

# The Potential of Nishida's “Encompassing” Language

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The main terms of Nishida's “encompassing” language are place (*basho* 場所), “the *basho* in which it is ‘located’” (於てある場所), field (野), plane (面), to subsume (包摂する), to include (含む), and to encompass (内包する, 包む, 包含する, 包括する). They are found in *From the Acting to the Seeing* (1927), and *The Self-Aware System of Universals* (1930), as well as in Nishida's main essays about temporality, especially “The Self-Determination of the Eternal Now” (1931). In each case, I shall verify within the specific contexts what the most encompassing stage is, and what, exactly, is located in it. By proceeding in this way, it will be possible to figure out the complete encompassing structure of Nishida's logic of *basho* and temporality, as well as the potential that is concealed within them. This potential includes a concept of the present that emphasizes the connection to history, an insistence on the fundamental and ethical self, and the emergence of a significant theory of alterity.

The central concept of Nishida's philosophy from 1926 onwards is that of *basho*. It led Nishida to create a philosophical system, namely the “logic of *basho*,” within which all parts of reality fit together harmoniously. This logic allowed him to exceed the usual metaphysical oppositions, or at the very least, to put them in a framework offering a broader

perspective. With the concept of *basho*, other important terms of Nishida's philosophy acquire meaning and connect together.

In what follows I will discuss Nishida's "encompassing" language in his "logic of *basho*" and in temporality. The structure of the "logic of *basho*" is "encompassing." Nishida's notion of temporality possesses the character of "encompassing," just like the logic of *basho*.

### BASHO AND ENCOMPASSING

The fundamental statement of the logic of *basho* is as follows: "Everything that is, is 'located' in something." The statement is rather complex but can be broken up into three parts:

everything that is すべて有るものは  
is "located" in に於てある  
something 何か

The term "is 'located' in" is the central point of this statement and constitutes the basis of an important distinction in Nishida, namely the difference between the *basho* and its content. The first part is "the place in which." This means that the *basho* is considered to be that which "encompasses." In other words, the *basho* is the place in which content is located: it accedes to a different status, according to the content that is located in it. Widening itself more and more, the *basho* transposes itself from consciousness as the *basho* of the subject/object relationship, to the affective self as the *basho* of the artistic world, and to the intelligible self as the *basho* of the realm of morality and religion. Ever widening, it is the historical world as *basho*. All these *basho* are located in an ultimate *basho*, which is not a being, but absolute nothingness (絶対無). This is the most encompassing and the largest *basho*, and it cannot be located in an even more encompassing *basho*. With this concept of *basho*, it is possible to break through the sphere of what Nishida called the "psychological self" to encompass all aspects of a human being (emotional, intellectual, intelligible, artistic, moral, and religious). This concept can also encompass a human being as "located" in society and in the historical world in relation with "thou" and with the multiplicity of beings.

The second part of the distinction which results from the emphasis Nishida put on “being in” (に於てある) is as follows: each *basho*, no matter where it is “located,” has a content of its own. Nishida calls this content “that which is” (有るもの), or “what is ‘located in’” (於てあるもの). In other words, it is always “located” in something, namely, in a *basho*. For example, the individual (個物) is “located” in the *basho* of being; the conscious self (意識的自己) is “located” in the *basho* of relative nothingness; and the intelligible self (叡智的自己) is “located” in the *basho* of absolute nothingness. In these cases too, the emphasis lies on “being in,” which is precisely the center, or axis, of Nishida’s fundamental statement that “everything that is, is ‘located’ in something.” Thus, Nishida separates the *basho* and the content that is “located” in it. That point is the focal node that leads to a better understanding of the logic of *basho* and of its extremely complicated parts.

Thus, each *basho* is determined in relation to its contents. Furthermore, each content becomes a self-determination of the *basho* in which it is “located.” Each determination splits into noematic determination and noetic determination, and therefore each *basho* encompasses double content. Things become increasingly complicated as each *basho*, including the content, are encompassed in a more encompassing *basho*. Each of these *basho* becomes new content in comparison to the more encompassing *basho*, while their own contents gain, in the broader *basho*, a new status. This continues on until one reaches the *basho* of absolute nothingness, which cannot be included in or determined by a wider *basho*. All the previous *basho*—which on their own level were considered as ultimate *basho*—become, in comparison to the *basho* of absolute nothingness, a series of *basho* more or less wide and encompassing in their own content.

