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A Zen Lens

An alternative way of thinking about a group of contemporary landscape photographers.

Bethany Kate Leitch

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield for the Degree of Master of Arts by Research

August 2021

Abstract

The photographers explored in this thesis are: Awoiska van der Molen, Thomas Joshua Cooper, Boomoon, Minny Lee, Jungjin Lee and Janelle Lynch. These photographers have been grouped as there are common strategies in their work and process of making which are: they all photograph fundamental natural elements, they all embrace an embodied slowness as part of their process of making and there is an embodied openness in the process of viewing their work. Discussion of landscape imagery often relies on Western aesthetics, namely the sublime, the picturesque and the beautiful. However, the common strategies identified in these photographers' work have some difficulties with being discussed from a Western aesthetic perspective. Driven by the frustration of struggling to discuss the photographers' work from a Western aesthetics point of view, this thesis considers these common strategies through a Zen Buddhist way of thinking. In the discussion of Zen Buddhism, this thesis turns to the writings of D.T. Suzuki (who discusses the idea of experiences being necessary in the understanding of Zen) and Jon Kabat-Zinn (who discusses the concept of being present in the moment in relation to Buddhist mindfulness). It is through exploring these writers that this thesis identifies key characteristics of Zen which aid the discussion of the photographers' work. These are: being present in the moment, being contemplative and an embodied openness.

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Introduction

When exploring landscape imagery (for example, photographs, paintings, drawings) there are existing established aesthetics that are often used to describe the work being discussed. The term 'aesthetics' refers to a branch of philosophy that is concerned with the nature of beauty and taste and can be associated with different principles or theories which underly a particular artist movement or style (Britannica, n.d.). Frequently used aesthetics in the discussion of landscape imagery are the picturesque, the beautiful and the sublime, all of which have a Western origin (typically forming in Europe). These aesthetics are regularly used in the discussion of landscape art and therefore represent a particular way of understanding the physical landscape and landscape imagery from a Western way of thinking. Landscape imagery shapes and reflects human relationships with the land. How the landscape is understood and viewed, is dependent on one's personal understanding, beliefs and cultural influences. Thus, if the discussion surrounding aesthetics in landscape imagery predominantly consists of Western ideas, then one's relationship with the land might be influenced in a particular way because of this.

This thesis aims to understand a loosely grouped set of contemporary landscape photographers:

Awoiska van der Molen, Thomas Joshua Cooper, Janelle Lynch, Boomoon, Jungjin Lee and Minny Lee.

When considering these selected contemporary landscape photographers, some difficulties with discussing their work through Western aesthetics arise. For example, the sublime is concerned with reaching the edge of the known and facing the unknown. It is when facing the unknown that one feels an overwhelming sense of fear. This idea of reaching the edge of the known and feeling fear can be associated with power as it can be said that knowledge is power. With more knowledge one can say they have more power as they know more about the world. However, it can be suggested that the selected photographers surrender their power.

The surrender of power in this thesis is associated with embracing the unknown. The photographers create ambiguous photographs where the information about the location is deliberately withheld from the viewer. This encourages contemplation both in the process of making and the process of viewing the work. The surrender of power is achieved through rejecting the common ideologies of the fast-paced world, the removal of any sense of who owns the land, and reflecting on the landscape in an internal and contemplative way which requires slowing down and being solely in the moment. This surrender of power can be considered as a key departure from Western understandings of landscape imagery as the work being discussed in this thesis

embraces the unknown rather than fearing it. By stepping away from Western aesthetics, an alternative way of thinking might be required in order to understand the work of the contemporary landscape photographers' in this thesis. This thesis proposes that the Buddhist thinking of Zen can be considered as an alternative way of thinking about these photographers. Existing research into landscape aesthetics have tended to focus on the Western notions of the sublime, the picturesque and the beautiful, rather than on Eastern notions of Zen. Although Zen is not typically used as a way of thinking about landscape imagery, it can be an alternative way of understanding a group of selected landscape photographers.

There are three key terms that need to be outlined. Firstly, the main key term is *Zen* which is the central idea in this thesis and will be developed and discussed in more detail later. Therefore, whilst it is important to identify Zen as a key term it will only be discussed briefly within this introduction. Zen is a Buddhist belief and practice that is a combination of both Taoist ideas and Mahayana Buddhist ideas. The term Zen is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese word Chan and it is a term that translates to mediation or mental concentration. Therefore, often the discussion of Zen Buddhism is around the idea of meditation in order to rid oneself of suffering and to be at one with the world. Zen as a term and concept is not typically a way of thinking about landscape photography since Zen is not pictorial in its essence. However, ideas can be drawn from Zen in order to discuss the contemporary landscape photographers in this thesis. The ideas that are drawn from Zen are the ideas of being present in the moment, internal contemplation and openness.

Secondly, in this thesis the term *landscape* is often used. The term *landscape* can be a challenging term to use due to its varied meanings, contexts and interpretations. There are a vast array of contexts in which the term landscape can be used such as: architecture, painting, geography, and gardening. For example, in geographical terms, landscape is "part of the Earth's surface that can be viewed at one time from one place. It consists of the geographic features that mark, or are characteristic of, a particular area" (National Geographic, n.d.). However, the etymology of the term originates from the Dutch word '*landschap*' which was a term used to describe paintings of natural scenery. In this thesis, the landscape might also be referred to as environment, area, space or place depending on the way in which the term is used. Although these definitions are variations of the term landscape, this thesis focuses on landscape photography which again alters the meaning due to the context of photography. In *Photography and Landscape* (2003) by Rod Giblett and Juha Tolonen, they state: "The camera objectifies the land as landscape and in doing so renders it as a visual phenomenon for the sense of sight and as a surface for aesthetic appreciation" (Giblett & Tolonen,

2003, p.53). Thus, before the landscape was interacted with, the area was considered a section of land. Through photography the photographer turns the landscape into an object to be seen and interpreted by the viewers. A landscape photograph can therefore be considered as the photographer's personal framing of a section of land, rather than being a realistic depiction of the geographical landscape. As each photographer goes to different places to take a photograph, the landscape in this thesis cannot be described in the way it visually looks or as a characteristic of a particular area. Rather it could be described in terms of what the landscape provides. The photographers in this thesis all have common strategies which are: they all embrace an embodied slowness in their process of making, they all photograph fundamental elements and they all create work that is open to interpretation and contemplation. The common strategies will be discussed alongside the three previously stated aspects of Zen: being present in the moment, being contemplative and embodied openness. Therefore, the term landscape in this thesis refers to the area of land chosen by each photographer which allows them to embrace these three strategies. When this thesis discusses landscape photography, it also important to mention an alternative phrase that might be used. Although these photographers are thought of as landscape photographers, they could also be considered as *elemental photographers*. The definition of elemental photography in this thesis is photography that focuses predominantly on fundamental elements which is one of the common strategies in the photographers' work. Although the term elemental photography is not necessarily a coined term, in this thesis it could be considered as an alternative definition of the photographic content created by the selected contemporary landscape photographers. Therefore, in this thesis, the work could be considered as both landscape photography and elemental photography.

Thirdly, another key term often used in this thesis is *nature*. The term nature can be a contested term to use as it has a vast amount of research into it and, similarly to landscape, can be considered in a variety of contexts. For example, one might use the term nature when referring to a human's innate qualities (human nature) or in ecology it is associated with the balance of living organisms (the balance of nature). Although this thesis has an awareness of the many definitions of nature, when the terms *nature* or *natural world* are used they refer to a landscape that is less dominated by visible signs of human intervention and predominantly contains elements that exist in the landscape naturally and are not placed there by humans. Most landscapes now have some form of human intervention in it as most landscapes have been explored by people. Extreme wilderness is very difficult to find. Therefore, it is important to say that the natural world is reflected in the landscape photography in this thesis by disguising the visible signs of human intervention in the work. It can also be

said that any landscape photograph reflects human presence in the landscape as the photographer has to physically be in the landscape for the photograph to be taken. Thus, although not visible in the final photograph, the landscapes that these photographers go to are ones in which human intervention is present due to their own presence in the landscape. Therefore, the terms *nature* and *natural world* in relation to the photography in this thesis cannot refer to an entirely natural landscape. Rather, the terms can be used to discuss work that does not reflect on the visible human aspect in the landscape. It can also be suggested that the selected photographers connect with nature when in the physical landscape. This means that they might engage with nature in order to search for the unconscious feeling of knowing when to take a photograph. This relationship with nature can be achieved by having an embodied slowness in the process of making that can give the photographer time for internal contemplation which allows for both internal and external discoveries to be made. Therefore, nature in this thesis is not only a landscape that has less visible signs of human intervention, it also becomes a place for a relationship to be made with both the external natural world and the internal self.

The purpose of this thesis is to try and understand a group of contemporary landscape photographers through a Zen way of thinking. This idea is considered through photographer case studies and the discussion of Zen ideas. This thesis is structured as follows: in Chapter 1, the sublime will be discussed as a stepping stone for this alternative way of thinking to be considered. The chapter will first of all outline the sublime in existing research before considering landscape and power as a key departure from the aesthetic. The chapter will then continue to consider the Eastern notion of Zen and the key aspects that can be drawn from it to discuss the contemporary landscape photographers in this thesis. In Chapter 2, the photographers' embodied slowness in their process of making will be discussed. This embodied slowness is considered through the process of walking, waiting, the photographers' equipment and the idea of working in solitude. In Chapter 3, the visible aspects of the photographs will be discussed. The main idea in Chapter 3 is the subject matter of fundamental elements which will first of all be defined before considering them in relation to the photographers' work. This chapter will then also discuss ways that reflect how the photographers look at these fundamental elements. These visual strategies are the use of light, blur and how they frame the landscape. Finally, in Chapter 4, the process of viewing the work will be discussed using the concept of an embodied openness. The basis of the discussion in Chapter 4 will be around the photographers' books and the strategies used to direct and encourage the viewers' interpretation of the work.

Chapter 1: An Enquiry into a Zen Way of Thinking

In the introduction to this thesis it was stated that landscape imagery is often discussed alongside aesthetics. Often these aesthetics are from a Western origin and it could be considered that one's understanding of landscape imagery might be influenced by Western thought because of this. However, there can be alternative ways of thinking about landscape imagery. In order to consider how different images can be understood through a different way of thinking, this chapter will first of all consider visually similar images which are understood through different aesthetic ideas.

1.1. Landscape imagery and aesthetics

In considering the idea that one's understanding of landscape can be determined by their personal experiences and perspectives, this thesis turns to landscape imagery, in order to consider how different images could be interpreted in relation to aesthetics. The three images chosen to discuss this concept are: *The Monk by the Sea* by Caspar David Friedrich, *The North Sea* by Zhou Chen, and *The Swelling of the Sea* | *Furthest West - Atlantic Ocean* by Thomas Joshua Cooper. These landscape images have been selected because they can all be read through different aesthetic ideas. For example, Caspar David Friedrich's painting can be read through the Western notion of the sublime, Zhou Chen's painting can be read through an Eastern notion of Zen and finally, Thomas Joshua Cooper's photograph can be understood through a combination of the two ideas. The sublime becomes a stepping stone for considering Zen in relation to contemporary landscape photography. Thus, Cooper's photograph is an interesting example of how landscape photography can be considered from both perspectives.



Figure 1: *The Monk by the Sea* (Friedrich, 1808-1810)



Figure 2: *North Sea* (Chen, 1368-1644)



Figure 3: *The Swelling of the Sea* | *Furthest West - The Atlantic Ocean* (Cooper, 1990-2001)

Both Figure 1 and 2 are paintings, whereas Figure 3 is a photograph. The three images are visually similar as they all portray a stormy sea and contain a figure which is dwarfed by the landscape. Although in Figure 3, the human figure is not visually seen in the photograph, the photographer themselves is implicitly in the photograph. This is because the photographer needed to be in the physical landscape when taking the photograph whereas Chen and Friedrich could have painted their paintings from an interior studio. In relation to Cooper's photograph, the figure although not visually seen is implied by the concept of being in the physical landscape to take the image. Thus, the photographer's process of making is key in exploring their work. This process of making will be discussed in Chapter 2. However, in this section, the visual aspects of the three landscape images will be analysed in relation to aesthetics.

Firstly, Figure 1 can be discussed. Friedrich (1774-1840) was a German painter whose work is often associated with Romanticism and the sublime. The sublime will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, but it is important to mention that the sublime is an aesthetic that is associated with an

overwhelming feeling caused by the fear of the unknown and the forces of nature in the landscape. Whilst viewing Figure 1, one could suggest the sublime is present due to the vastness of the landscape and the strong forces of the stormy sea, both of which are emphasised by the figure in the landscape. The Art Story website identifies that the figure in Friedrich's painting can be known as a rückenfigur, as the website states: "the solitary figure turned towards and in communion with the landscape, known as 'rückenfigur,' is one of the key ways German Romanticism differentiates itself from French and British Romanticism" (Art Story, n.d.). The Art Story states that the figure is turned towards the landscape in communion which means sharing intimate thoughts and feelings. As this painting is associated with the sublime, the rückenfigur could be facing the landscape with the feeling of being overwhelmed or fearful as he faces the stormy sea. Thus, the figure can be understood as a representation of trying to understand the forces of nature in order to gain control of the situation. As the figure looks towards the stormy sea, the viewer can only imagine the force behind the ocean that the figure is faced with. The painting therefore encourages the viewer to consider the overwhelming feeling associated with the sublime.

Figure 1 is often read through notions of the sublime. This is due to the audience often being from a Western background in which Western aesthetics strongly influence the discussion of landscape imagery. Although this painting is commonly associated with the sublime, if a non-Western painter were to view it and interpret it then the painting might not be viewed as a sublime image. This is because in China, the sublime is not an aesthetic used to discuss landscape paintings. Thus, the way this painting is viewed can depend on the cultural background of the audience. This links to Figure 2 by Zhou Chen as this is a Chinese painting which is typically read through notions of Zen and Taoism.

Zhou Chen was a Chinese painter active in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). As stated on the Metropolitan Museum of Art website "In Ming painting, the traditions of both the Southern Song painting academy and the Yuan (1271–1368) scholar-artist were developed further" (Metropolitan Museum of Art, n.d.). In the Yuan dynasty, painters reflected more on their inner spirit rather than direct observations of what was seen in the landscape. In the Ming Dynasty, this concept was explored further. Zhou's painting is visually similar to Friedrich's, since the figure is also small in scale compared to the vast landscape. Wai-yu Leung in his journal article *Two Sides of Landscape in Ink-wash Painting: Chinese Landscape Painting in Expressive Arts Practice* writes that "The vast landscape in Chinese painting represents the vastness of the universe" (Leung, 2021, p.212). The landscape that is painted could be a representation of the universe as a whole. Leung goes

on to say, “The human figure in the Chinese landscape painting is usually not the protagonist, and appears very tiny in size and resides indiscriminately in the midst of nature. It metaphorically exhibits who we are in the vast cosmos” (Leung, 2021, p.212). Therefore, the figure painted in Chen’s painting could be representing one’s place in the universe. If this is linked to the period in which the painting was made, it could be a reflection of Chen’s own place in the universe as he is becoming aware of his own existence. Although the stormy sea and clouds have connotations of the sublime, the figure in Chen’s painting does not appear fearful. This could be due to the figure in the vast landscape representing the process of understanding one’s place in the world. Thus, although this painting is visually similar to Friedrich’s, it is not considered to be a sublime painting.

The final image used to discuss this idea of aesthetics is Thomas Joshua Cooper’s photograph (Figure 3). Cooper is an American photographer of Jewish and Cherokee descent. Cooper’s photograph is being used as a combination of Zen and sublime ideas in order to consider how the work can be read through different ways of thinking. Firstly, Cooper’s photograph could be considered as a sublime photograph due to the stormy sea, which encourages the viewer to imagine the forces of nature when viewing it. There is an element of the unknown as the photograph fades into darkness in the top left-hand corner. Thus, there is an element of fear as one does not know what lies in the darkness or beneath the swirling ocean’s surface. This fear of the unknown is often linked to the sublime. This photograph differs to the two paintings previously discussed as it does not visually contain a human figure. Yet, it does imply the presence of the photographer. In the discussion of Zhou Chen’s painting (Figure 2) it was mentioned that during the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) and Ming dynasty (1368-1644) painters reflected more on their inner spirit rather than direct observations of what was seen in the landscape. In an essay by Ben Tufnell in which he discusses Cooper’s photographs he writes:

He stands with his back to the land and looks out at the sea. His characteristic position here is one of looking out - at the void - and thereby looking inwards. For the gaze that lights upon a blank plane is inevitably turned back upon itself (Tufnell, 2009).

Thus, the symbolism of the figure in Chen’s painting possibly reflecting on Chen’s own understanding of his place in the world, could be similar to Cooper’s gaze in his work. Cooper’s work becomes a reflection of his inner self as he gazes out into the void, and this internal reflection has similar ideas to the Chinese landscape

painting discussed in relation to Chen's work. This internal reflection has similarities with Zen which leads to the consideration of Zen being a way of thinking about this landscape photograph.

