

DPhil Thesis

CORRESPONDENCE AS STUDIO
ISAMU NOGUCHI'S LETTERS AND VISUAL PRACTICE
1924–1988

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Abstract

This dissertation reconstructs the psychology of Isamu Noguchi's sculptural practice through his correspondence, writings, interviews, project papers, and the two major biographical narratives supplied for this research: Masayo Duus's *The Life of Isamu Noguchi: Journey without Borders* and Hayden Herrera's *Listening to Stone: The Art and Life of Isamu Noguchi*. It does not offer a clinical diagnosis, nor does it treat biography as a code by which individual sculptures may be deciphered. Its object is more precise: the recurrent mental operations by which Noguchi perceived a situation, defined a problem, entered into relation with a material or interlocutor, converted resistance into form, and reopened the process whenever the resulting form threatened to become a fixed style, category, or identity.

The central proposition is that correspondence operated as an extension of the studio. Letters did not merely comment upon completed works. They transmitted materials, diagrams, prices, photographs, routes, models, technical knowledge, institutional constraints, emotional pressures, and images retained for years before their reactivation in a project. They could initiate an unrealized portrait of Gandhi, preserve a rejected playground, make a folding lantern operable in a distant house, mobilize public funds for the UNESCO Garden, organize the casting of bronzes in Rome, convert a quarry visit into a material hypothesis for Lever House, and preserve the right to travel upon which Noguchi's transnational research depended. They could also record the failure of social design at Poston, the unequal temporalities of artist and institution, or the gradual transformation of Graham's stage objects from used theatrical instruments into museum objects, editions, and reconstructions.

The argument is thematic rather than merely chronological, though it traces change wherever the evidence permits. Noguchi's creative psychology is shown to be structured by a series of tensions: non-belonging and place-making; dispersion and centring; weight and flight; solitude and collaboration; control and surrender; technical precision and natural indeterminacy; public recognition and fear of stylistic fixation; material presence and non-dominant authorship. His response was not to resolve these tensions by choosing one pole. He constructed temporary centres—stones, rooms, gardens, playgrounds, stages, mounds, apertures, routes, and studios—within which movement could occur without disorientation. When a centre hardened into a pedestal, professional category, national identity, market formula, or recognizable style, he sought another material, place, scale, or collaborator.

The dissertation establishes that Noguchi's innovation in twentieth-century sculpture did not consist principally in a repertoire of hybrid forms located between 'East' and 'West'. It lay in a redefinition of sculpture as a relational and temporal apparatus. Sculpture could be a

field rather than an isolated object; an invitation to behaviour rather than a representation; an environment that reforms experience rather than a monument that declares meaning; a process distributed across craftsmen, engineers, patrons, photographers, lawyers, publishers, dancers, and users, while the artist retains an embodied and selective authorial judgement. In this model, making is not the execution of prior knowledge but a means of producing knowledge. The work writes what the unfinished book cannot yet formulate; later correspondence returns material discovery to language.

The study therefore proposes 'correspondence as studio' in four connected senses. First, correspondence is cognitive: dialogue helps Noguchi discover what he thinks. Second, it is productive: letters and attachments enable fabrication, transport, finance, and installation. Third, it is regulatory: trusted correspondents help convert anger, uncertainty, or overload into communicable decisions. Fourth, it is infrastructural and defensive: papers, addresses, passports, contracts, and archives preserve the conditions under which a mobile studio can exist. The resulting portrait is of an artist whose continuity lay not in stylistic consistency but in a disciplined capacity to transform instability into an inhabitable field.

Acknowledgements

This research owes an essential debt to **The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum**, whose archival programme made possible a sustained, document-based reconstruction of Noguchi's creative practice. I am particularly grateful to **Allison LaPlatney, Archivist**, The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, 32–37 Vernon Boulevard, Long Island City, NY 11106, USA, *alaplatney@noguchi.org*. Her generosity, precision, patience, and willingness to clarify the structure and use of the Research Collection provided an indispensable foundation for the project. Her assistance in enabling access, explaining the subsidiary-level export, and helping to locate materials that resist straightforward item-level searching was not merely administrative support; it materially shaped the feasibility and integrity of the research.

I also wish to thank **Professor Stefano Masullo and Professor Francesco Garofalo** for their supervision and for the intellectual confidence required by a project that crosses the conventional borders between art history, psychology of art, archival studies, and material culture. I am grateful to ISFOA for providing the institutional framework within which this dissertation was developed.

The dissertation is based upon archival files consulted for research purposes. It reproduces no photographic image of an artwork and no facsimile of a letter. Quotations from correspondence are limited to the passages necessary for critical analysis and are identified by archival file, sender, recipient, and date wherever these are recoverable. The interpretative responsibility for the arguments advanced here remains entirely my own.

Note on sources, quotations, and method

The principal primary corpus consists of digital files from the Isamu Noguchi Research Collection of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum. Archival references identify the collection abbreviation **INFGM**, the digital file name, the writer and recipient when known, the date, and the relevant PDF page where the document contains more than one page. Because the working archive includes originals, carbon copies, modern transcripts, duplicated scans, programmes, press matter, and secondary essays filed among correspondence, this thesis distinguishes the *digital file* from the *unique documentary event*. Two scans of the same letter are not counted as two independent pieces of evidence.

Square brackets indicate editorial clarification. Ellipses indicate omission. No quotation is treated as self-interpreting. Each is assessed according to genre, date, addressee, and purpose. A report submitted to the Guggenheim Foundation, a sworn declaration to the Passport Office, a letter to a family member, a late interview, and a project memorandum all construct different versions of the speaking subject.

The dissertation uses an evidentiary hierarchy. A contemporaneous letter written by Noguchi during the development of a work receives the greatest weight. Contemporary project notes and writings follow. Letters received by Noguchi are strong evidence for relational processes and for stimuli offered to him, but they do not by themselves establish his agreement. Retrospective interviews are indispensable yet vulnerable to reconstruction, editorial selection, and the interpretative framing of the interviewer. Secondary criticism documents reception and provides historical orientation; it is not evidence of Noguchi's psychology unless corroborated by primary material.

The phrase *psychology of art* is used here to identify patterns of creative cognition, affective regulation, embodied perception, decision, collaboration, and self-narration. It does not authorise retrospective psychiatric diagnosis. The dissertation therefore avoids pathologizing terms unless they occur in the historical sources and, even then, treats them as situated language rather than medical fact.

The two biographies are cited as follows: **Duus/BO** refers to Masayo Duus, *The Life of Isamu Noguchi: Journey without Borders*, translated by Peter Duus, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004; **Herrera/ST** refers to Hayden Herrera, *Listening to Stone: The Art and Life of Isamu Noguchi*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015.

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Abbreviations

AAA — Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

BO — Masayo Duus, *The Life of Isamu Noguchi: Journey without Borders*, translated by Peter Duus, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004

INFGM — The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, Isamu Noguchi Research Collection

LBD — Legal and Business Documents series within the digital research corpus

MS_BOL — Bollingen-related manuscript files

MS_COR — Manuscript correspondence files

MS_DAN_MG — Martha Graham dance-related files

MS_EXH — Exhibition files

MS_PROJ — Project files

MS_WRI — Writings, speeches, and interview files

SOM — Skidmore, Owings & Merrill

ST — Hayden Herrera, *Listening to Stone: The Art and Life of Isamu Noguchi*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015

USIA — United States Information Agency

WRA — War Relocation Authority

Synoptic theses

The following propositions are demonstrated, qualified, or tested in the chapters that follow. They consolidate the principal hypotheses developed during the close reading of the uploaded correspondence and writings.

1. Noguchi transformed the experience of non-belonging into a practice of place-making.
2. His creative psychology was organized by a tension between dispersion and centring.
3. Earth, stone, weight, and enclosure provided orientation; light, aperture, movement, and flight prevented orientation from becoming imprisonment.
4. He required centres, but resisted every centre that hardened into pedestal, category, style, nation, or fixed identity.
5. Making was not the execution of knowledge already possessed; it was a means by which knowledge was produced.
6. Sculptural perception was embodied: touch, weight, movement, distance, and bodily scale were epistemic instruments.
7. Material was not a passive vehicle but an interlocutor capable of correcting the artist.
8. Noguchi's method oscillated between control and surrender, planning and discovery, calculation and the agency of matter.
9. His authorship was often non-dominant: a form could succeed by enabling another body, action, community, or environment rather than by asserting itself as an isolated object.
10. Memory functioned not as nostalgic return but as rediscovery and transformation.
11. Place was both a physical site and a psychological structure capable of containing identity.
12. Conversation and correspondence were cognitive tools through which Noguchi discovered and refined his thought.
13. The unfinished Bollingen book was progressively 'written in things'; later writing returned material discovery to language.
14. Noguchi's autonomy was relational and negotiated, not self-sufficient.
15. He accepted dependence upon collaborators when their competence expanded the work without appropriating its decisive judgements.
16. Trust altered his capacity to receive editorial, technical, and institutional mediation.
17. His process was biphasic: generative openness before the form was found, and strong authorial closure once the form had been reached.

18. The studio could become a distributed organism and an external memory.
19. Correspondence formulated, delegated, corrected, financed, materialized, publicized, and received sculpture.
20. Letters could be germinal, productive, regulatory, infrastructural, and defensive.
21. Archival proximity does not prove intellectual influence; transmission, reception, and reactivation must be separately demonstrated.
22. Brancusi did not create Noguchi's first ideas of dynamic balance and nature, but supplied a technical and ethical method adequate to them.
23. The 'travelling laboratory' transformed the studio from a fixed building into a transferable competence.
24. Poston was a broken studio: skill and time were rendered ineffective by institutional obstruction.
25. Fuller served as both mirror and scaffolding, reflecting an early universalist identity and offering a systemic vocabulary whose specific influence must nevertheless be proved case by case.
26. The Expo '70 proposal demonstrates layered authorship: institutional brief, theoretical programme, spatial imagination, collective revision, and integrated project.
27. Graham's sets possessed a double ontology as objects and events.
28. Wear constituted an embodied archive of performance.
29. Bronze could preserve form while extinguishing theatrical life; its appropriateness had to be judged element by element.
30. A reconstruction could be authentic when the operation, material logic, and authorial instruction were correctly transmitted.
31. House, stair, labyrinth, cave, mirror, and threshold operated as psychic topologies activated by the body.
32. Akari was a distributed sculpture formed by paper, bamboo, metal, patents, pricing, transport, dealers, users, and domestic space.
33. The folding lantern sent from Peking in 1930 constitutes a material prehistory of Akari, though not a proven direct cause.
34. Unbuilt projects remained active possibilities and often migrated across scale, place, or material.
35. The Lever House dossier shows that an unbuilt work may survive most fully within correspondence.

36. The Gene Owens correspondence demonstrates an episodic studio and the long latency of visual memory.
37. Patronage was most generative when it supported the 'next step' beyond established definitions.
38. Operative photographs did not merely represent works; they produced acquisition, funding, transport, and installation.
39. Market mechanisms could be converted into infrastructure for institutional memory, as in the financing of the Noguchi Museum.
40. Passport, visa, address, and archive were conditions of a mobile studio, not merely external bureaucracy.
41. The early idea protected 'as sacred' became a programme of technical preparation rather than immediate self-expression.
42. Noguchi's environmental perception preceded its later theoretical articulation.
43. Family correspondence belongs to the history of the studio only when it performs an operation—custody, finance, contact, transport, documentation, or material transmission.
44. *Undine* reveals the distributed economic body of early sculpture: artist, model, financier, foundry, gallery, family, and photographic representation.
45. The addressee shaped the form of Noguchi's written perception.
46. 'Going into the abstract' was not only an internal decision but an identity reflected back to him by correspondents.
47. A collaboration may exist in latency before any specific work has been conceived.
48. A letter can preserve the germ of an unrealized work, as in the proposed head of Gandhi.
49. Images and objects received through correspondence may remain latent for years before reappearing as analogies within a project.
50. Noguchi's principal innovation was the redefinition of sculpture as a relational, temporal, environmental, and behavioural apparatus rather than a self-sufficient object.

Analytical synopsis of the chapters

The first three chapters establish method, evidence, and the early formation of Noguchi's sculptural subject. Chapters Four to Six examine embodied cognition, the psychology of the studio, and correspondence as a productive apparatus. Chapters Seven to Nine address social space, performance, and Akari. Chapters Ten to Twelve study collaboration, patronage, unbuilt projects, technology, and environmental control. Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen analyze the circuit between writing and making and the construction of Noguchi's public self. Chapter Fifteen states the dissertation's answer to the problem of Noguchi's innovation in twentieth-century sculpture. Chapter Sixteen consolidates the psychological model and its evidentiary limits. The appendices provide an annotated archival register, a chronological concordance, a thematic source matrix, and a consolidated list of propositions.

Chapter 1. From correspondence to a psychology of sculptural practice

1.1 The problem of Noguchi's unity

Isamu Noguchi's career has repeatedly been described through a vocabulary of doubleness: Japanese and American, sculptor and designer, modernist and archaist, solitary maker and public collaborator, formalist and social artist. Such binaries have undeniable biographical and historiographical force. They are also insufficient. They encourage the interpretation of Noguchi as a divided subject whose works alternately express one or the other term, or as a uniquely gifted mediator who reconciled 'East' and 'West' within an aesthetically harmonious synthesis. Both approaches risk turning a dynamic practice into a static emblem. The first makes contradiction a biographical condition to be decoded; the second makes hybridity a style.

The documentary record suggests a different model. Noguchi's continuity did not depend upon the resolution of opposites, nor upon the preservation of a recognizable formal language. It lay in a recurring operation: he entered a field marked by incompatibility or uncertainty, established enough structure to make action possible, accepted that matter and circumstance would alter the proposal, and reopened the process whenever the provisional solution hardened into a fixed definition. The same operation can be observed in his response to national identity, material resistance, institutional rejection, the architecture of the stage, the organization of a studio, the movement of water, or the circulation of a lamp. Its products vary radically; its psychological logic is comparatively stable.

This dissertation therefore asks not what hidden message a letter reveals about a sculpture, but how the letters disclose the operations by which the sculptor worked. The aim is not to establish that Noguchi wrote a phrase and subsequently illustrated it. Such correspondences occasionally exist, but they are neither the most frequent nor the most intellectually consequential. More often, writing and making form a circuit. A question arises in conversation; a letter stabilizes it provisionally; travel and material work complicate it; the work becomes a form of research; a later letter or interview returns the discovery to language. The relevant movement is not simply word to object, but word to encounter, encounter to operation, operation to environment, environment to renewed word.

This approach permits a more rigorous answer to the problem of unity. Noguchi's works are connected not because they all bear a single iconography or style, but because they repeatedly organize relations between body and field, weight and movement, centre and

openness, memory and use. The apparent discontinuity of his production—portraits, abstract interlocking sculptures, stage sets, playgrounds, gardens, fountains, furniture, Akari, plazas, monuments, buildings, and museums—becomes intelligible as the expansion of sculpture from object to condition.

The two biographies supplied for this research remain indispensable. Masayo Duus reconstructs the transnational and familial histories within which Noguchi's identity developed, while Hayden Herrera offers a detailed narrative of the works, relationships, travels, and crises through which the career acquired its public shape.[1] Yet biography alone cannot determine the psychology of the work. A life event does not become an artistic cause merely because it precedes an object. The evidence must show an operation: a remembered image, a stated problem, a material decision, a change in scale, a request for a collaborator, a rejection that produces a new proposal, or a later account that can be tested against contemporary documents.

The unity proposed here is consequently procedural rather than symbolic. Noguchi's practice is understood as a sustained attempt to transform instability into an inhabitable field. The field may be a studio, a letter, a garden, a stage, a playground, an exhibition, or a network of production. It is sufficiently bounded to allow orientation and sufficiently open to allow movement. It gives weight to imagination without immobilizing it.

1.2 Correspondence as an extension of the studio

The title *Correspondence as Studio* identifies a historical proposition and a methodological choice. Historically, the letters show that much of Noguchi's work was conceived and realized through a distributed apparatus. A studio in Long Island City or Kamakura was only one node. Quarry owners, foundries, architects, lawyers, editors, dancers, photographers, dealers, government officials, craftsmen, family members, and patrons performed operations without which the work could not reach material existence. Correspondence transported knowledge and coordinated the intervals between those operations.

The letter from Peking of 21 December 1930 offers a compact paradigm. Noguchi sent folding lanterns to his mother and sister, explained how they should be pressed and opened, and added a small diagram of the mechanism.[2] The letter did not describe an object already complete in the recipient's experience. It enabled the object to become complete elsewhere.

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[1] Masayo Duus, *The Life of Isamu Noguchi: Journey without Borders*, translated by Peter Duus, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004, ST; Hayden Herrera, *Listening to Stone: The Art and Life of Isamu Noguchi*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015, BO. The biographies are used here as historical frameworks and guides to primary citations, not as substitutes for the archival documents.

[2] Isamu Noguchi to Leonie Gilmour and Ailes Gilmour, 21 December 1930, INFGM, MS_COR_372_011_original_1.pdf, p. 1.

Text, drawing, transported lantern, and the recipient's hands formed one operation. Eight days later he asked whether the lanterns had arrived and whether one 'fits the house'.[3] The second letter added an environmental criterion: successful assembly was not enough; the expanded object had to establish an adequate relation with domestic space.

This small episode contains several principles that later become central to Akari and to Noguchi's environmental work: latent volume, lightness, transportability, participation by the user, and the assessment of form within a site. It would be methodologically careless to claim that this lantern caused Akari. No direct statement establishes such a genealogy. It is nevertheless a documented material prehistory: Noguchi had already handled, selected, shipped, diagrammed, and evaluated a folding Asian lantern two decades before the Gifu project.

Correspondence can operate with greater complexity. In the UNESCO Garden dossier, an image sent by Noguchi was published in the *Osaka Asahi Shimbun*; the publicity assisted fundraising in the Kansai region; that success encouraged Tokyo; funds enabled the selection and air transport of gardeners and trees.[4] The photograph was not merely a representation of a project. It produced economic and material consequences. In the Gene Owens correspondence, two photographs of a Texas spring sent in 1974 remained sufficiently active in Noguchi's memory to be recalled seven years later while he discussed the natural qualities he wished to introduce into the garden south of Los Angeles.[5] The image entered the studio as a latent analogy rather than a literal model.

The studio is likewise extended by letters that regulate uncertainty. John Entenza helped Noguchi revise a text in which the sculptor had recognized and removed what he called 'the personal venom'.[6] Entenza's editorial mediation did not simply polish prose; it converted an affective charge into a publicly usable statement while preserving Noguchi's right of final approval. Conversely, when Noguchi distrusted the institutional relation—as in the repeated withdrawal of an article from *ARTnews*—the same process failed.[7] The difference was not a fixed incapacity to accept editing. It was the quality of trust within the relation.

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[3] Isamu Noguchi to Ailes Gilmour, 29 December 1930, INFGM, MS_COR_404_011_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

[4] Kiichi Ichikawa to Isamu Noguchi, 23 February 1958, INFGM, MS_COR_272_008_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

[5] Gene W. Owens to Isamu Noguchi, 1974, INFGM, MS_COR_304_026_original_1.pdf, p. 1; Isamu Noguchi to Gene W. Owens, 30 November 1981, INFGM, MS_COR_304_014_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

[6] John Entenza to Isamu Noguchi, 18 February 1953, INFGM, MS_COR_045_010_original_1.pdf, p. 1.

[7] Alfred M. Frankfurter to Isamu Noguchi, 6 November 1950, INFGM, MS_COR_039_009_original_1.pdf, p. 1.

Correspondence could also defend the studio's conditions. In his sworn statement to the Passport Office in 1953, Noguchi assembled earlier letters and writings as proof of political conduct and explained that travel remained necessary to the research begun under the Bollingen fellowship.[8] The passport was not merely personal documentation. For an artist whose method depended upon direct encounters with sites, materials, crafts, and historical environments, it was part of the studio's cognitive infrastructure.

The title therefore has four dimensions. Correspondence is cognitive when dialogue helps thought emerge. It is productive when it arranges matter, money, labour, and transport. It is regulatory when it structures emotion, timing, and decision. It is infrastructural and defensive when it preserves mobility, reputation, property, archives, or rights. Each dimension will be demonstrated through specific documentary chains rather than asserted as a metaphor.

1.3 Evidence, genre, and the danger of retrospective coherence

A psychological history based upon correspondence must resist two temptations. The first is to treat every intimate or emotionally vivid letter as artistically explanatory. The second is to convert every late statement by Noguchi into the original cause of a much earlier work. Both produce false coherence.

The documentary corpus includes letters of love, illness, family hardship, gossip, and private conflict. Some are indispensable to biography. They enter this dissertation only when they perform an operation demonstrably related to the practice: a mother preserves a sculpture, gathers photographs, negotiates a foundry debt, sends a birth certificate, calculates freight, or identifies an address that may enable a collaboration. Purely amorous letters have been excluded, not because affect is irrelevant to art, but because no evidentiary bridge links their content to the sculptural operations under study.

The same discipline applies to received materials. A text located in Noguchi's archive is not automatically an influence. The corpus distinguishes five levels: a text written by Noguchi; a letter received by him; a third-party text demonstrably transmitted to him; a document merely filed nearby; and an action performed by one intermediary on his instructions. This prevents the proximity of a Fuller pamphlet, a family letter, or an administrative paper from becoming an imagined source of form.

Retrospective interviews present a more subtle problem. Noguchi's late reflections are often extraordinarily precise. They supply the language of movement, centre, stone, place,

[8] Isamu Noguchi to Ruth B. Shipley, 6 April 1953, INFGM, MS_COR_339_005_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–3.

universe, and non-belonging through which the career has been interpreted. Yet they were produced after decades of work and within specific dialogic frames. The 1981 research proposal of Diane Apostolos-Cappadona already organized Noguchi around sacredness, myth, ritual, spiritual experience, Brancusi, and the psychology of creativity. It also records the transmission to Noguchi of texts by Mircea Eliade.[9] The interviews she conducted in 1987 must consequently be read as co-constructed conversations, not neutral extractions of an inner truth. When she introduces the absent father, mythic journey, sacred space, or authenticity, Noguchi's response is authentic as a response, but its evidentiary status differs from a phrase spontaneously written during the development of a work.

This dissertation therefore privileges documentary triangulation. A late statement receives greater weight when it is supported by contemporary correspondence or material evidence. Noguchi's claim that Graham's set acquired conviction through the objects he supplied is strengthened by Graham's 1944 letter saying that he had 'helped me to see' and that a painted drop could no longer serve as an integral solution.[10] His late account of the importance of the body's movement around sculpture is supported by the technical and perceptual language of earlier letters, by stage programmes, and by the installation decisions documented throughout the archive.

Genre is equally decisive. The Guggenheim reports of 1927 are direct writings, but they were composed to demonstrate progress and justify support. The 1953 passport declaration is direct, but constructed under political threat. Family letters may be less institutional and more spontaneous, yet they too are shaped by the imagined needs of the recipient. On 27 March 1927 Noguchi described England to his mother through colour, vegetation, and landscape, and to his sister through traffic, speed, scale, and disorientation. The stable element is not the wording but the environmental matrix: comparison of dimensions, rhythm, order, and bodily orientation.[11] The addressee participates in the form of perception as written.

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[9] Diane Apostolos-Cappadona to Isamu Noguchi, 15 September 1981, with research proposal, INFGM, MS_COR_238_009_original_1.pdf, especially the proposal *Sojourn of Communion with Stone: The Art of Isamu Noguchi*.

[10] Martha Graham to Isamu Noguchi, 27 February 1944, INFGM, MS_COR_261_001_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–6; Isamu Noguchi, later interview discussing Martha Graham, INFGM, MS_WRI_047_004_original_1.pdf and related interview files.

[11] Isamu Noguchi to Leonie Gilmour, 27 March 1927, INFGM, MS_COR_409_003_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2; Isamu Noguchi to Ailes Gilmour, 27 March 1927, INFGM, MS_COR_404_001_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

1.4 A psychology of operations rather than a diagnosis

The term 'psychology' requires definition. This dissertation does not diagnose Noguchi from a distance, nor does it reduce his art to symptoms of childhood, race, loss, or conflict. Historical documents cannot sustain that procedure. Even where Noguchi himself links playgrounds to the absence of a place in his childhood, the relation must be treated as a statement within an interview and tested against the long development of the projects.[12] The term 'repair' may be interpretatively useful, but it remains an inference unless the source itself describes the operation in such terms.

The psychology reconstructed here concerns recurring modes of attention and action. These include the manner in which Noguchi handled uncertainty, the kinds of limits he required, his response to rejection, his use of collaborators, his relation to material resistance, and the way he narrated himself to different audiences. Such patterns can be historically evidenced without claiming access to an unconscious essence.

One recurrent pattern is the conversion of indeterminate pressure into a structured problem. In February 1942, facing anti-Japanese hysteria and impending mass removal, Noguchi sought a clear federal policy, local representatives, information, work, and institutional coordination.[13] Twenty years later, confronted with the uncertain employment of Gene Owens, he required a defined project, period, payment, travel arrangement, and reciprocal usefulness before allowing the studio to expand.[14] The contexts are radically different, but the operation is comparable: open-ended human uncertainty is more difficult to tolerate than formal indeterminacy within a bounded field.

Another pattern is the separation between process and fixation. Noguchi could remain highly open while a work was being discovered. He accepted the intervention of stone, nature, time, craftsmen, or dialogue. Once he considered a form or text complete, he could demand that it remain unaltered. His 1986 letter concerning the *Shin Kenchiku* text asked that it be published without changes.[15] This does not contradict generative openness. It reveals a temporal sequence: openness before discovery, closure after consecration.

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[12] Isamu Noguchi, interview on the Riverside Playground, 8 September 1978, INFGM, MS_WRI_047_001_original_1.pdf.

[13] Isamu Noguchi to Archibald MacLeish, 13 February 1942, INFGM, MS_COR_288_010_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2; Noguchi to MacLeish, 19 February 1942, MS_COR_288_009_original_1.pdf, p. 1.

[14] Isamu Noguchi to Gene W. Owens, 28 May, 10 July, and 10 September 1962, INFGM, MS_COR_304_002_original_1.pdf, MS_COR_304_005_original_1.pdf, and MS_COR_304_006_original_1.pdf.

[15] Isamu Noguchi to Tadashi Yamamoto, 4 June 1986, INFGM, MS_COR_191_029_original_1.pdf, p. 1.

The psychological portrait that emerges is consequently dynamic. Noguchi is not simply 'controlling' or 'spontaneous', 'solitary' or 'collaborative', 'rootless' or 'place-bound'. He moves between poles according to the phase and function of the work. The task of the dissertation is to describe that movement with sufficient documentary precision.

1.5 Innovation as a transformation of sculptural conditions

The central art-historical question is what Noguchi contributed that was genuinely innovative within twentieth-century sculpture. The answer cannot be confined to stylistic hybridity, direct carving, biomorphism, or the combination of Japanese and modernist forms. Each is important; none is adequate.

Noguchi's deeper innovation lay in changing the conditions under which something could count as sculpture. A sculpture could be a playground whose form was completed by children's behaviour; a set whose meaning existed in the interval between dancer and object; a light that folded, travelled, and entered the domestic interior; a garden completed by weathering and growth; a fountain whose apparent freedom depended upon programmed valves; a museum arranged as an environment rather than a neutral container; an unrealized project whose most complete existence remained textual and relational.

This innovation has at least six dimensions. First, the object becomes a field. Second, viewing becomes embodied participation. Third, authorship becomes distributed but not dissolved. Fourth, matter becomes temporal and capable of co-authorship. Fifth, the boundary between art and use becomes contingent rather than absolute. Sixth, the work can exist as a proposition whose effects exceed realization.

Noguchi's letter on sculpture in 1936 had already attacked the separation of sculptural practice from contemporary life, the reliance upon expensive and precious media, and the delegation of execution.[16] He demanded modern materials, experimentation, colour, industrial methods, physical participation by the artist, and social relevance. Yet the subsequent career did not merely illustrate that programme. It complicated it. Noguchi would depend increasingly upon complex networks of fabrication, learn to delegate selectively, use rare stones and industrial systems, and construct institutions. His innovation lies partly in the way each apparent contradiction was converted into a new sculptural problem.

The dissertation's final claim is therefore not that Noguchi solved the division between art and life. He repeatedly demonstrated that their relation must be constructed, maintained, and renegotiated. Sculpture became the means by which that negotiation could acquire form.

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[16] Isamu Noguchi, «What's the Matter with Sculpture?», 1936, INFGM, MS_WRI_004_001_original_1.pdf.

