

phenomena

**APPROACHMENTS
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PHAINOMENA

Revija za fenomenologijo in hermenevtiko
Journal of Phenomenology and Hermeneutics

30 | 118-119 | November 2021

APPROACHMENTS — PRISTOPANJA

Inštitut Nove revije, zavod za humanistiko

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Fenomenološko društvo v Ljubljani

Ljubljana 2021

PHAINOMENA

Revija za fenomenologijo in hermenevtiko

Journal of Phenomenology and Hermeneutics

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Lektoriranje: | **Proof Reading:** Andrej Božič
Oblikovna zasnova: | **Design Outline:** Gašper Demšar
Prelom: | **Layout:** Žiga Stopar
Tisk: | **Printed by:** Primitus, d. o. o.

Uredništvo in založništvo: | Editorial Offices and Publishers' Addresses:

Inštitut Nove revije, zavod za humanistiko
Institute Nova Revija for the Humanities

Fenomenološko društvo v Ljubljani
Phenomenological Society of Ljubljana

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Revija *Phainomena* objavlja članke s področja fenomenologije, hermenevtike, zgodovine filozofije, filozofije kulture, filozofije umetnosti in teorije znanosti. Recenzentske izvode knjig pošiljajte na naslov uredništva. Revija izhaja štirikrat letno. Za informacije glede naročil in avtorskih pravic skrbi *Inštitut Nove revije, zavod za humanistiko*.

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The journal *Phainomena* covers the fields of phenomenology, hermeneutics, history of philosophy, philosophy of culture, philosophy of art, and phenomenological theory of science. Books for review should be addressed to the Editorial Office. It is published quarterly. For information regarding subscriptions and copyrights please contact the *Institute Nova Revija for the Humanities*.

Finančna podpora: | Financially Supported by:

Javna agencija za raziskovalno dejavnost Republike Slovenije | Slovenian Research Agency

Članki v reviji so objavljeni v okviru: | Papers in the journal are published within the framework of:

- Raziskovalni program P6-0341 | Research program P6-0341;
- Infrastrukturni program I0-0036 | Infrastructure program I0-0036.

Revija *Phainomena* je vključena v naslednje podatkovne baze: | The journal *Phainomena* is indexed in:

Digitalna knjižnica Slovenije; DOAJ; EBSCO; Emerging Sources Citation Index (Web of Science); ERIH PLUS; Humanities International Index; Internationale Bibliographie der geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Zeitschriftenliteratur; Internationale Bibliographie der Rezensionen geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlicher Literatur; Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts; ProQuest; Revije.si (JAK); Scopus; Social Science Information Gateway; Social Services Abstracts; Sociological Abstracts; The Philosopher's Index; Ulrich's Periodicals Directory; Worldwide Political Science Abstracts.

Enojna številka: | Single Issue: 10 €
Dvojna števila: | Double Issue: 16 €

Spletna stran: | Website:
phainomena.com

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CARLOS ASTRADA AND TETSURŌ WATSUJI ON THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF LANDSCAPE

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to critically compare the phenomenologies of landscape of two 20th-century philosophers deeply engaged with Heidegger's thinking: Carlos Astrada and Tetsurō Watsuji. In the first section, I show how they understood the relationship between the human being and landscape. With specific peculiarities, they both considered that the analysis of "temporality" must be complemented with a treatment of "spatiality." In the second section, I show that their analysis of spatiality

was connected, on the one hand, to a re-evaluation of corporality, and, on the other hand, to a quest to emphasize the social-communitarian dimension of human existence. In the third section, I present their different interpretations of Heidegger's notion of "Being-towards-death," and establish the links between it and their phenomenologies of landscape. In the final section, I propose Astrada and Watsuji's thoughts as the basis for *an alternative modernity* to that of the West.

Keywords: phenomenology, landscape, spatiality, corporality, Heidegger.

Carlos Astrada in Tetsurō Watsuji o fenomenologiji pokrajine

Povzetek

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Namen pričujočega članka je kritična primerjava fenomenologij pokrajine dveh filozofov 20. stoletja, ki ju jo močno zaznamovalo srečanje s Heideggrovo mislijo: Carlosa Astrade in Tetsura Watsujija. V prvem razdelku pokažem, kakor sta razumela razmerje med človekom in pokrajino. Čeprav z določenimi razlikami, sta oba menila, da je analizo »časovnosti« potrebno dopolniti z obravnavo »prostorskosti«. V drugem razdelku pokažem, da je bila njuna analiza prostorskosti povezana, na eni strani, s ponovnim ovrednotenjem telesnosti in, na drugi strani, s potrebo po poudarjanju družbeno-skupnostne razsežnosti človeške eksistence. V tretjem razdelku predstavim njuni različni interpretaciji Heideggrove ideje »biti-k-smrti« in načrtam vezi med njo in njunima fenomenologijama pokrajine. V zadnjem razdelku misli Astrade in Watsujija razgrnem kot osnovo za alternativno modernost od óne, ki zaznamuje Zahod.

Ključne besede: fenomenologija, pokrajina, prostorskost, telesnost, Heidegger.

I. Introduction

The intellectual career paths of the Argentine philosopher Carlos Astrada (1894–1970) and the Japanese philosopher Tetsurō Watsuji (1889–1960) have remarkable similarities. In 1927, both thinkers made a formative journey to Germany, where they came into direct contact with Scheler’s and Heidegger’s phenomenological approaches. This European experience was a milestone in their careers as well as in the field of philosophy in their home countries: once they went back to Argentina and Japan, both became undoubtedly recognized as great proponents of the 20th-century philosophy and promoters of the discipline in their national contexts.

