THE ARTS OF *MA*:
Religio-Aesthetic Values and Cultural Identity in Japan

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INTRODUCTION

The central thesis of this paper is that *ma* ("interval", "between"), together with the various meanings that it carries, points to a central value system — even a "cultural paradigm" as a fundamental "way of seeing" — within the culture of Japan. This central value system is found expressed most consistently and explicitly in the traditional arts of Japan — performing, visual, or literary arts — and, in that context, is both deeply religious and aesthetic simultaneously. While this particular paradigm and its artistic expression can be found in other cultures (notably traditional China), it so permeates Japanese culture that it could be argued that it is one significant element within a generalized Japanese cultural identity.

The discussion which follows focuses primarily on the meaning and function of *ma* — or *ma*-like phenomena — in specific, exemplary arts. Where relevant and useful, the possible connections of this idea to the religions of Japan — particularly Buddhism and Shinto — will be mentioned. By focusing on a paradigm or underlying value, however, the paper will only be suggestive as to the characteristics of the aesthetic forms that make up these arts; in short, I will be more interested in an underlying philosophy (or theology) of art in Japan than in the specific kinds of artistic expression that arise from that.

This paper is one expression of a continuing research project on *ma*, a project in large part inspired by an exhibit on *ma* put together by major figures in contemporary Japanese architecture and design (e.g. Arata Isozaki) and held at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum of New York City in 1979. The exhibit, and the catalogue which represented it *(MA: Space-time in Japan)*, is primary but relatively unspoken evidence (at least in *this* paper) for the nature and importance of *ma* in Japan. Subsequent research has only borne this out, though the admittedly ambiguous, vague, and often implicit presence of *ma* has not made it either obvious or easy. It is my hope that this paper might help articulate that which remains so difficult and inarticulate even to the Japanese.

However, the inarticulate character of *ma* is precisely one of its central features. The term refers, at least within the context of the arts, more to a "poetic" sense of reality than a descriptive one. The descriptive mode of articulation will always tend to break down or "deconstruct" as one attempts to get closer to the underlying meaning of a poetic "world".

That the "world" of *ma* is more poetic than descriptive is perhaps suggested by the original Chinese character for *ma*: a combination of the character for gate or doorway and moon. It is as though the very word itself invites one to experience the moonlight as it filters through (or between) the cracks and gaps in the gate.

Speaking of the root meaning of *ma*, the contemporary *nō* actor Kunio Komparu says:

> This word (*ma*) 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 included 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.[1]

In general Japanese usage, however, the word *ma* means an "interval" between two (or more) spatial and/or temporal things or events. Thus it is not only used in compounds to suggest measurement, but carries meanings such as gap, opening, space between, time between, etc. 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 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, between, 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. Beyond (or with) this, it also carries an experiential connotation in the fact that to be among humans is to experience each other in some dynamic way. Thus, for example in the phrase *ma ga warui* ("the *ma* is bad"), there resides the notion of being embarrassed.

The word, therefore, carries both objective and subjective meaning, that is, it can be discovered in the objective, descriptive world but also can quickly refer to particular modes of human experience. The former element is important for this paper but the latter 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 Arata Isozaki says):

> While in the West the space-time concept gave rise to absolutely fixed images of 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.[2]

The collapse of space and time as two distinct and abstract "objects" can only take place in a particular mode of experience which "empties" the objective/subjective world(s); only in an "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 its meaning presses beyond that to a deeper, poetic level.

