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Recommended Citation

Shields, James. "The Art of Aidagara: Ethics, Aesthetics, and the Quest for an Ontology of Social Existence in Watsuji Tetsurō's Rinrigaku." *Asian Philosophy* (2009) : 265-283.

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The Art of *Aidagara*: Ethics, Aesthetics, and the Quest for an Ontology of Social Existence in Watsuji Tetsurō's *Rinrigaku*

James M. Shields

This paper provides an analysis of the key term aidagara ('betweenness') in the philosophical ethics of Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960), in response to and in light of the recent movement in Japanese Buddhist studies known as 'Critical Buddhism'. The Critical Buddhist call for a turn away from 'topical' or intuitionist thinking and towards (properly Buddhist) 'critical' thinking, while problematic in its bipolarity, raises the important issue of the place of 'reason' vs 'intuition' in Japanese Buddhist ethics. In this paper, a comparison of Watsuji's 'ontological quest' with that of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), Watsuji's primary Western source and foil, is followed by an evaluation of a corresponding search for an 'ontology of social existence' undertaken by Tanabe Hajime (1885–1962). Ultimately, the philosophico-religious writings of Watsuji Tetsurō allow for the 'return' of aesthesis as a modality of social being that is truly dimensionalized, and thus falls prey neither to the verticality of topicalism nor the limiting objectivity of criticalism.

Watsuji Tetsurō is so well known as the leading ethicist of modern Japan that his concern for the arts and aesthetics is usually somewhat neglected. Yet these concerns not only constitute a large part of his writing but also provide a vantage point for looking at Watsuji's notion of emptiness. (LaFleur, 1978, p. 245)

As long as man . . . is merely a passive recipient of the world of sense, i.e. does not more than feel, he is still completely One with that world; and just because he is himself nothing but world; there exists for him as yet no world. Only when, at the aesthetic stage, he puts it outside himself, or contemplates it, does his personality differentiate itself from it, and a world becomes manifest to him because he has ceased to be One with it. (Schiller, 1982, xxv.1)

In the early 1990s, a polemical scholarly movement known as Critical Buddhism sent shock-waves through the hitherto calm world of Japanese Buddhist scholarship.

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Attacking doctrines, entire sects, philosophers and philosophical schools, the Critical Buddhists—under the *de facto* leadership of Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shirō—instigated a veritable cottage-industry for the ‘reappraisal’ of Japanese Buddhist ways, especially in terms of ethics (see Hakamaya, 1989, 1990; Matsumoto, 1989, 1993).¹ More specifically, the succeeding debates have prompted further investigation into: (a) the connection between specific religious doctrines, principles, values and the actual effects of these in terms of history and politics, and; (b) the even more vexed question of locating and identifying the ‘essence’ of a particular religion or faith tradition.

Critical Buddhists contrast the *essence* of ‘true’ Buddhism with the historical/ethical/political *effects* of the religion as it has been practiced, such that (ethical-political) judgments of the latter spur and complement a critical re-evaluation of the former. So-called *hongaku* or ‘topical’ thinking is the *bête noir* of this re-evaluation:

The basic weakness of *hongaku* thought according to the Critical Buddhists is that ontologically it does not allow for the existence of an Other, since all things are considered to arise from the single, undifferentiated primordial dhātu or locus, and that it is thus rendered epistemologically and ethically incapable of dealing with the complex manifestations of otherness that form concrete ethical choices. (Heine, 1997, pp. 256–257)

Thus, Critical Buddhism locates the weakness of (particularly East Asian Mahāyāna) Buddhist practice in the prevailing motifs which emphasize non-differentiation, union and harmony—*topos*—while downplaying reason, criticism and language—*critica*. An explicit correlation is drawn between the prominence of ‘topical’ doctrines in Japanese Buddhism and the ethical failings of the nation in the first half of the 20th century.²

A central target of Critical Buddhists is the Kyoto School of Japanese philosophy, which flourished in the early and mid-20th century under the successive leadership of Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945), Tanabe Hajime (1885–1962) and Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990). Critical Buddhists assert that the philosophers of the Kyoto School, in their attempt to bridge the divide of East and West, absorbed the worst of both traditions, effectively fusing the *topos* of Zen with the equally topical ‘essentialism’ of the anti-rational/anti-Cartesian stream of Western philosophy, culminating in the ‘phenomenological’ work of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). Thus the Kyoto School, Critical Buddhists maintain, not only contributed to the legitimization of wartime ‘emperor-system fascism’, but their legacy allowed for the eventual resurgence in Japan of ‘topical’ thinkers such as Giambattista Vico and ultimately for the popularity of ‘postmodern’ theory, with its concomitant shades of relativism and nihilism.

In their many attacks on Nishida, Nishitani and Tanabe, the Critical Buddhists rarely mention a fourth figure, who, while peripheral to the Kyoto School, was influenced by and in turn greatly influenced post-war Japanese thinking, especially in the field of ethics: Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960).³ This essay analyzes the place of nothingness in the philosophico-religious ethics of Watsuji, and more particularly the relation between his ethical-ontological principle of *aidagara* (‘betweenness’),

Heidegger's *Mit-sein* (being-with) and *Sorge* (Care), and the notion of *absolute mediation* developed by Watsuji's contemporary Tanabe Hajime. It is my contention that a fuller analysis of Watsuji's 'betweenness' *vis-à-vis* Heidegger and Tanabe opens an alternative understanding of a Buddhist ontology of relation which goes beyond the Critical Buddhist dichotomy of *critica* or *topos* and thus deepens the debate surrounding the Kyoto School's (and Zen's) 'forgetting of ethics'.

The Study of *ningen sonzai*

In Japan, Watsuji proclaims in *Rinrigaku*, ethics is the study of *ningen*—human being.⁴ The term *ningen* and the compound *ningen sonzai* are crucial to Watsuji's thesis: Western ethics, he argues, has been unable to come to terms with human relationships precisely because it conceives of individuals in an atomistic way—in which any meeting of persons is something of a 'fall' from the self-realized unity or the preservation of unitive individual being. Watsuji notes that, in contrast to the English term 'human being', *ningen* already implies sociality or relationship. The Sino-Japanese character *nin* (or *hito*) signifies two men supporting each other, while *gen* (or *aida*) implies 'between' or 'among'. Thus Watsuji's gloss on *ningen* is a kind of ontological-ethical credo: 'men, who are supporting each other, exist in the world'.⁵

As an ethical being, that is, a truly human being, one *negates* individualism by abandoning one's (already acquired) independence from others, and by 'realizing' (both in the sense of *coming to see* and *making real* or actualizing) the mutual interrelatedness of persons. This, for Watsuji, is the true meaning of 'selflessness' and the true basis of goodness or compassion. In other words, at the very 'ground' of individual being, let us call this for the moment the 'self', there exists a primary 'revolt against' the association of individuals; a process of inevitable individuation. If this association is conceived as a 'negation' (of the whole), as, indeed, nothing less than *the materialization of absolute negation*, then 'individuation' is a negation of absolute negativity (or emptiness). Thus 'an individual becomes an individual by negating emptiness...as her own fundamental space. This is the self-negation of absolute negativity', but this is only part of the process: 'In addition to that, an individual must be subordinate to society through emptying herself, regardless of how this emptying is performed' (Watsuji, 1996, p. 117).⁶ Here we see the complex dialectic or oscillation that exists within human being—a continual to and fro between the demands of self-expression and the call to sociality. In order to elucidate the precise meaning of Watsuji's formulation of the ontological basis for ethics, it will help to look briefly at his primary Western source and sometimes foil: Martin Heidegger.

