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A 'Way of Being' in Design

Zen and the Art of Being a Human-Centred Practitioner

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Design's attempts to address social, ethical and environmental concerns of our time have often been marred by well-meaning scholars who have generated hard-line definitions and models of what it means to be an 'ethical designer'. Their arguments often abstract values and advocate ideological and political positions that designers can find difficult to apply in their daily practices. Clearly, it is not as simple as prescribing 'right' or 'wrong' values for designers to have and then translating them through design. Whatever values there are, those values need to matter to people enough to translate them into action.[1] It will be argued that values are not impersonal; they cannot be detached and subsumed under a more universal value or comparable importance. The paper opens with a critique of this prescriptive approach to highlight reasons why ethical design remains stuck in a rut. It then moves on to discuss the close relationship between being ethical and being a human-centred practitioner in design. In doing so, I critique common notions of human-centred design that emphasise ergonomic, 'human-factors' as well as the 'do-gooder' disposition that is associated with

humanitarian design. Instead, I offer an alternative framework for human-centred design based on the Japanese ethical concept woven into what it *means to be human*.

The Japanese term for 'human being' is *ningen* (人間), composed of two characters for 'person' (人), and 'between' (間). The Japanese understanding of human as in-betweenness, etymologised by 'between person', situates it as a relational being. This is the central framework for my notions of 'self' and being 'human'.[2] This concept of human is strikingly different from major Western philosophies that emphasises 'anthropos' or 'homo', denoting the *individual*. Being human-centred is criticised for perpetuating an anthropocentric position[3] further contributing to humanity's self-centredness and environmentally destructive behaviour. The profound ethical difference of conceiving humans as detached and in isolation, compared to the Japanese concept of human as relational in-betweennes, is argued by one of the most significant Japanese philosophers of the twentieth century, Tetsuro Watsuji.[4] He was influenced by hermeneutics, phenomenology, Zen Buddhism and the Japanese indigenous spirituality of *Shinto*. In his book *Rinrigaku, ethics in Japan*, Watsuji is critical of Western philosophy (Heidegger and many others[5]) that emphasises the individual concept of self and the locus of the ethical problem pertaining to the consciousness of the individual. The paper dives deeply into Watsuji's ethical framework in explaining the *ningen* 'between person' that is significant to my definition of being human-centred. I attempt to combine the Eastern philosophy with the West by bringing in a selection of other philosophers such as Goethe, Bortoft and Merleau-Ponty that resonate with the argument constructed. There is nothing to be gained from East-West dualism or exoticism, as it locks down discourse. Although these Eastern and Western philosophies that I draw upon have not, until now, directly engaged with each other in the discourse of design[6] they have many valuable overlaps that I would like to share in this paper.

Watsuji argues that the relational association is located in the betweenness; to be human is to shift and change continually, to undergo a process of constant transformation. The transformation of a designer to being a human-centred practitioner is achieved in relation to others. This connection between self and others (including people, animals, objects and environment) is essential in positioning and embedding oneself in the world. The transformative process is more than cognitive learning or professional development – it is in fact a process of self-awareness that comes from continually reflecting on our activity, our behaviour and how we *are* with others. This is *reflective practice*. In contrast to reflection and reflective practice grounded in critical theory[7] I explore this by incorporating aspects of *wholeness* from Goethe's phenomenology[8] and embodied perception from Merleau-Ponty.[9]

I argue the importance of being a reflective practitioner is the first step in being able to fully understand ourselves, our relationship and our connection to others. This pursuit of self-awareness, through reflective practice, is the central argument of this paper of *being* a human-centred practitioner. Through weaving together these various frameworks, I discuss the cyclical journey of transformation of the self where reflection is experienced in an immersive, affective, embodied way.

