desert-like gardens using inorganic rocks, shingle and sand in preference to organic plant life is a topic of debate amongst Japanese scholars. In *Construction of 'Kire'* (1993)

the philosopher Ryosuke Ohashi notes the allusive character of 'dry' garden design. He claims that the upright rocks are like a mountain landscape after the plants have withered and the raked sand is like a riverbed after the river has run dry. (Ohashi, 1993: 80) It is certainly true that the constituent parts of these gardens resemble Japanese mountains and riverbeds but, on the other hand, it is also clear that the rocks and the sand have been used in a highly conventionalized way. As Ohashi says:

> A stone is a stone and not a mountain. Sand is sand and not water. It is just that a stone is like a mountain, and the sand is like water. What does this 'like' mean? When A is said to be like B, it contains the meaning that A resembles B. In this case B is the true form and A is an imitation of B. On the other hand, it also indicates that the ideal form of B is expressed by A. (Ohashi, 1993: 80)

Fig. 15: *Ryoan-ji* Temple, Kyoto, photo by Kuraimu (2008).

And so it is not only the case that the rocks are an imitation of the mountains, but also that the 'ideal form' of the mountains can be expressed by the presence of the rocks. As a result the components of a dry garden have a formal status that exceeds imitation. They have an abstract dimension that can be contemplated in its own aesthetic terms. Given that this formal aspect requires the spectator to appreciate qualities that are unlike the immediate appearance of nature, the relationship between the garden and nature is brought into an interesting tension. For example, Japanese garden enthusiasts use the term *syakkei* (literally 'borrowed scenery', Fig.16) to refer to the way that a successful garden design incorporates the natural landscape in which it is placed. An exquisite 'dry' garden set in mountainous countryside will become even more exquisite as the mountains that form a backdrop slowly become an absorbed component of the arrangements of rocks and sand. This process of harmonization is, for the gardener, a compositional process that addresses the interaction of cultivation and wilderness. In particular, it involves thinking ahead, predicting how the surrounding landscape, including the growth of trees and plants, will change as the garden matures. S*yakkei* is the gardener's version of the musician's co-adaptation of different rhythms (described above in my discussion of *ma* in musical performance) in that the incompatibility of garden artifice and wild nature is an opportunity for the astute gardener to maintain just enough difference within just enough synthesis as the rocks and sand, year by year, increasingly 'borrow' the surrounding landscape.

Fig.16: *Shugaku-in* Detached Palace as an example of *Syakkei*, photo by Osaka no Kaz (2008).

2.7 Visual art words

It is clear from Western writers on art that the compositional interplay of negative and positive forms has been an important consideration for artists throughout the history of visual art in Europe. The many books about drawing by the English art historian Philip Rawson explore not just the aesthetic dimensions of arranging voids and bodies but also the ontological implications of depicting the world as full of spaces as well as things. Rawson was an orientalist by training and understood the role of voids and emptiness in the development of visual art in China and Japan. See, for example, the discussion of two-dimensional enclosures in *Drawing: the appreciation of the arts 3* (1969) where Rawson describes how the negative shapes by which an artist depicts the space between bodies may be felt

to be equal to its opposite, the shapes of the bodies themselves (Rawson, 1969: 141-144). In the ancient book *Honcho gahoutaiden* it was said that a blank space is part of the surface pattern of a painting, your heart should fill it in. (Minami, 1983: 16) This psychological reading of an empty space might be said to turn the composition of a painting into an interaction between different levels of being, an idea that resonates with the meditative traditions of Zen Buddhism that are, like Shintoism, a key aspect of Japanese culture and history. For example, in a painting that depicts a single figure standing against an empty sky, the visual conversation between the figure and the surrounding space could evoke in the Japanese mind the interaction of the self with the hidden self, the two parts of the human psyche that do not communicate directly with each other, that operate independently but are nevertheless combined in the whole person. (Fig.17)
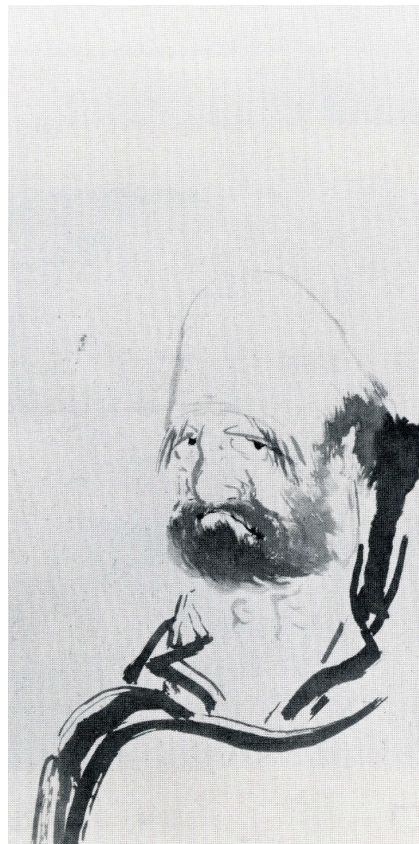
Fig.17: Musashi Miyamoto (17c.) *Bodhidharma* [Ink Painting]. Eisei Bunko.

Here the ability to create a visual evocation of the division of the self is thought provoking. It is impossible not to think of the famous book *The Divided Self* (1960), the psychiatrist R. D. Laing's pioneering account of the alienation of the inner and outer parts of the schizophrenic personality. We shall explore the psychoanalytical dimensions of my research later in the thesis when we return to the notion of conversational *ma* but, for the present, the divided agency of the conscious and unconscious selves provides an analogy for the spatial *ma* generated by Japanese artists as they create unified compositions of solid bodies and empty spaces. Here I imagine a process of adaptation in which the individual will of the artist, as they fill in the blanks with their 'heart', has to negotiate the non-understandable, non-adaptive nature of the unconscious 'other'. Once again, the sense of *ma* is created as the artist maintains just enough independence in relation to just enough negotiation. For an artist to think in this way about depicting figures in space reminds me of a Japanese philosopher Taisetsu Suzuki's advice 'draw bamboos for ten years, become bamboo, then forget all about bamboo when you are drawing'. (Suzuki, 1999: 25) The struggle to identify with the bamboo you are drawing is, in fact, the struggle to abandon your ego, to find your true intuitive self. This is a very Buddhist idea. The process of artistic representation is seen as a method for engaging contemplatively with existence. Enlightenment is sought through the annihilation of the distinction between artist-observer and observed nature. Here *ma* is a profound experience felt within the ecstatic tension of being neither conscious nor not conscious; neither separate from, nor part of, nature; this is the seventh stage on the path to Buddhist enlightenment. Japanese art historians have also found ways of analyzing the subtle pictorial construction of *Ukiyo-e* woodcut prints using the concept of spatial *ma*. Kazuko Mende (1997) has

written on a remarkable method of depicting the auditorium and stage of a

playhouse in a 1743 woodcut entitled *Interior of a Kabuki Theatre*.
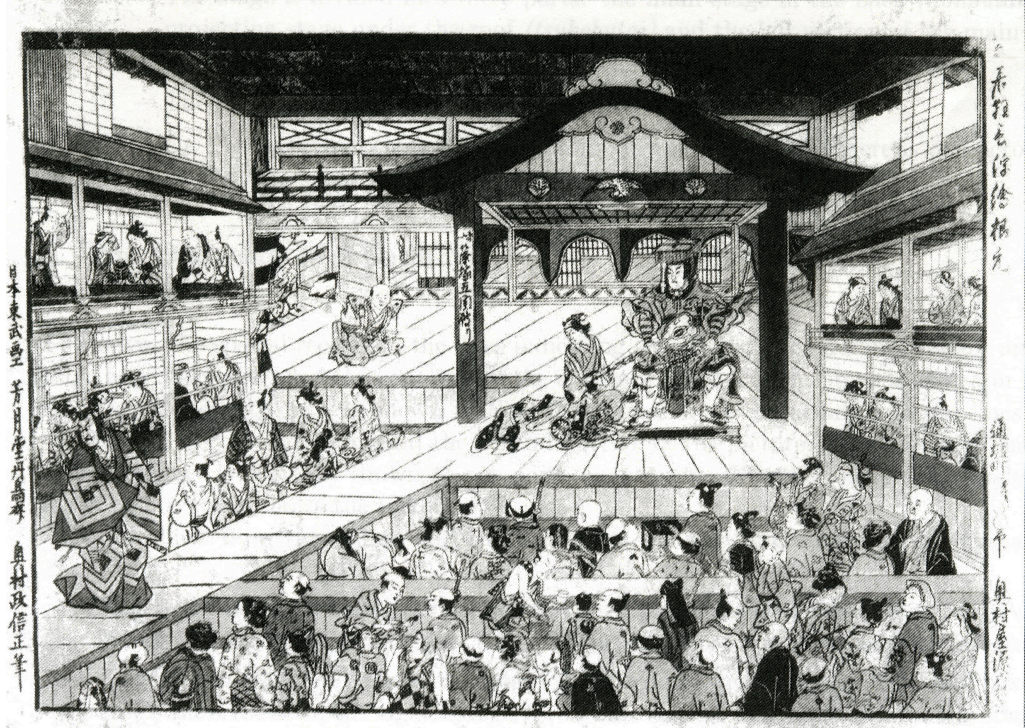
Fig.18: Masanobu Okumura (1743) *Interior of a Kabuki Theater* [Crimson Printed
Picture]. Museum fur Ostasiatische Kunst, Berlin.
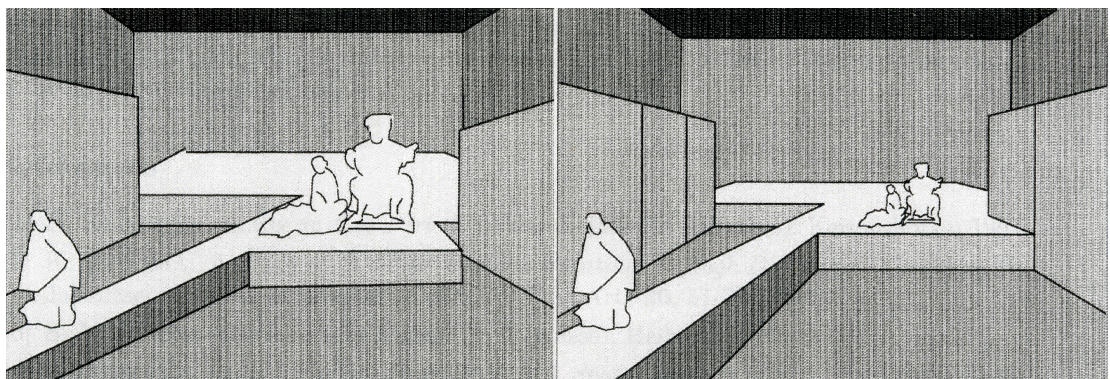
Fig.19: Diagram of theatre, analysed perspective by Kazuko Mende. The left
shows mixed projection of the audience space and the stage, and the right shows
perspective projection of the audience space and the stage (Mende, 1997, pp. 39)

According to Mende, *ma* is discernable in the 'shakiness' caused by the two conflicting drawing systems that have been united in the single image. A 'single viewpoint perspective' has been employed in the part of the print that shows the auditorium and an 'oblique projection' has been used to represent the stage. This effect is not the result of poor technique but the product of the artist's extremely creative spatial imagination. This very ambiguous use of spatial composition is highly expressive of the feeling of being inside the theatre. The 'single viewpoint perspective' evokes the spectatorial experience of the audience whilst the oblique projection emphasizes the formal world inhabited by the actors as they perform a play. Once united within a single composition our visual experience of the woodcut is rendered unstable ('shaking'). Our concentrated focus is fused with our ability to rapidly scan a surface of visual information. This shakiness, an unresolved shift between two types of vision, produces a *ma*-like tension that feels appropriate to the extraordinary experience of being present at a *Kabuki* performance.

In 'A Multicultural Look at Space and Form' (2003), an online chapter from an incomplete book project called *The Visual*, the American critic and art historian James Elkins claims that the various compositional systems for creating space in the visual arts fall into four categories: perspectival space, everyday space, psycho-physiological space, and imaginary space. The psycho-physiological category is divided into the compositional systems that address our subjective sense of the outwardly extending 'world at large' and our bodily engagements with the physical environment through touch. In describing these kinds of psycho-physiological experiences Elkins introduces the concept of *ma*. He explains that:

> *Ma* is similar to what modern Western critics called negative space, the emptiness between figures in a painting or forms in a sculpture. Negative space is a kind of opposite of what is painted – it is what is left over when the painted parts are mentally subtracted – and so it is elusive and intriguing to modernist eyes. (Elkins: 2003)

Elkins contrasts *ma* to the concept of distance he has analysed in his earlier discussion of perspectival space suggesting that the 'mixture of memory and sensation conjured by *ma*' distinguishes this kind of negative space from other compositional shapes that evoke either deep recessions or absences of visual information. In a chapter on 'Stage Distortion in Mannerism' Elkins tells us how the Mannerists transformed perspectival space and distorted the symmetrical perspective box in order to bring out disharmonies and emphasize the supernatural quality of being distant, peripheral or hidden. Here Elkins' ideas match much of what I discussed above in relation to Suzuki's annihilation of the distinction between artist-observer and observed nature and Mende's disharmonious shakiness in a *Ukiyo-e* woodcut. Despite this, Elkins struggles to fit *ma* into his taxonomy. It is referred to briefly in the discussion of psycho-physiological space but not mentioned again. However, I see *ma* potential in Elkins' other categories, particularly that of everyday space. The limitation of his spatial theory is it's Western art historical context. In fact, from a Japanese perspective it is difficult to detach Elkins' position on *ma* from the broader range of issues he deals with as a historian and critic working in a North American art school (Chicago Institute of Art). 'A Multicultural Look at Space and Form' needs contextualization in relation to this author's critical interests in both the history and theory of images in art and our understanding of how perception operates in general (e.g. *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing* [1997]; *How to use*

your Eyes [2000]) in order to interrogate the study of fine art within an academic context.[7] Given the multicultural frame in which Elkins discusses *ma*, it is interesting that he misses the fact that the Japanese context in which the term evolved does not have a separate category of 'fine art' in the Western sense. As we shall see below in Chapter 5 when we discuss Yuriko Saito's work on 'everyday aesthetics', this Japanese historian of design sees painting and sculpture in the same category as flower arranging and the tea ceremony. This means that the Japanese use of *ma* was never confined to specific aesthetic categories as found in the West. Elkins could just as easily have introduced *ma* in the section of his essay that addresses 'everyday' space. What seems to be 'elusive and intriguing' about *ma* for the few Western commentators who attempted a definition is its association with a range of contrasting spatio-temporal experiences that extend well beyond the field of 'high art' (in the Western sense, at least). For the Japanese, everyday space, psycho-physiological space and imaginary space can produce all kinds of temporal, as well as spatial forms of *ma*. Indeed, this thesis began as an attempt at explaining to Western art school colleagues how I encountered many diverse forms of *ma* as I pursued my creative, nominally sculptural, activities in the everyday world.

2.8 Summarizing my linguistic engagement with *ma*

We have been exploring a word that can evoke the ancient fusion of spatial and temporal experiences. *Ma* is a term that cannot be reconciled with modern ideas that keep space and time independent of one another. We all know that space is a

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[7] With *Artists with PhDs: On the New Doctoral Degree in Studio Art,* Elkins has enthusiastically contributed to the USA debate about practice-led doctoral research.

time-structured process and that time is uncovered in the spatial dimensions of our experiences but so many aspects of the organization of everyday life now tell us otherwise. In Japan, the culture that invented the concept of *ma*, the term has been applied to a bewilderingly wide range of situations since the seventh century. Most straightforwardly, it forms a cognate cluster of ideas linked to the aesthetic interest created by discontinuous experiences: gaps or *lacunae* (e.g. in the continuity of an architectural structure), pregnant pauses or broken threads (e.g. in a conversation or a narrative), and so on. The elusive nature of the term means that publications such as *Roget's Thesaurus* and the *Kojien* and *Gendai Shinkokugojiten* dictionaries have rarely left my side whilst I have been writing this thesis. Indeed, with this linguistic dimension in view, my second chapter has shown how the Japanese have invented composite terms that attach the word *ma* to music, social conduct, architecture, gardens and visual artworks. My aim has been to both introduce the richness of the concept and construct a platform for researching the impossibility of tying the term down, of arriving at a definitive explanation.

So far we have learnt that *ma* always involves the relationship between (at least) two things or moments. The concept, whether it refers to spatial or temporal arrangements, recognizes the fragile cohesion that occurs between separate units as the whole starts to become greater than the parts. *Ma* occurs when individuals cannot dissolve themselves into each other any further however much they try. They are indissolubly yoked together but, simultaneously, driven apart. As a result, a word that describes a sudden interruption or a poignant interval can be applied

equally to rhythmic tensions in music or sudden disjunctions in the design of a garden.

The essence of *ma* can be said to be the puncturing of cohesive space and time. There are innumerable points in which cohesion is punctured: clocks puncture duration; borders puncture continents and fences puncture territories. In the arts, creative practitioners are divided by their individuality. In collaborative situations (e.g. in an orchestra) each participant, having adapted their individuality to each other for as long as they can, eventually has to recognize that part of themselves cannot adapt any further. At this point *ma* appears in the recognition that true individuals cannot actually manage true communality. *Ma* arises in the aesthetic balance that occurs as each collaborator tries to continue by avoiding destructive confrontation within the group.

CHAPTER 3. Conversational *ma*

3.0 Exploring everyday social interactions through *ma*

As discussed in the last Chapter, *ma* has been used in a wide range of temporal and spatial situations. Many of these applications take the form of aesthetic experiences related to various types of art activity. However, in everyday contexts (perhaps a parallel to Elkins' notion of 'everyday space') the temporal dimension of conversational *ma* is, perhaps, the most common application of the concept in Japan. This Chapter seeks to describe the special role that the discontinuities of human speech have in arousing a sense of *ma*. Most Japanese would, I believe, confirm that the word is used in relation to interruptions or hesitations in the flow of conversation more often than any other. Here we ignore the aesthetic frames of reference concerning the visual and performing arts and explore everyday communal and social interactions. On the basis of personal experience, I think it is possible to claim that *ma* is most routinely evoked in the context of verbal exchange. Indeed, a Japanese may experience this kind of *ma* many times a day.

Unlike the artistic versions of *ma*, the occurrence of conversational *ma* is not necessarily a rarefied or elevated experience. It is not the product of a contemplative 'quietness, calmness and simplicity' as described by my Japanese colleagues during my survey of *ma* meanings at Northumbria University. Conversational *ma* occurs in the midst of human interaction and does not seem to

involve aesthetic distance. As with most linguistic acts it occurs in a near unconscious state. We speak like we breath or walk and a hesitation, broken narrative thread or other discontinuity becomes conspicuous because one is made self-conscious of what has happened by the person one is speaking to. At first I was not sure how to study this effect but decided that a good place to examine this kind of *ma* is in the dialogues in Japanese novels. For example, Miyuki Miyabe's collection of short stories 'Ashiarai-Yashiki' in her book *Honjyo-fukagawa Fushigizoushi*' has a passage that offers a clear example of *ma* at work in an everyday conversation. The story is set in medieval Japan. Omiyo is the daughter of a wealthy merchant who, having lost his first wife, has recently remarried. Omiyo's mother was gentle and good-natured but not beautiful. However her new stepmother is both beautiful and good-natured. Omiyo has the following conversation with her servant:

'Well, who do you think is beautiful, my deceased mother or my step-mother?' Omiyo asked.
Her servant *paused* (*ma wo oku*, 間をおく) to think and then answered:
'Your deceased mother was so beautiful, we cannot compare.'
Omiyo recognised that all adults *pause* to think like this in order to draw a veil over what has to be said delicately.
'I wonder if I will be beautiful like my step-mother.'
This time, the servant snatched at the chance to say:
'Of course! You will not be less beautiful than your step-mother.'
From her quick response Omiyo recognised another truth.
When adults are with children they also answer quickly as if they are not thinking anything. (Miyabe, 2001: 173-4)

There are interesting things to note about this interaction. The dialogue between Omiyo and her servant is filled with what I consider to be bad-*ma* because Omiyo

knew the servant was lying and was hurt by the quick response that followed the apparently more caring and delicate pause. In the moments in which the servant considered and then executed her responses, whether she answered slowly or quickly, the girl understood that the servant had something different on her mind. Miyabe's writing captures the fragile balance within the continuity of the conversation. By answering too slowly and then too quickly, the servant made Omiyo feel uncomfortable because she read more between lines than was actually said. The story continues:

> Omiyo looks at a hand mirror, at a puddle, at the surface of the river Yokojikkenn from the Tabisyo bridge. The reflection she sees is of an ordinary round face, drooping eyebrows, small eyes and a mouth that, without a doubt, resembles her father Chobei.
> "My step-mother and I are not related by blood."
> Omiyo heaves a sigh and covers her face with her hands. (Miyabe, 2001: 174)

The servant has not been able to conceal the truth from Omiyo. The complexity of Omiyo's relationship with her father following the death of her mother unfolds from the *ma*-like power of two tiny discontinuities in her dialogue with the servant. A delicate pause and an over-hasty reply lead the girl in to an anxious reconsideration of both her blood ties to her father and her new status as a stepdaughter.

Miyabe evokes *ma* through the manner in which his characters deliver words. The celebrated mystery writer, graphic designer and folklore researcher, Natsuhiko Kyogoku, uses references to facial expressions and bodily movements as well as from the intonations and hesitations of their speech. His detective story about

werewolves, *Loup-Garou Kihisubeki Ōkami* (2001), is set in a high school of the future. Physical human contact has become rare because nearly all communication takes place over the Internet. A *ma* moment is generated when Shizue, a school counselor, fails to recognize the trace of a curious aroma on the clothes of Hinako, a female school pupil.

> "What's...that smell?" Shizue asked.
> Then after a bit of a *pause* (*ma wo oku*, 間を置く) a simple answer came back.
> "It's incense…". (Kyogoku, 2001:198)

Various incenses are used in religious ceremonies and spiritual purification rites and there are a lot of incense fragrances (i.e. sandalwood, agar-wood, clove and so on) depending on ingredients. In this novel, the use of incense in religion had died out since Sizue had been a small child: for Shizue's generation, that smell rang some kind of bell, but it was not possible to specify what they were; whereas for Hinako's generation, despite nobody knowing what they were, Hinako, belonging to a younger generation than Shizue, was particularly interested in religious rituals and religious practices, so that she possessed more knowledge of incense than Shizue.

An awkward moment of hesitation here occurred because Hinako changed her answers during the awkward moment. The first was an automatic response to Suzue's question that was a name of specific incense fragrance, and as a second thought, she decided to simply answer 'It's incense', because she suddenly realized that there was no point in specifying the name of the fragrance because Shizue would be unable to understand. Hinako wants to avoid another awkward

pause. As a result Hinako decides to qualify her words with facial and bodily movements that convey a sense of uncertainty.