Carlos Astrada traveled to Cologne after obtaining a fellowship thanks to his essay *El problema epistemológico en la filosofía actual* (1927), in which he reviewed the latest trends in German philosophy at that time. This essay focused on Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology and some relevant members of his circle, namely, Alexander Pfänder and Max Scheler. In the winter semester of 1927–1928, he attended Scheler’s seminar on *Philosophical Anthropology*, which was decisive for the unfolding of his own philosophical views in the following years. Astrada and Scheler established a friendly relationship, abruptly interrupted by the latter’s untimely death in May 1928. Astrada, then, traveled to Freiburg with the main goal of studying with Martin Heidegger, who occupied the center stage of philosophy thanks to the publication of *Sein und Zeit* (1927). Astrada lived in Freiburg until 1930, when he decided to return to Cologne. From there, he made regular trips to the University of Bonn, where he attended his last courses in Germany. He returned to his homeland in August 1931.¹

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Tetsurō Watsuji was a Professor of Ethics at the Department of Philosophy at Kyoto Imperial University. In the summer of 1927, he traveled to Berlin thanks to a fellowship—very common at the time in Japan among prominent young professors—expecting to stay there for three years. However, he could not complete his stay: his father died in 1928 and the philosopher had to return to his country. During the year he spent in Europe, Watsuji

¹ For a biographical exposition of Astrada’s stay in Europe, see David (2004).

was strongly influenced by the phenomenological works of Scheler and Heidegger, whom he read extremely carefully. Both Scheler and Heidegger will be main references for his later writings on philosophical anthropology and ethics.²

Beyond the parallels presented, their previous intellectual experiences also show some similarities. Carlos Astrada's juvenile formation took place amid the anti-positivist movement that was widespread in Argentina between the decades of 1910 and 1920. The most important authors that had influenced him were the *Lebensphilosophie* thinkers: Henri Bergson, Jean-Marie Guyau, Georg Simmel, and, fundamentally, Friedrich Nietzsche. Furthermore, one must also consider Astrada's early readings of some of the proto-existentialist authors like Søren Kierkegaard, Miguel de Unamuno, and Arthur Schopenhauer.

184 For his part, during the 1910s and 1920s, Tetsurō Watsuji received a strong education in modern Western philosophy mainly oriented towards ethics. He was also one of the first introducers of the works of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard in Japan, developing their ideas in his early essays published between 1912 and 1915. He had also a passionate interest in British romantic literature and a vast knowledge of the history of Japanese thought (Carter and McCarthy 2019, 1).

Once back to their respective home countries, during the 1930s and 1940s, Astrada and Watsuji intersected their ideas with their respective national contexts. In fact, the national question had concerned them both in the previous decades; while Watsuji had already written some articles on the history of Japanese thought and Buddhism (McCarthy 2019, 503), Astrada's early essays show a concern for the *Argentine destiny* and the so-called *national question*.³ The estrangement that they experienced during and after their stay in Europe reinforced in both of them their former concerns for Japanese and Argentinean peculiarities and lead them to analyze the relations between the human being and its particular

2 For a brief intellectual biography of Watsuji, see Carter and McCarthy (2019).

3 For an introduction to Astrada's early thought, with a special focus on the *national question*, see Prestía (2021, 33–68).

environment. Astrada and Watsuji both replied to the question of the specificity of a single culture by placing the focus on the way a distinctive human type is configured by its relations with the landscape. Thus, their thought unfolds not only as a phenomenology of the landscape, but also as an attempt to elucidate the characteristic *ethos* of their national communities, of the Argentinean and Japanese *selfhood*.

There is no evidence that could confirm that either Astrada or Watsuji had read each other's works. Thus, I will not try to point out mutual influences. Instead, I will seek to establish a counterpoint between both authors' ideas, hoping that they can illuminate each other. Such a reading is possible as a result of the shared common ground of their inquiries: the phenomenological method, learned by both authors from Husserl, Scheler, and Heidegger; and, more specifically, the attempt to elucidate the structure of human existence. To the best of my knowledge, there is no research that relates the theoretical developments of both authors.

In the first section of this article, I will focus on presenting the shared basis, from which Astrada and Watsuji tried to establish the nature of the relationship between the human being and landscape. Therefore, I will describe the peculiarities of their approaches. I will show how both arrived at similar conclusions through a critical reading of *Sein und Zeit*. Astrada and Watsuji considered that the analysis of "temporality" had to be complemented with a treatment of "spatiality." In addressing the core of the connection of both dimensions of human existence, both authors stated that a human being understands itself not only through history, but also through environment. In the second section, I will show that their analysis of spatiality was connected, on the one hand, to a re-evaluation of corporality, and, on the other hand, to a quest to emphasize the inter-individual and social-communitarian dimensions of human existence. In the third section, I will present the different interpretations that both authors made of Heidegger's concept of "Being-towards-death," and I will establish possible links between this critical reception and their phenomenologies of landscape. In the final section, I aim to explore Astrada's and Watsuji thoughts as an original ground for re-thinking *an alternative modernity* to that of the West.

