

Eikoh Hosoe's Visual Poetry: Toward a Visual Language

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 give voice to a new visual language to examine an event for which existing words failed.

This seedbed of creativity blossomed fully in the photographic arena. The impetus for art production itself was reflective of a nation in transition: one 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 was among these innovative artists. The memories of witnessing the devastating carnage of his hometown were indelibly etched on his psyche and would shape his vision.

This thesis will set forth Eikoh Hosoe's development of a form of visual poetry rooted in a new vocabulary by a reading of three of his major bodies of work. Hosoe stripped cultural myths of their native-held and foreign interpretations; these were not affirmation, reaffirmations or challenges to conventions. Rather, he created a visual story-telling device - language, perception, understanding - anew by emptying commonly held perceptions and definitions of time and space. The text was at once ambiguous and pointed - a story-less story, where language is subverted, where the signifier and the signified are ambiguous and meanings are deduced and reduced to the sensate, the carnal, the sensuous and the subconscious.

The thesis through close readings of Hosoe's work, will magnify the artist's construction and production of meaning, demonstrating how he crafted an innovative voice from the devastation of war: visual poetry.

Introduction

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.

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 found the language to 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."¹ This excerpt, from the 1955 essay "Cultural Criticism and Society" has sparked countless arguments and interpretations.² 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. In this thesis, I will set forth Eikoh Hosoe's development of a form of

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms* (Great Britain: Neville Spearman, 1967) 34.

² 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."

visual poetry rooted in a new vocabulary. In so doing, this thesis will trace the history of Japan prior to and after World War II via a cultural studies lens, which will envelop social and art histories.

A significant challenge is inherently imposed on this project by a hegemonic bias. A cultural hegemony privileges Western thoughts, cultures, assumptions and ideas. As defined by Edward Said, in his seminal work "Orientalism," cultural hegemony is:

The idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. There is in addition the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness, usually overriding the possibility that a more independent, or more skeptical, thinker might have had different views on the matter."³

The impact of the West on East - often embraced, by the Japanese - is well noted. Similarly, cross-cultural examinations and theories of Western scholars and philosophers have gained international privilege; representing difference often becomes a pointed "otherness" in discourse analysis. According to cultural studies scholar, John Hartley, discourse analysis is usually associated with power struggles or the negotiation of power:

“(Discourse analysis is) concerned not only with complex utterances by

³ Edward Said, "Orientalism," The Edward Said Reader (New York: Vintage Books, 2000) 73.

one speaker, but more frequently with the turn taking interaction between two or more, and with the linguistics rules and conventions that are taken to be in play and governing such discourses in their given context.”⁴

However, it is tension, or a duality if you will, which in many ways underlies the construction of Hosoe’s visual vocabulary.

In this thesis, I will begin by outlining the historical context of Japan prior to and immediately following World War II, focusing on the role of photography in that country. This will lead directly to my two research questions and the methodologies I will use in my findings. I will then review literature on Japanese tradition and aesthetics, from the perspectives of Eastern and Western scholars (Chapter Two). Chapters Three and Four will be devoted to answering my two research questions, using specific examples from Hosoe’s major bodies of work (*Man and Woman*, *Barakei*, *Kamiatachi* and *Embrace*). Finally, I will draw conclusions and make recommendations for future research (Chapter Five).

⁴ J. M. Hartley Communication, cultural and media studies : the key concepts. (London: Routledge, 2002) 73.

Chapter One

Historical Context

In order to place Hosoe's precedent setting achievement - the development of a new visual language - the antecedents must be detailed. A concise history of cultural, social and political conditions will serve this purpose. In this chapter, I will look at the status of the visual arts in Japan, particularly photography, prior to World War II. This scene setting will provide for the subsequent look at how the war impacted this burgeoning art form in Japan.

Japan, "In the Beginning"

Early creation stories provide insight into the zeitgeist that governed the formation of Japan and a Japanese identity. Japan is mentioned briefly in Chinese historical works, namely the *Han shu*, as early as the First Century. However, the oldest records - the *Nihon Shoji* and the *Kojiki* - recorded in the Japanese language were compiled early in the Eighth Century. These volumes contain Shinto creation tales. The

language of the tales of the deities is vivid, rich, lusty and often grotesque; they express action and emotion corporeally.

