



Proposal

The Aesthetic Subject and Watsuji Tetsurō

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Abstract

Aesthetic values cannot be understood as either “subjective” or “objective” in the traditional sense, since neither perspective properly captures the way in which aesthetic value is both intimately personal and yet an focus of productive conversation. To understand the question better, we must reexamine our concept of what the subject and object are. To do so, I present the novel philosophical anthropology of WATSUJI Tetsurō and work through its implications for the outstanding questions of aesthetics. According to his anthropology, since our authentic selves are relationally constituted, it is possible for aesthetic judgment to be both “subjective” and importantly related to those of others in a community, yet differ regionally in response to environmental conditions. With this background in place, it is clear how aesthetic experience can be a double negation whereby we first distance the self from the object through disinterestedness and then negate that negation by bringing the subject and object together again in ecstasy, yet still communicable within and beyond communities of taste.

Thesis

Aesthetic judgment is the expression of an experience of disinterested psychic distancing and ecstatic union made possible as a subjective expression of a community’s way of life because the self is, as WATSUJI Tetsurō described, constituted by dynamic relationality.

Resources and literature review

The primary source for my dissertation will be the *Complete Works of Watsuji Tetsurō* (和辻哲郎全集 *Watsuji Tetsurō Zenshū* or WTZ) particularly volumes 1 (*A Study of Nietzsche*, ニーチェ研究 *Niiche Kenkyū*), 8 (*Climate and Culture*, 風土 *Fūdo*), 9 (*The Study of Ethics as the Study of Humanity*, 人間の学としての倫理学 *Ningen no Gaku toshite no Rinrigaku*), 10 (*The Study of Ethics A*, 倫理学上 *Rinrigaku Jo*), 11 (*The Study of Ethics B*, 倫理学下 *Rinrigaku Ka*), and 17 (*Revival of the Idols*, 偶像再興 *Gūzō Saikō*; *Mask and Persona*, 面とペルソナ *Men to Perusona*; *The National Character of America*, アメリカの国民性 *Amerika no Kokuminsei*). I will also refer to existing English translations of some of these works where convenient. My dissertation will draw on relatively neglected work from the Watsuji’s early and

middle periods in order to provided a better filled out picture of the influences that motivated his later writings and the context in which his claims ought to be understood. I have already translated into English several essays of Watsuji's that were previously available only in Japanese ("Mask and Persona," "Preface to *Revival of the Idols*," "The Psychology of Idol Worship," "Turning Point"), and I intend to continue offer new translations as appropriate.

Of these works, *A Study of Nietzsche* is the earliest and has been well explored by David Gordon's doctoral thesis and partial translation. *Revival of the Idols* is next and marks Watsuji's initial turn toward a more explicitly communitarian view of human nature as well as displaying his growing appreciation for Japanese culture. The later *Climate and Culture* shows the further development of Watsuji's cross-cultural insights following a trip to Europe. In it, Watsuji responds to the metaphysical studies of Heidegger and the cultural studies of Herder. *Mask and Persona* shows the wider application of Watsuji's mature philosophy to a range of cultural endeavors. Finally, in his later ethical writings, he creates a complete picture of his approach to the human being as both communal and individual as well as its implications for philosophy.

Throughout his career, Watsuji shows an acute awareness of the importance of aesthetic expression in cultural and philosophical self-understanding. Indeed, he often plays the role of cultural historian as much as he does that of philosopher, but this tendency must be seen in its proper context. For Watsuji, to speak of "humanity" in the abstract can be highly misleading, and one is often most likely to mistake particular culturally specific traits for human universals—a failing which he often observed in European philosophical anthropology. Accordingly, we can only create a portrait of the universal aspects of human nature by appealing to a detailed portrait of cultural specifics, not by attempting to bleach all detail from our own self-understanding.

In considering criticisms of Watsuji, my main opponent will be Naoki Sakai's *Translation and Subjectivity* and similar Leftist approaches to Watsuji's work. My goal is to show that while they are right about the existence of an unfortunate connection between

Watsuji and wartime fascism, they are wrong to think that this connection is a fundamental aspect of Watsuji's work. Rather, I will show that in many important respects, it departs from the core implications of his ethical and aesthetic insights.

My discussion of Kant's theory of aesthetics will draw primarily on his *Critique of Judgment*, and my discussion of Plato's aesthetics will limit itself mostly to its expression in the *Republic* and the *Symposium*. When considering Watsuji's *Study of Nietzsche* I will focus on Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*. Since my primary purpose in discussing these works is to construct a suitable contrast for a Watsujian theory of aesthetics, I will attempt to stay out of the secondary literature disputes as much as practically possible.

While the connection between the work of WATSUJI Tetsurō and aesthetics has been remarked upon by some scholars (LaFleur, Nara, Shields), little concrete study has been made of it. I aim to correct this omission by showing how Watsuji's approach brings to aesthetics a neat solution to the pressing problem of connecting the subjective and objective aspects of aesthetic judgment and the possibility of cross-cultural comparison by showing the deeper structure which must underlie our aesthetics—a dynamic structure of both distancing and ecstasy.

One persistent criticism of Watsuji in the secondary literature is that he places the state at the pinnacle of his ethical system and seemingly subordinates even religion to it. While I do not wish to make these criticisms the center of my dissertation, at least some mention must be made of their importance. For example, in correspondence with Robert Carter recorded in *Rinrigaku: Watsuji Tetsurō's Ethics in Japan*, YUASA Yasuo remarks,

In Watsuji's mind, religion was nothing more than a single aspect of ethnic culture. (312)

and

What troubles me is the manner in which the true nature or essence of religion is included within the general category of culture and positioned as something subordinate to the state. (315)

While accepting the basic appropriateness of these remarks, I argue that this central location for the state in Watsuji's philosophy can only be understood if we see it in light

of his lifelong preoccupation with tracing the origin of national aesthetics to the way of life embodied by its people. Unfortunately, Watsuji followed too many of his era in conflating ways of life for groups of people with a single national ethnic, linguistic, and cultural way of life. Drawing out the theme of ways of life in Watsuji's work gives us a framework within which to criticize the excesses of his wartime writings by correctly centering our investigation on the way of life of ordinary people rather than formal mechanisms of state power. From this perspective, we see that the aim of his cultural anthropology was to capture the aesthetics of various times and places as a means of hermeneutically investigating how the life of people comes to form a local ethic that expresses the deeper structure of universal ethics.

The literature contains a full range of interpretations of the political significance of Watsuji's work from criticism of his work as incipiently fascist (seen in Sakai and echoed in Brivio, Harootunian, and Koschmann) to defense of his work as a coded critique of fascism (LaFleur) to criticism of his work as insufficiently compelling to criticize the contemporary threat of Islamic terrorism (Dilworth). These three interpretations of Watsuji may be seen as the Leftist/Marxist critical interpretation, the Liberal/Communitarian apologetic interpretation, and the Liberal/Neoconservative critical interpretation. Each of these interpretations contains something of the truth but paints only a partial picture. Sakai is correct that Watsuji's writings during the war period were overly supportive of the imperial government and that his work as a whole was tinged with racist thinking but he is wrong to read his early work as supporting the far right and he neglects the mitigating factor of personal jeopardy in explaining Watsuji's apparent reluctance to issue sharper criticisms of the far right at the time when it was most vital to do so. LaFleur is correct in trying to read Watsuji's motivations charitably, but at times this can lead him to find critiques of the wartime government improbable concealed in what can otherwise be reasonably construed as propagandistic support of the imperial project. Dilworth rightly notes Watsuji consciously tried to position himself between the ultra-nationalists and Marxists but goes too far in reading

Watsuji as engaged merely in an anthropological, historical, and ethnocentric investigation of the “Japanese Spirit” and not a philosophical, hermeneutic, and universal project of investigating the structure of the human being. Watsuji always focused on concrete cultural structures in his writings, but this does not mean that he was merely an anthropologist or cultural historian. His aim in examining the concrete was always to reveal the abstract structure of which it was an expression.

Where my contribution differs from existing scholarship is that I hope to bring greater recognition to the importance of Watsuji’s work to contemporary aesthetics. Other scholars have recognized the role of aesthetics in the development of Watsuji’s early work but none have explored the implications of that work for aesthetics as a whole. I hope to show that, properly understood, his work allows us to understand the role of subjectivity and objectivity in aesthetic experience, the way that ethical and aesthetic values emerge from the lived experience of a culture as an expression of the invariant structure of humanity, the importance of art as an expression of the between, and the structure of aesthetic experience as distancing followed by ecstatic union.

Chapter 1. The Problem of Aesthetic Judgment

Problem of subjectivity and objectivity in aesthetic judgment

One central problem in aesthetics is determining whether aesthetic judgment is formed on a subjective or objective basis. Suppose that aesthetic judgment is completely subjective, such that statements of the form “That is beautiful” may be interpreted without loss as meaning “I find that to be beautiful.” In that case, no discussion about whether or not something is beautiful ought to arise, since my saying “That is beautiful” and your saying “That is not beautiful” are no more contradictory than my saying “I like licorice” and your saying “I do not like licorice.” To have a basis for disagreement, individual feeling is insufficient. There needs to be some common object of our disagreement. I believe that object is one way and you believe it is another way. Through dialogue, we are able to resolve our disagreements and come to a mutual understanding of the object.

CHAPTER 1. THE PROBLEM OF AESTHETIC JUDGMENT

However, to posit that aesthetic judgment is completely objective also seems to be problematic. First, despite no shortage of attempts, no one has been able to definitively specify the formal criteria of many of aesthetic predicates. While there have been many attempts to do so, none has gained consensus. This might not be so strange in itself, but at the same time, individuals have no hesitance about expressing their personal feeling about whether a work does or does not exhibit particular aesthetic predicates in some aesthetic judgment. We might attribute this social phenomenon to widespread ignorance or willingness to give an opinion without first obtaining a solid basis for rendering judgments, but we also have the experience of saying things like, "I understand why you think X is beautiful, but it just doesn't 'work' for me." In other words, we appeal to our feelings as individuals when discussing aesthetics though we just saw that individual feeling is an insufficient basis for discussion.

If we approach taste as a wholly subjective or individualistic matter, at least two problems result. First, without any common object shared by different participants in a discussion, it is not possible for any mutual discussion of aesthetics to take place. This is contradicted by our experience, in which aesthetics is fruitfully discussed, at least sometimes. Second, in the limit, there will be no ability for one to cultivate one's aesthetic judgment, since there will be nothing outside of a momentary, subjective experience to appeal to in the cultivation of one's taste.

If, on the other hand, we take taste to be a matter of wholly objective or collectivistic aesthetic canons, we also encounter at least two problems. First, that no canon has been universally accepted (though there are of course many historically and regionally specific canons of taste). This may be a merely epistemological difficulty on our part or some other sort of ordinary failing in our pursuit of aesthetic objectivity, but such a difficulty points to a second problem, which is that a wholly objective canon will be formally disconnected from the experience of personal assent or appreciation. It seems impossible that something could be objectively beautiful yet disagreeable to all possible perceivers

of the object. However without some link from objective beauty to the subject's judgment of agreeability, such a possibility cannot be ruled out.

To shed light on this discussion of aesthetic judgment, let us take simple judgments like, "This apple is red" or "The table is square." Are these judgments objective or subjective? There are at least six ways to interpret the question:

1. We might mean by "this apple is red" or "this table is square" that it *seems* that way to me right now. I am having a reddish experience of the apple or a squarish experience of the table.

2. Suppose that one is looking a quadrangular table from such an angle that it *appears* as a square to one's vision center. Under ordinary conditions, one would nevertheless perceive it aspectively as quadrangular, since the human vision centers naturally correct for angles of perspective and cause us to experience a square table *as* square even if seen from an angle that makes it seem non-square, and vice versa to see a non-square table as non-square even if it happens to form a square shape from one's perspective. Similarly, a green apple might appear as reddish under a reddish light, but one's vision will naturally correct for the apparent color of the apple so that it continues to be seen as green while appearing red.¹ (Normally, only artists are trained to notice the difference between how things seem aspectively and how they appear non-aspectively, but it can be noticed without any particular training.)

3. We might mean that the apple or table will seem red or square to any *suitable spectator*—that is, any time a "normal" human being with ordinary vision, stands a normal distance away under normal lighting conditions, etc., etc. that person will see these things as seeming red or square.

4. We might mean by red having a measurable *capacity* to reflect light of approximately 630 to 740 nanometers in wavelength when exposed to light of the ordinary spectrum at ordinary intensities at ordinary temperatures, etc. (An apple may still be red

¹See, for example, Adelson's checkerboard illusion in which two squares of the checker look like different colors though they are actually the same shade of gray: <http://web.mit.edu/persci/people/adelson/checkershadow_illusion.html>.

in a dark room.) We might mean by square having the tendency to be found square when measured by a normal observer under normal conditions.