True, long-term sustainable change towards building and creating an ethical practice cannot come from being told what to design or choosing the 'right' values to adopt. Neither does it come from simply undertaking community-based projects, taking up a social cause or deploying participatory methods. To manifest and practise human-centredness is not a switch one can flick 'on' when you are in the design studio at 9am and 'off' when you're leaving work. Instead, I stress the importance of human-centredness manifesting through all facets of our lives that involves engaging in the in-betweenness with others. It requires active creation and the *practising of practice* that is truly human-centred and aware – aware of oneself, of others and the world we live in. It is a day-to-day application and manifestation, not merely a mechanical repetition. The significance of this being a *practice* is that it is a transformation and evolution of ourselves in bringing an awareness and embedded-ness to what we do everyday. It is a path (*Tao*) by which we each carve our 'way of being' in the world.

Critique of Abstracting Values and Imposing Ideological Positions

Design is an intensely commercial practice and a significant mode of cultural production, playing a central role in shaping and informing the ideas and behaviours of people and their environment. As such, questions that address what's right, what ways of life are desirable, or what qualities are admirable, have been a central concern for design. Ethics is often used in association with design as a way to question how one should live and what kind of society we should create. Social priorities and cultural values are often invisible and yet are pervasively inscribed into the design process by the way designers, clients and other project stakeholders take part in the creation of the designed outcome. Discourses of human-centred and participatory design have developed methodologies and tools for addressing people's views, values and concerns throughout the design process with a view to optimising benefit for all. These discourses attempt to embed ethics within the design operation, but as Fry argues, such pragmatic approaches 'are totally inadequate when trying to deal with how designing subjects are created, how they are directed and for what ends, as well as how what they bring into being impacts upon the socio-cultural and material order'.[10]

Unfortunately, much of the debate on design's social role is hamstrung with literal and simplistic provisions for solutions. These debates are framed by charity and good intentions, for example: doing pro bono work for socially oriented organisations; using environmentally friendly methods of printing and production;[11] taking up a social cause to campaign on; or the worrying 'designing for the other 90%'[12] a trend that perpetuates a colonialist, paternalistic view in providing design solutions *for the other* people in developing countries. David Stairs, the author of *Design Altruism Project,* is scathing when he talks about the recent surge of interest in socially relevant design, saying 'it's so terribly trendy to care, about the poor, the environment, and every form of "betterment" that I begin to assume we must be selling more design by fetishizing social relevance'.[13]

Fry[14] describes the fundamental problem where cultures of design lack the conceptual tools to think ethically. He says this is why ethics remains a 'stranded debate and almost totally without the transformative agency it needs to have if design is to ethically progress'.[15] Fry's well-argued indictment calls on designers to take responsibility for being anthropocentric and accept this as an unethical condition. He claims that it is human nature to be non-sustainable creatures of destruction. To counteract this anthropocentrism, designers then need to become remade ethicists. He suggests that the consequences of unsustainability should be continually exposed, questioned and removed by destroying the things that are not sustainable – a practice that he calls 'elimination design'.[16] Making an ethical judgement on what is or is not sustainable design then becomes a measurement to create or destroy.

Fry is not alone in criticising designer's role and their lack of responsibility. Margolin proclaims in *The Politics of the Artificial*[17] that 'design must disengage itself from consumer culture … and participate in projects for the welfare of humankind both inside and outside the market economy'. Again, in *The Citizen Designer*[18], he calls for designer-citizens to have a 'calculus of values' that can enable them to 'proclaim the true quality of a product or service'.[19] He argues that this will enable ways to assess and avoid 'unwittingly participating in a situation that has a negative effect on someone or some group involved in the conception, planning, production, distribution, or consumption of the product'.[20] Worryingly, these arguments often place an ethical judgement-call on designers, which overstates and aggrandises the role of designers, assuming that they are the sole custodians of design when in fact, there are any number of agendas, people and politics that determines its course and outcome.[21] Stairs[22] deplores this parochial focus of design and designers. He says, '… the fact that 98% of designers when asked say they want only to *design*, not plan, write grants, fund raise, correspond, or do any of the nine-hundred other nitty little things necessary to helping less fortunate people and you're left with a large, well educated audience wearing blin[k]ers.'

