

ABSTRACT

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A “UNIVERSAL” LANDSCAPE

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The creation of landscapes allowed Isamu Noguchi to look beyond sculpture to an environment where stone, architecture, and landscaping met. This enabled him to think about what he wanted to accomplish as an artist, and by the end of his career landscapes became the aesthetic means to reconcile his “divided self.” He was an artist who had obtained commercial and artistic success at an early age, yet he had to deal with the deeply imbedded psychological challenge of his longing to belong. This apparent discrepancy in his life led Noguchi to create landscapes where he could psychologically belong by making them “universal.” In this paper I explore Noguchi’s struggle in defining his cultural identity, and I examine six gardens created by Noguchi, each coming closer to his wish for a “universal” landscape; an enclosed utopia separated from the chaos of the urban world and cultural definitions.

ISAMU NOGUCHI AND THE CREATION OF A “UNIVERSAL” LANDSCAPE

By

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University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
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Preface

When presenting my thesis topic to people both inside and outside the art historical community, most of the time they respond with the question, “Why landscapes?” Isamu Noguchi has been considered in most contexts as a sculptor first; many scholars consider his landscapes only as a setting for his sculptures. Noguchi did not see his landscapes, though, as stages for his sculpture, but rather as continuations of his sculpture, or as he called it, “space as sculpture.”¹ This was, as he described it, “the sculpting of space,”² a practice that allowed him to look beyond the confines of a single stone or piece of marble to an environment where stone, architecture, and landscaping met. Most of all, this was a medium that allowed him to think deeply about what he wanted to accomplish as an artist, and by the end of his career, I believe, the garden became a physical and emotional culmination of everything he was as an artist and as an individual. Indeed, Noguchi’s landscape was the aesthetic means to reconcile his “divided self.”

He was an artist torn between the two sides of his biracial and bifurcate heritage both personally and artistically, and it was through his landscapes that he was able to create what I have termed “universal landscapes”; physical sanctuaries where he could create enclosed utopias separated from the chaos of the urban world and cultural definitions. He was an artist, due to his inherent skill and heritage, who had obtained extreme commercial and artistic success at a remarkably early age, yet he constantly had to deal with the deeply imbedded psychological challenge of his longing

¹ Isamu Noguchi, *A Sculptor's World* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1968), 172.

² *Ibid.*

to belong. This apparent discrepancy in his life led Noguchi to attempt to create gardens where he could at least psychologically belong by making them, at least in his mind, “universal.” It was due to this role of the garden in his life that led Noguchi, even though he had achieved success through his sculptures, to pursue garden projects with such abandon and passion.

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Chapter 1: An Artist Torn Between Two Worlds

Isamu Noguchi was an artist whose identity was at once both biracial and bifurcated. He was an artist who found inspiration and fame due to his biracial heritage, yet he was also a man, due to his tormented and transcontinental youth, with a bifurcated inward self. Most commentators on Noguchi's art and life have stressed the artist's internationalism, his profound sense of rootlessness.³ Noguchi indeed spent much of his life in rhythmic passage between Japan and America, the two geographical, psychological, and spiritual poles of his existence. Throughout his life Noguchi was able to exploit this condition of flux, to transform it into deeply felt universal perceptions through the particularities of his art. Nonetheless, there is little question that his biracial heritage also caused great anguish in this sentient, creative personality. He began his short 1968 autobiography, *A Sculptor's World*, with the troubling questions, "With my double nationality and double upbringing, where was my home? Where my affections? Where my identity? Japan or America, either, both -- or the world?"⁴ This was a subject that came up repeatedly in conversation throughout his artistic career. In Long Island City, a decade before, he had stated tartly, perhaps in response to an unstated question, "I am not a Japanese artist. I am an American."⁵ But years later, at his studio and home in Shikoku, Japan, he confided, "I'm neither [Japanese nor American], in a sense. I'm an artist."⁶ To Noguchi, to define his cultural identity would

³ The bibliographical entries stress this point, but in particular see Masayo Duus, *The Life of Isamu Noguchi: Journey Without Borders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁴ Isamu Noguchi, *A Sculptor's World*, 11.

⁵ Benjamin Forgey, "Noguchi at Shikoku," *Landscape Architecture* 80 (1990): 58.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

be the same as a “trap which limits your life.”⁷ This freedom from cultural limitation was seen by many as his greatest asset; and in the foreword to Noguchi’s autobiography Buckminster Fuller wrote, “As the unselfconscious prototype of the new cosmos, Isamu has always been inherently at home -- everywhere...In my estimation the evolving array and extraordinary breadth of his conceptioning realizations document a comprehensive artist without peer in our time.”⁸ His eagerness to escape this “trap” of cultural definitions led him to become even more ensnared within his own inward bifurcated self. His search for the universal in the garden he hoped would alleviate his inward sense of not belonging.

Noguchi regarded his mixed East-West heritage as a potentially renewable inner source of inspiration, and he continuously borrowed diverse elements from both cultures. This included the decisive role of gardens, in which he incorporated traditional elements from Japanese gardens within modern landscapes, leading to what can be characterized as enclosed utopias within urban environments. In these contemplative gardens reflective of the East and the West, tradition and modernity, Noguchi would create a feeling of infinite expansive space, embraced within architectural symbols of modernity yet somehow without distinct borders. For Noguchi, who saw chaos as a dystopian consequence of the modern world, a utopia needed to be created for himself and humanity. In his own words, the artist wished to create “an oasis for myself and people who are close to me.”⁹ As Noguchi would admit only two years before his death:

⁷ Paul Cummings, “Interview with Isamu Noguchi,” November-December 1973 (Washington, DC: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution).

⁸ Buckminster Fuller, forward to *A Sculptor’s World*, by Isamu Noguchi, 175.

⁹ Dore Ashton, “Space in Sculpture,” *Landscape Architecture* 80 (1990): 42.

I think my madness in wanting to make gardens and so forth lies in...usefulness; it's a kind of humanizing space, and humanizing of sculpture. It's not merely sculpture for aesthetic purposes, nor a question of ego or something else; it's not even images of archeology or some fantasy in the desert. Rather, it is something that is actually very useful, and very much a part of people's lives. If I might say so, I think this probably comes from my own background; the need for belonging...the need to feel that there is someplace on earth which an artist can affect in such a way that the art in that place makes for the better life and a better possibility of survival...If through art the world can become more friendly, more accessible to people, more understandable, more meaningful, then even art has some reason. When I went to Paris and then to Peking and then to Japan and all over the place, I was always on a voyage looking for someplace where I could feel at home, where I would feel that I could be of some use.¹⁰

In this paper I will explore Noguchi's personal struggle in defining his cultural identity, and I will examine six specific gardens created by Noguchi within the last thirty-year of his life, each progressively coming closer to his wish for a "universal" landscape, which can be best defined as an enclosed utopia separated from the chaos of the urban world.

He called himself a "waif," a "loner," and a "stranger."¹¹ The child of an Irish-American mother and Japanese father, he had grown up in a fatherless home in Japan, then at the age of thirteen he was suddenly thrust into a life among strangers in America, never sure about who was a friend and who was not.¹² Pondering the difficulties of his youth in his autobiography, Noguchi supposed that his mother's

¹⁰ Lecture given by Noguchi on the acceptance of the 1986 Kyoto Award in the Spiritual Science & Expressive Art Category entitled "The Road I Have Walked." Translated from Japanese by the author. The Archives of The Noguchi Museum.

¹¹ Dore Ashton, *Noguchi: East and West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1992), 11.

¹² Leonie Gilmour, Noguchi's mother, was an American of Scotch and Native American background educated at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania. His father, Noguchi Yonejiro, was a Japanese poet who began his career at a young age writing and publishing in the English language in the United States and England. Leonie served as a copyeditor for Yonejiro's English writings, and soon fell in love with both the man and his culture. Stirred by patriotic sentiments on hearing news of the Russo-Japanese War, Yonejiro returned to Japan before the second birthday of his son Isamu in 1905. The following year Leonie brought Isamu to Japan, but Yonejiro soon married a Japanese woman, began a new family, and embarked on a career as a scholar and writer notable for his extreme Japanese nationalism. Nevertheless, Leonie remained in Japan and raised Isamu there as a single parent until he was thirteen years old, when she decided that he should continue his education in the United States and sent him off by himself to a boarding school in the Midwest.

decision to send him away from Japan was motivated by her concern for “the unfortunate situation of children of mixed blood growing up in the Japan of those days -- half in and half out.”¹³ “I distrust people,” Noguchi once confessed.¹⁴ He knew that his suspicion of others was his greatest fault. In his own telling, Noguchi’s life was rich in encounters and satisfactions, but always there was an undertone of unease due to his feelings of alienation in both Japan and America.¹⁵ This feeling deepened his mistrust of others, and until the end of his life whenever he faced a crisis he withdrew into his own shell.¹⁶ That shell was his creative work, the only sanctuary where he felt secure.

Until his death in 1988, Noguchi searched equally for his identity in Japan and the United States. His work and life developed at the margins of two cultures, where he carefully situated himself as artist and observer. He always acted and lived as if he were in exile, a foreigner and outsider. In *A Sculptor’s World*, he stated, “I find myself a wanderer in a world rapidly growing smaller. Artist, American citizen, world citizen, belonging anywhere but nowhere.”¹⁷ It was not that he deliberately rebelled against belonging; rather it was that he could not escape the cultural duality that he shouldered since his birth.¹⁸ In America, he often observed, he was mainly thought of as a Japanese artist, hence an outsider. In Japan, he was perceived as a Westerner. One might say that

¹³ Noguchi, *A Sculptor’s World*, 12.

¹⁴ Duus, *The Life of Isamu Noguchi*, 360.

¹⁵ This is evident in many of the events in both America and Japan that Noguchi recounts in his autobiography *A Sculptor’s World*.

¹⁶ This is evident in many events in Noguchi’s life many of which are talked about in Duus, *The Life of Isamu Noguchi*.

¹⁷ Noguchi, *A Sculptor’s World*, 39.

¹⁸ Duus in *The Life of Isamu Noguchi* quotes Noguchi from a tape he recorded as saying, “You might say, in some way, that I’m an expatriate wherever I am, either in America or in [Japan]; that I’m after all, half-breed there or half-breed here. It makes no difference. And therefore I’m [not] trusted, in either side. Either I’m being too American or not American enough, or I’m too Japanese or not Japanese enough...I’m very curious to know, for instance, what do that Japanese people really think of me -- as a fake Japanese or as a fake American? Which? Am I trying to be Japanese or am I trying to be American? I suspect they think I’m trying to be Japanese -- and that’s even worse from a Japanese point of view than to be and American, because they will say he’s a real phony, he’s an exotic” (360).

such circumstances strengthened him, but he seems to have been haunted by a lifelong sense of uneasiness and not knowing where to place his own self. Without a doubt, the fact that he was constantly under such tension deeply affected the way he created art. Throughout his life Noguchi hungered to belong but at the same time he was afraid of making a choice about where to belong. During World War II, for example, in an attempt to come to grips with his Japanese self and counter the negative stereotypes of his fellow Japanese-Americans, he volunteered for internment in a camp in Arizona as a Japanese-American for seven months.¹⁹ By the end of the war, Noguchi was concerned with the “enclosure of space” and impermanence. However personally unsettling his sense of not belonging may have been, it was at the heart of his imagery, imbuing it with singular vitality. Noguchi found the ability to take advantage of his biracial identity and this allowed him to live as a “traveler” with regards both to his artistic creativity and to his physical presence in the world. In the gardens he designed he did not have to make this choice. “My enthusiasm for making gardens,” he said late in life, “may spring from my upbringing, in other words, from my longing for someplace where I belonged. I was born bearing the burden of two countries, and I have never ceased searching to answer where is my native place, where can I find a peaceful life, where is there a place where I can be of use.”²⁰

When Noguchi moved to New York City in 1923 as a young man, he soon was drawn to art. He resolved to be an artist and changed his name from Isamu Gilmour to Isamu Noguchi, taking the name of his Japanese father who had abandoned him and his

¹⁹ Noguchi, “The Road I Have Walked.” Even though he was in California at the time, he was officially a New Yorker and thus not subject to the evacuation order, but he chose to be placed in an internment camp.

²⁰ *Isamu Noguchi: The Sculpture of Spaces*. Directed by Kenji Hayashi and Charlotte Zwerin (Sapporo Television Broadcasting, 1995).

mother when he was young.²¹ Thus, Noguchi entered into his artistic identity at the outset of his career through a reorientation of his national identity. By changing his name, Noguchi sought to come to terms with his Japanese heritage. Yet, Noguchi lived his entire life between two worlds. He shuttled from East to West, toward the end of his life maintaining studios in both Japan and in the United States, and drawing on both eastern and western traditions to animate his art. He straddled other boundaries as well: between the archaic and the modern, between the reservedly contemplative and the resolutely social.²²

His modern pedigree was unimpeachable: he was heir to the rigorously simplified, organic abstractions of his mentor, Constantin Brancusi, with whom he worked for a time in Paris in 1927. From Brancusi, Noguchi learned to use tools and materials; he was introduced to the language of abstraction and the avant-garde and was initiated into his teacher's universal view of art.²³ Later, his work would acquire a psychological intensity and totemic quality inspired by the surrealists, whom he encountered in New York around the time of World War II. But Noguchi also kept his distance from the modern movement. His direct carving technique was largely abandoned if not scorned by many modern sculptors. And he imbued his carvings and landscapes with a reverence for the Earth associated more with the animist religions of

²¹ A nice look into Noguchi's early artistic career in America can be found in Bruce Altshuler, "Isamu Noguchi in America" from *Isamu Noguchi no Sekai*, Freer Gallery of Art. As Noguchi says in his autobiography, *A Sculptor's World*, "I was at this time still known as Isamu Gilmour, and I had become completely acclimatized as an American. There was no hint of Japan about me. Yet when I finally became conscious that I was to be a sculptor, I decided almost involuntarily to change my name [to Isamu Noguchi], adopting one that perhaps I had no right to. I could see my mother's consternation, but she did not object, helping me rather in my travail, away from her, toward Japan, and the way that I had chosen" (15).