THE ARTS OF MA

One *locus classicus* for *ma* in the traditional arts of Japan is the *nō* drama. Specifically and relatively explicitly it is referred to by the great founder and theoretician

of *nō*, Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1443) who says the following in his writing called *Kakyō* ("The Mirror of the Flower"):

> Sometimes spectators of the No 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 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.[3]

Komparu says concerning this teaching by Zeami that "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."[4]

This "no-action" or moment "between", this empty interval (*ma*) in visual/oral space/time, is therefore a still or empty center around, within, or out of which the deepest meaning, enjoyment, and interest arises. This empty moment, or "negative space" as Komparu calls it,[5] has aesthetic/artistic power for it "unremittingly holds the attention" of the audience and yet presents or communicates no specific, descriptive content. It is a gap in time which is neither a contrived and self-conscious "act" of no-action nor a meaningless pause in the otherwise eventful sounds and sights on stage. Rather, it is significant and powerful (religiously *and* aesthetically) for faintly revealing the actor's "inner strength" — an inner strength which, in turn, is grounded in the (Buddhist) Mind of no-mind (*mushin*) as the ultimate basis of artistic creativity here. The *ma*, or empty moments between the actions, are thus windows into or gates out from which the "light" of this art might shine. They are pregnant moments of religio-aesthetic power.

These intervals of no-action do not, of course, happen in a vacuum. They are created, in part, by the forms of action which come before and after them — actions which themselves are based in no-mind and actions which are thereby "linked by entering the state of no-mind". The pregnant negative space/time thus works in concert with the figures and forms of the art both to "link" those forms and yet to break through their sequencing and their beauty of appearance into a deeper level beyond appearances.

It is precisely in this latter context that Zeami makes an important distinction in another writing (the *Shikadō-sho* or "Book on Attaining the Way of the Flower") between the essence (*tai*) and the performance (*yo*) in *nō* or, in a more appropriate poetic image, the flower and its fragrance:

> We must distinguish in the art of the No between essence and performance. If the essence is the flower, the performance is its fragrance. Or they may be compared to the moon and the light which it sheds. When the essence has been thoroughly understood, the performance develops of itself. Among those

who witness No plays, the connoisseurs see with their minds, while the untutored see with their eyes. What the mind sees is the essence; what the eyes see is the performance.[6]

The true power or essence of *nō* is a mind/heart/spirit (*Shin, kokoro*)-power which lies, as it were, beyond the more superficial appearances. The audience is being asked to see with their own mind/heart/spirit beyond the appearances, breaking through those appearances, however beautiful and interesting they may be. The intervals of no-action therefore both link the appearances yet help one "see" at a different level or in a different way.

All of this is, of course, based primarily in particular modes of experience, whether the no-mind and inner strength of the actor or the "mind's eye" of the connoisseur in the audience. *Ma* does not exist, or at least does not function or "work", without a certain kind of experiential sensitivity — one which, certainly in this case, is both religious and aesthetic.

In fact, the Buddhist influence here is both clear and crucial. The "essence" of *nō*, like the moon in Japanese and Buddhist symbolism, is enlightenment, "middle-way", or no-mind experience. The extemals of performance are, like the moonlight, the appearances of things as they arise on the grounds of that experience. Thus in *nō*, as in *ma*, we have both gates and gaps functioning to let the moonlight shine through, both the forms and non-forms (or intervals) of the art "faintly revealing" the depths.

While *nō* might provide one *locus classicus* for the appearance of *ma*, others[7] have pointed to *ma* in painting, tea and calligraphy, and have described it as "imaginary space" (*yohaku, kuhaku*) filled more by one's own mind than by an objective content. Komparu, in fact, relates *ma* to the pervasive stylistic distinction (based in calligraphy but not limited thereto) between *shin* ("correct" or formal), *gyō* ("going" or relaxed) and *sō* ("grass" or informal). In each of these artistic styles 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.[8] Especially in the latter "grass" style, the visual forms of the art tend to deconstruct or become dislocated from their normal, more descriptive, "correctness". This style leaves more space or "ground" for the imagination to enter, and for the viewer to be taken beyond mere appearances or "figures". Such an art is less representational and symbolic of some specific content or meaning than it is presentational of an immediate experience or atmosphere. *Ma*, too, functions this way in the arts (as the *nō* example indicates).