5. We might mean by red *currently* emitting light of approximately 630 to 740 nanometers in wavelength or by square currently having an angle of ninety degrees at each of its four corners and sides of equal length, as measurable by some idealized observer.

6. The same meaning as four or five but *without regard* for whether anyone will or could experience these facts.

These six interpretations have generally been arranged from those having more subjective involvement to those that are more objective, yet each is an equally acceptable as an interpretation of the natural language judgments in question. When considering whether aesthetic judgments are “subjective” or “objective,” it will be correspondingly difficult to answer in a univocal fashion. Whether aesthetic judgment is regarded as subjective or objective overall will depend in part on how we define those terms. However it seems clear that at least some degree of subjective involvement is prerequisite for our ordinary experience of aesthetic judgments, hence interpretation six can be ruled out. Aesthetic judgment must be connected to at least some possibility of experience. The lack of consensus about the formal definitions of many aesthetic predicates also makes it unlikely that something like interpretations four or five might be widely adopted. (The claim that beauty is a certain arrangement of forms, for example.) On the other hand, if debate about aesthetic judgments is productive (and it appears to be), we must reject interpretations one for being too personal to be the basis for productive discussion of aesthetics. Interpretation two on the other hand can be rejected for emphasizing a part of our perception that goes unnoticed under ordinary conditions. In that case, only interpretation three remains as a viable analogy for aesthetic judgment. Under this interpretation, the aesthetic judgment “This rose is beautiful” will mean something like the rose would seem beautiful to a suitable spectator.² Whether such a

². About the inaptness of the word “spectator” to describe the suitable subject of aesthetic judgment, see chapter four.

judgment should be classified as subjective or objective will turn on what we take to be its most relevant feature. If we say that what makes the suitable spectator suitable is her conformity to some sort of universal standard, then we will classify the judgment as objective, since the object's ability to be seen as having the relevant aspect is logically prior to the suitability of the subject. On the other hand, if we emphasize that the suitability of the spectator is cultivated for a particular situation, then we will classify the judgment as subjective, since it is the structure of the subject which allowed the object to be seen in a particular way. In either case, our choice of nomenclature will be heavily dependent on our view of the nature of the human subject and the world around. As such, no firm answer to the question of whether aesthetic judgment is subjective or objective can be given until we have better described the subject, the object, and the division between them (if there is any).

Plato and the representationalist tradition

Seen historically, Plato's theory of beauty can be taken as an exemplary of the objectivist approach to aesthetic judgment. For Plato, the beauty of an object is related to how well it participates in the form of beauty, not to the subjective capacity of perceivers to recognize this beauty. In a certain sense, Plato's theory of beauty is an anti-"aesthetic" theory, since he rejects *aisthesis* (neutral perception) as a means of grasping Beauty itself. Beautiful objects are themselves only means by which we recollect the form of Beauty, which towers over all particulars in its abstract iridescence. While it is true that in some cases not all subjects will be suitable to grasp the beauty of a particular object, it is nevertheless the object's relationship to Beauty which is determinative of its beauty. Though Plato has much to say about how a subject may become more suitable to grasp the forms, it is that relationship of the form and the object which is logically prior to the suitability or unsuitability of particular subjects.

Exposition and critique of Kant's universal subjective

Having coined our modern usage of the terms "objective" and "subjective," Kant was aware of the difficulties of classifying aesthetic judgments. He attempted to resolve

these difficulties in his *Critique of Judgment* by arguing that judgments of the beautiful and sublime have a universal but merely subjective validity. Kant claims that such judgments are ultimately subjective because they are based on indeterminate concepts and not truth-apt. Since they lack determined boundaries, the presentation of these concepts will inevitably vary from subject to subject, individual to individual. Nothing can be said about the truth of such judgments in general, since absent any objectivity, there is no truth to be had. On the other hand, they are universals, since we are able to appreciate them together as rational beings via our *sensus communis* and over the course of historical time we do seem to see some convergences in aesthetic judgments, such that discussion of them is not entirely unfruitful.

The key insight of Kant's "Copernican Revolution" in thinking about the relationship between our experiences and the world is that he creates a three tiered system with subjective, objective, and noumenal levels. On the subjective level are those judgments which are particular to the individual and incommunicable. On the noumenal level are the things in themselves as they are apart from all possible experience of them. What allows for communication is the objective level at which individual reasoners apply Universal Reason in order to grasp the ideal construction of the object. For example, suppose I see a chair. My subjective experience of the chair is private, and the thing in itself that has caused me to have that experience is unknowable, but I am able to communicate to you about the chair because I know that since we are both rational beings, we share the same universal Reason, which will construct the same objects of possible experience for either of us. The better I can describe the possible experiences that any rational being could have with the chair, the better I have described it as an object. In other words, conformity to pure reason is what defines the suitability of a subject to make a particular judgment.

Beyond the atomic subject

The difficulty with Kant's approach is that it begins with the assumption of a basic separation of persons into atomic individuals and only then tries to find a way to unite

the disparate experience of those different individuals into the experience of a single, unified world. For Kant, the key force that unifies the experience of disparate individuals is Reason in its theoretical, practical, and aesthetic forms. Similarly, Plato's theory works backwards from universal forms to the isolated souls that recollect them. In both cases, the picture of aesthetic judgment as subjective or objective is intimately tied to an overall view of the subject and object as dichotomously separated. However, if we overturn the assumption of the inviolate atomicity of the human being then we will be presented with a radically new way to understand the nature of aesthetic experience, which in turn will better clarify the position of aesthetic judgment. We find one such anthropology of the human being as fundamentally relational in the work of WATSUJI Tetsurō, and through it I will answer the following questions in aesthetics:

- What is distinctive about aesthetic experience as opposed to ordinary experience? Is aesthetic judgment subjective or objective? Is there a difference between performance art and the plastic arts? (Chapter 3)
- How is aesthetic agreement possible? Is there such a thing as compulsion in aesthetic judgment? Is aesthetic experience active (agentive) or passive (observed)? (Chapter 4)
- Why are there regional variations in aesthetics? Is there such a thing as progress in aesthetics? What is genius? Is aesthetics independent or is it subordinate to other concerns? Why are there persistent aesthetic disagreements? (Chapter 5)
- Is there any link between beauty and (moral) goodness? How does aesthetics relate to religion? (Chapter 6)

But before we answer these questions, we must first address questions about the nature of the human being and its method of study (Chapter 2).

Chapter 2. Watsuji's Anthropology and Method

Human existence as double negation of individual and society

The philosophy of WATSUJI Tetsurō is useful in shedding light on the question of subjectivity and objectivity because he spent his career exploring and explaining a new philosophical anthropology in which the relationality of the person was made fundamental. Furthermore, for Watsuji ethics is first philosophy. That is, we can never construct a lasting metaphysics or epistemology so long as we have not yet clarified

the practical grounds that form the space in which we can productively debate about these topics. Naturally, the same holds of debate about aesthetics. If our understanding of aesthetics rests in some sense on the interpretation that ideal observer would have a certain experience under certain circumstances, it will be impossible to describe aesthetics without describing what makes certain subjects better positioned to make aesthetic judgments than others and the comparison of subjects is inevitably a matter of ethics. But how is the study of ethics possible? Watsuji answers that ethics already forms the structure of our lives as human beings, so the study of ethics begins as the study of the human being, and this study will give us the basis on which can form our inquiries into metaphysics, epistemology, aesthetics, etc.

When we study the human being, we find something curious. Although we consider ourselves individuals, we are also deeply social animals. Even a recluse or a Robinson Crusoe had to have been a member of some society at one time in the past in order to develop into a self-sufficient individual adult; unlike other species, human infants are not self-sufficient. Watsuji draws on such thinking in his *Ethics*:

if a human being is, basically speaking, a social animal, then social relationships cannot be separated from her. It must be that a human being is capable of being an individual and at the same time also a member of a society. (14)³

In other words, we cannot think of human beings as first isolated individuals who then somehow become entangled in social relationships. On the other hand, we should not think of society as a kind of super-organism of which the individual is a mere part. Instead we must think of these relationships as having equal priority to our individuality. Our relationships are just as authentic a part of us as our individuality and vice versa. This shows a basic dipolarity of the human being as both individual and collective. In Japanese, the English word “human being” is translated as *ningen* 人間. It is written with two characters. The first, *nin* 人, can also be read as *hito* and means another person. The second, *gen* 間, can also be read as *aida*, *ma*, or *ken* and means a spatial or temporal

³. Translations of *Ethics* throughout from Watsuji Tetsurō's *Rinrigaku: Ethics in Japan*. Tr. Robert Carter and YAMAMOTO Seisaku. SUNY Press, 1996.

interval. The term *ningen* gained currency in the Japanese language as a Buddhist term meaning the “human realm” as distinct from the other realms of rebirth, such as the animal world or the various hells and heavens.⁴ Watsuji finds it telling that over time this term could change in its meaning from a realm to humans collectively to humans individually. One might think that this is merely an artifact of the fact that neither Japanese nor Chinese grammatically require a distinction between singular and plural, but according to Watsuji, its significance is much greater. For him, the multiple usages of *ningen* are a linguistic expression of an underlying truth about humankind as both particular (人) and relational (間). We are both discrete (人) and continuous (間). Such a usage could not have gained currency in the Japanese language if it did not reflect something of the truth about the human condition, namely that:

Individual persons do not subsist in themselves. [...] The whole itself also cannot subsist in itself. [...] If this is so, then both individuals and the whole subsist not in themselves, but only in the relationship of each with the other. (101)

Since neither individuals nor social wholes can exist independently, this means that they are both “empty” in the Buddhist sense of lacking independent substantiality and must derive from a more fundamental relationality. Watsuji explains that only by putting this “betweenness” (*aidagara* 間柄) of person and person first ontological can we solve the nagging problem of subject and object relations. In his ethics, the fundamental law of humanity (his replacement for Kant’s categorical imperative) is that individuals must negate the totality to which they belong in order to individuate themselves but they must negate that negation in order to return to the totality. He writes,

Totality is said to arise in the negation of individuality, but it is not able to appear in through the negation of the individual alone. Individuals are the many, and the totality as community existence arises at the point where these many individuals become one by forsaking their individuality. But in any totality whatsoever, individuality is not extinguished without residue. As soon as an individual is negated, it negates the totality so as to become an individual once more.[...] Totality subsists only in this movement. (23)

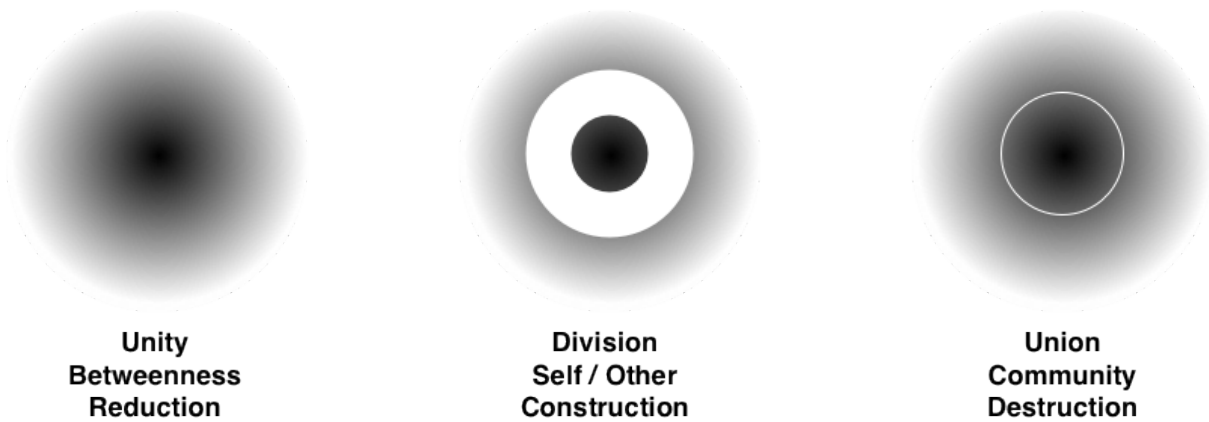
⁴The characters 人間 seem to have first come into use together during the Warring States or Han Dynasty period of Chinese history, where they meant something like “being among others in society.” Dating texts from that period can be fraught with controversy, so it is difficult to assign priority of usage, but it can be found in *Zhuangzi*, *Leizi*, *Shuo Yuan*, *Guanzi*, etc.