Prior to Fry's and Margolin's texts discussed here, others had made valid intellectual arguments on design ethics and criticised designers for not addressing social responsibilities in their day-to-day practices. Prominent examples are Victor Papanek's *Design for the Real World*, Nigel Whiteley's *Design for Society*, and Ken Garland's *First Things First Manifesto.*[23] However, the enormity of the responsibility some of these writers place on designers' shoulders is enough to make one want to give up practicing as a designer. Fry's sermonic tone can stir up feelings of anger, guilt, frustration and a sense of disempowerment. How does one know what to do or how to proceed with such a challenge? Margolin's call for the identification of a 'calculus of values' can easily be seen to be prescribing which values are more important than another. This can lead to abstraction and disconnection of values and can potentially become meaningless. Human values cannot be separated from the individual: the value of things we pursue or avoid depends on our individual aims and concerns.[24] A large part of the argument that surrounds a designer's ethical responsibility places importance on adopting values and ideological perspectives that many designers find difficult in applying or translating to their daily, commercial practices. This is, in fact, compounding the problem.

There are a growing number of design researchers exploring how design can provoke collective discussion on values among project stakeholders. One such example is 'critical design' by Dunne and Raby[25] where they create design artefacts that can provoke questions and reveal issues and values embedded within a project. Critical design performs to make known values, issues and concerns more explicit to people in humorous, exaggerated and provocative ways, for example, a 'nipple chair' that vibrates when it detects invisible electromagnetic fields inside the home. Dunne and Raby's critical design attempts to promote criticality of the social world that is *outside* of their design practice. This calls into question the effectiveness (or purpose) of such design – does it enable them to be critical and reflective of, or within their practice, and to discuss how issues and values become embedded in *what* and *how* they design? Critical design is one of many examples of a popular trend where too much attention is paid to what design *does*, rather than a closer attention on how designers *practice*. We, designers, need to think about how we enact our own choices and values in our practices in relation to others.

So, how do we re-orient our view of design, or indeed, re-orient our perception of ourselves?

Shifting from the Active Mode to the Receptive Mode

Henri Bortoft[26], a philosopher of science, drawing on developmental psychology, explains human beings as having two major modes of organisation: the *action* mode and the *receptive* mode. The action

mode refers to a consciousness that discriminates, analyses and divides the world up into objects. In relation to our understanding of design, this action mode is aligned with descriptions and discussions of what design *does* to the world. Those who see human-centred design from an ethnographic and social-science orientation may see it in terms of a method of gathering and delivering data on users and their context. This information serves the basis for the designing to take place. What methods enable and enact, design's materiality and its impact, all stem from a paradigm of design that privileges an active and conscious mode of engagement. This is the dominant paradigm of design. It is a form of consciousness that privileges a logical, analytical intellectual facility that results in selective perception.

Goethe,[27] best known for his poetry and plays, is significant to Bortoft's theory and the paper's discussion on shifting consciousness. Using Goethe's science as the basis of the argument, Bortoft explains that in order to reverse the way in which we engage with the world from one that focuses on an analytical, sequential and logical mode of consciousness, one must turn one's awareness from the singular *object* and encounter the *whole*. Recognising and distinguishing one thing from the other immediately separates oneself from the thing – we stand outside of it. This mode of consciousness implicitly limits the possibility for us to experience an *authentic wholeness*. Bortoft describes the receptive mode as openness, for example being open to events as they happen. This alternative mode of organisation utilises holistic, non-verbal, nonlinear and intuitive modes of communication. It emphasises sensory and perceptual consciousness and is based on *taking in* and working with what is, rather than manipulating an environment or situation to some predetermined outcome. In the context of design, it is an orientation that draws on and deepens the designer's ability to understand what it means to *be* in the world, an engagement that requires a way of designing that is open and receptive to the world.

This re-orientation, from what design *does in* and *to* the world to what it means for the designer to *be* in the world is a significant transformation. If human-centred design is defined solely as a conscious, analytical activity, it perpetuates the same Cartesian paradigm of viewing things objectively, at a distance, detached from ourselves. Worse, it will start depicting people as two-dimensional descriptions, devoid of any humanness. This inevitably leads to our disconnection with the world we live in. But it is not the world that we need to change or design, because the change begins within ourselves, through our re-orientation and transformation. This becomes a continued practice of 'being in' the world. Merleau-Ponty explains, '[t]he world is not what I think, but what I live through'.[28] 'Being in' the world is an immersive, embodied experience, heightening our attention and awareness to the

surroundings, shifting our consciousness and the realisation that the world encountered is revealed through our participation in it.