Another traditional art form with suggestive ties to the idea of *ma* is poetry. Much of Japanese poetry has avoided a "filled-up", three-dimensional, narrative/descriptive style. Rather, it has tended to crystallize or freeze a specific experiential moment — one with clear overtones of an imaginative, unarticulated reality as importantly present. The resultant poetic forms have often manifested gaps, holes, or intervals in the flow of words and images which have broken or dislocated a narrative, descriptive theme. A classic example can be found in Basho's (1644-94) frog *haiku*:

Furuike ya	Old pond!
Kawazu tobikomu	Frog jumps in;
Mizu no oto	Sound of water.

While the images cohere around a particular situation which could be more narratively described, the terse and grammatically unjoined phrases create gaps or breaks in a merely descriptive or narrative reading (such as 'There was an old pond

into which a frog jumped, making a splashing sound'). If sensitively read or "heard" the poem pulls one out of such a narrative reality and into the rich negative or imaginative spaces in between.

In light of this it is interesting to note that the great *waka* poet, Fukiwara Teika (1162-1241), once said that "excellent poetry is not found among the 'related verses' (*shinku*) ... It is precisely because these verses are all too predictable, each phrase taking up so surely after the previous one ... In "unrelated verses" (*soku*), however, each phrase stands apart from the next, better for the unexpected to come about."[9] The *waka* scholars Brower and Miner point out the effect of Teika's use of the uncommon, broken, or unrelated images when they say: "His unexpected rearrangement of nouns and verbs works with the allusions (to more ancient literature) to create a world of imaginative, mysterious beauty out of the natural order of time and place.[10]

Such a poetic process deconstructs or dislocates a descriptive or "natural" order of things; it breaks, cracks, and otherwise creates holes in the mundane flow of time and space. As Kurokawa goes on to say of such non-linked poetic images, "the space between the images gives the impression of non-sensual ambiguity and multiple images ... The gap left unfilled and undone becomes a transitional, complex, silent, multivalent space."[11]

Another poetic example of this same affirmation of spaces between can be found in linked verse (*renga*). Writing of the Buddhist influence on this poetry, Gary Ebersole says 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."[12] 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.

The Buddhist point, here, is important to underline for it affirms again one religious grounding for much of this affirmation of spaces in between. The "Buddhist essence" in this case is the direct realization of the impermanence (*mujō*) of things. Just as the descriptive/literal world is in constant flux, and the experiential awakening to that fact "empties" one into another perspective, so also the poetry is "linked" precisely through unlinking or "gaping" so that no *thing* and no narrative sequence abides. In Buddhism, the radical realization of *mujō* is synonymous with emptiness experience (*sunyata, kū*). Emptiness experience, in turn, is "middle way" or "betweenness" experience which abides nowhere and constantly deconstructs/ reconstructs the world. The *renga* poet Shinkei (1406-75) has said: "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."[13]

The theme of impermanence and non-abiding, with the resultant poetry of dislocation, finds expression in the poetic life-style as well as in poetry itself. Basho, like many before him, saw the poetic life as one of wandering dislocation without fixed abode, quite literally casting himself to the wind to let it blow him where it would. In fact, Basho referred to himself as a *fūrabō* or "wind-blown hermit," and his life exemplified the detached awareness of the immediately passing, impermanent world grounded in the no-thingness of *mu* or the emptiness of *ku*. The poetic art arising on this ground is dislocated as well; that is, it cannot be "located" in a literal, descriptive, narrative world — the "literary universes" referred to by Ebersole above. The poetry, as in the following example, breaks, cracks, and opens that world to another perspective — a perspective of direct, non-dual experience.

shizukasa ya	quiet!
iwa ni shimiiru	into rock absorbing
simi no koe	cicada sounds

A very different, and very contemporary, place where we can find a rather explicit affirmation of *ma* is in the film art of Yasujiro Ozu (d.1962). As a series of recent articles has made clear, fundamentally Ozu "directs silences and voids".[15] These analyses point out that empty shots (or "codas"), which contribute nothing to the narrative line or character development, are prominent 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 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.[16]

At least one of these commentators on Ozu's work directly links this to *ma*,[17] but the likeness, here, to what we've already seen is obvious. Particularly suggestive in the quote immediately 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.

