



## Beauty Incarnate

### A Symbolic Approach to Interdependence and Nothingness

This essay explores the possibilities of a symbolic theory of beauty based on a dialogue between the ideas of Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitarō and the Spanish philosopher Eugenio Trías. Two main approaches are presented: beauty as a relationship between opposites, and beauty as a phenomenological manifestation of being. Symbolology is used as an epistemological anchor to explain concepts through an integration of dual and connective structures (e.g., “and”). From this perspective, opposites are treated as conditions of the possibility of relationship. For Trías, the beautiful and the sinister are interdependent concepts. A particular mode of thinking is employed to overcome a rational and ontological model of contradictions, showing a horizontal and mutual necessity, often expressed in the arts. Once understood, this model enables a progressive turn to a meta-conceptual understanding of symbolic events as the incarnation of beauty. Finally, beauty is related to the permanent experience of the non-self (Nishida’s notion of 無我) during what Trías calls the Age of Spirit, thus blending the two philosophical proposals in a symbolic approach.

KEYWORDS: Beauty—aesthetics—nothingness—sinister—philosophy of limit—symbolic hermeneutics—Kyoto school—symbolic event—symbolic approach—intercultural philosophy

*O you who seek the highest and the best, whether in the depths  
of knowledge, in the turmoil of action, in the darkness of the past,  
in the labyrinth of the future, in graves or above the stars! do you  
know its name? the name of that which is one and is all?*

*Its name is Beauty*

Hölderlin, *Hyperion*

*One opposite is known through the other,  
as darkness is known through light.*

*Summa Th. 48*

Eugenio Trías (1942–2013), perhaps one of the most prominent Spanish philosophers since Ortega y Gasset (1883–1955), suggests that the symbol has re-emerged through romanticism and the philosophical exploration of modern aesthetics after a long period of obscurity.<sup>1</sup> In his major work, *The Age of the Spirit* (1996), he traces an alternative history of Being based on Rudolph Otto’s notion of the holy as the indeterminable space from which emanations of sense, to use a Heideggerian term, originate. According to Trías’ phenomenology of the symbol, each stage of the symbolic cycle establishes a specific mode of interaction with reality, in terms of ontology and epistemology, until the final arrival of the Spiritual Age.<sup>2</sup>

1. Cf. “The revelation of reason does not destroy, in fact, the symbolic substrate. It only inhibits and represses it. Or relegate it to concealment, condemning it to a clandestine existence”; and: “The symbolic conception of the world returns in the mystical eon through the priestly mediation of witness artist or through aesthetics” (TRÍAS 1994, 403).

2. This *Phenomenology of Symbol* determinates the phenomenon, in this case, the Holy, and the *logos* or the conditions of emergence and reflection on itself. The appearance and posterior analysis is performed through seven categories: (1) matter, (2) cosmos, (3) face-to-face relationship (witness and holy presence), (4) communication (oral and written), (5) hermeneutic keys for the understanding of hidden sense, (6) substratum of mystique, and (7) conjunction or

Prior to his renowned trilogy on the philosophy of “limit,” Trías delved deeply into the subject of beauty in his 1982 work *Beauty and the Sinister*, which will be discussed below. On the other hand, Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945) began his reflections on the topic with an early essay, “An Explanation of Beauty” (1900), in which he succinctly outlined his central aesthetic ideas. This text, written in his youth, was published in the journal of his school and clearly links his ideas to Zen, both theoretically and practically.<sup>3</sup> These ideas were later explored in a more detail in *Art and Morality* (『芸術と道徳』, 1920–1923). However, as Steve Odin points out, Nishida’s brief essay on beauty encapsulates elements that characterize his entire philosophical program, even extending to his final work “The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious Worldview” (1945).<sup>4</sup>

What may we say of the connections between the early and late thinking of Nishida and Trías? Both authors, like most modern students of aesthetics, began with Kant’s ideas as way to clarify their respective position. Nishida’s initial approach in “An Explanation of Beauty” is rooted in Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*. Nishida found that the idea of “pure pleasure” failed to capture the profound essence of the experience of beauty, which required a different approach. This was the reason he judged attempts by Marshall and others British psychologists unsuccessful.<sup>5</sup>

