

The Knowing Body

Nishida's Philosophy of Active Intuition

(*Kōiteki chokkan*)

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Pure experience and active intuition

Kōiteki chokkan 行爲的直観 plays a pivotal role in the final thinking of Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945).¹ In fact, as Kōsaka Masaaki explains,² from the beginning of the 1930s until his death in 1945, Nishida structured his philosophy along three closely interwoven guidelines:

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¹ The development of Nishida's thought is generally divided into three periods: the first, from 1911 to 1923, is usually called psychologistic or voluntaristic, being influenced by William James, Henri Bergson, and Johann Fichte. In the second period, from 1924 to about 1930, the birth of the "logic of place" (*basho no ronri* 場所の論理) must be remarked. The final period, from about 1931 to the death in 1945, is characterized by a turn to an ontology of history. While Nishida was strongly influenced by Buddhist tradition throughout his life, it is primarily with the series of Philosophical Essays (*Tetsugaku ronbunshū* 哲學論文集) that the concept of *kōiteki chokkan* acquires a certain importance, even if it is anticipated in the idea of "acting self" (*kōiteki jiko* 行爲的自己) developed in *Tetsugaku no konponteki mondai* 哲學の根本問題 [Fundamental Problems of Philosophy, 1933–1934].

² Kōsaka Masaaki 高坂正顯, *Nishida tetsugaku to Tanabe tetsugaku* 西田哲學と田邊哲學 [Nishida's Philosophy and Tanabe's Philosophy], Nagoya: Reimei shobō, 1949, 163 ff.

first, an ontology of historical reality, where he deals with the problem of Reality (*jitsuzai*) as a historical world (*rekishiteki sekai*) in dialectical relationship with the historical-somatic self (*rekishiteki shintaiteki jiko*); secondly, the logical structure of this historical world, in which he discusses his logic of contradictory self-identity (*mujunteki jikodōitsu no ronri* 矛盾的自己同一の論理); and finally, how human beings stand in relation to, and within, this reality, which is exactly the point with which action-intuition deals.³ In the same term “*kōiteki chokkan*” a twofold structure is clearly visible: action (creation, production), and intuition (vision, cognition, knowledge). An appropriate translation might be either “active intuition” or “action-intuition,” but actually it is not easy to choose between the two. Both stress important characteristics of the notion: one, its noetic-subjective value, the other, the equivalence between the two moments inside its structure.⁴

From a certain perspective, *kōiteki chokkan* can be interpreted as a return to the initial inspiration of Nishidian philosophy, namely, the fundamental idea of *junsui keiken* 純粹經驗, or “pure experience,” the pivotal concept of Nishida’s maiden work, *Zen no kenkyū* 善の研究 [An Inquiry into the Good] (1911). Nevertheless, the two concepts are significantly different in their conceptual frames of reference. This makes *kōiteki chokkan* an important moment in Nishida’s thought. It seems quite odd, then, that this notion has not attracted more attention from Western critics.⁵ The importance of this concept was highlighted by Nishida himself in his foreword to the 1936 edition of *Zen no kenkyū*:

³ Kōsaka M., *ibid.*

⁴ For the German, E. Weinmayr suggests the term *Handelunde Anschauung*, indicating the inadequacy of Nishida’s own translations of *Tatanschauung*, and *handlungsgemäße Anschauung*. For instance, *Tatanschauung* seems to imply the influence of the Fichtian idea of *Tathandlung*, while actually that is not the case. (E. Weinmayr, “Nishida tetsugaku no konpon shogainen” [Various Fundamental Concepts of Nishida’s Philosophy], in Kayano Yoshio 茅野良男 & Ōhashi Ryōsuke 大橋良介, eds., *Nishida tetsugaku*, Kyōto: Minerva Shobō, 1987, 220–221). For the French, Nakagawa Hisayasu 中川久定 suggests *intuition-acte* (“*Kōiteki chokkan to sono yakugo wo megutte*” [On *Kōiteki chokkan* and its Translations], in Nakamura Yūjirō *chōsakushū* 中村裕二郎, Geppō 7, Dai VII kan, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1993, 3–6).

⁵ With the exception of the pages of G. K. Piovesana (*Recent Japanese Philosophical Thought. 1862–1962. A Survey*, Tokyo: Enderle Bookstore, 1963, 110–115), as far as I know the only lengthy essay in Western languages about the concept of *kōiteki*

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The idea of "Place" was made concrete (*gutaika serare* 具體化せられ) as "Dialectical Universal" (*benshōhōteki ippansha* 辯證法的一般者) and the position of "Dialectical Universal" was made direct (*chokusetsuka serareta* 直接化せられた) as the position of "active intuition" (*kōiteki chokkan*). [. . .] What was defined as the world of "direct experience" (*chokusetsu keiken*), "pure experience" and so on, now has come to be thought of as the world of Historical Reality (*rekishiteki jitsuzai*). It is the very world of action-intuition, the very world of *poiesis* that is the world of pure experience.⁶

As is well known, *junsui keiken* is the original condition of unity between subject and object, before any distinction is added by ordinary consciousness, which in turn can be reduced to it. The same Nishida defined such a conception which deals with problems of individual perception and states of consciousness as "psychologistic."

"Pure experience" differs from *kōiteki chokkan* in its same theoretical premises.⁷ One, psychologistic, the other, ontologic, they almost appear as two opposite strategies of thinking: if pure experience—being a pre- and post-conscious immediacy—depreciates the rational, objective aspects of reality, such as language and logical method,⁸ in *kōiteki chokkan*, knowledge is conceived as a process inside the historical-

chokkan is a translation of a work by Yuasa Yasuo 湯浅泰雄 (*The Body. Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory*, New York: SUNY, 1987, chap. 2, "Nishida Kitarō's View of the Body," 49–74). Hereafter cited as *The Body*. (NOTE: While this paper was being printed, I learned that Professor A. Jacinto-Zavala devotes two chapters of his book *Filosofía de la transformación del mundo*, Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1989, to the theme of *kōiteki chokkan*.)

⁶ See *Nishida Kitarō Zenshū*, Vol. I, 6–7; hereafter, indicated parenthetically as follows: (I, 6–7).

⁷ Kosaka Kunitsugu 小坂国継, *Nishida Kitarō. Sono shisō to gendai* 西田幾多郎. その思想と現代 [Nishida Kitarō. His Thought and Today], Kyōto: Minerva Shobō, 1995, 79–93.

⁸ In *Zen no kenkyū* the philosopher's purpose is clearly stated: to explain everything on the grounds of pure experience (I, 4), while the reality is considered as a phenomenon of consciousness (*ishiki no genshō* 意識の現象). (I, 52) Even if here *ishiki* does not mean a conscious subject, this betrays a psychologistic and monistic tendency. See also: Nishida Kitarō, *An Inquiry into the Good*, trans. by Abe Masao & C. Ives, London: Yale University Press, xxx; 42 ff.

dialectical world. Nevertheless, in Nishida's final philosophy, this pre-eminence granted to dialectics does not imply the exclusion of concrete experience that was so central to his previous works. Instead, this concreteness is reformulated through the theme of the historical, practical body (*rekishiteki jissentekishintai* 歴史的實踐的身體), which acts and knows in the world as its self-expression.⁹ This theme actually replaces that of the original unity which precedes categorical distinction, as a typical statement of *Zen no kenkyū*. This replacement presupposes a certain amount of decisive rethinking, including a tendency to move from monism to pluralism. *Kōiteki chokkan* is in part a consequence of this process. In this formulation, the dimension of the body, in its various facets and its closely-knit links with the world, acts as a symbol of complexity, around which the problem of knowledge in the historical world turns.

Considering Nishida from this perspective of the historical body and active intuition is a way of better appreciating how near he is to other important figures of contemporary philosophical discourse, such as Heidegger who insisted on the relational and practical character of the Being-in-the-World (*In-der-Welt-sein*).¹⁰ The end of modernity, as the triumphant era of the Hegelian system and identity, coincides with a radical crisis of the conception of a self-sufficient Subjectivity. This change of perspective means a confrontation with all the aspects of reality, which Hegel will be accused of not having considered properly; but this will often be based on Hegel's lesson.¹¹ From this point of view, Nishida is not an isolated example. On the one hand, he patently intends to overcome the Hegelian system.¹² On the other, he owes much

⁹ Kosaka K., *Nishida Kitarō. Sono shisō to gendai*, 79–81.