²² A look into how Noguchi was both modern and archaic can be found in John Beardsley, "The Machine Becomes a Poem," *Landscape Architecture* 80 (1990): 49.

²³ An enlightening personal look into Noguchi's path to being an artist can be found in the manuscript of a lecture given by Noguchi on the acceptance of the 1986 Kyoto Award in the Spiritual Science & Expressive Art Category entitled "The Road I Have Walked."

the East or the archaic West than with the technologically-obsessed modern age.²⁴

From the teachings of eccentric inventor-philosopher R. Buckminster Fuller, Noguchi also learned to embrace a commitment to the humanistic use of science and technology, and a holistic perspective that would inform his view of nature as source and subject of sculptures and landscapes.²⁵ Not content to produce single objects isolated from the rest of the world, Noguchi tried insistently to integrate his work with other creative activities, and with the everyday environment as well. To Noguchi:

The complete artist [was one who had] no hard boundaries of categories in the arts -- the only limitations are in the artist himself with the strength, inspiration, and ability of the moment...in maintaining an open view of the world, with its multiplicity, and variety of situations, I believe he will want to break all limits.²⁶

As part of his goal to become a “complete artist,” Noguchi tore down his own artistic boundaries, extending his sculpture into the landscape, creating spaces, inspired by the gardens he saw in Japan that functioned as enclosed, apparently infinite, landscapes. As he would write later in his life, “My own efforts to cope with this isolation was to seek a larger frame of relevance for [my work], to break out of it’s too constricting definitions.”²⁷ Like his work, Noguchi wished to free himself from the “constricting definitions” of his identity.

²⁴ I first came across this notion of Noguchi’s connection to the Earth in Duus, *The Life of Isamu Noguchi*, 122-36.

²⁵ A complete look into the relationship between Noguchi and Buckminster Fuller can be found in Shoji Sadao, *Buckminster Fuller and Isamu Noguchi: Best of Friends* (Long Island City: The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, 2011).

²⁶ Isamu Noguchi, “The Complete Artist” (1960): 4-5. The Archives of the Noguchi Museum.

²⁷ Isamu Noguchi, “My Sculpture” in Minami Exhibition Catalogue, May 14-June 9, 1973.

Chapter 2: The Discovery of the Garden

From 1929 on Noguchi became an incessant traveler, searching for ways to define both his identity and his art. Buckminster Fuller often spoke of how Noguchi and the airplane belonged to the same age. To Noguchi, the airplane was a tool of sculpture and a means of “searching” for his own identity.²⁸ When he was 26 and already well-known as a sculptor in the United States, he made a crucial voyage to the East seeking one half of his heritage, and he spent several months in Japan (Fig. 1).²⁹ During this first voyage, he found an ancient civilization that offered him the means to think about what he had already sensed to be his artistic mission. In Kyoto, in particular, he found a refuge from the vicissitudes of his emotional life, and in the gardens of Kyoto he discovered the fusion of all his artistic interests.³⁰ According to Noguchi it was through a vision that led him to gardens: “I had a vision. I saw the earth as sculpture; I got the feeling that the sculpture of the future might be on the earth.”³¹ From very early on, Noguchi regarded the essence of sculpture not as the objects themselves but rather as the relation between works of sculpture and their environments. This attitude, which sought to create a unified landscape through the relation between works and environment, or rather gardens, was the reverse side of his own restless search for identity in a variety of changing environments. The passionate interest in gardens which he displayed from early in his career was a

²⁸ As quoted by Koji Takahashi in “A Vigorous Challenge to New Techniques” in *Isamu Noguchi: Human Aspect as a Contemporary: 54 Witnesses in Japan and America* (Kagawa: The Shikoku Shimbun, 2002), 18.

²⁹ A look into Noguchi’s voyage to the East can be found in Ashton, *Noguchi*, 33-44.

³⁰ This is clear in the way Noguchi refers to gardens in Rhony Alhalel, “Conversations with Isamu Noguchi” in *Kyoto Journal* (Spring 1989): 36.

³¹ Noguchi, “The Road I Have Walked,” NA.

reflection of this consciousness. The garden, gradually, became the reigning metaphor in his artistic life. Not trees, shrubs, water or stones, but a larger imagined totality that could be expressed in mysteriously varied terms.

It was after World War II, starting in 1950, that Noguchi returned to the Japanese Zen gardens and became inspired to incorporate these elements into his own gardens. After World War II, Noguchi was feeling restless, depressed, and uncertain about the future. This led him to take a fellowship in 1950 which allowed him to travel to England, France, Spain, Greece, Egypt, and Japan. The Japan of 1950 was very different from the Japan Noguchi had visited in his youth.³² He found the country less cold and more open. This was a time of reconciliation for the country: “My own explanation of this is that the war had leveled the barriers and hope was now everybody’s property. The disillusionment in war and the loss of one’s own particular rights brings with it a recognition of the humanity of all, including Americans.”³³ For Noguchi, in the chaotic void of the modern world -- a world without religion and threatened with nuclear destruction -- meaning must be created, and its creation required spaces that would encourage social ritual and unity.³⁴ The structuring of those spaces was to be the new calling of art, and its reigning metaphor was the garden. Disillusioned with the human race after World War II and by the death of many of his friends, Noguchi saw the garden as a place for recreating a universal utopia where one could separate oneself from the disenchantment and destruction caused by the war. With the onset of World War II, his time in a Japanese

³² I found this particularly evident in Jacquelynn Baas, *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 118-119.

³³ As quoted in Baas, *Smile of the Buddha*, 118.

³⁴ I owe this idea of social ritual and unity through space to Baas, *Smile of the Buddha*, 118.

Internment Camp, and the demise of many dear to him, including colleagues and even his father in 1947, Noguchi withdrew further into his artistic shell and began to look deeper into his Japanese roots. In 1950 this inwardness prompted him to return to Japan where he focused intently on the old artistic traditions, finding again the gardens of Kyoto and studying the philosophical principles from which they burgeoned.³⁵ From his first visit to Ryoanji in Kyoto (Fig. 2), Noguchi's imagination was captured:

In viewing this garden one has the sense of being transported into a vast void, into another dimension of reality -- time ceases, and one is lost in reverie, gazing at the rocks that rise, ever in the same but different spot, out of the white mist of gravel...Here is an immaculate universe swept clean...³⁶

Noguchi would soon attempt to recreate this same new "dimension of reality" in his own gardens; a "universe swept clean" of cultural labeling.

Nowhere else can there be found as strong a sense of the universe within four walls as in the Zen gardens. A quiet world of beauty was created by the simplest means in the smallest areas. Elements of the natural landscape, abstracted and reduced to a miniature palette, were used to produce a garden that embodied the model of Zen thought. The garden at Ryoanji, Kyoto is considered to be the best example of the dry (*karesansui*) garden in which water or landscape elements are symbolized by rocks and raked gravel.³⁷ Except for some moss around the base of the rocks, no plants are used. Zen garden theory designates the centrality of rocks as the "bones" of the garden and the secondary nature of the plantings -- a metaphor for the relationship between

³⁵ A look into Noguchi's study of Zen can be found in Alexander von Vegesack, et al, ed., *Isamu Noguchi: Sculptural Design* (London: Scala Publishers Ltd., 2004), 159.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 205.

³⁷ A look into the history and meaning of the garden elements in the Ryoanji garden can be found in Marc P. Keane's *Japanese Garden Design* (Boston, 2000): 59-60.

permanence and transience in nature.³⁸ Fifteen stones form an elegant composition, skillfully arranged so that one rock always remains hidden when seen from any point along the veranda. *Karesansui* gardens were intended to be an aid in the practice of contemplation with their real meanings lying in the viewer's realization of them through disciplined study. The viewer does not physically enter the garden but rather explores it mentally. In this case, what is actually a rather small garden could be found to be limitless, expressing the philosophic idea of Zen of finding the vast in the small. It is the responsibility of the viewer to fill in much of the landscape, and, of course, its ultimate meaning. One need not interpret the work in order to experience the remarkable serenity it seems to generate. Many Zen priests contend that it is possible by intense meditation to transport oneself into the garden so that any scene, no matter what its actual size, may become infinite. Like most Zen gardens, Ryoanji relies on a strong sense of enclosure for its mood. The surrounding wall also serves as a visual boundary or ground against which the stones and gravel are played. Noguchi witnessed all these elements of the Zen garden while in Japan, and many of these same traditional Zen garden properties he incorporated into his own gardens.

This trip brought him closer to the philosophical basis of the Zen garden, and he read the works of Muso Kokushi, a legendary master of Zen whose stone arrangements were highly esteemed and is considered by many to be the original creator of Zen gardens in Japan. Muso Kokushi defined the ideal makers of a garden as:

[T]hose who feel mountains, rivers, the great earth, grasses, trees and stones as their own being, seem it is true, by their love of nature, to cling to worldly

³⁸ The premier text on garden design is Zoen, *Illustrations for Designing Mountain, Water, and Hillside Field Landscapes* originally written sometime between 1448-1466. A translation of this text can be found in David A. Slawson, *Secret Teachings in the Art of Japanese Gardens: Design Principles, Aesthetic Values* (New York, 1987).

feelings, yet in this very thing their real search for truth is revealed...So they are perfect examples of the fact that the real seekers after truth love landscape.³⁹

Noguchi also met Shigemori Mirei, a scholarly expert on gardens, who taught him the essential nature of Japanese gardens as seen from a modern point of view, which Noguchi took and incorporated into his concept of space.⁴⁰ Kendall Brown, in his preface to *Mirei Shigemori: Rebel in the Garden* notes that “Shigemori embodies the central artistic quest of his era – a new direction in Japanese creativity founded on the desire to overcome a fundamental tension between the perceived polarities of dynamic Western Culture and the relative stasis attributed to the Asian tradition.”⁴¹ Shigemori’s new approach to Japanese garden tradition allowed artists to radicalize existing practices within the Japanese framework and thereby transcend the dichotomy of Japanese tradition and western modernity. In his gardens, Shigemori recovered the primordial power that the Shinto tradition attributed to nature, yet worked as a modernist artist-hero to innovate a traditional Japanese garden typology. Shigemori argued for a hybrid approach to the garden, in which the past would inform and give cultural resonance to present developments in form. He advocated for studying the past masters, and that designers should “emulate their way to invention rather than the results achieved, (so) gardenmakers could distill the most valuable inspiration for their work.”⁴² Noguchi himself had sought to express the feel of mountains, rivers, earth,

³⁹ Muso Kokushi, quoted in Irmtraud Schaarschmidt Richter and Osamu Mori, *Japanese Gardens* (New York, 1979), 41.

⁴⁰ An account of Noguchi’s meeting with Shigemori Mirei can be found in Koji Takahashi, “The Poetics of Between: On the Sculpture/Space of Isamu Noguchi” in *Isamu Noguchi Retrospective 1992* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1992), NA.

⁴¹ A look into Mirei Shigemori’s new approach to the Japanese garden tradition can be found in Christian Tschumi, *Mirei Shigemori, Rebel in the Garden: Modern Japanese Landscape Architecture* (Basel; Boston: Birkhäuser, 2007), 15.

⁴² Christian Tschumi, “Between Tradition and Modernity: The Karesansui Gardens of Mirei Shigemori,” *Landscape Journal*, no.1 (2006), 115.

grasses, trees, and above all stones, as his own creations in his gardens. For Noguchi, stones were a “symbol” of the earth and space around us.⁴³ The truth Noguchi was searching for was a place to which he could belong; but due to the conflict of his bifurcate heritage, he had to create this “oasis.”⁴⁴ The aesthetics established as a consequence of these Zen teachings, namely those of simplicity, restraint and the use of visual paradox, are some of the most important aspects which infuse Noguchi’s gardens.⁴⁵ As Noguchi wrote in 1960 in an unpublished essay entitled “The Complete Artist,” “The ideas of Zen Buddhism seems to offer...the possibilities of contacts with further depths of inner experience from which to draw substance for further development.”⁴⁶ Through Japanese gardens Noguchi realized:

...that a sense of vastness could be accomplished through such simple means, by the placement and proportion of things, by the lighting...A sense of infinite distance can be created even on as small an area as the stage. You might say that my awareness of this comes from my experience of Japan. The Japanese, being very restricted in their space, have over the centuries evolved ways of creating the illusion of space, especially in their gardens, of the distances of the sea or of mountain views and so forth, when they’re using very small areas... these illusions are created through isometric triangulation so that the eye is constantly carried from one to the other and there is no end to the vastness that appears to exist⁴⁷

Noguchi took this knowledge of Japanese garden design to the next level in the transformation of an entire architectural form into a enclosed Zen meditation garden.

⁴³ Noguchi describes stones as “symbols” in Alhalel, “Conversations with Isamu Noguchi,” 35.

⁴⁴ Noguchi’s interest in Zen and how he incorporated it into his art is described in Bonnie Rychlak’s “Sitting Quietly: Isamu Noguchi and the Zen Aesthetic” in *Isamu Noguchi: Master Sculptor*, ed. Valerie Fletcher (London: Scala Publishers Ltd., 2004), 187-211 and in Bonnie Rychlak’s *Zen no Zen: Aspects of Noguchi’s Sculptural Vision*, (New York: The Isamu Noguchi Foundation Museum, 2002).