He argued that Baumgarten’s aesthetics partially liberated reflection on the conditions for possibility of beauty from rational and religious constraints, thereby suggesting a secondary type of gnoseology based on intuition that comes “from the depths of the heart.” For this reason, Nishida’s main point of reference was Kant’s dissertation on beauty and the sublime. Interestingly, he saw the notion of disinterested pleasure as akin to Zen ideas of no-self or egolessness,<sup>6</sup> thus suggesting a point of convergence between two philosophical worlds. At the same time, this affinity at the rational level did not imply a complete detachment from the spiritual foundation. In his own words:

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union of both sides of the symbol. Cf. TRÍAS 1994, 123.

3. Cf. YUSA 2002, xix, 62.

4. NISHIDA 1987A, 214.

5. For more on the analysis of Nishida, experience, and art, see IWAKI 2001, 259–84.

6. On Nishida’s “oriental sources,” see STEVENS 2008, 62.

In Nishida's words:

What is the special characteristic of the sense of beauty? According to the explanation of German Idealism since Kant, the sense of beauty is pleasure detached from the ego. It is a pleasure of the moment, when one forgets one's own interest such as advantage and disadvantage, gain and loss. Only this *muga* is the essential element of beauty; when this is lacking, no matter what kind of pleasure you feel, it cannot give rise to the sense of beauty.<sup>7</sup>

His allusion to detachment from the ego points directly to *muga* (無我)—selflessness, self-effacement, or self-renunciation—as the selfless experience of beauty.<sup>8</sup> Based on the Sanskrit notion of *anātman*, *muga* appears frequently in Buddhist philosophy in reference the impermanent, insubstantial, and non-autonomous character of the individual.<sup>9</sup>

However, as Crespín notes, the notion of disinterestedness we find in Kant differs from Nishida's. For Kant, it has to do with indifference to actual existence of the perceived object and, therefore, does not touch on the disposition of the subject who experiences it. It is different with Nishida,<sup>10</sup> for whom beauty is understood as the negation of individuality. This theme will recur in future texts where the relationship between absolute nothingness and individuality is oriented to absolute negation, which allows him to explain the permanent tension that redefines subjectivity in terms of facing death.<sup>11</sup>

Nishida's philosophy is a departure from subjectivist views of beauty entrenched in German idealism that grant the individual complete ontological autonomy. Instead, Nishida draws a parallel between the abyss and the support structure that sustains not only individuals but all entities. This structure is maintained by a network of opposites, the presence of other individuals as well as their absence.

7. NISHIDA 1987, 216A.

8. CRESPIÓN 2008, 51.

9. NGUYEN 2019, 18–27.

10. Cf. CRESPIÓN 2008, 50.

11. "I think that the various difficulties attendant on such questions as the problem of monism and pluralism, or the problem of form and matter, are mostly due to conceiving self-identity in the direction of subject. Moreover, the problems of philosophy must indeed be the problems of life. But true problems lies in the self-determining present. It consists in living through dying" (NISHIDA 1970, 42).

For his part, Trías proposes that Kant's aesthetics of the sublime sowed the seeds for reintegrating the symbolic thinking of the infinite into the arts and post-idealist philosophy.<sup>12</sup> He compares this passage from the beautiful to the sublime to Julius Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon: "the extension of aesthetics beyond the limiting and formal category of the beautiful."<sup>13</sup> This led Trías to a consideration of the emergence of genius and a critique of aesthetic judgment, thereby expanding the frontiers of strict rationalism in order to expose the symbolic substratum of reality. Art was a revalidation of the pact between the sacred and its witnessing.