¹⁰ See particularly G. Chiurazzi, *Hegel, Heidegger e la grammatica dell'essere* [Hegel, Heidegger and the Grammar of Being], Roma: Laterza, 1996.

¹¹ See L. Cortella, *Dopo il sapere assoluto. L'eredità hegeliana nell'epoca post-metafisica* [After Absolute Knowledge. Hegelian Heritage in the Post-Metaphysical Era], Milan: Guerini, 1995.

¹² According to Nishida, "Hegel's Universal does not contain the true individual. It does not contain our self as our Will, our practical self. Hegelian Reason is opposed to the individual self as Will. So much remains of subjectivism" (XI, 166). This criticism is probably correct, if Hegel is interpreted as a philosopher of Consciousness. See expressions such as "Individuality is the principle of reality. In fact, individuality is the *consciousness* through which the being-in-itself is also for another." (*Phenomenology*, 527)

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to it. In fact, it is thanks to some fundamental Hegelian conceptual tools that Nishida tries to overcome modernity.¹³ However, in this conceptual battle, in which he engages the West-as-modernity, Nishida is very much in tune to the urgings deriving from his own cultural background, particularly, the Buddhist tradition. Accordingly, in the logical-dialectical structure, and especially in the concept of negation, he binds together Hegelian terminology and a strong Buddhist orientation. In this way, the Hegelian concept of identity becomes a non-linear, nonunitary process, in which, as we shall see, the process itself is thoroughly self-negating.

In this essay, I would like to explain the notion of *kōiteki chokkan* in relation to Nishida's ontological scheme. After an exposition of the fundamental motifs of the final thought of Nishida, I would like to examine action-intuition in the light of evaluations of the concept by Tanabe Hajime 田邊元, Takeuchi Yoshitomo 竹内良知, and Yuasa Yasuo 湯淺泰雄. In this way, I think it will be possible to appreciate the pros and the cons of such an idea, inside and outside Nishida's system.

The logical structure of the historical world and the problem of complexity

Like Heidegger, Nishida thinks that the conceptual approach follows the existential and practical relationship with the world. Philosophy takes as its object the richness of Reality, in which it is involved as well. It is just this complex Reality as "object which is not an object" (*taishō naki taishō* 対象なき対象)—an idea parallel to that of Hegelian totality—which represents one of the most important interpretative keys to the entire work of Nishida. In this context, the final thought of Nishida gives the historical world a particular importance. It is only from such a world that every opposition (matter and spirit, subject and object, universal and particular) can exist. This world of interaction (*ai-hataraki* 合い働き) between individuals, and between Individual and Universal, is called the World of dialectic Universal (*benshōhōteki ip-*

¹³ For instance, in the Logic of Place (*basho no ronri*) it is assumed that subsumption (*hōsetsu* 包攝) is the fundamental problem of knowledge. Nishida used many metaphysical concepts (such as the couple Universal/Particular), but he sometimes seems not to realize what we, after Heidegger, could call their onto-theological implications.

pansha no sekai). As will be explained, *kōiteki chokkan* clarifies the human way of knowing and acting, i.e., of *relating* to this dialectical world.

How must this world of Reality be conceived? In *Bashoteki ronri to shūkyōteki sekaikan* [Logic of Place and the Religious Worldview, 1945] Nishida draws a distinction between three levels of the world: the world of physics (*butsuriteki sekai* 物理的世界), the world of biological life (*seibutsuteki seimei no sekai* 生物的生命の世界), and finally the historical world (*rekishiteki sekai* 歴史的世界). (XI, 374–375) What really makes the difference between these three levels of the world is the kind of interaction that typifies that realm of reality. Thus, in the realm of physics, the relationship between physical objects is always reversible and no action arises as a result of an individual initiative. It is always a reaction to a previous act, a pure effect in the chain of causality, proceeding by pure quantitative force (XI, 374). The dominant feature of the world of biological life is its irreversible orientation, due to a temporal asymmetry: unlike a chemical-physical phenomenon, that is always reproducible and reversible, a biological organism is born, grows, decays, and dies and it cannot be brought to its previous stage again. At this level, even if an autonomous act by the individual is possible, what is lacking is consciousness. Just the historical world is the most fully human world, the world of self-awareness (*jikaku* 自覚),¹⁴ which transcends time, being a movement of self-transcendence of the world itself: “[In *jikaku*] the self is in the world and at the same time it tran-

¹⁴ In Buddhism, self-awareness (*jikaku*) is close to the attainment of spiritual awakening (*satori* 悟り). In Nishida, the term *jikaku* is very complex. In the initial period, *jikaku* can hardly be distinguished from *jikoishiki* 自己意識 (the subjective self-consciousness). Therefore, it is not easy to translate the term, for it fluctuates between the Buddhist and the psychologistic meaning. (J. C. Maraldo, “Translating Nishida,” in *Philosophy East and West*, 39–4 [1989], 492–493) In the final period, this distinction between *jikaku e jikoishiki* is somehow consolidated. In this context, *jikaku* (self-awareness) is neither substantial (*jittaiteki* 實體的) nor functional (*sayōteki* 作用的) but fundamentally locative (*bashoteki* 場所的) as a horizon (*suihei* 水平) where the self sees itself inside itself (*jiko ni oite*) (Ōmine Akira 大峯顕, “Hiai to ishiki. Nishida tetsugaku ni okeru jōitekina mono ni tsuite” 悲哀と意識. 西田哲學における情意的なものについて [Grief and Consciousness. On the Emotional Element in Nishida’s Philosophy] in *Nishida tetsugaku e no toi* 西田哲學への問い [Questions to Nishida’s Philosophy], Ueda Shizuteru 上田閑照, ed., Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1990, 102).

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scends the world. On the grounds of such a form of transcendence-*sive*-immanence, immanence-*sive*-transcendence,¹⁵ the unrepeatable and unique self, the historical self can be conceived." (XI, 149)

This dialectical relationship between the human being and the world is the basic structure of the logic of contradictory self-identity. The criticism of Western philosophical subjectivism and the attempt to develop a way of thinking more attentive to this world's complexity are the two moments, destructive and constructive, within a strategy that aims, through criticizing the one-sidedness of subjectivism and objectivism, to build an alternative new logic of complexity. According to Nishida, in the logic of the subject (*shugoteki ronri* 主語的論理),¹⁶ as in Aristotelian logic, the Individual is considered simply (*tan ni* 單に) as unknowable and irreducible to any rational explanation, but it can be grasped only through intuition. (XI, 434)¹⁷ This theory has the disadvantage that scientific reasoning is excluded and that human beings cannot be distinguished from animals. On the other hand, the consequence of the logic of the predicate (*jutsugoteki ronri* 述語的論理), as with Kantian criticism, is that the Individual would be totally reducible to the categories of intellect. (VII, 18 ff.) However, this cannot explain the unpredictability and freedom of the concrete, existential individual. In both cases, the theoretical approach is criticized as too limited. Human beings are in fact both law and instinct: they are consciousness, but not only consciousness, as in the logic of the predicate. (XI, 434) They are instinct, but not only instinct, as in the logic of the subject. (VII, 19)

It must not be left unsaid that by insisting on the one-sidedness of both types of logic, actually Nishida is already creating space for necessary mediation, and the more the opposition is presented as sharp and incompatible, the more this mediation is an inescapable need. In this

¹⁵ The Latin *sive* here translates the Japanese term *soku* 即 ("that is; namely"), which expresses "the contrasting and nonetheless coexisting aspects of reality" (G. K. Piovesana, *Recent Japanese Philosophical Thought*, 248).

¹⁶ In Nishida's definition of "logic of subject" this subject is in the classical sense of substratum, or *hypokeimenon*. (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, b. VII, chap. 3).

¹⁷ See Yusa Michiko, "The Religious Worldview of Nishida Kitarō," in *Eastern Buddhist*, 20-2 (1987), 67-68.