II. The humanized landscape or the historicity of nature

The most important contributions that the Western academia recognizes to Tetsurō Watsuji are: *Fūdo*, from 1935, and *Rinringaku* [*Ethics*], published in three volumes in 1937, 1942, and 1949, to which I will resort, in order to clarify the concepts of the former. *Fūdo* was translated into English in 1961 as *Climate: A Philosophical Study*. Later, in 1988, it was reissued as *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study*. The term “climate” attempts to replace the particular concept of *Fūdo*, which expresses a correlation between the human being and “environment” that cannot be reduced to an external relationship between two objects.⁴ On the contrary, Watsuji aimed to analyze the “phenomena of climate” not as a mere physical or “natural environment”—that is, as a matter of natural sciences—, but as “expressions of subjective human existence” (Watsuji 1988, v). Indeed, according to the Japanese philosopher, “[t]he most frequent misunderstanding about climate occurs in the commonplace view that influences exist between man and his natural environment” (Watsuji 186 1988, 8). This standpoint is the effect of abstracting the phenomenon of the environment—climate and landscape—, disconnecting it from human existence and its cultural history, and reducing it only to a natural environment. For Watsuji, this procedure is reflected even in the statement that “not only is man conditioned by climate, but that he, in his turn, works on and transforms climate” (1988, 8). Such dualism does not match with a phenomenology of *climate*. In this sense, Watsuji attempted to emphasize the mutual relations between historical and environmental conditionings as main characteristics of the fundamental structure of human existence.

In the prologue of *Fūdo*, Watsuji explained that the relationship between the human being and the environment was unconcealed to him in its “true

4 Augustin Berque (2004, 390–391) explains in detail the translation problems that Watsuji’s work has had both in English and German. Berque is also the French translator of *Fūdo*, and in the cited article he justifies his choice of the word “*milieu*” as the most suitable to express Watsuji’s thought. In the Spanish translation, Juan Masiá and Anselmo Mataix opted for the word “*ambientalidad* [environmentality],” and they usually add “*paisaje y clima* [landscape and climate]” for a more comprehensive definition, as they explain in their prologue: Masiá and Mataix (2006, 9–14).

guise” during his journey to Europe, when his mind “was full of a variety of impressions” gathered throughout that period (1988, vi). Watsuji’s contact with different landscapes, in addition to the reading of the problem of temporality displayed by Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit*, impelled him to “ruminate over and to concentrate [his] attention on [his] impressions about climate” (1988, vi; mod. text). The last part of *Fūdo* established the peculiarities of the conditioning of the monsoon environment in Japan composing, thus, an inquiry into the *authentic self-understanding* of the Japanese people.⁵

During the 1930s, while delving into his study of Heideggerian philosophy, Astrada wrote a series of essays centered on the relationship between the human being and landscape. The most outstanding of these studies, “La existencia pampeana” (1934), rewritten and published in 1938 under the title “Para una metafísica de la pampa,” was an attempt to elucidate the “characteristic landscape” of “Argentine humanity” (Astrada 2021c, 581).⁶ For Astrada, while the human being itself, “by the essential structure of its existence, is primarily a distant, ecstatic being, that is to say that, for it, the being of its existence is the farthest thing,” the Argentine human being, by virtue of the landscape, to which it has been thrown into existence, the telluric desolation of the Pampas, is “doubly ecstatic,” a “being of distance,” “a vanishing shadow and dispersion on its total melancholy, spiritual correlate of the monochord infinitude of the extension” (Astrada 2021c, 583–584). Ten years later, this essay will be a part of *El mito gaucho*, one of his main works. Astrada argued that “[t]he vague outline of the Pampas is the very outline of our intimacy”. We cannot “get rid of it,” because “it is part of our being” (Astrada 1948, 14). As Watsuji, he added a personal experience to his reflections:

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“when we were far away from the Pampas, at the mercy of the hallucination of European cities, we suddenly felt scattered, helpless in a desert area, superimposed, or better, under-imposed magically to our

⁵ The last section of *Fūdo* includes numerous contrasts between the “East” and the “West.” See, for example, the comparison between European and Japanese cities and housing and the reflections on the possibility of parliamentary democracy in Japan (Watsuji 1988, 157ff; 168–170).

⁶ All translations of Astrada’s works are mine.

urge to deal with the values of European culture [...]; we felt carried by a kind of inner discontinuity, by an emotional silence. A silence filled with the shadow of distant nights. It was the enigma of the Pampas traveling by our side.” (Astrada 1948, 13-14)

Far from his native landscape, Astrada discovers himself as what he really is: “a man of the Pampas.” But the Pampas are not simply “the physical environment,” but “spiritual Pampas,” “constituent” of the “ontological structure” of the Argentine human being (Astrada 1948, 14).

188 In *El mito gaucha*, Astrada draws conclusions on the historical-political dimension of the Pampean existence. According to the author, the inclination to dispersion of the Pampean *Dasein* would have been historically shaped by a generation that deserted its own destiny, vicarious of foreign modes of existence, a “transplant civilization” that turned the Pampas into a *Hinterland*, “colonized according to the requirements and to meet the needs of the European metropolis” (Astrada 1948, 36). Hence, the first task imposed to the Argentinean *Dasein* is to recover itself from the dispersion. This would make possible its authentic existence.

I would like to focus on Astrada’s considerations on the relationships between landscape and the human being. In *El mito gaucha*, the author remarked on the positive contributions of *geopsique* and climatology, while he at the same time also characterized the Pampas as an “existential structure of the Argentinean man” (Astrada 1948, 1, 5–6; 14). However, it must be noted that *geopsique* and climatology are *natural sciences* and, as such, they cannot reach the question of landscape in its ontological dimension.⁷ Only in 1949, Astrada developed such an attempt, in his article “Historicidad de la naturaleza,” a part of a friendly controversy between him and the Italian philosopher Ernesto Grassi.⁸ Astrada vindicated that all nature is already historized and, in a certain

7 In *Tierra y Figura*, Astrada returns to *geopsique*, climatology, and “*geobiology*,” but his treatment is rather ambiguous, tending to point out the inadequacy of those approaches for an ontological inquiry (Astrada 1963, 11–12).

