

Chapter Seven

World, Nothing, and Globalization in Nishida and Nancy

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The technological shrinking of the globe in the last few centuries has torn and erased what previously were cultural and geographical boundaries. We find ourselves surrounded by an ever-increasing multiplicity of truth configurations sounding in the global web of communication and information, each competing for universal and eternal validity. In the midst of *others*—like and yet unlike ourselves—*both* our implacement in the environing world of familiar contexts *and* its contingency become apparent. Truths, previously held to be unquestionable, now stand naked in their relativity. As the crossing of borders, whether geographical or virtual, becomes increasingly accessible and frequent, anxiety grows in the interface of new and multiple horizons. Many of us are finding that the world is a complex of horizons: “worlds” are now forced to contend with one another as each increasingly realizes its emptiness. Amid the global encounter of worldviews, truth claims, ways of life, and so on, the question arises, What is one’s place in the midst of others, the position one occupies in the world; how or where does one fit?

In the early part of the twentieth century, Japan as a nation was asking similar questions with regard to her place in the world. During the 1940s, Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945), founder of the Kyoto School of philosophy, noticed in *Sekai no shinchitsujo no genri* (Fundamental Principles of a New World Order, 1943) how formerly disconnected nations “have been brought into a common world space due to developments in science, technology, and economy.”¹ A few years earlier, in *Nihon bunka no mondai* (The Problem of Japanese Culture, 1940) he had written that nations can no longer stand separately from the world made one by free trade.² And a decade and a half prior to that (1926) he had argued that *to be* is *to be implaced*.³ Everything

that *is* must have its place (*basho*). In terms of the forms of interpersonal and interactive human existence that Nishida thematized during the 1930s, this means *world* (*sekai*). We exist by actively partaking in the world as a sociohistorical context. The world in this sense is what allows us to make sense of everything else; everything has meaning *within* its context, or, in phenomenological terms, its horizon. What happens then with the globalization of that world, the horizon of meaning, whereby one horizon contends with a multiplicity of *other* horizons? For Nishida, the world is ultimately implaced within a horizon of horizons that he calls “the place of absolute nothing” (*zettai mu no basho*). It is within that clearing of a nothing that multiple horizons of meaningfulness arise, contend, interact, and/or disappear.

We see comparable observations about the world in the work of a contemporary French philosopher, Jean-Luc Nancy, who also notices a *nothing* at the ground of the world. For Nancy, the archi-spatiality of the world is a nothing that makes room for beings and sense (i.e., meaning). Moreover, both thinkers provide a response to the contemporary situation of the world that has been called “globalization.” Much has already been written on Nishida’s somewhat embarrassing failures to politicize his philosophy, leading to the question of whether his philosophy has anything to offer by way of *praxis*. Nancy seems to suggest a way in which Nishida’s theory of place might be applied as *praxis*. On the basis of their possible convergence in the recognition of *the nothing* at the ground of the world, in this chapter I examine how we might understand, and respond to, this contemporary situation of globalization. In what way does the world’s implacement in or upon the unground of a nothing shed light on the process of globalization—and what are the implications for *praxis*? Nishida’s theory of the place of nothing stems from a particular appropriation of the Mahāyāna and Zen Buddhist concepts of emptiness (*kū*) and nothing (*mu*). The juxtaposition of Nishida’s theory with Nancy’s in a discussion of what is at issue for us today—globalization—might also provide an interesting means to bring premodern Buddhist thought into dialogue with contemporary continental philosophy.

Although I will be focusing on Nishida’s ideas rather than Buddhist concepts per se in relation to Nancy, I am to a certain extent presenting Nishida as a Buddhist thinker, so let me begin by briefly discussing this connection. Nishida makes references to various Buddhist doctrines, texts, and thinkers throughout his career. Among texts, we can mention classics such as the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras (including the famous *Diamond Sutra* as well as the *Heart Sutra*), *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, *Rinzairoku* (Ch. *Linji yulu*; *The Record of Linji*), and *Mumonkan* (Ch. *Wu-wen kuan*; *Gateless Gate*). Among Buddhist thinkers he refers to Nāgārjuna, Shinran, Nansen, Rinzai, Daitō Kokushi, Dōgen, Ikkyū, and others. And his own Zen meditation practice, which continued from his late twenties to his thirties, is well known. The Zen *kōan* that he studied and passed under his Zen teacher in

1903 when he was thirty-four years old was the *kōan* on *mu* (nothing). From the inception of his philosophical career, Nishida repeatedly makes reference to this concept of *mu*, an interest that culminates in his mature development of the concept of a “place” (*basho*) that is without determination or limit. Several years prior to his death he wrote in a letter to his former student, Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990), that it had been his dearest wish since his thirties to unite Zen and philosophy, despite the apparent impossibility of such.⁴ And in a separate letter the same year to another former student, Mutai Risaku (1890–1974), he writes that his final aim is to connect Buddhist thought with the modern scientific spirit through his logic of place.⁵ However, in the former letter to Nishitani, he also admonishes those who unthinkingly classify this thought as “Zen philosophy.”⁶ We need thus to exercise caution and not reduce or categorize Nishida’s thinking as *simply* Buddhist. Nishida rather saw himself as engaging in a nonsectarian philosophical search for truth. And his appropriations of Buddhist concepts like *mu* certainly go beyond traditional Buddhist formulations.

In what follows, I begin by discussing how both thinkers conceive the world and its relationship to society and history, and then proceed to the world’s relationship to the “nothing.” Following this, I discuss globalization and then look into the mode of *praxis* that we might draw from each thinker, before concluding with assessments of their respective views. I want to suggest that Nishida’s dialectic of self-negation that unfolds from the world’s implacement in the place of nothing translates into an *ethos* of humility that opens a space for meaningful engagement with others. Taking a clue from Nancy’s notion of freedom as the freedom of a free space and a spacing for freedom, Nishida’s notion of the world of worlds requires such a *praxis*. That is to say it necessitates our participation in the world’s *poiesis*, its self-formation, in recognition of the irreducible expanse of the nothing that we all share in co-being amid difference, if we are not to sink into the nihilistic quagmire of globalized consumer culture.

WORLD

I understand “world” in general for both Nishida and Nancy to mean the social and historical network of significations or meanings, very broadly construed, that enables human beings to live life with meaning. It is the web of contexts that we are both a part of and partake in. We find ourselves *always already* implaced in such a web of meanings that human existence would be unthinkable without that implacement or contextualization.

Nishida began developing his theory of “place” (*basho*) as the existential condition of man’s being in the late 1920s, but his examination shifts in the 1930s from an inward contemplation of self-awareness to an outward investi-

gation of the “world” (*sekai*) as the field of our interactivities. His inquiry began in 1911 (*Zen no kenkyū*; Inquiry into the Good) with an analysis into the depths of consciousness, but by the mid-1930s he had turned his focus outward to the enviroing world, wherein one is interacting with others—both other things and other human beings. The purview of his discussion of “place” during this period likewise expands in scope.⁷ After 1930, Nishida begins to understand the implacement that constitutes one’s being explicitly in terms of the contextual world of interaction. Throughout the 1930s, he provides a detailed examination of that world of interaction as inclusive of relationships with the environment, with tools and technology that alter the environment, and with other human beings—on manifold levels involving thought, significations, language, body, and so on.

