

1998

# The Theory of Nothing

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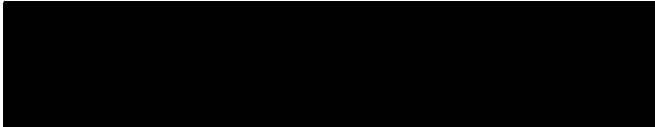
Rupniewski, Adam Wieslaw, "The Theory of Nothing" (1998). *Dissertations and Theses*. Paper 6393.  
<https://doi.org/10.15760/etd.3538>

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THESIS APPROVAL

The abstract and the thesis of Adam Wieslaw Rupniewski for the Master of Fine Arts in Art: Sculpture were presented May 27, 1998, and accepted by the thesis committee and the department.

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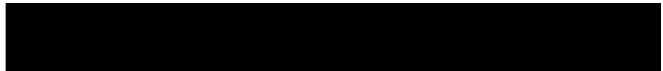
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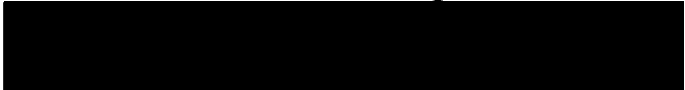


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## ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Adam Wieslaw Rupniewski for the Master of Fine Arts in Art: Sculpture presented May 27, 1998.

Title: Theory of Nothing.

My work was presented in the form of an installation. Using three and two-dimensional objects, as well as sound and light, I created a site specific type of installation. Materials involved in this project were hydrostone, plaster, steel and copper. The sound I recorded on my steel sculptures in an acoustic space and then mixed to create sound compositions to amplify the feeling for the space. This installation reflects my pursuits in painting and sculpture, as well as my interest in music and light effects. Its philosophical and spiritual content were expressed through visual language, symbolic use of elements and its number and performance part by an actor Johnny Stallings.

THEORY OF NOTHING

by

ADAM WIESLAW RUPNIEWSKI

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS  
in  
ART: SCULPTURE

Portland State University

1998

## Dedication

To my immortal friends Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta Maharaj and my children Igor and Agata.

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## Theory of Nothing

Modern physicists believe they have stumbled upon a path which leads to the mathematical secret at the heart of the Universe - a discovery that points towards a “Theory of Everything”, a single all - embracing picture of all the laws of Nature from which the inevitability of all things seen must follow with unimpeachable logic. (Barrow 2)

In 1995, I went through a sudden and unexpected experience. The questioner and seeker of truth and understanding that I was, disappeared. The only “thing” left was Nothing, which cannot ever be comprehended by my mind, because it is not a concept, nor through my senses since it is not a thing. I realized my true nature and who I am. My thought process is going through its own evolution, my life story is unfolding in its own way, but my selfidentification is no longer with the illusion of body or mind that exists in me and not me in them. Although so simple, it cannot ever be attained, since there is no one inside to attain anything, as well as ever present, it cannot be lost nor found. This impersonal state of being cannot be explained, nor understood since in itself it is the understanding and pure undivided awareness without subject of which to be aware. Nothing, in that context, cannot be defined. In the natural course of time I find that many people before me and probably many after me will experience the same revelation without making an issue of it.

When everything that I had known was removed, that what was left was me, I call it Nothing. Scientific pursuit of that truth is an attempt of the mind to find its



origin. There is no origin of mind, since there is no mind, but only illusion of it. Thus my title, with a tint of sarcasm and a play on words, is an introduction to my installation, that using visual language, brings a feeling for space and its metaphoric connotation.

Theory of Nothing is on one level, my aesthetic use of space with a minimal use of objects. The gallery floor is covered with fresco panels, two feet by two feet. (Figure 8.) The overall geometric structure echoes the rectangular shape of the gallery, and the straight forward order in which these squares are arranged is juxtaposed with the treatment of the panels' surface, echoing Abstract Expressionistic style. The fresco technique refers to an old Western tradition, developed during the Renaissance time, but also present in earlier ancient Greek culture.

Imagine the Sistine Chapel ceiling falling down and mixing into an abstract pattern. Instead of looking up, people now look down under their feet. In my installation one can see the small shift in the concept of admirable images separated by space and symbolically uplifted to the heavenly realm, as in the Sistine Chapel, taken into abstraction and set on the floor. Painting in Robert Rauchenberg's or Hans Hoffman's style, I slowly became enchanted even looking at the studio floor full of accidental splashes of color, dirt and shoe prints, leaving some mark of passing time and unpretentious, spontaneous compositions that my mind could chose from to its own satisfaction. My interest in modern abstract art has led me to recreate even my

aesthetic feelings and considerations that I had for the studio floor. People are welcome to walk over the panels and experience the texture with their feet, and maybe get the same feeling that I experienced as an outcome of appreciation of abstract art. The division between the groups of panels, thirty three in the middle and forty four on the sides and four at the entrance, is my esthetic solution for the gallery floor, as well as a strictly symbolic use of numbers. The two dimensional shapes created by panels are extended into the space by two steel cages that differ in size, the inner smaller and the outer larger. They are emphasizing and suggesting a conceptual division by a simple outline of space.

An installation is a situation where space is the medium. At its very core it is the response to space and exists because of the space. In visual art the development of a symbolic and illusionistic space, as well as different kinds of perspective, expresses human consciousness in pursuit of the understanding of space. There is symbolic space, like that developed in medieval paintings and mosaics where the flat gold background symbolized heaven, and illusionistic space, developed during the Renaissance and later when the illusion of space on a two-dimensional surface was perfected. Sculpture, as a three-dimensional object, involves space, but the central focus is on the object. (Figure 9.) Installation uses objects to reveal the space where the objects themselves are only pointers (although not always) not the main focus. We can make a statement by modifying space. How specific is that statement, it depends

on the viewer. As Picasso said, art has a life of its own and its comprehension is in the viewer, independent from its creator.

Installation art as a phenomena of Twentieth Century art certainly has had roots in the human psyche from the very beginning of time. The way we respond to the environment and organize our space has always been essential on both a collective and individual level. Social structures, beliefs and systems of value have been expressed through space throughout the millennium. Caves, huts, houses and castles, ziggurats and pyramids, mosques, synagogues, cathedrals and churches, as well as court houses and modern buildings, all involve space. Enclosed space expresses sometimes peripheral and sometimes very specific things like social status or cultural importance. Bigger houses or buildings signify the social status of the people who occupy them. For example, federal buildings in their inner structure emphasize space through big halls and high ceilings. On an individual level we respond to personal space in a very spontaneous way, be it a situation in a public elevator or in a private home. From my own observations, I have noticed that in crowded elevators we become more protective and silent, because of the unusual physical closeness that is the result of restricted space. Oppositely, we are more open in conversation in a natural landscape and open spaces. Often people will chose to go for a walk out doors to talk about more important things in a relaxing manner.

