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INTERVALS (*Ma*) IN  
SPACE AND TIME:  
FOUNDATIONS FOR A  
RELIGIO-AESTHETIC  
PARADIGM IN JAPAN

The term *ma* has only recently begun to receive the attention that it is due, both inside and outside Japan. What brought it to my attention was an exhibit relating *ma* to characteristic features of Japanese artistic (especially architectural) design,<sup>1</sup> which, like the word itself, was rich in meaning and ambiguity but which clearly suggested that *ma* was yet another reflection of a Japanese religio-aesthetic paradigm or “way of seeing.” Subsequent research has only confirmed this; the results of this initial research are offered here.

The word *ma* basically means an “interval” between two (or more) spatial or temporal things and events. Thus it is not only used in compounds to suggest measurement but carries meanings such as gap, opening, space between, time between, and so forth. A room is called *ma*, for example, as it refers to the space between the walls; a rest in music is also *ma* as the pause between the notes or sounds. By

<sup>1</sup> This exhibit took place at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York City in 1979. Its catalog, which in many ways is the basis for this article, is Arata Isozaki et al., *MA: Space-Time in Japan* (New York: Cooper-Hewitt Museum, n.d.).

the same token, it can also mean timing, as in the comic recitation art called *rakugo*, where *ma* is quite explicitly a part of the craft and skill.

By extension, *ma* also means “among.” In the compound *ningen* (“human being”), for example, *ma* (read *gen* here) implies that persons (*nin*, *hito*) stand within, among, or in relationship to others. As such, the word *ma* clearly begins to take on a relational meaning—a dynamic sense of standing in, with, among, or between. Related to this, it also carries an experiential connotation since to be among persons is to interact in some dynamic way. The Japanese phrase *ma ga warui* (“the *ma* is bad”), which has overtones of being embarrassed, well illustrates this nuance.

The word, therefore, carries both objective and subjective meaning; that is, *ma* is not only “something” within objective, descriptive reality but also signifies particular modes of experience. Both the descriptive objective (see Part I below) and experiential subjective (see Part II below) aspects are important. However, the latter usage is the point at which *ma* becomes a religio-aesthetic paradigm and brings about a collapse of distinctive (objective) worlds, and even of time and space itself. As the contemporary architect Isozaki Arata says:

While in the West the space-time concept gave rise to absolutely fixed images of a homogenous and infinite continuum, as presented in Descartes, in Japan space and time were never fully separated but were conceived as correlative and omnipresent. . . . Space could not be perceived independently of the element of time [and] time was not abstracted as a regulated, homogenous flow, but rather was believed to exist only in relation to movements or space. . . . Thus, space was perceived as identical with the events or phenomena occurring in it; that is, space was recognized only in its relation to time-flow.<sup>2</sup>

The collapse of space and time as two distinct and abstract objects can only take place in a particular mode of experience that “empties” the objective/subjective world(s); only in aesthetic, immediate, relational experience can space be “perceived as identical with the events or phenomena occurring in it.” Therefore, although *ma* may be objectively located as intervals in space and time, ultimately it transcends this and expresses a deeper level. Indeed, it takes us to a boundary situation at the edge of thinking and the edge of all processes of locating things by naming and distinguishing.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

The singular importance of *ma* in Japanese religio-aesthetics is well expressed by the contemporary *Nō* actor, Komparu Kunio, who, in relating *ma* to *Nō*, notes that:

Noh is sometimes called the art of *ma*. This word can be translated into English as space, spacing, interval, gap, blank, room, pause, rest, time, timing, or opening. . . . Of course both understandings of *ma*, as time and as space, are correct. The concept apparently first came from China . . . and was used in reference only to space, but as it evolved in Japanese it came to signify time as well. . . . Because it includes three meanings, time, space, and space-time, the word *ma* at first seems vague, but it is the multiplicity of meanings and at the same time the conciseness of the single word that makes *ma* a unique conceptual term, one without parallel in other languages.<sup>3</sup>

*Ma* seems to operate at, cross, and even deconstruct a number of boundaries. First, for some Japanese *ma* is a deep and living word that cannot even be discussed, much less analyzed and interpreted across the boundaries of culture and language. Second, *ma* operates at and bridges the boundaries between the traditional and contemporary arts, between religion and art, between one religion and another, and between religion and culture. (Paradigms tend to operate this way in cultures; they are fundamental ways of seeing or grasping the world that permeate the variety of forms of a culture and thereby cut across those divisions in culture created out of our own minds.)

Third, although *ma* ultimately deconstructs all boundaries (as mind-created constructs and orders imposed on the chaos of experience) and operates experientially at the interstices of being, some elements of its meaning and expression can be located within such constructs and orders. This article tries to be sensitive to both aspects, that is, to the location of *ma* in a descriptive world (Part I), and to the experiential meaning and power beyond locations and boundaries (Part II).

In the process of discussing *ma*, I will argue that the deeper meanings of *ma* can be found most explicitly in the arts and that the religions of Japan have influenced those meanings in significant ways. The resultant paradigm of *ma* is more clearly revealed in the arts, but it is "religio-aesthetic" in its fundamental character. Each section below, therefore, initially places *ma* in the arts but then pursues the potential parallels in the Japanese religions.

<sup>3</sup> Kunio Komparu, *The Noh Theatre: Principles and Perspectives* (Tokyo: Tankosha; New York: John Weatherhill, 1983), p. 70 ff.

I. LOCATING *Ma* IN SPACE AND TIME: PREGNANT NOTHINGS

## A. THE ARTS

Perhaps the most appropriate way to begin this section is to create an image out of the Chinese characters that constitute the written word *ma*. It is made up of two elements, the enclosing radical meaning gate or door (*mon*) and the inner character meaning either sun (*hi*) or moon (*tsuki*). The visual image or character, therefore, suggests a light shining through a gate or door. If we were to take the gate itself as representing the things or phenomena and events of the world, the opening in the gate becomes a *ma* or interval between the things. Yet *ma* is not a mere emptiness or opening; through and in it shines a light, and the function of this *ma* becomes precisely to let that light shine through. A literary example of this image can be found in the twelfth-century novel, *The Tale of Genji* by Lady Murasaki: "It was the fifteenth night of the eighth month. The light of an enclouded full-moon shone between the ill-fitting planks of the roof and flooded the room. What a queer place to be lying in!, thought Genji, as he gazed around the garret, so different from any room he had ever known before."<sup>4</sup>

A more historically, descriptively concrete example, however, can be found in *Nō* drama. The founder of *Nō*, Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1443), has said the following:

Sometimes spectators of the *Nō* say, "the moments of 'no-action' (*senu tokoro*) are the most enjoyable." This is an art which the actor keeps secret. Dancing and singing, movements and the different types of miming are all acts performed by the body. Moments of "no-action" occur in between (*hima*). When we examine why such moments without action are enjoyable, we find that it is due to the underlying spiritual (*kokoro*) strength of the actor which unremittingly holds the attention. He does not relax the tension when the dancing or singing come to an end or at intervals between (*hima*) the dialogue and the different types of miming. [Not abandoning this mind/heart (*kokoro*) in the various intervals (*himajima*)] he maintains an unwavering inner strength (*naishin*). This feeling of inner strength will faintly reveal itself and bring enjoyment. However, it is undesirable for the actor to permit this inner strength to become obvious to the audience. If it is obvious, it becomes an act and is no longer "no-action." The actions before and after an interval (*hima*) of "no-action" must be linked by entering the state of mindlessness (*mushin*) in which one conceals even from oneself one's intent.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Lady Murasaki, *The Tale of Genji*, trans. Arthur Waley (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1955), p. 80 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Nose Asaji, ed., *Zeami jūrokubu shū hyōshaku* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1949), 1:375 ff; as translated in W. T. DeBary, ed., *Sources of Japanese Tradition* (New York:

This example is precisely an instance of *ma*—an instance in which the light (here, “spiritual strength faintly revealing itself”) shines through the opening (here, the “moments of ‘no-action’”) in the gate (here, the actions and sounds “before and after an interval”). As Komparu says of this same example, “Zeami is suggesting implicitly the existence of *ma*. He is saying that Noh acting is a matter of doing just enough to create the *ma* that is a blank space-time where nothing is done, and that *ma* is the core of the expression, where the true interest lies.”<sup>6</sup>

More generally, however, Komparu discusses *ma* not only as the element that gives *Nō* its unique character as an art but also as a “negative space” of great importance:

Nowadays space is often described as positive or negative. Negative space is enclosed and fixed, and positive space is the space taken up [or occupied] by people or things that define a negative space by their presence. Both kinds of space exist in Noh: negative space (*ma*) is the stillness and emptiness just before or after a unit of performance, positive space is produced by stage properties and by the dramatic activities of performers. . . . The two kinds of space are connected by time. . . . While there may be empty, or “negative” time, there will never be unsubstantial, uncreative or uncreated time.<sup>7</sup>

This negative space/time is therefore anything but a mere nothing awaiting the positive space/time; it is a pregnant nothingness that is “never unsubstantial or uncreative.” To continue the metaphor, *ma* is not merely fecundative either; it glows with spiritual power, meaning, and attraction, just as a light shining through the gate or “a spiritual strength faintly revealing itself.”

Others have called this an imaginary space (*yohaku*, *kūhaku*) and related it particularly to painting, tea ceremony, gardens, and calligraphy.<sup>8</sup> In this sense it is negative space/time “filled” by the imagination more than by some thing.

In both *Nō* and many of the traditional arts of Japan (and China), the negative or imaginary space functions very centrally. Another form it takes in many of these arts, according to Komparu, is in relation to the artistic styles found in calligraphy and other arts called *shin* (“correct” or formal), *gyō* (“going” or relaxed), and *sō* (“grass”

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Columbia University Press, 1964), 1:285. Words in parentheses and brackets are my additions to original text. *Hima* is an older alternate character for *ma*.

<sup>6</sup> Komparu, p. 73.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xx.

<sup>8</sup> See esp. Teiji Itoh, *Nihon design ron* (Tokyo: Kashima Kenkyu Shuppan Kai, 1974), pp. 112–19; and Teiji Yoshimura, *Nihonbi no tokushitsu* (Tokyo: Kashima Kenkyu Shuppan Kai, 1980), pp. 178–99.

or informal). In each of these styles, Komparu suggests, the intervals or gaps serve as an empty “ground” or basis against or within which the forms or “figures” of the art function. Although present in the *shin* and *gyō* styles, one best sees this in the *sō* style, which tends to feature this emptiness.<sup>9</sup>

A literary example of this same affirmation of spaces between can be found, for example, in linked verse (*renga*). Writing of the Buddhist influence on this poetry, Gary Ebersole asserts that the “Buddhist essence of *renga*, then, is not to be located in the [literary] universes or scenes . . . created by the semantic relations posited between two links by the poets and the listener/reader, but in the space between the linked poems—that is, in the dissolution of the literary universe.”<sup>10</sup> The same could be said for the *Nō* drama example already given: in both, narrative story and action give way to a deeper message, which shines through the cracks and gaps in those forms.

In fact, the affirmation of spaces and gaps in between the forms of things has led one commentator to suggest that the very nature of the Japanese language is itself structured in this fashion. Kemmochi Takehiko says that Japanese is characterized by a series of overlapping and associated, discrete, image worlds that are, in turn, separated by emotional spaces called *ma*. Rather than construct a logical and linear narrative order, as Western languages do, Japanese carries internal gaps and pauses (e.g., *haru wa* . . .) and fixed endings (e.g., *desu*) that create distinct spaces that are, in turn, filled with *ki* (*ke*, *ch'i*) or emotional energy.<sup>11</sup> A narrative construct, or cause/effect narrative order, thus continually dissolves or deconstructs into these spaces.

A more contemporary example may well be in the film art of Ozu Yasujiro. As a series of recent articles has made clear, fundamentally Ozu “directs silences and voids.”<sup>12</sup> “Cudas” or “empty shots,” which generally show quiet, natural scenes that contribute nothing to the narrative line or character development, figure prominently in Ozu’s work: “Ozu’s films diverge from the Hollywood paradigm in that they generate spatial structures which are not motivated by the cause/effect chain of the narrative. . . . The motivation [for their use] is purely ‘artistic.’ Space, constructed alongside and sometimes against the cause/effect sequence, becomes ‘foregrounded’ to a degree that renders it at times the primary structural level of the film. . . . At times spaces

<sup>9</sup> Komparu, p. 71 ff.; cf. Itoh, pp. 120–34.

<sup>10</sup> Gary Ebersole, “The Buddhist Ritual Use of Linked Poetry in Medieval Japan,” *Eastern Buddhist* 16, no. 2 (Autumn 1983): 55.

<sup>11</sup> Kemmochi Takehiko, “*Ma*” *no nihonbunka* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1982), pp. 13–32.