> Hinako looked at Shizue with upturned eyes and squeezed herself hesitantly as she answered. Her manner showed that she did not know whether she was right or wrong. (Kyogoku, 2001:198)

In this way Hinako has turned an awkward response into a safe answer and avoided a further moment of bad-*ma*. Shizue is spared embarrassment. However, Kyogoku continues to explore the presence of bad-*ma* through his use of punctuation and the layout of the text. The conversation between Hinako and Shizue stumbles on for many pages in the following manner:

> Shizue slurred the end of her sentence as she timidly dropped her eyes. She felt that she was behaving like a pupil.
> "……Well, this is about Miss Yabe…"
> At last, she was saying what was really on her mind but in a very gauche manner. She looked at Hinako self-consciously.
> "Er…Miss Yabe asked a similar question to you?"
> "Ah…."
> The trifling pause (wazuka no ma, 僅かの間) was unpleasant. (Kyogoku, 2001: 216)

Throughout *Loup-Garou Kihisubeki Ōkami*, *ma*-like pauses like this are used to evoke the tensions that occur in conversations between characters who are mystified by their contact with the non-Internet world and those that believe they have a privileged knowledge of the past. Here is an example of two school pupils Hazuki and Ayumi (who believes she is half-wolf) having a discussion in a time in which few people still eat meat:

"Do animals…"

Hazuki feebly starts to ask.

"Do animals feel pity when they eat other animals?"

"They don't."

Ayumi answered without taking a pause (ma wo okazuni, 間をおかずに).

(Kyogoku, 2001: 284-285)

The response that Ayumi makes 'without taking a pause' is an example of *ma* being present without an actual hesitation in the written dialogue. Kyogoku, in applying the term *ma wo okazuni* to Ayumi's response, makes his readers question why she can answer so quickly and thus prepares us for the revelation in the final pages of the novel that she believes herself to be a wolf-girl and so is able to answer Hazuki from a position of instinctive prior knowledge. This microscopic contradiction in the reading experience is one of many that accumulate throughout the story which uses non-typical and unexpected forms of dialogue as a sub-plot that supports our understanding of the emotional states of the characters caught up in Kyogoku's narrative. This is made possible by the mechanism we are referring to in this chapter as conversational *ma.*

As a visual artist I am particularly interested in the way that Kyogoku employs punctuation symbols (for example: the ellipsis '…' or the hyphen '-') to make the reader encounter interjections, after-thoughts, incoherency, incompleteness and dubiety as they read. (Fig. 20)
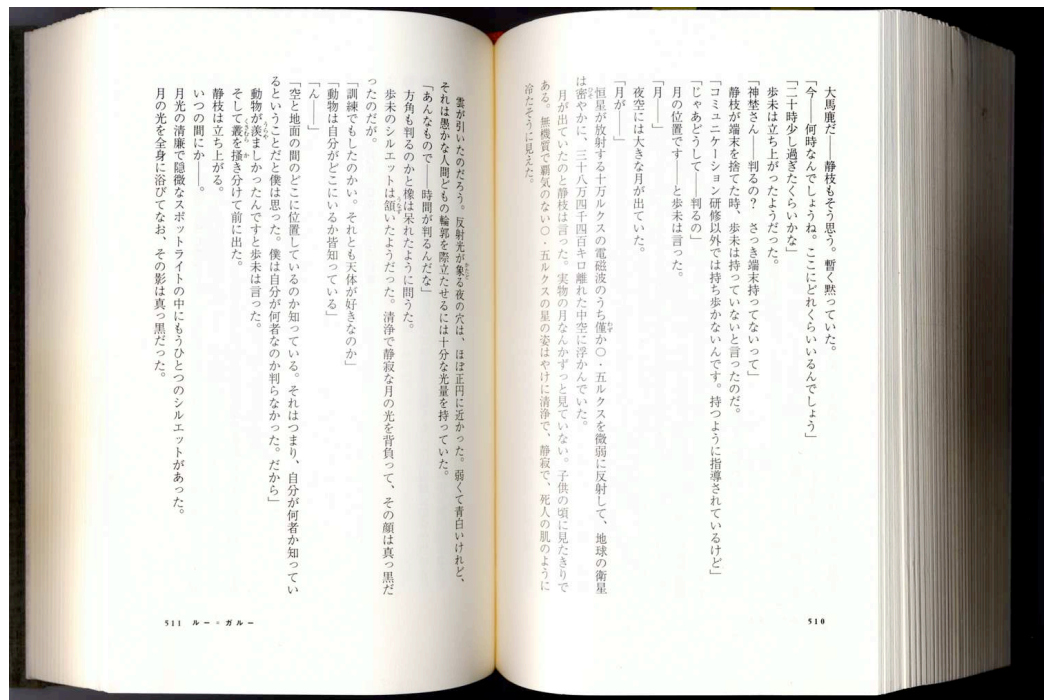
Fig. 20: Layout of *Loups-garous Kihisubeki Ōkami*. (Kyogoku, 2001, pp.510-511)

The graphic layout of *Loup-Garou Kihisubeki Ōkami* allows the reader to feel the uncertainty of the school pupils as they experience face-to-face communication in a world in which nearly all relationships are generated via the Internet. The symbols produce *ma* because, spread across page after page of dialogue, they give the text a faltering rhythm that represents not only awkward speech patterns but ironic facial and bodily movements too, and, by implication, the hidden or suppressed thoughts and emotions of the characters. For a Japanese reader with a cultural background that includes the concept of conversational *ma*, novelists such as Kyogoku open up an extraordinarily wide range of different thoughts and feelings for their readers without actually mentioning them in words.

The examples we examined above showed that the nonverbal aspects of novelistic writing can actually give access to a character's intentions, to the thoughts that are on their mind but not openly expressed. It is interesting to note

how the tacit dimension of conversational hesitation occurs. My examples suggest that there needs to be, in some kind of way, appropriately placed pauses to keep a conversation running smoothly, to aid the transmission of meaning. At this point we are able to explore the inner worlds of others as they add unspoken expression to their verbal communication. We are able to change our reactions and responses through our ability to read the subtext of pauses and hesitations of others.

3.1 Psychoanalytical views of hesitation

Here, we are going to explore the notion of hesitation as it occurs in the field of Psychoanalysis. In this section, we will first consider the view of a celebrated Western psychologist, Christopher Bollas, who writes about hesitation in conversations in a manner that would be familiar to readers of Miyuki Miyabe and Natsuhiko Kyougoku. There is an interesting book by Bollas called *Cracking Up* (1997) that reflects on his experiences as a practising psychoanalyst and writer on psychoanalytical theory. Here he make an interesting exploration of the inner world of human experience (based on Freudian thought) and provides examples of how hesitation mirrors the unconscious. In the following example, Bollas draws our attention to a conversational pause that, through the insightful response of an interlocutor, transforms an everyday moment of social intercourse into an act of apparent clairvoyance.

> "Let's go to hear the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra's concert next week, as I quite like their conductor, er…" and my friend says, "Simon Rattle", effortlessly finishing my sentence. (Bollas, 1997: 30)

We all experience 'gap-filling' moments in everyday life. Bollas says that they are the result of 'relational knowing'. This happens so often that such gaps are taken for granted. The interlocutor who fills the stalling of the sentence may not always guess the missing word or phrase exactly but is able to get near enough to move the discussion forward. With relational knowing the forward momentum of a sentence is generated by the presence of a 'er…' pause. The moment of forgetfulness marked by the 'er…' is the opportunity for an interlocutor to make a quick response and rescue the conversation. If the pause lasts for long enough for the speaker to feel uncomfortable with the silence this discomfort moment may be thought of as bad-*ma*. However, a prompt response spares the speaker's embarrassment, just as we saw above in Kyogoku's novel. My Japanese respondents think of this kind of conversational pause as the most natural form of *ma* in which the interaction of two minds produces a single statement around the pivotal moment of conversational hesitation. In the following example Bollas points out that he and his patient are interacting in way that reveals their inner thoughts:

> "Last night I went to…" and I silently speak "the opera" but the patient says "the cinema." A patient says, "I am really very…"; I silently reply "cross," and the patient says "pleased with my work on the book." (Bollas, 1997: 31)

Bollas' need to silently fill the speaker's gaps conforms to an interpersonal pressure we experience in most daily conversations. However, in this example the answers are at variance with the speaker's expectations suggesting a greater degree of bewilderment than one would normally want to experience. Bollas' point is that for a psychoanalyst, the process of psychotherapy involves thousands of such hesitant responses. The analyst operates in the role of the interlocutor and

has to respond sensitively to the patient's pauses and corrections. By learning when to fill the gaps and when to leave a silent space the analyst creates a 'separate sense' of the patient. According to Bollas, a psychotherapist:

> …learns each patient's idiomatic expressions by the analyst's introjections and develops a shadow ego which is crucial to the clinician's ability to create a separate sense for his patient. (Bollas, 1997: 38-39)

With continued contact with a patient's hesitations an analyst can engage, through the medium of linguistic errors and mis-timings, with the deep core of the patients inner life. The process is similar to learning a new language and it can take many years of psychoanalytical dialogue before the analyst is truly communicating with the analysand at an appropriately subtle level.

> A patient is telling me about a colleague with whom he has been having a hard time: "I know this man is a bully, and I can cope with his insensitivities, but that is not the point. I find that I feel something else, a sense that I am…," at which point I say "inadequate," and the patient answers in the affirmative with great relief. (Bollas, 1997: 30)

Bollas could have used alternatives words such as 'angry', 'despairing', and so on, but he chose 'inadequate': a choice that reflects years of conversation with this particular patient. The affirmative response reflects the appropriateness of the 'gap-filling'. According to Bollas the psychoanalyst and patient are in a state of unconscious communication during the mutually silent spaces in their conversation. Importantly, the analysand also develops a 'separate sense' of the analyst generating a relational value that affects both interlocutors. The notion of a 'separate sense' is useful not only for the specialist activities of the psychoanalyst,

but also in everyday conversations: it helps us to unwrap the mechanisms of interactive communication. For me Bollas' 'separate sense' is a sensitivity that seems very like the aesthetic appreciation of *ma*. I make this comparison because a Japanese version of his psychoanalytical theorizing is available in the work of Bin Kimura introduced above.

3.2 An Eastern psychoanalytical view of hesitation

Bollas' 'separate sense' opens up the communicability with others that occurs through verbal and non-verbal expression: this is achieved effortlessly; we all use this feeling in our everyday interactions, it is a feature of the flexibility of communication. Throughout our lives we gradually build up a 'separate sense' in relation to each person, we engage in conversation and adapt ourselves to a best way to each person. In a sense, we constantly act out versions of a 'self' that is comfortable to the 'others' with whom we interact.

The Japanese psychoanalyst Bin Kimura, as mentioned in Chapter 1, has very similar thoughts about conversations to Bollas but uses *ma* to understand the awkward moments of hesitation that fill a patient's psychological narrative. Bollas focuses on the positive aspects of the interpersonal relations between analyst and analysand whereas Kimura concentrates on the more negative dimension of constructing what Bollas would call a 'separate sense' with a patient. Kimura does not mention the inner responses that drive the conversations by which he conducts psychotherapy and so it is difficult to compare the work of the two psychoanalysts too closely. The similarities between them do break down quite

quickly but it is possible, I believe, to relate Bollas' concept of the 'separate sense' with Kimura's interest in *ma*.

I will cite a psychoanalytical story from Kimura that helps us compare the Japanese concept of hesitation with Bollas' Western version. Kimura tells us that his first discovery as a psychoanalyst was the increased consciousness of sin or guilt exhibited by schizophrenics and Japanese patients. As I described above, in the West a sense of personal guilt has an innate dimension influenced by Christianity, all humans are disfigured by original sin. By contrast, in Japan guilt is usually seen as the product of human mis-interaction, by one person's failure in the view of others. Kimura links this to an ingrained sense *ma* that continually informs the Japanese sensitivity to the atmosphere generated within social groups through conversations, a sensitivity that is hard to explain explicitly. (Kimura, (2) 2000: 44) As a result, Kimura helps me bring into focus the interrelation of *ma* and hesitation. The examples I am going to cite involve schizophrenic patients explaining their irritation in difficult interpersonal situations. One male patient said:

> I cannot get the timing right (*ma ga motanai*). My father makes my timing wrong. I cannot get my timing right with him. He takes advantage of me pausing. While talking to someone, I always start speaking earlier than I should do. I cannot be myself because I feel I am making a false start all the time. I cannot be myself so I make a false start. (Kimura: (2) 2000: 44)

Another young female patient described her feeling as follows:

> When I was a junior high school student, every time I tried to express myself, something pulled me back… As I struggled harder to express myself, others came into myself. Others occupied myself and I lost myself and it is as if others became

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the centre of me... I cannot keep *ma* (*ma ga motenai*) with my mother. I do not know how to keep *ma* (*ma no torikata*). So I cannot feel relaxed. (Kimura, 1998: 171-172)

In these extracts, Kimura's patients use *ma* to describe both the pauses in their speech and the emotional distances they experience within their social interactions relations. Considering that there is nonverbal communication within the silence or the pause, these two kinds of *ma* are different sides of the same coin (temporal and spatial dimensions of interpersonal communication). If we take the *ma* described in Kimura's examples as a matter of temporal discontinuity we can see that, in the Japanese context, people who are severely disabled by a psychotic condition (and thus not able to relate easily to others) are able to conceive of their problems by describing inappropriate pauses and conversational awkwardness rather than the innate human weakness posited by Christian European thought.

Even in the absence of verbal communication, an interpersonal engagement is established if some kind of *ma*-like reaction by the interlocutor takes place. Kimura's patients notice that their *ma* is bad and thus reveal to Kimura that they cannot sense what is in the mind of others. Here we see why Kimura thinks that the Japanese are much more 'other'-oriented than Westerners. (Kimura, 1978: 154) This can be understood by citing phrases such as *jyou ni moroi* (the state of being susceptible) that suggest an 'other'-centred emotional engagement that is different from the inner-focus of European psychologists such as Bollas. The word *jyo* in this phrase is quite similar to the English verb *to empathize* but Kimura focuses on the nuance of the Japanese word that implies that the empathizer is concerned for the plight of others to the point of total selflessness, an idea that is

not as strongly conveyed in the English dictionary definition of *empathy*: sharing the feelings of others. (Kimura, 1978: 155)

Here we see that a *ma*-oriented culture has a relationship with the psychological dimensions of conversational awkwardness that is ingrained by tradition. Another way to understand this is through the work of Tatsuya Nagashima, a theologian and philosopher, who has undertaken empirical linguistic research that suggests that the Japanese use of *yes* and *no* has deeper roots in the emotions than European languages which give preference to the logic of the words. Nagashima describes verbal exchanges in which *yes* and *no* are employed to assert facts but, nevertheless, result in an English speaker not knowing whether a fact has been affirmed or not. This is because the Japanese speaker is likely to say *yes* and *no* in order to achieve an emotional sense of unity with an interlocutor whereas it is more probable that an English speaker will conform to the semantic logic of the conversation. (Nagashima: 2002-2009) This is an example of the Japanese orientation to psychological agreement or sympathy that supports Kimura's theory cited above.

At this point we have established that the Japanese give a great deal of importance to the mind of others. It seems to be the case that the traditions of Japan exhibit this trait more than Western cultures. Kimura is able to illustrate his exploration of other-centeredness using the conversational version of the concept of *ma*. The examples used by the Japanese psychoanalyst correspond to the theoretical work of Bollas but, with no available semantic term like *ma* to help him explore the psychoanalytical dimension of hesitation, the European proposes the

concept of a 'separate sense' without adequately (from a Japanese point of view) defining the space-time gap that divides the two subjects as they struggle with their interpersonal difficulties. Thus the relationship between conversational *ma* and our ability to understand the tension between self and other gives the Japanese scope to explore everyday experiences of subject interacting with subject. We shall now turn to some primary investigations of my own that build on the ideas I absorbed through reading Kimura, Bollas and the Japanese novels quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

3.3 Everyday experiences of good- and bad-*ma*

In the discussion above about the separated inner worlds of conversationalists in both novelistic and psychoanalytical contexts we must note that conversational *ma* has, perhaps in contrast to the visual and performing arts versions discussed in Chapter 2, a strongly negative implication. As a result I was interested in how my Japanese colleagues viewed good- and bad-*ma* in their interpersonal relations. The following example is from a transcript of a discussion with Hiroko Oshima, a fellow PhD student on the practice-led doctoral research programme at Northumbria. She says that:

> There is no good-*ma*, because we maintain *ma* (like a rhythm to life) so that bad-*ma* will stand out when it appears.

Oshima suggests that good-*ma* goes un-noticed because it is so embedded in the successful negotiation of everyday life. It is an ingredient in social interaction that is:

> …like a lowest common denominator. *Ma* will happen more often (is easier to keep) between people who share the same nationality, culture, time, experience and so on.

This definition offers a view of conversational *ma* as an unconscious version of the aesthetic effects described in Chapter 2. Although Oshima and my other Japanese interviewee were able to articulate the positive attributes of conversational *ma*, none of them could cite a single concrete example. This surprised me because there are aspects of Japanese social life in which good-*ma* is continually made explicit; that is, in comic timing. Here a hesitant suspension of conversational flow is openly appreciated (we laugh and commend the joker) in the same way that a pregnant pause generates a humorous moment in the performing arts and receives applause. In this sense the good-*ma* of a joke conforms to the aesthetic dimensions already described. However, in cross-referencing from the theatre to everyday conversation we immediately evoke the interpersonal separateness discussed in relation to the psychoanalytical examples cited above. It is clear that making jokes is a risk-taking activity that involves 'other'-oriented sensitivities to the mind of those listening to the joke. A joke teller has to maintain a fragile balance between the elements of the joke and the capacity of the listener to appreciate the humour of what is being said. The joker's decision making needs to be not only instant but also apparent: the listener needs to recognize that the conversation has been resituated in the heightened mode of comedy.

However Oshima is not talking about heightened conversational experiences. She says that good-*ma* needs to be maintained in a way that is unrealistic in comic

dialogue: in everyday situations it is almost impossible to keep telling jokes without generating inappropriateness. Here good-*ma* would quickly turn into bad-*ma*. In contrast Oshima links *ma* to the ongoing smoothness of human relations: keeping up *ma* means that appropriate pauses are inserted un-noticed into conversations at every opportunity. As in the Japanese novels quoted above, the pauses in our conversations constitute the hidden structure that supports the seamless interaction of the speakers. If you start speaking quicker or slower it destroys the framework of your repartee, it suggests that you have something else on your mind, you separate yourself from your interlocutor. To maintain good-*ma* indicates mutual understanding. It is this sense that Oshima defines good-*ma* as a lowest common denominator in social interactions. Here we are talking about an aspect of interpersonal relations that extends beyond two conversers, we are describing an effect that occurs in the social interactions of groups of subjects who share a cultural history, or a localized space.

During an interview with the actor Kotomi Takahata I was made aware of the multiple acts of mind-reading that an actress has to undertake as she performs before an audience. Here good-*ma* is the invisible cement that bonds a group of separate subjects who have come together in a theatre to engage with her performance. As with Oshima's statement above, Takahata only notices *ma* when things go wrong; that is, when she destroys her audience's concentration with some kind of inappropriate action. I was reminded here of the term 'corpsing' which is used in the British theatre to describe an actor moving out of role by laughing. The quote from Takahata that begins this thesis describes how a careless yawn generated bad-*ma* in a situation in which the actor should have

been able to maintain a sense of mutual understanding with her friend. The key observation here is that the friend's response reveals that Takahata is being blamed for destroying the unvoiced good-*ma* that was making the 'serious' conversation possible. As a result Takahata feels guilty because a gap has opened up between her actual actions and the behaviour that was expected of her by her friend. It was if she had 'corpsed' before her audience and felt the shame of a professional actor who had started giggling whilst playing a dead body lying on the floor of the stage. Through my interview with Takahata I discovered the important role of shame in exposing the hidden mechanisms of *ma* that maintain interpersonal relations in a culture that has, at every level of social interaction, an ingrained 'other'-orientation. I shall explore this idea further in the next chapter in relation to the Western philosophical concept of intersubjectivity.

CHAPTER 4. Intersubjectivity

4.1 *Ma* and sympathy

In this chapter we turn from surveying the concept of conversational *ma*, an undertaking that has relied on my cultural inheritance as a Japanese artist, to the project of relating *ma* to my current situation as a Japanese artist in a Western art school. This latter context is, as described in the Introduction to this thesis, the cultural space in which I am undertaking my practice-led research and so the ambition to translate *ma* into terms comprehensible to the kind of Western imagination I have encountered since my arrival at Northumbria University is the means by which I hope to conclude my investigation.

Having reached the point where, following the overview offered in Chapter 2, we were able to focus interest on conversational *ma*, the ideas discussed in Chapter 3 offer us a key insight into the relational nature of *ma*-like experiences. As a result I now want to pick up the 'other'-centeredness that Kimura associates with *ma* and cross-reference this to the Western philosophical concept of intersubjectivity. In many ways the connection between *ma* and intersubjectivity is prefigured in my discussion of the work of Bollas in which the eye of an 'other' is revealed in the hesitations that occur in our daily conversations. For Bollas these hesitations

generate the 'separate sense' so vital to interpersonal relations. The main points to consider are as follows:

1. The unconscious and non-vocal acts of communication that Bollas associates with conversational pauses allow an interlocutor to guess the speaker's thoughts or feelings.
2. The process of subjective mirroring and being mirrored generated by the guessing makes each converser aware of the psychological state of observed-observing empathy.
3. In being observed, both participants in the conversation realize that the 'other' has noticed them and this self-consciousness creates a 'separate sense' for both conversers.

These three points abbreviate the discussion on intersubjectivity in the writings of European philosophers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). Given that we do not have direct access to the minds of others, philosophers have asked how it is possible to feel sympathy, or expectation, in relation to someone else? Merleau-Ponty claims that, since we cannot have access to the psyche of another we must grant that we seize the other's psyche indirectly, mediated by nothing more than bodily appearances (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 114). Clearly each of us can only access our own minds and therefore everything we think about other people's thoughts and feelings, is guesswork based on our immediate perceptions and remembered experiences. If I see someone crying I believe that person to be sad because I would cry if I were sad. However, this perception does not stop there: seeing another person cry also makes me sad. Why should I experience sadness

when I have no personal reason for being sad? According to Merleau-Ponty this kind of emotional sympathy is an extension of the process by which infants learn to engage with the world by experiencing their reflection in a mirror. For the first time they see themselves as subjects in the world, a discovery that leads to the realization that there are other subjects in the world like oneself. Merleau-Ponty refers to this as the system of the 'me-and-other', a concept derived from the French philosopher and psychologist, Henri Wallon (1879-1962) (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 146). Wallon's powerful concept of an ensnaring 'me-and-other' state, caused by our sense of being both spectator to ourselves, and object in the view of others, is known as intersubjectivity. This term, which began life as a critique of the view that human beings exist as individual isolated entities (Diamond and Marrone, 2003:13), was developed as a branch of phenomenological philosophy. Both Wallon and Merleau-Ponty contributed to this development (particularly Merleau-Ponty). With this term in mind we can now begin to re-engage with our discussion of conversational *ma* using the framework of intersubjective relations.

4.2 Introducing intersubjectivity

First we will examine the roots of the concept of intersubjectivity in the Western philosophical tradition. The idea has its origin in the debates of thinkers such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) and, the originator of the term, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Hegel is typical of many nineteenth century philosophers in that his thought addressed the relationship between individual subjects and the social units into which they are absorbed, an area that clearly prefigures the notion of intersubjective relations. Husserl relied on questions of

individualistic psychology in his pioneering work for the phenomenology movement

and it was in this context that the term intersubjectivity became a key concept for

philosophers concerned with, not just human psychology (e.g. Jean Laplanche [b.

1924]), but also political theory and sociology (e.g. Jürgen Habermas [b. 1929]).

