Life in Process

A Thesis

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by

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To Aunt Dottie

Who lives a life for a simple line:
“*The heart is like a muscle. The more you use it, the better it works.*”
Who is remembered as the Mother
Who has the strength to love us all
Thanks to
my family
with their love I am nourished
my friends
with their presence I grow up
my teachers and others came before me
with their insights and encouragement I develop
all life
with her collective dreams I experience

Thanks to my advisor
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my dear friends
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and many others who offer their generous help on the way, especially
Cathy Ellis, Donald Perone, Frank Wylie
Vita

Born in 1963

Field of Study
Art
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Some references
are traced in the following
writings are only the most generalized and simplified
points of entry to the products of my thinking and my experience
up to now.

My effort is to trace
only the beginning of
the trait into a fertile and infinite forest ...

... after all
only my intuition will royally guide me!
"I will tell you why I like the air I breathe, of course it keeps me alive, but there is a more important reason. It is because when I breathe the air in I breathe in all the sound from all the voices since the beginning of time. All the voices that have placed thoughts into the air, that is, thoughts escaping from the soul through the voice into the air I breathe in. Sounds that I cannot hear --- silent sounds filling the air that generations have spoken into. Consequently filling me with words that are an invisible text. An invisible sound text which mingles with my thoughts that are invisible. In essence an internal communion takes place giving the sense of the sublimity of silent transference."

------ John Hejduk

viii
Life is a process of balancing between
the unknown and known points on a curve
full of mystery and paradox
art is an unfolding of this Mobius strip

My dream and my media
throw open careless windows
and I find in my palms
the chance to address the whispering questions
guiding me like a ship
as I steer clear some moments
in this floating chaos
I. Life-flow: Content

Where
To date my life has been divided into four periods, each approximately seven years in length. I was six months old when I was adopted since my parents could not feed their seventh child. My adopted parents divorced when I was eight, and so I returned to my birth family. At fifteen I left my family for college. When I was sent to America to study math at age of twenty two the most influential shift in my life began.
Everything changes so naturally and out of my control. It appears so much like fate and I wonder if only my life that is this way.
My experience in America marked the real beginning of my adult life including my six years of marriage. As I look back I realize that the very first choice I really made on my own was to make art -- make art after ten years in mathematics. The determination to overcome the difficulties in making this dramatic turn acknowledged and confirmed the calling of my heart.
My vision of life began to form on a different level, while my logic -- my perception of life -- changed dramatically. The more obstacles I overcome, the stronger, wiser and happier I feel about life. The more transition I experience, the closer I come to reaching my place.
The physical and mental transition has made me feel that being rooted is only an illusion. Where you are from is only the point of departure.
I have not had any chance to identify my home -- either far away from where I was born or where I live now -- as an insider. But I have been taking comfort in the knowledge that I am an outsider since I first looked into my own camera viewfinder and am therefore an observer.
Having been on both Eastern and Western sides of the earth, and being educated in both science and art, my vision is fused with the complexity of both sides. In a statement for my video installation, Tree and Buddha, made after two three-month-long trips back to China visiting the ancient people and culture of far eastern China, I wrote, “Although I left my homeland long ago, my mind still floats between here and there.

*The tree lives in harmony with nature, yet it must be strong.
The mountain are barren, but they contain treasures.*

*...*

*The tree does not move, but the tree has a human form.
The man is young, yet the presence of men here is ancient.*

*The Buddha is carved from the stones of the mountains.*

*The tree drinks from the underground river of desires.*
Figure 3
Tree & Buddha
video still, 1993

My unconsciousness seems rooted in that land while my consciousness is virtually reshaped by my education and experience of Western culture. Life is a journey in which we all arrive at some place even if we depart from different points. For me, this is probably the same place where my close friends are called for, whether they are Chinese, Japanese, Malaysian, German, or American etc. This is the place in the middle of East and West where Nam June Paik and John Cage met. This also the same place of the far west lands of China.