Others have come enticingly near to these ideas, identifying an embodied shift through the theory of ontological designing. According to Anne-Marie Willis,[29] ontological designing differs from the predominant paradigm of design. Ontological designing seeks to know 'how we "are" and how we come to know who/what we are' in this world. We design this world, which in turn acts back on us, and designs us – a double-movement process that results in ourselves being designed by our designing. She weaves in Heideggerian concepts of 'being' as the condition of presence, describing the circular movement of designing, akin to the hermeneutic circle, where we can never step outside of this 'dance' of designing. Designing ontologically is based on 'being-in-the-world' – design is always situated and that our understanding of design – as well as our process of being designed – necessarily comes from this situated-ness. Rather than the linear trajectory of design that affects or has an influence on the world, ontological designing described by Willis is the acknowledgement and awareness of designing that inscribes designers' particular ways of working. Adding to Willis' perspective, the ontological tradition that is defined as *becoming* places emphasis on a changing and emergent world[30] and lends well to framing the cyclical, transformative process. This idea is significant to hold on to as we progress further into this paper.

A Practitioner's Self-Awareness through Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is widely acknowledged in enabling self-reflection and evaluation.

Donald Schön's seminal book, *The Reflective Practitioner*[31] which has been influential in theorising design practice, articulated the tacit knowledge that professionals bring to their work, and how reflective practice enables the practitioner to understand and make it explicit. However, what seems confusing with Schön's text is that it slips from framing reflective practice as an analytical, instrumental skill that one develops as a professional, to then explain reflective practice as something one experiences and feels through the body (the example he uses are the performances by a jazz musician, or a baseball player swinging a bat). The emphasis he gives to critical thinking is his way to counteract the pervasive paradigm of technical rationality, though in doing so, it compromises the strength of the embodied practice argument. He sees the limitations of institutionalised separation of scientific research and practice-based knowledge, so he positions reflective practice as a change agent to challenge the dominant positivist epistemology. 'Many practitioners, locked in the world view of themselves as technical experts, find nothing in the world of practice to occasion

reflection. They have become too skilful at techniques of selective inattention …'.[32] To break through this mind-set, he suggests that a confusing, problematic and unexpected situation can provoke designers to reflect on what had happened. This is what he calls 'reflection-on-action', which often involves a pause in designing. Through reflection, the practitioner can correct his or her actions by surfacing and criticising tacit understandings from practice to make new sense of the situation. It is important to note that he explicitly focuses on the external, surprising triggers as a 'feedback-loop' from a performance to motivate reflection and self-awareness. This then allows adjustment of a course of action to change previously held views and build new understandings in the situation that is unfolding. As the unexpected, divergent situation emerges, the practitioner has to reassess and modify their systems of knowing-in-practice. These concepts are all relevant to the paper's discussion on developing self-awareness and understanding, even though it is achieved via critical reasoning.

Critical theory's influence on the rational, cognitive framing of reflective practice, or more specifically, critical reflection, is also worth noting here briefly. Sengers et al's[33] work is a particularly interesting example of identifying how critical reflection can identify unconscious values and assumptions that are built into how design problems are conceived in the field of Human Computer Interaction. She and her colleagues have explored technologies that focus on facilitating dialogic engagement to support designers and users to be reflective of their values – a process they term 'reflective design'. Sengers et al's framing of reflective design is grounded in critical theory to identify and find alternatives to institutionalised cultural, social or political assumptions:

> '… [O]ur way of reasoning about the world is based on unconsciously held assumptions and perspectives that strongly condition what we see happening around us before we even begin to reason about it. Critical theory argues that our everyday values, practices, perspectives, and sense of agency and self are strongly shaped by forces and agendas of which we are normally unaware, such as the politics of race, gender, and economics. Critical reflection provides a means to gain some awareness of such forces as a first step toward possible change'.[34]

Critical thinking gives reflection a political emphasis, which involves making transparent otherwise concealed contingencies and determinants of our world.