Intersubjectivity has turned out to be a complex, multilayered and interdisciplinary

area of study that helps us explore questions of consciousness/unconsciousness

and self/otherness. Unlike Descarte's paradigm-shifting philosophical work in the

seventeenth century (I refer here to the famous Cogito: 'I think, therefore I am),

intersubjective questions of consciousness and the self are not investigated using

the logic of the asymmetrical access we have to, on the one hand, our own inner

life and to, on the other, the external world in which we live. In contrast,

intersubjectivity is studied using human sympathy or empathy. The target of this

approach is the self-knowledge that is created by experiencing the presence of

others in our external environment. There is an immediate link here to the

discussion above on conversational *ma* and in the next section I am going to begin

defining the aspects of intersubjectivity that will clarify what we mean in Japanese

culture by the using the concept of *ma.*

4.3 The aspects of intersubjectivity that are relevant to this research

Merleau-Ponty claims that we begin life intersubjectively. It happens from the

moment we are born through parental care. (Madison, 2001) Accordingly, infants

develop an internal 'other' within themselves even before they have developed any

clear sense of their own emotions. This happens because, in the first seconds of

life, a child will have some kind of physical engagement with its surrounding

environment. However faint this initial response, there has to be some level of input and output. Intersubjectivity should be seen as the basis of all human interactions. Psychotherapists Nicola Diamond and Mario Marrone claim that the process of understanding ourselves does not begin with our first person sense of our 'I', it is more accurately described as a process that commences with our experience of the 'other'. As a result, our subject's point of view evolves in relation to the point of view of other subjects (Diamond and Marrone, 2003:132). Merleau-Ponty, like fellow philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre, seems to model the evolution of the self on experiences such as shame; that is, experiences in which the knowledge one subject gains through contact with another is turned back on itself to create an objectified self-consciousness – as Sartre puts it 'an intimate relation of myself to myself' (Sartre, 1943: 221-222). It may be useful to look at this 'myself to myself' idea more closely in order to gain insight into this complex phenomenological mode of thought. In *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Sartre describes the impact of shame as follows:

> I have just made an awkward or vulgar gesture. This gesture clings to me; I neither judge it nor blame it. I simply live it. I realize it in the mode of for-itself. But now suddenly I raise my head. Somebody was there and has seen me. Suddenly I realize the vulgarity of my gesture, and I am ashamed. It is certain that my shame is not reflective, for the presence of another in my consciousness, even as a catalyst, is incompatible with the reflective attitude; in the field of my reflection I can never meet with anything but the consciousness which is mine. But the Other is the indispensable mediator between myself and me. I am ashamed of myself as *I appear* to the Other (Sartre, 1943: 221-222).

The last line of his quotation is very important to the discussion in this chapter. It clearly says that the presence of somebody else makes it possible for the 'I' to

imagine themselves from a point of view outside themselves. Being both observer and observed you feel that you would not have allowed yourself to make the vulgar gesture. Furthermore, this consciousness-building sense of shame involves an awareness of 'ought' and 'ought not'. In Sartre's example, the vulgarity of your gesture has to be psychologically uncomfortable, even socially prohibited, for you to feel the 'other's' disapproval. In these situations there is 'I' as 'I am' and 'I' as 'I should or ought to be'. The psychological pressure of the 'other's' eyes triggers this observer/observed interaction as they contradict the complacency of your behaviour. In this sense intersubjectivity is omnipresent in your life and it manipulates you as you try to act properly in different social circumstances.

In order to consider how we actually engage with the world as intersubjective beings, we can imagine what happens when, as we walk down a street, we suddenly trip over. We might notice that our ankle hurts because we twisted our foot as we fell. We might worry that our clothes have become dirty as we lay on the pavement. On the other hand, we might simply feel embarrassed. The first two responses seem to be rooted in our subjective domain. They concern, initially at least, one's own situation. However, the third response is immediately linked to our objective world. It comes into being as part of our awareness of the social environment in which we have all been placed. This intersubjective state is formed through the mutual reciprocity of human beings. For example, to continue our example, if, having picked ourselves up off the pavement we then proceed down the street only to see somebody else trip over, it seems clear that this experience would make us respond to the plight of the unfortunate 'other'. At the very least you would avoid tripping over them and making their situation worse. More

probably, we would rush up to them to make sure that they are all right. We would also worry about their feelings: that is, we might be very aware of their embarrassment. In this second stage of our narrative, our responses move from self-concern (we worry about tripping over the fallen pedestrian) to an altruistic sympathy for their physical and psychological wellbeing. The point is that both responses are part of our intersubjective experience. Furthermore, it is not always easy to disentangle the interaction of self-interest and compassion: in relation to your intersubjective state they form a single reciprocal process.

In the example above, I try to show that, at the moment we feel shame, we strongly recognize our intersubjectivity at work. We are aware that we are an observed-observing being. Intersubjectivity includes feelings such as sympathy; it is a projection of one's own self-knowledge onto others. To understand the complexity of this state let us now consider the following example. In a lift with another person, we feel a need to acknowledge their presence by saying hello. If the person is an acquaintance we are then likely to start a conversation but if not the interaction would probably go no further. However if our acquaintance with the other person is very slight (say, for example, a person who we have only met once and who is unlikely to remember us) we might well consider not making them feel awkward by following up our greeting with a conversation. The moment in which such a decision is made is the point at which intersubjectivity is embodied in our actions and in our self-consciousness. According to the developmental psychologist, Greg Madison, these subtle interpersonal transactions generate our deeply ingrained, and ultimately therapeutic, sense of community:

> [Merleau-Ponty] said the fundamental experience of 'common ground' between
> people was what allows us to have a community, whether harmonious or
> discordant. According to Nicola Diamond, 'The individual lives in a multipersonal
> field and conversely this inhabits the individual' (1996, p.305). We remain always
> exposed to the other and can take the other's different perspectives on ourselves.
> We are always in relation to this 'exteriorized look' and so are 'seen' even when
> alone (Madison, 2001).

Therefore our existence as observed-observing beings generates communal collectives such as a 'general public' and we are skilled enough to behave as these large-scale intersubjective entities expect us to do. We do this 'naturally' without thinking. The implication is that the physical and psychological development of the individual agent is a product of both social and psychological evolution, which is to say, of cultural evolution.

Philosophers such as Sartre and Merleau-Ponty followed Husserl's lead in giving the intersubjective experience an important role in the verification of our objective realm. Without our recognition of other subjects in our environment (other subjects who clearly feel and think as we do) we would not be able to conceive of a material world that continues to be present when we are not experiencing it; that is, when others, other than ourselves, continue to experience it. Thus our intersubjective understanding of the functioning of other subjects does not only construct our consciousness of ourselves, but also brings into being the concept of objectivity.

Western culture has used this kind of thinking as a philosophical tool to unlock the difficulty of relating the inner life of humans to the sense of 'otherness', and

objective reality, that dominates all personal experience. As a result, I am prompted to explore the possibility that intersubjectivity has developed in an intellectual space that, for the Japanese, would be occupied by the concept of *ma*. Clearly intersubjectivity approximates the relational realm of *ma* as described above. It does not matter if one is born in the East or West; human life is a series of encounters with different people, different situations, and different worlds. We continually interact with people in places under a wide range of circumstances. We cannot avoid being intersubjective creatures and the Western concept of intersubjectivity helps us understand not only how we develop consciousness, but also how we cope with the world around us. We are, from this point of view, caught in a seamless relationship with all that is 'other'. Here I want to examine how *ma* acts like intersubjectivity in helping us understand the external objective environment.

4.4 intersubjectivity and *ma*

At this point it is possible to see this seamless interaction with others, this ongoing capacity to construct both the self and an environment beyond that self, as a series of interpersonal and person-to-world gaps that come into being when one tries to match internal with external experiences. I am thinking here of those moments when the observing presence of another shakes us out of complacency and makes us feel ashamed. There is a spatio-temporal dimension to this interaction in which both parties are likely to feel uncomfortable and it follows that, for the Japanese mind at least, such gaps are pervaded with *ma* (they are what I referred to above as '*ma*-rich'). They make the space-time relation between the

observer and the observed vibrant with meaning. I can imagine situations in which a *ma*-rich moment is positive rather than negative in its effect; for example, the presence of another could prompt unexpected feelings, not of shame (as Sartre would have it), but also of pride and self-worth.

Oshima's claim that bad-*ma* is the only way of understanding *ma* is surely a Japanese version of this seamless interpersonal interaction in which a sense of the subjective-self comes into being through relational gaps that are alive with meaning. In Chapter 3, conversational *ma* provided an example of the intertwined process of vocal and unvocal communication. We have been able to relate this discussion to Bollas' notion of a 'separate sense' that, we now understand, powers the psychoanalyst's ability to establish an insightful relationship with the analysand by intuitive 'gap-filling'. In this process, the intersubjective transactions that occur in relation to *ma*-like linguistic errors and mis-timings is part of a general need to believe in the communicative abilities of human subjects. The points at which a conversation breaks down are the moments in which one recognizes the good-*ma* of intersubjective communication.

As a foreigner living in England I have encountered many bad-*ma* moments in which it is possible to understand the good-*ma* that inhabits the conversations I have with other Japanese. The deficiencies of my English vocabulary often lead to difficulties in expressing my thoughts and feelings and so I am very familiar with the experience of somebody else filling in the gaps in my conversations. On these occasions I know from experience that I give myself over to the greater knowledge of the 'gap-filler' (usually a native speaker) who tells me what I am trying to say. To

allow someone to take over your thoughts in this way involves not just a sense of

linguistic inferiority but also a concern that it would be rude to correct a person with

whom one is in conversation. Here good-*ma* comes into view as it infiltrates the

behaviour of Japanese as they cope with awkward silences (*ma ga warui*) or try to

maintain a conversation at an appropriate and reasonable level (*ma wo awaseru*).

The bad-ma of my poor English is an indication of the good-ma of my

intersubjective relations in Japan.

4.5 Introducing the concept 'I-Thou'

We are now in a position to understand how conversational *ma* provides us with

an alternative way of exploring the Western idea of intersubjectivity. However it is

possible to take the exploration a step further by adding one more Western

philosophical idea to our discussion: that is, the proposition that all existence falls

into 'I-thou' and 'I-it' relationships, two extremely useful terms coined by the

celebrated Jewish theologian Martin Buber (1878-1965). In doing this we will be

able to place all experiences of 'otherness', including the external and entirely

objective realm of material things, in the same explanatory frame as the

intersubjective intuitions that have guided our discussion of good- and bad-*ma* in

person-to-person conversations.

Let us begin with an example. The other day I saw a colleague struggling with the

printer attached to his computer. He was trying to print out a document, but the

machine would not respond. Having checked the relevant connections and

computer preferences over and over again, suddenly the printer began to work

and produced the document. My colleague could be heard speaking to the machine: 'Oh, thank you! Thank you!' Is he mad? No, I often speak to the tools I use in my studio practice. Somehow mechanical gadgets stimulate intersubjective reactions in human subjects even though the interaction is entirely one-sided. It is possible to apply our discussion of conversational *ma* to the material environment. As a result, an inert and lifeless object can somehow be subject to bad timing (*ma ga warui*) and my colleague can suddenly miss the presence of good-*ma* when a printer fails to provide him with the good timing (*ma ni au*) he expects of the equipment he relies on in his job. On these occasions human subjects act as though the material world exhibits consciousness, they behave as though their interaction with a printer was an intersubjective exchange, not a subject-object encounter. Consider here Merleau-Ponty's claim that since none of us has direct access to the psyche of another all intersubjectivity is mediated by bodily appearances. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 114) In the next section I will examine this familiar situation in which we seem to have emotional feelings about things. I want to define these kinds of experiences in the same terms as conversational *ma* in order to extend the discussion in this thesis to a debate on the role of *ma* in my activities as an artist.

4.6 Martin Buber

Buber created a marvelously simple and compelling vision of the religious and social dimension of the human personality. In *I and Thou* (1958), Buber's major theme is the meaningfulness we find in the dialectical relationships between man and man that reflect the relationship of man with God. Given the topic of my

research, the theological dimension of Buber's thinking does not bear directly on my interests in his writing. I will therefore focus my discussion on the 'I-thou' and 'I-it' interactions of 'man to man'. This is indicated in the nature of the primary signifiers I-Thou and I-It (I-He/She) that form the central motif of Buber's philosophical contribution to European thought. As Maurice Friedman writes in his essay 'Martin Buber and dialogical psychotherapy' (2003), *I and Thou* had a tremendous impact on the philosophy of religion, education, aesthetics, and on social thought in particular (Friedman, 2003: 52). Given the importance of Bollas and Kimura to the theoretical platform on which I have built my research, it is of great interest that Friedman notes: 'What is less known is that Buber's philosophy of dialogue has also had a striking influence on the theory and practice of psychotherapy and even on psychoanalysis. It seems that Buber's classic work *I and Thou* deserves wider attention and in this thesis it will attempt to broaden the application of Buber's thinking by exploring the notion of philosophy of intersubjective dialogue within my encounters with *ma* in my studio practice.

The I-Thou/I-It concept has deep intellectual roots that reach beyond the immediate context of European Existentialism in which Buber developed his ideas through the first half of the twentieth century (the philosophical context in which the younger Sartre was writing about intersubjectivity in 1940s). These roots link Buber's thinking to the giants of eighteenth and nineteenth century philosophers. Names such as Immanuel Kant, Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche feature in the literature I have read on Buber as well as references to the traditions of Judaic and Hasidic scholarship in which he grew up. For a non-Westerner like myself this is an extremely unfamiliar world of thought and I found Friedman's interrogation of Martin Buber a usefully succinct formulation of the I-Thou/I-It

relationship and I follow Friedman's account throughout this section as I outline Buber's ideas. According to Buber, man's existence in the world is twofold: we address our sense of earthly being either as 'I-Thou' (an 'I' responding to a 'Thou') or 'I-It' (an 'I' responding to an 'It') on the basis of our primary relation with God, which is, of course, the ultimate aspiration of all human relations. As with the phenomenologists, Buber understood that 'I' is always intersubjective: there is no 'self' without something 'other' that forces this 'self' into existence. 'I-Thou' is the subject-to-subject version of this on-going experience of self-creation. 'I-It' is the subject-to-object variant that arises when the relationships addresses the material world. However, sometimes we treat other subjects as if they are things, not just in an ethical sense (for example, when we treat a friend as a means to our own ends) but also perceptually, as when we see a person at a distance and experience them as no more than a tiny part of a vast landscape.

There are several critiques of Buber's concept of 'I-Thou' which, at this point, it is worth considering in order to contextualize my interest in the relationship between subject-to-subject and subject-to-object interactions; that is, the investigation of the concept of intersubjectivity that is the central concern of this chapter. Perhaps the most famous analysis of Buber's idea is that of the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995) and the dialogue between these two thinkers has many interesting aspects that deepen our understanding of the complicated philosophical concept of intersubjectivity. However, the Buber-Levinas debate, as interesting as it is in its own right, is beyond the scope of my thesis even though there may have been a degree of conversational *ma* in the intellectual space that formed within the dispute between two minds that had been steeped in European

Jewish thought during the twentieth century. The contemporary philosopher

Robert Bernasconi has noted that the nearness in theoretical position between

Levinas and Buber was striking to external observers but not apparent to the two

instigators of the debate. (Bernasconi, 1988: 100) As a result some have defined

the debate as a misunderstanding rather than a genuine disagreement shaped by

opposing positions and this has many of the hallmarks of the kind of interaction I

define as *ma*-rich (see Chapter 1 above) (Casey, 1999: 69).

However, Levinas' critique of the 'I-Thou' encounter does help me distinguish the

part of Buber's account that is most useful to my thesis. The French philosopher

says that 'I-Thou' is ethically meaningless because Buber's concept defines an

interaction that is equal, symmetrical and reversible for its participants. This means

that unless the 'other' (who has been given the status of a 'Thou') is placed 'first'

and treated as 'above' the 'Thou'-giving 'I' there can be no proper ethical relation. I

believe that this criticism does undermine the basis on which Buber separates

specific subject-to-subject relations from our more general relationships with the

environment around us. If we treat other subjects as if they are just things in our

material environment we lose our ethical perspective on 'otherness', we allow an

'I-Thou' encounter to be nothing more than an 'I-It' interaction. Levinas makes us

aware of the difference between having an 'I-Thou' encounter with a sense of

principle and with a feeling of empathy. The latter would not necessarily be driven

by ethical considerations for an 'other'.

On the other hand, this criticism does not affect my own interest in Buber because,

as I stated above, 'I-It' also has a perceptual dimension; that is, when a 'Thou' is

reduced to an 'It' by being placed at such a remote distance that the subject in question appears to us as no more than a tiny part of the surrounding environment. Here the wider existential relational forces that act upon our senses change the I-Thou/I-It idea. To see a person a long way off in a vast landscape turns a 'Thou' into an 'It' but this transformation does not seem to involve the ethics of a person-to-person interaction. Perhaps we here move from ethics into the realm of aesthetics.

'I-Thou' is a subject-to-subject relation and 'I-It' is a subject-to-object relation. On the other hand, having made a dialectical relationship, Buber tells us that these subject-to-object interactions are not fixed; they continuously oscillate between 'I-Thou' and 'I-It'. To imagine the everyday character of this effect, think about the experience of walking through a city park. We are aware of people around us sitting on benches. Others pass us by as they walk along the pathways. There might be groups of people chatting or children playing games on the grass. Unless we give them due attention we might as well be looking at things: like the leaves blowing in the wind, the people in the park are simply objects moving around us unless, by chance, our eyes meet with those of another. At this moment we instantly realize that we are in the presence of another subject, a thing that perceives us as we perceive them. In daily life we do not have enough empathy to bestow 'I-Thou' relationships on every human being in our immediate environment and every encounter potentially involves a flexible exchange of 'I-It' for 'I-Thou'. On the occasions when this is reversed, when 'I-Thou' is exchanged for 'I-It', we are confronted with a human characteristic which can, in the absence of moral consciousness, lead to the disastrous treatment of one person by another.

According to the *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (1999) the difference between Buber's two relationships is as follows: 'Thou' involves openness, reciprocity, and a deep sense of personal involvement. The 'I' confronts its 'Thou' not as something to be studied, measured or manipulated, but as unique presence that responds to the 'I' in its individuality. In contrast, 'I-It' generates a tendency to treat all forms of 'otherness' as impersonal objects governed by casual, social, or economic forces. (1999, p.104) I was led to Buber because he clearly understands that intersbjective relations are not necessarily confined to subject-to-subject encounters, they also occur in relation to our subject-to-object engagements. If another person can be reduced to 'It', then a material object can be elevated to 'Thou'. This thought has significance for my research project because it allows me to transfer the discussion in Chapter 3 to my own creative engagement with making artworks in my studio practice. My aim is to use Buber's thinking in *I and Thou* to elaborate the intimate conversations that artists have with the tools and materials they use. In doing this I hope to find a means of describing the *ma*-rich spaces that open up in a creative dialogue with things.

4.7 Buber and trees

Buber observes that 'I-Thou' relationships are continually generated within the entire environment we inhabit. It is not simply a product of interpersonal relations. The characteristics of openness, reciprocity, and personal involvement that define a 'Thou' relationship can be experienced with, for example, a tree:

I CONSIDER a tree.

I can look on it as a picture: stiff column in a shock of light, or splash of green shot with the delicate blue and silver of the background.

I can perceive it as movement: flowing veins on clinging, pressing pith, suck of the roots, breathing of the leaves, ceaseless commerce with earth and air - and the obscure growth itself.

I can classify it in a species and study it as a type in its structure and mode of life.

I can subdue its actual presence and form so sternly that I recognize it only as an expression of law - of the laws in accordance with which a constant opposition of forces is continually adjusted, or of those in accordance with which the component substances mingle and separate.

I can dissipate it and perpetuate it in number, in pure numerical relation.

In all this the tree remains my object, occupies space and time, and has its nature and constitution.

It can, however, also come about, if I have both will and grace, that in considering the tree I become bound up in relation to it. The tree is now no longer *It* (Buber, 1958: 20).

In this interesting extract, Buber enumerates a sequence of steps in our changing relationship with a tree. We sense the oscillation between 'I-It' and 'I-Thou' as we follow his various responses. The first relational step involves our visual experience of the presence of the tree in the natural environment. Here the tree strikes the viewer like a landscape painting or photograph and whilst our perception is enriched by the aesthetics of beauty, poetic detail and formal composition associated with viewing artworks, our response is based on the process of representation – the reification of the tree. In this initial step 'Thou' feelings hover in the empathy generated by the aesthetic impact of the image but these are dominated and reduced by objectification. In the second relational step any nascent 'Thou' feeling is held back as we think about the mysteries of the natural world and wonder about the 'ceaseless commerce' of the biological domain.

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Here we shift our aesthetic sensibility into an appreciation of the hidden mechanics of tree growth and experience an increasing sense of 'I-It'. This stage is followed by a relational step that fully embraces the 'It' response. Here we use the eyes of the scientist to place the tree within the taxonomic inventory of all known trees, to see it as an example of a class of botanical objects, not a unique presence in our lived experience. By this stage we seem to have little possibility of achieving a 'Thou' relationship with the tree, our response is entirely dominated by 'objective' research and study. As a result, the next two relational steps carry the viewer into the realm of the physicist and the mathematician. Here the tree is nothing more than an expression of a law or a purely numerical relation. Its presence is 'subdued' into the state of being entirely an object of my curiosity. However, the final relational step in the sequence overturns the dominance of the 'I-It' relationship and, through the exertion of personal 'will and grace', a sense of unique presence is reasserted and the tree is transformed into 'Thou'.

Given that 'I-Thou' relationships are modeled on the ultimate subject-to-subject interaction of human beings with God, Buber naturally questions himself about treating a tree as another subject, as a being with the capacity to engage in intersubjective relationships with human beings. Surely a tree cannot possess the required degree of consciousness to allow such an interaction? Tree huggers aside, most people believe that trees do not communicate with each other, let alone with us. Buber admitted that he could not find adequate answers to the issues raised by the proposition of subject-to-object relations. (Buber, 1958: 21) The theologian says that he has not ever come into contact with the soul or dryad of a tree but, nevertheless, feels that 'I-Thou' relationships can be established with

trees if we humans have the will to make them happen. (Buber, 1958: 21) What is being suggested here is that human willfulness compensates for, and then imaginatively exploits, our lack of direct access to the minds of others not just in subject-to-subject interactions, but in subject-to-object encounters as well. If we can feel sympathy for someone else because we guess that they are experiencing us in the way that we are experiencing them, then it is surely possible to respond to the bodily appearances of a tree by imagining that they are experiencing us in some manner similar to our experience of them. As Merleau-Ponty says intersubjectivity arises because we do not have access to the psyches of others, Buber stretches this 'otherness' to include encounters with entities we classify as objects.

From this we can conclude that 'Thou' does not need to be a conscious being. If a non-conscious natural thing like a tree has this effect then any entity in the material environment is also available for 'I-Thou' relationships. Because any conscious state other than our own is a production of our mind, it is possible to attribute emotions and feelings in almost situation. For example, if I see a tree being cut down, as the chainsaw severs the trunk, I spontaneously grip my arm and experience a sense of pain, or rather, imagine that I have pain in the way that I imagine that the tree has pain. Of course my arm does not hurt and I do not know if the tree hurts either. But I do know that, by projecting an image of my own psyche onto the tree, a part of the non-subjective world becomes a subject in my mind, another subject as I am. And so we arrive at the point where a conversation with the material world seems to be conceivable. I believe that treating things as if they are living subjects is not unusual for artists and, in Japanese culture; these

kinds of subject-to-object conversations involve *ma*-rich energies. In the next chapter, I am going to consider this 'I-Thou' relationship as a method of describing artistic practice, a process charged with good- and bad-*ma*.