The realization that Ozu's gravestone carries the single word *mu* on it only adds an exclamation point to the connections of much of this to what we've seen for *nō* and poetry above. The film critic Paul Schrader, in fact, discusses Ozu's work as a clear example of Zen art in which the "codas" (the "emptyshots" referred to above) cut away from the action to moments of unrelated, non-active, and usually natural scenes to invoke *mu* more explicitly (just as Zeami's moments of no-action). Schrader calls Ozu's films "rituals which create the eternal present (*ekaksana*), give weight to the emptiness (*mu*), and make it possible to evoke the *fūryū* (or artistic/aesthetic effect)."[18]

This is not to say, of course, that the action, themes and existent narrative or "message" of the films are unimportant. However, the codas or empty shots function to break, dislocate, deconstruct that world of meaning and action — emptying yet opening it to another, deeper, level of experience and reality.

Schrader goes on to say that, while the codas express *mu*, Ozu's "films are structured (finally) between action and emptiness, between indoors and outdoors, between scene and coda."[19] Although Schrader does not go on to do so, I would emphasize the word "between" in this comment. The *ma* of an art is not merely the pregnant intervals in space or time, although those are an important ingredient. *Ma* resides in that form/non-form dynamic or betweenness which is continually breaking open the literal, linear, descriptive world and inviting direct experience of the inarticulate, deconstructed, "empty" reality of immediate (nondual) experience, something I believe F.S.C. Northrop meant by the "immediately experienced, undifferentiated, aesthetic continuum."[20] As such, *ma* as a gap and window also functions to link or bridge the forms and figures of an art; to stand between and thus not opt for either form or non-form.

To shift to yet a fourth and final art form, we are now in a position to better understand what certain contemporary architects mean by *ma* — especially those architects represented by Isozaki and groups responsible for the exhibit referred to earlier. Most generally speaking, *ma* is understood by these people to effect architectural

design in a number of ways: the importance of opening, bridging spaces; form defining space rather than space serving form; simplicity, asymmetry, flowing/changing forms, etc. All such characteristics are, Isozaki says, true of all the "arts of *MA*." All suggest the results of affirming time/space intervals as crucial. This architectural discussion of *ma* takes something of the following form.

A particularly interesting and useful discussion of *ma* (in the context of architecture and city planning) can be found in an article by Gunter 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. This latter element, in particular, 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."[21]

In fact, for Nitschke *ma* is ultimately "place" or "place-making" in that it includes not only form and non-form but form/non-form 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 comprised of an arrangement of *things*, rather, it is "the simultaneous awareness of the intellectual concepts *form* and *non-form, object* and *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 *mysterious atmosphere* caused by the extemal distribution of symbols."[22]

Such experiential "places" are, by their very nature, characterized by a dynamic, active, changing, processual immediacy; it is a reality-sense or paradigm better characterized as poetic immediacy than merely objective or subjective. It is in keeping with what Joseph Kitagawa has described for Japan as a "unitary meaning structure" characterized by "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 space)."[23] 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 third world between subject and object, or subjectivism and objectivism. It is as Isozaki has said above: 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 Kisho Kurokawa. Emphasizing a "third world between," he discusses the *engawa*, or veranda, of a typical Japanese home as exemplifying the betweenness by which outside and inside, nature and human, etc., is merged to blur boundaries, distinctions, and oppositions. Generalizing upon this example and idea, he talks about Japanese culture as a "culture of grays", or a culture of "Rikyu gray."