Now, departing from this rational, political and analytical emphasis to discuss a different orientation to reflection and reflective practice, let's return to Schön once more. When he talks about 'reflection-in-action', his description has an embodied feel,

highlighting the sensual rather than the cognitive. He does so in reference to a baseball pitcher who talks about getting a 'feel for the ball'. '… [Y]ou are noticing, at the very least, that you have been doing something right, and your "feeling" allows you to do that something again'.[35] Similarly, when talking about jazz musicians improvising together, '…they also manifest a "feel for" their material and they make on-the-spot adjustments to the sounds they hear. Listening to one another and to themselves, they feel where the music is going and adjust their playing accordingly'[36]. The reflection that comes from performative knowing has an affective, experiential and phenomenological core to it. It is the situated-ness of the reflection-in-action that also frames what he calls 'back talk'. This 'back talk' is humorously and insightfully interpreted by Tonkinwise[37] as designers asking 'what a brick wants'. In response, the artefact 'talks back' at the designer in their 'material language', pushing and pulling at the complex design problem in the inter-subjective space. The feedback from the material is not information framed in a cognitive sense, but felt through an immersive experience. In other words, *reflection itself* is experienced, not just reflecting *on* experience. This openness in encountering the world through non-linear, non-verbal and intuitive modes of perception is in resonance with Goethe's encounter with an authentic *wholeness*, discussed earlier. What is important here, however, is not to isolate the artefact or performative experiences through intellectual structures of analysis, but to see its totality and to 'stay with the experience'.[38] At the heart of this reflective process, there is transformation 'which brings with it in the spectacle of the world and in our existence'[39].

Transformation of oneself evolves through reflective practice, which in turn enables self-awareness though an immersive, affective, situated experience of reflection. It is a cyclical process where the journey is what matters rather than where one arrives at. There is no 'mechanical' way to kick-start this cyclic process. In contrast with Schön's assertion, my view is that reflection need not begin by waiting for surprises or for something to go wrong. We just need to *begin*. In fact, we need to *practice this beginning*. Merleau-Ponty[40] talks about 'perpetual beginning of reflection' as a daily, applied practice of being open to and aware of our existence. 'Reflection cannot be thorough-going, or bring a complete elucidation of its object, if it does not arrive at awareness of itself as well as of its results'.[41] Practicing this *beginning* reminds us to encounter ordinary situations anew as if it was something of wonderment and full of serendipity. Though, instead of 'looking for' something consciously, which again emphasises an active mode of consciousness[42] attention is drawn through our peripheral vision. Like a glimpse, it enables us not to look for, but rather to chance upon something or someone serendipitously.[43] This 'practice of noticing' can 'strengthen awareness' and enable us

'to awaken … to possibilities'.[44] By simply being 'open' to looking at things anew, or be 'awake' to possibilities, it is an amazing experience to realise how un-related things can become so resonant with one another.

Encountering anew is a key concept in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological perception. Encountering anew requires the practitioner to adopt openness in their reflection of themselves and bring this understanding to the encounter. 'If reflection is to justify itself as reflection … it must not merely put one view of the world in place of another. It must show us how the naïve view of the world is included in and transcended by the sophisticated one'.[45]

Developing a sense of self-awareness is to see oneself as enunciated, as opposed to blinkered navel-gazing and endangering solipsism. Goethe maintained that a person's inner recognition and perception is equally as important as their outer senses and intellect. Seamon, in discussing Goethe's phenomenology, explains, '[a]s one learns to see more clearly, he or she learns to see more *deeply*. One becomes more "at home" with the phenomenon, understanding it with greater empathy, concern and respect'.[46] Understanding ourselves, others and the world with 'greater empathy, concern and respect' is a significant process of transformation. To assist with deepening the discussion of understanding 'self' and the relational connection to others, I now turn to Japanese philosophy that provides frameworks that resonate and complement the Western philosophies introduced so far in this paper.

