

The Invisible Ground of Sympathy  
and its Relation to Art.

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ABSTRACT

THE INVISIBLE GROUND OF SYMPATHY  
AND ITS RELATION TO ART

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The thesis discusses the invisible ground of sympathy as it relates to art. In the first chapter, the term "invisible ground of sympathy" is defined in the context of Taoism, from which the term derives; and a general history of Taoism is outlined. The invisible ground of sympathy is the exchange or interaction that takes place between a person and whatever that person's attention is engaged with, and is based on the philosophy of Taoism in which the qualities of quietism, freedom from comparative thinking, yin-yang, non-intellectualization and intuition provides the foundation for an attitude toward life. American painter Georgia O'Keeffe and American dancer Simone Forti are discussed, in the second and third chapters, in terms of their development as artists as it relates to the invisible ground of sympathy. The last chapter summarizes the conclusions reached in the body of the paper, and relates the term "invisible ground of sympathy" to a broader art context.

I would like to express my appreciation to Irene Whittome, Isobel Dowler-Gow and Chantal Pontbriand for the time and energy they so generously gave during the preparation of the thesis.

Special thanks to Cheryl MacDonald for work skillfully and cheerfully done.

I would like to dedicate the thesis to my dear friend and husband, Stephen Morrissey, in recognition of his unfailing support and assistance during this project.

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## Introduction

The idea of linking Taoist thought with art is not a new one; many artists have discussed the influence on them and their work of Oriental philosophy. There are undoubtedly many contemporary North American artists who are working within a Taoist context, either overtly or covertly stated as such. John Cage, for example, has stated this very strong influence of Taoism in his life and work --- one can find in his writings a strong similarity in tone with the Taoists. His work emanates a detachment and quietness that is distinctive and quite different from the "hype" of a lot of contemporary North American artists. He has worked through the eras of Pop art, etc., (he is a good friend of Robert Rauschenberg, for example) without using the larger-than-life style and imagery of this movement. Cage's work has always stressed a quiet involvement on the part of the listener (or viewer or reader, depending on whether the piece is primarily audio, visual or written). In fact his work, while at first glance perhaps attention-grabbing because of its innovativeness (for example his concrete poetry, pieces for prepared piano, etc.) demands intense involvement, attention and quietness from the audience in order that it be understood. Cage discusses this point in one of his stories used as accompaniment for Merce Cunningham's piece "How to Pass, Kick, Fall and Run",

I said that since the sounds were sounds, this gave people hearing them the chance to be people, centered within themselves, where they actually are, not off artificially in the distance as they are accustomed to be, trying to figure out what is being said by some artist by means of sounds.<sup>1</sup>

This kind of connection between the work and the viewer is the connection that I wish to discuss with relation to the work of Simone Forti and Georgia O'Keeffe. This connection can be described by writer Chang Chung-yuan's phrase as "the invisible ground of sympathy".<sup>2</sup> In order to clarify my use of this phrase I intend in the first chapter of this

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thesis to discuss the basic concepts of Taoism with which this phrase is associated.

My examination of Chinese Taoism will begin with the historical context of the philosophy, and its development in China. I will then discuss the legends and works of Lao Tzu and Chung Tzu, the two principle figures in Taoism .

Using the works of the Taoist masters as illustration, I will discuss the basic concepts inherent in the philosophy of Taoism. I will also use works from other philosophies and sources to amplify my explanation of the basic philosophy of Taoism.

The Taoist concern with nature provides a link between Taoism and the artists to be discussed in that context: Simone Forti and Georgia O'Keeffe. Both of these artists' work is in some way directly connected with nature, either as subject matter or as a point of departure. I will use the work of ancient Chinese artists (poets and visual artists) to further illustrate how the Taoists conceived of man's connection with nature, and to make comparisons between their thinking and the way these artists deal with nature.

In Georgia O'Keeffe's work we find a very obvious concern with nature; she has used nature and natural forms as her subject matter consistently throughout the approximately seventy years she has been painting. In her abstract work she has also concentrated mainly on organic forms. Critics have discussed the influence of Oriental thought and art on O'Keeffe (for example in Barbara Rose's book review of O'Keeffe's book Georgia O'Keeffe). In the chapter on O'Keeffe I will discuss this and other influences on her work (Alfred Steiglitz, the Transcendentalists such as Thoreau, Emerson) but I will also concentrate very heavily on



what O'Keeffe says herself about work. Through analysis of and discussion about her writings and her paintings I plan to show a strong connection between O'Keeffe and Taoism --- whether stated overtly by O'Keeffe or not. (In fact, O'Keeffe is not given to making statements about her work or her thinking that reveal influences, personal or artistic.) Nevertheless I feel her work stands as a very clear example of the invisible ground of sympathy operating in an artist's work.

In Simone Forti's work and writings we find also a definite Taoist tone. In fact, Simone Forti practised Tai Chi, a Chinese martial art based on the principles of Taoism. (In studying Tai Chi one is automatically studying the philosophy behind it.) Forti has studied closely the movement of animals caged in zoos. She has integrated some of the traits and patterns found in the animal's movement into her dance so that while we see a human form moving in space we can also be aware that the sources of some of these movements come directly from nature. In Forti's dance we find the type of connection between audience and performer that was expressed in John Cage's story. I will discuss this connection, this invisible ground of sympathy, by discussing Forti's work in the context of her writings and the writings of the Taoists.

In any conclusion of a discussion of this kind, perhaps nothing is proven so much as exposed and given light. Through a clear analysis of Taoist philosophy as expressed in Chinese art, poetry and writings; and discussion of the work of Georgia O'Keeffe and Simone Forti in regard to this philosophy, I hope to have provided enough common ground for the reader to make further connections among these artists and Taoism, and to provide a foundation for further examination, should the reader so wish, of Taoist-influenced art.

A work of art consists of two elements, the inner and the outer. The inner is the emotion in the soul of the artist; this emotion has the capacity to evoke a similar emotion in the observer.

Being connected with the body, the soul is affected through the medium of the senses --- the felt. Emotions are aroused and stirred by what is sensed. Thus the sensed is the bridge i.e. the physical relation, between the immaterial (which is the artist's emotion) and the material which results in the production of a work of art. And again, what is sensed is the bridge from the material (the artist and his work) to the immaterial (the emotion in the soul of the observer).

The sequence is: emotion (in the artist) → the sensed → the artwork → the sensed → emotion (in the observer).<sup>3</sup>

Wassily Kandinsky

## CHAPTER I

### Taoism and its relation to Art

In order to provide a context for a discussion on Taoism I would like to discuss briefly the development of Taoism in China. An historical outline would not be complete without a summary of the legends and facts surrounding Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, the two foremost proponents of Taoist philosophy. This background information will prove useful in the discussion that follows of Taoism as a philosophy, and its relation to art.

#### I Historical origins of Taoism

It is generally agreed that Taoism became a concrete philosophy with the writings of Lao Tzu. Lao Tzu lived in China circa 600 B.C.; attributed to him is the classic Taoist text the Tao Teh Ching (The Way of Life). Precise historical data on dates and the authenticity of manuscripts is not available; many original manuscripts have been lost and "rewritten" or "interpreted" by later Chinese writers and historians. It is generally agreed, however, that Taoism was known as a strong philosophical force in China concurrent with the beginning of Confucianism. There are some records which indicate that Confucius (born circa 551 B.C.) and Lao Tzu actually met. The conversations recorded between them may be imaginary, but in any case they serve to point out the differences between the two ways of thinking. After a visit to Lao Tzu, to whom the Confucians' ritualized, hierarchical and formalized philosophy seemed superficial and hypocritical, Confucius was quoted to have said:

of birds I know that they have wings to fly with, of fish that they have fins to swim with, of wild beasts that they have feet to run with. For feet there are traps, for fins, nets, for wings, arrows. But who knows how dragons surmount wind and cloud into heaven? This day I have seen Lao Tzu and he is a dragon. 4

Taoism evolved out of an ancient pantheism, with which ancestor-worship and the belief in good and evil spirits were combined. Every household had its household gods, their names and powers differing with each region, and every household had its shrine to the ancestors. The years between 722 and 221 B.C. were a period of tremendous social and political upheaval in China. The decay of the feudal system finally culminated in a 200 year period of civil war called the Warring States period, in which small feudal states disappeared and the remaining larger states fought for supremacy. As often happens during a period of transition and change, new philosophies or new off-shoots from old philosophies were developed. Taoism and Confucianism were two philosophies developed during this period, and both gained wide popular acceptance.

When Buddhism came from India to China, then to Korea and Japan, it was gradually modified to embrace many of the basic concepts of Taoism in order to make it more acceptable to the Chinese people. Brought by nomads through the Great Wall around 220-280 A.D., and by Indian missionaries from the south, Buddhism gradually took its place as a principle religion in China. Since Taoism was basically always a philosophy rather than a formal religion, Buddhism was without difficulty gradually integrated into a large segment of Chinese society. It was possible to be at the same time a Confucian, concerned with etiquette, political conservatism and harmony within the family, a Taoist coming to terms with the cycle of life through nature, and a Buddhist aiming at security after death.

Taoism also influenced greatly the Japanese Shintaoism

It is evident, then, that Taoism has been established as a philosophy since antiquity; its influence can be felt throughout the Far East in many forms: as a fundamental philosophy underlying most schools of thought in the Orient, and in certain tenets of Ch'an (Chinese Zen) and Zen (Japanese) Buddhism.

Before an attempt can be made to define Taoism, it is necessary to clarify what I mean by that term. After Lao Tzu wrote the Tao Teh Ching, Taoism as a philosophy became prevalent throughout much of China. Gradually, however, the desire for immortality or longevity led some Taoists to develop magical practices and alchemy. A mystical and magical form of Taoism was evolved. Around the first and second centuries A. D., Emperors were very much interested in the prospect of eternal life, and encouraged the study of alchemy (alchemists used gold and cinnebar) to find an elixir for immortality.

The spread of Mahayana Buddhism, with its seductive and optimistic promises of an after life and aid in daily life, was escalating so rapidly in China that some Taoists were spurred to try to match the glamour of Buddhist gods and spirits with Chinese Taoist ones. In some cases mystical phenomena were actually fabricated in an attempt to compete with the Buddhists' rich heritage of legends. In 165 A.D. the emperor Huan of the second Han dynasty ordered the first official offerings to Lao Tzu, and that a temple be built in Lao Tzu's honour. However, Taoism as a great organized religion (which included the magic and alchemy of later sects) did not really develop until the seventh century, during the T'ang dynasty. Taoism as a religion gradually became so clogged with gods, deities, ritual and magic practices that it bore little

## II Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu

Lao Tzu was said to have been immaculately conceived to a shooting star, carried in his mother's womb for 62 years and born white-haired in 604 B.C. His wisdom attracted many followers, but he refused to write down his philosophy, believing that to do so would add unnecessarily to the already abundant quantity of misconceptions and preconceptions about life and how to live it. He was unwilling to leave behind a record that could be turned into dogma by misguided followers; he had no desire to set down laws for men's behaviour, feeling that men's conduct should depend on their instinct and conscience. The legend goes on to state that Lao Tzu, discouraged by men's inability and disinterest in accepting "the way of life": to live in harmony with nature, with intelligence and respect; rode away on a water-buffalo into the desert to die. A warden of the great wall marking the boundary between civilization and the desert was warned by a dream of the sage's coming, and persuaded Lao Tzu to write down the principles of his philosophy. The result was the Tao Teh Ching: tao meaning the way of all life, teh the proper use of life by men and ching a text or classic. The Tao Teh Ching was a text of five thousand words comprised of eighty-one sayings, many of them in verse.

There is little documented historical data to substantiate this legend. Some Chinese historians living hundreds of years after Lao Tzu's death, as well as some contemporary Western scholars, have believed that Lao Tzu did not actually exist, and that the Tao Teh Ching was a compilation of the sayings of several men who lived during the two or three hundred years after Lao Tzu. Witter Bynner, the translator of the version of the Tao Teh Ching that is now widely accepted ( and

resemblance to the philosophy set down by Lao Tzu. Taoism as a religion gradually fell into a decline in popularity. However, much of Lao Tzu's philosophy remains an important part of the spiritual and philosophical make-up of the average Chinese. (Current information on what has happened with Taoism since 1949 is not available.) 5

In my discussion of Taoism I will use the term to mean the Taoist philosophy set forth by Lao Tzu, and I do not include in the term the magical or religious developments later ascribed to it.

is the version that I am using for this paper) agrees with his Chinese collaborator and translator, Dr. Kiang-Kang-hu. Dr. Kiang felt that the most probable conclusion from all the evidence is that Lao Tzu was a sage who existed circa 600 B.C., and was responsible for the original text of the Tao Teh Ching. Able disciples may have, during the next two or three hundred years, edited and added to the basic text without detracting from the main ideas expressed within the text. They may be also responsible for it being engraved on stone tablets dating from the third century B.C. The earliest known manuscript dates from the T'ang dynasty, a thousand years later. It was during the T'ang dynasty that Taoism experienced a national revival and was elevated and transformed into a state religion by the emperor.

Another Chinese sage, Chuang Tzu, lived, according to historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien (145?-89? A.D.), around the fourth century B.C., making him a contemporary of Mencius. According to this account, Chuang Chou (as he was named) has attributed to him a collection of writings we know of as Chuang Tzu. Whether Chuang Chou was the sole author of the Chuang Tzu is in doubt; many of the writings seem to come from other hands and are not as sharp or brilliantly written as the main body of the text. This leads to the supposition that several people as well as Chuang Chou were involved in the writing. Another cause for doubt of the authenticity of some of the writings stems from the fact that a Chinese historian compiled from these writings an edition several centuries later and discarded a number of sections which he considered to be inferior and of a spurious nature. The writings generally attributed to Chuang Chou are mainly in the form of stories and fables.

