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# MERLEAU-PONTY AND NISHIDA: "INTEREXPRESSION" AS MOTOR-PERCEPTUAL FAITH

**Adam Loughnane**
Department of Philosophy, University College Cork
adam.loughnane@ucc.ie

Both Nishida Kitarō and Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote extensively about artistic expression in their early works, yet in the last period of their careers that consideration is put mostly aside as they engage more directly with abstract ontological concerns. As this happens, a curiously overlooked concept becomes prominent in their writings, namely "faith." While Merleau-Ponty's is a "perceptual faith" *(foi perceptive),* and Nishida's is, broadly speaking, a religious faith (*shinnen* 信念), neither is strictly secular nor spiritual, yet both entail a remarkably similar ontology of the motor-perceptual body. Unfortunately, their lives ended before they could fully develop these philosophically problematic concepts. This is especially unfortunate because, as I argue, faith is one under-explored interpretive key that can help us understand not just the late period but also the entirety of their philosophic projects.[1] The present study therefore seeks to expand their notions of faith, not by imagining how it might have evolved had they further developed the concept, but by going back to their early writings, showing how their understanding of artistic expression actually prefigures their later concepts of faith. I argue that in their philosophies, the practice of artistic expression is a practice of faith—not faith in a transcendent being, scripture, or event, but faith as a motor-perceptual body woven into a motor-perceptual world. To explore this possibility within and between their writings, I frame their understandings of expression as "motor-perceptual faith," which serves as a provisional device for placing the two in dialogue, for finding new conceptual continuities between their early and late writings, and for challenging strict boundaries between art, religion, and philosophy East and West.

This discussion explores Nishida's and Merleau-Ponty's works in tandem and focuses on one of the most distinctive aspects of their understandings of expression and faith, which is how they go beyond a "positivist" account of the moving perceiving body. Since both philosophers construe motion and perception not as two separate actions but as one corporeal phenomenon, that event can be referred to as "motor-perception."[2] What is unique about their models of motor-perception—and what will constitute the heart of this analysis—is their inclusion of negation in their accounts of motion and perception. For both philosophers, to express oneself is to negate while being negated by the motor-perceptual world. In the first section I discuss negation on the perceptual level, followed by considering negation on the *motor*-perceptual level in the second section. This will provide the framework for seeing how negation factors into both philosophers' accounts of


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artistic expression, and ultimately for construing expression as a practice of motor-perceptual faith.

*I. Perceptual Negation: Multi-Perspectivalism*

Many of our taken-for-granted ideas, as well as some of the most sophisticated philosophical and scientific frameworks for understanding perception, are positivist in orientation. They are positivist in that they do not consider negativity, absence, or invisibility as constitutive aspects of perception, and therefore ignore the ways the negative is bound up with and complexifies positivity, presence, and visibility. Confined by this assumption, the visible is thought to be constituted solely by what is present to perception, by sensory data that hits the visual apparatus. What is invisible, absent, or unseen is thought to be secondary, non-essential or non-visual, or is simply ignored. In such a framework, vision is understood to be strictly uni-perspectival, while memories, projections, or imaginings that impinge upon vision are related to but not considered part of the visible itself.

Positivist assumptions tend to enforce a whole set of binaries, the most prominent being the distinction between the perceiving subject and perceived object. With this assumption as the starting point for theorizing about perception, one must then concoct an explanation for how these metaphysically discontinuous entities can encounter one another. Following from this basic dualism is a further set of binaries between mind and matter, proximity and distance, activity and passivity, vision and touch. Binaries such as these impede a full understanding of perception because philosophies built thereupon remain confined by various conceptual instantiations of the identity-difference binary. Yet, neither identity nor difference can explain perception: if vision were absolutely different and *discontinuous* from what is seen, it would replace the object when it occurs. Conversely, if vision were completely *continuous* and identical with that which it sees, there would cease to be a relation between two things, and therefore no perception. As Nishida writes, "If seeing and the seen are merely one, there is no intuition."[3] For perception to obtain, the perceiving subject must be partly identical to the perceived object, yet at the same time must have an aspect that remains distinct. Human perception is an event *between* identity and difference. The perceiving subject must be partly *continuous* with the seen object, while remaining partly *discontinuous*. Nishida's term "continuity of discontinuity" (*hirenzoku no renzoku* 非連続の連続)[4] points to this ambiguity, while in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy a similar ontological inclination is expressed as "chiasm" *(chiasme)* and "intertwining" *(entrelacs).*[5]

Because the body is related to the world in a chiasmatic continuous discontinuity, it is possible to look at body-world relations and notice difference, while from another perspective seeing identity. Neither Nishida nor Merleau-Ponty seeks to reduce this ambiguity to monist or dualist metaphysics. Their philosophies and their accounts of artistic expression are premised on sustaining this ambiguity. Moving to the next section I will discuss how ambiguity is explained in their

philosophies as a mutual form of negation, and how this points beyond positivism, beyond the representational model of perception, and beyond its uni-perspectival assumptions.

*Mutual Self-Negation: Sartre's* Nullité Absolue *and Nishida's* Zettai Hitei

To explain negation and how it relates to perception, we can begin with a very simple example of any everyday object that contains things. With a jug, for example, just as it has negative space to hold water or wine, likewise human perception requires negativity to allow perceptions to enter consciousness. If this were not the case, and visual data were transformed completely into the self when it reaches the eyes, there would be no perception. Something of the object must remain while that object is being perceived. What does remain is not of the self: it is non-self. Yet, insofar as an aspect of perceptual non-self is in the body of the self, it is a negation of the body. Perception is an event between self and non-self, between positivity and negativity.

To perceive, the self must be negated. To perceive is to be a perceptual non-self—yet not a complete non-self. Merleau-Ponty's discussion of negation in *The Visible and the Invisible (Le visible et l'invisible)* (1964) centers primarily on a critique of Sartre's notion of "absolute nothingness" *(nullité absolue).* Although Sartre seeks to counter the positivist framework for perception, he goes too far to the opposite extreme, understanding perception as requiring not a partial but a complete negation of the perceiving subject. For Merleau-Ponty, the unacceptable implication of absolute negation is that if the perceiving subject were pure nothingness, then the perceptual object would have to be absolute being and positivity. In his own words, "from the moment that I conceive of myself as negativity and the world as positivity, there is no longer any interaction."[6] For Merleau-Ponty, Sartre's absolute negation is another form of positivist philosophy disguised as a negativist philosophy.[7] Contrarily, he asserts that if I perceive "then I am no longer the pure negative." He continues:

> [T]o see is no longer simply to nihilate, the relation between what I see and I who see is not one of immediate or frontal contradiction; the things attract my look, my gaze caresses the things, it espouses their contours and their reliefs, between it and them we catch sight of a complicity. As for being, I can no longer define it as a hard core of positivity under the negative properties that would come to it from my vision.[8]

Just as a positive subject cannot encounter a positive object, on the other extreme a fully negated subject cannot encounter a purely positive object. "The absolute positing of a single object," Merleau-Ponty writes, would be "the death of consciousness."[9] Nishida speaks of the same "death" in his *Fundamental Problems (Tetsugaku no konpon mondai)* (1933) when he writes:

> Negation as self-negation, i.e., absolute negation, would be a self-death. The self would ultimately be nothing. There is no meaning to such an inclusion of absolute negation within the self. . . . For in order for there to be the mutual determination of individuals, the external must be internal and the internal must be external.[10]

To avoid the inversion of positivism, the perceiving subject *and* the perceptual object must both be constituted by positivity *and* negativity. Translators Krummel and Nagatomo refer to Nishida's idea of negation as "mutual negation."[11] The body is able to encounter the world not simply because the self negates while the world remains posited, but because of a two-way mutual negation. There is neither simple negation nor affirmation, but, as Krummel and Nagatomo argue, "each negates the other for the sake of self-affirmation."[12] It is only on this basis that bodies can encounter one another. "What makes these various inter-determinations possible," write Krummel and Nagatomo, "is mutual self-negation."[13] This self-negation is mutual insofar as it obtains on both sides of the perceptual encounter. The decisive point for Nishida is that affirmation and negation are not mutually exclusive ontological principles. One of the most definitive aspects of Nishida's late ontology is his principle of "affirmation of absolute negation" (*zettai hitei no kōtei* 絶対否定の肯定), which, like Merleau-Ponty's refutation of Sartre's absolute negation, clearly precludes a one-sided negation. One cannot affirm oneself counter to or in the absence of another or the world without at the same time being negated by the other and the world.