In one of the earliest and first myths of the *Kojiki*, eons passed before the heavens gave birth to deities. These deities in turn summoned two divine beings, Izanagi (male) and Izamani (female). Not only did the two create the islands that would become Japan, but they gave birth to several children who would become the sun, the moon and the sea (storms). Their first child, Amaterasu, the sun goddess (she was too beautiful, bright and radiant to remain on land, so her parents sent her up the celestial ladder), would later birth the emperor of Japan. The future emperors of Japan, then, had a connection to the divine. This remained a firm conviction with the Japanese until the mid 20th Century.

At the secular level, early fine art forms - among them the collaborative poetry called *renga* and the style of theater known as *Noh* - often honored deities or their handiwork. The belief system was further inculcated by Japan's self-imposed isolation; the culture of Japan developed during this time, 1635-1853, without external influence. Japan's borders were sealed, though very limited trade with the Dutch and Chinese did take place. Japan's geography served as another impediment to outsiders; as an island nation, indigenous culture was "protected" and thus flourished in this period. However, it is important to note, what is viewed as indigenous culture in Japan, specifically written language and religion (Buddhism) borrowed from other cultures,

namely China. As Davis notes:

This imitative quality is one of Japan's most marked characteristics. She has ever been loath to impart information to others, but ready at all times to gain access to any form of knowledge likely to make for her advancement. ... He (the Japanese people) has travelled far and wide and has made good use of his varied observations. Japan's power of imitation amounts to genius. East and West have contributed to her greatness, and it is a matter of surprise to many of us that a country so long isolated and for so many years bound by feudalism should, within a comparatively short space of time, master our Western system of warfare, as well as many of our ethical and social ideas ⁵

Imitation of Life

The introduction of photography to Japan occurred very near the end of isolationism, not, as is commonly thought, with its cessation. (The forcible end of Japan's isolationism occurred in 1853-1854 with the arrival of Commodore Perry and the signing of the Convention of Kanagawa.) Rather, several years earlier, at the limited-trade port of Nagasaki, a Japanese merchant signed and made the notation in receipt form for "A daguerreotype set, which is a tool for making a true copy, was brought to Nagasaki in 1843, but it was taken away and brought in again in 1848."⁶

⁵ F. Hadland Davis, Myths & legends of Japan, (Boston: David D. Nickerson & Company, 1910) ix

⁶ Anne Tucker ed. The History of Japanese Photography (New Haven: Yale UP, 2003) 17.

Here, it is worth noting the merchant's words "true copy." Though something of a moving target, the Japanese word for photography, *shashin*, is derived from the characters for the words "reproduce" and "true." In other words, the making of a true reproduction (copy). This is a fine point, but one worth noting, when compared to the English translation of the word.

... the English word "photography" comes from the Greek *photos*, meaning "light," and *graphia* meaning "drawing" or "writing"; when combined, these words mean the process of drawing or writing with light. We can see from this naming that early Japanese photographers did not see photography as a way of drawing with light, but rather as a means of producing a picture that is as faithful as possible to the original subject.⁷

It is believed that parts from the first camera were defective. When the components of an operable one were received five years later, it was sold to a Japanese feudal lord who had a strong interest in Western technology and sciences. For the Japanese, the camera and photography were not seen as a tool of the arts, but rather as an area of scientific inquiry, as alchemy. And though devoted researchers and translators would produce a sketch and operating manual for a daguerreotype in 1854, it would take an additional three years for the lord to have his portrait made. This 1857 portrait is the oldest known extant daguerreotype in Japan produced by a Japanese.

⁷ Robert Stearns, *Photography and Beyond in Japan; Space Time and Memory*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1995) 38.

One of Commodore Perry's crew, a camera man named Eliphalet Brown Jr., was the first to make a daguerreotype in Japan. The oldest extant images (three survive) date to 1854.