*Der Fall des Heideggers: The Limits of Care*⁷

According to Watsuji, Heidegger erred in: (a) his ultimate commitment to the language and philosophical structures of individualism and consequent neglect of the

social dimension of human being (or the *Mit-sein* of *Dasein*); and (b) his privileging of time and the temporal over place and spatiality. Let us begin with the first point of criticism. Here Watsuji diverges from the standard ‘postmodern’ criticism offered by Derrida and others, namely, that Heidegger was never able to free himself from the ‘logocentrism’ of Western metaphysics, even as he managed to escape some of its other pitfalls. For Watsuji, it is not primarily in the pining for Being that Heidegger goes astray (this is a regrettable but understandable consequence of his rootedness in Western ontology or onto-theology), but in the very framework of this thought, where, in Cartesian/Kantian (or perhaps Nietzschean/Kierkegaardian) fashion, the primary relationship is between the ‘individual’—*Dasein*—and the non-human world (whether such is conceived as Nature, Being or God).

Heidegger understood being-in-the-world (*in-die-Welt-sein*) in terms of the practical (or ‘ready-to-hand’) use of ‘tools’ and thus, for all his claims to have overthrown traditional metaphysical subjectivism, grounded his analysis in inescapably subjectivist language. ‘[T]he spatiality inherent in ‘a being there’ is, in the final analysis, attributed to the relationship of concern between I and tools and has nothing to do with the relationship of communication among human beings’ (Watsuji, 1996, p. 174). Though tropes of ‘being-with’ (*Mit-sein*) and Care/Concern (*Sorge*) occur quite often in the Heideggerian corpus, these themes, according to Watsuji, remain relatively underdeveloped, and do not easily connect with Heidegger’s more general thesis about Being and Time. This point requires some elaboration. *Care*—in which the whole structure of *Dasein* is understood, in its threefold nature as *thrownness*, *fallenness*, and *possibility*, to be ‘ahead of itself in already being in the world as being alongside what it encounters in the world’—is interpreted by Heidegger primarily if not solely in terms of temporality, by way of anxiety and being-towards-death (Watsuji, 1996, p. 215). Thus Care ultimately lacks the sense of (embodied) compassion between human beings.

We should note that Watsuji neglects to mention that Heidegger does in fact deal with ‘place’ and in a quite novel way: in practical concern or *Care*, Heidegger argues, distance itself becomes degeometricized and thus space becomes trans-spatial (e.g. when speaking on the telephone, one’s interlocutor is ‘nearer’ than the person in the next room, because she is part of one’s immediate ‘world’). Yet Watsuji is correct (and not the first to note) that this perspective, which would seem to open up the possibility of Care being manifest in terms of the space of neighborliness, is a path that Heidegger deigns not to pursue. This may be because, in an obvious debt to Nietzsche (but also to Jaspers and perhaps even, somewhat ironically, the *Frankfurter Schule*) Heidegger was intensely, almost obsessively wary of Mass Society or the Public—*das Man* (‘Them’). *Dasein*, after all, cannot be entirely an ‘I am’ if it also has to be a ‘with-them’.

Thus a non-trivial tension arises between authentic *being-with*, and inauthentic *being-with-Them*. It became clear to Heidegger that one of the lamentable symptoms of the modern age is precisely that ‘one’s own *Dasein* dissolves completely into the kind of being of “the Others” . . .’—thus *das Man* emburdens authentic *being-in-the-world*. Though Care (*Sorge*) unifies *Dasein*, even Care must recognize the fallenness

of man-as-They. For the Frankfurt thinkers and sundry existentialists, this situation of 'alienation' requires nothing less than a (Kierkegaardian) leap into subjectivity, even if it is a leap without a sure foundation or goal. Heidegger's Care is not by any means an 'ethical' modality; his use of this term, as with so many others, rids it of its conventional meaning. For Heidegger, this divestiture or deconstruction is a necessary step towards rediscovering the true meaning of terms; for others (such as Pierre Bourdieu) it is an emptying out of meaning with deep and disastrous implications on the philosophical and political level.

For Watsuji, whatever may be valuable in the Heideggerian trope of Care is lost in Care's relentlessly temporal aspect, and in its corresponding abstraction. Care is not situated in space, or bodies, nor is it ever associated with Others (tarnished in Heidegger as They). Along the same lines, Watsuji asserts that Heidegger's temporality is a purely individualized sort, and 'fails to materialize in the form of historicity'—which is the concrete temporality of persons-in-community.⁸ One's thrownness is a burden and the sense of repentance—of coming to terms with one's past—is not at all evident in the Heideggerian concept. In attempting to think Heidegger further, Watsuji contrasts Heidegger's *in-die-Welt-Sein* to the Japanese concepts *yononaka* and *seken*—'the public'—which signify not merely a the spatiality of human relationships but also the temporality of such.

Moreover, Watsuji raises the problem of the key philosophical term *Sein* or Being. Within Western philosophy, Being plays the role of the 'ground' of existence and of logic: it is the 'A is A' (Fichte) and the 'direct, undetermined "to be"' (Hegel) (Watsuji, 1996, p. 19). However, the grandeur, plenitude, and 'objectivity' of Being limit its applicability in terms of ethics. Western Being must be re-evaluated in terms more familiar and applicable to the Japanese situation, and to the condition of sociality more generally. Watsuji suggests that the Japanese term *sonzai* (*son* = maintenance or subsistence against loss [time] + *zai* = remaining within relationships [space]) is a more appropriate term for describing 'the subjective, practical, and dynamic structure of human being' (Watsuji, 1996, p. 21).

