

AGGRESSIVITY, ANXIETY, AND THE PLACE OF THE THIRD: INTERSECTING KIERKEGAARD, LACAN, AND WATSUJI

Thomas Diesner

Abstract

Aggressivity and anxiety are at the root of various social, political, individual, and therapeutic problems. Aggressive confrontations are usually based on a bipolar worldview, in which the other is experienced as the one who forces a certain course of action upon the self. What is missing in such a situation is something that enables mediation between the two sides to create an opening in its fixed structure. This is a third position or a place for a Third. Anxiety can be a reason for one to avoid an open encounter, for one tends to close, or put a limit to, the abyss of anxiety. But there is also a potential for opening, which lies in the place of the Third. In this article, I explore the possibility for such an opening along the place of the Third drawing on three authors: Kierkegaard, Lacan, and Watsuji.

Key terms: *Aggressivity, Anxiety, Third, psychoanalysis, Kierkegaard, Lacan, Watsuji*

Aggressivity and anxiety lie at the root of social, political, as well as individual and therapeutic problems. We need to cope with such problems not only in countries that have been designated as third world countries but also in the highly developed civic societies around the globe. Russia's war against Ukraine is certainly the most recent example of an engagement in aggressive confrontation involving open violence. Confrontations are usually based on a bipolar worldview – it is the other, so goes the justification, who forces a certain course of action upon the self. What is missing in this structure is something with the capacity to mediate between its two poles. Essentially, this is a third position, or a place for a Third.

Initially, the character of this Third, or that in it which would make it capable of serving as a precondition for alternative modes of action, may seem vague. However, a number of ideas on the Third can be found in a variety of contexts ranging from literature, logic, and post-colonial theory, to psychoanalysis.¹ I was particularly fascinated by some perspectives on the Third advanced in theories of intersubjectivity, in which it is understood as an intermediate

¹ Eva Eßlinger et al (Eds.), *Die Figur des Dritten. Ein kulturwissenschaftliches Paradigma* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010).

space between two or more people. If we take a political context as an example, the most widespread assumption there is that it is a third, neutral party that could mediate between two apparently irreconcilable positions. Mediation there succeeds, if and only if it is based on a common ground on which the opponents could reach an agreement. Such a ground could include common language, practice, or values, but in all events it will have to make reaching a unified perspective possible. What seems most important here is to create a dynamic that conditions a deviation from and overcoming of hardened bipolar positions. Such a dynamic will have to open a space that enables one to move and make shifts in the fixed constellation safe. In what follows, I will understand such an opening in the mutual dependence within the bipolar constellation as the place of the Third. I will endeavor to show that, unlike the fixed duality of the relationship of self and other, the place of the Third can make the safe encounter of two different subjects possible. Whereas without such an opening, something shared between the two poles of a bipolar constellation, such an encounter will fail.

To explore the possibility for such an opening, it will be essential to go back to one of the central characteristics of subjectivity. But contrary to the essentialist approaches to subjectivity, it will be necessary to remind and acknowledge that the subject is ultimately relationally constituted. Thus, I will draw on authors, for whom the relational approach is crucial. The existential situation in such a relational approach has been equally decisive, and so philosophizing as a practice is inevitably related to the conditions of life, or to the necessities of life (*Not des Lebens*), as Freud has put it.² Thus, in accordance with this approach, I will proceed to assert the importance of the place of the Third on (inter)subjective-existential grounds, while demonstrating in the process that a loss of the place of the Third – through either fixation or ignorance – will become the condition for aggressivity and anxiety to assume undue control over human action.