Trías' philosophy of the "limit" marks a further departure from Kant. He views the limit as a condition for an openness and permeability between the two sides as opposed to the setting up of a barrier or fixed border between noumenon and phenomenon that categorically prevents any kind of exchange.<sup>14</sup> Trías deliberately chooses to go through the "red light" by drawing on the symbol and creative imagination to reconcile "the suprasensible with the hedge of appearances. In this way, noumenon and phenomenon find in the symbol their conjugation, their copulative link."<sup>15</sup>

With Trías' proposal, we see how Nishida's definition of beauty expands beyond classical rational principles such as harmony, symmetry, balance, and relationships among objects. It is no longer merely a question of the sensory pleasure we derive from beautiful things. Rather, beauty is seen to encompass a profound experience that can make an individual tremble and be thrown off center. Trías articulates how such an alternative notion of beauty is more closely associated with the sublime and the continuous search for the absolute in spiritual evolution. It is also closer to the Kantian sublime<sup>16</sup> which both he and Nishida took as their starting points.

In this sense, Nishida and Trías stand unique as thinkers at a cultural frontier. Moreover, their reflections are enriched by the religious elements that permeate their thinking. Nishida saw in the contribution of Mahāyāna

12. "This sixth aeon encourages the witness to an adventure towards everything that transcends the limits of reason" (TRÍAS 1994, 432–46).

13. TRÍAS 2013, 26.

14. Cf. SUCASAS 2003, 200.

15. TRÍAS 1994, 506.

16. Cf. CRESPIÓN 2008, 51.

and Japanese Buddhism a key to correct the difficulties and impediments inherent to Western metaphysics,<sup>17</sup> and Trías relied on symbolic openness to overcome the concealment taking place in modern philosophy.<sup>18</sup> These aspects, together with their explicit intention to engage with global events, are only some of the many points at which the journeys of these two philosophers intersect. Their shared liminal approach further connects them in their reflections on symbolic interpretation.

#### THE SYMBOLIC TURN: THE TWO TRUTHS

Starting from the common ground of beauty, symbolism emerges as a shared territory for Trías and Nishida, a locus from which to experiment with hermeneutical possibilities for unraveling the notion of nothingness. It serves as a kind of conceptual axis on which to articulate two aspects of convergence related to the concept of beauty, as we will see further below.

As all know the etymology of the word “symbol” can be traced back to the Greek term *symbolon*, which refers to the joining of two halves of a medal.<sup>19</sup> In modern hermeneutics, authors such as Paul Ricoeur, Hans Georg Gadamer, and Andrés Ortiz-Osés view the symbol as a unifying force or a source of tension between two extremes of a single entity, act, or concept. This versatility lies in its ability to unify different elements and the ways in which it does this. This makes it a valuable tool in both philosophy and the arts, both as a conceptual and as a performative instrument. The centrality of the symbol in Trías’ thought is undeniable, as is Nishida’s interest in symbolism as an artistic movement, a question to which devoted several studies.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike linguistic and semiotic analysis, in which symbols and signs have

17. Cf. MARRA 1999, 173.

18. Cf. TRÍAS 2000, 518.

19. We see this in Gadamer’s application of the notion of symbol to human nature, where he notes the relationship between part and wholeness in which “every individual is a fragment” that seeks the restoration of oneness, as mentioned in Plato’s *Symposium*: “In the case of the symbol, on the other hand, and for our experience of the symbolic in general, the particular represents itself as a fragment of being that promises to complete and make whole whatever corresponds to it. Or, indeed, the symbol is that other fragment that has always been sought in order to complete and make whole our own fragmentary life” (GADAMER 1986, 32).

20. See CRESPIÑ 2021.609–638.

fixed meanings,<sup>21</sup> hermeneutics treats symbols as reflections of elements that cannot be completely defined. And if this is true for individual elements, it is also true for the relationships they establish, which are not singular, univocal, or static, but multiple and ever-changing. This is especially the case when symbols engage radical and opposing entities or concepts.

The *what* and *how* of the unification brought about by the symbol of beauty in its undefined conceptual character and the experience it entails correspond to two ontological moments in terms of both extension and content. This ranges from interdependence of particular elements to the absolute in clear reference to Nāgārjuna's doctrine of the two truths.<sup>22</sup> The capacity of the symbol to sustain the tension between radical extremes results in two converging movements which we refer to here as (1) a horizontal/relational system and (2) a vertical ontology of integration. Both contribute to a symbolic fabric or a sense of wholeness that retains the possibility of a multiplicity of interpretations.