¹⁸ Nishida Kitarō, *Nippon bunka no mondai* [Problems of Japanese Culture, 1940] Tokyo: Iwanami shinsho, 1982, 23-24; hereafter cited as NBM, 23-24.

way, he concludes that simple oppositions aren't able to explain the person (*jinkaku* 人格) as a creative element (*sōzōteki yōso* 創造的要素) of a creative world (*sōzōteki sekai* 創造の世界).¹⁸ This historical world is the unity and the foundation (self-identity: *jikodōitsu*) of these oppositions (contradiction: *mujun*). The nature of such a relationship cannot be reduced to simple identity. Instead, it must be a "radically contradictory identity," in which there is a perfect equivalence between terms. This prevents identity from prevailing over contradiction and vice versa.¹⁹

Mutually opposing things, in a sense, must be identical. [Let's assume] they oppose each other more than white and black, more than red and blue. Things that have no relationship between them cannot even be said to be in contradiction; the extreme limit of opposing things is their mutual contradiction. Here we cannot say in any sense that they are identical. Nevertheless, if they simply had no relationship, they could neither contradict each other. Such an identity must be something which is and is not, which is *contradictory in itself*, that is, it must be a contradictory self-identity. (XI, 187-188, emphasis added)

In this quotation, Nishida uses the term "contradiction" in an Aristotelian sense.²⁰ And yet, even in this extreme case of opposition, the opposites must have some sort of relationship, otherwise they

¹⁹ This use (and abuse) by Nishida of these logicistic definitions can be historically understood as an answer to the need to build a "new" philosophical logic which may grasp the essence of the world. (See G. K. Piovesana, *Recent Japanese Philosophical Thought*, 245 ff.) This approach always hides the risk to identify contingent historical reality with unchangeable logical realm, thus (ideo)logically crystallizing the existent. This problem is first theoretical and *then* political; that is, Nishida's philosophy seems too weak toward history, accepting everything as real just because it exists, eventually being almost unable to criticize the historical world. As to the problem of Nishida's ambiguous position toward nationalism, see: Arisaka Yōko, "The Nishida Enigma," in *Monumenta Nipponica*, 51-1 (1996), pp. 81-99, and the following translation of Nishida's *Sekai shin chitsujo no genri* 世界新秩序の原理 [The Principle of the New World Order].

²⁰ In fact, here Nishida deals with an opposition superior to that of black and white (according to Aristotle, the opposition of contraries), as the "extreme limit of opposing things." See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book 4, 10.

couldn't contradict each other.

How should this relationship between self-identity and contradiction be interpreted? To answer this question, we first have to consider the entire span of Nishida's philosophical career as an attempt, beyond traditional onto-theology, to conceive of a non-negating meaning of negation. In this general trend, the Buddhist influence is quite strong. As is known, Nishida's concept of Absolute Nothingness (*zettai mu* 絕對無) comes from a philosophical elaboration of the concept of "void" (Jap. *kū* 空, Skt. *śūnyatā*), as the negation of substantiality, of the self-nature (Skt. *svabhāva*, Jap. *jishō* 自證) of things. According to this conception, things are "void" (*abhāva* or *muga* 無我) because they are not self-sufficient, emerging from the network of interrelations of causal chaining (Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*, Jap. *engi* 緣起) in which things are endlessly changing. It is this unceasing dynamism that makes things as they are, hence the positive—or better, non-negative—meaning of the term. In Absolute Nothingness, as philosophical interpretation of *kū*, every opposition is mediated by an absolute self-negation, that "wraps" (*tsutsumu* 包む) contradiction without simply reducing the Particular.²¹ The same negation must negate itself, but not in the sense of double negation in formal logic that is equivalent to affirmation, as the negation of the negation of position.

Absolute Nothingness could be interpreted as a way of rethinking, through the impulse of Buddhist tradition, the speculative axis so fundamental in Western thought, which binds negation to determination. The famous sentence by Spinoza: "*Omnis determinatio est negatio*" (Every determination is negation), appeals to the positivity/position of every assertion, including negation, and conceives the negative necessarily as the affirmative of another position. Using Nishidian terminology, this means a "relative negation," i.e., a negation which negates an affirmation on the basis of another affirmation.²²

²¹ See Abe Masao, "Nishida's Philosophy of 'Place,'" in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 28-4 (1988), 355-371.

²² Overcoming the negative value of the concept of determination is the path taken by L. Tarca. See his *Elenchos. Ragione e paradosso nella filosofia contemporanea* [Elenchos. Reason and Paradox in the Contemporary Philosophy] Genova: Marietti, 1993; and *Logica Philosophica. La filosofia come determinazione del positivo universale* [Logica Philosophica. Philosophy as the Determination of the Universal Positive], Salerno: Magazzino, 1995. I thank Professor Tarca for his suggestions and comments on this point.

On the contrary, in Nishida a self-contradictory negation is a Horizon (or "Place," *basho*) that "wraps" (*tsutsumu*) every opposition/relationship as the most inclusive Place. This Absolute Nothingness (*zettai mu*) is beyond Being and Non-Being as their dialectical self-negation. It is not something in front of which one can stand. Being not opposed to anything inside of it (*oite aru mono* 於いてあるもの), there is no distinction between this Place and the wrapped thing. Absolute Nothingness then is the True Subject of things (XI, 397).²³ Accordingly, relative is no longer a determination, but a self-determination (*jikogentei* 自己限定) or self-negation (*jikohitei* 自己否定) of the Absolute, i.e., the final point of the process of the radical self-negation of the Absolute in the Relative. In this way, Relative is the Absolute and nothing remains of the Absolute. At the same time, the Relative also radically negates itself, and the final point of this self-negation is the Absolute. In this way, the Absolute is the Relative and nothing remains of the Relative. In other words, Absolute and Relative found each other through mutual self-negation. This self-negation is the key concept to understanding the religious relationship between Self and the Absolute,²⁴ as well as between Self and the World, and Self and the Other. In order to make this action/negation between things possible, a Medium (*baikaisha* 媒介者) is needed which cannot be a thing, but the nonsubstantial ground of things:

Action can be conceived as a combination of mutual negative elements, but for such a combination, there must be a Medium which is contradictorily self-identical. From the position of such a Medium, it can be said that what interacts in mutual opposition constitutes both of the extremes of the Medium's self-determination and the emerging of one result from mutual determination of the extremes may be considered as the self-transformation of this same Medium, as contradictory self-identity. (XI, 382)

In this quotation, it is important to note that the interrelation between things does not derive from things—i.e., from opposing positions which come into contact, as if they did not have any previous link—but

²³ I am deeply grateful to Professor Abe for this explanation.

²⁴ See XI, 426 ff.

from this Medium. It is such a relationship that makes things appear as self-determinations of the Medium. This Medium is not simply identical with itself, but it is a contradictory self-identity. In this position, nothing is canceled, or distorted, but everything, simply because it exists, exists as-such (*sono mama*). Only in such a non-position can the Wondrous Being appear, where neither thought nor things are negated.²⁵

The world of the dialectical universal

Inside the historical world, self-negation has a relevant meaning. The historical world is the world of interaction (*aihataraki*) between individuals, which negate each other.²⁶ In the case of two terms A and B, the action of A upon B is the negation of B by A, so that A becomes the Universal (*ippansha* 一般者) of B. However, in this negation, A also negates itself as Particular. That is, it is the self-negation of A.²⁷ Unlike Hegel, in this dialectical movement, A-as-world is not conceived as being at the end of a more or less linear process, in which it has to negate itself to triumph over B. In fact, A is one Particular among several. Accordingly, this action/negation of A is not exclusive: B too acts upon A, and so A and B are reciprocally equivalent: A is *at the same time* (i.e., as contradictory self-identity) active and passive towards B. In other words, it is at the same time influenced by the action of other Individuals, as Created (*tsukurareta mono* 作られたもの), and acting upon the other Individuals, as Creating (*tsukuru mono* 作るもの). This world of inter-negations is a dialectical world (*benshōhōteki sekai* 辯證法的世界) where A cannot be considered part of a one-layered process, according to which it is first a Particular and then a Universal. A is *at the same time* Universal which acts upon B and Particular that receives the action from B.

²⁵ See: Abe M., "Nishida's Philosophy of 'Place,'" 368 ff.

²⁶ See, e.g., Nishida Kitarō, NBM, 16 ff. In this, Nishida evidently is inspired by Hegel. However, mediating it through the influence of Leibniz's monadology, he overcomes the simple primacy of the Category and affirms the *contemporaneous* plurality of the world. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that also in the case of Heidegger, it is once again Leibniz who suggested to him the notion of World (*Welt*), as opposed to Hegelian acosmism. (See M. Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, XXIV, 248.)

