

Zen and the Art of Organizational Maintenance

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ABSTRACT This paper draws from the “Zen arts” as a means for reimagining management as a mindful practice known as “organizational maintenance.” Zen Buddhism has had a profound influence on Japanese arts—such as calligraphy, sumi-e drawing, the tea ceremony, landscape garden design, archery, and Haiku poetry. The Zen aesthetic, often referred to as *wabi sabi*, and its associated notions as being an “artless art” that values “controlled accidents” is explored for its import value as a form of aesthetic inquiry. I propose that organizational maintenance is a noninstrumental form of artistic experimentation, involving the creative resolution of dilemmas. In such a nondualistic perceptual framework, organizational maintenance is concerned with revealing an aesthetics of ineffability, a “quality without a name.” I suggest that by reframing creative dilemma resolution as a contemporary form of Zen koan practice, it becomes an analogous artifact that can stimulate a creative inquiry into the true nature of organizations.

Keywords: Zen Buddhism, mindfulness, aesthetics, wabi sabi, dilemmas

Zen Buddhism and its influence on the arts has much to offer in theorizing the connections between art, design and organizations. Many contemporary Western artists, musicians, poets and architects have been inspired by Zen, such as John Cage, Herbie Hancock, Phillip Glass, Brian Eno, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Franz Kline, Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Louis Kahn (Baas and Jacob 2004). What did they find? Lanier Graham (2010), curator of a recent exhibit on *Zen and the Modern Arts* notes:

Buddhists understand we do not have to die to find lasting peace inside ourselves, that each of us can become a Buddha, that is to say, all of us can realize our Buddha-Nature, our Unconditioned Consciousness, here and now. When this transformation of consciousness takes place, what changes occur? How are we different? We are Enlightened. It is said that as Enlightened individuals we are totally aware of the moment, not conceptualizing experience but being fully present in every experience. Unattached, we stand firmly between the experience of everything and nothing, holding on to neither. We “kiss the joy as it flies,” to quote William Blake. We continuously act directly, spontaneously, fearlessly, and lovingly.

Unlike Judeo-Christian religious art, the Zen aesthetic is not representational or iconographic. Rather, Zen inspired art is an expression of a new way of being/seeing—a way of directly pointing to the awakened state of mind. Many of the great Zen masters, such as Genko, Tesshu, Hakuin, and Bunsho, were also renowned calligraphers, poets, painters and musicians (Loori 2005). According to Loori (2005:5), Zen training and art practice were intermingled—

“Zen arts, creativity and realized spirituality were seen as inseparable, and a Zen aesthetic developed which expressed eternal truths about the nature of reality and our place in the universe.” In Japan, the Zen aesthetic developed in a refined set of principles—*wabi* and *sabi*. Wabi sabi represents a comprehensive Japanese worldview or set of aesthetic ideals, centered on the intangible longing for, as Zen scholar D.T. Suzuki put it, “the world we left as children,” a world in which we are in direct contact with a dynamic present.

The close alliance between Zen and the arts it inspired is based on the premise that the state of mind expressed in artistic creation is the same as that in meditation (Dumoulin 2002). The Zen aesthetic found expression in very down-to-earth and secular activities, such as drinking tea, gardening, flower arranging, and swordsmanship, to name a few. Zen maintains that “ordinary mind is the way,” implying that there is artistry in the midst of so-called mundane activities. Such a broad formulation of mindfulness is found in the Japanese term *seishintouistu*, descriptive of an awareness that the body and mind are unified through concentrated unselfconscious activity (Juniper 2003). Through this form of mind-body discipline, the person is able to loosen the dominance of the ego, and in essence, become one with the activity. In Zen, such a total absorption in a task is called *mushin*, or “no mind.”

Perhaps the first Western account of this is Eugene Herrigel's (1953) *Zen in the Art of Archery*. In this book, Herrigel, a German philosophy professor, tells the story of how he tried to understand Zen by spending five years just learning to draw the bow and release it without conscious intention or mental deliberation. The instrumental goal of hitting the target was completely irrelevant to the art. Indeed, the art could only be expressed if archer and the bow were in harmony, and only if the bow could “shoot itself” (Watts 1957). D.T. Suzuki, in the introduction to Herrigel's book, differentiates the uniqueness of all the Zen arts as “they are not intended for utilitarian purposes only or for pure aesthetic enjoyments, but are meant to train the mind; indeed, to bring it into contact with the ultimate reality.”

In Zen arts, there is a paradox: intensive practice is required on the part of the artist, but the self cannot be in control or perceive itself as the doer of the activity. Hitting the target is not the goal. Instead, the goallessness of Zen values that side of life that is outside of our conscious control and beyond the confines of the intellect. The techniques of the Zen arts have often been

dubbed the “art of the artless,” valuing what Hasegawa called “controlled accidents.” As Juniper (2003:92) points out, “the role of the artist is that of medium rather than individual...It is therefore the spirit of the artist at the moment of performance that is the criteria by which art is judged in Japan.”

The Zen aesthetic appreciation for secular, everyday activities found expression in Robert Pirsig’s best-selling novel, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (from which the title of this paper is derived). The narrator’s motorcycle, its maintenance, as well as the cross-country trip, is a metaphor for the narrator’s spiritual journey. The narrator spends a great deal of time articulating how the maintenance of a motorcycle can also be an art involving both the motorcycle and the maintainer when the interaction is of “high quality.” Pirsig compares this form of aesthetic appreciation of maintaining a motorcycle to the meditative practice of *zazen*, or “just sitting.”

Zen Buddhists talk about “just sitting,” a meditative practice in which the idea of a duality of self and object does not dominate one’s consciousness. What I’m talking about here in motorcycle maintenance is “just fixing,” in which the idea of a duality of self and object doesn’t dominate one’s consciousness. When one isn’t dominated by feelings of separateness from what he’s working on, then one can be said to “care” about what he’s doing. That caring really is, a feeling of identification with what one’s doing. When has this feeling then he also sees the inverse of caring, Quality itself (298-297).

For Pirsig, the awareness of Quality is prior to the subject/object split. Quality can be apprehended with a “non-intellectual” awareness. “Reality is always the moment of vision before intellectualization takes place” (Pirsig, 1974: 247). It is, for Pirsig, equivalent to Ultimate Reality, or what F.S.C. Northrop (1964) characterized as an “undifferentiated aesthetic continuum,” an experiential event prior to “sorting out” into subject and object. The art, or the way, to perceive Quality (and be at one with it as work unfolds), “...is to cultivate an inner quietness, a peace of mind so that goodness can shine through” (Pirsig 1974:295). The narrator’s Westward journey can be seen as a quest to his initial question in his first Chautauqua, “What is best?” The art of maintenance is a search for a union of opposites—such as the dichotomies between classic rationality and romantic subjectivity, aesthetic appreciation and a reliance on instrumental knowledge. And it is the narrator’s unifying and nondualistic insight into Quality

(with help from his alter ego, or “ghost” from his past, Phaedrus), which leads to the narrator’s inner peace and reconciliation with his son Chris.

In this paper, I propose that the art of organizational maintenance involves the creative reconciliation of dilemmas, which has as its basis a Zen-inspired Quality aesthetic. The paper explores how Zen Buddhist practice has inspired a wide-range of Japanese forms of artistic expression based on *wabi-sabi*. This “Zen aesthetic” offers aesthetic categories relevant to exploring the artistry of organizational maintenance.

