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Japanese Aesthetics

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about the journal

The aim of the *Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics* is to offer postgraduates interested in aesthetics a space to exchange ideas, and also to foster a resource that will promote high quality essays relevant to postgraduates' interests. The journal wishes to encourage a wide construal of the study of aesthetics to include papers from analytic, continental or historical points of view.

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Special issue: Japanese Aesthetics

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EDITORS' NOTE

The 'special issue' of an academic journal is an interesting beast. We intended to present an edition about 'Global Aesthetics'—a deliberately provocative topic—and envisaged essays applying western aesthetic concepts to non-western art; non-western critiques of traditional western aesthetic concepts; and much more besides. Yet it was original research related to Japan and its artistic and aesthetic traditions that dominated the submissions. And so, starting from a question far too big we, serendipitously, now proudly present a special issue on Japanese Aesthetics.

Colleen Fitzpatrick interviews Prof. Graham Parkes of University College Cork, and quizzes him on the different relationships eastern and western cultures have with their own artworks, and those of other cultures. Autumn Sharkey explores what a piece of Japanese avant-garde music, Takemitsu's *Equinox*, tells us about the translatability of cultural concepts. Finally, Tomoe Nakamura explains how a dichotomy between intellectual and sensory understanding of the world, a dichotomy deeply ingrained into the practice of western philosophy, was received by scholars from the Japanese tradition.

If art is a matter of expressing the universal in the particular, then perhaps this issue of the *PJA* can be seen as an attempt to explore the universal, or the global, through the very particular prism of the relation between the western and Japanese philosophical traditions.

Al Baker

University of Sheffield

Maarten Steenhagen

University College London

WHERE THE BUTTERFLY MEETS THE MOTH

An interview with Graham Parkes

Colleen Fitzpatrick

NUI Galway

COLLEEN FITZPATRICK: Much of your research takes a comparative approach to Continental European and East-Asian thought, including the philosophy of art. You have said that philosophy as practiced in Europe and the United States tends to be rather parochial, and one of your concerns has been to open people's minds to the benefits of a comparative approach. What are the benefits of this 'hermeneutic distance', as you have termed it, and how has this approach enhanced your life and work?

GRAHAM PARKES: The benefit of hermeneutic distance, which can be gained by engaging philosophy from a different tradition, is that it gives you a new perspective on your own philosophical tradition, one that allows you to see the tacit assumptions and presuppositions that implicitly inform your ways of thinking. Beyond that, it's always refreshing to investigate philosophies where the important questions are different from our own, and where questions that we think are important might not even arise.

CF: You have translated and interpreted many Japanese philosophical texts over the years and similarly opened up the western academic

tradition to comparative studies of both Nietzsche and Heidegger in relation to Chinese Daoism and Japanese Zen. Do you think that comparative studies help us to understand the differences and similarities between human beings around the world?

GP: I suppose the greatest difference between our traditions and those of East-Asia is that in classical Chinese and Japanese philosophy there's no notion of a transcendent realm, or of a creator apart from creation. Another difference is that whereas the ancient Greeks wanted to know 'What is truth?' the ancient Chinese tended to ask 'What is the way (to live)?' But at the same time there are commonalities, such as a mistrust of personal profit or fame as sensible motivations for our actions.

CF: You have a chapter entitled 'Body-Mind and Buddha-Nature: Dōgen's Deeper Ecology' in *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy: Classical Japanese Philosophy*.¹ Does the approach to the body-mind problem vary around the world?

GP: Well, the mind-body problem is one of those interesting cases where there really isn't a counterpart in East Asian philosophy. Since they never had an Orphic-Pythagorean tradition of separating soul and body, or a Cartesian tradition of separating mind and matter, the mind-body split simply wasn't a problem. Of course they distinguish the more physical from the more psychological aspects of a person, but as distinct perspectives rather than different substances.

CF: I would have thought that art would be more of an intellectual practice in Western culture, where we have become alienated from the embodied aspects of art; however, in your entry on Japanese aesthetics in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy you state that culture and the arts in Japan tend to be more closely linked to the intellect than in Western traditions.² This surprises me, as the East has brought us

¹Parkes 2010.

²Parkes 2011.

things like yoga and breath work, which is intended to bring us back to our bodies.

GP: I didn't mean to suggest in the SEP article that East Asian traditions are more intellectual than Western, but rather that 'the life of the mind' is always more intimately connected with the body, and with physical practice, than in the western traditions. If I may refer to something I wrote recently about this issue, the consistently heavy Asian emphasis on the physical practices underlying and informing philosophical thinking is something that one rarely finds in Western philosophy.³

CF: Wentworth has discussed how painting becomes an "intellectual curiosity" through over-analysis by art historians, which destroys the phenomenon being studied.⁴ Is this a specifically Western issue?

GP: Yes, I suppose there's little interest in abstract analysis in traditional Chinese and Japanese philosophy, or in intellectualizing that doesn't have practical application.

CF: Crowther's *Ecological Theory of Art* begins with the notion of embodiment, where art is the 'practice' that serves 'ontological reciprocity' in a way that philosophy cannot.⁵ We might say that 'ontological reciprocity'⁶ is reflected in Eastern philosophy, where all things are seen as interdependent parts of a cosmic whole.⁷ What's your opinion here?

GP: An ecological approach to art sounds great to me, and the importance of embodiment and practice have been largely overlooked until recently. And yes, the helpful idea of the world as a dynamic web of

³Parkes 2012.

⁴Wentworth 2004.

⁵Crowther 1997.

⁶Ibid., p. 1.

⁷Capra 1992.

interrelations is germane to the Chinese and Japanese traditions, both in Daoism and in Buddhism.

CF: It could be thought that because art is a sensuous bodily activity, which expands our view of the world, there are correlations between art and Eastern practices such as Buddhist ‘mindfulness’, meditation, and yoga. Do you have a stance on this?

GP: Yes, because of the influence of Chinese Daoism and Japanese Buddhism on East Asian art practices, many of them involve forms of mindfulness. And yes, they tend to be more intimately connected with the body than in the Western traditions, insofar as they require long periods of practice during which one pays careful attention to one’s movements.

CF: Do you think that painting as an art is viewed differently in Eastern cultures compared with ours, as it is closely aligned to the body? Where do you see the future of painting in our culture?