In this sense, Nishida considers the *basho* as an encompassing transcendence (包越者) where everything is located (see NKZ 4: 157). If one looks at Nishida’s philosophical vocabulary, the concept of encompassing was the medium that led, in 1926, to the concept of *basho*. During the period marked by the development of the logic of *basho*, the notion of encompassing appeared whenever Nishida dealt, for example, with the passage from the abstract universal (抽象的一般者; the first level of the universal of judgment) to the concrete universal (具体的一般者; the second level

of the universal of judgment). In the context of the abstract universal, Nishida used the terms “subsume” (包摂する) and “subsumption” (包摂). When analyzing the concrete universal, however, he completely changed his vocabulary and jointly employed the terms “contain” (含む), “encompass” (包む), “encompassing plane” (包容面), and “encompassing transcendence” (包越者). From Nishida’s terminology it is immediately seen clear whether he is dealing with formal logic or discussing the workings of his logic of *basho*.

### ENCOMPASSING AND TEMPORALITY

To summarize my ideas so far, the logic of *basho* is encompassing; Nishida uses this terminology to clarify the relations of reciprocal determination between the increasingly encompassing *basho* and their respective content. Nishida located himself in the framework of the same logic of encompassing when he tried to clarify the problem of time, the center of gravity being precisely the notion of *basho*. In fact, Nishida’s conception of temporality remains unintelligible if it is not seen directly within the framework of the logic of *basho*. Both operate in the same way even though their subject matters are different. One of the major assertions of Nishida about time is strictly identical to his fundamental statement concerning the logic of *basho* discussed above. It reads: “Everything that is, is located in time,” or, elsewhere, “Everything that is real is located in time.” From this starting point, for methodological reasons it is possible to go in two opposite directions, although Nishida himself always deals with the two directions simultaneously.

The first direction presents time as an encompassing *basho* or as the form of its content, namely reality. In general this is intended to show the relationship between “the place in which,” that is to say the *basho* itself, and “that which is ‘located in,’” that is to say, the content of the *basho*. Itself a content of time, reality in turn acquires the status of a *basho* compared with its multiple content.

This first direction consists in proceeding from time as the ultra-encompassing *basho* (compared to its own content and at its own level), to reality as a less encompassing *basho*. But a second approach is possible.

It consists in proceeding from the time conceived as *basho*, to a series of more and more encompassing *basho*. Therefore, what is the *basho* that includes time, and whose time is the self-determination? It is the present. Nishida states, “One has to admit, as Augustine did, that time is located in the present” (NKZ 6: 183).

Nishida’s topic of present-as-*basho* (場所の現在) is of extreme importance. It helps to take a crucial step in elucidating Nishida’s temporality since it now appears as the place (所), the space of time (時の空間) (NKZ 9: 149, 152), or a temporal space (時間的空間) (150) in which the past is already past, but not entirely, and in which the future has not yet happened, although it already appears.

Nishida signifies here that his concept of *basho* has an effect on what is located in it. The opposition of two contradictory terms—the past and the future—is always located in a *basho*, in this case the present. Locating contradictory terms in a *basho* permits Nishida to leave the framework of the simple opposition and to situate these contradictions into the place of their emergence. Thus, it is possible to finally escape from strict logical duality and to introduce into it the constant movement of the emergence and disappearance of contradictions.

The above-mentioned allows us to clearly see that the present is the *basho* of time, that is to say the place wherein linear time (formed by the past, the present, and the future) emerges. From time—as *basho* of “that which is”—Nishida proceeds to an even more encompassing topic, the present—as *basho* of time. But where is the deepening of the more and more encompassing elements of Nishida’s logic of *basho* headed? In other words, where is the present itself located? What *basho* is more encompassing than the present and that which contains it?

The real present, the present as *basho*, “does not move on a line outside the self but enters deeply in the self” (NKZ 4: 31). This means that while the present is a *basho* itself, it is deeply included in the self or in the spirit (see NKZ 4: 31, 42–3; NKZ 6: 185, 195). As Nishida states, “The self does not exist in time, it is time that exists in the self” (NKZ 6: 187 and 277; NKZ 12: 79). This is the new *basho* that is sought. In this sense, the self can be understood as the *hypokeimenon* of time (see NKZ 12: 40). As seen before, time is the *basho* of everything. However, with its ultra-encompassing character—ultimately, it coincides with the instant—allowing it

to be the *basho* of time, the self obviously has a special status: here too, the key to understanding is the concept of *basho*.