As Nishida's translators allude, this structure of affirmation and negation is similar in Nishida's and Merleau-Ponty's terminology:

> We find that this dialectic [of self-negation] involves a chiasma of vertical and horizontal interrelations manifest in various types of relations—such as individual-environment, person-person, subject-object, etc.[14]

Through mutual negation the absolute distinction between perceiving subject and perceived object is replaced by a partial non-subject and non-object. Thus, encounter is possible when, as Nishida writes, "in expression, the objective is the subjective, or rather subjectivity can be seen in the very depth of the objective. . . . [I]t has the meaning of determining and negating the person." And foreshadowing our later discussion, he claims that "this is especially so in aesthetic creation."[15]

*Negation: From Non-Subject to Non-Object*

Accepting that the self must be a perceptual non-self in order to encounter the world is not an entirely difficult proposition to accept, yet the implication that is perhaps more problematic—at least throughout the history of Western philosophy—is that the object itself must also be constituted by negativity. Not only must the self be partly non-self, but the object must likewise be non-object. Certainly, it is not difficult to find the Eastern precursors to Nishida's attempt to go beyond objecthood, but one might think that the non-object is neither part of Merleau-Ponty's tradition nor his own thinking. However, in his essay "Eye and Mind" ("L'oeil et l'esprit") (1961) and in later works, he pushes beyond positivist conceptions of objecthood. He writes: "a certain hollow opened up within the [object] in-itself, a certain constitutive emptiness—an emptiness which . . . sustains the supposed positivity of things."[16] Soon after, in *The Visible and the Invisible,* he similarly claims that "one sole condition is laid down for [the other] coming on the scene: that they could present themselves to me as other focuses of negativity."[17]

When considering negativity regarding objects, one must not go too far, as Sartre did, and absolutize it. This would simply be to reinforce the positive-negative binary from the other way around, rather than ambiguating the distinction. Just as an absolute subject and object cannot encounter one another, neither can a completely negated non-subject and non-object. Merleau-Ponty is sensitive to this issue and brings negativity into his account of perception without erasing all aspects of positivity:

> In reality, this glass, this table, this room can be sensibly present to me only if nothing separates me from them, only if I am in them and not in myself, in my representations or my thoughts, only if I am nothing. Yet (one will say) inasmuch as I have *this* before myself I am not an absolute nothing, I am a determined nothing: not this glass, nor this table, nor this room; my emptiness is not indefinite, and to this extent at least my nothingness is filled or nullified.[18]

Similarly, Nishida suggests that the negated object has a place for the perceiver: "[T]o view a thing artistically," he maintains, "must mean to submerge the self within the thing in itself. In abandoning the self, one conforms to the objective itself."[19] To perceive is therefore not simply for a subject to receive sense data from a positive object: the object itself must have negativity in order to render itself as a perceptual object. It is not only that I make space for the object to inhabit; there is a place, a "depth" in the object itself, which my perceptual body-mind inhabits.

*Multi-Perspectivalism:* "Depth" *and Internal-External Perception*

When the positive and negative aspects of perception are taken into account, we go beyond a uni-perspectival framework toward a multi-perspectival form of vision. As such, the absent and the invisible are included as constitutive aspects of the visible. Just as the visible has a "lining" *(doublure)*[20] of invisibility, according to Merleau-Ponty, similarly with Nishida the present is always constituted by the non-present. As Nishida writes, "if we consider that our consciousness is determined in the present, then there is no way of knowing about non-present things. However, we cannot deny that we clearly possess consciousness of the non-present."[21] To notice the multi-perspectival aspects of vision, we must follow Nishida's and Merleau-Ponty's endeavor to go beyond a simple dichotomy of the present and non-present.

Turning to Merleau-Ponty, one of his key insights about perception is that vision is always constituted by the presence of other vantage points. "The others' gaze on the things is a second openness,"[22] he writes. The "certitude of the perceptual faith" he claims, is "having access to the very world the others perceive."[23] We have access to the others' perspectives through the world, which are not positively present. They are present in the form of non-presence. In its absence, the non-present impinges upon the visible yet remains invisible. This ambiguity results in multi-perspectivalism not only among humans but also between the vantage points of humans and objects in the visual field. Because "things and my body are made of the same stuff," Merleau-Ponty claims that vision does not just come about in me, but "vision must somehow come about in them."[24] This is an almost inconceivable proposition if

one remains within a positivist framework and its overdetermined presence-non-presence binary. However, when negative aspects of perception are included, when the invisibility lining the visible is recognized, we can see objects as much more than passive receivers of uni-perspectival human vision.

*Seeing-Seen*

The way we see ourselves, objects, or the world is infused with the invisible and the representationally absent. We see other bodies and our own differently depending on who is looking at us. What we know, imagine, or remember about others can determine our experience of them more than the sensory data hitting our retinas. One of Merleau-Ponty's most important insights regarding vision is that seeing is never simply seeing, but always seeing-seen.[25] The being-seen aspect of our vision is invisible to us, yet it counts in our visual experience. We do not see what others see as though we had a video feed from their perceptual apparatus that added a second visual stream to our own. The other's vision has its own positivity, which we do not have access to, yet their vision is experienced within our own as non-present though constitutive. The invisible is not transformed into the visible; there is a "lining" of invisibility within the visible. Insofar as both positive and negative aspects determine perceptual experience, that experience expands from uni-perspectival to multiple-perspectival perception. This is possible because, as Nishida writes, "our own body is seen from the outside . . . [,] but besides being something to be seen, it is that which sees at the same time."[26]

Both Merleau-Ponty and Nishida explain how these multi-perspectival aspects are constitutive of all visual experience, even of vision of non-human entities, which fall under visibility in the broader sense. When we look at an object from a frontal vantage point our perception of the object is affected by dimensions that are not positively visible. When looking at a cube, we only receive positive visual data from at most three external sides, yet in their absence the other three sides as well as the internal dimension of the object are included in the frontal view. We know this, for example, from our experience seeing a building façade. We would not be surprised at the moment we find out that it is not a real building if our vision was not already determined by the expectation of features that turn out to be absent. The mistaken assumptions we have about objects such as a façade show us that vision is already reaching inside and around perceived objects, and being determined by expectations regarding features that are absent or hidden. Nishida says that we are conscious of (*ishiki shiteiru* 意識している) the absent things though they are not present to the senses.

A positivist approach misses multi-perspectival aspects of perception because it maintains an internal-external dichotomy. Contrary to this, Nishida argues in many places that "[t]here is no internal perception apart from external perception." "[T]he world of perception," he writes, "exists as internal-qua-external perception and vice versa."[27] Nishida further contends that "when we see the exterior of a box it cannot be said that its interior is not directly an object of consciousness. Nor can it be said that in the present the facts of the past are not present in consciousness."[28] Similarly,

according to Merleau-Ponty, I do not see things only from an external viewpoint, nor do I "see [the object] according to its exterior envelope; I live it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is around me, not in front of me."[29] In his earlier work *Phenomenology of Perception* he wrote:

> The object is seen at all times as it is seen from all directions and by the same means, namely the structure imposed by a horizon. The present still holds on to the immediate past without positing it as an object, and since the immediate past similarly holds its immediate predecessor, past time is wholly collected up and grasped in the present.[30]

To the extent that our perception is constituted by the non-present vantage point of unseen dimensions such as the inside or backside of an object, vision is more than uni-perspectival. If one only considered the positive aspects, vision would seem uni-perspectival, but such a limited view ignores the way that vision is augmented by the absent, invisible points of view. A dispersal of vantage points is possible because objects have what Merleau-Ponty calls "depth" *(profondeur),* which allows them to be experienced as having a negativity through which one sees the world from many points of view. In Merleau-Ponty's words:

> What I call depth is either nothing, or else it is my participation in a Being without restriction, first and foremost a participation in the being of space beyond every particular point of view. Things encroach upon one another *because they are outside one another.*[31]

Merleau-Ponty believes artists have the ability to instantiate this depth in their paintings. Artists do not simply depict what *they* see, but paint by "adding to what *they* could see of things at that moment, what *things* could see of them."[32] These visual experiences "attest to their being a total or absolute vision, leaving nothing outside, including themselves."[33] If we take seriously the account of vision given by Nishida and Merleau-Ponty, then many of what could be too easily disregarded as "poetic" or "suggestive" passages in their writings can be reconsidered as put forth in a language appropriate to the ambiguous nature of perception. For example, Merleau-Ponty writes, "the landscape thinks itself in me,"[34] and, quoting André Marchand, he writes that it felt "as though the trees were looking back at me."[35] Nishida says more simply that the "mountains and rivers must also be expressive."[36] These remarks will be misread if one remains confined to a positivist understanding of perception. I suggest that when considering the perceptually negative, these philosophers are describing visual experience in a world with perceptual depth, where perception is inherently ambiguous regarding internal and external presentation.