CHAPTER 5. An artist and her materials

5.1 'I-Thou' and artist's materials

In terms of sculptural practice, 'I' could be a sculptor and 'Thou' the sculptor's materials. In the previous chapter I talked about the intimate 'I-Thou' relationship that can be established between a person and a non-conscious thing. If a sculptor is willing to communicate using the physical presence of materials, 'I-Thou' relationships can develop. It seems to me that 'I-Thou' encounters between a human subject and a material object would be potentially *ma*-rich.

In Japan, looking at articles in art magazines, or essays in exhibition catalogues, you will see the phrase 'a dialogue with materials' everywhere. This is a well-worn cliché, particularly for sculptors and other kinds of artist-makers. For example, the Japanese wood carver Keiji Kidokoro treats the experience of creating sculptures as an act of nervous concentration in which he does not 'decide a form but the material tells [him] how and where to carve' (Kidokoro, 2005). This seems to confirm Kidokoro's 'I-Thou' relationship with the wood used in his sculptures. How can we communicate with a piece of wood? What exactly do artists do when they engage in an intimate relationship with physical materials? One possible answer to these questions arises in a conversation between Jiro Kohara, a famous forestry specialist, and the sculptor Hiroe Doumoto, who has created many fine sculptures

of the Buddha.[8] According to Kohara, each tree has a character or a temperament

like a human being and a technique was established by the Muromachi era (1392-

1573) that involved reading the unique character of each piece of timber in order

to produce long-lasting buildings and better wooden products. (Kohara and

Doumoto, 2005). This technique, which involved the interpretative skills of the

woodworker's five senses, identifies different types of temperament in relation to

different types of tree by taking into account the way each genus has evolved

through environmental change over millions of years. The sculptor is required to

understand the unique habitat of each individual tree from which each piece of

timber has been cut. The skill of all those who work with wood is to respond to

each timber's special personality and to make the best use of these distinct

characteristics. This can be interpreted in the aroma and weight of the wood, by

touching its surface and listening to its 'voice'. Kohara tells us that the sculptor,

Gengen Sato, claimed to have spent his whole life not only listening to, but also

talking with, the wood he carved (Kohara and Doumoto, 2005). In this way a

sculptor who understands the ancient techniques of working wood learns to utilize

the unique character of his natural materials.

From my own perspective, this sensory engagement with the material environment

has been concentrated on the qualities of fabrics and dyes. These were my

chosen materials for many years and I recognize the ideas discussed by Fukumi

Shimura, a Japanese textile artist specializing in the use of vegetable dyes, in her

interesting book *Flowers Talking* (2007). Shimura says that the best colours are

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[8] Kohara has undertaken many important projects related to the restoration and
preservation of historic wooden artefacts (such as Buddhist sculptures) and buildings (e.g.
the Horyu-ji temple, the oldest temple in existence).

derived from plants that are shaped by the environmental impact of different locations, seasons and years. When an artist repeatedly attempts to extract a colour from a particular plant year after year, it is as if they are in dialogue with the changing moods of nature. (Shimura, 2007: 108) Furthermore, when it comes to using organic solutions, the artist needs to observe the behaviour of the dye carefully in order to remove the cloth or yarn at the optimum moment. (Shimura, 2007: 20) During this process an artist is reacting as sensitively to the conduct of the dyestuffs as they would to an old friend with whom they have experienced many years of conversation.

In these examples, the material world is beyond the control of the artist and, as a result, it takes on the presence of another being. This seems to be a key idea that links my discussion of Buber's 'I-Thou' theory to the curious phenomenon of artists addressing their materials as though they are living agents with feelings. In these states, the materials have become 'Thou', they are no longer 'It'.

5.2 'I-Thou' and the tools of the artist

When conversing with materials, an artist is also interacting directly with tools such as calligraphy brushes, drawing pencils, wood carving chisels, and so on. Japanese artists often say that their tools are their lives and so they have to be looked after well (Wan: 2004-2005). When I started to learn the skills of calligraphy at the age of four, my teacher made a point of training me to never finish working without washing my brushes or clearing up my workspace. To this day, when I leave a place of work I sense that the equipment, even the room itself, will not

work for me when I return unless I have put everything away. It is as if the equipment one uses needs to be cared for as a friend. This kind of subject-to-object relationship, as described in Chapter 4 above, involves a moral awareness generated by the intersubjective presence of the 'other'. Sometimes I seem to hear an authoritarian voice, like that of my calligraphy master when I was a child, reminding me to tidy up after myself. Here the voice seems to belong to my tools. I cannot think that my tools are consciously communicating with me. There must be another explanation for this experience. Through many years of practicing calligraphy, my brushes have become part of me: they are like a component of my 'self' that can be removed and put away in a box. Because I have become 'attached' to them, I feel that their role in producing calligraphy is more than simply 'instrumental'. Scientific research has demonstrated that the brain creates body images that unite any routinely used artefactual or mechanical device with one's own body. (Iriki, 2008: 8) The neuroscientist Atsushi Iriki conducted experiments with Japanese monkeys to find out how a primate brain responds to continuously using a small garden rake. In the beginning the tool was just a foreign object, however as the monkey became adept at raking, the cerebral nerve cells began to treat the rake as if it were part of its body, as shown in Fig. 21. (Iriki, 2008: 8)
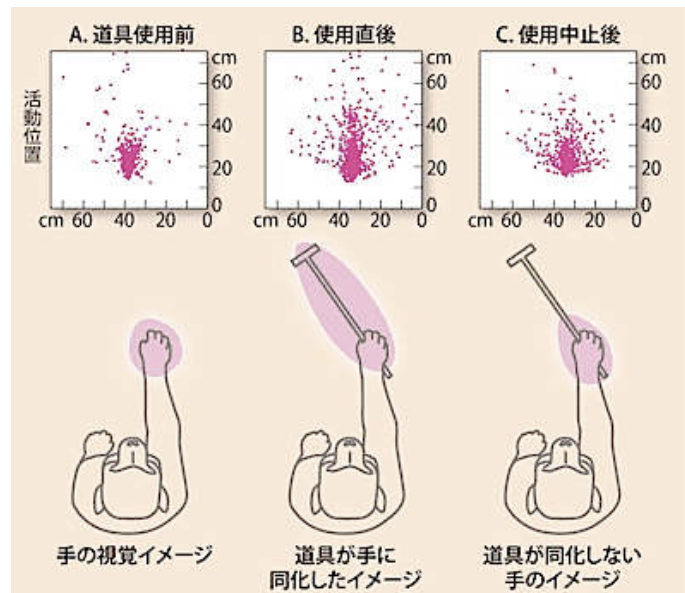
Fig. 21: Iriki's diagram of changing the neuro-cell with tool-using activity (Iriki, 2008, pp. 8). From the left, A is before using tool, B is in tool-using activity, and C is after tool-using activity. The three diagrams at the top indicate a range which the neuro-cell recognises as part of the body. The lower pictures below show the body image before, in the middle and after the tool-using activity.

As a result, it seems extremely likely that artists incorporate tools into their sense of 'self' as they become skilled at using these foreign objects for creative ends. This means that tools such as calligraphy brushes become, not just an extension of the surface of my body, but also an internal self with a voice that can impel me to treat these objects as if they were an end in themselves, rather than a means to an end. It is interesting that our extended self remains active when the brushes are no longer in use and have been safely stored in their box. I now seem to have many selves in a single bodily form. We have been discussing the self that treats the contact between my calligraphy brush and my paper as if it were my fingers responding to the subtle textures of the surface on which I am writing. But, equally, there are other tool-extended selves that incorporate my skills at driving a car, or using a sewing machine, into my body image. On the basis of this highly complex

form of information processing, it should not seem surprising that I treat my favourite tools as sensate beings: indeed, like old friends. The famous temple craftsman Mitsuo Ogawa provides a traditional Japanese view on this matter:

> Tools are the body itself. There is no meaning unless you can use them as you think and feel. For woodwork, the first step is to sharpen blades. …… If I teach myself a falsehood, I will learn a falsehood. It takes time to learn the proper way, however, once you learn it then your body will resist falsehoods. You have to make your body resist falsehoods. (Ogawa and Shiono, 2008:130)

Here we can see that the well-kept tools Ogawa employs to create new, or restore old, temple architecture, conforms to our model of the development of an 'I-Thou' relationship with the methods and materials of creative practice. So far in this chapter we have explored these kinds of 'I-Thou' possibilities within traditional creative engagements with physical materials and the tools that shape them. In doing this I feel I have established a reasonable platform for discussing *ma*-rich gaps in the 'I-Thou' skills that are learnt and absorbed in what Ogawa would describe as 'the proper way'. I now want to turn to the creative practices I have investigated during this research project in order to begin to explore the role of *ma*, particularly conversational *ma*, in contemporary art practices that are more risky and less easily seen to have aesthetic value. Since beginning this PhD my activities as an artist have ceased to reflect the Japanese traditions in which *ma* has been such a prominent feature. In the next section I try to understand how *ma* emerges within 'I-Thou' responses to everyday materials that have been pursued in an entirely experimental way for the purposes of moving beyond the traditional scope of fine art practice.

5.3 'I-Thou' relationships with experimental materials and unconventional tools

In order to address the non-traditional processes that have become interesting to me since I began my doctoral project, I will now explore the notion of a 'dialogue with materials' in relation to my experiments with polythene sheets. At a later stage I will review the artistic aims that led me to work with this material but here I want to introduce my own studio experiments using the discussion of 'I-Thou' relationships established in Chapter 4. The 'I-It' to 'I-Thou' transformation helps us understand how an artist can project intersubjective feelings onto any subject-to-object relationship. Although it is a well-worn cliché, artists do like to treat raw materials as sensate presences. We described above how the wood carver Kidokoro allowed himself to be instructed 'how and where to carve' by the timber he selected for his sculpture. (Kidokoro, 2005) This is certainly an example of Buber's application of 'will and grace' that binds us to 'I-Thou' relationships with trees. This transformation of 'It' into 'Thou' seems relatively straightforward when responding to the natural world. However, what about non-natural materials? In the context of contemporary creative practices, what about experiments where non-traditional processes are used to create art?

My development as an artist during my PhD project involved a shift from natural fabrics to synthetic materials. As a result I was not able to continue to follow Shimura's ideas about vegetable dyes. It was no longer possible to accept, as described above, that the best materials are derived from plants that are shaped by the environmental effects of different locations, seasons and years. Instead I

had to project my 'I-Thou' feeling onto industrial products such as polythene sheet. One of the most important practical questions in my research was: can I treat polythene as an old friend with whom I have years of conversation? As a result, a central motivation for my practice-led inquiry was the desire to experiment with synthetic industrial materials as 'Thou'.
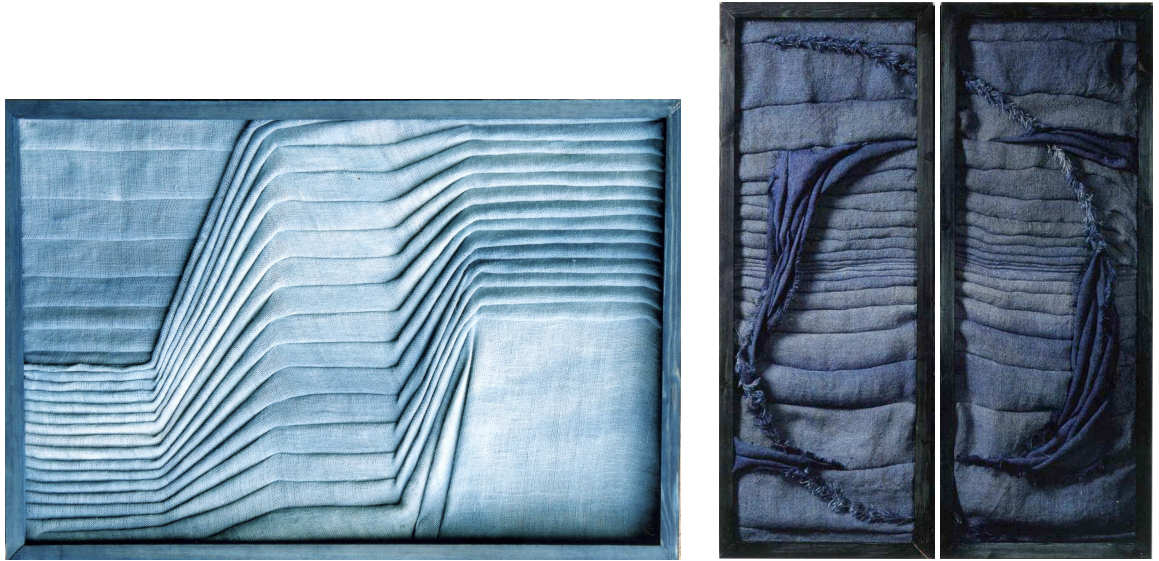
Fig. 22 & Fig.23: Pictures of textile works by the author.

Fig.24 & 25: Picture of polythene works by the author.

In relation to this ambition, one important criterion that emerges above was clearly the state of uncontrollability that results from my interest in 'distressing' polythene

with a heated clothes iron. Here I employ the verb 'to distress' in the sense used by furniture and clothes makers when they simulate the appearance of wear and age on their products. These processes, which often involve scratching and staining surfaces or fading the colour of a material, need to look unintentional and un-fabricated (Saito, 2007: 182). Therefore, the concept of 'distressing' captures the uncontrollable dimension of my practice that is such a feature of my adoption of an experimental approach to materials and tools. As I described above, Kidokoro does not 'decide' on the sculptural forms he creates, he is controlled by the wood he is carving. Therefore my growing 'I-Thou' relationship with polythene sheets must also embrace the unmanageable aspects of ironing polythene: That is, the difficulties I encounter using polythene as a creative medium and the problems I experience when I try to use a common clothes iron as an unconventional tool for studio experiments – these are all features of my dialogue with my materials. Perhaps, with the Kidokoro formula in mind, I should think of the degree of uncontrollability as the degree of intersubjective projection, the amount of transformation that has moved my studio conversation with my materials and tools from passive 'It' into active 'Thou'. This would certainly link my activities to Oshima's claim that we only know *ma* through bad-*ma* allowing me to identify the *ma* that emerges as I struggle to address polythene sheeting as though it was a living agent with feelings.

Fig. 26: The author making polythene piece. Filmed by Jude Thomas. [filmstill].

At a purely technical level my engagement with experimental materials and unconventional tools is dominated by the 'It' value of: 1) an electric clothes iron, 2) a folded remnant of fabric on which the iron is used to 'distress' the polythene, 3) a sheet of paper that acts as a buffer between the hot iron and the polythene and, finally, 4) the rolls of polythene sheeting from which I cut the sample-like rectangles that are 'ironed' into the distressed surfaces which represent the goal of my studio practice. The point of my research is to experience and reflect on the transformation of these particular 'It' values into 'I-Thou' encounters. However, it is possible to describe the entire studio process as if no 'Thou' would ever occur. In doing this I reduce my investigation to a 'how to do it' manual that involves five actions that can be itemized as following:

1. Warming the iron.

The temperature at which I use the iron is varied according to the type and number of polythene sheets. Polythene can have different chemical compositions and is

produced in a range of weights and thicknesses. Recycled or heavy-duty polythene (which is often thick and shiny) usually needs the iron to be set at temperatures between 180 and 200 degrees. Thinner varieties (which usually have a matt surface) have to be ironed at a temperature somewhere between 110 to 150 degrees. Thin polythene will completely disintegrate if the iron is too hot.
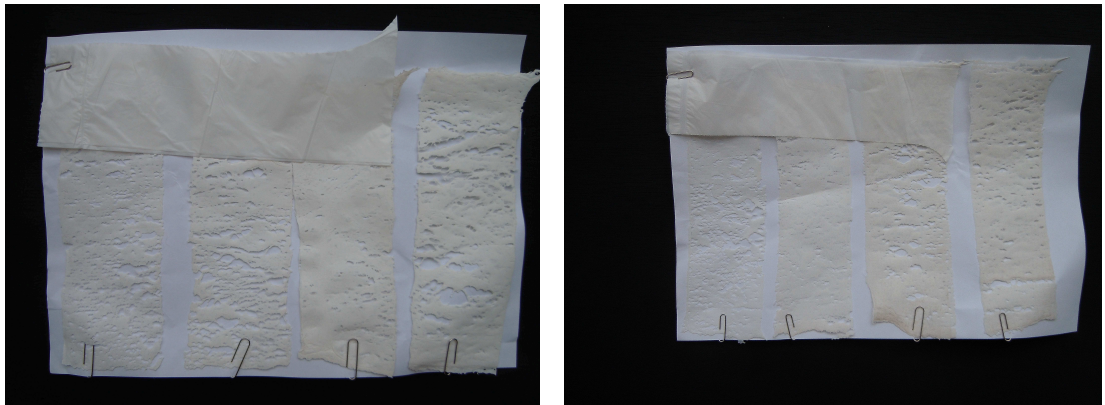
Fig. 27: Polythene samples showing the effect of ironing 4, 8, 12, and 16 layer stacks. On the left the polythene is recycled, on the right the polythene is similar in weight to that in everyday domestic use. Note the increasing size of holes as I increase the thickness of the stacks I iron. The similarity between the two types of polythene is achieved by modifying the temperature of the iron.

2. Preparing the fabric 'ironing board'

I iron the polythene on the floor of my studio. An important item in the execution of this process is the layer of fabric that serves as the 'ironing board' surface underneath the polythene. The shape of the holes that form as the heat distresses the polythene depends on the type of fabric I use. During my research I learnt how to vary the remnants of fabric I use as a base in order to create holes of different sizes and patterns on the polythene. I have also experimented with paper and metal meshes. However, paper (especially thin newsprint or tracing paper) can stick to the polythene and prove very hard to remove. Ironing on a shiny surface

does not work because polythene sheets simply shrink into a small dense block without any holes.

3. Cutting the rolls of polythene into 'sample' shapes

The rectangular format I use when cutting up the polythene in preparation for ironing is based on the shape of the Japanese paper samples I saw in the archive of the Sir Joseph Banks Centre for Economic Botany at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (I will be returning to this key experience in detail in chapter 7). I use a range of simple card templates to cut rectangles that remind me of the sheets of waterproofed paper in the Banks Centre collection. I avoid cutting each batch from the same roll in order to generate as much variation as I can in each ironing session. In addition, each roll of polythene is often unevenly stretched and so some parts are thicker than other. This can be seen as a series of horizontal stripes in the body of the polythene when it is held up to the light. These variations in thickness will greatly affect the shape of the 'sample' shape after the polythene has been distressed.

4. Placing buffer sheets of paper on the polythene

It is necessary to cover the stack of rectangular 'sample' sheets with thin, gloss-surfaced, paper that act as buffer between the polythene and the hot iron. The surface of the paper I use is shiny because experience has taught me that this kind of paper will not stick to the polythene as it begins to melt during the process of 'distressing'. It seems strange to me that thin shiny paper is not suitable as an 'ironing board' surface underneath the polythene but it serves well as a buffer. The reason seems to be that a thick fabric does not hold the heat and so continually

draws off the temperature of the polythene as the iron passes above, whereas the thin shiny paper prevents heat getting through to the polythene (with a great deal of heat loss into the air above) keeping the temperature at just the right level for the right kind of 'distressing' to take place.
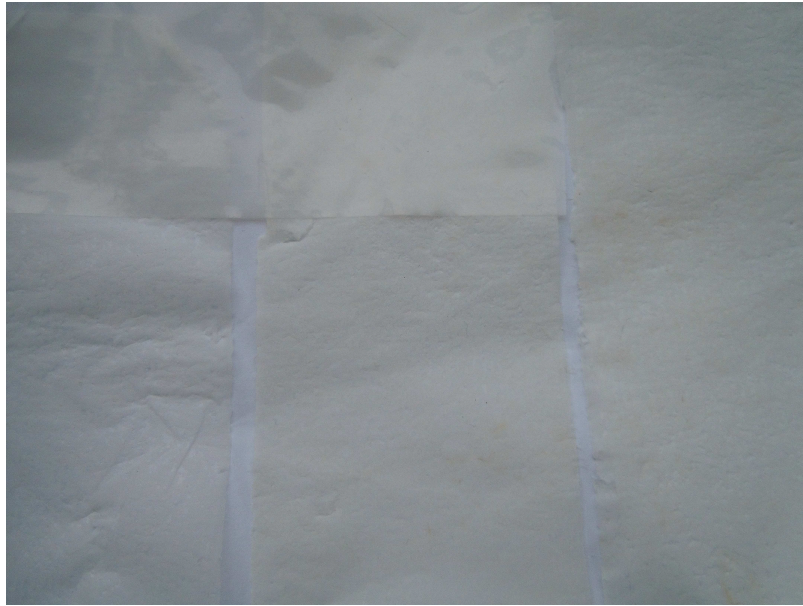
Fig. 28: Samples showing the low level of 'distress' achieved when I temporarily experimented with 'environmentally friendly' polythene that does not emit fumes when heated.

5. Ironing

As I begin to heat the polythene through the paper buffer I move the iron in short pushing and pulling actions, bit by bit, across the entire surface before me. I sit, Japanese style on the floor, smoothing out and pressing down the covering paper with my free hand as I work. This action is important because there are creases in the paper and folds in the underlying fabric that inhibit the movement of iron and cause an increase in the heat transmitted to particular sections of the polythene

stack. This can result in molten areas of polythene that render the 'sample' sheets useless for my purposes: they look damaged rather than 'distressed'.

However, at a personal and subjective level the process is a rather different experience than the 'how to do it' description above. I find myself entering into a dialogue with experimental materials and unconventional tools. I am more alert to this dialogue than I would normally be because I am consciously reflecting on the oscillation between 'I-It' and 'I-Thou' that, according to Buber, accompanies all human relations with 'others'. This increased sensitivity occurs because undertaking a practice-led PhD has forced me to theorize studio activities that I would normally allow to be entirely intuitive. Each day as I begin work, the polythene and the clothes iron await me in the studio. I have noted, particularly in the early stages of my research, that the polythene represents no more than an ordinary substance when I walk through the door. In order to draw these everyday things into an intersubjective encounter, I spend a certain amount of time cleaning my studio rather than commencing work. This ploy, which I find stimulates my creative curiosity, would be the same if the materials I was working with were traditional. The business of tidying up automatically evolves into the kind of moving around the studio I need to do in order to discover the motivation to commence work. I rely on this routine to uncover a sense of 'Thou' in the materials I am about to use. There will be a certain point at which I begin to notice the special qualities of the polythene, or feel the warmth of the clothes iron as it heats up, or start to imagine the changes that could occur in the polythene if I use this or that cloth as an ironing surface. By this time the material environment of the studio is no longer 'It"; it has become 'Thou'.