Zen Buddhism: Background and History

Before exploring the Zen aesthetic, it is important to have a brief background and to understand some of its historical context. Zen Buddhism is a tradition that had its roots in the teaching that Shakyamuni Buddha gave some 2500 years ago in Northern India. Different schools of Buddhism take different paths, but all are focused on an experiential inquiry to perceive and dispel the causes of human suffering. Fostering a direct and irreversible realization into the true nature of the self is common to all Buddhist schools. Buddhist teachings view the self as empty of any inherent or independent existence, essence or enduring substance. According to the Buddha, human suffering is rooted in a delusion that misperceives or misapprehends our self-nature. The three core insights of Buddhist teachings are that all conditioned phenomena are characterized by 1) *annica* (impermanence of all phenomena); 2) *annata* (no-thing has as an independent self-nature); and 3) *dukkha* (the suffering or unsatisfactoriness that arises through clinging to a misapprehension of permanence). Such somatic insights are usually developed through intensive meditation practices and a path of study in conjunction with a teacher or guide trained in the tradition.

The Ch’an (Zen in Japan) school of Buddhism emerged in China. When Buddhism migrated from India to China at the beginning of the Common Era, it encountered Confucianism in the North and Taoism in the South. At that time, Chinese culture and tradition, and early Chinese Buddhism in particular, placed a great deal of emphasis on the written word and self-cultivation through the study of traditional texts (Hershock 2005). In the sixth century C.E., Bodhidharma has the distinction of being both the first Chinese Buddhist Patriarch and also the founding patriarch of the martial arts (Shaolin).

Ch'an Buddhism broke with both the Chinese literary tradition and the richly textured metaphysics of Indian Buddhism by positioning itself as being "a special transmission outside of written teachings," and as "not being dependent on words and letters." This phrase is derived from Bodhidharma's four famous points that summarize the essence of Zen:

Zen is a special transmission outside the scriptures,
With no reliance on words and letters.
A direct pointing to the human mind,
And the realization of enlightenment.

The notion of direct, mind-to-mind transmission, traces to the mythic story going back to the times of Shakyamuni Buddha in the fifth century B.C.E.. In this story, the Buddha was about to give a teaching to a large assembly of aspirants on the top of Vulture Peak near Rajgir. The story is told that the Buddha, sitting silently, raises his eyebrows slightly as he raises a single wildflower. In the audience, Mahakashyapa emits a smile and the Buddha recognizes him immediately, responding "I am Wonderful Mind. I am Nirvana. I am the inexhaustible treasure house, the Eye of Nonduality. Now this Light is manifest as you, as Mahakashyapa." (Hixon 1995).

Japanese Zen originated from the Chinese word Ch'an, which in turn was derived from a Sanskrit word, *dhyana*. Often translated as "meditative concentration," Ch'an was a movement that placed a great deal of emphasis on the experiential practice of sitting meditation (*zazen*) as a direct means to awakening to one's true nature, which is beyond dualities. In this respect, Ch'an Buddhist masters took a completely different turn from that of their historical predecessors, the Indian pundits, who were known for their abilities to elucidate or expound upon the volumes of Buddhist texts and sutras. As a countercultural movement within Chinese religious society, Ch'an also reframed spiritual realization as enlightened activity in the lived world and as possible in the midst of secular activities. This amounted to a paradigmatic shift from the academic to the pragmatic, relocating the locus of spiritual attainment from an emphasis on individual subjectivity, and a hierarchic view of knowledge as something that could be possessed, discursively transmitted and attained—to an emphasis on demonstrating one's realization as virtuosic responsiveness or conduct (Herschock 2005). Describing the earthy, iconoclastic, irreverent, and dramatic aspects of spiritual realization in Ch'an, Herschock states:

In the practice of Ch'an, the hallmark of excellence is not the ability to transmit a fixed canon or act according to set customs and principles. It is unprecedented and yet skilled immediacy or improvisational genius (p.2).

In this respect, enlightened activity in Ch'an is regarded as embodied in exemplary conduct and demonstrative activity occurring within a social environment. Enlightened conduct depicts Ch'an masters as improvisational geniuses who exhibited and demonstrated their qualitatively dramatic presence, an immediate and unprecedented ability to respond in situationally appropriate ways.

Zen Buddhism, and the arts it has inspired, is rooted in fundamental practices of mindfulness, particularly sitting meditation, or *zazen*. *Zazen* fosters bare, naked attention--a way of just seeing reality directly, before it is divided into subject and object. Zen is intent on breaking the bonds of dualistic thinking. As an intensive somatic practice, *zazen* facilitates seeing without any mental bias—dropping thoughts, concepts, beliefs, preconceptions, presumptions, or expectations. *Zazen* has been described by Dogen as “thinking not-thinking.”

As a tradition that distinguished itself as a “transmission beyond words and scriptures,” posing the question “What is Zen?” is often met with illogical and nonintellectual responses. A famous response by an ancient Zen master to this question, was simply, “The clouds in the sky and the water in the jug.” The foundation of Zen rests upon these four basic postulates:

1. The nature of reality is inherently nondualistic.
2. Clinging to the idea of a self that is separate from the world is the cause of pain, stress, misery and suffering.
3. Life and all phenomena, including the idea of a self, are impermanent, fleeting and lack an independent existence.
4. Through great effort and meditative concentration, it is possible to break the bondage of dualistic thinking that is rooted to an attachment to an illusory sense of self, awakening to a nondualistic way of seeing/being.

Despite the wealth of well established Buddhist practices of mindfulness meditation and concentration, this ancient tradition has seemingly escaped the attention of organizational theorists (Levinthal and Rerup 2006; Weick and Sutcliffe 2006). The recent interest among organizational theorists in mindfulness has drawn mainly from the theoretical works of Harvard psychologist Ellen Langer (Langer 1989; 2000). Langer's conception of mindfulness as “distinction making” and “context shifting” has informed a number of theoretical developments

in organizational aesthetics (Barry and Meisiek 2010; Weick et al. 1999), but such formulations are distinctly expressive of a Western mindset, which privileges thinking and cognition as the dominant form of knowing. While not suppressing thinking or discrimination, Zen aims to go beyond dualistic perception which depends on mental concepts as intermediary filters for making sense of and explaining reality. Rather than trying to interpret and represent reality through words, concepts or images, Zen values direct, nondualistic perception. The point of awakening in Zen is to “just see” – a direct experience of perception – without verbal interpretations or intellectualization. Zen’s unusual proclivity for viewing the possibility of experiencing awakening in any life context inspired a new aesthetic appreciation for everyday things, for the “ordinary.” In the next section, I explore the Zen arts and the aesthetic of wabi-sabi.

The Zen Arts and the Aesthetic of Wabi Sabi

Zen-inspired artistic crafts and skills are known as *dō*, or the Way. Some examples include, the way of flower arranging (*kadō*), the way of tea (*chadō*), the way of the sword (*kendō*), of archery (*kyūdō*), the way of calligraphy (*shodō*), the way of poetry (*kadō*), and ways of self-defense (*judō* and *akidō*). During the height of the Sung dynasty, Ch’an monasteries in China were centers for learning painting, poetry and literature. In turn, the Zen arts in Japan were heavily influenced by Chinese culture and Taoism. Many Zen monks returned from their spiritual pilgrimages with scrolls of Chinese poetry, painting and calligraphy, along with Chinese artists. As Watts (1957) notes, there was “a tremendous cross-fertilization of philosophical, scholarly, poetic, and artistic pursuits in which the Zen and Taoist feeling for ‘naturalness’ becomes the dominant note.” One such classic text imported to Japan was *The Tao of Painting*, a book written in 500 C.E., which is a treatise on painting as a spiritual path (Loori 2005). The text describes how the apprentice artist can discover and express the *chi* (energy) of a mountain, bamboo or a plum blossom (Loori 2005). Here we see the development of a nature aesthetic where there is no duality between the human mind and the forces of nature. Watts describes this non-dualistic and non-representational nature aesthetic:

This does not mean that the art forms of Zen are left to mere chance, as if one were to dip a snake in ink and let it wiggle around on a sheet of paper. The point is rather that for Zen there is no duality, no conflict between the natural element of chance and the human element of control. The constructive powers of the human mind are no more artificial than the formative actions of plants or bees, so that from the standpoint of Zen it is no

contradiction to say that artistic technique is discipline in spontaneity and spontaneity in discipline (174).