GP: Since East Asian traditions don’t separate philosophy from religion, or art from craft, or ritual from daily behaviour in the way we tend to do, there’s always been a strong sense of practising the arts as ways of life. As far as painting and the body are concerned, despite the differences between East Asian traditions and ours, I’m always amazed at how aptly Merleau-Ponty’s ideas (especially in his essay ‘Eye and Mind’) apply to Chinese and Japanese practices. Perhaps that’s a reason to hope that painting that’s practised at a deep philosophical level might survive the ravages of postmodern trends.

CF: I know that you’re also interested in environmental philosophy; your chapters ‘Winds, Waters, and Earth-Energies: Fengshui and Sense of Place’ and ‘Mountain Brushes, Ink of Oceans: Nature as Sacred in Japanese Buddhism’ are so rich in natural imagery that one could confuse the titles alone for poetry.⁸ Reading ‘The Role of Rock

⁸Parkes 2003b; Parkes 2003a.

in the Japanese Dry Landscape Garden,' one has the impression that 'garden art' is an important part of Japanese and Chinese aesthetics.⁹ Even in India, flower arrangements form the fabric of both ceremonies and everyday life. Was your interest in the environment influenced by what you came across in Asian gardens, or are the two areas of study mutually exclusive?

GP: I suppose my interests in the arts and in the natural world developed in parallel. I sometimes feel a bit guilty writing about the fine arts when I feel that I should be trying to save the planet by writing about environmental issues instead. But of course the aesthetics of the natural world are a fascinating topic, and one to which East Asian traditions have devoted a great deal of thought. This is why Chinese and Japanese gardens are especially interesting, since the aesthetics utilized apply to both natural and human-made beauty. As for 'Mountain Brushes, Ink of Oceans,' I still like the title but would no longer recommend the article, which has been superseded by the more prosaically named 'Kūkai and Dōgen as Exemplars of Ecological Engagement.'¹⁰

CF: The traditional concept of 'sabi' in Japanese is quite beautiful—referring to increased age being part of the beauty of an object. Do you think that modern Japan is actually quite westernized and removed from traditional aesthetics? We often think of busy places like Tokyo when we think of Japan, not of the kind of aesthetic you've described in your writings.

GP: Well, yes, unfortunately the modern Japanese city is rather ugly in comparison to its counterparts in Europe, or even America. There's some outstanding contemporary architecture here and there, but mostly (thanks to the devastation of the country during the Pacific War) it's a wasteland. But there are pockets of traditional (often zen-inspired) beauty to be found all over Japan, so the old style aesthetics still persists.

⁹Parkes 2000.

¹⁰Parkes 2013.

CF: What has your research, which spans diverse cultures, led you to conclude about the purpose of art in the lives of human beings? How would you answer the question, 'what is art for?' and is there global parity to the question, in your opinion?

GP: I've always liked Nietzsche's idea that art is a stimulus to life: in a world without much in the way of intrinsic meaning, the existence of fine works of art gives you a reason to get up in the morning. And since we seem hell-bent on destroying the beauties of the natural world (which are another reason, at least for me, to get up in the morning), art provides a stimulus that is all the more important.

This is also related to Nietzsche's idea of aesthetic existence, of making one's life a work of art, by perceiving and experiencing creatively in addition to engaging in practices that imbue one's behaviour with style and grace. This corresponds well to the East Asian idea of the arts as ways of life.

CF: Could we talk about the word 'aesthetic'? Do you believe there is such a thing as 'aesthetic interest' that all human beings share?

GP: To start with, the etymology of the word 'aesthetic' has to do with sense perception. There has long been an aesthetics of the fine arts, but there is also an aesthetics in the West, more recently, of nature. In East Asian traditions they didn't have a word for aesthetics: the Chinese and Japanese use the term 'the study of beauty'. One positive development in aesthetics in recent years is the broadening of the term, so that so that we are talking not only about our reactions to works of fine art but also to nature, and about an aesthetics of everyday life. That would have a parallel in East Asian traditions, I suppose, from the side of Zen Buddhism, which encourages you to look at everything in a new way, and not to make this distinction we make in the west between the beautiful and the ugly, where we judge only the former to be worthy of our attention.

If you look at Greek philosophy, especially Plato, the notion of the Good is very much connected with beauty, and you have a similar

thing in ancient Chinese philosophy, where the same character is actually used to mean both beautiful and good. Nowadays we have an aesthetic of the ugly and the horrendous, and for me this is a positive move for the arts, since it expands their sphere beyond the production of works of beauty. There is a lot of great art that is unsettling, and which wouldn't be considered beautiful in any traditional sense.

I would like to say, however, that in the postmodern era many people want to forget about anything to do with beauty. I suppose I'm old fashioned, but I still retain a soft spot for beauty. If you take that democratising movement toward 'de-skilling,' for example, where the artist doesn't need to acquire any particular skills, the result, as far as I'm concerned, is a lot of ugly art that isn't at all interesting, because it hasn't been sufficiently crafted or thought through. With respect to Nietzsche's notion of the function of the arts, that stuff is hardly (at least for me) a stimulus to life, or something that enhances our existence.

CF: So on one hand you say that you welcome art being broadened to encompass lots of different things, but on the other hand if it all becomes ugly and too much of an intellectual thing then that's not necessarily a good thing either.

GP: Right. There's a great deal of conceptual art, some of which was revolutionary and interesting at the beginning, which has now become very tedious. I often wonder 'Why bother going to see or hear that stuff?' when I could just stay at home and read about it.

CF: On the subject of beauty, we do have this problem of subjectivity. Do you believe that there is any agreement on what is beautiful? Through your experience of different cultures, would you say that we all see things differently? Or is there a common standard?

GP: I don't think I do have a particular stance, since I studiously avoid writing about beauty. But in answer to your question, I think it's clear that there aren't any universal standards, or at least there are very

few. We might find some kind of harmony is valued in most cultures, but then there are different understandings of what harmony is. East Asian art goes in for emptiness and silence, and doesn't have much interest in symmetry, by comparison with our own traditions.

However, that's not to say that there are no 'orders of rank,' or standards by which we can judge works of art. We can say, for example, that in the context of the tradition of Western sculpture Rodin is a master. On what basis? Well, in any tradition that hasn't completely lost its way there are acknowledged experts, people who have spent their time studying works of art and evaluating them—art historians, curators, critics, aestheticians—and a fair degree of consensus tends to emerge over the long term. I don't have much time for those who dismiss all that expertise (which of course is always open to question) and say it's all 'subjective.'

