

Sensation and Image in Nishitani's Philosophy

HOSOYA Masashi

THE PROBLEM OF EXISTENCE: NIHILISM AND EMPTINESS

Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990) took his stand at the standpoint of emptiness, which is rooted in the tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhism, in order to overcome nihilism. The essay “*Kū to soku*” 空と即 [Emptiness and Immediacy, 1982] from the final years of his life, marks, in one sense, the culmination of his thought. In this essay, Nishitani develops his thought using two concepts: “making being transparent” (*u no tōmeika* 有の透明化) and “imaging of emptiness” (*kū no imējika* 空のイメージ化). These concepts are grasped existentially as a matter pertaining to “emptiness in sentiment” (*jōi no uchi no kū* 情意の内の空) and are ultimately related to the problem of “elemental imagination” (*kongenteki kōsōryoku* 根源的構想力). In other words, as a result of the elemental imagination that arises from what is described in Kegon philosophy as the “Dharma-realm in which all things interpenetrate each other” (*jiji muge hokkai* 事

* Translated by Robert F. Rhodes. Quoted passages are translated directly from the Japanese, but references to alternative existing English translations have also been provided where possible.

々無碍法界), the thing itself appears by being reflected in (*utsusare* 映され) and transferred to (*utsusare* 移され) “emptiness in the world of sentiment” (*jōi no sekai ni okeru kū* 情意の世界における空). The appearance of this thing itself (as a provisional illusion-like existence [*ke* 仮]) is what is meant by the “imaging of emptiness” and “making being transparent.” However, in “Emptiness and Immediacy,” Nishitani emphasizes the “imaging of emptiness” (or the self-delimitation of emptiness), and the problem of “making being transparent” (or self-emptying of being) does not become a major issue. Nishitani says that “everything is image and nothing more” (NKC 13: 152; NISHITANI 1999, 211), but in order to clarify the dynamic, transformative relation, i.e., the relation of *soku* 即 (immediacy) found at the site where an image is created, it is first necessary to consider the relationship between emptiness and nihilism. Hence I would like to begin by outlining the development of Nishitani's philosophy leading to the notion of “elemental imagination.”

Although Nishitani had already published a volume entitled *Nihirizumu* ニヒリズム [Nihilism] in 1949, it is only in *Shūkyō to wa nanika* 宗教とは何か [What is Religion?] published in 1961 that he comes to focus on the relationship between nihilism and emptiness. It is especially in the final two essays in this volume, “Emptiness and Time” and “*Kū to rekishi*” 空と歴史 [Emptiness and History] that we can see most clearly the kinds of issues that concerned Nishitani at this time. In contrast to the popular view (such as that proposed by Arnold Toynbee), Nishitani argues that “historicity can be fully realized” (NKC 10: 238; NISHITANI 1982, 217) only from the standpoint of emptiness, which is attained by overcoming nihilism. This is because nihilism is a “historical concept” that became manifest to Nietzsche's consciousness as “a historical event that welled up from the bottom of (modern European) history itself” (NKC 10: 232; NISHITANI 1982, 212). The nihilism that Nishitani attempted to overcome was not a pessimistic or decadent mode of thought characterized by subjective feelings of nothingness or loss of meaning and value. Rather it was Nietzsche's so-called “creative nihilism.” Nishitani's main concern was how to get beyond Nietzsche. In Nishitani's view, as long as Nietzsche's notion of the “will to power” is rooted in the standpoint of the will, it is something that still must be transcended.

There is no question that in Nietzsche “the fundamental question concerning history in its entirety and the problem of the ontological essence of human existence came together into one focal point and became one question” (NKC 8: 14; this passage is omitted in NISHITANI 1990). Through this process, both God-centered Christianity and modern human-centered secularism (scientism and humanism) were transcended. However, according to Nishitani, Nietzsche’s philosophy, to a certain degree, still lacks self-awareness and, insofar as it is rooted in the will, cannot escape the influence of a demonic, self-centered will. In contrast, the standpoint of emptiness is an absolute negation of the will which lies at the bottom of all forms of self-centeredness. Nihilism still functions as a metaphysical conceptual apparatus in Nietzsche’s philosophy, but by completely existentializing it (or by getting beyond it), Nishitani opened up the field of emptiness, making it genuinely possible to overcome nihilism.

Concerning the standpoint of emptiness, Nishitani, for example, states, “In contrast to the situation where one cannot encounter God no matter where one looks for Him in the universe, [the standpoint of emptiness opens up] the situation where one can indeed encounter God wherever one looks for Him in the universe” (NKC 10: 44; NISHITANI 1982, 38). But the important thing is that, once we reach the standpoint of emptiness, there is no need to make any reference to God at all. Or it can be said that it refers to the standpoint wherein all things can be explained without taking recourse in any metaphysical conceptual apparatus, such as Nishida’s “self-limitation of the locus of absolute nothingness” (*zettai mu no basho no jiko gentei* 絶対無の場所の自己限定). This is the reason why Nishitani did his best to avoid using the term “absolute nothingness” and used “emptiness” instead.

In any case, Nishitani’s reflection sweeps away all metaphysical thought. Situating himself at the point where “body and mind drop off” completely, he seeks to ground his existential foundation (the standpoint of emptiness) in temporality, through and through. The central topic of *Shūkyō to wa nanika* is “the transition from the standpoint of nothingness to the standpoint of emptiness.” In other words, it was a transition from “the standpoint that one’s own self is empty” to “the standpoint where emptiness is one’s own self, i.e., the standpoint of absolute empti-

ness, [that opens up] on this shore [of the stream of birth and death]" (NKC 10: 170; NISHITANI 1982, 151). I will discuss this point in greater detail below, but such a position is eminently realized (in the sense that "manifestation is immediately apprehension" (*genjō soku etoku* 現成即會得)) when it is interpreted not ontologically but in the context of the theory of time.

