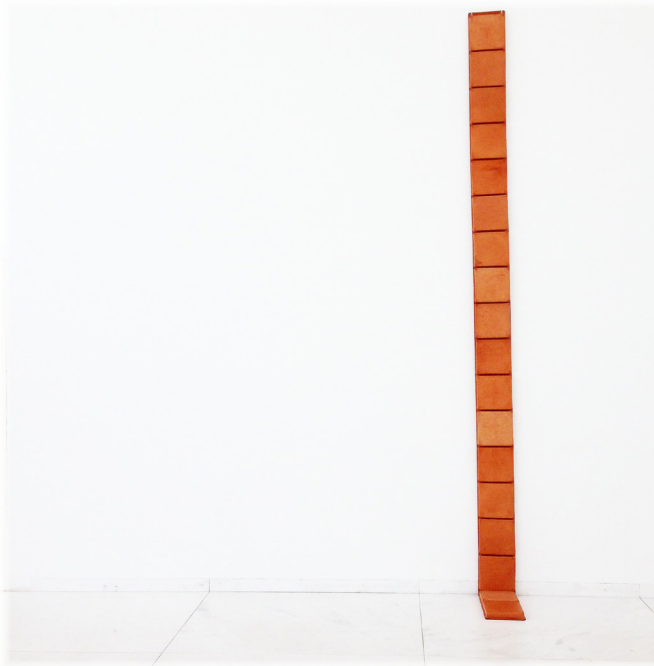


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Is Space a part of being? Reassessing space through Japanese thought

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Abstract

This paper adopts a hermeneutical approach to Japanese thought, in the light of Heideggerian thought, in order to reassess the way we understand space. In a first stage, a few ideas concerning Japanese language and aesthetics will be briefly addressed for a better understanding of how space is embraced in Japanese thought and culture (experience precedes description). We will then turn to the two main concepts: *fūdo* (*milieu*) and *basho* (place), coined by two 20th century philosophers: Watsuji Tetsurō and Nishida Kitarō. The logic behind *fūdo* is that a true awareness of space is built not from thinking about it – since we are already objectifying it and, therefore, understanding ourselves detached from it –, but from being in it; experiencing it. The concept of *basho* represents a more logical argument and allows us to focus on the relation between the particular and the universal; or, as we will see, between *being* and space. What we can conclude from the articulation and interpretation of these two concepts is that space is certainly more than just a pure geometrical concept or a receptacle where human beings exist – it can also be thought of as a part of *being*.

Keywords

Space; Being; Japanese thought; Ontology

Human beings are creatures of distance! And only by way of the real primordial distance that the human in his transcendence establishes toward all beings does the true nearness of things begin to grow in him. (Heidegger 1984, 221)

What exactly is space? And how can we define it? Probably, these questions will only be partially answered at the end of this paper; and, apart from the general notion of ‘space as a part of being’ that pervades this paper, answer them is not my purpose. Mainly because in trying to do so, tasks analogous to those required for interrogations such as ‘What it means to be a human being?’ or ‘What is good and bad?’ will certainly come up. The problem with all these notions – space included – is that defining them or theorizing about them might lead us towards a different direction than the one we wanted to go in the first place: the abstract. This does not mean that we should stop trying to think about space, but that the best way to know and understand it is through lived experience, through constant subjective and inter-subjective interpretation of ourselves in our relation to it. What I say or think about the word ‘space’ is near meaningless if not anchored to a concrete experience of it.

The role of experience in space is first credited to Kant for the significant leap he gave by focusing on bodily orientation and experience, thus breaking with the polarity between absolute and relative space. His insights were then developed by Husserl, who expanded the focus of spatial experience from the body to, what he called, the ‘near-sphere’ (*nah-sphäre*): “the proximal place or places in which I *am* or to which I can go”¹ – space had turned into a kinesthetic dimension. Later, this focus on kinesthesia was reviewed by Merleau-Ponty who elevated the experiential dimension of space to a level embedded not in one’s body, but in the entire perceptual field. In later works he reacts against the excessive focus (in Kant and Husserl) on “bodily bilaterality” (two eyes, two ears, two hands); for it led to a “fragmentation of being” and “a possibility for separation”². Probably due to this “danger” of objectifying the body in order to invoke spatial experience, Heidegger did not apply it as a means to his discourse on space³. One interesting notion he uses when treating space is “making room” (*einräumen*): an ontological aspect of *Dasein* that consists in the ways he creates a space that allows him certain actions. With this, he turns *homogeneous space* into a secondary dimension of *spatiality*. In Casey’s words⁴, “There can be no such homogeneous medium as space unless room as

