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The Ideology of Identity in the Thought of Nishida Kitarô

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Nishida Kitarô's (西田幾多郎 1870-1945) name is almost synonymous with Japanese philosophy today. Even more than 60 years after his death, a serious study in contemporary Japanese thought cannot ignore the writings of the *mandarin* of the only philosophical school that Japan ever produced, the Kyôto School (京都学派). For several years now, the thought of Nishida Kitarô and Kyôto School thinkers such as Tanabe Hajime (田辺元), Nishitani Keiji (西谷啓治), Miki Kiyoshi (三木清), Kôsaka Masaaki (高坂正顕), or Kôyama Iwao (高山岩男) – most of them Nishida's disciples – has become a topic of research in connection with its probable philosophical impact on Japan's official ideology in the 1930s. Indeed, some of these thinkers had been entangled in official activities in one way or the other, be it as advisors of the Shôwa Juku (昭和塾)¹ in Nishida's case, or providing the philosophical background for race-oriented thought in Tanabe's dialectics of the "species" (種). Perhaps in the most concrete case, they were functioning as contributors to the problem of (Anglo-American) modernity and the decadency of liberalism and democracy in a discussion which was titled the "Overcoming of Modernity" (近代の超克) in July 1942 where Nishitani took part, or in the famous Chûôkôron (中央公論) discussions on the "World-Historical Standpoint and Japan" (世界史的立場と日本) from November 1941 until November 1942 to which again Nishitani, but also Kôsaka, and Kôyama contributed.² As there can be no doubt that the political thought of these thinkers had a traditionalist, or rather, culturally essentialist paradigm, the debate remains undecided as to what extent their philosophy actually contributed to the official ideology. As interesting as it would be to go a step further in this direction of the debate, the scope of this paper denies us this opportunity. The fact that Nishida, for example, was a philosopher and well-educated not only in the main stream of Western philosophy, is often swallowed up in this whole debate, as if it should be natural for a philosopher to take sides in official state propaganda. Although these days the "poverty of philosophy" consists in exactly this dilemma – philosophers and intellectuals are no longer expected to criticize and oppose, but to provide explanations for controversial governmental steps, and thereby more often than not justifying them –, this should not be the ideal case as

¹ A right-wing think tank founded by Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro (近衛文麿) in 1938. Konoe Fumimaro held the position of Prime Minister from 1937-1939 and 1940-1941.

² The best overview on this discussion is provided by Heisig, J. W. and Maraldo, J. C. "Rude Awakenings. Zen, The Kyoto School, and The Question of Nationalism." University of Hawaii Press (1994)

we see it.

In this paper, rather than taking a closer look at the ideological *character* of Nishida later writings since the mid-1930s, we would like to address the *how* – introducing the question of how the *literal* “trans-lation”³ of logical-epistemological ideas into ideology could have been possible. We are aware that this project will take a much broader and in-depth analysis than this paper allows us to make, but at least we would like to address one of the main lines that can be filtered out in Nishida’s development of thought.

While reading Nishida, it is inevitable to feel drawn into a kind of *tour de force* of conglomerates of questions that he himself had to grapple with, especially at the beginning of his philosophical journey from 1911 to the late 1920s. The idea of Nishida’s maiden work *A Study on Good* (善の研究) is “pure experience” – the unity of an epistemological subject and object that constitutes “reality” as it truly is – or, in other words, consciousness. At this point, we cannot get into the intricate questions that accompany this problematic assumption. We can preliminarily only stress that Nishida himself is not even clear about the “unity” of subject and object prior to a split that occurs in the moment of reflection, or a “pre-established” unity that is a sort of “glue”, making experience possible in the first place – in Nishida’s terms, the problem of *imada* (未だ) and *sude ni* (既に), the problem of “not yet divided”, and “always already united (subject and object)”. In his 1917 work *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness* (自覚における直観と反省)⁴, he tries to solve some of the riddles of *A Study on Good*, especially the problem of self-reflection in self-consciousness (自覚), and later, in his “Logic of Place” (場所の論理), pre-eminently in his 1926 work *Place* (場所), he tries no less than to overcome the rules of Aristotelian logic that he somehow unluckily short-circuits as “Western logic”, and against which he poses his own “Eastern logic”. But there is an uncertainty lurking behind all of these works. He was uncertain about having solved the problem of the constitution of self-consciousness and reflection. In the prefaces of his published works at the time, his doubts and dissatisfaction with his own approaches that seems also to have originated from a strong sense of inferiority to the great Western thinkers he was influenced with,⁵ give a sign of this. His lack of confidence was only to be overcome in his later writings where a dramatic metaphysical

