

the placement of objects in space; from the concept of ma to a philosophy of space.

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the concept of ma

'It is the multiplicity of meanings and at the same time the conciseness of the single word that makes ma a unique conceptual term, one without parallel in other languages' ¹

the concept of *ma* is an ancient Japanese concept of space-time *said to be the foundation of Japanese aesthetics*².

ma is used both as a term to describe *the interval between two or more spatial or temporal things*³, and as a broader aesthetic *way of seeing* that considers the importance of placement and space as fundamental elements in shaping the experience of object by subject. by considering the impact of placement and space on the subjects experience of the object, *ma* is a concept that extends into experiential realm.

ma's focus on the experiential element that results from our choices of placement of objects in space, can be traced back to the concepts origins in Shintoism, the indigenous religion of Japan.

in the shinto religion, it is traditional to clear a *space* and set aside *time* to await the arrival of religious formless spirits, *Kami*. In this clear space-time, *Kami* descend, *filling the space with Ki [energy]*.⁴ here, the action of clearing a space -time is essential to inviting the active involvement of *kami*, and as such, provides a possible insight into how the importance placed on treatment of space has developed into a space-led aesthetic concept, *ma*.

curating space - inviting active involvement - embracing uncertainty

a look to the traditional artforms of Japan shows an example a particular preference of treatment of space within a space-led way of seeing can manifest. *ma* exemplifies an aesthetic preference for opening up space around objects so as to present ambiguity of meaning and an absence of narrative. these are characteristics found in traditional Japanese art forms such as haiku poetry and the ink drawings of *sesshu toyo* - and can therefore be described as *arts of ma*.

by presenting this space around objects, and removing the clarity of dictated meaning, the arts of *ma* hand control from object to subject, asking them to actively find their own understanding from the object.

by looking to these arts of *ma*, we can see how certain preference of treating the relationship between object - space- placement can carry with it it's own visible aesthetic. exemplifying how a particular space-led aesthetic can provide a link between, and shapes our experience of, a number of different objects.

looking at these possible manifestations of *ma in the context of* it's religio-aesthetic history

¹ Kunio Komparu, *The Noh Theatre: Principles and Perspectives* (Tokyo; Tankosha, 1983), p.70 in Pilgrim p.257

² Seigow Matsuoka, 'Aspects of Kami' pp.56, 47, in Pilgrim p.268.

³ Richard B. Pilgrim, 'Intervals ('Ma') in Space and Time: Foundations for a Religio-Aesthetic paradigm in Japan', *History of Religions* 25 (1986), 255-277 (pp.255).

⁴ Pilgrim pg. 262

the placement of objects in space

viewed from afar, *ma* can be seen to be a concept that considers the relationships between object - space - placement - subject and experience as strongly interlinked elements. with the view that **placement** and **space** has a significant impact on our experience of objects, *ma* provides a *way of seeing* that brings our attention away from looking solely to the object; instead including also the placement and space that surrounds it. by doing this, *ma*, understood more broadly as a *philosophy of space*, dissolves the specificity that comes with an object focused, way of seeing.

understood from this stance, it is possible to see that the concepts strength lies in it's ability to exist outside of this specificity to a certain field/ objects/topic etc. by removing this specificity - this space-led *way of seeing* can gives rise to a way of viewing the similarities and differences between seemingly disparate things.

a philosophy of space

taken as an example of a philosophy of space, *ma* provides an alternative to an object specific way of seeing. whilst the concept of *ma* is still relatively unknown in the west, the considerations that a philosophy of space brings to the fore; such as context, timing and curation can be seen to be gaining attention across disciplines. and with this, a re-framing of our *way of seeing* sure to bring with it exciting repercussions for the objects placed within.

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