I would like to focus on three authors here, not least for the purpose of bringing different perspectives into dialogue, or better into polylogue. More particularly, I will try to show that the place of the Third can be identified from the perspective of Søren Kierkegaard as orientation in a relation,³ from that of Jacques Lacan as language or the symbolic, and from that of the Japanese philosopher Watsuji Tetsurō (和辻 哲郎) as emptiness. Common to all three, I maintain, are two aspects: an opening that they introduce into the fixed dualistic relation of self and other and a recognition of a lack instead of its concealment. In this sense, these authors adopt a threefold structure which is more or less explicit and used to fundamentally revisit our understanding of both subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

I would like to note also that whereas the selection of these authors is indicative of the value and relevance of their philosophical thought with regard to the issue at stake here, it is also indicative of the possibility to engage them in a contribution to an intercultural philosophy, not in the sense of comparative philosophy, but rather in the sense of multicultural philosophy that is part of an ongoing conversation. Such a multicultural philosophy is meant to take the positions of both non-Western and Western authors seriously and to identify common aspects

² Sigmund Freud, “Zeitgemäßes über Krieg und Tod (1915),” *Studienausgabe*, Vol. IX (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 2000), p. 37.

³ This paper is a revised and extended version of a presentation given at the Kierkegaard Conference organized by KUD Apokalypsa and Kierkegaard Institute in Ljubljana in August 2020.

of their perspectives and arguments. In this case, I will aim to show that a specific development in Japanese philosophy, and particularly in the thought of the so-called Kyoto School to which Watsuji belongs, is – following the opening of the country upon the arrival of the so-called “black ships” (黒船) of Matthew Perry in 1853 – in a special way intercultural in itself. For the double work of its main figures – of simultaneously reflecting on Western philosophy and on the thought of their own tradition – gave rise to a unique perspective on the philosophical problems, which can be seen as being at once global and local.

Søren Kierkegaard: The Self as a Third

Traditionally, Kierkegaard has been regarded as a subjective thinker. This however does not mean that he takes the subject or the self as a self-evident fact of experience, which can thus serve as a basis for further theoretical work.⁴ Instead, in a well-known passage of his *The Sickness unto Death*, he defines the self as a relation:

The self is a relation which relates itself to its own self, or it is that in the relation [which accounts for it] that the relation relates itself to its own self; the self is not the relation but [consists in the fact] that the relation relates itself to its own self. Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short it is a synthesis.⁵

According to Kierkegaard, a synthesis is only a relation between two poles and, as such, it is only a negative third. This means that, if understood as a simple bipolar relation, a synthesis would not be sufficient to constitute the self. Instead, it is the relation to this synthesizing relation, to the negative third, added as a positive third, that completes the constitution of the self. As Kierkegaard puts it,

In the relation between two, the relation is the third term as a negative unity, and the two relate themselves to the relation, and in the relation to the relation; such a relation is that between soul and body, when man is regarded as soul. If on the contrary the relation relates itself to its own self, the relation is then the positive third term, and this is the self.⁶

What is important for Kierkegaard here is that the self can miss this relation and that actually this tends to be the case, whereas despair is the expression of this missing. In the course of his work, Kierkegaard describes the structures or figures that characterize such a missing or failing in the relation of finite and infinite, possibility and necessity, as well as in the aspect of consciousness. With regard to the latter, he identifies typologically three moments that characterize it. The first of them is the ignorance of the fact that despair guides the self in the self’s own actions.⁷ If this ignorance is overcome, then two further structural dynamics of the self become apparent – one of the self desperately wanting to be itself⁸ (in which I would like

⁴ Michael Theunissen, *Das Selbst auf dem Grund der Verzweiflung* (Frankfurt/Main: Hain 1991), p. 16.

⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death (Sygdommen til Døden)*, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton University Press, 1849/1941), p. 17.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

to recognize the modern day quest for authenticity), and another of the self desperately not wanting to be itself.⁹ We need to emphasize here that Kierkegaard associates the former with defiance (which I would like to associate here with aggressiveness), and the latter with weakness and avoiding real social encounters.¹⁰

If one relates these remarks to some made in *The Concept of Anxiety*, it becomes obvious that for Kierkegaard anxiety (not fear, which has an object) arises in a leap of reflection in which the mind reflects over or refers to itself.¹¹ More specifically, the mind in its not-fully-conscious, “dreaming” state produces the simple synthesis of two poles; whereas the mind as fully present, as self-consciousness, as a relation to this relation, involves also ‘the positive third’. Between a still ‘dreaming’ consciousness and self-consciousness there is a temporal gap, a lack, or even an abyss, caused by the reflexive reception of the synthesis of the two polarities (finite and infinite, possibility and necessity). Becoming aware of this abyss brings forward a manifold of possibilities for realizing a synthesis in freedom.¹² This makes the self dizzy and leads to anxiety, especially as the synthesis which is the realization of the self in self-consciousness can also be missed. Here Kierkegaard specifically stresses the ambivalent nature of anxiety: on one hand, anxiety impedes the self from being able to fulfill itself in its entirety; on the other hand, it is precisely this possibility – of the self not being able to fulfill itself – that remains present in anxiety. In the latter respect, anxiety is a driving force, a factor of the singularization and the subjectification of one’s own fate. Thus, anxiety makes a liberating cut in one’s own fate by producing a breach; that is, a knot and a middle ground, the subject itself, which means that without anxiety there is neither scientific, nor artistic production.¹³

This is what, according to Kierkegaard, characterizes our existential situation: the self manifests itself as an apperception of a relation of opposite determinations or modes of a possible life. That is, it manifests itself not as a substance, but as a relation, and thus also as a third position in its relation with the other. This position is such that in it one cannot and will not be certain of oneself. For, the self is a task, a cultivating effort, which is oriented towards a unified presence, the originality of the self, but can never reach it. In other words, this existential self is in itself a third position, a place of synthesis. If one remains aware of the inevitability of one’s precariousness, one’s anxiety, and does not try to conceal or suppress it, one becomes aware of oneself, knows oneself as existing with the other selves, and could thus become a place of encounter with such selves. For, Kierkegaard is clear that his self is not a solipsistic self and that, instead, as a doubled relation, the self is ultimately constituted by an-other. I will take this notion of the self as a point of transition to the second key author of my discussion – Jacques Lacan.

⁹ Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.78.

¹¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Der Begriff der Angst. Eine simple psychologisch-hinweisende Erörterung in Richtung des dogmatischen Problems der Erbsünde von Vigilius Haufniensis (Begrebet Angest)* (Frankfurt/Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1844/1984), p. 47.

¹² Ibid., p. 143.

¹³ André Michels, “Angst, zwischen Genießen und Begehren,” *Riss Materialien. Ent-täuschung des Subjekts: Angst in Philosophie, Psychoanalyse und Kultur. Beiträge der Summerschool, Zürich 2015* (Zürich: Vissivo Verlag, 2018, pp. 23-46), pp. 31-39.

Jacques Lacan: From a Dualistic-Imaginary to a Triangular-Symbolic Relationship

Like Kierkegaard, psychoanalysis places subjectivity at the center of its attention but focuses (far more than he does) on specific relationships of the self with other people, especially with primary others, such as parents. In particular, Lacan, who works in the tradition of Freud, emphasizes the constitutive role of the other/Other for the self and maintains that the self is constituted when the dualistic relationship with its fixed character is opened and transcended, which is achieved with the help of a third party.

For Freud, the concept of the Oedipus complex stands for a decisive psychosexual experience and is used in psychoanalysis to explain the immediate relationships of the self with its parents. Freud is primarily concerned with the position of the father whose authority introduces a separation or a rupture in the relationship of the self with its mother. The outcome of such a separation is anxiety that the self experiences as loss of an originary enjoyment (*jouissance*), which is essentially a separation-castration.¹⁴ Ultimately, the mother is given up as an object of desire and instead an internalization of the paternal authority takes place. Lacan appropriates the Freudian approach, but shifts the emphasis to the position of the mother. For Lacan, it is the mother who is the threat and against whom the self needs a defense. The mother is the Real, the nature itself, which the father, the Symbolic, aims to transcend.¹⁵ This intervention of the paternal leads again to a division into the twoness of the dualistic relationship of mother and child, but this time setting a barrier which inaugurates desire. This is how, for Lacan, the self becomes possible in the first place. Anxiety in this Oedipal situation is linked to a lack, openness, or emptiness in the face of desire. It is both separation anxiety and its reverse fusion anxiety.¹⁶