Not surprisingly, Brown photographed people, Japanese customs and scenery. By the early 1860s, portrait studios were springing up in port cities across Japan. The introduction of the wet collodion process in Japan at this time saw the industry begin to come into full bloom. Concurrent with the rise of the portrait studio was the increase in tourists making their initial pilgrimage to the once "forbidden" land; what the native Japanese might consider an everyday scenic shot, was imbued with a sense of the exotic. Tourists purchased photographic images as keepsake souvenirs. At the same time, the monied Japanese and advanced scholars were making their initial forays into the West. There, they obtained photographs and photographic equipment and literature used for further study at Shogun-sponsored institutes of Western Learning.

Additionally, dignitaries from the West would offer their peers in the East technological "gadgets" including print making equipment and photographic supplies. As the previous Davis quote makes clear, in this instance the Japanese were actively observing, imitating and gaining knowledge.

By the 1870s, the demand for portraits began to outstrip the number of photographers and a full-fledged picture industry was born. Technology was making gains as well; "masters" were training a second generation of photographers and various schools devoted serious research to developments in photography and Western-

style painting. Advancements in camera gear and the arrival in Japan of gelatin dry plate printing techniques in the 1880s allowed for greater quality control, a speedier process and, consequently, greater affordability; photographic portraits were not just for nobility any longer and began to outpace traditional, painted likenesses.

No longer isolated from trade, Japan could import the raw material goods for printing images and for crafting cameras. Photographers began to make a name for themselves. Their names and reputations were used to begin a system of rankings as to the quality of these image makers.⁸ As a result of a demanding public, photographers looked for opportunities to sell more varied images. Some portrait studios had elaborate costuming for the staging of events and bawdy or semi-nude “teahouse maid” images drew business. On a more high-minded plain, photographers began to use the cameras to document not only rites of passage, but significant cultural and news making events. Distribution of photographic publications of current events began. And though technology did not yet allow for photographs and text to be printed on the same page in newspapers, it soon would.

As photographic materials became more available, novices began to make photographs of their own. A wealth of camera clubs, beginning with the Japan Photographic Society were established as early as 1889. “How to” instructional

⁸ A discussion of this ratings system and an image of one such ratings form can be found in Tucker 24. The ratings system was not exclusive, by any means, to the field of photography; the Japanese ranked many professions, most notably the professional Sumo wrestlers. Extensive “grading” sheets were circulated via woodblock prints to rate the quality of work in a variety of fields.

manuals soon became widespread. And the definitions and lexicon for photography began to grow and mutate in subtle, but important ways.

Shifting focus

This change is worth a quick examination. As mentioned previously, the word *shashin* by definition, excludes creativity. Applying a strict definition of terms, a reproduction, not an interpretation, is the end game. This removes an element of creativity - or an artist's signature - from the equation. Interestingly, the Japanese also used *shashin* to describe Western painting; they considered its "truthfulness" more advanced than their own. This "superior" model was studied formally and emulated at the Institute for the Investigation of Western Books among other institutions. As the noted critic and art historian Iizawa Kohtaro observed, "It was not so much the difference between photographs and paintings that impressed (student artists); rather it was their similarities. To them, a photograph was a picture painted with a machine, while a Western-style painting was a photograph taken with a brush."⁹

As photography continued to grow in popularity and become more democratic, the once esteemed status of the professional photographer began to diminish. The first generation of photographers who originally popularized the medium, were known as *shashini* (masters of the photograph). However the subsequent generations of the *shashini* - the commercially driven ones - were known as *shashinya* (literally

⁹ Stearns 41.

“photograph room” or *shashinaya-san* (photo shop persons).

However, mirroring the rapid evolution in all facets of the country, change was coming to the way photographs and photographers were viewed. Following more than 200 years of isolation, the Japanese were inundated with ideas and inventions.

“Modernization was not only a matter of national survival ... but also one of national pride.”¹⁰ Again, the West would play a role as one century came to a close and another began.

Art Photography in Japan

In 1893, a British member of the Japan Photographic Society organized a photography exhibit, *Gaikoku Shashinga Tenran-Kai* (Foreign Photograph Exhibition), which included almost 300 images by some of England’s leading Pictorialist photographers. Among those photographers were George Davison, Peter Henry Emerson and others of the London Camera Club. This influential display would, by the turn of the century, fuel the creation of scores of devoted camera clubs and provide fodder for a sea change in the way photography was viewed. Pictorialism was established as an approach to photography that was unique to the medium and could be used as a means of artistic expression. With signature flourishes of soft focus and rich pigments, Pictorialist images were imbued with a palpable sense of the romantic, despite their pedestrian titles.