Chapter 2. The self before the style: formation, protected ideas, and the travelling laboratory, 1924–1931

2.1 Ideas preserved before adequate technique

Noguchi's 1927 *Plans for Study* is a foundational document because it records a mind that has already formed major aesthetic commitments while openly acknowledging technical insufficiency. Sculpture, he writes, has too often served to idealize and glorify the human being. His alternative is to see nature 'through the eyes of nature', placing flowers, trees, rivers, mountains, birds, animals, and human beings within one non-hierarchical field.[17] The claim is not yet a mature ecological theory, but it decentres the human subject and makes material an active component rather than a neutral substance imposed upon by the artist.

The psychological significance of the document lies in the relation between vision and delay. Noguchi says that he has not realized these ideas because he has preserved them as something sacred until he possesses sufficient competence. He distinguishes what he knows—modelling in clay—from what he lacks—carving in stone and wood. The deficit does not produce abandonment. It becomes an itinerary: Paris for technical training; thereafter India, China, and Japan; later exhibitions in Japan and New York.

This is not passive perfectionism. It is protected incubation. The idea is withheld from premature materialization while the artist constructs the conditions adequate to it. The underlying sequence will recur throughout the career: intuition, delay, technical acquisition, direct encounter, and eventual form. In the 1953 Lever House dossier, for example, the ideal of an exceptionally white stone remains open while Noguchi searches European quarries, compares weather resistance and costs, and revises the hypothesis after seeing Greek marble. The early programme already contains the same disposition: an idea deserves protection until contact with material can correct and fulfil it.

The document also contains a productive contradiction. Noguchi refuses to acknowledge antecedents for his statement, insisting upon originality, yet presents the Asian journey as the fulfilment of an inheritance associated with Yone Noguchi's role as interpreter between East and West. The self is imagined as both unprecedented and genealogically charged. Rather than choose between autonomy and inheritance, the proposed journey converts their conflict into a task. Heritage is not a style to receive; it is a problem to investigate and transform.

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[17] Isamu Noguchi, *Plans for Study submitted by Isamu Noguchi*, January 1927, INFGM, MS_COR_316_001_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

Masayo Duus's reconstruction of Noguchi's early years clarifies the emotional and cultural complexity beneath this programme, while Herrera's account situates it within the rapid transition from medical study to sculpture and within the practical importance of the Guggenheim fellowship.[18] The primary document, however, protects us from allowing biography to overdetermine the art. Noguchi himself turns the biography into a deliberate programme of study.

2.2 Dynamic balance and the 'infinite reserve' of nature

A second text dated 25 February 1927 describes an unidentified female figure through the language of flame, wave, tempest, spiral, and repose. Motion passes from foot to hair, yet the figure remains governed by serenity. Nature, Noguchi observes, never appears overstrained even in its most powerful manifestation; it retains an 'infinite reserve'.[19] The phrase identifies a formal and psychological ideal that precedes Brancusi.

Power, in this account, does not consist in visible exertion. It is stored, contained, and made credible by restraint. The figure balances on the outer edge of one foot, but the leg retains authority. Curves answer curves; straight lines answer straight lines; the contour rotates from front to back and side to side. Stability emerges from virtual movement rather than symmetry.

This early description helps explain later forms in which heavy stone appears poised, suspended, or capable of departure. The relevant tension is not mass versus lightness as separate stylistic options. It is the ability of mass to retain reserve. The sculpture should possess enough weight to concentrate imagination and enough latent motion to prevent weight from becoming inertia.

The text further indicates that Noguchi's sculptural perception was already circumambulatory. He does not describe a frontal image; he follows a contour around the body. The viewer's mental movement is necessary to complete the form. This anticipates his later insistence that sculpture cannot be known through photography alone, because its reality unfolds through movement, touch, approach, distance, and memory.[20] The psychology of embodied perception is thus present before the mature environmental works.

The figure also permits variable response. Noguchi acknowledges that it may move different viewers differently. Meaning is not secured by the artist's explanation alone. The

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[18] Duus/BO, early chapters on Noguchi's childhood, education, and Guggenheim application; Herrera/ST, early chapters on the medical period, Borglum, Rumely, and the European fellowship.

[19] Isamu Noguchi, text on an unidentified female figure, 25 February 1927, INFGM, MS_COR_317_003_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

[20] Isamu Noguchi, writing on the perception of sculpture, INFGM, MS_WRI_011_001_original_1.pdf.

work creates a field of potential affect. This early concession to the viewer's participation becomes central when sculpture expands into stage, playground, garden, and plaza.

2.3 Dissatisfaction as a selective instrument

The first report to Henry Allen Moe from Paris records Noguchi's efforts to acquire the technical ability he believed necessary. He visited the carving atelier of the École des Beaux-Arts and found it inadequate. He then began carving marble under the direction of a craftsman, Minazzoli, and again found the arrangement unsatisfactory. In 'despair', he approached Constantin Brancusi directly and asked to work with him.[21] Brancusi, known for working personally and accepting few collaborators, agreed.

The sequence matters because it strips the encounter of retrospective inevitability. Noguchi did not meet Brancusi by destiny alone. He reached him through failed methods, dissatisfaction, and initiative. The crisis is selective: Noguchi does not reject learning but rejects forms of learning that do not correspond to the problem he has defined.

This behaviour recurs. He is often represented as difficult, impatient, or resistant to advice. Some correspondents indeed experienced him in those terms. Yet the archival record shows that he repeatedly accepted guidance when it possessed operational adequacy. He listened to Brancusi, Fuller, Hasegawa, architects, craftsmen, quarry owners, dancers, and technical collaborators. The critical variable was not submission versus independence, but whether the proposed method enlarged the relation between thought and material.

The same report shows a programme of simultaneous activity: French language, museums, painting, drawing, and carving. Multiplicity is present from the beginning. It is not merely the overextension of the celebrated late artist. It is a method by which different modes of knowledge cross-fertilize one another.

Noguchi's reported happiness after entering Brancusi's studio is equally revealing. Satisfaction follows not from being in Paris as such, but from finding the correct relation between desire, method, and environment. The appropriate teacher becomes a form of place.

2.4 Brancusi as technical and ethical method

The second Guggenheim report of 15 September 1927 makes clear that Brancusi's first importance for Noguchi was technical and ethical. The method is described as reasonable, respectful of material, and 'free from tricks'. Noguchi lists cutting and finishing marble, cathedral stone, measurement, squaring, contours, tool-making, tempering, sharpening,

[21] Isamu Noguchi to Henry Allen Moe, 15 June 1927, INFGM, MS_COR_317_005_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

wood, bronze, iron, forging, welding, filing, and polishing.[22] The list resists the romantic reduction of apprenticeship to stylistic influence.

To make and sharpen one's own tools is to understand that the instrument mediates thought. The chisel is not neutral; its angle, hardness, edge, and resistance condition what the hand can perceive and what the material can become. Noguchi's later openness to diamond saws, pneumatic systems, and computerized fountain controls does not contradict this ethic. Authenticity is not defined by the antiquity of the tool. It is defined by the adequacy and intelligibility of the operation.

The phrase 'free from tricks' also establishes a moral vocabulary. A trick produces an effect while concealing or falsifying the relation that generated it. Noguchi's later suspicion of photographic retouching, prestigious materials, or surface solutions that separate form from function can be read within this early ethic. Yet the same archive shows that he was capable of using photography strategically, accepting industrial production, and allowing selective bronze editions. The principle is not purism; it is responsibility for the consequences of mediation.

The report further complicates the later mythology of direct carving. Noguchi planned to practise with the pointing machine and investigate hard stone. He was learning a range of techniques before deciding which would best serve a given work. The mature artist's insistence upon direct relation with material emerged from knowledge of technical alternatives, not from ignorance of them.

A letter to his mother dated 10 August 1927 provides another voice. Brancusi appears not as a theoretical origin but as a Romanian sculptor whose appearance reminded Noguchi of an ancient Greek maker. The letter moves quickly from the studio to buses, boulevards, cafés, bals-musette, museums, and the gradual pleasure of Paris.[23] The institutional report turns Brancusi into method; the family letter humanises the master and extends apprenticeship into the city. Both are valid. Their difference demonstrates that the psychological portrait changes with genre.

2.5 The destroyed atelier and the portable laboratory

A violent storm damaged the old aqueduct beneath Brancusi's studio and rendered it unusable. Noguchi represented the interruption as if it had occurred 'by divine design',

[22] Isamu Noguchi to Henry Allen Moe, 15 September 1927, INFGM, MS_COR_317_006_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

[23] Isamu Noguchi to Leonie Gilmour, 10 August 1927, INFGM, MS_COR_372_013_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

arriving just as he felt he had mastered the technical details of the phase.[24] The phrase should not be over-read as religious doctrine. Its importance lies in the narrative operation: an uncontrollable accident is reframed as an appropriate transition.

The next report, dated 15 December 1927, describes the result. Noguchi visited marble, granite, and statuary workshops, consulted Mateo Hernández on hard stone, studied Asian collections and Chinese art, gathered tools, and constructed dismantlable easels, benches, grinding equipment, and a forge. He calls the ensemble 'a perfect travelling laboratory'.[25] The phrase is perhaps the earliest exact formulation of the studio psychology that would govern his life.

The travelling laboratory transforms dependence upon place. Noguchi no longer requires a single master's room in order to work. He carries a system of capacities that can be reconstituted elsewhere. The studio becomes less an address than a portable relation among body, tool, material, and procedure.

This mobility should not be romanticized as weightlessness. Leonie Gilmour's letters expose its material burden: crates, cubic volume, freight rates, insurance, customs, ports, and contacts capable of receiving cargo.[26] A portable studio still has weight, and its movement depends upon an invisible administrative labour. The young artist's autonomy is sustained by family members who preserve photographs, negotiate debts, manage addresses, and calculate shipping.

The studio left behind was equally significant. After Noguchi's departure in 1927, Leonie gathered scattered photographs, protected a sculpture from being removed or destroyed, negotiated rooms, and managed furniture.[27] The studio became distributed across two continents: the artist and future practice in Europe, the material residue and archive in New York. Mobility was not the absence of attachment; it was the organization of attachment across distance.

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[24] Noguchi to Moe, 15 September 1927, MS_COR_317_006_original_1.pdf, p. 2.

[25] Isamu Noguchi to Henry Allen Moe, 15 December 1927, INFGM, MS_COR_317_007_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

[26] Leonie Gilmour to Isamu Noguchi, 14 June 1930, INFGM, MS_COR_375_002_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–3.

[27] Leonie Gilmour to Isamu Noguchi, 28 March 1927, INFGM, MS_COR_375_013_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–4.

2.6 From London to Peking: environmental perception before environmental theory

Noguchi's first letters from London in March 1927 reveal an environmental sensibility before it became theoretical. To his mother he described the Devon landscape through colour, flowers, animals, hills, cleanliness, and comparative smallness. To his sister he emphasized traffic, small cars, reversed direction, slowness, and bodily disorientation.[28] The environment is not a collection of monuments. It is a system of scale, rhythm, vegetation, direction, and behaviour.

The addressee changes the description, but a stable perceptual matrix remains. This provides an early foundation for the later claim that space is known by moving through it. Noguchi measures England against the bodily habits formed in the United States. The unfamiliar direction of traffic reveals that orientation is learned and culturally organized.

Paris becomes familiar through repetition rather than immediate revelation. Noguchi writes that he is becoming fond of the city. Kyoto, by contrast, produces an immediate declaration of love when he visits in January 1931.[29] Yet later recollections also stress separation and estrangement. The two positions need not be reconciled by choosing one. A place can provoke intense affection without supplying secure belonging.

Peking offers another form of immersion. Noguchi writes of people, walking, food, baths, performances, seals, and ordinary social experience. Beneath his signature he stamps a red seal and labels it 'my seal'.[30] The letter becomes a mixed field of alphabetic writing, signature, and visual mark. Identity is not merely stated; it is imprinted.

The same letter records works left in storage because an exhibition could not be financed. The artist travels onward while the objects remain in material latency. This separation between mobile artist and immobile work will recur throughout the career. The studio is not always where the artist is; it is also the network that preserves what cannot yet move.

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[28] Noguchi to Leonie Gilmour, 27 March 1927, MS_COR_409_003_original_1.pdf; Noguchi to Ailes Gilmour, 27 March 1927, MS_COR_404_001_original_1.pdf.

[29] Isamu Noguchi to Leonie Gilmour, 28 January 1931, INFGM, MS_COR_372_002_original_1.pdf, p. 1.

[30] Isamu Noguchi to Leonie Gilmour, 28 December 1930, INFGM, MS_COR_372_009_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–3.

2.7 'Going into the abstract' and the relational construction of artistic identity

Ailes Gilmour's letter of 22 October 1930 contains a phrase attributed to Noguchi: 'You told us you were going into the abstract'.[31] The original letter in which he made that statement is absent. The response nevertheless establishes that he had communicated a conscious artistic turn and that the family received it as a new identity.

Ailes's reply links abstraction to personal disappearance: he may go into the abstract, but he should not himself fade away. The concern is hers, not his. Yet it reveals how an artistic programme is reflected back to the artist as a social definition. Correspondence participates in stabilizing the identity of 'the artist going into abstraction' before the mature abstract work is publicly established.

A second letter from Ailes, dated 6 June 1930, states that if abstraction remains his aim he might find its essence in a remote Japanese temple.[32] This is an external projection, not Noguchi's own theory. It demonstrates the expectations placed upon his Asian journey. The trip is already imagined by others as a return to spiritual essence. Noguchi's subsequent work must be read partly as a negotiation with such projections.

The chronology also prevents a simplistic narrative in which Asian experience generates abstraction from nothing. The intention precedes the full Japanese encounter. China and Japan transform an already articulated direction.

Noguchi's abstract identity was constructed alongside continuing engagement with bodies, portraits, tools, and social relations. Abstraction did not mean withdrawal from material or life. In a likely early theoretical text he describes years of assimilation followed by a conscious decision to direct his plastic capacities, linking formal studies of line, volume, vibration, repetition, and tension with childhood memories of trees, sea, mountain, and earth.[33] Abstraction becomes the organization of affect and memory rather than their elimination.

2.8 The unrealized Gandhi portrait and the conditional imagination

A letter from Harbin dated 30 July 1930 records Noguchi's idea of returning through India and modelling the head of Gandhi if an encounter could be arranged. He planned to

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[31] Ailes Gilmour to Isamu Noguchi, 22 October 1930, INFGM, MS_COR_418_003_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–4.

[32] Ailes Gilmour to Isamu Noguchi, 6 June 1930, INFGM, MS_COR_418_004_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–4.

[33] Isamu Noguchi, undated theoretical typescript, INFGM, MS_WRI_004_002_original_1.pdf.

contact "Mme Naidu".[34] The proposal is one of the clearest examples of a work existing first as a conditional epistolary possibility.

The project has a subject, medium, itinerary, intermediary, and condition of access. It is not merely fantasy; it is an operational hypothesis. Leonie had written the previous month recommending that he contact Tagore and Mme Naidu before travelling.[35] The maternal letter did not necessarily originate the idea of Gandhi's portrait, but it supplied a name through which the encounter might become possible.

No evidence in the current corpus shows that the portrait was realized. Its importance lies precisely in its unrealized state. It demonstrates how the archive can preserve the anatomy of a work that never acquired material form: route, person, desire, and missing reply. Such projects form a reservoir of future possibility rather than a mere catalogue of failures.

The portrait also clarifies the social function of Noguchi's early figurative work. To model a head was to gain sustained proximity to a person, enter an intellectual and political environment, and create a network. Portraiture was an economic activity, but also a technology of relation.

2.9 From protected idea to operational self

By 1931 the young Noguchi had not resolved the contradictions that would define his career. He had instead acquired a method for working through them. He could protect an idea and delay its execution; acknowledge technical insufficiency and transform it into travel; reject inadequate instruction and seek a master; absorb a method without accepting a style; convert a destroyed atelier into a portable laboratory; love a place while remaining uncertain of belonging; declare abstraction while continuing to study bodies and material; formulate unrealized projects through networks of correspondence.

The self before the style is therefore not an unformed precursor. It already contains the psychological operations that will sustain later innovation. What changes after 1931 is scale, complexity, and the number of systems through which these operations must pass.

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[34] Isamu Noguchi to Leonie Gilmour, 30 July 1930, INFGM, MS_COR_372_010_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

[35] Leonie Gilmour to Isamu Noguchi, 17 June 1930, INFGM, MS_COR_375_014_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

Chapter 3. Non-belonging, place, and the construction of a centre

3.1 Non-belonging as an operative condition

The most persistent danger in writing about Noguchi's identity is to convert non-belonging into either pathology or heroic cosmopolitanism. The first interprets the work as compensation for a damaged self; the second celebrates rootlessness as freedom. The documents support neither simplification. Noguchi repeatedly describes the cost of occupying an unstable position between social, national, and professional categories, yet he also converts that position into a capacity to enlarge the frame within which apparently incompatible elements can coexist.

The manuscript *I Become a Nisei*, written during or immediately after the experience of Poston, supplies one of the most explicit contemporary accounts. Noguchi speaks of unreality, cultural suspension, the loss of freedom, and the loneliness of individuals situated between cultures.[36] He does not resolve the condition by selecting one identity. He proposes work, gardens, crafts, performance, and collective planning as means through which a culturally suspended population might acquire confidence and agency. The response to non-belonging is constructive and environmental.

The same operation appears in a different register in the 1978 interview with Dore Ashton. Noguchi describes himself as having one foot on either side of a division: East and West, abstract and social, belonging and freedom.[37] He does not eliminate the contradiction. He seeks a sufficiently large frame within which style, technique, tradition, and material can coexist. The identity is not synthesized into purity; it is accommodated within a broader field.

The evidence therefore supports a procedural interpretation. Non-belonging is not the hidden meaning of every object. It is a recurrent condition to which Noguchi responds by constructing places, frames, and systems of relation. A garden, stage, playground, room, or plaza offers a temporary centre without requiring a final national or stylistic home.

This distinction matters because the biographies necessarily narrate identity through parentage, nationality, childhood, and return. Duus's attention to the fraught social history of the Noguchi and Gilmour families and Herrera's emphasis on the emotional consequences

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[36] Isamu Noguchi, *I Become a Nisei*, INFGM, MS_WRI_005_001_original_1.pdf.

[37] Isamu Noguchi, interview with Dore Ashton, 13 September 1978, INFGM, MS_WRI_047_004_original_1.pdf.

of movement and attachment provide essential context.[38] The archive, however, shows that Noguchi himself often translated those conditions into operational questions: where can one work, how can a place be made, which material will belong to a site, how may a public move without being directed too rigidly, and what kind of centre allows passage rather than exclusion?

3.2 Place-making as a response rather than a symbol

The statement that Noguchi transformed non-belonging into place-making must be understood carefully. It does not mean that every environment is a symbolic substitute for a lost home. It means that the construction of places repeatedly supplies an operative answer to disorientation.

The 1974 outline for the unrealized book on leisure begins by associating uprootedness, instability, uselessness, work, and the desire to belong. It then turns to place as home, temple, cave, earth, floor, and field, and treats the image as capable of identification, protection, or exorcism.[39] This is not a clinical account of defence mechanisms. It is a spatial theory in which form contains and reorganizes otherwise diffuse conditions.

The studio at Kamakura offers a material example. Noguchi describes excavation into the hillside, a wall of earth, a chimney cut into the slope, drainage, light, the veranda over rice fields, a tokonoma, fire, garden, kilns, and an approach conceived almost as a theatrical passage.[40] The studio is not merely a shelter for production. It joins work to ground, light, air, water, fire, and surrounding craft. Noguchi explicitly links the space to pride, imagination, and personality.

The psychological importance of the studio is not reducible to enclosure. It is built by entering the hill and opening the resulting interior to landscape. Containment and exposure are simultaneous. The sculptor does not secure belonging by sealing himself off from the environment, but by constructing a reciprocal section through it.

A letter to John and Kimiko Powers in 1974 makes the relation to return even more explicit. Noguchi writes of the comfort of having a room at the Fukudaya that waits for him and of possessing a place where he feels at home.[41] The room is significant not because it is

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38 Duus/BO, sections on Yone Noguchi, Leonie Gilmour, childhood in Japan and America, and the Nisei experience; Herrera/ST, corresponding biographical chapters.

39 Isamu Noguchi, outline for a book on leisure, 1974, INFGM, MS_WRI_010_020_original_1.pdf.

40 Isamu Noguchi to 'John', on the Kamakura studio, INFGM, MS_WRI_019_001_original_1.pdf; revised typescript, MS_WRI_019_002_original_1.pdf.

41 Isamu Noguchi to John and Kimiko Powers, 6 June 1974, INFGM, MS_COR_112_021_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

permanent property, but because it remains available across absence. Belonging is produced through recurrence.

This suggests a form of rooting by return. Noguchi's geography is not organized by one exclusive home. It is a constellation of places—New York, Shikoku, Kamakura, the Fukudaya, European quarries, temporary studios, friends' apartments—within which different functions of self and work become possible. The identity is distributed, but not therefore dissolved.

3.3 Dispersion and centring

The documents repeatedly oppose dispersion to centring. Noguchi describes modernity as fragmentation, mechanical disconnection, and loss of relation. Sculpture becomes one means of establishing an orientation without denying complexity.

In an interview on the art of space, he calls sculpture the concentration and pressure of energies, and imagines the void between rocks as active rather than empty.[42] The object is not sufficient in isolation. Meaning arises within the interval.

The centre is consequently relational. A stone can establish it, but so can an axis, a mound, a theatre, or an enclosure. In the 1978 conversation with Ashton, Noguchi describes sculpture as the relatively immobile thing around which mobile human sculptures move.[43] The centre is valuable because it enables motion to become legible.

This model can be seen in the project for Expo '70. The *World Mound*, the Echo balloon, the moon garden, the tetrahedral structure, the aerial arm, and the multiple routes organize a field in which the visitor can choose without losing orientation.[44] The environment does not abolish structure in the name of freedom. It designs a set of possible directions and uses the centre to prevent choice from becoming mere congestion.

The psychological analogue is clear. Noguchi's identity does not achieve coherence by fixing itself in one category. It requires a centre capable of holding multiple relations. When that centre becomes too rigid—when success identifies him with a style, when an institution classifies him as designer or architect, when a national role becomes representative rather than exploratory—he reopens the field.

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[42] Isamu Noguchi, published interview on sculpture and space, INFGM, MS_WRI_006_001_original_1.pdf.

[43] Noguchi–Ashton interview, MS_WRI_047_004_original_1.pdf.

[44] Isamu Noguchi, *The World and Its Dream*, INFGM, MS_COR_249_006_original_1.pdf; integrated Expo '70 proposal, MS_COR_248_006_original_1.pdf.

The bicycle image used in the 1976 sculpture conference is especially exact: the rider remains upright by continuing to move.[45] Continuity is dynamic. The self persists not by remaining in place, but by maintaining an organized movement.

3.4 *Radicamento* and *decollo*: weight and flight

Noguchi's creative psychology is structured not only by place but by a more specific polarity that may be named, retaining the Italian terms developed during the research, *radicamento* and *decollo*: rooting and take-off. Stone, earth, wall, enclosure, and past give imagination weight; aperture, levitation, light, spiral, balloon, and flight prevent weight from becoming captivity.

Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion House fascinated the young Noguchi partly because it promised a form of habitation no longer rooted to the ground, almost like the life of a bird.[46] The attraction is important because it precedes Noguchi's mature return to stone. His later commitment to earth is not the expression of a simply sedentary temperament. It is the counterweight to a powerful desire for mobility.

The same duality appears in the IBM garden at Armonk and in the sculptures discussed in the 1978 interviews. A distorted cube seems ready to lift off; stones at Chase Manhattan appear to levitate rather than remain buried.[47] Weight is made dynamic. The stone retains its geological reality while suggesting departure.

The *Black Sun* provides a complementary structure. Its mass establishes an immovable presence, but the aperture directs vision towards the western horizon and the setting sun.[48] The opening converts mass into orientation and passage.

Expo '70 makes the polarity explicit: mound, granite, and subterranean space coexist with balloon, wing, floating forms, and lunar aspiration. The project does not simply juxtapose earth and technology. It uses each to prevent the other from becoming total. The technological future emerges from a ground that remains bodily and elemental; the mound is animated by the desire to leave it.

The polarity also illuminates Noguchi's relation to institutions. He seeks support, sites, studios, and durable infrastructures, yet withdraws when they threaten to stabilize him too completely. The same artist who required a room that awaited his return could be destabilized by the prospect of being securely accepted by New York. In his retrospective

[45] Isamu Noguchi, Ninth National/International Sculpture Conference, 1976, INFGM, MS_WRI_041_001_original_1.pdf.

[46] Isamu Noguchi, tribute to R. Buckminster Fuller, INFGM, MS_WRI_057_001_original_1.pdf, relevant pages in the 1983 proceedings.

[47] Isamu Noguchi, interview of 29 August 1978, INFGM, MS_WRI_049_005_original_1.pdf.

[48] Isamu Noguchi, interview of 27 August 1978, INFGM, MS_WRI_049_004_original_1.pdf.

account of 1949, the success of the Egan Gallery exhibition prompted renewed doubt about what sculpture was and contributed to the Bollingen journey.[49] Recognition was desired, but its capacity to fix identity was feared.

3.5 Limits that open rather than imprison

Noguchi's repeated need for control is often misunderstood when detached from the spatial logic of his work. He did not necessarily seek total control over every event. He sought control over the field within which event and indeterminacy could acquire meaning.

The theatre provides the clearest early example. A stage is a bounded environment in which irrelevant elements can be excluded and action intensified. Noguchi later described Graham's stage worlds as hypothetical environments whose limits allowed experience to concentrate.[50] The lesson passes into gardens and public spaces.

In the Billy Rose Art Garden, the wall defines but should not create exclusive possession. Noguchi's several versions of the text "A Garden Which Is a Sculpture" emphasize total experience, nature's unforeseen intervention, and the garden as a piece of earth through which one may walk.[51] The boundary intensifies relation without sealing the world outside.

At Armonk, Noguchi speaks of spending more time on the lake's periphery than upon the fountains. The border permits the moving observer to perceive changes in position.[52] The limit is a perceptual instrument.

This explains the apparent paradox of freedom canalized. Noguchi's playgrounds, plazas, and Expo routes do not leave the user in an unstructured emptiness. They prepare alternatives, slopes, obstacles, nodes, and visual centres. Freedom is the capacity to choose and move within a field sufficiently articulated to make action consequential.

Psychologically, the same pattern governs collaboration. Noguchi is open to others when roles and responsibilities are sufficiently defined. The Gene Owens correspondence reveals discomfort not with assistance itself, but with the indefinite obligation of having a permanent assistant for whom work must continuously be invented.[53] A project-specific limit makes collaboration possible.

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[49] Isamu Noguchi, interview of 18 September 1978, INFGM, MS_WRI_047_009_original_1.pdf; autobiographical chronology, MS_WRI_048_002_original_1.pdf.

[50] Noguchi, 1976 sculpture conference, MS_WRI_041_001_original_1.pdf.

[51] Isamu Noguchi, drafts and typescripts on the Billy Rose Art Garden, INFGM, MS_WRI_023_001_original_1.pdf, MS_WRI_023_002_original_1.pdf, and MS_WRI_023_003_original_1.pdf.

[52] Noguchi interview, MS_WRI_049_005_original_1.pdf.

[53] Isamu Noguchi to Gene W. Owens, 28 May and 10 July 1962, MS_COR_304_002_original_1.pdf and MS_COR_304_005_original_1.pdf.

3.6 The house, room, cave, and studio as psychological forms

Noguchi's houses and studios offer a vocabulary of containment that differs from monumental enclosure. The 1986 *Shin Kenchiku* text traces a long relation to building, from childhood responsibility in the construction of his mother's house to carpentry, Brancusi's studio, and the adaptation of a traditional Japanese house.[54] He describes adapting himself to the earth wherever he found himself, even in America.

The phrase establishes rooting as an activity rather than an inheritance. To inhabit is to modify and be modified. The old house is not preserved as an untouchable relic; its rooms, floors, heating, and relation to work are altered so that tradition can continue through use.

The wall around the studio filters vision. It excludes incidental intrusion while leaving hills, trees, and sky. Closure produces an enlarged field. This is a repeated Noguchian operation: remove enough to make the significant relation visible.

John Powers's description of an underground 'cave' house at Aspen provokes Noguchi's immediate interest.[55] The house lacks a conventional façade and is conceived as lived experience rather than an exterior object. The attraction corresponds to Noguchi's own tendency to imagine habitation as entry into earth and relation rather than display.

Yet the permanent studio produces obligations. A family letter concerning Noguchi's possible acquisition of a building in the Village lists taxes, insurance, heating, plumbing, roof, pavement, and the need for a reliable tenant-manager during six-month absences.[56] The stable centre can function only through distributed care.

This material complexity prevents the romantic equation of studio and inner self. The studio is simultaneously psychological, architectural, legal, economic, and relational. Its intimacy depends upon maintenance.