³ See Maraldo, J. “Tradition, Textuality, and the Trans-lation of Philosophy: The Case of Japan”, in: Heine, S. and Fu, Ch. “Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives”, SUNY Press, New York (1995)

⁴ From here on, referred to as *Intuition*

⁵ Not just Kant and Hegel, but also the Neo-Kantians Rickert, Cohen and Windelband, as well as Bergson and Husserl, and many more, were sources of inspiration for Nishida.

turn has taken place that explains the shift from his deep philosophical interest in the metaphysics of human consciousness to a high flying assembly of statements that regard the “historical world/historical body” (歴史的世界/歴史的身体) and has become utterly ideological.

From the mid-1930s, Nishida uses terminology and jargon that might not be immediately identified as that of the militaristic ultranationalist state. We cannot at this place go into details of Nishida’s personal contempt for the militaristic government – as soon as politics were involved, we find a disillusioned Nishida who mostly wished, as he explained in several letters to his friends and colleagues, that everything would “soon be over”. What we find more intriguing is that, no matter how far his personal involvement went,⁶ his writings were of a metaphysical language that reminds European, especially German audiences, very much of the heroic language used by *Weimarer Republik* historians such as Oswald Spengler (1880-1936) and Carl Schmitt (1888-1985) who in their very gesture opposed democracy, or the language of even earlier historians such as Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) whom Nishida admired. In *The Problem of Japanese Culture* (日本文化の問題) of 1938, Nishida is speaking of the “uniqueness” of the Japanese nation in the world, of the immanent-qua-transcendent character of synthesis that only Japan managed to maintain. Japan is hypostatized as a nation that managed to preserve its own culture and heritage, while it was at the same time strongly influenced by Chinese culture for centuries, and then by Western culture since the Meiji period. The language of “uniqueness” (特殊性), that is also “universal”, of a “past” that was sublated with the “future” in an “eternal now” (永遠の今), the fact that the transcendent is always immanent and vice versa, and that there is no logical One without the logical Many (一即多) in short: the much used (probably over-used) notion of “absolute contradictory self-Identity” (絶対矛盾的自己同一) is pre-eminent in his writings of that period. But this metaphysical concept did not stand alone, unrelated to the actuality of the “concrete world” (具体的世界). It was directly related to the Japanese people (民族). Here, Nishida says, that which is the concrete in the abstract is nothing less than the “species” (種).⁷ (One wonders at certain points, for example where Nishida goes on about the biological “world” and his ongoing fascination with the fact that the giraffe’s neck has just as many bones as the whale’s, if this example

⁶ He was rewarded with the Culture Medal in 1940, the highest official academic decoration, and also held a speech before the Emperor on the historical status of Japan on New Year’s Day 1941 – both great honours from the Japanese military state.

⁷ Nishida has taken up the notion of species after the criticism he received from Tanabe who saw “species” as the missing concept in Nishida’s dialectics. See Tanabe Hajime, *Nishida-sensei no oshie wo aogu*, 田辺元 「西田先生の教えを仰ぐ」 Tanabe Hajime Zenshū 田辺元全集 IV, Chikuma-shobō, Tokyo (1963)