This is already apparent in the general conclusion of Nishitani's *Nihilism*, where he describes "the standpoint where one 'transcends to the world' wherein there is an 'elemental unity between creative nihilism and finitude'" (NKC 8: 184; NISHITANI 1990, 180). The "elemental unity between creative nihilism and finitude" spoken of here becomes possible only by awakening to one's finitude, which, according to Nishitani, means that "the *Dasein* reveals at the ground of its own existence a nothingness that is working to negate oneself. In other words, it means that the self completely becomes its own finitude" (NKC 8: 171; NISHITANI 1990, 170). Here, Nishitani succinctly states that the *Dasein* is essentially a temporal existence, that he or she exists "in time" and that the self does not exist apart from time. Furthermore, the world "to which one transcends" in the phrase above does not mean the realm of *sophia* or the yonder shore beyond birth-and-death (*higan* 彼岸) but "this shore" on this side of the stream of birth-and-death (*shigan* 此岸). However, the "this shore" spoken of here is an "absolute this shore," which is opened up even closer to this side than the "this world" we usually take to be our world.

I will discuss this "absolute this shore" later, but if I were to describe it in one word, I would say that it refers to the clearing of the "*Da*" which the *Dasein* finds spreading out beneath his or her feet. It is the place dominated by the non-repeatability and uniqueness of the "here and now" or a place where each thing manifests itself in a particular moment in time. "Birth and death are the innate characteristics of their respective moment in time. Birth and death exist completely in 'time' in their own respective moment in time. In other words, they are temporal in essence, through and through. At the same time, however, they are, just as they are, devoid of substantiality from one moment to the next" (NKC 10: 84; NISHITANI 1982, 75).

Let me summarize here the characteristics of nihility as described by

Nishitani. On his view, nihilism is characterized by (1) lack of faith in, and doubt concerning, all metaphysical explanation of the world; (2) groundlessness (*Grundlosigkeit*); (3) lack of meaning and purpose; (4) sense of impermanence with regard to time; and (5) disorder, incoherence and chaos. Moreover, it is also possible to add (6) “absolute self-enclosure (*zettaiteki jikonaiheisasei* 絶対的自己内閉鎖性) and profound solitude” (NKC IO: 273; NISHITANI 1982, 249) as characteristics of nihilism. These characteristics derive from the negative character of nihilism itself. At the same time, however, there is a positive meaning to nihilism as well. For example, the first characteristic (lack of faith in, and doubt concerning, all metaphysical explanations of the world) closes off all nihilistic attempts to seek the truth in the “further shore” (the world lying “behind” this world) and provides us with the opportunity to turn to the absolute “this world.”

Likewise, even though the second characteristic, groundlessness, indicates the loss of all support and foundation, it makes possible “a bottomless freedom” which derives from our awareness of “a clearing akin to the empty sky which cannot be confined to any systematic closure” (NKC IO: 240; NISHITANI 1982, 219). Furthermore although the fourth characteristic—sense of impermanence—negates “permanence” insofar as it implies the sense of being vested with specific limitations, it simultaneously opens up a horizon where ceaseless novelty and creativity become possible. As Nishitani says,

“Nihilism” and “time,” in which all things have been nullified, bespeak a free and easy agility like that of a flying bird that never remains stationary and motionless in the sky for an instant; they bespeak a levity unencumbered by any burden. Or, like a bird that leaves no trace in the sky, they imply freedom from all constraints, whether it be restrictions arising from some current state of things or bonds arising from one’s past behavior. (NKC IO: 243; NISHITANI 1982, 222)

Moreover, the final characteristic—attachment to the self expressed in the term “absolute self-enclosure”—is related to the fourth characteristic—impermanence—and the fifth characteristic—disorder, incoherence and contradiction. The concept of nihilism is thus ambivalent and self-contradictory insofar as it has both positive and negative meanings.

It is well known that the first person to present a profound discussion of time was Augustine. In his *Confessions*, he argues that time, as something that “exists now,” is rooted in the present. But when it is “no longer present,” it is already past, and when it is “not yet,” it is still in the future. In this way, the present moment is an instant sandwiched between two states of non-existence, “no longer” and “not yet.” Moreover, this present moment arises and passes away instantaneously. Augustine’s question concerned the nature of this Archimedean point of time called the “present”—the instant of time that “exists now.”

Nishitani understands the essential structure of our being-in-time as a dynamic relationship between “existing,” “doing,” and “becoming,” explaining that the act of “doing” something brings forth a new entity “existing” in time. In other words, he holds that existence is maintained through time only because something is continually “being done.” Driven by an infinite impulse, one must continually do something, indeed cannot refrain from doing something continually. In this sense, Nishitani discerns the Buddhist notion of karma within the essential structure of “being” in “time.” Furthermore, on it he superimposes the concept of self-centeredness, the cause of so many problems in modern society, which takes the form of attachment and the will to domination. Seen in this light, history appears as the site where karma and effects of past karma (*shukugō* 宿業) function.

In short, Nishitani sees the roots of temporal existence not in self-identity, as is commonly assumed, but in self-centeredness. Moreover, such nihilistic self-centeredness is identified with karma. He says, “Even as we seek the home-ground (*moto* もと) of our own selves, we continually transmigrate through ‘time.’ This is our own karma. In other words, this is the true form of our temporal existence—that is to say, the way we exist in time” (NKC IO: 272; NISHITANI 1982, 248). This clearly reveals the nihilistic self-contradiction of karma: even though we seek to discover our true selves, as karmically conditioned beings we are compelled to transmigrate endlessly through time.