No matter where you were
No matter where you are
We are all somehow connected
on the same ground we stand
through the air we breathe
from the fire we burn
with water we drink, we touch, we find
What - Life and Art
I see life as some kind of progress in a nonlinear way which is defined by a lot of parameters such as age, place, race, gender, experience and background etc. -- which can be described as time, space and energy in metaphysical terms. Life is a journey whose benefits lie in the process of living. The true worth of all the important human experiences lies in the processes instead of the end although ends may shape the next process. One of the worst problems in the modern Western world is that "virtually every social system and function -- from politics to jogging to religion, exclusive (arguably) of sex -- has become little more than a means to an end," as Jim Norwine maintains 2.
This process of life needs wisdom -- spiritual guidelines. Wisdom is the insight knowledge which is based on experience and leads to wise actions, while knowledge is the awareness of facts. Both science and experience in daily life can provide me with knowledge. Art is capable of offering me the power by which I can transform knowledge into wisdom. The more closer art and life is, the more energy they can manifest. It is my dear friends Micha and Goro who helped me to open and see the threshold to a world of communion where knowledge becomes wisdom. As Micha tells me, "Knowledge can be taught, but Wisdom can only be learned through personal experience. I do hope our love and appreciation of life shine through and can touch people..." Like other artists such as Marina Abramovic, Ulay and Linda Montana, their life and ultimate yet humble love for life and people is the true spring for every vibration they make no matter if it is performance, dance or music. Their lives show me a way of being artist and making art.
On the way to understanding/living life, Zen is undoubtedly at the source of my artistic inspiration. It does not offer me much in term of any religious dogma/doctrine, while it is more a way of life. Zen guides me to the discovery of the reality of things and foundation of life in every daily experience in the most simple form by means of pure intuition.
While my physical existence causes my sense of gravity -- my pleasure and pain, Zen leads me to acknowledge the pull of life. It is the drawing power/tie/love between all things. While the power of gravity calls for the balance between yin and yang, life becomes a dynamic and somewhat mystical process/endless spiral motion of back and forth between two points, such as love and hate, life and death, joy and pain, physical and mental, past and future, reality and dream, left and right brain, science and soul, eastern and western, sky and earth, man and woman -- they are like one vortex pointing to two different directions on the Mobius strip.3 Zen calls for the harmony within ourselves. It teaches me the way of embracing life as a whole -- love, beauty as well as all problems of humanity in the process of searching for/experiencing the existence of the Self and the enlightenment of the soul.
"While it is easy to struggle over problems of life, it is difficult to love them all."

Zen master

For me as an artist, it does not take any intellectual research to realize the close relationship between art and life. As Andrei Tarkovsky puts it, in an interview

"If life is a process of spiritual enrichment, art is a means to get there."

If life is to breathe
    art is to feel
If life is being
    art is to expose
If life is to experience
    art is to embrace
If life is to live fully
    art makes me comfortable
If life is a process
    art is to capture momatun

If life is chaos
    art is to trace some order
    not the mathematical but the musical
    not to define but to connect
If life is an endless forest
    art is to find my path/way

If my art is to breathe
    only life can offer me air
If my art is to make a trace
    only life is the texture
If my art is a bridge
    only life is points of departure

Diving into oceanic depths
    pushed / pulled
Or flying above water
    balanced in mid-air
Or turning wheel of life
    vibrating like positive and negative
    charges in electricity
And standing at the threshold
    broken border between
    life and nature
    known and unknown
    conscious and unconscious
    physical and mental
"Duchamp has qualified the object into art,
I have qualified life into art."

George Maciunas

I want to integrate art into life. "Life in Process" is ever floating manifestation of my art.

Art is true celebration
no matter it is proved or disproved
realistic or abstract
emotional or intellectual
what matters is I find the ways
to live my life with
compassion with imagination
wisdom with discipline

Figure 4
Tree & Buddha
video still, 1993
How -- My art is a way of life

"From what life-flow do I take example, from what in this vast seminar of experience and memory do I make my own?"

John Throsh

I am not a narrative artist nor conceptual artist. Neither do I have the ambition to become such. My interest is not to imitate nor to represent life. My art is my way of response to life -- non-rational flow in this floating chaotic structure -- which is often personal and emotional. My work is my vehicle to provoke poetic thoughts through constructed experience, while my life gives me a sense of wandering as a child in the whole landscape where I am trapped, with mystery as well as drama as I experience in daily moments.

One night last summer, I took a short hike into a forest from a campground. I only had a dim flashlight to find my way into a deep blackness. At the beginning, my hand pointed the light onto the ground but I kept bumping into trees. It was more comfortable when I turned the light into the black space. Step by step, my intuition guided me and restored my balance before I could fall. I tried to distinguish the trees from the sizes and texture of their trunks and leaves which illuminated under the bleak light. Every tree was alive and trying to convince me of something, or confirming our brief encounter. But all I could glimpse was where my light led, as random / invisible as my mind rests / moves. There was an invisible voice in the air talking to me when my light was frozen by the caved maker on the trunk of a beech tree reading "Mark loves Lisa." "Ooh, Yes!" ...... That was how my mind spoke to myself. What were the chance that it would meet my eyes? or is its presence meant to be seen? Only a few moments in the whole life will be embodied in our memory forever --- gently reminding us of the word "beauty" ......
"The best thing can not be told, the second best are misunderstood."

Henzrich Zimmer

There are certain things we cannot talk about. Mystery still lives in this world: action and interaction, images and memory that cannot be spoken or explained, only revealed. There is mystery in both art making and life. We are often surprised how differently we react to different people and how we meet close friends at a right time and a right place. How a brief encounter may place some strong influence on one's life.

My vivid memory of my early childhood is the accident of having my left foot burned in the stove full of boiling water. It was another concrete feeling of mystery when I discovered the memory through a photograph which resulted from an incidental multiple exposure of two images which I took in two different places five hundreds miles apart. It is more than an image telling my forgotten story, but also a portrait reflecting my experience of departure from one world to another. Somehow I saw the story of my life in one multiple exposure. (see figure 7).
It is the unknown that
keeps me restless yet sanctuary as well as wondering.
I love driving, specially at night after a long and hot summer day ....
I sense my state of mind whenever I am on a road ....