⁴⁵ Historical, descriptive, and interpretive look into Zen gardens can be found in Marc P. Keane’s *Japanese Garden Design* (Boston, 2000): 47-63 and Marc Treib and Ron Herman, *A Guide to The Gardens of Kyoto* (Tokyo: Shufunotomo Company, Ltd., 1980), 93-95.

⁴⁶ Noguchi, “The Complete Artist,” 4.

⁴⁷ Isamu Noguchi, “The Sculptor and the Architect.” *Studio* 176 (1968): 18.

Although Noguchi admired the Japanese garden, he drew a clear distinction between his vision and the traditional form. To the repeatedly asked question about its influence on him, he discounted the Japanese garden's influence in forms and solutions. When asked about the forces which stimulate creative activities, he replied:

Conflict is...the spark of creation. We live in a modern world. The ancient world, the world of nature confronts. We are in conflict. From that comes creation, the two together. Only one is none. The Japanese garden is made from a collaboration with nature. Man's hands want to be hidden by time and by many effects of nature, moss and so forth, so you are hidden. I don't want to be hidden, I want to show. Therefore I am modern. I am not a traditional [gardener]. I think it is important for Japan today to know that you have to be involved with nature to be in conflict with it. Otherwise you are all alone, you are welding something but you are not speaking to nature. If you speak to nature you have to be strong, because nature is also very strong.⁴⁸

In 1949, he also wrote that "a reintegration of the arts towards some purposeful social end is indicated in order to enlarge the present outlet permitted by our limiting categories of architects, painters, sculptors, and landscapists."⁴⁹ He recognized that the arts in the modern era had drifted too far apart and too far from social function. As early as 1926, he recognized that his special gift might lie in conveying an understanding of Japanese art to a western audience. He wrote in a successful application for a Guggenheim Foundation fellowship, "My father...had long been known as an interpreter of the East to the West, through poetry. I wish to do the same with sculpture."⁵⁰ As he developed as an artist, this effort treated less with sculpture than with gardens. But for Noguchi, the two became synonymous: his ambition, as he told it, was to create "space which has itself become a sculpture."⁵¹

⁴⁸ Alhalel, "Conversations with Isamu Noguchi," 35.

⁴⁹ Noguchi, "Towards a Reintegration of the Arts," *College Art Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1949): 60.

⁵⁰ Noguchi, "Meanings in Modern Sculpture." *Art News* 48 (March 1949), 12.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 56.

Noguchi sought two essential experiences in his gardens: an art that could present a “hypothetic whole,” a symbolic unity of the various cultural elements that were part of his identity; and the shaping of spaces that would go beyond the static or isolated sculpture or space to be infinite.⁵² Gradually, he forged this vision, which, at the end of his life, he called “space as sculpture,” explaining:

I like to think of gardens as sculpturing of space: a beginning, and a groping to another level of sculptural experience and use: a total sculpture space experience beyond individual sculptures. A man may enter such a space: it is in scale with him; it is real. An empty space has no visual dimension or significance. Scale and meaning enter when some thoughtful object or line is introduced. This is why sculptures, or rather sculptural objects create space. Their function is illusionist. The size and shape of each element is entirely relative to all the others and the given space.⁵³

“Sculpture,” Noguchi would explain, “must not be only the rock...but also the space between the rocks and between the rock and man, the communication and contemplation between.”⁵⁴ He was influenced by the structure of Zen rock gardens, which he used like a stage on which concrete landscapes could be produced through sculpture, bringing art into the space of life, and making human life richer. Not until the 1960s did the term “public space,” “environmental art,” and “earth art” enter the vocabulary of American art, but even before then Noguchi was already groping with the concept that the soil itself could be fashioned into sculptural forms.⁵⁵ Noguchi’s work in the 1950s, in particular, marked his evolution as an environmental designer as he developed sculpture in relation to architectonic space. As Noguchi states, “The earth

⁵² These two goals are explained in Ashton, *Noguchi*, 106.

⁵³ Isamu Noguchi, *A Sculptor’s World*, 172.

⁵⁴ As quoted by Takahashi in “A Vigorous Challenge to New Techniques,” 20.

⁵⁵ This concept and just how advanced Noguchi was in regards to garden design is made clear in Duus, *The Life of Isamu Noguchi*, 150.

is modern, not old-fashioned; the ground is a modern medium.”⁵⁶ Noguchi developed his unusual ability to fathom the earth itself as a medium in his Japanese-inspired gardens partly as a response to feelings of estrangement from a satisfying sense of belonging. By using earth as a medium, he could create a landscape, like himself, which was neither Eastern nor Western, but, as he would consider, universal. His continuing absorption with various forms of the Japanese garden and earth was a means by which he could obtain possession of a dimension of his identity. In an earlier interview, he declared, “I’m like a soldier in a campaign in the desert -- far off, but always with the idea that there’s some place I’m going back to someday...where I won’t be alone, chasing the enemy on a camel.”⁵⁷

Through gardens he was able to create a physical sanctuary, which culminated in the creation of his own landscape and sanctuary in his studio and home in Shikoku, Japan. Here, Noguchi attempted, after years of struggle with his cultural identity, to create an oasis: a universal landscape where he would find the home he had secretly been searching for all his life. From almost the very beginning of his work with landscapes he pursued this goal. As Noguchi wrote in 1949, the physical environment had the power to “bring order out of chaos, a myth out of the world, a sense of belonging out of our loneliness.”⁵⁸ This hope and desire to create an environment in which he could truly belong continued throughout his life, and he told an interviewer in 1985 that he always wanted to build “an oasis for myself and people who are close to

⁵⁶ Noguchi, interview with Paul Cummings, *Artists in Their Own Words*, 111.

⁵⁷ Bert Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 169.

⁵⁸ Noguchi, “Towards a Reintegration of the Arts,” *College Art Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1949): 60.

me -- a world that exists, grows and changes from its own forces.”⁵⁹ The art he was most interested in, Noguchi explained, “has to do with people’s places in the world, their sense of belonging.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ashton, “Space in Sculpture,” 42.

⁶⁰ Noguchi, “Towards a Reintegration of the Arts,” 60.

Chapter 3: The Japanese Garden in a Western World

By the 1950s when Noguchi had returned from his travels, he was a middle-aged artist whose career can be described as the simultaneous pursuit of two main strains and influences. One is that personified by Brancusi, whose work was devoted to timeless and eternal qualities, and the other is defined by his lifelong friend Buckminster Fuller, whom Noguchi described as representing “America and the new technology of space and structures.”⁶¹ Noguchi sought to endow what he made and built in the modern era with a soul, both connected to a shared ancient past and creating relevance and hope for the future. Noguchi realized at this time in his life that through the collaboration with architects he would be able to express these ideals through expanding his sculptural ideas to encompass the landscape on a vast scale.

Over the course of the 1950s, Noguchi combined his knowledge of the traditional Japanese garden with elements of the Western avant-garde in several small projects. But it wasn't until 1956 that Noguchi was commissioned to make his first major landscape project, the gardens for UNESCO headquarters in Paris (Fig. 5).⁶² His vision would eventually bring gardeners, plantings, and eighty-eight tons of stone from Japan, and it engaged Noguchi in a sphere that would preoccupy him during the next thirty years -- the aesthetics and metaphysical dimensions of the Japanese garden and the ability to take these elements and make them his own or rather universal (Fig. 3-

⁶¹ As quoted in Amy Wolf, *On Becoming an Artist: Isamu Noguchi and his Contemporaries, 1922-1960* (Long Island City: The Isamu Noguchi Museum Foundation and Garden Museum, 2010), 123.

⁶² The planners had wanted an Asian artist due to the sponsorship by the Japanese government, but instead they chose Noguchi, whose previous garden for the Reader's Digest Building in Tokyo had demonstrated his skill as a designer of public spaces. He was someone whose efforts, they felt, would be both modern and Japanese in feeling. The Archives of The Noguchi Museum.

4).⁶³ As Noguchi said when describing the UNESCO garden, “Everything in the garden is thus given a personal twist, and so it may not be considered a true Japanese garden. However, it should be borne in mind that the Japanese tradition allows for the greatest latitude. It is in rising above the easily recognized that the great tradition asserts itself. The great garden is not easily differentiated from nature...”⁶⁴ This appropriately titled *Jardin Japonais* was Noguchi’s first large sculptural space. For the artist, this garden served as a sort of laboratory of experiences, a concentration of past and present elements from the two cultures that constituted his identity.⁶⁵

Noguchi was offered the commission by the architect of UNESCO Secretariat, Marcel Breuer, on October 20, 1955 for what was termed a “Delegates’ Patio.”⁶⁶ His selection was determined, according to Breuer, in part due to his Japanese name, as Breuer assumed the artist was Japanese. Even when it was clear that Noguchi was not a Japanese national and even though the garden would not be typically Japanese, as the committee initially intended, it would still have “the essential character of Japanese gardens, which is inherent in [Noguchi’s] attitude.”⁶⁷ As Noguchi explained to the Japanese Ambassador at the United Nations, “I was apparently selected...partly with this in mind, a compromise, as someone whose work they knew and could work with, the result of those efforts would be both modern and Japanese in feeling, which is what

⁶³ A description of Noguchi’s experience bringing gardeners, plantings, and eighty-eight tons of stone from Japan can be found in Bruce Altshuler, *Isamu Noguchi* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1994), 66.

⁶⁴ Noguchi, *A Sculptor’s World*, 167.

⁶⁵ A description of the project is in Duus, *The Life of Isamu Noguchi*, 273-85.

⁶⁶ Letter from Marcel Breuer to Isamu Noguchi, October 20, 1955. Archives of The Noguchi Museum.

⁶⁷ Letter from Isamu Noguchi to his Excellency Toru Hagiwara in Bern, Switzerland. Archives of The Noguchi Museum.

they wanted. A garden is, after all, a collaboration between architecture and the poetry of spaces.”⁶⁸

The *Jardin Japonais* began relatively small, but Noguchi successfully pressed for a significant increase in its scale and scope into a full-scale garden located in a large sunken space between the building for the UNESCO Secretariat and an office annex.⁶⁹ As Noguchi described in a letter, “My feeling was that an integration of the two were necessary.”⁷⁰ Problems quickly arose, though, due to the increase in cost involved in Noguchi’s “necessary” additions to the original plan. For the necessary \$45,000 cost of the project, only \$10,000 was available, leading Noguchi to beg for more money from not only the organizers of the project but even from the Japanese government.⁷¹ Initially, Noguchi’s designs for the gardens were considered “not sufficiently Japanese,” but Noguchi defended his design by insisting on the importation of stones and labor from Japan, explaining that these elements, could help the garden “become quite a characteristic Japanese garden with many traditional features...”⁷² Breuer, though, refused to alter his original design for the building to fit Noguchi’s ever expanding vision, leading to complaints that the Japanese style garden “would not suit

⁶⁸ Letter from Noguchi to His Excellency Toshikaru Kaso, September 24, 1956. Archives of The Noguchi Museum.

⁶⁹ Noguchi description of his initial design for the “Delegates Patio” in a letter to Baron Derds, August 28, 1956. The Archives of The Noguchi Museum:

This is divided into two parts: the one with the stone paving or “Delegates Patio” being the one specifically given to me to develop, the other green area was integrated into this to introduce the asymmetry and charm of nature. The sculptural pieces that could be prepared in Japan to great advantage are 6 of the stone elements in the Patio, which are in essence the same as Japanese “Ishidoro” or Stone Lanterns, in that they incorporate the possibility of lighting of the 34 elements which make up this part of the garden, there is besides these 6, a stone drinking fountain at the entrance way which might well be made in Japan. The rest, being either of cement or of laid granite, should be done there on the spot.

⁷⁰ Letter from Noguchi to his Excellency Toru Hagiwara in Bern, Switzerland. Archives of The Noguchi Museum.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Letter from Noguchi to M. Michael Dard (Chief of the Division of International Cultural Exchanges at UNESCO), January 8, 1957. Archives of The Noguchi Museum.

the style of the new UNESCO Headquarters.”⁷³ Noguchi later would say that for the UNESCO garden he felt “obligated” to do a somewhat Japanese garden, but instead he made it into “a kind of homage to Japan.”⁷⁴ Collaboration with the experienced Japanese gardener Touemon Sano, who came from a long tradition of gardeners in Kyoto, led to further problems. Sano felt that Noguchi didn’t really understand the theory of Japanese garden art, and he saw him as continually violating its fundamental principles and wanting to incorporate too many design elements of his own. During the two years that it took to build the garden, Noguchi was forced to confront these traditional ideas day after day. Whenever it was a question of where to place sculptures or stone lanterns, Noguchi categorically refused any positions in which they were even partly covered by vegetation, which was customary in Japanese gardens in order to create a sense of naturalism. Areas of water were not, in contrast to traditional rules, again in order to imply naturalism, laid out as flowing, reflective surfaces but as motionless bodies of water. As Sano would later describe Noguchi’s work attitude over the span of the project:

How the stones and the trees should be arranged were issues we battled over for about an hour every morning. Once we had agreed upon the procedure and begun working, all of a sudden, Isamu’s eyes glowed and he became full of spirit. There was no chatting and he wouldn’t even answer any questions. While sculpting a stone, he took no notice even if his hands were covered with blood...From time to time, he would hold the bow of his spectacles in his mouth and stare at a single point with his arms folded. Nobody could come close to him at such moments.⁷⁵

⁷³ This is evident in the letter exchanges between Noguchi and Breuer over the course of the project. The Archives of The Noguchi Museum. Quote comes from letter to Noguchi from T. Hagiwara (Japanese Ambassador), January 15, 1957. The Archives of The Noguchi Museum.

