

Eikoh Hosoe's Visual Poetry: Transforming Voice through Art

David Staton, 2011

The aftermath of the recent Japanese crisis has left unspeakable devastation along with mounting fears, doubts, consternation and questions. What to do? How to respond? What's next? With the past as prelude, some answers are certainties, including the soon-to-surface response from the artistic communities. Though the full scope of the devastation of the earthquake, tsunami and potential nuclear meltdown were still emerging as this essay was being written, events in Japan's past offer a template for how artists have come to create meaning in the face of utter devastation.

In Japan, the era following World War II was tremendously fertile for artists. In the face of the atrocities and extinguishments of people and culture, the opportunity to give life to something - to create where such devastation had taken place - was, for some, an act of atonement. For other creative sorts, the aftermath of the global conflict provided fodder for expressing disbelief and anger. And still others found a chance to create a new visual language to examine an event for which existing words failed. In this essay, I will set forth Eikoh Hosoe's development of a form of visual poetry rooted in a new vocabulary - a visual voice, as it were. A close reading of three of Hosoe's significant bodies of work will distill the essence of his distinct communicative form.

Overview

In September, 1945, just days after Japan's unconditional surrender in World War II, Eikoh Hosoe returned to his home city of Tokyo. At the height of the conflict, the 12-

year-old boy - and scores of women, the elderly, and children - had fled to the countryside; in Hosoe's case, the far northern reaches of the country, in the Tohoku region. Hosoe, his mother and brother returned under cover of night to Tokyo's Ueno Station. Hosoe's father - a Shinto priest - had remained behind in the city to care for the shrine. After a year apart, the family longed to reunite. However, upon arrival at the station, no transport was available for the trio to complete their travel to Katsushika, their home ward. They joined the masses of similarly situated people and huddled on the station's floor to pass the evening. At dawn, they saw the devastation.

The quotidian - shelter and sidewalks, bridges and buildings - and the elegant - a small brook, graceful ginko trees - were no more. American fire bombing had devastated the landscape and the familiar street sounds were replaced with the rumble and whine of American service vehicles and the bark of English commands. More than half of the city's buildings and dwellings were gone as were the lives of 130 thousand people. Hosoe read newspaper accounts of a "special bomb" and of the remains of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Everything had changed. Yet, the shrine his father had tended remained.¹

Two years later, Hosoe received his first camera. Beginning in his neighborhood, he began to document the new outside world. These were skilled, direct and humanistic portraits of daily life. Over a relatively short time, he unearthed the language to

¹ Tatsuo Fukushima "Eikoh Hosoe's Creativity," *Eikoh Hosoe: Photographs 1950-2000*, (Tokyo: Kyodo News, 2000)

articulate the monumental changes that had occurred both within (the interior landscape) and without (the physical landscape) on a three-inch-by-four-inch film strip.

The German philosopher Theodor Adorno has famously been quoted (and often misquoted) for the phrase “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.”² This excerpt, from the 1955 essay “Cultural Criticism and Society” has sparked countless arguments and interpretations.³ At base, it seems Adorno was suggesting art and beauty, as well as language, were impossibly meaningless in light of the atrocities of the global war.

Indeed, poetry did exist after Auschwitz, albeit as a visual lyric using a new, hybrid language. The photography of the adult Hosoe is a testament to this.

Context

A confluence of factors contributed to a blossoming of art photography in post-war Japan and Hosoe seems to have been influenced by or engaged in each. The Shudan Photography group, beginning in 1951, brought eight exhibitions annually to Japan, which featured works by prominent European and American photographers. The effect of the Shudan exhibits - and that of Edward Steichen’s world-travelling, epic “Family of Man” photo display - sparked a similar response in Japanese image makers; they wanted to make it new. Also at this time, students who had traveled to the West to be

² Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms* (Great Britain: Neville Spearman, 1967) 34.

