

Hidden Aspects of Temporality from Nishida to Watsuji

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The famous aporia about time which has become commonplace since Aristotle is well known: The past is not any more and the future is not yet; as for the present instant which separates the future from the past, it will immediately meet the past. From Plato to Plotinus, through the great Augustinian moment, and to Husserl and Heidegger, this aporia has been constantly taken up again and solved in many ways.

Under these conditions, it is not surprising that the problem of time would have attracted the attention of Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945)¹ who,

1. See especially the following four essays in NKZ 6: “Eien no ima no jiko gentei” 永遠の今の自己限定 [The Self-Determination of the Eternal Now, 1931], 181–232; “Jikanteki naru mono oyobi hijikanteki naru mono” 時間的なるもの及び非時間的なるもの [The Temporal and Non-Temporal, 1931], 233–59, “Jiai to taai oyobi benschōhō” 自愛と他愛及び弁証法 [Self-Love, Love of the Other and Dialectics, 1931], 260–99, and “Watashi to nanji” 私と汝 [I and Thou, 1932], 341–427. For a French translation of the first of these essays, see NISHIDA 2008, trans. Jacynthe Tremblay. For translations of the other three essays, see NISHIDA 2003, trans. Jacynthe Tremblay. Nishida’s temporality reached its maturity in 1932 with the book entitled *Mu no jikakuteki gentei* 無の自覚的限定 [The Determination of Nothingness in Accordance with Self-Awareness] (NKZ 6). It was developed especially in relation to the thought of

while standing within this wide current of thought, was able to reinterpret temporality and bring to it an original configuration by grafting it onto his “logic of basho” (*bashoteki ronri* 場所的論理), whose center of gravity is precisely the notion of *basho*.² Nishida’s conception of temporality is therefore extremely logical and rigorous.³ The logic of *basho*, with its encompassing structure, indicates a global dialectical movement between the *basho* and its content. It will be used as a framework of analysis concerning temporality in the thought of the other philosophers of the Kyoto School.

There has been little research before now on the topic of temporality. And yet, Kuki, Tanabe, Nishitani and Watsuji have all looked into the issue, although to a lesser extent than Nishida. In this article, these voices will be put into dialogue since each has something judicious, even important to say. They will address the following topics: First, a reevaluation of rectilinear time will make it possible to reexamine the status of

Augustine, to whom Nishida very often turned, more often even than to Plotinus. The strong influence that Augustine exerted on Nishida can be felt not only through the elucidation of the problem of temporality, but also when it is a question of determining the deepest stage of self-awareness (*jikaku* 自覚), a decisive topic which is inseparable from temporality.

2. Nishida gave his logic of *basho* its final configuration from 1926 onward, especially in the essay entitled “Basho” 場所 (NKZ 4, 208–89), and then in the whole of the book *Ippansha no jikakuteki taikei* 一般者の自覚的体系 [The System of Universal in Accordance with the Self-Awareness, 1930] (NKZ 5). The best translation of the word *basho* is an expression which Nishida also used abundantly, namely “that in which” (*oite aru basho* 於てある場所). *Basho* can also be translated by “place,” but at the risk of being deprived of its most original meanings. For that reason, it is preferable to leave it in transliteration and without italics, in order to allow its polysemia to be seen through the various contexts in which it appears.

3. The stages, clearly detectable in his essays, by which Nishida proceeds to draw a total configuration of temporality are as follows:

All that is, is located in something (NKZ 6: 223);

All that is real is located in time (NKZ 6: 341);

Time is the fundamental form of reality (NKZ 6: 341–2);

Time is the self-determination of the present (NKZ 6: 182, 341–2 ; NKZ 9: 149);

The self is the *basho* of time (NKZ 6: 187, 277; NKZ 12: 79);

Time turns in the eternal now (NKZ 6: 366, 377);

The instant is the point of temporalization of the self (NKZ 6: 187).