Chuang Chou is popularly thought to be a follower or disciple of



Lao Tzu. Analysis of his writings, however, shows that, while the Chuang Tzu is definitely Taoist in content and intent, some of the ideas differ from the ideas expressed in the Tao Teh Ching. Chuang Tzu is characterized by a skeptical iconoclasm and a dry, ironic wit. His writings also deal with the darker side of life more than does the Tao Teh Ching. Chuang Tzu, like Lao Tzu, comes across strongly as a vigorous non-conformist, extremely opposed to the formula for hierarchical, formalized patterns of behaviour prescribed by the Confucians. Chuang Tzu made scathing attacks on the Confucians, often poking fun at them by attributing Taoist sayings to them, in order to undermine their credibility. The evidence of a personality behind the writings is more noticeable in Chuang Tzu than in the Tao Teh Ching, which is a much quieter and more smoothly flowing work. In both of these works, however, the concept of Tao was essentially the same. Chuang Tzu has had a profound influence on Chinese artists; his admiration for nature inspired artists to look to nature for the truth in their art; he continues still to be a strong influence. He is mentioned in the Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting, a Chinese classic written in



five brushstrokes like a swallow in flight (feiyen.) fig.1

the seventeenth century that demonstrates the techniques as well as the spirit of Chinese painting. This text is one of the most influential and comprehensive texts on Chinese landscape painting. (fig. 1)

### II Taoism and its relation to art

Any attempt to describe or define Taoism must begin with a study of the work of Lao Tzu, the first Taoist to concretize his philosophy in writing. Any attempt to discuss Taoism must also begin with a disclaimer: Taoism is an intuitive process that does not lend itself easily, if at all, to an intellectual attempt to understand it. Realising, then, that I am attempting to do the impossible, I will try to select and interpret some of the basic tenets of Taoism as expressed by Lao Tzu and others, and allow the reader to develop from this her/his own concept of Taoism.

The understanding of Tao is an inner experience in which distinction between subject and object vanishes. It is an intuitive, immediate awareness rather than a mediated, inferential or intellectual process.

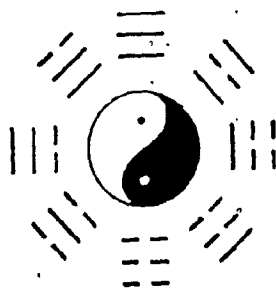
Talking about the tao is like the difference between (having the experience of) falling down on the ice while skating, and describing the experience to friends later.

Existence is beyond the power of words  
To define:  
Terms may be used  
But none of them absolute  
In the beginning of heaven and earth there were  
no words,

Words came out of the womb of matter:  
And whether a man dispassionately  
Sees to the core of life  
Or passionately  
Sees the surface,  
The core and the surface  
Are essentially the same,  
Words making them seem different  
Only to express appearance.

If name be needed, wonder names them both:  
From wonder into wonder  
Existence opens.<sup>7</sup>

The word "tao" literally means "the road" or "the way" and is used throughout China not only to denote Taoism but also as a general term to describe a root concept of fundamental Oriental philosophy. As a concept it has its counterpart in the word "michi", which means "the infinite order of the universe". Tao embraces many concepts within the one word. It can mean everything in the universe, the parts as well as the whole; it can mean "the whole, supreme, invincible order of the universe". Tao is also used to express the principle of creation as well as of order. The cycles of birth, death, growth and decay, the four seasons, etc., all contain within them the principle of yin and yang. Yin and yang (fig. 2) is the principle of expansion and contraction that operates in the universe as the opposing and balancing forces of life:



The Eight Trigrams around the Yin-Yang (T'ai Chi) emblem: from the Heaven trigram, at top, of three unbroken lines, clockwise, the trigrams of Fire, Thunder, Mountain, Earth (directly below Heaven), Water, Wind, and River. fig. 2

Nature, immune as to a sacrifice of straw dogs,  
Faces the decay of its fruits.  
A sound man, immune as to a sacrifice of straw dogs,  
Faces the passing of human generations.  
The universe, like a bellows,  
Is always emptying, always full:  
The more it yields, the more it holds.  
Men come to their wit's end arguing about it  
And had better meet it at the marrow.<sup>8</sup>



The concept of yin and yang as expansion and contraction, male and female, hard and soft, etc., is used as the basis for many practices in Oriental life, including Tai Chi<sup>9</sup> and macrobiotics. In macrobiotics, the yin-yang principle is used to balance acid and alkaline foods (contracting and expanding foods) in an effort to insure complete harmony within the body. (fig.3)

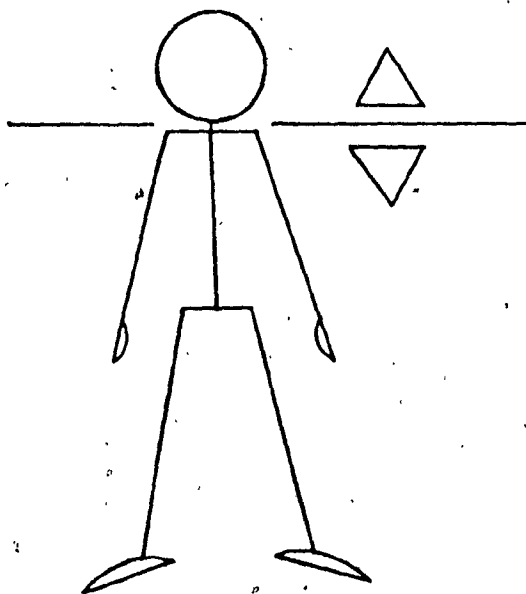


fig.-3

A key concept of Taoism is found in its non-judgemental nature. The understanding of the yin-yang principle can lead to the liberating realisation that there is no distinction between good and bad.

Would you know a simile for life and death?  
Compare them to water and ice:  
Ice melts and turns back into water.  
What has died must live again,  
What has been born shall return to death.  
Water and ice do no harm to each other,  
Life and death are both of them good.<sup>10</sup>

Whereas not to accept destiny is to face death blindfold:  
He who is open-eyed is open-minded,  
He who is open-minded is open-hearted,  
He who is open-hearted is kingly,  
He who is kingly is godly,  
He who is godly is useful,  
He who is useful is infinite,  
He who is infinite is immune,  
He who is immune is immortal. <sup>12</sup>

As a philosophy and as a life-style, quietism is in sharp contrast with the modern Western concept of progress and self-advancement; especially in the context of present-day North America where "change" and "progress" are often synonymous, and it is considered weakness to refrain from attempting to change things (this is particularly true with regard to issues pertaining to upward mobility, money and prestige). But quietism, as Lao Tzu says, is to "face life with open eyes" <sup>13</sup>; quietism is not, however, to be confused with inactivity, for life with all of its tasks must go on, but one does not need to identify oneself with these tasks. It is only with our eyes open that we can be receptive to life, and therefore able to clearly perceive reality. If we are caught up in the struggle to change what is, we cannot be simultaneously sensitive and receptive to what is. Krishnamurti discusses the way the mind or the intellect gets in the way of or prevents direct contact with life. Our perception is clouded by the activity of the intellect.

The intellect, the mind as such, can only repeat, recollect, it is constantly spinning new works and re-arranging old ones; and as most of us feel and experience only through the brain, we live exclusively on words and mechanical repetitions. This is obviously not creation... <sup>14</sup>

The intellect tends to cloud our perception with self-consciousness; in this way we prevent ourselves from making contact with any larger concept of life. As has been discussed in Taoist philosophy, it is intuitive awareness that leads to enlightenment. The Taoists often refer to enlightenment as a state of "non-being", a state where one can find

the true nature of one's real self. This term describes the state of mind necessary in order to be receptive to enlightenment; the concepts of quietism, freedom from comparative thinking, yin-yang, non-intellectualization and intuition are all integral to this process. Chang Chung-yuan discusses enlightenment in terms of identification with the "great sympathy":

The second of the pre-Buddhist concepts of sympathy in China is formed in the views of the Taoists. This sympathy was primordial identification, interfusion, and unification of subject and object, of one and many, of man and the universe. It was not a product of rational intellection, but an ontological experience.

This clearly describes enlightenment as an experience or as a state of being rather than an intellectual concept. The Taoists looked to nature for an understanding of and as a manifestation of Tao. By observing and relating to nature, it was felt that one could unlock the key to understanding the universe.

In ancient and modern Chinese poetry and art the subject matter is frequently that of nature. Han-shan discusses an experience of contact with the "great sympathy" in this poem,

I call to my friends, picking lotus,  
Wonderfully afloat on the clear river,  
And forget, in my delight, how late it grows,  
Till gusts of evening wind whirl by.  
Waves scoop up the mandarin ducks;  
Ripples rock the broad-tailed mallards;  
At this moment, sitting in my boat,  
Thoughts pour out in endless streams. 16

A good example of the experience of interfusion between the subject and the object, the knower and the known, the observed and the observer is the following story by Chuang Tzu.

Once I dreamed that I was a butterfly, fluttering here and there; in all ways a butterfly. I enjoyed my freedom, not knowing that I was Chou. Suddenly I awoke and was surprised to be myself again. Now, how can I tell whether I

was a man who dreamt that he was a butterfly, or whether I am a butterfly who dreams she was a man? Between Chuang Chou and the butterfly, there must be differentiation. (yet in the dream nondifferentiation takes place.) This is called interfusion of things.<sup>17</sup>

In this case, Chuang Tzu uses the story as a metaphor to challenge our unquestioned preconceptions about reality, as well as to describe the process of interfusion. Interfusion is a process that is very much a part of the process the artist is involved in, particularly in Oriental art where great emphasis is placed on being "one" with the subject being painted in order that the spirit, or "chi" of the subject may come through onto the paper.

Through interpenetration things are spiritualised. When the artist reveals the reality concealed in things, he sets it free and, in turn, he liberates and purifies himself. This invisible process, fundamental to Chinese art, is the action of Tao.<sup>18</sup>

In order for the subject to speak through the individual, the artist must be sensitive enough to be able to perceive and transmit this information. This is why painting was always regarded as a discipline and even as a ritual rather than merely a technique with which to create images.

Painting in China was never separate from the tao of living. Its main focus was, and still is, Tao, the Way, the cosmic order, or the course of nature, which was alluded to not only in the classics but frequently in discussions of painting as the ideal—the harmony of Heaven and Earth that everything should express. In painting, this aim of the fusion of spirit, that which pertains to Heaven, and the matter, that which pertains to Earth, relates both to the artist's own development and to the work of art, for successful results require the exercise of insight as well as technical skill, the ability to render the inner character as well as its external form.<sup>19</sup>

An example of Chinese Taoist painting is included in the illustrations at the back of this chapter (fig. 4).

Herrigel describes in terms of the spiritual practice of archery this process of interfusion:



Bow, arrow, goal and ego all melt into one another, so that I can no longer separate them. For as soon as I take the bow and shoot, everything becomes so clear and straightforward and so ridiculously simple. 20

Between the artist and the subject (not necessarily nature or life forms - the subject could be the paint, canvas, the effect of a brush stroke on a surface, photographic paper as in Rayograms, a piece of land as in earth art, etc.) there must be a ground of sympathy in order for creativity to be acted out. This invisible ground of sympathy provides the content in the work- it is the activity of the interaction between the artist and the subject which produces the work, not just the activity between the artist and his materials. Even if the subject the artist chooses is the materials, there must be some sympathy between the artist and the materials in order for any discovery or creative process to take place. Therefore the invisible ground of sympathy does not serve the literal translation of information (either solely perceptual or ontological or intellectual); it is the process by which the artist describes his interaction with his subject, using whatever materials are involved in creating the piece in order to concretize this interaction.

Kandinsky has discussed the further interaction between the artwork and the viewer. Here we find a sympathy that is made up of the artist, the artwork, the subject of the artwork, and the response in the viewer, the subject and the artist. Through the artwork the artist can make a connection with the viewer. This process is common to all art forms and is what constitutes the universality of art when it is viewed in the different contexts of different nationalities, or centuries. Without this invisible ground of sympathy, images from another time or culture would be meaningless to us.

4. Ch'i tai-Shih (1861-1957): Bamboo Branch

In this painting great force and power is evident in the brush strokes. The direct, simple and strong strokes come from a revelation of the unconscious; the painter was one with the subject and unlocked its essential nature. Therefore we do not see a reproduction of the actual beauty of the bamboo; we have its essential nature revealed to us.



### Footnotes

1. John Cage, A year From Monday ( Middletown, Connecticut : Wesleyan University Press, 1963 ), p. 134.
2. Chang Chung-yuan, Creativity and Taoism ( New York : Harper and Row, 1970 ), p. 19.
3. Wassily Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, trans. Arthur Jerome Eddy ( New York : George Wittenborn, Inc. 1960 ), p. 3.
4. Chang Chung-yuan, Creativity and Taoism, p. 20.
5. John B. Noss, Man's Religions ( London : Collier - Macmillan Ltd., 1963 ), p. 274.
6. Chang Chung-yuan, Creativity and Taoism, p. 19.
7. Lao Tzu, The Way of Life, trans. Witter Bynner ( New York : Capricorn Books, 1962 ), p. 25.
8. Ibid., p. 33.
9. See appendix I for an explanation of Tai Chi.
10. Han-shan, Cold Mountain, trans. Burton Watson ( New York : Columbia University Press, 1970 ), p. 86.  
See appendix II for a brief biography of Han-shan.
11. Lao Tzu, The Way of Life, pp. 25 & 26.
12. Ibid., pp. 33 & 34.
13. Ibid., p. 54.
14. J. Krishnamurti, Education and the Significance of Life ( London : The Camelot Press Ltd., 1953 ), p. 52.
15. Chang Chung-yuan, Creativity and Taoism, p. 69.
16. Han-shan, Cold Mountain, p. 24.
17. Chang Chung-yuan, Creativity and Taoism, p. 20.  
A Story from the works of Chuang Tzu.

18. Mai-mai Sze, The Way of Chinese Painting ( New York : Vintage Books, 1959 ), p. 50.
19. Ibid., p. 37.
20. Eugene Herrigel, Zen in the Art of Archery New York : Random House, 1971. ) p. 88.

## CHAPTER II

### Georgia O'Keeffe

#### Introduction:

Having laid the ground-work for a discussion on the invisible ground of sympathy and its relation to art through an examination of Taoism, I would now like to discuss the work of Georgia O'Keeffe, and to relate her work and her writings to this philosophy.