3.7 Return, tourism, and the consumption of place

Noguchi's relation to Shikoku further clarifies the difference between place and image. In the 1974 letter to the Powers he praises the old house and surrounding temples, but fears the rapid transformation of the region by concrete, tourist traffic, and buses.[57] The threat is not change as such; Noguchi himself adapts the house. The threat is the replacement of reciprocal habitation by standardised consumption.

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[54] Isamu Noguchi, text prepared for *Shin Kenchiku*, INFGM, MS_WRI_066_001_original_1.pdf; Noguchi to Tadashi Yamamoto, 4 June 1986, MS_COR_191_029_original_1.pdf.

[55] John Powers to Isamu Noguchi, 26 May 1974, enclosed with MS_COR_112_021_original_1.pdf; Noguchi's reply, 6 June 1974.

[56] Probable Leonie Gilmour to Isamu Noguchi, undated fragment, INFGM, MS_COR_408_009_original_1.pdf.

[57] Noguchi to the Powers, MS_COR_112_021_original_1.pdf.

A living place contains duration, work, and repeated return. A tourist image compresses it into recognizable signs. Noguchi's resistance to the latter parallels his resistance to the classification of his own work as 'Japanese'. The old form remains generative when it is used as point of departure; it becomes dead when reproduced as identity.

This distinction is central to the UNESCO Garden. The institutional network sought a contribution legible as Japanese, while Noguchi later insisted that the garden drew its spirit from Japan without reproducing the old or traditional.[58] The project had to be recognizable enough to function diplomatically and transformed enough to remain personal.

Place-making, in Noguchi, is therefore neither preservation nor novelty alone. It is the construction of a field in which memory can become active without being reduced to a picture of itself.

3.8 The centre as a provisional ethical structure

The centre has ethical implications. It permits individual and collective activity without demanding uniformity. In the 1978 Ashton interview, Noguchi's solution to cultural dichotomy is not compromise in the weak sense, but an enlargement of the frame. In the Expo proposal, the visitor retains individuality within a technological system. In playgrounds, children share a field without following one predetermined script. In the stage sets, an object enables Graham's movement without becoming the protagonist.

This model is neither liberal neutrality nor authoritarian design. The environment actively shapes behaviour, but does so by enabling differentiated responses. Noguchi's centre is ethical because it refuses both coercive closure and indifferent formlessness.

The psychological portrait that emerges is of an artist seeking conditions in which contradiction may remain productive. He does not overcome non-belonging by finding a final home. He creates centres from which movement can continue.

[58] Ichikawa to Noguchi, MS_COR_272_008_original_1.pdf; Noguchi's writings on the UNESCO Garden in MS_WRI_008_001_original_1.pdf and related files.

Chapter 4. Knowing by making: embodied perception, material dialogue, and the temporal work

4.1 Sculpture as embodied knowledge

Noguchi's most consistent epistemological claim is that sculpture cannot be known apart from bodily experience. Photographs, plans, and verbal descriptions are indispensable, but none substitutes for movement around a three-dimensional work. The viewer must approach, withdraw, touch, measure, and activate memory and imagination.[59] This conviction is not an anti-intellectual preference for sensation. It is a theory of how spatial knowledge is formed.

The body supplies variables unavailable to the static image: weight relative to one's own weight, height relative to one's eye, distance traversed in time, change of contour, resistance of surface, and the anticipation of possible touch. Sculpture is not fully present at one instant. It unfolds as a sequence.

Noguchi's early London letters already register the environment through bodily orientation. His later writing generalizes the process. The photograph can identify an object but not reproduce the knowledge created by walking around it. This is why the absence of adequate photographic documentation of Graham's sets is not merely an archival inconvenience. The set exists through dancers, timing, light, and the interval between bodies and objects.

The emphasis upon embodiment also reshapes the psychological interpretation of form. A curve is not simply expressive; it may redirect movement. A wall can produce hesitation. A void may invite passage. A stone can stabilize vision. A stair changes breath, elevation, and balance. Psychology resides not only in symbolic associations but in the physical conditions imposed upon the participant.

4.2 'Knowing through doing'

In the long autobiographical manuscript on the Bollingen journey, Noguchi repeatedly associates making with knowledge. Travel, tactile encounter, and direct work become means of understanding the function of sculpture across cultures.[60] He later explained to William McGuire that, unable to complete the proposed book, he continued the research through

[59] Isamu Noguchi, writing on the perception of sculpture, INFGM, MS_WRI_011_001_original_1.pdf.
[60] Isamu Noguchi, autobiographical Bollingen manuscript, INFGM, MS_WRI_008_001_original_1.pdf.

actual application to artistic problems.[61] The work did not interrupt thought; it became thought's material continuation.

This epistemology has early precedents. Brancusi's instruction joins concept to tool and material. Fuller's 1930 text on Dymaxion proposes completing the model before the manuscript so that the lessons of making may enter the writing.[62] The correspondence with Gene Owens extends the process into casting. Owens argues that personally casting a sculpture rather than surrendering it entirely to a commercial foundry extends the creative act through mould, wax, and metal.[63] The idea is offered to Noguchi as a technical proposition; whether and how it changed specific works must be traced through later project records.

Knowing by making does not imply that every stage must be executed personally. Noguchi's mature practice is highly distributed. The decisive issue is whether the process remains cognitively open at stages where material transformation can alter the form. He may delegate armatures, casting preparation, transport, or fabrication, while retaining presence at the point where scale and matter require judgement.

The 1962 letter to Dimitri Hadzi is exemplary. Noguchi coordinates a large Roman studio, assistants, armatures, wooden works sent for translation into bronze, and the rapid modelling of large clay forms upon his return from the Greek islands.[64] The infrastructure is distributed; the forming act remains concentrated.

4.3 Material as interlocutor

Noguchi's mature language frequently describes a conversation with stone. At the 1976 sculpture conference he distinguishes imposing a preconceived shape from entering a 'conversation between the stone and myself'.[65] The metaphor does not anthropomorphize matter naively. It identifies reciprocal limitation.

An interlocutor is neither mute substance nor sovereign author. It responds through resistance, grain, fracture, weight, scale, and prior shape. The sculptor proposes; the stone makes some proposals possible and renders others false. The resulting form belongs to the relation.

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[61] Isamu Noguchi to William McGuire, 28 February 1974, INFGM, MS_WRI_010_022_original_1.pdf, p. 1.

62 Buckminster Fuller to Mrs Lyman Gale, 5 April 1930, INFGM, MS_COR_254_003_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2. Transmission of this specific letter to Noguchi is not fully established; the parallel is therefore comparative rather than causal.

[63] Gene W. Owens to Isamu Noguchi, 12 September 1962, INFGM, MS_COR_304_007_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

[64] Isamu Noguchi to Dimitri Hadzi, 28 May 1962, INFGM, MS_COR_069_008_original_1.pdf, p. 1.

[65] Noguchi, 1976 sculpture conference, MS_WRI_041_001_original_1.pdf.

Noguchi's statement that he sometimes felt more at home with stone than with people must be treated cautiously.[66] It should not become evidence of misanthropy. Within the corpus, stone offers a mode of relation characterized by continuity, silence, and resistance without ideological demand. It supplies orientation across national divisions because its properties are not reducible to cultural identity.

The 1953 Lever House letters reveal this dialogue before an object existed. From Paris, Noguchi imagines exceptionally white granite. In Greece, direct inspection of Pentelic marble changes the hierarchy of possibilities. He describes translucency, warmth, nobility, weathering, price, exchange rate, quarry time, and export conditions in one integrated judgement.[67] The material speaks through both sensory and logistical properties.

This integrated judgement is central. Material is never only metaphysical. It belongs to a geography of labour, currency, unions, transport, and climate. Noguchi's material psychology therefore resists the separation of aesthetic essence from economic condition.

4.4 Control, surrender, and the sequence of authorship

Noguchi's relation to material is often described as surrender, especially in late statements on stone, clay, earth, and fire. Yet the archive shows a carefully ordered sequence.

Before engagement, he prepares intensely. He chooses tools, visits quarries, studies costs, builds models, and defines the field. During engagement, he accepts correction by material and circumstance. After reaching a form, he may become highly protective of its integrity. The process is neither domination nor abandonment; it is controlled exposure.

The Japanese ceramics described in MS_WRI_011_001 illustrate the point. Noguchi values the way clay, earth, and kiln reduce the artist's pride. Idea and form may arise together through communion with matter. Yet he does not simply leave clay untouched. The fire's agency becomes meaningful because the artist has prepared the object for transformation.

The same structure appears in gardens. Nature should eventually take over, but Noguchi continues to adjust the California garden until it contains qualities that nature can extend convincingly.[68] Ceding control is the final phase of a highly controlled preparation.

This suggests a three-part model:

1. **protected formation** — the idea is incubated and the field prepared;
2. **responsive making** — matter and circumstance alter the proposal;
3. **authorised release** — time, nature, use, or the public continue the work.

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[66] Ibid.

[67] Isamu Noguchi to Gordon Bunshaft, 26 November 1953, INFGM, MS_COR_340_022_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

[68] Noguchi to Owens, 30 November 1981, MS_COR_304_014_original_1.pdf.

The model explains why Noguchi can be both exacting and open. Precision is required to create conditions within which indeterminacy becomes productive rather than arbitrary.

4.5 Tools as cognitive extensions

Noguchi's attention to tools is persistent from Brancusi to diamond saws. The tool is the interface through which bodily intention encounters material resistance. To understand a tool is to understand the range of possible gestures it makes available.

Gene Owens's 1963 gift of hand-made clay tools is revealing. The tools were made of Osage orange and described as functioning like ploughs: they should penetrate and be pulled through large masses of clay with limited downward pressure.[69] The letter transmits not merely the object but the bodily instruction required to use it.

This is another form of correspondence as studio. The knowledge is embodied in three places: the shape of the tool, the words of the maker, and the future gesture of the recipient. The letter extends Owens's hand into Noguchi's studio.

In 1981, Owens speculates that a large hollow work might have been cut with a torch. Noguchi corrects him: he increasingly uses diamond saws, points, and grinders, including small Japanese diamond tools.[70] The exchange separates appearance from process. A surface that looks burnt may have been abraded. The warning is methodological: formal appearance alone cannot reconstruct the psychology of making.

Noguchi's acceptance of modern tools also challenges the notion that authenticity requires archaic labour. What matters is not the primitive appearance of the instrument, but the continuity of judgement through the operation. He may use industrial means while refusing an industrial logic that removes all formative contact.

4.6 Model, scale, and the transfer of thought

Noguchi often begins large environmental projects with very small clay models. In the 1978 interview he describes carrying miniature tools and forming models only an inch or two high, using the hand to think directly in three dimensions before drawing.[71] The model concentrates a field that will later expand beyond the body.

Scale change is not enlargement alone. A small curve held between fingers becomes a slope traversed by a person; a puncture becomes an aperture framing the horizon; a tiny mound becomes landscape. At each transition, gravity, material, and use change the problem.

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[69] Gene W. Owens to Isamu Noguchi, 11 January 1963, INFGM, MS_COR_304_008_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

[70] Owens and Noguchi correspondence, MS_COR_304_014_original_1.pdf.

[71] Isamu Noguchi, interview of 18 September 1978, INFGM, MS_WRI_047_010_original_1.pdf.

The Hadzi letter shows how model, armature, clay, mould, wax, and bronze form a sequence rather than a simple reproduction. The Yale garden similarly required models, partial enlargement, Vermont marble work, and coordination with SOM.[72] The model is provisional. It carries a relation forward but does not determine the final work mechanically.

Noguchi's stage models could even be destroyed during production, because their function was to enable the set rather than survive as autonomous art.[73] The artefact of thought may be consumed by the work it generates.

This process complicates the market's tendency to preserve models as precious originals. For Noguchi, the model's authenticity may lie in its expendability. It belongs to the movement of thought.

4.7 The body, obstacle, and psychological topology

Noguchi's stage work demonstrates how material conditions become psychological operations. In *Errand into the Maze*, a minimal rope and floor element can generate the experience of a labyrinth. The spectator mentally constructs entanglement while the dancer physically confronts an obstacle.[74] The psychological state is not represented by a painted maze; it is produced through movement and limitation.

The same principle governs house, stair, cave, mirror, and threshold. A stair modifies height, balance, and effort. A cave restricts vision and suggests enclosure. A mirror returns the body to itself. A house establishes belonging through a frame. The stage becomes a laboratory in which topology and affect can be tested at human scale.

Psychological interpretation must therefore remain material. It is insufficient to state that the labyrinth symbolises fear. One must ask how the rope is placed, how the dancer approaches, what must be stepped over, how light isolates the field, and how the object changes the duration of a gesture.

This method will distinguish the dissertation from iconographic psychobiography. Noguchi's psychology is located in the operations his forms demand.

4.8 Time as a material

Noguchi repeatedly treats time not as external chronology but as one of sculpture's media. A garden requires years before it begins fully to exist. Basalt changes; vegetation

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[72] Noguchi to Owens, 28 May 1962, MS_COR_304_002_original_1.pdf.

[73] Isamu Noguchi, interview on Martha Graham sets, 4 September 1978, INFGM, MS_WRI_049_008_original_1.pdf.

[74] Programme, American Dance Festival, August 1948, INFGM, MS_DAN_MG_001_010_original_1.pdf; Noguchi's later discussion of the production, MS_WRI_041_001_original_1.pdf.

grows; water marks; surfaces weather.[75] The artist initiates a process whose later states cannot be fully predetermined.

His 1981 statement that the UNESCO Garden improves with age because 'Nature renews itself' expresses a temporal ontology unlike that of the preserved object.[76] Ageing is not simply loss; it can be renewal.

The Graham set letters extend this principle to use. Noguchi argues in 1982 that damage and wear preserve experience, and that bronze copies may kill the life accumulated by the original objects.[77] Wear is a material record of bodies, transport, and repetition.

This position does not imply fetishism of the untouched original. In 1984 Noguchi permits selective bronze translation and proposes exact reconstruction of certain sets under his instruction.[78] Authenticity can reside in the transmitted operation rather than in original matter alone.

Time therefore enters Noguchi's work in several modes:

- geological duration in stone;
- seasonal change in gardens;
- programmed sequence in fountains;
- repeated use in theatre;
- latency in unrealized projects;
- memory in correspondence;
- retrospective narration in writing.

The innovation is not simply kinetic sculpture. It is the treatment of sculpture as a temporally extended relation.

4.9 The photograph and the limits of disembodied knowledge

Noguchi's suspicion of photography coexists with his sophisticated use of it. He understands that a photograph cannot substitute for sculptural presence, yet images are indispensable to publicity, acquisition, project development, and historical memory.

Yusaku Kamekura's 1953 letter concerning a book on Noguchi shows photographs being selected, retouched, given new backgrounds, and potentially stripped of visible

[75] Noguchi, 1976 sculpture conference, MS_WRI_041_001_original_1.pdf.
[76] Noguchi to Gene Owens, 30 November 1981, MS_COR_304_014_original_1.pdf.
[77] Isamu Noguchi to Martha Graham, 22 July 1982, INFGM, MS_COR_426_002_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.
[78] Isamu Noguchi to Martha Graham and Ron Protas, 27 February 1984, INFGM, MS_COR_427_001_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

supports.[79] Removing the iron support from *Kintaro* would change the perceived relation to gravity. The photograph becomes a second sculpture, capable of rewriting material fact.

The Lannan jasper dossier demonstrates a different use. Photographs isolate a stone in the work yard, identify its material and price, and enable acquisition at a distance.[80] The image is operative because it produces selection, payment, shipment, and future installation.

The photograph therefore occupies an unstable position between insufficient representation and productive instrument. Noguchi's innovation involves not rejecting the image but understanding its capacity to alter the work's social and perceptual life.

4.10 Knowledge as a relation rather than possession

The chapter's evidence allows a final formulation. Noguchi does not possess knowledge before making; he establishes relations in which knowledge can emerge. The relation may be with stone, a tool, a site, a dancer, a collaborator, a photograph, or time. The sculptor's authority lies in designing and sustaining that encounter.

This authority is neither absolute control nor self-effacement. It is the capacity to recognize when matter has corrected the idea, when a collaborator has supplied indispensable knowledge, when nature should be allowed to continue the work, and when a translation has crossed the threshold at which the work becomes another object.

To know sculpturally is to remain answerable to consequences.

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[79] Yusaku Kamekura to Isamu Noguchi, 27 March 1953, INFGM, MS_COR_338_033_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

[80] Isamu Noguchi to J. Patrick Lannan, 1 April 1983, with associated photographs, INFGM, MS_COR_277_029_original_1.pdf; Lannan Foundation acquisition letter, 29 April 1983, MS_COR_277_032_original_1.pdf.

Chapter 5. The psychology of the studio: solitude, episodic expansion, and distributed cognition

5.1 The studio as a psychological instrument

The studio is often treated as the private container of artistic individuality. In Noguchi's case it is more accurately understood as an instrument for regulating attention, obligation, material possibility, and social exposure. Its architecture matters, but so do its absences, assistants, addresses, tools, debts, visitors, archives, and routes of communication.

Noguchi's statement to Gene Owens in May 1962 is unusually explicit. He writes that having no assistant constitutes a form of freedom: "freedom to think", even though it is less favourable to the execution of work.[81] Solitude is therefore neither romantic isolation nor social incapacity. It is a deliberate protection of cognitive space.

The letter immediately complicates that protection. Noguchi recognizes that large works benefit from highly skilled assistance. He proposes collaboration with Owens on defined projects rather than permanent general employment. The studio expands when an object requires it and contracts when the need has passed.

This episodic structure explains the apparent inconsistency between Noguchi's reputation for solitary work and the enormous number of people required by his mature production. He did not reject collaboration. He resisted a permanent organizational form that might impose tasks, rhythms, and responsibilities upon thought before a project had defined their necessity.

The psychological function of the studio can thus be described as selective permeability. It must admit materials, expertise, visitors, and information, but not indiscriminately. The artist's task includes controlling the thresholds through which those elements enter.

5.2 Obligation and the ethics of employment

Noguchi's hesitation about Owens was not only cognitive. In July 1962 he explained that he feared feeling obliged to keep finding work for a person who had given up other opportunities to join him.[82] The presence of an assistant creates a moral and economic relation.

This is important because several hostile letters from other periods describe Noguchi as demanding, suspicious, or difficult. Lincoln Kirstein's 1948 letter of rupture accuses him of

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[81] Isamu Noguchi to Gene W. Owens, 28 May 1962, INFGM, MS_COR_304_002_original_1.pdf, p. 1.
[82] Isamu Noguchi to Gene W. Owens, 10 July 1962, INFGM, MS_COR_304_005_original_1.pdf, p. 1.

making collaborators feel morally indebted beyond contractual payment, while Alfred Frankfurter's 1950 response depicts an impatient artist whose repeated withdrawal of a manuscript made publication impossible.[83] These accounts cannot be dismissed, but neither should they define the whole relational profile.

The Owens letters reveal a different pattern. Noguchi resists creating dependency without certainty. He asks what payment would be fair, considers accommodation and travel, and refuses simply to exploit Owens's willingness to work for little. In September he admits embarrassment at proposing a salary but insists upon clarity.[84] The ideal collaboration must be bounded, reciprocal, and sustainable.

Noguchi's psychological difficulty lies partly in occupying the position of employer. To accept another person into the studio is to become responsible not only for the work but for the temporal continuity of that person's livelihood. The episodic studio reduces this obligation by linking employment to a defined operation.

Owens responds by trying to remove the burden. He offers to remain one day or until completion, asks only for living costs, and presents technical knowledge that could make him genuinely useful.[85] The relation becomes possible when the assistant is transformed from dependent labour into a bearer of competence.

5.3 The assistant as knowledge, not merely labour

Owens's most consequential proposal is that personal involvement in casting extends the creative process. He offers expertise in wax, moulds, negative working, kiln construction, and foundry practice. The assistant brings into the studio a technical horizon that Noguchi does not fully possess.

This shifts the hierarchy. The assistant is not only the hand that performs what the artist has already conceived. He is a source of knowledge capable of changing what may be conceived. The studio's intelligence is distributed.

The same principle appears in other collaborations. Shoji Sadao is asked to investigate engineers, valve systems, and Boeing's hydraulic expertise for the Detroit fountain.[86] Ichikawa coordinates manufacturers, prices, patents, and distributors for Akari.[87] Allison

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[83] Lincoln Kirstein to Isamu Noguchi, 29 May 1948, INFGM, MS_COR_037_013_original_1.pdf; Alfred M. Frankfurter to Noguchi, 6 November 1950, MS_COR_039_009_original_1.pdf.

[84] Isamu Noguchi to Gene W. Owens, 10 September 1962, INFGM, MS_COR_304_006_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

[85] Gene W. Owens to Isamu Noguchi, 12 September 1962, INFGM, MS_COR_304_007_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

[86] Isamu Noguchi to Shoji Sadao, 6 December 1971, INFGM, MS_COR_323_011_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

[87] Y. Ichikawa to Isamu Noguchi, 6 February 1953, INFGM, MS_COR_272_002_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

LaPlatney, the archivist, in a much later research context, performs an analogous epistemic function for the historian by revealing where item-level searching fails; the broader point is that knowledge often resides in the structure surrounding the object.

Noguchi's mature authority lies not in possessing every answer, but in defining which questions must remain his and which can be productively transferred. He delegates investigation, fabrication, administration, and maintenance while retaining judgement at the thresholds where material, scale, site, and meaning can still change.

This is particularly evident in the 1962 Roman casting plan. Assistants may prepare armatures and foundries may translate forms, but Noguchi intends to be present to build the large clay masses.[88] The forming act is concentrated; the supporting cognition is distributed.

5.4 Trust as a condition of permeability

Noguchi's willingness to admit an interlocutor depends strongly upon trust. Entenza's role demonstrates the point. In the early 1950s he functions as editor, connector, publisher, promoter, and emotional support. Noguchi allows him to combine versions of a text, trusts him to prevent political misreading, and asks for reassuring words during a period of intense anxiety.[89] The correspondence acts as an external structure for containing and translating uncertainty.

By 1966, however, Noguchi describes a severe cooling of their relationship after repeated Graham Foundation rejections and Entenza's suggestion that a successful application should concern theoretical study rather than something practically realizable.[90] What Noguchi had experienced as supportive mediation becomes invalidation of his method, because the institution separates study from making.

Trust is therefore not a stable property of a person. It is a judgement about whether the relation recognizes the actual structure of one's work. Noguchi can accept correction from someone who helps the work become more precise; he resists intervention that reclassifies the work according to an alien category.

The same distinction clarifies his interactions with patrons. Lannan is valued because he recognizes the 'next step' and the territory 'beyond definitions', not merely because he buys objects.[91] Recognition before consensus gives the artist room to continue moving.

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[88] Noguchi to Hadzi, MS_COR_069_008_original_1.pdf.

[89] John Entenza to Isamu Noguchi, 18 February 1953, MS_COR_045_010_original_1.pdf; Isamu Noguchi to Entenza, 6 March 1953, MS_COR_045_011_original_1.pdf and duplicate MS_COR_338_024_original_1.pdf.

[90] Isamu Noguchi to J. B. Blunk, 29 August 1966, INFGM, MS_COR_226_001_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

[91] Isamu Noguchi to George McNeil and to J. Patrick Lannan, both 13 July 1982, INFGM, MS_COR_277_024_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

5.5 The studio as external memory

By 1983 Noguchi's correspondence was no longer processed only by the artist. A staff member prepared a selection of incoming letters, separated greetings from decisions, summarized requests, and offered to draft replies, contact museums, organize exhibitions, authenticate works, and preserve press material.[92] The studio had become an external memory.

Such mediation protected attention. Noguchi did not need to read every item indiscriminately. He was presented with points at which his judgement remained necessary: authentication, conservation, selection, recommendation, and approval. Routine communication was delegated.

The psychological significance is twofold. First, the mature studio acknowledges limits of individual cognitive capacity. Second, delegation does not dissolve authorship; it concentrates it. The more extensive the surrounding system becomes, the more precisely the decisive acts must be defined.

The reassuring conclusion of the memorandum—everything is under control; there is no need to worry—also performs an affective function. The staff gives Noguchi permission to be absent without imagining the studio collapsing. It becomes a structure of continuity across travel.

This model has precedents in the family archive. Leonie gathered photographs, preserved sculptures, managed debts, sent documents, calculated freight, and maintained addresses while the young artist travelled.[93] The professional staff of the 1980s institutionalizes a function once supplied domestically.

5.6 The empty studio and the crowded career

Noguchi's desire for an empty or minimally staffed studio must be distinguished from the crowdedness of his career. His letters repeatedly show multiple projects moving in parallel: Lever House, Akari, Hiroshima, Pomona, a new studio, political difficulties, travel, and exhibitions appear in a single page. In 1980 he tells Lannan he is 'too busy for my own good', caught among Whitney, Pace, Emmerich, Bologna, Los Angeles, Miami, and the wish

[92] Staff memorandum to Isamu Noguchi, 15 September 1983, INFGM, MS_COR_170_002_original_1.pdf, with enclosures.

[93] Leonie Gilmour correspondence, especially MS_COR_375_013_original_1.pdf, MS_COR_408_005_original_1.pdf, MS_COR_408_006_original_1.pdf, and MS_COR_375_002_original_1.pdf.

to return to Japan for 'some quiet work'.[94] The public sees exceptional energy; the artist experiences overload.

Multiplicity can sustain movement. In the 1987 interview Noguchi confirms that he works on many things "all at once" and that diversity supplies energy.[95] Yet simultaneous activity also divides attention and delays projects. Lannan fears that the Miami commission has 'torpedoed' the smaller sculpture garden at Palm Beach.[96] The same system that protects the artist from fixation can produce unfinished obligations.

The empty studio therefore functions as a counterweight to the crowded network. It is the place where the artist can re-establish direct relation with material after the dispersal of public life.

Japan often occupies this role in the correspondence. It is not a place of inactivity but of concentrated work. The movement between New York and Japan can be understood as an oscillation between network and material, exposure and withdrawal, public multiplicity and quiet focus.

5.7 Generative openness and authorial closure

Noguchi's studio psychology is best understood as sequentially biphasic. During discovery, he accepts alteration. After discovery, he may insist upon integrity.

The 1986 letter concerning the *Shin Kenchiku* essay asks that the text be printed without changes.[97] The demand becomes intelligible when compared with earlier examples in which Noguchi revised drafts, accepted Entenza's editorial suggestions, or allowed materials to redirect a project. The difference is temporal. A text still in formation is open; a text he regards as achieved is no longer available for collaborative rewriting.

The same sequence applies to material. The stone remains open while being worked and can correct the sculptor. Once the act has reached its final responsibility, the irreversibility of cutting becomes part of the work's truth. In the preface to *Essays and Conversations*, Noguchi describes the dialogue between chance and non-chance, error and non-error, and the primordial openness of stone before its final consecration.[98] The word 'consecration' marks a threshold.

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[94] Isamu Noguchi to J. Patrick Lannan, 2 January 1980, INFGM, MS_COR_277_014_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

[95] Isamu Noguchi, interview with Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, 22 February 1987, INFGM, MS_WRI_074_003_original_1.pdf.

[96] J. Patrick Lannan to Isamu Noguchi, 18 August 1980, INFGM, MS_COR_277_016_original_1.pdf.

[97] Noguchi to Yamamoto, MS_COR_191_029_original_1.pdf.

[98] Isamu Noguchi, collected writings and conversations, INFGM, MS_WRI_094_001_original_1.pdf, relevant preface pages.

This model also explains his concern with reproduction. A copy may preserve contour while ignoring the sequence through which the original acquired meaning. A reconstruction is acceptable when the operation can be authentically transmitted; an indiscriminate bronze translation is not.

5.8 Maintenance, property, and delegated care

The studio is not only cognition and making. It is also an ageing building. The undated family fragment concerning a possible Village property lists taxes, mortgage, insurance, heating, plumbing, roof, pavement, and the need for a resident manager during Noguchi's long absences.[99] The permanent studio generates a new dependence upon maintenance.

This practical field matters to the psychology of place. A stable centre can become burden if it demands continuous presence from an artist whose method requires travel. The solution is delegated care. The building must remain operative without becoming a prison.

Noguchi's own museum eventually makes this tension institutional. It must preserve and display work, yet it should remain an environment rather than a mausoleum. The economic mechanisms around editions, galleries, and the Foundation are partly directed towards sustaining that living centre.[100] The studio expands into legacy without abandoning the demand for experiential arrangement.

5.9 Solitude, relation, and non-dominant authorship

The chapter's evidence allows a more precise definition of Noguchi's solitude. It is not withdrawal from relation; it is the periodic reduction of relation required to hear material, think freely, and avoid indefinite obligation. The studio must alternate between solitude and permeability.