CF: So are you saying that art can be judged in its own tradition against a historical and contemporary context, so that we might not learn as much by trying to compare a Western sculpture to an Asian work of art, while within traditions you can say 'this is a good example of *X*'?

GP: Right. It takes some work, but I think that within particular traditions you can find good grounds for saying that this work, or artist, is great, and this one is mediocre. I'm not sure, though, that this is possible across traditions—but it may not be desirable anyway.

Of course over time what is considered great can, and does, change: we might find that neglected works have been underestimated, and formerly revered works have been overrated. But for me it's an existential question: there isn't much time left, so what am I going to choose to read, or listen to, or look at? (Even if you're young, there's still not much time relative to the possibilities out there.) I'm not even going to have the time to experience all the Western art that I know I could enjoy—and then there's the whole of East Asia and the rest of the world's great art! So for me it comes down a question of what, realistically, we as finite beings are going to focus our attention

on, given that we have access to a vaster range of art works than any previous generation.

CF: Maybe we almost have too much access to too many things, so that we get glimpses of everything. To enjoy a work of art don't we really need to spend time with it?

GP: Absolutely. A good work of art takes *time* to become familiar with and to appreciate. Once I get into them, I find myself returning to the same books, or paintings, or pieces of music again and again.

CF: Do you have any advice regarding methodology and approaches for research in comparative philosophy of art? Are comparisons enough, or should we endeavour to develop our own traditions based on what we learn from others?

GP: I think maybe you're right. There is a place for 'comparative' research, but we should be going further, looking at what art and aesthetics actually are in different cultures, and trying to discern and appreciate the parallels and the divergences. And where they diverge, it's interesting to ask about the cultural, political, and historical reasons for this divergence. And then we can ask the question from each side: what do we learn if we come to understand why, say, the Chinese think such-and-such a work is beautiful? And can we learn anything from applying Chinese aesthetic standards to a work from our own tradition? So perhaps a better term would be 'cross-cultural,' because you're doing more than just comparing.

CF: When we look at these cross-cultural issues and come up with answers as to why and how our cultures are different, what do we gain? Do we learn more about human nature, for instance?

GP: Yes, I think we do, because after all we presume we know what human beings are on the basis of an extremely small sample—sometimes from a sample of one! So it's always helpful to look

at another culture, to go to another culture and try to immerse ourselves in those other perspectives. It's always a learning experience: if I can't understand why such-and-such an art form is so prominent in China or Japan, perhaps there's something lacking in me, maybe. And if I can come to understand it, my life might be enriched by that understanding.

CF: Does all this make us better people? Is that even what it's about?

GP: I absolutely think it does, because what makes us worse is parochialism, ethnocentrism. For me anything that opens us up a bit and extends our network of relations is always a good thing.

CF: Sometimes I wonder if in philosophy, after we make all these enquiries to be better people, to live in a better world, we then lose sight of that. Philosophy can get lost in the detail. Is Western philosophy practical enough?

GP: That's a very good point. I think of Pierre Hadot's book, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, where he shows that philosophy as a way of life was at the basis of the western tradition, but then for the most part, through an 'ascent to theory', lost its connection with real life.¹¹ Though I'm no stranger to the joys of purely intellectual enquiry, the world is in poor shape these days, and I think philosophy has a responsibility to try to make a difference. Since the East Asian traditions they never had Platonism or Christianity, their philosophy has always been rooted in practice, and that has had a significant impact on the way they look at aesthetics and art. Philosophy doesn't do itself (or the rest of the world) a favour by retreating into a citadel of pure theory.

¹¹Hadot 1995.

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEE: A native of Glasgow, Graham Parkes taught Asian and comparative philosophy at the University of Hawaii for thirty years before moving to Cork, in Ireland, in July 2008. His research interests are intercultural philosophy (Continental European and East-Asian), environmental philosophy, and philosophies of art and film.

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER: Colleen Fitzpatrick is a PhD candidate at NUI Galway. She has research interests in aesthetics and comparative philosophy.

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NOT LOST IN TRANSLATION

Using Takemitsu's Equinox for solo classical guitar to explain why cultural relativity isn't always relevant

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An authentic performance—and authentic here is judged on the interpretation's relationship to the composer's idea—is not simply a direct realization of the sounds and silences indicated by a score. Just as a sentence read aloud according to the dictates of a text's phonemic groupings would lack the communicative power lent by the inflections of meaning, the performer is expected to illuminate a score with certain nuances of style that are implied in the score. To creatively engage with the aesthetic ideas that a composer intends to express, the performer must form an understanding of the semantic system that the composer uses to communicate his or her ideas. The following discussion of Toru Takemitsu's *Equinox* explores the hypothesis that the chosen semantic system of communication is not definitive of the composer's aesthetic idea, but simply a mode of communication for a more universalised aesthetic truth, thereby diminishing the need to refer to a secondary system of authentication when interpreting the composer's intention.

Although the problems of musical meaning, understanding, and communication are a wide and thorny field of ongoing debate, this discussion begins from the premise that separate genres of music can be understood as forming individual structures of semantic meaning. These genre-specific 'languages' are formed around shared fac-

tors, such as conventions of style, historic progression, and instrumental technique. Although methods of communicating, identifying, and understanding musical phenomena may be idiosyncratic to specific genres, on a meta-level there remain features that are recognisably shared. Perhaps observable similarities between these structures hint at a wider, more universalised framework of aesthetic understanding.

The paper will look at the way Takemitsu communicates through his scores, both explicitly and implicitly, entirely within the context of the Western art music genre, enabling the performer to engage with and articulate ideas that would typically be associated with traditional Japanese music. I don't argue for the primacy of one semantic system over another; thus the argument could just as easily be reversed and look at one of Takemitsu's Western-influenced compositions scored for Japanese instrumentation. Ideas are not appropriated but translated; ideas can be interpreted with authenticity within individual semantic structures because what is important is their authenticity to a wider aesthetic ideal rather than to a culturally formulated truth.