²⁷ Nishida Kitarō, nbm, 18.

In this historical world therefore there is a kind of pluralism inconceivable in the Hegelian system. Indeed, Nishida admits the influence of Leibniz in his thought and what draws them so near is the idea of the world as an all-embracing place for irreducible Individuals.²⁸ Nevertheless, Nishida does not deprive the individual of its relationships with the world: he does not make it a Monad having "neither doors nor windows." The unique Individual is not put into question by any action on the part of other individuals, since these Individuals also negate themselves. It is the reciprocal transformation (action-negation-relationship) of the Individuals that corresponds to the self-formation of the world, in which the world transcends itself in the Individual. This difference from Leibniz is essentially due to the influence of the above-mentioned Buddhist concept of *engi* (Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*). In fact if the Individuals have no self-nature, it is their constitutional interrelation (i.e., their self-negating nature) which makes them as they are. According to Nishida, the self is thoroughly itself through a self-negation, i.e., through a constitutional openness to the world, while the world is thoroughly itself, through self-determination in the direction of the self, which makes the world concrete in the self.

Such a relationship is called expression (*hyōgen* 表現):²⁹ the world expresses itself in the self (determination and limitation), while the self expresses itself in the world (transformation of the world). In other words, if the self is the focal point (*shōten* 焦点) of the world, at the same time, it is the result of a process of self-determination of the world. If the self transcends the world as its self-transcendence, on the other hand, this is possible precisely because it is part of the world. Consciousness too is conceived as the function (*sayō* 作用) of self-expression of the world through signs (*kigō* 記號) that codify a language. A linguistic code is the result of the activity of expression *carried out by the same world through the self*. Therefore, the self is a contradictory self-identity, that always transcends the world transforming it, while at the same time returning to the world, when its movement settles, becoming the environment.³⁰ From this point of view, we can say that

²⁸ See, e.g., XI, 185-186.

²⁹ See, e.g., XI, 149.

³⁰ On this topic, see particularly Kōsaka Masaaki, *Nishida Kitarō sensei no shōgai to shisō* 西田幾多郎先生の生涯と思想 [The Life and Thought of My Teacher Nishida Kitarō], Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1941, 233 ff.

Nishida does not limit himself to clarifying the ties between the self and the world. He goes a step further, indicating their merging in a founding reciprocity, in which the boundaries between history and nature, the human and the natural worlds become more and more fluid and flexible than in many philosophies of the West.³¹ This theme of the radical complexity of the world, logically expressed in the contradictory self-identity, is ontologically deepened through the concept of the historical body.

The historical body as a symbol of complexity

According to Nishida, the historical world is the world of Reality (*ji-tsuzai* 實在), in which every opposition finds its own foundation. The main characteristic of the human world is that it is a creative world (*poiesis* or production: *seisaku* 製作): "This world of the historical reality is not just the world from which we are born and in which we are going to die, but it must be the world where we create things and creating them we are created by them."³² Indeed, in his final philosophy, Nishida gives the body a great ontological and cognitive value. In fact, as Woo-Sung Huh explains, in the transition from the logicistic period to the historical ontology a great change occurs in Nishida concerning the significance of the external reality. In the logicistic period, Nishida maintains a certain dichotomy between interiority and exteriority, emphasizing interiority. The human being is fundamentally a *homo interior*. Accordingly, the historical world is based upon self-awareness (*jikaku*). Turning to historicism, Nishida eliminates this difference, and the external world becomes as ontologically important as the mind.³³ It is the body that allows human beings to act upon the world

³¹ Such a fluid character was abhorred by Hegel and, notwithstanding his anti-Hegelism, by K. Löwith. They both saw in the attempt to indicate the connection of history with nature a reduction of consciousness to the symbol, as a monstrous manifestation of syncretism, typical of the "Oriental Spirit." See Karl Löwith, "Bemerkungen zum Unterschied von Orient und Okzident," in *Sämtliche Schriften*, Stuttgart: Metzler, Vol. II, 1983, 588 ff. On Löwith and his relationship with Japanese culture, see Gianni Carchia, *Introduzione* [Introduction] in K. Löwith, *Scritti sul Giappone* [Writings on Japan] Messina: Rubbettino, 1995.

³² Nishida Kitarō, *nbn*, 24.

³³ See also W.-S. Huh, "The Philosophy of History in the 'Later' Nishida: A Philosophic Turn," in *Philosophy East and West*, 40, 3, 1990, 350-352.

and to receive the action from the world, i.e., to be a contradictory self-identity.³⁴ Human beings are not *cogito*, but historical-somatic selves (*rekishiteki shintaiteki jiko*). They produce things, while in so doing are produced by these things. This creative interrelation between Created and Creating arises as extremely complex feedback,³⁵ expressed in the concept of the “[movement] from the Created to the Creating” (*tsukurareta mono kara tsukuru mono e* 作られたものから作るものへ), which stresses the dialectical process in its temporal aspect (while the above-mentioned structure of the dialectical world defines the process of spatial inter-negation).³⁶ The merely formal starting point of such a process is the passive, Created being—close to Heideggerian *Befindlichkeit*—which acts upon the Creating. The starting point is merely formal, since the Creating also comes from a previous condition of passivity. (VIII, 546–547)

For Nishida, the historical body has a strong symbolic value (in the original meaning of the Greek *syμβάλλειν*, or “put together”). In fact, much more than consciousness, which was the dominant concept in Western logocentric thought, the historical body reveals the human being as a multi-layered contradictory self-identity.

This trait of fertile complexity is the core of Nishida’s conception of Man. More than consciousness (*ishiki* 意識), the body is a structure belonging to all the levels of the world. It is physical and biological, and thus human beings act by instinct (*honnō* 本能), according to our Species (*shu* 種).³⁷ Nevertheless, we are truly human only in the historical

³⁴ See Yanagida Kenjūrō 柳田謙十郎, *Jissen tetsugaku toshite no Nishida tetsugaku* 実践哲学としての西田哲学 [The Philosophy of Nishida as Philosophy of Praxis], Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1939, 384.

³⁵ Noda Matao, “East-West Synthesis in Kitarō Nishida,” in *Philosophy East and West*, 4-4, 1955, 355–356.

³⁶ In this sense, Takeuchi’s analysis seems to me a bit too hasty. He asserts that in Nishida the dialectical process is not deepened, to the extent that Nishida’s dialectics cannot contain processual dialectics. Because of this inability, the world is absorbed in the mythical, ahistorical time of the Eternal Now (*Eien no ima* 永遠の今). (Takeuchi Yoshitomo, “Nishida tetsugaku no kōiteki chokkan,” in “*Nishida tetsugaku no kōiteki chokkan*,” Tokyo: Nōbunkyo, 1992, 16–17.) This criticism by Takeuchi means that Nishida’s dialectics is unable to overcome Hegelian dialectics.

³⁷ One of the main differences between Nishida and Tanabe on this point is that, while, according to Nishida, Species negates itself for the sake of Individual, in Tanabe it coincides with the irrational ties inside society, and can become a hindrance between

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world, which includes the worlds of physics and biology, and moves towards the individual through a self-transcending movement. (VIII, 543) Moreover, Nishida describes the manifold active and passive bodily relationships. On the one hand, Man *is* a biological body, i.e., has a passive attitude toward the environment. On the other, he *has* a body, as a means (or tool) of expression and action.³⁸ Therefore, Man is active and passive, immanent and transcendent, because while he is, as in Bergson, a “tool-making animal” and a *homo faber*, nevertheless this creativity is immersed in a closely-knit network of interactions, where the Created cannot be reduced to a simple passive object, but influences and modifies the Creating.

Summarizing, it is possible to find at least three important meanings in Nishida’s conception of the historical body: 1) the body functions as a principle of individuation.³⁹ In fact, Reality forms itself in the individual through the body. The absolute nature of reality as contradictory self-identity is nothing but this self-formation of reality in the individual body. 2) The historical body is the core of the natural and the historical process. 3) Finally, the body becomes the crucial point of the process of active intuition, because it is as historical-somatic selves that “we see the things in an active-intuitive way.” (VII, 546) Therefore, the historical body is the symbol and the point of convergence of the multilayered structure of the historical reality and its logic of contradictory self-identity.