Self-Awareness and Transformation through Interconnectedness

As introduced at the beginning of this paper, the Japanese word for 'human being' is *ningen* (人間) that is made by combining characters for 'person' (人), and 'between' (間). In other words, the character 'person' (人) on its own without the 'between' (間) does not mean 'human being' (人間). Words are the furnace that makes our very being. The etymology of *ningen-human* is therefore significant in situating the betweenness of human beings that encompass the public, the social, the communal. Watsuji[47] explains that this public *ningen* is its original meaning of the word used in Buddhist sutras and ancient Chinese text, which the Japanese adopted. In doing so, the Japanese language has produced a distinctive conception of 'human being'.

Central to Watsuji's point of *ningen* self is that it side steps the individualism and detachment of the Cartesian paradigm that separates the self and other. The non-dualistic Japanese concept of self, views each person's identity as integrally related to that of others.[48] Watsuji explains that to be human is to be both *individual and social* at the same time, '*ningen* is the public and, at the same time, the individual human beings living within it'.[49] The interdependence and interconnection implies the 'self' as a living

dynamic. It is relational, moving freely between the social and the individual. The relations between humans are not objective, nor are they spatial relations between object and object. 'Rather, they are act-connections between person and person like communication or association, in which persons as subjects concern themselves with each other'.[50] We can see why Watsuji sees insufficiency in the discourse of ethics when it is limited to individual consciousness and self-determination of the subject. This is how ethics can become confined to the rational and rule-governed, further disconnecting self and the other. Instead, subjective connections arises on the ground of definite betweenness, and on this basis, 'the relations of social ethics are established in the form of self-realization as a way of acting within this betweeness'.[51]

Building on Watsuji's philosophy, Maccarthy introduces a feminist perspective to explain ethics and intimacy as 'the self and other distinction empties out in betweenness; we are truly selfless and intimately connected with each other'.[52] Thomas Kasulis, a prominent US philosopher on Japanese Zen Buddhism, comments on Mccarthy's ethics of intimacy.[53] In explaining this, he describes the relation between self and other as internal rather than external, one that is interdependent rather than independent. He builds on Watsuji's view that entities are already inherently overlapping and internally linked. The ethics of intimacy is not about forging new relations between discrete individuals, nor is it intellectual and contractual where one needs to learn how to think ethically in terms of principles, norms and responsibilities. Rather, the ethics of intimacy 'stresses sensibility to, and responsiveness within, the pre-existing interdependence of the field within which those individuals already exist'.[54]

The non-dualism of in-betweeenness also extends to mind and body. They are inseparable. For the Japanese, the affective and emotive aspect is equally or as strongly pronounced as the intellect. It is strange for a Japanese person to talk about thought independently from feeling. Watsuji explains, 'the bodily motion is already filled with mind, which jumps with joy'.[55] Kasulis describes this as an empathetic and immersive engagement with the world. 'We care about what we think, and we think about what we care about'.[56] The body is an intimate part of the self's way of knowing. 'This individual bodily experience takes place only if we live in the betweenness'.[57] Similarly, in Watsuji's view, the body is an epistemological site and is essential in attaining knowledge and identity. Kasulis describes this elegantly using an example of how we can know clay. He describes, 'for the most part, modern Western philosophy sides with the geologist. While for the most part Japanese philosophers have studied with the Potter. Both traditions recognise both kinds of knowing, but there is a marked difference in emphasis as to which is the more profound. The Western model has been one of objectivity, detachment, observation, and logical

reflection. Whereas in many cases Japan's model has been one of engagement'.[58] Similarly, in holding the clay shaped by the potter's hands, we can feel their warmth, know their skills and glimpse at the way they see the world. Inanimate objects, therefore, are the embodiment of the people who created them. Even the object's use by someone can be thought of this way, for example, when we treasure a keepsake of someone close to us. Empathy, thus resides in the betweenness of people and the betweenness of people and objects.