⁷⁴ Cummings, “Interview with Isamu Noguchi,” 68-69.

⁷⁵ As remembered by Touemon Sano in “A Work Reflecting the History of Our Friendship” in *Isamu Noguchi: Human Aspect as a Contemporary: 54 Witnesses in Japan and America*, 68-69

The final product was seen by many reviewers as a failure. As Noguchi wrote to the editor of *Arts & Architecture*, “The critical press here has been frightening - least harsh perhaps on the garden but the whole project has been thoroughly damned, which it hardly deserves.”⁷⁶ Art critics deemed the work to be a garden and not art, whereas landscape architects virtually ignored the garden, dismissing it as art.⁷⁷ To the very end more and more problems arose, but Noguchi was determined to complete the project in accordance with his vision and often took the initiative himself to get things done.⁷⁸ Noguchi had found the appropriate canvas for his ideas of space, and he was determined that neither architectural nor financial tribulations would prevent him from his goal.

The basic plan of the sunken garden consists of rounded amoebic forms defining the curbed periphery of the pond, rounded mounds of earth, and patches of gravel, lawn, and paving. Stylistically, this composition suggests biomorphic Surrealism, but the experience of walking through the garden and indeed most photographs of it suggests a Japanese garden as recognizable as postcard images from Japan -- the pruned pines, the rocks embedded in gravel, a rock composition representing the Isle of the Immortals, the goldfish, the stone wash basins and their bamboo lades, and the granite slab footbridges (Fig. 6-8). Moreover, when one encounters these Japanese motifs, they are likely to appear against the backdrop of an

⁷⁶ Letter to John Entenza from Noguchi, November 18, 1958. The Archives of The Noguchi Museum.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ In letters from Noguchi to Sarei Shigemori written throughout 1958 Noguchi constantly complains of all the problems in the UNESCO project and how he feels that it is only through his initiative that things are getting accomplished. The Archives of The Noguchi Museum.

intricate pattern of the glass and steel of the UNESCO Secretariat just as the gardens in Kyoto were seen against a backdrop of white walls (Fig. 9).⁷⁹

It has become somewhat customary in Japan and elsewhere to insert a traditional garden at the foot of a modern skyscraper, but when Noguchi experimented with this concept in 1958, the traditional Japanese garden still seemed to belong with relatively small and modest unpainted wooden structures of temples or villas in Kyoto.⁸⁰ Not only did Noguchi reproduce Japanese garden motifs on Parisian soil, but he did so in jarring juxtaposition with a building that was admired as “uncompromisingly modern.”⁸¹ Marcel Breuer, the architect of this eight-story Y-shaped modernist Secretariat Building, with three wings coming together in curving facades, conceived of the relationship between art and architecture as one of “complementing each other, rather than parts of the same.”⁸² Noguchi’s thinking regarding the relationship between art and architecture was similarly based on the idea of sharply contrastive modes: “Architecture is not to be criticized for eliminating the irrational element. It must be free to follow its own ends. So must art, which is the irrational element, the human element. Architecture and art should complement each other.”⁸³ The UNESCO commission illustrates Noguchi’s evolving ideas about sculpture and space: his conviction that sculptural forms generate their own space, that a need exists to integrate sculpture within architectonic space, and that sculpture works as a counterpoint to architecture.

⁷⁹ A nice description of the garden is in Torres, *Isamu Noguchi*, 103-09.

⁸⁰ This concept of the use of traditional Japanese gardens in a modern setting is dealt with in Peter Walker, “A Levitation of Stones,” *Landscape Architecture* 80 (1990): 37.

⁸¹ Ashton, “Space in Sculpture,” 47.

⁸² Isamu Noguchi, “Garden of Peace: UNESCO Gardens in Paris.” In *Isamu Noguchi: Essays and Conversations*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona et al. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), 61.

⁸³ Noguchi, “The Sculptor and the Architect,” 18-20.

Despite the surrounding buildings, this space exists apart -- a place for experiencing peace -- something that diplomats from many nations needed to remember as their goal at UNESCO. From the entrance the entire garden cannot be seen all at once; visitors must walk into it, leaving the world behind.⁸⁴ “The intention of the...Japanese garden,” according to Noguchi, “is that of nature distilled for contemplation if possible as in the gardens of Zen temples...It is hoped that as the delegates wander...they will experience a release from the tensions and prejudices of the moment giving rise to a fuller and more dispassionate consideration of every problem.”⁸⁵ Noguchi, of course, learned this lesson from his study of Japanese gardens, especially the pleasure gardens (designed as a succession of defined spaces, each offering a different aspect of nature) and the meditation gardens for Zen monks (gardens to be viewed from one side, not entered).⁸⁶ In 1962 he explained: “the UNESCO garden is intended to be walked in. The vista constantly changes and, everything being relative, things suddenly increase in scale as others diminish. The real purpose of the garden may be this contemplation of the relative in space, time, and

⁸⁴ Since at the time when this paper was written the author had yet to visit the UNESCO garden, this idea is based on a description of this experience in Torres, *Isamu Noguchi*, 106.

⁸⁵ Letter from Noguchi to Ambassador Furugaki, March 9, 1957. The Archives of The Noguchi Museum,

⁸⁶ Ruth Wolfe, “Noguchi: Past, Present and Future,” *Art in America* 56 (1968): 32-45. The UNESCO design was crucial for Noguchi, since it brought him closer to the traditional Japanese expressions of nature employing rocks and water -- elements he used widely in later works. With great effort Noguchi raised the funds to buy all of the stones in Japan for the UNESCO project, and the top Japanese garden architect of his generation, Mirei Shigemori, took him to the island of Shikoku, where Noguchi would later establish a studio and garden of his own. In a mountain river Noguchi selected great stones in nature for the first time, an activity that later became a passion. This all stemmed from his serious study of Zen garden theory, which designates the centrality of rocks as the “bones” of the garden and the secondary nature of the plantings -- a metaphor for the relationship between permanence and transience in nature. Noguchi constantly explored the Japanese belief in the mythic capacity of rocks -- the ancient notion that they contain the imprint of life, nature, and history. “Stone is directly linked to the core of matter,” Noguchi said in an interview. “It is a molecular conglomeration, so to speak. If you strike a stone it echoes back with the spirit of existence within us. It is and echo of the whole universe...Stone is always old and new, and like a living being it exists with links to the past, the present, and future.” Cummings, “Interview with Isamu Noguchi,” 55.

life.”⁸⁷ Although Noguchi’s *Jardin Japonais* contains many of these traditional elements, it is by no means a standard Japanese garden.⁸⁸ In the end, though, the UNESCO gardens reflect Noguchi’s personal interpretation of the overall Japanese philosophy of space in the traditional garden:

To learn but still to control, not to be overwhelmed by so strong a tradition, is a challenge. My effort was to find a way to link that ritual of rocks which comes down to us through the Japanese from the dawn of history to our modern times and needs. In Japan, the worship of stones changed into an appreciation of nature. The search for the essence of sculpture seems to carry me to the same end...While the spirit of the garden is Japanese, the actual composition of the natural rocks is my own...⁸⁹

Traditional Japanese garden designers never mixed together categories of garden types, Noguchi, however, was only concerned with creating an oasis apart from the urban environment that surrounded it. “The garden is the first step, the first groping, toward another level of experience of sculpture and its utility,” he wrote at the time, “and it is an experience of a sculptural space as a whole transcending individual sculptural elements in it.”⁹⁰ The *Jardin Japonais* was the first step towards Noguchi’s realization of a universal landscape. Even with all the problems that arose through the creation of this landscape, Noguchi looked upon it as an important piece of his artistic self-fashioning. He even saw to the importation of a traditional gardener from Japan to see to the upkeep of the garden.⁹¹ The words he wrote to be placed on a plaque marking the garden express this belief. As one sentence on the plaque states, “Even the stones as

⁸⁷ Quoted in Il Kim, “Accumulations of Uncertainties: Noguchi, an Inveterate Experimenter.” In von Vegesack, *Isamu Noguchi: Sculptural Design*, 169.

⁸⁸ In fact, during its construction he argued constantly with the master gardener who came from Kyoto to assist him, as Noguchi broke rule after rule of traditional garden design. Examples of traditional elements in the garden include the use of *tobi-ishi* (stepping stones) traversing a pond, a *horai* (symbolic sacred mountain) with large natural stones, and two old *chozubachi* (water basins), along with trees imported from Japan, Altshuler, *Isamu Noguchi*, 66.

⁸⁹ Unpublished description of the project written by Noguchi. The Archives of The Noguchi Museum.

⁹⁰ Torres, *Isamu Noguchi*, 109.

⁹¹ Letter from Noguchi to Marcel Breuer, March, 1958. The Archives of The Noguchi Museum.

well as the spirit of this garden were a gift of Japan brought here and placed by the hands of Isamu Noguchi.”⁹² It was through this project that Noguchi also discovered the land where he would eventually build his own personal oasis years later; “My one desire is to be able to get back to [Mure], Japan as soon as possible and to somehow establish myself as a householder there...I should like to come to Japan, to work there, to find a home there, to live...”⁹³

⁹² Notes written in Noguchi’s hand of possible descriptions to be placed on a plaque at the garden. The Archives of The Noguchi Museum.

⁹³ Letter from Noguchi to Sarei Shigemori, March 4, 1958. The Archives of the Noguchi Museum.

Chapter 4: The Creation of Infinite Space

With the architect Gordon Bunshaft (Fig. 10) in the early 1960s, Noguchi took his knowledge of Japanese garden design to the next level in the transformation of an entire architectural form into an enclosed Zen meditation garden. Epitomized by Ryoanji, these gardens are to be viewed from the outside and are not generally to be entered. Noguchi utilized this basic concept in two sunken gardens created simultaneously, one at New York's Chase Manhattan Bank Plaza (Fig. 11), and the other at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University (Fig. 18). Both are designed to be seen from two levels, and cannot be entered, only perceived from the sides and above. The two gardens constitute a complementary pair of works.⁹⁴

Bunshaft saw sculpture not simply as decoration but as a functional part of the whole structure of a building. From the early design stages he worked with Noguchi to create artistic spaces and sites of repose and contemplation in his austere glass and steel high-rise office buildings.⁹⁵ It was Bunshaft's idea to have a sculptor design a total space adjacent to and interacting with the building as a means of humanizing the ground level areas around it.⁹⁶ Their collaboration allowed Noguchi to work on a series of epoch-making projects that profoundly transformed the meaning of the garden in contemporary life and allowed Noguchi to work towards the creation of a private urban landscape that defied the borders which enclosed it. To Noguchi space was the

⁹⁴ I owe the thought of these two gardens as complementary to Dana Miller, "Breaking Ground: The Environmental Works of Isamu Noguchi." In *Isamu Noguchi: Master Sculptor*, 173.

⁹⁵ According to Bunshaft, Noguchi was one of the only artists in the world who understood architectural space.

⁹⁶ Such a concern on the part of an architect was unusual in the mid 1950s. A look into the collaborations and relationship between Noguchi and Bunshaft can be found in Andrea O. Dean, "Bunshaft and Noguchi: An Uneasy but Highly Productive Architect-Artist Collaboration," *ALA Journal* 65 (1976): 52-55.

“continuum of our existence,”⁹⁷ and therefore in a physical form it had to appear infinite. As he wrote in his autobiography:

I am excited by the idea that sculpture creates space, that shapes intended for this purpose properly scaled in a space, actually create a greater space. There is a difference between actual cubic feet of space and the additional space that the imagination supplies. One is measure, the other an awareness of the void -- of our existence in this passing world.⁹⁸

Gordon Bunshaft, the senior partner of Skidmore Owings & Merrill, spoke of Noguchi as one of the country’s three greatest contemporary sculptors (with David Smith and Alexander Calder), and paid him the additional compliment of being, at the time, “the only artist who truly understands architecture...He knows it all, and probably thinks he can be an architect.”⁹⁹ For his part, Noguchi credited Bunshaft with a singularly discriminating eye and a determination which “squeezed out” whatever was in him.¹⁰⁰ Bunshaft was a physically largish man who, as the architect, was the arbiter of Noguchi’s designs due to the fact that most of the clients were large corporations, which left artistic such decisions as the placement and selection of sculpture to the architect. As Noguchi would admit about Bunshaft in his autobiography, “It is due to his interest that projects were initiated, his persistence that saw them realized, his determination that squeezed out whatever was in me. Indeed I am beholden to him for every collaborative architectural commission I have been able to execute in the United States...”¹⁰¹

Bunshaft believed in the importance and power of art especially when it was integrated with architecture, which was unusual for an architect at the time. As he saw

⁹⁷ Alhalel, “Conversations with Isamu Noguchi,” 37.

⁹⁸ Noguchi, *A Sculptor’s World*, 58.

⁹⁹ As quoted from interview with Gordon Bunshaft in Dean, “Bunshaft and Noguchi,” 52.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁰¹ Noguchi, *A Sculptor’s World*, 172.

it, architects should encourage the use of art as part of their buildings only if they have an interest and knowledge of art. He often spoke angrily about the average architect's ignorance of painting and sculpture: "I believe every architect should have a complete working knowledge of the current and historical visual arts not to use art in his architecture, but to do better architecture...."¹⁰² According to Bunshaft, architecture should be an artistic undertaking. It was probably because of these views that Noguchi, who was often temperamental when working with architects after his experience with the UNESCO garden, felt comfortable working with Bunshaft on several of his most important projects. Noguchi typically saw architects as "egotistical, wanting to hog the whole thing. They are afraid of something that might ruin their building, and I think they are justified from experience, because sculpture has usually been slapped onto a building for no good reason at all. I have treated it as a test of my competence to contribute something in spite of so-called collaboration, which is so one-sided."¹⁰³ Noguchi did not exclude Bunshaft from his criticism, but the similarity in their goals allowed for an uneasy but highly productive collaboration.