Dialectical vs. direct intuition

In this general framework, *kōiteki chokkan* is not only a theory of knowledge, at least in the sense this word has in contemporary epistemology. It is perhaps more precise to consider action-intuition as an ontology concerning the problem of human action and cognition with (and within) the world.

Nishida refuses the distinction between action and intuition, main-

gender and individual. See J. Heisig, “Tanabe’s Logic of the Specific and the Critique of the Global Village,” in *Eastern Buddhist*, 28-2 (1995), 198-224.

³⁸ See, e.g., IX, 178.

³⁹ Therefore action-intuition is a praxis (*jissen* 實踐) as a way to “create things outside the body,” and at the same time as “extension of the bodily movement.” (VIII, 550)

tained by both common sense and intuitionism:

By intuition, people immediately think of simple passivity, a kind of state of trance. Intuition is considered as the exactly opposite state of action. Action and intuition could be conceived on the grounds of a conceptual distinction. It is thought that the two terms cannot mutually combine completely. [. . .] By intuition, generally a simple absorption of the self into things, the disappearing of action is meant. However, we must consider this same starting point as a problem. (VIII, 541-542)

Even in the subject-object opposition, it is impossible to be detached from the historical world: "Also the subject-object division and opposition must be founded on a dialectical movement of the historical world." (VIII, 542) The dialectical movement of reality remains inside reality: "Therefore, reality, by overcoming reality, moves towards reality." (VIII, 563) This dialectical character of intuition is clearly stressed:

Intuition does not mean [. . .] a simple negation of the process, so that the Ultimate Truth may be seen all at once. This is an extremely childish and mystical way of thinking. Even artistic intuition is not anything similar. Intuition is an infinite process. Physics too is based upon an infinite process of infinite active intuition of our own historical and physical perceptions. Inside the intuitive process, each point is the beginning and the end. (XI, 153-154)

This notion of intuition as opposed to any immediate fusion is directly connected to the rejection of the concept of a self-sufficient entity that may bypass the mediating process. It must be noted that this statement shows quite a different orientation from the direct, i.e., a-processual (or pre-processual) nature of experience, so important in *Zen no kenkyū*. (I, 9 ff.) What changes here is that intuition is no longer an Absolute: experience occurs in the world. It does not arise from an absolute starting point, nor end absolutely, but it is an interrelated process; it is an integral part of the global whole of links which form the world.

Therefore, the concept of pure datum is criticized: "Action-intuition is not 'the totality at once.'" It is just that I disagree with the idea that,

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as with traditional epistemologists, the starting point is the discriminating subject, and in opposition to it, the datum is simply material, or irrational." (VIII, 565-566) In fact, "a subject in itself (*sono mono* そのもの), an object in itself do not exist." (VIII, 568) "Inside the world of historical development [. . .], a pure datum does not exist; the datum is Created." (VIII, 545) And again: "The datum is a Created and is also a Creating the Creating as Created." (VIII, 551) In other words, every "datum" is included in the dialectics of the "movement from the Created to the Creating."

From this point of view, it is abstract starting from the *an sich*, as if this would be the definitive starting point: "Even in the case of dialectics, I cannot agree with the concept of the datum, of the immediate, as a simple *an sich*. What I call the historical reality is always *an und für sich*." (VIII, 566) Unlike Hegelian dialectics, in which History is a process which includes totality, in the dialectics of place (*bashoteki benshōhō* 場所的辯證法), "conceptual continuity must be negated" (ibid.) and historical development cannot be conceived as continuous. On the contrary, it is a "discontinuous continuity" (*hirenzoku no renzoku* 非連続の連続), or a "continuity of interruption" (*danzetsu no renzoku* 断絶の連続), in which conceptual, rational progression is replaced by an inter-negative structure as an Eternal Present (*eien no genzai* 永遠の現在), where it is impossible to establish an order of priority, as in a linear process.

The controversy about datum involves the traditional scientific method as well. Science is accused of being based on certain aspects of reality detached from the concrete flow of events.⁴⁰ Everything must be brought back to the function of historical formation (*rekishiteki keisei sayō* 歴史的形成作用), which also gives rise to the subject-object distinction in a self-contradictory way. Therefore, the same abstract analysis is part of the totality. Then, against Kant, Nishida argues that "science itself developed inside the historical world. When an epistemologist

⁴⁰ This method of abstraction criticized by Nishida is the core of Galileo's experimental science. In fact, when Galileo devised the experiment of a falling body, he decided to reduce what was to be observed inside the given system. He decided, for example, to regard the falling body as if it were in a void, generating no friction with the air, while Aristotelian orthodoxy would have firmly refused such a simplification. See E. Severino, *La filosofia moderna* [Modern Philosophy], Milan: Rizzoli, 9 ff.; 39-41.

uses the word 'to know,' he is already determining the sense of objective knowledge." (XI, 150) Inside this abstract system, the observer is not present, *as if* there were a "viewpoint from nowhere": "Here the knower has been already removed. Still a type of knowing in which the knower disappears is inconceivable." (XI, 150) On the contrary, knowledge arises from an *entre deux* of subject and object: "Our knowledge neither arises from the simple world of things, nor from the simple world of the self. To employ an expression used since ancient times, it arises from the mutual determination of the subject and object of knowledge." (XI, 154) Moreover, according to Nishida the point of observation is circularly implied in the observed system: as in Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and some contemporary epistemologists,⁴¹ cognition cannot be considered apart from the flux of events and things which constitute the world.

Kōiteki chokkan or knowing as becoming

Facing the problem of the observer's involvement in the act of cognition, Nishida claims that knowledge is always a *practical, experiential act*. Action-intuition is called "an extremely realistic position of knowledge, as the grounds of any empirical knowledge. I define it as a position of knowledge based upon experience, as extremely experiential." (VIII, 541)

As Kōsaka Masaaki states, *kōiteki chokkan*, which nonetheless is a unitary concept, can be interpreted as both "action-as-intuition" and "intuition-as-action," even if in the concrete experiential act these two moments are always bound together.⁴² Through the theme of "intuition-as-action" (seeing as acting), Nishida aims at overcoming the common idea of sensorial intuition, according to which acting and know-

⁴¹ For instance, I can mention the names of Edgard Morin, Heinz Von Foerster, Ilya Prigogine, Isabelle Stengers, Douglas Hofstadter, Francisco Varela. There is a striking resemblance between Nishida's position and the conceptions expressed by M. Merleau-Ponty in his essay, *L'Œil et l'Esprit*, Paris: Gallimard, 1964.

⁴² See Kōsaka M., *Nishida tetsugaku to Tanabe tetsugaku*, 170. A somewhat similar distinction can be found also in Kosaka Kunitsugu (*Nishida Kitarō. Sono shisō to gen-dai*, 77-78) who draws a distinction between the noetic and the noematic sides of the world. They correspond respectively to the Individual aspect, where action is stronger than intuition, and the world of expression, where action is weaker.

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ing are opposite. Against realism, Nishida asserts that when the self observes an object, it is moved (Latin: *commotio*) by it through the self's act of knowledge. It is driven to express, to modify the world. Therefore, objects are not merely passive towards the subject: they act upon the subject and provoke its action. This aspect of *kōiteki chokkan* is connected with the artistic theory of Konrad Fiedler (1841–1895), according to whom when an artist is deeply immersed in the vision of objects, he spontaneously turns to creative action. Accordingly, vision is creation, i.e., it generates the creative act, and in practical experience no distinction can be drawn between these two moments.⁴³ This aspect of *kōiteki chokkan* is also expressed by Nishida through phrases as follows:

Mono to natte mi, mono to natte okonau

ものとなって見、ものとなって行う

To see, becoming things; to act, becoming things.

Mono ga kitatte ware wo terasu

ものが来って、我を照す

Things come and illuminate me.