³ Adorno 34. This brief excerpt from Adorno’s essay has long - and vehemently - been parsed for meaning. In his foreword to this, the first English edition, translator Samuel M. Weber offers this bon mot: “.. if Adorno is translatable at all, something which by no means can be taken for granted, it is precisely by virtue of his untranslatability.”

educated were returning to the East. Photography students were shaped by instruction at Lazlo Moholy-Nagy's Chicago Institute of Design. Though a broad-ranging artist, one of Moholy-Nagy's main focuses was on photography. His "New Vision" held that photography could create a whole new way of seeing the outside world that the human eye could not. Another factor which contributed to the burgeoning photography scene in Japan was the development of a camera and optical lens production industry in the country. Previously dominated by German manufacturers (Leica and Zeiss), following World War II Japan assumed the leadership role. Factories produced refined lenses and high performance cameras, among them Nikon, Canon, Minolta and Konica. Practically speaking, this new boon industry put better equipment in photographer's hands at a better price. At the same time, it was an early indication of an economically developing international power.

The impetus for art production itself was reflective of a nation in transition, as well. And in 1951, riding currents of change, an experimental group, the Democratic Artists Association (also known as Demokrato) was created by the photographer Ei-Q. The group took as its motto "Take art as your weapon and use it to destroy the present and create the future." A young photographer named Eikoh Hosoe, then a student at the Tokyo College of Photography, would join the group in 1952.

To an impressionable young artist, the members of the Democratic Artists Association offered heady talk and provided resolve for Hosoe. His choice of words in

describing that early impact is noteworthy:

One could say that the fact that I encountered many members of the 'Demokrato' through Ei-Q at a time when I still had not established myself as a photographer and started on my photographic career in a keloidal state having been exposed to immense radioactivity decided my fate.⁴

The analogy of the insidious, creeping power of a bomb and that of the fecund, potential power of art is vivid. Hosoe's art would soon mirror that colorful statement.

In short order, Hosoe immersed himself in the arts world, striking up collaborations with the avant garde of filmmakers, theater people, dancers (Bhuto) and writers, particularly Yukio Mishima. Like those other artists, Hosoe was engaged at a personal level unlike the detached objectivity of the previous generation.

This shift, toward that of an active observer, was fundamental and had broad-reaching implications. From the personal to the political, the photographer was offering an opinion, a personal insight, and delivering it with (sometimes a signature) style. The Japanese had previously been identified by historians, sociologists, policy makers and politicians as a passive culture with - to a large extent - a *received* aesthetic sensibility. At the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, Hosoe was defining *his own* aesthetic voice.

In a historic context, 1960 was a watershed year. For two months, unrest and

⁴ Fukushima 294.

upheaval took to the streets by way of protests, often marked by violence. Political upheavals between the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and the opposition Socialist Party focused on the position of each relative to a revised security treaty with the United States. An assassination attempt, media machinations and strong reaction from artists' groups ensued. Through May and into June of that year, tensions escalated; millions protested and participated in a nation-wide strike. In mid June, the treaty passed by default and a sense of subordination to the United States was reawakened in some along with a resurgent sense of nationalistic pride. Later that year, emboldened by continued economic growth, a new Prime Minister unveiled a plan to double individual income. Truly, this was an era of change. An attentive and fully engaged Hosoe gave witness.

Toward a new visual language

The idea of artistic collaboration - first developed with the Democratic Artists Association - was one Hosoe held steadfast and began thoroughly pursuing with his *Man and Woman* project. Process would become central to Hosoe's work; collaboration would become central to his process.

Man and Woman

The genesis of *Man and Woman* took place in 1959 when Hosoe attended a performance by Tatsumi Hijikata's Butoh dance group, *Akoku Buto-ha*, or School of Utter Darkness Dance Movement. Hijikata was the founder of Butoh dance. This was a

performance of firsts: the debut of a dance work as performed by a new dance troupe inaugurating a new dance genre. The work was *Kinjiki*, based on the work by the celebrated Mishima. It would, as it turns out, become the last time Mishima's piece was performed. *Kinjiki* dealt frankly with the, at that time, taboo of homosexuality. The night of the performance, both Hosoe and Mishima were part of the audience. At performance's end - which culminated with the simulated strangulation of a chicken amid a recorded orgiastic swoon - the audience was largely revolted. Hosoe and Mishima, however, were ecstatic. Hosoe joined Hijikata backstage to share his enthusiasms and a bond was formed.