Driving
  in the dark
  invisible  where I am
  but memories  thoughts  reflections of
  signs  flashing by
  random lights  on doted lines  silent trees
  exposed  a vision
  with no sight
  no language
  no doubt
  not stopped by noisy illusion
  still
  moving
  ahead

Driving
  under the sun  vibrating light
  drama  every moment
  no still point  state of existence
  reflection  chaos
  thirty frames a second
Maya / unfolded mystery
always
manifesting
behind

Driving
  at twilight
  smoke  clouds  against opening colors
  headlights  my dream  awaking
  with the expression of  my existence
  and your presence
between
wondering
now / worlds
I am still driving
on the same road where I made the departure
signs and map can only give me a sense of reference/direction
no matter how fast, how far and where I want to go
after all, I love driving ......

I wrote the poem despite the experience of five car accidents in six months. I am still driving with a valid license.
Untitled

Figure 7
Photography
20x24, 1990
Figure 8
Video Stills
1990
Figure 9

*Untitled*, 1990

B&W Photography

Figure 10

*Untitled*, 1990

B&W Photography
Figure 11

*Untitled, 1990*
B&W Photography

Figure 12

*Untitled, 1990*
B&W Photography
II. Art-Media /Vessel

Photography / Video
My understandings of life-art has been shaping my art-making. As a photographer, I use my camera as both a window and mirror, to see the external world, to reflect the internal, and to relate/connect myself to the external. I try to filter out these substantial moments in this dynamic yet chaotic flow of life through frozen images. At the beginning, my concern was more about the product, whether the image is about reality or metaphor. I became increasingly dissatisfied with only an image while my technique became more skillful. I started to be more concerned with the process -- not the process of the medium, but the process of art-life. Working with video has led me further to this world. This time-based medium offers me favorable potential to taste the stream of the ever moving visual & sound flow of life.

Along with my perception of life, it also changed my way of working. Instead of waiting and expecting a decisive moment, I freed my camera to move with what is called for every instant. While proceeding with a simple idea, I open my mind to the unreconceived and the unknown. When I am working with other performance artists, I tell them what they are going to experience in a certain space and under certain light, and then I "see what happens!" in front of the lens. The closer they can experience what we understood, the more successful the piece will turn out. I have never felt fulfillment with the final work when the performers are not into their moment of enjoyment. I have named this spontaneous process "orchestrated chaos."

Installation
The use of video and film, as well as photography, reflects our need to simulate/understand the objective world and communicate with each other. But artists such as Nam June Paik, Shigeko Kubota, and Bill Viola have taken the medium of video out of the context of television and used it as a conceptual element and technological tool in their art. The medium truly gives artists the power to refer to another time and place through a temporal image in a designed space. We live in a time of virtual reality created in part by new technology. It resembles conceptually our perception to the objective world by interplaying between objects and images, between physical time and imaged time.
Paik describes video art in the following manner: 9

"It would enable us to shape the TV screen canvas as precisely as Leonardo as freely as Picasso as colorfully as Renoir as profoundly as Mondrian as violently as Pollock and as lyrically as Jasper Johns". But art can also be as personally as the Mother.

I have been using photography, video and computer to explore technically, as well as conceptually, an inner reality which often is the projected and manipulated images of the external reality, and the process of experiencing through interaction between the internal and the external worlds. My art offers me a challenge to understand the life-picture of time-space-energy in its true manifestation. It seems natural for me to be interested in offering a real experience of interaction/reflection in a certain space and at a certain time. The combination of time-based media and space-oriented installation best conveys my vision in a basic relation of flow-vessel. It is a way to examine the same power which Mondrian tried to express in painting, only in a real time-space environment.

**Interactivity / Virtual Reality / Experience**

Both 'interactive' multi-media and 'virtual reality' are buzz words of the digital field in the nineties. The models are based on technologies that were driven from the electronic dreams were based on the very concept of consumption, male aggressive expression of control in a military industry, and the childish desire to obtain the end without going through a process of labor.

We have too much disappointment from so called 'interactive' communication systems ranging from war games to television to computer CD ROM to VR installation. This offers little more than point-click-action, and results in a tendency that might be termed a substitution of virtual reality for the virtue of Reality. It is apparent that as the commercial TV mentality has become increasingly pervasive, it has become easier for us to accept automated wars, documented mass starvation, political corruption and racism as part of the video reality, unrelated to the life we face on streets. A television show may give us more information and stories with which we may identify our own life/fantasy, without any reflective experience and without the realization of being desensitized and isolated by the
comfort and ease of being consumed. A fireplace offers us more powerful reflection while a television may cause a superficial illusion of our life. Our memories would be revealed in a quiet contemplation by a fireplace. Our love may be more truthful and intensified by a fireplace than in front of a television set. Our mind could free itself in an open field beyond the narrative montage of television.