These expressions are clearly influenced by the Buddhist doctrine of the non-Ego (*muga*), in which, losing one's own self-identity, self-awareness is attained. In this condition, knowledge becomes "seeing without a seer" (*miru mono nakushite miru* 見るものなくして見る), "knowing without a knower" (*shiru mono nakushite shiru* 知るものなくして知る), in which the subject of the action-intuition is no longer a conscious subject detached from the object, but is immersed (*botsunyū* 没入) in things. This is the condition of unity between body and mind (*shinjin ichinyo* 身心一如), between I and things (*butsuga ichinyo* 物我一如),⁴⁴ where the I is truly I and the things are truly things. Without this movement of self-negation, knowledge would be a pure distortion of the ob-

⁴³ See Kōsaka M., *Nishida tetsugaku to Tanabe tetsugaku*, 171–172. For a detailed analysis of the relationship between Nishida and Fiedler, see particularly: Takanashi Tomohiro 高梨友宏, " 'Geijutsuron' toshite no Nishida tetsugaku: Nishida Kitarō no tai Fidorā kankei o megutte" 「藝術論」としての西田哲学—西田幾多郎の對フィードラー関係をめぐって [The Philosophy of Nishida as "Theory of Art": About Nishida Kitarō's Relationship with Fiedler], in *Bigaku* 美學, 47-2 (1996), pp. 13–22.

⁴⁴ See also Kosaka K., *Nishida Kitarō. Sono shisō to gendai*, 119–120.

ject, which would simply become a part of the subject.⁴⁵ In this self-negation of the subject, action-intuition is clearly manifested as an articulation of Absolute Nothingness (*zettai mu*). While, for example, the idealism of Fiedler considers the cognitive process as a one-sided creation of the world by the mind, in Nishida the object is in a contradictory and complex relationship in which the object is identical with the subject, for it negates itself in the subject, and contemporarily it is entirely itself, for the subject negates itself in the object. In other words, *kōiteki chokkan* is not simply subjective, but indicates a structural relationship with the objective side of the historical world.⁴⁶

“Action-as-intuition” (acting as seeing), indicates the fundamental dependence of cognition upon somatic structure. Unlike Idealism, in a historical-biological body purely intellectual intuition cannot be conceived. Intuition or cognition means “to grasp things somatically,” (VIII, 549) inside the world of production. This somatic action has a twofold meaning: on the one hand, it stresses the Individual in its particularity; on the other hand, the Species (both in the biological and socio-historical senses) is asserted. Our actions are a kind of “instinctual movement” (*honnō dōsa* 本能動作), as a “movement of formation of the Species.” (VIII, 543) The Species in Nishida is involved in a relationship of contradictory self-identity with the environment, (VIII, 553) in which it negates itself, creating the individual. Active intuition takes place according to our Species, i.e., our cognition always concerns the bodily and perceptive structure of our Species.⁴⁷ However, active intuition does not correspond to simple perception (*chikaku* 知覺). Rather, “perception must also be active-intuitive.” (ibid.) In fact, the physical-perceptive structure cannot be considered outside the historical world. Therefore, nature itself is historical. (VIII, 551) Furthermore: “We do not see things in a purely sensorial way, but we grasp them subjectively. Therefore, this is a historical-social [event].” (VIII, 555) Interestingly enough, it is at the bottom of this subjectivity that its roots are sinking into the objectivity of the world, and vice versa.

Translating Nishida’s argument into the terminology of modern science, this would probably mean that cognition does not occur as if

⁴⁵ Kōsaka M., *Nishida tetsugaku to Tanabe tetsugaku*, 171–172.

⁴⁶ See Takanashi Tomohiro, “Geijutsuron . . .,” p.17.

⁴⁷ Kōsaka, *ibid.*, 176–177.

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the observer stood in God's omniscient position, but it is always relative to our physical structure and to the methods and the behavioral strategies we learn from our cultural and social environment. In fact, we *learn* to be in the world not through abstract notions, but thanks to cultural and historical forms of behavior, conceivable as automatism concerning the body, the practical knowledge.⁴⁸ By the way, Japanese arts, or *geidō* 芸道, from the tea ceremony to calligraphy, as well as martial arts, transmit their knowledge through an educational method in which the practitioner, through steady practice, memorizes numerous rigidly codified bodily movements and positions as an essential part of mastering an art.⁴⁹

Contradictory self-identity and kōiteki chokkan

According to Kosaka Kunitsugu, the relationship between *kōi* and *chokkan* inside Nishidian dialectical logic has a more conjunctive than disjunctive sense. For example, *kōi soku chokkan*, *chokkan soku kōi*, does not mean an opposition between action and intuition, but rather their mutual generation. Then, in action-intuition there is a slight tendency to stress identity over contradiction, unity over opposition.⁵⁰ However, in this way, Kosaka says, Nishida is already quite far from the equality between self-identity and contradiction we saw at the core of his dialectical logic. In fact, continues Kosaka, in Nishida the concept of contradiction (*mujun*) is not-exclusive or alternative, as in Hegel and Marx; rather it is "identifying" (*sōsokuteki* 相即的), or "reciprocally complementary" (*sōhoteki* 相補的). This involves a weaken-

⁴⁸ For example, in his genetic epistemology, Piaget has explained that the cognitive contact of the child with the environment does not occur on the grounds of a detached observation, but through concrete touching with the environment. See *La naissance de l'intelligence chez l'enfant*, Delachaux et Niestlé Neuchâtel, 1948; and *Introduction à l'Épistémologie génétique*, 3 vol., PUF, Paris, 1950.

⁴⁹ See also Nakamura Yūjirō, *Kōiteki chokkan to Nihon no geijutsu* [Action-Intuition and Japanese Arts], in Nakamura Yūjirō, *Nishida tetsugaku*, Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1993, 253-277.

⁵⁰ See Kosaka Kunitsugu, "Gendai Nihon tetsugaku to zettai mu: Tanabe Hajime to Takahashi Satomi no Nishida tetsugaku hihan" 現代日本哲学と絶対無—田邊元と高橋里美の西田哲学批判 [Modern Japanese philosophy and Absolute Nothingness: The criticisms of Tanabe Hajime and Takahashi Satomi toward Nishida's philosophy], in *Kenkyū kiyō* 研究紀要, 20 (1995), p. 11.

ing of the negative side of contradictory self-identity.⁵¹ Is it possible to solve this aporia? Certainly, Nishida did realize that the overcoming of simple identity was a pressing need. The very general orientation of his philosophical career shows a progressive shift from certain monistic temptations in *Zen no kenkyū*, to a kind of pluralism in the philosophy of the historical world, even if probably it could be said that this change is somehow still incomplete and ambiguous. In fact, the concept of *mujunteki jikodōitsu* is really polymorphous⁵² and escapes definitive assessment. For example, the concept of contradiction fluctuates from the Aristotelian meaning, which we saw before, to a "softer" use, as in *kōiteki chokkan*, where actually, as Kosaka shows, the sense of opposition between action and intuition *cannot be but secondary* in comparison with their unity. I think we can probably find an answer in the concept of the Dialectical World. In fact, this was emphasized by Nishida himself: "The position of the Dialectical Universal was made direct as the position of active intuition." (I, 6)

What negates what? Like Kosaka, I think that in *kōiteki chokkan* negation cannot mean that action negates cognition or vice versa, for this would necessarily blur any distinction between the Nishidian active intuition and sensorial or intellectual intuition. In my opinion, contradictory self-identity in active-intuition indicates the structure of the dialectical world, and in particular the historical body, *as the foundation* of the relationship between action and intuition. In this dialectical structure, the somatic individual negates the environment (*kankyō* 環境): "Seeing things in action-intuition means that things are seen, having to be negated," (VIII, 549) but this negation emphasizes *the subjective side* of the mutual negation between subject and things inside the historical world. Accordingly, *action-intuition is the subjective state of the dialectical world*. In fact: "To grasp objects, reality and so on as praxis, *as Subjective*, must be to grasp them in the sense of active intuition." (VIII, 550; emphasis added) Consequently, an identifying relationship between action and intuition does not represent an aporia from Nishida's point of view. Unlike *junsui keiken*, where the subjective

⁵¹ Kosaka K., *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵² In his systematic exposition of the concept, Yanagida Kenjūrō draws up a list of at least thirteen different meanings of the concept. See his *Jissen tetsugaku toshite no Nishida tetsugaku*, 416-430.

state of unity seems to be the sole reality, *kōiteki chokkan* is limited to the subjective side of the relationship, while the dialectical world has to be interpreted as the foundation of both subject and object.