There are remarkable similarities between how Nishida and Merleau-Ponty arrive at their accounts of multi-perspectival vision, especially as they approach their later writings. However, a point of disagreement emerges between the two as well. Both philosophers attempt to conceive of perception beyond the subject-object binary, yet it appears that Nishida goes farther in terms of proposing a fully delocalized and de-subjectivized form of vision with his concept of "seeing without a seer" (*mirumono nakushite miru koto* 見るものなくして見ること).[37] According to this concept, vision still arises as an event, yet there is no localizable subject or

object of vision. Nishida goes completely beyond the subject-object distinction toward a type of vision he later describes as the "self-seeing" of the world, and of Basho (場所). Referring to this "self-seeing," Krummel and Nagatomo explain that "[h]ere the meaning of 'seeing' extends beyond merely humans to encompass life or world in general."[38]

In his last work, where Merleau-Ponty develops his ontology of "Flesh" *(chair),* he explores a type of vision that exceeds the human body and arises as an event in a much broader perceptual fabric. Like Nishida, Merleau-Ponty is not speaking of vision as a strictly human faculty. He speaks of "a vision that we do not make but is made in us," writes Lawlor.[39] Unlike Nishida, however, Merleau-Ponty maintains a minimal localization of the perceiving subject. For Nishida one could not unambiguously claim which side of the body-world binary they are seeing from, as part of the event of vision, whereas for Merleau-Ponty "I am always on the same side of my own body."[40] For Nishida one is fully penetrating and penetrated by the visual world, whereas for Merleau-Ponty one must be "penetrated by the universe, and not want to penetrate it."[41] As Brook Ziporyn points out, these limitations impede full "reversibility of reversibility,"[42] and therefore a subtle prioritization of the subject of vision remains in Merleau-Ponty's thought. In conceiving of vision as "seeing without a seer," Nishida takes this extra step toward a fully reversible form of visual reversibility.

*II. Motor-Perceptual Negation: Multi-Volitional*

If we understand the body's *perceptual* intertwinement with the object as perceptual negation, then, when considering how the *moving* body intertwines with the moving world, we can explore the possibility of a *motor*-perceptual negation. Progressing to motor-perceptual negation does not require an enormous conceptual leap, since, as is well known, both Merleau-Ponty and Nishida consider motion and perception as two aspects of a single body-world phenomenon. To move is to perceive, and to perceive is to move. When discussing perception above, we were already implicitly talking about an aspect of motion. As Nishida writes, in *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy (Tetsugaku no kompon mondai)* (1933): "We act through seeing, and we see through acting. . . . Indeed, artistic creativity is a kind of action in such a sense."[43] Earlier, in *Art and Morality (Geijutsu to dōtuko)* (1923), he claims that "The artist sees through a fusion of eye and hand."[44] In "Eye and Mind" ("L'oeil et l'esprit"), on the other hand, Merleau-Ponty writes: "The visible world and the world of my motor projects are both total parts of the same Being."[45] By including motion, we can now advance from perceptual negation to *motor*-perceptual negation.

When considering motion in a positivist sense—whether materialist, physiologist, or physicalist—the motivating factor could be variously understood to be the intellect, will, desire, volition, or a combination thereof, but any of these assumptions would most likely presuppose that whatever that motivating faculty might be it is housed inside the body, not in the world external to it. Yet, as we begin integrating negation into an account of motion, upholding a strict distinction between the inside and outside of the moving-perceiving body becomes increasingly untenable. The two

philosophers suggest that the artist feels movement in the external world as though it were part of her body. The early Nishida writes, "to know the change of an external thing through one's vision is the same as feeling the movement of one's own body through muscular sensation. Hence the 'external world' refers both to our bodies and to other material things."[46] Françoise Dastur puts this connection forth in relation to Merleau-Ponty's concept "perceptual faith":

> The experience of the flesh, therefore, is able to take place only on the terrain of perceptual faith, which is also that of vision in action, the place where perceiving and perceived are still undivided and where things are experienced as annexes or extensions of ourselves.[47]

Things are felt as annexes of our bodies not only because our perception arises in them, but because our perceptual ecstasis includes motion ecstasis. Inseparable from vision, our bodily movements are intertwined with the motions of the world around us. Nishida's "unity of act and act" (作用と作用との直接の内面的結合)[48] and what Merleau-Ponty refers to as a "Distant will"[49] describe motion as such, and offer a more expansive account of the body by construing its movements according to a mutual negation between body and world. Rather than being centralized in the human body, motion, like vision, is dispersed throughout the motor-perceptual fabric. In this framework, just as vision becomes multi-perspectival, motion might be considered to become multi-volitional, with the source of motion sustaining an ambiguity between body and world. While this account receives more textual support in Nishida's philosophy, I explore how it is also implicit in Merleau-Ponty's reading of Cézanne's practice as a painter and artist.

*"Unity of Act and Act," and "Distant Will"*

Many of our assumptions about motion posit the existence of an active subject over against an objective world of non-volitional passive matter. Nishida and Merleau-Ponty reject these positivist assumptions, and go beyond the active-passive dichotomy, as well as the notion of a non-volitional entity. The world, Nishida writes, is animated by "volitional objects" (*ishitaishō* 意志対象).[50] Foreshadowing the coming discussion of artistic expression, Merleau-Ponty likewise conceives of objects—in this case the landscape—as a volitional entity. He writes in "Cézanne's Doubt" that the artist's hand was not controlled exclusively by his own volition but was the "instrument of a distant will."[51] Far from inert matter or passive objectivity, Mont Sainte-Victoire—the mountain in Aix-en-Provence that was the subject of years of observation by Cézanne—has a means of acting on the motor-perceptual body of the artist.

The artist must conform to objectivity, yet objectivity is not, as we might expect, motionless matter, nor is it characterized primarily by extension. The primary characteristic of objects, Nishida stresses numerous times, is not matter or extension but activity *(sayō).*[52] For Nishida, the world is not made up of discreet acting subjects here and non-acting objects over there, but is an "infinite continuity of acts."[53] When painting is considered accordingly, "both the artist and his work become one insep-

arable act."[54] Nishida's understanding of motion is not, therefore, a discontinuity of an acting subject and passive object, but what he calls, in his early work *Art and Morality,* a "unity of act and act." Just as the absolute subject cannot encounter a perceptual object, he argues that "there is no action if there is merely one individual."[55] We are not active as self-contained volitional individuals against a motor-neutral world; "we are active bodily," Nishida contends, "as the world's own self-transformations."[56]

Nishida wants to show how motion occurs without an absolute, substantive subject of action, and believes that the artist's gestures are particularly good at exhibiting this. In *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy* he writes:

> Artistic intuition must be an infinite activity. In artistic creativity we neither structure things conceptually nor imitate things merely passively. Things beckon and move us. Things become the self and vice versa. Moreover, it is an infinite process of self-determination as the activity of the oneness of subject and object. Artistic creativity is never finished.[57]

The human body no doubt has a principle of motion that appears to be internal to itself, though motion never arises exclusively from inside the body. Motion and even stillness are actions at the intersection of a body and the world. They are actions as movements constituting a living motor-perceptual fabric. The initiation of motion is therefore ambiguous regarding an internal or external locus.

In one of his earliest writings, Merleau-Ponty also highlights how objects and the world elicit the body's motion. He writes:

> The task to be performed elicits the necessary movements from him by a sort of remote attraction, as the phenomenal forces at work in my visual field elicit from me, without any calculation on my part, the motor reactions which establish the most effective balance between them, or as the conventions of our social group, or our set of listeners, immediately elicit from us the words, attitudes and tone which are fitting. . . . [W]e are literally what others think of us and what our world is.[58]

Our continuity of discontinuity with the world is not only perceptual: because perception and motion are in an ambiguous state of mutual determination and reversibility, we also feel the motion of perceptual objects as though our bodily motion were implicated. Vision and motion extend into the perceptual field and inhabit its volitional objects, just as the field extends into the body's motor-perceptual negation, which is its openness for the world.