During the height of the Kamakura period (1185-1336), Zen temples became artistic hothouses for Japanese artist-monks. The Zen arts—the tea ceremony, calligraphy, zenga (painting), bamboo flute, landscape gardening, architecture, No drama, archery, the martial arts, poetry--were intimately woven into the fabric of Zen training. Such arts were viewed as teaching vehicles for communicating the subtle wordless teachings of Zen. The focus was less on technique than on demonstrating one's level and depth of practice. For example, paintings and calligraphy were utilized as “visual discourses” that communicated spiritual insights in action. As a countercultural movement which gave little credence to scholastic or pedantic expositions, Zen monks embraced the role of art as a way to express profound spiritual truths. These became known as the “artless arts” of Zen (Loori 2005).

The fusion of the Zen arts into Japanese society and culture developed a distinct “Zen aesthetic” known as wabi-sabi. The spirit of Zen infuses wabi-sabi. This unique Zen aesthetic is a formative source for artistic creations, craft skills, or simple appreciation of natural processes and objects of everyday life. Through wabi-sabi, the sacred can be found in the profane. Often associated with the Japanese tea ceremony, a rational and expository explanation of this uniquely Japanese cultural aesthetic has been purposefully avoided. Seeking intellectual clarity to rationally explain wabi-sabi is considered sacrilegious by some Japanese critics. Articulated as an indigenous, elusive, and ambivalent feeling by most Japanese, Leonard Koren (2008), a Western architect who studied in Japan, notes that it is typically described as “a beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete.” Koren (2008) goes so far to suggest that an aesthetic obscurantism has occurred in Japanese families (iemoto) who closely guard the artistic concepts of wabi-sabi associated with the various traditional arts.

Wabi originally connoted the solitariness and aloneness of the hermit, what could be considered a serene melancholy or sad feeling of forlornness. However, as Zen became more established, such self-imposed isolation and poverty came to be appreciated as spiritually superior in quality. More specifically, wabi has more to do with a state of mind associated with simplicity and non-attachment to material possessions. Wabi is a spiritual way of life or philosophical outlook that reflects the spirit of Zen. In short, wabi encompasses the realization

that duality is an illusion, that clinging to ego and the material world leads to suffering, and that the appreciation of life's impermanence is essential to living in harmony with nature.

Wabi is the living philosophy that is outwardly expressed through the aesthetic principles of sabi. Sabi is the physical manifestation of impermanence. There is innate beauty to be found in ordinary objects that are irregular, imperfect and lacking in symmetry. Sabi has often been translated as “rustic simplicity.” In Buddhist terms, sabi refers to the “suchness” or essence of the object – the uniqueness of the thing in itself. Aesthetic appreciation for sabi, returns us back to wabi and back again to sabi, an aesthetic experience intended to engender a holistic perspective that is peaceful and transcendent.

While there are many varied translations and interpretations of wabi sabi, Juniper (2003:51) best encapsulates it in the following definition:

Wabi sabi is an intuitive appreciation of a transient beauty in the physical world that reflects the irreversible flow of life in the spiritual world. It is an understated beauty that exists in the modest, rustic, imperfect, or even decayed, an aesthetic sensibility that finds a melancholic beauty in the impermanence of all things.

Table 1 below compares and contrasts the aesthetics of modernism with that of wabi-sabi.

Chado: The Way of Tea. This Zen-infused art has had a profound influence on Japanese culture and aesthetics. The aesthetics of the setting for practicing this art integrates many of the Zen arts: architecture, flower arranging, landscape gardening, ceramics, and metalwork. Tea, of course, was imported into Japan in the 9th century by monks for use as a stimulant during their long meditation periods. Eisai is credited with creating the monastic tea ceremony. However, it wasn't until the 16th century, by the time the Zen arts were flourishing, that Sen no Rikyu (1518-1591) refined the tea ceremony into a secular offering for the Samurai and Shogun. The traditional tea

Table 1. Differences between the Aesthetics of Modernism and Wabi-Sabi

Modernism	Wabi-Sabi
Implies a logical, rational worldview	Implies an intuitive worldview
Absolute	Relative
Looks for universal, prototypical solutions	Looks for personal, idiosyncratic solutions
Expresses faith in progress	There is no progress
Believes in the control of nature	Believes in the fundamental uncontrollability of nature
Romanticizes technology	Romanticizes nature
People adapting to machines	People adapting to nature
Geometric organization of form	Organic organization of form
Solicits the reduction of sensory information	Solicits the expansion of sensory information
Is intolerant of ambiguity and contradiction	Is comfortable with ambiguity and contradiction
Function and utility are primary values	Function and utility are not so important
The box as metaphor	The bowl as metaphor
Everlasting (seeking permanence)	To everything there is a season (impermanence)

Adapted from Koren (2008)

ceremony is a vehicle for exploring a spiritual sense of beauty. It takes place inside a very small hut, with two small tatami straw mats, a thatched roof, with paper shoji walls, a small alcove, firepit, usually one scroll with calligraphy, and a simple flower arrangement. The implements used have a rustic and simple character. Both the setting and the ritual are designed to evoke a sense of reverential simplicity, surely a wabi-sabi environment, that exudes a feeling of caring, quality and appreciation of ordinary, everyday things (see Figure 1).



Figure 1 A Contemporary Tea Room

Sumi-e painting, Zenga and Calligraphy. Japanese painters were heavily influenced by the Chinese ink paintings (sumi-e). It is interesting to point out that Chinese classical studies integrated writing, poetry and painting. The role of the Chinese scholar was that of a generalist scholar-artist (Watts 1957). Zen monks emulated many of the aesthetic principles utilized among Chinese painters in the height of the Sung dynasty. These paintings were primarily of landscapes, depicting their feelings of naturalness towards mountains, trees, mists, waters, birds. However, the most distinct aspect of these paintings was an appreciation for space—and the relative emptiness of the picture. An aesthetic appreciation of space in the Zen sense is very different than Western conceptions of space as simply being a lifeless container for objects. As Herrigel describes it:

Space in Zen painting is forever unmoved and yet in motion, it seems to live and breathe, it is formless and empty and yet the source of all form, it is nameless and yet the reason why everything has a name. Because of it things have absolute value, are all equally important and meaningful, exponents of the universal life that flows through them (69).

The accommodating character and active expression of space in Chinese and Japanese landscape paintings also exhibits an active and inclusive engagement of the observer. In contrast, Western landscape paintings utilize unambiguous modes of linear perspective that posit a clear division between the observer and the observed, locating the viewer in a definite position outside of the painting (Purser 2000). In Chinese and Japanese landscape paintings, it is hard to locate the position of the observer (see Figure 2).



Figure 2 Chiang Yee's *Cows in Derwentwater* from *The Silent Traveller, A Chinese Artist in Lakeland*, first published in London in 1937.

Instead, space is utilized to accommodate the viewer as being within the scene, reflecting the feelings of intimacy and at-oneness with nature on the part of the artist (Barrow, 1995).

Underscoring this important role of space, Watts (1957) states:

The secret lies in knowing how to balance form with emptiness and, above all, in knowing when one has “said” enough. For Zen spoils neither the aesthetic shock nor the *satori* shock by filling in, by explanation, second thoughts, and intellectual commentary. Furthermore, the figure so integrally related to its empty space gives the feeling of the “marvelous Void” from which the event suddenly appears (179).