This world for Nishida does not stay the same; its dialectical nature as a field of interdeterminations necessitates transformation. Implaced in such a dialectical world (*benshōhōteki sekai*), we shape one another and the world through our acting and interacting while in turn being shaped ourselves. While the world is in one sense the subject of its formations, forming itself and us, at the same time this involves our own concrete interactivities, which in turn determines the world in a process Nishida calls “reverse determinations” (*gyaku gentei*). The whole and its elements are dialectically interdependent. We are conditioned by our surroundings, influenced by our upbringing, the television or Internet we watch, and so on. But we can also confront these determinations, to alter the conditions shaping us: “environment makes man and man makes environment.”⁸ The land nourishes us with food, but we in turn alter the land to increase or decrease its productivity, which then conversely affects our well-being. We exist as autonomous actors that simultaneously serve as creative and constitutive elements of this dialectical world. The reciprocity here is such that the world’s *poiesis* and humanity’s *poiesis* are dynamically conjoined in its continuous movement “from the made to the making” (*tsukuraretamono kara mirumono e*).⁹ In other words, human beings are made by the world and yet at the same time partake in making that world. In an extension of East Asian developments of the Mahāyāna notions of dependent co-arising and interpenetration of the elements of the cosmos, Nishida describes the world’s dialectical structure as “one qua many, many qua one” (*ichi soku ta, ta soku ichi*), whereby the one and the many, the universal and the individual, are in inter-determination.¹⁰

In the 1990s and 2000s, roughly half a century after Nishida, Jean-Luc Nancy described the intimate relationship between world and meaning in terms of a tautology: world (*monde*) is structured as sense (*sens*) and sense is structured as world.¹¹ He discusses the world particularly in two works, *Le Sens du monde* (The Sense of the World, 1993) and *Le création du monde ou la mondialisation* (The Creation of the World or Mondialisation, 2002). Nancy explains *sense* in the first book as the horizon that forms the opening of a

general “signifyingness” (*signifiance*), whereby all other significations are possible.¹² It forms the world, in Heideggerian terms, as the place of one’s being-(t)here (*Dasein*) or being-in-the-world.¹³ We might rephrase this in Nishidan terms as the place of one’s implacement (*oite-arū basho*). Since the “‘world’ is the totality of meaning,” sense or meaning is coextensive with the spacing of the world itself.¹⁴ The meaning or *sense* of the world then refers to *nothing* other than the very possibility of meaning itself. There is no meaning *beyond* the world, no transcendent provider or ground of sense.

For both Nishida and Nancy, the world as a web of significations constitutive of and environing our being is neither static nor complete. Its stability is subject to time and place and is never guaranteed. The world that is social is hence also historical and unfolds historically—ever open to alternative and novel possibilities. And as for the source of that dynamism, both point to an irreducible indeterminacy that is characterized in terms of (a) *nothing*. The world—that is, the web of meanings—to which we belong and in which we participate is what and how it is on the basis of a nothing, without ground or absolute reason. Groundless, its source of creation is its very indeterminacy. This is what distinguishes Nishida’s dialectic from a Hegelian or later Marxist sort: it has no intelligible guiding principle or determinable cause and is not moving toward a discernible resolution of its contradictions. The world in Nishida is without *arche* or *telos*, for it is implaced in or upon the abyss that Nishida calls the “place of nothing” (*mu no basho*).

Nancy, like Nishida, speaks of a *nothing* in relation to the world. The world for Nancy is always a “creation,” but with neither given principle (*arche*) nor assignable end (*telos*), nor material (*hyle*) aside from itself.¹⁵ Its facticity is without reason, ground, or cause.¹⁶ Without an a priori it refers only to itself. Hence its creation must be considered in the subjective sense of the genitive *of* in “the creation *of* the world”—a nontheological creation, without God. Nancy explains this to be an immanent self-creation of and from itself, resting on nothing, whereby *the nothing* grows as *a something*, a growth *of* and *from* nothing (*croissance de rien*).¹⁷ Coming from nothing, resting on nothing, going to nothing, the world is the nothing itself, being “without-reason” (*rien de raison*).¹⁸ Nancy includes here the sense of birth and death as if to suggest that we ourselves emerge from the nothing to give meaning to the world in our thoughts and actions before sinking back into the nothing in death. He suggests that meaning itself is something to be created in the many ways of our being-in-the-world.¹⁹

NOTHING

Both Nishida and Nancy thus look to an abyss for the source of the world’s creation and transformations, an abyss that each in his own way characterizes

as an indeterminate *nothing*. And in both cases that abyssal nondifferentiation also serves as a kind of space *wherein* determinations, differentiations, and thus creation of the world takes *place*.

In Nishida's case, the dialectical over- and interdeterminations of the world point to an abyssal place—in itself underdetermined or indeterminate—as the space of their occurrence, the world's bottomless potential for its presencing. The indeterminacy is, for Nishida, the source of the creativity of the multileveled interdeterminations that give rise to beings.²⁰ What makes the complex of interdeterminations possible in the first place is the world's nonsubstantiality.²¹ On this basis Nishida explains the world's unfolding in terms of the self-negation (*jiko-hitei*) of nothing.²² The one character attributable to the nothing is negation, and since the place of nothing is not delimited or determined by anything else, the negation it possesses is its own. In the act of self-negation it thus gives birth to the world of many. The nothing as place *enfolds* beings, but in its self-negation, *unfolds* beings. We may understand this as the self-differentiation of an undifferentiatedness, or a self-determining indeterminacy. Nishida himself characterizes this as a “self-forming formlessness” or a “determination without determiner.”

And if self-negation is the source of the determination of the world, it is also the source of the determination of individuals. The mutual self-negation of individuals permits their interrelations within the place of nothing, but without mitigating their uniqueness and creativity—interrelations that in turn determine the world. The multileveled complex of the dialectical world thus involves mutual self-negations on the part of both whole and parts, place and implaced, world and individuals. And that creativity on the part of both world and individuals, predicated upon the place of nothing, thus emerges *ex nihilo* to account for the irrepeatability and novelty of events in history and their unpredictability.²³

For Nancy the sense of the world's “being without reason” means likewise that the world and its ways cannot be calculated or predicted. Its mode of being is that of an unpredictable event, the eruption of the new, suddenly appearing from *nothing*. To go back to Nancy's tautology, the very sense or meaning of the world as such is the *creation of meaning*, its making of sense from nothing given—a significance without foundation, without reason. Like the mystical rose of Angelus Silesius (1624–1677), the world is “without why,” a mystery—but we are involved in that mystery of creation, the creation *of* the world/nothing (subjective genitive *of*). Nancy persistently pursues this idea of the nothing behind the world in a direction very similar to Nishida's notion of place. This is quite striking since he was most likely not cognizant of Nishida's work or of Kyoto School philosophy. For Nancy, as well, the world serves as “a common place of the totality of places,” but without any foundation.²⁴ In being permeated with nothing, the world makes room, in its emptiness, for the coexistence of beings and allows them to *take*

place.²⁵ The world is thus a place of any possible taking-place, wherein “there is room for everyone.”²⁶ He phrases this variously as “archi-spatiality,” “spaciousness of the opening,” and “space/spacing of presence/s”—the world’s spacing that is coextensive with the nothing.²⁷ Nancy views the world in this sense as an absolute immanence permeated by nothing, supported by nothing, with nothing beyond it; an empty opening that “weaves the coappearances of beings,”²⁸ allowing for the coherence of their coexistence, without reference to some *other* or transcendent foundational unity. The coherence or togetherness of the many, then, is not their oneness but rather their spacing.