The question is not to judge for or deny technology and its power -- whether to use it or not but rather who is using it and how it is being used. We all experience technical benefits in one way or another in everyday life. It is still a powerful means for artistic expression. Whether technology is neutral or not is up to the human involved --- it can be a server as well as a repressor. It can only serve its true meaning when it is not being misused or misrepresented. It is a vehicle just like a car or bicycle --- when we are taking advantage of a fast moving car in order to get to a remote and beautiful countryside, we may end up not finding a place as refreshing as a green countryside; when we are driving a car to get to work, we have to go to a gym to exercise our body while watching television to occupy our eyes, while riding a bicycle could refresh both muscle, mind and eyes.

Our sense of lost results from missing the connection with the Self -- it is vaporizing in an electronic cloud of image and illusion, profit and consumption, power and control. Only the transformation of the viewer from the passive role to active participant, at a personal and reflective level rather than in a programmed, and often misleading way, can make it possible to experience true engagement of the intellectual and personal. The difference between art and science is that art has the power that is never meant to be merely an expression of the technology in and of itself.

The investigation of the use of modern technology in the domain of art and in the service of humanity is a part of the postmodern practice of social discourse.

Myth

In every culture, our ancestors created all kinds of ancient myth by identifying their intimate/private experience with natural world/phenomenon. It is a primitive yet collective expression of basic human experience such as love/pain, joy/fear, and life/death. It is a way to provide an understanding of life and an intensification of life itself. It is connected with the web of life at a more general and fundamental level. Myth often takes the form of irrational and mystical stories, symbols and ceremonies. For me, although myth is not a direct source of subject matter, it provides me a channel through which my commitments can find inspiration and impulses. It helps me understand the basic connection of with the
humbled and sublime. Through this connection I can find the power that springs from the bottom of an ocean -- perhaps this is what is considered the "unconsciousness."

It seems to me that we are quite detached from our ancient mythical and cosmic experience in this fast-paused progressive technological and informational era. We all still experience primitive imagination and unconscious reverie daily in a more private manner. On the other hand, film and video as two forms of mass media have been engaging in creating new mythologies, which are often involved deeply with violence, sex and politics, in the form of forced/commercialized information and entertainment. Has departed from myths, religion has been practiced in corrupted forms of faiths or truth to justify its power. And modern technology that is created to expand our abilities to reach and control nature, often leads us to a commercial and programmed massive zone with a broken connection to our individual wills.

We are haunted by the image of exterminating ourselves as a species by means of our own technology. Growing up in an advanced technological world, a teenager is accustomed to comfortable and efficient cars. When he is not driving, he is used to asking his mother for a ride to a nearby school. He applies "they are born to drive!", when he is asked by his mother "what are your feet for?" His clever answer may well summarizes the concern we need to pay attention to -- What kinds of mythology technologies are creating?

Artists and scholars begin to cry for establishing new bridge between inner reality and external reality, like the video artist, Gary Hill, Rita Mayer and Mary Lucier, scholars Joseph Campbell and Gaston Bachelard. Art should express a way of making the bridge leads to where we came from: to find the myth and dream within the real, to see the feminine within the masculine; to connect the spiritual with the rational; to embrace the natural with the human. Myth / Zen / Art can offer us a way of looking into our inner source and making connection with the external world including civilized cities and primitive jungles -- they are more concerned with the virtue of the Reality.

As Gregory Bateson notes in "Steps to an Ecology of Mind",
"we are approaching a culture where we, like the Balinese, can have no art, but rather do everything well." 10

It is the spirit of art -- to ritualize one's self, one's life and environment including the primitive jungle as well as virtual reality.
III. Evolution

I expressed my personal vision by translating the metaphorical power of icons like nature, fire, light, smoke, ashes, trees, chair ladder and etc. in a variety of forms and context.

In the piece titled Codes, the computer processed images of a person's hand and an ancient Chinese columns are to be presented in large scale so that the lines and forms are broken into millions of pixels -- units with binary data, with colors and texture inherent in the hands and column. The process of computer transformation in breaking down any information into a binary system is coincident with ancient Chinese philosophy that any phenomenon can be understood through the interplay of Yin and Yang. That is a process of encoding and decoding. While keeping the original intact, the computer enhanced images will create symbolic information that is personal, historical and cultural. So it becomes a visually interesting conceptual reading about the person and the culture. The link is a metaphor of technology and spirituality. ( see figure 13 )

In an untitled piece, I used large panels of fragmented photographs of two male and female figures and video Colored Water, in which images of figures are shown with wave pattern of water. It is to deal with the dual energy pattern of both man-woman relationship and oneness versus wholeness, composed and decomposed, taboo and acceptable, serious and humorous, real and imaged, emotional and chemical. ( see figure 5 ).