8 The polemic took place as a result of the First National Congress of Philosophy in Mendoza, Argentina (1949). Grassi and the main European philosophers attended the Congress. Grassi’s work, “Contacto con la Naturaleza ahistórica y el mundo occidental

sense, “humanized.” This argument contrasted with the “lack of historicity” of nature that Grassi, overwhelmed by the monumentality of the Andes, thought to have found in the Americas—in a clear reminiscence of an old topic of Hegel’s regarding the *peoples without history*. As Astrada stated, “we owe it to Heidegger to have posed this problem in its true terms and on the basis of a strict elucidation of the ‘world’ phenomenon and an adjusted ontological approach to the nature and the being of the historical” (Astrada 1949, 159). In that sense, “nature is already involved in the historicity of Being-in-the-world of human being. Whatever the attitude, with which we place ourselves in front of nature,” Astrada argued, “every natural being is already within the existential perspective of our worldhood,” and, consequently, “all nature, even in its greatest distance from man’s possibilities, is always historical.” In other words, for Astrada all nature

is always the object of a more or less historical experience, experience that ranges from the mathematical formulas of physics in function of the purpose of mastering it technically to the aesthetic enjoyment of its multiple forms, and the awe and reverence in the presence of its uncontrollable power. (Astrada 1949, 159)

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Watsuji would agree with Astrada. For him, climate and landscape do not

exist alone and in isolation from history, entering and becoming a part of the content of history at a later juncture. From the very first, climate is historical climate. In the dual structure of man—the historical and the climatic—history is climatic history and climate is historical climate. History and climate in isolation from each other are mere abstractions; climate as I shall consider it is the essential climate that has not undergone this abstraction. (Watsuji 1988, 10)

técnico” and Astrada’s response were both published in the third fascicle of *Cuadernos de Filosofía* (Universidad de Buenos Aires), directed by Astrada himself. On the Astrada-Grassi debate, see David (2007).

Watsuji recognized that in *Sein und Zeit* there is, in fact, a treatment of spatiality—which can be found mainly in §§ 22–24. Nevertheless, he argued that, in Heidegger’s approach, spatiality remains “almost obscured in the face of the strong glare to which time was exposed” (Watsuji 1988, v). Watsuji was “intrigued by the attempt [of Heidegger] to treat the structure of man’s existence in terms of time,” but he also found it “hard to see why, when time had thus been made to play a part in the structure of subjective existence, at the same juncture space also was not postulated as part of the basic structure of existence” (Watsuji 1988, v). In that sense, Watsuji tried to point out a “limitation” in Heidegger’s work, to which he intended to reply with a *cultural phenomenology of the landscape* capable of filling the gap between temporality and spatiality.

190 Watsuji’s conception is clearly expressed in his commentary to the analysis of the “things-being-at-hand,” in which he complemented the Heideggerian perspective with his own standpoint of the landscape phenomenology: “the essential character of the tool lies in its being ‘for a purpose,’ lies, that is, in this purpose-relation. Now this purpose-relation derives from human life and at its bases we find the climatic limitation of human life” (Watsuji 1988, 13). Then, Watsuji developed a phenomenological consideration that we could call *historic-genetic*:

clothes are to be worn, yet they are worn above all as a protection against cold. Thus this purpose-relation finds its final origins in climatic self-comprehension. As well as understanding ourselves in cold or heat, we take measures, as free agents, for protection. We should not devise clothes completely spontaneously in the absence of the factors of cold or heat. [...] It is clear, then, that such tools have a very close relationship with climatic limitation. To say, then, that tools are to be found nearest to hand is, in fact, to say that climatic limitation is the foremost factor in objective existence. (Watsuji 1988, 13–14)

After his attempt at phenomenological clarification of the importance of “climate” in the basic structure of human existence, which is the main purpose of the first chapter of his book *Fūdo*, Watsuji dedicated the remaining chapters

to analyze three different types of landscape with their respective human types: the desert, the meadow, and the monsoon. He focused his attention on the latter to reinforce the specificities of the Japanese human type, which he characterized as “receptive and resigned,” with raptures of “savage resistance” (Watsuji 1988, 134; 137).

In quoting Heidegger as the one who made possible the analysis of the “historicity of nature” on ontological bases, Astrada did not pretend, like Watsuji, to point out a “limitation” or insufficiency of Heidegger’s work. However, Astrada’s developments could be easily read in that key, bringing it closer to the Japanese philosopher’s approach. The “Being-one’s-Self,” he would say on the first page of *Tierra y Figura*—a book from 1963, in which he resumed his inquiry of the relationship of the human being with the environment—, “it is a function *not only* of its time and its cohabitants, *but also*, and to a large extent, of its land, of the *genius loci*, of the landscape’s numen” (Astrada 1963, 9–10; my own emphasis).⁹ Thus, the “historical self-comprehension” of a community, its “self-awareness” (Astrada 1963, 25), is not produced solely in relation to the dimensions of temporality and historicity—which were in the foreground in Heidegger—, but it is also produced on the basis of a characteristic environment, already historized; in other words, the discovery “of ourselves,” the “self-apprehension” of the human being, according to Watsuji’s analogous formula, always occurs in a climate and landscape that condition and limit all the cultural objectivities of a community, and that is expressed in “literature, art, religion, and manners and customs” (Watsuji 1988, 6–8).