In other words, human existence is fundamentally a dynamic process in which we are never frozen into a static existence as self-defined individuals or socially constructed roles. When we act, we act in conformance to society or in opposition to society and through acting, we redefine ourselves and the roles society has for us. Neither totality nor individuality has substantial existence alone, but both come into being through dynamic opposition. For this reason, they can be said to be empty.

When we look back at the problem of subject-object relations in aesthetic experience with Watsuji's insights in mind, we see that the question of whether the object is beautiful or it is the subject who sees the object as beautiful assumes a separation of subject and object that may not correspond to reality. Watsuji has told us that the line between self and other is only indistinct. Might the same also be true of the line between subject and object? That is, if both the subject and object are artifacts of a more primordial betweenness, then any line drawn with the subject on one side and the object on the other will, in its being drawn, act to determine some of the qualities of the subject and object. The implications of this process will be explored in greater depth in the next chapter.

Cleavages in everyday existence

The pattern of double negation in human existence can be subsumed under a more general pattern of hermeneutic cleavage: first there is an undifferentiated whole, then its division, and finally the reunion of the parts without a reversion to the origin. Watsuji calls this a realization of original unity "through the correlation of unity/division/union [*tōitsu/bunri/ketsugo* 統一・分離・結合]" (37). Because this pattern underlies human existence, the only way to come to understand the structure of the human being—and hence the possible grounds of aesthetics—is through "the hermeneutic method of reduction/construction/destruction [*kangen/kōsei/hakai* 還元・構成・破壊]" (45). We reduce when we return to the moment of undivided unity in everyday experience. We construct when through action we differentiate through action a focus out of the field that surrounds it. Finally, we destroy or deconstruct when we reintegrate the focus into the field and recognize their union.

**Figure 1.**

As illustrated by figure one, unity/division/union and reduction/construction/destruction are parallel to the pattern of double negation at work in human existence. As human beings, we come from a place of betweenness where there are no defined boundaries between self and other. There is a difference between our core and those around us (as symbolized by the gradient from black to white), but this difference is a vague one with no bright line of discontinuity, only opposing poles. This is the first phase, unity. Then in negation we carve out a space between our self and our surroundings. We oppose those around us and so define ourselves. We separate the content from its context, the focus from its field. This is the second phase, division. In the third phase, we bring self and other together in a union to form a community. As individuals, we reconcile ourselves to society. Notice, however, that the marks of cleavage remain even after this reunion. After this, the cycle continues again from unity as we continually define and redefine through action our relations with others and objects.

Because of this, our investigation of aesthetics must begin with a “reduction” (*kangen* 還元, a return to the original unity) in which we grasp everyday experience as expressions of our existence. As Watsuji says,

there is no mine so rich as that which is called the *everyday experience* of human beings. Walking along the street we can find various goods on display shelves. Common sense already has some knowledge of how to classify, how to use, and why to buy them. In addition, there are none of these goods that does not give expression to [human existence] in one way or another. [...] In other words, as expressions, what we call the *things of daily life* all offer a passage to [human existence].

Therefore, we are able to take our departure from “facts,” taken in the most naïve and ordinary sense of the word. (39)

To be sure, should we merely observe the patterns of everyday existence without going any deeper, then aesthetics would be the mere study of public opinion—this kind of art is popular, this kind of is unpopular, some people like this, others do not, and so forth. We go beyond merely sociologically describing cultural patterns in aesthetics when we start to see how everyday experiences are expressions of a deeper structure of humanity and grasp that structure. Reduction is crucial to the understanding, but since human existence is a dynamic interplay between individuality and sociality, we cannot get a complete grasp of human existence through reductive reflection alone. We cannot, so to speak, understand aesthetics only from the armchair. A purely theoretical aesthetics would rapidly become disconnected from life as it is. We must also live these expressions constructively while detaching ourselves from them if they are to go beyond static understanding into dynamic realization in space and time. Finally, through this preparation we are able to deconstruct our experiences and grasp the structure of the union in human existence.

Chapter 3. Aesthetic Experience and the Meeting Point of Feeling **Aesthetic experience as distance and dissolution**

Having understood the basics of Watsuji’s anthropology and hermeneutic method, we are now equipped to begin to ask what an aesthetic experience is. Although Watsuji focuses on describing the ethical moment as a “double negation” where we negate the unity of human existence through individualism then negate that negation through a return to the totality but now with the marks of cleavage, I will argue that we can extend that description beyond ethics to a description of aesthetic experience as a double negation. In the first negation, we create a psychic distance between the self and object and achieve a state that Kant calls “disinterestedness.” If the process stopped there, this would leave us cold and aloof from the world and would not constitute an aesthetic experience. However, this individuating negation is a necessary precondition of the double negation in which we negate this negation and begin to dissolve the distance

between the self and object through “intoxication” or “ecstasy.” In the ecstatic aesthetic moment, we “lose ourselves” in the beauty of the object. It is not that in this moment we truly cease to exist, but we do through aesthetic experience come into union with the object and so grasp the prior unity which made the union possible. If this union is properly crafted, we find ourselves at meeting point with the feeling of the creator of the experience. Though my feelings and the feelings of the creator can be distinguished, in the aesthetic experience, they meet in the ecstasy of the moment.

It must be emphasized that this moment of intoxicated dissolution cannot stand on its own either. Just as we would not be able to have aesthetic experience if we remained frozen in disinterest, so we could not have an aesthetic experience if we dissolved all boundaries between the self and object. In order to have an aesthetic experience, there must be a subject and object which come into contact with one another, hence the complete aesthetic dissolution of the self would result in the loss of the possibility of the aesthetic. The aesthetic moment is a kind of approaching of the limit, whereby we return to the primordial unity of the subject and object without quite erasing the distinction between them. The subject and object experience union without uniting and thereby eliminating all difference between one another. The return to primordial unity is always a return with difference. By analogy, suppose we cleave apart a rock into two fragments, then cleave together those two parts. In doing so, we have returned the fragments to their origin but with a difference. The line of fissure between the two fragments will remain even as they reconstitute a single whole. The line of fissure shows the accumulation of history by the rock, even as its outer appearance remains the same. So too, the subject and object in union retain a difference from their original state even as they reclaim their former unity.

Subjectivity and objectivity in aesthetic judgment

If now we return to the question of subjectivity or objectivity of aesthetic judgment, we see why both answers were unsatisfying. Locating the aesthetic in either the subject or object will be unsatisfying because the aesthetic moment cannot be the product of

either one singly. Whether we describe it as a neutral subject receiving the beautiful object or the aesthetically-minded subject projecting feelings beauty onto a neutral object, we have separated the subject and object in a way that is unreflective of aesthetic experience. At the same time, we cannot completely abolish the difference between the subject and object, since to do so would preclude the possibility of the aesthetic moment. Rather, we must preserve aesthetic experience as a possibility that arises out of the prior unity of subject and object and expresses itself as their union in cleavage.

Aesthetic judgment is an expression of aesthetic experience as a judgment, so it can only be made after the division of a subject from an object, but this division does not reflect the primordial nature of the subject and object, which are originally united. Nevertheless, we may characterize aesthetic judgment as “subjective” in the sense that the nature of the subject determines the nature of the aesthetic experience that is possible. The division and union that are constitutive of aesthetic experience are particular to a subject. However, unlike Kantian aesthetics, we need not appeal to a universal rational subject to bring communicability to our subjective aesthetic judgments, since for Watsuji, the subject is not isolated, but fundamentally relational and interconnected. As such, although aesthetic experience is the experience of particular subjects, it is not therefore a private experience. Where particular subjects “overlap,” even their otherwise personal judgments can be shared. The nature of the self as relational means that aesthetic experience can be deeply subjective but nevertheless communicable to other persons.

The relation of subject-object as reflective of the relation of self-other

In describing the phenomenology of cleavage, we must also be clear to distinguish the union of the subject and *object* from the union of the self and *other*. The first is, strictly speaking, an aesthetic movement, and the second is an ethical movement. In practice, however, these two movements cannot be cleanly separated, but we find that the ethical movement is always prior to the aesthetic movement and must exist beforehand in order to make the aesthetic movement possible. On the other hand, the aesthetic movement, while posterior to the ethical movement, creates new possibilities for future ethical

moments to explore and can lead to radical shifts in how the ethical movement is actualized. As Watsuji writes, “a flower is said to be beautiful, but that it ‘is beautiful’ is based upon a specific manner of existence of a human being who finds it beautiful” (133). As a result, we find that we have to treat the two movements as interrelated, since the one is so often the ground of the other. The creation of psychic distance and its joining in intoxication is ultimately just one movement within the larger sphere of human existence, hence we must separately investigate its normative import (chapter 4), its historical milieu (chapter 5), and its relationship to religion (chapter 6) in order to fully grasp its significance.

The difference between self-other union and subject-object union is also responsible for a difference between the performing arts and non-performing arts. In the plastic arts, one relates to some object and through that object one grasps seemingly indirectly the person responsible for the creation of the object. In the performing arts, the object to be grasped is in a certain sense the creator of the object. (This ignores for a moment the difference between the players and the actors in theater, for example, but ultimately if the players are true to the work, there will be no real difference.) In the ultimate view, however, the difference between the two kinds of art is only slight, for a great artist of the plastic arts is able to express her subjectivity in such a way as to make transparent to the viewer the subjective milieu which gave rise to the object. Nevertheless, because of this slight difference, it will be easier to begin a concrete exploration of aesthetic experience by looking at the performing arts.

Bringing forth the between in theater

With this understanding of the aesthetic experience and judgment in mind, it is clear that the role of a philosopher-historian of art and culture like Watsuji is to categorize those methods which evolve historically and regionally by which the subject and object are first distanced from one another and second ecstatically united in order to grasp more precisely the unity which lies underneath them. These processes of subject-object interaction will in turn be driven by the self-other relations that make up the core of the

subject. When we examine closely the phenomena of everyday experience we begin to find numerous examples in which the supposedly individual and atomic self seems to merge with others in aesthetic experience as a part of the aesthetic grasping of the object. This process may be called “the meeting point of feeling.” These are moments in which the ego of the individual can be felt melting into the crowd as the crowd grasps the world before it. We experience such moments when we watch our home team score a crucial goal before the end of the game or when take part in any number of civic and religious functions from a Fourth of July parade to a Christian Eucharist service. The standpoint of traditional anthropology is to try to explain these events as deriving from individual drives and desires or the group’s need for unity and survival, but such explanations fail to connect the level of individual experience to the group imperative. But if the subject is something that is fundamentally connected to others then shared aesthetic feeling is possible, and shared aesthetic judgment is comprehensible.

To bring focus to this discussion, let us examine an example to which Watsuji returned several times throughout his career, that of theater. Greek tragedy and Japanese Noh are closely related aesthetic forms that exhibit very clearly the pattern of psychic distancing and reintegration I described. In *A Study of Nietzsche* (1913) Watsuji follows Nietzsche’s lead in describing the Dionysian intoxication of the audience of Greek tragedy,

The inner life of the Dionysian audience enjoys the *same* intoxication as that of the people who personally dance and sing; instead of expressing this joy with their entire bodies, however, they do so through the satyrs on the stage. There are no individuals there; the ego disappears and everyone melts into the root of nature. Accordingly, the distinction between the choral round dancers and the spectators exists solely as a fact of cognition and is by no means something that restricts inward fact. (636–7)⁵

Here Watsuji is not only relaying Nietzsche’s views but also advancing his own interpretation of the meaning of the drama. For Nietzsche, there were two aspects of tragedy, the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The Greek god Apollo was associated with the sun,

⁵.Translations of *A Study of Nietzsche* from David B. Gordon. *Self-Overcoming as the Overcoming of Modernity: Watsuji Tetsurō’s “A Study of Nietzsche” (1913) and Its Place in the Development of His Thought*. Doctoral thesis, University of Hawaii (1997).

beauty, and rationality, whereas Dionysus was the mad god of the festival. Nietzsche emphasized that both the Apollonian and Dionysian aspects of the tragedy were essential to its creative tension, but he tended to stress the Dionysian as an antidote to what he took to be a one-sided Apollonian German culture. Both the Apollonian and Dionysian aspects of the drama ultimately served to conceal the fundamental truth of the unsatisfactoriness of reality, but through different methods. The Apollonian concealed the inherent pathos of reality in semblances of dreams, but Dionysian does so through intoxication. Where the Apollonian emphasizes the importance of individuality (dreams are uniquely private), in the Dionysian the individual is lost to the frenzy of the crowd. Notice also that in this passage, the dissolution described is not merely a dissolution of subject and object, but primarily a dissolution of the bounds of individuality for the dancers and spectators. The artistry of the dancers reveals itself to the audience as the difference between audience and artist begins to weaken. From the perspective of the later Watsuji, this means that the aesthetic moment of appreciation for the dance cannot be grasped apart from the ethical moment of solidarity between the dancers and the spectators. As Watsuji reads Nietzsche, in such events the flow of life becomes powerfully concentrated, such that the will to power of the artist begins to overflow and wash over the crowd. In the intoxication of the aesthetic moment, the fabrication that “I” am a substantive soul is exposed as a falsehood and the truth that life concentrates where it will is revealed.