In another installation Energy / Gravity, a burned ladder is placed on a wall and acts as a passage from a space where a burned chair sits, to a monitor hung against the wall on the ceiling. The chair seat has a heart shaped hole through which a video monitor shows images of fire. The monitor on the wall shows close-up images of smoke (see figure 14 & 15). Life is shown as a process of combustion, burning and regenerating the energy from the very places of our body. The heart guides and feeds the fire which resides below the stomach. What leaves the body is a trace of love and hate just as ash or dust!
I have been working on a series of projects named **Life in Process**, which centered around the idea of examining our relationship and experience, to the five elements: fire, water, air, earth and ether, as modern men as well as the children of our ancestors.

The first piece in the series takes the form of video performance. On a white stage with multiple video monitors and a video projector, a live Butoh performance in a white box is visible only through a camera mounted on the ceiling, which interacts with video images of nature, fire, light, smoke, people, cities etc. (see figure 16)

In the second piece, I used five video monitors in the shape of a cross to express the struggle and sacrifice between human, civilization and nature. Modern life is a kind of infinite recycle of burning and consumption from trees to plastic cans, from the organic to the material. (see figure 17 & 18)

---

**Figure 13**

**Codes**

*Three panels of computer processed images:*

- an image of detail from an ancient Chinese column, placed in the center; two images of a person's hands, placed in two sides;
- Each image comprises of nine modules approx. 2x2 feet each.
- The whole mural looks like a giant computer screen, approx. 18x6 feet.
Energy / Gravity

Gravity is the enemy

The fire in our bellies

Figure 14
details
Multi-media Installation, 1993
Hopkins Hall Gallery, The Ohio State University
Energy / Gravity

carries us skyward...

Figure 15
Multi-media Installation, 1993
Hopkins Hall Gallery, The Ohio State University
Life in Process #1

Figure 16

Video Performance, 1992
The KATZ and DAWGS Gallery
Columbus, Ohio

On a white stage with multiple video monitors and a video projector, a live Butoh performance in a white box is visible only through a camera mounted on the ceiling, which interacts with video images of nature, fire, light, smoke, people, cities etc.
Life in Process #2

Figure 17

Video Installation, 1993
Haskell Hall, The Ohio State University
Materials: Six monitors, one video projector, woods, cans, trunks
Images: Figures in the central monitor, nature landscapes
in two side monitors, and skylines in three vertical ones
Life in Process #2

Figure 18

Video Installation, 1993
Haskell Hall, The Ohio State University

Materials: Six monitors, one video projector, woods, cans, trunks
Images: Figures in the central monitor, nature landscapes
in two side monitors, and skylines in three vertical ones
IV. Seer and Toucher -- Life in Process #3

This installation titled "Seer and Toucher", is originated in my personal experience of both childhood and adulthood, and is strongly motivated by the elements of fire and water, and their uses in ancient philosophies, myths and psychology.

Description
Now I can only guide your imagination through the installation:
You take off your shoes and socks and enter a door up a short stairway where you step into a total darkness. Led only by a solitary candle flame at the end of tunnel, you are walking, wondering and attracted towards the light with bare feet on soft fabrics and not realizing that the path narrows, until you can go no further toward the light.
Your instant will guide you to the next dim room through a hidden passage. In the wall, you are surrounded by four larger-than life size images of naked figures, moving and touching their own bodies very slowly and sensuously under dropping water ... Heard is the beat sound of dropping water from far in the distance.
At the end of this room, a trace of light points to another entrance leading to an enclosed space. This is the round fire/water mirror chamber ... you find yourself surprisingly stepping in water and see the reflection of your own body, lit by the light of fire, in the water and the round mirrored wall superimposed with images of huge dancing flame. This intimate space with fire and water seduces you --- The seer and toucher ritually emerge in the experience of having a shower or bath as it is directly deciphered and reflected in the video images. The objective contact with water and the subjective experience driven by flux images of fire provide you with a chance to look within ourselves. The illusion that fire arising from an ocean keeps the swimmer warm and certain of the destiny, while the water fulfills one's longing for joy.
The viewer leaves the same way in own's own phase...
The installation is meant to be experienced by one person at a time.
Where --- personal
We all know fire and water. We all experience the gravity on this planet from different pulling. I wonder why water always falls down while fire always tries to escape the gravity even if it never succeeds. While remembering my experience of contemplating fireside and water in the early childhood and having been fascinated by the metaphorical power of fire and water for years, it was some moments of experience that lead to the final realization of this piece. On a weekend of the summer in 1993, I was camping by a lake out of Columbus:

*After long hours of swimming in a lake surrounded by trees, I was seized by the intimate feeling of being close to and being part of this warm, tender mass when I was trying to hold my body still. I did it! When I held my breathe and closed my eyes, my body was held still by water without any other physical effort! Yes, my body is mostly water, and it seemed to that only difference is my breathe. It seemed to me that I was swimming in pure ether, being engulfed by the universal ocean and being in whole harmony with this organic substance! But the inner joy was a thousand times more infinite, more luminous and more incommensurable than the atmosphere with which I was thus mingled. I realized what the aesthetic experience is connected with!*