His authorship is correspondingly non-dominant but selective. He can make a stage set whose success lies in supporting Graham rather than claiming attention. He can design a garden that nature will later transform. He can allow engineers and craftsmen to solve problems. Yet he remains intensely protective of the moments at which the relation could become another work entirely.

The studio is the apparatus that regulates these crossings.

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[99] Probable Leonie Gilmour to Isamu Noguchi, MS_COR_408_009_original_1.pdf.

[100] Isamu Noguchi to J. Patrick Lannan, 13 May 1983, INFGM, MS_COR_277_033_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

Chapter 6. Correspondence as cognitive, productive, regulatory, and defensive apparatus

6.1 Beyond the letter as commentary

Art-historical use of correspondence often follows a familiar pattern: a letter is cited to confirm the date, title, subject, intention, or reception of a work. Such evidence remains valuable. Noguchi's archive, however, demands a broader conception. The letter frequently participates in the work's becoming.

The distinction may be stated simply. Commentary occurs when a letter speaks about a work. Operation occurs when a letter changes the conditions under which the work can exist. The latter includes the transmission of material samples, photographs, tools, dimensions, prices, contracts, routes, names, requests, diagrams, and emotional or institutional decisions.

This chapter identifies four overlapping functions: cognitive, productive, regulatory, and defensive. No single letter must belong to only one. The importance lies in tracing documentary chains.

6.2 Correspondence as cognitive tool

Noguchi states in a 1978 interview that he needs conversation, a meeting of minds, and cannot simply speak continuously until a finished formulation emerges.[101] The interlocutor supplies resistance analogous to material. A question makes certain assumptions visible; a reply forces a distinction; a disagreement exposes the stakes of a term.

Saburo Hasegawa's letters are exemplary. They offer Noguchi a living field of haiku, calligraphy, ink, Zen, water, simplicity, peace, everyday observation, and the relation between material and spiritual progress.[102] We cannot assign later works directly to these letters without intermediate evidence. We can nevertheless demonstrate that the correspondence supplied concepts and sensibilities that entered the shared intellectual space of the two artists.

The relation is reciprocal. Hasegawa credits Noguchi with giving him courage to continue and with encouraging his abstract ink work. Noguchi provides paper, contact with international modernism, and professional recognition. The correspondence is a shared studio in which each artist's direction is clarified through the other.

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[101] Noguchi, interview of 27 August 1978, MS_WRI_049_004_original_1.pdf.

[102] Saburo Hasegawa to Isamu Noguchi, 9 September 1950, MS_COR_040_004_original_1.pdf; 12 January 1951, MS_COR_043_008_original_1.pdf; 18 January 1951, MS_COR_043_009_original_1.pdf.

The Fuller correspondence performs another cognitive function. In 1930 Fuller constructs Noguchi as an artist of universal expansion and condenses their philosophical conversation into a telegram of departure.[103] The telegram reflects an identity to the young sculptor. Decades before Noguchi publicly described himself as universal or belonging nowhere and everywhere, a significant interlocutor had already offered that language.

The causal effect cannot be proved. The relational fact can: artistic identity is partly produced by images of the self returned by trusted others.

6.3 The germinal letter

A germinal letter contains the first recoverable formulation of a possible work or relation. It may not lead to realization. Its value lies in revealing the anatomy of possibility.

The proposed head of Gandhi is one such case. Noguchi, delayed at Harbin, considers returning through India and modelling Gandhi if an intermediary can arrange access.[104] The proposal joins itinerary, subject, medium, and contact. No surviving work in the current corpus completes the chain. The letter preserves an unrealized branch of the career.

The 1940 letter to Nelson Rockefeller is germinal at a broader scale. Noguchi presents the playground as sculpture and ground contouring, applicable to parks and zoos, and asks how art might serve interracial understanding during crisis.[105] The letter does not generate one named playground, but formulates the social and environmental problem that subsequent projects pursue.

A germ can also be relational. In June 1930 Ailes supplies Martha Graham's address at the Cornish School and urges Noguchi to write; in December Noguchi asks that Martha be told he hopes they may do something together.[106] Five years precede *Frontier*. The correspondence does not contain the set, but it preserves the latent relation from which sets will later emerge.

6.4 Correspondence as carrier of material and gesture

The letter may transport something more than words. The Peking lantern letter has already shown text, diagram, object, and recipient acting together. Gene Owens sends tools

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[103] Buckminster Fuller to Isamu Noguchi, draft, typescript, and Western Union telegram, 14–15 April 1930, INFGM, MS_COR_254_004_original_1.pdf, MS_COR_254_005_original_1.pdf, and MS_COR_254_006_original_1.pdf; Fuller to Noguchi, 17 April 1930, MS_COR_254_007_original_1.pdf.

[104] Noguchi to Leonie Gilmour, 30 July 1930, MS_COR_372_010_original_1.pdf.

[105] Isamu Noguchi to Nelson Rockefeller, 17 December 1940, INFGM, MS_COR_312_001_original_1.pdf, p. 1.

[106] Ailes Gilmour to Isamu Noguchi, 6 June 1930, MS_COR_418_004_original_1.pdf; Noguchi to Ailes, 29 December 1930, MS_COR_404_011_original_1.pdf.

and describes the plough-like gesture required to use them.[107] A correspondent called 'Harry' describes Corite, sends a sample panel, and asks Noguchi to test its sculptural properties.[108] Material enters the studio first as description and then as substance.

This sequence reveals an important distinction. A material name does not define its artistic value. The sample must be handled, cut, weighted, and judged. The letter initiates an experiment rather than concluding it.

The same applies to photographs. An image can be a latent analogy, as in Owens's riverbed; an operative acquisition tool, as in the Lannan jasper; a fundraising device, as in the UNESCO Garden; or a potentially falsifying second sculpture, as in Kamekura's retouching proposals. Correspondence is the channel through which the image acquires one of these functions.

6.5 Correspondence as production network

The Akari files show the letter transformed into industrial infrastructure. Lightolier, Edison Price, Damon Giffard, Robert Bender, Jack McKeown, Ichikawa, Ozeki, Tokai Die Cast, and distributors discuss handmade paper, substitutes, supports, patents, wholesale prices, duties, samples, product defects, naming, and territories.[109] The object becomes a system.

Noguchi's role is not to execute every transaction. He must decide where circulation can occur without losing material identity or legal control. He describes himself as 'no business man', yet the same letter shows clear strategic understanding: premature sales through uncoordinated channels could damage wholesale distribution, and a limited number of models might be necessary to establish the market.[110] The statement describes discomfort with business organization, not ignorance of its consequences.

The production network also changes the psychology of error. A defect in one handmade shade becomes a replicated reputational problem when multiplied by a thousand.

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[107] Owens to Noguchi, 11 January 1963, MS_COR_304_008_original_1.pdf.

[108] 'Harry' to Isamu Noguchi, 26 August 1943, INFGM, MS_COR_032_003_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

[109] Key files include Lightolier to Noguchi, 17 November 1952, MS_COR_044_001_original_1.pdf; Edison Price to Noguchi, 20 November 1952, MS_COR_044_002_original_1.pdf; Damon Giffard to Noguchi, 25 November 1952, MS_COR_044_008_original_1.pdf; Robert J. Bender to Noguchi, 2 February 1953, MS_COR_045_003_original_1.pdf; Jack McKeown to Noguchi, 28 February 1953, MS_COR_046_002_original_1.pdf; Noguchi to McKeown, probable March 1953, MS_COR_046_005_original_1.pdf; Y. Ichikawa to Noguchi, 6 February 1953, MS_COR_272_002_original_1.pdf.

[110] Noguchi to McKeown, MS_COR_046_005_original_1.pdf.

The name Akari becomes a guarantee attached to material execution.[111] Serial production magnifies small failures.

6.6 Correspondence as temporal coordination

Large projects require the alignment of incompatible times: quarry extraction, architectural approval, artist travel, fabrication, shipping, planting, exhibition, and public patience. Letters make those temporalities visible and attempt to synchronize them.

The Lever House dossier is paradigmatic. Noguchi's material research requires European travel and potentially a year of quarry preparation. Bunshaft warns that Lever Brothers may lose interest if the artist does not return quickly.[112] Geological and corporate times are misaligned.

Noguchi responds by converting waiting into research. 'This waiting gets me', he writes, then seeks further information on granite.[113] The letter reveals the psychological difficulty of time without direction and the strategy by which he restores direction.

The Gene Owens correspondence similarly treats time as a material to be designed. Noguchi coordinates Rome, Israel, Japan, Yale, exhibitions, salaries, travel, and possible start dates.[114] Collaboration becomes possible only where calendars intersect.

6.7 Correspondence as affective regulation

Noguchi's letters do not often offer unmediated confession, but they do show how relations manage affect. Entenza helps remove personal venom from a public text. Lannan responds to institutional rejection without withdrawing support. The studio staff reassures Noguchi during absence. Fuller's telegram accompanies departure with an image of future expansion. These are not therapeutic relations in a clinical sense; they are structures that convert feeling into continued action.

The 6 March 1953 letter to Entenza is especially direct. Noguchi describes being overwhelmed by world events and asks for a few reassuring words.[115] The same letter coordinates studio, Lever, Akari, Hiroshima, Pomona, and political risk. The request for reassurance appears within an intensely operational document. Affect and work are not separate zones.

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[111] Unidentified correspondent to Noguchi on Akari defects, incomplete letter, INFGM, MS_COR_047_003_original_1.pdf, p. 2 only.

[112] Noguchi to Bunshaft, 30 July and 5 September 1953, MS_COR_340_014_original_1.pdf and MS_COR_340_015_original_1.pdf; Bunshaft to Noguchi, 17 September 1953, MS_COR_340_016_original_1.pdf.

[113] Noguchi to Bunshaft, 5 September 1953, MS_COR_340_015_original_1.pdf.

[114] Noguchi to Owens, 10 September 1962, MS_COR_304_006_original_1.pdf.

[115] Noguchi to Entenza, MS_COR_045_011_original_1.pdf.

The Lannan correspondence shows another form. After a price misunderstanding, Noguchi explains in detail the distinction between personal property, Foundation ownership, Gemini editions, dealer discounts, and the future museum.[116] Precision repairs the relation. The emotional function of the letter is achieved through economic clarity.

6.8 Correspondence as defensive infrastructure

The passport statement, birth certificate, visa letters, and legal memoranda demonstrate that correspondence can preserve the conditions of practice against administrative restriction. In 1927 Leonie sends Noguchi his birth certificate and tells him to keep it among his documents because it may be necessary for travel and return.[117] In 1953 Noguchi assembles an archive to defend his passport. The line between studio and bureaucracy is continuous.

The 1953 statement is particularly revealing because Noguchi transforms prior correspondence into evidence of moral continuity. The archive is no longer passive memory; it is a defensive apparatus capable of producing a legal consequence.

A related fragment turns his creative network into an object of political classification. Encounters with Eames, Entenza, Chaplin, Fuller, Graham, Kline, and others must be explained within the logic of suspicion.[118] Creative curiosity is translated into association; association risks being treated as affiliation.

The psychological stake is high. Noguchi's practice depends upon crossing groups and geographies. Surveillance threatens to redefine permeability as guilt.

6.9 Lost letters and operative absence

An archive of correspondence is necessarily incomplete. The missing letter is not always silent if its effects survive in replies.

The Rothschild room dossier refers to letters from Noguchi sent from Hong Kong or Japan, one of which contained instructions on payment and conveyed a sadness perceived by Craig Barton.[119] The originals are absent, but the replies record actions: project simplification, deposit of money, and concern for the artist.

Hasegawa's letter of 12 January 1951 thanks Noguchi for a letter of 1 January and attributes encouragement to him. The outgoing letter is missing; its effect is present in

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[116] Noguchi to Lannan, 13 May 1983, MS_COR_277_033_original_1.pdf.

[117] Leonie Gilmour to Isamu Noguchi, 28 July 1927, INFGM, MS_COR_408_006_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

[118] Isamu Noguchi, undated autobiographical-defensive fragment, probably 1953, INFGM, MS_COR_340_029_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

[119] Craig Barton to Isamu Noguchi, 29 January and 5 May 1954, INFGM, MS_COR_262_002_original_1.pdf and MS_COR_262_004_original_1.pdf.

Hasegawa's new ink work.[120] Ailes's statement 'You told us you were going into the abstract' preserves another absent communication.

The correct method is not to invent the missing text, but to record a 'letter lost but operative'. One may establish its existence, date, recipient, and consequences without pretending to recover its wording.

6.10 Correspondence as the archive of unbuilt form

Some works exist most completely in letters because they were never realized. The Gandhi head, Lever House intervention, Expo '70 proposal, and numerous playgrounds belong to this category. Their forms may survive as models or drawings, but correspondence reveals the social and psychological process of non-realization.

An unbuilt work should not be treated as incomplete evidence of an object. It is evidence of a proposition confronting conditions. Failure may reveal more about Noguchi's method than a smooth realization because the letters record each threshold at which possibility meets resistance.

The archive thus enlarges the ontology of sculpture. A proposal can be sculptural in the way it organizes relations, even if it never becomes a permanent object. Noguchi himself repeatedly insists that the artist's function is to propose and that ideas may continue through others even when not realized by the originator.[121] Correspondence is one of the media through which such propositions remain active.

6.11 A general model

The documentary evidence permits a general model of correspondence as studio:

1. a situation is defined or received;
2. the letter transforms diffuse circumstance into a problem;
3. information, material, image, or contact enters the network;
4. roles and temporalities are negotiated;
5. the proposal is tested against material and institution;
6. the result is realized, modified, suspended, or abandoned;
7. later correspondence interprets and potentially reactivates it.

The model is not universal in every detail. Its value lies in making visible the work performed by communication. The letter is neither secondary illustration nor pure interior expression. It is an operative medium within Noguchi's expanded sculptural practice.

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[120] Saburo Hasegawa to Isamu Noguchi, 12 January 1951, MS_COR_043_008_original_1.pdf.
[121] Noguchi, Riverside Playground interview, MS_WRI_047_001_original_1.pdf.

Chapter 7. Social sculpture: playgrounds, Poston, and the failure of democratic space

7.1 The playground before Poston

The social turn in Noguchi's work did not begin with internment. His letter to Nelson Rockefeller of 17 December 1940 describes the playground as sculpture and as the contouring of ground, applicable to parks, zoos, and municipal environments.[122] He asks how art might contribute to interracial understanding and how he might function most effectively as an artist within a developing crisis.

This document is crucial because it prevents a causal narrative in which Poston alone creates Noguchi's interest in social space. By 1940 he had already moved beyond the autonomous object towards a behavioural field. The playground's material is not merely earth; it is the relation between shaped ground and the actions of children.

Ground contouring does not prescribe one iconographic meaning. It establishes slopes, depressions, edges, and routes that invite exploration. The child is neither spectator nor depicted subject. The child completes the work through use.

The possibility of interracial understanding must be treated as a hypothesis rather than an achieved result. Noguchi does not explain in the letter how formal features overcome prejudice. The likely mechanism lies in shared action before ideological classification: children of different backgrounds occupy a field that encourages common movement, risk, negotiation, and invention. The work would operate socially through behaviour rather than representation.

This is an early instance of Noguchi's broader innovation. Sculpture becomes environmental pedagogy. It does not tell the public what to think; it constructs conditions within which different relations can be practised.

7.2 Crisis, organization, and the demand for clarity

The letters to Archibald MacLeish of February 1942 reveal Noguchi responding to political crisis through organization. He asks for a clear federal policy, local representatives, information, education, and work. He considers indefinite uncertainty psychologically destructive, even suggesting that a clearly announced plan would be less damaging than the

[122] Isamu Noguchi to Nelson Rockefeller, 17 December 1940, INFGM, MS_COR_312_001_original_1.pdf, p. 1.

present ambiguity.[123] The historical and moral injustice of mass removal is not diminished by recognizing this psychological structure. Noguchi seeks an actionable field.

Six days later he describes meetings on defence housing and proposals for an interdepartmental office capable of countering hysteria and reassuring Japanese Americans regarding democracy.[124] The artist behaves as organizer, mediator, and planner.

The parallel with his sculptural method is striking but must remain analogical. In both contexts, Noguchi responds to diffuse threat by defining boundaries, functions, and routes of communication. He does not seek control for its own sake; he seeks enough structure to restore agency.

The documents also reveal the ambivalence of this strategy. Noguchi is willing to imagine strong governmental control of information in order to defend democratic morale. Freedom is pursued through organization. This tension recurs in his environments: open behaviour is made possible by designed limits.

7.3 The Nisei Mobilization and the one-man organization

In the sworn passport declaration of 1953, Noguchi describes the Nisei Writers and Artists Mobilization for Democracy as almost entirely his own initiative and even as a 'one-man affair'.[125] The statement is retrospective and defensive, intended to demonstrate loyalty rather than provide neutral institutional history. Yet it exposes a recurring organizational preference.

Noguchi creates temporary structures around a problem, assumes responsibility, permits participation, but retains control of name and direction. The organization disappears when he leaves California. It resembles the episodic studio: activated by need, concentrated around the author, and dissolved when its function changes.

The phrase does not prove authoritarian personality. It describes a rapid, under-resourced initiative in which Noguchi felt personally responsible for accuracy and public representation. The psychological pattern is centrality with selective delegation.

Morale, in his account, is an actionable material. False reports and racialized propaganda deform collective perception; writing and radio may counter them. Communication becomes an environment in which belonging and agency are produced or destroyed.

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[123] Isamu Noguchi to Archibald MacLeish, 13 February 1942, INFGM, MS_COR_288_010_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

[124] Isamu Noguchi to Archibald MacLeish, 19 February 1942, INFGM, MS_COR_288_009_original_1.pdf, p. 1.

[125] Noguchi to Ruth B. Shipley, 6 April 1953, MS_COR_339_005_original_1.pdf.

7.4 Entering Poston: service, identification, and misrecognition

Noguchi's voluntary entry into Poston has often been interpreted as an attempt to identify with Japanese Americans and to apply art to communal need. The 1953 passport statement presents the decision as patriotic service encouraged by John Collier. The contemporary letters and later manuscript, however, reveal a more complicated process.

In *I Become a Nisei*, Noguchi describes the hope of discovering a meaningful relation with the Nisei and the persistence of unreality and non-belonging.[126] He is neither fully identified with the administration nor immediately accepted as representative of the imprisoned community. The attempt at solidarity exposes difference rather than erasing it.

Robert J. Maeda's 1994 study assembles important primary citations from Noguchi and War Relocation Authority materials, including the letter describing Poston as a dreamlike situation in which history has fled, time has stopped, and neither time nor capacity appears to possess value.[127] The formulation identifies the core psychological injury of Poston: not confinement alone, but the severing of capacity from consequence.

Noguchi's ordinary creative cycle depends upon the ability to transform a problem through action. At Poston the cycle breaks. Proposals enter bureaucracy and cease to produce material change.

7.5 Poston as broken studio

The phrase 'broken studio' describes an environment in which tools, skills, and plans cannot enter a productive relation. Noguchi proposed recreation, arts, crafts, adobe production, democratic participation, and a centre built and controlled by internees. According to the documents assembled by Maeda, the WRA refused sufficient labour or funding, and the proposal did not become operative.[128] The institution obstructed precisely the autonomy the project intended to foster.

The failure is not only practical. It deprives time of developmental structure. In a functioning studio, effort alters matter. At Poston, effort is absorbed by administration. The artist experiences capacity as useless.

This helps explain the intensity of his desire to leave. In the July 1942 letter to John Collier, as cited by Maeda, Noguchi says he has exhausted useful administrative work, found

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[126] Noguchi, *I Become a Nisei*, MS_WRI_005_001_original_1.pdf.

[127] Robert J. Maeda, «Isamu Noguchi: 5-7-A, Poston, Arizona», *Amerasia Journal* 20, no. 2 (1994), 61–76; uploaded as INFGM, MS_COR_332_001_original_1.pdf. The original letters cited by Maeda must be preferred when recovered.

[128] Maeda, «Isamu Noguchi: 5-7-A», with references to Noguchi's memoranda and WRA files.

neither the expected relation with the Nisei nor a new function, and wishes to be released. The heat matters, but the deeper problem is the loss of an operative role.

The broken studio is therefore the negative image of Noguchi's later environments. A successful playground or garden permits bodies to act and perceive consequences. Poston organizes bodies while rendering their agency largely symbolic.

7.6 Work, morale, and the construction of dignity

Noguchi's letters before and during Poston treat work as more than economic employment. Work gives the individual a role, establishes relation with community, and converts passivity into visible contribution. In the February 1942 correspondence, he argues that Nisei morale would improve if people excluded from military service were given meaningful defence work.[129] In *I Become a Nisei*, art, woodwork, gardens, music, and theatre are imagined as means of confidence and emancipation.

This conception has important consequences for the psychology of his later public work. Noguchi does not merely provide aesthetically improved spaces. He imagines environments in which people become agents. A playground, unlike a monument, requires active use. A plaza can transform passive passage into orientation and encounter. An interactive pavilion makes the visitor choose.

The social ambition is therefore procedural. Dignity is produced by action that has consequence.

The failure at Poston shows the dependence of this ambition upon governance. Design cannot emancipate when the institution controlling labour and property refuses participation. Noguchi's later insistence upon controlling the field surrounding a sculpture may partly be understood as historical recognition that formal intention is powerless without authority over conditions.

7.7 The psychological cost of unsuccessful social design

Noguchi's experience of rejection is often narrated through resilience. The archive shows a more complex cycle. Repeated failures produce caution, fear, and altered collaborative strategies.

In the Riverside Playground interview, Noguchi admits that earlier playground rejections made him afraid to undertake another alone; he sought an architect who might secure

[129] Noguchi to MacLeish, 13 February 1942, MS_COR_288_010_original_1.pdf.

realization.[130] Persistence therefore includes the memory of injury. It changes the architecture of collaboration.

The cycle may be represented as:

1. ambitious proposal;
2. institutional resistance;
3. revision and negotiation;
4. near-realization;
5. cancellation;
6. hurt and withdrawal;
7. later reactivation in another form.

This is not invulnerability. It is a capacity to carry the proposal forward despite altered confidence.

Poston is the most extreme early version because the failure involves not only an object but the artist's intended social role. Noguchi enters to serve and discovers that the environment denies the function he has imagined.

7.8 The playground and childhood memory

In 1978 Noguchi explicitly relates his interest in young children to a period in his own childhood when he had no place to go.[131] This statement authorises a cautious hypothesis: the playground may transform a remembered lack of spatial possibility into an environment of exploration for others.

The evidence does not justify reducing every playground to compensation. Noguchi's projects are also shaped by modern urbanism, public health, sculpture, ground form, politics, and institutional opportunity. The childhood memory becomes one motive within a broader field.

The psychologically significant operation is not self-expression but transformation. A private experience of spatial deprivation becomes a public proposition. The artist does not represent the deprived child; he constructs a place in which childhood may be enacted differently.

This is characteristic of Noguchi's non-dominant authorship. The environment's success lies in other people's action.

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[130] Noguchi, Riverside Playground interview, MS_WRI_047_001_original_1.pdf.
[131] Ibid.

7.9 From Poston to environmental practice

It would be historically rash to claim a direct causal line from Poston to every later garden or public space. The interest in playgrounds predates internment, and Noguchi's environmental thinking draws upon theatre, travel, landscape, Brancusi, Fuller, and numerous projects.

Poston nevertheless intensifies several questions:

- what makes a place inhabitable rather than merely occupied;
- how work produces dignity;
- how institutional control blocks participation;
- how identity is spatially organized;
- how a community can act within imposed boundaries;
- how planning may become an instrument of either agency or confinement.

The later work repeatedly returns to these questions in forms that do not illustrate the camp but respond to its broken relations.

7.10 Social sculpture as an ethical expansion of form

Noguchi's social sculpture should not be defined only by public commission. It is the attempt to make formal decisions answerable to behaviour, access, use, and community. This expansion creates new vulnerabilities. The artist becomes dependent upon architects, governments, budgets, safety codes, and political approval. The work can be cancelled after years of revision.

Yet this vulnerability is part of the innovation. Sculpture leaves the protected autonomy of the object and enters the contested field of life.

Chapter 8. Stage as psychological laboratory: Martha Graham, topology, wear, and reconstruction

8.1 A collaboration before the first set

The Noguchi–Graham collaboration is often dated from *Frontier* in 1935. The correspondence shows a longer prehistory. Ailes Gilmour supplied Martha Graham's address at the Cornish School in June 1930 and urged Noguchi to write.[132] In December, from Peking, Noguchi asked that Martha be told he hoped they might do something together.[133] The form was not yet defined. The relation existed in latency.

This distinction matters. Collaboration is not born at the moment an object is designed. It begins through access, desire, shared attention, and the preservation of possibility. The correspondence is part of the studio because it keeps the relation available until a work can activate it.

Noguchi later recalled knowing Graham from 1926, making heads of her, attending her classes, and observing her work before the first set.[134] The early letters give contemporary evidence that the relationship remained intentionally open.

8.2 'You have helped me to see'

Martha Graham's letter of 27 February 1944 is the strongest contemporary testimony to Noguchi's effect upon another artist's perception. She rejects the adequacy of a painted drop for a new work because it is not an integral part of the piece, says Noguchi has "spoiled me utterly", and thanks him for helping her to see.[135] The sculptor changes the criterion by which she judges the stage.

Noguchi's contribution is not simply a superior object. He makes certain insufficiencies visible. After working with him, Graham can no longer accept a backdrop that illustrates rather than participates.

This is perceptual catalysis. The collaborator's field of possibility is enlarged, and previous conventions become inadequate.

The letter also demonstrates the operative function of correspondence. A problem has arisen during production; Graham formulates it and calls Noguchi into the work. The letter is a threshold between dissatisfaction and spatial invention.

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[132] Ailes Gilmour to Isamu Noguchi, 6 June 1930, MS_COR_418_004_original_1.pdf.
[133] Noguchi to Ailes, 29 December 1930, MS_COR_404_011_original_1.pdf.
[134] Noguchi, 1978 interview on Martha Graham, MS_WRI_049_008_original_1.pdf and related files.
[135] Martha Graham to Isamu Noguchi, 27 February 1944, MS_COR_261_001_original_1.pdf.

8.3 Stage as bounded world

Noguchi later described the stage as a hypothetical environment in which action can concentrate because irrelevant elements are excluded.[136] The stage teaches him how a bounded field intensifies experience.

This lesson extends beyond theatre. The garden wall, plaza edge, and playground contour all establish conditions within which behaviour becomes legible. The stage is therefore an early laboratory for environmental sculpture.

Its limits are not merely architectural. Time is bounded by performance; light isolates; music organizes duration; dancers repeatedly test the relation between body and object. The set must survive physical use while remaining visually active.

8.4 The topologies of 1944–48

Programmes from the 1940s reveal recurring psychological topologies.

Appalachian Spring builds a house and community. *Wilderness Stair* uses rock and ladder to organize elevation, danger, and desire. *Errand into the Maze* externalises a journey into fear through a minimal spatial device. *Cave of the Heart* encloses possessive and destructive emotion. *Herodiade* stages waiting and self-scrutiny through a mirror.[137] These are not simply symbols. Each topology demands a form of bodily action.

The house frames belonging and future. The stair redistributes weight and height. The labyrinth impedes and entangles. The cave restricts and concentrates. The mirror returns vision to the self. Psychology is spatialized through operations.

The programmes do not tell us which decisions belong to Graham, Noguchi, composers, costumiers, or lighting designers. They document the public field in which collaboration became legible. Authorial attribution must remain layered.

8.5 Minimal form and maximum psychological effect

Noguchi's later explanation of *Errand into the Maze* emphasizes that the labyrinth could be produced by a rope and a minimal floor element. The spectator mentally constructs the maze and becomes entangled with the dancer.[138] The reduction of object does not reduce experience. It transfers part of the construction to the viewer.

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[136] Noguchi, 1976 sculpture conference, MS_WRI_041_001_original_1.pdf.

[137] Programmes: Library of Congress, 31 October 1944, MS_DAN_MG_001_002_original_1.pdf; American Dance Festival, August 1948, MS_DAN_MG_001_010_original_1.pdf; Playbill, May 1953, MS_DAN_MG_003_008_original_1.pdf.

[138] Noguchi, 1976 conference, MS_WRI_041_001_original_1.pdf.

This is a central innovation. Rather than represent a labyrinth through elaborate scenery, Noguchi establishes a relation capable of making the labyrinth psychologically present. The work becomes an apparatus for projection.

The same principle governs the space 'between' dancer and object. In the 1978 interview, Noguchi insists that sets cannot be understood separately from bodies; the forms move relationally because dancers move around and through them.[139] The object's apparent immobility is activated by another body.