¹⁰ Terry Bennett, *Early Japanese Images* (Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle, 1996) 22.

While the first encounters with Pictorialism may have come from the West - the Linked Ring in Europe and Alfred Stieglitz' Photo Secession group in the United States - the Japanese put their own mark on the genre.

Whereas Western Pictorialism - like painting - spanned a diverse territory, from genre subjects, history and mythology to portraits, still lifes, and landscapes, the Japanese version was characterized by a heavy emphasis on landscape. This was not because Japanese painting (either traditional or Western-style) was heavily weighted toward landscape: the bias was specific to artistic expression in Japanese photography.¹¹

Photographs of the quotidian (the village well), the eternal (mountains), and the ephemeral (the delicate blossoms of spring), were favored by Pictorialism. And, they were all imbued with a lush, romantic, dream-like quality.

Subject matter was not the only defining characteristic of Japanese Pictorialism. In the catalog accompanying Art Photography in Japan, 1920-1940, Christian Peterson, curator of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, writes:

Japanese Pictorialists consistently produced pictures that compressed the three-dimensionality of the real world into spatially flat images. Rejecting the linear perspective of Western art, they crafted images that resembled flat massing of forms in *ukiyo-e* prints ... Japanese Pictorialist imagery is

¹¹ Tucker 103.

invariably quiet, spartan, and understated, like a tone poem. In a sense, photographers were making the visual equivalent of haiku, the Japanese form of verse that emphasized suggestion over literal description. (*see Fig. 1.*) Like haiku, Pictorial photography attempted to communicate with little.¹²

Pictorialism arrived years after its heyday and lingered in Japan years longer than it did in the West. The significant role of photographic press can not be over stated in popularizing the genre (following heated debate of its validity). By the 1920s, there were at least 30 monthly photography journals being published; publishing houses released hundred of publications on photography. In this era, camera clubs flourished and technology offered a big development in a small package; the hand-held camera would revolutionize the way photographs were made.

¹² Charles Schwartz, et al. Art Photography in Japan: 1920-1940 (New York: Charles Schwartz : Howard Greenberg Gallery, 2003) 13.

Shinko Shashin (New Photography)

The 1920s and 1930s saw technology evolve at a blistering pace. For the photographer, this meant advances in equipment - hand-held cameras that used film, rather than bulky plates. It also meant an array of new subject matter- sleek machinery, Bauhaus architecture - which, in turn inspired a new way of conceiving pictures quite different than that of Pictorialism: from deep shadows and sharp focus to strong graphic patterns and odd angles. The great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 influenced photography in at least two ways. Because Tokyo (and other cities) were leveled, the buildings, roads and inner-city transport were rebuilt in modernist form and the noise and the bustling pace of the city increased. Additionally, the quake's tremendous devastation destroyed countless Pictorialist images. However, without Pictorialism, modernist photographs wouldn't have existed.

Pictorialism provided modernist photographers with an overall artistic inclination and the organizational framework of exhibitions and publications that was as essential to the new aesthetic as the old. Many photographers had little difficulty introducing more contrast and sharper focus into their work, but they maintained their strong sense of design, a

basic tenet of Pictorialism.¹³

Progress moved fully ahead, the pace quickened, and in short order the modernist forms gave way to avant-garde expressions of surrealism and experimental abstractions. Another modernist avenue of exploration of New Photography concurrent with the avant-garde expressions was Real Photo, modeled after Germany's *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity). Writes, John Dower in his well-respected 1971 tome, A Century of Japanese Photography:

Beginning in the latter half of the 1920s, the Japanese also suddenly acquired almost unrestricted access to the latest trends in Western photography through a steady stream of articles, translations, exhibitions and systematic photographic reproductions ...They were especially receptive to the avant-garde developments in the country from which the Leica had come - the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) and visions of the Bauhaus group, as expressed by such innovators as Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and first introduced to Japan around 1926. This attraction to the Germany the Nazis devoured is instructive when one recalls the Bauhaus ideal of a new unity of art and technology. For the receptivity of Japanese photographers to such theories derived from the fact that Japan itself now confronted the challenges and seduction of modernity.¹⁴

¹³ Schwartz 17.