Hosoe began photographing Hijikata's dancers for publicity materials to promote his studio and his troupe's performances. In short order, the dancers began appearing in his art photography. This photography became the basis for a series shown the following year in two exhibitions. One was part of the Eyes of Ten exhibition, titled "Photography of Eikoh Hosoe, Dedicated to Tatsumi Hijikata." The other, *Man and Woman* was a more cohesive, comprehensive version of that body of work. In the book Eikoh Hosoe: Meta, Hosoe describes the impulse and inspiration:

It was not my intention, however, to photograph the dancing as it took place on the stage itself, because I feared that if I were to photograph an isolated portion of the performance, I would miss what was happening as a whole entity. what I wanted to do, rather, was to concentrate upon the

totality of the stage with my eyes and ears wide open. Then, later, back in my studio, with my camera I sought to create a drama or dance of my own, using Hijikata's body, *Man and Woman* was the subject I selected for the theme of this drama - my photographic theater.⁵

Here, Hosoe is fully enveloped in the role of director or choreographer, composing as he clicks his camera. The photos - the document - demonstrate this staging. The subjects for this project were Hijikata himself and two female dancers from his company. To emphasize the theatricality of the piece, the dancers are clad in sleek, black unitards; alternatively, they are bare at the waist. They are posed against one of two backdrops: a stark, black space or a gritty grainy scrim with tonal values that vary in the interplay of light.

As director, or editor, the sequencing of the images was another area of intense focus for Hosoe. Temporal reality is conflated with spatial reality to propel a stream of conscious narrative. This narrative moves from the reality of "establishing shots" to the abstraction of details, building tension (sexually, psychologically, formally) at each juncture. And in this visual language, old tradition is reinterpreted. Here, the Japanese idea of *ma* is engaged.

Ma is a concept that blends time and space and refers to the space of time between events and between objects. It is both sensually and intellectually perceived. In

⁵ Graham Howe, *Eikoh Hosoe: Meta*, (Los Angeles: Curatorial Assistance, Inc., 1991) 17.

its end effect, “*ma* gets your attention and directs your mind or thoughts along specific paths that lead to some kind of conclusion or some pleasant feeling.⁶ Silence and space (in music, architecture, art, literature, etc.) have an equal value as sound and object in *ma*. With this series Hosoe asks, “what is the space and time between man and woman?” The notion is pregnant with ideas, particularly, in light of historic circumstance, those of identity. The flow or narrative of *Man and Woman*, then, is carefully calibrated to elucidate these ideas.

At an even more base analysis of the compositional elements of *Man and Woman* are the bodies themselves. Bodies are central to this investigation; bodies in relationship to space and the interplay of shadow, time, and light; bodies in relationship to one another; bodies as sign and symbol; bodies as pure form. The human form and the corporeality of the flesh would be a continued area of investigation in Hosoe’s future works and central to his developing aesthetic, his visual voice. Writes Holborn, “Photography has granted him a language. The human body provided him with a subject.”⁷ The body as locus of artistic inquiry was a new idea, adds Holborn,

The body might be the subject for decoration or tattoo, but never would it be elevated to, say, the source of divine proportion. Unlike the Classical or Renaissance traditions of the West, the human figure is but a detail in the

⁶ Boye Lafayette de Mente, Elements of Japanese Design; Key terms for understanding & using Japan’s classic wabi-sabi-shibui concepts, (North Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 2006) 43.

⁷ Mark Holborn, Eikoh Hosoe; Masters of Photography, (New York: Aperture, 1999) 10.

oriental landscape.⁸

These are depictions of form - heretofore unseen in Japan - that read graphically from an aesthetic standpoint, not from a sexual perspective. This is part of Hosoe's process of recontextualizing pure form into abstract, bold, grainy and sensuous statements. (see *Fig. 1*)

It is never the subject itself that gives a photograph language; it is the subject in concert with how it is presented. Hosoe brought a similarly iconoclastic method to making his photographs as he did to their taking. That they are visually arresting and that there can be such a thing as a Hosoe style is largely predicated on the way he developed his films and printed his photographic papers. His prints are, by turns, gritty and grainy, soft and polished and always of stark, tonal contrast. Varying in size (as small as 17 x 17 cm. to as large as 53 x 53 cm.), Hosoe often "bleeds" the image to the paper's edge, without a border. These are not technically perfect prints, but they are technically consistent prints. (In an elaborate process, he underexposed, push-developed his film, which was copied onto high contrast light film; this was then contacted to litho film to produce a negative.) They read clear, loud, forcefully and seductively. Clearly, both in construction and execution, Hosoe was far removed from the Japanese realism aesthetic and its tenets.