For a detailed exposition of each of these stages, see TREMBLAY 2007.

the past and the future. Second, the past and the future will be brought back to their site, which is the present, in relation to the concept of “eternal now,” the “other” of time. Then, the acting of the human being within the present will be discussed. In conclusion, the problem of representation regarding “absolute present” and “eternal now” will be pointed out.

A REEXAMINATION OF RECTILINEAR TIME

The prevailing feature that can be found among all the philosophers of the Kyoto School regarding temporality is the importance attached to the present (*genzai* 現在) as *basho*, or site of time. This insistence aimed first and foremost at criticizing the prevalence of the rectilinear conception of time, as can be seen clearly in Nishida.⁴ At the beginning of the essay “The Self-Determination of the Eternal Now,” Nishida answers the age-old question, “Originally, what is time?” by recalling its current definition: “Time is regarded as a rectilinear progression flowing out from the infinite past to the infinite future” (NKZ

4. Nishitani pointed out that the rectilinear conception of time is found especially in Western Judeo-Christian thought. It is inseparable from the self-centered self which projects its shade onto everything. What Nishitani asserts is that Christianity supports a personal standpoint that allows people to be centered on themselves. He goes so far as to question the whole of Christianity on the basis of its faith in God as a personal God, and thus centered on himself. On this point, Nishitani’s thought lacks nuance (see NISHITANI 1982, 207). In Buddhism and among the ancient Greeks, time is conceived of as cyclical, recurring and ahistorical. This cyclical conception of time is appropriate from the standpoint of nature, in which one finds four seasons, twelve months and one year following another in a cyclical manner: “Nature’s ‘time,’ including astronomical time, returns without fail to its starting point, time after time, following the same circuit” (NISHITANI 1982, 205). Human life has traditionally been formed with this type of recurring time, as can be seen in annual festivals. In other words, since everything has aged at the end of one year, it must be regenerated at the end of the annual cycle. Cyclical time, however, leaves room neither for history, nor for the conscience of freedom. It is only with Christianity and the place that it grants to the awareness of the individual that time ceases to be recurring; there, each stage of human life becomes part of the drama and each moment of time becomes something new and creative, from whence new things can emerge.

12: 39).⁵ He considers that the rectilinear conception of time is derived from an abstract way of approaching it. It is in that case nothing more than an infinite movement which “passes eternally from the past to the future” (NKZ 10: 525). Nishida also notices that time conceived of in a rectilinear way constrains us, at the very most, “to be carried along causally” in a world considered in a mechanical or causal way, or from the multiple to the one (NKZ 6: 264, 277–78, 290). On the whole, a simple continuity passing objectively from one point to another is inconceivable. It makes it impossible to think either true time—that in which the present self-determines—or the true present (NKZ 6: 264).

To counter the unilateral character of this rectilinear conception of time, Nishida proposed an interpretation of time as “continuity of discontinuity” (*hirenzoku no renzoku* 非連続の連続) (NKZ 6: 343). Continuous time, which is flowing from the past to the future, must be determined by discontinuity and be in it (NKZ 6: 286). The unique character of each moment would be neglected if time were thought of as a simple continuity. To say that time is “continuity of discontinuity” means that it disappears (or is negated) from instant to instant and is born from instant to instant (NKZ 12: 39).

The reevaluation of the prevalence of the rectilinear conception of time involves *ipso facto* a new definition of the past and the future. Nishida limited himself to the Augustinian conception of past and future when he pointed this out: “However, the future has not arrived yet; and even if it is affirmed that the past has appeared, it has already passed. And what is more, it is absolutely impossible for us to know the past of the past” (NKZ 6: 182).⁶ At this stage, the principal question is as follows: “How can time be, if the past is not any more, if the future is not yet and

5. See also NKZ 6: 182, 234; NKZ 10: 525. Obviously, Nishida stands in continuity with Augustine who asked in book eleven of the *Confessions*: “Qu’est-ce donc que le temps?” (AUGUSTIN 1964, 264), before putting in confrontation the *intentio* and the *distentio animi*, which are two features of the human soul.