1 Conventional means to unconventional sounds

Obscure technical demands, precise notation, and a soundscape that is both evocative and peculiar are just some of the features idiosyncratic to the classical guitar compositions of Takemitsu. The classical guitar is an instrument capable of accommodating subtle timbral qualities, and it would be wrong to claim that timbral possibility hadn't already been widely explored through the existing classical guitar repertoire—in particular we might think of the rapid expansion of extended technique from the early 20th century onwards. However, Takemitsu's exploration of texture and colour is particularly distinctive, as are the notational devices he employs to coax the guitarist into entering and sharing his unique perspective.

Guitarists interpreting Takemitsu's music are often taught that an authentic interpretation of Takemitsu's timbral intentions should be based on a thorough understanding of traditional Japanese instruments, whose exotic sounds are mimicked within his composition.

However, Takemitsu was anxious about having his music miscategorised as ‘exotic,’ and this made him wary of “the dangers of using traditional Japanese instruments.”¹ After a brief flirtation with Japanese instruments in the mid 60s and early 70s, with compositions such as *Eclipse*, *November Steps* and *In an Autumn Garden*, such traditional instruments no longer featured in his concert works. In his 1971 essay *November Steps*, Takemitsu writes that combining traditional Japanese instruments with western style orchestras

was not as much an experiment with these instruments as it was an attempt to tap the demonic powers locked up in them . . . I found my world of sound widened and deepened.²

Takemitsu does not ask the guitarist to mimic the instruments of Japanese traditional music; instead of direct appropriation, the timbre is to be considered more abstractly. Japanese colouring, for example, influences Takemitsu’s aesthetic, and makes possible new ideas for shaping timbres on the classical guitar. He scores in a language that guitarists of the Western art music tradition can engage with, and it is the guitarists’ engagement with his translated ideas that creates such distinctive soundscapes.

Box 1 — Abbreviations

s.p. = sul ponticello

s.t. = sul tasto

p.o. = Position (or play) Ordinary

In *Equinox*, Takemitsu annotates the score with specific instructions for right hand attack (see box 1), allowing him to retain close control of the juxtaposition and combination of specific guitar-tone

¹Takemitsu 1995a, p. 89.

²Ibid., p. 89.

colours.³ For example, in bars 24–25 (see figure 1) Takemitsu combines natural harmonics on the twelfth fret with open string notes in natural position, then within the space of a quaver repeats the high Eb and B open strings—but this time indicating a sharper ponticello attack closer to the guitar’s bridge. The rapid interchange between the mellow and sharp sounds of ordinary and ponticello right hand attack, combined with the sweetness of mid-register natural harmonics, creates an effect seemingly alien to conventional guitar repertoire.



Figure 1: Bars 24–25

The left hand’s effect on tone colour is also taken into consideration: Takemitsu assigns specific left hand fingerings, fret board positions, and string choices throughout the score. It is common practice for classical guitar repertoire to be published with annotations for at least some left-hand fingerings, sometimes indicated by the composer and sometimes added by the editor or a credible performer. Because pitches can be repeated across the fretboard in up to six different positions, a multitude of fingerings are possible for most phrases. Conventionally, left hand fingerings are indicated to alleviate technical difficulties or to assist in maintaining the continuity of a phrase or voice; however, in Takemitsu’s guitar scoring this is not always the case.

The specification of left hand fingering can be manipulated to affect timbre. Pitches fingered in a higher position (towards the body of the guitar) sound sweeter, often with a muddier texture; pitches located in the lower positions (towards the headstock) are sharper and clearer; pitches on open strings have less clarity but greater length. Although *Equinox* initially seems to have assigned left-hand fingerings in accordance with ease of phrasing—unlike other

³Takemitsu 1995b.

Takemitsu guitar compositions, such as *In the woods*, and *Folios*, where the affective qualities of left hand phrasing are more explicitly exploited—Takemitsu does add some more specific and precise left hand positions. In bar 19 (see figure 2), Takemitsu indicates that the guitarist should play in a higher position on the fretboard, even though playing with more open strings or in a lower position would be possible. Here, his left hand specifications mean that the fingered notes are muddier, and are combined with the ponticello indication for the right hand. This makes for an interesting contrast against the sweet and sharp texture of the harmonics in bars 17 and 18.

Figure 2: Bars 16–19

As we have seen, the soundscape of *Equinox* is distinctive, but Takemitsu's scoring follows conventional classical guitar techniques. Although *Equinox* was written for a Japanese guitarist—Kiyoshi Shomura—Takemitsu's decision to write for a Western instrument presumes that the performer has a good understanding of Western technical and musical performance conventions. The repertoire and techniques that a performer absorbs when learning an instrument shape the relationship manifested between sound and score. As we saw above, the aesthetic choices Takemitsu makes in the score of *Equinox* sit entirely within the context and tradition of Western art music. Perhaps it could be argued that although the guitarist can engage with Takemitsu's scoring, an understanding of the tradition that *originally* influenced Takemitsu's translation would deepen the authenticity of their interpretation.

A possible response to this challenge might be the original hypothesis of this paper, namely that different genres of music are simply semantic systems for the localised comprehension of a more

universal aesthetic structure. The timbres that Takemitsu draws his influence from are not exclusively comprehensible within the semantic structure of Japanese traditional music, although this is a structure that explicitly identifies them as its own. Once these ideas have been translated into the language of Western art music, and are thus made coherent for the classical guitarist, the guitarist can then respond to these ideas intuitively using their own semantic structure; we might say that the ideas communicated are in fact shared within a far wider aesthetic structure. Furthermore, it could even be seen as simple appropriation if the performer were to reference their own intuitive understanding of Takemitsu's score to the semantics of Japanese traditional music.

2 Translation without appropriation

I have provided the hypothesis that a performer could engage with a score without reference to the composer's influences external to the semantic structure of the composition. We can test this hypothesis by applying it to implicit interpretation, rather than to the explicit score. When engaging with the implicit ideas of a particular composer, it is crucial that the performer and composer are speaking in the same language, so to speak. In accordance with the original hypothesis, if the composer has coded all their aesthetic views into the language the performer expects and understands, then the translation of implicit ideas should be as unproblematic as the translation of those that are explicit.

