

Connection and Disconnection - in Space, or in Time

Tadasu Fujii Associate Professor, Tokyo Zokei University

Translated by Jun Itoi

Video art work is titled, "Let it be". This work contains the still images of various combinations of the pieces of metal material, and switches continuously to the next image along with the same titled song by the Beatles. This work is exceptional for Hase's previous works which mostly used wood as material. It is because this video art was created for his presentation to the Royal College of Art. And, yet, this video reveals more of his notions about art making than his wood sculptures.

The way Hase handles materials is not what pushing his ideas onto them. It is more focused on the process of the relationship between wood and himself, and they make gradual transformation in that process each other. Although, the theory, "Idea" is origin from the thought of Plato, the meaning of it had changed gradually, and it started pointing the own ideas of artists since 16th Century. The sense of values of self-expression of each individual, which has become the main stream in the modern art era, is on the extended line of this idea.

This kind of sense of values was open to the criticism by the movements such as "Arte Povera" in Italy, "Process Art" at U.S., and "Mono-ha" of Japan, around 1970. For Hase, who started his artistic activity after ten years of those movements, they should have existed as to face them critically, and as to inherit, at the same time. Hence, his sculptures need to be interpreted from both aspects.

"The 10th Tokyo Biennale", held in 1970, is known as the exhibition which took these movements at the same period. This exhibition's commissioner, Yusuke Nakahara handled the artworks in the exhibition by taking "Between Man and Matter" as its theme. By Nakahara, "matter" is presented not as the method of creation, but directly as its state or the lapse of time. "Artworks do not only belong to human, neither exist as materials by themselves independently. They include the whole of the "between man and matter"." (On the occasion of the 10th Tokyo Biennale - Between Man and Matter, 1970.) Human, or artists do not take a transcendent position over matter, but handle the world which include the whole of the both.

Later, Nakahara renamed the phenomenon which surfaces between both as "Relational Image", and considered its origin is in Vladimir Tatlin of Russian Constructivism. Since the reproducibility is completely abandoned in Tatlin's sculptural reliefs, the existence of matter gets foregrounded. Moreover, the space

where matter resides gets considered as a part of the artwork. “The fragments of the objects (including walls and floors) which compose with each segmentation, build a new relationship between those.” (About Relational Images of World, 1972.) The roots of matter and space which play important roles for Hase’s sculptures can be found at here.

In addition, Nakahara used a word, “free-formed sculpture” to describe those artworks created around 1970. That encourages to look into the essence of artwork more on the “state” after separating the form of sculptures into “shape”, and “state”. These sculptures tend to have more degrees of reliance on actual exhibition space, so the installation will have more meaning than creative process. “In free-formed sculptures, materials which consist them have much larger meanings. And if they are not necessary to be consolidated to a single “shape”, each material’s spatial relationship, or invisible relationship should be decisive at there.” (From “Formed” to “Free-formed” Sculptures, 1974.) This idea will lead to Hase’s notion of how he takes sculptures rather as a fluid form than a definite shape.

Moreover, Nakahara expressed the change on the trend of sculptural art around 1980 when Hase started appearing, as “wooden block”. Nakahara discusses Hase’s works which are with his main material, wood, and also he points out they have the characteristic of “loose structure”. It suggests the easiness of construction, and the easiness of deconstruction simultaneously. “I would also like to pay attention to the fact that these “loose structure” works show a kind of “Eventness” in that they are potentially easy to dismantle.” (Wooden Blocks and Nature, 1983.) Although, the characteristic of this “Eventness” was to be presented as active in the video work “Let it be”, potentially, it can be understood as consistent from Hase's early works.

On the other hand, when you compare the previous trend, and Hase’s works, we need to pay an attention to the fact that he is the one who planned this exhibition. It is not rare that an artist shows works to public at own studio. But, there are the fundamental differences between that example, and the Hase’s exhibition. For Hase’s case, the act of exhibiting at his own studio is included as characteristics in his works.

Evidently, the unification of working space and exhibition space can be found in the previous trends. Nakahara took Carl Andre’s “Garden of Rust” as example. Andre picked up some scrap iron, and spread them on the floor of the museum room. He mentioned “If you call the act of scattering the steel wire as a process of making art, and it was executed at an exhibition room of a museum. Hence, the museum also worked as an atelier of the artist.” At the same time, “it can be said “after the exhibition, those rusted steel wires thrown away to a scrap yard, and might be

scattered in different way.” (Questions to Art, 1971.) In short, the exhibition term as the time limitation is strongly affecting on Andre’s “Eventness” as the structure of artwork.

The situation is not the same for Hase’s cases. The old wooden materials which were once used to build houses, were transformed to sculptures in its "loose structures", and sculptures transform into ordinary wooden materials. If these transformations need to be explained, there is nothing more to describe than this, but the changes actually occur continuously, and cannot be viewed separately. The absence of a clear border to define objects also applicable to the relationship between the material and the space. The outlines of sculptures change continuously. This means in other words, matter transform into space, and space transform to matter, one way another.

Principally, it is conceivable that the reason why Hase never puts a title on his work ties to this. If a “thing” is titled, it becomes a firm presence as the object, which confronts to its subject matter. It is not what his intention to propose that kind of existence, but to continue showing connections and disconnections of each part of his works, in time, and at space. Each part possesses its own time and space. Hase’s sculptures are the status of those parts are meeting and parting. Since the material, and Hase himself are the existence of transforming in space and time, those sculptures never reach to the final form. Connection and disconnection will continue to be repeated without ending as a completed shape.

There will be a non-avoidable conclusion, as long as the materials and Hase are materialistic existence. The wooden materials get decreased by machining with chainsaws or burners, and they disappear completely in the end. His works’ “Eventness” includes this kind of irreversible time and space.

The human absurdities which Hase felt when he visited the Auschwitz concentration camp, and the question about “what is a human being” which include himself are said to be resided in the initiating point of “Enshrined record.” This question is not abrupt. His acts of connect and disconnect are limited ones, and the sculpture corresponds to his life. By contraries, that fact draws insights on the transcendent matter.