In Lacan's theory, the concept of the lack plays a central role which with regard to anxiety takes on an additional doubling. For, anxiety also arises as a signal when something appears in the place of the lack; that is, when there is a lack of deficiency and thus differences seem to disappear. Indeed, on Lacan's view, only a lack, a gap in the whole, allows "the shifting and choosing in matters of identification and desire."¹⁷ Whereas to have a desire of one's own means to have a history and to be a self.¹⁸

To take a step back, we have encountered here the problem of the dual relationship again, now in the context of self-realization within the Oedipal triangle. Lacan offers another perspective on that relationship by means of his notion of the mirror stage as a structural aspect of the formation of the ego. More particularly, he suggests that the identification with one's specular image constitutes an ambivalent relation with the other, involving at once eroticism and aggressivity.¹⁹ Here I will focus specifically on aggressivity.

For Lacan, aggressivity is rooted in tensions that are internal to ego's self-image and represents the most primitive reaction of the subject against the constraints of its own imaginary

¹⁴ Cf. Paul Verhaeghe, *New Studies of old Villains: A Radical Reconsideration of the Oedipus Complex* (New York: Other Press 2009), pp. 33-34.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁸ Peter Widmer, *Angst: Erläuterungen zu Lacans Seminar X* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2004), p. 134.

¹⁹ Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," *Écrits: A Selection*, Transl. by B. Fink (London: Routledge, 1949/2002).

identity.²⁰ Lacan regards the mirror stage as a core structural element of the ego, pointing to the infant's experience of helplessness, which involves negative affects like anxiety, distress, or frustration. For the child, the relief from this experience goes through the discovery of its body image in the mirror. This identification with its own image as a unified, integrated whole, fully coordinated as in the elder and more mature others, seems to promise an overcoming this helplessness. This is why, for Lacan, the imago of the wholeness of its body has a motivating power with far-reaching effects on the child's psychological development. Subsequently, the identification with this image becomes an anticipation and source for all its fantasies ranging from the view of a fragmented body to the *Gestalt* of perfection and the armor of a deprived identity; whereas the rigid structures of these fantasies will shape the whole of child's individual development, which is why Lacan will aptly label them "orthopedic."²¹ Thus, for Lacan, at the mirror stage, the ego apperceives itself, above all, as an ideal body image which becomes a privileged object in the libidinal economy.

Now, it is important to note that, in Lacan's view, this self-identification of the self with an image is at the same time an alienation from itself and that in this very alienation aggressivity comes into play as a tension between the specular image and the real body, as the whole of the image seems to threaten the body with disintegration and fragmentation. Thus, for Lacan, the unique feature of aggressivity is in that it is not a defense of the ego but rather its rebellion against the constraints of the body image.²² Aggressivity in this sense is a drive of violation against the imaginary form of the body.²³ In short, aggressivity is part of the register of the imaginary and represents a relationship between the body and its mirror image, a relationship which also encompasses all other objects, including other people.

To be broken up, since it is fixed, this dualistic-imaginary relationship needs an intervention from a third party. Lacan sees this third represented in language, in speaking, and thus – again – in the symbolic:

But, thank God, the subject inhabits the world of the symbol, that is to say a world of others who speak. That is why his desire is susceptible to the mediation of recognition. Without which every human function would simply exhaust itself in the unspecified wish for the destruction of the other as such.²⁴

So we have demonstrated the necessity for a third term, which alone allows us to conceptualise the mirror transference, which is speech.²⁵

For Lacan, aggressivity is caught up in the identifications with the imaginary ideal (*Idealich*) of the ego and can only be recognized and dissolved in the speech that represents it. Thus, it is

²⁰ Richard P. Boothby, *Death and Desire: Psychoanalytic Theory in Lacan's Return to Freud* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 40.