Both Nishida’s and Nancy’s discussions of the world in its indeterminacy thus point to some sort of primal spacing. In other words, we are speaking here of a primal space that is in excess of the determinations that occur—that is, *take-place*—within it, but that provides the clearing for the emergence of beings. It is the opening of the very possibility of creation, whether ideally or materially, of meanings and of beings—of *onto-poiesis*. It is from out of, and within, this space that creation occurs, takes-place, *ex nihilo*. But the question looms to what extent we, human beings, are in control, if the primal spacing of the world exceeds all horizons of calculability and if due to this *ex nihilo* there is always an element in history of the unpredictable. Would this not lead us to nihilism and passivity?

GLOBALIZATION

If “world” is the horizon of meaning belonging to a social-historical collective of people, what seems different today under the phenomenon called globalization is that many “worlds” are brought in the midst of, and forced to contend with, one another, raising issues of authenticity and legitimacy. As alluded to at the beginning of this essay, the increasing accessibility and frequency of the crossing of borders between formerly isolated “worlds” is accompanied by anxiety in the face of broader and more complicated horizons that unfold from the merging and twisting of older ones. Amid the exposure of their relativity, horizons of meaning can no longer claim absolute validity. Both Nishida and Nancy point to possible ways of responding to this phenomenon.

Interestingly the increasing multiplicity of “truths” now made available on a global scale is simultaneously accompanied by an opposing tendency toward homogenization under what Nancy calls *eco-technics* or *eco-technology* of “capitalist, globalist, monopolist organization”; that is, the global structuration via technology of the world as a world economy.²⁹ Increases in efficiency and speed of travel, communication, and information exchange abolish distances, bringing the far near and displacing human existence into

alien lands. Accompanying this is the trend toward homogenization and erasure of the unique and indigenous ways of life belonging to particular societies in locales across the world, which in turn results in a sense of uprootedness, alienation, loss of orientation, or general loss of meaning—that is, nihilism.

Other phenomenologists, from Martin Heidegger to Edward Casey, have noted how under the reign of technology the uniqueness of the “home” as a place of dwelling is erased for the sake of calculability and replaced by the homogeneity of measured space.³⁰ Human beings thus lose their sense of orientation in the world and their grounding in an identity. As traditional sovereignties are weakened, only sovereignties coinciding with this eco-technical power remain.³¹ The world becomes a communication and information network and market of consumer goods, where differences in value or meaning can be reduced to “general equivalence.” With the exponential growth of the market, the force of commodification threatens all, as everything and anything can be repackaged as a commodity.³² Culture becomes consumer (pseudo)culture. And even our desires and needs become shaped accordingly by market demands: we want to be, live, and fuck like the latest TV/movie/rock/porn/YouTube star. To satisfy this desire, we buy. And we sell so we can buy. Everyone is leveled down to the “lowest common denominator,” the mass consumer: “I buy, therefore I am.” In such a world, human life becomes increasingly superficial and senseless as nothing but the ongoing transactions of quantified exchange values. The very point of human existence becomes lost in the technological facilitation of economic efficiency—but *efficiency for what?*

On the other hand, modern technology’s leveling of place across the world—its shrinking of the globe—has also led to the unveiling of its own contradictions. That is to say, homogenization is accompanied by a trend in the opposite direction that makes multiplicity and difference—the heterogeneity of cultural places—conspicuous. And under the light of difference and multiplicity, the nonsubstantiality—or emptiness—of every horizon of meaning becomes manifest. What one took to be the entire world in pre-modernity is revealed to be just one possibility among many, as the heterogeneity of the world in its planetary scale becomes evident. The world is shown to be a multiplicity of “worlds,” a multiplicity that includes disparity and opposition.³³

The proliferation of such worlds is the indeterminate multiplication—an “autistic multiplicity”—of centripetal “meanings closed in on themselves and supersaturated with significance.”³⁴ As a result, “meanings . . . [are] no longer meaningful because they have come to refer only to their own closure, to their horizon of appropriation,” spreading “destruction, hatred, and the denial of existence.”³⁵ Nancy mentions Sarajevo as a representative example of this phenomenon.³⁶ So there emerges the contradiction or tension between

the difference and multiplicity of the local—each closed in on its own meaning—on the one hand, and the drive toward sameness and homogeneity on the other, as global capitalism spreads its tentacles to reshape and repackage the different with a set of identifiable significations, incorporating it into its web of consumption. This also means that even the pronouncement of difference made technologically possible is often mediated and thus muted by the global media serving consumerist tendencies.

Nevertheless the tension between multiplication and homogenization remains unresolved. Capital's engulfment of the planet is never completed. We find ourselves faced with the extreme contrast between the inane and bland sameness of global consumer (pseudo)culture and the rich multiplicity of difference among local cultures, the extreme end of which in the face of globalization can react in xenophobic self-closure and violence. The world today is a world of many worlds, many imaginaries, involving the duplicity of homogenization and multiplication. Will globalization exhaust itself, as it spreads itself too thin to reveal an abyss underneath? For its perpetual incompleteness signifies the room for an alternative to globalization—an alternative that looks into that abyss to recognize the world as an empty clearing for “worlds” in their co-contingency and relativity. For Nishida, on the one hand, the many worlds are places, all implaced within the place of nothing. This notion led him to postulate the ideal of a “world of worlds” (*sekaiteki sekai*). Nancy, on the other hand, designates his version of this contemporary alternative that accompanies and opposes globalization, *mondialisation*.

WORLD OF WORLDS AND MONDIALISATION

What are the practical implications of globalization for human existence? How are we to respond in practice to the globalizing world in order to realize the full potential and authenticity of human existence? What responses do Nishida and Nancy suggest? Both seem to point to an opening of the world as a *praxis* in recognition of the *nothing*.

The World of Worlds in Nishida

Nishida himself—born and raised in an East Asian culture opening itself up to the world after two centuries of isolation—experienced that tension of global heterogeneity as a split within his own soul.³⁷ His dialectic was born out of his philosophical readiness to cross cultural and intellectual boundaries. Nishida's philosophical project of overcoming dualism was a search for a ground that could contextualize the disparity between East and West on the basis of a deeper unifying source. Ueda Shizuteru claims that the East-West split was exemplified in Nishida's own dual activities of Zen meditation and philosophy: “The split was itself his gateway to the ‘deeper foundations’ of

unity.”³⁸ But that foundation can be no universalizing essence that would impose upon, and hence erase, mutual differences among elements. It must rather be a *nothing*—that which provides space for coexistence; hence Nishida’s notion of the place of nothing as the primal spacing for the “world of worlds” (*sekaiteki sekai*).

We have now entered another century in which globalization continues its relentless advance; thus Nishida’s thinking is not entirely irrelevant to our contemporary situation. For Nishida, we recall, it is the very nonsubstantiality of the world as the manifestation of the absolute nothing in its self-formation—that is, the place of nothing as the place of places with its dialectic of self-negation—that clears room for the reciprocal and autonomous determination of individuals, permitting them in turn to act upon the world. The dialectical world of mutual self-negations allows for the harmonious coexistence of simultaneously interdependent and independent individuals in Nishida’s scheme. In other words, the nothing of the world as its *place* clears room for autonomy, coexistence, and plurality. Yet this was not a given for Nishida. It is something that we have to work to realize. At least this is one ethical implication we might draw out of Nishida’s philosophy of place. But what can Nishida’s thinking offer us today in the context of globalization? As borders crumble and boundaries are torn asunder, amid these conflicts and complications it would do us well to bear in mind the irreducible expanse—a *nothing*—wherein we all exist in *co-implacement* amid our differences.

