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The Work of Art for Nishida Kitarō and Alva Noë

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What characterises art? Is it an object, a practice, an activity, an expression, an experience—or something entirely different? One way to answer such questions is to look at what art does rather than what art is; at “the work *the art itself* achieves” (Noë 2015, 167). This paper explores this idea by placing Nishida Kitarō 西田 幾多郎 in dialogue with Alva Noë, showing how both philosophers view art as an active process that works both *in* and *with* the world.

Although Nishida and Noë are rarely discussed together, they share an identifiably enactivist understanding of art. Enactivism, first articulated by Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, posits that “cognition is not the representation of a pregiven world by a pregiven mind but is rather the enactment of a world and a mind” (1991, 9). Similarly, Nishida’s novel concept of “*kōiteki chokkan*” 行為的 直観 (acting, or active intuition), emphasises that we exist within “*a world in which that which is made makes that which makes*” (Nishida 1998, 48). Recognising the resonance with enactivist theories, John C. Maraldo offers a number of translations of “*kōiteki chokkan*,” even conceptually translating it as “enactive intuition” (2017, 200).

Section one contrasts Nishida’s novel concept of “*kōiteki chokkan*” with Noë’s idea of “organized activities.” Using the art of dance as an example, what Noë calls “capital-D Dance” (2021, 65), Nishida will be shown to contribute to enactivist theory, offering insights about the unity of action, intuition, and world in the creation and performance of art.

Section two examines the *work* of art for Nishida and Noë, showing how both thinkers share a comparable understanding. For Noë, art as a “strange tool” that investigates, disrupts, and reorganizes the organized activities that shape our lives, whereas, for Nishida, art is a paradigm example of “*kōiteki chokkan*,” and how what we do and think both shape and get shaped by the world.

Section three further develops this, showing where Nishida contributes to enactivist thought, specifically in regards to the role of the artist in the creative process. For Nishida, art is not merely the creation of an artist, as Noë implicitly claims, but rather the enactment of a mind and a world.

This paper demonstrates that Nishida and Noë share an enactivist understanding of art, though they differ about the role of the artist in the creative process. It is argued that Nishida contributes to enactivist thought by showing how art is a paradigm example of how actions and intuitions organize the world which, in turn, organizes artistic actions and intuitions.

1: The World of Action and Organisation

Since Varela et al.’s seminal book, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (1991), enactivist theory has attracted attention from thinkers across various disciplines, both within and beyond philosophy and cognitive science. Autopoietic enactivism, of which Varela et al. are proponents, understands cognition as deeply entangled with biological processes. Just as a flower is formed and sustained by processes that involve both it and its environment, autopoietic enactivism posits that combined processes within the brain, body, and world are all necessary for cognition (see also Maturana, and Varela 1992). Sensorimotor enactivism, first advocated by Kevin O’Regan and Alva Noë, places a focus on perception and action, arguing that “*vision is a mode of exploration of the world that is mediated by knowledge of what we call sensorimotor contingencies*” (2001, 940). According

to their view, perception is an activity; it occurs from the sensorimotor systems' dynamic interactions within a world that "serves as its own, external, representation" (2001, 939. See also Noë 2004).

Similar to Noë and O'Regan, Nishida's theory of *kōiteki chokkan* is the idea that, as Maraldo explains, "[w]hat we do shapes what we are, [and] shapes the world that in turn shapes us" (2017, 199). While Nishida's earlier works offer important nuances to his theory, as well as insights into how his thought developed over time, these earlier texts are only briefly referenced in this paper. The primary focus will be on *Nishida Kitaro's Fundamental Problems of Philosophy: The World of Action and the Dialectical World*, as translated by David A. Dilworth (1970), in which Nishida's recognizably enactivist concept of "*kōiteki chokkan*" comes to full maturity.

While there are similarities and differences to be found between enactivist theories, only Noë, Nishida, and, more recently, Miriam Kyselo (2024), address how art fits into the broader picture of human cognition and experience. It should be noted that while Noë's understanding of art is recognisably enactivist, albeit implicitly, his primary interest is in, as previously stated, "the work the art itself achieves" (Noë 2015, 167). Specifically, Noë is interested in articulating how art investigates, shapes, and reorganizes our lives. Nishida, in contrast, is explicitly interested in how action and intuition, paradigmatically exemplified in art, shape and are shaped by each other, as well as by the world. The mutual enactment of *kōiteki chokkan* offers a far more developed enactivist understanding of art, allowing Nishida to bring greater depth to the discussion.