²¹ Jacques Lacan, *Mirror Stage*, p. 6.

²² Jacques Lacan, "Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis," *Écrits: A Selection*. Transl. by B. Fink (London: Routledge, 1948/2002).

²³ Richard P. Boothby, *Death and Desire*, p. 39.

²⁴ Jacques Lacan, *Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by John Forrester (New York, London: Norton & Company, 1975/1991), p. 171.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

ultimately the language, or the symbolic, that enables us to reflect on aggressivity and its character.

Still, for Lacan, an absolute salvation cannot to be found in the symbolic, either. Our relationship to the symbolic remains ambivalent. This is because we are born into a complex symbolic structure, a structure that already has determined us from before our birth and that we are forced to admit. This clearly has consequences for the subject. By subjecting itself to this structure, the self divides itself and thus constitutes the conscious, as well as the unconscious. The subject is thus split by the work of language, a split which for the subject means an abdication of portions of the body's emotions and drives. Indeed, this means that a need cannot be always adequately claimed. For there remains what has been abdicated of, that which Sigmund Freud calls "Triebverzicht."²⁶

Thus, it appears that the power of language, the power of the Other, is not all that innocent but often all too violent. As psychoanalyst Bruce Fink, demonstrating the ambivalent nature of language in another aspect, has put it, "words bring things into being ... naming cuts into the real."²⁷ My organic needs can never be fully articulated, nor fully grasped in language. What is articulated in language is just an "inscription of the elementary biological subject, of the subject of need, in the defiles of the demand."²⁸ What remains is that which, as the Real, drives my desire.

Desire begins to take shape in the margin in which demand rips away from need, this margin being the one that demand – whose appeal can be unconditional only with respect to the other – opens up in the guise of the possible gap need may give rise to here, because it has no universal satisfaction ...²⁹

Hence, in Lacan's view, desire arises from a difference and revolves around a void, a deficiency, which appears in this difference, testifying to a primal repression, a "beyond-of-the-signified."

Here again the situation of the self, as in the existential situation described by Kierkegaard, remains precarious. On one hand, the symbolic triangulation permits the subject to leave the original and imaginary dualistic relationships, where its choice is either itself or the other, and to position itself between different others with different desires.³⁰ We could certainly point here to the self's reflective capacity, a "competence to look both at oneself and at another from something that we can only call a 'third position', a position outside oneself."³¹ On the

²⁶ Sigmund Freud, "Das Unbehagen in der Kultur (1930)," *Studienausgabe Band IX* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2000).

²⁷ Bruce Fink, "There's No Such Thing as a Sexual Relationship: Existence and the Formulas of Sexuation," *Newsletter of the Freudian Field*, Vol. 5. (1991), pp. 59-85, p. 60.

²⁸ Jacques Lacan, *Desire and its Interpretation. 1958-1959. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VI*. Translated by Cormac Gallagher from unedited French typescripts. URL: <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Book-06-Desire-and-its-interpretation.pdf> (14.10.2022), p. 100.

²⁹ Jacques Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," *Écrits*, The first complete edition in English, translated by Bruce Fink (London: W. W, Norton & Company 1966/2006). pp. 671-702, p. 689.