In 1937's *Mask and Persona*, Watsuji further explores the relation of Japanese aesthetics to philosophical anthropology in the title essay of the collection. In it, he explores the paradoxical nature of the Noh mask. Noh is an indigenous Japanese theater form which is performed by a masked actor with a chorus, which makes it quite similar to ancient Greek theater. Noh emerged in the 14th century, and typical plots concern the intersection of the otherworldly with ordinary or historical personages. A skilled actor is able to cause his (traditionally, all Noh actors are male) mask to take on a variety of expressions by changing its angle and thus the shadows on its otherwise emotionally blank

face. The five major categories of Noh masks are men, women, the elderly, spirits, and gods/demons, but there are many other subdivisions. The more overtly emotional the mask, the more difficult it is to show a variety of emotions. Thus, often a demon mask may only be employed at the climactic end of a play, whereas the mask of an ordinary woman might be employed throughout. The masks of Noh derive from Gigaku 伎楽, an ancient form of masked dance that is now largely extinct. Both were preceded by Kagura 神楽, the divine dances of the Shinto religion, the roots of which are recorded even in the earliest Japanese writings. Kagura survives in a number of different local forms today and is also used as the name for a style of dance within Noh.

On the one hand, typical Noh masks are completely blank and “washed clean” of all specific facial features. On the other hand, when employed dynamically by a skillful actor, these masks are able to come to life in a way not possible for other, more ostensibly realistic masks. From this Watsuji concludes that,

A mask is just the facial surface which remains when the body and head are stripped away from the original physical person, but that mask acquired a body once again. The expressing of the person can be reduced to just the facial surface, but this reduced surface holds a power to freely restore itself to a body. Seen this way, the facial surface has a core significance for the existence of a person [*hito no sonzai* 人の存在]. It is not simply one part of the physical body, but it is none other than the seat of the subjective [*shutai-teki naru mono no za* 主体的なるものの座] that subdues the physical body for itself, that is, the seat of personality [*jinkaku* 人格].⁶

Watsuji does not limit himself to an explanation of Japanese culture here, but begins to explore the role of the mask in the West. As is well known, the English word “person” derives from the Latin *persona*, which is thought to have originally signified the mask which is worn by an actor in a drama:

What we have thought about so far cannot but naturally remind one of its associations with “persona.” This word first meant the mask used in a drama. This meaning shifted, and since it meant the various roles in the drama, it became a word indicating the characters in the drama. This is the “*dramatis personae*.” [...] However, persons each have their own roles and duties in society. Behaving according to one’s own persona is how one gets done what must be done. Therefore, in the case that one acts in another’s stead to get what must be done, one has become employed as the persona of the other. This being so, the persona must mean “personality” as the subject [*shutai* 主体] of acts and the subject of rights. Thus, “mask” has become “personality.”

⁶ Translations from *Mask and Persona* are my own.

CHAPTER 3. AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND THE MEETING POINT OF FEELING

Now, the most vitally important point about the reason for this turnabout in meaning is that first “mask” had come to mean “role.” If masks were only seen as being merely a sculpted facial surface, such a meaning could not have arisen. It was rather because masks held the power to acquire living persons as their own bodies that they were able to be a role or to be a character.

In other words, we see from this aesthetic, historical transformation of mask into the person first that human beings locate the seat of their subjectivities in the facial surface. Second, because of this locating of the seat of subjectivity, it was possible for a mask to represent a particular role for a character to take or for a person to hold in society. Third, through the metonymy of such a role, we come to understand the personality as a whole. Again, if the person were wholly an individual, this process would be illogical. Similarly, if the person were merely an aspect of the collective, it would not have been possible for the facial surface to come to play such a role in the aesthetics of the Noh drama. What has happened in this linguistic transformation requires both the individuation of persons through the facial surface and the negation of such individual persons as mere holders of particular roles.

Nietzsche for his part makes similar observations about the important role of the mask in *Birth of Tragedy*, but for Nietzsche that which lies behind the mask must be divine:

all the famous figures of the Greek stage, Prometheus, Oedipus etc., are merely masks of the original hero, Dionysos. The fact that there is a deity behind all these masks is one of the essential reasons for the ‘ideal’ quality of those famous figures which has prompted so much astonishment. (§10, p. 51)

For Watsuji, the ideal is not so much the “god” hidden behind the mask as the mask itself. The mask becomes the seat of the subjective by revealing the dipolar nature of the personality behind it. That personality is always located in the betweenness of person and person, and so the roles it inhabits become a part of what it is in itself. To be a particular person means to have a particular set of overlapping relations with others. Masks work by highlighting particular role relations the person inhabits and so become synonymous with the person as a whole.

As for Noh, it clearly reveals the structure of the aesthetic moment as the overcoming of division and union. The motions of the actor are all tightly regulated and carefully prescribed, which creates a separation between the role and the actor who attempts to embody that role. The actor must detach himself from his ordinary concerns, as must the audience members who watch him. Having thus detached themselves, the Noh actor finds that he has taken on the self of the mask—not because of a Dionysian frenzy as in Greek drama but because of a more subtle form of intoxication. The ecstasy of Noh is the result of studied selflessness, in which the actor completely embodies his role by dissolving beneath the surface of the mask and the audience completely identifies with the pathos of the actor because of the dynamic negativity of the mask that he wears.

The Japanese philosopher SAKABE Megumi (坂部恵, 1936–2009) was inspired by Watsuji's "Mask and Persona" and expanded on its themes in his own writing. In his essay "Mask and Shadow in Japanese Culture: Implicit Ontology in Japanese Thought," he attempts to explain that the boundary between self and other is especially ambiguous in Japanese culture. He notes that the word *omote* (which can variously be written as 面, おもて, or 表) "means the mask, the face, but at the same time it also means the surface" (245). He goes on to write,

What is surprising to me is that "*omote*," with the connotation of surface, does not mean in the Japanese language or thought "the appearance" as opposed to some ideal entity (as in the case of Platonism) or to some real substance (as in the case of Kant's "thing-in-itself"). (245–6)

What this shows is that the Japanese people did not make a sharp distinction between what is on the surface of a thing and its interior "reality." Instead they saw the reality as being real only insofar as it was a surface.

Sakabe sees this characteristic of Japanese language also exhibited by Noh theater, in which "there is nothing but the play of various surfaces or various reflections" (247). For example, an important part of any Noh theater is the *kagami-no-ma* 鏡の間 (Mirror Hall), a room in which the Noh actor prepares for his role by envisioning himself as his character and in so doing "transmogrifies into the ultrahuman dimension of the spirit of the

ancestors” (245). Exiting this space, “The actor enters the stage as a self transmogrified into an other, or as an other transmogrified into the self” (245). If self and other were truly opposed, then such a transformation would be as impossible as A being not-A at the same time, since it would never be possible for the self to be other to itself. “Self” is by definition itself and not its other. But if Watsuji is correct that self is the negating of a more primordial unity which can be reconstructed in a union of betweenness then the inversion whereby self becomes other and other becomes self is comprehensible as a dynamic reconfiguration of the structure of the actor’s humanity. The actor places his self into his mask and lets the mask be his self. This is the state necessary for a great performance.

Sakabe quotes Zeami, the fourteenth century founder of Noh, who claims in his treatise *Kakyō* that a great actor must see himself with the eyes of the audience:

To repeat again, an actor must come to have an ability to see himself as the spectators do, grasp the logic of this fact that the eyes cannot see themselves, and find the skill to grasp the whole—left and right, ahead and behind. If an actor can achieve this, his peerless appearance will be as elegant as that of a flower or a jewel and will serve as living proof of his understanding. (246–7)

Zeami refers to such seeing as *ri-ken no ken* 離見の見 or the seeing of distant seeing. As we have seen before, the preparatory step for a truly aesthetic experience is first the creation of psychic distance. In this case, the psychic distancing allows the actor to individuate himself as object of his own gaze. The actor steps outside of himself and observes himself from the point of view of the audience. Having created this distance allows for the union of the audience and actor in a meeting point of feeling in which they become one with each other as their attention focuses on the artistry of the actor as the object of their experience. This is a meeting point of feeling in which the psychic distance between audience, actor, and art is minimized without ever quite collapsing.

Chapter 4. Reconstructing the Subject of Aesthetics **What is the source of normativity for an aesthetic ?**

Having investigated the meeting point of feeling in aesthetic experience, we must now attempt to reconstruct this subject who comes to feel compelled by the aesthetic

experience of others. Why should I as an individual come to feel compelled in my aesthetic preferences by the preferences of others? What is the source aesthetic agreement? How is it that there are such things as communities of taste? How can deference to such preferences of others possibly authentically express my subjectivity? As Watsuji notes in his *Ethics*,

The discrimination between approval and disapproval is itself both individual and social and thus cannot be comprehended without recourse to the fundamental structure of a human being. (127–8)

Therefore, to answer these questions about normativity in aesthetics, we must first to see how the subjectivity normativity arises in matters of ethics, so as to better grasp the fundamental structures of the human being. In so doing, we lay the groundwork for an expanded notion of the subject, in which what is outside of my body can nevertheless be an expression of my subjectivity and aesthetic judgment can be communal judgment yet also a subjective judgment.

As Watsuji explains in his *Ethics* though there is regional variation in morality—for example, one society may approve of human sacrifice while another condemns it—this does not undermine the universality of the basis of ethics. In all societies what is condemned are actions that undermine the trust basis of that society and what is praised are actions that reinforce the trust basis of that society. But if this is the case, how is it that we as individual members of society feel the call of conscience? If these values are being imposed on us from without in order to preserve society, then it is not clear why as individuals we should feel an *inner* impulse towards a morality made to preserve *outer* order. In that case, moral education is a kind of deformation of the person by which the individual is trained to ignore her authentic desires and interests and produce within herself a feeling of subordination to the order outside of her. Could it be that our call of conscience really be the result of a super-ego that is essential alien to us? Watsuji argues no. In the determination of guilt by a court of law, the one who accuses me stands in for society as whole, but in an affliction of conscience, the one who accuses me is the very emptiness at the heart of my self. In spite of the great degree of social determination

that undoubtably goes into the formation of conscience, when we truly feel the call of conscience it does not feel to us as something coming from without but it feels as though it was coming from our inmost personality.

The reason for this should already be somewhat clear from our prior discussion of Watsuji's anthropology. When we understand the subject correctly, we see it as arising out of the negation of the betweenness that stands prior to the individual or the community. As such, the call of conscience does not arise as an external voice speaking for society but as an internal voice speaking for the authentic source of the subject. As Watsuji writes, "an established betweenness is [...] authenticity as a the ground out of which we, fundamentally speaking, come forth" (187). When we see the important role played by betweenness as authenticity in Watsuji's ethical system, we realize that even after his turn away from Nietzsche and in spite of his acknowledged differences with Heidegger, Watsuji is still fundamentally an existentialist in his ethics, since he sees expressing the individual authentically as the source of ethical normativity. Where Watsuji differs from other existentialists, however, is that his emphasis in explaining the nature of authenticity is not our absolute freedom, our being-towards-death, or similar aspects of human nature. Watsuji is clear that authenticity comes from a return to the source of our being according to the fundamental law of *ningen* and that source is betweenness.

Watsuji explicitly links his discussion of conscience to Mencius, who coined the term 良心, which evolved eventually into the term *ryōshin* in Japanese and *liangxin* in Modern Standard Mandarin and is used to translate the English word "conscience." In the Warring States period, there was a debate about whether moral appropriateness (義 *yi*) was *nei* 内 (roughly speaking, "internal") or *wai* 外 ("external"). There have been various interpretations of the exact meaning of this debate, but we may on a loose reading take it that they wanted to know whether morality is in some ways dependent on the dispositions of the individual or if moral normativity can be imposed on the individual from without by completely impersonal formal considerations. For his part, Mencius claims

that our sense of the appropriate must be *nei* even as it responds to conditions in the world. I argue that what Mencius means by this is not that morality is ‘subjective’ in the sense of being determined only by the individual, but that morality is *nei* in the sense that it originates in our most inner and authentic self even as it is importantly interpenetrated by our relationships with others. Mencius and his interlocutors agree that one can take gustatory taste—savoring a roast or wanting a drink of water—as paradigmatic example of *nei* (*Mencius* 6A.4 and 6A.5). Mencius points out that these tastes, while paradigmatically internal, are nevertheless respondent to external conditions. On a hot day, I would like a cold drink, but on a cold day, I would like a hot drink. My wanting a particular kind of drink on the basis of these external circumstances cannot be the result of some coercive education in inauthenticity. If these sorts of desires are not authentic, then there are no authentic desires. In the same way, argues Mencius, our sense of what is appropriate must respond to external circumstances (and should it fail to respond it would be an error, just as it is an error to desire salt water in a desert), but it nevertheless the internality of the sense of appropriateness which gives it jurisdiction with which to compel us.