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On the very first pages of *Tierra y Figura*, Astrada stated that “it has not been rehearsed, as far as we know, a human typology based on the predominant shaping influence of the landscape” (Astrada 1963, 13). He then outlined some brief observations on this “typology”: the “somewhat lost

9 Although pointing out the need to consider nature from a perspective that intertwines environmentality and historicity, Astrada did not reach the depth of a concept like *Fūdo*. Instead, he frequently used the ambiguous and imprecise expression, *genius loci*. Some of the difficulties that the notion of *genius loci* has in the Astradian work are exposed in Prestía (2019). Lorenzo Marinucci has convincingly proposed a clarification of *genius loci*, bringing it closer to the precision of the vocable *Fūdo* and presenting it as its Western substitute (Marinucci 2017, 221–222).

look, requested by the mountain” of the “man of the Andes”; “the looking that penetrates distances and gets lost in them” of the man of the Pampas; and the particular look of the man of the mountain valleys, who shortens and narrows distances, “losing the real sense of them.” Those notes complete the picture of “Argentinean humanity,” which fifteen years earlier had been reduced to the Pampean landscape (Astrada 1963, 13–14; 18).

III. The corporality, the others, the community

192 It is possible to find another common ground in Astrada’s and Watsuji’s works in their insistence on considering *the individual human being* as an abstraction. Along these lines, Watsuji’s reading of Heidegger places the latter alongside the entire modern Western philosophical tradition, which the former considers to be of an *individualistic* tendency. For Watsuji, “an attempt to treat the structure of human existence as one of time only would fall into the error of trying to discover human existence on the level only of individual consciousness” (Watsuji 1988, 9). Thus, for the Japanese philosopher it is necessary to “investigate the temporality of *ningen sonzai* [human existence] in line with that subjective spatiality in which the self and the other, although opposed, are nonetheless brought into unity” (Watsuji 1996, 228). The emphasis on landscape and climate conditioning also implies an appreciation of the *social* dimension of the human being, as it will be shown further on.

As others have highlighted (Janz 2011, Liederbach 2012), Watsuji’s critique seems to forget that Heidegger had argued that *Dasein*, as Being-in-the-world, is always a Being-with [*Mitsein*] and that Being-with-Others [*Mitdasein*] is an essential determination of existence.¹⁰ However, it is true that Heideggerian *Daseinsanalytik*, especially with regard to the treatment of authenticity [*Eigentlichkeit*], falls entirely on the individual *Dasein*, leaving little room for the relation to others—of which, in the form of the everydayness of the they [*das Man*], the resolute *Dasein* is in fact subtracted. In short, Watsuji’s critique of Heidegger could be linked to what some authors have established

10 For a reading that defends Watsuji’s critique, but tries to show that some of his developments could be found in Heidegger’s lectures on Aristotle (*Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, 1924), see Culbertson (2019).

as the *Dasein*'s "solipsism."¹¹ According to Watsuji, in Heidegger's work "the relation between person and person" was "overlooked" and "hidden behind the relation between person and tools." "For this reason," he continues, "his disciple K. Löwith tried to bring to light this hidden element and clarify the idea of 'world' mainly with reference to relationships between person and person." (Watsuji 1996, 17) With such words, Watsuji addressed Karl Löwith's *Habilitationsschrift, Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen, ein Beitrag zur anthropologischen Grundlegung der ethischen Probleme* (1928), of which Heidegger himself was supervisor. Watsuji took into account Löwith's view to develop his own conception, centered on the interpersonal character of human existence.¹²

A critique such as Watsuji's is completely absent in Astrada, who, from the beginning, focused on *Mitdasein*. He dedicated a chapter of his first book, *El juego existencial* (1933), to comment extensively on Heidegger and to criticize other philosophical approaches regarding the problematic relationship between oneself and the others. Astrada succinctly expounded upon Löwith's arguments, but did not find a divergence between them and Heidegger's stance. Instead, Astrada acknowledged a complementarity between them, which would not allow him to delve too deeply into that inter-personal character of existence:

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Löwith, following the direction marked by Heidegger, has exposed [...] the fundamental and immanent structures of contemporaneity (*Mitwelt*). [...] World is always world of contemporaries. The concept of "the others" lies at the basis of the world's most primary determination of contemporaries or co-beings. (Astrada 1933, 91)

¹¹The earliest contestations to *Dasein*'s solipsism can be found in Scheler's critical account of Heidegger's ontological treatment of *Angst* and *Weltlichkeit* (1928) in *Sein und Zeit*, posthumously published as *Zu «Idealismus-Realismus» – Aus Teil V: Das emotionale Realitätsproblem* (GW 9, pp. 254–304). One should also consider Gadamer's phenomenology of the *pólis* as well as his ethical rehabilitation of the (Platonic) dialectic after Heidegger's criticism in *Sein und Zeit*, which was published in his *Platos dialektische Ethik* (1931) (GW 5, 5–163).

¹²For a reading of Löwith's critique of *Sein und Zeit*, see Riesterer (1969).

It should be noted that the reading of Heidegger carried out by Astrada was done from the very first point onwards with an emphasis placed on the ethico-political possibilities derived from *Mitsein*. This can be seen in “Heidegger y Marx,” a lecture delivered in September 1932 in Buenos Aires, one of the first theoretical rapprochements between these two thinkers. Astrada endorsed *Sein und Zeit*’s § 74, in which Heidegger states that *Dasein*, as Being-in-the-world, “exists essentially in Being-with-Others,” and that “its historizing is a co-historizing,” “determinative for it as *destiny* [*Geschick*],” a word that designates the “historizing of the community, of a people” (Heidegger 1962, 436). In this sense, the link with Marx is given from the consideration that revolutionary practice “surpasses individual human existence,” and is always done by a collective historical subject (Astrada 2021b, 472). Thus, for Astrada, *Dasein*’s solipsism was never raised as a problem because “own existence” is always considered within a community.