Thus, though Heidegger goes beyond the 'contemplative approach' to human existence, which reached an apogee in the 'transcendental phenomenology' of his mentor Husserl, his remarks on 'concernful dealings', while opening up spatiality as the structure of subjective existence, ultimately confines such to the relation of human beings and tools, and effectively bypasses interpersonal relationships.⁹ The reader might note a substantial irony here, regarding Heidegger's professed intention to escape the bondage of Western metaphysics and its subjectivist/humanist underpinnings. Indeed, it is precisely the latent or patent anti-humanism in the Heideggerian corpus (coupled with his infamous silence about his Nazi affiliations after 1945) that provides the fodder for the prosecutors of his 'Case'. But this makes Watsuji's critique seem odd: how can Heidegger, of all people, be accused of subjectivism? The answer, I contend, is less difficult than it may initially appear. Heidegger's rejection of the metaphysical 'forgetting of Being', necessitated a turn from 'ontic' (*ontisch*) to 'ontological' (*ontologische*) thinking. This move, while effectively subverting, for instance, the Cartesian and Kantian ego, also subverts the

community of egos that make up the dominant Western conception of sociality. While this is, in some ways, a positive ‘deconstructive’ move, Heidegger lacks the concepts or terms to allow for a rebirth of sociality out of emptiness or betweenness. In short, ‘man’, in becoming ‘the neighbor of Being’, loses touch with his neighbors who happen to be mere ‘beings’. For Watsuji, the result is not an overcoming of nihilism (which the Heideggerian project, in the wake of Nietzsche, claimed to be), but rather a nihilism *in extremis*.¹⁰

Between Self and Society: Towards Empty Being

The basic principle of Watsujiian social ethics can be deduced from these key terms. What is sought in (ethical) being—*sonzai*—is the realization of totality through the individual. Though this, at first glance, seems to fall into the hands of the Critical Buddhists, who lament the (re)turn to ‘totality’ over rational-critical (and ethical) discrimination and differentiation, Watsuji insists that this process occurs only through the ‘negation’ of *both* the individual and the totality. Above all, it is imperative to understand that *ningen sonzai* does not rely upon Being as a source of existence, but upon Nothingness or Emptiness (*kū*). ‘One can contend that I becomes aware of itself only through the medium of non-I, by making a detour of nothingness only on the ground of the subject in which the self and other are not yet disrupted’ (Watsuji, 1996, p. 225).

Thus, in a formula that superficially resembles the Hegelian dialectic, the individual must first ‘realize’ herself as the ‘other’ over and against the social whole—this is a crucial stage towards self-awareness. Indeed, ‘[a]part from the self-awareness of individuals there is no social ethics’. Independent consciousness, like capitalism for Marx, is not something to be disdained or avoided, but is in fact part and parcel of ethical ‘self-realization. The standpoint of independent consciousness—the I—is ‘acquired’ only through a primary disassociation from family, tradition, and society. ‘Just as we are able to abstractively produce an individual’s consciousness of retention by wiping away all elements of betweenness, so our own selfhood is recognizable only at the extreme point where all betweenness is eliminated.’ True communality is possible only through this initial ‘moment’ of independence. However, one must come to recognize that individuality cannot itself sustain an independent existence, but is grounded in a negation of the totality: ‘its essence is negation, that is, emptiness’ (Watsuji, 1996, p. 80).

The other ‘moment’ in the process is one in which the individual ‘surrenders’ to the totality; Watsuji calls this ‘the demand of the superindividual will’ (Watsuji, 1996, p. 23). This is another Watsujiian phrase that rings ugly to postwar ears and it is indeed one that has played into the hands of those accusing Watsuji of wartime collaboration. Whether by this ‘call of the totality’ Watsuji means to imply the Emperor/State or whether he refers to the transpersonal (or interpersonal) realm in a more general sense remains something of an open question.¹¹ What is most significant here is Watsuji’s attempt to situate ethics and ontology in the

'betweenness' of persons, and to understand 'authenticity' in terms of the self's annihilation, an annihilation which involves not a total disappearance, but the reconfiguration out of Emptiness: an identification with others in a nondualistic, but also non-monistic, meeting of self and other.¹² Unlike the Hegelian dialectic, with its sublation (*Aufgehoben*) of the thesis by the antithesis, in Watsuji we have a fuller preservation of the terms of the 'dialectic'—an oscillation rather than a true synthesis (Carter, 1996, p. 341). The self does not absolutely disappear, nor is it sublated, nor does it 'return' as an original, pure or True Self, but simply is now 'realized' as 'being empty', or in the words of Tanabe Hajime, 'empty being'.

Agency and Absolute Criticism

Let us now turn to an analysis of the work of Tanabe Hajime. Despite his one-time equivalence of the Emperor with the 'nothingness' that must undergird democracy, Tanabe's focus on the self-as-agent/agency (*shutai*) over the self-as-contemplative consciousness (*shakun*), reflects his Marxist sympathies,¹³ as well as his general desire to bring ethics back into the heart of Japanese Buddhism and philosophy. A prominent conception in postwar Japanese Marxism was the (Sartrean) notion that the 'abyss' of nothingness must underlie the freedom of the acting subject in the historical world.¹⁴ Likewise, Tanabe's 'subject' is first and foremost an agent, a subject-in-action or in-relation-with-others. Thus Tanabe would concur with Watsuji's comment that 'The study of ethics is the study... of the subject as a practical, active connection' (*jissenteki kōiteki renkan*)' (Koschmann, 1996, p. 103).¹⁵

The key terms in Tanabe's formulation that distinguish his own work from that of the other major Kyoto School figures Nishida and Nishitani are *metanoesis* and *absolute mediation*. Metanoesis (Jp. *zange*) 'entails the painful recollection of one's past sins, a feeling of remorse accompanied by the strong wish that these sins had not been committed' (Heisig, 1986, p. xliii). Crucial to Tanabe's thesis is the fact that the *meta* of meta-noetics implies that such ultimately 'surpasses the position of mere contemplation (*noesis*)' (Takeuchi, cited in Heisig, 1986, p. xlv). Yet what must also be noted is precisely the 'after' aspect of meta-noesis, which is not meant to be anti-rational or irrational, i.e. not an erasure or sublation of reason, logic, language, or criticism,¹⁶ but a way of pushing the critique of reason to its limits, a task, in Tanabe's eyes, begun but left incomplete by Kant, Hegel and Kierkegaard. In fact, Tanabe goes so far as to call his logic of metanoetics 'absolute criticism' (Heisig, 1986, p. lv).