Another contrast between Western visual art and Sumi-e paintings is the degree of spontaneity required in their execution. The use of oil-based paints allowed Western artists to revise and complete their works over long periods of time. This also led to a quest for realism and perfection of their representation of the image. In contrast, the use of Chinese black ink on silk or thin paper had to be executed in a single stroke of the brush, emphasizing a spontaneous and free movement of the hand. Premeditation, hesitancy, or any afterthought would immediately show. Noting the importance of this, Watts states, “...it is a perfect instrument for the expression of unhesitating spontaneity, and a single stroke is enough to ‘give away’ one’s character to an experienced observer (178).”

According to Loori (2005), there is a close connection between the mind of liberation attained in Zen and how it is expressed through the spontaneous action of the master-artist:

Spontaneity relates to art in which there is no artificiality or contrivance. Art that is natural expresses the artist’s direct experience of reality, the multiplicity of the universe that each one of us experiences every moment, without self-consciousness (183).

This is especially true for Zenga painting where the brushstrokes are very expressive and pronounced, ranging from delicate detail to powerful, bold outlines. Zenga and calligraphy visually demonstrate the aesthetic value of the imperfect, asymmetrical, and the so-called “controlled accidents” that are the result of stray brush lines and uneven inking of the paper. One of the most notable artists who mastered this style was Zen monk Sash (1421-1506), who was quite well known for zenga paintings that captured the evanescence of the changing four seasons (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Sash, *Winter Landscape*

Recognizing the spiritual significance of zenga, Loori (2005) states:

Zenga art is asymmetrical, without regular, recognizable geometrical shapes to anchor our eye. The brush lines are usually jagged, gnarled, irregular, twisting, dashing, sweeping. Zenga is bold and immediate, and almost always created spontaneously, in a single breath. In many cases, a zenga painting acts as a visual koan or sermon whose teaching is offered through very concise, direct pointing (176).

Another key figure known for his bold, forceful, sometimes humorous and irreverent zenga paintings was the 17th century Zen master Hakuin Ekaku. His most well known zengas are

of Daruma, or the Bodhidharma, the First Zen Patriarch (see Figure 4). Hakuin not only made liberal use of zengas as visual sermons, but he is also known as a seminal figure in revitalizing koan study in the Rinzai Zen school. Most Westerners have heard his popular koan, “What is the sound of one hand?” Surprisingly, Hakuin did not start painting until he was sixty years old. In the course of twenty-four years he had produced more than a thousand zenga paintings and calligraphy scrolls. What is striking about his various artistic works is the sense of abandon and vitality inherent in his brushstrokes, as well as freedom from the religious conventions of his day. Hakuin’s signature expression is captured in the irreverence, irony and even at times satirical nature of his visual themes and content.



Figure 4 Daruma by Hakuin

One of the most common images in zenga paintings is the *Enso*, or circle (see Figure 5). Note that the circle is almost always drawn in a rather eccentric and irregular way, denoting incompleteness and imperfection. Such a depiction is far removed from the geometrically perfect representation of an abstract circle that one would find in Western art. As a symbol of unity and wholeness in Zen, the *enso* is drawn to express the “perfection of imperfection,” the naturalness of the ordinary, and it points to the “living circle” that is organic, dynamic and continuously changing.



Figure 5 A Zen Enso.

Zen Poetry and Haiku. There are many aesthetic similarities between ink painting and Zen poetry/Haiku. As an art of expressing the inexpressible, the “wordless poetry” of Zen is known for what it does not say and for what it omits or leaves out. The artistic vision of Zen poets is similar to their ink painting counterparts in that Space is accentuated both in the outward expression and inward form of the poems. In the 11th century, many Zen poets took their inspiration from Chinese couplets. Noting this aesthetic similarity, Watts points out:

In poetry the empty space is the surrounding silence which a two-line poem requires—a silence of the mind in which one does not “think about” the poem but actually feels the sensation which it evokes—all the more strongly for having said so little (183).

Communications between Zen teachers and their disciples are well known for their radical directness and pithy expressions. Poetry was integral to the study of koans in the Zen tradition (a topic to be addressed later in the paper). This form of “wordless” poetry evolved into what is now recognized as Haiku poetry. The 17th century Zen teacher credited with developing and popularizing Haiku as a Zen literary art is Matsuo Basho¹. His best known Haiku poem was a response to his Zen teacher who posed the following question as the two of them were sitting in a garden: “What is the reality prior to the greenness of moss?” Meditating on the question, Basho spontaneously composed the following verse:

¹ Basho was actually known for the longer *renga* verses that he composed. *Hokku* were referred to as “starting verses.”

The ancient pond,
A frog leaps in,
The sound of water.

Basho's poem reveals an aesthetic where one's entire sense field and body/mind is inseparable from nature and imbued with the immediacy of this "live moment." It is a poetic expression of an unmitigated apperception that is direct, intimate, and expressive of an acute sensual experience.

Describing the Zen "no mind" entry to composing Haiku, Looi (2005) states:

To write haiku, to become this intimate with the moment, the poet must completely disengage, if only for an instant, all of her interpretive faculties. The mind must become one with the world, a detail of the world—the splash, a peach blossom, a neon sign flashing along the highway, the sound of a mountain stream. The poet's craft has to slip through the intellectual filters and instinctively record the image that has been perceived. As Basho said, "In writing, do not let a hair's breadth separate you from the subject. Speak your mind directly; go to it without wandering thoughts." For an instant, the artist opens to the ineffable truth of Zen. With the self out of the way, the world advances a step (219).

Another form of Zen poetry is what could be classified as poems of realization and enlightenment². These verses were usually composed by Zen masters as ways of expressing their awakening, realization or satori. A classic story is that of Hui-neng. The fact that Hui-neng was an illiterate layman has much to do with this account. Hui-neng was in Southern China and overhead a wandering monk chanting some lines from the Diamond Sutra, which he was completely unfamiliar with. The story goes that when Hui-neng heard the monk chanting the line "Arouse the mind without resting it upon anything," Hui-neng became instantly enlightened. Hui-neng followed the monk to his monastery, and the abbot there recognized that Hui-neng had attained some level of realization, but did not reveal this to other monks. Hui-neng was allowed to stay and was sent to work in the rice shed. One day the head abbot decided to pose a challenge and test whether any of his monks had attained enlightenment. The abbot invited any monk that was up to challenge to compose a poetic verse expressing their realization of the truth. Only the senior monk submitted this verse anonymously:

² The Tibetan Buddhist tradition is also well known for enlightened masters who compose "Songs of Realization," and poems expressive of awakened mind.

The body is precisely the Bodhi tree.
The mind is like a bright mirror standing.
Take care to wipe it all the time,
And allow no dust to cling..

Having heard about the challenge, he asked another monk to read what the senior monk had composed. He wasn't impressed. Hui-neng orally composed an alternative verse and asked this monk to put the words to paper for him. Hui-neng's verse read:

The root of Bodhi is not a tree.
Nor bright mirror standing.
Ultimately, not one thing exists,
So where is the dust to cling?

The abbot told the senior monk that his understanding of the Dharma and level of realization was still incomplete. Despite Hui-neng's illiteracy and lack of monastic training as a monk, the abbot recognized that his poetic verse was superior to that of the senior monk. The abbot conferred upon Hui-neng the authority to be the Sixth Patriarch, that is, his Dharma successor, but did so privately at first in order not to provoke jealousy among the other monks.

Zen-inspired Japanese Gardens. The compositional arrangements of Zen gardens also follow many of the aesthetic design principles that have been outlined in the other Zen arts. The aesthetic values of Zen gardens are in complete contrast to the European garden designs which utilize ornate, symmetrical and decorative imitations, or strive for a realistic illusion of a landscape (Maruyama 1992; 1993). Zen gardens also take their initial inspiration from the principles of Chinese landscape paintings. The use of large, solitary rocks surrounded by a sea of gravel, evokes the viewer's active involvement in appreciating the garden as a microcosmic metaphor for the universe. With its use of stark and limited materials, Zen gardens are also a perfect expression of wabi-sabi, offering simply a minimalist suggestion of "mountains and water" in a very small space (Slawson 1987).