¹⁴ John W. Dower, A Century of Japanese Photography (New York: Random House, Inc., 1980) 16.

In 1932, a small press magazine, *Koga* (photograph) began publication and though its run totaled only 18 issues, its manifesto had lasting power and challenged the Pictorialists. The essay "Return to Photography" in its debut issue, charged photographers with the role of expressing aspects of social life and

introduced the concept of the Real Photo to describe the new tendency and form, which incorporated three elements: expression of the beauty of the object, documentation of the era and reports on people's lives, and photographs produced through the sculptural properties of light and shadow.¹⁵

This humanist emphasis lent itself to journalism, specifically the selling of Japan via the multi-language tourist publication *Nippon*, whose staff photographers would become luminaries in Japanese photography. This function of photography, used as a marketing or propaganda tool, would soon become significant in Japan.

Tipping Point

The heady currents of dramatic change in Japan were not just limited to areas of technology and economy. A fervent nationalism was raging across the country, and a series of conflicts, initially with neighboring countries, would escalate and forever change Japan. Anti-Westernism pervaded daily life. Attempts at thought control - employed at varying levels in various ways - abounded by the mid 1930s. Artists -

¹⁵ Tucker 148.

traditionally bellwethers of independent ideas - were quickly muzzled.

The initial effort to control thought may have been directed primarily at the Communists, but within a short period of time the scope of what constituted “dangerous thought” was gradually enlarged until eventually socialism, liberalism, pacifism, and internationalism were all deemed threatening ideologies and, consequently, their adherents became object of persecution.”¹⁶

Avant-garde art, particularly that of the surrealists, was stifled because of its suspected liaison with international communism. And those who weren’t persecuted were recruited, particularly if they made socio-documentary images. Those who had been working in the humanist genre were made part of the Army Art Association, an outfit devoted to creating propagandistic “war art.” And a number of noted photographers - among them Ihee Kimura, Ken Domon and Masao Horino - had their talents coopted by propaganda organs of the Army General Staff Office, such as *Front*. The Association also rationed art supplies, prohibited the exhibition of any non-“war art,” and graded artists according to their importance.

This type of nationalistic fervor fueled the war machinery and typified the tenor of the times. Books deemed counter to the cause (in short, Communist) were banned, the reading of others published by the government mandated; the *Hachiman* (Shinto God of

¹⁶ Hane, Mikiso Modern Japan; A Historical Survey Third Edition, (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000) 277.

War) was embraced by soldiers and families of soldiers, and national myth (the divinity of the emperor and, by extension, the Japanese people) was expounded. As historians have pointed out, the nation's leaders became so consumed with this mindset, that they had become slaves of their own creation. There was no turning back. And with the Manchurian incident and its ensuing attacks on China, Japan expressed its fervent commitment to nationalism and to expand its regional borders. The later "siding" with Germany and Italy (1940) and the attacks on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii (1941) would prove to be terrible miscalculations and lead to the country's downfall.

American Occupation

This thesis clearly is not an examination of World War II, however, its outcome undeniably shaped myriad events and lives. Germane to this thesis, then, is a brief summary of the Allied occupation of Japan.

The occupation came as a result of the surrender of Japan in accord with the signing of the Potsdam Declaration in August, 1945. In January of 1946, another concession shook the nation to its core. This was the rescripting of Japanese legend by Emperor Hirohito disavowing his own divinity. In part, this disavowal read: "(the individual terms of the surrender) are not predicated on the false conception that the Emperor is divine and that the Japanese people are superior to other races and fated to

rule the world.”¹⁷ This identity-altering admission affected a nation, as did the tenets set forth by the occupying force, and the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP), General Douglas MacArthur. Among the considerable changes: the prohibition of teaching of Shinto doctrine in the schools and abolishment of state support for Shinto shrines; a recommendation to make Latin the national writing system; the suspension of teaching geography and history in the classroom until approved texts were available; the prohibition of materials (books, movies, etc.) that were detrimental to the purpose of the occupation. (For instance, in 1945, SCAP banned 236 films “with undemocratic ideology.”)¹⁸