1. Casey 1997, 219–220

2. Merleau-Ponty as quoted by Casey 1997, 236–37

3. Casey 1997, 243

4. Casey 1997, 252

been made within a given region of the ready-to-hand”. If we acknowledge that human beings are spatial – always already-in-the-world, and constantly “making room” – then space can be thought of as the medium through which human perception is constructed.

Nowadays, the role of experience is becoming crucial for any account of space. Even though, we still tend to build complex and intricate theories of space, even when focusing on body experience, which tend to over-objectify it. In the case of Japanese thought, until the encounter with the West in 1868, there was no problematization of space. Philosophy and Aesthetics were not thought of as separated disciplines, but as one single way to improve the self through the refinement of the sensuous experience of things – and not their exhaustive description. The word used today for space, *kūkan* 空間, was only coined after the referred encounter as a translation of the western abstract and measurable notion of space. Prior to that, what we find in Japanese traditional thought is a conception of space primarily based on the word *ma* 間 ‘interval’ – a fundamental notion of the Japanese *sense* of space: space grasped not through description, but through direct perception of the sensible phenomena⁵.

The encounter of Japanese and Western philosophy brought up their differences while, at the same time, gave both sides new tools of thinking. The two philosophers discussed below were both living during an era of intense intercultural exchange with the Western traditions of thought and science when they wrote these works. Watsuji Tetsurō’s *fūdo* is embraced here as an ethical concept and shows us a reluctance towards defining or theorizing space or nature; Nishida Kitarō’s logic of *basho*, on the other hand, is helpful mainly from a pure logical perspective and from his account on the ‘particular-universal’ relation.

In the following arguments I will try to avoid theorizing too much about the nature of space itself while proposing a new way to think about it, drawing a few stimulating insights from a few sources of Japanese thought. We will first begin our analysis with a brief look into both Japanese language (especially the word *ma* 間 ‘interval’) and aesthetic ideals, and their value for an account of space based on experience rather than description. Then, entering the realm of philosophy, Watsuji Tetsurō’s *fūdo* and Nishida Kitarō’s *basho* will be presented, each followed by an interpretation of their logics. Both these concepts are not problematizations of space, but hold some interesting clues that will help us reevaluate how we think about it in relation to *being*. But first let me define briefly what I understand as *being* is this paper.

5. Nitschke 1966

A brief clarification of *being*

Before beginning our analysis, there are a few ideas that should be clarified regarding the notion of *being* used here. Heidegger's being-in-the-world, or *Dasein*, presupposes a being already thrown up in the world before he starts to make meaning out of it. Furthermore, as he puts it, "Dasein is already ahead of itself"⁶. This means that one characteristic of *Dasein* is to be concerned with the possibility of its own being. In other words, being-ahead-of-itself is a condition of being that directs him towards his own (future) possibilities of being. This structure of *being* is comprised in the notion of 'care' (*sorge*); not emotionally (like worry, etc.), but ontologically, as *being towards*⁷.

The way he addresses this dimension of *being* is an example of his need to reformulate language to convey his message. Nonetheless, the fundamental idea behind it is similar to Husserl's 'intentionality': the idea that 'to be conscious is to be conscious of something'; there is always something towards which we *are* in the world. The difference between Heidegger and Husserl is that the former, although never using such a term, builds his own notion of intentionality by refusing to focus on consciousness itself, but on a level prior to our being-conscious-of-consciousness⁸. For Heidegger "our fundamental sense of things is not as objects of perception and knowledge, but rather as instrumental objects that fit naturally in our ordinary practical activity"⁹ – it is fundamentally a praxis-oriented account of *being*.

Nonetheless, what is important to retain here is *being* not as some kind of attribute embedded in the physical subject, but as a continuous process of intentional "circumspection" (*umsicht*) that constitutes that subject's own existence. Charles Guignon¹⁰ summarizes it: "As ex-sisting (from *ex-sistere*, standing outside itself) *Dasein* is always already "out there," engaged in undertakings, directed toward its realization" – and this is the essence of *being* I wish to emphasize in this paper.