Around the same time this project was taking place, Hosoe made a short,

⁸ Holborn, Eikoh Hosoe 6.

experimental film with Hijikata, *Navel and A-bomb*, that contains references to a signature component of his visual vocabulary. The 12-minute film bears the following description in a capsule review:

Two hands fighting for an apple, men with ropes, men carrying goats, naked children and a headless chicken ... the sand-covered penis of a child framed with distant island of the same shape. The method is anecdotal (man unravels a child's umbilicus), but the anecdotes lead to no further literary statement. Rather, they become associative, as do the scenes themselves ...⁹

In structure and visual, graphic language, Hosoe is borrowing liberally from traditional Japanese myth. The vivid written language of the Japanese creation myths of Amaterasu and Susano-o includes descriptions of vomiting and strewing feces, heavenly maidens striking their genitals until they die and sleeping in a chamber of snakes, thus mirroring the visual language of *Navel and A-bomb*. Titles, written by Tara Yamamoto, float over the images in the black-and-white 16mm film, creating synergy between text and image. In part, they read: "The black pale of the night of death is broken/ Light has burned the foreheads of just no matter who/ The flame comes from the West/ The day when the beards of the gods wither/ The poison clouds flow across

⁹ Richie Donald, *Japanese Experimental Film 1960-1980*, (New York: The American Federation of Arts, 1981) N.pag.

the sky/ Hallelujah "¹⁰

There exist contrasts between the two projects, most notably the medium used for each. However, commonalities - collaborative direction, theatrically striking imagery, an underlying tension - unite the projects. Both build meaning by re-envisioning relationships between images and the objects/ forms within those images.

Myth and allusions to myth would continue to play an important role in Hosoe's body of work, particularly in his next two projects. As a component of his expanding visual dialog, myth joined collaboration, theatricality and printing technique as cornerstones.

Barakei

The writer Yukio Mishima was aware of the images of *Man and Woman* and when the need arose for a publicity photo to accompany a new book of critical essays, he had his publishers contact Hosoe to do the work. By this time, Mishima's reputation as an iconoclastic writer and as a Japanese celebrity was well cemented; any photographer he may have selected would have leapt at the opportunity. The first day of the shoot, which took place in the courtyard of Mishima's home, Hosoe insinuated his own personality, telling Mishima he wanted the writer to make himself totally available and receptive to the ideas Hosoe would put forth for the photographs. Mishima complied and, in turn, let Hosoe know he wanted to be known as a man of the body. By the end

¹⁰ Richie N. pag.

of the first day, Hosoe had photographed the writer nude or nearly nude and wrapped in a garden hose. Holborn writes of this exchange:

Mishima approved of these unusual portraits and asked Hosoe what he was trying to achieve. Hosoe answered that he was interested in “the destruction of a myth,” in penetrating the facade of the successful writer.

Hosoe wanted to create an interior document, not a publicity shot.¹¹

What took place over the next four months resulted in a series of photographs most consider to be Hosoe’s crowning achievement and a publication (issued and reissued) evaluated as one of the finest - not just of Japanese photography - but of all photography books. With *Barakei*, Hosoe transcended the medium with what he dubbed his “subjective documentary.”¹²

Over the course of its 40 photographs, *Barakei* (later, “Ordeal by Roses” and, alternatively, “Killed by Roses”) shows the components of Hosoe’s voice fully realized. *Barakei* might be best viewed as a life-death-rebirth cycle. In this project, art and life are intertwined so as to be indistinguishable. Mishima - through Hosoe’s destruction of his myth - surrendered himself physically and psychologically to the process. There was a sense of breaking down and building up central to this project that both Hosoe and Mishima innately acted on and were acted upon by; a breakdown and rebuilding not

¹¹ Holborn, Black Sun 16.