194 Watsuji began from the observation of the dual character of human existence, which is at the same time “individual” and “social.” Watsuji rejected “anthropology, which treats man the individual, [and] sociology, which takes up the other aspect” (Watsuji 1988, 9). None of them respond to the reality of the human being, whose basic structure must be grasped at the same time “as individual and as whole” (Watsuji 1988, 9). The dual character of human existence, upon which Watsuji insisted, removes ontological primacy from both sides of that duality, seeking instead a relational approach: neither the self can be understood outside of a totality, nor the totality can lose sight of the many individual beings that make it up. On the basis of the Japanese terms *ningen*, which implies the individual and social dimensions of human being, and *aidagara*, which points to the *interpersonal* character of human existence or *in-betweenness*, Watsuji developed his own philosophical anthropology. Such a development is based on his thought about historical-environmental conditionality and his ethics—which does not imply a normative discourse, but the “order or the pattern through which the communal existence of human beings is rendered possible” (Watsuji 1996, 11). There is no individual subject that simply relates to another, but in all subjectivity, there is always already implied an in-betweenness, which is the way of being of human beings (Watsuji, 1996, 10). That in-betweenness is what, according to

Watsuji, Heidegger had neglected, although he considered human existence as essentially *Mitdasein*.

The dual character of human existence reveals itself in the phenomenology of landscape: when we feel cold, “we stiffen, or we put on warm clothes, or we draw near the brazier. Or, we may feel more concern about putting clothes on our children or seeing that the old are near the brazier” (Watsuji 1988, 5). “We feel the same cold in common. [...] Thus, it is not ‘I’ alone but ‘we’, or more strictly, ‘I’ as ‘we’ and ‘we’ as ‘I’ that are outside in the cold.” (Watsuji 1988, 4) Later, Watsuji exemplifies this duality of human existence with the experience of *the rejoicing in the cherry blossoms*: “the blossoms take our attention and we invite our friends to go blossom-viewing or drink and dance with them under the trees. Thus, in our relationship with the spring scene, either individually or socially we adopt various measures for securing enjoyment from it” (Watsuji 1988, 5–6).

Therefore, the self-understanding within the environment “reveals itself in the ways of creating communities, and thus in the ways of constructing speech, the methods of production, the styles of building, and so on” (Watsuji 1988, 12), objectivities, in which the individual human beings recognize themselves as belonging to a social dimension that is beyond them and that, at the same time, constitutes them—and that they also contribute to constitute. Hence, for Watsuji, “the basic unit of the structure of being inherent in *ningen* [human being] cannot be conceived of apart from the community” (Watsuji 1996, 228).¹³

Likewise, environmental conditioning means for the individual the awareness of its own body (Watsuji 1988, 12). In the reassessment of corporality, Watsuji turned away again from Heidegger, who gave little importance to it in *Sein und Zeit*. Conversely, for Watsuji, “the body is not mere matter,” but it is also subjectivity, a “self-active” principle that has “its foundation [in] the spatial and temporal structure of human life” (Watsuji 1988, 11). To establish a connection between corporality and environment implies a consideration of both dimensions of human life that goes further than the analysis that can

13 Hans Peter Liederbach (2012) has critically pointed out that, while “in a strict logical sense”, neither the “individual” nor the “totality” has ontological primacy, “in a practical level” “the individual has to submit itself to society”.

be offered by natural sciences or scientific anthropology. It cannot even be properly grasped by the “philosophical anthropology of today”—Watsuji was probably alluding to Scheler—, because it is limited to “the study of ‘individual man,’ without considering him as a whole, that is, in his relations with the others, relations that are historically-environmentally placed (Watsuji 1988, 10). In that sense, “Watsuji did not treat *fūdo* as solely the natural environment, but as a concept in which biological, physical, and geographical features exert forces on human living and through which human beings in turn transform the environment” (Murphy 2021, 22).

Astrada also addressed corporality in a controversial attitude towards Heidegger. In *La revolución existencialista* (1952), he argued that the human being is an “individual of a biological species with the functional ontological possibility of rising [...] to the *humanitas*,” elevation that occurs “without nullifying its nature.” For Astrada, “to exist [...] presupposes the ontic conditionality of *Dasein* (of the human being),” namely, its “entitative or psychophysical support,” its “biological substrate” (Astrada 1952a, 111–113).

196 In discussion with the later Heidegger, Astrada concedes to his Freiburg Professor that “existence can never be thought of as a specific modality among other ways, and that the body of man is something different” from the animal organism, “but not ‘essentially’ different, as Heidegger claims”. Accordingly, “man, as he humanizes, makes his body an instrument for his humanity” (Astrada 1952a, 112). Thus, Astrada opened the possibility of thinking the historicity inscribed in human corporality itself as a result of the co-constitutive bond between *Dasein* and its surrounding world. This is evident in the “human typology” contained in *Tierra y Figura* (Astrada 1963, 13).