To Noguchi, "...sculpture can only be of significance to architecture and to the space of human environment as something conclusive in relation to that space...The space around buildings should be treated in such a way as to dramatize and make the space meaningful and the sculptures should not just be 'objects'"¹⁰⁴ Bunshaft felt the same. To both, the sculptor should not merely be a decorator of buildings but a serious collaborator with the architect in the creation of "significant space and of significant

¹⁰² Ibid., 53.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 52.

¹⁰⁴ Noguchi, "The Sculptor and the Architect," 18.

shapes which defines the space.”¹⁰⁵ As Noguchi explained in a latter interview, “I shift. You know, you feel lonely and you want to have contact. I work with architects...partly for the contact, partly for the experience of working more in space.”¹⁰⁶ In Bunshaft, Noguchi found a rare architect that shared not only his goals as far as the meaning and use of space, but also an architect that allowed him a relative amount of freedom in the design and creation of his universal landscapes. They worked together on several projects of varying sizes, but, as with many of his artistic collaborations, Noguchi eventually split away from Bunshaft. As he stated later in an interview reflecting on his work with Bunshaft, “...in a way architects develop over the years, they become more and more so. I think they start out probably with considerable megalomania but they become impossible after awhile. So one has to drop them, or they drop you, one or the other.”¹⁰⁷ Even when it came to individuals and collaborators, Noguchi’s insecurities of lack of belonging took hold causing him in many instances to just walk away from otherwise rewarding collaborations.

By this time, New York was the city where Noguchi had lived and worked for nearly forty years. And while Noguchi claimed that his American environment lacked the “closeness of earth” that he associated with Japan, in New York he had contact with other artists and communication with people of similar interests and background. At about this same time he acquired an old factory in Long Island City and began converting it into a studio and residence. But, in order to “make this habitable,”

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Cummings, “Interview with Isamu Noguchi,” 26.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 72.

Noguchi hired “a skilled carpenter from Japan.”¹⁰⁸ Thus, in this period Noguchi went about dwelling in his New York community by importing something of the vision of the Japanese home he had as a boy, but he pursued this Japanese sense of home in a particularly American place.

A similar pattern was operative in his work at Chase: he sought some contact with the warmth of the Japanese earth by thrusting large chunks of it into the glass and steel jaws of New York’s skyscrapers. The office buildings Bunshaft designed during the 1960s were impressive for their size, for their technological development, and for their sensitive detailing and the Chase Manhattan Bank was no different.¹⁰⁹ Noguchi seems to have been energized by this extraordinary conjunction of a common emblem of Japanese identity (the Japanese rock garden) and a universal symbol of American identity (the skyscraper); two opposing aspects that corresponded to his own dual identity. Nevertheless, with Bunshaft’s sixty-four-story glass and aluminum tower (Fig. 12) looming above and the vast flat, white surface of the surrounding plaza, the sixty-four-foot-diameter glass-walled sunken well was a difficult space to render into a meaningful place of affiliation. Noguchi was given the plans for the building and plaza on October, 12 1956, and was essentially given free reign as to what to design for the plaza but with the condition that he would consult closely with Bunshaft on studies he made for the site.¹¹⁰ As Noguchi wrote to Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill on November 15, 1956, “I shall undertake to consult with you closely on studies for the Plaza as a

¹⁰⁸ The fact that Bunshaft was such an innovative architect for his time is made clear in Duus, *The Life of Isamu Noguchi*, 349-352.

¹⁰⁹ Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988), 77. This book is a nice look into the life and works of Gordon Bunshaft.

¹¹⁰ According to archival materials from Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, NY on October 12, 1956 Noguchi received the Site Plan, Ground Floor Plan, North Elevation, Western and South Elevations, East Elevation and Section thru Bay 10-11 in black and white prints (“for your information”). The Archives of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill.

whole. These will include the shape and size of the light court, and the placement and mass of sculpture, planting, trees, benches, parapets, pools, fountains, pavement patterns, and any other pavement features.”¹¹¹ Noguchi had learned from the UNESCO project the importance of contact with the architect in the designing and cost of the site.¹¹²

Reportedly disparaged as a “sunken art hole” by one architect, Noguchi’s well was essentially the bottom surface of an overwhelming vertically tiered shaft of space. From the very beginning of the project a plaza was planned adjacent to the skyscraper, but it was actually through David Rockefeller’s desire to make the interior workings of the bank more visible to the public, since, in his view, the bank “was intimately concerned with the whole community”¹¹³ that the project took on its current role. This idea of a sunken space with windows surrounding it, an “architectural surprise” as he called it, was a design element that Bunshaft copied throughout many of his projects, including the Beinecke Library, as a way of opening these buildings to the outside world.¹¹⁴ Noguchi’s solution was to conceptualize his design as a horizontal relief to be viewed from above as well as from the sides (Fig. 13 and 16).¹¹⁵ The well was recessed a full story below the plaza and walled with glass to introduce daylight into the large public banking concourse beneath the plaza. Thus, Noguchi’s installation could be viewed through the glass from the banking concourse, from the edge of the plaza

¹¹¹ Letter from Noguchi to Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, November 15, 1956. The Archives of the Noguchi Museum.

¹¹² Many of the letters Noguchi wrote to Bunshaft or his firm dealt with the cost of the garden and the rocks from Japan. The Archives of The Noguchi Museum.

¹¹³ Letter from David Rockefeller to Isamu Noguchi on the completion of the project. The Archives of The Noguchi Museum.

¹¹⁴ The repetition of this design element is pointed out in Nicholas Adams, *Skidmore, Owings & Merrill: SOM Since 1936* (Milan: Electa, 2006), 103.

¹¹⁵ To learn more about the history of the project, Ashton, *Noguchi*, 187-92 and Dean, “Bunshaft and Noguchi: An Uneasy but Highly Productive Architect-Artist Collaboration,” 52-55.

above, as well as from the windows of the office tower higher above. Each view offered viewers a new perspective onto the garden. There is a power to this garden strong enough to withstand the silhouette of the skyscraper standing in the background.

For the Chase Manhattan Bank Plaza located in the financial district of the world's busiest city, he provided a self-contained environment intended as a visual respite from the hustle and bustle of life. The sunken garden presents a pristine microcosmic landscape of mountains in a sea -- Noguchi's idiosyncratic version of a Zen meditation garden. The seven carefully chosen rocks the artist obtained in Kyoto for the installation in the sunken well were eroded into distinctive and intricate wavelike forms. He wanted a purely natural environment, so the rocks were sculpted by eons of wind and water, not by man.¹¹⁶ These were rocks that Noguchi selected himself from Japan for the landscape, even before he was officially signed to do the project. Bunshaft, an apparently constant ally throughout Noguchi's design process, though, quickly approved of Noguchi's vision of using the rocks from Japan. Noguchi saw these rocks as an essential part of his vision. He wrote to Bunshaft from Japan, "I have hurried in order to find out if the black stones were still available. In the nick of time, as he was about to see the one we liked...and many of the others I had my eye on were gone."¹¹⁷ While Noguchi refrained from carving or constructing these rocks, he attempted to sculpt their setting in the well in such a way as to give them strength to hold their own in this over-scaled space. Its elements stand as emblems of absent nature

¹¹⁶ Noguchi's desire for a purely natural environment is mentioned in Dean, "Bunshaft and Noguchi: An Uneasy but Highly Productive Architect-Artist Collaboration," 54.

¹¹⁷ Letter from Noguchi to Gordon Bunshaft, September 9, 1961. The Archives of The Noguchi Museum.

and of natural processes: of mountains and rivers, of uplift and erosion.¹¹⁸ The rocks are not part of the earth: they are “levitating”¹¹⁹; they are composed by man, but they are natural. The bottom of the garden was paved with stones arranged in circular and crescent-shaped whorls comparable to the patterns raked daily by Zen monks in their meditation gardens (Fig. 16-17).

The asymmetrical placement of the “mountains” in the “sea” offers endlessly changing vistas, as viewers walk around the periphery.¹²⁰ But, there also is a seasonal difference, as the dry winter garden becomes wet and active in the summer, with recessed jets spouting water that plays around the exotic river stones, while in the fall and winter it was dry like a Japanese rock garden (Fig. 13-14).¹²¹ When the pavers are seen through the clear water, they suggest the ebb and flow of tides or currents similar to the effect created by the patterns of raked gravel in Zen gardens.¹²² Sunlight creates lively ephemeral sparkles on the water’s surface while the undulating surfaces become shadows. This garden, a prototype in its use of so many elements -- sound, water, volume, flickering lights, elements both sculptural and natural -- would serve as a proving ground for many of Noguchi’s subsequent grand projects. It was in many ways

¹¹⁸ I owe this idea that in many of Noguchi’s gardens certain elements were selected as emblems of absent nature and of natural processes to Beardsley, “The Machine Becomes a Poem,” 50.

¹¹⁹ As quoted in Torres, *Isamu Noguchi*, 155.

¹²⁰ Description of the garden is based on the author’s own experience after visiting the site in the summer of 2011.

¹²¹ The seasonal difference to the garden is described in Duus, *The Life of Isamu Noguchi*, 295.

¹²² A look into Noguchi’s views on stones can be found in Ashton, *Noguchi*, 186-88. Stones in water had fascinated him during his first journey away from Tokyo between 1950 and 1952. In his photographs of the 1950 trip to Kyoto, there are countless views of stones placed in ponds or emerging like mountains from smaller bodies of water, as well as a number of photographs of *tsukubai*, “the traditional hollowed stones,” as Noguchi noted, “into which water trickles. They are used in a Japanese garden as both visual and aural objects of pleasure.” The Archives of The Noguchi Museum.

his first completely controlled experiment with the old idea of “the total work of art”¹²³ in an urban environment.

Noguchi wanted this to be a “modern garden” and he was determined to remold aspects of the Japanese garden tradition in response to the modern spatiality he confronted in Manhattan.¹²⁴ As he would reflect in his autobiography, “I was acutely conscious of...after all, New York was my reality, the surroundings familiar, the materials available common to my living. It seemed absurd to me to be working with rocks and stones in New York, where walls of glass and steel are our horizon.”¹²⁵ It was his contribution of spiritual and symbolic significance to a modern reality: “Nature and non-Nature. There will come other gardens to correspond to our changing concepts of reality; disturbing and beautiful gardens to awaken us to a new awareness of our solitude.”¹²⁶ In the Manhattan garden, Noguchi translates the patterns from Ryoanji Temple rock garden into a permanent ever-flowing and changing horizontal plane. The rhythmic movements and the subtle inter-relationships of the whole space give to this most tranquil and simple of gardens a calm intensity. At the same time, the viewer may perceive the subtle paradox of stones that remain unworked except for the action of water. These are set into a formalized surface, a surface that in turn forms a flowing rhythmical opposition to the architected environment in which they are set. No single perspective dominates, either from the plaza above or the offices below. This important public landscape epitomizes Noguchi’s understanding and expression of the concept of meaningful simplicity and the paradoxical potential complexities within the simple.

¹²³ As quoted from Noguchi in Ashton, *Noguchi*, 192.

¹²⁴ As explained by Noguchi in his autobiography *Sculptor’s World*, 171.

¹²⁵ As quoted by Shoji Sadao in “The Sculptor’s Genius Sparks at “Aluminum”” in *Isamu Noguchi: Human Aspect as a Contemporary: 54 Witnesses in Japan and America*, 139.

¹²⁶ Noguchi, *Sculptor’s World*, 171.

For the enclosed courtyard of the Beinecke Library at Yale University, Noguchi created the antithesis of the Chase Manhattan design (Fig. 18). Instead of taking nature as his paradigm, he produced an intellectually rigorous, entirely man-made environment.¹²⁷ Noguchi approached the design of the courtyard with the concept of unitary space in mind, seeing it as an extension of the architecture.¹²⁸ As Bunshaft explained in describing the project, the building and the garden were conceived as a unity.¹²⁹ Like the Chase Manhattan Bank garden, the Beinecke Library garden was a sunken garden that could be viewed from ground level as well as from an underground reading room for scholars using the library's collection. The Chase Manhattan garden, nestled under the towering bank building, was circular and used natural Japanese rocks and stones. By contrast, the Yale garden was rectangular and paved with white Vermont marble incised with abstract geometric patterns that allude to astronomical pattern, the modernist grid, as well as the raked stones of Zen gardens (Fig. 20).¹³⁰ In the middle stood three symbolic sculptures fashioned from the same white marble -- a spherical disc, a low pyramid, and a cube mounted on one tip -- all dazzlingly brilliant in the direct sunlight. Through these symbolic elements, Noguchi combined scientific and modernist designs within a space alluding to Japanese Zen gardens in order to create "nothingness" or rather a utopia "to which we will return."¹³¹ The design was

¹²⁷ A description of the project and symbolism is in Torres, *Isamu Noguchi*, 118-27.

¹²⁸ From the beginning Bunshaft's main concept was to re-create the spirit of medieval monastic libraries, in which books were venerated objects. The sunken courtyard recalled the cloister that traditionally surrounded such libraries.

¹²⁹ An enlightening look into the history of the project can be found in Gordon Bunshaft, "The Beinecke Project" (Professional Development Committee Archival Lecture Series, Beinecke Rare Book Library, 1989).