By discussing these three visually similar landscape images, this section has explored the idea of landscape images being interpreted and understood in different ways dependent on the cultural contexts in which they are viewed. This can be linked to my own personal cultural influences. As a researcher and photographer from Western Europe, the majority of my understanding on landscape imagery has been one heavily influenced by Western aesthetics and ideas. When researching landscape imagery, there initially was a predominant focus on the sublime, which influenced my understanding and interpretations of the work. Although there is no denying the importance that the sublime and the other existing aesthetics have had on the discussion of landscape imagery, when contemplating the photography explored in this thesis, it was considered whether they could be grouped as sublime photographs. The photographers in this thesis have common strategies which are found in their way of working, the final photographs and the process of viewing. These common strategies which have previously been listed contain elements of internal contemplation and openness that is personal to each photographer and viewer. Through considering the landscape images previously, these strategies can be linked to the internal reflection associated with Chinese landscape painting and Zen. Thus, although these common strategies can be considered from a sublime perspective, this thesis considers whether there could be an alternative way of understanding the work of selected contemporary landscape photographers. The sublime became a stepping stone for the consideration of the Buddhist thinking of Zen being an alternative way of understanding a loosely grouped set of contemporary landscape photographers. Although Zen is of an Eastern Asian origin and is not typically an aesthetic or a way of thinking about landscape imagery, this thesis proposes that Zen is a way of thinking that can be used in the discussion of both Western and Eastern landscape photographs.

1.2. The Sublime

As the sublime was the stepping stone for the consideration of an alternative way of understanding contemporary landscape photography, it requires further exploration in order to understand its importance. It also needs discussing in order to understand why the photographers in this thesis might benefit from an alternative way of understanding their work.

Research into the sublime has a long history. The concept of the sublime can date back to the 14th or 15th century in the Italian Renaissance period when paintings of death were made, creating a feeling of the unknown as to what happens when one dies and the fear of death itself. However, the aesthetic stance did not really take place until the 17th Century when Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux published a translated copy of Longinus' *On the Sublime* (thought to have originally been written in the 1st Century AD). What is interesting is that Longinus associated the sublime with language and thus this shows how the sublime can be a challenging concept to discuss. For example, it is a term used when discussing literature, art and nature and more recently in the 21st Century, when discussing urban landscapes. When discussing urban landscapes, often the phrase *toxic sublime* will be used. Jennifer Peeples in her article *Toxic Sublime: Imaging Contaminated Landscapes* states: "I define the term 'toxic sublime' as the tensions that arise from recognizing the toxicity of a place, object or situation, while simultaneously appreciating its mystery, magnificence and ability to inspire awe" (Peeples, 2011, p.375). Peeples uses the toxic sublime to discuss Edward Burtynsky's photographs of industrial landscapes. Therefore, there are various contexts in which the sublime can be used in the discussion of landscapes.

In landscape art, the sublime is often associated with the feeling of fear or a feeling of being overwhelmed when faced with nature. Not all nature will stimulate a sublime response. The sublime in nature is often associated with stormy seas, a dark forest or a mountain filled with chasms and dizzying heights. This feeling of fear or being overwhelmed in relation to a sublime response was often seen during the Romantic period, which began in the late 18th Century. The Romantic period was a movement in which artists and writers had new interests surrounding the ideas of emotions and nature. The Tate mentions that the new interests of Romanticism are "human psychology, expression of personal feeling and interest in the natural world" (Tate, n.d.). Thus, this feeling of fear when faced with nature could be what was classed as a new interest for artists in the Romantic period as it portrays expression and human psychology. Despite the vast amount of research previously conducted on the sublime and the many variations of how the term can be used, this thesis discusses the sublime to try and understand how Zen can also be used to study landscapes and landscape imagery.

Although there has been an extensive amount of research into the sublime previously, this thesis turns to two philosophers' ideas in order to discuss the aesthetic in more detail. These two philosophers are Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant. Edmund Burke in his book *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of*

Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757) discusses the feelings surrounding the sublime and the beautiful. He proposes that the feeling of fear and terror produces a feeling of delight which he later calls “delightful horror” (Burke, 1757). He describes this delightful horror as “a sort of tranquillity tinged with terror; which, as it belongs to self-preservation, is one of the strongest of all passions. Its object is the sublime” (Burke, 1757, p.130). Thus, one feels the effect of fear and the forces of nature but is also calm as one is aware they are not really in danger. For example, when viewing a landscape photograph that could be associated with the sublime, one might realise they are not really in danger as they view the overwhelming forces of nature that are represented photographically. Thus, the delight comes from an awareness that one is safe. In Burke’s research on the sublime, he also discusses different aspects that he suggests are sources of the sublime. These consist of: power, privation, vastness, infinity, succession and uniformity, difficulty, magnificence and light. Although this thesis is using Zen to discuss a group of contemporary landscape photographers, it is not to say that the photographs are only related to Zen, they could still be classed as the sublime too. Burke’s sources of the sublime might be visual aspects of the photographs. For example, vastness could be represented as a large expanse of water. However, these sources of the sublime could also be approached from a Zen way of thinking.

Immanuel Kant also discusses the sublime aesthetic, but he proposes different ideas as to what the sublime is and what the sublime does. Unlike Burke, Kant suggests there are two different types of the sublime: the mathematical and the dynamical. The mathematical sublime discusses the idea that one’s ability to grasp the vastness of nature is impossible. However, one’s attempt to understand the vastness of nature creates what Kant calls the faculty of reason (Kant, 1790). It is the faculty of reason which allows the sublime to be experienced. It consists “first of frustration at the inability of the understanding to grasp an absolute whole with the assistance of the imagination, followed by pleasure at the realization of the fact that our imagination also reflects the demands of our reason” (Kant, 1790, p.31). This links to a more recently written book titled *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy: Aesthetics, Ethics and Nature* (2013) by Emily Brady as she states “the most visceral part of the sublime reaction, a feeling of being overwhelmed by size or power, is linked to the ways in which an object strikes the senses and imagination” (Brady, 2013, p130). This links to the mathematical sublime as it discusses how one at first is overwhelmed by nature, but this is then followed by pleasure at is allows one’s imagination to be embraced. In contrast to the mathematical sublime, the dynamical sublime discusses how man’s physical powers against nature are small, but it is argued that humans do have a power within them that can withstand the forces of nature. Thus, humans have a

superiority over nature. In the book *Introducing Kant* (2011) by Christopher Kul-Want and Andrzej Klimowski, it is stated that “In the dynamic sublime, formless experience occurs through interaction with “Nature as a might”” (Kul-Want & Klimowski, 2011). “Nature as a might” refers to overwhelming forces in nature that have the potential for destructive power. Nature as a might is also described as formless as it exceeds one’s ability to perceive form due to its scale and force. Our power can be small in contrast to nature’s might. Kant refers to these overwhelming forces as:

Bold, overhanging, and as it were threatening, rocks; clouds piled up in the sky, moving with lightning flashes and thunder peals; volcanoes in all their violence of destruction; hurricanes with their track of devastations; the boundless ocean in a state of tumult; the lofty waterfall of mighty river, and such like (Kant, 1790).

The forces that Kant discusses provide a feeling of terror as one who experiences them begins to feel inferior to the object (the forces in nature). Although the sublime in nature is generated by these forces, the sublime is more about experiencing ourselves as we navigate the feelings aroused by a sublime experience. By having a sublime experience, one might initially feel overwhelmed and experience terror, however one’s mind gives way to other feelings. Want and Klimowski comment on this sublime experience by saying: “But other feelings ensue as a counter-force indicating a condition of “free-judgement”” (Want & Klimowski, 2011). It is through experiencing ourselves in a sublime context that one has a feeling of this free-judgement. Philip Shaw in his book *The Sublime* (2017) also comments on this sublime experience by stating: “Similarly with the dynamical sublime, in contemplating might from afar the mind realises the rational idea of *freedom* = from the slavish dependance on nature and the faculty of the imagination” (Shaw, 2017). Therefore, although the dynamic sublime can be linked with humans having the power to withstand the powers of nature, it is through internal contemplation and imagination that allows one to have a sense of freedom from nature’s might. This can allow one to experience pleasure despite initially feeling terror. Therefore, the mathematical sublime is one in which nature has superiority over humans as it influences one to imagine the forces and vastness of nature. Whereas, with the dynamical sublime, humans have superiority over nature as they can withstand the forces of the elements.

The experience of being in the physical landscape is important when considering the photographers’ work. As previously mentioned, the dynamic sublime is an experience had through interacting with nature and its

overwhelming forces. Similarly, a key concept in exploring the Zen lens is one's interaction with nature. However, the dynamic sublime can result in acknowledging humans' superiority over nature whereas Zen considers one's position to nature on a more equal ground. As the photographers in this thesis can be present in the moment whilst in the physical landscape their experience with nature is of a more equal stance. This is because as they are present in the moment they are connecting with nature. Therefore, this alternative position to nature is one reason why this thesis explores Zen as an alternative way of understanding the photographers' work. Another reason for the departure from a Western aesthetic perspective is a surrender of power which will be discussed in the following section.

1.3. Zen - A Surrender of Power

In considering Kant's "faculty of reason" this thesis turns back to Figure 1 and 2. The faculty of reason stems from one's frustration of not understanding the vastness of nature. This is then followed by pleasure as one imagines meaning rather than accepting the fear of the unknown. This is the faculty of reason as one's imagination reflects humankind's ability to reason. This reflects the discussion on the dynamic sublime where a quote from Philip Shaw's book was used to consider freedom from nature's might. As imagination gives way to reason, one can also have a sense of freedom and accept the fear they initially felt. As a human being, one has a desire to have knowledge because with more knowledge comes more power. For example, Michel Foucault, a French philosopher and historian states that "the goals of power and the goals of knowledge cannot be separated: in knowing we control and in controlling we know" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2003). Foucault suggests that power and knowledge are two entities that cannot be separated. By having knowledge, one has power and in both give a person control. Thus, this links to the sublime. The sublime is about getting to the edge of the known and facing the unknown which causes this overwhelming fear. One might fear the unknown, and the frustration that Kant discusses could be associated with this fear, as one fears a loss of power which comes from not knowing.

Landscape is often depicted based on the idea of knowing. For example, what does one know about the place and its history? If landscape imagery can be depicted based on knowing, this thesis returns to landscape images in order to consider this concept further. Figure 1 and 2 are both paintings which have an element of emptiness. It can be said that emptiness in art is not really empty. Emptiness becomes a pictorial space in which one's knowledge, imagination and feelings generate and interpret meaning. In Western paintings

(Figure 1 for example) the whole canvas is usually covered in paint. In Figure 1 the emptiness has been painted and represented by the vast landscape. The human figure in the painting looks out at the vast landscape which contains the sea and sky but nothing else. There are no other features in the painting of the landscape on which a narrative is suggested. Friedrich painted a landscape that deliberately did not contain elements which could provide narrative and this creates an element of the unknown. For example, one does not know where this landscape is or how far the ocean spreads (both past the edges of the canvas and into the distance). Therefore, in considering Kant's faculty of reason, as one understands they do not know the answers, one imagines them instead. The viewer when studying Friedrich's painting, creates and interprets the narrative that was deliberately not provided. When looking at Figure 1, the emptiness generates a fear of not knowing and the viewer, in an attempt to maintain power, turns to their imagination. Similarly, Figure 2 also contains emptiness. However, this is created through the style of painting. In Chinese painting (Figure 2) space is left completely untouched. Turning to Sheng Kuan Chung's journal article titled *Looking at Art Teaching Through Zen Aesthetics* (2014) he writes, "Asian painters frequently leave an unexecuted area in their work to allow the viewers to fill it in with their imagination" (Chung, 2014, p.15). Thus, the blank untouched areas are deliberately left empty and the reason for this could be to allow the viewers to look inwards at their imagination. These deliberately blank spaces relate to the Taoist belief of wu. Mario Wenning discusses the term 'wu', stating that "in its verbal usage, *wu* means "not being there", "not being present" as well as "not having". As a noun, it denotes "non-existence", "absence", or "nothingness" " (Wenning, 2011, p.561). Therefore, when Asian painters leave the space untouched they could be influenced by Taoism and embrace the concept of wu. It is in wu that one might interpret and imagine meaning. Both Figure 1 and 2 use emptiness and both ways of representing emptiness potentially stimulates the viewers' imagination. However, the emptiness in both paintings have different influences on the viewer. For example, in Figure 1 (which is thought of as a sublime painting), the emptiness generates a fear of the unknown. This fear and frustration results in the viewer turning to their imagination in order to interpret ideas and meaning, in order to dilute this fear of the unknown. Whereas, in Figure 2, the Chinese landscape painting which can be associated with Zen, links to the idea that Zen lets go of knowing. The emptiness in relation to Zen thinking, becomes a space for contemplation and meditation and one's internal thoughts can be embraced rather than them being dependent on knowledge.

As seen in Kant's writing, the sublime can be associated with both man's power over nature and nature's power over mankind. In considering how Landscape and Power can be associated with aesthetics in

landscape photography, Ansel Adams will be discussed. Ansel Adams was an American photographer who was mainly known for his photographs of Yosemite. His photographs often follow Western art traditions that depict the sublime in nature. In considering the sublime in relation to landscape art aesthetics it can be said that it is challenging to 're-present' the sublime in art. For example, Philip Shaw when discussing Kant's ideas on the sublime states: "Because it lacks formal limits, the sublime, unlike the beautiful, presents a challenge to artistic representation" (Shaw, 2017). The dynamic sublime is formless as the scale of nature's forces exceeds our ability to comprehend form. However, when re-presented in art it immediately adds form to the sublime experience. Also, the dynamic sublime occurs through interaction with nature. When re-presented in art, the viewer does not directly interact with nature, so the dynamic sublime is not directly experienced. Therefore, when a creative practitioner 're-presents' the sublime in art, it can become more of a reflection of the sublime experience shown through artistic methods. This can become a popular concept for creative practitioners to explore as it provides them with a process to try and understand their experiences. In considering Adams' photographs through the notion of the sublime, Rod Giblett in *Wilderness to Wasteland: The Sublime, the Picturesque and the Uncanny in the Photography of the American West* states that "Ansel Adams' photographs of towering mountains and canyons are the obvious major expressions and exemplars of the sublime in photography" (Giblett, 2009, p.43). Thus, in relation to visual aesthetics, Adams' photographs can be considered as sublime photographs.

When discussing power in relation to landscape imagery, it is important to state that power can be considered in a variety of ways. For example, power can be discussed in a political systemic sense but in relation to the sublime it can also be discussed using Kant's understanding of the faculties of the mind. The reason for considering Adams' photographs in relation to power is because he was commissioned by the National Park Service to create a mural for one of their buildings. Yosemite itself has a vast cultural history. It used to be an area of land used by Native Americans. However, once there was a discovery of gold in California, the land was competed for. This culminated in the Mariposa Indian War which resulted in the Native Americans being driven out of the area and Yosemite being open for settlement and later tourism (National Park Service, n.d.). Therefore, there is a vast cultural history in relation to land ownership and power. Even the idea that Adams was commissioned to take a mural photograph for the National Park Service, a federal agency company that manages all national parks in America, raises questions of who owns the land and has power over how it is represented. Thus, on one hand the cultural history and land ownership of the National Parks might be

considered when looking at Adams' photographs or they could be considered in relation to aesthetics as they are thought of as sublime photographs, or both the history and aesthetics can be considered.

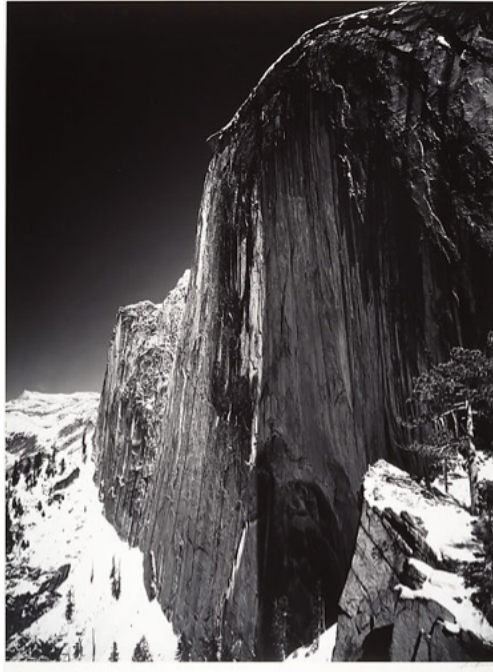


Figure 4: *Monolith, the Face of Half Dome* (Adams, 1927)

By discussing Adams's work, the ideas of taste and representation were introduced when the photographs were considered as sublime images. However, power was also considered whilst referring to the cultural context of the formation of National Parks and the concept of land ownership. This reflects how power can be considered in different senses. Landscape ownership can refer to power in a political systemic sense while taste and representation can be linked to the faculties of the mind that Kant discusses in his writing. In *The Continental Aesthetics Reader* (2011), Clive Cazeaux states: "Judgement for Kant, to clarify the term, is one of our cognitive powers, 'a mediating link between understanding and reason' (CJ 168)" (Cazeaux, 2011). According to Kant, the imagination works harmoniously with knowledge and understanding when forming a judgement of taste.