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In relation to my 'I-Thou' engagement with the routine task of ironing polythene, I was interested by the work of the Czechoslovakian artist Tatana Kellner whose *Iron* (2008) installation contrasts with my aspirations as a studio practitioner during this doctoral project (see the webpage of the Roos Art gallery: http://www.roosarts.com/made_in_rosendale_tatana_kellner.html). Kellner is an overtly political artist (she is currently artistic director of the Women's Studio Workshop in Rosendale, New York) and her multi-media work on the history of women's labour includes installations, video works and artist's books that explore the feminist issues raised by the exploitative employment of female migrants in North American laundry sweatshops in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The ethical position taken in Kellner's installation makes the viewer aware of the damaging subject-to-object encounter created by exploitative labour where the 'I-It' of ironing clothes transforms the ironing subject into an 'it' herself. In *Iron* the action of ironing has been mechanized producing a curious rhythmic effect as the iron moves up and down the ironing board and releases a jet of steam at the end of each action. This rhythm seems to me to be *ma*-less: the stages of the process are without change or surprise. The point is that the routine task the migrants are required to perform is not only monotonous but without any hope of 'I-Thou' encounters. In comparison, my studio practice, even though (as we shall see below) this activity involves toxic fumes from heated polythene, has more 'I-Thou' potential then the type of work represented in Kellner's *Iron*. Of course, as these fumes began to transform my studio into a noxious environment, I could have put on a fume mask, a precaution that would have been obligatory in the University's buildings where my experiments were subject to the institution's health and safety protocol. However, in my own workspace, once I had experienced the discomfort

of the fumes, and this discomfort had generated bad-*ma*, the last thing I wanted

was to insulate myself from the topic of my research. Without a fume mask I was

in a position to tolerate a certain level of physical unease without stopping and,

within this toleration, moments of hesitation would begin to increase until the

irritation became unacceptable, at which point I would have to stop ironing and

leave the room. During the period of work that led up to the cessation of practice

there were many instances at which I nearly stopped but decided to continue:

these were *ma*-punctuations in the flow of the ironing process and wearing a mask

would have prevented me experiencing this interaction between toleration,

hesitant uncertainty and the complete suspension of practice.

Fig. 29: Tatana Kellner (2008) *Iron* [Installation]. Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, New York, 2008.

This interrupted form of studio practice is a way of drawing attention to those special moments when routine work is imbued with, and carried forward by, aesthetic feelings. As I said above there is a point when, as I follow my usual working habits, I note the quality of the polythene, or the warmth of the iron, or imagine the transformations that could occur in the polythene when I begin ironing. This is my way of describing how 'It" becomes 'Thou'. Once this special feeling is established, the production of the artworks is no longer routine or everyday in its character. Nothing could be further from the experience of the machine-like movements represented in Kellner's installation. Boring actions such as cutting polythene sheets into shapes or piling up the shaped sheets on my ironing surface becomes suspenseful and therefore alive with possibility. As I said above, I have to cover the top sheet of each pile of shapes with thin paper in order to protect the polythene from direct contact with the iron. The paper has to be the right thickness to conduct enough heat to the pile. Even though I have undertaken this procedure many times, there are so many variables that I can never be sure of the results. The effect of the heat varies according to the thickness of the pile, or the types of polythene I have cut up, or the surface of the paper I am ironing through, and so on. This uncertainty is fully incorporated into the creative process because the lace-like surfaces I hope to achieve in the artworks are entirely the product of accidental effects. Whilst some sheets disintegrate into pieces, most hold firm and the process is capable of generating a wide range of textural transformations which exhibit both the fragile beauty of handmade paper and the resilient strength of fabrics such as silk (see figs. 27 and 28 above). On the other hand, I find some of the results either ugly or plain and, as I work in the studio ironing stack after stack of polythene sheets, I am continually aware of the 'hit and miss' nature of

this technique.

In contrast to the political ambitions of Kellner's piece, the uncontrollable aspect of my ironing technique is an unapologetically aesthetic venture with deep roots in the poetics of the Japanese tradition. By framing *ma* with my 'I-Thou' studio encounters there is a tension between the domestic labour of ironing and the aesthetic dimension of an everyday chore that seems to come quite automatically to a Japanese person. In her recent book *Everyday Aesthetics* (2007), the design historian Yuriko Saito cross-references the fast-developing academic fields such as Environmental Aesthetics and the theorizing of the 'everyday' in Cultural Studies with her own philosophical heritage in Japan.[9] Here important (and very current) Western ideas about our interaction with the world around us are refocused using the prism of a Japanese tradition that nurtures our appreciation of the mundane permeating the ordinariness of cooking and other activities associated with the female domain (Saito, 2007: 4). Saito is interested in the moral judgements that accompany our aesthetic encounters with everyday life; that is, the way we find ourselves caring about, or feeling sensitivity towards, or respect for, artefacts or buildings (Saito, 2007: 7). As we shall see below, both good- and bad-*ma* are products of a cultural sensibility that does not separate these moral

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[9] For an example of what Saito means by Environmental Aesthetics see the publications of Allen Carlson (e.g. Carlson, A. (2000) *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture*, London: Routledge.). Similarly, a key text informing Saito's approach to the 'everyday' is Light, A. and Smith, J. M. (eds) (2005) *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, New York and Chicester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press. Saito does not discuss an area of literature that I consider relevant to the interaction between artists and the 'everyday'. Here the classic publications are: de Certeau, M. (2002) *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press; Highmore, B. (2002) *The Everyday Life Reader.* London: Routledge; Lefebvre, H. (2008) *Critique of Everyday Life*, vols 1-3, London: Verso; and Lefebvre, H. (2004) *Rhythmanalysis: space, time and everyday life*, London: Continuum International Publishing.

values from aesthetic appreciation. It seems that the breaking up of polythene surfaces in my studio practice can evoke – like the crackling of the varnish on a historic oil painting, or the frayed edge of an old piece of fabric, or the weather-beaten façade of an ancient building – a sense of aesthetic pleasure in which I contrast the clean shiny appearance of the untouched roll of polythene with the 'distressed' condition that is created by the ironing process. As Saito suggests, it seems that the secret of aesthetic appreciation is that, whilst we want to dominate our material environment, we do not enjoy exerting 'total' control and take pleasure in those moments when we have to let go, when we have to let things be (Saito, 2007: 182-83). It is the 'fragile and delicate relationship between two opposing forces that marks out a pleasurable 'tension, balance, dialogue, or dialectic'. (Saito, 2007: 183) One of the most subtle ways in which the Japanese observe these opposing forces is through the irreconcilable nature of a *ma*-rich encounter.

As a result I can describe my studio activity in a way that is close to any traditional creative process. It is surely not too different from Kidokoro's discussion of woodcarving. My sensitivity to the qualities of different kinds of polythene, or the best level of heat at which to begin the ironing process, is similar to the sculptor's 'I-Thou' relationship with the timber out of which his sculptures were formed. The moment at which I stop tidying up and begin to make artworks is probably the moment when I start communicating with my materials in the same way that Kidokoro communicates with his wood. Even my acceptance of accidental effects mirrors the sculptor's acquiescence to the unique character of each tree from which the wood to be carved has been cut. In making these parallels I am beginning to demonstrate how an artist engages in an intimate relationship with

physical materials. My 'I-Thou' response has transformed the polythene and the iron into studio 'friends', a feeling that would be recognized by many artists from both Western and Eastern cultures.

There is also another level at which this dialogue replicates the discussion of conversational *ma* discussed in Chapter 3. The process of ironing polythene is not just unpredictable it is also unhealthy and unpleasant. The fumes produced by applying heat to polythene irritate the eyes and cause respiratory irritation. During the practical stage of my research, the bodily irritation of working with polythene would suddenly interrupt, sometimes destroy, my concentration. This led me to wonder if the periods of discomfort I experienced were like the bad-*ma* that the Japanese associate with moments of interpersonal embarrassment (in either conversational or cramped situations). If so, the good-*ma* of an artist's dialogue with her materials (like the well-balanced relationship between a wood carver and his trees) could be said to come sharply into focus through a contrast with the bad-*ma* of working with toxic or hazardous materials (Oshima's point again). As a result I became interested in using conversational *ma* to describe the risky and precarious nature of my experimental art practices.

I am aware that traditional and entirely non-experimental artistic methods also involve poisonous substances and hazardous practices. The library at Northumbria University has many 'methods and materials' manuals that alert artists to the health and safety issues connected with most fine art activities. Even Kidokoro's trees are not friendly when inhaled as fine dust, something that is quite easy to do if you are using high quality workshop machinery. The result of this

literature is that 'safe practice' informs every conventional aspect of visual arts production. What is very clear about experimental art is that the dangers can only lie ahead of the practitioner. The creative conversation that the artist has with her materials has to be, by definition, subject to sudden interruptions that break through the continuity of the aesthetic pleasure of creative production. Here bad-*ma* shows us how to value good-*ma*. This is the special feature of conversational *ma*: it is the version of *ma* that most directly captures the risk-laden experimentalism of creative studio activities.

5.4 'I-It' and the disordered sensorium

It is possible to link the *ma* experienced in these experiments to the growing body of literature on 'sensual culture'. For example, David Howes' *Empire of Senses* (2005) has a section dedicated to the 'Derangement of the Senses' (Howes, 2005: 357–396) that explores the way in which 'disordered, dispersed and fractured' senses provide valuable insights into the relationship between the human sensorium and the material world. The examples include sufferers of ES (environmental sensitivities) whose health is dominated (and destroyed) by objects, particularly consumer items that 'seep toxic fumes'. Howes' book also builds an argument for the creative stimulation generated by sensual disorientation using August Strindberg's fascination with the dramatic implications of being 'thrown off balance by the material world' (Howes, 2005: 357). It seems to me that being thrown off balance is a *ma*-like interruption of our 'I-Thou' relationships. The creative practitioner has her intersubjective conversation replaced with a hostile 'I-

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It' encounter. Here bad-*ma* is generated by the sudden return of 'It' in the midst of a process dedicated to the 'Thou' of our creative processes. In this sense, the bad-*ma* that occurred in my studio could be said to have helped generate, even maintain, the creative tension that drove my experiments forward. Here the repetitious activity of ironing polythene becomes a fascinating iterative learning experience dedicated to the oscillation of 'I-Thou' and 'I-It', the interaction of good- and bad-*ma*.

We must recognize that the subject-to-object interaction that generates the artist's conversational *ma* involves a complicated encounter between one's body and the outside world. The vehicles of sensual reception (vision, smell, touch, hearing, and taste) cannot in themselves produce *ma*-moments without 'I-Thou' intersubjectivity. As we saw above, Sartre gave a special place to shame in the evolution of human consciousness and I have cited this idea in Chapter 4 as the exemplary version of the intersubjective experience. Shame drives the development of human identity and the formation of a rich inner psychological life. When it comes to describing the interaction of good- and bad-*ma* in my studio dialogue with ironing polythene, Sartre's shame is comparable to Strindberg's loss of balance. Both are unpleasant but creative in their effect and it is the continual puncturing of 'I-Thou' by 'I-It' that transforms the continuity of aesthetic pleasure into creative production. In the same way that a bodily action such as walking along a path can result in me tumbling over and feeling embarrassment in front of other people, the dense fumes that result from ironing the polythene generate a self-critical discomfort that makes me self-conscious of my identity as an artist. Feeling uncertain about my abilities as a creative practitioner expands my self-knowledge and, in the same

way that my body learns to take more care when walking (I do not want to fall over again because I do not want to feel embarrassed), my artistic identity learns how to manage the discomfort and return itself to a state of good-*ma*. As with any social interaction, my body and world encounters in the studio continually adjust from bad-*ma* to good-*ma*. The hesitations or disruptions in the flow of my practice allow 'I-It' and 'I-Thou' to gradually build a new platform of activity.

5.5 'I-It' and 'I-Thou' oscillation in creative practices

The repetitious activity of ironing polythene leads to the kind of iterative learning that occurs through the oscillation of 'I-Thou' and 'I-It'. In my experimental practices, the hazardous nature of ironing polythene created enough bad-*ma* for me to fully understand what Oshima meant when she said that you only know good-*ma* through he experience of bad-*ma*. This creative tension is deeply rooted in the Japanese sense of aesthetics. In my home country there are types of human activity that are recognized as being particularly imbued with *ma*-rich aesthetic effects. We noted at the beginning of this thesis that the field of swordsmanship is an area in which *ma* is traditionally seen as a product of bodily, spatial and intersubjective relationships. Dueling is more than an interaction between two combatants: it is an interaction between a dueling body and a hostile environment that includes a deadly opponent. I am drawn to a comparison here with the hazardous environment of a studio given over to experimental practices.

The Japanese swordsman is engaged in the bodily project of either killing or being killed. This starkly dangerous intersubjective relationship is embedded in an active

environmental space that is psychologically linked to the notion of security (the need to keep a certain distance in order to secure your life). In *The Kendo Reader*, Hisashi Noma describes a special martial arts term *ma-ai* (literally a combination of *ma* and the verb 'to meet') that refers to the spatio-temporal 'theatre of action' in which each combatant adjusts the timing of his attack (Noma, 2003: 46-48). The word *ma-ai* is usually translated into English as 'interval' but the complexity of the concept is well described in a Wikipedia entry ('maai', 2008) that gives the definition as both the spatial distance between the opponents and also the time it takes to cross that distance. Importantly, *ma-ai* refers to the changing angle and rhythm of attack as it takes account of the opponent's height, reach (including his weapon) and speed of movement. Here Noma is evoking a military version of the intersubjective space in which my studio dialogue with discomforting materials takes place. Indeed, *ma-ai* is even used to describe the momentary lapses of awareness that are manifested in the opponent's loss of advantage, the *kokoro-no-maai* or mental interval in which the duel is either won or lost (Norma, 2003: 42).

In relation to the theme of my thesis, one could say that a swordsman uses the physical and mental *ma-ai* of the duel to create bad-*ma* for his opponent. The opposing swordsman then has to re-establish his position and so the bad-*ma* shifts back and forth between the two combatants. As each duelist enters the *ma-ai* of the other they are automatically 'It' to each other's 'Thou': as a result they become dangerous to each other. This oscillating experience of bad-*ma* is, in the context of this thesis, a version of the creative tension that occurs in my subject-to-object interactions with experimental materials. The studio provides a visual arts version of the duelist's *ma-ai*. The aesthetics of the practice, whether it be dueling

or making art, is generated by the uncomfortable presence of bad-*ma*. In this way, the experience of researching my practical work was informed by reading about the psychoanalytical conversations between Bollas and his psychologically disturbed patients. I then saw my experimental practice as shaped by the intersubjective hesitations that abruptly moved me from a state of friendship with my materials to estrangement and back again. This was an oscillation between 'I-Thou' and 'I-It', between good- and bad-*ma*. This discontinuity has a similar role to the conversational hesitations that, for Bollas, mirror the unconscious. In a psychoanalytical context it is the 'gap-filling' moments that produce what Bollas calls 'relational knowing'. Within my studio practice it was the constant stalling of intersubjectivity that generated new insights and understandings. At this point it became possible to see 'relational knowing' as a form of research methodology. Here it is the practitioner's ability to continually make quick responses that rescue the 'I-Thou' from the 'I-It' that shapes the possibility of practice-led knowledge. As a result, I am going to explore my studio version of conversational *ma* in the context of the research methodologies commonly used by artists undertaking practice-led doctoral research. In particular, I am going to apply my understanding of *ma* to the concept of action research.

CHAPTER 6. A *ma* researcher and her methodologies

6.0 Action research by artists

The founder of social psychology, Kurt Lewin (1890–1947), coined the term 'action research' in a 1946 paper entitled *Action Research and Minority Problems*. The method is described in the paper as 'a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action' (Lewin, 1946: 34-46). More recently the management theorist Peter Reason (2000) has written extensively on how action research creates 'practical knowing'. In this chapter I am going to cross-reference this notion of 'practical knowing' with Bollas' 'relational knowing' in order to explore the similarity between action research methods and my own self-examination of my practical work. For theorists such as Reason, the person involved in action research cannot be neutral which provides me with an immediate link to our discussion of intersubjectivity. The personality and background of the researcher will inform not just the way they gather and interpret information, but also the way they define the material to be researched. This is a method of pursuing an inquiry that is 'participative, grounded in experience, and action-oriented'. (Reason & Bradbury, 2001: xxiv) It is surely this aspect of action research that makes it so applicable to doctoral research by artists. It is the most popular approach amongst practice-led researchers in Fine Art at Northumbria University and this chapter was developed in discussion with my fellow PhD students and my principal supervisor, Chris Dorsett.

Reason & Torbert (2001) outline the different aspects of human intelligence used in action research employing ideas based on the thinking of the British psychologist John Heron who argues that 'there are at least four main kinds of inquiry outcome, corresponding to the four forms of knowing: experiential, presentational, propositional and practical' (Heron, 1996: 36-37). These are listed by Reason & Torbert as follows:

1) Experiential knowing: the product of a direct encounter with the process of inquiry, a response to the 'presence of some energy, entity, person, place, process or thing' (Reason & Torbert, 2001:13).

2) Presentational knowing: an explanation of experimental findings using any system of signs: for example, 'graphic, plastic, musical, vocal and verbal art-forms' that 'give form to our experience' (Reason & Torbert, 2001: 13).

3) Propositional knowing: an expansion of existing knowledge generating further theories or formulating new outcomes. A typical example of this form of knowing would be an academic commentary that expands, elaborates or re-interprets an over-familiar body of published knowledge (Reason & Torbert, 2001: 13).

4) Practical knowing: the knowledge of how to do things. The use of an ability or skill to fulfil the three prior forms of knowing by bringing them to 'fruition in purposive deeds, and consummates them with its autonomous celebration of excellent accomplishment' (Reason & Torbert, 2001: 13).

It is important to note that these four aspects of human intelligence form a sequence in which each stage is built, step-by-step, on the achievements of the previous form of knowing. Heron (1996) describes the inter-reliance of the four steps in the following way:

> …these kinds of knowing are a systemic whole, a pyramid of upward support in which experiential knowing at the base upholds presentational knowing, which supports propositional or conceptual knowing, which upholds practical knowing, the exercise of skill (Heron, 1996: 52).

From the beginning of my doctoral project I defined my research as practice-led. When I read Reason & Torbert and Heron I placed my activities as a researcher in the last of the four categories: 'practical knowing' or 'the exercise of skill'. I assumed that my exploration of the Japanese concept of *ma* would be confined to a familiar field of knowledge where, because I grew up in Japan and trained in a Japanese University, I would know how to investigate *ma* and would know how to use my existing abilities and skills to translate this concept for Western art school colleagues. However, on reflection, it seems now more accurate to say that my study of *ma* has required, as Heron describes, the sequential construction of a pyramid of research activity embracing all four aspects of human intelligence listed above. Reason claims that action research is resolved by, rather than responds to, 'practical knowing' and so my actual research journey has moved towards my current artistic activities in the following manner: 1) the experiential basis of my thinking transformed my culturally ingrained understanding of *ma* into 2) a presentational format that described the disparate ideas associated with *ma* in the

Introduction and second chapter of this thesis; this description led, in turn, to 3) the propositional exploration of conversational *ma* that became the central theme of Chapters 3 and 4; as a result I was in a position to exercise a range of supplementary skills in 4) the practical research reported in Chapter 5; by this point the action research process had helped me extend my understanding of *ma* beyond the ingrained knowledge with which I began the project.

At each stage, according to Torbert & Reason (2000), the researcher will be using a combination of the following three investigatory strategies:

1) First-person action research fosters an increased awareness of personal action in order to stimulate more moments of individual understanding.

2) Second-person action research involves face-to-face encounters with communities of inquiry in order to solve mutual problems.

3) Third-person action research seeks to extend communities of inquiry beyond face-to-face encounters to an impersonal, non-local, level.

In relation to these three categories it seems clear that at every stage in the sequential construction of a pyramid of research activity I have based my investigation on what Reason describes as the 'self directing, self generating, self knowing and self transcending capabilities of the individual person as inquirer'. (Reason, 2000) Throughout this thesis, the basis of my experiential knowing has been my own engagement with the idea of *ma* – this has been, and can only have

been, a first-person inquiry. Here, according to the Australian informatics theorist

Peter Marshall, an awareness of personal action involves the researcher's

distinctive character, an attribute that cannot be replicated by others (Marshall,

2001: 433). This individualistic and idiosyncratic aspect of action research is surely

a hallmark of all practice-led investigations by artists. However, when interacting

with a community of inquiry such as my colleagues on the practice-led fine art PhD

programme (e.g. the interview with Oshima cited throughout this thesis), my

strategy changed to second-person research. In this mode of research I developed

the presentational knowing that allowed me to write the parts of this thesis that

address the cultural complexity of *ma*. Lastly, I must note that my desire to

translate *ma* for Western artists has required that I operate as a third-person

researcher. Here I have employed propositional knowing to expand, elaborate and

re-interpret a concept that is in many ways over-familiar to a Japanese person.

Taking the three strategies of investigation together I conclude that my practical

knowing, the fourth and final stage of action research, became apparent in the

application of first-, second-, and third-person research to the studio experiments

described in Chapter 5.

6.1 Theory and practice in action research by artists

But what of Bollas' notion of relational knowing? How does this idea fit with the

concept of action research? By the end of Chapter 5 I had learnt that

conversational *ma* was nearly always bad-*ma* pointing at the otherwise tacit

presence of good-*ma*. I had also learnt that the awkward hesitations of speech

associated with bad-*ma* could be transposed from the stalling of person-to-person

dialogue to the hindering of subject-to-object studio encounters. By reflecting on the bad-*ma* of my experiments with polythene I saw that these interruptions to the positive continuity of studio production were creative and transforming when overviewed as a routine occurrence within my practice. This discovery returned me to Bollas because he had written so interestingly about the awkward gaps in his conversations with his patients. Rereading *Cracking Up* I understood that for Bollas conversational discontinuity was, when experienced as a sustained period of psychoanalysis, a creative space in which a 'separate self' was constructed and explored for therapeutic purposes. Bollas' creative 'gap-filling', the application of 'relational knowing', became a model for my cyclical moving back and forth between unhindered actions (the pleasure of experimenting with new materials) and disconcerting reflections (worrying about the impact of the resulting fumes on my health). This 'spiral of steps' that Lewin believed would generate a 'circle of planning, action, and fact-finding' is the classic form of action research, an investigatory momentum that enhances the researcher's level of attention (Marshall, 2001: 434). I would speculate that Bollas' relational knowing is a subtle form of action research in which the circles of action generated by the discomfort of conversational bad-*ma* stimulates a process that Marshall describes as a continuous testing of ideas, a shifting 'back and forth between practice and theorising'. (Marshall, 2004: 309) In this context, the product of Bollas' action research process would be the 'separate self' of the patient and I wonder if my subject-to-object dialogue with my studio materials could be theorized as the production of a 'separate self' for the polythene and the iron.

Here a point needs to be made about the interaction of theory and practice. By drawing on Bollas' concept of 'relational knowing' to explain the creative space generated by *ma*-like gaps I was able to step back to reflect on my experiences. This had the effect of transforming my very intuitive Japanese understanding of conversational *ma* into a research method that could be applied to my practice. Similarly, in Chapter 4, my application of supportive theories (i.e. Merleau-Ponty's intersubjectivity and Buber's *I and Thou*) to my 'local', first person experience of my tools and materials produced an improved plan of practice that created the enhanced level of attention required in doctoral research. Lewin thought of action research as a form of experimental fieldwork that fed directly into one's theoretical ideas but, these days, commentators such as Norwegian theorist Bjorn Gustavsen are not so sure that a direct connection can be made between theory and action. Gustavsen writes: 'theory alone has little power to create change and … there is a need for a more complex interplay between theory and practice' (Gustavsen, 2001: 17). In order to situate my investigation of *ma* within a methodology that Reason & Torbert believe makes a 'direct link between intellectual knowledge and moment-to-moment personal and social action', I will now describe the level of attention that I have tried to give to my studio practices in the light of my reading of Bollas, Merleau-Ponty and Buber (Reason & Torbert, 2001: 5-6). To do this I have to briefly describe some more literature from the field of action research.