¹³⁰ Plants were an impossibility in the sunken garden because water leaks posed too great a threat to the book rooms, so early in the project Noguchi and Bunshaft decided that the garden would be executed entirely in the Vermont marble that was being used on the exterior of the building.

¹³¹ Isamu Noguchi, "New Stone Gardens," *Art in America* 52 (1964): 84.

inspired by what Noguchi had seen in his travels abroad. “The idea started from the sand mounds often found in Japanese temples,” (Fig. 19) he wrote. “But soon the image of the astronomical gardens of India intruded, as did the more formal paving patterns of Italy. It became a dramatic landscape, purely imaginary; it is nowhere, yet somehow familiar. Its size is fictive, of infinite space or cloistered containment.”¹³²

When it opened the number of sightseers, drawn to the peculiar thin gray and rust-veined marble chest-like structure, swamped the number of scholarly visitors (Fig. 10).¹³³ As a dazzling evocation of abstract painting in the form of geology, it is a unique experiment, both loved and despised. As Bunshaft explained of the Beinecke Library, “I think it is one of the half-dozen best buildings I’ve ever done in my life. It’s the only building I’ve been involved in that has an emotional impact.”¹³⁴ Bunshaft’s description of the design process is typically direct: “As soon as we got the job I started thinking about a rare book library, and there isn’t much to know about it. What it is is a huge vault, a secure place with tremendous humidity and temperature control and stacking of books. In addition to that, there’s some offices for curators, there’s a reading room for a few scholars, and some exhibition space for little books and stuff.”¹³⁵ Bunshaft’s favorite description of the library is an encomium by Anthony Hobson, an authority on rare books, who called it:

The most imaginative construction of its kind for at least two centuries.
The exterior is of squares of Vermont marble framed in Woodbury granite,
and nothing in its severely horizontal lines prepares the visitor for the shock

¹³² Isamu Noguchi, “On Gardens and Landscapes.” In *Isamu Noguchi: Essays and Conversations*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona et al. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), 64.

¹³³ An article in *The Journal-Courier* (New Haven), 18 February 1964, noted five-hundred and fifty-scholars compared to between five and eight thousand tourists.

¹³⁴ Bunshaft, “The Beinecke Project.”

¹³⁵ As quoted in Betty J. Blum, *Oral History of Gordon Bunshaft* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1990), 215.

of pleasure as he enters. The main decoration comes from the books themselves...but the whole interior glows with a rich and varied light transmitted by the veined marble panels. The [offices] are placed around a sunken courtyard, furnished with an abstract landscape of white marble sculpture by Noguchi. This is a library of all the virtues...¹³⁶

At the Beinecke sunken garden, Noguchi was given free reign to design a sculpture garden. “We didn’t talk about what it should be, but had he come up with something lousy, I would have told him so,” said Bunshaft. “He came up with this marble concept, and I thought it was very beautiful, except for the round doughnut element, which was a little soft. Noguchi made several studies for it, and I really didn’t like any of them. Noguchi was annoyed at first but tried some more, and he eventually came up with what we have now, which is marvelous.”¹³⁷ The sunken garden is conceived at two levels (Fig. 21). Within this overall form, there are several registers -- horizons with differing functions. The horizons are, as Noguchi said, fictive, and are perceived as low-lying horizons of landscape when seen from above, perhaps from a mountain crest. Viewed through the frame of the balustrade above, the whole is a cosmic tableau -- a “drama,” the artist would intone, “being silently enacted, inexorably.”¹³⁸ Below, at the level of the garden, the readers in the books stacks see a landscape almost at their feet, with shifting perspectives and transformations wrought by the light from above. Sitting behind the glass-walled enclosure, one experiences the pyramidal, cubic, and circular forms as if they grew from the slabs of the court. From below, one is reminded that Noguchi had always had an affinity for enclosures such as he had experienced in the gardens of Japan. At the same time, the experience subtly

¹³⁶ Bunshaft, “The Beinecke Project.”

¹³⁷ Bunshaft, “The Beinecke Project.”

¹³⁸ Noguchi’s explanation of the Beinecke symbolism can be found in Noguchi, *A Sculptor’s World*, 170-71 and Noguchi, “New Stone Gardens,” 84-86.

shifts from the feeling of being in an enclosed garden to that of being at the edge of a great Italian Renaissance piazza. The garden changes as the viewer's perspective shifts and as the sculptures are transformed by the sunlight moving across them. During the day, shadows and reflections are picked up and reflected by the glass walls, which enclose the garden.

The marble pavement of intersecting circles and squares extends the prospects to, as Noguchi said, a fictive infinity (Fig. 20).¹³⁹ The arcs and straight lines, radiate to give the illusion of a great expanse, one portion of which is dominated by the pyramid rising in almost perfect symmetry to catch the sun in all its seasons, while off center and close to the glass wall is the giant pierced disk.¹⁴⁰ By making the sunken garden invisible from the street-level plaza, Noguchi further emphasizes the illusionary effect of space; it is a space separated from the urban environment outside. This garden sculpture represents two valences that consistently drew him: one toward geometry and purity, the other toward a universal landscape, pondered and represented as art.¹⁴¹ Here Noguchi invited viewers to intuit their place in the cosmic scene. As he once said, "There is a kind of relationship which had nothing to do with a message but has to do with people's place in the world, their sense of belonging. I think that kind of thing can be suggested by art."¹⁴² Yale's own professor of modern architectural history at the time, Vincent Scully, criticized the building and garden's "atmosphere of no place, nowhere, nobody..."¹⁴³ Noguchi wanted the Beinecke courtyard to invite an erudite

¹³⁹ As quoted in Ashton, *Noguchi*, 185.

¹⁴⁰ Noguchi, *A Sculptor's World*, 170-71.

¹⁴¹ Based on Noguchi's explanation of the Beinecke symbolism which can be found in Noguchi, *A Sculptor's World*, pp.170-71.

¹⁴² As quoted in Fletcher et al., *Isamu Noguchi*, 136.

¹⁴³ Scully, "Architecture and Man at Yale," *Saturday Review* 47 (1964), p. 28. Bunshaft's comment on Scully: "He's full of baloney." Blum, *Oral History of Gordon Bunshaft*, 226.

audience to contemplate the language of pure abstraction and to experience a sense of connection with the transcendent order of the universe.

At the Chase Bank and Beinecke Library, Noguchi developed a new form of urban garden. Both are rarified spaces, each reflecting the character of the building it adjoins. The Beinecke, a place for preserving rare books and ancient manuscripts, is a sealed, private area accessible only to scholars, and Chase bank, after all, is a vault for money and commerce necessarily concerned with security. Both are sealed buildings; so are their gardens. These gardens are areas for contemplation, not entry. They are constructed as separate worlds into which human beings cannot enter physically but can penetrate imaginatively. Like the gardens of Japanese Zen temples, they are separated from the outside world and one looks into them as objects for meditation. As one faces this world and oneself, one is encouraged to engage with the meaning of life. The garden's elemental forms enable the observer to populate these formal spaces with personal associations. These gardens also share concepts that emphasize changes (in perspective) and transformation (in daylight). By allowing the viewer to circumambulate his updated contemplation gardens at Yale and in Lower Manhattan, Noguchi transformed largely static forms into dynamic ones, providing pictorial change through movement. The Japanese garden tradition of the ambulatory garden is based on this principle of changing perspective and physical engagement with the landscape.¹⁴⁴ People may enter the space and then discover they are in scale with it, and it becomes real. "Empty space," he declared, "has no visual dimension or significance. Scale and meaning appear, instead, only when an object or a line is introduced...The size and

¹⁴⁴ A comparison between Noguchi's garden and the ambulatory garden can be found in Altshuler, *Isamu Noguchi*, 76.

shape of each element is entirely relative to all other elements and the given space.”¹⁴⁵

The architecturally imposing structures -- one of towering metal, the other of marble -- each symbolic of the institutions for which they represented, acted as walls for Noguchi’s landscapes; each providing the necessary protection against the modern environment Noguchi wished to escape. Once immersed imaginatively in the landscapes, though, these apparent structural walls seem fictive, as the viewer’s eyes move over an ever changing landscape.

In 1979 Noguchi was asked by Henry Segerstrom, a land developer in Costa Mesa in Orange County, California, to help in his project to beautify South Coast Plaza. Segerstrom had been perplexed about what to do with a 1.6 acre plot sandwiched between two fifteen-story bank buildings and a huge parking structure in one corner of the mall.¹⁴⁶ Asked at first, in 1980, to design only a fountain for a small park surrounded by commercial buildings, Noguchi, in his customary practice, suggested rather that he take on “the whole cubic space,” which measured approximately 120 x 120 meters, and make it a sculpture garden.¹⁴⁷ As a rule, Noguchi did not design projects for private developers, believing they were interested only in the bottom line, but he must have sensed here that he was dealing with someone who cared for aesthetic values as well as financial concerns.¹⁴⁸ His assessment of Segerstrom’s character proved accurate, and once the project was underway, Segerstrom declared to Noguchi, “I need an artist dictator and you’re it.”¹⁴⁹ Noguchi went on to make a completely

¹⁴⁵ Noguchi, *A Sculptor's World*, 161.

¹⁴⁶ Segerstrom’s hobby was collecting sculpture, and he had already installed outdoor sculptures by Alexander Calder, Henry Moore, Joan Miro, and others.

¹⁴⁷ A background into the development of the *California Scenario* can be found in Duus, *Life of Noguchi*, 334.

¹⁴⁸ This is noted in Sadao, *Buckminster Fuller and Isamu Noguchi*, 220.

¹⁴⁹ As quoted in Sadao, *Buckminster Fuller and Isamu Noguchi*, 220.

enclosed space into a work of art that would sum up his life's convictions. It is the example par excellence of his philosophy of garden design, or rather "the sculpturing of space."¹⁵⁰

The designated space for the garden, located in the middle of a commercial complex, is almost entirely enclosed by two glass-fronted office buildings and by two 12-meter-high, white-rendered walls which are part of an adjacent car park (Fig. 26). Noguchi's plan, which he entitled *California Scenario* (Fig. 22-25), was to be divided into six main sections, each symbolizing one aspect of California's diverse natural environment: desert, forest, mountain, agricultural, urban, and riverine.¹⁵¹ It laid out a symbolic panorama of the state, from the Sierra Nevada whose melting snow nourished the state with water, through California's evergreen forests and farmlands to its dry desert.¹⁵² *Desert Land* is a small round mound of earth with a sparse covering of cacti, agaves and bushes, a metaphor for the forbidding charm of the deserts of California. Opposite lies *Forest Walk*, a grass-covered ramp, surrounded by sequoias, a reference to the impressive forests of these giant trees along the coast of California. The other major elements of the project are *Land Use*, a mound of grass bearing a granite slab with the title *Monument to Development* and a small grove of trees, which provides a concave-shaped bench with shade. *Monument to Development* is Noguchi's ironic criticism of the uncontrolled building boom in California. *The Spirit of the Lima Bean*, a group of fifteen large, almost unworked granite stones, precisely interlocked to form a sculpture, which Noguchi intended to be a reference to Machu Picchu. Noguchi

¹⁵⁰ Isamu Noguchi, *A Sculptor's World*, 172.

¹⁵¹ Description of Noguchi's design and meanings come from correspondence between Noguchi and Henry Segerstrom throughout the design process for the site. The Archives of The Noguchi Museum.

¹⁵² A small stream flowed from the top of a triangular hillock representing the mountain terrain (Water Source) through a plaza paved with irregularly shaped sandstone slabs (River), where it disappeared under a narrow pyramid resting on one side.

intended the sculpture to evoke the origins of California's wealth prior to its being sold as land for development, farmers cultivated the land, their chief crop being beans. Except for the stainless steel employed in a fountain symbolizing the energy of industrialization, Noguchi used natural materials.¹⁵³ The entire area, an austere, introverted space, is paved with rough stone slabs. The designer draws on the full repertoire of his many years of experience in garden design to create a place that is both timeless and profound through the use of evocative imagery.

In Costa Mesa, Noguchi's fundamental vocabulary -- geometric and organic stone figures, shaped plants, and flowing water -- is brought into harmony by means of a spectacular white wall serving both as a backdrop and as a barrier beyond which there is only sky, as borrowed scenery in the manner of Zen gardens (Fig. 26). Here space is used as a stage through which expression is given to the compelling dialogue between nature and culture, employing the fundamental materials stone, plants, and water in a reduced, archetypal manner. Stone, which Noguchi selected personally, occurs in both its unworked elemental force as a flat upright boulder and in the form of an idealized Platonic body. A stream flows from a free-standing, triangular wall of natural stone, plunges down a narrow watercourse and meanders across the area disappearing under a reclining stone pyramid (Fig. 24-25). The highly-polished granite surface of the pyramid reflects the sky like a mirror and evokes an ancient Japanese myth, according to which a mirror was used to entice the sun goddess out of her cave so she would restore light to the universe. Piled apparently randomly on either side of the stream are solitary granite boulders. Every square inch of the relatively small plaza is calculated to produce an illusion of space and depth. Noguchi's play with perspective, always subtle,

¹⁵³ An explanation of the project can be found in Altshuler, *Isamu Noguchi*, 76.

occurs not only in the distorted placement of stones, but also in the clustering of the paving stones themselves, which lead the eye to the boundaries in diminishing lines structured by their pattern (Fig. 22, 24). Each circular and every triangular form contribute to the visual extension, far beyond the real perimeter of the space.¹⁵⁴

California Scenario greets the visitor like an oasis, not a place of empty stillness but of meditative tranquility. All the components of the space are interlinked and collectively create a unique, compelling spatial structure, through which the beholder moves as if on a stage separated from the skyline of Costa Mesa, which is today dominated by office buildings.