Why -- fire and water
I choose fire and water as metaphors for two points in life. I want the viewers to personally experience fire and water: their power, their contrast and their interplay, to see these well-known elements in a different light.
Fire and water alone has the power of being both subject and object at the same time, within us and outside us, invisible and dazzling, and they are the fusion of past and present, of soul and things, of spirit and matter. It seems to me that to live with fire and to embrace fire with water, is the true journey of our life. By showing the seductive power of these elements, I want to awaken the ancient myth of creation as an intimate union of the dual power of fire and water --- the Father God and the Mother Goddess 12 ( various myths in different cultures could be found in some books listed in the references ). This ritual message is directly connected to our daily life experience of having a shower as a true celebration of life itself.
Its way

Rubbing together
back ... forth ... in ... out
as a match vibrating seed of life
with sound of joy from
a place of darkness coolness
as waves upon a shore
up and down empty and full
enveloping flame of desire
bubbling thirst of touch

Fluxing glowing
reach ... expand ... flow ... sway
hot tongues inviting
touch with passion away from
cage of estrangement oscillating
power of desire
rise ... fall ... peak ... return
fountains the Moon
dance gravity
will a place of stillness
between past and future

Falling drop
pouring blessings
caressing churning
from the vast depths of ebbs
reach touch find
never stop blood
red as fire blue as ocean
curves of fresh
path of least resistance
boundary stone
reaching connecting refilling
river of life

Breathing deeply
in ... out ... come ... go
wave of fire feeding
blood with heat molten center of
the Earth burning fears joys
consciousness
breasts the Mother
a warm glow of orange
pulsing quivering igniting

Breathing deeply
in ... out ... in ... out 13
Figure 19

Seer and Toucher
Multi-media Installation
Video Stills, 1994
How
The whole installation is designed around a multi-layered thinking.
The metaphorical relationship between fire and water led to a spatial order of the basic visual elements: flame, shower images, fire images, and water in three separate rooms which are connected by passage ways: a circle from fire to water to fire / water to water to fire again. Leaving behind the fluorescent light in the hallway, the viewer encounters a flame, then images of people in showers then a larger-than life flame with water in a pool. Finally he leaves with the very flame behind, and remembers being somewhere, on his way back to his life. All visual images, sounds, and objects are reduced to the minimal and the simplest in order to speak to the viewer in a private and direct manner. All necessary material like carpet on the floor and candle holder are chosen to balance with all others: red carpet and sky blue painted ceiling, red candle and its ocean blue holder. Formally from a birds-eye view the whole space consists of one triangle, one rectangle, and one circle, that are connected in a way resembling a layout of ancient royal tombs in the Buddhist and other traditions (see figure 20).
It is less about the idea of than the physiological and emotional sensation of space/time.

Figure 20

3D plane
Sear and Toucher, 1994
Light/Dark Tunnel
Mysterious darkness of the space encompasses the viewer as he enters the room. It is a darkness which temporarily hides one from seeing the architectural reference of the room, blurs boundaries and conveys a sense of emptiness. For the viewer full of expectation, the initial lack of orientation instinctively means an intensive concentration on sensory perception in order to gain points of reference, and an open reaction to the unknown. Before the viewer becomes used to the darkness, his attention is attracted to the mysterious flame whose presence, even from a seemingly far distance, is inviting and tempting. It demands a state of mind in which one must trust in themselves and the artist, from the moment when they are asked to take off their shoes and socks. It is a state in which everything else is forgotten......The mind is so far away it cannot even remember where it is......And time suddenly ceases.

Shower Video Room
This altered state of sensation of space/time is reaffirmed by the altered 10% slow motion appearance in the video images of nudes in the second room combined with the remote sound of slow drops of water that echoes a heartbeat. The images float in a blank/black background, their larger-than-life size and the extreme slow movement of the figures and flame dance in the projected video images. The viewer is impressed with a physical relation more than a mental one.

Figure 21
Dark / light tunnel
Seer and Toucher
Multi-media Installation, 1994
"Here in this body are the sacred rivers ......"

Learning to accept our body, feel it, validate it, and love it -- These are the true callings from the subtle action of touching one's own body. The skin is the boundary of our bodies. The simple act of touch, of reaching out, of soothing, is the need to feel the real, the basic, the simple sense of connection, to feel a sense of satisfaction -- a counter to pain, tension, and estrangement, and healing as well as the expression of breaking a boundary, restoring and enhancing our whole organism. Through the physical expression of our being, by look, by touch, by movement, or by inner sensation, we can learn the language our body speaks and discover ever deeper parts of ourselves. It is the language of water --- sensation, pleasure, movement, and nurturance.
Fire/Water Mirror Chamber

Coded within our nerve impulses are our needs and desire -- to see and be seen, to touch and be touched. The men and women in the video are the perceivers and the perceived; they act and are acted upon; they are the sensors and the sensed. The viewers constitute and experience, in the last room, a dialectical interaction with what is around them and within themselves -- they are both the actor and observer of their own activities, the seer as well as the toucher.