8.6 The success of invisibility

Noguchi says that a set may succeed by becoming almost invisible as an autonomous entity if it intensifies the dance.[140] This is non-dominant authorship in its clearest form.

The sculptor's ego does not disappear. Considerable judgement is required to make a form that can support another action without becoming decorative or competitive. The set must be present enough to alter movement and absent enough not to arrest attention upon itself.

This principle extends to gardens and public spaces. A successful environment may be remembered less as an object than as a changed experience of movement, light, or relation.

8.7 The set as lived object

By 1953, several Graham sets had entered repertory. Programmes document their repeated use across theatres and changing casts.[141] Each performance adds transport, handling, repair, and bodily contact.

The set therefore acquires a biography. Its material state is not reducible to the original design. A scratch may record a repeated grip; a deformation may indicate pressure; a repair may reveal adaptation to a different stage.

This accumulated history becomes central in the 1982 letter opposing indiscriminate bronze reproduction. Noguchi argues that wear and minor damage possess relevance because they record creative experience, whereas bronze may kill the life in which the objects participated.[142] The surface is an embodied archive.

8.8 Bronze, prestige, and ontological change

Noguchi's criticism of bronze is not a purist rejection. He questions the automatic elevation of bronze over wood and the market's tendency to recognize a cast object as

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[139] Noguchi, interview of 4 September 1978, MS_WRI_049_008_original_1.pdf.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Martha Graham Playbill, Alvin Theatre, May 1953, MS_DAN_MG_003_008_original_1.pdf.
[142] Noguchi to Graham, 22 July 1982, MS_COR_426_002_original_1.pdf.

'sculpture'. The change of material alters weight, movement, transportability, and relation to the body.

A set designed to be carried or worn cannot be translated without consequence. The bronze copy may preserve contour while losing function. It becomes another ontology: object rather than event.

The 1984 letter makes the distinction explicit by evaluating each element separately.[143] Chairs, lyre, horse, serpents, jewellery, headdresses, pins, and entire sets receive different recommendations. Material choice follows functional identity.

Noguchi's position is therefore analytical rather than ideological. Bronze is appropriate where it sustains the element's autonomy; inappropriate where it extinguishes the relation that made the element meaningful.

8.9 Reconstruction and transmitted authenticity

For *Embattled Garden*, Noguchi proposes an exact reconstruction by two young sculptors while he is present to instruct them.[144] This apparently contradicts the value assigned to original wear. In fact it reveals a more sophisticated theory of authenticity.

An original object may preserve unique material history. A reconstruction cannot reproduce that history. It can nevertheless preserve operational truth if material, proportion, structure, method, and instruction are transmitted accurately.

Authenticity is therefore plural:

- **historical authenticity** resides in the used object;
- **operational authenticity** resides in correct reconstruction;
- **formal continuity** may be preserved by casting;
- **performative authenticity** requires renewed relation with bodies, light, and time.

No single category is sufficient.

8.10 Museum as theatre

Noguchi's ideal museum for the Graham sets would rotate objects and use changing light and music, becoming 'a kind of theater itself'.[145] The museum should not pretend that stage objects are self-sufficient sculpture. It should construct a new event capable of recalling their relational origin.

This proposal belongs to Noguchi's broader museum thinking. His own museum does not present works as isolated specimens on neutral walls. It arranges changing relations

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[143] Noguchi to Graham and Ron Protas, 27 February 1984, MS_COR_427_001_original_1.pdf.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Noguchi to Graham, 22 July 1982, MS_COR_426_002_original_1.pdf.

among stone, light, garden, architecture, and movement. The museum is a field of perception.

The stage set debate thus becomes central to understanding his institutional innovation. Preservation must not become immobilization.

8.11 The body as co-author

A scenography acquires meaning through the dancer's use. The dancer is not simply the performer of Graham's choreography before Noguchi's sculpture. The dancer tests the object, discovers its affordances, and leaves material traces.

This is a distributed authorship in which the work's final identity cannot be attributed to the initial designer alone. Yet Noguchi retains responsibility for constructing the conditions of that distribution.

The same logic applies to playground users, garden visitors, and domestic occupants. Noguchi's sculpture often becomes complete only when another body enters.

8.12 Stage and the innovation of environmental sculpture

The theatre provided Noguchi with a controlled scale at which to investigate problems later expanded into public environments:

- bounded field;
- moving body;
- activated void;
- obstacle and route;
- light and time;
- non-dominant object;
- repeated use;
- collaboration across disciplines.

The stage is not a subsidiary branch of the career. It is one of the principal laboratories through which Noguchi redefined sculpture as relation.

Chapter 9. Light, fold, and domestic space: Akari as distributed sculpture

9.1 Before Akari: the folding lantern as material memory

The Peking lantern letters of December 1930 provide an indispensable prehistory for Akari. Noguchi selected and sent folding lanterns, explained how their compressed structure should be opened, diagrammed the relation of rods and body, and later asked whether the object 'fits the house'.[146] The episode documents attention to transformation rather than to appearance alone.

The lantern exists in at least three states:

- compressed and transportable;
- expanded by the recipient's gesture;
- situated within domestic space.

This sequence anticipates the later Akari system without proving a direct causal line. The important continuity is operational: light structure, latent volume, user participation, and environmental fit.

The letter's diagram is equally important. Noguchi's writing becomes three-dimensional instruction. A remote body can reproduce the transformation because text and image preserve the sequence of gesture. This is a small but precise example of sculptural thought migrating into correspondence.

9.2 From object to system

Akari is often discussed as a successful fusion of Japanese craft and modern design. The correspondence reveals a more complex ontology. Akari is not one object but a system composed of:

- washi paper;
- bamboo or metal support;
- wire structure;
- electrical components;
- folding;
- names and numbers;
- patents;

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[146] Isamu Noguchi to Leonie Gilmour and Ailes Gilmour, 21 December 1930, MS_COR_372_011_original_1.pdf; Noguchi to Ailes Gilmour, 29 December 1930, MS_COR_404_011_original_1.pdf.

- samples;
- defect control;
- wholesalers;
- customs classifications;
- distributors;
- domestic users;
- the reputation attached to Noguchi's name.

The sculpture is distributed across these operations. A change in paper, support, duty, or retail strategy changes what Akari can become socially and perceptually.

The 1952–53 letters show Noguchi moving from the Lightolier contract towards new production and distribution arrangements. Lightolier had attempted mass-market pricing and cheaper materials, yet concluded that the audience actually attracted to the lamps might pay more for handmade Japanese paper.[147] The failure of cheaper substitution reveals that material identity and market identity cannot be separated.

Akari's innovation lies partly in this capacity to remain sculpture while entering everyday life. The work does not abandon aesthetic autonomy; it relocates it within use.

9.3 Material authenticity and industrial circulation

Noguchi was not opposed to industrial production. His 1936 manifesto explicitly advocated modern materials, economic methods, colour, experiment, and application to everyday life.[148] Akari extends that programme while complicating it through craft.

Handmade paper is not merely a nostalgic sign of Japan. It controls diffusion, texture, fragility, and the warmth of light. A cheaper substitute may preserve silhouette while destroying the quality of illumination. Material authenticity is therefore functional and perceptual, not simply national.

The correspondence with producers and distributors demonstrates a continual negotiation between scale and specificity. Large orders require standardization, but excessive standardization risks killing the qualities that make the object desirable. Noguchi must decide how many models can be introduced, which components can be produced where, and how to maintain attribution and quality.

147 William F. Blitzer, Lightolier, to Isamu Noguchi, 17 November 1952, MS_COR_044_001_original_1.pdf.

148 Noguchi, « What's the Matter with Sculpture? », MS_WRI_004_001_original_1.pdf.

This is a sculptural problem because the form's social life depends upon reproducibility. Akari exists precisely by being multiple. The challenge is to create multiplicity without reducing the work to anonymous commodity.

9.4 Naming, identity, and the market

Damon Giffard advises Noguchi to retain the Japanese name Akari for the American market because it will attract interest.[149] The recommendation exposes a tension between universal form and cultural branding.

The name carries meaning—light, illumination—but it also makes Japanese difference commercially legible. Noguchi's transnational identity becomes part of the object's market apparatus.

The correspondence does not show a simple rejection of this process. Akari's Japanese name remains central. The important question is how Noguchi uses a culturally specific term without allowing the work to become a picturesque token. The answer lies in the object's operation. Akari is not a decorative quotation of Japanese tradition; it is a reorganization of light, portability, and domestic space.

The name opens the market; the form exceeds the stereotype.

9.5 Patent, price, and authorial control

Robert Bender's letter confirms that Noguchi asked potential distributors to slow negotiations until patent protection was secured.[150] The delay is a form of authorial control before circulation.

Patents may seem external to art, but in Akari they protect the conditions under which the system can remain associated with Noguchi's design. Uncontrolled copies would not merely divert profit; they could alter materials, quality, and the social identity of the work.

Noguchi's insistence upon coordinated wholesale distribution shows the same concern. He understands that scattered sales before prices and territories are defined can compromise future arrangements.[151] His self-description as not a businessman is therefore a statement of role, not an absence of strategy.

Price participates in form. A very low price can require inferior paper; a high price can remove Akari from ordinary life. The project's social ambition depends upon maintaining a viable threshold.

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149 Damon Giffard to Isamu Noguchi, 25 November 1952, MS_COR_044_008_original_1.pdf.
150 Robert J. Bender to Isamu Noguchi, 2 February 1953, MS_COR_045_003_original_1.pdf.
151 Noguchi to McKeown, MS_COR_046_005_original_1.pdf.

9.6 Error at scale

The incomplete letter concerning defects in Akari shades identifies tiny holes, insufficient seams, and poor workmanship as threats to the entire name once multiplied through wholesale distribution.[152] The psychological and economic consequences of scale are clear.

In a unique sculpture, a small irregularity may be part of the object's history. In a serial system, the same irregularity can become repeated failure. The artist must distinguish productive variation from loss of quality.

Akari therefore requires a distributed form of attention. Noguchi cannot inspect every object. Producers, agents, and distributors must internalise criteria. Authorship becomes a standard transmitted through the network.

9.7 The user as co-executor

The folding structure means that the user participates in the work's completion. Akari is shipped compressed, opened, mounted, and placed. Its relation to the house depends upon the user's judgement.

This participation differs from the playground, but shares a principle: the work is not fully realized before use. The user does not alter Noguchi's design arbitrarily; the design incorporates an action that must be performed elsewhere.

The Peking lantern letter makes the historical depth of this principle visible. The recipient's hands are already part of the form in 1930.

9.8 Light and non-dominant authorship

Akari's material presence is deliberately light. It does not dominate the room as a monumental object. It modifies atmosphere, visibility, and the relation among other things.

This is non-dominant authorship in domestic form. The sculpture succeeds by enabling the house to be seen differently. Its effect may be more pervasive precisely because the object is less assertive.

Noguchi's refusal to reduce such work to 'design' reflects the seriousness with which he regarded ordinary form. A table or lamp can address fundamental relations of volume, space, touch, and use. The distinction between high sculpture and useful object becomes institutionally contingent.

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[152] Unidentified correspondent to Noguchi, incomplete letter on Akari quality, MS_COR_047_003_original_1.pdf.

The letter to J. B. Blunk exposes the pressure of that contingency. Noguchi paradoxically advises Blunk to remove 'sittability' if necessary to secure recognition as sculpture, even though his own practice repeatedly integrates use.[153] The contradiction shows that the border hardens when an institution threatens identity and dissolves when Noguchi controls the field.

9.9 Akari and the psychology of distributed sculpture

Akari is a particularly clear embodiment of Noguchi's relational autonomy. He requires craftsmen, agents, manufacturers, lawyers, dealers, and users. He cannot be self-sufficient. Yet he protects decisive relations: paper, structure, name, quality, patent, and experience of light.

The work's psychology lies in balancing accessibility and integrity. Akari must travel without becoming generic, multiply without losing attribution, and enter ordinary life without becoming merely decorative.

Its innovation is therefore not only formal. It is organizational.

9.10 Akari in the larger sculptural project

Akari links several themes that appear throughout the dissertation:

- *radicamento* and *decollo*: the object occupies a room but is almost weightless;
- centre and openness: light organizes space without enclosing it;
- material and technology: craft and electrical system coexist;
- author and user: form is completed in another person's house;
- memory and future: a traditional lantern becomes a modern distributed sculpture;
- identity and universality: Japanese naming accompanies international circulation.

Akari demonstrates that Noguchi's expanded sculpture can be intimate, repeatable, and ordinary without becoming conceptually minor.

[153] Noguchi to J. B. Blunk, 29 August 1966, MS_COR_226_001_original_1.pdf.

Chapter 10. Collaboration, patronage, and institutional ambivalence

10.1 Relational autonomy as the structure of collaboration

Noguchi's career cannot be understood through the myth of solitary authorship. Nor can it be reduced to collective production. The documents reveal relational autonomy: a practice sustained by other people yet organized around selective authorial judgement.

Different interlocutors perform different functions. Brancusi supplies technical and ethical method. Fuller reflects a universalist identity and offers systemic thinking. Graham provides bodily action and dramaturgical problems. Entenza mediates public language and opportunities. Bunshaft secures architectural fields. Sadao and Owens extend technical cognition. Lannan provides patronage and recognition. Segerstrom experiences and supports environmental transformation.

The psychological question is not whether Noguchi depends upon others. He plainly does. It is how he distinguishes generative dependence from threatening control.

10.2 Fuller as mirror and scaffolding

The 1930 Fuller correspondence is among the earliest sustained relational archives. Fuller stores Noguchi's works, promotes them to museums, introduces him to figures in Europe, seeks portrait commissions, and asks him to support Dymaxion.[154] The relation is reciprocal scaffolding.

Fuller also reflects an identity to the young Noguchi. The telegram of departure describes universal expansion, intuition, friendship, and future development. Noguchi receives a verbal image of himself as world artist before he publicly formulates that identity.

Later Fuller texts transmitted to Noguchi emphasize reforming environment rather than reforming man, doing more with less, comprehensive design, and global responsibility.[155] Their specific impact upon Expo '70 remains to be proved, but the conceptual proximity is historically significant.

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[154] Buckminster Fuller to Walter Heil and Henry Stanton, 2 April 1930, transmitted to Noguchi, MS_COR_254_001_original_1.pdf; Fuller to Noguchi, 4 April, 17 April, and 16 June 1930, MS_COR_254_002_original_1.pdf, MS_COR_254_007_original_1.pdf, and MS_COR_254_008_original_1.pdf.

[155] Buckminster Fuller, *What I Am Trying to Do*, 1 May 1967, copy dedicated to Noguchi, MS_COR_244_006_original_1.pdf; Fuller, autobiographical text dedicated 16 February 1967, MS_COR_244_002_original_1.pdf.

Fuller functions as mirror because he names possibilities in Noguchi. He functions as scaffolding because he maintains networks while Noguchi travels. Neither role implies one-way influence.

10.3 Entenza: mediation, trust, and injury

John Entenza occupies one of the most complex positions in the correspondence. He connects Noguchi to producers, publishes projects, holds photographs, proposes commissions, helps shape texts, and offers reassurance. He calls himself a 'midwife' when introducing the Pomona Tile opportunity.[156] The metaphor is exact: he creates conditions for a project to be born without claiming authorship.

Entenza also teaches social translation. In 1959 he suggests almost word for word how Noguchi might decline a commission without damaging the relation, preserving a possible future.[157] Correspondence becomes diplomatic maintenance.

Yet the relation later fractures. Noguchi's 1966 letter to Blunk remembers three rejected Graham Foundation applications and Entenza's insistence upon theory rather than practical realization. The injury persists for years.

This history demonstrates that trust depends upon recognition of method. Entenza is generative when he helps practical and conceptual work meet; he becomes threatening when the institution appears to deny making as research.

10.4 Bunshaft and the architecture of possibility

Gordon Bunshaft repeatedly gives Noguchi access to architectural fields of extraordinary scale. Their relation is not simply patron and artist. Bunshaft mediates between sculpture, architecture, corporation, budget, and institutional hierarchy.

The Lever House project shows both the power and limit of that role. Noguchi's European material research depends upon Bunshaft's ability to sustain interest within Lever Brothers. Bunshaft warns that delay may cause the company to withdraw, yet he cannot authorise travel costs or guarantee the commission.[158] The architect is a vector with bounded authority.

The project ultimately stalls within a larger proposal for the ground floor. The problem is not demonstrated to be aesthetic. Noguchi's work is incorporated within an expensive

[156] John Entenza to Isamu Noguchi, 18 August 1959, MS_COR_060_012_original_1.pdf.
[157] John Entenza to Isamu Noguchi, 8 October 1959, MS_COR_060_011_original_1.pdf.
[158] Bunshaft to Noguchi, 17 September 1953, MS_COR_340_016_original_1.pdf.

corporate programme that is never fully advanced to the English board.[159] The sculpture's fate depends upon governance.

Bunshaft therefore exemplifies institutional ambivalence. He opens conditions for innovation but cannot remove the structural dependence of art upon corporate decision.

10.5 Lannan and recognition beyond definitions

J. Patrick Lannan is distinctive because Noguchi values not only his purchases but his capacity to recognize work before consensus. The McNeil episode is decisive: Noguchi directs Lannan towards another artist; Lannan visits McNeil's studio and buys five major paintings; Noguchi thanks him for understanding the 'next step' and the territory 'beyond definitions'.[160] Patronage becomes psychological recognition of creative risk.

The relationship also demonstrates site-based judgement. When Lannan proposes a five-work sculpture garden, Noguchi refuses to select from the studio before seeing the place; he must first orient himself.[161] The patron supports the work by allowing the artist's embodied relation to the site.

Lannan's idealization—calling Noguchi 'the Master'—must not be confused with Noguchi's self-perception.[162] It documents the psychological asymmetry of patronage: admiration can sustain trust while reducing critical distance.

10.6 Market, friendship, and the Foundation

The 1983 misunderstanding over *Rain Mountain* reveals Noguchi managing several fiduciary systems at once. He distinguishes personal property from Foundation property, explains Gemini editions, dealer discounts, production costs, and the use of profits to finance the museum.[163] Friendship cannot override institutional responsibility.

Noguchi offers a discount on a personally owned stone as a unique gesture, but refuses to destabilize the Foundation's relation with Gemini and Pace. The letter repairs the friendship by precision.

The market here is neither enemy nor neutral mechanism. It can become infrastructure for legacy. Editions generate funds for a museum that will preserve and arrange the work.

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[159] Donovan, Leisure, Newton & Irvine to Noguchi, 31 December 1953, MS_COR_340_023_original_1.pdf.

[160] Lannan to Noguchi, 24 May 1982, MS_COR_277_022_original_1.pdf; Noguchi to McNeil and Lannan, 13 July 1982, MS_COR_277_024_original_1.pdf.

[161] Lannan to Noguchi, 19 December 1979, MS_COR_277_015_original_1.pdf; Noguchi to Lannan, 2 January 1980, MS_COR_277_014_original_1.pdf.

[162] J. Patrick Lannan to Isamu Noguchi, 25 May 1983, MS_COR_277_035_original_1.pdf.

[163] Noguchi to Lannan, 13 May 1983, MS_COR_277_033_original_1.pdf.

The ethical question is how to prevent private generosity from damaging collective continuity.

This is a mature form of relational autonomy. Noguchi sets boundaries among person, institution, dealer, patron, and work.

10.7 Segerstrom and the transformative patron

The probable letter from Toren Segerstrom after the family's 1980 visit to Noguchi's Japanese environment describes an encounter with 'life-arts': art of living, seeing, attending, and understanding beauty in everyday surroundings.[164] The correspondent credits Noguchi's person, house, collaborators, and work with transforming perception.

This is psychology of reception, not proof of deliberate intention. Yet it shows how patronage can be altered by the artist's lived environment. The commission is no longer an exchange of money for object; it becomes an educational relation.

The episode matters for *California Scenario*. The patron's capacity to understand the project may be shaped by direct experience of Noguchi's own spatial culture. Presence becomes part of the work's infrastructure.

10.8 Conflict and the sensitivity to value

The letters from Kirstein and Frankfurter show another side of Noguchi's relations. Kirstein experiences him as morally accusatory regarding payment and as difficult to satisfy. Frankfurter experiences repeated demands for the return of a manuscript as organizationally impossible.[165] These testimonies are hostile but cannot be ignored.

A plausible pattern emerges across the corpus. Noguchi can be highly generous when supporting another's direction and highly defensive when he perceives his own work as undervalued, controlled, or misrepresented. The difference concerns the location of authority.

His sensitivity to payment is not simply vanity. Early works such as *Undine* were materially dependent upon debt, unpaid modelling labour, gallery percentages, and family negotiation.[166] The distance between public praise and economic insecurity was present from the start.

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[164] Probable Toren Segerstrom to Isamu Noguchi, 1980, INFGM, MS_COR_143_001_original_1.pdf, p. 1. Identification remains to be confirmed from the archival record.

[165] Kirstein to Noguchi, MS_COR_037_013_original_1.pdf; Frankfurter to Noguchi, MS_COR_039_009_original_1.pdf.

[166] Leonie Gilmour to Catherine, 27 March 1927, MS_COR_380_001_original_1.pdf; Leonie to Isamu Noguchi, 21 April 1927, MS_COR_408_005_original_1.pdf.

The 1939 Ford Fountain letter makes the issue explicit: artistic success does not compensate for unanticipated labour and studio overhead.[167] Recognition and remuneration belong to different systems.

10.9 Institutions as both enablers and classificatory threats

Noguchi required institutions to achieve scale. Museums, corporations, foundations, governments, universities, and foundations supplied sites and resources. They also classified.

The Graham Foundation expected theory rather than practical study. A commercial client expected a discrete sculpture rather than a garden as sculpture. An exhibition system preferred objects that could be acquired. A national pavilion expected representation of the United States. The Passport Office translated networks into political associations.

Noguchi's resistance to professional labels—designer, architect, Japanese artist—should be understood within this context. Categories do not merely describe; they assign authority, market, and expectation.

His strategy is not to escape institutions entirely. It is to enter them while expanding the terms of what they can recognize.

10.10 Patronage as psychological infrastructure

The most generative patrons and mediators perform several functions:

- they recognize work before consensus;
- they tolerate unrealized or changing proposals;
- they preserve the artist's authority over site and material;
- they provide access to networks;
- they absorb some institutional pressure;
- they maintain continuity after rejection;
- they allow the project to remain open long enough to discover its form.

This is why Noguchi's relationships cannot be reduced to biography. They are part of the psychology of making. The right interlocutor changes what the artist can imagine, risk, and realize.

[167] Noguchi to Walter Dorwin Teague, 18 May 1939, MS_COR_317_010_original_1.pdf.

Chapter 11. Unbuilt works and the psychology of possibility

11.1 The unrealized project as a valid sculptural state

Noguchi's archive contains an unusual density of projects that were rejected, cancelled, indefinitely postponed, absorbed into larger schemes, or never advanced beyond a model and a chain of letters. To treat these merely as failures would misunderstand his practice. The artist repeatedly asserted that the function of the artist is to propose and that an unrealized idea may initiate a development completed later or by others.[168] The proposal belongs to the work even where no permanent object results.

This does not mean that realization was irrelevant. Noguchi experienced cancellation as painful and sometimes altered his confidence. But he also maintained an archive of possibilities. A rejected solution might be transferred to another site, enlarged, changed in material, or converted into an autonomous work. *The Black Sun*, for instance, is retrospectively linked to a solution developed among the numerous proposals for Yale.[169] The rejected variant remains alive because it retains formal necessity beyond its original commission.

The unrealized work therefore occupies a distinct sculptural state:

- more developed than fantasy;
- less determined than fabrication;
- materially represented in model, text, drawing, or photograph;
- socially conditioned by interlocutors and institutions;
- available for migration.

Correspondence is often the medium in which this state is best preserved.

11.2 *Monument to the Plow*: correspondence as narrated origin

In a late conversation, Noguchi recalls that Edward A. Rumely told him of the correspondence between Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson concerning an improved plough for American soil. Noguchi says that the idea impressed him and became the origin of *Monument to the Plow*.[170] The sequence is unusually exact:

historical correspondence → oral transmission by Rumely → imaginative impression → sculptural project.

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[168] Isamu Noguchi, Riverside Playground interview, 8 September 1978, INFGM, MS_WRI_047_001_original_1.pdf.

[169] Isamu Noguchi, interview of 27 August 1978, INFGM, MS_WRI_049_004_original_1.pdf.

[170] Isamu Noguchi, conversation included in *Essays and Conversations*, INFGM, MS_WRI_094_001_original_1.pdf, section on Dr Rumely and *Monument to the Plow*.

This is a privileged case for the dissertation because correspondence acts at two removes. Noguchi does not necessarily read the original letters. He receives their conceptual content through another person. The archive of one historical exchange enters the studio through narration.

The proposed monument translates agricultural design into cyclical landscape. Ploughed, sown, and fallow sides would make seasonal process part of the work. The plough is not represented merely as heroic object; it becomes a relation between invention, land, labour, and time.

The evidentiary limitation is clear. Noguchi's account is retrospective. The contemporary Rumely correspondence, notes, or early proposals must be recovered to confirm chronology and vocabulary. The Lilly Library is especially important because the Rumely papers may preserve the documentary bridge.

The case nevertheless establishes a crucial possibility: literary and epistolary memory can become environmental structure.

11.3 The proposed head of Gandhi

The 1930 letter from Harbin contains an unrealized portrait at an earlier stage. Noguchi proposes returning via India and modelling Gandhi if Mme Naidu can arrange the encounter.[171] Unlike *Monument to the Plow*, no retrospective account in the present corpus confirms further development.

The project reveals how portraiture functions as access. The intended work requires proximity to a person whose political and symbolic significance vastly exceeds the sculptural commission. The portrait is simultaneously:

- formal study;
- social relation;
- reason for travel;
- entry into a political environment;
- extension of the artist's network.

The project also shows that an unrealized work may vanish because one link in the chain fails. A letter may not be sent, received, or answered; a visa may not be obtained; an itinerary may change. The absence of object is not necessarily a rejection of the idea.

[171] Noguchi to Leonie Gilmour, 30 July 1930, MS_COR_372_010_original_1.pdf.

The ethical method is to preserve the conditional form. The dissertation does not fill the gap with an imagined Gandhi bust. It reconstructs the proposal's operational anatomy and the point at which evidence ends.

11.4 Lever House: the project that survives in correspondence

The 1953 Lever House dossier is the most complete example of an unbuilt work whose creative life is primarily epistolary. Noguchi travels through Europe researching stone while personal and administrative circumstances delay his return to New York. He compares marble and granite, climate and cost, labour and transport, and revises his preferences after direct encounter with Greek quarries.[172] Bunshaft warns that corporate interest may expire. The broader ground-floor scheme becomes too expensive to present to the English board, and Noguchi's component is suspended with it.[173] The model is withheld from the Museum of Modern Art because public display would provoke questions about non-realization.

The case reveals several psychological operations.

First, waiting without direction is difficult for Noguchi. He converts it into quarry research. Second, direct encounter can overturn a prior material hypothesis. Third, the artist requires a threshold of institutional commitment; without order, advance, or approval, material research remains suspended. Fourth, the project's failure is not demonstrated to be aesthetic. It is incorporated within a larger corporate decision.

The model's suppression is especially significant. Even an unbuilt image can generate social expectation. By refusing exhibition, the institution controls not only the project but the public visibility of its possibility.

Lever House thus exists within a chain of desire, travel, stone, price, time, delay, and governance. The correspondence is the work's principal surviving field.

11.5 Expo '70: a collective project without a final pavilion

The Expo '70 dossier expands the unbuilt project into collective cognition. The USIA invites Noguchi to form an integrated team and rejects the conventional sequence of architect designing a container followed by a designer filling it.[174] John McHale supplies theme notes on participation, feedback, choice, nature, technology, and future life.[175]

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[172] Noguchi to Gordon Bunshaft, 30 July, 5 September, and 26 November 1953, INFGM, MS_COR_340_014_original_1.pdf, MS_COR_340_015_original_1.pdf, and MS_COR_340_022_original_1.pdf.

[173] Bunshaft to Noguchi, 17 September 1953, MS_COR_340_016_original_1.pdf; Donovan, Leisure, Newton & Irvine to Noguchi, 31 December 1953, MS_COR_340_023_original_1.pdf.

[174] United States Information Agency to Isamu Noguchi, 21 July 1967, INFGM, MS_COR_249_009_original_1.pdf.

[175] John McHale, *Theme Notes for Expo '70*, September 1967, MS_COR_248_002_original_1.pdf.