California Scenario was the culmination of the many gardens Noguchi had designed since the UNESCO project twenty-five years before, and it embodied the lessons learned from the gardens he had studied in Japan and from the geometrical forms he had seen at the ancient astronomical observatories in India and in the piazzas of Rome. In *California Scenario* the inspiration he drew from Japanese models came to life seemingly effortlessly as part of the American landscape. Noguchi wrote of the marble garden at the Beinecke that “its size is fictive, of infinite space or cloistered containment.”¹⁵⁵ By allowing the viewer to circumambulate his updated contemplation gardens at Yale and in Lower Manhattan, Noguchi transformed that largely static form into a dynamic one, providing pictorial change through movement. In *California Scenario* Noguchi built a garden that achieved an even more impressive spatial concentration -- more impressive because the illusion is maintained as one walks through the garden. Although it is an enclosed space adjacent to an office building,

¹⁵⁴ A Description of *California Scenario* can be found in Ashton, *Noguchi*, 275-76. At the time of writing this paper the author had yet to visit and experience the site.

¹⁵⁵ From Noguchi’s description of the project in his autobiography *A Sculptor’s World*, 125.

California Scenario appears open and spacious; the proportional relationship of the asymmetrical pyramid to the smaller rocks and plants creates a sense of vastness and scale beyond the actual dimensions of the garden.¹⁵⁶ This was a skill he had learned studying Japanese Zen gardens such as Ryoanji. As such, it merits repeating the artist's words:

...that a sense of vastness could be accomplished through such simple means, by the placement and proportion of things, by the lighting...The Japanese... evolved ways of creating the illusion of space, especially in their gardens, of the distances of the sea or of mountain views and so forth, when they're using very small areas...these illusions are created through isometric triangulation so that the eye is constantly carried from one to the other and there is no end to the vastness that appears to exist¹⁵⁷

The other Japanese garden tradition, that of the ambulatory garden, is also based on this principle of changing perspective and physical engagement with the landscape. And its consideration will contribute to a wider appreciation of Noguchi's reliance on gardens to design a world of aesthetic, social, and personal integration.

¹⁵⁶ This sense of vastness is made apparent in Fletcher et al., *Isamu Noguchi*, 160.

¹⁵⁷ Noguchi, *The Sculptor and the Architect*, 18.

Chapter 5: The “Universal” Landscape

The garden for the Domon Ken Museum in Sakata is delicately shaded, reticent, perfectly poised between knowledge of what man can create and knowledge of the indispensable wellspring of nature (Fig. 28-32). This was a project, like many of his projects with Bunshaft, for which Noguchi was commissioned, and in which he was given a free hand. The architect, Yoshio Taniguchi, asked him not only to design a sculpture garden, but to help him design the site as well. Noguchi’s contribution, as Taniguchi insists, went far beyond the design of the sculpture garden, and a visit to the museum confirms the feeling that Noguchi’s terraced garden, with its slowly descending rough granite steps over which water steals almost silently to a final cascade into the lake, is essential to the entire design.¹⁵⁸ As Taniguchi would later remember when he first asked Noguchi to be part of the project:

He said, “This structure looks interesting. Yes, I will work on it together with you. However, if I take part, it won’t be the garden only. I shall probably say a few things about the building, too. Are you sure that’s OK?” He was looking at me with that mischievous smile characteristic of Isamu...I still remember how he immediately gave his opinion of my plan on the spot and picked up a pencil and began sketching...¹⁵⁹

Taniguchi, a Harvard-trained Japanese architect, has been praised by Glenn D. Lowry, the director of the MoMA, as an architect who “...is particularly sensitive to the issues of space, light, and volume. His feel for space is ethereal.”¹⁶⁰ Skepticism about

¹⁵⁸ For more detail on this project see Ashton, *Noguchi*, 278-83.

¹⁵⁹ As remembered by Yoshio Taniguchi in “An Unrealized Collaboration of Sculpture and Architecture” in *Isamu Noguchi: Human Aspect as a Contemporary: 54 Witnesses in Japan and America*, 132.

¹⁶⁰ As quoted in Wendy Moonan “Tokyo’s Modernist Jewel: A New Museum by Architect Taniguchi Shelters Buddhism’s Past” in *Architectural Digest* (October 2006): 158. Taniguchi has rarely discussed in print the philosophy and method behind his designs, preferring instead to offer terse explanations

the city and the current trend in construction for the sake of consumption led Taniguchi to the creation of self-sufficient worlds; microcosms indicative of his version of an ideal environment free from the confusion of the city. Many of his projects are situated in the countryside or in an extensive natural environment. As Taniguchi explained, “The site is the point of departure for the architect’s creative process, as the canvas is for the painter, the block of stone for the sculptor. But the architect’s canvas is not blank; a particular history and a natural environment have already made their marks on it. Architectural design begins with the study of those pre-existing features of the site and consideration of how to link them to the work of architecture.”¹⁶¹ This concern with the natural environment not only looks back to traditional Japanese architecture, but it also spoke to Noguchi in his search for the perfect environment for his landscapes. Where in past projects Noguchi’s landscapes were confined to the boundaries created by architectural forms, here his landscape could be at once contained within architecture but at the same time part of the infinite natural environment surrounding Taniguchi’s design.

Taniguchi succeeded in creating a style of architecture that worked with its surroundings to form a single landscape (Fig. 27-28, 32). The Domon Ken Museum is arguably the best example of this. A pond was positioned in front, and a hill -- more correctly termed an artificial mountain -- behind. The long approach allowed the

concerning just-completed works. His attitude has always been that his designs say all there is for him to say. One exception was the essay “Concerning Design,” published in *Shikenchiku* upon the completion (in 1978) of the Shiseido Art Museum, in which he discussed a series of past works. “They are the result of combining simple but contradictory figures, namely centripetal and centrifugal forms, and space and mass...Responding to given site and design conditions is one of the most basic problems in architectural design. And the most basic factor determining the composition of space is the decision made on such things as materials, lighting, colors and proportions...” explained Taniguchi in this article. Although in subsequent works the space created by his buildings increased in complexity, these statements summarize the basic stratagem of his design approach.

¹⁶¹ Yoshio Taniguchi, “Learning Architecture” in *The Architecture of Yoshio Taniguchi*, 253.

building to express a series of changes. Visitors enter the interior of the building leisurely by means of an internal circulation plan. The character of the interior spaces differs greatly; with completely closed-off exhibition spaces and corridors that draw the pond and surrounding view into the interior through slits in their walls. From a distance, the building seems to be part of the landscape, and from the inside visitors are offered glimpses of the outside world. The most distinctive feature of Taniguchi's work is, however, the way the landscape incorporates his architecture, unfolding like a single paint scroll.

Taniguchi's fundamental idea -- to design an absolutely discreet, classical building of granite with, as he wrote, a path as the organizing principle -- bestirred Noguchi's associations with ancient Japanese juxtapositions of nature and architecture.¹⁶² Noguchi believed that a building and its garden had a very important and clear relationship:

The building can no longer exist as object except as it participates with the garden -- as space. The garden lives with and through the building...[In] the building-garden relationship...nothing should be so self-assertive as to distract from the whole, so that this whole itself can be said to be a full and meaningful emptiness, to be a complete three-dimensional statement.¹⁶³

Nothing suited him better than that the entire museum, with its intermittent views of water and garden and park, and mountain, seen both from within and without, be designed as an abstract path, a way and idea that, as Taniguchi stated it, would contrast the soft flowing lines of the landscape with the sharp angular lines of the building (Fig.

¹⁶² This is apparent in the discussion of the design and final product between Noguchi and Taniguchi in Noguchi, Isamu, Yoshio Taniguchi, and Hiroshi Teshigahara. "Garden: Plastic Space with Link Inside and Outside." Interview in Japanese. *Ikebana Sogetsu* 150 (Oct. 1983): 13.zz.

¹⁶³ Isamu Noguchi, "Foreward" in Yukio Futagawa, *The Roots of Japanese Architecture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 8.

27-28, 32).¹⁶⁴ Although, like Noguchi's gardens, Taniguchi's low-lying structure is obviously a modern structure, with a beautiful long wall and a bridge joining the two sides of the park over the pond, the Domon Ken Museum was nonetheless a remarkable evocation, perhaps unconscious, of certain classical Japanese principles. Even the rectangular and square granite slabs on the sides and facade of the building echo old measures, while the frequent transitions from one level to another are directly Japanese.¹⁶⁵ As Taniguchi stated in an interview, "My most important challenge is how to represent contemporary Japan in my architecture. You need to feel something Japanese in the space."¹⁶⁶

The Domon Ken museum was compared to the residence of a Heian noble by several architects, with an arrangement similar to the Amida temples of that same period. In this Heian architecture, features such as; a pond, a mountain and the temple building unify under a certain prescribed cosmology and come to possess something of the innate character of an ideal landscape. Utopian vision -- both Japanese and foreign -- is reflected in the buildings, calling up a certain sense of nostalgia for visitors, helping them sublimate themselves into an ideal world.¹⁶⁷ It is also evident that Taniguchi was looking at gardens of the early Edo period, such as the Katsura Detached Palace. These gardens -- *kaiyushiki teien* -- abandoned symmetry and laid out scattered horizontals while skillfully utilizing the undulations of the topography, while the buildings are scattered throughout the space integrating themselves within the aesthetics of the garden. Like these gardens, the Domon Ken museum appears to be a part of the

¹⁶⁴ As quoted in Noguchi, Taniguchi, and Teshigahara, "Garden: Plastic Space with Link Inside and Outside," 13. zz.

¹⁶⁵ Description of Taniguchi's design in Ashton, *Noguchi*, 279-280.

¹⁶⁶ As quoted in Moonan "Tokyo's Modernist Jewel," 162.

¹⁶⁷ This connection between Taniguchi's design and traditional Japanese architecture is made in Riichi Miyake, "From Geometry to Landscape." *The Japan Architect* 21 (Spring 1996): 55.

landscape which surrounds it. Taniguchi aimed for an elegant, calm style of architecture which focuses on the relationship with the surrounding landscape, an element he found in classical Japanese architecture, combined with a sense of modernism. This dualism between tradition/modernity and Japan/the West was equally present in Noguchi's gardens, making Taniguchi and Noguchi ideal collaborators in every sense.

Fascinated by the landscape of the area and in agreement with Taniguchi's architectonic approach to building's design, Noguchi reinforced and enhanced the architectural concept of change over time.¹⁶⁸ Noguchi's garden connects mountain, museum, and water and is the essential component of the total design. The sculpture garden was located on the lakeshore where the water, the architecture, and the mountain were visually connected by the garden in the tradition of borrowed scenery (Fig. 30-32). The resolution of the space, which is at once interior and exterior, acknowledges that a balance is necessary between what man can create and his dependence on the wellspring of nature. In effect Noguchi produced a three-walled, open-air room, with a terraced floor of rough granite levels that descend very slowly in rhythmic steps (Fig. 29-30). Taniguchi's bridge becomes from certain viewpoints the symbol of the fourth wall, or creates a window, so that Noguchi's recessed garden is seen much as one sees a *tokonoma*¹⁶⁹ in a traditional Zen hall (Fig. 31).¹⁷⁰ In the

¹⁶⁸ Noguchi's approval of Taniguchi's architectonic approach is explained in Torres, *Isamu Noguchi*, 235.

¹⁶⁹ According to *Genshoku Chadō Daijiten* Japanese encyclopedia of *chanoyu*, entry for *toko* a *tokonoma* is a Japanese term generally referring to a built-in recessed space in a Japanese style reception room, in which items for artistic appreciation are displayed. The items usually displayed in a *tokonoma* are calligraphic and/or pictorial scrolls and an arrangement of flowers. The *tokonoma* and its contents are essential elements of traditional Japanese interior decoration. *Tokonoma* first appeared in the late Muromachi period (14th-16th century). In the *shoin* style architecture of this period and basically was a wall space where scrolls would be hung and a raised dais in front of this would be for

Domon Ken Museum, Noguchi was highly conscious of the *tokonoma*'s function as "a void which invites the imagination into communion with a mood."¹⁷¹ Seen from a distance, this simple absence in the lateral facade of Taniguchi's building reads both as a suggestive void and as an animated center from which space can flow; as a *tokonoma*, in effect, but a *tokonoma* no one had ever imagined before. From most vantage points within the museum, the garden appears enclosed; yet from others it seems to extend into the ideal landscape surrounding the museum and extending apparently infinitely beyond the skyline. The boundaries of architecture that had once forced Noguchi to create fictive versions of infinite space was now broken by a single opening looking out on an apparently infinite landscape that at once looks neither Japanese nor American far from the chaos of the modern world.

Taniguchi had conceived of the museum as a kind of pause between mountain and water and had wished it to be "half almost buried in the ground -- a static space that never changes -- and half floating on water, changeable."¹⁷² Noguchi picked up these threads and wove, into the central court, all the dominant motifs (Fig. 29). He planted a stand of bamboo trees at one corner that serve both sculptural principles in their verticality, and volatile sources of ethereal sounds. He chose a single sculpture -- a local granite, menhir-like stone with delicate gray-to-ocher tones, which is only partially shaped by his chisel -- to stand off center (but uncannily, as one moves, it becomes the center). This is an ambivalent symbol of both man and nature -- a silent witness, a

setting an incense burner, vase for flowers, and candle holder. In Zen tradition, the objects chosen to be displayed in a *tokonoma* are selected with a deeper meaning in mind; a message is given symbolically from the arranger to the viewer/visitor of the house.