1.1 The World of *Kōiteki chokkan*

A union of the words "*kōiteki*" 行為的 (acting, or active) and "*chokkan*" 直観 (intuition), the concept of "*kōiteki chokkan*" resists conclusive translation. In *Japanese*

Philosophy in the Making 1: Crossing Paths with Nishida, Maraldo offers six possible translations: action-intuition, active intuition, acting intuition, action-oriented intuition, performative intuition, and enactive intuition, before finally conceding that none are sufficient to fully encapsulate the nuances of Nishida's novel concept (Maraldo 2017, 200). Similarly, in "The Knowing Body: Nishida's Philosophy of Active Intuition" (1998), Matteo Cestari wrestles through a number of different conceptual interpretations, finally concluding that the true meaning of *kōiteki chokkan* may be somewhere in-between. Nevertheless, the idea underpinning *kōiteki chokkan* is as profound as it is simple: we exist as part of "*a world in which that which is made makes that which makes*" (Nishida 1998, 48), where our actions both shape and get shaped by the world.

This goes far beyond the creation of art. For Nishida, *kōiteki chokkan* suggests a reciprocity between all of our actions and thoughts, permeating within and throughout the world in which we are embedded and thus enacted. John W. M. Krummel, in his introduction to *Place and Dialectic: Two Essays by Nishida Kitarō*, explains how "Nishida distinguishes this world into the three levels of material, biological, and historical, which are in fact standpoints for viewing the same world" (2012, 31). For Nishida, this is the world of *kōiteki chokkan*, wherein what we can and will do is shaped by the activities of a world that "both transcends and includes personal action" (Nishida 1970, 20). Therefore, for Nishida, the world of *kōiteki chokkan* includes, transcends, and enacts our actions and intuitions.

1.2 The World of Organized Activity

Noë states that "[o]ur lives are one big complex nesting of organized activities at different levels and scales. [...] We are always captured by structures of organization. This is our natural, indeed our biological, condition. It is the basic fact about us" (2015, 10). Hence, for Noë, to be human is to be organized. It is to both organize and be organized by our activities. It is to act in a world which, in turn, actively shapes our actions. In this way, Noë's organized

activities resonate with Nishida's previous assertion that "[r]eality both transcends and includes personal action" (1970, 20), as we both organize and get organized by our individual activities.

Some examples of organized activities offered by Noë are "[t]alking, walking, eating, perceiving, driving" (2015, 10), as well as reading, writing, singing, dancing, fighting, and many more. What all these have in common is that they are something we do and learn socially. They are the norms, practices and values that bind us, offering a sense of belonging and shared identity. They are how we learn, how we communicate, and how we express our constantly unfolding identities. Thus, for Noë, organized activities both include and transcend the individual, in the sense that we both organize and are organized by our individual activities.

It can then be said that organized activities shape what is and can be done, as they provide structures of organisation that both include and transcend the individual. In this way, much, if not all, of what we can do is shaped and organized by our individual and interpersonal activities, as well as the socio-historical world in which we are situated. In short, we act in a world that shapes how we act. Noë explains:

these structures of organization are not of our own making. We don't direct or orchestrate or invent the dynamic patterns that organize us when we walk, look, listen, breast-feed, or talk. We are not exactly slaves to them—for our participation in such practices is, in many ways, precisely the exercise of our agency. [...] But we are, or are at least liable to get, lost in the complex patterns of organization that make up our lives (2015, 10).

In other words, we are consistent and active parts of organized activities as a whole. On one level, organized activities shape individual activities, shaping what is and can be conceivably done. On another level, individual activities shape organized activities, in the sense that the activity as a whole is shaped by its parts. Given their vast socio-historical context, organized

activities are so complex and ubiquitous that we are often unaware of the many ways that they shape our lives. They can impose and sustain norms, as well as offering limitations and constraints to what we can and will do as individuals. Thus, while “[w]e are not exactly slaves to them” (2015, 10), as Noë explains, organized activities shape and dominate much of our daily lives.

1.3 *Chokkan as Intuition*

An action, a performance, a production, a creation, and intrinsic to them all, an intuition. For Nishida, this first insight is at the core of *kōiteki chokkan*. Similar to Noë, Nishida explicitly links what we do with what we think. However, the direct English translation of *chokkan*, “intuition,” carries semantic baggage. Derived from the Latin *intuitus*, meaning immediate or direct knowledge or insight (Onions 1983, 483), the word “intuition” can imply a mind separate and distinct from the world.

To fully understand Nishida’s usage, it is important to first recognise that he is engaging with Kantian phenomenology, specifically Kant’s articulation of intuition (*anschauung*) as a passive engagement with the perceived world. In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant argues: “In cognition there are two elements: firstly, the conception, whereby an object is cogitated [...]; and, secondly, the intuition, whereby the object is given” (Kant 1781, Sec.18). Simply put, intuition is a passive and pre-conceptual reception of sensory data that then gets processed by cognitive faculties. This, for Kant, is a prerequisite for cognition, while also remaining distinct. In short, intuition is a passive way of receiving the world. The relevant point here is that, for Nishida, intuition is active and embodied, including all physical, cognitive, and perceptual actions. Accordingly, Nishida reinterprets Kant’s understanding, situating intuition as an active part of the active world.