alone makes his hypothesis on the species more concrete. Nevertheless, it is the most concrete example Nishida delivers.) Although he goes on lengthy excursions about world culture and its many heritages, his focus is clearly Japanese Culture as not only the title of his lecture suggests. He even goes as far as to claim that the “species” is the paradigm of the Man’s behaviour in world culture⁸ which leads directly back to the biologist and social Darwinist interpretations of Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West*, a book which Nishida isn’t the only one to have taken as a vantage point for his theory on the Japanese nation.⁹ It is only consequential that Nishida should use language of this kind in the writings that succeeded *The Problem of Japanese Culture*. In *Principles of a New World Order* (世界新秩序の原理) of 1943¹⁰, he affirmatively and repeatedly makes use of more official jargon such as the “The Eight Corners of the World under One Roof”(八紘一宇) and “the Pan-Asiatic Co-Prosperity Sphere”(大東亜共栄圏) and most of all of the notion of “Kokutai”(国体) – the National Body or Polity, which also serves as the title of the appendix to his “Philosophical Essays” of 1944. In *Principles of a New World Order* he states:

Japan’s national polity (国体) is not merely totalitarianism. The Imperial House is the beginning and the end of our world, as the absolute present that embraces the past and the future. The quintessence of the unbroken line of our national polity consists in the completion of the historical world itself with the Imperial House at its center.¹¹

Here we can detect the shift of one of Nishida’s central terms, the “absolute present”, or the “eternal now”, that goes back as far as *A Study on Good*, and was recussitated in *Intuition*, but in a completely different context. Whereas in his early writings the concept of “eternal now” meant to present self-consciousness in its pure state prior to the subject-object-distinction, and, respectively, consciousness as being trans-temporal, Nishida now applies that term to the Japanese State and the Imperial Household to refer to the fact of the unbroken lineage of successors to the Imperial throne (万世一系) – the “eternal” in the “now”. That the Imperial Household should be the center of the

⁸ *Nihon bunka no mondai* (日本文化の問題), Nishida Kitarō Zenshū (西田幾多郎全集) XIII, Iwanami Shoten (2003), p. 28

⁹ We cannot go into detail about the influence “The decline of the West” had especially on the Japanese intellectual elite of the 1930s and 1940s, among them many of Nishida’s disciples (Nishitani, Tanabe, Miki etc.)

¹⁰ This is the date of its final publication, after the text had been re-written twice.

¹¹ NKZ XI, (哲学論文集第四補遺). Arisaka Yoko translated this appendix in *Monumenta Nipponica* 51:1, Sophia University Press, Tokyo (1996)

historical world is a statement that results directly from his application of the term “contradictory self-Identity” to matters of history (simply put: the unbroken lineage of the Emperor – Identity – in a culture of many shades – contradiction) where the notion of self-consciousness has no place. Indeed, we can mark and identify a “turn” in Nishida from the *homo interior* to the *homo exterior*, from self-consciousness and absolute free will to the Species, the Nation, the State and the Historical, as for example Huh Woo-Sung so impressively analysed.¹² It might only be mentioned that Nishida’s early writings on self-consciousness and logic also suggest a deep rejection of the *homo historicus*, which makes this turn all the more spectacular. But how could this shift occur?

We cannot go into a full discussion of the details. What we would like to do is to draw attention to one important assumption that may have paved the way for the later turn, Nishida’s notion of “Immediacy,” or Identity. In his maiden work *A Study on Good*, Nishida states that “pure experience” (純粹経験) can also be understood as “immediate” experience (直接経験). Indeed, the idea of “immediate” experience was again relevant in the successor to *A Study on Good*, *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness*,¹³ where the idea of its “purity” was abolished. A logician or a philosopher engaged in epistemology or phenomenology may find the assumption of Immediacy untenable, since consciousness is and can never be without content or “un-intentional”. It is indeed difficult to maintain that true reality as it is presupposes no subject or object – in other words, that subject and object were just inventions of the human reflective mind – because the judgment itself already presupposes subject and object. This is how the logician would argue. But all sophistry aside: is “Immediacy” really an appropriate tool for understanding reality or consciousness? Nishida thought so. Immediacy is his *sine qua non* for the experience of true reality. Let us contrast this notion with what one of Nishida’s philosophical idols had in mind about the concept:

Hegel’s philosophy can basically be seen as a fundamental critique on Immediacy as a concept of a somewhat “higher” perception and knowledge. In his *Science of Logic* (Wissenschaft der Logik, 1812), “Being” and “Nothing”, the immediate concepts of thought, had to perish, because Thinking as such can never be immediate, because *Immediacy is unthinkable*.¹⁴ In his earlier *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Phaenomenologie des Geistes, 1807), on the level of experience, Hegel concedes that neither the one (the

¹² Again we have to refrain from a further discussion of the details of this turn. See Huh, Woo-Sung “The philosophy of history in the ‘later’ Nishida: A philosophic turn”, *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 40, no. 3 (July 1990)

¹³ Between *A Study on Good* and *Intuition*, Nishida had published a collection of essays under the title *Contemplation and Experience* (思索と体験) in 1915.

¹⁴ Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik I*, pp. 82-83. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main (1969)

“I”) nor the other (the “This”) are “just *immediate*, in sensual certainty (*Gewissheit*), but simultaneously *mediated*; I have certainty (of the One) *through* the Other, i.e. the Thing; and this is already in the certainty through the Other, i.e. the I.”¹⁵ Hegel further states, in his *Encyclopedia* on the Philosophy of Nature, that the true nature of reality cannot be the very given thing. It could be read as a direct reply to Nishida when he says: “This unity of intelligence and intuition, the being-in-itself of Spirit and its relation to the outside (*Aeusserlichkeit*), must not be beginning, but goal, not an immediate, but an evolved unity.”¹⁶ It is all the more important to stress Hegel’s critique of a pure, first principle, as Nishida often relates to Hegel and holds him in great honour. In his evaluation of Hegel’s great achievement, Adorno correctly sees this:

What Hegelian dialectics superseded: the dogma that the thought, in order to be true, needed a First, a Doubtless, turns out ever the more terrorist in the Jargon of Authenticity, as it so self-gloriously supposes its First outside of the spectrum of thought.¹⁷

Admittedly, “pure” and “immediate” could make positive principles of a *prima philosophia*, but to what price? In Nishida’s early writings, Immediacy becomes a “fetish”. And is this obsession with “purity”, “Immediacy”, the “self” in its inner state without the dangerous “outside”, this philosophical-pathological autism or, in a philosophical term, solipsism (that could become a kind of schizophrenic narcissism: where there is no other than myself, I am *everyone else*) not a means to assimilate the other into a unity that eliminates all differences? It has been shown by Hegel, on the level of the Logic of Essence, that Identity directly corresponds to Being (qua logical-ontological Nothingness: Immediacy). But Identity “in-itself” is the death of Identity. True Identity must contain its own difference, but that is not all: it must realize its own falseness. This is also where a deeper understanding of Hegel’s radical criticism on the “Law of Contradiction” and the “Law of the Excluded Middle” has to depart from: according to Hegel, the tautology (A is A) is the ultimate contradiction.¹⁸ And it is just because of this falseness (*Unwahrheit*) that the dialectical movement takes place at all: that Negation is the “truth” of pure Being is the self-realization of Being *through*

¹⁵ Hegel, *Phaenomenologie des Geistes*, p. 82., *ibid.* Our translation.

¹⁶ Hegel, *Enzyklopaedie II, Die Philosophie der Natur*, Suhrkamp Frankfurt (1969), S. 18. Our translation.

¹⁷ Th. W. Adorno, “Jargon der Eigentlichkeit – Zur deutschen Ideologie”, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt (1964), p. 41. Our translation. Needless to say, Adorno points his criticism towards Heidegger.