Absolute criticism is simply the existential involvement of the subject involved in the critical task, such that, faced with the 'crisis of its own dilemma', the subject 'surrenders' to its own self-criticism. This is not expressed by Tanabe in terms of the self's dissolution, but rather as the 'breaking-through (*Durchbruch*) of a self that hitherto had moved exclusively within the realms of discursive thinking and reflection' (Tanabe, 1986, p. 4). Moreover, this is the point at which 'absolute mediation' becomes involved: the 'truth' of the absolute can only 'function' in its

relative mediation with the world of forms and relative beings.¹⁷ ‘In this sense, the transformation through vertical mediation between the absolute and the self (Thou and I) must also be realized in horizontal social relationships between my self and other selves (I and Thou)’ (Tanabe, 1986, p. lviii). In other words, absolute mediation takes the form of mediation through other beings; ‘the effect of the absolute on the relative only becomes *real* as the effect of the relative on the relative’ (Tanabe, 1986, p. 19, my emphasis).

Here we see an obvious parallel with Watsuji’s *aidagara* as the ground for ethics and human being. Nothingness does not appear in itself ‘but only through its real channel which is historical being. . . . What determines the individual is always species as an historical, relative particular form of being. It is not some absolute negativity of nothingness apart from the movement of this relative negativity’ (Koschmann, 1996, p. 118).¹⁸

Absolute mediation takes place only through the irruption of absolute nothingness into relative being. In other words,

[b]eing here is ‘being as upāya,’ [*hōbentiki-sonzai*] that is, being as a mediator of nothingness. Moreover, human existential self-awareness, which realizes the compassion and altruism of the bodhisattva through the equality of mutual transformation, must be a mediation of nothingness in the sense of just such a transformation of subjectivity. (Tanabe, 1986, p. 109)

Thus, Tanabe concludes, metanoetics—and only metanoetics—is able to overcome, on the one hand, the problems of individualism that beset Western conceptions of freedom and, on the other, the lack of individual agency/ethics/this-worldliness of which Buddhism, and Zen in particular, is often (with some justification) accused.

Tanabe’s emphasis on the necessary ‘return to the world’ (*gensō*) which accompanies the ‘movement towards the absolute’ (*ōsō*), is largely directed against what he feels are the misunderstandings of Zen by ordinary folk (as opposed to sages). One of Tanabe’s primary (unstated but thinly-disguised) targets is his ex-mentor Nishida Kitarō, in particular Nishida’s concepts of *basho/topos* and the ‘absolute identity of self-contradictions’.¹⁹ Very much in line with the Critical Buddhists (but 40 years in advance of them),²⁰ Tanabe takes Nishida to task for preaching a reliance on the *topos* of absolute nothingness, as if it were a kind of abstract universal—‘some space with no specific orientation of direction of any particular point within it’.²¹ In short, Nishida-philosophy and, by extension, much of modern Japanese philosophy, lacks a sense of *mediation* and (absolute) *critique*.

Ethics as the ‘Kōan of Reality’

As we have seen, ethics (*rinri*) for Watsuji entails not simply a disciplined reflection on right or wrong, or on the proper ways of acting in social circumstances, but is about what it means to be a human in the world; ethics is, to borrow a term from Heidegger, ‘fundamental ontology’. Within this conception lies not only existential ‘facticity’ but also *sociality*: being in the world is not just a relation of the ego and the

world of Being, but a relation *between* beings. Here etymology comes into play once again. The Japanese term *rin* (or *nakama*) implies ‘fellowship’—‘a body or system of relations, which a definitive group of persons have with respect to each other, [which also] signifies individual persons as determined by this system’ (Watsuji, 1996, pp. 10–11). *Rin* also signifies ‘agreement’ (*kimari*), ‘form’ (*koto*), and ‘order among persons’, while *ri* signifies ‘reason’. Thus *rinri*, or ethics, is ‘the order or pattern through which the communal existence of human beings is rendered possible’ (Watsuji, 1996, p. 11).

The notion of ‘the betweenness of persons’ (*hito to hito to no aidagara*) is fundamental to Watsuji’s ethics and must be examined in greater detail. Despite the fact that it is always ‘concrete’, betweenness is manifest not simply in the physical situation of ‘meeting’, but in the ‘dialogue’ that takes place in such a situation. In Habermasian fashion, dialogue is a form of communicative action, in which ‘[w]hat I hear is not a succession of sounds, but the *koto* that expresses the betweenness of I and Thou. Even though this *koto* is spoken by Thou by means of her voice, the *koto* itself is communally retained between I and Thou’ (Watsuji, 1996, p. 77). Thus meeting is always a meeting of speaking or communicating beings.

Now we are faced with the task of fleshing out the meaning of different forms or modes of ‘communication’, and the place of speech in particular. For this we shall turn again briefly to Tanabe. At one point in *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, Tanabe speaks of the Zen *kōan* in terms of understanding that ‘the way of satori is not ethical in nature but remains at the everyday level’, but he adds that the ‘flaw’ in this conception of the *kōan* is that ‘history, as objective and common “social reality”, is bypassed, and thus too is ‘ethical seriousness’. In short, by use of methods like the *kōan*, Zen neglects ‘the objective historical world whose being should be “being as *upāya*”’. In contrast, Tanabe suggests that metanoesis ‘views ethics as the “*kōan* of reality”’ and thus ‘metanoetics is philosophy conscious of the foundation of history’ (Tanabe, 1986, p. 131). This requires some reflection. What does it mean to say that ‘ethics is the *kōan* of reality’? For Tanabe, the *kōan*, while significant for its shock-value—its dispositional-transfigurative capacity—also must bring one ‘back to the world’; in the *kōan* words are ‘skillful means’ to provoke *satori*/conversion. Thus too, ethics must involve ‘mediation’ by way of ‘skillful means’—actions, words (and perhaps symbols and myths)—which draw one out of and at the same time ground one in the world.

However, in what appears to be an attempt to distance his own theories from the ‘aesthetic intuitionism’ of those he criticizes (namely Nishida), Tanabe ultimately falls back on the notion that ethics must take ‘rational discrimination as its medium’ (Tanabe, 1986, p. 155). ‘[Nishida’s] aesthetic consideration’, he says, ‘does not serve to overcome the abstraction of intuition but is a mere development and extension of intuitionism. It neglects the deeper significance of the role of the axis in absolute transformation’ (Tanabe, 1986, p. 11). It appears that ‘aesthetic’ intuitionism here implies the sort of contemplation where one is ‘lost’ in the totality,²² without bothering to ‘return’ to the world of mediated beings. ‘The result is simply an

intuition similar to artistic creativity and therefore distinct from the faith-in-practice of Zen' (Tanabe, 1986, p. 56).