Nishida’s own concrete attempt to take his theory into the arena of world politics with his vision of a multicultural “world of worlds” sadly went unrealized. This was so even as Japanese militarists sought to appropriate his ideas by subtracting some key points. Rather than looking to the domination of a single culture to solve the inevitable and unavoidable encounter between regions and horizons, Nishida in *Tetsugaku no konpon mondai* (Fundamental Problems of Philosophy) of the mid-1930s looks to their mutual mediation, whereby each develops vis-à-vis one another in interrelationship: “True world culture will be formed by various cultures developing themselves through the medium of the world while preserving their own respective standpoints.”³⁹ In his vision each culture thus would be able to retain its own way of being while simultaneously developing itself in relation to others in the creation of a world culture.⁴⁰ And in *Nihon bunka no mondai* (The Problem of Japanese Culture, 1940), the question of intercultural encounter is no longer one of “us or them” or even East versus West: “It is not the question of negating Eastern culture by means of Western culture or negating Western culture by means of Eastern culture, nor of enveloping one into the other. Instead the point is to bathe both in a new light by discovering an even deeper and broader ground.”⁴¹ That depth is to be plumbed via mutual difference and co-relativity.

That broader ground of a world culture resulting from intercultural encounter culminates in what Nishida designates in *Sekai no shinchitsujo no genri* (The Fundamental Principles of a New World Order, 1943) the “world of worlds” (*sekaiteki sekai*).⁴² The “world of worlds” was thus to be realized only through cooperative interrelationship.⁴³ He even warns in *Nihon bunka no mondai* that for this one must carefully avoid making one’s own country (e.g., Japan) into a subject-body (*shutai*) that would dominate other cultures and countries. To thus attempt to negate them or reduce them according to one’s own national standpoint would be imperialism (*teikokushugi*).⁴⁴ His vision then is not nationalist imperialism—but neither is it an “internationalist globalism” that aims to eradicate or subsume differences under the assumed universality of an allegedly authentic way of being human, be it communism or consumerism: “Each nation or race, possessing its respective world historical destiny, combines into a single global world while each lives its own unique historical life.”⁴⁵ Nishida calls for each nation’s simultaneous self-realization and self-transcendence, whereby each reaches beyond itself to participate in erecting such a “global world.” But each nation can open itself up to this world of worlds only by first opening to its own concrete regional sphere or “co-prosperity sphere” (*kyōeiken*) founded upon geographical conditions and cultural bonds.⁴⁶ This means that the “historical life” belonging to the regional traditions and cultures of specific peoples are to be respected.⁴⁷ The world of worlds is to be realized only from out of the cooperative interrelationship of such “particular worlds” (*tokushuteki sekai*), precluding the domination of powerful national or multinational entities.⁴⁸

With no privileged or dominating center, the globe is thus spatialized as a place for the co-implication of regions.⁴⁹ Rather than possessing a universal essence that imposes itself upon the various cultures, the planet is their place, wherein they interact and coexist; a place possessing disparate cultural possibilities in nondistinction; a “nothing” (*mu*), from out of and in which their mutual differences are realized.⁵⁰ Within this space of a primal nothing cultures of the world interact to create dialectically their own identities vis-à-vis one another, accounting for both deep-rooted commonality and irreducible diversity. To realize that communal space of primal nothing wherein each region can develop and interact freely, the dialectic of nations would have to be one of mutual self-negation founded upon that place of nothing. Each organic national entity—for which Nishida employs the term *kokutai*—emerges spontaneously through a people’s self-determination as a historical body (*rekishitekishintai*).⁵¹ But such nations qua historical bodies must in turn interrelate through mutual self-negation, foregoing any aggressive designs upon others.⁵² On this basis Nishida foresaw the potential of the twentieth century to be an age when nations of the world overcome colonialism and undergo a world-awakening to realize the very world as their place of co-being.

This is not to ignore however a certain tendency in Nishida's later works toward cultural essentialism and, in particular, a Japanocentrism or Japanism (*nihonshugi*), including several attempts to conjoin his dialectical philosophy with the emperor cult of state ideology. For example, in *Nihon bunka no mondai* he sets forth Japan as the exemplar of the spirit of self-negation that would envelop its others in order to construct a one world through its contradictory self-identity.⁵³ He adds that this is Japan's destiny as the builder of East Asia and its coprosperity sphere. And in *Sekai no shinchitsujo no genri*, Japan has the unique responsibility—its world-historical task—to set up the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and ultimately to spread worldwide the principle of the world of worlds formation (*sekaiteki-sekaikeisei no genri*) by cultivating the principle of “eight directions constituting one universe” or “under one roof” (*hakkō iu*), centered on the Imperial Household (*kōshitsu*).⁵⁴ Nishida looks to the Imperial Household as a symbol, capable of functioning as the world's dialectical universal. In its absolutely contradictory self-identity, it can play the role of the place of absolute nothing to permit the unification of many in one. As evidence, Nishida recycles the spurious argument traceable to the Native Learning (*kokugaku*) scholars of Tokugawa Japan that the Imperial Household has remained constant—as an absolute present (*zettai genzai*)—amid change throughout the history of Japan, thereby drawing an analogy between the temporal and the spatial dimensions.⁵⁵ Thus, he concludes, “contained within our nation's Imperial Way [*kōdō*] is the world-formation principle [*seikaikeisei no genri*] of *hakkō iu*.”⁵⁶

One can raise several questions at this point: Is this really an alternative to imperialism? Is there any room within Nishida's dialectics for such an “unchanging essence”? Is Nishida here losing sight of his own vision by playing into the hands of ethnocentric imperialism? This privileging of Japan and essentialization of her attributes is, after all, countered by Nishida's own dialectics of the world. As Gereon Kopf argues, the dialectic of contradictory self-identity can equally apply to any other nation or peoples.⁵⁷ Nishida's Japanocentrism was certainly a reaction to the Eurocentrism of world powers at the time, and it is not unconnected to his response to the mainstream philosophical stance of the West that he took to be a “culture of being” (*yū no bunka*) as opposed to the “culture of nothing” (*mu no bunka*) of the East.⁵⁸ The irony, as Kopf has shown, is that Nishida justified his nationalism (and thus essentialism) with an antiessentialist philosophy.⁵⁹

Be that as it may, it is remarkable that as Japan was becoming engulfed in military conflicts in Asia and the Pacific, Nishida sought to give expression to his vision of a multicultural world of worlds in an attempt to influence decision makers. In retrospect we notice Nishida's naivety in agreeing to meet with some government or military strategists and policy makers at their research institutes or gatherings in the hopes that he might be able to influence them with his ideas. If Nishida's theory seems unconvincing because of

his failed attempt at practical application during the 1930s and 1940s, or because of postwar accusations of complicity with the militarist state, nevertheless I think the main thrust of his theory is still applicable to our present situation. But to be true to Nishida's core insights concerning place and dialectic, and to apply them to our contemporary needs, we would need to discard his Japonocentrism and essentialist tendencies, especially in regard to the Imperial Household and the reification of the nation-state—tendencies that are at any rate undermined by his own dialectical insights. We might then take his concept of the world of worlds and conceive it in a way viable to the contemporary situation, especially by bringing him into cross-cultural and cross-epochal conversation with other thinkers. The point is to realize an open place that privileges no center, the world as an open sphere that precludes closure, loosening the hold of essentialism and dissolving any residual absolutism.