In Watsuji’s language, we may state this same idea somewhat differently. Legitimate compulsion of the individual can only arise from the source of the individual, that is, from the subject, but the subjective origin of this compulsion does not mean that it is only a matter of what one particular person feels. The subject is not only individual. In our everyday experience, it is possible for social structures seemingly outside of the individual such as the family, community, or state to compel the individual, but this does not mean that they can exercise their authority insofar as they are external. They have authority only insofar as they are constitutive of one as a person. As he explains,

A family or a state, as instances of socio-ethical wholes, has the authority to demand obedience from individuals, but this demand cannot be authorized merely from the standpoint of a family or a state. (125)

If it is not as socio-ethical wholes that these institutions speak authoritatively, on whose behalf are they speaking? Socio-ethical wholes have the authority to compel just to the degree that they speak for the betweenness out which both they and the individual arise. Because the source of the individual and the social whole is the same, the one is on occasion able to speak for the other as the voice of its autonomous subject. This means both that the state is able to compel the citizen to follow its (just) laws and that the citizen is able to compel the state to reform its unjust laws. The basis for both forms of compulsion is the mutual dependance of the two: the individual could not be who she is without her state, and the state could not exist without its individuals. At its best, the relationship of the citizen and the state is one of virtuosic mutual contribution.

We may apply this understanding of the internality of conscience and morality to aesthetics by analogy to fashion: if the fashion choices we make are imposed on us from outside—and they certainly are, otherwise it would not just so happen that men in the West wear shirts and pants, whereas men in other cultures have worn robes, etc.—then why do we feel as though when I dress I put on clothes that reflect *my* taste in clothing? Has the outside force of fashion education deformed my authentic sartorial feelings? Watsuji argues to the contrary that fashion is an everyday experience of a kind of communal consciousness:

What makes this communal consciousness manifest in a particularly bold form, is the phenomenon of “fashion.” Fashion makes its appearance within the modes of clothing, food, and housing already historically and nationally fixed as more detailed common favorites. Even though individuals did not, to begin with, become conscious of a common favorite as their own, nevertheless, they do feel it to be their own favorite to the extent that they are inclined to view deviations from this favorite as either something funny or ugly. (74–5)

In other words, in fashion our aesthetic norms originate outside of the particular individual, but they are nevertheless felt as the subjective tastes of individuals because those individuals are ultimately expressions through negation of the prior betweenness. Society may help shape my taste in fashion, but it is still *my* taste. At the same time, however, by changing my taste in fashion, it is possible for me to change society’s taste in fashion. The two forms of taste are mutually entailing and are ultimately expressions

of the ways in which I as individual am made in part by the fashion of my society and my society is made in part by me.

Like Mencius, Watsuji also argues that we can see this same responsiveness of the internal to outside conditions in the physical sense of taste. He writes,

[W]e taste food by dividing it among us. Its taste depends on each person's peculiar sense of taste. In spite of this, is it true to say that tastes differ from one to another? Do we not enjoy the same sweetness when we taste sugar, dividing it among us? If one person tastes sugar and finds it bitter, we would lose no time in finding her a medical care on the assumption that she is sick. We attempt to deal with her as a person who is normally able to taste the same sweetness, although she is temporarily deprived of this ability. Based on the phenomenon that people experience the same taste, "communal eating," has played an important role since ancient times. [...] If it were true that bodily feelings separate people from one another, then such instances could not have occurred. (75–6)

For Watsuji, even highly subjective phenomena like our gustatory desires arise out of a wider matrix:

Human desires are already characterized by specific social forms. For instance, an appetite makes its appearance as a desire for bread, rice, a meat dish, or seafood specifically, all instances peculiar to the cultural location where the appetite arises. That there are fixed forms of cooking is already proof that the appetite is the appetite of the community, rather than being strictly individual. (74)

When we apply this to aesthetics more broadly, we see that aesthetic experience always takes place within a social and ethical context. In the aesthetic experience of tasting delicious food, for instance, one nearly loses oneself in rapture to the flavorful sensation of the dish. However, this experience of partial self-dissolution is always made possible first by specific cultural structures. Before we can experience a meeting of subject-object, there must be a coming together of individuals as a collective subject in a society. Hence our understanding of the subject of aesthetic experience can never be limited to an appreciation for the individual's experience alone, but we must also appreciate the ways in which the communal whole enjoys the aesthetic experience as a subject. Hence there is a voice which is able to speak with authority about the kinds of taste experiences we "should" be having when we enter into an aesthetic experience. It is the voice of the society as it expresses itself as the source of the individual. Because this voice is trans-personal, it is possible for us as members of a community to discuss our tastes

productively. It is not entirely “subjective” in the sense of being entirely individual-relative. On the other hand, since the voice is also the voice of the inmost source of the individual, this voice is “subjective” in the sense of being a part of the subject and able to, at times, command the assent of the subject.

Aesthetic subject: Ideal observer or authoritative agent ?

In exploring the role of community in creating aesthetic normativity, we had to come to a greater understanding of the nature of subject as communal. However, it is not enough to see this enlarged subject as something disembodied which passively observes the world from a distance through the eyes of the individuals that make it up. We must remember that the subject through which we grasp aesthetic experience should not been seen as a Kantian *cogito* appended to each of our internal presentation of objects. Rather, the subject is an active subject that inhabits this world physically:

The attempt to consider “consciousness” by means of epistemology or psychology originates with the modern ego-consciousness, which divides the individual into body and mind and deals with the mind separately from the body. [...] But the position of the *cogito*, which takes body as mere “matter,” should be submitted to severe criticism. The body is not merely the same as any other object but is basically something subjective. As an observer of phenomena, one’s eye is not matter as an object but is observing as a subject. Even the hand of an acting person is not an objective matter but the hand of an acting person. Moreover, apart from the subjective physical body, no human relationships could arise at all.(152)

Further showing the importance of this embodiment is the fact that “subject” is a term which affords multiple possible translations into Japanese.⁷ Of particular note for the period in which Watsuji was writing is the distinction between the term *shukan* 主観 and *shutai* 主体 when referring to the subject of experience. In both compounds *shukan* and *shutai*, the *shu* represents the host or ruler as opposed to a “guest” or one with an objective view *kyakkan* 客観. The difference between *kan* and *tai* is the difference between an “observer” and an “embodied agent.”⁸ That is, in the early years of modern Japanese

⁷ For example, the subject of a sentence is 主語 *shugo*. A subject of debate is 主題 *shudai*. A subject in school is 教科 *kyōka*. The subject of a ruler is 臣下 *shinka*. Etc.

⁸ The character for *tai* in *shutai* was written as 體 in the pre-war orthography, which reflects the close connection between the physical body and Confucian *li* 禮 (ritual propriety). That the post-war way of writing *tai* as 体 existed as variant also reflects the view that the body is the root (本) of the person (人).

philosophy, the Western subject was considered to be a transcendental observer (*shukan*) but with influence from Marx, Nietzsche, and other sources, the subject was seen as the agent of action (*shutai*). That the Japanese philosophers of this time period made this distinction when treating the subject shows the importance of the body as the ground of the human being.

One approach to talking about norms in aesthetics has been to couch claims about what constitutes good and bad taste in terms of the reactions of a hypothetical “suitable spectator” or an “ideal observer.” In this framework, taste is that judgment posed by an ideal observer and when faced with the question of rendering a judgment about a particular aesthetic object or event, the correct judgment to render is one that agrees with that of the ideal observer. However, from the perspective of the subject just mentioned it is clear that rather than thinking in terms of an ideal *observer* or *spectator* (*shukan* 主観), we should think in terms of ideal *embodied agents* or *actors* (*shutai* 主体).

Normativity and agenthood in Japanese linked verse

The nature of the subject of taste as both collective and agentive will be more clear if we examine one of its specific aesthetic manifestations. In *Climate and Culture* (1935) Watsuji observes that the aforementioned meeting point of feeling was central to many of the traditional Japanese arts, particularly linked verse. Linked verse is by its nature a collaborative process governed by the chances product of many imaginations rather than a single vision from a lead poet. In it, each poet contributes a verse which connects to the verse immediately before it, but not necessarily in continuity with the poem before that. Through this process, a group of poets would spend the evening creating a kaleidoscopic aesthetic performance in which the perspective of each poem shifts radically when read in juxtaposition with the poem after it rather than before it. Nevertheless, we do find something that connects these poems together while showing the individuality of the various authors. Watsuji asks,

Yet how can such chance create artistic unity? Here again the answer lies in “meeting of feeling,” in this case a meeting of the heart. If there is no meeting between the tempers of a gathering of poets, no surpassing linked verse will come of the gathering. While preserving their own indi-

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viduality, the poets combine their feelings and reveal their individual experience in a symphonic concord of each other's hearts. (196)

As in the Dionysian intoxication described by Nietzsche, there is a certain frame of mind which unites the various poets in spite of their differences, and that this frame of mind can exist at all reveals to us the nature of the human being as both individual and collective. Because the human being is both individual and collective, linked verse is able to show the personality of its many collaborators both individually and collectively without having to negate one for the sake of the other. The structure of the linked verse meeting provides the authors with detachment from their ordinary concerns but their appreciation for their mutually crafted verses allows them to express their hearts openly in a "symphonic concord" of merging perspectives.

To give a concrete example, take this incident in the life of the Japanese poet Bashō (芭蕉). One time a dispute arose about the proper interpretation of his disciple Kyorai's poem, "On the edge of this rock, / Here is one more / Moon-viewer":

Kyorai said, "Shadō asserted that this must be a monkey, but what I intend is another person." Bashō retorted, "A monkey! What does he mean? What were you thinking when you composed the poem?" Kyorai answered, "As I was walking over the fields and mountains, singing under the light of the full moon, I found, on the edge of a rock, another man filled with poetical excitement." Bashō said, "In the phrase, 'There is one more person,' you announce yourself; in this there is poetry." [...] My poetical taste is below the highest, but in Bashō's interpretation, there is something fantastic, I think.⁹

About this incident, the translator R.H. Blyth remarks, "we have here the entertaining picture of Bashō telling Kyorai, not what he ought to have said, but what he ought to have meant by what he said" (343). Why is Bashō's interpretation preferred over Kyorai's? What is the source of his authority? As the master of Kyorai, Bashō is in a position to offer an authoritative interpretation of Kyorai's work. Through a lifetime of training, Bashō has made himself able to instantly size up the merits of a haiku. He is able to speak for the poetic betweenness in which they operate. At the same time, one of the reasons that it is Bashō and not someone else who is in that position is that Kyorai

⁹ From Blyth, R. H. *Haiku. Volume I: Eastern Culture*. Paperback edition. Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1981, p. 343.

as the author had always intended for the poem to be evaluated for someone with the degree of insight that he considered his master to have. Thus, as an author, Kyorai has the authority to invest Bashō with a claim to the authoritative interpretation. Bashō is the “ideal observer” or “suitable spectator” for the poem because he has cultivated his taste to its utmost. But notice that the judgment that Bashō achieved came not through passive contemplation or reflection but through a lifetime of embodied engagement in the poetic arts. Thus, it is better to describe Bashō not as “ideal observer” but as an “authoritative agent.” The connoisseur must be in some sense an accomplished creator who enacts their artistry as an expression of the betweenness out of which the artistic community emerges.

Notice also Bashō’s interpretation of the poem: “In the phrase, ‘There is one more person,’ you announce yourself.” The experience of this verse also fits within the structure of detachment and ecstasy. “On the edge of this rock” introduces the scene with detachment. From a distance, the poet is observing a far off mountain peak. Then the poet writes, “There is one more.” From a detached perspective, this merely introduces another object of contemplation. But as Bashō recognizes, the detached perspective must now gain greater depth through its reflexivity. There is one more on the mountain, and I am on the mountain. This leads inexorably to the moment of aesthetic appreciation in which the difference between the poet’s self and the other on the peak are given union in a broader context: they are all moon-viewers, even the edge of the rock. In the moment of the aesthetic gaze, the subject expands to encompass everything, but the authority to speak for that subject is invested foremost in one who has cultivated the ability actively crystalize such moments.