In the *Key Concepts in the Philosophy of Education* (1999) Winch & Gingell say that the action researcher 'will identify an issue that needs to be resolved. She will design an intervention and record the effects of its implementation, review the outcomes and disseminate her results'. (Winch & Gingell, 1999: 8) In my case the

designed intervention is my conscious decision to map my bad-*ma* experiences

with my materials using ideas from Bollas, Merleau-Ponty and Buber. This

mapping process is likely to be repeated because the relationship between this

intellectual domain and my moment-to-moment *ma* experience is unlikely to gain

much clarity within one cycle of planning, action, and fact-finding. As the iterative

nature of the spiral of steps gains momentum, my reflections on my studio *ma* will

be continually influencing the design of the intervention and the implementation of

the practice. Whenever I cannot answer the questions raised by Bollas', Merleau-

Ponty's and Buber's ideas, the cycle has to be re-planned in the hope that a new

direction will emerge. The Australian educational theorist Stephen Kemmis has

produced a widely used diagram of the iterative action research cycles. Each

involves four steps: plan, act, observe, and reflect as follows:
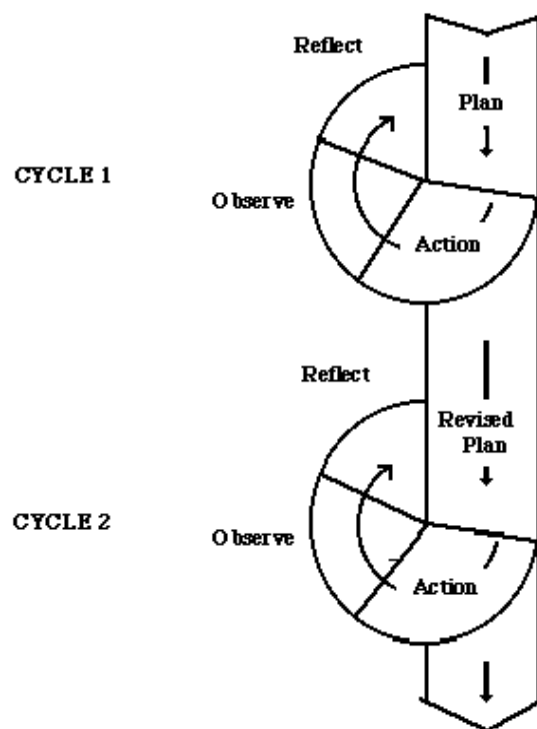
Fig. 30: Action Research Protocol developed by Kemmis (MacIsaac, 1996).

But the intervention of the intellectual world of Bollas, Merleau-Ponty and Buber into my very personal, and culturally specific, moment-to-moment *ma* experience seem to require a stronger emphasis on the first-person basis of my entire research project. The British educationalist Jack Whitehead improved the action/reflection cycle by taking into account the personal incentives that drive a student's desire to study. Whitehead replaces the neutral 'plan, act, observe, and reflect' steps proposed by Kemmis as follows:

1) I experience problems when my values are negated in my practice.

2) I imagine ways of overcoming my problems.

3) I act on a solution.

4) I evaluate the outcomes of my actions.

5) I modify my problems, ideas and actions in the light of my evaluations.

(Whitehead, 1989)

Reading Whitehead I am immediately reminded of the psychological pressure that keeps an artist in her studio working long hours without much sign of progress. The key concept for Whitehead is the experience of being a 'living contradiction', a form of personal dissonance that occurs when we cannot act in accordance with our values. In Fig. 31 below I have applied Whitehead's personal incentives to Kemmis' five steps. The result is that the dividing lines between planning and acting in the first cycle and acting and observing in the second cycle become

irrelevant to the progress of the action research process.
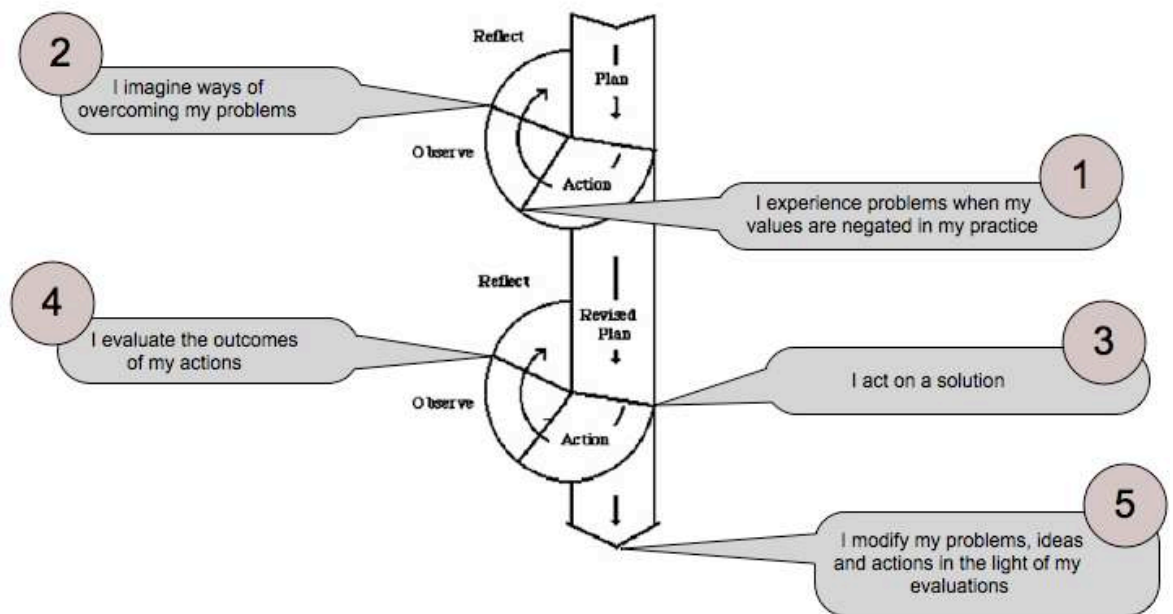
Fig. 31: Whitehead's personal incentives added to Kemmis' Action Research Protocol.

For example, if I start a day's work in my studio believing that ironing polythene should feel as creative and aesthetically fulfilling (filled with good-*ma*) as carving wood is for the sculptor Kidokoro I find myself, despite my intentions, unable to sustain this plan as the studio fills with fumes and I start to experience moments of bad-*ma*. Whitehead's five steps provide me with a conscious investigatory system in which 'I' the researcher, in experiencing these moments of bad-*ma*, can respond flexibly to herself as a 'living contradiction' by trying to deal with the discontinuity of not being able to maintain the values that I embody, not just as a Japanese artist, but also as a reader of Bollas, Merleau-Ponty and Buber as well. As a result, I can reconfigure Kemmis' diagram to reflect the shift from good- to bad-*ma* in the following manner:
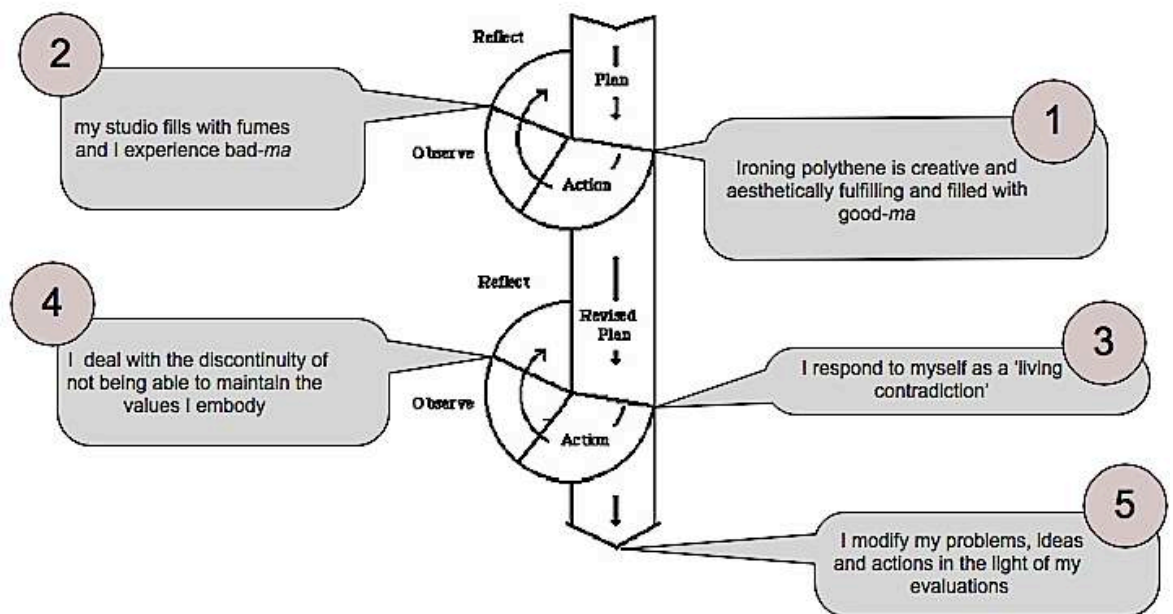
Fig. 32: Bad-*ma* encounters added to Kemmis' Action Research Protocol and Whitehead's personal incentives.

In this version of the diagram it is possible to understand how the highly systematic steps of action research can be converted to the more pliant embodied experiences in which my studio *ma* occurs. Once again the dividing lines in Kemmis' original cycle of steps have changed: this time the boundaries between acting and observing in both cycles have ceased to be important suggesting that the resolution of a 'living contradiction' iteratively enhances the action research cycle: the character of the cycle evolves as the action research proceeds.

6.2 Action research in relation to my body and my world

In this section I will explore how my bad-*ma* dialogue with my studio materials is related to Bollas' creative conversion of conversational hesitations into a 'separate

self'. The degrees of change that Whitehead places within each cycle help me become aware of, and give attention to, the subject-to-object interactions in which I experience conversational *ma* with my materials and tools. However, the Introduction and second chapter of this thesis make it clear that *ma* is a very enigmatic idea that is difficult, not only to define, but also to treat in an analytical or theoretical manner. In relation to the pyramid of sequential forms of knowing described by Reason & Torbert I defined both my initial (experiential) and final (practical) levels of knowledge as a profound encounter between my body and the world of my studio. Undertaking this PhD using the methods of action research has converted, perhaps rather artificially and not very creatively, the embodied nature of my first-person understanding of *ma* into second person to third-person research that suggests an impersonal form of knowledge. I began my investigation as a Japanese artist with an embodied understanding of *ma* (the experiential level explored in the Introduction and Chapter 2) and ended my project as a Japanese artist exploring my embodied encounters with *ma* in a Western art school (the practical level examined in Chapter 5) which seems to move my methodology from the idiosyncratic to the impersonal and back again. In this final section of Chapter 6 I want to describe the *ma*-like interaction of my body with the world, the interaction with which I began and concluded my research project, as a version of Whitehead's five steps into and out of 'living contradiction'.
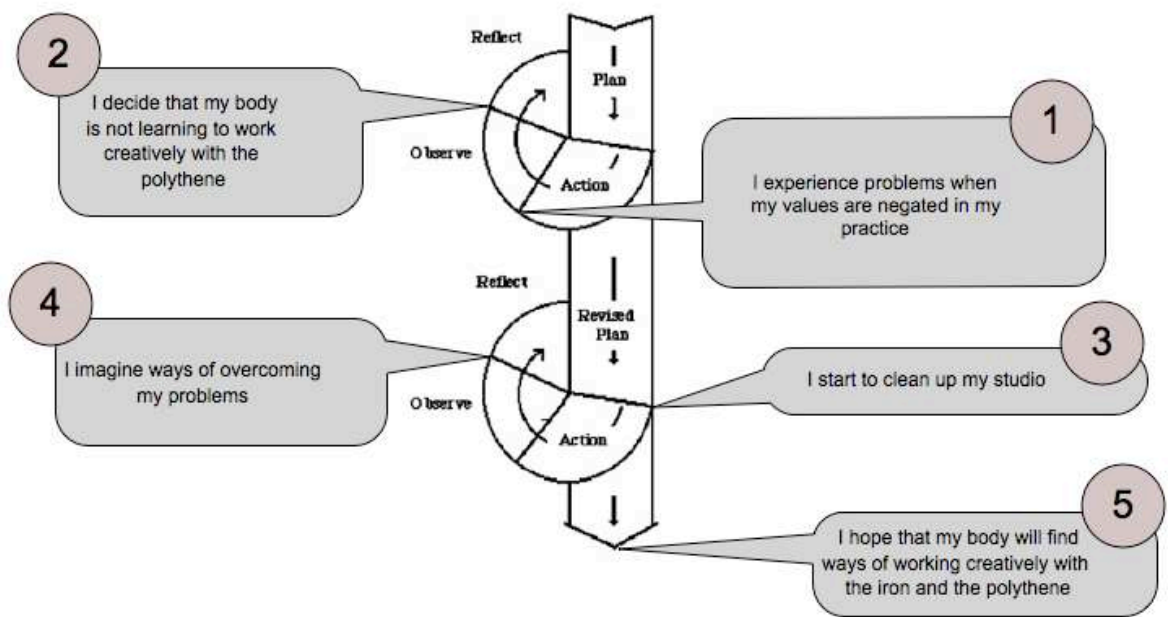
Fig. 33: The embodied *ma* of my studio practice added to Kemmis' Action Research Protocol and Whitehead's personal incentives.

Beginning with step one, I experience problems when my values are negated in my practice? (see Fig. 33 above) My response is that this negation involves my body not learning to work creatively with the polythene. And so I start to clean up my studio and, in doing this, I begin to imagine ways of overcoming my problems. As a result, my body finds ways of working creatively with the iron and the polythene and I am therefore acting on a solution. I then stop cleaning and begin to cut the polythene into shapes and, as I work, I evaluate the outcomes of my actions. With the process of evaluation comes the confidence to let my body interact with the iron and the polythene. My problems, ideas and actions are then modified in the light of my evaluations: that is, my body has learnt how to creatively manage the iron and the polythene. As a result of following this

sequence I further speculate that a Bollas-like 'separate self' for my subject-to-subject encounters with the polythene has developed.

In addition, the intersubjective relationship with the material environment that comes into view whilst reading Bollas, Merleau-Ponty and Buber suggests to me that my tools, my materials, even my studio, also learn how to use me as the interaction between my body and my world progresses through Whitehead's five steps. Having changed studios at Northumbria University several times since I began my PhD I have come to know that, with each change, my body acquires a lot of bruises. This is due to alterations in the arrangement of the furniture and my materials in these spaces. In Fig. 34 below one can see that, at first, a new studio negates my values as a studio user, this conforms to Whitehead's first step. My response is to occupy the space with my routines of cleaning and working. In doing this, I am drawn into an intersubjective relationship with my environment and begin to imagine the new studio learning to accommodate my actions. In this (admittedly fanciful) version of Whitehead's five steps, a reduction in bruising is a sign that hundreds of tiny shifts in the arrangement of my workspace have sought to overcome my awkward presence. These changes have been so small, and made by me in an entirely unconscious manner, that I feel like the studio is responding to me. Within this dialogue between my studio world and my creative body, a 'separate sense' of the studio seems to emerge just as it does in Bollas' conversations with his patients. Each bruise is like a *ma*-like hesitation. For example, to begin with I will often bang into the door of a new studio. If there is a small sign on the door saying 'push' it will not mean anything to me even though I can easily read the word. My body will continue to use the 'separate self' of my last

studio in which the door was marked 'pull'. Until a new 'separate self' is
constructed through my intersubjective dialogue with the new studio I will bruise
myself every time I use the door. Here the bad-*ma* of my clumsy interactions with
the door of my studio, which are often embarrassing if seen by a fellow student,
generates the creative space for 'relational knowing' and the emergence of the
studio's 'separate self'.
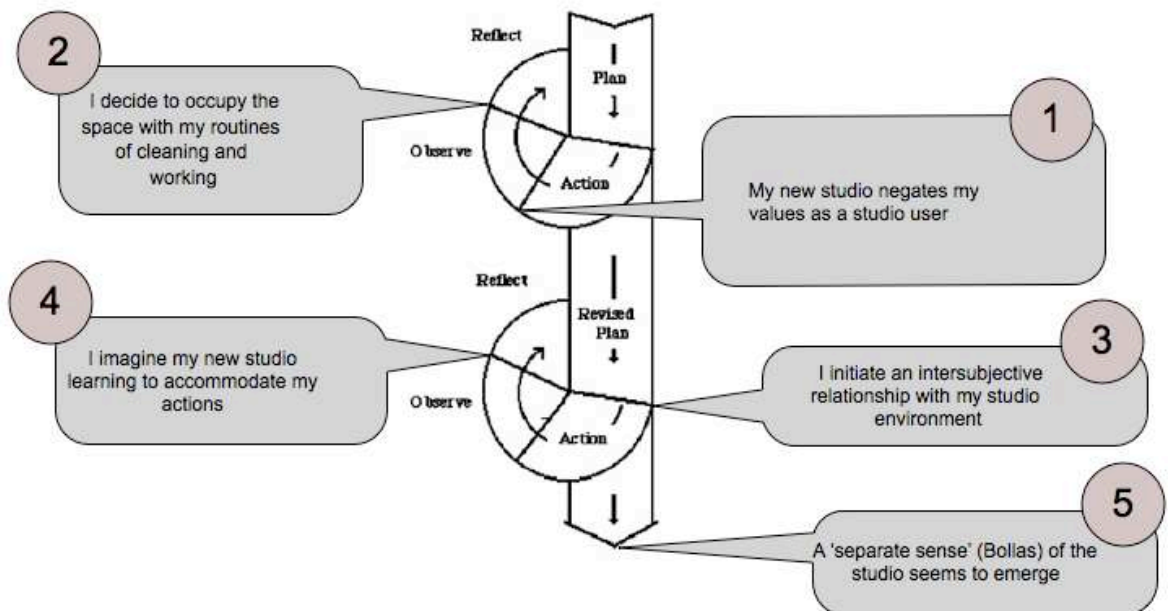
Fig. 34: The emergence of a 'separate self' (Bollas) within a studio routine based
on Kemmis' Action Research Protocol and Whitehead's personal incentives.

In the final diagram of this chapter (Fig. 34), I feel that I have begun to uncover the
concept of *ma* within the texture of everyday Western art school life and, as a
result, it will be easier to convey the subtleties of this enigmatic Japanese word for
UK artists. In my Conclusion, I want to reflect on the archeological discoveries I
have made as I have excavated down through my initial linguistic struggle with the

term to reach, eventually, the embodied experience of bad-*ma* in my studio. The next, and final, chapter of this thesis is an evaluation of this personal excavation of the buried cultural and psychological strata of the word. Here I turn to the role of *ma* in exploring an audience response to my practical work.

CHAPTER 7. Conclusion: is this *ma*?

7.0 *Ma* and aesthetic reception

I began this thesis with the difficulty of pinning down the meaning of the Japanese term *ma*. The task of definition turned out to be difficult for Japanese even though we use the word on a day-to-day basis. As a result, the first Chapter examined the range of the term and made a point of its special fusion of spatial and temporal experiences, a combination that is not, as far as I understand, found in the West; that is, in similar words that express the poignancy of sudden interruptions and other kinds of discontinuous experience. My interest settled on the *ma*-like aesthetic balance that occurs in conversations as each speaker tries to continue the discussion by avoiding destructive confrontation. By following this interest through into the psychoanalytical use of *ma* in the writing of the psychoanalyst Kimura, I was able to cross-reference the Japanese context of conversational *ma* to Bollas, and from this platform, open up the allied Western philosophical world of Merleau-Ponty and Buber. With this theoretical material in place I began to discuss the practice-led dimension of this research project. Here I examined the concept of intersubjectivity in Merleau-Ponty and, by adding ideas from *I and Thou* by Buber, was able to relate conversational *ma* to the 'dialogue with materials' that many artists claim to experience in their studio practices. Because my colleague Oshima had alerted me to the obvious fact that the form of *ma* we most notice is bad-*ma*, I was able to discuss the discomfort of the artist's bodily engagement with materials,

particularly contemporary hazardous substances. At this point I reached the most Western translation of *ma* I could imagine.

In Chapter Four (Section 4.3), as I recast the notion of 'a dialogue with materials' as an interaction between myself and the process of ironing polythene, I said that I would review the artistic aims that led me to work in this way. In the studio I wanted to create art works freely and it seemed that any disruption to the continuity of my practice would be destructive to that freedom. The realization that bad-*ma* both generates and maintains a creative 'I-Thou' interaction was the pivotal point in which I understood that the discomfort of *ma* was the embodiment of creative freedom: it was the process of change at work. In many ways, bad-*ma* in its dialogic manifestation is a rich and profound way of expressing the action research process for practice-led researchers in fine art. As the cycle of uncovering and resolving bad-*ma* moments proceeds, a creative momentum develops that has an increasingly positive effect on one's studio production. This seemed to me to be the point at which I was describing *ma* in Western terms.

One more issue needs to be addressed although, in being a matter of the reception of art, this topic is positioned slightly beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless it is interesting to speculate on the impact of research ideas that have been limited to the secluded environment of studio production. Here I want to briefly discuss the public dimension of my practice-led research, the point at which the first-person investigation moves, for the artist, to the presentational and propositional levels of knowing. In a way, by addressing levels 2 and 3 of the four forms of action research knowing (the forms least associated with practical first-

person experience), this section offers an evaluation of my studio-oriented ideas. Because of my first-person orientation, throughout this thesis *ma* does not come into focus at the impersonal level of a remote audience reaction. However, an external response is, in the end, an important confirmation of the studio activities described in Chapter 5, even though these activities concerned the application of *ma* within the process of production.

Fig.35: My polythene on display in Gallery North, Northumbria University, July 2009.

I like to think that I do not make my art for a distant audience and, during my research project I did not apply my thinking on *ma* to the process of responding to art exhibitions. My attitudes as a fine artist are partly a reaction to my training at undergraduate level in Japan as a textile designer in the Department of Industrial, Interior and Craft Design at Musashino Art University, Tokyo. In turning to fine art

for a master's degree I was partly rejecting the idea of targeting the needs of consumers; the psychological and physical impact of one's designs on users; the comfort, tastes and marketing dimension of creating textile designs; and so on. Making artworks is, for me, still deeply rooted in my love of textiles but the fine art process is more like a meditative activity, it is much more about being in the studio and following my intuitions. I sometimes imagine an exhibition viewer (for instance, a particular person I know) but never think about the anonymous mass of people that might encounter the work in a public gallery. Unlike the design context in which I trained, the studio orientation of my fine art practice means that I always consider my artwork as half complete, that future audiences will fill in a complete set of meanings as part of the exhibition experience. In the studio, my dialogue with materials generates possible meanings but any sense of resolution I achieve usually feels very personal, unique to my situation, to my life. In contrast, the act of interpretation in an exhibition is a unique aspect of being in a gallery or museum; that is, looking and walking around objects on display. What is interesting here, in relation to my discussion of Intersubjectivity and 'I-Thou' in Chapter 5, is that the gap between the private world of the studio and the public environment of the exhibition is just the kind of empty space that becomes *ma*-rich. The exhibition viewers, in interpreting my artworks, reach across the gap and transform my presence in the studio into that of a distantly observed person: I become, under their intersubjective scrutiny (and therefore, their intersubjective imagination), the creative originator of the art on display.