The aspect of Nishida's conception of the world that opens it beyond essentialist closure is precisely his notion of the nothing (*mu*) and its concomitant activity of negation (*hitei*), both having their roots in the Mahāyāna doctrine of emptiness (*kū*), which etymologically has the sense of an open sky.⁶⁰ Taking off from Nāgārjuna's notion of the emptiness of emptiness (*śūnyatāyāh śūnyatā*), the universal for Nishida understood as the world itself is empty of substance, hence an empty place, a place of nothing that in the act of self-negation permits the co-arising of beings. Not only are individuals empty of substance (in their egolessness), but so too is the universal, their place of implacement. As we saw above, the dialectic between world and individual is one of mutual self-negation that also incorporates the mutual self-negation among individuals. World and individuals are thus coconstituted through the dialectic of mutual self-negation. This realization would perpetually destabilize the threat of unilateral totalization, whether on the regional, national, or global level.

In addition to Mahāyāna emptiness, Nishida's notion of place has its roots in Plato's *chōra* (χώρα), which served as an indeterminate receptacle of formation in the *Timaeus*. But Nishida reverses the hylomorphic hierarchy of Greek metaphysics with his notion of a self-forming formlessness or determination without determiner. And in his dialectic of the world this means that the world forms itself via the individuals' self- and coformations without anything transcending the world of individuals. In any case the dialectic—and ironically even his appropriation of the symbolism of the Imperial Household as we saw above—is certainly more Mahāyāna in spirit than State Shinto or Confucian, in that its vision is one of integration and coparticipation between whole and parts in mutual self-negation rather than the imposition of a universal upon the particulars: “By each nation becoming self-aware of its own world mission, we will be able to construct a single world-historical world [*sekaishiteki sekai*], that is, a world of worlds.”⁶¹ Predicated upon a

boundless sphere that in itself is nothing and has nothing to impose upon its particulars—that is, the place of nothing—this vision is pluralistic rather than imperialistic and encourages cooperation, not domination. On the other hand, the self-negation of the place of nothing is far from being a form of ontological nihilism, as it serves to affirm the very beings it embraces as their place and indeed makes room for their co-being.⁶²

We need to remember, however, that the self-forming of the world for Nishida, predicated upon the nothing's self-negation, in turn is also predicated upon our own interactivity. Whether we realize that global space of co-being depends on how we interrelate and mutually respond; that is, whether or not we actively take part in the dialectic of self-negation. Nishida's dialectic of self-negation and (an)ontology of nothing permits the founding of an ethical posture that precludes the imposition of one's egocentricity vis-à-vis the other. In recognition of the finitude of one's being-in-the-world, it sets forth a posture of reciprocal humility that allows for coimplacement amid others in an empty space, permitting multiplicity and difference. In the absence of an absolute ground of universality that we might claim and wish to impose, space is permitted for an unimposing relationship with others. It is in this sense, in its call for an *ethos* of humility to cultivate such an open space, that we might look to Nishida's notion of the place of nothing and his world dialectic of self-negation. And in this regard I notice an interesting resonance with Nancy's ideas about the world. Both point to the world as opening a space of co-being that allows for mutual difference between singularities of the world. Indeed, if Nishida's ideas are unconvincing to some because of his own failed attempts at negotiating with the military state, we might look to Nancy's discussions of the world, globalization, and freedom as providing a clue to a viable application or appropriation of Nishida's theory.

Mondialisation in Nancy

In the case of Nancy, the rarefication of the sense of the world through globalization is precisely what opens the possibility for an alternative to globalization. In two of his works, *Le Sens du monde* and *Le creation du monde ou la mondialisation*, he distinguishes what he calls *mondialisation* from globalization.⁶³ While both globalization and mondialisation refer to the unification of parts of the world, in Nancy's view globalization works to produce uniformity through economy and technology, leading to an uninhabitable "un-world" (*immonde*) without sense.⁶⁴ He thus calls globalization in this respect *agglomération*—in English agglomeration or agglomeration—in reference to the Latin *glomus*, a ball of accumulations or the piling up of a series of conglomerations of "urban networks."⁶⁵ By contrast, mondialisation works to open the possibility of an "authentic world-forming"; a making of sense and creation of a world that makes sense; a world of distinct

human ways of being in a process of expansion. In tending toward the “un-world,” globalization works to suppress further “world-forming,”⁶⁶ whereas mondialisation works for the inexhaustible creation of meaning. The product of globalization qua agglomeration is *globality*, a closed “sphere of unitality” grasped as such, accessible for mastery.⁶⁷ Contrariwise, the product of mondialisation is the ongoing opening of the space of meaning that puts into question the very sense of the world. Paradoxically, however, in bringing the interconnections of various horizons into view on a global scale, it is globalization that makes mondialisation possible in the first place.⁶⁸ In either case, the world is one and yet a unity of many, a multiplicity of worlds. The question, then, is how to approach that many-ness. While that multiplicity can mean disparity and opposition, the world’s unity also involves the sharing and exposition of the many worlds within it.⁶⁹ For Nancy it is this question that leads to the differentiation of mondialisation from globalization. He also presents this question in terms of what the revealed groundlessness of the world entails—that is, the issue of meaning and nihilism.

The world’s globalization may tend toward nihilism, but at the same time its mondialisation can open the possibility of meaning. The de-signification of sense and the leveling of values under general equivalency unveils in the very emptiness of the world a space for the possibility of meaning.⁷⁰ As absolutes and foundations topple in what Nancy calls “detheologization,” the world becomes senseless. It is stripped naked, and revealed to be “without reason,” “without why.” He tells us that this end of the sense of the world is the end of the world of sense.⁷¹ It shows that there is nothing but the world itself, naked, without ground or transcendent governor. The withdrawal of being (qua ground) is “the nothingness of being, the being of freedom”—that is, a free opening.⁷²

This groundlessness frees a space, but with this space also appears a forking path, and a choice: Do we take the road to nihilism or the road to sense-making-world and world-making-sense—that is, emptiness as meaninglessness or emptiness as opening?⁷³ This question itself, Nancy implies, opens the possibility of meaning and may undo nihilism. He suggests that we might take the sense or meaning of the world—in its nonsense or meaninglessness—as nothing other than the possibility of its sense/meaning and of the immanence of value in the world itself in this very sense. He tells us that this is the one *value*—“the value of the world as such” and “of being-in-the-world as significance—or as a resonance without reason”—that capital fails to commodify without remainder.⁷⁴ Without looking to an other transcendent *world*, the path opens us to an other *space* that is “of place and of risk.”⁷⁵ It is the very exposure to finitude, groundlessness—including death—that opens us to community. For it exposes us beyond ourselves to others equally finite. Only on the basis of our fundamental finitude—of always *already being in*, or in Nishidan terms our implacement, which is always already shared—is

the being of the world opened up as our *being with*.⁷⁶ The “creation of the world” in this sense, for Nancy, means the spacing of meaning and spacing *as* meaning, whereby being is circulated in the *with* of being *with* one another.⁷⁷ In this sense Nancy reverses Heidegger’s apparent prioritization of individual authenticity over communality. He agrees with Heidegger that sense or meaning constitutes the world’s existence. But *Mitsein* (co-being, being with) ontologically precedes *Dasein* facing death in its singularity and not the other way around.⁷⁸ In our co-being *to* and *in* the world, *world* is structured as *sense* and *sense* is structured as *world*.⁷⁹ And in thus *making* the world, we *make* sense (of the world as well as of death) by exposing the absolute value that the world *is* by itself—that is, absolute value as the being-with of all that is—the world as the spacing and intertwining of many worlds, the meaning of which makes us *we* of the world.⁸⁰