The reason for this being important for this thesis is because the landscape photographers that are explored in this thesis surrender their power, but the question arises as to what surrender of power means. The photographers' work in this thesis is being considered in relation to Zen as an alternative aesthetic or way of thinking about representative landscape photographers. Aesthetics are related to politics as they can be

associated with the politics of taste and representation. Politics can then be linked to power, as politics shows one's personal taste or judgement. This is because one's personal taste of judgement in relation to aesthetics can influence someone else's beliefs and thoughts. Thus, one's influence based on their personal set of ideas can have power over someone else's. Thus, all images can be understood in relation to a power dynamic.

Landscape imagery could always be subject to taste and representation as humans will always have opinions and ideas about what they are viewing. In relation to power of judgement, taste stems from one's understanding which is created from both knowledge and imagination. However, in the introduction, this surrender of power was considered as being a method of embracing the unknown. The sublime is associated with the fear of the unknown and the faculties of the mind help one to cope with this fear, whereas Zen embraces the unknown as it encourages internal contemplation and meditation. This thesis can consider Kant's understanding of the faculties of the mind when defining surrender of power. Through the Zen lens, the photographers' work can be ambiguous as they do not provide the viewer with knowledge about several factors in their work (for example, location, scale, species of plant). However, through the emittance of knowledge in photographs, one's taste becomes more about imagination and contemplation rather than based on an understanding created by knowledge and imagination. Through a sublime experience one's understanding allows for them to realise their superiority over nature as one realises they can withstand the forces of nature's might (the dynamic sublime). However, through a Zen perspective, one has a contemplative attitude towards the landscape in an attempt to connect with nature. It is one's contemplative attitude, one's position to nature and the idea of embracing the unknown that allows for surrender of power to become a key departure from the Western notion of the sublime and a key stepping stone into the consideration of Zen in relation to the contemporary landscape photography in this thesis.

1.4. Zen

The previous sections in the chapter have considered how landscape photographs can be read through notions of the sublime but has also introduced ways in which they can begin to be considered through notions of Zen.

Zen's use in modern day conversations (even in Western conversation) often refers to one's mood and state of mind but its usage is casual in a similar way to how one would use another emotion to explain their mood. Yet, despite the casual usage of the term in modern day times, Zen has a long history. The etymology of the term Zen is discussed in Gregory P.A. Levine's book *Long Strange Journey: On Modern Zen, Zen Art, and Other Predicaments* (2017) for he writes: “ ‘ “Zen” is also, first, the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese character 禪 (chan), itself shorthand for the Chinese transliteration of the Sanskrit term dhyāna, which refers generally to mental concentration of meditation (Ch.channa)” (Levine, 2017, p.7). Thus, it is important to state that when this thesis discusses existing research into Zen, the term Chan might often be used.

Zen is part of Zen Buddhism which is a combination of Taoist ideas and Indian Mahayana Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism is often defined as a major historical movement in Buddhism. It is thought that it began in India around the beginning of the Common Era (Nagapriya, 2014). However, Mahayana Buddhism is now prevalent across multiple East Asian countries, such as China and Japan. Thus, Mahayana Buddhism is a group of Buddhist traditions, one of these traditions being Zen Buddhism. The other set of ideas that Zen Buddhism draws from is Taoism. Taoism, also referred to as Daoism, is an ancient Chinese philosophy and religion. Its origin is traced back to at least the 4th Century BCE and is thought to have been founded by Lao Tzu (also known as Laozi) (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2003). The Philosophy of Taoism is a tradition which looks at living in harmony with the Tao which translates into 'path' or 'way' (Nations Online, n.d.). Some of Taoism's practice is drawn from the philosophy of 'yin yang' and 'wu'. Yin yang is a dualist concept relating to a balance between opposites such as light and dark, hot and cold. Although complete opposites, they are all interlinked, and one cannot exist without the other. Everything is interconnected and thus, lives in harmony with one another. In Robin Wang's book *Yinyang - The Way of Heaven and Earth in Chinese Thought and Culture* (2012) Yin Yang is explained as follows: “When one compares something to yin or yang, this usually suggests a way of dealing with things through the balance or harmony between two elements” (Wang, 2012). Taoism, as it looks at living with harmony, allows one to understand that we need

one entity in order for an opposite one to exist. Therefore, Taoism allows one to understand that one needs all things in life in order to live in harmony. As mentioned, wu is also part of Taoist practice. Wu was previously mentioned as “nothingness” and “not being there” (Wenning, 2011). It is in this absence that one can imagine and map thoughts and ideas onto it. It is the nothingness which allows meaning to be interpreted. This links to Zen in this thesis as both the viewers and the photographers perhaps have an openness for a state of contemplation which allows thoughts and meaning to be created.

This thesis is considering Zen in relation to both Eastern and Western contemporary landscape photographers and is being written by a Western researcher. Thus, it is important to consider existing research of Zen in Western thought. A key writer who does this is D.T. Suzuki (1870-1966) who was a Japanese author who predominantly wrote about Zen Buddhism. He wrote about Zen in a particular way that spread interest to a Western audience. Richard M. Jaffe edited a book titled *Selected Works of D.T. Suzuki, Volume 1: Zen* (2015) which consisted of a handful of D.T. Suzuki’s essays. In the introduction, Jaffe discusses Suzuki’s ideas surrounding Zen, stating: “To understand Zen satori is needed. Without this experience no amount of talk is of any use in elucidating what Zen is” (Jaffe, 2015, p.53). Satori is a Buddhist term for enlightenment or awakening (Britannica, n.d). To put this into a simpler explanation, the BBC says:

Zen is something a person does. It’s not a concept that can be described in words. Despite that, words on this site will help you get some idea of what Zen is about. But remember, Zen does not depend on words - it has to be experienced in order to ‘understand’. (BBC, n.d.)

Thus, to understand Zen, one has to experience satori. This thesis can only touch on the history of Zen and as the researcher, I can state this is the beginning of my exploration into Zen as an alternative way of understanding a group of contemporary landscape photographers. I cannot state that I have experienced satori. However, that does not mean that this thesis cannot explore aspects of Zen in order to apply Zen to the contemporary photographers’ process of making, final photographs and the process of viewing. In applying Suzuki’s idea to the landscape photography in this thesis, experiences are important. When previously discussing Cooper’s work it was mentioned that being in the physical landscape and the process of making the photographs are key ideas in exploring his work (as well as the works of the other selected contemporary photographers in this thesis). Therefore, it is true what Suzuki and the BBC say, experiences are needed. As discussed above, Zen does not depend on words, this can make Zen a challenging term to define. One person

might practice Zen differently to someone else. Thus, Zen's definition perhaps depends on one's own understanding and thoughts. This is similar to the concept discussed at the beginning of this chapter, where Figure 1, 2 & 3 were considered from different viewpoints depending on the cultural contexts in which they were viewed. Thus, Zen can be a personal and individual experience. Zen perhaps is more about looking inwards than it is about looking externally.

Reflecting on the idea of Zen being more about looking inwards, this thesis turns to the Zen Studies Society website which suggests that Zen is more about exploring one's inner self than it is about viewing the external self or world as they write: "It's both something we are - our true nature expressing itself moment by moment - and something we do - a disciplined practice through which we can realize the joy of being" (The Zen Studies Society, n.d.). Thus, in this thesis Zen is a process of exploring one's internal self and becoming aware of one's state of mind and what it means to be (the joy of being). The photographers in this thesis all have an embodied slowness in their process of making, this in itself is a deliberate way of working but when in the physical landscape it allows them to slow down, rid themselves of the distractions of the fast-paced world and be present in the moment.

In the book *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life* (2016) by Jon Kabat-Zinn he discusses Buddhist Mindfulness. During his discussion of Mindfulness, he states, "mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and nonjudgmentally. This kind of attention nurtures greater awareness, clarity and acceptance of present-moment reality" (Kabat-Zinn, 2016). The act of being present in the moment is a key characteristic of Zen and can be considered in the discussion of the photographers' processes of making in this thesis. It can be suggested that the photographers' embodied slowness is what allows them to be present in the moment as they slow down to really be present and understand the physical landscape in which they are in. Being present in the moment can also be used to consider the embodied openness in the process of viewing the work. By being present in the moment when viewing the work, one can gain clarity of the scene in front of them. This being present in the moment cannot be forced upon the viewer but there can be techniques and strategies in the framing of the work that push the viewer to take a second look in order to consider and study the work in more detail. Therefore, the idea that in Zen mindfulness one is present in the moment (which allows for clarity and a greater awareness) is an important part of Zen to consider in relation to the photographers in this thesis.

Zen Buddhism as a religion differs from other religions, in the way that there is not a set belief system or set practices to adhere to. Rather it is a practice of being present in the moment and gaining clarity of the world. Reflecting on this idea of gaining clarity, this thesis again turns to D.T. Suzuki. In Chapter 3 of *Selected Works of D.T. Suzuki, Volume 1: Zen* (2015) Suzuki's essay titled *On Satori - The Revelation of a New Truth in Zen Buddhism* can be found. In this essay Suzuki states that "The essence of Zen Buddhism consists in acquiring a new viewpoint of looking at life and things generally" (Suzuki, 2015, p.15). Thus, Zen requires a new way of looking at everything in life. Buddhism discusses the idea of understanding suffering in order to let go of one's own suffering. To understand this suffering could be what Suzuki refers to when he discusses having a new viewpoint of looking at life. Thus, Zen can be an attempt to understand the world and what it means to exist in the world. It explores the idea that humans are beings in a vast world and an attempt to understand one's existence in the vast world is a key concept of Zen.

In the same vein as Suzuki's idea of Zen requiring a new viewpoint of looking at life, Steve Hagen in his book *Buddhism Plain and Simple* (1997) illustrates that Buddhism is a way of seeing:

The message is always to examine and see for yourself. When you see for yourself what is true - and that's really the only way you can genuinely know anything - then embrace it. Until then, just suspend judgement and criticism. The point of Buddhism is to just see. That's all (Hagen, 1997).

Although this thesis is using Zen as a way of thinking about contemporary landscape photography, it is also aware of the other aesthetics and ideas surrounding landscapes and landscape imagery. Therefore, Buddhism as a way of seeing, and a process of just seeing the world clearly, can be linked to Denis Cosgrove's research in *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* where he states that Landscape is a way of seeing: "Landscape is a way of seeing that has its own history that can be understood only as part of a wider history of economy and society" (Cosgrove, 1998, p14). Thus, he links this way of seeing to social formation and power.

Although there are two different ways of seeing being outlined, it is important to suggest that the photographers in this thesis surrender their power. This surrender of power was discussed in the introduction as well as at the end of the previous section. The way in which these photographers might surrender their power is by embracing the unknown and rejecting the ideologies of a fast-paced world, allowing them to be

rid of distractions and for them to be present in the moment. It is when they are present in the moment whilst in the physical landscape that they can be contemplative and reflective in their way of working and produce work that reflects on those processes. Therefore, the landscape as a way of seeing is not as a result of power as suggested by Cosgrove, but rather as a mindfulness Buddhist practice as suggested by Hagen.

Having outlined a brief history of Zen as well as having considered existing research into Zen, it is now important to consider Zen in relation to landscape imagery. Accordingly, this thesis now explores existing research into Zen art and considers how these ideas can be discussed in relation to the representative landscape photography in this thesis. Turning to Gregory P.A. Levine's book *Long Strange Journey: On Modern Zen, Zen Art and Other Predicaments* as an example of Zen in the discussion of Art, Levine states "Certain commentators refer to simplicity and directness, but they make no reference to chance, nothingness, or emptiness - Zen's postwar keywords par excellence" (Levine, 2017, p.28). Thus, discussion surrounding Zen art originally could have referred to simplicity and directness. For example, in Zen art and calligraphy a circle is often painted. This is called *Ensō* (See Figure 5). At first, when viewing this painting, the term "simplicity" and "directness" could be considered. The painting visually is a circle, sometimes complete and sometimes incomplete, which creates a visually simple image. Also, the circle consists of one or two brush strokes, meaning the painter has to be direct with his movements in order to create the work. The painting could be considered direct and simple. However, when one reads the painting more, there is what Levine states "chance, nothingness or emptiness" within the painting. *Ensō* paintings represent the circle of life for "The *Ensō* itself is a universal symbol of wholeness and completion, and the cyclical nature of existence, as well as a visual manifestation of the Heart Sutra, 'Form is void and void is form.'" (Sweet, n.d.) Thus, there is an emptiness in the centre of the circle, which could be considered a void. In Buddhism this void is called *Sunyata*. *Sunyata* in Buddhism is "the voidness that constitutes ultimate reality" (Britannica, n.d.). The circle (*ensō*) is more than simple and direct, it also has an emptiness which in relation to its cultural context, holds the meaning of life, and represents enlightenment as one understands what it means to be in the world. Referring back to the directness, the painter does indeed have to be direct, but there is also an element of contemplation as the painter has to be disciplined with their brush strokes as once the ink is on the rice paper it cannot be erased. This relates to Zen as one has to be contemplative with their actions which in this thesis, links to the photographers' contemplative embodied slowness in their process of making.



Figure 5: *Ensō* (Reirin, n.d.)

Considering Zen art in more detail, Levine goes on to discuss Laurence Binyon's ideas of Zen painting as Levine writes: "In Binyon's telling, a Zen painting not only expresses its maker's inner spiritual grasp of the outwardly pictorialized subject, it offers the viewer an opportunity to "summon an interiorized experience" ' ' (Levine, 2017, p.38). This refers back to the concept that Zen is more about looking inwards at oneself. In this thesis, this idea of looking inwards can be considered when exploring the photographer's process of making. The photographers in this thesis all have an embodied slowness in which the photographer can be present with their internal self as well as in the physical landscape. This links to the idea of being present in the moment. When the photographer has an embodied slowness as part of their process of making, it allows them to be more present with their surroundings as they slow down, rid themselves of distractions of the fast-paced world and really contemplate the photographs they take. The photograph itself reflects on being present in the moment. A photograph captures a single moment and freezes it in time. Thus, the photograph is an embodiment of this being present in the moment, as the camera allows for that single moment to be captured. Referring back to Levine's writing on Binyon's idea, the viewers' process of looking can be discussed. In this thesis, the viewers and the way the work is presented to the viewer is discussed as an embodied openness of looking. The way in which the work is framed for the viewer can alter the "interiorised experience" that the viewer has. Thus, the framing of the work can aid the meaning of the photographs and can be a further extension of the photographers' process of making.

Having considered the history of Zen and Zen art, characteristics of Zen can be considered to explore the contemporary landscape photography in this thesis in more detail. One of these characteristics is Kabat-Zinn's idea of Zen Mindfulness as being present in the moment. This being present in the moment is a key concept in the discussion of both the photographers' embodied slowness in their process of making, and

the viewers' embodied openness in their process of viewing. Being present in the moment can be achieved or semi-achieved through a variety of different processes. For example, in this thesis, the act of walking will be considered as a process of slowing down. Other processes that will be considered are the act of waiting, the processing of the photographs and the use of certain equipment, which can all slow the photographer down, and allows for them to have a personal and individual experience that could be linked with being present in the moment. Although in Kabat-Zinn's book this idea of being present in the moment is linked to clarity and a greater awareness, the selected photographs withhold concrete information from the viewer so could be seen as obscuring clarity. Therefore, the act of being present in the moment could perhaps be associated with an act of contemplation which is the next characteristic of Zen that will be discussed in this thesis. It is through being present in the moment that one's thoughts and feelings can be really acknowledged. Thus, through a contemplative process, Zen becomes an internal embodied experience which allows for clarity and awareness to be achieved. For example, the viewer might imagine the information being withheld from them and thus clarity and awareness comes from their internal contemplation and imagination. The final characteristic of Zen that will be used in this thesis is openness. Openness is the idea that one can open themselves up to really see the world and their inner self. Openness links both the being present in the moment and the act of contemplation together. It is openness that allows for these other two characteristics to occur. Openness can be considered in the viewing process of the work, as the photographers frame the work in a way that lacks concrete information and so the work can be open to interpretation and contemplation from the viewer. Therefore, the viewers can be open in the process of viewing, to imagine and create meaning within the pictorial world that they are in.

Having considered the key aspects of Zen in this chapter, the chapter that follows moves on to consider these Zen ideas in relation to the photographers' process of making. The ideas of being present in the moment, internal contemplation and openness will be used to explore the embodied slowness of the photographers' process of making whilst they are in the physical landscape as well as in their processes following their being in the landscape.