Since ancient times, karma was closely associated with the notion of transmigration. The theory of karma teaches us that in this being called “I” there is “continually manifesting the entire web of relationship arising through dependent origination, in which everything is mutually

related to, and dependent upon, all other things” (NKC IO: 265; NISHITANI 1982, 241). Furthermore, “Our ‘existing,’ in continually ‘doing,’ continually ‘becomes’ (generates and changes). The ‘doing’ is possible only by doing something. And to do something is only possible within the entire web of relationships in the world” (NKC IO: 264; NISHITANI 1982, 240). Here nihilism manifests itself as karma (or karmic existence) transmigrating endlessly within time. Time here is understood as the underlying basis of the entire web of relationships in the world. Moreover, as Kant’s discussion of the actions of transcendental wisdom indicates, the act of “doing” breaks through time even while remaining within time. In other words, while time is within experience and is bound by experience, it is beyond all experience. It has this dual experiential-wisdomic (*keikenteki-eichiteki* 経験の一観知的) structure. This can also be expressed as while being in time, it is always at the beginning of time. In this sense, time is ambivalent, just as nihilism is ambivalent.

Inasmuch as nihilism rises up to awareness from its roots in time and history, the “transition from the standpoint of karma to the standpoint of emptiness” becomes a concrete possibility. Nishitani discovers this transition not in attaining an other-worldly *nirvāna* by transcending this painful world of birth-and-death, but in recognizing the “im-mediate” identity of birth-and-death and *nirvāna*, as depicted in the Buddhist notion that “birth-and-death is immediately *nirvāna*” (*shōji soku nehan* 生死即涅槃). Nishitani took his stand on this thorough-going existential standpoint, founded on the realization (in such a way that manifestation is immediately apprehension) of “immediacy.”

From the locus (*ba* 場) wherein “birth-and-death is immediately *nirvāna*,” the finitude of birth-and-death becomes truly genuine finitude. In this situation, *nirvāna* is immediately the negation and affirmation of birth-and-death and serves to make birth-and-death truly birth-and-death. *Nirvāna* becomes the real nature of birth-and-death, as well as its reality and bottomless nature....

There, at each and every moment [a living being] manifests itself as a bottomless entity, or at each instant of the life of *Dasein* in birth-and-death, it [i.e., the entity or *Dasein*] is “immediately” realized (in such a way that manifestation is immediately apprehension) as the life of the Buddha. Concerning such existence, from one instant to the

next, we are bottomlessly within time. Bottomlessly encompassing the boundless past and boundless future, it brings time to fullness at each and every instant. This is what is meant by the words “falling away of body and mind, body and mind falling away” (*shinjin datsuraku, datsuraku shinjin* 身心脱落、脱落身心). (NKC IO: 203; NISHITANI 1982, 181)

The main point of Nishitani's religious philosophy is to comprehend (*kokoroeru* ころえる; literally “acquire in the heart/mind”) “the reality expressed by the word ‘immediately’ in the phrase ‘birth-and-death is immediately *nirvāna*’ and to attain realization of such reality (in such a way that manifestation is immediately apprehension)” (NKC IO: 200; NISHITANI 1982, 178). In Nishitani's view, such comprehension is both a “pre-philosophic” and “post-philosophic” matter, and there is no way to comprehend it except through existential realization. Such an existential method of philosophizing constitutes the distinctive feature of Nishitani's thought. At the same time, it also contributes to making Nishitani's thought quite difficult to understand. The following quotation, so reminiscent of the later Schelling, clearly reveals Nishitani's understanding of “existence.”

A transition occurs from great death to great life. We are unable to ask “why” it happens. There can be no conceivable reason for it. Nor is there any ground for thinking why it can happen. This is because this transition arises from an even more basic level than those types of matters that have conceivable reasons or grounds. If we try to find a reason for it, we can only attribute it, like religious figures of ancient times, to the gods and Buddhas. We can only attribute it, for example, to providence or love or the original vow. However, the reason offered from the side of the gods or Buddhas, is not the kind of reason that humans are impelled to seek.... Ultimately we can only say, “That's the way it is.” Where “*Was*” [“what” or “why”] cannot enter, there is only “*Das*” [“that” or “thus”]. Or else, we can only say that “the existent is like that.” (NKC IO: 254; NISHITANI 1982, 231–32)

The qualitative leap through which this transition is effected is transcendental and beyond human understanding. However, the locus of this transition is in “time.” In this regard, the transition is an eminently existential matter and none but the existent can realize this transition.

Moreover, without the self-overcoming and transcendental transition which existence undergoes in time, there can be no standpoint of emptiness which is none other than the absolute this shore. This is because “we are essentially attached to ourselves” and “we shut ourselves off from the standpoint of emptiness which is none other than the absolute this shore” (NKC IO: 117; NISHITANI 1982, 104).

Therefore, the standpoint of emptiness that Nishitani speaks of cannot be reached by contemplation and detached observation (*Zuschauen*). We are required to deal with it existentially.

Emptiness empties even the standpoint where emptiness is represented as an empty “thing.” Only then does emptiness really become emptiness. Emptiness is not set up as something outside and apart from being. Rather it means that we realize it in its oneness or self-identity with being. When we speak of “being is immediately nothingness” (*u soku mu* 有即無) or “form is immediately emptiness” (*shiki soku ze kū* 色即是空), we do not think of being on the one hand, and nothingness on the other, and then bring them together. “Being is immediately nothingness” means rather to stand at the point of “immediacy” and to see, from this standpoint, that being is being and nothingness is nothingness. (NKC IO: 109; NISHITANI 1982, 96–97)

“To stand at the point of immediacy” means to stand in awareness of the bottomless abyss of existence. It is for this reason that “emptiness in sentiment” is said to be “the locus of the profound mobility of imagination” (*kōsōryoku no fukai kidō-sei no ba* 構想力の深い機動性の場). The locus of emptiness “is where the reality of things that exist come simultaneously to be vested with the character of ‘provisional illusion-like existence’ (*ke* 仮). It is where things, just as they are, become illusions, and the thing itself is phenomena” (NKC IO: 165; NISHITANI 1982, 147). Elemental imagination is set in motion at such a locus of emptiness.