What about the contradictory self-identity in its relationship with active intuition? I think it is possible to agree with Yanagida Kenjūrō when he says that contradictory self-identity in action-intuition indicates that *the historical body* is the central point of the world, which forms itself historically.⁵³ The historical body in fact is the symbol of the historical world as the complex, nonlinear reality which contains all the oppositions. In fact, the body is not only subjective, i.e., it is not connected only to active-intuition. It is also a part of the world, as a movement from the Created to the Creating. *Kōiteki chokkan* inside the final ontology of Nishida is relatively less important than *junsui keiken* inside his first elaboration, precisely due to this concept of the historical body which has the function of a *trait d'union* between "outer" and "inner" worlds. *Kōiteki chokkan* is the subjective side of the historical world, and this means the negation of the environment accomplished by the subject; thus Nishida's position has much in common with Marx's position according to which the subject, in order to become free, must transform nature through his own work.⁵⁴ However, in Nishida's philosophy a way to escape subjectivism is indicated in this very act of subjective negation as movement of contradictory self-identity performed by *the historical world itself*.

Active intuition can be interpreted as the limitation of the same *Logos*, of the same Reason which in practical action is absorbed by things, and *becomes* the object of its knowledge/action (*mono to natte mi, mono to natte okonau*), while at the same time things are negated, becoming the Thought. In this way, active intuition is a process in which the subject becomes things: "A is expressed inside B, it is a point of view of self-expression of B. Consequently, I always say that one thinks, by becoming things, one acts, by becoming things." (XI, 381) It would be possible to read such a statement as a self-limitation of the

⁵³ See also Yanagida K., *ibid.*, 384.

⁵⁴ On Marx's concept of work as essence of Man as Subject, see M. Ruggenini, "Essenza del moderno. Soggettività valore, lavoro" [Essence of Modernity. Subjectivity, Value, Work] in *Il Dio della filosofia e il Dio della fede* [The God of Philosophy and the God of Faith], Venice, 1988.

same system of thought, a philosophy which encounters the very event of the world. Therefore, active intuition indicates that the same philosophy transforms itself into practice. In Nishitani's words, "One breaks through the conscious ego and thinks about facts by becoming the facts one is thinking about. It does not merely philosophize, as has been in the past, but *becomes* philosophizing."⁵⁵

Does active intuition have any possible meaning for our common knowledge? I think that where Nishida's action-intuition can be most practically fruitful is in the comparison with Francisco Varela's constructivistic theory of knowledge.⁵⁶ Varela admittedly finds in Phenomenology and Buddhism much inspiration for creating a new theory of cognition, and extensively quotes Nishitani Keiji as one of his sources. Trying to overcome traditional concepts of representation, he affirms that concrete knowledge is not based on any abstract Archimedean point. Indeed, the *embodied* experience of cognition occurs *even without any theoretical foundation*. Instead, it emerges as an *entre deux* where world and subject arise at the same time. He also explains this theory experimentally. There is insufficient space here to go into Varela's epistemology in depth. Suffice it to say that the similarities with Nishida are striking and many promising results are possible in developing such a comparison.

Critics on kōiteki chokkan

In this essay, I maintained that in *kōiteki chokkan* action and intuition have the same ontological value, but this interpretation is far from being commonly accepted by some critics such as Tanabe Hajime and Takeuchi Yoshitomo. Through different arguments, they affirm that action-intuition is a form of Contemplativism, a new type of intuitionistic metaphysics, not far from Plotinus (according to Tanabe) or Hegel (according to Takeuchi).

According to Tanabe, *kōiteki chokkan* is an "intuition of Absolute Nothingness" (*zettai mu no chokkan* 絶対無の直観) or an "action guided

⁵⁵ Nishitani Keiji, *Nishida Kitarō. Sono hito to shisō* [English translation *Nishida Kitarō* by Yamamoto S. & J. Heisig, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, 180].

⁵⁶ F. J. Varela, E. Thompson, E. Rosch, *The Embodied Mind. Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, Cambridge, MA, London: MIT Press, 1991.

by intuition of Nothingness."⁵⁷ However, this is a contradiction *in adjecto*, because a seen action is not an action anymore. It is consciousness. Then, concludes Tanabe, *kōiteki chokkan* is just contemplative consciousness, having nothing to do with the true action. It is just an aesthetic and artistic action.⁵⁸ As Kosaka states, it is particularly about the problem of moral and political action, or *praxis*, that Tanabe harshly criticizes Nishida's concept of action-intuition. If *kōiteki chokkan* is a kind of instinct guided by a learned skill, then it is a kind of naturalism, an intuitionistic vitalism (*seimeishugi* 生命主義), which destroys the true meaning of practical action. On the contrary, if *kōiteki chokkan* is but an intellectual intuition, everything becomes the content of the self-conscious intuition of Nothingness. Then again, the meaning of action is lost in a sort of contemplativism. Consequently, *praxis* cannot be grounded.⁵⁹

According to Tanabe, in Nishida's dialectics of action, an individual intuition of the world is needed. In such an intuition, the individual as acting subject returns to the Absolute One, which, as Absolute Nothingness, determines the acting self. Consequently, intuition determines action. It is for the sake of action.⁶⁰ Tanabe acknowledges there is a difference between Nishida and Plotinus. As a matter of fact, the latter asserts that action is for the sake of intuition. Plotinus' thought is an example of Greek Aesthetism (*geijutsushugi* 藝術主義), which tends to "revere contemplation and detest action and work."⁶¹ Certainly Nishida, according to Tanabe, is different from such a pure, radical form of aesthetism, but he is closer to an "Aesthetism, mingled with modern Libertarism and Oriental Activism (*tōyō no kōishugi* 東洋の行爲主義)." However it is not a simple syncretic compromise (*setchū konkō* 折衷混交), since it grasps a characteristic feature of Japanese arts, in which intuition is for the sake of action.⁶² It is just that, accord-

⁵⁷ Tanabe Hajime, *Tanabe Hajime zenshū*, Vol. VII, 318.

⁵⁸ THZ, VI, 472. See also Kosaka, "Gendai Nihon tetsugaku to zettai mu," 12-13.

⁵⁹ Kōsaka Masaaki, *Nishida tetsugaku to Tanabe tetsugaku*, p. 81.

⁶⁰ Tanabe Hajime, *Shu no ronri toshite no benshōhō* 種の論理としての辯證法, Osaka: Akitaya, 1947, 96-97.

⁶¹ Tanabe, *ibid.*, 98 where a reference is made to Plotinus, *Enneades*, V, 37.

⁶² Tanabe, *ibid.*, 99-100. Interestingly enough, here Tanabe acknowledges that there is an equivalence between "action-for-the-sake-of-intuition" and "intuition-for-the-sake-of-action."

ing to him, in *kōiteki chokkan* intuition is the immediate (*mubaikai* 無媒介) foundation of action. This lack of mediation leads to a sort of emanationism (*hasshutsushugi* 發出主義), in which “human relativity is negated,” ending up in mere “mysticism,” whose aim is the “union with the Absolute of God.”⁶³ In fact: “In *kōiteki chokkan*, intuition is stressed as a guide to action and through this the antinomic contradictions of the relative action should be sublated.” In Tanabe’s interpretation, this is caused by the strong *Jiriki* 自力 (Self-Power) trait of Nishida’s philosophy, which comes from a “Zen intuition” (*zenteki chokkan* 禪的直觀). Against this, Tanabe opposes his own position of Absolute *Tariki* 絕對他力 (Other-Power), where the religious Aesthetism is replaced by the “mediative moment of Nothingness as absolute conversion.”⁶⁴ As Kosaka Kunitsugu suggests, certainly there are many misunderstandings in this criticism. In the first place, *chokkan* is not *mu no chokkan*, i.e., an intuition of nothingness, which is impossible, but it is the consciousness (*jikaku*) of the identification with things.⁶⁵ Moreover, this consciousness, I contend, is the foundation of action, just as action is the foundation of consciousness.

