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Watsuji's Idea of the Self and the Problem of Spatial Distance in Environmental Ethics

Watsuji proposes a conception of the self as embodied and dynamic in constant cyclic relationship with the historical milieu. I argue that the concept of a relational individual can provide some solutions to the problem in environmental ethics of the spatial distance between an agent and the consequences of her actions. Indeed, by becoming aware of the interdependent relation between the self and the local shared milieu, one develops and recognizes feelings of care and belonging, which promote more environmentally sensitive lifestyles. Furthermore, this care and awareness of interdependence can be expanded to a global level, including distant human beings and natural environments. Ethics thus emerges from the constant dynamic relation between the relational individual and the historical milieu.

KEYWORDS: Watsuji Tetsurō—environmental ethics—sustainability—self—relational self—milieu—Japanese philosophy—historicity—spatial distance—Augustin Berque

Reflecting on environmental dilemmas, one is confronted with three main obstacles. First, one may feel distraught by the inherent complexity of the fundamental uncertainty of both the givens and the probable consequences of one's course of action (e.g., the highly complex and probabilistic climate system). Even when one is convinced of the necessity of changing behavior to tackle a specific environmental issue—for example palm-oil plantation induced deforestation—it is often hard to figure out which concrete actions are best for addressing it. For a Canadian resident consumer of palm-oil based product, the spatial distance separating her[1] from the consequences of palm-oil plantations in Indonesia makes it difficult to assess the consequences of the various possible courses of action and this contributes to uncertainty.

This paper does not address the problem of uncertainty directly but deals with the closely related problem of spatial distance, which refers both to the lack of direct communication and dialogue between the agent and the possible human and natural victims,[2] and to the absence of direct access to the consequences of one's actions (exportation of social and environmental costs). For instance, the consequences of my emissions of CO_2 might affect people severely in ecosystems on the other side of the planet.

These two problems are related to yet a third issue concerning temporal distance (e.g., most of the victims of nuclear waste disposition and depletion of natural resources belong to future generations), which, although I will not deal with it in this paper, also plays an important role in weakening the emergence of empathy and dialogue between the agent and those people and environments suffering as a result of her actions.

1. In this paper, I use the feminine as gender neutral.
2. BECK 1982.

In this paper, I argue that my interpretation of Watsuji's conception of the self and of the environment as *fūdo* or historical milieu can provide some solutions to the problem of spatial distance. I draw on Watsuji's ideas to situate environmental thinking as essentially a dynamic relation between the self and the milieu. Individual environmental ethical decision-making (and thus any ethics of sustainability) undoubtedly depends on our conception of the self for two reasons. On one hand, the interpretation of the self as *homo oeconomicus* is one of the root causes of the current global environmental crisis insofar as it encourages individuals to adopt unsustainable behavior. On the other hand, individuals—selves—are at the center of environmental decision-making and thus also at the core of any sustainable change of behavior. If we understand better what the self is, we might be able to create a self behaving sustainably and happily. Furthermore, in changing the conception of the self, our conception of the environment will also change. I argue here that the concept of historical milieu provides us with such an alternative. After presenting Watsuji's notions of self and historical milieu, I will show how my interpretation of those ideas can provide a solution to the problem of spatial distance in environmental ethics.

Watsuji's conception of the self

Before the rise of today's global environmental crisis, the Japanese phenomenologist Watsuji Tetsurō wrote two main works that lead scholars to refer to him as a pioneer of Japanese environmental ethics: *Ethics* and *Fūdo*.[3] The core of his ethics is a conception of human beings as intrinsically related to others and to the historical milieu (歴史的風土). For Watsuji, the self is embodied, relational, ever-changing, and always situated in a milieu.

The self as embodied and relational

Watsuji was undoubtedly inspired by his Buddhist cultural background in his rejection of the mind-body dualism. Indeed, long before the development of enactivism in contemporary cognitive sciences or even prior to Merleau-Ponty's works on the body, Zen Buddhist teachings had insisted

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3. See WATSUJI 1934, 1935.

on a non-dualist perspective of "bodymind" (身心).[4] From this perspective, the body is not seen as an obstacle to knowledge, but as a "vehicle" to access the truth. The notion of *ki* (気), sometimes translated as "energy," lies at the basis of Chinese medicine and reflects this understanding of bodymind. *Ki* is not experienced merely intellectually or physically. It is an energy of life (or breath) flowing between bodyminds and everything in the world, without bodies (the skin, brain, etc.) or things (stones, plants, etc.) obstructing its movements.[5] The self is thus permeated by influences from other selves, the environment, and the emotions.