6. See also NKZ 6: 240, 262, 290. In Augustine, the main aporia was that of the measurement of time, itself located within the framework of a more fundamental aporia, that of the being and the non-being of time. Augustine tended towards the second option by taking up again the well-known skeptical argument (AUGUSTIN 1964, 264).

if the present is not always?” (NKZ 6: 264).⁷ As will be seen in the next section, Nishida ends by giving past and future back their ontological pregnancy by locating them in the present itself. But before developing this point further, let us examine the status of the past and the future, as well as their relationship, in the other Kyoto School philosophers.

Tanabe recalls that contemporary existential philosophy speaks about the contingency of historical facts in terms of “thrownness” (*Geworfenheit*), used by Heidegger to express the past of the Dasein, which is also “thrown” into history. The true nature of human beings is thus to be directed towards the past that embraces them. They have no choice but to accept their own contingent character, for the nature of the past is to be contingent. It is outside our control; it is given to us from without, determines our existence and mediates it. It constitutes the foundation of any free decision. Existential philosophy, Tanabe continues, expresses the future of the Dasein in terms of “project” (*Entwurf*). Whereas contingency means a total absence of subjectivity, the notion of project implies a freedom which makes it possible to turn contingency into choice and a decision of the subject. Contingency is in fact brought to self-awareness only through the mediation of a free project in the future. Self-awareness belongs to the activity of the free subject, and without a subject which projects itself into the future and which thus freely determines its own being, it would have no thrownness at all. Thus, it is not contingency but freedom which is the principle of history and the essence of reality.

Watsuji adopts the same perspective as Tanabe when he stresses that the past is expressed in terms of “already.” It does not yet exist, except as the authenticity that it contained. However, the relational character that characterizes the human being during a past experience is not something that is now gone and somehow perished; it still exists in actual practice and determines that practice. Watsuji holds that the foundation out of which the human being comes forth is the past as authentic wholeness (WATSUJI 1996, 189). As for the future, it consists in this: that the present-walking implies a possibility of relationship, a “beforehand.”

7. This starting paradox is used as a point of anchoring to the central paradox of measure. Indeed, how can one measure what is not?

The human relationships that determine the present fact of walking “beforehand” form the authentic future, defined by Watsuji as follows: “‘Future’ is, in every kind of practical activity, the possible betweenness that gives this activity its direction; that is, its possible *ningen sonzai*” (WATSUJI 1996, 183).⁸ These remarks make it possible for Watsuji to unify the past and the future as follows: “What is possible ‘beforehand’ is ‘already’ determined. The already established human existence that belongs to the future is its authentic ‘past’; that is, its ‘by-gones.’ The present walking is determined by the future that exists in the form of the past and thereby reveals the manner of transportation characteristic of *ningen*” (WATSUJI 1996, 183–84).

As for Nishitani, he establishes the limits of a conception of time centered only on the past and future. The sciences and every kind of positivist theory, which turn to the past to find the causes of present phenomena and consider the bottom as a beginning, turn their backs on their own ground. The same applies to scientific philosophy and to the idealism of progress, which turn to the future in search of an ideal understood as a *telos*, or a bottom as an end. But these theories are in every case illusions which must be rejected. They share in common the self-affirming independence of the intellect, that is to say the secularization of reason. Modern science tries to find the causes and the finality of temporal things strictly within the framework of these temporal things. No bottom located beyond time is taken into account and every religious quest in connection with a transtemporal ground is rejected.