## **Process**

### *Working with materials.*

The nature of my process on the one hand is very simple, physically engaging labor. To create this installation I made square panels done in a fresco technique. The metal frames for the panels are 2'x2', built with the help of a jig. A metal net is welded onto the frame to hold burlap and hydrostone. Pigment is mixed with wet hydrostone, a harder version of plaster, and then applied in layers over a burlap surface. The choice of plaster as a basic material has personal meaning for me. I worked with plaster as a denture technician. Another fascination, besides the inherent qualities of plaster, is its ability to freeze fluidity and by this to metaphorically imply passing time. This observation comes from my appreciation of ancient achievements in art, particularly of the Amarna Period in Egyptian art, approximately 13c. BC when the plaster art work was developed to a high level. In its uniqueness in comparison to anything else that happened for thousands of years, the Amarna period expressed a new monotheistic spirit and the life-intoxication of the Pharaoh Aknakhten and his wife Nefferetetti.

The nature of hydrostone and its setting time created a rhythm to which I had to subordinate. Plaster and hydrostone are sensitive to weather changes, pressure, temperature and humidity as well as to the way they are mixed. Intensive mixing makes them set quicker. Considering the medium and the given circumstances, work on the panels became a very interesting experience because it combined spontaneity

within a very limited framework of time. Every day was a little bit different, and the rhythm of the work would differ every time I worked on the panels. This difference is “written” into every individual surface. The surfaces were created in groups of two, three and four panels at once. Organization of the work and its rhythm adds to the spontaneity and expressionistic quality of the frescos. For example, working on two at the same time was different from working on four or even six, and this is reflected in the surface treatment. The individual character of each fresco, as well as the way I can group them, is an outcome of the “restricted setting”.

Process is a very important part of my installation and in a sense a fulfilling goal on its own. I could watch myself operating and responding to an immediate situation in a free-thinking way, that felt like a liberation from the intellectual imposition of the mind. The technique of creating each panel was that of a very straight forward action painting. Charles Lachman in his article The Image Made by Chance' in China and the West: Ink Wang Meets Jackson Pollock's Mother talks about paintings done in China, already in periods of the T'ang (618-906), and Sung(960-1279) dynasties and later, which used “chance” and accidental images. Very often painters intoxicated by wine, like Wang p'o-mo (“Wang the Ink-flinger”) painted by splashing ink over silk and responding spontaneously to given images. That in spirit is very much the same as Abstract Expressionism's action painting.

The design on my fresco panels is not premeditated. It is purely an outcome of the given moment. The color of hydrostone and its fluidity together with impressions taken from the street creates an abstract image. Additional lines are my quick response to what I see and feel about a given visual situation. This way of setting the work, with material that can be used only within a very limited span of time allowed me to overcome conscious choices and any kind of rationalizations. The nature of hydrostone and its short setting time and my very limited, almost monochromatic use of pigments let me work in a quick and fluid manner. Basic understanding of visual balance had to operate on its own. In oil painting, acrylic, or any other painting medium there is time and opportunity to come back and rework or at least, as in case of watercolor or ink, make decisions in a more slow and deliberate manner. But in the case of plaster my decisions had to occur very quickly. My mind had no time to negotiate visual possibilities. I had to act immediately.

## **Space**

### *a. Space in the context of the installation.*

This installation is a visual and aesthetic response to a given space, the gallery. The rectangular shape of this space is a limitation and a challenge. The space could be contradicted, exaggerated, amplified or altered. My choice was to amplify the existing space with repetition of its basic shape in the form of two receding rectangular steel

cages. Their function is to suggest expansion and movement through their progressively diminishing size in relation to the walls of the gallery. (Figure 1.)

The gallery space was divided based on a two foot square plate as a unit. The choice of size refers to a modular system introduced by French architect Le Corbusier based on human proportions. The space of each unit can be occupied by an individual human being, a symbolic space, just enough for an average human being to stand straight without touching anything. At the same time it is a very strict physical division that represents the way we maintain ourselves as separate individuals in social situations. The underlying idea is a reference to personal space and its physical and psychological aspects. The repetitive size and individual character of each panel reflects my thoughts on the human condition in a social and cultural context. Sometimes, I feel that inside us the borderline between the collective and the individual is almost indistinguishable, unless one has an experience of a different culture. Suddenly this line becomes more visible and better defined. Everybody is born to an already existing social structure and at the same time everybody's deepest goal is to develop as an individual. Our existence is trapped between individual desires and dreams and social restrictions and expectations. The tension between these is one of the forces that challenges and also makes us grow in a search of balance. Is there any universal order that we can achieve as a society in which individual freedom will coexist with social needs? Is it something to be achieved at all or does it already exist?

It might be that there is no answer or that the answer is individual in the way we develop. The installation reflects some of these thoughts.

b. *Experience of space.*

The feeling for places and the way we respond to space is always tinted with earlier personal conditioning, but at the same time there is a universal response that can be evoked by different landscapes or spaces. The countryside vs. urban setting, the open view of the ocean or a desert, a majestic view of high mountains or a starry night sky seen from a remote place stimulates our feelings and very often lets us overcome self-importance, directing our thinking into more fundamental questions about the nature of life. It is the enclosure of space and many other factors, that makes cathedrals and mosques like Hagia Sofia in Istanbul contemplative places that can uplift our spirit into a more universal state. Of course, as my own experience tells me our conscious focus is always on the objective reality of architectural structures and physical objects, but it is space that stimulates our subconscious minds and perceptions. The opposite of the above could be the use of space in restaurants or taverns when the point is to focus on personal aspects of our lives and create a feeling of social connection or intimacy, to create a focus more on mundane and secular needs than on philosophical or universal questions. Again space is an important factor which stimulates our experience. On a psychological level, in every culture and within that



every individual, different spaces he will occupied. Referring to someone as being close to us or being at some distance, we are using language that defines a spatial division.