Because the concept of bodymind as described by Eastern traditions rejects mind-body dualism, considerations of the self are held to be relational. This is especially the case for Watsuji:

> The essential independence of an individual disappears when considered from either side of body or mind. It is obvious that I do not mean by this that an individual actually ceases to exist. What I mean to say is that if we try to grasp an individual in our ordinary life as truly individualistic, it comes to nought. As a result, even though our betweenness-oriented being subsists between one individual and another, we cannot posit this individual as an individualistic being whose existence precedes the already existing betweenness.[6]

In Japanese, two Chinese characters—"the space between" (間) and "individuals" (人)—combine to generate a word meaning "human being" (*ningen* 人間). The relation (*aidagara* 間柄, henceforth "betweenness") between individuals is thus *by definition* embedded in what it is to be human. This marks a radical difference from mainstream ideas of the human being as an independent and self-interested *homo oeconomicus*. According to Watsuji, "human" in Japanese refers to "being inside the world" (世の中), not only in the sense taking one's place in the social web of relationships, but also in the sense of belong to the environment as such. Furthermore, the Japanese

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4. See Shaner 1985.
5. See Yuasa 1993.
6. Watsuji 1996, 83. 身心のいずれの側から考察しても個人の本質的独立性は消滅してしまう。もちろん我々はそれによって個人が存在しないなどと言うのではない。ただ我々が日常存在において個人と考えているものを真に個別的なるものとして把握しようとすればそれが空無に帰してしまうというのである。従って我々の間柄的存在は、個人と個人との間に存するにもかかわらず、その個人を間柄に先立つ個別者として立てることができない。(WTZ 1: 127).

word corresponding to "ethics" is *rinri* (倫理), the first Chinese character referring to company (or humane relationships), the second to the idea of order or rules.

Watsuji establishes this betweenness as the place from which ethics emerges "naturally." He notes that we can have neither individuals before the relation nor the relation before individuals. According to Watsuji, neither takes "precedence."[7] This applies to all expressions of betweenness such as words, facial expressions, ways of living, customs, and ethics: they do not exist prior to the individual, but neither can the individual exist prior to these "moments" that constitute betweenness—that is, the "practical interconnection of acts" (WTZ 1: 35). In sum, there is a "contradictory relationship" expressed in the relational movement of individual and betweenness (WTZ 1: 58). He gives the example of the mirror to demonstrate this contradiction:

> The subject is not something static like a mirror, whose only business is to contemplate objects, but includes within itself the connections between oneself and the other. And these connections operate subjectively and practically, prior to contemplation. (WTZ 1:31)

For Watsuji, agency is an essential aspect of what it is to be human and this agency appears only in the betweenness, that is, in the relation of the "individual" with the "other." Thus, ethics emerges from questions raised from this "practical interconnection of acts" that constitutes the individual.[8]

Let us have a closer look at the cyclic movements between the world and the self, which constitute betweenness and, thus, constructs the individual. The first movement is the dissolution of the self into the other, into the community of humans, and into the milieu itself (see FIGURE 1). This collapse of difference between the individual and the other leads to the negation of the self. The second movement is the negation of this negation; namely, negating the social to return to the self. As Watsuji writes: "the negative structure of a betweenness-oriented being is clarified in terms of the self-returning movement of absolute negativity through its own negation" (WTZ 1: 117). Thus Watsuji's notion of the self is not fixed but rich and dynamic. Instead of being a nihilist, as some critics suggest, it is more accurate to read him

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7. WTZ 1: 102. See also McCARTHY 2010, 59.
8. See SHIELDS 2009.

in the light of the Mahayana Buddhist notion of emptiness (McCarthy 2010, 15).

Emptiness presents two crucial aspects. First, if we apply a Mahayana Buddhist reading to Watsuji's work, "betweenness" can be interpreted as emptiness itself.[9] Indeed, emptiness exists in the betweenness, where the dualisms of self-other and subject-object are overcome. Emptiness is simply the condition of the interrelation and interdependence between two individuals. Second, emptiness is also the ground from which the self, the other, and their relation emerge in dependent co-origination. As we saw previously, none of these is to be given priority over the others. At the same time, emptiness or betweenness is the place where the self and the other meet as well as the ground of all distinctions. This place of encounter and difference echoes Nishida Kitarō's theory of *bashō* in the sense that they can be seen to form a discontinuous continuity that unites and sublimates differences in a "self-identity of contradictories."[10]

The self as ever-changing

As with the example of the mirror, the self is never static but always *living*—a never completed work-in-progress. As such, its relational connections with the world and others are intrinsic parts of it (McCarthy 2010, 79). Human beings exist only as long as this cyclical process of becoming continues. If this process of interaction where betweenness and selves are constituted is interrupted, no self can exist. Watsuji refers to this dynamic cycle of negation as the fundamental structure of our existence as ethical human beings.

However, if the self is ever-changing, adapting, and dynamic in dialogue with others, these interactions also constantly challenge a "stabilized" notion of self-identity. The fundamental tension within each individual is part of any encounter with alterity, which always involves risk and trust. Let us first develop this uncomfortable aspect of risk.