SENSATION AS THE ABSOLUTE THIS SHORE

The distinctive feature of Nishitani’s thought lies in its existential method of philosophizing. This is particularly evident in the fact

that he casts away all metaphysical thinking and self-consciously takes his stand at the “standpoint of emptiness that is the absolute this shore.” This is because “the locus of emptiness appears to our awareness as the absolute this shore” (NKC IO: 170; NISHITANI 1982, 151) and such awareness is a thoroughly existential one which shuns all speculation and contemplation. According to Nishitani, “The distinctive feature of Buddhism lies in the fact that it is a religion of the absolute this shore” (NKC IO: 112; NISHITANI 1982, 99). He continues,

Even Buddhism, which teaches the standpoint of emptiness, speaks of transcendence to the further shore. However, this transcendental further shore goes beyond the usual distinction between this shore and the further shore. In this sense, we become aware of it as the unfolding of a horizon which may be called the absolute this shore. (NKC IO: 112; NISHITANI 1982, 99)

What is this “horizon which may be called an absolute this shore” which Nishitani emphasizes here? And how does it relate to the standpoint of emptiness? These questions may be rephrased as follows: Nishitani says that the standpoint of emptiness, “inasmuch as it is an absolute this shore... is opened up as a place that is even closer to this shore than we ourselves” (NKC IO: 147; NISHITANI 1982, 130)—where exactly can we find “a place that is even closer to this shore than we ourselves”?

The “we ourselves” in the phrase above refers to the “self” (*jiga* 自我) or “subject” (*shutai* 主体) that became prominent in the modern age. More specifically, it refers to Descartes’ ego or Kant’s transcendental ego. The “standpoint of the subject,” which is the representative form of “the self-interpretation of modern man,” first made its appearance in Descartes’ *cogito* (“I think”) and was further deepened in Kant’s theory of pure apperception. From this standpoint, the world of nature and phenomena was understood to be “composed of innate forms consisting of our sensation and understanding.” However, the “thing” grasped here “is only the form which has appeared to us” as the object of our senses. For this reason, we are compelled to say that it is nothing more than something that exists “insofar as it appears to our sight.” In other words,

It is none other than a form of the “thing” reflected (*utsusareta* 映された) in its relationship to us. It does not reveal the “thing” lying at its source. Rather it is the form that has been transferred (*utsusareta* 移された) to us from its source. The “thing” is transferred to us from its own source and is reflected in our “consciousness” or in our senses and intellect. (NKC IO: I47; NISHITANI 1982, I30)

Hence, as long as we remain at the standpoint of the modern self or subject, the “thing” cannot reveal itself. In contrast, Nishitani states that, for a thing to reveal itself as it is, there must be opened up “even closer to this shore than we ourselves” a place where a thing originally manifests itself from the beginning. The world that is opened up here has been called Suchness (*Tathatā*) since ancient times. “The place even closer to this shore than we ourselves” is none other than the place where it becomes possible for a thing to appear just as it is. The standpoint of subjective awareness which was opened up to modern men and women by Kant’s Copernican Revolution is here turned around another 180°, so that what results is a 360° rotation. This is a standpoint of absolute passivity, wherein the subjectivity of the self has been totally negated.

This absolute passivity, however, is not identical with Schleiermacher’s “intuition and feeling of the universe” or the state generally referred to as “mindlessness” (*mushin* 無心) in the Orient. This so-called standpoint of mindlessness cannot help but remain at the level of a mental attitude and disassociated from time. Rather, the essential point about absolute passivity is that it is “concentrated on itself and free from distraction.” Hence, rather than “mindlessness,” it may be more appropriate to say that absolute passivity refers to the state of “meditative absorption” (*jō* 定; *samādhi*; literally “[the state in which the mind is] settled down”) which, together with precepts (*kai* 戒) and wisdom (*e* 慧), is traditionally emphasized in Buddhism.

Indeed, Nishitani uses the term “settled down in its own place” (*jōzai* 定在) to describe the state in which the thing manifests itself just as it is (NKC IO: I45). Moreover, towards the end of his life, Nishitani took up the problem of “elemental imagination” to consider how a thing can manifest itself as something “settled down in its own place.” In the writings from this period, he interpreted “elemental imagination” quite

creatively, as the locus where “the power to sense things” (NKC I3: I54; NISHITANI 1999, 212) and “the power of imagination included within sensation” (NKC I3: I28; NISHITANI 1999, 193) can be brought into play. For this reason, “the place even closer to this shore than we ourselves” is considered to be the locus where a thing reveals itself, i.e., the “primal site where sensation comes into play” (NKC I3: IO6). It is the source from which Schleiermacher’s “intuition and feeling of the universe,” too, can arise.

Here it is necessary to give a brief account of Nishitani’s theory of sensation. The distinctive feature of his theory of sensation lies in the emphasis he places on the “elemental nature” (*kongensei* 根源性) of sensation. “The basic primal form of sensation is of such a character that we can’t do anything about. It has an aspect which cannot be reduced to some other deeper level or be resolved at a higher, more comprehensive level” (NKC I3: IO7). This derives from the distinctive character of “the power of sensation” (also called *sensus communis*) which is qualitatively different from understanding or reason. It refers to a privileged uniqueness possessed only by sensation whose essence lies in its contact with “things” from one instant to the next. The fact that sensation possesses a distinctive “root” that cannot be reduced to anything else derives, as Kant notes, from the passive structure of sensibility and sensation. In other words, from the beginning, sensation is premised on the fact that it arises in contact with something that is given to it. The fact that “something is given to it” or “something is being manifested”—we may call this “phenomenological given”—is *a priori* in the sense that it belongs to the realm of primal “facts” occurring here and now. It is, moreover, an absolutely passive event.