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.[24]

This comment stresses the processual, unfixed, dislocated sense of space or place, as well as the importance of experiential immediacy (*ki*). As Kurokawa elsewhere suggests, this grayness arises out of an "open-ended aesthetic" which refuses clear boundaries and fixed viewpoints but rather affirms the fluid, moving, processual viewpoint of direct experience — one which allows infinite variation, interchangeability, and the blurring of separate or distinctive things. As above, he relates this to both

ma and *kū* as the affirmation of a process of emptying while yet within the world of forms and objects: "If the concept of *sunyata* (*kū*) had a color, it would surely have to be Rikyu gray ... *Sunyata* is not the opposite of matter or being; rather it signifies a non-discriminative and non-perceptual concept of existence that signifies neither being nor nothingness. Hence, it is possible to say that it suggests the spatial dimension of the twilight color of Rikyu gray."[25]

This, however, is the same as to say "betweenness experience" or a "middle way experience" between the this/that world of descriptive, "discriminated" reality. Architectually speaking it expresses itself in shifting planes, open but pregnant spaces, blurred boundaries, and ambiguity. The *ma* of architecture provides a shifting, transient experience of living spaces and forms. It leads to asymmetry and non-fixed "centers" where "place-making" takes place.

One specific architectural form seems important in this regard, and that is the *kekkai* or boundary marker of any sort (especially movable partitions, fences, ropes, etc). The historian of architecture, Teiji Itoh, suggests that these *kekkai* are an important key to understanding and expressing a Japanese aesthetic of transient, changing, processual, and unfixed spacing and spaces. Tying this particularly to ancient Buddhist architecture, but implicating Shinto as well, Itoh says that the fragile, movable partition — now suggesting one boundary and now another but all in a rather subtle and veiled way — links things and spaces in their very flexibility. "In *kekkai* (he says) one finds a fluid concept of space that goes beyond fixed boundaries, and it is a concept of space that ultimately reflects the impermanence not only of space, but of all that is within it."[26]

The Buddhist influence is here again invoked in the sense of impermanence which breaks down the static, objective, three-dimensional, descriptive world into an immediately experienced dynamic process of form and emptiness. As we have seen above, this is central to a *ma* aesthetic (or *ma* perspective) that simultaneously locates and dislocates the world of form and order, and creates a ritual, actional, experiential, between, wandering aesthetic and perspective punctuated by pregnant gaps and veiled, changing forms — a "gray" art which is the "color of emptiness".

While such Buddhist influences have been rather clear and explicit all along, this paper would be incomplete if it did not at least suggest some possible Shinto influences on the meaning and function of *ma*. Though I have spoken at greater length on these influences or potential connections elsewhere, and do not wish to repeat myself here, these connections are important if for no other reason than that the exhibit which inspires this paper features them, suggesting as it does so that we have all perhaps given too much emphasis to Buddhist influences on Japanese culture.

The potential connections between Shinto and *ma* as a religio-aesthetic value or paradigm lie in three interrelated areas: shrines and their nature, the nature of *kami*, and the nature of Shinto ritual. The connection to shrines lies in the idea that shrines were originally little more than rather temporary open, stone-covered, sacred places (*shiki*) marked off by sacred rope (*shimenawa*[27]) and containing a simple pillar, rock or temporary abode (*himorogi*) for the god. The key here is both the pregnant, open, cleaned out spaces as sacred *ma*, and the idea of a temporary, impermanent, even rather fragile shrine form.

Closely related, however, is the idea of *kami* (or *tama*) as formless spiritual energies which can only be temporarily and vaguely experienced as they come into the sacred presence of the shrine and leave again. Seigow Matsuoka, in writing about Shinto and *ma* in the exhibit catalogue, stresses this factor as the "*kehai* (spiritual atmosphere) of *kami*" as it comes into the empty (open) spaces of the shrine and

is vaguely experienced by the worshipper. He thus says:

> *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*.[28]

This leads, so Matsuoka claims, to an aesthetic and art built on a "morphology of clouds"[29] — an ever-changing, impermanent, fluid, processual, veiled and ambiguous aesthetic or art in which a spiritual atmosphere (*kehai*, or simply *ki*) is as important as the forms depicted, and the negative, imaginative, open spaces/times are as important as what *is* objectively there.