THE PRESENT, SITE OF TIME

At this point in the analysis, it is a question of bringing back the past and the future—that is to say rectilinear temporality—within their site, which is the present. On this topic, the Kyoto School phi-

8. Watsuji defines human existence (*ningen sonzai* 人間存在) as “an incessant movement in which one becomes an individual by departing somewhat from the communal and then negating this individuality and bringing to realization the community in one way or another, so as to return to one’s authenticity” (WATSUJI 1996, 186).

losophers are almost unanimous. The exception is Kuki Shūzō.⁹ Rather than attempting to locate time in the present and, ultimately, in the eternal now, Kuki advocates straightforwardly a liberation out of rectilinear temporality.¹⁰ In “L’expression de l’infini dans l’art japonais” [The Expression of the Infinite in Japanese Art, 1928] he affirms that the mysticism of Buddhism and the pantheism of Daoism are both the expression of the same spiritual experience, namely liberation from time and space (KUKI 1998A). In the artistic field, the visual arts make it possible to be liberated from space, while poetry and music allow liberation from measurable time. The human being, who tends towards the infinite, can thus reach truth, morality and beauty.

Kuki again insists on the idea of liberation in “La notion du temps et la reprise sur le temps en orient” [The Idea of Time and the Repossession of Time in the Orient, 1928] with regard this time to the topic of the will and its link with time (that of transmigration) (KUKI 1998B). Time, he says, is for the will, since it does not exist if there is no will. In this context, transmigration is an infinite rebirth, a perpetual repetition of the will and an endless return of time. However, the human being needs to be saved from this type of time. Insofar as for Buddhism the will is the cause of all evil and of all pain, it is enough, in order to be liberated from

9. During and after his eight-year stay in Europe, Kuki focused his activity between 1929 and 1939 on the three following topics: the problem of time; the problem of literature, especially of poetry or rhyme; and the problem of “contingency,” located at the junction of the first two. Kuki’s idea of time was influenced by Bergson, Husserl and Heidegger on the one hand, and on the other hand by Nietzsche’s eternal return and the Indian theory of time. He tried to develop it in “The Problem of Time” and “The Metaphysical Time.” One also finds this idea in his doctoral thesis *Gūzensei no mondai* 偶然性の問題 [The Problem of Contingency, 1935]. There, Kuki closely connected time to contingency. He continued to be concerned with these issues throughout his life.

10. It should however be specified that Kuki’s conception of time is not constant. In his essay entitled “The Metaphysical Time,” for example, he stressed the present moment. In his writings about literature, he insisted on a very deep present. In his texts concerning contingency, finally, he developed the relation between the present and the encounter of the “other.” But in all these cases, one cannot speak of a concept of present which “contains” rectilinear temporality.

time, to deny the will. And time being that of the will, denying the will involves a liberation from time.¹¹

Contrary to Kuki, Nishida never speaks about a “liberation” from time and will in order to reach an extra-temporal and extra-historical reality.¹² His intention is rather to locate the traditional conception of time in its own *basho* which is the absolute present (*zettai genzai* 絶対現在). He affirms that “we can know the past and the future only by centering ourselves on the present” (NKZ 6: 182).¹³ This consists in admitting, as Augustine did, that “time is in the present” (NKZ 6: 183). Thus time is not limited to its rectilinear character. Rather, “the past flows while turning to the present, whereas the future flows while turning to the present. Our world comes from the present and returns to the present” (NKZ 6: 132).

The simple chronological past, when located in the present-*basho* or “present of the present”¹⁴ which includes it and from which it comes,

11. The liberation in question here is transcendent and intellectualist. It consists in denying time in order for the intellect to know, in death and eternal repose, a timeless deliverance. At the end of this essay, Kuki refers also to another type of liberation, that immanent and voluntarist type which one finds in *bushidō*. It consists in not being concerned with time, in order to live in the indefinite repetition of the search for the true, the good and the beautiful.

12. In this sense, Kuki’s perspective does not show an accurate philosophical analysis of temporality, at least compared to Nishida’s. He was satisfied with accepting just as they were the conclusions of the Eastern religions concerning temporality. The purpose of his affirmations is ultimately to leave temporality.