¹⁸ According to Hegel and his polemic against the law of the excluded middle, it “is the law of limited understanding (des bestimmten Verstandes) which wants to keep contradiction off itself, and, by doing so, contradicts itself.” (*Enzyklopadie I*, p. 244)

its falseness (note also that this is where the literal meaning of *dia-lectics* – *dia-légein* – lies). To Hegel, it is the “monstrous power of the Negative” (*die ungeheure Macht des Negativen*) that makes thought come alive, whereas pure Immediacy is its death. There could be no bigger contrast to this understanding of ontology (because Hegel’s logic is, correctly understood, ontology) than the understanding of Immediacy in *A Study on Good*. Here, where the One is the One, the existence of the Other is not possible. This is because pure experience, or consciousness, Nishida says himself, can be compared to Berkeley’s *esse est percipi*, so that the notion of subjective Idealism comes to mind, and indeed, Nishida’s first conception of reality is nothing but a rather naïve account of subjective Idealism through the monism of consciousness. The Other of course has to be interpreted as the “Negative Other” of pure experience (consciousness). But if pure experience is all that – truly – exists, then it is the One without the Other, pure positivity, and has been determined as such.

Negativity (the Other) is curiously lacking in Nishida’s maiden work, but also in its successor *Intuition*. Probably Nishida has realized this mistake, a mistake that fatally leads also to the destruction of the One or consciousness, although this consequence is never fully realized (it is only logical to speak of the One where there is an “Other”). Although he would not give up the idea of Immediacy in itself, he was more critical to the idea of the possibility of pre-cognitive experience, as this quote shows: “[...] pure perception must be prior to judgment. But does this pre-judgmental pure sensation exist, and how is it to be understood?”¹⁹ He goes on: “How is it possible to perceive a non-cognitive pure sensation?”²⁰ Nishida’s grappling with the problem does not rest, but he cannot find a solution that would still take into account the idea of Immediacy of self-consciousness (the One) and its reconciliation with the possibility of perception of the material world (the “Other”). To do that, he would have had to give the idea of Immediacy up. But even in *Intuition*, Nishida gives the idea of pre-reflective Immediacy priority over Thought.

Here, the Fichtean notion of “intellectual intuition” (*intellektuelle Anschauung*) becomes more important. It is the “self-positing” of thought, needless to say, in a “pure” state. Nishida, although critical of the exclusion of sensible experience in Fichte’s “intellectual” philosophy, supports the idea of intellectual intuition as the point of departure for experience, and especially self-experience as its very condition. Here, another difference to Hegel can be found. As Slavoj Žižek has correctly seen, in the

¹⁹ *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness*, transl. by V. Viglielmo with T. Yoshinori and J. O’Leary, New York, SUNY (1987), p. 46

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 47

notion of intellectual intuition,

Hegel paradoxically *returns to Kant*, i.e., he *rejects* those post-Kantian [Fichtean, Schellingean] attempts of a beforehand, precipitate, ‘immediate’ synthesis and proposes to overcome Kant’s inconsistencies in a different, ‘Hegelian’ way: by demonstrating how synthesis already is actualized where Kant saw only the splitting, so that there is no need to postulate a separate, additional act of synthesis in the ‘intellectual intuition.’²¹

Nishida’s fatal mistake which accounts for his metaphysical jump into the historical world that he sees contained in a religious pre-established harmony, has to be deduced from exactly this Fichtean supposition of intuition as grounding the totality of experience. The entirety or totality of experience in intuitional self-consciousness can only be understood if this very self-consciousness has already been constituted as the “unity of the manifold”, or the One. It becomes dramatic in passages where Nishida claims that also the body and bodily functions are “self-conscious systems” that have no reality outside the reality of self-consciousness (this is the Berkeleyan assumption in its most coherent application).²²

In his philosophy on history, especially in *The Problem of Japanese Culture*, Nishida only apparently undergoes a shift that seems to undermine his previous glorification of the idea of Immediacy. Even though Nishida’s terminology changes to more abstract terms, the idea of self-consciousness as a system of totality of the real world becomes the One. That is not to say that it denotes the same thing, for Nishida has abolished the idea of *homo interior* together with self-consciousness after his turn to the historical world, but the very *logic* of the idea of a total unity remains the same. Only this time, we are confronted with a kind of one-figured dialectics of mutual correspondence: the One (or the immediate I or self-consciousness = Identity) becomes the Many, and the Many become the One. This paradigm was used excessively by Nishida since the mid-1930s, when the “dialectical world” marked the line in the progression in his philosophy from the inner world to the outer world. The One-qua-Many or the Many-qua-One (一即多) is the basic foundation of his idea of the (absolute) contradictory self-consciousness. In his One-qua-Many dialectics, Nishida imagined world culture (One-qua-Many) of which Japanese culture as a special outcome