Tanabe's *Anaesthesia*

Tanabe's analysis and self-distancing from the Nishidan 'aesthetic' stance presupposes that *aesthesis* involves a kind of *a priori* relationship between a subject and object, rather than a relationship between beings and 'objects' in a community, one that entails the capacity for change and development. It also assumes that artistic creativity and 'aesthetic intuition' of experience involves only a vertical connection between mind and form, subject and art-object; and that this integration of experience will be, ultimately solipsistic and totalizing.²³ However, a perspective of *aesthesis* may well recognize the significance of mediation with greater perspicuity than other forms of prehension or awareness, in part because art and beauty are always already characterized by mediation of the 'absolute' in 'empty forms', such as words, symbols or rituals. In short, Tanabe's (Platonic) rejection of beauty and art—his *anaesthesia*—reflects a simplistic understanding of *aesthesis*, whereby concepts such as the 'sublime'²⁴ (where we find a discrimination of non-discrimination, prompted by an awesome Other-power, and leading to a complete transformation of—or out of—subjectivity, at its best), or the *intersubjective* aspect of artistic activity, are not addressed.

Aidagara and *Aesthesis*: The Ethics of Sociability

Ultimately, the significance of Watsuji's work and commitment to aesthetics emerges most clearly at the level of philosophical anthropology and the attempt to clarify a 'social ontology of existence'. Watsuji makes explicit reference in his aesthetic writings to traditional Japanese art forms, such as the tea ceremony (*chanoyu*) and linked verse (*renga*). These are of value precisely because of the particular way in which they express the *interdependence* of individuals in creation and artistic experience.²⁵ Unlike the high Romantic conception of the artist/genius as the solitary *maudit* in the manner of Faust or Byron, but very much in line with the 'classical' Romantics following Schiller's (mis)reading of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (Kant, 1987), Watsuji is concerned to evoke a paradigm of aesthetic 'play', which is at the same time removed from 'frivolity' and solipsism, and which is located in social space.

For all of their debts to Marxism, both Watsuji and Tanabe recognize the serious flaws in Marxist philosophical anthropology. Watsuji in particular criticizes the (vulgar Marxist) notion of *homo oeconomicus*: 'Human beings (unlike animals) forge relationships and develop language and consciousness... the most basic criterion of human existence is the formation of relationships between self and others, and the assumption of a certain attitude as posture in order to accomplish that' (cited in Koschmann, 1996, p. 104).²⁶

In order to nuance this vision of human nature, Watsuji turned to the writings of various *doyens* of late 19th-century and early 20th-century social theory: Gumpłowicz, Durkheim, Scheler, Tarde, Wiese and Simmel. However, being ultimately convinced that these thinkers (like Heidegger after them) were unable to rid themselves of commitment to an atomistic (and Judeo-Christian) philosophical anthropology, Watsuji missed a central theme to the work of Georg Simmel (1858–1918)—one that appears to have relevance to his own philosophico-religious ethics: *sociability*. In *The Sociology of Sociability* (1949), Simmel defines this term as the social counterpart of play as well as of art. Just as play and art ‘draw their form from . . . realities but leave . . . reality behind them’, sociability ‘makes up its substance from numerous fundamental forms of serious relationship among men, a substance, however, spared the frictional realities of real life’. Sociability so conceived, as the ‘sociological play-form,’ is beyond utility—it is an end in itself. ‘[S]ociability distils . . . out of the realities of social life the pure essence of association, of the associative process as a value and a satisfaction’ (cited in Koschmann, 1996, p. 187).

This concept has deep roots within the Kantian-Romantic tradition and especially in the writings of Friedrich Schiller, who, in *The Aesthetic Education of Man* (1801), attempted to work out the implications and possibilities of an ‘aesthetic’ approach to ‘enlightenment’. The very meaning of the term ‘aesthetic’ was extended by Schiller; no longer tied to works of art and their creation or reception, *aesthesis* applied to any thing—or person—that could be conceived as ‘living form’ (or perhaps, being-in-the-world); moreover, the appreciation or awareness of living form implies a modality of the entire being—a *metanoesis* that is itself *aesthesis* (Schiller, 1982, p. 101). The play concept is foundational in Schiller’s work, not only for art but for ‘the much more difficult art of living’ and his examples are drawn from life, especially the life of human relationship (being-with; caring-for). Play is conceived by Schiller as the ‘third drive’ which will reconcile the other fundamental drives: towards change (senses) and towards changelessness or order (reason). Rather than annulling or sublating these two, the play drive is a kind of ‘reciprocal subordination’ of or oscillation between them. ‘The play-drive, therefore, would be directed towards annulling time within time, reconciling becoming with absolute being and change with identity . . . [it] will endeavour so to receive as if it had itself brought forth and to bring forth as the intuitive sense aspires to receive’ (Schiller, 1982, xiv, pp. 3–4). Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby suggest that, in this light, ‘it would not . . . be at all inapt to compare [Schiller’s] “third drive” . . . to, say, the opening of the “Third Eye” in Zen Buddhism’ (Schiller, 1982, p. xcvi).

The Schillerian–Simmelian notion of the sociability-*aesthesis* of ‘play’ has especial relevance in the linguistic realm: when conceived *expressively* rather than simply *designatively* language has as one of its ‘functions’ the building of relationship, or association. Sociability arises not simply from mute ‘play’—but primarily from ‘dialogue’. Yet it is not simply ‘critical’ speaking, it is speaking that rests on a particular ‘field’ of relationship, and which ‘deepens’ that field in its very being. As Simmel puts it: ‘Sociability provides . . . an artificial space in which both objective

interests and personal egos are suspended, and each participant acts “as if” all were equal, and “as though he especially esteemed everyone” (cited in Koschmann, 1996, p. 187).²⁷ Human relationship, the ground and locus for ethics, is ‘empty’ of substance, unreal—*aesthetic*.

Conclusion: *kū ga kū zoru*

The above discussion of the place of *aesthesis* and the ontology of sociability leads ultimately to reflection upon the meaning of the Zen maxim regarding the ‘emptiness of emptiness’ (Jp. *kū ga kū zoru*/Skt. *śūnyāta śūnyāta*). This apothegm can be interpreted in a number of ways. Abe Masao (1975, pp. 187–188) reads it as indicating that ‘true Emptiness is wondrous Being, absolute *u*, fullness and suchness of everything, *tathāgata*, ultimate reality’. Abe’s paean to the plenitude of vacuity, while not invalid, must be dimensionalized somewhat by another reading of *śūnyāta śūnyāta*, whereby what is implied is the emptiness of the *realization* of emptiness itself. In short, emptiness upheld (*realized*) as a doctrine or an element of cognition must be further *real-ized* in the ‘experience’ of emptiness in the physical/phenomenal world.²⁸ Moreover, this ‘experience’ is not beyond language or conception, though it may not be exhausted by these modes of ‘revelation’. Here ‘true’ emptiness is the oscillation/mediation of nothingness-being, concretized, made real, in the *aesthesis-aidagara* of beings-in-the-world. In order for Compassion/Care to be more than an empty abstraction, mediation is necessary, and mediation implies a horizontality to the relationship of beings or living forms. Thus the horizontal aspect of *śūnyāta śūnyāta* runs against the strictly vertical tendency of *ōsō*-centrism/*topos*, without sliding into the anaesthetic temptations of the Cartesian (or Critical Buddhist) ‘topophobia’.