The assertion and promotion of pro-democratic platforms was, in fact, the greater purpose in the edicts carried out by SCAP. These ideas and ideals called for, among other things: sweeping reforms in land ownership, the elevation of women’s rights and thorough revisions of trade practices and education (curriculum and structure). Many of these notions were implemented. But, in a less formal fashion, the “Westernization” of the Japanese took place on a social and cultural level. Movie theaters and book stores were filled with previously unavailable offerings from the West; their ideas and images were appealing and persistent. “Some 38 percent of the theaters throughout the country were devoted exclusively to the showing of films from America in which capacity

¹⁷ David J. Lu, Japan: A Documentary History (Armonk: East Gate Book, 1997) 466.

¹⁸ David Elliot, Reconstructions: Avant-Garde Art in Japan 1945-1965 (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1985) 91.

crowds saw day after day the “refrigerators, cars, modern houses, highways and all the other accoutrements of the ‘Good Life.’”¹⁹ Best sellers previously not available because of Japanese censorship, found readers lining up days in advance of their publication. These in-demand works included books by Margaret Mitchell, D.H. Lawrence and Jean-Paul Sartre.

In 1952, the occupation officially ended. The legacy of seven years of American influence were evident and undeniable.

Research Questions

If establishing the historical context of pre-war Japanese culture and photography is the “before” part of this thesis investigation, my two research questions will provide the “after.”

Research Question One: How did the devastation of World War II shape the visual arts generally in Japan and inform Hosoe’s vision particularly?

In answering this question, I will demonstrate what Hosoe and others gleaned from a Japan in transition. The inherent and immediate ramifications of day-to-day living in a country occupied by a foreign army provided fodder for the first photographs the teenage Hosoe would make and would shape his later work. The death and devastation of the war were, in some ways, viewed as an opportunity for rebirth. Outward cues (absences) gave purpose to internal directions for explorations in

¹⁹ H. Paul Varley, “Culture in the Present Age” Nancy G. Hume, *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture* (Albany: State U of New York P 1995) 295.

his work. Specifically, artists seized upon this view - seeing a world of possibility - and it affected the way they worked just as it did the work itself.

Research Question Two: How - and why - do Hosoe's major works create a "new" visual language?

This research question synthesizes the first question's examination as well as the introductory historical context of photography in Japan. It may appear contradictory to refer to Hosoe's vision as wholly a new one because elements of that vision were borrowed from other sources. However, Hosoe's unique integration of disparate dichotomies - old/new, death/birth, man/woman - which infused the images' narrative(s) and appearances with a distinct communicative power.

Methodological Considerations

An analysis of aesthetics - including texts representing Eastern and Western theories - will be explored. In this fashion, a "more full and more fair" reading - when paired with the established historical context - can be given Hosoe's images. A similar examination of relevant texts regarding traditional myth and Japanese custom will aid in forming a broader understanding of an evolving Japanese culture.

An examination of language and representation models is warranted in support of my thesis contention that Hosoe, via his body of work, crafted a new vocabulary. The production of meaning defined by structuralists such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault will be measured in counterpoint to the way in which

Hosoe's photographs construct meaning. I will view selected images from Hosoe's most noted bodies of work - *Man and Woman*, *Barakei*, *Kamaitachi* and *Embrace* - through a cultural studies lens to illustrate my thesis. I will also include highlights from a recent e-mail interview I conducted with Eikoh Hosoe to elucidate some of these points. The questions will be noted in an appendix to this thesis.

By using these methods, I hope to arrive at a position to fairly interpret Hosoe's visual dialog; a position the Japanese aesthetician Ken'Ichi Sasaki describes as "not at analyzing the universal dimension of human existence but at describing a horizon peculiar to Japanese culture."²⁰

²⁰ Ken'ichi Sasaki "Poetics of Intransitivity," Japanese Hermeneutics : Current Debates on Aesthetics and Interpretation. ed. Michael Marra (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002) 17.