Zen garden design also is reflective of the "no mind" way of seeing/being. The design of a Zen garden is not about the imposition of the gardener's own ideas and intentions, but of following the way or design principles that are already inherently present in nature (Tamura 1935). The aesthetic conservation of naturalness in Zen gardens, along with their adherence to

minimalist simplicity, allows the viewer's imagination and sense of wonder to flourish. Zen gardens were places for deepening contemplation, not for passive adulation of the designer's artistry. Thus, Zen garden design not only mirrors the spiritual truths discovered and realized from the practice of Zen, but intentionally elevates the role of the viewer as an active agent in co-realizing this form of aesthetic beauty.

The most famous Zen garden, which has been the subject of innumerable interpretations, is the Ryoanji garden adjacent to a Rinzai Zen temple complex just north of Kyoto City. Originally built in 1450, it was reconstructed in 1486 after a fire. Ryoanji is relatively small rock garden, 10 x 30 meters in size (see Figure 6 below), consisting of 15 rocks of various sizes and shapes that sit arranged in raked grey gravel. The garden is backed by a low stone wall along the perimeter, and is open to the southern side of main temple hall's wooden veranda. There is no plant life introduced into the garden itself except for the moss that grows by the base of the rocks.



Figure 6 The Ryōan-ji Zen garden.

The viewer is immediately impressed by how the rocks are situated within the great expanse of gravel. For some, the rocks symbolize mountains or clouds; the raked gravel, the sea or space. These common interpretations are consonant with the preponderance of mountains and water in Chinese and Japanese landscape paintings.

McGovern (2004) suggests that there is much more at play at Ryoanji than merely being a coy representation of a “landscape-in-miniature.” Rather, McGovern examines the deeper meaning of Ryoanji garden by reading it as a text. Texts are not limited to linguistic modes of

communications. In other words, signs act as texts which are materially encoded. Different semiotic modes, as McGovern (2004:345) points out—such as “textures, colors, spatial elements and visual composition are all interactional elements which carry specific meanings and activate different dimensions of sensory experience”.

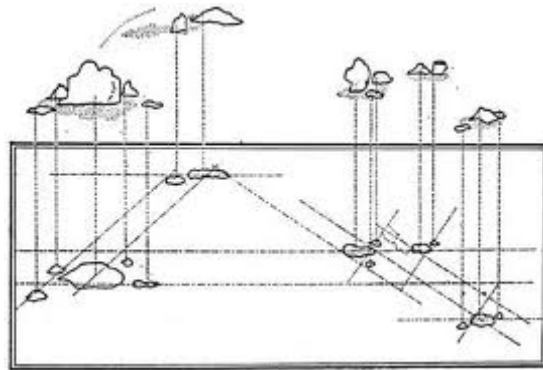


Figure 7 Diagonal line vectors at Ryoanji Zen garden.

McGovern maintains that Ryoanji makes distinctive use of semiotic materials, and he attempts to discern how this “garden-as-text” is composed artistically by analyzing the modes of lines and spatial configurations (see Figure 7). According to McGovern, communication of Zen sensibilities at Ryoanji are inscribed into a topographical textual form. This can be seen in terms of lines and texture relationships. For example, at Ryoanji, no one particular rock or rock configuration is the central object of focus. Instead of fixating on any one particular rock, attention is directed to the relationship between rocks as form, and gravel as space or emptiness. The eye is led into the interaction between form (positive space) and emptiness (negative space), a central tenet of Buddhist insight. McGovern also describes how the topographical placement of the rocks as visual units is suggestive of a correspondence to the organization of written language. The repetitive ordering and regulated visual arrangement of the rocks emulates rhythm and a sense of movement in time. McGovern even sees a direct correspondence of metric patterning in Haiku with way the clusters of rocks at Ryoanji are organized. Calling attention to this, McGovern (2004) states:

Haiku are thus based on phrasing and timing. The Ryoan-ji garden and haiku are both organized in terms of metric units. The garden does this through cluster of rocks configured in visual space. The haiku does this through speech sound configured in

rhythmic time. Both garden and haiku place strong emphasis on measured units and realize this in corresponding ways (353).

Ryoanji can also be viewed as visually expressing a koan, since not all of the rocks are visible from any one angle of vision (McGovern, 2004). This is interesting given the fact that Ryoanji is part of a Rinzai Zen temple, the Zen sect that emphasizes koan study as a way of practice. McGovern goes into great detail in decoding the visually semiotic organizing principles and constituency patterns as materially encoded at Ryoanji, but space limitations prevents further elaboration here.

The Zen Arts as Aesthetics Inquiry

Barry and Meisiek (2010) consider artistic experimentation as an advanced method for fostering mindfulness in everyday work life. Their excellent review illustrates how different forms of analogically mediated inquiry can stimulate the combinatorial practice of distinction making and context shifting. The Zen arts also represent an advanced form of artistic experimentation, grounded in Zen's profound positive regard for everyday lived experience. Further, the spirit of Zen shuns intellectualization and propositional knowledge in favor of awakening the mind in the midst of secular activities. Seeing the sacred in the profane, Zen practice is not limited to sitting on the meditation cushion, but embraces the whole of life. Thus, the Zen arts were living expressions of advanced forms of mindfulness-in-practice.

Learning from the Zen arts also amounts to a form of aesthetics inquiry, providing a new range of aesthetic categories to consider (Taylor and Hansen 2005). Indeed, the Zen arts and the aesthetic categories that they elicit, responds to the unrealized hope and potential that Taylor and Hansen (2005:1224) identified in terms of providing a deeper engagement of the senses and a focus on the experiences over objects. Below I summarize some of key aesthetic categories identified through the exploration of the Zen arts reviewed above:

Table 2 Aesthetic Categories in the Zen Arts

Rejection of dualisms; beauty is a dynamic, relational event. Distinction making is enhanced by not drawing distinctions between beauty and ugliness.

Beauty is not an independently existing thing or essence. Beauty has no self-nature (emptiness). Beauty is not a noun, but adverbial. Beauty is a function of Quality--an ongoing, relational creativity, or interdependence.

Acceptance of transience, impermanence, continuous change.

Celebrating the imperfection and incompleteness of nature. Valuing flaws as works of art.

Valuing the inconspicuous, the hidden, and overlooked details. Beauty can be found by slowing down to look at the subtle, ephemeral and evanescence of ordinary things. Seeing the essence of a thing, rather than emulating monuments that idolize greatness, permanence, and illusionary immortality.

Expressing the most with the least. Beauty in elegant simplicity. Valuing the aesthetics of space as enlivening form. Subtle profundity.

Freedom from habit or formula. Non-attachment. Freshness. Beginner's mind.

Minimalist control; designing and harmonizing with nature. Embracing asymmetric shapes and forms. Not resisting the natural flows and processural changes of nature.

Spontaneous over deliberate; avoidance of contrivance and premeditated behavior; absence of pretense. Unforced creative intent. (mushin, or "no mind")

Valuing of direct, embodied, lived experience over intellectual concepts and philosophizing.

Expressing the ineffable and indefinable Zen experience in ordinary everyday affairs (including artistic modes).

Engaging the senses in nondualistic experiences by immersion in nature (or the experience of the moment).

Artful Zen practices heighten existing attentive capacities (mindfulness), while opening up new sensory fields. Conducting artful practices enhances the circulation of attention-energy in the sensing organism/sensed environment system.

These aesthetic categories may now have an unforeseen relevance to understanding the artistry of organizational maintenance. Zen aesthetic principles can evocatively induce a mindful practice of perceiving and expressing quality in everyday work experience. Citing Dewey's (1958) notion that the purpose of art should be create a more satisfying experience, Taylor and Hansen (2005) argue that organizational aesthetics has a normative-value dimension--that of enhancing the quality and sensory experiences of organizational life.