Etched in the flesh and posture of the bones are our desires followed by our pains and joys. Desire rises from the need to expand, to move, and to be alive through the pursuit of pleasurable sensation which leads ultimately to union.

“Sexuality is at the center of this wheel of life.”

15
“Lust, the primal seed and germ of the spirits, existed first ... The seers, looking into their hearts, discovered the kinship of the existent and the nonexistent.”

Rg Veda 10.129.4 (455)\textsuperscript{16}

“Sexuality is a scared ritual of union through the celebration of difference.” As Anodea Judith points out, “Yet we live in a culture where this element of our lives is either repressed or exploited. Television screens allow our children to watch murders and crime show but censor any scenes that involving lovemaking. Still, the need for pleasure push onward, and people instead seek outlets in the form of alcohol and drugs (to loosen cultural inhibitions) violence, rape, amusement parks, poorly made pornography, and millions of dollars’ worth of advertising, playing on the repressed sexuality in all of us. ... It is not in desire that we are trapped. It is rather the repression of desires that puts us at cross purposes to ourselves.” 17
Figure 25

Video Stills

Seer and Toucher

Multi-media Installation, 1994
Figure 26

A view in the fire/water mirrored chamber
Seer and Toucher
Multi-media Installation, 1994

*If desire is the seed of movement
pleasure is the root of desire*
*If fire is the spirit of water
water is the container of fire*
Process / Construction
Much of the Seer & Toucher was envisioned during the quiet hours of night, in dreaming and awaking, far away from the crowd or cameras. The terror as well as the excitement of being alone in the beginning of the creative process was overwhelming. But I now realize, with great pleasure, that the journey has not been so solitary after all. My joy of being involved in this intense process, highly contributes to the evolution of the birth of the project. It owns a great deal to the trustful and graceful expression of the performers, half of whom had never performed nude before, and the generous and enthusiastic supports from the donors and other people including teachers and friends. The final construction in the space would be impossible without those strong and warm hands of this group of people. All those sleepless nights would be rather unbearable without their generous companionship.

Responses
The piece can not be explained in an artist’s statement except at a superficial level. Each person responds to the physical experience of this piece in a different way. As a poetic expression of something real and existing within ourselves in a daily action, it does invite open interpretation out of the participants’ personal experience within the space and at the time. There are some of very poetic responses which were captured in the last two days of the presentation.

"I found this to be very sensual, soothing & peaceful --- it was difficult to leave ... Was this what the womb was like I wonder? Thanks for the opportunity to wonder!"
"Truly amazing exhibit. I felt like I was going to die."
"Wow! I loved the feeling of walking barefoot, the first light looked so o o o o far away ..... When I left the ‘pool/flame/room’, I almost crashed into myself..... I wanted to stay much longer, to lie down in the middle room ... Thank you!"
"I love it --- its wonderful, very spiritual, very mystical. The water, the fire at the end of the corridor, the fire dancing on the mirrors like spirits dancing. Fabulous! I’d like to have this available all the time as a sanctuary."
"Beautiful & very nihilistic --- I experienced strangeness & mystery."
"Mastery piece, highly imaginative, feelings of uncertainty, calm, and surprise --- moving"
"...... Incredible in how our senses are guided along through the project: the enclosed walls, etc. Quite an experience!!"
"...... Transition from personal experience to voyeurism to personal experience raise questions of relation to or comparison for the experience of someone else......"

"...... The narrowing corridors are very effective to remind me of how we measure every thing against our own bodies...... There is a very slow, smooth quality about this piece, compelled with a slight feeling of fear --- from darkness and the unknown."

"...... Great transition from entrance, observance of characters as ‘others’ then a baptism in the water which brings about a sympathy with the characters. We become sharers of the experience / time slows, suspends. The idea of reflections, illusions is great. The experience makes one slow down and ponder / reflect."

" Thanks for sharing. As I entered I was full of fear but the candle definitely welcomed me, even urged me in. The different videos on screen compelled me to look harder and did disturb me a bit. Finally putting me into the water and fire mirror chamber really engaged me, causing me to look differently at the videos as I left."

"...... Your presence was evident throughout --- a feeling of another in the work --- your ideas taking shape through the environment and the sensations it produced......"

" It was better than the two dreams I had about your work. Yet you capture the dream in a more profound experience that I could sense, feel & smell. The child in me wants to go there to hide and cry and feel safe. Thank you for sharing your magic with me --- It entered my subconscious and is now part of my life experience......"

" ... It is best experienced in nude."

In fact, most participants have difficult in expressing their responses in words but most exit with very joyful and expressive faces. One dancer friend drawn a picture in the comment book to express her personal understanding.