The first truth pertains to the relational ontology that is conditioned by the historical and conventional origin of its parts. In this context, we may refer to Ortiz-Osés and his relational metaphysics of symbolic hermeneutics. Ortiz-Osés bridges philosophical and anthropological reflection by adopting cultural symbols, such as archetypes, capable of tolerating and accommodating contradictory ideas.<sup>23</sup> These cultural constructions are invariably presented in terms of the tension within a dyad: life/death, heaven/earth, immanent/transcendent, absolute/relative, being/not-being or being/nothingness, etc.

The second moment refers to ultimate truth, whose non-intellectual nature is seen by Nishida as the phenomenological experience of non-duality: "Beauty that evokes this feeling of *muga* is intuitive truth that tran-

21. On the differences between a "dead symbol"—or "sign," as it is called—and a symbol, see GARAGALZA 1990, 11.

22. In this way "The world as one's mundane experiences meant to satisfy egocentric designs and anchored on seemingly independent subjects and objects, is said to constitute *saṃvṛti-sat(ya)* or *prajñāpti-sat(ya)*, i.e., conventional truth; whereas the (meta-linguistic) realization of their fundamental interdependent nature as (mere) conceptual and conventional constructions, otherwise known as *nirvāṇa*, would constitute *paramārthasat(ya)* or *dravya-sat(ya)*, i.e., the ultimate truth" (LOUNDO 2016).

23. See ORTIZ-OSÉS 1989, 20; 2003.

scends intellectual discrimination. This is why beauty is sublime.” This, in turn, could be expanded from a particular experience to a permanent one: “As regards this point, beauty can be explained as the discarding of the world of discrimination and the being one with the Great Way of *muga*.”<sup>24</sup>

In contrast, Trías’ concept of the symbolic event seems to herald an ontological manifestation that transcends dualistic thinking. He defines it as a hierogamic union of two parts of the symbol: the witnessing and the symbolized.<sup>25</sup> In this context, the symbolized represents the hyperbole of mystery with its indefinable character. Consequently, for Trías, the connection will always be with the sacred dimension that aligns with the indeterminacy of the numinous (to employ Otto’s term). The symbolic union is to be a marriage between a fragment and the totality, reintegrating the state of oneness lost at the beginning of the symbolic cycles.<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, this line of thought maintains an obscurity with regard to what is known and allows for a philosophical permanence within the realms of meta-rationality and aesthetic experience, without succumbing to the pitfalls of nihilism or transcendentalism.

This approach can be associated with Nishida’s dialectic of an “identity of self-contradictories” which allows for the coexistence of opposites. In this case, beauty and the sinister emphasize the tension, the place (*basho*, 場所), or the foundation that unites them, as opposed to a the negative dialectic that would lead to their disappearance or absorption into a non-contradictory totality. At the same time, it permits the experience of *muga*, the negation of subjectivity, into absolute nothingness.

#### RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY: THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE SINISTER

As just indicated, the horizontal symbolic bond and Nishida’s logic of the place points out better than an antithetical Hegelian dialectic the relationship between radical and totalizing concepts. The question is, How can we understand beauty and its aesthetic consequences as a self-identity of absolute opposites?

24. ODIN 1987A, 216.

25. TRÍAS 1994, 218–19.

26. *Ibid.*, 458.



Although Nishida often takes up the opposition of subject and object, or of temporality and spatiality as opposed to the absolute, in order to explain the individual and the nature of consciousness,<sup>27</sup> our concern here with its application to beauty. His non-substantial logic suggests a way of understanding concepts as the establishment of an absolute opposition between two elements whose identity entails their involvement with one another.