I return to Zen as an inspiration for Robert Pirsig's book on the art of motorcycle maintenance. Along the journey, the narrator appears to have a major epiphany, or in Zen, what would be called a *kensho* (a breakthrough or glimpse of awakening)³. Tracing his steps, the narrator states:

So I backed up and shifted to the classic-romantic split that I think underlies the whole humanist-technological problem. But that too required a backup into the meaning of Quality.But now we have with us some concepts that greatly alter the whole understanding of things. Quality is the Buddha. Quality is scientific reality. Quality is the goal of all Art. It remains to work these concepts into a practical, down-to-earth context, and for this there is nothing more practical or down-to-earth than what I have been talking about all along—the repair of an old motorcycle.

Here we see the narrator enacting Zen aesthetic principles in how he is able to draw out new distinctions and creatively reframe his contextual understanding of what supposedly is initially considered to be purely an abstract understanding of the meaning of Quality. He does so by enhancing the quality of his attention towards the ordinary, down-to-earth, and simple work practice of maintaining an “old motorcycle.” Quality, its deepest meaning and expression, is to be found at that task at hand—in the seemingly mundane activity of motorcycle repair.

Of course, for Pirsig, motorcycle maintenance is somewhat of an evocative object and metaphor (Turkle 2007). Pirsig opens his book with the epigram, “the real cycle you're working on is a cycle called ‘yourself.’” Albert Low (1976), in his classic book, *Zen and Creative Management*, also seems to be pointing to the Quality aesthetic:

Many would say that if only they could become better managers, their lives would be more meaningful. It would be truer to say that if we could find our true meaning, we would stand a chance of becoming better managers. Becoming a better manager would be a byproduct of a practice aimed at reaching the source of our most pressing need: the need to be whole and significant.

I propose that organizational maintenance is such a managerial practice that is aimed at revealing an aesthetics of ineffability, what architect Christopher Alexander (1979) calls a “quality without a name.” Alexander's perceptual framework is to design homes, buildings, cities, and gardens “that make us feel most alive, most true to ourselves, the most unselfconscious, the most whole, the most complete, the most free” (Sheen 2011). This Quality aesthetic is grounded in felt, sensory experience. As Alexander argues, we can feel the “difference between good buildings

³ Kensho is usually the result of breaking through the impasse induced by a Zen koan.

and bad, good towns and bad.” A key principle is that “a system has quality when it is at one with itself; it lacks it when it is divided” (Alexander 1979:26). Alexander notes that this is a subtle freedom from inner contradictions, from dualisms; or, to put it another way, it is the capacity to creatively and harmoniously resolve seeming opposites or contradictions. Low (1976) refers to this state of seeing/being as “dynamic unity.” The ineffability of Quality is in complete unison with the spirit of Zen. The state of unity we all seek, the wholeness we all yearn for, is beyond words and prior to the division of subject-perceiving-object. This is why, Alexander, also maintains it cannot be pinned down, merely conceptualized into existence—why it cannot be named. Elaborating on this core aesthetic principle, Alexander states:

Indeed, this subtle and complex freedom from inner contradictions is just the very quality which things live. In the world of living things, every system can be more real or less real, more true to itself or less true to itself. It cannot become more true to itself by copying any externally imposed criterion of what it ought to be.This oneness, or the lack of it, is the fundamental quality for any thing. Whether it is a poem, or a man, or in a building full of people, or in a forest, or a city, everything that matters stems from it. It embodies everything. Yet still this quality cannot be named. (p.28, italics in original).

Ancient Western architecture was also informed by the praxis of *meditatio* and *contemplatio*. According to the ancient Roman architect Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, architecture is the child of two kinds of knowledge, knowing how and knowing that (*fabrica est continuata acritra usus meditation*). Knowing how is the continuous and careful meditation on the work as it is being done, and of an attention to the way its form is changed by the intention. Knowing that is the explanation of the way that the thing has been made, and of the order and measure behind its arrangement. *Meditatio* accompanies *fabrica*, or making and working. *Meditatio* very much resembles Schon’s reflection-in-action. *Cogitatione*, or mindful attention, accompanies *disegno*, or design. According to Schneider (2010), *cogitatione* is mindful attention that is directed towards the pleasure that comes with doing the work. As the famous architect Le Corbusier put it, the mind of the designer must bring “quarrelling conditions brought into harmony.” And that this is a mindful capacity which must be cultivated, Le Corbusier agrees, stating: “Architecture is a pure conception of the mind. It must be conceived in the head. Sitting in a chair. With the eyes shut!”

Organizational maintenance can be envisioned as the art of perceiving, holding and creatively resolving contradictions, dilemmas and oppositions that arise as part of the ongoing

process of organizing. Both the manager as organization-designer and the architect share a common challenge in resolving contradictions. It is calls for adopting what Boland and Collopy (2004) refer to as a “design attitude,” rather than a “decision attitude.” The latter is what is often conceived as the classic managerial task—that of “making the tough decisions,” which in reality severely limits the search of salient features, simplifies causal relationships, and reduces possibilities by a willingness to accept unattractive trade-offs (Dunne and Martin 2006).

Developing such a design attitude that is intent on the creative resolution of ongoing dilemmas in organizational life constitutes a *practice*, or, the “art of maintenance.” Conceiving maintenance as a practice takes it out of the domain of being merely an instrumental goal or activity. This form of maintenance is not episodic, or focused on “fixing” emergent problems. In other words, organizational maintenance is not a means to end, a tool for achieving Quality. Rather, organizational maintenance is a state of mind, a way of being, that is a direct perception and expression of Quality.

There is a parallel in Zen in terms of the role of meditation practice. Dogen, a thirteenth century Zen master, struggled with vexing dilemmas in his youth that drove him to a deep religious quest and pilgrimage. During that time, there were competing ideas among Buddhist schools concerning the role of practice. The Tendai school adhered to the idea of “original awakening,” that each sentient being already possessed “Buddha nature.” Other schools maintained that awakening must be acquired by progressing through various stages of practice. Whereas the Tendai school tended to neglect the need for practice and ethical precepts, the other schools treated practice as an instrumental means to attain enlightenment as an end that was far removed. Dogen struggled with this dilemma and had problems with both views. This was not merely a theoretical but a practical problem for Dogen (Abe 1992). Through deep exploration and after coming to his own awakening, Dogen rejected both the original and acquired awakening teachings. As Abe (1992) points out, the Tendai school of original awakening for Dogen amounted to a naturalistic-pantheistic heresy, which erroneously equated the human mind with true awakening. And acquired awakening turned practice into an instrumental activity, separated from the apparent goal of enlightenment, amounting to an idealistic-teleological view. Dogen’s creative resolution of this dilemma was neither to ignore practice, nor to view it as a means to an end, but to see practice as the basis for enlightenment. For Dogen, practice is a manifestation of realization.

The same is true for the practice of organizational maintenance. It is a contemplative art that arouses “whole body and mind” seeing, a phrase Dogen used to describe the total merging of subject and object, or seer and the seen, of self and other (Loori, 2005). This organizational art is depicted in the last of *The Oxherding Pictures*, “Entering the Market with Helping Hands,” a classic Zen text from the 12th century which expresses--through visual art, along with accompanying prose--the journey towards the full experience of awakening (see Figure 8 below). The series of pictures provides a map of the spiritual journey for the lost ox and the fruition of such a search. The ox, of course, symbolizes our true nature and authentic self, or the Zen notion of “no mind.”