The conversational *ma* of an audience engages with the special kind of 'relational knowing' provoked by an exhibition space. Every social space is designed for a

purpose: in the same way that a bank is for storing and retrieving money, a theatre is for appreciating performances, an art gallery for looking at artworks. According to this purpose, we, as social beings, unconsciously understand the unvoiced requirements of purposeful environments and try to behave in a fashion that fulfills these conditions. In audience-oriented spaces we are expected to sit quietly during a performance or not touch artworks in art galleries. Even if you wanted to make a noise in the middle of a play, or touch a sculpture, your sense of appropriate behaviour would usually forbid you to do so. Here the behaviour of an audience seeks to maintain its 'I-Thou' relationship with its surrounding environment against the reality of its 'I-It' status. In this thesis I am treating this relationship as a dialogic interaction that, in the case of an art gallery, makes an exhibition audience almost believe that inanimate objects actively communicate with them. I say 'almost' because, as with any other kind of intersubjective encounter, there is, according to Buber, an oscillation between 'I-It' and 'I-Thou'. The biologist Frederick Grinnell, who has written on intersubjectivity in the context of science, recognizes that ability to interact in a meaningful and reciprocal fashion involves the appropriateness of how, when and where to respond. As a scientist Grinnell notes that intersubjective subject-to-object relations with art objects would normally be considered inappropriate: 'I don't usually try to converse with statues or paintings of people, regardless of their physical similarity to other persons' (Grinnell, 1983: 185). But the truth is that, inappropriately of not, we do treat artworks as if they could somehow enter into a dialogue with us. This is the 'I-Thou' subject-to-subject encounter that is at the heart of my studio research. Transposed to a gallery, this kind of *ma*-rich interaction arises within the act of interpretation: faced with a mute,

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non-functional artwork we are prepared to imagine that that object on display is a conscious agent that can engage us in a meaningful and reciprocal way.

There is a famous passage in Jean Baudrillard's essay 'Simulacra and Simulations' (1988) that serves as an illustration of this point. Baudrillard describes Jackie Kennedy watching her husband, President J. F. Kennedy, on television waving to a crowd. According to Baudrillard, Jackie Kennedy waved back, even though she must have known that her husband could not see that she had acted in this way, she had responded to the non-conscious screen as though it was her husband. This unselfconscious response is surely an example of the subject-to-object encounters we explored in Chapter 5. The difference is that we are no longer considering 'I-Thou' within the process of production; we are seeing the same thing happen within the act of reception. However, what of the bad-*ma* dimension of reception? One clear example is an incident at the Koryu-ji temple in Kyoto in August 1960. A twenty-year old student from Kyoto University suddenly embraced a celebrated medieval sculpture of the Bodhisattva Maitreya (Fig. 29), breaking the right hand ring finger of a historic object that had been the first registered national treasure in Japan and therefore subject to the Act on Protection of Cultural Properties. The student is reported as saying:

> 'I wondered if this is genuinely the original when I saw it. I was disappointed. It was not gilded and its wood grain surface was bare and dusty. There was no guard around, so I touched it with innocent mischief. However, I cannot explain why I did so.' ('広隆寺', 2008)
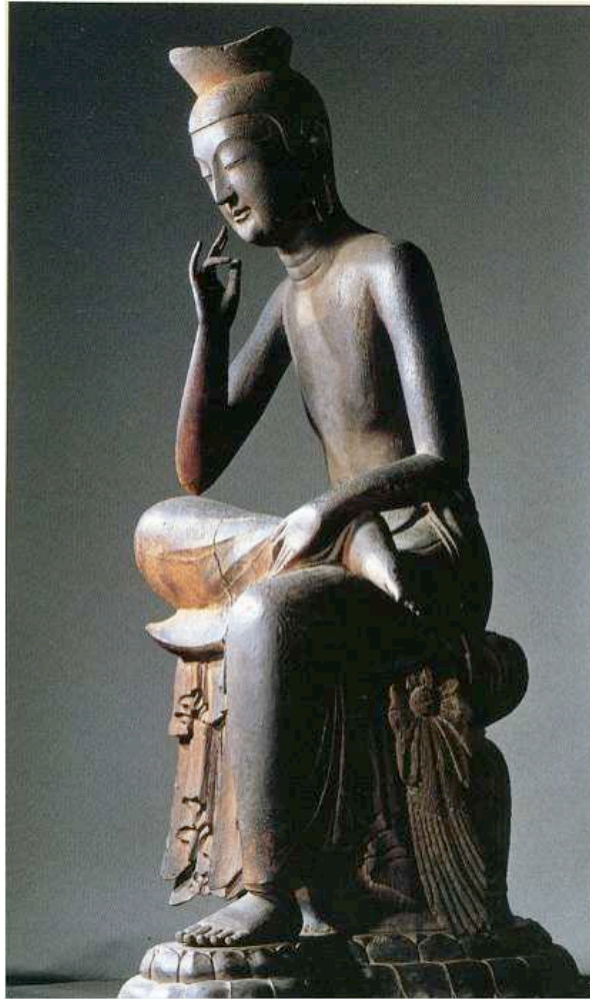
Fig.36: Unknown artist (estimated 6-7c.) *Maitreya* [Sculpture]. Koryu-ji, National Treasure of Japan.

It is easy to imagine the young student struggling to understand the venerated status of this ancient object. However the student's inability to explain his subject-to-object desire to touch the wooden Bodhisattva Maitreya resulted in a curious response from the Kyoto district public prosecutor who investigated the incident. All charges were dropped because it was decided that the sculpture itself was at fault: the object was so beautiful that the student could not help himself. The beauty of the sculpture, displayed before an attentive audience visiting the temple, had created a space for 'I-Thou' interactions and these involved both good- and bad-*ma* experiences. The student seems to have had his expectations of the 'I-

Thou' relationship interrupted by the bad-*ma* of the 'I-It' of the material object before him: he was disappointed by the 'It' of the bare, dusty surfaces of the ungilded object.

I have a more recent example that confirms the broader historical and cultural context of this discussion. Here I want to cite a story relayed in review of recent paintings by the important contemporary American artist Cy Twombly in The TLS (1st May 2009).[10]

> In July 2007, French police were summoned to a modern art gallery at the Hotel de Caumont in Avignon to restrain a visitor caught defacing one of Cy Twombly's paintings. Overcome by what she would later claim was the emotional intensity of a completely white canvas (which forms one panel of Twombly's triptych "Phaedrus"), Rindy Sam – a Cambodian-born French artist – leaned forward and kissed Twombly's work leaving a bright smudge of lipstick floating in the emptiness. "The red stain", Sam insisted, as she was taken into custody, "is testimony to this moment, to the power of art. (Grovier, 2009, p.17-18)

Rindy Sam's actions are an example of the 'I-Thou' of an artwork striving to survive in a dialogic tension with the 'I-It' attitude of the gallery and the French police.[11] Like the Kyoto student decades before, Sam thinks that she could not help herself; she felt that the 'Thou' of an object on display overcame her, by the 'emotional intensity of a completely white canvas'. She kissed the mute object as she would another person. Forced to confront the fact that she had inflicted material damage (the 'It' of a red stain) on a material object (the 'It' of an

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[10] In an exhibition at the Gagosian Gallery, New York in 2009.
[11] See also the articles in the Times Online (Hoyle, 2007).

expensive painting) Sam could only put her actions down to the ('I-Thou') 'power of art'.

These two examples of subject-to-subject relationships between art viewers and art objects involve inappropriately passionate responses to insensate things. In both cases one might say that, if the interaction had involved actual subject-to-subject encounters with real people, the incidents would have surely resulted in charges of grievous bodily harm and sexual harassment. This would certainly be thought of as bad-*ma* in the context of everyday behaviour in Japan. However it is interesting that in both cases the art object was recognized as powerful art through the person-like power generated by the viewer's exaggerated 'I-Thou' mode of interpretation. Within the uncontrollable desire to maintain the state of 'I-Thou', as Oshima says, the inappropriate bad-*ma* of embracing sculptures and kissing paintings makes us appreciate the good-*ma* of our usual interpretative interactions with artworks. As in a therapeutic session with Bollas, an awkward faux pas leads to creative 'gap-filling' and 'relational knowing'. The result is the aesthetic version of Bollas' 'separate self', a person-like identity projected onto a displayed object for the purpose of increasing the potency of the act of appreciation. This is the creative process of viewing art described using the concept of *ma* developed within the practice-led research reported in Chapter 5. In this way, the first-person investigation that has dominated my research methodology is shown to have some impact on the presentational and propositional forms of knowledge. The insights we have just gained into the appreciation of fine art demonstrate the value of my studio-oriented ideas at the more general level of audience reception.

7.1 *Ma*, archival space, and practice-led knowledge

We have now examined the possibility that the aesthetic dimensions of viewing art have their own version of the 'I and Thou' encounters I researched in my studio work. In both the studio and the exhibition environment, Bollas' *ma*-rich concepts of 'relational knowing' and 'separate self' are important ways of understanding the creativity provoked by bad-*ma*. And so, in these final sections of my thesis, I want to explore these same concepts in relation to viewing the studio experiments that form the practical component of my research project. In this way I will end my personal archeology of the cultural and psychological layers of *ma* by combining the subject-to-subject dimensions of the aesthetics of both production and reception.

In 2007 my supervisor, Chris Dorsett, and I visited the Sir Joseph Banks Centre for Economic Botany at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. We went to see the Parks Collection of Japanese Paper to look through boxes of samples collected by Sir Harry Parks who was sent in the 1870s to Japan by the Prime Minister of Great Britain, W.E. Gladstone, to report on papermaking techniques. At Kew we saw many fine examples of decorative paper. In particular I enjoyed seeing historic woodcut printed patterns and motifs I had studied when I had been an undergraduate in Tokyo. My interests as a designer were united with my practices as a fine artist. The beauty of the different kinds of papers, particularly the samples surfaced with resins in order to imitate leather, inspired me to start ironing polythene sheets in my studio. But I did not start working with the polythene because I wanted to exhibit thin sheets of surfaced material. In contrast, as

described above, my interest was limited to the exploration of the emergence of *ma* experiences within an artist's dialogue with her materials and the storage boxes full of paper samples in the archives of the Sir Joseph Banks Centre for Economic Botany suggested a way of representing my *ma* experiments without losing sight of the studio context in which my research had been undertaken.

My appreciation of the Parks Collection of Japanese Paper led me to explore the nature of the archive environment. There are ways of thinking about the aesthetic dimensions of visiting museum archives that are relevant here. John Cage (1912 – 1992), the avant-garde composer associated with *4' 33"* (the controversial 1952 piano piece consisting of four minutes thirty-three seconds of performed silence in which the audience listen to the ambient sounds of the concert hall), made an interesting contribution to our understanding of the creative potential of stored exhibition material. In *Rolywholyover A Circus,* staged at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Los Angeles in 1993, Cage applied his approach to creating musical performances, compositional procedures that were calculated in such a way that they favoured chance or random results, to exhibition curation. In the MOCA project, Cage selected works by artists he considered important and included examples of his own prints, watercolours and drawings. Using random techniques, the exhibits and their placement within the exhibition were continually rearranged by chance. As a result, the gallery displays were routinely transformed throughout the period that the exhibition was open to the public. Works changed position, disappeared into storage and reappeared according to a system laid down by the composer.
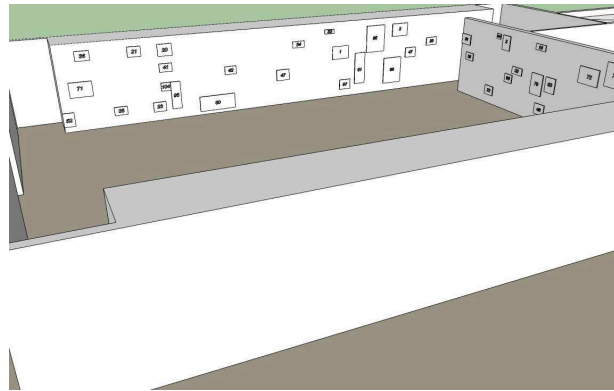
Fig. 37: Layout for the first 'hang' of *John Cage: Every Day is a Good Day*
BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art (2010)
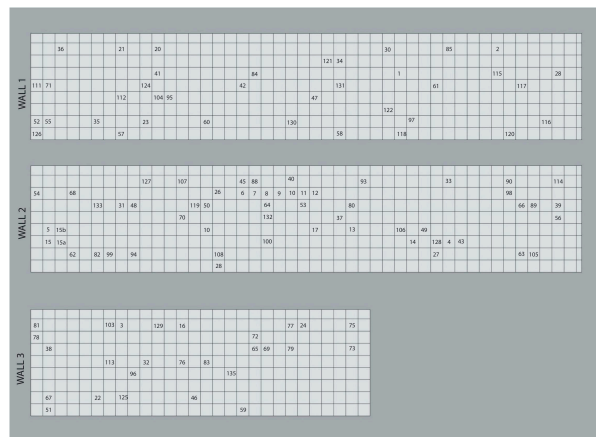
Fig. 38: Grid for the first 'hang' of *John Cage: Every Day is a Good Day* BALTIC
Centre for Contemporary Art (2010)

A recent revival of the approach initiated in *Rolywholyover A Circus* was staged at

the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead under the title *John Cage:*

Every Day is a Good Day (2010). This new project used Cage's chance-

determined system to calculate new displays. Figure X and Y show both the chart

and resulting installations on the walls of the BALTIC. This piece examines

exhibition curation as a performative process by introducing chance decisions and

random effects into the activity of installing displays of artworks. In this sense,

Cage was, late in his career, extending and elaborating his approach to musical

composition: *Rolywholyover A Circus* is sometimes referred to as 'a composition

for museum' (see Glenn Elert's online discussion of Rolywholyover at the

Guggenheim Museum in New York) This approach, as discussed in a range of

musicological literature, was in good part derived from Cage's interest in Eastern

philosophy. This interest led to musical compositions that were scored using the

fortune-telling process (that is, chance operations) of the *I-Ching* (the Chinese

Book of Changes) to determine the order of the sounds performed, a very Eastern

privileging of spontaneity and aesthetic qualities that have been caused without

premeditation. According to the musicologist Kyle Gann's book, *No Such Thing as*

Silence: John Cage's 4'33" (2010), Cage also claimed to have been influenced by

the lectures of Taisetsu Suzuki (the Japanese philosopher who was discussed in

section 2. 7 above) at Colombia University in New York (Gann, 2010: 146; Cage,

1967: 40, 46, 67, 70, 88, 161, 262, 266). This direct contact with the Japanese Zen

tradition would have given Cage a strong sense of the philosophical role of

emptiness that informs the aesthetics of *ma* and Gann debates the degree to

which the Zen Buddhist's declaration that all things are empty inspired the 'silence'

generated in the performance space during *4'33"* (Gann, 2010: 105). In

Rolywholyover A Circus the empty silence of the concert hall becomes the blank

wall of the gallery. It is possible to speculate that the blank walls generated by the

movement of exhibits were, for Cage, as much part of the work as the silence in

4'33". Clearly Cage thought of exhibitions as fluid and unstable experiences, a

very big step for museum curators, and in doing so he was introducing spatio-

temporal intervals into gallery viewing that I would call *ma*-rich.

I cannot find a reference to *ma* in any of the literature on Cage that is currently accessible to me but one wonders what he would have made of the term had it been made available to him by Suzuki or some other Japanese scholar. Certainly, from the 1960s, the renowned Japanese composer Tōru Takemitsu (1930 – 1996) was both celebrating the influence of Cage ('It was largely through my contact with John Cage that I came to recognize the value of my own tradition" [Takemitsu, 1989: 3]) and promoting the potential of Japanese traditional music in a contemporary context by discussing the role of *ma* in his own music:

> Just one sound can be complete in itself, for its complexity lies in the formulation of "ma", an unquantifiable metaphysical space (duration) of dynamically tensed absence of sound. For example, in the performance of "nō", the "ma" of sound and silence does not have an organic relation for the purpose of artistic expression. Rather, these two elements contrast sharply with one another in an immaterial balance. (Takemitsu, 1994: 4)

Takemitsu defines *ma* as the product of the unavoidable fact that, in creative processes such as composing and performing music, hiatus and flow sit in an irreconcilable state of opposition to one another and it is the conflict of opposition, rather than any 'organic relation', that does the aesthetic work. The aim of my first three chapters was to establish that, for the Japanese, the poetry of *ma* always involves a measure of discomfort within the habits of expectation and my exploration of Cage's use of silence and chance suggests that *ma* has applications within influential Western art practices and also supports my interest in the *ma* of archival spaces. I will now turn to the material condition of being in storage or 'off-display' that seems to me to be the source of the *ma* I experienced on my visit to Kew.

7.2 The *ma* of storage and being 'off-display'

The point is that the *ma*-rich spatio-temporal intervals that characterize

Rolywholyover A Circus involved returning exhibits to storage. Here the artworks

rested 'off-display' in a condition that, in Cage's curatorial experiment, had the

status of a silent pause in a piece of music. Cage considered pauses an integral

part of the musical experience and throughout his career gave silence equal

importance to sounded passages (Gann, 2010: ix). The presence of important

pauses in Cage's compositions (culminating in the continuous 'pause' of *4'33"*) is

clearly comparable to the poignant intervals and meaningfully discontinuous

experiences that, as I said at the beginning of this thesis, come into focus by using

the Japanese word *ma*. As an artist undertaking practice-led research on the topic

of *ma*, the haunting beauty of the archival space at the Sir Joseph Banks Centre

for Economic Botany was that the different boxes of paper had a *ma*-like quality

that I attribute to the state of being 'off-display'. At the beginning of this section I

observed that I was inspired to iron polythene sheets because I liked the way the

paper at Kew was stored (as opposed to exhibited).

Fig. 39 & 40: Installation views of *The Collector: After Cage - Die Dinge*, Marres Centre for Contemporary Culture, Maastricht (2006)

I will try to explain my interest in the *ma* of storage below but before doing so one more example of a revival of *Rolywholyover A Circus* will help clarify the creative power of exhibits that are 'off-display'. In 2006 four European museums (Neue Aachener Kunstverein in Aachen, Z33 Huis Voor Actuele Kunst in Hasselt, Espace Nord 251 Art Contemporain in Liège and Marres Centre for Contemporary Culture in Maastricht) hosted a project called *The Collector: After Cage - Die Dinge*. The curator, Claudia Banz, described how:

> all the museums in a 30 mile radius were asked to draw up a list of 10 works that would be available for loan. Chance determined the continuously changing selection from this list of works and their temporary placement within the exhibition. With *Rolywholyover A Circus* Cage tried to see the exhibition no longer as static, but pleaded for a more dynamic working method, in which the result is just temporary, and would serve only as a starting point for new combination of works. (Banz, 2006: online)

Thus the supply of 'works' supporting the 'temporary placements' within *The Collector: After Cage - Die Dinge* formed an archive of possible exhibits that the curator can mix spontaneously in the same fashion that Cage mixed musical

events in the early 1950s when he began to explore chance-determined systems. As the avant-garde composer, and close associate of Cage, Earle Brown describes:

> Cage was literally flipping coins to decide which sound event was to follow which sound event and that was to remove his choice, his sense of choice, and it was also to not to allow the musician to have any choice either (Bailey, 1993: 60).

This quote from Brown is included in *Improvisation: Its Nature and practice in Music* (1993)*,* Derek Bailey's seminal book on extemporization in all forms of musical performance practice. Given that the Japanese apply *ma* equally to the performing and plastic arts (see chapter 1 above), it seems appropriate that ideas about experimental music help us recognize museum storage as vehicle for random installation instructions that produce an exhibition full of unexpected spaces and temporal juxtapositions between artworks. Here the spatial and temporal intervals in *The Collector: After Cage - Die Dinge* and *Rolywholyover A Circus* represent a *ma*-rich conversation between changing exhibits that create strange, awkward moments rooted in the *ma* of being 'off-display'. With the concept of 'off-display' now before us, it is possible to discuss examples from the visual arts that explore exhibition storage as an art form in its own right.

Fig. 41: Christian Boltanski (1989) *Réserve du Musée des Enfants*, Musée d'Art Moderne do la Ville de Paris.

When it comes to artists using the systems of archiving and storing found in museum environments as a vehicle of poetic expression, the key practitioner is surely the French artist Christian Boltanski (born 1944). From the early 1980s Boltanski has produced countless installation pieces using archival photographs, storage containers and shelving. All these works explore the traces of lost and forgotten people (often as a result of war and genocide). As one can see in the installation photograph reproduced above, Boltanski employs the process of storage as a unifying mechanism that can memorialize thousands of individual, unknown lives. The effect can be both touching and distressing. The Tate Magazine (Issue 2, Nov-Dec 2002) featured a series of quotes from Boltanski in which he talks about the melancholic feelings that drive his ideas as an artist – he says:

I began to work as an artist when I began to be an adult, when I understood that my childhood was finished, and was dead. I think we all have somebody who is dead inside of us. A dead child. I remember the Little Christian that is dead inside me (Tate Magazine, 2002).

Remembering the 'dead child' inside is certainly an important part of immersing oneself in a Boltanski installation. It interests me that the simple act of accumulating and stacking old clothes can have such a powerful resonance. Even though the items of children's clothing used in *Réserve du Musée des Enfants* will remain anonymous forever, the overall effect leaves the viewer feeling sad in a very personal way. Because *Réserve du Musée des Enfants* was created for an exhibition in which artists were invited to tell 'museum stories', it seems clear that Boltanski thinks that his melancholic remembering of past lives is evoked by the experience of the museum store. The sudden interruption of personal feelings in the midst of a storage system that has been built to register countless lives is a museological topic explored in Dorsett's chapter 'Making Meaning Beyond Display' (2009). In this essay about the different approaches taken by artists and curators to the presence of a reserve collection hidden away, out of sight in the depths of the museum, Dorsett quotes Daniel Robbins, the director of the museum attached to Rhode Island School of Design which, in 1967, invited Andy Warhol to undertake a project called *Raid the Icebox 1*. Robbins describes how Warhol awakened his appreciation of the objects that sit unnoticed on storage shelves for years. 'There are personal overtones of almost unbelievable poignancy in the now anonymous rubbed kid heels of some fine lady's shoes' writes Robbins confirming the kind of momentary observation experienced when viewing a Boltanski clothing installation. (Dorsett, 2009: 244)

This poignancy becomes distressing when Boltanski uses his museum storage idea to address the countless lives cut short by the persecution of Jewish people during the Second World War. In these pieces (e.g. *Monument Odessa, 1991*; *20 Dead Swiss, 1990*; *Autel De Lycee Chases, 1988*; and so on) Boltanski takes on the grand themes of Twentieth Century history and we begin to leave behind the aesthetics of the everyday that are so important to the kinds of *ma* experiences I have focused on throughout my research.

Fig. 42: Philippe Thomas (1994) *Readymades Belong to Everyone* [Installation]. MaMCO, Geneva.