Furthermore, *corporality* allowed Astrada to challenge the representation of the universal and “abstract” human being. This representation, erected by the enlightened rationalism as a self-legitimizing image of the upcoming bourgeois civilization, is dominated by the instrumental *ratio* and the hypostasized “spirit.” At this point, the influence of German romanticism and historicism becomes evident.¹⁴ Astrada emphasized the reference to the

14 In *La revolución existencialista*, Astrada drew on the important contributions of Herder and Dilthey (1952a, 189ff). See also Astrada (1945; 1952b).

“national” dimension and argued for a human being “with an instinctive and emotional repertoire of historically conditioned preferences” and a reason developed in the “historical and psychovital reality” of such human groups. Such ideas should replace the “universal” and “cosmopolitan” character of the former “image of man” (Astrada 1952a, 194). Astrada contested the abstract universalism—in short, Eurocentrism—, in which each historical personality is diluted in the technical progress and its apparent neutrality. Yet, this did not result in particularism or exclusivism because, as I will show in the last section, he looked ultimately for an integration or complementarity of different human types. Universality is only achieved through immersion in the historical particularity of each community.

In this way, Astrada reintroduced the collective dimension of mankind, which makes superfluous the “pseudo-antinomy of *individualism* and *collectivism*” (Astrada 1952a, 194). In the same manner as Watsuji, for Astrada, “the singular man only exists and becomes meaningful within the community, in which he was born and to whose destiny he is bound” (Astrada 1963, 66).

Likewise, as the environment is already historized, the ways of dealing with it also involve the appropriation and recreation of the cultural objectivities that a community developed in the past: “it is not only we ourselves who today cooperate to defend ourselves or work against the cold, the heat, the storm, or the flood. We possess an inheritance of self-apprehension accumulated over the years since the time of our ancestors.” (Watsuji 1988, 6)

In summary, both Watsuji’s and Astrada’s proposals for a *cultural phenomenology of landscape* laid the foundations for an analysis of human life capable of giving an account of the mutual imbrication among the historical conditioning, the *incarnated* human being, the inter-personal relations of different orders—of kinship, friendship, erotism, labor, etc.—, and, finally, the dimension of the totality that gathers them, which both authors addressed: the people or national communities.

IV. “Own death” and “being for life”

For Carlos Astrada, the question of finitude was always the touchstone of Heidegger’s philosophy. This can be seen in the first articles, in which he

introduced Heidegger to the Argentinean public towards the beginning of the 1930s. There, he announced “the truth of the great new word brought to us by Heidegger: metaphysics of finitude” (Astrada 2021a, 406). As it is well known, in *Sein und Zeit* the “*anticipatory* resoluteness” allows an “authentic existence,” which is experienced as a subtraction from the “the ‘they’” [*das Man*] that permanently “conceals” it in the face of death (Heidegger 1962, 299). In Astrada’s reading, in which the ethico-political scope of Heidegger’s conception is emphasized, “own death” is always understood as subtraction from “the ‘they’” as well as *Dasein*’s reference to the national community or “political people”—the collective subject of historical change according to Astrada. In this sense, “true philosophy [...] is what leads man to meet his finitude, to his self-determination that allows him to have a destiny” (Astrada 1952a, 90). That self-determination is, at all times, *with-others*. As a consequence, Astrada frequently assumed the heroic and sacrificial *pathos* that can be found, at times, in Heidegger’s work (Losurdo 2001).

198 For Watsuji, the Heideggerian treatment of finitude is insufficient to the extent that it does not manage to break the sphere of the individual. Thus, his criticism of what he considers the “individualism” of Heideggerian thought is also revealed in his scant appreciation of the notions of “Being-towards-death” [*Sein zum Tode*] and “authenticity” [*Eigentlichkeit*].¹⁵

Watsuji argued that “[e]ven though such events as one’s last moments, the deathwatch, the funeral, a tomb, a Buddhist service held after forty-nine days in which a bereaved family, relatives and friends participate all belong to human death, [Heidegger] omits them” (Watsuji 1996, 219). According to Robert Carter, for Watsuji “[t]he preoccupation with one’s death is by itself insignificant, unless one includes the implication one’s death has for others or for society at large” (Carter 1996, 342). Death must be considered a phenomenon that occurs in the in-betweenness of human existence. Hence, “only in the relationship between self and other that the preparedness for death gives full play to its genuine significance” (Watsuji 1996, 226).

The inauthenticity of daily life, in which “one dies,” thereby hiding the most fundamental of *Dasein*’s possibilities, is well suited to a phenomenology of the

15 For a reading of Watsuji’s “authenticity,” see Liederbach (2012) and Shuttleworth (2019).

urbanized modern life of the Western Europe between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, the soil, from which Heideggerian philosophy sprang. The very phenomenon of the concealment of death responds, in fact, to a recent historical process—as Philippe Ariès, for example, has shown in his classic historical-anthropological work (1974). Thus, we could say that the awareness of one’s own finitude always occurs in a particular historical-environmental conditioning. The ontic contents of that disposition toward death are entirely traversed by that conditioning. I am not referring only to the way, in which we deal with the deceased body, although in that case we may also think that the environment conditions our death, *what to do* with it. I am thinking especially of the way of being, in which daily life is associated with the natural cycle of seasons, in which death is in fact involved in life as one of its moments. Astrada’s and Watsuji’s development helps us to understand that the historical-environmental conditioning weaves the ways, in which the individual human being is linked to its own death and the death of the others.

Complementary to his critique regarding the Heideggerian conception of death, Watsuji argues that what Heidegger portrays as “authenticity” also remains in the individual sphere. As Liederbach explains, “*Dasein*’s ‘authentic self’ (*eigentliches Selbst*) is nothing but the individual self insisting on its individuality and turning its back to all communal forms of existence” (Liederbach 2012, 131). Thus, according to Watsuji, “what Heidegger calls *authenticity* is, in reality, inauthenticity. And when this in-authenticity becomes further negated through the nondual relation of self and other, that is to say, when the *self* becomes annihilated, only then is authenticity realized” (Watsuji 1996, 225).