The hypothesis is complicated by the difficulty of pinning down implicit ideas and giving them any concrete definition. As an example, let's look at the Japanese concept of *ma*, which is controversial due to its dual function as a technical and abstract concept. Alison McQueen Tokita defines *ma* as a purely technical term, signifying:

rhythm (in *nagauta*, *uki-ma* implies a slight lengthening of the first of a pair of beats, while *tsume-ma* implies the

reverse), or timing (many dancers say that with *kiyomoto* narrative music, *ma go torinikui*, it is difficult to get the rhythm or timing right), or beat (*omote-ma* is downbeat and *ura-ma* is upbeat).⁴

This description defines *ma* purely in terms of its functional usage; it reflects Tokita's stance on the over-mystification of aesthetic concepts in Japanese traditional music, thus separating the meaning of *ma* in music from its other connotations in the Japanese language. Others, such as Richard Pilgrim, define *ma* as having both "objective and subjective meaning";⁵ *ma* can also signify space, or negative presence. The more subjective sense of *ma* could refer to the room, in architecture, the blank canvas between images of the Japanese scroll painting, or the silence between notes in music. However, 'space' here also describes the relationship between the subjects that frame that space. Understanding *ma* not just as negative presence, but also as the dynamic relationship between existent subjects, gives it the living experimental quality that often comes to the fore in its representation in art.

The conflicting opinions on *ma* can be at least partially attributed to the uniquely refracted state of self-reflection in Japanese aesthetics. Japan adopted Western art music into its education system from the 1890s onwards. For children of this generation and later, experiences of western art music, and the understanding of Japanese music from a western perspective, often preceded their direct exposure to music of their own culture. Roger Reynolds observes, in *Perspectives of New Music's* series on contemporary Japanese composition, that "Japanese intellectuals were made newly aware of Zen through John Cage's work (which reached Japan in the early sixties)".⁶

In relation to Takemitsu and *ma*, it is unclear how heavily Takemitsu's *ma* is a romanticisation of Japanese technical concepts. If an authentic interpretation hinges on an informed knowledge of the external influences that shape the piece, then it would seem that

⁴Tokita and Hughes 2008, p. 26.

⁵Pilgrim 1986, p. 257.

⁶Reynolds and Takemitsu 1992, p. 32.

Takemitsu's individual expression of *ma* is essential to the work, rather than that of Japanese traditional music. The composer's individuality, which exists in a constant fluctuation between influence and aesthetic choice, would then be something impossible to define. However, through the translation of the composer's ideas into the semantic structure of the performer's understanding, intention can be understood without reference to unstable external factors.

The opening bars of *Equinox* (see figure 3) have qualities that could be attributed to *ma*. Each phrase of the three opening bars seems to be moving towards silence rather than away from it. Each phrase begins abruptly, arriving from nowhere and then fading back into silence, from which a new phrase is born again. Here, phrases are born from silence and gravitate back to silence. The chord that announces the new phrase is accented, its indicated timbre alienating it from the tone colour that preceded it. After the declaration of the chord, the short arpeggio is directed to *morendo*, to fade into nothingness. These phrases contemplate the relationship between sound and silence, in much the same way that *ma* invites the contemplation of existence against absence. The sounding phrase can be understood as an interruption of silence, instead of silence simply being a pause between phrases.

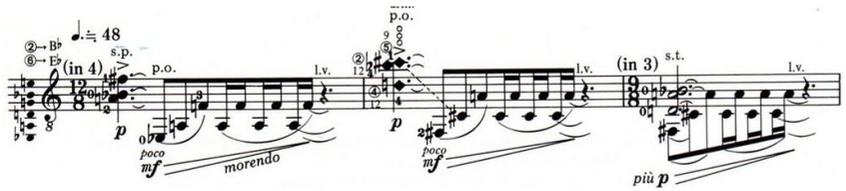


Figure 3: Bars 1–3

Although the realization of Takemitsu's phrasing is a phenomenon unusual in Western art music, the scoring of these phrases is within the semantic structure that shapes the musical understanding of the classical guitarist. Speculating from personal experience (although this would be an interesting study for further investigation), the score's sounds and silences seems enough to realize a soundscape that a lis-

tener could attribute to *ma*—based on intuition, that is, which here loosely refers to one’s musical understanding within the semantic structure of the culture one identifies with. This is not to advocate an appropriation of *ma* without respect to its original cultural origins, but to argue that *ma* can be intuitively engaged with because it is a wider aesthetic idea that exists across semantic structures, even if it isn’t explicitly identified within each structure.

Furthermore, it could also be argued that to define Takemitsu’s use of *ma* as something individual is to concede that Takemitsu’s usage of the concept is an appropriation of its position within Japanese tradition music. However, returning to the original hypothesis of this paper, I have speculated that *ma* indicates a concept that exists across a wider structure. Takemitsu is influenced by the Japanese form of *ma*, but his individual understanding of *ma* does not simply remove the idea from the context it requires to function. *Ma* can function across contexts; to be influenced by its form in one particular semantic system is to be influenced by just one possible perspective on a universal idea.

3 Relevent irrelevancy

Takemitsu’s soundscapes are distinctive, but these soundscapes are not the product of a simple translation of ideas from one structure to another. As we saw above, Takemitsu claims to have a meta-level of understanding over separate semantic structures due to his reflective position. He can see the concepts of Japanese traditional music from the position of an other; it is viewed to some extent through the eyes of the West. He can similarly see concepts of Western art music from the perspective of an other, viewed through the lens of traditional Japanese music. Timbres of Japanese instrumentation are not mimicked: the resonance of these timbres within their original context is considered and the contrasts of colour and flavour are sampled; their equivalents within the classical guitars timbral spectrum

are sought. Perhaps *ma* should not be seen as an exotic custom of an alienated culture. Instead its identification within the semantic structure of Japanese traditional music should be noted and identified as a concept that already functions within the semantic structure of Western art music.

It is this meta-level of understanding, the perspective that Takemitsu claims as a composer who breeches traditionally separate cultures, that allows ideas and functions to be translated across semantic structures. Regarding *ma* from a Western-centric position allows for a mystification of the subject, or an appropriation of *ma* in the form of identification rather than consideration of its function. A meta-level view lends itself to understanding *ma*'s function within Japanese traditional music and relating it to a meaning within Western art music which behaves in the same way but is not similarly identified.