While Nishida mentions cognition only a handful of times in his vast corpus, Maraldo explains that “Nishida's intuition somehow involves action [...] while retaining its traditional link to cognition, only this time a cognition placed not in the mind” (2017, 204). What Maraldo highlights here is that, for Nishida, intuition arises through our active engagement with the active world. For Nishida, intuition is linked with activity, be it physical, cognitive, or perceptual, as all arise both in and with the world. Notably, this expanded understanding of cognition involves the interplay of perception and action. Perception, for Nishida, is not distinct from cognition or action, as Kant’s intuition suggests, but a form of cognition that involves our sensorimotor engagement with the world. For Nishida, as Adam Loughnane explains, “[w]hen one intuits the world, he is at the same time acting *on* the world and *as* the world” (2019, 246). In other words, intuition is embodied, including action, perception, and, more generally, cognition as sensorimotor engagement both in and with the world.

Nishida expands further, writing that “true intuition appears through our action, but at the same time it determines our action” (1970, 173). Put another way, intuition is shaped by action and, as we will see in later sections, action is also shaped by intuition. This relationship between the individual and the world, between action and intuition, is one of mutual reciprocity, where one is shaped by the other. What we think is shaped by what we do, and what we do is shaped by what we think. As such, for Nishida, intuition and cognition are placed in the wider context of a world that both includes and transcends the individual.

Nishida gives that “[t]he world of intellectual objects is to be derived from that world of personal action” (1970, 3). Hence, intuition is not confined to some arbitrary membrane, like a brain, a skull, or even a body. Nor is it some quasi-Cartesian “thing” separate from the world. What intuition is, fundamentally, is an activity. It is the activity of the world which includes and transcends activities and intuitions of the individual. In this way, for Nishida, intuition is enacted within a world which “both transcends and includes personal action” (1970, 20).

1.4 *Kōiteki as Activity*

An intuition, a thought, an idea, a judgement, an experience, and intrinsic to them all, an activity. This second insight, like the previous, is at the core of *kōiteki chokkan*. It explicitly links what we think with what we do. Just as intuition is shaped by action, so too is action shaped by intuition. However, as with *chokkan*, a direct English translation of *kōiteki*, “acting” or “active,” is not without semantic baggage. Derived from the Latin *actio*, meaning outwards performance or doing (Onions 1983, 10), these words can imply a duality between that which acts and that which is acted upon, between subject and object, between mind and world, and between cognition and action. To be an active or acting individual can imply a world wherein one is active—a world of cause and effect, and of ontologically distinct objects.

This is not what Nishida has in mind when he uses the word “*kōiteki*.” While Nishida does agree that we act in the world as individuals, this only accounts for the personal or subjective component of the objective world. In *Merleau-Ponty and Nishida: Artistic Expression as Motor-Perceptual Faith*, Loughnane notes how “acting-intuition does not just describe the way the body moves; it is not just the character of human motion. It is also the character of the world’s own motion, how it lets things be seen, and how it sees itself” (2019, 245–246). In other words, we act and intuit within an active world that both transcends and includes all actions. This means that the activities of the individual are instantiations of the activities of the world, and that there is no duality to be found between mind and world, between thought and action, only ambiguity. Thus, for Nishida, to be an active individual is to be a part of an active world that both includes and transcends our actions and intuitions.

This means that action belongs as much to the world as it does to the individual. Action is shaped by intuition, intuition is shaped by action, both are shaped in and by the world. This means that actions cannot be attributed solely to the individual. Actions do not merely arise from the subjective, conscious, or cognitive individual, nor do they merely arise from the

objective or “inanimate” world; they arise from all. This means that our actions are enacted by the fact that we are an active part of an active world.

1.5 Summary

In summary, Nishida’s world of *kōiteki chokkan* offers depth to Noë’s world of organized activities, as well as our place within it. *Kōiteki chokkan* shows how what we do and think are inextricably linked within a world that both transcends and includes our actions and intuitions. Similar to Maraldo’s explanation of *kōiteki chokkan*, where “[w]hat we do shapes who we are, shapes the world that in turn shapes us” (2017, 199), for Noë, our actions organize the active world which, in turn, organizes our actions. By framing actions and intuitions as *acts* within the active world, Nishida expands on Noë’s insights, offering a more philosophically developed account of how cognition and action arise from, and contribute to, the world. This synthesis highlights how both theories converge on the idea that human cognition and action are fundamentally relational, being deeply embedded in the socio-historical world. Nishida’s *kōiteki chokkan* contributes to enactivist theory by not only linking action, intuition, and world, but also by illustrating how this unity operates within the broader structures of organized activities. This enriched understanding sets the stage for discussions about art and the *work* that it achieves.