Japanese perception: from language to aesthetics

There are two fundamental aspects that I want to focus regarding space in Japanese perception. The first one is the Chinese character *ma* 間, 'interval'. This is a very significant word in Japanese architecture, arts and ethics, and no account of space or place in Japanese thought can ignore

6. Heidegger 1962, 236

7. Heidegger 1962, 237

8. see Crowell 2005

9. Hall 1993, 125

10. C. Guignon 2005, 397

its relevance. It has been rendered as “sense of place”, “not as something that is created by compositional elements, [but] the thing that takes place in the imagination of the human who experiences those elements”¹¹. Its ideogram depicts the sun 日 showing through an open gate 門. Thus, aside from ‘interval’, the space that this character implies is not an empty space, but one that establishes the very possibility of relating to something – in this case: the sun. It is a *relational space*, a space that is not just a measurable area, but the very *possibility of relation*. In this sense, and as Nitschke¹² writes, it “fully expresses the two simultaneous components of a sense of place: the objective, given aspect and the subjective, felt aspect”. We can also identify this concept in (a) the *sumi-e* monochromatic painting, where, rather than an object’s detailed depiction, a great amount of space is left blank to invite suggestion and imagination¹³; in (b) architecture, as a principle used in the creation of a room or a space for a very specific action¹⁴; or (c) as a concept influenced by Buddhism and in work, for example, in the famous temple *Ryoan-ji*¹⁵, where space is experienced by the minimum detail and complexity, inviting the viewer’s imagination.

The most relevant aspect regarding *ma* is that it forms part of the Japanese word for ‘human’: *ningen* 人間. The first character means ‘man’; the word literally means ‘among men’ or ‘interval between men’. Thus, unlike the West where ‘human’ usually means an individual contained in himself (like the Greek ‘Anthropos’, the Latin ‘homo’ or the English ‘man’), in Japanese language, we can consider that being human intuitively holds a sense of space. Watsuji Tetsurō works his theory of *fūdo*¹⁶, that we will address later, and of *Ethics*¹⁷ based on the analysis of the word *ningen*; in the latter he develops the notion *aidagara* 間柄 or ‘betweenness’ (note the first character) as an ethical foundation for being human.

The second aspect is the impact that this particular ‘spatial thinking’ has on the aesthetic ideals that permeate Japanese arts. Without going into detail I will introduce a few ideas that we can find in Japanese aesthetics that will prepare the ground for the philosophical approach we will take below. Donald Keene (1995) defined ‘suggestion’ as one of the four characteristics of Japanese aesthetics. He opposes it to the “Western ideal of the climactic moment” that “grants little importance to the beginnings and

11. Nitschke 1966, 117

12. Nitschke 1993, 49

13. Parkes 1995, 90

14. The tea ceremony room, for example. Nitschke 1966

15. Iimiura 2002

16. Watsuji 1979; Watsuji 1988

17. Watsuji 1996

endings”¹⁸. Indeed, most painting (as we saw already in the *sumi-e*) and poetry, as well as most aesthetic ideals, are fundamentally suggestive. There is a manifest intention to present the least possible detail on what is being depicted, trying not to limit the reader/spectator’s possibility of understanding while allowing imagination to fill in the ‘empty spaces’. We can see this in the following poem:

An old pond,
A frog leaps in.
The sound of water.

Here the details are minimized; the poet just presents the scene. He does not explain it or puts his own emotions into it; for the scene itself cannot be described. The reader has to experience it himself and he does it through his own imagination, filling the poem’s ‘empty spaces’. Yasuda¹⁹ states it perfectly:

Here we want no adjective to blur our impression; the picture speaks for itself. We seek no metaphor or simile to make the picture clear, but simply let the objects do their part. (...) then our understanding will supply the necessary adjectives.

There are many aesthetic ideals that could be discussed regarding ‘suggestion’, but the one I feel is the most relevant for our analysis is *yūgen* 幽玄 (mysterious, subtle, hidden beauty)²⁰, for it largely summarizes all the aesthetic ideals that permeate poetry, drama, painting, gardens and tea ceremony during the 12th to 17th centuries²¹. *Yūgen* describes the hidden or profound feeling that “may be comprehended by the mind, but cannot be expressed in words”²². There are everywhere and at several occasions moments when the phenomena being experienced transcend any description. And even when someone describes such moments exquisitely – like, for instance, Marcel Proust did – we still tend to turn them inside and fit them to a similar moment in our own lived experience. There are certainly no words to define such moments – still, the Japanese managed to coin an emotionally charged word that would refer to what is indescribable: *yūgen*.