Freedom, according to Nancy, is that withdrawal of being, groundlessness, in a “founding” that is nothing other than the exposure of existence—as Heidegger put it, “exposure to the disclosedness of beings as such.”⁸¹ Freedom as the ungrounding of ground in the finitude of our existence is a free spacing: “freedom offers itself as spacious and spacing.”⁸² It occurs in the withdrawing of being (qua ground) before every singular being, a nothingness that provides the space for singularities of being in their common finitude as opposed to a common substance that would subsume them.⁸³ It is “the freedom that makes existence exist in the open . . . and at the same time produces the openness of the world and its free spacing.”⁸⁴ As such freedom is at the heart of *shared* being, ontological sharing, spacing the space of co-being.⁸⁵ Thereby the withdrawal of being (absence of essence) and the intensification of nothingness (of essence, of ground) turns into an affirmation of existence as its own essence, or *in-essence*.⁸⁶

Rather than possessing freedom, we discover freedom in our ex-sistence that is our in-essence, perhaps not unlike how the absence of *svabhāva* is what permits the co-origination of beings for the Mādhyamikas and how its realization—including the realization of *anātman*—is necessary for *nirvāṇa*.⁸⁷ Its spacing as such has no form; rather it gives *room* for forms and formations, singularities, of existence in their difference and relations.⁸⁸ Hence the end of sovereignty in the spacing of the world (i.e., of ecotechnics) *itself* means the *empty place* of sovereignty, where there is no longer a transcendent referent or ground, no common essence of the good.⁸⁹ But at the same time that absence or withdrawal of ground is the opening of freedom as a spacing: “existence as the sharing of being.”⁹⁰ For existence, as we saw above for Nancy, is nothing other than *coexistence*, it is never alone and nothing other than being, “exposed to the outside, exteriority, multiplicity, alterity, and change”—that is, exposed *as* being *to* being.⁹¹ Nancy states that freedom in this sense provides the archi-originary *ethos*, the groundless ground of every ethics, without which there would be neither Plato’s Good,

nor Kant's good will nor Marxian revolution.⁹² This seems to be the axis point for Nancy where globalization might turn to mondialisation, opening a free space for co-being or Nishida's world of worlds.

Nancy's theory of justice, like his understanding of freedom, is thus also based on this notion of the world revealed in its groundlessness as a space for co-being with others. The world that is without any transcendent norms or normative grounds, the world in its emptiness of principles, grounds, ends—that is, the world as it is—nevertheless sets forth this one law from within itself: *it must be shared out*.⁹³ As stated above, its emptiness is the space for its sharing. On this basis Nancy suggests the world's *nomos* to be “the distribution, apportionment, and allocation of its parts,” in each and every time “*as it is fitting*.”⁹⁴ Beings are constituted in their singularity through this spacing, which they share as mutually *other*.⁹⁵ Justice means what is due to each unique singularity in its coexistence with others. Justice is thus to be rendered both to the “singular absoluteness of the proper”—to the singular individual—and to the “absolute impropriety of the community of existents”—the communal space that is the property of no one.⁹⁶

The line of difference that distinguishes each from all others is also what connects them together. Justice is to be rendered to that line—the line of difference—in its indefinite intertwining that constitutes their coexistence. Coexistence via this line of difference means that they are sustained not by anything transcendent to them or grounding them nor by their being one, but by “the *nothing* of the *co-* that is . . . the in-between or the with of the being-together of singularities.”⁹⁷ Again, the nothing provides the space for their mutuality, their difference and their connection, and this is the space permitting the forming of the world, the coexistence that makes the world. Justice as such means opening to this space for the coexistence of the different and the novel, alteration and alterity, and thereby forming the world in being and meaning. In opening an *ethos* of cohabitation to be worked for, justice thus entails an ongoing *praxis*.

Although ontologically we find ourselves always already placed in the open space of the world, sharing itself is never simply given.⁹⁸ We must work for it, creating and recreating justice and a world of justice: “The only task of justice is thus to create a world tirelessly, the space of an unappeasable and always unsettled sovereignty of meaning.”⁹⁹ While we are co-being in the world at each instant, the opening of its space must be ongoing in an endless constituting, deconstituting, and reconstituting, whereby identities—the “we” of this co-being—are suspended and (re)defined, reinvented again and again.¹⁰⁰ For Nancy this is *the praxis of the sense of the world*—the project of creating meaning and making sense of the world—that the end of the world of sense opens up.¹⁰¹ It involves the shared endeavor of perpetual questioning and critique, working against closure and stratification—opening the open—made possible by realizing the “empty space of sovereignty,”¹⁰²

the revelation of the world as ungrounded, nonfoundational, nontranscendent, suspended on nothing, that is, the world as *ex nihilo*. In this way Nancy's ontology of opening the world, far from promoting indifference and nihilism, entails an engaged being-in-the-world, an ethics.

CONCLUSION

Nancy's notions of mondialisation and the freeing of the world as the space for difference, multiplicity, and co-being indicate a direction in which we might take Nishida's concepts of the place of nothing and the dialectic of the world in our attempt to apply them to our contemporary situation. Nishida's reference to coprosperity spheres—despite what the army ideologues might have hoped for—assumes his notion of a world of worlds, which in turn is grounded in his theory of the dialectical world and the place of absolute nothing. The grounding is an ungrounding undertow that serves to perpetually displace, or undermine, the tendency toward totalizing claims, whether essentialism in metaphysics or totalitarianism in politics. As noted above, the dialectic of self-negation translates into an *ethos* of humility that is applicable in the field of world politics as well as in the contemporary situation of intercultural encounter. It calls for an openness in the face of others and caution against dogmatism. Such openness is made possible in our recognition of the groundless ground—the world's desubstantializing matrix—that opens the space for planetary coexistence. This is the source of—and place for—distinct ways of being (and thinking) that would have to be assumed despite difference as the *wherein* of their being-in-the-world. Its formlessness provides the space for the co-being of truly different ways of being. On the micro scale, cities like New York City or Toronto today, or ancient imperial Rome, where people of diverse beliefs and ethnicities cohabit at least for the most part peacefully; situations like Occupy Wall Street that brought an eclectic mix of people of diverse convictions together to articulate a common protest; and/or institutions like universities where people from diverse backgrounds work together for common but fluid projects they agree upon, might be examples—even if less than perfect—of such practice. But with globalization, the point would have to be to realize that co-being in difference on a global scale—what Nancy calls *mondialisation* and Nishida the world of worlds. Faced with globalization or eco-technics, both Nancy's senses of freedom and justice and Nishida's notion of a world of worlds and the humility its dialectic implies would mean the appropriation of the world's space unveiled in its ungrounded openness as a *nothing*. Its abyss—emptiness of substance or essence—signifies an originary space of unlimited potential to be shared, permitting difference and creativity, allowing for multiple possibilities, and precluding totalizing closure.