<sup>12</sup> Kathy Geist, “West Looks East: The Influence of Yasujiro Ozu on Wim Wenders and Peter Handke,” *Art Journal* 43, no. 3 (Fall 1983): 234.

with only the most tenuous narrative associations (and *no* place in the cause/effect chain) are dominant; narrative elements may enter these spaces as overtones."<sup>13</sup>

At least one of these commentators on Ozu's work directly links this to *ma*,<sup>14</sup> and the likeness to what we have already seen is obvious. Particularly suggestive in the quote above is the relationship to the *shin*, *gyō*, *sō* structure; it is precisely an art in the *sō* style that "foregrounds" the empty spaces/times and uses the narrative actions, events, or forms of the art as "overtones." The light that thus shines through is the meaning and power of such imaginative or emotional "negative spaces" that dissolve the narrative, cause/effect world being presented.

Finally, and in particular reference to the exhibit mentioned in the introduction, certain contemporary architects are finding *ma* important for their work. The discussion of *ma* as it relates to these people, however, is more relevant to Part II below, since their understanding of *ma* is less obviously located within some order, boundary, and descriptive reality. Suffice it to say that *ma* (as the conjunction of space and time) is understood to effect architectural design in a number of ways: the importance of openings, bridging spaces, form defining space rather than space serving form, simplicity, asymmetry, flowing/changing forms, and so forth. All such characteristics are, Isozaki says, true of all the "arts of MA." All suggest that the results of affirming time/space intervals are crucial.<sup>15</sup>

Like the character for *ma* itself, therefore, the meaning of *ma* in many of these arts affirms the power, interest, depth or profundity that shines through the gaps, cracks, and intervals in space and time. The forms of an art often exist only to serve these interests and are often only understood in relation to them. Such intervals are thus referred to as creative/substantial negative spaces, imaginative spaces, or emotional spaces that the positive spaces, narrative sequences, or forms of an art help create but into which they dissolve.

#### B. THE RELIGIONS

*Shinto*. Although *ma* does not seem to play an explicit role in the religions of Japan, its relevance in the arts implies a strong structural/experiential parallel to, and strong influences from, Buddhism, Taoism,

<sup>13</sup> Kristin Thompson and Bordwell Smith, "Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu," *Screen* 17, no. 2 (1976): 45.

<sup>14</sup> Geist, p. 234 ff.

<sup>15</sup> Isozaki et al. (n. 1 above), pp. 12–53.

and especially Shintoism. My interest in what follows, therefore, is to attempt to locate in these religions evidence for an affirmation of intervals and gaps as “places” of true meaning and power.

In this process perhaps the most interesting connection is found within Shinto. Matsuoka Seigow—writer, publisher, journalist, and student of the Japanese religio-aesthetic tradition—presents a convincing argument that “the tale of Japanese culture has been told with excessive emphasis, perhaps, on its Buddhistic core. We believe that a better understanding of Japan [and *ma*] will be gained by tracing the role played by the *kehai* of *kami* [i.e., Shinto] in this composite culture.”<sup>16</sup>

Although Matsuoka’s argument is complex and rests in large part on a kind of theology of folk Shinto found in Part II below, his point here is to note the existence of *ma*-like elements, particularly in the ancient and continuing folk Shinto traditions.

*Ma*-like elements are best exemplified in Shinto in its sacred spaces—especially spaces thought (or designed) to be open, cleared out, and pure in anticipation of the coming and going of *kami*. Although these spaces may be located within shrine buildings or, for example, caves, their paradigmatic model is the cleared out, white rock-covered spaces surrounding shrines or even predating shrines—spaces variously referred to as *shiki*, *yuniwa*, *iwakura*, *kekkaï*, and *tamajari*. Especially in ancient Shinto, these spaces often contained a single tree, rock, or pillar (*himorogi*, *yashiro*, *yorishiro*, *iwasaka*) into which the *kami* would come to abide temporarily. Matsuoka emphasizes that these areas are sacred precincts, borders, or boundaries (*kekkaï*): “Rather than not know at all where *kami* might make its temporary appearance, our ancestors took to demarcating an ‘area of *kami*’ by enclosing a particular space with twisted rope thus sanctifying it in preparation for the visit of *kami*. This area was called *kekkaï*.”<sup>17</sup>

Such empty, pure, open spaces (where *kami* dwells) are also found in Japanese mythology. For example, in the myth of the sun goddess, Amaterasu, her return from within a cave to renew the world takes place on the dry riverbed (*kawara*) of heaven (*takamagahara*). Beyond that suggestive parallel, however, there is evidence that the word *kekkaï* may have originally meant a valley, crevice, or natural gap that then formed a border between this world and the world of *kami* in the mountains or beyond the sea—a crevice or gap into which *kami* would come.<sup>18</sup> Not unlike *ma*, such areas might be understood

<sup>16</sup> Seigow Matsuoka, “Aspects of *Kami*,” in Isozaki et al. (n. 1 above), p. 57.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 57; cf. Arata Isozaki, ed., *Teien to rikyu*, *Nihon no bi to bunka*, vol. 13 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1983), pp. 33–39, 149–52.

<sup>18</sup> In a private interview, folk religionist Miyata Noboru has suggested this (Tokyo, September 1983).



as a “no-man’s-land,” a gap or crevice between worlds, a sacred *ma* that the formless energy (*ki*) of *kami* comes into and fills.

Following the great folklorist Origuchi Shinobu, Matsuoka goes on to suggest that shrines and even homes came to be thought of as permanent or temporary *kekkaï* set up to host the visiting deity (*marebito*) at New Year’s.<sup>19</sup> More than this, however, perhaps even the object that embodies *kami* in a shrine, the *shintai*, could be considered *kekkaï* since, as Isozaki says, “space was believed to be fundamentally void. Even solid objects were thought to contain voids capable of receiving *kami* that descend at certain moments to fill such spaces with the spiritual power (*ki*) of the soul (*kami*).”<sup>20</sup>

Finally, since the word *kekkaï* refers, in Buddhism, to a special room in a temple set aside for a priest’s spiritual renewal,<sup>21</sup> we might reasonably conjecture that *kekkaï* may be related to Shinto ideas of seclusion in a sacred space for purposes of renewal (*komoru*), especially in caves, tombs, and *tama-bako* (“soul-boxes”), which—though containing nothing—are filled with sacred power to be imparted to those who have entered.<sup>22</sup>

A good example of this kind of sacred space is Hasedera, dedicated to the Bodhisattva Kannon and a popular pilgrimage site in the Heian period. In the *Manyōshū*, the first poetic anthology of Japan, and other early texts, the area around the temple was originally referred to by epithets such as *komoriku no hatsuse no kuni*, suggesting a special, secluded area set apart from the everyday world. Saigo Nobutsuna argues in his book, *Kodaijin to yume*, that the original Shintoistic worship of a mother goddess of the mountain became synthesized later with the Buddhistic cult of Kannon. Thus, in the popular devotions that included temporary seclusion in the temple by lay parishioners (which is well documented in the poetic diaries of the time, such as the *Kagerō nikki*), there persist Shintoistic notions of mountains and caves as places of access to the spiritual world beyond. Caves, mountains, and, finally, Buddhist temples were sacred spaces with womblike characteristics, where one could practice austerities for a spiritual rebirth.<sup>23</sup>

These conjectures and examples converge on a central point, that is, that Shinto affirms sacred intervals in space (and things) as those

<sup>19</sup> Matsuoka, p. 56 ff.