Figure 8 Tenth Ox Herding Picture:
Entering the Market with Helping Hands

The man depicted in this picture has a belly protruding, symbolizing what D.T. Suzuki (1957) calls “diaphragmatic thinking” or “a sort of thinking which is done with the whole body or the whole person.” Loori (2005) calls this form of thinking “working Samadhi,” which is a mode of expression intrinsic to all of the Zen arts. The tenth *Ox Herding* picture depicts the self-realized individual who is fully integrated, beyond all opposites, and able to freely relate to the situation at hand, that is, to live in accordance with the flow of life—what Hershock (1996) refers to as (1996) “improvisational social virtuosity.” The verse associated with this ox herding picture reads, “Carrying a gourd he [the old man] goes into the market, leaning against a staff he comes

home. He is found in company with the wine-bibbers and butchers, he and they are all converted into the Buddha.”

The tenth *Ox Herding Picture* is significant as prior versions were based on only eight pictures, concluding with a picture of the *enso*, the empty Zen circle, suggesting that the end of the spiritual path culminated in transcendent emptiness. However, Chinese Zen master Kuo-an Shin-yuan, author of the pictures we have today, added two more. The incomplete and empty Zen circle allows for transcendent emptiness to open into the fullness of life. Kuo-an Shin-yuan’s addition of the tenth picture shows that complete awakening entails reentering the stream of everyday life. Awakening in Zen is not a solitary affair or some private absorption in a unitive mystical experience. Rather, “such experience is to be radiated, not jealously guarded” (DiSanto and Steele 1990).

Organizational maintenance gives expression to the fundamental need to realize dynamic unity in action. In Jungian terms, it could be conceived as the path of individuation at the organizational level. It is true growth and development that is generative, integrative and life-giving. Whereas instrumental knowledge is downstream of contradictions and oppositions, awakening is upstream. Indeed, as Low (2008) points out, “Zen awakening is *awakening to the opposites as two valid ways of being.*” Austin (1999) concurs in recognizing that the Zen student encounters many seemingly contradictory elements which must ultimately be reconciled through *satori*, or awakening. Figure 9 below illustrates the dynamic tensions between various polar pairs of opposites in Zen practice.



Figure 9 A Field of Paradox: Contrasting Aspects of Zen
(Adapted from James Austin's *Zen and the Brain*, 1999)

One of the key paradoxes in the Zen tradition is the creative tension between rigorous discipline/structure and its spirit of unconventional irreverence for reliance on structure. Encountering Zen can be regimented and sober and at the same time incredibly iconoclastic and unpredictable. Steven Heine (2005) identifies this as the structure/anti-structure polarity in Zen. We must remember that Zen as an institution organized some of the most hierarchical and structured boot camps for the disciplined practice of meditation and the arts. From a competing

values perspective (Cameron and Quinn 1999), Zen has perfected the art of integrating a dynamic tension between hierarchical and adhocracy cultures. The awakened mind of Zen masters allowed them to transcend this structure/anti-structure paradox, acting as Herschock (2005:2) puts it, with an “unprecedented and yet skilled immediacy or improvisational genius.”⁴

As we can see, Zen and creativity are intimately linked. An important characteristic of creative individuals is their capacity to transcend traditional dichotomies by integrating what paradoxically appear to be polarized traits or “dialectical tensions” (see Figure 10; Barron 1963; Taylor and Barron 1964; Csikzentmihalyi 1996; Hampden-Turner 1999). These traits include the pairings of: highly energetic/restful, smart/naïve, playful/disciplined, imaginative/grounded in reality, extroverted/introverted, humble/proud, traditional/rebellious, passionate/objective, and suffering pain/feeling joy. Creative people are prone to imagination and fantasy, but rooted with a sense of reality; they are traditional and conservative, enabling them to gain mastery of a discipline, yet are also rebellious and independent, leading them to deviate and improvise. However, the type of creativity that is operative in the Zen arts is different in nature from that of more familiarized styles of Western creativity. Berman (1999) distinguishes Eastern Zen-inspired art as an expression of psychic unity and as transcending “self-expression.” In contrast, much of Western creativity and artistic expression has an obsessive-compulsive and neurotic quality to it—so called “passion” –where the creator/artist is “married to their work.” The Western mode of creativity resembles a “contemporary form of exorcism,” where the creator is attempting to heal an internal conflict (Berman 1999). In this case, creative insight appears to erupt from the unconscious. Creative work has a high psychic cost and suffers from being self-destructive and schismogenic in character. This is not the case with the Zen arts of the East. As Berman (1999:97-98) states:

The state of “no-mind” familiar to Eastern thought is largely foreign to the modern West (van Gogh was *out* of his mind, not in no-mind), for no-mind is a state of detachment or wholeness, and this indicates that the healing takes place *before* the work begins.This necessarily means the absence of an addictive or schismogenic structure. This kind of art is continuous with life; it doesn’t attempt to “outdo” life by means of psychic acrobatics.

⁴ Herschock makes many analogies to jazz improvisation in his descriptions of the awakened capacities of Chan/Zen masters. Purser and Speight (2010) have developed a model called the “jazz mind-set” which is also based on the fluid ability of jazz musicians to reconcile opposing skills and traits in real time.



Figure 10 Opposing Traits in the Creative Personality
(Adapted from James H. Austin, M.D., *Chase, Chance and Creativity*)

Awakening in Zen is experienced as a freedom from inner conflicts and neuroses. Thus, before managers can creatively engage in organizational maintenance, they must be at home with contradictions, dilemmas and ambiguities within themselves (Low 1976; 2007). This is tantamount to saying that managers must also be welcoming of insecurity, uncertainty, and dissonance, and even with the anxiety that is their emotional counterpart, and from which most people flee. This requires not only a design attitude, but a “creative attitude” (Purser and Montuori forthcoming). This involves becoming more aware and accepting of the warring or what appear to be conflicting qualities, voices, polarities or disowned aspects of one’s psyche. The depth psychology of Carl Jung considers this as the path of individuation; Koestler (1964) recognized this mode of creative thinking as bisociation.

I have had the good fortune of spending time with several Buddhist masters and I was struck by how effortlessly and harmoniously they can flow between opposites—moving fluidly between extreme seriousness to irreverent humor, engaging in complex thinking, yet expressing

their wisdom through unpretentious behavioral simplicity, being respectful and fierce defenders of their tradition, yet visionary innovators and reformers. This heightened level of virtuosic responsiveness, dramatic presence, and unobstructed freedom from a fixed sense of identity is in Ch'an and Zen recognized as exhibiting conduct that "leaves no trace" and as being a person "without rank." Hershock (1996) describes this heightened personal fluency and liberated cognitive-behavioral capacity as "an ability to respond in virtuosic timeliness, free from both hesitation and any reference to set patterns or habits of conduct, be these perceptual, emotive, or active (80)."

Coda: Zen Koans and Organizational Maintenance as a Contemplative Art

D.T. Suzuki, a noted scholar whose works first made Zen Buddhist philosophy accessible to the West states: "The Zen method of discipline generally consists in putting one in a dilemma, out of which one must contrive to escape, not through logic indeed, but through a mind of higher order." A dilemma can be viewed as any situation in which a single idea is called upon to resolve two incompatible frames of reference. The conditions for creative insight, therefore, have two parts: a single, unifying idea, and at least two conflicting frames of reference, although more than two may be involved (such as with a trilemma, or quadralemma). The single idea which achieves reconciliation of a dilemma is itself a manifestation of the drive to unity.

Dilemmas arise out of a basic conflict, wound, and fundamental ambiguity at the core of the human being (Low and Purser 2011). Human perception is both subjective and objective, we can be both participants and observers, and at the center and periphery, simultaneously. It is this basic ambiguity that is the basis for all spiritual practices which represent a drive toward unity, or wholeness. Koans are teaching "cases" and pedagogical devices, but their utilization in Zen Buddhism is for the purpose of awakening. The student working on a Zen koan must arouse all of his resources in order to face the ambiguity and dilemma generated by content of the koan (Low 1984; Shrobe 1994; Suzuki 1957). Zen teachers rarely provide the student any instruction or specific guidance on how to work with the koan, except for the occasional admonition to "become one with the koan." As ambiguity is amplified through koan practice, habitual intellectual and conceptual routines are frustrated, arousing what in Zen is called "Great Doubt."