### *III. Faith as "Interexpression"*

Nishida and Merleau-Ponty put forth their concepts in different idioms, yet faith, in both of their accounts—whether it is in the expression of the artist or the religious individual—is faith in the negative. Nishida describes the relation between mutually negated bodies as "interexpression."[59] In one of his last writings, "The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious Worldview" ("*Bashoteki ronri to shūkyōteki sekaikan*") (1945), he develops his mature ontology while elaborating a notion of

God, or what he variously refers to as the "Absolute" or "Buddha." Nishida does employ Western religious terminology, but his use of the term "God" can in no way be understood as referring to a transcendent, anthropomorphic deity in a Western, Judeo-Christian sense. Even though various religious traditions understand the relation between God and humans as involving negation, they do not go as far as Nishida does. In Christian negative theology *(Deus Absconditus; Deus Otiosus)* and in mystical and apophatic traditions across East and West, negation is understood as a uni-directional and non-ambiguous relation: God's expression is achieved by negating himself in order that the world and humans can be, but there is no reciprocity where humans negate so that God can be. God maintains the metaphysical laws, but he remains an exception to the laws governing what he creates. As such, negation is not a general ontological principle but only a principle of transcendence, which renders expression a one-way metaphysical determination.

Nishida's understanding of the relation of God to humans, however, fully ontologizes negation by conceiving of the relation as a two-way mutual negation, which he characterizes as "interexpression." "The relation between God and mankind," writes Nishida,

> is a relation of interexpression. The absolute does not destroy the relative; it possesses itself and sees itself in its own absolute self-negation. That which stands in relation to the absolute as its self-negation must itself be self-expressive through its own self-negation.[60]

The second sentence makes clear that it is not only God that negates so that humans can be, but humans themselves negate in order that God can be. As David Dilworth explains regarding Nishida, religion has a "transpositional structure: the self-negation of the self and the self-negation of the divine, in that matrix of mutual encounter called 'faith' or 'enlightenment.'"[61] Nishida discusses "God" in the context of his notion of "reverse" or "inverse polarity"[62] (*gyakutaiō* 逆対応). Humans and God are in a chiasmatic relation of mutual negation such that one interpenetrates the other. "The self exists in a relation of inverse polarity with the absolute," writes Nishida. He continues, claiming that in what he calls the "paradox of God" there is a "face-to-face relation with the absolute in a dialectic of mutual presence and absence."[63] In this framework negation is a fully ontological principle.

For Nishida, God is not an anthropomorphic being standing outside the material realm requiring a two-tier metaphysical trick to explain how he interacts with the world. God is not transcendent as opposed to immanent, otherworldly as opposed to this-worldly, but is the aspect of reality that unifies these dualities through negation. From Nishida's early philosophy, God is not considered primarily to be a being but an activity:

> . . . independent, self-fulfilled, infinite activity. We call the base of this infinite activity God. God is not something that transcends reality, God is the base of reality. God is that which dissolves the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity and unites spirit and nature.[64]

Envisioned this way, religious faith is not belief in a deity or religious dogma. For Nishida, faith is the practice of acting beyond the separations between self and world,

activity and passivity, subject and object, immanence and transcendence. This is achieved by allowing mutual negation to obtain between God and oneself, where I express God through my body, and he expresses me though his, that is, through the world. In the most basic sense, for Nishida the practice of religious faith is the practice of overcoming duality. "The dynamics of religious conversion," he writes, "entail the reciprocal, but nondual, intentionality of God and the individual soul. 'Faith' and 'grace' are names for this dimension of mutual, and transpositional, revealment."[65]

At this point, the connection in Nishida's philosophy between religious faith and his understanding of expression is made clear. Expression is not the simple affirmation of the self over against the world or God. Expression as "interexpression" is having faith to be negated while negating God: "The relation between God and mankind is always to be understood as dynamically interexpressive based on the principle of self-negation."[66] In adopting the terminology of Western religion and interpreting it through his Eastern tradition, Nishida shows how all reality is a locus for the exercise of interexpressive faith. In so doing he secularizes the spiritual terminology he appropriates, and also gives us an exciting opportunity for comparison with Merleau-Ponty's notions of faith and expression.

*Nishida: "Making-Made"*

A philosophy that embraces negation challenges the idea that expression is a strictly human activity. Even the word "expression," as derived from *exprimere,* the Latin word meaning the "action of pressing out," is not an appropriate term because it is positivist in at least two senses. First, it implies an internal-external binary where the expressive being has something within—an idea, an artistic impulse, or desire—which she then presses outward onto an external medium. Second, an active-passive dichotomy is upheld where expressive motion is explained only by the active human agent, while the material receiving the expression is thought to be a passive medium receiving but not implicated in the impression making. Contrary to this, when negation is taken into account—as I argue is the case with both Nishida and Merleau-Ponty—expression is ambiguous regarding internality-externality and activity-passivity, and is a multi-directional event between body and world.

The artist can no longer be thought of as a lone agent introducing expression into a passive world of non-expressive matter. Expression is always interexpression and as such has the structure Nishida refers to in his 1938 essay "Human Being" as "from the made to the making" *(tsukuraretamono kara tsukurumono e).*[67] Nishida writes that interexpression "must be a productive transaction; and so in productivity subjectivity becomes objectivity and makes things, and at the same time that which is made makes that which makes. It is one transactional process."[68] This making-made structure, made prominent in Nishida's mature writings, is the key to going beyond a positivist notion of expression.

Religious expression is not solely the human act of opening up to the divine: "This opening," Nishida's translator Dilworth writes, is a "mutual opening—a co-originative event."[69] For one to be "religiously volitional" is, then, to "open himself up to the working of God or Buddha within himself."[70] Religious faith is such a co-originative event and, like artistic expression, has the ambiguous structure of

making while being made: Both the believer and the believed arise as two aspects of the same expressive act. Quoting Nishida to this effect, Dilworth elaborates:

> The religiously active individual therefore encounters God or Buddha in the intimately personal dimension of interexpression through mutual affirmation and negation. "The self faces the absolute at the limit point of its own individual will. God, too, faces the self in his absolute will." Active religious expression must be ec-static—a leap of faith in that existential dimension wherein the act is the contradictory identity of transcendent and immanent planes of self-awareness. The act always has the paradoxical form of active intuition.[71]

Consequently, expression is not a one-way positive determination, whether from God to humans or from the artist to the world. Expression is an event of the motor-perceptual world in which the artist engages and co-creates. Nishida writes that "the relation between that which is self-expressive, and that which is expressed and hence made expressive must be grasped as a dynamic interexpression."[72]

Explaining this concept in reference to Leibniz, Nishida elaborates the mutual negation underlying both in the following words:

> The humanly conscious world having this structure of contradictory identity, self-consciousness is always interexpressive. . . . In Leibniz's own terms, each monad expresses the world and simultaneously is an originating point of the world's own expression.[73]

> The monads are the world's own perspectives; they form the world interexpressively through their own mutual negation and affirmation.[74]

Although Merleau-Ponty was critical of aspects of Leibniz' philosophy in his early work,[75] his later understanding of expression is, like Nishida's, conceived along the lines of monadological expression. Leibniz' monads, Merleau-Ponty writes, are in a "relation of reciprocal expression of the perspectives taken on the world."[76] Merleau-Ponty's understanding of expression, like Nishida's "interexpression," is a reciprocal body-world relation. Yet, unlike Nishida, who understands this relation as obtaining through mutual negation, Merleau-Ponty remains critical of the monadology for remaining within substantialism and ontotheological positivism.[77]

*"Expressing-Expressed": Sacramentalizing the Secular and Secularizing the Sacred*

In a recent work, Donald Landes frames Merleau-Ponty's theory of expression as "expressing-expressed," thereby hinting at similarities with Nishida's making-made structure.[78] As it is with Nishida, in Merleau-Ponty's view negation gives multi-perspectival/volitional motor-perception, thus expanding the account of expression. Merleau-Ponty arrives at this expansion, as Nishida does, by including the historical world in the account of the artist's motor-perception. He alludes to this historical, making-made dimension when he writes, "this is the historicity of the painter at work when with a single gesture he links tradition that he carries on and the tradition that he founds."[79] The artist takes from and gives to history in each gesture. Similar to Nishida's interexpression as making-made, "every relation with being," Merleau-

Ponty writes, "is simultaneously a taking and a being taken."[80] The artist is not an autonomous expressive entity. The artist is he who is able to make his body continuous with the world, through motor-perceptual negation, such that the world's own movements intertwine with his movements and make manifest a "distant will" in his body, through his hand, pencil, brush, or chisel.