2: The Work of Art for Noë and Nishida

For Noë, the *work* of art is philosophical. It is something that investigates, disrupts, and reorganizes how we humans live. Noë explains: “both art and philosophy—superficially so different—are really species of a common genus whose preoccupation is with the ways we are organized and with the possibility of reorganizing ourselves” (2015, xiii). Noë is saying here that art is a philosophical practice and that, equally, philosophy is an artistic practice. For Noë, these practices “seek to bring out and exhibit, to disclose and illuminate, aspects of the way we find ourselves organized” (2015, 16). In other words, the *work* of art is to reorganize life.

It is important to note that Noë is not saying that this is the sole function of art—a common criticism targeted at him, and one which he defends at length in “Entanglement and Ecstasy in Dance, Music, and Philosophy: A Reply to Carrie Noland, Nancy S. Struever, and Thomas Rickert” (2021). For Noë, art can have a myriad of secondary functions: “Art is not manufacture. Art is not performance. Art is not entertainment. Art is not beauty. Art is not pleasure. Art is not participation in the art world. And art is definitely not commerce. Art is philosophy. Art is putting our true nature on display before ourselves” (2015, 206). Noë is saying here is that what differentiates art from its many other functions is the way in puts life on display, thereby offering new ways of organizing the world and, ultimately, our lives.

2.1 Chokkan as Artistic Intuition

For Nishida, the *work* of art, that is, what art does, is ontological. It both shapes and gets shaped by our creative activities in the active and creative world. Nishida deems art to be a paradigm example of *kōiteki chokkan*, what he often refers to as aesthetic or artistic or intuition (e.g., Nishida 1970, 170, 178). The creation of art, for Nishida, is an activity where the artist takes in, or intuit, the world around them. In so doing, what is and can be created is shaped by their actions in a with the world. Nishida explains that “[i]n artistic activity we neither structure things conceptually nor imitate things merely passively. Things beckon and move us” (1970, 179). In other words, the world offers art to the artist, in the sense that what is and can be conceived is shaped and organized by their activities in and with the creative world.

In the art of dance, what Noë calls “capital-D Dance” (2021, 65), artistic intuition is instantiated. For Nishida, Dance is not merely the creation of an artist, but rather something that creates, or enacts, the artist as much as the artist creates or enacts it. What the Dance artist can conceivably do arises from their activities in a world that both includes and transcends their creative activities.

The performance of a ballet, for instance, is shaped by the historical world, in the sense that what has come before informs what ballet is and can be. Lost to antiquity, the history of ballet, and of Dance, transcends and includes any individual performances of dancers. The performance of ballet is also shaped by the physical world. The physical limitations of the dancer, combined with the physical limitations of the world, shape what can be conceivably done. The performance of ballet is also shaped by the social world. Ballet, for good or bad, is shaped by the music offered by an orchestra, by the cheers and lamentations of the audience (e.g., The Australian Ballet 2024), the other performers on the stage, and even by those who have come before, such as teachers, friends, family, and so forth. In fact, the historical and social worlds are merely different standpoints, leading Nishida to eventually combine the two into what he would call “the socio-historical world” (see Krummel 2012, 28–30).

This is what Nishida means when he states that “[t]he more deeply we penetrate the depths of desire or impulse, the more they transcend our consciousness and exist beyond us” (1970, 179), as artistic intuition belongs as much to the world as it does to the artist. When the artist intuits the world around them, they take in what the world offers and let it shape their activities. This is why Nishida thinks that art is a paradigm example of *kōiteki chokkan*, as, when at its best, art arises when the artist gets out of the way and allows the world to create through them by way of intuition.

As Loughnane explains, *kōiteki chokkan* “is the volitional orientation exemplified by the artist who in the same gesture makes and is made by the world, and in so doing maintains ambiguity between an active subject and an active object” (2019, 247). Indeed, this ambiguity is why many artist’s practice their craft. Never is art created solely for its own sake. It is always created in, with, and for the world. This is why Nishida argues that “aesthetic intuition may be regarded as intuition in the best sense” (1970, 173), as it enacted by the artist’s activities in and with the world. Thus, for Nishida, the world is our muse and we its intuited conduits.

2.2 *Kōiteki as Artistic Activity*

Art is also a paradigm example of how intuition is linked to action, as, for Nishida, “the world is a creative process [a]nd our body is a creative element of that world” (Nishida 1998, 48). Just as artistic intuition is the paradigm example of *kōiteki chokkan*, Nishida is saying here that artistic activity exemplifies how all actions are situated within an active world. This is where we both act and are acted upon, and a world wherein individual actions shape the world that shapes individual actions. For Nishida, artistic creation is such an activity, as it arises when the artist acts and intuitively the world.

In this way, the creative world evokes, beckons, and enacts creative activities. Art arises from the artist’s activities in and with the world. The world shapes artistic creativity, as does an artist’s creativity shape the world. Artistic activities do not arise merely from the individual artist, nor do they arise merely from the world, but rather from the ambiguity between both. We actively create and enact art in a world that actively creates and enacts us by way of artistic intuition.

