

MEDITATIVE VIDEOS

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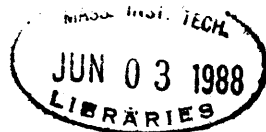
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Submitted to the Department of Architecture on May 6th, 1988
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Visual Studies

ABSTRACT

My intention is to provide "meditative" moments to all of us who must struggle with the fast pace of the modern world. These "meditative" moments are both calming and engaging. They resemble the moment of "satori," or "opening of mind," in Zen. Zen, embedded in the culture of Japan, is closely related to my work and sensibility.

In realizing my intention, I have chosen the medium of video. Video can reach a wide audience through broadcasting and home videos. Its photographic ability allows us to directly record and celebrate our natural environment. As video is an experience in time, it can create quiet soothing sounds and slow subtle movements. It allows us time to "tune in" to the rhythm of the piece.

In my video work, I depict basic natural elements such as light, water, and clouds, and their relationship to animate beings.

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Introduction

This paper describes my artistic intentions and various choices I made in creating my video work. References to other artists are made whenever appropriate. As I am interested in creating work that is experiential, I have chosen to write a large portion of this paper from a first-person viewpoint. Experience cannot be communicated fully through analytical arguments.

The sections titled "Runaway Pace," "Satori," and "Meditative Moments" describe the kind of experience I wish to create in my art work. My intention is to provide calming and yet engaging "meditative" moments to all of us who must struggle with the "runaway pace" of the modern world. These moments resemble moments of "satori" in Zen. Zen and its relation to Japanese history and culture are described.

"Experiences Created by Art" briefly describes various forms of art works, mostly environmental, which have been created since the 60's. I then discuss my choice of video art as the medium for my work. "Recent Works in Video Art" describes the various types of video art that have been created in the 80's. The subtle work of Nan Hoover seems close in

sensibility to the work I am interested in creating. "Meditative Videos" makes explicit my intent to depict in my videos basic natural elements such as light, water, clouds, and the relationship of animate beings to such elements.

The next six sections discuss various stylistic choices made in my images and sounds. In discussing shots and edits, references are made to various video artists as well as filmmakers such as Michelangelo Antonioni and Alain Resnais. John Cage is quoted as I discuss sound.

My three recent video pieces: semi no uta (1987), la fête de la côte (1987), and hikari (1988) are described. Still images taken from the video pieces are shown.

The paper concludes with a comment on the future direction of my work in the section titled "A Trip to Tokyo."

Runaway Pace

"The inescapable attribute of our time is runaway pace. Tidal waves of traffic pound us; sprawling cities and exploding populations squeeze us. Wildly erratic throbbing migrations-- the daily shuttle from home to work, from work to home, the weekend surge from city to country and from country to city, the punctuations of rush-hour deadlocks-- toss us in an accelerating rhythm barely within our control. Streams of speeding objects-- motorcars, airplanes, intercontinental missiles, orbiting space capsules-- weave a rapidly changing fabric all around us with patterns of spiraling velocities. At night, the reassuring calm of the firmament is blotted out by our cities, which are transformed into giant circuses where darting headlights, winking traffic lights, glittering, gaudy displays, and advertising signs whirl and swirl and pirouette in frantic competition for our attention.¹"

Gyorgy Kepes

"Is there any escape? Can we step outside our rushed selves and find the calm in which to meet our neglected deeper needs? As well step outside of a racing express train without expectation of harm! It seems equally impossible to look inside ourselves and find renewal of spirit. Our privacy, the sanctuary for our imaginative powers, is invaded, not only by such lashing tentacles of this world of motion as the onrushing images of the television screen, but even more by our own frantic restlessness.²"

Gyorgy Kepes

My intention is to provide "meditative moments" through my art work to all of us who must struggle with the "runaway pace." Before elaborating on my intentions, I shall briefly describe Zen. The spirit of Zen is closely related to my work and my sensibility.

Satori

The goal of Zen is to attain "satori," or "opening of the mind."
Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki describes "satori" as the essential part of
Zen:

"In Zen there must be *satori* ;" "there must be the
awakening of a new sense which will review the old
things from a hitherto undreamed-of angle of
observation.³"

He compares Zen to other forms of Buddhism:

"Zen is not a system of Dhyana as practiced in India
and by other Buddhist schools in China. By
Dhyana is generally understood a kind of
meditation or contemplation directed towards some
fixed thought; in Hinayana Buddhism it was the
thought of transiency, while in the Mahayana it was
more often the doctrine of emptiness." "When all
forms of activity are swept away clean from the field
of consciousness, leaving the mind like the sky
devoid of every speck of cloud, a mere broad
expanse of blue, Dhyana is said to have reached its
perfection. This may be called ecstasy or trance,
but it is not Zen.⁴"

According to Suzuki, "satori" is a personal experience. It can be

experienced in our everyday existence if the moment is ripe. Because of its personal nature, it cannot be taught by explanation. Zen masters can only indicate or suggest the right direction. Each of us must then struggle to bring out what is within us to attain that state. The formal practice of Zen consists of sitting motionless in silence in a posture called "zazen" attempting to resolve "koans." "Koans" literally means "public documents." They contain questions given by Zen masters and dialogues between ancient Zen masters and their disciples. They are apparently paradoxical, or non-sensical.

Having spent my childhood in Japan, the spirit of Zen seems to have entered somewhere under my skin even though I do not engage in any formal practice of Zen.

Zen was brought into Japan from China in the late twelfth century at the beginning of the Kamakura period. This was the time when the samurai, the warrior class, had begun to rule Japan, replacing the power of the nobility. The calming meditative experience of Zen was often sought by the warriors. They practiced Zen to free their souls from anxieties and turmoils of the battles.

Through Zen, they learned to be patient and to act quickly and decisively at the "right" moment. Passions and emotions were suppressed, while an intimate relationship was built with the rhythm of nature, her calmness and subtlety.

Not only was Zen a retreat, it also allowed the warriors to perform well in their martial arts. As a result, it aided their physical survival in addition to enriching their spiritual existence. To be effective in martial arts, such as archery or fencing, it was crucial to be completely calm and to act decisively, without any hesitation. This was similar to the use of brush strokes in Japanese paintings. No stroke could be retraced or erased. A bold decisive action either gave birth to a line, or destroyed the piece.

Zen was incorporated into the design of Japanese gardens. Gardens had been designed as miniaturized representations of the natural environment. Mountains represented by hills, water represented by water. In the Muromachi period, as Zen was absorbed into various facets of the Japanese culture, a different style of gardens developed. This style was unique to Japan.

These gardens were called "kara-senzui," or "dry," gardens. They were simple and compact. Waterfalls were replaced by large rocks that were positioned vertically. White sands or pebbles replaced actual brooks and ponds. The abstract quality of these gardens reflects the heightened sense of awareness attained at the moment of "satori."

Once, as a child I visited a Zen temple near Okayama, a city west of Kyoto and Osaka. Raikyuji was a small temple hidden away from major tourist excursions. I remember sitting on the tatami mat indoors looking out into the garden. As is common in traditional Japanese architecture, opening the sliding doors allowed the garden to be experienced directly from within the temple. The garden was small and was covered with beautiful white pebbles. The raked white pebbles were the sea within the seascape without water. The serenity of the garden overwhelmed the restlessness of the child. It had such a strong presence, such a strong absence. It was so calming. I sat still, staring at the stillness of the garden. I felt I could sit there for hours quietly, contemplatively. I cannot remember how long I stayed there looking out at the garden.

By the fifteenth century, the spirit of Zen had given birth to the tea ceremony. The tea ceremony furnished the warriors with occasions for relaxation. Tea huts were built in gardens and forests, creating means of experiencing nature and engaging in intimate conversations. Even today, the tea ceremony, or the act of drinking tea is a social event which has a calming, relaxing effect. When visiting someone, one is usually served tea. It takes time for the hot water to boil, and it takes time for it to cool down enough so that one can drink it. The visitors become oriented to the space and to the hosts during this time. They share tranquil moments together. They affirm each others existence.

Meditative Moments

I do not claim to have attained "satori." But I have experienced certain moments which resemble moments of "satori." Those moments were calming and refreshing. They were engaging. Those moments allowed me to explore my impressions. Impressions of the natural environment, animate energy. Impressions of time.

Rather than attempting to explain those moments from an "objective" or "scientific" point of view, I shall describe them as I experienced them. I shall describe my impressions. Personal experience is only meaningful if it is experienced. My hope is that these descriptions will remind the readers of similar moments in their lives. I am choosing to recount MY personal experiences here because those are the only experience I, as a first-person, have access to.

As a child I used to go skiing with my family. We usually travelled by train because it was faster than driving through the traffic in Japan. It was not a long train ride. We merely had to get over to

the other side of the mountain chains that separated the Kanto plains from the northern Hokuriku area. It was always rather hectic getting to the train station. Tokyo is so large that we would almost have to spend an hour on subways before arriving at Ueno station where the north bound long distance trains departed. Carrying skis and luggage in crowded Japanese subways were not pleasant. Even the north bound trains were often filled with holiday skiers and other travellers. I used to look out of the window waiting for the sight of snow. The train passed through many tunnels. And after each tunnel, I would peer out of the window hoping to catch sight of the white landscape. We passed through a long tunnel that never seemed to end. Suddenly, whiteness was all we saw. The ground, the trees, the rocks. Everything was covered with snow. Soft, untouched white forms. The world had been covered. We had finally reached the other side. Yasunari Kawabata, a Japanese writer, begins one of his novels by describing this sight. The softness and the whiteness enveloped everything. All the acuteness that was menacing and disturbing to the animate experience was dulled by the softness. The air felt fresher. I watched the white forms pass by the window. I almost regretted reaching our destination.

I had been travelling through many cities. I stayed in each city for one or two nights. Some days I saw more than one city in one day. Northern Europe had been much colder than I had anticipated. The weather was unpredictable. I had literally spent the last two years sitting in an office. An office with brightly lit fluorescent lights. Now I only wished to experience foreign land. I did not have enough time to see all I wished to see. I was committed to returning to school. I had spent the previous day roaming around in the Roman Forum in the August heat after being attacked by a group of gypsy kids. They had attempted to clear my pockets without much success. I was now sitting in a train heading northeast. My compartment was full. The conversations were loud. They were mostly in Italian, occasionally in Spanish, occasionally in English. The hallway was also filled with passengers. Holiday travellers as well as local Italians. Several hours passed. We arrived in Santa Lucia station. I walked out and stopped. I felt the sun, the water. I was standing on top of the stairs that led to the translucent water, the canal of Venice. The water reflected light as it moved, creating numerous

patterns. It was inviting. As if it had been waiting for me. I stood there for quite some time. I only wished I had come earlier.

These "meditative moments" took me away from my ordinary way of experiencing the environment. I was captured and absorbed by the imagery, the sound. My senses were active. I noticed subtle movements I usually did not notice. I heard sounds I usually did not hear. My sensorial experience was expanded and enriched. I was still aware of all else that was taking place around me although it felt as though they were more distant. It was similar to engaging in a physical exercise when my attention is more focused. I felt refreshed and energized.

Experience Created by Art

What are effective means of providing "meditative moments" in our world today? We face a wide range of possibilities as various forms of art are created, providing us with many different kinds of experiences.

Along with the development of technology, art works are created today which challenge our conventional sense of temporal and spatial scale. Satellite transmission reduces the time required to experience global events. The same program can be broadcast and received simultaneously in the U.S.A., Europe, Asia, as well as other parts of the world. Large scale environmental work, such as Otto Piene's inflatables, Christo's Surrounding Islands, and Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty, entice us to experience our environment, sky and earth, from "a hitherto undreamed of angle."