For Nishida this mutual taking-and-being-taken relation between God and humans is put forth as philosophic-religious experience. While Merleau-Ponty's expressing-expressed dynamic is not articulated in an explicitly religious idiom, Richard Kearney places this aspect of his thought between the sacred and secular according to what he calls "sacramental sensation." Similar to the mutual negation in Nishida's later writings where, through a making-made dynamic, God and humans give rise to each other, Kearney refers to a birthing-birthed dynamic between body and world:

> [E]ach sensory encounter with the strangeness of the world is an invitation to a "natal pact" where, through ". . . sympathy," the human self and the strange world give birth to one another. Sacramental sensation is a reversible rapport between myself and things, wherein the sensible gives birth to itself through me.[81]

Because it is in the immanent fabric of everyday phenomenal experience that the sacrament is available, there is, Kearney writes, a "transformation of the quotidian into the sacred."[82] The mutual birthing of body and world is an ontological aspect of all experience; therefore all phenomenal reality is transformed into a potential venue for what Kearney calls a "eucharistic" act of communion between body and world.

Nishida, I have argued, problematizes the sacred-secular distinction by taking religious terminology and bringing it down to earth, while Merleau-Ponty reaches the same point from the other way around, by elevating the mundane fabric of everyday experience toward the sacred. The body's openness onto the profane world is the primary and highest form of truth, and faith is the practice that achieves this truth.

By promoting faith as "communion" and nonduality with the everyday phenomenal world, Merleau-Ponty goes underneath the distinction between secular and religious philosophy, thereby taking one step outside of the Western tradition and inching closer to East Asian religious-philosophical orientations, which more readily accommodate art and religion within philosophy. Kearney sees the "anatheism" of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy as being achieved by the artist in particular: "Whether this mutual transversal of the sacred and secular in art and literature is a matter of sacramentalizing the secular or of secularizing the sacred," Merleau-Ponty's "anatheist" philosophy "may allow it to be *both at once.* Religion as art *and* art as religion."[83]

*Faithful Expression: Blind Spot*

The faith these philosophers speak of is not an ontic decision. It is the ontological dimension of all motion and perception mediated by mutual negation with the world. Unlike religious forms of faith, what Merleau-Ponty and Nishida articulate is not a kind of faith that one can choose their way in or out of. In his first published work

Nishida explains that the faith he speaks of is a "faith we cannot lose,"[84] an echo of which is found in his much later words:

> People often confuse religious faith with subjective belief. . . . [T]hey even consider faith to be grounded in the subjective power of the will. I maintain, however, that religious faith pertains to something objective, some absolute fact of the self. . . . Religious faith involves precisely this dimension wherein the self discovers itself as bottomlessly contradictory identity.[85]

This can be compared with Merleau-Ponty's view in *Sense and Non-Sense (Sens et Non-Sens)* (1948). Merleau-Ponty does not say that faith is our belief or decision, but instead "each of our *perceptions* is an act of faith in that it affirms more than we strictly know, since objects are inexhaustible and our information limited."[86]

If there is no position outside the motor-perceptual fabric, and therefore no way to choose one's way out of body-world negation, we might ask why are some people better at faithful expression? If faith is a fact of our being continuously discontinuous with the world, can we augment or modify faith? Cézanne is an exemplar for Merleau-Ponty in this regard because through his artistic experiments he was able to move and perceive out of a significantly elevated sense of continuity with the world he sought to depict. If he had a different understanding of his body's relation to the landscape, this might have made a crucial difference with respect to how he moved as part of that world. Had Cézanne believed implicitly that his body was motor-perceptually distinct from the landscape, he might not have meditated so attentively on it for hours seeking to gear his motion and perception into Mont Sainte-Victoire's, which might have rendered the mountain on canvas quite differently.

The question of how one can be faithfully oriented within the motor-perceptual world is complicated by the limits to motion and perception. To be co-participant in the world, as an artist or otherwise, is to immerse oneself within the negative, the invisible, and the passive. Because we are in a "natal pact" with the world, woven into its fabric, one can never have a detached outside view of the whole. As such, vision is never complete. Vision is limited by what Merleau-Ponty refers to as a "blind spot." This blind spot can be misinterpreted easily if we understand it in a positivist or representational sense. In *The Visible and the Invisible,* Merleau-Ponty explains how invisibility cannot be "treat[ed] as a simple state of non-vision,"[87] but is essential to the coming into being of the visible. He elaborates: "To this structure is bound the ambiguity of the consciousness, and even a sort of blindness of the consciousness, of imperception in perception—To see is to not see."[88] The significance of this blind spot and its ambiguity is not limited to vision: this physiological fact is an aspect of the more fundamental ontological principle of mutual negation that determines all of the body's relations to being. As Merleau-Ponty explains, "What it does not see is what makes it see, is its tie to Being, is its corporeity, are the existentials by which the world becomes visible, is the flesh wherein the *object* is born."[89]

The blind spot is not a circumscribed area here or there, which cannot be seen, such as the blind spot of a car from which no visual data is received. Visibility does

not manifest in one place and invisibility in another: the visible is "lined" with the invisible and therefore the blind spot in the deepest sense of the word cannot be eliminated. There is a dynamic element to the blind spot in Merleau-Ponty's view. When one tries to move into a different vantage point to remove it to see what was previously invisible, it changes as the world shifts from background to figure, from invisible to visible. It would be as if one were attempting to accurately measure the surface topography of water while being immersed in it. All movements aimed at measuring would be self-defeating because the attempt to assess the topography changes it, because the topography contains everything, including the movements that attempt to measure it. Only a position exterior to the motor-perceptual fabric could successfully make any such exhaustive measurement, but such a motor-neutral position is a fiction. The blind spot, and more generally the limitation on motor perception, maintains itself by virtue of the body being woven into the motor-perceptual fabric through mutual negation.

This blind spot limits not only vision: it is not only a perceptual blind spot but is more generally a *motor*-perceptual blind spot. This is an element of all movement that is beyond one's control. As discussed above, in the case of perception, a blind spot is maintained because the visible is constituted as lined by the invisible. Action is also lined by its opposite, in this case, passivity. Through the passive constituent of its activity, the body receives and enacts the solicitations of the world, receives and carries forth the historically sedimented ways of moving and doing things, without noticing or choosing to do so. In this sense, the body is not only intertwined with the world in perceptual ecstasis; it is also in a form of motion ecstasis. To be so oriented within the world is not to choose a certain movement: it is prior to any choice. It is the structure of the relationship between a motor-perceptual body and the world. The motion blind spot is a constitutive element of this intertwining, and therefore cannot be eliminated. We might be able to minimize the blind spot if we were active at one time and passive at another, yet just as we cannot parse the aspect of the visible field that is invisible, we cannot isolate the passive aspect of our motions, nor can we separate away the part that comes from our own body from the part solicited by objects and the world. All movement is ambiguously constituted through intertwined layers of activity and passivity, making and being made. All movement proceeds in tacit coordination with the blind spot; therefore all movement is partially out of one's control and proceeds with a constitutive form of risk. This motor risk will be discussed in the upcoming section, which will further establish the necessity of a motor-perceptual form of faith.