Consider *Poet on a Mountain Top*, the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) Chinese Landscape painting by *Shen Zhou* 沈周 (1427–1509). Depicted in this painting is the scene of a solitary man, presumably *Shen Zhou*, standing atop a rocky mountain obscured by clouds. In *Shen Zhou*’s line of site, a contemplative poem:

*White clouds sash-like
wrap mountain waists,
The rock terrace flies in space
distant, a narrow path.
Leaning on a bramble staff
far and free I gaze,
To the warble of valley brook
I will reply, whistling.*



Poet on a Mountain Top by Shen Zhou

In the distance, the silhouette of other mountains, or perhaps they are clouds, perhaps both, blend into the canvas. In the foreground, a solitary temple stands shrouded between mountains, trees, and clouds.

No such vista can be found in the mountains of *Suzhou* 苏州市, the region of China where *Shen Zhou* lived his entire life, and where he found the inspiration for his painting (Edwards, and von Mirbach 2003; 2023). This is because traditional Chinese landscape paintings are typically not meant to be an exact depiction of the world, a mere snapshot or singular perspective. Instead, *Shen Zhou* aimed to capture the “spirit” of the mountains of *Suzhou*, offering an expression and amalgamation of all perspectives and none in his work. When discussing the Chinese landscape painter *Guo Xi* 郭熙, Loughnane explains how

[t]he painter would not represent the mountains and rivers as though sight were constituted solely by the perspective given through visual data received while standing in one position while painting. Instead, he would depict the landscape as it appeared

through time, as it would look to a monk wandering through its paths, a fisherman docked on its banks, a farmer examining the minute features of the ground, or a surveyor taking the perspective of the whole (2019, 62).

This amalgamation of perspectives both includes and transcends all perspectives, allowing for an appreciation of the landscape as a unified whole.

In *The Great Image Has No Form, or On the Nonobject Through Painting*, François Jullien and Jane Marie Todd explain that:

To paint is not to apprehend the mountain “in one locale” and from a “single corner” [...]. It is to paint the mountain after climbing many a hill and sketching many a varied Mountain Top, after having one’s fill of hikes and vistas, after letting the infinite forms and resources of the mountain ripen one’s spirit (2009, 55).

Having had his fill of walking the mountains of *Suzhou*, *Shen Zhou* had a deep familiarity with its many vistas. This familiarity intuitively shaped each one of his brush strokes. *Poet on a Mountain Top* thus exemplifies Nishida’s *kōiteki chokkan*, as *Shen Zhou*’s artistic activities in the mountains of *Suzhou* gave rise to his artistic intuitions, as did his artistic intuitions give rise to each one of his brush strokes.

Poet on a Mountain Top is also an invitation. It invites us to join *Shen Zhou* in the creative processes. This is because, as Loughnane explains when discussing the painting *Pine Trees* (1593) by *Hasegawa Tōhaku* 長谷川 等伯,

To experience this work is not to have one’s sight stopped at its surface as though vision and what it palpates were of a different substance: as though vision were exhaustively explained by sense data reflecting off the painting’s surface. To engage with this

painting is to extend perception into and throughout its depth and all of its valences of co-constitution (2019, 62).

Similarly to *Pine Trees*, when engaging with *Poet on a Mountain Top*, we are invited to cultivate an awareness and appreciation of *Suzhou* and its many vistas.

Similarly, in Noë's example of Dance, a created performance cannot then be attributed solely to the artist. It is something that the world offers by way of their activities within. The physical world shapes what Dance both is and can be, to the extent that the shared physical limitations of dancer and of the world shape what is and can be conceivably done. In the performance of ballet, what a Dancer can and will do, regardless of skill or intent, operates within the shared physical limitations of the Dancer and of the world. While this may differ from person to person, as well as with age, no ballet dancer can, for example, stay fixed in the air indefinitely—as much as Dancers might try, all are subject to gravity. Like *Poet on a Mountain Top*, Dance is also an invitation. It invites us to join in the creative processes, putting the organized activity of dancing on display, showing us what it is and, crucially, what it can be. Thus, the active world is our muse, and we are its active conduits.

2.3 Art as Liberation

For Noë, art offers liberation from organized activities. For him, “[a]rtists do the miraculous: they refuse to play by rules, or rather, they invite you, with them, to make up the rules as you go along” (2015, 75). As such, artists are not bound by the limitations, constraints, and rules imposed by organized activities, given that, as Noë explains, “we make art out of organized activities” (2015, 10). In fact, it is precisely these shackles that the artist seeks to investigate and remove—or, at the very least, weaken. They do this by creating works of art that put organized activities on display, showing what they are and, crucially, what they can be, thus creating novel works of art that are “strange tools.”

Art is strange because, by design, it appears odd at first. At its best, art disturbs and disrupts in both subtle and profound ways, thereby offering us new and previously unrecognised ways of organisation. This disruption need not be monumental; it is enough that it interrupts, prompting us to recognise and reassess the organized activities that implicitly shape our lives.