13. Here, the “historical world” (and ultimately “absolute nothing”), just like the “absolute present,” are not metaphysical absolutes (the Being, the One, like the traditional philosophical conception of God) since those could not undergo any determination or change from the orders which are “inferior” to them. Obviously, it is difficult to render an account of Nishida’s temporal concepts at the conceptual level since they are non-substantial and operate on the meontological level. In order to reach them asymptotically, the concepts of determination, self-determination and reciprocal determination are most suitable.

14. The encompassing character of the present was already in embryo in Augustine, although one cannot of course detect yet in the *Confessions* a “present-*basho*” in Nishida’s sense. Nevertheless, Augustine did not neglect to ask the question not only of the how of time, but also of its site: “Si le futur et le passé existent, je veux savoir où ils sont. Si je n’en suis pas encore capable, je sais du moins que, où qu’ils soient, ils n’y sont ni en tant que futur, ni en tant que passé, mais en tant que

does not pass irremediably into the past anymore; rather, its significance is modified insofar as it belongs henceforth to the present. The same holds true with respect to the future. The present thus appears as the center in which the past has already passed and simultaneously has not yet passed, and in which the future has not yet arrived, although it appears there already.¹⁵ Therefore, Nishida goes beyond the notion of chronological temporality to reach the meontological dimension of the present. In other words, the present-*basho* is different from the chronological present, but the two are never irremediably separated. Indeed, the chronological present, like the past and the future, is located in the meontological present which is its very place of emergence.

Absolute present, ultimately, is in turn encompassed in “eternity” or the “eternal now” (*eien no ima* 永遠の今). The notion of eternal now is a question of capital importance in Nishida’s temporality. He goes so far as to say that “time turns in the eternal now” (NKZ 6: 366, 377). According to the structure of the logic of *basho*, the eternal now is the ultimate encompasser of temporality and of its constituent parts.

Nishitani connects the same notion of eternal now to the infinite openness or nihility that he recognizes at the bottom of time. Although time is without beginning or end, what is present is present at the moment. According to this conception, the beginning and the end of time are always in the present. This means that “while each and every point of time is itself—the past inexorably as past, the future inexorably as future—they are also simultaneous with the present” (NKZ 6: 267). Through this simultaneity, the present encompasses all pasts and all futures, and holds them.

Granting this, Nishitani addresses the question of the “instant”

présents. Car si le futur y est en tant que futur, il n’y est pas encore; si le passé y est en tant que passé, il n’y est plus. Où dont qu’ils soient, quels qu’ils soient, ils ne sont qu’en tant que présents” (AUGUSTIN 1964, 267–68).

15. This close link established by Nishida between the concept of present and that of *basho* appears more clearly when it is noted that the present is inseparably related to the notion of space. A coexistence of innumerable moments, one of the multiple, the present appears similar to a “place” (*tokoro* 所), a “space of time” (*toki no kūkan* 時の空間), or a “temporal space” (*jikanteki kūkan* 時間的空間) (see NKZ 9: 149, 150, 152). In this sense, any present moment is a temporal synthesis in space-*basho*.

(*shunkan* 瞬間). Here, he does not quote Nishida as his authority, but their conclusions are similar. Indeed, for Nishida, what self-determines at the root of time is the instant.¹⁶ The instant appears at the bottom of the temporal determination which, as noematic determination, moves continuously from the past to the future. The infinite past and the infinite future originate from this determination-instant (*shunkanteki gentei* 瞬間の限定) which goes beyond rectilinear time (itself the self-determination of the eternal now), and which consists in disappearing from instant to instant. For this reason, Nishida states, the determination-instant, conceived of noetically as continuity of discontinuity, must be, noematically, a continuous motion going from one point to another, that is to say, rectilinear time. It is impossible to consider separately these relations between the noema and the noesis (NKZ 6: 281).