Each thinker in formulating this notion of an empty space refers to the Greek concept of *chōra*. In Plato's *Timaeus*, *chōra* served as the receptacle for the in-forming of transcendent ideas that produce the genesis of the cosmos. Nishida refers to it at the beginning of his 1926 essay, "Basho," as having inspired the conception of his notion of "place." But prior to Plato, *chōra* in ordinary Greek also had the sense of the country or the environing region. Nancy reminds us of how the production of a city (*polis*), its delimitation from the surroundings, assumes the indeterminable *chōra* as the possibility of places, *where* the founding of the city takes place. It is the *nothing* upon or within which being is founded or existence is decided for. And such *poiesis* of the city is also a *praxis*—a founding that takes place by a free decision.¹⁰³ Thus for Nancy freedom implies the freedom of a free space and a spacing for freedom, giving room for forms and formations, or in Nishida's terms, a self-forming formlessness.¹⁰⁴

And if that self-formation of the world necessitates the coparticipation of individuals as Nishida's dialectic suggests, the only option would seem to be self-government of people. Cornelius Castoriadis looked to the political self-organization of the ancient Greeks (of the sixth to the fourth centuries BCE) into the *polis*, especially that of Athens, as providing a possible germ for an ideally autonomous—*auto-nomos*, that is, "self-governing"—society constructed out of an indeterminate nothing ("chaos" in Greek).¹⁰⁵ The world of worlds or mondialisation would imply the realization of such autonomy on a worldwide scale. Here we can mention Fred Dallmayr's hope that globalization, despite "the unchecked sway of transnational capital around the world," also promises "'globalization from below' . . . the attempt to forge or build up the global city through the interaction of cultures and peoples around the world."¹⁰⁶ But autonomy in this sense, that is on a worldwide scale, necessitates a recognition of that *choratic* expanse wherein we *all ex-sist*. Spacing as such entails humility in facing difference and alterity within the abyssal source of creation. This space of the world that is *chōratic* is the *nihil* of the *ex nihilo* of the world's creation—the formation of a world of worlds, a world that makes sense—for which all of us, each in our own way, are responsible. We are thus called to bear in mind the indefinite and irreducible expanse of the nothing wherein we all are in coimplacement amid mutual difference. Bearing this, we can work for the formation of a world of worlds, a world that makes sense so that we might make sense of the world.

NOTES

1. Z11: 445. All references to Nishida's works are to the original Japanese editions contained in the multiple volumes of *Nishida Kitarō zenshū* [Collected Works of Nishida Kitarō] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2002). Z stands for *Nishida Kitarō zenshū*, followed by the volume and page number.

2. Z9: 10.

3. Z3: 415.
4. Z23: 73.
5. Z23: 123.
6. See Takemura Makio, *Nishida Kitarō to Bukkyō—Zen to Shinshū no kontei o kiwameru* [Nishida Kitarō and Buddhism: Mastering the Roots of Zen and Shinshū] (Tokyo: Daitō shuppan, 2002), 21.
7. We see this extension of the meaning of *basho* from its initial 1926 formulation in his “Basho” (Place) essay, in *Mu no jikakuteki gentei* (The Self-Aware Determination of Nothing) of 1932, the two-volume *Tetsugaku no konpon mondai* (Fundamental Problems of Philosophy) from 1933 to 1934, and the several volumes of *Tetsugaku ronbunshū* (Philosophical Essays) that came out throughout the 1930s and 1940s. “Basho” is contained in Z3 and has also been recently translated in Nishida Kitarō, *Place and Dialectic: Two Essays by Nishida Kitarō*, trans. John W. M. Krummel and Shigenori Nagatomo (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). *Mu no jikakuteki gentei* is in Z5, *Tetsugaku no konpon mondai* is in Z6, and *Tetsugaku ronbunshū* is in Z7. For an English translation of *Tetsugaku no konpon mondai*, see *Fundamental Problems of Philosophy: The World of Action and the Dialectical World*, trans. David Dilworth (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1970).
8. Z8: 162, 314, 329.
9. See Z8: 219.
10. Z6: 207.
11. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 8.
12. *Ibid.*, 10.
13. *Ibid.*, 56.
14. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 42–43, 129n25; Nancy, *Sense of the World*, 78.
15. See Nancy, *Creation of the World*, 47; Nancy, *Sense of the World*, 41.
16. See Nancy, *Creation of the World*, 120n20.
17. *Ibid.*, 51.
18. *Ibid.*, 51.
19. See *Ibid.*, 52.
20. This multileveled dialect, which I have called a *chiasma* in my other writings on Nishida, involves simultaneously: (1) the universal’s self-determination; (2) the universal’s determination of the individual; (3) the individual’s self-determination; (4) the individuals’ reciprocal codeterminations; and (5) the individuals’ reverse determination of the universal. The “universal” (*ippansha*) in this case can be understood as the world itself.
21. In fact this idea in Nishida reminds one of the Buddhist concept of dependent origination as developed by the Chinese Huayan (Jp. Kegon) school: the mutual nonobstruction and interpenetration of thing-events (Ch. *shishi wuai*; Jp. *jiji muge*) comprising the world on the basis of their very patterning or “principle” (Ch. *li*; Jp. *ri*) that is in fact their emptiness (Ch. *kong*; Jp. *kū*).
22. See Z6: 273, 275.
23. See Z3: 437–38.
24. Nancy, *Creation of the World*, 42, 43.
25. *Ibid.*, 42.
26. *Ibid.*, 42.
27. *Ibid.*, 71, 73.
28. *Ibid.*, 70.
29. Nancy, *Sense of the World*, 101.
30. See, for example, Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), xv, xii, xiv.
31. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O’Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 135–36.
32. We might recall the opening lines of Karl Marx’s *Capital*: “The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as ‘an immense accumula-

tion of commodities.” Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (NYC: International Publishers, 1967), 43.

33. Nancy, *Creation of the World*, 109.

34. Nancy, *Being Singular*, xiii–xiv.

35. *Ibid.*, xiii.

36. See *Ibid.*, xiii.

37. On this and the following see Ueda Shizuteru, “Nishida, Nationalism, and the War in Question” *Rude Awakenings*, ed. James Heisig and John Maraldo (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1994), 102–3.

38. *Ibid.*, 103.

39. Z6: 353.

40. Z6: 353; Z11: 445.

41. Z9: 91.

42. This text, which has its source in a talk Nishida gave when he was invited by the Research Center on National Policy/Strategy (Kokusaku kenkyūkai), was distorted and simplified under government hands. The Kokusaku kenkyūkai had close ties to the army. Nishida was requested to put his talk into writing and did so after being persuaded that this could give him the opportunity to influence the content of a speech being prepared by Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki. According to Tanabe Juri, army officials found Nishida’s draft incomprehensible and wanted it simplified. When Nishida did not respond to this request, Tanabe himself (together with Kanai Shōji) out of necessity rewrote the manuscript, evidently altering its tone, and distributed the copies to the officials as well as to Nishida himself. In Goto-Jones’s reading, the newer tone resonates much more closely with the orthodoxy of the time, making it confrontational and conducive to the Japanese enforcement of the “co-prosperity sphere” upon other nations in contrast to the more inclusivist and nonconfrontational nature of Nishida’s own version. See Christopher Goto-Jones, *Political Philosophy in Japan: Nishida, the Kyoto School and Co-prosperity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 22, 76, 79. Nishida in fact complained about this version as a distortion of his original work. He warns in a letter to fellow philosopher Watsuji Tetsurō that the newer version could be the seed for future attacks on him and adds that he wanted instead to emphasize the global aspect of the Japanese spirit in contrast to the narrow vision of the militant nationalists. See Z23: 110 (letter 3821); also editor’s postscript in Z11: 560–61.