Eventually other aesthetic ideals could be brought here and we would find in them more or less the same underlying principle: suggestion. In-

18. Keene 1995, 31

19. Yasuda 1995, 129

20. The *yūgen* ideal was brought to the highest degree of refinement through the Nō theatre. The actor’s slow, stylized movements are used as a means to *suggest* and not *represent* something. Besides, there is also the idea that the “no-action” moments were the most enjoyable, since they incite our own involvement in the play. see de Bary 1958, Chapter 14; Ueda 1995

21. de Bary 1958, 278

22. a passage of a XV century book quoted by de Bary 1958, 279

deed, there is a preoccupation with avoiding detailed descriptions or definitions, inciting lived experience – *experience* precede *description*. Which amounts to saying, *feeling* precede *thinking*, *aesthetics* precede *philosophy*. And traditionally, until the 18th century Japan, aesthetics did not develop as a separate field from philosophy. On the contrary, the aesthetic experience – whether poetry, calligraphy, painting or the tea ceremony – was, to a great extent, the medium through which philosophical thinking was produced²³. Now, if we turn to the origin of the word ‘aesthetics’ – the Greek *aisthētikos*, ‘perceptible things’, from the verb *aisthesthai* ‘perceive’ –, an aesthetic experience is but a relation with what surrounds us, a way of perceiving. In this sense, Japanese aesthetics can show us a particular way of relating to space through its conceptual language and arts.

***Fūdo* as space ethics**

The term *fūdo* 風土 (literally ‘wind and earth’) was coined by Watsuji Tetsurō in 1935 in a book considered as a theory of geographical determinism: *Fūdo: an anthropological inquire*. In the first section he starts with a philosophical consideration of the environment and its influence on humans. In the second section, he engages in a description of three types of climate – monsoon, desert and meadow – and the different characteristics of those who live under these different climates.

However, just as Augustin Berque has been showing for more than thirty years²⁴, there is more behind Watsuji’s book than simple determinism. The first thing to take into account when trying to transcend the deterministic reading is the very translation of the word ‘*fūdo*’ as ‘climate’. In 1961 the book was translated into English by Geoffrey Bownas under the title *Climate: a philosophical study*; and then changed, in the 1988 edition, to *Climate and Culture: a philosophical study*. Just as Berque shows us below, the whole structure of this translation leads to strange renderings of the derivatives Watsuji coins from the substantive *fūdo*:

This lack of understanding sometimes leads Bownas to surrealistic roundabouts in order to avoid rendering the idea of *fūdosei* [*function of climate*’ or *human climate*’, according to Bownas; *mediance*’ according to Berque] in some passages which are meant to illustrate it; roundabouts which are indeed inescapable, since the translation, straightaway, locks out the purport of the book.²⁵

Many scholars still choose to use Bownas’ translation when treating

23. Parkes 1995, 82

24. The book where Berque exposes his interpretation of Watsuji’s ideas was first published in French (Berque 1986), then translated to Japanese (Berque 1988) and to English (Berque 1997).

25. Berque 2004, 390

Watsuji's theory²⁶. For that reason, justifying the translation's choice turns out to be essential to the present argument. We can start by taking a look at the terms used by Berque when translating Watsuji's theory. The main one, *fūdo*, is translated as *milieu*. Here, the author wanted the translation to keep the underlying meaning of the original word: *fūdo* 風土 has the character of wind and earth, but the wind character 風 also means 'ways' or 'customs'. Following this, Berque recovered the word *milieu*, coined by the French geographer Vida de la Blache (1845-1918), that stands for *the relation between humans and their particular environment*; a relation both subjective and objective, natural and cultural, collective and individual. With this, Berque moves closer to Watsuji's intention of avoiding the word 'nature': when we think about the natural environment, we tend to think of it as the concrete base of human life, and so we separate both *human life* and *nature*, "we then find ourselves examining the relation between two objects"²⁷. From the term *fūdo*, Watsuji derives *fūdosei* 風土性²⁸ and *fūdogaku* 風土学²⁹. The one that interests us the most here is the first one, which Berque translated as 'mediance'. Being *fūdosei* the character of *fūdo* and *fūdo* a relation itself, as explained before, a word that could express the very character of that ongoing relation was required: *mediance*, then, is "the attributive character between the physical and the phenomenal, the natural and the cultural, the individual and the collective"³⁰. Is the instant, I would say, at the very middle of that relation (*fūdo*) where we find ourselves constantly; where both poles of each of the three dualisms meet. Or, as Watsuji defined it: "is the structural moment of human existence"³¹.