*c. Space as a metaphor.*

The life force is in the grain in a dormant condition. Understand that life force and do not condition it to any form. This beingness is not something which you can capture a handful of, it is manifest - like space, it is all over. (Maharaj 68)

Besides all physical aspects and understanding of space, my interest in it streams directly from a more metaphorical and metaphysical comprehension of space. It is directly rooted in the development of human consciousness. As a starting point I can analyze one approach toward space in visual art. David Hockney's movie A Day on the Grand Canal with Emperor of China is an excellent example of a comparative study of different cultural attitudes toward life expressed in different perspectives, isometric perspective, very characteristic of Eastern art, vs. Western scientific perspective which began to develop during the Renaissance. Isometric perspective is a visual way to present a landscape or representational situation without a vanishing point or diminishing size elements, but still in an orderly fashion so the viewer can "read" a picture in a spatial context. Space is suggested by use of not converging diagonal lines of structures, local overlapping and the placement of things from the bottom up (vertical perspective). This creates a certain flatness, but at the same time allows us to maintain the feeling for distance and therefore of space. This is not a

literal, illusionistic depiction of space, but rather a conceptual space partially based on natural observation. In a landscape, objects farther away are in the upper part of our vision. This is a very significant point in comparison with Western scientific perspective that recreated the actuality of our vision and objectified the viewer's point of view. In the fourteenth century, Giotto di Bondone, an Italian painter, used perspective without convergence to a single point, but into a general background. Filippo Brunelleschi, an early Renaissance architect, with the help of Leon Battista Alberti, published mathematical calculations of the laws of perspective. The vanishing point became, from then on an important element in relation to any shape on the surface. The point of view is fixed and regulated by scientific, mathematical logic. A very interesting different perception of reality is hidden behind this abbreviated and partial comparison of cultures. Deciphering these different approaches toward space we can understand differences in a way of thinking and an evolution of different social and culture phenomena. In European medieval art, perspective was not a concern for artists. At that time artists used the background in a more decorative way, looking at classical paintings and mosaics without understanding early attempts to comprehend spatial laws. A difference in the size of figure is often depicted according to social status or religious importance, but not subordinated to spatial law. In ancient Greek and Roman art, for example in Pompeian paintings, there are more conscious efforts to translate three-dimensional reality onto the two-dimensional walls. In Northern

Renaissance art, the idea of aerial or atmospheric perspective appears in paintings like Visitation, by The Boucicout Master and also in Early Italian Renaissance in a relief by Donatello and paintings by Massaccio. In Western art further developments in cubism combined different kinds of perspective in order to express modern understanding of time and space, correlating with new theories like Einstein's theory of relativity. The fractional or multiple perspective, as in Egyptian reliefs and paintings where the profile of the head, hands and legs coexist with the frontal view of the chest, in cubism was mixed with isometric perspective to give the viewer complex and relative points of view. Sculpture doesn't refer to space by illusionistic means. It is a direct employment of space. As a three dimensional object it interacts with and occupies space. Nevertheless, the focus is not on space, but on the object. In more recent art space itself has become a medium and is important as space that encloses the viewer. Objects are now part of the ambiance of space and not the main goal. An installation is an attempt to free the spectator from one fixed point of view or a single focus on the object.

In Theory of Nothing the plates on the floor in comparison to the plates on the wall seem to be smaller, although they are exactly the same size. The egg is a central point in space in relationship to the cages and the viewer's movement. (Figure 1.) In isometric perspective the space is treated more conceptually in order to let the viewer's eyes freely penetrate the whole picture. In my installation space is arranged to let the

viewer see everything from any point in the gallery and relate to a central static point, the egg. Scientific and isometric perspective are both expressed. These observations introduce another layer to the space issue - the speculation on the origin of Western materialism. The Swiss philosopher of culture and theorist of the development of consciousness, Jean Gebser, observed that from around 500 BC and later from the Renaissance time, people consciously became aware of space. Thus started the disintegration of the mythological way of thinking. From this time a new definition of space and vocabulary shaped our relationship to our surrounding physical world. Gebser distinct progression in development of human consciousness, which he calls the magical man, the mythical man and the modern, materialistically oriented man. New material and historical perceptions were the first symptoms of Western materialism. Nevertheless, the mythological and magical is still a part of our psyche. Through mythology man is aware of time, but in a different context - there was a perfect beginning. Now everything is a repetition like death and birth, day and night, the seasons. Earlier, in times of the magical man and magical attitude toward physical reality, man was not even aware of time - the element that now operates in our consciousness when we are going through strong emotional states, whether it be love or some other alternate state.

Today, not only the land, but the water and the space above us, is divided between different countries and the concept of space with its divisions becomes a

threat to our existence. A small mistake, like a Norwegian airplane crossing in 1995 over Russian territory, could have been a reason for pushing the nuclear buttons and total disaster. This points out that we pay for all these material comfort and achievements by living deep down, as a modern civilization, in a neurotic state.

## **Light**

Light has always been an integral part of visual expression. Going back to cave paintings, the source of light had to be a big consideration, both as a necessity to see and as ambiance. Even today, we are enchanted by these images seen in artificial light. It is difficult to determine the function of cave art, but with a little bit of imagination we can see it in the light of a torch as it was seen by the young adults of that time, who perhaps were going through some kind of rite were exposed to the mystery of human interpretation of surrounding reality. In the flickering light of the main cave, in Lascaux, after a journey through the dark corridors of the cave channels, the gallery of lively animals, perhaps, mesmerized the neophyte in the powerful presence of the shaman and effected his intuitive understanding of his new status in the order of the natural world. The lighting and the images could have been the source of this stimulating“unworldly” scene that thousands of years later came back in a different form to mesmerize medieval populations through the splendor of a medieval invention - stained glass.

In my installation, light is another element used for creating the ambiance and feeling for the space. In Medieval cathedrals the dominating blue and red in stained glass, sometimes called psychological complementary colors, creates a purple aura that visually expands space, amplifying the architectural structure and also devotional feelings. This metaphorically points to the realm of God and His omnipresence. In my installation, there is an attempt in a secular setting to recreate the same metaphorical idea and feeling for space. Monochromatic use of gray in the tiles is an additional conscious choice. Joseph Beuys, in one of his interviews, explained his focus on grayness:

Jorg Shellman, Bernd Kluser: Beuys, why do you work mainly with anomalous, gray materials?