The elemental nature of sensation is directly related to the problem of the distinctive mode of existence of an individual “thing” which can only be described as “this thing” (*dieses*). Nishitani calls this “the ultimate distinctiveness or particularity that each and every thing in the universe possesses” (NKC I3: I40; NISHITANI 1999, 202), and proceeds to consider the problem of the “brute facticity” (*ganko na jijitsu* 頑固な事実) latent in such things. According to this analysis, at the primal site where sensation arises, all “things” manifest themselves as “bare facts” (*hadaka no jijitsu* 裸の事実) that are given to us just as they are. When

all things manifest themselves as things—that is to say, at the basic site where they are given to us in sensation—they are given to us in their “brute facticity.” In contrast to the fact that logic and logos belong to the realm of reason and pure thought—that is to say, to the realm of principle—Nishitani argues that the thing given in its brute facticity is “pre-logical” and, simultaneously, “post-logical.”

In order to sustain their lives, highly evolved organisms have developed immune systems, a self-defense mechanism that works by identifying foreign substances that have entered the body and expelling them as something “other” than the self. This is an example of “the ultimate distinctiveness or particularity that each and every thing in the universe possesses” taken from the world of biology, but it helps clarify what is meant by self-identity. In fact, each and every thing possesses its own distinctiveness and is marked off from all other things by a high wall. This is what Nishitani refers to as “absolute self-enclosure” and “brute facticity,” and it is in order to overcome this separation that it is necessary to “make being transparent.” However, we will fall into nihilism if we simply empty (or negate) existence in order to do this. The fact that something actually exists means that it is an absolutely unique existence and possesses a unique peculiarity. It means that it exists in the world as itself. A world without particular entities is no world at all.

As is well known, Hegel began his *Phenomenology of Spirit*—a work he called “the study of the experience of consciousness”—with a discussion of “sensational certainty,” wherein he analyzed the way in which “this thing” is known through sensible perception. There he mainly argued that sensation cannot be recognized as elemental, and that “sensational certainty” necessarily moves dialectically to “perception.” In Hegelian philosophy, all existents are grounded by the Idea in the process of the Idea’s self-development. Hence there can be no such thing as “brute facticity” or things in their distinctiveness and particularity. In contrast, Nishitani says that the “brute” in “brute facticity” refers to the fact that nothing can be done about it by any other thing. This succinctly expresses the characteristic that leads Nishitani to speak of the elemental nature of the senses. The senses, so to speak, “have their feet planted firmly on the ground.” As things-in-the-world, all things that exist have their foundation in the senses that are firmly planted “on

the ground.” Everything we experience is similarly grounded. This is what Kant referred to as the “touchstone of experience.” Just as a police detective always returns to the scene of the crime to start over when the trail he or she had been following reaches a dead end, sensation is the fundamental ground to which humans must always return. Nishitani’s profound study of the nature of sensation is connected at a deep level with the existential nature of his thought.

The “realization of existence” is a key term in Nishitani’s philosophy. Nishitani’s position is that existence is not an object of abstract contemplation but is something to be “realized existentially” (in such a way that “manifestation is immediately apprehension”). Here, the term “realize” means both to “bring to reality” and “to know.” In contrast to knowing things logically, to realize something means that we encounter “a reality that is manifesting itself just as it is” and that it is being realized experientially in a real way. It can be said that “we experience existence in an existential manner only when a thing arises as the existential realizing of existence.” Here the word “realize” has two meanings: “to bring to reality” and “to know.” It refers to the situation wherein *manifestation is immediately apprehension*. This dual structure, which is simultaneously epistemological and ontological, is similar to the situation described by the term “the elemental nature of sensation.”

Incidentally, Nishitani explains “knowing” in terms of the clarity of “awareness” that accompanies sense perception. “Sensation, in sensing what it senses, arises in the clarity of awareness that is direct (unrepeatable and unique). Sensation is that kind of thing. Sensation is sensation only when the object that is sensed is directly clear and obvious to the person or thing that senses” (NKC 13: 109). As the phrase “coldness and warmth are known naturally” indicates, the characteristic feature of the direct and primal “awareness” of sensation is that coldness and warmth are directly obvious to the sensing person, even when it is not explained in words. However, a sensation can be directly known only by the sensing person, i.e., the person who experiences the sensation, and only when the sensation is occurring. In these ways, sensation is, in a certain sense, limited. Just as a thing, in its brute facticity, exists as an entity enclosed in itself and possessing its own particularity, direct apprehension of sensation, i.e., the clarity of its “awareness,” is also self-enclosed

in such a way that it “does not accept any light from the outside.” The simultaneous existence of the light of awareness and obscure darkness of concealment in the horizon of knowledge is the fundamental contradiction inherent in sense perception. For this reason, the question of how to break through such self-enclosure and concealment—that is to say, the question of how to make sensation transparent without being disconnected from the elemental nature of sensation—is a central problem in the theory of sensation. Nishitani’s thought is also devoted to this problem of image and the elemental imagination from which images arise.

Let me consider Nishitani’s reflections concerning sensation a little further by clarifying what he means by the “three constituent factors of sensation.” As in the analysis of the relationship between *noesis* and *noema* in Husserl’s phenomenology, when we see something that exists, this is identical with the fact that it is appearing and manifesting itself before us. As Nishitani says, “The act of seeing is to open up an actual place wherein things can be seen. This act of seeing actually occurs only insofar as it serves as the field where things manifest themselves” (NKC 13: 106). Hence, the three fundamental factors constituting sensation are (1) the act of seeing, (2) the thing seen, and (3) the field where they manifest themselves. The act of seeing and the “thing” seen are both “features” of the open field where things manifest themselves. The three form a unity and cannot be separated from each other.