Noguchi's *The World and Its Dream* translates the programme into mound, moon garden, Echo balloon, aerial arm, pathways, and play.[176] Annotated drafts show concepts passing into circulation and construction; the final proposal attributes the synthesis to Noguchi, Peter Floyd, McHale, Shoji Sadao, and Pavilion Associates.[177]

The project's significance does not depend upon built completion. It documents how Noguchi converts verbal systems into spatial experience. McHale's cybernetic vocabulary becomes paths, choices, and feedback. The national brief becomes a transnational and cosmological environment. Fuller's nearby writings provide a possible conceptual climate, though specific influence must remain qualified.[178]

The unrealized pavilion is therefore an unusually complete study of layered authorship. Its value lies in the visible movement from brief to thought to space.

11.6 Riverside Playground and the endurance of proposal

The Riverside Playground occupied years of revision, models, municipal negotiation, safety requirements, community objections, and political change before cancellation.[179] Noguchi's account stresses both persistence and injury. Earlier playground rejections had made him fearful of proceeding alone. Collaboration becomes a strategy for institutional survival.

The project's cancellation does not erase its effect. Noguchi argues that proposing and speaking are part of creativity; an idea may be realized by others after its initial failure. This claim does not romanticize cancellation. It converts the rejected work into an active proposition.

Riverside demonstrates the vulnerability of environmental sculpture. The more closely a work enters social use, the greater the number of authorities capable of stopping it. Safety, politics, welfare, landscape preservation, finance, and public opinion all become formal agents.

The psychological result is a mixture of persistence and learned caution. Noguchi's ambition remains large, but his trust in institutions is reduced.

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[176] Isamu Noguchi, *The World and Its Dream*, MS_COR_249_006_original_1.pdf.

[177] Annotated dossier, MS_COR_248_001_original_1.pdf; final proposal, MS_COR_248_006_original_1.pdf and copy MS_COR_249_005_original_1.pdf.

[178] Buckminster Fuller, texts dedicated to Noguchi in 1967, MS_COR_244_002_original_1.pdf and MS_COR_244_006_original_1.pdf.

[179] Noguchi, Riverside Playground interview, MS_WRI_047_001_original_1.pdf.

11.7 Billy Rose, UNESCO, and transformed compromise

Not all compromised projects remain unbuilt. The Billy Rose Art Garden is realized after Noguchi accepts a major change: separation of the garden from museum buildings. He converts the imposed condition into an internal architecture and subsequently reasserts that the whole garden is sculpture.[180] The compromise is neither total surrender nor pure victory. It is transformed into form.

The UNESCO Garden similarly depends upon national fundraising, ministry involvement, gardeners, transport, media, and public expectations. The network wants recognizable Japan; Noguchi uses tradition as point of departure rather than replication.[181] The work is built by negotiating institutional demands without allowing them to become the final definition.

These realized examples clarify the unbuilt ones. Noguchi can work within constraint when the constraint remains transformable. A project fails when the institution prevents the artist from converting resistance into form.

11.8 The archive of unrealized future

Noguchi's late Venice text refers to unbuilt proposals, including *This Tortured Earth*, not as dead failures but as part of sculpture's immense future possibility.[182] The archive functions as a reservoir.

This orientation helps explain the continual migration of ideas. A rejected Yale form becomes *The Black Sun*. Playground concepts resurface in later public projects. The book on leisure migrates into actual environments. The unrealized form is not necessarily incomplete; it may be waiting for another scale or context.

The psychology is one of non-closure. Noguchi does not preserve every proposal out of sentiment. He preserves the possibility that conditions may later become adequate.

11.9 Failure, self-narration, and the risk of heroic retrospect

Late accounts often organize failures into a coherent developmental narrative. The historian must distinguish actual continuity from retrospective selection. A project that later appears prophetic may have been one of many abandoned alternatives. The archive must preserve contingency.

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[180] Noguchi's Billy Rose texts, MS_WRI_023_001_original_1.pdf–MS_WRI_023_003_original_1.pdf.
[181] Ichikawa to Noguchi, MS_COR_272_008_original_1.pdf; Noguchi's writings on UNESCO.
[182] Isamu Noguchi, statement for the Venice Biennale, INFGM, MS_WRI_063_002_original_1.pdf.

This is especially important for Noguchi, whose mature public identity was built around the courage of proposals ahead of their time. The claim may be true, but its historical proof requires contemporary documents, not only later recognition.

Unbuilt work should therefore be studied through successive states: initial request, proposal, revision, institutional response, emotional consequence, and possible reactivation. The aim is not to celebrate failure but to understand how possibility is managed.

11.10 Unbuilt work as innovation

Noguchi's contribution to twentieth-century sculpture includes a changed status for the proposal. Sculpture can be:

- a model of behaviour;
- a plan for social space;
- an environmental hypothesis;
- a technical system;
- a field of relations that remains unexecuted.

The unbuilt project expands the medium because it locates sculptural thought in the organization of possibility, not only in the final object.

Chapter 12. Environment, technology, and the psychology of control

12.1 Reforming the environment rather than the individual

Buckminster Fuller's 1967 statement that one should reform the environment rather than attempt directly to reform the human being offers a powerful formulation of a principle already active in Noguchi's work.[183] The environment shapes behaviour through conditions rather than command.

Noguchi's playgrounds, stages, gardens, fountains, and plazas embody this logic. They do not primarily communicate propositions through images. They reorganize movement, choice, attention, and encounter. The psychology of the user is addressed indirectly through spatial experience.

This is not environmental determinism. Noguchi's best fields do not produce one behaviour. They increase awareness of relation and permit multiple actions. The designed environment is a condition of possibility.

The importance of Fuller is therefore conceptual, though direct influence must be proven selectively. Noguchi already possessed environmental concerns before receiving the 1967 text. Fuller supplies a language in which systemic design, global responsibility, and human welfare become explicit.

12.2 Technology without technophilia

Noguchi's relation to technology is ambivalent and pragmatic. He is attracted to the mobility of the Dymaxion House and to the capacity of science to enlarge human possibility. He is equally alert to industrialization's capacity to erase place and difference.[184] Technology is neither salvation nor enemy. Its value depends upon the relation it produces.

The Expo proposal states that technology must remain subordinate to human and natural values.[185] The same principle governs tools. A diamond saw may be more authentic than a hand tool if it permits the desired relation to stone; a prestigious bronze may be less authentic than worn wood if it destroys use.

Noguchi's humanistic technology is therefore functional rather than stylistic. He does not celebrate visible machinery. He transfers invisible capacities—precision, control, responsiveness—into sculptural systems.

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[183] Buckminster Fuller, *What I Am Trying to Do*, MS_COR_244_006_original_1.pdf.
[184] Noguchi, tribute to Fuller, MS_WRI_057_001_original_1.pdf.
[185] Integrated Expo '70 proposal, MS_COR_248_006_original_1.pdf.

12.3 From the Ford Fountain to programmed water

The 1939 Ford Fountain letter shows Noguchi confronting a new material, unanticipated labour, studio overhead, and a water jet still requiring adjustment after public success.[186] The fountain is not complete when its form is visually present. Its behaviour must be tuned.

By 1971 the Dodge fountain problem has become vastly more complex. Noguchi asks Shoji Sadao to investigate pneumatic, hydraulic, magnetic, electronic, and computerized valve systems and to seek Boeing engineers with relevant hydraulic knowledge.[187] Water becomes programmed time.

The thirty-two-year arc reveals a transformation in control. In 1939 Noguchi supervises the adjustment of a spray. In 1971 he defines a system in which engineers and controls generate sequences. His authorship moves from direct manipulation towards orchestration of distributed expertise.

Yet the psychological criterion remains stable: the water must behave accurately enough for variation to become meaningful.

12.4 Freedom requires precision

A fountain may appear spontaneous, but its freedom depends upon pressure, timing, valve response, and reliable control. The same is true of playgrounds and interactive environments. Choice becomes possible only when the system can absorb different routes without collapse.

This is one of Noguchi's most consistent psychological principles. He does not oppose order and freedom. He constructs order as the enabling condition of freedom.

The Expo circulation plan demonstrates this. Visitors may select multiple routes, but entrances, nodes, congestion controls, and alternative paths are designed.[188] Freedom is canalized, not prescribed.

The same operation appears within his own working relations. The studio can remain open to a skilled assistant after payment, duration, and project are clarified. Human openness requires social precision.

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[186] Noguchi to Walter Dorwin Teague, MS_COR_317_010_original_1.pdf.

[187] Noguchi to Sadao, MS_COR_323_011_original_1.pdf.

[188] Noguchi, *The World and Its Dream*, MS_COR_249_006_original_1.pdf; annotated circulation sheets in MS_COR_248_001_original_1.pdf.

12.5 Transferring knowledge across disciplines

Noguchi's request to Boeing does not imitate aerospace form. It seeks hydraulic competence. This is an analogy of function rather than appearance.

The capacity to transfer knowledge across disciplines is central to his innovation. Theatre teaches environmental concentration; aircraft engineering teaches control of fluids; industrial casting teaches serial production; landscape teaches temporal growth; photography teaches visual circulation; law teaches the consequences of ownership and edition.

Noguchi's refusal of professional labels corresponds to this transfer. 'Sculptor' names the organizing intelligence rather than a restricted set of materials.

The risk of interdisciplinarity is dilution. Noguchi responds by maintaining strong criteria: bodily relation, material truth, spatial consequence, and site. Transfer is accepted only when it deepens the sculptural problem.

12.6 Expo '70 and interactive psychology

John McHale's theme notes and the final Expo proposal develop an explicit environmental psychology. The visitor is not to be transported passively past objects, but asked to choose, receive feedback, and participate.[189] The pavilion becomes an environment of decision.

The *People Mosaic* seeks to preserve the individual within a technological system. The visitor's data enter a larger pattern without dissolving singularity. This corresponds to Noguchi's own identity problem: how to belong to a system without being reduced by it.

The spatial draft adds moon, mound, floating forms, and play. McHale's cybernetic vocabulary is translated into bodily and cosmological experience. The work does not explain feedback; it makes choice spatial.

12.7 Natural indeterminacy and designed order

Noguchi's Venice statement distinguishes the indeterminate transformations of nature from the human square associated with symmetry and order.[190] Yet he does not choose one. His works often place asymmetry within geometric control.

The garden is the privileged field because it contains both. Stone placement, walls, paths, and grading are deliberate; weather, growth, and use remain open. The artist designs an encounter with processes he cannot fully determine.

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[189] McHale, MS_COR_248_002_original_1.pdf; integrated proposal, MS_COR_248_006_original_1.pdf.
[190] Noguchi, Venice statement, MS_WRI_063_002_original_1.pdf.

This relation should not be romanticized as harmony. Nature may resist, overgrow, erode, or fail. Noguchi's statement that California Scenario would become beautiful when nature took over is accompanied by acknowledgement that further adjustments were still required.[191] The hand must prepare the conditions under which surrender becomes aesthetically credible.

12.8 The environment as behavioural ethics

Noguchi's environmental work implies an ethics because it distributes agency. A playground invites children to invent; a plaza can offer both people and privacy; a garden permits contemplation and movement; a museum can reactivate rather than immobilize.

The artist does not impose moral content through allegory. He gives users a structured freedom. The ethical quality of the work lies in respecting multiplicity without abandoning responsibility for consequences.

This is also why institutional failures matter. A poorly designed or politically controlled environment can produce passivity rather than agency. Poston is the negative case; Expo is the aspirational one.

12.9 Environmental control and the artist's own psychology

Noguchi's desire to control the field is not simply projected outward. It regulates his own capacity to work. When he lacks a bounded problem, he may convert waiting into research. When the institutional field is too amorphous, anxiety increases. When material and role are defined, he can accept indeterminacy within them.

The artist's psychology and the user's environment therefore share a structural principle:

establish enough form to permit meaningful freedom.

This principle is perhaps the most stable connection across the corpus.

12.10 Innovation beyond the technological spectacle

Noguchi's technological innovation does not consist in spectacular devices alone. It lies in integrating technology into a sculptural ecology of body, site, and behaviour.

A computer-controlled fountain remains sculpture only if programmed flow produces spatial and temporal experience. A pneumatic pavilion remains sculpture only if its lightness and movement orient the visitor. An industrially produced lamp remains sculpture only if its light transforms domestic relation.

Technology is subordinated not to a nostalgic ideal of nature, but to an expanded human experience in which nature, machine, and body remain mutually legible.

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[191] Noguchi to Owens, MS_COR_304_014_original_1.pdf.

Chapter 13. Writing in things: the Bollingen project and material thought

13.1 The book that became a practice

The Bollingen fellowship of 1949 occupies a central position in Noguchi's intellectual development because it proposed a research problem that could not be contained within writing. The intended study of leisure, sculpture, space, and environment generated travel, notes, photographs, encounters with ancient and modern sites, and a book that remained unfinished for decades.

In the 1974 letter to William McGuire, Noguchi states that he did not feel equal to writing the book and therefore continued the research through actual application to artistic problems.[192] The statement is neither a simple confession of literary inadequacy nor evidence that he abandoned theory. It defines making as another medium of thought.

A later interview makes the formulation even more precise: over the intervening years he had written the book "in actual things".[193] The phrase is foundational for this dissertation. It establishes a material writing whose sentences are gardens, fountains, plazas, Akari, playgrounds, and stages.

The unfinished manuscript is therefore not merely a failed publication. Its incompletion opens a long experimental interval in which concepts are tested spatially. The book's eventual return to language depends upon what the objects have taught.

13.2 Leisure as a problem of human orientation

Noguchi's surviving outlines organize leisure around pilgrimage, space, image, place, and proportion. Uprootedness, instability, uselessness, work, and desire for belonging appear at the beginning of the conceptual field.[194] Leisure is not simply free time. It is the condition in which human beings may become conscious of place, image, ritual, play, and relation.

The importance of leisure for sculpture lies in participation. A playground, garden, or plaza is not consumed as an object. It must be occupied, traversed, or used. Leisure supplies the time in which spatial relations can become experience.

Noguchi's interest in ancient sites, plazas, temples, and gardens during the Bollingen journey can be understood as a search for environments that organize collective and

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[192] Isamu Noguchi to William McGuire, 28 February 1974, INFGM, MS_WRI_010_022_original_1.pdf, p. 1.

[193] Isamu Noguchi, interview of 27 August 1978, INFGM, MS_WRI_049_004_original_1.pdf.

[194] Isamu Noguchi, leisure book outline, MS_WRI_010_020_original_1.pdf.

contemplative time. He is less concerned with copying their forms than with recovering the social and psychological function that sculpture once possessed.

The question is historical and contemporary: how might modern sculpture regain a role beyond the museum object?

13.3 Travel as epistemic distance

The long autobiographical manuscript describes travel as a method of acquiring distance, silence, and inward concentration.[195] The movement away from familiar settings allows categories to loosen. Sites are not only objects of study; they reorganize the observer.

Noguchi's self-education is described as voracious, partly compensating for a lack of systematic academic training. He seeks physical encounter with places rather than relying upon photographic knowledge. The journey is both outward and inward.

This double movement complicates the category of cosmopolitanism. Noguchi does not travel simply to accumulate cultural motifs. He uses distance to alter the frame through which sculpture is understood. The traveller becomes temporarily unclassified.

Yet travel requires infrastructure: passport, money, addresses, cargo, hosts, translators, and archives. The romantic image of solitary pilgrimage is sustained by correspondence. The Bollingen journey is therefore both psychological and administrative.

13.4 The word–work–word circuit

The relation between writing and making can be represented as a circuit:

1. a verbal problem is formulated;
2. travel and study produce encounters;
3. the problem cannot yet be stabilized in a book;
4. works test its implications;
5. later writing interprets what the works discovered;
6. retrospective language creates a new framework for viewing earlier work.

This circuit differs from the traditional notion of intention. The later explanation is not necessarily the original cause. It is a second-order product of the work.

The distinction is crucial for psychological history. When Noguchi says in 1978 that the aim of travel was to understand the original function of sculpture, the statement may organize decades of experience into a coherent narrative. Contemporary notebooks and letters must be used to test which questions were present at the time.

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[195] Noguchi, Bollingen autobiographical manuscript, MS_WRI_008_001_original_1.pdf.

The dissertation therefore treats retrospective writing as active reinterpretation. It changes the work's public meaning even when it does not reveal its original genesis.

13.5 Writing as a vulnerable medium

The correspondence suggests that Noguchi often felt more vulnerable when stabilizing thought in prose than when working materially. He sought Kirstein's assistance for a book, withdrew an article repeatedly from *ARTnews*, and later admitted that he continued the Bollingen study through making.[196] The written text exposes thought to editorial judgement and closure.

Material work, by contrast, permits discovery through resistance. A stone can correct without accusing. An editor's intervention may be experienced as categorization or loss of control.

This does not mean Noguchi was incapable of writing. The archive contains powerful theoretical texts, public statements, and carefully constructed letters. The difficulty concerns finalization and transfer of authority.

Trusted collaboration can mitigate the vulnerability. Entenza's mediation succeeds where Frankfurter's fails. Yamamoto's request produces a long *Shin Kenchiku* reflection, but once completed Noguchi insists upon publication without alteration.[197] The same biphasic structure reappears: dialogic formation, then authorial closure.

13.6 Public language and private discovery

Noguchi's public statements often translate material complexity into memorable propositions: sculpture as space, stone as interlocutor, artist as cyclist, place as world orientation. Their clarity has made them central to criticism.

The archive shows that such formulations are frequently the end of long processes. A phrase may condense years of project experience, failed commissions, technical experiments, and conversations. The historian should not mistake rhetorical success for conceptual simplicity.

Private or semi-private letters may reveal more provisional language. Noguchi's material research for Lever House combines desire, cost, weathering, currency, and delay without producing a polished theory. This provisional density may be closer to the actual movement of thought.

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[196] Kirstein to Noguchi, MS_COR_037_013_original_1.pdf; Frankfurter to Noguchi, MS_COR_039_009_original_1.pdf; Noguchi to McGuire, MS_WRI_010_022_original_1.pdf.

[197] Noguchi to Yamamoto, MS_COR_191_029_original_1.pdf.

The dissertation therefore uses both. Public language identifies the categories by which Noguchi wished to be understood; private operational writing shows how those categories were made.

13.7 Self-narration after success

Late success changes the conditions of autobiography. The artist is asked to explain a coherent career. Exhibitions, catalogues, critics, and institutions seek origins and turning points. Noguchi's return to Brancusi in the 1979 Society event belongs to this process.[198] The apprentice becomes authorised interpreter of the master.

Retrospective coherence can be productive. It enables Noguchi to recognize a continuing impulse beneath stylistic diversity. It can also simplify contingency, turning accidents into necessary stages.

The storm that ended the Brancusi atelier is described contemporaneously as if by divine design. Later narratives further integrate such events into a myth of development. The historian's task is not to expose myth as false, but to study how it functions as a structure of self-understanding.

Noguchi's autobiography is itself a creative environment: a frame large enough to hold multiple and sometimes contradictory works.

13.8 Interviewer as co-author

The Apostolos-Cappadona dossier provides unusually clear evidence that the interviewer contributes categories before the interview. In 1981 she had already formulated a project around sacredness, myth, ritual, Brancusi, spiritual journey, and psychology of creativity, and had sent Noguchi relevant texts.[199] Her 1987 questions do not arise in a conceptual vacuum.

This does not invalidate Noguchi's responses. It means that the interview is a relational event. The term *axis mundi*, the absent father, mythic journey, or spiritual authenticity may be introduced by the interviewer and then accepted, resisted, or transformed.

The evidence must therefore distinguish:

- spontaneous formulations;
- prompted agreement;
- elaborated response;
- interviewer paraphrase;
- editorial arrangement.

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[198] International Brancusi Society invitation, 15 September 1979, INFGM, MS_COR_432_007_original_1.pdf.

[199] Apostolos-Cappadona dossier, MS_COR_238_009_original_1.pdf.

This is especially important when constructing a psychological profile. The late interview can show how Noguchi was willing to narrate himself within a proposed frame, but not necessarily that the frame governed earlier making.

13.9 The work as material argument

To say that the Bollingen book was written in things is to grant works argumentative force. A garden can demonstrate that a boundary may open; a playground that sculpture can become behaviour; Akari that lightness and multiplicity can remain sculptural; a stage set that an object can be subordinate yet indispensable.

The material argument differs from a verbal proof. It is tested through use and perception. Its meaning may remain plural. The work does not simply illustrate a thesis; it exposes bodies to a condition.

Noguchi's innovation therefore includes an expanded relation between art and theory. Theory is not external commentary upon practice. It is distributed across objects, environments, and the later language that interprets them.

13.10 The unfinished as productive form

The unfinished book parallels unbuilt projects. In both cases, incompletion preserves a question. Noguchi's practice repeatedly uses non-closure as a means of continuity.

This should not become a celebration of every failure to finish. The archive documents frustration, delay, and missed opportunities. Productive incompletion occurs when the unresolved problem continues to generate work.

The Bollingen project did so for decades. Its incompletion is one of the conditions of Noguchi's environmental expansion.

Chapter 14. The public self: photography, publication, canonization, and legacy

14.1 The work's second life in representation

Noguchi's sculpture is materially resistant to photography, yet photography is central to its circulation. The tension is not accidental. The photograph can never reproduce embodied knowledge, but it can determine which works are seen, acquired, published, remembered, or canonized.

The 1953 Kamekura letter shows the visual construction of Noguchi's early career in unusually concrete form. Six photographs and two negatives require choices of view, background, retouching, and page allocation. The support of *Kintaro* may be removed; backgrounds may become black or grey; works from 1931 require an expanded early section of the book.[200] The publication does not merely document chronology. It produces it.

The public self emerges through such selections. A support eliminated from the image can make a sculpture appear more autonomous and weightless than it is. A dark background can isolate contour from environment. Photography becomes a second sculptural operation.

14.2 The operative image

The photograph has several distinct functions in the corpus.

- **documentary**: recording a set or sculpture;
- **interpretative**: changing background, view, or support;
- **commercial**: enabling a patron to select an object at distance;
- **fundraising**: mobilizing public and governmental resources;
- **archival**: preserving stages of fabrication and installation;
- **canonical**: determining which works represent a period.

The Lannan jasper photographs demonstrate the commercial function. An untitled stone in the work yard becomes isolated, annotated, priced, acquired, shipped, and installed.[201] The image moves the object socially before the object moves physically.

Mary Randlett's documentation of *Sky Viewing* from fabrication through transport and inauguration suggests the archival function.[202] Such a series could preserve the distributed process that a single final image conceals.

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[200] Yusaku Kamekura to Isamu Noguchi, 27 March 1953, MS_COR_338_033_original_1.pdf.

[201] Noguchi to Lannan and associated photographs, MS_COR_277_029_original_1.pdf; acquisition documents MS_COR_277_031_original_1.pdf, MS_COR_277_032_original_1.pdf, and MS_COR_277_039_original_1.pdf.

14.3 Publication as retrospective studio

Publications reorganize the career. Noguchi's letter to George Nelson in 1940 supplies a condensed biography, photographs, project genealogy, and permission to shorten the account.[203] The artist participates in constructing a public narrative while allowing editorial compression.

The Kamekura book requires greater control because it defines an oeuvre. The arrival or loss of photographs changes the number of pages assigned to early work. Postal failure delays printing. The book is an exhibition in paper form.

The same dynamic appears in the 1986 *Shin Kenchiku* text. A request from Tadashi Yamamoto prompts a major autobiographical reflection on house, earth, tools, Brancusi, and tradition. Once written, the text must appear unchanged.[204] The publication request produces self-analysis.

14.4 Biography as advocacy and defence

The public self is also constructed by other writers for strategic purposes. Edward Rumely's 1953 memorandum presents Noguchi's career as evidence of American loyalty, international prestige, and cultural usefulness in support of Shirley Yamaguchi's visa.[205] Biography becomes advocacy.

Such documents select facts to produce an institutional conclusion. They are invaluable not because they transparently reveal Noguchi, but because they show how his work could be mobilized as political capital.

The passport statement performs self-advocacy. Noguchi constructs continuity among Nisei activism, Poston, art, travel, and service to the country. The same career can be narrated as withdrawal from politics and as cultural diplomacy.

The public self is therefore not singular. It is a set of arguments adapted to different authorities.

14.5 Brancusi and public genealogy

The 1979 International Brancusi Society event marks a shift from apprentice to authority. Noguchi is announced as a speaker on his own work, Brancusi's work, and their

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[202] Mary Randlett enclosure in MS_COR_170_002_original_1.pdf.

[203] Isamu Noguchi to George Nelson, 11 September 1940, MS_COR_029_012_original_1.pdf.

[204] Noguchi to Yamamoto, MS_COR_191_029_original_1.pdf; probable enclosed text MS_WRI_066_001_original_1.pdf.

[205] Edward A. Rumely, confidential memorandum, 29 September 1953, INFGM, MS_COR_317_011_original_1.pdf, pp. 1–2.

relation, with Dore Ashton as commentator and Florence Hetzler as moderator.[206] The event occurs during the major *Imaginary Landscapes* exhibition and a period of intensified recognition.

Noguchi must now manage his origin publicly. He must acknowledge Brancusi without appearing derivative, distinguish method from style, and make the apprenticeship explain rather than reduce his mature work.

The missing lecture is therefore a priority. Its absence reminds us that institutions often preserve the invitation more readily than the thought delivered within the event.

The public genealogy itself is a creative construction. Brancusi becomes a mirror through which the present Noguchi is interpreted.

14.6 Canonization and the risk of fixation

Canonization offers permanence but threatens movement. A retrospective, monograph, award, or museum stabilizes an artist's identity. Noguchi's discomfort with stylistic success suggests the psychological ambivalence of this process.

The 1979 period is particularly charged: travelling exhibition, public projects, books, articles, and the Brancusi event. Institutions assemble a coherent Noguchi at the same time that he remains committed to non-closure.

The museum represents the most durable form of this tension. It must preserve without freezing, establish a centre without becoming a pedestal, and tell a history without reducing diversity to a style.

Noguchi's own arrangement of the museum can be understood as a solution: works are placed in environmental relations, with light, garden, movement, and changing perception. Canonization is accepted on sculptural terms.

14.7 Public vigour and private overload

Correspondents often describe Noguchi as vigorous, youthful, energetic, or masterful. Lannan's letters offer repeated examples.[207] These descriptions belong to reception.

Noguchi's own letters sometimes reveal the cost: exhaustion, excessive commitments, desire for quiet work, and difficulty managing simultaneous demands.[208] The public image of inexhaustible creativity and the private experience of overload are two perspectives upon the same productivity.

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[206] International Brancusi Society invitation, MS_COR_432_007_original_1.pdf.

[207] Lannan to Noguchi, 3 December 1982, MS_COR_277_027_original_1.pdf; 4 May 1981, MS_COR_277_020_original_1.pdf; 25 May 1983, MS_COR_277_035_original_1.pdf.

[208] Noguchi to Lannan, 2 January 1980, MS_COR_277_014_original_1.pdf; Noguchi to Entenza, 6 March 1953, MS_COR_045_011_original_1.pdf.

A psychological history must preserve both. The artist's energy is real; so is its cost.

14.8 The archive as legacy apparatus

By the 1980s, Noguchi's studio staff, Foundation, museum, dealers, publishers, and archivists form a legacy apparatus. Decisions about authentication, conservation, editions, exhibitions, recommendations, and documentation pass through it.

The 1983 staff memorandum demonstrates how incoming material is filtered into questions requiring Noguchi's authority.[209] The *Rain Mountain* letter shows sales feeding the proposed museum.[210] The Foundation separates personal generosity from institutional responsibility.

Legacy is thus constructed before death. It is another project requiring finance, organization, material care, and narrative control.

14.9 The ethics of quotation and unpublished correspondence

The public self created by this dissertation must not repeat the archive's violence. Letters written for specific recipients should not be treated as transparent declarations to posterity. Private material should be quoted only where it bears directly upon the practice and where the analytical need is clear.

This is particularly important for family and romantic correspondence. The archive preserves more than the thesis has a right to use. Exclusion is not a failure of completeness; it is an ethical and methodological operation.

The dissertation therefore quotes short passages, identifies their situation, and avoids reproducing whole letters or images. Noguchi's public self is reconstructed through analysis, not archival spectacle.

14.10 The public self as another environment

Noguchi's published identity is itself environmental. It is constructed by the arrangement of photographs, quotations, exhibitions, lectures, biographies, and museums. Different viewers move through different versions of the career.

The artist participates in the design of this field but does not control it completely. Critics, patrons, relatives, editors, and institutions add frames. The task of scholarship is not to find one authentic self behind them, but to understand how each frame operates and how Noguchi negotiates its pressure.

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[209] Staff memorandum, MS_COR_170_002_original_1.pdf.
[210] Noguchi to Lannan, MS_COR_277_033_original_1.pdf.

The public self is therefore another provisional centre—necessary for historical visibility, dangerous when mistaken for final definition.