Chapter 5. Milieu, History, and Genius

Spatial and temporal aspects of the subject

Although Watsuji has given use picture of the subjective origin of our ethical and aesthetic values, we nevertheless cannot neglect a consideration of the historical, cultural, and environmental forces which construct our subjectivity. In doing so, we can

better understand why it is that in aesthetics we find agreement varies both historically and regionally as communities of taste arise and perish in particular parts of the world. This task Watsuji took up in his 1935 work *Climate and Culture*. *Climate and Culture* is called *Fūdo* 風土 in Japanese, which means roughly “climate” or “milieu” and is written with the characters wind (風) and soil (土). The title also relates to the *Fūdoki* 風土記, an eighth century chronicle of the geography, culture, and customs of the provinces of old Japan. The Japanese dictionary *Daijisen* 大辞泉 defines *fūdo* as,

1. Regional weather, soil, topography, and so on.
2. The spiritual environment as it affects the form of human cultures. (Translation mine)

In other words, *fūdo* refers not only to the external conditions of the weather and so on, but also to the human cultural milieu as situated in a particular space. Watsuji wrote the book after his 1927–28 journey to study abroad in Europe, and it contains his reflections on how the local cultures of the areas that he were shaped by and shaped their climates. By his own admission, the book was a further extension of Herder’s “Climactic Study of the Human Spirit,” although he granted that Kant was right to regard that work as “the product of the poet’s imagination” (17). Nevertheless, Watsuji aimed not only to make his own account more concrete than Herder’s, but also to address what he saw as a short-coming in then-contemporary German philosophy. Heidegger’s *Being and Time* had been published while he was in Germany, but in Watsuji’s estimation, the work was flawed because,

time not linked with space is not time in the true sense and Heidegger stopped short at this point because his *Dasein* was the *Dasein* of the individual only. (v–vi)

Watsuji felt that by contrast his own anthropology was better equipped to understand the problem of time because rather than study “*Dasein*,” he studied *ningen* 人間 which is intimately linked to the concept of a spatiotemporal interval (*aida* 間) and not strictly individual. Since in Heidegger’s philosophy all relationships of *Dasein* must connect vertically to Being, there is no room from authenticity in horizontal relations with others.

Indeed, our relations with others are a source of inauthenticity for Heidegger, since we become absorbed in the They and lose awareness of our being-toward-death. For Watsuji, however, even our temporal relationship with death is subordinate to our spatial relationships with others. When there is the death of an individual, the remaining members of the individual's community will hold a funeral ceremony. The end of the individual's life is not the complete annihilation of the individual, but a major transition point that marks the gradual diminution of the individual within the field of human relations over time.

Watsuji begins *Climate and Culture* with an exploration of the everyday climatic phenomena of cold. There are two mainstream approaches by which understand the experience of perceiving the cold. In the first, we might say that the cold is something outside of us, which we experience through our senses. The difficulty with this view, as was noted by Berkeley, is that strictly speaking, we do not perceive the cold outside of us, but we perceive *our idea of the cold*, which is inside of us. If the cold is some object that is truly independent of any of our perceptions of it, then what we perceive cannot be the cold but some faint impression created through a mysterious process by that unknowable external entity. Should we then turn to the solution of something like Berkeley's idealism, we are faced with a new problem. When I am outside, I experience my idea of cold. If you are outside with me, you may experience your idea of cold. But it is impossible for us to experience the *same* idea of cold, since coldness is the idea of the individual. In other words, under the first model of perception, cold is something external and thus unknowable, and under the second model, the cold is something internal and thus unsharable.

Watsuji rejects both of these models and notes that they both contain the assumption of a sharp subject-object dichotomy. In the externalist view, cold is objective, and under the internalist view, cold is subjective, but in neither view can there be any mixing of what pertains to a subject and what is outside of that subject. To go beyond this subject-object dichotomy, Watsuji advances an earlier form of his anthropology of *ningen*. If we

understand individuals as being *only* individuals and not also at the same time constituents of a community, then we can never understand how it is possible for the cold to be something shared by different persons. If we understand the cold as an object dichotomously opposed to the subject, then we cannot understand how it is possible to feel the cold. Watsuji writes,

How can we know the independent existence of the cold before we feel cold? It is impossible. It is by feeling cold, that we discover the cold. [...] The "feeling" of "feeling the cold" is not a "point" which establishes a relationship directed at the cold, but it is in itself a relationship in virtue of its "feeling" and it is in this relationship that we discover cold. (2)

According to this view, the usual distinction between subject and object, or more particularly the distinction between "the cold" and the "I" independently of each other, involves a certain misunderstanding. When we feel cold, we ourselves are already in the coldness of the outside air. That we come into relation with the cold means that we are outside in the cold. In this sense, our state is characterized by "ex-sistere" as Heidegger emphasizes, or, in our term, by "intentionality". (3)

Watsuji takes from Heidegger's suggestion of "ex-sistere" or standing outside the self another difficulty in Berkeley's idealism: how can we explain the continuity of the subject over time? The cold that I experience today is one idea, and the cold that I experienced yesterday is another idea. How can I make the claim that they are the same idea? For that matter, how can I make the claim that I am the same subject, since yesterday's subject was doing one thing (experiencing yesterday's cold) and today's subject is doing another thing (experiencing today's cold). So, something like Berkeley's idealism must give rise to Hume's fragmentation of the self unless we have some mechanism for saying that the self can exist projected through time. For Heidegger because of ex-sistere throughout our lifetime as individuals we are always projected forward to the moment of our deaths, and this self-projection is what makes possible our identity over time.

But for Watsuji, the same sort of standing outside must also exist in the perception of the cold outside of us. It is as though we look outside of us and find the cold and see that it has in it something of us, which is what allows us to take it and bring it inside of us. We go out and find ourselves beyond ourselves. Watsuji offers us another method

for understanding this. Suppose that it is not the case that there is first a subject and an object which are independent and opposed to one another, but originally, there is a field of subject-object unity, which is then divided into a subject portion and an object portion. In that case, we should not be surprised that the subject recognizes the object, or that the object seems to contain some quality that makes it possible for it to relate to the subject, since the subject and object were originally one. We might say that the two are holographically mutually containing but perspectivally structured.

This is the basic nature of Watsuji's hermeneutic of cleavage. The basic unity of subject-object is first cleaved apart into subject and object and then cleaved together into the subject's recognition of the object. Hence, the individual has a negative structure. The individual is a denial of the original unity and consciousness is a negation of that negation as the unity is reconstituted in self-awareness of union. Hence those climatic/cultural features of the world that seem to be outside of the subject are in some sense holographically contained within it.

In relation to taste, Watsuji's philosophy of climate helps us understand how the taste of groups varies not only over time (an observation made by Hume, Hegel, and many others) but also from community to community without implying a lack of refinement in other cultures. In a Hegelian paradigm, we might think of the ancestors of our community as rational individuals but limited in their tastes by what artistic media and objects had historically developed up to that point in time. For Hegelians, it is only in history that a culture develops its aesthetic refinement. However, these Hegelian accounts can only describe other cultures as more or less advanced in coming to embody Absolute Spirit in its progression through history. The path of Absolute Spirit is singular, and history has only one endpoint, though there are many different stragglers along its path. Watsuji gives us a new way of understanding the distinctiveness of other cultures without denying their rationality or dismissing their differences as the product of their "savageness." Since taste emerges out of the perspectives of the community, it must be grounded in climate as well as history. Cultural differences cannot be deterministically

reduced to climate, since climate and culture are mutually dependent, but it does allow us to understand how a different culture can differently embody in aesthetics and civilization its particular climactic niche without therefore being “backwards” in comparison to some other culture. This is also not to suggest that all cultures are equally civilized (cultural relativism), just that there are multiple possible ways in which a culture may progress in embodying the spirit of its time and place at which it may excel or lag behind (cultural pluralism).

Post-modern multilayering, not sublation

Introducing spatiality was not the only way that Watsuji challenged the Hegelian concept of a linear march of history. In “The Japanese Spirit” (1934)¹⁰ Watsuji proposes that,

the special characteristic of Japanese culture lies in the multi-layered accumulation of its various moments. (255)

This “multi-layered accumulation” —in Japanese *jūsōsei* 重層性—refers to a tendency in Japanese history for various theses and antitheses not to annihilate one another through sublation into a synthesis but to layer on top of one another and persist together simultaneously. By explicating this concept, we can better understand the nature of progress in aesthetics. Watsuji gives several examples of this tendency, such as in clothing styles:

Not only do we preserve in great part the styles of clothing of three hundred years ago, we also unify within a single life the styles that have been developed along separate lines in the samurai and commoner classes, respectively. The range of Western clothing has then been added as another layer of style on top of these. (256)

As has widely noted, even today traditional forms of Japanese dress such as the *kimono* have been preserved, not merely as a cultural relic, but as a living choice suitable for certain social situations. This has led to the now ubiquitous cliché of speaking of Japan as the “land where new and old co-exist” and presenting the image of a geisha in traditional attire checking her ultra-modern cellular phone or a bullet train speeding past

¹⁰ Translations from Dilworth, David A. and Valdo H. Viglielmo with Agustin Jacinto Zavala (Eds.). *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy: Selected Documents*. Greenwood Press, 1998. 231–61.

Mt. Fuji. Although such phrases and images are at this point rather clichéd, the clichés persist because of the underlying truth that Watsuji identified: Japanese aesthetic history is marked not only by progress in creating new styles but also the retention of old styles. As he goes on to explain,

Moreover, these aesthetic forms do not merely coexist with the newer styles. While they are mutually opposed they are unified in that opposition. (259)

That is to say, when a new style is created, it does not exist solely as a new, unconnected style. It is related to prior styles and brought into a kind of union with them, even if it is the union of opposition. For example, after the development of Noh theater, Bunraku puppet theater also developed in Japan. Where Noh is marked by the concealing of the living human face with a lifeless mask, in puppet theater a lifeless puppet is brought to life through skillful artifice. In a certain sense, puppet theater developed as a negation or inversion of Noh theater, but in spite of this both Noh and puppet theater are able to retain their individuality as styles through their mutual relatedness as negations of one another. He writes,

The present style of Noh is said to have become fossilized after the Tokugawa period, but this means that the inherent character of Noh was realized through the development of the puppet and Kabuki theaters. (259)

In other words, the essence of the thesis can only be brought forward after it has been negated by its antithesis, without thereby demanding that they both be erased by a synthesis. This is the same pattern that we observe throughout Watsuji's hermeneutic of cleavage. When unity is negated by division and that division is in turn negated by union, neither of these negations mean the erasure of the earlier phases. Psychic distancing is negated by the ecstatic intoxication of aesthetic experience, but the distancing itself is never eliminated by it. Rather, all aspects of this process exist together in a dynamic multi-layering that grows through historical time in response to climactic conditions.

Watsuji feels that the multi-layered quality of Japanese culture is perhaps unique in the world, and we may criticize his supposition as an example of a scholar being seduced by “the myth of Japanese uniqueness.” On the other hand, it is fair to say that the tendency towards multi-layering had not been as pronounced in the West in the past, and modernist Western theorists themselves denied the ability of layering to hold out against the flow of history, which makes Watsuji’s supposition more understandable. Since Watsuji’s time, however, the post-modern movement has taken place in Western architecture and other arts, and this movement explicitly takes the reappropriation and juxtaposition of different historical styles as its core methodology. “Sampling” is a technique that is now celebrated in many new social phenomena from hip-hop to blogging. The term “post-modern” was originally coined to refer to a new style of architecture that came after the modernist International Style. Whereas the International Style was purely functional and eschewed all ornamentation, post-modern architecture is whimsically eclectic in its designs. From architecture, the post-modern movement then spread out to other areas of culture and going back in time, earlier movements like Pop Art and Dada were celebrated as forerunners of its playful pastiche-making.

According to Watsuji’s theory of *jūsōsei*, however, Japan has always been post-modern in the sense that it has never been intent on creating a unified narrative of progress as was developed in the West under modernism. Even in the area of religion, Buddhism complemented and redefined Shinto, but it did not eliminate or expunge it. A Hegelian might complain that this merely shows that Japan is outside of the mainstream of the development of Absolute Spirit, since it is not unifying its oppositions in sublation under a synthesis. Watsuji counters that,

True concrete unity exists by causing each and every contradictory moment to live in its own inherent life. (260)

In other words, unity cannot mean the elimination of the original and the snuffing out of its life, but must mean its flourishing within a new context. This interpretation gives us a way to better understand the post-modern movement, which has (at times rightly) been

criticized for its obscurantism and lack of focus. The goal of multi-layering, according to Watsuji is not merely to juxtapose nor even to transgress social boundaries, but to bring into the highest development each of the theses under consideration. Historical theses only come to really live when put into dialogue with later antitheses, even if these antitheses do not result in their sublation. Post-modernism then should aim not just at eclectically collecting and transposing, but at trying to show the core significance of what it gathers through the skillful arranging of things into a meeting point of feeling.