<sup>20</sup> Isozaki et al. (n. 1 above), p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Itoh (see n. 8 above), p. 51.

<sup>22</sup> Private interview with Hirai Naofusa (Kokugakuin University, 1983); cf. Tanaka Hisao, ed., *Kamigami to hotoke, Nihon no bi to bunka*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1984), pp. 18–28.

<sup>23</sup> Nobutsuna Saigo, *Kodaijin to yume* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1972), pp. 87–88. This discussion forms part of his third chapter, “Dreams of Hatsuse,” pp. 75–119.

places into and within which the presence of *kami* is experienced. When one adds to this the notion that *kami* is itself formless, the argument seems to build: “*Kami* has no physical body; its body and essence exist as a vacuum, ‘a place entirely void of matter.’ But ‘void’ does not mean ‘nothing is there.’ Rather, to the Japanese, ‘there is a hollow there,’ as ‘nothing (*mu*) exists there.’ This concept of *kami* as the *kehai* (atmosphere of *ch’i*) which fills a void has given the entire Japanese culture its striking quality.”<sup>24</sup> Although this idea begins to encroach on Part II below, it suggests again the affirmation of the meaning and power of the formless, empty, unseen, and intangible; it suggests that the light shining through the door is, for Shinto, the light of *kami*.

*Taoism and Buddhism.* Since for our purposes the potential connections of *ma* to Shinto are more interesting and less obvious than connections to Buddhism and Taoism, the latter will be only briefly discussed. As Matsuoka has already suggested, perhaps there has been an overemphasis, in fact, on at least Buddhism’s connection to Japanese culture (and therefore *ma*), and it is time to redress the imbalance. (Taoism’s connections await further study.)

Although not exactly a Japanese religious text, the *Tao te ching* is an important source of Taoist ideas (in China and Japan) and an important place to locate a *ma*-like element. One of its most famous passages makes this clear:

Thirty spokes  
Share one hub.  
Adapt the nothing [*wu*] therein to the  
purpose in hand, and you will have the use of  
the cart. Knead clay in order to make a  
vessel. Adapt the nothing therein to the  
purpose in hand, and you will have the use of  
the vessel. Cut out doors and windows in order  
to make a room. Adapt the nothing therein to  
the purpose in hand, and you will have the use  
of the room.  
Thus what we gain is Something [*yu*], yet it is  
by virtue of Nothing [*wu*] that this can be put  
to use.<sup>25</sup>

Insofar as there is, for the *Tao te ching*, a “named Tao” or named world of twoness—nothing/something, *yin* (*in*)/*yang* (*yō*), and all

<sup>24</sup> Matsuoka, p. 56.

<sup>25</sup> Lao Tzu, *Tao te ching*, trans. D. C. Lau (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 67.

distinctions—it is the emptiness, “nothing,” or *yin* aspect that plays the primary role. While one must know the *yang* and the “something,” one must always return to the *yin* and the nothing as the gap, interval, or *ma* by which all is accomplished. This, of course, is more a metaphoric nothing than a literal one, but nonetheless a *ma* to be located in an order of distinctions.

That such ideas have had a strong influence on Japan cannot be doubted. In fact, the opening passages of both the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki* are deeply influenced by similar *yin/yang* or Taoist ideas, although perhaps reinterpreted and used in different ways for different purposes.

More obviously, and perhaps more deeply, Buddhist ideas have influenced a Japanese affirmation of “pregnant nothings” that give birth to a religio-aesthetic apprehension of the world. In the distinction between *mu* (nothing, no, nonbeing) and *u* (something, being, existence), for example, the importance of *mu* as the ground or basis for all existence is clear. In fact, to be awake to *mu* is to be liberated in *u*. As Zeami made clear, it is by entering the state of *mushin* (no-mind, *mu*-mind) that something is truly accomplished in *Nō* and that the actions/sounds on either side of an interval are linked. Much like the *Tao te ching*, it is thus by virtue of nothing that something is fulfilled or used.

Although the *mu/u* distinction is more appropriate for Zen, Tendai Buddhism, for example, makes the same distinction in different words by speaking of all things as being both “empty” (*kū*) and “temporarily existent” (*ke*). All such distinctions are meant to be transcended in a “third” place, of course, but that discussion remains for Part II below. Meanwhile it is important to know that within the descriptive, distinction-making world of Buddhism, such empty nothings (or nothings) are absolutely central.

The present Zen Abbot of Daitokuji in Kyoto, Kobori Nanrei, has not only supported much of this by suggesting that *ma* is importantly related to both Taoism and Buddhism but also has said that *ma*, in Buddhism, is the *mu* that necessarily forms a background for *u*. Using the analogy of replacing flowers and pictures in the *tokonoma* (alcove) each day, Kabori explains that to clear the old ones out leaving a blank wall is *mu* (*ma*); placing new flowers or a painting back in is the *u* by which *ma* (*mu*) is expressed and lived.<sup>26</sup>

These suggestive interrelationships between *ma* and Buddhism, Taoism, and Shintoism only deepen and clarify the religious (if not aesthetic) character of this term. In each case, though in different

<sup>26</sup> Kyoto, September 1983.

ways and with different meanings, it is precisely in the gaps and intervals of time, space, and being that spiritual power is manifested or grasped. Whether the *ki* (*ch'i*) of *kami*'s presence or the nothingness-agnosis that liberates being, all affirm the cracks in the gate as the place of the light's shining.