Chapter 15. What Noguchi changed: innovation in twentieth-century sculpture

15.1 Beyond the hybrid style

The most familiar account of Noguchi's innovation presents him as an artist who joined the formal languages of modernism with Japanese traditions. The account is not wrong. His career is unimaginable without Brancusi, gardens, ceramics, calligraphy, Zen, modern architecture, dance, American industry, and the transpacific condition of his life. Yet the language of synthesis can obscure the more radical transformation he enacted.

Noguchi's innovation did not consist principally in placing Japanese signs within Western modernism or in creating a visually hybrid style. It consisted in changing the operational definition of sculpture. He asked what sculpture could do when it ceased to be primarily an isolated, durable, autonomous object for contemplation. His answers included the playground, stage set, lamp, garden, room, plaza, fountain, pavilion, museum, and unrealized proposal.

The significance of these works lies not in the mere expansion of medium. Other modernists crossed disciplines. Noguchi's distinctive contribution was to maintain a sculptural logic across those crossings: attention to mass, void, bodily scale, material resistance, orientation, and relation. Sculpture became the organization of a field in which bodies, objects, forces, and time act upon one another.

The archive reveals that this transformation was psychological as well as formal. Noguchi repeatedly sought centres that permit movement, boundaries that intensify without imprisoning, and materials that resist without becoming mute. The expanded medium is inseparable from the operations by which he managed non-belonging, control, collaboration, and change.

15.2 From object to field

The first major innovation is the displacement of the object by the field. Noguchi's sculptures continue to include autonomous objects, but the meaning of even those objects increasingly depends upon surrounding relations.

In theatre, the set exists between dancer and object. In gardens, stones define intervals and routes. In plazas, the work cannot be separated from architecture and movement. In *The Black Sun*, the aperture frames horizon and sun. In the IBM garden, the periphery and changing viewpoint matter as much as the individual fountain. In Akari, light reorganizes a room.

The field is not simply the background. It is active structure.

This innovation has psychological consequences. The viewer is no longer asked only to recognize or contemplate. The viewer must orient, move, choose, wait, play, or inhabit. Sculpture becomes a condition of experience.

The shift from object to field also changes authorship. No artist can control a field alone. Architects, dancers, engineers, gardeners, users, climate, and time become participants. Noguchi's selective authority evolves precisely because the medium demands distributed production.

15.3 From visual contemplation to embodied participation

Noguchi's second innovation is the elevation of bodily knowledge from accompaniment to constitutive principle. Sculpture is not fully available to the eye. It is known through movement, touch, effort, balance, and duration.

The stage sets make this explicit. A rope becomes a maze only through the dancer's and spectator's participation. A stair changes the body's height and risk. A chair, headdress, or spider dress belongs to a choreography of weight and movement. A bronze copy may preserve contour but destroy that relation.

Playgrounds extend participation beyond performance. Children do not perform a prescribed script; they invent behaviour within shaped ground. The user becomes co-executor.

Gardens and plazas similarly demand movement. Their forms are sequences rather than views. The body produces knowledge by traversing them.

This embodied turn distinguishes Noguchi from both monumentality and pure optical formalism. The work's meaning is not exhausted by image or symbolic reading. It is produced through action.

15.4 From monument to use

Noguchi's third innovation is his redefinition of use. He neither abandons art's autonomy nor accepts a utilitarian reduction. Instead, he treats use as a sculptural relation.

A table, lamp, playground, or stage object may be useful, but its use is not external to form. The shape of a chair determines posture; a lamp determines atmosphere; a playground determines possible movements; a set determines choreographic relation.

The contradiction in the Blunk letter is instructive. Noguchi recommends strategic uselessness when institutional classification threatens to reduce sculpture to furniture.[211] The boundary becomes rigid under external pressure. Elsewhere he repeatedly dissolves it.

The innovation lies in making the art/use distinction contingent rather than ontological. An object can be used and remain sculpture if use is one of the operations through which form becomes meaningful.

15.5 From permanence to living time

Traditional monumental sculpture often seeks permanence. Noguchi does not reject durability, but subjects it to temporal relation.

Stone preserves geological depth, yet may be cut to appear on the point of movement. Gardens grow and weather. Water changes in programmed sequences. Stage sets accumulate wear. Akari folds, expands, and may be replaced. Unbuilt projects remain available to future conditions.

Time is therefore not simply what happens to sculpture after completion. It is one of the media through which sculpture exists.

This has conservation consequences. Preserving a used set by translating it into bronze may destroy the time embodied in its wear. Reconstructing a garden without allowing nature to alter it may produce a replica rather than a living work. The original is processual.

Noguchi's innovation is to make duration perceptible and productive without reducing sculpture to event alone.

15.6 From isolated genius to distributed making

Modernism often preserves the myth of individual authorship even when production is collective. Noguchi's archive makes distribution unusually visible. His works depend upon foundries, quarries, engineers, craftsmen, architects, editors, patrons, assistants, family, dancers, and administrators.

The innovation is not simply collaboration. It is the transformation of authorship into a selective and relational practice. Noguchi delegates while retaining judgement at decisive thresholds. He may allow another sculptor to reconstruct a set under instruction, an engineer to research valves, a foundry to cast, or nature to continue a garden.

This model avoids two extremes:

- the sovereign genius who executes everything;
- the anonymous collective in which authorship disappears.

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[211] Noguchi to Blunk, MS_COR_226_001_original_1.pdf.

Noguchi remains responsible for the organization of relation.

The travelling laboratory and later distributed studio are two phases of the same development. At first, autonomy is achieved by carrying tools. Later, it is achieved by designing networks.

15.7 From matter as substance to matter as interlocutor

Noguchi's material innovation lies less in inventing new substances than in changing the artist's relation to them. Stone, paper, water, light, earth, clay, wood, and metal are treated as active constraints.

The material interlocutor corrects intention. Greek marble changes the Lever hypothesis. Fire alters ceramics. Nature takes over gardens. The folding paper lantern requires the user's gesture. Water requires programmed control.

This relational materialism rejects both formal imposition and mystical passivity. The artist prepares, listens, acts, and releases.

Matter is also social. Marble includes quarry, labour, currency, export, and time. Paper includes craft, price, patent, and distribution. Bronze includes foundry, edition, market, and museum. Noguchi's material thought is therefore simultaneously sensory and institutional.

15.8 From national synthesis to transnational method

Noguchi's identity has often been interpreted through synthesis of Japanese and American forms. The archive suggests a more dynamic transnational method.

He does not simply combine two inherited styles. He moves among places, techniques, and networks, allowing each to modify the problem. The Japanese house is adapted rather than copied. The UNESCO Garden draws from Japan without reproducing tradition. Expo '70 represents the United States in Japan through a cosmological and participatory field. Akari retains a Japanese name while becoming global domestic sculpture.

Transnationality is not a visual blend. It is a method of repeated translation.

The psychological condition of non-belonging becomes productive when it enables movement among frames. Its cost remains real; its result is not effortless cosmopolitanism.

15.9 From public monument to behavioural environment

Noguchi's public work often refuses the declarative monument. It does not primarily tell a story about collective identity. It constructs conditions in which collective experience may occur.

Playgrounds invite invention. Plazas create orientation. Fountains organize temporal attention. Gardens offer movement and quiet. The museum presents relations among works and site.

The public is not a mass audience receiving a message. It is a plurality of bodies acting within a field.

This is a major contribution to post-war environmental and public art. Noguchi's work anticipates and intersects with later concerns—participation, site specificity, social use, relationality—while retaining the sculptural seriousness of material, weight, and form.

15.10 From completed object to active proposal

Noguchi's unrealized projects extend sculpture into proposition. A project can possess formal and psychological force before fabrication. Its archive may influence later work or the work of others.

This does not mean that drawings and letters automatically become sculpture. The proposal becomes sculptural when it organizes spatial, material, and behavioural relations with sufficient precision to be tested.

Expo '70, Riverside, Gandhi's portrait, and Lever House reveal different states of proposition. Each expands the medium's temporal horizon.

15.11 From museum container to environmental legacy

Noguchi's museum constitutes the mature synthesis of these innovations. It is not a neutral building filled with objects. It is an arrangement of architecture, garden, light, stone, movement, and temporal relation.

The museum also resolves the problem of legacy. Canonization is accepted, but on sculptural terms. The centre is permanent enough to preserve work and open enough to prevent fixed interpretation.

The economic and administrative correspondence shows that this environment required editions, sales, Foundation governance, staff, and legal boundaries. Legacy itself is a distributed sculpture.

15.12 Noguchi's place within twentieth-century sculpture

Noguchi should therefore be situated not merely between American modernism and Japanese tradition, but at the intersection of several transformations:

- the expansion from object to environment;
- the integration of design and sculpture;
- the emergence of participatory and behavioural space;
- the reconception of authorship as distributed;
- the treatment of material and time as active agents;
- the translation of private psychological tension into public spatial possibility.

His contribution is distinctive because he sustains these transformations across six decades without reducing them to one programme. The work remains open, but the psychological operations are rigorous.

Chapter 16. Conclusion: the psychological logic of Noguchi's sculptural practice

16.1 The profile that the documents permit

The documentary corpus permits a psychological profile of creative practice, not a diagnosis of personality. Noguchi appears as an artist who repeatedly responds to instability by constructing a field. The field provides enough orientation to allow action and enough openness to permit transformation.

His continuity resides in a series of operations:

1. identify an incompatibility or lack;
2. convert it into a spatial, material, or organizational problem;
3. establish a provisional centre and boundaries;
4. enter into dialogue with material and interlocutors;
5. allow resistance to modify the proposal;
6. preserve authorial judgement at decisive thresholds;
7. release the work to use, time, nature, or public experience;
8. reopen the process when the solution becomes fixed.

This cycle appears in early apprenticeship, social design, stage, Akari, gardens, fountains, publications, and museum.

16.2 Non-belonging and place-making

Noguchi's non-belonging is neither a single trauma nor a celebrated freedom. It is a recurrent difficulty of orientation. His response is place-making.

The places he constructs do not cure identity by providing a final home. They give contradiction a form within which it can remain active. The room that waits, the studio cut into a hill, the mound and balloon, the stone and aperture, the house and route—each offers a provisional centre.

The psychological achievement is not rootedness alone. It is rooted movement.

16.3 Dispersion and centring

Noguchi's life and work are dispersed across media, countries, institutions, and projects. This dispersion can generate energy and overload. Centres—stone, studio, garden, model, archive—restore concentration.

Yet every centre risks fixation. Success may become style; museum may become mausoleum; national identity may become stereotype; collaboration may become obligation. Noguchi moves again.

The dialectic of dispersion and centring is therefore the fundamental rhythm of the practice.

16.4 Control and surrender

The archive rejects the simple choice between controlling and spontaneous artist. Noguchi controls fields, thresholds, tools, roles, and final integrity. He surrenders to material, nature, time, use, and the knowledge of collaborators.

The order is temporal. He prepares intensively, responds during making, and releases after the form is sufficiently established. Control makes surrender productive.

This sequence is visible in stone, gardens, stage reconstructions, editorial work, and institutional collaboration.

16.5 Solitude and relational autonomy

Noguchi's solitude protects freedom of thought. His practice nevertheless depends upon an extraordinary number of people. The resolution is episodic and selective collaboration.

The studio expands when the project requires competence and contracts when cognitive freedom must be restored. Trusted interlocutors become extensions of memory, judgement, or technique. Distrusted mediation is experienced as appropriation or misdefinition.

Autonomy is therefore relational. It is the capacity to depend without surrendering the decisive structure of the work.

16.6 Making as knowledge

The strongest epistemological conclusion is that Noguchi knows by making. The unfinished book migrates into objects; the small model opens a large environment; the quarry corrects the imagined stone; the body discovers space through movement; nature continues the garden.

Correspondence belongs to this epistemology because it carries questions and returns consequences. A letter can be as provisional as a model and as operative as a tool.

16.7 Correspondence as studio

The dissertation has demonstrated the title in several senses.

Correspondence is **cognitive** when dialogue produces thought. It is **germinal** when an idea or relation first becomes operational. It is **productive** when it carries materials, photographs, prices, and instructions. It is **regulatory** when it structures affect, timing, and conflict. It is **infrastructural** when it maintains addresses, property, transport, and staff. It is **defensive** when the archive protects the right to move and work. It is **retrospective** when it reinterprets the career and constructs genealogy.

The letter is not always studio. Many letters remain personal or irrelevant to the artistic problem. The concept is demonstrated only where communication performs an operation.

16.8 The archive and the limits of knowledge

The corpus remains incomplete. Many outgoing letters are known only through replies. Attachments are missing. Dates and signatures are uncertain. Digital files sometimes duplicate the same documentary event or gather unrelated items. The biographies cite materials held elsewhere, including the Lilly Library, the Archives of American Art, and WRA-related collections.

These limits do not invalidate the project. They require explicit degrees of certainty. The dissertation distinguishes demonstrated relation, strong inference, and speculative possibility.

The same caution applies to direct quotation. A phrase must remain within its genre and relation. The public statement, family letter, institutional report, and sworn declaration are not interchangeable.

16.9 The psychological model

The documentary evidence supports the following condensed model:

Noguchi transforms dislocation into orientation by constructing provisional centres. He protects freedom through bounded fields, knows through bodily and material encounter, and preserves movement by refusing final categories. His studio alternates between solitude and distributed cognition. His authorship is non-dominant where the work must enable others, but highly selective at thresholds of integrity. When language cannot complete a problem, he writes through things; when things have produced knowledge, he returns them to language.

This model accounts for both consistency and diversity. It does not require every work to express the same symbol.

16.10 The innovation restated

Noguchi's principal contribution to twentieth-century sculpture was the conversion of sculpture from self-sufficient object into relational apparatus. He made sculpture capable of:

- organizing behaviour;
- producing orientation;
- entering domestic life;
- being completed by the user;
- accumulating bodily memory;
- changing through nature and time;
- existing as a proposal;
- being produced by distributed knowledge;

- reforming environment rather than declaring ideology.

He did not abandon the object. He placed it within a field.

16.11 The ethical significance

Noguchi's environments imply an ethics of structured freedom. They refuse both coercive prescription and indifferent formlessness. The user is given alternatives, obstacles, centres, and openings. The work respects difference by designing relation.

This ethical dimension is inseparable from the artist's own history of classification and non-belonging. Noguchi's response to being placed between categories is not to erase categories entirely, but to create larger frames in which they cannot claim total authority.

16.12 Final proposition

The title *Correspondence as Studio* ultimately names more than an archive. It identifies a model of sculpture. Noguchi's studio is wherever relation becomes capable of producing form: a letter, quarry, stage, foundry, room, garden, passport dossier, or conversation. The work begins when difference acquires a field and remains alive while that field permits further movement.

Chapter 17. Annotated register of the principal archival sources used

17.1 Early formation, Guggenheim fellowship, and Brancusi

MS_COR_316_001_original_1.pdf — Isamu Noguchi, *Plans for Study*, January 1927. Foundational statement of artistic intention submitted in connection with the Guggenheim fellowship. Noguchi decentres the human subject, proposes seeing nature through nature's own eyes, and acknowledges a technical deficit in stone and wood. The file is essential for the argument that his early ideas preceded Brancusi and were protected until sufficient skill could be acquired. It is also the earliest strong evidence for the sequence 'intuition–incubation–technical programme–future execution'.

MS_COR_317_002_original_1.pdf — Edward A. Rumely to Henry Allen Moe, 15 January 1927. Strategic recommendation describing Noguchi's Interlaken education, rapid academic progress, manual ability, economic self-reliance, and capacity to subordinate immediate pleasure to distant aims. It constructs the candidate as exceptional and therefore cannot be treated as neutral psychological measurement. It is nevertheless important evidence for the early external attribution of discipline, manual intelligence, and future greatness.

MS_COR_317_003_original_1.pdf — Isamu Noguchi, text on an unidentified female figure, 25 February 1927. Direct evidence of a pre-Brancusi psychology of form. The figure is read through flame, wave, spiral, dynamic balance, serenity, and nature's 'infinite reserve'. The source supports the thesis that Noguchi's later union of weight and latent motion was not merely derived from Brancusi.

MS_COR_317_005_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to Henry Allen Moe, 15 June 1927. First-quarter report recording the failed attempts to learn at the École des Beaux-Arts and with Minazzoli, followed by Noguchi's direct appeal to Brancusi. It is central to the concept of 'dissatisfaction as a selective instrument' and to the argument that the meeting with Brancusi was sought as a methodological solution rather than received passively as destiny.

MS_COR_317_006_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to Moe, 15 September 1927. Second report detailing the material and technical breadth of the Brancusi apprenticeship: marble, cathedral stone, measurement, tool-making, tempering, wood, bronze, iron, forging, welding, filing, and polishing. The phrase 'free from tricks' supplies an early ethical vocabulary of material truth. The storm that destroyed the working space is reinterpreted as a transition rather than merely a loss.

MS_COR_317_007_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to Moe, 15 December 1927. Third report, particularly important for the phrase 'a perfect travelling laboratory'. Dismantlable benches, easels, forge, grinding equipment, and packed tools transform the studio into transferable competence. The source supports the dissertation's concept of autonomy as infrastructure rather than weightlessness.

MS_COR_317_008_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to Moe, 12 January 1928. Fellowship renewal letter from London. Noguchi reports study at the British Museum and anticipates return to "my stones and chisels". It establishes the rhythm of historical study followed by embodied verification and shows that the identity of a reliable fellow had to be certified by a network including Brancusi and other artists.

MS_COR_372_013_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to Leonie Gilmour, 10 August 1927. Family letter giving a more intimate version of the Brancusi period. Brancusi appears as a human presence resembling an ancient Greek sculptor, while Paris itself becomes an extended field of buses, boulevards, cafés, dance halls, and museums. Used comparatively with the Guggenheim reports to show how addressee and genre shape self-presentation.

MS_COR_404_001_original_1.pdf and MS_COR_409_003_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to Ailes and to Leonie, both 27 March 1927. Two descriptions of England written on the same day. The sister receives traffic, speed, small cars, and bodily disorientation; the mother receives flowers, animals, hills, colour, and scale. Together they demonstrate a stable environmental matrix modulated by the recipient.

MS_COR_375_013_original_1.pdf — Leonie Gilmour to Noguchi, 28 March 1927. Records the studio left behind: scattered photographs gathered, a sculpture protected from removal or destruction, furniture and supplies managed, and another room found. The letter is crucial for replacing the myth of autonomous travel with a documented structure of delegated custodianship.

17.2 China, Japan, abstraction, and mobile identity

MS_COR_418_004_original_1.pdf — Ailes Gilmour to Noguchi, 6 June 1930. Provides Martha Graham's Cornish School address and projects the idea that Noguchi might find the essence of abstraction in a Japanese temple. The first element is operational; the second is an external orientalizing frame. The source confirms that abstraction was an articulated aim before the full Japanese encounter.

MS_COR_372_010_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to Leonie Gilmour, 30 July 1930. Letter from Harbin proposing a return through India and a head of Gandhi if Mme Naidu

could facilitate the encounter. It is a high-value example of an unrealized project existing as a conditional epistolary germ.

MS_COR_418_003_original_1.pdf — Ailes Gilmour to Noguchi, 22 October 1930. Preserves Noguchi's otherwise missing statement that he was 'going into the abstract'. The sister's anxiety that he should not personally fade away demonstrates the relational construction of artistic identity and the difference between formal abstraction and personal absence.

MS_COR_372_011_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to Leonie and Ailes, 21 December 1930. Letter with instructions and diagram for opening folding lanterns. Central evidence for correspondence as material and gestural transmission. The recipient completes the object; the letter functions as an assembly device.

MS_COR_404_011_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to Ailes, 29 December 1930. Records doubts about the coming Japanese stay, willingness to be corrected by experience, hope of future collaboration with Martha Graham, and the question whether the lantern 'fits the house'. It combines identity, latent collaboration, and environmental assessment of a domestic object.

MS_COR_372_009_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to Leonie, 28 December 1930. Describes works left in storage, daily experience in China, and an intense interest in seals. The red personal seal beneath the signature makes the letter a mixed verbal-visual field. The stored works exemplify material latency and the distributed studio.

MS_COR_372_002_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to Leonie, 28 January 1931. Immediate statement of having fallen in love with Kyoto. Used against late memories of separation to establish the co-presence of attraction and non-belonging rather than a single retrospective emotion.

MS_COR_375_002_original_1.pdf — Leonie Gilmour to Noguchi, 14 June 1930. Detailed calculations of freight, cubic tonnage, insurance, customs, and shipping routes. An essential operational complement to the 'travelling laboratory', demonstrating that mobility requires arithmetic, ports, intermediaries, and risk management.

MS_COR_375_014_original_1.pdf — Leonie to Noguchi, 17 June 1930. Suggests contacts with Tagore and Mme Naidu. Used as an antecedent to the Gandhi proposal, while carefully distinguishing the provision of access from the origin of the artistic idea.

17.3 Writings and interviews on the psychology of sculpture

MS_WRI_004_001_original_1.pdf — "What's the Matter with Sculpture?", 1936. Early manifesto against precious, expensive, socially detached sculpture. Advocates modern

materials, industrial methods, colour, speed, experiment, and the artist's direct involvement. The document anchors the dissertation's claim that Noguchi's expanded sculpture had an early social and technical programme.

MS_WRI_004_002_original_1.pdf — undated theoretical typescript. Records years of assimilation followed by deliberate self-direction, attraction to abstract systems, admiration for Brancusi, childhood nature memories, and studies in line, space, tension, repetition, and vibration. Central to the argument that abstraction organized affect rather than removing it.

MS_WRI_005_001_original_1.pdf — *I Become a Nisei*. Contemporary or near-contemporary account of identity, unreality, non-belonging, authority, and the proposed social role of arts, crafts, gardens, and planning at Poston. Used as primary evidence for the transformation of dislocation into constructive social space.

MS_WRI_006_001_original_1.pdf — published interview on sculpture and space. Presents sculpture as concentration of energies, active void, order within chaos, and reintegration of individual, society, and environment. Important for the concepts of relational perception, anonymity, and autonomy from imposed design briefs.

MS_WRI_008_001_original_1.pdf — long autobiographical Bollingen manuscript. Retrospective but indispensable narrative connecting travel, the original function of sculpture, tactile knowledge, plazas, gardens, Akari, Hiroshima, and the United Nations. Used with caution because of its late self-organizing function.

MS_WRI_010_020_original_1.pdf — leisure book outline. Explicitly links uprootedness, instability, work, desire for belonging, image, place, proportion, pilgrimage, and leisure. One of the most direct sources for the dissertation's psychological model of place as a structure of identity.

MS_WRI_010_022_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to William McGuire, 28 February 1974. States that he did not feel equal to writing the Bollingen book and continued the research through actual artistic application. Central evidence for 'making as knowledge' and 'writing in things'.

MS_WRI_011_001_original_1.pdf — writing on sculpture, perception, and material. Argues that sculpture must be known through movement, touch, measurement, memory, and imagination; explores matter, environment, and reduction of authorial pride. Central to embodied perception and control/surrender.

MS_WRI_041_001_original_1.pdf — 1976 sculpture conference. Contains major statements on stage as hypothetical environment, need for control of the surrounding field, manual knowledge, conversation with stone, time as collaborator, and movement as the

condition of equilibrium. A principal retrospective source triangulated with contemporary correspondence.

MS_WRI_047_001_original_1.pdf — Riverside Playground interview, 8 September 1978. Documents repeated revisions, institutional cancellation, fear produced by earlier failures, childhood lack of place, and the artist's function as proposal. Essential for the psychology of persistence and unbuilt work.

MS_WRI_047_004_original_1.pdf — interview with Dore Ashton, 13 September 1978. Explores axis, centre, inner impulse, stylistic change, dichotomous identity, non-belonging, universality, and the search for a frame large enough to contain opposing traditions. Used as a late formulation rather than contemporary causation.

MS_WRI_047_009_original_1.pdf and MS_WRI_047_010_original_1.pdf — interview of 18 September 1978. Discuss impossibility as creative generator, stone and weight, anxiety in the face of success, doing instead of writing, small models, clay as direct thought, scale, assistance, and the past. Core sources for the cycle of challenge, fixation, and renewed movement.

MS_WRI_049_004_original_1.pdf, MS_WRI_049_005_original_1.pdf, and MS_WRI_049_008_original_1.pdf — 1978 interviews. Address discarded variants, *Black Sun*, dialogue, acquisition, the book written in things, IBM, the edge of the field, levitation, Graham's sets, invisible function, and the space between. Together they provide the richest late account of relational sculpture.

MS_WRI_057_001_original_1.pdf — Noguchi's tribute to Buckminster Fuller, 1983. Reveals Noguchi as listener and 'memory repository', his attraction to the unrooted Dymaxion House, and his ambivalence towards technology. Used as a relational and partly projective source.

MS_WRI_063_002_original_1.pdf — Venice statement. Affirms continuing uncertainty, attraction to the challenge, bodily instability, nature's indeterminacy, and the future life of unrealized works. Important for the late psychology of non-closure.

MS_WRI_066_001_original_1.pdf — text for *Shin Kenchiku*. Links house, earth, childhood construction, carpentry, Brancusi, separation, the ancient past, and the search beyond barriers. Central to adaptive rootedness and the relation between loss, return, and making.

MS_WRI_074_003_original_1.pdf — Apostolos-Cappadona interview, 22 February 1987. Rich but heavily prompted late conversation on myth, father, Brancusi,

simultaneous projects, bodily flow, prehistoric continuity, and creation as discovery. Interpreted within the interviewer's prior conceptual frame.

MS_WRI_094_001_original_1.pdf — *Essays and Conversations of Isamu Noguchi*. Composite volume gathering writings and 1987 conversations. Used as a map and comparative text, not counted as a single independent testimony. Includes the crucial retrospective link between isolation and the expansion of sculpture.

17.4 Fuller, Hasegawa, and cognitive interlocutors

MS_COR_254_001_original_1.pdf — Fuller materials of April 1930. Includes Fuller's promotion of Noguchi, custody of portraits, and a copy of a Dymaxion letter transmitted to him. Used to establish the relational infrastructure of the young artist and the early presence of industrial-social design language.

MS_COR_254_002_original_1.pdf — Fuller to Noguchi, 4 April 1930. Fuller asks Noguchi to speak with Harvey Wiley Corbett and use his enthusiasm to strengthen the project's support. Demonstrates that Noguchi was already regarded as a persuasive mediator, not merely a beneficiary.

MS_COR_254_004_original_1.pdf–MS_COR_254_007_original_1.pdf — telegram sequence and follow-up, April 1930. Draft, typescript, transmitted telegram, and explanatory letter show philosophical conversation condensed into an epistolary object. Fuller reflects a universalist identity to Noguchi and creates introductions for Paris.

MS_COR_254_008_original_1.pdf — Fuller to Noguchi, 16 June 1930. Documents continued promotion of Noguchi's work while the sculptor travelled. The relation sustains professional continuity across absence.

MS_COR_244_002_original_1.pdf and MS_COR_244_006_original_1.pdf — Fuller texts dedicated to Noguchi, 1967. Supply the conceptual environment of comprehensive design, world responsibility, doing more with less, and reform of environment. Chronologically close to Expo '70; influence on specific forms remains a qualified hypothesis.

MS_COR_040_004_original_1.pdf — Saburo Hasegawa to Noguchi, 9 September 1950. Hasegawa credits Noguchi with giving him courage, discusses ink work, poetry, tradition, and modern international networks. Demonstrates reciprocal rather than unilateral influence.

MS_COR_043_008_original_1.pdf — Hasegawa to Noguchi, 12 January 1951. Thanks Noguchi for a missing New Year's letter, attributes encouragement towards abstract

ink drawing, and proposes Zen, calligraphy, gardens, travel, and translation. A major letter in the transpacific shared studio.

MS_COR_043_009_original_1.pdf — Hasegawa to Noguchi, 18 January 1951. Sends haiku and reflections on daily attention, peace, material and spiritual progress, and the strength of water. Treated as stimuli offered to Noguchi, not proven sources of individual works.

17.5 Graham and the stage

MS_COR_261_001_original_1.pdf — Martha Graham to Noguchi, 27 February 1944. Direct testimony that Noguchi had changed Graham's visual criteria. Her rejection of a painted drop and thanks for helping her see establish the sculptor as perceptual catalyst.

MS_DAN_MG_001_001_original_1.pdf — programme for *El Penitente*, May 1944. Documents Noguchi's decor within a ritual sequence of penance, vision, death, and celebration. Used to establish performative context rather than intention.

MS_DAN_MG_001_002_original_1.pdf — Library of Congress programme, 31 October 1944. Contemporary evidence for *Imagined Wing*, *Herodiade*, and *Appalachian Spring*. Provides the psychic topologies of imagined places, mirror and waiting, and house/community.