In their realisation of the score, performers must interpret the piece through their own creative persona. They must understand both what is explicitly written in the score, and what is implied through the shared language of composer and performer. I have argued that the realisation of a piece of music involves a communication of ideas between the subjective perspectives of two individuals. The piece's initial conception in the mind of the composer can result from an array of influences and a broad structure of aesthetic meaning. In works such as *Equinox*, where the piece is scored with the expectation of a performer's comprehension of a certain semantic structure, communication depends on the composer's ability to translate idea into shared language.

This paper has been concerned with Takemitsu's compositional approach. While to an extent Takemitsu can be considered a unique case, my hypothesis could be applied more broadly. Cross-cultural sharing of ideas is but one way of exploring separate semantic structures and reaching for a wider aesthetic frame. It might be interesting to explore this hypothesis in relation to historical context, especially in regard to 20th- and 21st-century works that seek to actively oppose expectations in their communication with both performer and

listener. It is only through understanding and engaging with aesthetic ideas as they are presented within a certain semantic structure, whilst understanding that this is only one possible structure and one possible translation of a shared idea, that the wider framework of aesthetic ideas in music can be approached.

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NISHI AMANE'S RESPONSE TO EUROPEAN DUALISM

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The dichotomy between *noesis* (intellectual perception) and *aisthesis* (sensory perception), and the philosophical predilection for the former, has played a decisive role in conceptions of the aesthetic in Western European philosophy. At the moment of the inception of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline in its own right, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762) coined the term 'aesthetic' on the basis of this dichotomy, and attempted to redeem the epistemic value of *aisthesis*. This article examines how this dichotomy was perceived by a culture in which such a dichotomy had been absent. It does so through an examination of the work of the Japanese philosopher Nishi Amane (1829–1897).

Scholars have acknowledged the historical importance of Nishi, who was a pioneer in introducing Western aesthetics to Japan. It is also known that Nishi developed utilitarian aesthetics under the influence of Ogyū Sorai's Confucianism and John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism, in which beauty or art is valued as a means of cultivating society.¹ Nishi's attitude is furthermore captured by a famous slogan of the time, '*datsua nyūō*', which means 'rejecting Asia and embracing Europe.'² Accordingly, aesthetics, for Nishi, is thought to be subservient

¹Hamashita 2005, pp. 268-272.

²Hamashita 2002, p. 96.

to cultural policy and under the control of politics.³

While there has been much research on Nishi's aesthetics in studies of arts or beauty, his conception of *aisthesis* has not attracted much attention. This is due to the fact that Nishi did not write cohesive works on aesthetics from the viewpoint of sensory perception or sensibility.⁴ However, re-examination of Nishi's philosophical works in their entirety makes it possible to see a potential resolution of the dichotomy between *noesis* and *aisthesis*, by re-consideration of the concepts of '*kotowari/ri* 理' (the principle) and '*michi/dō* 道' (the way).⁵ Taking this into consideration, his philosophical attitude is not necessarily reducible to the '*datsua nyūō*' doctrine, and as such his ambition to synthesize cultural difference is worthy of our attention. The purpose of this article is to clarify the way in which Nishi approached the two traditions with regard to this dichotomy, and to look at the methodology he employed for a reconciliation.

1 Dualism in European epistemology

This section will briefly explain the term 'epistemic' as it is used in this context, and how the dichotomy we referred to above has been constituted in European philosophy.

A wide range of philosophical inquiries that concern the process and results of 'knowing', 'recognising', and 'perceiving' have been labeled 'epistemology'. Citing Richard Rorty's definition of 'epistemological'—that is, "describing, judging, or evaluating an 'object' according to given criteria"—Gianni Vattimo contrasts 'the epistemological' with 'the hermeneutical'.⁶ Vattimo argues that only the experimental natural sciences can truly be called 'epistemological'. The hermeneutical, by contrast, deals with "an encounter of an inaugural disclosure of Being."⁷ The epistemological, in this restricted sense, should remind us

³Katō 2002, pp. 13-14.

⁴Hamashita 2005, pp. 272-273.

⁵*Kotowari* and *michi* are the Japanese readings, or '*kun'yomi*', while '*ri*' and '*dō*' are the Chinese readings, or '*on'yomi*'.

⁶Vattimo 2002, p. 10.

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 9-10. In defining 'the hermeneutical' Vattimo draws on Heidegger's idea of a work of art as

of Immanuel Kant, who attempted to reduce the epistemic or the cognitive to the conceptual. However pre-Kantian epistemology did not have such a clear distinction; it even included the aesthetic as an object of epistemology. As such, I use the term 'epistemic' in this classical sense in order to think about how something was valued as knowledge or truth before Kant. Therefore, 'the epistemic', in this article, includes differences in the thought process or paradigmatic thoughts *behind* the perception of knowledge or truth in a wider sense—as well as the results of this 'knowing'.

In Western Europe, epistemology in the above sense developed a dichotomy between *aisthesis* and *noesis* as one of its central foci. As is well-known, in Western European intellectual history one pervasive philosophical axiom has been the principle of dualism. This assumes that reality can be broadly divided into two categories: matter and mind (or body and soul, appearance and substance). Since Plato, however, there has been a far greater emphasis on *noesis*. This view runs parallel to the view that human beings are radically separated from other animals, and to the identification of humanity with a God-given capacity for obtaining true knowledge. Plato wrote in the *Phaedrus* that "the soul which has never seen the truth will not pass into the human form. For a man must have intelligence by what is called the Idea, a unity gathered together by reason from the many particulars of sense." (*Phaed.* 249b-c) In the *Theaetetus* he also clearly separated knowledge from sensory perception (*Theat.* 164b). In the Christian era, as claimed by Kai Hammermeister, the devaluation of the senses followed the Christian tradition of the mortification of sensory perception. Descartes played a decisive role in developing the modern version of epistemology, in which sensory perception is understood to be the source of error, and unreliable for any acquisition of truth. From this viewpoint, sensory perception needs to be controlled or repressed rather than relied upon as a source of guidance.

Admittedly there have been periodic attempts to redeem the epistemic value of sensory perception. Wolfgang Welsch has re-considered Aristotle's conception of *aisthesis*, which is the source of practical wis-

'the disclosure of a new way of experiencing the world.'

dom. Pre-Kantian aestheticians, such as Baumgarten, attempted a positive re-evaluation of the epistemic role of sensibility. Nietzsche's reconsideration of the concept of body, and some phenomenological or hermeneutical re-configurations of the concept of 'knowing' in the twentieth century, can also be seen as counterparts to traditional dualism. However, in terms of Western European intellectual history (especially before Nietzsche) the dichotomy and the predilection for noesis has been highly influential—and this is the tradition which Nishi drew upon. Consequently, Nishi's view of Western dualism followed a different modality from European philosophers who questioned dualism. This aspect of Nishi's thought can be observed in his translations as well as in his philosophical writings.