As I read Trías' aesthetics, the idea of a self-identity of contraries can be found in his analysis of beauty in *Beautiful and the Sinister*. For Trías, this logical pattern applies to the liminal condition of the sinister with regard to the beautiful. The limit is not an endpoint but an opening moment. It is conceived as a borderland at which proximity sets up an ongoing connections with that from which it is separated by negation. In this way, the mutual dependence of the beautiful and the sinister, and their mutual entailment, led him to formulate his initial hypothesis: "The sinister constitutes the condition and limit of the beautiful."<sup>28</sup>

Trías perceives the sinister as the concealed, chaotic force of the most dreadful impulses that lie dormant within a human being. Given their status as primitive and unconscious forces, they retain all the vitality that can be expressed in art. Beauty, akin to the modulations and manifestations of the classical categories of cosmic order, is assimilated into the sinister as its antithesis. Without beauty, darkness lacks the necessary forms for even minimal expression.

Trías concludes:

1. Without reference to the sinister, the beautiful lacks the necessary strength and vitality to be truly beautiful.
2. The sinister, when present without mediation or transformation, destroys the aesthetic effect, thus serving as its limit.
3. Beauty is always a veil through which chaos must be foreseeable.<sup>29</sup>

27. "That which is self-conscious must stand, self-consciously, in a dynamically expressive relation to an absolute other. This entails the biconditional structure of co-origination and co-reflection. Thus I repeat that I disagree altogether with the epistemological position that takes its point of departure from the logic of objects. I hold that thinking takes place within the structure of an interexpressive relation. Judgment itself occurs within the contradictory identity of subject and object" NISHIDA 1987B, 55.

28. TRÍAS 2013, 9.

29. *Ibid.*, 51.

Seen in this way, beauty is upheld by the sinister. Without the sinister, beauty would wither into mere decorative expression. This is why, in the relationship between the beautiful and the sinister, the copulative conjunction *and* serves as more than a mere grammatical copulative; it points to an ontological connection. This conjunction does not substantiate any meta-concept, but rather sees each extreme element of the bridge as supported by something that is explicitly different to it, yet not entirely external to its own definition.<sup>30</sup> In Mahāyāna Buddhism this interlacing of reciprocal support is referred to as emptiness or interdependence.<sup>31</sup> This is non other than what we are referring to as the place of nothingness. It is the ground from which Nishida can claim that, devoid of self and its partial and dualistic insight, “everything that was originally unpleasant undergoes a complete change and provides aesthetic pleasure.”<sup>32</sup>

Interdependence forces us to consider both the beautiful and the sinister in the same breath. The ecstatic sublime lifts us up precisely because it reveals to us the abyss. In Rilke’s words, “The beautiful is that beginning of the terrible that we humans can still endure.” We might say, the sinister inspires us, while the beautiful instills fear in us.

#### ABSOLUTE NOTHINGNESS AND VERTICAL BEAUTY

Trías poses the question:

What is the ontological status of that veil which is beauty? What is revealed when the veil is lifted? What lies behind the torn curtain?... Behind the curtain lies emptiness, the primordial nothingness, the abyss that ascends and floods the surface.<sup>33</sup>

30. At this point, we may note a divergence between Trías and Nishida: Trías argues that the symbolic event represents a unitive coupling of an existential nature and not just a conjunctive logical union, while Nishida’s non-reifying approach rejects the substantialization of the place of the *and*, focusing rather on the absolute nothingness where the unification occurs. For this reason, Trías is able to suggest a sexual connotation to the coupling that Nishida does not: “The sexual, amorous copulation constitutes the best metaphor to express the existential identity between the two parts of the symbol, which in the seventh category reach their conjugation: it is the full union between the witness and the sacred presence” (TRÍAS 1994, 33).

31. MARTÍN 2010, 702.

32. ODIN 1987A, 216.

33. TRÍAS 2013, 81.

From the perspective of symbolic hermeneutics, nothingness is neither an entity nor a non-entity but a horizon of understanding. It is absolute because it encompasses the possibility of its own negation: absolute being and non-being. The same applies to symbols which, due to their ambivalence and magnitude, can contain ontological extremes.<sup>34</sup> Absolute nothingness is thus implicated in everything but not exhausted by any entity.

But how can this nothingness “flood the surface” of the multiple and relative world? How can the multiple become one?