Nishitani, in a similar way, affirms that each point of the past and each point of the future are simultaneous with the present instant. Each one temporalizes itself as instant, which is always a “now.” In this sense, the present occurs simultaneously with each point of the past and the future. The present instant projects (reflects) in itself all possible pasts and all possible futures. In return, it becomes manifest insofar as it is the place into which are projected all the pasts and all the futures. The instant is what maintains all pasts and all futures at the bottom of the present. This is why Nishitani asserts that it is a monad of the eternity (which projects into the present the totality of infinite time).

Tanabe also focuses on the present, in order to connect time and eternity. His main question is as follows: How can one connect the “thrown-

16. “Time turns in the eternal now. It is conceivable neither from the absolute past, nor from the infinite future, but from the fact that the present self-determines. The instant must self-determine at the root of time. The instant which self-determines in that way is conceivable only as self-determination of the eternal now which encompasses time. Located in the self-determination of the eternal now—which self-determines in oneself—the instant is determined in countless ways, as it is said in Plato’s *Parmenides*. The instant which, by its own determination, determines time, must have the significance of an extension of the eternal now” (NKZ 6: 377). For Nishida, the principal source of inspiration regarding the instant is Plato. He places the instant out of time, in the same way that Plato located it between motion and rest and then established that motion is transformed into rest, and rest into motion (PLATON 1999, 207; NKZ 6: 376).

ness” of the past to the “project” of the future, so as to achieve a unified conception of time? History, says Tanabe, belongs to the past and is diametrically opposed to freedom, by which human beings connect themselves to the future. The contingency of the past and the freedom of the future are opposed, but on the other hand, they are equal because they are both nonexistent in the present.¹⁷ However, stressing their non-existence—i.e. their negation—is not sufficient since at the same time, they exist in the present and are able to establish the unity of time. Therefore, one can go so far as to advocate a “present of the past” (which makes possible the existence of the past) and a “present of the future” (which makes possible the existence of the future); both form a unity-in-contradiction within the absolute eternal present, understood as “present of the present.”¹⁸ Regarding the central role of the present, the perspectives of Nishitani and Tanabe are almost similar. However, they show a major difference with Nishida’s. For Nishitani, as for Nishida, the present is the origin of the ecstasies towards both the past and the future (Nishida would speak, in that sense, of the “self-determination” of the present). Nishitani, however, does not distinguish between the chronological present and the absolute or meontological present. The former seems to be directly the latter. Tanabe proceeds in a similar way. When he affirms that the past and the future are unified in the present, he seems to adopt something of the Nishidian present-*basho*, but without distinguishing between the chronological present and the present-*basho*. Apparently, he locates himself only on the continuous line of rectilin-

17. Nishida would speak of a “coexistence” of the past and the future in the present. Unlike the Nishidian absolute present, Tanabe’s notion of present seems to belong to rectilinear time. It is true that Tanabe mentions the absolute present, but without differentiating it from the chronological present.

18. These formulations are those of Augustine, who expressed the triple structure of the present in the following way: “Ce n’est pas user de termes propres que de dire: ‘Il y a trois temps: le passé, le présent et l’avenir.’ Peut-être dirait-on plus justement: ‘Il y a trois temps: le présent du passé, le présent du présent, le présent du futur’” (AUGUSTIN 1964, 269). Tanabe conformed himself to the Augustinian formulations in his work *Zangedō toshite no tetsugaku, Shi no tetsugaku* 懺悔道としての哲学, 死の哲学 [Philosophy as Metanoetics; Philosophy of Death, 2005], 75. It is therefore unjustifiable to translate them into English as “the presence of the past,” “the presence of the future,” and “the presence of the present” (see TANABE 1986).

ear temporality, without seeking like Nishida and Nishitani the other of time (absolute present or eternal now).¹⁹ We will see in the next section that the same can be said about Watsuji. His insistence on space and relationality enables him to emphasize not only the individual person but also society, and to establish a link between society (community) and temporality.²⁰ Nevertheless, the status granted by him to the present does not seem to go as far as with Nishida.