To truly meet an other, one needs to go out of one's own comfort zone to reach what lies "outside" of the "known" self. This is the first movement of negation of the individual in Watsuji's system (McCarthy 2010, 83). Of

9. See LaFleur 1978.
10. There is no space to enter into a discussion of this notion of Nishida's here.

course, the results of this encounter may threaten the temporally stabilized self. Throughout its existence (*sonzai* 存在), the self is threatened by the possibility of loss. As Graham Mayeda observes:

> This loss occurs through the objectification of the self, the process of the self becoming an object, for instance through bodily existence, spiritual existence, or language.... Yet, through objectification, the self is also constantly in danger—its bodily form, its life, and the things it says and records can be lost at any time, and so the existence of the self is constantly threatened. (MAYEDA 2006, 87)

Watsuji explains *sonzai* as "subjective self-subsistence." The self is thus constantly engaged in the interplay between loss and subsistence that takes place in the "empty" space of betweenness. This corresponds to what Hermans calls the "identity costs" generated by the encounter with the other due to the character of being intrinsically uncertain of the self (2011, 674). Hermans concludes that a certain tolerance for uncertainty is needed to embrace fully this dynamic and flexible self.

The second aspect of any encounter with alterity is trust. Watsuji claims that the entire structure of human existence depends on communal trust. For example, when one arranges to meet a friend, one trusts that the friend will arrive at the appropriate place and time. Most people living in urban developed areas today buy their food in supermarkets. They need to trust that others (e.g., chains of food production) will provide them with healthy, non-toxic products that will fulfil their basic need for subsistence. Indeed, trust is present everywhere in the interconnected acts of individuals. As Robert Carter writes, our "radical interconnectedness is possible only because true individuals have created a network in the betweenness between them."[11] This network of relations of trust between human beings and between human beings and their environment is the fundamental structure of the existence of individual human beings at both the physical level, where one depends on food and shelter, and at the "psychological" level, which depends on reliable communication through common language and on the exchange of emotional support with others. Betweenness is also the "locus

11. Robert Carter, "Introduction" to WATSUJI 1996, 350.

of meaning creation" in the process of mutual interaction between people and their environment (Mayeda 2006, 94–7).

Criticisms: difference and reciprocity

To adapt Watsuji's conception of the self to a contemporary model of environmental ethics, a number of criticisms need to be addressed. Some of them have been highlighted by advocates of the ethics of care.[12] Two families of criticisms can be distinguished here. The first sheds light on the importance of acknowledging and embracing the difference of the other. The second emphasizes the importance of the reciprocity of the relation to avoid abuse.[13]

Perhaps the most common objection to Watsuji's work is his endorsement of collectivism. Indeed, his concept of the human might be read as undermining difference. As Maraldo writes:

> Watsuji writes "self-other" as a single word (*jita*) that stands on one side of a negative equation whose second side (or negation) is a totality or greater whole. An individual's other half is not really another individual but the world (*seken*) that makes one a human being (Maraldo 2002, 84).

The self would then be "dissolved" into this greater unity or totality, erasing differences. Mayeda argues that the importance given to the fusion of the individual into the group prevents Watsuji from maintaining difference in an ethically satisfactory way (2006, 59).

This interpretation is problematic from an ethical perspective. I prefer to follow McCarthy's interpretation, which circumvents the criticism. Inspired by the "ethics of care," she understands betweenness as "a space from which individuals both emerge and return to, transformed in some way by losing self in that between but not necessarily subsuming the other or being subsumed by the other in the process." Accordingly, betweenness becomes "a space that allows for creative, generative tension or interplay—a place of true communion with the other in a mutual non-hierarchical manner" (2010, 89). Because the cycle of double negation is unceasing, the possibil-

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12. See for example Curtin 1992, Kroeger-Mappes 1994, and Skoe 1994.
13. See Molinier 2004.

ity of the self being lost in the totality or subsuming some specific other is averted.[14]

This latter point relates specifically to the *indistinguishability account* given by Val Plumwood in her criticism of "deep ecology." She acknowledges that deep ecology rightfully dismisses the misguided dualistic view that separates the human from nature but rejects its answer of dissolving all differences into "a metaphysics that insists that everything is really part of an indistinguishable from everything else."[15] In doing so, deep ecology falls into a kind of atomism that ignores the differences that are, in fact, a fundamental part of everyday life. This process of unification leads to ignorance of particular needs, which can hinder personal development. Without acknowledging these differences, in a non-reciprocal hierarchical relationship the dominator will simply assume that the dominated has needs like her own, or—in the worst case—that she is free to define those needs for the dominated. As the feminist philosopher Jean Grimshaw notes, care and understanding "require the sort of distance that is needed in order not to see the other as a projection of self, or self as a continuation of the other."[16]

This superiority given to the group leads Watsuji to advocate distinct hierarchical roles imposed by society. Individuals are supposed to flourish by surrendering to them. From the perspective of the Confucian tradition of thought, this is unsurprising. Indeed, in the opening pages of his *Ethics*, Watsuji refers explicitly to the five types of Confucian relations; father-child, lord-vassal, husband-wife, old-young, and friend-friend (WTZ 1: 11). The first three are strictly hierarchical. Obviously, this is unacceptable from a feminist perspective, or even, I might add, from an intercultural or global perspective where different systems of norms have to interact. Care without reciprocity easily leads to exploitation, which is why McCarthy insists on the reciprocity of the relation which emerges from betweenness (2010, 61). For example, if the relationship is hierarchical or unbalanced, "care" can become a smokescreen for relationships of oppression, domination, and abuse. This becomes even more important in our understanding of the relational self, in that the relation partly defines the identity of the individual.