Chapter 2: Embodied Slowness in Making

In the previous chapter, it was stated that the photographers' process of making is a key aspect of understanding their work. One of the common strategies that the photographers share is an embodied slowness in their process of making which can be discussed by considering Zen's concept of being present in the moment. The world is now fast-paced and in relation to photography, photographs are created daily and consumed daily. Technology and social media have allowed for more people to take photographs and see photographs. The photographers in this thesis reject the ideologies of a fast-paced world and deliberately embrace an embodied slowness in their process of making. This is a deliberate way of working that links to their surrender of power, as they reject the power that social media and technology have had in the fast pace consumption of imagery. They spend time in the physical landscape as well as time with each photographic series that they create. The way in which they embrace an embodied slowness is achieved in a variety of methods, for example, walking, waiting, the use of equipment and the processing of the work, all of which are discussed in this chapter.

2.1 Walking

“This book could not have been written by sitting still. The relationship between paths, walking and the imagination is its subject, and much of its thinking was therefore done - was only possible - while on foot” (Robert Macfarlane, 2012)

This quote by Macfarlane could be applied to the photographers' processes of making as their work cannot be created by sitting still. The actual photograph itself will often need to be made whilst being stationary. However, the process these photographers go on before taking a photograph is one in which walking in the landscape can aid their connection with the natural world. Therefore, this section considers the process of walking and what walking achieves when it is part of the photographers' process.

There are multiple reasons as to why one might walk. For example, it could be for exercise, it could be to partake in a task (for example, to travel to the supermarket) or it could be as a benefit to one's mental state of mind. In this thesis, the act of walking is discussed in relation to Zen's being present in the moment and the act of looking inwards. This being present in the moment can allow one to become aware of their own

internal landscape as well as connecting with the physical landscape in which one is walking. The particular act of walking that is discussed in this thesis can be a method used by the photographers to rid themselves of the distractions of the fast-paced world in order for them to be present in the moment whilst they are in the physical landscape. In order to discuss the concept of walking, this thesis turns to the writing of Rebecca Solnit, Dale S. Wright, Thomas A Clark and John Ruskin.

One of the aspects of Zen that was discussed in Chapter 1, was that Zen is more concerned with looking inwards than it is about looking outwards. Rebecca Solnit's book *Wanderlust* is a good illustration of acknowledging a relationship between the mind and the physical act of walking. For example, she states, "walking, ideally, is a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly making a chord" (Solnit, 2001, p.5). Accordingly, when walking in the natural world, the body is moving, the mind is thinking and the landscape is the canvas onto which thoughts and imaginations can be mapped. Thus, the body, mind and the world all work in harmony with one another and walking can be the foundation for this harmony to occur. This harmony can be linked to Taoism and Zen as Taoism is a tradition which looks at living in harmony with the Tao (the way). Through concepts such as yin yang, one understands that we need all entities in life in order to live in harmony. Solnit also says that "The rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts" (Solnit, 2001). Thus, the process of walking allows one to look inwards and think freely. As one might traverse the landscape, they might be traversing their thoughts simultaneously. Solnit also writes: "This creates an odd consonance between internal and external passage, one that suggests that the mind is also a landscape of sorts and that walking is one way to traverse it" (Solnit, 2001, p.6). *Wanderlust* highlights this idea that walking is not just a physical movement through the landscape but also a movement through one's mind. Thus, walking allows for the photographers to embrace their internal contemplation which is key to their process of making.

Rebecca Solnit's ideas on walking has some similarities to kinhin. Kinhin is a form of meditation which is performed by walking. Dale S. Wright in his book *Zen Ritual - Studies of Zen Buddhist Theory in Practice* discusses the idea of kinhin for he states:

Zen Buddhism has come to be so identified with seated meditation (*zazen*) that it is easy to overlook the fact that *zazen* is but one of the many ritual activities that form the core of traditional Zen monastic life. This article concerns one such ritual that has become a mark of modern Japanese Sōtō Zen, the slow walking (*kinhin*) that is done between periods of seated meditation (Wright, 2008, p.223).

Kin hin is a walking meditation in which one coordinates walking with breathing. One who is meditating by walking (*kinhin*) will take one breath followed by a step (or sometimes half a step) which is a slow and quiet process. It removes the distractions of the exterior world as one focuses on the meditative task at hand. Considering this in relation to Solnit's ideas around walking, it is in *kinhin* that the body and mind can work in harmony within the space they are in. It also removes all other distractions which allows one to be present in the moment which can allow one to become aware of their being in the world. *Kin hin* is a deliberate act of slowing down, which relates to the photographers in this thesis. It can be stated that the photographers choose a deliberate way of working that has an embodied slowness as part of the process which links to the choice of moving slowly when performing *kinhin*.

The slow pace of walking can influence one to look and discover more whilst in the physical landscape. It has already been considered that the body and mind work in harmony when one walks. Thus, when one walks through the landscape at a slower pace there is more time for both looking and thinking. The poem *In Praise of Walking* by Thomas A Clark is a good example of discussing the idea of discovering more by walking. In Thomas A Clark's poem *In Praise of Walking* he writes:

There are things we will never see, unless we walk to them.

Walking is a mobile form of waiting.

What I take with me, what I leave behind, are of less importance than what I discover along the way (Clark, 1988).

Considering the first line in the quotation taken from Clark's poem, it is possible that it could refer to the idea that not all places are accessible by other modes of transport, so walking is required to reach them. However, it could also be interpreted that walking, as a slower process, allows for more features of the landscape to

become noticeable. Due to the slower pace, we have more time to explore the places we walk through. Similar to Clark's in *In Praise of Walking*, writer John Ruskin wrote:

No changing of place at a hundred miles an hour, nor making of stuffs a thousand yards a minute, will make us one whit stronger, happier, or wiser. There was always more in the world than men could see, walked they ever so slowly; they will see it no better for going fast" (Ruskin, 1843).

In the same vein as Clark, Ruskin discusses how walking allows one to slow down, and in the process of slowing down one can become more aware of their surroundings. It is in this slower process that more can become visible to the person walking and therefore, more can be discovered.

Having discussed ideas surrounding walking, this thesis considers walking as part of the photographers' process. Firstly, Awoiska van der Molen will be discussed. Van der Molen is a Dutch photographer who predominantly photographs the landscape in black and white. Van der Molen will often spend weeks roaming the landscape in solitude, before she takes a photograph. In her reasoning for this being a key part of her process she states, "during this time I get connected with the environment and I start to see and feel more and more around me" (Van der Molen, 2015). Another reason she states is "to allow nature to imprint its specific emotional qualities on me" (Van der Molen, n.d.). Both of these quotes can suggest that Van der Molen has some intention of connecting with nature when she goes into the physical landscape. It is through this connection and slow process of being in the physical landscape, that Van der Molen can discover more, feel more and contemplate more before she takes a photograph. This can be linked to Zen's being present in the moment. When Van der Molen spends time walking in the landscape, she starts to feel more and see more around her which could be associated with the greater awareness and clarity that Kabat-Zinn associated with this present in the moment concept. Clarity is a difficult concept to explain. For example, what does it mean and how do you know when clarity has been reached? One cannot state for certain how each person reaches clarity or what clarity feels like for each individual. However, in this thesis, clarity is part of Zen that means one has made both internal and external discoveries by being present in the moment, and by having a contemplative slow process. It is through making these discoveries that one has an awareness of their being in the landscape and a connection with nature can be felt. On one hand, clarity could be considered as gaining knowledge of a situation and as previously mentioned, knowledge is associated with power.

However, Zen lets go of the idea of knowing in a surrender of power. Thus, clarity in this thesis is not about gaining knowledge of the photographer's experience. It is an individual clarity that results in an awareness of oneself.

There is also an element of Zen's idea of openness in Van der Molen's process of making. She spends time walking in the landscape to allow nature to imprint specific qualities on her. This can be linked to openness in her process of making as she has a desire for nature to provide her with these emotional qualities. It was stated in the previous chapter that openness is the idea that one can open themselves up to really see the world and their inner self. This concept of openness links to the harmony between body, mind and place that Solnit discusses and also the meditative state of *kinhin* as through meditating in this particular way, one opens themselves up for a state of awareness. It is through these concepts of being present in the moment and openness that one could suggest a sense of clarity can be reached. Thus, when Van der Molen feels ready to take her photograph, it might be because through connecting with nature and allowing it to imprint certain qualities on her that she has gained a sense of clarity.

2.2. Waiting

Referring back to Clark's poem, the second line taken from the quote says, "walking is a mobile form of waiting" (Clark, 1988). This again can be linked to the process of slowing down. When waiting, one is perhaps expectant of an event occurring. For example, one of the definitions of the term *waiting* is "remain in readiness for a purpose" (Oxford Language, n.d.). Therefore, waiting can mean that one is expectant of an event occurring when in the landscape. Linking this idea of waiting to this thesis, it can be suggested that the photographers whose work is studied, all have the intention of connecting with nature when they go into landscape. Thus, the purpose they are waiting for could be this connection to be felt and this connection can be achieved by waiting or walking. However, if using Clark's quote as a basis for this discussion, it can be said that the two work in harmony with one another. He pairs walking with waiting, one is stationary, the other is not. Linking this to a photographer's process, Boomoon says, "when I'm in the field, the image itself decides what moment I am waiting for. Waiting is part of the encounter" (Boomoon, n.d.). Boomoon as part of his process might walk to the location in which he photographs, yet walking is not the main part of his process, rather it is waiting. Boomoon states that the image decides the moment he is waiting for. Thus, it is through waiting in the physical landscape that Boomoon has time to be present in the landscape with a level

of openness. It is through these ideas that Boomoon can make discoveries both internally and externally which allows for him to have this greater awareness that Kabat-Zinn discusses as part of Zen Buddhist Mindfulness. Thus, it is not necessarily the image deciding for him when the moment is right. Rather, the waiting time allows for clarity to occur and when this clarity is reached that is when the moment feels right. Thus, waiting is how Boomoon reaches this point of clarity, whereas, Van der Molen, walks through the landscape for weeks. Therefore, one photographer walks as part of her process whereas the other photographer waits as part of his process. Although waiting and walking have differences, they both represent a method which encourages the photographer's embodied slowness.

Boomoon also states that "the image really is the culminating point in my complex experience of relationships with the world before me" (Boomoon, n.d.). Therefore, when Boomoon takes a photograph in the physical landscape it is reflecting on his relationship with nature. The reason for it being a complex experience is because it is not just a reflection of his bodily experience in the landscape but rather, it is also a mental experience. Clark creates a link between walking and waiting and by exploring walking, it can be stated that waiting can also be a link between the body, the mind and the world. Thus, through waiting, Boomoon has an internal relationship with both himself and the landscape, and the image taken is a reflection of that relationship.

Boomoon is not the only photographer in this thesis who waits as part of their process. Jungjin Lee also waits as part of her photographic process of making. This is illustrated in an article for the PKM Gallery which states: "her photographs, which involve a process of waiting and gazing until the object reveals its true nature, are meditative, picturesque, and suggestive of eternity that transcends the notions of time" (PKM Gallery, n.d.). Both the waiting and gazing methods, which are part of Lee's process, become meditative, which is suggestive of Zen beliefs as Zen's translation refers to mental concentration and meditation (Levine, 2017). The concept of being present in the moment can also be linked to Lee's process as the quote says, "suggestive of eternity" (PKM Gallery, n.d.). Nature and its fundamental elements are constantly changing whether it is due to natural processes such as erosion or the changing of seasons or whether it is down to human intervention altering the landscape. When Lee photographs these natural elements, the photograph freezes them in time, suggesting the elements' eternal existence. This links to being present in the moment because when waiting in the landscape, Lee can be present in the moment, and when she takes a photograph that moment is captured.

Similar to Jungjin Lee, Thomas Joshua Cooper also gazes as part of his process. In his PhD Cooper writes, “gazing leads to visual clarity and understanding. Seeing is the conscious activity that may result from gazing. Gazing and seeing are physiologically and psychologically linked. They are both products of visual consciousness. Gazing instigates seeing” (Cooper, 2017). The dictionary definition of *gaze* is to “look steadily and intently, especially in admiration, surprise or thought” (Oxford Languages, n.d.). Therefore, when one gazes they are looking slowly whilst in thought. There is this link between body and mind that is seen in the process of walking. When both Cooper and Lee state that they gaze as part of their process of making, it can be stated that they have a considered way of looking at the landscape they are in. Cooper states that seeing is a result of gazing. This shows that gazing is a slow process of looking that allows one to see the world clearly. This again links to clarity which is a result of being present in the moment. Thus, walking, waiting and gazing all can be slow processes that the photographers adopt in order to have a contemplative and internal relationship with the landscape. It is through this relationship that one can be present in the moment as they photograph.

2.3. Equipment

This chapter has so far demonstrated that walking, waiting and gazing can be part of the photographers’ embodied slowness. It is now necessary to discuss how the photography equipment can affect the process of making and how that can also lead to an embodied slowness. There are different ways in which the camera can be an accessory for reflecting the photographers’ experience. For example, Susan Sontag says, “photographs really are experience captured, and the camera is the ideal arm of consciousness in its acquisitive mood” (Sontag, 2005). It is important to acknowledge that a photograph cannot be a direct representation of an experience. This is because the photograph is not able to capture other aspects of physically being in the landscape and the camera cannot capture other senses that are experienced in the landscape. For example, the camera cannot capture the smell of the sea or the feeling of leaves under one’s feet. Therefore, it can be argued that a photograph reflects on an experience rather than capturing it. The photographer makes multiple conscious decisions when taking a photograph. For example, how to frame the photograph, where to set the camera up and what settings the camera should be on. Therefore, the process of being in the landscape might be an unconscious process of looking inwards and discovering one’s inner self, but the camera becomes a conscious process of reflecting on that internal experience. This harmony between

an unconscious and conscious process allows for the photographer to engage with their thoughts and feelings when they decide to take a photograph. Therefore, the camera itself is what allows one's inner self to be translated into pictorial form.

The majority of the photographers in this thesis use either large or medium format film cameras. These cameras can be cumbersome which in itself can slow someone down when they are walking through the landscape. These cameras can also take longer to set up than a digital camera does. This time-consuming process really allows the photographer to engage with the image they intend to create, and allows them to consider the shot in more detail. Similar to the walking and waiting process, the slower process allows for more discoveries to be made both internally and externally. Thus, the slow process of walking and the time spent in the landscape is reflected in the slow process of the photographers' methods due to the cameras they use.

When working with film there is a certain amount of consideration that goes into each shot. This is because when shooting on film, one is limited to a certain amount of exposures per roll of film (for example 36 exposures for 35mm film or 10 exposures on 6x7 120mm film). Unlike digital photography which can allow for thousands of photographs to be taken on each SD card, film is more limited. In order to not waste an exposure on film, the photographer considers each image carefully, pre-visualising it, before taking the photograph. The photographer will not be able to see the final images until they are developed so this almost requires the photographer to be considered but also to be prepared to work with any mistakes. For example, referring back to Chinese landscape painting Wai-yu Leung writes:

Brushstrokes cannot be erased or corrected once put on rice paper. It somehow impels people to be exceptionally mindful and even surrender to the "mistake" and to work with the "unexpected" brushstroke. Therefore, every stroke embodies the awareness and high energy of the painter, permeating the landscape with life (chi). (Leung, 2021, p.211)

The same could be said about film photography. The photograph cannot be erased once taken. Technically they can be manipulated by working on the negatives and scans of the images, but the photographer must remain aware of the possibility of error. Mistakes can still be made and these mistakes might even make for an interesting photograph. Therefore, film, like brushstrokes, can be subject to mistakes and require a level of awareness. However, that is not to say that shooting on digital does not require a level of consideration. One

can still be considered and aware when shooting on a digital camera. One can still work slowly and limit themselves with how many photographs they take but this limitation is due to the photographer restricting themselves rather than the equipment restricting them. Thus, the type of camera one uses can play a role in a photographer's process and how one experiences the landscape.

All of the photographers could be considered in relation to the use of equipment in relation to an embodied slowness. However, Janelle Lynch is a good example of discussing her use of camera. In an interview with Reneta Toney for Burchfield Penney Art Center, Lynch states, "I use an 8-x-10 inch camera, so also spend a lot of time underneath the focusing cloth when I'm ready to compose an image" (Lynch, 2013). Not only does the camera encourage a slow process of making, it also provides a personal experience of using it. When under the focusing cloth, Lynch can be alone in her thoughts. It is the time spent under the focusing cloth that adds to an experience of looking inwards. The dark cloth removes any distractions from the outside world so Lynch can be focused and able to contemplate both her thoughts as well as the photograph she is about to take. The dark cloth acts as a canvas on which her thoughts can be reflected. It is through these thoughts that she can imagine and consider how the photograph will look. Later on in the interview she says that "because I work in secluded places, a sense of security is critical for my concentration" (Lynch, 2013). When Lynch is under the focusing cloth, she feels safe. This allows for her to concentrate on her work rather than being distracted by any concerns or fear of being alone in a secluded place. This requirement to feel safe is another factor to be taken into consideration before the image can be captured, again slowing the process down.