Different in premises but similar in conclusions, the criticism raised by Takeuchi Yoshitomo points out the connection between Nishida’s acting-intuition and Hegel, who affirms that the substance of action is vision.⁶⁶ The same *kōiteki chokkan* could be reduced to a self-awareness (*jikaku*) at the foundation of action. Therefore, in Takeuchi’s opinion, Nishida does not avoid a bad, old habit of Western metaphysics, putting *theoria* before *praxis*, and falling into the same contemplationism (*kansō* 觀想) Marx had criticized in Hegel.⁶⁷ Therefore, both in Tanabe and Takeuchi we can find a similar objection. However, as I understand it, something not completely convincing still remains. It seems to me that they particularly fail to properly consider the importance of the historical body inside action-intuition. A correct evalua-

⁶³ Tanabe, *ibid.*, 106.

⁶⁴ Tanabe, *ibid.*, 108–110.

⁶⁵ Kosaka K., *ibid.* Kosaka acutely points out that this is due to Tanabe’s way of understanding *zettai mu*. According to Tanabe, religious consciousness is no grounds for ethical action. On the contrary, it is ethical action which is the grounds of consciousness of Absolute Nothingness.

⁶⁶ Takeuchi Yoshitomo, *Nishida tetsugaku no kōiteki chokkan*, 10.

⁶⁷ Takeuchi, *ibid.*, 87–93.

tion of such an aspect could help revise this charge of intellectualism against Nishida. In fact:

Thinking that the formative function of history is founded upon action-intuition does not mean to assert that the aim of human life is in an intuitive stillness. Our aim is thoroughly the historical formation. It is in the historical production that Man finds his own existence. (VIII, 550)

Our True Self is a historical practical Self. No praxis exists beyond the historical action. Our very thinking is a historical action. We are aware (*jikaku suru*), in the place which at the same time is Created and Creating. Accordingly, our self is historical and somatic. Otherwise, this is nothing but a thought self, [not the thinking self]. To cling to such a self is an illusion (*mayoi* 迷い). [. . .] Dōgen says: "To learn the Self is to forget the Self; to forget the Self is to be awoken by all beings." We grasp the True Self in the place where we negate the abstract-conscious self and become one, body and mind (*shinjin ichinyo*). We have to rethink the traditional philosophies from the self-awareness of such a True practical Self, of the Self which is one, body and mind. (XI, 168)

A different orientation has the criticism of Yuasa Yasuo. Unlike the other two critics, he is very sensitive to the dimension of the body.⁶⁸ In fact, he clearly states that "to grasp human being-in-the-world in the form of the acting intuition is to grasp the structural relationship between the self and the world in light of the modality of the *body*."⁶⁹ I perfectly agree with such a view. Nevertheless, he questionably interprets *kōiteki chokkan* as the dialectical relationship between activity and passivity. Yuasa draws a distinction between two sides of the concept: the first one, in which action is active and intuition is passive (common consciousness), and the other, where intuition is active and action is passive (deep consciousness). Here "there is a reversal in the structural relationship between passivity and activity, between the self and the world." At this deep level, "intuition is the unifying force beyond the

⁶⁸ Yuasa, *The Body*, 49–74.

⁶⁹ Yuasa, *ibid.*, 67.

surface self-consciousness."⁷⁰ Accordingly, Yuasa seems to confuse to a certain extent intuition in *kōiteki chokkan* with intuition in *junsui keiken*. (Indeed, just a few lines later he takes a quotation from *Zen no kenkyū*, where the unifying meaning of intuition is particularly stressed.) I cannot agree especially with his distinction between ordinary and deep level. In fact, Nishida asserts that *every* action or intuition emerges from the dimension of the Absolute Nothingness, including those coming from the abstract-conscious self, which Yuasa would call "ordinary level." In short, action-intuition is not a deep state of mind, juxtaposed to an ordinary one.

However, Yuasa somehow comes very close to a real problem in Nishida. It is not the fact that "Nishida did not consciously tell us how to transform the dimension of everyday experience into the dimension of experiencing *basho*,"⁷¹ as Yuasa affirms; rather that in Nishida the relationship between ordinary knowledge (*chishiki*) and *kōiteki chokkan* is almost left unconsidered. On the one hand, as Nishida himself admits: "Obviously, I do not say that action-intuition as such is knowledge (*chishiki*)." (VIII, 564) On the other, he does not clarify the problem of how common knowledge takes shape from *kōiteki chokkan*.⁷²

Particularly pronounced is his tendency to look at reality in a positive, transfigured way. From this point of view, the objection raised by Tanabe concerning the risk of absolutization of Man and the consequent oblivion of its Finitude can be reconsidered under a different and probably more precise perspective. This remark can also make more understandable Takeuchi's critique of Nishida's strong resemblance with Hegel. The direct and most noticeable consequence of this transfiguration of the Existing is that the problem of error is almost forgotten. How can we be sure that our knowledge is correct and not mistaken, or fruit of an illusion? Where is our human cognitive limit? Does it have any consequences on our way of living? In fact, we live in a social world, and thus falsehood and personal interests are unavoidable. How can we know the truth? Does *kōiteki chokkan* give at least some

⁷⁰ Yuasa, *ibid.*

⁷¹ Yuasa, *ibid.*, 72.

⁷² Nishida suggests only a "negation of *kōiteki chokkan*" in the environment (VIII, 564), without any further explanation.

hints about these crucial and indeed *very practical* points? Alas, we have to answer, "No." *Kōiteki chokkan* seems unable to solve, or at least to deal with, the problem of error. Alas, this problem fails to *even be mentioned* in Nishida's pages. And though it is present (as negative), it is transfigured as a moment within the historical world's creative process of self-transformation.

Certainly, Nishida emphasizes mainly the positive and creative aspect of the relationship with the world. However, doesn't he often hide (or at least leave undeveloped) its destructive (or simply limiting) meaning? For example, Nishida seems not to consider technology as a problem. On the contrary, advocating the Aristotelian concept of "creating nature," (IX, 151) he naturalizes technology, making it a constitutional element of human beings. Here only the positive meaning of technology is considered, but nothing is said about its *dark side*, which nowadays we often experience in truly dramatic ways. Here, Nishida's distance from the final Heidegger could not be greater. Heidegger foresaw many dangers lurking inside Modernity as the Era of Production, where human beings themselves are considered just as objects and products, inside a (re)producible world.⁷³ Nishida seems much more pragmatic and positive than Heidegger on the question, but how much did he realize the deadly risks inherent in such a position? Moreover, I must agree with Takeuchi, who criticizes Nishida's way of facing the entire sphere of society and politics.⁷⁴ Here too the problem of Finitude is at issue.⁷⁵ By mainly looking at this finite nature positively, doesn't he idealize the human dimension? Actually, he seems to look at the world from the perspective of a kind of "Idealistic Pragmatism," where Ideal and Real are equivalent, and the category "Real" takes the place of the conceptual couple "True/False." Given this, the well-known hesitation of the philosopher towards nationalism

⁷³ On this Heideggerian critique of Modernity, see particularly M. Ruggenini, *Il soggetto e la tecnica* [The Subject and the Technology], Rome: Bulzoni, 1977.

⁷⁴ Takeuchi Yoshitomo, *Nishida tetsugaku no kōiteki chokkan*, 63–64.

⁷⁵ On the philosophy of the Finitude from the perspective of Hermeneutics, see: M. Ruggenini, *I fenomeni e le parole. La verità finita dell'ermeneutica* [Phenomena and Words. The Finite Truth of Hermeneutics], Genova: Marietti, 1992 and *Il discorso dell'altro. Ermeneutica della differenza* [The Discourse of the Other. Hermeneutics of Difference], Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1996. From the point of view of Philosophical Hermeneutics, Nishida's philosophy clearly does not face the problem of interpretation.

during the War undoubtedly has deep roots. He seems *fundamentally weak towards (if not openly supportive of) the existing status quo*. From this point of view, a remark by Suzuki Tōru seems to hit the mark:

In the case of Nishida, absolutely contradictory self-identity speaks of the contradiction between Finite and Infinite, Relative and Absolute, Time and Eternal, but he ends by transferring it *as is* in the realm of the Relative. Here, Nishida committed a fatal mistake.⁷⁶

By overcoming, but also maintaining, such an idealistic philosophical framework, Nishida probably attained his best result, but at the same time this was his biggest limit.

⁷⁶ Suzuki Tōru 鈴木享, *Nishida Kitarō no sekai* [The World of Nishida Kitarō], Tokyo: Keisō shobō, 1977, 147-148.