I have intentionally limited the quotations used in this chapter almost exclusively to those written by O'Keeffe herself. O'Keeffe has consistently criticized the way her work has been interpreted by art critics, historians, etc. This quote, part of the preface to her book O'Keeffe, reflects her attitude:

The meaning of a word --- to me --- is not as exact as the meaning of a color. Colors and shapes make a more definite statement than words. I write this because such odd things have been done about me with words. I have often been told what to paint. I am often amazed at the spoken and written word telling me what I have painted. I make this effort because no one else can know how my paintings happen. <sup>21</sup>

I grew up pretty much as everyone grows up and one day seven years ago found myself saying to myself --- I can't live where I want to --- I can't go where I want to --- I can't even say what I want to. School and things that painters taught me even keep me from painting as I want to. I decided I was a very stupid fool not to at least paint as I wanted to and say what I wanted to when I painted as that seemed to be the only thing I could do that didn't concern anybody but myself --- that was nobody's business but my own. <sup>22</sup>

Georgia O'Keeffe made this statement in 1923, describing the beginning, some years previously, of the development in her painting of her

own unique vision. She felt that her work was, up until the point described in the quote, merely a repetition of things that had been done before. She decided that she would work outside of the academic fine arts context she had been trained to follow, and use only her own judgement to decide what she would paint and how she would paint it.

O'Keeffe continues her statement by saying:

I decided to start anew - to strip away what I had been taught - to accept as true my own thinking. This was one of the best times of my life. There was no one around to look at what I was doing - no one interested - no one to say anything about it one way or another. I was alone and singularly free, working in to my own, unknown - no one to satisfy but myself. I began with charcoal and paper and decided not to use any color until it was impossible to do what I wanted to do in black and white. I believe it was June before I needed blue.<sup>23</sup>

In this way, O'Keeffe was able to begin painting works that were completely unique because they stemmed from her own consciousness; painting developed in this way can never be duplicated or copied.

O'Keeffe was born in Wisconsin in 1887. She studied art at the Art Institute in Chicago and at the Art Students League in New York, and with Arthur Dow at Columbia College. Dow's idea that what was important was "to fill a space in a beautiful way"<sup>24</sup> encouraged her to discard the theories about art that she had been taught, and to paint to please herself. She had her first show at Alfred Steiglitz's New York gallery 291 in 1916. This exhibition was comprised of drawings she had sent to a friend, Anita Pollitzer, throughout the year, asking that they be kept private. Ms. Pollitzer showed the drawings to Steiglitz in spite of this request, feeling that the drawings were important and should be exhibited. (O'Keeffe had met Steiglitz previously, when an art student in New York, and had been greatly impressed by the Rodin drawings then on display at 291. [ Steiglitz's was the first gallery in the United States

to show the works of Rodin, Cézanne, Picasso and Matisse.]) The exhibition of her drawings at 291 was followed by another show there in 1917; the last exhibition Steiglitz hung at the gallery. Steiglitz took his first photographs of O'Keeffe at this time. This series of portraits was continued over the years until Steiglitz's death and eventually amounted to a collection of 500 photographs.

Steiglitz and O'Keeffe married in 1924. They lived in New York, spending the summers at Lake George. Steiglitz, an extremely gregarious person, was the centre of a group of artists, writers and musicians, including John Marin, Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, Charles Demuth, and Paul Strand. O'Keeffe's need for solitude in order to paint led her eventually to spending the summers alone in New Mexico. After Steiglitz's death in 1949 O'Keeffe moved there permanently; she now lives in Abiquiu, New Mexico.

I have provided some historical background for my discussion on Georgia O'Keeffe, as I find it extremely interesting to note the modes and influences prevalent in art and the arts generally at the time in which she began painting - and the almost total lack of influence reflected in her work of these modes. Cubism, and the development of the theories of Cézanne and the Post-Impressionists were having a far reaching influence on the artists of North America. American artists such as Marin, Demuth and others in Steiglitz's circle of friends were particularly opposed to O'Keeffe's use of pure, strong colour. O'Keeffe describes the way in which she came to paint a painting in the sombre, subdued colour favored by this group, whom she called "the men".

I often walked through the pasture to the back road and as I walked down past the beautiful juniper bushes the shanty looked very shabby. It had never been painted

and the outside boards were scorched by the sun. The clean, clear colours were in my head, but one day as I looked at the brown burned wood of the shanty I thought ' I can paint one of those dismal-colored paintings like the men. I think just for fun I will try - all low-toned and dreary with the tree beside the door. '

In my next show, The Shanty went up. The men seemed to approve of it. They seemed to think that maybe I was beginning to paint. I don't remember what the critics said about it, but when Duncan Phillips saw it he bought it for the Phillips Collection. That was my only low-toned dismal-colored painting. 25

O'Keeffe's paintings continued to retain the clean clear colours and simple forms she had begun to use in 1915. Her style never wavered and remained consistent throughout all the subsequent waves of painting in America such as 50's abstractionism, 60's Pop and Op Art, etc.

O'Keeffe also discussed her interest in making a peculiarly American kind of art:

I was quite excited over our country, and I knew that at that time almost any one of those great minds would have been living in Europe if it had been possible for them. They didn't even want to live in New York --- how was the Great American thing going to happen? 26

#### An Examination of O'Keeffe's Approach to her Art.

Georgia O'Keeffe's work is characterized by a spare, direct style, simplification and elimination of detail, the use of pure, strong colour, and an absence of obvious brush strokes. Her paintings do not generally emphasize texture; the paint is usually applied thinly; often the texture of the canvas can be seen. O'Keeffe works mainly in oils on canvas but has also done work in watercolour and pastel.

O'Keeffe often returned to subject matter she had painted in previous years. Certain themes recur throughout her work --- shells, skulls and bones, for instance; and she has painted the Red Hills near her home in New Mexico many times over an extended period of time.



In Red Hills and Sky, 1945, (fig. 5), we see just the silhouette of the hills, making a V against the blue sky. The canvas is divided quite symmetrically; the sky takes up by far the larger proportion of space. The hills are painted smoothly, almost softly. In colour and texture they resemble the human body; the painting transmits a very soft and sensual feeling. This is interesting since one would assume that the austere, minimal composition and very reduced surface modulation of the painting would impart just the opposite feeling.

The White Place in Shadow, 1942, (fig. 6) creates a very different effect. The hills that in the previously mentioned painting were soft and warm, are in this painting very obviously comprised of hard, grey rock. We are made very aware of how empty, uninhabitable and forbidding the White Place is. The composition, as well as the fairly realistic rendering and colour of the rock, helps promote the unwelcoming quality of the landscape. We are confronted with uncompromisingly huge, towering, sheer cliffs that obscure all of the sky except for a small strip along the top of the canvas. Our attention is completely focussed off this wall of rock that is unmoved and unmoving.

O'Keeffe also often worked in series, painting the same subject a number of times, changing the point of view, composition, colour, etc. In her Shell and Old Shingle series, painted in 1926, the subject is treated in a variety of ways. In each painting the colour remains similar; muted greys and whites (with bright green leaves in the two paintings in which leaves are included.) The variation is in her treatment of the subject matter itself. In Shell and Old Shingle IV, for example, (fig. 7) the treatment is extremely abstract; it is only because this painting is juxtaposed with the others in the series that we can see

what the subject is. In Shell and Old Shingle II, we see nearly all of the subject; in Shell and Old Shingle III (fig.8) we see a very closely-cropped, asymmetrically composed fragment. In Shell and Old Shingle I, (fig.9), the texture of the wood has been emphasized, and we see it with almost photographic clarity. Shell and Old Shingle VI is, in colour and composition almost a repetition of Shell and Old Shingle II; the impact, however, is quite different. In this painting the references to shingle or shell have been eliminated; the objects have become simply shapes to be manipulated: "They fascinated me so that I forgot what they were except that they were shapes together --- singing shapes." 27

An examination of O'Keeffe's work reveals that this quote describes an approach fundamental to her treatment of subject matter. Rather than concerning herself with a literal reproduction of the subject she is painting, she manipulates (and often abstracts) the subject, using the subject for its potential in a painting rather than as an object to be copied.

O'Keeffe's style has remained consistent over the sixty-five years she has been painting professionally. Her use of paint, colour, brushstrokes; her handling of subject matter, even the subject matter itself has changed remarkably little over the years. This consistency does not, however, in any way resemble repetition or redundancy; her work continues to retain its freshness.

#### Interpretation and Criticism

Critics have speculated about the extent to which Steiglitz, and photography, have influenced O'Keeffe's work, particularly because of

her use of isolated, blown-up details, and unusual cropping of compositions. (O'Keeffe's work has had a strong influence on many contemporary artists. For example, we can see in the work of Judy Chicago a strong similarity to O'Keeffe's flower paintings.) In an interview with Katherine Kuh, O'Keeffe disclaims this influence:

I'll tell you how I happened to make the blown-up flowers. In the twenties, huge buildings sometimes seemed to be going up overnight in New York. At that time I saw a painting by Fantin-Latour, a still-life with flowers I found very beautiful, but I realized that were I to paint the same flowers so small, no one would look at them because I was unknown. So I thought I'll make them big like the huge buildings going up. People will be startled; they'll have to look at them --- and they did. I don't think photography had a thing to do with it. 28

Barbara Rose has also stated:

Contrary to what some critics have concluded, photographic enlargement seems to have been more coincidental to her work than an influence on it. Steiglitz himself did not make enlargements. Her own flower enlargements are more directly related to the work of the American Luminist Martin Johnson Heade. Photography's influence on her work is more a matter of her use of cropping in her compositions. 29

O'Keeffe manipulated subject matter in order to strip away excess, and to expose the essence of a thing, rather than simply to expose a detail by enlarging it. She uses tight or unconventional cropping as a method of helping us focus more clearly on the subject, and to create tension within the composition, rather than in the way cropping is often used in photography --- as a device to eliminate unwanted information in a print. Perhaps where the concerns in O'Keeffe's painting and photography overlap is O'Keeffe's use of cropping to help us see a subject isolated from its surroundings, blown up larger than life and made more visible and noticeable because of this. In Two Calla Lilies on Pink and Closed Clam Shell, (figs. 10 & 11), for example, the subject matter has been pared down and refined in order to reveal only what O'Keeffe wants us to see; details and textures are

painted out. What we see is more in the line of a representation of the nature of a lily or of a clam shell, rather than the specific description of a particular lily or clam shell.

In any case, I think it can be safely asserted that whatever influence photography did have on O'Keeffe's work was relatively limited; it is obvious from study of her work that her concerns go far beyond the reproduction of what a camera can do with regard to either precision or cropping. Her work is, rather, the outcome of her own unique vision and experience.

Much has been said about O'Keeffe's use of the flower as a sexual symbol. This is a superficial interpretation of the much more complicated personal process O'Keeffe has used to show us the essence or inner nature of a growing thing. In response to this sexual interpretation of her flower paintings, O'Keeffe said:

Well, I made you take time to look at what I saw and when you took time to really notice my flower you hung all your own associations with flowers on my flower and you write about my flower as if I think and see what you think and see of the flower --- and I don't. <sup>30</sup>

Barbara Rose discusses this cliché of interpreting O'Keeffe's flower paintings as sexual symbols:

Mondrian, Van Gogh, Redon and others all paint flowers as peculiarly charged symbols of vitality without being analyzed for the sexual implications of their paintings. It is as if a rose is a rose if a man paints it, but it must be something else in a painting by a woman. One also suspects that if O'Keeffe's curving and undulating forms suggest analogies between the human body and landscape, these analogies are better explained by her sense of the unity of nature and the correspondence between all natural forms than they are by Freudian or surrealist symbolism. <sup>31</sup>

What O'Keeffe is really doing in these paintings is exploring in a new way subject matter that is commonplace, and all around us. By looking at it in a fresh, direct and straight-forward way, O'Keeffe

shows us just exactly what a flower is; through her perception of it we are able to see what we didn't notice (or take time to see) before.

O'Keeffe and the Invisible Ground of Sympathy

Nature:

It is O'Keeffe's strong feeling for nature that provides one of several links between her art and Taoism. Throughout the 70 years she has been painting, O'Keeffe has consistently turned to nature as her subject. She has chosen to live in the country and has done so since 1945; before that she migrated annually to the country each summer in order to be able to paint. She has talked about the impact nature and landscape can have on her:

I couldn't believe Texas was real. When I arrived out there, there wasn't a blade of green grass or a leaf to be seen but I was absolutely crazy about it. There wasn't a tree six inches in diameter at that time. For me Texas is the same big wonderful thing that oceans and the highest mountains are.<sup>32</sup>

O'Keeffe shares this sensitivity to nature with the Transcendentalist writers, particularly Emerson and Thoreau, whom she read when she was young. Her work shows a great affinity with the principle concepts of these writers.

Thoreau wrote:

All nature is classic and akin to art ... Poetry, painting, and sculpture claim at once and associate with themselves these perfect specimens of the art of nature ... The critic must at last stand as mute though contented before a true poem as before an acorn or a vine leaf. The perfect work of art is received again into the bosom of nature whence its material proceeded, and that criticism which can only detect its unnaturalness has no longer any office to fulfill.<sup>33</sup>

O'Keeffe shows affinities with Thoreau and Emerson in her book O'Keeffe, not in the writing style or content so much as in underlying philosophy

of being close to nature; the idea that one can find the truth in nature --- perhaps only in nature can one find the truth.

Emerson talks about this in his essay Nature:

The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth becomes part of his daily food. <sup>34</sup>

This concept of remaining a spiritual infant in order to retain sensitivity to the world is a concept integral to the philosophy of Taoism. Emerson makes a further reference to Taoism when he talks about his interfusion with nature; he is describing enlightenment as perceived by the Taoist:

Standing on the bare ground, --- my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, --- all mean egotism vanishes. I became a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part and particle of God. <sup>35</sup>

The Transcendentalists had individual ideas about how a life in contact with nature should be lived, but they did share a common goal of trying to cut through institutionalized ideas about religion and philosophy in order to perceive for themselves the higher truths of life, through contact with nature. This concept is very akin to Taoism; the Transcendentalists were, in fact, extremely interested in investigating Oriental concepts of religion and philosophy, and helped stimulate popular interest in Oriental thought and culture.

#### Oriental Art and Philosophy

The teacher Arthur Dow, who had influenced O'Keeffe so strongly when she was a student, was himself a student of the scholar and Orientalist Ernest Fenollosa, who was instrumental in introducing Japanese

art to America. O'Keeffe was assigned to read, as Dow's student, Fenolosa's Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art as well as his review of Gonse's L'art Japonaise. O'Keeffe was, in fact, during this period, more interested in Far Eastern art than she was in academic art or Cubism.