A third and related idea has to do with the process of Shinto ritual as primarily a stance of waiting in expectant openness and stillness. As private interviews with Shinto priests have suggested,[30] 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. Others have emphasized this same kind of experience through the metaphor of a host awaiting and attending to a guest, but all of it suggests a mode of sensitivity which opens the self to the depth of the moment through a discipline of open receptivity and sensual sensitivity.

Such experience tends to emphasize the fullness of the present moment in its intuitive, aesthetic immediacy as the locus of living reality. As we have already noted from Kitagawa, the ancient Japanese emphasized the immediate, 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 which filled it. On a similar theme, Gary Ebersole has said that *manyō* poetry reflects a non-linear and a historical sense of time in which the past is brought into the present and time is experienced as an "eternal now (*ima*)."[31] Jean Herbert seems to be 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 reflect an interest in) the domain of immediate experience."[32]

Such forms and modes of experience seem very parallel to what we have already described as *ma* aesthetic. They affirm not only the idea of pregnant intervals in space and time, but also a quality of awareness which seeks to penetrate into the depths of a sacred reality and experience its immediate presentness within or in between the flow or process of space/time.

CONCLUSION

It would seem that the *ma* of art begins — rather literally and descriptively — in the affirmation of pregnant holes or gaps (negative or imaginary space/time) in the sequence of images or events, intervals which function in part to both deconstruct that flow or "narrative" of sequential appearances, and yet to enliven and link those very appearances so dislocated. Hence the moments of no-action in *nō*, the gaps or cracks in poetry, the "empty" codas in Ozu's film, or the empty/filled "places"

of architecture all are "centres" and windows — of sorts — around and through which "interest" is aroused, an inarticulated reality is "faintly revealed", and the very forms and sequences of images standing on either side are linked.

The net result is an aesthetic (and art) which somehow stands (but not firmly) *between* the appearances of artistic form and the pregnant gaps, opting for neither one nor the other but granting both — in dynamic togetherness — as signs of the immediately experienced religio-aesthetic, both self-awareness — *jikaku* — and the conjunction of time. "Place" is a continuum, emptied of self/other, past/present/future, time/space, this/that/ inside/outside, etc. Such a descriptive, "real", three-dimensional world as described by these distinctions is collapsed, deconstructed, or dislocated, allowing another kind of light to shine through — however vaguely in shades of gray, or "through a glass darkly", as in an aesthetic of *yūgen*. In such immediate experience the boundaried, distinguished, descriptive, "objective" world begins to blur, fold together, destabilize and wander creating a "poetic" art of profound ambiguity and impersonal, non-metaphysical (but "spiritual") depth.

Most important, here, is the point about *ma* as a mode of awareness or experience, as a perspective or way of seeing and not merely as an objective criteria or feature of the art forms themselves. *Ma* is finally grounded in a particular kind of awareness and sensitivity in which the self or subject is emptied into the immediacy of each passing moment, a moment including both the passing forms of things and the inarticulate "depth" perceived in, through, and in between them. The self thus discovers the self in direct relationship with the other and not as set-off against it; space and time are not distinct things either from each other or from the human participant but are closely related to the events and experience taking place in them. (The philosopher Nishida Kitaro, in fact, closely relates the idea of place — basho — with both self-awareness — *jikaku* — and the conjunction of time. "Place" is a space/time continuum as immediately — relationally, dialectually, betweenly — experienced.[33])

The understanding of self as "in relationship" can be extended to relationship to other people as well. 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."[34]

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."[35] 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."[36]