The difference rests in the horizontal nature (or rather three-dimensional nature) of the active relationship, as opposed to the two-dimensional nature of the merely contemplative/intuitive one. Perhaps this is a ‘third aperture’—an aesthetic-ethical one grounded in the absolute nothingness of mediated betweenness, rather than the immediate *basho* of Self—conceived as an experience of *gen/ma* which draws *kū* back onto itself.²⁹ Here ‘disinterestedness’ (*Seinlassen*) does not imply passivity, contemplative serenity, or an intuitionist/topical merger of subject–object but rather a kind of (critical, non-instrumental) distancing that still upholds the fundamental betweenness of living forms in intersubjective space (*Öffentlichkeit*); one that refuses the tendency of emptiness or nothingness to collapse upon itself.

As Watsuji (1996) concludes: ‘Society can arise only between one subject and another in and through practical communication and, hence, through dialogue, communication, and transportation’ (pp. 161–162). In short, ethics does not require Cartesian, Hobbesian or Kantian ‘individuals’ acting out of self-autonomy, but that does not mean it can do away with linguistic/symbolic discrimination, distinction, differentiation *in toto*. Meditation—thinking-through or after-thinking (*denkt-nach*)—finds its home in the mediation of Nothingness by way of words, symbols and (primarily) the concrete ‘emptiness’ of other beings.

In this paper, by utilizing the most important philosophico-religious tropes of Watsuji Tetsurō *vis-à-vis* some key concepts of Martin Heidegger and Tanabe Hajime, I have drawn out the ethical implications of various conceptions of ‘fundamental ontology’. Critical Buddhists insist that Nishida, Nishitani and Tanabe (and one could say, by extension, Watsuji) are complicit in the devastation wrought by Japan on its own and other peoples during the first half of this century. This critique is primarily an ethical one, driven by considerations of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Kyoto tropes like the *logic of place*, *absolute self-identity of contradictions*, *absolute mediation* and *metanoetics*. The ‘ethical’ critique, however, ultimately hinges on a particular understanding of the use of language and the meaning of mediation, expounded in the Critical Buddhist exaltation of *critica* over *topos*. In developing the concept of *aesthesis* out of Watsujian ethical theory, I have suggested an alternative vantage-point from which to understand Kyoto School—and perhaps Zen—‘ethics’ more generally.

Notes

- [1] See, for instance, the papers by Heine, Hubbard, Sueki and Swanson in *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Hubbard & Swanson, 1997), the papers by Heisig, Ives, Maraldo and Van Bragt in *Rude Awakenings: Nationalism, Zen, and the Kyoto School* (Heisig & Maraldo, 1994), Brian Victoria’s *Zen at War* (1997), as well as Iris Chang’s *Rape of Nanking* (1997), and Patrick Smith’s *Japan: A Reinterpretation* (1997).
- [2] For a more extensive analysis and critique of the Critical Buddhist understanding of the nature of Buddhism as ‘criticism’, see ‘*Hihan Bukkyō: Critical Buddhism as a Hermeneutics of Practice*’ (Shields, 2006).
- [3] Carter (1996) concurs with LaFleur (1978), in remarking that, ‘[e]ven though Watsuji was certainly never a member of the “inner circle” of that school . . . the influence of that developing tradition on Watsuji is evident’ (p. 338). A true polymath, Watsuji published monographs on Nietzsche (1913) and Kierkegaard (1915)—for which he was credited with introducing existentialism to Japan—Japanese art and literature (1920), Dogen and the Japanese spirit (1926a), primitive Christianity (1926b), primitive Buddhism (1927), Confucius (1938) and Greek culture (1946). The study of ethics was a somewhat late concern, though very much indebted to his earlier religious, historical, aesthetic and cross-cultural investigations. Regarding the debate between William LaFleur and David Dilworth (1974); *pace* Carter, who sees them in a ‘dialectical tension’, it seems to me that LaFleur is closer to the mark in reading Watsuji in a ‘religious’ fashion. Certainly, I think Dilworth (1974, p. 17) is mistaken in de-Buddhizing Watsuji. Though Confucian elements are evident in his work, I agree with LaFleur (and Watsuji himself) in seeing Buddhism as the prominent influence in Watsujian thought, especially by the time of *Rinrigaku*. Carter (1996, pp. 347–349), in similar fashion to Dilworth, speaks of Watsuji taking Nishida in ‘a horizontal direction’, implying that he diverges from the ‘Buddhist’ path of absolute nothingness by going ‘epistemological’—again, a dichotomy (indebted to a Nishidan-existentialist privileging of pure experience over conceptual thinking and discrimination) that is, to me, facile and unnecessary.
- [4] The complete title of *Rinrigaku* is *Ningen no gaku to shite no rinrigaku*.
- [5] ‘The human being is ‘the group’ (*yo no naka*) and also the ‘person’ (*hito*) in the group. The human being is, therefore, *not* only the ‘person’ nor simply ‘society’ (*shakai*). Here we can see the dual quality of the human being’s dialectical unity’ (cited in Koschmann,