Now, why is *fūdo* an important notion for our reassessment of space? There are three main reasons. First, because Watsuji's book is a reaction against Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* and its emphasis on time, to the detriment of space. We saw how the word 'human being' in Japanese (*nin-gen*) has an implicit notion of space, or betweenness; it is expected, then, that Watsuji reacts against Heidegger's lack of focus on space. For Watsuji, Heidegger's account of being primarily based on *time* and the *Dasein* leads to an excessive focus on the individual, without considering the collective and, therefore, spatiality³². Here, we can recover the above mentioned

26. Mochizuki 2006; Carter 2013

27. Watsuji 1979, 3

28. The *-sei* 性 suffix adds the idea of 'character/function of'; so, from 'climate' (*fūdo*), the notion 'climaticity' (*fūdosei*) is sometimes used.

29. The *-gaku* 学 suffix turns the word into a discipline, like construction (*kenchiku* 建築), architecture (*kenchikugaku* 建築学). In Bownas translation we find 'the study of climate'. In Berque's: 'mesology'.

30. Berque 1997, 130

31. Watsuji 1979, 3

32. Watsuji 1979, 4

fūdosei as the character that is neither individual nor collective because it is both at the same time. This means that, in Watsuji's thought, each pole of the three dualisms referred to above cannot be treated on their own, independently: they are the very character (*fūdosei*) of our *fūdo* and the point from where we stand and deal with the world. Hence, Heidegger focus on individual leads Watsuji to approach the spatiality of human existence, which implies society as well as the surrounding environment, through the lens of the constant relation between nature and culture, subject and object, individual and collective: the *fūdo* (*milieu*).

Second, because of the conclusion he draws from his 'metaphor of the cold'. Although Watsuji reacts against the lack of spatiality in Heidegger, he is also strongly influenced by him when developing the argument that supports this metaphor. Very briefly, he tells us that it is impossible for us to know the existence of cold, as a transcendental phenomenon, before we feel cold ourselves³³. The cold, as an objective, independent thing, forms itself for the first time when felt by the subject that acts in constant intentionality. At this process of intentionality – Heidegger's *sorge* (care) and Watsuji's *sotoni deru* (stepping outside) – when the subject is *feeling cold* he is actually *stepping outside into the cold*. He concludes the metaphor by saying that it is at this very moment, when we step outside into the cold, that we "find ourselves"³⁴. It is in this *stepping outside* that we, within an encounter with something that is not us (later we will find a correlate of this in Nishida's logic of *basho*), comprehend ourselves. In one of Watsuji's examples: "[j]ust as we encounter our self happy or saddened in the wind that scatters the cherry blossoms, we comprehend our withering selves in times of drought when the sun scorches the trees"³⁵. I believe this example is enough for a better understanding of *fūdosei*. Watsuji introduces other examples, based on construction materials and culinary, not as products of a geographical determinism, but as expressions of that "structural moment" when nature and culture find each other and, to some extent, influence each other – they are expressions of how human beings comprehend themselves in their *fūdo* (*milieu*)³⁶.

The third reason is related to the absence of a definition or problematic of space in Watsuji's book. Indeed, while he points out the lack of spatiality in Heidegger as the primary reason for writing *Fūdo*, in the rest of the book he does not talk about space, but about distinctive types of climate and their influence on human beings. First, we have to recall the word *ningen* 人間 and its implicit spatiality, meaning that we cannot separate