This mode of experience deconstructs any objective, descriptive, three-dimensional, outer world set over against the inner world of the subjective self. It creates a kind of fluid, two-dimensional, flowing world which is transparent — like the gate of *ma* — to another kind of depth, a depth which is neither beyond this world nor deep in the self/soul of the human as psychological agent. It is a depth of *oku* — a sacred, invisible "center" where the gods dwell; a place (or process) or unfolding to nothing, but a place of rich being; a place (both literally and

metaphorically) of "the still heart where nothing happens."[37] This depth dismisses, as Roland Barthes has pointed out, the hidden inwardness of "soul" animating the inanimate, hidden meaning expressed in symbolic gesture. Rather, it reveals an "empire of signs" in which the "signs are empty and rituals have no gods," and "there is nothing to *grasp*."[38]

Such a religio-aesthetic mode of awareness expresses itself not only in the arts, but in the culture of Japan generally. The arts, however, are its clearest expression and they reveal a remarkable similarity across genre lines as they do so. In fact, to the degree that the Japanese arts have reflected *ma* they have reflected a cultural paradigm and helped establish a cultural identity in Japan. Insofar as *ma*, or *ma*-like elements, are paradigmatic for Japanese culture, they issue in common cultural (especially artistic) forms with common aesthetic criteria and common spiritual groundings; they all reveal the shady gray moonlight shining between the cracks and gaps in the gate.

ENDNOTES

1. Kunio Komparu, *The Noh Theatre: Principles and Perspectives* (New York/Tokyo: Weatherhill/Tankosha, 1983), pp.70f.

2. Arata Isozaki, *et al., MA: Space-Time in Japan* (New York: Cooper Hewitt Museum, n.d.), p. 13.

3. Nose Asaji, ed. *Zeami jūrokubu shū hyōshaku,* Vol. I (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1949), pp.375f. As translated in W.T. DeBary, ed., *Sources of Japanese Tradition,* Vol. I (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), p.285. Words in parentheses and brackets added by author from original text. The word *hima* is an alternate word for *ma* here.

4. Komparu, p.73.

5. Komparu, pp.xx-xxi.

6. Nose, p.471; DeBary, p.296. Nose makes it clear, here, that words such as mind and essence must be understood Buddhistically and spiritually.

7. See especially Itoh Teiji, *Nihon design ron* (Tokyo: Kashima Kenkyu Shupan Kai, 1974), pp.112-119; and Yoshimura Teiji, *Nihonbi no tokushitsu* (Tokyo: Kashima Kenkyu Shuppan Kai, 1980), pp.178-199.)

8. Komparu, pp.71ff (cf. Itoh, *Nihon.*, pp.120-134.)

9. As quoted in Kisho Kurokawa, "Rikyu Gray: An Open-ended Aesthetic" *Chanoyu Quarterly* 36 (1983), p.428.

10. Robert Brower and Earl Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), p.277.

11. Kurokawa, "Rikyu . . ."

12. Gary Ebersole, "The Buddhist Ritual Use of Linked Poetry in Medieval Japan" *Eastern Buddhist* XVI/2 (Autumn 1983), p.55.

13. Ebersole, "Buddhist Ritual Use . . .," pp.65f.

14. From Basho's *Oku-no-hosomichi* as translated by Cid Corman and Kamaike Susumu, *Back Roads to Far Towns* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1968), p.99.

15. Kathy Geist, "West Looks East: The Influence of Yasujiro Ozu on Wim Wenders and Peter Handke" *Art Journal* (Fall 1983), p.234.

16. Kristin Thompson and Bordwell Smith, "Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu" *Screen* 17/2 (1976), p.45.

17. Geist, pp.234f. (Cf. Ochiai Kiyohiko, "Eizō geijutsu no ma" in Minami Hiroshi (ed), *Ma no kenkyu: nihonjin no biteki hyogen* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1983) pp. 226f.