Art is a tool because its strangeness allows us, both as individuals and as a collective, to actively investigate and reorganize how we live. It does this by putting organized activities on display for all to see, exposing what they are and, crucially, what they can be. Therefore, art is a strange tool because, by design, it appears odd at first, and because it is something we use to liberate from the organized activities that dominate much of our lives. In short, as Noë explains, “we make art out of organized activities” (2015, 10).

Without art, our lives would be stagnant and unchanging. Art breaks conventions, offering new ways of organisation which shape culture, society, and life. Art offers us tools for emancipation from the organized activities that shape and even dominate our lives. Doing this, art alters our organized activities, in the sense that it offers new and strange ways of reorganizing in ways previously unknown and inconceivable. Consequently, for Noë, art is a driving force for society and culture. In fact, as Noë would later argue in *The Entanglement: How Art and Philosophy Make Us What We Are* (2023), art is *the* driving force for society and culture, while also shaping what we are in the process.

Like Nishida, for Noë art and life are deeply entangled, caught up in a complex and mutual relationship where what the artist creates shapes the world which, in turn, shapes what the artist creates. This reciprocity is what Noë, borrowing from Ian Hacking (1995, and 1999), would later call “the looping entanglement of art and life” (2021, 63). On one side of this relationship, art is informed by life. What is and can be created by an artist is informed by the

many of ways we humans find ourselves organized. These are the very things that the artist aims to display, investigate and liberate us from. On the other side of this relationship, life is altered by the strangeness of art. Thus, for Noë, art and life shape one another. Without life, there would be no inspiration for art and without art life would be stagnant and unchanging. Thus, life informs art and art alters life.

2.4 *The Art of Dance*

Consider, once again, the example of Dance. Dance is a creative activity which aims to alter the organized activity of dancing. Noë explains that “[w]hat makes dancing dancing is the way it is embedded in our lives, in particular, the way, by virtue of its embedding, it organizes us. What makes the artist’s dancing something other than dancing is the bald fact that it refuses to be embedded in that sort of way” (2021, 71). Dance, in other words, is a creative activity which is freed from the organized activity of dancing. It is only from this vantage point that it can investigate and potentially reorganize what dancing is. Noë continues: “[d]ancing gives rise to Dance, the art of dance, which in turn gives dancing new resources, and this circular, generative recursion drives us forward” (2021, 67). Accordingly, Dance investigates dancing, discovering and displaying what it can be. This is Noë’s “the looping entanglement of art and life” (2021, 63), adding that “it is not possible, for you or me or anyone else, to dance in a way that is unaffected by the influence of Dance and its history” (2021, 68).

How then does the artist break free from the organized activities that we find ourselves unknowingly shaped by? Artists are simply those who have, as Noë explains, “*an entirely different kind of relationship to [organized activities] than we ordinarily have*” (Noë 2021, 65). While organized activities shape much of what we can and will do, artists resist these predefined rules, encouraging you to join them in creating new ones along the way. This means that the relationship artists have with an organized activity is quite different from those within,

as it is only from the outside that an artist can investigate and potentially reorganize that from which they are informed.

In the example of Dance, its creation requires deliberation, planning, training, and knowledge of the organized activity of dancing itself. This is why Noë considers Dance to be kind of “*meta-dancing*” (Noë 2021, 66) that investigates, disrupts, and alters the organized activity of dancing. To explain, Noë returns to his claim that work of art is philosophical, explaining that:

philosophy does to our thought and talk what [Dance] does to dancing. In effect, it shuts it up, or stops it, or interrupts it, it takes these earnest doings—talking, dancing, arguing—and samples them, looks at them sideways, brackets them, [and] “reorients us” to them. And philosophical reorientations, like choreographic ones, [...] change the way we think, or dance, going forward. They change what we are (2021, 68).

This is not to say that the artist possesses some otherworldly ability to transcend and reorient dance, but rather that dance itself can alter the way we think, move, and, more fundamentally, what we are. Each of us can, and often do, reflect upon life. We are not unwilling cogs stuck in the proverbial machine, as we can all investigate, disrupt, and potentially reorganize how we live. What is an organized activity if not a collection of individuals acting together? As Noë notes in *Strange Tools*, “our participation in such practices is, in many ways, precisely the exercise of our agency. It’s how we make friends, find mates, get from point A to point B, recognize people in the crowd” (2015, 10). This means that we are all participants in organized activities, both knowingly and unknowingly, and that we can all reflect upon and attempt to reorganize ourselves at any time of our choosing.

Dance is also an invitation, as we are all potential artists. Just as a child pestering a parent by constantly asking “why?” is practicing philosophy, whenever we attempt to create

something which disrupts and potentially alters our organized activities, we are practicing art. While, in both art and philosophy, some are clearly more apt at this than others, we can all achieve the miraculous by breaking free from the perceived norms and practices which shape and bind us. Therefore, in Noë's entanglement of art and life, we are all potential artists, having the ability to free ourselves from the self-imposed shackles of organized activity.