## II. A WORLD IN BETWEEN

### A. THE ARTS

A particularly interesting and useful discussion of *ma* (in the context of architecture and city planning) can be found in an article by Günter Nitschke, which is in turn based in large part on the work of Isozaki and others. Among other things, Nitschke describes the various meanings of *ma* as: (1) having objectively to do with the four dimensions of length, length/width, area/volume, and time and (2) having subjectively to do with human experience. The latter element in the meaning of *ma*, together with the former, is the focus of this part. It brings us face to face with *ma* as a particular way of seeing, experiencing, or being aware of the world. Nitschke suggests that this aspect of *ma* has to do with the "quality of an event . . . as perceived by an individual."<sup>27</sup>

In fact, for Nitschke *ma* is ultimately "place" or "place making," in that it includes not only form and nonform (i.e., *ma* as empty spaces discussed in Part I) but also form/nonform as imaginatively created or perceived in immediate experience. Such place making is not merely the apprehending subject's awareness of an objective three-dimensional space continuum composed of an arrangement of *things*. Rather, it is "the simultaneous awareness of the intellectual concepts *form* + *non-form*, *object* + *space*, coupled with subjective experience, . . . it is the thing that takes place in the imagination of the human who experiences these elements. Therefore one could define *ma* as '*experiential*' *place*, being nearer to [the] *mysterious atmosphere* caused by the external distribution of symbols."<sup>28</sup>

Such experiential "places" evoke, by their very nature, a sense of reality characterized by a dynamic, active, changing, poetic immediacy instead of being merely objective or subjective. It is in keeping with what Joseph Kitagawa has described as Japan's "unitary meaning structure" of "poetic, immediate, and simultaneous awareness" within which past and future, time and space, are collapsed into the present, and "time [is] not perceived as an independent reality from nature [or

<sup>27</sup> Günter Nitschke, "'Ma': The Japanese Sense of 'Place' in Old and New Architecture and Planning," *Architectural Design* 36, no. 3 (March 1966): 152.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

space].”<sup>29</sup> It is an opening or emptying of oneself into the immediacy of the ever-changing moment beyond distinctions and *in between* the “this and that” world. It is a world in between subject and object. As Isozaki has said above: *ma* is a place in which space is “perceived as identical with the events or phenomena occurring in it; that is, space [as] recognized only in its relation to time flow.”

Another contemporary architect interested in *ma* is Kurokawa Kisho. Highlighting the idea of a “world between,” he discusses the *engawa* (“veranda”) of a typical Japanese home as exemplifying the betweenness by which outside and inside, nature and human, are merged, blurring boundaries, distinctions, and oppositions. In more general terms, he talks about Japanese culture as a “culture of grays,” saying, “*En, kū* and *ma* are all key words which express the intervening territory between spaces—temporal, physical or spiritual—and thus they all share the ‘gray’ quality of Japanese culture. . . . In design [*ma-dori*, “to grasp the *ma*”], *ke* [*ki*] represents the intermediary spaces; the sense of suspension between interpenetrating spaces is the feeling described by *ke*. In design, then, *ke* is the ‘gray zone’ of sensation.”<sup>30</sup>

As noted above, this sensitivity to spaces in between resonates with a spiritual energy called *ke* (*ki, ch'i*) or “vital breath” and “ether,” which, while formless, permeates and animates life. Such energies do not come immediately to awareness out of subject/object consciousness but are experienced in radically relational or betweenness experience within which the this-and-that-world is suspended.

Another recent book has focused on this relational character of *ma*. Okuno Takeo associates *ma* with a sense of relational ordering (*kankeiso*), or betweenness, and points out that several important words in Japanese carry *ma* (*kan, ken, gen*) with them in compounds: *jikan* (“time”), *kūkan* (“space”), *ningen* (“humans”), *seken* (“society”). All such terms, he says, imply a relational sensitivity—a sense of standing in the midst of or between reality rather than over against reality “out there.” Human relations, for example, thus become a matter of negotiating the *ma* (*ma no torikata*) between/among human beings.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Kitagawa, “‘A Past of Things Present’: Notes on Major Motifs of Early Japanese Religions,” *History of Religions* 20, nos. 1–2 (August–November 1980): 27–42.

<sup>30</sup> Kisho Kurokawa, “A Culture of Grays,” in *The I-Ro-Ha of Japan*, ed. Tsune Sesoka (Tokyo: Cosmo Public Relations Corp., 1979), pp. 9, 17; cf. his “Rikyu Gray and the Art of Ambiguity,” in *Japan Architect*, no. 266 (June 1979), pp. 26–56, and Itoh (see n. 8 above), pp. 32–51.

<sup>31</sup> Takeo Okuno, *Ma no kozō* (Tokyo: Shuseisha, 1983), pp. 7–29, 116 ff.

Okuno goes on to suggest how this betweenness experience has permeated Japanese culture and created a sensitivity to the immediately processual world; to a world of shadings and shadows, moon and mist, clouds and haze; and to *ki* (*ke*, *ch'i*) as an atmosphere (*kehai*) attendant to this world.<sup>32</sup>

Such views suggest that *ma* constitutes a “between world” as a particular sensitivity and atmosphere that arises when one empties the self (and subject/object distinctions) into the interstices of being. This world is at once temporal and spatial, aesthetic (poetic) and religious (spiritual).

#### B. THE RELIGIONS

*Shinto*. As was true in Part I above, the parallel and connection to Shinto is suggested primarily by Matsuoka's work, especially as it relates to folk Shinto. The focus of that connection here in Part II, however, shifts from *kekkaï* and sacred spaces to a particular sensitivity to the atmosphere of the presence (*kehai*) of *kami*, as well as to the nature of *kami* itself. Matsuoka expresses this as follows:

*Kami* does not abide: its nature is to arrive and then depart. The Japanese word *otozureru*, meaning to visit, is a compound of *oto* (sound) and *tsure* (bring). The ancient Japanese may truly have perceived the sound of *yūgen*, utmost mystery and elegance, accompanying the visitations of *kami*. No doubt this was what is today perceived as *ch'i* by those involved in martial arts and meditation. This “*kehai* of *kami*” has set the basic tone of Japanese culture.

The *kehai* of *kami*'s coming and going was to pervade the structure of homes, the structure of tea houses, literature, arts, and entertainment, and it has developed into the characteristic Japanese “aesthetic of stillness and motion.” This is what we call *MA*: the magnetic field from which the *ch'i* of *kami* subtly emanates. . . . Space, or *MA*, is the very foundation of Japanese aesthetics. Minute particles of *kami*, as it were, fill that *MA*.<sup>33</sup>

This *kehai* of *kami* implies two important elements: one is the nature of *kami* as formless energy that comes and goes, and the other is the character and centrality of religio-aesthetic sensitivity to this coming and going—to the “signs of the presence” (*kehai*). Relevant to the former, it is clear that the notion of *kami* operating here is closer to folk Shinto than to the classical Shinto tradition. In the folk tradition, as Origuchi and others have shown, *kami* are less the abiding, anthropomorphic deities of classical Shinto mythology and shrines than vague, formless energies or spirits (*tama*) associated with

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 397–415, 430–33.