¹⁷⁰ This is mentioned by Taniguchi in Noguchi et al., "Garden: Plastic Space with Link Inside and Outside," 13.zz.

¹⁷¹ Isamu Noguchi, 1952 manuscript, as quoted in Ashton, *Noguchi*, 280.

¹⁷² Saburo Hasegawa, letter to Isamu Noguchi, Jan. 18, 1951, as quoted in Ashton, *Noguchi*, 282.

sentinel, a point from which the viewer can seize all the conjunctions of mountain, sky, and water.¹⁷³ In its lonely presence and self-containment, this sculpture, with its base always washed by moving waters, comprehends all of Noguchi's most pondered ideas and values at the end of his life. It stands alone but strong within the constructed borders of Taniguchi's design, but it also looks forward to the idyllic landscape that surrounds the museum -- the flowing water and undulating surface appearing to almost be leading it to the freedom of the surrounding landscape. It strives towards the ideal of the natural -- the almost artless presence of nature. In its meditative synthesis of form, sound, and texture, this water garden seems to be intensely Japanese, yet it is like nothing else in the country. When looking at this garden one is reminded of Noguchi's definition of art: "Art is quite invisible and weightless; it hovers over the surface. Appearing anywhere, oblivious of time, we know it when we hear it, see it, clear as recognition."¹⁷⁴ The Domon Ken garden is the product of fifty years spent thinking about space and the universal. Taniguchi and Noguchi saw their artistic collaboration as a success at all levels, and they planned on working on several other projects together. Noguchi died, though, before any more such collaborations could come to fruition.¹⁷⁵ At Sakata, Noguchi succeeded in extracting from his whole life's response to gardens, by the most subtle and universal of means, cosmos out of chaos.

¹⁷³ Description of the garden can be found in Ashton, "Space as Sculpture," 43-44.

¹⁷⁴ Isamu Noguchi, "My Sculpture" in *Minami Exhibition Catalogue*, May 14-June 9, 1973.

¹⁷⁵ As remembered by Yoshio Taniguchi in "An Unrealized Collaboration of Sculpture and Architecture" in *Isamu Noguchi: Human Aspect as a Contemporary: 54 Witnesses in Japan and America*, 132-133.

Chapter 6: A Personal “Universal” Landscape

From the very beginning of his career as an artist, Noguchi turned the ambiguity of his identity into an asset. “I have always desired to belong somewhere,” he once told a Japanese newspaper reporter. “My longing for affiliation has been the source of my creativity.”¹⁷⁶ This sentiment, which he repeated over and over again during his long career, summarized the way he lived. He spent his life searching for a place to belong but at the same time he realized that his strongest asset was his “longing for affiliation” rather than affiliation itself. Insofar as that longing was a source of inspiration and creativity, Noguchi knew that he could never attach himself to any country or any group.¹⁷⁷ Realizing that he could never be completely American or completely Japanese, he pursued his search for artistic self-discovery with the freedom of a nomad, but the inevitable consequence of having few close ties to others was a constant feeling of extreme isolation. This loneliness gnawed away at him psychologically, especially during his final years. As he told someone, “Being half-Japanese and half-American, I am always nowhere.”¹⁷⁸

Moody, intuitive and driven, Noguchi attempted to fashion a new world of his own making in the many gardens he created throughout his life. In his last years Noguchi worked tirelessly in an effort to create an environment for himself. The final landscape would speak of all he knew. In the largest sense, it would be a studio: the space that generated all that he considered essential in his life. Noguchi first visited

¹⁷⁶ *Osaka mainichi*, Nov. 20, 1984.

¹⁷⁷ Noguchi makes this clear in Isamu Noguchi, “A Reminiscence of Four Decades,” *Architectural Forum* 136 (1972): 59.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Mure, a stonecutters' village in the mountains of the southwestern island of Shikoku, in 1956, while looking for stones for the *Jardin Japonais*. For centuries, quarries in Mure had produced *aji-ishi*, a hard, durable granite Noguchi came to favor. He established a studio there in 1969, and for the next twenty years, until his death in 1988, made Mure the base for his creative activities. Noguchi was distressed by the construction boom that was transforming the face of Japan. Once in Mure, however, the air seemed to change. The surrounding ancient mountains and their rugged stone outcroppings have been affected by extensive quarrying, but still felt as though time had stopped in the tranquil era of artisans. Living and working in rural Mure brought Noguchi back to the kind of natural and social environment he associated with his idyllic youth in Japan. Surrounded by supportive Japanese colleagues, both local stoneworkers and Tokyo cultural figures, he felt the acceptance that he had always sought, but never received. Noguchi's compound on the island of Shikoku was to be his last creation of a personal environment, saturated with both emotional and intellectual history -- his own cosmos, removed from the chaos of the world and free from the cultural identity he could not find (Fig. 33-36). When he had first decided to build a retreat on Shikoku, he had been enchanted with the timelessness of the landscape where both the houses and vistas never seemed to change. The very environment of Mure itself exudes an atmosphere that "liberates the heart and soothes the spirit."¹⁷⁹ His two-hundred-year-old house, modified ingeniously for modern life, faced the distant mountains, hovering over rice fields and falling toward the sea, and was framed closely by a great wall and a stand of bamboo beyond his veranda.¹⁸⁰ To exist in an atmosphere of "what has always been"¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Manabu Chiba, "The Legacy of Isamu Noguchi" from *Kenchiku to toshi* 350 (1999): 138.

¹⁸⁰ For more information on his home and studio in Shikoku read Ashton, *Noguchi*, 242-67.

appealed to Noguchi's mythic sensibility, a side of him that craved to know and live in the land of his origins. He knew well that it was a dramatic artifice and not a withdrawal from the world, but rather he was creating a space in which everything he had ever imagined, he felt, could be authentically lived. Each time he added a flourish to his space, he was shaping something of his own. As one friend explained, "It seems as if all that Noguchi dreamt of exists here."¹⁸²

After moving here, Noguchi transported a traditional warehouse to Mure to serve as his studio, and a samurai residence to serve as his house. These are buildings of the past; no longer is he working with architects who came to define modern architecture. He built walls and a stage of stone, so rather than the architectural boundaries to his past gardens he created his own natural partition between himself and the truly infinite surrounding environment. There is the sense of both modernity and primitivism. Looking out from a room in Noguchi's house, there is a garden with precise square contours, one of his black granite sculptures, and a beautiful stand of bamboo against the backdrop of the stone wall. The stone walls which gently envelop the atelier complex provide a frame for the mountain slopes in the background (Fig. 34-35). There are sculptures and innumerable fragments of stone piled up here and there, a vivid record of the passage of time, as if Noguchi was still working there (Fig. 38). Almost every day, members of the community come to sweep the garden. They wash Noguchi's sculptures with water and continue to maintain them. There are children

¹⁸¹ Isamu Noguchi, correspondence with Gene Owens, May 1968, as quoted in Ashton, *Noguchi*, 242.

¹⁸² Ryu Niimi, "The Long-Awaited Opening of the Studio" from *Isamu Noguchi: Human Aspect as a Contemporary: 54 Witnesses in Japan and America*, 15.

running about.¹⁸³ All of this contributes to make it an extremely gentle environment, full of life. This environment, encountered and shaped by Noguchi in his last years, was the ideal embodiment of what he had been pursuing throughout his life, that is sculpture taken as space, and the relations that arise between sculpture, architecture, and gardens. Probably it was also enabled by the specifics of the place he discovered at last, the place where he believed he could belong.

All gardens, Noguchi once told an assistant, were a metaphor for the Garden of Eden. As he explained, “People all have their own ‘Garden of Eden’...I don’t try to make to make a perfect garden. In all my gardens there is something a little off balance somewhere. But isn’t that like life? There is no such thing as a perfect life.”¹⁸⁴ He best expressed his vision of the Garden of Eden in his garden at Shikoku. A steep path of stepping stones leads like a gently murmuring stream up the side of the small mound at the top of the garden (Fig. 39). At the summit there opens up a view as far as the eye can see (Fig. 40). A stone retaining wall and pine trees along the boundary of the garden block views of the house and garden from the outside. The design creates the illusion that the “hill behind the house” is a separate world, all by itself, cut off from its surroundings, and in that separate world he planted trees from his birthplace, California, and placed rocks left over from previous garden projects (Fig. 34).¹⁸⁵ There exist stones that have only partially been carved or polished and some which have been left untouched, other than by constant exposure to the forces of weather. All these stones

¹⁸³ The author at this point in the paper has not yet visited Noguchi’s studio at Mure, so this description of the site is based on photographs and in particular the beautiful recent publication *Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum* (Takamatsu-shi: Isamu Noguchi Nihon Zaidan Bijutsu Shuppansha, 2009), which consists of photographs taken by Shinoyama Kishin of Noguchi’s Mure studio and garden.

¹⁸⁴ As quoted in Duus, *The Life of Isamu Noguchi*, 298.

¹⁸⁵ A description of his garden in Shikoku is in Duus, *The Life of Isamu Noguchi*, 393-95.

merge with the surrounding garden as a part of many natural elements like the trees and the rocks. The sculptures are lit by the fresh sunshine in the morning while stronger sun shines over them during the day. At dawn, they are enveloped by calm air and become invisible behind the shades of trees and buildings. At times, rain pours on them.

Gradually moss envelopes them and decay becomes visible.¹⁸⁶ These natural changes suggest the transition of time and make viewers realize that the space is alive. This is a separate world in which he combined elements from both sides of his cultural identity.

To Noguchi, it was a safe haven where he no longer had to be either Japanese or American. The space is neither “Western” nor “Eastern.” These polarities are perceptible in many of the stone sculptures Noguchi selected for this garden; they vary from raw boulderlike shapes seemingly ripped from the earth in the vein of Japanese rock gardens to smooth-surfaced variations on elemental geometry a style prevalent in Western modernism. It was “a garden filled with memories,” Noguchi said.¹⁸⁷ The whole is an ensemble of ever-varying vistas, punctuated by some of his most moving late stone sculptures.¹⁸⁸ It is, both metaphorically and in actuality, an oasis. Noguchi began work on this particular garden only a couple years before his death. Undaunted by the blazing midsummer sun, friends remember, he constructed the garden in a single spell putting great energy into this project.¹⁸⁹ The garden on this hill was to be his utopia. After the garden was finished, Noguchi often went there alone, and from the top he could see the islands of the Inland Sea that he once said were the original inspiration

¹⁸⁶ Based upon a lovely description of the site by Shoko Yashiro in “Isamu Noguchi’s Two Gardens” in *Isamu Noguchi Light and Shadow - Sculptural Resonance in Space: The Works of Isamu Noguchi from New York and Mure* (Sapporo: Sapporo Terebi Hōsō, 1998), 106.

¹⁸⁷ From an interview of Masatoshi Izumi by Masayo Duus, May 20, 1992. Quoted in Duus, *The Life of Isamu Noguchi*, 395.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁸⁹ As recollected by Taiko Okada in “Confidence Fostered Through the *Black Sun*” in *Isamu Noguchi: Human Aspect as a Contemporary: 54 Witnesses in Japan and America*, 44.

for the Japanese garden (Fig. 40-41). Perhaps in this space he had found a place where he came to terms with himself. At the top of the mound, which looks much like an ancient Japanese burial mound, stands Noguchi's gravestone (Fig. 42). Noguchi always wanted to be a citizen of the earth. Now he looks down at this place, the environment that he had been looking for throughout his life. Through the natural landscape that surrounds his studio and garden, the fictive infinite space of his commissioned gardens became a reality.

In the end, it took two homes to achieve what Noguchi had sought from his early years, his peripatetic course having led in the two directions that came to be represented by Japan and America. As Noguchi told a Japanese interviewer, "Both America and Japan live inside of me as a single human being, but whenever I am one, I always feel lonely without the other."¹⁹⁰ Together these places achieved for Noguchi what he had identified as the aim of art -- "bringing order out of chaos, a myth out of the world, a sense of belonging out of our loneliness."¹⁹¹ As he stated late in life, "I had to be universal or nothing at all."¹⁹² When we look beyond his personal yearning, we see that Isamu Noguchi had found his order and his myth in the garden and in stone. "I am sure that what I have done with a sense of continuity towards a situation," as Noguchi would explain towards the end of his life, "though whether the direction has been forward or backward, I do not know. I think that people keep walking...They find reasons and means for survival. They find it worthwhile not to die."¹⁹³ Noguchi's

¹⁹⁰ Isamu Noguchi, "Isamu Noguchi no naka ni aru higashi to nishi," *Fujin gaho* 672 (July 1960): 220-25.

¹⁹¹ Isamu Noguchi, "Towards a Reintegration of the Arts," 60.

¹⁹² *Portrait of an Artist: Isamu Noguchi*, videocassette, directed by Bruce W. Bassett (Whitegate, 1980).

¹⁹³ Noguchi, "The Road I Have Walked."

journey through landscapes and the universal was his own “means of survival” in a chaotic world determined to define his identity. Like one stone sculpture he made for his studio garden in Shikoku (Fig. 43), he was broken in half between two identities, but in his gardens and at his garden in Shikoku in particular, these two halves became one. In one of his final writings in 1986, appropriately entitled “Manifesto,” Noguchi poetically wrote:

Within our destruction or our saving would be found the needed scope of sculpture -- its enduring to define the space of our garden, the earth. If in a time of triviality such a course seems implausible, all the more reason. Seek the dead center of gravity, seek out of our difficulties the enduring.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Isamu Noguchi, *Noguchi: Seven Stones* (New York: Pace Gallery Publications, 1986), NA.

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