It is no surprise that Watsuji's concepts has connections to *Shinto* and Zen philosophy – he re-discovered his Japanese roots during the transformation from being an advocate of the Western philosophy to a critic of it. In this last section we see the beautiful resonance of Zen philosophy with the embodied phenomenological orientation of Goethe and Merleau-Ponty, and it deepens our understanding of Watsuji's ethics. Zen philosophy emphasises one's connection to nature and surroundings. It evolved over centuries in Japan from an amalgamation of Buddhism and Taoism, emphasising a more philosophical and spiritual orientation rather than a religious one. Zen philosophy echoes the indigenous religion, *Shinto* – a custom of Japan that respects and worships nature as sacred and life giving.[59] The sun, the stars, the rocks, man-made objects and creatures on earth, including humans, are seen as 'one'. This concept may not seem so bizarre when we look at the evidence from physics that explains everything on earth has been created out of 'star dust'.[60] Though, a characteristic of Zen philosophy is to see animals, nature and the inanimate as sentient beings that humans are connected with.

Zen principles and teachings are known to be difficult to grasp – this is because it is often 'taught' in the oblique dialogical encounters between the master and the student, deliberately avoiding direct mediation through lectures, text or rational analysis.[61] It stays clear of a rule-governed dogmatic approach sometimes reflected in other religions as an antithesis to its teaching and purpose. In describing the non-rational characteristic of Zen, Kasulis[62] discusses the concept of *Mu* as 'without thinking', a pre-reflective mode of consciousness as the very ground of immediate experience. He explains that for the Zen person who operates in such fashion, 'experience is grounded in its most direct contact with concrete reality'.[63] The Zen Buddhism practice of mindfulness and awareness brings one closer to one's ordinary experience.[64] Zen principles are therefore something that one acquires and experiences through *doing*, rather than *cognitive* learning. This can be through any manner of activities – though what is important is the daily, applied practice of it. For example, the training monks at *Eiheiji* monastery[65] practice this philosophical approach during their daily routines – how they clean the rooms, polish the floorboards, prepare

their food and clean the toilet – and not just during meditation hours. In other words, this practice takes place during their life and their lifetime. Zen master Dogen, founder of *Eiheiji* temple, explains that 'learning through the mind must be united with learning through the body'.[66] Tying this back to Watsuji's ethics, interconnectedness, stemming from human's in-betweenness of both the social and the individual, is not intellectualised or limited to a conscious thought. The ethical human is created in the daily encounter with others. This then leads to practice. In practicing Zen principles this way, the activity, the objects we use, the people we talk to, all become enmeshed in the embodied practice of reflection, transformation and self-awareness.

These are important philosophical concepts that can be integrated with design. That this approach should manifest and be practiced in our daily lives, and it is a process of gradual transformation, are important concepts to my definition of human-centred design. What I call *being a human-centred design practitioner* is a lived, embodied experience in the in-betweenness of people, objects and the world. Yet the gradual, transformative process can take place anywhere, anytime, like the training monks of *Eiheiji*. It is not just governed by participatory projects and timelines. It is not a tool or a method one brings to design to use when an appropriate opportunity arises. Human-centred design discourse that is overtly methodologically-driven is a form of detachment. The human that is interconnected, residing in the relational, transformational in-betweenness will fall through the cracks.

Conclusion

And finally, having traversed through various Eastern and Western philosophical frameworks, this paper has attempted to lead the reader away from a rationalistic ethical design discourse of axiomatic moralistic injunctions that can be found in some of the writings of Western scholars. Instead, I have proposed that an embodied re-orientation to design through the practice of reflection could have transformative agency. We can become 'ready' to being open to new encounters and being self-aware in the world in a situated and embodied way, forging a different kind of connection with others. This awareness brings forth an openness, mindfulness, compassion, empathy, reverence, acceptance and a sense of belonging with others and to our being in the world. It is neither me *or* you – it is me *and* you *and* the world we all experience. The transformation we undergo is the removal of such boundaries, particularly the detached selfness and instead, an acceptance of being in the betweenness.