<sup>33</sup> Matsuoka (n. 16 above), pp. 56, 47.

living or dead humans, or such elements of nature as particular mountains, rice, and/or simply “the other world” (*tokoyo-no-kuni*) beyond the sea. Such *kami/tama* come and go are often associated, therefore, with the “rare visitor” (*marebito*) bringing benefits at New Year’s time and returning again to its sacred locale in, for example, the mountains.

Such views might be generalized as “coming/going beliefs” (*kyorai shinkō*). They emphasize the dynamic, processual, ephemeral, and changing character of sacred reality or, as Genchi Kato suggests, a notion more typical of Shinto at its “primitive naturalistic” stage and of the sacred as *numina* than of Shinto in its “advanced naturalistic” stage and of the sacred as *deus*.<sup>34</sup>

Matsuoka suggests that this view of *kami* has led to a “morphology of clouds” insofar as clouds represent the moving, changing, ephemeral condensation of *chi/ki* as the living energy of *kami*. This morphology (and religious structure), he suggests, is visibly expressed in the medieval Shinto mandalas, which express the interrelationship of the world of *kami* with the world of nature and the human. He believes that these mandalas express the dynamic coming and going of *kami* into and out of a shrine and carry the cloud motif as well: “The tie linking the natural with the supernatural was a morphology of clouds, their myriad changes and forms. An important element in the Japanese occult was concern with the shape, color, volume, speed and position of the clouds. With the coming of the medieval period, this physiognomy of clouds influenced the basic patterns of all decorative designs. Most Japanese designs, in fact, are based on changing forms temporarily assumed by clouds and water. In this we can discern one of the reasons . . . why Japanese culture is a ‘Culture of Transformations.’”<sup>35</sup>

The other important element in an understanding of the *kehai* of *kami*, related to but distinct from the notion of *kami*, has to do with the particular character of the experience, sensitivity, or mode of knowing that seems important here. An “atmosphere” of sacred presence, after all, depends in part on the person who experiences it as such. As Isozaki explains it, “*MA* is the way of sensing the moment of movement. Originally the word *utsuroi* meant the exact moment when the *kami* spirit entered into and occupied a vacant space. . . . Later it came to signify the moment of *kami*’s sudden appearance. . . .

<sup>34</sup> Genchi Kato, *A Historical Study of the Religious Development of Shinto* (Tokyo: Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, Ministry of Education, 1973), p. 11.

<sup>35</sup> Matsuoka (n. 16 above), p. 56. Compare Okuno’s view expressed above relating *ma*-sensitivity to a preference for clouds, mist, and moon.

[This] gave birth to the idea of *utsuroi*, the moment when nature is transformed, the passage from one state to another. . . . *MA* is the expectant stillness of the moment attending this kind of change."<sup>36</sup>

*Ma* as a "way of sensing" and an "expectant stillness" implies *ma* as a particular mode of experience or sensitivity, one that is highly attuned to the immediacy of sensual experience; one that can, for example, hear the faint sounds of *kami* presence (*otozureru*), which Origuchi relates to the coming and going of *marebito*.<sup>37</sup> This sensitivity has become, as Matsuoka claims, "an archetype of 'knowing'" that has informed Japanese consciousness, that is, a religio-aesthetic paradigm.<sup>38</sup>

This experience or sensitivity can perhaps best be related to a particular mode of waiting for the various signs (*kehai*) of *kami* presence in expectant, receptive, sensitive openness. According to the assistant chief priest of Atsuta Shrine in Nagoya, Okamoto Kenji, Shinto worship is precisely a matter of waiting for, receiving, and attending to the presence of *kami* rather than an active seeking or petitioning that presence and its benefits.<sup>39</sup> Others have emphasized this same kind of experience through the metaphor of a host awaiting and attending to a guest, but all of them indicate a mode of sensitivity that opens the self to the depth of the moment through a disciplined receptivity and sensual awareness. As a recent traveler to Japan has said of the rather typical environs of a shrine, "And far back in the trees, shining with pure white light, is the Shoin Jinja. . . . Inside the shrine is no altar, no image to worship, only a space in which to feel."<sup>40</sup>

Such an experience points to the fullness of the present moment in its intuitive, aesthetic immediacy as the locus of living reality—an experience consonant with the ancient Japanese poetic awareness of time/space collapsed into the present moment. In Isozaki we have noted that space and time were experienced as simultaneous, and space was a function of time-events that filled it. On a similar theme, Ebersole has said that *manyō* poetry reflects a nonlinear and ahistorical sense of time in which the past is brought into the present and time is experienced as an "eternal now (*ima*)."<sup>41</sup> Jean Herbert seems to be

<sup>36</sup> Isozaki et al. (n. 1 above), p. 14 ff.

<sup>37</sup> Origuchi Shinobu, *Origuchi Shinobu zenshu* (Tokyo: Chuo Koron Shoya, 1982), 2:33; cf. Matsuoka (n. 16 above), p. 56.

<sup>38</sup> Matsuoka (n. 16 above), p. 56.

<sup>39</sup> Private interview (Nagoya, September 1983).

<sup>40</sup> Gregg Taylor, "Hagi: Where Japan's Revolution Began," *National Geographic* 165, no. 6 (June 1984): 760.

<sup>41</sup> Gary Ebersole, "The Religio-aesthetic Complex in Manyōshu Poetry with Special Reference to Hitomaro's *Aki no no Sequence*," *History of Religions* 23, no. 1 (1983): 18–36, esp. 34.



indicating the same thing when he reports that “Shinto insistently claims to be a religion of the ‘middle-now,’ the ‘eternal present,’ *naka ima* . . . [and reflects an interest in] the domain of immediate experience.”<sup>42</sup>

This way of understanding Shinto has an interesting parallel in work done by Joanne Waghorne on the “poetic gods” of Greek and Hindu polytheism.<sup>43</sup> What she finds in those traditions are two distinct notions of the gods, one positing abstract, metaphysical realities and orders and the other expressing the immediate experience of “primeval energy,” an energy that is embodied, for example, in poetry and drama and that is in constant motion and changing concretization. Given these two modalities of the sacred, and the two “theologies” they reflect, “the ‘sacred’ was either the transcendent form of being, manifested in the material world and revealed in its perfect form in myth, or the visual and sensual embodiment of a god whose nature was connected to the very vibrational energy which gave life to this ever-unfolding world.” The latter are the polytheistic “gods of the poets” and are just the opposite of, for example, Plato’s God of transcendent, abiding, changeless form. They are constantly mutable and have little to do with the creation of universal orders, cosmic laws, or paradigmatic models of behavior. “These gods live in a world of sight, sound, and taste (as in *rasa*), in fleeting moments of temporal experience.” They are the gods of a polytheism that is less “a mistaken belief in ‘many gods,’ but rather, belief in a particular understanding of the nature of God which sees no sharp distinctions between multiplicity of form, the material world, time, and divinity.”