2.4. Working in Solitude

In Chapter 1, Zen was discussed as being hard to define as it can be a personal practice based on one's own understanding, experiences and thoughts. Zen is a meditative experience that is about looking inwards in order to understand what it means to be in the world. This introduces the next aspect of the photographers' process.

Most of the photographers in this thesis work in solitude when they are in the landscape. It has already been mentioned that Awoiska van der Molen walks in the landscape whilst being alone in solitude. However, Van der Molen also furthers this idea when she processes her work. She often develops and prints her work

by herself. Thus, the processing of her work is an extension of her personal process of being in solitude. When developing film and printing film in a dark room, it is a slow and repetitive chemical process. Each time the print or film is worked on, slight adjustments will be made. For example, alterations will be made to how light or how contrast the photograph is until the photograph is how the photographer wants it to look. Thus, the processing of the work can also be associated with an embodied slowness which is key to the photographers' process of making. While Van der Molen develops her work alone, she can further reflect on her individual experience that she had whilst in the physical landscape. It is when she is in the dark room, working on each photograph, that more internal reflections and thoughts can be engaged with. Working on each image will require a level of focus and contemplation as she considers how each photograph should look. Because Zen is about looking inwards, it means that it is unique to each person. Thus, when considering Zen in relation to the photographers' work, their photographs are an independent creation that are created for the viewer to later experience. The photographers create the work with the knowledge that it will be viewed by other people, thus the photograph is not personal on a sense of it being solely for the photographers' viewing. Rather, the work is personal in the sense it is a reflection of an individual experience which later encourages the viewer to consider their own thoughts and interpretations when they are viewing it.

Although working in solitude can be a physical solitude, it can also be a mental solitude that occurs when the photographer looks inwards at oneself. A good example of a photographer reflecting their inner self is Minny Lee. Minny Lee is a multimedia artist from South Korea who works with photography, video, audio, poetry and installations. In her biography on her website she states that "in Far Eastern traditions, one takes a humble journey to discover the world and eventually oneself" (Lee, n.d.). She then states that her practice runs alongside this idea. In this thesis, this way of working can be discussed from a Zen perspective as Zen is an understanding of the world and one's existence in it through a process of looking inwards. In discussing her work, Lee mentions, "I constantly revisit personal memories and history through my photography, reflecting on my inner self" (Lee, n.d.). Thus, in looking into her personal memories and history whilst she is in the physical landscape, she is reflecting on her inner self and previous experiences. Simon Schama in his book *Landscape and Memory* writes:

For although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are in fact, indivisible. Before it can ever repose for the sense, landscape is the work of

the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock
(Schama, 2004, p.6).

Lee traverses the landscape in order to explore her personal memories. If landscapes are made up of history and memories, then the physical landscape is the perfect tool to aid Lee's discovery of her own memories. This might explain why she photographs the landscape when she explores her childhood. It is her inner self and her personal experiences that are then reflected in her art for the viewer to later experience. Lee's work is very personal to her and it is a reflection of a personal solitude in her own thoughts.

This chapter has studied the photographers' methods in their process of making. These methods are walking, waiting, gazing, their use of equipment and the idea of working in solitude. These five different methods have all been considered in relation to the photographers' embodied slowness that they embrace in their process of making. It is whilst embracing an embodied slowness that the photographers can look inwards in a state of contemplation and this allows for them to be present in the moment whilst in the physical landscape. Having considered the process of making in this chapter, the following chapter will discuss the subject matter of the final photographs.

Chapter 3 - Fundamental Elements

In the previous chapter, the photographers' embodied slowness was discussed. It is in this chapter that the visual aspects of the photographs will be discussed using a Zen way of thinking. The question arises as to how does Zen look visually? Zen is not necessarily pictorial in its essence. Thus, in considering Zen in relation to the photographs in this thesis, ideas are drawn from Zen and discussed alongside ideas surrounding fundamental elements, light and blur. Zen is not considered pictorially, but it can be applied to photography by exploring ideas surrounding the subject matter.

The predominant subject matter of fundamental elements is one of the key characteristics of the selected group of contemporary landscape photographers' work in this thesis. The chapter will begin by exploring fundamental elements and how they are photographed by selected photographers. It will then explore possible visual strategies that are used to reflect on how the photographers look at the fundamental elements. These visual strategies are: the use of light, blur and the photographers framing of the physical landscape.

3.1. Fundamental Elements

Before considering how the landscape photographers in this thesis photograph fundamental elements, it is important to discuss what fundamental elements are. Fundamental elements (also often referred to as classical elements or primary elements) were elemental terms proposed to explain the complexities of nature and all matter. The fundamental elements can vary depending on nationality or set of beliefs. For example, in both Western thought and Buddhist thought there are four main fundamental elements: earth, air, fire and water. In Buddhist thinking these fundamental elements are referred to as Mahābhūta (ChemEurope, n.d.). However, there are also countries which have more than four elements in their way of thinking. For example, in Chinese thinking there are five main fundamental elements: wood, fire, earth, metal and water (Simpkins and Simpkins, 1999). Thus, the actual fundamental elements can vary depending on the cultural context in which they are used.

Since this thesis uses Zen as a means of thinking about landscape photography, it is important to consider how the fundamental elements are used in Buddhist thinking. In *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy* (2013), Steven Emmanuel states that “to aid the understanding of *dukkha*, Buddhism gives details of each of

the five factors in its analysis of personality” (Emmanuel, 2013, p.33). These five factors are the five aggregates: rūpa (form), vedanta (sensations), saññā (perceptions of sense objects), the sankhāras (mental formations) and viññāna (consciousness) (Britannica, n.d.). Rūpa, the first of the five aggregates, is thought to be made up of the four primary elements previously listed: earth, air, fire, and water. Rūpa, which relates to form, considers that all matter is made up of these fundamental elements. The five aggregates are the basis for understanding dukkha (suffering) and thus, given that the primary elements are key to rūpa, the primary elements are key to understanding one’s suffering. In Buddhist thinking, the fundamental elements represent the foundation for understanding suffering (dukkha) and the act of freeing oneself from suffering.

Although fundamental elements can vary depending on one’s nationality or beliefs, each photographer discussed in this thesis focuses primarily on a fundamental element when they photograph the landscape. Although one cannot state what viewpoint these photographers consider these elements from, one can explore how they photograph the elements.

3.2. Water

Firstly, this thesis considers the fundamental element of water. When discussing a river, Chinese philosopher, Confucius, said that “It flows on like this—does it not?—never ceasing, day or night” (Confucius, Slingerland, 2003). The constant flow of water is representative of eternity as it is forever moving. This is also reflected on the Nations Online website which states “water has the capacity to flow, infinitely yielding yet infinitely powerful, silent and still, awaiting, flexible, ever changing, a stored potential and often dangerous (flood’s devastation) with the capacity also to nourish and cleanse” (nationsonline.org, n.d.). Thus, water in Chinese thinking can be considered as a symbol of eternity but it also has the power to cleanse. This links to the symbolism of water in Buddhist thinking. In a research article titled *Water - its significance in science, in nature and culture, in world religions and in the universe* by Peter Brüesch, it states:

in Buddhism, water symbolizes life, the purest form of food, and water is the particular element which in nature carries everything together... Water symbolizes purity, clarity and calmness, and reminds us to cleanse our minds and attain the state of purity (Brüesch, 2011, p.302).

In Buddhist thinking, water is found in all forms in nature, for example, it aids the growth of trees, the shaping of rock formations and a life source for animals and humans. The symbolism of water in Buddhism also represents purity and the ability to cleanse. This links to Zen which is about reaching a state of clarity and understanding of what it means to be in the world in order to free oneself of suffering. Considering this symbolism of water in relation to the photography in this thesis, Boomoon's work can be discussed.

Boomoon is a photographer from South Korea. He previously worked in black and white, photographing urban environments and the people within them. However, he now often works in colour and photographs the landscape, focusing predominantly on a fundamental element in each of his series. This change in style and subject matter is acknowledged in his biography on his website: "By the 1980s, he began working on landscape and developed his thoughts landscape as a mean of self-relexion [*sic*]" (Boomoon, n.d.). Thus, his elemental photographs are a means to reflect on his inner self. Elemental photography is not a commonly used term but it is a term used in this thesis to discuss photographs that predominantly focus on fundamental elements. Boomoon's self-reflection can be linked to a Zen way of thinking. This self-reflection can be linked to Chinese landscape painting. When Chinese landscape painters make Shan shui paintings, they do not always seek to portray a direct observation of what was seen in the landscape, rather they often seek to portray what was felt or thought whilst in the landscape. Shanshui paintings first began to be developed in the 5th Century and refers to a style of Chinese painting which uses brush and ink to depict the landscape. The term Shanshui translates to mountain-water-picture. Hence, mountains and rivers are often prominent natural features in these paintings. This concept of painting internal thoughts rather than visual observations is discussed on the New World Encyclopedia website which states "When Chinese painters work on shan shui painting, they do not try to present an image of what they have seen in nature, but what they have thought about nature" (New World Encyclopedia, n.d.). Thus, when Boomoon photographs the landscape as a means of self-reflection, there are strong similarities between his work and the characteristics of Chinese landscape painting and Zen.

Boomoon often photographs the landscape where one fundamental element is the dominant subject matter. For example, in his series titled *Falling Water*, he photographs a waterfall in a typology style. The work is abstract in terms of form and shapes. Despite its abstract appearance, there is an element of knowing in his work as one is still aware that they are viewing water. Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher, once said that, "no man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man" (Wang, 2019).

This can link to Boomoon's typology of photographs (Figure 8). Water is unpredictable in the way that it falls and Boomoon's typology of photographs reflect that. Although the photographs are of the same subject, each image is different due to the movement of water. If no man can step into the same river twice, then no man can photograph the same river (or waterfall) twice and Boomoon's typology of the waterfall proves that. The water falls at an immense speed and it is only due to the camera's ability to freeze this falling water in one single moment that the viewer is able to see the smaller details that form this vast amount of water. It was previously mentioned that in Buddhist thinking, water symbolises clarity, purity and calmness. When considering this alongside Boomoon's photographs, it can be associated with his landscape photographs being a means of self-reflection. This connection can be made because Boomoon photographs water (which in Buddhist thought is a symbol of clarity) as a means of self-reflection. It is through this self-reflection that Boomoon can gain a sense of clarity about his internal self. Therefore, water becomes the perfect subject matter for Boomoon to photograph as he aims to reflect on his inner self.

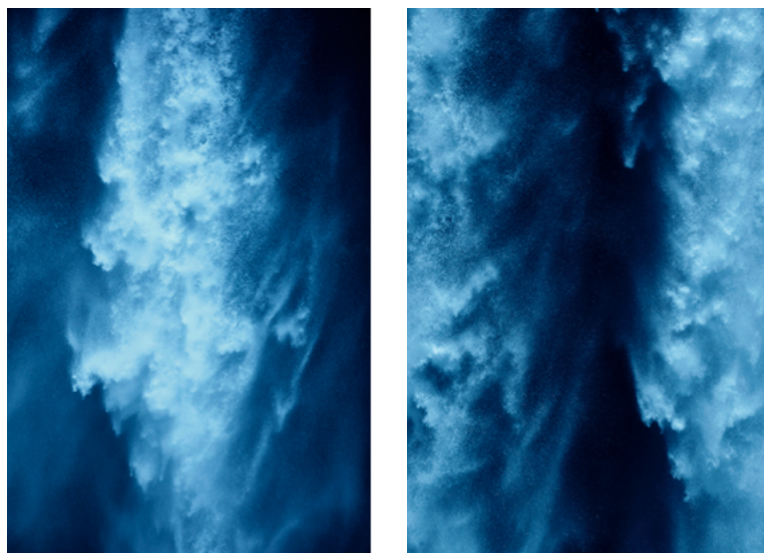


Figure 6 & 7: *Falling Water* #5580 and #8350 (Boomoon, n.d.)

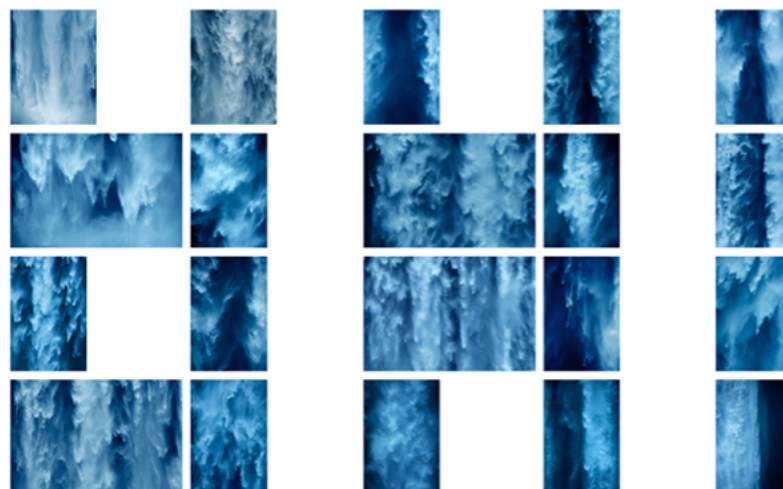


Figure 8: *Falling Water Screenshot* (Boomoon, n.d.)

Boomoon is not the only photographer in this thesis who predominantly photographs water.

Thomas Joshua Cooper in his project, *The Worlds Edge - the Atlantic Basin Project - An Atlas of Emptiness and Extremity*, travelled round the edges of the Atlantic basin, taking a photograph at each mapped out point such as 'Furthest West'. He often only took a single photograph in each location which visually maps out his journey for for the viewer.

The Atlantic Ocean that Cooper photographs has a historical context as it is known as the divide between the Old World (Europe, Africa and Asia) and the New World (The Americas). These terms were coined in the Age of Discovery, which was a period beginning in the 15th Century, in which European ships travelled around the world in order to find new trading routes. It is believed that the explorer, Amerigo Vespucci, during his explorations (of what we now know as the Americas), came to realise that it was not in fact the same land as Asia but was a completely different continent entirely. Vespucci was the first person to use the term "New World" in a letter to his friend Lorenzo Pietro Francesco Di Medici in 1503. In this letter he said, "it is lawful to call it a new world, because none of these countries were known to our ancestors, and to all who hear about them they will be entirely new" (Markham, 2010, p.42). It is important to say that there were already settlers in the "New World", so it is only "entirely new" for the people from the "Old World" who had not heard of this "New World" before. Hence, the Atlantic Ocean became the border between the Old World and New World and Cooper photographs this divide between the two worlds. During Cooper's photographic journeys he explores the Atlantic Basin like many explorers did when discovering the New World and so this historical context could be considered when discussing Cooper's project.



Figure 9: *The Swelling of the Sea | Furthest West - The Atlantic Ocean* (Cooper, 1990-2001)

However, Cooper's photographs are ambiguous as they do not tell the viewer anything about the place in which the photograph was taken. This historical context is not visually implied in his photographs, however can be inferred based on one's personal knowledge of the context surrounding the Atlantic Ocean. When discussing Zen in relation to the photography in this thesis it was suggested that Zen is a surrender of power as one lets go of the idea of knowing. It can be suggested that when Cooper creates these ambiguous photographs he rejects the power that this historical knowledge has on the meaning of the Atlantic Ocean and encourages the viewers to generate their own meaning in the otherwise ambiguous photographs. The ambiguity in his photographs does not provide any information about the location, so the viewers' interpretations are not influenced by their existing knowledge of the places. Ben Tufnell writes, "Cooper photographs are concrete images of time and place, they are intensely allusive and suggestive, imbricated with memories - both his and of history - and layers of possible meaning" (Tufnell, 2009). The way in which Cooper photographs the landscape encourages the viewer to ask more questions than the work answers. Ben Tufnell does hint at history of the place in his writing. Although Cooper's photographs do not directly visually refer to this history, the Atlantic Ocean as a subject will always be laced with this historical context. Thus, when it is photographed, its history will always be there.



Figure 10: *First Light—The South Indian Ocean, the Cape of Good Hope* (Cooper, n.d.)

In each location, Cooper often photographs the swirling ocean and rarely includes land in his photograph (as seen in Figure 9). As the swirling ocean fills the frame it creates a boundless image which removes visual narrative of the location as one does not know where the photograph was taken. Occasionally to compensate for this otherwise boundless image, Cooper will include a small section of land in the bottom of the frame which acts as an object on which the viewer can root themselves to the place (Figure 10). His photographs of

the swirling ocean are taken in black and white. Black and white photography is an abstraction of reality as one does not view the world in black and white. This abstraction along with the blurred sea, produces a photograph which is visually ambiguous but consequently allows for one's imagination to be stimulated. Cooper's work is more about the unseen than the seen (Tufnell, 2009). It can also be suggested that it is more about the imaginative rather than reality. This is because the ambiguous photograph of the swirling ocean encourages the viewer's internal contemplation in order for them to interpret the photograph.