33. Watsuji 1979, 11

34. Watsuji 1979, 13

35. Watsuji 1979, 15

36. Watsuji 1979, 17–19

humans from space and produce an independent account on each one of them. If Watsuji prefers to work his theory from the notion of *fūdo* instead of *nature* to avoid objectification, it is only natural that he also does not develop a problematic of space. What he does, then, is to work out a description of the phenomena of the world itself and of *fūdosei*: that “structural moment” when culture meets nature. Berque³⁷, recovering Nakamura Hajime’s ideas, links this to Japanese’s tendency of attaching themselves to “the sensible manifestations of nature, rather than referring them to some abstract principle”, illustrated by the proverb ‘*Matsu no koto wa matsu ni narae*’ (About pines, learn from the pines) – a tenet also present in Japanese aesthetics. We might consider, then, that Watsuji could not develop an abstract theory of space after having rejected the very notion of nature. Instead of developing a problematic of space (or even nature), he examined the relation between nature and culture in particular *milieus*.

Space as the *basho* of being

Nishida Kitarō’s main goal is to deconstruct the subject and object dualism. With the clear notion that a too brief account of his logic holds the risk of being overly simplistic, I will attempt to sum it up in a few sentences and then draw some hints from his discourse that are enough to grasp the logic behind *Basho* (Place).

Nishida’s logic, in my point of view, can be summarized in two key ideas: if (a) everything that exists, exists in something else³⁸, then (b) whenever objects are to be related and form a single autonomous system, there must be something that sustains that system, somewhere where it takes place³⁹ – this forms, what I will call, the ‘core logic’. Following this, Nishida starts developing his logic of *basho* from what is central to the act of knowing: the consciousness. He writes that when we think of things there must be a *basho* that reflects them, which he calls “the field of consciousness”. Thus, “[t]o be conscious of something is to reflect it in the field of consciousness”⁴⁰. He then goes on arguing against the idea that the object stands on its own outside our consciousness. If this were the case, how can we, who are within our consciousness, conclude that the object exists and transcends our consciousness? His answer is quite straightforward and follows the core-logic: “For the consciousness and the object to be connected, there must be something that envelops both of them; there must be a

37. Berque 1998, 64

38. An axiom stated for the first time by Archytas of Tarentum, which has repercussions in Plato and Aristotle’s accounts of place.

39. Nishida 1987, 67

40. Nishida 1987, 69

basho where their relation takes place”⁴¹. Nishida then starts to account for what this *basho* might be by pursuing a strong dialectical and metaphysical line of thought where he speaks about the “*basho* of true nothingness”, which I chose not to bring into this analysis.

My goal here is not to present a fully explained account of *Basho*, for it has been done before by some academics well versed in Japanese language and philosophy, but a much more elementary one: to take the core-logic of *Basho*, along with some hints developed by Nishida along his essay, and to interpret them as tools to help us think about space.

The main hints I will refer to are from his definition of ‘judgment’ and from his account of the relation between the particular and the universal, the subject and the predicate. For Nishida, “the act of knowing is an act of enveloping”⁴². And this ‘enveloping’ can be thought of as the main feature of a *basho*. On the other hand, ‘knowing’ is also formed by acts of judgment; and judgment is, in Nishida’s words, “the process of connecting the gap between the object of cognition and the place where it is reflected, its *basho*”⁴³. Nishida explains this argument using a grammatical example, which will lead us to the most meaningful hint for my analysis here. In the judgment ‘the rose is red’ the copula ‘is’ places the particular ‘rose’ inside the universal ‘red’ – ‘red’ becomes the *basho* of ‘rose’. Judgment, then, connects the gap between ‘rose’ and ‘red’, both of which do not hold any meaning if taken on their own.

Until now there is nothing new, but the way Nishida characterizes the relation between the particular and the universal leads me to an interpretation of the logic behind *basho* in spatial terms. According to Nishida, the copula ‘is’ forms the foundation of a judgment and expresses the relation between the universal and the particular. The judgment, then, becomes the process through which the universal particularizes and develops itself through specialization⁴⁴. The way he defines this relation is central to my argument:

the universal does not possess the particular, the particular is not the result of the universal, neither the relation between the two carries a meaning like ‘space that contains objects’ or ‘objects that exist in space’ (...). “The particular is a part of the universal; it is his silhouette. (...) [T]hat which exists possesses partially (分有) the proprieties of the *basho* where it exists: things in space are spatial.”⁴⁵

41. Nishida 1987, 70

42. Nishida 1987, 75

43. Nishida 1987, 73

44. Nishida 1987, 89 The word Nishida uses is *bunka-hatten* 分化発展. *Bunka* 分化 means specialization; differentiation; the process of division with the goal of creating two or more different things. *Hatten* 発展 means both development, as in ‘argument development’ or growth, as in ‘city growth’.