Experiences of light and motion activate energy within us, while also enhancing our awareness of various forms of energy in our environment. Walter De Maria creates an experience of natural thunder in Lightening Field. Alexander Calder's mobiles

enhances our awareness of the movement of air. With the use of electronic technology, various experiences in artificial light and motion can be created. The subtle moving artificial light emanating from Otto Piene's Star of David. Laser images projected on the Niagara Falls and on artificially created wall of steam. Holograms showing virtual three-dimensional objects. Wen Ying Tsai's "cybernetic sculptures" invite participation as the sounds created by the audience affect the undulating movement of steel rods on vibrating plates. Through film and video technology, light and motion in our environment can be recorded and later recreated to provide an audiovisual experience.

Multi-media, multi-sensorial environments are created both to provide "total" experiences and to entice the audience to participate in various explorations. Three-dimensional panorama movies projected on hemispherical ceilings envelop our field of vision, while binaural sound systems recreate a sense of real space. Some environments invite olfactory and/or tactual experiences. Jesus Raphael Soto's visual, tactual, and often sonorous environments invite the audience to enter and explore.

Events and performances create momentary, ephemeral, and memorable experiences. Nicholas Uriburu dropping thirty kilos of fluorescent sodium into the canal of Venice. Charlotte Moorman's cello performance wearing a TV Bra. Paul Earls's Dreamstage, an environment controlled by a live performer asleep and dreaming.

With the use of film or video, art works in other forms, such as environmental art and performance, can be documented and "recreated." Although documentation cannot totally recreate the experience of the original work, it can be a successful rendering of the original work in another medium. Film, or video documentation, with its sounds and movements, can be experienced in various spatial and temporal contexts. It can be broadcast or physically transported to other parts of the world. Through documentation, we may experience the original work in more ways than we could have if we were actually at the site. In Tokyo, I experienced the documentation of Christo's Surrounding Islands, which shows the installation process, negotiations with the Florida authorities, and the installed work as seen from the ground and the sky.

Videos and films can be incorporated into installations, environments, and performances. Nam Jun Paik uses television sets as "found" objects in his video installations. He collaborates with Charlotte Moorman in video performances such as TV Bra. Some video installations invite audience participation through video feedback mechanisms. The audience view themselves in monitors or video projections as they interact with the installation. Transovum, a video installation I collaborated on with C.M.Judge, creates an audiovisual tactual experience within an enclosed womb-like sculpture.

With such wide range of possibilities for creating art work, one must carefully select those qualities that seem most important to his or her work. An outdoor event and an indoor environment, are, by definition, mutually exclusive. A multi-sensorial olfactory tactual environment cannot be "broadcast" to the other side of the world. A garden or a natural environment cannot be carried home for "home viewing." Works involving English words, whether they be recited poetry, videos with dialogues, or electronic message boards, are bound to appeal differently to Anglophones and

non-Anglophones. Decisions must be made as to how much the artist creates and controls versus how much is left for the audience to explore on their own. In case of narrative films or videos, the audience may become totally passive, substituting the enacted drama for their own action and experiences.

In creating work that is intended to provide "meditative moments," I have chosen the medium of video. While video environments can create total experiences by removing the audience from their ordinary environment, I have chosen to work with non-environmental video pieces because I am attracted to its accessibility. Video can reach a wide range of audience through broadcasting. Although, in practice, access to broadcasting is still quite limited, potentially, millions of audience can be reached simultaneously. The portability and compatibility of video cassettes permit us to transport the work and view them in various locations, such as homes, offices, schools. As the world becomes smaller, it is important to create experiences that are portable, repeatable, and accessible to audience sharing our globe, which is large and small.

As with film, video can provide experiences in light and motion, activating energy within us, while showing us light and motion in our natural and man-made environments through its photographic images. The changing shapes of snow covered landscape as seen from a moving train. The seascape of white pebbles in a Zen temple. Movements of clouds as we sit and watch them from a tea house. The images have a sense of immediacy as they are created directly by light in the environment. Furthermore, with video, we can take images from different spatial and temporal contexts and combine them. For example, we can combine the beauty of various lands. The fresh white snow of the Hokuriku winter, the Venetian water reflecting the summer light, the autumn leaves of New England. By expressing my impressions of nature to the audience, they can be enticed to explore their impressions of nature, just as I hoped to remind the readers of similar moments in their lives by recounting "meditative" moments in my life.

As in the case of events and performances, video, its sounds and movements, can be experienced only according to the time and rhythm created by the artist. We confront the image, the sound, and the rhythm. Gradually, as we relax, we allow ourselves to

"tune in" to the work. We begin our exploration, reflecting upon our impressions. We perceive beauty and subtlety we often do not notice. We hear sounds we hardly hear. We follow rhythms we hardly follow. Our senses are stimulated.

Recent Works in Video Art

Due to the progress in technology, video, as a creative medium, is becoming increasingly accessible to individual artists. At the same time, as the technical qualities of these videos approach the required standards for broadcast television, opportunities for broadcasting video art and reaching a wide audience is expanding.

Video, as it becomes a more established medium, begins to synthesize with other media: music, dance, literature, theater, and poetry. Music videos, reflecting the popular culture, can be amusing. For example, in Imagine (1987), by Zbigniew Rybczynski, the sound track of John Lennon's music is accompanied by an image constantly moving from left to right, from one room to another, showing cycles of life: birth, growth, love. The piece is humorous since drastic transitions within a life-cycle are juxtaposed with simple displacements from one room to the next.

Dance videos such as Mary Lucier's In the blink of an eye

(amphibian dreams) "If I Could Fly I Would Fly" (1987) and James Byrne's Lament (1987) show us enticing sensual images of body movements. We observe various organic shapes created by human bodies and experience the energizing movements of the dancers. In Lucier's piece, some of the movements are fast, instantaneous, and energetic, while in Lament, the movement is slow and controlled.

Gary Hill experiments with language in works such as Happenstance (1983), Why Do Things Get In a Muddle? (1984), and URA ARU (Backside Exists) (1985-86). In URA ARU, word play of palindromes is combined with imagery of Japanese Noh dramas often creating "witty" juxtapositions. From the sound track, we hear various Japanese words being spoken, while the English translation appear as texts on the screen. The juxtapositions of words with other words, and words with images, are often humorous. For example, repeated shots of a chest being caressed is juxtaposed with the word "HADA" and "ADA," or "skin" and "grudge."

Bill Seaman explores the poetic relationship of language, image

and sound in his videos S.He (1983), The Water Catalogue (1984), and Telling Motions (1985-86). Recited poetry, and repetitive sounds are integrated with "found images" of water, motion, scenes from a moving train, to create a poetic structure that invites repeated viewing.

In Sabda (1984), Dan Reeves structures the imagery in accordance with several Bhakti poems. The poems are experienced not as sound but as texts overlaid directly on the images. While the sound track seems to consist of slowed down ambient sounds, the slowed down imagery are given "ethereal " quality through digital-imaging techniques. Some of the images are seen almost as a series of fragmented stills. The visual quality created by this technique is successful in expressing the transience of life. We see various facets of India: people cutting grass, beggars on the street, figures on bicycles, elephants emerging out of water, buddhas being carved. The word "sabda" refers to the "original sound of the world." The piece begins as we see and hear the text of a poem by Kabir, a northern Indian poet:

"When I began to hear the sound from within I
began to listen to it and kept listening to it. As I

became absorbed in that sound, all my inner pain began to leave me; all my misery began to leave me, I became so anchored in that sound. It is such a beautiful sound."

Dramatic, or narrative, structures are seen in such work as Dara Birnbaum's trilogy Damnation of Faust (1983-87). The key to such work is anticipating the conclusion. Damnation of Faust follows the lives of two girls. The conflicts between their inner selves and the external environments are expressed through multiple "windows" of various sizes and shapes displayed simultaneously on the screen. In the conclusion, the playground, where they grew up is destroyed for reconstruction. In one instance, the main screen shows the destroyed playground, and a small "window" displays a shot of children in the playground, an image from the past, a memory. Drama, or narrative, if successful, can move us because we, as human beings, can empathize with the predicaments of the characters, their joys and sorrows.

As television and surveillance cameras invade our lives, many video art work begin to deal directly with such "video culture," or the language of mass communication. In Joan Does Dynasty (1986), Joan Braderman inserts an image of herself into the

popular TV soap opera Dynasty to criticize its depiction of sex and power. In Made for TV (1984), Ann Magnerson plays various roles, such as a perfume advertiser, a cult figure, and a seductive dancer, on different "channels" of "television" as the video piece simulates switching from one channel to another, unable to stay in one channel for any length of time. Michael Klier, in Der Reise (1983), combines various footage collected by surveillance cameras around the city, creating a voyeuristic piece expressive of the sense of alienation in the modern world. Ken Feingold, in The Double (1984), edits together scandalous violent images collected from CNN news footage, such as bombings in various parts of the world, and scenes of open heart surgery. He succeeds in provoking and repulsing the audience.

Various videos depict our contemporary life. Some are witty and amusing, while others are apocalyptic and revolting. In Deadline (1981), Max Almy uses two images overlaid on top of each other. As a woman's mouth filling the main screen speaks "come on, you can do it," we see a man jogging in the small "window," which gradually become larger. Whenever the man becomes too tired to jog, we hear the "mouth" encouraging him. The contrasting size of

the two windows and images adds to the humor. Doug Hall, in Storm and Stress (1986), combines images of threatening weather with images of desolate industrial complexes. Nervous breathing sounds are heard as the clouds move in. In the climax, with the arrival of the tornado, the industrial complex burns, and a ship sinks. The piece ends with the sun coming out of the clouds. The "day after." Bill Viola's Anthem (1983) begins with a piercing scream of an eleven year old girl. The scream becomes the sound track and is combined with images of heavy industry, and open heart surgery. In Reasons for Knocking on an Empty House (1983), Viola portrays himself in solitary confinement, in an empty house. The camera is the only witness to his isolation and non-activity. Such claustrophobic depiction of the human condition is seen in other pieces such as Weather Diary 1 (1981) by George Kuchar, who records his confinement in a motel room during a severe storm, or Michael Smith's Secret Horror (1980), in which a solitary television addict is attacked by beings from the TV.

Some videos are more abstract. The subtle sensibility of video artist Nan Hoover is close to what I am interested in creating. Nan Hoover was born in New York and has been living in Amsterdam

since 1969. She was trained as a painter and has become involved with the media of photography, video, and performance since the early seventies. Her videotapes show subtle changes in light and form. She often shoots part of her body as it moves through light. Both her compositions and timing are carefully controlled, creating tension that is engaging. Some pieces are silent while others contain subtle low volume organic sounds.

In Desert (1985), Hoover begins with a shot of four "hills", which seem to be human legs. The image gradually becomes brighter, then darker, brighter, then darker. The change is so subtle that it can hardly be noticed at any given point in time. The ambiguity of the image is engaging. The image gradually dissolves into another shot which is similarly composed. The "hills" in this shot seem to be hills of a desert. Again the light shifts.

Landscape (1984) begins with a shot of what could be a Japanese rice cake, or a mountain. As it gradually moves, we realize that it is a macro close-up shot of part of a hand. Slowly, the hand moves downward and the camera zooms out. The low and high organic sounds are soothing.