Absolute nothingness is not only absolute due to its relation to the relative, which would limit its condition as an absolute to that specific relationship. It explains, without contradiction, all ontological totalities within itself. Given this absolute independence from everything and the correlative dependence of everything on it, nothingness thus provides the horizon against which each element can identify itself within its hermeneutical context and its relationship to that unalterable backdrop.

In the context of self-negation as explored by Nishida, a significant distinction emerges between the transient negation offered by beauty and the enduring negation provided by religion. Why do we seek religion? In his final essay, Nishida explains that, much the same way in which absolute nothingness encompasses its own negation, individuals also harbor their own negation, which sets them in stark contrast to eternal death, to nothingness itself. The identity of the self, like all identities, is self-defined by this absolute contrast.<sup>35</sup>

In this sense Michele Marra extends the notion of absolute negation beyond its application to beauty to the individual:

The determination of the individual by the absolute occurs through the mediation of absolute negation. Being is what exists by not-being—as in the case of an existence whose life is defined by its death, which is the continuity

34. “God as the true absolute must be Satan, too. Only then can God be said to be truly omniscient and omnipotent.... A God who merely opposes, and struggles with, evil is a relative God, even if he conquers over evil. And a God who is only a transcendent supreme God is a mere abstraction.” And further on: “The absolute God must include absolute negation within himself, and must be the God who descends into ultimate evil. The highest form must be one that transforms the lowest matter into itself. Absolute agape must reach even to the absolutely evil man” (Nishida 1987B, 75).

35. *Ibid.*, 67.

of discontinuity. As the place where the unattainable is grasped, the space of nothingness is where the existence of the self-determining individual takes place, and the unity of contradictories comes into being in an infinite dialectical process.<sup>36</sup>

According to Nishida, *muga* should not be seen as an extraordinary state or mystical experience<sup>37</sup> but rather as the daily consciousness of knowing ourselves, conditioned by the nothingness that we deny and the nothingness that, in turn, denies our individuality. This tension gives rise to the experience of the liminal state where the balanced structure of being and non-being coexists with Trías' *hermetic fence*, the locus for understanding the symbolic that has appeared before the witness and been translated and made intelligible not as an axiom but as an interpretation that preserves its partially undefined and open state. The self thereby becomes a nexus of understanding for the absolute, an ontological tear or gap where nothingness seeps into the surface.

In this sense, we make speak of the transition of beauty or *muga* from being an event of a primarily aesthetic experience to an event where the sublime is assimilated through the transcendence of dualities and the sensation of absolute nothingness that engulfs us. Similarly, Trías speaks of the ontological structure of the symbolic event as an occasion for perfect harmony between the observer and ultimate reality—primordial nothingness. For a moment, “the world of discrimination”<sup>38</sup> is abolished and unity is restored.<sup>39</sup>

The symbolic similarity between the pursuit of the Great Way of *muga* or the religious path, and the openness of the symbolic event situates both

36. MARRA 1999, 173. In Nishida's own words: “Absolute nothingness” must be absolute negation qua affirmation, i.e., absolute nothingness-qua-being. Or again, it must be the unity of absolute contradictories. It is the self-identity of various aspects, which touch but do not know each other. From such a stand-point, dying is living and living is dying, and there is an infinite dialectical process of negation-qua-affirmation. Dialectical determination touches this absolute self-identity at each step of its process” (NISHIDA 1987B, 17).

37. *Ibid.*, 112.

38. NISHIDA 1987A, 217.

39. For Trías, the unification produced by the symbol transforms the transcendental union into a “middle way” or reciprocal tension by which the symbolized (the holy) participates in the witness at the same time as the witness participates in the holy. This conforms a border identity characterized by a mutual implication of both sides. Echoes with the identity of self-contradictories are evident.

within a borderland. We dwell on the limit when we not only transcend the conditions of a dyad—subject/object—but also partake in that ultimate reality that defines us. Here, beauty is understood vertically: not from its aesthetic characteristics such as pleasure, order or chaos, which are typical of horizontality, but as an event of ontological integration that pierces the veil of beauty and opens itself to the emergence of nothingness.