The discussion above also indicates the fundamental factors that allow phenomena to manifest themselves. The fact that phenomena manifest themselves means that they are given to us from the world. Moreover, they appear to us as definite things with their own shapes and contours. That is to say, they appear to us as things with prescribed forms. They provide us with the fundamental structure enabling us to see them, to hear them and so forth. This is because, unless we perceive things as entities with prescribed shapes, the written words we see will only appear as ink blots and the voices we hear will be nothing more than vibrations in the air. This is a fundamental point which is presupposed above all in any discussion of “the primal place where sensation arises.”

Moreover, the recognition that sensation is already endowed with some kind of “form” leads us to posit “an underlying sensation serv-

ing as the foundation of apprehension” in the form of “perception” or “discriminating sensation.” Furthermore, when the “awareness” of various sensations (such as the sense of touch or taste) becomes the clarity of awareness that has passed through “form,” the “brute facticity” of things becomes transparent and their self-enclosure is ruptured and broken through. This is because the “form” possesses a universality which makes it essentially different from the particular content (shape, voice, fragrance, taste etc.) of the specialized senses (sense of sight, sense of hearing, sense of smell, sense of taste, etc.). Generally speaking, whether it is called its “shape,” “form,” “pattern” or “feature,”

inasmuch as the configuration of a thing refers to the way in which it appears or manifests itself as a phenomenon, i.e., as the appearance or visible form of the thing in identity with the thing itself, it belongs to the senses. At the same time, however, it is the starting point of the action of seeing things. It allows us to see a thing as, for example, a tea bowl, as a pine tree or bamboo, as a cat or dog—to give it a name by which it can be called and to define it conceptually. In this way, it is related to the realm of the intellect. (NKC 13: 157; NISHITANI 1999, 215)

Once we have come this far, we are already concerned with the problem of images.

ON IMAGE

The literary critic Kobayashi Hideo once remarked that “there are beautiful flowers, but there is no such thing as the beauty of flowers.” Nishitani takes a similar position concerning “perception.” For example, when we are looking at an apple, we see the apple within the red color we are looking at. There does not exist any “thing” that we call by a common noun, such as “red,” “color” or “apple.” Within the sphere of sensation, there only exists what is “here and now”: this “red,” this “color” and this “apple.” What we see continually changes and never appears to us twice as the same thing. It is unrepeatable and unique at each and every instant. Heraclitus famously declared that “we cannot

step into the same river twice.” The same can be said of perception since it is a direct knowledge in which subject and object are not yet distinguished. In this sense, it is prior to representation or conceptualization by the intellect. Moreover, it is essentially temporal and Heraclitean. In other words, perception is unrepeatable and unique, dominated by what is “here and now.” It is a completely localized knowledge. However, this knowledge arising in a localized space and particular instant of time is none other than what we call experience. Things that manifest themselves there are, as a rule, called “real” and “actual.”

Nishitani states,

For example, the act of seeing a particular apple, the apple that is seen, and the perception or experience that arises there are all real at that time and place, and are truly existing. Here I will call this mode of being common to all things that are said to be “factual” or “actual”—i.e., the way in which they are localized in the “here and now”—the “particular” [*ji* 事] in contrast to “principle” [*ri* 理]. Perception and direct experience belong to the realm of the particular. In contrast, all things that arise in a place disassociated from the localized “here and now” belong to the realm of “principle.” (NKC 13: 104)

What Nishitani calls the absolute this shore refers to this realm of the particular. It forms the horizon of experience which is an exceedingly existential mode of existence localized by the “here and now.” It must be kept in mind here that, despite Kant, phenomena and the thing itself do not constitute two distinct worlds. Instead, an actual horizon called experience is opened up “here and now” as the absolute this world. In terms of its temporal structure, this horizon is characterized by unrepeatability and uniqueness, constituting a Heraclitean flow of continual dispersal and coalescence. Only in such a this-shore-like horizon can this matter of emptiness become actualized. As Nishitani insists, only in this situation of emptiness can “things” manifest themselves just as they are while remaining illusions; only there can a thing manifest itself as a phenomenon, while essentially remaining an illusion:

The fact that existence is existence only by being one with emptiness means that, fundamentally, existence has the character of “provisional

illusion-like existence.” It means that all existence is essentially an illusion. (NKC 10: 146; NISHITANI 1982, 129)

However, in this case the locus of emptiness is localized in the “here and now” and, for this reason, manifests itself as a thing that must necessarily be actually experienced through sensation. If not, it cannot help becoming a type of metaphysical speculation. This is because by becoming disassociated from the “here and now,” all principle is separated at all times from the realm of sensation and time, as well as the realms of experience and actual existence.

“As long as it exists, each and every thing exists in the world of ‘existence’: it is only in the clearing called the ‘world’ that it becomes possible to make this statement” (NKC 13: 139; NISHITANI 1999, 201), declares Nishitani. As noted above, Nishitani argues that the standpoint of emptiness is the absolute this shore. This suggests that the clearing of the world is to be found only in the localized standpoint of the “here and now,” or in a place characterized by such localization. He argues that we must go back to “the very clearing constituting the world” which is characterized by “the two extremes in the entire network of relationships constituting the world: on the one hand, the clearing of the world itself and, on the other hand, the actual reality of the myriad things in the universe that are manifesting themselves” (NKC 13: 142; NISHITANI 1999, 203). Such a clearing is none other than the localized region of the “here and now” in which arise “the ultimate distinctiveness and particularity that each of the myriad things in the universe possesses.” There is no room here for metaphysical concepts like “absolute opening where there is no thing” or “total nothingness.” Rather the problem is how each thing that exists, with its own distinctiveness, “finds its own place” in its localized space in the world. By the phrase “to find its own place,” Nishitani means that a thing is in its proper position, that it is settled down at its own place and has found itself in the realm where everything is settled down in its own appointed place. The pine tree and the bamboo has each “found its own place” and is content with its place. It is for this reason that Bashō admonished, “Learn about the pine tree from the pine tree and about the bamboo from the bamboo.” Let me consider this point further by taking the following verse as an example.