2 Nishi's translations

The European dualism that resulted in a detailed classification of mental faculties—such as understanding, reason, sensibility, and so on—made translation work in the Meiji era intractable. Equivalent concepts to describe these terms were rarely found in existing words—as Nishi himself admitted.⁸ In the face of such difficulties, Nishi chose to create his own original glossaries. There are at least two discernible motives behind this decision. First, the translation was in part meant to be an edification. Although Nishi generally advocated empiricism and opposed idealism, he partly agreed with the German Enlightenment—in particular a Kantian epistemological account which assumes that a capacity for obtaining knowledge is *a priori* inherent in every human being.⁹ Accordingly, in his *Jinsei Sampō Setsu*, he proposed moving away from a feudalistic way of life and living as equal members of society—and this would include sharing methods of gaining knowledge.¹⁰ Translation was treated as a medium for making European wisdom accessible not just to intellectuals but also to wider society. It resulted in coining terms by combining exist-

⁸Nishi 1970, pp. 8-9.

⁹Ibid., p. 459.

¹⁰Nishi 1970, pp. 555-559; Kuwaki 2008, pp. 54-57.

ing Chinese characters or borrowing phrases from classical texts, so that readers could guess the meaning of new concepts. Nishi's second motive lay in the fact that, for him, translation was not only linguistic but also philosophical. One might argue that the selection of words in translation is trivial, because a word is ultimately a matter of sound and its meaning can be negotiated through communication. However, Nishi invested words with significance. To Nishi words were not mere signs; they comprised languages with history, custom, and, thus, concepts. In the case of ideography, not only words but also characters can be related to concepts. Nishi took this into account and chose to use existing phrases or original translations. His translation work was underpinned by a view that translation was a means of conveying concepts contained in the two languages being used. As a result, even after many amendments or discontinuation, according to a report by Teshima Kunio 606 out of Nishi's 2872 translations are still in use in Japan.¹¹

Chart One is a partial list of Nishi's terminology relating to central argument of this article. It highlights how he perceived the absence of certain concepts in Japan, in contrast to the importance of some core concepts in European philosophy. It also shows how much he relied on Confucian ideas in order to explain new concepts. Furthermore, it is possible to see that the concept of '*kotowari / ri* 理' played an important role for Nishi. In fact an examination of his consideration of '*ri*' demonstrates how he contrasted and reconciled different paradigms of thought.

¹¹Both this paragraph and Chart One are indebted to (Teshima 2001, pp. 301-309; Teshima 2005, pp. 73-88).

ENGLISH	TRANSLATION	KANJI	NOTES
<i>a priori</i>	Senten	先天	These counterwords were borrowed from the <i>Yi Jīng</i> and used to generate new meanings.
<i>a posteriori</i>	Kōten	後天	
Understanding	Gosei	悟性	Referring to these three terms, Nishi argued that the division of mental faculties in European thought is more diverse and complicated. ‘理性’ is his original word.
Reason	Risei	理性	
Sensibility	Kansei	感性	
Conscience	Dokuchi	独知	This term is derived from Inaba Mokusai’s commentary on <i>Da Xue</i> .
The natural law	Rihō	理法	Nishi frequently used the term ‘ <i>ri</i> ’. Among these four concepts, he stated that the term ‘ <i>seirigaku</i> ’ was derived from the Song School.
Theory	Risetsu	理說	
Logic	Ronri	論理	
Psychology	Seirigaku	性理学	

Chart 1 — A partial list of Nishi Amane’s translations

In order to translate ‘reason,’ as a human capacity to understand and form judgment, Nishi coined the term ‘*risei* 理性,’ which is a combination of the noun ‘*ri* 理’ (the principle) and the noun ‘*sei* 性’ (the nature), because he thought that both *ri* and reason relate to the con-

cept of 'the principle,' in the word, 'hō 法' (the law).¹² However, in his *Shōhaku Sakki*, he also noted that 'ri' and 'reason' are not completely translatable, because in the European concept of reason there is a clear separation between the law of humanity and the law of nature.¹³ Due to dualism, reason as a symbol of humanity disregards the rest of nature. But according to Nishi, the traditional concept of *ri*, which was influenced by neo-Confucian thought, includes both the laws of nature and the laws of humanity. Consequently, if the concept of reason can be re-configured based on the concept of *ri*, it follows that the concept of *risei* could offer a new understanding of humanity, that is, a concept of humanity that does not disregard the rest of nature. In other words, humanity is not defined by the separation of human beings from other animals, but is an indication of the continuation of human beings with the rest of nature. Although this re-configuration was not taken any further, his terminology implies the potential for such reconfiguration.

While Nishi did not reconfigure these concepts, he did reconcile them. In order to do so, he manifested a deep understanding of the division between the laws of humanity and the laws of nature; he was aware that confusion between the two might support old-fashioned folk beliefs, such as geomancy, which asserts that people are intimately determined by their immediate environment. Nishi did not support this account of knowledge, and instead advocated both empiricism and August Comte's positivism—which he thought lacking in traditional Japanese ideas. At the same time, he shifted the focus on the division between the laws of humanity and the laws of nature from its duality to the relationship between the two. This was done by relating the concept of *ri* to 'dō / michi 道'—'the way'.¹⁴ Citing the *Shuowen* lexicon, in which 'ri (li)' means polishing jade, he interpreted the ideography of the character 'ri' as veins on a piece of jade after be-

¹²'Nature' in this context means the basic qualities that are inherent in human beings. Uno Mieko argues that this understanding of the concept of 'sei' is influenced by Sorai, rather than by early Chinese thought. For more detail see Uno 2008.