Such is the case with the *kehai* of *kami* as well, where *kami* come and go into the interstices of being but leave their faint signs, and where sensitive humans, by emptying themselves into the midst of now (*naka ima*) may directly experience the time/space gods embodied—however fleetingly—in the signs, sounds, and sights of the world. It is an “experiential, mysterious place” created as a third place between all other places and as an accumulation of experienced *ch’i* beyond all distinctions, boundaries, orders, and descriptive constructs.

*Taoism and Buddhism.* Although the potential connection of *ma* to Shinto is the more important point of this article, both Taoism and Buddhism contributed *ma*-like elements that only deepened and reinforced the native viewpoint. These religious influences can only be briefly mentioned here.

<sup>42</sup> Jean Herbert, *Shinto: At the Fountain-Head of Japan* (London: George Allen & Unwin, London, 1967), p. 32 ff.

<sup>43</sup> The following discussion is dependent on Joanne Punzo Waghorne, “A Body for God: An Interpretation of the Nature of Myth beyond Structuralism,” *History of Religions* 21, no. 1 (August 1981): 20–47.

The classical Taoism of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu is certainly a part of this influence since it, along with Confucianism and Buddhism, came in at the top, as it were, of Japanese society and culture.<sup>44</sup> As mentioned above, Taoist ideas are demonstrably present in the early collections of mythology. Just where, when, and how these ideas arrived, however, is less our concern than what they were and how they might be related to *ma*.

Part I above suggested that *ma* in Taoism might be located in the affirmation of “nothing” as the function or use of “something,” and as an orientation to *yin* in the polarity of *yin* and *yang* (*in* and *yō*). Here, however, we find Taoism also expressing a world in between—in this case in between *yin* and *yang* (yet incorporating both).

In a recent book, *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism*, Norman Girardot discusses early Taoism in China as it reflects ancient mythic themes centering on cosmogony, and as they particularly appear in Lao-tzu, Chuang-tzu, and other classical Taoist sources. At the core of this theme (the *hun tun* or original chaos theme) lies a notion of “chaosmos,” incorporating both chaos as a pregnant nothing and cosmos as an ordered something while standing prior to and somehow in between *yin* and *yang* or any two-ness. It is the nameless Tao of the *Tao te ching* that is beyond or prior to the named Tao. “The Taoists affirmed that the silent, hidden, or real order of Tao embraced both chaos and cosmos, non-being and being, nature and culture. . . . The secret of life, the mystic secret of salvation, is to return to [this] primitive chaos-order or ‘chaosmos’ of the Tao.”<sup>45</sup>

This chaosmos, Girardot makes clear, is a third place between all two-ness, but especially the two-ness of nothing (chaos) and something (order), or *yin* and *yang*: “All of this in early Taoist texts is rooted metaphysically in the cosmogonic mystery of the third term or central gap—the ‘betwixt and between’—of chaos. This is in the trinitarian formula of liminal order. . . . Creation bears the impress of trinity, for ‘if it is true that two is the number that implies opposition and discord [as well as distinctions, boundaries, and naming] three is the number of reconciliation and concord,’ or as the *Tao Te Ching* says (Chapter 42): ‘Tao gave birth to the three.’ Truth is three, not one.”<sup>46</sup> The *ma* of Taoism can thus not only be located (Part I) but also can be dislocated, as it were, in a place that stands “betwixt and

<sup>44</sup> See, e.g., comments to this effect in Ichiro Hori, *Folk Religion in Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> Norman Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

between" all two-ness; a place emptied of distinctions, locations, and orders, yet a liberating, salvific place to be; a nameless place to which one constantly returns for renewal; a poetic place of immediate, religio-aesthetic awareness brought on, in part, by waiting and yielding (*yin*).

In other terms, Girardot follows Foucault in saying that human existence constantly finds itself at the juncture between the ordering codes of culture and language and the chaos of a pure experience of order in all its modes. This pure experience, perceived as touching an inner law or hidden network of life and self, seems to have no existence except as perceived through the grid or order created by culture (as through *ma* as empty spaces and times in the flow of being and time).<sup>47</sup> The issue, then, becomes one of arriving at a quality of awareness that holds fast to this deeper hidden Tao but also does not forsake the grid that lies in a third place betwixt and between being and nonbeing. Girardot quotes Octavio Paz on this score as follows: "The West . . . teaches us that being is dissolved into meaning, and the East that meaning is dissolved into something which is neither being nor non-being: In a The Same which no language except the language of silence names." He then goes on to say that the "chaosmos" (*hun tun*) is "Paz's inherently ambivalent 'The Same' that stands between all dualities."<sup>48</sup>

In the light of this central Taoist mythologem and its potential relation to *ma*-like ideas in Japan, it is intriguing to note the appearance of a similar Taoist cosmogony in the prefaces to both the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi*. In the former we find that "when the primeval matter had congealed but breath and form had not yet appeared, there were no names and no action. Who can know its form?"<sup>49</sup> In the latter we find that "of old, Heaven and Earth were not yet separated, and the In and Yo not yet divided. They formed a chaotic mass like an egg which was of obscurely defined limits and contained germs."<sup>50</sup> Interpreted metaphorically, these words could be understood in light of the *hun tun* theme discussed above. In fact, further research might show that these Taoist ideas are not a mere superficial overlay on the Shinto myths but reflect an early and serious appropriation of such ideas at the very heart of Japanese culture.

Buddhism carries very similar ideas with it and has demonstrably had greater influence on Japanese culture. Although the crucial ideas

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2 ff.

<sup>49</sup> Donald Philippi, trans., *Kojiki* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1968), p. 37.

<sup>50</sup> W. G. Aston, trans., *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956), p. 1 ff.

relevant to Part I above were the pregnant no-thing (*ma*) or no-mind (*mushin*) that stand over against something (*u*) or mind (*shin*); here the focus is on a between or “middle-way” awareness and the meditative techniques for its realization. The relevant terms that express this in Japanese Buddhism are *mujō* (impermanence), *kū* (emptiness), and *chū* (middle).