It needs to be noted that Nishida would likely disagree with Noë's assertion that art is necessarily a strange tool. While it may very well function in the way Noë describes, *kōiteki chokkan* highlights how art can also reflect or affirm the world, much in the way that *Poet on a Mountain Top* does. In fact, many traditional Japanese arts view art as an "everyday" or "ordinary" tool, deeply enmeshed with our daily lives and not meant to disrupt or disturb. While an important and interesting topic, this falls beyond the scope of this paper.

2.5 Summary

We can now parse out the details of Nishida and Noë's conceptual frameworks. Firstly, for both, to be human is to both act and be acted upon, and to both organize and be organized. We act in a world that shapes how we act, in the sense that our organized activities both include and transcend our individual activities. It is our shared existence that shapes and organizes much of what we can and will do as individuals.

Secondly, art offers liberation from the organized activities that shape our lives. Because art is informed by organized activities, it can expose what they are and, crucially, what they can be. Accordingly, art provides us with strange tools which we can use to reorganize ourselves, inviting us to break free from the different and overlapping organized activities that shape us.

Thirdly, for both, there is a reciprocity between art and life. Art is not life, and yet life informs art. Life is not art, and yet art alters life, be it on the societal and cultural level, as Noë

argues, or the level of the artists creating in and with the world, as Nishida posits. For both, this is the *work* of art.

3: Nishida's Contribution to Enactivist Thought

For Nishida and Noë, we live in a world of action and organisation that includes and transcends personal actions and intuitions, both shaping and being shaped by them. In the worlds of *kōiteki chokkan* and of organized activities, action and intuition shape and organize the world which, in turn, shapes and organizes action and intuition. For both authors, it is our activities in and with the world that shapes and organizes much of what we can and will do. Thus, for Nishida and Noë, life is a process of mutual shaping, where action, intuition, and organisation are reciprocally enacted both in and with the world.

3.1 The Role of the Artist for Noë

Within this enactivist framework, Nishida and Noë differ in perspective and emphasis, most notably about the role of the artist in the creative process. For Noë, the true work of art, that is, what the artist does, is done prior to their created work being offered to the world. This is when artists make art out of organized activities, displaying what they are and, crucially, what they can be. Implicit in this is the claim that organized activities are, at least in part, subjective, and that art is the subjective creation of an artist. In this view, art is the result of an internal investigation, with the final work being introduced to others as a secondary stage. This means that the true work of art, being the investigation of life, is done by an artist prior to it being experienced by others. Thus, for Noë, how art works to recognise life is secondary the creative process of the artist.

Noë's perspective emphasises the role of the individual artist in the creative process, exemplified by the fact that, when discussing the art of dancing, he often uses the words "Dance" and "choreography" synonymously, for example, writing that "[d]ancing [is]

categorically distinct from Dance, that is, from choreographic art” (Noë 2021, 66). Choreography is an activity prior to creation. It is the process of creating a choreographed work. While there are many different choreography techniques, both planned and improvised, in choreography movements or prompts are explicitly dictated prior to a performance (e.g., Kearns 2017). Choreographers work to create a work of art that can be displayed at some future time and place. Therefore, for Noë, the true work of choreography, and by extension art, is done prior to the performance, with the creation then (and only then) working to reorganize life.

Notably, this understanding aligns with a more general, and predominantly Eurocentric, conception of art that prioritises the role of the individual artist in the creative process. Maraldo, when discussing *kōiteki chokkan* in art, critiques this approach, deeming it

the usual view [where] the creative impulse begins in the individual’s mind and ends in a work perceptible by others [...]. Whether the aesthetics interprets the particular work as the embodiment and therefore the revelation of the artist's intention, or as a cultural product whose meaning is ascertained only by outside observers and participants, the work as a work of art is the creation of human subjectivity (2017, 209).

While Maraldo’s assessment is not directed at Noë, it is evidently applicable. Noë’s strange tools are the creation of human subjectivity, as it is only from the outside of a preexisting organized activity, which is to say, from the subjectivity of the individual artist, that they can create something new or strange. While Noë does acknowledge that organized activities inform the artist, his emphasis remains on subjectivity, and an artist’s ability to create something new. Therefore, for Noë, art is primarily the subjective creation of an artist, with the created work then (and only then) working to reorganize life.