3.3. Earth

The fundamental element 'Earth' often refers to soil and rocks but in some cases refers to flora which grows from the earth. Plants are not always considered as Earth as they are made up of other elements too. However, the photographers' subject matter of plants will be discussed in this section as they can be considered following the discussion of water because in Buddhist thinking, water is the key element found in all forms in nature. Plants hold water but grow from the earth.



Figure 11: *Family Portraits* (Lynch, 2017)

Firstly, in the discussion of earth, this thesis explores the work of Janelle Lynch. Lynch is an American photographer who has previously photographed portraits and urban environments. However, even in these photographs that portray human life, there was often plants present. For example, in Figure 11 she uses flora

as a backdrop for her portrait. However, in her photographs of a more ‘natural’ landscape, flora becomes her main visual subject matter. The term natural landscape is used loosely as it can be a challenging term to use because most landscapes now have some trace of human intervention. Also, her photographs could be taken in a garden or park which are not considered natural landscapes.



Figure 12 & 13: *Another Way of Looking at Love* (Lynch, 2015-2018)

In Lynch’s photographic series titled *Another Way of Looking at Love* (2015-2018), ideas of the interconnectedness of nature are explored. This is illustrated in the description of the series as it is stated that the work “explored the interconnectedness of all life forms and supports a renewal of human relationships to each other, and to the natural and spiritual worlds” (Lynch, n.d.). This interconnectedness of all life forms echoes the philosophy of Taoism and Zen. Taoism and Zen are both similar in the way they discuss harmony and one’s existence in the world. Also, it has previously been mentioned that Zen Buddhism draws from Taoist ideas as well as ideas of Mahayana Buddhism. Taoism discusses ideas surrounding the true essence of nature, whereas, Zen can be considered as an individual discovery through a set of meditative practices. Thus, Zen can be considered in relation to *Another Way of Looking at Love* as the project considers human relationships with both the natural and spiritual world, and this can be done by looking inwards.

Lynch photographs flora that can often appear as a jumble of plants and branches. Lynch says that she makes points of connection when she is in the physical landscape, stating: “Points of connection create spaces

which represent areas where new realities can be envisioned” (Lynch, n.d.). The points of connection provide a space or an opening in which Lynch can begin to look inwards and map her thoughts and imaginations onto her work. It is this process of finding connection or harmony between all things that reflects on a Zen perspective. The space or opening that Lynch looks for when in the landscape can be linked to wu. Wu is also comparable to the Sanskrit term, Śūnyatā. Śūnyatā translates to ‘emptiness’ or ‘voidness’ (New World Encyclopaedia, n.d.). Śūnyatā is similar to wu, as both are not really empty. For example, the Britannica website, when referring to Śūnyatā, states that “in Buddhist philosophy, the voidness that constitutes ultimate reality” (Britannica, n.d.). This is also referenced in Ben Tufnell’s introductory essay in Cooper’s book *True* which is an interesting example of reflecting this idea that the void is not really empty, as he states:

In Zen thought and iconography the Void is something to be sought and embraced. It represents clarity in opposition to the dense static of the world. It is an emptiness that allows us to find a true sense of relativity (Tufnell, 2009).

The void is not really empty because in the void lies everything and in the void multiple meanings can be created. The void can be difficult to define or even pictorially empty. However, in relation to photography, the emptiness allows the viewer to gain clarity as they contemplate the meaning of the work. Thus, the spaces in Lynch’s photographs have the potential to hold everything which are generated from these new realities that she discusses.

Rocks are also considered as representing the Earth fundamental element. In Zen thinking, rocks often symbolise mountains. This is the case in Zen Gardens which are also known as Japanese rock gardens. Zen gardens were designed as part of a meditative process. They are visually minimalistic but each element of the garden acts as a symbol. For example, the sand symbolises water and is often raked to show movement found in water. However, the rocks in Zen gardens represent mountains. Mountains have symbolism too. In ancient China, both in Zen Buddhism and Taoism, mountains are seen as a natural element which reaches to the heavens. Van Thi Diep, in her essay *The Landscape of the Void: truth and magic in Chinese landscape painting*, states that “Chinese landscape paintings often depict this scenery: mountainous landscapes among the mists analogous of a place between heaven and earth” (Diep, 2017, p.79). Mountains represent the space between heaven and earth and so to climb one is similar to going on a pilgrimage. The higher one climbs the

nearer to heaven one is, both physically and symbolically. Therefore, rocks in Zen thinking symbolise not only mountains but also the connection of heaven and earth.

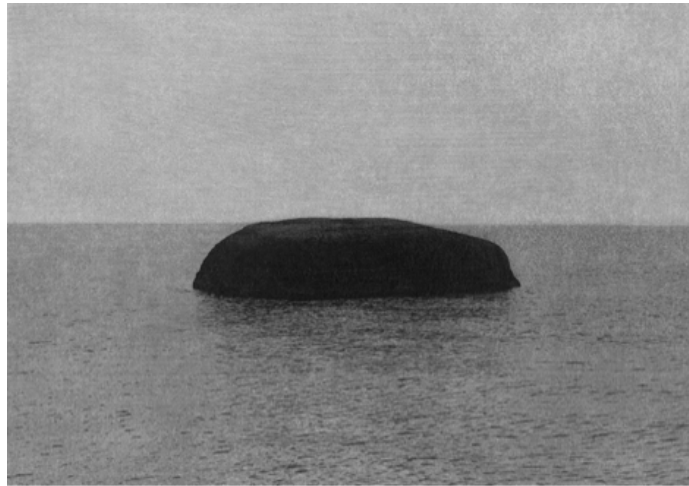


Figure 14: *Voice* (Lee, 2018-2019)

In Zen thinking, rocks have significance. The significance of the rock links to the next photographer in this thesis, Jungjin Lee. Lee is a Korean photographer who now lives in America. Lee photographs the landscape in black and white. She does not necessarily focus on one fundamental element per photographic series. However, each individual photograph predominantly focuses on a fundamental element. The way in which Lee photographs these natural elements is a way which portrays emptiness. The rock in Figure 14 is alone in the vast ocean. The picture is empty as there is no more narrative to the photograph. Considering Zen, this can have connotations of one's existence in the vast universe. It can also be considered as *wu*. It is in *wu* that one might interpret and imagine meaning. Thus, by photographing the elements in a particular way that deliberately only shows a rock in the vast ocean, one is forced to imagine and create narrative when viewing it.

The rock in Figure 14 is dark against the grey muted tones of the sky and sea which emphasises the presence of the rock. The question arises as to what the significance of the rock is. Rocks not only represent mountains and the space between heaven and earth, they can also symbolise time. Rocks hold a vast amount of geological time. Rocks are made up of multiple layers of minerals, sediments and fossils. These layers are built up over millions of years, resulting in a vast geological history found within these rocks. Figure 15 and 16 are photographs that I have taken. Figure 15 is similar to Lee's photograph of the rock in the ocean as it

portrays one rock alone in the landscape and the question again arises as to what the significance of the rock is. The type of rock that I photograph is a type of sedimentary rock called Gritstone. One of the locations that I photograph this type of rock in is Brimham Rocks. The rocks there were formed over 325 million years ago and, over time, water and weather has eroded them. There are different rock structures found in Brimham Rocks for example graded bedding (where larger grains are at the base and get progressively finer towards the top) and cross bedding (individual layers of sediment). These different rock structures develop over a long period of time. Thus, these rocks are representative of the vast geological time being discussed. Therefore, when photographing the rock on its own in the vast landscape, Lee could be reflecting on its importance in a vast geological history. She could also be reflecting on the symbolism of rocks from an Eastern perspective. This thesis cannot state why she is giving this particular rock significance, but its significance can be interpreted using these two concepts.



Figure 15 & 16: *Rocks* (Leitch, 2020)

3.4. Framing

Fundamental elements are the visual subject matter of the photographs. However, there are other visual strategies that can be considered when exploring the visual aspect of the work in this thesis. Thus, this thesis now discusses the framing of the work. The photographers in this thesis (apart from Jungjin Lee in a few of her photographs) do not include the horizon in their photographs. However, what does a lack of horizon do to a photograph? First of all, the lack of horizon creates a boundless image. When viewing the work, one does not know how far the subject matter expands beyond the edges of the photograph. It removes any sense of

scale from the photograph and the viewer is encouraged to imagine the size, and expanse of space that the subject matter fills. This links to the act of contemplation (which is considered as a characteristic of Zen) as the removal of a sense of scale encourages the viewer to contemplate the scale for themselves. In Boomoon's series *Falling Water*, the horizon was deliberately not included in the work. The removal of the horizon encourages the viewer to focus on the subject matter and encourages them to question the significance of the fundamental element. Thus, the lack of horizon encourages contemplation as it removes information about the physical landscape as well as directing the viewers' focus onto the subject matter of fundamental elements.

New Topographic photographers are also known for their placement of the horizon line. New Topographics was a term that was coined in 1975 by William Jenkins when he curated an exhibition of photographers associated with this photographic movement. It was a term used to describe the aesthetic used by American photographers who typically photographed black and white, man-altered landscapes. Traditionally, the horizon line is placed in the centre of the photograph to create balance between the elements. This is illustrated on *American Suburb X* which states:

Landscape's traditional midline placement of the horizon for compositional balance between earth and sky is often repositioned by New Topographics above or below midline, or is even absent, rendering the landscape cluttered, unbalanced, or constrained rather than pristine and endless" (*American Suburb X*, n.d.)

Thomas Joshua Cooper is influenced by New Topographic photographers. In Cooper's work the horizon is often absent, and the swirling ocean that fills the frame almost has that cluttered feel as there is no significant form in his framing of the landscape and the viewer is left potentially feeling lost. The absent horizon line in the photographers' work can create an unbalanced and overwhelming photograph. Typically, this overwhelming appearance of the landscape is discussed alongside the sublime. However, in Zen the idea of being overwhelmed by landscape is not associated with fear but rather embraced as a space for internal contemplation. The absence of the horizon can keep the viewers' eyes in the pictorial world for a longer amount of time. A straight horizon allows for the viewers' eyes to follow the line and out of the photograph. However, the lack of that horizon line in the photograph means the viewers do not have a formal guidance across the image, but rather a means to explore the world of the photograph in more detail in order to

comprehend it. This invites the viewer to stay in the pictorial world for longer in order to contemplate and interpret it.

3.5. Light

Light is a key factor in photography. Cameras redirect light rays which enter the camera and direct them to camera sensor or film in order for a photograph to be created. Thus, photographs need light to be taken. However, light can also be a subject matter within the photographs as well as a reflection of how the fundamental elements are looked at by the photographer. Awoiska van der Molen often photographs at night. Therefore, it can be said that she is drawn to the darkness when she is in the landscape. In an interview with FK magazine, Van der Molen states: “Darkness contains for me the beginning and the end; in there lays the source of everything” (Van der Molen, 2015). It is in darkness that more can be explored and discovered. This could be linked to the fundamental element of void in Indian thinking, as well as the Buddhist element of space. The darkness is a void or space in which discoveries can be made. Although the darkness in Van der Molen’s photograph is visually empty (Figure, 17), it is not really empty as it is physically filled with trees, animals and earth. However, it is also metaphorically filled with the potential for meanings to be created and imaginations to be stimulated. Therefore, the darkness, although visually empty, acts as a canvas on which one can look inwards and make internal discoveries.



Figure 17: *Sequester* (Van der Molen, 2011)

This also links to the Taoist belief 'wu'. In Chapter 1, wu was discussed in relation to Asian landscape paintings, where areas of the canvas are deliberately left blank. In relation to wu, it is considered that these deliberately left blank spaces encourage one to fill the gaps with their own imagination and meaning. Thus, the darkness that Van der Molen photographs, can be considered alongside wu as the darkness is nothingness but in the nothingness lies everything. By throwing the centre of the photograph into darkness, the photograph becomes more about the light than about the fundamental elements. In Van der Molen's photograph, the darkness can be considered the main subject matter. However, it also reflects her way of looking at the physical landscape. As the darkness can be discussed alongside wu and the void, the photograph reflects more of her internal experience than it does of the actual place.

The darkness in Van der Molen's photograph is in the centre of the photograph. Similarly, when I took Figure 18, I wanted to frame the darkness in the centre of the photograph. Before taking Figure 18, I was walking along a coastal path, surrounded by trees, so dense that the sea could not even be seen. Then, around the corner, the wooded area opened out into an open space with an area by the sea which was bleak in contrast to the dense woodland. The open area was completely void of life, no humans, no animals, no vegetation, just the shingled cliff side. By emphasising the shadows when I photographed the landscape, I created an element of blankness, as no detail can be found in the centre of the image where the darkness lies. I intentionally did this to represent how the cliff opened up into a vast empty space which represents my journey of being in the dense forest and with a turn of a corner was in the vast bleak space. The centre of the photograph represents my journey through the landscape. However, neither the bleak coastal landscape or the shadow of the cliff are empty or blank. For example, there is rock, time, memories and history in these places. It is in the emptiness that I could look inwards and it is in these empty spaces that I mapped my imaginations.



Figure 18: *Coast* (Leitch, 2020)

3.6. Blur

Another visual strategy that reflects how the selected photographers look at the fundamental elements is the use of blur. Minny Lee is a key example of using blur in her work. In Minny Lee's project *Encounters* (2008-2010) she photographs a variety of trees which she says have a different personality (Figure 19, 20 & 21). She often refers to these photographs of trees as portraits. In discussing these portraits, she states that "the portraits are reflections of my inner state and childhood memories" (Lee, n.d.). This can refer back to the process of looking inwards and the photographs act as a reflection of this process. The trees in the photographs are often blurred. This can be due to her technical decisions for example, she might use a slow shutter speed and when working with natural elements, the wind could blow the trees causing them to blur as the photograph is taken. However, the blur in Lee's photographs could also be interpreted as representing the concept that memories are not always easy to remember. The blurred trees could represent a lack of clarity in her childhood memories, acting as a visual representation of Lee's attempt to gain clarity of her own memories and experiences.

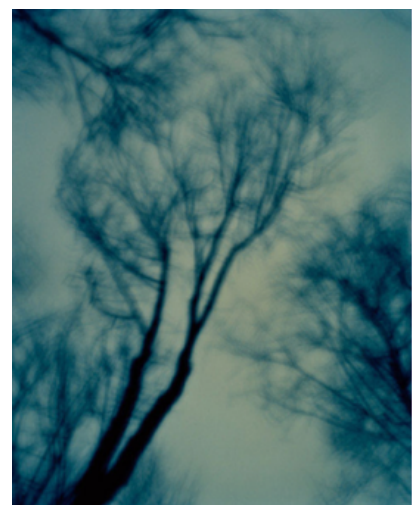
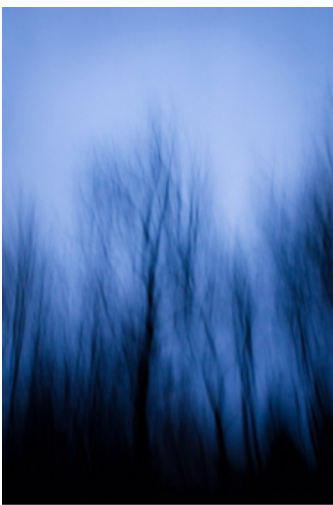


Figure 19, 20 & 21: *Encounters* (Lee, 2008-2010)

Lee often plays with the colour of the sky in her photographs of trees. In some photographs the sky is a vivid blue (Figure 19) whereas in others a muted brown (Figure 20). The variety of colours can represent different times or different seasons. Although these colours can be natural and the sky can be these colours, they somehow feel abstract. This could be due to the combination of the colourful sky alongside the blurred trees which makes the work feel almost dreamlike. This can also be suggestive of reflecting on the past. In an interview with *Tracking Art*, she states: "We don't always live in the present and in reality. We constantly go

back and forth between the past and present and dream and reality. From the absence of something, I can imagine the presence of something” (Lee, 2011). Her project *Encounters* is an exploration of her childhood memories. Thus, the dreamlike photographs represent this idea of exploring the past and the confusion between what she remembers and what really happened. The blurred trees act as the blurred line between dream and reality.

Thomas Joshua Cooper also uses blur in his photographs. He photographs the sea but portrays its swirling movement through using blur. This further creates an abstract viewpoint of the landscape. One does not view the movement of the ocean as a slow blur so this creates an alternative, abstract way of looking at the sea. The blur also can also be interpreted as representing time passing. Cooper occasionally photographs at night and a slow shutter speed will have been used in order to allow for the sea to be seen. This passing of time being visually suggested in Cooper’s work can be reflective of the vast journey that Cooper went on to create this body of work. The journey expanded over a long period of time. Thus, the journey, although not visually portrayed, is a key part of Cooper’s process that can be considered when studying his work and the concept of time.

This chapter has explored the visible subject matter of fundamental elements. However, the chapter has also considered the visual strategies that reflect on how the photographer looks at these fundamental elements. These visual strategies were framing, light and blur. How the selected photographers have photographed the fundamental elements reflects on internal contemplation and creates ambiguity in the work which encourages contemplation from the viewer. This idea of the viewers’ internal contemplation of the work is discussed in the following chapter which explores an embodied openness in the process of viewing the work.