*Expression and Infinity*

If Nishida and Merleau-Ponty rightly identify a constitutive limit to motion and vision, one might expect that they would depict artists who acknowledge such limits by constraining the body's expressive practices. Quite to the contrary, however, both conceive of artistic activity as infinite. In a footnote from his *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness (Jikaku ni okeru chokkan to hansei)* (1917) Nishida quotes Conrad Fiedler, who writes that "there is an infinity which has nothing to do with

the realm of thought, and which reveals itself purely as an infinity of the visible world."[90] It is not the philosopher: "Only the artist and those who can follow him stand before this infinity."[91] "Artistic intuition," in Nishida's account, "must be an infinite activity."[92] Merleau-Ponty also conceives of artistic expression as engaging an infinite world. According to what he called an "infinite logos," he writes that "each brushstroke must satisfy an infinite number of conditions," and, quoting Emile Bernard, suggests that each of these strokes must "contain the air, the light, the object, the composition, the character, the outline, and the style. Expressing what exists is an endless task."[93]

How can a single brushstroke, which we commonly think of as only corresponding to a small portion of a painting, contain the whole? A painting would never begin if the artist had to grasp all of the features of a landscape or a face. Nevertheless, for Nishida, "each of the artist's exquisite brush strokes expresses the true meaning of the whole."[94] Compare this with Cézanne as captured in Merleau-Ponty's words:

> If the painter is to express the world, the arrangement of his colors must bear within this indivisible whole, or else his painting will only hint at things and will not give them in the imperious unity, the presence, the insurpassable plenitude which is for us the definition of the real.[95]

Infinite magnitudes cannot be calculated by the reflective intellect. The artist's motions would never be "rapid and precise enough if they had to be based upon an actual calculation of effects."[96] The infinite cannot be reckoned with through calculation, and therefore presents a constraint on the intellect. "It is not that faith is supported by knowledge and the will, but that knowledge and the will are supported by faith," writes Nishida in his earliest monograph, where he further explains that "If we exhaust our intellect and will, then we will acquire from within a faith we cannot lose."[97] When speaking of "independent, self-sufficient true reality," which he construes as infinite, Nishida urges us to see that we "must realize the true state of this reality with our entire being rather than reflect on it, analyze it, or express it in words."[98] Similarly, Merleau-Ponty affirms that "we will miss the relationship—which we shall here call the openness upon the world *(ourverture au monde)*—the moment that the reflective effort tries to capture it."[99]

Contemplating Matisse's practice, which was captured on film in slow motion, Merleau-Ponty writes that with a "simple gesture he resolved the problem which in retrospect seemed to imply an infinite number of data."[100] While the reflective intellect cannot perform such calculations, Merleau-Ponty believes that the body is able to engage with the infinite in its most "simple gestures." At this point we can see a further necessity of a motor-perceptual form of faith. The visible is infinite because it includes not only the countless positive elements, but because it is also comprised of the negative, invisible, and unseen. One must have faith in these aspects because reflecting on them unintentionally changes them from negative to positive, from the invisible to the visible, and therefore reflection "renders impossible that *openness upon being* which is the perceptual faith,"[101] writes Merleau-Ponty. There must be an orientation within the motor-perceptual fabric that risks expression while acknowl-

edging the negative constituents, the invisible, and the passive without converting them into the visible and active. Doing so is not simply to be continuous with an infinite *visible* world; there are likewise an incalculable set of volitional loci eliciting one's motions from within the field of experience. The artist cannot reflect on the entirety of the solicitations that move her body, because each movement is part of an infinite continuity of interconnected acts. Nonetheless, when one risks putting reflection aside, Nishida argues that "the act of pure visual perception naturally moves our body and develops into a kind of expressive movement. This is the creative act of the artist."[102] The artist is the exemplar for Nishida because it is he who finds a way for the world to move the body without completely relinquishing himself to passivity. By risking being moved as such, he claims, "the prospect of a world of infinite visual perception opens up."[103]

Attempting such expressive movements in response to the world's infinite demand, and acting without prioritizing intellectual reflection, or importing a prefabricated representation of how the movement of a brushstroke will manifest, is a risk that necessitates motor-perceptual faith. This type of expression is not possible when one attempts to act purely based on reflective control or one's independent volition. Appropriate expression is possible when one moves their body with a faith that allows for a silent negotiation with the world. The artist must have faith that her actions will arise from an intertwinement with an invisible worldly expressive agent. Quoting Paul Klee, Merleau-Ponty writes that this agent is a "distant will": "working its way along the hand's conductor, it reaches the canvas and invades it."[104] "There is no break at all in this circuit,"[105] writes Merleau-Ponty. Cézanne's is an exemplar of this kind of expressive practice because he has faith that allows Mont Sainte-Victoire to intertwine with his body such that his expression is a multi-stable attunement between making and being made, expressing and being expressed. While he doubts, Cézanne nevertheless has faith that infinite artistic gesture can arise through motor-perceptual negation with the intrinsically volitional world.

### *IV. Conclusion: Cézanne's Faith as "Interexpression"*

Nishida and Merleau-Ponty focus on spontaneity to explore the motor-perceptual risk of expressive activity. In *Art and Morality* Nishida writes that "when the artist is thoroughly immersed in the horizon of pure visual perception, he spontaneously moves the organs of his whole body and becomes one expressive movement. At this time . . . the artist himself cannot foretell the direction and meaning of his own expressive act."[106] To express oneself without this foreknowledge, Merleau-Ponty also believes, is to risk one's gestures and to have faith that in "lending his body to the world" the painter "changes the world into paintings."[107]

If movements could be entirely controlled by one's reflective intellect, then one could at least consider the possibility of being in full control of one's gestures, and could attempt to foretell how they would transpire. However, when artists allow their gestures to arise at the intertwinement of body and world, activity and passivity, the work is only made visible as it is enacted. In this mode of interexpression, Nishida

writes, "the artist himself does not know what his creation will be. In such an instance he sees through action."[108] Similarly for Merleau-Ponty, this form of expression requires faith insofar as one must risk entering the expressive movement without full bodily control and without a pre-made representation of the outcome. Because "conception cannot precede execution," Merleau-Ponty writes, "before expression, there is nothing but a vague fever, and only the work itself, completed and understood, will prove that there was *something* rather than nothing to be found there."[109]

To achieve continuity with the world—as is the goal of Nishida's form of faith as interexpression—strictly human-centered expression would be too impoverished and could not possibly perform the infinite calculus. Artworks such as Cézanne's are the result of an intertwining of body and world and thereupon make the world visible in the way only great works can. This is an infinite task not available to artists who believe that they work as expressive agents independent of the world. Conversely, making expressive movements in response to the world's infinite demand and acting without reflection, without importing a prefabricated representation of how gesture and brushstroke will manifest, is a risk because the body's motor-perceptual negation with the world, together with the blind spot, makes all movements exceed one's control. To lend one's body to the world to meet this infinite demand requires faith, at once motor and perceptual, where the artist becomes both an *expressor of the world* and the thing *expressed by that world.*

To be precise, Merleau-Ponty had not yet come to develop his concept of faith in the period when Cézanne was occupying his thinking and writing. Nevertheless, we can now read his interpretation of the artist's practice as prefiguring the concept of "perceptual faith" and in so doing extend the dialogue with Nishida by way of his concept of "interexpression." Merleau-Ponty focused closely on the intricacies of Cézanne's practice because his experiments not only disclosed the motor-perceptual body he wanted to bring to our attention, but also revealed a landscape implicating itself through the artist's motion and perception. Insofar as Cézanne's actions geared into those of the landscape, each of his gestures enacted a motor-perceptual form of faith. As such, his expression allowed for a transfer of the landscape's expressive motions into his gestures. While painting, Cézanne was thus *giving to* and *taking from* the landscape in a way similar to the interexpressive orientation of making while being made that Nishida highlights in his mature writings.

Merleau-Ponty explains how Cézanne would sit and meditate in intense concentration on the landscape for hours, not moving an inch, only looking. When his movements arose it was not that Cézanne had finally filled himself with enough accurate landscape representations that he could then properly mimic, but that he had achieved a motor-perceptual form of non-selfhood that allowed the landscape's motions available through its non-objecthood to manifest in his body through negation. As such, it is not only Cézanne that sees Mont Sainte-Victoire but "it is the mountain itself which from out there makes itself seen by the painter."[110] Within such ambiguities, the artist and his movements are seen in a drastically different light than according to a positivist understanding of expression. Cézanne exhibits how a particular kind of artistic expression cannot be conceived of as originating exclusively

in a self-identical active subject. The artist does not simply act while the mountain remains motionless. Both mountain and painter are *acts,* and expression is what Nishida calls a "unity of act and act." As he writes a decade later in *Fundamental Problems,* "Artistic intuition must be an infinite activity. . . . Things beckon and move us. Things become the self and vice versa."[111]