In his essay “Emptiness and Immediacy,” Nishitani presents a detailed analysis of the following verse from Jōsō:

| | |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Sabishisa no</i> | From under sadness |
| <i>Soko nukete</i> | The bottom has fallen out: |
| <i>Furu mizore</i> | The falling sleet. |

According to Nishitani, this verse expresses succinctly the direct experience we have at the primal locus where sensation arises. The bottom falling out from under sadness and the falling sleet are two different things. The former is an event in the heart of the author Jōsō, while the latter is an event taking place in the outer world of nature. At first sight they appear to be unrelated. In fact, the inner emotional event and the outer worldly event are “connected holistically, so that the whole thing is one event.” But this connection is not a direct relation such that “the inner is transferred to the outer, or the outer affects the inner.” It is not a prosaic event, as when one feels sad upon seeing sleet fall. Nor is it a psychological event in which a subjective feeling of sadness triggered by the falling sleet is thoughtlessly projected on the objective scene spread out before one’s eyes. Rather, as Nishitani says, “this verse speaks of the situation prior to the separation between the emotional feeling and outer event. Or perhaps, it can be said that such a ‘locus’ is being revealed here” (NKC 13: 120; NISHITANI 1999, 187). “Bottomless sadness” simply expresses the author’s feeling and is not an adjective modifying sleet. It is “the very locus where sleet falls” or “the very locus where sleet manifests itself as actually falling” and this locus of manifestation “is the clearing where the bottom has fallen out from under sadness.” This is what Nishitani refers to as “emptiness in sentiment.” In the sleet that manifests itself as falling, i.e, in the sleet that falls with the bottom having fallen out from under sadness, we may say that “the world is worlding” (*sekai ga sekai shiteiru* 世界が世界している). The resonance between the words and the overlapping of images in the poem is possible only in the clearing that provides the locus in which things manifest themselves. In other words, the place where images resonate with each other forming a continuity within discontinuity is “the locus of a profound mobility of poetic imagination” (NKC 13: 160; NISHITANI 1999, 217).

In ontological terms, the poetic expression in which “images mutu-

ally overlap and mutually resonate” corresponds to the “circuminsessional network” (*egoteki renkan* 回互の連関) which Nishitani presents as the basic format for the structure of the world. In *Shūkyō to wa nanika* Nishitani notes that “each thing in the universe has an absolute individuality but, at the same time, is gathered into one” (NKC 10: 160; NISHITANI 1982, 148). This indicates “a relationship in which all things alternately become ‘master’ and ‘servant’ in relation to one another” (NKC 10: 166; NISHITANI 1982, 148). Nishitani calls this a “circuminsessional” relationship. However, in “Emptiness and Immediacy,” he describes this relationship using the metaphor of “a wall between two rooms.” Through this metaphor, he emphasizes the contradictory role of a “boundary” which demarcates, while simultaneously joining, different entities, creating continuities within discontinuities. He describes it in the following way: suppose there are two rooms, rooms A and B, separated by a wall made of a single wooden plank. The side of the wall facing room A indicates the limits of room A while serving to represent room B in room A. In other words, this side of the wall, while belonging to room A and being entirely a part of room A, is the manifestation of room B in room A. The same thing can be said of the other side of the wall facing room B. The important thing about this reciprocal relationship between rooms A and B is that “something that essentially belongs to A manifests itself by reflecting [*utsusu* 映す] itself, transferring [*utsusu* 移す] itself or projecting itself onto B. Moreover it does not manifest itself in the form of A within B but as a part of B” (NKC 13: 133; NISHITANI 1999, 197). Nishitani refers to this situation “wherein A is reflected in a totally different thing called B by taking on the appearance of B itself” as “the imaging of A.” He also describes it as the situation where “A thinks itself towards [*hineinbilden*] B” (NKC 13: 134; NISHITANI 1999, 197).

According to Leibniz, even though a monad has no window into the world, it is simultaneously a living mirror that reflects the entire universe. He finds the true nature of the monad, with its own distinctiveness, in “expression” and developed his thought concerning the network of the world in terms of expression. In the final analysis, Nishitani’s “circuminsessional network,” inasmuch as it is a theory of images, ultimately becomes a problem of expression. But in any case, his analysis of how

the world is structured through the circuminsessional network of things is quite suggestive.

Returning to Jōsō's verse above, the sleet and the sadness are manifesting themselves "here and now" as basic facts that are unique and unrepeatable. Phenomenologically speaking, the sleet is an external phenomenon in nature while sadness is nothing other than an inner state of mind. However, when these basic facts manifest themselves, they are like rooms A and B, each of which reflects the other and transfers itself into the other room through the wall between the two. In this way, the sleet is no longer a "bare fact" which can be apprehended through the five senses, but is something that has been turned into an image. In other words, the movement of the "sleet that falls as if the bottom has fallen out from under the sky" is reflected in one's sentiment in just the same way that room B is expressed in room A through the wall. Likewise, the "bottomlessly sad" state of mind is reflected in the sleet just as room A is reflected in room B. In this way, they are mutually reflected in each other. Therefore, the figure of the sleet and the sad state of mind overlap—or turn into—each other, creating a single image: that of the falling sleet in which the bottom of sadness has fallen through. Henceforth, the sleet becomes, for us, "the falling sleet in which the bottom of sadness has fallen through." In other words, "the falling sleet in which the bottom of sadness has fallen through" comes to describe for us the very form of the sleet itself. Being is made transparent (*u no tōmeika* 有の透明化) when "a particular thing expresses itself in the other" in this way. Conversely, it also means that emptiness is made into an image (*kū no imējika* 空のイメージ化) when each particular thing finds its place in its proper position in the world.