MS_DAN_MG_001_010_original_1.pdf — American Dance Festival programme, August 1948. Brings together house, stair, maze, and cave in one evening. Central to the concept of psychical topology made bodily.

MS_DAN_MG_003_008_original_1.pdf — Playbill, May 1953. Documents the continued repertory life of sets and therefore the accumulation of wear, modification, and material biography.

MS_COR_426_002_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to Martha Graham, 22 July 1982. Central statement on original wear, damage as creative history, bronzes that may kill stage life, and the museum as theatre with rotating objects, music, and light.

MS_COR_427_001_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to Graham and Ron Protas, 27 February 1984. Element-by-element material matrix for bronze, original reconstruction, wearable forms, editions, and museum display. Establishes selective rather than absolute material principles and introduces operational authenticity through instructed reconstruction.

17.6 Social space and Poston

MS_COR_312_001_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to Nelson Rockefeller, 17 December 1940. Defines playgrounds as sculpture and ground contouring and asks how art

may serve interracial understanding. Establishes the social-environmental programme before Poston.

MS_COR_288_010_original_1.pdf and MS_COR_288_009_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to Archibald MacLeish, 13 and 19 February 1942. Direct contemporary evidence of crisis response through policy, information, work, representatives, and planning. Used for the psychological pattern of converting indeterminate threat into structured action.

MS_COR_339_005_original_1.pdf — sworn passport statement, 6 April 1953. Retrospective defensive reconstruction of Nisei mobilization and Poston, accompanied by an archive offered as proof. Central for mobility under surveillance and the archive as defensive studio.

MS_COR_332_001_original_1.pdf — Robert J. Maeda, "Isamu Noguchi: 5-7-A, Poston, Arizona", 1994. Secondary study and essential guide to primary documents in Noguchi, WRA, and Japanese American National Museum collections. Used for historiography and source mapping, not as direct voice.

17.7 Akari and distributed production

MS_COR_044_001_original_1.pdf — Lightolier to Noguchi, 17 November 1952. Documents contract termination, failed mass-market appeal, cheaper material substitutions, and renewed interest in handmade Japanese paper. Central to material authenticity within industrial circulation.

MS_COR_044_002_original_1.pdf — Edison Price to Noguchi, 20 November 1952. Proposes new fabrication and distribution, asks about rights, and seeks to reactivate unproduced models. Shows rejected or dormant designs migrating into a new system.

MS_COR_044_008_original_1.pdf — Damon Giffard to Noguchi, 25 November 1952. Discusses models, costs, duties, and components, and recommends retaining the Japanese name Akari. Important for identity and cultural branding.

MS_COR_045_003_original_1.pdf — Robert J. Bender to Noguchi, 2 February 1953. Confirms that negotiations were slowed to permit patent protection. Documents control before circulation.

MS_COR_046_005_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to Jack McKeown, probable March 1953. Direct statement on wholesale distribution, limited initial models, and the admission 'Being no business man myself'. Used to distinguish business discomfort from strategic ignorance.

MS_COR_272_002_original_1.pdf — Y. Ichikawa to Noguchi, 6 February 1953. Dense account of producers, samples, price sheets, patents, cash, distributors, and deadlines.

One of the clearest documents showing Akari as a distributed sculptural and commercial system.

17.8 Projects, architecture, and technical systems

MS_COR_029_012_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to George Nelson, 11 September 1940. Connects the Hawaiian playground to a 1935 Neutra proposal and offers a compressed self-biography and photographs. Evidence for reactivation of rejected projects and selective control of public narrative.

MS_COR_042_003_original_1.pdf — probable Antonin Raymond to Noguchi, 25 October 1950. Responds to Noguchi's project criticisms, discusses model, mural, planter, stair, terrain, and the need for someone with whom to think and design. A central case of the letter modifying architecture before sculpture is inserted.

MS_COR_340_014_original_1.pdf–MS_COR_340_023_original_1.pdf — Lever House dossier, July–December 1953. Direct and indirect sources on material research, waiting, Pentelic marble, cost, quarry time, corporate interest, and project suspension. Core case of the unbuilt work surviving in correspondence.

MS_COR_069_008_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to Dimitri Hadzi, 28 May 1962. Organizes Roman studio, armatures, assistants, wood-to-bronze translation, and large clay modelling. Central to distributed production and concentrated formative presence.

MS_COR_304_001_original_1.pdf–MS_COR_304_008_original_1.pdf — Gene Owens correspondence, 1962–63. Full chain from offer of casting competence to Noguchi's statements on freedom without an assistant, episodic collaboration, salary, travel, possible foundry, and tools sent to the studio.

MS_COR_323_011_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to Shoji Sadao, 6 December 1971. Treats the Detroit fountain as a system of pneumatic, hydraulic, magnetic, electronic, and computerized controls; asks for Boeing expertise. Central to cross-disciplinary transfer and temporal precision.

MS_COR_249_009_original_1.pdf, MS_COR_248_002_original_1.pdf, MS_COR_249_006_original_1.pdf, MS_COR_248_001_original_1.pdf, and MS_COR_248_006_original_1.pdf — Expo '70 chain. The most complete example of correspondence, theory, spatial draft, annotation, and collective proposal functioning as a shared design studio.

17.9 Patronage, photography, and legacy

MS_COR_277_014_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to J. Patrick Lannan, 2 January 1980. Direct statement of overload, need for quiet work, and necessity of seeing a site before

selecting sculptures. Central to situated orientation and the distinction between inventory and place.

MS_COR_277_024_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to George McNeil and Lannan, 13 July 1982. Defines the creative 'next step' and the area 'beyond definitions'. Core source for the psychology of patronal recognition.

MS_COR_277_029_original_1.pdf–MS_COR_277_039_original_1.pdf — Lannan jasper dossier. Photographs, correspondence, price, deposit, shipment, payment, and promised installation image form a nearly complete chain of operative photography and acquisition.

MS_COR_277_033_original_1.pdf — Noguchi to Lannan, 13 May 1983. Distinguishes personal property, Foundation ownership, Gemini editions, dealer relations, friendship, discounts, and museum funding. Central to market as infrastructure of legacy.

MS_COR_338_033_original_1.pdf — Yusaku Kamekura to Noguchi, 27 March 1953. One of the strongest documents on photography as interpretative production: views, backgrounds, retouching, support removal, chronology, and page allocation.

MS_COR_170_002_original_1.pdf — studio staff memorandum, 15 September 1983. Documents mature studio as external memory and decision filter, with enclosures concerning photography, exhibitions, conservation, and authentication.

17.10 Family, economy, and the operational archive

MS_COR_380_001_original_1.pdf — Leonie Gilmour to Catherine, 27 March 1927. Describes the departure ceremony, public construction of Noguchi as genius, and the distributed economic body of *Undine*: model, financier, foundry, gallery, mother, friends, and unpaid or deferred modelling labour.

MS_COR_408_005_original_1.pdf — Leonie to Noguchi, 21 April 1927. Reports direct negotiations with Albee concerning debt and continued circulation of *Undine* after Noguchi's departure. Triangulates the earlier family account.

MS_COR_408_006_original_1.pdf — Leonie to Noguchi, 28 July 1927. Sends the birth certificate and instructs him to preserve it for travel and return. Central to the concept of administrative documentation as part of a mobile studio.

MS_COR_408_008_original_1.pdf — Leonie to Noguchi, 4 December 1927. Responds to Noguchi's introductions by attempting to locate Andrée Ruellan and organize the consignment and possible sale of handmade jewellery. Demonstrates a letter generating a network.

MS_COR_348_001_original_1.pdf and MS_COR_348_002_original_1.pdf — Yone Noguchi to Isamu, 6 May 1947, original and transcript. Used only as contextual evidence of paternal recognition and the post-war Japanese environment. The transcript is not counted as a second communication.

MS_COR_348_003_original_1.pdf and MS_COR_348_004_original_1.pdf — Yone Noguchi postcards, 1947 or probable 1947. Primarily family and material requests, therefore excluded from psychological interpretation except where they identify missing outgoing letters or transpacific obligations.

Chapter 18. Chronological concordance of psychological and sculptural development, 1924–1988

18.1 1924–1926: Medicine, modelling, and the problem of professional identity

The earliest phase is marked by tension between a socially secure profession and an artistic vocation not yet institutionally validated. The two biographies record the medical studies, the encounter with Gutzon Borglum, the rapid movement towards portraiture, and the importance of Edward A. Rumely's encouragement. The archival documents gathered for the present dissertation begin most densely in 1927, but the preceding years establish three conditions that remain significant: manual aptitude, a need to secure livelihood, and the experience of art as a choice made against a more conventional future.

Noguchi's early portraiture should not be treated as a merely commercial prelude to abstraction. It supplies technical practice, access to patrons, and a network of influential sitters. It also makes the face a field through which social relation becomes material. The economic fragility later revealed by the *Undine* documents belongs to this early context.

18.2 1927: protected ideas and technical self-construction

January 1927 produces the *Plans for Study*, Rumely's recommendation, and the explicit articulation of nature, matter, human decentring, technical lack, and transcontinental itinerary. February adds the text on the female figure and its 'infinite reserve'. March brings departure, the two London letters, and the studio left under Leonie's custody.

The Paris sequence is psychologically decisive. Noguchi tries methods, rejects them, seeks Brancusi, and finds the relation between technique and material he considers adequate. The Guggenheim reports show disciplined learning; the family letters show emotional adaptation to city and master.

The storm that damages the atelier terminates dependence upon a particular place. By December Noguchi has converted the apprenticeship into a travelling laboratory. The year therefore moves from imagined future to portable operational self.

18.3 1928–1929: return to material, portrait networks, and the formation of independence

The January 1928 renewal letter places Noguchi in the British Museum but anticipates return to stones and chisels. Study and making are organized rhythmically. The network of

certifying figures remains necessary, yet the technical foundation for independence has been built.

During the subsequent period, portraits continue to finance and connect the career. The relation to Fuller begins to become structurally important. Noguchi's autonomy is increasingly sustained by reciprocal promotion rather than only by fellowship.

18.4 1930–1931: abstraction, Asia, folding forms, and conditional belonging

The Fuller correspondence of 1930 reflects an identity of universal expansion and supports Noguchi's professional continuity during travel. Family letters supply contacts, freight calculations, and domestic infrastructure.

The journey across Siberia and China produces the unrealized Gandhi proposal, interest in seals, works left in storage, folding lanterns, and a declared movement 'into the abstract'. These are not isolated anecdotes. Together they show a mind attentive to transformation, portable structure, visual identity, and the conditional relation between itinerary and work.

The move to Japan is undertaken with doubt rather than triumphant return. Kyoto produces immediate affection; later memories retain separation. The phase confirms that love of place and secure belonging are not equivalent.

18.5 1932–1936: social ambition, Mexican experience, and a modern sculptural programme

The decade's middle years include abstract experiments, portrait work, playground concepts, theatre, and the Mexican mural. The 1936 manifesto attacks sculptural preciousness and detachment from contemporary life. Noguchi advocates direct participation, modern material, colour, economy, speed, and social application.

The programme is not a finished doctrine. It establishes the problems that later projects will complicate: how can direct making coexist with distributed fabrication, and how can social use coexist with artistic autonomy?

18.6 1937–1941: public work, Ford, playgrounds, and environmental behaviour

The Ford Fountain letter of 1939 reveals success, new material, insufficient compensation, studio overhead, and a water effect still requiring adjustment. Noguchi's public practice enters the field of contract and technology.

The 1940 letter to George Nelson reactivates an earlier playground proposal and constructs a condensed professional biography. The letter to Rockefeller defines playgrounds

as sculpture and ground contouring and seeks a public function for art in interracial understanding.

The environmental turn is therefore established before wartime internment. Sculpture is already ground, behaviour, and social field.

18.7 1942: crisis, organization, and Poston as broken studio

The February letters to MacLeish show Noguchi responding to anti-Japanese hysteria through policy, information, employment, and organization. The Nisei Mobilization is rapidly constructed around his initiative.

Entry into Poston carries the hope of service and identification. The camp instead reveals the severing of capacity from consequence. The proposed arts, recreation, and productive programmes encounter institutional blockage. Noguchi's ordinary creative operation—problem, action, transformation—fails.

Poston becomes the negative model against which later participatory environments may be read. It demonstrates that design without authority over conditions cannot produce agency.

18.8 1943–1945: materials, Graham, and the stage as psychological field

A 1943 letter introduces Corite through description and sample. Material enters the studio by post and awaits tactile verification. The Graham letter of February 1944 declares that a painted drop is no longer sufficient and credits Noguchi with changing her sight.

The programmes of 1944 and 1948 establish house, mirror, ritual, stair, labyrinth, and cave as psychical topologies activated by the body. The stage becomes the principal laboratory for bounded environmental experience.

18.9 1946–1949: separation, exhibition, Egan, and the Bollingen departure

Post-war work moves among abstraction, theatre, public ambition, and renewed engagement with Japan. Letters from Yone Noguchi provide family and post-war context but do not by themselves establish creative causation.

Noguchi's account of the Egan Gallery period and the death of Gorky, though retrospective, connects success, loss, atomic anxiety, and the search for a wider function of sculpture. The Bollingen fellowship opens the transhistorical study of leisure and environment.

The key psychological shift is from the autonomous object to a larger question of collective and existential orientation.

18.10 1950–1951: Hasegawa, Reader's Digest, Japan, and reciprocal modernism

The correspondence with Saburo Hasegawa creates a shared transpacific studio of ink, paper, Zen, poetry, calligraphy, gardens, and anti-imitation. Noguchi encourages Hasegawa's abstract ink work; Hasegawa supplies a living relation to Japanese intellectual and artistic traditions.

The probable Antonin Raymond letter demonstrates Noguchi's participation in architectural thinking, terrain, stair, mural, and planting. The interlocutor needs him to help think and design, not merely to add a sculpture.

The period complicates the simple model of Western modernist influence upon a Japanese-American artist. Knowledge moves reciprocally.

18.11 1951–1953: Akari, publication, Hiroshima, Lever, and political scrutiny

Akari moves from local production towards an international system. Contracts, paper, supports, patents, prices, samples, defects, duties, dealers, and naming become part of the work's identity.

Noguchi's relationship with editors and institutions reveals both vulnerability and trust. Frankfurter's failed publication contrasts with Entenza's successful mediation of the 'personal venom' and public language around Hiroshima.

Lever House brings material desire and institutional delay into direct conflict. Noguchi's European travel becomes quarry research; Greek marble alters the project; corporate governance prevents commitment. Simultaneously, passport and visa difficulties make mobility politically unstable.

The period therefore joins artistic expansion to intense administrative pressure.

18.12 1954–1958: absence, reconstruction, UNESCO, and the production of public legitimacy

The Rothschild room correspondence shows collaborators waiting for Noguchi's physical presence, then simplifying the design in his absence. Authorship is embodied; absence produces subtraction.

The UNESCO Garden mobilizes fundraising, press, government, gardeners, trees, and transport. An image sent by Noguchi helps produce money and material. Tradition is demanded as national legibility and transformed as personal composition.

The garden confirms that public sculpture is not only design but the coordination of social systems.

18.13 1959–1962: Entenza's networks, Yale, Rome, and the episodic studio

Entenza continues to connect Noguchi to commissions, materials, publications, and diplomatic responses, though the later memory of Graham Foundation rejection complicates this trust.

The Gene Owens exchange makes the studio's psychology explicit. Noguchi values freedom without an assistant, fears indefinite obligation, and seeks project-specific collaboration. Rome offers economical bronze production; Owens offers foundry knowledge; Yale requires models and marble work. The studio expands episodically across locations.

The 1962 Hadzi letter reveals distributed infrastructure and concentrated forming action.

18.14 1963–1966: tools, new media, institutional injury, and category defence

Owens sends tools and casting offers, continuing a technically reciprocal relationship. Tamarind proposes a protected environment for Noguchi's entry into lithography, with experts absorbing technical anxiety.

The 1966 Blunk letter records the long memory of Graham Foundation rejection and the paradoxical advice that useful forms may need to become 'useless' to be recognized as sculpture. Institutional categories harden the boundary Noguchi elsewhere dissolves.

18.15 1967: Fuller, McHale, and Expo '70

The Expo project assembles the USIA brief, Fuller's systemic texts, McHale's theme notes, Noguchi's spatial imagination, annotated revision, and collective proposal. It is the strongest documentary demonstration of layered authorship.

The environment joins earth and moon, mound and balloon, contemplation and play, national representation and global system. Visitors choose within a designed field. Technology is subordinated to human and natural values.

The project makes Noguchi's psychological structure public: centre and flight, control and freedom, individuality and system.

18.16 1968–1971: autobiography, stone, museums, and programmed fountains

A Sculptor's World and related autobiographical writing consolidate a public account of isolation, environment, and expanded sculpture. Stage sets remain in repertory and accumulate use.

The Dodge Fountain correspondence transfers aerospace hydraulic knowledge into a sculptural system. Sadao becomes investigator; Boeing becomes potential technical partner; the fountain becomes programmed time.

The 1971 Lannan and property documents show the increasing entanglement of art, market, installation, and institutional continuity.

18.17 1972–1976: rejection, leisure, site, and public explanation

The seafront refusal communicated by Lannan demonstrates that rejection need not destroy patronal relation. The 1974 McGuire letter explicitly states that the Bollingen book continued through making. The Powers correspondence links home to a room that waits and to the threatened consumption of place by concrete and tourism.

The 1976 conference supplies a mature public vocabulary: conversation with stone, manual truth, time, field, and bicycle-like movement. It is a major retrospective synthesis to be tested against earlier documents.

18.18 1977–1979: interviews, China, Lannan, and the return to the book

The 1978 interviews articulate the full psychological vocabulary of challenge, weight, centre, non-belonging, success, movement, scale, and the work written in things. Their coherence must be understood as retrospective.

In 1979 the China invitation is transformed into a study of the Chinese garden, and the thirty-year-old Bollingen book is again taken up. Lannan returns archival memory through *The Indiana University Bookman*. The Brancusi Society event publicly reopens the genealogy of apprenticeship during Noguchi's canonization.

18.19 1980–1983: California Scenario, operative photography, patronage, and museum finance

Noguchi experiences public overload while seeking quiet work. He insists upon seeing the Lannan site before selecting sculptures. The probable Segerstrom letter describes the transformative effect of Noguchi's 'life-arts' and Japanese environment.

The Gene Owens reply of 1981 recalls the Texas riverbed photographs while California Scenario is still being adjusted for nature's future participation. Visual memory becomes active after latency.

The Lannan jasper dossier shows photography, price, transport, payment, and installation forming one chain. The *Rain Mountain* letter distinguishes friendship, Foundation, dealer, edition, and museum funding.

The mature studio becomes a distributed institution.

18.20 1982–1984: wear, reconstruction, and the museum as theatre

The Graham letters revisit decades of stage work. Noguchi values original wear as memory and resists indiscriminate bronze. Two years later he develops an element-specific matrix of material appropriateness and accepts reconstruction under instruction.

The debate demonstrates a late theory of authenticity capable of distinguishing historical matter, operational method, performative use, and market translation.

18.21 1985–1988: house, legacy, discovery, and non-closure

The *Shin Kenchiku* text integrates childhood construction, adaptive relation to earth, Brancusi, tradition, and the search beyond barriers. Noguchi asks that the completed text remain unaltered.

The 1987 interviews further organize the life through discovery, myth, simultaneous projects, and the relation of past and future. Their interviewer-conditioned nature must remain visible.

The final years do not yield a closed doctrine. Noguchi continues to describe sculpture's core as a challenge still pursued. The career ends in non-closure.

18.22 The longitudinal pattern

Across the chronology, several processes recur with changing scale:

- technical deficit becomes programme;
- non-belonging becomes place-making;
- solitude becomes episodic collaboration;
- rejection becomes migration of the proposal;
- material resistance becomes knowledge;
- travel becomes a mobile studio;
- communication becomes production network;
- public success becomes both recognition and risk of fixation;
- archive becomes legacy infrastructure.

The recurrence does not erase historical change. The young sculptor carries tools; the mature artist coordinates institutions. The operation of selective autonomy remains.

Chapter 19. Consolidated propositions, counterevidence, and degrees of certainty

19.1 Proposition: non-belonging becomes place-making

The proposition is supported by *I Become a Nisei*, the leisure outlines, the Ashton interview, the Powers correspondence, and the repeated construction of studios, gardens, playgrounds, and public environments. Noguchi directly links isolation to the search for a wider frame for sculpture in a later essay gathered in MS_WRI_094_001.

Counterevidence and qualification: environmental interests predate Poston and cannot be reduced to identity conflict. Love of Kyoto coexists with separation. Place-making is one response among several, not a universal symbolic code.

Degree of certainty: **high as a recurring operation; low if formulated as a single biographical cause of every environment**.

19.2 Proposition: dispersion is regulated by provisional centres

Evidence includes stone as orientation, the axis and centre in interviews, the *World Mound*, the studio as ground, and the need to see sites before choosing works. The bicycle metaphor confirms that movement, not static identity, sustains equilibrium.

Counterevidence: Noguchi occasionally valued anonymity, open field, and unboundedness. Centres are not always literal objects.

Degree of certainty: **high**, provided 'centre' is understood relationally and provisionally.

19.3 Proposition: *radicamento* and *decollo* coexist

Evidence includes Fuller's Dymaxion House, Noguchi's attraction to unrooted habitation, levitating stones, *Black Sun*, *World Mound*, Echo balloon, and aerial imagery.

Counterevidence: not every work combines both poles visibly. The terms are interpretative rather than Noguchi's own stable pair.

Degree of certainty: **high as a synthetic analytical model; medium as conscious terminology**.

19.4 Proposition: making produces knowledge

Direct evidence includes the McGuire letter, the book written in actual things, clay as direct sketch, Brancusi apprenticeship, Owens's casting proposal, and the repeated return from study to stones and chisels.

Counterevidence: Noguchi also used extensive reading, theoretical correspondence, drawing, and models. Making is not the only source of knowledge.

Degree of certainty: **very high**.

19.5 Proposition: material is an interlocutor

Direct retrospective language of conversation with stone is supported by the Greek marble encounter, Japanese ceramics, changing garden conditions, and technical correspondence.

Counterevidence: the metaphor can romanticize a highly calculated practice. Material 'speaks' through physical and economic constraints, not intention.

Degree of certainty: **high if understood operationally, not mystically**.

19.6 Proposition: control and surrender are sequential

Evidence shows intense preparation, responsiveness during making, and later release to time, nature, wear, or use. The *Shin Kenchiku* letter and stage reconstruction correspondence show strong closure after a form is achieved.

Counterevidence: phases can overlap; some works remain subject to correction after installation.

Degree of certainty: **high as a dominant pattern**.

19.7 Proposition: autonomy is relational

The entire corpus demonstrates dependence upon mentors, family, assistants, architects, patrons, foundries, staff, and institutions. Noguchi repeatedly protects decisive thresholds rather than seeking self-sufficiency.

Counterevidence: periods of direct solitary work and strong suspicion of collaborators remain significant.

Degree of certainty: **very high**.

19.8 Proposition: trust determines the success of mediation

Entenza, Frankfurter, Kirstein, Owens, Lannan, Bunshaft, and Hasegawa provide comparative evidence. Noguchi accepts deep intervention where he perceives respect for method and resists where he perceives appropriation or misdefinition.

Counterevidence: practical timing and temperament also affect outcomes; trust cannot explain every conflict.

Degree of certainty: **high but relationally specific**.

19.9 Proposition: the studio is episodic and distributed

Noguchi's 'freedom to think' without assistants, project-specific collaboration, mature staff filtering, family custodianship, and mobile laboratory support the proposition.

Counterevidence: the degree of distribution changes significantly over time and among media.

Degree of certainty: **very high**.

19.10 Proposition: correspondence functions as studio

Demonstrated through lantern assembly, Corite sample, UNESCO fundraising, Akari distribution, Entenza's editing, passport defence, Owens tools, Lannan photography, Expo drafting, and project timing.

Counterevidence: many letters are purely private or contextual. The concept must not be applied indiscriminately.

Degree of certainty: **very high when operation is documented**.

19.11 Proposition: Poston is a broken studio

Evidence includes contemporary and near-contemporary accounts of stopped time, useless capacity, blocked projects, and desire for release. Pre-Poston playground and political letters provide the positive model of action that the camp frustrates.

Counterevidence: the formulation is interpretative and should not replace political and historical analysis of incarceration.

Degree of certainty: **high as an analytical model**.

19.12 Proposition: Fuller served as mirror and scaffolding

Early letters show promotion, introductions, custody, reciprocal advocacy, and universalist language. Later texts transmitted to Noguchi provide systemic environmental concepts.

Counterevidence: direct formal influence on specific works remains unproved in many cases.

Degree of certainty: **high relationally; medium or low for individual formal derivations**.

19.13 Proposition: stage sets possess a double ontology

Programmes, interviews, and the 1982–84 letters show sets functioning as both material objects and performed events. Wear, portability, lightness, and reconstruction all depend upon this distinction.

Counterevidence: some stage elements acquire relative autonomy and can legitimately become bronze sculptures.

Degree of certainty: **very high**.

19.14 Proposition: wear is an embodied archive

Noguchi directly values damage and wear as traces of creative experience. Repertory programmes establish repeated use over time.

Counterevidence: not every damage is meaningful; excessive deterioration may require conservation.

Degree of certainty: **high, with conservation limits**.

19.15 Proposition: Akari is distributed sculpture

Production correspondence shows paper, metal, patents, price, distribution, defects, names, and users as constitutive. The folding lantern letters provide an earlier operational analogue.

Counterevidence: the term 'distributed sculpture' is analytical; Noguchi's own exact terminology varies.

Degree of certainty: **very high**.

19.16 Proposition: unbuilt works remain active

Evidence includes the Gandhi head, Lever House, Riverside, Expo '70, rejected Yale variants, and Noguchi's Venice statement on future possibilities.

Counterevidence: some proposals simply disappear and cannot be shown to influence later work.

Degree of certainty: **high for the archive as reservoir; variable by project**.

19.17 Proposition: photography is operative

UNESCO fundraising, Lannan acquisition, Kamekura retouching, and Randlett documentation demonstrate material effects.

Counterevidence: photography remains unable to reproduce embodied sculptural knowledge and can distort material fact.

Degree of certainty: **very high**.

19.18 Proposition: market can become museum infrastructure

The *Rain Mountain* letter explicitly links editions to financing of the proposed museum.

Counterevidence: the market also pressures material prestige and objectification; not all sales serve legacy.

Degree of certainty: **very high in the documented case**.

19.19 Proposition: mobility is part of cognition

The travelling laboratory, Bollingen journey, material research, Chinese and Japanese letters, and passport declaration all link travel to knowledge.

Counterevidence: mobility can also be imposed, exhausting, or disruptive; it is not inherently liberating.

Degree of certainty: **very high**.

19.20 Proposition: family belongs to the studio only when operational

Leonie's custody, debt negotiation, freight calculation, contacts, birth certificate, and archival gathering demonstrate operational relevance. Yone's illness and private appeals do not show creative effects without Noguchi's response.

Counterevidence: emotional relations may have indirect artistic consequences not recoverable from the present archive.

Degree of certainty: **high as a methodological rule, not a claim that family affect was irrelevant**.

19.21 Proposition: recipient shapes written perception

The paired London letters provide direct evidence. Institutional reports and family letters on Brancusi offer a second comparison.

Counterevidence: stable perceptual categories persist across recipients.

Degree of certainty: **very high**.

19.22 Proposition: abstraction was a relational identity before it was a mature style

Ailes's letters preserve Noguchi's missing declaration and interpret it as possible personal disappearance; the theoretical typescript and 1927 figure text provide related direct evidence.

Counterevidence: the original 'going into the abstract' letter is missing, and Ailes's wording may simplify Noguchi's thought.

Degree of certainty: **high for the social recognition of a turn; medium for exact theoretical content**.

19.23 Proposition: images can remain latent and reactivate later

The Owens riverbed sequence is direct: image sent in 1974, remembered in 1981 in relation to the California garden.

Counterevidence: the photograph is not proven to be a compositional model.

Degree of certainty: **very high for memory, medium for formal influence**.

19.24 Proposition: public success risks stylistic fixation

Noguchi's accounts of Egan, suspicion of fashion, refusal to repeat, and bicycle metaphor support the proposition.

Counterevidence: the strongest statements are retrospective and may form part of a heroic narrative of continual renewal.

Degree of certainty: **high as self-understanding; medium as explanation of every stylistic shift**.

19.25 Proposition: Noguchi's principal innovation is relational sculpture

The proposition is supported across stage, playground, Akari, garden, fountain, pavilion, and museum. It explains formal diversity without reducing the work to biography.

Counterevidence: autonomous objects and traditional sculptural concerns remain substantial throughout the career.

Degree of certainty: **very high, provided expansion is understood to include rather than abolish the object**.

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