Joseph Beuys: Yes, Beuys works with the material, felt. Why doesn't he work with colour? But people never think far enough ahead to say: well, if he's working with felt, perhaps he means to evoke a colorful world inside us?

The phenomenon of complementary colours is well known if for instance, I see red light and close my eyes, there's an afterimage (ocular spectrum) and that's green. Or, the other way around, if I look at a green light, then the after image is red.[...]

So it's a matter of evoking a lucid world, a clear, a lucid, perhaps even a transcendental, a spiritual world through something which looks quite different, through an anti-image. (Beuys 2)

In my installation, gray becomes the dominant color to reflect basically the same idea Joseph Beuys stated, in a different way. I remember my feelings as a boy when I was living with my father in colorful Austria, compared to gray East European Poland. Any time I would go from Vienna to Warsaw it took me time to adjust to the grayness, and

yet any time I went back to Vienna I would miss Poland knowing how colorful life can be and how much I liked this grayness with its modesty and unpretentious existence. Gray and monochromatic colors have for me, besides other factors, personal meaning.

## **Texture**

An element, that enriches this gallery setting is the texture of the tiles in juxtaposition to the white smooth walls. The tile textures are a combination of natural hydrostone properties with impressions taken from streets and pavements. (Figur 8.) The fragmentary use of impressions adds to the esthetic of each panel as well as to the whole composition by adding the visual component of lines, shapes and colors to the individual panel. Texture as a visual element can suggest and evoke different feelings and associations. For example, a smooth surface can suggest sensual, cold or mechanical feelings, while a rough or rustic surface with organic shapes can be perceived as natural, warm and earthy. The surface of the panels has both of these qualities, the rough and rustic as well as the smooth, and creates a subtle play of tension between them reflecting the flow of life and the way we experience it with its inherent obstacles and moments of relief. Another aspect of texture is its interplay with the light sources that can sculpt different formations out of the same surface. The distribution of these textures is from inside the field of panels where the surface is flatter, to the periphery where it becomes more dimensional and wild. This is a

metaphor for movement in consciousness and its creation, if we believe that reality and matter are appearances and creations of consciousness and although the same in essence, different in quality. For example, in the thousand year old Indian Advaita philosophy, the motionless, noumenal aspect of the consciousness is called Nirguna - a complement to the consciousness in motion. (Figure 2a.) It is opposed to Saguna, or the phenomenal aspect, in other words, the physical, empirical reality as we can experience it through our senses. (Figure 2b.) The experience of both at the same time transcends one into a state that cannot be described in terms of existence or non-existence. My use of texture and its distribution in the whole installation is a reference to a contemplative state of meditation, or movement inside. The very middle of the floor which is a little lighter and flatter in texture, as well as more monochromatic in the use of grays, slowly transforms into more colorful and textural peripheries.

The Hungarian writer, Bela Hamvas, in his essay Orpheus mentions the connotation of Canon in Greek culture and the ancient world. Canon means “one thing”. Oneness is in the core of reality and the human heart or consciousness and in itself is an impersonal state of being within the universal order. Movement out of that core gives meaning to the phenomenal world and its appearance on the screen of consciousness. Movement toward the periphery of the consciousness is the beginning of chaos, overall an expression of the order but on a different level. The complexity of this kind of explanation is an outcome of the limitation of language to explain



sometimes even a simple experience or sensation. For example, a taste of sugar to a person who has never tasted anything sweet in her life, or a taste of a particular fruit never tasted before that defies verbal description. Our Western tradition with its well developed scientific outlook and achievements has become recently allied with Eastern philosophies. Scientists in quantum physics have become more interested in the gap between the observer and the observed and thus in the state of consciousness.

A most important implication in the postulations of the new physics - and the one which takes science even closer to the very basis of Advaita (non- duality) - is the bridging of the gap between the observer and the object observed. The mystic has always held that all there is, is a sort of relationship in which *there is know-ing* - the knower and the known being like the poles in a magnetic field, and not two separate opposing things - the knowingness (sentience) provided by Consciousness, the eternal one subject. (Balseker 147)

But the whole foundation of the Newtonian theory is the assumption that Reality exists independent of the viewer and as such can be analyzed to the point of explaining all the mechanics in a physical context. My visualized suggestion is directed toward the intuitive understanding that lies in each of us independent of language and mind.

Kantian space, albeit relative, albeit a tool of knowledge, a means of classifying phenomena, was quite clearly separated (along with time) from empirical sphere: it belonged to the *a priori* realm of consciousness (i.e. of the 'subject'), and partook of the realm's internal, ideal - and hence transcendental and essentially ungraspable - structure. (Lefebvre 2)

Another aspect of texture is its commonality in everyday existence - I used the street and sidewalk impressions in my tiles for this reason. Texture in this installation

is an esthetic and symbolic element, an expression of my deeper reflections on human life in relation to something that is as basic as the ground we walk over everyday. Sometimes, I am enchanted by the texture of an old wall or a piece of pavement. Seeing the lyrical and poetic side of life in this simple and basic experience, I feel the potential of our inner abilities to know our fundamental core - the Self. This knowledge is not in contradiction nor a supplement to rational understanding, but an intuitive apperception of the whole picture where the fragments are not anymore fragments but a composition of what philosophically we could try to describe, but cannot exactly put our finger on, as Reality.

### **Symbolic and formal use of shapes and objects in the installation.**

I stress simplicity as a challenge for myself, to simplify and minimize the visual language, not at the cost of meaning, but rather, as a condensation of thought and its processes. I believe it is a long term goal and a necessity for my development in any area. The simplicity of ancient remains like the Egyptian pyramids or the Aztec structures are a powerful visual landmark, not only because of size but also because of archetypal shape. Some movies, like 2001 - Cosmic Odyssey by Stanley Kubrick or The Stalker by Russian director Andrey Tarkovsky, illustrate this point. In 2001 - Cosmic Odyssey, as a symbol for intelligence and consciousness, Kubrick used a

rectangular form with a precisely smooth surface. Its mechanical beauty and simplicity adds to its symbolic expression and at the same time is esthetically pleasing, having an unworldly appearance although common and almost trivial in its basic shape. In “The Stalker”, the whole setting of an abandoned industrial landscape and common heroes is uplifted in a highly poetic manner to a metaphor of our human universality and psychological reality. In visual art, some portraits and paintings, like self-portraits or in a painting like A Philosopher in the Lofty Room by Rembrandt, have an unworldly beauty, although painted with a minimal amount of aesthetic means. The same might be found, of course, in the art of many others, like Francisco Goya, Constantin Brancusi, Andy Warhol, Joseph Beuys, Eva Hesse, Andy Goldsworthy, JayDe Feo, David Hockney and in installation pieces by Richard Serra. The installation by Richard Serra in San Francisco’s Modern Art Museum is a good example of an alternation of spaces in a simple yet powerful way. Elongated shapes of the room corner, cast in lead, are then arranged in a wavy manner occupying almost one third of this big space, radiating the roughness of the casting process and creating an unusual and unexpected presence in this otherwise usual place.