When sleet is reflected and transferred into sadness, and sadness is reflected and transferred into sleet, the sadness that has become one with sleet becomes sadness itself (i.e., sadness is made into an image). This is because the bottom of the raw, vivid emotion of sadness which is private and accessible only to a particular individual has, so to speak, fallen through. Henceforth, sadness is "sadness in which sleet falls." There is no other kind of sadness. Sadness is no longer a private, internal psychological state, a mere psychological phenomenon. Masaoka Shiki once wrote the following verse: "A cockscomb:/ there may be/

fourteen or fifteen of them.” Concerning the verse, Yamamoto Kenkichi said, “A cockscomb grows in such a way that ‘there may be fourteen or fifteen of them.’ ‘There should be fourteen or fifteen of them’ reveals the very way in which cockscombs exist. When I read a verse like this, I can no longer imagine a cockscomb being anything other than there being ‘fourteen or fifteen of them’” (YAMAMOTO 2006, 86). Earlier, I discussed the notion of the clarity of “knowledge,” but this verse reveals the power of image found at the basis of such “knowledge.”

I stated above that emptiness is made into an image where existence in its distinctiveness attains its localized “place.” But for the myriad things in the universe to attain their rightful place, i.e., for the world to world, it is necessary to consider another important factor. This is the factor of time. Citing the words, “when a speck of dust flies up, the world is contained therein; when a flower blossoms, the world arises,” Nishitani states as follows: “As one speck of dust flies up from the ground when the wind blows... as a flower quietly blossoms, the world manifests itself in a new activity of birth” (NKC 13: 137; NISHITANI 1999, 200). However, he gives no further explanation as to what he means by “activity” or “new activity of birth.” Hence I will take up “Plum Blossom,” the fifty-third chapter of Dōgen’s *Shōbōgenzō*, and consider the role of time in the reciprocal network constituting the world. In this chapter, it is written, “When an old plum tree ‘suddenly blossoms,’ there arises the world in full bloom. When the world arises in full bloom, that is the coming of spring.” This means that, when a plum blossom opens, the world worlds, and that event is identical with the coming of spring. What, then, does it mean for spring to come? At the end of “Plum Blossom,” Dōgen cites the words of the patriarchs and venerable Buddhas, “Spring is in the plum blossom and enters the picture,” and explains:

To draw a picture of the spring, you should not draw a willow, a plum, a peach or a damson plum [*sumomo* 李]. You must draw the spring. If you draw a willow, a plum, a peach or a damson plum, you are drawing a willow, a plum, a peach or a damson plum. You have yet to draw spring. It is not that you can’t draw spring. But aside from the patriarchs and venerable Buddhas, there is no one between the western heavens and the eastern lands who has managed to draw spring....

Because plum blossoms send us the spring, it is taken into the picture and drawn into the trees. It is an expedient device.

The spring does not exist apart from the willow, plum, peach and damson plum. But the willow, plum, peach and damson plum are just that, and even if we draw them, they are not spring. If we are asked to draw not a willow, plum, peach or damson plum, but spring itself, we become frustrated because spring itself does not exist anywhere. Only the brushes wielded by the patriarchs and venerable Buddhas, Dōgen declares, are able to reveal spring in the plum blossom. The point which Dōgen wants to make here is this: it is mistaken to say that the plum blossoms open with the arrival of something called spring. Rather, *the very place where the plum blossom opens is spring*. The literary critic Karaki Junzō states, “the term ‘the opening of the plum in early spring’ indicates both that the plum opens in early spring and that the plum opens [the season called] early spring. This phrase indicates just this kind of relationship” (KARAKI 1967, 123). Moreover, Karaki argues that the notion of immediacy provides the key to understanding this relationship. On his view, “immediacy” here means “to set in motion,” and indicates “an unobstructed world in which Rujing sets spring in motion, the plum blossom sets spring in motion, spring sets spring in motion, spring sets plum blossoms in motion, and the plum blossom sets plum blossoms in motion.”

I mentioned earlier that the locus of transformation is “time” and that transformation is an exceedingly existential matter. To “stand at the standpoint of immediacy” is to open up the “locus of a profound mobility of imagination” welling up from the bottomless abyss of existence. When the time is ripe, the world unfolds itself as the world. This is none other than “the arising of the world in full bloom.”

REFERENCES

Abbreviation

- NKC *Nishitani Keiji chosakushū* 西谷啓治著作集 [Collected Writings of Nishitani Keiji]. Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治, 26 vols. Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1986–1995.

Other Sources

KARAKI Junzō 唐木順三

1967 *Karaki Junzō zenshū*, 5 唐木順三全集、第5卷 [Collected Works of Karaki Junzō, vol. 5]. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō.

NISHITANI Keiji 西谷啓治

1982 *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan Van Bragt. Berkeley: University of California Press.

1990 *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*, trans. Graham Parkes with Setsuko Aihara. Albany: State University of New York Press.

1999 Emptiness and Sameness. In *Modern Japanese Aesthetics: A Reader*, ed. and trans. Michael Marra, 179–217. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

YAMAMOTO Kenkichi 山本健吉

2006 『俳句とは何か』 [What is a Haiku?]. Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten.