While Kitarō Nishida’s notion of *shintai*, or the body, has been explored in some studies, there have rarely been attempts to show how it has influenced art and architecture in specific cases that have cultural significance. The influence of Nishida’s philosophy in fact did extend to art and architecture, especially during the postwar period. In art, the example is Monoha, or the School of Things, which the present article looks into. The architecture of Tadao Ando, the designer of the Memorial to the Philosophy of Nishida Kitarō in Unoke Machi, Ishikawa Prefecture, Nishida’s native place, is a supreme example of architectural form, for which I plan to contribute another essay as a sequel to this one. The present essay comprises two parts. The first examines Nishida’s notion of the body (*shintai*), not in its entirety but to the extent that it relates to art and architecture; the second elucidates how the notion lent itself to becoming the theoretical ground for Monoha.

In his *Self-delimitation of Nothingness* (*Mu no jikakuteki gentei*) (1932), Nishida asserted that such a dichotomous judgment as “I see a bird” is the abstraction of a nonjudgmental state, which I would rephrase as “the-I-who-is-seeing-a-bird.” This nonjudgmental or prejudgmental state is the result of the self-delimitation of nothingness, the ultimate phase of the self as the non-I, in which the “I” and the bird are not differentiated yet remain dormant, with the possibility of co-emergence. At the establishment of a corporeal fabric between the sense of the “I” and that of the bird, claimed Nishida, what is external to selfhood begins to be sensed as the content of my own interiority. Put differently, while in the dichotomous judgmental formula, seeing a bird is a perceptual phenomenon external to one’s selfhood, as if the “I” sees the bird because the bird is simply out there, the seeing of the bird in the nonjudgmental state emerges from the voluntary delimitation of nothingness, the depth of the self.1 The bird does not stand outside as an object, but constitutes and completes the project of nothingness that embraces the world, giving rise to a palpable sense of the “I.” In this situational fabric, one knows the bird not because one measures and analyzes the bird, but because of what Nishida calls “the cogitation of cogitation,”2 or an intimate corporeal resonance with the bird.3 The body as the medium of egoistic self-consciousness is now decomposed and enacts a seeing of self-renunciatory acceptance, a process that Nishida anticipated as early as in his...
Art and Morality (1926), where he wrote that “only to the extent that the body is not purified as the self is the world of things in opposition to it externally.”4 The body reemerges as shintai, defining itself to be the sensational capacity to be filled by the world.

Nishida called this prejudgmental corporeal resonance “internal sensation” (nai-buchikaku).5 In this perceptual experience, the “I” and the bird outside do not become synthesized into one entity, in which case, claimed Nishida, there is neither interiority nor exteriority, and as such there is no sense of the self.6 Rather, both parties are intertwined through the logic of soku, or A = not A. What is internal coincides with what is external. This coincidence signifies in the case of “the-I-who-is-seeing-a-bird” that the “I” becomes the bird in order to become the “I,” rather than simply the “I” being absorbed by the bird. There is the “I,” and the “I” is the bird; there is the bird, and the bird is the “I.” Simultaneously, the “I” is not the “I,” and the bird, not the bird. According to David A. Dilworth, this symmetrical, yet reversed, reciprocity is the logic of “is and yet is not” and that of the “simultaneity, and biconditionality, of opposites without their higher synthesis.” In this logic of “biconditional symmetry,” “‘and is always an ‘and yet’ with its corresponding ‘vice-versa.’ Nirvana and yet samsara; samsara and yet nirvana. Nirvana (+1) if, and only if, samsara (−1); samsara (−1) if, and only if, nirvana (+1).”7

This logic of inverse correspondence or identity of contradictories is not a kind of cerebral play that amusingly challenges the principle of formal logic, which cannot proceed if there are contrary elements. Nor is it based on something like the structuralist zero as a kind of pivotal middle ground to sustain differential systems of integers, signs, genders, conceptual pairs, and so forth. It indicates the correspondence between seemingly contradictory particulars as having emerged from the same ontological ground of nothingness as an “onto-genetic matrix.”8 In particular, considered from the standpoint of “internal sensation,” the logic here is not simply a conceptual formula, but is anchored within, and posterior to, the unobjectifiable bodily sensation of self-awareness, in which nothingness, the depth of the self, sees its being imbued by the other.9 Furthermore, the logic is not only concerned with upholding the system of discreet particulars, but is simultaneously predicated on their synthetic ground, which envelops them and gives rise to them in interconnectedness, while being neither of them.

With this idea of “internal sensation,” Nishida’s early dogmatism of consciousness gives way to a more balanced perspective “with a Hegelian emphasis on its embeddedness in the historical praxis of a bodily agent.”10 Nishida clearly rejected the idea that the sense of the self emerges exclusively within the orbit of consciousness for the reasons that, first, a content of consciousness itself already involves a separation or gap, if not easily recognizable, between the conscious self and the self who sees consciousness,11 and, second, even conscious phenomena are bound to the body.12 Self-awakening at the moment of internalizing what has been seen as unrelated to selfhood exists as an action-sensation continuum, not simply a phenomenon of consciousness. This is because the coincidence between the exteriority of selfhood and its interiority in “internal sensation” has its origin in the voluntary
delimitation of the deep self, to articulate itself in temporality by embracing the world. In a sense, the true interiority of the self is constituted by the self’s own expression, yet this expression is based not on self-affirmation, to frame the outside world, but on its active, free, and complete self-negation, to allow the other to fill up the secured void of its interiority. In this active sensation, writes Nishida, “we grasp the True Self in the place where we negate the abstract-conscious self and become one, body and mind (shinjin ichinyo). We have to rethink the traditional philosophies from the self-awareness of such a True practical Self, of the Self which is one, body and mind.”

For Nishida, the true sense of self is found not in a self-contained consciousness where the outer world is purged, but within the volitional active mode of shintai as the agent of emptying selfhood, to internalize the other into my self. This moment of unconditional internalization is the bodily sensational phenomenon that concretizes one’s self-negation and, at the same time, one’s self-expression. Nishida, accordingly, states:

That which is looked upon as body holds the dimension of action on account of sensation and, simultaneously, is expressive. Rationalization of the Irrational, which voluntarily determines and defines itself without the intervention of an external subject of performance, signifies in its broadest sense determination through shintai. It is through shintai that what is sensed forms the interiority for the self. To include means to sensate through shintai. . . . What we think to be consciousness arises through this bodily determination (shintai teki gentei).

Interestingly, Nishida claims, making an association with the Buddhist idea of shin-shin datsuraku, that, at the moment when “internal sensation” starts to be understood from the standpoint of active and volitional depth of self, shintai disappears. This does not signify a sort of physical death. It points toward the fact that the shintai in “internal sensation,” insofar as it is concerned with the sensational capacity to be voluntarily filled by the outer world, is again transcended by the discovery of the plane of an active, volitional dimension in the depths of the self. From the standpoint of this volitional depth of self, “internal sensation” is like a weak will. Shintai now enters into the world of creative action beyond sensation, joining action and intuition together, rather than discarding the latter. It is the moment when “the significance of action concealed in sensation discloses itself.” Nishida called this new phase of shintai “the simple instrument of nothingness.”

As Yasuo Yuasa writes in his assessment of Nishida’s notion of body, the self at the moment of active perceptual intuition “[forgets] itself” and “recedes and submerges” into the depths of no-selfhood. The self ultimately “becomes an instrument or empty vessel” for the flow of intuition, in which the self throws itself into the world of action. The profundity of perception as rooted in the horizon of no-self leads the other to imbue the emptied vessel of the self at each moment of corporeal sympathetic seeing, listening, and touching. Subsequently, any remaining dimension of passivity in sensation is overcome because of the uncovered active and volitional depth of the sensation. In this redefinition of the body, shintai, as argued
above, reemerges as the immaculate iconic tool of nothingness in its full commitment to accept the world and to transform the world by creating new figures. The self as “empty vessel” is homologous with shintai, since the self without shintai neither is a vessel nor is able to empty itself. Because of this indispensable role of shintai as the agency for active sensation, Nishida even claims that the self that appears when “internal sensation” acquires the act dimension is coterminous with shintai.20

Nishida’s notion of shintai culminates with his claim on the work of art as “the pure body (junsui shintai) of the artist.”21 One can understand this assertion in the following manner. Borrowing Nishida’s definition of shintai in creative action as the “simple tool of nothingness,” one can also state that shintai in an “internal sensation” that operates as the capacity to be filled by the world can also be seen as a tool of nothingness because nothingness, too, in its voluntary delimitation, carries out the project of accepting the world through this level of shintai. Artistic creation for Nishida arises at the moment when the sensational capacity of this tool starts to overflow; this tool’s role is completed and a need for another tool to accommodate the surplus is imminent. The demise of shintai as concerned with the first level of tool is the redefinition of itself into a qualitatively different phase as the tool for creative action, concretizing the matrix of transformation of the world “from the Created to the Creating” (tsukuru mono kara tsukurareta mono e).22 Put differently, when shintai’s sensational capacity to be filled by the world is less than the penetrating world, shintai, insofar as it is concerned with internalization through sensation, dies and re-arises to enter into the world of creative action to accommodate the surplus. It is in this context that Nishida calls a work of art the “pure body (junsui shintai) of the artist.” What is created in this fashion is neither an object of unknowability in confrontation with the perceiving subject nor the sign of subjective intention, but the extension of the bodily self that is encountered in direct and immediate knowability. Thus, Nishida writes, “one and environment in [an] identity of absolute contradictories shape one’s own self.”23

Nishida’s idea of “the historical world” (rekishiteki sekai) aims at uncovering and illuminating the fundamental paradox of the human condition as the being of concrete sheer subjectivity predicated on an awakening into “the self’s own nothingness in the form of its own eternal death.”24 “The historical world,” as the absolute entailing its own negation within itself, is the concrete dynamic world of poieisis, where the world does not stand over against the self, but forms a self-transforming matrix of creativity. This world exists within the logic of self-affirmation through self-negation, employing each self as the center of its own expression.

The self of this historical world in sheer subjectivity is equally distanced both from the Aristotelian logic of the subject, for the reason that “human beings cannot be distinguished from animals” in this ancient Greek model, and from the logic of the transcendental predicate as in the Kantian moral imperative, for the reason that in this model “the individual would be totally reducible to the categories of intellect.”25 Nishida’s alternative lies in conceiving the predicate as “the true absolute,” which involves its own voluntary negation to bring forth the self, and thus immanently, not objectively, transcends the individual. The individual is now
reformulated as possessing sheer and meaningful subjectivity, along with his freedom, because the subject exists thanks to the dimension of self-negation existing within the true absolute. The temporality and locality of each subject cannot ever be repeated at such a moment when he stands on the topos of nothingness by negating the ego-self, conjoining temporality and finitude with the eternity and infinity of nothingness. On account of this, in the historical world, a person’s acts of “joy and sorrow, suffering and anxiety, worries and frustration”\(^2\) in the present are carried on in a “religious consciousness”\(^2\) into what Nishida calls “the eternal present” (\textit{eien no ima}) of the horizon of nothingness.\(^2\) This allows the field of life by man to be distinguishable from, on the one hand, the lifeless world of physics, where the quantitative opposition of forces and the chain of action and reaction take command,\(^2\) and, on the other, the instinctual world of biological life, which moves from the formed to the forming in accordance with its preset teleological framework.\(^2\) This paradoxical condition grants the subject sheer freedom—freedom not in terms of absence of bounds, but of emerging from the nature of the human condition as existence “in a relation of inverse polarity with the absolute.”\(^3\) In this sense, Nishida adds, “each of our actions is historical, and \textit{eschatologisch}, as the self-determination of the absolute present.”\(^4\)

The temporality and locality of each subject is symbolized and concretized by the presence of \textit{shintai}, which in this stage Nishida formulates as “the historical body” (\textit{rekishiteki shintai}). \textit{Shintai} is not an amalgam of physical properties, and it transcends the instinctual demands dictated by its biological characteristics, because it is equipped with consciousness. Consciousness at the moment of self-awakening, which Nishida defines as the instant of being truly human, however, does not transcend the bodily condition of the human being, either. Again, one’s sensational engagement with the world through \textit{shintai} is not merely passive. It has the dimension of \textit{act} at its core as it emerges from the emptying of selfhood in order to accept the other in its entirety and as it further evolves into the act of creation. Action takes place not through a dictation made by the contemplative consciousness but through the very negation of it; in this continuum between consciousness and action one’s sensational interwovenness with the world comes to completion. Consequently, the bounds of consciousness are constantly stretched to the realm of action. As Nishida states earlier, in the world of \textit{pois\\'es} “acting is knowing, as in the case of self-awareness,”\(^3\) and “action itself becomes consciousness.”\(^4\) Because of this sensational acceptance of the world and entering into the moment of creation, \textit{shintai} concretizes the reciprocal matrix of actions from the subject to the world, and from the world to the subject. As Nishida claims, corporeality marks a dialectical synthesis from the Created, which is not foregone but remains viable, to the Creating in the historical world of \textit{pois\\'es}.\(^5\) In this world of creation, the figures created by \textit{shintai} are the “pure bodies” of the artists, forming the pre-reflective and pre-predicative perceptual datum of the world.

In this matrix, \textit{shintai} appears as a twofold integration, an identity of absolute contradictories between seeing and being seen, hearing and being heard, and touching and being touched. I would like to emphasize the fact that \textit{shintai} in this dialectic

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is not split between contradictories, but is their identity. This differentiates shintai’s dialectical structure between seeing and being seen from, for instance, Jacques Lacan’s concept of visuality. Lacan’s subject of perception also acknowledges the dimension of being seen, which he theorizes as a gaze that “turns [the seeing subject itself] into a picture.”36 The subject, now torn between seeing and the gaze, which symbolizes “the lack that constitutes castration anxiety,”37 is like a montage and is “an effect of the (ever-frustrated) desire to image what the visual field always posits as its beyond but can never represent.”38 In Lacan’s theory of gaze, the segregation of the subject from the gaze—and from the world—fails to shake off the trait of self-centered subjectivity, as he is now frustrated and anxious before the fundamental impossibility of grasping, taming, and domesticating the world from which he is seen.39

The world for Lacan remains as an unfathomable Other that, as a result, dooms the subject to be haunted by “the (ever-frustrated) desire to image” in insurmountable psychological solitude. In contrast, the subject that is seen by the world in Nishida’s dialectic is the one whose core is empty, to be filled by, and to vibrate with, the figures constituting the perceptual datum of the world. Since the core of the self is empty before the horizon of nothingness, there is no ground for the formation of a hostile confrontation between the subject and the world.40

This visual experience under the matrix of active intuition of the world takes place on a horizon where associational operation vis-à-vis the objects, the elements of representational illusions, cannot be sustained. There is no such entity as the object of signification or of unfathomable silence standing in opposition to the subject who projects meaning upon it or who is to be dispirited by the silence. The illusion of the constancy and permanence of selfhood on the part of the subject dissolves so that shintai as the corporal agent of concretizing the emptiness of selfhood in its resonance with the world is completely activated. The figure standing in front of the subject is not apprehended by the subjectivizing trait of the self-centered subject, nor is it within the regulating, preestablished system of representation; it is apprehended by shintai, “the actively knowing body” that resonates with it to be led to the horizon of the trans-objective.41 Seeing on this horizon is always a breaking of the self-containedness and self-inwardness of the subject so that he may see the other, not superficially, but, in Nishida’s words, “by becoming the other.” The world at this point becomes refreshed as a topos, according to Nishida, that is “visually purified since all associational elements are eliminated.”42

To be sure, this visual experience does not mean that there is no figure to perceive. Rather, it indicates that the profile of the figure is not seen as the proof of its objective sign status any longer. This vision does not linger upon the contour and profile of the object, but transcends the dichotomy between appearance and essence by seeing it in conjunction with its background of nonbeing, by seeing the visible enshrouded by the background of the invisible. The figure now perceived on the horizon of nothingness becomes truly efficacious, and even alive, since it is seen in vibration and pulsation with shintai, the self-emptying corporeal agency.

This comprehension of seeing by Nishida represents an evolution of his early idea of “pure vision” existing in the process of artistic creation, as was expounded
in *Art and Morality* under the influence of Conrad Fiedler’s idea of vision. While in this stage the artistic creation is understood as the concretization of the absolute will streaming from the interiority of the subject to the world, the seeing on the horizon of nothingness incorporates the absolute passivity of the subject, who empties his selfhood to be fully filled up by the efficacy of the figure. Nishida further clarifies this kind of seeing with a reference to Zen:

> Zen speaks of “seeing into one’s own nature and thus becoming the Buddha-nature.” But this Zen phrase must not be misunderstood. “Seeing” here does not mean to see anything externally as an object; nor does it mean to see an internal self through introspection. For the self cannot see itself, just as the eye cannot see itself. And yet this does not mean that we can see the Buddha-nature transcendentally, either. If it were seen in that way it would be a fantasy. The “seeing” of Zen signifies an absolute overturning of the self. Thus it has the same meaning as the gaining of religious faith.43

Each moment of seeing, touching, and feeling in active intuition does not result in either the loss of one’s self or the absorption of the other into the self’s interiority, but leads to the inter-expression between the self and the other in absolute reciprocity. Put differently, the filling of the self-emptied “I” by the other does not indicate an “absorption in what is external as grammatical subject, or objectivity,”44 but an overturning of the ego-self to gain a greater self that embraces even its absolute contradiction. For Nishida, this is the ultimate dynamism of life, a dynamism predicated on shintai’s intermediary status to operate as absolutely contradictory simultaneity. One’s complete acceptance of the other through shintai and movement toward the transformation of the world is proportionate to the renunciation of the ego-self, according to Nishida, in order “to obey that which transcends us and causes us to be what we are, and to do so in the volitional, or dynamic, form of the contradictory identity of objectivity and subjectivity.”45

II

The importance of Nishida’s inquiry into art cannot be overemphasized in understanding his positive shift of the perspective of the body away from the early dogmatism of consciousness. “Pure experience,” the essential religio-philosophical achievement of his maiden work *An Inquiry into the Good (Zen no kenkyu)* (1911), was kept within the dogmatic perspective that singles out consciousness as the sole locus of true reality. Nishida thus wrote, “Even the body is simply a single part of the whole that consists of one’s phenomena of consciousness, for it is not that consciousness is within the body, but that the body is within consciousness.”46 Nishida’s engagement with the process of artistic creation, initiated with *Art and Morality*, however, led him to formulate a more synthetic comprehension that saw “the activity of mind and body as one lived reality.”47 At this point, Nishida further claimed that “Apart from the body, there is nothing that we can call the self. The self is a ‘sublimated body’”48—paving the way to his later notion of the body as being in a consciousness-action continuum and considered as homologous to the self. It is this
artistic influence that induced Nishida to rectify his earlier comprehension of “pure experience” as well. In his preface to the 1936 edition of An Inquiry into the Good, Nishida redefined his idea of “pure experience” as “the world of action-intuition—the world of poiēsis.”

Curiously, the relationship between art and Nishida’s philosophy was not unilateral. Nishida’s notion of the body elaborated upon during the prewar period in turn affected the formation of the art movement known as Monoha in postwar Japan. While the nomenclature of Monoha would lead one to believe that its focus was on mono, or things, this is not totally accurate. As Ufan Lee, the theoretical leader of this movement, made clear, the movement was concerned not so much with mono itself as with bringing “action and things together in such a way that a non-subjective world could be brought into being through revelations of space, conditions, relations, situations, and time.” Disclaiming the traditional notion of the artistic creation of the object, the movement shared the subversive and combative spirit of the young generation of Japan of the 1960s and 1970s. This period witnessed political turmoil exacerbated partly by an increasingly anti-Western sensibility and a disenchantment with Japanese traditional authority, which now came to be regarded as the ideological apparatus of the oppressive traditional feudal and social structure.

While there are numerous historical studies on Monoha, Naoyoshi Hikosaka’s is worth mentioning. Hikosaka saw Monoha as taking up the extreme position of materialistic objectivism, in opposition to the other extreme of subjectivism found in Nihon gainen ha, the Japanese version of Conceptual Art. In contrast, while reiterating this polarized perspective to a certain degree, Shigeo Chiba’s version balanced it by addressing the continuity of postwar Japanese art. Unlike Hikosaka, who regarded the Monoha movement as an imitation of the Environmental Art of the West, Chiba, like Lee, saw Monoha as “the art of relating oneself with the world,” rather than holding fast to the “mono” aspect of the movement. Chiba thus claimed that the spirit of Gutai, an aboriginal avant-garde group of the 1950s, was continued and expanded through the work of Monoha into the generation of the 1970s.

The advent of Monoha stemmed less from Nobuo Sekine’s in situ excavation, titled Phase-Earth (1968)—a cylinder of earth two and a half meters in diameter and three meters in height and the hole from which it was dug up from Sumarikyu Park in Kobe—than from the seminal interpretation of this work by Lee. While it was first received as another example of Sekine’s penchant for illusionism, in this case with mathematical overtones of “twisting, stretching, condensing until it is transformed into another,” Lee’s criticism of the work in his “The World and Structure” (Sekai to kōzó) offered a different interpretation. After disapproving of Minimalism, Light Art, and Environmental Art for the reason that these arts fail to transcend the dichotomy between the author as the one who retains the right to represent the world and the world as the material to be appropriated, Lee maintained that Sekine’s work manifested neither the conception nor the object, but invited their resolution in favor of a “trans-objective horizon” (hitaištōteki chihei). Sekine’s act of excavating the earth was not intended to embody any particular meaning, but simply to let the world reveal itself “as it is” (arinomamano aru).
Lee’s epochal 1971 publication *The Search for Encounter—The Sources of Contemporary Art* (*Deai o motomete—Gendai no bijutsu no shigen*) is a collection of articles that he had contributed to *Space Design* and *Bijutsu techo*. Some of these articles underwent various degrees of modification. One occasion was the alteration of the title of “Towards the Horizon of Unmediated Phenomena” (*Chokusetsuna gensho no chihei*), under which he published two articles in *Space Design* during 1970 and 1971, to “Transcending Being and Nonbeing” (*Sonzai to mu o koete*), which recalls Nishida’s idea of “the topos of absolute nothingness.” “Transcending Being and Nonbeing” further included a new subchapter titled “On Topos” (*Basho ni tsuite*), an addition that reveals an obvious Nishida influence. Indeed, Nishida’s presence is most strongly felt in the concluding chapter, “Prologue for the Phenomenology of Encounter: For the Preparation of an Uncharted Artistic Theory” (*Deai no genshōgaku josetsu: atarashii geijutsuron no junbi no tameni*). In this chapter, Lee adopted Nishida’s notion of *shintai* in association with the logic of *soku* and “the topos of nothingness” in order to overcome what he saw as unsatisfactory practices in modern art.

It would be an imprecise and lopsided assessment of Lee’s criticism to ignore the influence of other thinkers. Indeed, it has been observed that the primary participants in Monoha, including Sekine, Kishio Suga, Katsuro Yoshida, and Susumu Koshimizu, were familiar with phenomenology and structuralism through the teachings of Yoshishige Saito of Tama Art University. Saito brought to their attention “the ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Claude Levi-Strauss, and the writings of Donald Judd—all of which contributed to his investigation into the phenomenological problems of perception and illusion, and existence and cognition.” Lee himself, who was about a decade older than the other Monoha artists, became a student of philosophy at Nihon University after interrupting his study of painting in Korea. He was naturally well versed in contemporary intellectual debates and moved freely among thinkers ranging from Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger to Herbert Marcuse, Gaston Bachelard, and Michel Foucault, to validate his critique of modernity.

Among these thinkers, Merleau-Ponty holds a significant position. Influenced by the notion of body and perception espoused in Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*, “Eye and Mind,” and “Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man,” Lee saw the corporeality of the human being as the point of intersection between subjectivity and objectivity. This corporeality was the very condition for the operation of concrete perception more fundamental than consciousness that is confined within the epistemological horizon of cognition. Perception is believed to be equipped with its own modus operandi, enabling it to form a deeper level of corporeal intimacy with the world, an intimacy that exists prior to the intervention of any kind of consciousness based on the dichotomy between the subject withdrawn from the world, on the one hand, and the object, on the other. A new attribution of perception, not as a secondary, marginal operation for the benefit of the hegemonic mind, but as forming the ontological channel in one’s access to the Being of the world, is free from the subjective habit of objectification. The aloof scientific gaze into the world, conducted by what Merleau-Ponty called “the inner man” in order to
pigeonhole the world into categories, concepts, values, ideologies, and perspectives, is seen as an extreme reduction of the richness and concreteness of the pre-reflective and pre-analytic experience of the world. Lee observed in this philosophical outlook a fundamental challenge to the modern paradigm of representation enacted by the subject, who summons the world before himself. Lee claimed that Merleau-Ponty’s insightful discovery of perceptual depth restores the proper position of a thing having been cut off from the world and having been encapsulated by illusionary images. Lee writes:

In particular, Merleau-Ponty does not trust in the epistemological horizon of consciousness, and stands in its stead on the field of perception occurring prior to cognition. He redefines man as a corporeal being that exists at the very tangential point between the external world and the interiority of the self. In so doing, he seeks to see the movement of consciousness within the perceptual relationality between the world and the self. The task of contemporary philosophy for him is to defamiliarize (zurashite) man as the being of consciousness and the subject of cognition so that he may be redefined as the being of corporeality in the perceptual relationality with the world.

Lee maintained that Merleau-Ponty’s claim for the contradictory aspect of the body—it belongs to “I” and yet is simultaneously intertwined with the world in order to synthesize “seeing” and “being seen”—nullifies the hegemonic dichotomous framework between subject and object. It also allows one to escape from the dogmatism of the intentionality of consciousness as the sole datum for the comprehension of reality.

It would be a mistake, however, to overemphasize Merleau-Ponty’s influence on Lee’s theoretical construct to the point where it overshadows Nishida’s influence. A short passage in “Beyond Being and Nonbeing,” the fourth chapter of The Search for Encounter—The Sources of Contemporary Art, concisely clarifies Lee’s shift from Merleau-Ponty’s theory of body to that of Nishida. Introducing Merleau-Ponty’s dualistic definition of the body as belonging both to “I” and to the world, Lee writes:

What Merleau-Ponty is emphasizing in his Phenomenology of Perception, where he writes that “the body is dualistic in that it belongs to me and simultaneously to the world,” is the intermediary status of the human being. The very fact that a human is a corporeal being spanning the exterior and interior allows the mutual mediation between the self and the other in the form of encounter rather than in the form of confrontation. We can say that it is Nishida who pays attention to the phenomenon of self-awakening evident in such a dualistic transcendental aspect of body and in its twofold status between activity and passivity. This dualistic aspect of the body makes possible one’s “seeing” and “being seen”—or one’s “being seen” and “seeing”—simultaneously. I would strongly hold that we need to structure a place to activate this intermediary aspect of man and to substantiate the dimension of self-awakening residing in perception.

Nishida’s notion of the body as an identity of absolute contradictories based on the logic of soku contradictorily intertwines acting (hataraku) and seeing (miru) at each concrete historical moment of creation. And this notion, according to Lee,
not only subsumes Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the dualistic body as seeing and being seen, but also leads phenomenology of perception to a deeper, more religious plane of self-awakening (jikaku). The dualistic structure of body synthesizing subjectivity and objectivity, and consciousness and action, conditions one’s relationality with the world—a relationality predicated upon the possibility of one’s emptying selfhood to accept the world in full sympathy. In this fashion, Nishida’s philosophy of the topos of nothingness and its related notion of shintai reveals the hitherto uncharted religiosity of the otherwise mundane perceptual experience. Lee writes further:

The reason one can encounter the other is none other than this dualistic aspect of the body. The fact that the body is I and simultaneously the other, or that it is the other and, at the same time, I, indicates that the body is the mediating being of simultaneity, which transcends the dichotomous framework between subject and object. It goes without saying that it is the body that enables man to perceive the world before one recognizes it as an object. In “The Human Being,” Nishida writes of the body as a term in which passivity and activity intersect. “Acting is seeing, and seeing is acting. . . . Body exists where acting and seeing are integrated.”

This dualistic structure of shintai sustains the unification between subject and object, where the object moves the subject, and the subject, the object, echoing Nishida’s notion of active intuition.

The intercorporeal resonance with the object relieves perception from the familiarized field of the everyday, where one’s systematic segregation from the world secretly occurs under the mask of familiarity. The hegemonic representation of a thing into an image, sign, name, concept, and ideology conversely seals off not only the thing but also the subject within the preestablished system of representation. The semiotic solidification of the representational realm into a self-autonomous system of signification is based on the internalization of the unmotivated relationship between the sign and a thing into a system of self-referential differences. This emergence of the independent realm of semiotics naturalizes the differentiation between essence and appearance, and between “the mental image in the mind and the exteriority of something real.” Intervening in the perception of things, with the perceiver not as a self-effacing mediator but as a self-imposing agent, the semiotic system obfuscates the perceptual possibility of reaching the things in their entirety through corporeal relationality. The subject stands as a mere performer of the already given finite set of meanings as dictated by signs, instead of engaging with the things behind them through a corporeally driven active intuition. The subject even comes to be regulated and haunted by the representational system itself. This is the moment Lee characterizes as the “revolt of images” (Zō no hanran), an allusion to Foucault’s provocative proclamation of the death of modern man.

For Lee, restoring the intermediary zone between the subject and the world through the activation of shintai was an urgent cultural necessity, in order to facilitate an experience in which, in semiotic terms, the signifier, the signified, and the referent are one and the same. At this point, Lee rechristened shintai, which operates
in this realm of intercession, as “structure” (kōzō). “Structure” indicates the condition that sustains and activates relationality in a situational fabric between subject and object, repelling the zone of semiotic illusions. In its role as mediator, “structure” is present, yet self-effacing, conjoining its presence and absence simultaneously, not in successive fashion. In this fabric, the subject’s experience of the object is grounded in oneness, interconnectedness, and interwovenness, a state which Lee variously calls “intersubjective corporeality” (kyōdō shukanteki shintai), “bodily-ness” (shintaisei), and “bodily communality” (shintaiteki kyōdōseī).67

This connectedness redefines the subject and the object as intercorporeal “structural beings” (kōzōteki sonzai), rather than self-sufficient and self-contained entities. The confrontation between subject and object is lifted as the subject awakens into his situated-ness in the fabric of the object, while the object overcomes its status as a sign whose significance is to be conceptually deciphered, and acquires its transcendental otherness as a thing once the restored corporeal intimacy with the subject is activated. For Lee, the perception of the world at this moment occurs before the individualization of the senses takes place, and utilizes as its mode the totality of shintai, synthesizing the various kinesthetic, tactile, visual, and other sensory measures. This condition of totality maximizes and sharpens the perceptual capacity of shintai, and reaches a level in which, according to Lee, shintai sees faster than the eye and feels more deeply than the hand.68 Lee then quotes Nishida: “intuition is not a serene reflection of a thing, as the eye sees the thing, but becomes an act in which the subject and object are integrated.”69

While confronting the semiotic degradation of perception, Lee’s emphasis on the “situated-ness” of the subject and the thing was partly a translation of Nishida’s idea of topos (basho). As Nishida once claimed, in one’s perception of a thing, there is always a presupposition of topos that surrounds not only the thing but also the perceiving subject,70 characterizing each perception as being situational. In the appearance of a thing in this situational engagement, not in its substantiality, which is presumed to exist even without the acknowledgment of the knowing subject, arises the reality of the intertwined-ness between subject and thing. The subject is not outside the unfolding situation but within it, and becomes infected by the real. Of course, this kind of appearance differs from appearance as the antinomy of essence, which arouses a series of negative connotations such as superficiality, fakeness, falsity, or mask. The appearance of which Lee, as well as Nishida, would approve arises only in a situation in which the subject is a part, while the appearance, in opposition to essence, comes into being in the dualistic framework between the subject of disengagement and the object of perception. The former is an appearance in which the substantial core of a thing becomes emptied to uphold a situational wholeness. At this moment, the depth of the thing is filled with appearance.

Let me introduce Lee’s example to elucidate his notion of “situated-ness.” A piece of lacquerware at a dinner table overcomes its scientific and aesthetic objecthood through the accumulation of intercorporeal contacts with the hands and eyes of the family members. As its shiny surface fades through the repetitive daily serving of meals and washing, its jōtaisei, or “situated-ness,” breathes and shines through
the course of a family history. The gradual waning of the piece’s glossy surface con-
versely indicates the thickening radiance of its “situated-ness” in the actual world of
the family’s everyday life. Borrowing Jun’ichiro Tanizaki’s portrayal, this kind of ra-
diance comes not from polishing the lacquer to remove traces of handling and wear,
but from the very accumulation of these, which amount to something like dark pol-
ish.71 The object is not simply seen as a household item for which any dish can be
substituted, nor is it revered for its aesthetic appeal, as its original polish gradually
fades. Rather, this sedimentation of “intercorporeal reciprocity” between the piece
and family members allows the piece to overcome its instrumentality and its self-
enclosed status as a particular object, and it eventually become an “irreplaceable
part” of the family.72 At this moment, to see the piece only for its instrumental pur-
pose or aesthetic beauty is “to see the soil while not being able to see the earth.”73
This kind of seeing is an encounter not with the piece itself, but with its abstraction
into an object that is separated from the corporeally inscribed interwovenness with
the perceiver. The seeing that is predicated on the intercorporeal fabric that unites
the lacquerware piece and the family members liberates one’s vision from the profile
of the piece in favor of a visual dialectic between seeing and being seen. This recip-
rocating dialectic leads each family member to experience a sense of oneness with
the piece, and this oneness, according to Lee, leads the members to the perception
of a spatiality, which he calls “the place of nothingness” (mu no basho) and “trans-
parent space” (tōmei na kūkan).74
I would like to comment further on the sense of nothingness and transparency
that Lee claims exists in this spatial experience. This sense suggests that what is
viewed by a family member has overcome the dichotomy between himself and the
lacquerware piece through an established intercorporeal bond. The confrontation
between the self-contained subject and self-sufficient object dissolves once the dia-
lectic fabric is in operation. Simultaneously, this dissolution of the confrontation is
also the dissolution of the constancy of profiles and of the differentiation between
appearance and essence, so long as the fixed profile of the lacquerware is believed
to guarantee its state as an independent entity. As Arnold Berleant writes, “surfaces
require something beyond, the metaphysics of a Ding an sich, and they imply, there-
fore, the very division of reality that engagement abjures.” In the corporeal en-
goement between a family member and the lacquerware, “actually, there are no
surfaces but only perceptual situations.”75 The lacquerware, despite its presence,
comes to be melted—or in Nishida’s and Lee’s narrative, empties its selfhood—
into the practical situation of a dinner gathering. The degree of its self-effacing qual-
ity is actually the index of measurement of its success in upholding the situation.

Lee’s other story of the moment of encounter (deai) with a chrysanthemum
placed in a Japanese Tea room “on a serene afternoon” is also worth mentioning.
In this encounter, Lee claims, if seeing remains at the level of the profile of the
flower, the sense of knowing is only mechanical and is conditioned by the kind of
subjectivity that looks upon the flower as an object of confrontation and analysis. In
contrast, true seeing transcends the outline of the flower and resonates with it at the
moment when one is enshrouded by the “thickness and width” of the situational
wholeness of the tearoom, a wholeness unfolding, again in Lee’s words, “under the
contradictory identity between time and space.” True seeing gives rise on the part
of the perceiver to the sense of oneness with the flower, awakening into the
emerging trans-objective horizon that in turn embraces both. At this moment, one
is already empty of self-centered subjectivity and becomes “coalesced into” the
expanded situational wholeness in which the chrysanthemum sitting quiescently in
one corner of the room reflects the serene and unpretentious loftiness of the room
and further activates the discontinuous reciprocity of the room with the garden out-
side. Here, the chrysanthemum is also emptied of its object-like attention and
becomes what Lee calls a “structural being” of the situational fabric. Lee claims
again that this perception, under the dissolution of the self-centered subjectivity
and of the objecthood of the flower, extends toward the trans-objective horizon of
“transparent space.”

Kūkan, which originally appeared as the translation of the German word Raum
at the time of the introduction of the theory of empathy to modern Japan, acquires a
new significance in Lee’s artistic theory. Lee’s theory clarifies the concept of “space”
kūkan as the perceptual or experiential horizon emerging from the self-delimiting
corporeal reciprocity between subject and object. Because of this radical kind of
reciprocity, the perceptual horizon is not merely conditioned by the emphasis on the
somatic structure of the subject and his involvement with the world through action
and response. In this case, the residue of anthropocentric subjectivism might still be
witnessed, as long as one’s somatic condition is conceived of as the ground for my
existence, and is thus not completely annihilated with the habit of the cogitor con-
sidering itself to be the center of the world. Despite the subject’s being “implicated
in a constant process of action and response,” the body is looked upon as the origin-
ating point of action and response, which is still founded upon the conception of
body as the medium of self-affirming subjectivity. As Berleant observed, “the ego-
centricity of this conception remains, for the space around the body is territorial, an
enclosed space that is limited by the space of others.” Space is thus “continuous
with my body, grasped from me as the starting point, the degree zero of spatiality.”

As for Nishida, according to Lee, the true significance of the somatic condition is
not grasped until its role as the intermediary medium between subjectivity and ob-
jectivity and its self-emptying operation in concretizing this relationality are fully
accounted for. This relationality pulls the somatic being out of singularity and rede-
fines it in mutuality with the other, going beyond the paradigm of action and re-

space unfolds only on this condition of corporeal mutuality and relational-
ity, in which shintai works as the vessel of self-emptying for the encounter with the
other. Then, space as a perceptual phenomenon, not as a form in the transcendental
mind of the subject, nor as the territorial enclosure conditioned upon the subject’s
somatic condition, acquires an ethical connotation—on the basis of the principle of
its relationality with the other—and a religious one—on the basis of the premise of
the fundamental emptiness of selfhood.

Lee’s redefinition of space is also a criticism of the concept of space in modern
art practice. In “The World and Structure,” he criticizes the concept of “three-
dimensional entity” (rittai), which he claims can be observed in works by Ellsworth Kelly, Frank Stella, Robert Morris, and Robert Whitman. This “three-dimensional entity” is an alternative approach emerging in the wake of the hegemonic competition between anthropocentrism and fetishistic materialism, which transforms the material world according to human representation in the former case, and presents the material world itself in the latter. For Lee, the idea of “three-dimensional entity” negates not only the human being but also the object itself, and brings forth only the remaining autonomic three-dimensional space. As Lee writes, “In this case, ‘three-dimensional entity’ dispenses with the object status . . . and indicates a more conceptual and nonliteral state.”83 For Lee, Whitman’s employment of technological elements such as laser beams in his spatial experiments is not so much concerned with giving presence to the laser beams themselves. Rather, what comes to the surface is the space itself in its pure neutrality, before which any subjective act of discerning a thing and naming it is fundamentally baffled. The presentation of the neutral space addresses the transition from a fetishistic admiration of materials to their evaporation into the void, allowing a “nonobjective three-dimensional space” to come into being.84 At the same time, this space swallows up the human being, as one stands, disengaged from the situation, as a mere spectator of the void into which “any words of the human being can not possibly be inserted.”85 Lee finally characterizes this kind of space as “‘the third space’ (daisan no kukan), or ‘the specific spectacle’ (tokute no kōke), in which neither the object nor the human being, but only emptiness, exists.”86

The same kind of criticism can be applied to Donald Judd’s concept of “specific object.” This concept, in its apparent emphasis on the purity and neutrality of the object, becomes the target of Lee’s criticism, in that the nonrepresentational quality of the object does not cause the sense of reality to unfold before the subject. Its conceptual artificiality produces an indifferent object of literalness and a space around it, which leads the spectator to behold, again, mere emptiness.87 For Lee, despite the positivity of such works, first, in their challenge to the traditional relationship between the seeing spectator and the seen object, and, second, in their effort to bring about a nonobjective horizon, the concepts of “three-dimensional entity” and “specific object” are charged with an inertia to embody a mere empty void far distanced from one’s corporeal experience of the world as the ontological ground of the human being, as well as from the praxis of life.88

In contrast to these Western practices, the work favored by Lee that opens “space” (kukan) as the trans-objective horizon was Sekine’s Phase of Nothingness—Oil Clay (1969).89 In this work, Sekine performed a series of acts (shigusa), dividing a lump of oily soil into individual masses and then combining them again. Lee maintains that, even though Sekine himself must initially have had a plan for the earth, the artificiality of the subjective intention did not measure up to the masterful subject, who would take the world as the material to embody his own mental image. The artificiality gradually disappeared, once Sekine came into contact with the oily soil, and was replaced by a mutually determining relationship between the soil and himself.
In this work, the act \textit{(shigusa)} of Sekine is seen not as serving the subjective will aside but as setting the soil free from it, and further establishes the relationship between the artist and the soil as one of reciprocal determination. Sekine is being played by the soil as much as he plays with it. At this moment of correlation, or \textit{soku}, “Sekine remains Sekine, and, the soil, soil,” yet, simultaneously, “Sekine is the soil, and, conversely, the soil is Sekine” \textit{(Sekine soku yudo, yudo soku Sekine)}.

This mutuality does not remain at the level of a pointlessly endless series of contacts, but is embbued with a perceptual awakening into what Lee again calls a transcen-dental horizon of “space” \textit{(kukan)}, where the subjectivity of Sekine and the object-hood of the soil are dissolved. Lee writes:

At the point where the body in disarray returns to and fits with the world, space \textit{(kukan)} unfolds with a deepening sense of transparency. It is also at this moment that an order arises out of the inextricable maze of the everyday and the words speaking of the true phase of the world, which have been encapsulated by the unfathomable silence, come to be seen.

Expression does not occur when an aesthetic object is created to embody the intentions of the hegemonic subject. On the contrary, the one who expresses should awaken himself to his situated-ness, the preliminary step in acknowledging the negation of his masterly status, or, to borrow Nishida’s narrative, to empty his selfhood’s nothing. He is more like a “situated-actor,” rather than the authoritative master of creation. Like Sekine’s contact with the oil clay, which initiates a reciprocal play between the artist and the soil, the corporeal engagement with a thing through seeing, hearing, and touching itself becomes an act of expression of the self. To reiterate, it is not that the artist touches the clay because it is out there, but that the act of touching emerges from the depth of his self, which voluntarily empties selfhood to accept it as his interiority. This moment of the self’s engagement with the outside occurs not in the form of intentionality as a trait of consciousness, but as an act of the self’s volun-tary delimitation from which the intentionality itself arises. The acceptance of the oil clay through touching and feeling itself is thus contradictorily the expression of the artist, upon which the paradox of the contradictory identity between action and intu-intuition is inscribed. \textit{Shintai} as the agent of self-emptying subjectivity accepts the oil clay’s viscosity and fragility, and its silence and repose, and starts to move toward the horizon of the Creating beyond that of the Created.

In contrast to a performance or a happening, which, Lee claims, is an attempt at making “every part of the human being including consciousness and action” into objects, Lee refers to Sekine’s acts of expression based upon self-negation as \textit{shigusa}, a traditional Japanese term that could be translated as act or gesture, yet is free from any sense of preset choreographic dictation. In \textit{shigusa}, the differentiation between subject and object and between acting and the acted is constantly nullified through intimate corporeal contacts between the artist and the world. Expression arises in this matrix between action and intuition, upheld by the dualistic structure of \textit{shintai} between subjectivity and objectivity. A work of art emerges at the moment when \textit{shintai}’s sensational capacity to internalize the world overflows and enters
into the realm of creation to accommodate the surplus. A work that is created in this fashion extends the mediating role of shintai and, like Sekine’s oil clay, binds together the artist and the world. From this perspective, Lee finally quotes Nishida that “one can call the work of art even the pure body of the artist.”

Unlike the mere emptiness embodied by such notions as “three-dimensional entity” and “specific object,” the spatial experience in Lee’s theory acknowledges the presence of the perceiving subject and that of figures, yet is still transparent. This is because the aesthetic and semiotic attention of figures is transcended through the intercorporeal fabric between the subject and themselves, in the process of which a deeper level of knowing and intimacy based on the self-emptying shintai is actualized. “The transparent space” or “the place of nothingness,” Lee’s translation of Nishida’s notion of “the topos of nothingness,” is not simply a minimalistic annihilation of figures, but, on the contrary, grounds the efficacy of each figure on the horizon of the corporeally inscribed everyday praxis where aesthetic and functional attention is overcome, despite their figurative attributes. The full manifestation of the figurative power of an entity does not lie in its superficial semiotic parlance, nor in the aesthetic beautification of its narcissistic autonomy, but in its paradoxically self-effacing sedimentation into the corporeal thickness and voluminosity of the everyday. Nothingness in this sense is transparent fullness.

Notes


2 – Ibid., p. 126.

3 – Ibid., p. 123.


6 – Ibid.

7 – Dilworth also explains this dialectical logic with these words: “It will be important to note that Nishida’s concept of ‘contradictory identity’ is not dialectical (sublational) in a Platonic or Hegelian sense; in his language it does not postulate another level of being or noematic determination” (David A. Dilworth, “Introduction and Postscript” to Nishida Kitarō, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, trans. David A. Dilworth (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1987), pp. 5–6, 130–131.

8 – The dimension of negation immanent within nothingness, or the principle of self-articulation from nothingness to particulars, fundamentally differentiates itself from the abstract universal. The abstract universal, which occupies the slot
of the grammatical predicate in Aristotelian formal logic, does not include the dimension of self-negation within itself but simply defines each particular through its own affirmation. In the subsumptive relationship between the particular and the abstract universal in formal logic, the latter embraces the former only at the expense of distorting the concreteness of the particular. In contrast, nothingness is the ultimate concrete universal. While embracing the particular, it also reflects its concreteness. This concrete universal is not “a concept or logical abstraction but a transcendental activity which lies at the base of objective reality just as it lies at the base of empirical consciousness or subjective reality.” Simultaneously, nothingness can never be taken as the object of judgment; it remains until the end as “the matrix or context out of which all differentiations or determinations arise, and in which they and their mutual relationships are grounded” (Nishida, Complete Works, 4:226–237; Robert E. Carter, The Nothingness beyond God: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nishida Kitarō [St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1997], p. 59; Joseph A. Bracken, The One in the Many: A Contemporary Reconstruction of the God-World Relationship [Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001, p. 114).

9 – The “I” as articulated in “the-I-who-is-seeing-a-bird,” is to be reflexively seen in the deeper phase of the “I” as nothingness, realizing the formula of self-awakening as “the self’s seeing its own self.” “The self’s seeing its own self” is equally “nothingness’ seeing nothingness.” In other words, seen from the side of the concrete universal, self-awareness assumes the paradoxical form of “the universal which sees its own self.” This is because, for Nishida, if the sense of the “I” in “the-I-who-is-seeing-a-bird” is “the nothingness as seen” (mirareta mu), then that which voluntarily delimits itself into the “I” is “the nothingness that sees” (miru mu). The process of self-delimitation from one phase of nothingness to the other is also characterized as the rationalization of the Irrational. The noematic determination and affirmation of the self, in Nishida’s terms, has as its flip side the confrontation and negation of the grounds of the self as nothingness by exercising and deepening the absolute will of life. Accordingly, this process itself takes on the dimension of an oxymoron that contradictorily creates exteriority within its own interiority (Nishida, Complete Works, 5:379–380, 433; 6:124–128).


11 – In this regard, Nishida wrote, “Then, does the self come from thinking? That which is thought of is an object, not the self” (Nishida, Complete Works, 6:130) (my own translation).


13 – Ibid., pp. 125, 127.

15 – Nishida, Complete Works, 6:125.

16 – Ibid., pp. 129–130.

17 – Ibid., 10:236.

18 – In illuminating the uniqueness of Nishida’s notion of active intuition, Yuasa introduces a twofold structure between the surface and base layers. The surface layer is “the acting intuition grounded in the so-called ‘basho [place] vis-à-vis being.’” It comprises “a passive sense intuition (or perception)” and the subsequent cognition by the self, who “actively directs itself towards the target object (being).” As an example of this layer from a psycho-physiological standpoint, Yuasa offers the centripetal and centrifugal structure of the sensory-motor circuit, which Henri Bergson and Merleau-Ponty claimed to exist in the structure of one’s body. Yuasa writes: “The sensory-motor circuit is the mechanism by which the self acts directly towards the world through the centrifugal motor circuit, based on the information received passively via the centripetal circuit (sense intuition).” In contrast, Yuasa claims that Nishida’s place of nothingness demonstrates a theory of active intuition by positioning the self vis-à-vis nothing, rather than the object. The movement of this intuition does not originate from the self of everyday life, but from “the authentic self” as non-I, who stands on the horizon of nothingness. This movement reverses the relationship between passive intuition and active cognition, appearing in the surface layer of the twofold structure. As the intuition in this case originates from the base layer, or the depth of the self vis-à-vis nothing, toward the surface layer and then to the world, this intuition acquires the active attribute, unlike the passive intuition in the surface layer. It is at this moment that Yuasa claims the ontological transformation of the corporeality of the self into “an instrument or empty vessel receiving this intuition, that is, it simply acts as no-ego” (Yuasa Yasuo, The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory, ed. Thomas P. Kasulis, trans. Nagatomo Shigenori [and] Thomas P. Kasulis [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987], p. 199).

19 – Yuasa maintains that since the subject and object are embraced by the same ontological horizon of nothingness, the confrontation between the two is dissolved. Because of this dissolution, a perception at this moment is not a subjective act originating from the subject toward a targeted object, according to Yuasa, as in the centrifugal sensory-motor circuit of Henry Bergson and Merleau-Ponty. Rather, it is a self-revelation of the trans-immanent horizon of nothingness as the common ground of the subject and the object. In this self-revelatory operation of nothingness, the subject is able to empty his selfhood so that the other may come forward and unfold itself within the very self (Yuasa, The Body, p. 199).
21 – Ibid., p. 130.
26 – Nishida, *Last Writings*, p. 93.
27 – Ibid., p. 49.
30 – Ibid., pp. 50, 51, 57.
31 – Nishida’s concept of freedom is based on an inquiry into the condition of true individuality. He argues that the kind of freedom found in the Kantian moral self ends up becoming like the existence of biological instincts. In the system of thinking, the self moves along the objective logic as a mere mechanical reflector of the transcendental moral imperative with “his own rational determinations.” Nishida criticized the concept of freedom based on this kind of self to be “something merely Euclidean.” He was also critical of any accusation that his philosophy was too individualistic and mystical. His idea of freedom presents a formula between the individual and the absolute, though in a different manner from that of, for instance, the Kantian moral self. Nishida writes: “In the logical articulation of this absolute religious freedom I am also opposed to Western mystical philosophy in that the true individual must be established from the absolute’s own existential negation. Those who consider my philosophy to be itself mystical are thinking from the standpoint of object logic” (Nishida, *Last Writings*, pp. 111–113).
32 – Ibid., p. 110.
34 – Ibid., p. 80.
37 – Ibid., p. 73.

39 – While partly acknowledging the significance of Lacan’s attempt to de-center the subject from its presumed pivotal condition, Bryson saw Lacan’s visual theory, which takes the skull appearing in Hans Holbein’s The Ambassadors as the major strategic device for the argument on decentralization, to be still kept within the grip of self-centered subjectivity, as the vision here remains menaced, persecuted, and feared. These conditions are symptomatic of the still self-centered subject, which has just been decentralized, rather than fully accepting the decentralized condition (Norman Bryson, “The Gaze in the Expanded Field,” in Vision and Visuality, ed. Hal Foster [New York: Dia Art Foundation, 1988], p. 106).

40 – What Nishida’s nothingness criticizes in association with the category of the “I” is targeted at misconstruing the tangible facet per se as the primary modality of the self. Once mistaken, the “I” adheres to the illusion of permanence and substantiality, which operates as the basis for what Bryson calls “the apparatus of framing which always produces an object for a subject and a subject for an object.” The philosophy of nothingness overturns radically the “I” as an a priori ontological category of being and its “fundamental irreducibility.” It places “the je itself on the field of nihility or emptiness,” carrying out a “thoroughgoing displacement of the subject in the field of vision.” Nothingness calls into question the presumed core of the je itself, the source of frustration and anxiety at the moment of being exposed to a gaze (Bryson, “The Gaze in the Expanded Field,” pp. 88, 95).

41 – For the interpretation of shintai in active intuition as “the actively knowing body,” refer to Cestari, “The Knowing Body,” pp. 179–208.

42 – Nishida, Complete Works, 10:234 (my own translation).

43 – Nishida, Last Writings, pp. 90–91.

44 – Ibid., p. 102.

45 – Ibid.


48 – Ibid., p. 205.

49 – This self-clarification was prompted partly by his regret that the general tone of the book might be looked upon as “too psychological,” thus depreciating “the rational, objective aspects of reality, such as language and logical method” (Nishida, preface to An Inquiry into the Good, p. xxiii; Cestari, “The Knowing Body,” p. 181).


52 – Munroe, Japanese Art after 1945, p. 261.


54 – While this study does not make a serious inquiry into Suga’s art, he did occupy a special position in Monoha in the sense that he also based his work on the “in-depth study of the [Mādhyamaka], a central doctrine of the Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching that ‘all existence is interdependent and existence itself is void’” (Munroe, Japanese Art after 1945, p. 259).

55 – Ibid.


59 – Ibid., p. 132.

60 – This is my translation from the 2000 edition of Ufan Lee’s The Search for Encounter—The Sources of Contemporary Art. Curiously, this part does not appear in the 1971 edition. That this passage is not found in the earlier edition does not mean that Lee some thirty years later has changed his position as to the relationship between the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty and that of Nishida. Rather, it means that Lee has further clarified from a historical vantage point how he understood the similarity and difference between the two philosophies during the heyday of Monoha (Lee, The Search for Encounter, p. 132) (my own translation).


62 – Ibid., p. 201 (my own translation).


65 – In other words, this semiotic autonomy consigns to oblivion perception and its role as the way through which one engages with the world. The issue of representation itself is not dealt with in this autonomy, and even becomes a matter of no interest. Ricoeur further writes:

Then, too, the distinction between outside and inside returns in force. Yet semiotics believes that they have given up the representative illusion by having constituted the text as an inside without an outside, or rather as an inside whose outside (be it author, audience, or socio-cultural circumstances) has become irrelevant. The referent of the text has become a function of the text. Within the narrative field, it is the narrated story as narrated and nothing more. Just as we can speak of an implied author or an implied audience, we must speak of a referential field implied by the text, which is sometimes called the ‘world’ of the text. (Ricoeur, “Mimesis and Representation,” p. 144)

66 – Ufan Lee, “Descartes to Seiyō no shukumei” (Descartes and the destiny of the West), Space Design (September 1969): 121.


68 – Ibid., p. 52.

69 – Ibid., pp. 52–60.

70 – Nishida, Complete Works, 4 : 208–212.


73 – Ibid., p. 207.

74 – Other terms adopted by Lee are “expanse of nothingness” (mu no hirogari) and “the immediate world” (chokusetsu na sekai) (ibid., pp. 209, 218–220).


77 – Ibid., p. 220.

78 – While explaining his idea of space (kukan), Lee also employs other terms such as “perception-space” (jikakuteki kukan), “world” (sekai), and “field” (ba) (ibid., pp. 116–117).

79 – Berleant, Art and Engagement, p. 85.

80 – Ibid., p. 87.

81 – Ibid., p. 86.

82 – In this regard, it is noteworthy to mention Berleant’s efforts to shift the paradigm in the relationship between the subject and environment from “active model” to “participatory model.” While the former is based on the bodily subject
located in the matrix of action and response toward the world, the latter can be regarded as the paradigm of mutual influence, the highest form of interaction between the bodily subject and environment for Berleant. He writes:

We must balance the idea of the lived body and of lived space, of the self as initiating action and generating space, by including in the idea of environment the influences that are exerted on the body, the features and forces that guide our spatial sense and mobility and make an essential contribution to the definition of our lived space. . . . There is a reciprocity, an intimate engagement with the conditions of life that joins person with place in a bond that is not only mutually complementary but genuinely unified. . . . For all its intimacy, the active model still retains at bottom the discreteness of person and setting. It is an anthropocentric environment in which, no matter how close the exchange may be, there remains a residual, ineradicable difference. By contrast, the most complete development of environmental experience transcends all division. It is a condition in which every vestige of subjectivity disappears and the irreducible continuity of person and place becomes the fundamental term in grasping the meaning of environment. This is the participatory environment, a sense of the world both most ancient and most recent.

In order to stress the reciprocity between the bodily subject and environment, Berleant adopts such terms as “mutually determining forces” and “the unitary experiential field.” He also emphasizes the influence of environment on the body to rectify any residual anthropocentric dimension of the active model. According to him, the fundamental point that distinguishes the participatory model from the active model is the unitary and continuous experiential field between body and environment. However, he seems to have difficulty in pinning down the participatory model in contrast to the active model, using for both models such terms as forces, responses, and interactions. I would argue that Nishida’s point concerning the possibility of body as enacting and concretizing self-emptying subjectivity is a possible theoretical basis for explicating what Berleant sought to convey (Berleant, *Art and Engagement*, pp. 85–91).

84 – Ibid., p. 126.
85 – Ibid. (my own translation).
86 – Ibid. (my own translation).
87 – Ibid.
88 – Lee claims that, despite an artificiality that appeared in practice, the positive aspect of Light Art, Minimalism, and Environmental Art lies in their challenge to the traditional relationship between “the one who sees and the one which is seen.” In practice, they have the effect of dismantling the focal point and leading the spectator to a perception that goes beyond any given object of attention. Lee maintains that this ambiguity over what should be focused on conversely brings about a distinctive sense of spatiality. Yet, despite this contribution by these art movements toward bringing us closer to the horizon of the
nonobjective world, Lee is also critical of them by claiming that what is laid out in these movements is too artificial. Simultaneously, it is so destitute of content that what it embodies amounts to mere emptiness. Lee goes on to say that at the moment when these arts reach the extreme in removing materiality from the object, they end up becoming pure conceptualism. In this state, as is the case with conceptual art, the representational will of the artist may not be clear, but it is nonetheless hidden with potential force within the recesses of his or her conceptual intentions (Lee, “The World and Structure,” p. 130).

89 – Lee’s practice itself, for example in the Relatum series, presents some interesting cases, bringing together, through collision and superimposition, stone, glass, steel, and cotton. One work that appeared in the exhibition Phenomenon and Perception—Trends in Contemporary Art, held at the Kyoto National Museum in 1969, merits attention. This work originally entitled Phenomenon and Perception B and later renamed to Relatum displays the moment of collision between a piece of stone (dropped by Lee) and a piece of glass on the floor. Lee asserts that the work captures the moment of encounter in the form of a collision. In addition, it gives rise to an intriguing involvement among the artist, who initiates the movement of collision; the stone, which hits the glass; and the broken pane of glass. While this is a symbolic gesture representing the “smashing of conventional art, which depicted images,” this kind of practice, for Lee, minimizes the intervention of artificial concepts by the artist and is based on shigusa, the artless act of engagement with the world. Through this shigusa the artist creates a moment of reciprocal revelation between stone and glass.


91 – Ibid., p. 116 (my own translation).

92 – Ibid., p. 125 (my own translation).

93 – Lee, The Search for Encounter, p. 213.