45. Nishida 1987, 86–87

When trying to make sense of this logic and reinterpret it as a resource for the ‘being-space’ relationship, the connection between Nishida’s arguments and an ontological account of space can be smoothly accomplished. For that, I will divide his discourse into two arguments: the dialectical and the grammatical argument. In the dialectical argument what is at stake is the idea that things exist in relation to one another, and something that *is* exists against what *is not*: we are humans only by opposition to what is not-human; or, I am *myself* only in opposition to others that are not *myself*. But, in Nishida’s core logic, there must be a *basho* where this opposition is reflected and that sets it up. So, I am human against what is not-human, and this relation is sustained and made possible through a *basho* that is *space*. I can only *be* through the medium of space. Once again, the core-logic tells us that ‘everything that exists, exists in something else’: meaning that *being* that exists, exist in space. Here, we are already forming a judgment.

The grammatical argument draws from the definition of judgment explained before and completes this logic: forming a judgment is to place a particular inside a universal, i.e. turning the universal into the *basho* of the particular; then, by logical inference, when examining the relation between *being* and its surroundings, space is the universal and *being* is the particular. We can now reinterpret Nishida’s account on the relation between the universal and the particular in order to elucidate us about the ‘being-space’ relation: space does not possess *being*; *being* is not the result of space – which breaks away with a possible claim for geographical determinism –, neither the relation between the two carries a meaning like ‘objects that exist in space’ nor ‘space that contains objects’. Again, what exists, according to Nishida, possesses partially 分有 the properties of the *basho* where it exists: *being* possesses partially the proprieties of the space – *basho* – where it exists.

Kopf quotes Ueda Shizuteru’s concrete example concerning the ‘particular-universal’ relation and complements it:

There is no escaping the fact that England and I cannot be separated. England is the country in which I reside, and I reflect England by living there.” Consequently [Kopf adds], universals like the historical situation and the *Zeitgeist* are not transcendent or abstract but are concretely particularized in individual events. In this sense, there is no postmodernism without Jacques Derrida’s writings, no Nishida scholarship apart from particular essays on Nishida’s thought, no American lifestyle without individual Americans living their lives.⁴⁶

46. Kopf 2003, 32

Concluding remarks

The look into Japanese aesthetics assumed the role of a brief introduction to some of the general characteristics of Japanese perception and laid the ground for a better understanding of the subsequent analysis. As we saw, the general tendency is to avoid descriptions and details. Whatever sensible phenomena exist in the world, their most fundamental truths can only be apprehended by our own *taking-part* of it.

This *taking-part*, on the other hand, is analogous to the idea of ‘care’ that Heidegger used to refer to a subject that *is* always towards something, i.e. that continuous intentionality that, constituting the most basic feature of *being*, casts the way we deal with the world experientially. *Ex-sistere* or *sotoni deru*, ‘stepping outside’ (as Watsuji called it), is our way of being: the process where we are constantly stepping outside into our surroundings and its constituents and where we first comprehend ourselves. When we assume that we cannot think of human beings separated from our own *fūdo*, to think of *being* as this constant process of self-understanding through the space we always already inhabit is to turn a supposedly abstract and measurable notion of space into an indispensable part of *being* – or like the *ma* 間 word: the very possibility of relation.

With Nishida’s logic of *basho* we were able to turn space into the *basho* of being. Furthermore, examining his account of the ‘particular-universal’ relation we could see that while *being* is not possessed by space, neither determined by it, it possesses partially its properties. Here we are not simply claiming for, in Berque’s words, an “absolutization of the predicate”, but creating a relation between the universal (space) and the particular (*being*); between the subject and the predicate. If being possesses partially the properties of the space where it exists, then, space, while constituting a part of *being*, is *being*’s self-comprehension as well as an interpretation of that same being.

We can now return to Heidegger. Just like his idea of a praxis-oriented space ontologically preceding and abstract and homogeneous space, I am also proposing a similar notion of space: a *relational space* that, being a constitutive and absolutely essential part of *being*, can only be fully grasped through *being*’s practical activities; in other words, through its ontological condition of being constantly towards something.

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