THE ACTING OF THE SELF IN THE PRESENT

Finally, let us address the issue of the relationship between temporality and the self. As noted, the present is the *basho* of time, i.e. the place of emergence of the temporal series formed by the past, the present (in the chronological sense) and the future. Now Nishida, remaining under the influence of Augustine, comes to this affirmation: “The past, the present and the future are in our spirit” (NKZ 4: 42–43).²¹ This Augustinian inspiration makes it possible for Nishida to bring a solution to the problem of the relations between these three determinations of time within the present-center or present-*basho*: “The relations between the past, the present and the future are established when centering ourselves on the present, we combine with the past through memory and anticipate what has not arrived yet” (NKZ 6: 182). It appears from this

19. It must be said to Tanabe’s credit that he pointed out the close link between time and eternity. He rejected the Augustinian conception of “eternity” or “eternal now” because while encompassing time, it remains purely transcendent and does not imply the self-manifestation of eternity through a negative conversion into irreversible time. Tanabe explains the continuity of time and eternity not as starting from the transcendent aspect of time towards eternity, but as a movement in which eternity moves in order to return to time. For him, eternity is not a static transcendence embracing dynamic time, beyond the becoming of time, and subsisting in itself. Far from being a being identical to itself, it is continuously mediated by time through the negation, which allows time to develop in a continuity.

20. In Nishida, the link between temporality and society is not always clearly established. However, he explicitly connects temporality to the issue of the “other,” as one sees for example in his essay “I and Thou” (NKZ 6: 418).

21. See AUGUSTIN 1964, 269.

perspective that although the present is itself a *basho*, it is in turn (just like the past and the future) deeply encompassed in the self or the spirit which henceforth also has the status of *basho*. It follows that the true self is precisely the present self.²² Moreover, the present exists where the self self-determines. In other words, “it is not the self which is in time, but time which is in the self” (NKZ 6: 187).²³

Nishitani, just as explicitly, affirms that the human being exists here and now and that the self is where the instant is. Self can grasp the absolute present in the instant of time only by opening itself in this instant, and thus by becoming itself the equivalent of the absolute present. Therefore, the acting of the human being is also grasped at the bottom of the present. Being-in-time consists of a constant acting which requires remaining in the infinite openness of nihility, where the individual is connected to everything else. When the human being is located thus at the bottom of the present, where time and eternity intersect, all times are perceived as simultaneous.

As for Tanabe, he addresses the link between self and the present by pointing out that time comes to self-awareness through the standpoint of the self. Here, he draws his inspiration from Heidegger, who defined the contradictory unity between the past and the present with the help of the expression “thrown project” (*geworfener Entwurf*) (TANABE 1986, 70–71). Metanoetics, understood as a principle constituting the fundamental form of the action, intervenes here in the sense that the contingent determinations of the past are not merely a thrownness which has already passed, but a present whose significance is constantly renewed in a circular movement in accordance with the future that mediates it (TANABE 1986, 74, 241–42).²⁴ These determinations are connected with

22. See NKZ 2: 128. From *Zen no kenkyū* 善の研究 [An Inquiry into the Good, 1911] and *Jikaku ni okeru chokkan to hansei* 自覚に於ける直感と反省 [Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness, 1917], pure experience (*junsui keiken* 純粹経験) was always presented as an experience of the present. Actually, the present is “the point towards which the totality of the immediate experience converges” (NKZ 2: 126) and in which the human being comes into contact with the heart of the universe.

23. See also NKZ 6: 277; NKZ 12: 79.

24. Heidegger, says Tanabe by way of criticism, failed to explain in a dialectical way “the negation and transformation of ‘thrownness’ through ‘pro-jection’—break-

the practical subject who, while determined by the past, breaks through them by means of his/her freedom and is infinitely opened towards the future. The highest and deepest self comes from this breaking through the self by the means of the action, which mediates the self-awareness.