Halfsleep (1984) begins with a close-up shot of a mouth. The image is not necessarily recognizable until the camera begins to move up slowly, revealing part of the nose. Speech, footsteps, and mechanical sounds are heard. The shot fades to black and the sound continues. The next shot is a close-up of an eye. The camera moves down slowly, showing the nose, then the mouth. Then it begins to move back up to the eye. Sounds of air movement and human voices are heard. The movement is slow and controlled. Light and shadow are carefully composed. They create various abstract organic shapes. The shapes appear and disappear as the camera moves.

In Hoover's works, the ambiguity of the image, the subtlety of the movement, and the sound induces moments that are "meditative." In viewing them we are calmed and engaged.

"I am interested in creating images that reflect quietness. Using slow movements, catching the gradual changes of light, color, and form.....⁵"

Nan Hoover

Meditative Videos

Drama can be exciting. Reflecting on the conditions of contemporary life or the popular culture can be witty and humorous. Playing upon the language of commercial television can be valuable in enhancing our awareness of various codes implicitly presented in such medium. However, none of these endeavors relate to my intention. My intention is to create an engaging sensorial experience that takes us away from all the "excitement," "alienation," "social awareness," and other "conditions of the contemporary world." Metaphorically speaking, I am not interested in amusing samurai or "salarymen" by imitating their superiors. Rather, my interest is to take them out into nature and to let them experience the water, the sky, the earth. To let them affirm their biological sensorial existence.

I am also not interested in incorporating language into my work. My work is intended to be sensorial. It is pre-verbal. It must be felt directly with our senses. Furthermore, having grown up in countries which speak different languages, I find language to be limiting and somewhat provincial. As I am interested in creating

work that have universal appeal, I do not wish to bias my audience through expressing words in any particular language. I am, of course, aware that even without the use of language, it is inevitable that the same work will appeal differently to various age, gender, national, ethnic, and socio-economic groups. The world is heterogeneous. Nevertheless, most of us have audiovisual senses. Our biology allows us to engage in explorations of nature. To experience "meditative moments."

I am interested in depicting basic natural elements such as light, water, clouds, and the relationship of animate beings to such elements. In this sense it resembles Nan Hoover's work although the difference is that I am interested in capturing "found images" of nature, while she works with created, or performed, images. Through video, light and motion in our natural environment can be recorded. Sun light seen through the clouds. Movement of light reflected off the surface of the water. Movements of various animate beings such as carps and dogs. Their tactual interaction with each other and with their environment. Experiencing nature through videos, we see subtlety and beauty of nature we often did not notice. Our senses are awakened, and we are affirmed of our

biological existence closely linked to our natural environment. While the imagery and sound calm us and remove us from our ordinary world of social interactions, we are energized by the energy of these natural elements. My videos become "meditative" as they depict such natural elements.

Shot: the photographic image

How should nature be shot? The shot must create an enticing experience to the audience, who initially, may resist surrendering their defense mechanism and allowing themselves to fully experience the piece.

Certain filmmakers have created shots that are particularly engaging visually. Inspired by graphic design, Michelangelo Antonioni creates visually engaging images by combining graphic architectural composition with the human figures, and by contrasting the brilliant red color of the painted walls with the washed out colors of the misty surrounding in Il Deserto Rosso (1964). Alain Resnais creates visually striking compositions of figures in an architectural context as in L'Année dernière à Marienbad (1961). Alfred Hitchcock often shows us intriguing close-ups and shots from interesting angles, which keep us in suspense as we attempt to decipher what is taking place. Hitchcock creates his shots through meticulously prepared sketches, while Antonioni composes his shots spontaneously after being on location.

An engaging shot entices us to explore our impressions. I have already mentioned how Nan Hoover engages us in exploring the ambiguity of figuration and abstraction . C.M. Judge also works with the ambiguity of figuration verses abstraction in her video QVEA (1988). In this piece, various forms of shadow appear against the background of green grass. Initially, we are lost as to what the sense of scale is, or how the shadow is created. As the movement progress, we begin to recognize a human figure. The shapes of shadows created by the movement of the body are all the more engaging because they are created by the human body. Our impression is enriched as we perceive the image as a figure and as abstract shapes.

In my work, I have also experimented with the ambiguity of figuration and abstraction. In la fête de la côte, I relate the movement of water with movements of dogs fighting and mating on the beach. One of the shots is a superimposition of a shot of dogs caressing each other with a shot of pebbles in the beach. The shot begins as a freeze frame and begins to move. In the freeze frame image, the dogs are not recognizable and appear to

be a shadow, or an abstract form, related to the pebbles. As the dogs begin to move, it becomes more apparent what the image is. As the dogs move, at various instances, we notice the dogs as concrete figures more than as abstract forms. Other times, we notice the shapes of the pebbles, the light reflected from the water, and the abstract shapes more than the concrete figures. Our attention keeps shifting back and forth. It is similar to watching Nan Hoover's Halfsleep, in which our attention shifts between the concrete figure and the abstract forms created by the light and shadow on the figure.

Certain kinds of shots abstract from the particular animate beings qualities which are more universal. In la fête de la côte, the dogs are shot so that their faces are either excluded from the frame or seen only as shadow-like forms. This seems to divert the viewers' attention from the particular dogs we see. Our experience is not focused so much on the particular dogs. Instead, we experience the beauty and energy of the animate existence. The movements of the dogs, the movements of the ripples created by dogs in the water, the hairy texture of the dog's skin.

I have consciously incorporated this consideration in my still photographs of people to create work that are more universally appealing. In the series of photographs taken during the New Year holidays in Tokyo, all of my shots are close-ups of hands. Faces are completely excluded from the frame, or in one instance, it is in the shadow, making it impossible to identify the subject. Our interest is no longer the particular person photographed. Instead we are drawn to the expressive quality of the hands. Through hands we see determinations, hesitations, action, inaction. The various faces of human existence.

Shot: an event in time

A shot is a time-based event. It consists of a series of still photographic images shown in sequence over a period of time. The images are shown at a rate that creates the illusion of motion.

Unlike paintings or still photographs, shots can only be experienced in time. Any event that occurs within it must be experienced at the speed within the shot for the duration of the shot unless one chooses to leave the room. It allows the opportunity for the audience to become intimate with the events that are taking place within the frame.

Slow movements allow us to experience rhythms we usually do not experience. Nan Hoover and C.M.Judge perform in slow motion. Most of Nan Hoover's work consist of only one shot. As I have described, the changes that take place during the shot is so subtle that, at any given point in time, it is difficult to recognize any changes. Bill Viola, Dan Reeves, and Bill Seaman slow down their "found" images during the editing process. Slow motion seems to allow movements to be experienced more intensely. In

my work, I take images from nature and slow them down so that the changes become subtle. My piece hikari consists of one shot. As the audience watch the sun moving through the clouds, they notice subtle changes of light, color, and shapes of the clouds. At any given instant, only the slow shaking movement of the camera is noticeable. As we concentrate on any part of the image, we notice that somewhere along the way, other parts of the image have transformed its color and form. In my other pieces, through slow motion, we experience the movements of the water, the animate movements of carps and dogs.

The duration of the shot allows the audience to "tune in" and "slow down." Initially, there may be some resistance even if the photographic image is visually engaging. After a while, however, if the work is successful, it will engage the audience rather than bore them. One becomes aware of the subtlety. It is similar to walking into a dark room. Initially, one feels blinded and disoriented. As time passes, the eyes become accustomed to the low light level in the room. The pupils adjust, and one can see objects in the room.

Some filmmakers have purposely chosen to emphasize long single unbroken shots in their films. In Il Grido (1957), for example, Antonioni has a long wide-angle shot of a factory worker and his daughter on a hopeless journey across a desolate landscape of Po Valley. The realism is heightened as we see the characters and their environment in the same frame, and as we experience their journey in their time. We are not allowed to jump to the next location, or scene, by the introduction of another shot through editing. We watch them walk from one side of the frame to the other.

Antonioni's shots are often kept fixed even after the characters exit the frame. French critics called this practice "temps morts." The scene, independent of the characters or the plot, is considered to have "its own esthetic and thematic autonomy⁶." I have used "temps morts" in my piece semi no uta. The opening shot of ripples reflected on shoji screens is held fixed even after people's shadow's walk past behind the screens. In la fête de la côte, some black blank images are held as long as five seconds. During such seemingly idle moments, we as audience are provided with time to reflect upon our own impressions.

Editing

A sequence is created by juxtaposing one shot after another. Editing, or "montage," was emphasized by earlier Soviet filmmakers, such as Sergei Eisenstein. They believed that the expressive power of film was generated by the juxtaposition of various shots and that the images were associated and synthesized in the viewers' perception to create a total impression. Eisenstein, in Film Form, draws an analogy between an edited sequence and Japanese ideographs. Each shot is considered to be analogous to a "radical." "Radicals" are sub-patterns which constitute ideographs. Each "radical" has a distinct meaning. The meaning of an ideograph is given by the combined meaning of its radicals. He argues that similarly, shots are combined into a sequence to create a meaning, or a total impression.

Through editing, Alain Resnais experiments with our impression of time. In L'Année dernière à Marienbad, Resnais quickly intercuts between the past and the present as the same character X continues to speak a single unbroken sentence in the past and in the present. The editing is successful in giving us the

impression that in this film, the real sense of time is unimportant. The past, the present, the future are interwoven. X's sexual interest in A is independent of time.

Editing can be successful in expressing subtle moments of transitions from one state to another. Bill Viola, in Hatsuyume (First Dream of the New Year) (1981), has a sequence of shots taken from a car driving around Tokyo at night. The image becomes abstracted as we see the rain reflecting the changing lights of the city through the car windows. The abstract patterns created by the dripping water and the changing colors are held for some length of time. It is meditative. These shots are then followed by macro close-up images of carps swimming in a Japanese garden. We do not notice this transition until we recognize the tails of the carps. The moment we recognize the carps, we feel the sense of being taken away from the busy night life of the city to some peaceful garden.

As I have described, in my work, each shot is an impression. The shots are edited together by fading to black or white. The blank images create moments to reflect upon our impressions. Except

for hikari which consists only of one shot, the shots are edited together in my pieces to create a series of impressions. The progression is based neither on any narrative structure, nor on surrealistic association of imagery. They are merely impressions followed by impressions. Earlier impressions may allow us to explore later impressions more fully. The audience can explore their impressions, or draw various interpretations. They may, in fact, see a story although no story was intended. My intention is simply to let the audience feel the moments.

Silence

"Is there such a thing as silence?
Even if I get away from people, do I still have to
listen to something?
Say I'm off in the woods, do I have to listen to a
stream babbling?
Is there always something to hear, never any peace
and quiet?"⁷

John Cage

Silence may be impossible to create, but quiet video pieces, such as Nan Hoover's work, provide us with moments of introspection and rest. My videos tend to be quiet. Rather than overwhelming the audience with all types of sound, I let the audience "tune in" to the low volume level. Just as our eyes become accustomed to darkness, our ears become accustomed to silence. We may notice subtle changes in the sound, or the noise. Or we may imagine, for example, white noise to be the sound of water. As slow motion calms our visual activity, silence calms our auditory senses.

Sound

"And what is the purpose of writing music? One is, of course, not dealing with purposes but dealing with sounds. Or the answer must take the form of paradox: a purposeful purposelessness or a purposeless play. This play, however, is an affirmation of life-- not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord.⁸"

John Cage

Sounds found in our natural environment can be calming and engaging. The sound of the tide moving in and out. Sounds of dogs groaning. I often start with ambient sound and abstract from it. As recorded sounds are slowed down, the pitch becomes lower. We feel the lower, deeper sounds in our viscera. We feel our inner organs absorbing the sound. We feel energized.

Drones, Reverbs, Echoes

"At the New School once I was substituting for Henry Cowell, teaching a class in Oriental music. I told him I did not know anything about the subject. He said, 'That's all right. Just go where the records are. Take one out. Play it and then discuss it with the class.' Well, I took out the first record. It was an LP of a Buddhist service. It began with a short microtonal chant with sliding tones, then soon settled into a single loud reiterated percussive beat. This noise continued relentlessly for about fifteen minutes with no perceptible variation. A lady got up and screamed, and then yelled, 'Take it off. I can't bear it any longer.' I took it off. A man in the class then said angrily, 'Why'd you take it off? I was just getting interested.'⁹"

John Cage

Repetitive sounds can alter our sense of time. They can be used to create moments that are "meditative." A drone is a tone held continuously for a certain duration. Drones are common in our environment. Sounds of motors, sounds of fluorescent lights. We have even become accustomed to, and unconscious of, some drones. Depending on the pitch and the volume, they can be soothing or irritating. Drones tend to distort our sense of time. We

become numbed in some way, unable to bracket time in terms of any changes in the sound. Drones are incorporated in my video pieces.

Reverberating sounds create a sense of space, while creating a numbing effect. They can be found in Japanese bathrooms. Baths are common means of relaxation in Japan. After a long day at work, people relax in hot baths. Many people visit hot springs for vacation and recuperation. The hot water relax the muscles, and the steam obscures our vision. The echos in the room prevent any meaningful conversations in communal baths. One may resort to singing. We loose our sense of time. In semi no uta, a reverberation effect is added to the sound of water.

Echoes are used in Linda Montano's video piece Mitchel's Death. The piece consists of one head shot of a woman as she reads about the death of Mitchel. Her voice is echoed in four layers. Soon we are unable to understand what the words are. She continues to speak. After a while, we are numbed out. Her voice and echoes become background sounds.

"New music: new listening. Not an attempt to understand something that is being said, for if something were being said, the sounds would be given the shapes of words. Just an attention to the activity of sounds.¹⁰"

John Cage

semi no uta

semi no uta (1987) is an impression of a Japanese garden. The title "semi no uta" means "cicada songs" in Japanese. Cicadas are common in Japan in the summer. Though they are short lived, their presence is felt strongly from the drone like sound they create.

The sound of the cicada is heard in the beginning of the piece, as we see the water ripples reflecting on a shoji screen with its grid like pattern. The sound changes to the reverberating sound of water. We watch a carp in close-up moving through water, touching the rocks in the pond. A high pitched drone is heard. The sequence ends as the carp disappears under a stone. The shot fades to black and becomes silent. We then experience a gradual fade in from black as we hear a low drone followed by the reverberating water sound. In the next sequence, the image of the carp is blurred and abstracted by the reflections on the surface of the water in the foreground. The high pitched drone is heard again. The piece concludes with a shot of a lantern hanging from, or seemingly floating in, an olive colored background which is a

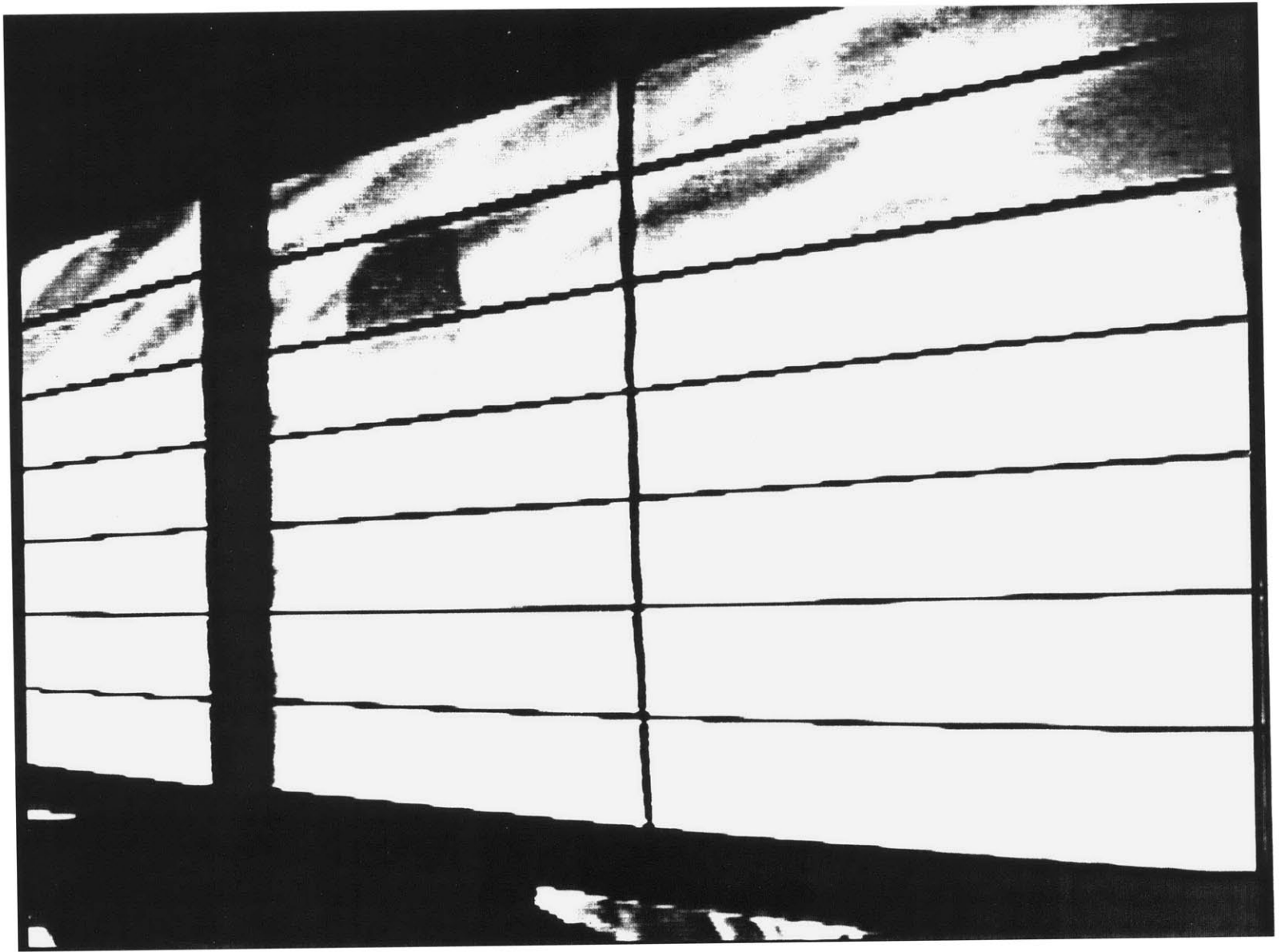
wall reflecting the water movement. The color of the wall is subdued as in many Japanese tea houses. Reverberating water sound is heard again.

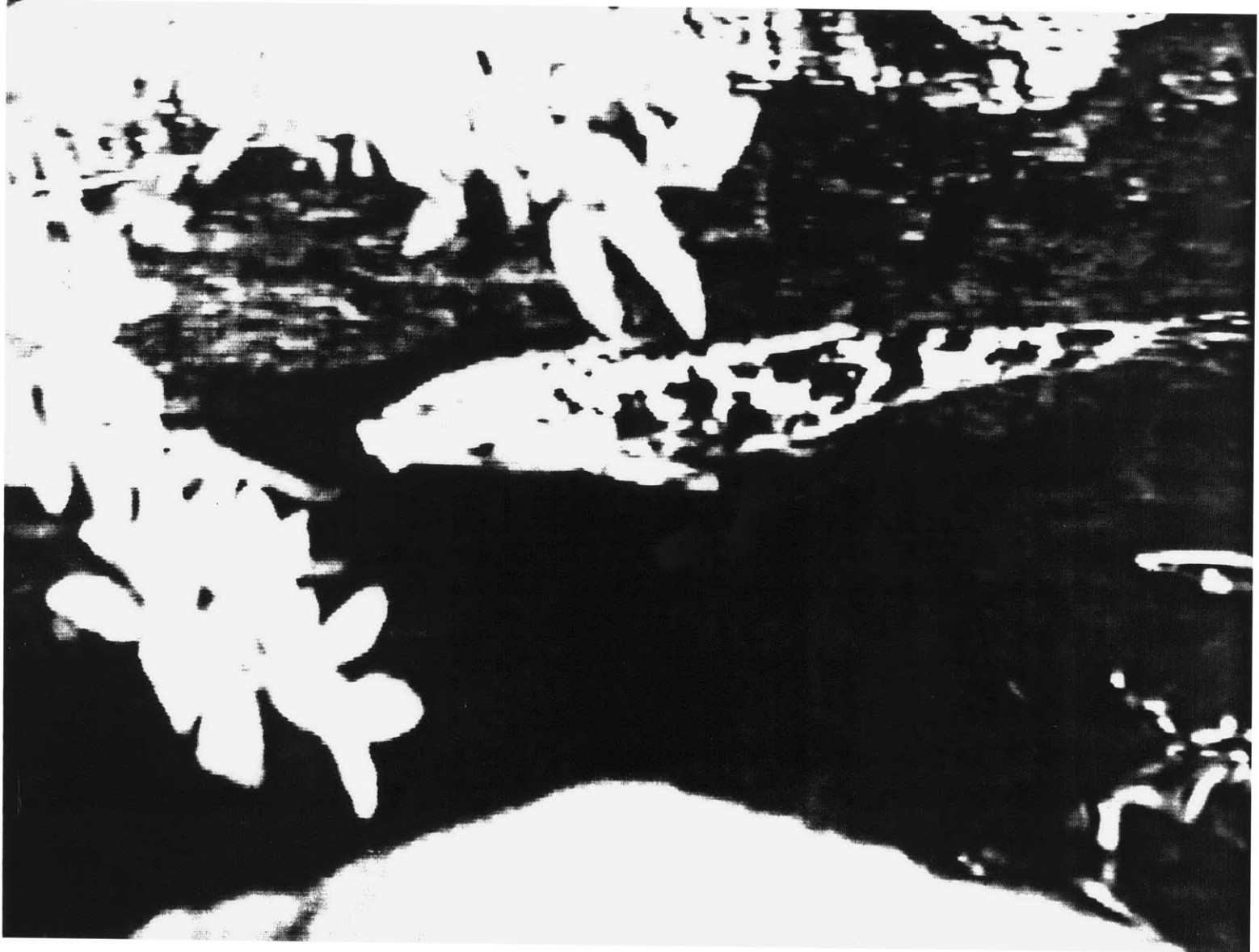
All cuts are created by fading to black or white. Fades are long and subtle. The timing was determined by my intuition rather than using any pre-programmed software features. All the shots are slowed down using the 1" video editing facility to intensify the subtlety of the movements.

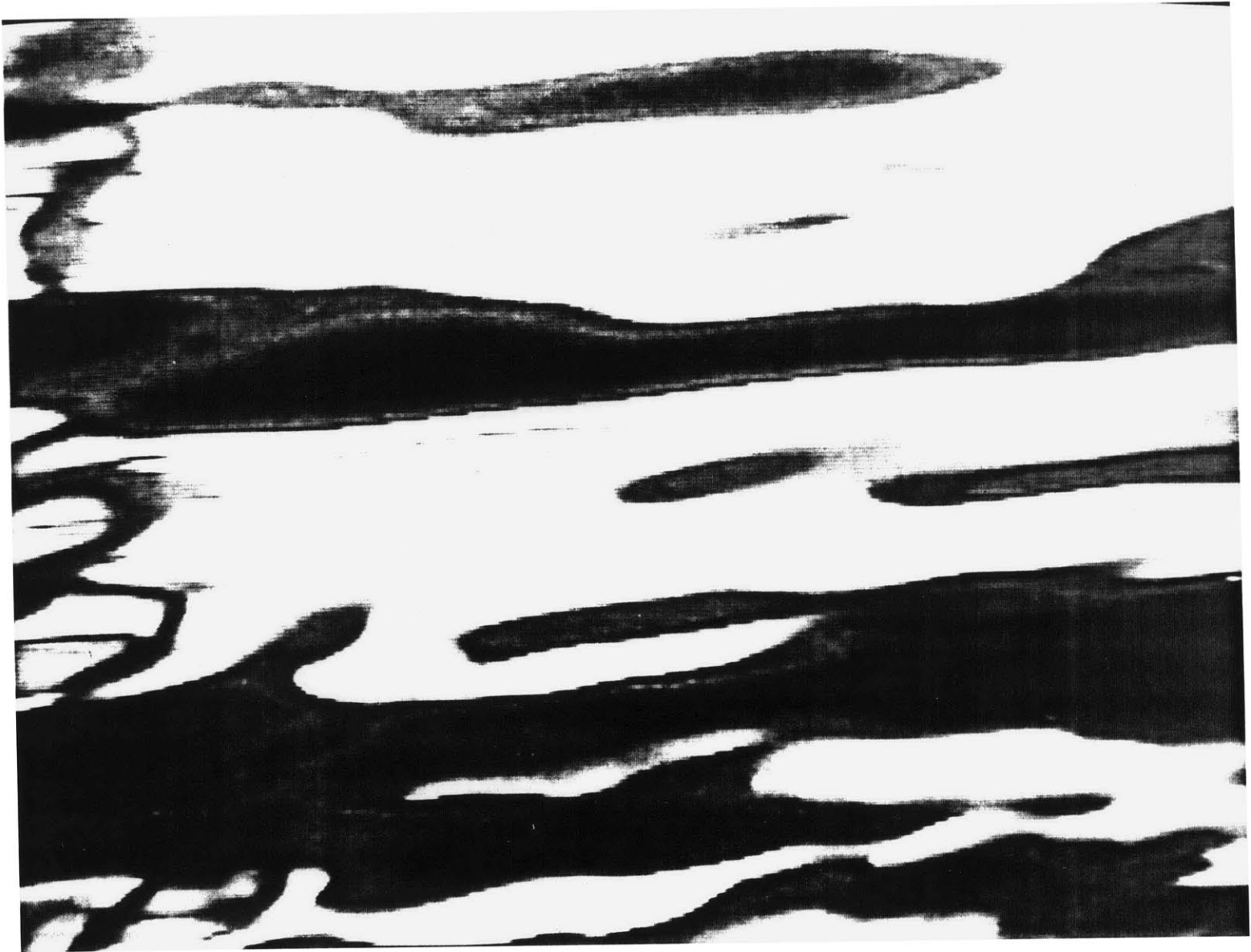
The drones were created on the DX-7 electronic synthesizer, and the pitches were chosen to be soothing. The reverberation effects were added to the sounds of water using an electronic reverb box.

It was a hot summer day. All I heard were the cicadas singing. I noticed a carp resting still in the water. The water was still. I walked further and saw a few carps lying on their side attempting to breath as they jerked their bodies out of the water. The drains had been clogged from the rain, the night before. As we unclogged the drains, we carried the carps in buckets to the other side of the pond where fresh water was coming out. I heard the

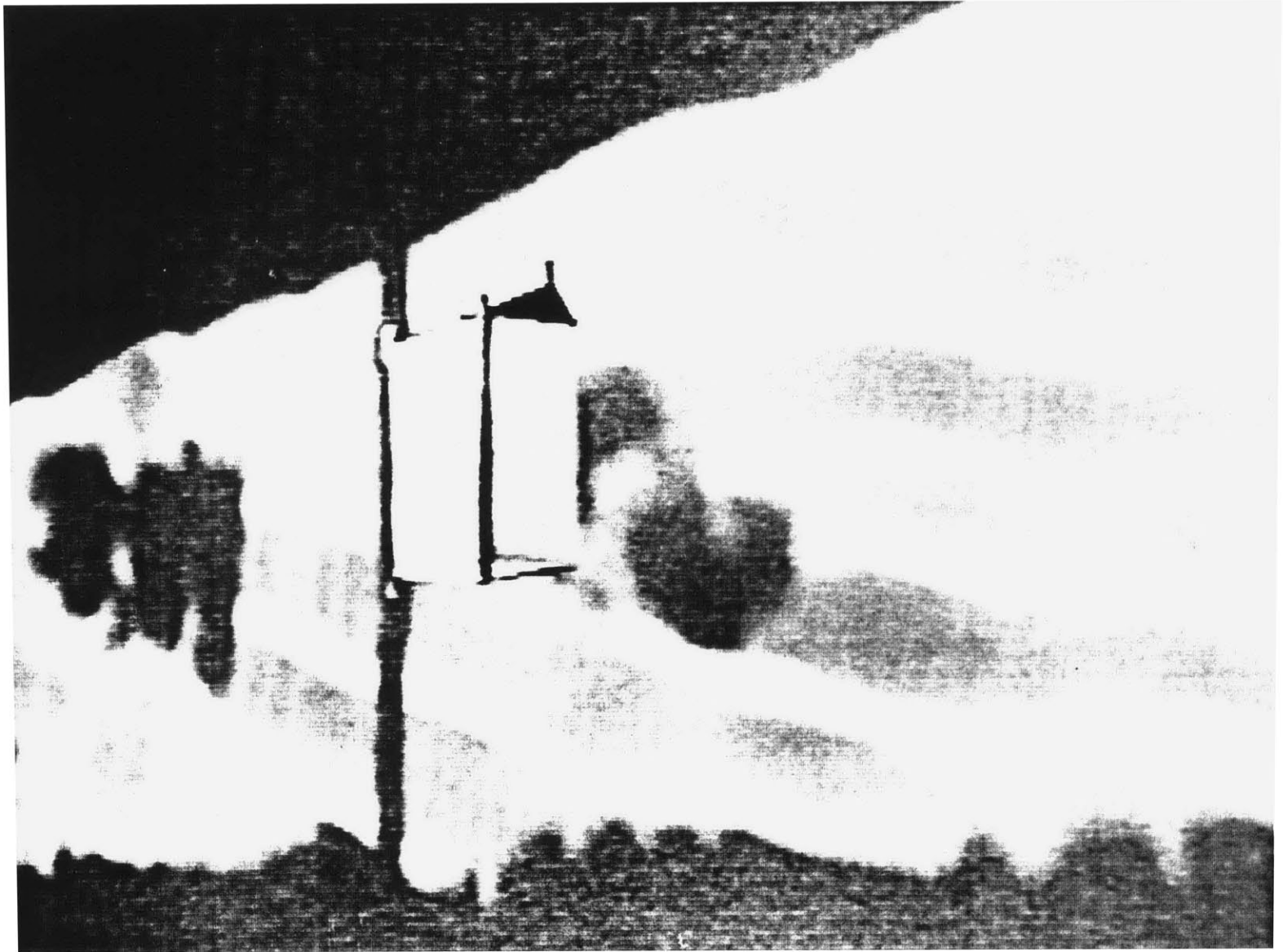
sound of the fresh water coming out. Light reflected off the surface of water creating shapes. The carps began to move. First slowly, then faster. As they swam, they created ripples. Concentric circles moving away from their body. Expanding, and eventually disappearing. The ripples became light. Lines of light full of energy. The light danced on the shoji screens. The light danced on the the tea-colored walls.











la fête de la côte

la fête de la côte (1987) is an impressionistic celebration of life and nature. Sounds and images are combined so that the animate beings and their inanimate environment act as one organism: the organism of nature with its own sounds, motions, and moods. The celebratory expression is understated. The sounds, the movements, the colors are all controlled and understated. The audio level is low, the movements are slowed down. All the shots, except for the last shot last only a few seconds. Colors and brightness are subdued. The moods conveyed are subtle and the piece is intended to be introspective.

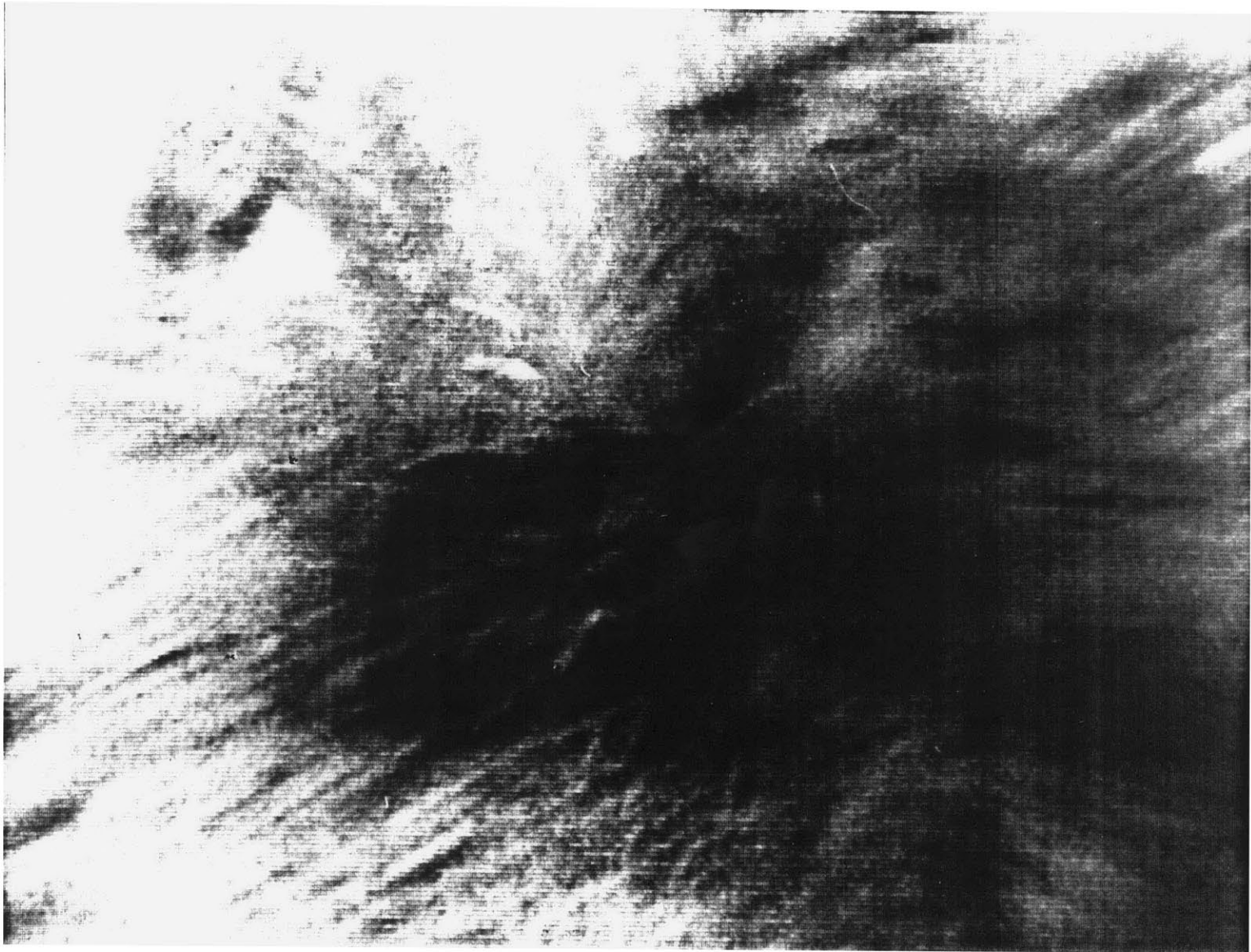
The piece begins with a series of four shots with realistic colors. The movements of the waves hitting the rocks are juxtaposed with the movements of dogs fighting. The images of dogs are accompanied by silence while low deep sounds accompany the images of water. The next two shots are silent. The fades to black are long. The movements are minimal, and the shots are tinted blue using a video colorizer. The last shot is a close-up shot of pebbles on the beach superimposed with a shot of two dogs

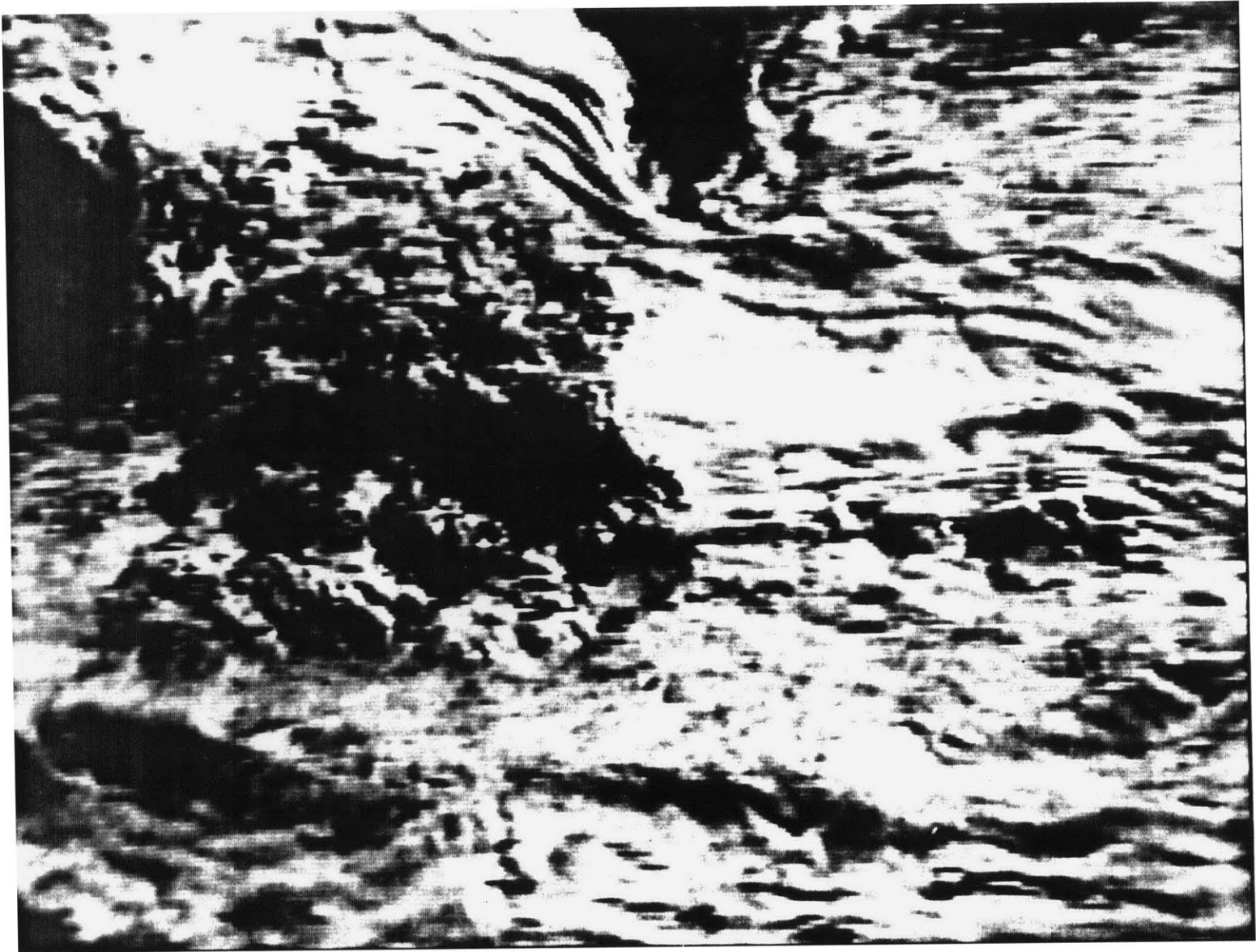
caressing each other. This shot is held for a few minutes. The images are composed so that the dogs often seem to be caressing the pebbles with their legs or tails. The shot is tinted magenta until the very end when the color slowly fades back to the real color of the pebbles as the images of the dogs fade out. We are left in silence. The image fades to black completing the piece.

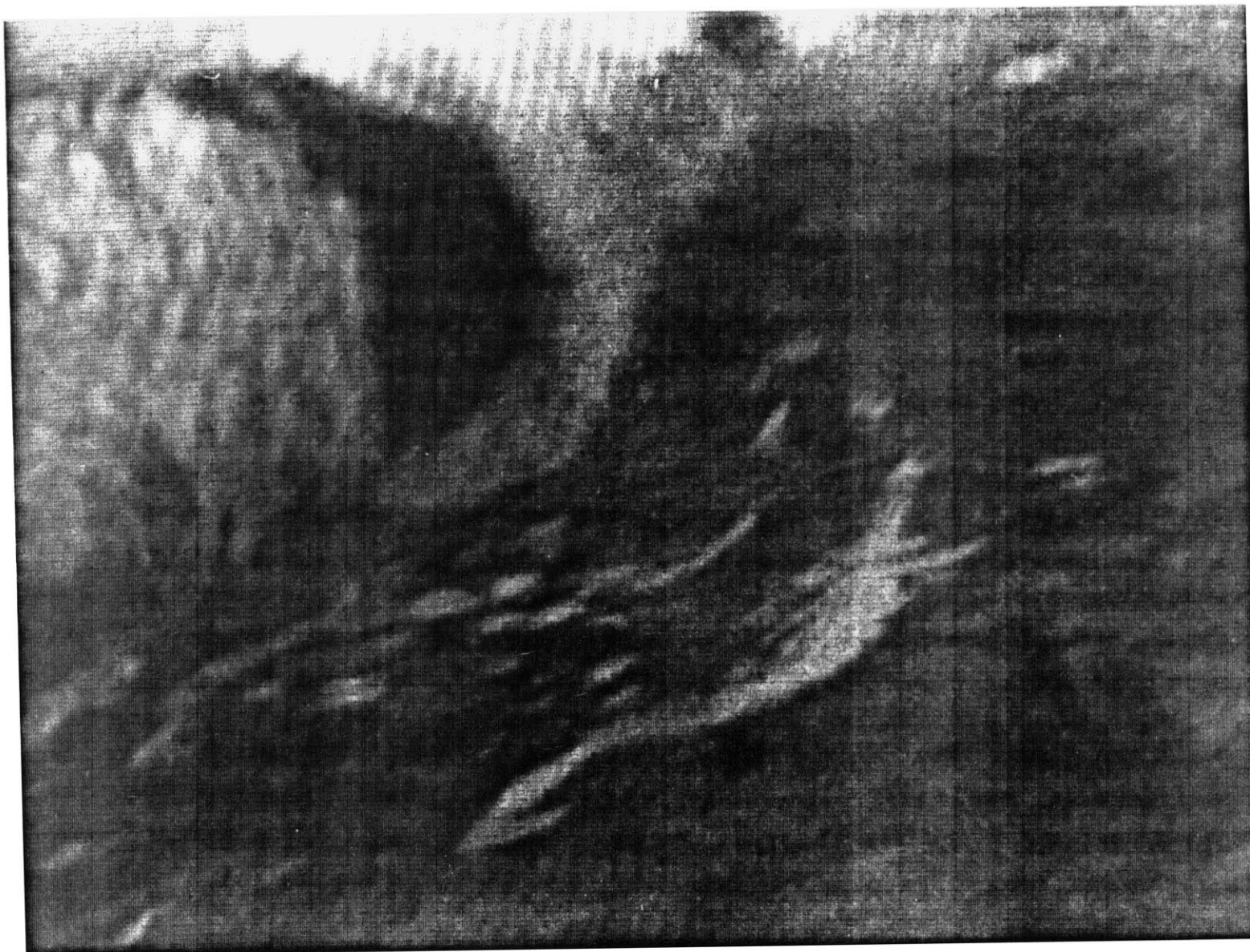
I was staying in a house that faced a beach. Every morning we would wake up to the sound of the waves. I used to sleep on the floor. Some days, the sound of the waves was loud. I woke up feeling as if I were inside the water. In late afternoon, a group of dogs from the neighborhood came down to the beach. They swam. They groaned. They caressed each other endlessly. They mated endlessly. Occasionally they fought. Occasionally they barked. Sometimes people played music on the beach.

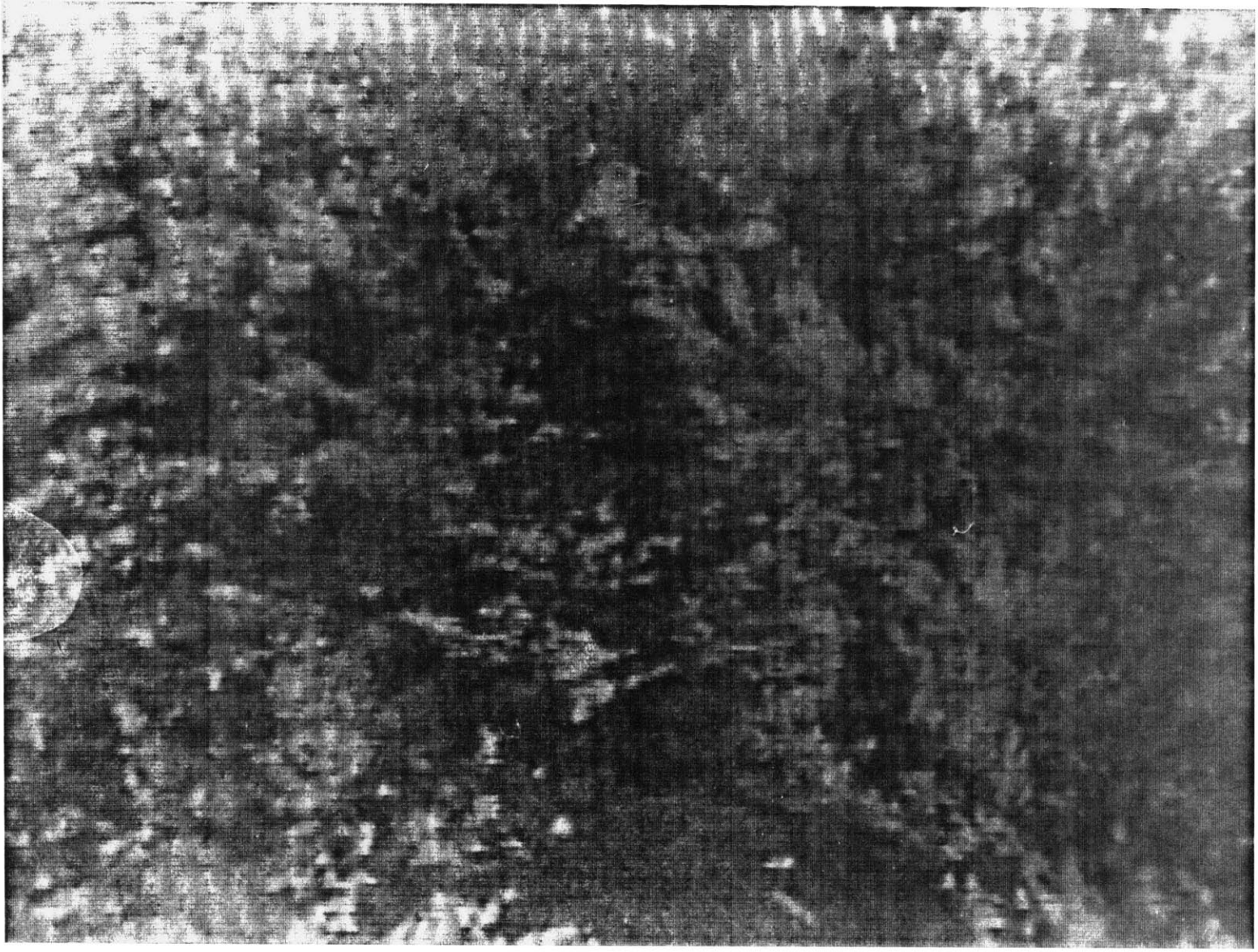


















hikari

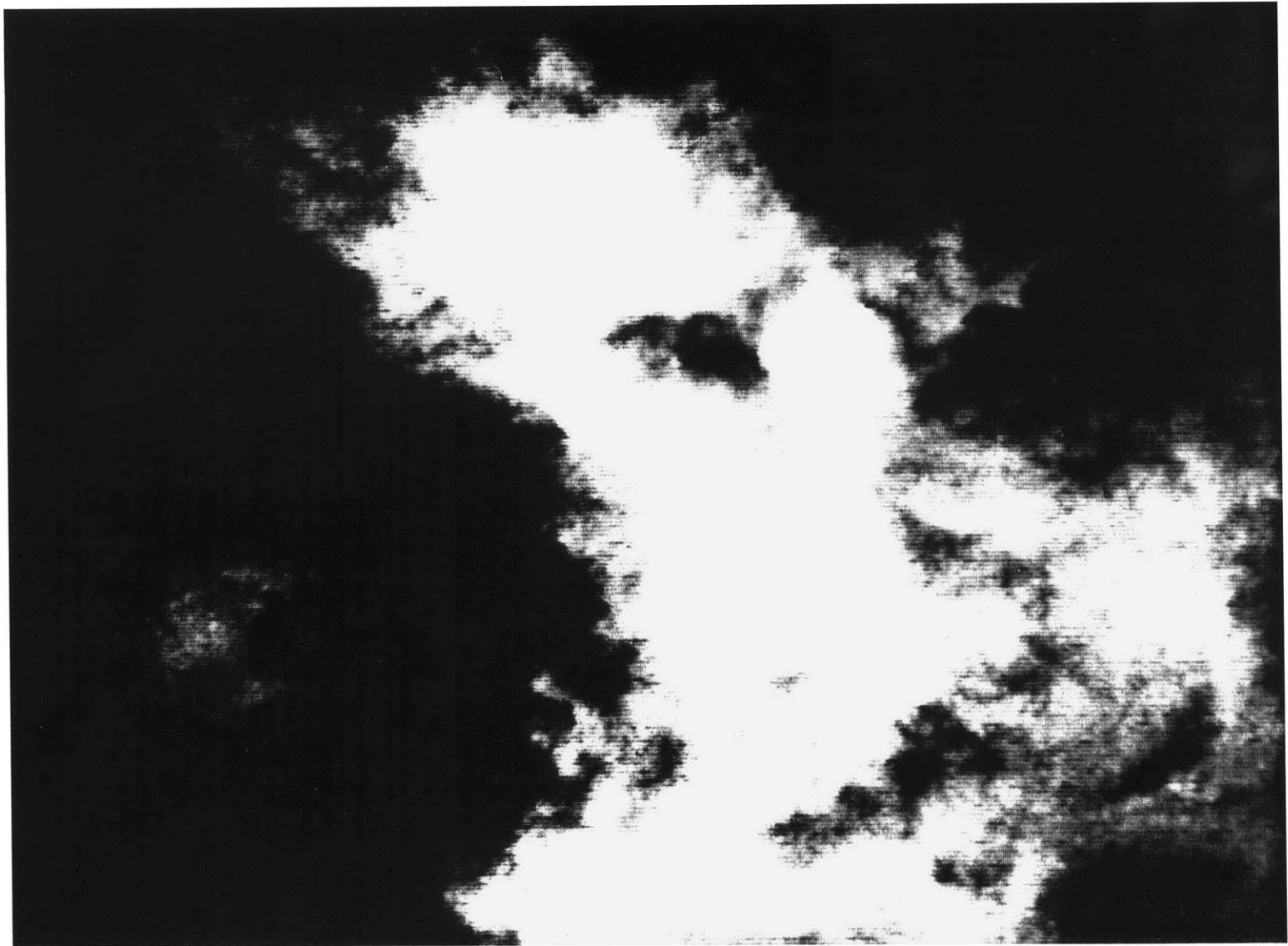
hikari (light) (1988) is a meditative experience created by light. The piece consists of one shot, one sound. In the beginning of the piece, we see a circle of light behind the clouds, which may appear to be the moon. The clouds are slightly tinted green and magenta. The clouds move very slowly. Eventually, the sun peaks out from behind the clouds, releasing rays of light. The colors become more saturated. Patches of soft blue, yellow, green, and magenta appear as the light is reflected through the lens of the camera. The clouds surrounding the sun become lit in such a way that we see a floral shape around the sun. The shot ends with a gradual fade to black as the clouds move in front of the sun. We see the circle again. A constant low pitched drone accompanies the shot and is continued even after the shot fades to black.

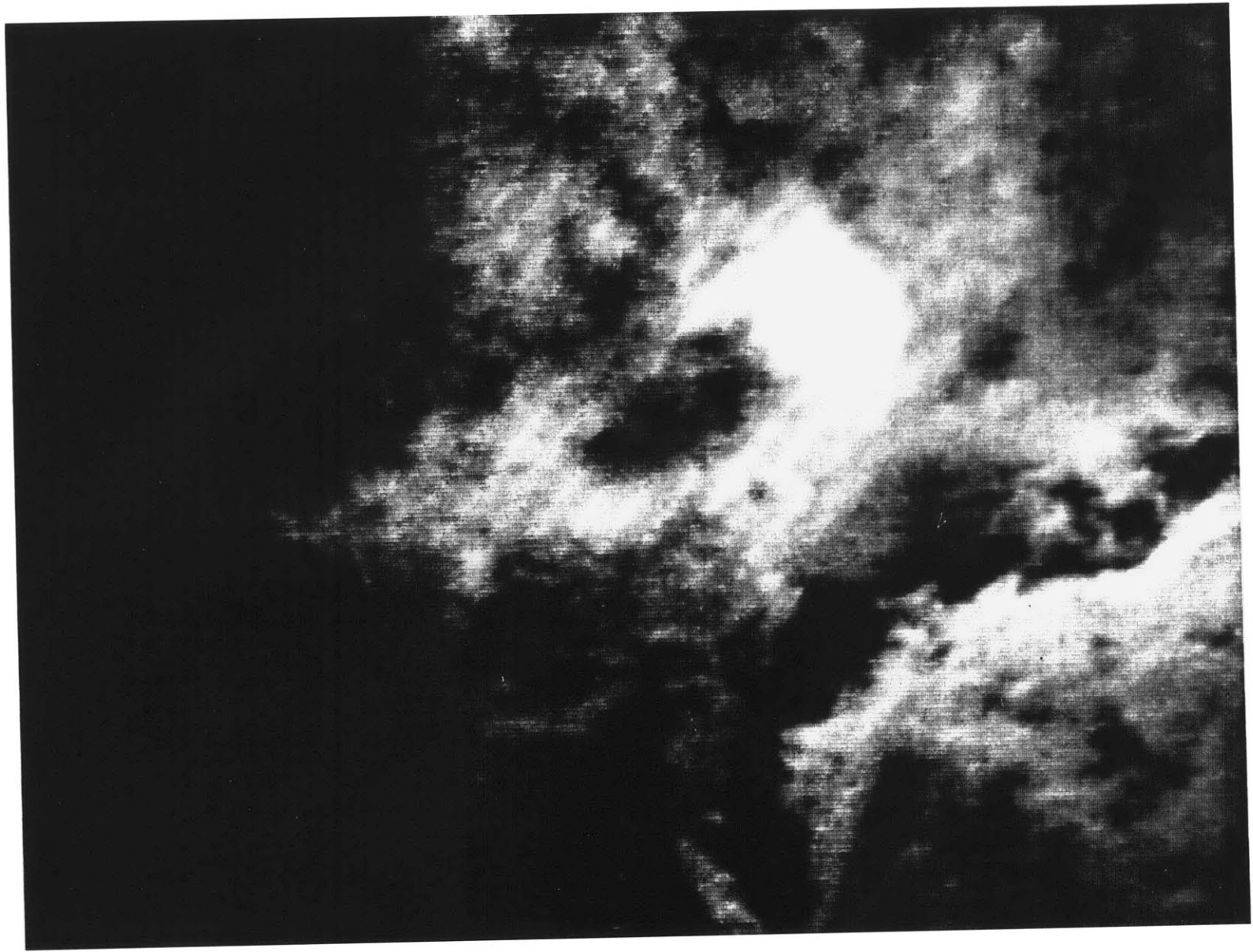
The changes in the colors and shapes are subtle. As I described earlier, at any given moment, the only noticeable change is the slow shaking movements of the camera.