#### THE AGE OF *MUGA*

The multidimensionality of the symbolism of nothingness allows us to position the axes on which each argument turns more clearly. Beauty, as a co-determined concept, is intimately linked to its interdependence with the sinister, on which it relies for its existence and intelligibility. In turn, the beautiful allows us to break through the conceptual conditioning of binary opposites and triggers the ecstatic experience of the absolute.

Time, which has its own dynamic, figures as the permanent horizon against which exchanges between these two dimensions occur in the thought of both Trías and Nishida.

For Trías, it is the space where symbolic transmissions or revelations occur, tracing back to the eras of the spirit in a diachronically “progressive” and yet “circular” manner. Once the seventh stage is reached, it recedes, and the cycle is no longer launched towards revelation but towards concealment.<sup>40</sup> For his part, Nishida conceives of this temporal dimension as a *basho* in which the permanent dialectic takes place.

This means we always touch the absolute at the place where individuals determine one another. Therefore, our concrete world exists in the flow of infinite time, yet is the convergence of infinite worlds. In other words, it is self-determining in the sense of a linear progression but at the same time it is self-determining in the sense of a circular return.<sup>41</sup>

The open character of temporality, which allows the linear and the circular to be grouped together and comes as no surprise to the symbolically alert, means that restricted beauty cannot be restricted to a specific moment.

40. Cf. TRÍAS 2000, 517.

41. NISHIDA 1970, 28.

Although the *muga* (the symbolic event), like the experiences of the medieval mystics, is rapturous and ecstatic, it is also fleeting.<sup>42</sup> According to *Bi no Setsumei*, the correct approach to reality would be to establish oneself on the state of self-negation or to maintain a permanent connection of two extremes of symbol.

For Trías, the consummation of the spiritual age is the union of rationality with symbolism.<sup>43</sup> It is the communion of the external and manifest with the hidden substratum—the holy abyss. The bonding of a modern monad with the world leads to a stable relationship that overcomes nihilism and the inability to think of nothingness. That is why similarity with the Great Way of *muga*, which moves us beyond differentiations, no longer implies a brief mystical experience of beauty but rather a permanent and ongoing state of non-duality. Mixing the philosophical perspectives<sup>44</sup> would lead us to speak of the advent of an age of *muga*—or, what would amount to the same, an age of beauty.

The symbolic journey comes to its end in apprehension of the formless and immeasurable, both in its horizontal dimension and in its vertical integration of the sublime and sinister. Assimilating pleasure and pain, the final stage allows for mediation or reintegration, opening a place for the joyful feeling of the sublime through which

the infinite becomes finite. The idea becomes flesh, and the dualisms between reason and sensibility, morality and instinct, number and phenomenon are overcome in a unitary synthesis. People “touch” that which surpasses and frightens them (the immeasurable). The divine becomes present and pat-

42. Heidegger, however, noted Augustine’s need to underpin art, and especially music, as a path to absolute beauty, so that the knowledge of aesthetic objects is not lost in the sensual nor wasted, but is embraced as a way, however minor, to the immutable truth. Cf. HEIDEGGER 1997, 141–2.

43. TRÍAS 1994, 479.

44. Trías ontological and metaphysical thinking merges with Nishida’s notion of nothingness through a versatile symbolism that aims to unify opposites, even cultural or philosophical. In this way, his negative evaluation of nothingness in *The Beautiful and the Sinister* and his traditional reifying ontology, would impede dialogue with Nishida difficult. I am persuaded that through symbolism, and the approach to words and concepts as symbols, open a hermeneutics path across the cultural divide..

ent through the human subject in the natural world, wherein our destiny on this earth is manifest in this privileged situation of ours.<sup>45</sup>

Beauty seen from the perspective of symbolic events is produced in the borderlands where the simultaneous presence of the one and the many becomes self-conscious, and where temporalities and contradictions intersect. This beauty is what we wish to call here beauty incarnate. The self-awakening in which have continuous access to a non-dual state of mind is the same state of mind from which the fresh “transmissions” of sense reach us—namely, nothingness. It is also the very place from which an “announcement” is made that worldly flesh, our self, has become pregnant with the absolute.

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45. Trías 2013, 28.

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