Through the practice of being human-centred, we each carve our own *Tao*, a 'path' of understanding of who we are and our connection to this world. There is no one 'path' or one 'world' that

is the right one. The path we carve is a relational experience, further cementing our understanding that our individuality is inseparable to what surrounds us. This practice of practising design and continuous reflection upon it is a 'way of being' – it is a process of evolution, enabling a greater understanding and connection to the people and the world we live in.

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Notes

1. Graham Haydon, *Education, Philosophy and the Ethical Environment*, Foundations and Futures of Education. New York: Routledge, 2006.
2. A note to the reader – I am Japanese, born in Japan and brought up by Japanese parents who instilled Japanese values and world-view. Though majority of my formal design education has taken place in other countries, in Australia, the UK and the US. I currently live and work in Australia. As such, the Japanese concepts and philosophical approaches introduced in this paper should not be taken too literally or generically as defining all Japanese people. It is tempting to do so, as the characteristics we see in their social cohesion, family stability, valorisation of work and the adaptive capacity, strength and resilience shown by the Tohoku communities in the wake of the Hokuriku disaster (11 March 2011 earthquake and subsequent tsunami that set off a chain-reaction of further disasters including the nuclear explosion of the Fukushima nuclear power plant) might appear to have strong relation to the ethics that is encompassed by the empathetic, interconnectedness of *ningen* human, discussed in this paper. It is a framework that, I would argue, many other non-Japanese cultures and communities also demonstrate as well.
3. See for example, Fry, Tony. 'Design Ethics as Futuring', *Design Philosophy Papers*, no. 2. 2004: pp. 1–6.
4. Watsuji, Tetsuro. *Rinrigaku: Ethics in Japan*, translated by Seisaku Yamamoto and Robert E. Carter as *Watsuji Tetsuro's rinrigaku,* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.
5. Watsuji Tetsuro (1889 – 1960) studied Western philosophical tradition and is considered to be one of the most influential Japanese philosophers of the twentieth century. It was spending time in Europe and reading Heidegger's *Being and Time*, that spurred him to reflect more deeply on the unique qualities of Japanese philosophy. Though, his emphasis of in-betweenness, which I draw upon in this paper, is in contrast to Heidegger's emphasis on individual and self. Watsuji critiqued

Heidegger's lack of considering the body and the spatial, that Heidegger only focused on one aspect of human being-in-the world – the individual. Watsuji explains that this omission of spatiality is insufficient to explain the relationship among and between people – not only the space of their relationships but also the spaces in which they lived and interacted.

6. The exception is Japanese Zen philosophy that is often referenced and incorporated into Western design, though I would argue that its influence had been limited to an aesthetic one pertaining to materials, its relationship to the environment and use by people, rather than a philosophical orientation that guides the way designers understand 'self', their relation to objects and others.
7. See Schön and Sengers – this will be discussed in more depth further down.

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   Sengers, Phoebe, Kirsten Boehner, Shay David, and Joseph Kaye. 'Reflective Design'. Paper presented at the Proceedings of the 4th decennial conference on Critical computing: between sense and sensibility, Aarhus, Denmark. 2005.
8. Goethe's phenomenology interpreted by Bortoft and Seamon: Bortoft, Henri. *The wholeness of nature: Goethe's way of science.* New York: Floris Books. 1996. Seamon, David and Arthur Zajonc, eds. 'Goethe, Nature and Phenomenology'. In *Goethe's Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Nature*, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998.
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19. ibid, p.122.
20. ibid.
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27. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) created a rich body of scientific work but was dismissed by his contemporaries at the time because it moved away from the dominant Newtonian paradigm of science (quantitative, empirical and instrumental). Instead, he approached it in an intimate, first-hand encounter between the learner and the thing studied. Goethe argued that scientific instruments to record and measure the world separated 'nature from man', warning that the greatest danger is the mind's tendency to impose an intellectual structure that is not present in nature. Since the development of a philosophical branch called phenomenology, we can now truly appreciate Goethe's perception of the world.
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50. ibid, p. 18.
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52. Mccarthy, Erin. *Ethics Embodied: Rethinking Selfhood through Continental, Japanese and Feminist Philosophies*. Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2010: p. 43.
53. In Mccarthy's foreward, ibid, p. xi

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