As previously described, such a meeting point allows for both individual and communal expression. Like a linked verse, post-modern art is at its most aesthetically appealing when it is able to bring its references together with respect for their uniqueness while also bridging the space between them. If the individual is primarily a negation of the subjective field of the public out of which we emerge, then it follows in Watsuji's thinking that the most powerful expressions of our subjectivity will not be those that aim at producing some positive content but those that aim at negatively realizing the possibilities of the personality. It is for this reason then that in Japanese aesthetics, we find a special sensitivity to the importance of 間 (in this case read as *ma*) for relating elements in such a way as to bring out the interplay of their context. Just as Japan developed historically in a pattern of multi-layering of aesthetic styles, it was natural for the Japanese to become acutely sensitive to the importance of skillfully juxtaposing items within a particular context, and this is exactly the approach that is needed to make the post-modern artists of today maximally useful when crafting aesthetic experiences.

Locating the genius in an ethos

These considerations of the importance of context in climate and history naturally lead us to reflect on the nature of genius in art. Genius seems to develop within history and redirect its course. Genius seems to begin in a particular climactic location but then cross its bounds and become a global phenomenon. It seems as though the greatest works of art are those that function even beyond their original contexts (think of the Venus de Milo, which was originally a religious artifact) and the greatest artists are

those who create new standards for art (think of Picasso). Kant writes that, “*Genius* is the innate mental predisposition (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art.”¹¹ On Kant’s theory, genius is the talent of the individual to create new rules of taste to match our indeterminate concept of beauty, rather than any communal capacity (though it is through this capacity that communal nature speaks). However, if we examine the concept of genius more closely, we find, as Hegel emphasizes, genius must express “the spirit of the times.” For one to paint like Picasso in the Renaissance would not have gotten one far, and to paint like Picasso today is merely to be an imitator.

Based on the foregoing discussion it should be clear that, examined according to Watsuji’s perspective, genius must not be seen as the possession of an individual alone. Rather, we should see it as the ability to crystallize the historical and climactic conditions of the public in a never before seen expression that gives rise to a new space of possibilities to project. Similarly, those great works of art like the Venus de Milo are great because they bring their ideals with them when they travel and instantly reconfigure the cultures into which they are introduced. Genius then should be seen not so much as ability to bring a rule of nature to art as an ability to bring an object out of its context by expanding its context in unexpected new directions. What makes genius so fascinating is not just the individual accomplishment of a particular work or object, but the social achievement of an ability to create or alter the existing ethos of an aesthetic community. Genius is made possible by the pre-condition of a certain historical and climactic culture which it expresses, but genius goes beyond its origin to alter the possibility of future aesthetic experiences.

Hiroshi Nara claims in “Art and Ethics in Watsuji Tetsurō’s Philosophy” that Watsuji’s aesthetics leaves art with

no power to give birth to a new form of art which can challenge the status quo of society, including art. This is because moral laws, which artists must abide by, come from the absolute negation of the autonomous self. And only in this way, that is, by means of emptying the self into the totality

¹¹ Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. Tr. Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987, §46, Ak. 307.

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of the nation, a person can be one with the nation. For an artist, there is no art that is subversive or produced to fulfill personal emancipation in Watsuji's framework. (113)

Nara is correct to claim that for Watsuji the artist emerges out of the social fabric of morality, but he is wrong to claim that Watsuji thereby suppresses all possibility of genius or historical change. It is precisely as a moralist that Watsuji feels qualified to speak to the ability of art and genius to subvert present art forms and advance history. For Watsuji, local ethics follow the local ethos—the local way of life—according to the patterns described by universal ethics. As the local ethos changes, so too will local ethics. The artist who attempts to fashion an aesthetic experience is naturally limited by the contours of society as it presently exists, since it will be impossible for the artist to facilitate distance and ecstasy in relation to an object if the structure of society does not allow for such the reception of such objects. The paintings of Pollock could never have gained an audience in the salons of the 1850's, for example, which means they would not have provoked an aesthetic experience for anyone at that time. When society has changed or is changing, however, a great artist is to become aware of the possibilities this creates and express those possibilities in art in such a way that a new category of aesthetic experience opens up. Genius gives the rule to art, but only in those historical and climatic milieux in which the rule can be successfully taken up. The genius of Japanese tea ceremony or flower arranging, for example, were never taken up in the West, but Japanese *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints directly inspired van Gogh, and through him influenced all Western painting following the post-Impressionist period.

This last example allows us to better understand the phenomenon of persistent aesthetic disagreement. It should be readily apparent from what has already been said that the climatic and historical difference between different communities may inhibit the emergence of shared canons of taste for the different groups. It is not a coincidence, for example, that we often observe opposition to the way of life presupposed by hip-hop music as coinciding with opposition to the music itself. The music is an expression of a form of living and to oppose the one is naturally entangled with opposition of the other.

On the other hand, we must also consider more closely the issue of aesthetic disagreements within a community. It may be the case that one individual with an otherwise ordinary background opposes some well regarded figure in the canon of an aesthetic community. This too we can account for on Watsuji's theory as a natural expression of the fundamental law of humanity. The individual defines herself as an individual by negation of her society. Without some form of opposition to the view of the public, there could be no defined individuals to speak of. What is more, we find that as an isolated opinion such a view will not rise to the level of a sustained disagreement within the aesthetic community; however, should such a view gain wider prevalence it will do so either by splitting the community into two opposed factions with different canons of taste or by causing the evolution of the community's tastes to better reflect its current forms of life.

Chapter 6. The Aesthetic, Moral, and Religious Values of an Ethos

Moral value and aesthetic value

As Hume observes in "Of the Standard of Taste" when we look at old paintings we can forgive those depicted their outdated fashions but when we read an old text, we are hard pressed to forgive what we see as the moral shortcomings of the past.¹² Why should there be such a difference in our attitudes? Did not past morality emerge out of the same field of subjectivity as past tastes in fashion?

We can explain this seeming difference by recalling the nature of authoritative connoisseur: to develop taste requires cultivation through action. Cultivating a love for past fashions risks perhaps causing one to pick up an anachronistic personal style; cultivating a love for past moralities risks ethical disaster. There is some asymmetry here, but the asymmetry is more quantitative than qualitative. We find it easier to shed our inhibitions about imaginatively engaging in past tastes than engaging past ethics, but it is the

¹². "Must we throw aside the pictures of our ancestors, because of their ruffs and fardingales? But where the ideas of morality and decency alter from one age to another, and where vicious manners are described, without being marked with the proper characters of blame and disapprobation, this must be allowed to disfigure the poem, and to be a real deformity."

potential consequences of such engagement that causes the degree of difference between the two.

Kant in the *Critique of Judgment* allows that beauty can be a symbol of morality (§59) but nevertheless maintains that they are and must be distinct. For Kant, beauty is apart from all interest whereas morality depends on a certain kind of interest—interest in duty for its own sake. It is easy to see the basic point of Kant’s claim that aesthetics must be disinterested. Suppose for example one looks at nude with a certain kind of interest. In that case, the nude is no longer art but pornography. The stars for Kant are the aesthetic objects *par excellence* exactly because we can never hope to possess them. On the other hand, we must not be disinterested about our moral progress but must hope to someday be worthy of the moral law within us.

However, Kant’s disinterested interest is not the only way that we can properly separate an aesthetic gaze from a merely instrumental gaze. Another approach is to look towards the object with sympathy for the way it exists from its own perspective. In other words, to see things with “compassion.” Such a stance is preeminently ethical, yet can also serve as the basis for aesthetic experience as well. (“Compassion” is a Buddhist name for this stance, but other traditions contain similar accepting perspectives, such as Confucianism’s *shu* 恕 or Christianity’s ἀγάπη.) By looking on an object with compassion, we are able to appreciate what is good for the object apart from how the object could be instrumentally good for us. In the moment of ecstatic unity with the object, we do not seek to annihilate it or change it, but delight in its being what it is. In the feeling of beauty we get the sense that everything is in its right place and take joy from the goodness of the object.

In the case of human beings, it clear how compassion can arise within a *ningen* anthropology—the I and the Thou who face each other both arise out of the same human betweenness and so have a common basis that allows them to share feelings without collapsing into one entity. But what about non-human entities? Here Watsuji seems to depart from his Buddhist influences in deference to his Western ones, because he

seems to mark a great divide between human beings and non-human entities. While not meaning to slight the important differences between humans and non-humans, I feel that Watsuji's philosophy would be corrected here by recalling that in the Buddhist tradition everything is empty, not only human beings. Because of this, and because of our micro-cosmic similarity to things in this world, we are able to have compassion (literally, to feel together with) for non-human entities as well as human ones, and in doing so, we are able to aesthetically appreciate them while also properly ethically comporting ourselves to them.

Religion and aesthetics

We have seen so far the deep relationship between social structures and the possibility of aesthetic experience and aesthetic judgment. However, religion also manifests itself ethically and socially, and moreover, it often does so through an appeal to aesthetic feeling. Hence it should be no surprise that throughout his career, Watsuji grappled with the role of religion in human existence. However, critics of Watsuji often contend that in his system he subordinated religion to the role of the state. These criticism are not without merit but must be placed within the broader context of Watsuji's life and career. In his earliest years, he followed Bernard Shaw, the English Romantics, and even Nietzsche in rejecting religion as an outmoded influence on society, but as time went on he began to reconsider its importance, but by the time of his *Revival of the Idols* (1918), he had begun to shift his emphasis. Where for Nietzsche "idols" represent congealments of life that ought to be destroyed, Watsuji saw also their positive role in the progression of life. In "The Psychology of Idol Worship," Watsuji explores the mindset of those Japanese who first accepted the foreign importation of Buddhism to Japan. Watsuji writes,

What especially catches the eye is that they demanded artistic joy [*geijutsu-teki na kanki* 芸術的な歓喜] from religion. Going further than that, they tied their faith to this sensuous joy. The former is proved by the great art that was born of the Nara period. The latter is unquestionably proven by several prominent social phenomena which manifest how much power the priests of that era held over the human body. These characteristics may have varied in form to some degree but are surely apparent in every religion that has since been born in Japan. For example, the Dionysian elements (the physical movements and type of dance involved) in the Nichiren sect and the nembutsu sects provide prominent examples of this religious joy. However, while what appeared later was fairly

strongly practical, in more ancient times it was especially and distinctly artistic. This close melding of art and religion is able to provide an extremely justified ground for idol worship.¹³

In other words, the ancient Japanese came to accept Buddhism as a religion first because of their love of the aesthetic, artistic joy it provided, and only later for its intellectual elements. Japanese Buddhism went through several distinct phases, starting with its establishment in the Nara period (710–794 CE). Where the earlier forms of Buddhism were more austere and aristocratic, later forms of Buddhism emphasized the efficacy of personal, popular devotion. In the Nichiren sect, it is held that the salvific power of the Lotus Sutra can be unlocked through the use of the proper mantras and mandalas, and the various nembutsu (念仏) sects held that keeping in mind (*nen* 念) the name of the Buddha (*butsu* 仏) of Infinite Light through chanting held life transforming power in this world and the next. Nichiren (日蓮, 1222–1282) was a Buddhist teacher who emphasized the importance of chanting *Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō* (南無妙法蓮華經, “Hail to the Wonderful Law of the Flowering Lotus Sutra”) while meditating before a *Gohonzon* 御本尊, a special mandala of Nichiren’s design. There are a variety of nembutsu sects (prominently, Hōnen [法然, 1133–1212]’s Pure Land sect and Shinran [親鸞, 1173–1263]’s True Pure Land sect), but in general they emphasize that calling on the Buddha Amitābha by chanting *Namu Amida Butsu* (南無阿弥陀仏, “Hail to the Buddha of Infinite Light”) will allow one to be reborn in the Pure Land in the next life, where salvation is much easier to achieve than in this world. However, Watsuji felt that these later forms of Buddhism were more practically oriented in comparison to earlier forms of Buddhism. Though the latter Buddhist sects did have strong aesthetic components, what allowed for the introduction of Buddhism in the first place was its direct aesthetic attractiveness. Again in Watsuji’s description of these Buddhist adherents, we see a structured detachment followed by an aesthetic rapture in the scene of those at a temple gathering listening to chanting of the monks:

They who were intoxicated [*tōsui* 陶醉] on music would sometimes open their enchanted eyes and gaze on the heavenly idols. They had already lost consciousness of themselves. They had already

¹³ Translations from *Revival of the Idols* are my own.

integrated the idols into their hearts, and in an infinity of gratitude and blessings they experienced an intense shining and a nimbleness of the whole heart.—Actually, their agitated hearts were extremely sensitive toward the statues and music. The strength and chiaroscuro of that inner life was no different in its extreme intensity of feeling, though it could not be called well defined. When all of their artistic results and religious influences were concentrated on just one point, that is, the veneration of idols, especially as in the aforementioned circumstances, the depth and strength of that ecstasy [*uchōten* 有頂天] seems to be almost beyond our imaginations. In this way, our ancestors had tasted one kind of aesthetico-religious great joy [*bi-teki shūkyō-teki na dai-kanki* 美的宗教的な大歓喜] in idol worship.