43. See Z11: 445.

44. Z9: 52, 59, 76–77.

45. Z11: 445.

46. Z11: 446.

47. Ueda, “Nishida, Nationalism,” 89.

48. See Z11: 445.

49. Z23: 386.

50. See Z9: 80; Z13: 19–20.

51. Nishida’s choice of words here—like “co-prosperity sphere”—is controversial. However, the term *kokutai* has been used in a variety of political significances throughout Japanese history. By 1935 political discourse had become severely restricted by the government and any statement that could be taken to threaten national policy as religiously sanctioned or to question the primacy of the emperor was suspect. Nishida’s use of this term in *Sekai no shinchitsujo no genri* coincided with its appearance in the document *Kokutai no hongī* (Fundamentals of the National Polity), published by the Ministry of Education in 1937 and in the authorship of which Nishida was reluctant to participate. But Nishida treated *kokutai* as an organic entity rather than as a legal institution. Goto-Jones thus argues that Nishida’s use should be read as a moral critique of the militarists’ understanding of *kokutai*. See Goto-Jones, *Political Philosophy in Japan*, 71–72, 73; also Ueda, “Nishida, Nationalism,” 90–95. The same goes for Nishida’s use of the term “co-prosperity sphere,” also popularly employed for militarist propaganda. According to Tanabe Juri’s recollection of Nishida’s meeting with army officials at the Research Center on National Strategy, Nishida rebuked the research institute by telling them that a genuine co-prosperity sphere “is definitely not imperialism [*teikokushugi*]. . . . A co-prosperity sphere coerced while fettering the freewill of everyone else would not be a co-prosperity sphere.” See

editor's afterword to the 1966 edition of Z12: 471. Nishida distinguishes his coprosperity sphere from an ethnocentrism that becomes an ethnic egoism (*minzoku jikoshugi*) and inevitably leads to aggression and imperialism (Z11: 449).

52. See Z9: 52, 59, 76–77.

53. See Z9: 57.

54. Z11: 450. The phrase "*hakkō iu*" originally appeared in the ancient chronicle *Nihon shoki* (Chronicles of Japan). From this a derivative phrase, "*hakkō ichiu*," was coined, and was also being used during the World War period by militarists, Japanists, and the radical right, with similar meanings. See Bret Davis, "Toward a World of Worlds: Nishida, the Kyoto School, and the Place of Cross-Cultural Dialogue," in *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy*, ed. James W. Heisig (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 2006), 238.

55. Z12: 409. See Gereon Kopf, "Between the Global and the Local: Applying the Logic of the One and the Many to a Global Age," in *Frontiers in Japanese Philosophy*, vol. 4, ed. Lam Wing-Keung and Cheung Ching-yuen (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 2009), 76–89; also Goto-Jones, *Political Philosophy in Japan*, 89; and Davis, "Toward a World of Worlds," 231–32, 234, 236–37.

56. Z11: 446–47.

57. For more on this and the following, see Kopf, "Between the Global and the Local," 79.

58. See Z6: 335.

59. See Kopf, "Between the Global and the Local," 82. There are further issues that need to be addressed in discussing the relationship of Nishida and globalism. An example is his over-emphasis on the centrality of the nation-state, which is also a product of essentialism. He ignores the issues of multiethnic states or multicultural nations as well as of multinational corporations. On this see John Maraldo, "The Problem of World Culture: Towards an Appropriation of Nishida's Philosophy of Nation and Culture," *The Eastern Buddhist* 28, no. 2 (Autumn 1995), 194; and Davis, "Toward a World of Worlds," 225.

60. It is interesting to note that, in ordinary usage, the Sino-Japanese graph for emptiness (空; Jp. *sora*) also signifies "sky" as well as "space." Furthermore there is a similar association made in Sanskrit; in the *Astasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, *śūnyatā* (emptiness) was used synonymously with "space." And the idea of the sky as an "open space" (*ākāśa*) in the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras allegedly inspired Nāgārjuna's own use of *śūnyatā*. On this see Nancy McCagney, *Nāgārjuna and the Philosophy of Openness* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), xix–xxi, 25–26, 35, 58.

61. Z11: 444–45.

62. See Z10: 315–16.

63. Although in French *mondialisation* is usually used to translate the English *globalization*, Nancy intentionally differentiates their meanings.

64. Nancy, *Creation of the World*, 34; Nancy, *Sense of the World*, 9. The French term here in everyday speech would be used to mean "base," "vile," "foul," but literally means "un-world." See translator's explanation (*Creation of the World*, 117n2).

65. Nancy, *Creation of the World*, 33–34, 118n5.

66. *Ibid.*, 50.

67. *Ibid.*, 28.

68. *Ibid.*, 36–37.

69. Nancy, *Being Singular*, 185.

70. Nancy, *Sense of the World*, 3.

71. *Ibid.*, 5.

72. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget McDonald (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 68.

73. See Nancy, *Sense of the World*, 8. For example, in *Experience of Freedom*, Nancy refers to Heidegger's 1955–1956 lecture "Principle of Reason," in which the examination of the "principle of reason" leads one to a leap that allows one to pass from the interrogation of being as ground or reason (*Grund*) to the thinking of being as "without reason" in its "groundlessness" (Nancy, *Experience of Freedom*, 42). The revelation of groundlessness in this regard opens up a free space—the abyss is an opening. The English translation of this lecture is Martin

Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991).

74. Nancy, *Creation of the World*, 47.

75. *Ibid.*, 51.

76. In other words, in freeing us to face our finitude, it frees us from absolutes—or the will to impose absolutes on one another—so that we may recognize our co-being or implacement in this shared space of groundlessness that is the world.

77. Nancy, *Being Singular*, 2–3.

78. For it is in community that we make sense of death, which for Heidegger in turn shapes how we make sense of our existence.

79. Nancy, *Sense of the World*, 8.

80. Nancy, *Being Singular*, 4, 5.

81. Nancy, *Experience of Freedom*, 92. Nancy is quoting Heidegger. The English translation is Martin Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 128.

82. Nancy, *Experience of Freedom*, 197n1.

83. Of course Nancy’s ontology of the singular, for example, in *Being Singular Plural*, is quite distinct in focus from Nishida’s ontology of the individual developed in the 1930s. Nancy’s ontology is an attempt, taking off from Heidegger’s fundamental ontology of *Dasein*, to account for co-being as co-originary with singularity and not derivative. Nishida’s account of the individual is more focused on its interrelationality and implacement; its relation to others and to its environment, place. But the interrelationality and the singularity of individuals are not necessarily incompatible. Both imply a primal place as their *wherein* that makes them possible. Hence for Nancy, singulars coexist; their singularity implies co-being.

84. Nancy, *Experience of Freedom*, 192n2.

85. *Ibid.*, 70–71.

86. *Ibid.*, 86.

87. *Ibid.*, 92, 96. Nancy on page 96 also quotes Heidegger’s statement from “On the Essence of Truth” that “Man does not ‘possess’ freedom as a property. At best, the converse holds: freedom, ek-sistent, disclosive *Da-sein*, possesses man” (129).

88. Nancy, *Experience of Freedom*, 145.

89. Nancy, *Being Singular*, 136–37.

90. Nancy, *Experience of Freedom*, 75, also see 78.

91. Nancy, *Being Singular*, 187.

92. Nancy, *Experience of Freedom*, 162–63.

93. Nancy, *Being Singular*, 185; Nancy, *Creation of the World*, 109.

94. Nancy, *Being Singular*, 185; Nancy, *Creation of the World*, 109.

95. Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 27.

96. See Nancy, *Being Singular*, 187–88; Nancy, *Creation of the World*, 110–11.

97. Nancy, *Creation of the World*, 73.

98. Nancy, *Being Singular*, 185; Nancy, *Creation of the World*, 109.

99. Nancy, *Creation of the World*, 112.

100. See Nancy, *Being Singular*, 71.

101. Nancy, *Sense of the World*, 9.

102. Nancy, *Creation of the World*, 104.

103. See Nancy, *Experience of Freedom*, 84–85.

104. *Ibid.*, 145.

105. See Castoriadis, “The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy,” in *The Castoriadis Reader*, trans. and ed. David Ames Curtis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 267–69, esp. 274–75; and in David Ames Curtis, ed., *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy: Essays in Political Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 81–123, esp. 105–6.

106. Fred Dallmayr, *Achieving Our World: Toward a Global and Plural Democracy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 24.