- 1996, p. 102). Watsuji's reliance upon root meanings and etymology (*figura etymologica*) is a trait familiar to students of Heidegger, and one that has been, it must be said, widely criticized as a somewhat malleable hermeneutic tool.
- [6] Watsuji's last phrase may, and perhaps should, give us pause. What does he mean by 'regardless of how this emptying is performed'? Watsuji goes on in this passage to conclude that human association so conceived is understood to be 'the movement of the negation of negation in which absolute negativity returns to itself through its own self-negation'; and that, moreover, this picture includes human association as 'coercion' (1996, p. 117). Thus the 'continuous creation of human beings' that is 'the basic principle of ethics' must be taken not simply as the biblical 'good creation' of more life but also as the 'bad creation' of the Orwellian or Huxleyan sort. See note 11.
- [7] Watsuji traveled in Germany and Europe in 1927, and, like his countrymen Nishitani and Tanabe, came into immediate contact with the work and person of Martin Heidegger. The young Heidegger had recently become the *doyen* of German phenomenological thinking, usurping the mantle of his mentor Husserl. Upon returning to Japan, Watsuji penned *Fūdo (Climate and Culture)* as a direct response to Heidegger's just-published *Sein und Zeit* (see Watsuji, 1971; Heidegger, 1996). Though ultimately critical of Heidegger's philosophy, Watsuji's considered response indicates that he—as with many other modern Japanese scholars—believed the German thinker's work to be of epoch-making importance and potentially a bridge over the Great East–West Divide.
- [8] 'What is the field in which two *Dasein* coexist? This field must also belong to the basic structure of *sonzai*' (Watsuji, 1996, p. 221).
- [9] This limited sense of spatiality is the reason, Watsuji (1996) claims, that Heidegger considered temporality to be of greater importance than spatiality (p. 175). But see Yuasa's (1996) comments on Heidegger's later *Kehre* as 'a turn from temporal life to spatial life' (p. 336), and also Sakai's (1991) critique of Watsuji on Heidegger, where Sakai wonders what form of individualism Heidegger is culpable of—surely, he says, not the classical substantialist or Cartesian sort. This point is well-taken, but I am inclined to agree with Lévinas (1994), Werner Marx (1992), Dilworth (1974), Steiner (1991) and others who argue that Heidegger was never able to extend his concern with 'concern' in a meaningful ethical way, and that this lacuna reflects a latent 'subjectivism' in his work.
- [10] See Steiner's (1991) remarks on the reading (by Rudolf Carnap, among others) of Heidegger's 'play with and on Nothingness' as a path leading to nihilism rather than out of it (p. 154). The precise differences between Heideggerian and Buddhist/Kyoto School understandings of nothingness bears further work, however it is clear that Heidegger was not working with a sense of *śūnyāta*. We might also note, in this regard, the abyssal *Liebestod* that colours the darker side of German Romanticism (and crops up in Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* [1918], a work with which the young Heidegger was quite familiar).
- [11] Bellah (1965), Sakai (1991), and Dilworth (2006) are the harshest critics of *Der Fall des Watsujis*, but even the more moderate Pincus (1991) and Odin (1992, 1996) acknowledge the strong connection between Watsuji's writings and 'totalitarian state ethics' (if not 'emperor system fascism'). Like Tanabe, Watsuji's biggest failing in this regard is his onetime equivalence of the Emperor as the locus of absolute nothingness, and thus the 'ground' and focus of individual and social existence. Watsuji is most culpable in his wartime writings, especially 'The Way of the Subject' and 'America's National Character', which reek of propaganda and racial stereotyping. Is this another instance of the Case of Heidegger, where a weak-willed man lets his ideas copulate with state ideology partly out of self-interest and partly out of a desire to give his ideas concrete form? More pressingly, is there a necessary or inevitable link between the philosophy/'ethics' of Japanese imperial ideology and Watsuji's ethics of betweenness? I say, provisionally at least, no. Watsuji's theory of personhood,

as outlined in the *Rinrigaku* (admittedly extirpated by the author himself after the War of its more Imperialist notions), is clearly meant to restore a Buddhist ‘middle way’ (Jp. *chūdō*) between extreme positions of essentialism on the one side and nihilism on the other; and between rampant individualism of the Bacon–Hobbes sort and the type of social organicism, which typifies fascist ideology. Though the odor lingers, and cannot be easily wished away, it should not render the life work of such a seminal thinker anathema.

- [12] Watsuji’s remarks here bear remarkable similarity to the work of: (1) Emmanuel Lévinas (1906–1995) a student of Heidegger who was also concerned with the lack of an interpersonal (and thus ethical) dimension in the Heideggerian corpus (and in phenomenology more generally); and (2) Jürgen Habermas, whose thesis of ‘communicative action’ or ‘discourse ethics’ sustains the notion of an interpersonal self (Habermas, 1990). I intend to explore these specific connections and their implications for interreligious dialogue in future research.
- [13] Tanabe, like Nishitani and Watsuji, studied in Germany in the early 1920s, and, as with these two, was highly influenced by the work of Husserl and Heidegger. In 1928 he succeeded to Nishida’s chair in philosophy at Kyoto University, a post he held through the war. Always fascinated with Hegel, he fell under the influence of the young Marxist thinkers of the period (e.g. Miki Kiyoshi [1897–1945]; Tosaka Jun [1900–1945]).
- [14] See Umemoto (1947). Despite superficial similarities, Tanabe’s subject ultimately diverges from the Sartrean–Marxist subject, largely because of his Kyoto School/Buddhist roots, where nothingness cannot be left as nihilism or negativity, some sort of existential ‘abyss’, but must be understood in terms of absolute nothingness, or *kū* (*sūnyāta*).
- [15] It must be noted, however, that Tanabe’s acting-subject acts out of a voluntary submission to the call or prompting of the Other-power. His is ultimately a philosophico-religious vision of *tarikī*. In other words, the self acts while being acted upon, and this effects a ‘conversion from negation to affirmation, from [being-toward] death to [being-toward] life’ (Heisig, 1986, p. xlv).
- [16] It is noteworthy that Tanabe’s own *metanoesis* or conversion emerged in the context of Japan’s impending defeat, and his own sense of powerlessness and lack of freedom, viz. the military regime’s rightist jingoism. Thus, rather than *metanoesis* being a turn away from the world to silence or contemplation of the absolute, it is, at least for Tanabe himself, a response to a lack of self-expression, dialogue, and criticism. *Metanoesis* can thus be conceived in terms of a bulwark against irrationalism, as much as against the excesses of reason and conceptualization.
- [17] This correlates with Streng’s (1967) thesis that ‘Nāgārjuna presumes no ‘absolute’ in relation to a ‘particular’ but empty structures of particulars’ (p. 151). Richards (1978) concurs.
- [18] Tanabe adds: ‘This is the point of contact between the philosophy of nothingness and Marxism’ (cited in Koschmann, 1996, p. 118). Of course, both Nishida and Nishitani had also insisted that their nothingness was not ‘absolute negativity’ but rather the plenitude of ‘emptiness’ which is at the ‘ground’ (or ‘field’) of such negativity, but Tanabe’s ‘historicalization’ of the philosophy of nothingness bespeaks a markedly different approach to the problem and one that might go some way in answering our concerns regarding the ‘lack of history’ in the work of the Kyoto School thinkers (see e.g. Gilkey, 1989, p. 68; Heisig, 1986, p. xx; D.T. Suzuki, cited in Heisig, 1994, p. 20).
- [19] These, according to Tanabe (1986), imply a ‘non-discrimination of discrimination’ (*mufunbetsu no funbetsu*) that is in fact very far from the ‘logic of Zen’, which is best exemplified in the reverse formulation: the ‘discrimination of nondiscrimination’ (p. 56). In the former, the emphasis is on the epistemological primacy of nondiscrimination, and thus a logic of both/and, rather than neither/nor.