14. See GONON 2000.
15. See PLUMWOOD 1991.
16. See GRIMSHAW 1986.

Thus, a strictly hierarchical relation naturalizes domination and inferioriza-tion, which become an essential part of the abused self (Plumwood 1993). In short, to avoid this slippery slope,

> respect for the other results neither from the containment of self nor from a transcendence of self, but in an expression of self in relationship, not egoistic self as merged with the other but self as embedded in a network of essential relationships with distinct others. (Plumwood 1991, 20)

Watsuji's conception of the historical milieu

We have described the self as embodied, relational, and ever-changing. Watsuji's idea of betweenness supports this relationality of the self. I have added the key role of difference and reciprocity in the relation. How can we then reinterpret the environment from the perspective of this relational self without falling into a dualistic logic that leads to a destructive domination of nature? The concept of milieu seems promising here. *Milieu* is a French word referring to a notion developed by several scholars of the École Française de Géographie. Interestingly, this notion resounds in Watsuji's concept of *fūdo*. The French geographer and philosopher Augustin Berque has sought to bridge these two cultural traditions in his work on "medial ethics" (Berque 1996). In what follows, I will explore, along with Berque and Watsuji, the concept of *milieu* as a counterpart to a relational being, much the way that "environment" was seen to be a counterpart to the independent conception of the self.

Watsuji's notion of *fūdo* was inspired by three main sources, namely his travels across Eurasia, his readings of phenomenologists, and the development of the Kyoto School. Through this notion, he intends to explore Japanese conceptions of human beings, ethics, and the environment. He defines *fūdo* as follow on the opening page of his book of the same title:

> The purpose of this book is to clarify the function of *médiance* as the struc-tural moment of human existence. The question here is not about the natural environment determining human life. What we usually think as the natural environment is a thing that has been taken out of its concrete ground, the human mediance, to be objectified. When we think of the relation between this thing and human life, the relation itself is already objectified. This posi-tion thus leads to examine the relation between two objects; it does not con-

cern human existence in its subjectivity. On the contrary, this subjectivity is what matters in our opinion. Even if medial phenomenon is here constantly questioned, it is as expressions of human existence in its subjectivity, not as the natural environment.[17]

A common objection to Watsuji's theory of *fūdo* is that it implies a natural determinism. Reading chapters two and three of the book, it is not hard to see how the criticism could arise. Nevertheless, the first chapter and Preface present a different viewpoint on which I will base my remarks. I translate *fūdo* as "milieu" and adopt the family of words developed by Berque around that notion (2011). As we will see, the translation of *fūdo* as "climate" is inadequate and misleading, especially in the context of environmental ethics. In the first chapter of *Fūdo*, Watsuji seems to embrace the paradigm of possibilism to avoid falling into determinist fallacies. According to possibilism, the environment imposes some constraints, but a culture is otherwise determined by social conditions.

Setting aside the objection of natural determinism, let us turn to what Watsuji means by the terms *milieu* (風土), mediance (風土性), and the medial (風土的).

The milieu refers to the Earth as lived by human beings, and human beings as living on the Earth. It can be understood as an echo of the Greek *physis* (φύσις). Mediance, also translated as intermediation, is then the semantic interpretation of the milieu; the subjective hermeneutic relationship to space-time.[18] Berque uses the example of the pencil to illustrate milieu. The pencil is part of a first set of symbolic systems: writing, words,

17. For all references to *Fūdo*, I use my own translation because I find English translations of *Fūdo* unconvincing (they translate the key word *fūdo* as "climate"). For a discussion of this problem of translation, see Augustin Berque's preface of the French translation of *Fūdo* (WATSUJI 2011). I also use Berque's translation of *fūdosei* as "mediance," from the word "milieu."

Here is the original Japanese text (WATSUJI 2004, 1): この書の目ざすところは人間存在の構造契機としての風土を明らかにすることである。だからここでは自然環境がいかに人間生活を規定するかということが問題なのではない。通例自然環境と考えられているものは、人間の風土性を具体的地盤として、そこから対象的に解族され来ったものである。かかるものと人間生活との関係を考えるという時には、人間生そのものもすでに対象化せられている。従ってそれは対象と対象との間の関係を考察する立場であって、主体的な人間存在にかかわる立場ではない。我々の問題は後者に存する。たといここで風土的形象が絶えずもんだいとせられているとしても、それは主体的な人間存在の表現としてであって、いわゆる自然環境としてではない。

18. See HESS 2013.

and languages, which are indicative of human relationships and the cultural imaginary. It is also part of a second technical system: trees produce wood, machines process the wood, paper mills produce the paper, and so forth. Here the milieu is construed merely as the usage and representation of the environment (Berque 2000, 92). The existence of the pencil is thus intrinsically relational.

