



## Empty Cross and *Shintai*: Tadao Ando's Church of the Light

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A proper understanding of the significance of the empty cross in the Church of the Light (1989) [Fig. 1, 2, 3] by Tadao Ando (b. 1941) should consider the Japanese notion of the body, or *shintai*. According to Kitaro Nishida (1870-1945), the father of the Kyoto Philosophical School and the foremost thinker in the intellectual history of modern East Asia, *shintai* is first the sensational capacity through which the world, in its coldness and hotness, sadness and joy, and hatred and love, comes into the heart of the perceiver and creates an intermeshed synthesis with the sense of the I. When the capacity of *shintai* in this sensational acceptance of the world is found inadequate, *shintai* enters into the realm of creation to accommodate the surplus.<sup>1</sup> In *shintai*'s transcending to the plane of action, an ultimate negation of any remaining contemplative consciousness in one's experience of the world, each action is always posturally articulated. Put differently, differences in the asymmetrical encounter between the capacity of the self and what the world offers are encountered by, embraced by, and dialectically united by, *shintai* into a postural configuration to throw oneself to a more complete and immediate unison with the world. Accordingly, each articulation emerges from the acknowledgement of the limited capacity of the self, overturning and stretching the bound of selfhood. Behind the activity of this body is the world toward which its posture is posed and within which its posture is placed. In this view, what is carried out through each posture is a matrix between "locating and being situated," a fundamental dualistic dynamic existent at the depth of one's "being in the world."

When one enters the chapel of the Church of the Light [Fig. 4], which does not offer any air-conditioning even in winter, his or her *shintai* in the cavernous space of coldness is pre-reflectively drawn to the warmth and brightness the empty cross at the end of the linear axis promises to offer. The linear axis now overcomes its role as a habituated compositional technique; it coincides with and guides the movement of *shintai*, or the actively knowing body, that faces the cross axially to be simultaneously faced by it. The "gradual forward movement, a

<sup>1</sup> Kitaro Nishida, *Complete Works* (Kitaro Nishida Zenshu), Tokyo: Iwanamishoten, 1949-1979, vol. 6, 128-130.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Neutra, *Survival through Design*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1954, p. 162.

<sup>3</sup> Daisetz T. Suzuki, "D.T. Suzuki: Shin Buddhism and Christianity Compared," in *Popular Buddhism in Japan: Shin Buddhist Religion and Culture*, Esben Andreasen, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998, p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61