³⁰ Cf. Paul Verhaeghe, *New Studies of old Villains*, p. 86.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

other hand, we can point to the other side of the symbolic, emphasized by Peter Widmer, which is the lack, the loss, the ultimate indeterminacy of the world, and the precarity of our existential situation as coming with language:

When we have analysed the experiences in which we have made ourselves an object, or the experiences in which we have made others an object, we are faced with the question of the other, of whom we do not know who he is. It is an unknown place ...³²

And again as in Kierkegaard, we find a difference in the roles and values of aggressivity and anxiety in our lives in Lacan as well. In contrast to anxiety, aggressivity ultimately remains fixed in dual-imaginary identifications and can be overcome only by introducing a third. This jump into triangularity is, as we have seen, loaded with anxiety. However, what is important here is that, for both Kierkegaard and Lacan, there is a potential in anxiety, a potential which can be actualized by confronting and taking anxiety as a guide into the unknown, into openness.

Watsuji Tetsurō: The place of the Third

One can search non-Western philosophy precisely for the opening of a perspective that is unavailable in the Western tradition but would presumably allow for a productive critical questioning of the concepts of that tradition. Responding to the calls for a decolonization of philosophy can surely serve as a critique of the dualistic-imaginary construction of the philosophical concepts. As we have seen in the two Western thinkers we focus on here, Kierkegaard and Lacan, the structure of the subject is closely related to a threeness. For Kierkegaard, it is the relation to a relation that determines the self and constitutes it as a positive third. For Lacan, in a slightly different fashion, the self is already in social space of intersubjective relations, which makes of the ego a social construct and excludes the possibility for an originary self as ultimately a mythical one. We shall now see that in distinction from these two thinkers the Japanese philosopher Watsuji Tetsurō (和辻 哲郎) takes a different position – one of “betweenness” (*aidagara* 間柄).

Although Watsuji did not directly belong to the famous group of philosophers in the 20th century around Nishida Kitarō (西田幾多郎), the so-called Kyoto School, he is still considered a thinker with similar perspective.³³ It should be mentioned that Watsuji wrote the first original Japanese work on Kierkegaard in 1915. Inspired by Kierkegaard, he became the first systematic philosopher of ethics in Japan. However, as Masugata³⁴ notes, no trace of Kierkegaard’s influence can be found in his later work.

Based on the analysis of the Japanese word for human being *ningen* (人間), Watsuji develops a position that differs from the individualistic approaches of the Western ethics, which

³² Peter Widmer, *Angst*, p. 161.

³³ Robert Carter & Erin McCarthy, “Watsuji Tetsurō,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2019 Edition), ed. by Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/watsuji-tetsuro/> (14.10.2022).

³⁴ Masugata Kinya, “A Short History of Kierkegaard’s Reception in Japan,” *Kierkegaard and Japanese Thought*, edited by James Giles (Hampshire, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), p. 31-52.

are rooted in the assumption of sociality.³⁵ For him, human beings are at once both individuals and social beings:

[...] the communion between man and man does not mean their becoming merely one. It is only through the fact that men are unique individuals that a cooperation between ‘man and man’ can be realized.³⁶

The Japanese word *ningen* is composed of two characters, *nin* (人), meaning “person” or “human being”, and *gen* (間), meaning “space” or “between.” The Japanese reading (*kunyomi*) of the second term is *aida* (間) (“between”) or *aidagara* (“relationship”). In this sense, the nature of the human being is associated with “betweenness” or better “being-in-relation-to-others,”³⁷ which suggests that “to live as a person means ... to exist in such betweenness.”³⁸ For Watsuji, the negation of the group and the negation of the individual point to the very ground, the “home ground” of human existence (*ningen sonzai*, 人間存在), which for him is emptiness. Following the founder of the Japanese Sōtō sect of Zen Buddhism, Dōgen Zenji (道元禪師), Watsuji advances the view that studying the self means forgetting the self. This suggests that betweenness is ultimately emptiness (*kū*, 空) (and vice versa), which as such is the “place where compassion arises and is acted out selflessly.”³⁹

In order to understand Watsuji properly, it is necessary to look at the Buddhist tradition in which he places himself. Buddhism is primarily concerned with the human being as an agent understood as placed within the between of what Western philosophy differentiates as subject and other. In contrast to the Western approaches, however, for Watsuji the proper explanation of this placement demands something very different from intentionality. His point here is that actions should not be explained entirely with the human will, because such an epistemic stance would belong to the ego alone. For Watsuji, action is the movement itself, in which the duality of self and other in the “not-being-two of self and other” constitutes the being-in-between.⁴⁰ This “subjective in-betweenness,” which is determined neither by a substantive self, nor by a substantive other, is itself the place of ethical action.