The same reasoning can be applied to human individuals. In the first chapter of *Fūdo*, Watsuji develops his account of milieu and mediance through the example of coldness. If coldness were a physical object, then it would either exist by itself, exist inside ourselves, or exist within the relation—that is, within the betweenness (Watsuji 2004, 13; Berque 2000, 156.). The first two options are easily ruled out; coldness is neither objectively distinct and separate from us nor exists independently from the environment. We feel the cold when we "go out." Thus, coldness is experienced in consciousness (from the point of observation) as an intentional experience (志向的 体験), but also with others through words, salutations, social activities, etc. Culture is built around our relations with the environment; people build houses, sew clothes, and cook warm meals to protect themselves from the cold. Arisaka summarizes the point well:

> Thus "being cold" does not simply indicate an internal feeling but rather the self is already "out in the world," related to a host of actions and nexus of cultural and civilizational practices. In short, our history cannot be conceived without its groundedness in place, and our existence cannot be separated from our concrete embodiment in place. (Arisaka 2015, 1)

Facing similar environmental constraints, different individuals and different cultures develop different solutions. Watsuji refers to these environmental constraints as "medial charges" (風土的負荷). He makes it clear that human existence entails both medial charge and freedom (2004, 26). Thus, the relation between the environment and human activity is one of dependence and not of determination.

Freedom appears in historicity and this historicity, in turn, can be seen at the social level of culture and at the individual level of the "moment of existence." At the individual level, Watsuji defines "mediance" in the first line of the passage quoted above as the "structural moment of human existence." Human beings exist both spatially and temporally through the milieu. An

individual is always situated bodily in a specific place, in the middle of a specific "milieu"—an environment covered by significations and symbols, co-determined both by the "medial charge" of the natural environment and the historical movements of the culture. Here time and space are also intrinsically coupled, insofar as a specific milieu is always part, product, and ground of a specific history. Individuals move and act within this co-determined web of signification and symbols spanning around them spatially and historically. The milieu is always lived by a subjective relational individual who acts on it and is influenced by it through the basic perception-action coupling.

Watsuji goes even further. As we saw in our discussion of his *Ethics*, the human being is a "being with," both individual and social, in which the relation is an intrinsic part of herself (COUTEAU 2010, 4). Ethics emerges from this betweenness as the realization of the self. Self-realization entails a dynamic and essential coupling of the individual and her social and natural environments. Consequently, the phenomenon of the milieu is defined as "the way human being discovers its own self" (WATSUJI, 2004, 48). Seen from another standpoint, if human existence is grounded in the interconnection of acts, it always takes place spatially and temporally, in other words, in a milieu (MAYEDA 2006, 86–7).

Mediance and historicity compose the two inseparable axes of human existence. The individual realizes herself by acting on her milieu (as an environmental, social and historical web of relationships); she is always embodied and situated spatially and temporally in that both past and the future are deployed in the structural moment of human existence, namely, in the interconnection of acts. The historical milieu also accounts for the way in which the individual agent is objectified, in which the individual agent's existence reaches beyond her spatio-temporal point of observation to embrace distant places and distant futures.

Hence, the individual not only carries a general past, but also a "medial past" (風土的過去). Far from being simply the world of nature external to human beings, the milieu is engraved into the very mental structures of a culture (BERQUE 2011, 324). The cultural imaginary has been built up by human intersubjectivity through the course of history and appears in habits and norms, as well as in architecture, clothing, and the arts. It is obviously shared by a community of living individuals and carries the weight of the influences of past human beings. The individual herself experiences the

milieu through this communal veil of mediance and historicity. In short, even if individual experience remains subjective, it is colored by mediance and historicity. The specific past of the web of memories carried by the self is unique and personal, but the memories themselves and the way in which they are remembered is influenced by the cultural imaginary in which the self is immersed. The same holds true for the future, which is decided intrinsically by individual agents but reflects cultural expectations reinterpreted and brought to life by individual actions.

<div align="center">Ethical relationship with the historical milieu</div>

In the context of our current global environmental crisis, this conception of a relational individual in relation to a historical milieu seems fertile ground for talk of sustainability. It connects the individual agent with (1) her specific social and environmental milieu, (2) the distant environment, and (3) future generations of human beings.[19] It would of course be anachronistic to expect Watsuji to address contemporary global environmental problems, and I do not mean to suggest that the line of argument that follows can be found in Watsuji's work or read into it. On the contrary, I suggest that an extension of these concepts can provide us with tools to interpret certain problems in contemporary environmental ethics.