Chapter 4 - Embodied Openness in Viewing

In the previous chapters, the photographers' work has been studied through considering their embodied slowness in their process of making as well as their subject matter of fundamental elements. However, embodied slowness is not the only embodied experience that can be discussed in relation to the selected photographers in this thesis. In this chapter the embodied experience of viewing the work will be considered. This experience of viewing the work is called an embodied openness as the work being viewed invites the viewer to interpret and contemplate the work. The photographs that have been discussed withhold certain information from the viewer which encourages the viewer to create meaning and narrative based on their own thoughts.

This embodied openness in the process of viewing the work would ideally discuss both the photobook and gallery exhibitions of the photographers. However, due to Coronavirus, gallery viewing has not been possible. Thus, I cannot discuss this idea from an embodied experience perspective as I have not had the opportunity to view the photographers' work in a gallery setting. Although, this thesis acknowledges the importance of gallery viewing in the process of having an embodied experience of viewing the work, this chapter will focus more on the photobook.

A photobook is not a book of photographs where the photographs inside are the body of work. Instead, the body of work is the photobook as a whole. When the photographers make a photobook they will make conscious decisions about each element of the book. For example, the cover, the paper type, the bind and the sequence of images. This chapter will interpret the meaning of these conscious decisions and consider how they could affect the viewers' interpretation of the work.

4.1. Minny Lee

The first photographer whose photobook will be considered is Minny Lee. In the previous chapter Minny Lee's project *Encounters* (2008-2010) was discussed. The photographs that she took for this photographic series were then made into a book. The book is an accordion bind which, once opened out, allows for the viewer to traverse through the work. It acts as a connected journey which reflects on Lee's journey to explore her childhood memories. When the book is fully opened out, the viewer can see the

variety of trees that Lee photographed as she states that each tree has a different personality. Therefore, the format of the book really allows for the different personalities to be seen. The accordion fold also requires a tactile engagement from the viewer in order to turn the pages and open the book out. The book immediately provides an experience of viewing the work in which the viewer physically has to turn the pages in order to see the work in more detail.



Figure 22: *Encounters Book* (Lee, 2015)

Lee when printing her photographs experimented with printing on rice paper, which she says she used in both her books and her installation process in the gallery. This use of rice paper reflects on an Eastern tradition of landscape painting as Chinese landscape painters often paint on rice paper and have done for thousands of years. Lee is a multimedia artist from South Korea who now lives in Hawaii in America and *Encounters* is a series which reflects on her childhood memories. Thus, Lee's choice of rice paper can be interpreted as a representation of her desire to return to her childhood memories when she lived in South Korea. Hence, the paper choice could be a reflection of her origin and culture. The viewer who then touches this paper in the book can make the connection between Lee, her childhood and the place where she grew up. However, it is only through having knowledge of the cultural history of rice paper that one might make those connections. Rice paper is a thin paper stock to use so when turning the pages of the book the work feels delicate. As the project reflects on Lee's childhood memories, the project is personal and intimate. Thus, the paper, being delicate, reflects the delicacy of the personal journey that Lee goes on. Also, this use of rice paper lead to a slow book making process. Lee's photographs are dark and the paper is thin, so when digitally printing on this paper type she stated it often got jammed (griffinmuseum.org, n.d.). Although the

slow process is due to the technical difficulties of working with the delicate paper, it still reflects the embodied slowness in her process of making.

The delicacy of the paper is also emphasised by the size of the book. The book itself is 5.5 x 7.5 inches. Thus, the book itself is small and emphasises the intimacy of the project. When holding this book, the viewers can immediately feel the quietness and personal aspect of the work as they can hold it in one hand as they view it. The cover of the book is a soft cover which introduces the delicacy of the work right from the beginning of the viewing experience.

4.2. Jungjin Lee



Figure 23: *Opening Book* (Lee, 2017)

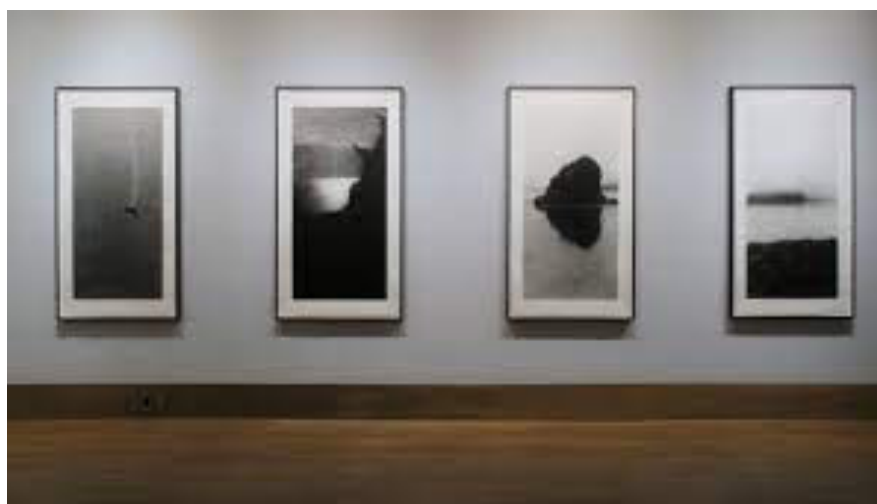


Figure 24: *Opening Exhibition* (Lee, n.d.)

Similar to Minny Lee, Jungjin Lee's book, *Opening*, is also an accordion fold. J.Lee's book is 15 x 7.5 inches meaning the vertical edges are significantly longer than the horizontal edges (as seen in Figure 23).

Although this chapter is focusing on the photo books, there remains an awareness of the gallery exhibitions. The way in which Lee exhibits her work is similar to the vertical style of her book (Figure 24). This has reference to hanging scrolls which are a traditional East Asian way of displaying paintings. Hanging scrolls have a vast cultural history. When Lee's work is viewed, the connections to the cultural meaning can be made. When discussing her reasons for printing her work in this vertical format she states:

Choosing a vertical format was an attempt to express the limitation of one's mind, and the title *Opening* refers to an opening of the heart, a freeing of it from its limitations. My thinking in general is rooted in Asian philosophy: Buddhism and Taoism. That philosophy is reflected in the concept of *Opening* more than with any of my previous series (Lee, n.d.).

It does not matter whether the work is being viewed in the gallery setting or through studying the book, this vertical display still has these ideas reflected in it. The vertical display represents how one's mind is limited. However, due to Lee's influences of Taoism and Buddhism, it can be considered that although one's mind is limited, it is through Taoism and Zen that one's mind becomes more open to interpretation. Thus, when viewing these vertical images, they represent one's openness within their inner self. The title *Opening* refers to an 'opening of the heart' (Lee, n.d.). Hence this can also refer to the embodied openness of viewing the work as the viewer interprets the work based on their inner feelings. It can also be stated that human perception can be limited and thus the mind's limitation can also be a reflection of human perception. If it is unseen to the viewer, it could provide a sense of the unknown. However, often there remains a sense of knowing that revolves around the unseen. For example, although it is unseen it does not mean it does not exist. Through an open mind and heart one can have awareness of entities existing in the unseen aspects of the world as one can imagine them. Thus, these limitations of one's mind that these vertical images represent can actually be considered as an invitation for contemplation and interpretation, in order to be free of these limitations.

Similar to Minny Lee, Jungjin Lee also works with rice paper. In discussing her book *Unnamed Road*, MACK books states: "Lee's work is often concerned with the materiality of printing technique, and for twenty years she has utilised a liquid photo-sensitive emulsion brushed on handmade rice paper, a method

akin to painting” (MACK, n.d.). Lee often wants her photographs to have visual similarities to paintings and through this paper choice she can achieve this as there is a vast cultural history surrounding rice paper in Chinese landscape paintings. In an article for Pasatiempo Magazine which discusses Lee’s work, Teri Thomson Randall states: “The artist decided to print on handmade rice paper for its softness and texture. ‘You can see the skin of it,’ she said, referring to the particles of straw that remain in the pulp” (Randall, 2002). Because one can see the particles of straw in the paper, the viewer immediately can think about the natural elements that helped create the paper. As Lee photographs the fundamental elements in the landscape a connection between the subject matter of the photographs and the paper stock is made as the viewer touches it. It immediately creates a relationship between the viewer and nature as they can almost feel the elements as they touch the work. The handmade rice paper that Lee prints on often has rough textured edges. This also feels natural as she embraces the roughness of the edges rather than trimming them down to form a neat edge around the photograph. In the book she keeps the edges of the photographs rough. The photographs in the book often have blank breathing space around them. Thus, by keeping the edges of the photographs rough, it gives the work significance. This is because the viewer can associate the rough edges and the paper stock with nature and then contemplate them in the breathing space.

Opening is a hardcover and it sits in a slipcase. The slipcase contains one photograph, whereas the cover of the book only has the title of the book printed on it. As the viewer removes the book from the slipcase they feel as though they are unveiling the work and the concepts that lie within it. The title of the work is the first thing the viewer sees as they remove the book from the slip case. This immediately creates a feeling that by unveiling the work it acts as an opening for something more to be discovered. Thus, the book acts as an opening for further contemplation and interpretation as the viewer is invited to consider this as they physically open the book and study the work.

4.3. Janelle Lynch

Similarly to Minny Lee and Jungjin Lee, Janelle Lynch’s book *Another Way of Looking at Love* is also an accordion folded format. Previously, it was stated that Lynch’s work is an exploration of the interconnectedness of nature and our relationship with it. Also, when she goes into the landscape to take the photographs she states that she finds points of connection. Thus, it can be interpreted that the accordion fold

reflects these key ideas of Lynch's work as all the pages are connected, reflecting on the connection between all life forms.



Figure 25: *Accordion pages of "Janelle Lynch: Another Way of Looking at Love" (Lynch, 2018)*

When discussing the interconnectedness of nature, Lynch states that it also “supports a renewal of human relationships to each other, and to the natural and the spiritual worlds” (Lynch, n.d.). These human relationships are immediately engaged with, as the caption of the first photograph is “For You”. By initially captioning the first photograph “For You”, the book feels intimate and personal. It creates a relationship between the viewer and the photographer as the work feels like it has been given to them to explore. The other captions in the book often appear on the opposite page to the photograph. The page that they appear on is blank and provides breathing room between the images. This breathing room allows one to really consider the work they are viewing and begin contemplating its meaning. The captions do not provide the viewer with knowledge of the plants, rather it introduces a poetic way of reading the images. For example, some of the captions are “Snow Dance” and “Red Leaves After Rain”. Thus, the captions are not scientific captions of each plant but rather a poetic description of the photograph being viewed. The captions withhold information about the plants and the location. This suggests that knowledge of the subject matter is not required for the interpretation of the work but rather the internal contemplation it encourages is. At the beginning of the book on a blank page spread, there is a single quote by Rebecca Solnit: “How long does it take to see something?” (Solnit, 2018). Immediately the viewer is faced with this quote and immediately the viewer

questions what it means to see something. When discussing gazing in relation to Jungjin Lee and Thomas Joshua Cooper's work, it was mentioned that gazing leads to seeing. This suggests that seeing is of a deeper level than just visually seeing the work. It can be interpreted that seeing is to really understand something. Thus, after reading this quote and moving on to view the work, the viewer searches and studies the work in a state of contemplation in order to really understand it.

Minnie Lee's book was considered delicate based on its size, cover and paper stock. Although both books are accordion fold, they have their differences in this sense. Lynch's cover is hardcover and the size of the book is 9x12 inches. The paper stock is thicker and the book is heavier and on the larger side for the viewer to hold. Although, the book itself is not delicate in the sense that Lee's book is, the heaviness and size means that the viewer feels the weight of the work in their hands. This weight can be interpreted as giving the work importance as its presence is made clear for the viewer to experience.

Previously, the photographers' work has been discussed alongside Zen's being present in the moment. In Lynch's book there is an essay by Darius Himes who states: "whether a photograph is looked at one minute, one year, one century after it is made, it is always the present moment with that magical time" (Himes, 2018). Thus, the photographs are reflections of a single moment frozen in time. The book, being a collection and story of these photographs represents the photographer's experiences and moments of being present whilst in the landscape. As the viewer explores the book, they too can follow the journey that the photographer went on whilst being present in the moment and can engage with their own inner thoughts whilst viewing it.

4.4. Awoiska van der Molen

The next book that will be considered is *Blanco* by Awoiska van der Molen. The front cover is a royal blue canvas cover with white text saying "Blanco" and "Awoiska van der Molen" on. The blue does not correspond to the work inside the book and the cover does not reveal any information about the work inside. Thus, information is being withheld from the viewer which creates an ambiguous aspect to the work from the initial viewing of the book. This ambiguity immediately invites the viewer to contemplate and imagine meaning as the cover does not reveal anything to them, it also encourages the viewer to open up the book in order to discover more. Inside the book this ambiguity is enhanced through a lack of captions. None of the

photographs are labelled, thus the viewer is only faced with the photograph. Therefore, one's interpretation of the work is through the feel of the book and the look of the images, rather than through solid information being provided for them.



Figure 26: *Blanco* book (Van der Molen, 2017)

The title *Blanco* in Dutch translates to 'blank'. In an interview with Jack French for Lens Culture, Van der Molen states: "In Dutch, "Blanco" means when something is unwritten, left empty. Blank...So, I don't want to steer anything, only offer the image. No words" (Van der Molen, n.d.). Thus, similar to the blank cover, the work does not aim to provide the viewer with information that provides a narrative. It asks them to think and to feel when turning the pages rather than have an understanding of the work based on knowledge. This links to the surrender of power that is a key departure from a Western notion of the sublime and key to the consideration of Zen. The work does not provide knowledge but rather embraces the unknown which stimulates one's imagination. When Van der Molen discusses the term 'Blanco' she states that it means 'left empty'. This can also be linked to the Taoist concept of wu which means nothingness. Van der Molen's photographs are not visually empty but they are empty of specific information. It is in a lack of knowledge that one can fill the nothingness (wu) with meaning. When the viewer looks at the front cover, they immediately are invited to contemplate and interpret the work based on their own thoughts and ideas. Inside the book is an insert written by Anna Dannemann which states: "using her personal experience within the landscape for her creative process, she instinctively searches for a state of being in which the boundary between herself and her surroundings blur" (Dannemann, 2017). By creating a book that is ambiguous in its initial appearance and by withholding information from the viewer, the line between the viewer's state of

being and the work also becomes blurred. The viewing process becomes an internal contemplation as each viewer interprets meaning. Hence, similar to Van der Molen when she is in the landscape, the viewers also use their personal experiences in order to have the embodied openness in the process of viewing. It is through this embodied openness of viewing that the viewers create their own meaning in the work.

The canvas cover is slightly rough in texture. This textured cover, as it is held in the viewer's hands, contrasts against the smooth paper stock of the inside pages. As the viewer studies the photographs of the fundamental elements they are reminded of the natural textures of the subject matter through the feel of the cover. However, the smoothness of the paper stock in the internal pages introduces a delicacy and softness to the work. Therefore, the viewer is both reminded of the fundamental elements being photographed due to the rough cover as well as the intimacy of the work through the soft and smooth internal pages. Inside the book, the smooth pages turn into a speckled grey card when it reaches an essay by Arjen Mulder who writes about the effect nature has on us when photographing it. When discussing Van der Molen's work he states: "These are not photos of or after Nature, the photos are part of that same Nature, of an event enabled by Nature, via her camera at that particular point in time and that particular exposure" (Mulder, 2017). Thus, he is suggesting that nature imprints these moments onto the photographer as they take a photograph. It relates to a point of clarity when an unconscious readiness to take a photograph is felt, and it is nature that provides this moment to occur. The images are a reflection of nature rather than it being solely a human's decisive creation. Similar to the canvas cover, the viewer is reminded of the natural subject matter of both the photographs and the essay as the paper stock that the essay is printed onto is slightly rough in texture and a heavier weight to the rest of the internal pages.

4.5. Thomas Joshua Cooper

Thomas Joshua Cooper's books are heavy, large in scale, and the covers of his books are often canvas hardbacks. The paper stock inside is also heavy as it has a higher GSM. GSM (grams per square metre) is the unit of weight used to describe the heaviness of the paper. As the viewer traverses through the heavy book, they travel through Cooper's vast journey and the weight reminds the viewer of the weight of the project as it was a large project taken over a long period of time. The inside pages, although heavy, are smooth and they subtly reflect light. At the beginning of the book *True* is the essay by Ben Tufnell. The following quote taken from Tufnell's essay was previously mentioned in relation to Cooper's photograph acting as a reflection of

his inner self. However, it can also be used to discuss the paper stock that is used inside the book because Tufnell states that:

He stands with his back to the land and looks out at the sea. His characteristic position here is one of looking out - at the void - and thereby looking inwards. For the gaze that lights upon a blank plane is inevitably turned back upon itself (Tufnell, 2009).