In my installation I use straightforward, simple, geometric shapes; a square and rectangle are the underlying structure of the composition. Of course, there is no shape in geometry that we could not find in nature. Nevertheless, squares and rectangles are very much associated with the human ability to conceptualize and as such they can

easily stand for a symbol of universal intelligence. Shapes of basilicas, churches and cathedrals include basic geometric shapes. The High Renaissance Masters thought circles and squares to be the most perfect figures. Vitruvius Man, well known from the Leonardo da Vinci drawing, would be a good example. In my installation the choice of these shapes is my direct response to the shape of the gallery. As such they amplify the simplicity of the place and its geometric order. Panels on the floor with their painterly two dimensional quality are echoed by three-dimensional rectangular forms taking us into actual three-dimensional space. In the middle of the space hangs a real egg as a small protest in opposition to the geometry in the room. The egg is an old fascination of mine, pregnant in symbolic meaning and at the same time so simple and common. (Figures 4,5,6.) In my installation the egg comes back, through a juxtaposition to this otherwise geometric structure, to pure organic form. It is in a sense a repetition of my attempt to focus on the egg form that I created in my piece Nameless (Figure 5.) which now is in the Branford P. Millar Library. Here the egg is placed against a simple white background surrounded by a steel cube. This is not a protest, but rather a search for balance and a recognition of the fact that forms are what they are and it is the mind that superimposes meanings. Another visual aspect of the presence of the egg is in recognition of the space, since space can be understood only in relation to objects, but never by itself. Its comparatively small size to anything else in that room is another way to underline the egg and relate it to space.

On the other hand the experience of pure space without relationship to objects is a mystical experience. (See p.39) In the core of pure understanding there is an awareness so simple and undivided that the subject (comprehender) - object (to be comprehended) is found as nonexistent. In India there is a term “akasha” that refers to space, ether or sky, but in a more metaphorical way it refers to a state of comprehension that manifests itself as a feeling like impersonal, omnipresent space where individuality is annihilated into nothing that cannot be theorized or expressed yet this feeling is manifested in everything that can be felt through the senses.

The appearance of the world with things which originate and cease to exist is a pure illusion of the mind. Reality is “like the sky” - without origination or cessation; the truth is “stainless, changeless and quiescent.” (Griffiths 33)

The egg with its negative indentations on the walls of the gallery adds another layer to the play between two and three dimensions. Considering the simplicity of the installation every element there provides a balance (sometimes by juxtaposition) to the other ones, creating a dialogue between the forms and sizes in relation to the space, amplifying awareness of the space.

## **Sound**

Music is an important part of my life and through music I find the issue of space intriguing and opening to me in a new way. Sources of my musical inspiration are quite broad, but my more direct reflection on the nature of space comes from music

mostly written by contemporary composers like Witold Lutoslawski, Gyorgy Ligeti, Henryk Gorecki, Krzysztof Penderecki, Terje Rypdal and jazz musicians as Jan Garbarek, Ralph Towner, David Darling or Eberhard Weber. In particular Witold Lutoslawski's Interlude and Symphony Nr.4, Gyorgy Ligeti's Lux Eterna, Atmosphere, Aventures or Terje Rypdal's Q.E.D. were more specific inspirations. Sound became an inspiration and a stimulating part of my art. Simply stated, I often listen to music while working on my projects. Also, from the beginning of my involvement with sculpture I tried to incorporate sound as an integral part of each composition. In my earlier piece called Indigenous People (Figure 7.) the sound was produced directly from the sculptural structure, a recording with music played on a Bansuri flute. Metallic and monotonous in its repetition it evoked something timeless and old and at the same time sounded very industrial, provoking ambivalent feelings in me. The sound of the flute was sentimental in contrast to the harshness of the metallic noise which was amplified from inside a rusted steel box. For Theory of Nothing the sound was produced in a similar way to amplify the effect of the space and to stimulate in the viewer a sense of this place. The sound was composed to express certain emotional qualities of facing the unknown or the solitude of a single life against the vastness of space, as well as to attract attention into this particular place. Listening to music from all over the world I have started to recognize how much a given environment, like a landscape, a language, or a way of living can influence melodic

structures. I tried to use sound that in its abstraction would add to the ambiance of my installation.

### **Performance Part**

I was not interested in the development of the plot, in the chain of events- with each film I feel less and less need for them. I have always been interested in a person's inner world, and for me it was far more natural to make a journey into psychology that informed the hero's attitude to life, into the literary and culture traditions that are the foundation of his spiritual world. I am well aware that from the commercial point of view it would be far more advantageous to move from place to place, to introduce shots from one ingenious angle after another, to use exotic landscapes and impressive interiors. But for what I am essentially trying to do, outward effects simply distance and blur the goal which I am pursuing. I am interested in man, for he contains a universe within himself; and in order to find expression for the idea, for the meaning of human life, there is no need to spread behind it, as it were, a canvas crowded with happenings. (Tarkovsky 204)

The last element in this installation is the presence of a person whose task is to just be, and in doing so to generalize the existential quality of the human condition. He is a symbol of Man. In his naked physicality he refers to everybody in time. This part of the installation is a metaphorical footnote. My intention is to leave the performance abstract and unintentional. Johnny Stallings, a professional actor, improvised with a technique called "deliberation" derived from theater director Scott Kelman. (Figure 3.) It was a simple attentive response to a given moment and within a given space. Attention is on the thought-process, when the first more superficial ideas of what to do are deliberately rejected in order to allow a more instinctive way of behavior. It was an

exercise in consciousness which, in an allegorical sense, describes a return back to the primary source of existence. It is a metaphorical journey through layers of time from the historical through the mythical to the magical man. Another aspect of my interest in Stalling's performance is my contemplation of the traditional subject "Ecce Homo", as seen in etchings by Rembrandt. I am looking for an archetypal symbol of a human being to relate to what the installation is all about - Nothing.