Another French artist Phillipe Thomas (1951–1995), working under a pseudonymous business name *Readymades Belong to Everyone* (inaugurated 1987), created an installation piece in the last years of his short life that evoked

the behind-the-scenes world of a museum or art gallery (Putnam, 2001: 63). The

photograph above shows a room with storage boxes and racking as well as the

various kinds of packaging equipment used by museum staff. It is clear from the

'*Readymades'* pseudonym adopted by Thomas that this work, and other similar

pieces made during the same period, attempted to push Marcel Duchamp's

famous critique of the art object to its most extreme limits. The central idea was

that the 'everyday' objects packed away in this storeroom are offered for sale to

museum visitors as 'art objects'. This action immediately led to the purchaser

being named as the creator of the work – a strange reversal of the usual

relationship between artists and their audiences (that may rely on a sense of *ma-*

like uncertainty being felt by those viewing the installation). Certainly, Thomas

draws our attention to the condition of being 'off display' in the museum

environment, the state in which the exhibits used in Cage's *Rolywholyover A*

Circus were placed when chance occurrences took them out of the exhibition.

Although I have never seen *Backroom* 'in the flesh', the photograph reproduced in

James Putnam's survey of artists using the museum environment as a creative

tool, *Art and Artifact: the museum as medium* (2001), gives a strong impression of

the sense of expectancy within the mundane nature of museum storage facilities

that I identified as being *ma*-rich during my visit to the Sir Joseph Banks Centre

archives at Kew. As Saito's definition of Japanese aesthetics makes clear (see

section 5.3 above) there is, in my home country, an aesthetic sensibility that

permeates everyday objects linked to activities such as cooking and packaging.

(Saito, 2007:3) When I look at the insignificant roll of parcel tape in the photograph

of Thomas' installation and think about ordinary things becoming authored

artworks as people buy them, then I see an approach to storage that 'nurtures aesthetic appreciation of the mundane' (Saito, 2007:3).

I can now turn to the sense of aesthetic pleasure I experienced in the archives of the Sir Joseph Banks Centre for Economic Botany at Kew. Whilst writing section 7.0 of this thesis on the bad-*ma* of aesthetic reception, I began to reflect on my visit to Kew. I had been very taken with the archive: the visit was an intensely aesthetic act of appreciation but it had not been like visiting a gallery. I spent an afternoon opening storage boxes and sifting through thousands of sheets of paper that had, in the nineteenth century, been designed for the pre-industrial workshop systems that produced domestic screens or sliding doors and, in the case of the imitation leather, disposable waterproof clothing and umbrellas. At Kew (and in the sister Parks Collection housed at the V&A Museum in Kensington) the samples are frozen in a state of pre-use. By collecting samples, Sir Harry Parks had removed the paper from the manufactory processes for which it was intended. I tried to imagine the individual items that might have been made with these materials but could not bring specific objects into my mind. This was, it seemed to me, a sort of discomfort, an emptiness that generated a poignant sense of *ma*. As a result, my studio activities became like the manufacturing of high quality papers for waterproof clothing, the creation of surfaced sheets without a specific end product. It was enough to work in imitation of the wonderfully creative nineteenth century Japanese artisans represented in the Parks Collection: it intensified my 'I-Thou' engagement with the unpleasant job of ironing polythene.

It is interesting to note in relation to the coated papers in the Parks collection that the artist Sian Bowen, who is a member of my supervisory team at Northumbria University, was also influenced by these kinds of Japanese papers when she was an artist in residence at the V&A Museum. During the residency Bowen began to experiment with traditional Japanese techniques for surfacing paper with black and raw lacquers. In an interview published in the catalogue for the exhibition *Dust on the Mirror* (2010), Bowen describes how she traveled to Japan and visited a number of lacquer craftsmen where she learnt that the raw material they use is taken from a tree that belongs to the poison ivy family and that it is, as a result, very harmful when in contact with the skin (Godfrey & Walker, 2010: 43). As Bowen developed her own drawings using lacquered paper she was very aware of the hazardous nature of the materials she was using. Here is a parallel with my own experiences of the fume-creating process of ironing polythene. My own conversations with Bowen confirm that oscillating between a 'potential for damage' and 'the creative impulse' forms part of an artist's studio experience and is very like my description above of the oscillation between 'I-It' and 'I-Thou'.

Fig. 43: The author's polythene sheets on display in the final installation of her research project (2010)

And so when it comes to the aesthetic dimensions of viewing my 'distressed' polythene sheets, I am interested in the gap between my world as an artist and the environment of the archive visitor, rather than that of the exhibition viewer. I have described above the *ma*-rich space that separates the first-person creativity of the studio practitioner from the first-person creativity of viewing art. In some ways, the gap generates creative power for the art viewer by not involving any direct contact with artistic action. Gallery exhibitions and museum displays are rather like the alienating modern social spaces I referred to at the beginning of the thesis – for example, the packed Tokyo commuter trains in which spatial bad-*ma* arises. Like a commuter train, an exhibition is filled with people and objects that are merely co-present, not really connected, and the 'I-It' of this situation requires the occurrence of 'I-Thou' feelings before the art viewer can begin a dialogue with the artworks on

display. One might say that galleries and museums have audiences that operate like distant consumers and, through the resulting alienation from studio production, are forced to be creative in a way that is appropriate to the environment in which they are located.

Fig. 44: The archive drawers of the final installation (2010)

I have said that this alienation is likely to involve bad-*ma* and, as a result, art viewers have their own special kind of 'relational knowing' provoked by exhibition spaces. The archive environment is similarly alienating and the archive visitor is a consumer in the same sense as an exhibition viewer. But perhaps the Parks Collection provokes a less distant form of consumption because, like the Japanese artisans who would have sorted through this paper looking for raw material for disposable waterproof clothing, the present-day visitor actively imagines what could be made of the countless samples. The yet-to-be-fulfilled status of the Collection generates *ma* and this feeling of poignancy recasts the visitor as an

artisan in her own right. This is how I want my work with polythene to be viewed. Given that my research project has been undertaken as a practice-led inquiry, my aim has been to contribute new knowledge to the field of contemporary art practice (which is not necessarily the same field of research that addresses the interpretation of contemporary artworks on display). It seemed to me that a combination of 'practical' and 'relational' knowing would arise in a viewing space that maintained the possibility of further production. I see this as a practical rather than an interpretative potential. Here an appropriately productive kind of good *ma* would come into view with the bad-*ma* that always seems to happen when a creative practitioner attempts a dialogue with their materials. As a result the contribution to knowledge proposed in *An Investigation into the Japanese Notion of 'Ma': Practising Sculpture within Space-time Dialogues* can be itemized in the following way:

- The discussion of *ma* in this thesis was designed to promote and reinforce the use of this term by Western artists. Although references to *ma* outside of Japan have increased since I began my research, the range of definitions I provide in chapter 1 and 2 captures the ambiguous nature of the word for non-Japanese and extends existing interest by suggesting how (particularly in relation to the conceptualization of space/time) this indeterminacy would enhance the vocabulary of Western artists.

- In addition, my chapter on conversational *ma*, in providing an area of study that relates the work of the psychologists Kimura and Bollas to visual arts practice, represents a novel theorization of *ma* which, as far as I know, has not been attempted before, even in Japanese literature on art and psychology. This emphasis on the conversational dimension of my topic

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also led to a unique application of Buber's philosophy of I-Thou/I-It encounters, and the concept of intersubjectivity, to the tool using activities of artists.

- Furthermore, the artistic implementation of this theoretical work based on conversational *ma* (as described in chapter 5) is also, as far as I know, entirely original and my practical research offers documentation that will demonstrate to other artists what happens when *ma* experiences occur in the routines of studio life.

- Lastly, the resolution of my studio work in the poignant yet-to-be-fulfilled nature of archival material is an additional insight that contributes to our understanding of conversational *ma* as a vehicle for practice-led research by artists. In the end, a research project about 'practicing sculpture within space-time dialogues' turned out to be not about the good-*ma* of exhibition reception but about the bad-*ma* of studio production.

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List of Appendices

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Appendix 3: Overview of artistic practice and related activities during the PhD

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With Hiroko Oshima (a 30 year-old female, a painter, a PhD student)
Date conducted the interview: 16 February 2005

A (Auther): You kindly took part in the discussion at the university, but I would like to ask you a bit further about the concept of *ma* again. The previous discussion was focused on *ma* in visual arts, but this time, can we talk about *ma* in conversation?

H (Hiroko Oshima): Uh-huh.

A: In the previous discussion before, one of the key findings was that good- or bad-*ma* appears from expectation or anticipation, in other words *ma* is a product of mind, and this finding re-inforced my supposition that *ma* comes about when something happens beyond the anticipation of normality. Is there anything you can think of that is *ma* in conversation?

H: Uhh, for example?

A: Well, while engaging in conversation, we just do not wait for an interlocutor's response, but narrow down the alternative expected responses, by using your common sense and looking at her facial expression, and sometimes preparing for the next response to an expected response.

H: Well, as we discussed with a Japanese group before, I agree with the finding that expectation or anticipation plays a great part in the appearance of *ma*. So that is why, I think *ma* is like a lowest common denominator. 'Ma' will happen more often (is easier to keep) between people who share the same nationality, culture, time, experience and so on.

A: Mmm, spending a longer time together means it's easier to guess what's to come next, doesn't it?

H: That's right. Speaking about *ma*, even for Japanese, the sense of *ma* varies in relation to where they are from. Did not you think Tokyo people speak slowly and make you irritated, when we were in Tokyo?

A: Yes, greatly, especially when in a hurry. I thought at the beginning why they speak in a *ma no nuketa* (means ill-placed pauses but usually indicates longer pauses. literally, without *ma*.) like way. On the other hand, I guess Tokyo people felt uncomfortable because we speak too quickly.

H: Yes. No time to interrupt. And start wondering whether we are really listening to them.

A: Yes, Yes.

H: Having said that, my family criticized me speaking strangely when I went back home in mid-term break.

A: Mmm, we are accustomed to Tokyo vocabularies and speaking speed, and they are integrated into our way of speaking without knowing. We thought that we were speaking as we had spoken our local dialect, yet something alerts us, I mean both sides, that this is not quite right.

H: Exactly. It is hard to tell the awkwardness that was caused by vocabularies or speed, though.

A: Indeed. It is hard, isn't it?

H: Anyway, we express the awkwardness, let's say, *ma ga awanai* (means to be unable to adjust appropriate pauses to the other's tempo and also implies others cannot to do so, literally means to be unable to adjust *ma* mutually), or *ma ga motanai* (means to be unable to keep a conversation going, literally, to be unable to maintain *ma*). Well, you mentioned good- or bad-ma but I think there is no good-ma, because we maintain ma (like a rhythm to life) so that bad-ma will stand out when it appears.

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A: Ooo-la-la… Yes, I agree with you that we maintain *ma* all the time, well let's say we are all trying to do so in order to avoid an awkward moment. This can be said 'the most natural form of *ma*'. However, you think there is no good-*ma*?

H: I think there isn't. Do we say 'that's good-*ma*'?

A: Don't we use the expression when watching a comedy or something? For example in a rapid-fire comic dialogue, one said something and the other supposed to joke back, right? Taking a shorter pause or longer pause sometimes makes us laugh, well it depends what he will say though. I think this happens not only in comedy but also in a daily conversation. Don't' we describe this kind of moment as good-*ma*? Like '*ima no meccha ma ga ii* (the pause just now was extremely well placed).' or else. Mmm, for example, you need or you want something, and then somebody gives it to you in time and from out of the blue. Don't you think this is good-*ma*?

H: Ah, yes. We do. We do, don't we?

A: Do you think of something like this moment from your experience?

H: Mmm, what would be…. Mmm.… can it be something like I had wanted to eat Japanese curry, and visited my friend and he unexpectedly prepared for Japanese curry. At a moment like this, I would think 'Oh, this is good-*ma*'.

A: Indeed. I would've thought so in that situation. 'Good-*ma*' in this sense is an unexpected fulfillment of your desire, in other words, it happens in between hidden desire and its fulfilment or an action by your friend, isn't it?

H: I guess so.

A: This contradicts one of the findings from the previous discussion, expectation or anticipation, but in this case, unexpectedness worked in a positive way… Oh, well then, do you think your friend knew you wanted to eat Japanese curry?

H: Mmm……. No… I don't think so.

A: Mmm, so in that case, the good-*ma* was not a mutual recognition, wasn't it?

H: Mmm… I guess not.

A: In that case, a question occurs to me is what differs good-*ma* and a good luck.

H: Ahnnnn.

A: I don't mean that I disagree with your 'good-*ma*' experience. I would've thought so in that situation. But, I just wonder… because if your friend did not intend to fulfill your desire, or he was most likely unaware of your individual desire, I mean…he might intend to please a group of Japanese (Japanese curry is one of the most popular meals in Japan), this is also considered as a coincidence or mere luck.

H: Mmm…... That's right, isn't it?

A: Is it possible for you to take his intention towards a group as his intention towards you, or towards you as a part of a group?

H: Mmm.., probably…I am still not sure whether I took it for me or for a group. Otherwise, I think this incidence will be a stroke of good-luck…

A: If so, either way, you felt it as 'good-*ma*' based on a dialectic relationship.

H: I think so.

A: Well, Thank you very much for joining me.

H: Don't mention it. It's my pleasure.

With Kotomi Takahata (a 21 year-old female, a performance artist, a performing art student)

Date conducted the interview 26 August 2005

A (Author): I am researching the Japanese concept of *ma.* Do you know *ma*?

K (Kotomi Takahata): Mmm…?

A: Don't we say, for example in daily conversation, '*ma ga warui* (that's bad timing),' '*hanashi no ma ga umai* (that is full of well-placed pauses),' and so on?

K: Ahhh. Yes.

A: Do you think you use *ma* related words?

K: Mmm, I am not sure, but I think so.

A: Well, then…. So, you are a performing artist, aren't you?

K: Yes.

A: I would like to ask you about *ma*, particularly in the context of performing arts. Do you think of anything related to *ma* now?

K: Ehhhh! I don't know.

A: Mmm. Let's say… In terms of performing arts, there seems to be a lot of essays and interviews, mentioning ma as natural rhythm or pause between artists. While you play a role in drama or dance, do you particularly pay attention when to start and stop your line in response to other participants?

K: Mmm…. No…. I don't know…

A: According to the essays, some performance artists and critiques claimed that suspension of speech and movement enable performing artists to express and create dramatic scenes which their audience can relate to their role. Do you agree with these opinions?

K: Mmm…yes, uh I would think so, but I am not sure.

A: So, you manage an unvoiced expression without consciousness, perhaps?

K: Mmm….most likely so….

A: *Ma* in performing arts, especially in drama, seems to be derived from the rhythm of daily conversation, so that you already know how long you should make a pause, don't you?

K: ….Well, I do not know. I am still a student so I guess I have not yet considered it that far.

A: Well then, you told me that you know *ma*, right? So will you give me an example of *ma* you felt either in drama or in daily life?

K: Mmm….?

A: Well, anything. Like a dialogue of other performance artists, a funny comic dialogue on TV which you thought had well-placed pauses, or a bad-*ma* experience in a conversation with somebody…

K: Mmm…….

A: No idea?

K: Mmm…. Well, when I was listening to a story…a serious story from a close friend, I yawned carelessly. And she looked at me as if she blamed me. That is an example of the kind of moment in which I feel 'bad-*ma*'.

A: Oh, dear… That made you feel bad, I suppose. Were you tired or sleepy?

K: Mmm….. Not particularly… So I don't know why I yawned.

A: So that you were not bold either…

K: No, I was not. But she looked at me as if I did something wrong…

A: Mmm… It cannot be helped, but yawning in the situation surely can be taken as an offence, can it?

K: I suppose so, but I didn't intend to offend her, though. But I thought I did something I shouldn't.

A: Do you think that way, because you saw your friend looked grumpy? Or you somehow noticed it by yourself?

K: Mmm…, I think it is because she saw me yawning…

A: Well then, do you think you would not have felt an awkward moment or bad-*ma* if your friend had not noticed you yawning and kept talking to you?

K: Mmm…. …Yes, I think so.

A: Well then, what about if your friend saw you yawning but was not grumpy? I mean her grumpy facial expression does something to cause the bad-*ma* moment?

K: Mmm…. I don't know….

A: Well, it has been quite useful. Thank you, Kotomi.

K: Ahh, don't mention it.

Appendix 2: A Consent Form

School of Arts and Social Sciences - Research Ethics Framework

Participant Consent Form

To be completed by both participant and researcher before research commences

Name of project

An Investigation into the Japanese Notion of 'Ma': Practicing Sculpture within Space-time Dialogues

Organisation(s) initiating research

Northumbria University

Researcher's name

Sachiyo Goda

Research Organisation

Northumbria University

Participant's name

I confirm that I have been supplied with and have read and understood an Information Sheet (ASS-RE5) for the research project and have had time to decide whether or not I want to participate

I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

I agree with Northumbria University recording and processing this information about me

I understand that this information will only be used for the purposes set out in the information sheet

I have been told that any data generated by the research will be securely managed and disposed of in accordance with Northumbria University's guidelines

I am aware that all tapes and documents will remain confidential with only the research team having access to them

My consent is conditional upon the University complying with its duties and oblagations under the Data Protection Act

Signature of Participant (Even if below 18 years old))   Date

Signature of parent / guardian / representative   (if
participant is under 18 years old)   Date

I can confirm that I have explained the nature of the research to the above named participant and have given adequate time to answer any questions concerning it.

Signature of Researcher   Date

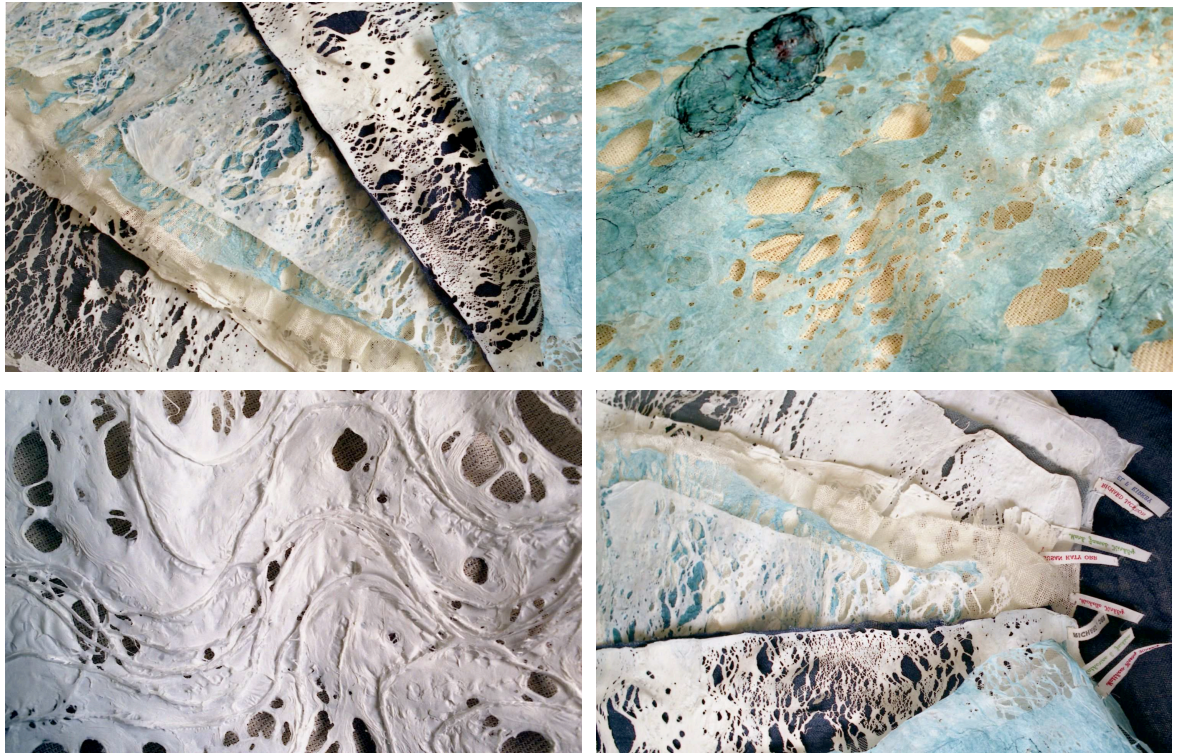This form was used by the researcher, for the projects in this study.

2005

Holy Jesus Hospital, experiment held in the postgraduate studio

Documentary photographs of the experiment, 2005.

I know that you know that I know, 2005, polythene [Installation]. Photos by Ikuko Tsuchiya.
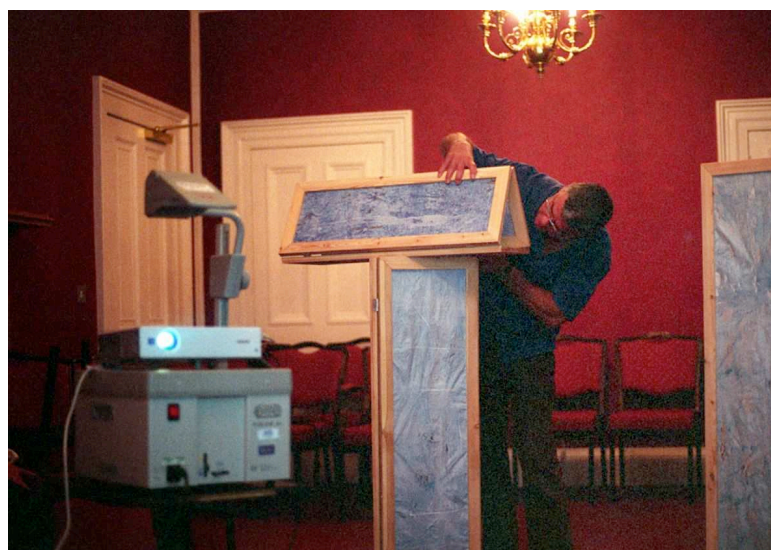
2006

August:

The 1st international conference on Arts in Society (15-18 August), at Edinburgh University, Scotland

Talk and workshop in relate to my research project

Documentary photographs of the workshop, 2006.

October-November:

'Swap 195' exchange project, Group Exhibitions Postgraduate Students Edinburgh School of Art and Northumbria University

I know that you know that I know, 2006, polythene [Installation].

2007

2008

Japan-Northumbria, Gallery North, Newcastle

2009

July-August:

Vit. PhD (Packing for the Crash), Group Exhibition practice-led PhD group

Northumbria University, Gallery North, Newcastle

Untitled, 2008, polythene.

Untitled, 2009, polythene [Installation].

Detail of *Untitled*, 2009

October:
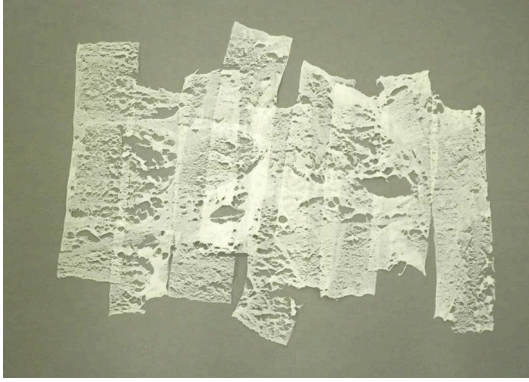
Filming of a polythene-making process

Film stills from a polythene-making process, 2009. Filmed by Jude Thomas.

2010

April: Exhibition as a partial fulfilment of the requirement of PhD Oral examination.

Untitled So Far, 2010, polythene, planchest, video [Installation].

Detail of *Untitled So Far*.