**Her Life**

These quoted lines reaffirm my personal vision of this piece --- it is intuitively feminine. I quoted those words in a way to confirm her own life, and her own personal relationship with each person who comes to be acquaintance with her. Because of my personal involvement in giving her birth, I can hardly have a fresh relationship with her to experience her as an ‘encounter-er’. It is the most basic experience that touches and triggers our unconsciousness and our connection within / between our bodies and our minds. The piece retains her own life right after encountering the first witness. Even through she exists physically only for two weeks,
she is strong enough to live with the 'experienced' as he remembers his brief moments of being this place and seeing these floating images whether it was only five minutes or thirty minutes.

I get to know her more so after she grows up on her own, through the expression of others, and the process of documenting and performing. Like a daughter, born from the web of life, she reaffirms my efforts and teaches me more about my art as well as life than any others, through the process of understanding her, loving her, and cherishing with her. She is the reflection of my love.
V. Conclusion

While “Seer and Toucher” is a very personal project, but, it is still impossible to measure how personal she is, due to her universal connection with each of us at an emotional level. While she is created to provoke intimate and ritual experience, it is difficult to know whether she succeeds or not, or to what extent. But the emotional depth she revokes: whether it is anxiety, surprise, fear, joy, calm, serenity, loneliness, delight, spiritual, mystical, or other private feelings, provides the sensory poetry of her life.

Knowing the need to recall a sensuous and emotional potential repressed in the notion of progressed civilization, high art and commercial usage of electronic media, it is my attempt to offer a unreferential space and timeless experience on both physiological and intellectual levels, using this medium of installation with these subjective materials (fire/water) and objective images (of flame and figures in water). I want the viewer to pay attention to subtle elements, and to see things in a different light --- The seers to see the invisible and the toucher to touch the untouchable and the intangible. The research in mythology, philosophy, psychology --- wisdom of those who came before me contributes to the product of my thinking and my experience. But at the end only visual intuition guides me and participants to trace the beginning of the trait into another deep and silent dimension between the physical and the mental, the emotional and the intellectual wonderings. It is a willingness to discovery and confront with the vulnerable and the powerful, offering us the full magic of time-space experience.

This new installation is another step in my journey of searching for a contemporary mythology within the domain of art. Like other projects, it opens a door to a new dimension where my personal expression and the universal connections can meet. The subject seems to be ancient; the medium is contemporary; the vision is uniquely fused with the complex intertwining of two diverse cultures, intimate experience and intellectual knowledge, spirituality and technology.
If my art is a vessel
only life is the flow
whether it is water or blood
not being still but flooding
from the beginning of time
Whether stream or ocean
not sampled but exampled
from the origin/root of unconsciousness

In a very encouraging way, the following words by Eric Meyer may express the closest of what I could possibly achieve in my art and what I envision of the soul which will nourish my work in the future,

“The process of living and working, the inevitable sense of drama and mystery that both entail, the balance that is required to both explore the unknown and confront the know: these elements are what give his work its undeniable sense of beauty and power, as well as its rich flavor of vitality and authenticity. . . .

Gu’s efforts in this arena (installation) demand the transformation of the viewer --- from the aesthetically traditional role of passive, almost voyeuristic observer to that of active participant and contributor to the work itself. Through this metamorphosis the art engages the participant in an intellectual and philosophic discourse that goes far beyond the point-click ‘interactivity’ that has become the watchword of the digital nineties. Gu’s installation work retains its authority because, despite his high-tech tools, the interaction takes place on a very personal, very human level; the technology is merely a means to a personal apotheosis, not a display in and of itself.

. . . .

Among other things, ‘Seer and Toucher’ is an adventure, an experience in autognosis that forces the participant to confront and revel in primal emotions through Gu’s anything-but-primitive emotional wizardry.”18
NOTES


3. Mobius strip is a one sided surface that is constructed from a rectangle by holding end fixed, rotating the opposite end through 180 degrees, applying to the first end. It is the most basic mathematical non-orientable surface on which you can travel from one point on one side to the same point but on the opposite side without crossing its boundary, while you are completing a circle in a 3D space. This model provides me with a concrete metaphysical object with which I can visualize a system of oriental thoughts dealing with the idea of duality.


5. quoted from a broadcast interview with Andrei Tarkovsky *A Poet of the Cinema*


7. quoted from my college friend


11. There are different metaphysical theories and practices in different cultures. They are very closely related despite their different terms. Among others, a very resourceful introduction can be found in a wonderfully written book by Anodea Judith and, *Wheel of Life*, Llewellyn Publications, St. Paul, 1993.

12. Different mythologies can be found in the following references:


In the following books, Gaston Bachelard offers depth psychanalysis based on four elements:
*Water and Dreams*. Dallas, 1983.

13. This poem is inspired by a book, *Wheel of Life*, by Anodea Judith, in which she designed different ritual meditations based on four elements: earth, water, fire, and air. I encountered the book in the process of writing this thesis, and is inspired greatly by her insights in the writing.


15. Ibid. p. 132.

16. Ibid. p. 131.

17. Ibid. p. 131.

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