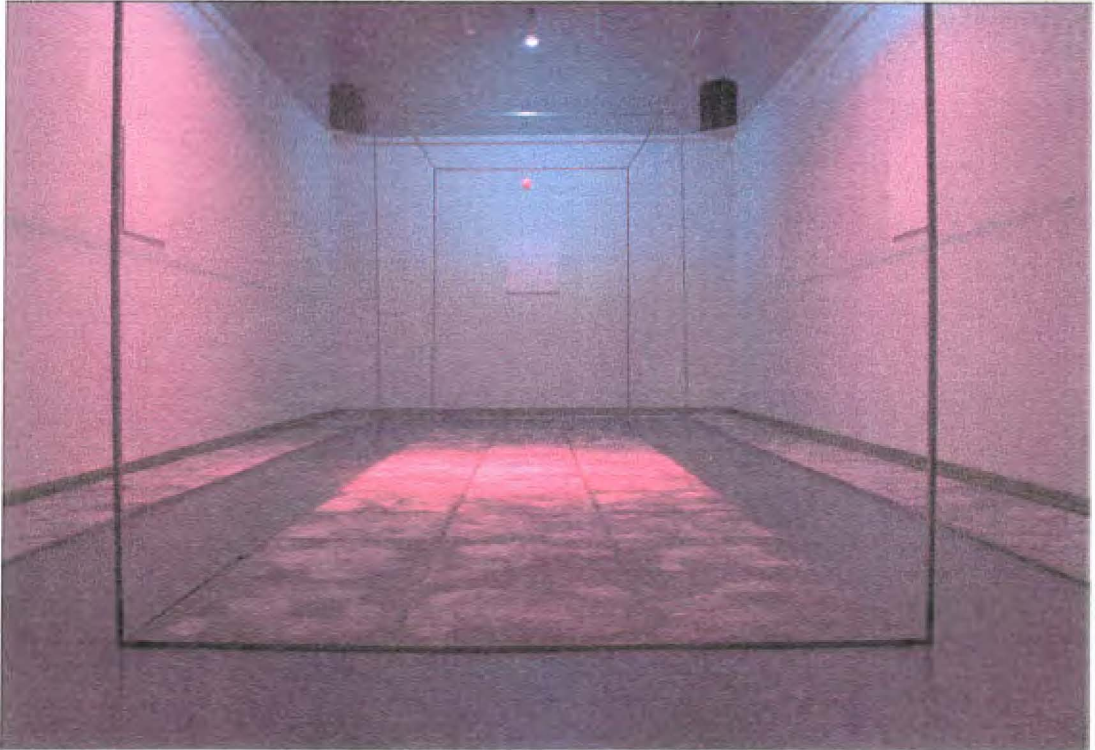




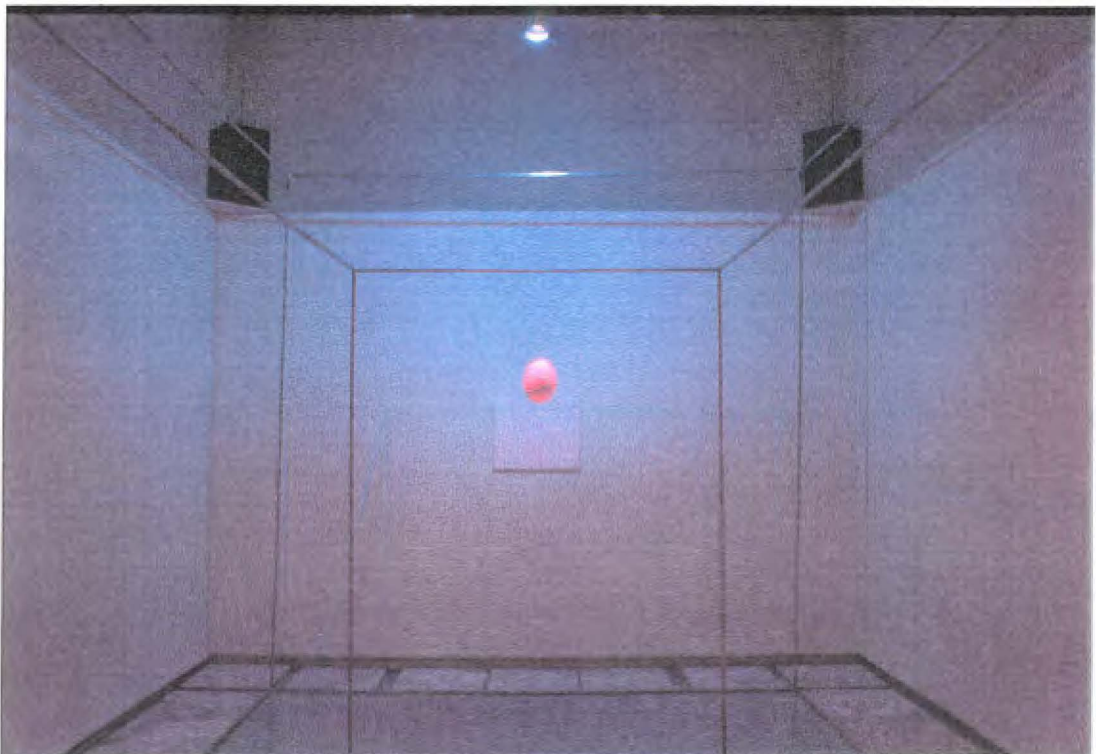


## FIGURES

*Figure Nr.1.*



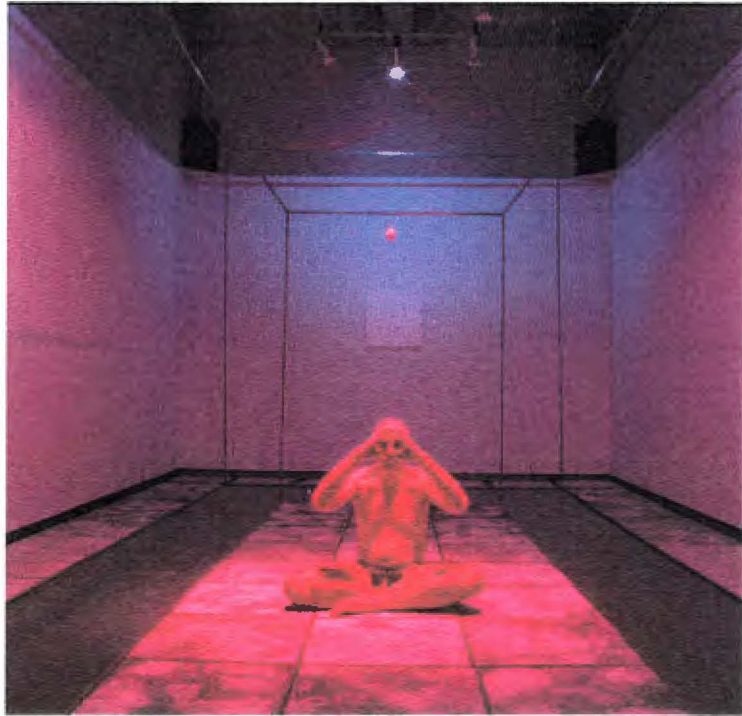
*a.*



*b.*

*Theory of Nothing - general view*

**Figure Nr. 2**



*a.*



*b.*

***Theory of Nothing - Nirguna (a.), Saguna (b.).***



*Figure Nr.3*



*a.*



*b.*

*Deliberation performance - Johnny Stallings*

*Figure Nr.4*



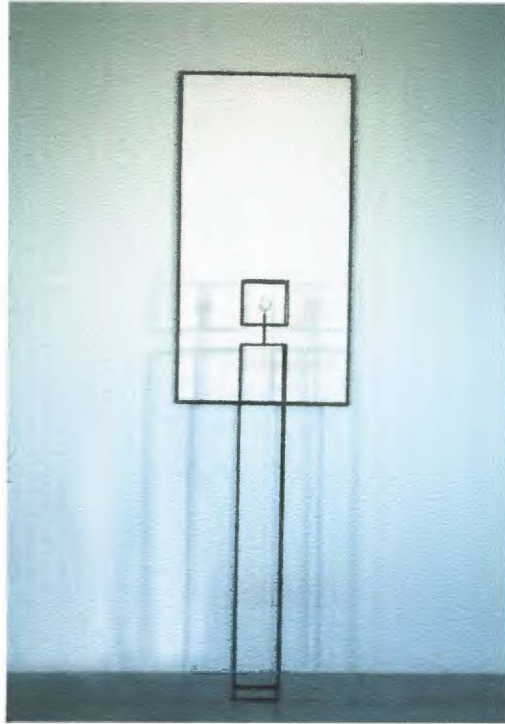
*a.*



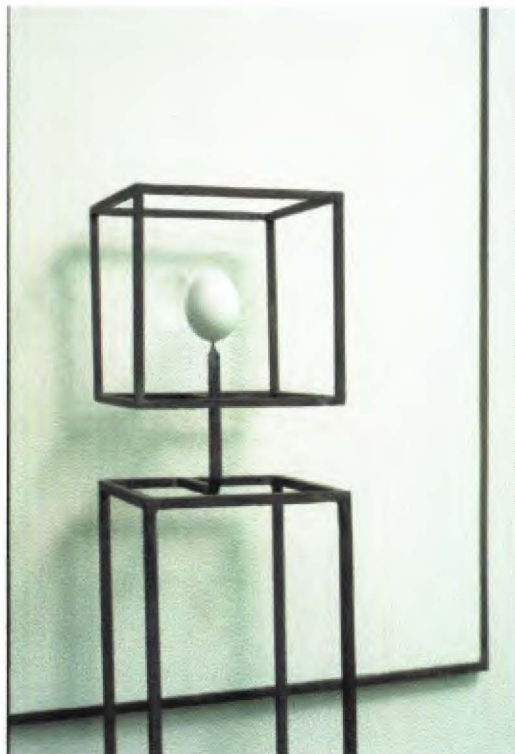
*b.*

*Ramana Maharshi - an egg and ink.*

*Figure Nr.5*



*a.*



*b.*

*Nameless - steel, an egg, marmurino, (Branford Millar Library).*



*Figure Nr.6*



*a.*



*b.*