Specific historical milieu

How is the relational individual connected to her specific historical milieu? In response, Berque introduces the concept of "trajection": the "existential pulse" between the self and the world, which is why the world matters to us (2000, 129). The mediance and the individual self are neither objective, nor completely subjective; they are *trajective* (1996, 83, and 107). Reality itself is trajective as a place of practices and actions. The concept of trajection has been widely developed in the field of human geography. Identity is produced by trajection through two processes: identification and differentiation. Spatial identity is understood as the feeling of belonging that an individual develops towards a specific space and can be defined as "the relation of identification of individuals to the space they live in (Rennes and

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19. This matter merits more attention than I can give it here.

RAMADIER 2011, 29)." This relation between the relational individual and the shared historical milieu is always mediated by a social dimension, the betweenness (see FIGURE 2).

An individual building her identity in a specific geographical setting is willing to join its social norms, historical past, and communitarian organization. This identification emerges on a variety of different scales: the house, the village, the region, the state, or even the planet Earth. Spatial identity can also be based on elements in the visible landscape such as Mount Fuji or a tree in front of a primary school. In other words, there is a strong link between emotional attachment to a place and identification. In this sense, a specific place can become an "extension of the self," created by repeated interactions through time between individual and place. The place then gets a specific value distinct from its utilitarian value[20]: the individual creates a "personal space" which she valorizes and protects.

In Watsuji's terminology, trajection refers to the cycle of negation and negation of the negation. Each aspect of the self described previously—the bodymind, the betweenness, and the aspect of becoming—corresponds to a specific way in which the relational individual is related to and cares for her specific social and environmental milieu. First, in relation to the milieu, the bodymind is indivisible as a point of observation and the perception-action coupling. Second, the key idea of betweenness appears in the relation between the self and its milieu as the place of emergence of the mediance and, thus, as the interval making trajection possible. Third, the embodied self is also a construal in the sense that it co-creates its mediance and its own identity through the process of trajection. Indeed, when discussing the milieu, our starting point is the embodied free and creative agent gifted with intelligence. To develop her identity, the individual relies heavily on the common cultural imaginary and on forms of self-representation and worldviews that are medially and historically determined (BERQUE 2011, 293). Finally, this individual is constantly "becoming by acting" in caring for

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20. From the perspective of this conception of relational individual imbricated in webs of relationships with her milieu, the dichotomy of intrinsic and instrumental value is begins to lose its relevance. Indeed, as neither the self nor the milieu exists "by itself," it seems difficult to assign either of them a value "in itself" (intrinsically). This discussion falls beyond the scope of this essay but could well be a subject of further research.

the other. Gonon refers to this care as "connective necessity" (2000, 64). Each action is trajective and composed of two moments, externally creating signification and internally reflecting the relation, which is, at the same time, passive (influenced) and active (free), since we exist through this trajection (Berque 2000, 94). Moreover, now more than ever, people are mobile and move a lot spatially. Individuals not only identify themsleves to one specific place but to several places on different scales (one's city of employment, home town, jogging woods, vacation beach, etc.). In short, spatial identity is not permanent but subject to change, especially to changes in practices of the space.

The two crucial aspects of the relational individual, difference and reciprocity, deserve attention. To emphasize our difference from the environment might seem unnecessary, and we have already discussed the risk deep ecology runs of forgetting it with its indistinguishability account. In human geography, differentiation is also considered a key process in establishing spatial identity by constructing an image of a place as the opposed to a place of belonging (Debardieux and Vanier 2002, 36–8). The process of differentiation constructs an image of the other in order to justify the representation of the self and to nourish an image of the self corresponding to a specific social position or lifestyle. In the case of a social other, this differentiation is often, but not always, reciprocal in the sense that I become the other of the other. It is easy to see how this process of differentiation can have disastrous consequences if it leads to neglect of interdependence and similarities.

Differentiation would not even be possible if the two opposing sides were not comparable, if they did not share a fundamental sameness. In the medial context, reciprocity can be understood as a recognition of the interdependence and the sameness at the ground of the difference. Reciprocity is necessary to avoid the danger of the exclusion of the other that only grows with the physical and mental distances reflected in concrete practices. For example, it is easy for one to enjoy living in a city by avoiding poorer or more polluted locales. Maintaining a distance with the other is also avoiding the "threat" of the encounter, which in turn can lead to redefine one's self and one's image of the other. In practice, reciprocity involves approaching the other, or in the milieu, stimulating and encouraging encounter and mutual understanding. While any interaction with an other involves uncertainty,

every encounter also contributes to reducing this uncertainty. This brings us back to Hermans's point that the realization of the self implies a certain tolerance for uncertainty (2011).

