

4. Tetsuro Watsuji

The chains of the Soul

In this essay, I will prove that *self-discovery* by environment, as mentioned in the quote, is impossible. First, I will analyse the human 'self'. Next, I will explain the influences of the environment, and come to the conclusion that Watsuji's *objectification* is false. Finally, I will discuss the possibility of other ways to understand yourself.

Human existence

We can see very clear scientific proof of the so-called *nature and nurture*. There are stories about children that are taken away from their parents at a very young age, but are fed by a female wolf in the jungle, thus surviving – the 'wolf-kids'. They don't know human customs; they use a kind of 'wolf-tongue' to communicate; even their physique changes: the hands and feet are quickly used to the walking on all fours and will as such grow differently. It is an example on how a specific environment can cause a new individual to become totally different than it would have been with another environment. If we replace the wolf by a human mother, the child is sure to be of a different intellectual level, without doubt. I will call this clearly existent, but impressionable part of the human the *Soul*.

The existence of a 'nature' in that wolf-kid is also very clear: although he changes a lot in his early years through the influence of the wolves, he is still clearly recognisable as a human: the working of the organs, his DNA, his bone structure – still, we remark that, evidently, the Soul has an influence on the nature of a person: as told in the example, the walking on both hand and feet changes the way some bones will grow. However, we can agree that there must be a limit, a ceiling to this influence: a human can act like a wolf, but never really be one. I will call this functional, primordial and material part of the human the *Body*.

Lastly, there is one more area I need to bring forward: the *Heart*. The Heart is the 'true nature'. The immaterial, inner and unique part of a human, that will often be described as character. Many will count the Heart as a part of the Body, and will consider it as some genes embedded in the DNA. With the very same scientific method, however, one could see a mistake in that

idea: if one can measure a likeliness in DNA in terms of percentage, one should see that same likeliness in character – measurable in terms of percentage. That is a very doubtful statement.

Nevertheless, this scenario is fiction, since we are at all times unable to have a clear look at one's Heart: it is always shrouded behind the curtain of his/her Soul. This means that in both cases – embedded in the DNA or not – the Soul will always hide the 'self' of a human. The statement of Watsuji thus becomes a paradox: since the environment influences the Soul, and the *self* is hidden *behind* the Soul, how can we discover that very self by the environment? We can't know which area (or number of areas) of the human Watsuji indicates, however, so I will continue to analyse his statement.

Habits

If indeed only the Body and the Soul are open for influence, and the Body is influenced by the Soul, that is itself influenced by the environment; then the Soul is both a gift and a curse. A gift, if we're brought up well, a curse if we're not. Because the Soul won't be able to change a whole life long. That is the power of the *habit*.

An explanation. We see that the amount of influence of the environment on a person steadily diminishes. Where the baby that is fed by a wolf instead of a human can still easily accustom to this way of life (that was not meant for him) ; that same boy, twelve years later, isn't capable anymore of learning a human language. And indeed we see that older people are not quite as hip as young people, lots of middle-aged people still listen to the music of their childhood, and almost anybody will agree 'that it used to be better'. What happened to the influence from environment, is this. We notice that there is not only a ceiling (as mentioned before) to the influence on the Soul; but that the impact of that influence also decreases, parallel to the number of habits, that increases proportionate. Habits are a rusted form of that environment, an influence that is no longer temporal but ingrained so deeply in the human, that it becomes almost invulnerable to any other influence.

A bad matter. A habit of any kind means that you won't be able to change anymore, or that it will be very hard. Habits are drugs, and even if the drug you are addicted to is good in this time, it won't be forever. Even if there are eternal and universal laws of ethics – which is another subject – the fact that laws and ethics do change throughout time and space, is unneglectable. Habits create cultures, and a difference in cultures create war. And although war can mean the end of a culture – the end of one vile habit – it will also mean the glorification of another. The fact of having a habit in itself is bad, without the content of that habit: it fogs our view on the world.

This understanding is of great importance for this evaluation of Watsuji's statement. Because his purpose – self-discovery – is hindered greatly by habit.

Objectification

Every object belongs to a group, and if one wants to have a clear view on that object, one may not belong to the same group, because one's very presence in the group renders any objective knowledge on the object impossible. I call this the *rule of inclusion*.

So, in this case, to understand him/herself means to see yourself from another angle. If you want to see yourself from another angle, you have to free yourself from the group you belong to – your culture, environment, ideas. And that's where habit comes in. Because the first influence of environment is neutral, and although it may really alter your actions, it never really changes your mind. But a habit is a far more advanced form of alteration: it fixes itself in you and won't let go. Habits make self-discovery impossible.

Again, this is where Watsuji's mistake lies. He also feels that there is a need to put things in perspective, *to objectify your existence*. But he tries to achieve that perspective by means of his environment, and that is sure to fail. Because there are environmental habits that he possesses, that already make him belong to the group *of* that environment. Watsuji is correct in his way of thinking, but does not go far enough. Indeed, environment *does not* objectify human existence, rather it '*subjectifies*' it, because of habit.

Self-discovery

Any organism will experience a greater influence on his *self* by his environment, than that he will gain knowledge about that self; thus rendering the possible positive effects of that very environment useless. Indeed, the change of one's very Soul due to an environment can happen so fast, it makes 'self-discovery' because of that environment quite unreal. But perhaps there are other ways for the human to understand him/herself.

This hypothesis practically means that there has to be a way to free yourself even further from the chains of the Soul: to be totally objective in the way you look at yourself. The only option that's left to us, humans, is reason. Reason is possibly neither part of Heart nor Body, since it is the only incorruptible force through which we can understand the world. We do know a lot of false arguments, sophisms and circular thinking; but a truly open mind should see the fault in these mistakes, through the force of true reason.