To sum up, Nishida leads to a characterization of the self as it is marked by temporality, helping to enlarge the self in order to see where it has always been located. In other words, this place is in the historical world where the self determines itself in a spatio-temporal manner. In the historical world as *basho*, and ultimately in the *basho* of absolute nothingness, a human being enters into relationships with others and with things in the precise moment of the present instant; in doing so, he/she becomes self-aware. The reason is that neither the past self (which is no longer), nor the future self (which is only anticipated and, therefore, is not yet) can exist here and now. Therefore they cannot truly enter into a relationship.

From this close link between the present and the self, Nishida goes a step further, broadening his view of the self as the *basho* of time to the eternal now (永遠の今). In other words, the present as *basho*, which encompasses the past, the present, and the future, is itself encompassed in "eternity" or "eternal now," and in turn becomes the self-determination of the latter; the notions of self, self-awareness, individuality, and history appear in a new perspective on this new encompassing level.

In the logic of *basho*, absolute nothingness is the most encompassing universal, which cannot be determined by anything more encompassing, but whose everything is self-determination. In the same way, the eternal now is understood as the ultimate encompassing stage of temporality. The latter, as we have seen, is a series of concentric circles that works like the logic of *basho*. In reality, the eternal now is itself located in the *basho* of absolute nothingness, with which it ultimately coincides.

Here again, Nishida's emphasis lies on the encompassing aspect of the *basho*, but in a way that is intrinsically linked to the notion of self-determination. This means, as it did in the case of the logic of *basho*, that temporality involves a series of more and more encompassing *basho* which correspond to a series of increasingly larger content. These *basho* and their contents are interconnected through the relationships of determination (限定), self-determination (自己限定), and mutual determination (相互限定). It is precisely because these relations are established through these determinations that Nishida manages to target the most encom-

passing level of temporality, namely that of the eternal now and of absolute nothingness.

The concept of self-determination has the connotation of being fundamentally relational. Indeed, it does not involve only a single self-determining element: in this case time, the eternal now, or absolute nothingness are all involved. Those elements have meaning only in relation to what is born of their self-determination or, more precisely, to what is born *as* their self-determination. Another point to note is that the concept of self-determination implies a self-modification, that is, both the determining and the determined are modified in some way by the moment of determination. In this way there appears a dynamic tension between self-determination and mutual determination.

This mutual determination occurs through the self-negation of both things and their *basho*. It is important to add here that in Nishida, any mention of a *basho* whatsoever (present, absolute nothingness, self, environment, and so on) requires an act of self-negation of what is located in that *basho* and what is encompassed by it. The negation is primarily a “negating movement” that spares nothing, including nothingness itself. That is why the concepts of negation (否定), self-negation (自己否定), and absolute negation (絶対否定), which themselves are inseparable from the notion of absolute nothingness, are used by Nishida to mark the absolute contradiction inherent in the self-identity of each of the terms in their respective relationships. By deconstructing self-identity, the concept of self-negation simultaneously brings about an affirmation of what has been submitted to the act of self-negation. What exists in the way of self-negation always determines itself (NKZ 6: 265).

Insofar as the movement of self-negation marks everything that is located in the *basho* of absolute nothingness, on the one hand it allows us to understand the complex relationships established forever between the various levels of reality (in this case between the different elements of Nishida’s temporality), and on the other hand, it allows us to rethink historical reality, human beings, thinking, and so on, in order to situate them in a broader horizon that leads to a questioning of traditional interpretations and fixed concepts. Based on the concept of self-determination as discussed above, it is easier to understand that the present itself functions as the self-determination of the eternal now:

What I think by self-determination of the eternal now means only that the present determines itself. The time which passes and eternity come into contact with each other in the present. Or rather, there is no eternity separated from the present that determines itself. The true meaning of eternity is where the present self-determines. (NKZ 6: 138)

In this essay I have tried to show the potential that Nishida's logic of *basho* and his encompassing language has when applied to the question of temporality. Absolute nothingness, whose everything is self-determination, is not located beyond the historical world and temporality. Understood primarily as encompassing, absolute nothingness is like an infinite circle whose center is everywhere, and whose circumference nowhere. This aspect of the unlimited circle has been extended by Nishida to the topics of the present, the self, and the eternal now. By using the concepts of *basho* and circle, Nishida emphasized an opening of temporality that allows us to overcome linear conceptions of time.

#### REFERENCE

- NKZ 『西田幾多郎全集』 [Complete works of Nishida Kitarō] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1978–1980), 19 vols.