Shared milieu

Any community of human beings inhabits a specific milieu, sharing a local environment at the same time. This milieu is a locus of shared inter-subjectivity, as it is a place where people meet each other and through which people project representations, significations, and symbols through a common imaginary. Specific memories of life experiences and feelings of belonging are, of course, personal. But since one experiences the world through the veil of a specific cultural imaginary, one's spatial identity is not exclusively personal but is also mediated by the group. Places and landscape items are given meaning mainly through tales and stories told by the group living in that space. From this perspective, in its social dimension the milieu assumes the role of "betweenness" as a space of interface between self and others, making possible dynamic cycles of identification and differentiation as well as the construction of one's own self.

Imagine a relational individual named Akiko living in the Japanese countryside. Over the years she has worked as a farmer in her local village and developed a strong sense of belonging to it and has a particular emotional attachment to the river that runs through it. Akiko knows her local environment well. She is aware of what can harm it and often comes up with alternative ways to protect it while maintaining her own lifestyle. Her neighbor Bunta works in the city and, although he may know less about the seasonal changes of nature, he is aware of the politico-economic challenges that face the village from outside investors and politicians. Akiko and Bunta are not close friends, but they exchange greetings when they meet and use the same words to refer to the river and to the mountains. Thus, even if their experiences of the milieu are subjective, they also share it as a place of encounter and of inter-subjectivity, just as they share common sense of belonging to it. Through their conversations and actions, Akiko and Bunta adopt lifestyles based on mutual respect and a shared desire to keep their local milieu healthy and meaningful. This web of relationships and interactions between relational individuals and between relational individuals and their milieu is constantly creating and changing the common imaginary linked to a specific

milieu. Proximity can soften some of the uncertainty as local relational individuals learn to live with, "listen" to, and respect their local environments.

Yet, one might raise the objection that people living in highly urbanized areas no longer have contact with the environment and, therefore, no longer care for it or know about it. For example, people living in a present-day Japanese megalopolis who spend their life in isolated and standardized boxes—walled rooms, subways, and the like—may not have any immediate contact with the natural environment. Nonetheless, even those with highly urbanized lifestyles are still in contact with elements of the natural environment like air and rain. They, too, suffer directly from acid rain and air pollution. As a consequence, they will at least care for the quality of the air they breathe and the water they drink, which are matters of basic survival. In this sense, as the argument that lack of direct contact softens the problem of knowledge loses, urbanized relational individuals can still be expected to stand up for things in their immediate milieu like air, water, and parks.

Sustainable, ethical behavior can thus be said to emerge spontaneously from the interdependency between the relational individual and her own milieu, which is both created by and supports her daily practices.[21] As the self is dynamic, it is also more adaptable to change in its social and natural environments and enhances its chances of survival (FIGURE 2). There is nothing surprising here, as shown by the numerous local movements against pollution formed within communities to protect their immediate milieu. In a word, climate change and exportation of pollution present us with another level of ethical lifestyle, feeling of belonging, and care for the global milieu.

21. To avoid misunderstanding, I want to insist that the relation as such is not always ethical. As discussed above (pages 50–2), a relation can be abusive and fundamentally unethical (which is exactly what is occurring today with the overexploitation of resources and the destruction of biodiversity). Nonetheless, I suggest that such inappropriate relations emerge only through a failure to acknowledge key aspect of the interdependency of the relation. The ethics of sustainability arises from a recognition of the dynamic interdependency of the self in its shared historical milieu. Obviously, the agent of such an ethics is human and the discussion and negotiation of ethics takes place exclusively between human beings. But as every human being interacts with the nonhuman world in daily life, ethics needs to include and orientate the individuals in their activities towards the nonhuman world. The concept of a "shared historical milieu" is precisely an attempt to overcome this dichotomy of human and nonhuman.

The problem of spatial distance and the global milieu

Is it possible to speak of a global milieu? As the conception of the milieu nourishes itself from experiences of life of an embodied and situated individual, it would seem that this individual is related to a particular milieu. From there, one's milieu could be easily enlarged to include past experiences. Most of us have developed the feeling of belonging to several specific milieus where we live for a period of our life. Let us see three main reasons to care for a "global" milieu.

To begin with, imagine a relational individual named Claudia who lives in a city in central Chile. Even if she has not visited her hometown in southern Patagonia for decades, she can care for its milieu and adopt practices to protect both her past and present milieus. Moreover, she is well aware of the vulnerability of both milieus to pollution coming from other milieus, for example, from the mountains surrounding her home town. Because she knows that the water originates from a spring in these mountains, she is motivated to care for this distant milieu. Here, the recognition of the interconnectedness of nature provides a first reason to care for a more "global" milieu.

Secondly, imagine Bunta traveling to Patagonia and meeting with Claudia. They talk and become friends. After returning to Japan, Bunta retains his concerns for the milieu surrounding Claudia, and even for the milieu of her childhood where he has never been. Simultaneously, Claudia begins to care about the safety and health of the environment where Bunta lives. Because Bunta and Claudia care about each other, they will also care about each other's milieus, because both of them know that these milieus are crucial to their respective lifestyles and identities. Furthermore, after talking with Bunta about his experience in Patagonia and the rich encounters that he had there, Akiko might also start to care about these faraway places and people and thus, too, about the soundness of their natural milieus. Here, Watsuji's insights may provide some theoretical support for better understanding the process of Akiko's and Bunta's realization of the importance of care for their milieus.