¹² Howe 25.

just of the body, but of spirit and of language. The writer best captured this rather illusive notion:

By stripping the subject of the various meanings it possesses and throwing it in amongst meaningless arrangements, the meaningless, mutual reflections that result regain a certain order of light and shadow. It is then that the work first acquires abstraction in its composing elements, as with words or sounds. For that, however, it is prerequisite that the subject first possesses a meaning of which it can be stripped.¹³

Further reflecting the art-life mirror, Holborn contends that the release date of the second edition of the book, published in 1971, was arranged by Mishima to coincide with his ritual suicide. (Mishima committed suicide by ritual *seppuk* - a ritual disembowelment by sword - in November, 1970 in the offices of the Japan Self Defense Forces following a failed attempt to incite a coup.)

In the dreamlike narrative of the project, Mishima is acted upon and transformed by temporal forces, symbolized by a rose and materialized through, by turns, dark forces and religious allusions (St. Sebastien). The gamut of human experience is veiled and unveiled: innocence (depictions of youth), surrender (being bound), the persistence of time and vision, as well as sex and sensuality are all revealed in Hosoe's images. (see *Fig. 2*)

¹³ Yukio Mishima, "An Introduction to Eikoh Hosoe" *Ordeal by Roses*, (Tokyo: Shudan, 1963) 1.

His directorial impulses are fully focused including the use of a “cast” (Hijikata and members of his dance troupe). Hosoe uses odd perspectives, painted backgrounds, sandwiched negatives, mirrors, double printing and a host of other technique to create a fictive space that is disorienting and disarming, chaotic and peaceful; it is otherworldly and reliant on the notion of *ma*. Hill calls this “a space of testimony” and views the project in its entirety as holding a symphonic structure.¹⁴ Though no firm strictures apply to symphonic arrangement, they traditionally include four movements of tonal and tempo variation. In the reissue of *Barakei*, the following “movements” are noted: Sea and Eyes, Eyes and Sins, Sins and Dreams, Dreams and Death, and Death. This reading of *Barakei* casts Hosoe not as director, but conductor.

Or, given the culmination of Hosoe’s overall disassociative effect, perhaps this is a story-less story; a place where language is subverted, where the signifier and the signified are ambiguous and meanings are deduced and reduced to impulse. In stripping Mishima of his “myth,” he created something - language, perception, understanding - anew. And here, *Barakei* fully embodies the aesthetic notion of *ha*. (*Ha* is described as a kind of life-inducing device, lurking behind Japanese ways of thought. It is thought that life forces are stimulated by defiance and activated through the process of destruction. In other words, *ha* interrupts flow - via destruction - and permits a major

¹⁴ Ronald J. Hill, *Eikoh Hosoe: Untitled 42* (Carmel, CA: The Friends of Photography, 1986) N. pag.

leap forward.¹⁵ As Hosoe later recounted, “What I meant was that destruction leads to creation. I couldn’t find the right words, but what I wanted to say what that I was trying to compose a totally unknown portrait of Yukio Mishima.”¹⁶

For his part, Mishima would later describe those “right words” Hosoe was looking for:

The object are stripped of their various meanings, which are flung into a meaningless arrangement where their meaningless reflection of each other eventually restores to a certain order to the light and shadow. It is only by such means that the elements with which he composes can acquire an abstract quality, similar to that of words and sounds.¹⁷

By any interpretation, Hosoe was fully in control of this creation.

As with *Man and Woman*, the body, in this case specifically the flesh, is an area of investigation and departure for Hosoe. In order to manifest his theme, Hosoe has said the flesh of Mishima was the only way in which it could be depicted. For all the presence of human bodies in his work, Hill notes, there is virtually no sense of motion. Rather, the flesh itself - and a place where the flesh can live and express itself - is the concern. “Flesh found the purest form of its expression in the studio,” he writes,

¹⁵ Masayuki Kurokawa, “Eight Manifestations of the Japanese Aesthetic,” Oct. 2007, < http://www.nextmaruni.com/e/concept/concept_3.html>

¹⁶ Fukushima 294.