Asked by Katherine Kuh what artists she most admired, she replied, "The Chinese." <sup>36</sup> In the same interview, Katherine Kuh asked O'Keeffe if she had been influenced by Oriental art. O'Keeffe answered:

I enjoy Oriental art very much and prefer travelling in the East than in Europe. But tell me, can you find anything in my work that shows an Oriental influence? I had an important experience once. I put up everything I had done over a long period and as I looked around at my work I realized that each painting had been affected by someone else. I wondered why I hadn't put down things of my own from my own head. And then I realized that I hadn't done this because I'd never seen anything like the things in my own head. <sup>37</sup>

Although some of O'Keeffe's work actually bears a visual similarity in brushwork or in composition to Oriental art, it is not really any physical resemblance that connects her work to Oriental art and thought; rather it is a philosophical similarity. It is interesting, however, and perhaps instructive, to compare O'Keeffe's water colour Blue Circle and Line with Japanese Sumiye painting (figs. 12 & 13). Sumiye painting, in the traditional Japanese manner, is done with black ink made of soot and glue, thin absorbant paper, and a brush of sheep or badger hair. The paper is so absorbant that if the brush is allowed to linger too long on the paper, the ink will blot and spoil the painting. This restriction inherent in the materials of Sumiye painting insures that the strokes will be spontaneous and immediate. The goal in a Sumiye painting is not to copy reality, but for the painting to become a creation in itself. As D.T. Suzuki says about Sumiye painting:

It attempts to make the spirit of an object move on the paper. Thus each brush-stroke must beat with the pulsation of a living being. It must be living too. <sup>38</sup>

O'Keeffe's watercolour Blue Circle and Line has in it this quality of living brush strokes, as well as a very obvious resemblance in composition, content, balance and the use of a stark white background, to Sumiye painting. Even the brush-strokes or characters themselves seem Oriental --- the circle is traditionally a symbol for the spirit, for example. D.T. Suzuki goes on to discuss the individuality inherent in each artist's brush-stroke, and compares this individuality with Zen Buddhism itself:

In each brush-stroke is there not something distinctly individual? The spirit of each artist is moving there. His birds are his own creation. This is the attitude of a Sumiye painter towards his art, and I wish to state that this attitude is that of Zen towards life, and that what Zen attempts with the life the artist does with his paper, brush and ink. The creative spirit moves everywhere, and there is a work of creation whether in life or in art. <sup>39</sup>

It is in part, this individuality that links O'Keeffe's work with Oriental art and philosophy. O'Keeffe has, throughout her life, worked to her own standards; from the time she first became interested in Dow's principle of filling a space in a beautiful way, and began to paint what she saw, her way:

I have things in my head that are not like what anyone has taught me --- shapes and ideas so near to me --- so natural to my way of being and thinking that it hadn't occurred to me to put them down. <sup>40</sup>

Choosing to find the source of one's creativity in one's self is not an easy choice; it means that there can be no models to follow or to be comforted by; to use as security. O'Keeffe said: "I believe that to create one's own world in any of the arts takes courage." <sup>41</sup>



But it is this same choice to cut herself off completely from accepted academic painting, or any other school or "ism" in art, which gives O'Keeffe's work its strength, integrity and uniqueness. Because she worked completely alone and for herself only, she was able to get in touch with her personal and individual vision of the world.

As we saw in the first chapter on Taoism, the Oriental artist's process can be likened to or is in itself tantamount to the process of self-realization. O'Keeffe's painting contains a meditative quality, a feeling of quiet and calm that reflects a sense of the artist's being at one with herself, and with her subject. I do not mean to infer that O'Keeffe is enlightened in the Taoist sense of the word; I am not qualified to make that assumption. But as will be seen upon examination of her work and her writings, there are very close parallels to the process of interfusion described in the chapter on Taoism.

#### O'Keeffe's Vision

The Sumiye artist endeavours to transmit through his work his interaction with the subject being painted. This is the process of interfusion; the invisible ground of sympathy that exists between the artist, his subject and his materials.

But Sumiye tries to catch things alive, which seems to be something impossible to achieve. Yes, it would indeed be an impossibility if the artist's endeavour were to represent living things on paper, but he can succeed to a certain extent when every brush-stroke he makes is directly connected with his inner spirit, unhampered by extraneous matters such as concepts, etc. In this case, his brush is his own arm extended; more than that, it is his spirit, and in its every movement as it is traced on paper this spirit is felt. <sup>42</sup>

O'Keeffe's works contain a feeling of power and grandeur; even her blow-ups of tiny details have a sense of vast and infinite space:

When I started painting the pelvis bones I was most interested in the holes in the bones --- what I saw through them --- particularly the blue from holding them up in the sun against the sky as one is apt to do when one seems to have more sky than earth in one's world... They were most wonderful against the Blue --- that Blue that will always be there as it is now after all man's destruction is finished. <sup>43</sup>

Technically, the feeling of space and serenity in O'Keeffe's work is aided by O'Keeffe's spare, minimal style and flatness of colour. There is an absence of obvious brush strokes; the paint is applied thinly and smoothly as if the artist responsible for the brush strokes is invisible and leaves no mark or trace of her presence on the canvas. (There is, however, evidence of the artist's hand in the straight lines that are never razor sharp, circles and curves that are accurate but obviously not drawn with a compass.) This quality of what could almost be called impersonality in the paintings, leaves us free to engage more intensely with the subject being painted --- we are not brought up short or distracted by activity on the surface of the canvas; all our attention can be focused on the picture itself. The emptying out of space and simplification or elimination of detail further facilitates this focusing of our attention.

The subject matter of O'Keeffe's work (and the way it is handled) transmits a meditative mystical quality (fig. 14). O'Keeffe has discussed one motivation for working with nature:

The unexplainable thing in nature that makes me feel the world is big far beyond my understanding --- to understand maybe by trying to put it into form. To find the feeling of infinity on the horizon line or just over the next hill. <sup>44</sup>

It is not only when she is working with recognizably natural forms that O'Keeffe is attempting to find understanding through form. She has talked about her abstract work in similar terms:

It is surprising to me to see how many people separate the objective from the abstract. Objective painting is not good painting unless it is good in the abstract sense. A hill or tree cannot make a good painting just because it is a hill or a tree. It is lines and colors put together so that they say something. For me that is the very basis of painting. The abstraction is often the most definite form for the intangible thing in myself that I can only clarify in paint. <sup>45</sup>

O'Keeffe reveals to us, in her paintings, her perception of the world, and in doing this helps us to perceive the world more clearly. Her work illustrates Kandinsky's <sup>46</sup> concept of the invisible ground of sympathy that exists between the artist, the subject, the art and the viewer. O'Keeffe states that Kandinsky's Concerning the Spiritual in Art was a book that she read very carefully as an art student. O'Keeffe has made reference to her intention of establishing sympathy with the viewer:

I often painted fragments of things because it seemed to make my statement as well or better than the whole could. And I long ago came to the conclusion that even if I could put down accurately the thing that I saw and enjoyed, it would not give the observer the kind of feeling it gave me. I had to create an equivalent for what I felt about what I was looking at --- not copy it. <sup>47</sup>

In many of her works we, as viewers, seem to be observing her personal explorations with the subject. The series Jack-in-the-Pulpit is a very good example of this. (figs. 15-17) We can observe her increasing familiarity with the flower; its structure, form, colour, etc. The first paintings are quite realistic; gradually the forms become more abstracted and at the same time she moves in closer and closer to the subject until finally, in the last painting we see only the "jack". In showing us a fragment of the subject, and in abstracting the forms in such a way that they create an equivalent for what she saw and how she felt about it, she reveals to us the essence of the subject, and

helps us to perceive more clearly the true nature of the subject. We are engaged in the invisible ground of sympathy that she has provided for us, through her contact with the subject, via the art. This is very much the process with which the Oriental artists were working. O'Keeffe's painting shows a strong similarity to the Orientals' concept of art. In both Oriental art and O'Keeffe's art we observe the interfusion between the artist and the subject (this is evident in the work) and we see the inner nature of the subject revealed to us through the individual and unique perception of a particular artist. O'Keeffe does not use Sumiye technique, or work with highly stylized Chinese brush-work and formalized subject matter, but her work does breathe the same feeling of tranquility, timelessness, vitality and sense of infinite space that the best Oriental art does. This universality inherent in her work is what makes her paintings from sixty-five years ago (as well as those painted more recently) as fresh and immediate as if they were painted within our present context and decade. As we look at work from any period in art we can often find examples of work that seems "dated" --- by this I mean that we are made very aware in the work of the plastic concerns of that particular time. In this century, trends in art move so quickly that issues widely and intensely dealt with in one decade are redundant in the next. O'Keeffe's work spans seven decades; it seems evident that it will continue to live, not merely to exist, indefinitely.

Footnotes

21. Georgia O'Keeffe, Georgia O'Keeffe ( Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1976 ) no pagination.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Katherine Kuh, The Artist's Voice, Talks with Seventeen Artists ( New York : Harper and Row, 1962 ), pp. 190-191.
29. Barbara Rose, " O'Keeffe's Trail ", The New York Review, New York, March 31, 1977. p. 30.
30. Georgia O'Keeffe, Georgia O'Keeffe.
31. Barbara Rose, The New York Review, p. 32.
32. Katherine Kuh, The Artist's Voice, Talks with Seventeen Artists, p. 189.
33. Henry D. Thoreau, The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau, ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allan ( Boston : Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949 ), vol. I, p. 43.
34. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. William H. Gilman ( Toronto : Signet Classics, 1965 ), p. 189.
35. Ibid., p. 189.
36. Katherine Kuh, The Artist's Voice, p. 200.
37. Ibid., p. 191.
38. D. T. Suzuki, Zen Buddhism. ( New York : Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956 ), p. 280.
39. Ibid., p. 281.

40. Georgia O'Keeffe, Georgia O'Keeffe.

41. Ibid.

42. D. T. Suzuki, Zen Buddhism, p. 282.

43. Georgia O'Keeffe, Georgia O'Keeffe.

44. Ibid.

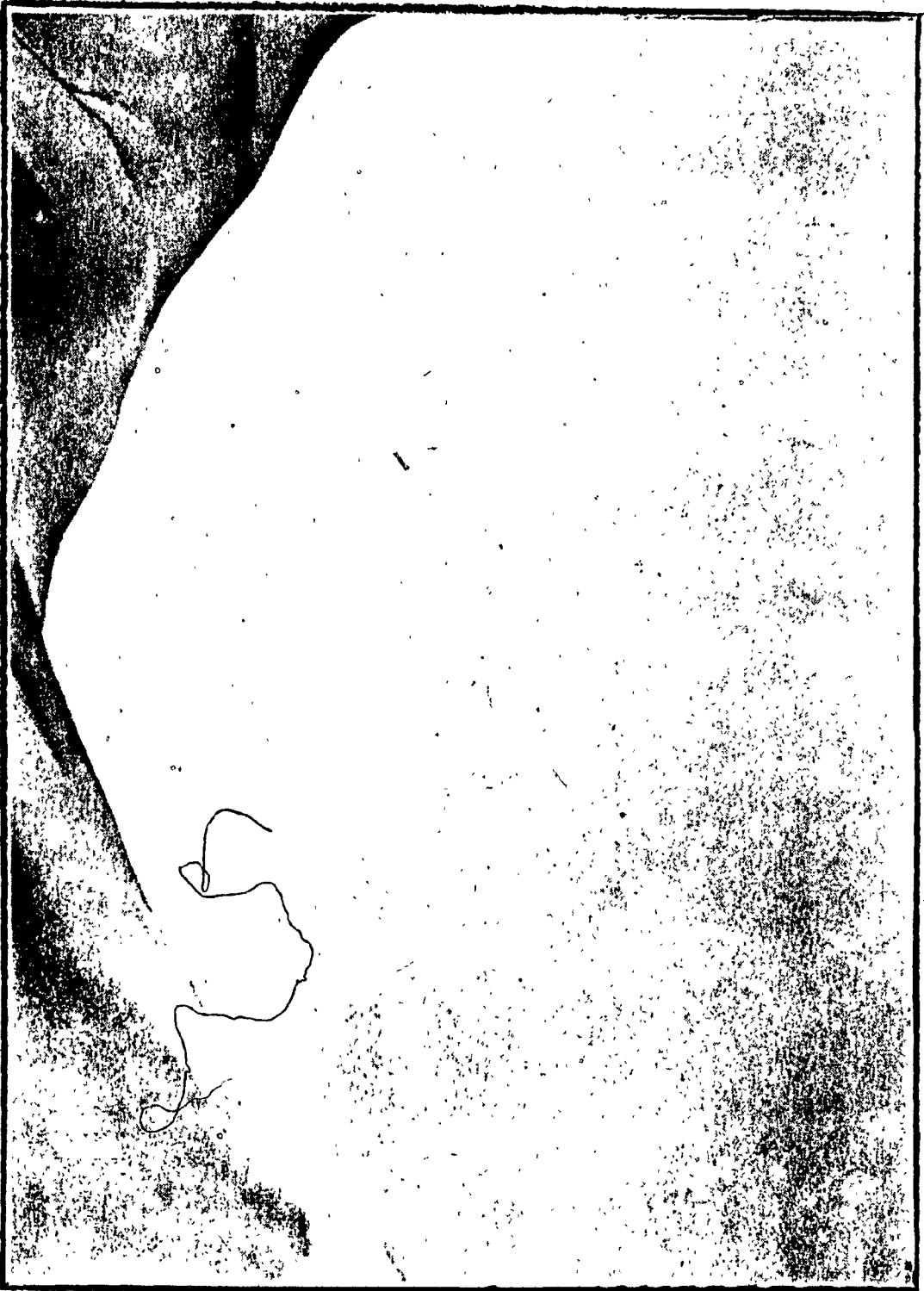
45. Ibid.