It is a misnomer to regard the Zen koan as a mere riddle, puzzle or conundrum that must be “solved.” As Philip Kapleau (1966), the author of *The Three Pillars of Zen*, points out, “Koans are not intellectual puzzles or conundrums, nor are they tricky and clever; rather, they are direct and profound...To realize the essence of a koan is to realize the primal condition of one’s own mind—a state of awareness, freedom, wisdom, and compassion” (Kapleau 2001:2).

As I have shown earlier, poetry along with the use of Zen koans, functioned as a means to communicate the essential wordlessness of Zen (Loori 2005). This literary contemplative art is still central to the Rinzai school of Zen. Such “encounter dialogues” between teacher and disciple are utilized to catapult the mind to beyond the barriers of habitual ideas and the dualistic intellect. Zen koan practice, in fact, can be seen as an art of transcending paradoxes and dilemmas. As Heine (2005:37) notes, “the key to understanding the calm composure coupled with spontaneous flexibility of the Unmoving Mind is the koan.” On the surface, koans initially appear illogical, paradoxical or non-sensical because of our attachment to language, words and concepts. Disciplined Zen koan practice dismantles habitual ways of perceiving, knowing and thinking.

It is another one of Zen’s living paradoxes that while as a tradition it claims to have rejected a dependence on “words and letters,” the utilization of poetry and koans through skillful improvisatory performances actually flourished during the Golden Age of Zen, producing a rich literary compendium. The literal translation of the word koan (kuang in Chinese) meant “public case.” The close synergistic relationship between poetry and koans is unique to Zen—what Lynn (1987) characterizes as “the teaching of poetic enlightenment.” A classic example of a Zen koan in this genre is Case 39 from the 13th century collection of koans, the *Mumonkan*:

A monk once wanted to ask Unmon a question and started to say, “The light serenely shines over the whole universe.” Before he had even finished the first line, Unmon suddenly interrupted, “Isn’t that the poem of Chosetsu Shusai?” The monk answered, “Yes, it is.” Unmon said, “You have missed it!” (translation by Sekida 1977).

Look how different in nature this koan reads as compared to the previous Haiku poem by Basho. In this koan, the monk is attempting to ask a question to the Zen master Unmon, but we can see that the nature of the question is quite far removed from his direct experience—the monk’s question is too conceptual, even if it is about clarifying the meaning “whole universe” (Low

1995). Zen master Unmon will have none of this, and immediately cuts off the monk. A line from the warning verse reads: “If you open your mouth only a little/Your life is lost.”

These koans, or “encounter dialogues,” are radically performative; they aim to spur spontaneous-insight-action, rather than heady conceptual analyses or clever intellectual responses (Flores 2008). Further, koans are designed to thwart and/or abruptly jolt Zen students out of mimetic obedience, or canonical routines—authentic and creative responses to a koan cannot be a matter of mere imitation. As Flores (2008:125) points out, “Masters of koans display a rhetoric of embodiment: their style of speaking and behaving is supposed to indicate their level of insight.”

Resolution of a koan is an embodiment of nonduality--referred to as *kensho*. Kensho cannot be explained intellectually, but only expressed in novel and spontaneous behavior that is unencumbered by habit, pretense, self-doubt or other sorts of premeditated responses. Thus, direct and spontaneous action is a key component of Zen koan practice. A “knowing/doing” gap is unacceptable in both Zen practice and in the Zen arts.

Organizational maintenance can be imagined as a contemporary Zen koan practice. By reframing the managerial art of creative dilemma resolution as a koan practice, it becomes an analogous artifact that can invite creative inquiry and artistic experimentation (Barry and Meisiek 2010). As a practice, organizational maintenance is of a higher order “meta-design,” which aims for a more complex and dynamic unity in the ongoing process of organizing. Such a formulation is aligned with Barry and Meisiek’s (2010) notion of Collingwood’s ‘art proper’ as that which is ‘imaginatively expressive’ and more of an ‘extraordinary departure’ from habitual emotional and cognitive states.

I end this paper with an example from the theoretical work on “creative management” by Albert Low, who is a Zen teacher and former Human Resource executive. Low opens his book by asserting that “dilemmas arise out of the whole.” From here, Low argues that managers must come to a deep intuitive insight and awareness--what Heidegger calls “meditative thinking” --if they are to realize that wholes are intrinsic, and that the complexity of a whole cannot be reduced without changing its nature. Zen Buddhism, Low suggests, can develop an awareness or way of thinking that can help managers to see the organic integrity of a concrete situation. The same life force that gives rise to species, plants, animals and organisms is the same force that creates organizations. The Zen aesthetic honors and respects this fact. Indeed, Zen views art itself as a

work of nature. Just as nature ultimately cannot be controlled or conquered without unintended and tragic consequences, neither can organizations. Human beings are nature in action. The grandiose image of management as the “mastermind” behind the design of organizations will always yield a lifeless artifact, a cheap imitation, devoid of Quality. Such places, as Alexander (1979) notes, are “...so filled with the will of its maker that there is no room for its own nature.”

Organizational maintenance requires an awareness that can embrace the whole, while creatively reconciling the dynamic tensions that are ongoing and seeking expression through growth. This is an ongoing, natural koan that all executives must face, whether they are aware of it or not. However, by growth, Low does not mean simply expansion in size, but greater depth, greater meaning, and greater degrees of freedom, and greater authenticity and human capacities. We see authentic and organic growth in nature all around us, which, was the subject of a great majority of the Zen arts. Every organism is willing itself, expressing its nature, growing and becoming more of itself if left unimpeded. Indeed, Low maintains that authentic growth—not maximization of profit—is the true nature of organizations.

However, organizations are complex wholes. There are a fundamental set of “trilemmas,” or forces, within any organization, that are also seeking to find expression and realization in growth (see Figure 11 below). The first trilemma shows that any organization exist because of some idea, in some form, with some demand—and this is the true nature of a “product.” Tensions are always tugging between these three forces. A great idea without a form goes nowhere. Ideas in elegant forms but with no demand, likewise. The second trilemma illustrates the ongoing tensions between “shareholder,” “market,” and “employee.” The dominant univalent view, which defines the purpose of a company as the maximization of shareholder value, has wreaked havoc on society and the environment. We need not say more. And the third trilemma, the oppositions between cost, value and quality--have been the subject of much ruminating among organization theorists and practitioners for some time.

Dynamic and Interactive Trilemmas

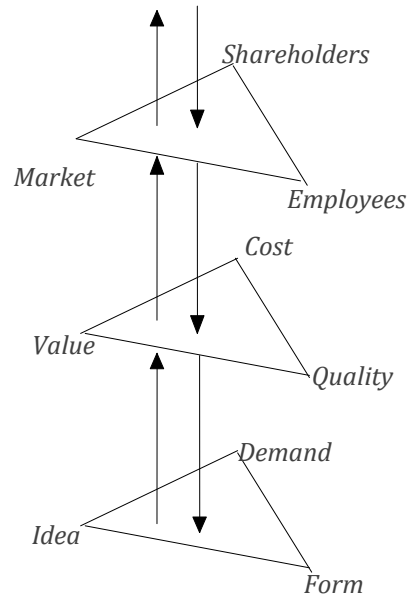


Figure 11 Fundamental Organizational Trilemmas

The art of organizational maintenance is tending to these interactive triads in a creative way, not suppressing or simplifying any one force at the detriment of others. Each has equal status, but keeping these fields of forces in balance and harmony is an artful practice. Zen can provide the aesthetic awareness needed for sustained appreciation, collective mindfulness, and a limitless capacity to be in harmony with the relational whole.

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