Let us recall lastly Watsuji's perspective on the same topic. "Human existence" possesses a temporal structure thanks to which the past and the future are unified within the present (WATSUJI 1996, 189). He expresses this unification in terms of "beforehand already."²⁵ In other words, the human being is already determined in its present movement. Its existence consists in the unified structure of past, present and future. Insofar as the fundamental unity of the human existence is temporality, Watsuji goes so far as affirming, as Nishida did before him, that the human being does not exist in time; it is time which emerges from the human existence (WATSUJI 1996, 190).²⁶

CONCLUSION: THE PRESENT-BASHO, A REPRESENTATION-LIMIT

These remarks lead to the important problem of representation which arises when one emphasizes the absolute present. This problem is evident above all in Nishitani. According to his conception of tem-

ing through the previously fixed determinations of the past inherent in thrownness" (TANABE 1986, 77). The definition of the project, especially the self-awareness of the can-be (*Sein-können*), is very close to potentiality or possibility in the Aristotelian sense. The changes that occur are likely to remain those that occur within a being identical to oneself. For these reasons, continues Tanabe, the theory of time presented in *Sein und Zeit* lacks metaphysical depth.

25. It should be noted that this "beforehand already" is not equivalent to memory and anticipation, which are limited in Augustine to the standpoint of the individual consciousness (see AUGUSTIN 1964, 269).

26. Watsuji takes care to specify that human existence is also spatial since temporality is the movement which links opposite human beings with each other, but in a manner which is connected to their spatial structure: "The structure of *ningen sonzai* is a temporality that allows past authenticity to arise nondually as the future, in and through present dualistic activities, and that consists of the self and other. Oppositions and unities that are spatial, motivate time to arise. Space and time are the two

porality, rectilinear time is grounded on a boundless and transcendent openness which is directly beneath the feet of human beings, namely the bottom of the present. Nishitani comes to this conclusion after criticizing the traditional Christian conception of a merely transcendent God located beyond the world. It appears however that he maintains the transcendence, but reinterprets it in terms of infinite openness located “below” the world. Regarding the representative schemes, it seems that there is little difference between the Christian conception and that of Nishitani. With this kind of representation, Nishitani might easily make vacuity or unlimited openness a well-defined being.

No matter what, it seems that one is doomed to this kind of spatial representation. In spite of the criticisms that one can address to Kuki, his idea of liberation from time has the advantage of directing us towards this more general problem: How is it possible to conceive of the “other” of the will and time without reducing it to a conceptual system or to a merely transcendent absolute (it matters little whether this absolute is supra-temporal, non-temporal, post-temporal or infra-temporal)? But also, how is it possible to think the other of time without this other being, on the level of its essence, a part of time itself?

In short, another type of logic is needed here, one that corresponds to Nishida’s logic of *basho*. For Nishida, absolute nothingness, of which everything is self-determination, is located neither beyond the historical world, nor below it, nor at its end. Understood above all as encompassing, it is like an unlimited circle whose center is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere (this metaphor of the unlimited circle is extended by Nishida to the topics of the eternal now, absolute present, and self). It is the only representation that Nishida ventures. Let us notice however that it is a representation-limit in the sense that as soon as it is posed, it is immediately deconstructed and projected towards the infinite, that is to say, towards the absence of any possible representation, thanks precisely to the unlimited nature of this circle and its lack of circumference. By limiting himself to the notions of *basho* and unlimited circle, i.e. by using notions not easy to represent, Nishida insists on

ways of grasping the same structure and do not subsist independent of one another” (WATSUJI 1996, 223).

the relational aspect that this “other” of time allows within temporality itself, just as he insists on an openness of temporality that makes it possible to go beyond the simple rectilinear conception of time.

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