Watsuji assumes that we “enter the world already within a network of relationships and obligations.”⁴¹ This can be associated with Lacan’s statement that the subject is intrinsically related to the symbolic even before its birth. But there is a difference. For Watsuji, the place of the third is not the symbolic, or the speech, but emptiness. This mirrors Zen Buddhism’s own

³⁵ Watsuji Tetsurō, *Ningen no gaku toshite no rinrigaku* (1934), German translation by Hans Martin Krämer, *Ethik als Wissenschaft vom Menschen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005).

³⁶ Watsuji Tetsurō, “A Study of the History of Japanese Spirit,” *Watsuji Tetsurō Zenshū (Complete Works of Watsuji Tetsurō)*, 27 vols., ed. by Abe Yoshishigo et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1935), p. 113, quote in: Carter & McCarthy, 2019.

³⁷ Kyle Michael James Shuttleworth, “Watsuji Tetsurō’s Concept of ‘Authenticity,’” *Comparative and Continental Philosophy*, Vol. 11 (3) (2019), p. 235-250, p. 4.

³⁸ Yuasa Yasuo, *The Body. Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory*, edited and translated by Thomas P. Kasulis & Nagatomo Shigenori (Albany: Tate University Press of New York, 1987), p. 37.

³⁹ Carter & McCarthy, “Watsuji Tetsurō.”

⁴⁰ Watsuji, *Ningen no gaku toshite no rinrigaku*, p. 117.

⁴¹ Carter & McCarthy, “Watsuji Tetsurō.”

idea of itself as a tradition, which is one of a special transmission, not established upon words but pointing directly to the human heartmind.⁴² In more specific terms, the difference is that, while for Lacan language offers an access of the self to itself, for Zen language is an obstacle to grasping the *dao* (道). Thus, in the famous encounter dialogues of early Chinese Ch'an Buddhism, as known from the collections *The Gateless Barrier* (無門關) and *Blue Cliff Record* (碧巖錄), it is not meaning that underpins understanding but rather, as Peter Hershock notes, the *conduct* of the participants. To be able to pass the challenge of such an encounter or to understand the case it presents (as in the practice of the *gōng àn* 公案), one has to free oneself from previous identifications and basic dichotomies, from habitual impulses, dispositions, or fixations with respect to speaking, thinking, perceiving and acting.⁴³

Still, this does not mean that Buddhist enlightenment draws on a linguistically purified or speechless state of mind, as alleged by Linji Yixuan's (臨濟義玄) and his yelled-out demand "Speak, Speak! Give me one true word."⁴⁴ Rather, what is most significant in Zen in this regard is, as Jin Park points out, a distinction between "live words" (活句) and "dead words" (死句), which was first made by the Han Chinese Ch'an monk Yuanwu Keqin (圓悟克勤).⁴⁵ The sense of this distinction is that one uses "dead words" if one is involved with the straightforward meaning of the words, whereas one uses "live words" if one is involved with what the words express in the specific context. Watsuji demonstrates this with an example of a common question asking of a person's well-being. As he sees it, in such a language situation, the asking was for a feeling that is expressive of the being-in-between for the person asking and the person asked. Here the question can also be understood as greeting, that is, as action in which what was asked for (the meaning of the words) is marginal. Thus, for Watsuji, speaking in being-in-between is acting and in this sense more fundamental. Its fundamentality consists in that this "in-between" is independent of any substantiality (in the Western sense of the term), and is thus empty, which is precisely what endows his position with a special critical nuance that is unavailable in the Western tradition.