3.2 *The Role of the Artist for Nishida*

For Nishida, the work of the artist does not end upon the creation of art, nor does it begin with the artist. Instead, art is enacted from the interaction between artist and world. This is because the true work of art, that is, what art does, is as much an offering from an artist to the world as it is an offering from the world to the artist. This is the core insight of *kōiteki chokkan*, where an artist's actions and intuitions shape the world which, in turn, shapes their actions and intuitions. This is why Nishida states that “[t]he motive of our actions does not merely arise from within [nor] merely given from without either” (1970, 193), as it arises from both. Accordingly, the true work of both art and artist does not end once an object, activity, or performance has been displayed for others to see, but continues on. In this way, as Nishida explains, “we create things externally and [...] things create us” (1970, 182), in the sense that artists create in and with a world that creates in and with artists. Thus, for Nishida, the true work of art can be seen in its capacity to continually enact both the artist and world. Art is not merely the subjective creation of an artist, but the creation of a world that both includes and transcends the creative activities of the artist.

In contrast to Noë's understanding, for Nishida, artist and world are mutually enacted by a creative process, as for him, once again, “the world is a creative process. And our body is a creative element of that world” (1998, 48). This means that the art's ability to shape the world is not secondary, as Maraldo explains:

Nishida envisions the artist not as an entity who simply preexists the creation of the artwork, but as someone who intuitively transforms the world by transforming it—a process that creates not only a work but the artist and a newly emergent world as well. Artist and work form mutually and are reflected in one another (2017, 209).

Kyle Peters explains further, writing that, for Nishida, “artistic agency is decentred across manifold positions in artistic production, and thus that artistic production is diffused across the continuum of subjectivity and objectivity” (2018, 477). In other words, art is not merely the creation of human subjectivity for Nishida. Nor is art merely the creation of the objective world. Art is the creative activity of an objective world that both includes and transcends human subjectivity.

Nishida would then, expectedly, disagree that Dance is a kind of meta-dancing, where choreographers create in relative isolation from the world. Nishida explains that “[i]t is not that artistic ideas come from heaven; they rather emerge from this great earth” (1970, 182). Art is something the world offers the artist who, in turn, offers art to the world. This view aligns with enactivist thought more broadly, as previously articulated by Varela et al., who write that “cognition is not the representation of a pregiven world by a pregiven mind but is rather the enactment of a world and a mind” (1991, 9). Similarly, for Nishida, art is not the creation of a pregiven world or artist, but the enactment of both. Therefore, Nishida contributes to enactivist thought, showing how art is not merely the creation of an artist that then works to reorganize life, as Noë holds, but rather the creative activity of the world that both includes and transcends the artist, and which unfolds and persists through their created work.

3.3 Summary

Nishida and Noë both agree that we live in a world of action and organisation, wherein much of what we can and will do is shaped by a world that both transcends and includes the individual. However, their perspectives diverge in a subtle yet important way. Noë views art as the subjective creation of an artist that then (and only then) works to reorganize life, whereas Nishida views art as a process of mutual enactment, involving both artist and world. For Nishida, the work of art is ongoing creative activity that unfolds and persists through its engagement both in and with the world. Therefore, Nishida’s recognisably enactivist

philosophy offers a more expansive view of art, situating it within a world of action and organisation, wherein creativity transcends the boundaries of individual subjectivity.

4: Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated how Nishida and Noë share a comparable understanding of art, and how, for both, we can identify art by what it does rather than what it is. For Noë, the world of organized activities transcends and includes the individual activities of the artist, just as, for Nishida, the world of *kōiteki chokkan* transcends and includes action and intuition. Nishida's novel and comparable perspective thus contributes to the discussion of art, showing how artistic actions and intuitions enact the world which, in turn, enacts artistic actions and intuitions.

However, this paper has also highlighted Nishida and Noë's different perspectives, most notably about the role of the artist in the creative process. For Nishida, art is not merely the subjective creation of an artist that then (and only then) works to reorganize life, as argued by Noë. This is because, for Nishida, artistic actions and intuitions mutually arise from each other, in the sense that what is and can be created by an individual artist is enacted by their activities in and with the world. Accordingly, for Nishida, the true work of art is not completed upon creation, as Noë contends, but rather unfolds, persists, and *works* within a world that includes and transcends both art and artist.

Building upon this, there are still valuable comparisons to be made between Nishida and Noë. While Noë views art as a “strange tool” that acts as a catalyst for reorganization, Nishida's broader understanding can allow for an appreciation of art that is both strange and ordinary. In traditional Japanese arts, such as *ikebana* 生け花 (arranging, or making flowers alive), also known as *kadō* 華道 (way of flowers), *sadō* 茶道 (way of tea), and *shodō* 書道 (way of writing)—the latter of which Nishida practiced—the work of art is not necessarily to

disrupt or reorganize life. Instead, these forms of art also serve as “everyday” or “ordinary” tools, meant to cultivate life and reflect its position within the world and cosmos (Carter 2008). Notably, this understanding of art shares similarities with the central thesis of Noë’s most recent book, *The Entanglement*, in which he argues that art and life are deeply entangled, and that this entanglement shapes what we are: an unfolding aesthetic phenomenon. Consequently, while these two thinkers are rarely discussed together, future comparisons between Nishida and Noë are warranted, particularly in examining the role and function of art in shaping our lives.

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