¹⁷ Nobuya Yoshimura, Eikoh Hosoe, Yukio Mishima, *Eikoh Hosoe, Photographs 1960-1980* (Rochester: Dark Sun Press, 1982) N. pag.

“everywhere else, the place proved less accommodating. In the surreal space of *Barakei*, the dictates of the environment force the body to assume unnatural postures; the space exacts its toll before accepting the body.”¹⁸

The surface quality of the prints is skin-like in variation. A stark range of tonal values is washed across the prints, impregnating the surface with a coarse vitality. Seeming imperfections - grittiness and graininess, ruptures and discolorations - are deliberate.

Adding another layer to this skin, Hosoe chose to create these images as platinum prints. This intricate technique, sometimes called an eternal print, begins with a large negative. A large negative, obviously, will magnify mistakes; “perfect” composition and execution are required in crafting a useable, large negative. The photographs are printed in the platinum process by placing the negative in direct contact with a photo-sensitive paper. The developing of the paper takes place in a carefully controlled chemical bath; platinum, which affords the finished prints a warmer tone, is part of this chemistry. This choice at once creates a further remove from reality - as though the prints were locked in time - and adds another layer of depth to Hosoe’s images.

¹⁸ Yoshimura N. pag.

Barakei established Hosoe internationally. And though his visual language was fully realized, he would continue to finesse its vocabulary. His next project would be a personal investigation.

Kamaitachi

With the project *Kamaitachi*, Hosoe set out to examine his past; the photographer wanted to “revisit” the fears and unrest that had shaped that part of his childhood spent in exile in the northern part of Japan during World War II. From the summer of 1944 until September of 1945, the pre-teen lived with his mother’s family in Yonezawa in north Central Honshu. During this time, Hosoe was an outsider in the community; he had moved from the big city to the rural countryside. Though family surrounded him, he was alienated, not completely accepted by the society surrounding him. This relocation was not a move of choice, it was a move of survival.

The project investigating these feelings seemed illusory. How does an artist give visual form to an emotive concept such as alienation? Make visible the invisible? Hosoe drew inspiration from Edward Weston’s photography.¹⁹ For Hosoe, Weston had the ability to infuse his photographs of objects - sea shells, cactus, cypress roots - with meaning and life that transcended their objectness. In order to give physical shape to

¹⁹ Hosoe first encountered Edward Weston’s photographs in an exhibition in Tokyo in 1953. In 1972, he met Edward’s son. With Cole’s permission, he translated Weston’s seminal masterwork “The Daybooks of Edward Weston” into Japanese. Since that time he has remained keenly interested in the photographer’s work.

this investigation of his formative years, Hosoe decided to embody the exploration in the mythic character of the *Kamaitachi*. The *Kamaitachi* is usually described as a weasel (sometimes a trio of weasels) or similar animal with sickle sharp teeth, which creates a rogue wind. The *Kamaitachi* preys on its subjects, often children, without provocation often setting upon them in swamps and forests. With lightning speed, it leaves a bloodless but distinct wound.²⁰ Hosoe, then, set out to visualize an emotion by using a mythic character. He had first become aware of the myth during his stay in the north.

The dark snowy country seemed to be full of ghosts. **In fact, there were ghosts.** We children were always frightened that something terrible would catch us when we went outside after dark. Yuki-onna or “Snow Woman,” and Kamaitachi were among them. I pictured the snow woman as not terrible but on the contrary, as rather romantic. Kamaitachi on the other hand, was something very awful. ²¹

The photographer turned to Hijikata as his subject; the chameleon-like dancer would assume the role of the *Kamaitachi*. For this project, Hosoe wanted to remove Hijikata from the staged arena of the studio and place him in the same sort of elements a *Kamaitachi* might be found. He also wanted to locate the project in the area where he had experienced this great sense of alienation. Hijikata was a more than willing

²⁰ Holborn, 8

²¹ Yoshimura N. pag. Hosoe’s observation that he viewed the Yuki-onna is interesting; in most literature, while defined as beautiful, she is considered malignant and a particular threat to children, see Davis, “Yuki-Onna, The Snow Bride,” in *Myths & legends of Japan* 149.

participant - he had grown up near the area where Hosoe had been evacuated and was well aware of the indigenous tale of *Kamaitachi*.