Expression is not exclusively a *human event*. When Cézanne achieves the proper motor-perceptual attunement with the world through a lively vision, that vision is no longer distinct from the action that paints the landscape. The light reaching the eyes includes a motor demand that invades the body, filling not just a perceptual negation but also a motor-perceptual negation. Expression arises as an attunement between body and world, paintbrush and landscape. Artistic movement is the unity of the acts of what Nishida calls the "historical body" (*rekishiteki shintai* 歴史的身体) and the acts of the "historical world" (*rekishiteki sekai* 歴史的世界). Cézanne is not free or in full control of his gestures. The artist cannot simply paint what he wants. As Merleau-Ponty writes, "Cézanne simply released that meaning: it was the objects and the faces themselves as he saw them that demanded to be painted, and Cézanne simply expressed what they *wanted* to say."[112] The artist is not the only expressive unit: she is the *expressor* but is equally the thing *being expressed.* For Merleau-Ponty this is so to the extent that it is "impossible to distinguish between who sees and who is seen, who paints and what is painted."[113] In Nishida's words, "the artist and his work become one inseparable act."[114] In a later essay "The Historical Body," he further elaborates:

> An art work combines both—the subjective activity and objective result. It is not that the artist just acts subjectively; rather, from the objective side, he is also acted upon by the thing. If one speaks of an opposition of subject and object, the artist acts out of his subjectivity and at the same time he is acted upon from the side of the object. The artwork is realized from a mutual interaction—or reciprocal transaction—of subjectivity and objectivity.[115]

Painting, as Cézanne practiced it, achieves a similar ambiguity between subjectivity and objectivity. The subjective desires of the artist are not the only thing motivating how a painting will turn out. "Motivating all the movements from which a picture gradually emerges," writes Merleau-Ponty, "there can be only one thing: the landscape in its totality and in its absolute fullness."[116] The world is therefore not a passive object for an active subject's artistic expression. Artists are not completely free to choose how the world will come to presence through their expressive gestures. They must risk engaging in an interexpressive relation where their work is co-authored with a much larger and invisible motor-perceptual agent. The world places demands on the painter's body and, Merleau-Ponty writes, "is capable of demanding *that* color and *that* object in preference to all others, and since it commands the arrangement of a painting just as imperiously as a syntax or a logic."[117] The world's demand is enacted through the aspect of the artist's body opened by way of motor-perceptual negation. Risking one's body to meet this demand through interexpression is an act of motor-perceptual faith.

Notes

1 – Nishida begins using this concept in his earliest published work, *Inquiry into the Good (Zen no kenkyū).* Similarly, the precursor to Merleau-Ponty's later notion of faith is found in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* trans. Colin Smith [New York: Routledge, 2002]). In that work he uses terms such as "trust," "belief in the world," and "primary/primordial belief," while also referring to the body's "preconscious possession of the world," and "primary comprehension," which prefigure the later concept of faith.

2 – Neither Nishida nor Merleau-Ponty uses the term "motor perception," yet both explore motion and perception as two aspects of a single ambiguous bodily phenomenon. In his early writings Merleau-Ponty uses the term "motor intentionality" when considering neurological pathologies of motion and perception, as interpreted through Gestalt psychology. In his *Phenomenology of Perception* he writes that "every perceptual habituality is still a motor habit" (p. 153). In his last work the ambiguity of motion and perception is developed as he explores the "chiasm" and "intertwining" of the visual and the tactile. Nishida employs various terms throughout his writings when referring to the ambiguity of motion and perception. In *An Inquiry into the Good,* his concept of "movement representations" (Kitarō Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good,* trans. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992], p. 24) and his later concept of "acting intuition" (*kōiteki chokkan* 行為的直観) suggest this ambiguity. Further aspects of motor perception are explored in Nishida Kitarō, *Art and Morality,* trans. David A. Dilworth and Valdo H. Viglielmo (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1973), p. 25, as "muscular perception," and in his *From the Acting to the Seeing (Hataraku mono kara miru mono e)* Nishida engages in an extended exploration of the "contradictory identity" of movement and perception when considered beyond the distinction between subject and object. As both philosophers move toward their later writings—Nishida developing his Logic of Place (*Basho no ronri* 場所の論理) and Merleau-Ponty his ontology of flesh *(chair)*—both expand beyond an ambiguity between the body's motion and perception and toward a further ambiguity between the body and a world also considered motor-perceptual.

3 – Nishida Kitarō, *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy: The World of Action and the Dialectical World,* trans. David A. Dilworth (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1970), p. 1.

4 – While Nishida uses this term mostly regarding time, Krummel and Nagatomo read it more broadly as a general ontological principle arrived at through self-negation. They write: "self-negation *(jiko hitei),* which [Nishida] also considers a "continuity of discontinuity" *(hirenzoku no renzoku).* We find that this dialectic [of self-negation] involves a *chiasma* of vertical and hori-

zontal interrelations manifest in various types of relations—such as individual-environment, person-person, subject-object, etc." (*Place and Dialectic: Two Essays by Nishida Kitarō,* trans. John W. M. Krummel and Shigenori Nagatomo [New York: Oxford University Press, 2012], p. 47).

5 – Several commentators, such as John W. M. Krummel (*Nishida Kitarō's Chiasmatic Chorology: Place of Dialectic, Dialectic of Place* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015]); Krummel and Nagatomo *(Place and Dialectic);* Nobuo Kazashi ("Bodily Logos: James, Merleau-Ponty, and Nishida," in Dorothea Olkowski and James Morley, eds., *Merleau-Ponty: Interiority and Exteriority, Psychic Life and the World* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999]); Bernard Stevens ("Self in Space: Nishida Philosophy and Phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty," in Jin Y. Park, and Gereon Kopf, eds., *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism* [Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009]); David Brubaker ("'Place of Nothingness' and the Dimension of Visibility: Nishida, Merleau-Ponty, and Huineng," in Park and Kopf, *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism*); and Gerald Cipriani ("Merleau-Ponty Cézanne, and the *Basho* of the Visible," in Park and Kopf, *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism*), have pointed out how many of Nishida's concepts are based on the same chiasmatic structure Merleau-Ponty employs, in that they instantiate various aspects of the ambiguity between identity and difference. Nishida does so regarding temporality with his concept "continuity of discontinuity" (*hirenzoku no renzoku* 非連続の連続), regarding the relation of the "historical body" (*rekishiteki shintai* 歴史的身体) to the "historical world" (*rekishiteki sekai* 歴史的世界), regarding logic with his "self-identity of absolute contradictories" (*zettai mujunteki jikodōitsu* 絶対矛盾的自己同一), regarding motor perception with his concept "acting-intuition" (*kōiteki chokkan* 行為的直観), and regarding expression with "interexpression" (*zettai ni aihan suru mono no sōgo kankei wa, hyōgenteki denakereba naranai* 絶対に相反するものの相互関係は、表現的でなければならない).

6 – Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes,* trans. Claude Lefort (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 52.

7 – For Merleau-Ponty the body's perceptual openness onto the world cannot be captured in a philosophy of full negativity or positivity. The body is neither at a "simple distance (n) or absolute proximity" to the world. Both of these alternatives rely on full "negation or identification," and Merleau-Ponty writes that "our relationship with Being is ignored in the same way in both cases" (*The Visible and the Invisible,* p. 127).

8 – Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* pp. 76–77.

9 – Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* p. 71.

10 – Nishida, *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy,* p. 47.

11 – See Krummel and Nagatomo (*Place and Dialectic*) and Krummel (*Nishida Kitarō's Chiasmatic Chorology).* There is a terminological difficulty with comparing Nishida on this point, because he uses the terms *zettai hitei* 絶対否定 and *zettai no hitei* 絶対の否定—both translated as "absolute negation"—which would seem to fall prey to Merleau-Ponty's critique of Sartre. Yet, as Gereon Kopf points out, Nishida's is an "idiosyncratic notion of *zettai*" ("Is Dialectical Philosophy Tenable? Revisiting Hegel, Nishida, and Takahashi," *International Journal for Field-Being* 3, no. 1 [2006]). Unlike Sartre's absolute negation, Nishida's *zettai hitei* is actually a mutual and partial negation. The Japanese word for "absolute," *zettai* 絶対, is composed of two characters, *zetsu* 絶 (to sever) and *tai* 対 (opposition). This type of negation has the notion of ambiguity built into its etymology insofar as negation is not pure but carries with it its own "severance."

12 – Nishida, *Place and Dialectic,* p. 51.

13 – Ibid.

14 – Ibid., p. 47.

15 – Translation based on Nishida, *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy,* p. 65, with minor.

16 – Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting,* ed. with introd. Galen A. Johnson, translation editor Michael B. Smith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), p. 144.

17 – Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* p. 59.