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In the light of Astrada’s and Watsuji’s works, perhaps the individual finitude can be thought beyond the extremes of sacrifice or solipsism. Astrada argues in *Tierra y Figura*:

at the end of their life cycles, all human beings remain leveled by the earth in an oblivion so remote that, in relation to it, it leads them to the immemorial [...]. This telluric oblivion erases the temporal differences of their emergency to life; the birth is poured into a slope, which knows no milestones or limits. (Astrada 1963, 15)

Herewith, the Argentinean author seems to evoke what Watsuji proposed: the “existence for death” [Being-towards-death] of the individual conscience is, in truth, “existence for life” [Being-towards-life] of the national community:

Men die; their world changes; but through this unending death and change, man lives and his world continues. It continues incessantly through ending incessantly. In the individual’s eyes, it is a case of an “existence for death”, but from the standpoint of society it is an “existence for life.” (Watsuji 1988, 10)

Finite individual existence, conditioned by an *ethos* that it recognizes and responds to, is thus inserted into the cycle of continuous renewal and transformation—identity in difference—, which is precisely a human collectivity.

V. The recovery of “landscape” as a critique of the Western capitalist modernity

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As I mentioned, Carlos Astrada’s and Tetsurō Watsuji’s remarks involved not only a phenomenology of landscape, but also an attempt to elucidate the *ethos* of their national communities. These inquiries into the peculiar characteristics of each people can be read as starting points for dealing, in the historical situation of the Western modernity, with the dynamics of capital itself, which pushes towards the imposition of a sole human type, de-historicized and de-environmentalized: the individual-consumer.

The question can be put as an urge: synthesizing a humanity that escapes the homogenization, to which the global era leads. However, by virtue of our own historical situation, we cannot ignore the cultural objectivities that we identify with the unfolding of the West, such as modern science and technology; dimensions that both authors recognize. This is based on the common conviction that in the various human types complementarity must be sought. For Watsuji, knowing one’s own character allows “an understanding of characters different from one’s own and facilitates the supplementation of one’s own failings through the adoption of another’s strong points” (Watsuji 1988, 132). Understanding the “Self,” is a necessary condition for understanding

otherness. By deepening into our *ethos*, we can “make contributions to human culture of which no other people is capable” (Watsuji 1988, 207). Similarly, Astrada argues that,

no single people, however extraordinarily gifted it may be, has access by its own means to the whole of truth and beauty, to the realization of full humanity. Rather, all other peoples participate with their thoughts, efforts, own ideals, and dreams, to its unveiling and full achievement. (Astrada 1963, 22)

From another standpoint, the matter can be approached in the terms of *modernity* and *tradition*, poles of an antinomy that, taken separately, are equally sterile. The works of Astrada and Watsuji aim to pursue an integration that would allow not to fall on the extremes of modernization—understood in its mere economic dimension—or traditionalism—as an exclusivism. In this sense, although with different degrees, it is clear that both philosophers are expressing their concerns from a similar historical-geographical situation: from the countries of semi-periphery, possible protagonists of an *alternative modernization*.¹⁶

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It becomes necessary, then, to delve into the peculiarity of landscape. It constitutes a limit: someone is neither free from being Argentinean or Japanese, nor can they escape it. In other words: we are not free of being who we are due to a historical-environmental particularity. Moreover, as Astrada and Watsuji intended, wherever we go, we carry with us our landscape, our limit. To go beyond that limit, to overcome it, we first have to understand and apprehend it, we have to be what we can be, in fullness. They both called for an assumption of the limit understood as possibility. This implies a challenge to an abstract *idealistic* vision that seeks to introduce universal models to unique dissimilar realities. As Watsuji explained, “we must remain conscious of the significance of, and love, our destiny, our destiny to have been born into such a climate,” but also: “the conquest of climate” “can only be achieved only by a

¹⁶ For a related approach to Watsuji’s philosophy, which tries to make it a resource for decolonial theory, see Murphy (2021).

climatic path—by the attainment, historically, of an awareness of climate. This done, man may surmount climate.” (Watsuji 1988, 207; 39)

In short, what Astrada and Watsuji suggested is that the human being *is*, individually and socially, solely in a historized landscape. The threads of human existence are intertwined with a characteristic historical-environmental conditionality, which in its sedimentation expresses a peculiar way of being of a national community, an *ethos* that can be seen in its cultural objectifications. From the comparison presented between the work of both authors, a similar proposal emerges, which calls for us to assume our historical-environmental conditionality and bring it to the fullest of its possibilities as a way of transcending it.

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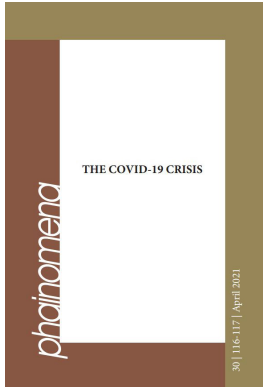
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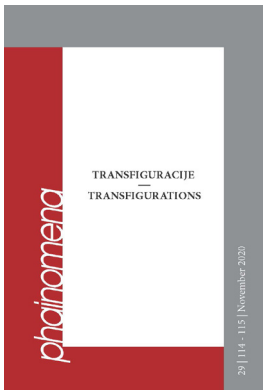


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