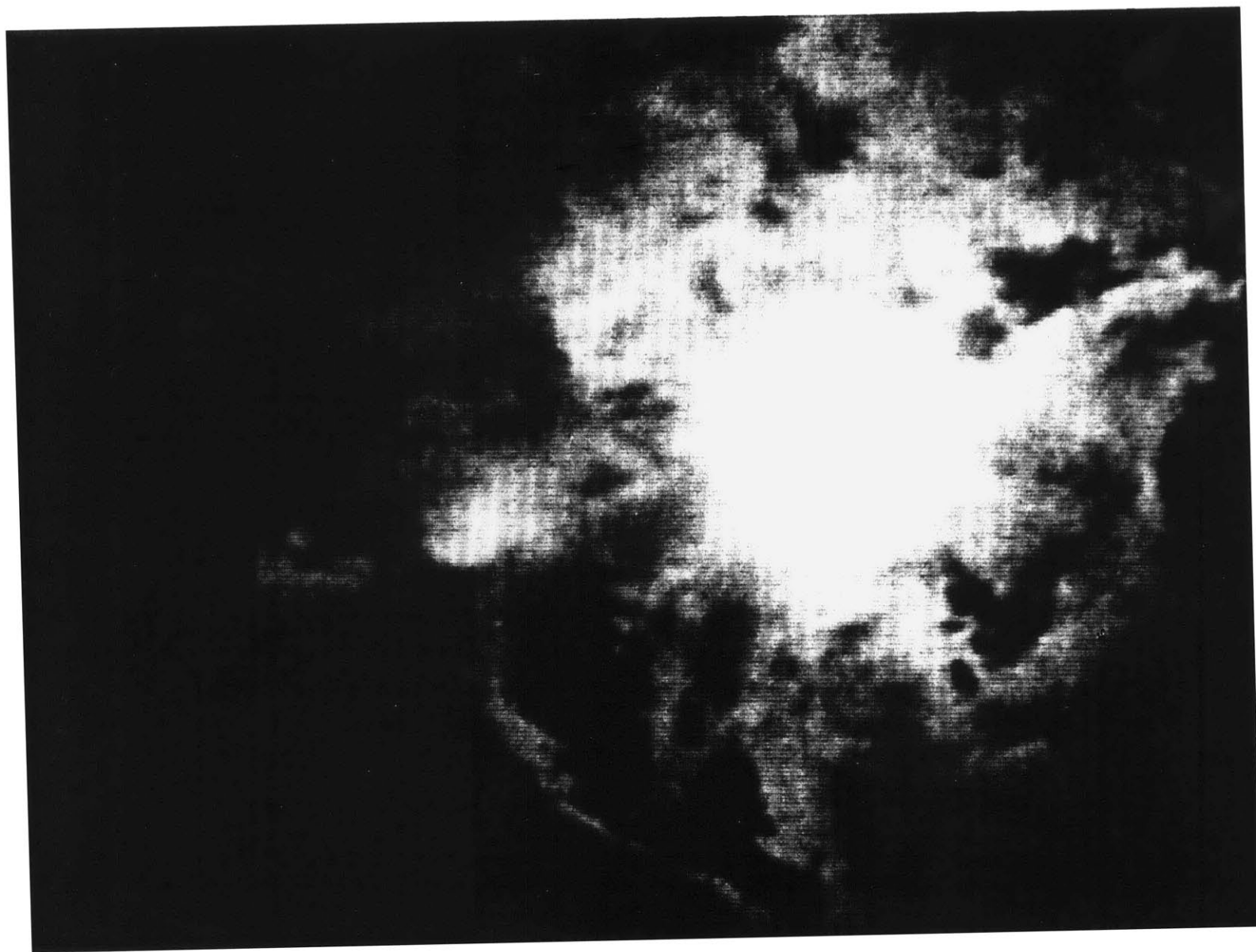
hikari resembles Nan Hoover's subtle work portraying created

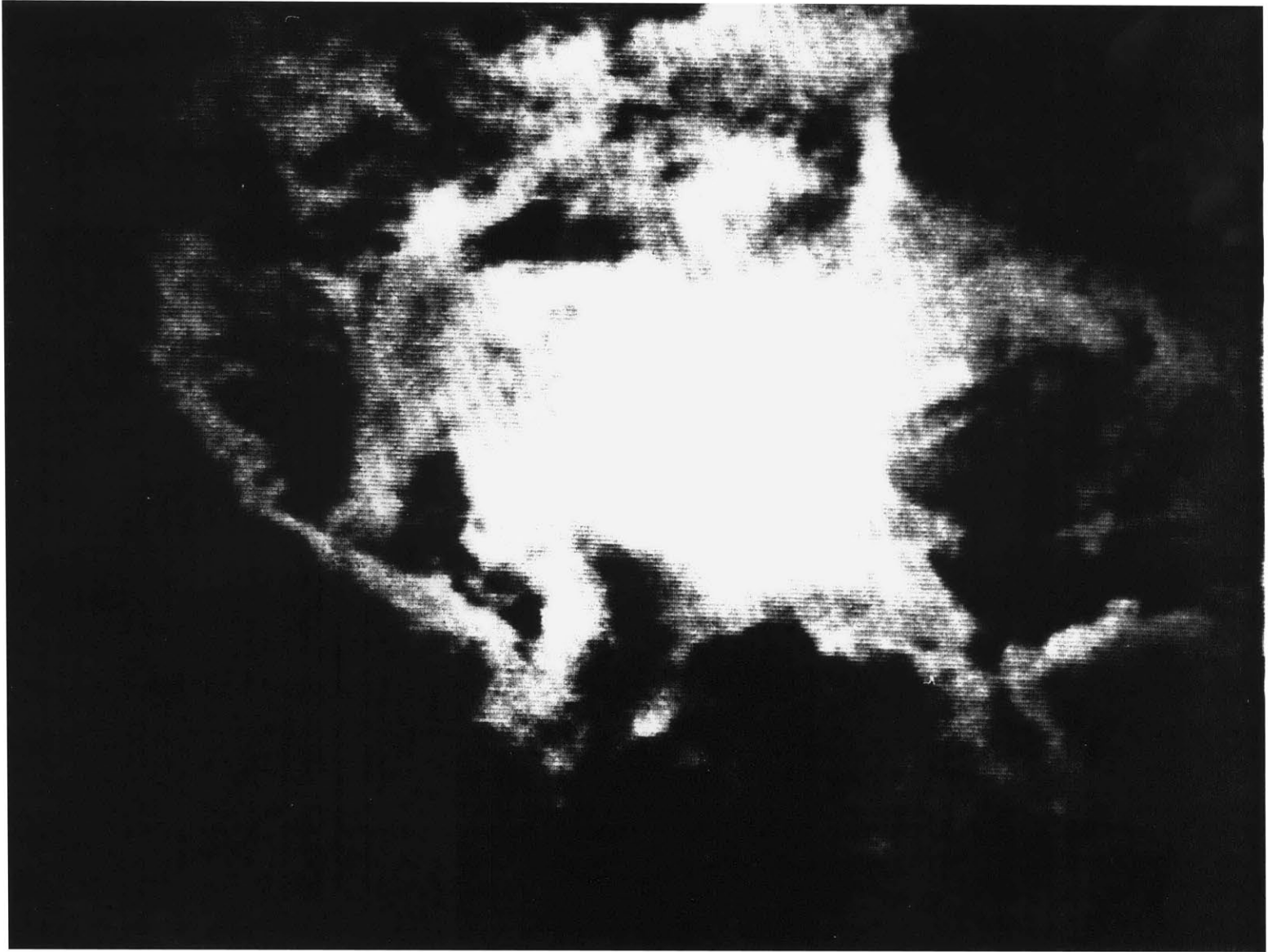
light. In hikari, light and sound are intended to be experienced directly. The image is intended to be projected large rather than shown on a monitor, while the sound should be heard using speakers large enough to animate the space where the work is presented. After I experience hikari, I feel refreshed and energized as if the energy generated by the light and sound were directly absorbed into my system.

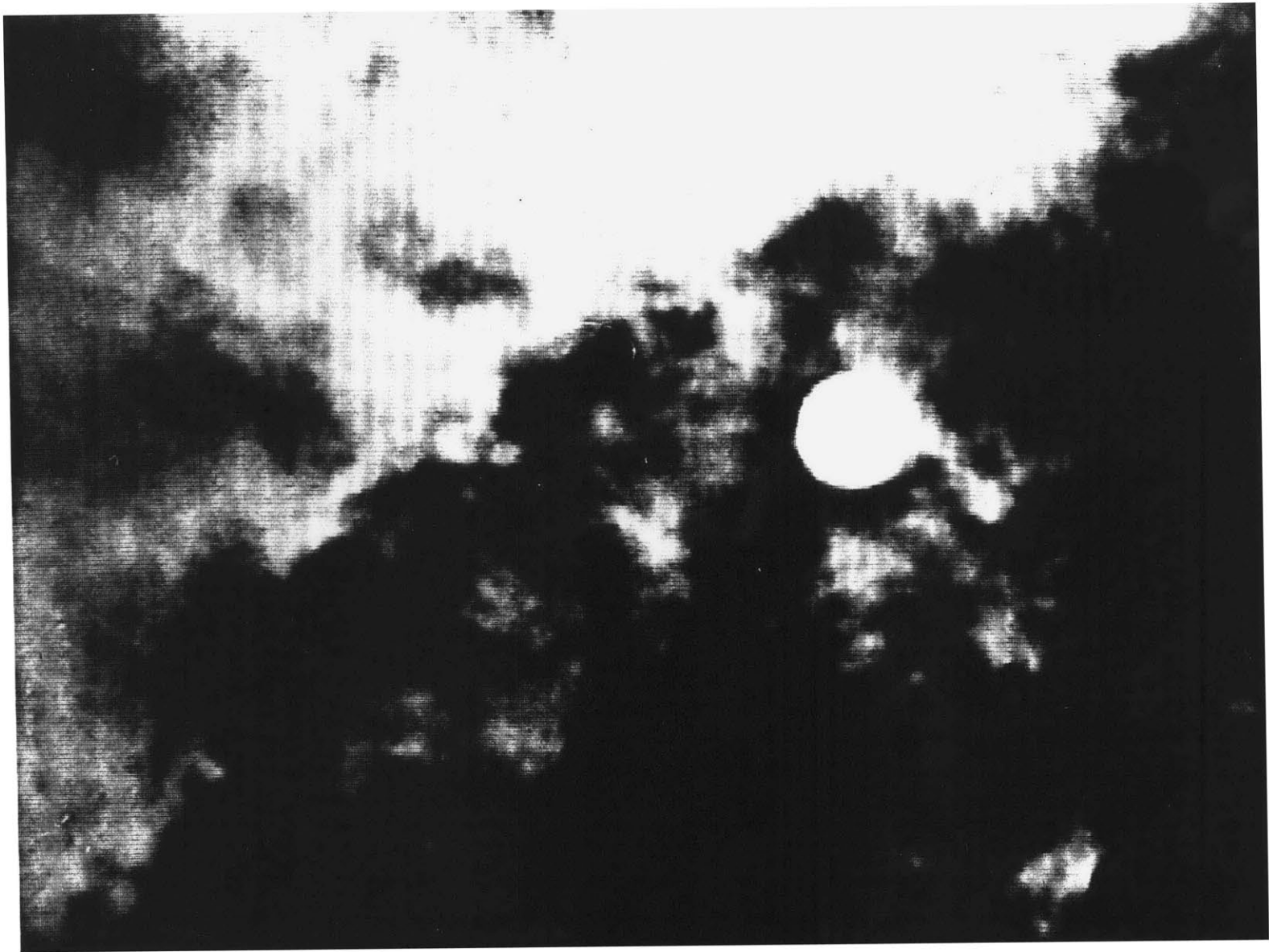












A Trip to Tokyo

I flew to Tokyo for the New Year holidays. When I presented my video works to friends and family at their home, I often had the unpleasant experience of being asked questions while the videos were playing or being distracted by some outside event. One problem was that video was seen as an extension of commercial television. They had become accustomed to running it in the background while engaging in any number of other activities. The other problem was that the environment in which the videos were shown were too ordinary and familiar to them. Because of the size of the monitor and the quality of the speakers, sometimes, the works failed to create the total hypnotic engaging experience I intended to create.

I am feeling the need to address the issue of space in presenting my video pieces. As I have mentioned earlier, various artists have been working on video installations. Transovum, for example, was successful in taking the audience away from their ordinary environment, creating a total experience in the dark.

On my trans-Pacific flight, they told me that all my baggage had to fit under the seat in front of me or inside the overhead compartment. After returning to Boston, I went to an office that sends facsimile to other countries in the world. They told me the largest size I could send was 11 X 17.

Footnotes

1. Kepes, Gyorgy, The Nature of Art and Motion, Introduction.
2. Ibid.
3. Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro, An Introduction to Zen Buddhism, pp.96.
4. Ibid.
5. Electronic Arts Intermix.
6. Chatman, Seymour, Antonioni; or, The Surface of the World, pp.125.
7. Cage, John, Silence, pp.42.
8. Ibid, pp.12.
9. Ibid, pp.93.
10. Ibid, pp.10.

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