18 – Ibid., p. 53.

19 – Translation based on Nishida, *Art and Morality,* trans. Dilworth, p. 101, with minor revisions.

20 – The term Merleau-Ponty uses is *doublure,* which has the sense of a "doubling," where one material lines another, such as how wallpaper lines a wall, or silk lines the inside of a suit (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in Johnson and Smith, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader,* p. 147). He also uses *doublure* when speaking of ideas "lining" the sensible (*The Visible and the Invisible,* p. 149). In other sections, when speaking of how our flesh envelops visible and tangible things, what is translated into English as "lining" is *tapiss* in French (*The Visible and the Invisible,* pp. 123, 137).

21 – Nishida Kitarō, *Ishiki no mondai* (*The Problem of Consciousness*), in *Nishida Kitarō Zenshū,* 3rd ed. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1978–) (hereafter abbreviated *NKZ*), vol. 3, p. 212.

22 – Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* p. 59.

23 – Ibid.

24 – Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," p. 125.

25 – For an elaboration of this similarity in Nishida and Merleau-Ponty see Steve Odin, *The Social Self in Zen and American Pragmatism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 371.

26 – *NKZ* 8 : 328.

27 – Nishida, *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy,* p. 189.

28 – *NKZ* 3 : 214. Nishida approaches this issue of interiority and exteriority from the standpoint of what he believes to be an invalid distinction between "direct" and "indirect" consciousness, a distinction wrongly indexed to perception and memory, respectively. (To draw this contrast, in *Ishiki no Mondai* Nishida uses the term "Indirect for our consciousness" [感覚的意識に直接でない] and several instances of contrasting terms such as "direct experience" [直接経験] "direct perception" [直接的経験] and "direct consciousness" [直接に意識]). He is arguing against the belief that when perceptions are stored in memory they cease to be perceptual. Nishida vividly illustrates the perceptual reality of memory in his account of the fragrance of the rose: "It is not the case that one smells the fragrance and then the past memory of a rose occurs, but in the midst of the rose's fragrance one smells the past memory" (*NKZ* 3 : 383).

29 – Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," p. 138.

30 – Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* p. 80.

31 – Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," p. 134.

32 – Ibid., p. 130.

33 – Ibid.

34 – Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt," in Johnson and Smith, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader,* p. 67.

35 – Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," p. 129.

36 – Nishida, *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy,* p. 35.

37 – *NKZ* 3 : 255.

38 – Nishida, *Place and Dialectic,* p. 360.

39 – Lawlor, Leonard, *Early Twentieth-century Philosophy*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), p. 151.

40 – Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* p. 81.

41 – Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," p. 129.

42 – Brook Ziporyn, "How the Tree Sees Me: Sentience and Insentience in Tiantai and Merleau-Ponty," in Park and Kopf, *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism,* p. 80.

43 – Nishida, *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy,* p. 193.

44 – Nishida, *Art and Morality,* p. 206.

45 – Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," p. 124.

46 – Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good,* p. 24.

47 – Françoise Dastur, "World, Flesh, Vision," in *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh,* ed. Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 35.

48 – Nishida, *Art and Morality,* p. 36.

49 – Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," p. 147. Merleau-Ponty quotes this term of Paul Klee's from his diary entry # 1104 in Klee. *The Diaries of Paul Klee, 1898–1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 387.

50 – *NKZ* 3:24.

51 – Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," p. 147.

52 – *NKZ* 3:118.

53 – Nishida, *Art and Morality,* p. 37.

54 – Ibid., p. 26.

55 – Nishida, *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy,* p. 47.

56 – Nishida Kitarō, "World as Identity of Absolute Contradiction," in *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy: Selected Documents,* ed. David Dilworth and Valdo Viglielmo, with Agustin Jacinto Zavala (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), p. 58.

57 – Translation based on Nishida, *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy,* p. 179, with minor revisions.

58 – Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* p. 122.

59 – I use David Dilworth's translation of *hyōgenteki kankei* 表現的関係 (*NKZ* 10:347) as "Interexpression." This translation as well as a more literal, expanded translation ("the mutual relationship between absolutely opposed things must be expressive") would accord with the present article's overall proposition that expression is the encounter of mutually negating entities.

60 – Nishida Kitarō, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, trans. with intro. David A. Dilworth (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press), p. 103.

61 – Ibid., p. 37.

62 – As Heisig contends, this concept is the theological version of Nishida's more basic notion of "self-identity of absolute contradictories" as it applied to the relation between humans and God. It is also translated as "counter-correspondence" or "inverse-" or "reverse-correlation."

63 – Nishida Kitarō, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview,* trans. with introd. David A. Dilworth (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press), p. 111.

64 – Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good,* p. 79.

65 – Nishida, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview,* p. 35.

66 – Ibid., p. 103.

67 – Nishida Kitarō, *Ontology of Production: Three Essays,* trans. with introd. William Haver (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 144.

68 – Nishida Kitarō, "The World as Identity of Absolute Contradiction," in Dilworth, Viglielmo, and Zavala, *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy,* p. 41.

69 – Nishida, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview,* p. 39.

70 – Ibid., p. 39.

71 – Ibid.

72 – Translation based on Nishida, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview,* p. 104, with minor revisions.

73 – Ibid., p. 53.

74 – Ibid., p. 58.

75 – In his *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty distances himself from Leibniz' conception of subjectivity (p. 374), and later in that work elaborates this in terms of monads being tied to a uni-perspectival vantage point that does not allow the perceiving subject to change points of view (p. 407).

76 – Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* p. 222.

77 – Ibid., p. 223.

78 – Donald A. Landes, *Merleau-Ponty and the Paradoxes of Expression* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

79 – Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," in Johnson and Smith, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader,* p. 100. In the 1930s Nishida begins conceiving of the body-world relation underlying human activity and artistic expression as a relation between what he calls the "historical body" (*rekishiteki shintai* 歴史的身体) and the "historical world" (*rekishiteki sekai* 歴史的世界). Expressive activity is not the "making" of an active artist over against a static "made" material world but is a dynamic and temporal "making-made" interaction between an expressive body and an expressive world. This world is not, however, a transcendent realm fully determining the individual. As what Nishida calls a "dialectical universal" comes into play, it both conditions and is conditioned by human activity, and develops "from the created to the creating." As James Heisig writes, the relationship between the historical body and historical world "works in two directions. . . . [T]he body

gives concreteness to historical life, and . . . the historical world gives the body an arena in which to work" (James W. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School* [Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001], p. 69).

80 – Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* p. 6.

81 – Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 89.

82 – Richard Kearney, "Merleau-Ponty and the Sacramentality of the Flesh," in Kascha Semonovitch and Neal DeRoo, eds., *Merleau-Ponty at the Limits of Art, Religion, and Perception* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 153.

83 – Ibid., p. 102.

84 – Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good,* p. 157.

85 – Nishida, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview,* p. 85.

86 – Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense,* trans. with an introd. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 179; emphasis added.

87 – Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* p. 33.

88 – Ibid., p. 225.

89 – Ibid., p. 248.

90 – Nishida Kitarō, *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Consciousness,* trans. Valdo Viglielmo with Takeuchi Yoshinori and Joseph S. O'Leary (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 186.

91 – Ibid.

92 – Nishida, *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy,* p. 179.

93 – Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt," p. 65.

94 – Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good,* p. 33.

95 – Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt," p. 65.

96 – Merleau-Ponty, "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," p. 103.

97 – Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good,* p. 157.

98 – Ibid., p. 51.

99 – Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* pp. 35–36.

100 – Merleau-Ponty, "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," p. 83.

101 – Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* p. 88.

102 – Nishida, *Art and Morality,* p. 24.

103 – Ibid.

104 – Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” p. 147.

105 – Ibid.

106 – Nishida, *Art and Morality,* pp. 48–49.

107 – Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” p. 123.

108 – Nishida, *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy,* p. 69.

109 – Merleau-Ponty, “Cézanne’s Doubt,” p. 69.

110 – Ibid., p. 128.

111 – Nishida, *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy,* p. 179.

112 – Merleau-Ponty, “Cézanne’s Doubt,” p. 71.

113 – Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” p. 129.

114 – Nishida, *Art and Morality,* p. 26.

115 – Nishida Kitarō, “The Historical Body,” in Dilworth, Viglielmo, and Zavala, *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy,* p. 40.

116 – Merleau-Ponty, “Cézanne’s Doubt,” p. 67.

117 – Merleau-Ponty, “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,” p. 92.