Ebersole has clearly shown in a recent article that Buddhism had considerable influence on *renga* poetry, not only an influence of ideas but an influence of practice as well. This is made clear in a passage from a fourteenth-century *renga* treatise: “Contemplating deeply the vicissitudes of life of man and body, always keep in your heart the image of transience (*mujō*), and proceeding to the mountains or the sea, feel the pathos (*awaremi*) of the karma of sentient beings and non-sentient things. . . . Through the four seasons of the plants and trees feel *hikarakuyō* [see below], being enlightened by the changes of birth, old age, illness and death.”<sup>51</sup>

The realization of impermanence is the realization of the absolute relativity of all things as they arise and fall in consciousness moment to moment. In such a realization the world is emptied and filled anew in each moment, and nothing abides. As in the discussion above, the world of distinctions and boundaries, of order and semipermanence, is constantly dissolving into the no-thing in between. Somewhat like Zeami’s “intervals between the action as most interesting,” *renga* also affirms the spaces or places between: “*Renga* proved to be a ‘natural’ demonstration of *mujō*, transience or ephemerality, and *hikarakuyō*, ‘whirling petals and falling leaves.’ The Buddhist essence of *renga*, then, is not to be located in the universes or scenes . . . created by the semantic relations posited between two links by the poets and the listener/reader, but in the space between the linked poems—that is, in the dissolution of the literary universe.”<sup>52</sup>

Although this suggests (as in Part I) that the *ma* of *renga* can be located in the spaces between the words, it is more than that as well, namely, an experience of betweenness and a “place” beyond distinctions. Ebersole quotes the *renga* poet Shinkei (1406–75) as saying, “The mind of the true poet is not caught upon existence or nothingness, upon *shinku* or *soku*, but is like the mind-field of the Buddha.”<sup>53</sup>

Such a mode of awareness, of course, has more often been referred to in Buddhism as “emptiness” (*kū*, *śūnyatā*) or “suchness” (*shinnyo*, *tathatā*) awareness and as a middle awareness between nothingness

<sup>51</sup> Ebersole, “The Buddhist Ritual Use . . .” (n. 10 above), p. 60.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65 ff.

(*mu*) and being (*u*). In Tendai Buddhism, this terminology is turned around a bit and “middle” (*chū*) awareness stands between emptiness (*kū*) and temporary existence (*ke*); it is the ultimate “place” to be. However expressed, such modes of awareness are Buddhism’s salvific, liberating, enlightening middle way of “co-dependent arising”; a mode of awareness that attaches to neither being nor nonbeing but experiences the world as absolutely relative and simultaneously arising/falling in radical, mutual dependence and relationship. On this point it is interesting to note that William LaFleur, in discussing the ethics of Watsuji Tetsuro, refers to *ningen* (“human being”) as importantly carrying the word *ma* (*gen*) in it: to be human is to be in relationship or betweenness. LaFleur argues that behind this notion of mutuality and relational existence, at least in Watsuji, is the idea of *kū*. Watsuji, he says, “uses *kū* as a basic term in his system. That is, the very reason why man is both individual and social is because, according to Watsuji, the individual dimension of existence ‘empties’ the social dimension and, conversely, the social dimension ‘empties’ the individual one. . . . [Existence] is a finely balanced mutuality of dependence.”<sup>54</sup>

Watsuji’s aesthetics, says LaFleur, are based on the same idea. For Watsuji, he says, each of the arts (under Zen Buddhist influence) has “a common point that the moment of negation lies at its core. . . . This moment of negation is not merely a nothing, but the notion of emptiness as co-dependent origination.”<sup>55</sup> In painting, for example, “there is a relationship between the void on the canvas where nothing is painted—a wide and deep space—and the dark silhouette of the sparrow.”<sup>56</sup>

Such ideas are none other than a Buddhist form of *ma*—a place in between where the subject/object world is continually emptied and, by virtue of that, continually filled with a radically impermanent, mutually dependent reality. As the Zen master Dōgen (1200–53) describes it: every SUCH moment is the absolute fullness of being/time (*uji*); all reality is totally present in that space/time moment.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Without question, the word *ma* can mean a variety of things depending on the context of its usage. Its rather consistent appearance in the traditional arts, however, and its apparent relationship to the religions

<sup>54</sup> William LaFleur, “Buddhist Emptiness in the Ethics and Aesthetics of Watsuji Tetsuro,” *Religious Studies* 14 (June 1978): 244.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

of Japan, clearly suggest that its central or deepest meanings are both aesthetic and religious. Moreover, its distinct meaning as a category of experience, knowing, or awareness suggests that it is a “way of seeing,” or a religio-aesthetic paradigm.

As a paradigm in Japanese culture, it affirms the power and meaning of intervals and gaps in time, space, and being that—when properly experienced (religiously, aesthetically, directly, meditatively, openly)—reveal a rich reality of presence and place, a moonlight shining through the cracks and gaps in the gate, and a world in between.

That this paradigm might appear in other cultures, though perhaps not so centrally or consistently, seems indicated by the following suggestive parallels. For example, in speaking of Heidegger’s understanding of *topos* (“place”), theologian of culture David Miller says:

Heidegger’s way . . . is a discovery of *topos* itself, a facing of the “region” or “space” which has been until now forgotten in our intellectualistic ways of thinking and being. . . . It is just in that *topos* of nothingness where we may expect to discover what is lost.

As we move courageously into the various nothingnesses of our being, we may begin to discover some life there, some feeling, something we had forgotten or skipped over. The *topos* of nothingness (*das Nichts*) is experienced as a “rift” (*der Riss*). Yet this nothingness is scarcely known to us. It is an emptiness that is essential to our being. It is that “region” into which meaning (*Logos*) is gathered (*legein*). So the rift, however much it may seem like a “mere cleft ripped open,” is not only that at all. The emptiness is full. It is a “clearing” . . . which comes now to appearance precisely in the “dark woods” of the oblivion of Being. . . . It is a dance of meaning, a dance which, according to Heidegger’s description, is “time’s removing” and “space’s throwing open” in a “play of stillness.”<sup>57</sup>

Finally, Annie Dillard certainly is expressing *ma* when she writes,

Ezekiel excoriates false prophets as those who have “not gone up into the gaps.” The gaps are the thing. The gaps are the spirits’ one home, the altitudes and latitudes so dazzlingly spare and clean that the spirit can discover itself for the first time like a once-blind man unbound. The gaps are the clefts in the rock where you cower to see the back parts of God; they are the fissures between mountains and cells the wind lances through, the icy narrowing fiords splitting the cliffs of mystery. Go up into the gaps. If you find them;

<sup>57</sup> David Miller, “Utopia, Trinity and Tropical Topography” (lecture presented at the Colloquium on “Utopia,” sponsored by the Protestant Theological Faculty of the University of Human Sciences of Strasbourg and the Department of Religion at Syracuse University, Strasbourg, France, March 13–15, 1980).

they shift and vanish too. Stalk the gaps. Squeak into a gap in the soil, turn, and unlock—more than a maple—a universe. This is how you spend an afternoon, and tomorrow morning, and tomorrow afternoon. *Spend* the afternoon. You can't take it with you.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), p. 276.