18. Paul Schrader, *The Transcendental Style in Film* (Berkeley: University of California, 1972), pp.33f.

19. Schrader, p.29.

20. F.S.C. Northrop, *The Meeting of East and West* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1946) chpt. IX.

21. Gunter Nitschke, "'*Ma*': The Japanese Sense of 'Place' in Old and New Architecture and Planning" *Architectural Design* 36/3 (March 1966), p.152.

22. Nitschke, p.117.

23. Joseph Kitagawa, "A Past of Things Present: Notes on Major Motifs in Early Japanese Religions" *History of Religion* 10/1-2 (Aug.-Nov. 1980), p.40.

24. Kisho Kurokawa, "A Culture of Grays" in Tsune Sesoka, ed. *The I-Ro-Ha of Japan* (Tokyo: Cosmo Public Relations Corp., 1979), pp.9, 17. (Cf. his "Rikyu Gray and the Art of Ambiguity" in *Japan Architect* 266 (June, 1979), pp. 26-56; and Itoh, pp.32-51. See also "Rikyu Gray . . ." above.)

25. Kurokawa, "Rikyu Gray . . . Open-ended Aesthetic," pp.38, 41f.

26. Keiji Itoh, "Kekkai: The Aesthetic of Partitions" *Chanoyu Quarterly* 32 (1982), p.57.

27. Itoh, in "Kekkai . . ." p.47, suggests that the origin of *kekkai* may go back to the idea of the *shimenawa* as a sacred movable boundary marker.

28. Seigow Matsuoka, "Aspects of *Kami*" in Isozaki, *MA*. . ., pp.47, 56.

29. Matsuoka, p.56.

30. Particularly interviews with Okamoto Kenji, Assistant Chief Priest at Atsuta Shrine in Nagoya (Fall, 1983).

31. Gary Ebersole, "The Religio-Aesthetic Complex in Manyōshu Poetry With Special Reference to Hitomaro's *Aki no No* Sequence" *History of Religions* 23/1 (1983), pp.34f.

32. Jean Herbert, *Shinto: At the Fountain-Head of Japan* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1967) pp.32f.

33. Nishida Kitaro, *Nishida Kitarō Zenshu* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1978-79); Vol. XII, p.66; XIV, p.353.

34. William LaFleur, "Buddhist Emptiness in the Ethics and Aesthetics of Watsuji Tetsuro" *Religious Studies* (14, June 1978), p.244.

35. LaFleur, p.246.

36. LaFleur, p.247.

37. Peter Popham, "God is in the Gaps: Tradition and the Architecture of Arata Isozaki and Fumihiko Maki," *Japan Society Newsletter* (April 1985), p.9. Cf. Fumihiko Maki, "Japanese City Spaces and the Concept of Oku" *Japan Architect* 263 (March 1979), pp.51-62; and Maki (et al.) *Miegakure suru toshi* (Tokyo: Kashima Shuppan Kai, 1983), pp.167-223.

38. Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), pp.108f and *passim*.

Relevant Kanji
(arranged alphabetically)

1. basho	9. kami	17. ma no torikata	25. otozureru	33. sukibito
2. en	10. kehai	18. mu	26. shiki	34. tama
3. furabo	11. kekkai	19. mujo	27. shin (kokoro)	35. yohaku
4. furyu	12. ki (ke, ch'i)	20. mushin	28. shin	36. yugen
5. gyo	13. ku	21. naishin	29. shinku	
6. hima	14. kuhaku	22. naka ima	30. senu tokoro	
7. himorogi	15. ma	23. ningen	31. so	
8. jikaku	16. ma dori	24. oku	32. soku	

Related works by the author of this paper

1. "Intervals (*Ma*) in Space and Time: Foundations for a Religio-Aesthetic Paradigm in Japan", *History of Religions*, Feb. 1986.

2. "Foundations for a Religio-aesthetic Tradition in Japan", in D. Apostolos-Cappadona (ed.) *Art, Creativity, and the Sacred*, New York: Crossroad, 1984.

3. *Buddhism and the Arts of Japan*, Chambersburg, PA: Anima, 1981.