While the strong influence of Nietzsche's thinking on Watsuji is apparent in this passage, we also see the beginnings of Watsuji's independence. What Watsuji has shown is that the rigid structure and rules of Buddhism, anathema to the Dionysian Nietzsche, have provided the space in which the Japanese devotees can experience an aesthetic rapture together. The rapture of the monks was made possible first by their commitment to detachment from the world, which was the precondition of their losing themselves to the world. The turn from Nietzsche to Buddhism was natural for Watsuji once he found in Buddhism a similar appreciation for the importance of appreciating the flow of life unimpeded by conceptual congealing, but it also meant Watsuji was gaining appreciation for the positive value of idols, both literal and conceptual. Where Nietzsche casually sneers at the inauthenticity of Buddhism's life negating tendencies (they are guilty of "denying the will"¹⁴ and "longing for nothingness"¹⁵), Watsuji began to appreciate life affirming aspect of self-negation in the face of an awesome aesthetic other. Nietzsche was only aware of a caricatured portrait of South Asian non-Mahāyāna Buddhism, but Watsuji was thoroughly acquainted with both Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna Buddhism, which gave him a better perspective on the ways in which Buddhism could be life affirming and embrace aesthetic experience. While both Watsuji and Nietzsche emphasize the importance of intoxication to the opening of the self to the Dionysian joy of aesthetic/religious ecstasy, Watsuji also begins to sympathize with the veneration of the idols as well, which is an act that would strike Nietzsche as servile and a betrayal of the will to power. As David B. Gordon argues, however, the common thread connecting Watsuji's work before

¹⁴ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Tr. Ronald Spiers. Cambridge Press, 1999, §7, p. 40.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* §21, p. 98.

and after *A Study of Nietzsche* is Watsuji's recognition of the overcoming of self as the means of expressing the authenticity of the self.

In his preface to *Revival of the Idols*, Watsuji expands the themes of the essays in the collection by illustrating his point with the story of the Apostle Paul. According to Watsuji, Paul was disgusted by the Dionysian excesses of the ancient Athenians, and managed to so impress them with his disdain for idolatry that a period of iconoclasm followed for the better part of two millennia. Watsuji allows that this was for the best historically, and yet we cannot wholly rid ourselves of the idols:

There is no need at this time to repeat that iconoclasm, or the destruction of idols, is indispensable as a way for life to progress. The flow of life is maintained by this path [*michi* 道] alone. Idols, which we unceasingly construct in our subconsciouses, must be destroyed by careful and unceasing effort.

And yet, it is not that these idols are created without meaning. They ought to give a strength that has unity in the flow of life and guide the growth of life toward a healthy abundance and beauty. This is the indispensable duty which they have in our way of life. Stuck without them between the confusion of consciousness and the division of desires, a person will end up stunted. It is possible that some will even go so far as treating "nihility" [*kyomu* 虚無] as an idol in order to be able to lead a life of positivity.

What finally brought an end to the era of iconoclasm in the West was a literal return of the idols of the past. Ancient Greek and Roman statues were restored to positions of honor in society. However, their new position was by no means identical to what it had been before the period of iconoclasm:

Nevertheless, idols that have been revived are no longer gods deserving of veneration. No one thought to offer before them a beast in sacrifice. No one thought to entrust his own fate into the hands of these idols. What caused the people tremble was not their being heretical gods but their beauty. Paul's expulsion of idols is something that should have been accepted as a matter of course only to the degree that the idols were taken to be gods for veneration. However, as works of art which are venerated for their beauty, the idols were offered unfair treatment by Paul. Now that unfair treatment is being recompensed, and the idols are seen by the people as possessing a dignity even as mere works of art.

In other words, statues like the Venus de Milo continue to possess a kind of awe inspiring power, but we no longer feel that power to be a religious one, but primarily an artistic one. This shows at the same time, the change brought about in the status of religion and the change in the status of art. New iconoclasts in the form of anti-clerical and even atheistic movements had taken root in the West, but their iconoclasm could not be total.

So soon as they suppressed God, they found that they had to put “Art” on a pedestal.

Watsuji writes,

The Christian “God” is also a kind of idol. Paul expelled idols made by “the hands of men.” The modern iconoclasts expelled gods made by “the heads of men.” However, just as Paul could not completely purge the idols, the modern iconoclasts were also unable to completely purge God. Even after the much-discussed pronouncement that “God is dead,” a god-seeking heart stealthily takes root in the breast of the people.

[...]

Though we have lost the name of God, nevertheless we cannot refrain from searching for a new name to give Him. Should we call Him “the Will”? Ought we to speak of Him as “the Absolute”? Or might we call Him “the Electron” as well? Perhaps these names ought to be cast out by a new Paul as demonic gods. We have built an altar to “the Unknown God” and await the appearance of a Paul that can clearly preach about God to us. And so we anticipate the destruction of all of the idols created by the spirit of modernity.

For his part, Watsuji sees both iconoclasm and idol worship as necessary moments in a process of historical unfolding. Neither can exist without the other, because they both bring us closer to discovering the hidden depths of the ordinary. There is a mysterious profundity in how things are on their own that is overlooked by ordinary consciousness but which we can recover when we use aesthetic awareness to alert us to the ecstatic interiority of things:

I preach the path of righteousness. I suppose some will call this banal. I, however, am talking about the joy of discovering new life in the banal. I am trying to tell you about the sweetness of the nectar secreted away inside the shell of the banal. As for the banal—fixed ideas that are taken to have no life—we needs must first shake the dulled senses out of their sleep by waking [*satoru* 悟る] the shell itself and then wield an iron hammer to break it apart. The eyes of new senses will for the first time be awakened to the revival of the idols.

I do not, however, merely aim to “resurrect the old.” When the old is raised up again, the old shell is cast off and a new life shines forth. The fetters of time no longer apply in this new life. It is eternally young, eternally new. My aim is in this way to extoll the eternally present life. I feel a presentiment of a great path that converges in the heart of all idols. And I feel that all human efforts, past and future, in extremis will be gathered in the direction of this path.

Thus we see that for the early Watsuji, religion is not just a means of ethnic self-expression whereby the state comes to enlist higher ideals for its legitimation. At its best, religion is a means to aesthetic appreciation of the eternal in every moment. The difficulty is that over time religions inevitably evolve into mere “idol worship” and must be smashed by iconoclasm so that the innate impulse to religiosity can find new and better ways of expressing itself without being stifled by frozen conceptions of how things ought

to be. While this understanding of religion does not make up for the shortcomings of Watsuji's later "idolization" of the state, it helps put into perspective how such idolization came about, in that he came to identify the state with that power which drives the cycle of idolization and iconoclasm forward.

Glossary

Chinese terms

Li 禮 — Ritual propriety, rites, ritual action. A central virtue in Confucianism, *li* is at once the attitude one is supposed to take during ritual action and the ritual action itself.

Liangxin 良心 — Conscience. Literally, good functioning of heart-mind. In *Mencius*, Mencius explains that we are all born with a good heart that will allow us to distinguish right from wrong, but only some of us preserve and grow the seeds of this ability.

Nei 内 — Inside as opposed to outside. Groups closer to oneself as opposed to further. Various Mencian scholars have taken the precise sense of internality differently, but most likely it involves those tastes that are individually, subjectively, and emotionally determined rather than those that are determined by a fixed, non-emotive procedure. See Shun, 94–112.

Wai 外 — External. Cf. *Nei* 内.

German terms

In-der-Welt-sein — Heidegger's Being-in-the-world. Cf. *yo no naka* 世の中 in Japanese.

Rausch — Intoxication.

Schein — Semblance.

Schönheit — Beauty. Notice its connection to *Schein*.

Japanese terms

Aida 間 — Also read *ma*, *kan*, *ken*, or *gen*. Betweenness, mediance. As *ma*, a room in a house or the spatial relationship of parts in an aesthetic object or experience. Literally, an interval of space or time.

Aidagara 間柄 — Relationship or "betweenness."

Bi 美 — Beautiful.

Bigaku 美学 — Literally, the study of the beautiful. Used to translate “aesthetics.” Cf. *Kansei* 感性.

Fūdo 風土 — Climate, milieu. Literally, wind and soil. The title of Watsuji’s book on his trip to Europe, translated as *Climate and Culture*. Relates to *Fūdoki* 風土記, an eighth century chronicle of the geography and culture of Japan.

Gen 間 — See *aida*.

Hito 人 — A person or human. Typically refers to another, not oneself.

Iki 粋 — The chic sensibility cultivated by citizens of Edo (Tokyo) during the Tokugawa period written about by KUKI Shūzō.

Ishiki 意識 — Consciousness. Notice the dissimilarity to *ryōshin* 良心, conscience, unlike their similarity in many European languages.

Jikaku 自覚 — Self-awareness, self-consciousness, transcendent unity of apperception, the noumenal aspect of the self.

Jinkaku 人格 — Personality or personhood. What makes a person a person. Used to translate Kant’s *Persönlichkeit*.

Jinruigaku 人類学 — Physical anthropology. Literally, the study of humankind. Cf. *ningengaku* 人間学.

Jūsōsei 重層性 — Multi-layeredness. Watsuji considered this a special characteristic of Japanese culture, in that previous civilizational achievements in Japan were preserved rather than eliminated by their synthesis with an antithesis.

Kagami no ma 鏡の間 — Mirror Hall. Room in a Noh theater where an actor prepares to play a role.

Kan 間 — See *aida*.

Kangen 還元 — Reduction. First step in Watsuji’s hermeneutic of reduction, construction (*kōsei* 構成), destruction (*hakai* 破壊). Literally, a return to the original.

Kansei 感性 — Literally, sensibility. Used to translate “aesthetic,” eg. in Kant’s Transcendental Aesthetic. Cf. *bigaku* 美学.

Ken 間 — See *aida*.

Kojin 個人 — Individual.

Kyakkan 客観 — Objective view. Literally, the guest’s perspective.

Kyōdōtai 共同体 — Community.

Ma 間 — See *aida*.

Ningen 人間 — Human beings, collectively or individually. Literally, person (*hito*) plus betweenness (*aida*). In Buddhism, it refers to the realm of humans as contrasted with the realm of gods, animals, spirits, etc.

Ningengaku 人間学 — Philosophical anthropology. Literally, the study of human beings. Watsuji’s method in ethics. He considers this distinct from sociology (*shakaigaku* 社会学) or physical anthropology (*jinruigaku* 人類学), since *ningen* is inherently both collective and individual.

Omote 面, おもて, or 表 — Mask, face, or surface. The outer appearance. Opposite of *urate* 裏手.

Ri-ken no ken 離見の見 — Seeing of distant seeing. Zeami’s aim for Noh actors.

Rinrigaku 倫理学 — The study of ethics. Literally, the study of the pattern of human relations.

Ryōshin 良心 — Conscience. Literally, good functioning of heart-mind. From the Chinese, *liangxing*, see above. Watsuji notes that unlike the English “conscience,” it is not directly connected to “consciousness” (*ishiki*), although there is an indirect connection.

Seken 世間 — The public. Cf. *yo no naka* and *ningen*.

Shakai 社会 — Society. Literally, a meeting around the sacred communal pole.

Shakaigaku 社会学 — Sociology. Literally, the study of society.

Shukan 主観 — The subject as perceiver. Literally, the host’s view.

Shutai 主体 — The subject as agent. Literally, the host’s body.

Sonzai 存在 — Existence. Literally, 存 preserving (temporal) and 在 residing (spatial).

Hence existence is a temporary preservation against inevitable loss and residing before inevitable departure.

Tōsui 陶醉 — Intoxication.

Uchōten 有頂天 — Ecstasy.

Wakaru わかる — To understand. Cf. *wake* and *wakeru*.

Wake 訳 — A reason for. Cf. *wakaru* and *wakeru*.

Wakeru 分ける — To divide. Cf. *wake* and *wakeru*.

Yo no naka 世の中 — Society or the public. Literally, in the world. Used by Watsuji to translate Heidegger's *In-der-Welt-sein*. Cf. *seken* 世間.

Yo 世 — World or generation. Notice that *yo* can be spatial or temporal.

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