- [20] Tanabe's remarks are often remarkably prescient of Critical Buddhism: 'There is no question but that the in-itself tendency of Zen Buddhism runs the risk of falling prey to unmediated self-identity. For the fact is, the principle of 'Above all else, the Great Death!' often degenerates into a mere national slogan, and religious action fails to me mediated by the rational seriousness of ethics, lacking the mediation either of the powerlessness of the self that is awakened in the confrontation with ethics, or of the radical evil that is hidden in the depths of the self' (Tanabe, 1986, p. 171). Of course, to this the Critical Buddhist response might be: *Physician, heal thyself!*
- [21] 'Since absolute nothingness is always a transformation and a mediation, it can never exist immediately' (Tanabe, 1986, p. 82). Compare Aristotle's frustration with Plato's abstract 'forms' (*Ethics* I.vi) and also, within classical Indian thought, Rāmānuja's response to Śankara's non-dualism, in which, for Rāmānuja, the inseparability of human and God/Other-power is not conceived as absolute identity, but the latter retains hegemony, and the former must respond in absolute faith and love.
- [22] Elsewhere, Tanabe (1986) criticizes both the Zen sage and the Daoist hermit for advancing no further than 'aesthetic enjoyment . . . despite their best efforts to transcend the ethical, [they] can only end up in a state of nature that is in fact sub-ethical' (p. 171). Tanabe is very much concerned with upholding the Kierkegaardian 'paradoxical' (or oscillating) dialectic over the Hegelian synthesizing/sublating one. His critique of Nishida is also extended onto Schelling and Böhme, whose *Ungrund* differs from Nothingness is being (1) unmediated and (2) allied with a principle of nondifferentiation (pp. 141–143). Also see Faure (1991) for a critique of the 'rhetoric of immediacy' in Chan/Zen Buddhism.
- [23] Tanabe (1986) mentions his debt to Plato (whom he prefers to Plotinus), suggesting that he 'shall adhere to a standpoint of the self-consciousness of action-faith that follows Plato in proscribing aesthetic contemplation', even while criticizing many other aspects of Plato's work as insufficiently 'concrete' (p. 89). Also see Tanabe (1986, p. 264), where he associates aesthetic enjoyment with 'pleasure', hedonism and elitism.
- [24] The 'positing-awareness' ('beautiful') and 'dispositioning-shock' ('sublime') aspects of *aesthesis* find theoretical expression within the Japanese aesthetic tradition in the distinction between *sabi* and *wabi* (see Inada, 1997, p. 126). *Aesthesis* (Gk. *αισθησις*, a perceiving) denotes 'the perception of the external world by the senses'. The derivation 'aesthetic' was first understood as 'things perceptible by the senses, things material' but, by virtue of Baumgarten's appropriation in his *Aesthetica* (1750) the term came to imply matters of taste and beauty. This 'misuse' was protested by, among others, Kant, who insisted that aesthetics refer solely to 'the science which treats of the conditions of sensuous perception' (*Critique of Pure Reason* I.I.§1). However, Kant himself, in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), effectively collapsed both senses into one. Thus *aesthesis* came to signify *creative activity* (non-teleological, and non-cognitive) as well as a kind of *discriminating awareness* (of the perceptive, that is, material and corporeal sort). It is also well to note that one of the roots of *aesthesis* is *thesis/thetic* (*θετικ-ος*), which implies 'placement', or 'position', and derives from the Indo-European root *de-*, which gave birth to both 'theory' and 'do'. Thus *aes-thetic* activity involves a *dis-position* in the way that Tanabe's *meta-noesis* involves an *after-thinking*.
- [25] The character *gen* (pronounced *ma* when understood as an artistic/spiritual ideal) is a key term in Japanese aesthetics, signifying 'betweenness'. Compare Mead (1964, p. 299), on the nature of aesthetic/creative experience, which 'belongs to coordinated efforts of man, when the role of the other in the production is aroused in each worker at the common task, when the sense of team play, *esprit de corps*, inspires interrelated activities'.
- [26] Besides the direct influence of Natsume Sōseki, other currents of thinking about aesthetics in Japan in the early 20th century no doubt had an effect on Watsuji's thinking. One important and influential thinker was Kuki Shuzo (1888–1941), who studied with Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Bergson, and whose best known work *Iki no kōzō*

(*The Structure of Edo Aesthetic Style*, 1930), focused on the sense of style and deportment prevalent, especially among the younger generation, in the late Tokugawa and early Meiji eras (see Kuki, 1997). This style (*iki*) was characterized by a 'playful bravado' which expressed the growing autonomy of a mercantile and artisanal class vs the asceticism and martialism of the samurai bureaucracy (Pincus, 1991, p. 148). Kuki upholds *iki* style as an essentially Japanese creation—balancing *bitai* (erotic allure), *ikuji* (fearless pride) and *akirame* ('Buddhist' resignation)—and one that must be used as a bulwark against Western cultural imperialism. In short, the secret of *iki* style is 'to continuously decrease the distance [between oneself and another/object] while never allowing that distance to be completely annihilated' (p. 147).

- [27] The 'fictiveness of sociability' has not gone unnoticed in Japanese philosophy. Fukuzawa borrows this aspect of Simmelian theory, thereby, in the words of Moriyama, 'pushing the logic of humanism to its furthest extreme' (cited in Koschmann, 1996, p. 186). Also see Nishitani (1990, pp. 252–255, 258–259), on 'play'.
- [28] Glyn Richards (1978), citing Streng's (1967) interpretation of Nāgārjuna, asks whether it might be that 'the meaning of *sūnyāta* ultimately has to be sought in its use in a form of life rather than in any attempt to locate an objective referent or counterpart?' (p. 260) It seems clear to me that this is indeed so.
- [29] 'The religioaesthetic principle of *ma* can be translated not only as betweenness and relatedness, but also as interval, gap, blank, pause, opening, void and a variety of other things indicating the ethereal beauty which is manifested by the empty space and/or time "in between" all persons and events' (Odin, 1992, p. 482). Watsuji adds: 'This is the ecstasy of art and at the same time an ecstasy expressive of what is called "self-and-other/not-two" (*jita funi*). Thus it is a religious ecstasy of the great emptiness' (cited in LaFleur, 1978, p. 249).

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