The project began in the city and moved to the country, mirroring Hosoe's boyhood trek. The process was experimental by its very nature; it more closely resembled a film shoot - which Hosoe and Hijikata would sometimes proclaim to villagers it was - or a series of spontaneous happenings. The myth, however, provided a framework, writes Holborn, "The myth provided a language with which he could touch the trauma of the past with the imagination of a child."²²

This modern folklore tale would be four years in the making; elaborate process is central to Hosoe's work. The creation of *Kamaitachi* in some ways marks a departure. Significantly, by creating an autobiography of fear and by animating the invisible, Hosoe seems to fully realize the implications of the fictive universe he is capable of creating. The 37 photos of this series show far less evidence of print manipulation than his efforts in *Man and Woman* and *Barakei* and, in some ways, the narrative flow seems more sharply defined than previously. The images, retain the theatrical zest, but the flavor is more propulsively cinematic. The record of the performative - the photo, itself as a communicative document - is also more noted in this body of work; with apologies to the critical communication theorist Marshal McLuhan, *Barakei's* construction of meaning occurs through the building of the message:

²² Holborn, *Black Sun* 19.

This attempt by Hosoe to make a record of his memories through the mediation of Hijikata's flesh and Butoh did not stop at simply being a record of Hosoe's personal reflections. Rather, it became a new "event" born of the relationship between these two men. A photograph has no memory; what it seeks instead is to tell a story to what is inside the viewer.²³

Hosoe's exploration of space is also different. *Kamaitachi* unfolds out of doors and a viewer could locate or orient themselves in this physical space. What they would feel in the space of *Kamaitachi* is threat. Hosoe's investigation of body, in this instance, places the subject in an unwelcoming environment; humans, and Hosoe, naturally, can not impose their will in this space. Things lurk, shadows creep, memories haunt. And this, finally, is perhaps the real space of investigation in *Kamaitachi*, the space of memory. (see *Fig. 3*)

Hosoe's visual poetics

Stripping away context and building up ambiguous truths. Seemingly meaningless arrangements effecting new meaning. Bodies wordlessly voicing urges, emotions in two dimensions. Ancient myth and folklore melding with cutting edge performance art.

²³ Nobuyuki Okabe. "The Photographs of Eikoh Hosoe: For the Creation of a New Story." Eikoh Hosoe: Photographs 1950-2000 (Tokyo: Kyodo News, 2000) 302.

Making visible the ephemeral, the ineffable. These are the compelling contrasts that inform Eikoh Hosoe's visual poetics.

The building blocks of his voice include unique "words" embodied in the demanding and original technical aspects of printing his images. At the same time, Hosoe employs phrases common to languages of the East, (his exploration of indigenous culture and tradition), as well as the West (a "received" sense of spiritual aesthetic via Weston). Hosoe actively constructs this language via his role as choreographer, director, photographer. As author and *auteur* Hosoe rarely crafts a linear narrative; more often it is a storyless story, with plots, facts and fictions being driven by emotionally charged currents but rarely following the accepted narrative conventions of beginning, middle and end. These tales take place in a fictive space that is by turns, disjointed, familiarly unfamiliar and fully constructed by Hosoe.

Hosoe's language is one that deconstructs the meaning of normalized representational systems, allowing the viewer to parse meaning at visceral, intellectual and aesthetic levels. The language addresses the human condition - the wants, desires and needs of the flesh - by giving visual form to such pursuits. It is wordless communication signifying not just the tragedy and challenge, but the aftermath of possibilities that arise when all that is known is destroyed.

Fig. 1. Eikoh Hosoe. Man and Woman #12. 1959. Eikoh Hosoe: Photographs 1950-2000.

By Eikoh Hosoe, et al. Kyodo News, Tokyo: 2000. Plate 17.

Fig. 2. Eikoh Hosoe. Barakei, or Ordeal by Roses, #16. 1961. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 3. Eikoh Hosoe. Kamaitachi #31. 1968. Courtesy of the Artist.