*From the Book of Job , "Jo" - steel, an ostrich egg, car oil.*

*Figure Nr.7*



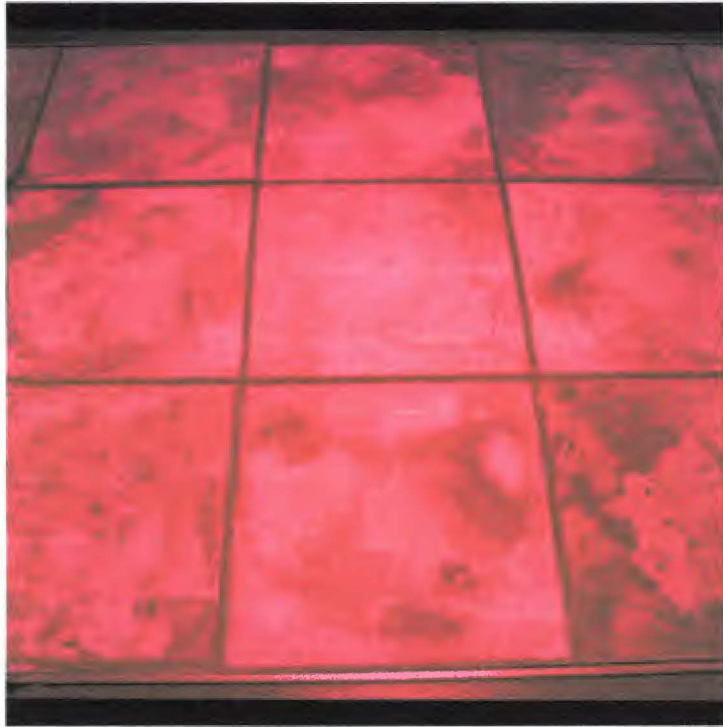
*a.*



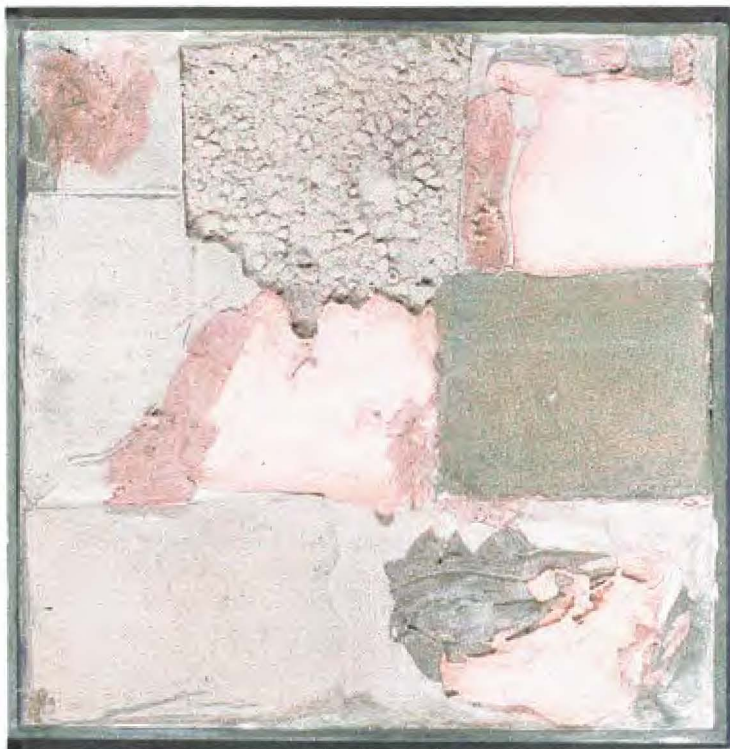
*b.*

*Indigenous People - plaster, clay, steel and sound.*

*Figure Nr.8*



*a.*



*b.*

*Fresco Plates - a. from Theory of Nothing, b. from "7".*

*Figure Nr.9*



*a.*



*b.*

*The Thinker - plaster, acrylic paint. (Branford P. Millar Library).*

*Person -non-person Nr.1*



*b.*

*adam rupniewski - Saguna - Nirguna and All.*



*...of the light I see You  
like the ocean  
infinitely beautiful  
in all objects  
reappearing out of non-being  
and deep...  
painting pictures of life*

*with*

*the lightness of a fulfilled  