Thus, it can be interpreted that the paper choice which subtly reflects light has connotations of Cooper's gaze reflecting back into his photographs. The work not only has vast history and references to time, it is also a reflection of Cooper's inner self. As the viewer studies this book, the light from their surroundings is reflected back off the body of work and can present the personal experience of viewing the book. One can view the book in their own choice of setting; thus the reflection of light is a personal experience for each viewer. It is through this personal experience that one can look inwards and then try to understand the work they are viewing.

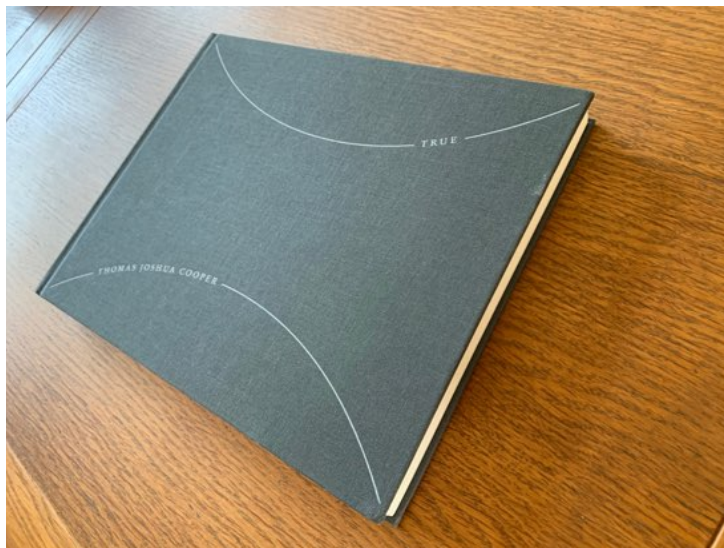


Figure 27: *True* book (Cooper, 2009)

The majority of the photographs in *True* are on the right-hand page and the left hand page remains blank. However, there is the occasional punctuation in the rhythm of the sequence through a double page spread with images on each side. Occasionally there is also a blank double page spread. These blank spreads act as pauses in Cooper's journey and give the viewer breathing room to contemplate the work that they have seen so far. Inside the book there are also trifold spreads. The photographs in these trifold spreads have subtle

differences and act as a triptych to show the subtlety in the landscape. In order to study these photographs the viewer has to interact with the work further my folding and unfolding the page from the centre fold. It acts as a reveal of the landscape as the viewer physically uncovers two photographs that are otherwise unseen. Ben Tufnell writes: “Thomas Joshua Cooper’s real subject is not what is seen, but what is unseen (but implied)” (Tufnell, 2009). The images behind the trifold are unseen, and it becomes an experience for the viewer to reveal the unseen. Thus, the trifold aspect throughout the book reflects on Tufnell’s statement that Cooper’s subject is unseen but implied.

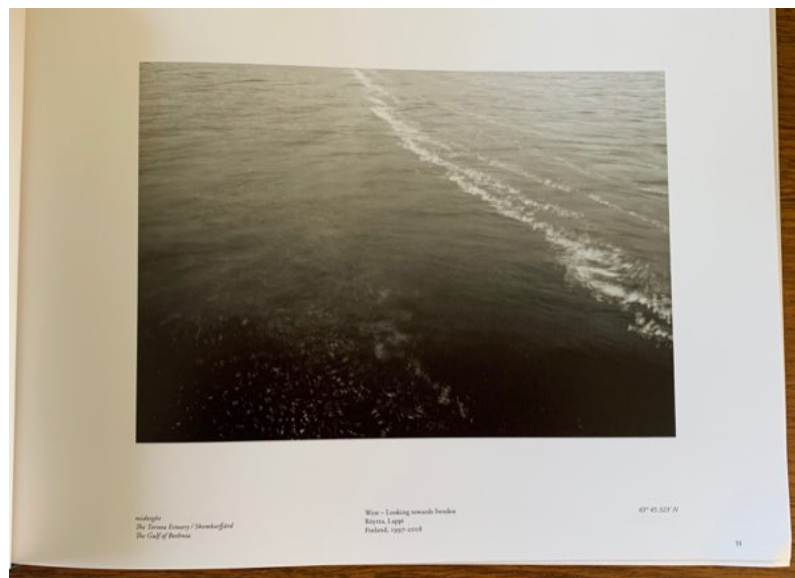


Figure 28: *West - Looking towards Sweden* (Cooper,

When discussing Van der Molen’s book, it was mentioned how there is a lack of captions which makes the work ambiguous and open to interpretation. However, in Cooper’s books there are often captions alongside the photographs. For example, in the book *True*, a couple of the captions are: “West - Looking towards Sweden” (Figure 28) or “Prime Head”. As well as these captions, there are the actual locations in which the photographs are taken as well as the map coordinates. Therefore, the location of the photographs is made clear and that information is directly handed to the viewer. However, despite the information being provided, it does not mean that Cooper’s work is not ambiguous. The actual photographs do not tell the viewer anything about the place. For example, the *West - Looking towards Sweden* photograph, is of the sea. The sea in the photograph is a dark grey with a white blurred wave coming into frame from the top right-hand corner.

Therefore, the viewpoint in which the photograph is taken is not reflective of the caption. The photograph does not reflect on the gaze of looking out to Sweden, rather it reflects on looking into the ocean. Thus, the

captions feel as though the place is important but the photographs do not. In Cooper's PhD he discusses his book by stating: "the photographs in *The Atlas* bookworks are made to be seen, read and studied in order to be understood" (Cooper, 2017). Thus, although the caption can provide some information, it does not necessarily provide an understanding. Through studying the work and reflecting inwards, the work can begin to be understood. By merely looking briefly at the photographs an understanding will not be made, thus, the work requires a slow process of studying the work. This slow process of viewing reflects the slow process of making that was discussed in Chapter 2. At the beginning of *True* there are two maps. In his PhD Cooper describes his books as a photographic atlas. Cooper goes on a vast journey to create his photographs where he mapped out each point that he stopped at. Thus, the book can be considered as a photographic atlas as the images represent his mapped out points. This could also suggest why the captions share the details of each location as the book acts as an atlas in which you would find certain information such as longitude and latitude.

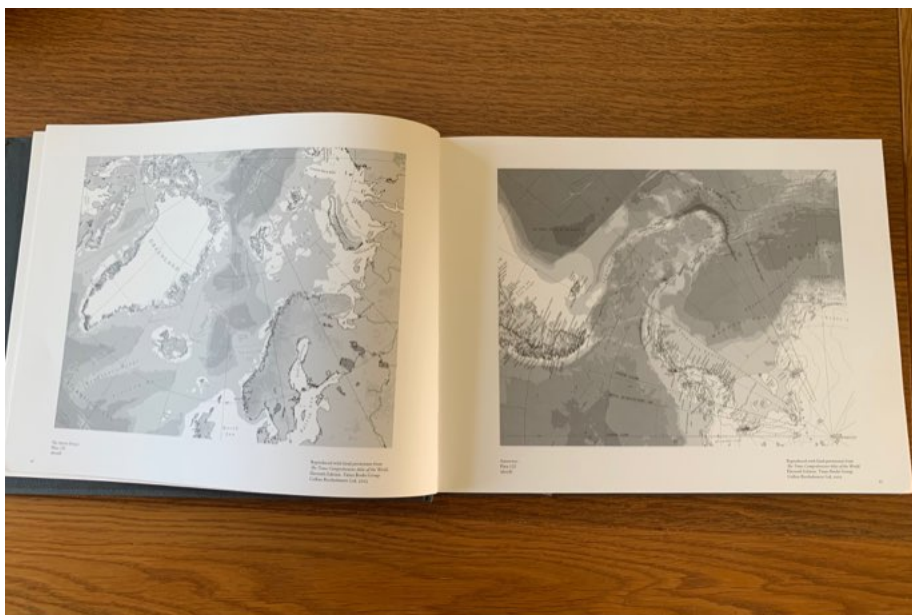


Figure 29: *Maps in True* (Cooper, 2009)

4.6. Boomoon

The final photographer whose book will be discussed in this chapter is Boomoon. Similar to not being able to experience viewing the photographers' work in a gallery setting, I have also not been able to see one of Boomoon's books in person. Therefore, I cannot discuss paper stocks and the cover in relation to the viewing

experience. However, despite this, how the photographs are presented inside the book as well as the size of the book can still be discussed.

When discussing Boomoon's use of fundamental elements it was stated that he creates a typology of images. This is also reflected in his books. When he creates his books it is often one photograph per page and on each page the photograph is situated in the same place. Although each photograph has subtle differences, they are all of the same subject matter, they all have the same frame and they are all the same size on the page (as seen in Figure 30). Thus, there is an element of repetition throughout the work. This is also emphasised by the repetitive motion from the viewer as they repeatedly turn the page to find a visually similar photograph. However, this repetition encourages the viewer to study each individual photograph in order to find the differences between each photograph.



Figure 30: *Naksan* (Boomoon, 2010)

The typology of photographs can also be interpreted as time passing. It was previously mentioned that Boomoon often photographs water, especially in the form of waterfalls. Waterfalls are constantly moving and the fall of the water takes on different forms all the time. Therefore, by creating a typology of photographs he is capturing the subtle changes in form that occur constantly but can be unseen to the human eye. It is due to the camera being able to freeze the falling water in that present moment that allows for these subtle

differences to be seen. Therefore, as the viewer moves through the book in a receptive action and studies the subtleties between each photograph, they can be aware of time passing which is captured in each photograph.

Although the gallery setting cannot be discussed as part of my personal embodied experience of viewing the work, it is important to mention how Boomoon exhibits his work in a gallery setting. Boomoon prints his photographs large scale. As it is printed large-scale, it allows the viewer to see the unseen because the viewer is able to see the abstract forms of the falling water that they would not be able to see without the camera freezing it in time. The large scale prints in the gallery provide a pictorial world that the viewer can explore and feel as though they are in the landscape. Although, the prints in the gallery are bigger than in a book, the large scale is still reflected in his books. The books that Boomoon creates are often larger in size. For example, his book *Naksan* is 13.2 x 9 inches. His book *Skogar* has two editions, one being 13.3 x 19.7 inches and the other being 7.3 x 9.5 inches. Therefore, as his books are of a larger scale, it can be stated that the book also provides a pictorial world. However, it is a pictorial world that requires the physical engagement of turning the pages in order to explore it.

This chapter has considered each of the selected photographers' books. It is through studying these books that connections can be made between the work and the meaning of the project as well as making cultural connections. Each photobook will have had multiple conscious decisions made in order to translate ideas into the viewing process. Although, the photographers cannot state what the viewer should think or feel when viewing the work, it is the conscious decisions that alter one's interpretations. However, ultimately it is due to the embodied openness in viewing the work, where the viewer contemplates and imagines meaning, that allows for these interpretations to be made.

Conclusion

In an attempt to understand a group of contemporary landscape photographers, research initially began by exploring aesthetics that I was strongly influenced by. The main aesthetic that influenced my understanding of landscape photography was the Western notion of the sublime. Through my investigation into discussing the selected photographers through notions of the sublime, I realised there were some difficulties in solely discussing their work based on sublime concepts. The reason for these difficulties is because the sublime is about reaching the edge of the known and facing the unknown which causes an overwhelming feeling associated with fear. This fear caused by the unknown relates to power as it can be stated that knowledge is power. However, when exploring the photographers in this thesis, I felt that they had rejected this idea of power through knowledge and had surrendered their power. This surrender of power is reflected in their work in multiple ways, for example: they create ambiguous photographs that withhold certain information from the viewer, they have an embodied slowness whilst in the physical landscape, and they encourage personal contemplation from the viewer which invites internal thoughts to be the source of their interpretation rather than information. Driven by these difficulties in considering the selected photographers through notions of the sublime, this thesis began considering alternative ways of thinking about the work. The alternative way of thinking that I explored was the Buddhist thinking of Zen.

The journey of considering Zen as an alternative way of thinking reflects my own journey in understanding the contemporary photographers' work in more detail. As I have previously been heavily influenced by Western aesthetics, this idea of a Zen perspective represents a newfound way of my own personal understanding of selected landscape imagery. In order to consider the selected photographers through a Zen way of thinking, the thesis identified common strategies between the photographers' work. These strategies are: they all embrace an embodied slowness in their process of making, they all photograph fundamental elements and there is an embodied openness encouraged in the process of viewing the work. To establish a Zen way of thinking about these photographers, the thesis began by considering the sublime as a stepping stone for an alternative way of thinking to be required before discussing Zen as a Buddhist belief and practice. It was specifically by considering the writings of D.T. Suzuki (who discussed experiences being necessary for understanding Zen) and Kabat-Zinn (who discussed the idea of being present in the moment) that I was able to identify key aspects of Zen to carry forward into the discussion of the photographers'

common strategies. These key aspects are: being present in the moment, internal contemplation and openness.

Though combining these common strategies of the photographers' work with the selected aspects of Zen, it was discovered first of all that the embodied slowness in the process of making can encourage an internal reflection. Through walking, waiting, the use of certain equipment and working in solitude, the photographer can rid themselves of distractions from the fast-paced world and be focused on the present moment. This level of focus can allow for time to be spent looking inwards and connecting with nature which leads to a sense of clarity. It is the sense of clarity that corresponds with the photograph being taken. The thesis in the discussion of an embodied slowness turned to Rebecca Solnit who discusses walking as harmony between the mind, the body and the world which relates to the Zen aspect of internal contemplation.

Secondly, the thesis identified that the subject matter of fundamental elements had cultural connotations. For example when Peter Brüesch discusses the Buddhist cultural beliefs on water, he states: "Water symbolises purity, clarity and calmness and reminds us to cleanse our minds and attain the state of purity" (Brüesch, 2011) In this thesis, this idea of water symbolising clarity was associated with Boomoon photographing the fundamental elements in the landscape as a means for self-reflection in which he gains clarity of the world around him as well as his internal self. Therefore, cultural connotations can be reflected through the subject matter of fundamental elements. However, it is through the framing of the landscape and the visual methods reflecting how the photographers look at the elements that the work can be considered ambiguous. The thesis identified a surrender of power which links to embracing the unknown. It was through exploring these ambiguous images that the thesis identified the idea that by creating work that does not tell the viewer anything about the place, the work encourages the viewer to also embrace the unknown. It is in this ambiguity that the photographers' self-reflection as well as the viewer's internal contemplation was considered.

Finally, the embodied openness in viewing the work was considered. This chapter was more limited due to the absence of the discussion surrounding gallery viewing. Although gallery viewing was acknowledged as a key idea in the embodied openness in viewing the work, it could not be discussed in detail. This is due to current circumstances of Coronavirus resulting in me not being able to experience viewing the photographers' work in a gallery setting. However, the photobook became the key topic in the exploration of

an embodied openness in viewing the work. It was through considering different aspects of the photobook (for example, cover, paper stock, use of captions) that the viewer's experience of viewing the work was explored. These deliberate decisions of presenting the work in a particular way encourages the viewer to contemplate the work and interpret it based on their own internal thoughts.

In conclusion, although not typically used as a way of thinking about landscape imagery, Zen has key ideas that reflect on the selected photographers' work. Although the selected photographers work can be considered through notions of the Western aesthetics (the sublime, the beautiful and the picturesque), it is through considering Zen that has allowed for me to consider alternative ways of understanding the work. Each case study has highlighted how photography and Zen can be considered in harmony with one another as there are similarities in both practices. Landscape imagery reflects on our relationship with the land and by considering the selected work through a Zen perspective, an alternative relationship has been explored.

Throughout this thesis, it has been stated that the chosen photographers are present in the moment whilst in the physical landscape. This results in them connecting with nature. Therefore, the alternative relationship that has been explored through studying a Zen perspective is one where the photographers are on a more equal ground to nature as they aim to connect with it. It can also be stated that by making photographs through a Zen lens, the photographers have a contemplative attitude towards the landscape. This is because they encourage internal contemplation when experiencing both the physical landscape and in the process of viewing their photographs of the landscape. Considering this idea in a wider context, the world is currently in an era of climate catastrophe. By connecting with nature on a more equal ground and through the encouragement of a contemplative attitude towards the landscape, it might influence one to consider how human impact affects the natural world. In Section 1.4 it was stated how in Zen mindfulness one is present in the moment which allows one to have a sense of clarity and greater awareness. From a Zen perspective, one's position to nature might be contemplative but this also influences a greater awareness about the landscape and our position in the world. This becomes an important concept to consider, as through the mindfulness perspective of the Zen lens, it could influence one's awareness of the current climate catastrophe we face.

Although this thesis is only the beginning of my research into Zen as an alternative way of thinking about landscape photography, it has only briefly touched on each aspect of Zen in relation to the photographers'

methods. Therefore, this idea would be a fruitful area for further research in order to consider the idea in more detail and by doing so even more similarities and discoveries might be made. However, the findings in this thesis show that Zen and the selected contemporary landscape photography, when considered in harmony with one another, can introduce an alternative way of understanding the work.

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