²¹ S. Zizek, “Tarrying with the Negative. Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology”, Duke University Press, Durham (1993), p. 39

²² “If we take material phenomena as our starting point we cannot explain the correspondence between mental and material phenomena. If, however, we begin from consciousness, our body appears as simply one phenomenon of the world of consciousness, and the eye, which senses light and color, itself belongs to the world of light and color.” *Intuition*, p. 117

(Many-qua-One), determining the concept of “self-negation” (自己否定) as the necessary condition, or „motor“ for their mutual correspondence. Though we cannot go into the details of Nishida’s conception of Japanese culture vis-à-vis world culture, it is clear that the use of the vague terms of One and Many make their relatively arbitrary application on the real world possible, while avoiding its political, cultural and historical conditions. One can say with Lacan, that the “symbolic order” has taken the place of analysis.

It was not until (absolute) contradictory self-Identity has been made into the principle of the One qua Many- Idea that Nishida’s thought has reached firm ground. That the world was not perceived as static, but as moving constantly “from the made to the making” (作られたものから作るものへ) is only interesting insofar as the process he perceives as “dialectic” needs another higher unity to enable this movement to be identified as a movement in the first place, something that Nishida did not address. But this understanding of dialectics is exactly where Nishida’s thought becomes limited. It can be generally said that Nishida constantly mistakes dialectics for a kind of Leibnizean “pre-established harmony” where everything falls into place. Dialectics, correctly understood, is rather the opposite of pre-established harmony, it is the point where the *impossibility* of a pre-established harmony is comprehended (*begriffen* in the Hegelian sense). The synthesis of opposites that Nishida sees fulfilled in his absolute contradictory self-Identity, or the little notion of *qua* (即), indicating the “symmetrical relationship” of two mutually negating concepts – such as One and Many, Being and Nothing, Time and Space, Transcendence and Immanence – does not fix the opposition and does not “heal the wound” that is ripped open by negation. Thesis and antithesis do not form a harmonious one, held together by the “glue” of synthesis. Nishida’s false step consists in mistaking synthesis for a re-established Identity (and therefore pre-established harmony). That is to say, he believes that “what the thesis lacks is provided by the antithesis and vice versa (the idea that Man and Woman form a harmonious Whole, for example).”²³ Zizek refers to the dialectics of Being and Nothing as the most radical example of the impossibility of endurance – or in this case: harmony – in the beginning of Hegel’s *Logic*²⁴, when he states:

²³ S. Zizek, *ibid.*, p. 123

²⁴ Being is its own Nothingness. Both “undetermined determinations” perish without even having a chance to sustain. Neither is nothingness the truth of Being – both are absurdly false –, it is only in Becoming that they have their “truth”. On the other hand, Negation as the first determined category, is the Truth of *Dasein*.

This false appearance of a mutual completion is shattered by the immediate passage of an extreme into its opposite: how can an extreme fill out the lack of its other, when it is itself, in its very opposition to its other, this other? [...] What ‘holds together’ the two extremes is therefore not the mutual filling out of their respective lacks but the very lack they have in common: the opposites of a signifying dyad ‘are one’ against the background of some common lack that they return to each other.²⁵

In other words: what Nishida fails to see in his conception of dialectics that unites opposites into a harmonious whole, is that synthesis affirms difference as such, or rather: synthesis is the negation of Identity. It is not enough to maintain that contradiction is the force of the movement, if that force is just the means to an end. In dialectics, contradiction is not the means to an(other) end, but the very end in itself. Otherwise, one would have to concur with Adorno: “Contradiction is nonidentity under the aspect of identity; the dialectical primacy of the principle of contradiction makes the thought of unity the measure of heterogeneity.”²⁶ This is the paradigm behind the “later” Nishida assumptions: it is the One that dictates the historical progress of the world, because in the One – the immediate unity of all the appearances of the world, all the *Mannigfaltigkeit in der Erscheinung* – the Many is sublated. In an account of the possibility of progress in world history in *The Problem of Japanese Culture*, Nishida states:

Body [物体] and Body work together in space which means that bodies must be equally spacial. But to say that the Many is the One means that the Many has to negate [否定] itself. When opposition [対立] stops, then working will stop [...] ‘A’ itself has to become the world. But this means nothing else than that the Many becomes the One, and the ‘A’ has to negate itself. This is how Thing [物] and Thing are opposed and negate each other, and to change one another means that both equally negate themselves, and become One. Both have been transformed into One, and that is the self-determination of the world.”²⁷

²⁵ S. Žižek, *ibid.*

²⁶ T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, Continuum, New York (1973), p. 5. quoted in Žižek, p. 124. Ironically, this critique on Hegel’s “totalitarian”, synthesis-ridden dialectics, could be applied to Nishida’s later philosophy. The irony consists in the fact that Nishida’s earlier, “undialectical” philosophy finds at certain points an ally *a contre cœur* in Adorno.

²⁷ NKZ XIII, p. 14-15. Our translation.

To Nishida, who at other points emphasizes the importance of the *mutual* negation of the One and the Many, of the Many to be the One, of the One to become the Many, can neither formally nor in terms of real content overcome the banal monism that constitutes his “dialectics”. “Diversity” or “plurality”, although advocated by Nishida verbally, are not given fertile philosophical ground, for all movement goes back to the One in either direction; Immediacy and Identity cannot participate in “diversity”, because the very notion of a “qua” (即) - relationship presupposes Identity. In his critique on Watsuji Tetsurô's (和辻哲郎) cultural philosophy, Naoki Sakai made a similar observation:

[...] Watsuji does not seem aware at all that, in order to juxtapose one national character with another, he has to take up a transcendent viewpoint, a bird's eye view, flying high above the ground where one encounters another. In spite of his dependence on Kant and his abhorrence on unmediated universalism, Watsuji does not recognize that the characterization of the other's particularity is simply impossible unless his own ethnocentric universalism is accepted.²⁸

With respect to Nishida's insistency on the “particular worlds” – other cultures – the same thing could be said about him. This is why Nishida's later philosophy is based on the contradictory *self-Identity*, and not on identical *self-Contradiction*.²⁹ Nishida's rhetoric remains in the realm of what Hegel polemically called “Identitätsphilosophie”³⁰.

One of the streaks of the progress that led to the “turn” in Nishida was triggered by the application of his earlier epistemological terminology to the “real”, the historical world. Here I tried to discuss the notion of Immediacy/Identity that was later translated into the One. That Nishida understood his “epistemological struggle” he fought with his earlier conceptions of the relationship of subject and object, to be simply “transferable” onto the philosophy of history, where they could be sublated into unity, has spared him to admit that his ideas have failed on the whole scale.

I do not want to criticize Nishida's thought as a whole, I only want to critically address the problems that Nishida saw himself in his early work. Although we object to the

²⁸ N. Sakai, “Translation and Subjectivity. On ‘Japan’ and Cultural Nationalism.” University of Minnesota Press (1997), p. 93. Sakai lives, teaches and publishes in the United States, so in this case the name order remains “Western style”.

²⁹ Note also the double support Nishida gives Identity – it is not just Identity, but “Self-“ Identity (自己同一)

³⁰ „Philosophy of Identity“. It was primarily directed towards Schelling.

simplified dialectics that is the symptom of Nishida's later thought of the contradictory self-Identity, we would like to encourage every student or researcher in this field to offer alternative solutions to the question of subject and object, of consciousness and the material world. Even today, it is still one of the unsolved big theoretical problems in the history of thought – not only in the West, but all over the world. It is a universal project.