promise,  
the quickness of a bypassing  
glance,  
the subtlety of a word,  
just not whispered,*

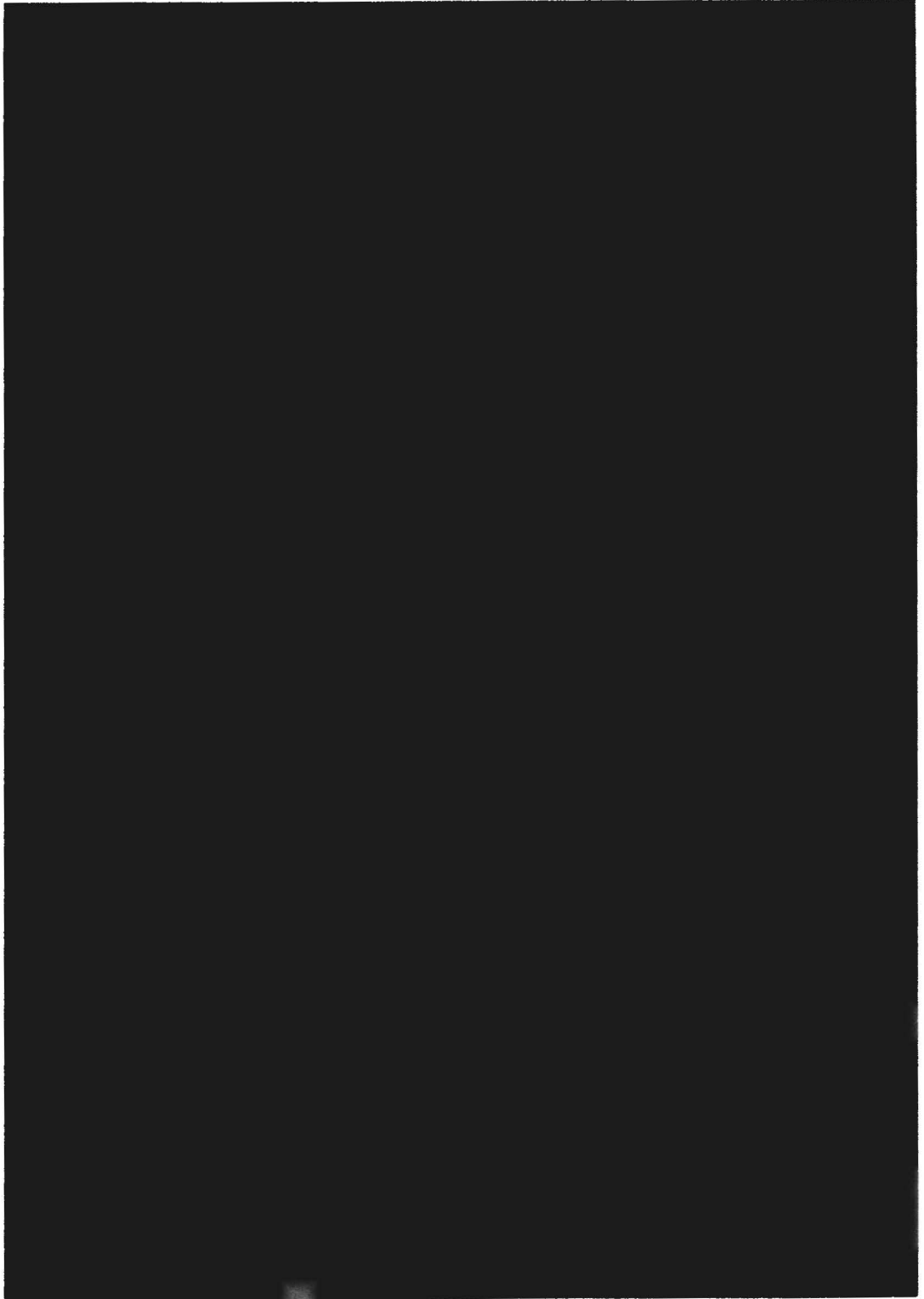
*and this whole illusion of reality,  
inexplicably  
everything is You,  
...present in nothingness,  
words like schools of fish  
wander Your boundlessness  
leaving no trace  
on Your immaculacy  
of nonexistence  
in everlastingly  
existing*

*affirmation and negation  
are meeting in Your  
picture of eternal  
silence,  
Your tranquillity...is...  
a state of bliss...*

*The Big Blue*

*adam rupniewski*

*december, 1995.*



*nothing + nothing = nothing*

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