46. See Wassily Kandinsky above on page 4.

47. Georgia O'Keeffe, Georgia O'Keeffe.

5. Georgia O'Keeffe: Red Hills and Sky, 1945.

9





7. Georgia O'Keeffe: Shell and Old Shingle IV, 1926





6. Georgia O'Keeffe: The White Place in Shadow, 1942.



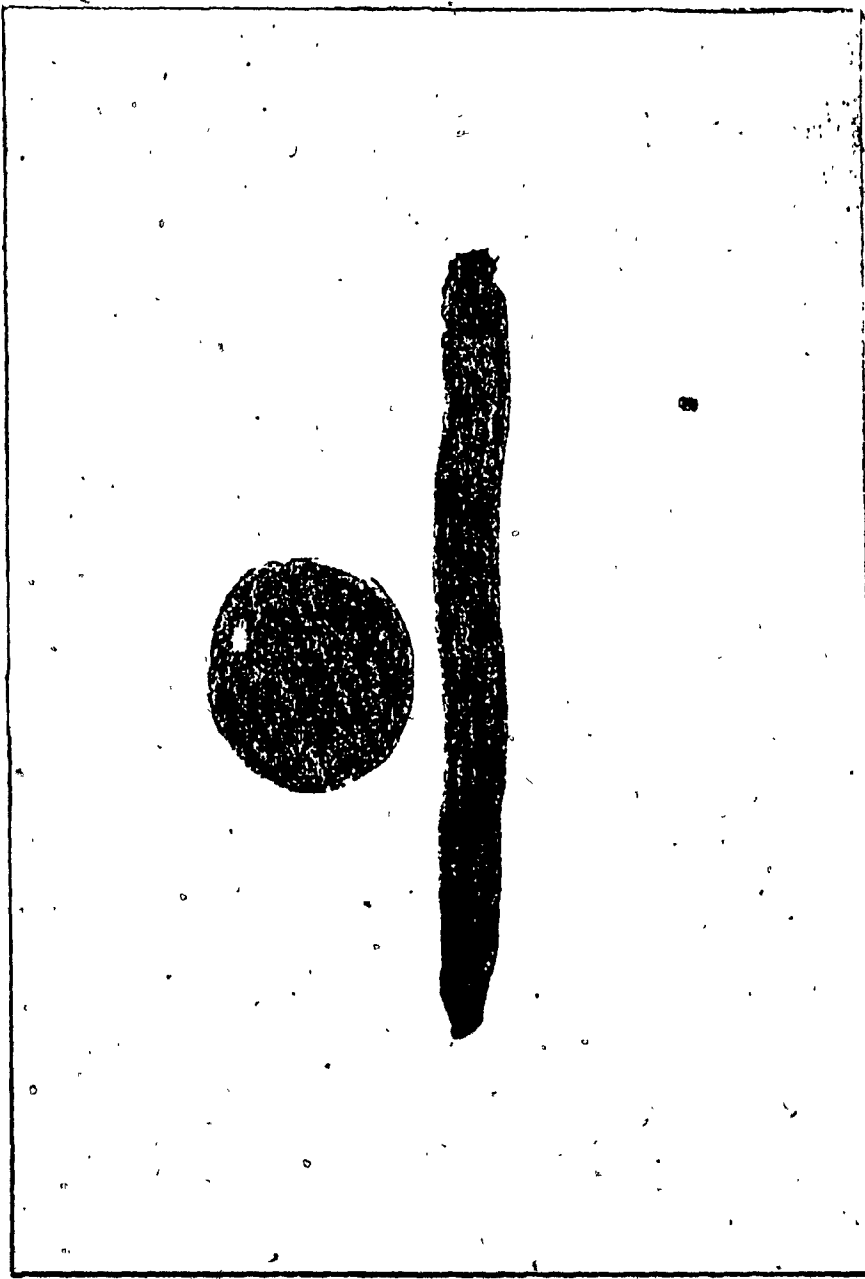
8. Georgia O'Keeffe: Shell and Old Shingle III, 1926.



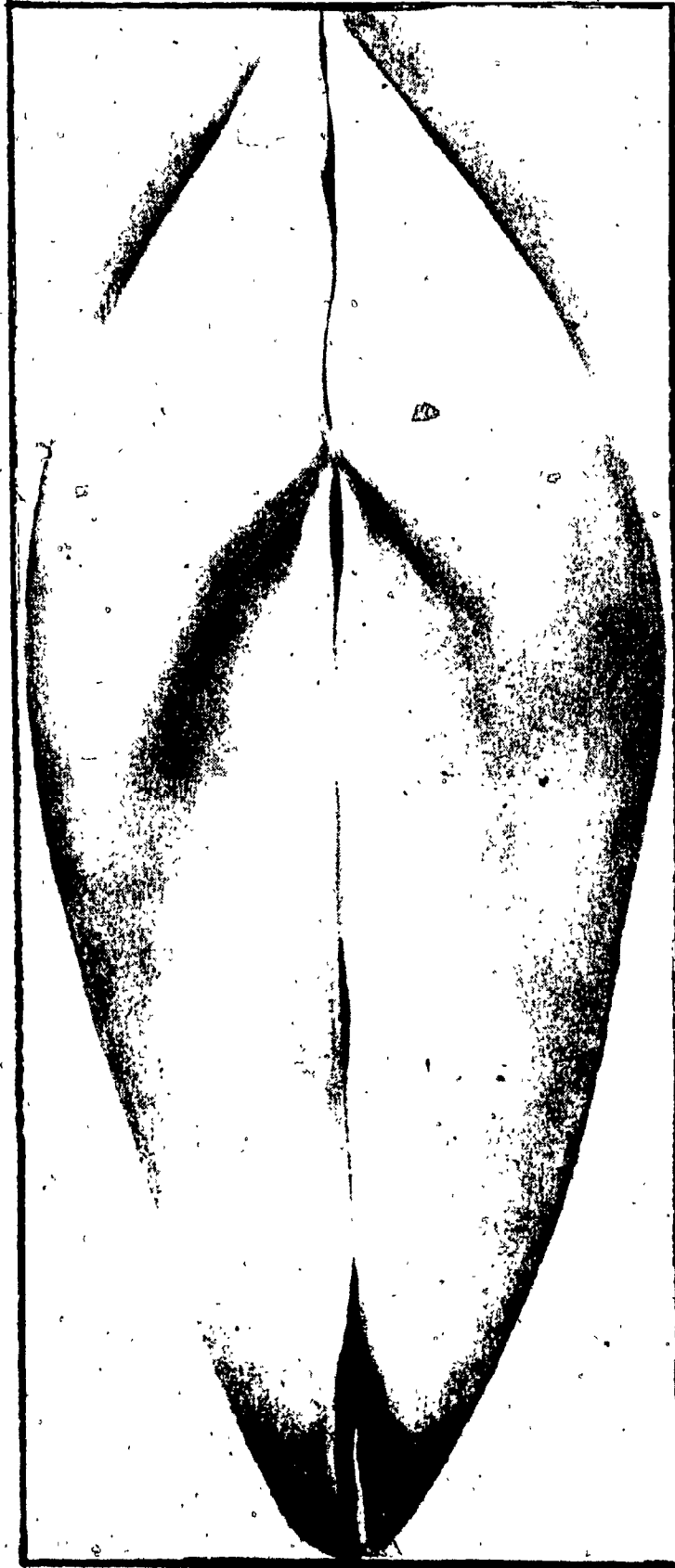
9. Georgia O'Keeffe: Shell and Old Shingle I, 1926.



10. Georgia O'Keeffe Two Calla Lilies on Pink, 1928.



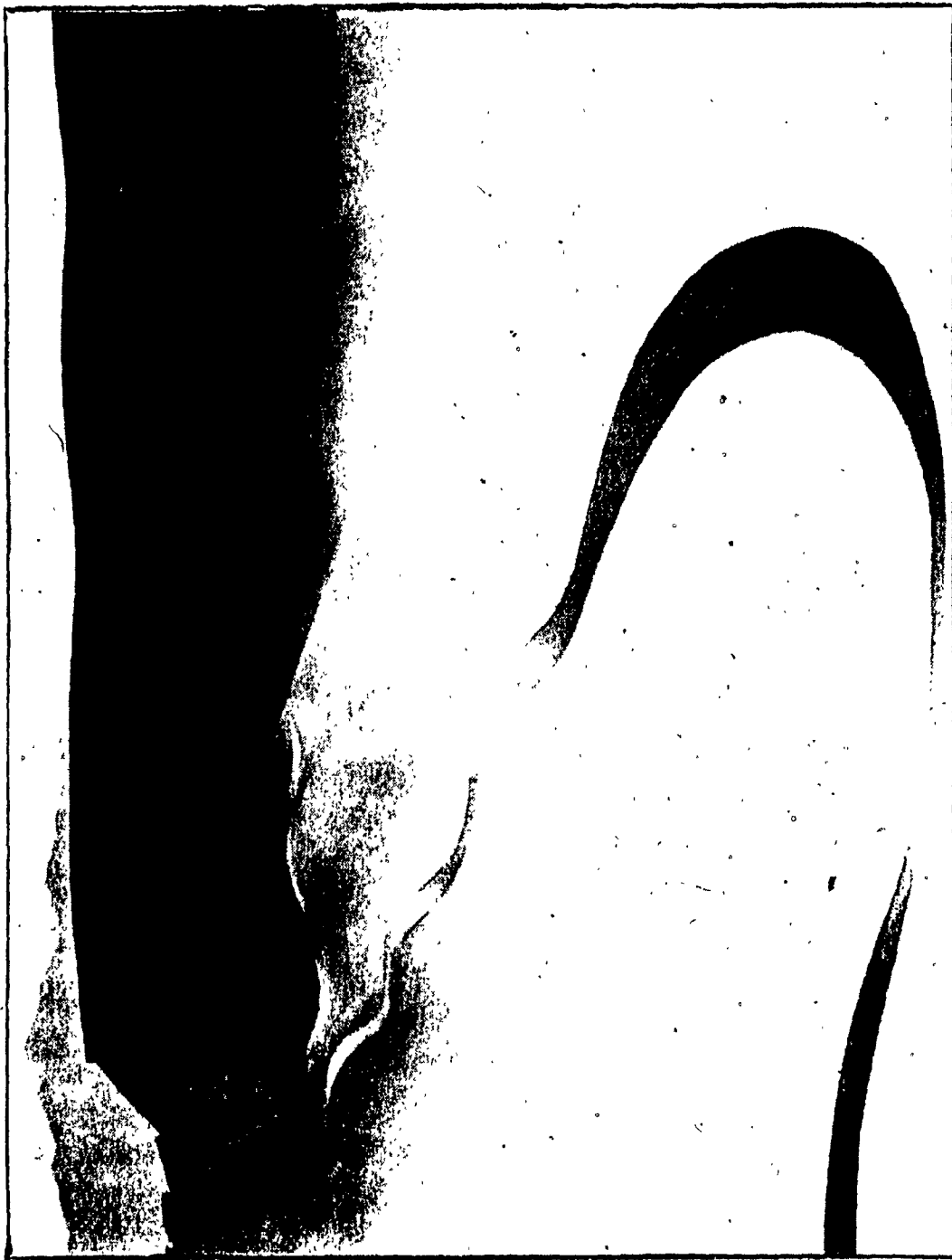
12. Georgia O'Keeffe: Blue Circle and Line, 1977.



11. Georgia O'Keeffe: Closed Clam Shell, 1926.



13. Shiryu Morita: Innocent Cloud, 1966.



14. Georgia O'Keeffe: Road Past the View I, 1964.



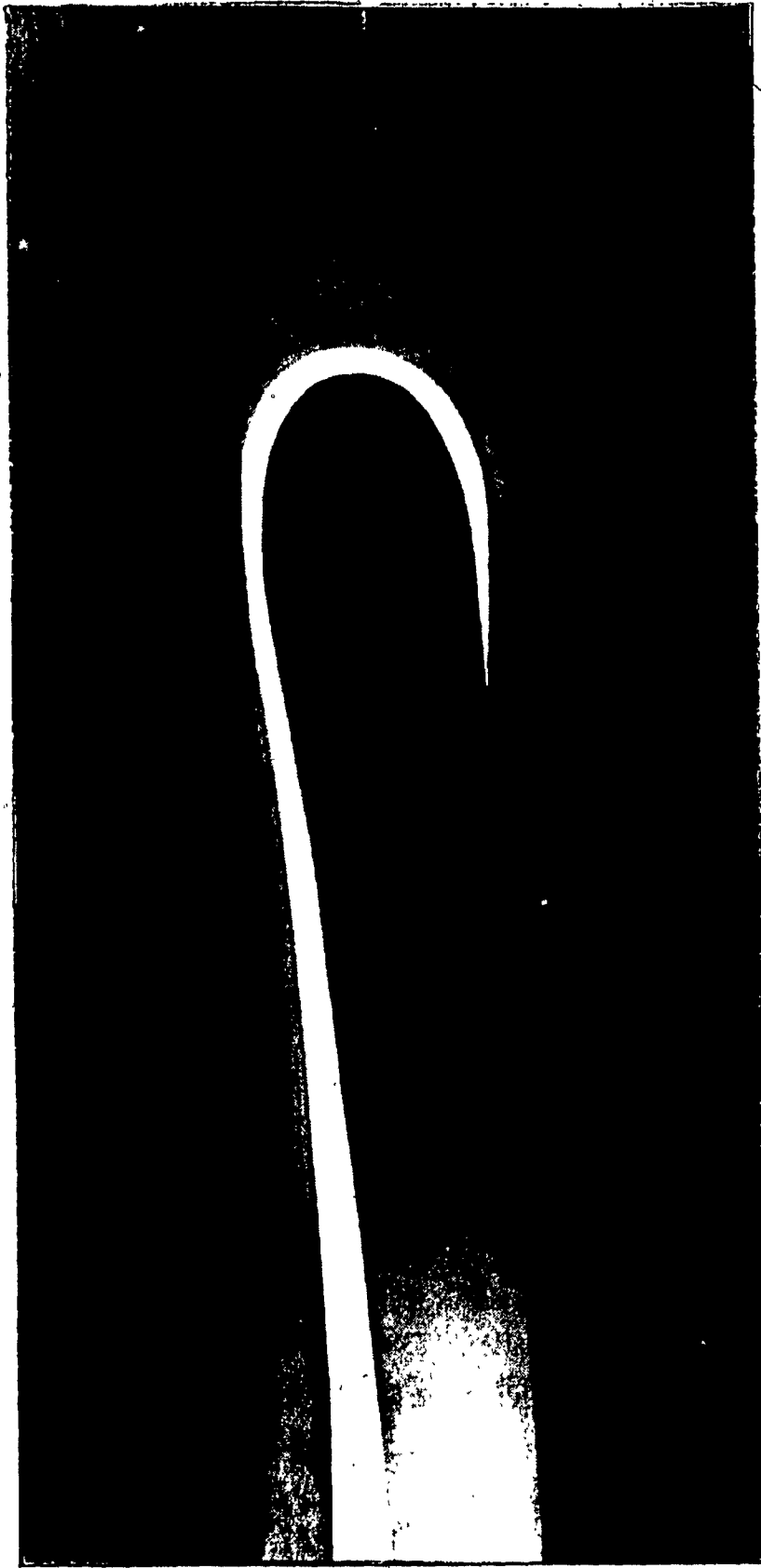


16. Jack-in-the-Pulpit III, 1930.



15. Jack-in-the-Pulpit II, 1930.

Georgia O'Keefe



17. Georgia O'Keeffe: Jack-in-the-Pulpit VI, 1930.

### CHAPTER III

#### SIMONE FORTI

I held a large grasshopper in my open hand. It swayed from side to side as we gazed into each other's eyes. We sustained this alignment of sight through an exact correspondance in our movements, which created a certain resonance between us. We danced together like this for many minutes. I had just saved its life and we were very curious about each other. <sup>48</sup>

#### INTRODUCTION

I would like to begin my discussion of the work of Simone Forti in terms of the invisible ground of sympathy with a brief summary of her biography.

Simone Forti was born in Italy, but left as a young child with her family in 1939 just before the outbreak of war. She has lived most of her life in the United States and is presently living in New York City. Forti began dancing (or began going to dance classes --- she had always been interested in movement) in 1956 at the age of 21. Recently married to artist Robert Morris, she began going to dance workshops given by Ann Halprin. Halprin was teaching movement based on the dancer's own sense of the body's potential --- how it worked and what it could do; and on improvisation based on following the stream of consciousness; and on the observation of nature. Forti talks about Ann Halprin as the first teacher to really capture her imagination. Forti studied and performed with Halprin for four years. In 1959, Forti and Robert Morris moved to New York. Forti went briefly to the Martha Graham School, and also to the Merce Cunningham School where she felt completely alienated from

the very controlled, carefully articulated movement being taught there. One important influence on Forti at the Merce Cunningham School, however, was the composition class taught by Robert Dunn. Dunn introduced the class to John Cage's scores, in which Cage was working with randomness, chance and control. This led Forti to try to become aware of what points of control she was using, and what she wanted to use, and for what purpose. During this time, she began working with a number of artists, composers and performers in New York. Her first performance in New York was as one of a group of performers in Robert Whitman's Happening called The American Moon. She began making and performing dance pieces which she called "dance constructions"; these pieces often involved the use of structures or props built for the performance. One of these dance constructions, titled See Saw, was performed by Yvonne Rainer and Bob Morris at the Reuben Gallery, on the same program with performances by Jim Dine and Claes Oldenburg. In 1961, she did a concert in a series of performances in Yoko Ono's loft, at the invitation of La Monte Young. She began, at this time, to collaborate with Trisha Brown and Dick Levin, and occasionally with Steve Paxton and to make up dances to "rule games." This collaboration eventually resulted in a concert.

#### Some Notions of Dance

In order to look at Simone Forti's work within a broader context I would like to examine, very briefly, the historical background of dance. Dancing was (and is), for primitive peoples, an integral part of their way of life; within some tribes and ethnic groups it is integrated into almost every activity of daily life. (An example is the

African "dance" comprised of rhythmic pounding of cassava root accompanied by singing.) Dancing is also closely tied up with religion, and religion for primitive people is not divorced from daily life:

...so various are dances and their functions among some peoples that they cover the larger part of life. Yet we have to remember that for primitive man there is no such thing as religion apart from life, for religion covers everything. Dancing is a magical operation for the attainment of real and important ends of every kind... the dance was, in the beginning, the expression of (the whole man for the whole man was religious. <sup>49</sup>)

According to Havelock Ellis, religious dancing can be broken down into two categories. The first he calls ecstatic dancing, in which: "the auto-intoxication of rapturous movement brings the devotees, for a while at least, into that self-forgetful union with the not-self which the mystic ever seeks." <sup>50</sup>

This type of dancing is exemplified by Sufi dancing, and some Hindu dancing, for example. The second category, Pantomimic dancing,

becomes the presentation of a divine drama, the vital reenactment of a sacred history, in which the worshipper is enabled to play a real part. In this way ritual arises. <sup>51</sup>

Pantomimic dancing is the forerunner of early Christian dances, and exists still in the "Set Dances" of the North American Indian.

Ellis sees modern professional dance of the Western world as belonging to two distinct categories. He names these the Classical, which is ancient and of Egyptian Origin, and the Romantic, of Italian origin, from which developed ballet. Classical dance is generally solo dancing (although it may be danced by groups and couples) and is based on personal expression of the individual; it is characterized by energy, intensity and passion. This type of dance has as its antecedent the ecstatic religious dance. Romantic dancing is mimetic; the individual is part of a larger group which functions together to produce the whole.

This dance stems originally from the Pantomimic religious dance.

I think that Ellis' categories can be useful in helping clarify the trends in modern dance. (Of necessity Ellis breaks off his groupings with Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis in the Classical group, and Russian Ballet in the Romantic group --- Ellis wrote his essay in 1923.) Since that time there have been many trends and developments in dance, but it is useful to group them under the same general headings in order to get a rough kind of overview of dance's progress in this century.

#### New Dance

In the new dance of the sixties, seventies and eighties there are people working very directly with this idea of manipulating movement around a concept(s) rather than around an orchestrated musical score or a story-line as in Romantic ballet. The idea of dance (eg. ballet) as a stylized, ritualized, and comprehensively choreographed set piece to be performed under very specific circumstances (with costumes, lighting, set design), gave way to an interest in movement as movement. This expressed itself in different ways, with different dancers researching and developing their particular areas of concern. Merce Cunningham, for example, who often works with John Cage, uses movements and the dancers themselves as visual elements, rather like minimal sculpture, at times. His use of movement, however, is much more akin to what Martha Graham developed (Graham began choreographing when Ruth St. Denis was still working) --- very elegant and vigorous movement often containing roots of traditional ballet steps such as arabesque, plier, jeté, etc. Dancers working in the 60's such as Ann Halprin, Trish Brown and Yvonne

Rainer developed ways of dancing in which the stylized movements and dance vocabulary stemming from traditional ballet were completely abandoned. The movement they worked with related much more closely to everyday movement and often made reference to "found" <sup>52</sup> movement such as walking, running, sitting, etc. Movements were objectified and related to actual time; the work was often very Minimal in style.

#### The Evolution of Simone Forti's Dance Form

Forti's dance stems mainly from the Classical dance tradition (in the sense of the word as used by Ellis <sup>53</sup>); her work is usually solo dancing, it is related very strongly with nature, is personal and intuitive and based on her own experience and body intelligence. Her work has a directness and lack of artifice or complicated structure that distinguishes it sharply from many Romantic dancers --- particularly the ballet. Forti has said:

I am more interested in the basic movements of the body than in invented and stylized movements that are superficial and unessential. Thus the body becomes something that is suspended in space, a thing that has weight. <sup>54</sup>

This interest in investigating the fundamental principles of movement is very evident when we see her dance; we can see echoes of characteristic movements made by various animals in her dances; a turtle crawling, a bear turning, a baby standing. Principles of balance, momentum, articulated movement, are taken apart and exposed move by move, then put together with other movements to form one continuous movement of crawling, standing up, turning, sitting down, crawling, turning, standing up, running, turning, then a spinning that goes faster and faster

responses around the point of predetermination, and would come out with movement that went beyond plan or habit. We spoke of expanding our movement vocabulary. And it did seem that the more movement one explored, the more material one could season and articulate. And of course each new kind of movement that one came upon was a welcome surprise. Every movement, every stepping off a curb, every fall of a leaf has its own particular quality. We used the term "movement quality" to help us focus on this particularity of essence, and to help us not discriminate against any movement we could experience. Another term we used a lot was "kinaesthetic awareness". The kinaesthetic sense has to do with sensing movement in your own body, sensing your body's changing dynamic configurations. But it's more than that. I can remember just waking from dreams and still having a sense of the dream landscape not only in my memory but in my limbs as well. 56

Forti's first dances in New York (she moved there after four years of studying and performing with Halprin) tended to be in the form of single tasks or activities often based on the game structures of children (figs. 18 & 19). These pieces often required constructions, usually very simple, minimal and sculptural visually, again loosely connected with children's playground equipment --- swings, see-saw, etc. All of these pieces were concerned with natural body movement (within normal range), channelled or used in specific ways to perform specific tasks. Exactly how the tasks were to be articulated in movement was left to the performer. In Huddle, for example, the performers are given the framework for their activity; how it is to be physically carried out is left to the performers' devices. Forti's work has evolved and changed over the 19 years she has been dancing professionally, but has always been characterized by the elements of humour and playfulness evident in the pieces illustrated here.

Throughout her career, Forti has been working with voice as one facet of her performances. Her investigations into what the voice can do tend to be in the same mode as her investigations with movement; she focuses on what the voice can do; what it is capable of in terms of



until we feel that she will keep spinning forever --- then she stops, looks around, walks over to the wall and sits down with her back to the wall waiting until it is time for her to start another series of movements. Her straight-forwardness and unwillingness to impose the artificiality of traditional choreographic modes on a piece --- she just stops whatever she is doing when finished, and walks off or over to another area to begin another movement, and often stops and thinks between sequences --- increases the feeling we have as viewers that we are watching her investigate and explore and learn about movement concepts on the spot. We know that she is familiar with these movements and with her body and what it can do, but we also know that she has not put these movements together in this relationship before. Because of this, what we are seeing is new, and fresh.

Forti has discussed her dance in the context of the primitive and ethnic beginnings of dance that Ellis was investigating:

I dream that these improvisations are part of a process that leads through generations, from unmanifest grass-roots to a highly evolved communal tradition. As in India. A tradition that can house the collaboration of limitless numbers of initiates. As in Jazz. The common ground must happen inductively. Not in one mind, but through an organic sifting. I feel that this kind of process can happen in dancing, and to a large extent it has happened. Americans are dancers. Strange, but true. Many white Americans are assimilating patterns that have come from Africa, getting their first experience of harmonic movement. The thread from Africa is only one of many. And the roots of our common store of movement lie in our various roots in our common experiences. 55

Forti's work with Ann Halprin laid the ground-work from which she gradually developed her own dance; her own way of relating to the world through movement. Forti discusses these early influences:

Ann approached technique through the idea that the body is capable of doing all kinds of movement. She gave us such problems as running while moving the spine through any possible positions. We called such problems "explorations". The body would give whole

creating sounds. Her work is pre-verbal; in this way she can express things that language cannot. She works with the voice directly from the body (fig. 20):

#### THROAT DANCE

This is a vocal improvisation in four sections. I limited myself to four types of vocal sounds, doing an improvisation on each. Each section had its own place in the room. One sound type was my very highest threshold of pitch. It is a matter of getting a great degree of constriction in the throat and increasing the air pressure very gradually until it just passes the threshold of being able to pass through the constriction. I can't keep this balance of pressure and constriction, constant, but I do my best, producing a flutter of clear, piercing squeaks. Another type was a loud double sound achieved with a throat posture that must be close to purring. The third was rhythmic pitch leaps, and the fourth of a similar order.

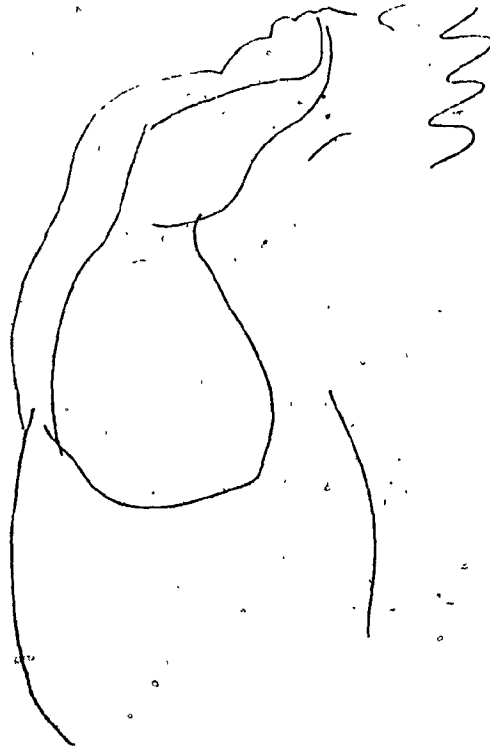


Fig. 20

Often her concerts include her singing songs that she has composed. The music may have words like in the traditional ballad; it may be a tape of sounds collected and woven together as in the following example:

Overlaid over Plumbing Music is the sound of a sound-recording of the water in the shower, sounding in recording like a brook or small waterfall and recorded in that sound and sounding within it is the sound of singing in the shower, naked and female and sounding like a girl in a skirt by a brook. 57

Forti has collaborated with several musicians/composers over the years; saxophonist Peter Van Riper, and Charlemagne Palestine are two of the people she has worked with.

After returning from her second visit to Italy, in 1969, Forti went to Woodstock; for the year following Woodstock she did not dance as an activity separate from everyday life, but was involved in dancing which was part of the fabric of the communal life she was sharing with others.

Both music and dancing had a great power over the rhythm of the day, over the cycles of daily life. Helping us stay apart, bringing us together, precipitating tides of festivity. I had been a dancer, and one thing that struck me then was that I was still dancing. I was still making movement studies, and getting into new areas of dynamics. 58

#### Simone Forti and the Invisible Ground of Sympathy

During this period we can see from Forti's writing that she became more aware of herself --- as a person; a dancer.

And there were moments of terror. I never lost my sense of identity and I always knew I was Simone. But all the acid I took seemed to break down the barriers to perception and communication between the myriad systems and processes which house the self and within which my own identity lived as one interpretation among many others with which I coexisted in a fertile jungle of interpenetration of life. With some, in a state of symbiosis; with others, in a state of organizational competition. 59

After a year of living in communes, Forti moved to California and took Tai Chi <sup>60</sup> classes with Marshall Ho'o at the California Institute of Arts. Tai Chi was to become part of a foundation from which all of her subsequent dance developed. Tai Chi was also the most specialized movement that she has studied.