The Social and the Place of the Third

Despite the differences in the perspectives of Kierkegaard, Lacan, and Watsuji on the third, I will conclude by emphasizing what they have common in this regard. In conveying our existential conditions, these three authors offer a critique of the substantive self that has been traditionally understood as self-contained. Likewise, the three of them see both the problems and the potentials which arise from an existential situation and to which we try to respond. In such a situation, the fantasies of completeness and of elimination of difference can be seen as inviting of danger. For, when lack and difference disappear, anxiety and aggressivity arise. In my reading, all of the three thinkers are ultimately concerned with preventing such an imaginary

⁴² Cf. Peter Hershock, "Chan Buddhism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/buddhism-chan/> (03.10.2018).

⁴³ Peter Hershock, *Liberating Intimacy. Enlightenment and Social Virtuosity in Ch'an Buddhism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 68ff.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁴⁵ Jin Y Park, "Zen and Zen Philosophy of Language. A Soteriological Approach," *Dao*, I (2002), vol. 2, pp. 209-228.

closure, as well as with preserving difference and openness in the intersubjective relations, by securing a place for a Third. This becomes clear in Kierkegaard and his overcoming of despair and anxiety in faith, in Lacan and his openness of speaking and the symbolic, as well as in Watsuji and his *betweenness* as emptiness promising an ethics without an underlying substance. Finally, the approaches of the three authors also converge in that they suggest, encourage, and promote certain practices of self-knowledge and self-cultivation, which are supportive of preservation of the difference and openness in question.

For the social philosopher, the question that arises here is to what extent these approaches can be applied to pressing social and political issues. This question is certainly worth exploring within the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe⁴⁶ and their critical analysis of the political significance of the master signifier.⁴⁷ It is also relevant in the discussion of the possibility for a much-needed transformation of the antagonistic constitutions of our societies fixated on identities into an agonistic pluralism. Laclau in particular has sought to undermine the substantialist form of reductionism, very much like the three authors discussed here. Among other things, this is evident from his analysis of the relationship of universality and particularity, in which he draws attention to the difficulties and dangers of any unilateral resolution in the face of the seemingly unbridgeable gap between the two poles of this relationship. Either the universal is nothing but a particular that has become dominant at a certain point in time, or the particular ignores its universal foundations (e.g. certain rights of equality) for the purpose of self-legitimation. To avoid such false resolutions, Laclau suggests an understanding of the relation between universalism and particularism in terms of a mutual dependence. Thus, the universal would remain part of the particular, which also means that the identity of the particular is to be characterized by a lack, or a crack, since in this way its putative constitution as a pure and complete particular also fails.⁴⁸ Opposite to this position would be a unilateral resolution that would bridge the gap between universal and particular by establishing, as Laclau calls it, a “true order,” which however would be at the expense of society’s freedom and democracy:

... in the case that the split could be superseded ... society would have reached its true order, and that all dissent would thereupon have come to an end. Obviously no social division or democratic competition between groups is possible in such conditions.⁴⁹

Thus, it becomes clear also in Laclau’s political philosophy that dual relations can sustain the possibility for a productive (socio-political) action, if at the same time an opening, or a place for the third, is re-established and sustained. Nevertheless, besides all theoretical insights, it remains always a new task to recognize and question – on an individual, as well as on a social level – the dead-end fixations that come along with an imaginary substantiating subject. Only in this way can the problematic consequences that such fixations bring for the

⁴⁶ Ernesto Laclau & Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, (Verso: London 1985).

⁴⁷ Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996), p 36ff.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20ff.

⁴⁹ Ernesto Laclau (Ed.), *The Making of Political Identities* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 5.

intersubjective relations be broken off, so that one is able to dare an encounter with what is open and unpredictable in the other.