In all there are three distinct reasons for the relational individual to embrace and care for a globally shared milieu. First is the recognition of the interconnectedness of nature, namely, that what affects a faraway environ-

ment might have repercussions on one's own milieu and impact one's own survival. Second is the care for other human beings, which is then extended to include their milieu. With increased opportunities for travel, technological advances, and multicultural diversity, this second aspect may grow still more important in the future. The fact that the world population is becoming increasingly urban and disconnected from direct contact with the natural environment might then be offset by a higher stimulation of empathy for a wider range of people and the vulnerable milieus tied up with their identity.

A third reason is the awareness of the common natural world to which we all belong as inhabitants of the Earth.[22] The feeling of belonging to the same shared milieu has been theorized with the tool of scales of identity. For example, Claudia has a localized identity as a native of her hometown (first scale of identity). She also developed another regional identity as an active member of her city (second scale of identity). When Claudia meets people in the city, it is likely that she presents herself as a native from her hometown, but when she meets other Chileans, she might refer to herself as a member of the city or as a Patagonian (third scale of identity). When Claudia meets Bunta, she probably identifies herself as Chilean (fourth scale of identity), or as a South American (fifth scale of identity). Finally, when Claudia and Bunta discuss their similarities and the commonness of their global environment, they might refer to themselves as citizens of the Earth (sixth scale of identity).

The feeling of belonging to a single, unique, interconnected planetary

22. The notion of "global milieu" differs from Berque's concept of *écoumène* in the following ways. In the introduction of his book of the same title, Berque defines *écoumène* as the Earth "en tant que lieu de notre être" (2000, 12), or the relation of humanity with the Earth (13). Also used in human geography, the notion of *écoumène* generally refers to the permanently inhabited portion of the earth. In both cases, seen from the viewpoint of individual environmental decision-making and action, this notion seems general and abstract. In contrast, the notion of milieu insists on the dimension of the experience of the individual within her environment. The third point discussed in the text having to do with the awareness of the commonness of nature may indeed partly overlap with the abstract intellectual concept of *écoumène*. But for the reasons mentioned, the abstract notion of the globality of the Earth is not indispensable for individual environmental decision-making. In other words, the individual develops herself through different flexible spatial scales of identification, which may or may not overlap with the global scale of *écoumène*. Finally, I see these scales of identity as contextual and changeable. Thus, while the identification with the *écoumène* may be appropriate for some individuals in some contexts, it is not necessary to adopt and develop environmental ethical decision-makings and actions.

milieu finds clear expression in the notion of global or Earth citizenship. All relational individuals belong to the same global milieu, Earth. But under the influence of particular cultural imaginaries, each of them has a personal representation of what this global milieu Earth is. Embracing the identity of a citizen of the Earth need not occur at the expense of other identities. It is not as if the self is being "expanded" to encompass the entire community of living being on this planet, such that its own point of observation and milieu of belonging are absorbed into that totality without remainder.[23] On the contrary, the identity of one relational individual unfolds itself in several scales of identity. These spatial scales of identity overlap, their borders are often blurred, and the relation between them for the most part is not clearly hierarchicized. In different contexts, the same relational individual may endorse a different scale of identity to give the most appropriate response to specific circumstances.

Moreover, these scales of identity are not static but contextual and changeable over time. The importance given to one scale of identity in the story-telling of one individual will change greatly according to the context and the claim one makes by identifying herself with one particular group or locale, thereby differentiating herself from other groups and locales. Finally, these different scales of identity are also historical in the sense they refer both to different period in the lifetime of an individual.

Conclusion

Watsuji's conception of the self is embodied, relational, ever-changing, and always situated in an historical milieu. This milieu is the particular natural environment covered by meanings and symbols lived out within the historical movements of the culture. Human existence is intrinsically relational. The realization of the self through constant dynamic cycles of co-determination with the historical milieu is made possible by the "betweenness" or the "emptiness" between the self and the other. Finally, environmental ethical decision-making emerges from these constant cycles of making sense of the world and acting on it.

In the foregoing I have attempted to address the problem of spatial dis-

23. See SINGER 1981, preface and his 2011 afterword.

tance in environmental decision-making. The local shared milieu was used as a basis for the development of feelings of care for the milieu and a sense of belonging to it. Elaborating the idea of scales of identity and impact of care for others on their milieus, I have argued that this care and awareness of interdependence can be expanded to a global scale that includes distant others and helps provide a solution to the problem of spatial distance.

Another way of addressing ethical questions that emerge from the relationship between the individual and her milieu is to explore the problem of temporal distance. Such an enquiry could go a long way towards bridging the present with the past and future by showing why we care not only about spatially distant people and milieus but also about temporally distant milieus and future generations.

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Abbreviation

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