During many of his classes, Marshall Ho'o, the instructor, would talk for fifteen or twenty minutes. The talks cast a lot of light on the world view from which Tai Chi comes but they were always direct communications of his own thinking about movement. And Marshall had thought a great deal about movement. He would talk to us about the things he most wondered about. Listening to his thoughts was not only interesting to me, it was vital. I learned a lot from him about what I might call the biology of movement, the politics of movement, and movement as a living model of the ways of The Way. I found that I could work on Tai Chi with the same absorption with which in my days in Woodstock I used to sit and watch the fire. In practising every day I was making friends with my inner strength. And I was developing a degree of ease and control in my movement that I had never before known and that eventually became the base for my own dancing. <sup>61</sup>

A great deal of Forti's work has been based on sympathy with nature: a further link between her work and Taoism. Halprin's workshops, which were held in the country, often focussed on close observation of the environment. Much of Forti's work in Italy evolved around the study of animal movement. She has described the sympathy that exists between her and the animals she comes into contact with:

The strongest clue I have to why I've again and again returned to the zoo is the feeling state that I'm sometimes in when I find myself looking eye to eye with a particular animal. Often I find that at that moment there's a flood of warmth that seems to pass between us and that I'm held spellbound. <sup>62</sup>

During her year of communal living after Woodstock, a lot of her attention was focused on living closely with nature and in finding her place in relationship to that (natural) world:

One morning I stood on a big round rock and put a heavy rock on my head. I was willing to be still, balanced on the rock and

balancing the other on my head, but in order to keep it together I had to keep a very slight movement, a tiny dance, going on between the two rocks. That went on for many minutes. No one else was awake. 63

Forti's work has become progressively more involved with working out the dynamics in the world through movement. Structurally, her dances are much looser than were her early pieces (eg. Rollers, Huddle, figs. 18 & 19). They are no longer "dance constructions", no longer task-oriented or as self-contained as the early pieces were. Her work still frequently involves collaboration with other performers (dancers, musicians, performance artists) and still follows the thread of investigation into animal and infant (human) movement. Her recent dances are more abstract and spontaneous than her early work; improvisation and free-association, so much a part of the work she did with Ann Halprin, resurfaces in her work now in a different and more personal form (figs. 21 & 22). Forti has described the basic technical elements with which she has been recently working as balance and momentum and their relationship. The circle has also become a focal point for study. Many of her movements are concerned with circling: walking around and around a room, turning in a tight pivot, running in a figure eight, leaning into the circle while spiraling around its outside circumference, spinning.

At times I've escaped an oppressive sense of fragmentation by plunging my consciousness into cyclical momentum. For myself I've thought of it as gathering my concentration, or centering; in short, as a rudimentary kind of prayer. 64

This interest in circling has extended to include an interest in the circle as a symbol, as in the seven circles which form the basis of the Star of David and of Arabic numerals: (fig. 23) The circle is also a symbol for the spirit or the universe or God in many Eastern religions.

Circling can also be related to different centres of gravity/dynamics within the body/self.

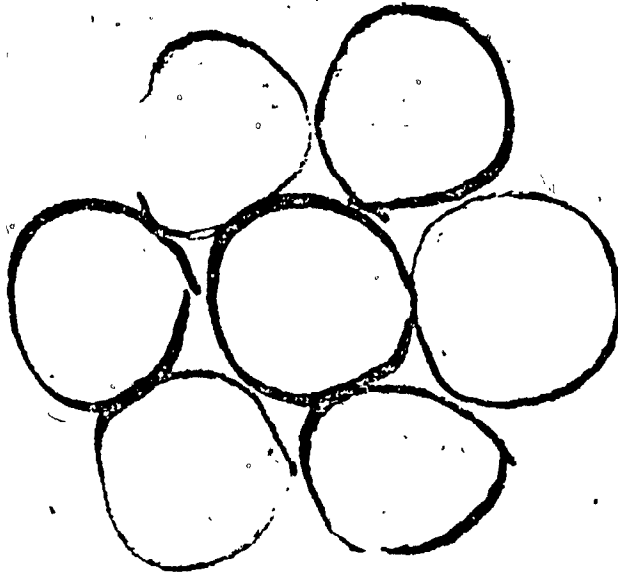


fig. 23

In my dancing I was banking from orbit to orbit. And whereas in banking I was identifying a high center with the precarious dynamics of circumference, in practicing Tai Chi I was learning to identify a low center with the stable dynamics of center. In rock dancing I had sifted out of the music the necessity of bouncing the center of balance, patterning it up and down the spine. And somehow, within the field of Charlemagne's music, my automatic pilot could give vent to many different structural attitudes, revealing the harmonics of a continent crossed by many migrations. And I pondered the idea that I was involved in a kind of dynamology. <sup>65</sup>

During the rencontre after her 03 23 03 performance (12 March, 1977, Montréal), Forti discussed her present work. Work sessions in her studio

provide her with a repertoire of material; she will work on specific "movement studies" such as turning, striding changing to crawling, etc.

I have observed in both grizzly and polar bears, a particular use of the neck and head in accomplishing direction changes: throwing of the whole weight of the great long neck and head and a follow-through of the rest of the body on that original momentum. I once observed an exaggerated form of this turning, which I learned to adapt to my body. From a crawling position, I push off onto my legs and throw my head around and back, letting the force spiral my weight around and back and drop me on all fours, heading in the opposite direction. And without breaking stride I lope along on all fours, swinging my head strongly from side to side and keeping from falling only by the fast filling in of the crawling. 66

These studies form part of a basic vocabulary of movement, upon which she draws during a performance. She comes to each performance with an overview of what material she wants to cover, and how to pace it.

#### Sympathy Between the Performer and the Environment

Forti has talked about the ritual of preparation for a performance which she follows; this is mainly focused on relating to the situation in which she finds herself --- establishing a sympathy with the space and the audience. She will check out the acoustics, the type and size on room, the floor: if the floor is slippery she will do slippery movements on the floor like fish, for example. If the floor has a lot of traction she will run in tight circles. The structure of each performance will be very loose; she will work out of what the space seems to demand, drawing upon her vocabulary of movement studies --- and her interaction with her fellow performer(s) if the piece is a collaboration. Forti has described this sympathy with a performance space with regard

to a particular performance (given in the Fine arts building in New York, 1976):

In the white room all of the windows are open. One two three four five six seven eight nine windows all open to the night. The air is soft and pleasurable and active, passing in and out. The lights are on, then off. Except for one, illuminating from below the great green fern, its long fronds full of breath. While the muffled tapping of steam bothered pipes, of metal popping, is lulling, further inducing to waiting. 67

Forti has also talked about the link of communication between her and the audience. She endeavors to transmit to the audience a kinaesthetic awareness, so that we as viewers can feel the motion in our own bodies. (She also feels that it is her responsibility to make the spark jump to the audience; that the audience has made their gesture by coming to the performance.)

The sympathy between artist and audience forms an integral part of her performances. Dewey has talked about the particular relationship between a performer and her/his audience:

The medium through which energy operates determines the resulting work. The resistance to be overcome in song, dance and dramatic presentation is partly within the organism itself; embarrassment, fear, awkwardness, self-consciousness, lack of vitality, and partly in the audience addressed. Lyrical utterance and dance, the sounds emitted by musical instruments, stir the atmosphere or the ground. They do not have to meet the opposition that is found in reshaping external material. Resistance is personal and consequences are directly personal on the side of both producer and consumer. Yet eloquent utterance is not writ in water. The organisms, the persons concerned are in some measure remade. 68

In the case of a performance artist the invisible ground of sympathy between the work and the viewer/audience is direct and immediate. Feedback about whether or not contact is being made can be picked up by the performer. The performer works within the total environment in which she/he is performing, not the least element of which is the audience. The immediacy of the situation creates a potential for great



intensity --- within the artist themselves, between the artist and the material being performed, the artist and the environment; and within the audience themselves and their reaction to the environment, the artist and the performance. Dance is, unlike painting which is done alone, a medium in which we actually witness --- and are actually a part of by virtue of our influence as part of the environment --- the invisible ground of sympathy operating as in Kandinsky's diagram:

emotion (in the artist) → the sensed → the artwork → the sensed → emotion (in the observer). 69

This extra element in performance art --- that the environment in which the work is produced is an ingredient of the piece --- provides a way for the viewer to be included in the artist's activity with an immediacy not possible in most visual art.

#### Dance State

Forti talks about being in a dance state:

I find it interesting to realize that the word "enchant" shares the same root with the word "chant". I've mentioned what I call the dance state. In a way, it's a state of enchantment. Perhaps it's a state of polarization into harmonic channels along which motor energy pleasurable flows. When I'm dancing, I am moved by that mysterious response to the music. And I pursue that special order of thoughts that come out of the body in motion and which seem to be one with the motion itself. 70

There is an interesting relationship between this quote and Ellis' concept of ecstatic dancing. Forti makes a distinction between a "trance state" and a "dance state," pointing out that a trance is by its definition limited completely to the present; in her work, Forti is interested in being in the past, present and future --- in this way she can draw upon past experience, control or pace the performance roughly in keeping

with her overview of the performance, and yet be completely involved in the process that is taking place, during the performance. She has talked about how the body's motor intelligence takes over when one is in a dance state:

The more you learn to trust your automatic pilot, the more crucial and basic choices you let him make and the more his mistake could be fatal. But the better you fly. And at great speeds he takes over anyway. <sup>71</sup>

Forti feels that everyone is sometimes in a dance state; it might be at a party where a dance state can keep people dancing for five hours or more; or rocking a baby can be a way of being in a dance state:

You can't shake a baby to sleep but you can rock it to sleep. Giving it the experience of smoothly shuttling back and forth, the momentum of its body reaching completion in either direction before returning, and back and forth. The rocker closely in tune with the rocked, closely guiding the metabolic transition from wakefulness to sleep. <sup>72</sup>

It is Forti's ability to tune in both with herself and her audience and environment; to establish an invisible ground of sympathy, that makes her work a totally compelling and moving experience in which to participate. Through her, we can get in touch with the essence of movement, and in her ability to translate her understanding of the complexities of movement she helps us get in touch with not only her perception of the world but our own as well.

Footnotes

48. Simone Forti, Handbook in Motion ( Halifax : The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1974 ), p. 13.
49. Havelock Ellis, The Dance of Life ( Boston : Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924 ), pp. 38-39.
50. Ibid., p. 41.
51. Ibid., p. 41.
52. See " A Quasi Survey of some ' Minimalist ' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Flethora, or an Analysis of Trio A." by Yvonne Rainer, in Minimal Art, ed. Gregory Battock ( New York : E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1968 ), p. 263.
53. See The Dance of Life, by Havelock Ellis, pp. 37-67.
54. Simone Forti as quoted by Germans Célant in Parachute, XI ( 1977 ), p. 13.  
My translation.
55. Simone Forti, Handbook in Motion, p. 113.
56. Ibid., pp. 29-31.
57. Simone Forti, Angel ( New York : self-published, 1978 ), p. 21.
58. Simone Forti, Handbook in Motion, p. 22.
59. Ibid., p. 18.
60. See appendix I.
61. Simone Forti, Handbook in Motion, p. 107.
62. Simone Forti, " Dancing at the Fence ", Avalanche XV ( December, 1974 ), p. 33.
63. Simone Forti, Handbook in Motion, p. 22.
64. Simone Forti, " Dancing at the Fence ", Avalanche, p. 33
65. Simone Forti, Handbook in Motion, p. 136.
66. Simone Forti, " A Chamber Dance Concert ", Drama Review, XIX ( October 1975 ), p. 39.

67. Simone Forti, Angel, p. 2.
68. John Dewey, Art as Experience ( New York : Capricorn Books, 1934 ),  
p. 158.
69. Wassily Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, p. 3.
70. Simone Forti, Handbook in Motion, p. 129.
71. Ibid., p. 99.
72. Simone Forti, " Dancing at the Fence ", Avalanche, p. 20.



#### ROLLERS

"Rollers" requires two wooden boxes approximately one foot and a half wide, two and a half feet long, and one foot deep. These are open at the top and set on swivel wheels. Each box has a hole drilled towards the top of each of three of its sides, with a rope approximately six feet long fastened to each hole. Two performers, each sitting in one of the boxes, improvise a duet of vocal sounds while six members of the audience pull on the ropes, giving the singers a ride. The three ropes fastened to the boxes seem to create a situation of instability, and in no time the boxes are careening wildly. For the singers in the boxes, this produces an excitement bordering on fear, which automatically becomes an element in their performance.



19. Simone Forti: Huddle, 1969.



In the company of the fern one can stand bending  
way backwards, hanging head and arms like fronds.