¹³Nishi 1970, p. 169.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 598-602.

ing polished.¹⁵ In Nishi's view, the veins are the symbol of the word '*suji* 直路', which signifies a direct relationship between things. The '*suji*' was rephrased as '*michi*', or 'the way'. That is to say, *ri* was construed as a holistic term that could be used to describe a network of relationships that permeate the world around human beings. In other words, it was taken as a symbol of truth referencing factual relationships in this world. Just as patterns on a piece of jade can't be seen unless it is polished, these relationships are hard to see unless the object is closely examined and studied in detail. Generally such relationships are invisible even if they exist as matters of fact. The examination and observation required to make the relationship visible Nishi conceived as the role of academic learning. According to Nozaki Morihide, seeing the concept of 'the way' as the holistic symbol of truth can be traced back to two Confucians: Itō Jinsai and Ogyū Sorai.¹⁶ Despite radical differences in the way they define the meaning of 'the way', Nozaki argues that both agreed that the concept of 'the way' is not reducible to ethical norms for individuals or groups, but instead should be construed as a symbol of truth that is ubiquitous and simultaneously comprehensive. In fact, Jinsai claimed that 'the way' is latent as truth in both the realms of humanity and nature, and it is the task of human beings to find and practice 'the way'; this 'way' exists not outside but *inside* human beings. Sorai also argued for the pervasiveness of truth in the world, but, unlike Jinsai, he considered 'the way' in the realm of humanity to be illuminated through '*reigaku*' (rites and music), where righteousness comes through beauty.

Although Nishi does not insist on 'rites and music' as a means of finding 'the way', his interpretation of the way as a relationship might also be seen as a redemption of the power of *aisthesis*. Taking Nishi's thought into consideration, *noesis* and *aisthesis* do not always run parallel. They can intersect, and human beings should pursue this occurrence. Knowledge, action, and awareness of beauty need to be synthesised. For Nishi, the difference between the processes of *noesis* and *aisthesis* is not intrinsic but methodological. Unlike the Platonic concept

¹⁵Ibid., p. 168; p. 598.

¹⁶Nozaki 1979, p. 115.

of the idea, truth is not attained by a soul cleansed of sensibility. Unlike Cartesian rationalism, there is no hierarchy between perceptions. While Kant restricted the epistemic role of sensibility to the transcendental realm, truth is thought to be known, perceived, and put into practice. Nishi explained the relationship between subject and object through an image of a road extending into the distance;¹⁷ he also used to the image of archery to refer to the acquisition of *ri*. That is, that which can be grasped by *noesis* and *aisthesis* relate to the same dimension of the world. The gap between the two was thus resolved. Here his ambition for synthesis is apparent.

In his aesthetic theory, Nishi conceptualised the independent realm of beauty by stating that beauty can be sensed without will or knowledge. However, at the same time he wanted to retain inseparability between beauty and ethical values. Although one of his translations of the term 'aesthetics' as '*zenbigaku*' (a science of goodness and beauty) was later discarded, his ambition to synthesise them remained. This view may remind us of the Greek word *kalokagathia* (beauty and goodness), but philosophically it is based more explicitly on Sorai, who saw the connection between mind and sensory perception and valued the epistemic power of 'rites and music.' Sorai stated that "defining virtue vis-a-vis the mind, without mentioning rites or music, moreover reveals a person is 'unlearned and lacking in the methods of the way'".¹⁸ Just as Sorai insisted on the inseparability of aesthetics, ethics, and learning, Nishi aimed to synthesize the different realms. By referring to Mill's greatest happiness principle, Nishi claimed that different academic disciplines should be synthesised for a single purpose, namely the practice of the doctrine. That is to say, acquisition of knowledge is not a purpose but a tool, and the practical role that the perception of beauty can play should be explored and acknowledged. This utilitarian perspective is supported by his epistemological account of '*ri*' as '*michi*', that is, the view that each faculty, each paradigm of thought, and human beings and nature are all inseparable, without being transcendental. And it is the task of each

¹⁷Nishi 1970, pp. 578-580.

¹⁸Ogyū 2006, p. 182.

individual to find and strengthen this connection.

3 Conclusion

In summary, Nishi's philosophy is indeed eclectic. However his eclecticism should not be reduced to the doctrine of 'rejecting Asia and embracing Europe,' nor to eclecticism between Confucianism and utilitarianism. Rather, Nishi's philosophy freely moves through different schools of thought in order to reconcile those differences for practical use. As with his efforts to approach the dichotomy by interpreting it from the viewpoint of 'the way,' his methodology is not a mere accumulation of ideas without centre or attention on subtle differences. He was attentive to differences, but never lost his synthetic focus. He believed that the purpose of academia was not to discover truth but to make use of any such discovery. As long as academia is considered a tool, he believed that all academic disciplines could synthesise with one another for a single purpose: ethical practice.

In order to make the most of Nishi's philosophy in a contemporary context, it is helpful to look to the concept of 'transculturality,' as proposed by Welsch. While the traditional concept of culturality is characterized by social homogenization, ethnic consolidation, and cultural delamination, transculturality is, according to Welsch, 'a consequence of the inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures.'¹⁹ A form is called transcultural 'insofar that it passes through classical cultural boundaries.'²⁰ Interculturality or multiculturalism is differentiated from transculturality because the two former concepts are still bound to the framework of traditional conceptions of culturality. That is, they seek mutual understanding of *segregated* cultures. In the state of transculturality, society is hybrid and complex, and the purely mono-cultural doesn't exist—on either a macro or a micro level.

Taking this configuration of the cultural into account, Nishi had an intercultural perspective. He was attentive to the differences be-

¹⁹Welsch 1999, pp. 194-213.

²⁰Ibid.

tween traditions in terms of processes of 'knowing', and he tried to build something new, culturally, through reconciliation of the differences. In this process the traditional concept of culturality was retained. However Nishi's philosophy also has the potential to approach what Welsch has defined as transculturality. Welsch argues that, 'the concept of transculturality sketches a different picture of the relation between cultures. Not one of isolation and of conflict, but one of entanglement, intermixing and commonness. It promotes not separation, but exchange and interaction.' That is to say, confrontation of different cultures should not result in particularization, such as monoculturalism, nor in universalization, such as we see in totalitarianism. It should not result only in the discovery of differences, either. Rather, it can help construct a new philosophical account with a clear purpose. Conducting such re-configurations might be one role of examinations of non-Western aesthetic discourses today. Nishi's reconciliation of Western European and Japanese thought—by means of drawing 'the way' between mental faculties and academic disciplines, and attempting to synthesize them for ethical purposes—offers us a way of thinking about a method and perspective for future re-configurations of the concept of 'the aesthetic.'

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