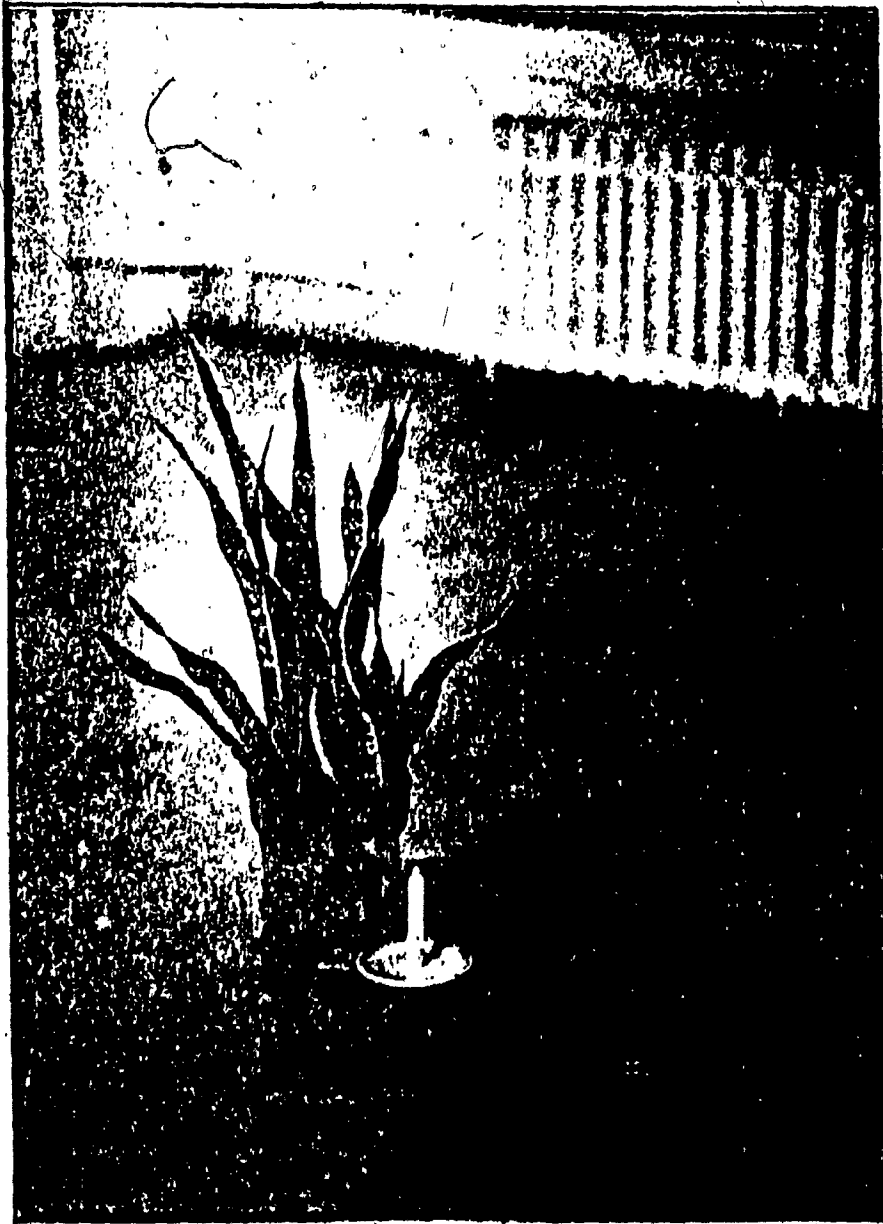
Fig. 19

## HUDDLE

### Another Dance Construction

"Huddle" requires six or seven people standing very close together, facing each other. They form a huddle by bending forwards, knees a little bent, arms around each other's shoulders and waists, meshing as a strong structure. One person detaches and begins to climb up the outside of the huddle, perhaps placing a foot on someone's thigh, a hand in the crook of someone's neck, and another hand on someone's arm. He pulls himself up, calmly moves across the top of the huddle, and down the other side. He remains closely identified with the mass, resuming a place in the huddle. Immediately, someone else is climbing. It is not necessary to know who is to climb next. Everyone in the huddle knows when anyone has decided to be next. Sometimes two are climbing at once. That's O.K. And sometimes sounds of laughter come from the huddle. The duration should be adequate for the viewers to observe it, walk around it, get a feel of it in its behavior. Ten minutes is good. The piece has also been formed in such a way that, as it ended, each of performers found six other people from the audience to get a second-generation huddle going, until six were happening simultaneously.





And in the company of the snake plant one can balance on one's back, reaching limbs, leg and arm and arm and head and leg reaching upward among each other snaking slightly.

Conclusion

To the extent that man is artist he is already delivered from his ego and has become a medium through which the true Subject celebrates his redemption in illusion. 73

Neitzsche

As we stated in the introduction to this paper, the intent of this thesis was not so much to come to any conclusions about the invisible ground of sympathy as it relates to art, but to examine what this relationship is, focusing on the work of two artists: Georgia O'Keeffe and Simone Forti. As was seen in the chapter on Taoism, the invisible ground of sympathy is the exchange or interaction that takes place between a person and whatever that person's attention is engaged with; this is based on the general philosophy of Taoism in which the qualities of quietism, freedom from comparative thinking, yin-yang, non-intellectualization and intuition provides the foundation for an attitude toward life. Interfusion between the artist and subject is necessary in order that an invisible ground of sympathy be established between the artist, the subject and the art being produced; and between the art, the viewer and the subject.

When the artist enters the invisible realm of creativity he uncovers the potentialities that are hidden in the spiritual court. To reach the state of no-thought, according to the Taoist, means to reach the realm of creativity. When the Chinese artist says that he enters the spiritual court he speaks of the ontological experience, the state of no-thought. This experience leads inevitably to the interfusion of subjective and objective reality. This interfusion initiates the process of creativity, which in turn establishes unity in multiplicity, the changeless in the ever-changing. The artist who has reached this state of oneness is supported by all the powers inherent in multiplicities and changes, and his work will be far beyond what his ego-form self could accomplish. Such a reflection of strength from the center of his being, however powerful it is, is completely non-intentional and effortless. 74

This quote succinctly sums up the Taoist concept of interfusion integral to the creative process. That this sympathy is not limited to the creative process has also been shown; sympathy can be established between the individual and whatever subject he engages with:

For in the immediate world, everything is to be discerned, for him who can discern it, and centrally and simply, without either dissection into science, or digestion into art, but with the whole of consciousness, seeking to perceive as it stands; so that the aspect of a street in sunlight can roar in the heart of itself as a symphony, perhaps as no symphony can: and all of consciousness is shifted from the imagined, the revisive, to the effort to perceive simply the cruel radiance of what is. 75

Being open to the invisible ground of sympathy that can exist between an individual and the world is not the exclusive prerogative of the artist; this interaction is open to anyone who is sensitive and receptive to themselves and their environment. It is an ontological experience and does not depend on the intellect or knowledge for its existence, but is rather a spontaneous exchange between subject and object that reflects interfusion between the observer and the observed.

That the invisible ground of sympathy plays an important role in creativity we can be in no doubt; as we saw from the writings of D.T. Suzuki and Chang Chung-yuan in particular, the invisible ground of sympathy between artist, subject and materials is absolutely essential in order that creativity take place.

If that sympathy does transpire, the artist can be said to let the tao speak through him:

In one respect, it might be described as the stage at which his whole personality is revealed in a painting, since the coordination of brushstrokes and of the composition is a direct expression of his character. Such an interpretation, however, misses the vital point: that all the steps of the painter's arduous training, all his accumulation of all the means available, all his efforts in the long process of his development of the self, should be directed by the concept of Tao and so be ritual acts sanctifying the painting that he produces. Then the tactility of brushwork is evidence less of the personal touch than of the power of Tao. The anonymity of the ritual act is, in effect, oneness with Tao. And painting is not self-expression but an expression of the harmony of Tao. 76

In this way the work is more than a reflection of the artist's personality;

it is the manifestation of the tao itself that speaks through the artist; the artist becomes the vehicle for that expression. In the Western world this same principle is used to describe the creative process; the word "tao" is not used, but the essence of the concept remains the same. Paul Klee has talked about this:

His position is humble. And the beauty at the crown is not his own. He is merely a channel. 77

And Jackson Pollack has described his experience of the creative process:

When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of "get acquainted" period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well. 78

There is an obvious similarity here with the Oriental concept of interfusion; of un-self-consciousness, of letting the work speak through the artist --- rather than the ego of the artist imposing itself on the work. When the work comes from this state of mind a sympathy is laid between the artist and the subject and the materials, that can be shared and entered into by the viewer.

Georgia O'Keeffe has shown in her writings and through her work the sympathy she establishes with her subjects --- and with nature. O'Keeffe's work goes beyond a repetition or reproduction of nature, or, in her abstract works, a preoccupation with colour and form, but is rather a statement of her response to the world --- put down in such a way that the viewer has access to this response and can make contact with the artist and the subject through the painting. Her work stands as a clear example of the invisible ground of sympathy operating in an artist's

work. Each painting not only tells us that O'Keeffe noticed and translated a subject into form and colour; it goes far beyond that and tells us something about the inner nature of that subject. As in Oriental art, when we look at an O'Keeffe painting, the essence of the subject speaks to us through the painting --- we are engaged in an invisible ground of sympathy with the tao.

Simone Forti shares this same ability to communicate the essence or inner nature of a subject --- through movement. By watching her translate her experiences and observations of the world into dance, we are able to participate in an invisible ground of sympathy not only with her as a performer but with the life systems she seeks to understand and reveal to us. As is true of O'Keeffe, Forti's work goes far beyond an attempt to reproduce or recreate elements of nature; Forti's work is a manifestation of her experience with that nature; of her interaction and interfusion with that nature. It is a philosophical similarity in attitude more than anything that allows us to discuss the work of Forti and O'Keeffe in the same context; it is their engagement with the invisible ground of sympathy; and their insistence on revealing the essence of a thing rather than merely its external form that provides a common bond --- a common base from which they both work.

Some Personal Comments --- My Link with the Invisible Ground of Sympathy

My art is just an effort to express the truth of my Being in gesture and movement. It has taken me long years to find even one absolutely true movement. 79

Isadora Duncan

Do I have a philosophy? This can best be answered by saying that what I have towards my work is an attitude, and that that attitude is

not radically different from the attitude I have about my life in general. I aim to bring to my work my complete self; to be present for the work as fully as possible. Without sensitivity and an openness to experience, no flow of information can be exchanged between the individual, the world, and the art. In my work and in my life I am trying to be open to this exchange as fully as possible --- it is not something that can be forced, and should be allowed to manifest itself in the work as spontaneously as possible, without interference or censoring. This does not mean that the work has to be done quickly with the immediacy of a sumiye painting; but that it should come directly from the artist's innermost self and not be reshaped, remodelled and generally censored out of shape by the intellect before it achieves its final form. This is the idea integral to Taoism; that the artist let the tao speak through them rather than having the individual "I" making the statement.

The consistent thing in my work is not the medium I use, or a philosophy of art, but it is myself. I am the constant in the work; I am the unifying force. As I grow and change, so does the work grow and change. I approach the world largely through my intuition, rather than, for example, primarily through the intellect or through the senses. It is natural therefore that I would deal with my work through the same medium.

Why do I make art? I also approach the world primarily visually rather than through the other senses. Art is the best way I have to examine my contact with the world, and the unexplainable. Feeling and noticing and understanding (or not understanding) is not enough --- I have to have a tangible outlet for all this; to give these things a form: it makes more sense when it's a visual form.

I need art to feel complete. Perhaps it is the further dimension of the possibility of establishing an invisible ground of sympathy with the viewer that also propels me to make art.

The more closely I get in touch with myself, the clearer and stronger the work seems to become. This process would seem to be a life process that can not be artificially speeded up or manipulated (for the sake of making art or for any other reason).

If my work can be said to have a theme, that theme is self-discovery.

Sympathy moves from all to one, creativity moves from one to all. Without sympathy there is no ground of potentiality to support creativity. Without creativity there is no means of actuality to reveal sympathy. Sympathy and creativity move together hand in hand. 80



Footnotes

73. Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy", as quoted by Arturo B. Fallico, in Art and Existentialism ( New Jersey : Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962 ), p. 55.
74. Chang Chung-yuan, Creativity and Taoism, p. 207.
75. James Agee, Walker Evans, Let us Now Praise Famous Men ( New York : Ballentine Walden Edition, 1960 ), p. 11.
76. Mai-mai Sze, The Way of Chinese Painting, pp. 119-120.
77. Paul Klee, On Modern Art ( London : Faber and Faber Ltd., 1948 ), p. 15.
78. Frank O'Hara, Jackson Pollock ( New York : George Brazillier Inc., 1959 ), p. 32.
79. Isadora Duncan, Isadora ( New York : Award Books, 1968 ), p. 9.
80. Chang Chung-yuan, Creativity and Taoism, p. 68.

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## Appendix I

### Tai Chi

Tai Chi is an ancient Chinese martial art in which integration of the body and the spirit ("chi" or life force) is sought. A complete vocabulary of self-defence movements, 86 forms in all, has been choreographed into one long series of continuous movements. The movements are executed at a very slow, even pace, with the body relaxed; each move coordinated with the breathing. The yin-yang principle of expansion and contraction forms the basis for the sequence of movements. The slow, controlled yet soft movements help promote harmony within the practitioner. Tai Chi also stimulates the circulation and function of all internal organs, thus being a preventative and a cure for degenerative diseases such as diabetes, rheumatism, etc. Chinese medicine and accupressure massage (which use the points and meridians of acupuncture) generally accompany the study of Tai Chi. Taoist philosophy is an integral part of Tai Chi, the foundation on which it is based. While Tai Chi can be used in ritual boxing and actual self-defence, it is more than anything a philosophy; an attitude towards life. The Taoist principle of going with the flow is the pivotal concept of Tai Chi.

Man at his best, like water,  
Serves as he goes along;  
Like Water he seeks his own level,  
The common level of life.  
Loves living close to the earth,  
Living clean down in his heart,  
Loves kinship with his neighbours,  
The pick of words that tell the truth,  
The even tenor of a well-run state,  
The fair profit of able dealing,  
The right timing of useful deeds,  
And for blocking no one's way,  
No one blames him. 1

When Tai Chi is used for self-defence, all actions are a reaction to

## Appendix II

### Han-Shan

Han-Shan was a T'ang Dynasty poet, writing at a time when Taoism was at its peak in China, and Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism was emerging as an important force. There are numerous legends about the life of Han-Shan; it was speculated that he was actually several people whose writings were compiled. Burton Watson surmises that Han-Shan probably lived in the late eighth and early ninth centuries A.D., and that the writings attributed to him were in fact written by Han-Shan himself and not by a group of writers. The most prevalent legend about Han-Shan is that he was a government official who retired from public life and went to live on a mountain. He became a recluse, living near a friend, another hermit called Shih-te, on a mountainside near a Buddhist temple. Han-Shan cultivated eccentric behaviour and ragged and disreputable dress; he wrote his poems on rocks and trees and on the walls of public buildings. In Cold Mountain we can follow a story line running through the poems, showing Han-Shan's dissatisfaction with his life, his search for a greater meaning to life, his seclusion and eventual tranquility.

Cold Mountain is not however, a cut and dried account of a monk's journey to enlightenment and perpetual harmony. One Zen principle is that once enlightenment is attained, the person is expected to remain enlightened. Han-Shan continues, however, to express his loneliness and misgivings throughout the book, interspersed with his growing sense of fusion with the world. His work is characterized by a very human and often humorous tone, his style is direct yet eloquent.



aggressive movement from the opponent; and all actions use, for the most part, the momentum of the aggressor. The central technique of Tai Chi is a turning away, thus allowing the energy of the aggressor to meet no resistance --- therefore a blow would have no impact.

What is more fluid, more yielding than water?  
Yet back it comes again, wearing down the rigid strength  
Which cannot yield to withstand it.  
So it is that the strong are overcome by the weak. <sup>2</sup>

Tai Chi helps the individual get closer in touch with themselves and the world; when one is deeply absorbed in Tai Chi, interfusion takes place between the self and the body: the movements provide a link between our inner and outer natures through which the Chi (life-force) can flow. The more in touch with one's inner nature one becomes, the more one can make contact with the world around one.

<sup>1</sup> Lao Tzu, The Way of Life p.29.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 74